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The First Iconoclasm in Islam: A New History of the Edict of Yazīd II (AH 104/AD 723)

DOI 10.1515/islam-2017-0002

Abstract: This article offers a revised history of the iconoclastic edict of the Umayyad caliph Yazīd II, which was promulgated in 104/723. This edict is often interpreted as a precursor of Byzantine iconoclasm and as a forerunner of the Islamic doctrine of images. Yet this focus on later developments has obscured the law's original purpose and meaning. This essay attempts to examine the issue anew by analyzing the written and archaeological evidence for the edict. In addition to presenting new sources and a revised dating, it situates Yazīd's actions in the context of early *dhimmī* legislation; apocalyptic anxieties at the Umayyad court; concerns about social mixing between Muslims and Christians; the caliph's sphere of activity in Transjordan; the emergence of a prohibition on images in Islamic thought; and the practice of Muslim prayer in churches.

Keywords: iconoclasm, Umayyads, Yazīd II, prohibition on images, early Islamic art, Christian-Muslim relations, Byzantine iconoclasm

Introduction

The reign of the Umayyad caliph Yazīd II (101–105/720–724) is generally regarded as short and unremarkable, especially in contrast to those of his distinguished predecessors such as Mu'āwiya or 'Abd al-Malik. He accomplished one thing, however, that set him apart from every caliph before him and practically every caliph after: according to an array of written sources, Yazīd promulgated an edict commanding the destruction of images.¹ Although the text of the edict has disappeared, a considerable body of archaeological evidence from the early medieval Levant hints that it may have actually been implemented. Why did Yazīd

¹ For an overview of Yazīd's reign, see Henri LAMMENS/Khalid Yahya BLANKINSHIP, "Yazīd (II) b. 'Abd al-Malik," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. Second Edition*, 13 vols., H.A.R. Gibb, et al., eds., Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009 [hereafter, *EI*], xi, 311.

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promulgate this decree? What were its practical effects? Can we reconstruct what happened on the basis of literary and material evidence? These constitute the central questions of the following article, which aspires to provide a new and comprehensive history of the edict. Although short-lived as a moment in time, Yazid's iconoclastic campaign offers a window onto several much broader issues of profound importance for the history of the early medieval Middle East. These include the emergence of aniconic attitudes in Muslim art, the rise of the *dhimmī* legal regime, conversion to Islam in the post-conquest period, and the role of apocalypticism in the political culture of the caliphate.

The edict of Yazid is no stranger to scholars of early Islam and the wider medieval world. Yet most mention it only in passing – usually en route to answering “bigger” or “more pressing” questions. These include whether Muslim practices inspired Byzantine iconoclasm² or whether the decree was a harbinger of the Islamic doctrine of images in later periods.³ As a result of this, Yazid's actions

2 C.H. BECKER, “Christliche Polemik und islamische Dogmenbildung,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 26 (1912): 191–195; Gerhart B. LADNER, “Origin and Significance of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” *Mediaeval Studies* 2 (1940): 129; André GRABAR, *L'iconoclasme byzantine: dossier archéologique*. Paris: Collège de France, 1957, 120–127; G.E. VON GRUNEBaum, “Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment,” *History of Religions* 2 (1962): 1–10; Oleg GRABAR, “Islamic Art and Byzantium,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 83 n. 40; Stephen GERO, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1973, 59–84; L.W. BARNARD, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy*, Leiden: Brill, 1974, 10–33; Cyril MANGO, “Historical Introduction,” in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*. Anthony Bryer/Judith Herrin, eds., Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977, 1–6; Gotthard STROHMAIER, “Der Kalif Yazid II und sein Traumdeuter: Eine byzantinische Legende über den Ursprung des Ikonoklasmus,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus* 3 (1979): 11–17; Patricia CRONE, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 59–95; L.W. BARNARD, “The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy: Leo III and Yazid II – a Reconsideration,” in *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Franz Paschke, ed., Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981, 29–37; Leslie BRUBAKER/John HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 105–117.

3 Henri LAMMENS, “L'attitude de l'Islam primitif en face des arts figurés,” *Journal asiatique* 6 (1915): 278; Thomas W. ARNOLD, *Painting in Islam: A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928, 85; K.A.C. CRESWELL, “The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam,” *Ars Islamica* 11/12 (1946): 159–166; Rudi PARET, “Textbelege zum islamischen Bilderverbot,” in *Das Werk des Künstlers: Studien zur Ikonographie und Formengeschichte. Hubert Schrade zum 60. Geburtstag dargebracht von Kollegen und Schülern*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960, 36; Ugo MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Introduzione allo studio dell'archeologia islamica: le origini e il periodo omayyade*, Venice/Rome: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1966, 249–275;

have rarely been studied on their own terms.⁴ What is more, because scholars so often present the decree as a predictable bellwether of things to come – both inside and outside the Islamicate world – they tend to ignore just how aberrant it was in its own day. Indeed, to my knowledge, Yazīd was the only pre-modern Muslim ruler to comprehensively ban images in this way, even if the actual effects of his decree were much more limited. We can detect how out of step he was with his own times, to say nothing of later centuries, by recalling that Yazīd's successor, his half-brother Hishām I (r. 105–125/724–743), revoked the edict as soon as Yazīd was dead. In other words, there was nothing ordinary about the caliph's actions. They were in fact extraordinary and deserve to be examined as such. The first goal of the article, therefore, is to defamiliarize the edict by presenting it within the political, social, and cultural context in which it appeared.

To date, the most important study of Yazīd's iconoclasm has been A.A. VASILIEV's famous article in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, which was published posthumously just over half a century ago.⁵ VASILIEV assembled and summarized most of the written evidence about the decree, and without his ground-breaking efforts, the present article could not have been written. Despite its many strengths, VASILIEV's study had several flaws. For one, it did not present the sources critically, weighing their reliability on the basis of dates, authorship, and content. What is more, VASILIEV skirted around several fundamental historical and methodological questions that instantly strike anyone who combs through the written evidence: Why did so few Muslim authors mention the edict when so

Oleg GRABAR, "Islam and Iconoclasm," in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*. Anthony Bryer/Judith Herrin, eds., Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977, 45–57; idem, *The Formation of Islamic Art*. 2nd edition, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, 73, 85 ff; Garth FOWDEN, "Late-antique Art in Syria and its Umayyad Evolutions," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004): 293–294, 300–301; Jamal ELIAS, *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, 67–69.

⁴ A recent exception is Mattia GUIDETTI, "L'Editto di Yazid II: immagini e identità religiosa nel Bilad al-Sham dell'VIII secolo," in *L'VIII secolo: un secolo inquieto; Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi. Cividale del Friuli, 4–7 dicembre 2008*, Valentino Pace, ed., Cividale del Friuli: Comune di Cividale del Friuli, 2010, 69–79; this article offers interesting interpretations of the archaeological evidence (see below, n. 144), but otherwise covers ground already tilled by other scholars, especially GRIFFITH and KING (see below, n. 6) and SCHICK, PICCRILLO, OGNIBENE, and BOWERSOCK (see below, n. 105). It does not deal extensively with the written evidence. An updated version of this argument may be found in Mattia GUIDETTI, *In the Shadow of the Church: The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria*, Leiden: Brill, 2017, 86–96, which appeared too late to include in the findings of this article.

⁵ A.A. VASILIEV, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956): 23–47.

many of their Christian counterparts did? How did Yazīd's iconoclasm relate to other events in his reign, as well as the broader context of the early eighth-century Near East? What role did images play in the rivalry between Muslims and Christians, which was intensifying in this period? Finally, is there any evidence for the edict's implementation in the archaeological record? Several scholars – notably G.R.D. KING and Sidney H. GRIFFITH – have offered preliminary answers to these questions in the decades since VASILIEV's findings were published.⁶ Yet by and large, final answers remain elusive. The second goal of this article, therefore, is to revisit the texts that VASILIEV studied, to introduce several new texts that escaped his notice, and to contextualize these alongside 50 years of new archaeological research on the Umayyad period.

The present article is organized into four parts. Part One provides a source-critical overview of the written evidence. It considers the date, provenance, and perspective of these texts in order to determine which ones are trustworthy. On the basis of this, it proposes a summary of events surrounding the promulgation of Yazīd's decree, refining and in some cases challenging VASILIEV's conclusions. Part Two analyzes the edict alongside other examples of Umayyad legislation, in particular, as part of an emerging, still unstable canon of laws that were designed to regulate contact between Muslims and non-Muslims. In some instances, the "ad hoc" legislation of the 710s and 720s foreshadowed permanent features of what would later emerge as the *dhimmī* regime. In others, however, Umayyad legal experiments failed to pass into the consensus of later Muslim jurists. The iconoclastic edict of Yazīd is an example of one such "failed law."

Part Three considers the place of iconoclasm in the broader framework of Yazīd's four years as caliph. It suggests that he may have been inspired to act by the recent passage of the first Islamic century, an event that had deep eschatological significance in the eyes of contemporary Muslims. It then argues that the 710s

6 G.R.D. KING, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985): 267–277; Sidney H. GRIFFITH, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VII^e-VIII^e siècles: Actes du Colloque internationale Lyon – Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris – Institut du Monde Arabe, 11–15 Septembre 1990*, Pierre Canivet/Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, eds., Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1992, 121–138; idem, "Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God: Iconophilia and Iconophobia in the World of Islam in Umayyad and Early Abbasid Times," in *Die Welt der Götterbilder*, Brigitte Groneberg/Hermann Spieckermann, eds., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, 347–380; the contents of this article are largely repeated in: idem, "Crosses, Icons and the Image of Christ in Edessa: The Place of Iconophobia in the Christian-Muslim Controversies of Early Islamic Times," in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, Philip Rousseau/Manolis Papoutsakis, eds., Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, 63–84.

and 720s represented a period of increased tension between old Muslims, new Muslims, and non-Muslims as the pace of conversion increased and as the state adopted a more explicit Islamic personality. This, in turn, may have encouraged the promulgation of a raft of new *dhimmī* laws, including the iconoclastic decree. This section also argues that the edict had the strongest effect within Yazīd's geographic base of power – the northwestern region of Transjordan known as the Balqā'. On the basis of this, it offers a novel interpretation of the many iconoclastic mosaics that have been discovered in this area and which have often been connected to Yazīd.

Finally, Part Four examines the edict against the backdrop of early Muslim attitudes towards figural art. It argues that Yazīd's decree may have contributed to – rather than drawn on – an emergent theological opposition to images, which began to crystallize during or shortly after Yazīd's reign. Next, it emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between “aniconism” and “iconoclasm” in early Muslim culture: although aniconism – that is, a tendency to eschew representation in art – emerged as the predominant aesthetic posture in medieval Islam, iconoclasm – that is, the proactive destruction of images – was very rare. The section concludes by asking why Yazīd claimed jurisdiction over physical spaces that normally lay outside the authority of a Muslim ruler, namely, the interior of churches. It considers whether the decree was designed to regulate or even counter the ‘then-common practice’ of Muslim prayer in Christian churches.

To conclude these introductory remarks, I wish to make a self-evident but important point about my own argument: over the years, a number of prominent scholars have dismissed Yazīd's decree as historical fiction or claimed that its significance was much exaggerated in later sources.⁷ Many have done so on the false assumption that the edict was mentioned exclusively in Christian texts, especially those of Byzantine provenance. While we can debate the original purpose and scope of the edict, it is undeniable in my view that Yazīd did promulgate some kind of law.⁸ In short, there are simply too many non-overlapping accounts of the edict from too wide an array of communities, regions, and languages to account for the information otherwise.

⁷ *Ḳuṣejr 'Amra* (no author or ed. listed on cover page), 2 vols., Vienna: K.K. Hof- and Staatsdruckerei, 1907, i, 155; Julius WELLHAUSEN, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, Margaret Graham, tr., London: Curzon Press, 1927, 324–325; GRABAR, “Islamic Art and Byzantium,” 83 n. 40; MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Archeologia islamica*, 260; BARNARD, *Background*, 18 n. 23; GRABAR, “Islam and Iconoclasm,” 46; BRUBAKER/HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 105–117.

⁸ For concurring opinions, see CRESWELL, “Lawfulness,” 163 n. 27; CRONE, “Byzantine Iconoclasm,” 69 n. 45; Juan SIGNES CODOÑER, “Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 67 (2013): 138.

Literary Evidence about Yazīd's Edict

Syriac

Syriac chronicles furnish the earliest and most important information about iconoclasm under Yazīd. These texts – all written by West Syrian (Miaphysite) Christians in northern Mesopotamia – take little interest in Byzantine iconoclasm on the other side of the frontier. In fact, only two of these texts – both of them late – draw a connection between Yazīd II and Leo III (r. 717–741), the contemporary instigator of Byzantine iconoclasm (a connection that preoccupies nearly all medieval Greek authors).⁹ Thus, the Syriac sources represent a geographic, linguistic, and confessional counterweight to the Byzantine texts, which have been central in most scholarly studies of Yazīd to date.

The very oldest source to mention the edict is the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* (*Zuqnīn*), though VASILIEV did not acknowledge it as such.¹⁰ Completed around 775 in a monastery in the Diyār Bakr region, the chronicle is important not only for its early date, but also for the rich information it supplies about other anti-Christian legislation at the time. *Zuqnīn* is also significant as an independent witness to the iconoclastic decree, given that its author did not draw on any still-extant earlier sources or provide information to any still-extant later sources. The *Chronicle of 819* (hereafter *819*) is another early Syriac text that mentions the edict, but its discussion of Yazīd's actions consists of a single line, which is repeated verbatim in the slightly later *Chronicle of 846* (*846*; not mentioned by Vasiliev).¹¹ The remain-

⁹ J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien: Patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, 4 vols., Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899–1910, ii, 491 (Fr.), iv, 456 (Syr. text); Paul Bedjan, ed., *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum e codd. mss. emendatum ac punctis vocalibus adnotationibusque locupletatum*, Paris: Maisonneuve, 1890, 118; E.A. Wallis Budge, ed. and tr., *The Chronography of Gregory Abū'l Faraj*, 2 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1932, i, 109. The first source written inside the caliphate to mention Leo's iconoclasm is the *Kitāb al-'unwān* of Agapius of Manbij (d. post-942), though it does not link the actions of Leo and Yazīd: GERO, *Leo III*, 81, and see below, n. 42.

¹⁰ J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Chronicon anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, 4 vols., Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1949–1989, ii, 163–16 (Syr.); Amir HARRAK, tr., *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV, A.D. 488–775*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999, 155–156 (Eng.); the antiquity of the report is also noted by Robert G. HOYLAND. *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997, 414 n. 88.

¹¹ *Chronicle of 819*: J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinet*, 3 vols. Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1952–3, i, 16. *Chronicle of 846*: E.W. BROOKS. "A Syriac Chronicle of the Year 846," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 51 (1897): 575 (Syr.), 584

ing Syriac histories – which as Maria CONTERNO has recently shown, probably derive much of their information about the seventh and eighth centuries from the lost historical work of Theophilus of Edessa and Byzantine Greek material – convey the same essential kernel of information, though they relate slightly different details.¹² These include the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* (d. 1199; *Michael the Syrian*), the *Chronicle of 1234* (hereafter *1234*), and the *Chronicle of Bar Hebraeus* (d. 1286; *Bar Hebraeus*), which all rely on the intermediary Syriac history of Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē (d. 845) rather than directly on Theophilus and the Greek material (*Bar Hebraeus* relies directly on *Michael the Syrian*).¹³ Of the three sources, *Michael the Syrian* is especially important for this study, given that it contains a textured account of other anti-Christian legislation that was promulgated at the start of the eighth century.

