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THE DEMONIZING FORCE OF THE ARAB CONQUESTS.  
THE CASE OF MAXIMUS (CA 580–662) AS A POLITICAL  
“CONFESSOR”

Two conflicting images of Maximus’ life and personality emerge from three sources, a traditional Greek *vita* written obviously by an admirer of Maximus and dated from about the time of the VIth Ecumenical Council (680/1) thus almost contemporary to Maximus’ times;<sup>1</sup> another seventh-eighth century polemical Syriac biography by the monothelite Maronite George of Resh’aina;<sup>2</sup> and various other hagiological *vitae*.<sup>3</sup> According to the latter, Maximus grew up near Tiberias. At an early age he entered the monastery of Mar Chariton, south of Bethlehem. The Persian invasion forced him to flee Palestine, first to Asia Minor and Crete and then to N. Africa where he arrived in the 620s. The Greek *vita* makes Maximus a native of Constantinople, son of an aristocratic family, who after a thorough education and imperial service as first secretary becomes a monk and develops into a profound theologian, ardent defender of the doctrine of the two natures and wills in Christ. As it has been shown this *vita* is based, to a significant extent, on material belonging to various accounts known as *Acta* dealing with Maximus’ trial, with additions (especially on his early

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<sup>1</sup> *PG* 90,68A–109B. L. THUNBERG, *Microcosm and mediator. The theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*. Lund 1965, 1, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> “The narrative concerning the wicked Maximus of Palestine, who blasphemed against his creator and his tongue was cut out”, in S. BROCK, *An early Syriac life of Maximus the Confessor*. *AnBoll* 91 (1973) 299–346, Syriac text, 302–312, trans. 314–319. Brock has given credence to the Syriac *vita* and its author (p. 342) on the ground that it does not seem to contradict flagrantly whatever little we know of seventh-century history from other sources; although he acknowledges that the details of Maximus’ birth and parentage “may have attracted certain mythical attachments”. This *vita* makes Maximus native of a village, Hesfin, son of a non-Christian Samaritan father, Abna, from Sychar and of a Persian Zoroastrian slave girl, SNDH, in the service of a certain Jew named Zadok from Tiberias, conceived out of wedlock. Under pressure from his fellow Samaritans, Maximus’ father freed the girl and fled to the village of Hesfin where for two years father and mother were offered protection by a priest called Martyrios and baptized with the name Theonas and Mary. *Ibidem*, 314.1–2.

<sup>3</sup> *BHG*<sup>3</sup>, 2.106–107, nos 1233m–1236d.

life) from various sources far removed from the time of the saint.<sup>4</sup> A main piece of the *Acta* is the so-called *Relatio Motionis*<sup>5</sup>. Its full title in Greek, *Ἐξήγησις τῆς κινήσεως, γενομένης, μεταξὺ τοῦ κυροῦ ἀββᾶ Μαξίμου, καὶ τῶν σὸν αὐτῷ, καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων ἐπὶ σεκρέτου*, points to a “Record of the trial between Maximus and his followers (on the one side) and the officers of the sekreton (on the other)“, dated May, 655<sup>6</sup> some seven years before Maximus’ death in Lazica, August 13, 662, after his tongue had been excised and his hands amputated. Maximus’ whole life (580–662), and not only from the period of his residence in Africa, as stated by Sherwood,<sup>7</sup> is made up of three interwoven elements: his monastic-hesychastic life, his relations with the court in Constantinople and its imperial governors (especially in Africa), and his activity against monothelism. We will concentrate on the second.

Maximus was in a position to know the imperial court and understand Heraclius (5 October, 610–February, 641) as, before embarking upon his monastic vocation, the emperor had sought him personally and used him as his first secretary (“ὑπογραφέα”) and then “minister and adjutant” (“ὑπουργὸν καὶ συλλήπτορα”)<sup>8</sup>. During his service Maximus forged close relationships and friendship with men in the imperial court who, like the emperor, valued his wisdom, his good advise, his eloquent and quick speech,<sup>9</sup> as Maximus’ subsequent correspondence with at least one of them, John the Chamberlain, testifies. Maximus’ tenure of service in the Constantinopolitan court was short. Some time between 613–614 he left Constantinople for Chrysopolis on the Asiatic coast to pursue a monastic life (“πρὸς τὸν μονάδα βίον”);<sup>10</sup> thence at times the reference to him as “Chrysopolites”.<sup>11</sup> From Chrysopolis and between the years 624–625 Maximus resided

<sup>4</sup> R. DEVRESSE, La vie de S. Maxime le Confesseur et ses recensions. *AnBoll* 46 (1928) 5–49.

<sup>5</sup> *PG* 90, 109C–129D.

<sup>6</sup> P. SHERWOOD O.S.B., An Annotated Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor. Rome 1952, 56, n. 89. In this otherwise indispensable work Sherwood keeps referring to Maximus and the Chalcedonians, anachronistically, as members of the “Catholic community”!

<sup>7</sup> SHERWOOD, Date-List, 7.

<sup>8</sup> *PG* 90, 69A.

<sup>9</sup> *PG* 90, 72C.

<sup>10</sup> *PG* 90, 72D.

<sup>11</sup> Mostly because of the silence over his title in later literature, scholars have doubted the assertion of the *vita* that Maximus under pressure accepted ever the position of abbot. For bibliography on this point, see THUNBERG, *Microcosm and mediator*, 3–4, and n. 5. Cf. also A. LOUTH, Recent research on St. Maximus the Confessor. *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998) 77.

in the monastery of St. George in Cyzicus, today's Erdek. In Cyzicus he became close friend to the local bishop John to whom he later wrote letters.<sup>12</sup> It was from these monasteries that Maximus wrote, or conceived, most of his major works, particularly *On the Ascetical Life* (*Liber Asceticus*), the *Quaestiones et Dubia*, and a number of epistles.<sup>13</sup> In the Spring of 626 Maximus experienced the advance of the Persians an event which brought about the dissolution of St. George's monastery. This event seems to have prompted Maximus' departure to Africa<sup>14</sup> and Rome, more than heresy itself, even though these regions were free from the monoenergetic and monothelite theologies which in the East had reached the Patriarch and the emperor himself.<sup>15</sup> Pentecost of the year 632, when Heraclius imposed baptism on Jews and Samaritans<sup>16</sup> finds Maximus in Carthage where he had arrived via Crete and, perhaps, Cyprus.<sup>17</sup>

In Africa Maximus became closely connected with the Byzantine governors Peter, *strategos* of Numidia, and George. Maximus wrote to Peter two epistles, *ep.* 13<sup>18</sup> and *ep.* 14<sup>19</sup>. His relationship with George was closer. There is one epistle, *ep.* 1, addressed to him.<sup>20</sup> These three epistles contain some of the earliest references of Byzantine literature to the Arab conquests. Interestingly enough they are also the most comprehensive ones of Maximus' own political views. Of some nine other epistles sent also to John the Chamberlain in Constantinople or referring to him (in chronological order *ep.* 2–4, 10, 43, 27, 12, 44, 45), *ep.* 10 and *ep.* 43 are of particular importance to our discussion. We will focus, therefore, on some of these epistles chronologically, as well as on the trial record, in an effort to follow Maximus' progressive criticism of, and alienation from, imperial authority, as well as to discern the true forces which formulated Maximus' conviction

<sup>12</sup> *ep.* 6, 8?, 28, 31, SHERWOOD, Date-List, nos. 5, 19–20, 16, 18, 17, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. SHERWOOD, Date-List, nos. 10–15, and 1–9.

