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HERACLIUS' ALLEGED FAREWELL SALUTE TO SYRIA

A number of Syriac and Arabic sources claim that the emperor Heraclius (610-41) performed a farewell salute to Syria as he left there to return to Constantinople in c. 637 following the decisive Arab victory at the so-called battle of Yarmuk, effectively abandoning the region to the Arabs.[1] While the two main surviving Syriac sources are in strong agreement with one another as to what exactly happened, where and how, the various Arabic sources preserve very different accounts again, differing even among themselves. However, none of the surviving accounts is particularly credible. Regardless of his precise whereabouts, actions or words, it is not plausible that Heraclius would have indulged in such a dramatic gesture, not least when its sole practical effect would have been to demoralize those around him even further as he seemed to accept that Syria was now lost to the empire.[2] Indeed, it was nothing new for Heraclius to lose Syria. He had lost it previously when defeated by the Persians near Antioch in 613, and there is no evidence of any grand gesture during his retreat from the region then.[3] The purpose of this note, therefore, is to propose a new explanation of the origin of this story, arguing that Heraclius' original words and intent have been seriously misunderstood due to a misinterpretation of the original Greek text at the earliest stage of its transmission when it was first translated from Greek into Syriac.

Writing in Syriac, Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and the so-called anonymous chronicler of 1234 agree in all the essential details as they describe

[1] For the most detailed recent analysis of this material, see L. I. Conrad, *Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma*, in G. J. Reinink – B. H. Stolte (eds), *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation* (*Groningen Studies in Cultural Change*, 2), Leuven – Paris – Dudley, MA, 2002, pp. 113-156.

[2] A. J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion*, Oxford, 1978, p. 163, refers to the "infinite pathos" of this alleged farewell. P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, Cambridge, 1980, p. 11, refers to it as a "moving farewell". It has traditionally been accepted pretty much at face value. See e.g. A. N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century, II: 634-641*, Amsterdam, 1972, p. 73. However, modern academic commentators now tend to reject the farewell salute itself while accepting associated testimony concerning the emperor's itinerary or military preparations. See e.g. W. E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 148, who passes over the salute itself in silence while accepting all else. Others cannot resist a good story, but make their disbelief clear. See e.g. R. G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*, Oxford, 2015, p. 46. Popular works continue to repeat it in a most uncritical fashion.

[3] See W. E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 75-77.

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Heraclius' departure from Syria. Indeed, they agree word for word even in large parts, including, most importantly, the exact words spoken by Heraclius as he made his alleged farewell salute. Michael reports as follows:

> Heraclius, king of the Romans, when he saw the devastation that prevailed, departed with sorrow from Antioch and went to Constantinople. It is said that he gave a parting farewell to Syria, saying: *sōsou Syria*, which means (in Greek): "rest in peace, Syria". He had given orders to his troops and sent them to pillage and lay waste the villages and cities, as if the country already belonged to the enemy. The Romans seized and plundered everything that they found. More than the Arabs these Romans despoiled the lands and ceded control of them to the Arabs, who became their new rulers. Heraclius wrote to all the Romans in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Armenia, saying that no-one should engage with the Arabs in battle, but whoever could hold on to his post should do so.[4]

The fact that Michael the Syrian and the chronicler of 1234 agree so closely here proves that they draw upon a common source in this matter, and it is generally agreed that they probably derive this material from the lost Syriac chronicle by Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē (d. 845).[5] However, there is no agreement from where Dionysius himself derived this material. On the one hand, Conrad, who generally argues that one can recover large parts of the lost Syriac chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785) by identifying the material common to his apparent dependants Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818), Agapius of Hierapolis (wr. 940s) and Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē, as decided by the material common to Michael the Syrian and the chronicler of 1234, excludes the story of Heraclius' alleged farewell salute to Syria from the material that he credits to Theophilus.[6] This is because neither Theophanes nor Agapius seems to preserve the story of the farewell salute. Instead, he argues that Dionysius derives the story of the salute from an Arab-Islamic literary tradition originating in the Muslim community of northern Syria, and then set it within the larger narrative derived from Theophilus of Edessa. On the other hand, Hoyland, who agrees in principle with Conrad concerning the methods for reconstructing the chronicle by Theophilus, does include Heraclius' alleged farewell salute to Syria in his reconstruction of this text.[7]

[4] Translation from R. G. HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (*Translated Texts for Historians*, 57), Liverpool, 2011, p. 107.

