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Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Rom, Via Sicilia 136, 00187 Rom, Tel. +39(0)6-488814-1
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Seventh-Century North Africa

Military and Political Convergences and Divergences

by *Walter E. Kaegi*

Improved knowledge of facets of Early Islam and its government have both sharpened focus and tweaked knowledge of the 7th-c. transition between Byzantine, Late Antique, and Early Islamic environments in North Africa. Here are some general observations, not any intensive micro-study.

Some convergences of opinion have developed with formation of a larger picture of improving and more accurate focus of wider Mediterranean context, east to west and north to south. Yet convergence does not mean absolute consensus.

Transitions in North Africa between Byzantium and Islam are more poorly documented than those between Byzantium and Early Islam in some other regions that border the Mediterranean, such as Palestine and Syria. Historians of Byzantine and Early Islamic North Africa can only envy the resources available to scholars who investigate regions that lie further east. Papyri thus far regrettably reveal little explicit information about the conditions, trends and events in mid- and late-7th-c. North Africa.

There has been a convergence of scholarly interest on memory and its roles in history. This is true not only for 7th-c. North Africa, but for many other regions and periods. Also, there are related challenges of oblivion, silence, and effacement, and erasure. Questions of identity are receiving appropriate attention[1].

Convergences and divergences involve examination of the context for survival of a region inside a venerable and prestigious though far-flung and hard-pressed bureaucratic empire, the Byzantine or Roman stub of it, in an era of rapid change and volatility.

Convergence at one level is easy to observe: the interconnectedness of the 7th-c. Mediterranean from east to west, north to south is evident in primary sources such as the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* (630s)[2] and in the modern scholarship of G. W. Bowersock, M. McCormick, and C. Wickham[3]. The *Doctrina Jacobi,* which itself is the object of divergent opinions concerning its date and origins, attests to the speedy spread of flashes of information about embarrassing Byzantine military reversals on the Palestinian coast to communities in the vicinity of Carthage in North Africa[4].

Seventh-century North Africa experienced a fundamental convergence of its own developments that overlapped with a protracted Byzantine crisis of dynastic succession and legitimacy. Seventh-century Byzantine North Africa is almost co-terminus with the Heraclian dynasty, which lasted from 608 (or 610, depending whether you include the initial revolt against the usurping Emperor Phokas in 608), until 711. The tenuous and volatile character of imperial power at the centre, Constantinople, experienced repeated, successive reverberations and consequences in North Africa. Events and sources (Arabic and Latin) testify to the insecurity and unreliability of political and military leadership at or near the imperial palace in 602, 610, 641, 647–648, 662–663, 669, 695, 698, 705, 711, 713, 715, 717[5]. These crises at the centre cannot have improved confidence levels in North Africa.

It was the fortune of Byzantine North Africa to have momentary exposure, in the form of voluntary visits and even enforced exiles, to major policy undertakings of decision-makers. These initiatives started in the imperial palace and central Constantinopolitan bureaucracy, however abortively. Byzantine North Africa likewise experienced the sometimes disruptive momentary presence of extraordinarily influential fiscal and ecclesiastical leaders from Constantinople or lesser centres. But gyrating central imperial policymaking only worsened and distorted some local provincial responses in North Africa. North Africa remained a place to which the imperial government exiled those whom it regarded as troublemakers among ethnic, political, and religious dissidents. Very prominent exiles temporarily resided in North Africa, however involuntarily.

1 Conant 2012.
2 Dagron – Déroche 2010.
3 McCormick 2001; Bowersock 2005; Wickham 2005.
4 *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* 3, 1 (Dagron – Déroche 2010, 152); *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* 5, 16–17 (Dagron – Déroche 2010, 208 f.); *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* 5, 20 (Dagron – Déroche 2010, 214–219).
5 Kaegi 1981; Kaegi 2003; Kaegi 2010; Kaegi 2016.

