

War, Trade, and Cultural Exchange between Muslims and Byzantines before the Seljuk Conquest of Anatolia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Muslim–Byzantine relations from the emergence of Islam in the seventh century to the eve of Seljuk expansion into Anatolia in the eleventh century, arguing that prolonged military confrontation did not prevent sustained forms of cross-frontier interaction. Drawing on medieval Arabic-Islamic chronicles, geographical and administrative works, literary sources, and Byzantine historiography, it analyses the formation of the Muslim–Byzantine frontier and the interconnected roles of warfare, diplomacy, commerce, captivity, human mobility, artistic production, intellectual transmission, and religious encounter. The article demonstrates that the frontier functioned not simply as a barrier between competing political and religious worlds but as a changing zone in which conflict itself frequently generated mechanisms of contact. Military campaigns produced negotiations and prisoner exchanges; merchants, commodities, captives, and craftsmen moved across political boundaries; Byzantine artistic resources were incorporated into major Islamic building projects; and Greek scientific and philosophical traditions circulated through diplomatic and multilingual scholarly networks. Arabic representations of the *Rûm* similarly reveal the coexistence of hostility, curiosity, admiration, and religious polemic. By bringing these forms of interaction into a common analytical framework, the article argues that warfare and exchange were mutually entangled rather than historically separate processes. The Seljuk expansion of the eleventh century should therefore be understood not as the beginning of sustained Muslim engagement with Byzantium in Anatolia, but as a new political stage within a frontier world already shaped by several centuries of confrontation, mobility, negotiation, and cultural exchange.

Keywords: Muslim–Byzantine Relations; Byzantine Empire; Abbasid Caliphate; Arab–Byzantine Frontier; Cross-Cultural Exchange; Seljuk Anatolia.



1. Introduction

Relations between Muslims and Byzantines constituted one of the most enduring forms of political, military, and cultural interaction in the medieval Mediterranean and Anatolia. From the emergence of Islam in the seventh century to the expansion of the Seljuk Turks into Anatolia in the eleventh century, relations between the two sides were shaped by conquest, frontier warfare, and political rivalry, but also by diplomacy, commerce, human mobility, and intellectual and cultural exchange. Military conflict represented only one dimension of this relationship. Warfare coexisted with diplomatic negotiations, truces, commercial contacts, the movement of people and objects, and the circulation of knowledge and cultural practices. Muslim–Byzantine relations before the Seljuk expansion into Anatolia should therefore be examined not simply as a history of confrontation between rival powers, but as a prolonged process in which conflict and interaction developed side by side.

Contacts between the Arabs and the Byzantine world long predated the rise of Islam. Commercial networks connected Arabia with Byzantine-controlled territories, particularly Syria and neighbouring regions, while Christianity was already familiar to communities in and around the Arabian Peninsula. Early Arabic historical traditions also preserve indications of direct political and linguistic contacts with the Byzantine world. Ibn Ḥabīb's (d. 860) account of 'Uthmān b. al-Ḥuwayrith, a Meccan notable who sought Byzantine support in the late sixth century, describes his efforts to gain access to the Byzantine emperor and repeatedly refers to interpreters (*tarājima*) connected with the imperial court. The same narrative relates that, while in Byzantine territory, 'Uthmān encountered a teacher instructing people from among the *Rūm*, whom he recognised as an Arab after hearing him recite a line of Arabic poetry.¹ Although written considerably later than the events it describes, the account reflects an Arabic historical memory of linguistic intermediaries and Arab individuals operating within the Byzantine world before Islam.

Early Islamic biographical and historical traditions likewise associate the Prophet Muhammad's pre-prophetic life with commercial journeys towards Syria, further illustrating the place occupied by the Byzantine-influenced north in the geographical imagination of early Islamic historical writing.² Taken together, these traditions suggest that Arabia and the Byzantine sphere were connected through commercial, political, religious, and linguistic networks before the seventh century.

The emergence of Islam gave these pre-existing contacts a new political and religious

significance. The Qur'ānic reference to the Byzantine defeat and anticipated recovery in *Sūrat al-Rūm* provides an early indication of the significance attached to the Byzantine–Sasanian struggle within the emerging Muslim community.³ Early Islamic exegetical traditions associated the anticipated Byzantine recovery with Muslim rejoicing, commonly relating this response to the Byzantines' status as Christians and thus as People of the Book, in contrast to the Zoroastrian Sasanians.⁴ Direct military encounters and the rapid expansion of the Islamic state subsequently transformed this earlier familiarity into a sustained relationship between neighbouring political and religious powers.

The Muslim conquests of the seventh century fundamentally altered the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. Byzantium lost control of Syria and other important eastern territories to the expanding Islamic state, while repeated campaigns gradually produced a militarised frontier extending across the Taurus and neighbouring regions of Anatolia. Warfare remained a recurrent feature of this frontier for centuries, from the early campaigns and Umayyad expeditions against Constantinople to the more institutionalised frontier warfare of the Abbasid period. Yet the frontier was neither completely closed nor defined exclusively by hostility. Negotiations and truces accompanied warfare, while envoys, captives, merchants, craftsmen, religious figures, and other travellers continued to move, under changing conditions, between Byzantine and Muslim territories. The frontier consequently functioned both as a zone of military separation and as a space through which people, commodities, information, and practices could circulate.

Modern scholarship has substantially expanded our understanding of the military, political, and ideological dimensions of Muslim–Byzantine relations. Studies of the early Islamic conquests and the formation of the Arab–Byzantine frontier have demonstrated the complexity of military and political interaction, while scholarship on Arabic representations of Byzantium has shown that Muslim perceptions of the *Rūm* cannot be reduced to a single image of a religious enemy. Research on Byzantine–Islamic commerce and cultural transmission has further demonstrated the persistence of economic and material connections across political boundaries. Nevertheless, warfare, diplomacy, commerce, and cultural or intellectual exchange are often examined as distinct aspects of this history. Bringing these forms of interaction into a common analytical framework makes it possible to ask how a frontier characterised by recurrent warfare could simultaneously facilitate sustained forms of contact.

This article therefore asks how prolonged military confrontation between Muslims and Byzantines coexisted with diplomatic, commercial, material, and intellectual interaction before the Seljuk expansion into Anatolia. It argues that warfare and exchange were not mutually exclusive historical processes. Rather, the frontier created both restrictions and opportunities for interaction. Military confrontation generated negotiations and diplomatic missions; commercial networks continued to connect Byzantine and Islamic territories; craftsmen, objects, and artistic practices circulated across political boundaries; and scientific and intellectual knowledge could be transmitted even during periods of imperial rivalry. The Muslim–Byzantine frontier should thus be understood not simply as a barrier between two political and religious worlds, but as a changing zone in which conflict, negotiation, mobility, and exchange continually intersected.

The study draws primarily on medieval Arabic-Islamic chronicles, geographical and administrative works, and other literary sources, including al-Ṭabarī, Qudāma b. Jaʿfar, al-Muqaddasī, Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn al-Athīr, and Ibn Khaldūn. These materials are complemented by Byzantine historiography, particularly the *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor, which provides an important comparative perspective on political and military relations between Byzantium and the Muslim world. Taken together, these sources are used both to reconstruct particular episodes and forms of interaction and to examine how relations between the Byzantine and Islamic worlds were recorded and represented within different historiographical traditions. Since many of these accounts were written considerably later than the events they describe, they are not treated as transparent records of historical fact; where necessary, their narrative character, chronological distance, and differing political and religious perspectives are taken into account. Arabic-Islamic and Byzantine evidence is therefore read comparatively and alongside modern scholarship on the Byzantine–Islamic frontier, warfare, diplomacy, commerce, mobility, and cultural and intellectual transmission. By tracing these interconnected forms of contact from the emergence of Islam to the period immediately preceding the Seljuk expansion into Anatolia, the article reconsiders the pre-Seljuk centuries as more than a prolonged period of Arab–Byzantine warfare. They constituted a formative phase in which military rivalry repeatedly intersected with diplomacy, commerce, human mobility, material culture, and intellectual exchange. The Seljuk expansion into Anatolia therefore transformed an existing field of Muslim–Byzantine interaction

rather than initiating such contact for the first time.

