

The Conversion from Islam to Christianity as viewed by the Author of *Digenes Akrites*

[La conversion del islam al cristianismo vista por el autor de
Digenes Akrites]

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Resumen: El autor de *Digenes Akrites* señala al cristianismo del momento como la religión superior y presenta tres modelos de conversiones del islam al cristianismo. Este polémico texto, que se encuentra en *Digenes Akrites*, es muy interesante, pues se sitúa entre el pensamiento tradicional bizantino de corte polemista y el sentido literario. Este artículo se ocupa de esos casos de conversiones del islam al cristianismo, tal como fueron vistos por el autor de *Digenes Akrites*, con el propósito de indagar sobre lo que el autor de la obra conocía del islam.

Abstract: The author of *Digenes Akrites* aimed to present Christianity as the superior religion and he presented three patterns of conversions from Islam to it. This polemical piece, which is found in *Digenes Akrites*, is very interesting, since it moves between the Byzantine polemical traditional thought and the literary sense. The present paper deals with those cases of conversions from Islam to Christianity as viewed by the author of *Digenes Akrites* with the aim of investigating what the author of the work knew about Islam.

Palabras clave: Islam y cristianismo. *Digenes Akrites*. Conversión desde el islam. Bizancio y los musulmanes. Épica bizantina.

Key words: Islam and Christianity. *Digenes Akrites*. Conversion from Islam. Byzantium and Muslims. Byzantine epics



Undoubtedly, the epic of *Digenes Akrites*¹ has a special importance in the Byzantine literature, which is derived from its unique subject about the Byzantino-Islamic conflict on the Eastern common frontiers² or the traditional conflict between Islam and Christianity in the middle ages.³ These frontiers brought to light some known epics that showed the ideological, psychological, and social nature of the Byzantine and Arab inhabitants there. During the war, these frontiers were fiery, while at the time of peace they were a civilizational common bridge, which combined between Byzantium and the Arabs on the eastern frontiers. V. Christides, who indicates that there were mutual literary influences between the two sides,⁴ where the first three chapters of the epic of *Digenes Akrites*⁵ are

¹ Maybe the story of this epic dates to around the first quarter of the tenth century, and its description, whether first in oral form or in writing, to the same period or rather later. (See Michael J. JEFFREYS, "Digenis Akritas and Kommagene", *Svenska Forskningsinstitutet i Istanbul Meddelanden* 3 (Stockholm, 1978), p. 17 (henceforth JEFFREYS, "Akritas and Kommagene").

² On these frontiers see John HALDON and Hugh KENNEDY, "The Arab Byzantine frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organizations and Society in the Borderlands", *Recueil des travaux de l'institut d'études byzantines* 19 (1980), pp. 79-116; Nicholas OIKONOMIDÈS, "L' épopée de Digénis et la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X^e-XI^e siècles", *Travaux et Mémoires* 7 (1979), pp. 375-397. (henceforth OIKONOMIDÈS, "L' épopée de Digénis"); Hélèn AHRWEILER, "La frontière et les frontières de Byzance en orient", in *Actes du XIV^e congrès international des études byzantines, 1971* (Bucharest, 1974), pp. 209-230.

³ Astérios ARGYRIOU, "L' épopée de Digénis Akritas et la littérature polémique et d'apologétique islamo-chrétienne", *Byzantina* 16 (1991), pp. 7-34. (henceforth ARGYRIOU, "L' épopée de Digénis Akritas")

⁴ As for the Arabic influence on the main structure of the epic *Digenes Akrites* see Vassilios CHRISTIDES, "Arabic Influence on the Akritic Cycle", *Byzantion* 49 (1979), p. 97 ff.

⁵ There are many versions of this epic, but I will depend on the most ancient versions, Grottaferrata and Escorial. The first version was transcribed between 1250 and 1300, the second version between 1450 and 1500 (Roderick BEATON, "Was *Digenes Akrites* an Oral Poem?", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 7 (1981), p. 11 [henceforth BEATON, "Oral Poem"]) As for the editions of the epic see *Digenis Akritis. The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions*, edited and translated from Greek by Elisabeth JEFFREYS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), (henceforth *Dig. Akr. Esc.*); *Digenes Akrites*, edited and translated from Greek by John MAVROGORDATO (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), (henceforth *Dig. Akr. Gro.*); Erich TRAPP, *Digenes Akrites. Synoptische Ausgabe der ältesten Versionen. Wiener Byzantinistische Studien*, No. 8. (Wien, 1971); A. J. SYRKIN, *Digenis Akritis* (Moscow: Moskva. Izdat. Akad. Nauk SSSR, 1960), in Russian; S. KYRIAKIDIS, *Ὁ Διγένης Ἀκρίτας* (Athens, 1926); Constantinos SATHAS et Emile LEGRAND, *Les exploits de Digénis Akritas. Épopée byzantine du dixième siècle. Publiée pour la première fois d'après le manuscrit unique de Trébizonde* (Paris, MDCCCLXXV); S. IOANNIDIS, *Ἱστορία καὶ Στατιστικὴ Τραπεζοῦντος καὶ τῆς περὶ ταύτην χώρας* (Constantinople, 1870). For the modern studies about these versions see Roderick BEATON and David RICKS (eds.), *Digenes Akrites. New*

actually an Arabic saga, proves it. This is the part where the exploits of Digenes' father are narrated.⁶

While on the Byzantine side, there is the epic of Digenes Akrites, whose scenario is similar to that of the Arabic one, *al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah*,⁷ there are additional epics such as 'Umar b. al-Nu'mān⁸ and Sayyid Ghāzī al-Baṭṭāl,⁹ which have common literary elements with *Digenes Akrites* and *al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah*.¹⁰ For instance, in the epic of 'Umar b. al-Nu'mān, Rumazān, whose father is an Arab and mother is an abducted Greek, is a Muslim who was born and reared in Greek territory. He converted his kin-folk to Christianity.¹¹ This part is similar to the story of *Emir* of Syria, father of *Digenes Akrites*, as we will see.

Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry (Aldershot: King's College London, 1993); Michael J. JEFFREYS, "Digenes Akritas Manuscript Z", *Δωδώνη* 4 (Ioannina, 1975), pp. 163-201; Linos POLITIS, "L'Épopée byzantine de Digenes Akritas. Problèmes de la tradition du texte et des rapports avec les chansons akritiques", in *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: la poesia epica e la sua formazione 1969. Accademia dei Lincei* (Rome, 1970), pp. 551-581 (rep. *Paléographie et littérature byzantine et néo-grecque* [London, 1975], XX); Alexandre SOLOVIEV, "La date de la version russe du Digénis Akritas", *Byzantion* 22 (1952), pp. 129-132; Constantin DANGUITZIS, "Le problème de la version originale de l'épopée byzantine de Digénis Akritas", *Revue des études byzantines* 5 (1947), pp. 185-205; Henri GRÉGOIRE, *Ὁ Διγενής Ἀκρίτας, ἡ βυζαντινὴ ἐποποιία στὴν ἱστορία καὶ στὴν ποίησιν* (New York, 1942); IDEM, "Une nouvelle version du roman de Digénis Akritas", *Byzantion* 4 (1927-28), pp. 171-178. H. Grégoire wrote also numerous articles most of which were published in a single volume under the title *Autour de l'Épopée byzantine*, «Collected Studies Series» 40 (London: Variorum, 1975). On studies about this epic see: http://opac.regestimperi.de/lang_en/suche.php?qs=&ts=Dig%C3%A9nis&ps=&tags=&jahr=&thes=&sprache=&sortierung=d&pagesize=20&objektart=&page=1

⁶ CHRISTIDES, *Arabic Influence on the Akritic Cycle*, p. 96.

⁷ *Sīrat al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah* (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-Sha'biyah, 1981), 7 vols. Cf. Nabīlah IBRĀHĪM, *Sīrat al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah Dirāsah Muqāranah* (Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, 1994); Marius CANARD, "Delhemma, épopée arabe des guerres arabo-byzantines", *Byzantion* 10(1935), pp. 283-300; IDEM, "*Dhu-l-Himma*", *EF*², II, pp. 240-246.

⁸ See V. CHRISTIDES, "An Arabo-Byzantine Novel 'Umar al-Nu'mān Compared with Digenēs Akritas", *Byzantion* 32 (1962), pp. 549-604.

⁹ See Rashād M. KHAMIS, *Sīrat Sayyid Baṭṭāl Ghāzī fī l-qaṣaṣ al-sha'bī al-turkī wa-athar al-ṣirā' al-islāmī al-bizantī*, Ph.D. dissertation (Ain Shams University, Cairo, 1988).

¹⁰ Christides thinks that the first part of the Arabic epic *al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah* and the story of 'Umar b. al-Nu'mān are from the oral and written repertoire of the Umayyad period without any direct relation between them. (CHRISTIDES, *Arabic Influence on the Akritic Cycle*, p. 101.)

