Vom ğihād zum diwān. Dynamiken an den Peripherien des mittelalterlichen dār al-Islām (7.–11. Jh.)

Veranstalter: Marco Di Branco/Kordula Wolf, Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom; in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Zentrum für Mittelmeerstudien (Bochum)
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Bericht von: Lorenzo Bondioli, Rome

Among others, the German Historical Institute of Rome is currently promoting some historical research projects focused on the Muslim-Christian relations in Southern mediaeval Italy. On 2 December 2011, the Institute in collaboration with the Centre for Mediterranean Studies of Bochum (Germany) hosted a workshop funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation. The conference, intended as an activity within the research project „Between Lombard and Norman Unity. 'Creative Destruction' in Southern Italy in the light of Rival Religions, Cultures and Political Powers", aimed to discuss several historical issues related to the Arab conquests in the Mediterranean. The title of the conference, „From *ğihād* to *diwān*", exemplifies the two main issues that scholars have had to face with regards to the early Arab conquests, and their long-term consequences. In fact, whether the Arab military conquests have to be analysed per se, notwithstanding there is a need for research to enquire into the subsequent formation of the new social, political, and religious equilibrium between the conquerors and the non-Muslim conquered.

The first lecture of the day, given by SAMIR KHALIL SAMIR (Beirut/Rome), focused on the Muslim-Christian relations in the 10th–11th century in Egypt. Khalil Samir approached the *Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamūn*, a Coptic text that only survived in its Arabic translation and is still lacking a proper edition. The *Apocalypse* was probably written within the Coptic monastic milieu, as it clearly reflects perspectives and concerns of monks and clergymen about the increasing Arabisation of the Egyptian society. Even if the exact date of the *Apocalypse* is still difficult to assess, this text represents an interesting and precious source of information about the slow evolution of the Egyptian society under Arab rule, testifying to a turning point in the history of the Coptic language and culture. In fact, the decline of Coptic as the everyday and literary language feared by the author of the *Apocalypse* turned out to become an actual feature of the evolving medieval Egypt. Even the Coptic „Renaissance" (12th–14th centuries) was characterized by the extensive use that the Coptic writers made of the Arabic language. Thus, the *Apocalypse* stands as a relevant record made by an eye-witness to the cultural and linguistic changes that the Christian-Egyptian society was experiencing as a long-term effect of the Arab conquest. In addition, Khalil Samir pointed out how the unclear relation between Arabisation and Islamisation could be the object of further research.

The second lecture by MICHELE BERNARDINI (Rome) dealt with the problematic issue represented by the interaction between the Arab-Islamic identity and the cultural background of the Iranian plateau. Bernardini pointed out how the historical inquiry into the Arab and Islamic influence on the Iranian history and culture has often been compromised by anachronistic categories of identity. In Bernardini's opinion, nationalism contaminated the historical research by misleading many scholars into belittling the external influences on the Iranian culture. Thus, the role played by the Arabs and the Turks in the formation of the early mediaeval Iran has often been minimised or denied. New publications such as „Samarcande et Samarra" by Étienne de la Vaissière (2007) have recently helped to change this erroneous perspective by re-analysing the whole history of the Ummayad presence in the Iranian plateau. In the meantime, linguistic studies such as B.G. Fragner's have highlighted the intense and complex interaction between different ethnicities (Persians, Arabs, Turks) and languages in the early mediaeval Iranian plateau. Such works have greatly contributed to set a new research pathway which could lead to a better understanding of the relevance the Arab conquest and the Islamisation had in the history of Iran.

The third lecture of the day moved to the West of the Arab empire, focusing on

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the Spanish peninsula (the Arab Al-Andalus). ANN CHRISTYS (Leeds) chronicled the history of the Arab conquest of Visigothic Spain by referring mainly to two primary sources, the Latin *Chronicle to 754* and Ibn Ḥabīb's universal chronicle. Being nearly contemporary to the Arab conquest of Spain, the *Chronicle to 754* is a useful and precious source of accounts about the conquest itself. Moreover, this text is even more fascinating with regard to the information that it omits. For instance, the chronicle does neither depict the Arab and Berber invaders as members of a new faith, nor does it mention great battles. Ibn Ḥabīb's chronicle is somehow a different kind of source. Instead of focusing on the history of the conquest, Ibn Ḥabīb reports many fabulous legends concerning the first Arab invaders and the legendary booty they gained thanks to their military deeds. However, Ibn Ḥabīb's main interest lies in the juridical aspect of the conquest. In fact the writer, a Mālikī jurist in Abd al-Raḥman II's court, aimed to demonstrate that a rightful *ǧihād* made the Arabs rulers of Al-Andalus. Such an explanation could provide the Andalusian Ummayad Caliph with far more political legitimacy than the mere thirst for booty of the first conquerors did, whether or not a *ǧihād* actually took place when the Arabs first invaded Spain in 711.