2. From Early Contacts to the Formation of the Muslim–Byzantine Frontier

Relations between the Arabs and Byzantium did not begin with the rise of Islam. Long before the seventh century, Arab communities maintained commercial, political, and religious contacts with Byzantine territories, particularly in Syria and neighbouring regions. Arab merchants travelled northwards, while Christian Arab communities formed part of the political and religious landscape along the Byzantine–Arabian periphery. Byzantium was therefore not an entirely unfamiliar power to the inhabitants of Arabia when Islam emerged. The rise of the Muslim polity in the seventh century nevertheless transformed the nature and scale of these earlier contacts, gradually bringing the expanding Islamic state into direct political and military confrontation with the Byzantine Empire. The first significant military encounters occurred during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. The Battle of Mu'ta in 8/629 brought a Muslim force into conflict with troops associated with Byzantine authority in the Syrian frontier region. Al-Ṭabarī provides a detailed account of the expedition among the events of the eighth year of the Hijra, including the successive command of Zayd b. Ḥāritha, Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib, and 'Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥa.⁵ In the following year, the Prophet personally led the expedition to Tabūk. Although this expedition did not result in a major battle with Byzantine forces, it demonstrated the increasing strategic importance of Syria and the Byzantine-influenced northern frontier for the emerging Muslim polity. Al-Ṭabarī likewise treats the Tabūk expedition at considerable length among the events of 9 AH.⁶ Philip K. Hitti accordingly characterises Mu'ta as the principal Syrian military engagement during the Prophet's lifetime and contrasts it with the following year's Tabūk expedition, which ended without a major armed confrontation.⁷

These expeditions should not be regarded as the beginning of an uninterrupted Muslim–Byzantine war. Their importance lies rather in the growing orientation of the Muslim polity towards Syria and the northern frontier. This northern dimension also appears in early Islamic religious tradition. A report preserved by Ibn Abī Shayba attributes to the Prophet the statement that “the keys of Syria” had been given to him.⁸ Regardless of how such traditions are interpreted historically, their preservation in the Islamic literary tradition reflects the importance that Syria subsequently acquired within Muslim memories of the formative period. The scale of Muslim involvement in the region changed fundamentally after the Prophet's death. Once the Ridda wars,

the conflicts that followed his death in Arabia, had been brought under control, Muslim forces were dispatched northwards towards Syria. Hitti describes several detachments operating along different routes into southern and south-eastern Syria under commanders including ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ, Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān, and Shuraḥbīl b. Ḥasana.⁹ These operations marked a transition from the more limited expeditions of the Prophet’s lifetime to sustained military expansion into territories that had formed part of the Byzantine imperial sphere. The encounters at Mu’ta and Tabūk can therefore be understood as an early stage in a much broader transformation that, after 632, would fundamentally reshape the political geography of Syria and eventually produce a durable Muslim–Byzantine frontier.

The political situation changed dramatically after the Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632. Under the first caliphs, Muslim armies expanded into territories that had long belonged to the Byzantine and Sasanian imperial systems. In the Byzantine case, campaigns in Syria and Palestine resulted in the loss of some of the empire’s most important eastern provinces. The Battle of Yarmūk in 636 represented a decisive stage in this transformation, after which Byzantine efforts to retain effective control over Syria proved unsuccessful.¹⁰ The conquests thus altered not only the territorial balance between Byzantium and the emerging caliphate but also the geographical framework within which subsequent relations between them developed. These developments occurred against the background of the prolonged Byzantine–Sasanian war of the early seventh century. Although Emperor Heraclius had succeeded in reversing earlier Persian advances, decades of warfare had placed considerable military and material pressures on the Byzantine Empire. The Muslim conquests therefore coincided with a period of profound transformation in the Near East. Byzantine losses, however, should not be explained solely as the consequence of exhaustion. Kaegi’s detailed reconstruction of Yarmūk points instead to a combination of military strategy, topography, logistical difficulties, tensions within the Byzantine forces, relations with the local population, and the tactical effectiveness of the Muslim armies.¹¹

One of the most important consequences of these conquests was the gradual formation of a new frontier between Byzantine Anatolia and Muslim-controlled Syria and northern Mesopotamia. This frontier did not emerge immediately as a clearly demarcated territorial boundary. Byzantine withdrawals, Muslim advances, negotiated settlements, contested territories, and efforts by both sides to control

strategically important routes contributed to its formation. Al-Balādhurī's account of the Syrian frontier preserves an important early Muslim representation of this process. He reports that the fortresses and military posts between Antioch and Tarsus were at times abandoned by their Byzantine inhabitants, and preserves a tradition according to which Heraclius removed the inhabitants of these settlements during his withdrawal from Antioch in order to prevent the Muslims from advancing through a populated and productive zone between Antioch and Byzantine territory.¹² Military operations could themselves be accompanied by negotiation: even during the campaign culminating at Yarmūk, negotiations took place between the Byzantine forces under Vahan and the Muslims.¹³ Political accommodation and military confrontation therefore need not be understood as entirely separate features of the emerging Muslim–Byzantine relationship. Tarsus illustrates the gradual character of this frontier formation particularly well. Although Muslim forces reached the region during the early conquests and Tarsus subsequently served as a point of passage for expeditions into Byzantine territory, it did not immediately develop into a permanently settled Muslim frontier city. During the Umayyad period, military activity continued through the Cilician zone, while the consolidation and settlement of positions farther north proceeded incrementally, particularly through centres such as al-Maṣṣīṣa. Tarsus itself acquired a more permanent institutional character only under the Abbasids, when its reconstruction, fortification, and settlement transformed it into one of the principal Muslim bases facing Byzantine Anatolia.¹⁴

Geography was fundamental to the formation of the Muslim–Byzantine frontier. Following the loss of Syria, the southeastern limits of Byzantine power increasingly contracted towards the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountain zones, while the territories between northern Syria, Cilicia, Cappadocia, and the Armenian regions became exposed to recurrent Muslim raids and invasions. Kaegi emphasises the strategic importance of the mountain passes that connected these regions, including the Cilician Gates and the routes running through the Anti-Taurus between Germanikeia (Mar'ash), Elbistan, Melitene (Malatya), and the Cappadocian plateau. These passes were not merely geographical obstacles; they constituted the principal corridors through which armies and travellers could move between Syria and Anatolia and therefore became crucial to both Byzantine defence and Muslim campaigning.¹⁵ Al-Balādhurī's account confirms the practical importance of these routes from the Muslim side. He preserves differing traditions concerning the earliest Muslim

penetration through the *darb* of Baghrās and records that Muslim commanders conducting summer and winter campaigns left substantial forces at vulnerable frontier positions until the campaigning armies returned from Byzantine territory.¹⁶ The geographical conditions of the Taurus and Anti-Taurus also contributed to the changing character of Muslim expansion after the principal conquests of the seventh century. Once the fortified cities of Syria had been lost, the Byzantines increasingly relied upon defensible positions in the mountain ranges and their passes. According to Kaegi, Muslim armies were unable to develop an equally effective strategy for sustained operations on the Anatolian plateau, where difficult terrain, logistical constraints, and the absence of local Arab populations upon whose cooperation they might have relied made further expansion progressively more difficult. The consolidation of Byzantine defence in depth around the mountain passes thus helped to create a frontier in which Muslim forces could repeatedly penetrate Byzantine territory without necessarily converting these incursions into permanent territorial conquest.¹⁷

This geographical stabilisation did not bring military confrontation to an end. On the contrary, the frontier became the setting for recurrent campaigns that continued under the Umayyads-Abbasids. The pace and intensity of these operations were also closely connected to political conditions within the caliphate. Kaegi notes that the Muslim civil wars of 656–661, 680–692, and 747–751 seriously disrupted offensive operations against Byzantium, while the major attacks on Constantinople represented the high point of early Muslim expansion against the empire.¹⁸ The development of the frontier should therefore not be understood simply as the result of Byzantine geographical advantages or military recovery. It emerged from the interaction of terrain, logistics, defensive adaptation and changing political circumstances on both sides.

The seventh-century conquests consequently created a new political geography without producing complete separation between the Byzantine and Islamic worlds. The loss of Syria and neighbouring territories shifted the principal zone of confrontation northwards towards Anatolia, while the Taurus and Anti-Taurus increasingly structured military relations between the two powers. Yet the resulting frontier was neither a fixed boundary nor an impermeable barrier. Armies repeatedly crossed it, and, as the following sections demonstrate, so too did envoys, captives, merchants, craftsmen, objects, and knowledge. The frontier should therefore be understood as a changing and contested zone in which military confrontation existed

alongside negotiation and cross-border mobility. It provided the geographical framework within which Umayyad and Abbasid campaigns against Byzantium developed and within which the diplomatic, commercial, human, and cultural interactions examined below became possible.

3. Warfare, Raids, and Diplomacy on the Muslim–Byzantine Frontier

Following the establishment of Muslim rule in Syria and the gradual formation of a frontier along the approaches to Anatolia, military relations between the caliphate and Byzantium entered a new phase. The rapid territorial expansion that had characterised the early conquests did not continue indefinitely into the Byzantine Anatolian heartland. Instead, confrontation increasingly assumed the form of recurrent cross-frontier campaigns, defensive measures, fortified positions, and, at particular moments, large-scale attempts to penetrate deeper into Byzantine territory. Under the Umayyads and later the Abbasids, warfare remained a persistent feature of Muslim–Byzantine relations, but its intensity, organisation, and objectives changed in response to political and military circumstances on both sides. At the same time, recurrent conflict generated its own mechanisms of communication, as truces, negotiations, tribute arrangements, embassies, and the exchange of captives became integral to the management of a frontier that neither side was able permanently to eliminate.