¹¹ CHRISTIDES, "An Arabo-Byzantine Novel", p. 562.

In the first part of the epic, which is the history of the father of *Digenes Akrites*, an Arab *Emir*, descended from a Paulician origin,¹² the author of the epic presents Christianity as the superior religion and presented three cases of conversion from Islam to it. This polemical piece, which is found in *Digenes Akrites*, combines between the Byzantine polemical traditional thought and the literary sense. This paper deals with the cases of the conversions from Islam to Christianity as viewed by the author of *Digenes Akrites* and stresses his knowledge about Islam and its relation with the polemical writings of the Byzantine polemicists.¹³

The epic begins with an Arab raid on Cappadocia commanded by an Arab *Emir*,¹⁴ called Mousour,¹⁵ which ended with the abduction of a Byzantine girl, the daughter of a Byzantine general of Kinnamus' family, and a mother of Constantine Doucas' family.¹⁶ Here the fortune-tellers had predicted that an Arab *Emir* will be

¹² OIKONOMIDÈS, *L'épopée de Digénis*, p. 377. Because there was an alliance between the Paulicians who were persecuted by the Byzantine Church, and the Arabs against Byzantium, the author gave the *emir*'s family Paulician names, except the name Ambron, to combine between his family and the heresy of the Paulicians. The alliance between the Paulicians and the Arabs was obvious in the case of the *emir* of Melitene, 'Umar al-Aqta' (Ambron in the epic), and the *emir* of Tarsos 'Alī b. Yahyā al-Armanī. See Nicolas ADONTZ, "Les fonds historiques de l'épopée byzantine Digénis Akritas", in *Études Armeno-Byzantines* (Lisbonne: Livraria Bertrand, 1965), pp. 15, 18 (henceforth Adontz, *Les fonds historiques*); Tarek M. MUHAMMAD, *Al-Muslimūn fī l-fikr al-masīhī: al-'Aṣr al-wasīlī* (Cairo: Masr al-Arabia for Publishing and Distribution, 2008), pp. 241-244. About the Paulicians and Byzantium see *Peterus Siculus Historia*, J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), PG CIV, cols. 1240-1349; George CEDRENIUS, *Compendium Historiarum*, ed. Immanuel BEKKER, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, II (Bonn, 1838), pp. 206-207, 209-212. Cf. Paul LEMERL, "L'histoire des Pauliciens d'Asie mineure d'après les sources grecques", *Travaux et Mémoire* 5 (1993), pp. 1-144; Dragoljub DRAGOJLOVIC, "The History of Paulicianism on the Balkan Peninsula", *Balkanica* 5 (1973), pp. 235-244; Henri GRÉGOIRE, "Autour des Pauliciens", *Byzantion* 9 (1936), pp. 610-614; ADONTZ, *Les fonds historiques*, pp. 16-18.

¹³ Because there is a long chain of papers and studies of famous Byzantinists who deal with many aspects of this epic, this paper will deal with the most important studies that relate to its main purpose.

¹⁴ About the Life of this *Emir* compared to the life of his son Basil Digenes Akrites see Mieke PENNINGCK, "Two Heroes, Two Lives in the Grottaferrata Digenes Akrites", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 31(2007), pp. 32-52.

¹⁵ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, XXX.

¹⁶ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, XXX & I.266-267. This genealogy is according to the version of Grottaferrata. But in another version the father is called Andronicus or Aaron, of the family of Ducas, and the mother is called Anna, of the family of Kinnamus or Magastrean. See *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 137-138; *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, XXX; ADONTZ, *Les fonds historiques*, pp. 9-12.

converted to Christianity and will kidnap her.¹⁷ The author gave him a nice and solemn description¹⁸ and introduced the incident of conversion from Islam to Christianity. The author referred to the beauty of Irene,¹⁹ which he made an enough reason for the conversion of the Arab *emir* to Christianity. He referred to the virginity of the girl (τυγγάγουσαν παρθένον), too.²⁰ It is a strange reference which leads to a question: what did it mean?

It may refer to the young age of the girl and her chastity or to the preference of the Arabs to marry the virgin girls.²¹ Mavrogordato, depending on the version of Andros, says, ‘When she was twelve years old and more beautiful than the moon she saw in the palace a picture of Love painted in the likeness of a little boy shooting with a bow, and one of her maids told her that this was the strong and terrible one, armed with arrows and fire, the conqueror, the salve-driver, bearing inkhorn and paper to his victims. She only laughed and said she was not afraid of his arrows, his lions, his fire, or his ink and paper.’²² This description indicates that she was still young and an adolescent. Therefore, she should not be carried off and married by an Arab *Emir*.²³

The author of the epic indicates that the *Emir* of Syria became a Muslim by his kinsmen, when he says: “My father died while I was still a baby; My mother gave me to my Arab kinsmen, who brought me up in faith (of Muḥammad).”²⁴ This is an indirect reference to show the reason of his adopting Islam. He points out the following:

“No generals resisted me, nor armies;
A woman though has conquered me most lovely,
Whose beauties burn me and whose tears consume;

¹⁷ ADONTZ, *Les fonds historiques*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁸ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.30-48.

¹⁹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.61,105.

²⁰ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.62.

²¹ There is a reference to this issue in some Prophetic traditions (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* [Beirut, 1978], no. 3746, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* [Beirut, 1954], no. 2998, *Kitāb al-Musāqāh*; *Sunan al-Nasāʾī*, ed. ‘A. Sulaymān and S. K. Ḥasan [Beirut, 1991], no. 3168, *Kitāb al-Nikāh*.)

²² *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, xxx. Cf. Michael J. JEFFREYS, “The Astrological Prologue of Digenis Akritas,” *Byzantion* 46 (1976), pp. 376-377.

²³ JEFFREYS, “The Astrological Prologue”, p. 385.

²⁴ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I. 286-288.

Her sighs enflame; I know not what to do.”²⁵

Therefore, the Arab *Emir* presents an offer to her brothers saying that he wishes to be baptized as a Christian, marry her, and come over with all his people to the Byzantine side.²⁶ To show her chastity, as a Christian girl, the author points out that she never kissed the *Emir* and never spoke to him.²⁷ To confirm this quality, the author made the *Emir* swear by the Good Prophet, the Great Muḥammad.²⁸ He ends this episode of the epic saying:

“They free the captives, they destroy armies,
Make man deny his faith and not fear death.”²⁹

After the arrival of the bride and her husband she also said, “Lord Christ, whoever hopes in thee has never failed of all that he desired.”³⁰

The version of *Esc.* confirms the marvelous beauty of the girl so that the *Emir* renounced every thing for the sake of her beauty and her high nobility.³¹ The remarkable point here is that this description indicates some Arabs were ready to renounce Islam for love or marriage to a beautiful Byzantine girl, i.e. he indicated that a carnal desire led the Arab *Emir* to do it. This reflects that Arabs were ready to renounce Islam for their carnal desire, especially love, which is repeated in book five of the version of *Gro.*³² Talking about this point leads us to deal with the second case of the conversion from Islam to Christianity in the epic and to put its reasons in focus.

The author begins with the strange tale of the most beautiful girl (πᾶνυ ὠραισιᾶτη), daughter³³ of the great *Emir* Haplorrabdes,³⁴ who lived with her father

²⁵ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.297-300.

²⁶ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.304-306; *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v.175-177. See also JEFFREYS, *Akritas and Kommagene*, p. 9. “If you deign have me as your sister’s husband, For the sweet beauty of your own dear sister I will become a Christian in Romania.”

²⁷ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.308.

²⁸ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 165.

²⁹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.333-334.

³⁰ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.38-39; *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 202-204.

³¹ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 175, 183-185, 218.

³² *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, V.1-289.

³³ In the copy of Oxford, she was called Aïssé. See *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, xlv.

and her mother Melanthia³⁵ at the city of Meferkeh.³⁶ She fell in love with one of her father's Byzantine captives, son of the Byzantine general Antiochus. They eloped together with horses and a treasure but at their first encampment beside a well, he deserted her and rode away. They slept three days together before his escaping with the gold. The behavior of her lover was unexpected and soon she ran on foot after him screaming, "Going dearest? Where are you leaving me alone? Have you forgotten the kindnesses I showed you? Remember not our first especial vows?" She had been there alone for ten days. The day before, an old man crossing the desert on his way to Arabia had told her how he had five days before seen her husband rescued from the brigand Mousour at a place called *Blattolivadi*, by the young Akrites.³⁷

At this moment, a band of a hundred Arabs attacked them and tried to carry her off, but Akrites scattered them. Then, she recognized him as the Akrites who had rescued her lover and he offered to lead her back to him. But Akrites made a condition to do it, which is, "if she would renounce the faith of the Aethiopians (ἐὶ καὶ τὸ σέβας ἀρνηθῆ τῶν ἀισχυρῶν Αἰθιοπῶν)."³⁸ At once, she answered that she had already been converted by her husband. Then, he took her on his horse to take her back to her lover.³⁹ Thus, the author made the girl renounce Islam and adopt Christianity for the returning of her escaped lover.