[5] See e.g. A. PALMER, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (*Translated Texts for Historians*, 15), Liverpool, 1993, p. 158, who includes this material in his attempted reconstruction of Dionysius' chronicle.

[6] CONRAD, *Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma* [see n. 1], pp. 144-152.

[7] See R. G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others See It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, 13), Princeton, 1997, pp. 638-39; *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* [see n. 4], pp. 106-108.

Two main arguments may be adduced in support of Hoyland here. The first is that Agapius' description of the behaviour of Heraclius following the battle of Yarmuk is so close to the descriptions by Michael and the chronicler of 1234 of the same that it seems clear that all three derive their material from the same source. Agapius reports as follows:

> Heraclius made his way from Mabbug to Antioch, for he had already despaired of (retaining) Syria, namely al-Sham, and was certain that the Arabs would conquer it. When Heraclius, while at Antioch, saw the rout of the Romans and learned what the Arabs had done to the Persians, he was overcome with anger and distress and afflicted with grief. He wrote to Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and Armenia ordering them not to engage the Arabs in battle and not to oppose the decree of God. He informed them that this was a scourge sent by God Almighty upon His people and that there was no escaping the decree of God and no avoiding the fulfilment of what God almighty had promised to Ishmael son of Abraham: that many kings would issue from his loins.[8]

Agapius locates Heraclius at Antioch when he decides to withdraw from Syria following the battle of Yarmuk, as do Michael and the chronicler of 1234. Furthermore, he concludes the anecdote by describing how Heraclius wrote to his other forces throughout the East ordering them not to engage with the Arabs in battle, as do Michael and the chronicler of 1234 also. Most importantly, however, and in contrast to Michael and the chronicler of 1234 who depict Heraclius writing to the three regions alone of Armenia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, Agapius depicts him writing to a fourth region also, Syria. In other words, Agapius depicts Heraclius treating Syria in the exact same manner as Armenia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. Therefore, the suspicion must be that Agapius, or his source, has simplified a tradition similar to that preserved by Michael and the chronicler of 1234 by omitting the description of a special farewell salute to Syria, but compensated for this by including Syria among the regions that Heraclius then wrote to immediately after this salute. Perhaps he did this simply to abbreviate the text, but it is probably relevant also that Michael and the chronicler of 1234 quote the exact words of farewell attributed to Heraclius transliterated from Greek into Syriac. Agapius may have preferred to omit this incident rather than to preserve a fragment, even in transliteration, of a language that would have been unknown to most of his intended readers.

The second argument in support of Hoyland against Conrad here is that the fact that Michael and the chronicler of 1234 quote the exact words attributed to Heraclius in transliterated Greek suggests that their ultimate source was probably composed in Greek. This is true even if one considers this

[8] Translation from HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* [see n. 4], pp. 106-107.

particular anecdote in isolation, but it becomes all the more convincing when one considers it within its full context as but one of a series of similar examples within these sources whose language and content betray their origin in a Greek source. These examples include such items as the settlement between bishop Cyrus of Egypt and the Muslim commander ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in c. 638, the building of a mosque under ʿUmar on the Temple Mount in Jersusalem, the naval battle off Cape Phoenix in c. 655, and the account of the embassy of the eunuch Andrew to the court of Muʿāwiya in c. 667.[9] Commentators may disagree as to the exact lines of transmission of these accounts, so that some argue that Theophanes, Agapius, Michael the Syrian and the chronicler of 1234 all derive this material via Theophilus of Edessa, while others prefer to believe that Theophanes may have derived it directly from Theophilus' own Greek source, but none deny the Greek nature of this ultimate source.[10] Accordingly, it is not plausible to hypothesize one origin for the story of Heraclius' farewell salute to Syria and another origin altogether for closely associated material displaying similar signs of Greek origin.

Although Conrad argues that the story of Heraclius' farewell salute to Syria originated within the Muslim community in northern Syria, he does not then attack its credibility in any way. On the contrary, he accepts that Heraclius did indeed bid farewell to Syria, even using the exact words as preserved by Michael and the chronicler of 1234, which he restores to Greek as σώζου Συρία.[11] He then seeks to explain Heraclius' behaviour in this manner on the basis that this phrase "was a religious slogan associated with Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem", although also allowing that Heraclius may have used this phrase ironically as he withdrew from Syria.[12] However,

[9] See e.g. M. Conterno, *Theophilos, 'The More Likely Candidate'? Towards a Reappraisal of the Question of Theophanes' 'Oriental Sources'*, in M. Jankowiak – F. Montinaro (eds), *Studies in Theophanes* (*TM*, 19), Paris, 2015, pp. 383-400, at 386-393; Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* [see n. 4], pp. 23-26.

