



# A supplementary investigation tracing the Christians under the Shadow of Muslim Rule in the Emirate of Crete (ca 825/6-961 CE): the Case of the Treaty of Naxos in John Caminiates' narration of the Sacking of Thessaloniki in 904 CE

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## Abstract

This article is divided into two parts. The first part deals with a treaty which was concluded between the inhabitants of the island of Naxos with the authorities of the emirate of Crete as it appears in the Byzantine source of Caminiates' *Capture of Thessaloniki* (904 CE), an autographic narration written by an eye witness. Most probably this was a common law treaty. In the second part, which originates from Caminiates' narration, enriched with relevant additional material, the most striking point to emerge is the brief description of the little known activities of the local people of Crete during the time of the Arab dominance of Crete (ca 825/6-961). The study of the fate of the local Christian people (autochthons) who lived under the shadow of the Muslim rule of the emirate of Crete has hitherto been neglected and requires further research with emphasis on the preservation of the local Church.

**Keywords:** Naxos, emirate of Crete (ca 825/6-961), common law treaty, autochthons, Arab conquerors

## Research Methodology

The approach towards a universal interdisciplinary study of history is a dominant contemporary trend. This approach in the field requires knowledge of Oriental sources and their proper evaluation in connection with the other sources, a task which is difficult to be accomplished. The present author, using the original Arabic text of several Arabic sources in combination with the Greek text of the relevant Byzantine sources, focuses his attention on the study of the Islamic dominion of Crete under the Muslim Arabs (ca. 825/6-961 CE) and its impact on the life and culture of the indigenous population. Thus, in his article "A supplementary investigation tracing the Christians under the Shadow of Muslim Rule in the Emirate of Crete (ca 825/6-961 CE): the Case of the Treaty of Naxos in John Caminiates' narration of the Sack of Thessaloniki in 904 CE", the demonstrates that although the Arab-Islamic conquest of Crete jeopardized the Byzantine maritime trade in general, local trade was not interrupted among the islands in the southern Aegean.

Moreover, a scrutiny of Caminiates' narration reveals that no forced Islamization was applied by the Muslim Arabs on the Christian population of Crete, although limited cultural influence cannot be denied. More research is however undoubtedly needed based on the various new archaeological finds in Crete, which will be presented at a conference in Chania, Crete in March 2019. The author is the president of the organizing committee. His exceptional background of Classical Greek and good



knowledge of the Arabic language and culture have enabled him to choose and work on interdisciplinary historical projects.

## Introduction

At the turn of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Crete was abruptly changed from a Byzantine island into a small Islamic Sunni emirate, loosely connected with the Abbasid state (Christides, 1984; 2016). The absence of information in all relevant sources does not permit us to reconstruct the socio-political changes of the local Christian population which took place during the Muslim occupation of the island. Thus, direct sources dealing with the legal status of the local Cretan Christian inhabitants remain unavailable in contrast to Egypt where the papyrological evidence clearly reveals the legal status of the non-Muslim Egyptians (Tillier, 2013).

Paradoxically, a Byzantine source, Caminiates' narration, which describes the Arab sack of Thessaloniki in 904 by Leo of Tripoli and his return trip to Tripoli, includes an oblique reference to an important legal action undertaken by the Muslim authorities of the emirate of Crete, i.e. a special peace treaty between the Muslim authorities of the emirate and the Christian inhabitants of the island of Naxos. Caminiates' narration also yields information about the local Christian inhabitants of Crete whose existence can hardly be traced in any sources (Böhlig, 1973; Tsaras, 1987; for the Greek text and the Modern Greek translation see Tsolakis, 2000). His narration is in sharp contrast to the descriptions by reliable Arab historians who wrote the events many years after they had taken place, using previous, but now lost sources.