When they rested on the road, Akrites did not resist his desire and did commit the sin of adultery with her, though "she opposed the doing, calling on God and on her parents' souls."⁴⁰ While Akrites committed the sin of adultery with her, the author presented many acceptable reasons, as apologizing and excuses such as he was fifteen years old,⁴¹ i.e. he was still young to recognize what the sin was, the

³⁴ Maybe he was Abū Taghlib of Mayyāfāriqīn or Martyropolis, one of the Arab frontier towns like Melitene, who was an ally of Bardas Sklerus in 976. *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, 146, n. 2238.

³⁵ In the copy of Oxford, she was called Fatouma. See *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, xlv.

³⁶ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, V.66-68.

³⁷ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, V.15-175.

³⁸ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, V.178-223.

³⁹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, V.225-233.

⁴⁰ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, V.242-245. He describes these moments saying, "And when I took her up on my own horse, and we set out to go to Coppermines, I knew not what I was, I was all fire, Passion increasing utterly within me. So when we rested as for natural need-My eyes with beauty and my hands with feeling, My mouth with kisses and with words my hearing-I started to do all of lawless action, and every deed I wanted all was done.

⁴¹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, V.24.

Satan's help,⁴² who made him ready to forget God Himself,⁴³ and he did not resist her great beauty, which maybe was eye-catching in that desert. Thus, the author was interested in showing acceptable reasons for a sin of a Christian (Akrites).⁴⁴ In contrast, the reasons, which led the Muslim girl (daughter of Haplorrabdes) to make a lot of sins such as taking of her father's treasures and escaping with her Christian lover, her conversion to Christianity, and her marriage to a Christian youth, contradicting the Islam's regulations,⁴⁵ did not make sense except love.

Therefore, there are some questionable points: Are there real similar cases of conversions from Islam to Christianity because of love or beauty? Did the author of the epic derive this idea from reality? Alternatively, is it a poetic imagination?

To answer perfectly these questions we have to site the other literary epics, such as *al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah*, which is full of similar stories, aside and depend on the historical accounts.⁴⁶

Ibn al-Jawzī mentions an interesting story about one of the Arab fighters who converted from Islam to Christianity during their siege to a Byzantine fort in Asia Minor for love of a Byzantine woman. The story says, "'Abdat b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm said, we went in an incursion against the land of *al-Rūm*. A youth accompanied us. No one of us was most reading of the Qur'ān than him. He was fasting at day time and was praying at night. We passed by a fort and the soldiers moved away from it. Then, he disembarked near the fort. We thought that he went to urinate. He looked to a Christian woman, who was looking from the back of the fort, and he loved her. He said to her, in Greek, How could I reach you? She replied, when you become a Christian, the gate will be opened for you and I will be for you. He did and he had been entered into the fort...In another incursion, we returned (to the fort) and passed by him while he was standing up with the Christians and looking to us from

⁴² *Dig. Ak. Gro.*, V.248.

⁴³ *Dig. Ak. Gro.*, V.253.

⁴⁴ Akrites committed the sin of adultery again with Maximo, the Amazon woman, but the author made Maximo seduce him. So, to atone for his sin, Akrites killed her. See *Dig. Ak. Gro.*, VI. 3229-3294. Cf. also Elisabeth JEFFREYS, "Maximou and Digenis", *Byzantinoslavica* 57/2(1996), p. 369 ff.; M. JEFFREYS, "Akritis and Kommagene", p. 12; Muhammad, *al-Muslimūn fī l-fikr al-masīhī*, pp. 233-234.

⁴⁵ Islam allows the Muslim men to marry the *dhimmī* girls or women (Qur'ān 5:5 [*Sūrat al-Mā'idah*]) but it dose not allow the Muslim girls or women to marry the *dhimmī* men, unless the latter converted to Islam. (Qur'ān 2/221 [*Sūrat al-Baqarah*]).

⁴⁶ It will be useful to follow the approach of H. Grégoire's school, i.e. to compare the poetic events to the historical sources to reach to real similar events, not to hypothetical ones.

the rooftop of the fort. We said, 'O so and so, what about your reading (of the Qur'ān), your prayers, and your fast?' He replied, 'Know that I forgot all the Qur'ān except this verse:⁴⁷ *It may be that those who disbelieve wish ardently that they were Muslims, Let them eat and enjoy life, and let (false) hope beguile them. They will come to know.*'⁴⁸

Al-Isfahānī repeats the same story, but he made few changes. He referred to the great beauty of the Byzantine girl and he made Satan, who dominated that Muslim youth, made him deny Islam, and then he entered into the faith of the girl.⁴⁹ Thus, al-Isfahānī indicated the reasons that made this Muslim youth renounce Islam and convert to Christianity, the dazzling beauty of the girl and Satan's seduction. These are the same reasons, which were mentioned by the author of *Digenes Akrites* when Akrites committed the sin of adultery with the daughter of the Arab *Emir* Haplorrabdes.

When the Arabs returned in their second incursion, one of them said to him, 'would you like us to give them (the Byzantines) a ransom and set you free?' He thought for one hour and said, 'Go, God be with you.'⁵⁰ The last account of al-Isfahānī indicates that he hesitated to take an immediate decision and preferred to remain with his Byzantine beloved.

Thus, according to the story of ibn al-Jawzī and al-Isfahānī, love and beauty were the reasons of the conversion from Islam to Christianity, such as the case of the *Emir* of Syria who married Irene and the case of the daughter of Haplorrabdes who escaped with her Byzantine lover.

In 927 A.D./315 A.H., as Ibn al-Athīr said, an Arab called Ibn al-Daḥḥāq who had a fort on the Islamo-Byzantine frontiers called al-Ja'farī. This man denied Islam, converted to Christianity voluntarily, and went to the Byzantine Emperor who gave him many gifts and ordered him to return to his fort. Later the Arabs attacked him, led him into captivity, and killed his companions.⁵¹ The last case

⁴⁷ Qur'ān 15/2-3 (*Sūrat al-hijr*). Eng. trans. M. PICKTHALL: رَبُّمَا يَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ كَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ، ذَرَهُمْ يَأْكُلُوا وَيَسْتَمْتَعُوا وَيَلْبِغُوا الْأَمَلِ فَسَوْفَ يَتَلَوْنِ

⁴⁸ IBN AL-JAWZĪ, *al-Muntaẓim fī tārikh al-mulūk wa-l-umam* (Beirut: Dār Ṣāder, 1358), V, pp. 120-121.

⁴⁹ Abū l-Faraj AL-ISFAHĀNĪ, *Al-Aghānī*, ed. S. Jābir (Beirut: s.d.), VI, p. 127.

⁵⁰ AL-ISFAHĀNĪ, *al-Aghānī*, VI, p. 127.

⁵¹ IBN AL-ATHĪR, *Al-Kāmil fī l-Tārikh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiya, 1996), VII, p. 36.

indicates that the real conversion from Islam to Christianity or the opposite resembles an existing fact on the Islamo-Byzantine frontiers.⁵²

Al-Isfahānī mentions an early story that took place for another one during the time of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. He says that the post came from Constantinople to 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz in which we found this story: The messenger of the Umayyad Caliph who was sent to Constantinople to ransom the Arab captives heard someone singing two Arabic verses and was crying after them. Then, he went to his room and said, 'peace be upon you.' He replied the greeting. The messenger said to him, 'I am the messenger of *amīr al-mu'minīn* 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz to this tyrant (i.e. the Byzantine Emperor) to ransom the captives.' The messenger asked him, 'O man, who are you?' He replied, 'I am al-Wābiṣī,⁵³ I had been taken as a captive and tortured until I believed in their faith (i.e. Christianity).' The messenger asked al-Wābiṣī to return to Islam. But he replied, 'You want me to return to Islam, while I married a woman of them and these are my two boys from her?' He said, 'If I entered al-Madīnah they will say to me, O Christian (*yā naṣrānī*) and so to my boys and my wife!' Thus, al-Wābiṣī preferred to remain at Constantinople with his family and preferred to remain as a Christian and to enjoy drinking wine, and eating pork, as he said.⁵⁴

Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār refers to some incidents of real conversions from Islam to Christianity, but he attributed these cases to the hardship of captivity at Constantinople, i.e. they adopted Christianity as an obviation (*tuqyah*).⁵⁵ However, he mentions another story about one of the converted Muslims, which proves that the reasons that were mentioned by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār are unacceptable. He depended on some witnesses of the Arab captives who returned to the Islamic territories and became free, while the other Arabs, who converted and married Byzantine women, did not come back to their land, though they became free after their doing that.⁵⁶ One of the converted Arabs married, by the order of the

⁵² ARGYRIOU, "L'épopée de Digénis Akritas", p. 10.