[10] Neither Conterno, *Theophilos* [see n. 9], nor M. Debié, *Theophanes' 'Oriental Source': What Can We Learn from Syriac Historiography?*, in Jankowiak – Montinaro, *Studies in Theophanes* [see n. 9], pp. 365-382, accept the possibility that a source could have been translated first from Greek into Syriac, then back from Syriac into Greek.

[11] Conrad, *Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma* [see n. 1], p. 148. I.-B. Chabot, *Chronicon Anonymum ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens I* (*CSCO*, 109), Louvain, 1954, p. 196, restores it as σώσου Συρία. However, the verb σῴζω, 'I save' never takes this form. It should be noted that the transliteration of this phrase from Syriac into English varies slightly in modern translations. While Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* [see n. 4], p. 107, transliterates it as *sōsou Syria*, Conrad, *Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma* [see n. 1], p. 148, transliterates it as s*ōzū Sōriyā*, Palmer, *The Seventh Century* [see n. 5], p. 158, transliterates it as s*ōzou Syria,* and Chabot, *Chronicon Anonymum* [see n. 11], p. 196, transliterates it as *sāzō Suria*. The context and verbal ending reveal that the second-person singular present imperative in the passive or middle voice – σῴζου – is what is required here.

[12] Conrad, *Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma* [see n. 1], p. 151.

there are three main weaknesses to this attempt to rationalize Heraclius' alleged behaviour in this manner. The first is that it is difficult to understand how or why memory of the salute would have been preserved in northern Syria if it had happened much as described, since all the witnesses ought surely to have returned safely to Constantinople with Heraclius himself. The second is that, even if Christians did sometimes perform some sort of farewell when leaving Jerusalem, Heraclius was nowhere near Jerusalem at the time of his alleged farewell salute, not near the Holy Land as normally understood even, and there is no evidence that he had advanced much further southwards than Antioch in Syria during this, his last campaign. Hence it would have been entirely unexpected for him to perform such a salute, even in irony, when returning back across Syria's northern border. Finally, there is no hard evidence that Christian pilgrims did actually perform some sort of ritual farewell either to Jerusalem itself, or to the Holy Land more generally, when returning from pilgrimage.

Conrad draws attention to an Arabic version of the farewell salute that could be interpreted to support his assumption that, by the seventh century, Christians did perform some sort of ritual farewell to Jerusalem when returning from pilgrimage. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) reports this as the second of three different versions of the departure of Heraclius for Constantinople that he preserves, running as follows:

> According to 'Ubādah and Khālid: Whenever Heraclius made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, left Syria behind [on his way back], and entered into the land of the Byzantines, he used to turn back and to say: "Peace be upon you, O Syria! This is the farewell of a man who takes leave of you without fulfilling his desire and will return." When the Muslims moved on Ḥimṣ, he crossed the Euphrates and camped at al-Ruhā'. He remained there until the people of al-Kūfah appeared, Qinnasrīn was conquered, and Mīnās was killed. When this happened, he retreated to Shimshāṭ. When he left Shimshāṭ in order to cross into the Byzantine territory, he ascended to an elevated place, turned back, looked in the direction of Syria, and said: "Peace be upon you, O Syria! This is a farewell after which there will be no re-union. No Byzantine man will ever return to you except in fear until the ill-fated one is born; would that he would not be born! How sweet will be his deeds and how bitter will be their outcome with regard to the Byzantines."[13]

The fact that this account begins with an attempt to explain the origin of Heraclius' alleged farewell salute to Syria in his normal behaviour when returning to Constantinople from pilgrimage to Jerusalem illustrates the need felt by the originator of this particular variant of the story to find some sort

[13] Translation from Y. FRIEDMANN, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, XII: The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine*, Albany, 1992, p. 182.

of explanation for what he seems to have regarded as rather unusual behaviour otherwise. However, the fact that Heraclius did not make regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem, as assumed, but was probably able to visit it just twice, once each in 629 and 630, suggests that this author knew little about the historical Heraclius, but simply invented this story on the basis of how he imagined a pious Christian emperor should have behaved.[14] Furthermore, in his alleged reference to the "ill-fated one", Heraclius reveals knowledge of the Islamic doctrine of the Dajjāl, or Anti-Christ, that is obviously anachronistic.[15] It is clear, therefore, that it would be most unsafe to take any of the allegations within this account seriously.

