Out of Antiquity: Umayyad Baths in Context

by

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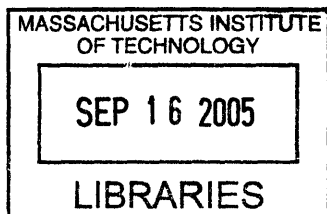
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relationship between the art and architecture of the early Islamic period to those of pre-Islamic Bilad al-Sham (the region encompassing the modern-day countries of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel), and focuses on the Umayyad bathhouse as a paradigm through which this relationship is articulated. The visual culture of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750CE) is of extreme importance, not only because it constitutes the foundation of Islamic art and architecture, but more importantly because it serves as the main link in the chain of cultural transmission from the Greco-Roman and Byzantine worlds to the Medieval Islamic world. The first section of this dissertation explores the ways in which this relationship has been studied as well as the nature of the primary sources, and suggests a new method of how best to study and understand Umayyad art and architecture and their relationship to precedent and contemporaneous cultures. The second section examines the cultural, architectural and political changes in Bilad al-Sham between the fourth and eighth centuries CE, and how the events of these four centuries shaped the art, architecture and culture of the Umayyads. The third and fourth sections concentrate on transformation of the shape and function of the bathhouse in late antiquity, and how the bathhouse was adapted to fit the needs of both pre-Islamic and Islamic late antique cultures in this region. This study concludes by suggesting that Umayyad architecture and culture can best be understood only when interpreted as part of the rich regional and cultural milieu of late antique Bilad al-Sham.

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Introduction

The period of transition from Byzantine to early Islamic rule in *Bilad al-Sham* presents the student of cultural history of the eastern Mediterranean with particularly challenging questions. Among these, the question of the relationship between the art and architecture of the early Islamic period to those of pre-Islamic *Bilad al-Sham* is not the least complex. *Bilad al-Sham* (the region encompassing the modern-day countries of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel) formed the core of the empire of the first Islamic dynasty, the Umayyads (660-750 CE), and the majority of extant Umayyad art and architecture survives in this region. [Map 1] The visual culture of this first dynasty of Islam is of extreme importance, not only because it constitutes the foundation of Islamic art and architecture, but more importantly because it serves as the main link in the chain of cultural transmission from the Classical Greco-Roman and Byzantine worlds to the Classical Islamic world.

Like other transitional periods in art history, such as fourteenth-century Italian art and architecture which mark the transition from the Medieval to the Renaissance periods, Umayyad art and architecture belong very much to the worlds that they bridge. Therefore, the key to understanding Umayyad art and architecture lies in their relationship to precedent, contemporaneous as well as subsequent visual cultures. Since the late nineteenth century, the nature and scope of this relationship has often been studied and debated. In the first section of this dissertation, I examine the ways in which this relationship has been studied, the nature of the primary sources, and suggest my own reading of how best to study and understand Umayyad art and architecture and their
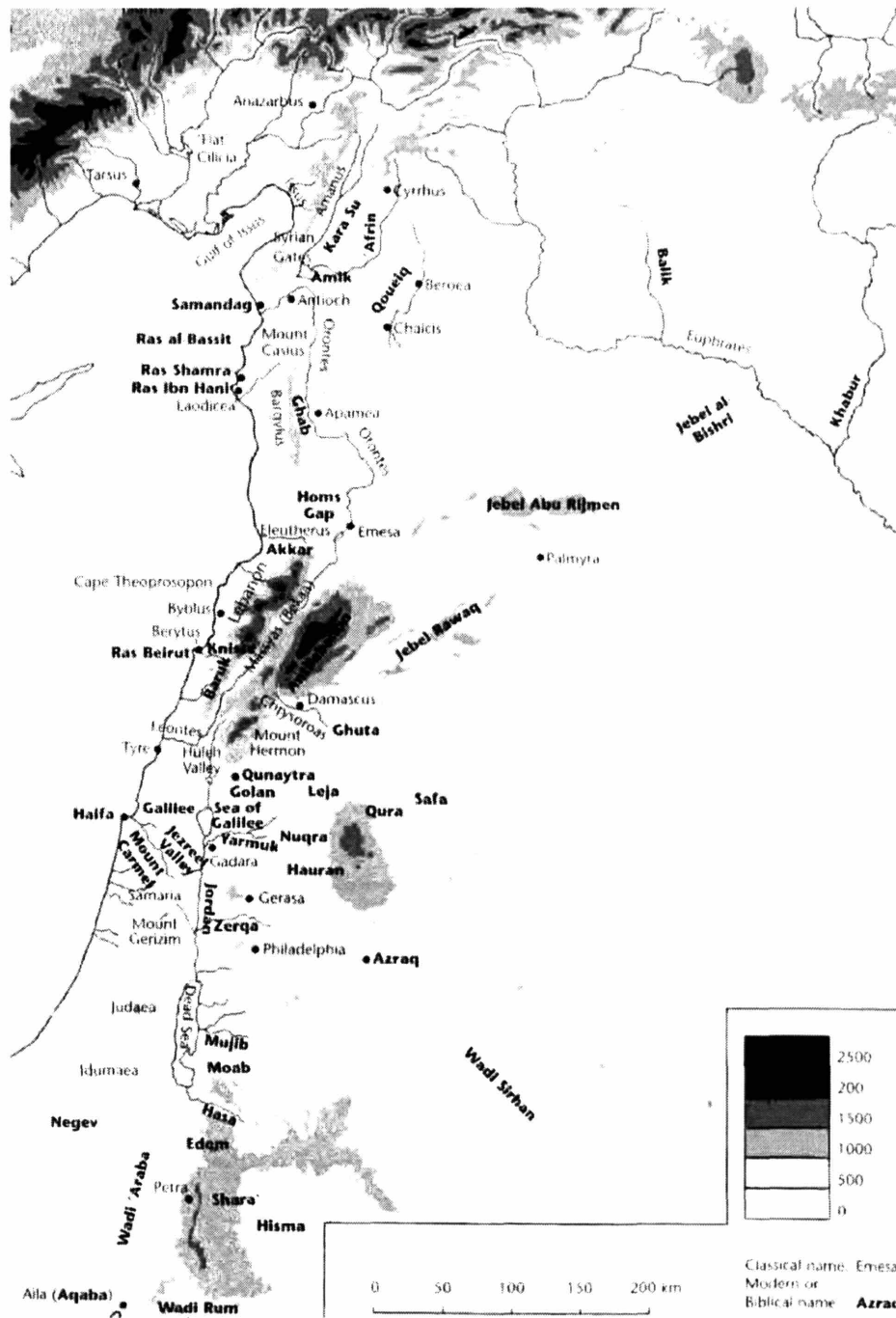
Map 1   **Map of Bilad al-Sham. Reproduced from Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles, 2003), 6.**

relationship to precedent and contemporaneous cultures. The second section examines the cultural, architectural and political changes in Bilad al-Sham between the fourth and eighth centuries CE, and how the events of these four centuries shaped the art and architecture of the Umayyads.

Umayyad visual culture and precedent and contemporary visual cultures are further explored in the subsequent two sections, where the bathhouse is used as a paradigm through which this relationship is articulated. The bathhouse as a building type is one of the most prevalent features of both Classical and Late Antique (both pre-Islamic and Islamic) public and private culture, and provides a relatively clear example of how Classical visual culture was adopted and adapted to fit the needs of both pre-Islamic and Islamic Late Antiquity. However, late antique bath architecture in *Bilad al-Sham* (and elsewhere) has received surprisingly little attention from scholars.

There has been no monograph solely devoted to baths and bathing in Late Antiquity. Late antique bathhouses are usually given a cursory treatment in works devoted to Classical or medieval Byzantine baths and bathing. In addition, little attention has been paid to Byzantine baths. Phaidon Koukoules, author of an encyclopedic study of Byzantine social life, read the sporadic references to baths and bathing in later Byzantine literature as markers that the baths, together with other public institutions inherited from the Romans, were proof that Byzantium served as a bridge between classical and Turkish traditions.[1] In the only monograph on Byzantine baths, Albercht Berger offers an exhaustive compilation of references to baths from Byzantine literary sources of all kinds. His treatment is

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[1] Phaidon Kukules, *Byzantinon bios kai politismos* (Athens, 1948-51), vol. 2, pp. 62-65.

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thorough, extending to a discussion of the staffing of baths and the kinds of oil and cleansers used by bathers. However, Berger devotes only a short chapter on bath architecture, in which he relies on literary descriptions and archaeological evidence drawn from older compilations (rather than from recent archaeological reports). Overall, Berger's discussion of architecture and archaeological excavations is less satisfying than his use of literary sources –his examples are limited and widely scattered.[2] Furthermore, Berger devotes very little attention to late antique baths and concentrates his discussion on post-ninth century Byzantine baths.

In the monumental two-volume work on Roman baths, Inge Nielsen provides a formidable wealth of archaeological and epigraphic information on Roman baths and bathing culture across three continents covering 387 baths in both text and catalogue.[3] The strength of the vastness of Nielsen's approach also results in an undeniable weakness: Few examples are discussed in much detail, and the great majority of the baths are mentioned as examples of a particular type or usage. It is in this vein that late antique baths are treated –as examples of late Roman provincial baths.

In his seminal book on baths in the Classical world, Fikret Yegül devotes one chapter on baths and bathing culture in the Late Antique and Byzantine world, in which he gives an overview of the main characteristics of the late antique bathhouse along with a

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[2] A. Berger, *Das Bad in der byzantinischen Zeit* (Münich, 1982)

[3] Inge Nielsen, *Thermae et Balnea: The Architecture and Cultural History of Roman Baths* 2 vols. (Aarhus, 1990).

general discussion of the early Christian attitudes toward bathing.[4] In his treatment of the

early Islamic baths, Yegül rightly asserts that the "acceptance of baths as a social and

cultural institution is among the many important ways that the medieval Islamic society

became the inheritor and the perpetuator of Classical culture."[5] However, Yegül falls short

in providing a novel treatment of the role of the bathhouse in Umayyad society. Here,

Yegül focuses on the two best-known Umayyad baths, Qusayr Amra and Khirtbet al-

Mafjar, and reiterates the older argument, articulated originally by Oleg Grabar in his

dissertation and fleshed out in his later book *Formation of Islamic Art*,[6] that the raison

d'être of the Umayyad bath is to provide a *majlis al-lahwah* (pleasurable gathering) for the

Umayyad elite, where they partook in poetry recitals, music making, singing, drinking and

feasting.[7] (The usefulness and limitations of this interpretation is discussed in more detail

later in this dissertation.) In a subsequent appendix devoted to the Turkish *hammam*, Yegül

outlines their development and uses in medieval and modern Turkish society. In this

discussion, he glosses over the early Islamic hammam and presents it as the prototype of

the later medieval and modern Turkish hammam. Indeed, Yegül's treatment of the early

Islamic baths is very much in line with how these baths have been treated in literature on

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[4] Fikret Yegul's seminal book, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1992): 314-349.

[5] ibid. 349

[6] Oleg Grabar, "Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court," Ph. D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1955); idem. *Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, 1973): 153-159. A similar idea has also expressed by G. L. Harding, *The Antiquities of Jordan* (London, 1967), 153; R. Hillenbrand, "*La Dole Vita* in Early Islamic Syria: the Evidence of the Later Umayyad Palaces," *Art History* 5.1 (1982), 1-35.

[7] Ibid. 249. Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*. 156.

the Islamic bathhouse. Most scholars tend to gloss over the early Islamic bathhouse as a

"transitional" bath-type that was little more than a steppingstone between Roman baths and

Turkish hammams of the late Medieval and early Modern period.[8] For example, even the

most thorough treatment of the development of the medieval Islamic hammam, Martin

Dow's book on the hammams of Palestine, devotes but a few pages to the early Islamic

bathhouse in which Dow argues that the importance of the early Islamic baths is due to the

fact that they provide the link between the Roman prototype and the later Islamic

examples.[9]

The fact that baths are among the most ubiquitous features of Early Islamic

architecture, and can be found in almost every type of Early Islamic settlement, from cities

to palaces, is often attributed to the Muslim ritual of ablution.[10] Even though, Islam unlike

Christianity, does require the performance of regular ritual purification, there is no

indication from either literary sources or archaeological excavations that bathhouses were

originally adopted solely to fulfill this religious need. In fact, as I argue later, the adoption

and transformation of the bathhouse under the Umayyads should be seen not as a result of

religious predilections, but as a concrete expression of Umayyad culture and its

relationship to the cultures of pre-Islamic Late Antiquity. Furthermore, by focusing on the

baths and bathing in Late Antique *Bilad al-Sham*, I do not, as others have done read

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[8] For Islamic baths in the later Middle Ages see, H. Grotzfeld, *Das Bad im arabischislamichen Mittealter* (Wiesbaden, 1970). For the Medieval and Ottoman baths of Damascus see, Michel Ecochard, *Les Bains de Damas* (Beirut, 1942).

[9] Marin Dow, *The Islamic Baths of Palestine* (Oxford, 1996).

[10] See for example, J. Sourdel-Thomine, "Hammam" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam.* 2nd edition, vol. 3, pp. 139-146.

"Islamic" forms, motifs, or tastes, *back* onto the Umayyad examples, but rather I interpret

them as part of a rich regional and cultural milieu.

I. The Limits of Antiquity: Cultural Continuity and the Study of Umayyad Art and Architecture

1. 1 The Formation and Development of the Field

The interest in Islamic art and architecture developed in the West during the eighteenth century, following diplomatic, commercial and colonial involvement in the traditionally Islamic lands of North Africa, the Middle East, western Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Islamic coins were arguably the objects that first captured the attention of western scholars. The first scholarly book on Islamic numismatics was G. J. Kehr's *Monarchiæ Asiatico-Saracenicæ status, qualis VIII, et IX. post Christvm natum seculo fuit, ex nummis argenteis prisca Arabum scriptura kufica, a monarchis arabicis Al-Mansor, Harun Raschid, Al-Mamon aliisque in metropolibus chaldææ, Persiæ, Transoxanæque cusis* (1724)[1], in which the author correctly read the Kufic inscriptions and provided commentary. By the late eighteenth century other collections of Islamic coins had been catalogued, culminating in the systematic classification by C. M. Frähn, *Das muhammedanische Münzkabinett des asiatischen Museum der kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu St Petersburg* (1821)[2].