⁵³ He was Al-Ṣalt b. al-'Āsī b. Wābiṣah b. Khālid b. al-Mughīrah b. Makhzūm. He was the *Emīr* of al-Ḥijāz. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz punished him, according to the Islamic faith, because of his drinking the wine. Then, he was angered and left al-Ḥijāz, going with the Muslims against the Byzantine territories (AL-ISFAHĀNĪ, *al-Aghānī*, VI, p. 125.)

⁵⁴ AL-ISFAHĀNĪ, *al-Aghānī*, VI, pp. 125-126; IBN AL-JAWZĪ, *al-Muntaẓim*, VII, p. 55.

⁵⁵ Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār AL-HAMADHĀNĪ, *Tathbūt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, ed. A. 'Uthmān (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabiyya, 1966), I, p. 171.

⁵⁶ AL-HAMADHĀNĪ, *Tathbūt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 171.

Byzantine Emperor to his retinue, a rich woman having a hamlet, cattle, and much money. This converted Arab said that he lived with her delighted (فأثمت معها مسروراً). He also worked as one of the Byzantine guards who were sent to guard the harvest of the Emperor with the other guards for every forty days. When he returned to Constantinople, he was informed that his wife had a boy friend during his absence. He thought that his wife married another man during his absence, but his mother-in-law told him that the Byzantines did not marry another one, and that he was her friend, who went when you came back. After his objection, his mother-in-law said to him, 'Go to your house and see the treasures and wine.' Then, he went to his house and lived unjealously with his wife.⁵⁷

It is evident that the Byzantine Emperor had a notable role in the conversion of some Arabs to Christianity through the privileges which were granted to the baptized Muslims by him.⁵⁸ Some of these privileges are mentioned in *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus.⁵⁹ He says that each one of them must receive three *nomismata* from the *protontarius* of them, six *nomismata* for their yoke of oxen, and fifty-four *modioi* of grain for their seed and provisions. He says also, 'Note that concerning captives given as son-in-law to households (οἴκου), whether the household which the Saracen son-in-law enters is military (στρατιωτικός) or civil (πολιτικός), it is exempted for three years from the land tax (συνουγή) and the hearth tax (καπνικόν). After the three years, this household is obliged once more to pay the land tax and the hearth tax.'

'Note that when the captives or others are given land for settlement, they remain free from all service to the fisc for three years, and they pay neither the hearth tax nor the land tax. After the companion of the three years, they pay both the land tax and the hearth tax.'⁶⁰

Thus, the story of al-Wābiṣī and the account of al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār made captivity the main reason of the conversion of these Muslims from Islam to

⁵⁷ AL-HAMADHĀNĪ, *Tathbūt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 171-172.

⁵⁸ AL-Amīn ABŪ SA'DAH, "Bizanta fi l-malāhim al-'arabiyyah: Qirā'ah fi Sīrat al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah", in Hātim AL-ṬAHĀWĪ (ed.), *Dirasāt fi tārikh al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā, Festschrift of Qāsim A. Qāsim* (Cairo: 'Ayn li-l-Dirasāt al-Insāniyyah wa-l-Buḥūth, 2003), p. 321.

⁵⁹ CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, ed. Io. Iac. REISKII, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1829), II, chap. 49, pp. 694-695.

⁶⁰ ERIC MCGEER, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 1995), p. 366; ARNOLD TOYNBEE, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World* (London: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 82-83.

Christianity.⁶¹ On the other hand, they proved that they preferred to stay at Constantinople with their wives instead of returning to the Islamic territories and to the hardship of *al-Jihād*, although the chance of their return existed. The same thing took place by the *Emir* of Syria who married Irene and so was the daughter of Haplorrabdes who escaped with her lover. The two persons, the *Emir* and the daughter of Haplorrabdes, preferred to go to the Byzantine territories to live there with their lovers, because they denied Islam and converted to Christianity. It was a logical issue, because the Islamic society never accepts them as apostates (*murtaddūna*), in which they face the punishment of the apostates, i.e. death.

These cases of the conversions from Islam to Christianity prove that there were some Arabs who converted to Christianity not for religious purposes, but for secular ones, probably to avoid the hardship of the captivity, to enjoy love and beauty, or to live a comfortable and opulent life. Of course, there were many similar cases, which are out of the scope of this paper.⁶²

Thus, when the author of *Digenes Akrites* used the idea of love and beauty as a reason for the conversion from Islam to Christianity, he took this idea from the fact that some Arabs did it and lived with their Christian wives inside the Byzantine lands. In addition, he presented a clear reason for the conversion of the *Emir* to Christianity. This conversion serves the literary composition of the text of the epic, because the second part of it, from the fourth chapter up to the end, depends on this marriage, from which Irene will bear Basil Digenes Akrites, who combined the specifications of the two ethnic races, the Byzantine and the Arab. According to an Oriental tradition, the child who was born from two different races should have unusual abilities, like Basil Digenes Akrites.⁶³

As for the third case of the conversion from Islam to Christianity, the author has introduced this incident with a limited piece of the Islamic apology by the

⁶¹ About this issue see Tarek M. MUHAMMAD, "Byzantium and the Other: The Case of the Muslim Captives". Forthcoming.

⁶² There are many cases of the conversions of some Arabs to Christianity at Constantinople, either under the captivity or voluntarily. See al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiya, 1407), V, pp. 320-322, 332-333; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, V, p. 239; VI, p. 43; VII, 70; Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, s.d.), IV, pp. 28-29. See also the case of the Arab Samonas who took a splendid career at the Byzantine court during the time of Leo VI (886-912). L. RYDÉN, "The Portrait of the Arab Samonas in the Byzantine Literature", *Graeco-Arabica* 3(1984), pp. 101-108; Romily J. JENKINS, "The Flight of Samonas", *Speculum* 23:2 (1948), pp. 217-235.

⁶³ ARGYRIOU, "L'épopée de Digénis Akritas", p. 11.

mother of the baptized *Emir* of Syria followed by a Byzantine polemical piece. There were no clear reasons of the conversion of the *Emir's* mother. Thus, the author presented dramatic polemical and apologizing warrants. It seems that this case of conversion was not in harmony with the literary context; particularly the converted mother and the *Emir's* people who did not take part in the events of the epic after the end of the sketch of their baptism and their moving to live in Cappadocia with the *Emir*. This indicates that the Byzantine polemical piece was quoted from a Byzantine polemical source and was reused in the literary context as warrants of the conversion of the *Emir's* family, too. It seems that it is inclined to show the superiority of the Byzantines over the Arabs or Christianity over Islam.⁶⁴

When the mother of the *Emir* of Syria had known that her son denied Islam and converted to Christianity, she sent to him a letter full of laments, reproaches and grief in which the author made her remind him of the advantages of Islam, and she also did not forget to indicate the wealth, slave girls, wives, the future ambitions of her son, *Emir* of Syria, and the military achievements of his father and uncles. It is notable that his mother reminded him of that he would lose his glory in Syria and every thing, and that he would be cursed by his mother.⁶⁵ The mother refers mainly to the military victories of the Arabs over the Christians, i.e. there was a long heroic history against the Byzantines that could not be forgotten, though she herself forgot it when she converted to Christianity. (This is a repeated contrasted situation for the mother.)

Leo III mentions the Arabs' usage of their military victories over the Byzantines in his letter to the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz. He said to him, you had insisted on your tyranny and challenge and attributing the military victories, which heaven gave you, to your faith.⁶⁶ The editor of the letter of Romanus Lecapenus to the *Emir* of Damascus confirms the pride of the Arabs with their military victories over the Byzantines.⁶⁷ These Byzantine references indicate

⁶⁴ ARGYRIOU, "L'épopée de Digénis Akritis", pp. 11-12.

⁶⁵ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.50 ff.; *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v.291.

⁶⁶ GHÉVOND, *Histoire des guerres et des conquêtes des arabes en Arménie*, trad. fran. par Garabed V. Chahnazarian (Paris: Librairie de Ch. Meyrueis et compagnie, 1856), p. 97.

