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LIFE AND TIME OF JOHN OF DAMASCUS

A Thesis Presented

by

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## PREFACE

The present study is the result of a desire to know about a countryman and a great Saint of the Christian Church. My interest goes back to my childhood when I used to pass a street named after Saint John of Damascus, and later on, in my studies of the Patristic Age, my attention was caught by the many references to the same name. Finding that the English sources were deficient in information on the life of The Damascene, and since I was majoring in the Patristic field, I thought that it would be a contribution to the field if a new study was made on the life and time of John of Damascus.

The Damascene is an integral part of his faith and environment. Hence no study can explain fully the enigmatic life of one, who renounced the luxury and honour of the Umayyad palace for the poverty of the Monastery of Saint Saba, without taking into consideration the historical milieu in which he was born and nurtured. Consequently, in the first chapter an attempt is made to describe briefly the general policies of the Byzantine Empire in the sixth and early seventh centuries as they relate to Syria in general and Damascus in particular, taking into consideration some specialized problems. The second chapter deals with the immediate time and place of The Damascene, namely, Damascus

in the Umayyad period. After the biography, I have presented a short summary of his works leaving aside ascribed or apocryphal material and have concluded with a brief note about the significance of The Damascene in regard to some of the main movements of his day, such as Iconoclasm, Christian thought, and Islam. The last two chapters are by no means conclusive but are rather the initial notes of a voluminous work which is beyond the scope of the present study. The purpose of this study is to focus the defused information about John of Damascus into a narrative which depicts his life and work. No originality is claimed beyond the benefit of getting to know The Damascene and putting together scattered information.

This study would not have reached its present form without the assistance of my professors Dr. B. Thurston and Dr. W. Ward of the American University of Beirut, Dr. L. Fisher of the Claremont Graduate School, and my wife who patiently undertook the trouble of reading the text and making helpful suggestions and corrections. I acknowledge my indebtedness to Father Joseph Nasrallah's scholarly work and articles on The Damascene which played a considerable role in providing or suggesting information. I hope that this work is worthy of some of the benefit which I received in great measure from the aforementioned, and from the libraries of The American University of Beirut, University of St. Joseph of Beirut, Aleppo College, Honnold of The Claremont Colleges, The University of California at Berkeley, and The University of California at Los Angeles.

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## CHAPTER I

### DAMASCUS ON THE EVE OF THE ARAB CONQUEST

Syria was an integral part of the Byzantine Empire. Consequently it was a partaker in its fortunes and misfortunes in the sixth and early seventh centuries. The elements which combined to form the complex civilization of the Empire were the Roman tradition in law and government, the Hellenistic tradition in language, literature, and philosophy, and the Christian tradition in religion and faith. The prevailing conviction was that the Empire was a part of God's will, and because of this was protected by Him. With God's approval secure, the Empire would become God's instrument in realizing His will on earth. This concept of a kind of theocracy affected both the domestic and foreign policy of the Empire. "The Sovereign and the Byzantine State were both Defenders of Faith."<sup>1</sup> Inside the Empire the Emperors tried to implement God's will and strove to defend the community of believers against its foe, the unbeliever, who could be a heretic, a Persian, or an Arab. Its foreign policy was to conquer the unbeliever in order to convert him

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<sup>1</sup>N.H. Baynes (ed.), *Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. xxi.

to Christianity. In war, the icons and crosses preceded the marching armies of "Christ the Victor."

The Justinian dynasty dominates the history of the sixth century. It drew the basic lines to which the following dynasties responded either positively or negatively. The Emperor who gave his name to the dynasty and who is the central figure of the century is Justinian The Great (527-565). Therefore any conclusive discussion of the historical setting of this period has to deal with the policies of Justinian and their effect on the Empire.

#### Policies of Byzantine Emperors

Justinian inherited an empire which was suffering with grave wounds from the past. The Empire had failed to evolve a political system that could ensure either stability to the throne or prosperity to the nation. Seditions in the cities, abjection in the country, ill-disciplined troops in the camp, unfaithfulness in office,<sup>1</sup> division within the Church and Empire, and enslavement of the farmers moved Justinian to introduce his great reforms in order to remedy the situation.

For the last time a purely Roman-minded Emperor, Latin in speech and thought, would rule on the Bosphorus. In him the theory of Roman sovereignty would find its fullest expression in Byzantium and most rigorous application. Roman sovereignty involved, in his view, the restoration of the Old Roman Empire, and the propagation

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<sup>1</sup>W.G. Holmes, *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1912), I, 194.

and victory of the orthodox faith in both the East and the West. He was inspired by the vision of Constantine The Great, the vision of one empire and one religion. In pursuance of this policy, Africa was retaken from the Vandals (534), Italy from the Ostrogoths (537), Southern Spain restored to the Empire, and, as a result, all the Mediterranean basin was opened for Byzantine commerce and shipping.

Justinian endeavored to ensure the defense and security of the Empire by the institution of high military commands which were entrusted to the *Magistri Militum*. He created military zones on all the frontiers which were occupied by special troops, *Limitanei*. He ordered the building of a continuous line of fortresses, with strongholds behind them, along the frontier. In addition to these military measures, Byzantine diplomacy brought under its suzerainty the barbarian tribes which drifted along the frontiers of the Empire. This goal was achieved by diverse methods such as judicious distribution of favors and money, ingenious craft in inciting one tribe against the other, religious propaganda and commerce. Thus the Empire established for itself a constituency of vassals along its frontier.<sup>1</sup>

The policy of Justinian in the West had been essentially offensive. In the East, it was restricted rather to a defensive program. Justinian was anxious to preserve all his forces for the realization of his dream. Consequently

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<sup>1</sup> C. Diehl, *History of the Byzantine Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925), pp. 28-29. Cited hereafter as *Hist. Bys. Emp.*.

he did not seek military conquests in the East, and submitted to war only when he had no other alternative. He maintained the safety of the Empire in the East by military arrangements which were combined with clever diplomatic maneuverings. However, the Emperors' indulgence in the West had absorbed the resources of the Empire, and lack of money led to the disorganization of the military institutions formed to protect the East. Corps of *Limitanei* were disbanded; the fighting force of the troops along the front in Syria was diminished; "strong positions were left without defence and often bereft of garrisons altogether."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned hazards was the Persian menace, the perpetual enemy of the Romans. Both Empires strove to dominate Syria, and consequently Syria became the battleground on which both sides met and fought. During Justinian's rule, two major wars were fought between the two sides. The result of the first was the so-called "Perpetual Peace," which was bought by an indemnity of one hundred and ten centenaries of gold which was to be paid by the Byzantine Emperor. The second war, however, was more disastrous to the Empire in general and to Syria in particular. When Chosroes, the King of Persia, marched through Syria his object was not conquest but money and loot. He proceeded methodically to sack the towns. He also exacted a pecuniary ransom from small towns. His demands rose as he

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<sup>1</sup>C. Diehl, "Justinian's Government in the East," *The Cambridge Medieval Hist.*, ed. J.B. Burry, II (1913), 37. Cited hereafter as *Camb. Med. Hist.*, II.



went along, and the cities which could not satisfy him, were doomed to be sacked and burned. Many Syrian cities such as Aleppo and Antioch were ravaged, the latter being leveled by pillage and fire, losing most of its citizenry through outright slaughter or seizure as captives.

Thus, when Justinian died, he left behind him an exhausted Empire which was crying for help. An answer was attempted by his successors. They inaugurated a new policy by recognizing where the vital interests of the Empire were, namely in the East. The northern and eastern frontiers were the gateways to the capital. Anatolia and Syria provided for the agricultural, industrial, and commercial needs of the Empire. The rest of the century was occupied by successful efforts to reduce the consequences of Justinian's one-sided policy. Hence, instead of aggression in the west, passive defence was substituted, and a network of small alliances was attempted. All such gains were swept away by the revolution of 602, which brought a reign of terror and anarchy to the Empire.

"The seventh century was one of the darkest periods in Byzantine history."<sup>1</sup> It was a time of grave uncertainty. The reason for this condition was twofold; from without the Persians and the Arabs attacked the exhausted Empire, from within a critical change was taking place; the transformation from Roman to Greek thought was producing an oriental character.

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<sup>1</sup>Diehl, *Hist. Bys. Emp.*, p. 40.

In 610 Heraclius, the son of the governor of Carthage, was able to force his way to the throne. However, after he ascended the throne, he was unable to keep the Persians from continuing their advance into the Empire. They took Antioch in 614, and Damascus in 615. The Persian army advanced as far as Chalcedon. In an attempt to bring peace and order, Heraclius refashioned the army, and repaired the shattered finances by a strict economy which reduced the size and expenses of the armies. After some deliberation Heraclius attacked the Persians and was able to regain his provinces only to lose them forever to the armies of the Caliph 'Omar. The loss of Syria and other provinces to the Arabs led to a counter measure on the part of the Empire, the building up in Asia Minor of a new military system. The countryside was organized into a series of military provinces or themes, which were named after the regiments stationed in the area, and took the place of the older provinces. Each theme was under the control of a *Strategos*, or general, with a *Proconsul* under him to look after the civil administration. The soldiers settled on the land, especially in the frontier regions to form a sort of territorial force.<sup>1</sup> Land grants were also made to farmers subject to an inheritable obligation in the army.

Some scholars like Ostrogosky<sup>2</sup> have argued that the new system which Heraclius introduced marked the beginning

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

of a distinctively Byzantine Empire. It was on this system and its successful maintenance that the defence of the Empire depended. This new Empire was the reply of the Christian East to the threat of Islam. "Here there is no continuity with the old Roman Empire:" says Toynbee as quoted by Baynes, "but a reassertion of imperial absolutism and of administrative centralization to meet changed conditions."<sup>1</sup>

Ever since 1200 B.C. , Damascus had been a metropolis. First the Arameans made it their capital and then successive waves of conquerors from the East and the West took Damascus as their headquarters for the southern province of Syria. The territory of this city was so extensive that during the rule of Tiberius it had boundary disputes with Sidon.<sup>2</sup> In the third century colonial rights were conferred on Damascus by its Roman rulers, who formerly had been suspicious of its loyalty because of its tendency to gravitate towards the desert and its inhabitants.

When Justinian launched his reforms, he combined some provinces and offices; where it was necessary he kept the status quo but increased the taxes. Being in a frontier province called *Phoenicia Libanensis* , Damascus was not subject to change. The military commands and civil governors remained separate and co-ordinate. In order to raise the status of the civil governors and prevent them from falling under the power of the army, something which had happened

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities*, Bk. xviii, chap. 683.

frequently in the past, they received an increase in salary and the title of moderator.<sup>1</sup> Damascus had a *rationalis*, who was an officer that represented the supreme *rationalis* at the Emperor's court. The latter were the ministers who had served in the central administrative body and formed the *Comes Largitionum Sacrarum Largitionum*. In the East the provincial *rationalis* were raised to the dignity of *comites* and were in charge of the gold mines, mints, and the state factories of arms and clothes. They supervised the revenue department, the commerce, and the depots (thesauri) of gold and silver.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the seventh century, the λογοθέτης replaced the *Comites Largitionum* in Damascus.<sup>3</sup> This office was held by Mansur ibn-Sarjun, the grandfather of John of Damascus.

### Economic Difficulties

In the sixth century the economic vitality of the Empire was sapped by three essential groups of the Byzantine Empire: the officials, the landowners, and the military. In addition to this, an exorbitant amount of money was spent on the Barbarians both in war and bribery, giving us a fairly complete picture of the factors which caused what Diehl describes as "an extraordinarily disturbed condition."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 28-602* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1964), I, 282.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 427.

<sup>3</sup>L. Brehier, *Les Institutions de l'Empire Byzantin* (Paris: 1949), pp. 249-256.

<sup>4</sup>Diehl, *Hist. Byz. Emp.*, p. 529.

What other resources the Empire could muster went to the West, and so the East suffered from a gradual drainage of its resources, so much so that revolutions in the provinces and even in the capital were not uncommon.

In Byzantium the sale of public offices was an ancient custom which led to deplorable results in the sixth century. After paying money to obtain their office, the governors expected to recoup their losses from the province and amass as much wealth as they could. The lower officers followed their superiors and by doing so ruined the district and the taxpayer, bringing disorder and destitution to the provinces. On the judicial level the law was obscure and antiquated, leading to an arbitrary and partial administration of justice in the provinces. All of this resulted in a general feeling of insecurity and caused the immigration of the working classes from the towns of the provinces into the big cities, especially Constantinople. The people left the country; the towns were emptied, the fields deserted, and the agriculture abandoned. According to an official document, the country had become "quite uninhabitable," because of "the wickedness of the officials."<sup>1</sup> Complaints and complainers poured into the capital adding new elements of disorder and discontent which burst into the dangerous Nika Riot of 532 A.D.

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<sup>1</sup>Diehl, *Cam. Med. Hist.*, II, p. 153.

The second group which contributed to the economic bankruptcy of the Empire was composed of the great landowners: wealthy civilians, former army personnel, and the monasteries. These were strong enough to defend themselves and escape the exactions of the tax collector who drove the small landowners and farmers off their lands. In the imperial Novels of the sixth century there is continual mention of civilian landowners, who disturbed the Empire by their assaults upon the people and property of the countryside. Their rapacity was notably disturbing in the Asiatic provinces where murder, brigandism, agitation, and risings abounded. These self-styled tyrants obtained vast provinces, had numberless dependents who ran the businesses for them, and maintained troops of armed men at their own expense. Ruthlessly and without fear, they ravaged the countryside, harried and oppressed the people, and seized what lands they chose, including those belonging to the Church, and even to the Emperor himself. "The countryside was laid waste by these raids on goods and property, of which local administrators often took their share; the inhabitants fled, agriculture ceased."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the gluttony and greed of these landowners, the monasteries attracted both property and men into their domain, emptying the Empire of men and goods on which

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<sup>1</sup>C. Diehl, *Byzantium: Greatness and Decline*, trans. N. Walford (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 153.

it depended more than anything else. In one sense the monasteries helped those who were disillusioned with the so-called Christian society by giving them hope in the spiritual realm, but they failed in that they kept those who came to them within their walls. The monasteries grew as an economic and political institution which could stand against the monarch. Any visitor to Syria is able to see the remains of these monasteries which dominated the countryside and even the towns. Some of these monasteries such as that of St. Simeon the Stylite and St. Daniel near Aleppo, are monumental evidence of the power which monasticism exercised over the inhabitants of Syria and the whole Byzantine Empire.

The army presented another source of discontent. Although it was an excellent army in war, it had faults which are inseparable from mercenary armies. It was composed of a heterogeneous multitude, trained in the profession of arms, but without the cohesion of nationality or uniform military discipline. Often barbarian contingents, called *foederati*, obeying their own leaders, served the Emperor.<sup>1</sup> Their only tie being materialistic, they pillaged mercilessly wherever they went. They had "an insatiable greed for gold, wine, and women, and with thoughts always bent on plunder, they easily slipped the yoke of discipline, and imposed unheard of conditions on their generals."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup>Diehl, *Cam. Med. Hist.*, II, p. 11.

Resulting from this grim economic situation, were some consequences to which the Empire could not be indifferent. A feudal society was emerging in which the public welfare received a secondary place to that of the great landowners. "The middle class was slowly disappearing and with its proletarianization the threat of social strife was growing."<sup>1</sup> The revenue from the taxes was falling away because its chief source, the peasant, was disappearing. The Imperial security was endangered because of the loss of national pride, this pride being intimately connected with the workers of the soil. Consequently patriotic devotion began to wither. A man had no zeal left in him to defend a state which allowed him to be despoiled.

This was the condition of the Empire which was thrust into the hands of Justinian. He calculated that only one-third of the taxes imposed reached the treasury, and the poverty of his subjects destroyed the source of the public wealth and his main income. Because of these factors the Emperor was greatly concerned with the economic affairs of the East.

Being organized both in disposition and in training, he undertook to reform this chaotic state by giving the Empire "definite and indisputable laws."<sup>2</sup> In 529, the Justinian Code was proclaimed, and in subsequent years new

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<sup>1</sup>R. Guerdan, *Byzantium, Its Triumphs and Tragedy*, trans. D.L.B. Harlley (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1957), p.85.

<sup>2</sup>Diehl, *Hist. Byz. Emp.*, p. 44.



additions followed until 565, when the work was completed, known as the *Corpus Juris Civilis*. This new body of law described the duties of the officials and the responsibilities of the citizens. Justinian abolished the sale of offices, increased the salaries, suppressed useless departments in the government, united the civil and military powers in some provinces, and centralized the main activities of the Empire in the capital. He gave great impetus to public works throughout the Empire, and applied himself to develop the industrial wealth and commercial activity of the Empire. Although the Persian kings caused some difficulties, Byzantine commerce, as a whole, prospered in the sixth century. This is evident from the universal credit which Byzantine currency enjoyed. Byzantine coins have been found in India and the Near East, as well as in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the Emperor's good intentions, his administrative reform was not successful. From the statements of public documents we learn that officials continued to steal, "in their shameful love of gain."<sup>2</sup> The soldiers continued to pillage, and justice was slow and corrupt as it had been before. The Emperor needed money for his wars, his buildings, his imperial luxury, and for bribery of the barbarians. Hence at the end of

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<sup>1</sup> J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), II, p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> Diehl, *Hist. Byz. Emp.*, p. 42.

his rule we find him ready to tolerate any amount of exaction in order to provide for his needs. A contemporary describes the stage which this financial tyranny had reached by saying that, "a foreign invasion seemed less formidable to the taxpayer than the arrival of the officials of the fisc."<sup>1</sup>

The result of this deplorable economic situation was that the proceeds from taxes were quickly diminished by the constant demands of the treasury. The army was reduced in numbers and often delayed in receiving its salary. The cities, forced to economize, withdrew the public salaries which they previously had paid to physicians and teachers. "Advocates are said to have been jobless because people did not have enough money to hire them."<sup>2</sup> Some towns could not even finance the lighting of the streets. The misery suffered was terrible enough to justify the sinister statement of John Lydus, "The tax-gatherers could find no more money to take to the Emperor, because there were no people left to pay the taxes."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned, notice must be made of the natural catastrophies which befell the Empire. In 551, a severe earthquake shook the Empire destroying important cities and centers in Syria. Five years later

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<sup>1</sup>A.A. Vasiliev, *History of The Byzantine Empire* (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1961), I, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup>Diehl, *Hist. Bys. Emp.*, p. 43.

saw the scourge of famine, and in 558 came the plague which desolated not only the capital but other parts of the Empire such as Syria and its main cities.

