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The Expedition of Nicetas on Egypt 609-610 A.D. : How, Why and When?

Professor Butler in his serious book *The Arab Conquest of Egypt* speaks about the entrance of the Byzantine leader Nicetas, cousin of the Emperor Heraclius, into Egypt. He shows the battles which took place between the forces of Nicetas and those of the Emperor Phocas (602-610), but he omits some important details like the military plan of Nicetas to conquer Egypt, and does not answer the questions : Why did Nicetas enter Egypt during that time and when? These are the main questions, which I will try to answer in the following pages.

I think that it is important to show the general conditions of Byzantium during the reign of Phocas, which gave Heraclius, Archon of Africa, the motive to send his son Heraclius to Constantinople and Nicetas to Egypt.

Byzantium faced a difficult period during the years of 602-610 A.D., in which Phocas Tyrannus¹ had become an emperor in the wake of the revolution of the Byzantine soldiers of Danube frontier in 602 A.D.² So, we

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¹ Most of Byzantine historians mention Phocas as a tyrannus, for example see : Leo Grammaticus, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, *CSHB*, (Bonnae, 1842), 143; G. Codinus, *De Aedificiis, Opera Omnia*, ed. J. P. Migne, *PG*, tome 157, (Turnholt), col. 606.

² On these events see: *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, Eng. trans. Michael and Mary Whitby, (Oxford, 1986), chap. 8; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, Eng. trans. H. Turtledove, (Pennsylvania, 1982), 1; Nicephorus, Patriarch Constantinopolitani, *Breviarium Rerum post Mauricium Gestarum*, ed. I. Bekker, *CSHB*, (Bonnae, 1837), 3; see: Sébèos, *Histoire d'Heraclius*, trad. Fran. A. Macler, (Paris, 1904), 54-55; *Les legendes Syriaque d'Aron de Sarouge, de Maxime et Damece d'Abraham, Maître de Barsoma, et de l'empereur Mauricius*, texte Syriaque, ed et trad. F. Nau, *PO*, vol. 5, (Paris, 1910), 776-778; Jean of Nikiou, Arab. trans. under title: *Egypt in the Manuscript of Jean of Nikiou* by O. Saber, (unpublished M. A. thesis Cairo University, 1981); Shlosser, F., *The Reign of the*

can say that his rule was not legitimate. Once Phocas became an emperor, The Persians took revenge up on him for what did to their late friend Emperor Maurice. They started to attack the Byzantine possessions, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Syria³. In the west, Slavs overran the peninsula of Balkans in which they later settled. The Byzantine forces were enable to drive them off it. Like their predecessors, Avars also crossed the river of Danube and overran Thrace and Illyricum⁴.

One of modern historians outlines the general conditions of the Byzantine Empire during the time of Phocas in these words "The empire appeared to be unable to know what she really wanted. Phocas's abduction of the throne led to serious consequences and causing chaos in the whole Byzantine government. Phocas was not suitable for the rule of the empire because he was a foolish and ignorant person who only pursued his personal ends"⁵.

Thus, the Byzantine Empire passed by very difficult conditions both externally and internally. Phocas began his reign by the massacre of the five sons of Maurice in 27th. November 602 A.D., and the cutting off their heads.⁶ Moreover, he arrested Maurice's wife and her three daughters. Afterwards, he deprived them of their imperial clothes and put them in a monastery of nuns.⁷ When their plot against Phocas had failed, the latter

Emperor Maurikios, (Athens, 1994), 94 ff.; Vaihle, S. "Execution de l'empereur Maurice à Calamich en 602", *EO*, 13(1910), 201-212.

³*Theophanes*, 3-5; *Nicephorius*, 3; Zonaras, I., *Epitomae Historiarum*, ed. M. Pindor and T. Butter Wbost, *CSHB*, (Bonnae, 1841-1897), vol. III, 199-200; see: *Sébèos*, 57-64; Ismai'l, L., *The Byzantine Empire in the Reign of the Emperor Heraclius* (Cairo, 1985), 45-47 (in Arabic); Kaegi, W., *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, (Cambridge, 1996), 31 ff.