⁶⁷ Armand ABEL, "La lettre polémique d'Aréthas à l'émir de Damas", *Byzantion* 24 (1954), pp. 367-368; Adel-Théodore KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam* (Louvain, Paris: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1969), p. 233.

that the Arabs already did it. The Arabic poetry is full of many examples that confirm this fact.⁶⁸

The mother said sadly to her son the following verses, which play a vital role in the poetic sketch and form an emotional and religious introduction:

“You have put out my light, blinded my eyes;
Dear child, your mother how have you forgotten,
Denied your kindred and your faith and country,
And have become a reproach in all Syria?
To every man we are become abominable,
Deniers of the faith, the law’s transgressors
Not having well observed the Prophet’s words.
What came to you, child, how could you forget them?”⁶⁹

Thus, according version, the mother mentioned three issues to her son, Islam, the Prophet’s commandments, and home. These are the main factors that form the personality of the *Emir*. The author of the epic referred to the Prophet’s commandments as if all know what these are. This reference indicates that the author was aware of these commandments so that he referred to them without details. Then, what are the Prophet’s commandments, which the author referred to? It is expected that the commandments of the Prophet, which the author means here, are the Prophetic traditions that speak about the punishment of the apostates and motivate the Arabs to keep their faith stronger. ‘Ikrimah narrated the following Prophetic tradition, “‘Alī burnt some people and these news reached Ibn ‘Abbās who said, Had I been in his place I would not have burnt them, as the Prophet said, ‘Don’t punish (anybody) with Allah’s Punishment.’ No doubt, I would have killed them, for the Prophet said, ‘If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.’”⁷⁰ This punishment is repeated in other Prophetic traditions.⁷¹

⁶⁸ For instance, see the famous poem of Abī Tammām after the Arab conquest of Amorion. See *Diwān Abī Tammām al-Tā’ī* (Beirut, 1889), pp. 15 ff.

⁶⁹ *Diğ. Akr. Gro.*, II.52-59.

⁷⁰ *Şahīh al-Bukhārī*, no. 2794, Kitāb al-Jihād wa-l-Siyar; no. 6411, Kitāb Istitābit al-Murtaddīn; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Maḥmūd Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo, 1975), II, no. 2526, Kitāb al-Ḥudūd.

⁷¹ *Şahīh Muslim*, no. 3175-76, Kitāb al-Qisāmah wa-l-Muḥāribīn wa-l-Qaşāş wa-l-Diyāt; *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 1322, Kitāb al-Diyāt; *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 4642, Kitāb al-Qisāmah; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 2525, Kitāb al-Ḥudūd.

There is a sage before the application of this punishment, where the Muslims ask the apostate to announce his repentance or to be killed. This procedure is called *al-Istitābah*.⁷² For instance, in 242 A.H./856 A.D. ‘Aṭārīd was a Christian who adopted Islam; after many years as a Muslim, he returned to Christianity. The Arabs asked him the repentance, but he refused and insisted to be a Christian. Then, the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil killed him and burnt his body at the gate of al-‘Āmmah.⁷³

When the *Emir*’s mother reminded him of the military achievements of his father and uncles, she stressed his father’s refusal of the offer of the Byzantine generals that the Emperor would make him πατρικίος⁷⁴ καὶ πρωτοστράτορας,⁷⁵ and preferred to keep the Prophet’s commandments, despised all honor, and gave no heed to wealth.⁷⁶ Then, the Byzantines μεληδόν τον ἔκοψαν, καὶ ἀπήραν τὸν σταθλὺν του.⁷⁷ It means that his father preferred martyrdom for the Islamic faith than wealth and glory. On the other hand, this is a reference to the superiority of Islam made by the mother, though she accepted later to be baptized, and then this reference became nothing.⁷⁸ This indicates that the author of the epic was aware of the value of martyrdom among the Muslims, whose reward, according to the Qur’ān, is Paradise,⁷⁹ especially that the events of this epic took place on the Byzantino-Islamic frontiers that had a common culture. According to A.

⁷² IBN ḤAJAR AL-‘ASQALĀNĪ, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. A. Ibn Bāz and others (Beirut: s.d.), XII, pp. 267-275.

⁷³ AL-ṬABARĪ, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, V, p. 325. There is an early example which says that during the ammad there was a Yemenite Jew who adopted Islam and after some time he returned to Judaism. His punishment was killing by the sword. See IBN ḤAJAR AL-‘ASQALĀNĪ, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, XII, p. 268.

⁷⁴ The order of *patricians* founded by Constantine survived till the latest period of the Empire. In the fourth and fifth centuries it was a very high dignity, sparingly bestowed. The value of this title changed from time to time. For more details see John Bagnell BURY, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1911), pp. 27-28.

⁷⁵ The *protostrator* was strictly the chief of the *taxis* of *strators*, whose duty originally was to assist the Emperor in mounting his horse and perform the duty of grooms. He rides beside the Emperor. At a triumph, he rides close to the Emperor, with the *flamulum* and places the imperial spear on the necks of captives. In the later time it s place grew in dignity and importance. For more details see CONST. PORPH., *De Cer.*, I, pp. 81-82, 568, 609-610; BURY, *Imp. Adm. System*, pp. 117-118.

⁷⁶ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.66-71; *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 254-265.

⁷⁷ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.72.

⁷⁸ ARGYRIOU, “L’*épopée de Digenis Akritis*”, pp. 20-21.

⁷⁹ Qur’ān 3:169 (*Sūrat Āl-‘Imrān*): “Think not of those, who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision.”

Argyriou's view, the author of the epic borrowed this description from the death of 'Umar b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Aqtā', *Emir* of Melitene (Malatya),⁸⁰ whom the Byzantine generals besieged from all sides as soon as he had nothing to do except martyrdom at the battlefield, by the same way which the father of the *Emīr* died.⁸¹ It is remarkable that the conception of martyrdom at the battlefield for the faith was found also on the Byzantine side, where the story of the forty-two martyrs of Amorion refers to the martyrdom of the general and *patricius* Constantine, whose story became well known on the frontiers.⁸²

According to the version of *Esc.*, the mother in her letter to her son, stressed the girls' marvelous beauty as a reason of his conversion. She said, 'Are there no girls in Baghdad, in the fortress of Basra? Are there no beautiful girls down in Babylon ... to rival the sun? Do not you remember the noble girls of Aleppo that they shine like the sun and are perfumed like musk? And do not you remember, my child, the girls whom you loved and who beat their breasts and find no consolation?'⁸³ She continued her speech blaming her son saying:

“τὰ πάντα προσαπώλεσας δι' ἀγάπην χανζυρίσσης
καὶ κατάρως γέγονας εἰς πάντα μασγιδίον.”⁸⁴

In the first verse, she called his attention to that he loved a swine-eater, a hated animal by the Muslims. It is known that Islam forbade eating pork⁸⁵ and the

⁸⁰ ARGYRIOU, “L'Épopée de Digénis Akritas”, p. 20.

⁸¹ About the expedition of 'Umar against the Byzantine territories of Asia Minor in 863 and his death see, THEOPHANES CONTINUATES' *Chronographia*, ed. Immanuel BEKKER, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1838), p. 179; SYMEON MAGISTER AC LOGHOTHETAE, *Chronographia*, ed. Immanuel BEKKER, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1838), pp. 665-666; GENESIUS, *Regna*, ed. Caroli LACHMANNI, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1834), pp. 94-97; LEO GRAMMATICUS, *Chronographia*, ed. Immanuel BEKKER, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1842), pp. 238-239; CEDRENIUS, II, pp. 163-165; AL-ṬABARĪ, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, V, p. 357; IBN AL-ATHĪR, *al-Kāmil*, VI, p. 153; AL-MAS'ŪDĪ, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādīn al-jawhar*, ed. M. Muḥī l-Dīn, (Beirut: Dār Ṣāder, s.d.), IV, p. 214. Cf. also Henri GRÉGOIRE, “La bataille de 863 A.D.”, *Byzantion* 8 (1933), pp. 534-540; IDEM, “Michael III et Basil le macédonien dans l'inscription d'Ancyre”, *Byzantion* 5 (1929-30), p. 336 ff.

⁸² KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam*, pp. 169-179; ARGYRIOU, “L'Épopée de Digénis Akritas”, p. 20.

⁸³ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v.232-239.

⁸⁴ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.82-83.

Muslims considered its eaters impure. Then, they regarded the Christians impure⁸⁶ because of their eating pork.⁸⁷ She tried to show the hugeness of his sin, i.e. his love to a swine-eater⁸⁸ and his conversion to Christianity, which led him to be cursed in all the mosques of Syria.

