

# Pilgrimage and Relics in the Byzantine-Arab Borderland: the Hala Sultan Tekke in Cyprus

The surviving buildings of the Hala Sultan Tekke complex, which is situated on the western shore of the Salt Lake (Al-yki) near the modern city of Larnaca, owe their existence to Ottoman officials, dervishes, and donors of pious foundations flourishing in the second half of the eighteenth and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. The visitor's eye is first caught by an inscription (fig. 1) placed above the pointed arch of the doorway leading to the garden of the Sufi lodge. The text refers to extensive refurbishments sponsored by the governor of Cyprus and is dated to the year 1228/1813<sup>2</sup>. The mosque's fountain or *şadırvan* (fig. 2) is slightly older (1796-1797), whereas the mosque consisting of a single-domed prayer hall, a narrow three-arched portico, and a minaret seems to have been completed a few years later (1816-1817)<sup>3</sup>. The site's centerpiece is a tomb situated southeast of the mosque's kibra wall (fig. 3). In its present form, the building consists of a domed square embellished by four small semi-domes in each corner. The sarcophagus of Hala Sultan, the holy woman venerated on this site, is placed in its center between four slender columns. According to an inscription placed above the doorway, this *türbe* was built at the behest of Sheikh Hasan, the Sufi lodge's warden, in the year 1174/1760<sup>4</sup>. These and other architectural features bear witness to the fact that Hala Sultan Tekke loomed large in the worship practices of late Ottoman Cyprus.

Up to the present day it is one of the major Muslim pilgrimage sites in the region and popular belief ranges it next to the holy places of Islam in Mecca and Medina<sup>5</sup>. According to Sheikh Hasan's inscription this is due to the woman's kinship with the Prophet Muhammad: »His Excellency, the Sultan of exalted rank, the best of women, the rising of the son of miracle-working, that is Umm Harâm, since she is the milk-aunt of the prophet of the most noble ones«<sup>6</sup>. We are dealing with a highly revered female person, who belongs to the circle of Muhammad's closest companions and is connected

with the traditions concerning the first arrival of Muslims in Cyprus in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>.

In what follows I shall discuss the emergence of the veneration of Hala Sultan/Umm Harâm in Cyprus against the background of the creation of holy shrines, pilgrimage sites, and worship practices in early Islam. More specifically, it should be demonstrated why, when, and under what circumstances a female companion of the Prophet and her tomb became a focal point for religious and political claims in the Byzantine-Muslim borderlands. Given that the site in question is closely linked with early Muslim elites and their expansionist ambitions, it is important to ask how the complex in question is related to other places of Muslim veneration that resulted from the contact with or transformation of Christian traditions and worship practices. This, in turn, leads us to a better understanding of the religious and ideological bearing Umm Harâm's tomb and other comparable sites may have had in Byzantine-Arab contact and conflict zones.

The earliest surviving accounts on the death of Umm Harâm, the daughter of Milhân, are transmitted by al-Wâqidî, a leading expert of law and the early Islamic historical tradition from Medina, who worked as judge in Abbasid Baghdad and died there in 822<sup>8</sup>. The material gathered by al-Wâqidî came down to us in the late 9<sup>th</sup>-century »Book about the Conquests of the Lands« by al-Balâdhurî (d. ca. 892), who arranged and probably abridged all available reports about the Muslim conquest, administration, taxation, and legal status of Cyprus in a separate chapter of his work<sup>9</sup>. There is also a brief note on the first Muslim attack on Cyprus and Umm Harâm's death on the island in the chronicle by Khalîfa b. Khayyât, the oldest extant work providing a complete survey of early Islamic history, which was composed in Baṣra before 854, the year of the author's death<sup>10</sup>. Extensive references to Cyprus can also be found in a treatise on finance and taxation entitled *Kitâb al-amwâl* by Abû 'Ubayd al-Qâsim

1 For history of the Ottoman site, which is mentioned for the first time in Ottoman law court registers in the late 1650s, see Bağışkan, *Monuments* 54-58. – For early modern descriptions of this site and their interpretation, see Papalexandrou, *Hala Sultan Tekke* 51-81.

2 For the text of the inscription along with an English translation, see Bağışkan, *Monuments* 59.

3 Bağışkan, *Monuments* 56-57 and 66 (for the fountain's inscription).

4 Bağışkan, *Monuments* 56.

5 Bağışkan, *Monuments* 66-68.

6 Bağışkan, *Monuments* 61-62: *Hazret-i Sultân-ı 'âlî mertebeye hayru n-nisâ, matla'-i mihr-i kerâmet, ya'nî Umm Harâm çun ridâan Hala'didir Resûlü Ekremîn.*

7 For a summary of Muslim traditions concerning Umm Harâm, see Cobham, *Umm Harâm* 81-101. – Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria* 374-377, who translates a brief Ottoman account written by Sheikh Ibrâhim, son of Sheikh Muṣṭafâ. – For the early Arab raids and the early Arabic presence in Cyprus, see Christides, *Image* 11-38, 61-63. – Metcalf, *Cyprus* 395-423.

8 For this person, see Halm, *al-Wâqidî*.

9 Al-Balâdhurî, *Futūḥ al-buldân* 152-158 (the chapter bears the title *amr Qubrus*, »the case of Cyprus«). – For the author, see Becker/Rosenthal, *al-Balâdhurî*. – For the details of these reports and their transmitters, see Beihammer, *Naval Campaigns* 47-68. – Keskh, *Depiction* 25-38.

