

996: Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Anṭākī on a Pogrom against Foreign Christian Traders in Old Cairo

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Daniel G. König, 996: Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Anṭākī on a Pogrom against Foreign Christian Traders in Old Cairo, in: *Transmediterranean History* 8.1 (2026).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18148/tmh/2026.8.1.98>.

Abstract: In spring 386/996, an angry mob accused a large group of Christians classified as “Byzantines” (*al-Rūm*) of having laid fire to the new Fāṭimid fleet in the shipyard of Old Cairo. The fleet was just about to set out to support the caliph al-ʿAzīz bi-llāh in his war against Byzantium. More than one hundred Christians were killed; massive looting and a harsh reaction on the part of the authorities ensued. This incident—reported by the contemporary Arabic-Christian chronicler Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Anṭākī, and narrated in two versions in the later works of al-Maqrīzī—has been contextualised differently. One strand of scholarship uses this episode to discuss the Fāṭimids’ treatment of *ḡimmī*-s, i.e. non-Muslims under Muslim rule. Another strand identifies these “Byzantine” Christians as Amalfitans, thus regarding the incident as evidence for intensifying economic relations between southern Italy and Egypt. The article brings these two perspectives together by comparing Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd’s depiction of events with those of al-Maqrīzī and by situating the episode within the broader contexts of Fāṭimid–Byzantine relations, interconfessional and interreligious coexistence in Egypt, and transmediterranean trade.

Source

Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire de Yahya-ibn-Saʿīd d’Antioche* [Part II], ed. Ignace Kratchkovsky, trans. Alexandre Vasiliev, in: *Patrologia Orientalis* 23/2 (1932), pp. 447–448, trans. Daniel G. König.

وأما العزيز فإنه بعد خروج الملك باسيل إلى الشام
برز إلى منا جعفر من أعمال مصر في سائر
جيوشه وأظهر قوة العزم إلى بلاد الروم وتقدم إلى
عيسى بن نسطورس بإنشاء أسطول يسير معه
بمسيره في البحر إلى طرابلس فجمع ابن نسطورس
الأخشاب من سائر النواحي وأنشأ أسطولا في
دار الصناعة بمصر وحمل إليه جميع الآلات والعدد
والسلاح وعزم على تسيره بعد صلاة الظهر من
نهار يوم الجمعة لسبعة عشر ليلة بقيت من شهر
ربيع الآخر سنة ست وثمانين وثلثمائة

After the military campaign of the [Byzantine] ruler Basil in Syria, the [Fāṭimid caliph] al-ʿAzīz set out for Mūna Ġaʿfar, one of the districts of Egypt, with all his troops. Here he displayed the will to campaign against the lands of the Byzantines. Thus, he ordered ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus to build a fleet that would accompany him by sea to Tripolis. So Ibn Naṣṭūrus collected wood from various regions and created a fleet in the shipyard of Old Cairo (*Miṣr*) which he approvisioned with military equipment, provisions, and arms. He planned to put it on its way after the afternoon prayer on the Friday of the year 386, on which seventeen nights of the month Rabīʿ al-Āḥir remained [i.e. 12 Rabīʿ II 386 = 4 May 996].

فوقع فيه نار في ذلك اليوم الذي عول على تسيره
فيه وأحرق منه ستة عشر مركب واتهم الرعية

But on the day when he wanted to put it [the fleet] into the water, it caught fire, so that sixteen ships were burned. The people (*al-raʿiyya*) blamed this fire

بحريقه تجار الروم الملافطة الواردين بالبضائع إلى
مصر فنار عليهم الرعيّة والمغاربة وقتلوا منهم مائة
وستين رجلاً ونهبوا دار مانك الذي في الرقائين
بمصر وكان فيها مال عظيم لهؤلاء الروم فكانوا
نازليين فيها

ونحبت كنيسة ميخائيل التي للملكية بقصر الشمع
وأخذ منها آلة ورحل وآنية ذهب وفضّة ما يساوي
جملة كثيرة وشعثت الكنيسة ونحبت كنيسة
النسطورية وجرح أسقف بما لهم يسمّى يوسف
ويعرف بالشيزيري جراحات مات منها

وركب ابن نسطورس وقت النهب ونزل إلى مصر
وتقدّم بكف الأذية عن الروم والمنع منهم ونودي
في البلد بأن يردّ كل واحد من النهاية جميع ما
أخذه فردّ البعض من ذلك وأحضر من سلم من
تجار الروم من القتل ودفع إلى كلّ واحد منهم ما
اعترفه وقبض على ثلاثة وستين رجلاً من النهاية
واعقلوا وأمر العزيز بالله إطلاق ثلثهم وضرب
ثلثهم وقتل ثلثهم فكتب رفاع منها تضرب ومنها
تقتل ومنها تطلق وتركب تحت إزار وتقدّم كل
واحد منهم أخذ رقعته وكان يعمل به بحسب ما
يخرج فيها وذلك يوم الخميس لثمان خلوان من
جمدى الاولى من السنة

on the Amalfitan-Byzantine traders (*tuḡḡār al-Rūm al-Malāfiṭa*) who bring their wares to Egypt, to the effect that the people and the Maghrebis rose against them, killed 160 of their men and pillaged the house of Mānak, which is in al-Raffāʾīn in Old Cairo (*Miṣr*) where there was a lot of money belonging to these Byzantines, since they resided there.

The Church of Saint Michael in Qaṣr al-Šamaʿ, which belongs to the Melkites, was also plundered. Various utensils, furniture, as well as gold and silver vases of high value were stolen and the church left in a chaotic state. The Nestorian church was also plundered. Its bishop with the name of Yūsuf, also known as al-Šayzīrī, was wounded so badly, that he died.

While the pillaging was going on, Ibn Naṣṭūrus mounted his horse, rode to Old Cairo (*Miṣr*), and ordered to end the attacks against the Byzantines (*al-Rūm*) and to leave them in peace. In the city he ordered to proclaim that everyone should bring back everything he had taken. Some brought back a few things. He then brought together those men of the Byzantine traders who had been spared from being killed and gave back to them what they recognized as theirs. He also arrested 63 men from among the pillagers who were detained. [The caliph] al-ʿAzīz bi-llāh ordered that one third should be let go, one third beaten and one third executed. Then notes were written “You will be beaten,” “You will be killed,” “You will be let go,” that were put under a cover. Every one of them [the pillagers] stepped forward, took one of the notes and was then treated according to what had appeared on the note. This was on Thursday, the eighth day of the month Ġumādā al-Awwal of the same year [29 May 996].

Authorship & Work

[§1] Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Anṭākī was a Melkite chronicler and—possibly—a physician who spent his early life in Egypt, emigrated to Antioch around 405/1015, and wrote an important historiographical work (*tārīḥ*). As he states in the introduction of his work, he conceived it as an independent addition (*ḡuz ʿan mufradan muḍāfan*) to the chronicle written by Eutychios or Saʿīd b. al-Baṭrīq (d. 328/940), the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria (sed. 933–940).¹ Setting out

¹ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part I, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 705–710; Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, pp. 17–20, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/12>.

where Sa‘īd b. al-Baṭrīq ended, Yaḥyā’s chronicle begins in the year 326/938 and, in the extant manuscript versions, leads up to the year 425/1034.

[§2] Yaḥyā’s biography has to be reconstructed on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Whether he was related to Sa‘īd b. al-Baṭrīq, as claimed by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (d. 668/1270), cannot be substantiated.² His adherence to the Melkite confession of Christianity is suggested by the fact that he continued the chronicle of the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria and reported much on Melkite clerics (*al-Malakiyya*), while largely ignoring the affairs of what he calls “Jacobite” (*al-Ya‘qūbiyya*, i.e. Syriac Orthodox) and “Nestorian” (*al-Nasṭūriyya*, i.e. Church of the East) clergy.³

[§3] He himself explains in the introduction to his chronicle that he was initially based in Egypt and then moved to Antioch, where he settled in 405/1015.⁴ Although he does not say this explicitly, it is generally accepted that this relocation had to do with the oppressive measures against Jews and Christians, implemented by the Fāṭimid caliph al-Ḥākim (r. 386–411/996–1021) at the beginning of the eleventh century.⁵ Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd describes these measures in detail, e.g. in connection with the years 395/1004–1005⁶, 398–400/1007–1010⁷, and 403–404/1012–1013⁸, precisely locating events in Cairo and providing many details of what happened at and in interaction with the court. He probably profited from the permission, given in Ṣafar 404/August–September 1013 by al-Ḥākim to the Jews and Christians of Egypt, to emigrate to Byzantine territory with all their belongings, which he mentions in his chronicle.⁹ We can assume that he became an integral member of the influential Arabic-speaking Melkite community of Antioch, which had come under Byzantine rule in 969.¹⁰

