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The Mediterranean Frontier: Christianity face to face with Islam, Type Chapter Author(s) Hugh Kennedy Page start Page end 'The Muslim.

Roman–Persian Wars , Byzantine–Sassanid Wars , Byzantine–Sassanid War of 602–628 , and Siege of Constantinople The prolonged and escalating Byzantine–Sassanid wars of the 6th and 7th centuries and the recurring outbreaks of bubonic plague Plague of Justinian left both empires exhausted and vulnerable in the face of the sudden emergence and expansion of the Arabs. The last of these wars ended with victory for the Byzantines: Emperor Heraclius regained all lost territories, and restored the True Cross to Jerusalem in 629. Expansion under Muhammad , 630–661 Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate , 661–750 According to Muslim biographies, Muhammed, having received intelligence that Byzantine forces were concentrating in northern Arabia with alleged intentions of invading Arabia, led a Muslim army north to Tabouk in present-day northwestern Saudi Arabia , with the intention of pre-emptively engaging the Byzantine army; the news, however, proved to be false. Though it was not a battle in the typical sense, nevertheless the event represented the first Arab attack on the Byzantines. It did not, however, lead immediately to a military confrontation. In any case, Muslim Arabs after certainly pursued a full-blown invasion of both empires, resulting in the conquest of the Levant , Egypt and Persia for Islam. Arab conquest of Roman Syria: Muslim conquest of Syria In the Levant, the invading Rashidun army were engaged by a Byzantine army composed of imperial troops as well as local levies. The Roman Emperor Heraclius had fallen ill and was unable to personally lead his armies to resist the Arab conquests of Syria and Roman Paelestina in 634. In a battle fought near Ajnadayn in the summer of 634 , the Rashidun Caliphate army achieved a decisive victory. Antioch fell to the Muslim armies in late 636 , and by then the Muslims occupied the whole of northern Syria, except for upper Mesopotamia , which they granted a one-year truce. In December 636 , the Muslims departed from Palestine to invade Egypt in early 641 Muslim conquest of Egypt By the time Heraclius died, much of Egypt had been lost, and by 644 the whole of Syria was in the hands of the armies of Islam. He was progressively joined by further reinforcements, notably 12,000 soldiers by Al-Zubayr. The Byzantines, divided and shocked by the sudden loss of so much territory, agreed to give up the city by September 644. Conquest of the Exarchate of Africa[edit] Further information: Muslim conquest of the Maghreb "The people of Homs replied [to the Muslims], "We like your rule and justice far better than the state of oppression and tyranny in which we were. Under the Umayyads the conquest of the remaining Byzantine and northern Berber territories in North Africa was completed and the Arabs were able to move across large parts of the Berber world, invading Visigothic Spain through the Strait of Gibraltar , [18] under the command of the allegedly Berber general Tariq ibn-Ziyad. He put a governor in place in Egypt at al-Fustat , and launched raids into Anatolia in 647. Then from 647 to a new North African campaign was launched to protect Egypt "from flank attack by Byzantine Cyrene ". An Arab army of 40,000 took Barca , defeating 30,000 Byzantines. In 648 , Kairouan in modern Tunisia was established as a base for further invasions; Kairouan would become the capital of the Islamic province of Ifriqiya , and one of the main Arabo-Islamic religious centers in the Middle Ages. Kennedy , "the Muslims should attack whenever possible; rather than peace interrupted by occasional conflict, the normal pattern was seen to be conflict interrupted by occasional, temporary truce hudna. This resulted in the defeat of the Byzantine navy at the Battle of the Masts in 655 , opening up the Mediterranean. Under the instructions of the caliph Uthman ibn Affan , Muawiyah then prepared for the siege of Constantinople. Trade between the Muslim eastern and southern shores and the Christian northern shores almost ceased during this period, isolating Western Europe from developments in the Muslim world: These expeditions, aiming both at plunder and at weakening and keeping the Byzantines at bay, as well as the corresponding retaliatory Byzantine raids, eventually became established as a fixture of Byzantine–Arab warfare for the next three centuries. The remains of the old field armies were settled in each of them, and soldiers were allocated land there in payment of their service. The themata would form the backbone of the