<sup>14</sup> R. DEVRESSE, La fin inédite d' une lettre de s. Maxime. *Revue des Sciences religieuses* 17 (1937) 25–35, at 31ff.

<sup>15</sup> *PG* 90, 76A. According to Maximus' biographer, Heraclius had been introduced to the heresy of monoenergetism (affirming one single energy in the person of Christ) by Athanasius, the Jacobite bishop of Hierapolis, Syria. *PG* 90, 76CD.

<sup>16</sup> On the basis of R. Devresse's publication of the unedited final paragraph of *ep.* 8. La fin inédite, 25–35.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. reference to correspondence with a Cypriot by the name Marinus, in SHERWOOD, Date-List, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *PG* 91, 509B–533A; cf. also *Relatio Motionis*, *PG* 90, 112B.

<sup>19</sup> *PG* 91, 533B–544C.

<sup>20</sup> *PG* 91, 364A–392D.

and led to his most cruel end as Confessor, not merely of faith but of political intrigue as well.

1. *Ep.* 10 to John the Chamberlain (*PG* 91, 449A–453A)

This epistle was written by 626, very soon after Maximus' departure from the imperial court and during his stay in Cyzicus, or between 630–34 during his early years in Africa.<sup>21</sup> It was written in response to John's question as to why God has determined that humans may be ruled (lit. βασιλεύεσθαι=reigned) by others since all human beings are of one and the same kind. This is an important question considering that it came from an insider of the imperial court, the response to which may be taken as expressing Maximus' own political views in general. Serving under Heraclius, John could not have any other ruler in mind than this emperor. Maximus' response can be summarized as follows. Rule has been ordained in order to protect humans from turning against their own kind and to reject God's kindness (449BC). Life is full of hardships and departing from it should be considered preferable to being attached to it (449D). However, because of human attachment to this life God has allowed that humans be reigned by other humans in order, by curtailing further vicious assaults against life by evil, to make life more bearable (452A). Rule has been ordained so that humans may not devour each other like the fish in the ocean, and the stronger suppress the weak (452A). God has allowed those of the same kind to exercise control over their own by means of laws (452B). Rule is exercised with God's consent for the purpose of averting anarchy and revolt, of claiming authority by everyone, for inducing people to live in peace by means of words, and for inspiring fear towards those who plot to commit evil. Maximus expresses his own "political philosophy" in the concluding paragraph, that a king who acts in this manner "is second to God on earth, minister of the divine will, with authority from God to reign over human beings" (452D); however, a king who behaves in the opposite manner "is a tyrant, something which leads ruler and the ruled ones to the precipice of perdition" (453A). Is this a notice served on those in the court, Heraclius himself, and the citizens ruled by him? If the epistle is dated on 626, Heraclius' rule was under a particular strain on that year. On August 7 Constantinople had been under the double siege of the Avars and the Persians, although the siege ended in failure. If it is dated between 630–634, the letter might have in mind Heraclius' heavy handed imposition of baptism of Jews in Carthage (632) to which Maximus had objected (*ep.* 8) not

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<sup>21</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 26, no. 9.

so much for the sake of the Jews, but on the ground that such a forced conversion might in fact dilute the Christian community itself.<sup>22</sup> My reading of *ep.* 10 is that this must be dated between 630–634. The actual nuances of Maximus’ rationale were lost to his accusers some thirty years later!

### 2. *Ep.* 43 to John the Chamberlain (*PG* 91, 637B–641C)

In this letter<sup>23</sup> Maximus expresses his joy at receiving a letter from his “God-guarded lord” with a reference to peace (“μετὰ τῆς εἰρήνης” 637B); an allusion perhaps to the peace treaty which Chosroes signed with the Byzantines in 628<sup>24</sup>. Maximus infers also that he is far away from John, physically,<sup>25</sup> although this may not necessarily mean that he had already arrived in Africa as from 626 to 632 he was passing through Crete and possibly Cyprus. On this occasion he uses the opportunity to speak about the benefits of peace not between rival ethnic enemies but among Christians, and of the obligation they have to submit themselves to the sovereignty of Christ to whom they ought to pay their dues – an implicit juxtaposition to earthly sovereignty and to the dues paid by one nation to another (as the Persians to the Byzantines, 640AB). In conclusion he remarks that humans become worthy of peace when they eradicate their passions which result in a revolt against God (640C). One may read Maximus’ remark on one’s revolt against God as an inference to Heraclius’ deviation from orthodoxy and his adoption of monoenergetism, the doctrine raised since 619 and accepted as a compromise for monophysitism.

### 3. *Ep.* 13 to Peter the Illustrious, *strategos* of Numidia, Against the teachings of Severus” (*PG* 91, 509B–533A)

What prompted Maximus to write this letter was Peter’s own message to Maximus on the safe completion of his voyage by sea (obviously from Numidia to Alexandria on orders from Heraclius in 633), and of some

<sup>22</sup> Following the vehement attack on the Arabs in *ep.* 14 [cf. below], Maximus turned in greater length against the Jews. On the literature related to this event cf. R. G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*. Princeton, N.J., 1997, 78f.

<sup>23</sup> Except for the inscription of the recipient, this epistle is identical to *ep.* 24 (*PG* 91, 608B–613A) to Constantine *sakellarios*, the assumption being that the same letter was sent to both persons. SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 32-3, no. 28.

<sup>24</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> “... καθ’ ἣν ἀλλήλων ἀπεινα οὐδέποτε δύνανται, κἄν πολλῶ διεστίχασιν ἀλλήλων σωματικῶς τῷ τοπικῶ διαστίματι”. 637C.

former converts to orthodoxy who had relapsed to Severian monophysitism. After a warm introduction (509B–512A) in which Maximus praises the humility and meekness of his “blessed lord” Peter,<sup>26</sup> the author makes an analysis of the monophysite concept of “σύνθετος φύσις” which he refutes and contrasts to the orthodox “σύνθετος ὑπόστασις”.<sup>27</sup> In the end Maximus apologises for not being able to substantiate his words with quotations from the Patristic literature as there are no books in his possession; a signal that the letter must belong to an early stage of Maximus’ residence in N. Africa. For this reason he urges Peter on spiritual and dogmatic matters to consult the “Father, and teacher, master abbot” Sophronius (“Πατέρα τε καὶ διδάσκαλον κύριον ἀββᾶν Σωφρόνιον”) whom Maximus praises as “truly mindful and wise advocate of truth, undefeated champion of the divine doctrines, able to struggle with words and deeds against all heresies along with everything else that is good, rich in possession of books, and eager to enrich everyone who wishes to learn things which are divine” (533A). Sophronius was at the time in Alexandria taking part in the affair of the *Tomos* (633); another indication that Peter was already in Alexandria himself. The use of the title “ἀββᾶς” points to Sophronius as being still the abbot of the monastery he had established in N. Africa bearing his own epithet “Eucratas”. Sophronius was elected Patriarch of Jerusalem on June 634; a terminus *ante quem*. There is ample internal evidence, therefore, to date this epistle between 633, the year of Peter’s sail to Alexandria, and June 634.<sup>28</sup>

As its title indicates, the epistle is dogmatic in character. There is no direct political inference or criticism in it. The whole epistle, however, constitutes a revolt against the official policy of imposing the monothelite doctrine, and a moratorium on any further doctrinal disputations. If there is anything that might be the cause of some discomfort to the political authorities in this epistle it is the heartfelt reference to Sophronius, an ardent champion against monoenergetism and monothelitism, the position embraced by the emperor himself and the Patriarchal sees of Constantinople and Alexandria.

