

Tarek M. Muhammad *Allā Wa Koubar* in the Byzantine Conception*

In the last quarter of the 20th century, A.Th. Khoury presented Islam and its beliefs to the European readers as it had been viewed by the Byzantine writers, i.e. he re-formed the Byzantine polemical accounts and clarified the image of Islam in the Eastern Christian thought between the 8th and the 13th centuries [Khoury, 1969; 1972]. Shortly, thereafter, when D. Sahas dealt with the same subjects, he had more balance views than Khoury in dealing with the Byzantine and Islamic accounts². On the other hand, the Byzantine polemicists relate their accounts on *al-Takbīr* (*Allā Wa Koubar*) with the relation between it and the Ka'ba, the worship of the Star of the Morning, the Black Stone, and the head of Aphrodite.

Therefore, this paper will examine the Byzantine conception of Ἀλλὰ Οὐὰ Κοῦβάρ (*al-Takbīr*), which is a part of Muslims' prayer and the Islamic rituals, in order to highlight how it was perceived by the Byzantines, especially some Byzantinists such as Khoury and Sahas did not discuss this issue in their works.

As for the Byzantine sources, I am not going to make a survey of the polemical accounts that spoke about Islam which are outside the scope of this paper³. I will pick up only the main Byzantine accounts which focused on the subject of this paper.

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As for Islam, the Byzantine polemical writings of the seventh century against it were different from those of the 8th century. The Byzantine

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2 | For instance see [Sahas, 1972; 2000, p. 467–484].

3 | The recent book, which speaks about this issue, is "Seeing Islam as the others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam" by R. Hoyland [Hoyland, 1997]. The author dealt with a lot of Greek, Syriac, Syrian, Armenian, Coptic, Jewish, Persian, Chinese, and Latin sources that spoke about Islam during the 7th–8th centuries.

writers of the seventh century were shocked by the brutality of the raiding armies of the Muslims, which within a relatively short period they found themselves in control of major urban centers⁴. At the same time, a new religion, Islam, has developed with a Prophet, a holy book (Qurʾān), and an Islamic law (sharīʿa) [Jeffreys, 1986, p. 312–314]. Thus, they wrote as expositors of this new situation for which the Byzantine military efforts were ineffectual.

In the eighth century, when the Muslims were busy in their wars against Byzantium, the Byzantine authors were quick to exploit them in order to denounce Islam as a cruel and therefore inferior religion [Krausmüller, 2004, p. 163]. The 8th century was the actual beginning of the examination of Islam and John of Damascus (7th–8th c.)⁵ presented the first comprehensive view of Islam for many Greek theologians who critically studied it. By regarding Islam as a “*Heresy of the Ishmaelites*”, John of Damascus warned his contemporary Christians of the heretical character of Islam, without posting a “threat” to the Muslims. Therefore, they dedicated a part of their polemical writings against Islam and its fundamentals.

The writings of John of Damascus and of the monks of st. Saba’s monastery concerning Islam functioned as a bridge between Byzantium and Muslims. While being subjects of the new Muslim authorities and facing daily challenges with regard to their faith, they maintained a certain degree of diplomacy in dealing with the mother church of Constantinople. Presumably, the knowledge, as well as rumors, about Islam and Muslims found their way to Constantinople, a long time before any polemical works appeared in Byzantium [Abou-Seada, 2000, p. 221].

After the spread of John of Damascus’ account, a chain of the Byzantine polemicists who examined Islam and the Qurʾān came into existence, namely Theophanes the confessor, Nicetas of Byzantium, Euthemius Zigabenus, and among others⁶. John of Damascus said: “These, then, were idolaters and they venerated the Morning Star and Aphrodite, whom notably they called *khavar* in their own language, which means ‘great’; therefore until the times

4 | For example, Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638), explained the Muslim fast triumphs as a divine punishment of God to Heraclius (r. 610–641) because of his sins. In his Christmas sermon for 634, Sophronius attributes his, and his congregation’s, inability to visit Bethlehem for the festival, to the “beastly and barbarous” Saracen menace, and to Adam’s expulsion from Paradise. But, he declares, repentance and good deeds will restore the former peace and tranquility and, by holding to the right faith, the Ishmaelites’ sword can be blunted; a life lived in a way that is dear to God will surely bring bloody destruction upon the Saracens. Puzzled and horrified that the customary celebrations cannot take place, Sophronius has turned to a traditional explanation for unexpected misfortunes. Pseudo-Methodius (late 7th c.), bishop of Patara in Lydia, thought also that it was a divine punishment of God to the Byzantines, because of their sexual sins rather than the qualities of the Arabs. See: [Usener, 1886, p. 507–509, 515; Constantelos, 1972, p. 328–332; Palmer, Brock, Hoyland, 1993, p. 222–242; Reinink, 1982, p. 336–344]. For more details see: [Hoyland, 1997, p. 70–73, 264–270; Ogle, 1946, p. 318]. Cf. also [Kaegi, 1969, p. 139, 143; Muhammad, 2008, p. 198–199].

5 | John of Damascus worked at the court of the Umayyad Caliphate in a high position retired and later served as a monk at the monastery of St. Saba near Jerusalem. His staying and his spiritual service at this monastery gave him a chance to examine Islam and write about it with awareness more than the other Orthodox Christians did. On the life of John of Damascus see [Louth, 2002; 1995; *Isbīrū Jabbar*, 2002; Sahas, 1972, p. 17–50; Hemmerdinger, 1962, p. 422–423; Hoeck, 1951, p. 5–60; Lupton, 1882]. As for John of Damascus and Islam see: [Louth, 2002, p. 76 ff.; Sahas, 1992, p. 185–205; idem, 1972, p. 67–159; Khoury, 1969, p. 47–67; Meyendorff, 1964, p. 129 ff.; Khoury, 1957–1958, pp. 44–63; Hoeck, 1951, p. 5–60; Jugie, 1924, p. 137–161; Lupton, 1882, p. 90–100].

6 | About the writings of these polemicists see: [Sahas, 2000, p. 467–484; idem, 1996, p. 232–238; Khoury, 1969, p. 47–309; Meyendorff, 1964, p. 116–132; Jeffreys, 1986, p. 315–321; Eichner, 1936, p. 133–162, 197–244]. Cf. also: [Khoury, 1990, p. 53–306].

of Heraclius they were, undoubtedly, idolaters. From that time on a false prophet appeared among them”⁷.

Thus, he suggested that the Arabs before Islam were idolaters. They gave back a cult to the Star of the Morning and to Aphrodite the *Khabar* that is the Great ⁸. The notable point of this part of John of Damascus' account is that he used the past tense (participle Aorist) “εἰδωλολατρήσαντες καὶ προσκυνήσαντες”, to refer to the Arabs of *Jāhiliyya*. In another part of his account, he discusses Islam where he mentions again about Aphrodite⁹. Within this context, he introduces the Ishmaelites (later the Muslims) to the Byzantines as worshippers of idols and he presents Islam as a heresy¹⁰. These words would later penetrate the anti-Islamic writings of the Byzantine polemicists, when they spoke of *al-Takbīr* [Khoury, 1972, p. 240].

