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Saracens and the Sea: Reactions to Contact and Conflict between Muslims and Christians in the Early Medieval Mediterranean

A Thesis in History

By

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Abstract: The rise and expansion of Islam throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Southern Europe has long been considered by historian of the early medieval period as a significant shift in the trajectory of European and Near Eastern history alike. Seen from the longue durée, and in the reports of contemporary chroniclers, the full effects of this turning point in world history take centuries to germinate. As Saracen forces and individuals moved into what had been a largely uncontested, Christian Mediterranean, each side sought to create definitions, stereotypes, and categories that would contextualize and provide a model for interaction between peoples of different religions and cultures. Yet even as Christians saw Saracens in terms both biblical and classical, as Phoenician scoundrels and desert-dwelling barbarians, and as Saracens saw in Christians the old order giving way to the new, easy categorizations and generalizations were never satisfactory. Such was the scope of interaction and contact between Saracen, Latin, and Greek, that individuals broke the mold of antique classifications as often as they reified them. The real history of this nuanced period of the early medieval era is not one of clashing ideologies or civilizations thrown into conflict; rather a history of individuals acting in local contexts, often independent of or with no consideration for the political and cultural power holders who attempted to phrase the difference in simplistic terms. This thesis examines the history of representations of Saracens created by Christians, and of Christians created by Saracens, in attempting to trace the development of stereotypes, preconceptions, and categories which are still used to define our understanding of the interconnected Mediterranean world today.

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I. Introduction

The *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* purports to record a vision of the fourth-century Syriac martyr Methodius, a premonition received atop Mount Sinjar of a coming apocalypse.[1] According to the vision, tribes of the desert outside Israel had subjugated all the lands of Christendom once before. These desert nomads, descendants of Ishmael, were not confined to just the promised land: having completed their conquest of the Israelites, they turned their ambitions seaward. They "floated over the ocean's waves in wooden vessels… up to Rome, Illyrium, Gagatnus, Thessalonica, and the great Luza above Rome."[2] This iteration of the Ishmaelite kingdom, Pseudo-Methodius reports, was broken up by a rebellion of the Israelites, led by Gideon. But this was not to be the end of the Ishmaelites. In the final era, the nomads would return from the outer desert around Yathrib and destroy the kingdoms of the Greeks and Romans, subjugating all nations all the way "to the great ocean of Pontus." Likely composed just prior to 692, the *Apocalypse* had almost sixty years of hindsight on the Muslim conquest of Palestine with which to design its eschatological narrative. This vision must have struck a chord, for it circulated far beyond the Mesopotamian Syriac communities in which it was composed, appearing in both Greek and Latin by the early eighth century.[3]

The Ishmaelites were more commonly referred to by contemporary observers as Hagarenes or Saracens, all three names referencing various Judeo-Christian traditions concerning the lineage of Arabs living in and around the deserts of the eponymous peninsula. These Saracens, like their supposed predecessors presented in the *Apocalypse,* had not been confined to

[1] Pseudo-Methodius, "The Apoclaypse of Pseudo Methodius, 5.8" in *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*, translated and edited by Michael Philip Penn, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 108.
[2] Ibid., 116.
[3] *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 111.

Palestine and Syria. They occupied Egypt in 642, and followed that with an invasion of Roman Africa in 647. Defeat on land was one thing − Sassanid Persia had overwhelmed Egypt and the Levant scarcely two decades prior − but by 649 the first ships of the caliphal fleet put to sea. The Byzantine fleet− which had dominated the central and eastern Mediterranean since the Justinianic wars on the Vandalic and Ostrogothic kingdoms− lost its supremacy (albeit temporarily) at the bloody Battle of the Masts in 654. And all of these grim reversals came at the hands of the Saracens, who most Greco-Roman authors of the past several centuries had been content to label a persistent but ultimately ineffectual thorn in the side of the Eastern Empire. How were Byzantine and Latin Christians to react, and how should these events have been interpreted?

Pseudo-Methodius offered an explanation to seventh-century Italians for the raiding galleys already appearing off the shores of Sicily and Calabria; for Byzantines, it promised the eventual reversal of Saracen gains by an idealized king of the Greeks. What it made no attempt to explain, however, was how those residents of the border territories between Islam and Roman Christendom should grapple with the new socio-political milieu of a shared Mediterranean.

The consensus of early medieval history has taken steps to reevaluate the assumptions made in Henri Pirenne's *Mohammed and Charlemagne* about the fragmented economic world and violent times of the Mediterranean sphere following the rise of Islam. Yet while recent historiography has done much to reframe our understanding of the economic world shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews in this period, little scholarly effort has been expended in outlining the cultural shifts brought about in the Mediterranean zone as it became a contested space. The history of interaction between these neighboring ideologies and civilizations in the

early medieval period is storied, but there is as yet no definitive text on the changing perceptions that each group formed of the other.

This study will attempt to reconstruct the realities of Muslim and Christian interaction in the first four centuries following the establishment of the Caliphate, focusing particularly on those littoral zones of the Mediterranean which played host to some of the most sustained and nuanced contact between these two groups. The Mediterranean Sea continued to be in the early medieval period, as it had been in late antiquity, a permeable space the control of which impacted all those living on its shores. A lack of total domination of Muslims over Christians and vice versa meant that they often found themselves inhabiting, if not the same regions and towns, islands and fortresses separated only by thin strips of sea.

As is always the case, the political world shaped and was in turn motivated by the social world; this study will examine the most obvious incidences of Saracen-Christian contact expressed in chronicles and histories, namely violent clashes and campaigns motivated by conquest or the promise of plunder. The movement of troops, ships, and the expansion of political control all indelibly shaped the Mediterranean world, as soldiers settled in newly conquered territories and blended into the social fabric. This paper will also confront interactions of a nature altogether subtler, and likely more significant in the long run, where Saracens and Christians met outside of a martial context to scheme, trade, and play the game of politics across religious and cultural lines.

Given the often polemical and politically motivated nature of the source material, many histories of this period are often best used to track shifting perceptions of Saracens by Christians and vice versa. In order to contextualize a newly-contested Mediterranean, Christians of both the East and the West turned to classical and biblical models alike to represent their powerful

Saracen neighbors and adversaries. This continuity allowed both high political actors and the larger common populace to adapt to the new status quo, as antique stereotypes of Saracens and reflections on other "barbarian" groups of the Roman past created a model for interaction. For as much as their entry into Mediterranean affairs shocked Christian observers, Latin and Greek writers alike adapted old rhetoric to suit new purpose. Saracens, likewise, were forced to examine their conquests and their role in the Mediterranean world. While some writers saw Mediterranean expansion as the new frontier of jihad, many more Saracen raiders and rulers found the sea an expanse ripe with opportunity for those willing to work not only counter to Christian powers but also on their behalf. As Saracens rationalized the complex nature of their new relationship with Christians and vice versa, new perceptions separate from classic expectations began to form in the context of trade, conflict, and diplomatic contact across the sea.

The image of the Saracen that coalesced out of interactions between native Christians and raiding Saracens on the coasts of southern Italy spread from there to the wider Latin Christian world. Bolstered by earlier Eastern Christian stereotypes of the Saracen as a violent opportunistic scoundrel, this polemical characterization of the Saracen pirate was not without its antecedents. The rapid reconfiguration of the Mediterranean system engendered by Saracen expansion and the establishment of Islamic rule, and the manifold ways in which Saracens and Christians interacted both violently and not, did not allow for such clear battle lines to be drawn from the start. Over the course of this period, as Christian writers learned more of their Saracen counterparts and vice versa, rationales for conquest and conflict crystallized along ideological lines. The image of the Saracen that sailed to Christian lands in search of plunder and land was by turns vicious, cruel, and shockingly irreligious; yet Christians were capable of and inflicted the same evils, a fact of

which Christian observers were eminently aware. By the same token, Saracen writers understood their expeditions across the sea as opportunities for glory and wealth as much as spiritual fulfillment. While the conquest of the sea would come to represent one of the great frontiers of jihad, Saracens took to the sea first and foremost out of pragmatic necessity, and without particular loyalty to the Muslim rulers of their home ports. The Mediterranean littoral of the early medieval era provided a contested, shifting, and often hazardous zone, which both encouraged the formation of group identities and rendered them obsolete or ineffectual just as swiftly. For residents of these troubled shores, whether Muslim or Christian, the feared other was always present, and either to trust or turn your back on them unilaterally was to invite danger in equal measure.

In terms of geographic breadth, this study focuses on an area stretching roughly from the coasts of Sardinia and Africa in the west to Syria and Palestine in the east, and from the Alps and the Danube in the north to the Sahara and Lower Egypt in the south. This broad area is dominated by the Mediterranean at its center, and, as a result, includes the sites of some of the most fascinating incidences of contact and communication between Muslim Saracens and Christian Europeans. Occasionally Baghdad, Cordoba, and other political and economic centers will make themselves known in this narrative, but only as the residents thereof move within the area of focus. The exclusion of Andalusia and the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba is a deliberate one; despite a history of cohabitation and interaction between Muslims and Christians which encourage comparison to this thesis's main points of examination, a sufficient treatment of the nuanced world of al-Andalus in addition to the themes already to be discussed would require a study of far greater length than this.

Temporally, this essay will focus in on the years from the mid-seventh century to the turn of the eleventh century, though again it will reach beyond these constraints briefly and as necessary to provide context and situate this narrative within a broader scheme of Mediterranean history. The entry of Muslims onto the Mediterranean Sea in force, with the commissioning of Mu'awiyah's fleet in 649, changed the tenor of Mediterranean communication and travel; by the tenth century, the Byzantine empire and Italian cities had recovered much of their ability to police their own coastlines, and some of what was required to actively project naval power onto Saracen-occupied lands. The exercise of sea power by the Norman conquerors is similarly beyond the scope of this study, save to say that the Saracen loss of Messina to Robert Guiscard in 1061 may signal how drastically the situation in the central Mediterranean had changed.

