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## THE ARMENIAN AND BYZANTINE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF JIHĀD\*

In the course of an excursus dealing with the Persian Wars of Justin II and Tiberius I Constantine,<sup>1</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, the historian of the reign of Maurice,<sup>2</sup> relates, in accordance with the time-honored traditions of ancient historiography and with the current rhetorical practice of his day, what purport to be if not the actual words at least the sentiments most appropriate to the con-

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\* The text of the present article was read as a paper at the Ninth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference held at Duke University, Durham, N.C., November 4-6, 1983.

1. Theophylact's source for this excursus must have been the largely lost historical work of Menander Protector. See K. Krumbacher: *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* (München: Beck, 1896), p. 249. This is important owing to the high degree of historical accuracy and reliability generally attributed to Menander's work on the basis of those fragments of it which have come down to us. Cf. in this connection the remarks of S. Impellizzeri in *La letteratura bizantina da Costantino agli iconoclasti* (Bari: Dedalo libri, 1965), p. 248; and of H. Hunger in *Die hochsprachliche profane Litteratur der Byzantiner* II (München: C. H. Beck, 1978), 311.

2. We know that Theophylact must have completed his History some time after the death of Chosroes II in 628, the latest datable event referred to in his work. Cf. Hunger, II 317, n. 149. How early he started, though it must have been during the reign of Heraclius, is a matter for speculation. One possible clue is offered us for the date of composition of the passage under discussion by notable similarities of both style and subject matter between it and George of Pisidia's poem on the First Persian Campaign of the Emperor Heraclius (= *Expeditio Persica* I, lines 19-59). For general historical reasons and owing to stylistic and related considerations, the detailed discussion of which I propose to undertake in a forthcoming monograph on the "Religious Dimension in Byzantine-Iranian Relations (572-628)," I am inclined to the view that it is Pisides who is borrowing and adapting material from Theophylact and not vice versa. Assuming this state of affairs to be the case that would give us 622-23, Pertusi's suggested date for the composition of George of Pisidia's poem (cf. Giorgio di Pisidia, *Poemi. I. Panegirici Epici*, Edizione Critica Traduzione e Commento a cura di A. Pertusi (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 1959), p. 15) as a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the present passage.

tents and occasion of a speech delivered by the Roman General, Justinian the son of Germanus to his men just before the battle of Melitene in 575.<sup>3</sup> The rhetorical excesses which characterize Theophylact's style and perhaps commended him to his contemporaries<sup>4</sup> may perhaps also account for the scant attention which the altogether novel and truly remarkable ideas expressed in this speech have so far received.<sup>5</sup> What those ideas were I shall endeavor to make clear by first translating and then commenting on the passage in question. After that I propose to draw the reader's attention to certain broad but significant similarities between these ideas and the concept of Jihād as initially expressed and enunciated in the pages of the Qur'an.

First the speech:

This day, Romans, will be the start of great blessings for you, if you hearken to my words. Arm your souls in defense of the body: let your hearts do battle on behalf of your hands. Let each man brave danger on behalf of his fellow, and you are safe. Fellow philosophers (I say "philosophers" rather than "soldiers" advisedly, for yours alone is the constant rehearsal of death), make it plain to the barbarians that your mettle is immortal. Put your souls beyond the reach of fear. Resolve to strike or be struck down, receiving the blows of the enemy as though your bodies were a part not of you but of somebody else. Let the enemy bear witness, as they fall, to your valor: let their corpses tell the tale of your trophies. Comrades, joint sharers with us of the pain and the fame of war, close combat is the supreme test of courage and of cowardice, and the supreme arbiter of souls,<sup>6</sup> for either it exposes once and for all the effeminacy of cowards, or it shall today proclaim with wreaths and splendid triumphs the manhood of the brave. Do not suffer the fate of a soul enamored of its body

3. Theophylactus Simocatta, *Historiae*. Edidit Carolus De Boor. Editionem correctiorem curavit explicationibusque recentioribus adornavit P. Wirth (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1972), pp. 135-38 (= Lib. III, 13).

4. Cf. Impellizzeri, pp. 252-53.

5. E. Stein, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Reiches vornehmlich unter den Kaisern Justinus II und Tiberius Constantinus* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1919), p. 83, n. 8 while accepting one detail as authentic, dismisses the speech in general as just so much "rhetorical trumpery and therefore historically worthless."