The reign of Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (661–680) represented an important stage in the intensification and gradual organisation of Muslim military activity against Byzantium. His long experience in Syria and earlier involvement in campaigns against Byzantine territories contributed to sustained pressure on the northern frontier even before his accession to the caliphate. Al-Balādhurī records that during Mu‘āwiya’s campaign towards Amorium in 25/645–646, the fortresses between Antioch and Tarsus were found deserted and that forces drawn from Syria, al-Jazīra, and Qinnasrīn were stationed at these positions until the campaigning army returned. He further notes that similar measures were adopted in subsequent expeditions, suggesting an early attempt to secure vulnerable routes and positions during operations beyond the frontier.¹⁹

Under Mu‘āwiya’s caliphate, military pressure on Byzantine territory continued, and Constantinople itself increasingly entered the strategic horizon of the caliphate. Ibn al-Athīr, under the events of 49/669–670, while also noting an alternative dating to 50 AH, relates that Mu‘āwiya dispatched a large army into Byzantine territory under

Sufyān b. 'Awf and ordered his son Yazīd to join the expedition. After initially remaining behind, Yazīd subsequently joined the army with substantial reinforcements. Ibn al-Athīr names among the participants several prominent Companions, including 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī. According to his account, the Muslim forces penetrated deeply into Byzantine territory and reached Constantinople, where fighting took place between the Muslims and the Byzantines.²⁰ Constantinople also acquired a religious and symbolic significance in Islamic tradition. A report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad announced its future conquest and praised the commander and army that would accomplish it: *"Constantinople will surely be conquered. What an excellent commander its commander will be, and what an excellent army that army will be."*²¹ Such traditions contributed to the enduring place of Constantinople in Muslim religious and historical memory.

Ibn al-Athīr further relates that Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī died near Constantinople and was buried close to the city walls. Significantly, he adds that the inhabitants of the city "sought rain through him" (*fa-ahluhā yastaskūna bihi*).²² This tradition was not confined to Ibn al-Athīr's historical narrative. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr similarly states that Abū Ayyūb's grave near the walls of Constantinople remained known and venerated and that people sought rain through it, while *Uṣd al-Ghāba* preserves essentially the same tradition.²³ The recurrence of this account in medieval Arabic-Islamic literature is significant. Although these later accounts do not by themselves establish the precise nature of local practices surrounding the grave, their preservation across several sources demonstrates the persistence of a Muslim historical tradition associating Abū Ayyūb's burial place with local reverence in Constantinople. A military expedition was thus remembered not merely as an episode of confrontation, but also as giving rise to a religious memory that extended far beyond the immediate context of warfare. The much later Ottoman history of Abū Ayyūb's burial place provides a striking indication of the persistence of this memory. The persistence of this tradition is further illustrated by the much later Ottoman history of the site. Following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the location associated with Abū Ayyūb acquired renewed prominence. Tursun Bey records the subsequent development of the area around the shrine, which attracted settlement and became a flourishing quarter outside the former Byzantine walls.²⁴

The chronology of these campaigns, however, is represented differently in the Arabic-

Islamic and Byzantine historiographical traditions. Whereas Ibn al-Athīr places the expedition associated with Yazīd and Abū Ayyūb under 49 AH, while noting an alternative dating to 50 AH, Theophanes describes preparations for a major Arab naval offensive against Constantinople under 671/2 and places sustained fighting before the Byzantine capital under 672/3. According to Theophanes, the Arab fleet anchored in the region of Thrace and engaged Byzantine forces almost daily from April to September before withdrawing to Kyzikos for the winter; he subsequently describes the conflict as continuing over several years.²⁵ Theophanes does not mention Abū Ayyūb or the tradition concerning his grave in this account. Rather than attempting to harmonise these narratives into a single chronology, the differences between these accounts underline the need to distinguish between the ways in which the campaigns against Constantinople were preserved in Arabic-Islamic and Byzantine historiography.

Military confrontation under Mu‘āwiya was nevertheless accompanied by diplomatic negotiation. Theophanes records that in 676/7 Mu‘āwiya sent envoys to Emperor Constantine seeking peace. In response, the emperor dispatched the patrician John Pitzigaudes to Syria to conduct negotiations. According to Theophanes, Pitzigaudes was received with honour by Mu‘āwiya and a group of Arab commanders, after which the two sides concluded a written peace agreement confirmed by oaths. The agreement was reportedly intended to remain in force for thirty years and stipulated an annual payment of 3,000 pieces of gold, fifty captives, and fifty thoroughbred horses to the Byzantine Empire.²⁶ Although the details are preserved here from a Byzantine historiographical perspective and are not reproduced with comparable specificity in the Arabic chronicles, the account provides important evidence for the diplomatic mechanisms that accompanied military confrontation. Even during a period characterised by repeated campaigns and attacks on Byzantine territory, communication through envoys, formal negotiation, and temporary peace agreements remained possible. Warfare and diplomacy thus operated alongside one another as different means through which relations between the two powers were conducted.

The alternation between military confrontation and diplomatic accommodation continued under ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (685–705). During the early years of his caliphate, when Umayyad authority was challenged by internal conflicts, particularly the struggle against ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, ‘Abd al-Malik entered into a negotiated

arrangement with Byzantium involving regular payments in return for peace. Arabic chronicles place this accommodation within the context of the caliph's internal political difficulties, while Theophanes preserves the agreement from a Byzantine perspective.²⁷ The arrangement provided 'Abd al-Malik with an opportunity to concentrate his resources on consolidating Umayyad authority. Once his internal position had strengthened, however, relations with Byzantium again shifted towards sustained military confrontation. The Battle of Sebastopolis in 692 marked an important stage in this transition. Theophanes provides a detailed account of the confrontation, including the defection of a substantial body of Slavic troops from the Byzantine army to the Muslim side, and records renewed Muslim military activity against Byzantine territories in its aftermath.²⁸ The sequence again illustrates that treaty-making and warfare were not mutually exclusive features of Muslim–Byzantine relations. Rather, negotiation and military confrontation could succeed one another as political and strategic circumstances changed. Renewed warfare was accompanied by efforts to strengthen and consolidate the Muslim presence along the frontier. Seasonal expeditions into Byzantine territory continued, but some operations went beyond temporary raiding and involved the fortification and settlement of strategically important positions. Ibn al-Athīr reports that in 84/703–704 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Malik established Muslim control over al-Maṣṣīṣa (Mopsuestia), rebuilt its fortress, constructed a mosque, and stationed three hundred selected soldiers there.²⁹ Such measures indicate an effort to transform strategically important frontier settlements into more permanent military centres. Fortification, garrisoning, and settlement therefore complemented recurrent expeditions and contributed to the gradual consolidation of a more durable Umayyad military presence along the Byzantine frontier.

The most ambitious Umayyad attempt against Constantinople occurred during the reign of Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik (715–717), when a major expedition under Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik advanced against the Byzantine capital. Al-Ṭabarī, under the events of 98/716–717, preserves detailed traditions concerning both the preparations for the campaign and the severe difficulties subsequently experienced by the Muslim army. According to one account, as Maslama approached Constantinople, he ordered each cavalryman to carry two *mudds* of provisions, which were accumulated near the city in quantities compared to mountains. The army was instructed initially not to consume these stores but to obtain food from the

surrounding territory; it also constructed wooden quarters and cultivated crops, indicating preparations for an extended stay rather than a short seasonal expedition.³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī further preserves a tradition according to which Leo (*Ilyūn*) persuaded Maslama that the Byzantines would submit if the accumulated provisions were destroyed. Maslama consequently burned the supplies, after which the Byzantine position strengthened and the Muslim army suffered severe shortages.³¹ Theophanes presents the campaign from a Byzantine perspective. He records that Maslama, after wintering in Asia and realising that Leo had deceived him, crossed from Abydos into Thrace with a substantial army and advanced towards Constantinople, laying siege to the city on 15 August 717. He also describes the arrival of a large Muslim fleet and the Byzantine use of liquid fire against Arab ships.³² Taken together, the Arabic and Byzantine traditions portray the operation as a sustained and exceptionally ambitious attempt against the Byzantine capital rather than an ordinary frontier raid. At the same time, their differing narratives—particularly concerning Leo's role and the causes of the Muslim army's difficulties—demonstrate the importance of reading the siege through both Arabic and Byzantine historiographical traditions. Al-Ṭabarī also preserves a variant account of Leo's stratagem. Rather than persuading Maslama to destroy the accumulated provisions, this version relates that Leo obtained permission to transfer most of them into Constantinople, after which he openly turned against the Muslim army. The resulting shortage reportedly reduced Maslama's forces to consuming animals, hides, roots, and leaves.³³ The existence of these variant narratives cautions against treating the details of Leo's stratagem as a straightforward reconstruction of events. Nevertheless, both accounts place deception and logistical vulnerability at the centre of the Muslim army's difficulties, illustrating the practical problems involved in sustaining a prolonged expedition against Constantinople.

The failure of the major expeditions against Constantinople did not end Umayyad military pressure on Byzantium. Confrontation increasingly assumed the form of recurrent campaigns across the Anatolian frontier, and warfare against Byzantium also entered the political and literary language through which Umayyad military prestige was represented. This dimension is particularly visible in the poetry of Jarīr b. 'Aṭīyya. In a panegyric addressed to Mu'āwiya b. Hishām, Jarīr portrays the rulers of the Rūm as coming before him in submission and chains, and describes his military blow as having humbled the Byzantines and brought "good tidings" (*bushrā*) to people far and wide.³⁴ Such language is plainly panegyrical and should not be read

as a literal description of the political balance between the Umayyads and Byzantium. Its significance lies instead in demonstrating how warfare against the Rūm could be transformed into a language of victory, prestige, and dynastic legitimacy. Military engagement with Byzantium had thus acquired not only strategic but also important symbolic and literary dimensions.