[§4] How long Yaḥyā lived in Antioch and when he died, remains disputed. Later Arabic-Islamic sources suggest independently that he could have died in the 1060s. In his history of Aleppo (*Tārīḥ Ḥalab*), Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-‘Azīmī (d. 556/1161) copied passages from what he calls “the History of the Christian from Antioch” (*tārīḥ al-Anṭākī al-masīḥī*), claiming that this historiographical work ended in 458/1066. On this basis, some scholars have surmised that Yaḥyā died in or after this year.¹¹

[§5] It is also disputed whether Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd engaged with medicine. As mentioned above, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (d. 668/1270) claims in his bio-bibliographical dictionary on physicians that Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd b. Yaḥyā, presented here as author of a historiographical work called “The Continuation” (*Kitāb Tārīḥ al-ḡayl*), was related (*nasīb*) to Sa‘īd b. al-Baṭrīq, the patriarch of

² Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *Uyūn al-anbā’*, ed. Müller, vol. 1, p. 239; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *Uyūn al-anbā’*, ed. Riḍā, p. 546, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/6687/532>: “nasīb li-Sa‘īd b. al-Baṭrīq yuqāl lahu Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd b. Yaḥyā wa-summiya kitābuhu Kitāb Tārīḥ al-ḡayl (...)”

³ Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 13.

⁴ Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Histoire*, Part I, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, p. 708; Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, p. 19, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/14#p1>.

⁵ Lev, *Persecutions and Conversion*, pp. 73–91.

⁶ Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Histoire*, Part II, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 464–468; Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, pp. 252–256, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/246>.

⁷ Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Histoire*, Part II, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 488–497; Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, pp. 277–283, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/271>.

⁸ Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Histoire*, Part II, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 508–519; Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, pp. 295–305, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/289>.

⁹ Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Histoire*, Part II, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, p. 519; Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, p. 305, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/299>.

¹⁰ Todt, *Antioch*, pp. 176, 182. Also see: Todt, *Dukat und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat*.

¹¹ Al-‘Azīmī, *Tārīḥ Ḥalab*, ed. Zahrūr, p. 345; Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Histoire*, Part III, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Micheau and Troupeau, p. 374.

Alexandria, who was known as a physician.¹² Moreover, Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa wrote a separate entry on a physician from Antioch called Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd b. Yaḥyā, who carried the additional teknonym (*kunya*) “father of Faraġ” (*Abū l-Faraġ*). But although the given name (*ism*) “Yaḥyā” and the patronymic (*nasab*) “son of Saʿīd, son of Yaḥyā” are identical, Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa did not identify the historian with the physician. This has led to uncertainties whether Yaḥyā the historiographer can be identified with Yaḥyā the physician.

[§6] Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa’s knowledge of Yaḥyā the physician is based on a work by the Arabic-Christian physician Ibn Buṭlān (d. 458/1066). He visited Antioch in 440/1049 on his way from Baghdad to Cairo and then settled in Antioch in 447/1055.¹³ In 455/1063, Ibn Buṭlān composed a treatise, which describes Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd the physician as a contemporary authority (*al-sayyid fī zamāninā*), claiming that he had been directly informed (*ḥaddaṭanī*) about a particular medical case by “the virtuous shayḥ Abū l-Faraġ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd b. Yaḥyā, the physician in Antioch, (...) this master of our time, a leading authority in knowledge, foremost in religion and virtue, and the author of distinguished works (...).”¹⁴ Yaḥyā the physician is also mentioned by other Arabic-Islamic scholars and seems to have written an extant commentary on a standard work of Arabic Galenic medicine.¹⁵

[§7] Scholarship is divided, since Yaḥyā the historiographer and Yaḥyā the physician are only treated as one person in a manuscript of the Christian-Arabic author ʿAmr b. al-Mattā (fl. 11th or 14th cent.).¹⁶ ʿAmr cites a passage from the history of a person called “Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd b. Yaḥyā al-Malakī al-Mutaṭabbib,” a name referring both to Yaḥyā’s Melkite identity (*al-Malakī*) and his expertise in medicine (*al-Mutaṭabbib*).¹⁷ Yaḥyā the historiographer’s almost clinical description of the caliph al-Ḥākim’s mental disposition as well as the attention he gives to medical issues in his chronicle have been used as an argument to prove that the historiographer was also a physician.¹⁸ Last but not least, Georg Graf pointed to three manuscripts attributed to Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd: a treatise (*maqāla*) on the truth of the Christian religion as well as refutations of Judaism and Islam.¹⁹ In line with Ibn Buṭlān, their existence suggests that Yaḥyā was a polymath who engaged with different topics, i.e. history, medicine, and religion.

[§8] Sceptics refuting the identity of the historian and the physician argued that a historian who had already redacted a historical work before 455/1015 must have been rather old by 455/1063 or 458/1066.²⁰ They also wonder why the parts of his chronicle dealing with the period between 425/1034 and 458/1066 have been lost without leaving a single trace,²¹ apart maybe from an

¹² Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, ed. Müller, vol. 1, p. 239; Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, ed. Riḍā, p. 546, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/6687/532>. Accepted by Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 13; refuted by Micheau, *al-Anṭāqī*.

¹³ Schacht, Ibn Buṭlān; Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 19. Also see: Conrad, Ibn Buṭlān in Bilād Al-Shām, pp. 131–157. Todt, Antioch, p. 181, wrongly dates his settlement in Antioch to 1054.

¹⁴ Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, ed. Müller, vol. 2, pp. 86–87; Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, ed. Riḍā, p. 323, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/6687/309>: “ḥaddaṭanī al-ṣayḥ al-fāḍil Abū l-Faraġ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd b. Yaḥyā al-ṭabīb bi-Anṭākya qāla wa-hādā l-sayyid fī zamāninā ʿalam fī l-ʿilm muqaddam fī l-diyāna wa-l-murūʿa wa-lahu taṣānīf ḡalīla (...).”

¹⁵ Glynias, Ibn Buṭlān, p. 131.

¹⁶ Usually dated to the fourteenth century, but also to the late tenth and early eleventh century, see: Swanson, ʿAmr ibn Mattā; Rassi, *Christian Thought*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part III, ed./trans. Troupeau and Micheau, p. 374, based on *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, ed. Assemanis, vol. 2, p. 393; Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part III, ed./trans. Troupeau and Micheau, p. 374; Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁹ Graf, *Geschichte der christlich-arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2, p. 51 (Sbath Fihris 2527–2529).

²⁰ Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire*, pp. 167–172.

²¹ Micheau, *al-Anṭāqī*.

announcement by Yaḥyā himself that he would deal with certain events in the ruling period of the Byzantine emperor Michael IV (r. 1034–1041).²²

[§9] In spite of these doubts, the majority of scholars accept that Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd was a historian and physician who was born in Egypt in the ruling period of the Fāṭimid caliph al-ʿAzīz bi-llāh (r. 365–386/975–996). If born in the early 980s, he would have been mature enough to start working on the chronicle in the first decade of the eleventh century, maybe 397/1006–1007²³, and to revise it once before settling in Antioch in 405/1015. There he interacted as a physician with Ibn Buṭlān and other medical specialists in the 1050s and early 1060s, dying in his eighties after 458/1066, the supposedly last entry of his chronicle according to al-ʿAzīmī.²⁴ This interpretation of the evidence is almost entirely based on Victor Rozen’s (d. 1908) seminal study of Yaḥyā’s chronicle in his biography of Basil II (r. 976–1025), published in 1883.²⁵

[§10] The extant manuscripts of the chronicle provide insight into the period between 326/938 and 425/1034,²⁶ covering the greater part of the ruling period of the Iḥšīdid dynasty in Egypt and Syria (r. 323–358/935–969), the Fāṭimid takeover of Egypt in 358/969, the inner affairs of Fāṭimid Egypt and Syria, Fāṭimid–Byzantine relations, the situation in the Byzantine–Muslim border zone in northern Syria under the Ḥamdānids (r. 293–394/906–1004), as well as Fāṭimid–Ḥamdānid relations. It contains additional information on Iraq, Armenia, Georgia, and Bulgaria, while regularly mentioning the patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria.²⁷

[§11] In the introduction to his work, Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd explains in detail how he composed his chronicle. He claims to have been commissioned by an unnamed person to write a continuation of Saʿīd b. al-Baṭrīq’s work, the chronicle known as “Arrangement of Pearls” (*Nazm al-ḡawhar*). Reviewing several manuscripts in circulation, he chose a manuscript that contained no additions and ended in the year 326/938. After writing a first version of the continuation, with Rozen arguing that this was accomplished between 1003 and 1008,²⁸ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd claims to have produced a second version in the light of new source material before emigrating to Antioch. After settling there in 405/1015, he produced a third version on the basis of sources previously unavailable to him.²⁹ Apart from this historiographical work, Yaḥyā may have written the three treatises on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam mentioned by Graf,³⁰ and—if we accept his identity with the Antiochene physician carrying the same name—some medical works, including a commentary on a medical treatise by Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq (d. 260/873).³¹

Content & Context

[§12] The source excerpt cited above is set in the ruling period of the Fāṭimid caliph al-ʿAzīz bi-llāh (r. 365–386/975–996), around three decades after the Fāṭimid takeover of Egypt and their construction of Cairo as the new capital in the immediate vicinity of al-Fuṣṭāṭ or Fuṣṭāṭ

²² Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 17, on the basis of Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part III, ed./trans. Troupeau and Micheau, p. 534–535.

