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WHY DID HERACLIIUS NOT DEFEND JERUSALEM,
AND FIGHT THE ARABS?

BY

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Sophronius I (ca. 560 - 11 March 638), identified with Sophronius the «Sophist» (although the argument has not yet been convincingly stated), ascended the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem in the year 634. At the age of seventy-four, or closely, he was certainly neither seeking nor campaigning for the post! In fact in his own Synodical Letter which he sent canonically to Sergius I, Patriarch of Constantinople (610-638) and to his patriarchal synod on his ascension to the throne, Sophronius conveys his greetings, expresses humility, and laments extensively and passionately the fact that he was «forced physically» (τῶν χειρ, με βιασμένοις) by the clergy, the monks, and the laity of his Church to leave his peaceful monastic life and exchange it for the troubles and responsibilities of the highest ecclesiastical office. In this most lively and profoundly theological document Sophronius articulates eloquently the confession of faith of the Church of Jerusalem and of his own, specifically on the Trinity, Logos theology, anthropology, eschatology, tradition of the Church, namely the Councils, and he formulates a se-


2) PG 87.3: 3148A-3200C; announced to be translated by P. Allen in the series Translated Texts for Historians by Liverpool University Press. References to the text will be given thenceforth to the Migne edition, column number and locus only.

3) «Βασίλειο, βασίλει! παμμακαριστή, πώς μεφιλον νέν το ιερίς, και πολι τον προσφεύωντερον, αφι ουσερ εξ ιεροπρασμος αι δραματων τήβην έλθει, και φωκαυς πισι καταντολίμαι τοις κύμαλις... Επει αυν ταται και τοτεν πέρα, σοφίαται, εις εμ τον προσφύον ανάκημη μεγάλη και βλα θεοφλω κληρικών, και ευδακιν μονωχών, και ποσιων λαικών, των πατεων πολιων της αγιας Χριστου του Θεου ημων πολεως; των χειρι με βιασμένων, και τραυματε ομοπλήνων γεγενθαι, άνος ουκ οδια οιδε εποιμενα κρύμας». 3148A...3149B.

4) 3152C-3160B. Sophronius seems to be making a distinction between the first four «great, most venerable and sacred» councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451), which the Church of Jerusalem accepts as ecumenical, and the second Council in Constantinople (553) which he personally accepts with the same honour:
ries of anathemas against heresiarchs and heresies\(^6\). In his conclusion Sophronius asks for the prayers and support of his fellow bishops\(^7\), and he pleads with them to pray for their emperor so that he may have a long life and victories against the «Barbarians», especially the Saracens\(^8\).

These were turbulent times, theologically and politically, for the Church as a whole and for the city of Jerusalem. Sophronius, a staunch Chalcedonian and a perceptive theologian knew that behind the supposedly compromising doctrine of monothelitism, embraced by emperor Heraclius and most bishops, there was monophysitism in disguise. While still a monk, he undertook a journey to Constantinople in an effort to convince Patriarch Sergius, a Syrian by birth and allegedly the son of Jacobite-monophysite parents\(^9\), of the heretical nature of the monothelite theology, albeit in vain. He was still in Constantinople when Patriarch Modestos of Jerusalem (632-634) died, and Sophronius was called to become Patriarch.

On the political front the rise of Islam and the expansion of the Arabs outside the deserts of Arabia excited the Bedouin nomadic tribes in the Syro-Palestinian region to revolt against the Byzantines\(^10\). The upheaval of the

\(^{6}\)«Τέτταρας τοιχαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐνθέων τῆς Ἑκκλησίας δοξάτων μεγάλως καὶ ἱεράς ὀλοκληρωμένας συνόδους διέχειται... Ἐπὶ ταύτας δὲ ταῖς μεγάλαις καὶ ὀλοκληρωμέναις παρεκτέσεις τε καὶ πανέρας τῶν ἁγίων καὶ μακάρων Πατέρων ὁμοτύμωι ἀθρόεις τέσσαρας, καὶ πέμπτην ἄγιαν ἄλλην παρὰ ταύτας καὶ μετά ταύτας συνανα, ὀλοκληρωμένης δέχεια συνόδου, τὴν ἐν τῇ βασιλίκῃ καὶ αὐτὴν γεγομένην τῶν πύλων, Ἰσακτίωναν ὑπὸ τότε τὰ σκήτηρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἑαυτῆς ἀνέπωτον...», 3184C, 3189C.

\(^{7}\)3190C-3196D.

\(^{8}\)3196D-3200C.

\(^{9}\) Cf. quotation below, n. 13.

Saracen tribes, inflamed by the enthusiasm of the newly found identity had, in the words of Sophronius, «developed into a great hurricane which was forecasting disaster». In his *Synodical Letter* Sophronius asks the Patriarch of Constantinople and his bishops to pray for the kings [that is, Heraclius] that God may give them a long life and victories against the «Barbarians», especially the Saracens:

> Τὴν ἱστιν δὲ ἐκεῖνον πολυάκινον ἕως παράκλησιν, ἓνα ἐκτένη ποιήμα πάλαι καὶ ἀπαυγόν τὴν πρὸς Θεον ἱεροτάτην καὶ δέσποτα ὑπὲρ τῶν φιλοχριστῶν καὶ γαλανοτάτων ἡμῶν βασιλέων, τῶν θεοῦ τὴς βασιλείας λαχάνων τῶν ὁλιγάκας· ἰδίως αὐτοῖς φιλοκτήριμως Θεὸς καὶ φιλαθρόως, ὡς καὶ δύναμιν ἐχὼν ἀσθενὴς πόλουματι, ταῖς ἱμετέραις θεοδόκτοις εὐχαίς μελιττώμενος, ἐτῶν μὲν πληθὺν αὐτοῖς πολλὴν προσχάρισθαι, ἵκας τέ μεγάστας κατὰ Βαβδάρων δοκὴ καὶ τρόπαια, καὶ παιδῶν παιδίν αὐτοῖς στεφάνια, καὶ εἰρήνη δεικὴ χαρακώσει, καὶ σκῆπτρα παράσχων κραταία καὶ οὐδόξαμα, Βαβδάρων μὲν ἄπαντων, μάλαντα δὲ Σαρακηνῶν, ὄφριν καταβαττότα, τῶν δὲ ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἀδοκήτως νὰν ἡμῶν ἐπαναστάτων, καὶ πάντα ληξομένων ὁμίῳ καὶ θηρίων φρουράμενοι, καὶ δυσσιήδε καὶ ἀδικείαν τοιμήματι.