The authenticity of the work of Caminiates and the personality of Leo of Tripoli have been discussed by many modern authors (Kazhdan 1978; Christides, 1981; Farag, 1989; Odetallah, 1995), and any further discussion goes beyond the scope of the present author. Odetallah also undertook the task of comparing the attitude of Leo of Tripoli's soldiers towards the Byzantine captives with a similar attitude of the Byzantines towards the Arab prisoners on their raid against Damietta in 853 (Odetallah, 1983:47).

Legal details about the treaty are not mentioned since Caminiates simply reports that Leo's fleet "arrived in Naxos from which the inhabitants of Crete received taxes" ("Κατήχθημεν εἰς τινα νῆσον καλουμένην Ναξίαν ἐξ ἧς οἱ τὴν Κρήτην οἰκοῦντες φόρους λαμβάνουσιν") (Tsolakis, 2000:174, §70.). The nature of this treaty will be discussed based on our knowledge of the Arab Islamic law (*fiqh*) in connection with the relevant Byzantine law. Moreover, certain relations between the subjugated natives of Crete and the Andalusian Arab conquerors will be also traced, although the information is laconic and irritatingly vague.

The treaty of Naxos has been compared to the peace treaty of Cyprus, according to which the Cypriots, like the inhabitants of Naxos, paid a yearly tribute to both the Byzantine emperor and to the Arabs (Pitsillides & Metcalf, 1995; Beihammer, 2003; Christides, 2006:34-35). Nevertheless, the treaty of Cyprus was a complicated one with international implications, while that of Naxos was a marginal agreement, as it will be seen further in this study (for Cyprus' international position, see Letsios, 2017: 600-601; Koutrakou, 2017:149).

The treaty of Cyprus was probably a written document because of its military importance although no extant copy has survived. On the other hand, the Naxos simple trade treaty was most likely oral and for this reason it does not appear in any historical source. It should be added that the treaty of Cyprus, although basically a peace treaty of neutralization, also contained the obligation of the Cypriots to observe and report on



the movements of the Byzantines around the island, information hitherto unnoticed (Balādhuri, ed. 'A. al-Tabbā'a, 1987, 210; for the Arabic sources concerning the treaty of Cyprus see Christides, 2006:34, n. 97).

The treaty of Naxos can be better compared to the treaty between the inhabitants of the Byzantine city of Barqa in Cyrenaica and the Arab general 'Amr bn. al-'Āṣ in 642, according to which, without involving the Byzantine authorities, the inhabitants of Barqa, mainly Berber Laguatan, arranged to conclude a peace treaty (*ṣulḥ*) with the Arabs. They had to pay a tribute (*jizya*) of 13,000 dinars (Yāqūt, ed. F. A. Al-Djundi, 1990:463; Balādhuri, 1987, Ar. text 314; trans. by Hill, 1971:55). The inhabitants of Barqa had no further obligation and the Arabs withdrew without leaving any military force to secure the collection of the taxes which were sent to the Arabs by the inhabitants of Barqa (Christides, forthcoming). If we examine the Naxos treaty within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), we can assume that it could have been arranged according to one of two types. According to the first, a non-Muslim state could conclude a peace treaty (*ṣulḥ*) (Beihammer, 2003:170) with an Islamic state, the only stipulation being payment of a fixed amount of tribute, usually yearly, without any other obligation. Additionally, the non-Muslim state was permitted complete independence (Ḥamīdullāh, 1977:104). The Christian Spaniards under the Muslim rule enjoyed a limited judicial independence presided over by their own Christian judge (*qāḍī'l-'ajam*) (Castejón Calderón, 1948). Therefore, had the Naxians arranged to have such a peace treaty, obviously the island would have been free, outside the territory of the Arab emirate of Crete, subject only to taxation, while maintaining its absolute independence.