This interest in epigraphy led in the eighteenth century to the study of other inscribed

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[1] Georg Jacob Kehr's *Monarchiæ Asiatico-Saracenicæ status, qualis VIII, et IX. post Christvm natum seculo fuit, ex nummis argenteis prisca Arabum scriptura kufica, a monarchis arabicis Al-Mansor, Harun Raschid, Al-Mamon aliisque in metropolibus chaldææ, Persiæ, Transoxanæque cusis* (Leipzig, 1724). Richard Ettinghausen regarded this monograph as marking the beginning of Islamic archaeology, in "Islamic Art and Archeology," nn: T. Cuyler Young (ed.): *Near Eastern Culture and Society* (Princeton 1951): 21.

[2] C. M. Frähn, *Das muhammedanische Münzkabinett des asiatischen Museum der kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu St Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, 1821)

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works of Islamic art. The traveler and scholar Carsten Niebuhr was one of the first to

record Islamic inscriptions, and in his description of Arabia, published in 1772 he

illustrated a page in Kufic script from an early manuscript of the Quran.[3] Inscriptions also

played a large part in the first catalogue of an entire collection of Islamic decorative arts,

the *Description des monumens musulmans du cabinet de M. le duc de Blacas* (1828) by the

French Orientalist J. T. Reinaud.[4] Other noted epigraphers of the period included the

Ottoman historian J. von Hammer-Purgstall, who published several inscriptions, and the

Italian abbot Michelangelo Lanci, whose three-volume *Trattato delle simboliche*

rappresentanze Arabische e della varia generazione de' Musulmani caratteri includes

engravings of inscriptions on talismans, amulets, arms and armor, metal wares and

textiles.[5]

Superficial familiarity with Islamic architecture was spurred by the publication of

Entwurff einer historischen Architektur in the early eighteenth century, the general history

of architecture by Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach.[6] It included representations of

Arab, Turkish and Persian architecture taken from coins and the accounts of travelers and

archaeologists. Fischer von Erlach's images inspired the design of several kiosks, pavilions

and palaces in a quasi-Oriental manner in Germany, such as the mosque-shaped pavilion

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[3] Carsten Niebuhr, *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Leipzig, 1772).

[4] Joseph Toussaint Reinaud, *Description des monumens musulmans du cabinet de M. le duc de Blacas* (Paris, 1828).

[5] Michelangelo Lanci. *Trattato delle simboliche rappresentanze Arabische e della varia generazione de' Musulmani caratteri* (Paris, 1845-46).

[6] Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* (Leipzig, 1725).

and other buildings in the gardens at Schwetzingen near Mannheim by Nicolas de Pigage. In turn, the exotic (yet accessible) Islamic buildings in Spain began to be known and documented towards the end of the eighteenth century. The architects Juan de Villanueva and Pedro Arnal were sent by the Real Academia de San Fernando to make drawings of Granada and Cordoba under the direction of José de Hermosilla. Published in 1780 as *Antiguedades árabes de España*, the drawings were the basis for J. C. Murphy's *Arabian Antiquities of Spain* (1813), [7] which brought the buildings to an even wider audience. A veritable flood of visual accounts ensued: Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey published *Souvenirs de Grenade et de l'Alhambra* (1837), *Monuments arabes et moresques de Cordoue, Séville et Grenade* (1836–9) and *Essai sur l'architecture des Arabes et des Mores, en Espagne, en Sicile, et en Barbarie* (1841), which also introduced monuments in North Africa. [8] The two atlas folios by Jules Goury and Owen Jones, *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra* (1842–5), conceived as a pattern book for architects, further familiarized European audiences with Islamic architecture and launched a craze for Oriental fantasies in the West. [9] Meanwhile, Egyptian Islamic architecture was introduced to Europe by the *Description de l'Egypte* (1809–28), the scientific record of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt (1798–1801) and arguably one of the greatest achievements of the

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[7] J. C. Murphy's *Arabian Antiquities of Spain* (London, 1813)

[8] Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, *Souvenirs de Grenade et de l'Alhambra* (Paris, 1837): idem. *Monuments arabes et moresques de Cordoue, Séville et Grenade* (Paris, 1836–9); idem. *Essai sur l'architecture des Arabes et des Mores, en Espagne, en Sicile, et en Barbarie* (Paris, 1841).

[9] Jules Goury and Owen Jones, *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra: from drawings taken on the spot in 1834, by Jules Goury, and in 1834 and 1837 by Owen Jones*. 2 volumes. (London, 1842–5)

encyclopedic tradition of the French Enlightenment. Published in nine volumes of text, ten

elephant folios of plates and an atlas, and covering everything from Egyptian antiquities to

popular music, the work included accurate views of Islamic buildings and reproductions of

inscriptions, many now destroyed. Like views of the Alhambra, these images were adapted

by European artists and architects for their own purposes.[10]

By the 1880s, a more scholarly approach to the understanding of Islamic art and

architecture developed among European scholars who went beyond earlier nineteenth

century Orientalism and sought to understand Islamic art and architecture within the

culture that produced it. This deeper interest in Islamic art was reflected in the number of

exhibitions, a growing interest in collecting Islamic artifacts, in archaeological expeditions

to traditionally Muslim regions such as the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in the

growth in scholarship on Islam and on related topics. At the end of the nineteenth century,

several European intellectual traditions, including the study of ancient Near Eastern

languages and antiquities, Orientalism, and the history of art, came together in a new field

of inquiry: the study of Islamic art. At this time, most of the literature devoted to the study

of Islamic art (and Islamic history in general) tended to focus on the first centuries of

Islam. The goal of most of this scholarship was to elucidate the formative principles of

both Islam and its arts. The major intellectual trends at the time, Darwinism (evolutionary

theory) and Romanticism urged scholars to investigate the formative periods of all

cultures. It was in this climate that the study of Umayyad art and architecture was born.

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[10] *Description de l'Egypte, ou, Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Egypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française* (Paris, 1808-1828).

Germany and Austria dominated the scholarship of both Byzantine and Islamic art in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. German speakers formed the majority of Islamicists with numerous chairs in the major universities of Europe and North America. This German-speaking community embraced not only Germans and Austrians but also those of Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Russian, Swiss, and even Greek extraction, like Musil (Czech), van Berchem (Swiss), and Rhodokanakis (Greek). The majority of these early historians of Islamic art tended to study both the Byzantine and the Islamic traditions. For example, scholars such as Riegl, Strzygowski, Wickhoff and Saxl, who were primarily Byzantinists ventured into the field of Islamic art. This tendency to bridge Byzantine and early Islamic art was perhaps a result of the prevalent quest to situate early Islamic artistic and architectural production within the traditions of late antiquity (here defined as the amorphous period between the Fall of the Roman Empire and the coming of Islam.) However, the interest in Early Islamic art and architecture was not restricted to the German academic circles, but spread among other European Orientalists whose travels throughout the Muslim world inevitably shaped their scholarship. A notable example can be seen in the work of Max van Berchem, which helped pave the way for the future of Early Islamic art history.

After traveling to Egypt, Palestine, and Syria in 1889, van Berchem returned to Geneva, where he developed the idea of "l'archéologie arabe" ("Arab archaeology.") For him this "archaeology" was the historical study of "monuments," by which he meant architecture, painting, decorative arts, inscriptions, coins, seals, or manuscripts made in the lands where Arabic was spoken. He saw these "monuments" not as isolated examples of art

but as historical documents that would reveal the true history and origin of Islam.[11] Van

Berchem's influential work was a first among several other pioneering works on Early

Islamic art that were published before the second decade of the twentieth century. Because

the earliest extant Islamic objects and monuments date to the Umayyad period, early

scholarship on Islamic art and architecture focused on this period.

In fact, the six years from 1904-1910 saw the publication of four works which

served as foundation for future studies of Umayyad art and architecture: Hartmann's book

on the Dome of the Rock[12]; Schulz and Stryzgowski's study of Mshatta[13]; Musil's book on

Qusayr Amra[14]; as well as Herzfeld's study on the genesis of Islamic art[15]. An examination

of the early literature on Umayyad art reveals that the majority of scholars believed that

early Islamic art grew out of Classical antiquity. However, various scholars have

differently described the nature of this continuity. Some argued that this continuity is

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[11] One of Max van Berchem's most significant contribution to the study of Islamic art is his multi-volume, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum,* which not only catalogued historical inscriptions from various regions but also placed them in their historical context. See, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum I: Egypte.* Mémoires de la Mission archéologique française au Caire XIX (Paris, 1894-1903); *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum II: Syrie du Sud,* Mémoires de l'Institut français archéologique du Caire XLIII-XLV (Cairo, 1920-22); and with Halil Edhem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum III: Asie Mineure,* Mémoires de l'Institut français archéologique du Caire XXIX (Cairo, 1910-17).

[12] R. Hartmann, *Der Felsendom in Jerusalem und seine Geschichte.* (Strasbourg, 1909).

[13] Josef Strzygowski and Bruno Schulz, "Mschatta," *Jahrbuch der Königlichen Preuszisschen Kunstsammlungen,* 25 (1904): 205-373.

[14] Alois Musil, *Kuseijr 'Amra.* (Vienna: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1907.)

[15] Ernst Herzfeld, "Die Genesis de Islamischen Kunst und das Mschatta Problem," *Der Islam* I &2(1910): 27-63 and 105-44.

marked (or even marred) by the degeneration of Classical models. This deterioration of

Classical visual culture, according to the proponents of this argument, is due to a

ubiquitous Umayyad practice of (often blindly and poorly) copying Classical models in the

construction of a new art.[16] To prove their arguments, the advocates of this theory

depended exclusively on formal and stylistic analysis, which at the time was perhaps the

most popular method in art historical discourse.[17]

In 1910, the German scholar Ernst Herzfeld published his aforementioned

influential article, "Die Genesis der Islamischen Kunst," in which he attempted to answer

the question of the originality and uniqueness of Islamic art by raising the problem of its

formation. Drawing on the ideas of the art historians Jacob Burkhardt and Aby Warburg,

Herzfeld argued that early Islamic art cannot be explained in purely formal terms. Herzfeld

proposed that the study of any art should include the relationship of that art to its setting.

According to Herzfeld, Islamic art can only be understood in what can be termed its

ecological setting, that is, in relationship to all the features of its environment.

Subsequently, Herzfeld (much under the influence of contemporary art theory) was drawn

to a sort of deterministic position that the newly conquered lands of *Bilad al-Sham*

themselves had "foreseen the coming art of Islam" ("die werdende Kunst des Islam").

Even though one may easily argue against the likelihood of such artistic developments, it

remains true that Herzfeld was the first to realize that there is a problem inherent in the

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[16] See for example, Giovanni T. Rivoira, *Architettura Musulmana; sue origini e suo sviluppo* (Milan: U. Hoelpi, 1914).

[17] See for example, H. Wolfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriff: das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1915).

new method of formal analysis in identifying the nature of early Islamic art. Unfortunately, Herzfeld's solutions suffer from two major defects, both of which are products of his historical and academic milieu. The first and understandable shortcoming of his conclusions is that his information was limited compared to what is now available. The other defect is due to the fact that he wrote at the time of Europe's (re)discovery of and fascination with the Orient, and due to his involvement in the so-called "Orient oder Rome"(Orient or Rome) debate that was thriving within the academic circles of early-twentieth century Europe. The focus of this debate was the identification of the sources of medieval European art. The dichotomy, classical perfection vis-à-vis oriental "ornamental" aesthetic, identified in this debate, clearly influenced Herzfeld's tendency to see only "oriental" (i.e. Ancient Near Eastern) roots to Islamic art. He based his argument on the façade of the Umayyad *qasr* of Mshatta, which the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin had recently acquired and installed on its second floor as an example of late antique architecture. [Figure 1] Herzfeld's article challenged that placement and argued that this façade was a product of "eastern" and not "western" art. In fact, he was the first scholar to conclusively date this façade to 744 CE and thereby place it among early Islamic monuments.

Figure 1   **Mshatta façade in 1900. Photograph by Gertrude Bell. Gertrude Bell Photographic Archive A233. http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/photos/fpx/A_233.htm**

Mshatta belongs to a group of Umayyad period buildings and settlements that have since become known collectively as the Umayyad *qusur* (singular *qasr*) or "desert castles," a term that generalizes and inaccurately identifies the purpose and function of some of these buildings in Umayyad society.[18] None of the names now given to any of these

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[18] Lawrence I. Conrad, "The *Qusur* of Medieval Islam: Some Implications for the Social History of the Near East," *al-Abhath* 29(1981): 7-23. Conrad deemphasizes the element of luxury often held implicit in the word *qasr*, and draws heavily on nineteenth- and twentieth-century travelers' descriptions of relatively humble structures considered by their inhabitants to be *qusur*. The word *qasr* is probably derived from the Greek *kastron* or the

Umayyad buildings or settlements dates to the Umayyad period.[19] Furthermore, the term

qasr is not attested in Umayyad inscriptions, however it does occur in pre-Islamic and

early Islamic (pre-750 CE) poetry[20] and in the Quran.[21] However neither source provides a

definitive definition: In the poetry, qasr denotes a royal palace, a residence, or any

structure deemed impressive either for beauty or size. The Quranic qasr is either antique or

paradisal or a simile.[22]

In fact, the term qasr in the context of Umayyad architecture connotes a multitude

of meanings including, a small settlement (Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi), an administrative

complex (Qasr Amman), a bathhouse (Qusayr 'Amra), a small agricultural compound

(Qasr 'Ain al-Sil), as well as an opulent palatial complex (Qasr Mshatta). Given the

comparatively large number and variety of extant Umayyad qusur (as opposed to surviving

religious monuments, for example), it is not surprising that these buildings and settlements

are the subjects of much of the early scholarship on Islamic architecture. Indeed, much of

this early scholarship on the qusur has (and continues to) shape our understanding of

Umayyad culture.