«I implore you with the same fervor, to supplicate and pray to God, extensively and ceaselessly, for your Christ-loving and most gentle kings, who have been allotted the rudders of governing from God, that God the compassionate and man-loving one, who has power equal to His will, appeased by your God-receptive prayers, may grant to them many years, give them great victories and trophies against the barbarians, crown the children of their children with wreaths, fortify them with divine peace, and provide them with a strong and mighty staff, that may smash the pride [lit. the eyebrow] of all barbarians, especially that of the Saracens who, because of our sins, have unexpectedly revolted now against us, plundering everything with a crude and beastly disposition, irreverent and ungodly adventures».

This is a direct and passionate plea for imperial intervention. In a strange way, Sophronius wrote to the bishops of Constantinople about Heraclius, son of the exarch of Carthage (born ca. 575 - d. in Constantinople Feb. 641), as «their kings», although in the same sentence he made refer-

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11) On the name *Saracens*, its meaning and treatment in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature see, Daniel J. Sahas, *Saracens and the Syrians in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature and before*, under publication in the *OCA*.

12) «Καὶ πολὺν ὡς συνεξεχειρέας τῶν κλάσθων, καὶ τῷ κλάσθῳ παραφραστὰ σὲ τῶν κλάσθων», 3148A.

13) PG 873: 3197C-D.

14) Became emperor on October 5, 610 (575 - d. in Constantinople Feb. 641), after he overthrew the tyrannical Phocas at the end of a ruthless civil war (608-610).

15) «... τὰς θεοδόκτοις ἡμῶν βασιλεία διαφίκησε», 3200A.
ence to the kings of our kingdom for whom he wished to be peaceful and prosperous. Are these textual flaws, or intentional distinctions? Furthermore Sophronius expressed the wish that Heraclius may subdue the Saracen threat immediately (θέτων), as he did before (καθά το πρότερον), obviously with the Persians. By doing so Sophronius was actually inviting Heraclius to undertake a crusade personally to rescue Jerusalem. Born in ca. 560, Sophronius had known Heraclius as a crusader, and he was close to the times when the traumatic civil war against the «tyrannical» Phocas (610), and even closer to home when the six-year wars (618-624) and the exhilarating victory over the Persians and the recovery of the cross of Christ were taking place. He probably knew also that, unlike his predecessor Maurice (582-602), Heraclius commanded his army in person.

Heraclius did not respond to Sophronius’ plea. One may hypothesize that the exact message did not reach the emperor or, if it did, might not have alarmed the far away residing Constantinopolitan bishops and the emperor who might not have sufficiently appreciated the danger veiled behind a rather obscure and pietistic sentence that the Saracens «...because of our sins, have unexpectedly revolted now against us, plundering everything with a crude and beastly disposition, irreverent and ungodly adventures». The particular wording implies tribesmen living in the midst of, or in close proximity to, Christians who now have revolted against their neighbours; this is not a message of an invasion from an outside force. This «revolt... irreligious and ungodly adventures» being a punishment of God for the sins of the Christians, as the ascetic and elderly ecclesiastic put it, did not necessarily carry the meaning of the prospect of a permanent occupation to the offi-

16) «ίσα εὐθυμολε使用权 ενων αυτων εκ επι γῆς άιων βασιλειων Εχωνες...» 3200A.
17) «καταθάλλον θάτων αυτων τα μακαρια πληρη φραγματα, και ευτελες αυτων επισηφων, καθα το πρότερον, τον θεοσθάτως ίμων βασιλευς δορθεων, 3197D-3200A.
19) In a sermon of his on Epiphany (6 January 635) Sophronius raises the rhetorical question, «Why do wars happen to us? Why do barbarian assaults are multiplying? Why do Saracen troops rise against us?» To this he gives his own answer, that this is because of the sins of the Christians, who have deviated from the faith and conduct which God has willed for them. Text in A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, Ανάλεκτα Τερασολματικος Σταρχολογίκας, vol. V. (Bruxelles 1963 [1888]) 151-168. SCHÖNBORN sees a difference in the tone of anxiety of Sophronius regarding the Arab invasions between that exhumed in his Synodical Letters, where there seems still to be hope that the emperor may triumph over the Arabs, and the pessimism expressed in the Epiphany sermon. In such a difference SCHÖNBORN bases his suggestion that Sophronius was elected Patriarch in the earliest days of 634. Sophrone, pp. 90-91.
cials of the imperial court. What were the sins of the Christians for which God was rising the Saracens against them? To consider that Sophronius implies here the heresy of monothelitism, is not improbable; and for the monothelite Patriarch and the emperor this was neither a heresy nor a sin! One could also surmise that, since these Saracen incursions came, according to Sophronius himself who writes in early 634, «unexpectedly» (ἀνεξοχήτως), Heraclius might have thought of Sophronius’ alarm as premature, not threatening to the empire. In such a context the plea could not, perhaps, have the chance to be taken seriously. The Saracen uprising as Sophronius refers to, sounds like familiar nomadic expeditions (razzias) aimed at plundering villages rather than conquering cities and land permanently. Indeed, the textual evidence makes the Saracens in earlier times plunderers of villages of Syria and Palestine. Thus Theophanes informs us that in the early years of Justinian’s reign (527-565) the Saracens launched an expedition against Antioch, Palestine and Syria, although in this instance this expedition forced the emperor to defend the villages against «the barbarian Saracen». Further south in the Sinai the Saracens posed a threat to the monastery and the local population, something which, on the testimony of Procopius, prompted the emperor to build, at the request of the monks, a fortification around their church dedicated to the Theotokos. The Leimon22 of the

20) «... ἔπερχεται Ἀλαμπαδάκας ὁ Ζεκάκης, ὁ βασιλέας τῶν Σαρακηνῶν, καὶ ἔπραξεν τὴν πρώτην Σιρίαν ἔως τῶν ὀρῶν Ἁρμοκείων... καὶ ἔβαλεν πολλοῖς καὶ ἔκανεν τὰ ἐξαίρετα Χαλκηδόνος καὶ τὸ Ξέμιον κτήμα καὶ τὴν Κινηραῖαν χώραν. Chronographia, p. 178, 8-12. One can detect Theophanes’ despire for the Saracens and for al-Mundir in particular in his belittling him as ὁ βασιλέας τῶν Σαρακηνῶν» («the little [or, fake] king of the Saracens»).