According to the second type of treaty, in case that in 904 the Andalusian Arabs of Crete had conquered Naxos temporarily, its inhabitants would have had to pay the fixed taxes that were required of non-Muslim (Christians or Jews) inhabitants of an Islamic state, known as *dhimmis* (Khadduri, 1955:220). Similarly, the tax paid by the *dhimmis* is usually called *jizya*, but often the term *kharāj* is also used which basically means "agricultural tax" (for the often confusion of the Arabic terms about taxes, see Hitti, 2002:171).

We should not also reject the idea of trying to understand the nature of the Naxos treaty by noting the social conditions which prevailed in Naxos at the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> century as they are reflected in Caminiates' narration. It is my view that the Naxos treaty was not concluded according to any specific Arab or Byzantine written law, but instead it was based on the local oral tradition circulating in the southern Aegean at the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Actually both the Arabs and the Byzantines recognized such supplementary oral law, which was called "ἐθιμικό δίκαιο" in the Byzantine sources and *'urf* in the Arabic (Khalilieh, 1998:15). According to M.-G. Lily Stylianoudi, during the period before the Crusades, parallel to the official Byzantine law that followed the Roman law, the "ἐθιμικό δίκαιο" (common law) emerged. It was strongly related to the everyday social problems of the average citizens (Stylianoudi, 2009:89). This oral "common law" was spread among all the Cycladic islands in the southern Aegean and it fluctuated constantly until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it was replaced by the written law (Kasdagli, 2009:441).

The local small-merchant trade among these islands, especially between Naxos and Crete, greatly facilitated the exchange and transportation of agricultural products (Nikolaou, 2004:306; Poulou Papademetriou, 2014). It seems, therefore, that the treaty reported in Caminiates' narration was possibly a local oral agreement following those traditional patterns.



It is of particular interest that the Arab law (*fiqh*), as mentioned above, also included a similar ethical oral law called *urf*, based on local customs. Although it was not incorporated into the Islamic written law (*sharī'a*), it was recognized by the different Islamic law schools of the Sunnīs (Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī, a.o.), Shī'ites (Zāhirīs, a.o.) (Khalilieh, 1998:15). We can assume that the Muslim conquerors of Crete easily accepted the Byzantine oral law which coincided with their own concerning hospitality and well treatment of travelers. Thus, as M. Leontsini pointed out (2017:221), the natural advantage of trade connecting the islands of the southern Aegean continued even during the period of the Arab dominance of Crete (Gerolymatou, 2004:73).

### **Autochthons (αὐτόχθονες) Cretans and Andalusian Cretans (Κρήτες) in Caminiates' narration of the Sack of Thessaloniki by the Arabs in 904. Further information**

Beyond Caminiates' detailed information of Leo of Tripoli's sack of Thessaloniki in 904 and his adventures on the return journey to Tripoli of Syria, we can also glean some vague but important evidence on the activities of the local Christians of Crete who lived under the Muslim dominance and about whom there is almost total silence in all historical sources. Caminiates makes a clear differentiation between the local Byzantine population under the Muslim dominance and the Andalusian settlers of Crete. He calls the former "αὐτόχθονες" (autochthons) (Tsolakis, 2000:186, §74, 2) and the latter "Κρήτες" (Cretans) (Tsolakis, 2000:176, § 71, 4): "οἱ τὴν Κρήτην οἰκοῦντες" (those residing in Crete) (Tsolakis, 2000:184, §73, 5). The almost unnoticed reference to the "autochthons" is of unique importance. It shows that the local Muslim Andalusian inhabitants of Crete lived side by side with the local Christian population with whom they interacted at least in their capital of Handax. Unfortunately, no more details about the local people are reported by Caminiates, save their task to entertain Leo's soldiers (to be reported further in this study).

If we accept the theory that Naxos had been conquered by the Arabs of the emirate of Crete at the time they concluded their special treaty with Naxos, we can discern some coordination between the Muslim Andalusian conquerors of Crete and the local Christian population of Naxos. Caminiates reports that the inhabitants of the island of Naxos not only welcomed the captains of Leo's army but they also offered gifts to them (Tsolakis, 2000:174, §70, 2), most probably in agreement with the Andalusian Cretan authorities.