²³ Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 14.

²⁴ Canard, *al-Antākī*, p. 516; Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part III, ed./trans. Troupeau and Micheau, p. 374; Glynias, *Ibn Buṭlān*, pp. 130–131.

²⁵ Rozen, *Imperator Vasiliy Bolgaroboytsa*.

²⁶ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part III, ed./trans. Troupeau and Micheau, pp. 373–559.

²⁷ Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, pp. 3–4.

²⁸ Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 11.

²⁹ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part I, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 708–710; Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmūrī, pp. 19–20, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/14#p1>. English translation of the passage in Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, pp. 8–10.

³⁰ Graf, *Geschichte der christlich-arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2, p. 51.

³¹ Glynias, *Ibn Buṭlān*, p. 131; Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part III, ed./trans. Troupeau and Micheau, p. 375, FN 12.

Miṣr, i.e. Old Cairo. During his reign, the caliph acted against Byzantine interests by exerting great efforts to acquire control over northern Syria and the Ḥamdānid emirate of Aleppo. Relations with Byzantium were thus strained.

[§13] In the 950s, Byzantine emperors had embarked on a policy of reconquering territory lost to the Muslims, both in the eastern Mediterranean and in northern Syria. Byzantine troops under the general Nikephoros II Phokas conquered Crete (961) and, when he had become emperor (r. 963–969), took Cilicia (964–965) and then Cyprus (965). Raids into Syria eventually led to the conquest of Antioch (969). Under John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–976), Byzantine forces penetrated central and southern Syria, subjecting Aleppo and temporarily conquering Damascus.³² However, they met with increasing resistance on the part of the Fāṭimids who were pushing into Palestine and southern Syria and increasingly began to engage with the Ḥamdānids of Aleppo. Although vigorous, Emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025) was prevented from continuous campaigning by several bouts of inner strife and rebellion. In consequence, he focused on retaining control over Antioch and—indirectly—over Aleppo, defending them against repeated Fāṭimid incursions in 983, 992, 995, 999.³³

[§14] The episode related in the quoted excerpt has to be interpreted against this backdrop of generally hostile Byzantine–Fāṭimid relations. Its geographical setting has been meticulously reconstructed by David Bramoullé.³⁴ According to Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, al-ʿAzīz had ordered his high-ranking and influential Christian functionary, ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus, to build a fleet that would support the caliph’s terrestrial campaign against the Byzantines. This fleet was supposed to be launched on 12 Rabīʿ II 386 (4 May 996). When the fleet caught fire on the day it was to set out, “the people” (*al-raʿiyya*) accused a group of “traders from among the Rūm ... bringing wares to Egypt” (*tuḡḡār al-Rūm ... al-wāridīn bi-l-baḍāʾiʿ ilā Miṣr*) of arson. Who were these foreign traders?

[§15] Because these traders (*tuḡḡār*) are classified as “Byzantines” (*al-Rūm*), older scholarship regarded them as Byzantine foreigners or as Greek, i.e. Melkite, Christians from Egypt.³⁵ In this vein, the editions of Cheikho, and later of Tadmurī, chose to read *tuḡḡār al-Rūm wa-l-Qalāfiṭa al-wāridīn bi-l-baḍāʾiʿ ilā Miṣr*, which translates to “the Byzantine traders and the caulkers bringing wares to Egypt.”³⁶ Although this reading is possible, it raises the question why caulkers, i.e. artisans working in shipyards and sealing matter into seams or joints to make them watertight, would have been involved in trade. Since they were part of the work force responsible for constructing the fleet, it does not seem convincing that they should have become victims of mob violence because they were suspected of having destroyed the ships. An alternative reading given as a manuscript variant by Tadmurī reads *tuḡḡār al-Rūm wa-l-Malāqiṭa*, i.e. “Byzantine and Malāqiṭa traders.”³⁷ The word *Malāqiṭa* derives from the consonant root “l-q-ṭ,” which is associated with the action of receiving or picking things up. It can form the word “forceps” (*malqaṭ*, pl. *malāqiṭ*) and, in the variant *al-mulāqiṭa*, refers to a

³² Andrews, *The Letters of Ioannēs Tzimiskes*, pp. 259–287

³³ Hamblin, *Byzantine-Muslim Wars*. Also see: Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade*, pp. 183–191; Stern, *An Embassy*, pp. 239–258; Canard, *Byzantium and the Muslim World*, pp. 720–725; Hamdani, *Byzantine–Fatimid Relations*, pp. 169–79; Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, pp. 478–497; Farag, *The Aleppo Question*, pp. 44–61; Tibi, *Byzantine-Fatimid Relations*, pp. 91–107; Lev, *The Fatimids and Byzantium*, pp. 190–208; Holmes, ‘How the East Was Won,’ pp. 41–56; Kennedy, *Byzantine–Arab Diplomacy*, pp. 81–91; Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*; Krönung, *Employment of Christian Mediators*, pp. 71–84.

³⁴ Bramoullé, *Les Fatimides et la mer*, pp. 370–387.

³⁵ E.g. Wüstenfeld, *Geschichte der Faṭimiden Chalifen*, p. 61: “Die Griechischen [*sic*] Christen in dem benachbarten Orte”; Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade*, p. 191: “Byzantine agents.”

³⁶ Eutychiei patriarchae Alexandrini annales, II. *Accedunt annales Yahia ibn Said Antiochensis* ed. Cheikho et al., p. 178 with FN 5; Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, p. 233, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/227>.

³⁷ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, p. 233, FN 6, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/227>.

specific gait of horses.³⁸ Since this does not make much sense in this context, this reading shall be discarded.

[§16] Cheikho's reading was not adopted in the edition by Ignace Kratchkovsky and Alexandre Vasiliev who interpreted the sequence of Arabic letters as *tuġġār al-Rūm al-Malāfiṭa*.³⁹ The term *al-Malāfiṭa* contains a sequence of consonants that is also found in the toponym "Amalfi," i.e. "m-l-f." This interpretation was taken up by Claude Cahen who argued that traders hailing from Byzantium would not have brought merchandise to Egypt in a time of war.⁴⁰ But why should Amalfitans have been classified as "Byzantine traders" (*tuġġār al-Rūm*)? In the late tenth century, Amalfi was part of the Byzantine zone of influence in southern Italy. As Latin Christians, the Amalfitans adhered to the Chalcedonian creed also professed by Byzantine Christians that is known in Arabic as "Melkite" (*malakī*). The existence of a Latin monastery on Mount Athos—eventually dominated by Amalfitans and therefore called "Amalfion" (Αμαλφιόν) or "Monastery of the Amalfitans" (Μονή των Αμαλφηνών) already at the end of the tenth century—suggests that, from the Byzantine and Melkite perspective, the Amalfitans were viewed as a subject people and even as part of the Byzantine Church.⁴¹ In view of this, classifying them as "Byzantines" (*al-Rūm*) would have made sense from the Arabic-Christian perspective of Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd. Cahen's reading has accordingly been accepted by later scholarship on Amalfi.⁴²

[§17] Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd claims that the mob killed 160 of these "Byzantines" and pillaged a place described as the "house of Mānak in al-Raffā'īn in Old Cairo (*Miṣr*)," which he identifies as the residence of these traders where they stored their money and belongings.⁴³ Pillaging then began to extend first to the Melkite Church (under the ecclesiastical authority of the patriarch of Constantinople), then to a Nestorian church whose bishop Yūsuf al-Šayzīrī died from his wounds.