⁴Zonaras, III, 200; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 47-49; Dvornik, F., *Les Slaves Byzance et Rome au XI^e siècle*, (Paris, 1926), 5.

⁵Farang, W., *Studies in the History and Civilization of the Byzantine Empire*, vol. I, (Alexandri, 1985), 111. (in Arabic)

⁶*Theophanes*, 1; *Sébèos*, 55; *Jean of Nikiou*, 150; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 41.

⁷*Theophanes*, 1; *Jean of Nikiou*, 151; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 41.

killed them without mercy.⁸ The revolutions against the tyrant spread in the whole empire. In Antioch, he overcame the revolutionaries by force⁹, but in Egypt, he unleashed the wild animals, like tigers and lions, to tear the bodies of the Egyptians in the streets.¹⁰ He also raped women¹¹ and virgins.¹² In addition to his deeds, he was in very bad terms with the political parties of Constantinople.¹³

Zonaras says that "... All the people hated Phocas because of his rape of women, continual drinking and the many massacres that happened under his order".¹⁴ Patriarch Nicephorus completes the dark image by these words "... The Christians had suffered a lot under him. The Persians overran the provinces of the Romans. Inside the empire, Phocas caused great adversities, and the Romans were not able to stand this".¹⁵ Thus, Phocas had drawn his end by his hands!

The Byzantine historians mentioned that Priskos,¹⁶ Phocas's son-in-law, had sent a message to the Archon of Africa, patricius Heraclius, in 608

⁸*Theophanes*, 3,5; Ismaï'l, *Heraclius*, 41.

⁹*Theophanes*, 7; *Zonaras*, III, 200-201; *Sébèos*, 55-56; G.Cedrenus, *Compendium Historiarum*, ed.I. Bekker, *CSHB*, (Bonnae,1838), 712; Eutychiei Patriarchae Alexandrin qui cognominatus est Sai'd ben Batrik, *Annales*, interprete Edwardo Pocokio, (Oxoniae, =1658),221-222; Ch. Diehl, " L'Égypte chrétienne et byzantine ", dans: *Histoire de la nation Égyptienne*, ed. Gabriel Hanotaux, (Paris, 1933), 535.

¹⁰Jean de Nikiou, *La chronique de Jean, l'évêque de Nikiou*, notice et extraites par M. H. Zotenberg, (Paris,1879), 208-209.

¹¹*Nicephorius*, 5; *Zonaras*, III, 201; *Cedrenus*, 712; *Leo Gramm.*, 146.

¹²*Jean de Nikiou*, 206, n.2. (=Arab trans, 155).

¹³*Theophanes*, 7; *Zonaras*, III, 201; Ismaï'l, *Heraclius*, 53-56; Janssens,T., " Les Bleus et les Verts sous Maurice, Phocas et Heraclius ", *B*, 11(1936),515-523.

¹⁴*Zonaras*, III, 201.

¹⁵*Nicephorius*, 3.

¹⁶Some historians calls him also Crispos. See. *Leo Gramm.*, 146; *Nicephorius*, 4; Priskos had a high dignity in Constantinople. He was a comes of *excubitors* and *eparches* of the city. See: *Theophanes*, 2; *Nicephorius*, 4; Diehl, *L'Afrique Byzantine*, (Paris, 1896),518.

asking him to come and rid them of his tyranny.¹⁷ The senators of Constantinople joined Priskos in his invitation to Heraclius,¹⁸ and most probably there were communications between the Greens's party and Heraclius.¹⁹

Now, depending on the Byzantine sources, we can come up with the reasons which pushed Priskos, Phocas's son-in-law, to send a message to Heraclius. Leo Grammaticus mentions that "...The patricius Crispos got angry from the massacres which happened under Phocas's order."²⁰ Theophanes adds that Priskos "...couldn't stand helpless in front of the evil practices spread by Phocas every where".²¹