Concerning the activities of the Andalusian conquerors of Crete, there is only a bleak image of them in Caminiates' narration. They simply appear as if they were solely engaged in slave trade (Tsolakis, 2000:184, §73, 5-6). Tsaras' statement, based on the exaggerated image that occupied Arab Crete had become a devil's nest and "the greater slave trade center in the whole of the Near East", cannot be accepted (Tsaras, 1987:132). This misconception is actually caused by his confusion with the situation which prevailed in Crete (Christides, 2013:199, n. 1) and Naxos (Gasparis, 2009:211) in later periods, after the eleventh century. Caminiates' narration does describe certain cases of buying and selling slaves (Tsolakis, 2000:184, §73, 5-6), but those were infrequent instances, and the general spirit which is clearly noticeable is a frantic effort even by Leo of Tripoli, who appears to be a bloodstained monster, to secure as many Byzantine prisoners as possible in order to exchange them with the Arabs captured by the Byzantines. It is worth mentioning here that when Leo's fleet was battered by a fierce storm and it was almost inevitable that he would throw some of the Byzantine captives overboard in order to lighten the ship to save it, Leo refused to take that action



although it was permitted by the Islamic law (Khalilieh, 1998:96). His decision can be explained by his desire to save the lives of the Byzantine captives and keep them for the Arab-Byzantine exchange of prisoners (Tsolakis, 2000:188-191, §75- 76).

It is of particular interest to note that the moral obligation of a state to see to the liberation of its captives is usually placed in the seventeenth century (Resser and Zwierlein, 2013:406). This should be considered inaccurate. It can be traced at least as far back as the ninth century during the time of the Arab-Byzantine struggle. Both Arabs and Byzantine paid special attention to liberating their captives whether by ransom or exchange as early as this period (Campagnolo-Pothitou, 1995:52).

### **Speculative assumptions concerning the legal system of the Andalusian conquerors and the indigenous population of Crete. Further information about the socio-political changes of the local people during the Arab occupation**

The above-mentioned treaty of Naxos is the only reference we possess concerning any legal relations between the Andalusian Muslim conquerors of Crete and the indigenous population of Naxos. Undoubtedly, as it happened in other Christian countries conquered by the Muslim Arabs, the Muslim community of the Andalusian conquerors of Crete, which was augmented by a great number of Muslim newcomers from other countries, established a legal system based on Muslim legislation. We do not have any detailed reference to the Islamic regulations imposed on occupied Crete because there are only scattered references in the Arabic sources (Christides, 1984:114-115). We know the name of the *qāḍī* of Crete, Fath bn. al-'Alā' (Ḥimyari, 1975:51) and the existence of a number of learned jurists, some of them born in Crete and others visiting this island from other Muslim states (Ḥimyari, 1975:51).

While such prominent jurists residing in the emirate of Crete are reported in the Arabic sources, there is no concrete information about the judicial system the Arabs used on this island. Most probably, the institution of the *qāḍī* (judge) was applied to the Muslim inhabitants of Crete, as we can assume from the reference mentioned above to *qāḍī* Fath bn. al-'Alā' (Ḥimyari, 1975:51). Concerning the judicial system of the indigenous Christian population, nothing is reported in Caminiates' narration since his only interest was to describe what happened to the Byzantine captives transported by Leo of Tripoli. Caminiates provided us with only brief references to the servile attitude of the local people towards their Andalusian conquerors. He vividly describes how after disembarking in Handax, the capital of the emirate, Leo's army paraded on horseback triumphantly through the streets of the city, headed towards a place to pray, obviously the mosque of Handax, and how afterwards they were entertained by the local people (autochthons) of Crete (Tsolakis, 2000:186, §74, 2-3). Thus, by this casual remark, it appears the autochthons served their Andalusian masters.