6. Or "lives." The Greek is ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so.

by turning your backs to the enemy. This sweet death rehearsed day in day out by us is a kind of sleep, a sleep longer than the usual, but oh! so very short compared with all recorded time to be. Do not bring yourselves to accept dishonor with safety. That is no death to die, and a grave which never covers the man who has brought down upon himself the stigma of cowardice. Do not allow the king of Persia with his acquisition of utterly unwarlike multitudes, his bombast, his swaggering, his posturing and his bluster, to upset warriors of your heroic stature. Are they not a nation of braggarts who excel in boasting and make it their stock-in-trade? Dismiss past reverses from your minds and dwell upon the allied contingents reinforcing us.<sup>7</sup> Forget about the previous defeat, which a general's folly conceived and the insubordination of his subordinates disastrously delivered.<sup>8</sup> True heroes do not know the meaning of fear. Their sustenance is cold steel and the pains inflicted by the spear are for them like the pangs of hunger driving them on to partake of greater dangers. So keep your backs a closely-guarded secret from the enemy, do not initiate them into the revelation of their true nature. I know that (honorable) wounds are the source from which triumphs spring. The road to flight is the road to slavery not to safety; cowardice is no firm basis for securing a promise of deliverance. Divest yourselves of your bodies for the sake of your armor, of your lives for the sake of your shields. Fight with all your limbs: let no limb fail to have its share of danger. Let the perfect coordination of your weapons guard your ranks like a wall, let the mass formation of your cavalry make a palisade round your infantry, and do you fence yourselves about in one united stand like a solid and continuous piece of masonry. Let not your spears leap out of your hands: strike, but do not part with your weapons. The Persians do not bear a charmed life, nor is their good fortune guaranteed to last for ever. Barbarians are not equipped with hands incapable of feeling fatigue; they are not physically superior to us. They do not have two lives; or bodies of steel. They too are no

7. For the mustering of mercenary and allied contingents on the orders of the Emperor (presumably Justin II is meant), cf. Theophylact's remarks in Lib. III, 12. 8.

8. The reference here is to the earlier defeat of the Romans under the command of Marcianus, already described in Lib. III, 10.

strangers to death. The war, moreover, is a just one, not one which has brought immortals into conflict with mortals. The Romans have enlisted justice on their side, since they have even made yet another attempt to find a peaceful solution.<sup>9</sup> The Persians have put justice on the opposing side to themselves; indeed they abominate peace and revere aggression as though it were an auspicious deity. We have no false religion, we have not appointed fictitious divinities to be our leaders. We do not have a god who is subject to the lash, for we do not elect a horse to be an object of worship. We do not worship a god that turns to ashes, burning brightly today and soon not even visible. We do not construct a theology out of smoke and wood, only to have the falseness of its terminology refuted by the fact of physical destruction. The barbarian is in high spirits; but success is not in the habit of confining herself to one spot once she sets foot on the altars of the wicked. And while injustice often waxes strong, it too is eventually confounded to decay. March, therefore, into battle in a manner worthy of the name you bear, lest along with physical losses we also lose our reputation. Let us not abandon the massed shields of our allies, but clasp them tightly as one would with young mistresses at the height of their youth and beauty, and fight on their behalf as though they were our own home towns away from home with us.<sup>10</sup> Play the Spartan in battle: let each man be a Cynegeirus,<sup>11</sup> even though he did not actually get on board a ship.<sup>12</sup> Nothing is more unmanly than to run away, or more abominable than to be taken prisoner. Therefore it behoves us either to die or to translate into reality our expectations of

9. The reference must be to the recently arranged three-year truce, which did not, however, include Armenia. Cf. Theoph. Sim., Lib. III, 12. 10, and also to the earlier truce of much shorter duration, negotiated in the early spring of 565 and mentioned in Lib. III, 12. 3.

10. Cf. n. 7 and reference given there. Stein is probably right in seeing here an allusion to the presence of an Armenian contingent consisting of Vardan Mamikonean and his followers, since these had in fact been obliged to leave their homeland, the principality of the Mamikonids in the district of Tarawn northwest of Lake Van, and to take refuge in Roman Armenia, after the murder of the Persian Marzban in the insurrection of 572. For further details, see Stein, p. 63.