10 Khalîfa b. Khayyât, *Tārîkh* 116. – For the author and his work, see Zakkar, *Khalifa b. Khayyât*.



**Fig. 1** The inscription above the doorway arch leading into the Sufi lodge. – (Photo A. Beihammer).

b. Sallām, a specialist of Islamic law, who was judge in the Cilician city of Tarsus in the years 807-825 and died in 838<sup>11</sup>. Tarsus' vicinity to Cyprus may have arisen the author's interest in the island and allowed him access to information on the legal status of its inhabitants. Accordingly, he copied a collection of opinions expressed by contemporary experts on how Muslim authorities would react appropriately to a breach of the treaty, which regulated the relations between the people of Cyprus and the Islamic state<sup>12</sup>. Most probably due to the author's predominant interest in legal matters, however, there is no mention of Umm Harām. It becomes clear thus that reports about Muslim rights and claims regarding Cyprus and its inhabitants were widely circulating between the cities of the Byzantine-Muslim borderland and the urban centers of the Muslim central lands already in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. The governorship of 'Abd al-Malik b. Sālih (d. 811/12), a cousin of the first two Abbasid caliphs, who during the 790s led a number of military campaigns against Byzantine territory at the behest of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786-809), forms an irrefutable terminus ad quem for the crystallization of opinions defining the legal relations between Cyprus and the caliphate<sup>13</sup>.

According to the aforementioned set of reports and traditions, Caliph 'Uthmān was highly reluctant to give Mu'āwiya, the governor of Syria, permission to mount a naval attack on Cyprus. His predecessor 'Umar had rebuffed all requests

of this kind. As had been pointed out in the careful analysis by Khaled Keshk, the various versions of this permission story reflect negative attitudes prevailing among many representatives of the early historiographical tradition towards Mu'āwiya, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, who should not be extolled too much for his military skills and feats of war, on the one hand, and Caliph 'Uthmān, who was generally accused of a whole series of unlawful decisions contravening the exemplary conduct of the Prophet and his first caliph Abū Bakr<sup>14</sup>. As will be shown below, the introduction of Umm Harām as the person who stands for the compromise between the supporters and the opponents of Muslim naval expeditions lies at the heart of the glorification and veneration of this female companion in the early Muslim tradition.

The caliph, the relevant reports go on, gave in provided that the commanders take their wives with them. When the Arab fleet in the spring of 28 a. h. (25 September 648-13 September 649) set forth from Acre in Palestine, just as Fākhita bint Qarāza traveled along with her husband Mu'āwiya, Umm Harām bint Milhān al-Anṣāriyya accompanied her husband 'Ubāda b. al-Sāmit, one of the Prophet's companions, who served as commander in Syria and Egypt<sup>15</sup>. During the operations of the Muslim troops on the island, the mule on which Umm Harām was riding stumbled. Hence, the noble woman fell, broke her neck, and was buried near the spot of her fatal accident. The place where she was interred came to be

11 For the author and his work, see Gottschalk, Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām.  
 12 Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, Kitāb al-amwāl 213 no. 337; 236-237 no. 407: Mu'āwiya's attack on Cyprus along with a list of participants, 264-268 no. 469-476: the opinions of seven experts, which Abū 'Ubayd found in letters preserved in the administrative office of the governor of the frontier regions [al-thughūr], 'Abd al-Malik b. Sālih.

13 For this person, see Zetterstéén, 'Abd al-Malik b. Sālih.  
 14 Keshk, Depiction 27-25.  
 15 For 'Ubāda b. al-Sāmit, see Kennedy, Conquests 150-152. – For the conquest of and early Muslim rule in Egypt, see Kennedy, Egypt 62-85. – Sijpesteijn, Arab Conquest 437-459.

**Fig. 2** Mosque and şadırvan of the Hala Sultan Tekke complex. – (Photo A. Beihammer).



known as *qabr al-mar'at al-şāliha*, »the tomb of the righteous woman«<sup>16</sup>.

There is no piece of information in the Muslim sources indicating that the said tomb was situated on the site of the Ottoman Hala Sultan Tekke. Yet other sources bear witness to the fact that the memory and veneration of Umm Harām constituted a long-standing local tradition that persisted not only in the so-called condominium period but also through times of Byzantine and Frankish rule on the island up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century at least. Constantine Porphyrogenetos' treatise *Peri thematon* defines the island of Cyprus with its thirteen cities according to old Roman tradition as a consular province and counts it as the fifteenth theme in the East. After enumerating pieces of information related to the island's mythology and ancient history up to Roman times, the author remarks: »While the Roman arms rusted due to negligence, the Saracens took hold of the island during the reign of Heraclius. Aboubacharos, whose daughter's tomb can be seen on the island, was the first to cross over to it and took hold of it«<sup>17</sup>. Neither chronologically nor with respect to the mentioned leader's identity this statement is accurate, although it was otherwise well known in Byzantium that the commander of the first Muslim naval expedition was Mu'āwiya<sup>18</sup>. Accordingly, the identity of the Muslim woman venerated in Cyprus is likewise distorted. Yet it is

still remarkable that a woman's tomb, which was closely related to the first arrival of the Muslim Arabs on Cyprus, is mentioned in a 10<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine treatise among the island's most outstanding characteristics and historical details, which the author expected to be of interest for his readership. Most intriguingly, we are dealing with one of the very few instances in which Muslim worship practices on Byzantine soil have become part of the Byzantine elite's collective memory. More than two centuries later, the *Kitāb al-ishārāt ilā ma'rifat al-ziyārāt* by 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Harawī (d. 1215) again refers to the tomb of Umm Harām as a center of worship and pilgrimage site<sup>19</sup>, something that indicates that even after the restoration of Byzantine rule over the island by Emperor Nikephoros II in 965 the veneration of the Muslim holy woman did not fall in oblivion or was impeded by the Byzantine authorities. We have no further information about the status of this site, but it may well be that it functioned like the mosque in Constantinople or other sites of Muslim worship in Byzantine territories, which enjoyed the protection of the Fatimid caliphate of Cairo or other Muslim rulers in the framework of mutual treaties. The safety of the Orthodox (= Melkite) Christians living in Syria and Egypt and the imperial protection of churches and pilgrimage sites in Palestine required a careful policy of mutual respect and tolerance.