Some effort must be made to clarify what is meant by the terms which will see relatively regular use in this paper. 'Saracen' itself is an exonym subject to an abundance of interpretations, changes in use, and negative connotations alike. Following classical Christian authors, Medieval Latin and Greek chroniclers used 'Saracen' to denote a *gens* which, according to those same classic authors, was tied by direct descent to Ishmael, son of Hagar and Abraham. Saracen was originally used to refer only to these nomadic and semi-nomadic Arabic tribes, though its use expanded significantly as a result of Arabization and Christian error. At the point at which this narrative commences, 'Saracen' has barely begun to shake off its roots as a catch-all for the nomadic tribes of the Arabian Desert. It will take the greater part of this period for the term to take up the definition favored by Norman Daniel, that is, "a man who holds the same religion as Muhammad."[4] Rather than specifically connoting Arab or Muslim, 'Saracen' at this time was in transition between its antique and medieval meanings, and the ambiguity fostered by its use in

[4] Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 1960), 14.

Christian sources belies the difficulty in restricting it to a single cultural or religious definition. For the sake of clarity it will be most useful to consider the term ‘Saracen’ as a cultural marker, denoting in its broadest sense one who originates from the regions dominated by Islam and the Arabs who followed it. The Saracens to be discussed in this study include some who were not Arab, and some who were not Muslim, and indeed some who may have been neither. As the goal of this paper is not to define ‘Saracen’ over time (an effort which requires significant attention of its own), but rather to divine Saracen self-conceptions and Christian European ideas of Saracens, this study will accept some ambiguity in order to conform to the nature of the source material.

Likewise, a large part of the specific vocabulary for discussing the Christian witnesses of the changing Mediterranean used in this essay will require explanation. ‘Christian’ and ‘Muslim’ are themselves less than ideal means of creating a distinction between residents of the Mediterranean basin during this period, as it implies that all adherents of one region or another shared the same beliefs, policies, and prejudices. While used broadly the label of ‘Christian’ is unwieldy and omits too much, the more specific categories within said designation will serve for this paper. Latin as well as Greek or Byzantine Christians will be of primary concern to this study; again, following Daniel, these will refer respectively to those who practice the Latin liturgy of Rome, as opposed to the Greek liturgy of Constantinople. Greek Christians may, at the cost of some imprecision, be included within a wider group which this paper will call ‘Eastern’ Christians, alongside Christians of the Syrian and Arabic rites. The association here is almost entirely geographical for the purposes of this study; ‘Eastern Christians’ will refer to those Christians who had the earliest and most direct contact with Muslims and Muslim rule, as they lived in and around the areas of the Mashriq, Egypt, Asia Minor and Persia.

In all, the three categories which sit at the center of this study – that is Saracens, Eastern Christians, and Western Christians – are in part constructed for the benefit of this discussion. All three such distinctions, if indeed they existed at all, changed significantly from the seventh to the tenth centuries, both independently and as a result of their interaction with one another. While the real significance and degree of separation between these categories demand considerable attention in their own right, for the moment they will provide a convenient means of distinguishing this study's historical subjects.

The secondary literature dealing with the central Mediterranean of this period is somewhat bare. Both Michael McCormick in *Origins of the European Economy* and Christophe Picard in *Mer des Califes* have done considerable work on the Mediterranean broadly (and have been significant resources for this study), but McCormick's interest is understandably economic, and Picard's primarily political. This study will attempt to see the regions of Africa, Southern Italy, and Southern Greece as connected but distinct, both representative of the wider context of the early medieval Mediterranean and unique in their forms of contact between Christians and Muslims. Sections of Sarah Davis-Secord's *Where Three Worlds Met* have provided a model for the socio-cultural historical discussion which this paper will attempt, but its close focus on Sicily as well as its broader chronological range both stand apart from this study's goal of creating a broader accounting of Saracen impact and influence on the Mediterranean world. Finally, this paper will emulate Norman Daniel's goal in *Islam and the West* of tracing the arc of Muslim-Christian dialogue, albeit with a focus that is earlier chronologically speaking and more narrow spatially.

II. Hismahelitai, Agareni, and Sarakenoi: The Image of Saracens before Islam

"[The nation of the Saracens] inhabits the desert extending from Arabia to Egypt's Red Sea and the River Jordan. They practise no craft, trade, or agriculture at all, but use the dagger alone as their means of subsistence. They live by hunting desert animals and devouring their flesh, or else get what they need by robbing people on roads that they watch in ambush."[5] So begins the treatment of the Saracens in the *Narrations of Pseudo-Nilus*, a fifth-century hagiographical sketch of the Sinai Peninsula. The Sinai played a significant role in the creation of a classical Greco-Roman image of Saracens; sparsely populated, arid, and rocky, it was exactly the sort of place to which nomadic Arabic raiders might retreat after raiding the towns and fields of Roman Palestine. What set Sinai apart from so many other spaces of trackless desert for the early Christian writers was precisely its biblical connotations; religious communities established around the mountains of the peninsula drew hermits and those seeking martyrdom after the end of the persecution of Christians in the empire. To the authors of texts like the *Narrations*, written by or for Christian ascetics inhabiting the Sinai Peninsula, indigenous Saracens seemed all too keen to grant them that martyrdom; the Christian narratives surrounding the Sinai are remarkably graphic in their attempts to construct Saracens as the demonic oppressors of the local monasteries.

These texts' stylized nature was exactly the trait which would have made these narratives some of the most widely read representations of Saracens available to Eastern Christian readers before the rise of Islam. The vicious Saracens presented in these texts existed within them to provide a counterpoint to the holiness of the monks they targeted. The Saracens of the

[5] Daniel Caner, *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai: Including Translations of Pseudo-Nilus' Narrations, Ammonius' Report on the Slaughter of the Monks of Sinai and Rhaithou, and Anastasius of Sinai's Tales of the Sinai Fathers* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 2010), 94.

Narrations, for instance, practiced human sacrifice; they preferred beautiful young children, but would settle for venerable holy men as well.[6] The texts attempted to portray Saracens as utterly callous with regards to the sanctity of the Sinai peninsula and the monasteries established there. According to the Sinai authors, even purported miracles observed by Saracens as well as Christians were not enough to sway the nomads to faith in Christ and salvation. [7]

In spite of the polemics of the Sinai narratives, Saracen tribes in the deserts of Arabia generally speaking enjoyed good relations with the Christian monastic communities that began to crop up in the region in the fifth century.[8] The monastery of Pharan on the edge of Palestine took its name from the desert to which Hagar and Ishmael were banished; for ascetics of the pre-Islamic period, the deserts of Arabia represented a way to reconnect with an extant biblical landscape. Some Saracens of the sixth century adopted Christianity with seeming relative ease; missions and monastery traditions are recorded as far from Byzantine borders as Najran in northern Yemen.[9] One of the best known Arab practitioners of Christianity in this region was Fayminun, a wandering ascetic whose miracles won a large number of converts in the area of Yemen.[10] Stories of mystics like Fayminun not only spread Christianity throughout the Arabian peninsula, but also reinforced the Byzantine Christian belief that its deserts represented an ideal location for communion with God. The Saracen Christians inhabiting the Arabian deserts were aware of their biblical associations, particularly those concerning Hagar and Ishmael; as Eastern Christian missionaries and monks shared these stories with them, some Saracens began to reclaim and uphold the image of Ishmael as the progenitor of their people.[11] This sort of

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[6] Ibid., 95.
[7] Ibid., 177.
[8] Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks: 1989), 405.
[9] Ibid., 517.
[10] Al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari*, tr. C.E. Bosworth, vol. 5 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 194.
[11] Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 536.

identification would be followed up and even more strongly touted by the Saracens of the early ummah, the widespread community of adherents of Islam.

The Sinai narratives were not the only witness of the Saracens' customs in pre-Islamic Arabia and the surrounding regions. Sozomen, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, reports that the majority of Saracen tribes, as a result of longstanding contacts with Hebrews, had adopted many Jewish laws as their own, including circumcision and a prohibition on the consumption of pork.[12] In a typical triumphalist fashion, Sozomen also notes that a particular tribe of Saracens under one Zocomus had adopted Christianity, and had gone on to become one of the most powerful tribes on the peninsula. In general, the earliest representations of Saracens were created by Greco-Roman classic authors.[13] Even so, the presence of pre-Islamic Christian Arabs in Islamic Arabic histories, without corollaries in the Byzantine sources, suggest that oral traditions had preserved indigenous Christian narratives like that of the mystic Faymunin on the Arabian Peninsula.

Though on the surface many Saracen tribes could be saddled with the demeaning and ever-popular designation of *barbaroi*, federate peoples and warriors in the service of Byzantium seemed to enjoy greater recognition. Bishops from federate tribes and army units attended the First and Second Councils of Ephesus, as well as that of Chalcedon.[14] Zocomus appears to have led the Salihids, a federate kingdom in the area of Osroene which was a favored Byzantine ally in the fifth century.[15] The successors of the Salihids and the foremost of these federate tribes were the Ghassanids, responsible for the defense of the long Byzantine border along the Arabian Desert. In addition to regular defense of Byzantium against the Sassanid-allied Lakhmid

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[12] Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: W.M.B. Eerdman's, 1887), 375.
[13] Walter D. Ward, *The Mirage of the Saracen: Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 4.
[14] *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 521.
[15] Ibid., 243.

kingdom based in al-Hira, the Ghassanids enjoyed a special status as protectors of Palestine and the Holy Land.[16] In addition to this honor, the Ghassanid kings were granted the title of *phylarch*, and it was expected that they would manage Saracen affairs and politics on behalf of and in defense of Byzantine interests. Yet in spite of, or perhaps apart from their important role in Byzantine geopolitics, the Ghassanids were still known as Saracens in Greek sources[17]. To apply a term which only carried the negative connotations of the Sinai narratives was a diplomatic faux-pas in the extreme.