11. Brother of Aeschylus, fought and fell at Marathon (490 B.C.) in a bold attempt to seize a Persian ship by the stern.

12. According to Herodotus VI. 114 his hand was severed from his body with an axe and he fell off.

victory. Feast your eyes on the fresh reinforcements the Caesar<sup>13</sup> has raised, there is not a single weakling among them, the whole contingent is fighting fit; for it was the emperor's good pleasure thus to uphold his honor. So, I who am haranguing you will be the first to do battle. I shall engage the hands of all to endure suffering through my own eagerness in not enduring not to suffer. My eagerness to act is outstripping my eagerness to advocate action and practice becomes the harbinger of theory: for the soul's impetuous ardor is apt to set itself at odds even with the natural order of things. Today angels enlist you and inscribe on their muster rolls the souls of the dead, offering them a recompense not equal to their weight (in gold), but infinitely surpassing that in respect of the bounty to be weighed out.<sup>14</sup> Let no man whose soul is bent on pleasure wield the spear, let no devotee of luxury take part in the secret rites of battle: let no man who prides himself on his possessions share in the enterprise. The line of battle seeks those whose first love is danger. Come let us put an end to words with deeds and channel our theoretical reflections into the practical action of the battlefield.

Though much of this speech if taken up with the often labored and sometimes tortuous elaboration of rhetorical commonplaces, the following passage merits closer scrutiny:

The war is a just one, moreover, not one which has brought immortals into conflict with mortals. The Romans have enlisted justice on their side, since they have even made yet another attempt to find a peaceful solution. The Persians have put justice on the opposing side to themselves; indeed they abominate peace and revere aggression as though it were an auspicious deity.

13. The future Emperor Tiberius I Constantine, proclaimed Caesar on 7 December 574 during a brief period of lucidity by the now insane Justin II.

14. For the practice of paying reward money out of the emperor's privy purse to soldiers who distinguished themselves in the field and for the existence of an official whose job it was to distribute such imperial benefactions to them, see *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque*, ed. R. Keydell. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), Lib. III, 2. 4; Lib. IV, 17. 2-3. The promise spelt out in this elaborate metaphor based on the actualities of contemporary army life, however, is the promise of Eternal Life in return for death in battle, and that is important.

We have no false religion, we have not appointed fictitious divinities to be our leaders. We do not have a god who is subject to the lash, for we do not elect a horse to be an object of worship. We do not worship a god that turns to ashes, burning brightly today and soon not even visible. We do not construct a theology out of smoke and wood, only to have the falseness of its terminology refuted by the fact of physical destruction.

Among the arguments which the general adduces in order to encourage his men to enter the fray boldly the two just quoted are striking both for their content and for their juxtaposition i.e.: 1) The Romans are not the aggressors, therefore right is on their side—a fairly self-evident though universally acknowledged ethical consideration; and 2) the Persians are the followers of a false religion, the Romans, by implication, of the true one—a sort of justification by orthodoxy.

It might prove instructive at this point to take a look at the Qur'an, Sura II, verses 190-94:<sup>15</sup>

And fight in the way of God with those  
who fight with you, but aggress not: God loves not the  
aggressors.  
And slay them wherever you come upon them,  
and expel them from where they expelled you;  
persecution is more grievous than slaying.  
But fight them not by the Holy Mosque  
until they should fight you, slay them—  
such is the recompense of unbelievers—  
but if they give over, surely God is  
All-forgiving, All-compassionate.  
Fight them, till there is no persecution  
and the religion is God's; then if they  
give over, there shall be no enmity save for evildoers.

15. The translation I have used throughout is that of A. J. Arberry. *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964). For the Arabic text I have consulted: *The Quran: The Eternal Revelation Vouchsafed to Muhammad, The Seal of the Prophets*, Arabic text with a new translation by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (London and Dublin: Curzon Press, 1971). As far as the numbering of the verses is concerned, however, the official Egyptian practice, adopted exclusively in *Der Koran* R. Paret, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1980) and in the 1980 reprint of the second edition of the same writer's *Der Koran, Kommentar und Konkordanz*, has been followed throughout.

In these verses, which are among the most celebrated of those devoted to the subject of Jihād,<sup>16</sup> though there is much which belongs specifically to a distinctive historical, geographical, cultural, and religious milieu and to a different historical situation, there are nevertheless several points of similarity between them and the ideas expressed in the Greek passage. In both there is a similar suggestion of moral rectitude deriving from not being the aggressor, a similar exhortation to fight, and a similar justification in terms of believers versus unbelievers. There is perhaps also a certain ambivalence in both cases about the way in which the avoidance of aggression and the necessity to fight with determination are combined.<sup>17</sup> Some of the more obvious formal differences in exposition are clearly functional. In the koranic passage injunction, prohibition, and statement tend to alternate, the statements giving the grounds for the course of action advocated. This is in keeping with its didactic purpose and universal import.<sup>18</sup> In Theophylact, though imperatives abound elsewhere in the speech, we have a series of statements in which affirmation and negation tend to alternate. What is said is taken for granted as being generally accepted by and even well-known to those to whom it is addressed. This is in keeping both with the occasion on which it was delivered and with the probability that it is a mere reflection of the official imperial propaganda of the time.<sup>19</sup>