Nicephorius and Zonaras mention a different reason. In 607, Phocas celebrated the marriage of his daughter Domentzia and Priskos. During the ceremonies of her marriage in the hippodromos, Phocas saw two statues of Priskos and his wife placed beside that of him and his wife Lontia. Accordingly, he got angry and ordered to destroy the statues of Priskos and his wife Domentzia at once.²² Thus, Phocas insulted Priskos openly and most probably, he aimed to destroy Priskos' hopes as a future emperor after Phocas. Hence, Priskos became one of the enemies of the emperor²³, and according to Zonaras, Priskos became frightened that Phocas might kill him

¹⁷Theophanes, 6; Leo Gramm., 146; Zonaras, III, 201-202; Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, Eng.trans. M. Ogilive-Grant, vol. I, (Amsterdam, 1968), 81; Diehl, *Afrique*, 518; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 60; Butler, A., *The Arab Conquest of Egypt*, (Oxford, 1902), Arab trans. by M. F. Abu Hadid, (Cairo, 1989), 4; Janssens, *Les Bleus*, 522.

¹⁸Zonaras, III, 201; Diehl, *Afrique*, 518.

¹⁹Stratos, *Byzantium*, 81; Janssens, *Les Bleus*, 522-523.

²⁰Leo Gramm., 146.

²¹Theophanes, 6.

²²Nicephorius, 4; Zonaras, III, 201; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 54-55; Butler, *Arab Conquest*, 4; Janssens, *Les Bleus*, 522.

²³Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 55.

and intended to get him out of the throne.²⁴ Therefore, he and the senators had sent a message to Heraclius in which they asked him to come into Constantinople.

In fact, Priscos received the news of a rebellion against the emperor Phocas in Africa, which was situated far from Constantinople.²⁵ This rebellion was under the leadership of Heraclius²⁶ who was the sole person who had the ability to do a successful revolution against the Byzantine emperor. Therefore, we have to ask the question, why patricius Heraclius is regarded as we earlier described him?

Patricius Heraclius was born in c.540 A.D., in an Armenian noble family. He shared in Byzantium's wars against the persians in which he gained a military glory.²⁷ From 584 to 585 A.D., he became a general in the Byzantine army in Asia Minor.²⁸ As a reward for his loyal services, the emperor Maurice appointed him Archon of Africa²⁹ in 599-600 A.D.³⁰ In Africa, Heraclius took his brother Gregorius as an assistant to him.³¹ Thus, the fertile land of Africa became a suitable place from which the revolution against Phocas will arise safely³² because it had 18000 soldiers and a small

²⁴Zonaras, III, 201.

²⁵Nicephorius, 3.

²⁶Theophanes, 6; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 81.

²⁷Stratos, *Byzantium*, 80; Diehl, *Afrique*, 517; Jenkins, R., *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries A.D. 610-1071*, (London, 1966), 20.

²⁸Stratos, *Byzantium*, 80.

²⁹Nicephorius, 4; Diehl, *Afrique*, 517; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 80.

³⁰Stratos, *Byzantium*, 80.

³¹Stratos, *Byzantium*, 80; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 59. When Phocas become an Emperor, he did not isolate Heraclius, Archon of Africa, as the Archon of Ravenna. Probably, he aimed to gain his loyalty and to ensure the arrive of Africa's wheat to the capital. Diehl, *Afrique*, 518; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 80.