It bears mentioning that nomads were not the only peoples of Arabic language and culture interacting with the sixth-century Byzantine milieu. The extension of *civitas* to former citizens of Nabatea in 212, and the broader granting of rights to provincials in the 212 Edict of Caracalla, meant that many Arabs settled in Roman Near Eastern towns were legally Roman as much as they were Arabic.[18] While the practical impact of these recognitions of citizenship is easy enough to track, the changes this brought to Arab identity in the empire are less clear. Syria in particular was home to large communities of settled Arabs, as well as pastures which saw regular use by more nomadic groups from the peninsula.[19] The presence of these Arab populations which had largely integrated into the Byzantine *oikoumene* reveals that part of the distinction implied by 'Saracen' was the continuing nomadism of the tribes it was applied to. The designation of 'Arab' included any Arab speaker, living either inside or outside the empire. *Sarakenoi*, however, were foreigners by nature, and so denied many of the rights traditionally associated with Roman citizenship.

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[16] Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 8.
[17] C.f., in Menander the Guardsman's fragmentary history. Roger C. Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman: Introductory Essay, Text, Translation and Historiographical Notes* (Liverpool: Cairns, 1985)
[18] *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 413.
[19] Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 22.

In spite of improving relations with Christians and Byzantium, a negative reputation continued to follow Saracen tribes in Byzantine circles. Sozomen, the same historian who had praised Zocomus' conversion, picked up the false etymology of the name Saracen as pertaining to the banishment of the Saracen people by Sarah.[20] Likewise, Malchus of Philadelphia, himself of Romanized Arab descent, criticized Byzantine alliances with Saracen tribes as a capitulation to barbarians.[21] Saracens, of course, never lost their reputation as inveterate raiders of both Roman and Persian territory; Procopius in the early sixth century names them alongside Huns, Persians, and Slavs as the most frequent and damaging invaders of Byzantine territory.[22] As often as they shared positive relations with Byzantine Christians and could be characterized as pious, loyal, or brave by outside sources, the nomadic residents of the Arabian peninsula were vilified as the opportunistic scoundrels and savages of the Sinai martyr narratives. Whether Saracens were represented positively or negatively depended upon their successful service to the empire.

Saracen interactions with the Roman world, and therefore the narratives about Saracens which coalesced to form a representative idea of Saracens in the broader Mediterranean sphere, were circumscribed within the seemingly endless rivalry between Byzantium and Persia. As merchants, raiders, and mercenaries, Saracens were some of the most frequent go-betweens in the great struggle between empires; accusations of treachery and cowardice abounded. Menander the Guardsman, a late-sixth century Greek chronicler, records that the movement and conduct of Saracen merchants in both Persia and Byzantium was restricted by a particular treaty of armistice: "It is agreed that Saracen and all other barbarian merchants of either state shall not

[20] Sozomen, 375.
[21] *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 535.
[22] Procopius, *The Secret History: With Related Texts*, ed. and tr. Anthony Kaldellis (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010), 102.

travel by strange roads but shall go by Nisibis and Daras, and shall not cross into foreign territory without official permission. But if they dare anything contrary to the agreement (that is to say, if they engage in tax-dodging, so-called), they shall be hunted down by the officers of the frontier, and handed over for punishment together with the merchandise which they are carrying, whether Assyrian or Roman."[23] The suzerainty of Byzantium and Persia over a number of Saracen tribes meant that Saracens generally were expected to conform to the laws set out for them by the two powers; tribes had to uphold the line from Ctesiphon or Constantinople, regardless of their own interests. The situation was untenable in the long term; the Ghassanid federate relationship with Byzantium fell apart a full five decades before the initiation of the Islamic conquests outside the peninsula.

Whether relations with Byzantium were strained or positive, Saracen interactions with the empire, particularly those of the federate kingdoms and tribes, colored Roman and consequentially European Christian perceptions of Saracens before the Islamic conquest of the Levant. These images of Saracens, whether as capable warriors or opportunistic savages, would become the representations associated with the vanguard of the Muslim invasion of the Levant. The patriarch of Jerusalem in 634 complained to the emperor Heraclius of severe Saracen raids; unbeknownst to the patriarch, these were not simply the predictable predations of border tribes, but only the first of the ummah's warriors in Palestine.[24]

III. Trade, Raiding, and the First Saracen Fleets: The Shores of the Greek East

The defeat of the Byzantine navy at the bloody Battle of the Masts was in many ways the inauguration of three further centuries of danger and violence on the seas for Christian and

[23] *Menander the Guardsman,* 73.
[24] *Mirage of the Saracen,* 128.

Muslim alike. The maritime raiding which would become a constant in the western Mediterranean world began first in the east. Pseudo-Methodius's vision predicts near-total domination of the world by the Saracens: "They will seize the entrances of the North, the roads of the East, and the ocean's crossings. Men, livestock, animals, and birds will be yoked to the yoke of their enslavement. The oceans' waters will become enslaved to them."[25] To see the world from Syria or Mesopotamia in the later seventh century, one might have believed this enslavement had come to pass; the Caliphate had overwhelmed one of the most ancient empires in the world and deprived the other of a large part of its territory. It had seemingly emerged from the First Fitna, a tri-partite succession crisis following the death of the Caliph Uthman, without slowing the pace of expansion. Even the Eastern Mediterranean, upon which no non-Roman ships had sailed in centuries, had become an extension of the Muslim polity. But raiders and pirates, while the most numerous travelers on the Saracen-ruled seas, were far from the only individuals bold enough to risk regular maritime transit. Such violent living on the seas was made possible and profitable only by the port communities that supported the Byzantine and Saracen fleets, and the merchants and go-betweens who kept ship-bound commerce flowing.

The Caliph Umar (634-644) had famously forbidden a fleet to be fitted out to counteract Byzantine naval power.[26] The most persistent of the early Caliphate's leading advocates for the necessity of a navy was Mu'awiyah, later the first Umayyad Caliph. Mu'awiyah was responsible for the governance of Syria and Palestine; nearly the whole length of his province was accessible from the sea, and the revived navy of the Heraclian dynasty under Constans II made controlling the coast exceptionally difficult.[27] While the Bilad al-Sham was ever in danger of attack from the

[25] *When Christians Met Muslims*, 120.
[26] Al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari*, tr. Stephen R. Humphreys, vol. 15 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 27.
[27] Christophe Picard, *Sea of the Caliphs: The Mediterranean in the Medieval Islamic World*, tr. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 188.

sea, other areas of the conquest also suffered from the lack of a Saracen fleet. The Greek citizens of Alexandria, only recently subjugated in 641 by ‘Amr ibn al-’As, rebelled when a Byzantine relief fleet docked at the harbor in 642.[28] Though the city was reclaimed, it was clear that the Caliph could not rely on coastal Greek cities to remain loyal while the ummah lacked a fleet of its own. At length, the Caliph Uthman saw the need for a response, and granted Mu’awiyah leave to form and sail a fleet. Even so, Uthman bid Mu’awiyah take his wife and the wives of his captains on board, likely in the hopes that such would discourage reckless action. Uthman’s concerns seem to have been unfounded, for when Mu’awiyah’s fleet launched in 649, its expedition to Cyprus seems to have been an unqualified success. In addition to a tribute (*jizyah*) of 7,000 dinars, Mu’awiyah obtained the right for the ummah to appoint an imam as patrician of Cyprus to watch after Saracen interests on the island.[29] Cyprus, according to the treaty, would be tributary to both Byzantium and the Caliphate, and aid neither − a unique arrangement in the history of the early Islamic conquests. Such an arrangement, however, was difficult to guarantee without a dedicated Saracen presence on the island. The Cypriotes purportedly broke the treaty in 652 by furnishing the Byzantine fleet with supplies, and Mu’awiyah returned in retaliation, looting and devastating a large part of the island. Mu’awiyah had already begun to set the tone of Saracen presence on the seas; though he seemed little interested in a true conquest of the island, his response to challenges to Saracen sea power were swift and unforgiving.

The origin of the fleet’s ships sheds some light on the social changes that were engendered by the Saracen entry into the Mediterranean. In order to outfit a naval force capable of matching Byzantine sea power, dedicated naval manufacturing would be required. Certainly

[28] Charles Cutler Torrey, “The Mohammedan Conquest of Egypt and North Africa.” In *Biblical and Semitic Studies: Critical and Historical Essays by the Members of the Semitic and Biblical Faculty of Yale University*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 290.
[29] Tabari, Vol. 15, 74.

some members of the ummah from Himyar or Oman could have possessed the knowledge necessary for such a task, but Mu'awiyah seems to have preferred local talent. Mu'awiyah was concerned with establishing functional ports for his new naval endeavor; accordingly, he had craftsmen and "certain artisans and carpenters" settled in coastal Acre, likely where they could focus their industry on the building of ships.[30] Mu'awiyah invested a great deal of human capital in his coastal cities. In 662, he had a large number of Persians transferred to Tyre and Acre. One observer noted that "When we took up our abode in Tyre and the littoral, there were Arab troops and many Greeks already there. Later, people from other regions came and settled with us, and that was the case with all the sea-coast of Syria."[31] Mu'awiyah, in his capacity as governor of the Bilad al-Sham, relocated people as he saw fit to support his naval designs; the result seems to have been a cosmopolitan workforce in the arsenals which created the first Saracen ships. The first of these new industrial concentrations which would become the *Dar al-Sina'a,* or arsenals of the Saracen navy, was based at Acre.[32] This sort of focus on the Syrian coast was long-lived; as late as the reign of Basil the Macedonian (867-886), Saracen shipbuilding was located in "Egypt and in the coastal cities of Syria…"[33]

Mediterranean travel in late antiquity was predicated on the knowledge of reliable sea routes and safe harborages along those routes.[34] In order to mitigate risk and lessen the need for large stores of supplies, ships stayed by the coast and were often beached at night, to save the crew the stresses of twenty-four-hour sailing. In blunt terms, successful sailing for a fleet of any size would have required not only practiced sailors, but navigators intimately familiar with the

[30] Baladhuri, 180.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Sir John Bagot Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 335.
[33] Sevchenko, Ihor, tr., *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Liber quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris Amplectitur* (New York: De Gruyter, 2011.), 235.
[34] Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300-900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 422.

coasts of the Mediterranean and the patterns of winds, sailing seasons, and currents. It seems unlikely that, considering Umar's prohibition, very many of the ummah would have been able to acquire this level of experience by the time Mu'awiyah was putting together his naval expeditions. Mu'awiyah required capable seamen, and the sources offer some suggestion as to where he found them.