16. Cf. P. K. Hitti: *History of the Arabs*, 8th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 136, also H.A.R. Gibb, *Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 45. A possible date for the revelation of these verses would be "just before the expedition of al-Hudaybiya in March 628, or perhaps after it," according to W. Montgomery Watt, *Companion to the Qur'an* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 38.

17. It is perhaps interesting in this connection to note that the injunction not to attack first is said to be abrogated by a later verse. Cf. Montgomery Watt, *Companion*.

18. A quick check against the original reveals the following results: eight imperative constructions, of which five are positive imperatives, two are negative i.e., la + the jussive, and one is an example of the special elliptical use of the same negative particle in conjunction with the accusative of a noun (for which cf. W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1896-98, Part Third, section 35) and four statements, of which three are affirmative and one negative.

19. Of course there are other significant differences. For instance, in the koranic passage there is an exhortation to kill if need be, whereas in the Theophylact passage such exhortation would be superfluous. Again the differences are accountable in terms of specific purpose and general historical context. In the first case it is a question of overcoming the natural reluctance felt at the idea of



The next passage is much shorter and perhaps even more remarkable: "Today angels enlist you and inscribe on their muster rolls the souls of the dead, offering them a recompense not equal to their weight in gold, but infinitely surpassing that in respect of the bounty to be weighed out."

Here the Roman general expresses his belief, a belief the expression of which is clothed in imagery drawn from the world of Later Roman and early Byzantine military life,<sup>20</sup> that those who die in battle will be rewarded with Eternal Life. Unlike the earthly reward for valor it cannot be offered by the emperor and personally guaranteed by him, for only God can make and stand over such a promise: hence perhaps the reference to angels.

Now, let us examine briefly Sura IV, verse 74 of the Qur'an:

So let them fight in the way of God who  
sell the present life for the world to come;  
and whosoever fights in the way of God  
and is slain, or conquers, We shall bring him a mighty  
wage.<sup>21</sup>

Here the same reward is promised for a similar sacrifice, though here the promise is made directly, for it is God who is speaking. Also, although the contingency of death in battle is mentioned first, the reward is extended to those who "fight in the way of God and conquer." In both passages the greatness of that reward is emphasized. In neither is there any attempt at description. For the Roman general's hearers any such earthy evocations of the bliss of paradise as abound elsewhere in the Qur'an were ruled out by such passages in scripture as Matthew, 22, 30 and the generally intangible picture of celestial bliss adopted by Christian tradition.<sup>22</sup>

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killing one's kinsmen newly separated from one by the recent espousal of the new faith, in the second of overcoming the Roman soldier's fears on the field of battle, of the possible military superiority of a foreign enemy who had been for centuries the bearer and champion of an alien and largely antagonistic ethos and culture.

20. Cf. n. 14.

21. For the date of this verse, see the following remark of Montgomery Watt, p. 66: "There is no clear account of the occasion when this passage was revealed, but it fits the time just before the second expedition to Badr (a year after Uhud) when no fighting in fact took place." In other words 626, cf. the same author's *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 340.

22. Would his appeal have been any more effective, had it been otherwise? It is a curious fact that in the hostile and scurrilous account of the life and teachings of

In view of the broad similarities established between the various ideas just discussed I would suggest that, if we were to look for a single word to sum up all the most important features which they possess in common, no word would fit such a requirement better than the word "Jihād." Ideas which have such wide implications for the conduct of political affairs and for international relations, however, do not suddenly appear from nowhere by a sort of spontaneous generation but tend rather to have the germs of their existence in some actual event or series of events. It is in this direction, therefore, that the quest for historical significance must apply itself. In the present case we have not far to look.