The successors of Justinian were faced not only with this weak financial state, but with the Avars on the Danubian frontier and the Persians in the East. They struggled to resuscitate the Empire but faced so much opposition that they had difficulty in procuring mercenaries. Consequently, we read that the armies of the Emperor Maurice consisted chiefly of subjects of the Empire. Conscription became very frequent and lasted for a long time. The *Strategikon*, a military manual ascribed to the Emperor Maurice, speaks of military service for all subjects which lasted until their fortieth year.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most important economic components of the Empire was the province of Syria. Constantinople depended heavily upon Syrian agriculture, commerce and industry, as well as on its taxes. The condition of Syria's agriculture and taxes fluctuated according to the policies and administrative corruption of the Empire. It followed what has been described as the general situation of the provinces. The trade and textile industry, being more peculiar to Syrian economy, had different developments.

Syrian commerce has a long history which can be traced from the beginning to the end of the Empire.

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<sup>1</sup> Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

Particularly in the second and third centuries, the Mediterranean basin was colonized by the Syri, a term used to describe those who came from the eastern part of the Empire. "Among all the races of the Empire the most active in these mercantile ventures were the Syrians."<sup>1</sup> They developed settlements on the Mediterranean coast and inland along the commercial highways and rivers. The islands of Delos and Sicily were seats of strong Syrian colonies. A bilingual epitaph of the third century found in Gual mentions a Syrian merchant from Kanatha who owned two factories in the Rhone basin, from where he imported goods from Aquitania.<sup>2</sup>

The new division of the Empire which the Byzantines instituted after Constantine The Great did not affect foreign trade relations with Syria. "Throughout the Mediterranean world the eastern merchandise was disseminated by Syrian merchants, who had their stations in every port,"<sup>3</sup> and acted on the side as news carriers. By way of example, a Syrian trader told Saint Simeon The Stylite the story of St. Genevieve.

The merchants may be divided into two classes, resident and itinerant. The resident Syrian merchants

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<sup>1</sup>A.E.R. Boak, *A History of Rome to 565 A.D.* (rev. ed.; New York: 1930), p. 319.

<sup>2</sup>P.K. Hitti, *History of Syria* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1951), p. 347.

<sup>3</sup>Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

were all over the Byzantine Empire. Their settlements did not cease to flourish. They could be found among other commercial centers in Rome, Naples, Carthage, Marseille, and Bordeaux. Even in Merovingian Gaul many of the shopkeepers were Jews and Syrians. When King Guntram entered Orleans in 585, he was greeted by acclamations in Hebrew, Syriac, and Latin.<sup>1</sup> Some of these merchants were very prosperous. "Eusebius, a Syrian merchant of Paris, was rich enough to outbid his local rivals for the bishopric of the city in 591."<sup>2</sup> Imports consisted of grains and luxury articles: from Ascalon and Gaza came wines, purple from Caesarea, woven fabrics from Tyre and Berytus, pistachios and sword blades from Damascus and embroidered textiles and glassware from several other Syrian towns.

The itinerant merchants can be divided into two classes, those who travelled by land and those who travelled by sea. The former were of wide variety and ranged from huge camel caravans that crossed the desert loaded with perfumes, spices, and precious stones of India and Arabia, to the humble peddler who frequented the village fair with his odd assortment of wares.

Maritime commerce was a very highly developed enterprise of the Empire. It extended beyond the limits of the Mediterranean into the Indian Ocean and went as

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory of Tours, *Historiae Francorum*, Bk. viii, chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 866.

far as China. We hear of a Syrian merchant in China as early as the third Christian century.<sup>1</sup> By the seventh century large settlements were to be found there. Many people were involved in maritime commerce. The shippers carried not only their own cargo but merchants with their wares, which they would sell in the ports along the way. The ships took the Syrian exports and brought tin from Europe, spices, gold, and precious stones from Africa and India, and silk from China.

The silk industry assumed great importance in the Byzantine Empire; its entire trade was controlled by the Syrians. In order to develop industry and commerce in his Empire, Justinian paid great attention to the silk industry. However, his success depended on his ability to control the regular flow of silk from China. The Persians controlled the import, which varied according to the ever-changing diplomatic relations between the two rivals. Hence Justinian ventured to free the Byzantine merchants from the tyranny of the middleman, the Persians. Syrian merchants set out from Aila, on the Gulf of Aqabah, to work the shores of the Red Sea and get as far as India and Ceylon, from where they could bring silk. Justinian, not wanting to limit his changes, ventured on other circuitous routes. But the Persians had the upper hand in the Indian ports and would not allow themselves to be

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<sup>1</sup>F. Hirth, *China and the Roman Empire* (Leipzig: 1885, reprinted in China 1939), pp. 255-56.

deprived of their profits. Through war and peace the flow of silk continued and Syrian products flourished.

In 540, a rupture occurred between Persia and Byzantium which brought about a grave crisis for the Syrian manufacturers. Justinian made matters worse by regulating the price of the raw silk, thus ruining the silk industry. The craftsmen, who were humble manual workers, were threatened with starvation by this situation, and consequently many of them left the country and migrated to Persia.<sup>1</sup> Thereupon Justinian bought the factories of Tyre and Berytus, and turned the silk industry into an imperial monopoly from which he obtained an immense profit, though ruining the industry. Fortunately his successors did not follow his policy; Syria's textile industry recovered, and, with new changes, Syrian manufacturers found markets as far as China. In general it can be said that Syria was able to maintain a certain balance and not be ruined completely by the Empire's economic poverty. This was because of its trade and industry which depended on the ingenuity of the Syrians rather than on their rulers, whose excellence lay in their ability to extort money from their impoverished subjects.

Damascus, being situated between the desert and the mountains, with its fertile soil and abundant water, has

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<sup>1</sup>Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 862.

been able to support human habitation from the dawn of history until today. The natural barrier between the town and the sea forced Damascus to turn its attention towards the interior where it lay along the caravan routes. Being situated in the midst of a rich oasis, the city served as a market place for the nomads, and as a halt for the caravans that joined the Euphrates with the Nile.<sup>1</sup>

During the Byzantine period Damascus was the most important city of the province of *Phoenicia Libanesis*. It was a prosperous city, rich in agricultural, mineral, and industrial products. The gardens of al-Ghouta were fertile land for grains, vegetables, and fruit-trees such as pistachio and apricot. It had alabaster quarries, an item of great demand in the capital of the Empire. Damascus was famous for its armories. Due to its earlier experience in making weapons, Diocletian established armories there, and consequently it became the seat of an arsenal.<sup>2</sup> The Damascene sword blades were an international item of commerce. Although Damascus was not one of the two cities that was famous for its silk products, it had silk factories; however, its specialty was linen mattresses and bolsters of which there were three grades that sold at 1.750, 1.250, and 800 denarii.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>N. Elisseeff, "Dimashk," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (London: Luzac and Co., 1965), II, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup>Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 834.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 849.



To all of these natural resources and home products must be added the city's strategic location on the main trade routes, thus providing the city with natural arteries for the circulation of its commerce.

Damascus was doing well until the Second Persian War when Chosroes II, fearing the success of Justinian in the West, started on his bloody campaigns. In 615, Damascus was attacked by the Persian armies who invoked great suffering upon its inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The city was devastated; its fortunes were plundered; many of its inhabitants were killed, while others were deported into Persia as slaves. The Persians persecuted the Christians and made Damascus their headquarters for propagating the extermination of all the Christians. In Damascus they were joined by 26,000 Jews who attacked Jerusalem, conquered it, and ransacked the holy places.<sup>2</sup> It was not until Heraclius recaptured the city from the Persians that Damascus began to recover from its heavy losses, and the city of great commerce was restored to its former grandeur and active life.

#### Contending Christian Groups

The Christian Church in its attempts to define and defend its faith suffered from divisions and splits within

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<sup>1</sup>Cedranus, edition Bonn, I, 714-715; Theophane, *Chronographia*, I, 463.

<sup>2</sup>P. Sykes, *A History of Persia* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), I, 482.

its ranks which provided a fertile ground for heresies and sects. These divisions proved to survive longer than the heresies which the Church was combating. Thus in the sixth century we find factions within the Church struggling to gain prominence in the Empire. The main contestants were the Sees of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and, later on, Constantinople and Jerusalem. Each of these had its own school of thought which presented its theological opinion within an Aristotelian or Neo-platonic frame of thought. The main centers of the theological ferment were Antioch and Alexandria. Through the first six centuries of development, most of the Church was divided among Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, Duophysites, Monothelites, and the Donatists; all, except the last, developed in the Eastern part of the Byzantine Empire. Meanwhile the Church of Rome was more involved with the problems of the West, namely the Barbarians. In relation to the East it played the role of an arbiter, never forgetting to assert its claims of primacy.

The first problem that confronted the Church concerned the relationship of Jesus Christ to God, the Father. A priest of Alexandria named Arius, who was the pupil of one of the students of Origen, preached a doctrine which subordinated the Son to the Father. Proceeding from the philosophical premise that God is the eternal and unknowable monad, he argued that the Son was created by the Father and

thus inferior to the latter. This line of thinking was dangerous for the Church of Alexandria. Arius was excommunicated in Egypt whence he went to Caesarea of Palestine, Antioch, and Nicomedia. Here were some illustrious students of Lucian, the great Origenist scholar, who supported his doctrines. The debate between the Alexandrian and Antiochean theologians became so acute that Constantine The Great was obliged to summon the First Ecumenical Council to convene in Nicea in 325. The result was the condemnation of Arius, a definite split in the Church, and the Nicene Creed which defined the relation of the Son to the Father as being of the same substance, ὁμοουσιον τῷ πατρί . An unforeseen result was the beginning of imperial intervention in ecclesiastical affairs, which set a precedence that became too costly for both the Christian Church and the Empire. Till the end of the century debates continued, and the Emperors' positions shifted, according to their policies, from the Nicene to the Arian points of view.

Having officially solved the problem concerning the relation of the Son to the Father, the Christian Church was faced with another one, namely the relationship between the human and divine aspects of Christ. An answer was given by another Antiochean, Nestorius, the Bishop of Constantinople. He taught that in Jesus the divine and human aspects were joined in perfect harmony of action, and yet, they were two

separate natures. Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria opposed him and suggested that the divine aspect in Christ was superior to the human element. When the third Ecumenical Council was convened, it condemned Nestorius, whereupon a few churches in Northern Syria seceded and formed independent bodies under the protection of Persia.

The Christological controversy was not easily terminated by a council. A few years later it was revived in another form. What was suggested mildly by Cyril of Alexandria was carried to an extreme by Eutyches, one of his followers in Constantinople, who taught that Christ had only one nature, the divine having absorbed the human. Constantinople, Rome, and Antioch joined in their opposition to this monophysitic interpretation of the nature of Christ. In the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, Monophysitism was declared a heresy, thus bringing triumph to those who held to the two natures of Christ.

The Council of Chalcedon left behind it two sharp and distinct divisions within the churches of Syria, the Monophysites and Duophysites, or believers in two natures. The latter remained as a small body in Syria, This community secured orthodoxy by its adherence to the Council's Creed. Thus it escaped the persecution and excommunication which befell the other churches of Syria. The Emperor looked on it with special favour and protected its interests. "By way of reproach their opponents, centuries later, nicknamed

them Malkites, royalists."<sup>1</sup> The majority of the Malkites were city-dwellers and Greeks who gradually replaced the Syriac liturgy with the Greek. This contributed to their separation and identification with the foreign and aristocratic rulers whose unpopularity increased with the passage of time.

Monophysitism ultimately survived only in Syria and Mesopotamia. The great organizer of the Monophysite Church was the Bishop of Edessa, Jacob Baradaeus, who consecrated several Bishops in Syria. Consequently, the Syrian Monophysites came to be called Jacobites. They had great missionary zeal and spread their doctrine to places outside Syria and farther East. They were very popular among the Arab tribes that had settled in southern Syria. However, the Monophysite doctrine had been outlawed by the Byzantine government, and religious tolerance was not a particular trait of the Empire. Any deviation from the religious credo of the ruling Emperors was outlawed by the Emperors or Church councils. Consequently, under Justinian and his successors, the Monophysite Church suffered the misfortunes of a dissenter.

Justinian was concerned about the Church because of personal interest and public welfare. He heaped upon it

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

special favors and protection, "but at the same time despotically he imposed his will upon it, proclaiming himself emperor and priest."<sup>1</sup> With an eye to western goodwill, Justinian attempted to heal the schism between Rome and Constantinople which was caused by doctrinal disputes. The prize which he offered to the West was Monophysitism. The Monophysite Church was anathematized throughout the Empire, and subjected to vigorous persecution. Syria, being its headquarters, suffered the terrible consequences of this policy. The Patriarch Severus of Antioch was deposed and anathematized by the Synod of Tyre (518). During this persecution which continued for three years, more than fifty Bishops were chased from their Sees; many convents were closed, and the monks who survived imprisonment or massacre were reduced to flight. The persecution, however, did not weaken the cause of the Monophysites whose agitation continued to spread secretly throughout the East and even in the capital itself. In fact, Justinian's religious policies resulted in a revival of separatist tendencies in Egypt and Syria. They roused the fury of the populace against the Emperor and his supporters, the Malkites. Theodora, Justinian's wife, was more perceptive than her husband and recognized the main facets of the political problems which were breeding the popular form of theological disagreements. She felt that the religious

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<sup>1</sup>Diehl, *Hist. Byz. Emp.*, p. 543.

differences by which the oriental nations manifested their separatist tendencies threatened danger to the monarchy. In order to pacify the growing discontent, she sided with the Monophysites, defending their cause in the palace, and gaining opportune concessions for them.<sup>1</sup>

Justin, the successor of Justinian, tried to bring about a reconciliation between the Monophysites and the Malkites. Being exasperated by their refusal to come to an agreement, he began, in 571, a fierce persecution of the Monophysites, the horrors of which are depicted by John of Ephesus. Emperor Maurice in his later years (598-599) also reverted, as Justin had done, to a policy of religious persecution in his endeavour to force the Chalcedonian orthodoxy on Syria. And when Phocas came to the throne, he tried to maintain order by terror. In 607, he expelled the Jacobite Patriarch of Alexandria, and deprived Syria and Egypt of the right of choosing an ecclesiastical dignitary without his permission. In 608, he brought military interference to prevent a meeting which was to be held between the Patriarchs of Syria and Egypt to discuss their common problems. The Jacobite populace which was augmented by the Jews resisted the Imperial troops. They slew the Malkite Patriarch, and the rioters gained the day. As a result, later on, the Emperor was able to

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<sup>1</sup>Diehl, *Camb. Med. Hist.*, II, p. 27.

establish his authority only with great difficulty and by very cruel means.

A more conciliatory attempt was made by Heraclius. He strove, in concert with the Patriarch of Alexandria and others from both parties, to find a formula of conciliation which would regain the dissenters. From these attempts sprang the Monothelite doctrine which spoke of Christ as having one will. This formula came too late for Syria, which was soon to be conquered by the Arabs. The new formula did not satisfy either side. Eutychius, the Christian historian of the tenth century, reports that the citizens of Emesa (Homs) called the Emperor a "Monothlet and enemy of the faith."<sup>1</sup> Religion received great importance during and after Heraclius, the reason being the rise of a new enemy, the Saracenes. The wars of the Emperor against this enemy were taken as crusades. "The emperors were passionately interested in theological problems. From that time on, orthodoxy and nationality meant the same thing at Byzantium."<sup>2</sup>

From this short survey of the religious situation of the Byzantine Empire we are able to conclude that by the beginning of the seventh century the Christian Church was divided between the Monophysites and Malkites who were

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<sup>1</sup>Vasilieve, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>Diehl, *Hist. Byz. Emp.*, p. 49.



both dissatisfied with the religious policies of the Empire. "It was the unyielding policy of the emperors that rendered the provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt ready to secede from the Byzantine Empire."<sup>1</sup>

Damascus was not only a center of commerce but also displayed a flourishing religious life. The town was first dominated by the gigantic quadrangular temple which dates to the ninth century B.C.. In the Christian era the Church of St. John the Baptist was built on the same site. There are several shrines in and around the city, some of which antedate the Apostle Paul. Hence we can say that the city had a long standing in the religious tradition of the Near East. Ibn-'Asaker has preserved for us the names of more than twenty-five churches,<sup>2</sup> which were situated in different parts of the fortified city. Some of these churches belonged to the Jacobites, but most of them belonged to the Malkites, whose Metropolitan came after the Patriarch of Antioch in the Malkite hierarchy.

What was here described as the religious policies of the Empire in general, is applicable to Damascus in particular, where the rivalry between the two parties often led to bloody persecutions and accusations of heresy. Hence, we are not surprised when we read the report of Baladhouri,

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<sup>1</sup>Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> ابن عساكر، تهذيب تاريخ ابن عساكر (دمشق المكتبة العربية) الطبعة الأولى  
الجزء الأول ص ٢٤١ - ٢٤٢.

an Arab historian of the ninth century, in which he quotes the Syrians as saying to the Arab conquerors, "Your rule and your justice are more agreeable to us than that tyranny and those insults to which we have been subject."<sup>1</sup>

### Specialized Problems

Before the Muslim Conquest, Syria had witnessed the rise and fall of three Arab states on its southern border. The founders of these states were Arab nomads who migrated northward from Arabia, abandoned the pastoral in favour of the sedentary way of life, and engaged in agriculture and trade. The oldest of these states was that of Nabatia which flourished in the fourth century B.C.. It commanded the trade routes of Syria including that of Damascus. Around 85 B.C., Coele-Syria was taken by the Nabateans from the Seleucids, and Damascus put itself under their protection. This dependence was motivated by the Damascene's hatred for the Iturraean Tetrarch of Chalcis (Anjar). Even after the incorporation of Syria by Pompey in 64 B.C., the Nabateans maintained Damascus for a tribute which they paid to Rome. This state continued until Harithath IV, in whose reign Damascus passed into Roman hands. Culturally, the Nabateans are described as Greco-Aramean, and politically, the state assumed the role of a client or ally of Rome.<sup>2</sup> Its capital

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<sup>1</sup>Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

was Petra, a metropolis which had a unique architecture. It was carved in the bosom of sandstone rock displaying the vivid colours of the area.

As the sun of Petra began to set, that of Palmyra, another caravan city and the second Arab state, began to rise across the Syrian frontier. Its economic condition reached such a stage of prosperity as to make it one of the richest cities of the Near East. With its economic growth came the expansion of its military influence over Syria, part of Asia Minor, and northern Arabia. In 270 A.D., Zobda, a Palmyrene general, marched at the head of 70,000 soldiers into Egypt. Rome, having realized the threat which this desert town was presenting, sent the Emperor Aurelian himself to subdue the Palmyrenes, which he was able to do. He destroyed the capital for its rebellion and killed its inhabitants. Henceforth, Palmyra fell into oblivion except for short periods of restoration.

