

ΚΕΝΤΡΟΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΡΩΜΑΪΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΟΣ
ΕΘΝΙΚΟΝ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ

RESEARCH CENTRE FOR GREEK AND ROMAN ANTIQUITY
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION

ΜΕΛΕΤΗΜΑΤΑ

37

GARTH FOWDEN
and
ELIZABETH KEY FOWDEN

STUDIES ON HELLENISM, CHRISTIANITY AND THE Umayyads

ATHENS 2004

DIFFUSION DE BOCCARD – 11, RUE DE MEDICIS, 75006 PARIS

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Επεξεργασία κειμένου, εικόνων, εκτύπωση και βιβλιοδεσία:
Γραφικές Τέχνες «Γ. Αργυρόπουλος ΕΠΕ»
Κ. Παλαμά 13 Καματερό Αθήνα
Τηλ. 210 23 12 317 – Fax 210 23 13 742

COVER ILLUSTRATION

Mosaic showing an imaginary or perhaps local landscape in the west portico of the Great Mosque, Damascus (early eighth century).

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Preface

The present volume offers a partial presentation of research that has been prosecuted, in one form or another, over the past decade and more. Some early, misguided ideas about the relationship between Hellenism and the Umayyads as manifest in the paintings of Quşayr 'Amra appeared in chapter 6 of Garth Fowden, *Empire to commonwealth: Consequences of monotheism in late antiquity* (1993); while in chapter 6 of *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (1999), Elizabeth Key Fowden looked at the relationship between Christianity and Islam in Umayyad al-Ruṣāfa. A three year grant from the 'Aristeia' programme of the Greek Ministry of Development, General Secretariat for Research and Technology, within the European Union's 3rd Community Support Framework, has encouraged us to concentrate on specific aspects of these cultural interactions. A more rounded interpretation of the material, with due emphasis on the wider Islamic environment, will be published elsewhere.

Our *Studies* are divided into two largely discrete parts, though there is considerable overlap in the primary materials to which we address ourselves, largely because we are both concerned to make as much as we can of the material evidence. This reflects the more general priorities of the Centre for Greek and Roman Antiquity (K.E.R.A.) at the National Research Foundation, Athens, which has provided the institutional framework for this research. The Centre's emphasis has been, since its creation in 1979, the writing of history with particular regard to archaeological, epigraphical and numismatic sources.

Part I, 'Hellenism and the Umayyads', concentrates on the frescoes in the bath house of Quşayr 'Amra in Jordan, as a way into the court culture of early Islam and its debts to the Greek and Roman tradition. The paintings are the work of artists familiar with both the classical tradition, including mythological depictions, and the art of the Christian empire of New Rome, Constantinople. But both currents are here turned to a new end, the glorification of the Arab Muslim dynasty of the Umayyads, which ruled from Damascus between 661 and 750.

Part II, 'Christianity and the Umayyads', gives more space to the Qur'ān than is required in Part I – the monk in his lamplit cell is a familiar image in the Muslim scripture. But the culture of the court is prominent in this Part as well, for some of the Umayyads were attracted to the aesthetics and, in an odd way, the freedom of the monastic milieu – wine drinking played no small part in nourishing this affinity. The final chapter looks at the interplay between monasteries and the Umayyads' so-called 'desert castles' – residences, pleasure domes, hunting lodges and farms built in the Syro-Jordanian steppe and along the fringes of the desert. To this latter category, Quṣayr 'Amra also belongs. Both types of establishment offered a distinctive way of life in an oasis setting. The desert castle might even be built atop a monastery, or beside it.

We hope very much that our researches will contribute to a debate that seems now to be entering a new and fertile phase, and revolves round the whole question of the relationship of Islam to the world within which it emerged – one used to say 'into which it burst'. In particular, we hope to strengthen a growing tendency to invoke the material evidence as a helpful supplement to the notoriously controversial literary traditions about the origins of Islam.

Acknowledgments

Without the freedom and support afforded by the Centre for Greek and Roman Antiquity (K.E.R.A.) at the National Research Foundation, Athens, and by a three year grant from the 'Aristeia' programme of the Greek Ministry of Development, General Secretariat for Research and Technology, within the European Union's 3rd Community Support Framework, this book would have taken much longer to write - in fact, it might never have been completed. We are particularly grateful to the Centre's director, Miltiades Hatzopoulos, for his active encouragement of fields of research not otherwise much cultivated in Greece at the moment.

Although I first visited Quşayr 'Amra in 1977, it was not until 1991 that a lecture delivered by Irfan Shahîd at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton provoked me to take a closer interest in the place. During my time as a member of the Institute's School of Historical Studies (1990-91) and subsequently, Glen Bowersock and Oleg Grabar were enthusiastic and stimulating interlocutors. Other major debts, more recently contracted, are owed to Juan Zozaya in Madrid, who took part in the Spanish mission during its last phase in 1974, and Claude Vibert-Guigue in Paris, who knows Quşayr 'Amra better than anyone else alive. For help with the Arabic inscriptions I would like to thank Frédéric Imbert, while Hussein Qudrah has kindly obtained for me various Jordanian publications. For travel grants I am particularly indebted to the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust; the Society of Antiquaries of London; the Centre for Greek and Roman Antiquity at the National Research Foundation, Athens; and the Foundation for Hellenic Culture, Athens.

G.F.

The Robert F. Goheen Prize in Classical Studies of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowships Foundation and the Olivia James Travelling Fellowship of the American Institute of Archaeology afforded me the opportunity to visit archaeological sites in Syria and Jordan. In addition, for providing occasions on which I discussed some of the ideas developed in these chapters, I

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E.K.F.

PART I

HELLENISM AND THE UMAYYADS

by

GARTH FOWDEN

1.

QUŞAYR 'AMRA

The baths of Gadara

Among the civilised amenities of Syria that must have appealed particularly to the Arabs who conquered this land in the 630s was the famous old bathing complex at al-Ḥamma in the valley of the River Yarmūk near the southern tip of Lake Tiberias. The city of Gadara (Umm Qays) on the heights just above it had long been a seat of Greek culture in the region, most notably associated with the Hellenistic poet Meleager (fl. 100 B.C.). Two later fourth-century writers, the Christian Epiphanius of Salamis and the polytheist Eunapius of Sardis, both describe it as a place for pleasure and relaxation, its hot springs, says Eunapius, inferior only to those of Baiae near Naples.¹ Epiphanius's tone is less approving; but the resort's popularity continued unabated despite the progress of Christianity. Numerous Greek inscriptions reveal that the baths were seen as a holy place (ἱερός/ἅγιος τόπος) and considered to have healing properties. Pilgrims, including officials but also a pantomime artist, a piper, an actress and a juggler, left thankful records of their visit.²

Until, it seems, the great earthquake of 749, the complex and its water supply continued to be maintained, though by Umayyad times in rather straitened circumstances.³ The most striking evidence from this period is a monumental, carefully cut nine-line inscription that starts with a cross and goes on to record the thorough restoration of the complex in the reign of Mu'āwiya (661-80).⁴ The caliph's name and title (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) are carefully transliterated from the Arabic, along with the name of the local

1. Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum* 5.2.2; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.7.5-8.

2. Di Segni, *Hammat Gader*.

3. Hirschfeld, *Hammat Gader* 144-58.

4. Di Segni, *Hammat Gader* 237-40; cf. Gatier, *S.Byz.Is.* 153.

official John the Gadarene - whose title, though, is given in Greek. The date - the feast of the locally significant S. Sabas - is specified according to the indiction, the local (Gadarene) era, and that of the *hijra*. The inscription was found *in situ*, and it seems that no need was felt for a parallel, Arabic version. For the time being, the atmosphere and (in view of the cross) local authorities of Gadara remained Greek, albeit with due acknowledgment of the new rulers in Damascus.

A graffito dated 740 shows that the al-Ḥamma bath complex was still in use at that date, while its declaration that 'we sojourned (*nazalnā*) in these hot baths' may indicate that the place continued to be regarded as a place of healing, and therefore holy. But this graffito is in Arabic, no longer Greek, and that may indicate (though not necessarily) that it was written by a Muslim.⁵ By the late Umayyad period, Gadara's long tradition of linguistic Hellenism was on the wane; but the culture of the bath, with roots in both the polytheistic and the Christian phases of the Greek tradition, was still appreciated.

The late Umayyad bath house at Quṣayr 'Amra, though much less complex than Gadara's, conforms likewise to the idea of the bath as social centre. In particular, it adheres to the pre-Islamic eastern convention - found, of course, in the West as well - according to which bathing installations were accompanied, indeed dominated, by a large hall designed for social assemblies. But before we turn our attention to Quṣayr 'Amra's hall, the paintings that adorn it, and the Greek and Arabic texts scattered among them, a brief general introduction to the whole site is required.

Quṣayr 'Amra: The buildings

The perfectly preserved painted bath house of Quṣayr 'Amra stands close to the banks of the Wādī 'l-Buṭum, in the Balqā' region of Jordan between 'Ammān, some 65 km. (as a bird flies) to the west-north-west, and the oasis of al-Azraq some 27 km. to the east (fig. 1). This part of al-Balqā' is a stony, grey, gently rolling wasteland, well to the east of the traditional zone of settled life and 'proverbially excellent wheat'⁶ in the hills of Moab, but also somewhat beyond the 100 mm. isohyet that notionally divides the steppe lands from the desert.⁷

5. Amitai-Preiss, *Hammat Gader* 270-72.

6. Yāq. 1.489 s.v. 'Al-Balqā'; cf. al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm* 175, 180.

7. D.L. Kennedy, *Archaeological explorations* 11-15; Northedge, 'Ammān 1.19-20 and figs 6-9; Gatier, *Frontières terrestres* 442-44.

The first explorer to set eyes on Quşayr 'Amra, in June 1898, was the Moravian priest and scholar Alois Musil. But in those days the region was lawless, and Musil had to make two more extended visits in 1900 and 1901 in order to gather sufficient documentation to convince his sceptical colleagues in Vienna. They found the idea of 450 m² of previously unknown late antique frescoes stranded exactly on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire a little hard to digest. In 1907 the Vienna Academy published two elephant folio volumes (*Kuşejr 'Amra*) containing Musil's account of his discovery, studies by other Viennese scholars, and a series of architectural drawings and facsimiles of the frescoes prepared by Alphons Leopold Mielich, a painter of Impressionist leanings who had accompanied Musil in 1901.

Lack of adequate photographic documentation, along with widely divergent estimates offered within the Vienna publication itself regarding the monument's date (between the fourth century and the mid-ninth), induced a certain caution about Quşayr 'Amra in scholarly circles. Musil's own late Umayyad dating of the building and its frescoes quickly prevailed, and has never since been questioned. But that only made the place seem even more mysterious, since how could a supposedly iconoclastic Muslim patron have commissioned frescoes so full of hedonism and *joie de vivre*, and especially of scantily clad dancing girls and nude bathing women? Today, in the light of our awareness that even strict Muslims rejected images of living beings only in religious contexts, it seems odd that an Umayyad prince's painted bath house should have appeared so problematic. Yet Quşayr 'Amra's status as something of a curiosity deprived it of the central place in accounts of early Islamic art which it deserved on account of the extent, skill and intrinsic interest of its frescoes.

The filthy state of the paintings, and their remote location, meant that for decades Mielich's facsimiles were the only available documentation. This situation was seemingly remedied in 1971 to 1974, when a Spanish team cleaned and conserved the frescoes, and published a summary description of the complex and its decoration, together with an invaluable selection of clear photographs of the paintings after - but not before or during - the restoration: M. Almagro, L. Caballero, J. Zozaya and A. Almagro, *Qusayr 'Amra: Residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de Jordania* (Madrid 1975). Though intended only as the forerunner of a fuller account, this remains the standard work of reference.

In the aftermath of the Spanish restoration, there slowly began to surface suspicions that the paintings had been significantly retouched. In 1989 a

French specialist in fresco restoration, Claude Vibert-Guigue, embarked in collaboration with the Jordanian archaeologist Gazi Bisheh on the production of full-size tracings of everything visible on Quṣayr 'Amra's walls onto transparent sheets of plastic, which were then photographed at one quarter of the original size. The project was completed in 1995. The present state of the frescoes has in this way been recorded in unprecedented detail, along with the damaged areas and the numerous graffiti. A full publication of the paintings is also planned.⁸

As a result of this project, certain parts of the paintings which had remained obscure after the Spanish restoration can now be reconstructed. Elements of vegetal decoration, and even whole figures, can now be shown to be lurking on what had seemed to be hopelessly damaged paint surfaces. So far as one can tell in advance of the final publication, our knowledge of Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes is not about to be enlarged spectacularly. Something significant has been taken away, though, in the sense that an element of doubt has been introduced into our understanding of what we thought we could see. We now know that there has been quite frequent and extensive repainting, even if it is not usually radical enough to affect the sense of the composition.

Despite these problems, Quṣayr 'Amra's paintings open a wide and inviting window onto the life of the Umayyad court and the mentality of its denizens. They are a document unrivalled, though fortunately not unparalleled, in the other 'desert castles', in Arabic *quṣūr* (from the singular *qaṣr*, meaning a substantial residence or fortified structure), that are known to modern scholarship. And their style is by and large quite unmistakably that of the late antique Mediterranean *koinē*, in other words Greek. They are by far the most substantial source we dispose of for the study of the use and meaning of Hellenic culture in the Umayyad elite milieu. And it is, accordingly, overwhelmingly to the evidence provided by Quṣayr 'Amra that Part I of this book will be addressed.

Viewed from the outside, there is nothing monumental about Quṣayr 'Amra: the internal volumes of the limestone structure are presented without disguise or adornment (fig 2).⁹ Its walls, of varying thickness, are built for the

8. Vibert-Guigue, *S.H.A.J.* 5 and *ARAM periodical* 6 (1994); Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.89-94, 2.310-12.

9. For a full description of the buildings see *Q. 'A.* 27-41, 46-47, 77-81, with additional details in Bisheh, Morin and Vibert-Guigue, *A.D.A.J.* 41 (1997). Photographs of the exterior: Jaussen and Savignac 3. pls XXXVI-XXXIX; Creswell pls 70-71; *K.Is.* pl. 31; *Q. 'A.* pls I-II.

most part of poorly cut stones, along with a few much larger, well squared blocks possibly taken from an earlier structure on the same site.¹⁰ Mortar is used abundantly to smooth out the irregularities, and is lime-based, as was the custom in Syria and generally in Roman architecture. Quşayr 'Amra makes relatively little use of gypsum, unlike other Umayyad buildings in the region, whose builders were more indebted to Mesopotamian and Iranian construction techniques. The same continuity with Roman architecture is apparent in the construction of the vaults with rubble masonry rather than the brick used, for example, in the palace at Mushattā, south of 'Ammān. By using brick and gypsum, with its excellent binding qualities, vaults could be constructed without the use of expensive and hard-to-come-by wood centering; but this consideration carried less weight in a small building like Quşayr 'Amra.¹¹

The rectangular hall, oriented north-south (fig. 3), has three longitudinal tunnel vaults and eight small windows placed high in its walls close to the vaults. To the southern end-wall are attached three small barrel-vaulted chambers, the middle one terminating in a plain wall, while the two side chambers are provided with shallow apses. The hall's external measurements, including the projecting apses, are roughly 14 m. x 10.5 m. Opening off its east side is a sequence of three tiny rooms that make up the bath itself. The third of these rooms has an apse on its northern and southern sides, and is covered with a dome lit by four arched windows. On its east side is the boiler and water tank, and beyond that a large walled area, the bath's easternmost appurtenance and now the only part which lacks a roof, if it ever had one. This appears to have been an addition to the main structure, and was probably the service area and wood store for the boiler.

The complex's principal entrance is a basalt portal in the hall's northern wall. Through this doorway the sun streams in to supplement the diffused, dappled light from the high, small windows once filled with tracery and coloured glass. As for the space within, it is divided lengthways (north-south) into three equal-sized, marble-paved bays by single, broad and slightly pointed arches parallel to the hall's axis, springing from pilasters and pseudo-capitals at a height of about 1.5 m. At first glance this reminds one of a three-

10. For fragments of Greek inscriptions (presumably reused) or graffiti found at Quşayr 'Amra, see *Q. 'A.* 79; Vibert-Guigue diss. 2.119, 3. pl. 131.2-3; Bisheh, Morin and Vibert-Guigue, *A.D.A.J.* 41 (1997) 385-86.

11. Almagro, *S.H.A.J.* 5.

aisled basilica. But the use at Quṣayr 'Amra - copying, it seems, the nearby but somewhat earlier Umayyad fort at Qaṣr Kharāna¹² - of arches supporting tunnel vaults rather than roofs made of stone slabs, represents an innovation in Syrian architecture, an influence, rather, from Mesopotamia. What one perceives on closer inspection is 'a clear interior, nearly square, without aisles, the triple division being confined to the vaulting above one's head'.¹³ The overall effect is one of spaciousness (fig. 4).

The furnishings are left to our imagination. The only installation of which traces remain - though they were not found until the Spanish restorers undertook a small excavation - is a marble-revetted pool (Latin *piscina*, whence Arabic *fiṣqīya*), measuring 1.95 x 1.40 x 0.40 m., and situated at the northern end of the east aisle. It seems that this hall combined the functions of the entrance hall of the standard Roman bath house, and its frigidarium, where one cooled off by sitting in the shallow *fiṣqīya* and having cold water poured over one, after experiencing the intense heat of the inner chambers. Alternatively, the pool enabled one to freshen up before taking one's place in the hall, without going through the whole bathing process; or else it functioned as a simple air conditioner for those sitting near it. Shallow pools of this sort, not designed for immersion, have been found in the halls of several late Roman and Umayyad bath houses in Syria (Sarjilla, for example, Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī and Ḥammām al-Ṣarāḥ).¹⁴

The hall's main surfaces are divided into four zones. The first reaches door lintel height, the second the sills of the windows, the third the spring of the barrel vaults. The fourth zone consists of the vaults themselves. If the complex's exterior is of the austere simplicity, its interior is riotous variety and colour, paintings spreading out over every wall and vault of the hall and of the smaller rooms too.¹⁵ The lowest zone was taken up by a marble dado

12. Urice, *Qasr Kharana*, esp. 86-87, seconded by Hillenbrand, *Oriental art* 37 (1991), suggests a date before 684.

13. Creswell 441, and cf. 444-49; Gaube, *Z.D.P.V.* 93 (1977) 85.

14. See respectively Charpentier, *Syria* 71 (1994); Schlumberger, *Syria* 20 (1939) 215, 219 and pl. XXXIII (= *Q.H.G.* 6, 8 and pl. 51a); *Q.H.E.* 90-91; Bisheh, *Da.M.* 4 (1989) 227.

15. The frescoes of Quṣayr 'Amra have not yet all been illustrated in a single publication. See Musil's photographs in *Ḳuṣejr 'amra und andere Schlösser* figs 13-20, and *Arabia petraea* 1. figs 118-24; Mielich's facsimiles in *Ḳ.'A.* 2; photographs in Jaussen and Savignac 3. pls XXXIX.2-XLIII, XLV-LIV; photographs taken immediately after the Spanish restoration, in *Q.'A.*; and photographs taken by Fred Anderegge for Oleg Grabar: Ettinghausen and Grabar 57-65; Grabar, *C.A.* 36 (1988), *S.Byz.Is.* (all references to direction in the legends of these two

and, above it, by representations of simple wall hangings and by bands of ornament. Figural decoration begins at lintel height, that is to say eye-level (the doors being low, at least by our standards). One's attention is particularly caught by the painting of an enthroned prince that adorns the rear wall of the barrel-vaulted alcove in the middle of the south wall right opposite the entrance, and provides a focus for this most public part of the bath. Here must be the spot where Quşayr 'Amra's owner sat to receive distinguished guests. Other frescoes, of attendants and dancing girls, drop further hints at the way in which the hall was used on more formal occasions of reception and entertainment.

As for the two small, virtually unlit apsidal rooms, they are entered through low doors in the side walls of the alcove, and are the only parts of the complex that afforded complete privacy. These rooms could have been for changing or undressing, though screens or large towels held by servants would have served this purpose just as well.¹⁶ It would also have been possible to sleep in them, or indeed to use them for the erotic pleasures that Quşayr 'Amra's paintings often seem to evoke.¹⁷ The walls and vaults of these particular rooms are decorated with frescoes of vines and bunches of grapes; while the interlacing curvilinear patterns of the carpet-like mosaic floors develop in an original fashion the pre-Islamic repertory of the Greek East, with which the artists at Quşayr 'Amra were still intimately familiar.¹⁸

The part of the complex that was set aside strictly for bathing is entered through a doorway in the hall's east wall. One immediately finds oneself in a tunnel-vaulted room with a bench round the walls, and a waste water outlet. It is often hard to assign specific functions to each chamber in ancient bath houses, and Quşayr 'Amra is no exception. The tunnel-vaulted room presents special difficulties, but by process of elimination it was most

articles are incorrect) and *A.O.* 23 (1993). Good colour photographs from before 1971 exist only for frescoes that were legible and therefore little affected by the Spanish restoration: see below, 32 n. 21, 82 n. 36. The most comprehensive verbal descriptions of the frescoes are Wickhoff, *K. 'A.* 1.208-12; *Q. 'A.* 48-71; Grabar's unpublished *Paintings at Qusayr Amrah*; and, in a category entirely of its own, Vibert-Guigue's massive doctoral thesis, *Peinture omeyyade*. The same author will provide comprehensive visual documentation in *Les peintures de Qusayr 'Amra*, to be published in collaboration with G. Bisheh.

16. Sauvaget, *Syria* 20 (1939) 247; Dow, *Islamic baths of Palestine* 6.

17. Cf. al-Ghuzūlī (d.1412), *Maṭāli' al-budūr fī manāzil al-surūr* 2.8-9 (tr. (German) Grotzfeld, *Das Bad im arabisch-islamischen Mittelalter* 146-48).

18. Kessler, in Creswell; Piccirillo 50, 147, 258, 350-53 etc.

probably the apodyterium, where one undressed before the bath. It will also have eased the transition from the hot bath - by which it was indirectly heated - back to the hall. Hence a door leads straight into a cross-vaulted room which must be the tepid chamber or tepidarium, designed to allow a gradual increase in the body's temperature. It is provided with a full immersion bath in its north wall. The third, domed room is the hot chamber or caldarium, with full immersion baths in each of its two apses.¹⁹ Both tepidarium and caldarium were heated under the floor, by hypocausts. The upper walls of the tepidarium were covered in frescoes, while those of the caldarium, an especially elegant room, were decorated with mosaics. The dome was frescoed.

To this caldarium one may apply the description of the corresponding chamber in the baths of his villa, penned by a fifth-century Gallic aristocrat, Sidonius Apollinaris:

At this point there stands the hot bath... It has a semicircular end with a roomy bathing tub, in which part a supply of hot water meanders sobbingly through a labyrinth of leaden [at Quṣayr 'Amra ceramic] pipes that pierce the wall. Within the heated chamber there is full day and such an abundance of enclosed light as forces all modest persons to feel themselves something more than naked.²⁰

The 'abundance of enclosed light' that floods into the caldarium at Quṣayr 'Amra through its four windows certainly contrasts with the oblique illumination of the hall: the zodiac painted on the dome (fig. 5)²¹ stands out as clearly as do the stars over the surrounding steppe at night. 'The edifice is aglow like the vault of heaven',²² which we know was depicted in certain bath houses in the Greek East, though Quṣayr 'Amra is the only example of this convention that has actually been preserved. It has been shown that the zodiac was painted on the dome from a model in a Greek astronomical manuscript - once more, we find ourselves in the presence of an artist familiar with the region's pre-Islamic visual traditions.²³

19. Creswell pl. 75b.

20. Sidonius Apollinaris, *epistulae* 2.2.4 (tr. W.B. Anderson).

21. Cf. *K.Is.* pl. VI and *Q.* 'A. pl. XLVIII - a rare chance to compare colour photographs from before and after the Spanish restoration; also Brunet, Nadal and Vibert-Guigue, *Centaurus* 40 (1998) 99-101 figs 1-3.

22. See Leo Choïrosphaktes's poetic description of a palace bath built or restored by the East Roman emperor Leo VI (886-912), in Magdalino, *D.O.P.* 42 (1988) 116-18, line 13.

23. Saxl, in Creswell; Brunet, Nadal and Vibert-Guigue, *Centaurus* 40 (1998); cf. Mielich,

The Quşayr 'Amra bath house did not stand entirely alone. On higher ground some 600 m. to the northwest was built a single-storied enclosure measuring some 27 x 32 m. excluding projecting towers, and presumably designed to serve a residential function, but now just a heap of stones. Halfway between this courtyard dwelling and the baths, but still on the high ground, stood a watchtower. On the same spur, remains of smaller dwellings have also been detected.²⁴ Clearly the bath house was, originally, much less isolated than it seems now (fig. 6).

The use that was made of all these buildings depended, primarily, on their water supply. During rainfall, water pours off the stony hills and collects in the Wādī 'l-Buṭum, where it may form substantial pools. In a flash flood, the hall and bath easily fill with water,²⁵ which the wedge-shaped wall that bounds the complex to the west was designed to divert. Quşayr 'Amra also has two wells. One, just in front of the facade of the bath house, has on one side remains of an unusually intact, recently (1996) restored winding installation (*sāqiya*) and its circular camel track, and on the other side a small cistern. This well supplied water which was piped into the bath house. Some 325 m. to the southeast, on the very edge of the wadi, is another such installation, for the irrigation of fields. North of this and east of the main structure are the remnants of a garden wall, while the wadi was dammed to allow some irrigation. The nearest constant spring, though, is at the al-Azraq oasis.

Since Quşayr 'Amra lacks the large reservoirs that are so characteristic of other such sites in the steppe and desert, it is unclear to what extent its irregular water supply could be stored and spread out over dry periods. But in any case, the buildings were probably not in use for very long. In the first place, they show no sign of the alterations, extensions and contractions that are so characteristic of the archaeological record of longlived baths. Secondly, an expert on ancient water-lifting devices, Thorkild Schiøler, who visited Quşayr 'Amra in 1969, observed that 'neither in the [main] well nor in the walls was there the slightest evidence of wear. There are usually heavy

Κ. 'A. 1.194. For almost exactly contemporary depictions of the twelve constellations in the Vatican gr. 1291 copy of Ptolemy's *Handy tables* (now dated to 753/54) see Albani, *To Βυζάντιο ως οικουμένη* 38-40. Seventh- and eighth-century Syriac astronomy 'seems to have been predominantly Ptolemaic', whereas the earliest Arabic astronomical texts (735 onwards) come from the East and show strong Iranian and Indian influence: Pingree, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93 (1973), esp. 34-35, 37.

24. Sauvaget, *R.E.I.* 35 (1967) 34; Morin and Vibert-Guigue, *A.D.A.J.* 44 (2000) 583 n. 10.

25. Musil, Κ. 'A. 1.87-88; cf. Sauvaget, *R.E.I.* 35 (1967) 34.

deposits of crustaceous lime around water tanks and wells, but I could find no trace of this either.²⁶ Finally, there is no evidence that the frescoes were ever repaired or repainted, as one might reasonably have expected especially in the tepidarium and caldarium.²⁷ The lower surfaces of the walls were admittedly protected by marble cladding, but the paintings on the upper walls, and on the caldarium dome, would have suffered had the bath been in use for a generation or two. Yet some of the best preserved frescoes are to be found precisely in these two hottest rooms. One concludes that Quṣayr ‘Amra’s heyday was brief. Even during that short period, the bath house may have been used only seasonally. And the elaboration of its painted hall contrasts so strikingly with the modesty of the other buildings, especially the courtyard dwelling, that one is forced to conclude that its owner and his retinue, which must have been rather grand, will have camped out in tents, no doubt luxuriously appointed, and pitched around the bath house. That would in turn explain the very limited defensive value of the built structures. Their users’ best defence was their mobility, and their citadels were elsewhere.

Indeed, not only the soundly built stone bath house itself, but also its decoration, and the resources needed if it was to be provided with water, and fuel for the boiler, all point to a capital investment, and therefore a patron, from the urban world beyond the steppe horizon. Quṣayr ‘Amra did not meet local needs, but rather gratified the whims of wealthy outsiders. It was conceived for occasional visits, full of pleasures one might dream of, but hardly expect, in the desert. In particular, Quṣayr ‘Amra was perfectly placed to allow its owner to take advantage of the abundant opportunities for hunting offered by the steppe hereabout, and the desert fringes. No doubt the wandering Arabs of these regions had long been in the habit of coming here to hunt the gazelles that were attracted to the wadi in winter and especially springtime by its standing water, and probably took advantage of it as a protected route of migration as well. In the 1960s, Guy Mountfort wrote:

After examining the Qasr we explored the Wadi el Butm. It was full of tired migrants such as Rollers, Collared Flycatchers, Redstarts, Chiffchaffs, Lesser Whitethroats, Nightingales and Rufous Bush Chats. Swal-

26. Schiøler, *Water-lifting wheels* 96.

27. Cf. the baths west of the Great Mosque of al-Mutawakkil at Sāmarrā’: Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* VII (‘Die die Malereien zerstörende Feuchtigkeit der Bäder machte eine dauernde Übermalung notwendig, und es fanden sich daher bis zu 16 Schichten übereinander, wie die Jahresringe eines Baumes, von vielleicht nicht viel mehr als 16 Jahren.’), 81-84, pl. LVIII; also Arnold, *Painting* 85-86 and pl. XVIIc.

lows were passing through in considerable numbers, swooping down from the surrounding hills and flying close to the bed of the wadi to escape the wind.²⁸

The built installations, though, were aimed at grander hunters than these - we shall later encounter them in the bath house frescoes, in hot pursuit of their quarry. On such occasions we may imagine the place invaded by a whole caravan of domestics and women who transformed it, however temporarily, into home from home for their masters, while cooks prepared the meat of the animals just caught, and garnished it with vegetables produced in Quşayr 'Amra's gardens by the skeleton staff that will have lived there permanently. Such large-scale expeditions into the steppe or desert were a common form of entertainment for the Umayyads. We read for example in various sources, such as the tenth-century compilation of poetry and of stories about poets known as the *Kitāb al-aghānī* (*Book of songs*), an account of how the Caliph Hishām (724-43) once went out from his preferred residence at al-Ruṣāfa in the Syrian steppe near the Euphrates, accompanied by 'his family, his entourage, his servants and his companions'. He camped in a barren, stony plain, but in a year when the rain had fallen early and abundantly, so that the landscape was transformed by an abundance of springtime grasses and gaily coloured flowers, and all was beautiful to behold.²⁹ In the same book we glimpse his successor the Caliph al-Walīd b. Yazīd (743-44) relaxing after a day's hunting 'in a tent whose floor and walls were adorned with Armenian (carpets and hangings)', which were enormously prized by the Arabs,³⁰ while on another occasion we find him setting forth to spend some time carousing with his drinking companions and court poets in a hunting lodge he owned: the Arabic word is *mutaṣayyad*.³¹ This is perhaps also the best label to attach to Quşayr 'Amra, at least in the shape in which it has come down to us, and without prejudice to the possibility that it was meant to be developed, eventually, into a more permanent type of settlement.

The focus of this busy scene will have been neither the courtyard dwelling nor even the welcome refreshment of the bath itself, but rather the bath house hall, where the patron received his guests. Looking further afield, to

28. Mountfort, *Portrait of a desert* 80, and cf. 60 (gazelles).

29. Işf. 2.129, and cf. Ibn Qutayba, *Al-imāma wa-'l-siyāsa* 2.126.

30. Al-Aşma'ī in Işf. 6.101; Ahsan, *Social life* 191-92.

31. Al-Madā'inī in Işf. 7.80.

the wider context provided by the bath houses of late Roman as well as early Islamic Syria and Palestine, one can see that the 'hall type' design followed at Quṣayr 'Amra and nearby Ḥammām al-Šarāḥ was far from innovative. From the limestone uplands of northwestern Syria, Antioch's hinterland, eastwards to the banks of the Euphrates and southwards to the al-Naqb Desert, but also in much of the rest of the Mediterranean world, are still to be found numerous examples of a type of bath house which combines compact sequences of bathing rooms *strictu sensu* with an often much larger social area, usually rectangular in shape. This area might either be roofed or not, and if in some places it was purely private in intention, in others it was designed for public assemblages, often social or cultural rather than strictly balneal in character.³²

What exactly were the social acts that could appropriately be performed in a bath house, yet were of sufficient formality to require a reception hall for their setting? In whatever had to do with bathing, the Roman example counted for something, as Herod the Great had shown in his palace at Caesarea Maritima, the public half of which featured an audience hall opening onto a courtyard surrounded by stoas, while the private part was built round a large bathing pool on a promontory lapped by the Mediterranean. The palace and the pool remained in use into the sixth century, and were still recognisable when Caesarea fell to the Arabs.³³ The complex's whole conception anticipates the elaborate Umayyad palace, its audience hall graced by a 19.5 x 3.4 x 1.25 m. indoor swimming pool, at Khirbat al-Mafjar in the Jordan Valley near Jericho (another place where Herod, like the Hasmoneans before him, built residences graced by baths and several substantial swimming pools designed to afford relief from the place's intolerable heat³⁴). From constructing half one's palace round a swimming pool to conducting public business in the bath is but a step or two. Unfortunately it is not clear whether the 'Sophianai', where the emperors of East Rome were wont, in the eighth century, to make formal receipt of the booty brought back by their conquering generals, are to be identified with the suburban Constantinopolitan palace of that name, or the very central and quite separate bath house.³⁵

32. See above, 30 n. 14; also Brown, *Excavations at Dura-Europus* 49-63; Yegül, in *Corinthia*; Charpentier, *TOΠΟΙ* 5 (1995).

33. See the sequence of articles in Raban and Holum (eds), *Caesarea Maritima* 193-247.

34. Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 15.53-55; Lichtenberger, *Baupolitik* 55-70.

35. Theophanes, *Chronographia* 451, and cf. 243, 251, 434; Leo Grammaticus, *Chronographia* 191; Mentzu-Meimare, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 89 (1996) 64-66.

The ninth-century Greek chronicler Theophanes does record, though, that in the same city, in the year 713, the Emperor Philippicus 'decided on the Saturday of Pentecost to enter the public bath house of Zeuxippus on horseback with his retinue and instruments of music, to wash himself there and breakfast with citizens of ancient lineage'.³⁶ Another source tells us that a painted statue of Philippicus was set up in the same baths.³⁷ A comparable royal portrait figures among Quşayr 'Amra's frescoes, along with depictions of music-making and an image suggestive of imperial triumph; while the social habits of the Constantinopolitan court were familiar enough to the Arab elite.

Despite the difference in scale - which is anyway compensated by the existence in the Balqā' of much larger late Umayyad structures like Mushattā - it is easy to imagine some such scene unfolding at Quşayr 'Amra. An Umayyad potentate would have sat in front of the portrait of the enthroned prince at the hall's focal point, and there entertained 'his family, his entourage, his servants and his companions', or (these enumerations of retinues are common in the *Kitāb al-aghānī*) 'the people of his household, his clients (*mawālī*), the poets and the ministers'.³⁸ He would have been mindful also of the need to cultivate friendly relations with the area's tribal leaders. And this potentate probably was indeed, as Musil first suggested,³⁹ the *amīr* (heir apparent) and subsequently, for a brief fifteen months in 743-44, caliph al-Walīd (II) b. Yazīd already mentioned in passing. To complement this general introductory description of Quşayr 'Amra, it is as well to rehearse briefly the reasons for this identification, since they are often ignored even in the specialist literature.

The patron's identity

If, as seems reasonable, we deduce from the various factors already enumerated⁴⁰ that Quşayr 'Amra was not in use for very long, and that its frescoes are likely therefore to be contemporaneous with the structure they adorn, then a firm *terminus post quem* is provided for the whole complex by the fact that one of the paintings depicts the last Visigothic king of Spain,

36. Theophanes, *Chronographia* 383.

37. *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* 82.

38. İsf. 2.129, 4.311 (from al-Madā'ini).

39. Musil, *K.* 'A. 1.158.

40. Above, 33-34.

Roderic, who was vanquished and probably killed by an Umayyad army in 711 or 712. The Visigothic prisoners and fabulous booty taken by the Arabs in Spain did not arrive in Damascus until shortly before the death of the Caliph al-Walīd I on 24 February 715,⁴¹ so it is unlikely that this ruler was himself responsible for Quṣayr ‘Amra. We must search among his successors. A *terminus ante quem* is provided by the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750, which resulted in the transference of the centre of political power from Syria to ‘Irāq and a much reduced likelihood that a princely bath house would ever again be built in the Balqā’. Nor is it likely that an Abbasid patron would have advertised so exclusively Umayyad a conquest as that of Spain - which continued under Umayyad rule even after the rise of the Abbasids.

Within this period of thirty-five years from 715 to 750, two further considerations should be taken into account. First, one would feel more comfortable assigning a structure as non-autonomous as a hunting lodge to a prince who can be shown to have had a more general interest in the Balqā’ - Quṣayr ‘Amra is unlikely to have been its patron’s sole investment in the region. Secondly, the preferred candidate will have spent at least a year or two of his career as heir apparent to the ruling caliph, and have commissioned Quṣayr ‘Amra during that period. This emerges from two Arabic texts that form part of the fresco decoration. Along the arch that frames the princely portrait to be discussed at the beginning of Chapter 2 runs a text written in white Kufic letters carefully and elegantly painted on a blue ground. The French epigrapher Frédéric Imbert has recently offered, with all due caution, a fuller version of this text than was previously available. He reads:

O God, forgive the heir apparent (?) of the Muslim men and women...
well-being from God and mercy!⁴²

Admittedly the reading is uncertain. But the possibility that the patron was an heir apparent rather than a ruling caliph is fortunately confirmed by a three-line Arabic acclamation in Kufic letters similar to those used in the prince’s portrait, positioned high up above the south window in the east aisle:

O God (*Allāhumma*), bless the *amīr* as you blessed David and Abraham

41. *Mozarabic chronicle of 754 56-57* (tr. Wolf); al-Wāqidi in al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūh al-buldān* 231; Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion* 57-63; Collins, *Arab conquest* 28-31, 39.

42. *Allāhu[mma] i[ghfir] ?li-walī [‘a]hd? al-muslimīn wa-l-[mus]lima* (sic)... ‘āfiya min allāh wa-ra[h]ma: Imbert, *Inscriptions arabes*.

and the people of his [i.e. Abraham's] community [i.e. the Muslims]... gift...⁴³

The title *amīr* was commonly employed to designate the heir apparent.⁴⁴ It was also used of provincial governors. We can be sure, in other words, that Quşayr 'Amra's patron did not, at the time this text was executed, hold the office of *amīr al-mu'minīn*, that is, Commander of the Faithful or caliph - though he probably looked forward to assuming it in the not too remote future.

After 715, the only Umayyads known to have built anywhere in al-Balqā' are al-Walīd's half-brother Yazīd II (720-24) and his son. Both were in fact strongly attached to the region. Yazīd lived at al-Muwaqqar, only 45 km. west of Quşayr 'Amra on the road to 'Ammān, and he died at Bayt Rās, ancient Capitolas near Irbid.⁴⁵ He had been the officially designated heir apparent for three years before his accession.⁴⁶ And he was far from being an ascetic, unlike his immediate predecessor 'Umar II (717-20). Yet his son al-Walīd spent even longer living in al-Balqā' than Yazīd had, because before he acceded to the throne he was obliged to sit out the 19 years of his uncle Hishām's caliphate, throughout which he was the officially designated heir apparent.⁴⁷ And had Yazīd built Quşayr 'Amra, one would have expected his son to have used it during this period, and for signs of use on the well head

43. *Allāhumma bārik 'alā al-amīr kamā bārak[ta 'alā] d[ā]wū[d wa-]ibrahīm* (sic) *wa-āl millatihi... 'atiya...al-...: Imbert, Inscriptions arabes*. I am obliged to Frédéric Imbert for communicating to me his readings of these two inscriptions, and to Irfan Shahīd for discussing them with me.

44. See e.g. the Qaşr Burqu' inscription (dated 700) of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik: Gaube, *A.D.A.J.* 19 (1974) 97 and pl. XXXI.1; Ṭab. 2.1890-91 (tr. 27.2); also, with reference to al-Walīd b. Yazīd, al-Madā'inī and others in Işf. 4.392-93, 7.10 (tr. Derenk 81), 19.142; Crone and Hinds, *God's caliph* 11. Only in unambiguous contexts might one call the caliph *amīr*, as in a letter in which one had already used the fuller title: Baramki, *Q.D.A.P.* 8 (1939) 53. Otherwise, it was a sign of non-recognition: al-Madā'inī in Ṭab. 2.1875 (tr. 26.247).

45. Creswell 493-97, pls 81-82; Kuthayyir 'Azza, *Dīwān* 340; Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, *Naqā'id* 997.6.

46. Ṭab. 2.1342 (tr. 24.70-71).

47. Derenk, *Al-Walīd*, provides a brief account of al-Walīd's life and (like Rotter, *Abu l-Faradsch* 100-27) a partial German translation of our most abundant source, Işf. 7.5-97. Hamilton, *Walid*, incorporates English translations or summaries of the same material in an entertainingly anecdotal narrative. The most comprehensive treatment, with important critical remarks on Abbasid manipulation of the literary sources, is 'Aṭwān, *Al-Walīd*; see also Abbott, *Studies* 3.90-103.

and elsewhere to have been more conspicuous. Since al-Walīd was also every bit as much a hedonist as his father, he must be accounted the stronger candidate.

It is true, of course, that one does not have to be a hedonist in order to enjoy a bath, especially after a day's hunting. Nevertheless, Quṣayr 'Amra's paintings do exude *joie de vivre*, and al-Walīd was neither an ascetic like 'Umar II nor an austere, miserly puritan and born accountant as Hishām (who loathed him) was alleged to be. So it is not entirely irrelevant to observe that al-Walīd was a fervent seeker of pleasure through poetry, music, wine and women. He was also handsome,⁴⁸ a fine horseman and athlete of great physical strength,⁴⁹ a hunter, especially of the wild ass that is so much depicted at Quṣayr 'Amra,⁵⁰ and something of a practical joker.⁵¹ Nor did he entirely neglect more serious pursuits. Besides his passion for poetry, and the many invitations he addressed to leading poets and singers and literary scholars, who competed for his favours, including substantial cash handouts,⁵² al-Walīd also took an amateur's passionate interest in the history of the times before Islam, 'collecting the records, poems, historical traditions, genealogies and dialects of the Arabs'.⁵³ Since much of the Arabs' historical memory was transmitted in their poetry, as one can see from the inordinate amounts of verse contained even in a work such as the *Life of the Prophet* by Ibn Ishāq (c. 704 - c. 767), these interests are two sides of the same coin.⁵⁴ As we shall see, Quṣayr 'Amra's paintings include personifications of Poetry and History, labelled in Greek.

Al-Walīd celebrated his uncle Hishām's long-awaited demise in characteristic fashion, with wine and a singing girl,⁵⁵ but was to enjoy his throne only for fifteen months after that (743-44), until he was assassinated during a

48. *Mozarabic chronicle of 754 87 (Alulit* (= 'Αλουλιτ, an attested variant of the more usual 'Αλουλιδ: Bell, *Aphrodito papyri* 539 s.v.) *pulcher Emir Almuminim*); Işf. 4.392, 10.101, 19.142; and further references in 'Aṭwān, *Al-Walīd* 172.

49. Bal. 2. fol. 163a = p. 325 (42 Derenk); Ṭab. 2.1811 (tr. 26.164); Mas. 2248-51 (3.217-19 Dāghir); Işf. 7.31 (tr. Derenk 108).

50. Hishām b. al-Kalbī in Işf. 7.58 (partial tr. Derenk 118); al-Haytham b. 'Adī in Bal. 2. fol. 160b = p. 320 (31 Derenk); al-Madā'inī in Ṭab. 2.1775-76 (tr. 26.127) and Işf. 7.56 (tr. Berque 123), 80, 87 (tr. Rotter 122); and cf. Bal. 2. fol. 155a = p. 309 (4 Derenk); Işf. 7.114-16.

51. Işf. 7.70-71; and below, 41.

52. E.g. Işf. 6.80-81, 7.111-14; cf. 'Aṭwān, *Al-Walīd* 182-209.

53. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist* 103 (tr. Dodge 197-98).

54. Abbott, *Studies* 1.14-19.

55. Işf. 7.23 (tr. Derenk 97-98).

revolt led by members of other branches of the Umayyad clan. His accession had thwarted numerous ambitious cousins; his way of life had offended somewhat wider circles. But with his assassination, the first of a reigning caliph since 661, a fatal blow was struck at the plausibility of the Umayyad dynasty itself, and at the cohesion of its power base, Syria.

If al-Walīd had one powerful motivation besides pleasure, it was the desire to shock. Our literary sources are full of outrageous stories, some no doubt apocryphal, and of poems in similar vein attributed to al-Walīd, not a few of them spuriously, one suspects - though neither apocrypha nor spuria commonly attach to nonentities (any more than do plagiarists, of whom al-Walīd was to know a few). According to one story, al-Walīd had the jester Ash'ab (d. 771) dressed up as a monkey and adorned with bells, then exposed his erect penis and had the 'monkey' bow down before it;⁵⁶ according to another, al-Walīd, hearing the muezzin's call as he withdrew from the singing girl Nawār, sent her in disguise to preside at prayers in his place.⁵⁷ There is the unforgettable image of al-Walīd using a copy of the *Qur'ān* for target practice, and declaiming verses in which he places himself proudly among the damned.⁵⁸ In another poem, he professes to be ready for the flames of hell, if only he can become, for a moment, the cross he has just seen a pretty girl reverencing in church.⁵⁹ Contemporaries who moved in the same circles seem to have perceived al-Walīd as one who was deliberately placing himself beyond the bounds of Islam.

In one respect, though, al-Walīd differed from his father: his genuine talent for poetry - itself a potentially impious taste, in the eyes of the strict.⁶⁰ Among contemporaries, his reputation was backed up by his prodigious skill and energy as a musician;⁶¹ and he is still esteemed today in Arabic literary circles for the delicacy of his wine and love poetry.⁶² Because his verse was a

56. Al-Haytham b. 'Adī in Işf. 19.184 (tr. Rosenthal, *Humor* 90); al-Madā'inī in Işf. 7.56 (tr. Berque 123); Bal. 2. fol. 162a = p. 323 (38 Derenk). For a real performing monkey belonging to Yazīd I, see Mas. 1918 (3.67-68 Dāghir); also Nadler, *Umayyadenkalifen* 219-21, for the poets' mockery of this caliph's weakness for apes. It is not clear why Rosenthal, *Humor* 22 n. 1, is so sure that all stories about Ash'ab and al-Walīd are 'entirely legendary'.

57. Al-Madā'inī in Bal. 2. fol. 162b = p. 324 (40 Derenk) and Işf. 7.57 (tr. Berque 124); al-Işfahānī, *Al-qiyyān* 16-17.

58. Işf. 7.59-60 (tr. Rotter 119).

59. Al-Walīd b. Yazīd fr. 32 (tr. Hamilton 165).

60. Cf. Işf. 7.90 (tr. Rotter 125). For the *Qur'ān*'s view of poets see 26.224-27.

61. Işf. 9.314.

62. See Blachère's sensitive essay in *Analecta* 379-99; also Jacobi, *Festschrift Ewald Wagner*.

direct expression of his way of life (or, at least, could plausibly be represented as such), all sorts of anecdotes gathered around the poems in order to explain their content and context, just as stories were woven round each verse of the *Qur'ān*, to show why and on what occasion it had been revealed. The long chapter on al-Walīd in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* is an excellent specimen of this genre of poetico-biographical commentary; and its colourfulness has attracted the attention not only of literary historians but also of students of Umayyad politics and art, with the result that al-Walīd has come to bulk somewhat larger than his brief reign alone can justify in accounts of the Umayyad dynasty, and especially of its contribution to Arab culture.

Even after his succession to the caliphate, al-Walīd seems to have stayed mostly in the Balqā' and pursued his pleasures.⁶³ It is hard to see much difference between the stories in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* that call him *amīr*, and those in which he is *amīr al-mu'minīn*.⁶⁴ For him the caliphate was not so much a responsibility as an opportunity to indulge his longing for

ripe girls like statues, slaves, and mounts to hunt,
and dizzy wine.⁶⁵

He gathered poets around him, especially those of the Hijāz School who had long suffered for their reputation as libertines.⁶⁶ And their shared pleasures nourished his own poetry, imparting to the Arabic wine song a new subtlety, of which the great Abū Nuwās was soon to be the heir:

God and the holy angels hear me speak,
and all the righteous worshippers of God.
These are my heart's desire: a cup of wine,
the sound of music and a pretty cheek
to bite; a noble friend to drink with me,
a nimble serving man to fill my bowl,
a man of wit to talk; an artful minx
with round young breasts in jewelled necklaces.⁶⁷

63. This may be deduced from Bal. 2. fol. 166a = p. 331 (55 Derenk); Tab. 2.1743, 1776 ad init., 1795, 1819 (tr. 26.91, 127, 148, 174); and cf. Bal. 2. fol. 163b = p. 326 (45-46 Derenk); *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* pp. 368-69.

64. He may even be addressed as caliph in stories which clearly took place under Hishām; see e.g. the comedian al-Ash'ab in Iṣf. 3.344-45.

65. Al-Walīd b. Yazīd fr. 15 (Iṣf. 7.19, tr. Hamilton 20).

66. See Hammād al-Rāwiya in Iṣf. 22.106 for a characteristic list of al-Walīd's poet companions.

67. Al-Walīd b. Yazīd fr. 22, and cf. Hamilton 191 no. 84 (tr. 149).

2.

ROYAL IMAGERY

Although they duly mention his taste for Greek girls (*rūmīyāt*),¹ our literary sources are otherwise quite uninformative about al-Walīd's Hellenic culture. But Quṣayr 'Amra - if it is his - goes far towards filling the gap. Since al-Walīd was apparently not considered exceptionally Hellenophile (something Abbasid historians, generally hostile to the Umayyads, would otherwise certainly have taxed him with), we may take Quṣayr 'Amra as more generally indicative of the degree of interest in things Greek that one might have expected members of the Umayyad elite to show. The hall's royal imagery speaks with particular eloquence of its patron's cultural horizons.

Portrait of a prince

As the visitor's eye adjusts itself to the hall's gentle light after the glare of the limestone desert, one of the first things it discerns is the painting on the back wall of the alcove that closes the central aisle right in front of him (fig. 7).² The prince stares out at us from a substantial throne with a high, rounded back, which in turn stands under a round arch each of whose flattened extremities rests on a spiral-fluted column. We are reminded of the similar architectural frame in the fourth-century Madrid *missorium*'s depiction of the Emperor Theodosius I, and the seventh-century David Plates adorned with scenes from the life of an Old Testament prince widely regarded as an exemplar of Christian kingship.³ Arches stood for royal authority, and Arab tradition had that of Khusraw II's palace at Ctesiphon collapse just at the time of Muḥammad's birth.⁴

1. Al-Mad'āinī in Bal. 2. fol. 156a = p. 311 (8 Derenk); Işf. 7.9 (tr. Derenk 80).

2. Cf. K. 'A. 1.215 fig. 132 (and cf. 213), 2. pl. XV-XVI; Q. 'A. pls X-XI; Ettinghausen and Grabar 57 pl. 29.

3. A.S. 74-76, 475-83.

4. Wahb b. Munabbih in Ṭab. 1.1010 (tr. 5.332).

Atop each column perches a sand grouse (*qaṭā*), a type of bird smaller than a partridge, somewhat like a ptarmigan, which dwelt in large flocks in the deserts of Arabia and is much alluded to in early Arabic poetry.⁵ Avian 'supporters' - to borrow a term from heraldry - were common in the art of the Roman East, though apparently not in Sasanian territory. Portraits of royal, holy or otherwise distinguished personages, along with the canon tables at the beginning of Gospel books such as the sixth-century Rabbula Gospels from Northern Mesopotamia, were quite often framed by an arch or some similar structure on which birds perched, usually two large ones *en face*.⁶ At Quṣayr 'Amra, though, this honorific convention, with its intimation of Paradise gardens⁷ or of the celestial vault, has been vulgarized, and is also used to adorn the hangers-on who crowd the prince's alcove,⁸ or the various figures, some naked, some perhaps amorously involved with each other, who inhabit the thirty-two panels into which the central vault is divided.⁹

More sand grouse, twenty of them altogether, can be seen processing along a painted frieze that follows the curve of the alcove vault - or, to be more precise, two processions encounter each other at the mid-point of the curve. Double avian processions of this sort were occasionally employed as a framing device in Syriac art, as for example in the Rabbula Gospels.¹⁰ Single rows of birds occur commonly enough in Sasanian art;¹¹ while similar sand grouse processions - this time in painted stucco - wended their way round various parts of the Umayyad palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar. It has recently been proposed that their symbolism is erotic.¹² But perhaps the nearest parallel - in conception if not execution - to Quṣayr 'Amra is the so-

5. Dozy, *Supplément* 2.386; *E.A.P.* 1.163-67, 178.

6. Colledge, *Art of Palmyra* 49, 50 fig. 30 (rock carving dated A.D. 147 from near Palmyra); *A.S.* 31-32, 330-32 and pl. IX, 547, 618-19; Cecchelli, Furlani and Salmi, *Evangeliarium syriaci ornamenta*; Farioli Campanati, *Felix Ravenna* 145-48 (1993-94) figs 7, 9, 10, 11, 14; Richardson, *Isles of the North* 180-81 (marble inlay panel showing edicule containing cross, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople), and cf. 182, 183 fig. 11.

7. Nordenfalk, *Studies* 31.

8. Grabar, *A.O.* 23 (1993) 104 figs 5-6.

9. See below, 81.

10. Cecchelli, Furlani and Salmi, *Evangeliarium syriaci ornamenta* fols 10b, 11a.

11. Kröger 177-78; and cf. Esin, *Kunst des Orients* 9 (1973-74) 82 figs 29-30, 83-84 (Varakhsha near Bukhārā, and Sāmarrā').

12. K. Brisch, *K.Is.* 181-82 (pl. XV); Baer, *I.E.J.* 24 (1974); Behrens-Abouseif, *Muqarnas* 14 (1997) 16; cf. Jabbur, *Bedouins* 124-25.

called Qazwīn silver plate in Teheran, thought to have been made during the century and a half following the fall of the Sasanian dynasty. Here the monarch is shown standing in front of his throne under a substantial arched structure, the facade of which is decorated with framed images of birds, seven on each side.¹³

At least, then, as regards these peripheral elements of the composition, the portrait of the prince seems to be of eclectic inspiration, combining a distinctly Roman-style architectural frame with avian supporters from the Roman East and an avian procession that is more Sasanian in style. As for the pair of richly appressed servants who stand flanking the prince, they are a standard framing element in East Roman depictions of eminent personages (fig. 8), and are not unknown in Sasanian art either, as on the Qazwīn plate again. As the ninth-century writer al-Jāhīz explains, a caliph, or someone else in a comparable position of power and influence, used never to be without a slave girl standing behind him to wave fly whisk and fan, and another to hand him things, in a public audience in the presence of other men.¹⁴

At Quşayr 'Amra, these particular servants seem to be male - but there are plenty of women close at hand on the alcove's side walls. The long fans they wield with both hands are a rarity in courtly iconography - usually we find fly whisks held in one hand only.¹⁵ Dressed alike, in a long tunic or shirt (*qamīṣ*) with a high neckline either beaded or embroidered, a long, loose mantle or wrap (*ridā'*) covering it, elaborately patterned, and slippers, these two attendants look quite like the musicians in a late Umayyad hunting fresco from Qaşr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī near Palmyra, which breathes a distinctly Iranian atmosphere.¹⁶ On the other hand, male costume in the late Sasanian Ṭāq-i Bustān hunting reliefs, whether the king's or his servants', is different, involving heavy, stiff, tight-fitting and embroidered caftans with belts, and the traditional Iranian leggings.¹⁷

13. Cf. von Gall, *A.M.I.* 4 (1971) 225 and pl. 37(2); Harper, *Silver vessels* 115-17 and pl. 34.

14. Al-Jāhīz, *Risālat al-qiyān* 20 (tr. Beeston).

15. Loberdou-Tsigarida, *Οστέινα πλακίδια* 253 nos 26-27 (Coptic bone plaques); Ghirshman, *Artibus Asiae* 16 (1953) 52 and figs 1-2 (frontispiece) (post-Sasanian silver); *K.Is.* pl. 106 (ivory casket from Córdoba, dated 1004); cf. Mas. 622 (1.292 Dāghir) (portrait of Khusraw I); Ṭab. 3.306 (tr. 28.278) (al-Manşūr the Abbasid).

16. Schlumberger, *Syria* 25 (1946-48) pl. B = Ettinghausen, *Arabische Malerei* 37 = *K.Is.* pl. XIII; and cf. R. Hillenbrand, *K.Is.* 174-75, esp. 174a; Carter, in Harper, *Royal hunter* 77-78.