While Conrad argues that Heraclius did perform the farewell salute much as described, Shoshan suggests that the story may have been fabricated on the basis of an existing literary model.[16] In particular, he draws attention to the similarities between Heraclius' farewell to Syria and the description by the monk Strategius of how the patriarch Zachariah bade farewell to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives as he was being driven into exile by the Persians following their capture of that city in 614. However, the similarities between the two incidents are superficial at best. In one case, an emperor bids farewell to a whole region, but, in the other, a patriarch bides farewell to a single city. In one case, an emperor bids a short, sharp farewell, but, in the other, a patriarch performs a much longer speech. In one case, the emperor is sad but calm, but, in the other case, a patriarch is absolutely distraught. In one case, the emperor departs a free man still, but, in the other, a patriarch departs a prisoner. The similarities are simply not enough to prove any direct link or influence between the two alleged incidents. Finally, one notes that there is a possibility that Strategius' account may itself have been influenced by an even older model, the biblical description of King David's flight from Jerusalem (2 *Samuel* 15), but that does not contain a farewell salute as such, and is even less likely again to have had any influence upon the story of Heraclius' farewell salute.[17]

There is also a third potential approach to this problem, although one that appears to have been neglected heretofore. It involves neither an acceptance of the farewell salute at face value nor a dismissal of it as a literary fiction,

[14] On Heraclius' visits to Jerusalem, see C. ZUCKERMAN, *Heraclius and the Return of the Holy Cross*, in C. ZUCKERMAN (ed), *Constructing the Seventh Century* (*TM*, 17), Paris, 2013, pp. 197-218.

[15] FRIEDMANN, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, XII* [see n. 13], p. 182, n. 672; CONRAD, *Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma* [see n. 1], p. 146.

[16] B. SHOSHAN, *The Arabic Historical Tradition and the Early Islamic Conquests*, London, 2016, pp. 65-66.

[17] R. L. WILKEN, *The Land Called Holy*, London, 1992, p. 223.

but the analysis of it as incident that has been severely misunderstood during the process of transmission. In this case, one must start with the story as preserved by the two sources that seem most likely to preserve it in its earliest surviving form, Michael the Syrian and the chronicler of 1234, as indicated by the facts both that they preserve the simplest and most unadulterated form of the actual farewell itself and do so in transliteration of the language used by the probable ultimate source for this account, Greek. As already noted, the Greek should be restored as σῴζου Συρία. However, the form of the verb σῴζω "I save" used here is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be translated as the present imperative singular in the passive voice, so meaning "Be saved!", that is, "Be safe!" or "Farewell!", and it is clear that the originator of the particular version of the story preserved by Michael and the chronicler of 1234 understood the verb in this sense. On the other hand, it could also be translated as the present imperative singular in the middle voice, so meaning "Save (yourself)!". For example, in the *Septuagint*, the speaker at *Proverbs* 6:3 uses it in this way when advising a young man to avoid debt: ποίει, υἱέ, ἃ ἐγώ σοι ἐντέλλομαι, καὶ σῴζου, "Do, son, what I am telling you, and save yourself". Furthermore, this verb can also include the idea of motion when used in this way. For example, when an angel advised Lot to flee from Sodom because God was about to destroy it, he said (*Genesis* 19:17): εἰς τὸ ὄρος σῴζου, μήποτε συμπαραλημφθῇς "Remove yourself in safety to the mountain, so that you are not killed".

So in what sense did the author of the ultimate Greek source here intend the verb σῴζου to be understood, "Farewell!" or "Save (yourelf)!"? In order to determine this, one needs to take the broader context into consideration. Would it have made more sense for him to have depicted Heraclius saying "Farewell, Syria!" or "Save (yourself), Syria!" within the general context otherwise? One can understand the attraction of interpreting Heraclius' last words upon leaving Syria as a farewell to that region, since he was actually leaving it. However, the wider context suggest that his main preoccupation as he left Syria was in reorganizing his defences so as to offer the best resistance to the Arabs. Immediately after describing the farewell salute, Michael and the chronicler of 1234 both describe how Byzantine troops devastated the region. They then describe how Heraclius sent letters to the remaining Byzantine forces in Armenia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia ordering them not to engage in open battle with the Arabs, but to try and hold onto their positions as long as they could.