[§18] In all this, the mob is said to have been supported by Maghrebis (*al-Maġāriba*). They can possibly be identified as groups of North African Kutāma who had played an important role in facilitating the Fāṭimid conquest of Egypt and in securing their power. During the reign of al-'Azīz, they were increasingly being replaced by other army units, and their influence on governmental affairs waned as a result. This seems to have led to much frustration among the Kutāma. It was temporarily alleviated when—immediately after the events discussed here—al-'Azīz entrusted the guardianship of his minor son al-Ḥākīm (r. 386–411/996–1021) to the Kutāma leader Ibn 'Ammār on his deathbed. However, Ibn 'Ammār's attempt to restore the position of the Kutāma led to his downfall and eventually to a Kutāma revolt.⁴⁴

[§19] Ibn Naṣṭūrus put a stop to plundering, returned as much of the looted goods as possible to the surviving Byzantines (*al-Rūm*) and arrested 63 pillagers. On 8 Ġumādā I 386 / 29 May 996, i.e. around three weeks after the fleet was supposed to start out, the arrested looters were punished. According to Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd, they were forced to draw lots which set a third of them free, subjected a third of them to beating, and ordered the execution of the rest.

[§20] The Egyptian historiographer al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), generally considered a conscientious compiler of earlier material, gives two rather different variants of this episode. The shorter version, contained in his "Admonition to the True Believers on the History of the

³⁸ Ridā, *Kitāb Mu'ġam matn al-luġa*, vol. 5, p. 199, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/29613/2844>.

³⁹ Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd, *Histoire*, Part II, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, p. 447 with FN 3.

⁴⁰ Cahen, *Un texte peu connu*, p. 5 FN 3: "ces Rūm ne peuvent guère être des Byzantins en un temps de guerre, ce ne peut donc être que des Italiens."

⁴¹ Merlini, *Un monastero benedettino*.

⁴² Citarella, *Relations of Amalfi*, p. 303; Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, p. 82.

⁴³ For a localisation with a map, see Bramoullé, *Les Fatimides et la mer*, pp. 375–377.

⁴⁴ Lev, *State and Society*, pp. 81–82, 90–92; Lev, *Army*, pp. 344–347; Halm, *Kalifen von Kairo*, p. 126.

Fāṭimid Imāms and Caliphs” (*Ittiʿāz al-ḥunaḩāʿ bi-aḩbār al-aʿimma al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-ḩulaḩāʿ*), does not mention a source. It claims that Byzantine captives (*al-Rūm al-asārā*) were accused of having laid the fire. The common people (*al-ʿamma*) killed 107 of them and then acquired loot amounting to 90,000 dīnārs whose provenance is not defined. Interrogated by ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus and Yānis al-Ṣaqlabī, the chief of the police (*mutawallī l-ṣurṭa*), the survivors confessed that they had committed arson. A proclamation was issued that threatened to punish everyone who failed to return the plundered goods. While beginning with the construction of a new fleet, ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus seized a number of looters, killing some of them and imprisoning others, while recovering much of the loot.⁴⁵

[§21] The longer, more detailed version, is found in al-Maqrīzī’s “Book of Exhortations and Useful Lessons in Dealing with Topography and Historical Remains” (*al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār bi-ḩikr al-ḩiṭaṭ wa-l-āṭār*). It forms part of a description of the shipyard of al-Maqs. Al-Maqrīzī claims that the fleet was built here, unlike Yaḥyā who locates the shipyard in Old Cairo (*Miṣr*).⁴⁶ Al-Maqrīzī’s narrative of events is taken from a lost chronicle of Egypt written by the Sunnī Muslim historiographer al-Musabbiḩī (366–420/977–1030), a contemporary to the events. This version does not speak of Byzantine captives, but of “Byzantine Christians” (*al-Rūm al-naṣārā*) who were accused of arson. As in the shorter version, the number of killed amounted to 107. Plundering extended to what can be translated neutrally as “belongings,” commercially as “goods” (*al-amtiʿa*). Al-Musabbiḩī claims that the bodies of the dead Byzantines were thrown into the streets. The survivors were imprisoned in the shipyard, where they confessed their deed to ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus, Yānis al-Ṣaqlabī, and Masʿūd al-Ṣaqlabī, the latter defined as chief of the police. They informed the caliph of the events and of the loss incurred by looting that amounted to 90,000 dīnārs. While ʿĪsā immediately began building new ships, Yānis had the police comb the city, ordering the return of all plundered goods. This did not prevent parts of the populace (*aḩḩāṭ al-nās wa-ʿāmmatuhum*) from playing with the heads of the dead, from dragging their corpses through the city, and from burning them on the shore of the Nile. Guards posted throughout the city began to pursue and seize the looters. As in Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd’s version, those arrested received a piece of writing indicating their punishment: twenty men were then beheaded and crucified, twenty-three flogged and paraded through the city with the head of one of the slain Byzantines hanging from their necks, the others were merely imprisoned. The search for looters continued, increasing numbers of goods were seized and sometimes thrown on the street by those fearing punishment, since looters who brought something back or were known to have looted were imprisoned and then executed on 8 Ğumādā I 386 [29 May 996]. Troops made a show of force in the city, publicly beating men in the streets as a punishment for stirring up sedition (*aṭār al-fitan*) and for plundering the sanctuary of the Commander of the Faithful (*naḩb ḩarīm amīr al-muʿminīn*). The following day, the terrified populace was called upon to hand over the remaining loot within one week. ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus proceeded to rebuild the fleet, but the war against the Byzantines did not take place because al-ʿAzīz died on his way to Syria.⁴⁷

[§22] Although the differences between Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd’s and al-Maqrīzī’s account have been noted, their implications have not yet been systematically analysed.⁴⁸ Claude Cahen went as far as claiming that the narrative of Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd and the two versions included in al-Maqrīzī’s works largely correspond and complement each other, emphasizing that al-Musabbiḩī’s

⁴⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāz al-ḩunaḩāʿ*, vol. 1, ed. al-Ṣayyāl, AH 386, p. 290, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/176/334>. See Appendix for the full source text.

⁴⁶ On these two Fāṭimid shipyards and their location, see Bramoullé, *Les Fatimides et la mer*, pp. 346, 370–381.

⁴⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ*, ed. Maṣṣūr, vol. 3, p. 342–343, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/11566/1249>. See Appendix for the full source text.

⁴⁸ Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 497; Jiwa, *A Study*, p. 242; Bramoullé, *Les Fatimides et la mer*, pp. 373–375.

description in al-Maqrīzī's longer version also suggests that traders, not captives, were accused of arson.⁴⁹ However, juxtaposing the three versions of events reveals alternative narratives featuring considerable differences. These concern the date and place of the fire, the identity of victims and perpetrators, the death toll, the extent of plundering, the measures taken to punish the arrested looters, and other details.