<sup>26</sup> ...ἐνδιαθέτως καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκτίησατο τὴν προαίτητά τε καὶ τὴν ταπεινώσιν”. *PG* 91, 509D.

<sup>27</sup> “ὁ καὶ παράδοξον, ὑπόστασιν σύνθετον θεᾶσθαι, χωρὶς τῆς κατ’ εἶδος αὐτῆς κατηγορημένης συνθέτου φύσεως”. *PG* 91, 517C.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. also SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 40-1.

4. *Ep. 14* to the same (Peter), “a dogmatic epistle” (*PG 91, 533B–544C*)

In this epistle Maximus is asking Peter to use his good offices and intercede with the “God honoured pope” to receive back to Church the carrier of this letter, deacon Cosmas from Alexandria (a former monophysite?) returning now to his family and friends. This pope can be no other than Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria who in 640 was summoned to Constantinople to be rebuked by the emperor, not to return to his seat before the summer of 641. Thus *ep. 14* follows the lengthy *ep. 15* “to Cosmas... deacon of Alexandria”<sup>29</sup> dated after 634;<sup>30</sup> it falls into the same period, 634–640, and more specifically between 634–36, the period of the Arab conquest of Syria.<sup>31</sup> Outlining on his behalf Cosmas’ own faith (536A–537B),<sup>32</sup> Maximus uses the opportunity to reiterate his orthodox theology vis a vis the monophysite one. While *ep. 13* is purely dogmatic, *ep. 14* is loaded with political implications. In pleading for Cosmas’ acceptance, Maximus makes reference to the successful Arab advances in Syria, a disaster which he attributes to the iniquities of the Christians themselves. Taking from that he remarks that it is time for all Christians to come together, be of one faith and ask for God’s protection and comfort, now that so many challenges have arisen. To make, perhaps, his point stronger he resorts to an uncharacteristically forceful language to paint the threat coming from the Arabs. He writes:

“For indeed, what is more dire than the evils which afflict the world today? For those who can discern what is more painful than the unfolding events? What is more pitiful and frightening for those who are now enduring them? To see a barbarous nation from the desert overrunning another’s lands as if they were their own, and civilization [lit. the peaceful way of life] itself being ravaged by wild and untamed beasts who are only bearing the mere appearance of human beings”.<sup>33</sup>

Such chastisement of the enemy would have been welcomed as a psychological boost to the morale of the Byzantine population if Maximus had

<sup>29</sup> *PG 91, 544D–576B.*

<sup>30</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 40, no. 46.

<sup>31</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 40-1, no. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Cosmas had asked earlier Maximus to provide him with such a definition of the orthodox faith and Maximus responded with an extensive epistle. Cf. *ep. 15, PG 91, 544D–576D*, dated after 634, between 634–40; SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 40, no. 46.

<sup>33</sup> Τί γάρ τῶν νῦν περιεχόντων τὴν οἰκουμένην κακῶν περισσαιοτέρων; τί δὲ τοῖς ἡσθημένοις τῶν γινομένων δεινότερον; τί δὲ τοῖς πάσχουσιν ἐλεεινότερον ἢ φοβερότερον; Ἔθνος ὄρξιν ἐρημικόν τε καὶ βάρβαρον, ὡς ἰδίαν γῆν διατρέχον τὴν ἀλλοτριάν· καὶ θηροῖν ἀγρίοις καὶ ἀτιθάσσοις, μόνης ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσι ψιλὸν σχῆμα μορφῆς, τὴν ἡμερον πολιτείαν δαπανωμένην...”*ep. 14, PG 91, 533B–544C*, at 540A. Cf. also HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 77-8.

not made Christian conduct, including that of their rulers, responsible for the defeat of the Christians in the hands of this “bestly” nation. He writes:

“What is, as I said, more disastrous to the Christian eyes and ears? To see a pitiless and quaint nation allowed to raise its hand against the divine heritage! But all these are happening because of the many sins which we have committed. For we have not conducted ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. We all have sinned, we all have been unlawful, we all have abandoned the way of the commandments which says, “I am the way”, and we have attacked each other [or, raised ourselves against each other] like beasts, ignoring the grace of love for humankind and the mystery of the sufferings of God who became flesh for our sake.”<sup>34</sup>

The key phrase “we all have attacked each other like beasts” (“πάντες κατ’ ἀλλήλων ἐθηριώθημεν”) is, perhaps, inferring to the heavy-handed oppression, mostly by the state, of those with differing doctrinal beliefs. A harsh critique like this coming from an ardent dyothelite becomes even more belittling as the author pointedly reminds his readers that the “divine inheritance” is now occupied and shamed by “a pitiless and quaint nation” (“ἔθνος ἀπηνές καὶ ἀλλόκοτον”)! Such a context and contrast must have infuriated the imperial authorities who must have taken this assessment of the Arab invasions, especially at such an early date, as malevolent and treasonous, undermining the Christian morale. One is reminded here of the ire which John of Damascus (*ca.* 655–*ca.* 749) arose to the Constantinopolitan court, to the extent that he was anathematized by the iconoclastic council of 754 as “Saracene-minded” (“Σαρακηνόφρων”) and “conspirator against the empire” (“...ἐπιβούλω τῆς βασιλείας”), along with being a “bastard”, “falsifier” (i.e. liar), “insulter of Christ”, “teacher of impiety”, and “perverter of the Scriptures”<sup>35</sup>! There is more than a verbal hyperbole in these adjectives and accusations. John of Damascus’ opposition to em-

<sup>34</sup> Τί τούτων, ὡς ἔφην, Χριστιανῶν ὀφθαλμοῖς, ἢ ἀκοαῖς φοβερότερον; Ἐθνος ἀπηνές καὶ ἀλλόκοτον, κατὰ τῆς θείας κληρονομίας ὄραν ἐπανατείνεσθαι χεῖρας συγχοροῦμενον. Ἄλλὰ ταῦτα τὸ πλῆθος ὧν ἡμάρομεν συμβῆναι πεποιθήκαμεν. Οὐ γὰρ ἀξίως τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πεπολιτεύμεθα. Πάντες ἡμάρομεν, πάντες ἠνομήσαμεν, πάντες ἀφήκαμεν τὴν δόδον τῶν ἐντολῶν τὴν εἰποῦσαν, “Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδός”, καὶ κατ’ ἀλλήλων ἐθηριώθημεν, ἀγνοήσαντες τῆς φιλανθρωπίας τὴν χάριν, καὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τοῦ σαρκωθέντος Θεοῦ παθημάτων τὸ μυστήριον”. *PG* 91, 533B–544C, at 541BC.