Greek and Latin

Most of the Byzantine Greek sources that mention Yazīd's iconoclasm contain two narrative elements: information about the decree itself and information about how knowledge of the decree passed into Byzantium. The former is of great interest to us here, while the latter is not. Stephen GERO, Paul SPECK, and other scholars have analyzed the largely fictional reports claiming that Yazid acted under the influence of a Jewish magician named Tessarakontapechys, who promised the caliph an additional 30 (or 40) years in power if he promised to destroy images. The Byzantine legend claims that Yazid carried out the magician's request, only to die shortly thereafter. Having been exposed as a charlatan, Tessarakontapechys

(Eng.); on the relationship between these sources see Sebastian BROCK, "Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources," *Journal of the Iraqi Academy, Syriac Corporation* 5 (1979–80): 14.

12 Maria CONTERNO, *La «descrizione dei tempi» all'alba dell'espansione islamica: un'indagine sulla storiografia greca, siriana e araba fra VII e VIII secolo*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014; for additional discussion, which appeared before CONTERNO published her convincing findings, see Robert G. Hoyland, tr., *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011, 1–41, 221–222 (for the edict); see also the important review of this book by Arietta PAPAConstantinou in *Le Muséon* 126 (2013): 459–465.

13 *Michael the Syrian*: Chabot, *Chronique*, ii, 489 (Fr.), iv, 457 (Syr.); for facsimile of the original Syriac manuscript, see now Gregorius Yuhanna Ibrahim, ed., *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Great*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009, 460. *Chronicle of 1234*: Chabot, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234*, i, 308. *Bar Hebraeus*: BEDJAN, *Chronicon*, 118 (Syr.); BUDGE, *Chronography*, i, 109 (Eng.).

is then said to have fled to the Byzantine region of Isauria, from which his ideas spread to Constantinople.¹⁴ Although I will not deal with this aspect of the Yazīd tradition, it bears noting that it is largely the invention of later iconodule authors who were eager to condemn Byzantine iconoclasm as the invention of a wicked Muslim king and his devious Jewish adviser. It seems that Byzantine authors yoked this myth to more credible historical reports about the caliph's law. Despite the need for caution, it is also important to note that the legend is extremely old – appearing in the second-earliest source about Yazīd's law of any kind. What is more, it finds echoes in the history of the Muslim annalist al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who mentions that Yazīd possessed a Jewish adviser named “Abū Māwiya.” Unlike the Christian authors, however, al-Ṭabarī has nothing to say about iconoclasm in connection with this figure.¹⁵ Quite clearly, something more is happening than meets the eye, even if it remains elusive to us.

The earliest Byzantine account of Yazīd's decree is found in the *Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* in 787, in a lengthy speech by John of Jerusalem, “de-legate of the apostolic sees of the East” (*John of Jerusalem*).¹⁶ Although dated to 787, there is some speculation that John's speech drew on much earlier elements, though this has been difficult for scholars to prove.¹⁷ The council, of course, restored the veneration of icons after the reigns of the iconoclast emperors Leo III and Constantine V (ca. 741–775), and John's report must be read in this political and theological context. Although John's lengthy description of the Jewish sorcerer is fanciful (and is conspicuously missing from every report written inside the caliphate), his description of Yazīd's law is not entirely inconsistent with what we know from eastern sources. *John of Jerusalem* also contains an interesting detail that would seem to corroborate the historicity of the decree: immediately

14 GERO, *Leo III*, 59–84; Paul SPECK, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus*, Bonn: Habelt, 1990; cf. Sidney H. GRIFFITH, “Bashir/Bēsēr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III; The Islamic Recension of his Story in Leiden Oriental MS 951 (2).” *Le Muséon* 103 (1990): 293–327.

15 al-Ṭabarī. *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, 15 vols in 3 pts., M.J. de Goeje, ed. Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901, ii, 1463–1464.

16 J.D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 56 vols, Paris: H. Welter, 1758–1798, xiii, cols. 195–200 (Gk.); John Mendham, tr., *The Seventh General Council, the Second of Nicaea, Held A.D. 787, in which the Worship of Images Was Established*, London: W.E. Painter, 1849, 294–297 (Eng.). For this and all subsequent Greek sources, see the source entries in Leslie BRUBAKER/John HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680–850): The Sources, An Annotated Survey*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.

17 VASILIEV, “Iconoclastic Edict,” 46; GERO, *Leo III*, 62–64, on the text known as the *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, written before 787, which contains a similar account of Leo III and a Jewish soothsayer, though without any mention of Yazīd as we find in *John of Jerusalem*.

after John's speech, the acts register an interjection by an unnamed bishop from Messina (Sicily?), who told the council: "I, too, was a child in Syria when the caliph of the Saracens destroyed the images."¹⁸ The bishop's statement is so brief and so matter-of-fact that one is tempted to believe it.

Turning to the chronicles, CONTERNO's recent book argues convincingly that much of the Oriental content in the *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (d. 818; *Theophanes*) derives from Greek and Syriac material shared with Dionysius of Tel Mahrē, along with a Greek source knowledgeable about events in the caliphate.¹⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that *Theophanes* furnishes much of the same information as *Michael the Syrian, 1234*, and *Bar Hebraeus*, though infuses it with Constantinopolitan material to reflect its particular concerns about Byzantine iconoclasm.²⁰ With respect to Yazīd, the relationship among the remaining Byzantine sources has been worked out in detail by GERO and SPECK. To summarize their findings, *John of Jerusalem* exercised a strong influence over two tracts that were later ascribed to the patriarch of Constantinople, Nikephoros I (r. 806–815): *Antirrheticus III* and *Antirrheticus IV*.²¹ *John of Jerusalem* exercised a less concrete, though still clear influence on an apocryphal letter to the emperor Theophilus I (r. 829–842), which has been dated to the period before 843 (*Ep. ad Theophilum*).²² This letter was a source, in turn, for the *Chronicle of George the Monk* (fl. 860s–870s; *George the Monk*), which inspired a string of later works, including the *History of George Kedrenos* (fl. 12th c.; *George Kedrenos*) and the *Historical Extracts of John Zonaras* (d. post-1159?; *John Zonaras*).²³ These sources were also influenced by *Theophanes*. *Theophanes'* account of Yazīd's reign, in turn, was copied wholesale into a recension of the *Passion of the Martyrs of Constantino-*

¹⁸ Mansi, *Collectio*, xiii, col. 200.

¹⁹ See above, n. 12.

²⁰ Carolus de Boor, ed. *Theophanis chronographia*, 2 vols., Leipzig: Teubner, 1883–1885, i, 401–402 (Gk.); Cyril Mango/Roger Scott, trs., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284–813*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1997, 555–556 (Eng.).

²¹ *Antirrheticus III*: J.P. Migne, ed. *Patrologia cursus completus, series graeca*. 161 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866 [hereafter, Migne, PG], c, cols. 527–534. *Antirrheticus IV*: J.B. Pitra, ed., *Spicilegium Solesmense: complectens Sanctorum Patrum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum anecdota hactenus opera selecta*, 4 vols., Paris: F. Didot fratres, 1852–1858, i, 375–377.

²² Migne, PG, xcv, cols. 355–358.

²³ *George the Monk*: Carolus de Boor, ed., *Georgii monachi chronicon*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1904, 735–736. *George Kedrenos*: Immanuele Bekkero, ed., *Georgius Cedrenus [et] Ioannis Scylitzae ope*. 2 vols., Bonn: Impensis ed. Weberi, 1838–1839, ii, 788–789. *John Zonaras*: Maurice Pinder, ed., *Ioannis Zonarae epitomae historiarum libri xviii*, 3 vols., Bonn: Impensis ed. Weberi, 1841–1897, iii, 257–258. For more on these historians, see Warren TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 114–120, 339–342, 388–399.

ple (d. 730; *Martyrs of Constantinople*), which has been dated to 869 and is preserved in the *Acta sanctorum*.²⁴ The original Byzantine reports about the edict – *John of Jerusalem* and *Theophanes* – were translated into Latin, though without major changes. These are found in the *Acts of the Synod of Paris of 825* and the *Chronographia tripartita* of Anastasius Bibliothecarius (d. 879), respectively.²⁵ On balance, the Byzantine sources agree on the general outline of Yazīd’s legislation, though they disagree on certain more legendary details, such as the number of Jews who advised Yazīd (one, *John of Jerusalem*, *Theophanes*, *Antirrheticus III*, *Antirrheticus IV*, *Martyrs of Constantinople*; two, *Ep. ad Theophilum*, *George the Monk*, *John Zonaras*; or many, *George Kedrenos*) and the geographic origins of these Jew(s) (*Laodicea*, *Theophanes*, *Martyrs of Constantinople*; *Tiberias*, *John of Jerusalem*, *Antirrheticus III*, *Antirrheticus IV*; or *Isauria*, *Ep. ad Theophilum*, *George the Monk*, *John Zonaras*).

Armenian

Although not as abundant as the Greek, the Armenian sources are arguably more important. As with the Syriac texts, the Armenian testimonia preserve the memory of Miaphysite Christians living directly under Muslim rule (as opposed to Chalcedonian Christians living under Byzantine rule). The Armenians were not wrapped up in the politics of Byzantine iconoclasm to nearly the same extent, and therefore, they were not as eager to tie events in Constantinople to Yazīd II.²⁶ Indeed, the Armenian chronicles which mention the edict show no obvious influence from sources outside Armenia, even if they are heavily dependent on each other.²⁷

²⁴ J.-B. Sollerius, et al., eds., *Acta sanctorum Augusti. Tomus II*. Paris/Rome: Apud Victorem Palme, 1867, 435–436.

²⁵ *Synod of 825*: Albert Werminghoff, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae historica. Concilia aevi Karolini*, 2 vols., Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1906–1908, ii, 519–520. *Anastasius*: de Boor, *Chronographia*, ii, 210–211.

²⁶ Despite this, iconoclasm appears to have been a problem in Armenia as early as the seventh century, as suggested by the treatise attributed to Vrt’anēs Kertoł, “Concerning the Iconoclasts,” a new translation of which is being prepared by Christina Maranci and Theo van Lint.

²⁷ GERO, *Leo III*, 137 n. 37 states that the Armenian chronicles derive their information about Yazīd’s edict from Byzantine iconophile or Syriac sources, but I do not see any reason for that. Armenia, of course, was a province of the caliphate, and it is plausible that the Armenian chronicles preserve local memories of that edict. Indeed, certain aspects of the reports have no parallels in sources outside Armenia (e.g. Yazīd’s possession by a demon, the slaughtering of pigs; see below n. 74). For more on Armenian sources for early Islam, see Robert W. THOMSON, “Muhammad and the Origin of Islam in the Armenian Literary Tradition,” in *Armenian Studies in*

The earliest account comes from the *History of Lewond* (fl. late 8th – early 9th c.; *Lewond*), which like *Zuqnīn* and *Michael the Syrian*, situates the edict of Yazid amidst other anti-Christian activity at the time.²⁸ The *History of Thomas Artsruni* (d. ca. 904–908; *Thomas Artsruni*) copies the account in *Lewond*, while the later *History of Vardan* (d. 1271; *Vardan*) summarizes this information in a single sentence.²⁹

Arabic

The Arabic sources about Yazid's reign are among the richest yet most difficult to interpret. With a few exceptions, nearly all of them – Christian and Muslim alike – come from Egypt, which may tell us something about where Yazid's law was implemented and later remembered. On the Christian side, there is an early possible reference to iconoclasm in the *Proto-Fourteenth Vision of Daniel* (ca. 750–760; *Vision of Daniel*), a Copto-Arabic text containing a famous list of Umayyad kings (not mentioned by VASILIEV).³⁰ The eleventh king in the list, “who shall sow oppression throughout the entire land and destroy ancient things made by hand” (*yufsidu ṣanā'i' al-yad al-awwalīn*), has been interpreted as Yazid II, though not without some controversy.³¹ It may be related to apocalyptic

Memoriam Haïg Berbérian, Dickran Kouymjian, ed., Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986, 829–858.

28 GERO, *Leo III*, 139 n. 47 (Arm.); Zaven Arzoumanian, tr., *History of Lewond the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians*, Wynnewood, PA: St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church, 1982, 104 (Eng.).

29 *Thomas Artsruni*: Thomas Artsruni, *History of the House of Artsrunik*, Robert W. Thomson, tr., Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985, 171 (Eng.). *Vardan*: J. Muyltermans, tr. *La domination arabe en Arménie; extrait de l'Histoire universelle de Vardan*, Louvain/Paris: J.-B. Istaş & Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1927, 104. Note that Vardan also translated the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* into Armenian; his translation reproduces Michael's passage about Yazid without any major changes: Victor Langlois, tr., *Chronique de Michel le grand, patriarche des syriens jacobites, traduite pour la première fois sur la version arménienne du prêtre Ischôk*, Venice: Typographie de l'académie de Saint-Lazare, 1868, 253.

30 C.H. BECKER, “Das Reich der Ismaeliten im koptischen Danielbuch,” *Nachrichten von der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, philologische-historische Klasse* (1916): 13 (§ 25, Ar.), 19 (Germ.), 25.

31 Otto MEINARDUS, “A Commentary on the XIVth Vision of Daniel,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 32 (1966): 421–422 (Yazid II); Harald SAUERMANN, “Notes concernant l'apocalypse copte de Daniel et la chute des Omayyades,” *Parole de l'Orient* 11 (1983): 344 (‘Umar II or Yazid II). On the genre generally, cf. Jos M.J.M. VAN LENT, “The Nineteen Muslim Kings in Coptic Apocalypses,” *Parole de l'Orient* 25 (2000): 643–693.

traditions about Yazīd found in Muslim literature, as we shall see below. There is a much clearer discussion of Yazīd's iconoclasm in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria (History of the Patriarchs)*, a massive history of the Coptic Church from its foundation to the eleventh century, which was compiled and redacted by the Alexandrian churchman Mawhūb b. Maṣṣūr b. al-Mufarrij.³² Its treatment of the reign of Yazīd is cursory, but like *Zuqnīn, Michael the Syrian*, and the Armenian sources, it presents the iconoclastic decree in the context of other anti-Christian activities during his reign, and therefore is extremely valuable.

Scholars often dismiss the Muslim sources about Yazīd's iconoclasm (or do not realize that they even exist), but this is unwarranted.³³ What is true is that the edict is strangely missing from most mainstream Islamic historiography, the majority of which was written in the eastern provinces of the caliphate during the 'Abbāsīd period. These include the histories of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt (d. 240/854), al-Balādhurī (d. 302/892), al-Ṭabarī, al-Ya'qūbī (d. early 4th c./10th c.), al-Azdī (d. 334/945–946), Ibn Kathīr (d. ca. 700/1300), and many others.³⁴ What survives is in some ways more interesting: a collection of Egyptian Muslim texts which record the implementation of the edict in connection with the destruction of a famous statue in a bathhouse in al-Fuṣṭāṭ. The earliest source in this respect is Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's (d. 257/871) account of the conquest of Egypt, *Kitāb futūḥ Miṣr (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam; not discussed by VASILIEV)*.³⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, in turn, supplied information to two later biographical dictionaries of Egyptian Muslims: the *Wulāt Miṣr* of al-Kindī (d. 350/961; *Kindī*), and via *Kindī*, the later *Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* of Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. ca.

32 C.F. Seybold, ed., *Historia patriarcharum Alexandrinorum*, Beirut: E Typographeo Catholico, 1904, 153 (Ar.); for further discussion of Christian persecution under the middle Umayyad caliphs, cf. 121, 134, 141, 143–144.

33 E. g. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 334; BRUBAKER/HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 116.

34 On the reign of Yazid in Arabic Muslim historiography, see Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh Khalīfa b. Khayyāt*, 2 vols., Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umarī, ed., Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Ādāb fī Najaf al-Ashraf, 1967, i, 328–344; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 13 vols., Maḥmūd al-Firdaws al-'Aẓm, ed., Damascus: Dār al-Yaqāza al-'Arabiya, 1997–2004, vii, 186–309; al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ii, 1372–1466 (Ar.); David Stephan Powers, tr., *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk), Volume XXIV: The Empire in Transition*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, 103–196 (Eng.); al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, 2 vols., no ed., Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Ghurri, 1939/1940, ii, 52–57; al-Azdī, *Tārīkh al-Mawṣil*, 2 vols., 'Alī Ḥabība, ed., Cairo: no pub., 1967, i, 5–19; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 15 vols., al-Shaykh 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ, et al., eds., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1994, ix, 177–197.