From the time of Diocletian it was the regular policy of the Empire to make treaties of mutual aid with tribes along its frontier. On the eastern frontier the system was especially well developed. In each zone of limes there was a paramount sheikh, *Phylarch*, who was given some rank in the official hierarchy. "The federate Saracenes received regular food subsidies, *annonae foederaticiae*, in return for which they refrained from raiding Roman territory"<sup>1</sup> and kept away tribes which were

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 611.

independent or allied with Persia. In the Byzantine period two Arab dynasties stand out, the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids. The Lakhmids were under the suzerainty of Persia. The Ghassanids came into Hawran from South Arabia around the same time as the Palmyrene state was passing away, and they replaced earlier Arab settlers as masters of the territory. In the fourth century they adopted Christianity and sympathized with the Monophysites. In 528, Harith-ibn-Jabalah, a Ghassanid king, fought the Lakhmids, and, in recognition of his services, Emperor Justinian appointed him lord over all the Arab tribes of Syria with the titles of Phylarch and Patricius, this being the highest title in Byzantium next to that of the Emperor himself. During a visit to Constantinople, al-Harith was even able to secure some privileges for the Monophysite Church, whose doctrine spread vigorously in Syria during this period. The Ghassanid Kingdom extended from Petra, in the west, to al-Rasafe in the east. Bosra, a city 90 kilometers south of Damascus, became the ecclesiastical capital of the region and was a famous trading center, where, according to Muslim tradition, Muhammad the Prophet passed with his caravans and learned about Christianity.

However, the unorthodox leaning of the Ghassanids alienated them from the successors of Justinian who often plotted against their kings, or cut off their subsidy.

The Ghassanids retaliated by raiding the Byzantine territory in Syria. But, as a result of these harsh policies of the Empire, by the end of the sixth century the Ghassanids' national solidarity was broken down and their kingdom was split into several sections, some of which joined the Persians. During the Muslim Conquest, some tribes of the Ghassanids are reported to have been fighting on the Byzantine side. Their last prince adopted Islam, then, renouncing it, retired to Byzantium. The settlement of the Ghassanids extended along the southern border of Damascus, and, consequently, there was a great deal of communication between the Beduins and their market Damascus, which they considered as the ideal of earthly splendour. Later on some of their tribes settled near Damascus. Their presence in Damascus strengthened the Monophysites on one hand and, on the other, nourished the Semitic racial and cultural life of the inhabitants of Damascus who had successfully rejected the Hellenizing and Romanizing attempts of their rulers of the past centuries. The desert culture which they had developed left a great impression on Damascus, so that during the Umayyad Caliphate, the princes were sent to the Ghassanid cities for their training in the manly sports.

The aforementioned three Arab states and other tribes played an important role in paving the way for the Muslim Conquest. They were the joining link between the desert of Arabia and the Byzantine Empire. They transmitted

certain vital elements of Syrian culture to their kinsmen in Arabia. "The Nabateans transmitted the letters which made the writing of the Koran possible," says Professor Hitti.<sup>1</sup> As has been mentioned, the Ghassanid centers spread Christian traditions and ideas among the passing caravans. On the military front they presented the Arabs with a foretaste of what might be done by a larger Arab force, thus providing a graphic lesson of Arab potential. In their relation to Damascus they were a constant reminder of the Damascenes kinship with the Semitic East rather than with the Roman or Byzantine West. Even their adoption of the Monophysite version of Christianity supports this nationalistic trend which found an outlet in theological doctrines and ecclesiastical rivalry rather than in direct self-assertion which they could not afford. Hence by the beginning of the seventh century Syria was ripe for a revolution; it was ready for a drastic change, no matter from what source, for therein lay the only hope of the people.

Before the Arab conquest of Syria, Islam and Christianity viewed each other as co-religionists, rather than rivals, because they shared a common Judaeo-Christian tradition and similar religious and ethical concepts such

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

as a day of judgment, and the oneness of God. Thus, to the Syrian Christians, Islam in its early form appeared more like another sect rather than as a new religion, or heresy. This concept can be documented by ancient writings and pronouncements from both the Christian and Muslim parties. Writing immediately after the conquest, a Patriarch of the Eastern Church describes the Muslim conquerors in the following complementary terms;

The Arabs, to whom God at this time has granted dominion over the world, are, as you know, among us. But they are not enemies of Christianity. On the contrary they praise our faith and honour the priests and saints of the Lord and confer benefits upon the monasteries.<sup>1</sup>

From Muslim sources we have several events and proclamations which reflect this relatively friendly attitude. Even before the ensuing conquests began, the Muslims watched the activities of the Byzantine Empire with concern and good will. Ibn-'Asaker informs us that during the Persian-Byzantine wars, the Caliph abu Bakr wagered against those who were pro-Persian; and every time the Byzantines won, he and the believers rejoiced in the victory of God.<sup>2</sup> This concern for the Christians is eloquently expressed in abu Bakr's command to the army. Among other things he says, "Do not destroy a church . . . and you will find some people who have imprisoned themselves, for whom they have

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 523, citing Iso'yahb III, "Liber Epistularum," *Scriptores Syri*, ed. Rubens Duval (Paris: 1904), ser. II, Vol. LXIV.

<sup>2</sup> ابن عساکر، التاريخ الكبير (دمشق: طبعة روضة الشام ١٤٢٤) الجزء الاول ص ٨٤.

imprisoned (meaning God), leave them alone."<sup>1</sup> These statements reflect clearly that there was a consciousness in both camps of a religious affinity between them. Even the green colour of the Muslim flag reflects the colour of the anti-imperial party or the Monophysites.<sup>2</sup> Consequently when the Muslims first appeared in Syria, they were often hailed as deliverers.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup>S. Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (London: Edward Arnold Publ., 1959), p. 71.



## CHAPTER II

### DAMASCUS UNDER THE Umayyad Dynasty

#### The Muslim Conquest

In the power vacuum left by the disintegrating Byzantine Empire, Mohammad's followers quickly achieved one of the world's greatest military conquests. The Arabs rushed upon the Byzantine and Persian Empires to free themselves "from the hot prison of the desert"<sup>1</sup> and to spread their new religion. Some authors doubt the second motive<sup>2</sup> and see in the Arab conquest the economic factor only. The missionary zeal and effort of the Arabs to convert other peoples to their new-found faith is undoubtedly strong evidence for taking religious as well as economic motives into consideration in an appraisal of the Muslim Conquest.

In Mohammad's life-time, only separate detachments of the Muslim army were able to cross the Byzantine border. The most significant conquests were made in the time of the second Caliph 'Umar. He sent three detachments in 633 which were led by 'Amr ibn-al-'As, Yazid ibn-abi-Sufyan,

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<sup>1</sup>L. Caetani, *Studi di Storia Orientale* (Milan: 1911-14), Vol. I, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup>Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

and Sharhabil ibn-Hasnah. The Standard-bearer in Yazid's army was his brother Mu'awiyah, who became the founder of the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus. The first encounter occurred at Wadi al-'Arabah, where the Byzantine army was defeated. Sergius, the Patrician of Palestine, was overtaken with his retreating army at Dathin, near Gaza; he was killed, and the army was almost annihilated on February 4, 634.<sup>1</sup> When Heraclius received the bad news, he was in Emesa (Homs). He organized an army and sent it under his brother's leadership. By this time the Arab army was tired, thus abu Bakr ordered Khalid ibn-al-Walid, who was in Iraq, to go and reinforce the detachments on the Syrian front. Khalid took his army and crossed the Syrian desert in a memorable feat, which lasted eighteen days. On April 24, 634, Khalid appeared to the north-east of Damascus. He encountered the Christian Ghassanid forces which he defeated, and continued his journey south till he met the harassed detachments of his companions. The united Arab army continued its move north till it met the Byzantine army at Ajnadayn on July 30, 634. The Byzantines were defeated, and those that survived took refuge in Damascus, Homs, and Antioch. After a month, the Byzantine army was encountered again at Marj al-Suffar. The two armies

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ياقوت ، معجم البلدان . الجزء الثاني ص ٥١٤ - ٥١٥

fought so hard that one description says that the blood mixed with the water and the mills milled with it.<sup>1</sup> About four thousand Arabs were wounded, and the defeated Byzantine army sought safety in Damascus. After fifteen days, the Arabs moved towards Damascus. They captured al-Ghouta and its churches and laid siege to Damascus. This was done in order to isolate the city, which after six months surrendered in September 635; meanwhile, the Byzantine garrison had been evacuated.

The taking of the city has conflicting traditions. Some say that the city surrendered "through treachery."<sup>2</sup> The negotiators were the Bishop of Damascus and Mansur ibn-Sarjoun, the grandfather of John of Damascus. According to Lammens,<sup>3</sup> surrender was the best solution to the dilemma into which Damascus was put. The Damascenes and the Byzantines<sup>4</sup> thought that the Arabs would return to the desert after they had had their fill, and that the Byzantine Emperor would come to their assistance some time in the near future. Consequently, in order to save the

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1 *أما رستم، كنية من بني الأندلس، يروي في تاريخه، ص 87، 88، 89.*

<sup>2</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

<sup>3</sup>H. Lammens, "Étude sur le regne du Calife Omayyade Mu'awia I," extrait de *M.F.O.*, t. I, II, III (Beyrouth: 1908), pp. 389-390.

<sup>4</sup>Yacout informs us of a Byzantine high official's visit to the Mosque of Damascus during which he told his companion, "We, Greeks, were talking of the short stay of the Arabs, but when I look at what they have built, I know that they will stay for a long time." p. 479.

present, and not fall into the tragic situation which befell the cities that were taken by force, the Damascenes tried to meet the problem by themselves.<sup>1</sup> However, there is a third tradition, which has been refuted by Caetani, ibn-'Asaker, A. von Kremer, and Yacout.<sup>2</sup> According to the latter, Khalid ibn al-Walid conquered the eastern part of the city by force, while abu-'Ubaidah ibn-al-Jarah, Yazid ibn-abi-Sufyan, and Sharhabil ibn-Hasnah were admitted peacefully by the Bishop and Sarjoun who came to an agreement with them.<sup>3</sup> According to ibn-al-Batriq and ibn-al-'Amid, when the Damascenes gottired of the siege, al-Mansour stood on top of Bab-al-Sharki and asked Khalid to grant security to him, to his family, and to the people of Damascus except the Greeks.<sup>4</sup> Khalid promised to fulfill the request and gave him a promissory note which reads:

In the name of Allah the merciful, this is what Khalid ibn-al-Walid grants to the inhabitants of Damascus, when he enters the city peacefully. He gives them security for themselves, their property, and churches. The wall of their city will not be destroyed and none of their houses will be taken, as long as they pay the poll tax.<sup>5</sup>

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1 نصر الله، الذكري المئوية الثانية عشر لوفاة القديس يوحنا الدمشقي (مطبعة الطبعة البولسية ١٩٥٠) ٤٢٥٦

2 R. Hartmann, "Damascus," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, I (1913), 903-904.

3 ياتون، فتوح البلدان ٤٦٥٦

4 رستم، ص ٢٩

5 (Translation mine)

احمد به يحيى به جابر (البلاذري) فتوح البلدان (القاهرة: مكتبة النهضة المصرية ١٩٥٦) القسم الاول ١٤٤٦

The Arabs spent the winter in Damascus, but in the spring of 636, they had to evacuate it because Heraclius organized a new fighting force of Armenian and Arab mercenaries which was put under the command of his brother Theodorus. The Arabs relinquished Homs and Damascus and concentrated their army, which was composed of 2,500 men, at the valley of Yarmuk, from where retreat to the desert would be easy. They were obliged to revert to this strategy because of the superiority of the Byzantine army. The decisive battle took place at the juncture of the Yarmuk River in August 20, 636. The Arabs won, the Byzantine army was annihilated, and the fate of Syria was decided. Heraclius with the remnant of his army headed towards Antioch. Al-Tabari and Baladhouri quote Heraclius' last words: "Farewell, O Syria and what an excellent country this is for the enemy."<sup>1</sup>

After the battle of Yarmuk, most of the occupied cities welcomed the conquerors except Damascus and Qinnasrin which put up some resistance, but finally surrendered. Ibn-al-Batriq and ibn-al-'Amid ascribe to Mansour ibn-Sarjoun an important role in the Yarmuk battle, where he allegedly fought against the Arabs.<sup>2</sup> However, this seems improbable because after the second conquest Mansour kept his position with the Arabs. If he had fought against them he would

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

<sup>2</sup> نصر الله، الذكرى المشوية ص ٤٤

have been killed or deposed.

Due to the resistance which the Damascenes put up, the conqueror accepted their surrender under conditions which were somewhat harder than before. Most of the former agreements were kept except the one concerning the churches. The Christians were forced to give up some of their churches, and were permitted to keep fifteen only,<sup>1</sup> one of which was the Cathedral of John the Baptist. Some writers say that half of the houses also were taken from the people, but al-Baladhuri records a conversation of 'Abd-Allah al-Waqidi in which he says, I read Khalid's letter to the Damascenes and found nothing about dividing the houses and the churches.<sup>2</sup> He asserted that some of the inhabitants left the city and went to Byzantium; consequently, the Arabs replaced them. However, such lack of interest in material gain seems highly improbable for an army whose famous general, 'Umar ibn-ul-As, had made the following statement to the Bishop of Gaza, when the latter offered some money as a gift to the Arab armies.

'Umar said:

Although as you mentioned we are relatives yet your gift was partial. We would like to make it even. We shall take half of what you have of rivers and buildings and we shall give you half of what we have of thorns and stones. Concerning the hunger which you mentioned which drove us out of our country, we have in this country a plant called

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<sup>1</sup> البلاذري، فتوح البلدان القسم الاول ص ١٤٧

<sup>2</sup> (Translation mine)

البلاذري، فتوح البلدان القسم الاول ص ١٤٦

wheat, from which we gained food. Hence we shall not depart from you unless we make you our slaves or you kill us under the stem of this plant.<sup>1</sup>

### Survey of Growth and Extent of the Umayyad Empire

At the beginning of the eighth century the Muslim Empire reached its greatest expansion. It extended from the shores of the Atlantic and the range of the Pyrenees to the Indus Valley and the confines of China. Within 100 years, they won an Empire bigger than the one the Romans had built in 600 years. The Muslim Conquest of the ancient world was carried on in several stages. Syria, Iraq, Persia and Egypt were subjugated under the Caliphs 'Umar and 'Uthman. This marked the end of the first stage. After the pacification of these territories, Mu'awiyah started the second stage in which he attacked foreign territories by land and sea. The naval campaigns were against the Byzantines. On land his armies took two different directions: one division went west and began the conquest of North Africa while the other division pushed the frontier of the Muslim Empire to central Asia. The third stage was achieved during the reign of 'Abd-al-Malik and his successors who subjugated Transoxiana, in the east, and Spain in the west. Their method in these conquests followed a regular pattern: "raids, followed by more raids and

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<sup>1</sup> (Translation mine)

ابن عساکر، التاريخ الكبير، الجزء الاول ص ٢٥٠

tribute, refusal to continue to pay, attacks, and conclusion of peace."<sup>1</sup>

The Arabs were inexperienced and unequipped with the necessary administrative technique or experience which the newly conquered land needed. Consequently a three-week conference was held on the day of al-Jabiyah in which 'Umar and his generals worked on the administrative problem. The outcome of this conference is not clear but the decisions which were taken then are reflected in the covenant, 'Ahd, of 'Umar:<sup>2</sup>

1. The Muslim Arabs were supposed to form a sort of "religio-military aristocracy, keeping their blood pure,"<sup>3</sup> living aloof from the conquered and abstaining from holding or cultivating any land.
2. The conquered people were given a new status, that of *Ahl-al-dhimmah*, and they were subject to a tribute which comprised both land tax *Kharaj* and poll tax *Jizyah*. They were given the privilege of enjoying the protection of the Muslim army from which they were exempt.

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 460.

<sup>2</sup> ابن عساکر، التاريخ الكبير الجزء الاول من ١٧٨-١٨٠، و ١٥٠-١٥١، والابن سني المسترة (القاهرة ١٣١٤) الجزء الاول ص ٩٩.

<sup>3</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 422.



3. Movable property and prisoners of war which were won as booty constituted *Ghanimah* and belonged to the warriors. The case was different when the acquisition was a piece of land; then it belonged to the Muslim community.

At the al-Jabiyah conference, Syria was divided into four military districts, *jund*, which corresponded to the formerly established Byzantine provinces. These were Dimashq (Damascus), Homs, al-Urdunn (Jordan), and Filistine (Palestine). Into these districts or camps the Arab soldiers brought their families and were given rights and privileges which later immigrants from Arabia could not enjoy. At the head of each *jund* stood the commander-in-chief and governor-general who combined in his person all the executive, judiciary, and military authority. The Muslims, in the beginning, worked according to the Byzantine governmental system; even the local officials who did not withdraw from the country were left in their positions.

Due to the linguistic, ethnic, and religious affinity of the Muslims to the Syrians, an unprecedented event took place. The people of Syria identified themselves with the Arabs and their way of life. All the Greco-Roman attempts, to change the people, were not able to penetrate more than a small fraction of the population.

Before the year of al-Jabiyah conference was over, a terrible plague hit the country in which Yazid, the commander-in-chief of the army and Governor of Damascus, died. He was replaced by his brother, Mu'awiyah, the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty. Mu'awiyah was the prophet Muhammad's secretary.<sup>1</sup> As the governor of Syria, he held his office for twenty years and later on, as a Caliph, he ruled for twenty more years. The policies which he had followed during his governorship were continued in his Caliphate.

Mu'awiyah, the governor, began by trying to win the friendship and confidence of his Syrian subjects and the Christianized Arab tribes such as the Ghassanids. "For a wife he chose a Jacobite Christian, Maysun, daughter of Bahdal of Kalb, a south Arabian tribe,"<sup>2</sup> which was the most powerful one in Syria. She was permitted to keep her religion, and became the mother of Yazid, his successor. This relationship caused Mu'awiyah to be looked upon as the legitimate successor of the Ghassanid princely house.<sup>3</sup> Both his personal physician ibn-Uthal and court poet, al-Akhtal were also Christians. Mu'awiyah kept Mansur ibn-Sarjoun as the financial controller of the state. The

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *St. John de Damas*. (Harrisa: 1950), p. 29. Certain questions have been raised against the frequent use of this author. However, our use is justifiable because of its singular treatment of the subject.

<sup>2</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 425.

<sup>3</sup>C. Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic People* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1947), p. 72.

Sarjounits administered so well that it became possible for Mu'awiyah to double the salary of his soldiers, strengthen the frontier fortresses against Byzantium and undertake projects of agriculture and irrigation in al-Hijaz. UMu'awiyah gained the confidence of the Christians to such an extent that the Jacobites and their opponents brought their disputes to him and asked him to judge between them. The people of Edessa did not hesitate to ask his assistance in building their church that had been demolished by an earthquake. He responded to their request and rebuilt the church. By such acts of tolerance and magnanimity he won the confidence of the Syrians and firmly established the Muslim Empire.

Mu'awiyah's second step was to reorganize the army, which was based on old tribal tradition. He changed it into a first class military force that had discipline and order. It was kept in fit condition by the seasonal raids which were carried on against the Byzantine border towns. Next to the army came the navy, which he developed to such an extent that it became second only to the arsenal of Alexandria. The Arabs' lack of experience on the sea led Mu'awiyah to depend on Greco-Syrians who had a long tradition of maritime activity.