Byzantine North Africa participated peripherally in the major but obscure efforts by Emperor Heraclius late in his reign (610–641), exact date uncertain, to have his sakellarios (Treasurer) Philagrios create a new census of the empire[6]. It was imperative to raise revenues to meet rising imperial expenses. Philagrios briefly fell out of favor at Constantinople when Heraclius' widow and niece Martina exiled him to Septem (Ceuta, now northern tip of north-west Morocco)[7]. That probably interrupted the process of reassessing the tax potential of the empire. Volatility at the top in Constantinople probably disrupted, impeded and confused efforts to implement comprehensive tax reassessment and tax collection, which difficulties continued to surface, however confusedly, in accounts in Latin and Arabic primary sources. Political confusion in Constantinople probably resulted in and reinforced confusion in fiscal leadership and initiatives. Changes probably confused taxpayers in provinces such as those in North Africa.

So there is a convergence of assent by researchers on the importance of North Africa's revenues and grain for the empire but divergence on their part concerning whether Byzantine or Muslim initiatives really were the cause for local taxpayer unrest in Italy, Sicily, and North Africa in the 660s. Constantinople was trying desperately to find revenues to fill the gap for loss of very substantial Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian tax flows. Africa became an obvious target for ratchetting up imperial taxes to swell the government's coffers. This effort also involved, as the *Liber Pontificalis* reports, potential inventorying, cataloguing and seizure of ecclesiastical plate, often silver[8]. The empire's leaders and especially its fiscal ones needed to find the financial means to confront hugely expensive military expenditures to resist the Muslim threat in the south-east and south, as well as that of the Lombards in Italy, and Avaro-Slav depredations and offensives, while trying to maintain, as far as was possible, the elevated standard of living to which bureaucratic and other elites at the centre of the empire were accustomed[9]. Those were contradictory challenges. No simple solution was available. There was necessarily going to be resultant pain. North Africa was caught in the middle of conflicting trends.

A ‹perfect storm› of different and sometimes contradictory problems – fiscal, religious, ethnic, internal political succession, military and external – struck North Africa in the 7th c. It was an unprecedented situation, a concatenation of many trends. They did not all originate in Byzantine North Africa. Seventh-century North Africa cannot be studied alone, in isolation. North Africa was part of a larger context but it was not seamlessly or tightly integrated into broader Mediterranean and hyper-Mediterranean contexts. Today it needs specialized local studies but also must be fit into a larger Mediterranean framework and even one that stretches beyond that sea to the east and north and west[10]. Some of this aids fitting North Africa into better perspective, or better reframing it. The crisis was not exclusively military. It is evident that contemporaries in North Africa and elsewhere did not understand what forces were transforming their world, and they certainly did not know how to reverse, check them or control them. Military, political and civilizational processes and developments were unable to complete themselves in North Africa without reverberations and alterations from the exterior. Unlimited local agency did not exist.

Evidence for partial but incomplete convergence exists. Both Byzantine and Muslim historiography tended to omit, erase, and emend traditions about 7th-c. North Africa. Except for Heraclius and his cousin Niketas, no members of the Byzantine dynasties are reported to have campaigned in person in North Africa since the age of Justinian I. Questions shroud Heraclius' shadowy cousin Niketas, son of Gregory. Just how much time did he spend in North Africa, where and until when?[11]

Later Arabic historiography, including ʿAbbāsid, transmits and disseminates a skewed historical memory. North Africa was far away from Baghdad, Damascus, and even Cairo. Only dim memories exist in extant Muslim sources concerning Byzantine political, military and ecclesiastical institutions and prosopography in North Africa. There is no explicit Muslim consciousness of any Byzantine ‹Exarchate› in North Africa. Muslim sources offer no evidence for possessing knowledge of precise Byzantine institutional terminology in North Africa. The fortunes of the office of the Count of Africa are opaque, as are those of the vicars. The whole topic of the institution of the Exarchate in North Africa has likewise receded in scholarly discourse.

Muslim sources preserve no coherent and intelligible picture of 7th-c. Byzantine fiscal, political, military and ecclesiastical institutions in North Africa. That generalisation applies to the History of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam as well as to that of Ibn Khaldūn half a millennium later. The Byzantine era receives minimal delineation in their narratives.

Convergent trends are unmistakable for eschatological expectations for both Muslims and non-Muslims in

6 Theodoros Skoutariotes, Σύνοψις χρονική (Sathas 110).
7 Nikephoros, *Historia syntomos* 30.
8 Lib. Pontif. 1, 344.
9 Haldon 2004, 179–234.
10 Bowersock 2012; Bowersock 2013.
11 PLRE III, 940–943.

