



# Arabic-speaking Ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire (from the Ninth to Eleventh centuries)

Nicolas Drocourt

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# Ambassadors, Artists, Theologians

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Zachary Chitwood · Johannes Pahlitzsch (eds)



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# Arabic-speaking Ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire (from the Ninth to Eleventh Centuries)\*

In the framework of the conference held in Mainz, Arabic-speaking ambassadors deserve special attention. This paper will focus on the first three centuries of the period under consideration (i.e. between the ninth and eleventh centuries). Official emissaries were already present within the Byzantine Empire during the previous centuries, since the very beginning of Islam. The period of the *rāšidūn* caliphs and then the entire Umayyad period soon demonstrated that military contacts were only one side of a much more complex reality of relations between the Arab Near East and Byzantium. Peaceful relations also prevailed. Arabic-speaking ambassadors – as well as Byzantine emissaries sent to Damascus and then to Baghdad – were at the heart of these relations. Various studies by Marius Canard or, more recently, those by Andreas Kaplony and Alexander Beihammer, among others, have focused on these first decades and centuries of official and diplomatic relations<sup>1</sup>. They have demonstrated notably that many Arab ambassadors stayed in the Byzantine Empire – even if the ebb and flow of their movements did not follow a regular pattern, depending on geopolitical circumstances<sup>2</sup>.

The case of Arabic-speaking ambassadors sent to Byzantium during the subsequent centuries, until the beginning of the Crusades, can be analyzed. As such, the subject raises many questions. First of all, who are the ambassadors under consideration? What is their social and political profile? What are their conditions of travel and stay within the Empire? But we also have to deal with the political and cultural consequences of their stay in the Byzantine Empire – an aspect which will be considered in the third part of this paper. As a whole, the place and influence of these ambassadors compared to that of other individuals (monks, merchants or art-

ists) between Byzantium and the Arab Near East can also be considered within the context of this overview.

## Part of an Elite? Social Profile and Reasons for the Choice of Arab Ambassadors

Thanks to the written sources, scholars usually posit that ambassadors formed part of an elite during the Middle Ages – and this is not only true for Arab ambassadors sent to the Byzantine Empire<sup>3</sup>. But this seems particularly true for these emissaries, and, more generally, for the ones who moved from the Muslim to the Christian world and vice versa<sup>4</sup>.

Indeed, they have to be considered as part of a social as well as a military and political elite, even if this assertion cannot be checked for each case of diplomatic contact known to us. A few examples tend to prove this fact. First of all, the notable Abū 'Umayr 'Adī b. Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Aḡanī is impressive in that sense. He represents a case which requires careful thought. In the first part of the tenth century, 'Abd al-Bāqī held official administrative functions on the Abbasid Syrian frontier with Byzantium. He was an Arab from the Tamīm tribe originating from the Cilician city of Adana<sup>5</sup>. He is known to us notably because of his personal relations with one of the greatest Arab geographers of this century: al-Mas'ūdī. The latter presents him as a commander of the Syrian borderlands (*šayḥ aṭ-ṭuḡūr aš-šāmīya*)<sup>6</sup>, while al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī calls him a *ra'īs* of the same *ṭuḡūr*<sup>7</sup>. He appears to have played a central role in the diplomatic contacts between Byzantium and the Abbasid Caliphate. Indeed, if he reached Constantinople in May 946 to meet Constantine VII in the

\* I am very grateful to John Tolan and Jean-Marcel Périillon for reading and commenting upon earlier versions of this article. In the following study, the phrase »Arab ambassadors« will indicate Arabic-speaking ambassadors, be they Muslims or Christians.

1 See Canard, *Proche-Orient*; Kaplony, *Gesandtschaften*; Beihammer, *Nachrichten*; Rochow, *Byzanz und das Kalifat*.

2 Kennedy, *Diplomacy* 134-137.

3 For the relations between Byzantium and the Western world, see notably McCormick, *Ambassadors* 45-72, and Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 107-121.

4 Drocourt, *Diplomatic Relations* 59-61. I will focus here on the Arab ambassadors coming from the Arab Near East, including Egypt, and whose name and identity

are known, but a few of them remain *anonymi*: for them see PmbZ #30171, #30248, #30252 and #30370. For Aḡlabid envoys, to whom I will pay less attention, see, for instance: PmbZ #22680 and #22681.

5 On this notable and his relations with Byzantium see now: PmbZ #20086, with all the bibliographical references; see also Drocourt, *Diplomatie sur le Bosphore*, *Index sub verbo* »'Abd al-Bāqī«.

6 Mas'ūdī, *Prairies d'or* 2 §739 (277).

7 Vasiliev/Canard, *Byzance et les Arabes* 78 (*ra'īs* is translated as »notable« [in French] by M. Canard in this passage).



name of the caliph<sup>8</sup>, he was already an official mediator in 924, when he escorted a Byzantine embassy to Baghdad<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, at the beginning of the summer of 917 his name is also mentioned in Arabic sources for the role he played in the reception of another Byzantine embassy in order to prepare an exchange of prisoners<sup>10</sup>. Known through Arabic and Greek sources, 'Abd al-Bāqī has not surprisingly attracted the attention of historians of Arab-Byzantine relations<sup>11</sup>. We should also note that, for the beginning of the tenth century, Greek chroniclers mention the arrival of a man known as *Abelbakēs* in Constantinople for diplomatic reasons. Some scholars suggest he might be our 'Abd al-Bāqī, and, therefore, this diplomatic mission could have been the first of numerous official contacts for the *ra'īs* of the borderlands<sup>12</sup>. However, these views are not shared by other historians<sup>13</sup>.

The long «career» of Abū 'Umar 'Adī b. 'Abd al-Bāqī should not conceal another Arab ambassador known thanks to the famous historian aṭ-Ṭabarī. The name of this envoy clearly indicates a family link with the one just presented. Aṭ-Ṭabarī indeed mentions an official emissary whose name was Yaḥyā ibn 'Abd al-Bāqī. In 896 the latter also took part in a diplomatic mission between Baghdad and Constantinople. Sent by the Ṭūlūnid *amīr* Ibn Ḥumārawayh, he also prepared a major exchange of prisoners<sup>14</sup>. The precise nature of the family links between the two Ibn 'Abd al-Bāqī remains unknown<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, these two ambassadors remind us that different members of the same family can lead official delegations to Byzantium to defend the diplomatic interests of the Abbasid Caliphate<sup>16</sup>.

What is significant for our purpose is the fact that the Arabic term *ṣayḥ* can be associated with other official emissaries – thus confirming their political and social importance. Two cases prove this during the eleventh century, firstly with the *ṣayḥ* 'Abd al-Gānī ibn Sa'īd. He was sent to Constan-

tinople during the year 404 H. (13.7.1013/1.7.1014) by the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim. The famous Arabic and Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī specifies that he was Sunni<sup>17</sup>. His aim was certainly to renew the official peace treaty between the Byzantines and the Fatimids – a treaty already signed at the end of the year 1000 or beginning of the following year<sup>18</sup>. At the end of the year 1060, the new Mirdāsīd *amīr* of Aleppo also sent a *ṣayḥ* to Constantinople, 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Hafāḡī, asking the *basileus* for military aid against another Mirdāsīd faction<sup>19</sup>.

But other eminent Arab persons with local roles should be evoked as diplomatic agents. In May or June 1062, while military tensions were high with the Byzantines, the *amīr* Timāl b. Šālīḥ decided to send from Aleppo one of the notables of this city, Šāfi' b. 'Aḡāl b. as-Sūfi. Representing an *amīr* and city in a strong position, he succeeded in his diplomatic mission<sup>20</sup>. But if the choice of notables can be a guarantee of success, it does not necessarily equate to a strong Arab position. Exactly one century before, at the end of 962, the same inhabitants of Aleppo sent some of the most distinguished men to negotiate the surrender of their city with Emperor Nikephoros Phokas, who was besieging it<sup>21</sup>. Historians can find other examples of such surrenders negotiated by eminent members of Syrian cities at the time of the Byzantine conquest in the 970s<sup>22</sup>.