When the Caliph 'Uthman ibn-'Affan was killed, and 'Ali established himself as the fourth Caliph, Mu'awiyah

denied the new Caliph the usual oath of fealty and came out as the avenger of his cousin. On the surface, this conflict seemed to be caused by personal rivalry but in fact it had deeper reasons. It was a question of which would head the Muslim Empire, Damascus or al-Kufa. After the Siffin battle 'Ali was deprived of his office, and Mu'awiyah was able to assert himself within the Caliphate in 661. He chose Damascus as his capital, and kept the Christians in key positions.

In 679 Mu'awiyah nominated his son Yazid to the throne; this act was against orthodox Muslim tradition which taught that the first among them was he who was the most pious man. But might made right and Yazid thus assumed power from 680-683. As has been mentioned before, Yazid's mother was a Christian who loved the desert, especially Palmyrena, where her tribe roamed. Thus we are not surprised to see Yazid brought up in both the city and desert ways of life. In the desert he lived and grew with his Christian relatives, where he learned the manly sports. In Damascus he associated with John of Damascus and the poet al-Akhtal, who used to enter his palace freely, even when Yazid became a Caliph. These three used to meet together at Sarjoun's house which was located near the Caliph's palace, al-Qasr al-Khadra, in the quarter which is known as "Bestan al-Qet."<sup>1</sup>

His association with the Christians has led some Muslim historians to say that Yazid had become a Christian.<sup>1</sup> His son Mu'awiyah II was put under the care of a Christian monk for his education. He kept many Christians in their positions as heads of provinces such as al-Raha, which remained for a long time under the governorship of Anastasius ibn-Andraos. In 670, Yazid took the road to Mecca as a pilgrim. This was one of his father's ideas in order to announce his presence to the Hijazites and make himself known in the Muslim world. It is said that his inseparable friend al-Akhtal accompanied him on this pilgrimage. According to a Latin version of the life of John of Damascus, we read that John also accompanied the Caliph on his pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>2</sup> Yazid and al-Akhtal visited Jerusalem; this was done for his mother's and friend's sake. Yazid was a famous drinker of wine, a great lover of singing and singing girls of whom he kept two famous ones. In the spring of 669, Mu'awiyah sent his son, Yazid, to conquer Constantinople. He laid siege to the capital with its triple wall. His heroic actions in this event distinguished him for bravery and fortitude so that he earned the title of "fata-al-'Arab."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> نصر الله، الذكور النرية، ص ٥٦

<sup>2</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

Yazid succeeded his father Mu'awiyah in 680. His reign lasted three years, and he was succeeded by his son, Mu'awiyah II. The latter was a weak and sickly young man whose reign lasted three months. The Caliphate then passed to the Marwanid branch of the Umayyad family.

Of the Marwanids the most important persons in relation to the city of Damascus were 'Abd-al-Malik ibn-Marwan (685-705), and his son al-Walid I (705-715). By the beginning of the eighth century some of the Arab officials had learned the intricacies of secretarial details. The time had come for Arabic to replace Greek and Pahlawi which were then used in the Muslim Empire. The change began under 'Abd-al-Malik and continued during the reign of his son. In al-'Aqd al-Farid<sup>1</sup> we read that 'Abd-al-Malik told Suleiman ibn-Sa'di, his secretary that "Sarjoun is endearing on us his goods; I think that he knows how much we need him for keeping the accounts. What can we do about him?" Sa'di told him that, "If you wish, I'll change the accounts from Greek to Arabic." The Caliph told him, "Do so." And he did so by changing the books into Arabic; consequently, 'Abd-al-Malik appointed him over all his work. There is another manuscript in the British museum which informs us that Sarjoun got sick, but before he died, the Caliph sent him a messenger who asked his opinion as to

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<sup>1</sup> ابن عبد ربه وابو عمر احمد بن محمد العقد الفرید (القاهرة: الطبعة الشرقية ١٣٠٢هـ) الجزء الرابع ص ٢٥٥.

who had knowledge like his. Sarjoun told him, "ibn-Sa'di of the Muslims, and a certain man from Ba'lbek of the Christians."<sup>1</sup> After this, Sarjoun died, and 'Abd-al-Malik appointed Suleiman ibn-Sa'di to the books which he translated into Arabic.

With the change in the official language of the Empire came a change in the coinage. In Damascus, bronze-like coins with the picture of Constance II engraved on them had been used. During the first year of his Caliphate, Mu'awiyah coined some money which did not have a picture of the cross but of the Caliph brandishing a sword; this was rejected by the people, however. Thus, in general, we can say the Byzantine coinage was current in Syria until the time of 'Abd-al-Malik (695), when purely Arabic dinars and dirhems were struck.<sup>2</sup> As to the immediate reason for this change, Dr. Rustum has the following to say. 'Abd-al-Malik was paying a certain amount of money to Justinian, who continued to threaten him and demand more payment. In this period, a quarrel occurred between the Caliph and the Emperor concerning some phrases which were written on the coins and on the papyrus bundles that were imported from Egypt. The Copts used to write the name of Jesus, or a trinitarian formula. 'Abd-al-Malik ordered them to change

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نظر الله، الذكرى السنوية ص ٥٥ - ٥٤

<sup>2</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

the latter and say, "He, God, is one."<sup>1</sup> Justinian got angry and threatened to write a derogatory phrase concerning the Prophet Mohammed on the coins which were being used in both Empires. Fearing that such disgrace might befall the Arabs, 'Abd-al-Malik ordered the coinage to be in Arabic in 692.<sup>2</sup> The Caliph also developed a regular postal service in order to facilitate communication between the governors or officials of the provinces and the central government at Damascus.

#### Relationship between the Christians and Muslims in the Umayyad Empire

The population of the Umayyad Empire was divided into four social classes: the Muslims, the clients, members of tolerated sects and followers of a revealed religion, and the slaves. The relationship of the ruling class to the other three classes of society varied according to the needs of the time and those who were ruling. Therefore, a summary of the relationship of each social class to the other would help us get a complete picture of the interdependence of the Muslims and Christians of the Umayyad period. In general we can say that the relationship was less strict and more tolerant and generous during the Sufyanids than the Marwanids whose pressure and restriction gradually increased with the passage of time.

At the top of the society stood the Muslims, who were headed by the Caliph, his family, and the Arab aristocracy.

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رستم ص ۷۶

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رستم ص ۷۶



"Down to the 'Abbasid period the Arabs constituted a social hereditary caste."<sup>1</sup> The Muslim Arabs looked down on agriculture and industry. They were the conquering heroes, and wanted to remain so. In the beginning, the army was composed of Muslim Arabs, but their great losses in the west obliged them to recruit non-Muslims also.<sup>2</sup> For their residence, the Arabs chose the large cities. In Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and other towns, they lived in separate quarters, according to their tribal affiliation. Some Arabs settled in the country and established villages which were mostly pastoral and not so much agricultural. Although the Muslims concentrated in the cities, being a minority with a desert culture behind them, they were not able to change or affect to a great extent the traditional Christian culture and life of the cities during the first century of their rule.

After the Muslim Arabs came Neo-Muslims. These were the nations of the conquered land who came to profess Islam because of force, pressure, or conviction. Theoretically there is no priority between one Muslim and another except in piety, but actually the proselytes did not enjoy the same status as the Arabs. These converts, usually attached themselves as clients *mawali* to some Arab tribe and became

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<sup>2</sup>H. Lammens, *La Syrie. Precese Historique* (Beirut: Impr. Catholique, 1921), I, 117.

its members. These people devoted themselves to studies and fine art; they became the bridge which communicated the old Greco-Syrian culture to the Arabs.

The third class consisted of the Christians, Jews, and Sabians who were called *Ahl-al-dhimmah*, which means the people for whom we have an obligation of protection. This relationship had precedence in the Quran where we find that a status of tolerance was granted to the *Ahl-al-Kitab*, the people of the book or scripture.<sup>1</sup> The Sabians were granted this status because they were monotheists and followers of John the Baptist.<sup>2</sup> In return for the protection which they enjoyed the dhimis paid land and capitation tax *Jiziah and Kharaj*. Not being members of the Muslim community, the dhimis decreased in their social and political position in the country. In matters of judicial procedures they were left to their own religious leaders because *Al-Shari'ah* the Muslim Law, was considered too holy to be used for non-Muslims.

Until the beginning of the second Muslim century the Christians were the secretaries of *al-dawaween*, or official documents because the Arabs had not mastered the administrative machine. The Christians used to seal their letters with the sign of the cross and their Muslim

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<sup>1</sup>Quran: 9:20; 2:99; 103; 3:62-5.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:59, 5:73, 22:17.

chiefs would stamp them with their seals. The Christians monopolized the handcrafts. They were the artisans of the Empire. They were the builders, tailors, shoemakers, tradesmen, bankers, and they became the treasurers of the state. They kept schools to which Arab youth were sent. They supervised the making and keeping of weapons and the fleet.<sup>1</sup> Hitti devotes a large section to the means of pleasure and entertainment which the Christians controlled, and especially to the monasteries. The monks were experts in wine making, honey, fruit and flower raising; they maintained special guest rooms for entertainment and pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

During the Sufyanids, the status of the Christians was so good that it roused the jealousy of the Muslims. Some Christian groups reaped more benefits than had been possible under the Byzantines. The Jacobites were given an independent status, and their religious leaders received many material and political advantages. In days of trouble, both sides asked the assistance of the Caliph. As we have seen, when the Church of al-Raha was destroyed, the Caliph donated money; also in some centers new churches were built as in Fostat and al-Basra.<sup>3</sup> In the battle of

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<sup>1</sup> نصر الله ، الذكرى الثوبية ص ٦٠

<sup>2</sup> Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 487, citing Ibn-Fadl-Allah al-'Umari, *Masalek al-Ahsar fi Mamalik al-Amsar* ed. Ahmad Zaki, Vol. I (Cairo: 1924), pp. 321-22, 349, 351-52, 355-56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Siffin, Mu'awiyah depended on the Christian Arab army.<sup>1</sup> When the Arab tribes of Iraq and Mesopotamia united against the Umayyads, it was the Christian Taghlebite tribe that came out of the coalition. After the death of Mu'awiyah, al-Madinah revolted against Yazid, and the Taghlebitcs had an important share in destroying the revolutionists. During the quarrel over the successor of Mu'awiyah II, bani-Kalb assisted greatly in transferring the Caliphate to the Marwanids. Hence we read in several poems of their reminding the Marwanids of their favor:<sup>2</sup>

نألا يكن منا الفلينة ننه فما نالها الا ونحن شهدوا

During the Marwanids the relationship was often strained. The Caliphate was beginning to get weak, and in order to hide this, the Caliphs took great pains to present a glorious, rich, and happy picture to the public, consequently using a considerable part of the treasury. In addition to this aspect, the great military campaigns drained the money of the Empire. With the foundation of the military camps which soon grew into large towns, the natives had on the spot a much better source of income than in the country where the peasants had to pay their quotas

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> ابن عسار، التاريخ الكبير الجزء الرابع، صان به جدل  
If the Caliph had not been one of us  
He would not have had the Caliphate  
Without first our martyrdom. (Translation mine)

of tribute. Thus an exodus from the country began, and at the same time the number of converts to Islam increased. As the new believers ceased to be subject to taxes the result on the state treasury was a decrease of income. Hence a change was introduced which included the new converts to Islam as liable to taxation, and the dhimis were asked to pay higher taxes.<sup>1</sup> Finding that being a Muslim did not exclude them from the taxes, some Christians put on the robe of a monk. The Umayyads found out about this trick and imposed taxes on the monks also. They even put a tax on the dead, which was paid by the relatives of the deceased.<sup>2</sup> In general we can say that the Christians were treated fairly well until the days of 'Umar II. However, the Caliphs were interested in converting the Christian Arab tribes such as the Tanoukhites, Taghlebites and bani-Kalb. The Sufyanids did not use force in their endeavor, but some of the Marwanids did. Al-Walid I put to death the chief of the Taghlib Tribe for his refusal to accept Islam.<sup>3</sup> The restriction and degradation of the Christians by their conquerors reached its worst aspect in the days of 'Umar II. He issued regulations which excluded Christians from holding a public office; he forbade them to wear turbans, or to have

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<sup>1</sup> C.H. Becker, "The Expansion of the Saracenes in the East," *The Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1913), II, 362.

<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

forelocks, and imposed on them special clothes with leather girdles. They were to ride their horses without a saddle, and could not build new churches. Their prayer was to be carried on in subdued voices. In the court there was a great difference between a Christian and a Muslim. The penalty for killing a Christian was only a fine, while even a Christian's testimony against a Muslim was not accepted in the courts.<sup>1</sup> A Chinese historian who was made a prisoner of the Arabs in 750 A.D. and lived among them for ten years has testified to the courage of the Christians of Syria: "When the people of Fulin (Syria) are kept as captives in the frontier states, they will rather accept death than change their national customs."<sup>2</sup> By the beginning of the eighth century, not only the Christians of the central provinces were subject to oppression, but others also who were on the borderlands of Syria and Armenia. The Byzantine-Arab warfare invoked a great deal of suffering on the people of these provinces. In 703 A.D. so many churches were set on fire that the year was called "The Year of Burning."

#### History of Damascus in This Period

What the Arab conquerors found at Damascus is recognized to be the same general plan as that of today's old section of the town. In spite of several catastrophies which

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup> Chau Ju-kua, *Chinese and Arab Trade*, trans. F. Hirth and W.W. Rockhill. (St. Petersburg Printing Office of Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1912), p. 109.

befell the city, Damascus kept the same layout. This fact is due to the natural location of the city.<sup>1</sup> It lies at the point where the road that joins northern and southern Syria crosses the river Barada which runs from east to west. Due to these factors the city is in the shape of an elongated rectangle on the south bank of the river Barada. The city was dominated by the gigantic quadrangular temple, which dates to the ninth century B.C., when it was used by the Arameans as a temple of Haddad, the Sun God.<sup>2</sup> Later on, it was consecrated to Jupiter Damascenus. In the Christian era, the Church of John the Baptist was built on the same site. The visitor can still see the ancient market place, the amphitheater, the senate hall, the street called Straight, the foundations of an ancient citadel, parts of the ancient wall, and some city gates. The two rivers, Barada and Pharpar, provided the city with fresh water. The city was surrounded by gardens of vegetables, orchards, and vinyards whose produce was praised in many Arabic poems.

Damascus under the Umayyads reached its zenith of riches and glory as never before or after in its history. As has been mentioned before, its geographical location on the main trade routes secured a considerably well-to-do

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<sup>1</sup>W. Muir, *The Caliphate Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, ed. Weir (Edinburgh: John Grout, 1924), p. 340.

<sup>2</sup>العش، آثارنا في الأتيم السوري (دمشق: الطبعة الجديدة ١٩٦٠) ص ٤٤٥

economy which was augmented by its new status in the Umayyad period. The material and human spoils of war poured into the capital where the central government and the families of the Arab fighters were situated. Damascus became the scene of such triumphant processions as that of Musa ibn-Nusayr whose princely train comprised, besides his staff, 400 persons from the Visigoth nobility, who wore their crowns and were girdled with their gold belts of office. They were followed by a large retinue of slaves, of captives who were loaded with treasures of booty<sup>1</sup> and one thousand Spanish virgins. Foremost among the trophies was the priceless legendary table which was taken from the Toledo Cathedral. The decoration of the table with precious stones had been an object of great competition among the Gothic kings.

With economic growth came cultural development. For a thousand months,<sup>2</sup> Damascus was blessed with a very high cultural attainment. It became the center where scholars, poets, orators, musicians, architects, technicians, theologians and philosophers converged. The Umayyads, being in the second stage of the Muslim conquests, used their resources in their wars and in

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 466, citing ibn-'Abdul-Hakam, pp. 210-11, ibn-'Idhari, Vol. II, pp. 21-22; ibn-al-Qutiyah, *Tarikh Iftitah al-Andalus* (Madrid: 1868), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> نصر الله، الذكرى السنوية ص ٤٠٠



organization of the newly conquered territories. However, the period has the credit of being the incubator in which the seeds were sown to come into full bloom in the 'Abbaside Caliphate. The study of Arabic grammar was one of the first disciplines which was cultivated in this period. The need for this study grew out of the new converts to Islam, who, being motivated by religious and socio-economic reasons, wanted to be on a par with their Arab conquerors. As a result of the study of the Quran, the sciences of lexicography and philology, tradition about the Prophet and his companions, and the canon law arose in this period. The Umayyad period also saw the beginnings of several religio-philosophical movements often referred to as the sects such as Mu'tazilah and Qadriyah. Other sciences such as medicine and alchemy were some of the early disciplines which were cultivated by the Arabs. The wordly Umayyads re-established the dethroned art of poetry which had received ill favour by the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>1</sup> Poets such as Ka'b ibn-Ju'ayl of the Taghlib tribe, al-Akhtal, and 'Umar ibn-abi-Rabi-'ah, the prince of Arabic erotic poetry, flourished in this period.

In architecture two famous buildings were constructed in this period: the Caliph's palace, called

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<sup>1</sup>Quran, 26:7; 36:69; 69:41.

al-Khadra, because of its green dome, and the Umayyad Mosque. Among the Umayyads, the most important builder is considered to be al-Walid ibn-Abdul-Malik. Until this day, the Muslims had conducted their worship in a makeshift mosque which was next to the Church of St. John the Baptist. Al-Walid wanted to build a place which was worthy of the capital of the Umayyads. He liked the sight of the Church of John the Baptist. At first he wanted to buy the church; because the Christians refused, he took it by force and incorporated it into the new building of the mosque.<sup>1</sup> Thus, one of the wonders of the world, the Umayyad mosque, was built in 705. Walid spent a great amount of money on this building. Hosts of workmen were brought from Constantinople particularly for the mosaics,<sup>2</sup> and many skilled workmen and materials came from Egypt. Later on, 'Umar ibn-'Abdul-'Aziz (717-720) wanted to do justice and return the church to the Christians; but this time, the Muslims of Damascus refused and then convinced the Christians to take all the churches of al-Ghouta instead of the Church of John the Baptist, which they did.<sup>3</sup> Walid is also famous for building a hospital for leprosy near Bab-al-Sharki. Ibn-'Asaker adds that al-Walid used

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<sup>1</sup> البلاذري، فتوح البلدان، النسخ الأول ص ١٤٩

<sup>2</sup>Hartmann, *op. cit.*, p. 905.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

to give bags of money to be distributed among the righteous and the lepers, and he told his stewards not to make an inquiry but to give to every one who was seated (because of illness), a servant, and to every blind man, a guide. This was the first institution for the sick in Islam. Al-Walid was instrumental in erecting street lights, organizing the streets and houses, digging wells, and initiating new villages. Yazid I has given his name to a river in Damascus because he improved the water supply by reconstructing a Nabatean canal on the slopes of Jabal Kasyun.