Caminiates does not indicate the language in which the Andalusian conquerors communicated with the local people of Crete who served them and he does not add anything further regarding the relations between the Andalusians and the indigenous people. Some limited information concerning the existence of the autochthons of Crete and their hostile reactions towards their Andalusian masters can be drawn from the work of the Byzantine author, Leo Diaconus, as Panayotakis indicated (1960). He correctly pointed out that certain allusions in the work of Leo Diaconus indicate that a number of local Cretans, whom he calls "ἠγεμόνας τῶν τόπων ἰθαγενεῖς ἄνδρας" (men who were local native leaders), cooperated with the Byzantine invading army of Nicephorus Phocas which liberated Crete in 961 (Panayotakis, 1960:63, n. 197).



The only source which sheds a little more light in a rather confusing way is the *Vita* of Nikon o Metanoeite, which will be discussed in the following appendix.

## Appendix

### **Nicon o Metanoeite and the problem of the Islamic influence of the Andalusian Arabs on the indigenous population of occupied Crete**

Nicon o Metanoeite is the nickname of St. Nicon who acquired this name because he constantly used the word “metanoeite” (repent) in all his sermons, which he had borrowed from St. John the Baptist’s sermons. According to his *Vita*, which was published with a long preface and a thorough commentary by Lampsidis (2007), St. Nicon was born in Pontos in 928 (Lampsidis, 2007:475) and died on his way from Sparta to Corinth in 1005 (Lampsidis, 2007:477). His fame peaked during the time of the emperor Nicephorus Phocas (963-969) (Lampsidis, 16: lines 31-32). His *Vita* reports that although St. Nicon was born into a wealthy, aristocratic Byzantine family, he renounced his family and wealth. After spending a few years in a monastery, he wandered around the Byzantine Empire barefoot and dressed in rags, preaching repentance.

Of unique importance is the visit of Nicon o Metanoeite to the island of Crete (Lampsidis, 2007, 178), which took place in 962, just one year after its liberation by Nicephorus Phocas in 961 (for Phocas’ invasion of Crete, Christides, 1984, 172-191; Markopoulos, 1988, Koliass, 1993; Kremp, 1995, 345; Christides, 2017:46; Karapli, 2017:73, 77; Gigourtakis, 2017:55). Nicon o Metanoeite crossed the whole island preaching “repentance” to the inhabitants who had passed a long period under the shadow of the Muslim Arabs. One would expect that on the one hand, Nicon o Metanoeite would describe the attitude of the indigenous population towards the Arab conquerors, and on the other hand, he would present some glimpses of at least something positive in the Arab occupation.

The meager information we have concerning the treatment of the Arab rulers towards the indigenous population of Crete reveals the usual Muslims’ tolerance towards the *ahl-al-dhimma* (people of the covenant) which also extended to the Jewish population of the island (Christodoulakis, 2011:70-71; Christides, 2016:141). It is worth mentioning here Christodoulakis’ remarks that in the *Martylogion* of the Eastern Church, in which a large number of martyrs are listed, none are dated to the period of the Arab occupation of Crete (ca. 825/6 – 961) (Christodoulakis, 2011: 69). Occupied Crete was developed into a frontier Sunnī emirate which, thanks to the island’s excellent agriculture, developed close trade relations with the other Islamic states, especially Egypt. It is from Egypt that a Cretan *dīnār*, now in the Royal Cabinet in Stockholm, made its way to Sweden (Christides, 2016,142). Simultaneously, an urban culture developed in Handax, the capital of Crete (Kremp, 1995:345; Ballan, 2015:8). The constantly increasing archaeological finds (Starida, 2011,116-118), due to the recent excavations, along with the numismatic evidence (Miles, 1970; Barcelo, 1983; Mazarakis, 2013), amply attest to the prosperity of the island.