This role of members of the elite of cities and the administration is thus entirely confirmed by the ranks, functions or dignities occupied by a few Arab ambassadors whose names and functions have been recorded in our sources. Some *qāḏīs*, for example, can be found among these temporary diplomats. The flight of Bardas Skleros to Baghdad gave rise to numerous exchanges of embassies and ambassadors between Constantinople and the Abbasid capital. Among them, the coming of Abū Bākr al-Bāqillānī to Byzantium in 980/981, in the name

8 Kōnstantinos Porphyrogennētos, *De ceremoniis* 2,570,11-15 (presenting him as coming from Tarsus and as the caliph's representative); Mas'ūdī, *Avertissement* 407; see also Maqrīzī in Campagnolo-Pothitou, *Echanges* 19 f.; Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 653. He was received with other envoys (PmbZ #30370) also coming from Tarsus; they were not sent by *amīr* Sayf ad-Dawla nor received on Monday, 31 May 946 (as suggested by Angelidi, *Receptions* 484, maybe after Featherstone, *Display* 85 for the mention of Sayf ad-Dawla) because this day was a Sunday: Kresten, *Kaiserpalast* 15 (n. 42) and 22-25.

9 Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 605 with all the references.

10 Maqrīzī in Campagnolo-Pothitou, *Echanges* 18; Mas'ūdī, *Avertissement* 406; Vasiliev/Canard, *Byzance et les Arabes* 66-69, 78, 169-170; Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 578 and 578a.

11 See among others Canard, *Héraclée* 363, n. 1, and more recently: Beihammer, *Strategies* 388 f. For his relations with al-Mas'ūdī: Drocourt, *Political Information* 96 and 106 with subsequent bibliography.

12 See recently: PmbZ #20086 (probably in 906/907) with all the Greek references; the author of this notice remarks that the term of *gerōn* qualifying *Abelbakēs* in some of these Greek sources could be a transposition of the Arabic *ṣayḥ*, which is associated with 'Abd al-Bāqī as we have seen; Canard, *Héraclée* 363, n. 1 (under the date of 907); Drocourt, *Diplomatic Relations* 60 f. n. 141.

13 Beihammer, *Strategies* 388 f., does not mention him and, thus, does not establish any link with other diplomatic missions; see also Kresten, *Kaiserpalast*, 22-25, n. 74 and 29 f.

14 Tabarī, *Return of the Caliphate* 33; Vasiliev/Canard, *Byzance et les Arabes* 12. See PmbZ #28458; Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 525d and 534.

15 See Tabarī, *Return of the Caliphate* 33, n. 178; Campagnolo-Pothitou, *Echanges* 50.

16 As such, the parallel with Western Latin practices is tempting: at the same moment, the family of Liudprand of Cremona (his father and stepfather) also took part in diplomatic contacts between Provence, North Italy and Constantinople: see Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 108-111, 294 f., 297 and 301.

17 See the references to al-Maqrīzī and other Arabic sources in Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 798 f, and PmbZ #20011; see also Felix, *Byzanz und Islam* 59; Bianquis, *Damas* 307. 'Abd al-Gānī ibn Sa'īd is one of these Arab ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire only attested by Arabic authors.

18 Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, nos 789e, 792b, 798 f and 800c; Krönung, al Ḥākim 154, n. 59.

19 References to Kamāl ad-Dīn in Bianquis, *Damas* 572; Honigmann, *Ostgrenze* 117.

20 Bianquis, *Damas* 575; see also Honigmann, *Ostgrenze* 117.

21 See the references to Arabic sources in Canard, *H'amdānides* 813, and 812, n. 211.

22 As in 975 with the negotiation and surrender of Ṣaydā, see: Matthew of Edessa, *Chronicle* 31 (§19) (translation Dostourian: »the Sidonites (...) sent the elders of their town«); Bar Hebraeus 175 (but without any precision concerning the envoys): Ibn al-Qalānīsī describes the coming of a certain Abū I-Faḥḥ ibn aš-Ṣayḥ, notable of Sidon in Walker, *Tzimiskes* 321; Bianquis, *Damas* 98; Honigmann, *Ostgrenze* 100.

of the Būyid 'Aḍud ad-Dawla, has to be mentioned<sup>23</sup>. He was, at that time, a *qāḍī*, but also a famous jurist and theologian as Ibn Ḥallikān describes him in his *Biographical Dictionary*<sup>24</sup>. The same author also mentions another *qāḍī* who acted as an envoy of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir. Indeed, a man known as al-Qudā'ī led a mission to the Bosphorus in the mid-eleventh century. As a member of an intellectual elite, he wrote books which served as sources for subsequent Egyptian historians – such as al-Maqrīzī, who confirms his diplomatic role<sup>25</sup>. If we trust Kamāl ad-Dīn, he led a second embassy in the name of the Fatimids to the emperor Romanos IV in 1068<sup>26</sup>.

Even a vizier can act as an ambassador. Abū-l Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Maḡribī, vizier and envoy of Sayf ad-Dawla, negotiated an exchange of prisoners with the Byzantines in 966<sup>27</sup>. In the mid-eleventh century, the vizier, poet and ambassador Abū Naṣr al-Manazī (d. 437/1045) frequently traveled to Constantinople, where he purchased a great number of books<sup>28</sup>.

Finally, one should not forget the cases of diplomatic contacts with the court of Constantinople in which the *amīrs*, mainly understood here as autonomous princes governing an emirate, come to the Empire themselves to meet the emperor and to negotiate with him. These cases are numerous. The circumstances explaining such a choice are different from one case to the next. An *amīr* can negotiate and conclude an exchange of prisoners. The presence in Constantinople of the one called *Delemikēs* by the *De ceremoniis*, at the end of the summer of 946, provides a good example of this<sup>29</sup>. The coming of an *amīr* can be a mark of allegiance – such as the case of Abū Ḥaḥṣ, *amīr* of Melitene at the end of the year 931<sup>30</sup>. It is all the more obvious since the contact occurs while the emperor himself is on a military campaign which appears to be successful: the famous chronicler Yahya al-Anṭākī depicts it as taking place during the military presence in Syria in 995, for example<sup>31</sup>. In September 1032, an important

diplomatic negotiation took place in Constantinople concerning notably the oriental frontier of Byzantium and, thus, the fate of various emirates which were concerned with that frontier<sup>32</sup>. Among the representatives who were present, it is not surprising to find one of these *amīrs* himself, Ḥassān ibn al Mufarriḡ al-Ġarrāh, *amīr* of Tripoli<sup>33</sup>. Less than thirty years later, in 1056/1057 (H. 448), the Seljuk sultan Tuḡril Beg sent rich gifts to the Byzantine emperor through two eminent emissaries: the *amīr* Quṭb ad-Dawla and a man known as al-Ḥasanī presented as a *ṣarīf*, an Arabic term which means that al-Ḥasanī was considered a descendant of the Prophet<sup>34</sup>.

This last example definitely convinces us that Arab ambassadors were above all members of the political and social elite of the Arabs. The presence of *amīrs* reminds us of the importance attached to official contacts with Byzantium, as well as the need to be represented before the emperor in the best way possible, which means with the most suitable men.

Beyond this first overview of the social profile of our ambassadors, a few other explanations should be given. Why were these men chosen and not others who may have had the same profile? The choice of an ambassador remains based on a feeling of confidence. This confidence concerns, of course, the sovereign who sends an envoy and the latter, but also, to a lesser degree, the trust between the envoy and the sovereign who receives him (here the *basileus*). An ambassador should be reliable for the sovereign that he represents abroad<sup>35</sup>. As such, it is not surprising that caliphs or *amīrs* sent the closest person of their entourage and political circle. Abū Ishāq Ibn Ṣahrām, for his second stay in the Byzantine Empire in the name of the Abbasid caliph and Būyid *amīr* 'Aḍud ad-Dawla, is thus presented as »one of the trustworthy men« of the latter by Yahya al-Anṭākī<sup>36</sup>. Their choice can be directed to their own relatives. The presence of one of the sons of *amīrs*, for example, is frequently observed in our sources, and it is confirmed by Arabic as well as Greek sources. It seems, however, that this practice was more fre-

23 Arabic references to Ibn al-Athīr's *Kāmil* in Donohue, Buwayhid 77 (see also in Canard, Deux documents 56, n. 3) and to Abū Ṣūḡa' in Beihammer, Sturz 36-39, 37 n. 47 (and for the date, see also PmbZ #22689 and Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, no. 766b). Another Arabic source can be useful, as quoted by Mansouri, Musulmans 390, n. 42.