Under the Sufyanids, the Christian community of Damascus enjoyed a considerably high standing. There was mutual respect on both sides, and the generous gifts which were given to the Christians were not uncommon. Even Spanish chronicles refer to the faithful devotion which the Christians showed to Mu'awiyah. With the removal of the Sufyanids came a change in the fortunes of the Christians of Damascus, who were closer and more sensitive to the central authority. Restrictions were imposed by the Marwanids, as we have seen, and reached their worst stage in the days of 'Umar II who forbade Christians to hold public offices and imposed on them a special uniform. His successor Yazid II not only took away a few of the Christian churches, but "also ordered the destruction of the religious images."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Blockelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

The Damascenes were in close contact with the activities of the Arab Empire, hence they were often thrown into the tribal and political rivalry of their rulers and the court. They were witnesses to fights and cruel executions of the members of the ruling dynasty. These events, which were reinforced by the restrictive measures which the later Caliphs imposed, resulted in a more realistic appraisal of the new Arab conquerors.

This was the city in which The Damascene was born and spent the first half of his life. Its high cultural attainment played an effective role in the life and work of John. The political tensions and vicissitudes led him to his final decision to become a monk. His life reflects the history and personality of the Christian community which was obliged to face a choice between conforming to the religious pattern of the new ruler or remaining loyal to its faith.

## CHAPTER III

### LIFE OF JOHN OF DAMASCUS

#### His Family and Its Position in the Umayyad Caliphate

John of Damascus was born c. 675 into an eminent family, which was known by the Arabic surname of al-Mansour which means "victorious." It has been suggested that this surname was given to John's grandfather because he mediated between the Arabs and the Damascenes and saved the city. Others say that it was an opprobrious name which the Byzantines gave him because they charged him with betrayal. The ninth century historian Theophanes relates that the Emperor changed the name Mansour to *Mamser*, "bastard."<sup>1</sup> The grandfather's complete name is Mansour ibn-Sarjoun.

The origin of the Sarjounites has been the object of great controversy among historians and scholars. Some, such as von Kremer,<sup>2</sup> think that they were Greeks. He probably has based his conclusion on one source, namely al-Tabari, who says that Mu'awiyah's secretary and advisor was "Sarjoun ibn-Mansour, the Greek."<sup>3</sup> Father Nasrallah

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<sup>1</sup>J.H. Lupton, "Joaness Damascenus," *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, eds. W. Smith, J. Wace, II (1882), 409.

<sup>2</sup> نصرالله، الذكرى السنوية ص ٤٦

<sup>3</sup> الطبري، تاريخ الامم والملوك (الناشر: مطبعة الاستقامة ١٩٢٩) الجزء الرابع ص ٤٤٤

opposes the aforementioned proposition and presents a detailed defence of the Arab origin of the Sarjounites. His main argument consists of a study of the two names in Arabic literature, from which he concludes that the two names of Mansour and Sarjoun are not Greek names, but Arabic. However, the name Sarjoun, סרְגִיּוֹן, is the Hebrew transliteration of the Babylonian Šarrum-Kîn, "The King is steadfast." The name Mansour was a popular name among the Arab tribes that settled or wandered in Syria. There are individuals of the Ayad tribe who were called Mansour, e.g. Mansour ibn-Yaqdun bn-'Afsa bn-Du'mi bn-Ayad. The name was also popular with the famous Rabi'ah and Kudba'ah tribes. The latter's sibilings, bani-Kuleib, settled near Damascus in Mazeh for which the city is surnamed "Mazeht Kalb."<sup>1</sup> This tribe accepted Christianity and one of its sons is Mansour ibn-Jamhour. Yacout al-Hamazani informs us that bani-Rabi'ah also roamed the Syrian desert and that some of them settled on the river banks, and others settled near the towns and were integrated with them. Father Nasrallah's conviction is strengthened by ibn-Dureid's saying that Mansour ibn-Ja'unah of bani-Rabi'ah was a nobleman in Damascus, and that Christianity was in the Rabi'ah tribe.<sup>2</sup> The name Serjius was also a popular one among the Arab and Armenian Christians of the Byzantine

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<sup>1</sup> ياقوت، معجم البلدان، معجم البلدان (بيروت دار صادر ١٩٥٧) المجلد الخامس ١٤٤ ص

<sup>2</sup> نصرالله، الذكرى السنوية ص ٥٧

Empire. And it was so popular that it developed variant forms such as Sarkis, Serji, Serjeh, Gorgis, and as a diminutive in the form of Sarjoun. The Roman General Serjius, who died for his faith, became the famous saint of al-Rasafeh and the patron saint of the monks. He became the mediator of the Taghlebites who had his picture on their flags. The following is a quotation from al-Akhtal which bears witness to the latter fact.<sup>1</sup>

لما رأونا والطيب طالما  
دابصرا راياتنا لرامنا  
وما سر جس موتنا نائما  
خلوانا رازان والمزارعا

However, we must say that although there is no direct evidence concerning the origin of the Sarjounites, for sure they were not Greeks.

As to the religious affiliation of the Sarjounites, it has been suggested by Father Ishaq al-Armali that they were Jacobite Monophysites. His argument is based on ibn-al-Batriq's statement which presents Mansour's request from Khaled during the surrender of Damascus in which he asked security for himself, his family, and the Damascenes, except the Greeks. But the word Greek refers to a national and not to a religious affiliation. Moreover, we read in Patriarch Dionysius al-Talmahri's writings that Sirji ibn-Mansour, the Chalcedonian secretary of Damascus, informed against Athansi ibn-Joumieh, the Syriac.<sup>2</sup> This

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1 نصرالله، الذكرى الثوبية ص ٤٨  
When they saw us with the lifted cross,  
And the emblem of Saint Serjius,  
They also saw the imminent death  
Hence they left us Razan and the farms. (Translation mine)

2 الاب اسحاق ارملة، «اداب اللغة اليونانية والكتابة السريانية»، المجلد 2  
(مصر: الطبعة البولسية ١٩٤١) ص ٤٩.

theory is refuted by the obvious fact that when John retired to monastic life he did not choose a Jacobite monastery of which there were more than one hundred and thirty-seven<sup>1</sup> in Syria, but chose St. Saba which was a stronghold of the Chalcedonians.

The Sarjounites took up their residence in Damascus before the sixth century. In the days of Emperor Maurice (582-602), the Sarjounites enjoyed high political and social standing and exerted great influence in directing the affairs of *Phoenicia Libanesis*. According to Eutychius, the Christian Arab historian of the tenth century, Mansour was chief treasurer. Ibn-al-Amid says that Mansour became the Emperor's representative of the province.<sup>2</sup> During the Persian invasion, Mansour kept his position, paying a tribute to the conqueror, which he did not want to relinquish even after Heraclius' (610-641) reoccupation. Although Mansour kept his position,<sup>3</sup> the Emperor did not forget this event and was suspicious of Mansour.

When the Arab army besieged Damascus, it was Mansour who negotiated with Yazid ibn-abi-Sufyan. Even some authors like al-Balazi and ibn-'Asaker say that he signed the agreement. When Yazid took the governorship he

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1 نصر الله الذكرى المشوية ٢٧٦٤

2 نصر الله، الذكرى المشوية ٤٠٥٤

3 رستم ٦٧ ص



kept Mansour in his position and gave him the title of *Mawla Halif* which means the friendly client or friendly ruler. This title has been contested. Lammens defends the point of view of ibn-'Asaker and ibn-Shaker al-Kutubi who interpreted the word *wala'* to mean religious loyalty and not one of service.<sup>1</sup> This title was given to his son and siblings. He died in the first half of the seventh century.

Mansour's son Sarjoun held a position similar to his father; he became the treasurer of the Caliph. It is in relation to him that Lammens defends the point of his becoming a Muslim. But all factual and historical evidence proves the opposite. Our first historical testimony comes from Theophanes, who states clearly that Sarjoun was a perfect Christian, "ἀνὴρ χριστιανικώτατος."<sup>2</sup> The monk Mikhael, who wrote the biography of The Damascene in the eleventh century, says that he followed the guidance of virtue and the praiseworthy religion, fearing God, keeping His commandments; he was full of wisdom and a lover of learning.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these testimonies we can mention a few facts about Sarjoun. He built a new church in Damascus outside the Gate of Faradis. 'Abd-al-

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<sup>1</sup>Lammens, *Etude sur le regne du Mu'awia I*, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup>Lupton, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *مناهل السماني* دسيرة يوحنا الدمشقي الاولية «السيرة» نشرها  
المصري قسطنطين الباشا (مصر: الطبعة البولسية 1914) ص 145

Malik, the Caliph, wanted to take the pillars of the Church of the Virgin Mary which was in Gethsemane, and carry them to the Mosque of Mecca. Sarjoun joined the Patriarch and convinced the Caliph to change his mind, which he did on condition that Justinian II would provide others.<sup>1</sup> Finally we can say that the fact that he had a son like John of Damascus indicates the family education and religious background of Sarjoun.

When Mu'awiyah became Caliph, the treasury was in total deficit and he could not ask help from the other provinces which were in similar condition. This deficit was due to the heavy military operations and to the tradition of the Arab fighters who considered the treasury theirs to spend. Consequently, in order to build his economy on a healthy basis, the Caliph used the assistance of Ziad ibn-Abihi and of Sarjoun ibn-Mansour. The latter became the head inspector of the treasury and the minister of war.<sup>2</sup> Sarjoun defined the amount of tax which must be collected; he supervised its collection and distribution to the army and to other governmental officials. He even supervised the finance of the navy and war. And after 660 the field of his responsibilities extended beyond Syria to the border of the Indus Valley, North Africa, Spain, Asia

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<sup>1</sup> نصر الله، الذكري السنوية ص ٦٤

<sup>2</sup> نصر الله، الذكري السنوية ص ٤٩

Minor, Iraq and Khurasan. And when Mu'awiyah was on his death bed, he gave Sarjoun, plus two other Arabs, the responsibility of directing the affairs of the state till his son's arrival.

Sarjoun kept his responsibilities and privileges during Yazid's reign (680-683), who depended on Sarjoun's council. Al-Jahshari relates that when Yazid heard about Hussein's rebellion in Iraq, he asked Sarjoun whom to appoint to oppose Hussein. Sarjoun told him "'Ubeid-Allah-ibn-Ziad" whom Yazid hated. But Sarjoun, producing a document from Mu'awiyah, convinced the Caliph to abide by his advice.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Sarjoun continued his services until the Caliphate of Abd-al-Malik, who ordered the translation of the official documents into Arabic. This created some friction between the Caliph and Sarjoun, who, already grown old, fell ill, and died c. 703-705.<sup>2</sup>

Sarjoun was blessed by two sons, one of whom was John, whom Muslim writers call Mansour. The other brother's name has not been preserved. The latter was the father of Stephen al-Sabeiti who took after his uncle John and entered the monastery of St. Saba. Stephen had a brother, Gregory Sinsak, who also retired to the same monastery and was famous for the religious poetry and hymns

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<sup>1</sup> نهر الله، الذکر المرقوم، ص ٥٠

<sup>2</sup> رستم ص ٧٠

which he composed. In addition to these monks, the Mansour family produced some great men who remained in Damascus and exerted their influence until the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> In Jerusalem there were two Patriarchs of this family, Serjious (842-858), and Elijah III (879-907).<sup>2</sup> John's father, being a generous man, adopted a boy called Cosmas who grew up with his son John and became a very good friend.

### Biography

When we study the life of John, our sources are limited. Until the beginning of this century we had depended solely upon Le Quien's translation of a biography of The Damascene which he had done in 1712, using it as an introduction to the works of this Saint. Le Quien considers the author to be the Patriarch John of Jerusalem of the tenth century. In 1912 the first and oldest version of John's biography was published in al-Masarrah by the Monk Constantine al-Basha al-Mukhlesi. A few years before this publication, Father Basha found an old manuscript about the life of John of Damascus. After a short time he found another manuscript in the Syrian village Ka'arbu of Hamah, which was written in the year 1646 by Gabreil ibn-Constantine of Hamah, son of Gregory, Bishop of Hamah. In the Vatican library he found a manuscript

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1 نصر الله، الذكرى الثوبية ٦٤ ص

2 رستم ٦٨ ص

from 1223, written by the Monk Bemin-al-Siqi of Damascus. When Father Basha compared these manuscripts he found that the latter was the oldest, most perfect and correct version, and thus he published it in 1912. I shall translate this version<sup>1</sup> as The Damascene's life is being narrated. However, I shall use other pertinent information. To preserve the original, I shall enclose it in quotation marks. According to the editor this biography was first written in December, 1084 or 1085.

The father of St. John searched all Persia for a teacher who would not inspire in his son a love for archery, soldiership, hunting or athletics.<sup>2</sup> He finally found this ideal teacher in Cosmas, "the philosopher monk of Calabria, who had come to the city of Damascus with a group of captives to be sold as slaves by their captors, who had taken them from some boats. The slave whose selling became difficult was beheaded. Those that were going to be beheaded used to come first to Cosmas of Calabria, the philosopher monk who was with them in slavery, and ask him to intercede for them so that they would be clothed with patience while being tortured and would receive forgiveness for eternal life. When the captors

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<sup>1</sup> منازل سبأ، السرة من ٢٧٥ - ٢٨٤ و ٢٨٤ - ٢٨٤  
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<sup>2</sup> N.H. Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

saw the respect which he received from the slaves, they asked him, 'Are you the Patriarch of the Christians, and consequently you enjoy this?' He answered them, 'I am neither a Patriarch nor a chief, but a poor monk and a philosopher.' After this answer he began to cry very bitterly."

"Mansour, father of John, noticed his condition. He hurried towards Cosmas and asked him: 'What makes you cry, O man? Your appearance informs me of your renunciation of the world.' He answered him: 'I am not crying for life in this world, for its misfortunes, its changes, or all of its suffering, but I feel sorry for the knowledge which I have acquired since my childhood, and for which I have worked all my life. I have never had a chance to enjoy it, nor have I been able to teach it to someone who would ask God's mercy upon me after my death.' Mansour asked him: 'And how far have you studied?' He answered him: 'I have completed everything.' "

"When Mansour heard this, he hurried to the Caliph and received Cosmas as a gift from him. After which he took Cosmas to his house, liberated him from slavery, and asked him to teach his own son John and his spiritual son Cosmas, who was an orphan. Thus Cosmas became their tutor; and within a short time they learned from him all the sciences of the day such as grammar, philosophy, astronomy, and geometry. They did not leave a book unstudied; they

learned by heart the Greek classical literature, and became absorbed in biblical studies. Their excellence in learning is obvious to anyone who reads their writings. In spite of all this, both students desired a higher way of life and a more virtuous state. When the monk Cosmas was through with their education, he asked Mansour to permit him to retire into the monastery of St. Saba in Jerusalem, and spend the rest of his days in the service of God. Cosmas was granted permission and went to the monastery where he stayed till his death."

Although the Caliph had the official books translated into Arabic, he, nevertheless, kept the Christian officers and scribes. In this respect, says Suleiman ibn-Abd-al-Malik: "We could not dispense with them for an hour, even though they did not need us for an hour in their politics."<sup>1</sup> "After the death of Mansour, his son John became the πρωτοσύμβουλος, secretary of the Caliph, master of his secrets, publicity, all permission and prohibition." This position is considered to be even higher than that of his father. John became the chief advisor of the Caliph. Thus he reached the highest worldly position of his time and country. He used his office to help his people and was the final authority on many problems. His house was the place where the leading

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1 رستم ص ۷۱

religious and non-religious men of his day met<sup>1</sup> to discuss current issues of religious or philosophical subjects such as al-Qadariya.

One of the most popular subjects of his day was the Iconoclastic movement, which was led by the Emperor Leo III, the Isaurian. Due to the present condition of the sources it is difficult to find the causes of this movement. Some reasons are given about which there is no universal agreement among the historians of the Byzantine Empire. Some see in Iconoclasm religious causes, others, political. As a religious reform it aimed at arresting "the progress of the revival of paganism."<sup>2</sup> And as a political movement, the Emperor wanted to free the people from the strong influence of the Church which held the allegiance of the laity. In addition to these two factors, there is no doubt that the Jews and Muslims and some Christian sects such as the Paulicians exerted a great deal of influence on this problem. John of Damascus was contemporary with two Iconoclastic emperors, Leo III and Constantine V.<sup>3</sup>

"And at that time (while John was in the Umayyad service) Constantine,<sup>4</sup> the son of Leo the Isaurian, the

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<sup>1</sup> المحرر «سيرة القديس يوحنا الدمشقي» السرة سنة ١٩٥٠ ١٨٤٤

<sup>2</sup>Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup>The author has committed an anachronism concerning the Emperor Constantine; as we read in the rest of the narrative it is Leo who wrote the letter and not Constantine.



Iconoclast and ruler of Constantinople, disturbed all the churches, and drove away those who held to the orthodox faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He fought the statue of Jesus and Mary, and the icons of all the saints. He hated the theologians who discussed the nature of God, and the ascetic monks who were following the life of the angels and called them the ones who were covered by the black of darkness. John of Damascus did not hesitate to write about the orthodox faith. He sent his writings to the churches who were near and far asking them to hold fast to the praise-worthy religion of kneeling before the icons, quoting Basil The Great who said that the veneration of the pictures reaches to their first origin, namely the person whom they represent. When Leo heard the words and deeds of John, he plotted against him. He called his scribes, and showed them some of John's writings, asking them to write a letter imitating John's handwriting and style. It was to be addressed from John to the Emperor, wherein he would advise the Emperor, as a coreligionist, that the towns of the province of Damascus were bereft of any defensive force and that any one could capture them very easily."

"Leo sent this letter to the Caliph of Damascus, with a letter which explained his good intention. The Caliph believed this letter and ordered his men to cut off John's hand and hang it in the center of the city of

Damascus, which was done. Later on John asked the Caliph to give him back his hand, which he did. John took the hand and went to his oratory and asked the Virgin to heal his hand for which he promised to sing her praises as long as he lived. The Virgin appeared in his dream and healed his hand." The legendary form of this incident has led many scholars to disregard it. However, we find similar orders given by the Caliphs to other Christian leaders. "The Caliph al-Walid II (743-744) ordered the tongue of Peter, Metropolitan of Damascus, to be cut out, because of his preaching against the Muslims."<sup>1</sup> Thus it would not be far from the truth to say that a severe punishment was inflicted upon The Damascene which led him to make his decisive decision.

The enemies of The Damascene started a rumor that the Caliph did not cut off the hand of John but that he accepted a certain amount of money and cut off the hand of somebody else. The Caliph called his old minister to him and asked him, "What medicine has healed you and what remedy have you used?" "My Christ," answered John with a loud voice, "is a perspicacious medicine; He is almighty, he did not make my healing difficult."<sup>2</sup> "When the Caliph heard this and examined his hand, he apologized and wanted to return John to his former

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<sup>1</sup>St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. F.H. Chase, Jr. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1958), Vol. XXXVII, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

office and position. Thanking him, John declined and asked the Caliph's permission to be freed from his responsibilities. After several attempts to alter John's decision, the Caliph gave John permission to choose. John went home and, after distributing his possessions to the poor, took the road to Jerusalem, and entered the monastery of St. Saba in the company of his half-brother Cosmas."