35 Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa, and Spain, known as the Futūḥ Miṣr of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam*, Charles Torrey, ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922, 113–114.

874–875/1470; *Ibn Taghribirdī*), both of which state that iconoclasm occurred during the reign of the governor of Egypt, Ḥaṅḅala b. Ṣafwān al-Kalbī (r. 102–105/721–724).³⁶ The main outlier among the Muslim sources is the *Khiṭaṭ* of al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442; *Maqrīzī*).³⁷ This text mentions Yazīd’s iconoclasm twice: first in a straightforward annalistic account of the Umayyad caliphs, and second, at the start of a lengthy section about the Christians of Egypt and their churches, where iconoclasm is discussed alongside other anti-Christian activities.

Another Muslim source that may mention iconoclasm but was not known by VASILIEV is the *Kitāb al-fitān* of Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/843; *Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād*). A collection of eschatological *ḥadīth* from the Umayyad period, it contains several ambiguous references to a figure who may be Yazīd. At a number of points, the text speaks about an individual called “the son of the eraser of golden objects” (*ibn māḥiq al-dhahabīyāt*). All of these appear in the context of conversations between a monk named Yashū‘ and the Companion Ka‘b al-Aḥḅār, the famous convert from Judaism.³⁸ In one report, Ka‘b asks Yashū‘ whether he knows which kings will reign after the Prophet’s death. What follows is a list of rulers who are fairly easy to identify by their nicknames, including “*al-Ṣiḍḍiq*” (Abū Bakr), “*al-Farūq*” (‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb), and “*al-Amīn*” (‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān). The monk then predicts that the tribulations of the Umayyads will commence when “the son of the eraser of golden objects” is killed. The text’s recent translator, David Cook, interprets this as a reference to the caliph al-Walid II, not only on the basis of the specific chronology in the passage, but also the enigmatic title of the caliph’s father, which seems to refer to Yazīd and the destruction of images.³⁹ The term *al-māḥiq* has echoes in the Qur’ān, which states that God “blots out” usury (Q. *al-Baqara* 2:2) and “unbelievers” (Q. *Āl ‘Imrān* 3:141).⁴⁰ The “erasure” of

³⁶ Kindī: al-Kindī, *Wulāt Miṣr*, Ḥusayn Naṣṣār, ed., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1959, 93. *Ibn Taghribirdī*: Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, 16 vols., Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1992, i, 319–320; see Khalid Yahya BLANKINSHIP, *The End of the Jihād State: The Reign of Hishām Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyyads*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, 289 n. 24.

³⁷ al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā‘iz wa-l-i‘tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*, 7 vols., Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid, ed., London: Mu‘assasat al-Furqān lil-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2002–2013, ii, 50; iv, II, 999–1000.

³⁸ Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-fitān*, Majdi Manṣūr b. Sayyid al-Shūrī, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1997, 461 no. 1482, in which Yashū‘ is explicitly called a “monk” (*rāhib*) with further references to *ibn māḥiq al-dhahabīyāt* at 74 no. 272, 128 no. 531. I thank David Cook for sharing these references with me.

³⁹ David COOK, *The Syrian Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition: The Book of Tribulations of Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī*, no. 490 (forthcoming); I am grateful to David Cook for sharing this unpublished work with me.

⁴⁰ See also the *ḥadīth* literature, in which the verb *maḥaqa* and related words are also used in

this unnamed king, therefore, is a virtuous one, and Yazīd seems the most likely candidate.

The second reference in *Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād* comes from a curious “apocalyptic chronicle” embedded in the text that is not entirely unlike what we find in the *Vision of Daniel*. This chronicle features a far more comprehensive list of kings than the aforementioned passage, and within this list, it mentions an individual called the “braggart, the demolisher of the building, and destroyer of the images” (*al-ṣalif hādīm al-bunyān wa-mughayyir al-ṣuwar*). Based on the king’s position in the list, the length of his reign, and the actions ascribed to him, Michael COOK has argued that it refers to Yazīd II, though David COOK has expressed doubts about this proposal.⁴¹ Although the chronicle is found in a Muslim text, Michael COOK has suggested that it originally came from a Christian source. As evidence of this, he points to the text’s “clumsy and unidiomatic” Arabic style, the fact that it dates history from the conquest of Syria rather than from the Hijra (as one would expect in a Muslim source), and its interest in events of concern primarily to Christians, such as Yazīd’s decree. Michael COOK’s argument, in my opinion, is persuasive. Furthermore, even if the passage in *Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād* is Christian and not Muslim in origin, it supports the impression left by the majority of sources more generally: namely, the iconoclastic decree of Yazīd was real, and it made such a profound impression on contemporaries that when Christians (and Muslims) chose to remember the caliph’s reign, they mentioned the obliteration of images as its defining moment. We shall return to the possible apocalyptic connotations of the edict below.

Before concluding this section, it is worth highlighting the silences in the historical record, too. Not only are there no references to Yazīd’s decree in mainstream Muslim texts, but there are also no references to it in Christian sources where one would expect to find them. The Melkites Agapius of Manbij (fl. 940s) and Eutychius of Alexandria (alias Sa‘īd b. al-Bīṭriq, d. 328/940) pass over the edict in silence.⁴² So does the Nestorian Elias bar Shīnāyā (d. 1046), the Copts al-Makīn b. al-‘Amīd (d. 672/1273) and Ibn al-Rāhib (d. ca. 1295), and the Samar-

a positive light: A.J. Wensinck, ed., *Concordances et indices de la tradition musulmane*, 8 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1936–1988, vi, 174–175.

⁴¹ Michael COOK, “An Early Islamic Apocalyptic Chronicle,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52 (1993): 27–28; David COOK, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2002, 346 n. 63; cf. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 334–335.

⁴² Agapius: A.A. Vasiliev, ed./tr., “*Kitab al-‘Unvan. Histoire universelle écrite par Agapius* (Mahboub) de Menbidj, second partie, fasc. 2,” *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912) : 504–505. Eutychius: Louis Cheikho, ed., *Eutychii patriarchae Alexandrini annales*, 2 vols., Beirut/Paris: E Typographeo Catholico/Carolus Poussiègue, Bibliopola, 1906–1909, ii, 44–45.

itan Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Danafī (fl. ca. 1355).⁴³ The twelfth-century East Syrian chronicler Mārī b. Sulaymān mentions Yazīd, but he has strangely positive things to say about him. He notes that the caliph “restored the Christians to his service and honored them” (*wa-radda l-Naṣārā ilā khidmatihī wa-akramahum*), but he says nothing about his persecution of Christians or iconoclasm.⁴⁴ It is hard to understand what caused these lacunae, but I shall offer some suggestions below.

The Contours of the Law

Having reviewed the literary sources, we are now in a good position to analyze what these sources actually say. Despite their geographic and linguistic diversity, they furnish a surprisingly coherent picture of what took place. In nearly every text, Yazīd is portrayed as the primary instigator of the edict. That it was a real piece of legislation is implied by several texts, which refer to a “command” (*fūqḍānā*, 1234, cf. *Zuqnīn*), a “general letter” (*egkuklion epistolēn*, *John of Jerusalem*), a “universal edict” (*dogma katholikon*, *Theophanes*, cf. *Antirrheticus III*), and a “written order” (*kitāb*, *Tahgr*, cf. *Kindī*, *Maqrīzī*).

We learn that Yazīd was primarily concerned with churches (*Zuqnīn*, *John of Jerusalem*, *Theophanes*, *Ep. ad Theophilum*, *George Kedrenos*, *John Zonaras*, *History of the Patriarchs*, *Maqrīzī*) and other Christian religious buildings (*Zuqnīn*, *Michael the Syrian*, 1234, *Bar Hebraeus*, *Antirrheticus III*), but several sources also state that “homes” were attacked (*Zuqnīn*, *Michael the Syrian*, 1234, *Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād*, *John of Jerusalem*). The Muslim authorities were mainly interested in images of living beings (*Michael the Syrian*, *Bar Hebraeus*, *John of Jerusalem*, *Antirrheticus III*), and to drive this point home, the sources utilize words which emphasize “representation” and “likeness” (e.g. *Gk. homoiōma*, *Antirrheticus III*;

⁴³ *Elias bar Shināyā*: L.-J. Delaporte, tr., *La chronographie d'Élie Bar-Šinaya métropolitain de Nisibe*, Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1910, 100–101. *Al-Makīn*: al-Makīn b. al-‘Amīd, *Tārīkh al-Makīn. Tārīkh al-Muslimīn*, ‘Alī Bakr Ḥasan, ed., Cairo: Dār al-‘Awāšim lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 2010, 179–183. *Ibn al-Rāhib*: Louis Cheikho, ed., *Petrus Ibn Rahib. Chronicon Orientale*, Beirut/Paris: E Typographeo Catholico & Carolus Poussielgue, 1903, 57. *Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Danafī*: Milka Levy-Rubin, ed. and tr., *The Continuatio of the Samaritan Chronicle of Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Sāmīrī al-Danafī*, Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2002, 55.

⁴⁴ Henricus Gismondi, ed., *Maris Amri et Slibae, De Patriarchis Nestorianorum*, 2 vols., Rome: Excudebat C. de Luigi, 1896–1899, i, 65; cited in Luke YARBROUGH, “Did ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Issue an Edict Concerning Non-Muslim Officials?” in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, Antoine Borrut/Fred M. Donner, eds., Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2015, 171.

Ar. *tamāthīl*). These seem to reflect specifically Muslim concerns about images endowed with “spirit” (Ar. *rūh*), per the *ḥadīth* discussed in the final section. The list of destroyed objects included statues (*Michael the Syrian, 1234, Antirrheticus III, Antirrheticus IV, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, Kindī, Maqrīzī, Ibn Taghribirdī*), books (*Michael the Syrian, 1234, Bar Hebraeus*), liturgical vessels (*John of Jerusalem, Antirrheticus III*), vestments (*John of Jerusalem, Antirrheticus III*), images on walls (*Michael the Syrian, 1234, Bar Hebraeus, John of Jerusalem, Ep. ad Theophilum*), and mosaics (*John of Jerusalem*). Some of the destroyed objects were made of stone (819, 846, *Michael the Syrian, 1234, Bar Hebraeus*), while others of wood (819, 846, *Michael the Syrian, 1234, Bar Hebraeus, John of Jerusalem*), ivory (1234) and bronze (819, 846). Although not an image as such, crosses were also reportedly damaged (*History of the Patriarchs, Maqrīzī, Łewond, Thomas Artsruni, Vardan*). The umbrella terms for these objects were quite broad. The Syriac sources speak of *ṣūrātā* and *ṣalmē*; the Greek sources of *eikones* and *charaktēres*; and the Arabic sources of *ṣuwar*, *aṣnām*, and *tamāthīl*.⁴⁵

Yazīd’s Law and Muslim Images

Many historians have concluded not unreasonably that Yazīd targeted Christian objects. This seems likely to me as well, but there is overlooked evidence in several Arabic sources which suggests that Muslim objects were destroyed, too. The earliest reference of this kind appears in *Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam*, which mentions the edict in a passage about an early governor of Egypt named ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān (d. 85/704):

The bath which is known today as the bath of Abū Murra was originally a property belonging to a man from (the tribe of) Tanūkh, that is Jadd b. ‘Alqama or his father. This man asked: “O ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān ...,” so he granted (the property) to him. He therefore built a bath for (his son) Zabbān b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and by Zabbān(’s name) it is well known today. Regarding it, the poet says:

“He who is pure of heart / Let him become even purer in the bath of Zabbān
It possesses no spirit, and no lip may kiss it / But it is only a statue in the form of a man”

⁴⁵ On the broader meanings of these terms, see: Syriac: R. Payne-Smith, ed., *Thesaurus syriacus*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1980, 3386–3387, 3408–3409; Michael Sokoloff, ed. and tr., *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin; Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann’s Lexicon Syriacum*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009, 1282, 1290. Greek: G.W.H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961, 410–416, 513. Arabic: E.W. Lane, ed., *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols., Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980, iv, 1735–1736, 1745.

In the bath was a statue (*ṣanam*) of marble in the shape of a woman, which was a great marvel until it was destroyed (*kusirat*) in the year in which Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik destroyed the statues. He commanded their destruction in the year 102.⁴⁶

Whereas *Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam* was primarily interested in the fate of the statue – to which he secondarily connected the edict – *Kindī* was primarily interested in the edict to which he secondarily connected the statue. It seems that the statue’s destruction became part of local lore among the Muslims of al-Fuṣṭāṭ, where the baths of Zabbān were located. The statue must have been quite famous, for we find in *Kindī* a new line of poetry attributed to one Kurayb b. Makhlad al-Jayshānī, which follows the same first line of poetry in *Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam*: “Thick and pleasant, with a slim waist, in good proportion / Upon its cleavage in the chest, a full-bosomed woman.”

It is not hard to imagine what this statue may have looked like. Such an image – found in the bath of a wealthy Muslim, whose father had been governor of Egypt and whose grandfather had been the caliph Marwān I (r. 64–65/684–685)⁴⁷ – probably resembled the zaftig beauties painted on the walls of Quṣayr ‘Amra in the Jordanian desert or the clothed statues displayed in the bathhouse of Khirbat al-Mafjar near Jericho (Figure 1).⁴⁸

A similar image – possibly a repurposed piece of classical statuary, based on its description – existed in the courtyard of the great mosque of Wāsiṭ in Iraq: though not in a *ḥammām* as such, the statue is said to have spouted water from its brazen breasts.⁴⁹ We have no other evidence about the destruction of

⁴⁶ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa*, 113–114. For passing references in earlier studies, see ARNOLD, *Painting*, 85; Maged S.A. MIKHAIL, *From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt: Religion, Identity, and Politics after the Arab Conquest*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2014, 117.

⁴⁷ For more on Zabbān and his bath, see Ibn Duqmāq, *Description de l’Égypte, par Ibn Doukmak, publiée d’après le manuscrit autographe conservé à la Bibliothèque Khédiviale*, Karl Vollers, ed., Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale, 1893, 10; al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī tārikh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, 2 vols., Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, ed., Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīya – ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakā’ uhu, 1967–1968, i, 267.

⁴⁸ Garth FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ‘Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 57–79; Hana TARAGAN, “A Matter of Looking: The Female Images in the Umayyad Palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar,” in *The Metamorphosis of Marginal Images: From Antiquity to Present Time*, Nurith Kenaan-Kedar/Asher Ovadiāh, eds., Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University – The Yolanda and David Katz Faculty of the Arts – Department of Art History, 2001, 69–77; cf. Petra M. SIJPESTEIJN, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 80.

⁴⁹ Baḥshal, *Tārikh Wāsiṭ*, Kūrkīs ‘Awwād, ed., Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif, 1967, 76; I am grateful to Michael Cook for this reference.



Fig. 1: Statue of a woman, Khirbat al-Mafjar, Jericho, West Bank; first half of the 8th c.; Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem.
Photo: Christian C. Sahner

Muslim images under Yazīd, but the anecdote about Zabbān's statue has an aura of truth to it. That such a statue may have been smashed was also not unprecedented in the early eighth century: Yazīd's predecessor, 'Umar II, reportedly protested the presence of an image in an unnamed bathhouse and demanded to have it removed. "If only I could find out who painted it," 'Umar is reported as saying, "I would have him severely beaten!"⁵⁰ The matter of images in baths also prompted a comment by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). When asked by a student whether it was permissible to scratch off the head of a picture (*ṣūra*) he saw in a bath, Ibn Ḥanbal replied, "Yes."⁵¹ Given the story of Zabbān's statue and these other anecdotes, we should be open to the possibility that Yazīd's edict applied to Christian and Muslim images alike.