John also regarded that the Ka'ba is the head of Aphrodite¹¹, which was an idol made of stone of *Khoubar* [Khoury, 1969, p. 144; Meyendorff, 1964, p. 119]. That is, according to Nicetas of Byzantium, the people would prostrate before it, which was erected at Bakka [Khoury, 1969, p. 144]¹². Another reference to *Khoubar* is mentioned in the letter of Germanus I, patriarch of Constantinople (715–730) sent to the bishop Thomas of Claudioupolis. He says: “τὴν μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τελουμένην παρ' αὐτῶν λίθῳ ἀψύχῳ προσφώνησιν τὴν τε τοῦ λεγομένου Χοβάρ ἐπικλήσιν...” [Mansi, 1759–1798, 109E = PG 98, 168C]¹³. Thus, he called the stone (λίθος) *Khoubar* (Χοβάρ)¹⁴ and depicted the Muslims as idol worshippers until his time [Sahas, 1996, p. 235]¹⁵. D. Sahas assumed that under the expression *Habar* [sic] could be a reference to the exclamation *Allahu Akbar* [Sahas, 1972, p. 87].

The most important Byzantine account is that of George Hamartolus (9th c.) who hated Iconoclasm, Islam, Manichaeism, and idolatry and often had expressed his hatred with a string of obscene epithets [The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, 1991; s.v. Hamartolus, p. 836]. He regarded the Muslims as worshippers of idols and referred to Aphrodite and its relation with *al-Takbīr*. He mentioned that they adored the goddess of pleasure, Aphrodite of the Greeks. They call it Star of the Morning, *Koubar* (Κουβάρ),

7 | John Damascene says: “Οὗτοι μὲν οὖν εἰδωλολατρήσαντες καὶ προσκυνήσαντες τῷ ἑωσφόρῳ ἄστρῳ, καὶ τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ, ἡ δὲ καὶ Χαβάρ τῇ ἑαυτῶν ἐπωνόμασαν γλώσσει, ὅπερ σημαίνει μεγάλῃ, ἕως μὲν οὖν τῶν Ἡρακλείου χρόνων προφανῶς εἰδωλολάτρου. Ἀφ' οὗ χρόνου καὶ δεῦρο ψευδοπροφήτης αὐτοῖς ἀνεφύη.” [John Damascene], see english translation [Sahas, 1972, p. 132; Hoyland, 1997, p. 485–486].

8 | *Patrologia graeca* 94, 764 (hereinafter referred to as PG); English translation: [Sahas, 1972, p. 133]. Cf. also: [Khoury, 1972, p. 60; Meyendorff, 1964, p. 119; Eichner, 1936, p. 235; Louth, 2002, p. 77].

9 | PG 94, 769; English translation: [Sahas, 1972, p. 136].

10 | As for Islam viewed as a heresy B. Lewis says, “For Christians, Islam was at best a heresy, more than usually a false doctrine, founded by one who was variously depicted, at different stages in the evaluation of European consciousness, as a heretic” [Lewis, 1993, p. 7].

11 | PG 94, 769; [Sahas, 1972, p. 137]. Cf. also [Khoury, 1969, p. 63; Meyendorff, 1964, p. 119; Eichner, 1936, p. 235].

12 | Bakka is one of the Qur'ānic names of Makka. It is called also 'Umm al-Qurā (the mother of villages). Sūrat Al-'Imrān, 3/96; Sūrat al-An'ām, 6/92; Sūrat al-Shūrā, 42/7. The Byzantines knew many shapes of its name Bakka, Mekke, and Makkhe. See: [Montet, 1906, p. 153].

13 | Cf. also: [Sahas, 1969, p. 127, n. 177; idem, 1972, p. 87, n. 1].

14 | D. Constantelos regarded the stone as the Ka'ba not the Black Stone [Constantelos, 1972, p. 352].

15 | According to Sahas' view the phrase “τὴν τε τοῦ λεγομένου Χοβάρ ἐπικλήσιν” means the stone is called *Khoubar* or Allah's name is *Khoubar* [Sahas, 1972, p. 87, n. 3].

which is called in their horrible and vulgar language the great. They persist considering Aphrodite a divinity. The text of their prayer proves this assertion. Here is the common formula: *Alla* (Ἀλλᾶ), *Alla, Wa* (Ὁὐᾶ) *Koubar* (Κουβάρ), *Alla*. *Alla* means God and *Wa* means bigger. *Koubar*: great, to be known the Moon and Aphrodite. Therefore, they translate it as follows: “God, God the bigger, and the big -to be the Moon and Aphrodite — is God” [Hamartolus, 872C–873A-B]¹⁶.

Thus, Hamartolus provided the Byzantines with a detailed formula about *al-Takbīr*. He presented the Muslims as idolaters and referred to Aphrodite, which had been mentioned earlier by John of Damascus. Probably, the source of Hamartolus, from which this polemic piece was quoted, had been confused.

The anonymous author of *rituel d’abjuration* indicated that the house of Makka with its big built stone has an effigy for Aphrodite. He also referred to the Muslims as worshippers of the Star of the Morning, Aphrodite *Kabar*, which was called the great and made them one of the anathematized Islamic symbols by the converted Muslims [Montet, 1906, p. 154; Khoury, 1969, p. 192].

The Anonymous author of the polemic piece of *Contra Mahomet*¹⁷ and Hamartolus repeated almost the same words of John of Damascus and regarded the Arabs idolaters up to the time of Heraclius (r. 610–641) and they worshiped the Star of the Morning, Aphrodite, which was called *Khabar*, the great [Anonymous, 1448B-C]. He also referred to the rituals of the Islamic pilgrimage and to the formula of *al-Takbīr* as follows, *Allāh*, *Allāhu Akbar*, *Allāhu Akbar*. When he spoke of the camel¹⁸, he indicted that the Saracens invoke the Star of the Morning and Aphrodite *Khabar*, the great¹⁹.

We have to take into consideration the influence of those polemic pieces on *al-Takbīr* and the idols of the Arabs that convey also to the Byzantine historians and chronographers, which verify that the popular notions about the origins of Islam which are reiterated by different authors in different ways [Meyendorff, 1964, p. 118]. Two examples only of the Byzantine historians will be mentioned in order to prove those fictitious accounts of the Byzantine polemicists about Islam were continuous.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus (10th c.) mentioned almost the same accounts of John of Damascus and Hamartolus when he said: “They pray also to the Star of Aphrodite which they call *Koubar*, and in their supplication cry out All, “ἄλλᾶ οὐᾶ κουβάρ”, that is, God and Aphrodite. For they call God Alla, and Wa they use for the conjunction ‘and’ and they call the star Koubar. Therefore, they say “ἄλλᾶ οὐᾶ κουβάρ”” [Constantine Porphyrogenitus, p. 92; idem, , 1949, p. 78–79].

16 | Cf. also: [Khoury, 1969, p. 185–186; idem, 1972, p. 240–241; Eichner, 1936, p. 238].

17 | On the author of this text see: [Khoury, 1969, p. 194–195].

18 | Probably he means the Camel of Šālīḥ.

19 | PG 104, 1453D–1456B. Cf. also: [Khoury, 1972, p. 241].

While Hamartolus thought that the word ‘*Wa*’ is an adjective, “the bigger”, Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentioned that it is a conjunction, *and*. Despite that, he is confused, too.