North Africa and elsewhere in the 7th c.[12]. The new 2012 Dumbarton Oaks edition and translation of the late 7th-c. Pseudo-Methodius *Apocalypse* offers the best and most convenient critical edition of the Greek text. But surprisingly the explanatory footnotes to the Greek text and translations completely neglect and omit two recently established toponymical identifications respectively for Gigthis, southern Tunisia, and for Olbia in northeast Sardinia. Here the editor and translator Garstad was apparently following the state of scholarship back in 1993 when G. Reinink edited the Syriac original text. These omissions require correction. However, they will not permanently set back North African and central Mediterranean toponymics. For the moment, some readers and users of this well designed, convenient and otherwise excellent edition and translation may miss the precise toponymic identifications in a timely way, until scholarship takes account of topographical identifications published in 2000, 2002, 2003[13].

Muslim seizure of the region of Cyrenaica by 643 was a decisive step toward successful conquest of North Africa. In principle, Cyrenaica contained adequate terrain and topographic features for a viable defensive strategy but it lacked an adequate demographic base and its swift Muslim occupation following Muslim capture of Alexandria pre-empted and eliminated that option. Although isolated, it was fertile and could furnish invaluable provisions and invaluable information and advice to the Muslims, or to the Byzantines, if the inhabitants cooperated. Cyrenaica did experience some subsequent clashes between Byzantines and Muslims, but it never served as a reliable bulwark for Byzantine defenses[14].

The de facto demarcation line between Muslim and Byzantine spheres of authority in North Africa remained inherently unstable between 643 (date of Muslim occupation of Tripoli, Libya) and 647/648, date of the first major Muslim expedition into southern Tunisia or as it was, the late Roman/Byzantine province of Byzacena, by ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ, with his substantial human and financial resources as governor of Egypt. From then until the Muslim occupation of Mauretania II (Tingitana) that is extreme northwest Morocco, at the beginning of the 8th c. CE, the role of Egyptian governors remained prominent, even though they were unable to micromanage everything from Egypt.

Military dimensions of the 7th c. contain many convergences. Both Muslims and Byzantino-African military forces converged for decisive combat at or near Sbeitla (Sufetula) in 647/648. The region surrounding Sbeitla was strategically significant for dominating the province of Byzacena (southern Tunisia) but it also offered an opening for Muslim military penetration westwards into Numidia. It created a potential pivot for the Muslims, for from it one could move north as well as west from the Sbeitla region and southern Byzacena. Another convergence or coming together of decisive events took place in the middle 660s, culminating in Muslim raids that overran Cululis (ʿAyn Jalūla), Jirba, and enabled the establishment of a Muslim foothold in Byzacena at or near the future al-Qayrawān[15].

Limited convergence of scholarly opinion has formed about the role of Armenians in Byzantine North Africa in the final half-century or so as military commanders and as soldiers. Most scholars agree that Armenians had a presence and that the presence and role of Armenians in North Africa deserve more assessment.

North Africa does not stand alone in the 7th c. Events in Sicily and Sardinia and Italy as well as Egypt affect conditions and trends in Byzantine North Africa, whether religious, military, maritime, agricultural, or commercial.

Convergence is growing on the strategic importance of Egypt in the formation of decisions and for supply or resources and intelligence for Muslim expeditions and ultimate conquest of North Africa. Many questions remain open concerning Muslim leadership in Egypt and decisions concerning North Africa. This trend in rising estimation of the importance of Egypt for Muslim North Africa coincides with greater appreciation of the planning involved in the Muslim conquest of Egypt and Muslim mastery of its Byzantine administrative machinery[16]. But existing sources do not permit reliable conclusions on whether Early Muslim occupiers of North Africa imported certain practices from Egypt

12 Reinink 1993, 149–187; Donner 2010, 78–82.

13 Garstad 2012, respectively p. 338 lines 8 and 12. These refer to chapter 5, Greek edition, pp. 14–15 and Latin text, chapter 5.5 and 5.8, p. 90 lines 3–5 and p. 92, line 1. On p. 338, «Notes to the Translation», line 12, the correct toponym is Olbia in northeast Sardinia, which Muslims raided from Tripoli, Libya. Identifications explained in Kaegi 2000, Kaegi 2001, Kaegi 2003 and Kaegi 2013. – B. Garstad acknowledges in an email on 5 September 2013 to the author that he had overlooked these published identifications and would have taken account of them if he had known in advance. He will revise in a newer edition.