21) «ἐκ τῶν ὀρῶν τῆς Συρίας καὶ φοινίκων ἀγχωρίτων [ἀγχωρίτων] ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁ ἐν Συρίᾳ, ὅ ἐνθείως ἡ Σαρκομορία βαρβαρόν έγειρεν ἄν τὴς χώρας ἔρμων ὁ ὁσιώτατος ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνῳ... ἐν Χαλκηδόνονον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδόνον... ἐν Χαλκηδό

Cilician born monk and writer John Moschus (d. in Rome 634) speaks of Saracens living near the Dead Sea, dressed like Jews, and attacking passersby. In one instance Saracens attack an anchorite and behead him. In the early part of the seventh-century, when the walls of two alliances (of the Persians with the North and Northeastern Arabian tribes, the Lakhmids, and of the Byzantines with the Northwestern Arabian tribes, the Ghassānids) gave way to pressures from the outside and from within of each own confines, the power of the nomadic groups was unleashed. They indulged in destructive raids against settlements in the area of Jordan and even near the walls of Jerusalem. The Saracen raids, many of them directed against the monasteries of Judaea, including the lavra of Mar Sabbas, had been destructive enough to have alarmed the population of Palestine. Heraclius sought to have been aware of the Arab threat in general. Two major battles between the Byzantines and the Arabs, one at Dāthin near Gaza (4 February, 634) and another at Ajnadān near Lydda (30 July, 634) had resulted in Byzantine defeat. In the latter Heraclius’ own brother, Theodore, had fallen and his army had been dispersed. These two defeats may have convinced Heraclius that to undertake an expedition against the unry and undisciplined forces of the Arabs was too risky and, therefore, one may want to suggest that his reasons for not responding to Sophronius’ plea were purely military. A few months later, on Christmas Day, 634 which happened to fall on a Sunday, Sophronius delivered a sermon at the Church of the Theotokos in Jerusalem, lamenting the fact that because of the disorder of the Saracens and their destructive revolts, himself and the Christians could not celebrate Christmas at the birthplace of Christ. Jerusalem was to be the next.  

23) A Council at the Lateran equated Saracens and Jews, at least in the dress: «Πέρι φύλεως σχήματος Χριστιανών, Ιουδαίων καὶ Σαρακηνῶν. Εν τούτων ἐπιρριχίας παρά τῶν Χριστιανῶν ταῖς Ἰουδαίως ἢ Σαρακηνῶς ἢ τῶν ἐνδημάτων διαστέλλει διαφορά, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τούτων ὅτως τις ἐπηρείως σύγχρος, ὡς μηδὲνα ἐκατέρθη τα...» PG 87: 2868C.  
24) Leimon, Cap. XX, PG 87.3: 2868A-B.  
27) Shlomo D. Goitein [Jerusalem in the Arab period (638-1099)], The Jerusalem Cathedra, 2 (1982) 168-196, at 170 maintains that «Gaza was the first objective in the war of conquest» and that «Jerusalem was remote from Arab conquest». His assertion is based on the assumption that «The Arab invaders did not move against Jerusalem initially, for in desert conquest Bedouin generally seek to conquer areas they frequent for purposes of trade or ac-
sacrifice of Jerusalem itself started during the third phase of the Arab conquests under Abū ʿUbayda, supported by a number of able commanders, conquerors of Syrian cities, such as Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān, Muʿādh b. Jabal, Ḥālid b. al-Walīd, and ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ. Inside the walls Sophronius was defending the city, trying to keep the spirit of the people alive and hoping for assistance from Constantinople. Abū ʿUbayda proposed a choice among three terms: conversion to Islam, capitulation and paying of taxes, or destruction of the city. Conversion to Islam was beyond consideration. Also, the experience of the destruction of the city by the Persians twenty five years earlier made fighting against the Arabs and risking destruction of the holy places equally unacceptable. Sophronius, finally, chose capitulation, but only to ʿUmar personally. By capitulating Jerusalem to the Arabs, Sophronius was not simply protecting the city physically; he was also keeping it from becoming a Jewish city! If Sophronius was interested only in the temporary physical protection of the city, he could have capitulated it to ʿUmar’s deputy. Capitulation and paying of taxes was not seen as a treasonous act. Damascus was capitulated in 636 by the bishop, or an «Abbot», and the grandfather of John of Damascus, Manṣūr ibn Sargūn. Three years after Jerusalem, in 641, the Patriarch of Alexandria did exactly the same. Capitulation of a city did not guarantee absolute safety for the people, especially for those who offered resistance and chose martyrdom. In fact the capitulation of Jerusalem is connected with the martyrdom of ten men who were decapitated in front of the walls of the city, whose relics Sophronius placed in the martyrium of St. Stephen the protomartyr! The Muslim invasions revived the cult of saints and martyrs with a new wave of «neomartyrs».

Why then, even when ʿAmr’s troops were at the door of Jerusalem, and Abū ʿUbayda was defining the terms of surrender, did Heraclius not re-
companying convoys. Ibid. Emphasis is ours. However, Jerusalem had been known to the Arabs and Islam had associated itself with it from its earliest moments. Whether the siege itself lasted for a long period of time, or it was only a short one which took place just before 638, is still under debate. The sources seem to point to a lengthy surrounding of the vicinity and to a rather short siege of the city itself.