None of the positive aspects of the emirate of Crete mentioned above are reported in Nicon o Metanoeite’s *Vita*. The short reference to the prevailing situation in Crete at the time of Nicon’s visit in Crete- just a year after its liberation by Nicephorus Phocas- is infused by a strikingly hostile spirit. The narration is in reality a sermon of exhortation of the inhabitants who were accused of contaminating Christianity with the unscriptural Islamic beliefs of the conquerors (Lampsidis, 2007:46, 178-180). Lampsidis’ suggestion



that the original first version of the *Vita*, in which St. Nicon's visit to Crete is included, was written by the Saint himself, with only a few later insertions, seems reasonable (Lampsidis, 2007: 343-344, 376). The *Vita* represents the rigid religiosity which characterized Nicon's previous sermons, exacerbated by his enmity towards the Islamic religion.

Nicon o Metanoeite's *Vita*, replete with inflammatory exaggerations, has led a number of modern scholars to assume that the whole population of occupied Crete had converted to Islam by force (for a fresh look at the old discussions, see Lampsidis, 2007:413-415). Such a view is easily rejected since the Arabs, in general at this period, faithfully followed the Islamic prohibition of forced Islamization which is explicitly mentioned in the Koran. Also the theory is false that part of the indigenous population residing in Handax, was forced to convert to Islam while those living in the countryside and the mountains remained Christians (Panayotakis, 1961-1962; Voulgarakis, 1963:263-264). Probably a small number of Christian town dwellers could have converted to Islam willingly, but this type of Islamization must have been reduced to a slow process.

Unfortunately, Nicon o Metanoeite's reference to the transformation of the Cretan society after the Arab occupation adds only limited information to our knowledge. He states bluntly that the social structure of the whole Crete was contaminated by the mores (ἤθησι) of the Arab conquerors, without giving any details (Lampsidis, 2007, 46, §16, line 16). Obviously, he does not imply any wholesale conversion of the local Cretans to Islam, as has been wrongly assumed by some modern scholars, as mentioned above, but he accuses the whole Christian population of acquiring certain habits of the Arab conquerors including the Arabic language.

Similarly, in Egypt we notice that Arabization and various other mores of the Arab conquerors were acquired by the local society before the conversion to Islam of most of its inhabitants which took place on a grand scale much later (Garcin, 1987: 131-132; O'Sullivan, 2006; Sijpesteijn, 2007:451-455; Parker, 2013:222).

Another argument of the supposedly total Islamization of Crete during the Arab dominion, based on Nicon's *Vita*, is that during his visit in Crete, Nicon built a number of churches (Lampsidis, 2007, 48, §21 lines 12-13). Therefore, it has been concluded that no churches existed in occupied Crete because, supposedly, they had been destroyed by the Arab conquerors. However, Nicon, full of his Christian zeal, also built churches in other places which had not been deprived of churches (Lampsidis, 62, §22: lines 17-18). We should take into consideration that, according to the Islamic rules, no churches of the *dhimmis* (people of the covenant) were permitted to be destroyed or pillaged, although no new churches were allowed to be constructed (Khadduri, 1955:214). Of course, violations of this rule did occur, often caused by vengeance, following news about the Byzantines' destruction of Islamic mosques. The most conspicuous example is reported by the reliable author Yahya bn. Sa'īd al-Anṭāqī (for his reliability, see Micheau, 1998). In his chronicle, he describes the violent reaction of the people of Cairo when they were informed that Nicephorus Phocas had conquered Crete in 961 and destroyed its mosques. They rioted and pillaged some Christian churches in Cairo, but finally they were restrained by the Egyptian authorities (Kratchkovsky & Vasiliev, 1924, 782 [84], 783 [85]).