17. Cf. *Taq-i B.* 4.96-111; Peck, *E.Ir.* 5.749-51.

As for the prince himself, he appears to be attired little differently from his attendants. His long tunic or shirt, and his mantle, must correspond to the *izār* and *ridā'*, both of deep saffron, that the Caliph al-Walīd II wore when seated on his throne.¹⁸ It is rather by posture and gesture that the prince is marked out. He is seated on a voluminous cushion placed upon his throne. Together with the arch immediately above it, and the semicircle of the vault, the throne's rounded headpiece provides a triple frame for the prince's head, which was set against a halo too. Much of this central part of the fresco is badly damaged. We cannot discern any longer the prince's face, and though we see that his right forearm is positioned in front of his chest, it is not clear whether he is holding a cup, as kings often do on Sasanian and post-Sasanian silverware,¹⁹ or raising his hand in the royal gesture of triumph and benediction that was customary in both Rome and the pre-Sasanian East.²⁰ Overall, what this panel most recalls is the frontal portrait of the Roman emperor that became current from the late third century onward and was particularly popular in the mid-eighth century, and the closely related iconography of the enthroned Christ.²¹ This debt to the Roman tradition is further underlined if we compare the Quṣayr 'Amra prince with the two late Umayyad princely

18. Ḥammād al-Rāwīya in Iṣf. 2.203, and al-Aṣma'ī in Iṣf. 6.88; cf. Dozy, *Noms des vêtements* 24-25 (on the wide meaning of *izār* in early Islam), and Ahsan, *Social life* 34-39 (also on the *qamīṣ*, perhaps a more accurate term for the tunic illustrated at Quṣayr 'Amra). Al-Walīd is also mentioned as wearing, on different occasions, a saffron shirt (Ḥammād al-Rāwīya in Iṣf. 7.56), or a brocaded gown gleaming with gold (Iṣf. 3.305), or else (the singer Ḥakam al-Wādī in Iṣf. 6.295, 13.305) a gown, mantle and boots, all of brocade or patterned fabric (*washī* - which might be woven with gold thread: Ahsan, *Social life* 52-55). See also al-Haytham b. 'Adī in Bal. 2. fol. 167a = p. 333 (59 Derenk); al-Madā'inī in Ṭab. 2.1802, 1806 (tr. 26.156, 160). The statue of a caliph, probably al-Walīd, found at Khirbat al-Mafjar shows him wearing a long Sasanian-style belted coat and trousers, both of red: K.M. 229. On Hishām's dressing in red silk see Ḥammād al-Rāwīya in Iṣf. 6.85 (tr. Hamilton 76) and Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* 2.208 (tr. 1.471).

19. Ghirshman, *Artibus Asiae* 16 (1953). Certain Umayyad caliphs were in the habit of drinking even while seated on their throne during a formal audience: Grabar, *Studies in memory of Gaston Wiet* 58.

20. Rome: Brilliant, *Gesture and rank*, esp. 204-11; also Piccirillo 96, 98, a mosaic from Mādabā, dated 578, showing the Sea personified, and surrounded by fishes and marine monsters. Pre-Sasanian East: Ghirshman, *Iran* 27 pl. 36, 55 pl. 68, 94-95 pls 105-06 etc. In Sasanian art, this gesture was used only as a sign of reverence to deities: Choksy, *Iranica varia*.

21. Brilliant, *Gesture and rank* 204-08; A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* 24-25, 196-200; A.S. 31, for an early sixth-century ivory diptych leaf, probably showing the Empress Ariadne; Belting, *Bild und Kult* 78-79; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* 104 no. 161 and pl. 82, and Cecchelli, Furlani and Salmi, *Evangelarii syriaci ornamenta* fol. 4b, for Christ enthroned.

images in stucco that were recovered from the excavation of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī. One, from the gatehouse's outer arcade, is Sasanian in pose (knees apart, heels together) and dress (especially the characteristic Iranian ear rings). The other, from the gatehouse's courtyard facade, is Roman.²² The idea of depicting a prince - presumably the same prince - in more than one guise of quite different cultural resonance within a single artistic scheme is striking, and as we shall see in the next section of this chapter, there may exist a partial parallel to this at Quṣayr 'Amra. But the prince in his alcove is, first and foremost, a reflection of the late Roman iconography of *imperium*.

The prince's feet rest on a footstool; and below that, in an area of painting hard to decipher since Musil and Mielich removed part of it, was depicted among other themes an aquatic scene including birds, fishes and four or five fishermen in a boat that also contained amphoras. One is reminded of the Nilotic scenes that became especially popular in the art of Palestine and Syria during the fifth and sixth centuries.²³ But this painting is more than just standard bath house decor;²⁴ and anyway it is not free-standing, but part of a larger composition. It may, then, represent the mighty rivers - Tigris, Euphrates and Nile - that watered the caliphate's richest regions,²⁵ or else the Ocean that embraces the Earth, underneath Heaven's vault symbolized by the arc of birds that touches the aquatic scene at its left and right extremities. This was appropriate imagery with which to frame a world-ruler,²⁶ as had long been recognised in the Roman Empire.²⁷ Indeed the poet al-Farazdaq, in encomiastic mode, not only envisaged al-

22. *K.Is.* pls 38, 59. Cf. Strika, *A.I.O.N.* 14 (1964) 730-43; R. Hillenbrand, *K.Is.* 163-64 (pl. 38); K. Brisch, *K.Is.* 182-83 (pl. 59); *Q.H.G.* 14-15, 22; E.H. Peck, *E.Ir.* 5.763a. Pose: Harper, *Iran* 17 (1979) 50. Ear rings: *Taq-i B.* 4.61-62; Abka'i-Khavari, *Das Bild des Königs* 63, 64-65; Tyler-Smith, *Numismatic chronicle* 160 (2000) 155-56; al-Aswad b. Ya'fur al-Nahshalī, *Qaṣīda dālīya* 23; Ṭab. 1.2642, 2880-81 (tr. 14.11, 15.86-87).

23. Balty, *Mosaïques* 245-54; also Piccirillo 160-61 pl. 209, and 'Mosaici', in *Umm al-Rasas* 1.142-43, with Baumann, *Spätantike Stifter* 152-55, for similar compositions from Mount Nebo (A.D. 557) and Umm al-Raṣāṣ (borders of eighth-century nave mosaic, church of S. Stephen).

24. Dunbabin, *Papers of The British School at Rome* 57 (1989) 25-29.

25. Al-Aḥwas (d. 728/29) in Bal. 1. fol. 381a = p. 761 (158, §442 'Abbās) (tr. Nadler, *Umayyadenkalifen* 123).

26. *Letter of Tansar* p. 29; Ettinghausen, *Arabische Malerei* 32.

27. Maguire, *Earth and ocean* 73-80, and Williams, *Numismatic chronicle* 159 (1999) 310-13 (note especially the positioning of personifications of Earth or Ocean under the ruler's feet). See also below, 50-51, on the al-Mundhir building at al-Ruṣāfa.

Walīd II seated under a dome that represented the heavens (as does that of Quṣayr ‘Amra’s caldarium), but also emitted the conceit that al-Walīd was himself ‘the sky of God’.²⁸ Another poet, Ṭurayḥ al-Thaqafī, maintained al-Walīd was able to command the waves to do whatever he liked - an original notion even in the uberous world of Umayyad panegyric.²⁹ And if the caliph’s power was supposed to be cosmic, it was also expected that his generosity would prove to be Oceanic, or at least Nilotic.³⁰ In the Umayyad milieu, it was the Euphrates that provided the more usual simile for that princely openhandedness of which poets dreamed, and with which so many of the *Kitāb al-aghānī*’s anecdotes culminate.³¹

This portrait of the prince as world-ruler, positioned at the hall’s focal point, imparts a note of tremendous solemnity to the scene. Alphons Mielich expressed particular admiration for the disposition and execution of the paintings throughout the whole alcove.³² And although portraits of princes - plaster statues rather than paintings - have been found in other Umayyad structures, at Khirbat al-Mafjar as well as Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, they seem to have been positioned high up in niches, as a type of architectural decoration without ceremonial function.³³ At Quṣayr ‘Amra, by contrast, the portrait of the prince marks the exact spot where he would have sat to receive his petitioners.³⁴ On such occasions the alcove may initially have been closed off with a curtain of the sort often mentioned in the *Kitāb al-aghānī*, and depicted in Quṣayr ‘Amra’s own paintings. This would have been drawn back, by slave girls or other servants, when the moment came for the prince to show himself.³⁵ The same moment of drama is still achieved

28. Al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān* 1.12 (extract tr. Jamil, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 41).

29. Al-Madā’inī in Iṣf. 4.310 (tr. Nadler, *Umayyadenkalifen* 265).

30. Cf. John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria* 4; Thābit b. Qays b. al-Shammās in Ṭab. 1.1496 (tr. 8.38).

31. On the striking frequency of the theme see Montgomery, *Vagaries of the qaṣīdah* 191-94, and cf. 161 n. 220; Nadler, *Umayyadenkalifen* 22-26.

32. Mielich, *K.* ‘A. 1.195b, 196b.

33. *K.M.* 98-103, 228-32, pl. LV.1, 5; *Q.H.G.* 15 and nn. 120, 123.

34. For al-Walīd, as *amīr*, holding court in a bath house, see Iṣf. 4.307-10.

35. Al-Jāhīz (attributed), *Kitāb al-tāj* 31-33; Iṣf. 1.61-62, 3.306, 7.54 (tr. Hamilton 45-46, 37, 110 respectively), 7.79 (quoted below, 78; the latter two passages are from Ḥammād al-Rāwīya); *K.* ‘A. 2. pls XVII-XVIII; Vibert-Guigue, *S.H.A.J.* 5.109 fig. 7; Hillenbrand, *Art history* 5 (1982) 9-10. Compare the Sasanian monarch’s curtain (al-Jāhīz (attributed), *Kitāb al-tāj* 28-29); the *velum* of the Roman emperor or empress (Eberlein, *Apparitio regis* 13-48); and the *ḥujub* in front of God’s throne (*Ḥadīth Dāwūd* 19.22-25).

today in the liturgies of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which also culminate in the manifestation of a king to his people, with the help of a curtain hung from the chancel arch or the central door of the icon screen in front of the altar, the throne of Christ.³⁶

This manner of presenting the prince as if he were a sacred object reflects absolutist and indeed theocratic conceptions that were given memorable expression in the letter by which al-Walīd II bestowed rights of succession on two of his sons - an episode of which more will be said later in this chapter:

God appointed His caliphs to follow in the path of Muḥammad's prophetic ministry... The caliphs of God succeeded each other as sovereigns over that which God had made them inherit from His prophets and that which he had entrusted to them. No one contests the right of the caliphs without God striking him down... No one treats their authority lightly and challenges the decree of God vested in them without God granting them mastery and power over such a person and making an example of him and a warning to others... It is in showing obedience to those whom God has appointed to rule on earth that there lies happiness for those whom God inspires thereto...³⁷

The future Marwān II (744-750) had recently expressed himself in similar terms, when as governor of Armenia he had written to congratulate al-Walīd on his accession:

The Commander of the Faithful...has assumed responsibility for matters which God has judged him competent to decide, and he stands confirmed in absolute control of the charge which has been laid upon him...God has singled him out from His creatures to rule, for He sees their circumstances. God has invested him with the caliphal ornament hanging round his neck and has bestowed on him the reins of the caliphate and the torque of authority. Praise be to God Who has chosen the Commander of the Faithful for His caliphate and to maintain the firm foundations of His religion! He has preserved him from the evil designs of the wicked; and He has elevated him and has brought them low. Anyone who persists in

36. Trempelas, *Τρεῖς λειτουργίαι* 71 n. 19.

37. Ṭab. 2.1756-64, esp. 1758-59 (tr. 26.106-15, esp. 108-09 C. Hillenbrand). Cf. also al-Walīd's letter to Hishām, in Bal. 2. fol. 157a = p. 313 (13-14 Derenk); Ṭab. 2.1746 (tr. 26.95); and an earlier expression of similar ideas in Ṭab. 2. 1231 (tr. 23.178). For this religious understanding of the caliphate, see Tyan, *Institutions* 1.439-73; Crone and Hinds, *God's caliph* 24-42; al-Azmeh, *Muslim kingship* 62-79; Donner, *Narratives* 40-43; Jamil, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 30-45; also below, 2.14-17.

such base actions destroys his soul and angers his Lord, but anyone whom repentance directs to the true course, abstaining from what is wrong and turning to what is right, will find God ever disposed to forgive and be merciful.³⁸

Just a few years after this, Marwān had his chief secretary ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā address a letter of exhortation to princely virtue to his son and heir. The letter’s emphasis is, naturally enough, more on the prince’s duty than his subject’s obedience; but still that duty is performed in response to a choice made by God, not the people.³⁹ The dissemination of such ideas was, in the Arab world, very much a product of the new, Islamic revelation, or rather of the political dispensation to which it had given rise. Through a vivid anecdote, al-Ṭabarī suggests that the first caliph to insist on explicit recognition of them had been the proud and tyrannical al-Walīd I.⁴⁰

Pre-Islamic kings had, it is true, worn modest diadems.⁴¹ The Ghassanid al-Mundhir (570-c. 581) had even held audience seated in a custom-built structure at al-Ruṣāfa (Sergiopolis) near the Euphrates. The building still stands, and proclaims ‘The fortune of Alamoundaros conquers’ in a Greek inscription located just underneath a frieze decorated with marine animals that runs round the apse. The building looks remarkably like a church, and is situated close to the martyr shrine of one of the Christian Arabs’ favourite saints, Sergius, which was chosen, about the year 575, as the setting for the negotiations and oath-taking that ended a period of estrangement between al-Mundhir and the Roman emperor Tiberius, after the latter’s inept attempt to have his Arab ally assassinated. In view of the fact that churches were not infrequently the venue for audiences and other official business, it looks as if al-Mundhir was using either an actual church, or else a hall with a distinctly ecclesiastical air about it, in order to convey a (barely) subliminal message about his own status.⁴²

Since al-Ruṣāfa remained an important centre under the Umayyads, and

38. Ṭab. 2. 1752-53 (tr. 26.102 C. Hillenbrand).

39. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, letter 21 (tr. Schönig, *Sendschreiben* 17-73; summarised Latham, *A.L.U.P.* 167-72). On ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd generally, as a spokesman for the late Umayyads’ sacral idea of kingship, see al-Qādī, *Saber religioso*. Cf. additionally al-Madā’inī in Bal. 2. fol. 728a (82-83, §158 ‘Athāmina) (on Hishām); and, on the same idea in Umayyad poetry, Wagner, *Grundzüge* 2.23-24.

40. Ṭab. 2.1232-34 (tr. 23.179-81).

41. ‘Athamina, *Al-qaṭara* 19 (1998).

42. Brands, *Da.M.* 10 (1998); E.K.Fowden, *Da.M.* 12 (2000).

indeed became the more or less permanent residence of al-Walīd's uncle the Caliph Hishām (724-43),⁴³ Quṣayr 'Amra's patron can hardly have been unaware of al-Mundhir's building atop its knoll just outside the city's north gate. Its general layout, the emphasis its inscription placed on the idea of victory, whose role at Quṣayr 'Amra will be discussed later in this chapter, and perhaps even its frieze of marine animals, may have been in his mind - along with recollections of various Syrian bath houses he had visited - when he commissioned his own project. It would be idle, though, to pretend that pre-Islamic Arab tradition offered more than an embryonic precedent for the high view of their caliphate espoused by the Umayyads, who were accordingly forced, to a large extent, to borrow ideas, images and architectural forms from their neighbours, especially the Sasanians and the Romans, who had had their own experience of expressing a vision of universal and divinely sanctioned empire. The parallels to Quṣayr 'Amra's royal iconography that are to be found if we look on the Roman side of the frontier are particularly striking. Two groups of images especially stand out, one a product of the Greek and Roman tradition, the other Jewish and Christian in inspiration.

The late antique Roman iconography of power is amply documented in the many ivory consular diptychs that have survived (e.g. fig. 8).⁴⁴ Most are products of the fifth century and the first half of the sixth, and a number of them may have been produced in Syria or Egypt. The Umayyads or their artists could conceivably have been aware of these valuable and eminently transportable objects, and even if they were not, the diptychs display a range of imagery that remained familiar in the East Roman world. They portray ceremonially attired consuls enthroned within an architectural framework or arch, from which curtains sometimes hang and on which two large birds may perch. The great man's feet rest on a footstool. Lictors or other ceremonial or symbolic figures usually flank him, and often Victories too, who brandish portrait medallions. Depictions of Gē holding a kerchief weighed down with fruit are also encountered. Above the consul's head, often on the arch itself, runs an inscription that identifies him. Beneath the consular footstool, slave boys may be glimpsed pouring rivers of gold coin from capacious sacks. Acrobats and other entertainers perform, and combats with wild beasts are much favoured too, especially the spearing of them in arenas. Merely to

43. On the Umayyads and al-Ruṣāfa, see the sources gathered by Kellner-Heinkele in Sack, *Resafa* 4.

44. For a range of examples see Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* pls 1-37.

enumerate all these features makes plain the many points of contact between the consular diptychs and Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes. There is here a substantially shared conception of what a royal iconography should be. But for royal images which were definitely familiar to the Umayyads we have to turn to Syria's mosaic art.

The church of the Archangel Michael in the abandoned village of Ḥawīrtah, 15 km. north of Apamea in Syria, recently yielded to its excavators a fine mosaic floor of the late fifth century (fig. 9).⁴⁵ In the place of honour just in front of the sanctuary step, and facing the visitor who enters from the west, Adam was depicted naming the animals as they throng around him. Seated majestically on a thick cushion reposing on a backless throne, he raises his right hand in blessing or a gesture of speech, while in the other he holds a book. His head is flanked by two birds facing each other. Above him is inscribed his name, in Greek. Behind in the sanctuary stood the altar, the throne of Christ the heavenly king, of which Adam's throne acts as a direct visual precursor, just as Adam himself - who is fully clothed, not naked - prefigures Christ.⁴⁶ Flanking Adam, in the basilica's side aisles, are scenes of wild animals attacking each other, the hunting party's antecedent and parallel in the world of Nature. Presumably from another church not far away, and probably from the same position in it, is now preserved in the Ḥamā Museum a similar mosaic that depicts Adam seated on a cushion, upon a throne which this time has a back and stands under a round arch supported on two columns (fig. 10).⁴⁷ He holds no book, but raises his right hand in blessing. His feet rest on a footstool. His name is inscribed clearly in Greek and maladroitly in Syriac. The resemblance between this panel and the Quṣayr 'Amra fresco is particularly striking.

Another such panel, said also to be from northern Syria, is preserved in Copenhagen.⁴⁸ As at Ḥawīrtah, Adam is seated on a backless throne, and rests his feet upon a footstool. His right hand is raised. His name appears above his head, in Greek. But unlike the other two panels, this one shows Adam's head surrounded by a nimbus. Evidently the prototype of earthly

45. Canivet and Canivet, *Hūarte* 1.54-56, 133-40, 142, 207-25, 258-59, 296-98; 2. pls CXII-CXVII, CXX-CXXVIII, and plan X; Donceel-Voûte, *Pavements* 102-16.

46. Ephraem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.16, 41.

47. Canivet and Canivet, *Hūarte* 1.259-60; Donceel-Voûte, *Pavements* 487.

48. Trolle, *Nationalmuseets arbejdsmark* (1971); Canivet and Canivet, *Hūarte* 1.259, 2. pl. CXVIII.2.

royalty⁴⁹ will have been frequently encountered by members of the Muslim Arab elite during the visits they loved to make to the churches and monasteries in which their newly won possessions abounded.⁵⁰ And the common ancestor had a special significance for Muslims, since it is recorded in the *Qur'ān* that God made him his deputy (*khalīfa*), and taught him the name of each created being. 'I will place on the earth a *khalīfa*', so God declared to his angels;⁵¹ and the only other man of whom God says this in the *Qur'ān* is David who, as we have seen, is also invoked at Quṣayr 'Amra in connection with the prince.⁵² God then had his angels prostrate themselves before Adam; only Satan (Iblīs) refused.⁵³ According to Jewish and Christian non-canonical traditions that may go back as early as the first century A.D., the first to adore the image God had made of himself was the Archangel Michael, who then bade the other angels follow suit.⁵⁴ Adam's presence in the Michaëlion at Ḥawīrtah is therefore easy to understand. So too is the unmistakable visual allusion to his standard portrait at Quṣayr 'Amra, for as God's first caliph, directly and unambiguously nominated, he was the ultimate symbol of legitimacy.

That the Umayyad court milieu was ready for such an image is suggested by an anecdote the ninth-century historian al-Balādhurī preserved, according to which the Caliph Hishām once bade his courtier and advisor, the orator Khālid b. Ṣafwān, ' "preach a sermon, and be quick about it!" ' Khālid rose to the challenge with the following:

"You are set over creation, and there is none over you save God Himself.

You are proceeding towards God; therefore fear God."⁵⁵

Now, at Quṣayr 'Amra, an ingenious iconographical suggestion evokes the first half, at least, of Khālid's mini-sermon, by reminding the visitor of Adam the ruler of all creation and God's own appointed caliph. There is, though, a still closer parallel to the princely portrait in the letter, from which a passage has already been quoted, whereby al-Walīd bestowed rights of succession on

49. John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesin* 2.13.4; Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 1.4 (tr. Chabot 1.5); and further references in Maguire, *Rhetoric, nature and magic* IV.368 n. 33.

50. Cf. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fifth century* 405-09; Hamilton 86-91.

51. *Qur'ān* 2.30-33.

52. *Qur'ān* 38.26.

53. *Qur'ān* 2.34; Wahb b. Munabbih, *Kitāb al-tijān* 15; various sources in Ṭab. 1.82-86, 91-94 (tr. 1.253-57, 263-66).

54. Awn, *Satan's tragedy* 20-22; Canivet and Canivet, *Hūarte* 1.299-300.

55. Bal. 2. fol. 726b (74, §141 'Athāmina).

two of his sons, and drew a this time explicit parallel with God's designation of Adam as his deputy on earth.⁵⁶ The full significance of this passage emerges only if one considers that Quranic exegetes active under the Umayyads, when called upon to explain the polyvalent and in many ways obscure word *khalīfa* as applied to Adam, never - with one possible exception - suggested any connection between this term and the head of the Islamic state!⁵⁷ It was, then, as a defiant comment on the Muslim Establishment's refusal to legitimise the excessively 'kingly' Umayyads⁵⁸ by associating them with the Quranic Adam that al-Walīd chose to invoke Adam when proclaiming his heirs, and have himself depicted as Adam at Quṣayr 'Amra.⁵⁹

We should bear in mind as well that not a few beholders of the Adamic portrait at Quṣayr 'Amra will have seen it through the lens of *Genesis* as well as the *Qur'ān*. For them, Adam had not only been set over the whole of terrestrial creation, including the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven, but was also made in the very image of God. And just as at Ḥawīrtah the image of Adam anticipated the throne of Christ, that is to say the altar that stood in the apse behind the mosaic, so too at Quṣayr 'Amra it is conceivable that the prince's borrowings from the iconography of Adam evoked in the subconscious at least of certain viewers, such as the recent converts who frequented the Umayyad court, feelings of awe similar to those felt by the Christian who stood - or had once stood - before the altar of his Lord. Even the attendants with their fans recalled the two deacons similarly equipped, who flanked the celebrant bishop and priests and 'discretely chased away the small flying insects'.⁶⁰ Already by the sixth century these fans no longer had a purely practical function, and had come to symbolize the six-winged cherubim.⁶¹ On the stone *ciborium*, the canopy that protected the holy table, might be represented not only these liturgical *flabella* but also peacocks

56. Ṭab. 2.1759 (tr. 26.108-09).

57. Al-Qādī, *Gegenwart als Geschichte*. (Reference courtesy of Baber Johansen.)

58. On Umayyad *mulk* see e.g. Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī in Elad, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 54 (text), 35 (translation), reporting a tradition derived from Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib (d. 763) referring to al-Mu'āwiya and 'Abd al-Malik.

59. Even though, according to the text painted above his head, he was not yet himself caliph: see above, 38-39.

60. *Constitutiones apostolorum* 8.12.3; cf. Denḥā, *History of Mārūthā of Takrīt* (d. 649) 74 - my thanks for this latter reference to E.K. Fowden.

61. Braun, *Das christliche Altargerät* 642-45.

perching on its rising arch,⁶² just like the sand grouse on the arch that shelters our prince. And on the apse's semidome behind the altar, our hypothetical visitor to Quşayr 'Amra might also have seen a mosaic or fresco portrait of Christ enthroned above the waters of Paradise and their abundant shoals of fish.⁶³

No knowledge at all of Christianity was required, though, for one to be put in mind at Quşayr 'Amra of the mosaic of Christ enthroned that occupied the vault above the emperor's throne in the famous Chrysotriclinus audience hall at Constantinople.⁶⁴ The image was removed or covered at some point - we know not when, exactly - during the period of iconoclasm. But the Umayyad elite will have known of it, and may have had it in part to thank for the urge they felt, to substitute an image modelled on Christ's antecessor Adam, in similar relation to the ruler. Just in the period when the iconoclast emperors of East Rome were refusing any association of their own image with that of Christ,⁶⁵ an Umayyad prince was neatly circumventing the obstacle Islam had placed in the way of depictions of divine sanction or investiture, by alluding to an icon that was widely known in late antique Syria and depicted the common father of all mankind, whom God had created in his own image.⁶⁶

A dynastic icon

Although the prince occupies Quşayr 'Amra's focal point, on the back wall of the alcove, he is not the only enthroned figure depicted in the hall. No less immediately visible to visitors who enter through the main doorway is a large painting on the southern end wall of the west or right-hand aisle (fig. 11).⁶⁷ It depicts a mature, richly dressed woman reclining under an

62. For both images, see the Perugia *ciborium*: L'Orange, *Cosmic kingship* 138 fig. 99, and cf. Leclercq, *D.A.C.L.* 5.1617 fig. 4468.

63. Ihm, *Apsismalerei*, plates; also the large aquatic scene under Christ enthroned in the apse of the Monte della Giustizia oratory, Rome: *ibid.* 16 fig. 1, 149-50.

64. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine architecture* 77-78, 230-31; *Anthologia Palatina* 1.106-07.

65. A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* 113-14; Auzépy, *EYΨYXIA*.

66. For a bath house in Constantinople decorated c. 900 with mosaics or paintings showing, among other things, the Emperor Leo VI apparently in the guise of the kingly Adam, and aquatic scenes, see Magdalino, *D.O.P.* 42 (1988), esp. 106-07.

67. Cf. K.'A. 2. pl. XXV; Q.'A. pls XIV-XV; Grabar, *R.E.I.* 54 (1986) 131-32 (photographs taken after the Spanish restoration *pace* Baer, *Da.M.* 11 (1999) 17); Betts, *A.A.E.* 12 (2001) 98-99 figs 1-2.

awning on an Iranian-style couch throne with cushions,⁶⁸ and flanked to the left by a young woman who wields a long fan, while to the right stands a mature, noble-looking man with a moustache and beard. He wears a round, ribbed hat, slightly pointed, and long robes; and he clasps a staff, whose crozier-shaped head was perhaps an inspiration of the Spanish restorers. The hat is a 'low' *qalansuwa* or *qalansīya*, as worn by senior Sasanian officials and affected by their Umayyad successors.⁶⁹

Two young persons are positioned in front of this man and beside the couch, a little to the right of the reclining female. One squats in front and wears a sort of headscarf, not unlike a *kūfīya*;⁷⁰ the other stands or perches behind and wears a *qalansuwa*. The junior of the two is young enough to have been taken for a girl;⁷¹ but at Quṣayr 'Amra even grown men have been thought to be women (a point that will be touched on again shortly), while one wonders under what circumstances it could have been thought necessary, let alone interesting, to depict a female minor. In all probability, both are boys.

There are no obvious and enlightening parallels to be drawn here, as there are between the princely portrait and the Adam mosaics. The image is non-stereotyped, tailor-made to convey a specific message. The Sasanian-style throne makes one wonder whether to some extent the composition may have been designed as a deliberate contrast with the more Roman-style portrait of the prince in the alcove, just as the two princely images at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī are presented, one in the Roman manner and the other in the Sasanian.⁷² The Arabs, once despised by both empires, now enjoy the luxury of plundering either at will.⁷³ Yet there was nothing unusual, under

68. On Sasanian thrones see Ṭab. 1.963, 1048-49 (tr. 5.262, 385-86) and 2270, 2274 (tr. 12.66, 70); Ghirshman, *Bīchāpour* 2.69 fig. 8; von Gall, *A.M.I.* 4 (1971) 207-35; Harper, *Iran* 17 (1979) (with a conclusion (64) which would have benefited from knowledge of the Quṣayr 'Amra painting); Shaked, *J.S.A.I.* 7 (1986) 77-82; Abka'i-Khavari, *Das Bild des Königs* 72-77.

69. Sayf b. 'Umar in Ṭab. 1.2025, 2037 (tr. 11.13-14, 27); Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran* 30-34; Ahsan, *Social life* 30; and cf. *Chateaux omayyades de Syrie* 33, 42 (Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī); Creswell pl. 120 (Mushattā); Muthesius, *Byzantine silk weaving* pls 25A-B, 79B (hunter silks).

70. For possible adult use of this type of head covering at this period see Miles, *Museum notes (American Numismatic Society)* 13 (1967) 212, 216 and pls XLVI-XLVII.

71. Q. 'A. 56; Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.214.

72. Above, 46-47.

73. Note also the apparent fluctuation between an East Roman and a rather more Sasanian

the later Umayyads, in the use of couch thrones with cushions,⁷⁴ and one senses that a more specific message is being conveyed here. It will be argued in another publication that the distinguished-looking male depicted in a rather self-effacing position at the right of the fresco is Quṣayr ‘Amra’s patron al-Walīd, and that the staff he holds is the staff of the Prophet, one of the symbols of the caliphal office.⁷⁵ As for the woman who is being accorded special honour, centre-stage, she is the mother of al-Walīd’s son al-Ḥakam, whom in May 743 he declared his legal heir.⁷⁶ Still in 743 young enough to be regarded as not of age⁷⁷ (even though in Islam legal majority is entailed by puberty, which is in turn determined by physical signs⁷⁸), al-Ḥakam is the youth marked out by his slightly more eminent position in the painting, and by the similarity of his headgear to that of his father. The other young person is his half-brother ‘Uthmān, who was second in line to the throne.

In short - and bearing in mind that al-Walīd was murdered in April 744 - we have here a precise date for our bath house, but also (as so often at Quṣayr ‘Amra) a unique thing in Umayyad art, not a depiction of an individual caliph, but a family portrait, an icon that stands for the royal house, and perhaps even for the dynasty understood diachronically, in other words the ideal of smooth succession. Al-Walīd’s proclamation of al-Ḥakam encountered bitter opposition within the Umayyad elite, because his mother was an *umm walad*, a slave concubine.⁷⁹ Nobody had yet sat on the caliphal throne, whose mother as well as father had not been a free-born Arab. It seems likely, then, that the Quṣayr ‘Amra image was designed to reinforce

conception of the royal portrait in some of the Umayyads’ ‘Arab-Byzantine’ coin types: Milstein, *Israel numismatic journal* 10 (1988-89) 11.

74. Al-Haytham b. ‘Adī in Bal. 2. fol. 719a (23, §42 ‘Athāmina); al-Madā’inī in Ṭab. 2.1739 (tr. 26.82); Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī in Iṣf. 6.81 = 16.22; Ibn Qutayba, *Al-imāma wa-l-siyāsa* 2.126; Ṭab. 2.1285 (tr. 24.7), 1451 (tr. 24.181), 1615 (tr. 25.150); Grabar, *Studies in memory of Gaston Wiet* 54 n. 16; Sadan, *Mobilier* 32-51, 99-120.

75. Al-Wāqidī in Ṭab. 1.2982 (tr. 15.183) (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān), 2.92 (tr. 18.101) (Mu‘āwiya), 2.1467 (tr. 25.2) (Hishām); al-Walīd b. Yazīd fr. 86 and Iṣf. 7.24 (tr. Derenk 99) (al-Walīd II); also the poem attributed to al-Ḥakam in Ṭab. 2.1891 (tr. 27.2), in which the ‘aṣā stands for al-Walīd himself; Theophanes, *Chronographia* 429 (s.a. 753-54); Jamil, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 53-54. A governor might also carry a *qadīb*: Iṣf. 20.382.

76. Ṭab. 2.1755-64 (tr. 26.104-15).

77. Al-Madā’inī in Bal. 2. fols 163b-164a = pp. 326-27 (46 Derenk), Ṭab. 2. 1776-77, 1827 (tr. 26.128, 185), and Iṣf. 7.82.

78. Abū Mikhnaḥ in Ṭab. 2.372-73 (tr. 19.166-67), 739 (tr. 21.107); *E.Is.* 1.993.

79. Ṭab. 2.1891 (tr. 27.3); Iṣf. 7.83-84.

al-Ḥakam's position in the court milieu, as also that of his mother. And if, as is highly probable, Umm al-Ḥakam was a *rūmīya*, a prisoner of war from the East Roman Empire, then the two Greek words that are painted at the top of the panel⁸⁰ must have been intended, in part, as a personal compliment. The word to the right, which has been clearly legible since Musil's day, is NIKH, 'Victory', an attribute without which no dynasty or ruler could survive. As for the word to the left, it has only been visible at all since the Spanish restoration and is harder to read. A possible suggestion is XAPIΣ, 'Grace'⁸¹ - an allusion perhaps to the blessing of God, or even the *charis* of Adam in Paradise.⁸² Certainly al-Ḥakam needed whatever grace he could get, if he was to win a victory over his many potential enemies. A later historian asserted that the Umayyad clan was in general opposed to the succession of concubines' sons, 'because they believed that the passing of their kingdom would come about in the reign of the son of a concubine'.⁸³

The six kings

At the southern end of the hall's west wall, in other words adjacent and at right angles to the panel just now discussed, stand the famous six kings who, along with the naked bathers in the tepidarium, are Quṣayr 'Amra's most frequently reproduced and extensively analyzed image. They also offer the most explicit evidence we have about the patron's cultural horizons (fig. 12).⁸⁴

The kings stand erect and confront the viewer in two ranks, *simāṭān*, as was the custom of the dignitaries who clustered round the throne of both Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs.⁸⁵ Each king stretches out both hands, palms turned upwards in a gesture that traditionally denoted supplication or at the very least the rendering of honour,⁸⁶ towards his right, our left, in the di-

80. See fig. 11, and n. 67 above, also Jaussen and Savignac 3. pl. LV.5; Creswell 397 n. 3; Q. 'A. 56; Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.215.

81. Bowersock, *Selected papers* 152. One might, by analogy with ΚΕΨΗ and ΠΟΙHC(H) (below, 107), have expected XAPH. Grabar, *A.O.* 23 (1993) 102 n. 33, withdraws his earlier suggestion of APIC[TO]NIKH.

82. Cf. Lampe, *Patristic Greek lexicon* 1517b.

83. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh* 325 (tr. Carra de Vaux 420).

84. Cf. K. 'A. 2. pl. XXVI (=K. *Is.* pl. VIII); Q. 'A. pls XVI-XVII; Ettinghausen and Grabar 59 pls 32-33; and the drawings by Nicolle, in *War and society* 77, nos 8A-B.

85. Ṭab. 2.1820 (tr. 26.175); Işf. 18.220 (tr. Berque 127).

86. Cf. John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria* 4 (the crowd stretches forth its hands to a

rection, that is, of the immediately adjacent dynastic icon, which is placed somewhat higher on the wall, but still is the most obvious recipient of the kings' gesture (it can only be addressed indirectly to the prince enthroned out of sight in his alcove). The faces that can still be seen are, contrary to what one might expect, young and beardless. Indeed the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl, before the labels were deciphered, took the kings for women.⁸⁷

In the art of the late antique East, young men were in fact quite often presented in a way that seems to us to make them look effeminate, in order to underline social, cultural or even moral distinctions that were important to the artist or patron. One thinks, for example, of the seventh-century mosaic in the church of S. Demetrius at Thessalonica, in which a youthful, beardless S. Demetrius is flanked by a strikingly hirsute and wrinkled bishop and governor.⁸⁸ A cameo portrait depicting a Theodosian empress was recycled as an icon of a soldier martyr, S. Bacchus, just by adding a label.⁸⁹ Even imperial hunters are depicted, on a silk at the Vatican, as 'clean shaven...with large eyes, lengthy fine noses and small mouths'.⁹⁰ Peter Brown's observation, in his study of the late antique body, that 'indeterminacy of any kind was disturbing to late antique persons',⁹¹ reflects accurately enough the ascetic's wariness of effeminate youths,⁹² but ignores the artist's habit of distinguishing sanctity and worldliness, or noble and base pedigree, by employing facial types that subordinate the vocabulary of sex and age to a primarily symbolic grammar.⁹³ At Quşayr 'Amra the six kings are marked off, by their unrealistically soft appearance, both from obvious social inferiors such as the beaters in the hunting scene above them,⁹⁴ and from the bearded figure of al-Walīd in the dynastic icon. This softness of the six kings

benefactor generous as the Nile: see above, 48); A.S. 575 (sixth-century pyxis showing standing pilgrims who extend their hands toward S. Menas).

87. Riegl, quoted by Müller, *K. 'A* 1.VI; also von Karabacek, *K. 'A* 1.217, 220a; and cf. Becker, *Islamstudien* 1.297.

88. A.S. 554-55.

89. E.K. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* 35, 36 fig. 5.

90. Muthesius, *Byzantine silk weaving* 62.

91. P. Brown, *Body and society* 438.

92. E.g. *Apophthegmata patrum*, P.G. 65.176; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii* 16.

93. On youthful appearance as a symptom of sanctity - both covered in later Greek by the concept *charis* - see Rostovtzeff, *Yale classical studies* 5 (1935) 237; Kádár, *Acta antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 40 (2000); Mas. 89 (1.63 Dāghir).

94. See below, 88.

identifies them as representatives of an older, more sophisticated but also less vigorous civilisation than that of the Arabs.

The kings' robes are not easily understood from Mielich's much-reproduced facsimile, and the damage that has been inflicted on this panel means that only the left and middle figures in the front row can be described with some confidence. Both wear two full-length garments: a dark blue inner tunic, richly patterned and presumably of silk, and a white outer mantle or *chlamys*, to use the Greek term, fastened at the right shoulder with a brooch. The central figure wears red slippers. The neckline of the inner tunic is covered by the mantle, so we cannot tell whether it is beaded or embroidered, like those of the enthroned prince's attendants. And whereas the mantles of these two richly clad servants rest loosely on their shoulders without a clasp, and lie in folds on their arms as they raise them to wield their fans, the kings' mantles fall straight to their feet, which suggests that they are of a heavier material, possibly wool. One recalls Procopius's description of the robes bestowed by the Roman emperor Justinian (527-65) on native rulers set over parts of Armenia:

There was a cloak (*chlamys*) made of wool, not such as is produced by sheep, but gathered from the sea. The creature on which this wool grows is called a *pinnos*. The part where the purple should have been, that is, where the insertion of purple cloth is usually made, was of gold. The cloak was fastened by a golden brooch, in the middle of which was a precious stone from which hung three sapphires by loose golden chains. There was a tunic (*chitōn*) of silk adorned in every part with decorations of gold which they are wont to call *ploumia*. The boots were of purple colour, and reached to the knee. They were of the sort which only the king (*basileus*) of the Romans and (the king) of the Persians are permitted to wear.⁹⁵

This heavier outer garment is depicted, with the inner tunic visible too, in mosaics of the church of S. Demetrius at Thessalonica, which cannot all be securely dated but certainly belong between 600 and 900, and in the sixth-century icon of Mary with SS. Theodore and George (or possibly Demetrius), at the monastery of S. Catherine, Sinai (fig. 13).⁹⁶ Though their *chlamys* lacks the characteristic inserted embroidered panel or *tablion*

95. Procopius, *De aedificiis* 3.1.19-23 (tr. H.B. Dewing, emended).

96. For the Thessalonica mosaics see Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou and Tourta, *Περίπατοι* 160-70.

mentioned by Procopius, the six kings are attired, broadly speaking, in the manner of the East Roman court.

This should not surprise us, as the court of Constantinople was the late Umayyads' most plausible remaining rival, and its cultural prestige still enormous. It in turn had been much influenced by the Sasanian court, so its fashions could stand, in a sense, for Iran as well as Rome. The fabrics that evoked these prestigious associations had become all the rage with the Umayyads. The example set by the Caliph Sulaymān was followed by Hishām and, of course, al-Walīd b. Yazīd.⁹⁷ The only element of the six kings' costume that would not have been so familiar, except in images on coins, fabrics, silverware and other portable objects, was their headgear. Mielich's facsimile shows each monarch differently adorned in this respect; and on a fragment of the fresco removed by Musil and Mielich, now in Berlin, one can still see part of the crowns of the first and second figures from the left.⁹⁸ On the wall itself, all that now remains is the remarkable insignia on the head of the third figure from the left, that is to say the middle figure in the front row. It resembles a rather fancy candlestick whose topmost element is a crescent moon, its tips pointing upwards. In Mielich's facsimile there are also wings curving up on either side. Although the central feature, as we see it today, is entirely the product of restoration, the wings have surprisingly been allowed to disappear, apart from a few faint traces.⁹⁹ Still, one's impression that this device is meant to look like a Sasanian crown,¹⁰⁰ or rather to reflect the imprecise post-Sasanian, including Umayyad, understanding of what Sasanian crowns had been,¹⁰¹ is confirmed by the label immediately above.

The kings' names (or titles) are painted above their heads in blueish-white letters on a blue background, the Greek version on top, the Arabic

97. Sulaymān: al-Madā'inī in Ṭab. 2.1337-38 (tr. 24.62-63); Mas. 2154 (3.175 Dāghir). Hishām: Mas. 2219 (3.205 Dāghir). Al-Walīd: above, 2.4 n. 18, and Işf. 7.70, on his changes of costume several times each day.

98. Vibert-Guigue, *D.A.* 244 (1999) 93.

99. Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.233. Since Q. 'A. 57 takes the wings' existence as given, one can only conclude that the Spanish restorers forgot to sketch them in again.

100. For a wide selection of which see Göbl, *Sasanidische Numismatik* tables I-XIV.

101. Ghirshman, *Artibus Asiae* 16 (1953) 53; Harper, *Iran* 17 (1979) 50; Kröger 186a, 256a; also the eighth- or ninth-century East Roman silk at S. Ursula's, Cologne: Muthesius, *Byzantine silk weaving 70-71*, 174 (M 32), and pls 80A, 100A.

underneath.¹⁰² Little now remains of them,¹⁰³ but if we combine that little with the records made by Musil and Mielich,¹⁰⁴ and a few years later by Jaussen and Savignac,¹⁰⁵ we can be reasonably sure about the following readings, from left to right:

1.] Ç A P

q - y - ş [

2. P O Δ O P I K °

l / r ?] - ū - d / dh - r - ī (?) - q

or, assuming no lost initial letter, and reading the first preserved letter as *rā'* not *wāw*:

r - d / dh - r - ī (?) - q¹⁰⁶

3. X O C Δ P O I C

k - s - r - ā¹⁰⁷

4. N I / H Γ Q

] sh - ī

In other words, four of the kings represented were Caesar (in Greek ΚΑΙΣΑΡ / Kaisar, in Arabic Qayṣar), Roderic (ΡΟΔΟΡΙΚΟΣ / Rodorikos in Greek, but elsewhere attested only in the form ΡΟΥΔΕΡΙΧΟΣ / Roudericchos;¹⁰⁸ Lūdhriq or Ludhriq in the ninth-century Arabic geographers¹⁰⁹), Khusraw (ΧΟΣΡΟΗΣ / Chosroēs or ΧΟCΔΡΟΗΣ / Chosdroēs¹¹⁰ in Greek, Kisrā in Arabic), and the Negus (not elsewhere attested in Greek; in Arabic Najāshī).

102. Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.67-68. Bilingual labels are not uncommon in the art of the Roman East: see e.g. below, 89 n. 74 (hunting scene from Dura Europus), and fig. 10 (mosaic of Adam, Ḥamā Museum).

103. Fragment of first and second names from left preserved in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin: Vibert-Guigue, *D.A.* 244 (1999) 93. Remains of third and fourth names *in situ*: Q. 'A. pl. XVIIa; Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.68, 234. Fifth and sixth names illegible: van Berchem, *Journal des savants* (1909) 367 n. 1; Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.234.

104. *Q.* 'A. 1.199b, 220 figs 137-38, and 2. pl. XXVI.

105. Jaussen and Savignac 3.97-98 and pl. LV.4.

106. Cf. Nöldeke, *Z.D.M.G.* 61 (1907) 225; Becker, *Islamstudien* 1.297.

107. Cf. Nöldeke, *Z.D.M.G.* 61 (1907) 224; Becker, *Islamstudien* 1.294; Jaussen and Savignac 3.97. The *alif maqṣūra* is written, as often in manuscripts, with *alif* not *yā'*.

108. Procopius, *De bellis* (mid-sixth century) 7.5.1, 7.19.25, 7.19.34. My thanks to Irfan Shahīd for kindly drawing these passages to my attention.

109. Ibn Khurrādādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik* 90, 157, and Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 82-83 (de Goeje vowelized the *dhāl* with *fathā*). Al-Wāqidī (d. 823) in *Ṭab.* 2.1235 (tr. 23.182) gives Adrīnūq; al-Ya'qūbī (d. 897), *Ta'rīkh* 2.285, has Adrīq. See also Becker, *Islamstudien* 1.297.

110. Nöldeke, *Z.D.M.G.* 61 (1907) 224.

The Arabic labels correspond to names that were used generically in Arabic for *all* the rulers of a given land or dynasty: the Roman emperor was always or very often called Qayṣar, the Visigothic king Lū/udhrīq, the Sasanian monarch Kisrā, and the ruler of Aksum Najāshī.¹¹¹ Only in the case of the Visigothic king, who even in the decades immediately after the conquest of al-Andalus occupied a less prominent place than the others in the Arab world view,¹¹² is it probable that our panel makes a personal reference, in this case to the last Visigothic ruler, who was overwhelmed by Ṭāriq b. Ziyād in 711 or 712 and was called Roderic. His name was adopted as generic by the Arabs, presumably for the simple reason that they had never come into contact with any other ruler of the Visigoths.

As for the Greek labels, until the time of Heraclius (610-41) Roman emperors normally called themselves *autokrator kaisar* in Greek, *imperator caesar* in Latin. Heraclius replaced this formula with the title *basileus*, already long familiar in literary texts; and thenceforth sons and heirs of emperors, and even leading personalities at court or foreign rulers might be called *kaisar*, but not emperors (except in Latin).¹¹³ The Sasanians had traditionally addressed the Roman emperor as *kaisar*, but from 591, at least, began to use *basileus* as well.¹¹⁴ The Arabs too, in due course, became aware of the new title, but appear not to have adopted it.¹¹⁵ They stuck to Qayṣar, or *Qayṣar malik al-Rūm*, ‘Qayṣar king of the Romans’, a formula commonly found in Ibn Ishāq’s eighth-century biography of the Prophet. The most probable explanation is that this title had become familiar to the Arabs through common usage long before Islam, and then had been in a way consecrated thanks to the pious stories that circulated about the letter Muḥammad had supposedly addressed to the Qayṣar Heraclius, exhorting him to accept Islam.¹¹⁶ And this usage appears to have been so deeply rooted, that it did not occur to the Quṣayr ‘Amra artists to offer *basileus* as

111. Qayṣar, Kisrā, Najāshī: Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik* 16-17; Mas. 397, 714 (1.182, 339 Dāghir); Lū/udhrīq: Mas. 398, 474, 701, 747 (1.182, 213, 334, 358 Dāghir).

112. By al-Ṭabarī’s day, the conquest of al-Andalus could be dismissed in a few lines: 2.1235, 1253-54 (tr. 23.182, 201).

113. Röscher, *ONOMA ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣ* 36-37, 159-71.

114. Röscher, *ONOMA ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣ* 155-56, to which add Nicephorus of Constantinople, *Breviarium* 12.57: still under Heraclius the Roman emperor assumed that his Iranian counterpart would call him *Kaisar*.

115. Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik* 16.

116. See e.g. Ibn Ishāq in Ṭab. 1.1565-67 (tr. 8.104-06).

the Greek version of Arabic Qayṣar. Perhaps they also wished to maintain as close a parallelism and harmony as was possible between the Greek and Arabic titles.

Their command of Greek - certainly sufficient to have permitted them to write *basileus*, had they wanted to - is amply demonstrated by the other three surviving labels. Chosdroēs was a perfectly acceptable Greek form of the Iranian name Khusraw, with, in this case, a normal substitution of *iota* for *ēta*, 'i' for 'ē'. As for Rodorikos derived from the Latin Rodericus, and Ni/ēgos from the Ge'ez *negus* or *nāgāsī*, these names or titles are unlikely to have been widely current in Greek during the eighth century, when not only Constantinople but also Greek speakers elsewhere were almost completely out of touch with both Aksum and Spain. So either our artists were using current but rare terminology; or they were creating new forms, and avoiding - be it noted - the temptation to derive them from the Arabic.¹¹⁷ Either way, they were demonstrating a certain rough and ready¹¹⁸ competence in the Greek language. It has nonetheless been suggested that *kaisar* is merely a transliteration from the Arabic, and that the artists therefore knew no Greek.¹¹⁹ It is indeed undeniable that their choice of *kaisar* may have been influenced by the currency in Arabic of the title Qayṣar. But it is also conceivable that they were aware of this title's former currency in Greek. They may even have been familiar with the Sasanians' preference for it, once upon a time. In any case, the other three labels were plainly not devised by people ignorant of the Greek language.

The six kings are shown presenting their respects to the figures in the dynastic icon on the end wall, to which Caesar, on the left of the panel, stands closest (and the dynastic character of which is implicitly underlined by the artist's vision of the kings as symbolic and representative rather than individualised figures). But their gaze is fixed straight ahead. Although the

117. Pace Gatiér, *Syr.Byz.Is.* 148: 'La forme grecque transcrit simplement le terme arabe.'

118. Rodorikos being a less literary form than Procopius's Roudorichos (above, 62 n. 108).

119. Becker, *Islamstudien* 1.293-94. It has also been held that the Arabic texts at Qūṣayr 'Amra were confidently painted, whereas preliminary outlines or even stencils had to be used for the Greek labels: Mielich, *Κ.*'A. 1.196b, 199b, followed by (among others) Becker, loc. cit., and Creswell 409. This is now rejected by Vibert-Guigüe diss. 1.67, 235-36, and 2.220-21, who holds that the labels in both languages were executed with equal confidence, and that outlines were usually done in a light colour, whereas the traces visible at Qūṣayr 'Amra may reflect a change of mind about the best colour to use for the lettering.

status of the three pre-eminent members in the front row is not otherwise differentiated, the most natural interpretation is that the middle one, Khusraw, is the leader of the delegation, albeit only as *primus inter pares*.

This is not the place to investigate the significance that each of these figures individually will have held for Quṣayr ‘Amra’s patron and his guests. As regards Khusraw and Caesar, Kisrā and Qayṣar though, it seems that they bulked large in the Arab imagination at this time. Certainly they were often mentioned together. According to one of his earliest biographers, sceptics had mocked Muḥammad, saying that his new religion was as plausible as the idea that ‘the treasures of Kisrā and Qayṣar will be opened to him’.¹²⁰ Even some of his followers had their doubts, and complained about how ‘“Muḥammad promises us that we shall enjoy the treasures of Kisrā and Qayṣar, whereas it is not safe for one of us to go to the privy!”’¹²¹ The Prophet’s favourite poet, Ḥassān b. Thābit, was said to have replied to doubters:

Be not like a sleeper who dreams that
he is in a town of Kisrā or of Qayṣar!¹²²

The Sasanian dynasty had of course been defeated by the armies of Islam, and its empire eliminated as an independent political entity. Although Kisrā had left in the Arabs a fond, lingering envy of a ruler who had made so much of this world’s wealth and beauty attend his smallest whim, the assimilation of Qayṣar’s position to Kisrā’s that is implied at Quṣayr ‘Amra seems more than slightly tendentious. For the ruler of Constantinople had in the end fallen much less far than his brother the lord of Ctesiphon. He still stood for the mighty empire of Rome, whose defeats in the early seventh century at the hand of Irān the Qur’ānic *sūra* known as ‘The Greeks’ alludes to (according to the more probable interpretation), but only to add that ‘after their vanquishing, they shall be the victors in a few years’.¹²³ Rome went on to survive even the high water mark of Arab expansion, and in 718 saw the armies of Islam, and all its naval forces too, retire in disarray from the shores

120. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* 175 and 448 (Ḥamīdullāh).

121. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* 357, 675 (Wüstenfeld) / 2.135, 3.245 (al-Saqqā) (tr. Guillaume 243, 454). In pre-Islamic Arabia houses lacked privies, so one had to venture outside the settlement, preferably at night, to relieve oneself: Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* 733 (Wüstenfeld)/3.327 (al-Saqqā), quoting the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha.

122. Ḥassān b. Thābit in Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* 303 (Wüstenfeld) / 2.64 (al-Saqqā) (tr. Guillaume 207).

123. *Qur’ān* 30.1-5 (tr. Arberry 2.105).

of the Bosphorus, which - with a brief exception in 782 - they were not to see again for many centuries, and then under Turkish auspices. Above all, Rome's cultural prestige remained intact, even at the court of the caliphs whose holy book accused Christianity of departing from the straight path of true belief. And Rome had remained one, while the Church had split irrevocably. The influence of its cultural supremacy has already been noticed in the portrait of the prince. Here, in the six kings panel, it is openly acknowledged in the person of its political head and representative.

We have already learned, by now, to expect little conventional Muslim piety at Quṣayr 'Amra; but if we would gauge how a portrait of Caesar might appear to a mid-eighth-century Arab, we must recall that part of this monarch's fascination lay precisely in his dogged survival, and so in the hope that he might yet submit to God's fullest revelation. Hence the popularity then and down the ages of the story of how Muḥammad wrote to the Caesar of his own day, Heraclius, and bade him recognise the new revelation; and of how that emperor wished to do so, but the great men of his realm prevented him.¹²⁴ A similar tale was told of a correspondence between the Caliph 'Umar II (717-20) and the Emperor Leo III (717-41), though on this occasion, too, without the result the Muslims desired.¹²⁵ Quṣayr 'Amra's Caesar, then, is in no wise a defeated enemy of Islam, but rather a prestigious competitor whose submission might still be hoped for - and his culture, in the meantime, enjoyed.

In short, not only Kisrā but Qayṣar too remained potent symbols of the age before Islam, the world, according to Greek writers, whose 'two eyes' they had been.¹²⁶ And Quṣayr 'Amra's fresco of the six kings turns out, on closer investigation, to be a characteristic product of that cultural and political dyarchy. For while its content appears to have been inspired by stories that were told about Kisrā and his court, the style of its execution is deeply indebted to the other imperial tradition, the Roman civilization that Qayṣar stood for.

Chiefly in the encyclopaedic historical and geographical writings of the Abbasid period, some of whose authors were Iranian and enjoyed access to the oral and written traditions of their native land, we encounter a mass of interrelated stories about gatherings of the kings of the world to pay homage

124. Ibn Ishāq in Ṭab. 1.1565-67 (tr. 8.104-06).

125. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 490-501.

126. Fowden, *Empire to commonwealth* 18 n. 21.

to Kisrā at the Sasanian court. Qayṣar is regularly named in this context; so too are kings of China, the Turks and India (among whom we should probably also seek the two figures whose names have not survived, at the right of the Quṣayr 'Amra panel). Roderic and the Negus are not mentioned, but nor is there any reason to expect an Umayyad patron and his artists to have followed Sasanian traditions slavishly, without any adjustment to the realities of their own times. In general, such stories are imaginative and flexible. They are to be taken in the same way as the fantasies about the ancient sages who gathered round Alexander the Great's coffin to swap aphorisms - a Greek genre known to have been already familiar, in Arabic translation, at the court of Hishām.¹²⁷ There was also the iconographical theme, known to us from the Roman period, of the Seven Sages, who could never in historical reality have met in the same place and at the same time. A variant on this was the Seven Doctors, a theme exemplified in two different versions at the beginning of the great sixth-century Dioscorides codex at Vienna.¹²⁸ Such gatherings of chronologically disparate great names are part of our six kings' ancestry, though the looser, conversational grouping of the sages, and the difference in their number, warn us not to assume too close a link.

Evidently the Quṣayr 'Amra painting shares with the stories about the kings of the world the basic concept of a gathering of monarchs or their representatives to honour one of their number who is recognised as of pre-eminent prestige. But it would hardly be possible to use what, in the form in which we have them, are mainly Abbasid literary traditions, in order to elucidate the genesis of an Umayyad painting, were it not for the fact that one of our sources, and among the earlier in date, ties the story to a particular monument, and in doing so provides co-ordinates in space, and to some extent in time as well, for the genesis of a tradition that helps explain the painting as well as the texts.