The Geography of the Edict according to the Texts

The sources provide hints of where the edict may have been implemented. Several texts assert that it applied to all of Yazīd's domains (*Zuqnīn*, 819, 846, *John of Jerusalem*, *Antirrheticus III*, *Antirrheticus IV*, *Ibn Taghribirdī*), and at least rhetorically, this may have been true. Yet the contours of the reporting tell us something different about where damage may have occurred. For example, there are many reports about Yazīd's iconoclasm from Northern Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Armenia, suggesting that enforcement in these regions may have been especially robust. As we have seen, the edict also left an impression on Egyptian writers,⁵² but unfortunately, there are no archaeological data from Egypt to confirm or deny

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz*, Carl Heinrich Becker, ed., Berlin: Verlag Von S. Calvary & Co., 1900, 46–47; cited in R. DE VAUX, "Une mosaïque byzantine à Ma'in," *Revue biblique* 47 (1938): 257; CRESWELL, "Lawfulness," 161. On Aws b. Tha'laba al-Taymī, who declaimed verses of poetry about statues of two women he saw in Palmyra, ca. 60–64/680–683: Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 5 vols. no ed., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977, ii, 17–18; cited in FOWDEN, "Late-antique Art in Syria," 283–284.

⁵¹ Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī li-Ibn Qudāma*, 9 vols., al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, ed., Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1948, vii, 10; I am grateful to Michael Cook for this reference.

⁵² On the abundance of Egyptian evidence, see BECKER, "Christliche Polemik," 192; LAMMENS, "Arts figurés," 278; VASILIEV, "Iconoclastic Edict," 39–43; MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Archeologia islamica*, 258–259. Along these lines, Leslie MACCOULL argued that a paschal letter of the Coptic patriarch Alexander II (r. 705–730) – which she dated to 724 – contains a veiled reference to the edict, though as Robert HOYLAND has pointed out, this remains a matter of conjecture: L.S.B. MACCOULL. "The Paschal Letter of Alexander II, Patriarch of Alexandria: A Greek Defense of Coptic Theology under Arab Rule," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 35; HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 112–113.

an above-average incidence of iconoclasm there at the start of the eighth century.⁵³ The only plausible archaeological evidence for Yazīd's decree comes from the disfigured church mosaics of Jordan and Palestine. If this damage is in fact connected to the edict of Yazīd, as scholars have suggested and I believe may be true, this could help contextualize the not insignificant number of written testimonia about iconoclasm connected to the area, namely *John of Jerusalem* and *Theophanes*. As Part Three of this essay will argue, there are several reasons to believe that particular regions of the southern Levant may have borne the brunt of Yazīd's damage.

Just as the abundance of certain kinds of sources may reveal where the edict took hold, so the absence of other kinds of sources may reveal where it did not. In this respect, it is interesting that we have no information about Yazīd's decree from Iraq or Iran. This may be an accident of survival, yet it may also indicate that Yazīd's legislation was geographically confined to the caliph's immediate sphere of influence in southern Syria (and Egypt), not the restive, far-away provinces of Central Asia. In any event, if the edict was mainly designed to target Christians, as seems likely, it stands to reason that it had little effect in areas where there were relatively few Christian subjects.

Who Carried Out the Edict?

The sources indicate that a number of different agents carried out the damage. 1234 suggests that Yazīd entrusted the law to his half-brother, Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 121/738), who had led the abortive siege of Constantinople only a few years earlier and who had briefly served as governor in Kūfa, Baṣra, and Khurāsān under Yazīd.⁵⁴ The sources mention no other deputies by name. Elsewhere, we read that the edict was carried out by "agents" (*Zuqnīn*), "amīrs with Arabs" (*John of Jerusalem*), and by "Jews and Saracens" (*Antirrheticus III*). That Jews were involved in the persecution of Christians – and in particular, in the

53 J.E. QUIBELL, *Excavations at Saqqara (1908–9, 1909–10): The Monastery of Apa Jeremias*, Cairo: Imprimerie de l'institut français, 1912, iv; this is the only archaeological evidence for iconoclasm in Egypt during the eighth century of which I know; at the same time, QUIBELL's efforts to connect the damage with the edict of Yazīd are unconvincing. As were those of J.W. CROWFOOT, another early archaeologist who tried to connect iconoclastic damage (in this instance, at Jerash in Jordan) to Yazīd: "The Christian Churches," in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, Carl H. Kraeling, ed., New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938, 172.

54 al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ii, 1416–1417; al-Dinawārī, *Kitāb al-akhbār al-tiwāl*, Vladimir Feodorovich, ed., Leiden: Brill, 1888, 334.

destruction of their sacred images – is a motive with ancient lineage.⁵⁵ After the conquests, this claim surfaced frequently in anti-Muslim literature, in which Jews (and Samaritans) were portrayed as aiding and abetting the caliphs' persecutions of the church. There are famous stories, for example, of Jews petitioning caliphs to remove Christian symbols from public spaces, of Jews participating in the trial and execution of Christian neomartyrs, and of Jews disputing theology against Christians in the presence of Muslim potentates.⁵⁶ Seen in this light, the legend of Yazīd and his Jewish soothsayer may be part of a wider campaign aimed at lumping together Jews and Muslims together as enemies of God.

The Date of the Edict

A number of sources state or strongly hint that the edict was revoked after Yazīd's death (*John of Jerusalem, Antirrheticus III, Maqrīzī, Ibn Taghribirdī*).⁵⁷ In the Greek sources, this is implied by the fact that the caliph's successor, Hishām, tried to hunt down the Jew(s) who had encouraged his brother to promulgate the law (and who had falsely promised him 30 or 40 years in power in exchange for

55 J.-B. FREY, "La question des images chez les juifs à la lumière des récentes découvertes," *Biblica* 15 (1934): 298–299; Ernst KITZINGER, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 129–131; on Jews destroying their own images in late antiquity, see Charles BARBER, "Truth in Painting: Iconoclasm and Identity in Early Medieval Art," *Speculum* 72 (1997): 1019–1036; BOWERSOCK, *Mosaics*, 99–111; Rina TALGAM, *Mosaics of Faith: Floors of Pagans, Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land*, Jerusalem/University Park, PA: Yad Ben-Zvi Press/The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014, 428. In the context of Byzantine iconoclasm, the iconodules sometimes likened their opponents to Jews: e.g., Mansi, *Collectio*, xiii, col. 97a; see further references in GERO, *Leo III*, 60.

56 1) Jews demanded that 'Umar I remove the cross above the church on the Mount of Olives: de Boor, *Chronographia*, i, 342; Chabot, *Chronique*, ii, 431; idem, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234*, i, 260–261; Addai Scher, with Robert Griveau, eds., "Histoire Nestorienne (Chronique de Séert). Deuxième partie (II)," *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1983): 304. 2) Jews were present at the execution of Peter of Capitolias (d. 715): Paul PEETERS, "La passion de S. Pierre de Capitolias († 13 janvier 715)," *Analecta Bollandiana* (1934): 313. 3) Jews and Samaritans were present at the trial of Bacchus (d. 786): François Combefis, ed., *Christi martyrum lecta trias Hyacinthus Amastrensis, Bacchus et Elias novi-martyres*, Paris: Apud Fredericum Leonard, 1666, 107, 112, 121. 4) Jews as participants in theological disputes between Muslims and Christians: Michael PENN, "John and the Emir: A New Introduction, Edition, and Translation," *Le Muséon* 121 (2008): 89; John C. LAMOREAUX/Hassan KHAIRALLAH, "The Arabic Version of the Life of John of Edessa," *Le Muséon* 113 (2000): 439–460.

57 In this, *John of Jerusalem* misidentifies Yazīd's successor as his son al-Walīd (Gk. Oulidos): Mansi, *Collectio*, xiii, col. 200.

destroying images; *Ep. ad Theophilum*, *George the Monk*, *George Kedrenos*, *John Zonaras*). Meanwhile, two sources – *Theophanes* and *Martyrs of Constantinople* – state that the edict did not attract much attention because Yazīd died shortly after it was promulgated.

The question of what happened to the decree after Yazīd's death raises a still thornier issue: when was the decree promulgated? VASILIEV argued that the edict was handed down in 721, and this assumption has been accepted by most scholars ever since.⁵⁸ In reaching this conclusion, VASILIEV privileged the testimony of what he regarded as the earliest written source, *John of Jerusalem*, which posited a two-and-a-half year gap between the promulgation of the decree and the caliph's death. Given that Yazīd died in AH Sha' bān 105/January 724, this would mean that the law came into effect in the summer of 721. *Antirrheticus III* mentions the same two-and-a-half year gap; 819 and 846 identify the year as Seleucid 1031/720–1; and *Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam* mentions AH 102/July 720–July 721.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, a slightly earlier date of 720 is suggested by 1234, which states that the edict appeared in AH 101/July 719–July 720. Given that Yazīd acceded to the throne in Rajab 101/February 720, this would mean he promulgated the law in his first six months in office, i. e. between February and July 720. The *History of the Patriarchs* also leaves open the possibility of 720, stating that when Yazīd “first seized control of the realm” (Ar. *wa-awwal mā akhadha al-mamlaka*), he issued a number of anti-Christian laws, including the iconoclastic edict.

Recently, Glen BOWERSOCK has called this dating into question. He has criticized VASILIEV for the “rather naïve conviction that the earliest source, namely John the presbyter, deserved preference as such.” BOWERSOCK then highlighted the chronology in *Zuqnīn*, the earliest dated source, which places the edict in Seleucid 1035/AD 723–724, and to *Kindī*, which places it in AH 104/AD June 722 – June 723 (cf. *Maqrīzī*).⁶⁰ Many later Greek sources (*Ep. ad Theophilum*, *George the*

58 VASILIEV, “Iconoclastic Edict,” 45–47; and following him, notably GRABAR, “Islam and Iconoclasm,” 45; idem, *Formation*, 85–86.

59 For these and the following dates, see the conversion tables in Venance GRUMEL, *Traité d'études byzantines. I. La chronologie*, Paul Lemerle, ed., Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1958, 248.

60 BOWERSOCK, *Mosaics*, 104–105; and following him, now Basema HARMANEH/Karin HINKKANEN, “The Mosaic,” *Petra – The Mountain of Aaron. The Finnish Archaeological Project in Jordan. Volume I: The Church and the Chapel*, Zbigniew T. Fiema/Jaakko Frösén, eds., Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 2008, 257. Here, it is worth noting that *Zuqnīn* ascribes the second round of anti-Christian legislation under Yazīd to Seleucid 1036/AD 724–725. Given that Yazīd died in January 724, this strikes me as an exceptionally narrow – and therefore, implausible – window, and thus brings into question the overall dating found in *Zuqnīn*. Despite this, as dis-

Monk, George Kedrenos, John Zonaras) concur with this dating, stating that the decree was issued less than a year before Yazīd's death in January 724, hence, sometime in 723. Amidst this, *Theophanes* – which contains the most detailed chronology of all the sources – locates the edict in AM 6215/722–723, which it identifies as the fourth year of Yazīd's reign.

Despite the abundant evidence pointing to 721, I am inclined to agree with BOWERSOCK in dating the edict to 723 (probably the first half of that year, i. e. AH 104). This is not only because two exceptionally early sources place the decree in 723 – *Zuqnīn* and *Kindī* (which should be considered especially trustworthy, for unlike the Byzantine sources, they were written inside the caliphate and because they report information from outside the echo chamber of the Greek and Syriac chronicles discussed by CONTERNO). 723 also seems more plausible on the basis of the telling detail in *Theophanes* (cf. *Martyrs of Constantinople*) that the decree failed to attract much attention because Yazīd died shortly after issuing it. If this is true, we can begin to understand the silence of the mainstream Arabic Muslim sources about the edict, as well as the lack of possible archaeological evidence in areas outside western Transjordan, where Yazīd is known to have spent time as caliph (see below, Part Three). In other words, despite the impression the decree made in Christian historiography, it may have been in effect all too briefly to merit mention in Muslim sources.

The Iconoclastic Edict and Anti-Christian Legislation

The Legal Context of the Edict

Let us now examine how the chroniclers represented Yazīd's decree in context. What do the pages and paragraphs around our reports have to say about the circumstances in which the caliph promulgated his law, and what can these tell us about the law's purpose? *Zuqnīn* explicitly portrays the edict as part of a larger legal campaign against Christians, among other groups:⁶¹ the year after issuing the iconoclastic decree, Yazīd reportedly ordered the killing of “white dogs, white

cussed below (see Part 2), we know that at least one of these second-round laws was short-lived, and Yazīd's sudden death may have been the reason why.

61 Chabot, *Chronicon anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, ii, 164.

doves, and white cocks.”⁶² He then issued a “harsh edict” (Syr. *fūqdānā ḥarīfā*) against “dumb animals” – perhaps beasts of burden – slaughtering them “despite [their] doing no wrong.” He then ordered the killing of all “blue people” – probably meaning blue-eyed people; this came to an end, however, before anyone had actually died.⁶³ Yazīd also decreed that the testimony of a Syriac-speaker (Syr. *sūryāyā*) should not be accepted against that of an Arab (Syr. *ṭayyāyā*). Finally, he set the blood money for an Arab at 12,000 silver dirhams (Syr. *zūzē*) and a Syriac-speaker at 6000. The chronicler concludes by remarking that even “the Arabs hated [Yazīd] and his regulations.” As we shall see below, several of these strange actions may have had apocalyptic connotations.

Michael the Syrian also provides a list of anti-Christian laws that were promulgated at the time, though he ascribes these laws to Yazīd’s predecessor, ‘Umar II (r. 99–101/717–720).⁶⁴ These laws are mentioned in the same section of the chronicle as the iconoclastic decree, and therefore, deserve to be examined alongside it. *Michael the Syrian* states that when ‘Umar took power, “He began to mistreat the Christians.” His goals were two-fold: first, “He wished to emphasize that he was affirming the laws of the Muslims” (Syr. *nāmūsayhūn d-mashlmānē*), and second, “because the Arabs had not been able to conquer Constantinople.” Despite being perceived as a pious ruler, he set about oppressing Christians “in all respects.”⁶⁵

⁶² The Fāṭimid caliph al-Ḥākim (r. 386–411/996–1021) also killed dogs, and his apocalyptic mania is well known; cf. M. CANARD, “al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh,” *EI*², iii, 79.

⁶³ It is not clear why Yazīd would have targeted people with blue eyes, though they seem to have had sinister connotations in the early Islamic period (the following cited in COOK, *Apocalyptic*, 17–18, 67, 249). 1) Apocalyptic traditions speak about unfaithful ‘ulamā’ who will be transformed into pigs and monkeys at the end of days and have their faces turned black and their eyes turned blue: COOK, *Apocalyptic*, 17–18. 2) The Shī‘a claimed that their archenemy, ‘Umar I, had blue eyes: Etan KOHLBERG, “Some Imāmi Shī‘i Views of the Ṣaḥāba,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984): 162; cf. Ignaz GOLDZIEHER, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, Leiden: Brill, 1920, 298. 3) The foreign enemies of Islam were sometimes said to have blue eyes, such as the army of the Rūmiya which will attack the Muslims at the end of days: Suliman BASHEAR, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd Ser. 1 (1991): 185. 4) Yazīd b. al-Muhallab insulted the Umayyad general al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd (whom the caliph Yazīd dispatched to suppress the Muhallabid revolt in the east) for having “blue eyes and red skin, his mother being a Greek”: al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ii, 1398.

⁶⁴ Chabot, *Chronique*, ii, 488–489 (Fr.), iv, 455–456 (Syr.).

⁶⁵ The image of ‘Umar II as a pious caliph pervades medieval Muslim historiography; Christian sources are generally less sympathetic towards ‘Umar, though interestingly, the Armenian tradition looked favorably on him; see GERO, *Leo III*, 132–133, 138; on the famous letter exchange between ‘Umar II and Leo III, see further references in David Thomas, et al., eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History. Volume 1 (600–900)*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 203–208, 375–385.