The institutionalisation of frontier warfare is particularly visible in the organisation of seasonal expeditions. Qudāma b. Jaʿfar provides unusually detailed information concerning the seasonal organisation of campaigning against Byzantine territory. Drawing upon what he describes as the experience of people familiar with the frontier (*ahl al-khībra min al-thughūriyyīn*), he states that the spring expedition (*al-ghazāt al-rabīʿiyya*) should begin around 10 May and last for thirty days, through the remainder of May and the first ten days of June. The troops would then remain for approximately twenty-five days, allowing their mounts to recover and the men to assemble for the summer campaign (*al-ṣāʿifa*), which began around 10 July and could last approximately sixty days. Qudāma treats winter campaigning (*al-shawātī*) more cautiously: if such an expedition was necessary, he recommends that it should not penetrate too deeply into enemy territory, should be limited to a journey of approximately twenty nights, and should begin towards the end of February, extending into the first days of March.³⁵ His account demonstrates the extent to which campaigning had developed into a recurrent and seasonally organised feature of frontier warfare. It also reveals the practical considerations underlying this rhythm: the condition and provisioning of horses, the availability of pasture, the vulnerability of the enemy, the distance that supplies could be carried, and the climatic conditions of the frontier all influenced the timing and depth of military operations.

The memory of warfare on the Byzantine frontier was also preserved through narratives surrounding individual warriors. Among the figures associated with these campaigns was al-Baṭṭāl b. ʿAmr, who appears in Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī's account of Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik's expedition against Byzantine territory. In Ibn Aʿtham's narrative, al-Baṭṭāl is presented as one of Maslama's prominent warriors: when Maslama negotiated his entry into the Byzantine city, he stipulated that al-Baṭṭāl should remain with his companions at the city gate. The account further portrays the Byzantine ruler as warning his people against harming Maslama out of fear that al-Baṭṭāl might storm the city, and relates that al-Baṭṭāl and his companions were indeed preparing to do so before Maslama restrained them.³⁶ Although the narrative contains

literary and heroic elements and should not be read uncritically as a straightforward record of events, it is significant for showing how recurrent warfare against Byzantium generated a cultural memory centred upon individual frontier warriors such as al-Baṭṭāl.

4. The Abbasid–Byzantine Frontier: Warfare, Fortification, and Diplomacy

The transition from Umayyad to Abbasid rule in the mid-eighth century altered the political context of Muslim–Byzantine warfare without bringing frontier confrontation to an end. Although the political centre of the Abbasid caliphate lay farther east in Iraq, the Syrian–Cilician frontier remained an important zone of military organisation and settlement. Al-Balādhurī's account provides particularly valuable evidence for the continuing development of this frontier under the early Abbasids. He records that al-Manṣūr ordered the reconstruction of al-Maṣṣīṣa after its walls had been damaged and settled additional troops there, while al-Mahdī further increased its garrison. The same account describes the development of Adana and, under Hārūn al-Rashīd, the reconstruction and fortification of Tarsus, where troops from Khurasan, al-Maṣṣīṣa, and Antioch were settled. Al-Balādhurī also attributes to Hārūn the fortification or development of other frontier centres, including 'Ayn Zarba and al-Hārūniyya.³⁷ These measures demonstrate that Abbasid engagement with Byzantium was not confined to recurrent raids. Fortification, military settlement, and the reinforcement of garrisons formed part of a broader effort to sustain a durable military infrastructure along the Byzantine frontier.

Military confrontation could itself create circumstances for negotiation and diplomatic accommodation. The major campaign led by Hārūn b. al-Mahdī in 165/781–782 provides a particularly clear example and is recorded in both Arabic and Byzantine traditions. Al-Ṭabarī relates that Hārūn, who had not yet become caliph, advanced deep into Byzantine territory and reached the vicinity of the strait near Constantinople. Negotiations followed, and Irene agreed to a financial settlement; Hārūn, in turn, required that guides and markets be provided along the army's return route. Al-Ṭabarī further records that a three-year truce was concluded and Muslim captives were released.³⁸ Theophanes likewise describes Hārūn's advance as far as Chrysopolis and the subsequent negotiations, although his account differs in its details and explanation of how the settlement came about. He records the exchange of gifts between Irene and Hārūn and an agreement for payments to be made to the Arabs at specified times. In his account of the following year, Theophanes explicitly

remarks that the peace with the Arabs gave Irene a “*breathing space*,” which she used to redirect military resources elsewhere.³⁹ Read together, the two traditions demonstrate that military campaigning, diplomatic negotiation, financial arrangements, gift exchange, provisioning, and the recovery of captives could form interconnected components of Muslim–Byzantine relations rather than separate spheres of activity. The close relationship between diplomacy and warfare remained visible after Hārūn’s accession to the caliphate. In his account of 187/803, al-Ṭabarī relates that the deposition of Irene and the accession of Nikephoros I brought an earlier agreement between Byzantium and the Muslims to an end. Nikephoros wrote to Hārūn challenging the financial arrangements concluded under Irene and demanding the return of the payments she had previously made. According to al-Ṭabarī, Hārūn responded by writing on the back of Nikephoros’ letter: *“In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate. From Hārūn, Commander of the Faithful, to Nikephoros, the dog of the Romans: I have read your letter, you son of an infidel woman. The answer is what you shall see, not what you shall hear.”*⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī then relates that Hārūn immediately marched into Byzantine territory, after which Nikephoros sought an accommodation involving an annual payment, although he subsequently violated the agreement. Theophanes does not preserve this celebrated exchange of letters in his account of Nikephoros’ accession. His chronicle nevertheless records continuing military confrontation between the two powers and, under 805–806, describes another major invasion by Hārūn followed by negotiations initiated by Nikephoros. According to Theophanes, Byzantine envoys were sent to Hārūn to seek peace, and after prolonged negotiations an agreement was concluded involving annual payments and a commitment not to rebuild captured fortresses. When Nikephoros subsequently rebuilt and fortified these positions, hostilities resumed.⁴¹ Read together, although without assuming that the two sources describe identical episodes, these accounts illustrate the unstable and reversible relationship between military pressure, diplomatic correspondence, negotiated payments, and renewed warfare in Abbasid–Byzantine relations.

Captivity provided another mechanism through which warfare generated negotiation and direct communication across the frontier. In the same year, 187/803, al-Ṭabarī records that al-Qāsim b. Hārūn al-Rashīd entered Byzantine territory and besieged Qurra, while another Abbasid force under al-‘Abbās b. Ja‘far b. Muḥammad b. al-Ash‘ath laid siege to Ḥiṣn Sinān. Under pressure from the siege, the Byzantines offered

to surrender 320 Muslim captives in return for the withdrawal of the Abbasid forces. Al-Qāsim accepted the proposal and withdrew under the terms of the agreement.⁴² The incident provides a concrete example of the role played by captives in frontier diplomacy: individuals seized through warfare could themselves become instruments of negotiation, creating occasions for bargaining and direct contact between the two sides. By the beginning of the ninth century, therefore, the Muslim–Byzantine frontier had developed into a highly organised arena in which recurrent warfare coexisted with fortified settlement, diplomatic negotiation, financial agreements, and mechanisms for the recovery of captives.

By the tenth century, the military balance along the Muslim–Byzantine frontier had changed significantly. The weakening of Abbasid central authority and the emergence of increasingly autonomous regional powers fragmented the political landscape on the Muslim side of the frontier, while Byzantium entered a period of renewed military expansion in the east. The defeat and death of the emir of Melitene, ‘Umar al-Aqṭa’, had already marked an important stage in the recovery of Byzantine military initiative, and subsequent Byzantine advances increasingly placed Muslim frontier territories under pressure.⁴³ Political fragmentation further complicated Muslim responses to this expansion, since regional powers pursued their own strategic interests rather than operating within a unified caliphal frontier policy. As El Cheikh observes, political rivalries within the Islamic world—including Fatimid hostility towards the Abbasids—could at times take precedence over common opposition to Byzantium.⁴⁴ The earlier pattern of repeated Muslim penetration into Byzantine Anatolia was thus gradually replaced by a more complex military balance in which Byzantine armies increasingly possessed the capacity to conduct sustained offensive operations eastwards.

The changing balance of power was also reflected in Arabic representations of Byzantine ambitions. Al-Subkī preserves a statement attributed to a Byzantine emperor expressing the ambition to extend Christian authority over Muslim territories and spread the religion of the cross in the East and West.⁴⁵ Whether this passage preserves actual imperial rhetoric or represents a later Arabic literary construction, it is significant as evidence of how Byzantine expansion could be perceived and remembered in Muslim historical writing. In this strand of Arabic historical memory, Byzantium was represented not simply as an empire defending Anatolia against Muslim incursions but as an expansionist power threatening

Muslim-controlled territories. This transformation significantly altered the political and military environment of the eastern frontier inherited by the eleventh century, when the emergence of the Seljuks introduced a new power into a region already shaped by several centuries of Muslim–Byzantine interaction.

The changing military balance of the tenth century did not, however, bring cross-frontier interaction to an end. Byzantine expansion altered the political conditions under which Muslims and Byzantines encountered one another, but military rivalry continued to coexist with diplomatic communication and the movement of people and goods. The frontier remained both a zone of confrontation and a channel of interaction. It is within this broader context that the commercial networks, human mobility, and cultural exchanges examined in the following section should be understood.