The story of the healing of the hand which has been circulating for a thousand years appears in different variations in the collections of the history of the saints. Father Nasrallah points out that these versions are based on Mikhael's text. There are others such as *Synaxaire of Constantinople*, the *Monologue of Basil*, and the *Vita Marciana* which do not make any allusion to the event. The Byzantine historians who mention the struggle which The Damascene carried on against the Iconoclastic emperors ignore this fact. If it was real, at least some of them would have mentioned it. However, there is one exception, Georges Hamartolos, who relates the incident of the severed hand and the miraculous healing. All of the contemporary historians consider this story as legendary. Judging from internal evidence, Father Nasrallah proves that this story was told to give us the reason for John's retirement into the monastery, and that the hand was cut off after his Iconoclastic letters.<sup>1</sup> There is

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 79.

no doubt about the etiological nature of this event and the role which it was to play for the ordinary Christian of the day whose imagination had a more dynamic role than his intellect in his life.

An intelligent study of the Iconoclastic discourses shows that they do not have the tone of a layman living in the world, but of a clergyman who speaks like a bishop and lives in Jerusalem or its environment. For example, at the beginning of the second discourse he says, "The humble and useless servant of the Church of God."<sup>1</sup> However, this does not exclude the possibility of John's being interested in the subject while he was in the service of the Caliphate.

Concerning the reason for John's renunciation of the world, we do not have ample or direct evidence. Some suggestions are valid, such as the increased pressure of the Caliphate on the dhimis and the indirect attempts at proselytizing. Some writers go so far as to say that even John was presented with the choice between his position and his faith.<sup>2</sup> This point of view is based on the statement which is found in the writings of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 which says that John, like Matthew The Evangelist, left everything in order to follow Christ, considering the shame of Christ greater wealth

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.* (Translation mine).

<sup>2</sup> دستم ص ۷۱

than the treasures of Arabia and choosing to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 'Umar II's caliphate, between the years 718 and 720<sup>2</sup>, John went to the Monastery of St. Saba where his tutor Cosmas had retired. The monastery is situated in a wild and inaccessible spot by the valley of the torrent of Kidron, some ten miles southeast of Jerusalem. Here the anchorite Saba The Sanctified was living in solitude, when in 483, a group of hermits began to gather about him. In the following three years, the community grew so fast that the Bishop of Jerusalem, Sabestius, ordained Saba a priest and appointed him Abbot of the monastery, which commanded great respect and attracted great thinkers and saints. Consequently, it became a very important center of Christian spirituality and learning. "When John asked the Abbot for permission to live in the monastery, the Abbot welcomed him. But because of John's high status none of the elders wanted to take him in charge. They said that John was a great man, and would not obey their orders. Finally one of them consented and accepted John as his disciple. The elder forbade John from all worldly imagination or its

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<sup>2</sup> Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

vain disposition, and ordered renunciation of all secular learning. He was supposed to act against his desires, not do anything without the consent of his elder, not write letters to anyone, nor utter any word about non-religious knowledge. John accepted all this and stayed with him for a long time. One day his teacher wanted to test him so he told him, 'There is a great demand for our product (which was baskets) in Damascus. We have a great supply of them. Why don't you take some and sell them in that city and bring the money to use for our needs?' Thus, he loaded John with a great many baskets, and doubling the price so that he would not sell them quickly and return, he sent John. When John got to Damascus and started selling the baskets, nobody wanted to buy any because of the price. Later on some of his servants saw him, and pitying their master, they bought the baskets from him. He returned to the monastery wearing the crown of triumph, victorious with the Satan of pride."

"One of the monks died. He was a neighbor of John's teacher and had a brother who was overcome with grief. The latter asked John to compose a funeral hymn. John did not answer him because he did not want to disobey the orders of his teacher. After the brother had implored him for a long time, John gave in and composed a poem which is still sung in our day for the ceremony of the

dead. When he had finished its musical arrangement, his teacher came in and ordered John to leave. John sent the elders of the *Laura* to intercede for him. His teacher consented to accept him back on one condition, that John should clean the toilets of all the monks. John accepted this condition and began to work. His teacher saw him and forgave him."

"After some time the Virgin appeared to John's teacher and asked him, 'Why do you close the spring and forbid it to flow? John is going to beautify the churches and decorate the feasts of the saints with his hymns.' After this the teacher permitted John to write what he wanted and confessed that his previous action was the action of an ignorant man. Then John began his compositions about the Resurrection Canon and the Trobaries. Cosmas also was composing, and they used to compete in their compositions amiably."

"When Cosmas had stayed long enough, the Bishops of Jerusalem ordained him as a Bishop in a city called Maiuma, which today is called Mimas. He shepherded the flock in the pastures of salvation, and reaching a very old age, went to be with the Lord. John was called by the Patriarch of the Holy City and was ordained a priest without wanting to be one; but because of his superiors' insistence, he yielded. When John returned to his *Laura*, his devotions

were increased, and he dedicated his time to revising and editing his letters which spread to the ends of the world."<sup>1</sup> Arabic ecclesiastical tradition has preserved The Damascenes "Exposition and Declaration of Faith." In this profession of faith which he made on the occasion of his ordination to the priesthood, he says about himself:

Thou hast nourished me with spiritual milk, with the milk of Thy sacred words. Thou hast sustained me with the solid food of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy only begotten and most holy Son, and hast intoxicated me with the sacred life-giving chalice which is His blood that He shed for the salvation of the world. Because, O Lord, thou hast loved us and given Thy beloved only-begotten son for our redemption, which He willingly undertook and without shrinking, so truly, O Christ God didst thou humble Thyself to bear upon Thy shoulders the straying sheep that was I and feed me in a verdant place and nourish me with the waters of right doctrine by the hands of Thy shepherds, who, once by Thyself fed, did forthwith feed Thy chosen and noble flock. And now, O Lord, by the hands of Thy pontiff Thou has called me to minister to Thy children.<sup>2</sup>

As a monk, John was an outstanding student. This was partly due to his former education and experience and partly to his increased interest in biblical and theological studies in which he was able to achieve an excellence that enabled him to be the writer of "the first Summa Theologica,"<sup>3</sup> *The Fountain of Knowledge*. It was this excellence that

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<sup>1</sup>Here ends Father Mikhael's account of The Damascene.

<sup>2</sup>St. John of Damascus, *op. cit.*, pp. x-xi.

<sup>3</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 500.



attracted the attention of his superiors and made him the spokesman and advisor of the Patriarch John of Jerusalem. In a letter which The Damascene had written we read the following, "Truly I say that the blessed Patriarch John did not utter a word which dealt with spiritual knowledge without telling me about it as if I had been his private student."<sup>1</sup> Thus John became the advisor, friend, and spokesman of the Patriarch who used to summon him from his monastery to preach in the Church of the Resurrection. Later on John went abroad and delivered his famous homilies against the Iconoclasts at various places, and his eloquence won him the title of χρυσορροῖας, Golden Stream. It was of this situation that Theophanes relates: "At that time John Chrysorrhoas flourished at Damascus in Syria, a priest and monk and a teacher most noble in both life and speech . . . And John together with the Bishops of the East anathematized the impious [Leo]."<sup>2</sup>

After his sermons John would return to the monastery at St. Saba where he taught and wrote. Theophanes, the historian, calls him διδάσκαλος ἀρίστος, "eminent professor," because he embodied the best qualities of a teacher, such as clarity, precision in terminology, love of making distinctions, argumentation, and the habit of making

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<sup>1</sup>(Translation mine) المرّة ١٩٥٠ ص ٢٧

<sup>2</sup>St. John of Damascus, *op. cit.*, pp. xii-xiii.

simple comparisons in order to explain the highest teachings or doctrines.<sup>1</sup> From this aspect of John's life there is a letter which was sent to John the Bishop of Latakia as a preface to "Elementary Introduction to Doctrines." In this letter John says, "I, the miserable sinner, open my mouth as a stammerer who stutters, hoping that God will grant me the spirit of wisdom for the sake of those who asked me to speak and for the benefit of my hearers."<sup>2</sup> The fact that he taught is certified by two of his disciples, John the Bishop of Latakia, and Theodore abu-Qurra, from whose pen came *Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni* and *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani*, and who said that these were from the oral teachings of John of Damascus.<sup>3</sup>

The Damascene grew and matured in a world which was tolling the bell for the dying Byzantine Empire and heralding the birth of the new Arab Empire. He was fully aware of the situation in both Empires. He had suffered the treacherous consequences of the policies of the Byzantine Emperors and had a foretaste of the changing Muslim policies and their tightening grip over the Christian community of Syria. Sensitive and intelligent as he was, he could not but react to both Empires between which

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> المرقية ١٩٥٠ ص ٢٧١

<sup>3</sup> المرقية ١٩٥٠ ص ٢٧١

the fortunes of the Christians swayed. Hence we find him denouncing the Byzantine Emperors and denying to them the right to interfere in ecclesiastical affairs. Because of his highly appraised attempts against Iconoclasm, Christian tradition has ascribed to him tours which The Damascene is supposed to have taken through Syria, Asia Minor, and Constantinople. Several modern writers<sup>1</sup> have accepted this tradition but we have no conclusive evidence for accepting it. In the earliest version of John's biography which is available, no mention is made of such significant ventures.

In regard to the ever-growing claims of Islam, The Damascene was vocal. He classified Islam as a heresy and confounded it with Arianism which denied the divinity of Christ.<sup>2</sup> He was not afraid to meet their arguments and tell them such things as, "If you call us associates, *Mushrikun*, we call you mutilators."<sup>3</sup>

Besides these two political powers, The Damascene found it necessary to write against the non-political but equally dangerous religious movements. Monophysitism which had been suppressed under Byzantine rule was free

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 501, citing Shehade and Nicolas Khury, *Summary of the History of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem*, (in Arabic) (Jerusalem: 1925), p. 252.

<sup>2</sup>Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XCIV, cols. 763-74.

<sup>3</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 524.

to flourish in Syria. It had such a secure position that it was able to develop several varieties, which received their names from their leaders such as Jacobites, Senerians, and Acephali. The Nestorians, who were safely established in Persia and out of reach of the Byzantine Emperors, started to penetrate into Syria. Monothelites were still in the mountains of northern Syria. Finally a dangerous revival of Manicheanism began to penetrate Asia Minor and the East.<sup>1</sup> Against these dangerous movements The Damascene composed a number of works which describe and refute their arguments. In subsequent chapters these aspects of The Damascene's life will be considered in more detail. His works moulded the thought of the Christian Church of the following centuries. They became the yeast in Muslim theology which leavened several Muslim schools of thought.

When not engaged in preaching or teaching, John was busy in his quiet study writing treatises or composing poems and hymns. One of his biographers says that John spent his declining years in his study where "he set himself the task of revising and correcting his multifarious works,"<sup>2</sup> for which he was deemed worthy of the "Double Honour" because he fulfilled the double obligation of obedience, humility, and discipline of mind and body. He

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<sup>1</sup> St. John of Damascus, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

<sup>2</sup> Lupton, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

reached the age of seventy-five--one of the old hagiographers reports that he lived a hundred and four years<sup>1</sup>--and died while occupied in writing his canons, odes, *Idiomela*, *Cathismata*, *Troporia*, *Theotokia*, and the like. He was buried in the Monastery of St. Saba, and in the twelfth century his bones were taken to Constantinople and buried there.

There is no certain date for the death of The Damascene. Neither in Father Mikhael's nor in any other biography of the Saint is there any mention of a date for his death. The historians and critics that wrote before 1906 agreed that John must have died before 754. This is the date of the heretical council which Constantine V called and which met in his palace in Hieria. The Bishops in the council, while discussing the enemies of the Iconoclastic movement said that: *Ἡ τριάς τοῦ τρεῖς καθεῖλεν*, "The Trinity removed (lit: destroyed) the three."<sup>2</sup> The "three" were Germanus of Constantinople, George of Cyprus, and John of Damascus who must have been dead by this time. In 1906 Father S. Vailhe discovered a text about the life of The Damascene's nephew Stephen, written by Leo The Damascene in 809, which indicates that Stephen left Damascus and joined his uncle in the Monastery of St. Saba when he was

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<sup>1</sup> السيرة ١٩٥٠ ص ٢٧٢

<sup>2</sup> (S.) Vailhe, "Date de la Morte de St. Jean Damascene," *E.O.*, 1906, pp. 28-30.

nine years old. Stephen stayed with John for fifteen years and the latter died in 749 when he was sixty-nine years old. Father Nasrallah presents a very convincing argument and sees no reason not to conclude that John died in 749.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after John's death, believers began to pay him homage. He, who was dubbed by his enemies "a traitorous worshipper of images, cursed favorer of Saracenes, a wronger of Jesus Christ, a teacher of impiety, and a bad interpreter of the Scripture,"<sup>2</sup> was exonerated by the Seventh Ecumenical Council and considered as one of the defenders of the orthodox faith, and one of the Bishops of the council shouted, "May his memory live forever."<sup>3</sup> Since then writers have called him "our righteous father, John The Theologian." His name appears in the book of the lives of the saints, and in 1890 Pope Leo XIII proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church.<sup>4</sup> He is the last Father of the Greek Church and the greatest of her poets.<sup>5</sup> The Orthodox Church celebrates his day on the fourth of December, and the Roman Catholic Church on the twenty-seventh of March.

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<sup>1</sup> نصر الله، الذكرى السنوية من ١٤٧

<sup>2</sup>G.R. Woodward and H. Mattingly, *St. John Damascene Barlaam and Joasaph* (London: William Heinemann, 1937), p. xx.

<sup>3</sup> المسرة ١٩٥٠م ١٠٠٠

<sup>4</sup> السنة ١٩٥٠م ١٠٠٠

<sup>5</sup> Woodward, *loc. cit.*

John is still considered to be the last theologian of the early Greek Church whose outlook was universal. His loyalty was bound by his devotion to the Christian tradition. He carried out his program according to his wish, which was not to say anything of his own. Consequently he is not considered to be one of the creative theologians but rather an editor or compiler of the Christian heritage. He had an astonishingly versatile and constructive mind which was capable of organizing and building up a coherent system of thought out of diverse materials. He was a combination of a theologian, exeget, historian, preacher, poet and above all, a saint whose personality as well as his work is highly esteemed in the Christian Church.

## CHAPTER IV

### LITERARY WORKS

John of Damascus grew up in an age which had gone through a considerable amount of change in its intellectual, cultural and political aspects. By the eighth century the theological ferment had subsided, if not totally, considerably. The Canon was decided, a Christian Creed was accepted by most of Christendom, and significant theological definitions concerning the relationship of the Father to the Son and to the Holy Spirit had been formulated. The enthusiasm of the primitive and persecuted Church had given way to the institutionalized and often government-subsidized Church. The Ecumenical Councils had, in many cases, finally and authoritatively clarified the central problems of the Christian faith. "The exegetical-historical and dogmatic speculative interest flagged and was almost entirely ousted by liturgical and ascetical requirements."<sup>1</sup> The great controversy of the eighth century was farther from the main issues of Christianity than ever before. It dealt not with fundamentals but with the outer shell; the

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<sup>1</sup>B. Altaner, *Patrology*, trans. H.C. Graef (New York: Herder and Herder, 1960), p. 549.



icons that were decorating the walls of the building became the primary concern of a decadent Christianity.

Another important factor which had contributed to the change was Greek philosophy to which Christian thinkers had been finally reconciled. In the first half of the sixth century Leontius of Byzantium, John Philoponus in the east, and Boethius in the west introduced Aristotelian philosophy and its logic into Christian theology. Neo-Platonism never lacked followers in Alexandria. When the political uncertainty, caused by the Barbarians in the West and Islam in the East is added, we have a fairly complete picture of the main factors which underlay the literary work of The Damascene and of his age.

As theological and intellectual creativity slackened, the past was glorified. The authority of the Church Fathers became the final word on many a theological issue. Traditionalism, the handing down of the teachings of the Fathers, became a principle. Many writers were interested in collecting and arranging the intellectual products of the past. Thus the *Catena* and *Florilegia* which deal with Christian doctrines came into being in the East. Of the several Christian centers of thought, only the Rhetorical School of Gaza flourished in this period. The Greek Church produced several great men, one of whom was the great mystic Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and

theologians such as Maximus the Confessor and others. The latter was, like The Damascene, a secretary of the Emperor Heraclius, but had left the palace, become a monk and had written against heresies.

The literary activity of The Damascene was prosecuted in the famous Laura of St. Saba. John was primarily a theologian; because of his wide knowledge and interest he was able to write about various secular subjects as well as about theology, the queen of the sciences of the time. Consequently we find his literary works to be in various forms. To him belongs the merit of being the first expositor of the doctrines of the Church Fathers,<sup>1</sup> defending them against the diverse heresies of the day. He has written also about such subjects as morality, asceticism, sacred music, poetry, and, being an eloquent orator, he has left us several sermons.

In enumerating his works, it is difficult to make a definite list because of the abundance of original and ascribed material which is scattered in many places. Le Quien prepared the first list in 1712 which was enlarged by Migne's edition in 1864-91. In the early twenties of this century, P. Jugie did the latest work on which F.

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<sup>1</sup>John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. by D.F. Salmond, (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers; Oxford: Parker and Co., 1899), IX, p. vi.

Nasrallah depends. In my exposition I shall depend, primarily, on Migne's work.<sup>1</sup>

John did most of his work in Greek. But he was "fully at home in the Arabic tongue. He often cites the *Qur'an* word for word and shows his familiarity with the Hadith or traditions."<sup>2</sup> Therefore it is natural to expect some work in Arabic. Unfortunately, until now, there is no definite list or word in this respect. Nasrallah thinks that there is a surprising amount of material in Arabic waiting to be discovered.

#### Dogmatic Works

His most important work is the *Fountain of Knowledge*. It was written at the request of his former colleague and friend Cosmas Melodius, Bishop of Maiuma, in 742. At first John hesitated to undertake the job and wrote to Cosmas: "If Moses announced his inability to convey to the people God's commandments, how can I with my own mind express the divine mysteries which surpass the understanding and mind of every creature?"<sup>3</sup> Trusting Cosmas' prayer, and in obedience to his ecclesiastical authority, John undertook the job of collecting what the

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<sup>1</sup>J.P. Migne, *Joannis Damasceni*, Vol. XCIV of *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: 1864), pp. 19-63.