16 Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* 152-154: »When the first raid on Cyprus took place, Umm Harām bint Milḥān embarked on the ship along with her husband 'Ubāda b. al-Sāmit. When they arrived in Cyprus, she disembarked from the ship and she was offered a mule in order to mount it. Then it stumbled and killed her«.

17 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Peri thematon* 15, in: Nerantzi-Varmazi, *Σύνταγμα* 53 no. 44.

18 Const. Porph. de adm. imp. 20, in: Nerantzi-Varmazi, *Syntagma* 53 no. 46.1: Τούτου στρατηγὸς χρηματίζει Μαυίας ὁ παραλύσας τὸν Κολοσσὸν Ῥόδου καὶ πορθήσας Κύπρον τὴν νῆσον καὶ πάσας τὰς πόλεις αὐτῆς.

19 Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt* 144-145: »Cyprus also contains the tomb (*qabr*) of Umm Harām, daughter of Milḥān, sister of Umm Sulaym, may God be pleased with them both«.





Fig. 3 Umm Ḥarām’s tomb situated at the southeast side of the *kībla* wall. – (Photo A. Beihammer).

But let us turn to the first emergence and the religious and ideological implications of the worship practices around Umm Ḥarām’s tomb. With her fatal accident, the island, which in the collective memory of the young Islamic community formed the first target of Muslim naval expeditions, acquired its first martyr. There are three aspects, which are especially noteworthy from a methodological point of view: (1) The early Muslim tradition included Cyprus into the regions related to the memories of the early conquests (*futūh*). (2) The woman’s tomb quickly gained significance as a sacred site of remembrance and veneration, as is attested by the reports of al-Wāqidi and other authors. (3) Umm Ḥarām’s personal links with Muhammad associated the island of Cyprus with the memories of the birth of Islam and the Prophet’s deeds and sayings.

These features make plain that we are dealing with memorial practices that were consciously created and promoted by the religious and military elites of the early Muslim caliphate. Even if we accept the tales about Umm Ḥarām’s premature

death during the first Arab campaign as historical fact, it is still very unlikely that the woman’s grave excelled as an object of veneration right from the onset. In 649 Muslim-Arab rule in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt was still in a very rudimentary and inchoate stage. To judge from the evidence provided by urban centers, such as Jerusalem and Damascus, the erection of large congregational mosques and other places of worship, which gave rise to the crystallization of a clearly defined Muslim identity in the conquered regions, hardly began before the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, when the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik asserted his rule against his rivals in the second civil war. Most monuments of this kind even date some decades later to the reign of his son al-Walid I (705-715)<sup>20</sup>. It is also important to note that it was during ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign in 686 that the caliphate’s political influence in Cyprus was legally corroborated by a peace treaty concluded with the Byzantine imperial government<sup>21</sup>. It is reasonable to assume that from that time Muslim authorities had an increased need for substantiating their claims to Cyprus on religious grounds.

20 For the Dome of the Rock erected in 691/692, see Grabar, *Qubbat al-ṣakhrā’*. – For the congregational mosque of Damascus, which was erected on the site

of a shared sanctuary encompassing the church of St John the Baptist and a Muslim prayer section, see Flood, *Great Mosque* 1-8.

21 Dölger/Müller, *Regesten* no. 253a [257]

Unfortunately, no source explicitly refers to the ideological and political backdrop of Umm Harām's veneration in Cyprus. Yet the detailed accounts transmitted by Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām and al-Balādhurī about legal and institutional matters concerning the status of Cyprus and similar cases in other parts of the Byzantine-Arab frontier indicate that members of the Umayyad elite harnessed the memory of an early Muslim martyr to bolster expansionist ambitions (futūh) and to counter voices of internal opposition to these plans<sup>22</sup>. The aforementioned legal opinions articulated by prominent traditionists and jurists (fuqahā') of the early Abbasid period give us precious insights into the concepts and arguments, which early Islamic legal thought used to define the Muslim state's relations with a group of people living in the Byzantine-Muslim borderland. It is also important to note that the specialists in question lived in different regions of the Muslim world and represented a variety of legal traditions: al-Layth b. Sa'd (d. 791) was based in Egypt; Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 811) and Mālik b. Anas (d. 795) were closely related to the Holy Places of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, Mecca and Medina respectively; Mūsā b. A'yūn (d. 793/794) resided in Harrān; Ismā'il b. 'Ayyāsh (d. 798/799) was Syrian; Yahyā b. Hamza (d. 799) was judge in Damascus; Abū Ishāq al-Fazārī (d. 804) and Makhlad b. Husayn from Basra (d. 806/807) were based in al-Maṣṣīṣa/Mopsuesteia and thus were involved in the administrative and political matters of the frontier zone in nearby Cilicia<sup>23</sup>. They agreed that Cyprus lay between the people of Islam and the Romans (bayna ahl al-islām wa-l-Rūm), paid taxes to the Muslims on account of the peace treaty with Mu'āwiya, but at the same time also to the Romans, and thus had to be regarded as dhimma, i. e., »protected subject«, to both sides<sup>24</sup>. The majority of the jurists advised the Abbasid governor to respect the treaty with the Cypriots and not immediately to proceed to punitive measures, for it was only some of the island's inhabitants who perpetrated the violation of the treaty and it would be unjust to punish the entire population for the crime of a small section<sup>25</sup>. This cautious attitude on the part of the Abbasid Empire's leading legal specialists clearly indicates that many of the decision makers in Baghdad were fully aware of the island's precarious position as an exposed outpost of Muslim presence in the maritime region between the shores of Cilicia and the Syrian littoral. The maintenance of the existing balance of power in this section of the Byzantine-Muslim frontier zone must have been an issue of primary importance for the

smooth functioning of the local administrative and military structures, as well as the commercial activities between Byzantine and Muslim regions.