The early Saracen fleet was not without its share of jockeying between the various commanders. In the lead up to the Battle of Masts, Muhammad ibn Abi Hudhayfa, one of the younger captains of the expedition, felt that one of his colleagues, Abdallah ibn Sa'd, erred too much on the side of caution. When Ibn Sa'd halted the fleet for prayer with the Byzantines in sight, Ibn Hudhayfa balked; he urged the crews of the ships to commit themselves to the battle with haste. Ibn Sa'd chastised him, but the younger man was unrepentant. In frustration, Ibn Sa'd expelled him from the large part of the fleet as punishment: "'Leave off! [It will be] better for you. By God, you are not sailing with us.' (Muhammad) responded, 'Shall I sail with Muslims [at all]?' (Abdallah b. Sa'd) said, 'Go wherever you want.' (al-Waqidi) continues: So (Muhammad b. Abi Hudhayfa) sailed by himself, in a ship with no one but the Copts, until they reached [the site of] the Battle of the Masts."[35] It is clear that the implication of this punishment was that no Muslims would follow Ibn Hudhayfa if he insisted on reckless behavior. What is less obvious is how Ibn Hudhayfa's would find a crew of entirely non-Muslim sailors among a Saracen fleet. It seems unlikely that the crew would have been drawn expressly from the non-Muslim crews of different ships for the express purpose of punishing Ibn Hudhayfa. It is far more plausible that the ship had already been crewed entirely by Copts, but how this came to be is less clear. A religious prohibition on which crews manned which ships is certainly possible,

[35] Al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari*, tr. R. Stephen Humphreys, vol. 15 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 74.

but the admirals would have required experienced navigators, and as stated above it is more than likely some of these individuals would have been non-Muslim. It is a possibility that Copts and other non-Saracenic sailors made up such a large portion of the fleet's total manpower that certain ships would naturally carry no Muslim sailors.

If this were the case, however, the sources might have told us of difficulty maintaining discipline. As it is, one of the only incidents of mutiny by Christian sailors against their Saracen commanders in this early period of the fleet is presented to us by Theophanes the Confessor, writing on the 717 siege of Constantinople. Just as the two Saracen fleets linked up to begin the blockade of the city, "the Egyptian [crews] of these two fleets took counsel among themselves and, after seizing at night the skiffs of the transports, sought refuge in the City and acclaimed the emperor."[36] As a result of this mutiny, and the information provided by the Egyptian crews, the Arab support fleets were sunk in the harbor. Nevertheless, this incident stands apart on the record of the early Saracen fleet; the particular motivations for this mutiny are indistinct, especially considering that Egyptian crews would have almost certainly been present at the first siege of Constantinople, and no similar mutiny is reported. The fact remains that Copts and other Eastern Christians seem to have served on Saracen ships without issue. It seems clear, at least, that Ibn Sa'd did not imagine that Ibn Abi Hudhayfa would come to harm with his Coptic crew for any other reason than his own hubris.

Christians did not only man the crew positions of Mu'awiyah's fleet. Occasionally, they were selected for missions of a far more delicate nature. Following a slight on one of his courtiers by a Byzantine patrician, Mu'awiyah devised a scheme to lure the patrician out of Constantinople for vengeance. To make the scheme work, however, would require patience, and

[36] Theophanes the Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284-813*, tr. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 546.

someone as much at ease in the world of Byzantine nobility as in the presence of the commander of the faithful. Such exceptional men were understandably few and far between, but Mu'awiyah had a particular operative in mind from the very first days of his fleet. The caliph "sent to Tyre, on the Syrian coast, for a certain man who had distinguished himself in innumerable naval expeditions against the Greeks. He was tempered and hardened by experience, and spoke the jargon of the Byzantines. Mu'awiyah had him brought to court, and secretly told him of his plan, asking him to lend it all his skill and patience."[37] The caliph's plan, as related by al-Mas'udi, was thus: this Tyrene sailor would present himself to the court of the Byzantine emperor, offering to trade in much sought-after luxury goods produced in the Caliphate as well as silk, which ordinarily were quite difficult to procure in Byzantium. After several years of transit back and forth between Syria and Constantinople this sailor turned spy managed to build up enough of a rapport with his kidnapping target that he persuaded the patrician onto his ship, and vengeance for Mu'awiyah's courtier was secured.

Despite the dearth of information on this Syrian sailor presented in al-Mas'udi's anecdote, his activities shed light both on the organization of the Saracen fleet and the nature of naval contact between Byzantium and the Caliphate. The sailor might have been a member of the ummah, or a Christian. He complained to the emperor in the midst of his multi-year mission that he came to Constantinople at great personal risk, as he needed to appear to the authorities back in Syria as either a prisoner or a spy in the city order to escape punishment for consorting with Byzantines. Of course, the Syrian authorities knew that this sailor was in fact engaged in espionage, but this exchange suggests that open commerce between the ummah and the empire was prohibited on the Muslim side. This prohibition on trade is supported by the movement of an

[37] Al-Mas'udi, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, tr. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Kegan Paul, 1989), 324.

outbreak of plague in 745; rather than pass to Constantinople along the much more direct sea route, the disease spread from Syria to Egypt, to Africa, before finally passing into the Byzantine sphere via connections between Africa, Sicily, and the Byzantine capital. This circuitous route suggests that few, if any, merchant ships traveled between Syria and Constantinople in the mid eighth century.[38] The relative ease with which this Tyrene sailor was received in Constantinople is subsequently curious, though this may be explained by the high demand for silk and other manufactured goods from Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Silk Road.

The Byzantines seemed to begrudge merchants from the ummah, but they certainly desired their goods. A series of laws in the *Book of the Eparch*, a later ninth century manual for the highest economic officer of Constantinople, apply to Syrian merchants as distinct from other importers and silk merchants. Aside from rules of conduct and commerce, Syrian merchants (ὁι πρανδιόπραται) were also subject to a unique prohibition: "Syrians who have come to Constantinople with merchandize are not permitted to stay in Constantinople for more than three months in the caravanserais. During those three months they must complete their sales and effect their purchases. All the foreign articles which their customers may have entrusted to them for sale on account shall be declared by them to the exarch, and he shall dispose of them to best advantage."[39] If the prandiopratai were not to sell all of their goods within this ninety-day period, they would be subject to harsh penalties. The shaving and flogging they would suffer was common to many other infractions in the *Book*; unique to these merchants who failed to complete their transactions, however, was the confiscation of all of their goods. One can only imagine the state such a punishment would have left a merchant from Syria or Baghdad in.

[38] *Origins of the European Economy*, 505.
[39] Duichev, Ivan, tr., *To Eparchikon Vivlion (The Book of the Archon)* (London: Variorum, 1970), 236.

Whatever the difficulties of maritime trade between the Caliphate and the Byzantine empire, the economic world of both empires was still alive on the seas; it took on a tone altogether more violent, however. The ease of long distance travel and communication in the sea zones of the Byzantine empire was hampered by danger from Saracen pirates operating out of Crete following its conquest in the early ninth century.[40] The Byzantines, likewise, drew a rich bounty in the sale of pirated Saracen ships and goods, as well as enslaved Saracen sailors, at the markets of Antalya on the southern Anatolian coast.[41] Curiously enough, one of the most successful raiders to command Saracen ships of the last part of our period bears the unmistakably Greek name of Photios. Photios, leading a fleet out of Cyprus, enjoyed uncommon success in his early ventures; his raiding fleet would "plunder the whole [area of the] Aegean, often extending their attacks as far as Prokonesos in the Hellespont, and capture and kill many people."[42] Whatever Photios' ethnicity or religion, he suffered an ignominious defeat: The Byzantine fleet engaged him twice, the first battle costing the Cypriot raiders a full twenty of their fifty ships. Later, when Photios attempted to raid the more far-flung areas of Southern Greece, the imperial fleet caught him again and subjected him and his men to torturous punishments and execution.

The naval system developed first by Mu'awiyah encouraged opportunistic men like Photios from any region or people under Saracen domination; unfortunately for Photios, it was a system with a limited life span. Al-Mu'tadid, Caliph in 900, ordered the ships based in Tarsus to be burned out of fear that the local populace would revolt and turn them over to the Byzantines; even so, ships from Tarsus four years later raided Antalya and liberated many Muslim prisoners

[40] Origins of the European Economy, 233.
[41] Ibn Hawqal, *Le Configuration de la Terre (Kitab Surat al-Ard),* tr. and ed. Hendrik Johannes Kramer and Gaston Wiet (Beyrouth: Comission Internationale Pour La Traduction des Chefs-d'Oeuvre, 1964), 192-193.
[42] Ibid.

likely awaiting sale there.[43] The Abbasids retained enough naval power after this to punish a Cypriot breach of the near-three-hundred year old treaty with Mu'awiyah in 929.[44] Within the next few decades, however, the island was lost definitively to the Byzantines. Ibn Hawqal, a tenth-century geographer and traveler of the Saracen Mediterranean, bemoaned this loss as a result of Muslim carelessness and sloth.[45] In the same vein, Ibn Hawqal recounts the reversal of roles between Byzantium and the Caliphate in the waning days of the tenth century: "In our age, the Byzantines are relentless in their descents on the shore of Syria and the beaches of Egypt. They chase ships along all the coasts and they capture them everywhere. No relief, no help is provided for the Muslims, and no one has a remedy. Their local authority is violated or absent; the prince amasses and guards everything for himself…"[46]

Whatever the grim state of the Saracen eastern Mediterranean by the tenth century, it was a region that had been indelibly shaped by the maritime policies of Saracen leaders like Mu'awiyah. By relying on knowledgeable sailors and craftsmen, regardless of origin or religion, Mu'awiyah and his successors had enabled seamen like the Tyrene sailor or Photios to rise to positions where they could menace even the Byzantine core in Constantinople. While peaceful trade decreased in favor of raiding and piracy, Syrian merchants were still to be found in Constantinople, and their goods were some of the most sought after in the city. Pseudo-Methodius once again represented a vision of the end of Saracen domination in the Mediterranean: "Egypt will be devastated, Arabia burned with fire, and the land of Hebron devastated. But the bay of the sea will be at peace."[47] Whatever the cost to the Mediterranean

[43] The Great Arab Conquests, 337.
[44] Mas'udi, 385.
[45] *Le Configuration de la Terre*, 176.
[46] Ibid., 199. (My translation)
[47] *When Christians Met Muslims*, 125.

littoral after centuries of raids and retaliations, espionage and restricted trade, the Christian faithful hoped for one thing: peace on the sea.