First, *Michael the Syrian* states that ‘Umar “plotted for them to convert to Islam.” He incentivized this by lifting the poll tax (Syr. *ksef rīshā*; = Ar. *jizya*) on converts, as it had previously been the custom to continue taxing *mawālī* (non-Arab converts to Islam). As a result, many Christians apostatized to Islam (Syr. *ḥanefū*). Second, Christians were forbidden from giving testimony against Muslims. Third, Christians were barred from holding positions of political power (Syr. *d-lā nqūm kristyānē b-shūltānā*), a mysterious statement sometimes taken to mean that ‘Umar banned non-Muslims from state employment. This is based on the claims of several Muslim sources, too, but as Luke YARBROUGH has recently shown, there is reason to doubt that this purge ever actually happened.⁶⁶ Fourth, Christians were prohibited from raising their voices in prayer. Fifth, they were forbidden from striking the *nāqūshā* (Ar. *nāqūs*, Gk. *sēmantron*), the wooden board that was beaten to summon the faithful to prayer. Sixth, they were prohibited from wearing an article of clothing known as the *qbāytā*, which Jean-Baptiste Chabot, the editor of the text, interpreted as a long overcoat for men. Seventh, they were barred from riding horses. Eighth, if a Muslim killed a Christian, he should not be killed in return, as was customary; rather, the Christian’s family had to be paid a sum of 5000 silver dirhams. Ninth, ‘Umar withheld and redistributed the earnings of the monasteries and the lands they possessed. Tenth and finally, he prohibited Muslims from drinking wine and must (Syr. *ḥūlyā*, e.g. “new wine”). 1234 – which also draws on the chronicle of Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē like *Michael the Syrian* – contains a shorter list of anti-Christian measures, including prohibitions on Christians’ raising their voices in prayer, striking the *nāqūshā*, and riding with saddles.⁶⁷ In addition, 1234 mentions the same immunity against the death penalty for Muslims who killed Christians, and the same 5000 dirham sum for blood money.

The *History of the Patriarchs* provides different information about anti-Christian legislation than *Michael the Syrian* and 1234.⁶⁸ It begins by stating that ‘Umar imposed the *jizya* on those did not convert to Islam “who were not in the habit of paying it.” It then details a number of anti-Christian measures implemented during Yazīd’s reign, which the text characterizes as a time of “calamity and affliction.” Upon assuming power, Yazīd is said to have reimposed on the church and bishops the *kharāj* (the land tax) which ‘Umar had previously lifted. He then levied an unspecified tax on the people, with the result that “every person was squeezed in his own land” (*dāqa kull man fī bilādihī*).

⁶⁶ YARBROUGH, “Did ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Issue an Edict?”

⁶⁷ Chabot, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234*, i, 307.

⁶⁸ Seybold, *Historia*, 153.

The Egyptian Muslim historian al-Maqrīzī also provides context for the perceived proliferation of anti-Christian legislation during the 710s and 720s.⁶⁹ During the reign of ‘Umar, Maqrīzī mentions a ban on wine and the closing of taverns, alongside the liquidation of Coptic estates in rural areas (*mawārith al-Qibṭ ‘an al-kuwar*).⁷⁰ Although Maqrīzī briefly mentions the iconoclastic edict of Yazīd in the same breath as ‘Umar’s various measures against Christians, he includes information about Yazīd’s reign itself in a different section of his work.⁷¹ Here, we read that “hardships came upon the Christians, the likes of which they had never witnessed before.” For example, in response to new taxes imposed by Yazīd’s governor, ‘Abdallāh b. al-Ḥabḥāb, Copts from “the eastern fringe” (*‘āmmat al-ḥawf al-sharqī min al-Qibṭ*) reportedly rebelled against their Muslim rulers.⁷² An official named Usāma b. Zayd al-Tanūkhī then seized the property of Christians and branded the hands of monks. This brand included the name of the monk, his monastery, and the date of his branding. Anyone found without a brand reportedly had his hand chopped off. Meanwhile, any Christian discovered without his papers (*manshūrāt*; probably statements of safe conduct based on the payment of taxes) had to pay a fine of 10 dinars.

Finally, the Armenian sources state that Yazīd gave orders to break “the standard of the dominical cross of Christ which was erected in various places” (*Ēwond, Thomas Artsruni, cf. Vardan*). This may be a reference to the distinctive stone crosses found in Armenia during late antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁷³ Interestingly, all three Armenian sources also mention that Yazīd ordered the slaughter of pigs, a point we shall return to shortly.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, ii, 50.

⁷⁰ For comment on the term *mawārith* in this context, see YARBROUGH, “Did ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Issue an Edict?”, 176–177.

⁷¹ al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, iv, II, 999–1000.

⁷² For more on this figure, see Nadia ABBOTT, “A New Papyrus and a Review of the Administration of ‘Ubaid Allāh b. al-Ḥabḥāb,” in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb*, George Makdisi, ed., Leiden: Brill, 1965, 21–35; on the revolts, see now MIKHAIL, *Byzantine to Islamic Egypt*, 118–127.

⁷³ L. AZARIAN/A. MANOUKIAN, *Khatchkar*, Milan: Ares, 1977.

⁷⁴ The slaughter of pigs is attested in other periods, too. 1) Under ‘Umar I, who killed the swine of Christians and debited an equivalent amount to the *jizya* to compensate them for the lost property: Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *The Book of Revenue*; Kitāb al-Amwāl, Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, tr., with Ibrahim M. Oweiss, Reading: Garnet Pub., 2002, 46. 2) Under ‘Abd al-Malik ca. 694; he also destroyed crosses that year: *Theophanes*: de Boor, *Chronographia*, i, 367; Agapius, *Historia* in HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa*, 189 (VASILIEV, “*Kitāb al-‘Unvan*,” 497 omits fol. 105v of the original manuscript where the reference can be found, according to HOYLAND); *Michael the Syrian*: Chabot, *Chronique*, ii, 475 (Fr.), iv, 447 (Syr.); *Chronicle of 1234*: Chabot, *Chronicon ad*

Umayyad Legislation and the *Dhimmī* Regime

Taken as a whole, the sources leave the distinct impression that Yazīd and ‘Umar presided over a period of increased anti-Christian legislation. Indeed, the uptick in persecutory laws furnishes the most immediate context for understanding Yazīd’s iconoclasm.⁷⁵ Amidst this, it is interesting to note that several of the new anti-Christian laws show parallels with later *dhimmī* regulations as reflected in Muslim jurisprudence of the ninth century and beyond. These include prohibitions on Christians testifying against Muslims in court (*Zuqnīn, Michael the Syrian*), serving in Muslim governments (*Michael the Syrian*), raising their voices in prayer (*Michael the Syrian, 1234*), striking the *nāqūshā* (*Michael the Syrian, 1234*), not wearing distinguishing articles of clothing (*Michael the Syrian*), riding with saddles (*Michael the Syrian, 1234*), selling wine (*Maqrīzī*), and requirements for paying different levels of blood money (*Zuqnīn, Michael the Syrian, 1234*). It is significant that the sources portray these as new laws being promulgated for the first time (or at least catching the chroniclers’ attention for the first time), rather than as old laws being promulgated anew.

Versions of these laws can be found in works of *fiqh* codified during the ninth century and later, notably in the body of *dhimmī* regulations known as the Pact of ‘Umar (Ar. *‘ahd ‘Umar, al-shurūṭ al-‘Umarīya*).⁷⁶ There is no consensus on when these laws first came into being. Scholars such as Albrecht NOTH dated them

annum Christi 1234, i, 296. 3) An edict (Syr. *fūqdānā*) ca. 703–704: *Chronicle of 819*: Chabot, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234*, i, 14; *Chronicle of 846*: BROOKS, “Syriac Chronicle of the Year 846,” 573 (Syr.), 581 (Eng.). 4) Under the Fāṭimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 386–411/996–1021): MIKHAIL, *Byzantine to Islamic Egypt*, 117; B.T.A. Evetts, ed. and tr., with Alfred J. Butler, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries, Attributed to Abū Šāliḥ, the Armenian*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895, 267. Regarding the prohibition on pigs generally, see F. VIRÉ, “Khinzīr,” *EP*, v, 8–9; A.J. WENSINCK, “Nadjis,” *EP*, vii, 870; Richard A. LOBBAN, Jr. “Pigs and their Prohibition,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 57–75.

75 For prior discussion of this theme, see GRABAR, “Islamic Art and Byzantium,” 83 n. 40; MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Archeologia islamica*, 260; GERO, *Leo III*, 59–60 n. 2; GRABAR, *Formation*, 85–86.

76 See an early recension of the *shurūṭ* in al-Ṭurtūshī (d. 520/1126). *Sirāj al-mulūk*, Ja’far Bayātī, ed., London: Riad El Rayyes, 1990, 401–402; with comment in A.S. TRITTON, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of ‘Umar*, London: Oxford University Press, 1930, 5–17; Antoine FATTAL, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d’Islam*, Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1958, 60–69; Wolfgang KALLFELZ, *Nichtmuslimische Untertanen im Islam: Grundlage, Ideologie und Praxis der Politik frühislamischer Herrscher gegenüber ihren nichtmuslimischen Untertanen mit besonderem Blick auf die Dynastie der Abbasiden, 749–1248*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995, 78–79; Mark R. COHEN, “What was the Pact of ‘Umar? A Literary-Historical Study,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (1999): 100–157.

to the time of the conquests, especially the reign of the second caliph, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–644), whose name they bear.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Milka LEVY-RUBIN has argued that they date to the reign of the “second ‘Umar,” that is, the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar (II) b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99–101/717–720).⁷⁸ Most recently, Luke YARBROUGH has pointed out the folly of trying to ascribe the *ghiyār* (laws about distinguishing articles of clothing, which are often included as a component of the *shurūṭ*) to any one Muslim ruler, given the wide array of caliphs who are credited as having promulgated them. Some of these rulers were very early (e.g. ‘Umar I), while others were very late (e.g. al-Mutawakkil, r. 232–47/847–61). He concludes by floating the attractive idea that the *ghiyār* may not be Umayyad in origin at all, but rather, formulations of the ‘Abbāsīd period that were made to appear ancient so as to give them a patina of authority.⁷⁹

We need not take sides in this debate to see that individual elements of later *dhimmi* regulations probably began as rather unsystematic, ad hoc legal experiments in the Umayyad period. In this respect, if the Christian sources are trustworthy, the reigns of ‘Umar II and Yazīd II were crucial years of legal innovation for what would come later. But it is not only successful laws that concern us here, but also unsuccessful ones. For just as there were certain legal experiments under the Umayyads that gave rise to *dhimmi* regulations in the ninth century, so it seems there were other experiments that failed to pass into the consensus of later Muslim jurists.

Examples of “failed laws” included blanket prohibitions on certain types of animals, namely swine (as mentioned in *Zuq̄nīn*, *Lewond*, *Thomas Artsruni*, *Vardan*). But the single best example of a failed legal experiment was Yazīd’s iconoclastic edict. Although promulgated in the same 10-year period as a raft of other *dhimmi* laws, it has no parallel or basis in later works of *fiqh*. It is true that the *shurūṭ* of later centuries prohibit the display of Christian symbols in public places – especially crosses – but they have nothing to say about the proactive destruction of these symbols, especially those inside Christian buildings.⁸⁰ That the iconoclastic edict was a failed experiment in its own time is suggested by the

77 Albrecht NOTH, “Problems of Differentiation between Muslims and Non-Muslims: Re-Reading the ‘Ordinances of ‘Umar’ (*al-Shurūṭ al-‘Umarīyya*),” in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, Robert G. Hoyland, ed. and tr., Farnham: Ashgate, 2004, 103–124

78 Milka LEVY-RUBIN, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

79 Luke YARBROUGH, “Origins of the *ghiyār*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014): 113–121.

80 al-Ṭurtūshī, *Sirāj al-mulūk*, 401; Abū Bakr al-Khallāl, *Aḥkam ahl al-milal*, Sayyid Kisrawī Ḥasan, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1994, 356; see also the famous *ṣulḥ* treaty between

actions of Yazīd's successor, Hishām, who repealed the law once his predecessor was dead. What is more, there is no evidence of imperially sponsored legislation against images after Yazīd (even if we have reports from the eighth and ninth centuries of individual Muslims attacking Christian images).⁸¹

Finally, it is worth noting that the iconoclastic edict of Yazīd is not unusual as an example of *dhimmī* legislation that disappeared from Muslim sources but which survived in Christian ones.⁸² To name but a few others, the family of Syriac, Greek, and Arabic chronicles studied by Robert HOYLAND, Maria CONTERNO, and others (along with 819 and 846) all state that 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705) ordered the slaughter of pigs;⁸³ *Michael the Syrian* claims that al-Walīd I (r. 86–96/705–715) required magicians to be tried by ordeal;⁸⁴ the Greek life of the neomartyr Elias (d. 779) states that al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785) promulgated an edict prescribing death for Muslim converts who returned to Christianity;⁸⁵ and the Latin *Memoriale sanctorum* of Eulogius claims that the *amīr* of Córdoba, 'Abd al-Raḥman II (r. 206–238/822–852) issued a decree threatening the execution of

'Umar I and the Christians of Jerusalem, which guarantees the safety of their crosses, among other things: al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, i, 2405–2406.

81 The parallels among these stories are so close that one is tempted to see them as literary tropes. 1) Muslims shoot arrows at an icon of St. Theodore at Karsatas near Damascus: André BINGGELI, "Anastase le Sinaïte: *Récits sur le Sinai* et *Récits utiles à l'âme*. Édition, traduction et commentaire," Ph.D. dissertation, Université Paris – IV, 2001, 220 (Gk.), 532 (Fr.); cf. Bonifatius Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos. III: Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975, 185. 2) The Muslim nobleman Rawḥ al-Qurashī attacks an icon of St. Theodore at a monastery on Mt. Qāsyūn in Damascus: Emanuela BRAIDA/Chiara PELISSETTI, *Storia di Rawḥ al-Quraṣī. Un discendente di Maometto che scelese di divenire cristiano*, Turin: Silvio Zamorani, 2001, 97. 3) Muslim soldiers visit a church in Gabala (Ar. Jabala) and try to gouge out the eye of an image of the Virgin: Mansi, *Collectio*, xiii, col. 18; cf. Joannes B. Aufhauser, ed., *Miracula S. Georgii*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1913, 8–12. 4) al-Aṣḥab b. 'Abd al-'Azīz spits on an icon of the Virgin in Ḥulwān in Egypt: B. Evetts, ed., "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria, III: Agatho to Michael I (766)," *Patrologia Orientalis* 5 (1910): 52 (306), cf. 149–150, 403–404, in which a Muslim attempts to deface an image of the crucified Jesus. A remarkably similar story recorded in the *Tārīkh al-azmina* of the Maronite Patriarch Iṣṭifān al-Duwayhī (d. 1704) claims that when the forces of the Shī'ī amīr Mūsā Ḥarfūsh attacked Jibbat Bsharī in northern Lebanon in 1602, a soldier entered a monastery and struck an icon of the Virgin Mary. Later that night, his hand reportedly shriveled, and he died. Clearly the motif had a long lineage; cited in Usaama MAKDISI, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008, 43.

82 For discussion, see HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 596.

83 See above, n. 74.

84 Chabot, *Chronique*, ii, 481 (Fr.), iv, 451 (Syr.).

85 Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ed., *Sylogē Palaistinēs kai Syriakēs hagiologias*, 3 vols., St. Petersburg: Tipografia Kirshbaum, 1907–1913, i, 52.

blasphemers.⁸⁶ Not a single Muslim source mentions any of these laws, which must have had a not insignificant impact in their own day judging from their inclusion in these Christian texts. Perhaps what we are dealing with is a bigger historiographic problem about information disappearing from one body of texts while surviving in another.⁸⁷

The Reign of Yazīd and the Archaeological Record

An Age of Apocalypse and Islamization?