Yet a substantial part of the early tradition about naval activities refers to negative attitudes of the early Muslim elite, as is clearly reflected in Caliph 'Umar's refusal. Hence, there was a need to enhance the idea of Muslim presence on Cyprus ideologically. Umm Harām's memory enabled the early transmitters to present Mu'āwiya's naval campaigns against the island as being in accordance with the Prophet's spiritual legacy and political aims. All views opposing the maintenance of Muslim influence on the island were to be dismissed as contravening God's plan. A careful reading of the available accounts reveals various points of friction with respect to the early caliphate's attitudes towards naval operations and a full integration of Cyprus into the Muslim realm. Once that Caliph 'Umar, who was generally accepted as an indisputable authority for all kinds of exemplary decisions and behavioral patterns, was opposed to the idea of ghazw al-bahr, i. e., »maritime raids«<sup>26</sup>, only a dictum attributable to the Prophet himself could overrule this position.

As an outstanding female figure from among the ansār, i. e., the earliest supporters of Muhammad after his emigration to Medina, Umm Harām was in a position to serve as a highly revered witness of conquest intentions in the early Muslim community. She was the motherly aunt of Anas b. Mālik, a personal servant of Muammad in numerous battles and public acts, and accompanied her husband 'Ubāda b. al-Sāmit on his campaigns in Syria until they settled in Mu'āwiya's new residence city of Damascus<sup>27</sup>. Accordingly, various chains of transmitters evoke Umm Harām as witness for the Prophet's explicit approval of naval campaigns: »The first soldiers of my community who will carry out a raid on sea are highly regarded«<sup>28</sup>. Other versions place even more emphasis on Muslim jihad concepts: »I admire the people of my community who travel on sea, for it is an enemy, and thus they make efforts on the path [of Allah]«<sup>29</sup>. »I saw people of my community traveling on sea. The likes of these people are like the kings ruling over the nation«<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, the Muslim tradition starkly underlined Umm Harām's high degree of familiarity with the Prophet. Because of their links of kinship, Muhammad used to take a nap laying his head in her lap while she was delousing him. On one of these occasions, he predicted the Muslim sea raid, stating that she would be among these warriors<sup>31</sup>.

22 Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, Kitāb al-amwāl 264-268 (no. 469-476). – al-Balādhurī, Futūh al-buldān 155-158.

23 For these jurists, see Merad, al-Layth b. Sa'd, Spector, Sufyān b. 'Uyayna, Schacht, Mālik b. Anas. – Ibn Sa'd, al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā 7, 225 (no. 3955) (Mūsā b. A'yūn). 219 (no. 3906) (Yahyā b. Hamza). 227 (no. 3976) (Abū Ishāq al-Fazārī). 227 (no. 3978) (Makhlad b. Husayn).

24 Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, Kitāb al-amwāl 264 no. 469.

25 Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, Kitāb al-amwāl 268 no. 476.

26 al-Balādhurī, Futūh al-buldān 152: »The Muslims did not travel on the sea of the Romans before that (first raid against Cyprus), for Mu'āwiya asked 'Umar for his permission to undertake a raid on sea but he gave no permission«.

27 Ibn 'Asākir, Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq 70, 209.

28 Ibn 'Asākir, Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq 70, 210: *awwal jaysh min ummatī yaghzūna l-bahr qad ūjibu*.

29 Ibn 'Asākir, Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq 70, 213: *'ujibtu li-nās min ummatī yarkabūna hādihā l-bahr, wa-huwa l-'adūw, yujāhidūna fi l-sabil*.

30 Ibn 'Asākir, Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq 70, 214: *ra'aytu nāsān min ummatī yarkabūna l-bahr mithluhum ka-mithli mulūk 'alā l-usra*.

31 Ibn 'Asākir, Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq 70, 215.

Despite some remarkable achievements in the years following the first attack on Cyprus, the deployment of the early Arab fleet was by no means an unquestionable success story. The most serious setback in Mu'āwīya's reign was the defeat of the Muslim ships attacking the sea walls of Constantinople, which according to recent findings has to be dated to the years 667-668<sup>32</sup>. The fortifications of the imperial city, unfavorable climatic conditions, the Greek fire, other military disadvantages, and an overall lack of experience were factors determining the limits of Muslim naval warfare against the Byzantine Empire. Moreover, constructing and maintaining large numbers of combat vessels was a huge burden for the state treasury<sup>33</sup>. A Byzantine counter-offensive backed by fresh naval contingents from Sicily in the years between 672 and 678 caused even more damage to the Arab side and changed the previous balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>34</sup>. After 678 the caliphate for the first time was forced to conclude a disadvantageous peace treaty with the Byzantine Empire, stipulating the payment of huge sums of tribute to Constantinople<sup>35</sup>. This event, too, may have purveyed another argument supporting the reduction of the caliphate's naval forces and the restriction of raids to the borderland of Asia Minor.

In Cyprus the situation of the Arabs soon deteriorated. After the second incursion of 33 a. h. (2 August 653-21 July 654), Mu'āwīya reportedly established a garrison of 12000 soldiers, who were all enrolled in the *dīwān* and thus were entitled to receive regular payments from the caliph's treasury. Later the caliph transferred settlers from Ba'labakk to Cyprus and erected a *madīna*, i. e., a sort of garrison town, and mosques<sup>36</sup>. A flourishing Muslim community supported by stipends from Damascus and at least a part of the tribute of 7200 dinars paid by the local inhabitants was in the offing<sup>37</sup>. Mu'āwīya's son and successor Yazīd I (680-683), however,

suspended these payments and ordered the settlement in Cyprus to be destroyed<sup>38</sup>. No source explains the reasons for this sudden change of policy. The only incentive mentioned in one report is bribery<sup>39</sup>, but again without illuminating the background of these schemes. Irrespective of the underlying motives, it is evident that there were political and financial interests rejecting plans of direct Muslim control over Cyprus. It becomes understandable, therefore, why the Prophet's statements in favor of naval raids and Umm Harām's authority became so important a tool for the groups supporting opposite views. Despite all predicaments, it is worth abiding by Mu'āwīya's goals regarding the islands and coastal areas in the Eastern Mediterranean, for his objectives were in tune with God's will. There is reason to believe that it was as a result of these events that political forces in the caliphate began to foster the veneration of Umm Harām and established a site commemorating her martyrdom. This assumption is further supported by a number of simultaneous developments in both the Muslim central lands and the Byzantine-Muslim contact zone.