<sup>2</sup>J.E. Merrill, "John of Damascus on Islam," *The Muslim World*, XLI, No. 2 (April 1951), p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>(Translation mine) المسرة ١٩٠٠ ص ٤٧.

great scholars had said and presented it in concise form. This book has been called the Dogmatic Handbook of the Middle Ages,<sup>1</sup> and won him the title of "Father of Scholasticism."<sup>2</sup> It is divided into three parts which deal with philosophy (*Dialectica*), heresies (*De Centum Haeresibus Compendium*), and the orthodox faith, (*De Fide Orthodoxa*). The first two are a philosophical and historical introduction to the third part which is a very lengthy and important piece of work. The author states the purpose of this division of his work which is "to clear and strengthen the vision of the disciple, that after seeing through and detecting what is false,"<sup>3</sup> he may abide in the truth.

The first part is called by the author κεφάλαια φιλοσοφικά. It is a series of short chapters on the philosophical definitions of Aristotle mostly, of Plato through Maximus, The Confessor, and of Porphyry's *Isagoge*. This part has a long and a short version, which are preserved in Le Quien's work.

The second part *Concerning The Heresies*, is called by the author περί αἰρέσεων ἐν συντομίᾳ ὅθεν ἤρξαντο καὶ ἄθεν ὑπερβόσιν: It is a historical introduction to

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<sup>1</sup>N.H. Baynes and H. Moss, *Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 228.

نصر الله، الذكرى السنوية لها 2

<sup>3</sup>Lupton, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

theology. The author presents the origin and development of one hundred three heresies. The first eighty heresies are verbal reproductions of the seven sections of the *Anacephalaeosis* of Epiphanius. Of the remaining twenty-three, most are borrowed from writers like Theodoret, Thimotheus of Constantinople, Leontius of Byzantium, and Sophronius of Jerusalem; a few are original works about Iconoclasm, Aposchistae or Doxarii, and Islam, whose founder received his knowledge about Christianity from an Arian monk. The Damascene refutes some of the Muslim arguments with clear Aristotelian logic and ends up calling the Muslims mutilators because they admit that Christ is the word of God and Spirit, and yet they separate him from God.

After the rules of the dialectic and the review of ancient heresies comes the third book *Concerning the Orthodox Faith*, *Ἐκδοσις (or Ἐκθεσις) ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδοξου πίστεως*, of which there is an English translation.<sup>1</sup> In this book John follows the order of Theodoret in his book, *Epitome of Divine Dogmas*. It differs from the latter in being less creative and more of a compilation of materials taken from the scriptures, opinions of the Church Fathers and statements of the Ecumenical Councils. Hence he produced a work which is "an unexhausted storehouse of tradition."<sup>2</sup> Of the three Cappadocians, he followed mostly

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<sup>1</sup>John of Damascus, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-101.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vi.

Gregory, "The Theologian," of Nazianzus. He also was greatly influenced by Nimesius, Bishop of Emesa, and used other theologians such as Cyril of Alexandria, Leo The Great, Leontius of Byzantium, the Martyr Maximus, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Epiphanius, and the writer who took the name of Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>1</sup> Of the western theological works, he was familiar with the *Tome* of Pope, Leo The Great to Flavianus, Bishop of Constantinople.

The book is composed of one hundred chapters. It has been customary among the Latin translators to divide it into four parts; but this division is not found in any Greek codex nor in the Greek edition of Verona. A later version called *Codex Regius* No. 3445, divides it into two parts.<sup>2</sup> The four-fold division is after the fashion of the *Sentences* of Peter of Lombard. The first book comprising chapters i-xiv, treats the nature and attributes of God and the Trinity; the second book, chapters xv-xliv, discusses the works of God such as creation, the universe, angels, paradise, man, his faculties and passions. This section raises the philosophy and natural sciences of the day to a respectable position. It is here that we find the results of his knowledge of astronomy and physics. The third book, chapters xlv-lxxiii, is on

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vii.

the doctrine of the incarnation, the nature and personality of Christ, and other topics connected with the Monophysite and Monothelite controversies, and ends with the descent into hell. Book four, chapters lxxiv-c, continues to discuss aspects of christology and treats various other subjects such as faith, baptism, cult of the cross, customs of worship, Lords supper, mariolatry, veneration of the saints, holy scriptures, the sabbath, virginity, circumcision, antichrist and the resurrection.

In addition to this great work, which has been called a *Summa Theologica*, John has written several other theological treatises:

1. *De Institutione Elementari* is one of John's early works, addressed to the Bishop of Laodicea, and begins with definitions of the terms which were used in the controversy of the Monophysites. It was written before the *Fountain of Knowledge*.
2. *De Recta Sententia Liber*, is a formal profession of faith composed by John to be used by Bishop Elias of Yabrud, who was not in the Malkite Church but who wanted to be. It was to be recited before Peter, the Metropolitan of Damascus. Since the treatise does not mention Iconoclasm, it must have been written before 726.
3. *De Sancta Trinitate*, is a short catechism in the form of questions and answers on God, the Trinity and

the incarnation. This work seems to have been edited by somebody else.<sup>1</sup>

4. *The Exposition and Explanation of the Faith*, is a confession of faith which was recited by The Damascene on the day of his ordination. This treatise is preserved in an Arabic translation which was discovered by P. Jugie.<sup>2</sup> Its date is suggested to be before 726 for the same reason which is given above (2).

#### Polemic Works

In the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, the Church was preoccupied with enemies both from within and without. This aspect of the Church is reflected in the polemics of The Damascene. Moved by his love and concern for the Church he wrote against the heresies of his day such as Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Monothelitism, Manicheanism or Paulicianism, and Iconoclasm. He has also left an outline of a discussion with a Saracene and a treatise against popular superstition. His discussions in these works center around the problems of faith and belief, which make them similar to his dogmatic works. The polemics are twelve in number, but some of them treat the same subject several times. He has written two treatises against the Nestorians, two against the

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



Jacobites, two against the Manicheans, and three treatises against the Iconoclasts.

1. The polemic treatises, which are held with special respect in the orthodox churches, are contained in *De Imaginibus Orations* . These were written between 726 and 730 prior to the council of the oriental bishops who anathematized Leo III, the Isaurian.<sup>1</sup> The occasion which called forth these addresses has been mentioned before, namely Leo III forbade the use of images in the churches and appointed a new bishop of Constantinople. John wrote the first protest in the form of an apologetic word, *λο ος απολο ητικος* , in defence of the images and followed it by a second address which clarified the first, "An account of the first which is not very well known to many," *δια το μη πανυ ευδιαγνωτου τοις πολλοις του πρωτου ειναι* .<sup>2</sup> The third was a repetition of the former two with more perspicuity. The author maintains that "it is not the part of the Emperor's to legislate for the Church."<sup>3</sup> "The image was but as a mirror, in which they could see, as 'through a glass, darkly,' the reflection of Him whom alone they worshiped."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>2</sup> Lupton, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>4</sup> Lupton *op. cit.*, p. 414.

2. *De Hymno Trisagio Epistola*, was written to the Archimandrite Jordanes, 734-735, after the death of Patriarch John of Jerusalem. The Damascene supports the traditional interpretation of the Trisagion against his contemporary's, the Abbot Anastase of St. Euthymius', interpretation. In this treatise John says that the triple holy of the hymn is addressed to the three divine persons and not to the Son only. Consequently, the addition of Peter Fullo, "You who were crucified for us," is unacceptable. The Damascene, it was claimed by Anastasius, supported this change. In order to clarify his position, John wrote about this controversial subject.

3. *De Natura Composita Contra Acephalos*, is a summary of another letter, written by The Damascene in the name of Peter, Bishop of Damascus, to the Jacobite Bishop of Daraa, in order to convert him to the orthodox faith. The subject which is treated in the latter treatise is similar to *De Natura Composita Contra Acephalos*, namely the two-fold nature of Christ. The author discusses the subject fully. The Acephali, or "headless," were the extreme Monophysite party of Egypt, who separated from the Patriarch, Peter Mongus of Alexandria, for subscribing to the Henoticon.<sup>1</sup> The estimated date for this treatise is before the death of the Patriarch, Peter of Damascus, in 728.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

4. *Adversus Nestorianos*, was composed to establish the divinity and unity of Christ. He appeals to the Nicene Creed to support his views. In one passage John uses an illustration from the famous industry of Damascus, the manufacture of sword-blades, in which he says that "a sword which has the nature of iron acquires the nature of fire when heated in the forge without losing that of iron; so Christ took by his incarnation the human flesh (ἐνυπόστατον) which he bore without losing his divinity."<sup>1</sup>

5. *De Duabus in Christo Voluntatibus*, are two treatises directed against the Jacobites and Monothelites. The two natures and two wills of Christ are treated. The term *Monothelite* was first coined by The Damascene, who argues that, "in Christ the Divine will operated 'through' the human as through an instrument."<sup>2</sup> The Damascene treats the subject with similar arguments to those of St. Maximus The Confessor.

6. There are two dialogues against the Manicheans. The first is *Dialogus contra Manichaeos*, whose genuineness was suspected by Billius, a former editor of The Damascene's works. His reason was the interpretation of the fire of Hell which John defined, "as not material fire, but the unquenchable flame of sinful desire, ever-raging, ever-

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

baffled." But it is accepted by others as The Damascene's work. The dialogue touches on important theological and metaphysical questions such as the foreknowledge of God and predestination. The second dialogue, *Against the Manicheans*, κατὰ Μανιχαίου διάλογος, was written after *Concerning the Orthodox Faith* and is based on its fourth book. It dates from 742.

7. The Damascene was the first outstanding scholar who entered the field of polemics against Islam.<sup>1</sup> His famous work on this subject, as it has been mentioned is preserved in the *De Fide Orthodoxa*. The topics which the author chose and the arguments which he employed have been constantly used since then. Dr. Merrill, in his aforementioned article, studied this tractate and concluded that the "author was not acquainted with even the first four *suras* of the Qur'an in detail."<sup>2</sup> Theodore abu-Qurra (+820), has preserved for us an outline of a discussion with a Muslim in the form of a "Dialogue between a Christian and a Muslim," Διαλέσις ξαρακηνοῦ καὶ χριστιανοῦ. The objections of a Muslim to the doctrine of the incarnation are met. This dialogue was written by a disciple of John of Damascus. There is another dialogue, on the same subject, which was not composed by John directly. The latter is preserved in an Arabic version.

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, *loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 97.

8. Among his polemics are such minor works as *De Draconibus* and *De Strygibus*, which were directed against popular superstitions that detracted the Christians from their devotion.

### Ascetic Works

A man who had renounced the world and withdrawn to monastic life cannot but write about monasticism, which held a considerable place in the thinking of the day.

1. The principle work of The Damascene in this field is the *Sacra Parallela*, which is an anthology of detached sentences, arranged in alphabetical order, taken from the scriptures and the Fathers. The work is divided into three books which are arranged according to the subject of each. The first treatise is about God, the Trinity and the light of our minds. The second is about the knowledge of man and human affairs. The third is on virtues and vices, each of which is compared with its opposite. It is from this comparison that the name *Parallela* is derived. The original of this work is not available, and in later copies additions have been made. There are two tractates which are very similar to the and could have been the original or closer to the original. The first of these is found in *Codex Vat. 1236*,<sup>1</sup> and the second is in a manuscript which belonged to Cardinal

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

Rochefoucauld and was given to the Jesuit College of Clermont.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this extensive work there are other short pieces.

2. *De Octo Spiritibus Nequitiae*, is a summary of the eight vices by which a monk is tempted: "Gluttony, evil concupiscence, covetousness, and the rest; together with the means by which they may be overcome."<sup>2</sup>

3. *De Virtute et Vitio*, is an appendix to the former treatise. In this the Damascene classifies virtues and vices according to the two-fold nature of man. He presents in a very condensed form many psychological and ascetic notions.

4. *De Sacris Jejuniis*, is a letter to a monk named Cometas, on the subject of the lenten fast. John explains that whether we fast eight or seven weeks does not make as much difference as our attitude.

#### Exegetical Works

The Damascene has left us one exegetical work, namely *Locis Selectis in Epistolas S. Pauli*. It is a commentary on the Epistles of Paul. Most of the comments in addition to his own were taken from the various homilies of John Chrysostom and other writers like Theodoret, and Cyril of Alexandria. In its present form, the commentary

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<sup>1</sup>Lupton, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 415.

is arranged in short paragraphs following the verse which they explain.

### Homilies

John of Damascus was an eloquent and outstanding preacher. His sermons are characterised by doctrinal teachings which render them comprehensible. The main doctrines that appear in his homilies are the Trinity and incarnation. There are thirteen sermons published under his name, of which nine are genuine; the rest are of doubtful authenticity. In the following list I shall enumerate the authentic sermons which are the first nine.

1. *Hom in Transfiguration Domini*, was delivered at the Festival of the Transfiguration, in the Church of Mount Tabor after the beginning of the Iconoclastic persecution.

2. Three Homilies about the Dead, *Dormitionem B.V. Mariae* whose authenticity has been questioned by Cave, as cited by Lupton,<sup>1</sup> are accepted by later writers as authentic because of *Codex Paris Graec 1470*, which dates from 890.<sup>2</sup> To some scholars the work is an important support of Mariolatry. The first homily is short and restrained but the second is long and imaginative. In it he describes the death of Mary, the reasons for and fact of the Assumption

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

which he portrays in great detail. In one passage "he compares the reception of the Incarnate Son of God into the womb of the Virgin, to the reception of fire by straw, glorifying, not consuming it."<sup>1</sup> The third homily is short and of little importance in contrast to the second.

3. The homily *In Sabbatum Sanctum* "For Holy Sabbath" is the longest of the homilies, and in some respects a very important one. The Damascene discusses in it the importance of Sunday and reviews the mysteries of God's existence, of man's creation and fall, of the incarnation, and of the divine will and energy of Christ.

4. There are two homilies about the nativity of the Virgin Mary, *In Nativitatem B.V. Mariae* . Le Quien<sup>2</sup> accepts them as authentic while others suspect their genuineness.<sup>3</sup> These sermons are noted for the profusion of scriptural quotations, allegorical interpretations of Old Testament passages, and repetitions of images and phrases. A recent study by Mitchel has proven the authenticity of the first, which begins with "Δεύτε πάντα εἶδη ."<sup>4</sup>

5. *Laudates St. Joannis Chrysostomic* is a eulogy about Chrysostom; in which he makes a special reference

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<sup>1</sup>Lupton, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup>Migne, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Lupton, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

<sup>4</sup>Mitchel, *The Mariology of St. John of Damascus*.



to the Saint's history and commends him for maintaining the true doctrine of the hypostases "and the distinctions of will in Christ."<sup>1</sup> The style is very ornate and figurative which is a characteristic of most of his homilies.

6. *Laudatio St. Barbarae Martyris* is another panegyric about St. Barbara who was an only daughter of a governor. Because of her new faith, Christianity, she was persecuted and martyred by her father. The language and style of the homily have created doubt with some scholars but Langden suggests that it could have been delivered by John and that the inserted legendary material could have been common material which he was repeating.<sup>2</sup>

7. *In Ficum Arefactam* is a sermon about the dried fig tree which was delivered in the Church of the Resurrection. The language of this sermon is different in that it is less forceful and impetuous.

Many sermons are ascribed to John whose authenticity is suspected such as: *In Sanctam Parascenen*, *In Annuntiationem B.V. Mariae*, two sermons, and a fragment found in a cantata on Luke 1:35.<sup>3</sup> There are purported to be other homilies scattered throughout different libraries and private collections for which there is no systematic record.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>2</sup>J. Langden, *Johannes von Damaskus* (Gotha: 1879), p. 238.

<sup>3</sup>Lupton, *op. cit.*, pp. 419-420.

The Poetic, Musical, and Liturgic Works

The Damascene was brought up in a time and place in which "the greatest measure of literary progress was then achieved in the field of poetical composition."<sup>1</sup> The court of the Umayyads became a kind of Suk 'Uqaz where poets competed. Satire and panegyric were two of the most famous forms which flourished. The poets were supported by the Caliph because of their important service in affecting public opinion. It was in the company of people like al-Akhtal, Ka'b ibn-Ju'ayl, Jarir, al-Hajjaj, al-Firazdaq Kutayr, Ra'i, Nabigat al-Subiani, Nosaile and others with whom John of Damascus spent his social hours in Howarin.

Although we have no evidence of The Damascene's writing Arabic poetry, his poetic genius shines through the piles of his Greek works and won him "the double honour of being the last . . . of the Fathers of the Eastern Church, and the greatest of her poets."<sup>2</sup> The name of The Damascene continues in Byzantine tradition more as a musician than anything else. His biographer, Mikhael of Antioch, tells us that even the Virgin Mary was so taken by his ability to compose poetry and music that she had to intervene between him and his teacher at the Laura of St. Saba. The latter apologized for his restrictions and permitted John to express his devotion

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

<sup>2</sup>J.M. Neale, *Hymns of the Eastern Church* (London: 1870), p. 90.

with poetry and music. Consequently, The Damascene became a writer of hymns and the reformer of the musical system of the Byzantine Church of the eighth century.<sup>1</sup>

Before giving a brief summary of this aspect of his productivity, I deem it necessary to raise the question concerning the authenticity of all that is ascribed to The Damascene. As in the other areas of his work, here also there is an enormous body of material whose authenticity is not yet established. The latest work on this subject is by Armand Lailly, cited below. He proposes some criteria for establishing the authenticity of John's liturgical and musical works. The author's conclusion is that The Damascene had considerable influence on both the liturgy and the music of his day, whose extent is not yet definite. In addition to The Damascene, the name of his half brother Cosmas occupies a very high place in the pages of Byzantine musicologists. For Theodore Pradrome of the twelfth century, Cosmas is the musician, *μελουργός* "the sublime, Ὁ θεσπεσιός." and the divine musician, Ὁ θεῖς μουσικός. It is interesting to note also that MS. 353 of the Bibliotheque Nationale de Paris reserves the primacy, in its title, for Cosmas; it reads *Hymnes de Cosmas et de Jean Damascene*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I.R.P. Armand Lailly, "L'influence liturgue et Musicale de St. Jean de Damas," *الذكرى المنوية* p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

Tradition has ascribed to The Damascene the following:

A. In liturgy

1. The organization of the text of *The Oktoikhos*, which is the most extensive liturgical book. It contains the different parts of the Divine Office which are prescribed for vespers, midnight prayers, morning prayers, lauds, and the mass. The book is divided into eight sections from which it has derived its name.

Another name for the book is *Parakletiki*.

2. The composition of many poetic canons.
3. An important role in editing the *Typikon of St. Saba*.

B. The chronicler, George Cedrenus, who lived under Alexis Comnenus has said that the most beautiful flower of The Damascene is the composition of the hymns of the liturgy.<sup>1</sup> His work of composing hymns is very rich and is divided into two categories: the first is metric hymns, and the second is rhythmic poetry. Mgr. Sophronios Eustratiadis attempts to give an exact count of The Damascene's hymnography. He attributes to his pen 531 *hirmoi*, 75 canons for the Menology, 15 canons for Pentecost, 545 *idiomela* for all the year, and 138 *stichera*.<sup>2</sup> Modern critics ascribe to John a leading role in the composition of the music of *The Oktoikhos*.