<p>Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, <i>Tārīḥ al-ḡayl</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIME FRAME: <i>planned date to launch fleet</i>: Friday, 12 Rabīʿ II 386 [4 May 996]; <i>executions</i>: 8 Ġumādā I 386 [29 May 996] • LOCATION OF FIRE: shipyard of Miṣr, i.e. al-Fuṣṭāṭ or Old Cairo • DRAMATIS PERSONAE: <i>identity of accused</i>: Amalfitan-Byzantine traders (<i>tuġġār al-Rūm al-Malāfiṭa</i>); <i>number of killed</i>: 160; <i>admission of guilt</i>: no; <i>identity of looters</i>: the people (<i>al-raʿiyya</i>) and the Maghrebis (<i>al-Maġāriba</i>); <i>executors of countermeasures</i>: Ibn Naṣṭūrus at the order of al-ʿAzīz • LOOTING AND COUNTERMEASURES: <i>looters</i>: pillaged residence (the house of Mānak), Church of Saint Michael, Nestorian church, Nestorian bishop wounded deadly; <i>countermeasures</i>: Ibn Naṣṭūrus rode through al-Fuṣṭāṭ, ordered to end attacks against Byzantines (<i>al-Rūm</i>) and to proclaim that loot should be returned, collected survivors and returned belongings to them, arrested 63 men, executed the order of al-ʿAzīz to free one third, beat one third, and execute one third on the basis of notes drawn haphazardly
<p>al-Maqrīzī, <i>Iṭtiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIME FRAME: <i>date of fire</i>: Friday, 24 Rabīʿ II [16 May 996] • LOCATION OF FIRE: shipyard of al-Maqs • DRAMATIS PERSONAE: <i>identity of accused</i>: Byzantine captives (<i>al-Rūm al-asārā</i>); <i>number of killed</i>: 107; <i>admission of guilt</i>: yes; <i>identity of looters</i>: common people (<i>al-ʾamma</i>); <i>executors of countermeasures</i>: ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus; Yānis al-Ṣaqlabī, chief of police • LOOTING AND COUNTERMEASURES: <i>looters</i>: pillaged the captives' house near shipyard; amount of loot: 90,000 dīnār; <i>countermeasures</i>: interrogation of accused, proclamation and threats to return loot, looters seized, some killed, some beaten and imprisoned, much loot returned
<p>al-Maqrīzī, <i>al-Mawāʾiẓ</i> (explicitly based on al-Musabbiḥī)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIME FRAME: <i>date of fire</i>: Friday, 24 Rabīʿ II [16 May 996]; <i>burning of corpses</i>: Saturday, 25 Rabīʿ II [17 May 996]; (<i>second?</i>) <i>execution of looters</i>: Thursday, 8 Ġumādā I [29 May 996] • LOCATION OF FIRE: shipyard of al-Maqs • DRAMATIS PERSONAE: <i>identity of accused</i>: Byzantine Christians (<i>al-Rūm al-naṣārā</i>); <i>number of killed</i>: 107; <i>admission of guilt</i>: yes; <i>identity of looters</i>: people at the shipyard (?) joined by crowds from the common populace (<i>al-ʾamma</i>); young rabble (<i>aḥḍāṭ al-nās</i>) and commoners (<i>ʾāmmatuhum</i>); <i>executors of countermeasures</i>: [ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus (deputy of financial affairs)]; Yānis al-Ṣaqlabī, deputy of caliph in Cairo; al-Yānisiyya police force; Masʿūd al-Ṣaqlabī, chief of police; Abū Aḥmad Ġaʿfar, commander of Yānis • LOOTING AND COUNTERMEASURES: <i>looters</i>: pillaged residence, i.e. the house of Mātak, near shipyard and elsewhere, belongings [or "goods" (<i>al-amṭiʿa</i>)] of Byzantines; threw their bodies into the streets; arrested and imprisoned survivors in the shipyard; <i>countermeasures</i>: interrogation of accused, letter to al-ʿAzīz, circulation of police in markets calling for return of loot and threatening punishment; Yānis secured city; <i>looters</i>: played with heads of the slain, dragged corpses through streets, tied them together and burned them on the Nile shore (Saturday, 25 Rabīʿ II); <i>countermeasures</i>: warning and persecution of looters; 20 men decapitated and crucified, 23 flogged and paraded through streets with heads of Byzantines hanging from their necks, others imprisoned on the basis of notes drawn haphazardly; loot searched relentlessly; people report on others; imprisonment of additional looters who swear oaths; looters decapitated (Thursday, 8 Ġumādā I); markets closed; display of power by chief of police with fire-bearers; beating, public exposure of, and speech to group of arrested men; amnesty for those who return loot within a week

Figure 1: Comparative table summarising the different depictions of events

[§23] According to Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, the fleet was supposed to set out 12 Rabīʿ II 386 [4 May 996]. Although he reports that the fire broke out in the shipyard of Old Cairo (*Miṣr*) on the scheduled day of departure, he does not specify whether this corresponded to the originally planned date. This could explain the discrepancy to the two versions in al-Maqrīzī, which locate the shipyard in al-Maqs and date the fire twelve days later, to 24 Rabīʿ II 386 [16 May 996]. Whereas Yaḥyā speaks of accusations and violence against foreign “Byzantine ... merchants

⁴⁹ Cahen, *Un texte peu connu*, p. 5.

bringing wares to Egypt” (*tuḡḡār al-Rūm ... al-wāridīn bi-l-baḍāʾiʿ ilā Miṣr*), al-Maqrīzī speaks of violence against “Byzantine captives” (*al-Rūm al-asārā*) who were plundered in a house near the shipyard in the shorter version, and of “Byzantine Christians” (*al-Rūm al-naṣārā*) residing near the shipyard in the longer version. Yaḥyā’s looters are made up of a mob and Maghrebis, whereas al-Maqrīzī attributes violent action to “the common people” (*al-ʿamma*) in the shorter version, and, additionally, to younger rabble (*aḥdāṭ al-nās*), in the longer account. Yaḥyā speaks of 160 deaths, al-Maqrīzī of 107. Whereas Yaḥyā suggests that the Byzantine [Amalfitan] merchants were innocent victims, al-Maqrīzī has the Byzantines confess their crime in both versions. Yaḥyā describes how looting first hit the merchants’ residence, then the Melkite and finally the Nestorian church. Al-Maqrīzī, in turn, defines the extent of looting through the sum of 90,000 dīnārs in both versions, and suggests in the longer version that the looters did not only target the Byzantine’s house, but also other objects that were considered part of the caliph’s property or “sanctuary” (*ḥarīm*). Whereas Yaḥyā describes Ibn Naṣṭūrus as immediately taking action against the plundering mob, al-Maqrīzī has him teaming up with the chief of the police and taking measures against selected looters while beginning to construct a new fleet. Al-Maqrīzī’s longer version citing al-Musabbīḥī describes the authorities’ measures in detail, pointing to the violent actions of the looters and highlighting the terror produced by the police. It parallels Yaḥyā’s account in that it ties the looters’ individual punishment to pieces of writing assigned to them haphazardly. It is noteworthy that al-Maqrīzī’s longer account frames their punishment as a response to sedition and the plundering of the caliph’s “sanctuary” (*ḥarīm amīr al-muʿminīn*), not as a retribution for their attack on Christian merchants, their residence, and their churches.

[§24] While it is difficult to establish the precise reasons for these variations, Yaḥyā’s and al-Maqrīzī’s accounts certainly have different implications. Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd presents us with a seemingly unfounded accusation against foreign merchants associated with Byzantium who, in the tense atmosphere of current Fāṭimid–Byzantine relations, become victims of mob violence. Violence is not only directed against these persons and their property, but also against the church representing their confession, then against other Christians as well. The mob is assisted by Maghrebis, possibly disgruntled regime supporters, but is stopped energetically by the acting Christian vizier and then punished in a rather haphazard manner by order of the caliph. Al-Maqrīzī, in turn, presents us with an accusation against Byzantines that turns out to be true. While killing seems to be confined to these perpetrators who had every reason to prevent a fleet from setting out against Byzantium, looting must have gone beyond the Byzantines’ direct environment if it created damages amounting to 90,000 dīnārs and was regarded as an aggression against the caliph’s property. In both of al-Maqrīzī’s versions the mob violence is neither directed against foreign traders nor against Christian infrastructure, and it does not result in the death of a Nestorian bishop.

Contextualization, Analysis & Interpretation

[§25] Taking into account these rather different accounts of the same event, the following paragraphs give an overview on the main interpretations of Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd’s narrative that have been formulated in scholarship. These revolve around two central topics—first, the attitude of the Fāṭimid government and Egyptian Muslim society vis-à-vis non-Muslims, both resident subjects and foreign visitors (§§26–31); second the role played by Amalfitans in Egypt at the end of the tenth century (§§32–35).

[§26] The pogrom described by Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd and recounted by al-Maqrīzī on the basis of an earlier source was directed against Christians, regardless of whether we define them as foreigners or locals, be they merchants, captives, or simply Christians. Both Yaḥyā and al-Maqrīzī insist that the perpetrators were harshly punished by order of the caliph, either by the

Christian functionary Ibn Naṣṭūrus, or by Ibn Naṣṭūrus and representatives of the Cairo police. The behaviour of the common people and of the authorities have been commented upon by scholars who used this episode to illustrate the Fāṭimid handling of their non-Muslim subjects.

[§27] The standard interpretation runs as follows: the Fāṭimids belonged to a minority group of Ismāʿīlī Islam and their particular creed was not shared by the Sunnī majority population of Egypt. In view of tensions with the Sunnī establishment, the ruling dynasty was more open vis-à-vis other religious minorities and foreign non-Muslim merchants. According to Shelomo Dov Goitein, the fact that the Fāṭimids represented only a small minority “contributed to a trend of tolerance in their conduct of government and to a general leniency toward other minority groups.”⁵⁰ In the words of Claude Cahen, the Fāṭimids, “mistrusting the orthodox Muslims,” tended to draw on the services of Jews and Christians.⁵¹ Regarded in this vein, the pogrom of 386/996 cannot be explained solely as mob violence against perceived saboteurs in the context of Byzantine–Fāṭimid hostilities, but as a popular act of venting anger against groups privileged by a little loved governing elite, partly composed of non-Muslims wielding authority.