IV. Colonization and Conflict in the Central Mediterranean

Naval excursions by Saracens were of course not confined to the east. The sea had opened to expansion following the establishment of the first Caliphal fleets; but soon the Mediterranean was host to a veritable swarm of independent Saracen raiders, sailing wherever local defenses were poor enough to encourage swift looting. These pirates and mercenaries are ubiquitous in the southern Italian view of this period, and it is little wonder that the greedy, sacrilegious pagan warrior is the image which occurs most frequently in Latin chronicles. Yet Saracens can still be found engaging in diplomacy and trade with the local Latins, or else building or remaking cities on Sicily and the Apulian coast. For the Saracens themselves, the region of the Central Mediterranean was a linchpin of their wider world, a frontier that promised great reward to warriors, merchants, and travelers alike.

In 849, a group of Saracen raiders, hoping to follow up on earlier successful raids, set out for Rome from their base on the island of Totarum, off the coast of Sardinia. Instead of the easy gain they had hoped for, the Saracens found a combined fleet supplied by a league of maritime cities on the Southern Italian coast, including Naples, Gaeta, and Amalfi. The Saracen fleet was destroyed, but according to the *vita* of Pope Leo IV, not all of the raiders were condemned to death: “We ordered that some should live, bound in iron, but for one reason only, so that they could know clearer than light both our hope, which we have in God, and his ineffable piety, and also their own tyranny. After this, to stop them living among us idly or without distress, we were bidding them carry out everything, sometimes at the wall which we were beginning round St. Peter the apostle’s church, sometimes at various manufacturers’ tasks, whatever seemed

necessary."[48] The consignment of these raiders to slavery was in part an ironic punishment; Saracen pirates were renowned for their proclivity for trading European Christian slaves to the large markets of Africa. More fascinating, however, is that Leo gave the captive Saracens this task out of a fear that they might live easily in the city they had intended to pillage, suggesting that a Saracen, captive or otherwise, might not find Rome inhospitable without a prescribed punishment.

A naval victory over the Saracens was a vast improvement from Gregory's day, when "the ungodly, wicked, and god-hated race of the Agareni were rising up from their own territory and compassing nearly every island and district, and atrociously causing, and are still to the present day never ceasing to cause, the looting of men and the devastation of places."[49] The domination of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the surrounding waters of the Mediterranean by Saracen raiding vessels was a long-standing issue, but the Italian city-states seemed more than capable of fending them off when their efforts were coordinated. The success of raiders like those who menaced Latium during Gregory's pontificate was predicated upon the division of these Italian cities, if not their direct collaboration with the Saracens.

Constans' II fleet appears to have been en route to Africa, 500 ships strong, when confronted by the Saracen fleet at the Battle of the Masts. If the Battle put an end to Byzantine naval supremacy in the seventh century, the conquest of Africa saw its effect. When, in 698, the "entire Roman fleet" recaptured Carthage briefly, the Caliphate responded with a fleet "larger and more powerful."[50] Saracen dominance of the sea was clear, and it allowed raiding ships from the Muslim-occupied regions of the Mediterranean much greater mobility. Shortly after this

[48] Raymond Davis tr., *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of Ten Popes from A.D. 817-891* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 133-134.
[49] Ibid., 67-68.
[50] Theophanes the Confessor, 516.

assault on Carthage was repulsed, raiding ships began to ply the waters around Sicily. Pantelleria, about a third of the way to Sicily from the African coast, was conquered and colonized in 700.[51] Islands like Pantelleria would go on to serve as the ideal havens for Saracen raiders.

Saracen ships− likely having split off from the fleet in the eastern Mediterranean − may have been active in the waters around Sicily and southern Italy even before the conquest of Carthage. The earliest date for a raid on Sicily is 652, provided by the vita of Pope Martin; this seems improbable, as does Theophanes the Confessor's mention of a 662 capture of part of the island.[52] Nevertheless, a date in the late 660's or early 670's is certainly feasible. The circumstances of the 670's seem particularly likely: Sicily had been destabilized both by the assassination of Constans II in 668, and by a subsequent rebellion of the general Mezesius on the island.[53] According to the *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* of al-Baladhuri, the first raid occurred during the reign of Mu'awiyah (661-680), and Sicily was "continually invaded" afterwards.[54] Such raids seem to have been conducted on at least a yearly basis, primarily for the purposes of looting and slave-raiding rather than expansion;[55] even al-Baladhuri notes the "idols of gold and silver studded with pearls," the most impressive loot from this first incidence of raiding.[56] Treasures such as these linked Sicily at the extreme end of a much wider trade route in the Islamic world; the idols in question were sold at Basrah and packed off for buyers in India. When warriors under the Aghlabid emirate landed at Mazara on the island's southern coast in 827, it was the

[51] *The Great Arab Conquests*, 333.
[52] Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 81.
[53] Raymond Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to A.D. 715* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 75.
[54] Baladhuri, 375.
[55] *Where Three Worlds Met*, 79.
[56] Baladhuri, 375.

first time Saracen fighters had come to conquer. The Aghlabid emirs represented their invasion of the rich island of Sicily as a continuation of earlier periods of Jihad.[57] The long duration of the conquest − fifty years from 827 to the fall of Syracuse in 878 − meant that both Byzantine and Saracen administrations were in residence on the island for an extended period, and residents of the island consequently needed to be able to move in both Byzantine and Islamic spheres.[58]

The length of the conquest of Sicily itself hints at the significance of the island to both the Byzantine and Saracen worlds. As one of the few remaining Byzantine strongholds in the west, it linked Byzantium closely with Italy and the western Mediterranean beyond; as a territory rich in agricultural produce and economic development, Sicily would go on to be the jewel of the Saracen Mediterranean.[59] Already by 745 there were significant enough links with the Saracen North Africa for an outbreak of the plague to spread to the island, and from there to the Latin and Greek zones of the Mediterranean. The Byzantines observed the loss of Sicily with understandable frustration; the chroniclers of the Macedonian dynasty blamed the fall of most of the island as well as considerable holdings in Calabaria and Apulia to the Saracens on the ineffectiveness of the emperor of the Amorian dynasty, Michael III.[60] The Saracens, for their part, exulted in their successful conquest. Sicily could stand as a stable frontier territory, largely administrated throughout the period of Saracen rule from Kairouan; it represented both an economic gain and a spiritual victory over the Byzantines.[61] Ibn Hawqal lavished the island with praise in his treatment of it: "The most prosperous [of Mediterranean islands], thanks to Islam and as a result of its population, is Sicily: It is the largest of all, the best supplied, the best

[57] *Sea of the Caliphs*, 103.
[58] *Where Three Worlds Met*, 76.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Theophanes Continuatus, 189
[61] *Where Three Worlds Met*, 172.

defended due to the energy of the emigrants from the Maghreb who settle there."[62] By the tenth century, Sicily had integrated itself into the broader Mediterranean system of Muslim rule − even as internal instability left it vulnerable to eventual conquest, with revolts against Aghlabid control reported as early as 899.[63]

Though Sicily might have provided an ideal platform for raids on southern Italy, it seems that Carthage was still the preferred port of call for raiding ships.[64] In fact, Saracen raids and colonization in Italy had begun long before the conquest of Sicily. The fleets based at Carthage had a command structure separate from that of the more regimented eastern fleets; indeed, a large number of the ships which participated in raiding Italy seem to have been privately owned and operated without the oversight of the emir.[65] Perhaps the most significant Saracen possession on the Italian mainland was Bari, a city which provided an ideal port for the export of wealth and slaves won on excursions across the southern half of the peninsula. The Saracens had first arrived in Bari, however, not as conquerors but as mercenaries; Radelgis, Duke of Benevento, had hired them with the intention of using them against Salerno.[66] It was not the last time that the Christian lords of southern Italy would invite Saracens into their disputes only to be betrayed. At times, Saracens from Bari seemed to have the run of the peninsula; the last emir, Saugdan, was recorded to have led his fellow 'Ishmaelites' (as they are referred to in the *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum* of Erchempert) in a raid on the entire region of Benevento around 860.[67] Such was the success of this outpost at Bari that Saugdan received caliphal

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[62] *Le Configuration de la Terre*, 197-198. (My translation)
[63] Waitz, Georg, ed., *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum Saec. VI-IX* (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), 452.
[64] *Where Three Worlds Met*, 121.
[65] *The Great Arab Conquests*, 334.
[66] Kenneth M. Setton, "The Italian Cities and the Arabs before 1095," in *A History of the Crusades: The First Hundred Years*, ed. Marshall W. Baldwin, vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 47.
[67] *Scriptores Rerum*, 245.

recognition of his rule when he petitioned Baghdad for it, meaning that Saugdan had at least some legitimacy in viewing himself as a jihadi.[68]

The era of Bari's dominance was brief, but even its conclusion sheds some light on the position of Saracens in the world of Southern Italy. In 871, a combined force of Franks, Lombards, and Byzantines under the Frankish King Louis II conquered the city and captured Saugdan.[69] As a political hostage the emir was moved to Capua, where he appears to have associated freely with the local nobility. Charmed by Saugdan's dry wit and no-nonsense demeanor, Louis allowed the former raid leader into his confidence. Saugdan saw his opportunity for escape in this: he drove a wedge between Louis and the local Capuan nobles by claiming to the Capuans that Louis intended to arrest them, and then planting the idea in Louis' mind himself.[70] Obtaining his freedom from the rebellious Capuans, Saugdan managed to escape to Africa. Not one to forget his humiliation at the hands of the Franks, Saugdan returned from Carthage with an army shortly afterwards; upon hearing of the return of Louis with an impressive army, however, he retreated.