The second example is George Cedrenus (11th c.) who wrote a historical epitome [Nicol, 1991, p. 69] in which he spoke about Islam being influenced by the polemical piece of George Hamartolus against it. He stated that the Saracens in the old time had worshiped the idols and the so-called Aphrodite of the Greeks that is of pleasure, as well as the star of the morning. They also worshiped *Koubar*, which they called in their vulgar language Aphrodite, and they regarded it as God. They described it as the great. They called it by these words *Alla, Alla Ua Kubar Alla. Alla, Alla* means the God, God. *Koubar*: the great, to be known the Moon and Aphrodite. Therefore, they considered God to be the big and great, surely the Goddess Aphrodite. Moreover, he regarded Islam to be false and mixed between God (Allāh) and the Greek goddess Aphrodite, were regarded one²⁰.

Thus, the aforementioned Byzantine writings reflect deep rooted conceptions among the Byzantines, which are as follows:

(A) The Muslims were worshippers of idols.

(B) The worship of Aphrodite and the Star of the Morning existed before Islam.

(C) The Muslims were still worshipping Aphrodite and the Star of the Morning at the sacred sanctuary of Makka.

(D) The Muslims used the pagan word *Koubar* or *Khabar* of John of Damascus in the formula of *al-Takbīr*.

(E) When the Muslims cry with this formula, *al-Takbīr*, or use it during their prayers they invoke for the Greek Goddess, Aphrodite.

(F) The head of Aphrodite, which lies at Makka, was an idol stone that was brought there from Petra [Eichner, 1936, p. 239].

In order to highlight the reason of the Byzantine misunderstanding, the Arabic accounts on *al-Takbīr* should be examined as well. Therefore, there is a questionable point: when did the early Muslims use the formula of *al-Takbīr* in their Islamic rituals?

It is known that the Muslims use the formula of *al-Takbīr* on three religious occasions, which are consecutively: the call to prayer, prayer itself, and the pilgrimage.

As for the Muslims’ prayer, the Prophetic traditions mention that Allāh ordered the Prophet Muḥammad during his journey to the Heaven, which is known as *al-Isrā’ wa-l-Mi’rāj*, and his nation to pray [Ṣaḥīḥ al-

20 | G. Cedrenus says: “...Πάλαι μὲν γὰρ εἰδωλολατρῶντες καὶ τῇ παρ’ Ἑλλήσιν Ἀφροδίτῃ λεγομένην, τούτέστι τῇ ἡδονῇ, προσκυνοῦντες, καὶ τὸν ἀστέρα ταύτης τὸν Ἑωσφόρον εἶναι μυθολογοῦσιν, ἣν δὴ καὶ Κουβάρ τῇ ἑαυτῶν κακεμφάτῳ γλῶσση ἐπονομάσαντες, ὅπερ ἐστὶ μεγάλη, διέμειναν ἑωσάρτι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην θεὸν ὀνομάζοντες. Ἵνα δὲ μὴ δόξωμέν τισι ψευδο-λογεῖν, σαφηνίσωμεν τὸ μέγα αὐτῶν μυστήριον. Ἔχει δὲ ἡ λέξις τῆς μυσαρᾶς αὐτῶν καὶ παμβεβήλου προσευχῆς οὕτως Ἀλλᾶ Ἀλλᾶ Οὐὰ Κουβάρ Ἀλλᾶ. Καὶ τὸ μὲν Ἀλλᾶ ἐρμηνεύεται ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Θεός, τὸ δὲ Οὐὰ μείζον, τὸ δὲ Κουβάρ μεγάλη ἦτοι σελήνη καὶ Ἀφροδίτη. Ὅπερ ἐστὶν οὕτως. Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Θεός μείζων καὶ ἡ μεγάλη, εἴτ’ οὖν Ἀφροδίτη Θεός. Καὶ τοῦτο σαφηνίζει ἡ ἐπαγωγή τοῦ τελευταίου Ἀλλᾶ...” [Cedrenus, 813D–816A].

Bukhārī, no. 336, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 234, 237, Kitāb al-Īmān], and that the angel Gabriel taught it to the Prophet Muḥammad [Sunan al-Tirmidhī, no. 138, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt; Sunan al-Nasāʾī, no. 521, Kitāb al-Mawāqīt; Sunan Abī Dawūd, no. 332, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt]²¹. In this case, if the Arabic account is authentic, it means that the Muslims had known the formula of *al-Takbīr* in their prayer one year before the migration of the Prophet to Madīna.

As for the formula of *al-Takbīr* in the call to prayer, there are many contradictory accounts about who consisted it.

Ibn Ishāq, the first biographer of the Prophet Muḥammad, referred briefly to two stories about it, which are detailed by Ibn Hishām, the second biographer of the Prophet [Ibn Ishāq, p. 312]. The latter biographer explains the main reason for the adoption of the Islamic call to prayer, *al-Adhān*, and states that when the Prophet migrated to Madīna and Islam was established there, he used to go to the mosque for prayer and hence the Muslims were coming to the mosque to pray with him without any call to prayer²². But, gradually the number of the Muslims increased. Therefore, some Muslims asked the Prophet to make a call to prayer, to draw their attention to the actual time of it. Then, he was going to take a horn, like the Jews, but he declined preferring using a bell, like the Christians, but it was abandoned. As they were undecided, ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Zayd al-Anṣārī²³ saw a *ru’ya*²⁴ and came to the Prophet to inform him about it. He said: “O the Messenger of Allah, a man passed me with two green pieces of cloths, carrying a bell in his hand. I said to him, O ‘Abdullāh, would you like to sell this bell? He replied, what would you do with it? I said, to call to prayer with it. He replied, Could I show you the way to the good? I said. What is it? He replied: say *Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar; aṣḥhadu an lā ilāh illa-l-Lāh, aṣḥhadu an lā ilāh illa-l-Lāh; aṣḥhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūlu-l-Lāh, aṣḥhadu anna Muḥammadan Rasūlu-l-Lāh; ḥayy ‘ala al-ṣalāh, ḥayy ‘ala al-ṣalāh; ḥayy ‘ala al-falāḥ, ḥayy ‘ala falāḥ; Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar; lā ilāh illa-l-Lāh*” [Ibn Hishām, p. 457–458; Sunan Ibn Māja, no. 706, Kitāb al-Adhān].

Then, the Prophet Muḥammad said: “It is a real *ru’ya*, God willing, go with Bilāl and teach him it to use it as a call to prayer. He has a more

21 | Cf. also: [Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, p. 183].

22 | The Muslims pray five times daily, the Morning prayer, the Noon prayer, the Afternoon prayer, the Sunset prayer, and the Evening prayer [al-Sawwāf, n.d., p. 52–53].

23 | He is ‘Abdullāh Ibn Zayd Ibn Tha’laba Ibn ‘Abd Rabbu al-Anṣārī, brother of Bilḥārith Ibn al-Khazraj. He fought at the battle of Badr and presented al-‘Aqaba. In 32 A.H., when he was sixty-four years old, he died. [Ibn Hishām, p. 19].