³²On the organization and administration of Archonate, see: Diehl, Ch., *Études sur l'administration byzantine dans l'exarchate de Ravenne*, (Paris, 1888); Diehl et Marçais,

fleet³³ The distance from Africa to Constantinople was a motive to Heraclius to start his revolution against Phocas.³⁴ He prevented the grain's tax of Africa which was sent annually to Constantinople. In 608 A.D., he kept in custody the ships which were carrying the wheat and navigating towards Constantinople.³⁵ Heraclius did not also pay the taxes of 608 to the capital. Therefore, it is supposed that these taxes will help him to prepare an army which is larger than the previous one, especially that it was relatively small.³⁶

Afterwards, Heraclius consulted his brother Gregorius about what they would do?³⁷ As for Heraclius, he was a 60 years old man,³⁸ who decided to respond to the invitation of Priscos and send his forces to Constantinople under the command of his son Heraclius.

According to the Byzantine sources, the two leaders Heraclius and Gregorius prepared a military plan as follow: "The young Heraclius will loose with his forces against the tyrant by sea. Likewise, Gregorius will send out his son Nicetas by dry land; whichever one of them got to Constantinople first and conquered the tyrant would become Emperor".³⁹

Histoire de moyan âge, (Paris, 1936), 222; Vasiliev, A., *History of the Byzantine Empire*, (Madison, 1952), 175.

³³Stratos, *Byzantium*, 81-82.

³⁴Diehl, *Afrique*, 518.

³⁵Stratos, *Byzantium*, 81; Diehl, *Afrique*, 518; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 58,60. The winter of 608 was very harsh, so that the sea froze. *Theophanes*, 7. Great numbers of inhabitants and animals died during that winter of, and the grains fields in Byzantium destroyed. So, there was a famine inter the Byzantines, specially the poor peoples. Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 58-59.

³⁶Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 60-61.

³⁷*Nicephorius*, 4.

³⁸Diehl, *Afrique*, 517.

³⁹*Theophanes*, 7; *Nicephorius*, 4; *Zonaras*, III, 202; *Cedrenus*, 711-712; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 82; Jenkins, *Byzantium*, 20; Butler, *Arab Conquest*, 40; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 61-62; Bell, I., *Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest*, (Oxford, 1948); Arab trans. A. A. Aly, (Cairo, 1968), 192; Duchêsne, *L'église à VI^e siècle*, (Paris, 1925), 373.

Prof. Diehl added that, after the conquest of Egypt, Nicetas had to take the land route, across Syria and Asia Minor, into Constantinople.⁴⁰

Here, I think that the serious point in the accounts of the Byzantine historians is reached, i.e. the military plan of the Heraclius. If his plan is regarded as true, it means that there is a competition between Heraclius, the younger, and his cousin Nicetas to obtain the Byzantine throne. On the other hand, we have to remember that the forces of Nicetas have to fight with the forces of Phocas in Pentapoli, Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor, and conquer it, to enter Constantinople, according to the plan of Heraclius. Therefore it is questionable how many thousands of miles this army will march, how long time it will spend and finally, if Heraclius ensure that Nicetas will gain the victory in every stage of his march !

Of course, Heraclius will go to Constantinople by sea, and will arrive to it before his cousin Nicetas,⁴¹ because the distance between Africa and Byzantium is shorter by sea than the other of Nicetas. In deed, Heraclius entered to Constantinople in Monday, 6th October, 610 A.D.⁴²

Although Theophanes says that Nicetas had arrived with his forces from Alexandria and Pentapoli to Constantinople in the same time,⁴³ the others say that he arrived in 612 A.D., after his conquest to Egypt.⁴⁴

According to the above mentioned information, we can't accept the military plan of Heraclius as it is, and we will imagine what the true plan is.

⁴⁰Diehl, *Afrique*, 520.

⁴¹*Nicephorius*, 4.

⁴²*Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorof, *CSHB*, (Bonnae, 1832), 699-701. = Eng. trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, (Liverpool, 1989), 150, n.421; 151-152. There were many different dates of Heraclius' arrival to Constantinople, but we recorded the date of the contemporary source, *Chronicon Paschale*. Cf. *Sébèos*, 64; *Theophanes*, 8; *Nicephorius*, 4; *Eutychius*, 222-225.

⁴³*Theophanes*, 8.