Saugdan's political maneuverings, while not exactly unexpected of a hostage of a Frankish king, nevertheless reveal the ease with which Saracen leaders had adapted to the system of loyalties in southern Italy. That Saugdan managed to escape such dire straits mostly unscathed speaks as much to the nature of diplomatic interaction between Saracens and Christian lords as to the emir's own cunning.

Saracen raids in the central Mediterranean ranged far beyond southern Italy alone. In the Byzantine sphere, fleets sailed out from Bari for both western Greece and the Greek cities of

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[68] Barbara M Kretuz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Philadeliphia Press, 1992), 38.
[69] Theophanes Continuatus, 199-201.
[70] Ibid., 203-211

Dalmatia. The revived Byzantine fleet was quick to respond to these attacks, but between the danger of leaving outposts without a garrison on the Slavic frontier and the difficulty in orchestrating an attack on the Saracen possessions in Sicily and Italy, the Greeks were unable to retaliate; even when the Saracens were defeated at sea, there were few threats to their entrenched position in the south Central Mediterranean.[71]

The most significant zone of Saracen involvement in southern Italy was the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea, from Calabria all the way to Latium. Pope John VIII's (872-882) letters, both to the leaders of southern Italy and the Frankish emperor Charles the Bald, betray a sense of great urgency. No doubt foremost in John's mind was the 846 sack of Rome by Saracen pirates, who overwhelmed the recently constructed fortifications at Ostia in spite of a complement of Frankish guards.[72] The sack had been devastating for both the city and St. Peter's itself, which was still being restored after John's time. Although a particularly destructive storm meant that the Saracen ships sunk leaving the city with their treasure, the cost of the raid encouraged the construction of the Leonine walls in order to prevent future such raids.[73]

More than fortifications, however, Rome required allies. The principal cities of the Tyrrhenian Sea coast, including Salerno, Capua, Naples, Amalfi, and Gaeta, frequently struggled against one another as often as the Saracens. Naples in particular had longstanding treaties with one or more Saracen groups on the peninsula, much to the chagrin of the papacy. It was in the hopes that the duke of Naples might side with his coreligionists against his Saracen allies that Pope John VIII (872-882) wrote to the bishop of Capua, asking him to gauge the Duke's

[71] Theophanes Continuatus, 191-5.
[72] *The Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 93-96.
[73] Ibid., 133.

opinion.[74] Naples, however, was not receptive. John asked Aion, bishop of Benenvento, to be his liaison with a Greek fleet apparently coming to protect Rome against Saracen attacks; the hope was that the presence of the Byzantines might encourage the Italian cities to dissolve "the impious treaty with the Hagarenes."[75] When the Greeks arrived and attempted to contract Naples, Salerno, Gaeta and Amalfi for support, all four cities declined; they did not wish to jeopardize their peace with the Saracens.[76] Cooperation on the merits of religion alone was out of the question for the power players of southern Italy, despite the overtures made by the papacy of John. In truth, internecine fighting between Christians in Italy troubled the papacy as much as the Saracen problem; in a letter to Charles the Bald of Francia, John complained that even getting such letters to the north was prohibitively difficult; in addition to the Saracens harassing communication by sea, "hostile Christians" were just as dangerous on land.[77]

As in the east, the ascendant period of Saracens on the coasts of Italy was not to last forever. Unlike the east where permanent conquest was the reality, it had always been the nature of Saracen involvement in the peninsula to intercede only where space was created by the factional disputes of the local Italian nobility. Cities like Taranto or Bari remained in Saracen hands only so long as Frankish and Byzantine attentions were elsewhere. A Byzantine fleet under the *drungarios* Naras turned from pirate hunting to raiding of its own in 876, attacking Saracen-held Sicily and "with only few exceptions, he freed the towns held by the Hagarenes in Calabria and Lagobardia from barbarian domination and transferred them to Roman sovereignty."[78] The death knell of permanent Saracen colonization on the peninsula came in 915,

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[74] Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 126, *Hincmari Rhemensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia* (Paris: 1852), 729.
[75] Ibid., 726.
[76] *Scriptores Rerum*, 249.
[77] *Patrologia Latina*, 711.
[78] Theophanues Continuatus, 221-229.

when the diplomatic wrangling of John VIII finally bore fruit; a coalition of Italian cities, led by Pope John X, drove the last group of Saracens stationed on the mainland from their fortress on the Garigliano river in 915.[79]

The impact of Saracen raiding on the Italian peninsula is difficult to gauge. Following the Christian sources, large areas of the Mezzogiorno were subject to burning, looting, and mass depopulation; the Saracens themselves report that raids on these territories were exceedingly lucrative. Where they built semi-permanent bases or conquered cities, the Saracens did not seem to be outsiders in the political realm of southern Italy; rather, leaders like Saugdan seem to have been involved in the disputes of their Christian neighbors more in their capacity as local power holders than as executors of Jihad. Ultimately, rather than overwhelm Italy and restructure it as Muslims had in conquests around the Mediterranean rim, the very nature of their limited presence required them to involve themselves within the local system.

V. The Saracen Mediterranean: Representations and Self-Definitions

Saracens and European Christians operated in two different spheres within the Mediterranean. With the expansion of Saracen influence into the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, then, an area of liminality was also created where the established rules of conduct of both domains applied depending on circumstance. The ease with which an individual whether Saracen or Christian could move between these two spheres is of paramount interest to this study. By tracing both travel through and residence in this boundary area, it becomes clear that the system of Saracen dominance in these zones was adapted to better suit itself to interaction with Christian European politics and culture.

[79] "The Italian Cities and the Arabs," 51.

Saracen writers constructed their possessions in the Mediterranean as both boundary lands and vital parts of the *dar al-Islam.* They often saw the permeability of this border as a chance for Christians to test Saracens and vice versa. Ibn Hawqal, writing in the late tenth century, enjoyed hindsight on almost the entirety of this period. Though he was a geographer by trade, his descriptions frequently evoke the previous glory of the ummah, as contrasted with the decline he saw in his own time. When ibn Hawqal faced the Mediterranean, he saw it in a broad expanse of history, and saw the changing fortunes of Saracens on the sea as an indicator of moral laxity among his contemporaries. In a passage from his *Kitab Surat al-Ard*, ibn Hawqal outlines a strikingly romantic view of the Saracen Mediterranean possessions: "The Muslims once owned pluralities of powerful islands, reputed and worthy of their renown, which were seized from the enemy, like Cyprus and Crete. These were two islands rich in agricultural production and well supplied, visited by numbers of exporters, who came there to trade. The conquest of these two islands from the Byzantines was a springboard for [the Muslims'] growing ambitions: garrisons were established there, and personnel and munitions were stationed. They created a fire whose flames never diminish in intensity and whose ardor does not decrease. The Muslims constituted a test for Christianity which was all too real, because they brought morning and night incessant attacks, such that they rendered inevitable their proximity to the envisioned objectives and their nearness to the places of rest of the Byzantines."[80] By conquering Byzantine territory and continually infringing on the eastern Roman sphere, Ibn Hawqal asserts, Muslims had not only increased their own fortunes but had also created a situation in which the Byzantines were forced to respond. The conquest of Cyprus and Crete was a challenge to Byzantium as much as it was an expansion of Saracen power in the Mediterranean.

[80] *Le Configuration de la Terre*, 197-198. (My translation)

Even where Saracens did not directly rule, their presence was still felt. The inability of the Byzantines to police all their coastal provinces meant that particularly far-flung regions, such as southern Italy, were still forced to pay tribute to Saracen emirs in order to avoid attack. Ibn Hawqal records one such a case in Calabria, where "the rulers of the Maghreb have imposed an annual tribute on Calabria of a plurality of thousands of dinars which they levy on them."[81] The ability of Saracen rulers to extract tribute even without force meant that the need for actual conflict with Byzantine forces diminished, even as Byzantine power began to recover in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Not all of the results of this proximity to the Byzantines met with Ibn Hawqal's approval, however. During his visit to Sicily, he made note of a group of Muslims living in Sicily who, against tradition, seemed to coexist with the local Christian populace in relative harmony. Most egregious to Ibn Hawqal was the fact that these Muslims would marry Christian women, and then allow their daughters to be raised as Christians.[82] While recorded instances of this sort of intermingling between Muslim and Christian populations are rare, that this occurred on the island border province of Sicily suggests the possibility of similar developments elsewhere on the islands of the Mediterranean, distanced as they generally were from champions of orthodoxy like Ibn Hawqal.

Of course, the Mediterranean had not always been the Saracen sea Ibn Hawqal describes. The maritime traditions of the Saracens were tied most significantly to the trading cities of Yemen and Oman; Saracen seamanship on the Mediterranean was seen in light of its older eastern counterpart on the Indian Ocean.[83] The Indian Ocean was also the realm of Saracen

[81] Ibid., 195.
[82] *Where Three Worlds Met*, 133.
[83] *Sea of the Caliphs*, 87.

merchants more so than the Mediterranean − as in the case of the plunder from the first raid on Sicily, Saracen traders could often make a killing transporting European goods to India and vice versa. Yet according to Ibn Hawqal, exporters frequented the islands of the Mediterranean under Saracen control.

The infrastructure of Mediterranean trade employed by the Saracens was designed following earlier Greek models. One institution in particular, the Greek *pandocheion,* was adapted to the uses of Saracen trade while retaining its earlier role as a hostel. Rendered in Arabic as *funduq*, these caravanseri were constructed in many of the major Mediterranean port cities under Saracen control, including Tunis, Alexandria, Tyre, and multiple may have existed in Palermo.[84] As the purpose of a *funduq* was primarily to facilitate trade by providing merchants with lodgings, storage space, and neutral grounds for barter, the existence of such a far-flung network suggests an equally widespread set of trade routes.