28) DONNER, Conquests, pp. 151-2.
spond? The answers which have been given (some of them hinted to above) are mostly military: Heraclius was already over sixty years of age (he was born in ca. 575), tired of wars, and ill 32. His army had already been defeated by the Arabs, although the final defeat at Yarmūk and his bidding farewell to Syria were still to come (20 August, 636). By Heraclius’ time, and because of his own policies, the empire could no longer afford the large network of garrisons which once had maintained. This process of thinning out such defenses had begun from the sixth century, with the exception of those at the border with Persia 33; Heraclius, therefore, would not have wanted to be tied with long-term military commitments to Palestine and Syria. He also might have reconciled with the idea that Jerusalem was a lost cause and that the aged and theologically uncompromising Patriarch was a small guarantee that he would be able to keep the city peaceful and the situation stable, even if himself were able to halt the Muslim advances momentarily. Also Heraclius’ military base had been Antioch, closer to his native Armenia, while Jerusalem was not a strategic post and no previous emperor had used is as such. The condition of the Byzantine military forces at the time of the rise of Islam was also a factor for Heraclius, especially the restlessness of the troops coming from the East, bringing along their readiness to mutiny when they came to defend Syria and Palestine 34. Although the only reigning Byzantine emperor to have visited Jerusalem (and that only when he reinstated the cross of Christ which he recovered from the Persians) 35, and in spite of his reverence for the city, Heraclius might have considered – and rightly so – that the Muslims would not harm the Christians and the city as the Persians had done 36. Finally, Heraclius might have underestimated the actual danger in which Jerusalem was, and the repercussions which its fall would have caused on the rest of the Eastern provinces.

These military considerations notwithstanding, there seems to be another set of considerations, the theological and doctrinal ones, coupled with those of personality conflict between the two protagonists. On account of some explicit and implicit evidence on these considerations, we may not

32) According to KAEGL (Byzantium, p. 63) in the 630s Heraclius continued to be energetic and his illness had not incapacitated him.
33) Cf. KAEGL, Byzantium, p. 51.
34) Ibid., p. 62.
35) Ibid., p. 63.
36) Archaeological evidence shows that the Persians, although Zoroastrians, did not systematically destroy Christian churches or prevent the Christians from worshipping in them in the areas which they controlled, particularly in Palestine and Syria; and this in contrast to the destruction they caused in Asia Minor. Cf. KAEGL, Byzantium, p. 45.
want to disregard them as irrelevant. Taking the clue from Theophanes, the least that one can suggest is that Heraclius had been previously embarrassed by Sophronius’ anti-monothelete campaign, in which the traditionalist mystic had exposed monotheletism as a heresy, and he was now agitated by the Patriarch’s *Synodical Letters* which insisted on its condemnation. Writes Theophanes:

«ἀκούσας δὲ ταῦτα Ἡράκλεως ἠριζότης, καὶ καταλύοντα μὲν τὰ οἰκεῖα ὁψὶ θέλησεν, καὶ πάλιν τῶν ὀνειδισμῶν οὐχ ὑπέφερεν» («When Heraclius heard about these, he felt ashamed, because on the one hand he did not want to dissolve his own creations, but on the other he could not stand the reproach either»).

The personality of Heraclius is multifaceted and undetermined. It can be said that, if Heraclius was an able general, he was a rather weak administrator and an even weaker, if not ignorant, theologian. Heraclius’s military abilities and success, in relation to the Syro-Palestinian context and aspirations, may need to be modified and possibly revised. When he arrived in Constantinople in 610 to overthrow the «tyrannical» Phocas, he found the Slavs and the Avars invading the northern Balkans, the Persians exerting pressure on the eastern frontier, and pockets of Phocas’ sympathizers re-

37) The context of the passage allows us to safely interpret this «these» as being the election of Sophronius as Patriarch, the convention of a council which condemned the monothelete doctrine, and the synodical letters which the new Patriarch sent to Sergius of Constantinople and to the Pope.


39) Jenkins’ evaluation of Heraclius is not at all complimentary! His fame both as a ruler and as a soldier was deeply, and very justly, venerated for centuries in Byzantine memory by others, while for Jenkins «...his reputation as a statesman and a soldier is ludicrously exaggerated». JENKINS, *Byzantium*, p. 22.

40) Phocas was executed on October 5, 610 in Constantinople. Heraclius was crowned emperor by Sergius in the palace church of St. Stephen. On the same day Eudokia, his fiancée, was crowned empress and he and her were married! On July 7 (611?) Epiphania, their daughter, was born. On August 15 she was baptised at Vlachernae by Patriarch Sergius. On May 3 (612?) Heraclius the Young, their son, was born, named also Constantine. In the same year (612?), August 14, Eudokia died. On October 4 Heraclius’ daughter Epiphania was crowned empress by Sergius and on December 25 his son Heraclius the Young. In 613/4 Heraclius married Martina who was crowned empress by Sergius. Theophanes’ source for Heraclius’ history is George of Pisidia (Cf. *Chronographia*, p. 298, 18), which W. E. KAEGI Jr. [«New Evidence on the Early Reign of Heraclius», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 66 (1973) 308-330] revisits on the basis of new evidence from the Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon, edited by A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *Vie de Théodore Saint de Sykéon* (Brussels, 1970).

41) In the month of May (611) the Persians launched an attack against Syria, conquered Apameia and Edessa, and came up to Antioch. In the ensuing battle the Byzantines were defeated, «and all the troops of the Romans were lost so that very few escaped». THEOPHANES,
sisting him in Ankyra and Antioch\(^\text{42}\)\! Given the bitterness of the civil war (608-610) and his personal hatred for Phocas, one can assume that Heraclius was feeling betrayed by the Syrians for having harboured the Phocas’ sympathizers who resisted him. Asia Minor and Syria were areas in which Heraclius experienced disasters early on, like the rebellion of Komentiolos, Phocas’ nephew (610-611), and his own defeat by the Persians in 611. After the conquest of Caesarea of Cappadocia (612?) during which the Persians took many thousands of captives\(^\text{43}\), the Persians captured Damascus. Heraclius proposed truce in exchange of paying taxes; an offer which the Persians refused. In 616 they captured Jordan, Palestine and Jerusalem, abducted Patriarch Zachariah and the cross of Christ and took them both to Persia. The Persian victories extended to Egypt, Alexandria and Libya, all the way to Ethiopia.