24 As quoted by the latter Ibn Ḥallikān 2,616 f.; on his activities as a jurist and *qāḍī*: Lambton, State 69-82. On the context: Donohue, Buwayhid 77.

25 Maqrīzī 276; Ibn Ḥallikān 2,617; Guest, List of Writers 117 and 124.

26 References to Kamāl ad-Dīn (given by Hamdani, Relations 177 f.); Felix, Byzanz und Islam 120 and n. 222.

27 This envoy, who would stay in Constantinople as a hostage, is known as a »*wazīr*« in only one Arabic text (Ibn al-Azraq); modern historians can present him as a »*vizir du H'amdanide*« (Sayf ad-Dawla) as does Canard, H'amdanides, 824 f., while others consider him a secretary, notably A. Beihammer, in Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, 707b, 707d (presents him as a »*Se-kretār*« thanks to Kamāl ad-Dīn who mentions him as »*kātib*« which means secretary); on this point see PmbZ #20071. I thank Bettina Krönung for commentaries and help rendered for these passages. On his function and role as an ambassador, see also: Campagnolo-Pothitou, Echanges 31, 46 f.

28 As recalled by El Cheikh, Byzantium 110 and her references.

29 Konstantinos Porphyrogenētos, De ceremoniis 2,15,593 f. He was probably 'Alī b. Ḡa'far ad-Daylamī, *amīr* of Amida, and was sent by Sayf ad-Dawla: Kresten, Kaiserpalast 30 f. and n. 92; PmbZ #21448; Vasiliev, Dynastie macédonienne 315 f.; Angelidi, Receptions 471. On his functions as *apokrisarios*, see the analyses proposed by Zuckerman, Olga 648, n. 2 and 671. The exchange

of prisoners took place during the month of October 946: Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, no. 653b.

30 The *amīr* came with the military commander of Melitene; they were welcomed by John Kourkouas, and then they came to Constantinople and met the emperor: the Greek chroniclers describing it are mentioned by Vest, Melitene 2,821 f.; Vasiliev, Dynastie macédonienne 266 f. See also, in the year 1000, the case of the Marwānid *amīr* Mumahhid ad-Dawla Sa'id: Yahya, Histoire 2,252; Felix, Byzanz und Islam 134; Ripper, Marwāniden 34 f.

31 Yahya, Histoire 2,234 (the *amīr* of Aleppo is accompanied by his chamberlain); ibidem 235 (governor of Tripoli); Bianquis, Damas 205 f.

32 See now Beihammer, Muslim Rulers 167 f.

33 Yahya, Histoire 3,163; Iōannēs Skylitzēs, Synopsis historiarum 383; Bianquis, Damas 497; Felix, Byzanz und Islam 43 and 100 f.

34 Book of Gifts 112 (§91). A probable mention of this last ambassador by Iōannēs Skylitzēs, Synopsis historiarum 454 (see the parallel established by Cahen, Diplomatie 13). Felix, Byzanz und Islam 171 and n. 114; Grabar, Shared Culture 121 f. (with the only date of 1057).

35 On this purpose, see the Siyāsāt-Nāma of Nizām al-Mulk, ch. 22: Nizām al-Mulk, Siyāsāt-Nāma 133 (French translation); Nizām al-Mulk, Book of Government 101 (English translation).

36 Yahya, Histoire 2,193. Logically, these conceptions of confidence in the heart of the choice of ambassadors are also true in the Byzantine and Western Christian spheres: McCormick, Ambassadors. On the embassy led by Ibn Ṣahrām: Donohue, Buwayhid 77 f.; PmbZ #22703, and above all Beihammer, Sturz.

quent, if not exclusive, during the eleventh century. To my knowledge we don't find caliphs sending their own sons. But it frequently appears during the first half of the eleventh century with other sovereigns. Mirdāsīd's *amīr* from Aleppo or *amīr* Ḥassān b. al-Mufarrīḡ sent their sons to Constantinople to request Byzantine titles and stipends. This seems to be a significant change in the way Arab and Muslim sovereigns conceived their diplomatic representation to the emperor. It is also certainly a consequence of close ties between Constantinople and these new Muslim frontier lords, the latter sometimes taking the role of representatives and dignitaries of the Byzantine Empire – as recently summarized by Alexander Beihammer<sup>37</sup>. It seems clear that this practice also corresponds to a period when the Byzantine Empire still had a strong influence on its eastern neighbours.

Among these trustworthy persons around the Abbasid caliphs, one should observe that the eunuchs are less present than other persons in this diplomatic role. As is well known, they played an important role in the first political circle of different caliphs, as D. Ayalon has demonstrated<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, they were rarely chosen as ambassadors to the *basileus*. Thanks to the Syriac author Bar Hebraeus one can be found, in the mid-ninth century, received by Empress Theodora to prepare an exchange of prisoners<sup>39</sup>. It remains true that eunuchs regularly appear in negotiations that take place in the borderlands, notably to prepare and carry out the well-known exchanges of prisoners between Byzantium and the Arabs<sup>40</sup>.

The choice of an ambassador is also the choice of a person who will be able to discuss and negotiate specific points. Since these diplomatic discussions concern the borderlands, it is not surprising to find residents of these areas chosen as official envoys, especially when they are part of the local political and military elite. Their names are indicative of their origins, and thus of their choice. Abū 'Umayr 'Adī b. Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Aḍanī, already presented, is a significant case<sup>41</sup>. We can add to him another envoy, acting for the Fatimid caliph on the eve of the battle of Manzikert. According to an Arabic text, his name was Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm b. 'Alī al-Kafartābī<sup>42</sup>. Here again, this *nisba* – an adjective indicating a person's place of origin used at the end of the name – indicates a man originating from Northern Syria (Kafartāb) who

is at the heart of Byzantine-Muslim negotiations<sup>43</sup>. Another question seems important: the capacity of these men to ratify treaties or peace conventions. It is not only a question of trust between the sovereign involved in these negotiations and his ambassador. It is also a question of knowledge of the law. This is an aspect that can explain the presence of *qādīs* or judges at the head of Arab embassies. Reading the account given by Abū Šuḡa' about Ibn Šahrām's embassy in 372 AH helps us to understand how long and hard these negotiations were, and how they could stumble over the written and final resolution – even if the re-writing by Abū Šuḡa' is not to be ignored<sup>44</sup>. Ambassadors have to be aware of these legal aspects before negotiating and even concluding any treaty or truce<sup>45</sup>.

Of course, linguistic skills should not be forgotten. If translators and interpreters existed at the imperial court of Constantinople, and if scholars hypothesize that there was an Arabic department in the Byzantine imperial chancery<sup>46</sup>, the knowledge of the Greek language was certainly another criterion in the choice of Arab and Muslim sovereigns. Here again, not surprisingly, we find Arab emissaries originating from the borderlands where bilingualism was a reality. As such, the case of 'Abd al-Bāqī in the first part of the tenth century is really symptomatic of this tendency: coming from the borderlands, being a high status officer, acting several times as ambassador and intermediary between Constantinople and Baghdad, and speaking Greek fluently if we trust Arabic testimonies. In 917, he acted in Baghdad as the official interpreter of the Byzantine emissaries coming to the Abbasid capital<sup>47</sup>, a function that he held one more time seven years later<sup>48</sup>. In the second part of the same century, the famous Arab geographer al-Muqaddasī explained that in different *ribātāt* of the south Syrian coast numerous persons speaking Greek could also be sent to Byzantium as members of an embassy<sup>49</sup>.

Last but not least, another criterion concerning the choice of Arab ambassadors is the fact that some of them are also Christian<sup>50</sup>. One has to note that it seems that most of these Arab and Christian ambassadors were above all Melkites. Three examples are significant. At the conclusion of the tenth century, a man known as Malkūṭā as-Suryānī offers a first ex-

37 Beihammer, Muslim Rulers, and more precisely at 165-167 and 172, with all the references to Greek and Arabic sources. But we should observe that this choice is also true, at the same moment with the *amīr* of Sicily who, in 1035, sent his son to Constantinople: see Felix, Byzanz und Islam 204 f. and the references to the sources. A request of this sort is not always met with success: Iōānnēs Skylitzēs, Synopsis historiarum 388; Beihammer, Muslim Rulers 177.