Aside from the legal evidence, are there any other clues about what motivated Yazīd? The mainstream Muslim sources are not particularly helpful in this respect given that they consistently portray the caliph as reckless and profligate – more interested in his beloved slave girls Ḥabāba and Sallāma than in statecraft.⁸⁸ Despite the general absence of useful information, it is important to remember that Yazīd came to power within a year and a half of the anniversary of the first Islamic century (ca. December 3, 718). This momentous event may have influenced his immediate predecessor, ‘Umar II, whose very public turn to piety and decision to besiege Constantinople in 717 may have reflected unarticulated anxieties about this date.⁸⁹ In Muslim circles, the capture of Constantinople had eschatological significance, and it may have been the case that ‘Umar was motivated partly by a desire to usher in the end times as the year 100 approached.⁹⁰ Likewise, the raft

86 Ioannes Gil, ed., *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, 2 vols., Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, ii, 368.

87 See Peter BROWN’s more general comment on the conspicuous absence of non-Muslims in the historical record of the early Muslims, this despite their large numbers in reality: Peter BROWN, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*. 2nd ed., Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003, 301.

88 No doubt the product of later ‘Abbāsīd writers who were determined to demonize the Umayyads; for a snapshot of Yazīd’s personality in the sources, see R.W. HAMILTON, *Walid and his Friends: An Umayyad Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, 1988, 63–73.

89 I owe this idea to conversation with David Cook.

90 See especially Suliman BASHEAR, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Third Series* 1, 2 (1991): 173–207; cf. Nadia Maria EL CHEIKH, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2004, 60–71. The siege of Constantinople seems to have created hardships for Christians living inside the caliphate, who were increasingly seen

of *dhimmī* legislation promulgated under ‘Umar may have had something to do with this moment of increased apocalyptic fervor. This same fervor may have also motivated some of Yazīd’s more peculiar actions, including his order to slaughter unclean animals and blue-eyed people, both of which have echoes in Muslim apocalyptic literature.⁹¹ Yet it is the conspicuous allusion to Yazīd’s iconoclasm in two apocalyptic texts – the Christian *Vision of Daniel* and the Muslim *Kitāb al-fītan* of Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād – that amplifies the eschatological “background noise” of Yazīd’s law most clearly. As we saw in Part One, these texts refer to an unnamed Umayyad who “destroys ancient things made by hand” (*yufsidu ṣanā’i‘ al-yad al-awwalin*, *Vision of Daniel*). The sources also call him “the destroyer of images” (*mughayyir al-ṣuwar*, *Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād*) and the “eraser of the golden objects” (*māḥiq al-dhahabīyāt*, *Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād*). If the identification with Yazīd is correct, as I have argued, it is revealing that apocalyptic prophecies of the period focused so intensely on his iconoclasm. It not only suggests that the edict was remembered as the defining moment of his reign, but also that Yazīd’s iconoclasm was understood to have an apocalyptic meaning in the eyes of contemporaries and slightly later writers. If all of this is true, it is easy to imagine why Yazīd may have ordered the obliteration of images before the Judgment Day: perhaps he was eager to avoid punishment for letting idolatry proliferate in his realm? Perhaps Yazīd was trying to accommodate members of his court who were particularly concerned about upholding piety and purging unbelief? Indeed, given Yazīd’s consistent – and no doubt, slightly exaggerated – portrayal as a *bon vivant*, it is tempting to imagine that he was acting on the advice of the religious rigorists around him rather than on his own accord. If these eschatological undercurrents are real, it is also not surprising that later writers omitted Yazīd’s decree from their histories: the apocalypse failed to materialize, and religious initiatives connected to it may have either been suppressed by historians or simply forgotten.

as a fifth column; see for example *Michael the Syrian*’s remark that ‘Umar issued his new *dhimmī* laws in reaction to the failed siege: Chabot, *Chronique*, ii, 488 (Fr.), iv, 456 (Syr.); Robert G. HOYLAND, *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, 198. See also the alleged martyrdom of 60 Byzantine archons in Jerusalem in 725/725: Athanasios PAPAPOULOS-KERAMEUS, “Muchenichestvo shestidesiati novykh sviatykh muchenikov postradavshikh vo Sviatom grade Khrista Boga nashego pod vladichestvom Arabov,” *Pravoslavnyi palestinskii sbornik* 12 (1892): I–25; cf. BARNARD, *Background*, 25; George HUXLEY, “The Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 18 (1977): 369–374; for discussion of Christians as a fifth-column under Muslim rule, see Christian C. SAHNER, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World*, ch. 5, conclusion (forthcoming).

91 See above, n. 63, 74.

In addition to the apocalypse, there are hints in the works of al-Ṭabarī and other medieval authors that Yazīd's reign may have witnessed increased conversion to Islam and deteriorating relations between old Arab Muslims and recent converts from non-Arab backgrounds.⁹² Across the empire, Yazīd's deputies are known to have adopted harsh measures against the *mawālī* similar to those that had been implemented in Iraq several years earlier by al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714).⁹³ As is well known, al-Ḥajjāj faced waves of new converts during his time as governor and consequently had to grapple with declining tax revenues. He responded to this crisis by expelling the *mawālī* from the *amṣār* and by reimposing the *jizya* and the *kharāj* on them as if these new converts were still *dhimmīs*. Similar policies were implemented under Yazīd and proved deeply unpopular, provoking fits of unrest across the empire.⁹⁴ Such violent episodes suggest that Yazīd's reign may have been a time of increased social unrest, sparked by the sudden and unprecedented mingling of old Muslims, new Muslims, and non-Muslims in a shared society, as opposed to segregated communities in a stratified post-conquest society, as it had been during much of the seventh century. Perhaps this tension provides a context for the new *dhimmī* legislation of the 710s and 720s, including Yazīd's iconoclastic decree.

Another way to understand the decree is to consider geography. The Umayyad court is well known to have been peripatetic:⁹⁵ Yazīd, for example, spent much of his life in an area of Transjordan known as the Balqā', while his predecessor Sulaymān set up shop near Ludd in Palestine and his successor Hishām in al-Ruṣāfa in the Syrian steppe.⁹⁶ As Jere BACHARACH has argued, it seems that 'Abd al-Malik assigned different areas of Bilād al-Shām to his various sons, who in turn, undertook development projects in their respective areas. When they

⁹² For background, see Patricia CRONE, "Mawlā," *EP*², vi, 875–880.

⁹³ A. DIETRICH, "al-Ḥadjdjadj b. Yūsuf," *EP*², iii, 39–43; WELLHAUSEN, *Arab Kingdom*, 267–311; G.R. HAWTING, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750*, 2nd ed., London/New York: Routledge, 2000, 66–70; Patricia CRONE, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 13–17. On the policies of 'Umar II, who abolished the practice of taxing the *mawālī*, cf. H.A.R. GIBB, "The Fiscal Rescript of 'Umar II," *Arabica* 2 (1955): 1–16; Chabot, *Chronique*, iv, 456.

⁹⁴ BLANKINSHIP, *Jihād State*, 81–90; e.g. in North Africa, Berber Muslims killed the governor – Yazīd b. Abī Muslim Dīnār, himself a *mawlā* – who had learned his craft under al-Ḥajjāj in Iraq: al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ii, 1435–1436.

⁹⁵ BLANKINSHIP, *Jihād State*, 80.

⁹⁶ YAQŪT, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, i, 489; the governor of the Balqā' during Yazīd's reign was al-Ḥārith b. 'Amr al-Ṭā'ī: Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, i, 330.

acceded to the throne, they also established their courts there.⁹⁷ There is abundant archaeological evidence of Yazīd's presence in the Balqā' from both before and after he became caliph, notably at al-Muwaqqar, a village about 25 km south-east of 'Ammān, where he built a palace and a reservoir.⁹⁸ There is also the nearby palace of al-Qaṣṭal, which will be discussed below. As caliph, Yazīd took up residence in the city of Bayt Rās (Capitolias), about 70 km north of 'Ammān.⁹⁹ In fact, it was in Bayt Rās that Yazīd's consort Ḥabāba died after reportedly choking on a pomegranate seed. Traditions state that Yazīd was so shaken by her death that he died in neighboring Irbid shortly after.¹⁰⁰

The region of the Balqā' was 'majority Christian' during the Umayyad period. We have a remarkable account of the state of Muslim-Christian relations there less than a decade before Yazīd's accession in the form of the passion of Peter of Capitolias, a priest from Bayt Rās who was executed for blasphemy by the Muslim authorities in 715.¹⁰¹ This document, originally written in Greek but only surviving in a later Georgian translation, is considered to be an authentic product of the early- to mid-eighth century. Most of the text is preoccupied with Peter's blasphemy, trial, and execution. Along the way, however, it provides interesting details about social life in Bayt Rās, and in particular, the perceived uptick in Islamization in the area which first prompted Peter to antagonize the authorities. In the passion, Peter is said to have provided counsel to Christians being led off to execution, "persuad[ing] them to choose death on behalf of Christ rather than this fleeting life."¹⁰² The text does not explain who these Christians were. One

97 Jere L. BACHARACH, "Marwanid Umayyad Building Activities: Speculations on Patronage," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 27–44, for Yazīd II, 36–37.

98 YĀQŪT, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, v, 226–227; see C.E. BOSWORTH, "al-Muwaqqar," *EP*², vii, 807. For archaeological studies of the site, see various articles by R.W. HAMILTON in *The Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 12 (1948): 63–74; K.A.C. CRESWELL, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932–1940, i, 493–497; Muḥammad WAḤĪB, "al-Mawṣim al-thāni lil-tanqibāt al-athariya fi l-Muwaqqar: taqrīr al-awwal," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 37 (1995): 5–23 (Arabic section).

99 J. SOURDEL-THOMINE, "Bayt Rās," *EP*², i, 1149; C.J. LENZEN/E.A. KNAUF, "Beit Ras/Capitolias: A Preliminary Evaluation of the Archaeological and Textual Evidence," *Syria* 64 (1987): 39–40; HAMILTON, *Walid*, 72.

100 al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ii, 1464; YĀQŪT, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, i, 168 (sic. "Izbid"); S. ORY, "Irbid," *EP*², iv, 75–76.

101 French summary in PEETERS, "Passion de S. Pierre"; new English translation in Stephen J. SHOEMAKER, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine: Passion of Peter of Capitolias, Passion of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba, Passion of Romanos the New-Martyr*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press (forthcoming). For discussion, see SAHNER, *Christian Martyrs under Islam*, ch. 3.

102 SHOEMAKER, "Life of Peter of Capitolias," § 5; PEETERS, "Passion de S. Pierre," 303.

wonders whether they had converted to Islam and then returned to Christianity, which made them “apostates” under the law.¹⁰³ Peter hoped that by prompting his own death, he would become a symbol of strength and resilience to others facing pressure to leave the church. As the text puts it:

For then he saw that the cloud of godlessness and the fog of seduction were widespread and that truth was violently oppressed by falsehood, when many who had vacillating thoughts were captivated by the ease of pleasures, by apostasy from the truth, and by falling willingly into falsehood. And some were attracted and won over through flattery, while others were stolen away by the promise of gifts. And once it happened that they broke some people through coercion by torture and beat them into exchanging light for darkness and made them renounce the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of this [Peter] was enraged and distressed and forsaking life.¹⁰⁴

Like many martyrologies, the life of Peter is an anti-Muslim polemic, and therefore, should be read within the conventions of the genre. At the same time, if the text is indeed a product of the eighth century, as seems likely, it provides clear evidence that conversion was increasing – or at least was perceived to be increasing – in the exact region where Yazīd was active only several years later. The perceived uptick in conversion, in turn, had an irritant effect on the social order, exacerbating rivalries between Muslims and Christians. One wonders whether Yazīd’s anti-Christian legislation – including the iconoclastic decree – was promulgated against a similar backdrop of social unrest in the Balqā’ region.

Geography and Archaeology

The issue of geography is doubly important because it can help clarify one of the most complicated bodies of potential evidence for the decree: the large number of iconoclastic church mosaics scattered across the southern Levant. According to the work of Robert SCHICK, Michele PICCIRILLO, Susana OGNIBENE, Glen BOWERSOCK, and others, more than 150 such mosaics have been discovered across Israel/Palestine and Jordan, with the greatest concentration of these located in northwestern Jordan.¹⁰⁵ As Schick has observed, with the exception of a single

103 On this phenomenon, see SAHNER, *Christian Martyrs under Islam*, ch. 1.

104 SHOEMAKER, “Life of Peter of Capitolias,” § 5; PEETERS, “Passion de S. Pierre,” 303.

105 Robert SCHICK. *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study*, Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995, 180–219; Michele PICCIRILLO, “Iconofobia o iconoclastia nella chiesa di Giordania?” in *Bisanzio e l’Occidente: arte, archeologia, storia: Studi in onore di Fernanda de’ Maffei*, Claudia Barsanti, et al., eds., Rome:

church in northern Syria at Nabgha, we have no examples of iconoclastic mosaics from what is today Syria or Lebanon, along with Egypt and North Africa.¹⁰⁶ Whatever its causes, clearly, this was a regional phenomenon. It is all the more difficult to explain given that the epicenter of the damage does not correspond to a known Byzantine or Arab province or to a single ecclesiastical jurisdiction from late antiquity, such as a bishopric. In other words, there is not an obvious political or religious dimension to the geography of Levantine iconoclasm.

Here, it is interesting to note that the highest concentration of damaged mosaics is found inside what was once Yazīd's sphere of influence – the greater region of the Balqā'.¹⁰⁷ In a pre-modern polity in which it could be difficult to enforce the law far away from where the court is based, it is not hard to imagine why legislation like Yazīd's may have had a bigger impact in those areas that were close to the caliph. I do not wish to claim that all of the iconoclastic damage was connected to Yazīd: as countless scholars before me have argued, the evidence is simply too abundant and too complicated to claim that all of it derives from Yazīd's short time in power. Yet I believe there are good reasons to think that some of it does date to his reign.

For example, there are several churches whose floors are known to have been decorated with images just before Yazīd's accession, but which show evidence of iconoclastic damage from sometime later, possibly when the decree was in force. These include the church at al-Quwaysma, 3 kilometers south of 'Ammān, whose mosaics were installed in 717/718 (Figure 2); the church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Raṣāṣ, 30 kilometers southeast of Mādabā, whose mosaics were installed in 718 (Figures 3–4); and the acropolis church at Ma'īn, 5 kilometers southwest of Mādabā, whose mosaics were installed in 719/720 (Figure 5).¹⁰⁸ In all three

Viella, 1996, 173–191; Susanna OGNIBENE, "The Iconophobic Dossier," in *Mount Nebo: New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, 2 vols., Michele Piccirillo/Eugenio Alliata, eds., Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1998, i, 372–389; eadem, *Umm al-Rasas: la chiesa di Santo Stefano ed il «problema iconofobico»*, Rome: «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, 2002, 467–485; BOWERSOCK, *Mosaics*, 99–111; Robert SCHICK, "The Destruction of Images in 8th-Century Palestine." in *Age of Transition: Byzantine Culture in the Islamic World*, Helen C. Evans, ed., New York/New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, distributed by Yale University Press, 2015, 132–141.

106 On Nabgha, see Rana SABBAGH, et al., *Le martyrien Saint-Jean dans la moyenne vallée de l'Euphrate. Fouilles de la Direction Générale des Antiquités à Nabgha au nord-est de Jarablus*, Damascus: Ministère de la Culture/Direction Générale des Antiquités et des Musées, 2008, 11–22; cited in SCHICK, "Destruction of Images," 134–135.

107 Noted in passing in KING, "Declaration," 276.

108 For extensive references to excavation reports of these sites, see BRUBAKER/HALDON, *Sources*, 30–36; idem, *Iconoclast Era*, 107–113; HAMARNEH/HINKKANEN, "Mosaic," 258; SCHICK, "Destruction of Images," 137.

churches, the damage could have plausibly occurred because of Yazīd's edict. By the same token, however, there is nothing to suggest that the damage could not also have happened after Yazīd was dead. We shall have to look to metrics other than dating for confirmation of this hypothesis.