Latin castrum. See Irfan Shahid, *Byzanitnium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century.* Volume 2 part 1 (Washington DC, 1995-): 67-75.

[19] For an analysis of the contemporary names of Umayyad settlements and buildings see, Taleb Abdallah Smadi, "The Umayyad Presence in Bilad al-Sham: a Toponymic Study." University of Pennsylvania, Ph. D. Thesis, 1991

[20] See for example, Hassan ibn Thabit, *Diwan* nos. 105.2; 123.2; Abu Qatifa (as quoted in Isfahani). Tuqan, *Al-Ha'ir* 39-42.

[21] Quran 7.74,22.45, 25.10, 77.32.

[22] For a discussion on the uses of the term qasr in the Quran see, Nasser Rabbat, "al-Qusur wa dalalat al-abhah fi al-amara al-mamlukiyya," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales,* IEFAD, Damascus, LIII-LIV (2001-2002): 539-558.

During the same year that Herzfeld published his article of Mshatta, another

influential article on that same *qasr* was published by the noted French Orientalist and

priest, Henri Lammens. Lammens, drawing on a theory first proposed three years earlier

by Alois Musil in his volume on Qusayr Amra, published his seminal article, "La 'Badia'

et la 'Hira' sous les Omayyades," in which he attempted to interpret the raison d'être of the

Umayyad *qusur*. [23] Lammens proposed that these *qusur* reflected a cohesive group that can

be explained by both the nomadic nature of the Umayyad elites as well as their aristocratic

pursuits. Lammens believed that these *qusur* were directly related to the settlements of the

pre-Islamic Arab cultures in the region, especially those of the two most powerful

Christian tribes, the Lakhmids and the Ghassanids. According to Lammens' theory, each

Umayyad caliph, the members of his family and the ruling elite owned their own camping

ground. These encampments at first were made of tents, but gradually increased in luxury,

and permanent buildings were erected. [24] Therefore, according to this reasoning, nomadic

instincts coupled with an atavistic longing for the desert were the driving forces that led the

Umayyads to build their *qusur* in the hinterland of *Bilad al-Sham*. Lammens also

suggested that in order for the caliphs to maintain equality among their many wives, each

caliph had to build a palace for each one of his wives (which according to this reasoning

explains the large number of buildings in a confined geographic location). In addition,

Lammens believed that the Syrian Desert also served as a school for the Umayyads to learn

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[23] Henri Lammens, "La Badiya et la Hira sous les Omayyades. Un mot à propos de Msatta," *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale*, Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut. 4 (1910): 91-112.

[24] Lammens, "La *Badia* et la *Hira*," p. 100.

"pure Arabic."[25] Even though much of Lammens' sources and arguments have since

proven to be flawed, the impact of his assertions still resonates in much of the scholarship

on the Umayyads and especially their *qusur*. The idea that the Umayyad *qusur* should be

studied as a single entity and that the key to understanding these buildings is in the

behavior, taste, and "nature" of the Umayyad elite proved to be the cornerstone of future

studies on Umayyad secular architecture.[26]

The approaches of the German art historical schools and the Orientalist traditions

of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were soon supplanted by new and

different academic and intellectual traditions. After World War I, mandatory power was

established in the Levant, and with it came the establishment of permanent schools and

institutes that encouraged a deeper involvement in and understanding of the traditionally

Muslim lands that the new powers occupied. It was from this atmosphere that the prosaic

but academically fruitful writings of Jean Sauvaget, Ugo Monnert de Villard, and K. A. C.

Creswell emerged.

Sauvaget was rather negative about the intellectual value of art historical methods

and preferred to study Islamic art by what he termed "archaeology," in the sense that any

given site or monument can only be understood by studying all of the evidence available

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[25] Lammens refers to the Syrian Desert as "l'école des Princes," "La *Badia* et la *Hira*," p. 98.

[26] In 1921, Herzfeld published an article which supported the theory proposed by Lammens. In this article, Herzfeld argues that the Umayyad caliphs and their associated elite went out into the desert to escape the confines of the urban centers. Herzfeld argues that the Umayyads were going back to their nomadic roots. Ernst Herzfeld, "Mshatta, Hira und Badiya: Die Mittellander des Islam und ihre Baukunst," *Jahrbuch der Koniglichen Preuszischen Kunstammlungen* 42(1921): 104-46.

on it. In his works, Sauvaget sought to reveal the "silent web of history" ("la trame silencieuse de l'histoire") by combining a close study of such physical remains as buildings and inscriptions with a careful reading of historical sources. Although he regarded himself as an archaeologist, he never excavated, and considered archaeology more a type of evidence than a methodological procedure. Some of his best-known works relate to the mosques and *qusur* of the Umayyads, in which he looks at Umayyad architecture as directly (and without much thought) borrowing from previous traditions in its conception and design.[27]

Sauvaget was also inspired to some degree by the work of one of his contemporaries, Henri Stern. In his work on the Umayyad *qusur* in particular, Stern sought to define unifying typological and iconographic formulas regardless of differences in location, scale, or layout.[28] In an uncompleted study (he died before its publication), Sauvaget surveyed all of the known Umayyad *qusur* (an unprecedented and unrepeated effort). Here, Sauvaget concluded that all these buildings shared a similar type –one main structure surrounded by a group of buildings and that all these sites were provided with their own water resources. He proposed that these buildings, when considered in their larger geographical context, would have been used as agricultural complexes. Their

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[27] See for example, Jean Sauvaget, *La Mosquée Omeyyade de la Médine: Etude sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique* (Paris, 1947); "Remarques sur les monuments Omeyyades," *Journal Asiatique* 231(1939): 1-59; and "Châteaux umayyades de Syrie. Contribution à l'étude de la colonisation arabe aux Ier et IIe siècles de l'Hegire," *Revue des Études Islamiques* 35(1967): 1-49.

[28] Henri Stern, "Notes sur l'architecture des Châteaux Omeyyades," *Ars Islamica* 11-12(1946): 72-97. In this article, Stern comes up with a more or less exact pattern of what constitutes an Umayyad building or site.

location along with the extensive irrigation systems, canals, cisterns, and aqueducts that

surrounded many of these buildings proved (without a doubt) to Sauvaget that agricultural

exploitation was a major function of these *qusur*. That they served a larger function in

Umayyad society, and should not only be perceived as buildings where only princely

activities such as entertaining and hunting took place, is perhaps the most important

contribution that Sauvaget made to our understanding of these *qusur*. Sauvaget proposed

an alternative explanation of the *qusur* by constructing a colonization model derived from

the notion that land for the use of Arab allies in the Conquest had become rare and

therefore, the semi-arid regions outside the urban areas had to be exploited for additional

real estate and used as farmland.[29] However, like Lammens and Stern before him, Sauvaget

consistently tried to fit all these buildings into a single pattern by assuming that they all

reflected the same architectural and functional type. Yet, Sauvaget's "archaeological"

method was more comprehensive than previously attempted, in scope as well as in his

inclusion of not only a thorough description of a given site, but a discussion of how both

the form and function of the Umayyad *qusur* can be traced directly to the Roman

latifundia. In this regard, the Umayyads emulated (without much innovation) Roman

models in the construction of their *qusur*. Therefore, Sauvaget's analysis of the

"archaeology" of these *qusur* demonstrates that they are direct descendants of Roman

models.

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[29] Jean. Sauvaget, "Châteaux umayyades de Syrie. Contribution à l'étude de la colonisation arabe aux Ier et IIe siècles de l'Hégire," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 35(1967): 1-49.

At about the same time that Sauvaget was developing his views on the importance

of archaeology to the study of early Islamic architecture, the Italian archaeologist and art

historian, Ugo Monneret de Villard was also writing an introduction to Islamic

archaeology. Even though this work remained unfinished, it exemplified a shared concern

with Sauvaget that only through an organized correlation between a mass of very diverse

kinds of archaeological evidence could the art and architecture of early Islam be studied

and understood. Monneret de Villard shared with Sauvaget the view that the architecture of

the Umayyads, while deeply rooted in Classical antiquity, was a more or less mediocre

expression of precedent models.[30]

Unlike Sauvaget and Monneret de Villard, the English technical draftsman turned

historian of Islamic architecture, K. A. C. Creswell was not concerned with archaeology

but with creating a chronology and with tracking the evolution of Islamic architecture.

Creswell spent the majority of his career cataloguing Islamic buildings by meticulously

measuring and photographing them. He also published a vast bibliography of Islamic art

and architecture. His seminal book *Early Muslim Architecture* set the standard for many

future manuals on Islamic architecture and art. Much of this tome is devoted to the study of

the Umayyads. His approach to Islamic (and consequently Umayyad) buildings can be best

described as a scientific analysis that focuses on providing a rigid chronological sequence

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[30] Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Introduzione allo studio dell'archeologia islamica; le origini e il periodo omayyade.* (Venice: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1966), pp. 249-65.

and offers limited interpretation to the meanings of those monuments.[31] In many ways,

Creswell's beliefs were similar to those of Sauvaget and Monneret de Villard, in that he

saw the rise of Islamic architecture and its eventual transformation in later centuries as part

of an ongoing evolution that was inherent in the study of any architecture.

However, since the mid-twentieth century, most scholars have abandoned the view

that Umayyad visual expression is nothing more than a copy of Classical models or that it

is simply a natural outgrowth of Late Antique art and have refined their interpretation of

Umayyad visual culture. In addition, most scholars working on Umayyad art and

architecture agree that the Umayyads were influenced by Classical antiquity, Pre-Islamic

Arab culture, and by Sasanian culture, but that the Umayyads selectively appropriated and

transformed these models to fashion a unique imperial and religious iconography.[32]

In particular, Oleg Grabar's seminal work, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, first

published in 1973, espoused the idea that the Umayyads carefully selected models from

precedent and contemporaneous cultures for articulating their new religion and imperial

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[31] K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture; Umayyads, Early Abbasids and Tulunids.*
2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932-1940).

[32] See for example, M. Bonfioli, "Syriac-Palestinian Mosaics in Connection with the
Decorations of the Mosques at Jerusalem and Damascus," *East and West* X (1959) 57-76;
Richard Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic world; three
modes of artistic influence.* The L. A. Mayer memorial studies in Islamic art and
archaeology, v. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972); Irfan Shahid, "Ghassanid and Umayyad
Structures: a case of Byzance après Byzance," in P. Canivet & Jean-Pail Rey-Coquais,
eds., *La Syrie de Byzance a l'Islam VIIe-VIIIe siècles. Actes du Colloque International,
Lyon –Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris –Institut du Monde Arabe, 11-15
septembre 1990* (Damascus, 1992): 301-07; ibid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth
Century,* Volume 2, Part 1, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002); E. J. Keall,
"Forerunners of Umayyad Art: Sculptural Stone from the Hadramawt," *Muqarnas* 12
(1995): 11-23; Shakir Lu'aybi, *al-Fann al-Islami wa al-Masihiyah al-'Arabiya: dawr al
Masihiyin al-arab fi takwin al-fann al-Islami* (Beirut, 2001).

power.[33] By drawing upon visual, archaeological and textual sources, Grabar argues that

the formation of an Umayyad imperial iconography illustrates how a nascent empire uses

precedent and contemporaneous iconographic motifs to express a new imperial identity

and a new faith. That the Umayyads were conscious manipulators of artistic and

architectural iconography proved to be the most enduring opinion of how Umayyad visual

culture was developed and articulated. Recent studies of Umayyad iconography continue to

expound on Grabar's theory of appropriation.[34]

For example, in his study of the Great Mosque of Damascus, Finbarr Barry Flood

has taken this approach a little further. In his analysis and interpretation of the various

components of the Mosque and its context, Flood deftly draws on visual, archaeological as

well as medieval Arabic textual sources and argues that the Umayyads in their

manipulation of precedent visual examples were able to "translate" these examples in such

a way that architecture and its decoration, function as a "three-dimensional 'text' designed

to convey meaning to both target and source cultures."[35] In general, Flood's argument

along with other recent art historical scholarship regards Umayyad architecture and art as a

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[33]Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987)

[34] See for example, Klaus Brisch, "Observations on the Iconography of the Mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus," in Priscilla P. Soucek, ed. *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World. Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University 2-4 April 1980* (London, 1988): 13-20; Oleg Grabar, "The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," in Derek Hopwood, ed., *Studies in Arab History.* (1990): 15-21; Priscilla P. Soucek, "Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor?" *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 109-134.

[35] F. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies in the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 11.

mutation created by the confluence of Sasanian and early Byzantine architecture with an added ill-defined, yet distinctly "Islamic," taste. Those art historians who have stressed contributions of Byzantine and Sasanian architecture and art to Umayyad architecture and art have been at pains to distinguish the latter as a radically new development. For example, Oleg Grabar has advanced the notion of an "Islamic overlay" on preexisting arts and has argued that "[early] Islamic art. . . can be imagined as a sort of graft on other living entities." Paradoxically, it is common in art historical scholarship to assert both that the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is entirely Byzantine in conception, *and* that it is fundamentally new in some syncretic "Islamic" way.

Unfortunately, our understanding of Umayyad architecture and iconography and its relationship to precedent and contemporaneous arts has not changed fundamentally since the publication of *The Formation of Islamic Art*. The origins of Umayyad art and architecture are still debated and the art historian is still plagued with the question of what method to rely on when attempting to interpret this art and architecture and its relationship to precedent and contemporaneous visual cultures.

The major change that has occurred in the study of Umayyad art and architecture in the past three decades is manifested in the emergent methodological rift between Islamic art historians and Islamic archaeologists. Since the 1970s, many historians of Islamic art, like those in many other fields of art history, eagerly participated in the trend of relying almost exclusively on textual evidence to elucidate works of art and architecture. This trend of turning to the written word is perhaps an appropriate reaction to the wilder speculations of former generations of collectors and connoisseurs, who had insisted on the

supremacy of the eye over any cultural document. This trend has had several ramifications

on the study of Umayyad visual culture. The emphasis of research in Islamic art has shifted

to the later periods, principally because more documentary evidence is available for them.