The correlation between jihad and the creation of new pilgrimage sites was a widespread phenomenon in early Islam. Tombs of Muslim chiefs of the conquest period and prominent *sahāba* members can be found in all major centers of Egypt and Syria<sup>40</sup>. As time went by, however, these places quickly became integral parts of the Muslim world and lost their immediate relevance to the conquests. We have to look at contested border zones lying at the crossroads between Byzantium and Islam in order to detect parallels with Umm Harām in Cyprus. The most striking example of a showcase saint, who gave his life for Muslim jihad, is Abū Ayyūb al-Ansārī, who was buried outside the walls of Constantinople<sup>41</sup>. Most remarkably, Abū Ayyūb also appears on the list of companions participating in the first naval raid on Cyprus<sup>42</sup>. Hence, there is a direct link between him and Umm Harām.

32 Haldon, Byzantium 63-64 and now Jankowiak, First Arab Siege 237-320, who on the basis of an extensive analysis of all available sources makes very plausible that the siege has to be dated to the time span between the fall of 667 and perhaps June 668 rather than the four-year period 674-678, which has become commonly accepted textbook knowledge.

33 Christides, Arab-Byzantine Struggle 87-103, esp. 87-90 (who argues that the Greek fire as an effective weapon in the wars against the Arabs has been overestimated and ascribes the reasons for the Arab failure mainly to a lack of experience and the Byzantines' brave resistance). For the financial burden of fleet expeditions, see Beihammer, Zypern 51.

34 Jankowiak, First Arab Siege 266-289. 316-317.

35 Dölger/Müller, Regesten no. 239 (diplomatic contacts between Mu'āwīya and Emperor Constantine IV and conclusion of a peace treaty). no. 253 (renewal of the existing treaty with caliph 'Abd al-Malik).

36 Al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-buldān 153. – Christides, Image 29-30. – For details concerning the second Arab attack on Cyprus, which seems to have mainly affected the cities of Salamis-Constantia, Lapithos, and Paphos, see Christides, Image 21-28. On the basis of inscriptions and archaeological evidence, the Arab garrison town is usually located in Paphos (Christides, Image 30), yet none of these pieces of evidence can be dated to 7<sup>th</sup> century and the written sources provide no further information about the location of the Arab *madīna*.

37 For the total amount of polltax paid by the Cypriots, see Al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-buldān 153. – Browning, Kypros kai Arabes 250.

38 al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-buldān 153-154.

39 al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-buldān 153: *balaghanā anna Yazīd b. Mu'āwīya rushiya mālan 'azīman* (»we were informed that Yazīd b. Mu'āwīya was bribed with a lot of money«). – Christides, Image 30-31 points to the overall instability of the caliphate under Yazīd's reign due to the second *fitna* or civil war. This partly

explains the caliph's bad reputation in the early historiographical tradition, presenting him prone to all kinds of abuse and corruption. Given that a similar measure was applied to the Arab garrison of Rhodes, we may assume that the withdrawal of garrisons from the islands south of the Byzantine coastland of Asia Minor has to do with the shift of power after the failure of the siege of Constantinople and the strengthening of the Byzantine fleet in the region of Caria and Lycia.

40 For tombs of Companions of the Prophet in Syria, see Talmon-Heller, Graves 604-611. – On holy places in general, see Kister, Sanctity 18-65. – On Muslim legal opinions on funerary architecture, see Leisten, Orthodoxy and Exegesis 12-22.

41 Ibn 'Asākir, Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq 26, 33-65 no. 1876. – For a summary and brief analysis of the main characteristics of this account, see Khalek, Dreams of Hagia Sophia 134-136.

42 Al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-buldān 154 gives a list of high-ranking companions, who had distinguished themselves already in the Prophet's lifetime and latter on excelled as military commanders in the conquest period and transmitters of ḥadīths: 1) Abū Ayyūb Khālīd b. Zayd b. Kulayb al-Ansārī; 2) Abū l-Dardā' (Keshk, Depiction 36 no. 63); 3) Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī; 4) 'Ubāda b. al-Sāmit (Keshk, Depiction 36 no. 64); 5) Faḍāla b. 'Ubayd al-Ansārī (Ibn 'Asākir, Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq 48, 290-307 [no. 5605]); 6) 'Umayr b. Sa'd b. 'Ubayd al-Ansārī; 7) Wāthila b. al-Asqa' al-Kinānī (Ibn 'Asākir, Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq 62, 343-366 [no. 7945]. – Keshk, Depiction 36, n. 66); 8) 'Abd Allāh b. Bishr al-Māzinī (Keshk, Depiction 36, n. 68); 9) Shaddād b. Aws b. Thābit, who was the son of the brother of Hassān b. Thābit (Keshk, Depiction 36, n. 65); 10) al-Miqdād (Ibn 'Asākir, Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq 60, 143-183 [no. 7618]); 11) Ka'b al-Habr b. Mātī' (Ibn 'Asākir, Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq 50, 151-176 no. 5817); 12) Jubayr b. Nufayr al-Ḥaḍramī.



Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī was a very important figure among the Prophet's early companions in the newly founded community of Medina and the subsequent period of Muslim expansion. His house was the first to be chosen by Muhammad as accommodation after his arrival in Medina<sup>43</sup>. Thereafter he is constantly mentioned in the lists of eyewitnesses attending crucial battles and other turning points in Muhammad's lifetime and appears as authority for numerous sayings of the Prophet<sup>44</sup>. During the conquests and the first civil strife, Abū Ayyūb is said to have participated in the campaign to Egypt and to have sided with Caliph 'Alī in the battle of Nahrawān against his Khārijite enemies<sup>45</sup>. He then settled in Damascus, apparently as a highly revered member of the early Muslim elite, closely affiliated with the Umayyad caliphate. High aged, he participated in the campaign of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya against Constantinople<sup>46</sup>. His death before the land walls of the imperial city was the starting point of Abu Ayyūb's »sanctification« as a perennial symbol of Muslim ambitions to incorporate the center of the Christian Roman Empire into the Abode of Islam. In the surviving reports collected by the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Damascene author Ibn 'Asākir this process evolved in three steps. On being deadly wounded, he allegedly expressed the wish to be buried as close as possible to the city walls<sup>47</sup>. At first the Byzantines threatened the Muslims to destroy their martyr's tomb but refrained from doing so in fear of Muslim reprisals against Christian churches in Muslim territories. Subsequently, the Byzantines adopted Abu Ayyūb's veneration, erecting a white-colored domed building (qubba baydā') over his grave<sup>48</sup>. Muslim collective memory, thus, perceived the tomb of the Prophet's companion as a common place of worship, which linked Muslim claims to Constantinople with Christian desires to appeal to the protection of a saintly figure. Reportedly, the Byzantines in times of drought used to pray for rain at Abu Ayyūb's tomb<sup>49</sup>. Eventually, a champion of early Islam acquired qualities of a miracle worker in the manner of a Byzantine saint and appears as a jointly venerated mediator between Islam and Christendom.

The parallels with Umm Harām's tomb and veneration in Cyprus are quite obvious and there is reason to assume that Abu Ayyūb's memory in Constantinople may have served as a model for the creation of Umm Harām's worship on the

island. In both cases we are dealing with Muslim saintly figures venerated in a crucial contact and conflict zone between Islam and Christianity. Both persons belong to the circle of the Prophet's companions in Medina and were involved in the expansion of Islam. In both cases, the protagonists' Muslim identity merged with their surrounding Christian environment.

The latter aspect has to be viewed in the context of a broader development in the creation of the Arab-Muslim Empire, namely the emergence of a sacred topography in the newly conquered regions of Syria<sup>50</sup>. In the course of this process, the holy places of the monotheistic religions received a Muslim interpretation and urban centers, which loomed large in the new political and administrative system, were associated with the Muslim version of heilsgeschichte and the early days of Islam. Muslim jurists were reluctant in adding other sites of veneration to the holy places of Mecca and Medina<sup>51</sup>. Nevertheless, political exigencies, popular beliefs, and well-established local traditions quickly gave rise to the emergence of sacred areas at first at biblical sites in Palestine, such as Jerusalem and al-Ramla, and later in centers of political significance, which possessed long-standing traditions of local cults based on relics and the memory of saints and prophets or gained sacredness through tombs of renowned companions of the Prophet and/or commanders in the Islamic conquests<sup>52</sup>. It suffices here to recall some crucial mechanisms, which help us better understand the development of the veneration centered around Umm Harām's tomb.

A telling example is the city of Damascus, where the Christian Cathedral Church of Saint John the Baptist was replaced by the Umayyad Mosque erected by Caliph al-Walīd I (705-715) while John the Baptist was integrated into Muslim practices of worship<sup>53</sup>. This case reveals an interesting mixture of religious strategies, which, on the one hand, established close bonds between the entire complex's Christian past and Muslim present and, on the other, placed emphasis on the theological and ideological rupture with Christian tenets. The baptism of Christ in the Jordan River and the feast of Epiphany are especially strong manifestations of Trinitarian concepts<sup>54</sup>. John the Baptist's transformation into a Muslim prophet, therefore, starkly underlined the idea of Muslim superiority.

43 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 42-43. – Khalek, *Dreams of Hagia Sophia* 134.

44 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 39, 42.

45 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 42.

46 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 36, 38-39, 40, 42, 60-63. The dates given in the Muslim tradition are 50 a. h. (29 January 670 - 17 January 671) (ibidem 16, 36), 51 a. h. (18 January 671 - 7 January 672) (ibidem 16, 40), and mostly 52 a. h. (8 January 672 - 26 December 672) (ibidem 16, 38, 39, 42, 63). For the siege of Constantinople, see also Theoph. Conf. chron. 353-354 (Mango/Scott, *Theophanes Confessor 493-494*), where the beginning of the siege is dated to the year 6165 a. m. = 672/673. This date would approximately concur with the year 52 of the Muslim tradition. Other reports date the Yazīd's expedition to 55 a. h. (6 December 674 - 24 November 675): Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 60. The siege is usually dated to the years 674-678, but the available information is rather terse. A certain terminus ante quem is the year 678, in which Byzantium and the Muslim caliphate concluded a peace treaty (Dölger/Müller, *Regesten* no. 239). For an extensive discussion of the entire

body of Muslim sources in correlation with other historiographical traditions, see now Jankowiak, *First Arab Siege* 262-276.

47 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 60: »Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, while participating in the siege of Constantinople, ordered to be interred beside the walls of the city. We brought him close to them and interred him beneath our feet«.

48 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 61-62.

49 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tāriḫ Madīnat Dimashq* 16, 61.

50 For numerous examples for the sanctification of important mosques, holy sites, and urban centers in Syria and Palestine, see Kister, *Sanctity* 21-30. – For growing interest in ancient tombs, sacred sites and relics and the promotion of worship practices related to them, see Talmon-Heller, *Graves* 604-613.

51 Kister, *Sanctity* 18-19.

52 Kister, *Sanctity* 19-24. – Talmon-Heller, *Graves* 604-613.

53 For the erection of the Umayyad Damascus, see Flood, *Great Mosque* 1-8, 184-236. – For the veneration of John the Baptist in Damascus and his Muslim reinterpretation, see Khalek, *Damascus* 85-134.