Mediterranean trade between Saracens and Christians increases towards the end of this period. By the ninth century, Islamic jurisprudence in North Africa forbade the pirating of Christian merchant ships bound for trade with Muslims; authorities in Kairouan were concerned that the traditional methods of gaining wealth on the sea were strangling potentially valuable trade contact with Christians.[85] In this period before the economic domination of the Mediterranean by Italian traders, the established Saracen powers were happy enough to protect Christian trade. The study of Mediterranean communications conducted by Michael McCormick reveals that at least six of the specifically attested Saracen travelers on the sea left Muslim

[84] Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69, 108, 202.
[85] Ibid., 104.

territory for the west with an explicitly economic motivation, whether for trade or for other business.[86]

Whatever small-scale trade passed between Africa and Italy and Constantinople and Syria, the single largest economic activity which involved both Saracens and Christians remained the same throughout the period: the slave trade. Immense demand in Africa and Mesopotamia meant that slave-taking could be a remarkably lucrative business. Latins and Greeks were not the only targets for such enterprises, either; Slavic captives were among the most common carried across the Mediterranean for sale at Saracen markets. Ironically, Saracens were not the only ones selling captured Christians in this period; Byzantine crews who had caught Saracen raiders in transit might still sell the pirate's human cargo at a profit.[87] On a rare occasion, a Christian slave might be captured, traded, sold and bought by Christians living under Saracen rule, as with the abbot Elias.[88]

A witness of this high volume traffic in slaves was Bernard, a Frankish monk on pilgrimage to the Holy Land around 870. Curiously enough, though Bernard passed through ports in Africa as well as Tripoli on the Syrian coast, the greatest number of slaves he saw along his way was nine thousand total Christian captives in Taranto, as compared with three thousand such captives in each of his later destination ports.[89] Taranto was certainly not the end destination for the slaves Bernard saw in port; it seems likely, therefore, that it was merely the largest center for export in slaves from the Saracen properties on the Italian peninsula, with its shipments being sent according to demand to cities across the Mediterranean basin. Significant to

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[86] *Origins of the European Economy*, 217.
[87] Ibid., 246.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Bernard, *Das "Itinerarium Bernardi Monachi,"* tr. and ed. Josef Ackermann (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2010), 117.

the understanding of this slave trade are the Saracen traditions surrounding manumission. Slaves who were given the option of manumission often found that conversion to Islam was a required part of the process.[90]

Bernard's account of his visit to Bari furnishes a further insight into the conception of spaces Saracen and Christian in the early Medieval Mediterranean: arriving into the city, Bernard refers to it first and foremost as a "civitatem Saracenorum," rather than as a Roman or Italian city conquered by Saracens.[91] While this may have been convenient shorthand on Bernard's part, this usage nevertheless suggests that contemporary readers would grasp his meaning without further clarification. Despite being a city of Saracens, Bari was Bernard's next destination in the course of his pilgrimage, and this was the most important facet of its character to him. What Bernard intended with the phrase − whether the city was Saracen with respect to its politics, culture, or population − is unclear, but Bernard does not tell us much about Bari outside of this designation. Bernard also carried a remarkable show of trust from Saugdan when he left Bari: a letter of safe conduct, guaranteed by the emir himself.[92] The pragmatic reasons for this grant are manifold: arresting monks on pilgrimage would likely have antagonized Saugdan's Christian neighbors, and frightened future pilgrims away from engaging ships from Bari for transport. What is more surprising, however, is that the sailors piloting the slave ship which bore Bernard eastward respected the letter for the whole journey. The letter even carried enough clout to persuade the ruler of Alexandria to craft a similar letter on the monk's behalf for the leader of Babylon.

It is clear that Saugdan had become part of a Mediterranean-wide Saracen elite; by contracting with him, Bernard was guaranteed safe passage across the greater part of the Muslim

[90] Origins of the European Economy, 247.
[91] *Itinerarium Bernardi Monachi*, 116.
[92] Ibid.

world. While religiously and politically opposed to the Byzantines, the Mediterranean system of the Saracens did not allow such barriers to halt the movement of individuals and goods. It required only recognition by those in power in order to secure safety of transit for anyone, regardless of their nation or faith.

The degree to which this system extended beyond regions under direct Saracen control is unclear. Ibn Hawqal, in his summary of all the shores of the Mediterranean, spends a relatively large amount of time describing the region of Calabria and the cities of Amalfi and Naples. His attestations of the countryside around Naples − as well as the structure of its market and the quality of its cloth − seem to indicate that he has either first - or at most second-hand familiarity with the city in his own day.[93] Ibn Hawqal and others like him still had access to the cities of the Calabrian coast, even sixty years after the last Saracen settlement on the peninsula was reduced. It is possible that Ibn Haqal was able to move with some freedom in the southern Italian zone in spite of his status as a Saracen. It may very well be that, in defiance of expectation, Ibn Hawqal never imagined a Mediterranean split down the middle by conflict with Byzantium and other Christians, and that his appearance in Naples would have been not nearly so strange as modern readers might imagine.

VI. Saracens and Christians: The Variable Characterizations of Early Medieval Muslims

At the initiation of the Saracen conquests in the early 630's, it was simple enough to see the advance of Islam as merely a Saracen raid of particular range. As successes for the Saracens mounted, however, and they made clear their intention not merely to raid but to conquer and rule, Christian writers were forced to account for these political changes beyond what their easy

[93] *Le Configuration de la Terre,* 197.

definition of Saracen could provide. Successes at sea brought the forces of the ummah into contact with European Christians across the Mediterranean swiftly, and these Europeans sought definitive answers as to how desert nomads had overwhelmed the Eastern Empire not just on land but also at sea.

Perhaps one of the most popular early interpretations of Saracen success and presence in the Mediterranean basin was that the conquests had come about as a result of the wrath of God, and particularly as punishment for the sins of impious Christians. This was the vein present throughout the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, after all; the idea that the Saracens would rule the earth for their apportioned time and then suffer the penalty for their denial of God no doubt carried a certain appeal for seventh- and eighth-century readers. Pseudo-Methodius indicates that loose morals were to blame for this predicament; as Christians had defiled themselves and their faith in God, the *Apocalypse* reports, "God will hand them over to the defilement of the barbarians."[94] Only the truly pious, those who did not indulge in carnal sins prior to the coming of the Saracens, would be saved this fate, or so Pseudo-Methodius claimed.

Yet Pseudo-Methodius was far from the only text linking Saracen expansion with a form of divine punishment. A Syriac life of Maximus the Confessor, vitriolic and unequivocal in its approach to its subject, seems to rely on the same conceit for dealing with the problem of rationalizing Saracen successes: rather than generalized Christian excess, this time the Saracen armies march on the particularly heretical trail of Maximus the Confessor. The raid on Cyprus is orchestrated as a result of his preaching there; Arwad, too, barely three kilometers from the Syrian coast, was reduced as a result of Maximus' influence.[95] While "God's wrath punished everywhere that had accepted his error," what is less clear from the source is whether or not

[94] *When Christians Met Muslims,* 119.
[95] *When Christians Met Muslims,* 68.

these writers considered the Saracens to be aware of their divinely appointed task. Certainly, representatives of the ummah spoke of a divine calling, but the implication that they were tracking a particular holy man across the Mediterranean would have been laughable to Saracen authorities.

Even as other writers scrambled to define the nature of the Saracen empire as an eschatological force or instrument of divine punishment, certain authors began to comment on Islam as a rival ideology already as early as the middle eighth century. One such author, John of Damascus, is noteworthy in that by including the "heresy of the Ishmaelites" in his treatise *On Heresy,* he integrated Islam into the world of Christian thought not as a pagan error or even as an opposed religion, but as a schismatic and misinterpreted branch of Christianity, following the advice and pseudo-prophecy of a man who had only desired the expansion of his own power. Even John, however, does not escape the apocalyptic inclinations of his contemporaries: he introduces the faith as "the fore-runner of the Antichrist."[96] John also picks up on earlier Eastern Christian ecclesiastical histories; he uses the names Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, and Saracens for the adherents of Islam, as well as the biblical etymology for each. John reports that the Saracens with whom he has engaged in dialogue claim to accept the prophets.[97] So early an identification of Islam as a fellow Abrahamic religion is remarkable if only because large numbers of sources even later than this continue to treat the Saracens as pagans.

In general Christian authors of the east fell into two camps; those living under Saracen rule, who tended towards more abstract and apocalyptic understandings of the changed geopolitical balance of the Near East, and those still living in Byzantine territory, whose open

[96] *John of Damascus on Islam*, 133.
[97] Ibid., 137.

vitriol for the Saracens was encouraged rather than inhibited by the political climate.[98] So it was with the chroniclers employed by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who in a unique vein seems to have drawn on classical rather than biblical associations to contextualize the Saracen enemies of the empire. Byzantine efforts to represent the problem of Saracens in North Africa and the Mediterranean drew heavily from antique Roman history: Saracens were reimagined as a new 'Carthaginian' foe.

While the association of Saracens with Carthage may have begun as simply a useful geographical definition, the contexts in which the Saracens of North Africa are referred to as Carthaginians may shed light on the intentions behind this usage. Beginning with its accounting of the loss of Sicily by the policies of the emperor Michael III, the chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus points to the Saracen presence on the North African coast as "the neighboring Carthaginian power."[99] Occasionally, raiders operating out of Ifriqiya were referred to both as Saracens and as residents of Carthage, as in the report of a raid on Dalmatia and Ragusa by "the Hagarenes from Carthage."[100] More striking is the description of Saugdan, emir of Bari: as he began to lay his plans for an escape from Capua, the chronicle calls him "a crafty man, and privy to Punic wiles."[101] Whatever Saugdan's Punic wiles might have been, the association begins to take shape: the Saracens, like the ancient Phoenicians, had sailed to Carthage and set it up as a maritime threat to the empire; like the Carthaginians, they were already in the process of contesting Sicily and other Italian territories.