ALDO A. SETTIA's (Pavia) lecture also dealt with the Arab presence in the Western Mediterranean. In particular, Settia focused on the most controversial „Saracen colony" of Fraxinetum (nowadays La Gard-Freint, in Southern France). Settia wanted to show how the destructiveness of the „Saracens of Fraxinetum" had often been exaggerated by historians, both ancient and modern. In fact, Settia showed how the *destructiones Saracenorum* mentioned by 10th century Italia and Provencal records were often no more than a mere rhetoric expedient which could justify political manoeuvres such as the joining of two bishoprics under one bishop. In recent times, scholars influenced by such records have tended to blame the Saracens of Fraxinetum for every destruction mentioned by the sources, even when the identity of the raiders had been significantly omitted (probably meaning the plunderers were local outlaws or even overbearing lords). As an overreaction to this negative evaluation of the Muslim presence in Fraxinetum, other scholars asserted the role of Fraxinetum as outpost of the Arab culture in Western Europe. In Settia's opinion, both of these positions have to be reconsidered in order to reassert the actual historical role of the famous Arab colony in the French Midi.

The fifth lecture, given by GIUSEPPE MANDALÀ (Madrid), presented a new source for the history of the religious minorities in Arab Sicily. Mandalà himself discovered the manuscript account of the story of the Christian physician Yūḥanna, who suffered martyrdom when he refused to abandon his faith and convert to Islam. The story consists of a short narration of how Yūḥanna, physician at the Kalbite court of Palermo, was encouraged by his lord to convert to Islam and, after having refused, ended up to be lynched by the mob outside the palace. Mandalà proposed a link between this episode and the contemporary events of Fatimid Egypt, where the Caliph al-Ḥākim (996–1021) was putting great pressure on the non-Muslim élite forcing many Christians and Jews to convert. Yūḥanna's martyrdom could be an extreme sample of how the Sicilian emirs were reworking their policy towards non-Muslims. Thus his story can be helping in reconstructing a momentous point in the history of the religious minorities in Arab Sicily.

The sixth and last lecture by MARCO DI BRANCO (Rome) covered the Arab advance in the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean. In particular, Di Branco dealt with the early Arab raids against Cyprus and Rhodes, first looted in 653 and then occupied for seven years starting from 674. This occupation of Rhodes was denied by L. I. Conrad in his „The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East" (1992). Lawrence noted that early Arab historians tended to confuse Rhodes with the little island of Arwād, some miles off the Syrian coast, and thus excluded that any occupation of Rhodes ever took place. However, Di Branco pointed out how the confusion between Rhodes and Arwād originated from a simple spelling mistake, as the two names are very similar in their Arabic transliteration.

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The occupation of Rhodes reported by Arab historians probably actually took place in 674, something which would fit well with the coeval Arab naval advance against Constantinople. During that very campaign the first Arab raids against Crete took place too. The Aegean island was then occupied by Andalusian pirates more than two centuries later. The Cretan emirate was eventually overtaken by the Byzantine and thus left the *dār al-Islām*, as had happened to Cyprus and Rhodes too: was there a link between these different cases? And what was the role of *ğihād* in the conquest of these islands? These and more questions are left unanswered, as they represent future possible research topics.

The whole context raised by the workshop remains open to further inquiries. In this sense, the lecturers aimed to propose new research methods and to indicate possible future avenues. Many different issues were identified, highlighting the complexity of a research approach to the Arab conquests and to the rise of Islam. As always, further research is needed in order to widen the historical understanding of the formation of the *dār al-Islām*.

Conference overview:

Michael Matheus (Roma): Indirizzo di saluto

Kordula Wolf (Roma): Introduzione

Samir Khalil Samir (Beirut/Roma): Lo scontro culturale tra Copti e Musulmani come presentato nell'„Apocalisse di Samuele di Qalamun"

Michele Bernardini (Roma): La conquista islamica dell'area iranica e i rapporti tra conquistatori e conquistati tra VIII e X secolo

Ann Christys (Leeds): From *ğihād* to *diwān* in two providential histories of Hispania/al-Andalus

Aldo A. Settia (Pavia): *In locis qui sunt Fraxeneto vicina.* Saraceni veri e presunti fra Provenza e Italia

Giuseppe Mandalà (Madrid): La Sicilia islamica: minoranze e „periferie" (secoli IX–XI)

Marco Di Branco (Roma): Dalla guerra navale alla conquista delle isole del Mediterraneo. Fonti arabe e fonti bizantine a confronto

Lutz Berger (Kiel): Zusammenfassung (Riassunto)

Commentators
Nikolas Jaspert (Bochum)
Lutz Berger (Kiel)
Gianroberto Scarcia (Roma)
Biancamaria Scarcia-Amoretti (Roma)

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