38 Ayalon, Eunuchs.

39 Bar Hebraeus 142.

40 Ayalon, Eunuchs 114-121; Campagnolo-Pothitou, Echanges.

41 See here references on notes 5 and 8 (Mas'ūdi, Avertissement 407). 'Abd al-Bāqī appears as governor of the city of Adana in 901: PmbZ #20086, 57.

42 Book of Gifts 196 f. (§263).

43 Ibn Māmak, coming from Antioch (*rasūl Antākiya*) in 982, may also be mentioned here: PmbZ #22700; Canard, H'amdanides 847 f. His coming takes place during the negotiations between Constantinople and Baghdad concerning the flight of Bardas Skleros.

44 See Beihammer, Sturz.

45 We should here make another comparison with the choice of ambassadors in the Western Christian world during the same period: the number of chancellors, notaries and specialists of written and juridical culture increases at the same moment: Drocourt, Place de l'écrit 37 f.

46 See Beihammer, Strategies 387 f., n. 54 and the references to previous studies.

47 Maqriẓī in Campagnolo-Pothitou, Echanges 18; Mas'ūdi, Avertissement 406; see the Arabic authors translated into French in Vasiliev/Canard, Byzance et les Arabes 66-69 (Ibn Miskawayh), 78 (al-Ḥatīb al-Baḡdādī), 169 f. (Sibt ibn al-Ḡawẓī); Book of Gifts 148-150 (§161). This reception has been largely analyzed by historians: Kennedy, Diplomacy 140.

48 Vasiliev/Canard, Byzance et les Arabes 69 (Ibn Miskawayh); Beihammer, Strategies 389; Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, no. 605.

49 Muqaddasī, Best Divisions 148. The *ribāt* (pl. *ribātāt*) was a fortification which housed military volunteers to defend Islam, see Picard/Borut, Rābata 44.

50 I will not develop this theme here; see the contribution of Bettina Krönung in this volume.

ample. He was twice sent to Emperor Basil II<sup>51</sup>. He was also a merchant, the only one I could find among the ambassadors, whose activities were certainly concerned with the fate of Arab-Byzantines borderlands. But the two most significant cases were the two patriarchs of Jerusalem, Orestes<sup>52</sup> and then Nikephoros<sup>53</sup>, who acted as envoys of the Fatimid caliphs in the first part of the next century. Beyond their great respectability – an important aspect for their reception in Byzantium – one should not forget that the former also had personal and familial links with the Fatimid caliph, being an uncle of the latter<sup>54</sup>.

## Conditions of Travel and Stay within the Empire

The presence of Arab ambassadors within the Byzantine Empire raises other questions. It concerns all the data in the texts connected with their conditions of travel and stay in Byzantium. Numerous studies have been devoted to these questions for merchants and other Arab travelers, but less attention has been paid to the ambassadors<sup>55</sup>.

This is quite surprising because we can find various data on these points in different texts (Arabic or Greek, normative or narrative ones). The data concerning the conditions of travel in the Byzantine territories are the first point. Like every member of official delegations, Arab ambassadors have to be escorted by Byzantine officials from the borderlands to the capital and on the way back. It was a double question of security: security for them and their retinue, but also security for the Empire itself since ambassadors could act as spies<sup>56</sup>. A quick glance at the *De ceremoniis* allows us to underline that this official escort was a reality which was orally recalled by the *logothetēs tou dromou* in the Great Palace of Constantinople. Indeed, chapter 47 of the second book of the *De ceremoniis* presents the various questions and answers that were orally exchanged between the *logothetēs* and three »kinds« of official visitors in Constantinople: the papal envoys, the Bulgarian ones and the ambassadors coming from Arab Muslim partners of Byzantium. It is worth noting that only the last of these were asked any questions connected with con-

ditions of travel and the quality of the official escort. According to this chapter, the *logothetēs* has to inquire about the ambassador's health but, above all, about the reception by the *stratēgoi* of the themes crossed by the embassy. Was this reception proper? Furthermore, the escort, led by what the text calls a *basilikos*, is also questioned. A third question appears: »Did any annoyance or trouble occur on the road?«<sup>57</sup>.

One has to remark that, if these questions are not confirmed as such in other testimonies, two Arabic texts confirm the nature and quality of this official escort in the oriental parts of the Empire. The first one concerns the case of the coming of the *amīr* of Tripoli (al-Ḥassān b. al-Muffariğ al-Ğarāh) to meet Romanos III in 1032. The rank of this Arab guest was such that he was escorted by the *katepanō* of Antioch, Niketas of Mistheia, until they arrived in Constantinople<sup>58</sup>. Another example is given by Ibn Šahrām and the detailed account of his embassy in Constantinople in 982. If we trust the account of Abū Šuġa', the Būyid envoy asserted that he proceeded to the capital and entered it »after [he] had been met and most courteously escorted by court officials«<sup>59</sup>.

Of course, the quality of this official escort is logically emphasized in Greek texts – as, for the first example, in that of John Skylitzes. A Greek and Byzantine author would not detail, or even mention, an official escort that went wrong. Secondly, one should not forget the geopolitical context behind each exchange of embassies. It is not surprising to find a decent, if not cordial, reception of an Arab ambassador while the overall relations between the sovereign who sends the latter and the court of Constantinople are at their best. Conversely, things can go wrong on the road and Arab emissaries can be the first victims. In 977, for example, a delegation of *Saracens* carrying the annual tribute from Aleppo to Constantinople had to interrupt its travel in Phrygia. If we trust John Skylitzes, this delegation then became the new stake in the struggle between Basil II and the rebels following Bardas Skleros. The amount of gold the emissaries were ready to offer in Constantinople, thanks to the famous treaty concluded in 970 with the Emirate of Aleppo, reached another political sense in that context, and the official emissaries were certainly disrupted in their task during the battle that followed<sup>60</sup>.

51 See all the references to Arabic sources in: PmbZ #24852; Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, nos 781a and 781<sup>b</sup>; Beihammer, Strategies 389, suggests that he »probably spoke Greek fluently«; Beihammer, al-Ḥākim 182.

52 PmbZ #26197 (Orestes) with the Arabic sources Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, no. 789e; Beihammer, al-Ḥākim 190; Krönung, al-Ḥākim 143, n. 14 and 145.

53 PmbZ #25674 (Nikephoros [I.] (von Jerusalem); see also, on the circumstances of his mission: Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, no. 816c; Beihammer, al-Ḥākim 188, n. 70, and 190f.; Shepard, Holy Land 530-536.

54 According to Ibn al-Qalānīsī it appears that another Christian acted as the only envoy in the mission led by Orestes; his name was Ibn Abī l-'Alā' Fahd b. Ibrāhīm. Yahya al-Antākī, who seems to be more trustworthy, does not mention it at all, but names Orestes: Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, Regesten, no. 789<sup>e</sup>. Ibn Abī l-'Alā' Fahd b. Ibrāhīm was a Christian secretary (but not a Melkite) of the eunuch Baḡawān. There is no reference to this envoy in the recent PmbZ, although historians had already noted his presence for this diplomatic contact: Bianquis, Damas 250; Felix, Byzanz und Islam 49, n. 15; Krönung, al-Ḥākim 143, n. 14.

55 Berger, Arab Travellers; Reinert, Muslim Presence; more information concerning the ambassadors in Anderson, Islamic Spaces; see also now Drocourt, Diplomatie sur le Bosphore 374f., 585-671.

56 Koutrakou, Spies.

57 Kōnstantinos Porphyrogennētōs, *De ceremoniis* 2,47, 683 (l. 11-14), 684 (l.20)-685 (l.1-3), and 685 (l. 18f.). In the first case, the *stratēgos* of Cappadocia is mentioned for the envoys coming from »Syria« and sent by the *amermounnēs* (i. e. caliph).

58 Iōānnēs Skylitzēs, *Synopsis historiarum* 383; Beihammer, Muslim Rulers 172f. (with references to Kekaumenos' *Stratēgikon* depicting the *amīr's* stay in Constantinople); Bianquis, Damas 497; Felix, Byzanz und Islam 100.