Unfortunately, neither Michael nor the chronicler of 1234 explains why exactly Heraclius either allowed, or even ordered, his troops to devastate the region. Michael claims that the Byzantines did more damage than the Arabs

to the region, and the general impression is given that Heraclius was doing no more than cruelly indulging the worst inclination of his troops. Therefore, it is tempting to dismiss the claim that Heraclius either allowed or ordered his troops to devastate the region in this way as yet another example of the anti-Byzantine propaganda which Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē sometimes wove into the material which he derived from Theophilus of Edessa.[18] Fortunately, the final of the three versions of Heraclius' departure from Syria for Constantinople preserved by al-Ṭabarī provides a more detailed and rational account of the same event:

> According to Abū al-Zahrā' and Amr b. Maymūn: When Heraclius left Shimshāṭ and entered the Byzantine territory, he turned back toward Syria and said: 'I used to greet you in the manner of a traveller. Today I am greeting you in the manner of one who departs. No Byzantine man will ever return to you except in fear until the ill-fated one is born; would that he would not be born'. Heraclius moved onward and reached Constantinople, taking with him the people of the fortresses located between Alexandretta and Tarsus so that the Muslims should not be able to move within any populated territory between Antioch and the Byzantine land. He laid the fortresses waste so that the Muslims would not be able to find anyone there. At times Byzantines lay in ambush near the fortresses and launched surprise attacks upon those who were lagging behind, and the Muslims had to take precautions against this.[19]

This account confirms that Heraclius deliberately ordered the devastation of northern Syria, but reveals that he only did so after he had evacuated its population. Furthermore, it also reveals that his intention in so doing was to deny cover or supplies to Muslim forces entering the region. This all makes good military sense.[20] Consequently, the suspicion must be that this account better preserves the description of Heraclius' action following his alleged farewell salute than do either of the two Syriac chroniclers depending upon Dionysius for this event. Accordingly, and in the context of the action that Heraclius is supposed to have performed immediately afterwards, it seems that there are two possible explanations of his alleged words if he had intended to say "Save (yourself), Syria!" rather than "Farewell, Syria!". The first possibility is that he was directing his call towards the inhabitants of the region that he intended to devastate in order to persuade them to save

[18] See e.g. M. P. Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*, Philadelphia, 2015, pp. 48-49; J. J. Van Ginkel, *The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography: How did the Changing Social Position of the Syrian Orthodox Community Influence the Account of Their Historiographers?*, in E. Grypeou – M. N. Swanson – D. Thomas (eds), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 171-184, at 178-179; Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century, II* [see n. 2], pp. 73-74.

[19] Friedmann, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, XII* [see n. 13], p. 182.

[20] See Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* [see n. 2], p. 148.

themselves from death or enslavement at the hands of the Arabs by accompanying him to safety beyond the Taurus mountains. In other words, it was a call to evacuate the new border region. The second possibility is that he was directing his call to the remaining troops scattered throughout wider Syria, and not just to those stationed in the immediate region about to be devastated, with the same message that he would send next to the troops in Armenia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. In other words, it was a call for continued resistance by all, but one emphasizing that he would not be able to send reinforcements any time soon, so that these troops would have to fend for themselves. On the whole, however, the evidence probably favours the former possibility, since if Heraclius really had intended to inspire the troops to keep resisting, he would probably have used more explicitly violent or aggressive language, urging them to fight the good fight, be courageous, or something of this type.

It is my argument, therefore, that the author of the Greek source from which all other accounts of Heraclius' alleged farewell salute to Syria derive had originally described Heraclius bidding σῴζου, Συρία "Save (yourself), Syria!" to the inhabitants of what would be the new borderland in northern Syria between the Byzantine and Arab empires before he laid waste to this region in order to deny its resources to the enemy. However, his text was ambiguous in two key respects. First, he used a present imperative singular verb in the middle voice which was open to misinterpretation as a present imperative singular verb in the passive voice. Second, he used metonymy, that is, instead of addressing the people of Syria explicitly as such, he addressed them rather by the name of the land that they inhabited, so saying "Save (yourself), Syria!" rather than "Save (yourselves), Syrians!". Unfortunately, the first translator of this phrase from Greek into Syriac took the wrong meaning in each case, and these misinterpretations were mutually reinforcing. He misinterpreted the Greek to mean "Be saved, Syria!", that is, "Farewell, Syria!", rather than "Save (yourself), Syria!", and then took the address "Syria!" literally in reference to the land itself rather than its inhabitants. The result was these words became detached in meaning from the material that followed next, a description of the people leaving the land before the retreating Byzantine troops ravaged it, and were treated in description of a separate incident during this whole process, a farewell salute to Syria itself, rather than as an integral part of the material that followed.

