

Stephen Humphreys (University of California, Santa Barbara), “Anti-Christian Violence in the Jazira during the Early Ninth Century (810-833): Was It an Infringement of Islamic Norms?”

The revolt of Nasr ibn Shabath al-‘Uqayli in the upper Euphrates basin in 811-825 attracted considerable attention from both Muslim and Christian writers, but they treated it very differently. Our chief Muslim source (Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur) regarded it as a challenge to caliphal supremacy, and more broadly as a threat to the political and religious unity and integrity of the Islamic community. He says nothing about Nasr’s impact on the territories and peoples that fell under his control. In contrast, the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahré, portrayed the revolt as a exceptionally violent assault on the Christian communities of North Syria and the Jazira. He is predictably indifferent to the ideology of caliphal authority. However, a close examination of Dionysius’ narrative reveals that the criteria which he uses to condemn Nasr’s violence are precisely those articulated by contemporary Muslim writers (Abu Yusuf, and the epistle of Tahir ibn al-Husayn) in their discussions of just rulership and of the rights and disabilities of the caliph’s non-Muslim subjects.