Heraclius’s military victories do not seem to have been as decisive. He had to deal with both the Avars in Thrace and the Persians in the East. His peace treaty (attempted twice) with the Khagan of the Avars was humiliating; and this in order to deal with the Persians. The message with which Theophanes leaves us is that Chosroes was not defeated by Heraclius directly, but by internal revolt; he was overthrown by his general Seroes who imprisoned him, killed his son in front of him, called Chosroes’ opponents to humiliate him and then ordered his execution. It was then that Seroes sent a message to Heraclius asking him to sign a permanent peace agreement, freed all Christian prisoners, including Patriarch Zachariah, and returned to Heraclius the cross of Christ\(^\text{44}\). It was also a year later (629) that Heraclius travelled to Jerusalem to reinstate it\(^\text{45}\). This event established Heraclius’ reputation as a successful military man. From the point of view of the Christian Arabs of Syria and Palestine, this happy outcome was part of the long standing conflicts between the two empires\(^\text{46}\); not necessarily a test or a warranty of Byzantine victory over the Saracens and the Muslim Arabs who were spreading out rapidly from the deep south. The fact that Heraclius used

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\(^{42}\) Cf. KAEGL, "New Evidence", pp. 311ff.

\(^{43}\) THEOPHANES, Chronographia, pp. 299, 33 - 300, 3.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., pp. 326, 23 - 327, 16.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., pp. 328, 2-10, 13-15.

\(^{46}\) Theophanes interprets the six years wars, after which he signed peace with the Persians on the seventh, typologically, or mystically, in the manner of God who created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested! "... τὸν ζ’ ἔτει εἰσε ἀλυσίας μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης ἐπὶ Κωνσταντινουπόλιν ἀποστρεφεὶς μυστικῶς τινα θεωράν ἐν τούτῳ πληρώσας." Ibid., pp. 327, 25-27, 327, 27-28.
to command the army in person has been used as evidence of the emperor’s military ability, although this style may speak more of his crusader mentality. This style resulted in significant victories; but against the Persians, not against the Arabs. Kaegi has aptly suggested that, Heraclius’ “travel in the [Syro-Palestinian] region would have alerted him to the importance of the Christian Arabs in providing security. In spite of everything, he failed to make efficient defensive preparations against the Muslims, whether by using friendly Christian Arab tribes or raising sufficient Byzantine troops from other areas. But that may not have been the primary concern of Heraclius. Heraclius’ principal concerns after departing Jerusalem in 630 were the reconstruction of ruined holy sites; settling of problems within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, namely Modestus episcopacy in Jerusalem; Jewish policy; and efforts to heal doctrinal Christological controversies, especially among Monophysites, his own fellow Armenians and the Jacobites. The first two indicate Heraclius’ interest in Jerusalem, while the last concern with doctrinal matters.

On matters of administration Heraclius remained personally detached. Characteristically, when in 622 he undertook the expedition against the Persians, he left behind to manage the affairs in Constantinople his own son, Heraclius junior, called also new Constantine, who at the time was barely ten years of age, Patriarch Sergius, and the patrician Bonosus, a prudent, intelligent, and ready man. He even named as guardian of his son his former rival, the Avar Khagan, with whom he had just made peace! Theophanes remarks, rather sarcastically, that Heraclius «thought that» he had concluded a peace accord with the Avars! As to the thematic system which has been attributed to him, this must be credited actually to his predecessor, emperor Maurice.

Furthermore, Heraclius is depicted also as a vengeful person who after his victory against Chosroes celebrates the holiday of the Epiphany (627),

47) Heraclius is depicted by Theophanes as a crusader, who leads his troops against the enemy (especially the Persians), encouraging and inciting them with religious words and favour, and promising them eternal life. Cf. e.g. Ibid., pp. 307, 2-13; 317, 17-21; 319, 23.
48) Byzantium, p. 76.
49) In fact, immediately after his pilgrimage to Jerusalem he participated in two local church councils, one in Hierapolis/Manbij in N. Syria (631) and another in Theodosiopolis/Erzurum in Byzantine Armenia (between February 631 and February 632). Ibid., p. 76.
50) THEOPHANES, Chronographia, p. 300, 8-9.
51) Ibid., p. 303, 3-8.
52) «... καὶ μετά τῶν Ἀράμων εἰρηνεύσας, ὡς ἐνεμικεῖν. Ibid., p. 302, 28.
53) JENKINS, Byzantium, p. 16ff.
In the context of our theme, one may wonder whether this is not an aspect of Heraclius’ personality which needs to be taken into account in respect of how, perhaps, Heraclius was feeling towards his critic, Sophronius. Thus Heraclius, although he knew Palestine and Syria better than any emperor since the third century\textsuperscript{55}, seems not to have been in tune with two distinct characteristics of the region and its people, discontent already with the protracted Byzantino-Persian wars; namely, independent thinking politically, and doctrinally diverse, and passionate.

But let us take a few short steps back and look at Heraclius’ profile in relationship to theology and doctrine. Our sources for this excursus are neither plentiful nor descriptive. The earliest one is the History in eight books by Theophylaktos Simocattes (the «snub-nosed cat») born towards the end of the 580s\textsuperscript{56}. Born in Egypt in the sixth century, his early education was taken most likely in Alexandria. He moved to Constantinople at the time, or shortly after, the overthrow of Phocas. A civil servant and writer, he was legal advisor to Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople who, perhaps again, encouraged him to write the History. This is mainly a military, diplomatic and political, not a religious, history of the Roman empire. The part of history which is his, and the main one, is the history of emperor Maurice (582-602). For the previous period he borrowed from Procopius, Agathias and Menander Protector; thence the epithet attached to him, διτιγραφεῖς (copier).

His information on Heraclius is scant. A better source may be Theophanes which, however, needs to be used with a considerable care.