24 | The Muslims distinguish between the dream and *ru’ya*. They think that the human can see the devil, bad or good things, any events in his dream. However, in the *ru’ya*, they think that the human sees only the good things, apostles, the good and pious people (*Awliyā’u Allāh*), and glad tidings. There are many Prophetic traditions about dreams, from which Abū Sa’īd al-Khudrī said that the Prophet said, “If anyone of you sees a dream that he likes, then it is from Allāh, and he should thank Allah for it and narrate it to others; but if he sees something else, i.e., a dream that he dislikes, then it is from devil, and he should seek refuge with Allah from its devil, and he should not mention it to anybody, for it will not harm him” [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 114, Kitāb Tafsīr al-Aḥlām, english translation: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/011.sbt.html>]; Abū Hurayra also said, “I heard Allah’s Apostle saying, ‘Nothing is left of the prophetism except al-Mubashshirāt.’” They asked, “What are al-Mubashshirāt?” He replied, “The true good dreams (that conveys glad tidings)” [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 119, Kitāb Tafsīr al-Aḥlām, english translation: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/011.sbt.html>].

beautiful voice than you” [Ibn Hishām, p. 458; Sunan Ibn Māja, no. 706, Kitāb al-Adhān].

Ibn Hishām indicates that when ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb went to buy two pieces of wood for the bell, he heard the call to prayer. Then, he went to the Prophet to inform him of what he saw in his sleeping, too. On the other hand, Ibn Hishām mentions that the revelation (*al-wahy*) came to the Prophet with it. Therefore, when ‘Umar told the Prophet about what he saw, he said to him, “the revelation preceded you with it” [Ibn Hishām, p. 458]²⁵.

The remarkable point in the first story of Ibn Hishām is that he mentioned the formula of *al-Takbīr* as mentioned later in the Byzantine sources. Moreover, what ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Zayd saw was a *ru’ya* not a dream. ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī was half a sleep, half a wake, i.e. in a reverie [Ibn Hishām, p. 457]. The biographer was going to say that the dream of ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī was not a conventional dream, but it was a divine inspiration. The Prophet Muḥammad himself confirmed this suggestion when he said to ‘Umar, “the revelation preceded you with it”.

The second point is that Ibn Hishām said that “the revelation (*al-wahy*) came to the Prophet with it”. This view is opposite to the first account of Ibn Ishāq, in which he said that it was ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī who knew the words of *al-Adhān* in his *ru’ya*. Saying which one is true means the Prophetic traditions should be examined, too.

According to Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Anas Ibn Mālīk said [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 568, Kitāb al-Adhān, no. 568; al-‘Asqalānī, p. 77]²⁶: “The people mentioned the fire and the bell (they suggested those as signals to indicate the starting of prayers), and by that they mentioned the Jews and the Christians. Then Bilāl was ordered to pronounce *Adhān* for the prayer by saying its wordings twice, and for the *Iqāma* (the call for the actual standing for the prayers in rows) by saying its wordings once”.

According to Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Abū Maḥdhūra said [Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 572, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, no. 740]²⁷: “The Apostle of Allāh taught him *al-Adhān* like this: Allāh is the Greatest, Allāh is the Greatest; I testify that there is no God but Allāh, I testify that there is no God but Allāh; I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, and it should be again repeated: I testify that there is no God but Allāh, I testify that there is no God but Allāh; I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of

25 | Cf. also: [Sunan Ibn Māja, no. 707, Kitāb al-Adhān]. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, “When the Muslims arrived at Madīna, they used to assemble for the prayer, and used to guess the time for it. During those days, the practice of *Adhān* for the prayers had not been introduced yet. Once they discussed this problem regarding the call to prayer. Some people suggested the use of a bell like the Christians, others proposed a trumpet like the horn (sic!) used by the Jews, but ‘Umar was the first to suggest that a man should call (the people) to the prayer; so Allāh’s Apostle ordered Bilāl to get up and pronounce the *Adhān* for prayers” [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 578, Kitāb al-Adhān, english translation <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/011.sbt.html>; al-‘Asqalānī, p. 77].

26 | English translation see: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/011.sbt.html>. He also said: “When the number of Muslims increased they discussed the question as to how to know the time for the prayer by some familiar means. Some suggested that a fire be lit (at the time of the prayer) and others put forward the proposal to ring the bell. Bilāl was ordered to pronounce the wording of *Adhān* twice and of the *Iqāma* once only” [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 571, Kitāb al-Adhān, english translation no. 580 <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/011.sbt.html>].

27 | English translations see: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/html>.

Allāh, I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh. Come to the prayer (twice). Come to the prayer (twice). [Ibn] Ishāq added: Allāh is the Greatest, Allāh is the Greatest; there is no God but Allāh”.

Al-ʿAsqalānī adds that when ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Zayd came to the Prophet Muḥammad to inform him about his *ruʿya* ʿUmar said, do you send a man to call to prayer? Then, the Prophet ordered Bilāl to pronounce the call. But this account does not coincide with the authentic Prophetic Tradition, which said that ʿUmar came to the Prophet after he listened to *al-Adhān*. Al-ʿAsqalānī also explains that the revelation came to the Prophet with the formula of the Islamic call to prayer before the *ruʿya* of ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Zayd. The proof, as he said, is when ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Zayd ended the narration of his *ruʿya*, the Prophet said to him “*It is a real ruʿya*” [al-ʿAsqalānī, p. 81–82].

According to these Arabic accounts, there are some conclusions about *al-Adhān*, which contains the formula of *al-Takbīr*:

(A) The main objective of adopting a call to prayer was the growing number of the Muslims.

(B) There were three proposals for the suggested call, the fire, the horn, and the bell.

(C) The *ruʿya* of ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Zayd had taken place and was narrated to the Prophet Muḥammad.

(D) The Prophet ordered Bilāl to call to prayer using the formula of ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Zayd and he taught the same formula to other Muslims.

(E) Ibn Hishām said that the revelation (*al-wahy*) came to the Prophet with it. Because some Prophetic Traditions, which referred to this issue, are doubtful, it is difficult to rule out if it is true or not²⁸. On the other hand, the Muslim narrators such as ʿAbd al-Bāqī Ibn Qānīʿ (d. 351 A.H.) Ibn Qānīʿ, p. 111–112] and Muḥammad Ibn Hibbān (d. 354 A.H.) [Ibn Hibbān, p. 19] confirm that ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Zayd is the one who saw the *ruʿya* of *al-Adhān*.

As for the third usage of *al-Takbīr*, the Muslims use it during the rituals of pilgrimage and *ʿumra* (the lesser pilgrimage). They mention it every time of the seven circuits around the Kaʿba (*al-tawāf*) and during the other rituals of the pilgrimage and *ʿumra*, where God ordered the Muslims to glorify Him greatly (*wa-kabbirhu takbīraa*)²⁹.

It seems that the Muslims did not use the formula of *al-Takbīr* during their pilgrimage before 6 A.H. because the first *ʿumra*, which was made by the Prophet and his companions, was incomplete at 6 A.H. [Ibn Hishām, III–IV, p. 263–272] and in 7 A.H. the Muslims made a complete *ʿumra* [Ibn Hishām, III–IV, p. 314–316]. In 9 A.H., Abū Bakr led the Muslims to make the pilgrimage without the Prophet Muḥammad [Ibn Ishāq, p. 621–624], who made his only pilgrimage, which is called the farewell pilgrimage, in 10 A.H. [Ibn Ishāq, p. 667–668; Ibn Hishām, III–IV, p. 507–510].