It is far easier, for example, to use texts when writing about Ottoman art of the eighteenth

century than it is about Umayyad art.[36] Conversely, Islamic archaeology, which is more

important for understanding the earlier periods, has become less important in the eyes of

many art historians, a somewhat disturbing trend, since the study of Umayyad art is

intrinsically linked to archaeology.

As a result, Islamic archaeology is becoming a more specialized field increasingly

distinct from Islamic art history. In addition, most current studies devoted to Umayyad art

and architecture fit better under the rubric of archaeology and are often written by

archaeologists (or by specialists outside the field of art history). The work of Islamic

archaeologists, most that of notably Donald Whitcomb and Alan Walmsley, has been

instrumental in expanding our knowledge about Umayyad material and urban culture.[37]

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[36] There is a lack of reliable written sources for the Umayyad period. None of the Arabic
historical texts predate 850 CE –a century after the fall of the Umayyads.

[37] See for example, Alan Walmsley and Kristoffer Damgaard, "The Umayyad
congregational mosque of Jarash in Jordan and its relationship to early mosques," *Antiquity*
79 no. 304 (2005): 362-378; Alan Walmsely, "Coin Frequencies in Sixth and Seventh
Century Palestine and Arabia: Social and Economic Implications," *Journal of Economic
and Social History of the Orient* vol. 42 part 2(1999): 326-350; Donald Whitcomb,
"Archaeological evidence of the early mosque in Arabia," in *Religious Texts and Material
Contexts*. J. Neusner and J. F. Strange, eds. (Lanham, MD, 2001): 185-97; ibid. "Umayyad
and Abbasid periods," in *The Archaeology of Jordan*. B. MacDonald et al., eds. (Sheffield,
2001): 503-513; ibid "Archaeological Research at Hadir Qinnasrin, 1998," *Archaeologie
Islamique* 10 (2000): 7-28.

The study of Umayyad art and architecture is now at an important scholarly watershed. Even though the body of physical evidence (owing to archeological excavations) has continued to grow during the past few decades, Islamic art and architectural historians have been slow to integrate this new data into their scholarship. [38] As a result, it can be argued that today the Umayyad period is one of the least popular among Islamic art and architectural historians. Indeed the number of recent publications by architectural or art historians on Umayyad topics is very small when compared with the number of recent publications on the later periods.

In addition, art and architectural historians working on Umayyad topics have concentrated on interpreting a handful of monuments[39] and have resisted exploring the material by using different methods than the ones laid out earlier in the twentieth century. For example, there have been no thorough recent art historical studies of objects (ceramics,

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[38] The recent Ph.D. dissertations: Marie Alanen, "Architectural Reuse at Jerash: A Case Study in the Transformation of the Urban Fabric, 100 BC-750 AD" (University of California, Los Angeles, 1995); Rebecca M. Foote, "Umayyad markets and manufacturing: Evidence for a commercialized and industrializing economy in early Islamic Bilad al-Sham (Syria)" (Harvard University, 1999); Tracy Lynn Hoffman, "Ascalon ʿArus al-Sham: Domestic Architecture and the Development of a Byzantine-Islamic City" (University of Chicago, 2003); Claude Vibert-Guigue, "La Peinture omeyyade du Proche-Orient: L'Example de Qusayr Amra," (Université de Soutenance: Paris 1, 1999) are the only recent theses on Umayyad art or architectural history that incorporate new archaeology or that deal with Umayyad architecture in *Bilad al-Sham*.

[39] The main monuments that have been discussed by art historical literature are: the Dome of the Rock, the Mosque of Damascus (and the other mosques of al-Walid I), Qusayr Amra, Mshatta, and Khirbet al-Mafjar. Only a few studies have been devoted to other Umayyad sites such as ʿAnjar. There is a copious amount of literature on these sites. For a convenient (if not up to date) summary of much of the available literature on these monuments see, K. A. C. Creswell, *A Bibliography of the Architecture, Arts and Craft of Islam to the 1ˢᵗ Jan. 1960* (Cairo, 1961) and it supplements; idem. *A Short Account of the Early Muslim Architecture*, rev. ed. James W. Allan (Cairo, 1989); and J. W. Allan, "New Additions to the New Edition," *Muqarnas* 8 (1991): 12-22.

numismatics, etc.), the smaller mosques or the bathhouses that are found in most Umayyad

settlements. In addition, there has been no scholarship on Umayyad art (or early Islamic art

in general) that adequately integrates contemporary art historical methodologies. The

prime reason behind these deficiencies lies in the nature of the primary sources. The

problematic nature of both the textual and archaeological evidence, combined with the fact

that Umayyad art is transitional and therefore has to be studied in relationship to precedent,

contemporaneous and subsequent art, makes the task of the Umayyad art historian a

particularly challenging one.

1.2. The Primary Sources: Problems and Possibilities

During Late Antiquity, *Bilad al-Sham* was fraught with dramatically fluctuating fortunes of different cultures, political powers and religions. Therefore, one must be prepared to encounter in the literary evidence a considerable degree of distortion, bias, and in some cases outright fabrication. Not to mention that most of the literary references to the Umayyad period were written well after the demise of the Umayyad caliphate. Despite the dearth of primary sources and their inaccuracies, scholars have continued to rely upon the available literature in their reconstruction of Umayyad history. Indeed, since the mid-twentieth century, some interpretive studies of Umayyad iconography have effectively employed textual analysis.

Most of the studies dealing with Umayyad secular architecture have relied almost solely upon a single text, the *Kitab al-Aghani* by Abu Faraj al-Isfahani,[40] a tenth-century collection of historical, geographical and literary information about the Umayyad period.[41] It is a rich source for the study of the social and domestic life of the Umayyad caliphs, particularly al-Walid II (d. 744 CE). For example, R. Hamilton's study of the Umayyad *qasr* of Khirbet al-Mafjar near Jericho as the caliph al-Walid II's "house of pleasure," uses excerpts poetry attributed to al-Walid II from the *Kitab al-Aghani*, to vividly describe the activities that might have taken place within the walls of this palace and bathhouse (such as al-Walid's penchant for bathing in wine to explain the shallow pool in the reception room

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[40] Al-Isfahani, Abu Faraj Ali ibn al-Husayn. *Kitab al Aghani*. 27 vols. (Beirut, 1969-72).

[41] It should be noted here, that in the 1950s, Oleg Grabar relied heavily on this text in his reading the *qusur*. See his unpublished dissertation, "Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court," Ph. D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1955).

at Khirbet al-Mafjar).[42] Robert Hillenbrand also brilliantly used the poetry of al-Walid II

mostly from *Kitab al-Aghani* in his imagining of the "Dolce Vita" of the Umayyad princes

in their *qusur*.[43]

Similarly, in the recent work on Qusayr 'Amra, Garth Fowden attempts (in a very

valiant effort) to write a historical monograph on the building itself and its place within

Umayyad society. In order to do so, Fowden relies heavily on extant literary sources,

especially the collected poetry from the Umayyad period. By combining the visual imagery

of both the frescos at Qusayr 'Amra with the collected poetry of the period, Fowden is able

to in an atmospheric evocation of an elite Umayyad milieu, or "rather of its cultural

pretentions."[44] Because the poetry and the art do (and can) not provide a complete picture

of life at Qusayr 'Amra, Fowden deftly weaves into his analysis post-Umayyad Arabic

historical narratives (which he readily admits are problematic) as "corroborative" materials

to fill in the gaps. What emerges is a very compelling picture of the activities of an elite

Umayyad society well steeped in the culture of late antique Syria. However, it should be

noted here that no surviving text even once mentions Qusayr 'Amra, or anything that

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[42] R. W. Hamilton, *Walid and his Friends: an Umayyad tragedy.* Oxford studies in Islamic art; 6. (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Board of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, 1988.) It is worth noting here that H. Atwan in his book on al-Walid questions the credibility of the story on which Hamilton bases his interpretation, see H. Atwan, *Al-Walid b. Yazid: 'Ard wa naqd* (Beirut, 1981): 189-190.

[43] R. Hillenbrand, "*La Dolce Vita* in Early Islamic Syria: the evidence of the Later Umayyad Palaces," *Art History*, 5 (1982): 1-35.

[44] Garth Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley, 2004), xxvi.

resembles it, therefore Fowden's reliance on these texts while revealing is highly

speculative.

Even though *Kitab al-Aghani* and the collected poetry of the period do provide a

glimpse into the world of the Umayyads, relying on such sources does have its limitations.

For instance, much of the poetry used as the foundation for the above mentioned

interpretations (as well as others that attempt a presentation of the Umayyad court life)

focus on the caliph al-Walid II, who was in many ways an eccentric hardly typical of both

his rank and the office he occupied.[45]

Furthermore, there are theoretical and concrete drawbacks in explaining

architecture through poetry, unless, as for instance with much later Persian and Ottoman

poetry, the poetry itself deals with architecture, or, as in the Nasrid Alhambra, poetry

adorns the architecture.[46] The immediate, ephemeral and oral nature of Early Islamic

poetry -much of it was not written down at the moment of its recitation, but when the event

in which it participated was recorded- is in diametric opposition to the permanent medium

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[45] For more on Walid II's life and poetry, see for example, F. Gabrielli, "Al-Walid ibn Yazid. Il califfo e il poeta," *Rivista degli Studi orientali* 15 (1934): 1-64; D. Derenk, *Leben und Dichtung des Omaiyadenkalifen Al-Walid in Yazid* (Frieburg, 1974); Husayn 'Atwan, *Sirat al-Walid ibn Yazid min kutub al-tarikh wa al-adab wan min shi'rih* (Cairo, 1980); and Walid ibn Yazid, *The Diwan of Walid ibn Yazid*. Translated and commented on by Arthur Wormhoudt (Iowa, 1984).

[46] For more on Persian and Ottoman poetry that describe architecture, see for example, W. Thackston, "Mughal Gardens in Persian Poetry," in *Mughal Gardens: Sources, Places, Representations, and Prospects*, J. L. Wescoat and J. Wolscheke-Bulmahn, eds. (Washington DC, 1996), 233-58; S. Hamadeh, "The City's Pleasures: Architectural Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul," Ph.D. Dissertation, MIT (Cambridge, 1999), Chapters II and IV. For later medieval examples from Islamic Spain examples see for example, Maria Jesus Rubiera, *La arquitectura en la literatura árabe* (Madrid, 1981); and D. F. Ruggles, "Arabic Poetry and Architectural Memory in al-Andalus," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 171-178.

of architecture. Not to mention that Umayyad poetry is mostly panegyric and rarely mentions aesthetics, or art and architecture.

Other Post-Umayyad textual sources blended with visual documentation have also been used to reconstruct the meanings of Umayyad buildings. Followers of this method seek an explanation of the visual forms by studying textual sources, such as histories, biographies, and travelogues. In many cases, such studies have provided very persuasive and coherent interpretations of Umayyad monuments. Due to the nature of what is recorded or discussed in these sources,[47] these texts tend to be more suitable for the study of known imperial commissions, especially the Umayyad religious monuments such as, the Dome of the Rock and the mosques of caliph al-Walid I.[48]

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[47] Some of the most consulted sources include: al-Balādhurī, *Kitab Fūtuh al-Buldān*. Ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1866); Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarīkh Madinat Dimashq*. Vol. 2 part 1, Ed. S. Munajjid (Damascus, 1954); ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, ed. A. Shiri (Beirut, 1989-92); ibn Hawkal, *Kitab Surat al-Ard*, ed. J. H. Kramers (Leiden, 1938); Istakhri, *Kitab masalik al-mamalik*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1870); al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan at-Taqasim fi maᶜrifat al-aqalīm*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden. 1906); al-Masᶜudi, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa-Maᶜadin alJawahir*, 4 vols. ed. M. Abd al-Hamid (Cairo, 1964-65); al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, 15 vols. Ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1870-1901); al-Waqidi, *Futuh al-Sham*, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1972); al-Wasiti, *Fadail al-Bayt al-Muqqadas* (Jeruslem, 1979).

[48] The first monograph to use this approach was, J. Sauvaget, *La Mosquée Omeyyade de Médine* (Paris, 1947). In reality, the historiography of this particular approach predates Sauvaget, as Henri Lammens and Ernst Herzfeld were inspired by buildings to search for texts, but they did not look for an interpretation of the buildings. For more recent examples of this approach see, Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*; Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6(1989): 12-21; Nasser Rabbat, "The Dome of the Rock Revisited: some Remarks on al-Wasiti's Account," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 67-75; Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Dome of the Rock, the Ka'ba, and Ghumdan: Arab Myths and Umayyad Monuments," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 57-65; Josef Van Ess, " 'Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock. An Analysis of Some Texts," in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns, eds. *Bayt al-Maqdis, Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, Part 1, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, 9 (Oxford, 1992): 89-103.

The lack of accurate contemporary written sources, combined with the fact that none of the Arabic historical texts predate the year 850 CE, a century after the fall of the Umayyads, are among the most apparent hurdles that the art historian must face when dealing with the Umayyad period.[49] More importantly however, is the fact that the early texts (whether contemporary non-Muslim or later Muslim sources) do not give too much detail on art or architecture. Let alone the fact that most post-Umayyad Arabic texts are less than complimentary and often out right antagonistic towards the Umayyads and their legacy. Despite the inherent gaps in and biases of the sources, one must consider the available Arabic and non-Arabic sources but to do so with caution.

Inscriptions on buildings are the most contemporary form of textual evidence.[50] Some of the most compelling interpretations of inscriptions that have shaped our understanding of Umayyad religious and imperial iconography are Oleg Grabar's many works on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in which he looks at the building itself as a text. By studying the Quranic inscriptions alongside the rest of the decoration of the building, Grabar is able to rationalize a convincing interpretation of the building: The Dome of the Rock was a monument that aimed to attest the power of a nascent empire in a new land rich in competing ideologies. Unfortunately for the student of Umayyad visual

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[49] See for example, R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1997); Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad, eds. *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, Papers of the first Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam: Problems in the Literary Source Material.* (Princeton, 1992).