⁴⁴*Nicephorius*, 6-7; Kaegi, W., "New Evidence on the Early Reign of Heraclius", *BZ*, 66(1973), 325; "Nicetas", *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, (New York, 1991), 1480; Diehl, *Égypte chrèt.*, 538.

To do a suitable imagination to the events, we have to put two facts into consideration. The first is that the forces of Heraclius, the son, were collected from Africa, Pentapoli and Egypt.⁴⁵ The second is that the grain supplements which were going from Egypt to Constantinople in 609 A.D., had been stopped. There is also an important point that is Heraclius had navigated to Byzantium in the summer of 610 A.D.

Now, let us see the supposed plan of Heraclius. Nicetas has to lead his forces and march towards Egypt to conquest it and add it to the authority of Heraclius. Meanwhile, he will prevent the grain supplements which are going from Egypt to Constantinople. This actually happened during 609 A.D.⁴⁶ The prevention of the grain supplements from Africa, which happened before by the Archon Heraclius, and Egypt, afterwards by Nicetas, will put Phocas in a critical situation in Constantinople, and lead to a famine there. Then the inhabitants of the capital may rebel against him. In addition to this, Nicetas has to send forces from Egypt to Africa, to support Heraclius in his naval expedition against Phocas. This fact is shown by Theophanes who says that the forces of Heraclius consisted of soldiers from Africa, Pentapoli and Egypt.⁴⁷ Afterwards, when Nicetas subjected Egypt to the authority of Heraclius the later sent his son Heraclius, with the collected forces, by sea to Constantinople. Thus, when Heraclius arrived to Thessaloniki, some of his ships had been loaded by the wheat, to distribute it free over the people of the capital, who were delighted by the present new Emperor and his wheat!⁴⁸

Any way, although there was an invitation to Heraclius, from Priskos and the senate, and Africa was ready to start the revolution, he hesitated to take a final decision and preferred to stay one year to prepare the required

⁴⁵*Theophanes*, 8; *Stratos, Byzantium*, 87.

⁴⁶*Ismail, Heraclius*, 58.

⁴⁷*Theophanes*, 8; *Stratos, Byzantium*, 87.

⁴⁸Eutychius says that : " when Heraclius went to Constantinople, the people are delighted by his presence and their difficulties are dissolved by his wheat, barley and cereals ", see: *Eutychius*, 222.

equipment.⁴⁹ The young Heraclius and Nicetas armed the forces of Africa.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, an event which urged Heraclius to take his decision and carry out the military plan took place.⁵¹ Phocas had known the news of the revolution of Africa,⁵² and in the same time Epiphania, wife of the patricius Heraclius, Eudocia, fiancée of his son Heraclius,⁵³ and Fabia, daughter of Epiphania, were in Constantinople.⁵⁴ When Phocas heard that they were in the city, he ordered to arrest them and put them in a monastery under guard.⁵⁵ Jean of Nikiou adds that Phocas set to rape the virgin Fabia, but he couldn't because of her menstruation. Then he left her and went away.⁵⁶ Phocas may be tried to do this, to retaliate from Heraclius, specially that he was a detestable man all around the empire. Phocas also wanted to use the family of Heraclius as a profitable card to force Heraclius stop his rebellion.⁵⁷ Thus, we can regard this event as the first spark which gave the

⁴⁹ Diehl, *Afrique*, 519.

⁵⁰ Gibbon, E., *The Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, (London, 1929), 388.

⁵¹ Diehl, *Afrique*, 519.

⁵² Gibbon, *Rom. Empire*, 388.