Writing in Arabic in the year 902/03, the Iranian geographer Ibn al-Faqīh has the following to say about the town of Qarmāsīn, better known as Kirmānshāh in Iran:

At Qarmāsīn is the Dukkān, where the kings of the earth gathered together: Faghfūr the King of China, Khāqān the King of the Turks, Dāhir the King of India, Qayṣar the King of Rome, and Kisrā Abarwīz. [The

127. Grignaschi, *Le muséeon* 80 (1967), esp. 228-39, 261-64.

128. Gerstinger, *Dioscurides* 28-30 and pls 20-21, on both sages and doctors.

Dukkān] is a four-sided platform made of stone, so carefully constructed and held together with iron clamps that no space can be detected between any two blocks. Anyone who sees it thinks that it is made of a single piece of stone.¹²⁹

Since Ibn al-Faqīh was a native of Hamadhān (Ecbatana), somewhat to the east of Kirmānshāh, and wrote about a century and a half after the fall of the Umayyads, it is reasonable to assume that local traditions along these lines had indeed been passed down, and went back not just to the age of the Umayyads, but to that of the Sasanians themselves. And Kirmānshāh lay on the High Road from Mesopotamia to Khurāsān, one of the focal points of the Umayyads' *Drang nach Osten*, so it is perfectly possible that the Dukkān and its associated traditions were familiar, at first hand or by report, to our bath house's patron or artists. We have no reason to doubt that it was a real and still, in those days, conspicuous monument. It is frequently mentioned by the Arabic geographers as a halt on the road from Kirmānshāh to Hamadān, and remains of it were identified in the 1960s by the archaeologist Leo Trümpelmann.¹³⁰

Once we have tied our story to a Sasanian monument, it becomes reasonable to suppose that the physical object gave rise, perhaps from the very outset, to a variety of aetiological speculations or 'explanations'. And it is attractive, though not absolutely essential, to surmise that the catalogue of kings that became an essential part of these stories had its origin in some inscription, or a labelled image carved, painted or in mosaic, that was preserved on the spot.¹³¹ Indeed, Ernst Herzfeld convinced himself that the Dukkān had sheltered an image which directly inspired that of the six kings at Quşayr 'Amra, and proposed our panel for the then non-existent and still now exiguous corpus of evidence for Sasanian painting.¹³² The discovery in 1965 at Afrāsiyāb (Old Samarqand), far to the east yet still within the Iranian cultural sphere, of what seems to have been a royal reception hall with mid-seventh-century frescoes depicting ambassadors from various Asiatic peoples, confirmed the taste for such themes - which are also alluded to in

129. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 217, quoted with some variants by Yāq. 4.331 s.v. 'Qarmīsīn'.

130. Trümpelmann, A.A. (1968); cf. Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* 6.

131. Cf. the reliefs of Mithridates II at Bīsūtūn (Ghirshman, *Iran* 52 pl. 65), and Shapur II and Shapur III at Ṭāq-i Bustān (*Taq-i B.* 4.143, 163-66), with inscriptions in Greek and Pahlavi respectively.

132. Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* 5-6; id., *Der Islam* 21 (1933) 235.

Chinese literary sources on Central Asia - and helped to fill in the general background of the Quṣayr 'Amra painting.¹³³ Yet the relaxed, naturalistic grouping of these emissaries from Irān (according to a recent interpretation), China, Tibet and even as far away as Korea, bears little relation to the rigidly paratactic, frontal stance of the Quṣayr 'Amra kings. Herzfeld too had to admit that the most relevant surviving corpus of evidence, namely the Sasanian royal rock carvings, offers no very close parallels to the frontality of the Umayyad painting, and was reduced to arguing - from little evidence - that this style became commoner towards the end of the Sasanian period. This seems unlikely. Usually, both in the rock carvings and elsewhere, it is only the *shāhanshāh* who is depicted frontally; and in that case he is more commonly seated than standing, while his courtiers and petitioners are shown in profile.¹³⁴

It is much preferable to proceed in the light of what we know for sure, however little that may be. Taking, then, on the one hand the painting of the six kings, and on the other hand the traditions that accumulated around the Dukkān, which are too suggestive to be ignored, one may indeed accept that the former is likely to have been inspired by the latter. One may also reasonably surmise, with Herzfeld, that there had been preserved at the Dukkān (until when, though, we cannot say) some document, quite possibly an image with labels that named the kings individually. When Quṣayr 'Amra's patron proposed this theme, though, he very probably had mainly in mind the various stories that were in circulation, and knew of the place and the (hypothetical) image only by hearsay; while what his artists produced was determined by their own visual vocabulary which, for all its eclecticism, was closer to Roman than to Iranian tradition.

This is why the six kings ended up looking so strikingly East Roman, especially in their frontality. The parallels that immediately spring to mind are a perhaps Constantinopolitan sixth-century icon preserved at Mount Sinai (fig. 13), and mosaics of the sixth century at Ravenna and of the same period or later at Thessalonica.¹³⁵ In the late sixth-century Syrian gospel book written by the scribe Rabbula, there is a comparable depiction of Mary

133. Mode, *Sogdien und die Herrscher der Welt*.

134. Schlumberger, *La Persia e il mondo greco-romano*; Ghirshman, *Iran*, e.g. 184 pls 225-26.

135. Above, 60 and n. 96; Martinelli, *San Vitale (Atlante)* 220-37 (the Ravenna Justinian and Theodora mosaics; note especially the soldiers and ladies in waiting).

flanked at Pentecost by the apostles, six in front and six behind, making hand gestures that recall those of the six kings.¹³⁶ Heraclius's coins showing him flanked by his two sons, all standing, were well known in the Muslim world; in the 690s, 'Abd al-Malik's mints imitated them (fig. 27A).¹³⁷ There is also a Coptic codex in Naples, perhaps written as early as the fifth century, which contains part of the *Book of Job*, and on the back of its last leaf an ink drawing of an emperor, quite possibly Heraclius again, with to the right of him likewise frontal depictions of what appear to be his empress and two daughters, all gesturing with their right hand away from the prince.¹³⁸ Further comparisons for the six kings are offered by two frescoes from Caesarea Maritima, found close to each other and both dated, on internal grounds, to the late sixth or early seventh century. One shows orant saints frontally disposed, stylistically quite reminiscent of the Rabbula Gospels, and identified by Greek labels positioned on either side of their haloes. The other depicts Christ flanked by the twelve apostles ranged frontally on either side of him and gesturing towards him (fig. 14).¹³⁹ Given the dearth of evidence for monumental painting in the sixth- to eighth-century East, it is notable that *both* these recently discovered frescoes offer parallels with the six kings. If, on the other hand, one compares Quṣayr 'Amra's Kisrā with two seventh-century monuments from the Iranian cultural zone that are plausibly supposed to depict late Sasanian monarchs, namely the hunting reliefs at Ṭāq-i Bustān and one of the frescoes at Afrāsiyāb, one has to admit that the belted vestments, soft cap and facial hair of these figures differentiate them considerably from what we see at Quṣayr 'Amra.¹⁴⁰

Behind the six kings fresco lies, then, a long history of cultural and political dyarchy between Rome and Iran. Does it also bear a message for its own times? The presence of the Roman emperor and of the Aksumite monarch, whose country was never subdued by the armies of Islam, excludes the easy assumption that the painting enumerates vanquished enemies. And anyway the kings are not depicted as supplicants grovelling in the dust, even though this type of image was perfectly familiar from a number of well-

136. Cf. A.S. 495-96.

137. Cf. Fowden, *Empire to commonwealth* 127 pl. 6, 154-55 pls 9a-9b.

138. A.S. 35-36.

139. Cf. T. Avner, *Caesarea papers*.

140. *Taq-i B.* 4.109 fig. 44, 138 fig. 64; Mode, *Sogdien und die Herrscher der Welt* 58-71, 205 fig. 15 (and cf. *Taq-i B.* 4.117 fig. 50 - the figure at the right).

known Sasanian rock reliefs.¹⁴¹ Rather the six kings express what the Dukkān too had been designed to promote, namely a peaceful acquiescence in the *shāhanshāh*'s rule, to which the Umayyad caliphate had now fallen heir. The understanding of military and political triumph that is here at work is a broad one, characterized by a marked sensitivity to the cultural factor. The NIKH or Victory advertised on the end wall, and towards which the kings make obeisance, has been achieved not just by force of arms, but also by a 'spoiling of the Egyptians'. If, for example, Kisrā's Irān is recognised to be every bit as alive as Qayṣar's Rome, and just as deserving of a place among the six kings, that is because it was still a cultural force to be reckoned with in late Umayyad times. And there must be a similar explanation for the presence of Roderic, who not only symbolized the Umayyads' military and political expansion into the furthest western reaches of the world, but had also been the owner of 'the table of Solomon the son of David, containing God knows how much gold and jewels', that the Arab conquerors had found in the city of Toledo, and sent back with much other plunder to the Caliph al-Walīd in Damascus.¹⁴² These treasures had to do not only with the fate of monarchy (for they had long been connected with certain beliefs about the foreordained end of empires¹⁴³), but with the history of monotheism too. In his generic capacity, 'Roderic' was in addition held by Muslim historians to have been a noted hunter.¹⁴⁴ The Negus too, as a leading representative of non-Chalcedonian Christianity, meant more to the Muslim world, which had absorbed most of the lands in which that theological tradition was dominant, than he could to the Romans, for whom he was merely a remote heretic. In short, the significance of several of our kings, in the context in which they find themselves at Quṣayr 'Amra, is cultural at least as much as political. That is perhaps the reason why they are all attired in court not military dress.

Finally, the obverse of Quṣayr 'Amra's sensitivity to the cultural legacy of the pre-Islamic world is a certain ambiguity about Islam itself. In the

141. Ghirshman, *Iran* 153-61, 190-91.

142. Al-Wāqidi and others in Ṭab. 2.1235, 1253-54 (whence the quotations, tr. 23.182, 201 M. Hinds); al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh* 2.285; Ibn Khurrādādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik* 156-57; Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 82-83; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* 5.327-29 (tr. 3.483-85).

143. See Procopius, *De bellis* 4.9.1-9, asserting that Justinian sent to Jerusalem the Solomonic treasures Belisarius captured from the Vandals, because certain Jews told him that keeping them in the palace at Constantinople would bring ill fortune.

144. Mas. 474, 701 (1.213, 334 Dāghir): the Visigothic king Euric (466-84) introduced the art of falconry to Spain and the Maghrib.

alcove portrait al-Walīd does, admittedly, present himself in the guise of God's first caliph, Adam. This is a powerful image and Quranic allusion, not to be ignored. It is reinforced by the explicit reference to Islam in the text on the arch that frames the princely portrait. One should recall too the text in the east aisle that alludes to Abraham and David (though Islam had no monopoly on them), and the dynastic icon that shows al-Walīd holding the Prophet's staff. But any Muslim, on entering a room decorated with depictions of women playing music or dancing with almost no clothes on, would either have thought of Paradise or - more realistically in a bath house - understood that these were ostentatiously non-Islamic pleasures, to be contrasted with such pursuits as reading the *Qur'ān*, fasting and religious conversation.¹⁴⁵ There are also features of the bath house's decoration that could have been presented in a more explicitly Islamic fashion, had the patron desired. A politico-militarily triumphalist presentation of the six kings would have meshed well with the idea of Islam as a new revelation that superseded and entailed the disappearance, through *jihād* if necessary, of all that had gone before. That was what many among the Umayyads' Muslim subjects expected in the public or, for that matter, private declarations of their masters. Hishām and al-Walīd were, it is true, personally unwarlike,¹⁴⁶ and on the frontiers things were not going well by the early 740s.¹⁴⁷ But that was no reason not to claim victory if victory was what one's religion required. And everyone knew that the caliphate would never have come into being in the first place without the force of Islam to propel it. Apart, though, from the sacral element in the princely portrait, there is little else at Quṣayr 'Amra to remind us of this debt. The six kings, in particular, are rather to be admired than pitied, and the implication is that their cultural legacy is of more interest than their spiritual subjection (or that of their peoples) to Islam.

One may recall - and contrast - the popular tales about how Muḥammad had written to the kings of the world requesting they submit to Islam. Our earliest surviving source for the Prophet's life, Ibn Ishāq, writing not so far in time from the date of Quṣayr 'Amra, named the following as recipients: the rulers of Yamāma, al-Baḥrayn and 'Umān in Arabia; Muqawqis the ruler (i.e. Chalcedonian Christian patriarch) of Alexandria; Qayṣar, that is

145. Hishām b. al-Kalbī in Ṭab. 2.396 (tr. 19.190); cf. Kister, *J.S.A.I.* 23 (1999).

146. Al-Wāqidi in al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 186.

147. Blankinship, *Jihād state* 199-222.

Heraclius; the ruler of the Ghassanid Arab confederation in Syria; the Negus; and Kisrā.¹⁴⁸ Though Heraclius is said to have been favourably disposed, nobody accepted Muḥammad's offer, and only the Negus even bothered to send a civil reply. But the point of the story was that, in return for confirmation in their office and responsibilities, the Prophet had expected the kings of the world to accept his revelation. At Quṣayr 'Amra there is no such expectation. Rather, the six kings are shown in all the glory of their secular kingship (*mulk*), and the Umayyad patron, far from imposing his revelation on them, instead annexes their political and cultural prestige. He will hardly have been unaware that religious opponents of his regime were singling out precisely this kingly aspect of Umayyad rule as one of their principal reasons for denying its legitimacy.¹⁴⁹ But he seems content to present himself in a fashion akin to that in which Christian writers of the period portrayed Muḥammad: merely as the first king of the Arabs, and the successor of Roman and Iranian emperors.¹⁵⁰ If in the princely portrait he lays claim - for those with eyes to see - to the prophetic aura of a true caliph as well, it is through an allusion to Adam, who was as acceptable to Jews and Christians as to Muslims, and whose title of *khalīfa* contemporary Quranic exegetes studiously avoided connecting in any way with the ruling dynasty.¹⁵¹ This image too is, in fact, very much a glorification of the caliph's kingly majesty, a far cry from the ascetic, indeed hagiographic verbal portraits of the Prophet's immediate successors, especially Abū Bakr and 'Umar, that were evolving at this very time in the works of religious scholars.

148. Ibn Ishāq in Ṭab. 1.1560-75 (tr. 8.99-115).

149. See above, 54.

150. Brock, *Syriac perspectives* VIII.14, 20; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 393-99, 458; Wolf, *Conquerors and chroniclers* 41-44.

151. See above, 54.

3.

BATHING WOMEN AND HUNTRESSES

While Quṣayr ‘Amra’s royal images anchor it firmly in a particular historical conjuncture, its paintings of entertaining or merely decorative women bring movement and life to the scene. They have been responsible, as well, for the modest notoriety our bath house has enjoyed in the art historical record during the century that has elapsed since its first publication.

Artful minxes

In the poem quoted at the end of Chapter 1, al-Walīd expressed his heart’s desire for wine, a drinking companion, and

an artful minx

with round young breasts in jewelled necklaces.

Of such, he made sure there would be no shortage at Quṣayr ‘Amra.

The most conspicuous paintings of entertainers are on the south soffits of the hall’s two arches (fig. 4).¹ To the left we see ‘a singing girl drawing her fingers over a lute, plucked sonorously by her thumb’, in the words of the poet Labīd who died in the reign of the first Umayyad caliph, Mu‘āwiya.² On the corresponding soffit of the west arch is an awkward depiction of a female dancer clad in bikini bottom, bracelets, armllets, anklets, a necklace and a body chain (fig. 15). She is typical of Quṣayr ‘Amra women in that she has a rather slender torso and firm breasts, but heavy hips and fleshy thighs, calves and arms. Her jewellery is also quite characteristic. Especially worth noting is the body chain (*wishāḥ*), which rests on the shoulders and falls saltirewise

1. Jaussen and Savignac 3. pl. XL.3-4; Q. ‘A. pl. XXVIIb-c; Ettinghausen and Grabar 65 pl. 41.

2. Labīd b. Rabī‘a, *Mu‘allaqa* 60 (tr. Jones); cf. Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣili in Iṣf. 17.164-65 (tr. Berque 184).

to the waist, its four sections clasped together on the chest and back by a decorative brooch-like element. Such chains might be worn by ladies of rank but also by goddesses, whether fully clothed or naked. Either way, they gave special emphasis to the breasts.³ Aphrodite was commonly shown wearing one, as in various Roman pottery figurines found in Jordan (fig. 23);⁴ while a first-century B.C. mirror cover in Rome shows a woman wearing one while enjoying intercourse.⁵ Our dancer's clownish pose is anticipated by that of another dancing girl, this time clothed, on the probably sixth-century Egyptian ivory plaque of Isis that adorns the pulpit of Henry II in Aachen Cathedral.⁶

Besides other, less well preserved paintings of instrumentalists in the corresponding positions on the north soffits of these same arches, music making and dancing are illustrated at at least two other points in Quşayr 'Amra's frescoes. On the central aisle's northeast spandrel is a group consisting of a male musician flanked by two female dancers with large, expressive eyes and fully dressed. The one on the left twirls her hands above her head, while the one on the right wears a long-sleeved, belted shift patterned with roundels, diamonds and flower sprigs in the elaborate Sasanian manner, and holds a tambourine. The musician plays the long-necked lute, and the fact that its neck extends up towards the right-hand dancer's face, while the middle part of the instrument has been virtually obliterated by water streaming in through the vault, caused the Spanish team to identify the woman as a flautist - and perhaps to misrestore her right hand.⁷ As was remarked in the Preface, what we now see on Quşayr 'Amra's

3. Lane, *Arabic-English lexicon* 2943; K.R. Brown, *Gold breast chain* (add a late fourth- or early fifth-century example found in 1992 at Hoxne in Suffolk, England: C. Johns, *Jewellery of Roman Britain* 96-98, 217-18, and colour pl. 6). Note also a 'safaitic' rock carving showing a woman adorned with little but armllets, anklets and a body chain: de Vogüé, *Inscriptions sémitiques* 141.

4. Cf. Iliffe, *Q.D.A.P.* 11 (1945) pl. II.25-26; M.-O. Jentel, *L.I.M.C.* 2(1).159 no. 111; Loberdou-Tsigarida, *Οστέινα πλακίδια* 251 no. 14.

5. Dierichs, *Erotik* 124 pl.141. For further examples Roman, Coptic and Sasanian see Baer, *Da.M.* 11 (1999) 14.

6. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* 59-61, pl. 41 no. 72 (bottom right).

7. I owe this interpretation of the fresco to Oleg Grabar's unpublished book on the Quşayr 'Amra paintings; cf. also E.H. Peck, *E.Ir.* 5.740, 764. Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.291-94 sees, from left to right, a female dancer, a male tambourinist, a male flautist, and a hand - apparently belonging to a fourth musician - holding a cymbal.

walls is to some extent the product of modern interpretation. Meanwhile, in the diamond-shaped compartments on the vault of the apodyterium, a man plays the flute while a man and a woman in a long tunic covered by a mantle dance (fig. 16). The Spanish restorers saw these figures as gypsies. Certainly they are homelier in appearance than the entertainers in the main hall; but the dancing woman's dress and pose - if not the clumsiness of execution - are well paralleled in late Roman art of the highest quality. Elsewhere on the same vault a bear plays a lute and a monkey dances, like untold generations of animals before them in the art of the Near East, while a bystander throws up his hands in astonishment.⁸ Are these performing animals humans in disguise? As already noted, al-Walīd b. Yazīd was said to have summoned the comedian Ash'ab from al-Madīna, dressed him in monkey-skin trousers with a tail, and set him to dance and sing.⁹

Besides such entertainers, there are numerous women represented at Quṣayr 'Amra, particularly in the prince's alcove and around the arch leading into it, who may have been dancers, but play no clearly definable role save as adornments of the court - assuming all or most of the figures were intended to correspond to people or types who actually frequented the building. Under a strip of vault decoration consisting of vases, floral designs, small human figures and birds,¹⁰ the alcove's side walls on either side of the enthroned prince are painted with arcades and Corinthian capitals. Between the columns stand figures singly or in groups of three against a background of drapes and plants or trees.¹¹ Above them, immediately under the arches, human figures of whom we see only the head and shoulders hold each one of them a kerchief (*mandīl*) weighed down, possibly with fruit like the personifications of Earth (*Gē*) one finds in the somewhat earlier Christian mosaics of Mādabā, to the west, and in a remarkable Umayyad painting discovered at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī in Central Syria.¹² If this is the model,

8. K. 'A. 2. pl. XXXIV; Q. 'A. pls XXXIX, XLII. With the dancing woman compare Åkerström-Hougen, *Villa of the Falconer* 110-13 and pl. VIII. For musical animals see Spycket, *Iraq* 60 (1998).

9. See above, 41 n. 56.

10. Vibert-Guigue, *ARAM periodical* 6 (1994) 358 fig. 13.

11. Cf. K. 'A. 2. pls XVII-XVIII; Q. 'A. pl. IX; Grabar, *A.O.* 23 (1993) 104 figs 5-6.

12. Linant de Bellefonds, *Ελληνισμός* 233-35; Maguire, *Rhetoric, nature and magic* VII; and cf. Ahsan, *Social life* 46-47. Mādabā: Piccirillo xxiii, 174-75, 178-79. Further Christian parallels: Schmidt-Colinet, *Mitteilungen zur spätantiken Archäologie und byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 1 (1998).

then these ambiguous personages are female, like most of the standing figures, who are elegantly but not always fully dressed. One, for example, wears a long tunic and veil and a necklace, and stands with arms uplifted in a posture similar to that in which late antique Christians customarily prayed. Another, who wears just a long skirt, a belly chain decorated with round objects like coins, a necklace and a few bangles, looks as if she might well be a dancer. She holds aloft a horn of plenty, just like similarly dressed stucco figures at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī and Khirbat al-Mafjar.¹³

The arcade-and-figures motif is common enough in Mediterranean and Iranian art.¹⁴ It is echoed at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī too, in the stucco reliefs of topless women, probably dancers, who hold flasks of wine (?) and adorn the parapets of the first-floor gallery around the courtyard.¹⁵ Both there and at Khirbat al-Mafjar and Quṣayr 'Amra it is courtly luxury that is being evoked, and Plenty, the abundance that characterizes a happy reign. One is reminded of a story told by Ḥammād al-Rāwīya (694-772/73), about how he once recited a love poem that threw al-Walīd b. Yazīd into ecstasy. The prince

raised his head to motion to a servant who was standing there as if he were the sun. He lifted a curtain behind him, and there came forth forty pages and maids like a scattering of pearls, with jugs in their hands and napkins. He said: "Give them to drink", and all drank without exception, while I went on declaiming the poem. At daybreak he was still drinking and pressing drink on us, and we left his presence only when the attendants carried us off, wrapped in rugs [or: sleeping carpets], and deposited us in the guest house.¹⁶

Likewise at the court of the Armenian king Gagik (d. after 942/43), in a milieu influenced by East Rome and Iran, but also by Islam, we can imagine similar scenes unfolding. Here is how the tenth-century continuator of the historian Thomas Artsruni describes the paintings in Gagik's palace on the island of Alt'amar in Lake Van:

13. *Q.H.G.* pl. 67c; *K.M.* pl. LVI.9. With the belly chain compare the late sixth- or early seventh-century marriage belt at Dumbarton Oaks: *A.S.* 283-84.

14. See e.g. Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* 18-21; Rostovtzeff, *Yale classical studies* 5 (1935) 190-92 and fig. 31 (bone plaques from Olbia, showing court scenes); Loberdou-Tsigarida, *Οστέινα πλακίδια* 251-52 nos 16-20.

15. Cf. R. Hillenbrand, *K.Is.* 171-72.

16. *Işf.* 7.79.

(The pictures) include gilt thrones, seated on which appears the king in splendid majesty surrounded by shining young men, the servants of his festivities, and also lines of minstrels and girls dancing in an admirable manner. There are bands of men with drawn swords, and wrestling matches. There are also troops of lions and other wild beasts, and flocks of birds adorned with various plumage. If anyone wished to enumerate all the works of art in the palace, it would be a great labour for himself and his audience.¹⁷

This manner of courtly luxury, not always distinguishable from mythological fantasy, had become common coin in late antiquity. The abundant parallels one can observe in carvings on Coptic bone plaques, for example, or the mosaics of Mādabā,¹⁸ suggest it had moved sharply downmarket. But that did not stop its influence reaching the court of Ctesiphon, which the Arabs had known long before they looted it, only to be enslaved in their turn by a mirage of maidens bearing flowers and fruit. Since the Sasanian court had assigned a place of such honour to these and other entertainers,¹⁹ it was probably Quṣayr 'Amra's patron's immediate model.

This atmosphere intensifies in the central aisle of the hall. On either side of the alcove arch, on the lower part of the southern spandrels of the hall's two arches, bejewelled but almost naked beauties were depicted in elaborate niches.²⁰ The modest gestures of these two women, their ornaments and even the niches framing them recall images of Aphrodite that had been common in the Roman East.²¹ Similar female figures, likewise framed in niches, proffered posies to visitors as they entered the palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar.²²

At the other end of the main aisle, by the entrance, the northwest spandrel shows a beautiful but pensive woman propping herself against a cushion (fig. 17). A hovering but wingless figure, more likely in this context to be an inept Eros than an apteral Victory,²³ hands her a crown. She wears a

17. Thomas Artsruni, *History* 295-96.

18. Strzygowski, *Koptische Kunst* pl. XV; Loberdou-Tsigarida, *Οστέινα πλακίδια*; Piccirillo 52, 68-69.

19. See al-Jāhīz (attributed), *Kitāb al-tāj* 25, 28; Abka'i-Khavari, *Das Bild des Königs* 70-71.

20. K. 'A. 2. pls XVII, XVIII, XXIII; Baer, *Da.M.* 11 (1999) pl. 3a.

21. E.g. M.-O. Jentel, *L.I.M.C.* 2(1).155-56, esp. no. 31.

22. Hamilton 52-54, 56 fig. 23.

23. C. Augé and P. Linant de Bellefonds, *L.I.M.C.* 3(1).943 nos 9-10, 949 no. 106; 3(2).669, 677; and compare the entry in the same work on 'Victoria'.

long skirt but is bare from the waist up save body chain, necklace and bangles. In both appearance and dress she closely resembles the two women who are painted standing with their arms held up above their head in the soffit of the eastern arch (fig. 18).²⁴ Each holds a bowl or shallow basket full of small circular objects, apparently coins; and between these, at the apex of the arch, is a much damaged circular medallion which contained a portrait, possibly of a woman - hair and eyes are still discernable, but the lower part of the face has been destroyed.²⁵ These fine, lifesize images remind us of the depictions of Victory (Nikē) holding up portrait medallions that were to be seen throughout the Roman Empire including Syria and Jordan, and had deep roots in Greek artistic tradition.²⁶ Especially in their attire, they also recall an Aphrodite in a mosaic from a sixth-century mansion at Mādabā (fig. 19). They make an impression even in Quṣayr 'Amra's crowded hall. Their significance for the patron and artists, though, is hard to guess. Probably they evoked nothing more specific than what they suggest to today's visitors, namely a courtly, opulent and vaguely triumphal atmosphere, with a touch of irreverence in the topless and wingless Victories. If there was an allusion to some historical individual, the reclining woman who receives a crown, and whose undress (other than in the context of bathing) virtually excludes her having been of free status, may have been some especially prized singing girl - such female entertainers were by definition slaves.²⁷ Though they resemble her, the women in the arch soffits are elegant space fillers, not portraits.

The vault of the central aisle substitutes for the *fabrefactum lacunar*, the

24. Cf. Q.'A. pls XXVIIa, XXVIIIa, XXXIII.

25. Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.365-74, and a photograph taken in 1974 and kindly shown me by J. Zozaya, but not reproducible. The western arch has lost most of its corresponding decoration. What remains excludes the possibility that the women of the eastern arch were duplicated, or that there was a medallion in the same position as on the eastern arch.

26. Cf. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom* pl. 1, and pp. 14-17, 25-30; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* pls 4-5, 8-9, 11; Linant de Bellefonds, *Ελληνισμός* 238-39; Spetsieri-Choremi, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 111 (1996).

27. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risālat al-qiyaṅ* (a much more enlightening discussion than al-Iṣfahānī's *Al-qiyaṅ*); Ṭab. 2.1766 (tr. 26.117), on al-Walīd II's order for female musicians, falcons and horses from Khurāsān; C. Pellat, *E.Is.* 4.820-24. On the freedom of behaviour and dress of slave compared to free women see Simeon of Beth-Arsham, *Letter G* pp. 55-59; *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* 1.222-23 (from Dionysius of Tel-Mahrē, d. 845); al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risālat al-qiyaṅ* 23; Iṣf. 22.211 (tr. Berque 196); also the reports according to which 'Umar I insisted his female slaves serve guests unveiled, discussed by Johansen, *Law and society* 79-80.

'cunningly wrought coffered ceiling', that Sidonius Apollinaris was so proud of in his bath house,²⁸ a cheaper solution in the form of thirty-two panels arranged in four rows, each panel containing one or two figures placed under gable-shaped arches, with a bird in each spandrel.²⁹ This type of decoration was commonplace in the Roman world, and had caught on in Irān too.³⁰ Some of the figures are naked, and some seem - the paintings are ill executed, much damaged and extensively restored - to be erotically involved with each other. Strikingly similar scenes, including niches with the same gable-shaped arch, adorn a bronze and iron brazier of the Umayyad period recently unearthed at al-Faddayn near Mafraq, northwest of Quṣayr 'Amra beyond Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt.³¹ This object is also adorned by statuettes of naked women wearing armlets, anklets and necklaces, and belongs to the same world as our bath house.

Abundance, relaxation and eroticism; music-making, singing and dancing; the showing off of fine clothing and jewellery by women - all these things were, and long remained,³² a natural part of bath house culture, even outside the court milieu. Yet as with all pleasures, they took their special, intense taste from contrast with exertion and risk, whether in the hunt, whose strenuousness the side aisles prominently display, or in war, ever part of Umayyad life. That danger and pleasure are two sides of the same coin was the main idea behind the Arabs' verse battle cries, with their endless insistence that 'skill with the sword blade' would bring the admiration of 'a lovely serving girl, adorned with necklace and anklets'.³³ We should keep in mind this background rumble of strife and violence, whether external or internal. The dancing girl may stand for Victory as well;³⁴ peace comes only after war.

28. Sidonius Apollinaris, *epistulae* 2.2.5 (tr. W.B. Anderson).

29. K. 'A. 2. pls XX, XXII; Q. 'A. pls III, VII, VIIIa; Vibert-Guigue, *D.A.* 244 (1999) 93.

30. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* pl. 38; Kawami, *Metropolitan Museum journal* 22 (1987) 27-28.

31. *Omeyyades* 68-69; and compare also the stucco ornament at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī: *Q.H.G.* pls 58, 63c, 68d-e.

32. Russell, *Natural history of Aleppo* 1.137-38; Lewcock, al-Akwa' and Serjeant, *Ṣan'ā'* 514, 518, 524.

33. Tab. 1.3005 (tr. 15.203 Humphreys), 3014-15 (tr. 15.212-13); 2.561, 562, 617 (tr. 20.146, 148, 201).

34. Cf. Kiss, *Το Βυζάντιο ως οικουμένη* 82, on the crown of Constantine Monomachus.

Nudity

As for the entirely naked - rather than alluringly adorned - women for whom Quṣayr 'Amra is so celebrated among art historians, the nature of their eroticism is harder to judge, if they are meant to be erotic at all. On the east wall of the apodyterium, for example, a nude man and an at least half nude and plainly pregnant woman flank the window and look at each other, the woman seen frontally, the man from behind. Between them, underneath the window, Mielich saw a third naked figure, apparently a baby in a reclining position, so presumably the fruit of the couple's union.³⁵ Opposite this scene, in the lunette over the door into the hall, a naked youth contemplates what may have been a naked woman - a painting to be discussed in the next chapter. In the first hot chamber, heavy-buttocked women carrying buckets for drawing water bathe their children in what are among Quṣayr 'Amra's best-known images (fig. 20);³⁶ while in the main hall, in the middle of its west wall, a woman almost totally undressed emerges from a pool and is gazed at by a crowd of onlookers.³⁷

The *Qur'ān* exhorts women to keep themselves covered; men, too, were expected to 'guard their private parts'.³⁸ Also, a saying was attributed to Muḥammad, according to which women might not enter bath houses at all, and men only with their private parts covered.³⁹ Evidently Quṣayr 'Amra's decoration consciously flouted Muslim ethical norms. Whether it also broke the period's iconographical conventions is less certain. Alois Riegl took for granted that no nude could possibly be Muslim, and went so far as to adduce this assumption in support of the early dating he offered for Quṣayr 'Amra.⁴⁰ But we now know that the Umayyads not only approved artistic representations of naked figures, but also applied the Islamic ban on depictions of living beings, that emerged between the late seventh and late eighth

35. *Q.*'A. 2. pl. XXXV; Jaussen and Savignac 3. pls XLVI-XLVII.1; *Q.*'A. 68 and pl. XLIIIb. Any who doubt the woman is pregnant have only to compare fig. 26. Vibert-Guigue diss. 2.10, 13, is not certain the right-hand figure is male, and wonders whether the 'baby' may be an Eros.

36. See also Jaussen and Savignac 3. pls LI-LII; *Q.*'A. pls XLIV-XLVI, XLVIIb; Ettinghausen, *Arabische Malerei* 31, and *K.Is.* pl. X (colour photographs taken before the Spanish restoration); Vibert-Guigue, *D.A.* 244 (1999) 94.

37. See below, 98-99.

38. *Qur'ān* 24.31, 33.35.

39. Lewcock, al-Akwa' and Serjeant, *Ṣan'ā'* 501. For further traditions against nudity see U. Rubin, *Eye of the beholder* 83-86.

40. Quoted by Müller, *Q.*'A. 1.II.

centuries,⁴¹ only in religious buildings. There is a marked contrast between the riotous decor of the 'desert castles', and the sober avoidance of living beings in the mosaics of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock, or at the Great Mosque in Damascus. Even within a single structure, as for example the palace of Mushattā, one could find a mosque decorated aniconically standing close to a throne room adorned with more-than-lifesize statues of both men and women either entirely naked or draped in such a way as to emphasize rather than hide their private parts.⁴²

In his taste for nudity, Quṣayr 'Amra's patron must have been influenced - at least indirectly - by the Greeks' and Romans' long tradition of mythological representation. In late antique art, it is true, nudity rarely featured in scenes from contemporary reality such as those in our Jordanian bath house. We quite often find naked athletes, especially wrestlers, in mosaics.⁴³ Otherwise, nudes were commonest in scenes from the lives of Old Testament figures like Adam, Jonah or Daniel, or in mythological compositions as at sixth-century Mādabā, not far from Quṣayr 'Amra (fig. 19), and - as personifications of the Hours - in a Vatican Ptolemy manuscript, made only a decade after Quṣayr 'Amra.⁴⁴ To judge from the Greek epigrams collected in the *Palatine anthology*, Aphrodite, Eros, nymphs and Graces were commonly depicted in bathing establishments, and often unclothed:

Here once upon a time young Eros stole
the wondrous robes of Graces at their bath.
And off he made, leaving them naked there,
ashamed to show themselves without the doors.⁴⁵

It may well be that the bath house was one of this artistic tradition's last refuges from Christian disapproval. In a letter already quoted, the fifth-century Gallic aristocrat - but soon to be bishop - Sidonius Apollinaris describes the decoration of his own bath house in words which make no bones about his dislike for paintings of nudes:

Here no disgraceful tale is exposed by the nude beauty of painted
figures, for though such a tale may be a glory to art it dishonours

41. Van Reenen, *Der Islam* 67 (1990) 60-70.

42. K. Brisch, *K.Is.* 184-85 (pls 62-65); Trümpelmann, *A.A.* (1965); Baer, *Da.M.* 11 (1999) 19-20.

43. E.g. Pausz and Reitingner, *Nikephoros* 5 (1992).

44. Piccirillo 53, 68-69, 77, 80 (Mādabā); above, 1.9 n. 25 (Vat.gr. 1291). For mythological nudes on silver vessels, see Matzulewitsch, *Byzantinische Antike*.

45. *Anthologia Palatina* 9.616.

the artist. There are no mummers (*histriones*) absurd in features and dress counterfeiting Philistion's outfit in paints of many colours. There are no athletes slipping and twisting in their blows and grips... There will not be found traced on those spaces anything which it would be more proper not to look at...⁴⁶

Sidonius implicitly concedes that a bath house without nudes might still in his day be thought unusual; but at Scythopolis by the River Jordan, about the year 515, statues of a naked Aphrodite and a nymph were thrown into a bath house hypocaust, where archaeologists recently found them again, lying face down in the mud.⁴⁷

Captives taken during Sasanian campaigns in the Roman East, especially from Antioch, carried this Mediterranean taste for bath houses and the depiction of the naked body into the heart of the rival empire.⁴⁸ If we want a direct precedent or even model for the Quṣayr 'Amra nudes, we should consider the reliefs of dancing girls and musicians on conveniently portable Sasanian silver objects, but also the depictions in mosaics from Bīshāpūr and stucco reliefs from the mansions of the Iranian elite at Ctesiphon.⁴⁹ The ultimate inspiration for these naked and diaphanously draped figures, who play instruments or hold aloft fruits or flowers, may have been Dionysiac;⁵⁰ the iconography of Aphrodite also offers some parallels.⁵¹ But in the Sasanian and *a fortiori* the Arab Muslim context, these arguably once mythological beings are happy to be taken at face value, as entertainers. The silver vessels on which they were often depicted first percolated into the Arab world as booty taken in the wars of conquest;⁵² and later on we hear of al-Walīd b. Yazīd ordering, as caliph, 'gold and silver ewers' to be specially

46. Sidonius Apollinaris, *epistulae* 2.2.6-7 (tr. W.B. Anderson).

47. Tsafirir and Foerster, *D.O.P.* 51 (1997) 129-30 and figs 37-38.

48. Bath houses: Morony, *Iraq* 266-70. Nudes (all third- or fourth-century): Ghirshman, *Bīchāpour* 2. pls B, V-VII, and von Gall, *A.M.I.* 4 (1971) 193-205 (mosaics, Bīshāpūr); Daems, *Iranica antiqua* 36 (2001) 51, 133 fig. 190 (stucco figurines, Ḥājītabād, 300 km. southeast of Shīrāz), and 51-52, 133 fig. 192 (bronze figurine, Tuzandajan); Harper, *Royal hunter* 145-46 (seal stone).

49. K.M. 235-36; Ghirshman, *Bīchāpour* 2. pl. XXIX; Kröger 85-88, 103-07, 116-17, pls 27-28, 41-42, 48.1; Duchesne-Guillemin, *Instruments de musique*; Goldman, *Iranica antiqua* 32 (1997) 247-49, 254-55, 258-59; Daems, *Iranica antiqua* 36 (2001) 58-59, 146-48 figs 217-25.

50. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran* 3-10 and figs 8-9, 16, 18-22; Marschak, *Silberschätze* 251-54.

51. M.-O. Jentel, *L.I.M.C.* 2(1).159-61.

52. Hishām b. al-Kalbī in al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 338.

made far away in the East in Khurāsān (where Sasanian memories had lingered longer than in the West) for use at his court.⁵³ Sasanian or post-Sasanian vessels could definitely have provided models for Quṣayr ‘Amra’s artists, in their (admittedly inept) attempts to depict nudes neither athletic nor mythic, but simply pleasure-giving, and in a courtly setting.

Literary sources can be of great assistance in our attempts to judge the precise resonances of Quṣayr ‘Amra’s paintings, especially its nudes, for those who commissioned and first saw them. What did the naked female body signify at that particular time and place? The *Qur’ān*’s exhortation to women to cover themselves represented no innovation. That was the modest - but in the dust of steppe or desert also practical - fashion in which women, including Christian women, had long since dressed.⁵⁴ And in the bath house, women were usually segregated from men, at least when unclothed. An ascetic like Symeon of Emesa (Homs) might break into the women’s bath, but only in order to prove that he was in full control of his own body. The women quite properly beat him up and threw him out.⁵⁵ Others could only dream of such escapades, for instance the Greek epigrammatist fantasizing about Eros making off with the Graces’ ‘wondrous robes’, or the pre-Islamic poet Imru’ al-Qays, whose verses

Oh yes, many a fine day I’ve dallied with them [sc. women],
and especially I call to mind a day at Dāra Juljul,
a day I slaughtered for the virgins my riding beast,⁵⁶

were elaborated into a fanciful tale about the poet’s passionate pursuit of his cousin ‘Unayza. One day, he came upon ‘Unayza and her friends bathing in a pool of rainwater. Hobbling his camel, he crept up and stole their clothes. They ignored his exhortations to come out and get them until, as the day wore on, they emerged one by one and reclaimed their dresses, all except ‘Unayza, who begged him to throw it to her - in vain. ‘so she came out, and he

53. Ṭab. 2.1765-66 (tr. 26.116-17 C. Hillenbrand), and cf. 2.1779 (tr. 26.131).

54. Dirven, *Mesopotamia* 33 (1998) 298 figs 1-2 (Palmyra, first century B.C. and A.D.); Barbet and Vibert-Guigue, *Peintures des nécropoles romaines d’Abila* 1.179-92, 2. pls 106a, VI.4, VII.1 (mid-second century A.D.);⁵ Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 17.4 (on the Arabia of his day); Lazar P’arpec’i, *History* 110 (Armenian, late fifth century); Simeon of Beth-Arsham, *Letter G* pp. 57-59 (South Arabia, first quarter of sixth century); Pisentius of Coptos (d. 632), *Encomium on S. Onophrius* pp. 15-16; Denḥā, *History of Mārūthā of Takrīt* (d. 649) 84. Further references in the admirably learned article of de Vaux, *Revue biblique* 44 (1935).

55. Leontius of Neapolis, *Vita Symeonis Sali* 149.3-18.

56. Imru’ al-Qays, *Mu’allaqa* 10-11 (tr. Arberry, *Seven odes* 61, with adjustments).

gazed at her both in front and behind, then he returned her dress.' The women's reproaches he proceeded to disarm by slaughtering his camel and treating them to a fine feast. In the form in which we have this story in the *Kitāb al-aghānī*, it is put into the mouth of none other than the Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq (died c. 728-30), who is reminded of it during a similar encounter with a pool-full of naked girls. He tries to play Imru' al-Qays's trick on them, but ends up getting a mud bath from the girls, who also steal his mule (eventually returned, with an obscene message suggesting what he might do with it).⁵⁷

The nude bathers at Quṣayr 'Amra busy themselves with their children, and take no thought of showing off their bodies. Yet the paintings were put there to be looked at. They may not tell the story of Dāra Juljul, but they do make possible - indeed encourage - that same visual violation of their subjects which Imru' al-Qays imposed on 'Unayza and her companions. The enormity - and by the same token intense transgressive pleasurable - of this violation is best felt if we recall the deep offence the Arab was liable to take if another man was so unwise as to praise the beauty of one of his women. For example, the poet al-Nābigha's intimate description of the wife of al-Nu'mān III (c. 580-602) of al-Ḥīra in southern 'Irāq had resulted in a sudden fall from grace that was long remembered.⁵⁸ It is possible to sympathize, then, with Oleg Grabar when he wonders whether Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes of nudes are not just erotic but 'perhaps even pornographic' (though surely only by suggestion).⁵⁹

Women at the hunt

It should by now be clear that the iconography, that is to say the external form, of many of Quṣayr 'Amra's images of women was indebted to the Greek and Roman traditions that had for over a millennium so impregnated the visual vocabulary of Eastern Mediterranean artists. Often this tradition was channeled through the Syrian workshops which, as we shall see, in all probability produced the artisans who worked at Quṣayr 'Amra. At other moments it may have been mediated through the artistic products of Sasanian or post-Sasanian Iran, which also of course were subject to other

57. Iṣf. 21.342-46 (tr. Weisweiler, *Arabesken der Liebe* 155-58). For variations on the same idea see the comedian Ash'ab in Iṣf. 16.155-56 (tr. Berque 322); also Iṣf. 18.43.

58. Ibn Qutayba in Iṣf. 11.17, and cf. 3.216-18, and Ishāq al-Mawṣilī in Iṣf. 4.397. Also Abbott, *J.N.E.S.* 1 (1942) 354-55, 356; S.P. Stetkevych, *Mute immortals* 165.

59. Grabar, *Formation* 155.

influences, of non-Mediterranean origin. The Quṣayr 'Amra artists were addressing themes of universal interest, and the product of their labours could hardly be impervious to the great imperial iconographical traditions of the past.

Much the same can be said of the four large hunting scenes that adorn the walls of Quṣayr 'Amra's hall. The Greeks and Romans had assigned the hunt, together with bathing, a prominent place among mankind's favourite diversions. 'Hunting, bathing, having fun, laughing, that's the life!', proclaims a graffito on the paving stones of the forum at Timgad in North Africa.⁶⁰ Roman art was full of images of the hunt, which might also adorn bath houses.⁶¹ Even as late as the eighth century, paintings or mosaics with depictions of the hunt (as well as horse races and scenes from the hippodrome or theatre) were still a perfectly familiar sight in the East Roman Empire.⁶² As for Sasanian depictions of the hunt, they were among the most aesthetically distinctive products of the late antique world.⁶³ And the Sasanians were known for stocking their residences with hunting art. The Roman soldier-historian Ammianus Marcellinus, who died at the end of the fourth century and had campaigned against the Iranians in Mesopotamia, was struck by the way in which pictures of the king killing wild beasts were very common 'in every part of [their] houses'.⁶⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, an Arabic historian but of Iranian origin, recorded in the tenth century a tradition about how Bahrām Gūr - 'the wild ass' - had once, before he came to the throne (420-38), killed a lion and an onager with a single shot, and immortalized his achievement by having it painted on the wall of one of his residences.⁶⁵ His hunting exploits were to become a common theme in Iranian interior decoration, both in Sasanian times and under Islam.⁶⁶ One has only to consider a late Sasanian silver gilt bowl now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, with its miniatures of

60. *C.I.L.* 8.17938: 'venari lavari ludere ridere occ est vivere'; cf. Dunbabin, *Papers of The British School at Rome* 57 (1989) 6-7 esp. n. 3.

61. E.g. J.B. Ward-Perkins and Toynbee, *Archaeologia* 93 (1949) pls XLII-XLIII (Hunting Baths, Lepcis Magna, second-third century); M.M. Mango, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995) 263-82 (late antique bath buckets decorated with hunting scenes).

62. Stephen the Deacon, *Vita Stephani Iunioris* 26.

63. Harper, *Royal hunt*.

64. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 24.6.3.

65. Ṭab. 1.857 (tr. 5.85-86).

66. Hishām b. al-Kalbī in Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* p. 178; al-Tha'ālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb* pp. 179-80; Fontana, *Bahrām Gūr* 13-17.

musicians and wrestlers as well as a hunter trying to spear a bear in a net,⁶⁷ to sense an atmosphere, or a combination of passions, extremely close to Quṣayr 'Amra's, though less susceptible to explanation in terms of Graeco-Roman artistic models.

To illustrate the extent to which awareness of the Greek and Roman tradition, in particular, may be helpful in appreciating the Quṣayr 'Amra hunting paintings, even if sometimes only by contrast, we may take the two frescoes that illustrate the practice of hunting with nets. One of them occupies the upper zone of the west wall, an enormous space some 7 m. long and 1.5 m. high (fig. 21).⁶⁸ It is an energetic and confidently drawn painting of a herd of onagers being pursued at full tilt from left to right into a trap by three mounted hunters riding bareback, one of whom is falling from his horse (an unusual theme,⁶⁹ whether used here by way of allusion to a specific incident,⁷⁰ or for the sake of artistic variety, or as a joke at the expense of Arab opponents of the new-fangled stirrup,⁷¹ we can only guess). The trap is made of a net held up by stakes, while the quarry is directed towards the enclosure thus formed, at the right of the composition, by a guiderope supported by spears driven blade upwards into the ground. To each spear is attached at least one black pennant or cloth, and by each spear lurks a beater or net man, a precise detail to which a rare parallel may be found on a Sasanian silver plate, the Tcherdyne plate in the Hermitage Museum, where the profiled heads of beaters and salukis alternate round the scalloped rim formed by the outline of the net.⁷² The beaters at Quṣayr 'Amra follow the stampede of the onagers with rapt attention, each clasping in outstretched arm a burning torch. Their markedly coarse features, contrasting with the often effeminate beauty of other male figures in the frescoes, indicate servile status; and though we see only their heads and arms, we may be sure they wore the short belted tunic that was the characteristic dress of men of their station.⁷³ Black beduin tents are positioned at the beginning of the guiderope

67. Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. no. 1966.369; see Harper, *Royal hunter* 53-54.

68. Cf. Q. 'A. pls XXII-XXV; Grabar, *C.A.* 36 (1988) 78-79 figs 5-9; id., *A.O.* 23 (1993) 103 fig. 2.

69. Cf. Kleemann, *Satrapen-Sarkophag* 142-44; Talbot-Rice (ed.), *Great Palace* 124-25 and pl. 45.

70. Cf. Mas. 2250 (3.217-18 Dāghir).

71. Cf. Nicolle, *War and society* 17-19.

72. Harper, *Silver vessels* 79-81, pl. 27.

73. Cf. Oddy, *Numismatic chronicle* 151 (1991) 61 fig.1, 65; E.H. Peck, *E.Ir.* 5.763 (and cf. *Taq-i B.* 4.96, 111 fig. 46).

and by the mouth of the net, in other words at the far left and right of the panel. In the right tent we discern the faces of three onlookers, conceivably women.

At the left of the composition a single onager senses what lies in store for it and, still running, glances back over its shoulder. It is a gesture rich in resonance, artistic as well as emotional. This animal reminds us of another onager facing its end in a late second-century A.D. wall painting from a private house at Dura Europus on the Euphrates frontier between Rome and Iran, which in turn vividly recalls the famous hunting sculptures, some eight or nine centuries older, from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, now in the British Museum. We are in the presence of a durable artistic motif that has no need of Greek or Roman parallels to illuminate it.⁷⁴ It depicts a moment of peculiar poignancy: 'It is said,' according to Musil, 'that the gazelles even dream of the narrow opening [of the trap] through which they rush to certain destruction. If a Bedouin wishes to stop a gazelle in flight, he shouts: "A narrow opening is in front of thee, O gazelle!", and the gazelle at once stops and looks round.'⁷⁵ But others may identify with the animal's predicament: an aged poet, of the early Arabs, compared himself to 'the gazelle who has escaped, yet death still awaits him when he is caught in the nets'.⁷⁶

This scene has a sequel, on the northern end wall not of this west aisle, but of the east aisle. Here we see the gory scene inside the net enclosure once all the animals have entered.⁷⁷ Six hunters dispatch onagers with spear or sword, or cut them up; while those they have not yet killed run in a frenzy round the edge of the enclosure, trying to escape. There are parallels to this particular scene in late Roman art, particularly in mosaics and ivory diptychs, though usually set in the wild or in an amphitheatre⁷⁸ and not, as here, in a net hunting trap.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, hunting with nets was a common enough subject in Greek and Roman art.⁸⁰ There is even a rather close

74. Rostovtzeff, *Yale classical studies* 5 (1935) 273-78, and figs 71, 75; Barnett, *North Palace* pls LI-LII. For parallels from the Mediterranean world see Schlunk, *Centcelles* 23 fig. 6, 103-06.

75. Musil, *Rwala* 27.

76. Arġāt b. Suhayya (d. c. 705) ap. Işf. 13.39 (tr. Berque 302).

77. Cf. K. 'A. 2. pl. XXXII; Q. 'A. pls XXX, XXXI.

78. Cf. Lavin, *D.O.P.* 17 (1963) figs 7, 21, 110, 120-21; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* pls 20, 31, 32.

79. Cf. Lavin, *D.O.P.* 17 (1963) figs 76, 128.

80. Fowden, *Roman and Byzantine Near East*, esp. 132.

parallel to the scene on Quṣayr ‘Amra’s west wall, right down to such details as the pennants or cloths attached to the spears, in a mosaic in the fourth-century A.D. Christian mausoleum at Centcelles near Tarragona on the northeast coast of Spain.⁸¹ Such comparisons, remote in both place and time, can admittedly be of no decisive usefulness to the student of Quṣayr ‘Amra, whose paintings undoubtedly reflect local experience.⁸² It is worth quoting, though, a Greek literary account of this form of hunting, which both makes clear what is happening at Quṣayr ‘Amra, and underlines how familiar this form of hunting was, in Syria especially.

The passage in question can be found in a third-century A.D. verse treatise on hunting, the *Cynegetica* by Oppian of (Syrian) Apamea, often also known as Pseudo-Oppian. Towards the end of his work Oppian describes lion hunting as it was practised along the Euphrates, and bear hunting as conducted by the River Tigris and in Armenia.⁸³ If we put these two rather similar accounts together, they yield the following picture. First, nets are disposed in a crescent, attached to strong stakes. At the tips and in the middle of the crescent, hunters lie in ambush ‘under piles of ashen boughs’.

From the wings themselves and the men who watch the entrance they stretch on the left hand a well-twined long rope of flax a little above the ground in such wise that the cord would reach to a man’s waist. Therefrom are hung many-coloured patterned ribbons, various and bright, a scare to wild beasts, and suspended therefrom are countless bright feathers... On the right hand they set ambushes in clefts of rock, or with green leaves they swiftly roof huts a little apart from one another, and in each they hide four men, covering all their bodies with branches.

Beaters drive the animals towards the trap;

and each man of them holds a shield in his left hand - in the din of the shield there is great terror for deadly beasts - and in his right hand a blazing torch of pine; for, above all, the well-maned lion dreads the might of fire, and will not look on it with unflinching eyes.

The beasts, terrified by the torches and the din of shouting men and clanging shields and ‘swinging feathers whistling shrill’, and by ‘the ribands waving aloft in the air’, charge into the net and are there ensnared. Musil too speaks

81. Schlunk, *Centcelles* 23 fig. 6, and pls 5-7, 38-40.

82. Fowden, *Roman and Byzantine Near East*.

83. Oppian of Apamea, *Cynegetica* 4.112-46, 354-424.

of hunting gazelle by driving them between two fires - not for illumination, as the hunt he took part in was conducted by daylight, but in order to scare the animals into running in a particular direction.⁸⁴

Since Pseudo-Oppian continued to be read in the East Roman Empire, while the oldest manuscript, of the eleventh century, is illustrated with scenes from the hunt which have been thought to derive from late antique and perhaps Syrian models,⁸⁵ it is possible that Quṣayr 'Amra's artists drew on some such source, as they did also for the zodiac in the caldarium dome.⁸⁶ Yet their paintings do not in fact resemble those so far known from either this or the later Pseudo-Oppian manuscripts; nor indeed is it necessary to assume strict adherence to any such prototype, when everyday life around the Wādī 'l-Buṭūm provided inspiration in abundance.

Much closer in date than Pseudo-Oppian to the Quṣayr 'Amra frescoes is of course the corpus of early Arabic poetry, both pre-Islamic and subsequent. One of its dominant themes is the hunt, and it would be idle to pretend that the student of Quṣayr 'Amra's hunting paintings can get to grips with them solely on the basis of parallels in Greek and Roman art.⁸⁷ Granted, though, that our subject is Umayyad Hellenism, we may confine ourselves here to emphasizing the need for careful contextualisation of the Hellenic element in the art of Quṣayr 'Amra. Much more went into the making of the Umayyad cultural persona than what could be had from imperial Constantinople and its provincial imitators, however beguiling that may have seemed to some. In order to illustrate this point, it is worth reflecting for a moment on the relationship that may have existed between Quṣayr 'Amra's paintings of women and its hunting scenes. Both sets of images, taken separately, seem quite comprehensible in the light of the Greek and Roman tradition. But once they are interwoven with each other, as in Quṣayr 'Amra's hall, something strikes the Hellenist as not quite familiar any more.

That something is of course precisely the combination of women and the hunt. To the eye of many hunters in the ancient world, and not just Greeks, there would have seemed to be a tension implicit here. 'Every kind of animal was susceptible to his power, although he could not wield it over women':

84. Musil, *K.* 'A. 1.18.

85. Kádár, *Greek zoological illuminations* 91-109, 118-20, pls 138-85; but see also J.C. Anderson, *D.O.P.* 32 (1978) 195-96.

86. See above, 32.

87. On Umayyad hunting poetry see Wagner, *Grundzüge* 2.46-58.

Carlo Levi's observation about the aged grave-digger and wolf-tamer he befriended in a southern Italian village⁸⁸ reflects - although in an unusually absolute form - a widespread and ancient belief that, whenever in his life this becomes necessary, a man must choose whether he wishes to deploy his most vital energies in subduing animals or women. So it was that when Gilgamesh and the unnamed hunter resolved to tame the wild man Enkidu, who lived at one with the animals and set them free from the hunter's traps, they sent him the harlot Shamhat:

Shamhat unclutched her bosom, exposed her sex, and he took in her voluptuousness.