[§28] Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd’s narration of events provides much evidence for interreligious and intrasocietal tensions in Egypt—but not only under the Fāṭimids. In his chronicle, he describes two earlier pogroms. They took place in 349/960 and 350/961, i.e. under Iḥšīdid rule, and followed a pattern very similar to the one dealt with here. According to Yaḥyā, the two earlier pogroms also took place in reaction to tensions with Byzantium—in this case Byzantine victories in Syria and Crete. Mob violence initially targeted the Melkite church and subsequently the churches of what he refers to as the “Jacobites” (*al-Yaʿqūbiyya*) and “Nestorians” (*al-Naṣṭūriyya*). During the second pogrom, the Iḥšīdid government sent forces to quell the disturbance.⁵² As in 386/996, plundering and killing also extended to Christian factions who were neither foreigners, nor linked to Byzantium or the Melkite rite. This has prompted Maciej Czyż to establish an interdependence between Fāṭimid–Byzantine tensions and anti-Christian violence in Syria and Egypt during the tenth and early eleventh centuries that cannot be regarded as the result of specifically Fāṭimid policies vis-à-vis the religious groups of Egypt.⁵³

[§29] Yaḥyā’s account also points to alternative sources of tensions in Egypt. In his description of the pogrom of 386/996, he mentions the participation of Maghrebis, possibly Kutāma. As already stated above, the Kutāma were gradually losing influence on the Fāṭimid rulership they had helped to build up. Maghrebi participation in the pogrom can possibly be read in this light, also considering that the career of the person who stopped the pogrom, i.e. ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus, ended abruptly in 387/997, around one year after the shipyard fire, thanks to Kutāma intervention. Under al-ʿAzīz, Ibn Naṣṭūrus held an eminent position. In 383/993, he had been entrusted with the administration of government (*naẓār fī l-umūr*) and honoured with the title “our most illustrious master” (*sayyidunā al-ağall*); after al-ʿAzīz’s death, he was arrested by Ibn ʿAmmār, leader of the Kutāma faction, on the grounds of excessive and illegal taxation, and eventually executed.⁵⁴ This suggests that violence against Christians was not necessarily

⁵⁰ Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, vol. 1, p. 31.

⁵¹ Cahen, Un texte peu connu, p. 6: “On sait combien, se méfiant des musulmans orthodoxes, ils avaient au contraire, là, largement utilisé les services des Juifs et des Chrétiens.”

⁵² Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part I, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 778–780, 782–783; Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, pp. 92–93, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/86>; *ibid.*, pp. 95–96, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/89>.

⁵³ Czyż, *Byzantine Reconquista*, 369–387.

⁵⁴ Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Histoire*, Part II, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 442, 451; Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, pp. 228, 238, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/222>, <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/232>; Lev, *Army*, pp. 344–347.

religiously motivated, but directed against a faction of society that seemed to have gained the upper hand in securing the caliph's favour.

[§30] It is remarkable that al-Maqrīzī's two versions of the event seem to downplay the interreligious component of the conflict. Although al-Maqrīzī mentions tensions between Kutāma and other groups, they are not mentioned in the passages relevant here.⁵⁵ However, even more than Yaḥyā, al-Maqrīzī's longer account based on al-Musabbihī highlights the extreme degree of violence used vis-à-vis these Christians and their corpses, as well as the harshness of the government crackdown on the looters who were, in a number of cases, punished by decapitation and crucifixion. Viewed from this angle, the pogrom of 386/996 could be explained in line with Maurice Canard who regarded the pogrom as an extremely violent outburst of accumulated frustration, claiming that "discontent provoked a popular movement against the Christians, following the burning of the fleet (...)." ⁵⁶

[§31] Shainool Jiwa took a decisive stance against opinions that hold Fāṭimid favouritism of non-Muslim minority groups responsible for the pogrom of 386/996. She underscores that the Fāṭimid caliphs, because of their independence of Sunnī 'ulamā' and the special spiritual role attributed to them in the Ismā'īlī creed, had more freedom to engage with other religious groups than Sunnī rulers.⁵⁷ She also emphasises that Jews and Christians had played a very important role in the Egyptian administration already before the Fāṭimid takeover, a situation to which the Fāṭimids had to adapt.⁵⁸ Rather than interpreting frequent and well-documented complaints of Sunnī Muslims against high-standing Jewish and Christian government functionaries as indicating rising frustration among the Sunnī community,⁵⁹ Jiwa argues that al-'Azīz always had an open ear for Sunnī complaints and tried to deal with all religious and confessional groups equitably in line with his "humane attitude" vis-à-vis people of all faiths.⁶⁰ In consequence, Jiwa seems to regard the pogrom of 386/996 as a singular incident that was directed against Byzantine or Italian foreigners in a situation of Byzantine–Fāṭimid tensions. "A couple of churches were also plundered and a bishop was severely injured in the incident (...)," but the vizier and the chief of the police "eventually restored tranquillity" and punished the perpetrators "according to a judgement proclaimed by the Fāṭimid ruler."⁶¹

[§32] A completely new angle of discussion was opened up by Claude Cahen. By highlighting the Amalfitan background of the Christian victims, he saw an additional foreign policy dimension in this outburst of anti-Christian violence that was only peripherally linked to Fāṭimid-Byzantine tensions because it concerned Fāṭimid Egypt's relations to the Latin West.

[§33] Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd did not feel particularly well informed about the Latin West. At the beginning of his chronicle, he explains that he will provide information on the patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople, but not on the patriarchs of Rome. He claims that he lacked secure information (*lam yaḥṣal lī asmā' uhum 'alā l-taḥqīq*) and could not find them in the diptychs (*fī l-dibṭiḥun*), concluding that "neither the name nor the memory of

⁵⁵ But see Lev, *Army*, pp. 344–347.

⁵⁶ Canard, *al-'Azīz*, p. 824.

⁵⁷ Jiwa, *A Study*, p. 134; Jiwa, *Religious Pluralism*, p. 3; Brett, *Realm of the Imām*, pp. 447–448.

⁵⁸ Jiwa, *A Study*, p. 134. Halm, *Kalifen von Kairo*, pp. 13, 226.

⁵⁹ See, e.g. Halm, *Kalifen von Kairo*, p. 127: "Der wachsende Einfluß nichtmuslimischer Beamter machte böses Blut." On these complaints, see Ibn al-Aʿīr (d. 630/1233), *Al-Kāmil fī l-tārīḥ*, sine ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir), AH 386 [996 CE], vol. 9, p. 117; Ibn al-Aʿīr, *Al-Kāmil fī l-tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, vol. 7, p. 476, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/21712/4207>; Catlos, *To Catch a Spy*, p. 105 FN 17. A list and short description of leading functionaries under al-'Azīz bi-llāh in al-Imad, *The Fatimid Vizierate*, pp. 164, 172–173.

⁶⁰ Jiwa, *A Study*, pp. 131–133, 141 (quote); Jiwa, *Religious Pluralism*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Jiwa, *A Study*, pp. 144–145, 242–243 (quote).

any one of them has been recorded in the lands of Egypt and Syria because of the lack of news about them and the geographical distance of their country.”⁶²

[§34] In spite of this clear evidence for lacking interconnections between Egypt and Latin Christendom, Cahen believed in an intensive relationship between Amalfi and the Fāṭimid ruling elite. He regarded Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd’s reference to the 160 dead as evidence for a sizable Amalfitan merchant community in Cairo. Pointing to Amalfitan trade with Aḡlabid North Africa at the end of the ninth century, he thought it possible that the Amalfitans linked up to the emerging power after the Fāṭimid takeover of North Africa in 297/909, thus becoming “the artisans and, in any case, the beneficiaries of the Fāṭimid conquest of Egypt.”⁶³ Suffering from a lack of wood and metal,⁶⁴ exacerbated by Byzantine embargos dating from 960 and 971,⁶⁵ the Fāṭimids needed the Amalfitans to provision them with these goods. Consequently, the Amalfitans rose to a privileged position in Egypt, where they did not only become active in Alexandria, but in the Fāṭimid capital Cairo itself. For Cahen, the special relationship between the Fāṭimids and the Amalfitans also explains the harsh punishment of the looters in 386/996: “The conduct of the Caliph al-‘Azīz in 996, once the first wave of popular fury had passed, clearly shows that he did not want, at any cost, to lose their services.”⁶⁶

[§35] There is no concrete evidence for this “special relationship” between Amalfi and the Fāṭimids apart from Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd’s depiction of the pogrom in 386/996. However, we do possess evidence for active transmediterranean commerce with late Aḡlabid North Africa⁶⁷, e.g. in Slavic slaves⁶⁸, and an Amalfitan involvement in this in the late ninth century.⁶⁹ The Amalfitans may have become acquainted with the Fāṭimids, when the latter took power in Ifrīqiya at the beginning of the tenth century. This does not prove, however, that they moved to Egypt together with the Fāṭimids. Egypt was frequented by foreign traders already before the Fāṭimid takeover, including by merchants from Venice and the Byzantine Empire.⁷⁰ Amalfitan traders, possibly considered as a group belonging to the wider Mediterranean domains of Byzantium, did not need a special relationship with the Fāṭimids to participate in this. Consequently, scholarship on Amalfi’s early trade relations certainly regards Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd’s report as evidence for the expansion of Amalfitan trade in the pre-crusade era, but has only cautiously taken up Cahen’s proposition of a special relationship.⁷¹ Scholarship on Fāṭimid Egypt, in turn, has accepted Cahen’s argument that the Fāṭimids were dependent on the Amalfitans for the import of wood,⁷² whereas Geniza research has brought to light documents attesting Amalfitan trade with Fāṭimid Egypt in the mid-eleventh century, i.e. after the pogrom.⁷³

⁶² Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Histoire*, Part I, ed. Kratchkovsky, trans. Vasiliev, pp. 706–708: “lam yarfa‘ li-aḥad minhum fī bilād Miṣr wa-l-Šām ism wa-lā ḡīr li-inqitā‘ aḥbārihim wa-bu‘d bilādihim (...)” Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd, *Tārīḥ*, ed. Tadmurī, p. 19, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/14512/14>.