[50] See for example, R. Hoyland, "The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997): 77-102.

culture, no other building than the Dome of the Rock offers any original inscriptions that

might aid in an iconographic interpretation. The only types of inscriptions found on other

Umayyad buildings are those that are either evocations of God, brief Quranic inscriptions,

the names of the Prophet and early caliphs, dedications, dates, or graffiti.[51] [Figure 2]
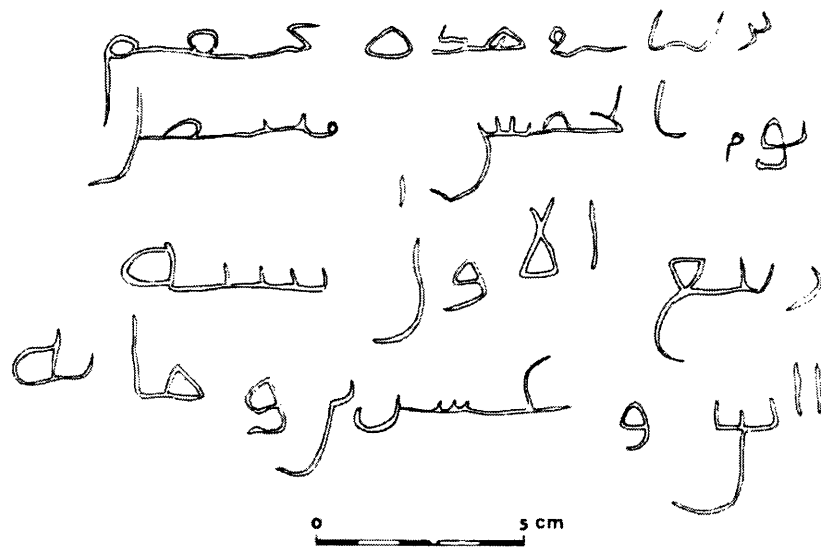
Figure 2 **Drawing of an Arabic Inscription on top of fountain. Hammat Gader.**
Reproduced in Y. Hirschfeld et al. *The Roman Baths at Hammat Gader: Final Report*
(Jerusalem, 1997), p. 271.

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[51] The limited Greek and Arabic inscriptions at Qusayr Amra have led to some interesting
interpretations of two fresco panels. The Greek names identifying most of the so-called
"Six Kings" panel has led Oleg Grabar to both date the frescos and to interpret them as
another example of Umayyad imperial art. See, Oleg Grabar, "The Painting of the Six
Kings at Qusayr Amrah," *Ars Orientalis* I (1954): 185-87. The "CAPA NIKH" painted on
the so-called "Sarah" fresco in Qusayr Amra has been used by the historian Garth Fowden
to interpret the frescos, like Grabar, as testaments how an Umayyad campaign of
"legimitimizing" and asserting their new empire. However, the reading of this particular
inscription as "Victory to Sarah," or "Victory of Sarah," as Fowden reads it is disputed by
many Classicists. See, Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of
Monotheism in Late Antiquity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 138-160.
Since the publictation of this book, Fowden has refuted his original reading of this
inscription, see, idem. *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*
(Berkely, 2004): xxii.

Another factor that limits our understanding of this region in late antiquity and the Umayyad period is the nature of the archaeological evidence. The first problem lies in the fact that most archeological excavations of the early twentieth century were interested with uncovering earlier remains rather than Islamic ones, thereby giving the Islamic material little attention.[52] For example, the published reports of the excavations of Jerash between 1928 and 1934 focus on material from the Classical and the Byzantine periods, but contain virtually no information about the Early Islamic period.[53] It was only the later excavations of the 1980s that revealed the full extent of the Early Islamic occupation at the site.[54] The second problem that limits the value of archaeological evidence is the inherent difficulty of closely (specifically) dating building phases and stratigraphic layers. Many examples of seventh, eighth and ninth century pottery found in excavations cannot be precisely dated because the ceramic styles evolved from one generation to the next without any sharp breaks caused by political events.[55] Therefore, without dated inscriptions or coins to help provide dates that are more precise it is often very difficult to correlate archaeological data with specific historical events.

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[52] R. Schick, "Palestine in the Early Islamic Period: A Luxuriant Legacy," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 61 (1998): 81.

[53] C. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*. (New Haven, 1938).

[54] F. Zayadine, ed. *Jerash Archaeological Project, 1981-1983* (Amman, 1986).

[55] See for example, Cherie Lenzen, "The Archaeology of Islamic Periods," in *Archaeology of Islamic Jordan: New Directions*, Cherie Lenzen and Alan Walmsley, eds. (Irbid, 1993); J. P. Sodini and E. Villaneuve, "Le Passage de la céramique byzantine à la céramique omeyyade en Syrie du Nord, en Palestine et en la Transjordanie," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe-VIIIe siècles: Actes du Colloque International*. P. Canivet and J. R. Coquais, eds. (Damascus, 1992): 195-218; and Jodi Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology: circa 200-800 CE*. (Sheffield, 1993).

Also, the lack of adequate publication of archeological excavations or even the fact that many sites remain unexcavated further hamper the use of archaeological evidence. Even though the Early Islamic period has seen increased attention from archaeologists in the last three decades, many sites remain virtually unidentified or unexplored. A number of the major cities listed by Arabic geographers lay uninvestigated. This is most often due to the fact that many of these cities, such as Damascus and Gaza, have been continuously inhabited, thus inhibiting archaeological excavations. The current political situation in the region has also hindered the excavation of many important sites especially those, such as al-Jabiya in the Golan Heights, that are located in politically unstable regions. In addition, many Umayyad sites that are cited in historical texts, such as the winter palace at Sinnabra, remain unidentified, and many other excavated sites have yet to be completely published. Others are published only partially and only a few sites have been excavated extensively and published fully.[56]

Notwithstanding the drawbacks inherent in the tenuous nature of some of the archaeological data, the results of recent archaeological excavations have been instrumental in showing that the only viable path from the Late Antique to the Early Islamic world is an uninterrupted one. In fact, these excavations have demonstrated that, archaeologically, the Islamic conquest was in most regions of *Bilad al-Sham* an invisible conquest. That is, the archaeological record shows no clear boundary between the post-

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[56] The only Umayyad period sites that have been fully excavated and published are: Qasr Kharana, Khirbet al-Mafjar, Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi, Rusafa, and Aqaba. For a concise and informative historical review of Early Islamic archaeology in Palestine, Israel and Jordan, see, R. Schick, "Palestine in the Early Islamic Period: A Luxuriant Legacy," 74-108.

Classical world and the first century of Islamic occupation.[57] Several archaeologists and

historians have characterized this continuity as a "continuity of change." That is, any

changes from Classical antiquity were a result of social developments on a large scale that

had little to do with the coming of Islam, but were changes that originated in the latter

decades of the preceding Byzantine period.[58] Generally, this pattern of change is seen in

the major and permanent alterations to the urban centers of *Bilad al-Sham* between the 6th

and the 8th centuries CE. Archeological excavations have made it clear that these

alterations, such as the shrinking of towns, the encroachment on streets by makeshift

structures, the use of *spolia* in new buildings, began in the sixth century and were made in

response to a new concept of "the city."[59] Furthermore, new archaeological work

conducted in the past two decades reveals that there is no universal trend of how the cities

of *Bilad al-Sham* evolved between the seventh and early ninth centuries.

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[57] See for example, Peter Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: the Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh century* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, Collection of Near Eastern and Classical Antiquities, 1992.); James Sauer, "Umayyad Pottery from Sites in Jordan," in L. T. Geraty and L. G. Herr, eds. *The Archaeology of Jordan and Other Studies*. (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, 1986), 301-30.

[58] See for example, Lawrence Conrad, "Historical Evidence and the Archaeology of Early Islam," in *Quest for Understanding: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Malcolm H. Kerr*, ed. S. Seikaly et al. (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1991) 263-82.

[59] The literature on the continuity of change in the urban landscape of post-Classical *Bilad al-Sham* is vast. See for example, A. Kazhdan and A. Cutler, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Byzantine History," *Byzantion* LII (1982): 429-78; H. Kennedy, "Change and Continuity in Syria and Palestine at the Time of the Moslem Conquest," *Aram* 1(1989): 258-67; H. Kennedy, "From *Polis* to *Madina*: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria," *Past and Present* 106(1985): 3-27; A Wharton, *Refiguring the Post Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem, and Ravenna*. (Cambridge, 1995); and Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "The Demise of the Ancient City and the Emergence of the Medieval City in the Eastern Roman Empire," *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* 7(1988) 365-401.

Archaeology has also been instrumental in revealing the cultural climate of the society between the late sixth and the late eighth centuries as well as in dispelling some prevalent myths about *Bilad al-Sham* during the first two centuries of Islam. To begin with, much of this work has shown that the non-Muslim communities continued to be active despite the Muslim Conquest and shift of power. The archeological work of Robert Schick, Michele Piccirillo, and Jacques Bujard, for example, has shown that the Christian communities of *Bilad al-Sham* continued to thrive.[60] Archeological research during the past fifteen years has shown that most of the churches in *Bilad al-Sham* survived the Muslim conquests. In fact, it is believed that no less than fifty-six churches in Jordan alone continued to be used well into the eighth century. In addition, no fewer than eight churches were built or repaved with mosaics in the Umayyad period.[61] Archaeology has also helped us understand that the end of the Umayyad period did not mark the end of settlement in *Bilad al-Sham* as had previously been perceived. In fact, many of the Umayyad sites continued to be used well into the Abbasid period. The recent dissertation of Rebecca Foote as well as the work of archeologists, such as Y. Tsafrir, G. Foerster, and A.

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[60] R. Schick, *The Christian communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule: a historical and archaeological study*. (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995); Jacques Bujard and F. Schweizer, *Entre Byzance et l'Islam. Umm er-Rasas et Umm al-Walid, fouilles genevoises en Jordanie*. Catalogue, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire et Foundation Max van Berchem (Geneva, 1992); Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*. (Amman, Jordan: American Center of Oriental Research, 1993);

[61] B. de Vries, "Jordan's Churches: Their Urban Context in Late Antiquity," *Biblical Archaeologist* 51 (1988): 222-226; Michele Piccirillo, "The Umayyad Churches of Jordan," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* XXVIII (1984): 333-341.

Walmsley, [62] has demonstrated that contrary to common belief (and confirming the assertions of Arabic texts), *Bilad al-Sham* experienced an industrial and economic boom rather than an economic depression during the Umayyad period.

In fact, there is considerable archaeological evidence that shows that construction of broad, shop-lined thoroughfares in both new and existing cities was relatively common in Early Islamic *Bilad al-Sham*. The evidence for the new and expanded markets within existing towns in Early Islamic *Bilad al-Sham* is widespread, especially for the late seventh and eighth centuries. For example, evidence for the renovation of pre-existing markets can be found in Palmyra/Tadmur, Scythopolis/Baysan, Sergiopolis/Rusafa, Tiberias/Tabariyah, Apollonia/Arsuf, and Emesa/Hims. The Early Islamic markets in all of these cities follow an orthogonal plan. [63] [Figure 3] It can, therefore, be surmised that ordered and linear market streets were common features of towns in Early Islamic *Bilad al-Sham*. The Early Islamic predilection for cross-axial planning is also apparent in Early Islamic urban planning.

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[62] Rebecca Foote, "Umayyad markets and manufacturing"; Y. Tsafrir, and G. Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis in the Fourth-Seventh Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 85-146; Alan Walmsley, "Regional Trade in the Islamic East Mediterranean," in *The Long Eighth Century*, ed. Inge Lyse Hansen and Chris Wickham (Leiden, 2000): 265-344.