54 Khalek, *Damascus* 99-108.

A Muslim legend about the miraculous discovery of John's skull and the erection of a new tomb, which came to serve as a Muslim site of veneration within the new mosque, brought the appropriation and re-interpretation of pre-existing Christian traditions to completion<sup>55</sup>. Another important aspect is the fact that according to the Muslim tradition the Byzantine imperial government under Emperor Justinian II significantly contributed to the erection of the new mosque by sending craftsmen, mosaic stones, and money<sup>56</sup>. Art historians have adduced convincing arguments that the surviving parts of the original mosaic decoration actually evince Byzantine influence<sup>57</sup>. It is more difficult to decide whether these elements are to be attributed to local workers trained in Byzantine traditions or to foreign workers imported from the Byzantine capital<sup>58</sup>. Be that as it may, the evidence provided by written sources shows that the Umayyad caliphate sought to extoll its architectural and ideological efforts by establishing links with the court of Constantinople. Universal ambitions and the caliphate's claim to be the heir of the Roman Empire are possible motives lying behind these narratives.

In the case of Umm Harām, we may assume that similar concepts were at work, though on a much smaller scale. Umm Harām's burial place was by no means invented out of thin air. The Salt Lake, on the shores of which the righteous lady was interred, is situated in a multilayered sacred area demarcated by the nearby Mountain of the Cross (Stavrovouni) and the Church of St Lazarus<sup>59</sup>. Both traditions were of supra-regional significance. The relic preserved in the monastery of Stavrovouni is closely linked with the legends of St Helena<sup>60</sup>. The veneration of the True Cross gained special prominence in the time immediately preceding the Arab raids, when Emperor Heraclius in triumphal celebrations in both Jerusalem and Constantinople restored the relic, which had been removed by the Persians<sup>61</sup>. Knowledge about Heraclius' sojourn in Jerusalem is clearly reflected in accounts of the early Muslim tradition<sup>62</sup>. The veneration of St Lazarus in Cyprus is connected with the widespread belief that he was the first bishop of Kition. Byzantine chronicles ascribe the erection of a new church of St Lazarus to Emperor Leon VI and stress the active involvement of the Byzantine fleet in this building project<sup>63</sup>. The strong presence of Byzantine

naval forces in and around Cyprus has most probably to be seen in connection with a significant rise of Arab expansionist activities in the Mediterranean at that time. The Aghlabids of North Africa stroke heavy blows against Byzantine positions in Southern Italy and Sicily culminating in the conquest of Taormina in 902. The involvement in these clashes of fleet contingents from Constantinople must have seriously drained the overall striking power of the imperial navy. Raids and conquests in the Aegean conducted by Arab emirs of Crete, Tarsus, and Syria, such as the conquests of Samos (892/893), and Lemnos (902/903) and the dreadful sack of Thessalonica (904) constituted an immediate threat to Byzantine maritime positions in the Eastern Mediterranean and may account for an increasing interest in the strategic advantages of Cyprus. The subsequent counter-attacks of Himerios, in which Cyprus was directly involved, bear witness to these constellations<sup>64</sup>.

The region around the Salt Lake in Cyprus enjoyed an outstanding reputation for its sacredness and was a provincial center of imperial patronage, which in times of political and military challenges certainly gained in importance. The decision of Muslim authorities to establish Umm Harām's burial place in this area apparently resulted from the long-standing Christian worship practices centered in this specific part of the island. A region dedicated to the veneration of the True Cross and the memory of St Lazarus gained a Muslim dimension through the commemoration of a woman martyr, who gave her life in the context of the Muslims' first attempt to extend their faith and political authority over the maritime regions of the eastern borderlands. Just as in the case of Damascus, we are dealing with the transformation of local traditions related to the Christian belief in Incarnation and an outstanding saintly figure. Just as in the case of Constantinople, we are dealing with a person linked with early Muslim concepts of conquest and Holy War. We lack sources describing specific pilgrimage practices in the medieval ages. Yet, as has already been mentioned, the existence of Umm Harām's tomb is attested by written sources of different origin up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, something that indicates a well-established and unbroken local cult and, to some extent, explains its successful revival in Ottoman times.

55 Kahlek, Damascus 108-134.

56 For a detailed analysis of the available source material and the views of modern scholars on the alleged or real Byzantine contribution to the Umayyad mosques in Medina and Damaskus, see Kaplony, Konstantinopel und Damaskus 167-191. – For the evidence provided by stylistic parallels between elements of the mosaic decoration in Damascus and other places, see Flood, Great Mosque 17-25.

57 Flood, Great Mosque 25-35 especially points to the motif of the pendant pearls, which appears in mosaics of Ravenna and Rome and is related to the iconography of the Heavenly Jerusalem and eschatological resonances in Byzantine imperial art. At the same time, jewels and pearls figure prominently in Qur'anic descriptions of the Paradise and thus have also a very strong Muslim point of reference.

58 Flood, Great Mosque 24-25.

59 Papalexandrou, Hala Sultan Tekke 251-281.

60 For the veneration of the St Helena and the Holy Cross in Cyprus, see Mitsides, Ekklesia tes Kyprou 112.

61 Drijvers, Heraclius 175-190.

62 For the image of Heraclius in the early Muslim tradition, see El Cheikh, Byzantium 34-54.

63 Theoph. Cont. 6.18, 364-365: ἔκτισεν δὲ καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἁγίου Λαζάρου ἐκκλησίαν τῶν λεγομένων Τόπων, καὶ μονὴν ἀνδρῶν εὐνοῦχων ἐν αὐτῇ κατεσκεύασεν· ἔνθα καὶ τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου Λαζάρου σῶμα καὶ τῆς ἀδελφῆς αὐτοῦ Μαγδαληνῆς ἀνακομίσας ἀπέθετο. Τοῦ δὲ στόλου ἐν τοῖς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοιούτων ἔργοις ἀσχολουμένου, [...] For the dating, imperial patronage, and architectural characteristics of the Church of St Lazarus in Larnaca, see Chotzakoglou, Byzantinē architektonikē 491-495.