28 | For instance, some of these traditions mentioned that it was Gabriel who taught Muḥammad *al-Adhān* [al-ʿAsqalānī, p. 78–79] or Muḥammad listened to it during his journey to the heaven, which is known as *al-Isrāʾ wa-l-Miʾrāj* [al-Qāḍī ʿIyād, p. 132].

29 | Sūrat al-Isrāʾ, 17/111. English translation M. Pickthall: “And magnify Him with all magnificence”.

– II –

The other point, however, which is related to *Alla Wa Koubar* in the Byzantine sources, is that the Greek writers point out that the Muslims worship the stone, i.e. the Ka'ba, and call to Aphrodite there, *Alla Wa Koubar*. John of Damascus, as a polemicist, replied to the Muslims, who accused the Christians of idolatry for venerating the cross, by saying: "How is it that you rub yourselves against a stone by your Χαβαθαύν,³⁰ and you express your adoration to the stone by kissing it?" And some of them answer that Ἀβραάμ συνουσιάζσαι τῇ Ἀγάρ on it; others, because he tied the camel around it when he was about to sacrifice Isaac"³¹.

John of Damascus did not criticize this Islamic behavior only but he criticized their kissing of the Black Stone (*al-hajar al-aswad*), whom they called *Khaber*, when he says: "However they claim that the stone is of Abraham. Then we respond: 'Suppose that is of Abraham, as you foolishly maintain; are you not ashamed to kiss it for the only reason that Abraham had intercourse with a woman, or because he tied his camel to it, and yet you blame us for venerating the cross of Christ, through which the power of the demons and the deceit of the devil have been destroyed?' This, then, which they call 'stone' is the head of Aphrodite, whom they used to venerate (and) whom they called Χαβέρ, on which those who can understand it exactly can see, even until now, traces of an engraving"³².

While the author of *rituel d'abjuration* indicated that Muḥammad confirmed that Abraham and Ishmael erected the Ka'ba [Montet, 1906, p. 153; Khoury, 1969, p. 191]³³, Leo III referred in his polemical reply to the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz to the Muslims' veneration of the Ka'ba and the Black Stone, where he said that they were scarifying there [Ghémond, p. 89]³⁴. In addition, Leo III accused also the Muslims of worshipping the Stone, which he called *rukṇ* [Ibid., p. 90]³⁵.

The Black Stone is also mentioned in the Byzantine literature, where the author of Digenes Akrites mentioned the following verse:

"νὰ προσκυσήσης, ἀμηρῶ, τὸν κρεμάμενον λίθον" [Digenes Akrites, 9: § 102–103].

Apart from the repetition of the Byzantine accounts, which are mentioned above, and the relation between the Black Stone, the Ka'ba, and the Islamic rituals, there are two questions: What does the formula of *al-Takbīr* mean? Did the Byzantines understand its formula correctly?

30 | Χαβαθαύν (*Khabathan*) is a Greek mispronunciation of the Arabic word Ka'ba. [Meyendorff, 1964, p. 119; Vasiliev, 1955–1956, p. 27].

31 | PG 94, 768 D–769 A; Eng. trans. see [Sahas, 1972, p. 137].

32 | PG 94, 769 A–B; Eng. trans. [Sahas, 1972, p. 137].

33 | About the erection of the Ka'ba by Abraham see: *Sūrat al-Baqara*, 127; *Sūrat Āl-'Imrān*, 96–97; *Sūrat al-hajj*, 26. English trans. Pickthall. Cf. also: [Watt, 1979, p. 6; Hawting, 1999, p. 24, 37–39; Muhammad, 2011].

34 | See also: [Khoury, 1969, p. 216].

35 | While Leo III aimed to say the Black Stone, he said *al-rukṇ*. The latter in the Islamic rituals of pilgrimage means *al-rukṇ al-Yamānī* (the Yemeni corner), which is located in another corner of the Ka'ba and the Muslims touch it during their going around the Ka'ba as *sunna*. Ibn al-Jawzī confirms it, when he says that "the Messenger of Allāh touched only the Black Stone and *al-rukṇ*" [Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 140].

Let us clarify the meaning of the phrase *al-Takbīr* in the following schedule and explain how the Byzantines understood it.

Arabic phrase	English trans. ⁽³⁶⁾	The Byzantine trans.
Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar.	Allāh is the Greatest, Allāh is the Greatest.	Allah Wa Koubar, Aphrodite and the Star of the Morning.

It seems that the Byzantines did not know the real meaning of *al-Takbīr*. Therefore, why did such misunderstanding take place?

The Arabic phrase says *Allāhu Akbar*, *Allāhu Akbar*, while the Byzantines understood it as *Allāh Wa Koubar*, *Allāh Wa Koubar*. Hamartolus translated “Wa” as an adjective “the bigger”. *Koubar* does not mean Aphrodite and forms no problem to Hamartolus. It was the current interpretation since John of Damascus brings which states that the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya* adored Aphrodite and called it *Khabar*, the great [Khouri, 1972, p. 241]. While Constantine Porphyrogenitus understood it as *Allāh and Koubar*, Cedrenus thought that “Wa” means the bigger, i.e. the Moon and Aphrodite.

In order to get to the crux of the confusion of the Byzantine accounts, the linguistic evidence should be used.

The Arabic nominative sentence consists of a noun and a complement. The complement may be either a noun or an adjective. According to this grammatical basic, the Arabic phrase *Allāhu Akbar* means Allāh (God) is the greatest. The first word Allāh includes the letter ‘u’ in English, which refers to the Arabic vocalization *ḍamma*, the mark of the nominative. Then, the Arabic sentence will be الله أكبر. It is remarkable that there is *ḍamma* = (‘) above the first word “Allāh (الله)”. In this case, it will be pronounced in English *Allāhu*. Al-mo’adhin (the man who makes the call to prayer) often connects the first word *Allāhu* with the second word *Akbar* during his call to prayer. Then, one can listen to two words as one word, *Allaahuwakbar*. On the other hand, the Arabic vocalization *ḍamma*, which sounds in Arabic as “w + a” equals the pronunciation of the Arabic conjunction “و = wa” (= and). Then, *Allāhu Akbar* will be heard as *Allah-w-Akbar*. The non-Arabic native speakers will not understand the difference between the vocalization *ḍamma* and the Arabic conjunction “و = wa”. Constantine Porphyrogenitus made such a huge mistake in thinking that the Arabic *ḍamma* phonetically means “and”, “wa = و”. Therefore, he thought that the phrase *Allāhu Akbar* means “Allāh and Koubar”.

According to this linguistic clarification becomes clear why the Byzantines confused the first and last phrases of the Islamic call to prayer (*al-Takbīr*)³⁷.

36 | This translation depended on the English trans. of the Prophet’s tradition of Abū Maḥdūra, which is mentioned above. Another translation is available at: [al-Sawwāf, p. 55–56].

37 | Probably the Byzantines did not mention the rest of the Islamic call to prayer because there is no phonetic confusion in its formula.