5. Trade, Human Mobility, and Cultural Exchange

Military confrontation did not bring economic and cultural interaction between Byzantium and the Islamic world to an end. Although the Arab conquests transformed the political geography of the eastern Mediterranean and created a militarised frontier between Byzantine Anatolia and the territories of the caliphate, this political division never constituted an impermeable boundary. Merchants, commodities, craftsmen, captives, envoys, and information continued to move between the two worlds under changing political conditions. The evidence becomes particularly substantial from the ninth century onwards, when commercial networks connected Byzantine territories with Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Armenia, and the wider Islamic Near East.⁴⁶ Warfare could restrict these movements, but it did not eliminate the economic, diplomatic, and social mechanisms that sustained cross-frontier mobility. Indeed, some forms of interaction—including the movement of captives, ransom negotiations, diplomatic gifts, and the circulation of booty—were themselves direct consequences of military confrontation. Commercial exchange operated through both maritime and overland networks and connected the Byzantine–Muslim frontier with a much wider geography of circulation. Routes through Cilicia and eastern Anatolia linked Byzantine territories with Syria, northern Mesopotamia, Armenia, and regions farther east, while maritime connections integrated Byzantine and Muslim ports into broader Mediterranean and Black Sea networks. Commercial interaction should therefore not be understood simply as a bilateral movement of goods across a fixed political boundary. Merchants and commodities could pass

through several intermediary regions and markets before reaching their destinations, making Byzantine–Islamic commerce part of overlapping regional networks rather than a single frontier economy.⁴⁷

Melitene/Malatya provides a particularly revealing example of the coexistence of military confrontation and commercial activity. Situated in one of the principal zones of Byzantine–Muslim conflict, the city and its surrounding region were repeatedly exposed to warfare, yet commercial exchange persisted within this militarised environment. The evidence examined by Koray Durak suggests that Melitene continued to participate in Byzantine–Islamic commerce and that its commercial importance increased particularly from the tenth century, reaching a high point in the eleventh.⁴⁸ The case of Melitene therefore illustrates the dual character of the frontier especially clearly: a region repeatedly affected by raids, military campaigns, and political rivalry could simultaneously function as a zone through which commodities and people continued to circulate.

The commodities exchanged between Byzantine and Islamic territories were diverse and included both luxury products and more practical goods. Arabic geographical and commercial writings preserve evidence for the presence of Byzantine products in Islamic markets. Among the goods associated with Byzantium were silk and linen textiles, carpets, aromatic substances, resins, furs and leather products, swords, gold and silver vessels, medicines, ceramic vessels, horses, and other manufactured or luxury objects. The movement of commodities was not unidirectional. Goods reaching Byzantine territories through the Islamic world included spices and other products originating farther east, among them pepper, cinnamon, cloves, musk, and other valuable commodities whose circulation connected Byzantine–Muslim commerce with much wider networks extending towards India and Central Asia.⁴⁹ The frontier between the two political worlds was therefore also embedded within longer-distance systems of exchange in which the caliphate often functioned as both a producer and an intermediary for commodities moving towards Byzantine markets.

The character and geographical extent of this commerce also changed over time. Evidence examined by Koray Durak suggests that during the ninth and early tenth centuries Byzantine exports to Islamic markets consisted particularly of silk and expensive manufactured objects, while luxury commodities travelled in the opposite direction. By the eleventh century, however, both the range of goods and the geographical reach of commercial interaction had expanded. Byzantine exports

included different types of textiles, vessels, utensils, and foodstuffs, while merchants originating from Islamic territories were present in Byzantine regions extending into western Asia Minor and Bithynia.⁵⁰ The mid- to late tenth century thus appears to have constituted an important period of transition in the development of Byzantine–Islamic commerce.

The circulation of commodities represented only one dimension of mobility across the Byzantine–Muslim frontier. Warfare itself repeatedly displaced individuals across political boundaries, particularly through captivity, while ransom and organised prisoner exchanges created mechanisms through which captives could return across the frontier. Ibn al-Athīr records that in 181/797–798 a major exchange took place between the Byzantines and the Muslims, describing it as the first such *fidā*’ conducted under the Abbasids. According to his account, al-Qāsim b. Hārūn al-Rashīd was responsible for supervising the exchange, which took place at al-Lāmis, a coastal location twelve *farsakhs* from Tarsus. The event attracted a substantial gathering from the frontier regions, including soldiers, scholars, notables, and other inhabitants of the *thughūr*. Ibn al-Athīr gives the number of Muslim captives recovered as 3,700, while noting that another report placed the figure even higher.⁵¹ The episode is significant not merely for the number of prisoners involved but also for the scale of organised human movement that such exchanges generated across the frontier.

Such exchanges were not isolated events. Al-Ṭabarī records a series of prisoner exchanges during the Abbasid period. In 179/795–796, he reports that a *fidā*’ took place between the Muslims and Byzantines in which, according to his account, no Muslim captive was left in Byzantine territory without being exchanged. The event was sufficiently prominent to be celebrated by the poet Marwān b. Abī Ḥafṣa, who praised the release of captives whose imprisonment had previously appeared so permanent that Muslims had regarded Byzantine prisons as their graves.⁵² Al-Ṭabarī records another exchange in 192/807–808 under the supervision of Thābit b. Naṣr b. Mālik, while later exchanges continued to take place at al-Lāmis near Tarsus.⁵³ These notices indicate that the recovery of captives became a recurrent feature of relations across the Byzantine–Muslim frontier rather than an exceptional consequence of a single diplomatic settlement.

The organisational character of these exchanges becomes particularly clear in al-Ṭabarī’s account of the events of 241/855–856. According to his narrative, the Byzantine ruler sent an envoy named George (*Jūrjis*) to negotiate the ransom of

Muslim captives held in Byzantine territory. The Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil responded by sending Naṣr b. al-Azhar b. Faraj to ascertain the situation of the Muslim prisoners, after which arrangements were made for a temporary truce so that the captives could be assembled and the exchange conducted safely. The exchange eventually took place on the River al-Lāmis and involved 785 Muslim men and 125 women. Al-Ṭabarī's detailed description also records the participation of officials, soldiers, the chief judge Ja'far b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid, inhabitants of Baghdad, and a Byzantine delegation.⁵⁴ The recurring association of al-Lāmis with such exchanges is independently reflected in Arabic geographical writing: al-Mas'ūdī, in his description of the region between Seleucia and Tarsus, identifies al-Lāmis specifically as the place where *fidā'* between Muslims and Byzantines took place.⁵⁵ Together, these accounts show that prisoner exchange had developed into an organised frontier practice involving diplomatic envoys, temporary truces, designated exchange sites, administrative preparation, and the movement of substantial numbers of people across the political boundary.

Such exchanges continued into the early tenth century. Al-Ṭabarī records further *fidā'* arrangements in 292/904–905 and 295/907–908, involving approximately 1,200 Muslim captives in the former and several thousand in the latter.⁵⁶ The recurrence of these exchanges over more than a century is particularly significant for understanding the character of the frontier. Warfare continually generated captivity, but captivity in turn generated negotiation, temporary suspensions of hostilities, and regulated human movement. The military frontier was therefore simultaneously a space of coercion and a setting in which established diplomatic mechanisms developed for managing some of the human consequences of war.

Captivity did not, however, always culminate in repatriation. Warfare and other forms of cross-frontier mobility also brought Byzantine men and women into Muslim society, where some remained as slaves, servants, concubines, or members of Muslim households. The presence of Byzantine women is particularly significant because, in some cases, such movement resulted in enduring familial and dynastic connections across the political frontier. Arabic genealogical and historical sources preserve numerous references to women of Byzantine (*Rūm*) origin who became incorporated into Muslim households, including the Abbasid ruling family. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, identifies Qāṭis, the mother of the caliph al-Wāthiq (r. 842–847), as an *umm walad rūmiyya*, and likewise describes Ḥabashiyya, the mother of al-Muntaṣir (r. 861–862), as

a woman of Byzantine origin.⁵⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī preserves comparable notices concerning the mothers of several Abbasid caliphs, including al-Muntaṣir, al-Muhtadī, al-Muqtadir, and al-Mustakfī, whom he likewise identifies as women of Byzantine origin.⁵⁸ Genealogical works provide further evidence that women identified as *Rūmiyya* were present in Muslim families beyond these particular cases.⁵⁹ These references are important not because they establish that all such women had entered Muslim society through warfare or captivity—the sources frequently do not specify the circumstances of their arrival—but because they reveal a more permanent dimension of human mobility across the Byzantine–Islamic world. Women originating from Byzantine territories could become incorporated into Muslim households and, in some cases, into the Abbasid dynasty itself, where their sons subsequently occupied the caliphal throne. Cross-frontier mobility could therefore produce not only temporary encounters generated by warfare, diplomacy, or commerce, but also enduring familial and dynastic connections that crossed political, religious, and cultural boundaries.