She was not restrained, but took his energy.
 She spread out her robe and he lay upon her,
 she performed for the primitive the task of womankind.
 His lust groaned over her;
 for six days and seven nights Enkidu stayed aroused,
 and had intercourse with the harlot
 until he was sated with her charms.
 But when he turned his attention to his animals,
 the gazelles saw Enkidu and darted off,
 the wild animals distanced themselves from his body.⁸⁹

To hunt is, then, to abstain from intercourse with women.⁹⁰ And since the mere presence of the fair sex was a temptation, women came to be excluded from participation. A virgin goddess might break the rule, especially if she hunted alone, like Homer's 'arrow-showing Artemis' striding 'over lofty Taygetus or Erymanthus, delighting in boars and swift-running hinds'.⁹¹ So too might Amazons, or semimythical queens such as Semiramis, Dido or Zenobia, who as al-Zabbā' grew into a central figure in Arab story-telling, and generated numerous expressions that became Arabic proverbs.⁹² But Procris, who was possessed by sexual jealousy of Cephalus, and spied on him as he hunted alone on Hymettus, died by her husband's own spear. These Greek myths were part of Qusayr 'Amra's wider cultural background. A mid-sixth-century mosaic found in 1982-83 at Sarrīn near the Euphrates in

88. C. Levi, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* 60 (tr. Frenaye 71).

89. *Epic of Gilgamesh* 1.170-80.

90. Cf. Serjeant, *South Arabian hunt* 82-83.

91. Homer, *Odyssey* 6.102-04.

92. Hishām b. al-Kalbī in Ṭab. 1.757-67 (tr. 4.139-48).

northern Syria alludes to the tragic love of the hunters Meleager and Atalanta, and includes powerful images of both Artemis and Aphrodite.⁹³ Another sixth-century mosaic uncovered in the same year, 1982, but this time at Mādabā, illustrates the story of Phaedra, who longed to hunt alongside her chaste beloved, and Hippolytus, who fell victim to Aphrodite's jealousy of his all-exclusive devotion to the divine huntress.⁹⁴ Artemis and Aphrodite, the hunt and the pleasures of heterosexual sex, are eternally juxtaposed as in Quṣayr 'Amra's paintings, but often at odds with each other too, even fatally.⁹⁵ An Arab woman who insisted on going hunting was well advised to dress as a man, and mind her behaviour.⁹⁶

To this taboo on women at the hunt, Irān and the wider East was recognized to be an exception - a laxity that Greeks pointed to, along with polygamy, incest and exposure of the dead,⁹⁷ as proof that the Iranians were the polar opposite of their 'civilised' values. 'When he went out hunting, his concubines too went out with him', exclaims the fourth-century B.C. historian Heraclides of Cyme in his disapproving account of the Iranian monarch's luxurious life-style;⁹⁸ while the diplomat Megasthenes tells how the great Indian king Chandragupta ('Sandracottus': c. 324-300 B.C.) would indulge in 'a sort of Bacchic hunt' surrounded by heavily armed women in chariots or mounted on horses and elephants. 'Such things are quite alien to our customs', observes the prim Greek.⁹⁹ Presumably it is again Chandragupta that the first-century A.D. Roman writer Quintus Curtius Rufus has in mind in his history of Alexander the Great, when he recounts the decadent habits of an Indian king who, 'amid the prayers and songs of his concubines', enjoyed shooting at animals kept specially for that purpose in a game park.¹⁰⁰

But even in this exotic East, the role of women in the hunt seems usually

93. Balty, *Mosaïque de Sarrîn*; ead., *Mosaïques* 262; cf. Raeck, *Patron and pavements*.

94. Piccirillo 51, 66.

95. Cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 785-95 (on Melanion); and further references in Anderson, *Hunting* 90-91. By contrast the hunt was, at least in ancient Greece, a natural prelude to homosexual courtship, as we see in archaic vase paintings of lovers offering hares, in particular, to the beloved: Schnapp, *Le chasseur et la cité* 247-57, 325-32, 345-50 (vases), 454-56 (myth).

96. Ḥammād al-Rāwīya in Iṣf. 11.175-77 (tr. Weisweiler, *Arabesken der Liebe* 132-34).

97. Agathias, *Historiae* 2.23-24, 30.

98. Heraclides of Cyme, *Persica* fr. 1.

99. Megasthenes, *Indica* frs 32 and 27b.

100. Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* 8.9.28.

to have stopped well short of the kill. Assyrian royal hunting reliefs of the seventh century B.C. show women as spectators and musicians;¹⁰¹ while on the two famous Sasanian hunting reliefs at Ṭāq-i Bustān commonly assigned to the reign of Khusraw II (590-628), and much more realistic in style than the rather symbolic hunting scenes common on Sasanian silverware, the King of Kings is attended by bevvies of women who play the harp, clap and perhaps sing as well.¹⁰² A probably post-Sasanian silver plate shows a king feasting with his queen on the meat of wild boar killed during a day's hunting.¹⁰³

Ṭāq-i Bustān lies just east of Kirmānshāh, a town in western Irān on the so-called High Road that led from Mesopotamia through the central Zagros Mountains to Khurāsān, the crucially important Central Asiatic frontier of Arab conquest.¹⁰⁴ It had been carved out of the mountainside little more than a century before the most likely date for Quṣayr 'Amra, and must (like the nearby Dukkān, evoked in Chapter 2) have become familiar to the Umayyad armies as they passed this way, especially on account of its splendid sculpture of Khusraw's favourite horse Shabdīz, which the Arabs accounted one of the wonders of the world and whose name they applied to the whole site.¹⁰⁵ If we view the hall at Quṣayr 'Amra, with its equally realistic hunting scenes and its many decorative women, as an artistic whole, it is hard to deny a general similarity of atmosphere as well as obvious differences, such as the prominence given to the hunter-monarch at Ṭāq-i Bustān. Women are not excluded from the general vicinity of the hunt - it has even been suggested that some of the onlookers who watch the hunt on the west wall from the safety of their tent are female.¹⁰⁶ Nor is it easy for the modern viewer to know whether women may implicitly be present even where they are most visually

101. Barnett, *North Palace* 37 and pl. VI, 39 and pl. XIV.

102. *Taq-i B.* 1 and *Splendeur des Sassanides* 85-86 (photographs); *Taq-i B.* 3. pl. XI (photogrammetric elevation of left-hand hunt; 4.83-95, 135-36, 192 (description). On the date see Herzfeld, *A.M.I.* 9 (1938); Mode, *Sogdien und die Herrscher der Welt* 64-70.

103. Ghirshman, *Artibus Asiae* 16 (1953) 63-66.

104. Note the letter of 'Umar II quoted by Ṭab. 2.1366 (tr. 24.95).

105. Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik* 19-26, describes the road and mentions (19) Shabdīz (as Shibdāz), and also the Dukkān (see above, 67-68). For detailed accounts of Shabdīz see Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 214-17, and Yāq. 3.319-21, s.v. 'Shibdāz'. Ibn Khurradādhbih 162 underlines how much Ṭāq-i Bustān was admired. On Umayyad Syrians in Irān see Northedge, *'Ammān* 1.103.

106. Q. 'A. 60 and pl. XXVb.

absent. Besides alerting him to the patron's generosity, the scenes of solemn butchery on the end walls of the east aisle will have put a late Umayyad observer in mind, once more, of that verse in 'the most famous, the most admired and the most influential poem in the whole of Arabic literature',¹⁰⁷ where Imru' al-Qays has slaughtered his camel for the girls he has tormented, and the virgins went on tossing its hacked flesh about and the frilly fat like fringes of twisted silk.¹⁰⁸

As recently as 731 a poet had claimed, while lamenting a general's neglect at the Battle of the Defile near Samarqand against the Turgesh Turks:

You abandoned us like pieces of a slaughtered beast
which the slaughterer (*al-jāzīr*) divides for a round-breasted
girl.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand one can say with certainty that women do not participate actively in the Quṣayr 'Amra hunts. Generally speaking the relaxed Iranian approach to the question of women at the hunt is preferred to the absolute exclusion favoured by other ancient peoples.

Perhaps Quṣayr 'Amra's treatment of the subject is best described as a subtle playfulness, something we find also in early Arabic poetry. Imru' al-Qays, for example, in his famous 'suspended ode' already referred to, mixes in a most provocative fashion the themes of sexual love on the one hand, and on the other the inter-related ideas of the journey and the hunt, which in the classical ode are usually kept more firmly apart.¹¹⁰ And the young gazelle is of course a standard metaphor for the desired woman. Here we find ourselves in a purely Arab atmosphere, and one which long antedated the appearance among Arabs of an imperial court, with the fantastically expanded prospects it offered of non-Arab contacts and foreign influences. Nowhere else in these studies will we come as close to touching the Arabian cultural substrate, on which Muḥammad had brought to play a distinctive form of monotheism, while the Umayyads exposed it as never before to the forces of Hellenism and Iranism.

107. Arberry, *Seven odes* 41.

108. Imru' al-Qays, *Mu'allaqa* 12 (tr. Arberry, *Seven odes* 61).

109. Ibn 'Irs al-'Abdī in Ṭab. 2.1557 (tr. Blankinship, *Jihād state* 159).

110. Imru' al-Qays, *Mu'allaqa*.

4.

MYTHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

It has become clear enough, in the last two chapters, that Quṣayr 'Amra's use of Greek and Roman artistic techniques and themes is pervasive, yet always subservient to a decorative scheme that is distinctively Umayyad. As we know from the remarkable sequence of mosaic floors uncovered during the last century or so at Mādabā, carefully labelled scenes from Greek mythology continued in that milieu to be highly regarded, entirely for their own sake, at least into the sixth century (fig. 19).¹ Quṣayr 'Amra contains only one comparable painting: it depicts three thoroughly Hellenic personifications grouped together and labelled in Greek as Poetry, History and Philosophy. These will be discussed later in the present chapter. But since this scene is so exceptional, one wonders whether it is to be taken at face value. Where the Mādabā Hippolytus mosaic evokes - and presupposes knowledge of - a whole mythological world, the Quṣayr 'Amra personifications, two centuries later, seem comparatively bloodless allusions to mental activities which might, conceivably, be conducted in a totally non-Hellenic cultural context. As for Greek mythology, its iconography is undeniably a presence at Quṣayr 'Amra. But what of its content? A recent student of the frescoes has gone so far as to argue that the myths of the Greeks can be viewed as a 'fil conducteur' to the interpretation of our frescoes.² The first section of the present chapter addresses itself to the question, to what extent the content rather than just the iconography of Greek mythology was familiar to Quṣayr 'Amra's patron and his circle, as well as to the artists who worked for them. The second section deals with the philosophy of the bath, which may, it turns out, have been so much a matter

1. See above, 83, 93 (also for the mythological mosaic from Sarrīn); and below, 102 (the Dionysiac cycle in Syria generally).

2. See below, 106 n. 48.

of substance that its formal expressions were taken largely for granted.

Mythology

A few visual allusions to Greek mythology have already been noted in passing. There is for example the zodiac painted on the caldarium dome, apparently copied from a Greek astronomical manuscript (fig. 5).³ In the main hall, a prominent pair of images recalls traditional Greek and Roman depictions of Victory (Nikē) (fig. 18),⁴ while another figure reminds one of Eros (fig. 17).⁵ The mythological resonances of nudity were also commented upon.⁶ But it was suggested at the same time that one ought not to rush to detect conscious mythological allusion in images where, conceivably, what was of interest to the artist was only the figures' outward form.⁷

Of all Greek mythology's bodily forms, that of Aphrodite was the most beguiling. And the iconography of Aphrodite was duly invoked on several occasions in Chapter 3, where it seemed that such allusion might help to localise the sources of the Quṣayr 'Amra artists' visual vocabulary.⁸ There is, though, one image in the hall that makes particularly striking use of the mental picture of Aphrodite that many inhabitants of Syria must have had in mind, granted her extraordinary popularity - especially among the Arabs.⁹

In the very middle of the west wall, underneath the large scene depicting hunting with nets that was discussed in Chapter 3, we behold a tall and beautiful woman, almost entirely naked, standing in a bathing pool amidst an impressive architectural setting (fig. 22).¹⁰ From a gallery, a crowd of onlookers - probably female, though at Quṣayr 'Amra men too, even the six kings, may be clean shaven - looks through a high colonnade into the central space and watches the bathing beauty. The arch to the right of the composition is narrower, and rests on the carved lintel of a doorway closed by a white curtain. Above the lintel and framed by the arch, perhaps in a gallery over the entrance to this grand chamber, can be discerned the head and shoulders only of another, this time solitary observer, beardless and

3. See above, 32.

4. See above, 80.

5. See above, 79.

6. See above, 83-85.

7. See above, 84.

8. See above, 76, 79, 80, 84.

9. M.-O. Jentel and F. Zayadine, *L.I.M.C.* 2(1).154-69.

10. Cf. Q.'A. pls XVIa, XVIII-XX.

wearing a necklace, but quite possibly a high-class male (in the manner of the six kings) rather than a female.¹¹ A woman attendant stands next to the pool and gestures toward the bather.

Of the iconographical origin of the central figure there can be no doubt: she is a late but powerful avatar, at the very heart of the Muslim caliphate, of a standard image of Aphrodite, who was of course ever at home in the bath house. A ceramic statuette found near 'Ammān could almost have served as a model for the Quṣayr 'Amra artist: a tall and striking figure, both arms half raised, and completely naked save for a body chain, a necklace, armlets and bracelets (fig. 23).¹² The Quṣayr 'Amra bather wears the skimpiest of bikini bottoms, a turban and a necklace. Instead of a body chain, a pendant hangs between her breasts, though this is not unparalleled in images of Aphrodite.¹³

Something else that strikes one about this painting is its lack, unlike other images that we will encounter during our investigation of Quṣayr 'Amra, of any explanatory label, either in Arabic or in Greek. One can only deduce that, to those who built and used Quṣayr 'Amra, the scene was comprehensible at a glance. It stood for an idea, or represented an event, that was familiar to all. Unfortunately, this mental key to the painting has long since been lost, and modern students of Quṣayr 'Amra have been left to speculate. Could our bathing beauty be, for example, that seven cubit tall slave girl of great beauty who was sent as a gift to the Sasanian monarch Khusraw I 'of the immortal soul', Anūshirwān (531-79), by a king of India?¹⁴ But that would make this the only painting in the hall that has nothing whatever to do with the Arab world. It seems too whimsically chosen a theme - and certainly not recognisable at a glance - for a context where everything else relates so closely to the life of an Umayyad prince.

Perhaps, in that case, the bathing beauty is one of the patron's favourite singers or dancers?¹⁵ There is, though, no shortage of such women in the hall, and the others want to get on in the world by performing and pleasing. By contrast, the subject of our fresco benefits from a striking backdrop and an attentive audience, yet shows no disposition to entertain, whether with dance

11. Necklaces were part of the well-off male's wardrobe: *Taq-i B.* 4.109 fig. 44; *Iṣf.* 7.70 (al-Walīd b. Yazīd); and cf. *Hisnām* o. al-Kalbī in *Ṭab.* 1.754-55 (tr. 4.136-37) on 'Amr b. 'Adī, the first Lakhmid king of al-Ḥīra and the first Arab man to wear a necklace.

12. Cf. M.-O. Jentel, *L.I.M.C.* 2(1).159 no. 111.

13. M.-O. Jentel, *L.I.M.C.* 2(1).165 no. 244, 2(2).169.

14. *Mas.* 623 (1.293 *Dāghir*); cf. Grabar, *A.O.* 1 (1954) 187 n.17.

15. Grabar, *Formation* 154-55.

or song.¹⁶ She seems oddly aloof, given that, so far as one can tell, her only reason for being here is to show off the charms of her almost naked body. There is something awkward about the scene; while the impression one has that the onlookers in the gallery to the left are all women, and only the solitary and perhaps somewhat furtive observer at the right is a man, gives the male visitor to Qūṣayr 'Amra a sense of being a voyeur, of looking in on something not intended for him. Could it be that this woman is not a slave entertainer, but free, or else a free woman reduced suddenly to captivity and now displayed at the conqueror's court?

As has already been pointed out, in May 743 al-Walīd made a serious break with precedent by proclaiming as his heir a son, al-Ḥakam, who had been born to a concubine rather than a legal wife.¹⁷ It will be suggested in a forthcoming publication that the patron of Qūṣayr 'Amra is here forestalling or replying to criticism of that decision by his cousin Yazīd b. al-Walīd, who was also the son of a concubine.¹⁸ That fact did not, though, stop Yazīd from revolting against al-Walīd or from becoming, very briefly, his successor as Yazīd III. His mother was Shāh-i Āfrīd, grand-daughter of the last Sasanian monarch Yazdagird III (632-51). She had been taken prisoner by the Arab general Qutayba b. Muslim during a campaign near Samarqand, and presented to the Caliph al-Walīd I (705-15) in Damascus.¹⁹ Arguably this is the scene here depicted, less incongruously than at first sight appears, right next to the painting of the six kings, among them Kisrā.

What is of interest in the present context, though, is the way in which a purely Greek iconographical model has been adopted, without significant alteration, in order (it is suggested) to convey a political message aimed exclusively at the Umayyad elite - and quite probably at one particular member of it. The message itself is plain enough - that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. But there is also an implicit call for tolerance, in a situation where a multiplication of foreign prisoners of war, and therefore of concubines, had already diluted the purity of the Arabs' blood, if not of their

16. Her left arm is in the same position as that of the dancer on the south soffit of the hall's west arch (fig. 15). But otherwise her body is static.

17. Ṭab. 2.1755-64 (tr. 26.104-15), 1891 (tr. 27.3); Işf. 7.83-84.

18. On the general reaction to al-Walīd's move, see al-Madā'inī in Bal. 2. fols 163b-164a = pp. 326-27 (46 Derenk); Ṭab. 2. 1776-77, 1827 (tr. 26.128, 185); and Işf. 7.82. Yazīd is not specifically mentioned in this context, but was among al-Walīd's leading opponents: Ṭab. 2.1777 (tr. 26.128-29).

19. Ṭab. 2.1246-47 (tr. 23.195), 1874 (tr. 26.243); Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 209.

patrilineal genealogies.²⁰ Hence a certain grace in the reproof's delivery: Shāh-i Āfrīd is depicted at a moment of exposure and humiliation, but also of triumph through the beauty of her body. In this way the scene harmonizes with Quşayr 'Amra's many other paintings of female grace and beauty. It does not, though, offer us any proof that either Quşayr 'Amra's patron, or the artisans he employed, were aware of who this Greek goddess was, whose image they had appropriated. Strictly speaking, it does not even prove they knew her name. All we can deduce, without fear of contradiction, is that they found her image ideal for their particular purpose.

Is it then possible, elsewhere at Quşayr 'Amra, to locate an image that demonstrates knowledge of the *context* of Greek mythology? In the apodyterium there is a painting that at least goes beyond the one just discussed, in that instead of merely incorporating a single figure from mythology into a new composition, it apparently takes a whole scene from one of the Greek myths, and reproduces it *in toto* without remodelling. The fresco in question adorns the lunette over the door that leads from the apodyterium into the hall (fig. 24).²¹ Apparently in the context of a hilly landscape, it depicts a pensive young man - we see only his naked torso - resting head on hand in the upper left part of the composition, while contemplating what can best be compared to a large open sleeping bag - Musil believed it was a shrouded corpse,²² while the Dominicans Jaussen and Savignac, who investigated Quşayr 'Amra shortly after Musil, thought they saw two bodies lying side by side.²³ In fact, it must depict a single person reclining on a mattress, as is clear if one compares it with the Dream of Joseph (Mary's spouse) on a mid-sixth-century ivory panel on Archbishop Maximian's *cathedra* at Ravenna.²⁴ A small, naked, winged Eros²⁵ hovers in the upper central area of the lunette and gestures towards the young man.

In art of the Roman period, representations of Eros were quite often deployed in funerary contexts;²⁶ and a funerary interpretation of this image can be made to cohere satisfyingly with other paintings in the apodyterium:

20. Abbott, *Studies* 3.70-71.

21. Cf. Jaussen and Savignac 3. pl. XLV; Q. 'A. pl. XLIIIa; Winkler-Horacek, *Da.M.* 10 (1998) pl. 73a.

22. Musil, *Kusejr 'amra und andere Schlösser* 39.

23. Jaussen and Savignac 3.91.

24. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* pl. 74 no. 140.

25. C. Augé and P. Linant de Bellefonds, *L.I.M.C.* 3(1).948 no. 90.

26. Hermary, *L.I.M.C.* 3(1).929-31, 938-39.

the youth, pregnant woman and baby in the lunette opposite, if that is what they are,²⁷ and the three busts that form a line linking these two paintings across the middle of the vault, and have been thought to represent the three ages of man: youth at the east end, maturity in the middle, and old age at the west end (fig. 16).²⁸ If we put all five paintings - thus interpreted - together, they make a neat sequence, the three ages parenthesized by birth on the east wall and death on the west. It would be a mistake to assume that this is an inappropriate theme, just because bath house decorations tended to strike a joyous - or at least active rather than reflective - note. Baths are for the care of the body, and each body has its own history, never more obviously than when unclothed as were all those that passed through this room.

Latterly, though, a different interpretation of the painting over the door has tended to prevail. All the apodyterium paintings are redolent - markedly so even by Quşayr 'Amra's standards - of the art of the late antique Mediterranean;²⁹ and the tympanum fresco has been seen as alluding to a specific episode in Greek myth, namely Dionysus's discovery of Ariadne, abandoned sleeping on a Naxian strand by the faithless Theseus.³⁰ Dionysus immediately bears her off and marries her. This story, together with the whole Dionysiac cycle, had been enormously popular - and, what is more, well understood - in the art of pre-Islamic Syria, until at least the latter part of the sixth century.³¹ The Arab invaders will certainly have encountered numerous depictions of it in mosaic (fig. 25) and fresco and more portable forms. Of its visual familiarity there need be no doubt.

It takes, though, a faithful eye to discern the outline of Ariadne's body amidst the elongated drapes that occupy the bottom half of the Quşayr 'Amra panel. Nor does the contemplative youth look much like Dionysus. On the other hand, the traditional iconography does usually show Ariadne naked (sometimes in rear rather than frontal view) amidst an abundance of

27. See above, 82.

28. Cf. Q. 'A. pls XXXIX, XLa. Vibert-Guigue diss. 2.27 is doubtful about the three ages, but himself proposes, 2.328-30, an interpretation of the apodyterium, tepidarium and caldarium frescoes that adds up to much the same thing (couple with Eros in apodyterium lunette: fertility; bathing scenes in tepidarium: infancy; zodiac in caldarium: adulthood).

29. R. Hillenbrand, *K.Is.* 162-63; Farioli Campanati, *XXXIX corso di cultura sull' arte ravennate e bizantina* 292-94, on the lozenge-shaped decorative compartments of the vault (but also Kröger 82-83, for an Iranian parallel).

30. Winkler-Horacek, *Da.M.* 10 (1998).

31. C. Augé and P. Linant de Bellefonds, *L.I.M.C.* 3(1).514-31, esp. 524-26; Piccirillo 69, 76-77 (Mādabā, sixth century); Balty, *Mosaïques* 262.

drapery; Eros looks exactly like the Eros who is always part of this scene; and the general disposition of the figures conforms well to what one expects of 'Dionysus discovering Ariadne' (fig. 25).³² So it is not hard to agree that the iconographical type was present in the artist's mind as he worked. The question is what he, or his patron, understood by it.³³

Such questions are not easily answered on the basis of purely iconographic materials. Unless the artist adds a text to his work, or is operating within a strict text-bound tradition such as that of Eastern Christian icon painting, one can only in the end speculate about the way in which he hoped his image would be interpreted. In other words, we may argue that that really is 'Dionysus discovering Ariadne' on the wall at Quşayr 'Amra, only if we first demonstrate on the basis of separate, explicit and preferably therefore literary evidence, that the people who created Quşayr 'Amra were familiar with these myths.

In the mid-1960s, Mario Grignaschi drew attention to an Arabic version of a series of letters presumably composed originally in Greek and supposed to have been exchanged by Alexander the Great and his teacher Aristotle.³⁴ Grignaschi argued that the original Greek text was probably compiled in the mid-sixth century, while the Arab editor was Sālim Abū 'l-'Alā', one of the Caliph Hishām's secretaries and most intimate collaborators at al-Ruṣāfa, where this ruler resided on a permanent basis.³⁵ Sālim was a *mawlā* (an

32. Cf. Reinach, *Répertoire* 112-13; W.A. Daszewski, *L.I.M.C.* 3(1).1060 no. 97 (rear view); Winkler-Horacek, *Da.M.* 10 (1998) pl. 74; Loberdou-Tsigarida, *Οστείνα πλακίδια* 255 no. 38.

33. Cf. on a similar problem that exists in the study of artistic consciousness even at Constantinople itself, in the eighth century and later, Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire* 133: 'si le sens des oeuvres - je veux dire l'identification de leur modèle - intéresse désormais assez peu, leur forme fascine...'. Many centuries before, this had been the more general fate of Greek artistic motifs as they travelled eastwards into Asia. 'It is the visual image that is borrowed, not the concept': Boardman, *Classical art* 14 and *passim* (reference courtesy of Robin Lane Fox). Bowersock, *Selected papers* 154-55, makes a similar suggestion with regard to a Syrian mosaic of Romulus, Remus and the she-wolf, dated 511.

34. Grignaschi, *Bulletin d'études orientales* 19 (1965-66); *id.*, *Le muséeon* 80 (1967); *id.*, *Problematics of power*; cf. Latham, *A.L.U.P.* 154-64.

35. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist* 131 (tr. Dodge 257-58); and cf. al-Madā'inī in Ṭab. 2.1649 (tr. 25.179), 1729-31 (tr. 26.71-74), and 'Abbās, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 28-32. Manzalaoui, *Oriens* 23-24 (1974) 156-57, 162-64, 192, 193, 218, 241, questions some of the arguments in favour of a pre-Abbasid date for the Arabic version of the letters, but in the end allows that Grignaschi's theory may not be so improbable.

Arab's non-Arab client, usually but not necessarily a Muslim;³⁶ pl. *mawālī*), and (if we provisionally accept Grignaschi's theory) quite possibly of Iranian origin, since the editor of our text is exceptionally well informed about matters Sasanian. Adopting for himself the persona of Aristotle, Sālim's intention is evidently to convey tactful advice on government and warfare to his master Hishām/Alexander. (The correspondence's detailed references to Central Asian campaigns are among the stronger arguments for assigning the work to the reign of Hishām, when such matters were uppermost in the mind of the Umayyad elite.) Besides the basic framework of the Alexander story, the letters and connecting text allude frequently to ancient Greek literature, and quote by name from such as Homer - in fact, pseudo-Homer - and Euripides. Grignaschi also pointed out that Sālim understood enough Greek mythology to be able to substitute references to the Sibyl and the Tower of Babel in passages where his original alluded, respectively, to the Delphic oracle or the story of the Aloadae, who sought to reach heaven by piling mountain on mountain.³⁷

Sālim evidently did not expect his readers to be as informed about things Greek as he was. But even if we assume that what we have in this - apparently - rather early specimen of Arabic prose represents the sum total of his Greek erudition, and that among the late Umayyad secretaries - anyway a very small group³⁸ - nobody else shared his tastes, still we now have a figure who will certainly have been acquainted with al-Walīd b. Yazīd when he was residing at al-Ruṣāfa before his break with Hishām in the later 730s, and is known to have been responsible for writing the letter that apprised al-Walīd of Hishām's death and his own succession.³⁹ He plainly was also capable of translating a Greek literary text, and adapting it with intelligence and sensitivity. If Iḥsān 'Abbās is right to suppose that the mysterious 'Samāl' identified by al-Ṭabarī as the author of the letter by which al-Walīd bestowed the right of succession on al-Hakam was in fact Sālim,⁴⁰ then

36. Crone, *Slaves on horses* 49, esp. n. 358.

37. Grignaschi, *Bulletin d'études orientales* 19 (1965-66) 47-48.

38. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh* 323 (tr. Carra de Vaux 417); Blankinship, *Jihād state* 81.

39. I follow 'Abbās, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 30, in assuming that the Sālim b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān referred to by al-Madā'inī in Bal. 2. fol. 716b, 717a (4, §5 and 8, §11 'Athāmina) and Ṭab. 2.1750 (tr. 26.99) is the same as Sālim Abū 'l-'Alā'. Note also that, while Bal. §5 calls him a *mawlā* of Sa'īd b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, al-Madā'inī in Ṭab. 2.1649 (tr. 25.179) gives his patron's name as 'Anbasa b. 'Abd al-Malik. It is clear from the context of these two passages, though, that we are dealing with one and the same person.

40. See Ṭab. 2.1764 (tr. 26.115), and the note on p. 311 of 'Abbās, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd.

Hishām's secretary apparently worked for al-Walīd as well,⁴¹ and may therefore have known Quṣayr 'Amra at first hand, and even been actively involved in the latter phases of its design.⁴² It will not have been beyond the capacity of such a man to inspire al-Walīd with an interest in the story of Dionysus, of all Greek divinities the most congenial to the young *amīr*'s personal inclinations, and in particular to his love of wine. Indeed, the legend of Dionysus has left a distinct imprint on the *Letters of Aristotle to Alexander*.⁴³

Nor was Sālim's interest in things Greek by any means unique in the environment of the last Umayyads. Another *habitué* of the court at al-Ruṣāfa, and a benevolent influence on the relationship between the caliph and his crown prince, was Hishām's half-brother Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik. He was sufficiently inspired by stories of Alexander's travels to take time off from his campaigns and try to visit the famous Cave of Darkness that the conqueror alone had penetrated, at the sources of the Tigris River.⁴⁴ It seems that the Greek *Romance of Alexander* by pseudo-Callisthenes may already have been translated into Arabic by this time.⁴⁵ Another, even more tantalizing figure is al-Ghiṭrīf b. Qudāma al-Ghassānī, who served as master of the hunt to both Hishām and al-Walīd, and drew extensively on Greek sources in his influential *Book on birds of prey*.⁴⁶ Like Sālim, al-Ghiṭrīf is exactly the sort of person one can imagine accompanying al-Walīd on his expeditions to Quṣayr 'Amra.

Not - it should be underlined - that a scholarly knowledge of ancient Greece, such as Sālim's, was *necessary* for either the design or the appreciation of Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes. The foregoing observations are intended

41. Note that the interpolated list of caliphal secretaries at Ṭab. 2.835-43 (tr. 21.213-23) declares baldly that Sālim was al-Walīd's secretary, not Hishām's (838). Al-Jahshiyārī (a younger contemporary of al-Ṭabarī), *Kitāb al-wuzarā'* 59, 65, states that Sālim was secretary to both Hishām and al-Walīd.

42. According to al-Madā'inī in Ṭab. 2.1649 (tr. 25.179), Sālim's deputy, Bashīr b. Abī Thalja, was from Jordan.

43. Grignaschi, *Bulletin d'études orientales* 19 (1965-66) 40-41, 69-72.

44. Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥṣan al-taqāsīm* 20, 136, 146. On the location of the Birkleyn caves between Diyarbakir and Bingöl, and their association with Alexander, see further Markwart, *Südarmerien* 57-60, 232-39; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey* 3.274-77, 282, with map facing 406; Bagg, *Assyrische Wasserbauten* 112-16.

45. Abbott, *Studies* 1.50-56; Grignaschi, *Le muséeon* 80 (1967) 224.

46. Al-Ghiṭrīf b. Qudāma al-Ghassānī, *Kitāb dawārī al-ṭayr*, esp. p. 2; and cf. Möller, *Falknereliteratur* 29-36, on the extremely complex textual history of this work.

merely to indicate the maximum involvement attested, in these circles, by the available evidence. In practice, somebody with al-Walīd's education and opportunities - or even a good deal less - could have become sufficiently familiar with the forms of Greek art just by keeping his eyes open,⁴⁷ and with the main Greek myths through conversation with the educated *mawālī* of Greek origin who abounded at the Umayyad court, to be able to appreciate superficially the allusions contained in the Qūṣayr 'Amra frescoes. Failing even that, a painting depicting a virile young man discovering a half-naked young woman in a lonely spot will still have had its own charm and suggestiveness, not unlike that of the story of 'Unayza and her companions at the watering hole, evoked in Chapter 3 in connection with the naked bathers in the tepidarium, right next to the apodyterium.⁴⁸ It does, though, seem quite likely that Qūṣayr 'Amra's patron and some of his friends would indeed have been able to recognise and even understand a Greek zodiac when they saw one,⁴⁹ and likewise an allusion to a romantic story from Greek mythology.

Philosophy

Sālim, Maslama and al-Ghiṭrīf are suggestive figures whose presence at the late Umayyad court indicates the existence if not exactly of a Hellenizing coterie, then at least of a permeability to Greek culture on the part of individual members of the elite. The personifications of Philosophy, History

47. Proof that specific monuments of the polytheist past remained visible to the Umayyads is rarely available. See though below, 123, and the recently excavated Nabatean temple at Khirbat al-Dharīḥ southeast of the Dead Sea, that served as a barn under the Umayyads until it collapsed in an earthquake. Falling architectural reliefs of the old gods crushed several cows, to which soft landing they doubtless owe their excellent state of preservation: Egan and Bikai, *American journal of archaeology* 103 (1999) 502-05, including figs 14-16.

48. These bathers have also been suspected of Dionysiac allusion, though with less plausibility than the apodyterium tympanum: Winkler-Horacek, *Da.M.* 10 (1998) 276-83. Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.273-80 detects allusion to the myth of Achilles on Scyros in various panels of the hall's west aisle, notably the dynastic icon and the bathing beauty, and indeed regards Greek mythology as a 'fil conducteur' for understanding Qūṣayr 'Amra's many references to nature, femininity and fertility: 2.246, 288, 317-19, 323. Even in the light of Grignaschi's work, this seems exaggerated for the period and audience in question.

49. Their practical familiarity with the night sky was of course a given. Cf. the poem by al-Walīd's friend 'Abd al-Ṣamad quoted by Ṭab. 2.1744 (tr. 26.92).

and Poetry, all labelled in Greek - whose presence in Quṣayr 'Amra's hall has already been noted in passing - seem to point in the same direction. Surely here, at least, somebody is laying explicit claim to a smattering - or more - of the elite culture of pre-Islamic Syria?

The three figures in question are to be found high up on the southern end wall of the east aisle immediately under the barrel vault and on either side of the window (fig. 26).⁵⁰ They are in a standing position, barefoot and bare-headed but clad in flowing robes. They resemble the personifications one finds in mosaics of the Roman period, such as the early fourth-century floor from al-Shahbā' in the Hawrān representing Philosophy, Maternity and Justice, now in the Damascus Museum.⁵¹ As in this mosaic, so too in our fresco, each figure - presumably female, like most personifications - is labelled in Greek. In blueish-white letters on a blue ground we read, from left to right, ΚΕΨΗ, ΙCΤΟΠΙΑ and ΠΟΙΗC(H),⁵² in other words, Inquiry or Philosophy, History and Poetry.

As it happens, *Skepsis* is not at all part of the standard repertoire of personifications in late antique art,⁵³ which gives one to think that this is indeed no casual assemblage of off-the-peg figures. Some care may have gone into the choice of these particular disciplines for representation. One recalls too that al-Walīd b. Yazīd was not only an accomplished poet, but also an avid collector of the historical traditions and genealogies of the Arabs.⁵⁴ Yet that very thought raises again the awkward question of form versus content. Should even labels in Greek, let alone unlabelled Greek iconographical types, necessarily be taken to denote Greek concepts? Or

50. K. 'A. 2. pl. XXIX; Vibert-Guigue, *D.A.* 244 (1999) 94.

51. *L.I.M.C.* 3(2).278.

52. Cf. Mielich, *K. 'A.* 1.199a (on the 'E' of ΚΕΨΗ, which is now barely if at all recognisable according to C. Vibert-Guigue, letter of 2 April 2000); Jaussen and Savignac 3. pl. LV.6-7; Q. 'A. 63-64; Grabar, *A.O.* 23 (1993) 106 fig. 11; Vibert-Guigue diss. 3. pl. 166. Bowersock's preference, *Selected papers* 152-53, for the rare form ΚΕΨ (i.e. σκοπός/ή) seems arbitrary in view of the coherence of these three intellectual personifications, not to mention the presence of an 'H' at the end of the word. I propose ΠΟΙΗC(H) not ΠΟΙΗC(IC), by analogy with ΚΕΨΗ. The assimilation of third declension types ending in -ις to the first declension in -η had begun many centuries before this: Niehoff-Panagiotidis, *Koine und Diglossie* 74-75, and cf. Mitchell, *Anatolian studies* 27 (1977) 92-96. (I am obliged to J. Niehoff-Panagiotidis and A. Panagiotou for help with this point.) Pace Becker, *Islamstudien* 1.292, there is no sign of or room for a sigma at the end of ΚΕΨΗ.

53. J.C. Balty, *L.I.M.C.* 7(1).791.

54. See above, 40.

rather, allowing the intrinsic probability that the artist who painted a Greek word on a wall will have had some inkling of its meaning, can we be sure that the patron too, and his friends, understood the concept denoted? - assuming they were in a position to read the word itself. The genealogies of the Arabs, or their odes, are after all one thing, and the works of a Procopius or a Nonnus quite another.

Sālim and the others discourage, on the other hand, undue scepticism. As regards History, in particular, the six kings fresco reveals a cosmopolitan field of cultural and political reference, with both formal and substantial references to East Rome. And even the Poetry of the Greeks appears to have been in some degree part of Sālim's cultural baggage, though at Quṣayr 'Amra it is to Arabic poetry that one instinctively resorts. But strangely enough, it is Philosophy that turns out to be most relevant to the culture of the bath.

Although the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic hardly got under way until the ninth century, the same Sālim Abū 'l-'Alā' we have just encountered as a possible transmitter of Greek mythological themes to the Umayyad court also reveals in his *Letters of Aristotle to Alexander* some knowledge of Hermetic philosophy. When this was first realised, in the 1960s, the early date came as something of a surprise;⁵⁵ but the student of Quṣayr 'Amra has every right to see this discovery as no more than confirmation of what his monument had already announced to the world some 60 years before Grignaschi published his researches. What exactly was it, though, that the Arabs saw as Greek philosophy's contribution to the art of bathing?

In order to answer this question, we have to resort to the writings of the physician and philosopher Muḥammad b. Zakarīyā' al-Rāzī, who was deeply immersed in Greek learning and died in the second quarter of the tenth century. Al-Rāzī was concerned to show that the bath caters to the mind quite as much as to the body. Quṣayr 'Amra had by this time long since fallen into oblivion. But what al-Rāzī has to say about the decoration of bath houses reassures us that the tradition out of which Quṣayr 'Amra had grown remained vigorous:

When beautiful pictures also contain, apart from their subject, beautiful, pleasant colours - yellow, red, green and white - and the forms are repro-

55. Grignaschi, *Bulletin d'études orientales* 19 (1965-66) 48-52; id., *Le muséeon* 80 (1967) 249-52. Cf. also Gutas, *Greek thought, Arabic culture* 109.

duced in exactly the right proportions, they heal melancholy humours and remove the worries to which the human soul is prone, as well as gloom of spirits. For the mind is refined and ennobled by contemplation of such pictures. The gloom in which it finds itself dissolves. He [al-Rāzī] said also: Consider only how the philosophers (*al-ḥukamā'*) of old who, in the course of many years, invented the bath realised, thanks to their subtle mind and sound intellect, that a considerable part of the powers of a man who enters a bath relaxes. Their wisdom enabled them to discover through their intelligence how this can be accomplished swiftly, and they therefore had artistically made pictures, with beautiful, pleasing colours, painted in the baths. In addition, they were not content with a single subject but undertook a division into three, since they knew that the body possesses three sorts of spirits, animal, psychological and physical. Hence they arranged that each subject of a painting should serve to strengthen and increase one of the above-mentioned powers. For the animal power they have depicted battles, fights, hunts on horseback and the chase of beasts. For the psychological power they have depicted love, themes of lovers and beloved, how they accuse one another or embrace, and other scenes of this sort. And for physical power they have depicted gardens, trees pleasant to look at, a mass of flowers in charming colours. Such and similar pictures belong to first-class baths. If one asks a discerning painter why painters use only these three subjects for the painting of baths, he cannot give a reason for this; he would not remember those three qualities (of the mind) as the reason. This is due to the fact that the earliest beginnings lie so far back, and hence the cause is no longer known. (The philosophers) have not omitted anything that is correct, nor introduced anything meaningless.⁵⁶

There could hardly be any stronger argument than this passage for the thematic unity of Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes. It is true that al-Rāzī was a profounder student of Greek philosophy than anyone we know of who lived in the eighth century. Yet his description of the 'ideal' bath corresponds so precisely to what we can still see at Quṣayr 'Amra, that one can hardly doubt the Umayyad patron and his artists were following a paradigm inspired by or originally interpreted in the light of Greek philosophy, even if they themselves were unaware of that paradigm's earlier history.

56. Al-Rāzī, quoted by al-Ghuzūlī, *Maṭāli' al-budūr fī manāzil al-surūr* 2.7-8 (tr. (English) in Rosenthal, *Classical heritage* 266, here slightly emended).

If al-Rāzī was right, and it really was possible for the bath's philosophical dimension to escape the attention even of its own creators, then the student of Quṣayr 'Amra should take this as a warning, and search the paintings yet again for the influence in them not only of Greek thought, but also of the *Qur'ān* and indeed generally of guiding ideas that may not have been made iconographically explicit. Besides 'boundless pleasure', recreation of body and mind, and the purveying of certain cultural and political messages, were there any other major preoccupations that our patron and his artists expressed, consciously or otherwise, through their paintings? One suggestion will be offered here, in guise of conclusion.

Quṣayr 'Amra's paintings must have been completed in A.H. 125-26, corresponding substantially to the years 743-44 of the Christian era and covering the whole of the brief reign of al-Walīd II. They are an unrivalled visual resource for the preoccupations of the Umayyad court milieu at this time, and both complement and are complemented by the later historical accounts, which for all their problems seem to be describing much the same situation. Further material evidence, likewise connected to privileged social milieux, has been coming to light in recent years in the shape of coin hoards hidden in various places in Syria, with terminal issues belonging precisely to those same years A.H. 125-26.⁵⁷ These bear silent but eloquent witness to the collapse of confidence precipitated by the revolt during which al-Walīd was murdered, to be succeeded for a brief six-month by his cousin Yazīd III. Yazīd's succession took place in an atmosphere saturated with recriminations about use of the community's wealth. In a sermon delivered at this time, Yazīd promised not to accumulate wealth (*māl*), and to employ whatever surplus (*faḍl*) there might be in order to succour the needy.⁵⁸

These two words, *māl* and *faḍl*, evoke an already longstanding discussion within Islam, about the proper use of economic resources belonging to Muslims. The *Qur'ān* does not treat possessions as in themselves bad, providing right use be made of them. 'Those who treasure up gold and silver, and do not expend them in the way of God', are promised a painful chastisement;⁵⁹ but that does not mean one should reject contact with wealth as if it were intrinsically evil. Believers are exhorted to 'struggle in the path of God with their possessions (*bi-amwālihim*) and their selves'.⁶⁰ So there

57. Sears, *American journal of numismatics* 12 (2000), esp. 181.

58. Ṭab. 2.1834-35 (tr. 26.194).

59. *Qur'ān* 9.34 (tr. Arberry).

60. *Qur'ān* 4.95, 49.15; also the passages discussed by Donner, *Narratives* 73-74.

was no objection - how could there be, after the conquests? - to accumulation of wealth. What did become controversial was the *use* to which it ought to be put. There seems to have emerged a consensus that any *faḍl* left over after all legitimate private calls on one's *māl* had been met ought to be disposed of in social and charitable works.⁶¹

For example, immediately after the fall of Ctesiphon, booty from Kisrā's palace was shared out, according to Arab custom, by the general Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās, until there remained nothing but one gigantic carpet.

On it were pictures of roads, and inlays like rivers; among them were pictures of houses. The edges looked like cultivated lands planted with spring vegetables, made of silk on stalks of gold. Their blossoms were of gold and silver... The fruits depicted on it were precious stones, its foliage silk and its waters golden.

To sit on this carpet was to enjoy the sensation of being in a garden. Sa'd suggested it be exempted from the division of spoils and despatched to al-Madīna, for the Caliph 'Umar to do with as he saw fit. But 'Alī, the Prophet's cousin, argued that material things are to be *used*, not hoarded - so the carpet was cut up and distributed.⁶²

Not just here, but throughout al-Ṭabarī's lengthy account of the Arab penetration of Sasanian Mesopotamia, this same preoccupation with right use recurs. When al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa were being founded, 'Umar wrote and advised Sa'd not to allow his men to build houses higher than 'the norm'.

"But what is this 'norm'?", they had asked. "The 'norm' ", 'Umar said, "is that which keeps you well away from wastefulness but, at the same time, won't make you lose sight of what you are aiming at,"⁶³

namely securing their position and livelihood in a conquered land.

It was, predictably, under 'Umar's successor that standards were held to have slipped. In the course of a heated debate with, among others, 'Alī himself, the Caliph 'Uthmān was said to have observed:

"There remained a surplus (*faḍl*) of wealth (*māl*), so why should I not do as I wish with the surplus? Why otherwise did I become imām?"⁶⁴

In similar vein, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty:

61. Bravmann, *Spiritual background* 229-53.

62. Sayf b. 'Umar in Ṭab. 1.2451-54 (tr. 13.31-34 G.H.A. Juynboll). This is but one of many such edifying stories about luxury articles: Raven, *Journal of Semitic studies* 33 (1988) 214-16.

63. Sayf b. 'Umar in Ṭab. 1.2488 (tr. 13.68 Juynboll).

64. Ṭab. 1.2940 (tr. 15.144 R.S. Humphreys, slightly adjusted).

“The earth belongs to God, and I am God’s caliph. Whatever I take from it is mine, and what I leave for the people is a gift from me.”⁶⁵

In other words, there was a feeling growing among some of those who stood to profit by such an arrangement, that the caliph ought to be allowed full discretion in disposing of the community’s *faḍl*. There were various justifications that might be offered to disguise what at least in part was naked greed. The dynasty needed to be wealthy and prestigious, for the sake of the caliphal office. And anyway, what higher authority was to distinguish dynasty from caliphate? One can see how the accusation of *mulk* grew in part out of a perception that the *faḍl* element in the Umayyads’ wealth was more and more treated by them as their gift not God’s, and therefore as redounding to their credit and strengthening their claim to absolute authority. Even such pious investments as ‘Abd al-Malik’s Dome of the Rock or al-Walīd’s Damascus mosque advertised the prestige of the dynasty as well.

Mu‘āwīya’s supposed attitude, held to have been anticipated by ‘Uthmān and by those who entrusted Kisrā’s carpet to ‘Umar’s discretion, was allowed to set the tone for the rest of the Umayyad dynasty. Already Mu‘āwīya was said to have himself pointed out the contrast between his own ‘wallowing’ in the goods of this world, and the rejection of them by his predecessors Abū Bakr and ‘Umar.⁶⁶ A poetess from ‘Alī’s camp ruefully pictured Mu‘āwīya and his cronies lording it at al-Khawarnaq,⁶⁷ anticipating his successors’ growing attachment to their country residences. By the time we get to Quṣayr ‘Amra it is clear that Abundance and Dynasty are felt to be complementary concepts - there is no longer anything shameful in that. Quṣayr ‘Amra is indeed a veritable icon of Abundance. Of this theme the prince triumphantly enthroned with an aquatic scene beneath his footstool and flanked on the alcove’s side walls by figures reminiscent of personifications of Earth or holding aloft a horn of plenty, or the six kings who stand for the empires of old that had yielded up so much wealth to the Arabs, or the splendid hall in which Shāh-i Āfrīd is displayed, or the voluptuous bathers with their children, are no less illustrative than the hunting scenes with their promise of succulent meat, or the noble date palms and other trees, the

65. Al-Wāqidī in Bal. 1. fol. 349b = p. 698 (20, §63 ‘Abbās) (tr. Pinto and Levi della Vida 10-11, §20).

66. Ṭab. 2.211-12 (tr. 18.222), a tendentious anecdote attributed to one of Mu‘āwīya’s lieutenants.

67. Hind bt Zayd b. Makhrama al-Anṣārī in Ṭab. 2.146 (tr. 18.154-55).

basket full of freshly plucked grapes, or the fishes of the sea.⁶⁸ Nor is it hard to translate this artistic language into the prosaic terminology of the economic historian, who evokes - and documents from archaeological evidence - the Umayyads' infrastructural projects, their encouragement of a market economy, their monetary and administrative reforms.⁶⁹

The atmosphere changed so radically in the round century that elapsed after the death of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, that one wonders whether some external influence had intensified the natural instincts so obviously at work. Abundance had been one of the great themes of pre-Islamic Syrian art.⁷⁰ And there was a related nexus of ideas - creation (*ktisis*), acquisition or possession (*ktēsis*) and use (*chrēsis*) - so often evoked by Greek thinkers that it had become commonplace,⁷¹ and so frequently alluded to in inscriptions applied to works of art or utility⁷² that by the sixth century it was thoroughly banal. Mosaic floors both in Syria and elsewhere routinely included representations of these personifications, usually identified by Greek labels.⁷³ And when Procopius reports how the Lakhmid prince al-Mundhir (505-54) encouraged the Sasanian emperor Kawādh I (488-531) to attack Antioch because of its inhabitants' addiction to *tryphē*,⁷⁴ that luxury for which they and the Syrians generally were notorious⁷⁵ and which they commonly personified in their mosaics,⁷⁶ it is hard not to wonder about the Muslim Arabs' reaction to these same images when, just a century later, they entered the cities of Syria, having quite possibly never seen such a thing as a bath house in their life before.⁷⁷ Or, *a fortiori*, two hundred years later, at the apogee of Umayyad

68. For the last three themes see K. 'A. pl. 28; Q. 'A. pls 9, 12, 26.

69. E.g. Walmsley, *Long eighth century* 290, 342-43.

70. Kiillerich, *Kairos*.

71. See e.g. *Corpus Hermeticum* 9.5 (creation - use); Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.11.62 (creation - use - enjoyment, on which see below); various earlier references in the Greek lexicon of Liddell, Scott, and Jones; and cf. Gnlika, *XPHΣΙΣ*.

72. Bull. épigr. (1972) no. 264; Dunbabin, *Papers of The British School at Rome* 57 (1989) 19; M.M. Mango, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995) 267 (inscriptions on bath buckets).

73. See e.g. Levi, *Antioch mosaic pavements* 1.278-79, 2. pl. LXIVa (personification of *Chrēsis*, probably accompanied by *Ktisis*); also 254-56 for the more general philosophical atmosphere of certain Antiochene mosaics; Maguire, *Earth and ocean* 48-55 (*Ktisis*).

74. Procopius, *De bellis* 1.17.37.

75. Julian, *Contra Galilaeos* fr. 21.116A; Damascius, *Vita Isidori* fr. 222.

76. Levi, *Antioch mosaic pavements* 1.206, 2. pl. XLVIe.

77. Lewcock, al-Akwa' and Serjeant, *Ṣan 'ā'* 501-04; and cf. Goldziher, *Introduction* 43 n. 27; also Sayf b. 'Umar in Ṭab. 1.2451 (tr. 13.31, with note ad loc.), and Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl*

mulk. They must surely have seen in these luxurious and elegant displays of wealth - indeed, of wealth personified and elevated into a semidivine sphere - a potent encouragement to their own acquisitiveness, an example of unashamed opulence set by a materially superior civilisation which they had admired and envied, and now controlled.

The thematic abundance of Quṣayr 'Amra's paintings, which some have read as a sign of artistic immaturity, may then be in part a meditation on precisely this cultural encounter and economic conjuncture, a deliberate reflection of the abundance of the Arabs' inheritance and an affirmation of their right as humans, but also as conquerors, to make use (*chrēsis*) of it and to derive therefrom enjoyment (*apolausis*) - another common theme in the late antique mosaics of Syria.⁷⁸

Allāh 733 (Wüstenfeld)/3.327 (al-Saqqā), on the lack of privies in pre-Islamic Arabian houses. But Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 188-89, alleges that al-Baṣra possessed bath houses from its very foundation.

78. Levi, *Antioch mosaic pavements* 1.305-06, 2. pl. LXVIIId (personification of *Apolausis*, in a bath house); Dunbabin, *Papers of The British School at Rome* 57 (1989) 13-14, 19-20; Raeck, *Patron and pavements*, on the relation in late antique art between the themes of *chrēsis*, *apolausis* and hunting.

5.

BARBARIANS IN THE BATH

It is time now to make a more direct approach to a question that has often been implicit in the previous pages: how does Qusayr 'Amra fit into the wider mid-eighth-century cultural landscape? We have said, for example, a lot about the single, remarkable individual who was its patron; but he could not realise the vision he nourished without the help of artisans, who brought along their own cultural baggage. Where did these workers come from? What was their part, and that of the patron, in the definition of the Umayyad cultural persona that we see under construction not only at Qusayr 'Amra but also in the numerous other princely residences that have survived in Syria, especially in the steppe and desert regions where there has been little or no subsequent building to destroy their traces? In what terms can that cultural persona best be characterized? And does it fit into our more general picture of how barbarian invaders were absorbed into the Mediterranean world in late antiquity?

We may begin, though, with the opening Qusayr 'Amra itself offers onto this wider scene, namely the Greek as well as Arabic labels on its frescoes. We have already encountered them individually, each in its own particular context. But Arabic was the language of the patron and his guests. Why then were some of the frescoes labelled in Greek as well, or even exclusively?

Greek and Arabic

The appeal of Greek was felt by a much more specialised audience at the end of Umayyad rule than had been the case in the time of Mu'āwiya, when it must still have been widely spoken in Syria. We can best measure the distance travelled under the Umayyad dynasty by comparing Qusayr 'Amra, where Greek is used sparingly and only for labels, while all texts that require continuous prose are in Arabic, with the al-Ḥamma bath house already described at the beginning of Chapter 1, with its monumental and carefully

cut nine-line Greek inscription informing us that the bath was thoroughly restored in the year 662. The apparent absence of a parallel version in Arabic is notable.

Between the restoration of the al-Ḥamma bath house and the decoration of Quṣayr 'Amra, one would indeed expect the consolidation of Arab rule and the spread of Islam to have resulted in a decline in use of the Greek language in Syria. And this does indeed appear to have been the case, so far as one can tell from the relatively few inscriptions and papyri that have been retrieved from patchy archaeological investigations. Tombs are subject to fashion like anything else; and for reasons unclear, the latest more or less securely datable Greek funerary inscriptions so far found in Syria belong to the decade after Mu'āwiya's death. At about the same time was drawn up the latest dated Greek document in the cache of papyri that was found at Nessana in the Negev.¹ Nevertheless, we also find workers employed on the construction of Khirbat al-Mafjar casually writing messages and documents on discarded fragments of marble as late as the reign of Hishām, in Greek as well as Arabic.² Workmen left Greek graffiti on the old wooden ceiling of the al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem, whose much disputed date lies somewhere between 'Abd al-Malik or al-Walīd I and c. 780, but is most probably Umayyad.³ Greek letters were commonly employed as masons' marks.⁴ And lamps continued to be produced with Greek (Christian) inscriptions at the same time as lamps with Arabic (Muslim) inscriptions were making their appearance. One remarkable specimen from Jordan proclaims 'The light of Christ is the resurrection' in Greek round its filling hole and nozzle, and on its base, in Arabic, 'In the name of Allāh, the gracious, the merciful'.⁵ Other lamps adorned with mostly unintelligible assemblages of Greek letters are particularly hard to date, though some seem pre-Islamic and one has an inscription saying it was made in A.H. 211 (A.D. 826-27).⁶ Further afield,

1. Gatier, *S.Byz.Is.* 146-47, 152.

2. Schwabe, *Q.D.A.P.* 12 (1946); Gatier, *S.Byz.Is.* 151 n. 3. For fragments of marble with Greek lettering found at Quṣayr 'Amra, see above, 29 n. 10; but these are probably of earlier date.

3. Hamilton, *Structural history* 92-95; Hillenbrand, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 273-77.

4. Monneret de Villard, *Introduzione* 310 (Mushattā, Khirbat al-Mafjar). Each of the disks that compose the hypocaust pillars in the bath house of the *qaṣr* at al-Faddayn near Mafraq bears a Greek letter: Vibert-Guigue diss. 2.149-50.

5. Khairy and 'Amr, *Levant* 18 (1986), esp. 152 no. 15.

6. C.A. Kennedy, *Berytus* 14 (1961-63) 85-86; Wilson and Sa'd, *Berytus* 32 (1984) 63, 87 fig. 18; Khairy and 'Amr, *Levant* 18 (1986) 150 no. 12.