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Byzantine defensive system for centuries to come. Four years later, a massive Muslim fleet reappeared in the Marmara and re-established a base at Cyzicus, from there they raided the Byzantine coasts almost at will. Finally in 674, Muawiyah sent an army to invest Constantinople from land as well, beginning the First Arab Siege of the city. The returning Muslim fleet suffered further losses due to storms, while the army lost many men to the thematic armies who attacked them on their route back. The setback at Constantinople was followed by further reverses across the vast Muslim empire. As Gibbon writes, "this Mahometan Alexander, who sighed for new worlds, was unable to preserve his recent conquests. By the universal defection of the Greeks and Africans he was recalled from the shores of the Atlantic. Then, the third governor of Africa, Zuheir, was overthrown by a powerful army, sent from Constantinople by Constantine IV for the relief of Carthage. In this climate, the Umayyads consolidated their control of Armenia and Cilicia, and began preparing a renewed offensive against Constantinople. In Byzantium, the general Leo the Isaurian r. Whatever the real number, it was a huge force, far larger than the imperial army. From July to August, the city was besieged by land and sea by the Muslims, who built an extensive double line of circumvallation and contravallation on the landward side, isolating the capital. Forced to extend the siege into winter, the besieging army suffered horrendous casualties from the cold and the lack of provisions. The crews of the new fleets were composed mostly of Christians, who began defecting in large numbers, while the land forces were ambushed and defeated in Bithynia. As famine and an epidemic continued to plague the Arab camp, the siege was abandoned on 15 August. On its return, the Arab fleet suffered further casualties to storms and an eruption of the volcano of Thera. Byzantineâ€™Arab wars â€™ The first wave of the Muslim conquests ended with the siege of Constantinople in 678, and the border between the two empires became stabilized along the mountains of eastern Anatolia. Raids and counter-raids continued on both sides and became almost ritualized, but the prospect of outright conquest of Byzantium by the Caliphate receded. This led to far more regular, and often friendly, diplomatic contacts, as well as a reciprocal recognition of the two empires. In response to the Muslim threat, which reached its peak in the first half of the 8th century, the Isaurian emperors adopted the policy of Iconoclasm, which was abandoned in 730 only to be readopted in the 780s and finally abandoned in 843. Under the Macedonian dynasty, exploiting the decline and fragmentation of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Byzantines gradually went into the offensive, and recovered much territory in the 10th century, which was lost however after to the Seljuk Turks. Raids under the last Umayyads and the rise of Iconoclasm[edit] Map of the Byzantine-Arab frontier zone in southeastern Asia Minor, along the Taurus-Antitaurus range Following the failure to capture Constantinople in 678, the Umayyads for a time diverted their attention elsewhere, allowing the Byzantines to take to the offensive, making some gains in Armenia. On the Arab side, Cilicia was permanently occupied and its deserted cities, such as Adana, Mopsuestia al-Massisa and, most importantly, Tarsus, were refortified and resettled under the early Abbasids. These two regions came to form the two halves of a new fortified frontier zone, the thughur. The raids were also largely confined to the borderlands and the central Anatolian plateau, and only rarely reached the peripheral coastlands, which the Byzantines fortified heavily. In 726, Leo published an edict condemning their use and showed himself increasingly critical of the iconophiles. He formally banned depictions of religious figures in a court council in 730. In the words of Warren Treadgold: Only in the late 8th century did the Muslim raids again become a threat, but the great Byzantine victory at Akroinon and the turmoil of the Abbasid Revolution led to a pause in Arab attacks against the Empire. It also opened up the way for a more aggressive stance by Constantine V r. The annual raids, which had almost lapsed in the turmoil following the Abbasid Revolution, were undertaken with renewed vigour from ca. Sicily, Italy and Crete[edit] Main article: History of Islam in southern Italy While a relative equilibrium reigned in the East, the situation in the western Mediterranean was irretrievably altered when the Aghlabids began their slow conquest of Sicily in the 8th century. Using Tunisia as their launching pad, the Arabs started by conquering Palermo in 828, Messina in 842, Enna in 848, culminating in the capture of Syracuse in 878. Byzantium further suffered an important setback with the loss of Crete to a band of Andalusian exiles, who established a piratical emirate on the island and for more than a century ravaged the coasts of the hitherto secure Aegean Sea.

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