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>Laily, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

1. He introduced musical signs and rhythm into church music.
2. He composed many melodies for the canons of the troparia.
3. He introduced an important change in the Byzantine music by reducing nineteen musical signs to six and modifying some rules that have survived to our day. He also devised signs which represent musical qualities and quantities.<sup>1</sup>
4. To him is also ascribed a great part of the *Typikon of St. Saba*.

The musical influence of The Damascene is still seen in the Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Churches where many of his Easter hymns are still sung. Cal. Pitra has classified The Damascene with Cosmas and Andrew of Crete as the Fathers of hymnography.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>Laily, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN OF DAMASCUS

It is difficult to confine the effect of such a multiferous life into a few pages, and be sure that we have a true picture and that justice has been done to the "Doctor of Christian Art." The influence of The Damascene is so wide that I am obliged to limit my survey to the three outstanding areas of Iconoclasm, theology, and Islam.

#### On Iconoclasm

The three orations written against the Iconoclasts brought The Damascene to the attention of modern scholarship.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the political situation of his day which divided the world into two hostile camps, he was able to make his voice heard both in Constantinople and Damascus. His influence became so strong that he was considered the champion of the Iconophiles<sup>2</sup> of his day. The impression which John made upon the Iconoclasts was so strong that it

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<sup>1</sup>P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1888), IV, 629.

<sup>2</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

commanded a response from the Emperor Constantine Compronimus. The Iconoclastic Council, which he called in 753, concludes thus: "Anathema to Mansur, the man of evil name and Sarcen sentiments! Anathema to Mansur the worshiper of images and writer of falsehood! Anathema to Mansur, the insulter of Christ and traitor of the empire."<sup>1</sup> The arguments which he advanced have become the traditional reply of the Church to those who question the use and presence of icons in Christian Churches. The Damascene argues that images to the ignorant masses are like the written or spoken word to the educated man. They are memorials, "representations, imitations, likenesses, and books for the uneducated."<sup>2</sup> He admits the limitations of the human means of expression and says in spite of that "we cannot do else than express ourselves according to our limited capacity."<sup>3</sup> As to the nature of the image, he says, "an image is . . . an imprint of something showing in itself what it represents,"<sup>4</sup> but these two must not be equated or identified with each other. The respect which is given to the image passes to the original. However, The Damascene warns his readers

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<sup>1</sup> St. John of Damascus, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> P.J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> John of Damscus, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

against idolatry by, "not making a god of it (the image), but saluting it as an image of God made flesh."<sup>1</sup> In regard to the Emperors' interference in ecclesiastical problems, The Damascene draws a sharp line between secular and religious authority and defines very clearly the responsibility of each. Thus in his second speech he says, "It appertains not to kings to make laws for the church . . . political welfare is the concern of kings, the ecclesiastical system is a matter for pastors and doctors; and this, brethern, is an act of brigandage."<sup>2</sup> The reason for this distinction is that the Church is based on the oral and written tradition of the Fathers in contrast to the Empire which is governed by imperial edicts. It was with such distinctions and arguments that the author defended the cause of the Iconodules, assisting in their final victory on the first Sunday in Lent in 843, which is still being celebrated in the orthodox churches at the same time of the year. Although the pictures were reinstated, the exiles recalled, and the prisoners set at liberty, The Damascene's protest against the Emperor's right to interfere in ecclesiastical affairs went unheeded. "In the struggle," writes Harnack, which for a century the Byzantine Church maintained against

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward and Mattingly, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup>E. Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (Oxford: Calander Press, 1957).



the State, not her religious constitution alone, but her liberty was at stake. On the first point, she was the victor; in the struggle for the liberty, she yielded."<sup>1</sup>

The distinction between the essence and form, the primacy of the first over the second, and the utility of form for essence is a valuable contribution to the cause of Christian art. It shows a true understanding of all Christian symbolism in the written, spoken, acted, or painted form. It is the kind of understanding which minimizes secondary differences in an attempt to emphasize the relevant issues of Christianity to our Ecumenical Age.

#### On Christian Thought

It has been noted before that the Christian community of Syria was the bridge by which Greek culture and thought was transmitted to the Arabs. In John of Damascus we see the best example of this process. He was the synthesis of Greek learning and Patristic thought. In addition to this "he became the great channel which carried Greek thought to the Middle Ages and thus became the link between East and West."<sup>2</sup> Thus, we are not surprised to hear one of the Greek thinkers of the fifteenth century say that when he quotes The Damascene, he is also quoting all the philosophers and theologians of the past.

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<sup>1</sup> J. B. Bury, Cook, and Adcock, (eds.), *The Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1923), IV, 41.

<sup>2</sup> الادب يوحنا الفاجوري البولسي «مؤلفه يوحنا الدمشقي» السيرة  
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The fame of The Damascene as one of the greatest theologians of history rests chiefly on his work, *The Fountain of Knowledge*, which became the theological textbook for many of the monasteries of Syria. This book was used in the Jacobite, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Roman Orthodox, Churches, and even in distant churches such as the Churches of Armenia, and Georgia.<sup>1</sup> In the entire work there is an application of Aristotelian categories to Christian theology. As he clearly states, "Let us collect knowledge that serves the truth."<sup>2</sup> The author took many Aristotelian definitions and added to them such distinctions as the difference between nature, person, and essence. He was not a mere compiler but also a creative philosopher who, using the Aristotelian definitions, created new theological expressions which are distinguished by their clarity and freedom from contemporary theological schools.

In the history of Christian thought, The Damascene is considered to be the theologian of the incarnation. This subject was treated in most of his theological work. He teaches that Christ exists with God simultaneously "as does the fire with its light,"<sup>3</sup> "that each nature in

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 635.

<sup>3</sup>St. John of Damascus, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

Christ possessed its peculiar attributes and was not mixed with the other,"<sup>1</sup> and that "in the Person of the Word the flesh subsisted or had personality."<sup>2</sup> John succeeded in extracting from the doctrine of the three persons, who are identical in their attributes and power,<sup>3</sup> all that the Eastern Orthodox Church teaches in its faith and theology. He recognized only two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. He accepts the Old Testament canon of twenty-seven books and adds to the New Testament, the Apostolic Canons of Clement. He supported his theological conclusions by the writings of the Fathers whose unanimous teaching he considers to be as binding as the Scripture. After the Fifth Ecumenical Council, he joined the duophysite camp and fought against its enemies.

It is rather difficult to find out the exact influence of The Damascene over Byzantine theology because this theology is not well known. The reason for this confusion over the extent of his influence is due to the Byzantine theologians, whose habit was to make use of their predecessors without giving them credit or mentioning their names.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, The Damascene exerted a considerable influence upon the thinking of the Christian

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 633.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

Church. He enjoyed such respect from both East and West that during the *Philioque* controversy of the thirteenth century, the Old Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, and Oriental Churches turned to The Damascene for a definition of the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that would give them a basis for union.<sup>1</sup> It is said of him that,

He restored the Unity of the Triad by following the ancient theory of the Greek Church, representing the God the Father as the *αρχη* . . . the being of the Holy Spirit no less than the being of the Son, as grounded in and derived from the Father.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that the influence of The Damascene was greater in the ancient period than in our day. Among the Slavs he was held in great respect all through the Middle Ages. Not having the same amount of material at their disposal, they were less able to make use of The Damascene's works than the Greeks. At the end of the ninth century, John, Exarch of Bulgaria, translated *Concerning the Orthodox Faith* into the Old Slavonic language. He omitted certain parts, and added many passages from the Fathers. This translation went from Bulgaria to Russia, where we find the oldest manuscript in Moscow's Synodic Library. In the sixteenth century, Prince Kurbsky made a Russian translation of it, which was followed by several

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<sup>1</sup>Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 636.

<sup>2</sup>Neander, *Passim*, III, 554.

other translations, the last one in 1894.<sup>1</sup>

It was through the translated works of The Damascene, that a powerful stimulus was provided to the theological study of the West. Peter of Lombard, Thomas Aquinas and other Schoolmen are greatly indebted to him. It was because of this role of The Damascene that he has been given the epithets, "Father of Scholasticism" and "Lombard of the Greeks."<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that The Damascene's work imposed itself upon the work and method of Peter of Lombard. It inspired some of his chapters and specially his christology. The Damascene is the one who is quoted in it most frequently from among the Fathers. In his famous *Book of the Sentences*, Peter Lombard has used The Damascene to such a degree that one can substitute the title for that of the *Fountain of Knowledge*.<sup>3</sup> Peter's final triumph in the West, after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, increased the effect of The Damascene in the West. The *Book of the Sentences* became "the very text of theological education, upon which innumerable masters and students were to furnish the commentary."<sup>4</sup> From this date on the vogue of *De Fide Orthodoxa* began to

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup>Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 635.

<sup>3</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup>Bury, *op. cit.*, V, 804.

increase steadily until the days of Thomas Aquinas. In this period The Damascene's works were "quoted daily."<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, The Damascene has exerted considerable influence on Aquinas. Up to this date, no systematic work has been done in this area which is of great significance for the final union of the Churches of the East and the West. Since The Damascene is one of the greatest theologians of the Orthodox East and Aquinas of the Roman West, their agreement would mean an important and fundamental link to facilitate the dialogue and the fulfillment of Christ's prayer, "that they may all be one."

The Damascene expressed his faith and devotion not only through systematic theology but also through the warmth of his poetry and hymns. He left a deep impression on the Greek Service Books which is still felt in the music and poetry of the Holy Orthodox Church of the East. As has been mentioned, The Damascene used doctrinal expressions which were animated by a living devotion.

Cardinal Pitra attributes to him the doctrinal character of the later Greek hymnody. He says that the rhythm of the canons may often be traced in the prose of the *Fountain of Knowledge*. The great subject around which his hymns are grouped is the Incarnation, developed in the whole earthly career of the Saviour.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>H.L. Bennett, "Greek Hymnody," *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, ed. J. Julian (New York: Dover Publ., Inc., 1957), I, 604.

Until his day, Mary, the mother of Jesus, did not have any significant place in the hymns of the Eastern Churches. After The Damascene we find that the Theotokion and Staurotheotokion become prevalent in the hymns and that the Virgin Mary presides over all.

In hymnody as well as in theology The Damascene was an editor. Until his day there was no standard for the composition of hymns; his work "formed a kind of Summa in the writing of hymns."<sup>1</sup> The Byzantine system of eight modes, *The Oktoikhos*, which was mentioned before as one of those works that were ascribed to him, "goes back to *The Oktoikhos* of Severus, the Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch (512~~7~~-19)."<sup>2</sup> This system was used by The Damascene, who edited Severus' work. Before the time of The Damascene there was a common stock of hymns which was introduced by Severus in the sixth century. In addition to this, the Syriac Church had a definite repertory of hymns. John of Damascus used these two sources. Adapting their hymns he collected them in *The Oktoikhos* which became the hymnody of the Byzantine monasteries and churches.<sup>3</sup> Even the Typikon is not considered to be his work, but that of St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup>E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116.

(634-84), The Damascene was instrumental in popularizing it throughout the Empire, contributing to the disappearance of the local Typika of the different districts.<sup>1</sup>

Among the original hymns of The Damascene is the Canon of Easter Day which is also called, "The Golden Canon," or "The Queen of the Canons." This canon holds a most prominent place and is considered to be his highest achievement.<sup>2</sup> It exhibits the best characteristics of the Greek Canon. It is considered to be a magnificent effort of the imaginative devotion of John. It became the subject of several commentaries by Theodore Prodrome, the last Theodosius, John of Zonaras and others. An eminent school was founded after The Damascene in St. Saba's Laura, which followed the principles of The Damascene and continued to be productive till the fourteenth century. Among the famous descendents of this school are Etienne the Melodian, Theophanes of Graptos, St. Saba The Young, Babylas, Aristobulos, Gregory, and John.<sup>3</sup>

The musical influence of our author penetrated even into the liturgy of the church against which he fought, namely the Jacobite Church. In the *Kaune Yunays* are to be found extracts from The Damascene's canons. The Arabic

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>Julian, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 169.



hymn of *al-Sahrane* is also used in the Greek Orthodox, Roman Orthodox, and Syriac Churches. Coptic writers, as Saker Butros ibn-al-Raheb of the thirteenth century, do not hesitate to mention The Damascene and call him "the melchite *anba Yanah*."<sup>1</sup> The Protestant Church has two hymns<sup>2</sup> about the resurrection ascribed to The Damascene which were translated by John M. Neale: "Come ye faithful raise the strain" and "The day of resurrection".

#### On Islam

The influence of John of Damascus was not limited to the realm of Christian thought, but extended to Islam, where we find him rendering an important contribution to the development of Muslim theology, the rise of Muslim sects or heresies, and the growth of philosophical tendencies among the Arabs. He even initiated a school of Christian apologetics which defended the faith against the onslaught of Islam, which he classified as heresy. Abu-Qurra was one of the famous disciples of this school. There are many other famous apologists such as the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (779-823), abu-Nuh al-'Anbari (ninth or tenth century), Ibrahim al-Tabarani, abu-Fadl'Ali

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>*Christian Hymns* (New York: The North Riverside Press, 1947), pp. 111-114.

ibn-Rabban al-Nasrani, and many others whose names are mentioned by Nasrallah.<sup>1</sup>

Although Islam conquered the Near East by military force, it faced serious attacks from the older religions of the area: Christianity, Judaism, and Manicheanism. It had to give reasons for its faith and existence. The polemics of The Damascene and of his contemporaries forced the Muslim thinkers to defend their faith with a method similar to that of their opponents. The result was the dialectic theology of 'Ilm al-Kalam. The effect of The Damascene is seen very clearly when we compare the Muslim dialectic writings with our author's *Dialectica* in which we have a detailed scheme of dialectics which could be applied to theology.<sup>2</sup> Like The Damascene the Muslim theologian begins his treatise with a philosophical introduction, then he discusses sects and heresies which is followed by the main subject. It is worth noticing that even many of the technical words were a direct translation from Greek" substance ( $\sigma\upsilon\sigma\tau\alpha$  - *jawhar*), quantity ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\omicron\rho\upsilon$  - *kam*), relation ( $\pi\omicron\sigma\epsilon$  -  $\tau\iota$  - *idafa*), quality ( $\pi\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon$  - *kalf*), activity and passivity ( $\pi\epsilon\iota\omicron\iota\upsilon$  and  $\pi\alpha\sigma\chi\epsilon\iota\upsilon$  - *fi'l* and *infi'al*)<sup>3</sup> etc. This Aristotelian

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<sup>1</sup>Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>J.W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), I, 64.

*Ibid.*

method was used and developed into an Atomistic type of theology "which was Islam's most original contribution to philosophy,"<sup>1</sup> and played an important role in medieval scholasticism.

The influence of The Damascene extended beyond methodology into the content of Muslim theology, whose representatives wove their talk with his subjects.<sup>2</sup> They would begin with a discussion about God and his attributes, then present God and his work, and close the treatise with an exposition of prophecy. The material which is presented in the first two sections has its parallel in the writings of The Damascene; instead of the third section which was a discussion of Jesus Christ, the Muslim substituted prophecy. The theological doctrine about the uncreated and eternal Qur'an, bears a great resemblance to the Christian doctrine of the Word. Many Christian scholars.<sup>3</sup> on Islamics have no difficulty in finding the origin of the Qur'anic doctrine in the Christian teaching about the Logos, "and that the Greek Church, perhaps through John of Damascus, has played a formative part, . . . by a kind of transfusion of ideas from Christianity and not as a result of controversy."<sup>4</sup> Thus, we find

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<sup>1</sup>D.B. Macdonald, "Kalem," *The Encyclopedia of Islam* eds. M. Th. Houtsta & others (London: Lazac & Co., 1927), II, 673.

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<sup>3</sup>M.S. Seale, *Muslim Theology* (London: Luzac & Co., 1964), p. 66. A. Guillaume, *Islam* (Edinburgh: R & R Clark, 1961), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup>D.B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Juris-*

that corresponding to the heavenly and uncreated Logos stands the uncreated and eternal Word of God; to the earthly manifestation of Jesus corresponds the Qur'an. Further evidence on this point may be deduced from abu-Qurra's *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani*.

The first theological discussion arose in Islam with the Sect of Qadarites, who held that man was endowed with a certain amount of qadar, "power" or "free will,"<sup>1</sup> in opposition to orthodox Muslim tradition which denies any initiative to man. Traditionally it has been accepted that the ideas of The Damascene had a germinating role on the Qadriah. Dr. Watt has cast doubt on this tradition and says: "There were external influences at work, but they were never the sole causes, rather they were a stimulus to which Islam responded."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Seale's comparison of representative passages from the Qadriah and The Damascene's writing is the best evidence for the Christian source of the new Islamic teaching on free will. His conclusion is that John did not originate the discussion on free will, but he did exert a considerable influence.<sup>3</sup> In this study, Dr. Seale notes two important words which were used by both The Damascene and the Qadriah writers. The Damascene's

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*prudence and Constitutional Theory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 146.

<sup>1</sup>R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam in the Christian Environment* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1928), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>Seale, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 6-125.

term "permission" is rendered in the Arabic translation of his works by the word *takhliya* and the word "free will" or *autoexousios* by the word *tafwid*.<sup>1</sup> These are examples of direct influence and borrowing.

The Mu'tazila sect was another diversion from Orthodox Islam. It claimed the oneness, *Tawhid*, of God and rejected much of Muslim eschatology and the doctrine of the uncreated Qur'an. It claimed that 'God could not be perceived by the senses but by the heart, and that God, therefore, could not and would not be seen.'<sup>2</sup> It interpreted the anthropomorphic Qur'anic passages allegorically. Man has a certain amount of freedom, according to the Mu'tazila, the misuse of which causes evil in the world. This sect, being an offspring of the Qadriah, has a similar relationship to the influence of The Damascene as its predecessor.<sup>3</sup> One cannot help but see *De Fide Orthodoxa* molding Muslim thinking in its image.

The Damascene is indirectly connected with the beginnings of Arab philosophy. Amir Ali says: "The controversies of the Greek and the Saracene furnished a strong incentive to the study of dialectics and Greek philosophy . . . . Their rationalistic and philosophical disputes with their own orthodox brethren . . . led to the growth of philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

tendencies among the Saracenes."<sup>1</sup> Miguel Asin Palacios bestows on The Damascene and abu-Qurra the honour of being the initiators and teachers of the Muslim Theologians of the East.<sup>2</sup>

In the ever-growing spiritual barrenness of the Christian East, John of Damascus became the Golden Stream quenching the spiritual thirst of his age with fresh water from the Apostolic Fathers, and offering it to the confused and oppressed Christian. His poetry and music enriched the worship of the Church; his arguments stimulated the Muslim theologian. He was a synthesis of his time and one wonders whether the antithesis was a blessing or a curse in his case.

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<sup>1</sup> S.A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (London: Christopher's, 1946), pp. 365-366.

<sup>2</sup> Nasrallah, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

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