The author of the epic was aware of the Muslims' position towards the converted persons (*murtaddūna*). On the other hand, the author exaggerated his view about the Muslims' punishment of the *murtaddūna*, where the punishment includes killing of the mother and the children of the *Emir*, and that his relatives will give his pretty women (κορᾶσια) to other men.⁸⁹

It is notable that the mother offered her son to take his Byzantine wife (Ῥωμαῖσσαν) with him to Syria.⁹⁰ Maybe, in this case, she planned to convert Irene to Islam, if she accepted to come with her husband to Syria. There were many cases of Byzantine women who lived with their Muslim husbands inside the Islamic territories.⁹¹ Some of them converted to Islam and others remained Christian. For instance, the mother of Khālid b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qisrī, the governor

⁸⁵ Qur'ān 5:3 (*Sūrat al-Mā'idah*): "(Forbidden unto you (for food) are carrion and blood and swine flesh, and that which hath been dedicated unto any other than Allah, and the strangled, and the dead through beating, and the dead through falling from a height, and that which hath been killed by (the goring of) horns, and the devoured of wild beasts, saving that which ye make lawful (by the death stroke), and that which hath been immolated unto idols. And (forbidden is it) that ye swear by the divining arrows. This is an abomination. This day are those who disbelieve in despair of (ever harming) your religion; so fear them not, fear Me...") See also Qur'ān 2:173 (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*), 16:115 (*Sūrat al-Nahl*).

⁸⁶ Argyriou discussed the subject of impurity in the Christian and Islamic polemical writings in detail. See ARGYRIOU, "L'épopée de Digénis Akritas", pp. 14-18.

⁸⁷ Argyriou, "L'épopée de Digénis Akritas", p. 14.

⁸⁸ AL-QĀDĪ 'ABD AL-JABBĀR, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 173, mentions that the Romans, before Christianity, ate the pork, used the castration, attacked the countries, took the captives, killed, and enslaved, and made adultery. When they became Christians, these habits remained among them.

⁸⁹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.85-91.

⁹⁰ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.97.

⁹¹ The mother of the Umayyad Caliph Marwān b. Muḥammad was a Byzantine woman (*Rūmiyyah*), who was called Mariya al-Birmā (IBN AL-JAWZĪ, *al-Muntaẓim*, VII, p. 260). The Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr had a Byzantine concubine, who was called Qālī Farāsha (AL-ṬABARĪ, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, IV, p. 540). The mothers of the Abbasid Caliph al-Wāthiq bi-l-Lāh, zalūm, the Abbasid Caliph al-Muntaṣir bi-l-Lāh, Ḥabashīyyah, and the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tamid 'alā Allāh, Fityān, were Byzantine women. See AL-ṬABARĪ, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, V, p. 431; IBN AL-JAWZĪ, *al-Muntaẓim*, VI, p. 265; XI, p. 353; XII, 103; IBN AL-ATHĪR, *al-Kāmil*, VI, pp. 72, 201. See also Marius CANARD, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les arabes", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), p. 45.

of Iraq and Khurāsān for fifteen years, during the time of the Umayyad Caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, was a Byzantine woman (*Rūmiyya*); his father married her during one of the Byzantine feasts. After her marriage, she remained Christian. When she died, her son built a church for her beside her tomb. But the people blamed him and the Arab poet al-Farazdaq satirized him. Therefore, he destroyed it.⁹²

Now, the *Emir*, after some confusion, sets off to reassure his mother, singing to his companions of desperate situations from which he saved them.⁹³ Lastly, the *Emir* arrived in Syria and met his children, women, and his mother, who, after kisses and hugs, praised him.⁹⁴ Then, immediately, the mother began to speak again about Islam, to increase its value before her son and the audience. Here the author presented an interesting polemical dialogue between the mother, i.e. the Muslim, and her son, i.e. the Christian, before all of his people (esp. the *Emir*'s women, children, and relatives). He would end the Islamic apology of the mother to start the polemical speech against Islam and to present the virtues of Christianity. The author made the *Emir* not only debate with his mother but also invite her and his people to be baptized. In his sermonic address, the *Emir* presented Christianity as viewed by the Byzantine church.

This is the dialogue of the mother with her son, *Emir* of Syria:

The Mother:⁹⁵ Say why you tarried, child, in Romania;
 Not seeing you, I would not see light at all,
 Nor sun shining, nor in the world to live.
 Do strange wonders happen in Romania
 Such as are done, child, at the Prophet's tomb,
 Where you went with me going to my prayers?
 Saw you a wonder strange how in the night,
 Without a light, came radiance from on night,
 Filled the whole house with light unspeakable?
 Did you see bears and lions, wolves with sheep,
 And many kinds of beasts together feeding,

⁹² IBN AL-ATHĪR, *al-Kāmil*, IV, pp. 476-478.

⁹³ JEFFREYS, "Akritas and Kommagene", p. 9.

⁹⁴ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.124-130. According to the version of *Esc.* he arrived in al-Raqqah. *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v.527-531.

⁹⁵ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.135-153; Eng. trans. MAVROGORDATO, III.772-790.

Not hurting one another, not at all,
 But all there waiting till the final prayer,
 Then how bending the knee they straight retired?
 Did you see greater wonder in Romania?
 Is there not with us Naaman's kerchief,
 Who was a king among the Assyrians,
 Thought worthy of wonders for his host of virtues?
 How did you come, child, to transgress all this?

The Emir:⁹⁶ All this, O mother, I have knowledge of.
 Before I shared the light, I truly honored
 Things really worthy of darkness and all destruction.
 But when God in the highest did think good
 To snatch me from the throat of the cunning Beast
 And thought me worth the water of rebirth,
 I put all these away as tales and fables,
 And as occasions of the eternal fire.
 For who revere these things are always punished,
 But who believer on God the father of all,
 Maker of heaven and earth and of all things invisible,
 And in Christ the Lord, the Son and Word of God,
 Begotten of His Father before all ages,
 Being light of light, and very God, and great,
 Who for mankind came down on earth for us,
 And from the virgin mother Mary born,
 Suffered the cross for our salvation,
 Was buried in a tomb, which you too honor,
 And risen up from the dead on the third day,
 Even as the Holy Scriptures do instruct us,
 Sits ever on the right hand of the Father,
 And of His kingdom there shall be no end;
 And in the Holy Spirit, making all things live,
 Which with the Father and the Son and Word I worship,
 Confessing one baptism for the remission of sins;
 I await the resurrection of all the dead,

⁹⁶ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.160-198; Eng. trans. MAVROGORDATO, III.797-835.

And every one's requiting of his trespasses,
 The forgiveness of the righteous as was promised,
 And the unending life of the world to come.
 Every one believing on this holy Trinity,
 Baptized in the name of the Father eternal,
 And of the Son by Him timelessly begotten,
 And of the Holy Spirit quickening all things,
 Shall never perish but forever live.
 Who has not known these things, my sweetest mother,
 In the gehenna of fire is punished forever;
 There is much weeping there and gnashing of teeth,

(Here the *Emir* stopped his speech to announce that he decided to come back to Byzantium⁹⁷ and carried on the second part of his sermon. This sudden stop and announcement of his final decision was an intentional event from the author to increase the sigh of the mother to hasten her decision)

The Emir:⁹⁸ My faith confirming in the Trinity,
 For the world is not worth a single soul;
 For if all things we gain and lose the soul
 None verily the profit in that hour
 When God shall come from heaven to judge the world
 And set all men to give account before Him;
 When we shall hear a voice bidding us go
 Into the outer and accursed fire,
 There to abide forever with the devil,
 As having His commandments disobeyed.
 But those who in Christ the Lord believe, as is right,
 And have observed his worshipful commands,
 Shall shine out even as the sun in that hour,
 And they shall hear the voice of their good master,
 'Come and inherit, by the Father blest,
 Heavens' kingdom which I have prepared for you.'
 And these shall go into eternal life;

⁹⁷ *Dig. Ak. Gro.*, III.201.

⁹⁸ *Dig. Ak. Gro.*, III.202-227; Eng. trans. MAVROGORDATO, III.839-864.

The judge is just and rightly He repays.
 Mother, if you wish to be thought worthy of life,
 From fire redeemed and the eternal dark,
 Fly from vain error and invented tales,
 And recognize the God in three persons,
 United in one substance unconfounded.
 Listen to your own son and come with me,
 I will be your father in the Holy Spirit,
 And when baptized your sponsor in rebirth.

The Mother:⁹⁹ Child, I believe through you on God in Trinity,
 With you I will journey well to Romania,
 Baptized for remission of many faults,
 And grateful to have had the light through you.

The audience:¹⁰⁰ With you we are all coming to Romania,
 And when baptized may we win life eternal!

The Emir:¹⁰¹ Praise to Thee the only, Merciful God,
 Who desirest not at all the death of a sinner,
 But pitying waitest his return to Thee,
 To make all men partakers in Thy kingdom.

This apologized and polemical piece may be divided into three themes:¹⁰²

- A. The short apology of the mother about Islam.
- B. The great apology of the *Emir* about Christianity.
- C. The confession of all with Christianity and baptism which are among the Christian holy rituals.

The author used the phrase τὸν ὅλον οἶκον¹⁰³ to refer to the Holy Mosque of Makkah, which is called in Arabic *al-Baytu al-Ḥarām*. It indicates that he used the common word, which is used by the Muslims to refer to the Sanctuary House of Makkah. It is probable that the author lived on the Byzantino-Islamic frontiers,

⁹⁹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.232-235; Eng. trans. MAVROGORDATO, III.869-872.