14 A visit to Libya in September 2013, my first since 1968, included an initial one to Cyrenaica. It greatly improved my knowledge of Cyrenaican terrain.

15 Kaegi 2010, 162–194.

16 Sijpesteijn 2007, 437–459; Trombley 2013, 5–38. Important revisionist interpretation of Muslim conquest of Egypt: Booth 2013. This is very noteworthy but these revisions do introduce or discuss new material of relevance for the Muslim conquest of North Africa.

that, for example, involved Muslim authorities communicating policies and regulations hierarchically down to local Christians through ecclesiastical parish authorities[17].

Muslim leadership often made its decisions about North Africa from its control of administrative machinery and communications in Egypt. Egypt served as the nodal centre for its military and diplomatic initiatives and actions. The Byzantines in North Africa for their part quickly lost whatever understanding they had of Muslims or proto-Muslims via an Egypt that fell from their control of at the end of the 630s and beginning of the 640s. That asymmetrical situation disadvantaged many North Africans and Byzantium. Predicting actions and seeing and interpreting the moves of the Muslims through the lens of Sicily and Sardinia and Malta was a poor substitute for that from Egypt. From its anchor in Egypt Muslim authorities could probe vulnerabilities in the desert and experiment with extensive land sweeps. Byzantine Sicily, Italy and Sardinia provided bases for maritime strikes against Muslims in North Africa and information mostly about coastal areas, not the North African interior. Possession of Egypt gave the Muslims a great and indeed dual advantage, although no guarantee of any ultimate total religious or military victory in North Africa. The Byzantines owned no equivalent stronghold for marshalling defences and intelligence for their efforts to defend and to control North Africa. The Byzantines' loss of Egypt cast a major shadow over Byzantine-Muslim political and military manoeuvres and competition for North Africa.

Convergences and divergences exist in scholarly opinions concerning the role of autochthonous peoples and their identities. Divergences exist concerning appropriate nomenclature, whether for peoples or placenames. Some scholars such as the author of many volumes on 7th-c. Byzantium, A. Stratos, expressed surprise at the relatively tepid actions of 7th-c. North African Christian elites to band together resolutely in order to develop effective and energetic resistance to Muslim raids and invasions[18]. Peter Brown points out how elites in North Africa actually and generally (with some exceptions) held back from supporting Catholic clergy in North Africa versus the region's Arian Vandal occupiers a century or more earlier. Is this in some way an anticipation of their mixed and low-key participation and inaction resisting the Muslims/Arabs in the middle and late 7th c.? Brown does not make any such conclusions or even raise questions about their role in the 7th c. But Brown's ever-observant remarks alert investigators to earlier patterns of conduct that might help to understand some otherwise puzzling 7th-c. historical events[19]. Did monastic leaders discourage support for the Byzantine authorities in the face of the Muslim threat? An obscure but prestigious and influential monastic who influenced Maximus the Confessor was the poorly understood Thalassios ‹the Libyan› or ‹African› who wrote the following *gnome*: Patiently endure the distressing and painful things that befall you, for through them God in His providence is purifying you.» Thalassios does not refer to Muslims, but some contemporaries could have received his exhortation to endure suffering and interpreted it to mean avoid open resistance to the Muslim invasions[20].

Study of 7th-c. Africa profits from recent major scholarly investigations on North Africa in the 3rd, 4th and 5th c., but those works cannot solve all of the questions of the 7th c., which has its own specificity.

There tends to be more convergence of scholarly opinion among Islamicists, e. g., Ramzi Rouighi, who discern fragmentation and centrifugal forces as the basic characteristics of North Africa[21]. But North Africa was fragmented and did not and could not fall simply and monolithically to some alien power or people with some simple and single military or political stroke.

There is a general convergence of scholarly opinion today, in contrast to that of earlier decades, that Christian communities persisted a long time in North Africa after the Muslim conquest, essentially up to and during the beginning of the Crusades.