Nicon o Metanoeite's efforts were not restricted to returning the small number of the converted Cretans to the fold, but mainly to restraining the whole population of Crete from the gradual Arabization and acquisition of other Arab habits, like the Mozarabs in Muslim Spain. In Spain the longer period of the Arab occupation had resulted in the



complete Arabization of a large portion of the population which nonetheless remained Christian and used the Arabic language (Aillet, 2008; Molénat, 2008; Monferrer Sala, 2008). Gradually, the Mozarabs used the Arabic language even in the churches, but only partly in the liturgy (Roisse, 2008:215-216).

## Conclusions - Remarks

To sum up, Crete was not transformed into a pirates' nest during the Arab occupation but into a frontier Sunni emirate, loosely connected with the Abbasid state. It was ruled by a series of emirs who nominally accepted the supreme authority of the Abbasid caliphs. Based on his admirable numismatic research, G. C. Miles attempted to reconstruct a list of the emirs of Crete which was only partly successful (Miles, 1963). Most of the names of the emirs he discovered are correct, but the dating of each ruler is rather speculative (Miles, 1963; Christides, 2016:141-142). A precise chronological order still needs to be completed.

Details about the activities of each of the emirs are lacking. We only have some information about the first emir, Abū Ḥafṣ, the leader of the Andalusian Arabs who landed on Crete in 825-826, and the last emir 'Abd al-'Azīz who surrendered to the Byzantines in 961 (Christides, 1984:183). According to the Arabic sources, Abū Ḥafṣ (d. 231/846) became the leader of the Andalusian conquerors only at the time of their departure from Egypt (ca. 826) (Christides, 2015), where they found refuge after they had been expelled from Spain (ca.818). 'Abd al-'Azīz, the last emir of the emirate of Crete, is described in the Byzantine sources as a fierce old man who was captured by the Byzantines and treated kindly (Christides, 1984:183), but who refused to convert to Christianity.

Crete remained basically an agrarian country during the Arab rule and its trade with the other Islamic states brought it great prosperity, as attested by the abundant coins made of gold, silver and copper that have been discovered (Miles, 1970; Barcelo, 1983; Mazarakis, 2013). In addition, a Geniza letter, written in Judeo-Arabic by Joshua Holo, also reveals the prosperity of Crete at the time of the Arab occupation (Christides, 2006:164-166). Although Caminiates was solely interested in the fate of the Byzantine captives, in his description of the conquest of Thessaloniki in 904 and their transportation from Thessaloniki to Syria, he indirectly offers some glimpses of the situation in occupied Crete. Likewise, Nikon o Metanoeite, a keen eye-witness author, who visited Crete a year after its liberation by Nicephorus Phocas (961), focuses his attention on the alteration of the character of the local population under the shadow of the Muslim conquerors. He laments not only over the conversion of some Christians to Islam, but in a broader context, over all Christian dwellers of Crete who, like the Mozarabs in Spain, were influenced by the language and mores (ἥθεισι) of the Muslim conquerors. To end this discussion, it should be noted that the gap between the Andalusian conquerors of Crete and the indigenous inhabitants of the island was not unbridgeable, in spite of the differences in language and religion.

The treaty of Naxos demonstrates a certain early assimilation between the Arab conquerors and the local people. Nikon o Metanoeite's hagiographical narration, on the one hand, shows an alteration of the true Christian spirit of the indigenous population, but on the other, it manifests a certain sharing of customs between the two parties. The lack of evidence of the destruction of any Byzantine churches, with a few exceptions, reveals the flexible spirit of Islam towards the *ahl al-dhimma* (protected people), which was also applied by the Muslim conquerors of Crete. Actually, the theory that the cathedral of St. Tito in Gortyne was burnt during the Muslim occupation



(Kalokyris, 1980: 150, n. 70) has been rejected by most archaeologists (Orlandos, 1926: 308-319; Baldini, 2009: 644-645).

Further research is needed concerning any destruction of the churches but especially about the attitude of the Muslim conquerors towards the Christian Church of Crete. Hopefully, the new archaeological research will shed more light on this little known period of Cretan history.

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