6. Craftsmen, Materials, and Monumental Architecture

The circulation of people and objects also had visible consequences for artistic and architectural production. Some of the most striking evidence appears in Arabic accounts of monumental Umayyad building projects. These sources associate Byzantine craftsmen, materials, and artistic techniques with important Islamic religious monuments, suggesting that political rivalry did not prevent Muslim rulers from drawing upon specialised knowledge, labour, and artistic resources originating beyond their own political boundaries. Al-Ṭabarī provides an important example in his account of the reconstruction of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina during the reign of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik. Under the events of 88/706–707, reporting the testimony of Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān, he states that al-Walīd informed the Byzantine emperor of his decision to reconstruct the mosque and requested assistance. According to the account, the emperor sent 100,000 *mithqāls* of gold, one hundred workers, and forty loads of mosaic materials. Al-Ṭabarī further reports that additional mosaic materials were collected from ruined sites and sent to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, who supervised the reconstruction in Medina.⁶⁰ The precise numerical details preserved in the account should be treated cautiously, but the tradition itself remains significant. One of the principal Arabic historical sources thus remembered the renovation of one of Islam's most important sacred spaces as involving financial resources, specialised labour, and

artistic materials associated with the Byzantine world.

A comparable tradition appears in al-Muqaddasī's account of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. He associates the construction and decoration of the mosque with craftsmen drawn from several regions, including Byzantium, Persia, India, and the Maghrib. His account also preserves a report that al-Walīd threatened the Byzantine emperor with the destruction of churches in Muslim territory if assistance was withheld.⁶¹ The polemical character of this detail requires caution, particularly when reconstructing the precise circumstances under which craftsmen or materials were obtained. Nevertheless, the broader narrative again points towards the circulation of specialised labour, materials, and artistic knowledge across political boundaries. Taken together, the traditions concerning Medina and Damascus are particularly significant because they demonstrate that Byzantine–Muslim interaction was not confined to the geographical frontier itself. Skills and materials associated with the Byzantine world could travel far beyond the frontier and be incorporated into monumental projects situated deep within territories governed by the caliphate.

These examples should not be interpreted as evidence of simple or unilateral Byzantine “influence” upon Islamic architecture. The process was more complex. Craftsmen, techniques, and materials could be transferred into new political and religious settings, where they were selected, adapted, and employed according to the requirements of Muslim patrons. The resulting monuments therefore demonstrate not passive imitation but the appropriation and transformation of artistic resources circulating across the Byzantine–Islamic world. The significance of these accounts lies not merely in identifying the possible origins of particular craftsmen or materials, but in revealing the mechanisms through which specialised skills and artistic practices could cross an otherwise militarised political frontier. In this sense, monumental architecture provides particularly tangible evidence that political and military rivalry could coexist with cultural and technological exchange.

A more detailed version of the Damascus tradition is preserved by Ibn ‘Asākir. According to his account, al-Walīd, requiring a large number of skilled workers for the construction of the Umayyad Mosque, wrote to the Byzantine ruler requesting craftsmen from the *Rūm*. The surviving versions differ over the number involved: one refers to two hundred craftsmen, while another gives a figure of four hundred. Both versions relate that al-Walīd threatened military action and the destruction of churches in Muslim territory if the requested assistance was withheld, after which the

Byzantine ruler is said to have agreed to send the craftsmen.⁶² The discrepancies in the numerical details, together with the strongly rhetorical character of the reported correspondence, caution against treating the narrative as a verbatim record of diplomatic communication. Yet these problems do not render the tradition irrelevant. When considered alongside al-Ṭabarī's account concerning Medina and al-Muqaddasī's account of Damascus, Ibn 'Asākir's narrative further illustrates how medieval Arabic historical memory associated major Umayyad building projects with the movement of Byzantine craftsmen and technical expertise into the Islamic world. A comparison with Byzantine historiography is instructive. Theophanes, writing from a Byzantine perspective, also associates al-Walīd with a major transformation of the religious landscape of Damascus. Under 706/707, he reports that al-Walīd seized the city's principal Christian cathedral, presenting the action within a markedly hostile account of the caliph's treatment of Christians.⁶³ Theophanes does not, however, mention the dispatch of Byzantine craftsmen described in the Arabic tradition. The contrast illustrates the different concerns that shaped Arabic and Byzantine representations of the same period. Whereas Arabic accounts could preserve memories of craftsmen, materials, and imperial assistance connected with monumental construction, the Byzantine chronicle emphasised the loss of Christian religious space. The two traditions should therefore not be artificially harmonised, but read as evidence of the different ways in which the transformation of Damascus under Umayyad rule was remembered.

Religious space also appears in Arabic traditions concerning the Umayyad campaigns against Constantinople. Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī preserves a narrative in which Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik negotiated with the Byzantine ruler during the campaign against the imperial capital, with al-Baṭṭāl b. 'Amr also appearing prominently in the account. According to this narrative, the resulting arrangement included the establishment of a mosque associated with Maslama, together with a written assurance attributed to the Byzantine emperor that the mosque would remain protected.⁶⁴ The tradition must be treated cautiously. Ibn A'tham wrote considerably later than the events he describes, and his account cannot by itself establish the precise date, circumstances, or subsequent institutional history of a Muslim place of worship in Constantinople. Its significance for the present argument lies instead in the way Arabic historical memory represented the encounter. A campaign remembered primarily within the context of military confrontation could simultaneously be represented as involving negotiation

over religious space. The narrative thus brings together warfare, diplomacy, and religion and provides another example of the ways in which political hostility could coexist with negotiated forms of cross-frontier interaction. Taken together, the evidence concerning craftsmen, artistic materials, monumental architecture, and religious space reveals forms of interaction that cannot be reduced either to military confrontation or to a simple model of Byzantine cultural “influence” upon the Islamic world. Muslim rulers could seek, acquire, and adapt specialised labour and artistic resources associated with Byzantium while remaining engaged in political and military rivalry with the empire. The resulting movement of technical expertise illustrates the selective permeability of the political boundary between the two worlds. Such exchanges neither eliminated religious antagonism nor produced uninterrupted cultural integration; rather, they demonstrate that rivalry itself existed alongside channels through which skills, materials, and practices could circulate. The movement of technical and artistic knowledge also points towards a broader dimension of Byzantine–Muslim relations: the circulation of books, scientific traditions, scholarly information, and ideas, which became particularly significant during the Abbasid period.

7. Intellectual, Scientific, and Religious Exchange

Cross-frontier interaction was not confined to commerce, material culture, architecture, and religious space. Intellectual contacts also formed an important dimension of Muslim–Byzantine relations, particularly during the Abbasid period, when the acquisition and translation of Greek scientific and philosophical works received substantial scholarly and, at times, caliphal patronage. Byzantium occupied a significant, though by no means exclusive, place within this process. The circulation of books, diplomatic missions, translators, and learned individuals demonstrates that intellectual transmission could continue across political and religious boundaries even while military confrontation remained a recurrent feature of relations between the two powers. A tradition preserved by Ibn Khaldūn provides a revealing example of how later Muslim scholarship remembered this process. In his discussion of the transmission of the rational sciences, Ibn Khaldūn relates that the Abbasid caliph Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr requested works of Greek learning from the Byzantine emperor, including a work by Euclid and writings concerning the physical sciences. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the arrival and study of these works stimulated Muslim interest in the sciences, while the translation and acquisition of Greek learning subsequently

expanded under al-Ma'mūn.⁶⁵ Since Ibn Khaldūn wrote several centuries after the events he describes, the account should not be treated as contemporary evidence for the precise circumstances of the exchange. It is nevertheless significant for the way in which later Muslim historical tradition represented the acquisition of scientific knowledge as capable of crossing an imperial frontier otherwise marked by political and military rivalry.

A related tradition preserved by al-Suyūṭī, who explicitly attributes it to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī's commentary on the *Lāmiyyat al-'Ajam*, connects the acquisition of Greek books even more directly with diplomatic relations. According to this account, after al-Ma'mūn had concluded a truce (*hādana*) with one of the Christian rulers, he requested from him a collection of Greek books that had been kept in a repository inaccessible to others. Al-Ṣafadī is reported to have tentatively identified this ruler as the ruler of Cyprus. The Christian ruler then consulted his advisers concerning the request; while most opposed sending the collection, one ecclesiastical dignitary advised him to do so, expressing the polemical expectation that the introduction of these sciences would produce discord among Muslim scholars.⁶⁶ As with Ibn Khaldūn's account, the considerable chronological distance between the reported event and the surviving narrative requires caution, while the tradition itself expresses uncertainty concerning the identity of the Christian ruler. It cannot therefore establish the precise circumstances of a particular Byzantine–Abbasid transfer of books. Its significance lies instead in the way later Muslim historical memory explicitly connected diplomatic negotiation with the movement of Greek learning across political and confessional boundaries. The same report also places al-Ma'mūn's activities within a longer history of translation rather than presenting his reign as the beginning of Greek–Arabic intellectual transmission. Al-Suyūṭī, continuing his citation of al-Ṣafadī, states that al-Ma'mūn did not initiate translation and Arabisation (*al-naql wa-l-ta'rib*), since such activity had preceded him. He refers to Yaḥyā b. Khālīd al-Barmakī in connection with the translation of the *Almagest* (*al-Majisṭī*) and also records the well-known tradition that Khālīd b. Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya had earlier promoted the translation of Greek works in connection with his interest in alchemy.⁶⁷ These reports need not be accepted uncritically as a precise chronology of the beginnings of the translation movement. They are nevertheless valuable for showing that medieval Muslim authors themselves understood the transmission of Greek learning as a cumulative process extending across successive generations rather than

as an innovation confined to the reign of al-Ma'mūn.