59 Amedroz, Embassy 921, but it seems that this escort, led by »court officials«, concerns instead the one he received in the capital of the Empire. This escort was also appointed »to watch« and control him: Durak, Performance 159.

60 The army of Basil II was finally victorious, and the emissaries reached Constantinople after the battle near the fortress of Oxythos: Iōānnēs Skylitzēs, *Synopsis historiarum* 321; Belke/Mersich, Phrygien und Pisidien 353 (with the date we follow); Canard, H'amdanides 682 and 849; Honigsmann, Ostgrenze 103.



Another point can be mentioned in relation to the stay of Arab ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire. It concerns their housing as well as their freedom of movement within the capital of the Empire. We have to recognize that we do not have much information on this aspect of diplomatic relations between Byzantium and the Arabs – but this is also true for other ambassadors coming from other parts of the medieval world. However, some data leak out from Arabic sources. Naṣr ibn al-Azhar, the Abbasid envoy in 860, notes that after the first audience with the emperor, he was lodged in a place near the Great Palace<sup>61</sup>. In his case, it is clearly to maintain close control over him since the Byzantine authorities isolated him for four months before resuming diplomatic negotiations. One should recall here that another Arab ambassador, although he was coming from the Western part of Muslim territories (i.e. the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba), Yaḥya al-Ġazāl, mentioned the place where he and his retinue were housed twenty years earlier. He called it the *akadamīya min marmar*, which means »an academy of white marble«<sup>62</sup>. This detail leads us to mention the apparent or real luxury, and maybe comfort, of these places of residence for Arab ambassadors. In 946, thanks to the Greek and normative source *De ceremoniis*, we learn that the Muslim ambassadors who came to the capital to prepare an exchange of prisoners were housed in a place called the *chrysiōn*<sup>63</sup>. If this sole mention remains vague, notably compared with the abundant details given in the same book by Peter the Patrician describing the stay of a Persian embassy in the sixth century, the Greek term employed refers one more time to luxury and, logically, comfort<sup>64</sup>.

One last example of an Arab ambassador housed in Constantinople has to be underlined. It concerns Ishāq ibn Šahrām and his stay in 982, already mentioned. Through the details presented by Abū Šuġa‘, we learn that he was »honourably lodged in the palace of Nikephoros Kanikleios (Nikfūr al-Kānilī)« – who was the Byzantine envoy who went to Baghdad and came back with the Būyid ambassador<sup>65</sup>. This detail in this account sounds very important for our purpose. It clearly establishes the fact that a high degree of confidence appeared at that time between the two parties here in negotiation, the court of Constantinople and Bagh-

dad. Unless the Arab ambassador or the Arab writer Abū Šuġa‘ made a mistake, it is the only case I have found where an Arab ambassador was lodged in a private place in the Byzantine Empire<sup>66</sup>.

Our sources remain scarce on other aspects of the stay of Arab ambassadors in the Byzantine capital – even if they could stay there for months<sup>67</sup>. Of course, if these Arab ambassadors were Muslim they could have access to the so-called mosque of Constantinople, to which recent studies have drawn our attention<sup>68</sup>. This place plays not only a religious role in the capital, but also a political one for Muslim prisoners, merchants or ambassadors. It was in the mosque that the famous *qāḍī* al-Qudā‘ī, a Fatimid envoy in the mid-eleventh century, was a direct witness to the change of the political allegiance associated with the Friday sermon or *ḥuṭba*. Indeed while he was in the capital, illustrating the peaceful relations that had existed between Cairo and Byzantium at that time, he witnessed the arrival of emissaries sent by the Seljuk sultan Tuġril Beg. Their request concerned the Friday prayer (*ḥuṭba*): it should be preached in the name of the Abbasid caliph rather than in that of the Fatimid one – a claim the Byzantines agreed to<sup>69</sup>. If Arab ambassadors were Melkite or Orthodox Christians, they could certainly have access to numerous Christian churches, sanctuaries or monasteries of the capital, especially if they were patriarchs of Jerusalem such as Orestes and Nikephoros at the beginning of the eleventh century.

But the display of Christian churches, or relics, was not only reserved for Christian or pagan partners: in 906/907 the sacred objects of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople were shown to Arab and Muslim envoys. If by this means the Byzantine emperor tried to demonstrate his religion's superiority, it was also a choice made in the presence of an ambassador coming from Melitene and who was also the father of the famous Samonas. Nevertheless, the Greek and Christian chroniclers considered such a display to be exaggerated<sup>70</sup>. This aspect leads us to the symbolic part of the official reception of Arab ambassadors at the Byzantine court. Much has been written on this topic. I will just recall here the fact that the Byzantine court ritual of *proskynēsis* could have been presented in the sources as a problem for Arab emissaries. Whether they are exaggerated or not, partially or totally fic-

61 Tabari, *Incipient Decline* 156.

62 I quote the translation adopted by Lévi-Provençal, *Echange* 12, but one should note that the translation proposed by M. A. Makkī and F. Corriente is quite different: Ibn Hayyān, *Crónica* 237.

63 Kōnstantinos Porphyrogennētos, *De ceremoniis* 2,15, 583 and 586, l. 12. On the *chrysiōn* see Bauer, *Geschenke* 160, n. 115 and the references.

64 In May 946, the Arab ambassadors were also associated with another form of luxury, at the end of the dinner they had with the emperors in the *triklinos* of Justinian (Kōnstantinos Porphyrogennētos, *De ceremoniis* 2,15, 585f.). There they were served »a wild-vine decoction, rose-water, *galaion* and other fragrances«, and then »they washed and dried themselves with handtowels of high quality«, and they »were abundantly filled with those fragrant and sweetly smelling perfumes and ointments« (I quote here the translation of Angelidi, *Receptions* 484f., correcting the one of Featherstone, *Display* 97). As remarked by C. Angelidi, other envoys in the same long chapter were not offered a comparable treat of fragrances, and we must suggest with her that, in this way, this official meeting was certainly adapted to these Arab guests. Indeed, perfumes

and luxury products were narrowly associated with Eastern neighbors of the Byzantines, be they Arab or Muslims: Koutrakou, *Eastern Luxury Nexus*, and especially 329 for perfumes.

65 Amedroz, *Embassy* 921; Beihammer, *Sturz* 30.

66 The *Chronicon Salernitanum* informs us of a Salernitan bishop who gave accommodation to a Muslim emissary in his personal residence, but had to go to Rome in expiation of his crime: Drocourt, *Diplomatic Relations* 57f.

67 As the case of Naṣr ibn al-Azhar shows (see above n. 61).

68 Anderson, *Islamic Spaces*; Woods, *Maslama*.

69 See Felix, *Byzanz und Islam* 119-121; Anderson, *Islamic Spaces* 101f.; Thomson, *Relations* 55f. and 59; Donohue, *Buwayhid* 78; Drocourt, *Political Information* 103, n. 60.

70 Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia* 374f.; Iōannēs Skylitzēs, *Synopsis historiarum* 189; PmbZ # 26973A; Vest, *Melitene* 2,766. On the contrary, in 1161, when Manuel I Komnenos received the Seljuk sultan Kilij Arslan II in Constantinople, access to Hagia Sophia was strictly forbidden to the Muslim sovereign: Iōannēs Kinnamos, *Epitome Rerum* 206.

titious or not, some Arabic texts depict the way these envoys tried to free themselves from this *proskynēsis* or other court ritual, and thus try to demonstrate their superiority before the *basileus*. The cases of Yahya al-Ġazāl and of al-Bāqillānī have to be mentioned, and have already been analyzed by previous studies<sup>71</sup>. Trying to avoid and spurn formal etiquette could also have been a choice of Arab ambassadors sent by Turkish rulers. Skylitzēs describes how arrogant was the one he presents as a *serifos* or *šarīf*. Faced with this attitude, Emperor Constantine IX decided to dismiss the ambassador without negotiating<sup>72</sup>.