This actual state of research in North Africa is contemporary with increasing intensive investigation of the parameters of transition between the Late Antique Roman world and that of Islam throughout the Mediterranean. There is insufficient space to cite and discuss all of these energetic and observant senior and junior researchers[22].

Byzantine military commanders in 7th-c. North Africa ceased to be rotated or recycled from tours of duty in upper Mesopotamia and Syria. Byzantium's eastern frontier, including Upper Mesopotamia and the edge of the Syrian desert, stopped serving as a kind of de facto training laboratory for Byzantine commanders in North Africa to learn how to combat Arabs under conditions not totally dissimilar to those in sections of North Africa. For whatever reasons, they did not refresh or invig-

17 Very early 8th-c. cases of papyri: P London IV 1343 line 26; P London IV 1384 lines 15–18. On which see: Mikhail 2014, 148 note 78.

18 Stratos 1975, 222. 251.

19 Brown 2012, 401 s.

20 Thalassios, *Centuria* 1, 28.

21 Rouighi 2011, 9. 12. 175 f.; Conant 2012.

22 Schick 1995.

orate themselves or improve their fighting and commander skills against the Muslims in any measurable way in North Africa during the 7th c.[23]. They did not manage to find any winning formula for military success or effectiveness against the Muslims.

The imperial government in Constantinople could not afford to shift adequate funds and skilled manpower and leadership from its other endangered borders and regions to North Africa. It was that simple. Even though Emperor Heraclius owed much to North Africa, including his crucial initial base of support for seizing the throne from the usurping Emperor Phokas, he found it to be necessary to respond to and concentrate on higher priority crises elsewhere, outside North Africa[24]. No great Byzantine military leaders emerged in North Africa after Heraclius, ones who could stand out and devise vigorous and practicable cost-efficient resistance to tribal raids or the newer phenomenon, major Muslim expeditionary campaigns.

North Africa exerted influence on Constantinople, it did not merely absorb influences from it, as is evident in the case of Heraclius and his nephew Niketas. The case of failure of the naval relief or rescue expedition to recover Carthage under John the Patrician in 698 is instructive. That unit rebelled and proclaimed the drungarios Apsimar as Emperor Tiberius III. The unit abandoned campaigning in North Africa and overthrew Emperor Leontios[25]. In retrospect the Byzantine Empire's military record in North Africa was no great object of pride or emulation for Byzantine posterity.

Very different perspectives and experiences can develop on the Bosphorus from those in the vicinity of Carthage or the North African interior. One cannot accurately appreciate North Africa's weather conditions, distances, terrain, tribal complexities and logistics from the Bosphorus. Constantinople appears to be more secure than the frequently vulnerable urban areas, including ports, in North Africa. Local Byzantine and Muslim commanders required latitude in making military decisions about strategy and tactics in North Africa, given the distances and the slowness of communications. They found it necessary to make decisions and react in the light of the actual finite human and material resources under their control.

There is growing agreement that more study of the relevance of conditions and events in Sicily for conditions in North Africa is desirable. Convergence of opinion has developed that North African trade persisted with Italy and with Sardinia.

Seemingly remote texts and publications can have implications for North Africa. T. Greenwood recovered, translated and explained neglected fragments of the 7th-c. Armenian scholar Anania of Shirak. They help to illumine the activities of the powerful 7th-c. imperial sakellarios Philagrios, including clues to Byzantine fiscal practices and procedures in the late 630s and immediately following. They may, but this is tenuous, give a few more flashes of information about Philagrios and about practices contemporary with the earliest Islamic conquests. They do not explicitly refer to conditions in North Africa. Greenwood makes a case for identifying the Philagrios mentioned as church deacon in Anania of Shirak with Philagrios the sakellarios who initiated a general cadastral survey late in the reign of Heraclius[26]. Whether Philagrios and his subordinates ever completed such a survey is unknown[27].

If, as Greenwood proposes, we can identify Philagrios the deacon with the later sakellarios Philagrios who was exiled to Septem (Ceuta) in 641, we then can assume that there existed talented and experienced Byzantine bureaucrats in North Africa who were capable of making or attempting somewhat complicated budgetary calculations for infantry and cavalry expenditures for the Byzantine military in the middle of the 7th c. A repertory of those capable of accounting reckoning existed. All of this is perfectly consistent with a sakellarios Philagrios, whom Heraclius charged with making a general census, per the brief notice in the *Synopsis Chronike* [Synopsis Sathas] of Theodore Skoutariotes[28].