⁶³ Cahen, *Un texte peu connu*, p. 7: “les artisans et en tous cas les bénéficiaires de la conquête fatimide de l’Égypte”; Cahen, *Commercial Relations*, pp. 15–16.

⁶⁴ Lombard, *Un problème cartographié*, pp. 234–254.

⁶⁵ Arona, 971: *The Decretum Venetorum*.

⁶⁶ Cahen, *Un texte peu connu*, pp. 7–8, p. 8: “Le comportement du Calife al-‘Azīz en 996, une fois écoulé le premier flot de la fureur populaire, signifie bien qu’il ne voulait à aucun prix perdre leurs services.”; Cahen, *Le commerce d’Amalfi*, p. 292.

⁶⁷ Bosanquet, *Maritime Trade*, pp. 108–128.

⁶⁸ Mishin, *The Saqaliba Slaves in the Aghlabid State*, pp. 236–244.

⁶⁹ Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, pp. 55, 61, 80–82.

⁷⁰ Paziienza, *Venice*, p. 157; Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade*, p. 175; Laiou, *Exchange and Trade*, pp. 723–725, 728–729, esp. p. 728.

⁷¹ Citarella, *Relations of Amalfi*, p. 303; Citarella, *Patterns in Medieval Trade*, p. 554; Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, p. 82.

⁷² Lev, *The Fāṭimid Navy*, p. 242.

⁷³ Simonsohn, *Jews in Sicily*, vol. 1, no. 107, pp. 105–107 (1046 CE); *ibid.*, vol. 1, no. 113, pp. 237.

[§36] In his study of Muslim military and commercial engagement with and in the Mediterranean, Christophe Picard stated with utmost conviction that the pogrom of 386/996 was “committed by a population infuriated by fiscal advantages granted to Latin merchants.”⁷⁴ While there exists no evidence for a Fāṭimid grant of fiscal advantages to Amalfitan traders, the preceding review of the different scholarly approaches to Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd’s report suggests that the events dealt with here do not only concern a group of foreign traders and that it is necessary to paint a more multifaceted picture. The anti-Christian pogrom can be interpreted against the backdrop of Fāṭimid-Byzantine hostilities, Fāṭimid religious policy, interreligious and interconfessional tensions, as well as transmediterranean commercial relations that are also attested elsewhere, e.g. in connection with the trade in Slavic slaves.⁷⁵ While we may regard Yaḥyā’s perspective as fraught with a pro-Christian bias⁷⁶—in spite of his entirely unpolemical treatment of Jews and Muslims throughout the chronicle⁷⁷—his narrative sheds important light on how foreign policy concerns, intrasocietal tensions, and transmediterranean trade relations came together to play out on interreligious relations. Against this backdrop, we may ask ourselves what motivated al-ʿAzīz bi-llāh and his functionaries to resort to a rather curious and seemingly haphazard form of punishment that put to death one group of looters, punished another less harshly, and let the third go. Allotted arbitrarily, this punishment does not seem to have been meted out in relation to the severity of the offence. Possibly, it served to cater to the demands of all groups involved in the tensions that produced this outburst of violence: those who wished to restore order and to avoid future pogroms by setting a radical example; victims of the pogrom who wanted to be reassured of governmental enforcement of their legal claims; and discontents who may have regarded violence against Christian foreigners and/or the Christian populace with its high-ranking representatives as legitimate.

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⁷⁴ Picard, *Sea of Caliphs*, p. 136.

⁷⁵ König, 903–906: Die Raffelstettener Zollordnung.

⁷⁶ Frequently evoked by Jiwa, *A Study*, pp. 137, 141.

⁷⁷ Forsyth, *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, p. 3.

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Appendix: The Alternative Narratives in the Works of al-Maqrīzī

The Shorter Version in *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā*

Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā' bi-ahbār al-a'imma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-ḥulafā'*, vol. 1, ed. Ḡamāl al-Dīn al-Šayyāl, Cairo: al-Maḡlis al-a'lā li-l-šū'un al-islāmiyya, 1967, AH 386, p. 290, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/176/334>.

وفي العشرين منه رفع العزيز إلى غيفة فنزل بالعقارية بعد أن أقام في مناخه أربعة أشهر وخمسة وعشرين يوماً، فأقام بها ليلة، ورفع إلى بلبيس فنزل بظاهرها.

On the twentieth [of this month, i.e. Rabī' al-Āḥir, i.e. 12 May 996], al-ʿAzīz marched to Ḡayfa and encamped at al-ʿAqāriba after having remained at his previous camp for four months and twenty-five days. He stayed there one night, then proceeded to Bilbays and encamped in its environs.

ونودي في البلد لا يتأخر أحد عن المسير في الأسطول، فوقعت في الأسطول نار، فاحترق وقت صلاة الجمعة لست بقين من ربيع الآخر، فأنت على ما فيه من عدة وسلاح، حتى لم يبق منه غير ست مراكب، لا شيء فيها، فاتهم بذلك الروم الأسارى، وكانوا في دار بجوار الصناعة بالمقس، فنهبتهم العامة، وقتلوا منهم مائة وسبعة أنفس.

A proclamation was made in the city that no one should delay in joining the fleet. Then a fire broke out in the fleet, and it burned at the time of the Friday prayer, with six days remaining in the month of Rabī' al-Āḥir [16 May 996]. It consumed all the equipment and weapons therein, leaving only six ships, with nothing in them. The Byzantine captives (*al-Rūm al-asārā*) were accused of this; they were in a house near the shipyard (*dār bi-ḡiwār al-šinā'a*) at al-Maqs. The common people (*al-ʿamma*) plundered them, and killed one hundred and seven of them.

وحضر عيسى بن نسطورس ويانس الصقلي متولي الشرطة إلى الروم، فاعترفوا بأثم أحرقوا الأسطول، فكان ما ذهب في النهب نحو تسعين ألف دينار، فنودي برد النهب، وتوعد عليه.

ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus and Yānis al-Šaqlabī, the chief of police, went to the Byzantines, and they confessed that they had burned the fleet. The value of what was lost in the plundering amounted to about ninety thousand dīnārs. So a proclamation was made to return the plunder, and threats were made regarding it.

وشرع عيسى بن نسطورس في إنشاء اسطول جديد، وظفر بعده من النهابة، فقتل بعضهم، وحبس بعضهم بعد الضرب الشديد، فأحضر كثير مما نهب.

ʿĪsā b. Naṣṭūrus then set about constructing a new fleet. He later seized some of the looters: some were killed, and others were imprisoned after severe beating, and much of what had been plundered was recovered.

The Longer Version in *al-Mawāʿiz* citing al-Musabbiḥī (366–420/977–1030)

al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiz wa-l-i'tibār bi-ḡikr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa-l-āṭār*, ed. Ḥalīl Maṣṣūr, Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1998, vol. 3, pp. 342–343, URL: <https://shamela.ws/book/11566/1249>.