[63] See for example, K. As'ad and F. M. Stepniowski, "The Umayyad Suq in Palmyra," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 4(1989), pp. 205-223; Alan Walmsley, "Regional Trade in the Islamic East Mediterranean," 276-283; A. Zeyadeh, "Urban Transformations in the Decapolis Cities of Jordan," *ARAM* 4(1992): 101-115; R. Foote, "Commerce, Industrial Expansion, and Orthogonal Planning: Mutually Compatible Terms in Settlements of Bilad al-Sham during the Umayyad Period," *Mediterranean Archaeology* 13 (2000): 25-38; I. Roll and E. Ayalon, "The Market Street at Apollonia-Arsuf," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 267 (1987): 67-76.
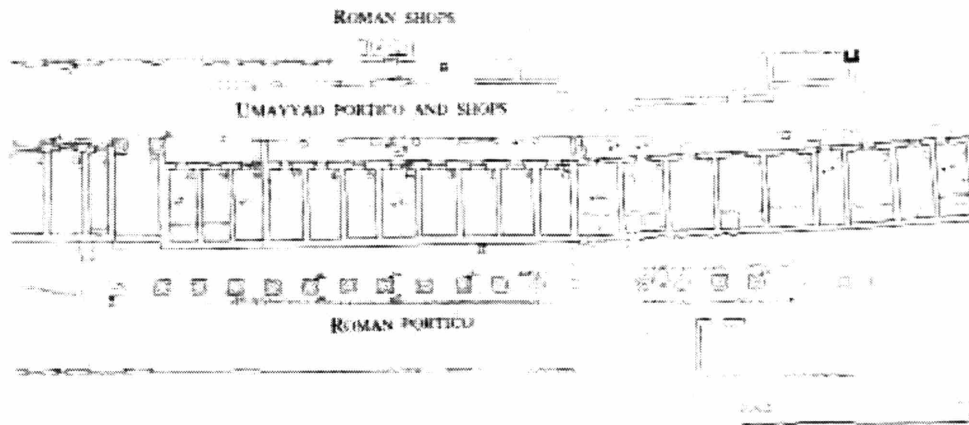
Figure 3   **The Umayyad Suq at Palmyra, after K. al-As'ad and F. M. Stepniowski,** **"The Umayyad Suq in Palmyra,"** *Damaszener Mitteilungen* **4 (1989): fig. 1.**

Archaeological excavations of Early Islamic settlements, including the *amsar* (sing. *misr*, "garrison town"), have greatly contributed to our understanding of Early Islamic urban planning. For the Umayyad cities of *Bilad al-Sham*, the work of Donald Whitcomb on Aqaba and its relationship to other Umayyad cities, such as Anjar and al-Ramla, has been especially useful.[64] These studies have shown that the plan of these early Islamic garrison towns was thought out carefully on a regular plan that was related to the planning of Roman legionary camps. In each of these settlements, the land was divided into residential quarters along tribal lines (*Khitat*), in the center was an open space that housed the Friday Mosque (*Jami'*) and the governor's house (*Dar al-Imara*). This model shows that contrary to the previously prevalent view that Early Islamic cities were haphazardly

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[64] See for example, D. Whitcomb, "Amsar in Syria? Syrian Cities after the Conquest," *ARAM Periodical* 6 (1994): 13-33.

laid-out, careful planning was from the beginning a principal characteristic of Islamic

urban planning. [65] [Figure 4]
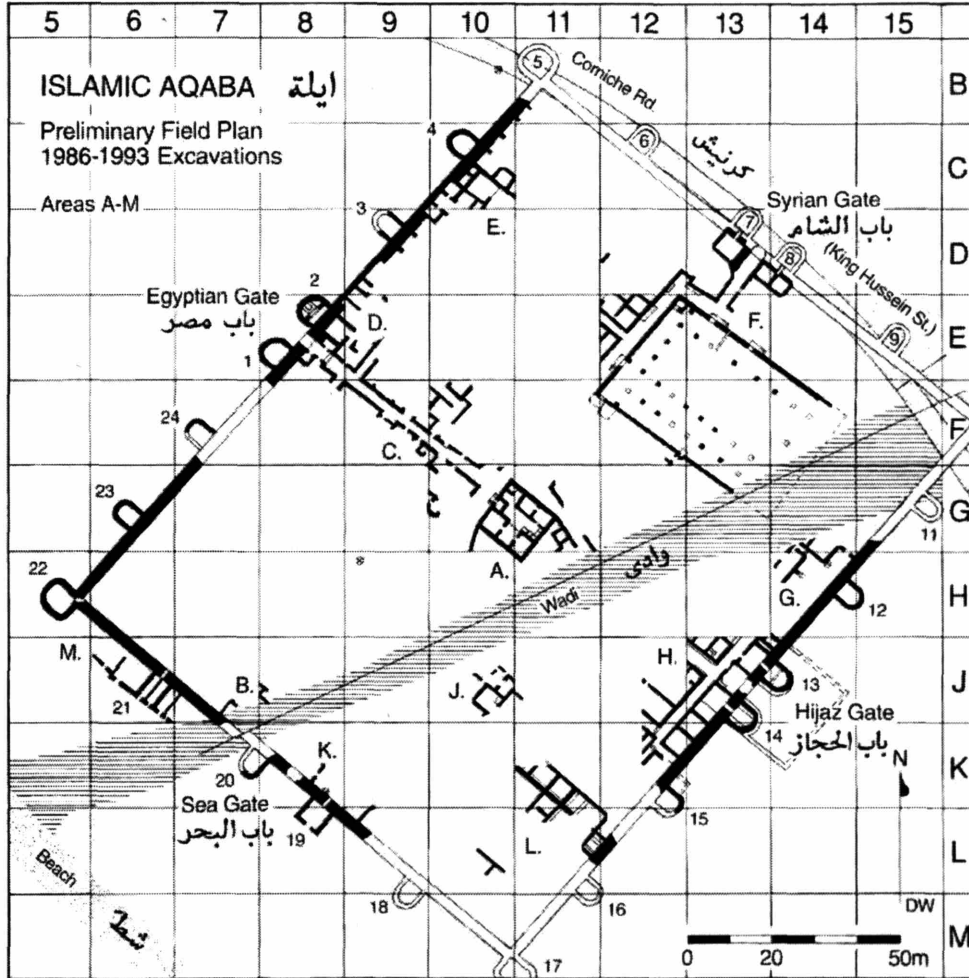
Figure 4   **Plan of the Excavations at Ayla (Aqaba) 1986-1993. Axial streets once connected the four gates with the Dar al-Imara and the Congregational Mosque at the center. Plan by Donald Whitcomb, reproduced on http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/AQA/NN_SPR94/NN_Spr94_fig3.html**

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[65] See for thorough and updated reports of this archeological excavation see, http://www-oi.chicago.edu/OI/PROJ/AQA/Aqaba.html. For more on the structure of early Islamic *amsar* see, H. Djait, *Al-Kufa, naissance de la ville islamique*. Islam d'hier et d'aujourd'hui; (29 Paris, 1986).

As is apparent from this discussion, much work has been done on Umayyad art and architectural history, but what remains true is that most current and innovative work has been done outside the field of Islamic art and architectural history. Additionally, the question of how Umayyad visual culture relates to precedent and contemporaneous cultures remains open for interpretation. Early Islamic visual culture can perhaps be best understood once we move away from questions of "origins," "difference" or "influence," and focus on strands of cultural continuity within Late Antiquity. However, before this can be done, it is important to first redefine what is meant by 'Late Antiquity' in this study: how this new definition of 'Late Antiquity' is different from the one defined by the founders of Islamic art history, and why this rubric is appropriate for studying Umayyad visual culture.

1.3. Modifying the Definition of "Late Antiquity"

The past three decades have seen the metamorphosis of Late Antiquity from a non-period that is loosely "in between" Antiquity and the Middle Ages to a period in its own right. The concept of "Late Antiquity" has existed for a little over a century. Introduced formally as a book title by the Austrian art historian Alois Reigl in his 1901 book, *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*,[66] the term Late Antiquity quickly became a stereotype that was often associated (like Early Islamic art) with the "decline" of the high culture of Classical Antiquity.[67] Over the past three decades, however, the study of late antiquity has emerged as one of the most dynamic areas of multi-disciplinary research in the humanities. Defined most simply, this new field embraces the history of the Mediterranean, Europe and the Middle East during the period c.250-800 CE.[68]I do not intend to explore here the complex dialogue between "Anglo-American" scholarship and "Continental" scholarship

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[66] Alois Reigel, *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna, 1901).

[67] The "decline" label as it has been applied to the period between the rise of the Roman Republic and the Renaissance was first mentally codified in the eighteenth century by Edward Gibbon in his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 6 volumes (London, 1776-1788).

[68] There is considerable variation in how scholars define the temporal and geographic boundaries of "late antiquity". For an excellent introduction to the issues, see R. Martin, "Qu'est-ce que l'antiquité 'tardive'? Reflexions sur un problème de périodisation," in *AIÔN: Le Temps chez les Romains*, ed. R. Chevallier (Paris: A & J Picard, 1976) pp. 261-304. Many historians whose interests center on the Mediterranean world generally adopt a shorter chronological span, setting the reign of Justinian (527-65 CE) or Heraclius (610-644 CE) as the Field's temporal boundary. See for example, Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-600* (London: Routeledge, 1993) and A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike: Römische Geschite von Diocletian bis Justinian, 284-565 n. Chr.* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1989). Historians of the Middle East tend to favor a longer periodization, see for example, F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, "Toward a Definition of Late Antiquity," in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, eds. F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 3-21.

that lies behind the field's creation. Suffice it to note that the parallel categories in "Continental" scholarship (i.e. *Antiquité Tardive, tardo antico, die Spätantike*, etc.) each has its own history, related to, but by no means identical to, the development of the category "late antiquity" in Anglo-American scholarship. What is important in this context is to note that today, Late Antiquity in all cases roughly covers the same time-period and concerns.

By the early 1990s, the field of Late Antiquity established itself as a recognizable academic entity, as evidenced in the emergence of numerous conference series devoted specifically to the study of late antiquity, the creation of new graduate and undergraduate courses, research groups, as well as a proliferation of monographs and journals focused on the period of "late antiquity."[69] Though many of the topics under examination belong to well-established sub-fields of research (such as History, Religious Studies and Economics) the choice to frame much recent work under the rubric of late antiquity reflects a substantial shift in scholarly paradigms. Late Antiquity, in its new "guise," offers in theory an opportunity to define a historical period in entirely cultural terms. It is a period of cultural coherence. Despite the overall efforts at presenting an "all inclusive" picture, much of the literature has been selective and incomplete. Indeed, not enough attention has been given to what is arguably one of the field's most essential innovations, its attempt to bridge the gap between western Mediterranean and Middle Eastern history.

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[69] For a recent review of the state of research in the field of Late Antiquity see, Joel Walker, "Limits of Late Antiquity: Philosophy between Rome and Iran," *Ancient World* 33(2002): 45-69.

In principle, the field of late antiquity has always included the lands "east of Byzantium." This broad vision of late antiquity first appeared in Peter Brown's seminal 1971 book, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750*,[70] which notably included the rise and articulation of early Islam as the last stage in Late Antiquity. This general categorization of Late Antiquity has since been broadened and revised by other historians, most notably Garth Fowden and Glen Bowersock, interested in the diverse regional cultures of the late Roman and the early Islamic Middle East.[71] In addition, since the 1990s, a highly acclaimed scholarly series, "Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam" published by the Darwin Press at Princeton has focused on the relations among the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean from the death of Justinian in 565 to the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750. The project, directed by Averil Cameron, Lawrence I. Conrad, and G. R. D. King, brings together scholars from different disciplines and encourages an interdisciplinary approach by holding workshops, conducting research on particular sources and issues, and sponsoring a program of publications.[72] Similarly, the recent

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[70]P. Brown, *World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750*. (London, 1971).

[71]See for example, Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*; G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*. Thomas Spencer Jerome Lectures, Eighteen (Ann Arbor, 1990).

[72]See for example, Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, eds. *Problems in the Literary Source Material. Papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, (Princeton, 1992); G.R.D. King and Averil Cameron, eds. *Land Use and Settlement Patterns. Papers of the Second Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Princeton, 1994); Averil Cameron, ed. States, *Resources and Armies. Papers of the Third Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Princeton, 1995); Lawrence I. Conrad, ed. *Patterns of Communal Identity. Papers of the Fourth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Forthcoming); Lawrence I. Conrad and G.R.D. King, eds. *Trade and Exchange. Papers of the Fifth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Forthcoming); John Haldon and

Harvard University Press reference book on late antiquity makes explicit its goal "to treat

as a single whole the vast geographical space covered by the Roman and the Sasanian

Empires."[73] In addition, a recent group of scholars has mobilized to form "Sasanika: Late

Antique Near East Project," which aims to increase awareness of and integrate Sasanian

culture and history into the field of Late Antiquity.[74] Interestingly, the assertions that Islam

fits into late antiquity have generally come from those, such as Fowden and Bowersock,

who are not specialists in Islam or Islamic history. However, despite such efforts as the

ones outlined above, the current shape of the field, as defined by conferences and

publications, remains heavily weighted towards the Mediterranean world of the Roman

Empire and its successor states in Western Europe. Scholarship on the transition between

Byzantium and early Islam and the integration of the early Islamic world into the world of

late antiquity is still at a nascent stage, especially at an art historical level. For example, a

recent collection of articles devoted to the reevaluation of the study of late antique art

includes no articles on (or even mention of) Islamic art or architecture.[75] Additionally,

Islamic topics (with the occasional inclusion of new discoveries in Islamic archaeology)

are seldom part of conferences, study groups, or journals dedicated to this period.

Lawrence I. Conrad, eds. *Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East. Papers of the Sixth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Forthcoming). See also http://www.darwinpress.com/slaei/series.html, for an updated list of previous and forthcoming publications in this series.

[73]G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World.* (Cambridge, 1999).

[74] See, http://www.sasanika.com

[75] Jens Fleischer et al., eds. *Late Antiquity Art in Context* (Copenhagen, 2001).

Not withstanding these deficiencies in the current shape of the field, Late Antiquity is arguably the most suitable framework for the study of Umayyad visual culture. Integrating Umayyad visual culture within the Late Antique paradigm is practical precisely because this new framework invites us to look across the traditional disciplinary division between "western" and "Islamic" art history, and encourages us to see visual culture as coherent and not defined by political regimes. Thus, Umayyad artistic and architectural production is seen, not as new (or even derivative) forms but as dynamic products of late antique visual culture.

II. Changing Landscapes: *Bilad al-Sham* between the Fourth and Eighth Centuries

2.1 Introduction

This section focuses on two interrelated topics pertinent to the understanding of

Umayyad architecture and its place within late antique *Bilad al-Sham*. The first topic is a

discussion of the shape and nature of the urban and rural landscapes of Late Antique *Bilad*

al-Sham between the fourth and the seventh centuries. It includes how administrative and

religious changes, as well as natural events, affected the built environment. The second

topic concerns geopolitical and cultural orientation (or reorientation) of *Bilad al-Sham*,

after the Islamic conquests. This discussion includes an investigation of the connections

between the new Arab Islamic administration and the cultural milieu of Late Antique *Bilad*

al-Sham. In addition, it examines some of the far-reaching outcomes of the Arab Islamic

conquest, the transformation of the role of *Bilad al-Sham* within this new context, as well

as the significance of the Arabization measures undertaken by the Umayyad authorities in

the late seventh century.