Some religious writings of Anastasius the Sinaite offer late-7th-c. perspectives on Muslim occupation of the Near East (my term)[29].

Byzantine governmental policy tried to discourage local officials from negotiating local treaties or arrangements with Muslim authorities unless they had previously secured permissions or a waiver from Byzantine imperial authorities, in order to avoid undermining the imperial government's prestige and monopoly of power to conduct international relations. That policy had already emerged in Syria and Egypt well before the Muslim pressures on and conquest of North Africa. The 9th-c. historian Theophanes the Confessor gives some of the best descriptions of this phenomenon[30].

23 Kaegi 2010, 100–103.
24 Kaegi 2003, 21–57.
25 Nikephoros, *Historia syntomos* 41.
26 Greenwood 2011, 131–186, esp. 150 f. 161 f. 166.
27 Brandes 2002, 459 f.
28 Theodoros Skoutariotes, Σύνοψις χρονική (Sathas 110); Zuckerman 2005, 80–84.
29 Anastasius Sinaites, *Quaestiones* 65. 68. 69. 99.
30 Theophanes 338–339; Hoyland 1997, 584–590; Nikephoros, *Historia syntomos* 23, 26.

So much for convergences. Here is a selective and admittedly incomplete list of the opposite features, namely, important divergences in scholarly understanding of North Africa and divergent trends within North African history in the 7th c.:

The extent to which Sasanians managed to penetrate west between 619 and 629. Did they expand as far as Tripolitania? Or even Carthage? The theory of the late Paul Speck (Berlin) that the Sasanian Persians briefly occupied Carthage has not won acceptance[31]. There is no confirming evidence. In fact, the Carthaginian mint continued to strike Byzantine coins throughout the period in question, which implies continued Byzantine official control there.

Did the Sasanian Persians managed to raid and occupy Cyrenaica between 619 and 628 and if so, what did they do and to what effect?[32]

To which extent did the Muslim conquest of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania determine the fortunes of Muslim and Byzantine military forces? Was a Byzantine defence-in-depth practicable for Cyrenaica? What happened to the local inhabitants of Cyrenaica before, during and after Muslim raids and occupation? This micro-region was not solidly supportive of the Muslims. Primary sources are too opaque to be able to clarify the volatile and murky conditions. In 688 CE Zuhayr b. Qays al-Balawī regrouped his military forces there from Byzacena and al-Qayrawān, and found himself trapped and slain there, at or near Barca, by Byzantine units who descended by sea. They slew Zuhayr but failed to accomplish any enduring occupation of Cyrenaica[33].

The question remains open, whether Theophilus of Edessa is a common eastern source for the chronicle of Theophanes and other narratives. Contesting this thesis are Maria Conterno and Muriel Debié[34].

What was the relevance of the rebellion of the imperial usurper Mizizios and his son John in Sicily in the face of the assassination of Emperor Constans II in Syracuse in 669 (following T. Greenwood's chronology, which itself is subject to debate)[35]?

Divergences can be understood in a different way, in the sense of coordination, including approaches to Muslim historiographical traditions. Divergences can refer to assymetrical approaches and strategies.

Can we trust early Muslim accounts at all? Scepticism persists about the reliability of primary sources in Arabic for the history of the 7th and 8th c.[36].

What were the roles of Ibn al Zubayr and ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān in North Africa, and related propaganda concerning both with respect to North Africa[37]? We need to reconsider the implications for North Africa of the governorship of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān as amīr of Egypt from 685–705 CE[38]. This was a final critical time for Byzantine and Early Muslim North Africa.

Scholarly disagreement exists concerning existence and intensity, if any, of trans-Saharan gold trade before the Muslim conquest of North Africa[39].

Controversies swirl around issues of Byzantine taxes in North Africa between 534 and 711: their nature, changes, if any, and the effectiveness of the government in extracting them[40].

Many aspects of toponymics need more research, in particular understanding the alteration of place names between antiquity and the Early Islamic era. North African scholars have contributed much to filling this gap[41].

Scholars dispute the size of the Byzantine and Muslim armies[42].