The circulation of texts formed part of a much broader translation movement that transformed the intellectual landscape of the Abbasid world. Works dealing with philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and other branches of knowledge were translated into Arabic through complex linguistic and scholarly networks. Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist*, composed in the tenth century, provides particularly important evidence for the extent to which Greek philosophical and scientific literature had become known within Arabic scholarly culture.⁶⁸ Its bibliographical notices reveal not merely an interest in individual Greek authors but the incorporation of a substantial body of earlier learning into the intellectual world of Arabic-speaking scholars. This process, however, should not be described simply as a direct transmission of knowledge from Byzantium to the Abbasid caliphate. Greek learning reached Arabic readers through several routes, and Syriac-speaking Christian scholars and translators played an especially important role in this process. The career of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq provides a particularly important example of this multilingual scholarly environment. Arabic historical tradition associates Ḥunayn b. Ishāq with the transmission and revision of Greek scientific works, including Euclid and Ptolemy's *Almagest*.⁶⁹ His example illustrates the importance of Christian scholarly intermediaries in the transmission and transformation of Greek scientific knowledge within the Islamic world. The intellectual relationship between Byzantium and the caliphate must therefore be situated within a wider network connecting Greek, Syriac, Christian, and Arabic scholarly traditions. Byzantium constituted one source and participant within this broader intellectual geography rather than the sole intermediary through which Muslim scholars encountered Greek learning.

Personal mobility provides another dimension of this history. As Nadia Maria El Cheikh has observed, several prominent Byzantine intellectual and ecclesiastical figures came into contact with the Abbasid world during the ninth and early tenth centuries. Between 829 and 907, figures including John the Grammarian, Constantine-Cyril, Photios, and Leo Choirosphaktes were associated with encounters involving the Abbasid court in different diplomatic and intellectual contexts.⁷⁰ These episodes should not be interpreted as evidence of a continuous institutional programme of Byzantine–Abbasid scholarly cooperation. Their importance lies instead in demonstrating that diplomatic encounters could simultaneously serve as occasions for intellectual contact. Envoys and representatives did not move between courts

solely as political agents; they could also carry linguistic expertise, texts, information, and knowledge of the societies from which they came. Diplomacy and intellectual exchange were therefore closely connected, although they were not identical processes. The same channels that enabled rulers to negotiate truces, tribute, prisoners, or political disputes could also create opportunities through which books, information, and learned individuals circulated. At the same time, much intellectual transmission occurred outside direct relations between the imperial courts, through multilingual Christian communities, translators, merchants, travellers, and other intermediaries. The Byzantine–Muslim frontier should consequently be understood not merely as a line separating two military systems but as one element within a broader network through which different forms of knowledge could move.

Alongside the transmission of scientific and philosophical knowledge, religious texts and theological traditions constituted another important dimension of intellectual interaction between the Islamic and Christian worlds. By the Abbasid period, biblical and Christian materials were increasingly accessible in Arabic, providing Muslim scholars with additional means of engaging with Christian doctrines and traditions. Muslim authors could encounter Christian traditions not only through political relations or direct contact with Christian communities but also through written texts. Hitti notes the circulation of Arabic translations of biblical writings and draws attention to the use of biblical material by Muslim authors such as al-Jāḥiẓ.⁷¹ The significance of this textual circulation should not be understood primarily as evidence of religious accommodation. Much Muslim engagement with Christian doctrine developed within polemical contexts, in which knowledge of Christian beliefs and texts served the purposes of theological argument and refutation. Yet polemic itself required forms of intellectual contact. The ability to discuss, cite, reinterpret, or criticise another religious tradition presupposed access—whether direct or mediated—to information about its scriptures, doctrines, and practices. Religious controversy could therefore constitute a form of cross-confessional intellectual encounter even when its purpose was disagreement rather than reconciliation.

Caution is nevertheless necessary when relating this broader Arabic Christian textual environment directly to Byzantium. Arabic translations of Christian scriptures and Muslim knowledge of Christian theology did not necessarily originate in Constantinople or result from direct Byzantine–Abbasid exchange. Christian communities living under Muslim rule, particularly those participating in Arabic and

Syriac intellectual cultures, played an important role in transmitting Christian texts and theological knowledge. The evidence should therefore be situated within the broader history of Muslim–Christian intellectual interaction rather than attributed exclusively to direct contact with the Byzantine Empire. Nevertheless, this religious dimension remains relevant to Muslim–Byzantine relations. Byzantium represented the most powerful Christian polity confronting the caliphate, and Muslim perceptions of the *Rūm* were consequently shaped not only by warfare and diplomacy but also by wider Islamic understandings of Christianity. The circulation of Christian texts, theological debate, and polemical literature formed part of the intellectual environment within which Byzantine society could be interpreted by Muslim authors. Intellectual interaction thus operated at several interconnected levels: through the acquisition of books, translation of scientific and philosophical works, diplomatic encounters involving learned individuals, multilingual scholarly communities, and engagement with Christian religious traditions. As in the spheres of commerce and material culture, political and religious rivalry did not produce intellectual isolation. At the same time, the knowledge generated through such contacts was not necessarily neutral. It could be appropriated, criticised, transformed, or incorporated into polemical representations of the other. This tension between knowledge and representation provides the transition to the ways in which medieval Muslim authors described and imagined Byzantine society.

8. Muslim Perceptions and Representations of Byzantium

The long history of warfare, diplomacy, trade, captivity, and intellectual contact between Muslims and Byzantines also generated a substantial body of Arabic writing about the *Rūm*. Medieval Muslim authors described Byzantine lands and society from a variety of perspectives, commenting on geography and climate, physical appearance, cultural practices, religion, moral character, and social behaviour. Such descriptions, however, should not be approached as straightforward ethnographic observations. They emerged from different literary genres and historical contexts and were frequently shaped by inherited geographical theories, political rivalry, religious polemic, literary convention, and the rhetorical purposes of individual authors. Arabic representations of Byzantium therefore reveal not only perceptions of Byzantine society but also the intellectual and cultural frameworks through which Muslim authors conceptualised foreign peoples.

Al-Qazwīnī provides a particularly revealing example of the geographical

representation of the *Rūm*. In his *Āthār al-Bilād wa-Akhhbār al-'Ibād*, he describes their territories as extensive, fertile, and prosperous while emphasising the severity of their climate. He connects the physical characteristics of their inhabitants with the cold and northerly location of their lands, attributing to them predominantly fair complexions, light-coloured hair, and physical robustness. He also associates their disposition with *lahw* and *ṭarab* (amusement and musical entertainment). Al-Qazwīnī further remarks upon their skill in pictorial representation, claiming that their artists were capable of depicting different human emotional states, including laughter and weeping, happiness and sadness.⁷² These observations belong to a broader medieval geographical tradition in which climate, physical appearance, and cultural characteristics were frequently connected. Moreover, since al-Qazwīnī wrote considerably later than the period examined in this article, his account should not be treated as contemporary evidence for pre-Seljuk Byzantine society. Its importance lies rather in demonstrating how accumulated knowledge and representations of the *Rūm* continued to be organised and transmitted within the Arabic geographical tradition. Literary works provide a different type of evidence for the stereotypes attached to the *Rūm*. In his *Kitāb al-Bukhālā'*, al-Jāḥiẓ places different peoples within comparative discussions of generosity and miserliness. In one passage, the *Rūm* appear between the Persians and the Ṣaḳāliba in an argument concerning the supposed relationship between intelligence and generosity. More strikingly, in an anecdote attributed to Ṭāhir al-Asīr, al-Jāḥiẓ reports the claim that the *Rūm* were “the most miserly of peoples” (*abkhal al-umam*), adducing as supposed evidence the assertion that their language contained no name for *jūd* (generosity).⁷³ The argument is reinforced by the assertion that people give names only to things they need to use, thereby turning an alleged linguistic absence into a rhetorical proof of Byzantine miserliness. The argument is immediately placed alongside a comparable linguistic claim concerning the Persians, illustrating the comparative and rhetorical character of such ethnographic judgements. These statements should therefore not be treated as straightforward descriptions of Byzantine social behaviour. Rather, they demonstrate how the *Rūm* could function as a literary category through which Arabic *adab* writers explored and caricatured perceived characteristics of different peoples.

Political and military rivalry could produce still more openly hostile representations. The correspondence between Hārūn al-Rashīd and Emperor Nikephoros I preserved by al-Ṭabarī provides a particularly vivid example. Following Nikephoros' rejection

of the financial arrangements established under Empress Irene, al-Ṭabarī attributes to Hārūn an aggressively insulting response addressed to the Byzantine ruler as the “dog of the Romans” (*kalb al-Rūm*), followed by the declaration that the emperor would see rather than merely hear the caliph’s answer.⁷⁴ As discussed earlier, the episode belongs principally to the history of political and military confrontation. Yet its rhetoric is equally significant for the history of representation. Here the *Rūm* appear not as an abstract foreign people but as the principal imperial adversary against which caliphal power and authority could be articulated.