Ernst Herzfeld found masons' marks in Greek, along with graffiti and sketches for architectural decoration in the Greek manner, while excavating in al-Jawsaq al-Khāqānī (the Khāqānī Palace) at Sāmarrā', which was started in 836.⁷

Usually, our evidence can be made to tell us no more than that somebody, somewhere could use Greek either more or less effectively, at a time that may be specified but usually is not. A remarkable bilingual fragment of Psalm 78 does, though, allow us to witness the *process* of Greek's supplanting. The piece of parchment in question was discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century in the treasury of the Great Mosque in Damascus, but must originally have been designed for use in the city's cathedral or some other church. Both the Greek and the Arabic texts are written in Greek characters, and the system of transliteration from Arabic to Greek is deliberate and, presumably, revealing of the pronunciation of Damascus Arabic at that time. This document belongs to a period when previously Hellenophone Christians were starting to use Arabic in church, but could not as yet read it with much fluency. When was that period? Estimates have ranged from the late seventh to the late eighth century.⁸ The most natural moment for such texts to have come into the possession of the mosque authorities would have been after the demolition of the church of S. John that stood on the site until the caliphate of al-Walīd I.⁹ But given the conservatism of liturgical language, the later date is much more realistic. The convert poet al-Nābigha al-Shaybānī, in a poem addressed to al-Walīd himself, observed that during the period when the Christians had still shared the sanctuary, they did *not* pray in Arabic.¹⁰ The role of Arabic was not really fully accepted until the tenth century. Only at the isolated monastery of S. Catherine, Sinai, was there perhaps less resistance, though there too the earliest specimens of liturgical Arabic are of the eighth century.¹¹

As for literary composition in Greek, we know that the ecclesiastical elite - or rather, its pro-Chalcedonian sector - continued to write in that language until at least the end of the eighth century. Its most famous representative was John of Damascus, a scion of a civil service dynasty who became one of

7. Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* 96-99.

8. Violet, *Orientalistische Litteratur-Zeitung* 4 (1901) 429-30; Haddad, *S.Byz.Is.*

9. Sourdel-Thomine and Sourdel, *R.E.I.* 33 (1965) 84-85.

10. Al-Nābigha al-Shaybānī, *Dīwān* 53.1 (tr. Nadler, *Umayyadenkalifen* 231).

11. Nasrallah, *Mouvement littéraire* 2(2).183-84.

the great teachers of the Greek Church and appears to have died towards the middle of the eighth century.¹² Others carried on the tradition of theological composition in Greek for another generation or two.¹³ Until (on present evidence) the 760s, formal public inscriptions in churches might also be in Greek, as is apparent from the excavations recently conducted at Umm al-Raṣāṣ in the Balqā'.¹⁴ But public inscriptions have in many cultures employed languages no longer in daily use by ordinary people. Nor, in any case, was the linguistic split something Islam had introduced to Syria, since Chalcedonian congregations had long included speakers of Syriac, 'Melkite Aramaic' or Arabic as well as Greek.¹⁵ By the second half of the eighth century even ecclesiastical writers were going over to Arabic. The earliest Christian texts in Arabic, whose date of composition can be determined with reasonable accuracy, belong to the period immediately after the death of John of Damascus.¹⁶ John's ardent admirer Theodore Abū Qurra (c. 750-c. 825) became the first significant Chalcedonian theologian to write in Arabic - and quite possibly never in Greek, whereas John himself had never written in Arabic.¹⁷ The linguistic transition is summed up by a Sinai Arabic manuscript (no. 154), a quintuple palimpsest, in which an eighth- or early ninth-century Arabic text is superimposed on Umayyad Arabic superimposed on seventh-century Greek uncials superimposed on two layers of Syriac - 'all by itself virtually a complete stratigraphic record of the Christian literary history of Palestine to the early Arabic period'.¹⁸

The other milieu in which Greek remained current under the Umayyads was the caliphal administration. Men familiar with the ways of the old East Roman bureaucracy continued to find a market for their skills in the mints and the accounting and tax offices,¹⁹ in part because systems of numerical

12. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 480-83; Conticello, *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* 3.1001-03.

13. C. Mango, *Scrittura*; cf. Schick, *Christian communities* 98-100.

14. Piccirillo, 'Iscrizioni', *Umm al-Rasas* 1; cf. Gatier, *S.Byz.Is.* 147-48, 155; Bull. épigr. (1996) no. 504. For a recently discovered Greek inscription, dated 732, recording completion of a mosaic in a church near Gaza, see Saliou, *Revue biblique* 107 (2000) 405-06.

15. Rubin, *Sharing the sacred* 155-57; Graf, *J.R.A.* 13 (2000).

16. Griffith, *D.O.P.* 51 (1997) 25.

17. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity* II.162, VII.34-36.

18. Griffith, *D.O.P.* 51 (1997) 26.

19. For remarkable specimens of the documents they produced, in Greek but concerned exclusively with dealings by Arabs with Arabs, see Kraemer, *Nessana* nos 92-93.

calculation were better developed in Greek,²⁰ while governors could more easily demand honesty of the subject peoples than of fellow Arabs, whom it might be politically costly to accuse of financial malpractice.²¹ Until 'Abd al-Malik's currency reform in 697-99 several mints, including that of Damascus, stamped their name on coins in Greek as well as Arabic - a parallel, but half a century earlier, to the bilingual labels on the six kings panel.²² And it was only gradually, starting in 'Irāq in 697 and then one by one in the other provinces, finishing with Khurāsān as late as 742, that orders were given for Greek, Middle Persian and other 'local' languages to be replaced by Arabic in the civil service offices or *diwāns*.²³ In practice, neither the coinage nor the tax registers were immediately purified of the alien tongues. Private mints continued to produce imitations of the so-called 'Arab-Byzantine' coinage well into the eighth century;²⁴ while Christian scribes trained in Greek turned out to be less easily dispensable than some had hoped, as the East Roman chronicler Theophanes reports with some malice.²⁵ But gradually, and at varying speeds in different places, the process of attenuation of Greek and transition to Arabic was effected.

If, then, we except the ecclesiastical milieu, it becomes clear that Quṣayr 'Amra does stand close to the end of a linguistic epoch. Its few Greek labels will not have struck anyone as utterly exotic, and those who actually wrote them showed signs of possessing a native speaker's linguistic instinct: they preferred first declension endings in *ēta* to the more formal *iota - sigma*; and they devised plausible ways of writing names or titles as rare in eighth-century Greek as Roderic and the Negus.²⁶ Yet all texts designed to convey more than just a single name or concept were written

20. Theophanes, *Chronographia* 376, 431.

21. Al-Madā'inī and others in Ṭab. 2.457-58 (tr. 20.36-37), with reference to 'Irāq, but probably true of the ex-Roman provinces too.

22. Milstein, *Israel numismatic journal* 10 (1988-89); Qedar, *Israel numismatic journal* 10 (1988-89) 33-34. Compare an Umayyad balance found recently at Scythopolis in Palestine, with gradations incised on the beam in pairs of letters, both Greek and Arabic: Tsafirir and Foerster, *Excavations and surveys in Israel* 9 (1989-90) 127.

23. A.A. Duri, *E.Is.* 2.324.

24. Bates, *ARAM periodical* 6 (1994), esp. 393-95.

25. Theophanes, *Chronographia* 376, 431 - and cf. also 416 ad fin. (with Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 354-60); Ṭab. 2.1470 (tr. 25.7); al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā'* 43 (Ibn Baṭrīq), 56 (Tādharī b. Aṣāṭīn al-Naṣrānī), 57-58, and cf. 64-65; Blankinship, *Jihād state* 38, 80; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 112, 287; Shboul and Walmsley, *Mediterranean archaeology* 11 (1998) 258.

26. Above, 107 n. 52 and 64.

in Arabic. For whose benefit, in that case, were the Greek labels intended?

Part of this question's interest is that it recalls to one's mind the fact that most of Quşayr 'Amra's frescoes do without labels. Even the bathing beauty in the west aisle and the typanum painting in the apodyterium, which puzzle us, were considered self-explanatory then. Some longer Arabic texts were provided, such as the originally (not just now) hard-to-read texts painted above the windows on the north and south walls - one of them, which invokes Abraham and David, was discussed in Chapter 1. There was also a monumental three-line Arabic text, perhaps recording the foundation of the bath house, in a *tabula ansata* below the dynastic icon. But all of these texts are boxed off from the frescoes and apparently conceived of as independent of them. Only a minority of the frescoes were thought to require direct verbal embellishment or comment, and that was provided exclusively in Arabic on the portrait of the prince, and in Arabic and Greek together on the six kings panel. That leaves only the dynastic icon and the quintessentially Hellenic personifications bearing labels in Greek alone.²⁷

The best clue to the intended audience is in the dynastic icon's proclamation of the Umayyads' victoriousness, their NIKH, and in the six kings panel. Umm al-Ḥakam and al-Walīd's other Greek concubines no doubt taught their master a few words of their native tongue. But the ability he thus acquired, to decipher the writings on the wall, could have been of practical use to him only on one particular type of occasion - namely, when receiving ambassadors from the emperor of East Rome (or his rivals). We read in the *Chronicle* of Theophanes:

In this year Oualid...became ruler of the Arabs. Both Constantine [V] and Artabasdu[s] [a usurper] sought his alliance by dispatching to him, the former the *spatharios* Andrew, the latter the logothete Gregory.²⁸

Such men will surely have appreciated a little hunting during the intervals of diplomatic negotiation, which can only have been conducted in the Balqā', since that is where al-Walīd permanently resided. When the day's exercise was over, 'Victory' and the six kings will have provided them with matter for political rumination. The personifications of Philosophy, History and Poetry reassured them - how convincingly we cannot know - of the cultural cre-

27. Musil reported seeing the letters ΡΩΠΑ next to the figure - now hard to discern - on the north end wall of the west aisle: von Karabacek, *Κ.*'A. 1.237 n. 75. Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.266 reports traces of another Greek text in the lunette above this panel.

28. Theophanes, *Chronographia* 416 (tr. C. Mango and R. Scott).

dentials of their interlocutor. The awe with which even the Umayyad elite might face official visitors from Constantinople is nicely illustrated by a story, apocryphal no doubt but psychologically plausible, that was told about Mu'āwīya. Having 'built' (meaning perhaps rebuilt, or extended) in brick his Damascus seat, the al-Khadrā' Palace, he asked a visiting East Roman envoy for his opinion, only to be informed that the upper part was good for birds and the lower for rats. Mu'āwīya dutifully demolished the palace and rebuilt it, this time in stone.²⁹

Quṣayr 'Amra's patron and his circle were, in short, far from being a *linguistically* Greek milieu. They were Arabs who spoke Arabic. They did though admire Greek culture from afar, and wish to be associated with it. What they knew of Hellenism came mainly in the form of images - a category which included, so far as most were concerned, the mysterious Greek letters.³⁰ A few, like the secretary Sālim, may have been considerably better informed, as for example about the content and even meaning as well as the iconography of certain Greek myths. Such men will have helped design Quṣayr 'Amra's decorative scheme. But they will not have been typical of the bath house's everyday 'customers'.

Patrons, artisans and artists

In order to give concrete expression to their cultural aspirations, the patron and his circle were obliged to rely on the artisans and artists they employed. Even Sālim was a *mawlā*, one of the subject peoples, not an Arab. Unusually, Quṣayr 'Amra devotes a sizable part of its decorative scheme to depicting scenes from artisan life. The hall's east vault is divided into thirty-two panels arranged in four rows, and given over in its entirety to scenes from the construction industry - in fact, they could very well have been 'photographed' from the construction of Quṣayr 'Amra itself.³¹ Once more there are thirty-two panels arranged in four rows. We may note, in particular, paintings of stone masons squaring blocks, loading them onto camels, and building walls with them; a blacksmith labouring at his anvil; carpenters making ready their wood; and building workers preparing mortar. They all

29. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq* 1(2).133-34, and cf. 138.

30. Cf. Franklin, *D.O.P.* 46 (1992) 81; but also, on Constantinople itself, Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire* 153-56.

31 Cf. *Q.* 'A. 2. pls XXVIII; *Q.* 'A. pls XXXIII-XXXVIII; Piccirillo 353 fig. 784; Vibert-Guigue diss. 1.426-65.

wear a short tunic reaching to just above the knee, with sleeves of varying length; and they go barefoot. It is the characteristic and practical dress of the working man.³²

Such depictions had not been uncommon in Roman art. One thinks, for example, of the masons, carpenters and painters, all represented as *putti*, in the eight compartments around the portrait of that great early sixth-century church builder, the princess Anicia Juliana, at the beginning of the Vienna Dioscorides codex.³³ But the sequence of thirty-two paintings at Quşayr 'Amra is exceptionally rich: together, they make up a far from inconspicuous part of the overall decoration. Even supposing the patron confined himself to ordering so many square metres of vault fresco, without further specification, still he could apparently be relied on not to object to a mass intrusion of the lower orders into his private space.

It seems, though, to be generally - and reasonably - held that the role of the patron in late antiquity, including the Umayyad period, might be quite active, assuming he or she possessed a certain education. In particular, impetus towards innovation was more likely to come from patrons than artists, who unless interfered with tended to stick with what they knew.³⁴ It is true that the Muslim Arab conquerors were intruders from the peripheries of the Roman and Sasanian worlds, few of whom can have had more than a nodding acquaintance with or appreciation of the artistic vocabulary and techniques that had evolved in such ancient and sophisticated lands as 'Irāq or Syria.³⁵ Ziyād b. Abīhi, for example, Mu'āwiya's governor of 'Irāq, wished to endow al-Kūfa with the tallest mosque ever seen, but had no idea

32. See above, 88 n. 73.

33. Gerstinger, *Dioscurides* 34-35. See also Reinach, *Répertoire de peintures* 251-52; Zimmer, *Römische Berufsdarstellungen*, esp. 66-67; A. Grabar, *Premier art chrétien* 223-24 pls 246-47 (hypogeum of Trebius Justus, Rome); Sörries, *Buchmalerei* 23-25 and pl. 2 (fol. 4r) (building of Solomon's temple in the probably fourth-century Quedlinburger Itala); Pentz, *Invisible conquest* 48 fig. 14 (Syrian mosaic, now in National Museum, Copenhagen, showing a mosaicist at work).

34. Cf. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa* 24-26, 47-48, 51-52, 228-29; Asimakopoulou-Atzaka, 'Επάγγελμα τοῦ ψηφοθέτη 74-76; Hamilton 21, on the patron of Khirbat al-Mafjar. But note also, in favour of the artisan's creativity, Hunt, *P.E.Q.* 126 (1994) 122-23.

35. Whelan, *I.J.M.E.S.* 18 (1986) 205, questions this assumption, but might have assessed Mecca's cosmopolitanism more conservatively could she have known P. Crone's *Meccan trade*. And whatever the merits of her reinterpretation of the *mihrāb*'s origins, it is relevant to the second or third generation after the conquest, not the first.

how to solve the technical problems. When a plan was proposed by an architect trained under the Sasanians, Ziyād's response (freely rendered) was: 'That's just what I wanted, but I couldn't put it into words'.³⁶ Other Arabs were famously indifferent to the splendid courtly objects they carried off as booty, or even despised them as a matter of religious principle.³⁷ But a curious story about an Iraqi visitor to Palmyra who wrote verses about a sculpture of two young women he saw there, declaimed them to the Caliph Yazīd I (680-83) and was complimented for showing a sensitivity no Syrian had ever exhibited, captures the process of aesthetic awakening.³⁸ As for al-Walīd b. Yazīd's generation, it had grown up not exclusively in Arabia, but amidst the very remnants of the ancient empires. In fact, some members of the Arab elite must by this time have possessed a breadth of experience and cultural reference that could hardly have been matched by any artist of their day.

But where did the patron find the builders and decorators he needed in order to give concrete form to his ideas? Certainly there was no shortage of choice: the Umayyads - al-Walīd I in particular - are known to have brought workers both specialized and unskilled from various regions, notably Egypt, to work on major projects in Damascus, Jerusalem and, alongside others from northern Mesopotamia, 'Ayn al-Jarr ('Anjar) in Lebanon's al-Biqā' Valley.³⁹ Al-Walīd I also sent 'eighty Greek and Coptic artisans from Syria

36. Sayf b. 'Umar in Ṭab. 1.2492 (tr. 13.73).

37. Sayf b. 'Umar in Ṭab. 1.2452-54 (tr. 13.31-34 G.H.A. Juynboll).

38. Hishām b. al-Kalbī in al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 355; Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 110-11; Yāq. 2.17-18 s.v. 'Tadmur'.

39. Mouterde, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 22 (1939); Küchler, *Z.D.P.V.* 107 (1991); Morelli, *Tyche* 13 (1998). Note also Flusin, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 1.25-26, 30-31 (Anastasius the Sinaite on Egyptians clearing the Jerusalem temple esplanade under Mu'āwiya); Elad, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 1.54 (text) and 35 (translation) (Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī on 'Abd al-Malik assembling 'craftsmen and architects from all regions' in Jerusalem); *Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yōḥay*, a Jewish apocalypse of early Abbasid origin (in view of its allusion to the murder of Marwān II and his kin), quoted by Lewis, *Studies in classical and Ottoman Islam* V.326 (and cf. 309, 327-28), on al-Walīd's bringing of 'distant men from strange lands' to divert the River Jordan; *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* pp. 368-69 (on the building activities of al-Walīd II in the desert, using workers gathered 'from everywhere' - evidently including Egypt); and Northedge, 'Ammān 1.101 (on the probability that Qaṣr Kharāna was built by workers from 'Irāq). Compare the thousand Egyptians sent by Patriarch John the Almsgiver of Alexandria (610-19) to rebuild churches burned by the Iranians in Jerusalem: Leontius of Neapolis, *Vita Iouannis Eleemosynarii* 20.

and Egypt' to rebuild the mosque in al-Madīna.⁴⁰ It has even been maintained that the extraordinarily varied sources of Umayyad architectural and artistic style, sometimes observable within one and the same structure, are explicable in terms of parallel work executed in different sections of the same building site by just such levies drawn from scattered regions of the caliphate.⁴¹ It may be possible to see some evidence for this hypothesis in the inscription from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī⁴² that dates the construction of 'this (fortified) settlement/residence' (the feminine noun *madīna*, hard to translate 'town' in this particular context) to the reign of Hishām, but then goes on to declare that 'this' (unspecified, but masculine this time) 'is one of the things that the people of Homs made', alluding to whatever the inscribed stone formed part of, but evidently not to the whole project.⁴³

Applied indiscriminately to artistic analysis, though, the corvée hypothesis tends to underplay the ability of the Umayyads' artists to evolve eclectic styles without dividing their labour.⁴⁴ Especially when dealing with a building as small and architecturally unadorned as the Quṣayr 'Amra bath house, it is wiser to assume that most of the workforce was (as, in part, at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī) local. We cannot, it is true, exclude the possibility that the architect, for example, had been influenced by Mesopotamian roofing techniques,⁴⁵ or that the artists, whose work was of such direct consequence for the impression the building made on visitors, were sought further afield. Mielich and Vibert-Guigue, who both studied the frescoes in intimate detail, came away with a high opinion of their creators' self-confidence, inventiveness and subtlety.⁴⁶

40. Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 7.

41. Herzfeld, *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 42 (1921) 131-33, adducing *inter alia* Quṣayr 'Amra, on which see immediately below; Schlumberger, *Syria* 20 (1939) 359-60 (= *Q.H.G.* 24); Sauvaget, *Syria* 24 (1944-45) 100-02 (on 'Anjar); Almagro, Jiménez and Navarro, *A.D.A.J.* 44 (2000) 439, 440 ('Ammān citadel).

42. *R.C.E.A.* 1. no. 28.

43. Cf., on a similar formula in an Umayyad inscription from Buṣrā, Sauvaget, *Syria* 22 (1941) 58. The Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī inscription is accordingly mistranslated and misinterpreted in *Q.H.E.* 150, 191, where it is assumed that the whole *madīna* was built by the people of Homs. Note also the suggestion, made on strictly archaeological grounds, that the brickworkers came from Mesopotamia: *Q.H.E.* 152-53.

44. Cf. Rogers, *Muqarnas* 8 (1991) 52-54, on Creswell's 'fatally atomistic' concept of decorative style in his analysis (following Herzfeld) of Mushattā.

45. Cf. above, 29.

46. Mielich, *Κ.* 'A. 1.190a, 194b, 195b; Vibert-Guigue, *ARAM periodical* 6 (1994) 348, and *S.H.A.J.* 5.108. R. Hillenbrand, *K.Is.* 164, is less enthusiastic.

Whatever mistakes or inelegancies they committed are extenuated by the fact that they were executing orders that required them to innovate, and working at speed in true fresco.⁴⁷ It is possible, then, indeed intrinsically probable, that the patron sought out the best painters he could find. But it seems unlikely that so compact a site could have accommodated, at the same time, distinct levies of workers from separate regions.⁴⁸

Moreover the abundance, competence and thematic richness of the mosaics found over the last century or so at Mādabā, and at Umm al-Raṣāṣ some 30 km. to the south-east, shows that the settled lands to the west of Quṣayr 'Amra were well endowed with artistic talent not just in the sixth century, whose remains are outstanding, but throughout the Umayyad period and on into the first years of the Abbasids as well. The recently discovered Phaedra and Hippolytus mosaic at Mādabā reveals the continued vitality of mythological art even in the sixth century (fig. 19);⁴⁹ and if, thereafter, we are confined for the most part to the neutered repertoire of the ecclesiastical mosaicist, still he might show admirable skill and verve in executing scenes from the hunt or the agricultural year. These time-worn themes of villa decoration had been annexed by the Church, or were deployed by patrons of churches to underline their own social standing;⁵⁰ but at Quṣayr 'Amra they emerged once more in their traditional secular setting, just when they were being deployed on the last churches of Umm al-Raṣāṣ to be decorated or redecorated under Muslim rule. A detailed stylistic comparison between Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes and the mosaics of Umm al-Raṣāṣ has yet to be made; but it is obvious at a glance that the artisans who worked, contemporaneously, at these two sites shared a tradition and a vocabulary.⁵¹ The chances are, then, that Quṣayr 'Amra's patron did not need to look far in order to find artisans and artists reasonably capable of giving built and painted form to his - or his advisors' - ideas.

What may have been the consequences of such an encounter between

47. Vibert-Guigue, *S.H.A.J.* 5.108 (against Pollak and Wenzel, *Q. 'A.* 1.200; *Q. 'A.* 71).

48. Pace Rosen-Ayalon, *Archiv orientální* 63 (1995) 462. Hamilton (*K.M.* 42-43, 292, 344) assumes local masons and decorators, working though in an eclectic style, even at the much larger palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar. To judge from graffiti found on site, they were Christians and Muslims, with possibly some Jews as well.

49. Cf. Piccirillo 51, 66.

50. Baumann, *Spätantike Stifter*, esp. 5, 87-89, 97, 162-63, 186.

51. Cf. Piccirillo 47, and Farioli Campanati, *Arte profana*, against Finster, *Gegenwart* 388 (comparing Quṣayr 'Amra with ivories *hypothetically* assigned to Syria by K. Weitzmann).

artists with the limitations that came from having been trained in a particular tradition, and a patron who dreamed of depicting a new political and cultural reality that was without precedent, we have already seen in our analysis of the six kings panel; for there it seems likely that an idea derived, presumably by the patron, from Iranian traditions known to us only from literary contexts, was given visual expression by an artist whose idiom was East Roman and who had no access to, or perhaps interest in, possible Sasanian models. If despite that he created something to our knowledge unique, he had only his patron to thank. Nor is the six kings panel by any means the only painting at Quşayr 'Amra that apparently lacks convincing parallel in what we know of ancient art. The same can be said of the dynastic icon and the bathing beauty - making a whole row of unique compositions (whatever the iconographic debts of their constituent parts) lined up along the walls of the west aisle. All this suggests an original, imaginative mind at work. In view, particularly, of the personal nature of the references contained in some, at least, of these paintings, that original mind is likely to have been the patron's. But without artists prepared to go beyond the familiar stereotypes, it would have been a mind without issue.

The numerous parallels that have been adduced in previous chapters, between Quşayr 'Amra's decoration and that of other more or less contemporary Umayyad palaces such as Qaşr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī or Khirbat al-Mafjar show, though, that this dash of originality in our bath house need not undermine Quşayr 'Amra's claim to be broadly representative of late Umayyad court art. Quşayr 'Amra has, for example, no monopoly of scantily dressed decorative women. They are there, in stucco this time, at both the sites just mentioned.⁵² It remains, then, to enquire what the court taste of which Quşayr 'Amra is a typical example can tell us about the broader cultural identity and aspirations of the Umayyad elite and, to the extent that that elite was representative, of the Arab conquerors generally.

Constructing a cultural persona

An initial problem that arises in discussing any given cultural persona is how to identify its various aspects. Talk of 'influences', for example, has by and large been eschewed in this book, so as not to prejudge the question whether there was an Arab visual culture for the influences to work upon in the first place. This was not in order to espouse the extreme position of the British architectural historian Archibald Creswell, who opined that 'Arabia,

52. *Q.H.G.* pls 65d, 67c; *K.M.* pl. LVI.9.

at the rise of Islam, does not appear to have possessed anything worthy of the name of architecture'.⁵³ It was indeed, though, intended to reserve judgement on whether the Muslim Arabs imported any non-verbal artistic tradition of their own into Syria. Nothing we have seen suggests they did, and it is highly improbable that they executed with their own hands any of the projects with which we have been concerned.⁵⁴ Arab musicians and singers, who already possessed a sophisticated understanding of their art, might travel widely in order to study non-Arab traditions; or they might copy immigrant musicians.⁵⁵ Either way they subjected themselves to what may properly be called 'influences'. But when it was a mosaic that was needed, artisans had either to be found locally, among the subject populations, or be sent from the Roman Empire;⁵⁶ in the latter case, we hear nothing of their training locals, let alone Arabs of Arabia, in their skills. The tradition represented by the splendid paintings and sculptures that have been found, especially in South Arabia, seems by this time to have been extinct. So too the Yemeni style of tower house like the famous Ghumdān palace at Ṣan'ā', whose wonders were sung by many a poet (and ignored by Creswell).⁵⁷ These dwellings were popular in other parts of Arabia too, such as al-Madīna,⁵⁸ and there were parallel architectural types even in late antique Syria.⁵⁹ But the style is not known to have found any echo under the Umayyads. Since, then, the invaders brought from Arabia a disposition to become patrons, but nothing in the realm of the arts - or even of common pottery⁶⁰ - that they cared to teach, we had better think of their debts to other traditions as adoptions, not influences.⁶¹

53. Creswell, *E.Is.* 1.608. On the pre-Islamic architecture of Arabia see now Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and pagans* 11-18, based on literary sources, and Finster, *A.A.* (1996), from an archaeological perspective. To be fair, the Arabic historians themselves present the early invaders as uncouth nomads and contrast them with the might and sophistication of Irān in particular (Ṭab. 1.2602 (tr. 13.186), just one among numerous similar passages), evidently in order to underline the irresistible power of the Muslim revelation and faith.

54. The occasional exception, as e.g. al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 187, proves the rule, of which there is a good illustration by Sayf b. 'Umar in Ṭab. 1.2492 (tr. 13.73), on the construction of the al-Kūfa mosque.

55. Iṣf. 3.273 (tr. Berque 147); Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima* 2.360 (tr. Rosenthal).

56. See below, 134.

57. Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣan'ā'* 44.

58. Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and pagans* 12-13.

59. Monneret de Villard, *Introduzione* 27-29.

60. Morony, *Identity* 26-27.

61. What I call 'adoption' corresponds to Ettinghausen's 'transfer' (a rather theoretical

Ahmad Shboul has spoken of Umayyad Damascus as 'the adopted city *par excellence*'. Although for a time its dominant culture continued to be Greek, still the Arabs could feel at home there because 'the city and its hinterland formed part of that traditional socio-economic continuum that had, for a long time, extended between Syria, with its pre-Islamic Arab population, and both the Hijaz and south Arabia.'⁶² Arabs - especially the better travelled - were able to adopt Damascus as it stood because in a sense it was already theirs, or at least extremely familiar. Before the invasions, some Arabs of Arabia already enjoyed an identity to which cultural adoptions operated in Syria had contributed. And the autochthonous Arabs of Syria, whatever their cultural distinctiveness, were in no sense less 'Syrian' than anyone else, for Syria itself was a broad Church. It is perhaps only our ignorance of Ghassanid art that prevents our seeing to what an extent the Umayyads were building on foundations already set. The same goes for Lakhmid al-Ḥīra: the shadow of al-Khawarnaq lies heavily across the pages of early Arabic literature.⁶³ Nevertheless, the invasions did mean that an Arab elite became far more intimately involved, as patrons, with the whole spectrum of cultural productivity in Syria than had previously been the case. After the invasions the impetus towards cultural self-representation according to the norm that prevailed in cities such as Damascus, Homs or Qinnasrīn became immensely more powerful, and affected far more Arabs including numerous immigrants such as the Umayyads themselves.

In what sense, then, was it possible for Arabs formerly of Arabia to derive cultural identity from materials adopted without previous interaction in any substantial breadth or depth? Especially when these adoptions were operated at second hand, through artisans who wanted to please, and continue being employed, but knew what they knew, and no more. In their desire to gratify, and in any novel suggestions the patron might have (like constructing a *mihrāb* for prayer), lay seeds of development. But the weight of the local past was bound to lie heavily at first, including whatever 'influences' had once, or still now, weighed upon it - for at the artisan level the concept

category, since he finds few instances of it) together with much of what he calls 'adoption'. My 'influence' corresponds to the more advanced stages of Ettinghausen's 'adoption', plus his 'integration'. Ettinghausen's point is that what is adopted becomes subject, thenceforth, to new rules. Needless to say, all modes of cultural reception are in reality a continuum. See Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran* 1-2 and *passim*.

62. Shboul, *ARAM periodical* 6 (1994) 102.

63. Cf. e.g. 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Ta'rikh al-Ḥīra* 34-35.

of 'influence' comes more naturally than at that of the Arab patron.⁶⁴ This is plain enough in the history of the Umayyad coinage, for example, at least up to 'Abd al-Malik's currency reform in 697-99, since until that date mint workers went on producing more or less the same coins they had produced for their earlier masters, whether Sasanian or Roman. After that date, though, the substitution of Islamic epigraphical types for the earlier iconic types represented a clear case of intervention by the Arab ruling elite, probably by the caliph himself, who now for the first time took an initiative in a question which concerned - among much else - artistic patronage. Henceforth the coinage could fairly be said to represent what the rulers had specifically requested rather than what they had inherited and expediently continued. For the first time, it can be treated as evidence for their own sense of identity, or at least for what they saw fit to project publicly as their identity (fig. 27).

This did not mean that all artistic production under Umayyad patronage was now to be as different from artistic production for, say, the Christian Church, as post-reform coins were different from pre-reform coins. One has only to look at eighth-century Syrian mosaic floors - and their figural quite as much as their geometrical elements - to see that a great deal of the vocabulary continued to satisfy caliphs and bishops alike.⁶⁵ But since we know for certain that the Arab patron was now capable of taking an active role, it becomes increasingly reasonable to regard the work of the artists he employed as representing something with which he himself was positively willing to identify. Even if the end product remained close to pre-Islamic models, so that the patron appeared to be adopting alien cultural goods wholesale, while the use of the concept 'influence' (with reference to the Arab patron) continues to seem inappropriate, still that adoption was the

64. For the distinction between the artisan who follows a 'Tradition' (and can therefore be subject to influences: G.F.), and the alien patron who can contribute to a project only through 'Rezeption', see Meinecke, *Northern Mesopotamia* 148, though his use of 'Rezeption' to refer only to revival of defunct styles is narrower than mine of 'adoption' to describe Arab patrons' relations with contemporary styles as well, which initially they could not control and digest the way one does an influence. One should not, though, overemphasize the role of non-Arabs in defining Umayyad culture. Neither influential *mawālī* like Sālim Abū 'l-'Alā', nor *a fortiori* the artisans who worked at Quṣayr 'Amra, would ever have been heard of outside the employ of their Arab masters. Maslama and al-Ghiṭrīf, the other two figures at the late Umayyad court noted above, 105, for their interest in things Greek, were both Arabs.

65. Piccirillo 47. Figural elements: Farioli Campanati, *Arte profana*.

patron's conscious decision freely arrived at, and something he was prepared to be both known and judged by.

The heavy legacy of the past has indeed been a theme of this book, but an attempt has been made not to represent its workings too mechanistically. With the precision that was his hallmark, and assuming that the six kings fresco is the only one that displays Sasanid influence, Creswell calculated that it occupies less than one twentieth of the total painted surface, and that 'it is only Persian in inspiration, and not in execution, so that the Persian element in the whole decoration is less than a fortieth part, perhaps about 2 per cent.'⁶⁶ Without such simplemindedness, Creswell would never have covered the enormous amount of ground he did. But our aim here is to understand the mix - rather than just the constituent parts - of the Quṣayr 'Amra recipe. And it is in the process by which this mixture was brought about that we are most likely to recognise the Arabs' - rather than their artisans' - own distinctive contribution to the Umayyad phase in late antique aesthetics. There can, furthermore, increasingly be observed, beyond the mixture, a genuine creativity too, as old images were remodelled or new ones devised, in order to meet particular needs of the Umayyad patron. Of this, we have seen striking evidence especially in the frescoes in the west aisle of Quṣayr 'Amra's hall. When these were made, the phase of pure adoption already belonged to the past.

On balance, the mother's milk of our artists seems to have been the Greek art under Roman and, increasingly, Christian patronage that was characteristic of the late antique Mediterranean, and not least of Syria. The proofs are numerous and obvious: the labeled personifications in the east aisle, the wingless Eros in the central aisle, the bathing beauty after Aphrodite, the Adamic prince in his alcove, and the dress and pose of the six kings in the west aisle. There are at least formal resemblances between the hunting scenes and similar depictions on ivory consular diptychs and in various monuments around the Mediterranean, such as the apparently imperial mausoleum at Centelles. The apodyterium preserves further echoes of the classical, illusionist element in Greek art, especially the vault paintings and the tympanum fresco modelled on the iconography, and probably the myth itself, of Dionysus and Ariadne. The caldarium culminates in the thoroughly Greek zodiac painted on its dome. Elsewhere the simplified, hieratic forms of late antiquity are often a closer inspiration.

66. Creswell 409.

The main stream of Greek style had, though, by late antiquity flowed into many subsidiary channels and irrigated numerous provincial variations on itself. The eye of the student of Quṣayr ‘Amra is caught especially by the art of Coptic Egypt. Browsing in the plates of a recent monograph about bone plaques used to decorate relatively cheap caskets manufactured in Egypt in imitation of others made of ivory or precious metals,⁶⁷ one encounters elaborately dressed women posing in curtained arcades; naked women, dancing girls and musicians both male and female; maidens wielding fly whisks; various personifications, some of whom hold kerchiefs weighed down with fruit; winged victories carrying crowns; hunting scenes; and mythological figures or whole scenes: Aphrodite and Dionysus are frequently sighted, and we even find Dionysus with Ariadne on their Naxian beach. We know too that al-Walīd I in particular had employed Egyptian artisans on projects in Damascus, Jerusalem and elsewhere.⁶⁸ Beyond that, all is speculation. It is not impossible that Egyptians were employed at Quṣayr ‘Amra as well;⁶⁹ but it is perhaps wiser to dwell on the common debt shared by these two corpora of images to the clichés of the late Greek visual imagination. Nor were the Umayyads by any means the first Arabs to encounter the arts of Egypt. It is hard, for example, to imagine that the Prophet’s Coptic concubine Māriya had arrived from her native land without at least one carved casket for her valuables.⁷⁰

Evidence for Sasanian art being as deficient as that for Coptic is abundant, the Iranian element at Quṣayr ‘Amra is correspondingly elusive. Nevertheless, the possible influence of themes popular on Sasanian and post-Sasanian silverware, especially the scantily dressed dancing girls, was noted in Chapter 2; so too was the prominent position assigned to entertainers at both Quṣayr ‘Amra and the Sasanian court. The fact that hunting scenes were so popular in Sasanian interior decoration should be borne in mind; while the pervasive mix of female entertainers and hunting scenes is particularly suggestive of the Iranian milieu, as exemplified by Ṭāq-i Bustān. We are again reminded that forms may be East Roman but inspiration Iranian by the six kings as interpreted in Chapter 2. Also suggestive of Irān are Umm al-Ḥakam reclining on her cushioned throne, and the avian procession in the

67. Loberdou-Tsigarida, *Οστέινα πλακίδια*.

68. Above, 123-24.

69. Suggested by van Lohuizen-Mulder, *BaBesch* 73 (1998).

70. On Meccan trade with Egypt, see Crone, *Meccan trade* 119-20.

princely portrait. The numerous and detailed parallels drawn by the mid-ninth-century *Kitāb al-tāj* - attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ - between the tastes and etiquette of the Sasanian and the Umayyad as well as the Abbasid courts are, in general, food for thought. So too is the overwhelming predominance of Persian among those of the *Qur'ān*'s loanwords that have to do with luxury goods or the furniture and other accoutrements of Paradise. Words for treasure, silver coinage (the dirham), pearls, camphor, musk, ginger, cushions, rich carpets, fine silks and silk brocade, the well-watered meadows of Paradise, the couches on which one will recline and the ewers in which (non-alcoholic) drinks will be served - all are of Iranian origin.⁷¹ Even so, between the holy book's seventh-century Arabian milieu and the mid-eighth-century Syrian environment of Quṣayr 'Amra, Irān's dominance of the luxury end of the market undeniably slipped. It was of course intrinsically likely that local Syrian artists would tend to prefer an East Roman idiom. Beyond that, Constantinople's survival despite repeated Arab onslaughts, and the cultural influences mediated especially by diplomatic contacts and prisoners of war, were probably the main factors.

As for the Arab contribution, it cannot easily be isolated and catalogued, but is to be discerned in what are in fact among Quṣayr 'Amra's most characteristic features - namely, the *combining* of Graeco-Roman with Iranian motifs and visual styles, and the choosing of themes congenial to Arab taste and circumstance, as was exemplified by the discussion in Chapter 2 of the six kings panel, and might be further underlined by comparing Quṣayr 'Amra's emphases with those of the one art form that is inalienably Arab, namely the ode or *qaṣīda*. In the ode, the Arab poet sang of the abandoned campsite, of love, of his journeyings, and of his horse or camel. Finally, he praised either a prince, or his own tribe, or himself.⁷² Each part of the ode had its own character and conventions; and each part might be capable of standing alone, as an independent poem. Certainly the parts did not normally add up to what we would appreciate as a linear narrative, or regard as a reasonably natural and predictable sequence of ideas. The transition from one to another might be alarmingly abrupt. Yet they were, for all that, held together by the poet's distinctive style and character, whose imprint was

71. Jeffery, *Foreign vocabulary* 46-47, 52-53, 58-60, 129-30, 145-46, 150-51, 153-54, 179-80, 210-11, 246-47, 251, 261, 264, 281. These borrowings may have been effected in the pre-Islamic period, and via other languages such as Aramaic.

72. Cf. Wagner, *Grundzüge* 1.83-115.

applied impartially throughout. And no Arab critic expected the theoretically separable parts of the ode to stand alone in practice. The *qaṣīda* was universally regarded as an autonomous and indivisible literary unit. In the same way, Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes were made up of numerous separate paintings, sometimes with no discernible shared subject matter to connect them with the other paintings, even those immediately adjacent. Yet all were at the same time loosely linked together by the architectural framework that contained them, and by a general, albeit at times indirect or implicit, theme of princely panegyric or at least celebration of the princely life. The resemblance to the *qaṣīda* extended, in other words, beyond the shared themes of love, hunting and panegyric (for what is Quṣayr 'Amra if not a panegyric of its patron?) to embrace also a fundamental structural affinity, which Reynold Nicholson best conveyed in his observation that 'the *qaṣīda* is no organic whole: rather its unity resembles that of a series of pictures by the same hand or, to employ an Eastern trope, of pearls various in size and quality threaded on a necklace.'⁷³ More recent critics⁷⁴ have spoken of the parts of the *qaṣīda* as 'panels' - a word we have often employed for our paintings too.

There is, in this early period, no more faithful touchstone of 'urūba, Arabism, than the *qaṣīda*.⁷⁵ If, then, we ask in what the Arabism of Quṣayr 'Amra's frescoes consists, we may most reliably answer in the following two ways: firstly, in the congeniality of their subject matter to the Arabs' taste as manifest in their poetry; and secondly in a manner of perception shared by the hearer of the ode and the beholder of the paintings, which we may call an appreciation of the 'panelled mode'. This is not to imply that the panelled mode was an Arab invention. In fact it had long been one of the distinguishing features of Mediterranean art, in Greek East and Latin West alike. Sixth-century East Roman writers had emphasized the shifting vision, darting gaze and general fragmentation of focus that characterized con-

73. Nicholson, *Literary history* 78.

74. J. Stetkevych, *Tradition and modernity*, esp. 116 n. 5; Montgomery, *Vagaries of the qaṣīdah*.

75. Awareness of an 'Arab' identity transcending tribal affiliations is already unambiguously attested in the Namāra inscription of A.D. 328: for the most recent edition see Calvet and Robin, *Arabie heureuse* 265-69. The rise of Islam dealt a decisive - though not immediate - blow to the power of genealogy to confer an Arab identity. Under the Umayyads, mastery of the Arabic language became the decisive criterion: Abiad, *Culture et éducation* 69-72.

temporary perception of artistic forms;⁷⁶ while the mosaic floors of churches in Jordan, right down to the eighth century, tend to break a given scene into sequences of compartments or roundels, assigning a single major figure to each.⁷⁷ That this 'late antique aesthetic of discontinuity'⁷⁸ should have been so congenial to the Arabs as well, even in the inner citadel of their poetic creativity, opens up intriguing questions about the congruities of Mediterranean and pre-Islamic Arab culture - which it would be inappropriate, though, to tackle within the strictly Umayyad focus of the present study.

No less than in their preferences, the Arab contribution to our frescoes is also apparent in their omissions. It would be hard to think of anything more comprehensively ignored by both Quṣayr 'Amra and the *qaṣīda* than the whole sphere of agricultural activity, which held no charm for Arabs. There are no calendars of months in Umayyad art. If a depiction of a basket of grapes at Quṣayr 'Amra alludes to the vintage,⁷⁹ that is just one exception to the rule, and anyway predictable in view of the weakness of many Umayyads for wine drinking - which brings us to a second significant theme which, if not absent from Quṣayr 'Amra, is certainly not especially conspicuous, namely Islam. Just as the Umayyad *qaṣīda* was discreet about the new revelation, and only gradually admitted its patterns of thought to the poetic vocabulary,⁸⁰ so too Quṣayr 'Amra, without ignoring Islam completely, does not promote it, as has already been pointed out at the end of Chapter 2.

This Arab choosing and combining, and with it the whole Umayyad persona, is also distinctively Syrian. Not that Syria had been selected as the caliphate's centre and focus for the sake of its cultural potentialities; but the combining would have been done otherwise, had 'Irāq become the Muslim empire's heartland earlier than it did. The caliphs would still have sought Constantinopolitan artisans and materials for their most prestigious projects, as the Umayyads did for the mosques of al-Madīna and Damascus;⁸¹ but Sasanian forms would have been drawn on more extensively in both

76. Roberts, *Jeweled style* Chapter 3, 'Poetry and the visual arts', especially the quotations on pp. 74-75 from Procopius and Choricus of Gaza.

77. Baumann, *Spätantike Stifter* 64, 183 and pls 5.9, 19.44.

78. Roberts, *Jeweled style* 97.

79. Q. 'A. pl. XXVIb. For other vintage scenes in the *quṣūr*, see Creswell 600 and pl. 129 (Mushattā); K.M. 171 and pl. XXXVIII.

80. Cf. Montgomery, *Vagaries of the qaṣīdah* 209-53.

81. Flood, *Great Mosque* 20-24 - though his reading of central Umayyad Damascus's mosque-palace complex as a copy of the Constantinopolitan equivalent is highly speculative.

architectural and artistic production. Syria, by contrast, had for centuries been part of the Graeco-Roman sphere. On the eve of the Arab conquest it was among the most culturally vibrant provinces of the Roman Empire, not only for its native Syriac tradition, but for its Hellenism too, as one can see from the Mādabā mosaics (e.g. fig. 19) or from the Syriac tradition itself, which was in every aspect (not just the literary) a translation culture.⁸² In the eighth century, a Theophilus of Edessa (695-785) could still be immersed in Greek astronomy, and translate both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* into Syriac.⁸³ It was only to be expected that Syria would pass these tastes on to its Arab conquerors.⁸⁴

Once freed of Roman rule, Syria could also become more permeable to its other neighbour, that eastern civilisation of Irān, which had always been a presence, though necessarily a discreet and even suspect one the further west one went.⁸⁵ It is not often possible to grasp the individual human dramas that contribute to such cultural evolutions, while their artistic products are often tricky to pin down in space or time. Hence the peculiar interest of a figure such as the Iranian Mazdean soldier Magoundat from al-Rayy, who deserted the victorious Sasanian army c. 615 and installed himself at Hierapolis in the house of an Iranian Christian silversmith, whose apprentice he became. When he subsequently moved to Jerusalem to be baptized (he was the future S. Anastasius the Persian), he did so again under the auspices of a local silversmith, though whether of Iranian or this time Roman origin we are not told.⁸⁶ Then there was also Abū Lu'lu'a Fayrūz al-Nihāwandī, an Iranian

82. On the literary side of things, Syriac and Greek, see respectively the articles by S.P. Brock and G. Cavallo, in Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore*. Cf. M.M. Mango, *East of Byzantium*, on the classical tradition in Northern Mesopotamian art and architecture; also Balty and Briquel Chatonnet, *Fondation Eugène Piot: Monuments et mémoires* 79 (2000).

83. Pingree, *D.O.P.* 43 (1989) 236-37. Had Theophilus served the Umayyads before he attached himself to the Abbasids?

84. The force, in late Umayyad times, of this locally filtered Hellenism is underestimated by Gutas, *Greek thought, Arabic culture* 18-20, who assumes that the Umayyad elite had access to Greek culture only in its Christian Constantinopolitan form, via the Greek-speaking bureaucrats of Damascus. But there was much more to Syrian Hellenism than this elite, while even Constantinople may have had more room for the ancients than Gutas allows (cf. above, 1.9 n. 25 on Ptolemy), following Av. Cameron who has now, though, moderated her 'dark' view of Constantinopolitan Hellenism at this period: *Changing cultures* XII and Addenda p. 2.

85. East Syria: M.M. Mango, *East of Byzantium* 118-19. West Syria: Kondoleon, *Antioch* 130-38.

86. *Acta martyris Anastasii Persae* 6, 8, 10; cf. the commentary in Flusin's edition, 2.226.

Christian carpenter, stone mason and smith, who was taken prisoner during Heraclius's war with Irān, and then captured in turn from the Romans during the Arab invasion of Syria. We know about him only because he happened to assassinate the Caliph 'Umar (644); but in that context we learn that he was regarded as a specialist worker who earned a relatively high wage.⁸⁷ Under the aegis first of the Iranian and then of the Arab conquerors, Syrian craftsmen or immigrants like Magoundat or Abū Lu'lu'a operated a combination of Roman and Iranian artistic forms from a conveniently liminal position of proximity to both traditions.⁸⁸ Despite occasional apparent attempts to allot Rome and Irān the same weight by making them parallels, as in the two princely images found at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī,⁸⁹ the combination was not, overall, operated on terms as favourable to Irān as to Rome. It might nonetheless amount to more than a mere juxtaposition of representative types. In the six kings panel and to some extent also the princely portrait, Roman and Iranian forms and ideas were mixed with some subtlety even within one and the same panel.⁹⁰

The same holds for the audience hall taken as a whole. Although individual elements in its decoration can be identified as either Iranian or Roman, while the overall artistic impression is more Roman than Iranian, the general

87. Ṭab. 1.2632 (tr. 13.216), 2722 (tr. 14.89-90).

88. In emphasizing the *concurrent* adoption of Roman and Iranian artistic styles by the Umayyads, I diverge from Hillenbrand's view, in *Essays in honor of K. Otto-Dorn*, that in the early eighth century (especially at Quṣayr 'Amra) the main influence was East Rome, while by mid-century (at Mushattā) it had become Irān. The assumption of the present discussion is that Quṣayr 'Amra and Mushattā are both to be dated towards the end of the Umayyad period. Hillenbrand's position (anticipated by Strika, *A.I.O.N.* 14 (1964) 747-49) is vitiated by his indecision about whether to assign Quṣayr 'Amra to the early eighth century (*Essays* 73, 78, 80) or to al-Walīd II (*Art history* 5 (1982) 2), as also by his assertion on consecutive pages that Mushattā rejects 'Byzantine symbolic vocabulary' and that it 'achieves...a natural mingling of Byzantine and Sasanian elements' (*Essays* 80-81).

89. Above, 46-47; and cf. the similar comment by R. Hillenbrand, *K.Is.* 174-75, on the two floor frescoes also found at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī.

90. Contrast Schlumberger's view of the Roman and Iranian elements in both the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī and Quṣayr 'Amra paintings as 'coulant côte à côte, sans se confondre encore': *Syria* 25 (1946-48) 102. Schlumberger concedes that a mingling of the two traditions can be observed in Umayyad stucco work (*ibid.* n. 3), but only in the field of ornament, not in that of figural sculpture: *Syria* 20 (1939) 356-57 (= *Q.H.G.* 23). Rather than simply reflecting the artists' inability to combine styles, though, the two princely portraits at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī may have been deliberately designed as a 'Roman' and a 'Sasanian' image - a refinement on Quṣayr 'Amra's juxtaposition of six kings differently attired but stylistically homogeneous.

concept cannot be so easily labelled: it would have made equal sense on either side of the frontier. For the chief preoccupation of both courts, when orchestrating the ruler's public appearances, was the illustration of his omnipotence in war and peace alike, what the Iranians called *razm* and *bazm*. *Razm* meant war and the hunt; while *bazm* meant the formal royal audience with its accompanying celebrations. Either might be overdone by a self-indulgent and therefore unworthy prince;⁹¹ but neither could be dispensed with by a ruler who sought to maintain his own power, and with it the state's stability.⁹² This much, at least, was the common concern of all princes. There was nothing more natural than that an Arab, caught between Iran and Rome no longer politically but certainly still culturally, should express his situation in a language whose vocabulary was taken from both sides, but whose syntax was now, beyond dispute, Arabic.

It is true that art produced under the Umayyads outside Syria might be less eclectic - post-Sasanian silverware, often hard to tell from Sasanian originals, is an obvious example. But Syria, being the metropolitan province, has yielded the overwhelming bulk of our evidence, and our best criteria for defining Umayyad style. The lines of cultural transmission that converged on Syria from every direction⁹³ guarantee it against any imputation of eccentricity. It is not, then, unduly limiting to characterize Umayyad art as being essentially Arab-Syrian.⁹⁴

As if to convey the catholicity of their *imperium*, the Umayyads drew widely, even indiscriminately, on the whole spectrum of artistic models visible to them from their Syrian vantagepoint, regardless of date or context.⁹⁵ That they should have contracted debts to Irān or Rome was predictable; but

91. E.g. Thomas Artsruni (ninth century), *History* 71; Mas. 595 (1.275 Dāghir); Işf. 2.97.

92. On *razm* and *bazm* at the Iranian court see Abka'ī-Khavari, *Das Bild des Königs* 77-78. As for the Constantinopolitan court, cf. above, 36-37 (audience in the baths of Zeuxippus; receipt of booty in the Sophianai).

93. Fowden, *Empire to commonwealth* 17-18, 63-65.

94. Monneret de Villard, *Introduzione* 4, objected to the application of the term 'Arab art' to the early Islamic period, on the grounds that its art was still late antique. The characterization 'Arab-Syrian' is intended to soften this objection - the patrons were indubitably Arabs, and so were some of the artists: *I.G.L.S.* 21. no. 142.

95. This habit has often been noted in passing with reference to the Umayyads (e.g. Schlumberger, *Syria* 20 (1939) 359-60 (= *Q.H.G.* 24); Ettinghausen - Grabar 66), but so far is best documented in the stucco decoration of early Abbasid al-Raqqā, which recalls Roman Palmyra and not, despite their greater proximity, the sixth-century monuments of al-Ruṣāfa: Meinecke, *Rezeption* 258-61.

we also find them imitating Palmyrene and Nabatean statuary.⁹⁶ They were capable of showing splendid disregard for conventional relationships between form and decoration. Examples range from bronze incense burners or ewers of egregiously cluttered design,⁹⁷ to the superabundance of foliage that threatens to burst out of its Graeco-Roman geometrical framework in the al-Aqṣā woodcarvings in Jerusalem,⁹⁸ to Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī where the quadrangular enclosure punctuated by gateway and towers and reminiscent of a Roman fort was sheathed in a glorious abandonment of stucco decoration (fig. 28). Although it was not unknown in the Roman East in earlier times, it seems that the Umayyads imported the habit of large-scale stucco decoration from Irān. Whether, at least on occasion, they brought the artisans too, or preferred to rely on the versatility of locals, can only finally be decided by documentary evidence, which at present is not available.⁹⁹ But the stucco itself will almost certainly have struck those in a position to know as an affectation of Sasanian manners.

Undeniably, Umayyad art often seems awkward and ill-digested; yet there is a chemistry, however wild, between its elements. One might even go so far as to say that they tend toward an accommodation.¹⁰⁰ If, as at Quṣayr ‘Amra, the forms are often Greek, while some forms and some concepts too may be Iranian, there was also an Arab-Syrian synthesis struggling to emerge. This synthesis was probably brought about, in significant part, by reading Arab concepts into the adopted forms. For example, whatever the knowledge of Greek culture possessed by a few members of the Umayyad elite, it seems likely that the Greek personifications of Poetry and History on the walls at Quṣayr

96. Palmyrene: Schlumberger, *Syria* 20 (1939) 349-50 (=Q.H.G. 21); Meinecke, *Northern Mesopotamia* pl. 6c-d. Nabatean: K. Brisch, *K.Is.* 185 no. 64a (Khirbat al-Mafjar); cf. above, 106 n. 47 (Nabatean sculptures from Khirbat al-Dharīḥ), and Monneret de Villard, *Introduzione* 30-33.

97. Cf. Ettinghausen and Grabar 70-73.

98. Hillenbrand, *Bayt al-Maqdis*, esp. 303-08.

99. Meinecke, *Northern Mesopotamia* 142-43, supposes Iranian artisans. For the opposite viewpoint see above, 125 n. 48; Kröger 263-64; Northedge, ‘*Ammān* 1.102.

100. Becker’s formulation, *Islamstudien* 1.281, is too bald: ‘Die Umayyaden schufen keine neue Kultur, sondern übernahmen schlankweg das Vorgefundene’. And cf., recently, Meinecke, *Northern Mesopotamia* 148, on ‘das uneinheitliche Erscheinungsbild und die starke rezeptive Grundbehaltung der umayyadischen Architektur.’ On the other hand, recent attempts to locate ‘a sophistication which belies the traditional image of the early Islamic period as one of cultural passivity’ (Flood, *Bayt al-Maqdis* 358) have been based exclusively on religious architecture, and principally the *miḥrāb*.

'Amra will have spoken to nearly all those who saw them (and for whom the labels almost certainly had to be translated) of Imru' al-Qays rather than of Homer, of the Arabs' battle tales (*ayyām*) or stories of Iranian heroes and kings of old rather than Xenophon or even pseudo-Callisthenes's perhaps very recently translated Alexander romance. Likewise the seated prince may have been indebted to the Christian iconography of Adam; but once that allusion had been recognised the Muslim beholder's mind, however full of alien wisdoms, will have focused on the Quranic Adam, God's first caliph. Similarly the hunting scenes may, in the artist's mind, have owed something to the Roman parallels or models alluded to in Chapter 3; but the quarry, nets, tents, saluki dogs and fairly ordinary hunters, one of whom is falling off his horse, presumably all reflect what one might have seen in the environs of Quṣayr 'Amra or - at the most ambitious - have heard extolled in an impromptu panegyric such as that of Yazīd b. Dabba al-Thaqafī on al-Walīd b. Yazīd, his horse Sindī, and the onagers they caught together.¹⁰¹ Certainly it makes no attempt to rival the superhuman heroism of, for example, the Sasanian royal hunt. The dynastic icon and the Shāh-i Āfrīd panel are further examples of non-Arab visual style applied to distinctively Arab or even Umayyad subject matter.¹⁰²

The political events that brought the Umayyads down did not cut off this development of Arabic secular art, though of necessity it shifted tracks and became less Syrian. Our evidence from the early Abbasid period is thin, though the glass paving and remnants of floor frescoes (as at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī¹⁰³) recently found in Hārūn al-Rashīd's capital, al-Raqqā, are at least suggestive.¹⁰⁴ After that there is nothing for several decades, until we reach the paintings Herzfeld found in the Jawsaq al-Khāqānī at Sāmarrā'. These, along with other aspects of the decorations at Sāmarrā', are not without echoes, sometimes rather powerful ones, of the art of the Umayyad *quṣūr*.¹⁰⁵

101. Işf. 7.114-16.

102. Finster, *Kunst des Orients* 7 (1970-71) 117-21, supposes a parallel development in the religious context, seeing the Damascus mosque mosaics as an adaptation of Christian symbols of Paradise to the new, Muslim vision.