While there are inherent problems with both the archaeological and the literary

evidence (as discussed in the previous section), there is also the added hurdle of integrating

the two. The written sources (Ibn 'Asakir, for instance)[1] concentrate on the major cities,

such as Damascus, whereas archaeological excavations have generally concentrated on

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[1] Ibn 'Asakir, Ali ibn al-Hasan, *Tarikh madinat Dimashq: wa-dhikr fadliha wa-tasmiyat man hallaha min al-amathil aw ijtaza bi-nawahiha min waridiha wa-ahliha.* Ali Shiri, ed. (Beirut, 1995-2001).

more secondary sites (such as Pella/Fihl, Gerasa/Jerash, and Umm al-Jimal).[2] Therefore,

finding points of contact between text and physical evidence is difficult and in many cases

even impossible (and in some instances one type of evidence contradicts the other.)[3]

Furthermore, while most scholars working on Late Antiquity and Early Islam are

conscious of the fragmentary and often imprecise character of the literary sources, many

seem to be less aware (and certainly less critical) of similar failings in the archaeological

record.[4] Of particular concern is the tendency to invest archaeological and numismatic

evidence with a decisiveness, especially in matters of chronology and causation, which

they cannot provide.[5] Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that, despite the surge in

excavations during the past few decades, the archaeological record for much of Late

Antique *Bilad al-Sham* remains incomplete.

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[2] See for example, C. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*. (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938); F. Zayadine, ed. *Jerash Archaeological Project 1: 1981-1983* (Amman, 1986); R. Smith and L. P. Day, *Pella of the Decapolis. Final Report on the College of Wooster Excavations in Area IX, the Civic Complex, 1979-1985.* (Wooster, 1989); B. de Vries, "The Umm al-Jimal project, 1981-1992," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 37(1993): 433-60.

[3] A joint article by the historian Ahmad Shboul and the archeologist Alan Walmsley, "Identity and Self-Image in Syria Palestine in the Transition from Byzantine to Early Islamic Rule: Arab Christians and Muslims," *Mediterranean Archaeology* 11(1998): 255-287, aptly demonstrates the divergent nature of the sources when it comes to interpreting this period of transition.

[4] See for example, A. Kazhdan and A. Cutler, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Byzantine History," *Byzantion* 52 (1982), 437-441; Clive Foss, "Syria in Transition AD 550-750: an archaeological approach." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* no. 51(1997): 189-269.

[5] For a discussion of the benefits and shortcomings of relying on archeological evidence see for example, James Russell, "Transformations in Early Byzantine Urban Life: The Contribution and Limitation of Archaeological Evidence," *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers.* Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University, August 3-8, 1986. (Washington, DC, 1986), 137-154.

Another complicated subject that the student of this period encounters, is the question of how to characterize the complex culture(s) of this rich and diverse region, especially during periods of transition. By the fourth century, six centuries of Hellenistic and Roman rule had left an indelible mark on the cultural identity of *Bilad al-Sham*, and Hellenism had spread throughout the region.[6] In fact, many cities of *Bilad al-Sham*, such as Antioch, Apamea, Aphrodisias, Beirut, Byblos, and Gaza, were centers of Greek culture and learning throughout Late Antiquity, and Greek was the common language of much of the region.[7] However, the degree of Hellenism in the culture of Late Antique *Bilad al-Sham* continues to be debated, and has evoked a variety of (often contradictory) responses in scholarship. For instance, many prominent Islamicists, such as Philip Hitti, Fred Donner and Hugh Kennedy,[8] have argued for a culturally divided region, a land of "two-cultures"[9] in which the "Hellenistic veneer...was very thin indeed."[10] According to this view, the bifurcation of pre-Islamic Late Antique *Bilad al-Sham* is reflected in a seemingly unbridgeable ethnic divide that separates the indigenous Aramaic –and increasingly

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[6] It is important to distinguish the difference between "Hellenization" and "Hellenism." Whereas, Hellenization implies the superimposition of Greek language and culture over local indigenous traditions, Hellenism on the other hand connotes the adoption (and modification) of Greek language and culture by indigenous cultures.

[7] See for example, R. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: the Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1988).

[8] Philip Hitti, *A History of the Arabs* (London, 1970); Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981); Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates. The Islamic Near East for the Sixth to the Eleventh Century.* (London, 1986.)

[9] Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 3-5.

[10] F. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 92-6.

Arabic-speaking rural population from the Greek-speaking urban elite. Hence, Hellenism is seen here as an imposed culture, with only superficial acceptance in an otherwise Semitic region.

However, the characterization of Hellenism and its role within the context of the Late Antique Near East is generally defined differently by scholars from a Classics or a non-"Islamic" background.[11] In general, most of these scholars have convincingly discounted the aforementioned description of Hellenism as only providing a patina over an underlying native culture. Most scholars of Late Antiquity emphasize acculturation, and agree that Hellenism should be perceived as an integral part of and not separate from the culture of Late Antique *Bilad al-Sham*. In fact, as late as the sixth-century, in some areas of *Bilad al-Sham*, social advancement and official patronage were still bound up with proficiency in rhetoric and intimate familiarity with Homer and other Greek and Roman texts. In addition, the "primary characteristic, or the primary social function of Greek culture was precisely its universality."[12] Another equally important feature of Hellenism is that it was readily adopted and adapted by local cultures. The universality and adaptability of Hellenism in Late Antiquity is chronicled in one of the longest late antique epic poems from the mid-fifth century, the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnos of Panopolis (modern day Akhmin

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[11] See for example, A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, eds. *Hellenism in the East* (London, 1988), especially the chapter by Fergus Millar, "The Problem of Hellenistic Syria;" 110-133; Fergus Millar, "Empire, Community and Culture in the Roman East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews, and Arabs." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987), 143-164; G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1990).

[12] Fergus Millar, "The Problem of Hellenistic Syria;" 111.

in northern Egypt).[13] The *Dionysiaca* faithfully documents late antique Hellenism in the

eastern Mediterranean and reveals that Christian piety, in many cases, was entirely

compatible with a profound appreciation of pagan traditions. At the same time, Greek

mythology continued to provide inspiration for much of the art of the period between the

fourth and the eighth centuries. For example, two well-preserved mosaic panels from the

so-called Hippolytus Hall of a sixth-century villa in Madaba depict the characters from the

Greek tragedy of Phaedra and Hippolytus as well as depictions of the goddess Aphrodite

and Adonis accompanied by several cupids and the Graces. [Figure 5] Representations

from Greek mythology also appear within religious contexts. For example, a portrait of the

Greek goddess Thalassa/Thetis as a representation of the sea appears in the late-sixth-

century Church of the Apostles in Madaba.[14] [Figure 6] In effect, Hellenism provided the

lingua franca for the visual culture of late antique *Bilad al-Sham*.

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[13]Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*. 3 vols. English translation by W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge, MA: 1955-56).

[14] Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, 1993).

Figure 5   Mosaic Pavement with Aphrodite, Adonis and Cupids. Hippolytus Hall, Madaba (photo by Conrad Schmidt)

Figure 6 Mosaic of Thetis/Thalassa, Church of the Apostles, Madaba. Reproduced in
G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*, Islamic Art in the Mediterranean
Series. Museum With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 103.

Furthermore, some scholars of Late Antiquity, most notably G. W. Bowersock,

have argued that Hellenism was the foundation on which the early Islamic empire was

built. In his book on Hellenism in Late Antiquity, Bowersock maintains that Hellenism

served as a prerequisite for Islam. The pre-Islamic Arabs of *Bilad al-Sham*, according to

Bowersock, readily adopted and adapted many elements of Hellenism, and established an

indispensable socio-cultural base for Early Islamic culture.[15] Similarly, Averil Cameron

played down the idea of an ethno-cultural conflict between Greek and Semitic elements in

late antique *Bilad al-Sham*, and stressed that the culture, like the history, of this region is

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[15] Glen Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 87-100.

complex and cannot be generalized.[16] Indeed, while the culture of most of late antique

Bilad al-Sham was heavily imbued with Hellenism, this region is historically,

demographically, geographically and ethnically varied. Therefore, this complexity should

be acknowledged before any reconstruction of this region in Late Antiquity is attempted.

Consequently, given the constraints of the available sources and the overall complexity of

the region, the following discussion presents but a detailed impression of what this region

may have looked like between the fourth and the eighth centuries.

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[16]Cameron, A. "The Eastern Provinces in the 7th Century A.D., Hellenism and the
Emergence of Islam," *ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ [Hellenismos]—Quelque jalons pour une histoire
de l'identité grecque*, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25-27 octobre 1989, ed. S. Said.
(Leiden, 1991), pp. 287-313

2.2 The Urban and Rural Landscapes Between the Fourth and Seventh Centuries

By the early fourth century, *Bilad al-Sham* had a dense network of cities and towns that were supported by a strong rural (and mostly agrarian) economy. These cities and towns were the social, cultural, religious, and economic focal points of the community, as well as the administrative centers for the Roman Empire, where taxes were collected, registers were kept, and civic projects were organized.[17] The multifaceted role of these cities and towns was enhanced by extensive reforms that were started in the late third century during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian (r. 284-305) and continued until the end of the fourth century.[18] These reforms resulted in the creation of smaller provinces, in an increase of municipal districts[19], as well as in the refurbishing and construction of forts along the eastern and southern frontier of the Roman Empire.[20] Furthermore, the fourth-century reforms created an effective and relatively stable administration that persisted until the end of the sixth century. Yet, the fourth century was also a time of significant changes throughout the Roman Empire, and in *Bilad al-Sham* in particular.

The first half of the fourth century was momentous in Roman history. In 312, the Emperor Constantine (r. 306-337 CE) converted to Christianity, and later in 330, he

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[17] See for example, G. Woolf, "The Roman Urbanization of the East," in S. E. Alcock, ed. *The Early Roman Empire in the East* (Oxford, 1997), 1-14.

[18] See, T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA, 1982).

[19] See, G. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, 1994), 142-144; K. C. Gutwein, *Third Palestine. A Regional Study in Byzantine Urbanization* (Washington, 1981), 5-26.

[20] S. T. Parker, *Romans and Saracens: a History of the Arabian Frontier* (Winona Lake, IN, 1986), 135-43.

established a new imperial capital, Constantinople, in Byzantium in Asia Minor.[21] The

establishment of Constantinople represents a transfer –from West to East- of the nucleus of

the Roman Empire. This shift affected *Bilad al-Sham* by making the region closer to the

"heart" of the Empire. However, the more significant change to the region was due to the

acceptance of Christianity and its eventual adoption, during the reign of Theodosius I (r.

379-395 CE), as the official religion of the Empire. Probably the most profound impact

that the adoption of Christianity had on the Eastern imperial provinces lay in the

transformation of much of southern *Bilad al-Sham* from a distant outpost to become the

most hallowed spot on earth: a "Holy Land," where, according to Christian belief, the

momentous events of the life of Jesus Christ and the events of the Bible, had taken place.

"Holy" places were subsequently identified by the imperial court with the construction of

monumental churches, especially in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.[22] [Figure 7]

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[21] For more on the life of Constantine see for example, T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, 1981). For more on the foundation and early development of Constantinople see for example, G. Dragon, *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses Institutions de 330 à 441* (Paris, 1974); and C. Mango, *Le development urbain de Constantinople. IVe-VIIe siècles* (Paris, 1990).

[22] See for example, E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312-460* (Oxford, 1982); J. E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: the Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1993); and P. W. L. Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1990).

Figure 7   Madaba Mosaic Map created in the 6th century and represents the major sites and cities of the Christian Holy Land with Jerusalem at its center. Reproduced from M. Piccirillo - E. Alliata (Eds.), *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897-1997. Traveling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period.* Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Amman, 7-9 April 1997 (Jerusalem, 1999): fig. 11

The designation of these new Holy sites instigated pilgrimage to the region from all

areas of the Roman world.[23] As Christianity spread throughout the rest of *Bilad al-Sham,*

many other sites associated with Christian saints, ascetic monks, or miraculous events,

were subsequently identified and marked with lavish ecclesiastical complexes. For

example, shrines like those of St. Thecla at Seleucia in southern Anatolia (early fifth

century), St. Sergius at Sergiopolis/Rusafa (late fourth-early fifth century), St. Leontios at

Tripoli (mid-fifth century), and St. Simeon the Stylite in northern Syria (mid-fifth century),

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[23] For a firsthand account of a pilgrimage, see for example, George E. Gingros, ed. *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage.* Ancient Christian Writers Series, 38. (New York, 1970).

attracted vast numbers of believers,[24] which in turn contributed to boosting the economy

and to a rise in building activities throughout the region. [Figure 8]

Figure 8   View of the Church of St. Simeon the Stylite (Qal'at Sam'an) with what remains of the St. Simeon's column. Reproduced in Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*. (Los Angeles, 2003), 134.

It is important to note here that the Christian church was far from united in Late

Antiquity, and that *Bilad al-Sham* was a scene of a fierce and prolonged struggle between

the Monophysites and the Dyophysites. The main difference between these two sects of

Christianity lay in the interpretation of the hypostatic union (the fusion of the divine and

human natures) within the person of Jesus Christ. The Monophysites believed that Jesus

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[24] See for example, Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*. (Berkeley, 1999); Pierre Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'orient* (Paris, 1985); D. Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert*. Byzantinisches Archiv, XIII. (Munich, 1965).

had a single nature composed of both the human and the divine, where as the Dyophysites

insisted that Jesus had two separate natures –one human and one divine. In general (and

there were significant exceptions), the Dyophysites were concentrated in the urban and

coastal regions, whereas the Monophysites were mostly in the rural areas.[25] Despite this

division in the Church, Christianity was pervasive in its spread and its architectural

materialization throughout *Bilad al-Sham*.

Together with the Christianization of *Bilad al-Sham* came another significant event

that further shaped its cultural character. Starting in the fourth century, the defense of the

eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire was entrusted to Christian Arab confederates

(*foderati*), namely the Tanukhids in the fourth century, the Salihids in the fifth century and

later the Ghassanids in the sixth century.[26] The Ghassanids were the most powerful, and

represented the most mature expression of the *foderati* system. Their kings were integrated

into the Roman military and administrative hierarchies. Around the court of these

Monophysite Christian Arabs grew a world of palaces, hunting, and poetry. Even though

the political independence of the Ghassanids ended in the late sixth century when

Byzantine disapproval (and distrust) of Monophysitism brought down their confederacy,

the memory of their rule and their culture persisted well into the Umayyad period, and this

Christian Arab culture was probably (as will be discussed in a later section) a potent source

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[25] For more on this topic see, J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions* (New York, 1989).