This information leads us to the question of the immunity of our ambassadors. Like others, Arab envoys in the Empire enjoyed a diplomatic status that theoretically protected them against any mistreatment. This is guaranteed by the *ius gentium*, which is a common law that can be found in various normative texts, be they Greek, Latin or Arabic. Of course, voluntary isolation could appear as a political choice by Byzantine authorities, as we have already pointed out. In 860, Naṣr ibn al-Azhar remained isolated for four months<sup>73</sup>. Around forty years later, another Arab ambassador coming from Baghdad was subjected to the same treatment. At-Tanūḥī explains that he was sent to the capital of the Byzantine Empire to investigate the situation of Muslim prisoners of war. Rumors had reached Baghdad that they were mistreated. When he arrived, he was allowed to visit a prison and see them, but only after having been isolated for many days. And if we trust his testimony, the prisoners he saw were in good health, wearing new clothes. But the ambassador was not taken in, explaining that if the Byzantine authorities had refused to receive him officially for several days, it was precisely to have enough time to change the appearance of Muslim prisoners<sup>74</sup>.

When political and military tension arose, the Arab ambassadors – as well as the Byzantine ones in Arab territories – could suffer other forms of ill-treatment. In the context of war and military campaigns, if the principles of the *ius*

*gentium* were recalled by the Byzantines<sup>75</sup>, the reality was sometimes different. The choice of isolation appears more frequently than during periods of peace, and this isolation clearly reaches another level that we have to call imprisonment. In 992, for instance, the *katepanō* of Antioch received an envoy of Manġūtakin, a Turkish *amīr* acting in the name of the Fatimid caliph. This diplomatic contact took place while Manġūtakin was leading military operations against the Byzantines in the region. The first reaction of the *katepanō* was to send the official envoy to jail. Nevertheless, the *basileus* was very upset by this reaction of his *katepanō*: if we trust Yahya al-Anṭāki, the emperor asked his *katepanō* to send the envoy to him – while he was campaigning on the Bulgarian front – and when the envoy reached him, Basil II decided to free him<sup>76</sup>. Another significant case concerns the famous military campaign led by Romanos III in 1030 against the emirate of Aleppo. Again thanks to information delivered by Yahya al-Anṭāki, we learn that Muqallad b. Mirdās, Aleppo's ambassador to the emperor, was also imprisoned by the latter and remained in jail during the entire campaign, until the defeat of the Byzantines. But what is significant is the fact that the Byzantine envoy sent to the Mirdāsids suffered the same fate<sup>77</sup>.

Finally, except for these specific cases – specific because they are associated with a military context – one has to note that these envoys did not suffer in physical terms. I only found one case which refutes this observation. It concerns an envoy sent by the inhabitants of the city of Tarsos while Emperor Nikephoros Phokas was besieging it in 965. Proposing peace, the envoy was certainly surprised by the emperor's reaction: he burnt the letter on the head of the envoy with a gesture which also »singled his beard and [the emperor] drove him away«<sup>78</sup>. This is an attitude that was beyond all expectations and in contradiction with the principles of the so-called *ius gentium*. It can be explained by a form of triumphalism by the Emperor who at that time won numerous military victories in northern Syria<sup>79</sup>.

71 References in Drocourt, *Relations* 63f., n. 153 for the question of the *proskynēsis*. Clothes are also an aspect appearing in these contexts: in 860 the entry of Naṣr ibn al-Azhar in the Great Palace was already a kind of affront to this etiquette; the way at-Tabarī describes it demonstrates that the ambassador employed it in a good way for his first encounter with Emperor Michael III: on this case see Durak, *Performance* 162; for the case of al-Bāqillānī: Beihammer, *Kommunikation* 177f.

72 Iōannēs Skylitzēs, *Synopsis historiarum* 454. A parallel has to be drawn with another *šarīf* mentioned as an ambassador in an Arabic text (see above on note 34). One has to note that even if the sovereign or sultan was Turkish, some of his ambassadors sent to Byzantium were Arabs. In AH 444 (3 May 1052/22 April 1053), for instance, Tuġril Beg sent to Constantinople someone whose name was Abū 'Alī b. Kathir: Felix, *Byzanz und Islam* 118f.; Idris, *Glanes* 304.

73 Tabarī, *Incipient Decline* 156.

74 Tanūḥī in Vasiliev/Canard, *Byzance et les Arabes* 288f.; see Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 595b (proposing July 922, but not excluding a previous date, 913/914); PmbZ #31070. An anonymous envoy of the patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem was also sent with the one coming from Baghdad, but was not isolated by the emperor: PmbZ #31072.

75 See notably Leōn VI, *Taktika*, ch. XVII, § 5, 394 and ch. XX, § 33, 548. In 1071, some material guarantees were given to the envoys who came from Alp Arslan on the eve of the battle of Manzikert as attested by Greek sources (notably Michael Attaleiates): to be read now, in comparison with many other texts in non-Greek languages, in the recent monograph of Hillenbrand, *Manzikert*.

76 Yahya, *Histoire* 2,230f.; Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 781c; PmbZ #31964 (on the anonymous envoy); on Manġūtakin: PmbZ #24858.

77 Yahya, *Histoire* 3,127-129 (who presents, in fact, the cases of two different ambassadors from Aleppo who were sent to jail – and the first of them with the gifts he tried to offer to the emperor – but the latter logically refusing it; he would only accept it at the end of the conflict: *ibidem* 141, and Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 834a). Historians have experienced some confusion about these two embassies: see Bianquis, *Damas* 472f. and the observations made by Felix, *Byzanz und Islam* 85, n. 128. For the reference to the Byzantine envoy imprisoned: Yahya, *Histoire* 3,127-129 and 141; Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 832b. On the topic of diplomatic reception during military campaigns of the *basileis*: N. Drocourt, *L'activité diplomatique* (in press).

78 I quote here the terms of Bar Hebraeus 170; for the reference to Arabic sources, see: Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten*, no. 706b; PmbZ #31474 (*Anonymus*).

79 This triumphalism and its consequences in the range of diplomatic contacts are also obvious for other foreign ambassadors received at the court of Nikephoros Phokas: Drocourt, *Ambassadeur maltraité* 97f. Another case must be underlined, even if it doesn't concern an Arab ambassador sent to Byzantium but who crossed the Empire as an envoy between the Zirid and Abbasid courts. His name was Abū Ġālib aṣ-Širāzī and in AH 443 [15 May 1051 - 2 May 1052], he was captured by the Byzantines while he was trying to conclude an alliance against the Fatimids of Cairo. He was thus sent by the Byzantines to this city

## Cultural and Intellectual Impact of the Presence of Arab Ambassadors in Byzantium

A final aspect of the Arab diplomatic presence in the Empire has to be considered: its cultural consequences. This theme has already been largely studied by numerous scholars, notably Nike Koutrakou for the period under consideration<sup>80</sup>. As such, this part of the study will be shorter than previous ones. Intellectual, artistic or, in a broad sense, what is called cultural relations can be surprising in the context of political relations between Byzantium and its Arab and Muslim partners. However, historians have demonstrated that we should not only assume military or political opposition between the Byzantines and these partners. The relations in question had a cultural dimension and were a reality that reminds us how ambivalent these multifaceted relations were.

Indeed, as part of an intellectual elite, Arab ambassadors did not come to the Empire for political or military reasons alone. In various cases, the sources evoke the intellectual dimension of their presence – and even focus on this aspect only, deliberately forgetting the diplomatic and major reasons for their presence. This assumption seems obvious in the case of relations between Cordoba and Constantinople in the mid-tenth century. If we trust Arabic testimonies, they only implied cultural ties between the two courts, but, in fact, these contacts also prepared a military attack against a common threat: the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya<sup>81</sup>. The relations of Byzantium with the Arab Near East offer the same perspectives. As such, the case of the first embassy led by Abū Ishāq ibn Šahrām is significant. This diplomatic mission was carried out in the name of the Ḥamdānīd's *amīr* Sayf ad-Daula. Cultural aspects were certainly not the first reasons explaining the presence of the Arab ambassador in Constantinople, but they prevail in the famous Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist*. Ibn an-Nadīm gives a lot of interesting details on that mission and on the cultural role that Ibn Šahrām played. He describes him asking the emperor of the Byzantines to open »a temple of ancient construction« where, in ancient times, »the Greeks (...) worshipped heavenly bodies and idols« – a temple which was closed in the mid-tenth century and could only be reached after a three-day journey from Constantinople. The emperor agreed to open it and the ambassador was allowed to visit it. Thanks to his report Ibn Šahrām asserted that he had »never seen anything equaling its vastness and beauty«; but he also mentioned that he saw numerous »ancient books« and that some of which, according to him, »were worn« or »in nor-

mal conditions«, while others were »eaten by insects«<sup>82</sup>. The temple was closed after the envoy's visit, and, as Juan Signes Codoñer remarked, Ibn Šahrām went back without any of these manuscripts<sup>83</sup>.