¹⁰⁰ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.239-240; Eng. trans. MAVROGORDATO, III.876-877.

¹⁰¹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.242-245; Eng. trans. MAVROGORDATO, III.879-882.

¹⁰² ARGYRIOU, "L'épopée de Digenis Akritas", p. 19.

¹⁰³ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.143.

where the life there, at the time of peace, was common. This phrase confirms that they went to Makkah for pilgrimage. On the other hand, the version of Escorial referred clearly to their visit to the Great Mosque of Muḥammad.¹⁰⁴ It indicated that the grand fathers of the *Emir* of Syria were buried at the Prophet's tomb.¹⁰⁵ But, in another place, it put the tomb of Muḥammad at Makkah.¹⁰⁶ Their visit to the tomb of Muḥammad does not mean the pilgrimage. It is notable that the meaning of the version of Grottaferrata, which refers to *al-Bayt*, i.e. the Holy Mosque of Makkah, is different.

This confusion is expected among the Byzantine polemicists, because when the Muslims of Syria and its hinterlands, such as the case of the *Emir* of Syria and his mother, come to Makkah, they will enter at first al-Madīnah, which geographically is located north of Makkah. Then, they take a rest after a long journey and visit the Mosque of Muḥammad (*al-Masjid al-Nabawī*), in which his tomb is located. This visit is a *sunnaḥ*, not one of the rituals of the pilgrimage. The Prophet Muḥammad said to the Muslims, "One should travel only for visiting three mosques (*Masājid*): *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* (at Makkah), *al-Masjid al-Aqṣā* (at Jerusalem), and this (my) Mosque (at al-Madīnah)."¹⁰⁷ After their rest and visit to the Mosque of Muḥammad at al-Madīnah, they continue their journey to Makkah, to start the rituals of the pilgrimage. Therefore, the Byzantine writers thought that the Islamic pilgrimage was related with the visit to the tomb of Muḥammad.

In this case, because the epic of *Digenes Akrites* was an oral poem,¹⁰⁸ it will be usual to read popular beliefs about Islam, which entered into its literary composition by one or another.

Although the Byzantine polemicists did not declare that Muḥammad or Islam had miracles,¹⁰⁹ the author of the epic made the mother of the *Emir* refer to unspeakable light, which filled the entire Holy Mosque at night and did not come from the sky or any other source of light. She regarded it a miracle. The idea of the

¹⁰⁴ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 247, 250.

¹⁰⁵ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 147. This is a right indication to the public big tomb of the Muslims, which was dedicated for their burying by Muḥammad himself and was called al-Baqī'. It is located at al-Madīnah and very close to the Prophetic Mosque and Muḥammad's tomb.

¹⁰⁶ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 288-289. Cf. ARGYRIOU, "L'Épopée de Digénis Akritas", p. 22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1731; Kitāb al-Ḥajj; 1115, Kitāb al-Ṣawn; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2383, 2475, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, 300, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh.

¹⁰⁸ BEATON, "Oral Poem", p. 27.

¹⁰⁹ See Adel-Théodore KHOURY, *La polémique byzantine contre l'Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 42-52.

unspeakable light that filled the House is mentioned in the Byzantine polemical writings. In the letter of Romanus Lecapenus to the *Emir* of Damascus, the editor of it referred to this issue and compared between the annual miracle which happens in Jerusalem at the tomb of Christ, until the day of Resurrection, where the light fills the place of his sacred tomb. In his comparison between this miracle and the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad, the author of this letter said that Muḥammad's tomb is always shadows and darkness all over your life.¹¹⁰

Bartholomius of Edessa, who knew more about the Arabs and their beliefs, said that according to an Islamic tradition the unbeliever that would look on the tomb of Muḥammad would lose his vision. In contrast, the faith of the Muslims declares that a column of light rises from his tomb or that the angels sit in a circle around it.¹¹¹ Now, because Islam became clearer for the scholars than before these are untrue beliefs, which are used by the Byzantine polemicists. However, probably they were popular beliefs used by the commons of the Muslims.

When the Prophet Muḥammad died, his companions decided to bury his body at the house of his wife 'Ā'ishah, where he died. They dug his tomb inside the house and by the end of the ceremonies of the burying, they descended his body into the tomb, which was under ground.¹¹² Later, when Abū Bakr died, the Muslims buried his body beside the Prophet's tomb, inside the same house.¹¹³ In addition, when 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb died, they buried his body beside the tomb of Abū Bakr.¹¹⁴ It means that the house of 'Ā'ishah contains three corpses. This house, which became a tomb, was built in the beginning beside the Mosque of the Prophet at al-Maḍīnah in 1 A.H./622 A.D. Muslims all over the world can visit it at any time.¹¹⁵ Because this tomb contained the corpses of the Prophet and of his companions, the Muslims venerate it so much until now. This veneration leads the

¹¹⁰ ABEL, "La lettre polémique d'Aréthas", p. 365; KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam*, pp. 230-231.

¹¹¹ BARTHOLOMIUS OF EDESSA, *Confutatio Agareni*, J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), PG, CIV, 1412A.

¹¹² IBN ISHĀQ, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyyah*, ed. Ahmad Fārid al-Mazyadī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 2004), pp. 719-423; IBN HISHĀM, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, ed. Mustafa al-Saqqā and others (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rīfah, 2006), III-IV, pp. 555-557.

¹¹³ AL-ṬABARĪ, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, II, p. 349, 355; IBN AL-ATHĪR, *al-Kāmil*, II, 267.

¹¹⁴ AL-YA'QŪBĪ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, s.d.), pp. 159-160; IBN AL-JAWZĪ, *al-Muntaẓim*, IV, pp. 330-331.

¹¹⁵ After many expansions of this mosque, the tomb became located inside the Mosque of the Prophet, in one of its corners.

commons of the Muslims to suppose unreal miracles, such as those that were written by Bartholomius of Edessa.

As for the mention of many kinds of the animals at the Mosque, we do not think that the purpose of the author was the animals themselves.¹¹⁶ Probably he likened all kinds of people who pray at the Holy Mosque to some contrastive animals, wild and domesticated. Therefore, the mother regarded the people who pray side by side and bend their knees there until the last prayer, i.e. the pray of night (*ṣalāt al-‘ishā’*), a wonder. This description stimulates us to say that the author saw by himself the Muslims when they pray.

Thus, the mother of the *Emir* stressed their journey to the Holy lands of Makkah for the pilgrimage to move the emotional and spiritual feelings of her son, which he had during their pilgrimage. Maybe by this way she persuades him to return to Islam.

Lastly, the mother referred to the sacred *mandelin* of Christ, which was still in the Arabian custody in Edessa whence it was removed in 944.¹¹⁷ The legend says that when Abgar V, king of Edessa, was sick, he sent to Jesus asking to come to cure him. Christ promised him that he would send to him one of his apostles to heal him and to spread Christianity among his people. The story says that Christ put the image of his face on a kerchief and sent it to Abgar. This kerchief had a miraculous ability to heal the sick people.¹¹⁸ Although this is a Christian story, the mother of the *Emir* regarded also the kerchief a wonder. The avowal of the mother of this wonder is based on Qur’ānic evidence, where God speaks about the ability of Jesus to heal the sick people. The Qur’ān says, “And will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel, (saying: Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah’s leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah’s leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you, if ye are

¹¹⁶ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, 144-145.

¹¹⁷ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, lxx.

¹¹⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*, ed. F. L. CROSS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), s.v. Abgar. On this legend, see Juan Pedro MONFERRER-SALA, “La ‘leyenda del rey Abgaro’ contenida en un manuscrito árabe del siglo XVI”, *Archivo Teológico Granadino* 62 (1999), pp. 107-140, and J. P. MONFERRER-SALA & AMALIA ZOMEÑO, “Abgari regis fabulae versio iuxta narrationem magnae ecclesiae Edessae aedificationis (secundum *Sinaiticum arabicum CDXLV* qui in Coenobio Sanctae Catalinae asservatur)”, *CCO* 5 (2008), pp. 147-181, and the bibliography quoted in both articles.

believers.”¹¹⁹ The mother related between the legend of the kerchief, which maybe was circulated there by the Arab Christians, and the ability of Jesus to heal the sick people, which is mentioned in the Qur’ān.