<sup>35</sup> G. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, t. 13, Florence 1867, 356D; and D.J. SAHAS, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”*. Leiden 1972, 4.



peror Leo III's iconoclastic edict was the pretext, but his intimate association to the Umayyad court in the Muslim occupied Damascus may have been the true cause.

### 5. *Ep.* 12 to John the Chamberlain (*PG* 91, 460A–509B)

This lengthy *ep.* 12 to John the Chamberlain written in November–December 641<sup>36</sup> provides the background of events which led to the writing of *ep.* 1 to George, eparch of Africa, which we will discuss next. At this point it is important to note that all of Maximus' epistles to John, whom he calls "my lord", are extensive, pastoral and instructive in character. They were also written some thirty years (this particular one twenty-eight) after he had left Constantinople; something which shows that Maximus had after a long time friends in the imperial court whom he could address as equal, and even register complains with them.<sup>37</sup> In this epistle Maximus makes critical remarks about the political and moral climate of Constantinople. He complains also that he had not received advance notice from John about an imperial secretary by the name Theodore (460A) who had been sent to Egypt carrying a letter from Martina, the queen (evidence that Heraclius had already died),<sup>38</sup> with orders that the eparch of Africa releases the nuns of the abbess Joannias of Alexandria (465B) and of the "Sacerdos" monastery (465A), all of them of the Severian heresy! According to Maximus, George had rejected the letter as forgery, made a show against the envoy, and turned hard against the heretics; all this in order to clear the name of the empress as heretic, or heretic-sympathizer. George's assessment of forgery and his subsequent actions had been supported by Maximus himself (461D) and the Eucratades,<sup>39</sup> the monks of Sophronius'

<sup>36</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 45–48, no. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. also his statement in *ep.* 43 (sent also to Constantine *sakellarios* as *ep.* 24) where he refers to his closeness with them in spite of their physical distance: "... καθ' ἣν ἀλλήλων ἀπεινὰ οὐδέποτε δύνανται, κὰν πολλῶ διεστίγασιν ἀλλήλων σωματικῶς τῷ τοπικῶ διαστήματι" (637C).

<sup>38</sup> Martina (whom Maximus calls *δέσποινα* and *πατριζία*, 460B), was Heraclius' niece and second wife. After the death of Heraclius (February 10, 641) she ruled, as Heraclius had willed, together with Heraclius' son Heraclius Constantine, from his first wife, Fabia/Eudokia, and with Martina's own son Heraclonas; they were all disgraced in October of that year. Constans II, son of Heraclius Constantine and Heraclius' own grandson, was able to rule in November 9, 641. Maximus seems to be unaware of these events. Cf. SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 47. George, the eparch of Africa and recipient of the imperial letter, probably had knowledge of these events; that is why he was inclined to dismiss the letter as forgery.

<sup>39</sup> "οἱ ἐπίκλην Εὐκρατάδες" (461A).

monastery. In this epistle Maximus gives his own account of conduct of the heretic nuns of Alexandria<sup>40</sup> and he praises George's lofty character praising his efforts to convince those heretics who came from Syria, Egypt, Alexandria and Libya to return to the fold of the Church (cf. 465A). He proceeds then with a lengthy refutation of Severian monophysitism (465D–500A) and with an exposition of the orthodox teaching,<sup>41</sup> noting that he is writing all this not because he had any doubts about John's own faith and its firmness but out of a deep concern for John's predicament in the Constantinopolitan court in the midst of those "champions of heresy" ("τοὺς τῶν αἰρέσεων προμάχους").<sup>42</sup> The times were charged with politico-doctrinal empathy, and the year 641 the year when Heraclius died and Babylon in Egypt had surrendered to the Arabs, was particularly traumatic and unsettled. Maximus was, perhaps, offering ammunition to those "champions of heresy" who, on the first opportunity, would retaliate against him!

6. *Ep.* 1 to lord George, eparch of Africa (*PG* 91, 364A–392D)

This epistle, following *ep.* 18<sup>43</sup> is, actually, a homily of exhortation and a farewell message to George as he was sailing to Constantinople. *Ep.* 18 is a letter by George to the nuns apostates from the orthodox faith written by Maximus himself in George's name, which provides the background for *ep.* 1. In *ep.* 18 George [i.e. Maximus] was urging nuns in Alexandria who in December 641 or January 642 had lapsed to monophysitism to return to the Church, threatening them with confiscation of the property he had previously made available to them. He was also stating that he was about to travel to Constantinople and report their relapse to the emperor leaving their fate to him.<sup>44</sup> Thus the date of *ep.* 1 must be late 641, or

<sup>40</sup> Maximus makes reference to the convent's practice of rebaptizing those joining it ("...καὶ παραβαπτίσματα ποιεῖν τοιμᾶν" 464B).

<sup>41</sup> While in *ep.* 13 Maximus is not quoting Fathers because he lacks books in his possession, here, longer established on African soil, he is quoting Cyril of Alexandria, and to a lesser extent Gregory the Theologian and Basil.

<sup>42</sup> "ἀλλ' εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς βουλόμενος, ὅποσον καὶ ὀπόσον ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν ἀγῶνα, διὰ μερίμνης αἰεὶ μου ἐκκαίοντα τὴν καρδίαν· καὶ παρατηρεῖσθαι νηφαλαιότερον παρακαλῶ τοὺς τῶν αἰρέσεων προμάχους· ἵνα μὴ τις αὐτῶν παραλογισάμενος ὑμᾶς ἐν πειθανολογίᾳ ψεύδους, τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν διαυγὲς καὶ ζωτικὸν τῆς πίστεως νᾶμα τοῖς ἰδίους τῶν ἀσεβῶν δογμάτων ἐπιθολῶσαι ὅποιος δυνηθῆ, ὅπερ μὴ γένοιτο" *PG* 91,508D. THUNBERG is not particularly accurate when he uses Maximus' letters to John as an indication that his relations with the court were good. *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor.* Lund 1965, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *PG* 91, 584D–589B.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 48, no. 67.