We need to clarify the Byzantine emperor Constans II's military competence and role, including his motivation for moving to Italy and Sicily in 663, and whether solicitude and considerations for North Africa's vulnerability played a role in his calculations[43].

31 Speck 1988 75–77.

32 Sauer et al. 2013, has first endpaper maps which show Persian conquest in North Africa extending only to Gulf of Sirte, «Extent of Sasanian Empire» (3rd–7th c.) – no conquest shown for Tripolitania but comments borders fluctuating. See also Map 1 on p. 7 in Payne 2015, for map of Sasanian Empire and discussion of historical context, 7–16.

33 Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, Futūḥ Miṣr (Torrey 202 f.; Gateau 74–76).

34 Conterno 2014, 153–157. Original version was dissertation of 2011 (Conterno 2011), now revised as book, Conterno 2014. Debié supports the conclusions of Conterno: Debié was aware (Debié 2016, 4 note 6) of Conterno's forthcoming dissertation and printed book, but did not learn of it in sufficiently advance time to take account of it in his own book. Conterno has updated her conclusions in Conterno 2015.

35 Kaegi 2016.

36 Brunschvig 1942–1947, 108–155.

37 Kaegi 2010, 133–135. 216–218.

38 Mabra 2015.

39 On this controversial subject see Austen 2010, 11–18, but see Kaegi 2010, 39.

40 Many questions deserve clarification: Zuckerman 2005; Kaegi 2010.

41 Mahjoubi 1967; Jaidi 1977; Desanges et al. 2010. But scholarly divergences remain on the locations of operations of al-Kāhina, of Abū'l Muhājir Dīnār in 678, and the location of the decease of Kasīla (Kusayla): Encyclopédie berbère 27–29 (2009–2008) 4255–4264 s. v. Koçeila (Y. Modéran); Encyclopédie berbère 27 (2005) 4102–4111 s. v. Kahena (Al-Kâhina); also Encyclopédie berbère 34 (2012) 5572–5577 s. v Nomadisme (H. Claudot-Hawad), also Encyclopédie berbère 34 (2012) 5578–5589 s. v. Nomadisme saharien en Afrique du Nord dans l'antiquité (P. Trousset) and Encyclopédie berbère 9 (1991) 1307–1310 s. v. Bagaï (Bāghāya) (P. Trousset); Encyclopédie berbère 34 (2012) 5633–5668, esp. 5661–5662 s. v Numides, Numidie (J.-P. Laporte).

42 Whitby 1995; Haldon 1997, 208–253; Whitby 2000, 288–295. 306–314.

43 Corsi 1983, 81–85.

Divergences are fading among scholars for the discredited thesis that Byzantium attempted under Constans II to establish some kind of ‹theme system› (military district system) in North Africa in the waning years of Byzantine occupation[44].

The amount of African traces in Emperor Heraclius' dynasty, including himself and his successors, are subjects of dispute[45].

No consensus exists on the extent of and conditions of Judaism and Jews under the Vandals and Byzantines in North Africa, and whatever role Judaism or Jews had in North Africa at the moment of the Early Muslim conquests there. The extremely harsh Justinianic legislation against Jewish religious structures in North Africa may derive from some assumption that Jews had collaborated with Vandals. But no explicit explanation exists in extant primary sources[46].

New studies of Monotheletism result in divergent interpretations that do affect historical understanding of religious conditions in the middle and late 7th c.[47].

The significance of holy war, including Jihād, in 7th-c. North Africa is questionable. Byzantines had no practice of waging holy war in a strict sense (authorized by a competent ecclesiastical authority = Ecumenical Council or Permanent Synod of Bishops and the Patriarchs)[48].

Divergence endures on the issue of North Africa and contemporary 7th-c. Cyprus as possible parallels or models of relevance for understanding options for mixed-status occupation or sharing resources by Byzantium and Muslims[49].

Divergences exist concerning demographics. The population of respective provinces in North Africa before, during, and immediately following the Muslim conquests are unclear, because of inadequate sources[50].

Divergences bedevil Late Antique and Byzantine North African history concerning provincial boundaries and their significance[51].

Divergences concerning the conditions of Christian monasteries in North Africa exist, but there is convergence of opinion that the North African monastic situation differed from that in Egypt and the Levant and from that in Gaul[52].