وقال في حوادث سنة ست وثمانين وثلاثمائة: ووقعت نار في الأسطول وقت صلاة الجمعة، لست بقين من شهر ربيع الآخر، فأحرقت خمس عشاريات وأنت على جميع ما في الأسطول من العدة والسلاح واتهموا الروم

Concerning the events of the year 386/996, he [al-Musabbiḥī] related: A fire broke out in the fleet at the time of the Friday prayer, with six days remaining in the month of Rabī' al-Āḥir [16 May 996]. It burned five squadrons and destroyed all the equipment and weapons in the fleet. They accused the Byzantine Christians (*al-Rūm al-naṣārā*) who

النصارى، وكانوا مقيمين بدار ماتك بجوار الصناعة التي بالمقس، وحملوا على الروم هم وجموع من العامة معهم، فنهبوا أمتعة الروم وقتلوا منهم مائة رجل وسبعة رجال، وطرحوا جثثهم في الطرقات، وأخذ من بقي فحبس بصناعة المقس،

ثم حضر عيسى بن نسطورس خليفة أمير المؤمنين العزيز بالله في الأموال ووجهها بديار مصر والشام والحجاز، ومعه يانس الصقلي، وهو يومئذ خليفة العزيز بالله على القاهرة عند مسيره إلى الشام، ومعهما مسعود الصقلي متولي الشرطة، وأحضروا الروم من الصناعة فاعتزفوا بأنهم الذين أحرقوا الأسطول، فكتب بذلك إلى العزيز بالله وهو مبرز يريد السفر إلى الشام، وذكر له في الكتاب خبر من قتل من الروم وما نهب، وأنه ذهب في النهب ما يبلغ تسعين ألف دينار،

فطاف أصحاب الشرط في الأسواق بسجل فيه الأمر برد ما نهب من دار ماتك وغيرها، والتواعد لمن ظهر عنده منه شيء، وحفظ أبو الحسن يانس البلد وضبط الناس، وأمر عيسى بن نسطورس أن يمد للوقت عشرون مركبا، وطرح الخشب وطلب الصناع وبات في الصناعة، وجد الصناع في العمل،

وأغلب أحداث الناس وعامتهم يلعبون برءوس القتلى ويجرون بأرجلهم في الأسواق والشوارع، ثم قنوا بعضهم إلى بعض على ساحل النيل بالمقس وأحرقوا يوم السبت، وضرب بالحرس على البلد، أن لا يتخلف أحد ممن نهب شيئا حتى يحضر ما نهبه ويرده، ومن علم عليه بشيء أو كتم شيئا أو جحدته أو أخره، حلت به العقوبة الشديدة،

وتتبع من نهب فقبض على عدة قتل منهم عشرون رجلا ضربت أعناقهم، وضرب ثلاثة وعشرون رجلا بالسياط،

had been residing in the house of Mātak near the shipyard at al-Maqs. Joined by crowds from the common populace (*al-‘amma*), they attacked the Byzantines, looted their belongings [or “goods,” “merchandise” (*al-amti ‘a*)], killed one hundred and seven men among them, threw their bodies into the streets. The rest was arrested and imprisoned in the shipyard at al-Maqs.

Then ‘Īsā b. Nastūrus—deputy of the Commander of the Faithful, al-‘Azīz bi-llāh, over financial affairs and their administration in Egypt, Syria, and the Hiḡāz—arrived, accompanied by Yānis al-Ṣaqlabī, who at that time was al-‘Azīz’s deputy in Cairo while he was on his way to Syria, and with them Mas‘ūd al-Ṣaqlabī, the chief of police. They brought the Byzantines from the shipyard, and the latter confessed that they had burned the fleet. This was written to al-‘Azīz bi-llāh, who was preparing to depart for Syria. The letter informed him who of the Byzantines had been killed and what had been plundered, and that the loot taken amounted to ninety thousand dīnārs.

The police circulated through the markets with a decree (*siḡill*) ordering the return of whatever had been plundered from the house of Mātak and elsewhere, threatening punishment for anyone found in possession of stolen goods. Abū l-Ḥasan Yānis secured the city and maintained order among the people, whereas ‘Īsā b. Nastūrus ordered that twenty ships be completed immediately; timber was supplied, craftsmen were summoned, and he spent the night at the shipyard while the craftsmen worked diligently.

Meanwhile, many of the rabble (*aḥḍāt al-nās*) and commoners (*‘āmmatuhum*) played with the heads of the slain and dragged them by their feet through the markets and streets. Then they tied some of the corpses together on the Nile shore at al-Maqs and burned them on Saturday. Guards were posted throughout the city with orders that no one who had looted anything should fail to present what he had taken and return it. Anyone known to possess something, conceal it, deny it, or delay returning it would face severe punishment.

Those who had looted were pursued; several were seized, and twenty men were executed by decapitation. Twenty-three others were flogged

وطيف بهم وفي عنق كل واحد رأس رجل ممن قتل من الروم، وحبس عدة أناس، وأمر بمن ضربت أعناقهم فصلبوا عند كوم دينار، وردّ المضربون إلى المطبق، وكان ضرب من ضرب من النهاية وقتل من قتل منهم برقاع كتبت لهم، تناول كل واحد منهم رقعة فيها مكتوب إما يقتل أو ضرب، فأمضى فيهم بحسب ما كان في رقايعهم من قتل أو ضرب، واشتد الطلب على النهاية فكان الناس يدل بعضهم على بعض، فإذا أخذ أحد ممن اتهم بالنهب حلف بالأيمان المغلظة أنه ما بقي عنده شيء.

وجد عيسى بن نسطورس في عمل الأسطول وطلب الخشب، فلم يدع عند أحد خشباً علم به إلا أخذه منه، وتزايد إخراج النهاية لما تحبوه، فكانوا يطرحونه في الأزقة والشوارع خوفاً من أن يعرفوا به، وحبس كثير ممن أحضر شيئاً أو عرف عليه من النهب،

فلما كان يوم الخميس ثامن جمادى الأولى ضربت أعناقهم كلهم على يد أبي أحمد جعفر صاحب يانس، فإنه قدم في عسكر كثير من اليبانسية حتى ضربت أعناق الجماعة، وأغلقت الأسواق يومئذ وطاف متولى الشرطة وبين يديه أرباب النفط بعددهم والنار مشتعلة، واليبانسية ركاب بالسلاح، وقد ضرب جماعة وشهرهم بين يديه وهم ينادي عليهم هذا جزء من آثار الفتن ونحب حريم أمير المؤمنين، فمن نظر فليعتبر فما تقال لهم عثرة ولا ترحم لهم عبرة في كلام كثير من هذا الجنس،

فاشتد خوف الناس وعظم فرعهم، فلما كان من الغد نودي: معاشر الناس قد آمن الله من أخذ شيئاً أو نحب شيئاً على نفسه وما له، فليرد من بقي عنده شيء من النهب، وقد أجلناكم من اليوم إلى مثله،

and paraded through the streets, each with the head of one of the slain Byzantines hanging from his neck. Others were imprisoned. It was ordered that those decapitated were crucified at Kawm Dīnār. Those who had been beaten were brought to the prison. And those looters who had been beaten or killed had been beaten or killed on the basis of a note written for them. Each of them took a written note which specified whether the person would be killed or beaten, and this was executed according to what their respective paper had said with regard to killing or beating. The search for the loot continued relentlessly, and people began reporting on one another. When anyone accused of looting was seized, he would swear solemn oaths that nothing remained in his possession.

ʿĪsā b. Nastūrus pressed on with rebuilding the fleet and demanded timber, taking any wood he knew of from its owners. Increasing amounts of loot were taken from those who had seized it, and some threw it into alleys and streets out of fear of discovery. Many who brought something back or were known to have looted were imprisoned.

On Thursday, the eighth of Ġumādā al-Ūlā [29 May 996], all of them were decapitated by Abū Aḥmad Ġaʿfar, the commander of Yānis, who arrived with a large force of Yānisiyya troops in order to decapitate this group. The markets were closed that day. The chief of police paraded with a large number of fire-bearers (*arbāb al-naḥāṭ*) before him and flames blazing, while the Yānisiyya rode armed. A group of men were beaten and publicly exposed before him as he proclaimed to them: “This is the punishment of those who stir up sedition and plunder the sanctuary of the Commander of the Faithful. Let whoever sees take warning!” No misstep was excused, nor was any mercy shown to them.

Fear among the people intensified greatly. The next day a proclamation was made: “People, God has granted safety to anyone who took or looted anything with respect to his person and property. Let whoever still has something of the plunder return it. We grant you respite from today until the same day next week.”

وفي سابع جمادى الآخرة نزل ابن نسطورس إلى الصناعة
وطرح مركبين في غاية الكبر من التي استعملها بعد
حريق الأسطول، وفي غرة شعبان نزل أيضا وطرح بين
يديه أربعة مراكب كبارا من المنشأة بعد الحريق، واتفق
موت العزيز بالله وهو سائر إلى الشام في مدينة بلبيس.

On the seventh of Ġumādā al-Āḥira [27 June 996],
Ibn Nastūrus went down to the shipyard and
launched two enormous ships constructed after the
burning of the fleet. On the first of Sha‘bān [1
August 996], he again descended and launched four
large ships newly built after the fire. It happened
that al-‘Azīz bi-llāh died while traveling to Syria,
in the city of Bilbays.