103. Schlumberger, *Syria* 25 (1946-48).

104. Meinecke, *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin* 128 (1996) 170-71. But al-Raqqā's abundant stucco decoration does not resemble Umayyad work: Meinecke, *Rezeption* 258.

105. Ettinghausen and Grabar 124-25. On the influence of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, see R. Hillenbrand, *K.Is.* 175-77; M.L. Carter in Harper, *Royal hunter* 77-78. On Mushattā: Hillenbrand, *Essays in honor of K. Otto-Dorn* 74-79; Enderlein and Meinecke, *J.B.M.* 34 (1992) 148-49, 158 n. 91; Meinecke, *Northern Mesopotamia* 148, 164 fig. 14.

Yet the influence of Irān is much increased, and a timeless formality is substituted for the movement and life that pervade the Quṣayr 'Amra paintings.¹⁰⁶ This was to be the style of Arab - or perhaps we should rather by now say Islamic - painting for centuries to come.

Barbarians in the bath

In later Umayyad times, though, 'classical' Islamic civilisation was only just beginning to form.¹⁰⁷ And as is apparent from - for instance - the first part of Ibn Ishāq's *Life of the Prophet*, it still at that time had room for a massive amount of pre-Islamic contextualisation. The classical canon was later to dispense with most of this pre-Islamic narrative, as one can see just by casting a glance at Ibn Hishām's early ninth-century abridged edition of Ibn Ishāq; but under the Umayyads, Islam had not yet to such an extent denied its deep roots in late antiquity, or its debts to Jewish and Christian tradition. This was no doubt one (among many) reasons why the Arabs' revelation, that which posterity has seen as most original about the invaders, and what marked them off from many other barbarian peoples who had pressed in upon the charmed shores of the late antique Mediterranean, may not have struck contemporaries as the most notable thing about them.¹⁰⁸ As for the Arabs' rulers, in particular the Umayyads, they proclaimed themselves 'caliphs' - that is 'deputies of God' - and therefore inheritors in some part of Muḥammad's religious authority. Yet outsiders - and some of their fellow Muslim Arabs too - perceived them as just another set of 'kings' (*mulūk*), a throwback (in Muslim eyes) to the bad old self-glorifying days of pre-Islamic ignorance.¹⁰⁹ One begins to wonder, in short, whether the Arabs' experience of Mediterranean inculturation was really so unique after all, far less the abrupt break in the history of these lands that later historians delighted to describe. The speed with which the newcomers seized Rome's eastern provinces had indeed been unparalleled; but this very fact may have encouraged some of their Christian subjects to see them as just a passing cloud¹¹⁰ - like the Iranian invaders during the first two decades of Heraclius's

106. Ettinghausen, *Arabische Malerei* 42-44.

107. For this view see Sharon, *J.S.A.I.* 14 (1991) 121-34; Crone and Hinds, *God's caliph* 72-73.

108. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 535-38.

109. For Christian writers, see the references above, 73 n. 150. For Muslim criticism of Umayyad inclination towards *mulūk*, 'kingship', see above, 54 n. 58.

110. On the apocalyptic literature see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* ch. 8.

reign.

Precedent suggested that, if they managed to hang on to their new possessions, freshly arrived barbarians were quick learners - and that the educative process might turn out to be of as much benefit to their subjects as themselves, since the latter desired to participate in the same way of life that the former so earnestly wished to preserve. Indeed, to a few observers there was something almost embarrassing about the zeal with which certain barbarians imitated civilised ways - they became a mirror suddenly held up in front of the more self-indulgent, less manly features of the Roman elite's behaviour. Here for example is the sixth-century Greek historian Procopius of Caesarea on the Vandals:

Of all the nations which we know, that of the Vandals is the most luxury-loving, while that of the Moors lives in the hardest conditions. For the Vandals, from the time they gained possession of Libya, indulged in baths, all of them, every day, and enjoyed a table abounding in all things, the sweetest and best that the earth and sea produce. They were very given to wearing gold, and clothed themselves in Median garments, which now they call "Seric"; and they passed their time, thus attired, at the theatre and the hippodrome and in other pleasurable pursuits, and above all else in hunting. And they had dancers and mimes and all sorts of things to see and hear, music and whatever other diversions men dream up. Most of them dwelt in parks abounding in water and trees; and they held numerous banquets, and sought after every type of sexual pleasure. But the Moors for their part live in stuffy huts both in winter and in summer...¹¹¹

Almost everything Procopius says here could have been written by a similarly observant Greek or Iranian about the Umayyad *quṣūr* and the life that was lived in them. Their milieu was still that of the world of late antiquity. In studying it, we find ourselves witnessing not so much the birth of Islamic civilisation, as another episode in that familiar late antique adjustment of the motifs of Mediterranean or Iranian high culture to the needs of 'barbarian' peoples eager to admire, to participate - and not be smothered. By the time Quṣayr 'Amra was built, the Arab elite was so sure it was itself no longer 'barbarous' that it could without qualms point to 'the uncouth and

111. Procopius, *De bellis* 4.6.5-10 (based on the translation by H.B. Dewing). Cf. the encomiastic poems by Fl. Felix, preserved in the *Anthologia latina*, on the Alianas baths rebuilt by the Vandal king Thrasamund (496-523). For text, translation and commentary see Chalon, Devallet, Force, Griffe, Lassère and Michaud, *Antiquités africaines* 21 (1985).

brutish Arab of the desert who obdurately act at random in the perplexity of ignorance' as a particularly noxious example of that condition.¹¹² The patron of Quṣayr 'Amra would have been not a little disconcerted to learn that the frescoes with which he had adorned his bath house contained 'des scènes originales de la vie nomade'.¹¹³ He would have been impressed, though, could he have foreseen the attraction his adopted way of life would continue to exercise, despite the carpings of the pious and thanks at least in part to the impetus the Umayyads gave it. The Abbasid palaces of Sāmarrā', for instance, provided a setting for a courtly life whose elaboration and self-indulgence had much in common with the Umayyads', while the decoration of the buildings themselves not only echoed, as already noted, the themes of Umayyad court art, but also in at least one case the decoration of a specific Umayyad structure, Mushattā'.¹¹⁴ And the prestige of the Abbasid court inspired even the East Romans to imitate it.¹¹⁵

The product of this latter cultural convergence - Umayyad, Abbasid and 'Roman' - is best evoked in the Greek epic *Digenis Akritis*, where it describes the palace built on the Euphrates by the poem's hero, the son of a Muslim *amīr* who crossed over to Roman territory and was baptized for love of a Christian girl he had taken captive on a raid, and now bore him Digenis. The passage may be quoted at length, for it is our only extended ancient evocation of a rural *qaṣr*'s appearance and atmosphere:

By channel from Euphrates' bank he made to flow the water,
 planted a second Paradise pleasing to all beholders,
 a grove that was incomparable, true joy to eyes it offered.
 Around the grove a wall he cast, of height just as it should be,
 each one of its four sides was made with blocks of polished marble.

...

Beneath the trees the meadow flowered, brilliant in all its glory,
 showing a range of various hues, its blooms were all a-bursting.

...

Into the meadow water flowed, copious, from all directions,

112. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, letter 21 p. 216 (tr. Latham, *A.L.U.P.* 168; Schönig, *Sendschreiben* 18); cf. al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 424-25; and the poets quoted by Nadler, *Umayyadenkalifen* 7-8. Note also (from a slightly later date) Bashshār b. Burd 11-12 (Arabic), 50-51 (translation) in Beeston's selection.

113. Grabar, *Penser l'art islamique* 20.

114. Above, 139.

115. A. Grabar, *L'art de la fin de l'antiquité* 1.265-90.

and in there birds of various kinds enjoyed their habitation.

...

Amidst this very Paradise of wonderment and pleasure
the valiant frontiersman raised up a truly pleasant dwelling
of many rooms, and four-square built, its masonry cut finely,
with stately columns up above, and likewise there were windows.
The ceilings - every one of them - he covered in mosaic work
of costly marbles all made up, and gleaming in their glory.
The floor he brightened, paving it in patterns made of stone work,
while inside he made upper rooms on three floors in succession.
Their height it was considerable, their vaults were many-varied,
rooms cruciform and five-domed halls, amazing to behold them,
with marble work all glittering and gleaming, full of radiance.

...

And then on each flank of his house he layed out in its side-wings
reclining rooms both long and grand, with gold-encrusted ceilings,
and thereupon the victories of olden heroes' courage
he had them show in gold mosaic that gorgeously depicted
first Samson's fight against the foe, of alien race and kindred,
and then the stories of David and Goliath, and Saul; of Achilles and Odysseus,
Bellerophon and (at length) Alexander; of Moses and the exodus of the Jews.
All these and very many more in both reclining chambers
Digenis had recorded in mosaics of golden pieces,
which gave to all who saw them there a pleasure that was
boundless.¹¹⁶

Although considered a product of the twelfth century, *Digenis* preserves echoes of the ninth- and tenth-century Roman-Arab frontier world. At least in this milieu, a palatial style the Abbasids partly inherited from the Umayyads had been fully assimilated not only to the Alexander romance but also to Homer and the whole world of Greek mythology as well. The Old Testament from which Christian and Muslim alike drew inspiration, and to which one of Quṣayr 'Amra's Arabic texts makes reference by invoking Abraham and David, was likewise abundantly illustrated on Digenis's palace walls. And

116. *Digenis Akritis* 7.12-16, 23-24, 30-31, 42-52, 59-63, 99-101 (Grottaferrata version; author's translation). For further descriptive elements preserved in later versions, including reference to a bath house, and for a more detailed comparison with the *quṣūr*, see the bibliography noted in Jeffreys's edition, p. 205.

just as the *quṣūr* allotted Islam its separate place in the mosque, so too Digenis did not mingle the Gospel story with the Hebrew and Hellenic themes in his hall, but built a church that stood apart in the courtyard of his residence. The religious allegiances from which the two civilisations of Christian Rome and the caliphate drew their specific colouring were excluded, in the *quṣūr* as in Digenis's palace, from the focus of social life.¹¹⁷

Choices such as these suggest a milieu in which soldiers and men of action - not scholars or priests - had the last word. The days of 'barbarism' had not yet become mere historical memory. But even those soldiers and men of action were still an elite. Procopius too clearly has in mind the Vandal ruling class, not the rank and file. We must be careful not to take a bath house created by an Umayyad prince as necessarily indicative of the cultural horizons that were available to the mass of Arab fighters on whom the strength and endurance of the caliphate so directly depended. The legitimacy of the later Umayyads depended, admittedly, on their ability to project themselves as rulers of an 'Arab empire' (*al-dawla al-'arabīya*), while denouncing their opponents and eventual supplanters as an 'Iranian gang' (*al-fi'a al-'ajamīya*)¹¹⁸ - preferring the language of race pure and simple to Wellhausen's more subtle distinction between Arab Umayyads and Muslim Abbasids.¹¹⁹ Yet if we judge from the historical narratives preserved by al-Ṭabarī, for example, the cultural atmosphere of the great barrack cities of al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa had little in common with that of the Syrian *quṣūr*. Even if some of these latter were also designed in part as accommodation for armed retinues, still the accommodation was apparently far more austere in decoration than the owner's, set apart on the upper floor. Subjects of conversation below stairs are likely to have ranged from hunting to the many bloody politico-religious schisms, such as Shiism and Kharijism, that were rending the Islamic community at this time, but probably did not take in the niceties of royal iconography, let alone Greek mythology. Another prominent if no longer very powerful Arab milieu was that of the refined salons of al-Madīna, famed for their poets and singers. For all its cultural distance from the barracks of 'Irāq, though, al-Madīna will have been much less exposed than the *quṣūr* to

117. Cf. Brown, *Authority and the sacred* 11-12, on the exuberant art and inconspicuous Christianization of the fourth-century Roman elite. His words could be applied, with a few changes, to the Umayyads as well.

118. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, *letter* 38.

119. Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich* 350-52.

the unique cultural mix of Syria, with its strong East Roman element. In short, whatever the usefulness of the *qaṣīda* to the interpreter of Quṣayr ‘Amra, the frescoes come nowhere near the poetry as a touchstone of Arabism. Instead, they attest to a rather advanced stage of Mediterranean inculturation on the part of their Umayyad patron and his immediate circle.¹²⁰

120. A major question that awaits an answer is the extent to which the Umayyads were inspired by the residences of the late Roman military elite in Syria. That the ordinary military *castrum* was part of the *qaṣr*'s background has often been suggested. But still closer parallels are offered by the luxuriously appointed sixth-century complexes at Qaṣr ibn Wardān near Ḥamā - to whose Near Eastern as well as Constantinopolitan architectural affinities Grossmann has now drawn attention, *Da.M.* 12 (2000) - and nearby al-Andarīn, whose *castrum* turns out to have been decorated with wall mosaics, wall paintings (non-figural), porphyry and marble revetments, and *opus sectile*: Strube, *XXe congrès international des études byzantines* 3.217. These buildings too must be part of the genealogy of Digenis's palace. My thanks to Alastair Northedge and Christine Strube for discussion of this important new perspective.

PART II

CHRISTIANITY AND THE Umayyads

by

ELIZABETH KEY FOWDEN

6.

MONKS, MONASTERIES AND EARLY ISLAM

At the monastery of St Catherine on Sinai there is a palimpsest manuscript of Christian texts with five layers: the oldest two are in Syriac, then seventh-century Greek, followed by Arabic of the first century of the Hijra and finally Arabic of the late eighth to early ninth century.¹ This linguistic layering on parchment manifests in the most tangible way the cultural diversity of the Christian East. Pilgrimage to the Holy Land was in part responsible for the diversity, but it was largely just a reflection of the region's varied inhabitants. Before the Islamic conquests, speakers of Syriac, Aramaic, Greek and Arabic identified themselves as Christians and even lived together within monastic walls. After the conquests, monastic life continued in many ways as before, but now it also served as a generative point during this critical period when Islamic ideas of holiness and asceticism were taking form. What will interest us in this chapter are the ways in which Muḥammad and his early followers responded to the deeply-rooted and diverse monastic culture that they encountered in the seventh and eighth centuries. Before examining views of monks in the Qur'an and later traditions, though, we must first attempt to understand the characteristics of monasticism in the Arab cultural zone around the time of the Prophet, in order to picture on the ground how monks impinged on the experiences and imagination of the first Muslims.

Monastic culture on the eve of Islam

Sozomen in the mid-fifth century records that the Arabs 'became familiar with faith in Christ through their encounters with the priests and monks who lived close to them, virtuous men and wonder-workers, who were living a contemplative life in the neighbouring desert'.² This description serves as a

1. Atiya, *Arabic manuscripts* 19; Griffith, *D.O.P.* 51 (1997) 11-31.

2. Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.38.14.

prelude to his story about the conversion of the Salīhid phylarch Zokomos in the early fifth century, whose childless state was remedied thanks to the miraculous intervention of one such monk. A slightly earlier Arab leader, Māwiya, had her own holy man, Moses, who also 'led the contemplative life in the neighbouring desert' and became priest and bishop for her tribe after their conversion.³ The attraction of ascetic wonder-workers at the steppe's edge drew Arabs across Syria-Mesopotamia, even creating a conflict of loyalties between the Lakhmid king al-Nu'mān I (d. after 418) and his Arab subjects when the latter began flocking to the monk Symeon on his pillar in northern Syria, behaviour perceived as potential treachery against their Iranian overlord.⁴ After a chastizing dream in which Symeon himself threatened the Arab king with physical violence if he interfered with his subjects' devotion to the stylite, al-Nu'mān permitted the pilgrimage to Symeon's monastery at Telanissos, making sure at the same time to counterbalance their interest in Symeon with churches of their own back in al-Ḥira. According to legend, this al-Nu'mān eventually abdicated to follow the ascetic life himself.⁵

Two Syriac lives – one of Ahudemmeḥ and the other of Mārūthā – reveal the sort of ties that linked pastoral and semi-pastoral communities to monasteries.⁶ Put together, the missionary activity of these two metropolitans of Takrīt in northern Mesopotamia spanned nearly one hundred years, from the mid-sixth to the mid-seventh centuries. Ahudemmeḥ and Mārūthā were consummate diplomats in political circles (although Ahudemmeḥ eventually died a martyr after converting a Sasanian prince), and at the same time occupied themselves with the salvation of pastoral Arab souls. The construction of monasteries played a pivotal role in their strategy. These were built at a water source and near often-travelled routes through difficult landscapes, so that they served as meeting points where the region's pastoral populations, as well as merchants and pilgrims, could be monitored as well as fed and sheltered. It was said of Ahudemmeḥ's Sergius monastery north of

3. Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.38.5.

4. *Vita Simeonis Stylitae* (Syriac) § 67 (Assemani).

5. See Part 2, chapter 2. A later fifth-century Arab king, the Salīhid Dāwūd, is also remembered for renouncing bloodshed and re-directing his efforts toward the construction of a monastery. The story of Dāwūd's renunciation is recorded in the ninth-century *Jamharat al-nasab* of Hishām al-Kalbī. For a translation and discussion of the sources, see Shahīd, *B.A.F.I.C.* 257-62.

6. *History of Ahudemmeḥ* 7-51; Denha, *History of Mārūthā* 63-96.

Takrīt, near Jabal Sinjar, that the monks cultivated a ‘garden filled with goods for the entire country where [the monastery] was situated’.⁷ Monasteries in the ‘desert’ were gardens and way stations, as well as houses of prayer, and their manifold purposes were fused in the experience of those who visited them.

The eighth-century *History of Mārūthā* crystallizes into hagiographical form the many roles assumed by monks and monasteries in late antique Syria and Mesopotamia. The course of Mārūthā’s life, as monk and metropolitan, elucidates monastic involvement in education, in the power struggles of the anti-Chalcedonian, or ‘monophysite’, and Nestorian hierarchies, and the socio-economic relations of the region, as well as pre-Islamic mission, particularly among Arab pastoralists. Born in c. 565, Mārūthā was an approximate contemporary of the Prophet Muḥammad, whom he outlived by seventeen years. When in 649 Mārūthā died, he left behind flourishing monophysite communities, both lay and monastic, in northern and central Mesopotamia, as far south as Kūfa and environs. The course of his life speaks for the geographical and cultural kinship of Syria-Mesopotamia, regardless of changing political frontiers. During this period, as it is presented in Mārūthā’s biography, the divisiveness within Christianity – especially among monophysites and Nestorians – was more disruptive to everyday life than the invasions and counter-invasions of the Romans and Sasanians, followed by the Arab conquests. This spiritual rupture within the Christian communion left a distinct impression on early Islamic writing about Christianity and monasticism, starting with the Qur’ān.

The *History of Mārūthā* is a useful framework for discussion since it covers so much ground. As a source of evidence for monasteries it is unusual, though not unique. Fragments of information collected from various Syriac chronicles and hagiographies are slowly being reintegrated by scholars to build up a more three-dimensional picture, particularly for northern Syria and Mesopotamia.⁸ Further south our evidence – both literary and material – grows more sparse. Even so, the discovery of new archaeological evidence in Jordan, for example, and the Gulf States⁹, should help us to eke out what we

⁷ *History of Ahudemme* 4, p.30; cp. Denha, *History of Mārūthā* 6, p.86 and pp. 88-89.

⁸ See, e.g., Nau, *Arabes chrétiens*; Brock, *Numen* 20 (1973) 1-19; Harvey, *Byzantion* 58 (1988) 295-308; Harvey, *Asceticism and society*; Palmer, *Monk and mason*; Palmer with Brock and Hoyland, *West-Syrian chronicles*.

⁹ See, e.g., Beaucamp and Robin, *Travaux et memoires* 8 (1981) 45-61; Potts, *Arabian Gulf in antiquity* vol. 2; King, *B.S.O.A.S.* 60 (1997) 221-35, with bibliography.

already know from episcopal lists, toponyms and scattered anecdotes about monks. My use of the *History of Mārūthā* is founded on the assumption that the general outline it offers of monastic life rings true throughout West Asia and can accommodate the many local peculiarities that will have existed and that future research will, hopefully, illuminate.

The first substantial section of the *History of Mārūthā* is dedicated to Mārūthā's great appetite for learning, which, from his earliest boyhood, he had acquired in the Mesopotamian monasteries in both Sasanian and Roman territory.¹⁰ After establishing himself as a 'master and doctor and interpreter of Books, and exemplar of perfection and model for the blessed' at the monastery of Nardas overlooking the Tigris, near Balad, Mārūthā took up residence at the famous monophysite monastery of Mar Zakī near Callinicum, in Roman territory. For six years he lived among the monks of that place, reading the Fathers, especially Gregory the Theologian. Afterwards he moved on to live in cells around Edessa, where he learned the art of calligraphy from a monk – further indication of the central importance of the book in monastic culture. Thence he journeyed to Beit Reqūm, also in Roman territory, for a relatively brief stay of some two years, before returning in 605 to Sasanian territory, lest he be suspected of espionage, as the flames were being fanned for renewed conflict between the two empires.¹¹ Even before he returned from the West, Mārūthā's 'treasure of learning and perfection' had drawn attention to him and provoked an attempt to make him a bishop. Fearful for his spiritual state, writes his biographer and eventual successor as metropolitan of Takrīt, Mārūthā successfully resisted this first approach, quoting Gregory the Theologian on the spiritual danger of accepting honours. Making allowances for hagiographical flourishes, two clear features – book learning and perfection in spiritual practice – emerge as the qualities Mārūthā had acquired from the monasteries and hermitages. These were also to be the qualities of Christian asceticism most esteemed by early Muslims.

When in 542-78 Jacob Baradaeus had set about creating a separate, parallel monophysite hierarchy opposed to the Chalcedonian, it was in the monasteries that his hierarchy was based, rather than in the cities after which the sees were named. During the course of the late sixth and early seventh

10. Denha, *History of Mārūthā* 64-71.

11. Nau, in his introduction to the *History of Mārūthā* 53-54, cautiously suggests that Mārūthā spent 593-603 at Mar Zakī, 603 near Edessa and 603-605 at Beit Reqūm.

centuries, divisions hardened between monophysite and Chalcedonian and between monophysite and Nestorian. Sources from this period recount endless conflicts between the different communities represented by the monks. But occasionally there are signs that the differences were exaggerated by polemicists. Others, such as the great Isaac of Nineveh (d.c. 700), would warn against 'reading books which accentuate the differences between the confessions, with the aim of causing schisms, which provides the spirit of slander with a mighty weapon against the soul'.¹² When Mārūthā returned to Roman territory, he took up residence at the famous Mar Mattai monastery and began a program of correction and edification of the monks there. Canon law was regulated, chant improved, deacons put in line. Next, he moved to the monastery of Shīrīn near Hulwan in eastern Iraq, where he discovered that monophysites and Nestorians were sharing in the holy eucharist, a precious glimpse of blurred boundaries between the two communities. Mārūthā soon cured that illness, educating in right doctrine and practice the abbot, his monks and the many members of the Sasanian court who frequented the monastery. Lay involvement in monasteries should never be forgotten amidst the accounts of reforms in canon law, ritual practice, fasting, daily routine and psalmody. The monk came to stand emblematically for the Christian faith as a whole – such was the powerful role played by asceticism during Muḥammad's lifetime.

Attention was given not only to learning and spiritual exercises, but also to the aesthetic dimension of worship: the harmonious movements of the celebrating clergy, praiseworthy chanting, beautiful vestments, lambent liturgical vessels, lamps and candelabra. Mārūthā is also credited with lavish building projects once he accepted, in 629, the title of Metropolitan of Takrīt and all the East.¹³ A fascinating description of the monasteries of the pre-Islamic Arabs reports that

three groups of Yamanite Christians used to compete with one another in the construction of *biya'* (churches) with attention to their decoration and the beauty of their structures: the house of al-Mundhir in Ḥīra, and Ghassān in al-Shām, and Banū 'l-Ḥārith ibn Ka'b, the Ḥārithids in Najrān. Their *diyārāt* (monasteries), which were exceedingly high, were located in places that abounded with trees, gardens and streamlets. They used to have the furnishings of these structures made of gold and silver and their

12. Isaac of Nineveh, *The first part* 48 (tr. 34).

13. Denha, *History of Mārūthā* 79-83.

curtains of brocade. In their walls they had mosaics and in their ceilings gold.¹⁴

The elaborately decorated architecture of some monasteries was also emphasized by John of Ephesus in his *Lives of the eastern saints*, composed in 566-68.¹⁵ On the development of the pilgrimage centre built around the pillar of Symeon the Elder, Isaac of Antioch remarked that the monks 'have deserted the (spiritual) heights and have plumbed the depths with their many grandiose building activities'. Isaac did not mince words: 'The sun blushed to see monks who had turned into merchants'.¹⁶ Still, the late sixth and seventh centuries saw continued building and adornment of monasteries and churches, while the relics of miracle-working saints and martyrs continued to attract pilgrims and donations. For example, at the first monastery where Mārūthā lived, that of Nardas, Mar Lazar worked cures and miracles. When reporting these, Mārūthā's biographer goes on to comment that the monastery was renowned not only because of the martyr, but also for the spiritual leaders it produced, who were holy men and miracle workers both in life and death.¹⁷ The holy man continued to be the focus of much reverence as a spiritual athlete who through his efforts had come closer to God than the ordinary man or woman would even aspire to do.

In the sixth century, writers such as Cyril of Scythopolis and John of Ephesus experienced and attempted to capture in writing the holy man's powers of discernment and healing that could not be bound by any ephemeral limits, least of all the monastery wall. Peter Brown has described this cultural climate, in which the individual ascetic is not tied down by his monastic obedience but freed in order – through his own spiritual restoration

14. The account is preserved in al-Bakrī, *Mu'jam al-buldān* 603, s.v. Dayr Najrān; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān* 2.538, s.v. Dayr al-Najrān; and Ibn Fadl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-abṣār* 1.309, citing al-İṣfahānī as his source; see Shahīd, *B.A.SI.C.* 2(1)160-63, for translation and discussion of the texts. Cp. another description preserved in 'Umarī concerning the last Lakhmid king at the monastery of Hind the Younger: 'And it was related that al-Nu'mān used to pray in it and receive communion; that he hung in its *haykal* (chapel) five hundred lamps (*qindīls*) made of gold and silver. Their oil during feast days [was] oils of lily and of willow and others there were similar to these. And the wood he used to buy (for censuring in the chapel) consisted of Indian aloes and of ambergris, in quantities that defy description'. For translation and discussion of this passage, see Shahīd, *B.A.SI.C.* 2(1)163-64.

15. See John of Ephesus, *Lives of the eastern saints* 4, 7, 12, 14, 17, 20, 31, 33, 35, 42, 47.

16. Both quotations from Isaac are translated by Brock, *Numen* 20 (1973) 17.

17. Denha, *History of Mārūthā* 67-68.

– to work toward the healing of all who sought illumination:

In a world where the primary division was not that between the monastery and the world, or between the clergy and the laity, but the existential chasm between religious persons and the vast majority who had neither the leisure nor the inclination for such matters, it was usual for any outstanding person or monastic establishment to function as a ‘monastery without walls’ for a wide network of religiously-minded clients ‘in the world’.¹⁸

These frontierless ascetics – including contemporaries of Mārūthā and Muḥammad - were also the subject of John Moschus’s *Pratum spirituale* at the end of the sixth century, though his work is less caught up with contemporary polemics than that of his predecessors.¹⁹ Andrew Palmer has described what he sees as a slow shift in hagiographical writing from a focus on the powers of the living holy man to those of holy relics. By the ninth century Palmer discerns what he describes as an almost superstitious fixation on relics.²⁰ But in the late sixth and seventh centuries holy men, living monks in cells and in monasteries still commanded enormous attention alongside those who worked miracles from their silver-encrusted reliquaries. At the same time we do, though, find a growing uneasiness, at least among some writers, about human ability to discern the difference between holiness and illusion. We see growing accusations about false relics, while the charge of idolatry is launched against a range of offenders.²¹

Saints and relics drew converts to Christianity. Once Mārūthā had rectified the errant behaviour in Takrīt, he turned his attention to mission – to the inhabitants of central Mesopotamia, and those who crossed the region, especially the Arab pastoralists.²² A water source was tapped, holy men imported and a magnificent monastery grew up in the countryside near an important route between Takrīt and ‘Āqūla (future al-Kūfa). The community conformed to the environment – shelter, food and drink welcomed the traveller, who once inside would also behold the impressive architecture and its adornment, perhaps even witness a service. At least some of the monks’ outward spiritual life would

18. Brown, *C.A.H.* 14.796; cp. Charanis, *D.O.P.* 25 (1971) 74, on the intertwined fate of monks and lay people.

19. Rousseau, *C.A.H.* 14.747-48.

20. Palmer, *Monk and mason* 182-83.

21. See, e.g., *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens* 180 (Syriac text), 439 (tr.): canon 12 of the Nestorian Katholikos Isho’yahb, dated 585, to his bishops.

22. Denha, *History of Mārūthā* 85-89.

have been visible to the casual visitor to the monastery church – major feasts provided opportunity for that. The veneration of saints through their relics and icons would have been one of the most striking visual souvenirs of a monastic sojourn. The patron saint of Mārūthā's monastery was S. Sergius, by that time a well-established miracle-worker among Arabs of the region.

Through their prophecies about the Prophet, the monks of Syria and Mesopotamia were given a role to play also in descriptions of Islam's spread in the region. In both Muslim and Christian literature, the best known monk in the pre-history of Islam is Baḥīrā²³ at Buṣrā (Roman Bostra in the southern Ḥawrān), who perceived the signs of the young Muḥammad's vocation when the boy accompanied his uncle in a trading caravan from Mecca to Syria. According to tradition, the Quraysh caravan had stopped in the shade of a tree near Baḥīrā's cell and the monk invited them for a feast, having already witnessed signs indicating a supernatural presence among them.²⁴ While this Baḥīrā had the good fortune to meet Muḥammad in person, other monks served in different ways as pointers toward the coming divine revelation. In addition to his account of Baḥīrā's witness to Muḥammad's destiny, Ibn Ishāq also recounts the story of the four men who broke from the traditional polytheism of the Quraysh in order to seek out the pure religion of Abraham, the Ḥanīfīya. According to this tradition, the four set off on their independent spiritual quests, and three of them became Christians. The fourth, Zayd b. 'Amr, did not attach himself to any religion of the day, but lived according to principles of purity, abstention from idolatry and humility before God. He left Mecca in order to wander in search of the religion of Abraham

questioning monks and rabbis until he had traversed al-Mawṣil and the whole of Mesopotamia; then he went through the whole of Syria until he came to a monk at Mayfa'a in the Balqā'. This man, it is alleged, was well instructed in Christianity. He asked him about the Ḥanīfīya, the religion of Abraham, and the monk replied, 'You are seeking a religion to which no one today can guide you, but the time of a prophet who will come forth from your own country which you have just left has drawn near. He will be sent with the Ḥanīfīya, the religion of Abraham, so stick to it, for he is about to be sent now and this is his time.'²⁵

23. Baḥīrā is sometimes known by the name of Sergius or Sergius Baḥīrā: see Gero, in *Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam* 47-58.

24. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 115-116 (tr. 79-81).

25. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 148-149 (tr. 102-03). Guillaume mistranslates 'at Mayfa'a' (no doubt an unfamiliar toponym to him) as 'in the high ground'.

What is of interest for our purposes is not whether this eighth-century account preserves traces of a pre-Islamic monotheism, the religion of the so-called *ḥanīfiya*, but rather the way in which the tradition takes for granted the place of pre-Islamic monks as preservers of wisdom – even prophetic wisdom.²⁶

The pre-Islamic monks involved in the Arabs' Christianization cannot be easily classified. No clear boundaries were drawn between the hermit in his cell and the coenobitic monk in his 'desert' monastery. Mārūthā himself had been both. Gradually we reassemble the fragmented picture showing the variety of ascetic forms that continued well into the eighth century. Stylites, dendrites and cave-dwellers persist alongside monks living in small monastic complexes as well as expansive coenobia. For example, we now have epigraphic evidence for a stylite at 'Ayn al-Kanīsa near Mount Nebo in the second half of the sixth century.²⁷ This hermitage was repaired as late as 762. Michele Piccirillo has also made the plausible suggestion that the tower outside the walls of Umm al-Raṣāṣ/Mayfa'a in the Balqā' housed a monk.²⁸ The Syrian stylite Timothy is said to have died at a great age near Antioch in 871.²⁹ Reference to a 'monk in his secluded cell on high (*uṣṭwān*), where the vulture round his nest doth fly' appears in verses attributed to the Yemeni poet Dhū Jadan, suggesting at least a familiarity with the ascetic phenomenon of stylitism in South Arabia.³⁰ Excavation has brought to light a small monastic complex with an agricultural enclosure near Jerusalem that appears to have been inhabited in the Umayyad and even Abbasid periods.³¹ Across the Jordan, near Jericho, was discovered what the excavators identified as a secluded Nestorian hermitage, dating probably to the ninth century. The hermitage consisted simply of two rectangular, adjoining rooms – a dwelling and a chapel, the latter's floor decorated with an estrangelo Syriac inscription. Two glass hanging lamps and a bronze censer were found inside the chapel.³²

26. For the controversy over interpreting the *ḥanīfiya* tradition, see Rippin, in *Islamic studies* 153-68.

27. Piccirillo, *Liber Annuus* 44 (1994) 521-30.

28. Piccirillo, in *Umm al-Rasas – Mayfa'ah* 1.37-46. See also below, chapter 7.

29. See the discussion of the Arabic *Life* of S. Timothy the Stylite in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 113-15.

30. Dhū Jadan in Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 26 (tr.19).

31. Arav, Di Segni and Kloner, *Liber Annuus* 40 (1990) 313-20, plates 41-44.

32. Baramki and Stephan, *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 4 (1935) 81-86 pls 52-54. For a recent survey of evidence (some very sketchy) for monasticism 'in the Arab Area', see Shahīd, *B.A.S.I.C.* 2(1)167-71.

A beloved theme in pre-Islamic poetry that comes to life in this context is the image of the ascetic's lamp-lit cell. The famous *Mu'allaqa* of Imru' al-Qays includes this description of a threatening storm:

My friend, can you see the lightning? Let me point out to you its flashes in the distance gleaming like the flash of hands [as it moves swiftly] in a mass of cloud piled up like a crown.

Its light giving illumination, or like the lamps of a hermit (*rāhib*) who has been generous with oil on the twisted wicks.³³

Earlier he uses a similar image to evoke the luminosity of his beloved:

In the evening she lights up the darkness as though she were the light in the place where the hermit (*rāhib*) does his eventide devotions.³⁴

Imru' al-Qays takes the image no further – there is here no suggestion that the poet pried into the nature of the monk's devotions. But encounters with hermits are treated in a matter of fact way. Monks are a part of the scenery. At the same time they are a source of fascination and aesthetic pleasure, as well as succour in uncivilized places: 'the stars were like lanterns lit by monks guiding returning travellers'.³⁵

Many of the scattered references to encounters with monks tend to portray the pre-Islamic Arabs as plunderers tamed only by monkish miracles³⁶ - occasionally we find accounts not without a touch of humour, such as the story of some monophysite Arabs who met a bald-headed mime who, fleeing the law, had taken to the countryside. Both his appearance and his presence in the 'desert' persuaded the Arabs that he was a monk, so they compelled him to celebrate the liturgy for them.³⁷ Not all reported encounters between monks and Arabs were edifying, but it would be unrealistic to expect otherwise. That some monks and their monasteries were targets for raiding cannot be doubted, but neither can we dismiss out of hand the evidence for Arab pursuit of monks for their spiritual wealth and sacramental gifts.

Pre-Islamic poetry shows a preference for identifying the hermit, rather than the coenobite, as the 'good monk'. But it is a pronounced privileging, not a monopoly that the solitary enjoys among the Arabs. Despite the

33. Imru' al-Qays, *Mu'allaqa* 71-72 (tr. 82-83).

34. Imru' al-Qays, *Mu'allaqa* 39 (tr. 69-70).

35. Imru' al-Qays, cited by el-Tayib in *A.L.U.P.* 48.

36. E.g. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii* 51; John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 155.

37. Leontius of Jerusalem, *Contra monophysitas* 1900-1901.

predictable hagiographical flourishes of the *History of Mārūthā* and also the *History of Ahudemmeḥ*,³⁸ the success of these missionaries among the Arabs was based on their coenobitic way of life – only such an arrangement could respond to the demands made by the landscape and the transhumant way of life with such adroitness. Brightly-lit candelabra, luxurious fabrics and silver vessels would certainly have awed visitors. But the image that lingered longest was the simplest one – the humble oil lamp of the solitary monk in contemplation.

The continuation of monasticism after the conquests

Monasteries continued to thrive despite the temporary set-backs some suffered from the conquests, and there is evidence of new monasteries being built and restored under Muslim rule.³⁹ The transition was relatively smooth at Takrīt. Mārūthā himself took part in negotiations following the city's capture⁴⁰ and his biographer betrays no awareness of disruption during Mārūthā's reign. Due to the nature of the sources, both literary and archaeological, the degree of upset caused to monasteries will probably never be well understood. The variety of accounts in the sources – from utter desecration and pillage to peaceful co-habitation – must mirror the variety experienced at the time, influenced at it was by a whole array of factors from the personal style of the commander to the terrain.⁴¹ Traditions were handed down according to which Muḥammad asked that hermits be spared; while Abū Bakr was said to have exhorted his men 'You will pass people who occupy themselves in monks' cells (*ṣawāmi*); leave them alone, and leave alone what they busy themselves with'⁴² Muslim respect for Christian monks

38. *History of Ahudemmeḥ* 3.1.7-51.

39. See, e.g., for northern Mesopotamia, Palmer, *Monk and mason* 182-90, and Robinson, *Empire and elites*, especially 64-66. For an excellent overview of monasteries in Muslim society, see Sourdél, 'Dayr' in *E.Is.*2. Also Kennedy, in *C.A.H.* 14.602, on the difficulty of evaluating the material evidence: 'the building of monasteries, for example, could be an indicator of economic expansion as people endowed the church with their surplus wealth, or it could be a sign that monasteries were expanding their lands at the expense of impoverished or depopulated villages'.

40. Fiey, *L'Orient Syrien* 8 (1963) 296-99.

41. See recently Morony, *Hugoye* 3 (2000) 1-28, who is particularly interested in the evidence for natural disasters as a significant cause of economic and social unrest in the sixth to twelfth centuries.

42. Ṭab. 1.1850 (tr. Donner); cf. also Ṭab. 1.1987-88 on the protection of Najrani monks.

was reflected also in the terms of surrender made out in 633 for al-Ḥīra, the predominantly Christian Arab settlement on the Middle Euphrates. According to this agreement, monks who did not work for a living and who had wholly abandoned worldly life were not required to pay the *jizya*, but were still considered to belong to the protected people.⁴³

The literary evidence allows a few glimpses of the ways Christians tried to explain the existence of Muḥammad's followers. For instance, John Bar Penkāyē, a monk from northwest Mesopotamia writing c. 687, makes some almost generous comments about the followers of Muḥammad, in particular about their attitude toward asceticism. He writes: 'Before calling them [Muslims], (God) had prepared them beforehand to hold Christians in honour; thus they also had a special commandment from God concerning our monastic station, that they should hold it in honour'.⁴⁴ This recognition was also voiced in the unpublished 'Disputation against the Arabs' in which the interlocutor of a monk of Bēth Hālē is an emir who is quoted saying, 'Even Muḥammad our prophet said about the inhabitants of the monasteries and the mountain dwellers that they will enjoy the kingdom'.⁴⁵ This emir should most probably be identified with 'Abd al-Malik's son Maslama, a general and governor whose career spanned from 86/705 to his retirement to northern Syria in 114/732, six years before his death in 121/738.⁴⁶ In 98-99/717-718, he besieged Constantinople, which may have boosted his notoriety among eastern Christians, making a date in the 720s the most likely date for the disputation. Whether or not the text records an actual event is of less interest than the details of the encounter, since in order for the text to have been at all convincing, these must have been deemed within the realm of the possible. The emir is versed in both Christian scripture as well as the Qur'ān, but claims that 'we do not accept all your Books.'⁴⁷ For a cure for an

43. Ṭab. 1.2044-45.

44. John Bar Penkāyē, *Rīsh Mellē* 14. 141* (tr. 57).

45. Tr. Griffith, *Hugoye* 3 (2000) 11, and 7 with nn. 28 and 29 on the edition in preparation. There were those who held the opposite view as, for example, the Kufan Maymūn b. Mihrān (b.40/660-61), an influential *faqīh* and administrator for 'Abd al-Malik and later Umayyads, who espoused the view that even pious monks were damned, being non-Muslims: al-Qushayrī, *Ta'rikh Raqqā* 27, cited by van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 1.20 with n. 4. See Sviri, *J.S.A.I.* 13 (1990) 199-201, for two further anti-monastic sources from the Umayyad period.

46. This text has been recently commented upon by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 465-72, and Griffith, *Hugoye* 3 (2000) 1-22.

47. Tr. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 467. By the early Abbasid period, the monastery – as well as

unnamed affliction, the emir has resorted to the monastery of Bēth Hālē, which would appear to have been built in the mid-seventh century near Ḥīra, famous for its salubrious climate.⁴⁸ This fits neatly into the role of monasteries as hostels and the home of doctors and healers, as depicted in the *History of Mārūthā*.⁴⁹ During his sojourn, the emir is allowed to witness the monks' rites 'performed at the appropriate seven times'⁵⁰, further textual confirmation that Muslims had occasion to observe Christian practices not only from afar as in public processions, but also in more intimate settings. The emir's reported reactions too are of a more general interest: awe at the frequency and devotion of the monks' prayers, repulsion from their reverencing of the cross, icons and relics – highlighting the more widespread worry about saint cult expressed by Muslims elsewhere.⁵¹

This uneasiness about aspects of Christian worship was apparently overridden in the case of S. Sergius at al-Ruṣāfa, where Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik erected a large mosque just to the north of the shrine of al-Ruṣāfa's miracle-working saint. Building at or near the site of a Christian holy place or monastery was not unique to Hishām.⁵² As we shall see in the next chapter, there are several examples of Umayyad *quṣūr* that reoccupied monastic sites. This further corroborates the socio-economic role played by monasteries, since the remoteness combined with access to routes and natural resources that a monastery required were also sought by the Umayyad elites, who found in these places both refuge and a means of surveying the tribes on whose support their rule depended. What is so

the *majlis* – had become an established setting for descriptions of theological disputations between Christian monks and Muslims. On this subject, see the work of Griffith, especially in *Majlis* 13-65.

48. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne* 3.204, 223; Griffith, *Hugoye* 3 (2000) 7; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 465, considers a monastery near al-Mawṣil a possible alternative.

49. Cp. a vizier who was cured at a monastery where he had stopped to recover from an illness while travelling to Diyarbakır, and fell into conversation with a monk: in Griffith, *Majlis* 50.

50. Tr. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 466.

51. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 469-70; Griffith, *Hugoye* 3 (2000) 9-12.

52. While Hishām's father 'Abd al-Malik (65/685-86/705) is remembered for his increasing Islamicization of the caliphate, there was no shortage of Christians in his circle, including administrators such as John of Damascus's father, and the Arab Christian poet al-Akḥṭal. The caliph is also represented as having read books from the Old Testament and the Christian Gospel: see Griffith, *Majlis* 19. On the influence of debate with Christians on the formation of Islamic *kalām* - a related, and vast, subject - see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 1.52-55.

striking at al-Ruṣāfa, though, is the deliberate association of the mosque with the adjoining courtyard of the Great Basilica, an extensive ecclesiastical and, it seems, monastic complex. Thanks to this arrangement, the Muslim who entered Hishām's Great Mosque to pray had easy access to the shrine of S. Sergius.⁵³ Such an unusual arrangement suggests that in this case at least, Hishām was willing to risk the dangers of *shirk* that had haunted Muḥammad.

Under Islam, monasteries and their holy men continued to fill a niche in the landscape and society of the late antique Middle East. Only now, the visitors who passed through the monastic complexes included Muslims. We should never forget, though, that many of these first generation Muslims had formerly been polytheists, Jews, Zoroastrians and, most of all, Christians.⁵⁴ For many early Muslims it seems that Christian practices and beliefs acted as stimuli along the way to the formation of a distinctively Islamic way of holiness and asceticism.⁵⁵ The dominance of eschatological beliefs in both traditions, for instance, has been an area of special concern for scholars interested to trace Christian influence in Islamic thought.⁵⁶ Likewise, suggestive similarities can also be located with regard to seclusion, humble attire, charity and poverty, fasting, weeping, vigils, healing and prayer ritual.⁵⁷ One should bear in mind when considering these sometimes

53. For a description of the situation at al-Ruṣāfa see Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* 60-100, 174-91, and below, chapter 7.

54. For a synthetic discussion of direct survivals of pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, and the nature of the many accommodations of such customs in early Islamic Iraq, see Morony, *Iraq* 502-06, arguing at 503, for example, that 'Monophysite forms of Christian asceticism were brought by the pastoral Arabs of Iraq who settled in Basra and Kufa. As Muslims, such converts continued to do those things which could be supported by the Qur'ān or by early Islamic practices in the Hijaz.'

55. On the Christian context as a 'generative point' for Islam, see Böwering, *Oriens* 36 (2001) 144.

56. One such study with far-reaching impact is Andrae, *Kyrkohistorisk Årskrift* 23 (1923) 149-20; 24 (1924) 213-92; 25 (1925) 45-112.

57. See, e.g., Smith, *Studies in early mysticism* 101-52; Morony, *Iraq* 445-66, the best synthesis of Muslim belief and practice set against the diverse inherited culture of Iraq. The collection of similar practices made by Ofer Livne-Kafri, *J.S.A.I.* 20 (1996) 105-29, draws on a wide range of early Islamic literature, some of it still unpublished and much of it little studied. A shortcoming of this useful article is the absence of any chronological analysis of the sources cited. A related subject that will not be treated here is the influence of Syriac liturgical language on the Qur'ān: see recently Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*.

strikingly close parallels that Muslims often made slight, but clearly deliberate adjustments to pre-existing practices they adopted as their own,⁵⁸ in order to inject these practices with a new spirit that would facilitate the slow process of transmutation and accommodate the developing requirements of formative Islam. But it has proven difficult to do more than place Christian and Muslim practices side by side and draw cautious conclusions about influence. By edging the physical dimension of asceticism – its material and cultural context – more fully into the picture one may hope to arrive at a more rounded understanding of interaction and influence between monks and early Muslims.⁵⁹

The nature of our literary evidence is largely anecdotal and like quick silver to handle. Still, for our purposes of getting to grips with the environment of monasticism under Muslim rule, it leaves no doubt concerning the continuing role played by monasteries and the varied ways in which Muslims could interact with monks. We have seen the example of the monk of Bēth Hālē. There is also the enigmatic Mālik b. Dīnār al-Sāmī (d. 130/747-8), a Muslim preacher and ascetic, who flourished in late seventh/early eighth century al-Baṣra and numbered among his teachers the traditionists and mystics Anas b. Mālik, Ibn Sīrīn, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Rabī‘a al-‘Adawīya. Though he left no written work, a multitude of sayings and anecdotes have attached to him.⁶⁰ In one account, Mālik was reported to have conversed about ascetic practices with a monk whom he encountered on a mountain. The latter, surprised to be met with such questions, inquired whether he was not a follower of the Qur’ān. Mālik (who earned his daily bread from copying the Holy Book) replied that he was indeed, but that that should not stop him from sitting at the feet of the Christian ascetic. This story was recorded by Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (336/948-430/1038), whose

58. Morony, *Iraq* 445.

59. For a general exposition of this approach, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 34: ‘Much effort has been expended in the past on highlighting the similarities and parallels between the literatures of the different communities of the Middle East, especially traits common to Judaism and Islam, but often with a view to ascertaining origins and establishing borrowing. Before such judgements can be made greater consideration would have to be accorded to the ways in which information was transmitted and to the affects of a shared physical and cultural environment’; and n. 8, citing Wansbrough, *The sectarian milieu* 51-54. Particularly succinct is the latter’s assessment: ‘Required is some means of determining the origin or native habitat of “universal” theologoumena’ (54).

60. See Pellat, *E. Is.*, ‘Mālik b. Dīnār’, and van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 2.91-93.

grandfather, a convert to Islam, had been a famous ascetic. Abū Nu‘aym himself travelled widely and studied in Iraq, Hijāz and Khurāsān, and came to be respected as a transmitter of *ḥadīth*, a sufi and the author of an immense collection of the lives and sayings of 649 pious figures. Though he begins formally with the four righteous caliphs, he is a more or less untapped source of evidence concerning monks in early Islamic circles. Abū Nu‘aym claims that Christian scriptures were a direct influence on Mālik.⁶¹ Indeed, Mālik himself described a visit he paid to a monastery in order to borrow a book.⁶²

Reasons for visiting monasteries – their monks, saints and libraries – were as varied as their visitors. Monasteries made so strong an impression on Muslim culture that a literary genre evolved known as the *diyārāt* – that is, collections of poetry and anecdotes set in monasteries. The genealogist and historian Hishām al-Kalbī (c. 120/737-c. 204/819), who was born, studied and died in al-Kūfa, cited among his sources the archives of the *biya‘* of al-Ḥīra.⁶³ Literally ‘churches’, *biya‘* in Arabic writers struggles to cover a wide spectrum of religious arrangements that co-existed in late antiquity, continuing well into the medieval period.⁶⁴ Though his work devoted to the churches and monasteries of al-Ḥīra has not survived, it was mined by later writers such as Abū ‘l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967), who also wrote a *Kitāb al-diyārāt*, but which suffered the same fate as Hishām’s.⁶⁵ The only such work to have survived intact is by al-Shābushtī (d. 998).⁶⁶ Another text, the tenth-

61. Also on Mālik’s asceticism, see Goldziher, ‘Asceticism and sufism’, in *Introduction to Islamic theology* 134.

62. Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Hilya* 2.365, cited in Livne-Kafri, *J.S.A.I.* 20 (1996) 108 n.25. Mālik dates his book-borrowing to the time of al-Ḥajjāj, the iron-fisted yet cultivated Umayyad governor of Iraq from 73/692-95/714.

63. Ṭab. 1.770. Khalidī, *Arabic historical thought* 52, translates *biya‘* as ‘monasteries’; whereas Perlman in his translation opts for ‘churches’. Shahīd, *B.A.FO.C.* 354 with n.14, also takes it as ‘churches’.

64. A comparative, historical study of *bī‘a*, *dayr* and *sawma‘a* (possibly including also *kanīsa* and *hayka*) would be a great service. As a start, see Shahīd, *B.A.SI.C.* 2(1)172, where he briefly discusses the ‘interchangeability’ of the two terms *bī‘a/biya‘* and *dayr/diyārāt* both in general and with specific reference to a passage describing the famous Dayr Hind, which like all monasteries, of course, contained at least one church, and was located within the loosely built settlement of al-Ḥīra: al-Bakrī, *Mu‘jam* 2.606-7.

65. See Shahīd, *B.A.SI.C.* 2(1)159-60; also al-Iṣfahānī (attributed), *Kitāb adab al-ghurabā‘* 26-28, 34-36, 59, 64-68 and 94, and see the discussion in the translation by Crone and Moreh, *Book of Strangers* 150-52.

66. Al-Shābushtī, *Kitāb al-diyārāt*.

century *Book of Strangers* (attributed to al-İṣfahānī), is a compilation of Arabic graffiti, linked together by a common theme of nostalgia. In it monasteries, as places haunted by travellers, pilgrims and monks, all people who have to some degree uprooted themselves from their accustomed place, provide the backdrop for scenes of tourism, drinking and sexual encounter. This burgeoning *diyārāt* literature reflects the development of the social dimension of monasteries in order to accommodate the evolving dynamics of Muslim rule.

While staying at al-Kūfa, the poet Jaḥza (224/839-324/936) was invited to visit Dayr Ḥanna, a favoured monastery near al-Ḥīra.

“This is the time to visit [explained his host], in the spring; while the gardens are in full bloom, and the pools are yet standing after the rain. The steppe is near at hand...and we shall not fail to hear the purest Arabic borne on the air to our ears...” We found the Dayr indeed a beautiful building [confirms the poet], encompassed by its gardens, with the river of Ḥīra... flowing near by. So there our tents were pitched. And the monks came out bringing us such gifts and favours as they had. As we sat there eating and drinking there passed by us a lovely youth...carrying one of the Christians’ holy books.⁶⁷

Both our literary sources and the Umayyad remains suggest that part of the allure of monasteries for Muslims was the architecture and its decoration. Their reputation as storehouses of beauty and wonder fascinated even non-Christian circles. As a passing remark in the *Book of Strangers*, we read: ‘when I was a boy in Syria I went into a Christian church to see things in it that I had heard praised.’⁶⁸ A visit reportedly made by al-Mutawakkil, the Abbasid caliph who reigned between 847 and 861, further illustrates the attraction. On a visit to the region of Homs, the caliph requested to ‘walk around in all the monks’ churches’. ‘So he took my hand’, the narrator relates, ‘and proceeded to explore the churches and monasteries at length, looking at their marvellous pictures and splendid accessories and seeing the young monks and daughters of priests with faces like moons on branches strut about in porticoes and courtyards.’ We should not be surprised that a monastic church was reported to be among the wall-paintings adorning an Abbasid residence at Sāmarrā’, capital of the caliphate from 836-c. 892.⁶⁹

67. ‘Umarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, translated in Hamilton 87-88.

68. *Kitāb adab al-ghurabā*’ 78; cp. 36-37: ‘I passed by the church in Edessa on my way to Iraq and, having heard about it, went inside to see it.’

69. See Creswell 2. 232-42, 265-70. Also Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* 84.

One visitor to the al-Mukhtār residence at Sāmarrā' left a written record of the painting he saw there: 'One of [the paintings] was of a church with monks in it, and the best was of the priests who officiate at night.' He goes on in verse:

We never saw anything like the splendor of the al-Mukhtār,
nor anything like the painting of the night priest.⁷⁰

Presumably, the painting struck the viewer because it depicted the generous use of lamps in churches during night-time offices. Of all church decorations, lamps were the most evocative.

I was sleepless in the monastery of al-Māṭirūn,
as if I were guarding the stars
that travel at the end of the night.
Sirius passed by,
looking like churches hung with lamps.⁷¹

It is upon early Abbasid literature that we primarily depend for references to Umayyads and monasteries. One wonders whether, for example, the reports according to which various Umayyad caliphs died or were buried at a particular monastery might have originated as anti-Umayyad slurs. Al-Walīd I, for instance, is said to have died at Dayr Murrān, the luxuriously decorated monastery in the foothills of Jabal Qaysūn overlooking the Ghūṭa that was also a favourite haunt of other caliphs and notables – Umayyad, but also Abbasid.⁷² But the ample evidence that the Abbasid elite continued this tradition of monastic visits goes some way toward confirming similar reports concerning the Umayyads. It is hard to imagine that the more festive and social dimensions of monastic culture that were drawn out and developed in the early Abbasid period were not already present in the earliest years of Muslim rule. People (including some novices) had gone to monasteries in pursuit of ease and a full stomach long before the coming of Islam. But there were always those who cleaved to the original ideals.

Suliman Bashear made a fascinating collection of instances where Christians and Muslims either prayed together, or more often Muslims

70. *Kitāb adab al-ghurabā'* 24-25.

71. *Kitāb adab al-ghurabā'* 94.

72. Sourdel, 'Dayr Murrān', *E.Is.*2: 'Umar b.'Abd al-'Azīz was buried at another Dayr Murrān (also, confusingly, known as Dayr Sam'ān), near Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān in northern Syria. One would like to know where at al-Ruṣāfa Hishām was buried.

prayed alone in Christian holy places.⁷³ In these encounters we glimpse individual efforts to ignore the dangers of *shirk* that shadowed the saints and the forms their worship had evolved in Christian tradition. The problematic icons could, if necessary, be covered over with a cloth.⁷⁴ The hope of a miracle still drew Muslims to Christian manifestations of holiness regardless of the theologians' excoriations of monks and their society. It is to the theologians' views and the Quranic background that we shall now address ourselves.

Early Islamic reactions to monks and monasticism

The word *rahbānīya* – the monastic state – appears only once in the Qur'ān, in a passage whose exegesis has been a problem from early on:

And we put in the hearts of those who followed Jesus, compassion and mercy, and the monastic state (*rahbānīya*); they instituted the same (we did not prescribe it to them) only out of a desire to please God. Yet they observed not the same as it ought truly to have been observed. And we gave unto such of them as believed, their reward; but many of them have been doers of evil.