early 642.<sup>45</sup> George's trip to Constantinople was either for health reasons,<sup>46</sup> or for consultation with the emperor, or it may have been a recall to answer questions; the last being the most probable reason. Maximus wrote three epistles to his friend John the Chamberlain, one questioning George's recall (*ep.* 12) and two pleading for his speedy and safe return (*ep.* 44 and 45).<sup>47</sup> In *ep.* 1 Maximus expresses the wish that George may be allowed to return to Africa so that his presence may be enjoyed by the people of the province.<sup>48</sup> Particularly affectionate, Maximus praises George's manners,<sup>49</sup> his many virtues and his love for the poor and the needy (372D–373C). It is in this context that he urges George to protect himself from the vices and dangers which one may encounter in Constantinople and which he enumerates; not so complimentary a report on the state, particularly of the imperial court! Such traps and vices included a spirit that leads away from any virtuous and *theotic* disposition;<sup>50</sup> a tendency towards material things;<sup>51</sup> fear of human threat which shakes one's good intention to remain steadfast;<sup>52</sup> flattery that unnerves the soul;<sup>53</sup> retaliating for an injury, which corrupts the peace of the soul;<sup>54</sup> desire to rule over others, which curtails any love for God;<sup>55</sup> and all in all a climate corruptive of one's spiritual disposition.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>45</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 49, n. 69.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. 373D. Maximus extends his wishes and those of the Fathers of the province for the restoration of George's health: "Σὺν ἔμοι δὲ γνησίως πάντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν οἱ ταύτην διὰ σὲ παροικούντες τὴν χώραν τίμοι Πατέρες ἀσπάζονται, νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἀπαύστως μετὰ δακρύων τὸν Θεὸν ἱκετεύοντες, ἀποκαταστήσαι μεθ' ὑγείας ἡμῖν τὸν ἡμῶν Γεώργιον, τὸν ὄντως γλυκὺν καὶ ὀρώμενον καὶ ὀνομαζόμενον ..." (392AB).

<sup>47</sup> *ep.* 12 is dated November–December, 641 (SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 45–8, no. 66); *ep.* 44, Winter 642 (SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 49–50, no. 70), and *ep.* 45 early 642. SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 50–1, no. 72.

<sup>48</sup> "ποθοῦμεν πάλιν σε θεάσασθαι παρόντα, καὶ ἀπολαῦσαι σου τῆς καλλονῆς" (364A).

<sup>49</sup> "τοῖς θεοῖς μὲν τοι τῶν συντροφῶν ἀρετῶν κεχαρακτηρισμένον τρόποις" 364A.

<sup>50</sup> "Μὴ τοίνυν ταύτης, δέσποτά μου εὐλογημένε, τῆς ἀγαθῆς καὶ θεωτικῆς ἕξεως, τῆς ἐχούσης σου πρὸς Θεὸν τὴν γνώμην συνέκδημον, ἐκοτῆσαί τι τῶν ὄντων δυνηθῆ" (365AB).

<sup>51</sup> "μὴ χρόνος ἀπάκτως ἑαυτῷ συμμεταβάλλον τὴν τῶν ὑλικῶν πραγμάτων φορὰν, τῆς γνώμης ἀλλοιώσῃ τὸ βάσιμον." (365B).

<sup>52</sup> "μὴ ἀνθρώπων ἀπειλὴ φόβον προτεινομένη, τῆς καλῆς διαθέσεως μετακινήσῃ τὸ στάσιμον." (365B).

<sup>53</sup> "μὴ λόγος κολάκων ἀνδρῶν τῇ προφορᾷ καταγλυκαίνων τὴν ἀκοὴν τῆς ψυχῆς χαννώσῃ τὸ εὐτονον." (365B).

<sup>54</sup> "μὴ ὄρεξις ἀντιλυπήσεως, ἐκ τοῦ δύνασθαι τυχὸν πρὸς τινα, τὸ σύνολον διαφθεῖρη τοῦ τρόπου τὸ ἡμερον." (365B).

<sup>55</sup> "μὴ πόθος περὶ τὸ ἀρχεῖν δόξης, τῆς περὶ τὸ Θεῖον ἀγάτης μειώσῃ τὴν ἔφεσιν." (365B).

<sup>56</sup> "... Καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν, μὴ νόσος, μὴ ὑγεία, μὴ πλοῦτος ὁ κάτω συρόμενος, μὴ πενία τῶν φθειρομένων, μὴ ψόγος, μὴ ἔπιανος, μὴ θάνατος, μὴ ζωὴ, μὴ τὸ παρὸν, μὴ τὸ μέλλον, μηδὲ καθάπαξ ἔτερον τῶν ὄντων ἢ γινομένων, τὴν θρηψαμένην σε ταύτην, καὶ εἰς τότε προαγαγοῦσαν παρὰ τε Θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων κλέος φιλοσοφίαν, νοθεύσαι δυνηθῆ" (365CD).

An enumeration of such specific spiritual and moral pitfalls would have made little sense if Maximus did not know personally that such vices characterized life in the Constantinopolitan court.

This epistle is a profoundly spiritual and mystical exhortation, talking about striving after “incorporating in one’s self the fullness of God, and becoming wholly god by grace” (376A), “becoming integrated with ourselves and with God, or rather with God alone” (377D), and pursuing a spiritual struggle of humility, fasting, vigils, prayer, and the reading of divine words (388A). Maximus’ ascetic ideals and hesychastic qualities calling for a renunciation of the world we see “which will pass away taking along its own end giving its place to the eternal and incorruptible world” (389C), are unmistakable in this exhortation. By nature, as well as in style and content, this is a critique against secularism and the centers of earthly power. Addressed to a governor who is sailing to the court of the empire it constitutes, indirectly, a repudiation of earthly authority.<sup>57</sup> A key point in this exhortation is Maximus’ assertion that governing or being governed, like that of being rich or poor, is not a matter of nature or of volition (γνώμη) but a matter of God’s providence which governs all things (cf. 392C). With such expressed anti-establishment views Maximus could not be considered as the most popular person among secular-minded people of his time – monothelites, or not.

#### 7. *Ep.* 44 to John the Chamberlain (*PG* 91, 641D–648C)

This is a spiritual advisory epistle, written during the winter of 642,<sup>58</sup> in which Maximus pleads with John to remain steadfast to the one and only goal in life, to follow Christ and not be attached to this prevalent and false world (“τὸν πλάνον κόσμον καὶ κοσμοκράτορα”);<sup>59</sup> a clear critique of secular power. Maximus must by now have been disillusioned by the heresy and unfaithfulness of the imperial court and he was trying to protect at least his closest friends from its snares. He then asks John to receive the carrier of his epistle, Theocharistos,<sup>60</sup> a fine person, “protector of my community”

<sup>57</sup> Cf. below, n. 72.

<sup>58</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 49–50, no. 70. However the reference to “kings”, in the plural, may be pointing to a date before November 9, 641 when Constans II began reigning alone.

<sup>59</sup> “...ἕνα καὶ μόνον ἔχοντα σκοπὸν ἀκολουθῆσαι..., μηδενὶ καταδεθέντα τὸ παράπαν πατριᾶς δεσμῶ πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν πλάνον κόσμον καὶ κοσμοκράτορα” (644C).