⁵³ Stratos and Ismai'l mistaken when they regarded Fabia or Favia as a fiancée of Heraclius. (Stratos, *Byzantium*, 88; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 67.) Because Theophanes (8-9) and Zonaras (III, 202) mention that her name was Eudocia not Fabia. Cf. Diehl, *Afrique*, 519. Jean of Nikiou also confirms the accounts of Theophanes and Zonaras, and says that Fabia was a daughter of Epiphania. (*Jean de Nikiou*, 206, n.2 = Arab trans. 155) Stratos (*Byzantium*, 88) also mentions that Heraclius' fiancée was a daughter of Rogas, (a Prince or Notable?) of Aphros (Lybia). But, Theophanes (8-9) says that Eudocia was a daughter of Rogas, son of Aphros. Thus, Aphros is a name for the grand father of Eudocia not a name for Lybia.

⁵⁴ Theophanes, 8-9; Zonaras, III, 202; Diehl, *Afrique*, 519; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 88. Jean of Nikiou (*Jean de Nikiou*, 206, n.2 = Arab trans. 155) says that they were in Cappadocia.

⁵⁵ Zonaras, III, 202; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 67; Diehl, *Afrique*, 519.

⁵⁶ Jean of Nikiou, 155. (Arab trans.)

⁵⁷ Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 67. Stratos (*Byzantium*, 88.) arranged this event after departure of Heraclius' fleet to Constantinople and its approach from it. But, I don't know one of

hard motive to Heraclius to carry out his plan against Phocas. In 609 A.D., he distributed money on the Berbers of Tripoli and Pentapoli,⁵⁸ to ensure their assistance in his wars against the forces of Phocas.⁵⁹ He sent his leader Bonâkis to Pentapoli accompanied with three thousands soldiers and countless rabbles of Berbers to wait him there.⁶⁰ Then, of course, Bonâkis had to overcome the sites of resistance which he would face and then wait his general Nicetas,⁶¹ who marched in the end of 609 A.D.,⁶² from Africa, to catch with Bonâkis.⁶³

In Tripoli, despite all the efforts of governor Kiezil and the cooperation of the tribal leaders, generals Mardios, Ecclesarios and Isidoros succeeded in separating of Carthage from Egypt. After this, Bonâkis was forced to turn towards Tripoli to quell the resistance and open up the communications with the Exarchate.⁶⁴ At the same time, Kiezil sent a unite, may be to the south of Pentapoli, to subdue it.⁶⁵ Then, Nicetas who had entered Egypt and aided by Leontios,⁶⁶ governor of Maréotes,⁶⁷ marched to Alexandria. To the west of

Byzantine State men, such as Heraclius, revolted against the Emperor while his family is under the Emperor's control ! I think that it will be suitable to put this event before the start of Heraclius' revolution against Phocas directly. May be Heraclius was adjourned the execution of his plan till the recursion of his family to Africa. But when he lost it, he has to save it and carry out his plan for Byzantium. See: Diehl, *Afrique*, 519.

⁵⁸In this province there were the estates of Heraclius' family. Stratos, *Byzantium*, 83; Ismai'l, *Byzantium*, 62; Butler, *Arab Conquest*, 8-11.

⁵⁹*Jean de Nikiou*, 206. (= Arab trans. 156); Maspero, J., *Organisation militaire de l'Égypte Byzantine*, (Paris, 1912), 65; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 62.

⁶⁰*Jean de Nikiou*, 206-207. (= Arab trans. 156); Butler, *Arab Conquest*, 8.

⁶¹He is called *Niqita* in the Arab translation of *Jean of Nikiou*, see: Arab trans. 156.

⁶²Diehl, *Égypte chrét.*, 535.

⁶³Stratos, *Byzantium*, 83.

⁶⁴Stratos, *Byzantium*, 84.

⁶⁵Butler, *Arab Conquest*, 8.

⁶⁶He is called *Leondios* in the Arab translation of *Jean of Nikiou*, see: Arab trans. 156.

Alexandria and near the Drakos canal, the governor of Alexandria tried to help up the advance. The battle which was fought ended in favour of Nicetas. The governor was slain and his head was sent to Alexandria.⁶⁸

At this point, the events of the expedition of Nicetas inside Egypt will start. The Bishop of Nikiou, the sole source of the events, recites their details ; Butler and Stratos follows him.