64 For the Arab conquest of the last Byzantine strongholds on Sicily and Muslim maritime activities in the Aegean, see Vasilev, Byzance et les Arabes 2.1, 142-152, 157-181; Christides, Conquest of Crete 160-161; Malamut, Les îles 1, 82-84.



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## Zusammenfassung / Summary / Résumé

### Pilgerfahrt und Reliquien im byzantinisch-arabischen Grenzgebiet: Die Hala Sultan Tekke in Zypern

Die Hala Sultan Tekke am Ufer des Salzsees nahe der modernen Stadt Larnaka ist der bedeutendste muslimische Pilgerort Zyperns von osmanischer Zeit an bis zum heutigen Tag. In der muslimischen Tradition wird Hala Sultan oder Umm Harām als eine Frau, die zum Kreis der engsten Vertrauten Mohammeds gehörte, sehr verehrt; sie ist mit der Ankunft der Muslime auf Zypern in der Mitte des 7. Jahrhunderts verbunden. Wenn auch die schriftliche oder archäologische Quellenlage sehr dünn ist, so kann man doch begründet annehmen, dass sich das Grab von Umm Harām im frühen 8. Jahrhundert zu einem Ort der Verehrung und geheiligtem Gedächtnisses entwickelte. Ich will in diesem Beitrag die Verehrung von Hala Sultan / Umm Harām in Zypern vor dem Hintergrund der Entstehung heiliger Schreine, Pilgerorte und Praktiken der Vereh-

rung im frühen Islam untersuchen. Ich will zeigen, wann und unter welchen Umständen eine weibliche Begleiterin des Propheten und ihr Grab zu einem Kristallisationspunkt religiöser und politischer Ansprüche an der Grenze von Byzanz und der muslimischen Welt werden konnte. Da der fragliche Ort eng mit den frühen muslimischen Eliten und ihren expansionistischen Ambitionen verbunden ist, ist es wichtig zu fragen, wie er sich zu den anderen Orten muslimischer Verehrung verhält, die im Kontakt mit oder in der Umformung von christlichen Traditionen und Verehrungspraktiken entstanden, wie etwa das Grab von Abu Ayyub al-Ansari in Konstantinopel und die Umayyaden-Moschee in Damaskus. Dies führt uns wiederum zu einem besseren Verständnis der religiösen und ideologischen Bedeutung des Grabes von Umm Harām und anderer vergleichbarer Orte, die es in den byzantinisch-arabischen Kontakt- bzw. Konfliktzonen gab.

### Pilgrimage and Relics in the Byzantine-Arab Borderland: The Hala Sultan Tekke in Cyprus

The Hala Sultan Tekke at the shores of the Salt Lake near the modern city of Larnaca is the most important Muslim pilgrimage site on Cyprus from the Ottoman period down to the present day. In the Muslim tradition, Hala Sultan or Umm Harām is a highly revered woman belonging to the circle of Muhammad's closest companions and is connected with the first arrival of Muslims on Cyprus in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century. Although the evidence provided by written or archaeological sources is extremely scarce there is reason to believe that the tomb of Umm Harām developed into a site of veneration and sacred memory in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century. In this paper I examine the veneration of Hala Sultan/Umm Harām in Cyprus against the background of the creation of holy shrines, pilgrimage sites, and worship practices in early Islam. I try to show why, when, and under what circumstances a female companion of the Prophet and her tomb became a focal point for religious and political claims in the Byzantine-Muslim borderlands. Given that the site in question is closely linked with early Muslim elites and their expansionist ambitions, it is important to ask how it is related to other places of Muslim veneration that resulted from the contact with or transformation of Christian traditions and worship practices, such as the tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari in Constantinople and the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. This, in turn, leads us to a better understanding of the religious and ideological bearing Umm Harām's tomb and other comparable sites may have had in Byzantine-Arab contact and conflict zones.

### Le pèlerinage et les reliques aux confins arabo-byzantins: la Hala Sultan Tekke à Chypre

La Hala Sultan Tekke, sur la rive du Lac salé non loin de la ville moderne de Larnaca, est le site de pèlerinage musulman le plus important depuis la période ottomane. Dans la tradition musulmane, Hala Sultan, ou Umm Harām, est une femme fort vénérée qui comptait parmi les proches compagnons de Mohammed et qui est rattachée à l'arrivée des Musulmans à Chypre au milieu du 7<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ne disposant certes que de très peu de sources écrites ou archéologiques, on peut cependant admettre que la tombe d'Umm Harām est devenue un lieu de vénération et de mémoire sacrée au début du 8<sup>e</sup> siècle. Je vais examiner ici la vénération de Hala Sultan/Umm Harām à Chypre, dans le contexte de la naissance de lieux saints, de sites de pèlerinage et de pratiques d'adoration au début de l'islam. Je vais tenter de démontrer pourquoi, comment et dans quelles circonstances une femme de l'entourage du prophète, et sa tombe, sont devenues la cible de revendications religieuses et politiques aux frontières de Byzance et du monde musulman. Étant donné que ce site est étroitement lié aux premières élites musulmanes et leurs ambitions expansionnistes, il est important de s'interroger sur sa relation à d'autres lieux de vénération musulmans, nés du contact avec des ou de la transformation de traditions chrétiennes et de pratiques d'adoration, comme la tombe d'Abu Ayyub al-Ansari à Constantinople et la mosquée des Omeyyades à Damas. Et ceci nous permet alors de mieux saisir la portée religieuse et idéologique qu'ont pu avoir la tombe d'Umm Harām et d'autres sites comparables sur les relations entre Byzantins et Arabes et sur les zones de conflit.