<sup>60</sup> Is this a proper name lost in the adjectives (“Illustrious lord God-graced” Ἰλλούστριον κύριον θεοχάριστον, τὸν ἐπιφερόμενον τὴν παροῦσάν μου μετρίαν συλλαβὴν...” 644D), or another adjective? In the Migne edition “Illustrion” is capitalized while “theochariston”

(645A), “ready comforter during many, frequent and painful circumstances [or sicknesses]” (645A). He pleads with John so that the carrier, whom Maximus and others have a ready master in every good deed, be allowed to return (645B); an inference that persons unfavourably recalled by the court were prevented from returning to their post, or homeland! At this point Maximus becomes bold and, although he prays for the well being of the “kings”,<sup>61</sup> he expresses his anger at the holding of George, a benefactor of the exiled monks. The epistle enumerates George’s virtues and the good deeds he has performed as governor (645C–648C), ending with the bold statement that “no one has been more authentic a servant of their [the kings] reign” (648C). Considering the context and the details of this epistle one may suggest that this Illustrious “God-graced” (θεοχάριστος) lord was none other than George himself, the eparch of Africa, carrier of the letter!<sup>62</sup>

#### 8. *Ep.* 45 to John the Chamberlain (*PG* 91, 648D–649C)

This epistle, written early in 642,<sup>63</sup> is another plea with John to intercede with the kings<sup>64</sup> for the return of eparch George, and “convince them not to listen to the malicious tongues of lawless people who, like with a sharpened shaver, commit trickery and love evil rather than kindness”.<sup>65</sup> Hard and unambiguous words against court officials. They are repeated in *ep.* 16, dated also as early as 642, to Cosmas, deacon of Alexandria, where Maximus clearly states that George is kept captive in Constantinople suffering bitter punishments as a result of malicious tongues and accusations from those who have no fear of God.<sup>66</sup> *Ep.* 45 exhorts once more the virtues of George and enumerates the many philanthropic works he has accomplished in his eparchy. What was the reason of George’s maltreatment? The most obvious one, his rejection of Martina’s letter and the actions George

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is not. Sherwood does the opposite, signalling Theocharistos as the proper name of the carrier of this letter. *Date-List*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> the plural implies co-emperors.

<sup>62</sup> Sherwood suggests that it is not possible that “in a letter of which George was the bearer there should occur a description of that same George’s departure” (648B), even though there is a hint to this matter in *ep.* 12. *Date-List*, 49–50. This, however, may not be a strong argument.

<sup>63</sup> SHERWOOD, *Date-List*, 50-1, no. 72.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. above, notes 59 and 61.

<sup>65</sup> “καὶ πείσαι γλώσσας ἀδίκους ἀνδρῶν παρανόμων μὴ παραδέχεσθαι, ποιούσας δόλον ὡσεὶ ξυρὸν ἠκονημένον, καὶ ἀγαπώσας κακίαν ὑπὲρ ἀγαθοσύνην” (649B)

<sup>66</sup> “... ἐκ συκοφαντίας τῶν μὴ φοβούντων τὸν Κύριον, τῷ γενναίῳ τῶν ἀρετῶν φύλακι κυρίῳ Γεωργίῳ. φθάσαν παρεμυθήσατο τὸ γράμμα σου τὸ ἱερὸν, ὅσε Πάτερ” (576D–577A).

took contrary to its directives, can be dismissed on the basis that there was hardly any time lapsed between its writing and the downfall of the queen which had taken place before Theodore's arrival in Alexandria. What is then left is the naked sycophancy rampant in the imperial court.<sup>67</sup> This epistle, therefore, may reveal the actual conditions which formed the climate for Maximus' own trial, exiles and mutilation; which brings us to documents in which the central figure is now Maximus himself!

9. The *vita* [PG 90, 68A–109B] and the *Relatio Motionis* [PG 90, 109C–129D], or Ἐξηγήσεις τῆς κινήσεως (=Record of the trial proceedings)<sup>68</sup>

The “*vita*” and other *Acta* related to Maximus' “trial” form the basis of his life story. They also reveal the psychological state of official Constantinople at the time of the rise of Islam and of the earliest Arab conquests, and its attitude towards Maximus. The documents liven Maximus' epistles which we have discussed, and shed light on his “political” juxtaposition with the Constantinopolitan establishment. We are treating, therefore, these documents as a unit.

The trial itself took place in Constantinople in the month of May 655, some seven years before Maximus' death. According to the *vita*, Maximus' main accuser was a sakellarios who, in spite of or, perhaps, because of his very progressed age [eighty years old at the time of the trial (90, 88C), thus fifty-eight years old at the time of the events for which he accused Maximus] was in a position to offer an eye and ear witness testimony and, thus, be particularly intimidating. In the words of the biographer,

When that ill-named Sakellarios was brought in front of the saint he started to shake him up in advance with harsh words and threats, calling him unjust and traitor (προδοτήν), and enemy of the emperors (καὶ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐχθρόν. 90, 89A).

To the judge's question as to what may have been the defendant's treason, the accuser replied that “he had delivered great cities, like Alexandria, and Egypt, and Pentapolis which were part of our [the Byzantine] borders to the Saracens of whom he claimed to be much in favour and a most close friend”!<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> SHERWOOD, Date-List, 50.

<sup>68</sup> dated May, 655; SHERWOOD, Date-List, 56, n. 89.

<sup>69</sup> “ὡς εἴη πόλεις μεγάλας προδοτικῶς, Ἀλεξάνδρειαν φημί καὶ Αἴγυπτον καὶ Πεντάπολιν, τῶν ἡμετέρων μὲν, φησίον, ἀποσπάσας ὄριον, τοῖς δὲ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἤδη προσθήμενος· ὧν καὶ τὰ μάλιστα εὖνον αὐτὸν ἐχάλει, καὶ οἰκειότατον” (90, 89B); emphasis is ours. Cf. also above, note 34.

One would have expected that if guilty as accused, Maximus as an ascetic would have defended his actions and made a public display of the reasons of his conduct; but he denied the accusation because, as his biographer has noted with a rhetorical question, “what would have been his profit from the conquests of cities for which he (always) wanted the best”?<sup>70</sup>

Another accusation levelled at Maximus was that while in Rome Maximus’ disciple, Anastasius, was proclaiming on behalf of Maximus that it is neither proper nor reasonable for anyone to call the emperor a priest;<sup>71</sup> a seemingly substantive accusation which questioned the established emperor’s right to have part in the domain of doctrine. Maximus rebuffed this accusation saying that the context of such statements had to do with the *Tomos of Union* (92B), discussed in Alexandria in 633, and with the universal principle that matters pertinent to the definition and investigation of doctrine are the prerogative of those ordained to priesthood, not of the kings; a principle which, according to Maximus, is valid at all times.<sup>72</sup>

#### 10. The *Relatio Motionis* (PG 90, 109C–129D)

This part of the *Acta* expands on the trial itself. Maximus is accused from the beginning as having advised Peter, governor of Numidia, not to obey the order of the emperor to advance to Egypt with troops against the Arabs, his reasoning being that God is not inclined to assist the Roman

<sup>70</sup> “τί γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ τῇ ἀλώσει τῶν πόλεων, αἷς μᾶλλον τὰ λυσιτελῆ ἐβούλετο;” (90, 89B).