It is most likely that the Byzantines did not plan to mix between the real meaning of *al-Takbīr* and what they wrote about it. They wrongly tried to explain the proposed relation between the words of *al-Takbīr* as they heard it at the battlefields, where the Muslims used it as battle-cry [Muhammad, 2010, p. 86], or in Constantinople, either at its mosque or at the imperial palace itself.

Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī mentions that when the messengers of the Muslim caliph arrived in the imperial palace at Constantinople to meet the Byzantine emperor, they raised their voices saying, *lā ilāh ill-l-L-āh wa-l-Lāhu Akbar*. Then, the emperor sent to them saying, “Do not raise your voices with your faith on my door”. When they entered to the court of the emperor, he asked them, “Does your word, which you said, *lā ilāh illa-l-L-āh*, mean that there is no one with God?” They replied, “Yes”. He said: “And *Allāhu Akbar*, is God the greatest of all things?” They replied, “Yes” [al-Hamadhānī, p. 187].

Eichner, according to Hamartolus, thought that the formula of *al-Takbīr* is a panegyric formula for God used by the Muslims [Eichner, 1936, p. 238]. Therefore, he concluded that the word *Koubar*, the great, which was mentioned by the Byzantine polemicists, was used by the Arabs before Islam and later by the Muslims. His view indicates that the rituals of the Muslims were pagan and were related to Aphrodite [Eichner, 1936, p. 238]. Khoury also repeated the same words of Eichner [Khoury, 1972, p. 241]. In 1969 and 1972, D. Sahas said, “We don’t know whether the Pre-Islamic acclamation was, indeed, *Allāhu Akbar*” [Sahas, 1969, pp. 127–128, n. 178; Idem, 1972, p. 87, n. 2].

Thereupon, there is a questionable point: was the formula of *al-Takbīr* used in Pre-Islamic Arabia or not?

In the absence of clear archeological and literary evidence, it would be difficult to answer such question. Nevertheless, there is an Arabic piece of Qutrub (d. 821 A.D.)³⁸ who mentioned all the formulas of acclamation (*al-tahlīl* or *al-talbiya*), which were used by the Pre-Islamic Arab tribes during the circulation around the Ka’ba³⁹. Each of these tribes adopted a private formula of the acclamation, which was different from one tribe to another. He mentioned the formulas of the tribes of Jurhum, Khuzā’a, Quraysh, Kināna, Thaḡif, Hudhayl, al-Anṣār, Yemen, Ḥimyar, Qays, Tamīm, Banū Asad, Rabī’a, Azd, ‘Akk and Madhḥij, and Kinda⁴⁰. It is likely that the most famous formula was that of Quraysh⁴¹. According to these formulas of the acclamation, there is no mention of the phrase of *al-Takbīr*, which was

38 | The author is Abī ‘Alī Muḥammad ibn al-Mustanīr, surnamed Qutrub. His manuscript title is *al-Azzmina*. He died in 821 A.D. [‘Aṭṭār, 1978, p. 81]. I could not find this Ms. But its owner mentioned these formulas in his book *al-Ka’ba wa-l-kiswa*.

39 | During their going around the Ka’ba, the Arab pilgrims were applauding and whistling, too. (*Sīrat al-Anfāl*, 8/35)

40 | See: [‘Aṭṭār, 1978, p. 81–86]. Cf. also: [Ibn al-Kalbī, p. 5–6].

41 | Ibn Hishām says: when Kināna and Quraysh come (*‘Ahallu*), they say *labbayka l-Lāhumma labbayka, labbayka lā sharīka laka, illā sharīkun huwa laka, tamlikuhu wa-mā malaka*. English translation: “Here we are O Lord! Here we are! Here we are! Thou hast no associate save one who is thine Thou hast dominion over him and over what he possesseth” [Ibn Hishām, I–II, p. 91] (see [Ibn al-Kalbī, p. 5]) or “At your service, O God, at your service; you who have no associate apart from an associate which you have; you who have power over him and that over which he has power” (see: [Hawting, 1999, p. 22])

used by the Muslims later. In spite of that, it is difficult to say if it was exactly found before Islam or not.

– III –

Let us turn to another issue, where the Byzantine polemicists related *al-Takbīr* with the Ka'ba, the Black Stone, and Aphrodite, about which they said that its head is preserved at the sacred sanctuary of Makka.

As for the Black Stone, which is located at the southeastern corner of the Ka'ba, as the head of Aphrodite, which was brought to Makka from Petra, as Eichner claims [Eichner, 1936, p. 239], it is known that the Arabs venerated this Stone greatly⁴². The great dignity of the Black Stone among the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya* remained among the Muslims, too, for many reasons:

(A) The Arabs thought that Adam had descended from the Paradise with this stone [al-Fākihī, p. 90; al-Ya'qūbī, p. 6; al-Tabarī, p. 82, 85; Ibn al-Jawzī, I, p. 209].

(B) They thought that the angel Gabriel had brought it from the Heaven to Abraham to complete the erection of the Ka'ba [al-Tabarī, I, p. 152; Ibn Kathīr, I, p. 165; II, p. 299].

(C) Ibn 'Abbās said, "The Prophet said that the Black Stone descended from Paradise, it was whiter than milk, and it was blackened by the sins of Adam's sons" [Sunan al-Tirmīdhī, no. 803, Kitāb al-Ḥajj; Sunan al-Nasā'ī, no. 2886, Kitāb Manāsik al-Ḥajj].

(D) Ibn 'Abbās also said that "the Messenger of Allah said, this stone would come on the Day of Resurrection with two eyes, to see with them, and a tongue, to say with it, and testify who touched it rightly" [Sunan Ibn Māja, II, no. 2935, Kitāb al-Ḥajj; Sunan al-Tirmīdhī, no. 884, Kitāb al-Ḥajj; Musnad Aḥmad, no. 2275]⁴³.

(E) They thought that the supplication beside this Stone is acceptable [al-Baṣrī, p. 24].

(F) Al-Fākihī indicates that the Arabs thought that this Stone cured from the diseases of leprosy, blindness, and albinos [al-Fākihī, I, p. 94].

Despite the apparent dignity of the Black Stone among the Muslims, 'Ābis Ibn Rabī'a said that 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb came near the Black Stone

42 | There is a famous story about this stone, which says, in 608 A.D. Quraysh decided to rebuild the Ka'ba after a sudden flood had shaken its foundations and cracked its walls. The old structure was demolished and the new construction began. When the walls rose from the ground and the time came to place the famous Black Stone in its place on the east wall, a dispute arose among the clans as to who would have the honor of laying it in its place. Each clan wanted to have the honor of placing the stone for itself. This dispute almost led to a civil war. No peaceful solution seemed possible. At this critical juncture, Abū Umayya b. al-Mughīra al-Makhzūmī said to the Makkans, "Put it off till tomorrow, the man who enters the Ka'ba first of all in the morning will be our arbitrator in this dispute." Everybody liked the idea. In the morning, the first one to enter the *ḥaram* was Muḥammad. On seeing him they all said, "We shall agree with his verdict". Then, he was asked to give his decision on the matter. He took a garment and spread it on the ground, and placed the Black Stone in the middle of it and then he asked the quarreling people to catch all the sides of the garment and lift it up. They carried the stone to its corner at the Ka'ba. Then, Muḥammad picked up the stone from the garment and put it in its place. See: [Ibn Ishāq, p. 150–156; Ibn Hishām, I–II, p. 191–195; al-Māwardī, p. 253; al-Isbahānī, p. 175–177]. See also: [Guillaume, 1955, p. 84–87; Khanam, 2006, p. 27].