Religious polemic generated another, often harsher, vocabulary of representation. In his *al-Mukhtār fī al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, al-Jāḥiẓ discusses castration as evidence of what he portrays as Christian lack of compassion and moral corruption. He characterises castration as an especially severe form of mutilation and condemns its performance upon children unable to resist it. Significantly, he associates the practice geographically above all with the lands of the *Rūm* and Abyssinia, claiming that peoples elsewhere who practised it had learned it from them.⁷⁵ The passage occurs within an explicitly anti-Christian polemical argument and should therefore not be treated as a neutral description of Byzantine social practice. Its importance for the present discussion lies instead in demonstrating how knowledge—or purported knowledge—of practices associated with Byzantine society could be incorporated into Muslim theological and moral criticism. Gender constituted another important field in the Arabic representation of Byzantium. As Nadia Maria El Cheikh has demonstrated, Arabic literary traditions could portray Byzantine women through a combination of admiration and moral suspicion. Their physical beauty could be emphasised while at the same time being associated with sexual attraction, temptation, and moral danger.⁷⁶ Such representations should again be distinguished from straightforward descriptions of Byzantine social life. They belonged to broader literary and polemical constructions of the *Rūm*, in which gender provided a particularly effective means of articulating cultural and religious difference.

These gendered representations acquire additional significance when considered alongside the evidence for actual human mobility discussed above. Byzantine women were not merely subjects of literary representation in Arabic texts. Warfare, enslavement, commerce, and other forms of cross-frontier mobility also brought women identified as *Rūmiyya* into Muslim territories, where some became members of elite and even caliphal households. The literary construction of Byzantine women

therefore developed within a social environment in which encounters with women of Byzantine origin were not entirely abstract. Nevertheless, the existence of such contact should not lead us to treat literary stereotypes as transparent reflections of social reality. On the contrary, the coexistence of actual mobility and literary representation illustrates how knowledge generated through contact could be reshaped according to the conventions and ideological purposes of particular texts.

Negative representations, however, constituted only one dimension of Muslim perceptions of Byzantium. The evidence examined in the preceding sections makes any interpretation based solely upon hostility difficult to sustain. Muslim rulers could request craftsmen and artistic materials associated with the Byzantine world; merchants and commodities crossed political boundaries; prisoners were exchanged through negotiated mechanisms; individuals of Byzantine origin entered Muslim households; Greek scientific and philosophical knowledge attracted sustained interest; and diplomatic encounters provided opportunities for the circulation of books, information, and learned individuals. Byzantium could therefore be represented simultaneously as a military enemy, a Christian theological opponent, a source of specialised artistic expertise and desirable commodities, and a participant in the transmission of prestigious intellectual traditions.

This apparent contradiction is central to understanding medieval Muslim perceptions of the *Rūm*. Familiarity did not necessarily produce admiration, just as hostility did not prevent curiosity, negotiation, or exchange. Indeed, sustained interaction itself contributed to the complexity of Arabic representations of Byzantium. The Byzantines were neither distant strangers nor merely members of an abstract religious category. They constituted a neighbouring imperial society with which Muslim states and communities had interacted for centuries through warfare, diplomacy, commerce, captivity, migration, religious controversy, and intellectual exchange. Arabic representations consequently combined observation with stereotype, knowledge with polemic, and practical familiarity with political and religious hostility. The literary image of Byzantium thus adds an important perceptual dimension to the patterns of interaction examined throughout this article. The same historical proximity that generated recurrent warfare also produced sustained knowledge of the other, although that knowledge was continually reshaped by political competition, religious difference, and literary convention. By the eleventh century, therefore, Muslim engagement with Byzantium encompassed not only military and diplomatic

experience but also a substantial body of geographical, literary, religious, and cultural representations of the *Rūm*. This accumulated knowledge formed part of the broader historical environment inherited by the Seljuks as they entered and transformed the political geography of Armenia and Anatolia.

9. Conclusion

Relations between Muslims and Byzantines before the Seljuk expansion into Anatolia cannot be adequately understood through the history of warfare alone. From the emergence of Islam in the seventh century to the transformation of the Anatolian political landscape in the eleventh, military confrontation remained a persistent feature of relations between the two sides. The loss of Syria and other eastern Byzantine provinces, the gradual formation of a frontier around the Taurus and Anti-Taurus regions, recurrent Umayyad and Abbasid campaigns, and repeated campaigns against Constantinople created a long history of political and military rivalry. Yet these same centuries also witnessed diplomacy, prisoner exchanges, commercial activity, human mobility, artistic and material transfers, religious encounters, and the circulation of knowledge. Conflict and exchange were therefore not separate or successive phases of Muslim–Byzantine relations; they developed simultaneously and were often interconnected. The formation of the Muslim–Byzantine frontier was central to this process. The seventh-century conquests shifted the principal zone of confrontation from Syria towards Anatolia and contributed to the emergence of a militarised borderland between the two powers. This frontier, however, never functioned simply as an impermeable boundary separating two isolated societies. Under the Umayyads and Abbasids, recurrent campaigns, fortified settlements, and seasonal expeditions institutionalised military pressure, while periods of warfare repeatedly alternated with negotiations, truces, diplomatic missions, and prisoner exchanges. Particularly revealing were the organised exchanges of Muslim and Byzantine captives, which demonstrate that even one of the most direct consequences of warfare could generate regularised forms of negotiation and cross-frontier interaction. Warfare and diplomacy should therefore be understood not as contradictory modes of Muslim–Byzantine relations but as interconnected mechanisms through which both sides managed a persistent imperial rivalry.

Human mobility further complicates any rigid distinction between the two societies. Captivity did not invariably culminate in repatriation: individuals of Byzantine origin entered Muslim territories as prisoners, slaves, servants, concubines, craftsmen, and

members of households. The presence of women of Byzantine origin within elite and even caliphal households is particularly significant, since cross-frontier movement could produce enduring familial connections extending beyond the immediate circumstances of warfare. Commercial and material circulation reveals a similar pattern. Despite recurrent hostilities, commodities, merchants, diplomatic gifts, tribute, booty, and other forms of material wealth continued to move between Byzantine and Muslim territories. Frontier regions consequently operated not only as military zones but also as spaces through which goods and people circulated. Trade itself formed only one component of a broader economy of mobility: warfare, diplomacy, ransom, travel, and political negotiation could likewise transfer objects and resources from one society to another. The Muslim–Byzantine frontier was therefore simultaneously restrictive and permeable, obstructing certain forms of movement while facilitating or generating others.

Architectural and artistic exchange provides particularly visible evidence of this selective permeability. Arabic historical traditions concerning major Umayyad building projects associate Byzantine craftsmen, mosaic work, and imperial assistance with important Islamic monuments. Although individual details of these accounts require critical treatment, their broader significance lies in the movement—or historical memory of the movement—of specialised labour, artistic techniques, and materials between rival political worlds. Such transfers should not be understood simply as Byzantine “influence” upon Islamic civilisation. Muslim patrons selected, appropriated, and adapted craftsmen, techniques, and materials within new architectural, religious, and political contexts. Cultural transmission was thus selective and transformative rather than merely imitative.

Intellectual exchange likewise challenges any assumption that prolonged political rivalry produced cultural isolation. Abbasid engagement with Greek scientific and philosophical learning developed through multiple routes and multilingual scholarly communities, with Syriac-speaking Christian scholars and translators playing a particularly important role. Nevertheless, traditions concerning the acquisition of Greek books from Christian or Byzantine rulers, together with evidence of diplomatic encounters involving learned individuals, illustrate how political boundaries could be crossed through the circulation of texts and knowledge. Diplomacy could consequently operate as an intellectual channel as well as a political one. The circulation of Christian writings and Muslim engagement with Christian theology

further extended this intellectual contact, even when knowledge of Christianity was employed for controversy and refutation rather than religious accommodation. Arabic representations of the *Rūm* reveal another consequence of this prolonged proximity. Medieval Muslim authors did not construct a single or internally consistent image of Byzantine society. Byzantines could appear as military enemies and theological opponents and could be represented through negative stereotypes concerning morality, generosity, gender, and religious practice. At the same time, Byzantine craftsmen could be valued for their specialised skills, Byzantine territories and commodities could attract geographical and commercial interest, and Greek intellectual traditions could command considerable scholarly attention. Hostility, curiosity, admiration, and polemic could therefore coexist. These apparently contradictory attitudes were themselves products of sustained interaction: the *Rūm* were neither distant strangers nor merely an abstract Christian other, but a neighbouring imperial society with which Muslims had interacted for centuries.

Taken together, the evidence examined in this article suggests that warfare, diplomacy, captivity, commerce, material transfer, religious encounter, and intellectual exchange should not be treated as independent categories. They frequently emerged from the same historical circumstances and could reinforce one another. Warfare generated captives and negotiations; prisoner exchanges required diplomatic arrangements; diplomacy facilitated the movement of people, objects, and information; frontier regions combined military and commercial functions; and religious rivalry encouraged both polemical representation and the acquisition of knowledge about the other. The frontier was therefore simultaneously a zone of separation and a mechanism of interaction: it divided two competing political and religious worlds while also creating circumstances in which people, commodities, skills, texts, and ideas could cross between them. Seen from this perspective, the Seljuk expansion of the eleventh century should not be treated as the beginning of sustained Muslim engagement with Byzantium in Anatolia. The Seljuks encountered a frontier already shaped by several centuries of Arab–Byzantine warfare, diplomatic practice, prisoner exchange, human mobility, commercial circulation, cultural transfer, and accumulated knowledge of the *Rūm*. Their expansion altered the political balance and territorial structure of this older field of interaction rather than creating it anew. The political transformation of Anatolia in the eleventh century therefore represented not the beginning of Muslim interaction with Byzantium, but a new stage in a much older history of confrontation and exchange.

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