There is divergence concerning whether Rome and Byzantium harmed North African long-term trends of internal development in the theories of A. Laroui and Y. Modéran[53].

There is debate on the Aures (Aurasian) mountains and the extent of Byzantine control of it. Some scholarly divergences exist even though a convergence of opinion affirms that the centre of gravity for much Byzantine-Muslim and North African-Muslim conflict was the larger region of the Aures, in southern Numidia. It was the area for mobilization of resistance. Here were some decisive battlegrounds. But this was also the region in which flexible and resourceful Muslim leaders experimented with and developed ways to encourage and persuade tribesmen to adjust to an Islamic environment, without exclusive recourse to sheer military might. Divergent traditions exist about the Muslim commander 'Uqba b. Nāfi', his chronology and expeditions and his relationships with and policies toward North African autochthonous tribes[54].

Many other unresolved questions remain. They would require another publication to begin to explore.

44 Kaegi 2010, 19 f. 214.

45 Kaegi 2003, 21–24.

46 Unproven and very speculative are G. P. Bognetti's hypotheses of Jewish collaboration and mediation between Lombards and Early Islamic raiders in southern Italy and Sicily, discussed in Corsi 1983 89–97. No certainty that such conditions in southern Italy also existed in North Africa. If true there could be comparable linkages in North Africa, but no conclusive evidence exists. Other studies: Encyclopédie berbère 26 (2004) 3939–3951 s. v. Judaïsme dans l'Antiquité (J.-M. Lassère); Encyclopédie berbère 26 (2004) 3969–3975 s. v. Juifs du Maghreb (J. Taïeb). See the group of papers in Zuckerman 2013, esp. Afinogenov et al. 2013, Andrist 2013a, Andrist 2013b, and Schiano 2013.

47 Jankowiak 2009 (unavailable to me at this time); Larison 2009; Tannous 2014.

48 Koder – Stouraitis 2012. The authors of those papers did not discuss the situation in North Africa. Broader and learned but controversial revisions of historical interpretations of Muslim conquests further east: Hoyland 2015.

49 Very useful cautionary material in: Zavagno 2011/2012.

50 Whitby 1995; Haldon 1997, 208–253, Whitby 2000, 292–295. 306–314.

51 Hoyland has raised questions about provincial boundaries in Palestine-Syria. Similar questions arise for provincial boundaries in North Africa, which are not his concern. Descriptions of provincial boundaries in sixth and beginning of the 7th c.: Hierocles, Synecdemus.

52 I learned much about this subject from face-to-face conversations with Professor Thomas F. X. Noble of Notre Dame University. – Walter D. Ward (Ward 2015, 67–91), explores the sacred topography of the Sinai and the complex relations and tensions there between nomads and monastics and monasteries. There is no comparable sacred topography of remapped Christian North Africa.

53 Laroui 2001, 61–65; Modéran 2003, 817.

54 Encyclopédie berbère 35 (2013) 5789–5794 s. v. Oqba Ibn Nâfi (Y. Modéran – H. Claudot-Hawad). – Divergence also remains concerning the conditions, structures, demographics and activities of such autochthonous populations. See Encyclopédie berbère 34 (2012) 5584–5589 s. v. Nomadisme (P. Trousset – Y. Modéran).

Abstract

A study of convergence and interrelated trends in a process of transition and change of North African regions from Christianity to Islam. Discussion of gaps in primary sources. Problem of terminology due to the different languages of the primary sources in the sixth and seventh centuries. Opaque conclusions: historical explanations and extrapolations are difficult and controversial to make. Silence of the sources a challenge for some periods.

Résumé

Une étude sur les tendances et convergences dans le processus de transition de la Chrétienté vers l'Islam en Afrique du Nord. Discussion sur les écarts entre les sources d'information. Problèmes de terminologie que supposent les différentes langues du sixième et septième siècle. Conclusions, explications et extrapolations historiques difficiles et sujettes à controverse. Certaines périodes complètement dénuées de sources.

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Address

Walter E. Kaegi
Professor Emeritus of History and the College
Department of History
The University of Chicago
1126 East 59th Street, Mailbox 56
Chicago, IL 60637
USA
kwal@uchicago.edu