43 | Al-Fākihī says that this is a weak tradition [al-Fākihī, I, p. 82, 87].

kissing it and said, “No doubt, I know that you are a stone and can neither benefit nor harm anyone. Had I not seen Allah’s Apostle kissing you I would not have kissed you” [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 1494, Kitāb al-Ḥajj 44; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 2228, 2230–2231, Kitāb al-Ḥajj; Sunan al-Tirmidhī, no. 788, Kitāb al-Ḥajj; Ibn Kathīr, p. 5, 153]. It means that ‘Umar was not convinced with the idea of kissing the Black Stone, but he did it only as a *sunna*, and that the Muslims did not worship it. Therefore, although John of Damascus was right when he said that the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya* worshiped the Star of the Morning and the Stone [Sahas, 1972, p. 88]⁴⁵, which he called the head of Aphrodite, he was mistaken when he attributed his account to the Muslims. If someone had ever known anything about Islam in those days, he would have admitted to it being against idolatry.

It seems that John of Damascus was aware of the following Qur’ānic verses⁴⁶: “Lo! The first Sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples”⁴⁷ and “And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (Abraham prayed): Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Nearer, the Knower”⁴⁸.

In contrast, he says that the Muslims venerate it because some of them told him that they thought that Abraham had intercourse with Hagar on it, or because he tied his camel to it⁴⁹. The anonymous author of *rituel d’abjuration* mentioned these two stories of John of Damascus [Khoury, 1969, p. 192]. Maybe the anonymous source of John of Damascus was influenced by the popular story of Isāf and Nā’ila, which was common among the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya*⁵⁰. It says that Isāf was a man who had an illegal intercourse with a woman, Nā’ila, inside the Ka’ba. Then, Allah transformed them into two stones. Despite this, the Arabs put their idols around the Ka’ba and the well of Zamzam and worshiped them [Ibn al-Kalbī, p. 8; Ibn Ishāq, p. 63; Ibn Hishām, I–II, p. 95–96; al-Fākihī, II, p. 241; al-Ḥamawī, I, p. 170; V, p. 36; al-Qalqashandī, p. 267]. On the other hand, there is no Qur’ānic reference, which can support the interpretations of John of Damascus about the main reason for which the Muslims venerate the Ka’ba or the Black Stone. By referring to Abraham, both explanations tend to stress that the origin of Islam goes to Abraham and attribute the foundation of the Ka’ba to him, an affirmation that is clearly Qur’ānic [Sahas, 1972, p. 89]. His evidence that

44 | English translation no. 667: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/026.sbt.html>.

45 | About the worship of the stars and stones among the Arabs in *jāhiliyya* see: [Ibn al-Kalbī, p. 14, 32; al-Alūsī, p. 239].

46 | Apparently, John of Damascus examined at least three *sūras* of the Qur’ān: *Sūrat al-Baqara*, *Sūrat al-Nisā*, and *Sūrat Al-Ma’ida* [Louth, 2002, p. 79].

47 | The Noble Qur’an, eng. trans. Pickthall, *Sūrat Āl-‘Imrān*, 3/96. Leo III was aware that the Ka’ba was erected before Muḥammad and that the Arabs at that time made their rituals there. [Ghévond, p. 89].

48 | The Noble Qur’an, eng. trans. M. Pickthall, *Sūrat al-Baqara*, 2/127. About the Ka’ba see: [Alexander, 1938, p. 43–53; Septimus, 1981, pp. 517–533; Khoury, 1972, p. 275–281; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 1957, p. 379–390, 533–535]. Leo III thought that Muḥammad who built the Ka’ba [Ghévond, p. 89].

49 | PG 94, 769 A; eng. trans. [Sahas, 1972, p. 137]. Cf. also: [Khoury, 1972, p. 275].

50 | ‘Ā’isha said: “We still hear that Isāf and Nā’ila were a man and a woman from Jurhum who had intercourse inside the Ka’ba. Allāh transformed them into two stones” [Ibn Ishāq, p. 63; Ibn Hishām, I–II, p. 95–96].

the Muslims venerate the Ka'ba and the Black Stone is correct and that the Muslims worship them is not authentic.

However, among the idols which the Arabs worshiped before Islam there was no mention to Aphrodite ⁵¹ whose head, according to the Byzantine accounts, was preserved in the Ka'ba that is known as the Black Stone. To claim that this Stone has come from Petra or somewhere else, the geologists have to put a part of it under a microscope to analyze its chemical and physical components, and that would be an impossible mission⁵².

When the Prophet Muḥammad spoke about the Black Stone, he used the Arabic verb نَزَلَ /*nazala* = “descended”. It means that this stone was not brought from another place, such as Petra, to Makka. Therefore, according to this linguistic evidence, it might have descended from the sky on the valley, on which the Ka'ba was erected. Then, the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya* regarded it as a holy stone and the Black Stone became a sacred sign. It is a common knowledge that the Arabs used to worship stones which they called *al-anṣāb* [Sūrat al-Mā'ida, 5/90; Ibn Hishām, I–II, p. 91]⁵³.

According to al-Fākihī, “In the beginning of its ignorance, Quraysh found two stones on the mountain Abū Qubays, one was yellow and the other was white. They said, ‘By Allah, these stones do not belong to the stones of our country or to stones of other countries. We think that these stones have descended from the Heaven.’ They kept them and named the yellow one the Minor, which was lost. When they re-built the Ka'ba, they put the white stone in one of its corners” [al-Fākihī, I, p. 86]. Therefore, the Black Stone was probably a meteor that descended from the sky.

Apart from the holy dignity attributed by the Arabs to the Black Stone, the linguistic evidence of the Prophet Muḥammad proves that there is no relation between this Stone and Aphrodite. On the other hand, the testimony of 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb proves that it was nothing more than a stone. However, the question remains, why did the Byzantines use the phrase “κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης”? Is the phrase “The Greek goddess” an explanation of John of Damascus ⁵⁴ and repetition of Cedrenus or what⁵⁵?

To answer these questions, it has to be mentioned that Pre-Islamic Arabia was full of different kinds of worships such as idols (*al-aṣnām*), stones (*al-ahjār* or *al-anṣāb*)⁵⁶, trees, many structures like the Ka'ba, *stellae*

51 | About the idols of the Arabs before Islam see mainly, The Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-An'ām*, 6/143–144; *Sūrat Yūnis*, 10/59; *Sūrat Nūh*, 71/23–24; *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq*, 86/1–3. Also: [Ibn al-Kalbī, p. 8–54; Ibn Ishāq, p. 60–67; Ibn Hishām, I–II, p. 90–103; Bartholomeus of Edessa, PG 104, 1385].

52 | There were many attempts to take a piece of the Black Stone, but they failed and the persons who tried to do it were put to death. See: <http://hajj.al-Islam.com/display.asp?lang=eng&sub=9&fname=hmacca/k21>

53 | Ibn Hishām mentioned that Ishmael's sons (Ishmaelites) were the first worshippers of stones.