Now I will try to determine the accurate date of this expedition, but to do this a question is raised: why Egypt itself is a strategic aim to Heraclius?

The famous historian A.Jones gives us the answer when he says that " If we ask any of the Roman Emperors about the close relation of Egypt with the Empire, the answer will be the wheat and money ".⁶⁹In spite of Jones's words let us to investigate some historical evidences. When Augustus entered Egypt, at the end of the first century B.C., he changed it to a Roman province and issued an edict says that no one was allowed to come to Egypt without a permission from him self. Tacitus also says about it: " Egypt is a fortified province, which has plenty of grains. It has conflicting attitudes and it revolts rapidly."⁷⁰ In 350 A. D., both the emperor Constans and his opponent Magnentius hurried to subdue Egypt to their authority, and ensure having its wheat and money.⁷¹ Lastly, the Emperor Justinianus had issued a special law of Egypt, the law no.13, and created an administration for the wheat which was interested in the corps of Egypt and their arrival to Constantinople.⁷²

⁶⁷This province is situated in the west of Alexandria, see: Butler, *Arab Conquest*, 11-12; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 83.

⁶⁸*Jean de Nikiou*, 207.(=Arab trans.156).

⁶⁹Jones,A., "Egypt and Rome", in: *Legacy of Egypt*, (Oxford, 1947), 282.

⁷⁰Abdul-Hamid, R., " Egypt and the Byzantine Throne", in: *Egypt and the world of Mediterranean*, ed. R. Abbas, (Cairo, 1986), 80.

⁷¹Abdul-Hamid, *Egypt*, 87.

⁷²Abdul-Hamid, *Egypt*, 78; Johnson and West, *Byzantine Egypt: Economic Studies*, (Princeton, 1949), 236.

Any way, the last examples show to us the important position of Egypt in the imperial policy. Likewise, Patricius Heraclius had known the importance of Egypt, and its riches of wheat and money. Annually, Egypt sends 8 million ardeb of wheat to Constantinople, during the reign of Justinianus, and any delay in delivery of it will cause a revolution in the Byzantine capital.⁷³

Therefore, when Heraclius sends Nicetas to Egypt, he wants to prevent the grain supplements from Constantinople. To do this, he enters Egypt and seizes Alexandria, which has the main granaries, to which the ships bring the wheat through all the Egyptian provinces by the Nile.⁷⁴

Actually, Nicetas succeeded in seizing Alexandria,⁷⁵ and prevented the wheat from Constantinople in 609 A.D.⁷⁶ Then, Phocas realized that the danger was great. Therefore, he ordered his leader Bonosos, who was in Antoich, to suppress a revolution,⁷⁷ to leave Antoich and go to Egypt rapidly to meet Nicetas and conquer it again.⁷⁸

⁷³ Johnson and West, *Byz. Egypt*, 160.

⁷⁴ Atta, Z., *The Economic Life in Byzantine Egypt*, (Cairo, 1994), 155.

⁷⁵ Jean de Nikiou, 209-210; Sébèos, 56.

⁷⁵ Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 58. Phocas in 610 A. D. ordered to arrest some ships which are coming from Egypt and loaded by the wheat, and congregated it with his soldiers to face Heraclius' fleet. Cf. Stratos, *Byzantium*, 88; Ismai'l, *Heraclius*, 67. The fact that the ships were loaded by the Egyptian wheat supports my own view that Heraclius wants to have the wheat of Egypt. So, Nicetas sent some ships, which were loaded by the wheat, to Constantinople, after the fall of Alexandria in his hands, to support the presence of Heraclius in the Byzantine Capital. But, when these ships fallen in the hands of Phocas, Heraclius loaded some of his ships with the wheat of Thessaloniki. Cf. *Eutychius*, 222.