If the above argument is correct, then any differences between the surviving accounts of Heraclius' alleged farewell salute are the results of the transmission process where various editors have felt free to re-work their material somewhat in order to better serve their immediate literary needs.

For example, it is understandable why, given his apparent anti-Byzantine stance, Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē may have been tempted to omit any acknowledgement of the fact that Heraclius had evacuated the people of northern Syria before he ordered his troops to devastate it, and then perhaps to exaggerate the extent of the devastation as if the whole of Syria had been treated in this manner. On the other hand, other editors may have been tempted to add to the basic account, whether to appeal to the religious or regional interests of their immediate readers, or even to add to the plausibility of the overall account. Consider the words attributed to Heraclius by al-Balādhurī (d. 892) in his version of the farewell salute:

> When Heraclius received the news about the troops in al-Yarmuk and the destruction of his army by the Moslems, he fled from Antioch to Constantinople, and as he passed ad-Darb he turned and said, "Peace unto thee, O Syria, and what an excellent country this is for the enemy!" – referring to the numerous pastures in Syria.[21]

In this case, the words attributed to Heraclius seem designed to appeal to a universal Arab pride in the wealth of the land that they had conquered from the Byzantines, if not to a specific Syrian pride in the wealth of their region.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the argument that all accounts of Heraclius' alleged farewell salute to Syria must derive from the same Greek source because they all repeat the same errors in the transmission of this material which had originally been a call to evacuate northern Syria, not a farewell salute, does not deny the separate transmission of independent Arab traditions concerning the departure from Syria. One notes here that neither the chronicler of 1234, Michael the Syrian, nor Agapius mention that Heraclius returned to Constantinople via Samosata, and this renders it unlikely that their ultimate Greek source had either. One also notes that al-Ṭabarī preserves three different accounts of Heraclius' departure for Constantinople, where the first, which does not contain the farewell salute, bears little resemblance to the second and third, already quoted above, which do contain the farewell salute.[22] It is arguable, therefore, that this first, which does mention Heraclius' departure via Samosata, better preserves an independent Arab tradition, and that the reference to Samosata in the second and third accounts, which derive ultimately from the Greek source, represents a contamination from the independent Arab tradition.

[21] Translation from P. Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, New York, 1916, p. 210.
[22] Friedmann, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, XII* [see n. 13], pp. 181-182.

In conclusion, the story of Heraclius' farewell salute to Syria deserves more critical attention than it has received heretofore. In the final analysis, one cannot totally exclude the possibility that he did indeed bid farewell to Syria much as the tradition records, but it seems highly unlikely that he did. However, if one rejects the historicity of the story of his farewell salute, one then has to explain its origin, who invented it, and why. I have argued here that the story has its ultimate origin in the misunderstanding of a Greek text during its translation into Syriac and, unless one is to invent an unnecessary multiplicity of lost sources, the translator responsible for this error was probably Theophilus of Edessa. In particular, I have argued that Heraclius had originally been depicted declaring "Save (yourself), Syria!" to the inhabitants of northern Syria as he sought to evacuate them from the new border region, and not "Farewell, Syria!" to Syria itself. In hindsight, of course, the latter represents a more moving and perceptive appreciation of the changing geo-political situation, but that is irrelevant from a purely historical point of view.

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SUMMARY

This paper offers a new explanation of the origin of the story as recorded by a variety of Syriac and Arabic sources that the emperor Heraclius had bade farewell to Syria as he retreated back to Constantinople in c.637. It is argued that the Greek source at the root of this tradition had originally depicted Heraclius declaring "Save (yourself), Syria!" to the inhabitants of northern Syria as he sought to evacuate them from the new border region, and not "Farewell, Syria!" to Syria itself. However, his language was ambiguous, and the initial Syriac translator misunderstood his intent.