(Sura 57:27, tr. A. Wensinck, *E.Is.* 8.396)

Wensinck's translation is, of course, an interpretation. There are two schools of thought that part ways over whether 'we put' should have three direct objects – compassion, mercy and monasticism – or just two, leaving monasticism to go with the following verb ('invented', 'introduced', 'instituted'), producing in Arberry's translation, for example: 'We set in the hearts of those who followed him [Jesus] tenderness and mercy. And monasticism they invented'. If we follow the first reading, monasticism bears a divine seal; if the latter, it is a human invention.⁷⁵ What immediately precedes and follows the troublesome passage is also highly suggestive in the context of early Islamic ideas about monks and their calling. Preceding it is

73. Bashear, *Muslim world* 81 (1991) 267-83.

74. This is a solution accepted by al-Barqī (d.274/887), *al-Maḥāsīn* 507 (Najaf 1964), cited by Bashear, *Muslim world* 81 (1991) 280.

75. For discussion of the problem, see Beck, *Studia orientalia* 13 (Helsinki 1946) 17-29, who understands *rahbānīya* as one of three objects. Beck reviews earlier modern readings and concentrates particularly on grammatical problems raised in this passage. See also Sviri, *J.S.A.I.* 13 (1990) 195-208; and McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians* 263-84, a detailed discussion of commentaries on Sura 57:27, beginning with al-Ṭabarī. None of these primarily text-based discussions is much concerned to place the passage in a wider historical context.

God's statement 'We sent Jesus son of Mary, and gave unto him the Gospel', so that monasticism (whether a divine or human idea) is intimately associated in the Qur'ān with Christianity, after Jesus and the Gospel. This is borne out repeatedly in both Quranic and other early Islamic writers' use of monks as representatives of Christianity. What follows, namely, that the intention was good, but in practice the monastic vocation (regardless of whether it was God's idea or man's) was not lived properly, is absolutely crucial to our understanding of the mixed early Islamic views of monasticism.

This ambivalence about monks has been the focal point of much discussion, both early Islamic and modern, about Muḥammad's attitude toward *rahbāniya* in the Muslim community. Rather than asking, 'Was Muḥammad opposed to monasticism?', a more oblique approach might pose instead the question, 'What did monasticism and monks mean to Muḥammad and his early followers?' If we ask the latter question, we will end up with answers as diverse as the phenomenon of 'monasticism' itself, of which the first part of this chapter is only a brief illustration. The Quranic ambivalence mirrors the untidy complexity of late antique monastic life and can be said to represent the very essence of the Quranic view of monkery.

The fact that - unlike Christianity - Muḥammad's faith was fused during his lifetime with political power highlighted the tension between on the one hand the individual's search for God that required detachment from society and, on the other, the application of knowledge of the divine to the *umma*, almost as if the very purpose of individual spiritual progress was to serve the community. Muḥammad's *umma* was said to be divinely guided, rather than governed by tribal allegiances; but the source of knowledge about this divine guidance was carefully hemmed about.⁷⁶ This tension was already amply present in late antique society, where it had developed gradually within Christianity; but Islam had to grapple with it from its inception.

Muḥammad himself was said to have fasted and prayed, and to have been considered by contemporaries as unusually ascetic in his manner. But his adverse reaction - as reported in an early tradition - to the austerities of some of his followers encouraged a more negative view of asceticism within the post-prophetic *umma*. In this *ḥadīth*, which appears already in the mid-eighth century, we see Muḥammad strictly regulating the forms religious devotion should take when he defuses the plans of a group of his followers to

76. See Robinson in *Cult of saints* 256-60, on the closing of the tap of prophecy - through which new, Muslim saints eventually seeped, nonetheless.

embrace an austere ascetic way of life marked by fasting, woolen garments, celibacy and solitary cells.⁷⁷ Muḥammad is said to have insisted that ‘he who does not adhere to my *sunna* and does not follow my fashion does not belong to me...Our *sunna* is (wearing) clothes, (eating) food and (having) women.’⁷⁸ This *ḥadīth* is used already in the mid-eighth century as a way of explaining the God-given things that man should enjoy, not reject (Sura 5.87), and appears sometimes together with versions of the well-known motto ‘Monasticism was not prescribed upon us’.⁷⁹ Critically important is the fact that the would-be monks included ‘Alī, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān b. Maz‘ūn. If such celebrated early Muslims had been allowed to turn inward toward a life of contemplation and prayer, the Islamic movement might have been deprived of its vital expansionist momentum. Instead, individual spiritual aspirations were supposed to be subordinated to the progress of the collectivity. It had to be made clear that the Islamic community was outward turned, remaining tightly focussed on the ritual practices handed down in the Qur’ān and derived from existing models. The *ḥadīth* present Muḥammad not as a denigrator of his followers’ aspirations, but as a leader who simply underlined their inappropriateness to his vision of the Islamic community. The ascetic of the type mentioned in this *ḥadīth* was a potential threat to that community since the ideal to which he aspired was to become a stranger to this world – and through contemplation he might attain to a closeness to God that threatened the unique position of Muḥammad, he might even assert a personal sanctity resembling that claimed for Christian saints. Instead of this model, the Muslim ascetic who won approval was the ‘warrior of God’ who fought on the front line of Muslim expansion.⁸⁰

The famous early dictum: ‘Our monasticism is *jihād*’ again focusses on

77. Commenting on the women mourning the death of Muḥammad, Ḥassān b. Thābit, a convert from Christianity to Islam in Muḥammad’s lifetime, is said to have lamented ‘like nuns they put on garments of hair’: Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 1026 (tr. 690).

78. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, MS Ahmet iii 74, i ff. 105b-106a, cited by Sviri, *J.S.A.I.* 13 (1990) 198. For other views both opposing and extolling celibacy, see McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians* 271-79; Livne-Kafri, *J.S.A.I.* 20 (1996) 110-11; and Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic theology* 122-24 and n. 21, who assembles a number of related *ḥadīth* on celibacy as well as fasting and almsgiving, and concludes that these sentiments are unlikely to have originated with Muḥammad, who ‘had the highest respect for the ascetics’.

79. Sviri, *J.S.A.I.* 13 (1990) 199.

80. On frontier ascetics, see Robinson in *Cult of saints* 252-56; and Livne-Kafri, *J.S.A.I.* 20 (1996) 110.

the communal, thus avoiding the danger of *shirk* lurking behind the wonder-working monk. Chase Robinson has recently written that ‘warfare against non-Muslims (polytheist and monotheist alike) – holy war (*jihād*) conducted ‘in the path of God’ – was the proving ground of belief and piety’.⁸¹ The ascetic energy that went into a monk’s strivings to know God was channeled in early Islam toward the formation and preservation of the *umma*.⁸²

The perversion of pure religion and the hybristic elevation of men to divine status and their association with the One God are themes that pervade the Qur’ān and, in particular, its indictments of Christian error. As we have seen, similar themes of corruption of truth and lack of spiritual discernment lay at the foundation of controversy among Christians in the sixth and seventh centuries. Many criticisms underlying the eighth-century eruption of iconoclasm, for instance, arose from a deep-seated distrust of man’s ability to see through the holy man to God⁸³, or put another way, were born of an awareness that human weakness can lead the less assiduous soul to identify the man with God, to become one of those who associate.

Quranic indictment of error comes in Sura 9:30-31:

How they are perverted! They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God, and the Messiah, Mary’s son – and they were commanded to serve but One God; there is no god but He; glory be to Him, above that they associate. (Tr. Arberry).

In the accusation that monks were taken as lords apart from God, we see the reflection of two intertwined developments in late antiquity: the rise of the holy man and the rise of monasticism. Both developments carried with them great spiritual rewards and enormous spiritual risks.⁸⁴

In the following line the error of associating not only monks but also Mary’s son with the One God is condemned – in other words, not just the cult of saints, but also the worship of Jesus. Before our eyes we can see evoked the late antique processions of icons, the prostrations before the cross, the sung invocations and hymned praises of Mary and all the saints. Monks who are taken ‘as lords apart from God’ are the holy men to whom people appealed for succour. Ultimate blame falls on those who do not see through the monk to God; but deeply implicated in the accusation are the

81. Robinson in *Cult of saints* 249.

82. See Goldziher, *Muslim studies* 2.357-59, on this and related traditions in praise of devotion to family.

83. See Brown, *Society and the holy* 251-301.

84. On Christianity as *shirk*, see the recent discussion in Hawting, *Idea of idolatry* 82-85.

monks themselves, who cultivated and maintained the cult of saints in the monasteries that either housed a living saint or preserved the relics and icons in which the holy man's presence and power resided. It is these same monks who at Sura 9:34 'consume the goods of the people in vanity and bar from God's way' - by their involvement in the cult establishment that had grown so large and so wealthy by the sixth and seventh centuries.⁸⁵ Future chastisement is promised in the following line for 'those who treasure up gold and silver and do not expend them in the way of God'. One may recall the warnings of Isaac of Antioch.

Seen in the context of developments within Christian monasticism, another famous early *ḥadīth* – 'There is no monasticism in Islam' – points toward the corrupted form of the monastic calling condemned in Sura 9:31. In the Quranic passages and the closely-related *ḥadīths* discussed here so far, caution about the risks of monasticism shades into outright rejection as the surest safeguard. That this is a safeguard against monasticism gone wrong, rather than denial of the institution's potential goodness, is seen in the one distinctly positive account of monks, in Sura 5:82-85:

And thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians'; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud, and when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe; so do Thou write us down among the witnesses. Why should we not believe in God and the truth that has come to us, and be eager that our Lord should admit us with the righteous people?' And God rewards them for what they say with gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever; that is the recompense of the good-doers. (tr. Arberry).

The 'good monk' is he who recognizes the truth of Muḥammad's message, whether he lived to learn of the new revelation or whether, as in some accounts, he was a sort of Muslim before Muḥammad (not unlike the Christians before Christ, including Plato, Aristotle and even Aristophanes, who can still today be seen on church frescoes in Greece). On the authority

85. The Quranic distinction between the good monk and the rapacious one is echoed in the report of Salmān al-Fārisī's experience first with a corrupt Syrian bishop who hoarded his parishioners' gold, followed by his encounters with a sequence of pious ascetics (including the bishop's successor) in Syria, then in al-Mawṣil, Nisibis and Amorium. The last one recommended that Salmān go to Arabia where a prophet of the religion of Abraham was about to arise: Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 138-39 (tr. 97-98).

of Wahn b. Munabbih, Ibn Ishāq relates the story of Faymiyūn, the epitome of the 'good monk'.⁸⁶ A Syrian holy man who would not have been out of place in the *Lives of the eastern saints* or the *Pratum spirituale*, Faymiyūn withers sacred palm trees by his prostrations and prayers (called *rak'as*), heals the sick and curses a noxious snake that creeps up on him while he is praying in the desert solitude. Mobbed by seekers of cures, he is forced by his holiness to keep to the road. While walking with Ṣāliḥ⁸⁷, a persistent disciple, Faymiyūn is abducted by an Arab caravan, which then sells him as a slave in Najrān. There Faymiyūn continues his ascetic life. 'One night Faymiyūn stood up in a hut his master had allotted to him, praying, when the whole hut was filled with light as if from a lamp, until it was completely illuminated but without the presence of any lamp.'⁸⁸ The Najranis are converted, though 'afterwards they suffered the same misfortune [or "innovations"] which befell their co-religionists in every land' - a sentiment echoing Sura 57:27.⁸⁹ Faymiyūn's devotions attract another disciple, 'Abdallāh b. al-Thāmir, who 'began to sit with him and listen until he became a Muslim and acknowledged the unity of God and worshipped Him'.⁹⁰ Healing the sick of Najrān in the name of the One God, 'Abdallāh eventually falls foul of the king, who kills him by his own hand. Years later, in the reign of 'Umar I, 'Abdallāh's grave is opened and the words 'Allāh is my Lord' are found inscribed on his ring.

The descriptions of Faymiyūn and 'Abdallāh are intended to show how the prayerful devotion of these miracle-working holy men points toward Muḥammad's revelation. Likewise, in the portrayal of other Christians who had a cameo role to play in the formation of Islam, their holy book possesses a prophetic authority. We see this in the many versions of Muḥammad's famous encounter with the monk Baḥīra of Buṣrā, who consulted his books to confirm the signs of the boy's unique future.⁹¹ The truth of Baḥīra's

86. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 20-22 and 23-24 (tr. 14-16 and 16-17) on his disciple 'Abdallāh b. al-Thāmir; also recorded in Ṭab. 920-23 (tr. 195-99) and 923-25 (tr. 199-202 with n. 487 on the name Faymiyūn, n. 490 on Wahn, n. 501 on Muḥammad b. Ka'b as a source, and nn. 491-505 for commentary on the story of Faymiyūn and his disciple).

87. Ṣāliḥ is a rare name evocative of Qur'anic associations with the pre-Islamic warner of the Thamūd: see Bosworth, *History of al-Ṭabarī* 5.196 n. 492.

88. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 22 (tr. 15).

89. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 22 (tr. 16). A nearly identical phrase appears also at 24; see below for similar interpretations of Christians who have strayed from Jesus's teaching.

90. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 23 (tr. 16).

91. On Baḥīra, see Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 115-17 (tr. 79-81); cp. 119-20 (tr. 82).

discernment is confirmed by Khadija's cousin Waraqa b. Nawfal, who is described as a 'Christian who had studied the scriptures and was a scholar'⁹² and knew that a 'prophet would arise among this people [the Quraysh]'.⁹³ The 'good monks' encountered in Mesopotamia and Syria by Salmān al-Fārisī and Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl, each on an independent quest for the true religion, also foretold the imminent arrival in Arabia of the prophet who would satisfy their yearnings.⁹⁴ In Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d.150/767) and al-Ṭabarī (d.310/923), drawing on Ibn Sa'd (d.230/845), we see the development of the idea that those faithful followers of Jesus's teaching were pushed to the fringes by the majority of so-called Christians, who perverted true belief and became guilty of *shirk*. Commenting on the good monks and priests in Sura 5:82, who 'wax not proud' but weep at the truth God has sent down, Muqātil explains that these were the few true disciples of Jesus, those who dwelt in cells (*ṣawāmi'*) and included among their number the monk Baḥīra.⁹⁵ These fringe groups scattered to become either stylites, wanderers or dwellers in 'monasteries [*duyūr*] in the desert' sustained by wells and gardens.⁹⁶

I have suggested that Muḥammad's reaction to his early followers' monkish ambitions arose from his vision of individual holiness trained in the service of the community's progress. In a similar way, even when the Qur'ān and later sources such as those used by Ibn Ishāq allow for the goodness of some Christian monks, that approval is carefully focussed on the way in which the individual discernment of those 'good monks' pointed toward the Prophet. Besides their holy books, what these monks had in common was a humility, purity and transparency to the will of God wherever it led them. Monks were meant to be forerunners of the Prophet, not a permanent feature of the religious landscape. Their continuing existence after the coming of Islam was a sign of waywardness. Logically, they should have converted. Considered obsolete at best and willful perverters of the truth at

92. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 121 (tr. 83).

93. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 101 (tr. 69). Robinson, in *Cult of saints* 244-46, has reviewed the evidence for the Christianity of Waraqa and is inclined to accept it, rather than view the evidence as a backward projection. On early Muslim views of Waraqa and the relationship between Baḥīra and Waraqa, see also Robinson's article 'Waraqa b. Nawfal' in *E.Is.* 11. 142-43.

94. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 136-43 (tr. 95-98) on Salmān, 143-49 (tr. 98-103) on Zayd.

95. For an analysis of these texts, see Sviri, *J.S.A.I.* 13 (1990) 201-08.

96. Nearly identical accounts are found in al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* (Istanbul 1294) 10-11, and al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut 1980) 27.138; for the texts and translation, see Sviri, *J.S.A.I.* 13 (1990) 205-06 with n. 28. See also McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians* 263-84.

worst, the Christian monks kept alive, even developed their spiritual traditions and did not cease, simply because of these judgments against them, to attract the interest of Muslims. Theologians and commentators would continue to interpret the Quranic monks in the light of current theoretical concerns. But as we have seen, these were not always convergent with developments on the ground in the first two centuries following the conquests, when monasteries continued to provide a venue for meeting spiritual, but also social and political needs.

CHRISTIAN MONASTERIES AND Umayyad RESIDENCES IN LATE ANTIQUE SYRIA

The study of Christian asceticism and early Islam has often been coloured by the belief, expressed in a myriad of ways, that cultural borrowing is a matter for reproach. The motivation behind some scholarship has seemed to be the desire to demonstrate a flaw deep within Islam based on its debt to Christianity. To be derivative is to be discredited - even if it was an established (if rarely far-trodden) path to God that early Muslims were following. But there is no doubt that Muslims took their own turnings along the way. The understandable response of some scholars has been to overcompensate by dismissing the importance of the Christian background, or boiling it down to a notion of a common ancient oriental soil.¹ The current scholarly trend is toward breaking the habit of seeing pre-Islamic practices and beliefs as a threat to some pure form of Islam.² My hope is that with a clearer picture of the physical settings for spiritual exchanges between Christians and Muslims we may come closer to understanding further the ways in which Christian monasticism fertilized and galvanized Islamic ideas of holiness.

Medieval Arabic writers often mention Christian monasteries, either recalling their former glory, or describing them as places still visited by Muslims. Among some recent scholars there is a tendency to dismiss this as the 'cliché of the monastery'. In an effort to re-evaluate the role of monasteries in both pre-Islamic and Muslim Greater Syria, this second

1. E.g. Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions* 10. Schimmel asserts that 'a meeting with a Christian ascetic or with a wise monk is a fictional element in Sufi legends of early times': *Mystical dimensions* 34; cf. Livne-Kafri, *J.S.A.I.* 20 (1996) 108, who rejects this judgement in favour of understanding legendary elements as illustrative of real experiences within society.

2. Robinson in *Cult of saints* 241-62 is a good example, though in his treatment too there lurks an assumption of mutual exclusivity between the two traditions.

chapter examines the physical and literary evidence for sites that were occupied by both monasteries (*diyārāt*) and later by Umayyad residences (*quṣūr*) - Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, Qaṣr Burqu', al-Faddayn, Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt and al-Ruṣāfa – underlining the related social and political levels at which both monasteries and *quṣūr* operated.

Both the medieval Arabic geographical writers and modern toponymy attest the frequent occurrence of the terms 'dayr' (monastery) and 'qaṣr' (permanent residence) in the placenames of Greater Syria. At one level, the reason for this is not far to seek since monasteries and residences were the most conspicuous architectural features in the landscape, especially in the steppe and desert as it stretches eastward from the densely populated coastal regions toward Mesopotamia. Abandoned, ill-understood structures were labelled by later generations, who were impressed by the size and possibly also the decoration of these complexes, as either 'dayr' or 'qaṣr' – likely guesses at the function of these buildings in their days of glory. When evaluating these names today we should beware not to over-indulge in toponymic scepticism simply because the terms Dayr and Qaṣr are so common. More lies behind this long tradition of appellation than the imagination of the beduin.

Though one might assume that their purpose and function were very different, still Christian ascetic houses and Umayyad country residences in the steppe had various features in common – water, gardens and relative isolation combined with accessibility to routes. Under-explored is their shared function as places of convergence in the steppeland. Though our evidence is less concrete than one might wish, it is clear that some *quṣūr* were built at sites formerly occupied by monasteries – or were even constructed in close proximity to an inhabited monastic complex. It is the aim of this chapter to examine the archaeological evidence for this relationship in the light of the literary materials, in order to understand better the various levels at which these two categories of building are related.

The pursuit of detachment from the world, and at the same time a spiritual paradise made possible through the ascetic life, was what defined monastic life in Syria as elsewhere. The monastic life cannot be approached in its fullness, though, unless we also consider the geographical context, the world of the steppe, in which many of the Syrian monasteries flourished. I suggest that the Umayyads' understanding of the steppe landscape and their use of its built and cultivated spaces was influenced by the pre-existing monastic tradition that members of court circles encountered there. An

anecdote about the Caliph Hishām (724-743) recorded by the ninth-century historian al-Balādhurī captures a moment when these two worlds overlapped:

Hishām fled from the plague and came finally to a monastery (*dayr*). The monk brought him into a garden of his, four *jarībs*³ in area and began to give him the tastiest and ripest fruits. Hishām said, ‘Would you sell me your garden?’, but the monk remained silent. Hishām repeated his question, but the monk was still silent. ‘Why do you not speak, O monk? Are you hoping that all the people but you will die?’ ‘Why?’ the monk asked. ‘So that you may gain your fill,’ Hishām said, ‘when everything in the world is left for you’. At that the monk laughed and said, ‘Didn’t you hear that, O Abrash?’ Abrash said [i.e., to the caliph] ‘Aside from him, no free man has ever met you’.⁴

With these words Hishām’s boon companion, Abrash al-Kalbī, attempts to explain to the sole ruler of one of the world’s wealthiest and most extensive empires, the layers of paradox that coexist in the steppe: the monk in his cell is free, while the caliph is driven from his urban dwellings into the desert; the ruler offers money for the garden, the ruled has no need for the money – is not, in fact, ruled but has been freed by his way of life; the monk’s cell with its garden, like the Syrian monasteries with their water and shelter, stands in stark contrast to the ungenerous, often threatening world around the garden walls.

Al-Balādhurī does not mention place-names in his story of Hishām’s encounter with the monk, but it requires no leap of the imagination to accept such a meeting as highly possible, given the caliph’s interest in Christian holy men in other literary accounts, a subject we will return to below in the context of al-Ruṣāfa. If it were necessary to set the story in connection with some place known to us still today, we could plausibly choose either Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī or al-Ruṣāfa, two sites strongly linked with Hishām.

Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī

An expensively produced bronze inscription ascribes construction activity at the site now known as Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī to Hishām in his

3. Four *jarībs* is about 6.5 square km.

4. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* 70 §129 (‘Athāmina); tr., with slight adjustment, by Conrad in *Quest for understanding* 271.

fourth year as caliph (A.H. 109 / A.D. 727).⁵ The complex included a *qaṣr* with a walled garden, a bath house and the building over whose entrance the inscription was discovered, possibly a khan. The site lies 60 km. south-southwest of Palmyra, near the intersection of the road linking Palmyra with Damascus via Qaryatayn and that from Homs to al-Jawf and eventually al-Hijāz (fig. 29). These long-distance routes, especially the former that followed the northeast-southwest-oriented course of Jabal Rawāq, were also important for local communications and provided access to good hunting grounds (certainly one of Hishām's interests in the area).⁶ In the Roman period, these and related routes had been punctuated with forts and formed part of the larger system of surveillance of Roman interests in Syria and the frontier zone with the Iranian Empire. The region around Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī was primarily pastoral steppeland whose inhabitants were linked in relationships of symbiosis with the villages and market towns in the vicinity, to the southwest toward Damascus and especially to the west and northwest, toward the major settlements of Homs and Ḥamā and their hinterland.

In the Umayyad period, a sophisticated system of underground canalization provided water for domestic use and irrigation at Hishām's complex. The water supply was conveyed from the artificial lake formed by the Harbaka dam, located 16 km. south of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr.⁷ The enormous Harbaka dam is believed to have been built in the late first or early second century A.D., and its storage lake of more than one km.² gathered in it the melting snows and seasonal rains that ran off Jabal Rawāq. The extent to which Hishām elaborated, rather than simply refurbished part or all of this complex water system has proven difficult to determine precisely. Both surface and subterranean water conduits channeled the water in various directions, including a cultivated area supplied by a reservoir some 600 m. west of the *qaṣr*, and a walled garden still further west. The orchard and garden with its brick enclosure were fed by a system of water distributors and sluices. Imagery from this garden no doubt inspired some of the stucco decoration on the entrance to the *qaṣr*, where trees are depicted heavy with fruit and entwined with bountiful grape vines.

5. For the publication of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, see *Q.H.G.* esp. 26-28 on the Greek and Arabic inscriptions. See also Creswell 506-18.

6. On migration routes and hunting in this area, see Fowden, in *Roman and Byzantine Near East* 107-36.

7. Calvet and Geyer, *Barrages antiques de Syrie* 91, with fig. 49, and 92.

The tower that Hishām incorporated into the northwest corner of his richly-decorated *qaṣr* may well have been built originally as part of the Roman military outpost known on the Tabula Peutingeriana as Heliaramia. Such installations never served a single purpose, but depending on their size functioned variously as garrisons, look-out points, defensive towers, halting places for travellers, even hermitages for ascetics. At Heliaramia, the tower was reused subsequently as part of a monastic complex that made use of the water supply provided by the Roman dam. Excavation at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr has established the site's identification as a monastery by bringing to light a lintel carved with various Greek inscriptions that was later reused as a threshold in Hishām's *qaṣr*. The nature of the inscriptions suggests that their original location was over the monastery entrance, or some other prominent position. They are carved in five separate panels, some by different hands, and have been combined in a slightly varying order by Schlumberger and Jalabert-Mouterde.⁸ Nonetheless, the allusions both to a monastery with its archimandrite and to the phylarch Arethas are not disputed.

Panel four gives the date of dedication as '[in the time of such and such] archimandrite and the most pious deacon Anastasios and the most glorious phylarch Arethas'.⁹ Here the phylarchate of al-Ḥārith b. Jabala (known in Greek as Arethas), Ghassanid leader and staunch supporter of anti-Chalcedonian, or 'monophysite' Christianity, is incorporated into the very dating of the longer inscription. Panel one, thought to have been carved slightly later on the same limestone lintel, reads like a personal greeting to al-Ḥārith:

[To Flavius] Arethas, patrician, [many] years, [long] life. Great [leader] welcome the year 870 [A.D. 558/559].

Although these inscriptions do not help to establish the date of the monastery's foundation, they nonetheless confirm the involvement at the monastery of the well-attested Ghassanid phylarch and patrician al-Ḥārith, active from c. 528-569. A precise date is provided in the second text, apparently commemorating a visit to the monastery by the phylarch in

8. Schlumberger, *Syria* 20 (1939) 366-72 (= *Q.H.G.* 25 with nn. 237, 238 and 239), offered the first description and edition of the inscriptions, later republished by Jalabert-Mouterde in *I.G.L.S.* 5.240-43. See also the comments by Shahīd, *B.A.S.I.C.* 1.258-61, 779-80 and 833; and MacCoull, *Tyche* 11 (1996) 157-58.

9. It is inaccurate to state that 'the inscription... recorded the building, in 559, of a tower by the Ghassanid Harith/Arethas', as in Gregory, *Roman military* 184.

person (558/559). Al-Ḥārith left a marked impression in the annals of late antique history, both Greek and Syriac, thanks to his twin role as defender of Roman interests against Lakhmid and Sasanian claims in the frontier zone, and as stalwart patron of monophysite Christianity, whose hierarchy was based primarily in the monasteries of Syria and Egypt. And in addition to acting as a political patron of the monophysites in external affairs, he assumed the function of mediator between quarreling factions *within* the monophysite communities.¹⁰ The chosen venue for al-Ḥārith's mediation was on several occasions al-Jābiya, the Ghassanid's most famous *ḥirtā* or permanent encampment, which included dwellings, churches and at least one monastery, dedicated to S. Sergius. On one diplomatic occasion involving a later Ghassanid phylarch, Jafna in 587, our source specifies that the meeting was held in the church of S. Sergius, presumably the catholicon of the aforementioned monastery.¹¹ For al-Ḥārith to have chosen the monastery at Heliaramia as a venue for his efforts in the realm of ecclesiastical politics would not have been surprising, and it is possible that the inscription's greeting and the dating to his phylarchate reflect such a relationship between the phylarch and the religious establishment in the steppe. The monastery is known to have appeared at least once in the literature of the period, when Sergius, the priest and abbot of 'Haliurim', was listed among the monophysite clerics who signed the so-called 'Letter of the Archimandrites' in 570 against the Tritheist heresy, by which time al-Ḥārith's son and successor, al-Mundhir, had taken his place as defender of the monophysite communities.¹²

Hishām's reworking of the site over 150 years later has complicated any attempt to understand the monastery's plan and organization. But its indisputable Ghassanid connection combines with its favourable setting and

10. For a lucid account of al-Ḥārith's and, later, his son al-Mundhir's role in the controversy surrounding the consecration of Patriarch Paul of Antioch, a rift with serious repercussions for relations between Syrian and Egyptian monophysites as well as between monophysites and Chalcedonians, see Frend, *Rise of the monophysite movement* 323-30. For analysis of Ghassanid links with monophysite monasteries that builds on Theodor Nöldeke's important study of the 'Letter of the Archimandrites', *Z.D.M.G.* 29 (1875) 419-44, see Shahîd, *B.A.S.I.C.* 1.825-38.

11. See the 'Letter of the Archimandrites', in *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas* 215 (tr. 149); Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 10.22 (tr. 2.367); also Nöldeke, *Z.D.M.G.* 29 (1875) 430; and Aigrain, in *D.H.G.E.* 3.1218-19.

12. *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas* 233 (tr. 155); see also Shahîd, *B.A.S.I.C.* 1.833.

irrigation system to sketch in a picture of a flourishing ascetic oasis in the steppe with a role to play at the level of diplomacy, a striking precedent for the caliph's own development of the site, if Hishām's use of other *quṣūr* is any guide. The acclamation for al-Ḥārith over the entrance evokes a scene in which the phylarch arrives at the monastery, receives the appropriate acclamations, and is led to the catholicon where, as patron of the monophysite community, he participates in a doxology from a position of honour. Following the service he would take up his active role as patron and receive petitions - in other words, hold court. From our literary evidence regarding the Umayyads, and in particular al-Walīd b. Yazīd, we can easily reconstruct a scene in which the Umayyad caliph arrives at a monastery, is shown the sites and then takes up residence in rooms in the monastery where he, like the Ghassanid leader before him, would hold court. As we have seen in the previous chapter, a banquet and considerable wine-consumption could also have been part of any Umayyad monastic visit.¹³ Even here a precedent exists since banquets in churches were known to have been offered in pre-Islamic Christian Arab circles as well.¹⁴

In addition, we should not overlook the fact that Hishām's prominent re-use of architectural elements from the monastery is unique in the *quṣūr* known to have been built on monastic sites, which will be discussed later. The monastic phase often left little distinct architectural trace, as we shall see at Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt; or the Byzantine material was so thoroughly incorporated as to be no longer separable from the Umayyad, blurring what symbolic message it might have carried. But rather than being demolished and then reincorporated into a new building, the tower at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr was given a conspicuous place as one of the *qaṣr*'s four corner towers.

Towers were a common feature of monasteries in this region, though the evidence can often be interpreted in diverse ways.¹⁵ In general, the multi-purpose nature of towers complicates any effort to arrive at a clear

13. On caliphal visits to monasteries, see Hamilton 86-91.

14. For example, 'Adī b. Zayd, a celebrated Christian Arab diplomat at the court of Khusrau II, held a banquet in a church to seal an alliance with some Arab clients: Iṣf. 2.100. It would be fascinating to know the venue of the most memorable banquet hosted by al-Ḥārith, that in honour of Ephrem, the Patriarch of Antioch, when the latter was served camel meat so that the phylarch could make a theological point: see Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 9.29 (tr. 2.246-48).

15. Numerous examples in northern Syria are cited by Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les reclus Syriens*.

understanding of their use over time. But hermits were certainly known to take up residence in abandoned towers built originally for reasons of security and surveillance, and later fallen into disuse as the frontier zone came to be controlled instead by Rome's Arab allies.¹⁶ The *Life* of Alexander Acoemetes portrays various bands of ascetics wandering in the early fifth-century frontier zone between the Roman and Iranian empires, encountering Roman soldiers, and spending some time in an (inhabited) *castrum* before setting off again to settle in another place.¹⁷ One cannot assume, of course, that every *castrum* or tower in late antique Syria housed a recluse.¹⁸ But the particular ascetic practice of confining oneself to a tower in order to focus the mind and body on God does appear to have been widespread.

At Umm al-Raṣāṣ, the fortified Roman settlement of Mefaa, still stands what is probably the most familiar example of a monk's tower. Kastron Mefaa/Mayfa'a is located near one of the main routes between Bostra/Buṣrā and the Arabian peninsula, and the site's material remains suggest it was a flourishing settlement at the steppe's edge in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries. Churches were being built and decorated with luxurious mosaics as late as the mid-eighth century. The tower with its single, small door, rises up 14 metres from the middle of a square courtyard with a small church at its southeast corner. Nearby there are cisterns hewn into the live rock and stone quarries.

The powerful image of the monk in his tower left its impression in a poem ruminating on the fleeting nature of all human existence, even that of holy men, that is attributed to Dhū Jadan, a pre-Islamic Himyarite nobleman:

For death no man can hold back
 though he drink the perfumed potions of the quack,
 nor monk in his secluded cell on high
 where the vulture round his nest dost fly.¹⁹

16. For a discussion of the evolution of the frontier zone in the context of the northern region of the modern state of Jordan, see MacAdam, in *Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* esp. 536-40.

17. For a discussion of the *Life*, with an eye to the frontier zone, see Gatier, in *Frontières terrestres, frontières célestes* 441-455.

18. Note, for example, the extreme scepticism of Tate, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du Nord* 48-51. A middle ground must be sought between interpreting towers as purpose-built havens for hermits and maintaining a blindspot to the multiple uses to which towers may have been put subsequent to their construction.

19. In Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra* 26 (tr. 19).

The monk in the steppe becomes a symbol of welcome in the wilderness, but also of seclusion – the same contrasts that emerged from Hishām’s encounter with the monk and his garden.

Another, lesser known example of what has been identified as a hermit’s tower is to be found at Qaşr Burqu’ located to the east of Buşrā at the point where the steppe and the eastern edge of the basalt desert, the *ḥarrah*, meet. Qaşr Burqu’ was subsequently transformed into a small Umayyad *qaşr*, making it an interesting parallel – though dramatically less impressive in terms of its architecture – to Qaşr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī. Qaşr Burqu’ is a simple irregular square courtyard with rooms on two sides, in the midst of which stands, with a different orientation, a late Roman tower that survives up to a height of three storeys and probably once rose to more than twelve metres (fig. 30).²⁰ Built of local stone, the tower’s architectural style is related to that familiar from the Jabal Ḥawrān to the west. The setting is exposed and arid, the effects of which could be dangerously disorienting, as one traveller reported during a sweltering April expedition in 1928: ‘we were anxiously looking for Qaşr el-Burqu but the mirage shortened our horizon, and what proved eventually to be the top of the tower at Burqu was decided to be but a tuft of grass.’²¹ Despite the occasional deceptiveness of natural phenomena, there can be no doubt that the tower acted as a valuable marker in the open landscape. Qaşr Burqu’ overlooks the Wadi Minqat, which was dammed to form a lake that would have been a significant feature in the desolate surroundings.²²

The tower – surrounded by either the ruinous stone structures that survive, at least one of which may be contemporary with the tower²³, or more ephemeral buildings – would have served as a habitation and storehouse, and as a watch tower and stronghold in the desert. The damaged Greek inscription “Respect the Lord” (?) and a cross carved over a lintel

20. For descriptions of the site, see Day, in *North Arabian desert* 150-158, with drawing of lintel with cross on p. 156; also Schroeder and Field, in *North Arabian desert* 57-58, quoting Gertrude Bell’s brief report from 1913; and Schroeder, ‘Architectural report’, in *North Arabian desert* 95-99. For the context of the sites and structures at Qaşr Burqu’, see King, in *Proceedings of the seminar for Arabian studies* 17 (1987) 91-105, esp. 93 where he describes Qaşr Burqu’ as ‘used as a monastery deep in the desert’; and most recently Helms, *Early Islamic architecture* 50-66.

21. Schroeder and Field, *North Arabian desert* 57.

22. Helms, *Early Islamic architecture* 59.

23. Gaube, *A.D.A.J.* 19 (1974) 93-100; Helms, *Early Islamic architecture* 60-66.

suggest a Christian presence, though the dating and precise nature of this presence is undeterminable on the basis of present evidence. Umayyad involvement at the site is unequivocally attested by an inscription recording the erection of unidentified structures (*al-buyūt*) by al-Walīd I in A.H. 81/A.D. 700, while he was still heir apparent during his father 'Abd al-Malik's caliphate.²⁴ What is clear architecturally is that the square enclosure of the *qaṣr* was built around the tower, rather than incorporating it as one of the enclosure's four corner towers as at *Qaṣr al-Ḥayr*. In both places, however, a plausible interpretation of the material evidence is that a tower was originally built as part of the Roman system of surveillance for the frontier zone, used from its conception for a variety of purposes, and occupied later by an ascetic community of unknown size, supported by the local water supply. Perhaps due to the general insecurity of the seventh century, particularly between A.D. 610 and 640, the sites ceased to function as monasteries and were later re-occupied by members of the Umayyad elite. How much time elapsed (possibly none at *Qaṣr Burqu*²⁵) between these Christian and Umayyad occupations, we cannot know at this point.

Before we leave these examples of diachronic sharing of the same site by monasteries and *quṣūr*, brief mention should be made of two other sites that, according to recent investigation, also fall into this category: al-Faddayn and *Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt*, both located on the northwestern fringes of the Balqā', which was home to a notable concentration of Umayyad *quṣūr*.²⁶

The site of al-Faddayn, just north of Mafraq's centre, possesses a spring and a reservoir, and was integrated into the network of roads connected with the Via Nova Traiana. Excavation has uncovered traces of a monastery at the site, confirming the testimony in the 'Letter of the Archimandrites' that includes the signature of a presbyter and an archimandrite from the monastery at 'Phedin'.²⁷ On the ground have been found a large enclosed courtyard and the apse, nave and side aisles of a small church (fig. 31).

24. Helms, *Early Islamic architecture* 57.

25. Helms, *Early Islamic architecture* 58-59.

26. No doubt the densest concentration of *diyārāt* and *quṣūr* was in the vicinity of Damascus and the Ghūṭa, though all physical traces are now lost thanks to constant development over the centuries. For example, the fame of Dayr Murrān, overlooking the Ghūṭa from the slopes of Jabal Qaysūn, extended well beyond the Umayyad period, when it was frequented by several caliphs, including al-Walīd I (who died there) and al-Walīd II (who drank there): cf. Sourdél, *E.Is.* 2. 198.

27. *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas* 217 (tr. 150).

Because the Byzantine complex was incorporated into a later, Umayyad complex, it has proven difficult to explore further the Christian phase.²⁸ In the early to mid-eighth century, the *qaṣr* at al-Faddayn was owned by Saʿīd b. Khālīd b. ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, and is known to have been visited by both Yazīd II, the brother of Hishām, and his son, al-Walīd II.

Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt is a Roman fort located some 18 km. southeast of the Via Nova Traiana between Buṣrā and Philadelphia/ʿAmmān. The site may already have been occupied by a Nabatean watch tower when, under Trajan or soon afterward, a small fort was built to house a Roman garrison guarding the route to the Azraq oasis and, in general, keep watch over the region's inhabitants. This simple square fort with rooms around a central courtyard underwent various phases of expansion and alteration, including the addition of four corner towers in 529, according to an inscription. Another inscription, now lost, allegedly recorded a monastic presence. This stone was noted (though never transcribed) in the twentieth century by Rees and Harding, and the latter reported that 'some time in the seventh century it [Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt] became a monastic establishment and an inscription recording this fact is now built into the main gate of the Arab legion camp at Zerka'.²⁹ David Kennedy, who has studied the site extensively, considers it quite plausible that Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt was occupied by monks in the seventh century, and has drawn attention to the fact that crosses were carved on the basalt blocks at conspicuous places, including on the upright to the right of the main gateway.³⁰ It has also been suggested that the largest room (4) may have been a chapel.³¹ Umayyad reoccupation of the fort is clearly signalled by the reuse of stone, the replastering of internal walls, and the mosaic floors that have come to light during the excavations by Ghazi Bisheh.³² Other sites can be named that are thought to have been used at one time as monasteries and later refitted for Umayyad occupation – Qaṣr al-Bā'ij near Umm al-Jimāl, for instance; Dayr al-Kahf, 40 km. southeast of Buṣrā; and Dayr al-Qinn, 11 km. northeast of Dayr al-Kahf. But other than scanty remains on

28. Humbert, *Liber Annuus* 36 (1986) 354-58, and in *Contribution française* 125-31, with site plan at end of article; also Michel, *Les églises d'époque byzantine et umayyade* 224.

29. Harding, *Antiquities of Jordan* 154.

30. Kennedy, *Archaeological explorations* 17-68, esp. 40-41, 50, 53, and the map on p. 4; Kennedy has recently reiterated his confidence in Harding's report of the inscription and the likelihood of a seventh-century monastery at the site: Kennedy, *Roman army in Jordan* 95.

31. Gregory, *Roman military architecture* 293.

32. Bisheh, *Muqarnas* 10 (1993) 49-56.

the ground, nothing else is known of these sites. It is more instructive, instead, to turn to the most impressive example of contemporary sharing of a single site by both *dayr* and *qaṣr* in the late antique period.

Ruṣāfat Hishām

The late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt al-Rūmī (born in Byzantine territory, but taken prisoner at an early age and raised in Baghdād as a Muslim) described ‘a monastery [*dayr*] in the town of al-Ruṣāfa of Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik, which is a day’s march from Raqqa for those who are laden...I myself have seen this monastery and it is one of the wonders of the world as regards its beauty and its architecture. I believe that Hishām built his *madīna* [meaning the extra muros development] next to this monastery [*dayr*] and that the latter existed before the *madīna*. There are monks in it and churches. It stands in the middle of the town [of al-Ruṣāfa]’.³³ He also says that Hishām turned his attention to al-Ruṣāfa at a time when the plague was raging, and that he would go there in the summer months. Yāqūt does not claim that Hishām’s was the first construction there, but rather adds that the wells Hishām used were dug by the Ghassanids who had a residence there before him.³⁴ Such a pedigree is no surprise given our other evidence of Ghassanid involvement at al-Ruṣāfa, though Yāqūt’s is the only literary mention of a pre-Islamic *qaṣr* at al-Ruṣāfa.

The attraction of al-Ruṣāfa to both Ghassanids and Umayyads cannot be explained without reference to the soldier-martyr whose body was revered within the city walls. Though al-Ruṣāfa was not a natural, spring-fed oasis like Ṭayyiba or Palmyra, sites also located along the Strata Diocletiana, waters did gather in the wadi there. Still, this is not sufficient to explain the unique architectural and religious developments the site witnessed. The sixth-century pilgrim to the saint’s shrine entered the massive gypsum walls of the city through one of the monumental gates, and beheld within a densely built-up town richly provided with churches, the most prominent of which dominated the southeastern corner of the walled space. This three-aisled basilica of the familiar Syrian type, known today as Basilica A, or the Great Basilica, housed the martyr’s reliquary in a shrine just north of the apse. The pilgrim approached this shrine either from the north aisle of the Great Basilica, or from a door on the basilica’s northeast

33. Yāq. 2.510, s.v. Dayr al-Ruṣāfa.

34. Yāq. 3.47-48, s.v. Ruṣāfat al-Hishām.

end, which led into the side chapel from the spacious north courtyard.³⁵

Immediately to the south of the Great Basilica is an area that underwent various stages of reworking. It has been suggested that what we have are the remains of episcopal quarters and also a monastery.³⁶ The history of monastic life at al-Ruṣāfa can be reconstructed only with difficulty given the paucity of both literary and architectural evidence. That a monastic community was drawn to the holiness of the place is certain, and we hear of an abbot of 'Rasiḫta' before we learn that Hishām was attracted to the monastery, Yāqūt was impressed by the monks within the city walls.³⁷

People from across the socio-economic and cultural spectrum of Syria, but also from further afield in the Roman and Iranian empires, appealed to the martyr's power; and their veneration for S. Sergius was reflected in the grandeur of the architecture and decoration that surrounded his tomb.³⁸ While Sergius of Ruṣāfa received gifts from Roman emperors and Sasanian monarchs, reverence for the miracle-worker and soldier saint was particularly rooted among the region's Christian Arab tribes. The walled settlement, its shrine and its monastery, served as a place of convergence on important migratory and trade routes used by the Arab pastoralists, semi-pastoralists and merchants of the region. Ghassanid use of al-Ruṣāfa as a point of convergence has been widely recognized since Sauvaget's well-known discussion in 1939 of the stone structure with the al-Mundhir

35. Ulbert, *Resafa* 2.43-62, 171-77.

36. Ulbert, *Resafa* 2.118-27, 144-45; also Ulbert, *Resafa* 3.3.

37. The literary evidence for a (possibly sixth-century) monastery at al-Ruṣāfa appears in a colophon of a manuscript that belonged to a certain Zooras, son of Paul of Takrīt, who gave it to the Syrian monastery in Scetis, and is signed by 'the humble sinner Joseph, bishop of the holy monastery of Rasiḫta': Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis* 1.117. Assemani suggested that Zooras might be identified with the anti-Chalcedonian stylite who baptized the Empress Theodora in 535. Archaeological investigation at Tetrapyrgium, a fourth-century *castrum* on the Strata Diocletiana between Sura and al-Ruṣāfa, has revealed intense occupation of the site, both within the fort and in the *vicus* surrounding it, in the fifth and sixth centuries. This flourishing corresponds to the parallel rise in al-Ruṣāfa's fame as a pilgrimage site. In addition, a monastery was built within the fort, no doubt benefiting from its nearness to al-Ruṣāfa's miracle-working saint. The monastery took the form of cells around a courtyard in which was set a small church with a square apse and flanking rooms, which has been dated to the early to mid-eighth century, according to the most recent study of the evidence: see the interpretation by T. Ulbert, in M. Konrad, *Resafa* 5.64-68, though the critical numismatic evidence, and its context, is problematic.

38. On the cult of S. Sergius at al-Ruṣāfa, see Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* passim.

inscription, located just to the north of the walls.³⁹ Thanks to its water supply and gardens, its situation at the intersection of routes and particularly its pilgrimage shrine of Sergius, al-Ruṣāfa prospered in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries as a *ḥaram* where tribes from the entire region of Syria and Mesopotamia would meet. It was this gathering together of a wide range of the area's inhabitants that caught the attention of political leaders such as Anastasius, Justinian and Theodora, Khusrau II and al-Mundhir.

The value of such a location was not lost on Hishām. His involvement at al-Ruṣāfa should be seen in the light of the more general current discussion of the function of the Umayyad *quṣūr*. Recent studies have emphasized the multiple and specifically Umayyad purposes of these complexes, particularly their role in making the dynasty's presence felt in the steppe and facilitating surveillance of the tribes on which the dynasty relied for the maintenance of its own authority in the region.⁴⁰ At sites in the Balqā', members of the Umayyad elite such as al-Walīd I, Yazīd II and his son al-Walīd II, either built afresh or reused abandoned material in order to make conspicuous the Umayyad presence among their subject Arab tribes. At al-Ruṣāfa the situation was different since Hishām found already in place a settlement and pilgrimage centre that had been understood by previous rulers as a point of convergence for the region's inhabitants where political as well as religious authority could be reinforced. He did not, then, attempt to stem the tide of Arab Christian pilgrims, but encouraged devotion to the holy man Sargis by binding a monumental mosque to the church's north courtyard (fig. 32).⁴¹ Thanks to this architectural arrangement, uniquely preserved in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, the Muslim pilgrim to S. Sergius's shrine crossed directly through a door in the mosque's *qibla* wall into the shared arcaded courtyard and thence into the chapel at the north-eastern end of the Great Basilica in order to reverence the saint's relics. It is important to emphasize that the ground on which Hishām had his mosque built was riddled with dolines, and difficulties must have been encountered because of these circumstances

39. For more recent consideration of the building in its architectural and cultural contexts, see Brands, *Da.M.* 10 (1998) 211-35, and Fowden, *Da.M.* 12 (2001) 303-24.

40. For discussions of *quṣūr* in this light, see Gaube, *Z.D.P.V.* 95 (1979) esp. 196-209; Conrad, *Al-Abhath* 29 (1981) 7-23; MacAdam, in *Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* 531-47; King, in *S.H.A.J.* 4.369-75.

41. Sack, *Resafa* 4 passim, esp. 41-42 on the *qibla* wall. For a discussion of the Islamicization of the holy site at al-Ruṣāfa, as well as at Damascus and Jerusalem, see Fowden, *Common Knowledge* 8 (2002) 124-46.

already from the time of construction. In other words, it took determination and strong motives to build on this site. While there is no reason to diminish the role played by Hishām's personal attachment to the saint, we should not forget that the caliph also had a political motivation. Hishām's persistence in choosing this site underlines the influence that the miracle-working saint had on caliphal subjects at the pilgrimage complex, which certainly included the monastery later admired by Yāqūt - an influence that Hishām hoped to share. In doing this he was following the precedent set by the great pre-Islamic Arab leaders of Syria, the Ghassanids, whose association with Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī should also be recalled in this connection.

In addition to this extraordinary mosque, Hishām also built his *madīna* in what we assume was a more or less open space to the south and east of al-Ruṣāfa's glittering gypsum walls. Like Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, al-Ruṣāfa depended on exploitation of the local wadis and the use of canalization and water storage to maintain the gardens the inhabitants and visitors required. There appear to have been at least five *quṣūr*, one of which has been partly excavated, with another thirty or so smaller structures that would have together made up the caliphal *madīna* housing Hishām, his extended family and court. Excavation of one large square *qaṣr* (roughly 70 metres square) with living quarters arranged around the central courtyard has brought to light stucco decoration and painting of high quality.⁴² In among the walled residences spread gardens and pavilions with their elaborate painted stucco decorations, only tantalizing fragments of which have survived.⁴³

Little of this suburban area has been scientifically explored, but structural outlines show up clearly in a splendid aerial photograph published by Maurice Dunand in 1953.⁴⁴ In our efforts to recreate Hishām's Ruṣāfa, the most useful complement to this photograph are the descriptions of al-Ḥīra, the famously salubrious Lakhmid settlement that spread out between the Euphrates and the desert. At al-Ḥīra, public spaces, markets, pasture, crop fields and gardens grew up between loosely inter-related walled quarters (called *quṣūr*) that enclosed dwellings (*buyūt*) and churches, while larger *quṣūr* and monasteries spread out close by and in the surrounding countryside, each with its own walled garden.⁴⁵ The sixth century was a time of great

42. Otto-Dorn, *Ars Orientalis* 2 (1957) 119-33.

43. Ulbert, *Da.M.* 7 (1993) 213-31.

44. Dunand, *De l'Amanus au Sinai* 140, top photograph.

45. Talbot Rice, *Ars Islamica* 1 (1934) 51-58 and figs 5, 6, 7, for plans and a photograph of

prosperity in al-Ḥīra and its hinterland, as it was also at al-Ruṣāfa. The latter lived on as an Umayyad centre, whereas al-Ḥīra gradually began to be overshadowed by al-Kūfa, a new Islamic settlement nearby, as the region's urban hub. But the process was slow, and certainly al-Ḥīra's surrounding monasteries and country residences, especially al-Khawarnaq, continued to fulfill the same needs even though the masters had changed.

As points of convergence in the steppe, the overlapping roles that monasteries assumed were practical, social, spiritual and aesthetic. Coexisting with these was a political dimension that cannot be separated from the others. We have already seen this in the case of Ghassanid leaders who acted as patrons and mediators at monastic complexes, and in the involvement of a variety of political leaders who chose the pilgrimage complex of al-Ruṣāfa as a backdrop against which to display their influence. The *quṣūr*, like the monasteries, are characterized by this same overlapping of functions, with the difference that the spiritual is much less conspicuous.

Al-Khawarnaq

The *qaṣr* most renowned for its associations with power and prestige was al-Khawarnaq, near al-Ḥīra. The story of al-Khawarnaq and its builder, the Lakhmid sovereign al-Nu'mān I (c. 400-c.418), and its association with the famous Sasanian hunter-monarch Bahram V Gūr (420-438), became the stuff of legend in Arabic and later Persian literature.⁴⁶ Hishām al-Kalbī, a native of eighth-century al-Kūfa and an important source for pre-Islamic Arab history, recounts that:

Al-Nu'mān sat one spring day in his audience chamber at al-Khawarnaq and looked down at al-Najaf, with the gardens, date-palms, orchards, and canals adjoining it, on his western side, and down at the Euphrates on his eastern side, he being on the ridge of al-Najaf. He was pleased with all the greenness, the flowers, and the water courses he could see, and exclaimed to his vizier and companion, "Have you ever seen the like of this view?" The vizier replied, "No; if only it were to last!" The king said, "What then

painting in an excavated church. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-buldān* 244 (tr. 391), attests the porous nature of the nonetheless urban settlement at al-Ḥīra in his account of its capture in A.H. 12/A.D. 633, when Muslim cavalry rode into the open spaces between the built-up areas. See also Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Lakhmiden* 12-17.

46. On the history and legends of al-Khawarnaq, see Pantke, *Der arabische Bahrām-Roman* 52-68.

endures?” He replied, “That which is with God in the next world.” The king asked, “How can that be attained?” He replied, “By your abandoning this present world, by devoting yourself to God and by seeking that which is laid up with Him.” So the king renounced his kingdom that very night; he put on coarse garments and left secretly in flight, without anybody knowing.⁴⁷

‘Adī b. Zayd, the Arab Christian poet from al-Ḥīra who flourished in the second half of the sixth century as a diplomat at both the Sasanian and the Lakhmid courts, used the story in one of his poems meditating on the decay of mortal fame.⁴⁸ The Umayyads are known to have enjoyed the pleasures afforded by al-Khawarnaq and its surroundings. It was in many ways a precursor to the *quṣūr* they would later build for themselves. After his victory near al-Kūfa in the autumn of A.H. 71/ A.D. 690 or A.H. 72/A.D. 691, ‘Abd al-Malik, the father of Hishām, ordered a banquet to be prepared at al-Khawarnaq. The sumptuousness of the food and the beauty of the setting – with its already legendary resonances – inspired him to comment to his companions on the fleeting nature of man and all his efforts. ‘How pleasant our life is! If only anything lasted!’ and, quoting a well-known line, ‘Everything new, O Umaymah, goes toward decay; and every man will some day become a has-been.’⁴⁹

This famously well-positioned *qaṣr* came to be closely associated by the Umayyads and still later rulers with the powerful story of a king who relinquished the most a mortal could attain in order to become a penniless, roofless wanderer. Some four decades after his father’s celebrated banquet, Hishām received a delegation from ‘Irāq at his court at al-Ruṣāfa. The group included the eloquent orator and transmitter of poetry, Khālīd b. Ṣafwān b. al-Ahtam. After being shown in, Khālīd invoked God’s blessings on the caliph and proceeded to recite the story of al-Khawarnaq and its lord. When Khālīd had finished, the lord of al-Ruṣāfa – his beard and turban moist with tears – had them all dismissed and shut himself up in his *qaṣr*. One of Hishām’s *mawālī* hastily chastised the orator for his indelicate choice of subject, but Khālīd responded that he had resolved never to sit with a king without speaking to him of God.⁵⁰

47. Ṭab. 1.853 (tr. 5.80-81).

48. Ṭab. 1.853-54 (tr. 5.81); cf. also Iṣf. 2.131-32.

49. Ṭab. 2.819-21 (tr. 21.195-96).

50. Iṣf. 2.128-32.

These traditions about al-Khawarnaq further suggest that there was more to the *quṣūr* than self-indulgence, or even exercise of political power in the steppe. The *qaṣr* also represented flight from the city in favour of a simpler life – as Abū Qaṭīfa (d. before 693) so famously put it in his much-quoted verses expressing a preference for the *qaṣr* and its palm grove to all the glories of Damascus.⁵¹ The *qaṣr*, perhaps because of the contrast it set up between the arid steppe on the one hand, and pleasure and politics on the other, could lead the mind toward denial of the world and an embracing of more spiritual preoccupations. It was not so great a leap from al-Nu‘mān’s gesture to the monastic life as traditionally lived by Christians. And there is also the fact that monks ‘seeking the good pleasure of God’⁵² received some favourable consideration in the Qur’an. The Muslim who encountered a monk or monastery in the steppe could not possibly have failed to recall those Qur’anic monks – or the many prophetic monks who appear in Islamic tradition, such as Baḥīrā and the monk of Mayfa‘a who had advised a pre-Islamic monotheist to go back to Arabia⁵³. Ultimately, as any monk knew, and as even an Umayyad caliph might occasionally divine, the paradox of plenty in the steppe held the power to act as a goad to return to the bare essentials, the way of the original ascetics who wandered the steppe, settling at a source of water, in an old tower - round which a monastic community, with all its potential distractions from the bare essentials, would gradually arise.

51. Iṣf. 1.9, 13, 52-54.

52. *Qur’ān* 57:27.