The Marzban, or governor, of Persarmenia, Čihr-Wšnasp, a scion of the ancient Parthian house of Suren and a relative of the Sassanian king Chosroes I, had made himself extremely unpopular with the local inhabitants by his brutal and high-handed administration. In particular he was responsible for the murder of the Armenian prince Manuel Mamikonean and for the implementation of a decision emanating probably from the monarch himself to build a Fire-Temple in the overwhelmingly Christian town of Dvin. When the Marzban persisted, despite the protests of the Catholicus John III, with the building of the Temple, the latter called upon the Armenians to concert measures of active resistance. Čihr-Wšnasp with a force of only 2,000 cavalry at his disposal and confronted with the determined opposition of approximately 10,000 armed men withdrew temporarily to the court of Chosroes, whence he returned with a force of 15,000 men and strict orders to build the temple and stifle all resistance. When he reached Dvin (in March 571),<sup>23</sup> however, he was attacked and killed by the insurgents whose numbers had risen to 20,000 and who were now led by Vardan Mamikonean, the brother of Manuel. The insurrection spread also to neighboring Iberia, but the tide of war soon turned against the rebels and Vardan, the leaders of the nobility, the Catholicus, and the bishops fled to

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Muhammad given in the ninth-century Byzantine chronicle of the monk Theophanes, straight after the statement that "he [i.e., Muhammad] taught his followers that whoever slew an enemy or was slain by him went to heaven," there then comes a bitter, distorted, and abusive description of some of the features of paradise as described in the Qur'an. Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig: B. G. Teutner, 1883), I, 334, lines 20-27.

23. On 30 March 571 according to P. Goubert, *Byzance avant l'Islam*, Tome I: *Byzance et l'Orient*, (Paris 1951), p. 66. Stein, p. 24 and p. 37, no. 23.

Constantinople, where the emperor, Justin II, accorded them protection and an honorable reception.

When in the spring of 572 the Persian ambassador, Sebokht, arrived in Constantinople to collect the annual tribute agreed upon as part of the terms of the Peace Treaty concluded by Justinian the Great and Chosroes I in 561 and intended to last for fifty years, Justin II refused to pay. When the ambassador expressed his sovereign's displeasure moreover at the turn events had taken in Armenia, the Byzantine emperor replied that he had taken the Armenians under his protection and that he would not stand by and allow his correligionists to suffer injustice. Thus began the third great conflict between Byzantium and Iran. It lasted almost twenty years, did much damage to both empires, and helped pave the way for the last and most horrendous conflict of all.

After various vicissitudes which I propose to describe elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> those ideas which are our chief concern reemerge in a slightly altered form during the reign of Heraclius, as is abundantly clear from even a superficial reading of the historical poems of George of Pisidia and in particular from the first forty lines or so of his verse panegyric on the first Persian campaign of the Emperor Heraclius. Indeed, it may even be that Byzantium in its darkest hour drew from the religious fervor associated with such ideas an intangible source of moral strength which helped to make possible the military victories of Heraclius. We can be reasonably sure, however, that their role was negligible compared with that of similar ideas in enabling an unknown Arabian prophet and his small band of loyal followers to effect the unification and moral regeneration of a people hitherto weakened by an uncertain sense of identity and by constant internecine warfare, which is perhaps one of the reasons why the Arabs have a single word to describe these ideas but the Greeks do not.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHIES

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### BYZANTINE DISSERTATION SURVEY

This installment, compiled in May 1984, is a continuation of the survey published in *BS/EB*, 9, 1 and 2 (1982), and 10 (1983). The survey is intended to report all doctoral dissertations on Byzantine subjects in progress or recently completed at North American universities. From now on, any dissertation which has been "in progress" for more than ten years will be dropped from the list.

#### DISSERTATIONS IN PROGRESS

The address given for each student is intended to remain valid for some time, but may require forwarding. After the name of the university, the department or degree program is named if this is not obvious (and the supervisor is named in parenthesis). The examination date given is the year in which the student completed all requirements preliminary to the dissertation, and should therefore suggest how far the project may have advanced. This list will be kept up to date and reprinted annually with whatever corrections and additions have been submitted.

#### *Art and Archaeology*

Joseph Alcherms (Dumbarton Oaks, 1703 3rd St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20007). "The Cemetery Basilicas of Rome and its Suburbs," New York University, Institute of Fine Arts (Thomas F. Mathews). Exams 1983. The archaeology and function of this distinctive Early Christian building type.

Susan MacMillan Arensberg (2820 28th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008), "The Padua Bible (*London, B.L. Add. 15277; Rovigo, Accademia dei Concordi, Ms. 212*) and the Phenomenon of the Late Medieval Picture Bible," Johns Hopkins University (H. L. Kessler). Exams 1981.

24. Cf. n. 2.