Not indifferent to doctrine, Heraclius was not able to understand the nuances of doctrine and resolve theological disputes, although he was daring in taking initiatives on such matters. For him to defend the council of Chalcedon, which Constantinople had embraced, was a duty and a criterion of Orthodoxy; even if he was unable to understand the essential meaning and

\textsuperscript{54} «... destroying Chosroes’s palaces, which were luxurious, marvellous and amazing buildings, which he cleared to the ground so that Chosroes may learn how the Romans were feeling [lit. what pain the Romans were feeling] when he was burning and making the cities desolate». \textit{Theophanes, Chronographia}, p. 322, 19-21.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Kaegi, Byzantium}, p. 76.

the implications of the theology of this council, as his subsequent actions clearly prove. On matters of religious life he appears to be pious and possibly superstitious. According to the vita of St. Theodore of Sykeon, when Heraclius granted grace to Domentziolos’ life he asked for the saint’s blessings and, according to the same vita, although he was in haste to meet the Persians, he personally visited the saint at Sykeon during Lent (613) en route to Antioch. He was defeated! The Persians took Antioch and overran Cicilia, including Tarsus. The Vita emphasizes indirectly the influence of monks and holy men in Byzantium.

Theophanes depicts Heraclius as having been tricked into monothelitism by the Jacobite Patriarch Athanasius. On the advice of Sergius who was a monothelite, Heraclius had already instructed Athanasius to accept the council of Chalcedon and confess two conjoined natures and «one natural will and energy in Christ» on the promise that he would make him Patriarch of Antioch. Athanasius agreed, but he raised to Heraclius the question about the energies and the wills («... κινήσεις πρὸς βασιλέα περὶ πίστεως λόγους...»); an obviously slippery question for which Theophanes ascribed to Athanasius the rather unflattering epithets of «a cunning and wicked man, in the order of the natural knavery of the Syrians»! Taken aback (ξενοφοβηθεῖς) by this theological probing, Heraclius asked Sergius of Constantinople, his long time protégé and ally. Sergius in turn, and possibly out of ignorance, asked Cyrus bishop of Fasis. Both then agreed that

57) His antipathy towards the monophysites and anti-Chalcedonian Syrians was evident, and mutual, and his religious policies deadly for the empire. Cf. Joseph Nasrallah, Saint Jean de Damas, son époque - sa vie - son oeuvre (Paris, 1950) 51. In Edessa he was refused holy communion by the metropolitan Isaiah for not anathematising the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. In Mabboug, where the Chalcedonians predominated, he clashed with the citizens over the question of the one will of Christ. They were anti-Nestorian, but adhered to the doctrine of the two wills in Christ. Heraclius pillaged the houses and the churches of those who did not profess monothelitism and persecuted their priests and monks. Michael the Syrian, History, XI, iv, 412-13. Michael, the monophysite chronicler, sees these persecutions as a cause for the success of the Arabs. Under these circumstances, it would make, perhaps, little sense for Heraclius to fight actively against the Arabs.

58) Festugière, Vie de Théodore Saint de Sykéon, pp. 311 (chapter 152, lines 10-18), and 328.


61) «αὐτῆς ἀνθρώπου καὶ κακοίρους τῆς τῶν Σύρων ἐμφάνισεν πανορμίδης». Ibid., 329, 22-23.

there is one will and one energy in Christ. Heraclius then wrote to Pope Honorius I (619-625) who was inclined towards the monothelite doctrine; so was the Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyrus (630-643). When Cyrus succeeded George (621-630) to the patriarchal throne of Alexandria he signed an accord with the bishop of Pharan Theodore, affirming the one natural energy of Christ. Monothelite was also the Patriarch of Antioch Anastasius. Theophanes says nothing about the patriarchate of Jerusalem at this point. We must assume that Jerusalem and Patriarch Zacharias (609-632) were Chalcedonian. Sophronius' struggles against monothelitism had forced Heraclius to issue an edict (Ἐκθέοις), hated by the Orthodox, and much in the tradition of the Henotic of the pro-monophysite emperor Zeno (474-91), declaring a moratorium on any further squabbling on either one or two natures or wills in Christ. This was a formula of faith, written by Patriarch Sergius, which in an effort to reconcile Chalcedonians and Monophysites was supporting monothelitism. Thus of the pentarchy, only Jerusalem was Chalcedonian orthodox; a sign of how unsuspecting were Sophronius' contemporary ecclesiastics of monothelitism as a disguise for monophysitism. In reality Heraclius' edict was imposing the emperor's will and monothelitism by default.

This was the theological and psychological context when the seventy-four year old Sophronius ascended the throne of Jerusalem. At this point the monothelite controversies had fragmented the East and alienated it from the West; so much so that Theophanes remarks that,

After events developed the one right after the other, the council of Chalcedon and the Catholic Church fell into a great disrepute (δὲναι δὲ). For the Jacobites

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63) Theophanes calls this pope John, which may not be an anachronism, as Turtledove has suggested («Theophanes' chronology is confused, as is often the case when he discusses events in the West», The Chronicle of Theophanes, p. 32, n. 70). Pope Honorius (d. 12.X.638) was a monothelite. He was succeeded by Severinus, a monothelite sympathiser, who served as pope only from May 28 to August 2, 640. His successor, Pope John IV became pope on Christmas Eve, or Christmas Day, 640 and reigned until 642. He convened a synod in January 641, which condemned monothelitism and the monothelite Ekthesis of Heraclius. Heraclius died February 11, 641. Although he was informing the pope of the faith of Sergius (610-638) and Anastasius of Antioch (620-628) (Chronographia, p. 330, 5-6), both of them being already dead at the time of John's ascension to the throne of Rome, this fact does not exclude the possibility, as A.N. Stratof has maintained [Byzantium in the Seventh Century, II (634-641) (Amsterdam, 1972) 148-49], that Heraclius, who died in February 641, did indeed write to this pope expose the events regarding the Ekthesis and Sergius' compulsion on him, and renounce his monothelite concession; even if no such letter has survived. Heraclius' renunciation of monothelitism in Anastasius Apocrisarius, on the testimony of Maximus the Confessor, in PG 90:125A-B.

and the [monophysite sect of the] Theodosians were boasting that, «it is not us with Chalcedon, but rather Chalcedon which came into communion with us, by having confessed, through the one energy, the one nature of Christ» 65.