53. See chapter 6 above.

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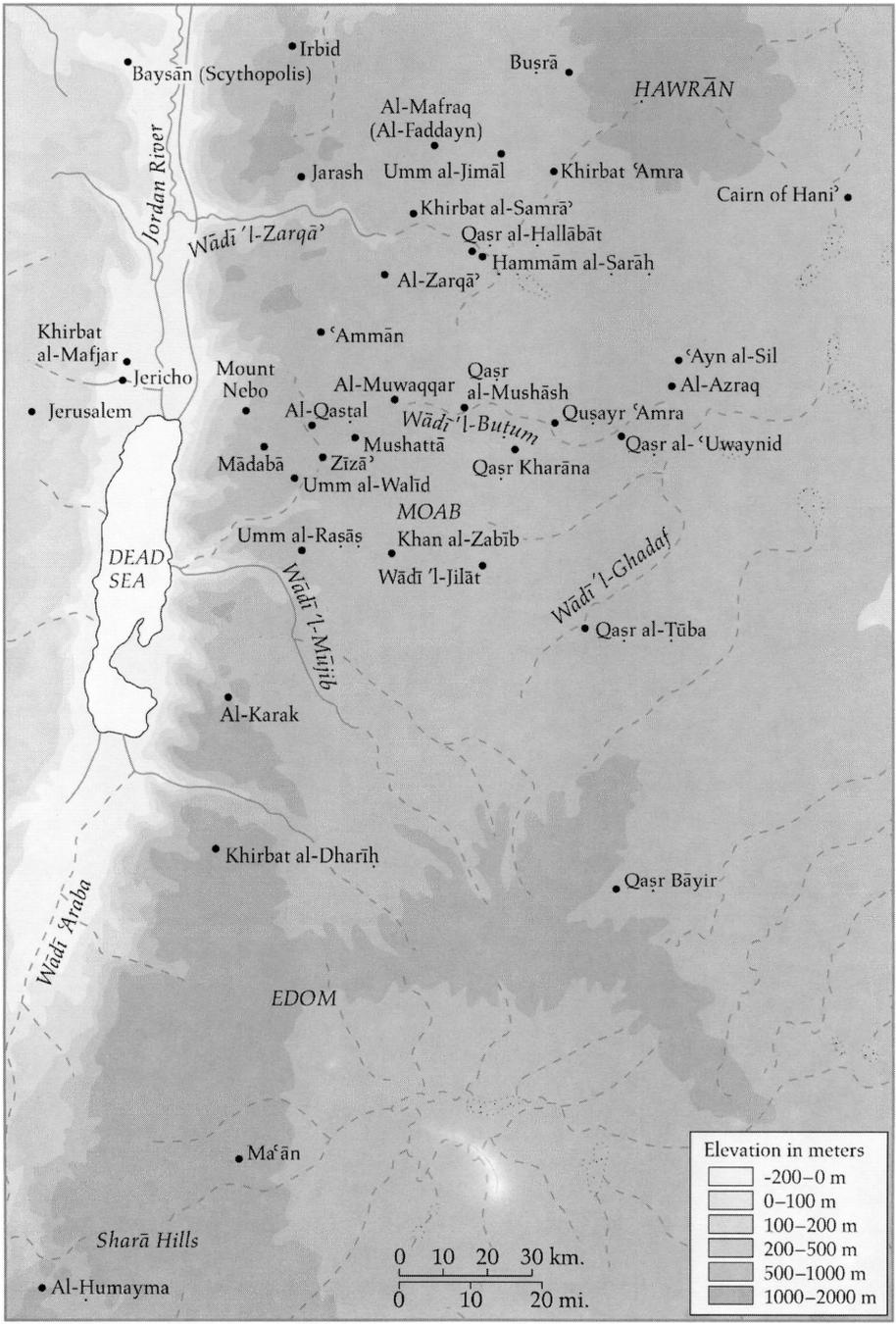
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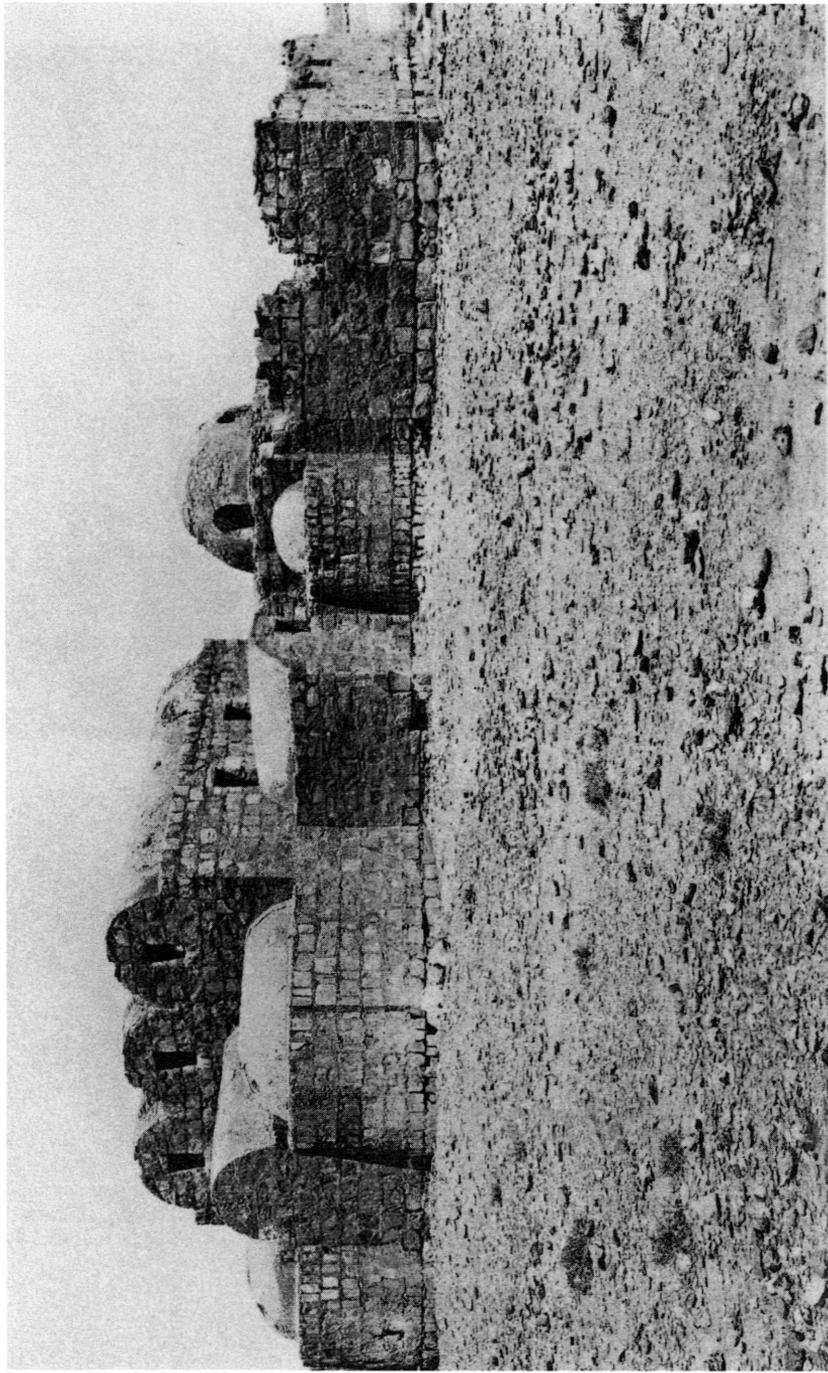
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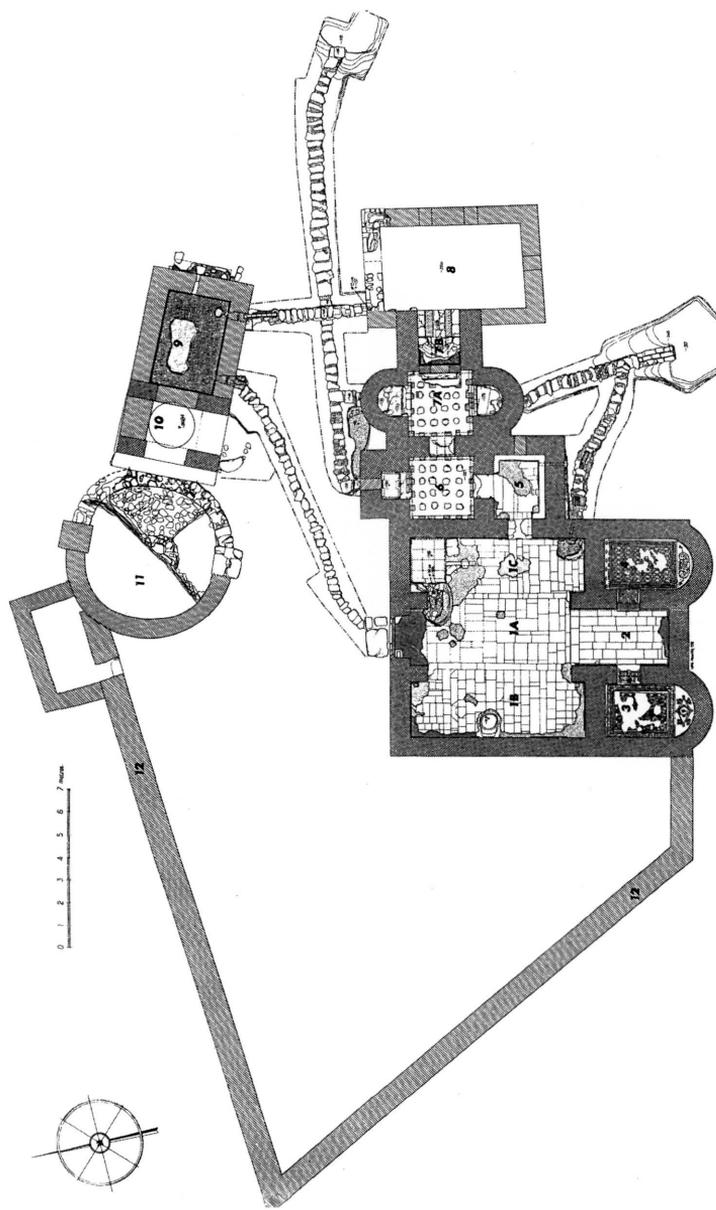
ILLUSTRATIONS



1. Map of Umayyad Jordan. Drawn by Bill Nelson.



2. Qusayr 'Amra from the south-east (1909-12).
A.J. Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie* (P. Geuthner, Paris 1909-22) 3. pl. XXXVII.



3. Qusayr 'Amra: plan of the bath house.
J.I.L. Macarrón, in M. Almagro, L. Caballero, J. Zozaya and A. Almagro, Qusayr 'Amra: Residencia y baños omeyyas en el desierto de Jordania (Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, Madrid 1975) fig. 4.

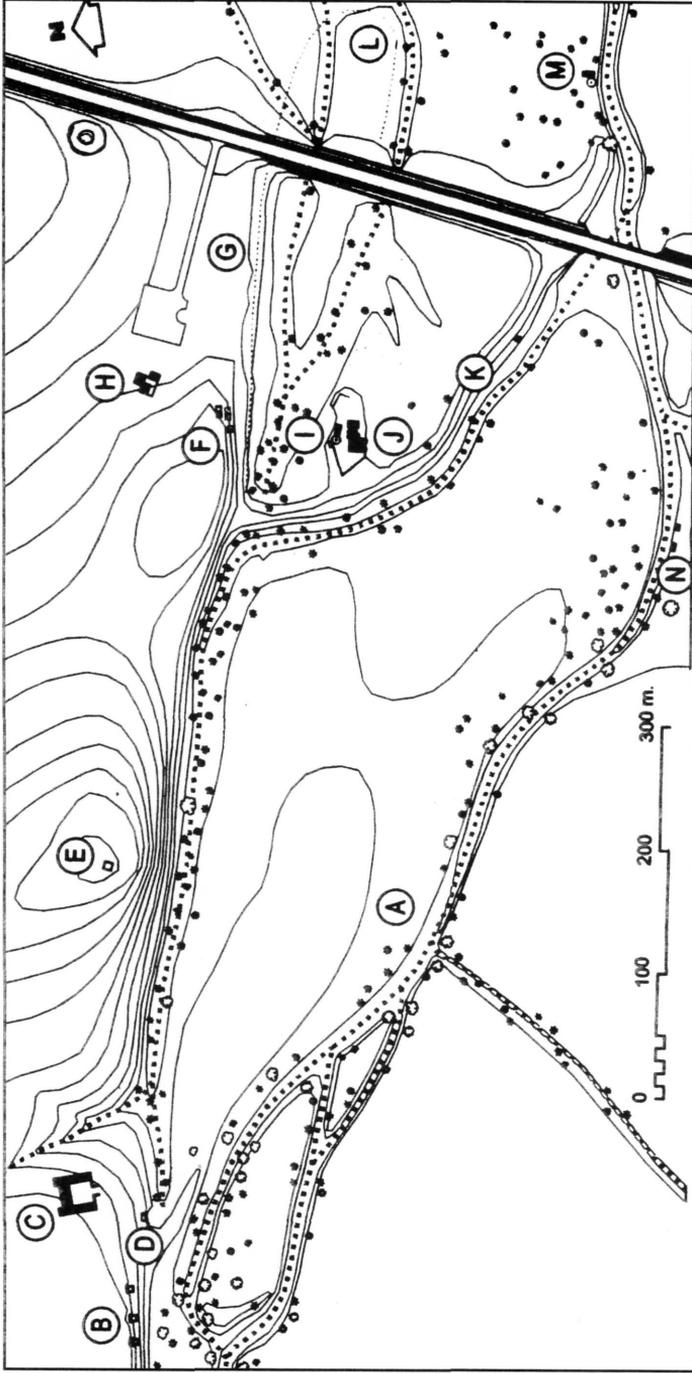
- 1A.** Hall, central aisle.
- 1B.** Hall, west aisle.
- 1C.** Hall, east aisle.
- 2.** Hall, alcove.
- 3-4.** West and east apsidal side rooms.
- 5.** Apodyterium.
- 6.** Tepidarium.
- 7A.** Caldarium.
- 7B.** Boiler and water tank.
- 8.** Service area and wood store (?). circular camel track.
- 9.** Cistern.
- 10.** Well.
- 11.** Winding installation and circular camel track.
- 12.** Flood barrier.



4. Quşayr 'Amra, hall, looking from entrance (north) to alcove (south).
F. Anderegg, courtesy of O. Grabar.



5. Quşayr 'Amra, caldarium, dome: Zodiac (fresco).
Q.'A. pl. XLVIIIb.



6. Qusayr 'Amra: plan of the bath house's environs.

T. Morin, in T. Morin and C. Vibert-Guigue, 'Une structure d'accueil des visiteurs à l'entrée de Qusayr 'Amra', A.D.A.J. 44 (2000) 589.

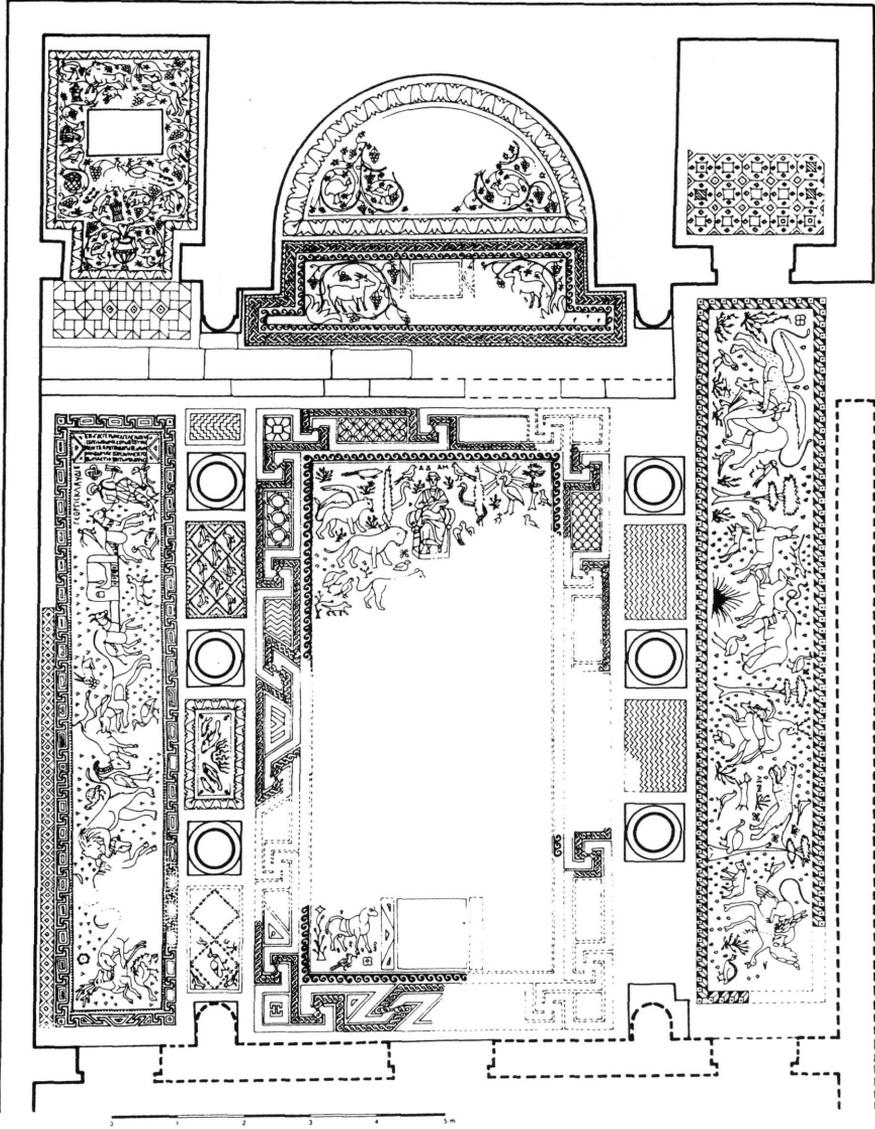
- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A. Wādi 'l-Buṭum | D. Cistern with central pillar | I. Well in front of bath house | L. Remnants of garden wall |
| B. Traces of structures | E, F, G. Remains of small structures | J. Bath house | M. Well by wadi |
| C. Courtyard dwelling | H. Visitors' centre | K. Modern dyke | N. Traces of structures |
| | | | O. 'Amman - al-Azraq highway |



7. Quşayr 'Amra, hall, alcove, south wall: The enthroned prince (fresco).
F. Anderegg, courtesy of O. Grabar.



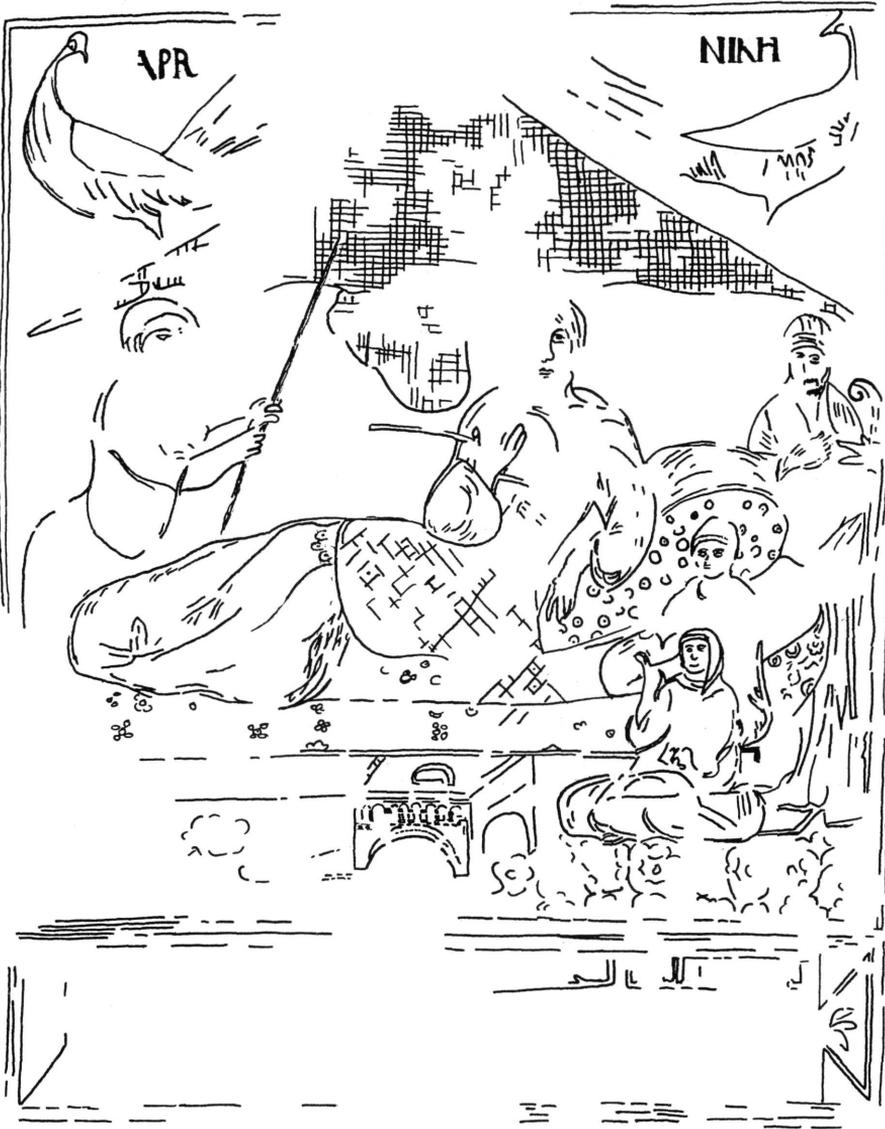
8. Consular diptych of Areobindus (ivory, Constantinople, A.D. 506)
Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zurich, Inv. no. A-3564.



9. Hawirtah, Church of the Archangel Michael, floor (mosaic, late fifth century).
 Drawing by F. Laroche, in P. Canivet and M.T. Canivet, *Ḥūarte: Sanctuaire chrétien d'Apamène (IV^e-VI^e s.)* (Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 122) (P. Geuthner, Paris 1987) 2. plan X.



10. Adam (mosaic), Ḥamā Museum.



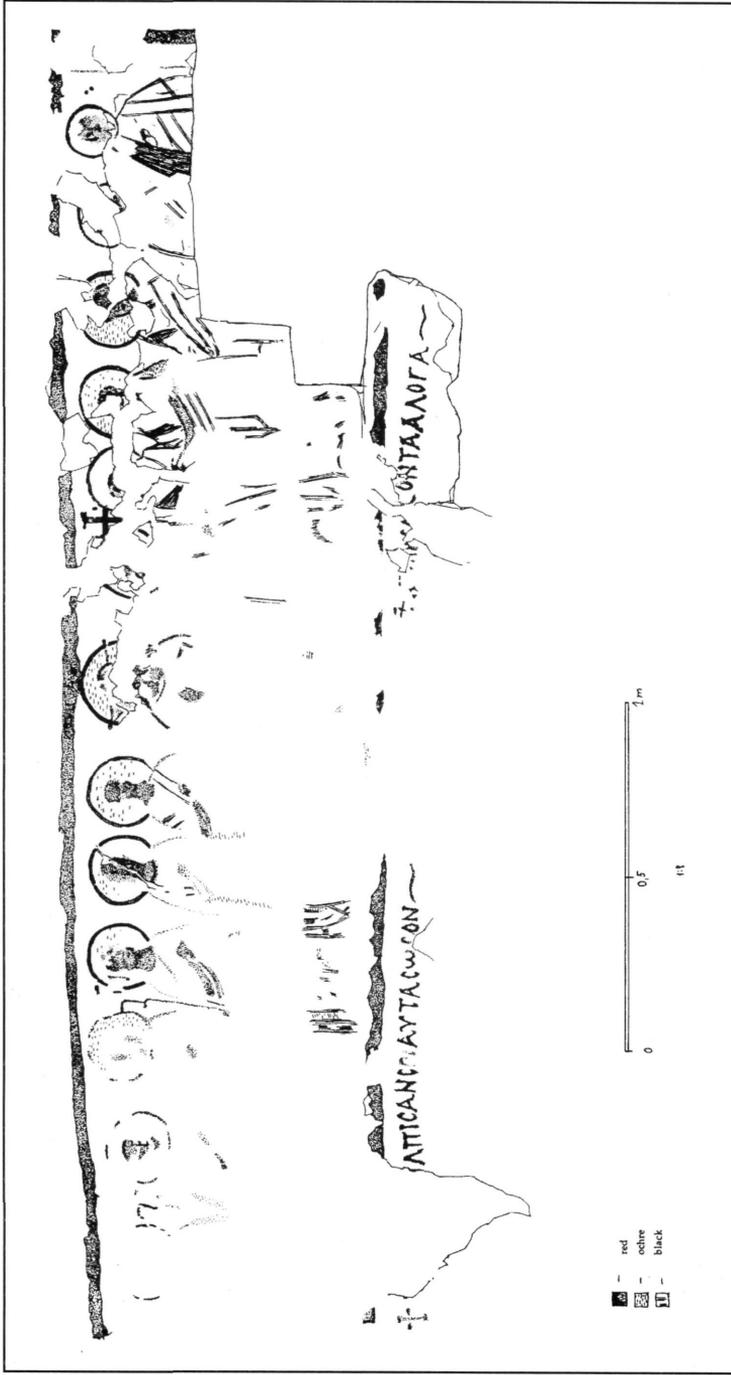
11. Qaşayr 'Amra, hall, west aisle, south wall: The dynastic icon (fresco).
Tracing by C. Vibert-Guigue, simplified by G. Fowden.



12. Quşayr 'Amra, hall, west wall: The six kings (fresco).
F. Andereg, courtesy of O. Grabar.



13. *The Virgin enthroned between SS. Theodore and George/Demetrius (icon, sixth century). Monastery of S. Catherine, Sinai.*



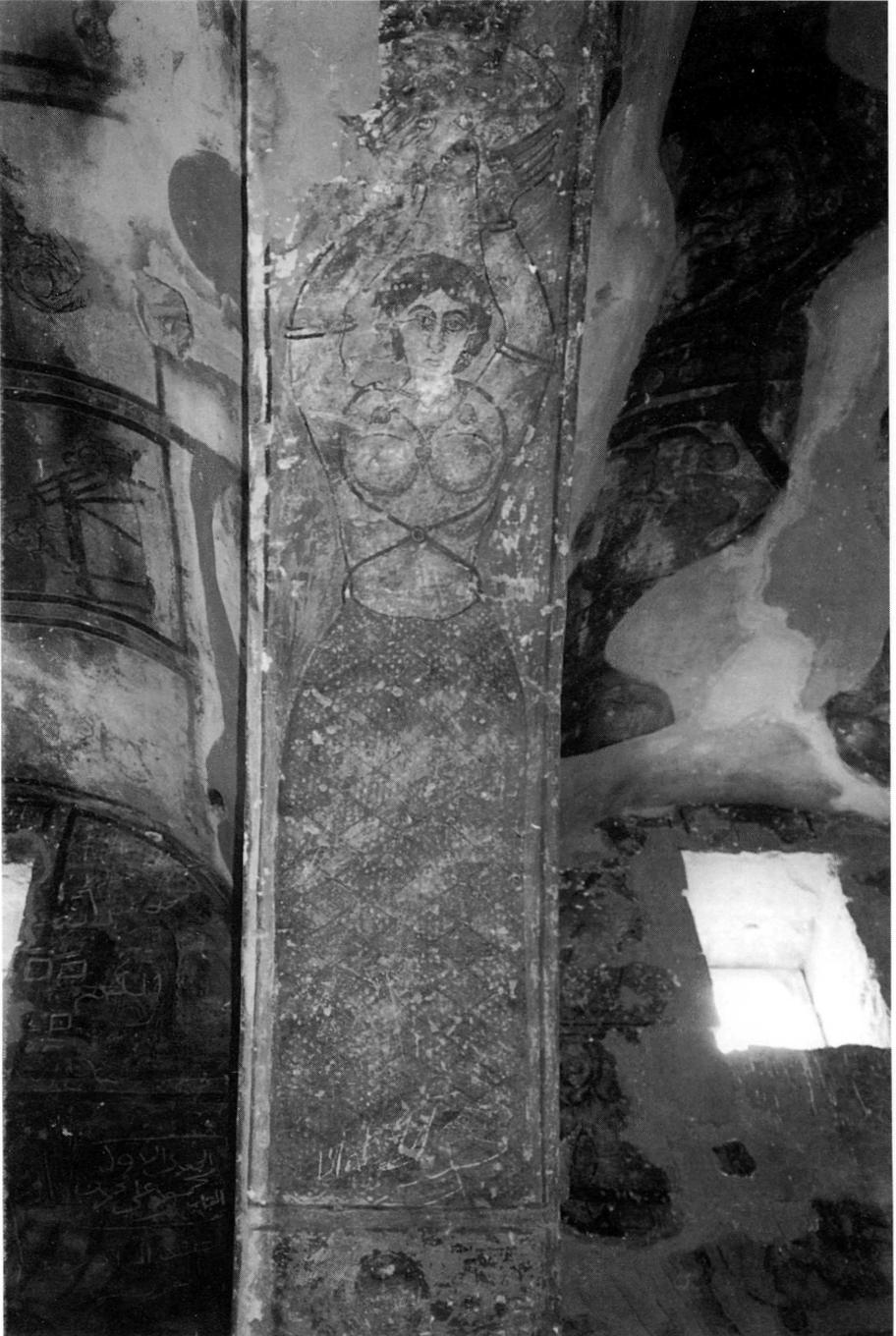
14. Caesarea Maritima: Christ and the twelve apostles (wall painting, late sixth or early seventh century).
 B. Haimov, in T. Avner, 'Early Byzantine wall-paintings from Caesarea', in K.G. Holm, A. Raban and J. Patrich (eds),
 Caesarea papers 2 (Journal of Roman Archaeology, Portsmouth, R.I. 1999) 120 fig. 15.



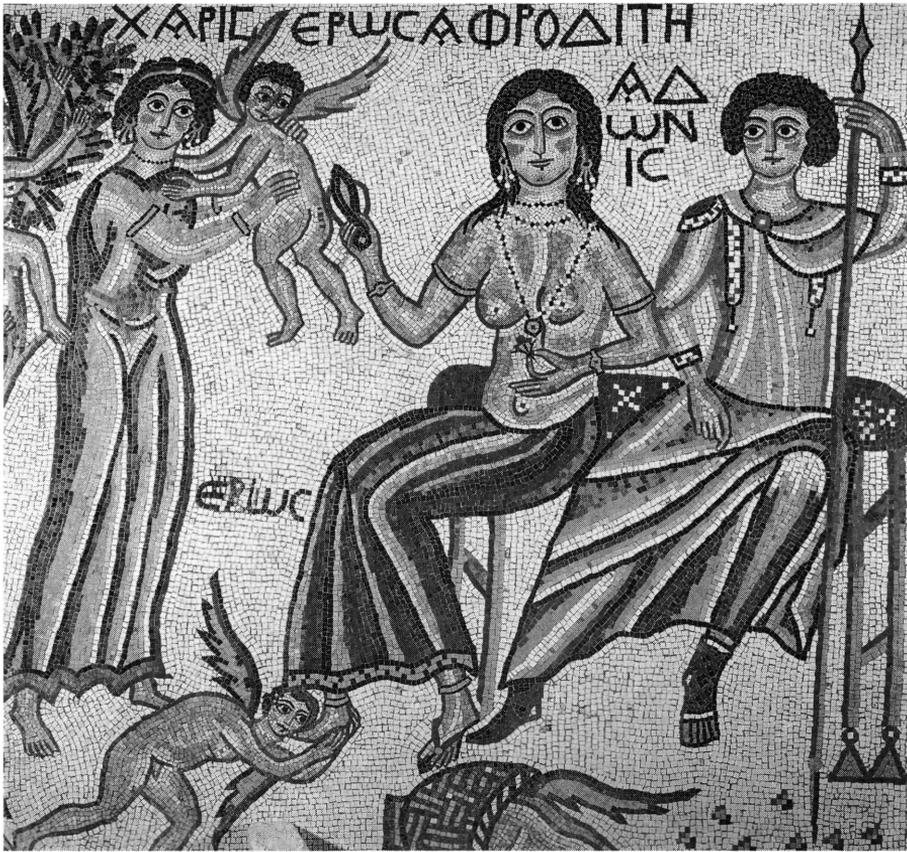
15. Quşayr 'Amra, hall, west arch, south soffit: Dancing girl (fresco). L. Kamperides.



17. Qaşayr 'Amra, hall, central aisle, northwest spandrel:
Pensive woman with Eros (fresco). J. Zozaya.



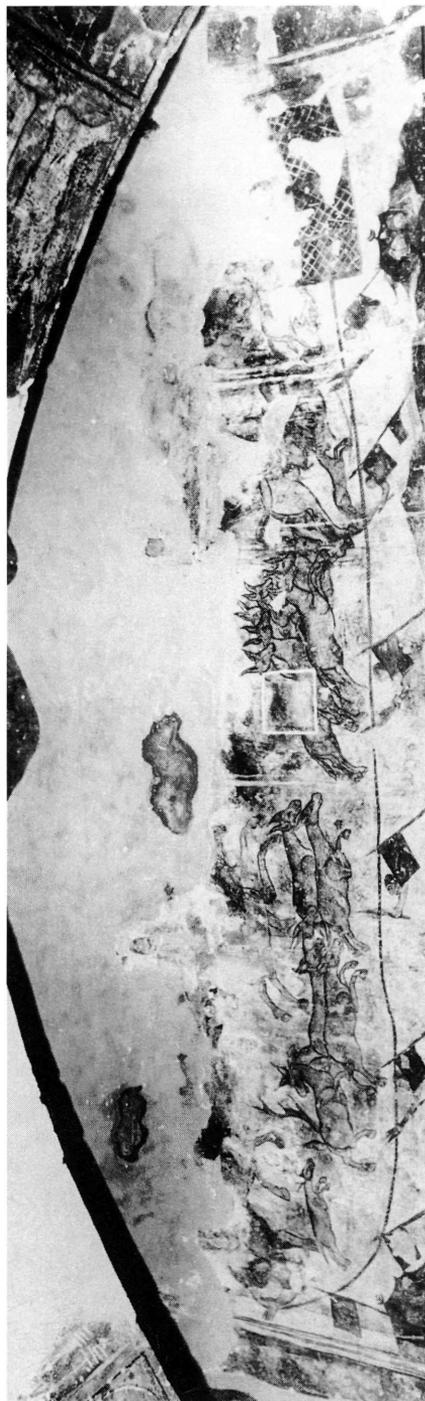
18. Qaşayr 'Amra, hall, soffit of east arch: Decorative woman and medallion (fresco).
L. Kamperides.



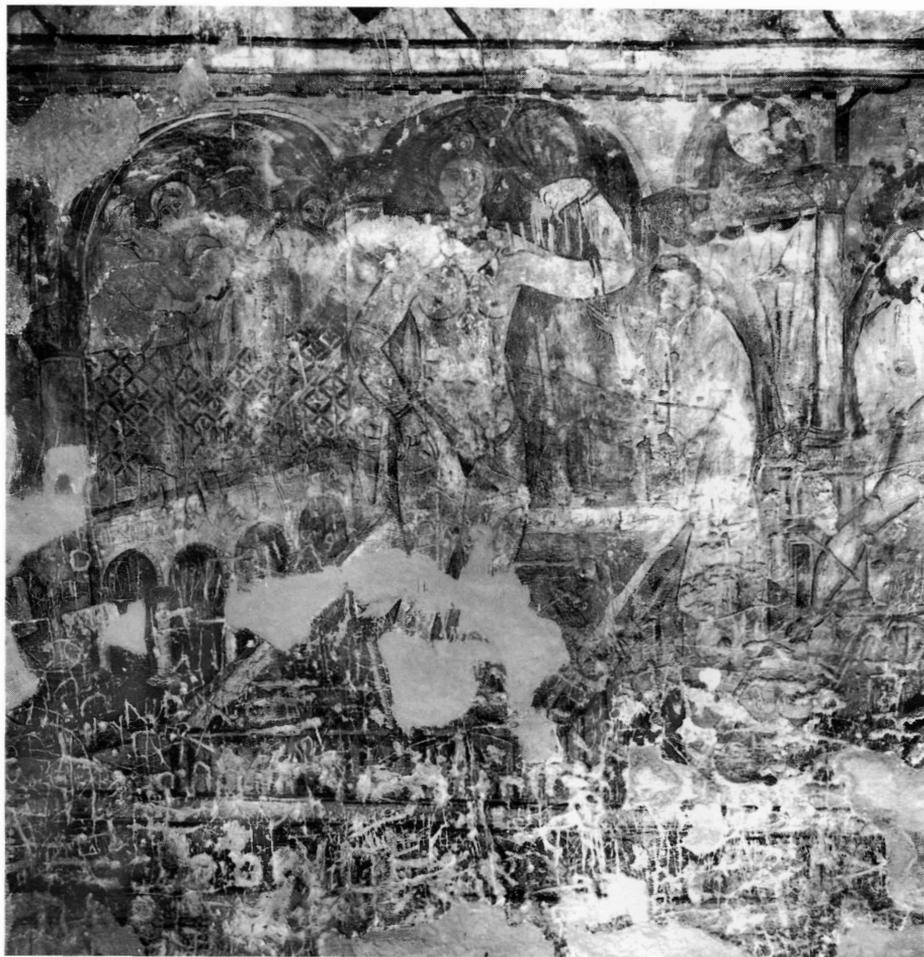
19. Mādabā, Hippolytus hall: Aphrodite (mosaic, first half of sixth century).
By permission of the Department of Antiquities, Jordan.



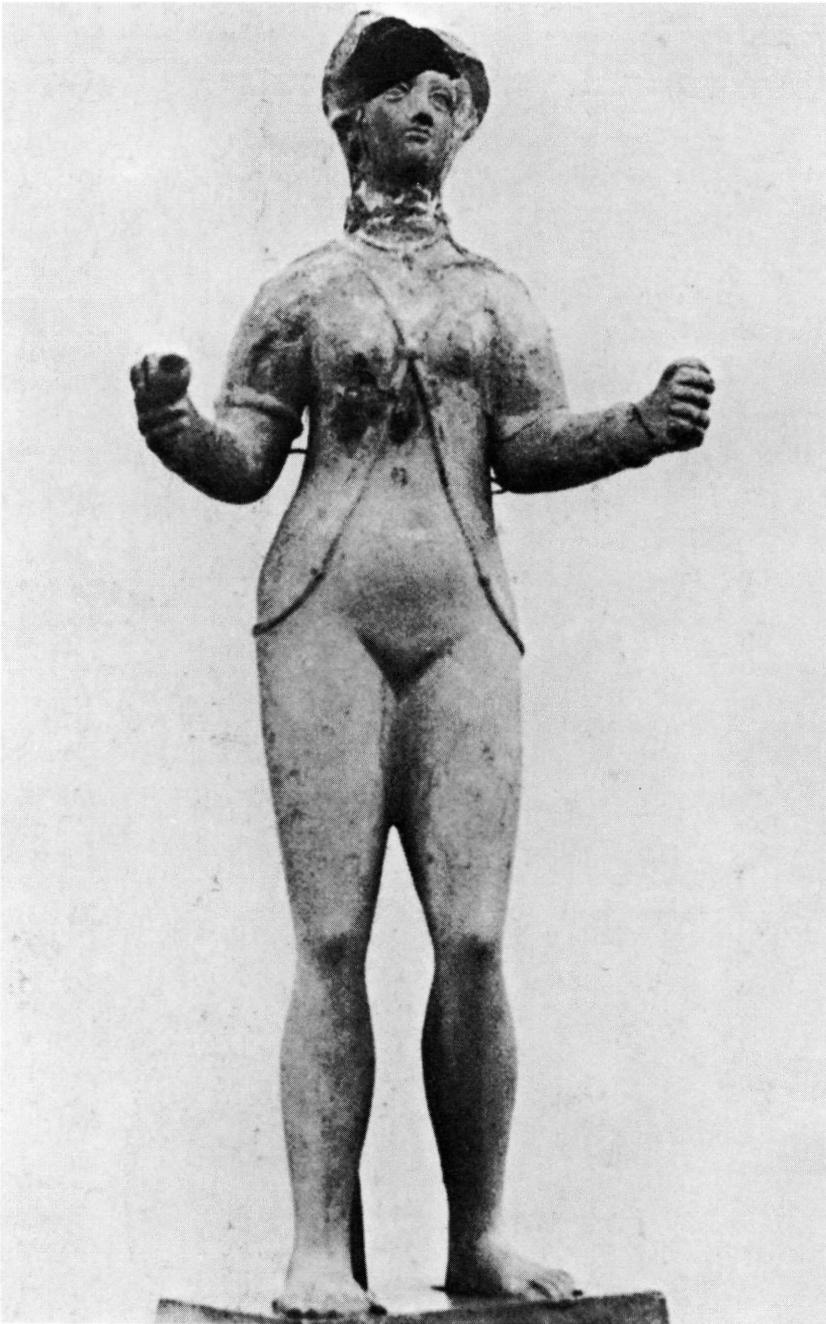
20. Quşayr 'Amra, tepidarium, south wall: Bathing women (fresco).
Q. A. pl. XLIVa.



21. Quşşyr 'Amra, hall, west wall: Hunting scene (fresco). F. Anderegg, courtesy of O. Grabar.



22. Qaşayr 'Amra, hall, west wall: *Bathing beauty* (fresco).
F. Andereg, courtesy of O. Grabar.



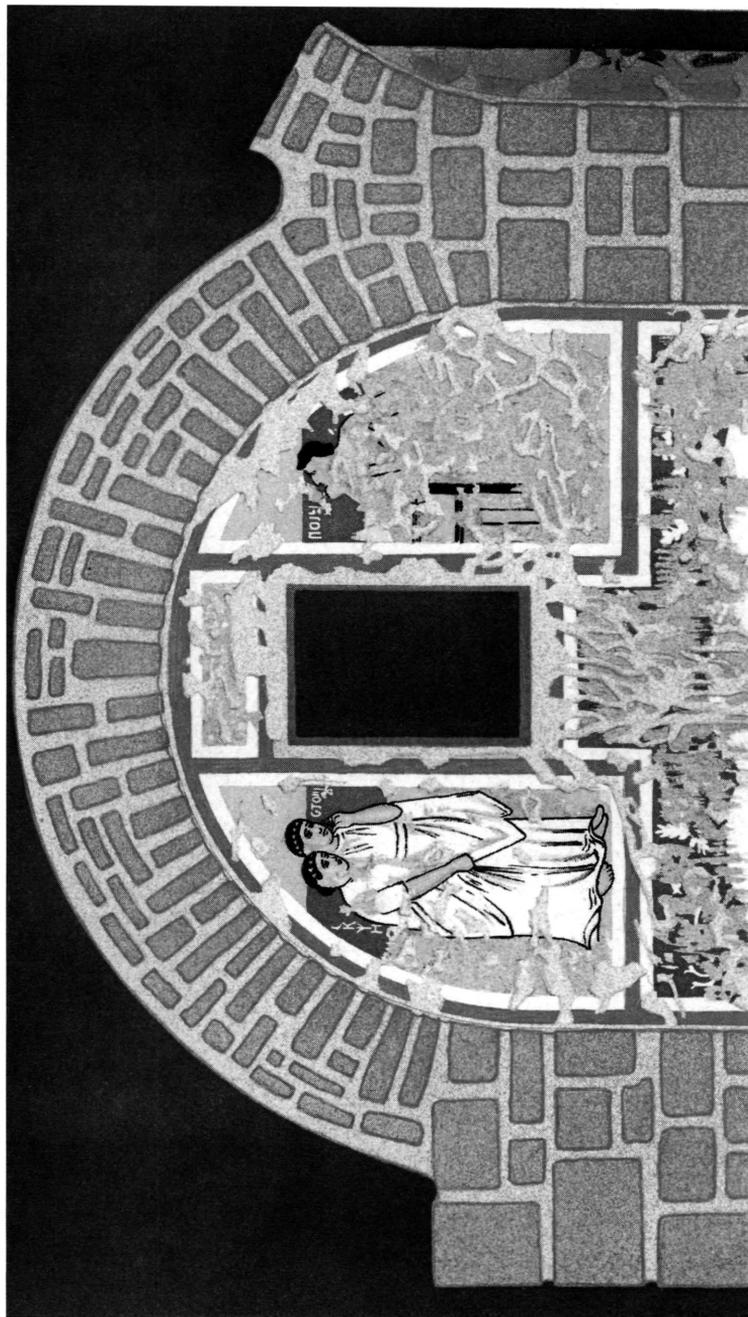
23. Aphrodite (ceramic statuette, found near 'Ammān).
Archaeological Museum, 'Ammān, inv. no. J 12940.
By permission of the Department of Antiquities, Jordan.



24. Qusayr 'Amra, apodyterium, lunette over door into hall: Dionysus and Ariadne (fresco).
A.J. Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie* (P. Geuthner, Paris 1909-22) 3. pl. XLV.



25. Seleucia, House of Dionysus and Ariadne: Dionysus and Ariadne (mosaic, Severan). Antakya Museum.



26. Quşayr 'Amra, hall, east aisle, south wall: *Philosophy, History and Poetry* (fresco).
K. A. 2, pl. XXXIX.



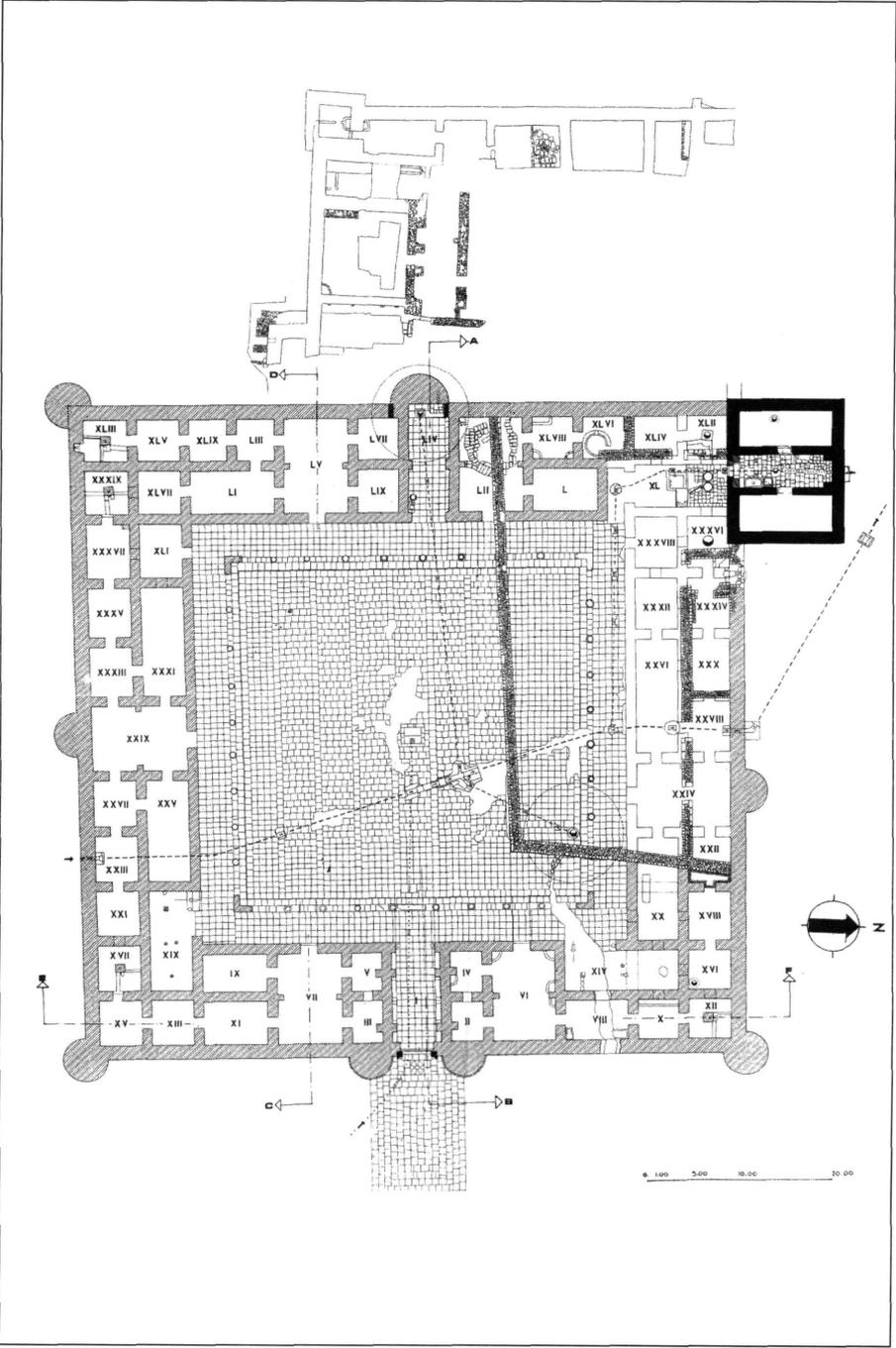
27A. Solidus/dinar of 'Abd al-Malik (685-705), imitating a solidus of Heraclius, Heraclius Constantine and Heraclonas (632-38), with crosses modified (no date). Islamic coins and medals, Auction 18 (18 February 1986) (Spink and Son Numismatics, Zurich 1986) 30 no. 86.



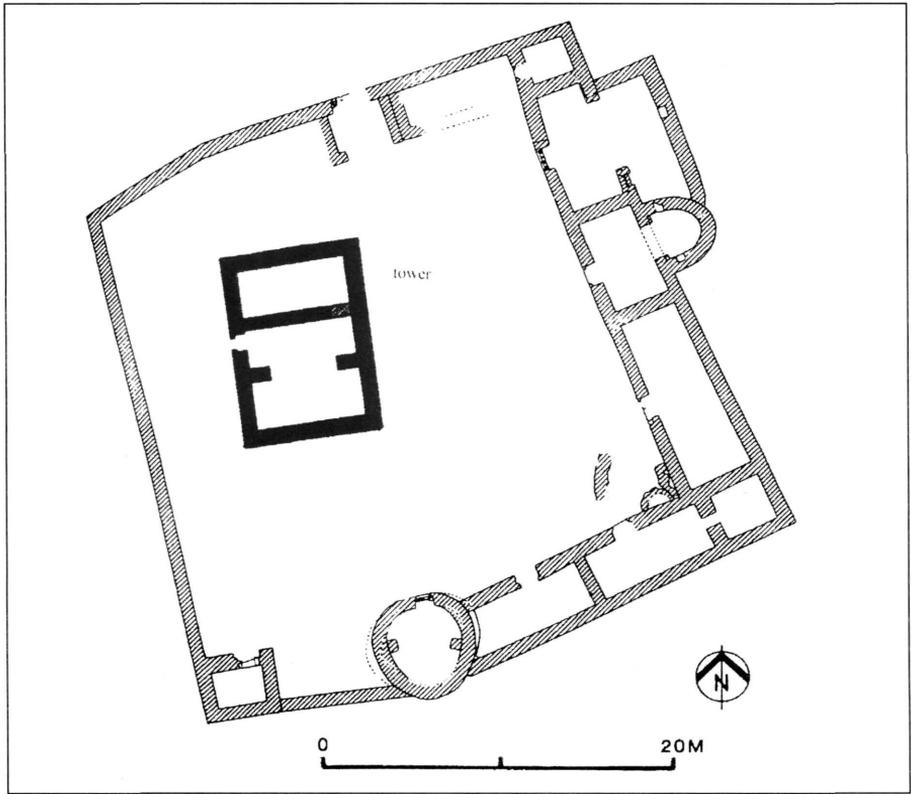
27B. Dinar of 'Abd al-Malik, dated 77 A.H. The first Islamic coinage to abandon imitation of East Roman and Sasanian models and use only religious texts. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia.



28. Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, gateway decorated in stucco. National Museum, Damascus.
D. Schlumberger, *Qaṣr el-Heir el-Gharbi* (Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient,
Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 120) (P. Geuthner, Paris 1986) pl. 58.

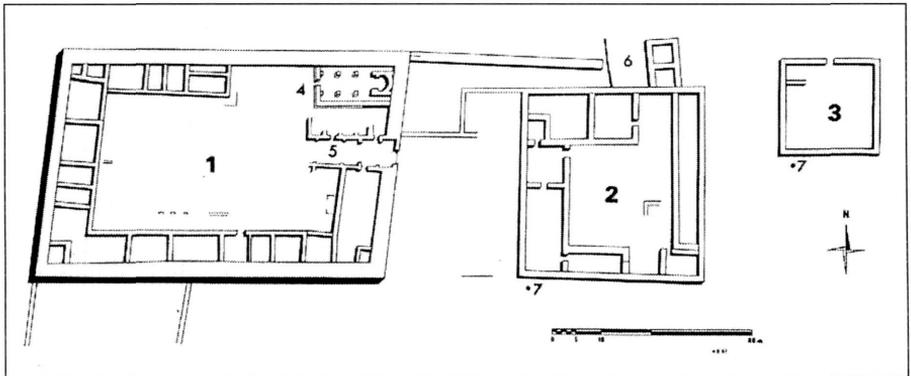


29. Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi: plan.
Q.H.G. pl. 22.



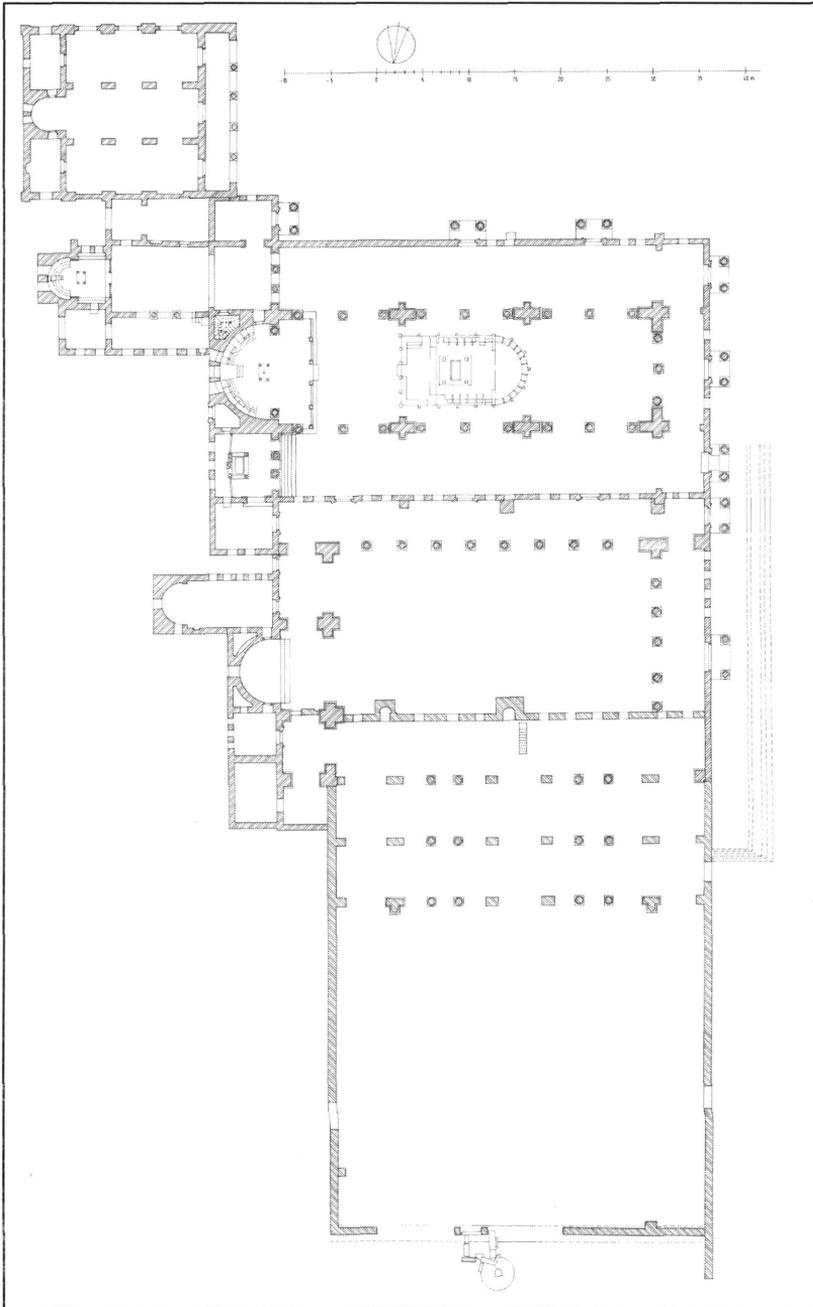
30. Qaşr Burqu': plan.

D. Kennedy, The Roman army in Jordan (London 2000) 75, fig. 8.15.



31. Al-Faddayn : plan.

J.-B. Humbert, 'El-Fedein/Mafraq', in Contribution française à l'archéologie jordanienne (Amman 1989), following p. 131.



32. Plan of Great Basilica and Great Mosque with shared courtyard, al-Ruṣāfa.
D. Sack, *Resafa 4: Die Grosse Moschee von Resafa-Ruṣāfat Hišām*
(Mainz 1996) pl. 71.

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