<sup>71</sup> “μὴ ὅσων εἶναι μὴδ’ εὐλογον ἱερέα τὸν βασιλέα καλεῖσθαι” (90, 92A).

<sup>72</sup> “τὸ ὀρίζεσθαι περὶ δογμάτων καὶ ζητεῖν ἱερέων μᾶλλον ἢ βασιλέων ἐστὶ” (92C). Cf. an extended version of this particular accusation, in the *Relatio Motionis*, PG 90, 113D–117D. John of Damascus used very similar words and style to speak against Leo III’s interference with matters of doctrine with regard to the icons “... βασιλέων ἐστὶν ἡ πολιτικὴ εὐπραξία· ἡ δὲ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ κατάστασις, ποιμένων καὶ διδασκάλων ... οὐ δέχομαι βασιλέα τυραννικῶς τὴν ἱερωσύνην ἀρπάζοντα”. PG 94, 1301D–1304A; cf. SAHAS, John of Damascus on Islam, 12. For a more recent discussion and bibliography on the priestly nature of the Byzantine emperor, see G. OSTROGORSKY, The Byzantine Emperor and the Hierarchical World Order. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 35 (1956) 1–14; Fr. DVORNIK, Early Christian and Byzantine political philosophy. Origins and background, vol. 2. Washington 1966, 643–6; D. NICOL, Byzantine Political Thought in: *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (ed. J. H. BURNS). Cambridge 1988, 51–79, especially 67–73; for bibliography on the subject, see *ibidem*, 696–703; G. DAGRON, Empereur et prêtre: étude sur le “césaropapisme” byzantin. Paris 1995, esp. 145; G. P. MAJESKA, The Emperor in His Church : Imperial Ritual in the Church of St. Sophia, in: *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (ed. H. MAGUIRE). Washington, D. C. 1997, 1–11.

state while Heraclius and his family were in power. The text of the trial reveals also the deep emotions which the monothelite controversy had bred. Here is the exchange between the “sakellarios” and “elder”<sup>73</sup> Maximus:

“Are you a Christian?” He replied, “By the grace of Christ the God of the universe I am a Christian.” The former said, “That is not true!” The servant of God<sup>74</sup> answered, “You say I am not, but God says I am and will remain a Christian.” “But how,” he said, “if you are a Christian, can you hate the emperor?” The servant of God answered, “And how can this be evident? For hatred is a hidden disposition of the soul, just as love is.” And he said to him, “From what you have done it has become clear to everyone that you hate the emperor and his realm. For you alone betrayed Egypt and Alexandria and Pentapolis and Tripoli and Africa to the Saracens.” “And what is the proof of these things?”, he asked. They brought forward John, who became sakellarios<sup>75</sup> of Peter, the general of Numidia in Africa, who said, “Twenty-two years ago the grandfather of the emperor [of the present day Constans II (641–68)] ordered venerable Peter to take an army and go off into Egypt against the Saracens, and he wrote to you as if he were speaking to a servant of God, having information that you were a holy man, to inquire whether you would advise him to set out. And you wrote back to him and said not to do such a thing because God was not pleased to lend aid to the Roman state under the emperor Heraclius and his family.” The servant of God said, “If you are telling the truth, then you surely have both Peter’s letter to me and mine to him. Let them be brought forth and I shall be subject to the punishments prescribed in the law.” But he said, “I do not have the letter; nor do I even know if he ever wrote one to you. But everyone in the camp [φοσάτων] spoke of these things to each other at the time.” The servant of God said to him, “If the whole camp talked about this, why are you the only one to libel me? Have you ever seen me, or I you?” And he answered, “Never.” Then turning toward the senate the servant of God said, “Judge for yourselves if it is just to have such accusers or witnesses brought forward. ‘By the judgement you judge you shall be judged, and by the measure

<sup>73</sup> *PG* 90, 109C.

<sup>74</sup> The use of the expression “servant of God” (more familiar in Arabic, *abd Allah*), rather than “elder”, or “the saint”, is interesting here to note. Does it betray an Arabic influence and a later date of the text of the trial?

<sup>75</sup> “finance minister”, according to G. C. BERTHOLD’s *Maximus Confessor. Selected Writings*. London 1985, 17.



that you measure it shall be measured unto you,' says the God of all (Mt. 7:2)."<sup>76</sup>

The accusation of treason "twenty-two years ago" is actually unfounded because, as we noted above, Maximus wrote to Peter in Egypt when the *strategos* had already proceeded to Alexandria. Also the record of the Arab conquest of Egypt and North Africa is completely different from the simplistic and exaggerated one presented at the trial. A traditional source lays emphasis that the general 'Amr b. al-'As had difficulty in convincing caliph 'Umar to proceed with the conquest of Egypt, especially since the conquest of Syria under Khalid b. al-Walid was still in process. A more modern interpretation of events is that the caliph did give his consent as part of his general plan of conquests. Although an able negotiator and diplomat, al-'As, who had been in Egypt on trade while still a pagan, as a general was no match to Khalid b. al-Walid. However, the Christological conflicts and the oppressive policy of Byzantium, through its patriarch and civil governor of Egypt, Cyrus (630–642),<sup>77</sup> imposed on Egypt for ten years since its reconquest from the Persians, made its fall to the Arabs an easy mission. John, the monophysite bishop of Nikiou, an incomplete and admittedly not so friendly a source towards the Byzantines,<sup>78</sup> remarks:

And when the Moslem saw the weakness of the Romans and the hostility of the people to the emperor Heraclius, because of the persecution wherewith he had visited all the land of Egypt in regard to the Ortho-

<sup>76</sup> Adapted partially from BERTHOLD's Maximus Confessor, 17-8.

<sup>77</sup> A former bishop of Phasis in the Caucasus and for this so-called Caucasian, is known in the Arabic sources as "Muqawqis". F. GABRIELLI, Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam. New York 1968, 170.

<sup>78</sup> H. ZOTENBERG, ed. tr. Chronique de Jean évêque de Nikiou. Paris 1883, translated by R. H. CHARLES, The Chronicle of John (c. 690 AD), Coptic Bishop of Nikiu, from Zotenberg's Ethiopic Text. London and Oxford 1916. Italian translation by A. CARILE, Giovanni di Nikiou, cronista bizantinocopto del VII secolo, in: Byzantium. Tribute to Andreas N. Stratos, vol. II, Athens 1986, 353–398. The references here are from the English translation. Originally written in Coptic and translated to Ethiopic from where Zotenberg's translation. The Chronicle of John, Coptic bishop of Nikiou and "rector" of the bishops of Upper Egypt presents a thirty year gap of the period from the accession of Heraclius to the imperial throne to the appearance of the Arabs before Babylon, Egypt, i.e. of the years from 610 to 640, the period which is of our special interest here! Its sources are John Malalas, John of Antioch, and the Chronicon Paschale. John of Nikiou had his own reasons in describing bloody conflicts between the Christians and the Muslim Arabs; he wanted to show how the theological feuds among the Christians and the injustices of the Byzantines against the Christian population of Egypt were the cause of divine punishment.