Immediately after his election as Patriarch, Sophronius called a synod of bishops which anathematized the monothelitite doctrine. Subsequently to this he sent his canonical Synodical Letter to the synod of Constantinople in which he articulated the faith of the Church of Jerusalem, and anathematized all heresies including monothelitism. There is no obvious sign of tension between Jerusalem and Constantinople in this Letter. On the contrary, Sophronius sounds respectful and very humble, showering his fellow bishops with such superlatives like, «most wise men», «blessed», «most blessed», «compassionate», «affectionate», «most holy», «all-holy», «a God-loving and joyous brotherhood» 66, asking them for their guidance, teaching, and brotherly support in the pursue of his pastoral duties 67, and assuring them of his own love, which they will experience «if they (you) discover the spiritual fervour which is in his (my) heart» 68. Most likely the Constantinopolitan bishops must have read this «spiritual fervour» to mean passion of a stubborn zealot!

Theophrastes’ narrative at this point with reference to Heraclius, is revealing. He writes:

«When he heard these (ταῦτα) Heraclius was ashamed. He did not want to dissolve his own creations, but could not stand disrepute (ἀνείκεσιμον, lit. shame) either. Thinking that he was doing something great, he then promulgated the so-called Edict which said that one should not [is not allowed to] confess either one or two energies in Christ...» 69.

65) τούτων ἔδε ὁ Πατριάρχης Σώζων, ἡ σύνοδος Χαλκεῖα καὶ ἡ καθολικὴ περιέπεσε εἰκοστῇ ἁγιορείᾳ. Ἀντικρυπτότατον γὰρ ἔλεγεν Σωζώ, καὶ οἱ Θεοδοσιανοὶ φλεσσαντες, ὅτι οὗτος ἤμεις τῇ Χαλκείᾳ, ἀλλὰ Χαλκείων μᾶλλον ἡμῖν ἐκουσώρησαν, διὰ τῆς μᾶς εὐεργείας μᾶλλον ἀλογονήσασα φίλον Χριστοῦ» Chronographia, p. 330, 11-15.

66) ὁσφοντάτος, 3149B, 3184C; ἡμαρτυρίας 3152C; ἡμαρτυρίας, συμπαθείς, φιλότητος τις, μακροθυμεῖν καὶ τῶν μακροθυμητῶν ἐμῖν τὸ συμπαθεῖς καὶ φιλότητος τις... 3196D; ἡμαρτυρίας, 3160C; ἡμαρτυρίας, 3200C; ἡμαρτυρίας καὶ φιλότητος ἰδιεφελῆ, 3200C.

67) Σοφοντάτος, 3149B, 3184C; ἡμαρτυρίας, 3152C; ἡμαρτυρίας, συμπαθείς, φιλότητος τις, μακροθυμεῖν καὶ τῶν μακροθυμητῶν ἐμῖν τὸ συμπαθεῖς καὶ φιλότητος τις... 3196D; ἡμαρτυρίας, 3160C; ἡμαρτυρίας, 3200C; ἡμαρτυρίας καὶ φιλότητος ἰδιεφελῆ, 3200C.

68) ἐγνώστηκε τῇ ἑλήθη τῷ θρόνῳ εἰς εἰσδέθειν ἑδαιμονίᾳ, 3197A.

69) ἀνείκεσις ἢτα τοῦ Καλκέου ἢτα, καὶ καταλύσατο τὸ τις, ἀνείκεσις ἢτα ἢτα καὶ τῶν ἀνείκεσιμον ὑπερήφανον, τότε δε ὅτι μέγα τοι νομίζων.
One may wonder whether Heraclius would have ever felt embarrassed for the «disrepute» of the Church and would have ever issued this edict, had Sophronius not treated monothelitism as heresy and exposed Heraclius’ «own creations»? We must assume also that Heraclius’ embarrassment may not have been merely theological or doctrinal, but personal as well. The commotion which the monoenergetic/monothelite debate had created, gave the opportunity to the anti-Chalcedonian forces especially among the populace to ridicule their opponents. As in a previous case, Theophanes says that the anti-Chalcedonians and staunch opponents of Heraclius were dragging the reputation of the Church to the taverns and bathhouses (graphic details which may help us to understand the nature of Heraclius’ embarrassment) mocking the Chalcedonians that, «the formerly pro-Nestorians, have now been awakened and returned to the truth, by being united with us on the [issue of the] one nature of Christ, through the one energy» 70. Such a ridicule must have, certainly, tarnished the reputation of an emperor otherwise victorious in the battlefield; and the finger which had turned the spotlight on him was Sophronius! I do want to acknowledge that I am reading my own thesis into Theophanes’ text, but the text seems to be collaborating the thesis consistently 71.

- Furthermore, Theophanes attributes the rise of the Arabs and the defeats of the Roman [Byzantine] army to the fact that «the Church was then shaken by both kings and impious clergy» because of monothelitism; not so subtle an inference and blame on Heraclius for the Arab victories 72! Indeed, from the time of the peak of Heraclius’ career which was the reinstatement of the cross of Christ (21 March, 630) 73 to his death (641),

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70) An article by Alexander Alexakis, «Before the Lateran Council of 649. The Last Days of Herakleios the Emperor and Monothelitism. (Based on a new fragment from his letter to Pope John IV [CPG 9382])» to which I had access before its forthcoming publication in Ammianus Historiae Conciliorum, 27 (1995), promulgates the thesis that Heraclius was a monothelites at the time of his death. Although I am not convinced that the evidence which Alexakis uses (a fragment from the tenth-century iconophile florilegium of Codex Venetus Marcianus Graecus 573 where the phrase ἣς θεὸς γὰρ ἐνεργήσθη γενετήριον κατὰ θεὰν τῆς φύσεως ὑπὸ πλήθους κατὰ τῆς ξυστίας καὶ δεσποτίαν ἄποινας καὶ ἰδίῳ αὐθεντικῷ θέληματι τὰ τε θεία καὶ ἀνθρώπινα ἐνεργήσατε πᾶσιν ἀνάξιον) is sufficient to justify the monothelitic conviction of Heraclius until his deathbed, or that the phrase has been correctly understood as monothelite, the study does make the point that Heraclius’ monothelitic conviction was a widely accepted fact.

71) Cf. below, n. 75.