Anyway, at this part of the mother’s conversation with her son she emphasized the highness of Islam that depended on the military achievements over the Byzantines, i.e. the Christians, the glories of his family and on the miracles or wonders.¹²⁰

Now we have to turn towards the sermon of the *Emir* to his mother and his relatives. The *Emir* begins his sermon to them with derogating from Islam and regards all the wonders, which she mentioned worthy of darkness and all destruction. He avows that all these are tales and fables, which lead to Hell.¹²¹ This theological attitude is not different from that of the Byzantine polemicists who regarded Islam a false faith¹²² and the Islamic beliefs especially that speak about Jesus and the Christian rituals, lies.¹²³ They accused also the Muslims that they are unable to understand neither the Christian issues,¹²⁴ nor theology nor philosophy rightly.¹²⁵

After this criticizing part of the *Emir* against Islam, he turned to present the virtues of Christianity and show the Christian faith.¹²⁶ In the version of *Esc.*, the *Emir* showed that he fell in love with the much-hymned Theotokos that he loved with all his soul. He regarded the Roman territory to be the Paradise itself.¹²⁷

E. Jeffreys refers to that the author of the epic used the formula of the Nicene Creed. She says, ‘at the version of *Gro.*, as part of the *Emir*’s attempt to convert his mother, there appears a paraphrase of the Creed, which is very close to the original. There is substantial reflection of eleven or the twelve clauses, word-for-word in places, elsewhere differing to preserve the metre. Only the clause about the Holy and Apostolic Church is completely omitted, while there are gaps in three

¹¹⁹ Qur’ān 3:49 (*Sūrat Āl-’Imrān*). Eng. trans. M. PICKTHALL.

¹²⁰ ARGYRIOU, “L’*épopée de Digénis Akritas*”, p. 23.

¹²¹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, I.162-169; *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 546-547.

¹²² ABEL, “La letter polémique d’Aréthas”, p. 356; KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l’Islam*, p. 226.

¹²³ GHEVOND, *Histoire*, pp. 46, 48, 54.

¹²⁴ ABEL, “La letter polémique d’Aréthas”, pp. 361-362.

¹²⁵ ARGYRIOU, “L’*épopée de Digénis Akritas*”, p. 27.

¹²⁶ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.171-195.

¹²⁷ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v.549-552.

others.¹²⁸ This passage of the sermon of the *Emir* to his mother is not found in the version of the *Esc*.

At this part of the epic, the author did not quote only from the Nicene Creed, but also from the Byzantine polemicists, especially from the *Rituel d'abjuration de la foi musulmane*, which indicated that the apostate, before baptism, had to receive special religious regulations about the basic rituals of Christianity.¹²⁹ This took place by the *Emir* with his mother through his sermon.¹³⁰ His mother said,¹³¹

‘My much loved child, I will go wherever you wish,
I go out of compassion for you and out of my great love for you,
I renounce my family,
I renounce Muhammad, our Great Prophet,
Alas, what have you done to me, Alas what did you do to me?’

Argyriou made a comparison between the speech of the *Emir* to his mother and the text of *Rituel d'abjuration*¹³² and proved that there was a tidy relation between the two texts, where the author of the epic had used several phrases of the text of ritual in his sermon.¹³³

The formula of the ritual of the apostate from Islam to Christianity, according to the text of Ritual, is: “I, so-and-so, convert today from the Islamic faith to the Christian one, loving of the Christ and the Christian faith from all my soul, I disown the religion of the Saracens and anathematize Mahomet who the Saracens venerate him as apostle of God and Prophet.”¹³⁴ Thereupon, after the end of the

¹²⁸ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, xlii.

¹²⁹ According to Sahas the process of the ritual of conversion from Islam to Christianity includes four stages. About the details of these stages see Daniel J. SAHAS, “Ritual of Conversion from Islam to the Byzantine Church”, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36:1(1991), p. 59 ff.

¹³⁰ ARGYRIOU, “L’*épopée de Digénis Akritas*”, p. 28.

¹³¹ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, v. 561-565.

¹³² J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), PG, CXL, 128A, 133A-136B = Edouard MONTET, “Un rituel d’abjuration des musulmans dans l’église grecque”, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 53 (1906), pp. 145-163, text and trad. fran. pp. 148-155. Cf. also KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l’Islam*, pp. 193-194.

¹³³ ARGYRIOU, “L’*épopée de Digénis Akritas*”, p. 28 ff.

¹³⁴ J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), PG, CXL, 128A = MONTET, “Un rituel d’abjuration”, p. 148:13-19; KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l’Islam*, p. 193. Cf. also *Strat al-Amīrah dhāt al-Himmah*, I, p. 897; John V. TOLAN, *Saracens, Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 124; Franz CUMONT, “L’origine de la formule grecque d’abjuration imposée aux musulmans”, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 64 (1911), pp. 143-150. After this ritual

sermon of the *Emir*, his mother said that she believed through him on God in Trinity and accepted to be baptized. She and all of his people said to him that they confess Christ, come with him to the Byzantine lands, and 'when baptized may we win life eternal'.¹³⁵ The belief of *Emir*'s family on the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is identified with the text of Ritual, too.¹³⁶

There is a notable point that is although the *Emir* spoke about the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Crucifixion, rising of Christ, baptism, and others, as Christian beliefs, while Islam presents another different view about them, the attendants never objected to him. The author presented the mother as a listener only to her son with amazement. It means she felt that the proofs of her son were strong and affective.

A general remark all over the first part of the epic is that the author refers, from time to time, to the piousness of the Christians through their thanks and praise to Christ. For instance, Anna, mother of Irene, thanked Christ saying:

"My Christ, praise to thy loving-kindness,
Hope of hopeless, praise be to thy power,
All thy will doing, nothing impossible,
For and this enemy thou hast made tame,
And hast delivered my daughter from death."¹³⁷

Because of the *Emir*'s conversion to Christianity, the author showed also his piousness after his baptism. When he was about to leave Cappadocia to meet his mother in Syria he said to his wife,

"O Christ, O Son and Word of God
Who to the light of God's knowledge hast led me,
From darkness hast redeemed and error vain,
Knowing the heart's secrets and reasonings"¹³⁸

the converted person announces twenty anathemas against all the Islamic symbols ammad, his wives, daughters, and grandsons, Abū Bakr, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān and others until the God of Muḥammad. See Montet, "Un rituel d'abjuration", pp. 148-155.

¹³⁵ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, III.232-240.

¹³⁶ J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), PG, CXL, 133A.

¹³⁷ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.14-18.

¹³⁸ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, II.251-254.

And after the acceptance of his mother and his relatives to be baptized and of the departure with him to Cappadocia, he praised and thanked Christ saying,

“Praise to Thee the only, merciful God,
Who desirest not at all the death of a sinner,
But pitying waitest his return to Thee,
To make all men partakers in Thy kingdom.”¹³⁹

Thus, the *Emir*, his mother, and his people departed from Syria to Cappadocia to be baptized and to live there as Christians.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

Digenes Akrites shows that the Byzantines were interested in converting Arabs to Christianity.¹⁴¹ Two cases of the conversion from Islam to Christianity formed the main events of the first part of the epic, while the third case is mentioned in the second part, which demonstrates the deeds of Digenes Akrites.

As for the theological attitudes of the author of the epic, he made the conversions from Islam to Christianity the main literary element in the first part of it. He presented three cases of conversions from Islam to Christianity, two of them were because of love and beauty, and the third depended on preachy and polemic sermon. He showed the highness of Christianity over Islam clearly, which was one of the favorite subjects among the Byzantines, and the piousness of the Christians. To prove the last point he presented apologizes and excuses for the sins of Digenes Akrites and used the words of thanking and praising to Christ from time to time.

The author used the idea of love and beauty as a stand point for the conversion to Christianity based on a fact that there were some cases that took place on the Eastern borders of Byzantium or at Constantinople, i.e. his idea was not literary fabrication. He used also the Byzantine polemical ideas against Islam to invite his mother and his people to Christianity.

Many of the *Emir's* polemical phrases proved that the author was aware of many Islamic issues, such as the rituals of the pilgrimage, the Holy Mosque of Muhammad and his tomb, the Holy Mosque of Makkah, the general tomb of al-

¹³⁹ *Dig. Akr. Gro.*, III.242-245.

¹⁴⁰ *Dig. Akr. Esc.*, III.246-248.

¹⁴¹ SAHAS, “Ritual of Conversion”, p. 68.

Madīnah, the prayers of the Muslims at the Holy Mosque of Makkah, the Muslims' visit to the tomb of Muhammad and his dignity among them, the commandments of Muḥammad, which verify the punishment of the apostates, and Islam's prohibition of eating pork. This wide knowledge about these Islamic issues besides his ideas about the reasons of the conversions of some Arabs to Christianity prove that he knew more about Islam, which stimulate us to say that he was one of the Christian borderers, either Byzantine or non-Byzantine Christian. Furthermore, he knows well some of the Byzantine polemical writings, such as the letter of Romanus Lecapenus to the *Emir* of Damascus, *Confutatio Agareni*, *Rituel d'abjuration*, and the Nicene Creed, too.

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