Assuming for a moment that the mosaics were indeed damaged because of Yazīd, it is important to note that the law was applied very inconsistently, for while some buildings were purged of images, others retained their images throughout the caliph's time in office. A good example is the church of St. George at Dayr al-'Adas, about 50 kilometers southwest of Damascus, which received a new mosaic floor with images in 722, directly in the middle of Yazīd's reign (Figure 6).¹⁰⁹ The mosaic portrays hunting scenes, farming, and a camel driver without a trace of iconoclastic damage. Along these lines, OGNIBENE, SCHICK, and Rina TALGAM have also discussed the church of the Virgin at Wādī 'Ayn al-Kanīsa at the foot of Mt. Nebo, whose sixth-century figural mosaics were damaged, presumably in the eighth century when al-Quwaysma, Umm al-Raṣāṣ, and Ma'īn were also disfigured.¹¹⁰ Unlike these churches, however, whose mosaics were not restored, a fire devastated the church at 'Ayn al-Kanīsa sometime in the eighth century, prompting it to be rebuilt and for a new mosaic floor to be laid ca. 762 (Figure 7). This new floor aimed to restore the appearance of the original sixth-century version, including images.

There is nothing comparable to 'Ayn al-Kanīsa anywhere else in the region. The decision to go back to the pre-iconoclastic phase of the building is even more surprising when we consider that most church mosaics which were installed in the late Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd periods were adamantly aniconic (though not necessarily iconoclastic, in the sense that they show no explicit evidence of

109 Of course, if we follow the dating of 723 which I proposed (see Part One), this may explain why a church so close to the Balqā' region was paved with images only a year earlier in 722. For more, see Janine BALTU, *Mosaïques antiques de Syrie*, Brussels: Centre belge de recherches archéologiques à Apamée de Syrie, 1977, 148–150; Pauline DONCEEL-VOÛTE, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban: décor, archéologie et liturgie*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Département d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art, 1988, 45–54; Pierre-Louis GATIER, "Les inscriptions grecques d'époque islamique (vii^e–viii^e siècles) en Syrie du sud," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VII^e–VIII^e siècles: Actes du Colloque internationale Lyon – Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris – Institut du Monde Arabe, 11–15 Septembre 1990*, Pierre Canivet/Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, eds., Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1992, 148; BRUBAKER/HALDON, *Iconoclast Era*, 112–113.

110 Michele PICCIRILLO, "Le due iscrizioni della cappella della Theotokos nel Wadi 'Ayn al-Kanisah sul Monte Nebo," *Liber Annuus* 44 (1994): 521–538; OGNIBENE, "Iconophobic Dossier," 382–384; eadem, *Umm al-Rasas*, 115–116, 467; TALGAM, *Mosaics of Faith*, 425–426; SCHICK, "Destruction of Images."

damage to older figural mosaics). These include mosaics found at Nabhā in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon, in the presbytery of the church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Raṣāṣ (Figure 8), and the church of the Virgin at Mādabā (Figure 9).¹¹¹ Thus, ‘Ayn al-Kanīsa may represent one attempt to return to an earlier period before the onset of official iconoclasm, when images were considered to be licit. It is hard to say what prompted this change. On the one hand, scholars who are inclined to see Palestinian iconoclasm as an endogenous movement¹¹² might claim that the Christians who worshipped at ‘Ayn al-Kanīsa shifted their attitudes due to a passing theological fad. On the other hand, those who are tempted to connect the damage to the edict of Yazīd might see the restoration of the mosaics as evidence that the community wished to return to the *status quo ante* after the law was repealed.¹¹³ Both theories have merit.

In general, it is undeniable that Christians were the ones directly responsible for the destruction in the vast majority of churches.¹¹⁴ In nearly every instance, the damage is too careful, the reconstruction too deliberate, and the symbols occasionally used to replace figural art too Christian to suggest that Muslims were the ones behind it (Figure 10).¹¹⁵ In this respect, Palestinian Christians may have been

111 OGNIBENE, “Iconophobic Dossier,” 384; FOWDEN, “Late-antique art,” 292–293; for more on the Church of the Virgin at Mādabā, see now Henry MAGUIRE, “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm: Erasures from Church Floor Mosaics,” *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies; Essays in Honor of Lois Drewes*, Colum Hourihane, ed., Princeton, NJ & Tempe, AZ: Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, & Brepols, 2009, 111–120.

112 Notably, BRUBAKER/HALDON, *Iconoclast Age*, 106–115; SIGNES CODOÑER, “Melkites and Icon Worship”. Bishops inside the caliphate made a number of efforts to stamp out iconoclasm in their dioceses (discussion in SCHICK, *Christian Communities*, 210–211). 1) A synod in Jerusalem condemned iconoclasm in 760: Mansi, *Collectio*, xii, cols. 679–680. 2) The patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem anathematized Kosmas of Epiphaneia for his iconoclast views: de Boor, *Chronographia*, i, 433–434. 3) The eastern bishops sent a letter condemning iconoclasm to the pope in Rome: Migne, *PG*, c, cols. 1117–1118; Mansi, *Collectio*, xii, col. 720. In the early ninth century, Theodore Abū Qurra also penned a treatise defending the veneration of icons, partly in response to local opposition to the practice: Ignace Dick, ed., *Maymar fī ikrām al-iqūnāt li-Thāwadhūrus Abī Qurra*, Jounieh: al-Maktaba al-Būlusīya, 1986 (Ar.); Sidney H. GRIFFITH, tr., *Theodore Abu Qurrah: A Treatise on the Veneration of Holy Icons*, Leuven: Peeters, 1997 (Eng.); comment in idem, “Theodore Abū Qurrah’s Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985): 53–73.

113 SCHICK, “Destruction of Images,” 141.

114 SCHICK, *Christian Communities*, 209–210.

115 E.g. the famous church at Massuh, where a cross replaced figural imagery in one field (Figure 10): Michele PICCIRILLO, “Chiesa di Massuh e il territorio della diocesi di Esbous,” *Liber Annus* 33 (1983): 335–346; or at Umm al-Raṣāṣ: OGNIBENE, *Umm al-Rasas*, 404–405. In light of this, it is interesting to note that *Antireticus III* adamantly denies that Christians took part in the destruction mandated by Yazīd’s edict: MIGNE, *PG*, c, col. 529c.

influenced by the nascent aniconism of their Muslim neighbors and taken action against their own images in response. At the same time, it is tempting to see the disfigured mosaics as evidence of the implementation of Yazīd's decree among the area's Christian population. This is suggested by the overlap between Yazīd's zone of activity and the location of the damaged mosaics; the *terminus post quem* for the destruction at churches like al-Quwaysma, Umm al-Raṣāṣ, and Ma'īn; and the impression left by 'Ayn al-Kanīsa that iconoclasm was imposed at one point only to have been lifted later.¹¹⁶ Here, the nature of the obliteration is very telling. Although the damage is inconsistent from one church to the next – and even within different parts of the same church – if we allow ourselves to generalize, it is obvious that the iconoclasts were targeting images of living beings. Christian writings and symbols like crosses were preserved, as were images of man-made things (e.g. cities) and plants. What was destroyed were images of people and animals. This seems as likely a confirmation of Yazīd's edict as we could hope for, especially given the fact that the decree was concerned with “living beings,” as several sources tell us. This particular character of the damage also calls to mind the complaints of late antique clergy who crusaded against pagan and naturalistic imagery in churches during Roman times. These clergy argued that churches were sanctuaries of God and should not be decorated in a manner resembling a temple, home, or another profane space. In this sense, the iconoclasm of the eighth century may have harnessed deep-seated anxieties that had gripped Christians in the Middle East long before Islam.¹¹⁷

Yazīd's Decree and Early Muslim Attitudes Towards Images

I have deliberately postponed discussion about the role of images in Islam to this final section because, as I argued in the introduction, I believe the decree must be understood mainly in the context of social, political, and legal developments in the middle Umayyad period. Art history can be a useful tool for contextualizing Yazīd's actions, but it is not the most important one. If anything, the long shadow of the *Bilderverbot* – the prohibition on images in Islam – has prevented scholars from analyzing the edict in its most immediate historical context. Despite this

¹¹⁶ Concurring with TALGAM, *Mosaics of Faith*, 427.

¹¹⁷ See Henry Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion: Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 11–47.



Fig. 2: Iconoclastic damage, birds in roundels, al-Quwaysma, Jordan; mosaics first installed 717/718.

Photo: Michele Piccirillo, "Le chiese di Quweismah-Amman," *Liber Annuus* 34 (1984), photo 15 (reproduced with permission from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem)



Fig. 3: Iconoclastic damage, boys fishing, Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Raṣāṣ, Jordan; mosaics first installed 718.

Photo: Christian C. Sahner



Fig. 4: Iconoclastic damage, donor portraits, Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Raşāş, Jordan; mosaics first installed 718.

Photo: Christian C. Sahner



Fig. 5: Iconoclastic damage, ox replaced by a tree, Acropolis Church, Maʿīn, Jordan; mosaics first installed 719/720. Photo: Sean Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar (<http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk>)



Fig. 6: Camel driver, hunting, and farming scene, Church of St. George, Dayr al-'Adas, Syria; mosaic installed 722.

Photo: Pauline Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban: décor, archéologie et liturgie*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Département d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art, 1988, 49, fig. 23 (reproduced with permission from Pauline Donceel-Voûte)

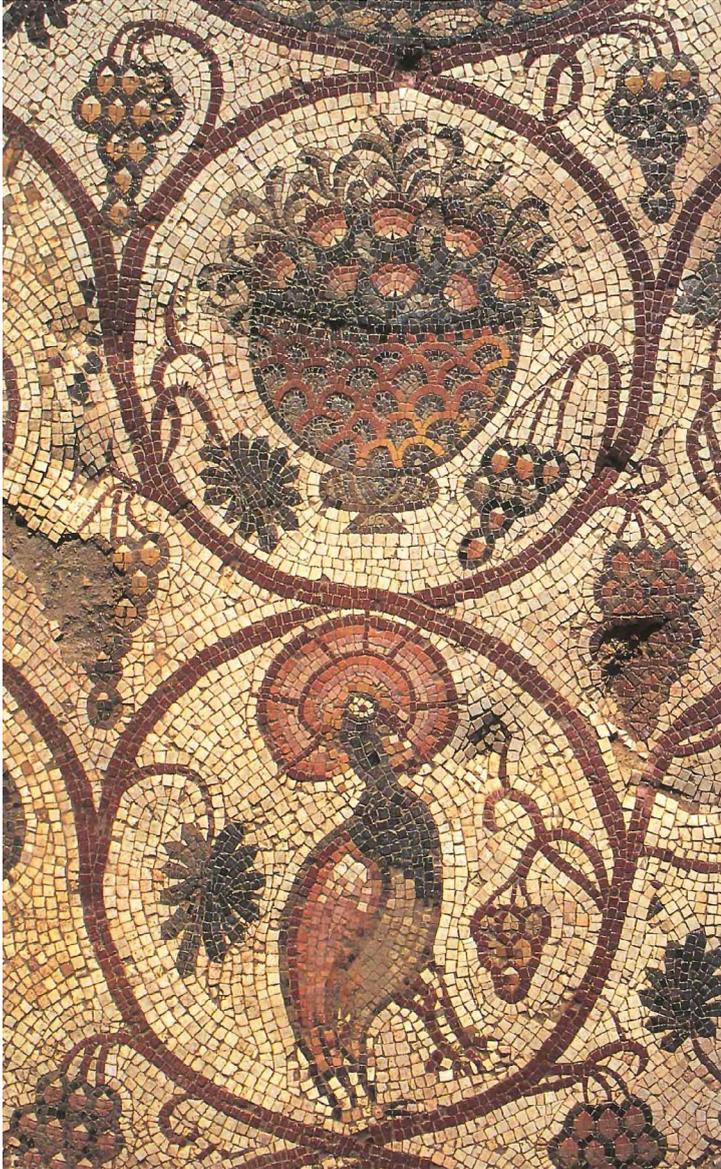


Fig. 7: Phoenix and potted plant, Church of the Virgin, Wādī 'Ayn al-Kanīsa, Mt. Nebo, Jordan; mosaic installed ca. 762.

Photo: Michele Piccirillo, "The Mosaics," *Mount Nebo: New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, 2 vols., Michele Piccirillo & Eugenio Alliata, eds. Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1998, i, 362, fig. 231 (reproduced with permission from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem)



Fig. 8: Aniconic mosaic, presbytery, Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Raṣāṣ, Jordan; mosaic first installed 756.

Photo: Christian C. Sahner

caveat, it is undeniable that the decree was an important benchmark in the evolution of early Muslim attitudes towards figural art, and therefore, it must be examined within this framework in the final section.

The Qur'ān and Early Muslim Art

The Qur'ān lacks a clearly articulated prohibition against images.¹¹⁸ There are several passages, including Q. *al-Mā'ida* 5:90 and Q. *al-Ḥajj* 22:30, which warn

118 On the Qur'ān and early Muslim attitudes towards images: LAMMENS, “Arts figurés,” 241; ARNOLD, *Painting*, 4–6; Georges MARÇAIS, “La question des images dans l’art musulman,” *Byzantion* 7 (1932): 161–183; CRESWELL, “Lawfulness”; Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Īsā, with Harold W. Glidden, tr., “Muslims and Taswīr,” *The Muslim World* 45 (1955): 250–268; Bishr FARÈS, “Philosophie et jurisprudence illustrées par les arabes: la querelle des images en Islam,” *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, 3 vols., Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1956–1958[?], ii, 77–109; GRABAR, *Formation*, 78 ff; G.R. HAWTING, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 45–66.



Fig. 9: Aniconic mosaic, Church of the Virgin, Mādabā, Jordan; mosaic first installed 767.
Photo: Christian C. Sahner



Fig. 10: Iconoclastic damage, cross inscribed in field of scrambled tesserae, Upper Church, Massuh; damage from ca. 8th century. Photo: Michele Piccirillo, “La chiesa di Massuh e il territorio della diocesi di Esobous,” *Liber Annuus* 33 (1983), photo 20 (reproduced with permission from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem)

the reader against “statues” (*aṣnām*) and “idols” (*awthān*), but there is nothing with the force or decisiveness of famous verses of the Bible such as *Exodus* 20:4–5 or *Deuteronomy* 5:8–9. The slow formation of a prohibition on images is also suggested by the many examples of representational art from the first two centuries after the Hijra. These include the coins that circulated before ‘Abd al-Malik’s financial reforms, including the so-called standing caliph issue (which as Robert HOYLAND has argued, may even portray the Prophet Muḥammad);¹¹⁹ the statuary of Umayyad castles such as Khirbat al-Mafjar near Jericho or Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbi near Palmyra;¹²⁰ the shockingly vivid wall paintings of Quṣayr ‘Amra east of ‘Ammān;¹²¹ the statue of the mounted rider that reportedly adorned the green dome at the heart of al-Manṣūr’s Round City at Baghdad;¹²² and the wall

¹¹⁹ Robert G. HOYLAND, “Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions,” *History Compass* 5/2 (2007): 593–596.

¹²⁰ Khirbat al-Mafjar: R.W. HAMILTON, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959; Mikko LOUHIVUORI, “The Palace of Hisham and 8th Century, C.E. Iconoclasm,” in *Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times*, Antti Laato/Pekka Lindqvist, eds., Leiden: Brill, 2010, 99–214; Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbi: Janine SOURDEL-THOMINE/Bertold SPULER, *Die Kunst des Islam*, Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1973, pl. XII, XIII, 59.

¹²¹ FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ‘Amra*.