Theophanes Continuatus appears to take up this definition of Saracens as a neo-Punic foe in lieu of an identification along religious lines; when Syracuse was conquered by a Saracen

[98] *Islam and the West*, 2.
[99] Theophanes Continuatus, 189.
[100] Ibid., 191.
[101] Ibid., 203.

force in 878 due to imperial attention being focused elsewhere, the chronicle bemoaned the loss as "what hitherto had been a splendid and famous city which had often overcome the many armies of Hellenes and barbarians that had besieged it, was reduced to a heap of ruins."[102] It seems likely that, given the association with the Saracens, this use of the term *hellenikas* is operating with its common late antique and early medieval meaning, that is, pagan. The Saracens presented in an imperial chronicle of Byzantium are known only as barbarians culturally and pagans religiously, as late as the middle tenth-century; most significantly, the Saracens appear as political enemies of the empire, and so are cast in the role of the wily Carthaginians.

For the part of Latin Christians in Italy, interpretations of the Saracen threat varied based on region. In the *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum* of Erchempert, writing at Monte Cassino, the Saracens are presented in a familiar vein as a direct punishment from God. When Adelchis, prince of Benevento, betrayed the Frankish emperor Louis II by imprisoning him at Benevento, the Saracens were accordingly incited by God to rise up out of Africa and avenge the emperor, according to Erchempert.[103] Yet curiously for the arc of this narrative, the Saracens upon arriving began only to raid and loot the countryside, rather than attempt to rescue Louis; and subsequently Adelchis is shown once again in a favorable light as he gathers an army to drive the Saracens back out of Italy. In spite of their God-given directives, Saracens were still ultimately the villains of Erchempert's narrative; even a treacherous Christian could redeem himself fighting against them.

Not all Christians had that opportunity, however. Just as in the case of Adelchis, the *Gesta Episcoporum Neapolitanorum* discusses a case in which Louis II sent the prefect of Amalfi to arrest certain rebellious nobles of Naples. When the Neapolitans learned of this, they

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[102] Ibid., 237-241.
[103] *Scriptores Rerum*, 247.

fled the city in ships too quick for the Amalfitan forces to catch; however, a group of Saracens sent by God also pursued the ships, and caught the escaping Neapolitans as their craft was turned by the tide. In this case, Christian traitors received a just death at the hands of Saracen pirates.[104] Perhaps, as Ibn Hawqal suggested, the Saracens in southern Italy were present as a test for the Christians; such a conception would do much to explain how Christian writers rationalized the Saracens as instruments of divine will.

Of course Saracens were not present only to punish Christian weakness; on occasion, they could even assimilate to the local Italian population. Saracens settling in Benevento were expected to convert in a treaty of 849.[105] Saracens could even be inspired to aid Christians against other Saracens: in Salerno around 871, a Saracen by the name of Arrane living in the forum of the city stopped a servant of the prince Guaifer. Arrane wished for the servant to deliver a warning to the prince that he should prepare his armies and navies for an impending naval attack by a band of Saracens; when asked why he would inform against his kinsmen, Arrane proclaimed that he did so out faith in God and the Son of Mary.[106] Such a proclamation suggests that Arrane was at least sympathetic to Christians, if not Christian himself; he did not imagine that God was on the Saracen side. Thanks to Arrane's informing on his people, the prince was able to defeat the Saracen incursion.

From the perspective of the papacy, Saracens like Arrane were too few and too far between. Again, however, Saracens are referred to in papal documents as late as the later ninth century as pagans: in his letters, John VIII acknowledged them both as "unbelieving Saracens"

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[104] *Scriptores Rerum*, 446.
[105] *Patrologia Latina*, 320.
[106] G.H. Pertz, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, vol. 3 (Hannover: Hahn, 1839), 528.

and "sons of the handmaiden."[107] The Saracens for John were uniformly a plague on the city of Rome; swords in hand, they had depopulated the entire area of the city in their quest for captives to sell. Even so, rather than adherents of a heterodox sect of the Christian tradition, John recognized the Saracens only as pagans; the danger in their presence came as much from their propensity for opportunistic raids as their ideological opposition to Rome.

Saracens were not the only enemy of the Christian faithful, however. "What do we say of pagans, with no Christians doing any better?"[108] John's frustrations came as a result both of his diplomatic difficulties in appealing to the lords of southern Italy, and the danger of attacks on the city of Rome by Christians as well as Saracens. Little more than a decade before John's election to the papacy, Frankish troops sent to guard the city instead vandalized St. Peter's, desecrating the altar and killing priests. "The extent and nature of the evil and hapless activities [the Franks] carried out were such as even the Saracen horde had not presumed or thought to carry out therein…" [109] While Saracen aggression was a concern, John was understandably galled by such actions from fellow Christians. Saracen attacks became the model to which transgressions by other Christians could be compared; to be considered in the same light or even more poorly than the Saracens was surely a mark of great anathema.

The images and definition of Saracens in this period were unique by region and by purpose of the author. Fascinatingly, a relatively small number of writers appear to have followed John of Damascus in declaring the religion of the Saracens a heresy; most were content to call them pagans, if they engaged with the image of the Saracen in a religious dimension at all. Throughout these narratives it is plain enough to observe that if Saracens saw themselves in any

[107] *Patrologia Latina*, 696.
[108] Ibid.
[109] *Lives of the Ninth Century Popes*, 172.

of these roles, it was that of the divine punishment. Unlike the Christian apocalyptic authors, however, Saracens put no expiration date on their own conquests; those like Ibn Hawqal were content, for the moment, to be the crucible in which Christian conviction would be tried.

VII. Conclusion

The political and cultural geography of the early Medieval Mediterranean experienced drastic shifts with the introduction of Saracen fleets to previously Roman waters. To the Saracens themselves, this shift in the maritime status quo allowed for expansion and freedom of movement across the Mediterranean, as often to acquire new targets for raiding or opportunities for settlement as to advance the cause of jihad. In the zones of closest contact with European Christians in which they settled or moved, from Sicily to Bari to Constantinople itself, the Saracens found themselves acting according to the demands of the dominant Christian cultural and political system; leaders like Saugdan were required to learn how to play the game of Christian politics, and even individuals like the Tyrene sailor were prized for their ability to move in Byzantine circles.

The earliest Greco-Roman and Christian images of Saracens were always in the minds of Christian observers of the Saracen Mediterranean. Though the Saracens themselves recorded earlier traditions of pious Christian Arabs in the peninsula, the persistent image for the wider Mediterranean world was that of the Sinai martyr narratives and Procopius; seeing Saracens first and foremost as opportunistic bandits and barbarians had great implications for the changing image of Saracens over this period.

In the east, the needs of the fleet were seen to by talented sailors and artisans chosen for their abilities, not their ethnicity or religion. The very nature of Mediterranean travel meant that

the Saracen fleet relied on knowledgeable foreign navigators in order to find success in their raids. Though the golden age of the Saracen raider was disappearing at the end of our period, writers like al-Mas'udi and Ibn Hawqal recalled the advantages and the glory brought to the ummah by intrepid sailors on the once Byzantine-dominated sea.

In the west, distance from the support of the main Saracen fleets encouraged an independent spirit with regard to maritime ventures. The sailors of Carthage pulled in vast quantities of slaves and other plunder from the territories of the northern Mediterranean rim. The temporary and limited nature of conquest on the Italian peninsula required that the Saracens had a measured hand in their dealing with Christians, and the most successful Saracen leaders were those who saw opportunities to play Christian powers against one another. Such close contact inevitably led to the development of communities and individuals that could operate in both worlds, whether in the form of insightful converts like Arrane or the Muslim-Christian communities of Sicily.

Early Medieval European Christians were themselves of many minds on how to define the Saracen expansion. Many preferred the explanation of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, that the Saracens were unwitting pagan instruments of divine retribution for Christian sin or error. Whatever their understandings of Muslim religious beliefs, Christian writers in this vein could also see the beginnings of the end in the Saracens' continued success both on land and at sea. Others, particularly those of the Byzantine tradition, preferred to see Saracens merely as exceptionally successful barbarians, or even classical enemies of Rome in a new era. Latin Christians accepted the identification of Saracens as a means of divine justice, though the popes were just as keen to use them as a model by which to judge negative Christian behavior.

Across the Mediterranean basin and in instances of trade, diplomacy and violence, Christian writers made use of older stereotypes to contextualize the advance and the ascendancy of the Saracens. Whether they reaffirmed or defied these classifications, the perception of Saracens was indelibly shaped by the classic past, both religious and secular. Saracens, too, sought to define the Christians against whom they struggled and with whom they allied in familiar terms, even as the spectrum of relations and interactions across the Mediterranean defied such broad generalizations for either side.

The parallels between this period in southern Mediterranean history and the contemporary era are keenly felt. As questions abound in popular discourse regarding the 'sanctity' and 'integrity' of white European Christian identity, and refugees and immigrants from Muslim-majority countries are frequently seen in the role of foreign invader, such periods of intense and sustained communication and contact between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean must be our point of historical reference. Whatever lessons are to be gleaned about the ability of Asian and African Muslims and European Christians to cohabit, they must be gleaned not only from the incidences of sectarian violence which have been used to characterize the Medieval period in the popular imagination. Rather, Saracens − and whoever their modern day corollaries may be − must be evaluated not only as conquerors, but as neighbors, economic partners, and above all, participants in a system of human interaction across the sea which is still in evidence millennia after its first iterations.

The image which European Christians had of Saracens necessarily placed them in a wider context of biblical history. But we should not assume that their only interactions were the "endless cuts" of Ibn Hawqal; the proximity of Saracen outposts to Christian settlements necessitated that each side learn how to move in the other's world, if only to protect their own

holdings. The natural result was that Saracens were as present in the Christian system as Christians in the Saracen system; contact and connection necessitated the development of individuals on both sides who could move across the political and cultural boundaries, to both defy and redefine pre-established models of interaction.

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