72) On the exact date of Heraclius’ return of the true cross of Christ to Jerusalem and
the Byzantines, and Heraclius personally, experienced only defeats in the hands of the Arab Muslims. It is not, perhaps, coincidental, that when the staunch Chalcedonian Theophanes speaks of the rise and victories of Islam and of the Muslim Arabs, uses the expression which Sophronius coined about them in his Christmas oration; a way, perhaps, of recalling pious Sophronius and his anti-monothelitism, and Heraclius and his monothelitism. He writes:

«Ὅτως δὲ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τὸτε ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ τῶν ἁπάντων ἱερέων ταραττομένης, ἀκέτατο ὁ ἐρημωμένως ἱμαλή τῷ τῷ ἱματίῳ ἱμάτιος τῶν λαῶν τῶν Ἰσραήλ...» (thus when at that time the Church was in turmoil by [or due to] the kings and the impious clergy, Amelek from the deep desert arose smiting us, the people of Christ)²⁸.

Which other kings and priests did Theophanes have in mind except Heraclius and the monothelite Patriarchs?

In 634, according to Theophanes (A.M. 6125, 633/4 A.D.), or August 636 according to Kaegi, and after the defeat of Theodore, brother of Heraclius, and his return to Emessa/Hims, and in spite of a victory by Baanes commanding the army in the place of Theodore, Heraclius «had despaired and abandoned Syria; he took the precious cross (lit. wood) from Jerusalem

bibliography, see KAEGI, Byzantium, p. 74, n. 20. KAEGI prefers 21 March 630, rather than Grumel’s 631. KAEGI states that the event «has been neglected, for the history of Byzantine resistance against the Muslims in Palestine and Syria» (p. 74). Perhaps this is too early an event to have played such a role at a time when Muhammad was still alive, the expeditions against Syria and Palestine had not yet started and the Arabs had been defeated at Mu’ta (629) at the hands of the Byzantines. If any meaning, the return of the cross was a trophy of the defeat of the Persians, and a symbol of resistance in case of any future return of theirs to the region!

²⁴) Following KAEGI’s chronology these are the main military engagements between Muslims and Heraclius during his life: October 630, Muslim expedition against Tabuk (N.W. Arabia); 633/early 634, actual conquest of Syria (Aeopolis/Ma’ārib); February 4, 634 defeat at Dāthin near Gaza; 30 July 634, battle of Aqṣūqayn; 634, Muslim victory at Skythopolis/Fahil; 635, the Muslims capture Damascus and Himyar for the first time; August 636, the Muslims evacuate Himyar and Damascus (Theodore, brother of Heraclius); 20 August 636, final phase of the battle of Gābiyā-Yarmūk; late 636/early 637, the Muslims recapture Damascus, Ba’labak, Himyar, 637, the Muslims capture and occupy Jerusalem; June/July 637, the Muslims capture Gaza and possibly Ascalon for the first time; 637, Byzantine and Muslims agree on a truce at Qinnasrin/Chalkis; 638, Muslims occupy N. Syria; 639/640, Muslims overrun Byzantine Mesopotamia; 640, Muslims terminate the conquest of Palestine, storm Caesarea Maritima and final capture of Ascalon; December 639, Muslims depart from Palestine to invade Egypt; early 640, Muslims invade Byzantine Armenia; 640, Mu‘āwiya attacked Cilicia, and Euchaita (Anatolia); 11 February 641, Heraclius died.

²⁵) Chronographia, p. 332, 8-11.
and went off to Constantinople [76], a vividly symbolic act! Heraclius’ des-

pa r, and abandonment of greater Syria, including Palestine and Jerusalem
itself, coincide exactly with the patriarchate of Sophronius (634-638)! The
death of Sophronius in 638 did not pass Theophanes’ attention unnoticed. It
gave him the opportunity to remind his readers who Sophronius was and
with whom this Patriarch ought to be contrasted: «an ornament to the church
of Jerusalem, in words and in deeds, who struggled against Heraclius and his
co-monothelites, Sergius and Pyrros!» [77].

Given the reasons, military and administrative, which we mentioned
earlier, and adding the personal and confessional ones, one wonders whether
it would have been self-explanatory for Heraclius to have rushed to Palestine
to bail out Sophronius. Saving the city, which at the time was to him either
not in an imminent danger, or beyond delivery, is one thing; but responding
to Sophronius, another. One issue on which the sources do not give us basis
to speculate is what Heraclius and the Constantinopolitan bishops were pos-
sibly thinking (if they were) about protecting the holy sites and the many
pilgrims from the Arabs. Thus it was not only military considerations, but
also the whole climate of discontent and division created by the monothelite
controversy which was unravelling in Syria, that made Heraclius disheart-
ened and even unwilling to assist any further the Christians against the Arab
onslaught. His wars had been with the Persians; not with the Arabs. The
highlight of his career had been the defeat of Chosroes and the return of the
holy cross to Jerusalem; this had been his real triumph. Any other battle may
have been considered by him risky, and any other (potential) victory, even a
major one, against the Muslim Arabs (so close and kin to the Syro-
Palestinian Christian Arabs, from whom he had experienced less than an
enthusiastic reception and acceptance) might have been considered by him –

an Armenian – anticlimactic and not a matter of his highest priority. Walter
Kaege’s Byzantium and the early Islamic conquests is an almost exhaustive
work on the broad question as to why Byzantium was unable to contain the
emergent Islam in its initial years and thus let Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia
and Armenia be lost to the new religion. The answer is to be found in the as-
essment of the imperial conditions on the eve of the rise of Islam, including
ethnic stereotypes, military and religious miscalculations, dangerous strains

[76] Ibid., p. 337, 8-10.
[77] Ἄν ταύτας ἀπεβίων Σωφρίνου, ὁ λόγῳ καὶ πράξει τὴν Ἱεροσολύμων
catakonmēsas ἐκκλησίαν καὶ κατὰ τὴν Ἑρακλείου καὶ τῶν σει αὐτῷ Μονοθελητῶν
κακοδόξεις ἀγωνιστήριον Σεργίου καὶ Πυρροῦ. Ibid., p. 339, 30-32.
and inertia in obsolescent fiscal, military and political institutions and attitudes, as well as some principal military campaigns and battles. Religious miscalculations aggravated by an incompatible personal chemistry between Heraclius, a Roman in culture, and Sophronius, a Syrian mystic, seem very much to have to do with it; at least with regard to the defence of Jerusalem.

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