¹²² Al-Qazwīnī, *Zakariya ben Muhammad ben Mahmud el-Cazwini’s Kosmographie*, 2 vols., Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, ed., Göttingen: Dieterich, 1848–1849, ii, 209–210; cited in ARNOLD, *Painting*, 20; cf. Richard ETTINGHAUSEN, Oleg GRABAR, Marilyn JENKINS-MADINA, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 52.

paintings from the ‘Abbāsīd palace at Sāmarrā’.¹²³ Even an avowed iconoclast like Yazīd could savor images in certain contexts, as evidenced by the palace that he (or his son) built at al-Qaṣṭal, 25 km south of ‘Ammān, which features mosaic images of lions, leopards, bulls, and gazelles.¹²⁴

Despite these famous examples, we should not forget that iconic art was the exception in early Islamic culture rather than the norm.¹²⁵ The tension between iconism and aniconism is evident, for instance, in the famous Umayyad palace complex of al-Mshattā, also located 25 km south of ‘Ammān (very close to al-Qaṣṭal), which is thought to have been commissioned by the caliph al-Walīd II (r. 125–126/743–744).¹²⁶ The façade of al-Mshattā, which is now housed mostly at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, is geometric in design, but small images of animals fill the stone foliage. On the façade that was once mounted along the southern wall of the *qaṣr*’s mosque, however, the animals suddenly disappear. Clearly, iconic art was permissible in secular settings like an audience chamber of a palace, but not in religious ones like a mosque.

The middle Umayyad period was a time of evolving attitudes towards images and their symbolic power. G.R.D. KING and Sidney H. GRIFFITH have argued that Yazīd’s edict grew out of the broader rivalry between Islam and Christianity, which was intensifying at the turn of the eighth century. In this world, religious animosity was often expressed in charged visual language. Classic examples of this “visual dispute” include the financial reforms of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, who banished the quasi-Byzantine (and Sasanian) iconography of early Umayyad coins in favor of ones emblazoned with the aniconic Muslim creed; the construction of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; and the demolition of the Church of St. John the Baptist in Damascus and its replacement with a congregational mosque filled with non-figural mosaics. Christian symbols, including crosses and icons, were also targets of Muslim attacks.¹²⁷ As GRIFFITH has suggested, a clear legal prohibition against images may have first emerged at this time as part of a wider effort to claim the public sphere for Islam in competition with existing Christian monuments and symbols.

123 ERNST HERZFELD, *Die Malereien von Samarra*, Berlin: D. Reimer, 1927.

124 BACHARACH, “Marwanid Building Activities,” 36–37; TALGAM, *Mosaics of Faith*, 417.

125 GRABAR, *Formation*, 87.

126 GRABAR, *Formation*, 89; cf. idem, “The Date and Meaning of Mshatta,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 243–247.

127 See above, n. 56, 81.

Prophetic Tradition and the Prohibition on Images

At this point, we come to the famous matter of the *Bilderverbot*, the legal prohibition against images in Islam, which is a frequent topic of discussion in medieval *ḥadīth* collections. In one particularly famous tradition, the Prophet proclaimed that artists (Ar. s. *al-muṣawwir*) will be among the damned on Judgement Day in punishment for breathing spirit (*rūḥ*) into their creations, thereby behaving like the Creator. As Rudi PARET and Daan VAN REENEN have shown, the *Bilderverbot ḥadīth* found in the canonical collections go back to the Umayyad period – but just how far remains a matter of debate. PARET initially dated these traditions to the closing decade of the seventh century, arguing that they came into circulation at the same time as ‘Abd al-Malik’s well known financial reforms.¹²⁸ In a more rigorous study based on a larger corpus of *ḥadīth*, VAN REENEN challenged PARET’s conclusion, arguing that the *Bilderverbot* originated in a slightly later period – that is, ca. 100–160/720–775.¹²⁹ If this is so, it would prove that the standard prohibition on images emerged in concert with or shortly after Yazīd’s edict, not before. Given this, we might see Yazīd’s actions as a harbinger of things to come – or even a shaper of later developments – rather than as a reflection of the way things already were.¹³⁰

When it comes to understanding the iconoclastic edict (as well as the corpus of traditions connected to the *Bilderverbot*), it is essential to differentiate between two distinct phenomena: iconophobia and iconoclasm.¹³¹ The early Muslims were iconophobic – in the sense that they largely avoided the representation of living beings in art – and many eighth-century traditions express this disapproval or aversion very clearly. At the same time, early Muslims were not often iconoclastic – in the sense that they rarely destroyed images of living beings in their own art or in the art of others. Aside from the edict of Yazīd and the early attacks against

128 Rudi PARET, “Die Entstehungszeit des islamischen Bilderverbots,” *Kunst des Orients* 11 (1976/1977): 177–178; for PARET’s five other articles on the *Bilderverbot*, see idem, *Schriften zum Islam: Volksroman – Frauenfrage – Bilderverbot*, Josef van Ess, ed., Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1981, and above, n. 3.

129 Daan VAN REENEN, “The *Bilderverbot*, a new survey,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990): 69–70.

130 Contra BARNARD, *Background*, 18: “Yazīd’s iconoclastic edict was not the initiation but the culminating point of Muslim Iconoclasm in the Caliphate.”

131 A distinction lost on many scholars, though with notable exceptions: PICCIRILLO, “Iconophobia o iconoclastia”; OGNIBENE, “Iconophobic Dossier,” 384; ELIAS, *Aisha’s Cushion*, 30–33, 84–99. More generally, see Jan N. BRENNER, “Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes Towards a Genealogy,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008): 1–17.

crosses and icons mentioned above,¹³² it is hard to identify many certifiable episodes of iconoclasm at this early date.

Several examples, however, do stand out. For instance, there are famous stories about the Prophet purging the Ka'ba of its idols (though curiously, of saving an icon of Mary and Jesus which he found inside). But as Suliman BASHEAR has shown, these legends are all missing from the earliest layers of the *sīra-maghāzī* biographical tradition about Muḥammad, and therefore, probably represent interpolations from the eighth century or later when a consensus around the *Bilderverbot* was crystallizing.¹³³ Indeed, they are probably part of the same campaign to demonize artistic representation which we can also detect in various Prophetic traditions. There is also the oft-quoted story of a censer with human images (*tamāthīl*) that once belonged to the caliph 'Umar I, who used it to perfume the Prophet's mosque in Medina. During the reign of al-Mahdī, however, a governor of the city reportedly sanitized the censer by having the images hammered away.¹³⁴ In addition to these, there are a small number of *Bilderverbot ḥadīth* that mention the proactive destruction of images. One of these claims that the angel Gabriel refused to enter the Prophet's house due to the images that existed inside. Gabriel ordered Muḥammad to cut off the heads of these pictures "so they may become like trees."¹³⁵ Other traditions, meanwhile, speak of the Prophet tearing apart objects embroidered with crosses (*taṣlib*, *muṣallab*, *ṣulub*).¹³⁶ Aside from these, it is difficult to identify many precedents for Yazīd's edict in the Muslim tradition. There are isolated episodes of destruction, but nothing on the scale or of the systematic quality of what Yazīd ordered.

It is also hard to find traditions that have anything to say about Christian images. One famous *ḥadīth* relates a conversation between Muḥammad and Umm Ḥabība and Umm Salama, who took part in the first Hijra to Ethiopia in 7 BH/614–615. There, they reported seeing a church called the Māriya, which was richly adorned with paintings. The Prophet explained to the two women that

132 See above, n. 56, 81.

133 Suliman BASHEAR, "The Images of Mecca: A Case-Study in Early Muslim Iconography," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992): 361–377.

134 M.J. de Goeje, ed., *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum*, 8 pts., Leiden: Brill, 1870–1894, vii, 66.

135 VAN REENEN, "Bilderverbot," 33; cf. GRABAR's comment on the conspicuous presence of trees in the mosaics of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, which play a role in the composition analogous to that of human figures in a Byzantine mosaic: *Formation*, 88–89. See also Ibn Qudāma's comment in the *Mughnī* that an image becomes licit only when its head is removed; cited in PARET, "Textbelege zum islamischen Bilderverbot," 46–47.

136 VAN REENEN, "Bilderverbot," 49; PARET, "Entstehungszeit," 176.

the Christians of Ethiopia were in the habit of building shrines (s. *masjid*) over the graves of holy men and of adorning them with pictures. “These shall be the worst people at the resurrection,” the Prophet proclaimed.¹³⁷ Finally, there are traditions stating that ‘Umar I refused to pray in churches containing “statues and images” (*tamāthīl*, *ṣuwar*), along with related traditions claiming that Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/688) used to pray in churches provided he found no statues inside them.¹³⁸

Muslim Prayer in Churches?

This final set of traditions brings us close to another possible explanation for Yazīd’s edict. As BASHEAR and others have shown, abundant literary evidence suggests that early Muslims sometimes prayed in churches.¹³⁹ Occasionally, this was because both Muslims and Christians considered a given site to be holy, as evidenced by reports that Muslims prayed on the steps of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, among other *loca sancta*.¹⁴⁰ Pragmatism also drove the practice given that mosques were initially slow to appear in the major cities of the caliphate (e.g. Damascus, Ḥimṣ, and Córdoba), and even slower to appear in the countryside. Thus, Muslims sometimes had to worship in borrowed space belonging to rival communities. Given this, it is easy to imagine how individual churches may have been expropriated for Muslim worship, as TALGAM has recently suggested, especially in Levantine villages, which often had multiple churches for small Christian populations.¹⁴¹ One of these could be converted into a mosque without significantly disrupting the overall amount of worship space for the majority of villagers. As much seems to be the case at Umm al-Jimāl and other late antique settlements along the modern Syrian-Jordanian border, where

137 VAN REENEN, “*Bilderverbot*,” 50; PARET, “*Entstehungszeit*,” 175; the tradition is striking given that Umm Ḥabība’s first husband was ‘Ubaydallāh b. Jaḥsh, who joined the Muslims on the Hijra to Ethiopia, but who ended up apostatizing to Christianity and not returning. She would later become one of the Prophet’s wives: Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat al-nabī*, 4 vols., Muḥammad Muḥyi l-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamid, ed., Cairo: Maktabat Muḥammad ‘Ali Ṣubayḥ, 1963, iii, 417.

138 PARET, “*Textbelege*,” 39; cf. ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, 12 vols., Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘ẓamī, ed., Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1970–[?], i, 411–412, x, 398.

139 Suliman BASHEAR. “*Qibla musharriqa and early Muslim prayer in churches*,” *The Muslim World* 81 (1991): 267–282; see also Robert HOYLAND, “*Jacob and Early Islamic Edessa*,” in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, Bas ter Haar Romeny, ed., Leiden: Brill, 2008, 16.

140 TRITTON, *Non-Muslim Subjects*, 52.

141 TALGAM, *Mosaics of Faith*, 428–429.

several modest Byzantine churches were converted into mosques during the Umayyad period or thereafter.¹⁴²

If this is so, we can begin to understand why Yazīd may have wanted to eradicate images inside churches. As it developed in the ninth century and beyond, Islamic law claimed no authority over what happened inside Christian sanctuaries – including how they were decorated. Yet Yazīd intervened forcefully to purge churches of their graven images. Following the suggestion of OGNIBENE and BOWERSOCK, is it possible that Yazīd wanted to cleanse churches of images precisely because Muslims were praying inside them?¹⁴³ It is an attractive theory in many ways. At the same time, we must remember the caveat of Mattia GUIDETTI, who has observed that none of the Levantine churches with iconoclasm feature the “mobile *miḥrāb*” that is sometimes found in buildings adapted for dual Christian-Muslim use.¹⁴⁴ One such *miḥrāb* is found in the Kathisma Church near Jerusalem, which is known to have been used by Christians and Muslims alike beginning in the seventh century.¹⁴⁵ Of course, a *miḥrāb* was not absolutely necessary for Muslims to pray: the *qibla* could be marked in ways other than a prayer niche. Still, the idea that Yazīd was concerned about images because he was primarily worried about Muslims in churches is persuasive, and may help explain the unusually invasive nature of the caliph’s legislation.

142 G.R.D. KING, “Two Byzantine Churches and their Re-Use in the Islamic Period,” *Damazener Mitteilungen* 1 (1983): 111–136; idem, “Some Churches of the Byzantine Period in the Jordanian Ḥawrān,” *Damazener Mitteilungen* 3 (1988), 35–75; Bert DE VRIES, “Continuity and Change in the Urban Character of the Southern Hauran from the 5th to the 9th Century: The Archaeological Evidence at Umm al-Jimal,” *Mediterranean Archaeology* 13 (2000): 39–45; Roberto PARENTI/Stefano ANASTASIO, “Umm al-Surab,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 116 (2012): 697; cf. the case of the North Church at Shivta in the central Negev: Bilha MOOR, “Mosque and Church: Arabic Inscriptions at Shivta in the Early Islamic Period,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 40 (2013): 104–108.

143 OGNIBENE, “Iconophobic Dossier,” 385–386; eadem, *Umm al-Rasas*, 139–140; BOWERSOCK, *Mosaics*, 109.

144 GUIDETTI, “Editto di Yazid II,” 75–76.

145 Rina AVNER, “The Recovery of the Kathisma Church and its Influence on Octagonal Building,” in *One Land – Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM*, G. Claudio Bottini, Leah Di Segni, L. Daniel Chrupcala, eds., Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2003, 173–186; eadem, “The Kathisma Church: A Christian and Muslim Pilgrimage Site,” *Aram* 18–19 (2006–2007): 541–557; Stephen J. SHOEMAKER, “Christmas in the Qur’ān: The Qur’ānic Account of Jesus’ Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003): 11–39.

Conclusion

Oleg GRABAR once remarked that the difference between Byzantine and Islamic iconoclasm is that the former deserves to be spelled with a capital “I,” while the latter deserves to be spelled with a lower-case “i.”¹⁴⁶ Put another way, whereas Byzantine iconoclasm was a discrete historical phenomenon, Islamic iconoclasm was more of an aesthetic attitude than an event or a specific phase in time. GRABAR’s distinction goes a long way toward differentiating these related issues, but it does not go far enough in identifying what made the Islamic case truly unique. As I have tried to show in this article, iconoclasm narrowly understood was rare in the early Islamic period. Indeed, were not for Yazīd’s edict (along with scattered references to individual attacks against Christian images in the years around it), I am not sure that Islamic iconoclasm would even warrant a lower-case “i.” In Islam, what is significant is that we see the emergence of a pervasive aniconism in the early period, but an aniconism that was midwifed without the organized destruction that befell images across the border in Byzantium (or which would occur centuries later in Protestant Europe).¹⁴⁷ This is an important distinction that merits further scholarly discussion.

Given that Yazīd’s decree was such an aberrant episode, how should we understand it today? That the edict harnessed an emergent antipathy for images as yet unarticulated by jurists and theologians is clear. But here again, it may be better to see the caliph’s law as a forerunner of things to come rather than an expression of the way things already were. This was progressive legislation in the true sense of the term: it looked ahead in time, not backward. Whatever Yazīd’s purpose, his law seems to have had a limited effect. It was probably in force for a year or less, and the lack of definitive archaeological evidence outside of the southern Levant suggests that it was not implemented widely. The celebrated iconoclastic edict may have amounted to a great act of saber-rattling – a symbolic gesture aimed at cowing Christians at a time of heightened social unrest and apocalyptic angst or as a way of placating religious hardliners at court – rather than a law with serious legal force. Whatever the caliph’s motivations, they clearly did not pan out, as his reign was cut short by his early death in 105/724 at the age of 34. In this, we find ourselves facing the central paradox of Yazīd’s decree: a piece of legislation whose implicit connections to “bigger issues” have made it the subject of constant speculation among modern scholars, but whose

¹⁴⁶ GRABAR, “Islam and Iconoclasm,” 45.

¹⁴⁷ See now James NOYES, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 23–58.

significance in its own day may have been much more limited. Perhaps it is not a surprise that medieval Muslims forgot what Yazid had done.

Acknowledgments: This article represents a much expanded version of a paper I first wrote for John Haldon in 2010. I would like to thank Glen Bowersock, Garth Fowden, Luke Yarbrough, and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback on subsequent drafts, as well as the audiences at the University of Cambridge and the University of Notre Dame who listened to my findings. Sean Leatherbury, Pauline Donceel-Voûte, and L. Daniel Chrupcala were helpful in obtaining images. Finally, I would like to thank the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman, where I held a CAORC Pre-Doctoral Fellowship in the summer of 2014. This allowed me to visit many of the sites mentioned in this article.