This example of cultural contact through diplomatic means is interesting for various reasons. First, and although the »cultural exchange« was partially aborted, the case shows us that this kind of cultural display was possible. Secondly, the part played by the Arab ambassador appears very active, requesting orally or by written correspondence for the emperor to open this old temple. Thirdly, we should of course be very cautious about this testimony: it was also written to prove the idea – much more than the reality – of an ambassador who triumphs over the Byzantine emperor. Furthermore, this passage of Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist* illustrates one of the aspects of Byzantine-Arab relations demonstrated by Dimitri Gutas. Indeed, it tends to demonstrate that the Byzantines could not be aware of their Greek cultural heritage since they were Christians – and the text of the Arabic author clearly states the temple »had been locked since the time that the Byzantines had become Christians.« On the contrary, Arabs and Muslims were the ones who could appreciate this cultural heritage, due to their adherence to Islam, and therefore defended a philhellenic and anti-Byzantine attitude<sup>84</sup>. As such, diplomatic means and the cultural dimension of this contact were a way to demonstrate the superiority of Arabs and Muslims over the Byzantines.

Material culture was not absent from cultural exchanges through the ebb and flow of embassies. The place and role of gifts must be pointed out. This aspect has also extensively been studied by Byzantinists recently, so it will not be developed here<sup>85</sup>. But it remains important to remind ourselves that Arab ambassadors – as well as Byzantines ones – occupied a central place in the concrete transfer of gifts. The famous *Book of Gifts and Rarities* (*Kitāb al-Ḥadāyā wa-t-Tuḥaf*) demonstrates this at the end of the period under examination<sup>86</sup>. However, one has to recognize that in most cases we do not have much information about the evolution of these objects, their real cultural impact or consequences within the Empire. Nevertheless, we must underline that the objects which circulated by these diplomatic means (luxurious clothing, books, ivory etc., or the »curious and new« objects offered by Naṣr b. al-Azhar among others in 860) demonstrate how close the Byzantine and Arab elites were. Of course, diplomatic gifts could have a political impact: the choice of a gift is never innocuous. Exotic animals such

where he was publicly humiliated, before going back to Constantinople. There, the *basileus* received another Arab envoy from Baghdad asking for the release of Abū Ḡālib aš-Širāzī: this story was known to al-Maqrīzī: Felix, *Byzanz und Islam* 117-119; Lev, *Fatimids* 273; Idris, *Glanes* 303 f. (with a French translation of al-Maqrīzī).

80 Koutrakou, *Highlights*; for the ninth century: Magdalino, *Road*; Sypiānski, *Cultural Rivalry*; Signes Codoñer, *Theophilos* 421-448; see also, in broader perspective: Drocourt, *Diplomatie sur le Bosphore* 707-724.

81 Koutrakou, *Highlights* 99 f. (with the references to the works of Juan Signes Codoñer).

82 Ibn an-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist* 585 f. This text is also translated by Vasiliev/Canard, *Byzance et les Arabes* 295 f.; on this contact see also Canard, *Deux documents* 56 f., n. 4; PmbZ #22703.

83 Signes Codoñer, *Diplomacia del Libro* 172.

84 Gutas, *Greek Thought*; see also El Cheikh, *Byzantium* 102-106.

85 See Cutler, *Significant Gifts*, with references to his previous studies; Beihammer, *Kommunikation* 183-188; Drocourt, *Diplomatic Relations* 66 f.

86 *Book of Gifts*.

as the giraffe and elephant sent from the Fatimid caliph of Egypt in 1054 could be exhibited by the emperor to the inhabitants of Constantinople<sup>87</sup>. A few years before, in 1032, to demonstrate how much the *basileus* could trust him, the *amīr* of Aleppo sent him no less than a precious Christian relic: a lock of hair of John the Baptist. This gift complemented the annual tribute paid to Constantinople by the Mirdāsids. By this gesture, the *amīr* »emphasized his high esteem for the capacity of the *basileus* – his overlord – as head of Christianity«<sup>88</sup>.

This can lead us to a last aspect: the intellectual skills of Arab ambassadors. As noted above, some of them were chosen thanks to their ability to communicate in Greek with the Byzantine authorities. This fact is important but it should not be downplayed that all the ambassadors, whether they could speak Greek or not, should theoretically be able to lead discussions which were certainly complex. This is due, first of all, to the fact that diplomatic negotiations about exchanges of prisoners or the new delimitation of borderlands were complex, as demonstrated, for example, by the report Abū Šuġa' made of Ibn aš-Šarhām's embassy in 982<sup>89</sup>. Secondly, one has to recall that theological discussions were certainly frequent with the emperor and his entourage, when the Arab ambassadors were Muslims. The diplomatic presence of Abū Bākr al-Bāqillānī gives clear testimony on that point. During his stay in Constantinople he held a theological discussion in the presence of the emperor, the patriarch and other Greek theologians who were presented as »priests«. This discussion also dealt with astronomical topics<sup>90</sup>. Historians have already underlined that such debates during diplomatic encounters could involve history and geography<sup>91</sup>.

Clothes are also a means of expressing cultural differences and Arab ambassadors were aware of it. Again the cases of Našr ibn al-Azhar in 860 and Abū Bākr al-Bāqillānī more than one century later underscore this<sup>92</sup>. Of course, the way Arab ambassadors, and others, wore their clothes in a diplomatic context, added to the way subsequent authors describe it,

had symbolic meanings<sup>93</sup>. Whatever it shows of the diplomatic confrontation between the Arab Near East and Byzantium, it first underlines the fact that ambassadors had to be well-acquainted with each other's culture. Furthermore, it clearly demonstrates that every diplomatic contact necessarily had a cultural component. It also shows that embassies, to quote Nike Koutrakou, »created their own cultural interest, by inciting the other party's interest in the envoy's thought-world and vice-versa«<sup>94</sup>.

## Conclusion

Is it necessary then, after these developments, to stress again the importance and role played by Arab ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire? Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, there were many of them, acting as political or diplomatic actors as well as cultural brokers. As part of an elite, be they Christians or Muslims, their presence within the Empire implies many things. First of all, they were usually carefully welcomed by Byzantine authorities, and normative texts such as the *De ceremoniis* appear to be confirmed by narrative ones. Their conditions of stay were also favorable in Constantinople, judging from the scarce information we can rely on, even if their potential role as spies led the Byzantine authorities to pay close attention to them. Being part of a social or political elite and members of the first circle of the sovereign's family they represented, they reached a high degree of trust with that sovereign. That element was essential to conduct diplomatic negotiations and, furthermore, to conclude any treaty with the Byzantines. A dimension of confidence between Arab ambassadors and the Byzantines was also an advantage, and the repeated choice of some eminent envoys ('Abd al-Bāqī, Ibn aš-Šarhām or the *qāḍī* al-Qudā'i) tends to prove it. Last, but not least, the intellectual profile of these official emissaries certainly fostered cultural exchanges between Byzantium and the Arab Near East.

87 As such, these gifts constituted a form of propaganda for these inhabitants, who were »avid spectacle-lovers« and who constituted an appreciative audience for exotic parades as analyzed by Koutrakou, *Eastern Luxury Nexus* 337f. (with the references to Greek sources).

88 Beihammer, *Muslim Rulers* 167 and the references to the Arabic sources; Felix, *Byzanz und Islam* 100f.; for other cases between Byzantium and its Muslim neighbors: Beihammer, *Kommunikation* 183f., and especially for relics from Edessa: Beihammer, *Muslim Rulers* 174 and references.

89 Amedroz, *Embassy*; Beihammer, *Sturz*.

90 Qāḍī 'Iyād, *Tartīb al-madārik* 63-67; I owe this reference to M. T. Mansouri. Al-Bāqillānī, is also known for his works on Christian theology: see Thomas, *Al-Bāqillānī* 446-450.

91 Koutrakou, *Highlights* 97 (with the bibliographical reference to Jonathan Shepard). The passing on of political information through Arab ambassadors concerns this topic: Drocourt, *Political Information*.