54 | PG 94, 769 B.

55 | PG 121, 813D–816A.

56 | Ibn al-Kalbī says: “The Arabs were passionately fond of worshipping idols. Some of them took unto themselves a temple around which they centered their worship, while others adopted an idol to which they offered their adoration. The person who was unable to build himself a temple or adopt an idol would erect a stone in front of the Sacred House or in front of any other temple which he might prefer, and then circumambulate it in the same manner in which he would circumambulate the Sacred House” [Ibn al-Kalbī, p. 28].

(*al-kawākib*), animals, Judaism, and Christianity⁵⁷. Bartholomeus of Edessa, who knew about Islam more than John of Damascus [Meyendorff, 1964, p. 124], referred to the stellar divinity of the Arabs such as the Star of the Morning, Aphrodite, *Zebo* (Ζέβω), *Chronos* (Χρόνος) and *Khamar* (Χάμαρ = in Arabic *Qamar* = “the Moon”). He said that the Qur’ān has mentioned them as idols [Bartholomeus of Edessa, 1385C; Eichner, 1936, p. 236]. This stellar divinity existed mainly in Southern Arabia beside the other worships where the Arabs worshiped the Star of the Morning, *kawkab al-Zuhra* (in Latin *Venus*)⁵⁸. This star was the brightest one among other stars. It was called *Najm al-Ṣabāḥ* (the Star of the Morning) or *‘Azīz*, which rose before dawn [Sālem, 2001, p. 410–411]⁵⁹. There is an indication in the Byzantine epic *Digenes Akrites* to the Star of the Morning and its specifications, “φωστήραν τὸν ἀλγερινόν, ἥλιον τὸν φωσφόρον”, which means that this Star was well known for the Byzantines, too [Digenis Akritis, v. 220].

There was an important stellar trinity in Southern Arabia consisting of the Sun (*al-Shams*), the Moon (*al-Qamar*), and Venus (*al-Zuhra*) [‘Abdul Wahāb, n.d. p. 382]. Hamartolus⁶⁰ Cedrenus⁶¹, and Bartholomeus of Edessa⁶² refer to some of these stars which were worshiped by the Arabs, especially the Moon. Because of the importance of this star among the Arabs God swore by it in the Qur’ān and called it *al-Ṭāriq*⁶³. This Qur’ānic evidence proves that the Byzantine accounts about the worshiping of the Arabs to the Star of the Morning before Islam are correct. It is notable that the Star of the Morning had many shapes of the names as follows:

The Qur’ān	Byzantine Greek	Arabic	Latin
Al-Ṭāriq (The Bright Star)	...ἔωστρον ἄστρον (The Star of the Morning)	Al-Zuhra Najm al-Ṣabāḥ ‘Azīz	Venus

It is noteworthy that when J. P. Migne edited the Greek texts of John of Damascus, Hamartolus, Cedrenus, and Bartholomeus of Edessa, he changed the Greek name Aphrodite into Venus in his Latin translation, because the Greek goddess Aphrodite equals the Roman goddess Venus [The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 1970, s.v. Venus]. Thereupon, it is supposed that John of Damascus, as a Greek writer, used also the Greek name Aphrodite instead of the Arabic name *al-Zuhra*. According to this hypothesis, he and

57 | See: [al-Shahrstānī, p. 655–661]. Cf. [Hoyland, 2001, p. 139–166; von Grunebaum, 1970, p. 24; Kensdale, 1955; Winnett, 1938, pp. 239–248].

58 | Sahas called the main star there *‘Athar* [Sahas, 1972, p. 72]

59 | Sālem thought that it was also called *dhu-al-Khalaṣa* or *Malik*, which mentioned by Ibn al-Kalbi, too. About this idol, see: [Ibn al-Kalbi, p. 29–32].

60 | PG 110, 872C–873A.

61 | PG 121, 813D–816A.

62 | PG 104, 1385C, 1441C.

63 | Sūrat al-Ṭāriq, 86/1–3. It says, “By the heaven and the Morning Star, Ah, what will tell thee what the Morning Star is!, The piercing Star!”. Eng. trans. Pickthall, 86/1–3.

Cedrenus added an explanation for their readers that Aphrodite means the Greek goddess, but practically it was the Star of the Morning, i.e. Aphrodite, Venus, and *al-Zuhra* are one which is the Star of the Morning. In this case, the Byzantine polemicists regarded the Black Stone a symbol for the Star of the Morning, not the Greek goddess Aphrodite, which was worshiped by the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya*, especially in Southern Arabia.

Conclusion:

Thus, while the Muslims themselves were busy in their holy wars against the Byzantines, especially during the seventh and eighth centuries, the Byzantine polemicists paid their attention to recognize Islam. The Muslims, at least during these two centuries, had no time to explain for the Byzantines what Islam is⁶⁴. On the other hand, many Muslim writers regarded the Byzantines as infidels (*kuffār*) or polytheists (*mushrikūn*) and they had to fight them⁶⁵. Therefore, they regarded the Byzantine Empire as their principal enemy [Constantelos, p. 328]. On the other hand, the efforts of the Muslim caliphs to convert the Byzantine Emperors into Islam were based mainly on Christian polemical issues⁶⁶.

Thereupon, it is not strange to read that the Byzantines did not know well many Islamic issues at that time, not only the formula of *al-Takbīr*, the Black Stone, but also their saying that the grave of the Prophet Muḥammad is located at Makka, not at Madīna, the Islamic law of marriage, the rituals of the pilgrimage⁶⁷, and others.

It has to be mentioned that the Byzantines might have not well understood the meaning of *al-Takbīr* because of a phonetic confusion and because they depended trustingly on oral or written confused sources without examination, such as the anonymous source of John of Damascus about the Islamic rituals. In addition, the usage of the formula of *al-Takbīr* by the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya* is not confirmed.

The Byzantine idea that the Arabs in *Jāhiliyya* worshiped the Star of the Morning, stones, and the Moon is correct. However, their accounts about the relation between the Black Stone, the head of Aphrodite and the Islamic rituals is not acceptable, because Islam is being against idolatry.

64 | When the Muslims conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the other lands, they asked the Christian inhabitants either to be Muslims, or to be Christians with paying *jizyah*, or fighting in case they refused the first two offers.

65 | See: [Horowitz, 1926, p. 59 ff]. The Qur'ān calls the Christians *ahl kitāb*: Sūrat al-Baqara, 2/109; Sūrat Āl-'Imrān, 3/64–65, 69–72, 110, 113; Sūrat al-Nisā', 4/153, 159.

66 | For example see the contents of the message of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz to Leo the Isurian and the response of the latter [Ghévond, p. 40–97; Abel, 1954, p. 343–370; Khoury, 1969, p. 200–218; Muhammad, 2008, p. 71–133].

67 | Some Byzantine writers thought that the Muslims worshiped the garment of Muḥammad (*burda*), the grave of Muḥammad is located at Makka not at Madīna, and that the Muslims worshiped it [Digenes Akrites, 9, 53 § 770–780; Khoury, 1969, p. 229, 231; Argyriou, 1991, p. 25–26].

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