dox faith [i.e. monophysitism, or the non-Chalcedonian faith], at the instigation of Cyrus the Chalcedonian patriarch, they became bolder and stronger in the war.<sup>79</sup>

ʿAmr b. al-ʿAs appeared in the Delta at the end of 639 with a small force of barely four thousand horsemen. Therefore in 633, the year of Peter's advance to Alexandria, there was no immediate threat from the Arabs. The resistance al-ʿAs encountered in 639 was minimal. He occupied al-Farama (Pelousion) in the early 640. He avoided attacking Alexandria directly. He proceeded instead towards the fortress of Babylon (Bâbilyûn) near present-day Cairo. The only important encounter took place at Heliopolis near Babylon where the emperor's general Theodore was defeated in Rajab 219/July 640.<sup>80</sup> After the fall of Babylon Patriarch Cyrus began peace negotiations, something which infuriated the emperor who recalled him to Constantinople on Easter Day (640), disowned and banished him as traitor.<sup>81</sup> It was only after Heraclius' death, February 10, 641 and the surrender of Babylon (Rabî'a 21 20/9 April 641) that Cyrus was able to conclude a treaty with al-ʿAs (September 641). Heraclius died before the conquest of Alexandria. Constantine, his successor, who had promised to send help, soon fell ill and died. His reign lasted only one hundred days! As a result, John of Nikiou remarks pointedly, "the people mocked Heraclius and his son Constantine".<sup>82</sup> Theodosius<sup>83</sup> and Anastasius moved then to the city of On to attack ʿAmr b. al-ʿAs. After the fall of Babylon ʿAmr proceeded slowly to the capital Alexandria. Convinced that the Arabs could not be defeated, and wanting to head the Alexandrian Church under Arab domination away from Byzantine control, Cyrus appeared now more con-

<sup>79</sup> Ch. 115.9, p. 184.

<sup>80</sup> John of Nikiou mentions two Byzantine generals, Theodosius and Anastasius, whom he calls "governors". They were some twelve miles away fortifying the citadel of Babylon. They responded by sending general Leontius to Abuit. John presents the conquest of Egypt not as an easy enterprise for the Arabs. As he writes, "ʿAmr the chief of the Moslem spent twelve months in warring against the Christians of Northern Egypt, but failed, nevertheless, in reducing their cities". Ch. 115.9, p. 184.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. GABRIELLI, Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam, 170-1. John of Nikiou puts the matter differently. The purpose of Cyrus' recall to Constantinople was for the emperor to have "a counsel with him" as to the course of action with regard to the Arabs "that he should fight, if he were able, but, if not, should pay tribute". He also ordered that Theodore come to Constantinople and leave Anastasius "to guard the city of Alexandria and the cities of the coast". Ch. 116.8, p. 185-6.

<sup>82</sup> Ch. 116.9, p. 186.

<sup>83</sup> John of Nikiou calls the Byzantine general, Theodore, Theodosius; an easy confusion of two names of the same meaning.

ciliatory towards the clergy which he had previously oppressed. The Alexandrians reacted violently against the treaty but Cyrus managed to persuade them to accept it. He himself, however, did not enjoy what he had hoped for; he died in March 642. In September of the same year the Greek garrison evacuated Alexandria, as agreed, and the inhabitants started paying tribute to the Arabs in return for their lives.<sup>84</sup>

The Arab occupation of Egypt was accomplished rather peacefully; so was that of Pentapolis (Cyrenaica, called Barqa by the Arabs, 643).<sup>85</sup> The subjugation of North Africa took another seventy five years (711). ‘Amr had succeeded in occupying Egypt with negotiations rather than with military means alone. But the court of Heraclius, puzzled by the whole affair of the rise of the Arabs and embittered by the loss of Syria, was seeing the thread of the Arabs and the shadows of treason everywhere. This is not a strange or novel state of mind!

An intriguing question in this excursus is, Who was this sakellarios, the accuser of Maximus? All indications seem to point to Theodore, the imperial secretary who in Maximus’ *ep.* 12 to John the Chamberlain is mentioned as carrying letters from Martina to George the eparch of Africa.<sup>86</sup> Another person at the time by the name Theodore is the general who was defeated by al-’As at Heliopolis. *Sakellarios* is certainly a title of political and ecclesiastical office higher than that of a letter carrier.<sup>87</sup> But the circumstances warranted a high profile figure to carry such a sensitive message and order. A person of the court can also be considered as one of the sycophants against whom Maximus warns John the Chamberlain in *ep.* 45.<sup>88</sup> This may very well be one of Heraclius’ confidants, the general whom ’Amr b. al-’As defeated at Heliopolis in July 640. The remark of Maximus’ biographer that this was an “ill-named Sakellarios” points to both, a sycophant and a Theodore who is anything but a “gift from God”. We are inclined to suggest that this may be the same person with sakellarios, the carrier of Heraclius’ letter with an order also to oppose militarily the Arabs. De-

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<sup>84</sup> Alexandria fell in 643, according to I. M. LAPIDUS, *History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge 1990, 39.

<sup>85</sup> In fact it was not until the year 27/647 that a Muslim army destroyed the forces of patricius Gregory, at Sufetula (the modern Sbeitla, in Tunisia). L. V. VAGLIERI, *The Patriarchal and Umayyad Caliphates*, in: *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A (ed. P. M. HOLT – ANN K. S. LAMPTON – B. LEWIS). Cambridge 1970, 57–103, at 63.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. above #5.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. N. OIKONOMIDES, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Paris 1972, 251<sup>20</sup>, 312.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. above # 8.

feated badly by al-'As in Heliopolis in 640, thus opening for the Arabs the way to Alexandria (642) and Pentapolis (643) which was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria, and now (in May 655) in his eighties, he fabricates a story against Maximus related to Peter's dispatch to Egypt in 633 and making Maximus the cause of all subsequent developments; an event to which at his fifty-eighth year he was probably an eye and ear witness. A problem in this identification may be posed by the texts. In the *Relatio Motionis* the sakellarios refers to Maximus as someone who "hates the king" ("Καὶ πῶς... εἰ μισεῖς τὸν βασιλέα;" 112A), which implies that Heraclius was still alive; while in the *vita* he refers to Maximus as "an enemy of the kings" (καὶ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐχθρὸν, 90,89A), which implies Martina and her co-emperors. But this discrepancy can be explained in the following way: that in each case the accuser refers to a different incident, in the first instance to 633 and to Maximus' alleged bad advise to Peter, and in the second to 641 and to Maximus' support of George's disregard of the imperial letter. In both instances Maximus is accused of disobedience against imperial authority. The case, however, may also be that it was actually Heraclius who had sent the letter to George, eparch of Africa, who, by the time Theodore arrived in Egypt, had died. The rapid sequence of events is even reflected in the confusion of the record of the trial. What the record, however, does not seem to obscure is the traumatized and schizophrenic psychological state of the Byzantine court as a result of the Arab conquests and the factor of Islam.