92 See the testimony of Ṭabarī for the first of two (Ṭabarī, *Incipient Decline* 156); for the second one: Mansouri, *Tissus* 548 and his references.

93 See, notably, Beihammer, *Kommunikation*.

94 Koutrakou, *Highlights* 97.



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## Summary / Zusammenfassung

### Arabic-speaking Ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire (from the Ninth to Eleventh Centuries)

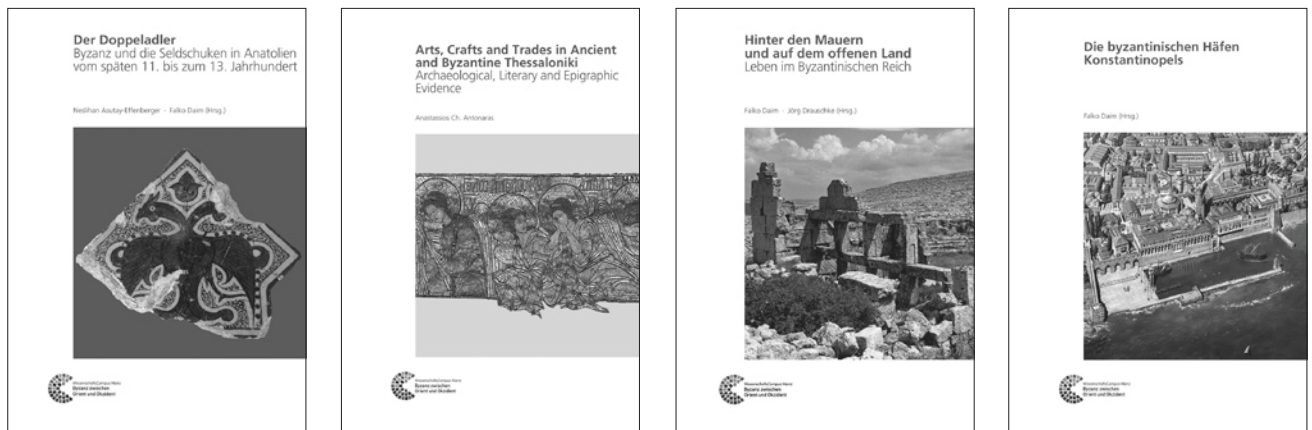
Arab-speaking ambassadors were numerous in the Byzantine Empire between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Generally, members of the ruling elite, they could be *ra'īs* of the *tuğūr*, such as the famous 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Aḡanī, known from Arabic and Greek sources. Significantly, the terms *šaiḥ* and *amīr* can be associated with other official emissaries. The choice of an ambassador by Muslim sovereigns was based on a feeling of confidence. This explains why these sovereigns often sent members of their close entourage and political circle, but linguistic skills were also important. Moreover, the presence of such envoys within the Empire raises many other questions, such as the ways in which they were received. The advantageous arrangements for their official voyages and reception (suggested by Greek normative texts such as the *De cerimoniis*) are confirmed by narrative texts, notably those in Arabic. As far as we can know it from the sources, they were cordially welcomed in Constantinople and hosted by the *basileis*. Nevertheless, political and military contexts could have an influence on their stay in the Empire. A last aspect that their presence implies deals with its intellectual and cultural impact. Indeed, Arab-speaking ambassadors were important cultural brokers between courts, thanks to their intellectual profile as well as the official gifts they bore

### Arabischsprachige Botschafter im Byzantinischen Reich (vom 9. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert)

Es gab zwischen dem 9. und 11. Jahrhundert zahlreiche arabischsprachige Botschafter im byzantinischen Reich. Im Allgemeinen Mitglieder der herrschenden Elite, konnten sie *ra'īs* des *tuğūr* sein, wie der aus arabischen und griechischen Quellen bekannte berühmte 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Aḡanī. Bezeichnenderweise können die Begriffe *šaiḥ* und *amīr* mit anderen offiziellen Abgesandten in Verbindung gebracht werden. Die Auswahl eines Botschafters durch muslimische Herrscher beruhte auf dem ihm entgegengebrachten Vertrauen. Dies erklärt, warum diese Herrscher oft Mitglieder ihres engeren Gefolges und ihrer politischen Kreise entsandten. Aber auch Sprachkenntnisse waren wichtig. Darüber hinaus wirft die Anwesenheit dieser Gesandten innerhalb des Reiches viele andere Fragen auf, wie etwa die Frage nach der Art und Weise, wie sie empfangen wurden. Für ihre offiziellen Missionen und ihren Empfang förderliche Regeln, die in griechischen normativen Texten wie *De cerimoniis* festgehalten wurden, werden durch narrative Texte, insbesondere durch arabische, bestätigt. Soweit wir aus den Quellen erfahren, wurden die Gesandten in Konstantinopel herzlich empfangen und von den Kaisern beherbergt. Gleichwohl konnten politische und militärische Umstände ihren Aufenthalt im Reich beeinflussen. Ein letzter Aspekt betrifft die intellektuellen und kulturellen Auswirkungen ihrer Anwesenheit. Arabischsprachige Botschafter waren dank ihres intellektuellen Profils und ihrer offiziellen Geschenke wichtige Kulturvermittler zwischen den Höfen.



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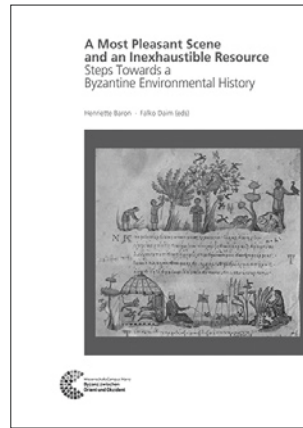
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# Sigles Used

|                 |  |         |  |
|-----------------|--|---------|--|
| ABSA            | The Annual of the British School at Athens   | JRA     | Journal of Roman Archaeology   |
| AJA             | American Journal of Archaeology  | JRAS    | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society   |
| AnBoll          | Analecta Bollandiana   | JRS     | Journal of Roman Studies   |
| BAR             | British Archaeological Reports   | JSAI    | Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam  |
| BHG             | F. Halkin, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca (Bruxelles <sup>3</sup> 1957)              | JSS     | Journal of Semitic Studies   |
| BMGS            | Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies   | MSR     | Mamlūk Studies Review  |
| BSOAS           | Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies                                 | MW      | The Muslim World   |
| BV              | Byzantina Vindobonensia  | OC      | Oriens Christianus   |
| Byzslav         | Byzantinoslavica   | OCP     | Orientalia Christiana Periodica  |
| BZ              | Byzantinische Zeitschrift  | ODB     | The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium   |
| CahArch         | Cahiers archéologiques   | PG      | Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris 1857-1866) |
| CCSG            | Corpus christianorum, Series Graeca  | PL      | Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris 1844-1880) |
| CCSL            | Corpus christianorum, Series Latina  | PLP     | Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit                                 |
| CE              | Coptic Encyclopaedia   | PmbZ    | Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit                                   |
| CFHB            | Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae  | PO      | Patrologia Orientalis, ed. R. Graffin / F. Nau (Paris 1904-)                   |
| CSHB            | Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae   | RAC     | Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum   |
| CPG             | Clavis Patrum Graecorum, hrsg. v. M. Geerard / F. Glorie (Turnhout 1974-1987)          | RbK     | Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst   |
| CRAI            | Comptes rendus des séances de l'année de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres | RE      | Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft                  |
| CSCO            | Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium  | REB     | Revue des Études byzantines  |
| CSHB            | Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae   | SBN     | Studi bizantini e neoellenici  |
| DeltChrA        | Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας                                       | SI      | Studia Islamica  |
| DOP             | Dumbarton Oaks Papers  | SubsHag | Subsidia Hagiographica   |
| DOS             | Dumbarton Oaks Studies   | TIB     | Tabula Imperii Byzantini   |
| EI <sup>2</sup> | Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition (Leiden et al. 1954-2004)                          | TM      | Travaux et mémoires  |
| GRBS            | Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies   | ZDMG    | Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft                        |
| IJMES           | International Journal of Middle East Studies   | ZDPV    | Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins                                    |
| JESHO           | Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient                               |         |  |
| JÖB             | Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik  |         |  |







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