⁷⁷ On this revolution, see: *Theophanes*, 7; *Cedrenus*, 712; *Zonaras*, III, 200-201; *Eutychius*, 221-222; Jenkins, *Byzantium*, 20; el-?Areni, E., *The Byzantine State*, (Cairo, 1960), 377.

⁷⁸ Jean de Nikiou, 211.

According to the last events we conclude that Heraclius aims at obtaining the Egyptian wheat in the first rank, specially Eutychius mentions an important information which says: "when Heraclius had gone to Constantinople, the people are delighted by his presence and their difficulties are dissolved by his wheat, barely and cereals".⁷⁹ Therefore, the loss of Egypt from the hands of the emperor will cause great difficulties to him. Here, we can add that Heraclius may want to protect his eastern frontier of Africa from the expected attacks of the forces of Phocas. When Nicetas the Egyptian ships, he will support the small fleet of Africa which will sail to Byzantium under the command of Heraclius.⁸⁰ The fact that the forces of Heraclius consist of soldiers from Africa, Pentapoli and Egypt⁸¹ helps us to record the military aim of Heraclius, i.e. he was searching for a military support to his small army in order to be able to achieve his future's projects for Byzantium.

There are some factors which help Nicetas to be successful inside Egypt, like the hatred of the Egyptians to the Byzantine rule and to the religious doctrine of Constantinople which is different from their doctrine. The Egyptians joined Nicetas in his fight against Bonosos and his army,⁸² and killed Theodore, Patriarch of Chalcedonians in Alexandria.⁸³ Porf. ?Abdul-Hamid outlines the latter events in the following paragraph:⁸⁴ "The conquest of Egypt is the main point in Heraclius' plan and if he conquers it, he will be able to recruit soldiers from the Egyptians and will have its wheat. Also, if he seize Alexandria and its ships, he will prevent the grain supplements from Constantinople."

⁷⁹ Eutychius, 222.

⁸⁰ Stratos, *Byzantium*, 82.

⁸¹ Theophanes, 8; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 87.

⁸² Jean de Nikiou, 210; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 84.

⁸³ *Chron. Paschale*, 699. (= Eng.trans. 149); Stratos, *Byzantium*, 84.

⁸⁴ ?Abdul-Hamid, *Egypt*, 98.

About the accurate date of the expedition of Nicetas on Egypt up to the going of Heraclius to Constantinople, we know from Sébèos that Heraclius sailed to Constantinople in the second year of the rule of Persian king Khosroes.⁸⁵ And according to Theophanes, this period equals 610 A.D.⁸⁶

Therefore, the last stage of fighting between Nicetas and Bonosos, to subdue lower Egypt, takes place in the last two months of 609 A.D. and the first months of 610A.D.; because Heraclius sailed with his fleet to Constantinople in the beginning of the summer of 610 A.D.⁸⁷

Now, there is the question of the accurate date of Nicetas's march towards Egypt. If any person lives in Egypt, up to now, he will know that the season of wheat's mowing begins from the end of May until June; then, it is put in the granaries. If we assume that the collecting of the corps taxes will take two or three months, from July to September, this means that the ships will transport the wheat to Constantinople during that time. Because Heraclius aims at having the Egyptian wheat and prevents its arrival to the Byzantine capital, he may sent his leader Nicetas to Egypt during September of 609 A.D., i.e. during the time in which the granaries of Alexandria are full of wheat. Finally, it has to be confirmed that Nicetas stayed in Egypt till the arrival of Heraclius to Constantinople, to arrange its internal affairs. Thus, it seems, through the last events, that Egypt is the main aim of Archon Heraclius by which he becomes able to send his son Heraclius to Constantinople and conquer it. Heraclius succeeds in his plan, and his nephew Nicetas succeeds also in his conquest to Egypt, and provides Heraclius with soldiers and ships from Egypt. Besides, he puts Egypt under the authority of Heraclius.

⁸⁵ *Sébèos*, 64.

⁸⁶ *Theophanes*, 8.

⁸⁷ *Stratos, Byzantium*, 87.