[26] Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, 149-52; Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*. (Washington, D.C., 1989); idem, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*. v.1 pt. 1 & 2. (Washington, DC, 1995, 2001)

of inspiration for the Umayyads. Furthermore, during the period of Ghassanid hegemony many important building projects were undertaken throughout the region.[27]

The arrangement between the Byzantines and their Arab *foederati* also enhanced cultural and economic relations of *Bilad al-Sham* with the Arabian Peninsula, particularly with the Hijaz. The route between the Hijaz and Syria, traditionally identified as the northern end of the incense route, is assumed by many modern scholars to have been controlled and protected by the Ghassanids.[28]In addition, Syrian Arabs were the primary suppliers of grain, oil, and wine for the Arabian Peninsula well into the sixth century, while traders from this area (especially the Hijaz) traded their highly valued goods, such as spices and animal skins, in Syria. Furthermore, the Syrian Arabs also shared some cultural traits with the peninsula Arabs, most notably their language and tribal organization. Indeed, it has often been argued that both the material and cultural exchanges between these two regions are key elements that contributed to the prosperity of pre-Islamic Mecca and its merchants, as well as to the rise of Islam. Even though, this notion, held by many scholars, has been challenged in the past three decades[29], these challenges have not held up

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[27] I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, v.1 pt. 2.

[28] Robert Simon, *Meccan Trade and Islam: Problems of Origin and Structure*, translated by Feodora Sos (Budapest, 1989).

[29] The importance of trade in pre-Islamic Meccan society has been disputed most notably by Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, 1987).

to historical scrutiny.[30] Hence, the importance and corollaries of trade between *Bilad al-Sham* and the Arabian Peninsula should not be discounted.

In fact, the very active trade routes enabled *Bilad al-Sham* to improve ties with the Arabian Peninsula, and were the main conduit through which cultural ideas were transmitted. A remarkable example of this cultural exchange can be seen in the city of Faw in the pre-Islamic kingdom of Kinda on the Arabian Peninsula (about 280 km northeast of Najran). Faw is located on one of the main trade routes that connect *Bilad al-Sham* to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Excavations at Faw have revealed the remains of a prosperous urban society whose visual culture was imbued with both indigenous and Hellenized elements.[31] Perhaps, one of the most remarkable examples of this combination is a mural portrait of a man (identified in a Musnad Arabic script as Zaki) being crowned with a wreath of grapes by two smaller figures. [Figure 9]

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[30] For a cogent refutation of Crone's argument see, R. B. Serjeant, "Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam: Misconceptions and Flawed Polemics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 110, No. 3 (1990): 472-486

[31] A. R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Faw: a Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilization in Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh, 1982).

Figure 9 Fresco from Qaryat al-Faw. Reproduced in A. R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Fau: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilization* (Riyadh, 1982), 136.

This representation is an illustration of how, because of trade, elements of Hellenism, such as anthropomorphism as well as Dionysian grapes, informed the artistic expression of the southern reaches of pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula.

The relatively stable conditions under the Arab *foederati* between the fifth and the early sixth centuries also fueled urban growth throughout *Bilad al-Sham*. This urban expansion was characterized by an increase in both building activity and in the

maintenance of existing civic infrastructure.[32] For example, the major thoroughfares of

Caesarea, Scythopolis/Baysan, and Jerusalem, were refurbished during the first half of the

sixth century.[33] In addition, during this period the water supply of most cities was

maintained and improved to satisfy the increased demand caused by the growth of the

urban population. This is attested to in the strengthening of aqueducts and the building of

dams throughout *Bilad al-Sham*. Furthermore, the provision of water within the cities and

towns was expanded through the building of fountains and cisterns. Sewage and storm

drains were also maintained. [34] In addition, during this period, many of the cities and towns

throughout *Bilad al-Sham* were either furnished with new circuit walls or had their citadels

rebuilt or maintained. For example, in Caesarea, Jerash and Tiberias, new circuit walls

were built in the mid-fifth, late-fourth, and mid-sixth century respectively.[35] Whereas in

cities such as Pella and Gadara/Umm Qays the ancient citadels were renovated between the

fifth and the sixth centuries.[36] Since none of the above-mentioned cities were located in the

limes (the border region between the Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Empire), the

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[32] Alan Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia: A Case of Urban Success in Late Antiquity," in N. Christie and S. T. Loseby, eds. *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1996), 126-158.

[33] Holum and Hohfelder, *King Herod's Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (New York, 1988), 175-76; Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, "Bet Shean Excavation Project, 1988/1989," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 9(1991), 120-121; N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1984), 205-211.

[34] Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia," 141-142.

[35] Holum and Hohfelder, 164-165; Y. Hirschfeld, "Tiberias," in E. Stern, ed. *New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Volume 4. (Jerusalem, 1993), 1470; Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia," 135.

[36] Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia," 135.

refurbishing of circuit walls as well as the maintenance of the citadels, was not necessarily

due to an increased threat in security, but rather provided a certain eminence to the image

of these towns. Alongside these measures of renewal came significant transformations

within the fabric of cities and towns.[37]

To begin with, the anti-pagan edicts of Theodosius I (379-95), which authorized the

destruction of pagan buildings and the suppression of public festivals and entertainment,

accelerated changes in the urban character of the cities and towns. In 391, Theodosius I

prohibited pagans from visiting temples and sacrificing, effectively preventing them from

practicing the fundamental rituals of pagan cults. In 392, all pagan cults were officially

banned. Like many imperial decrees, Theodosius' orders were probably difficult to enforce

universally, and there is no evidence that they completely obliterated paganism. However,

these decrees did mean that paganism was now officially forbidden, and they encouraged

anti-pagan advocates like Theodosius' prefect of *Oriens* (as *Bilad al-Sham* was known),

Cynegius, to destroy or close numerous pagan temples. Similarly, bands of monks and

Christian ascetics were enlisted in combating the "demons" that inhabited the pagan

temples. This exorcism of temples from the "demons" often involved vandalism or the

destruction of temples and effigies of pagan deities.[38]

By the late fifth century, Christianity had obliterated all elements of paganism (but

not Hellenism), an achievement expressed in the demolition of temples and in the erection

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[37] Ibid. 136-137.

[38] Garth Fowden, "Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire AD 320-435," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978), 53-78.

of churches.[39] A good illustration of how elements of Hellenism survived amid the destruction of pagan structures can be seen in Jerash, where a temple dedicated to Dusares-Dionysius, arguably the most popular deity in the late antique East,[40] was razed to make room for a new cathedral. The destruction of the temple, however, did not erase the annual celebration of Dionysian rites in Jerash. In fact, the church authorities made a concerted effort to accommodate this important and popular festival into the newly "Christianized" city. The annual wine festival was reinvented as a celebration of Jesus' first miracle: the changing of water into wine at Cana.[41]

In addition, the period between the mid-fifth and the mid-sixth centuries was a time of intense church building throughout *Bilad al-Sham*. Over five hundred churches, ecclesiastical complexes, and oratories have been discovered, most of them built during this period.[42] As the church and state grew closer, the political structure provided the template for the ecclesiastical organization of the empire with, as a rule, archbishops in the capital cities, and a bishop for each municipality. Responsibility for civic affairs, including the collection of taxes, was gradually transferred from the council of citizens (*boule*) to the

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[39] Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia" 129-32.

[40] Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity,* 41-53.

[41] Alan Walmsley, "The 'Islamic City': The Archaeological Experience in Jordan," *Mediterranean Archaeology* 13(2000): 8.

[42] See for example, H. C. Butler, *Early Churches in Syria: fourth to seventh centuries*, ed. E. Baldwin Smith (New York, 1929); J. Lassus, *Sanctuaires chrétiens de Syrie* (Paris, 1947); A. Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land* (Bonn, 1970); A. Ovadiah, "Early Churches," in E. Stern, ed. *New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* I (Jerusalem, 1993); A. Ovadiah and C. G. de Silvia, "Supplementum to the corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land," *Levant* 13 (1981): 200-61; Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia," 126-158.

bishops, clergy and other members of the church hierarchy. Bishops assumed the leading position in the town councils as well as the role of urban patrons.[43] Thus, attention shifted from secular to religious building, with the clergy sponsoring as well as encouraging the erection of many ecclesiastical buildings.

The building of churches, inns for pilgrims (*xenodochia*), and monasteries Christianized the landscape. By the mid-sixth century, the civic identity of cities and towns was measured by their churches. The number of churches in the cities and towns grew considerably: For example, Umm al-Jimal had fifteen churches,[44] Gerasa/Jerash also had fifteen churches,[45] Caesarea had at least ten churches,[46] Bostra at least five including a monumental cathedral,[47] Philadelphia/Amman seven,[48] Pella/Fihl had three sizeable churches,[49] Eboda/Avdat two,[50] and Petra at least three.[51] Money was also poured into the

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[43] A. Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire AD 284-430* (London, 1993), 71-74. See also, G. Fowden, "Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire AD 320-435."

[44]K. De Vries, "The Umm el-Jimal Project, 1981-1992," *Annual of the Department Antiquities of Jordan* 37 (1993), 452.

[45] Zayadine, ed. *Jerash*, 16.

[46] Holum and Hohfelder, 178.

[47] M. Sartre, *Bostra: des origines à l'Islam* (Paris, 1985), 119-139.

[48] A. Northedge, *Studies on Roman and Islamic 'Amman I: History, Site, and Architecture.* British Academy Monographs in Archaeology 3. (Oxford, 1992), 59-60.

[49] Walmsley, "Pella: the Byzantine Period," in D. Homès-Frefericq and J. B. Hennessy, eds. *Archaeology of the Jordan* 112(1989), 403-404

[50] K. C. Gutwein, *Third Palestine: A Regional Study in Byzantine Urbanization.* (Washington D. C., 1981), 178, 192-194.

building, refurbishing, and decorating of monastic complexes, as well as in the creation of ornate liturgical implements, such as chalices and altars. For instance, one large treasure, perhaps numbering more than fifty silver objects, dedicated to the sixth-century Church of St. Sergius at Kaper Koraon in Syria, included chalices, patens, an ewer, a bowl, a flask, several crosses, a pair of liturgical fans, book covers, spoons, a ladle, a strainer and lamps.[52]

Furthermore, Christianization changed the shape of places of worship. The traditional pagan temple was architecturally quite unsuited to the needs of Christian worship; for the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgical occasions that involved large congregations, Christian architecture turned instead to assembly halls (*ecclesia*) of the faithful. While it can be argued that Christianity liberated architects from the conventions of classical temple design, it soon imposed new rules. Early Christians typically worshipped in private homes that were adapted for congregational use. Once a private home was converted, it became a *domus ecclesiae* ("house of the congregation"). A well-known example of such a structure is the early-third-century *domus ecclesiae* at Dura Europos, where the dining room of a private house was transformed into a rectangular hall

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[51] Z. T. Fiema, et al. *The Petra Church.* P. M. Bikai, ed. (Amman, 2001); P. M. Bikai, "The Ridge Church at Petra," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 40 (1996): 481-486; J. Frösén, et al. "The 1998-2000 Finnish Jabal Harun Project: Specialized Reports," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 45(2001): 337-392.

[52] See for example, Alan Cameron, "Observations on the Distribution and Ownership of Late Roman Silver Plate," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 5 (1992): 178-85; C. Johns, "Research on Roman Silver Plate," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3 (1990): 28-44; Marlia Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium: the Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures* (Baltimore, 1986.)

that accommodated sixty people, with a raised dais for the bishop on the eastern wall.
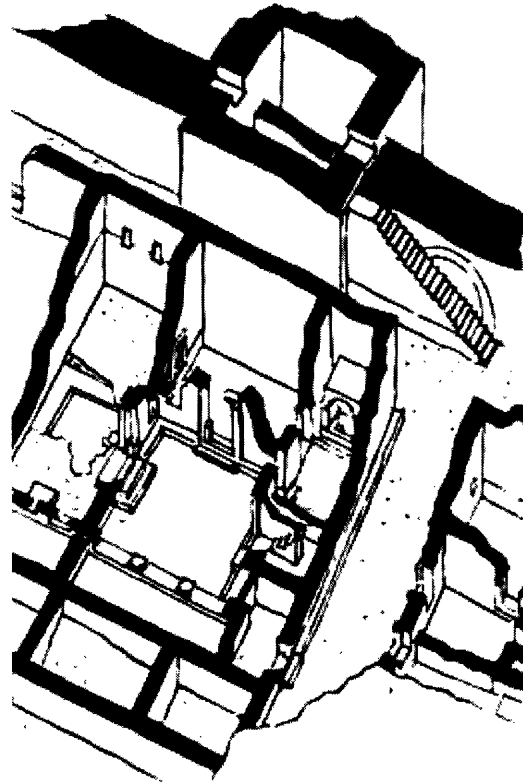
[Figure 10]

Figure 10   **Isometric reconstruction of the *Domus Ecclesia* of Dura Europos (c.240-256 CE). Reproduced from http://www.sln.org.uk/re/syria/images/duraeuropos2.gif**

The shape of churches did not change too much until Constantine embraced

Christianity in the early fourth century. With his conversion came the introduction of

monumentality as well as distinct forms to church architecture. Constantine's commissions

for monumental churches, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (c. 324)

and the Church of St. John Lateran in Rome (c.313-18), established the basilica as the

normative design for buildings for Christian assembly. The Christian basilica was derived

from civic buildings of that name that were used by emperors and officials of the later

Roman empire as audience halls. The latter buildings were large, rectangular structures

divided into aisles and nave with an apse at one end housing the tribunal of the emperor or presiding magistrate. This basic design was extensively adapted for Christian use, and the Christian basilica became the standard type for both parochial and episcopal churches. However, basilicas varied a great deal in plan, for example, some basilicas had no apse while others had three apses. In *Bilad al-Sham*, the most common type was the triple-apsed basilica.[53] [Figures 11a & 11b]

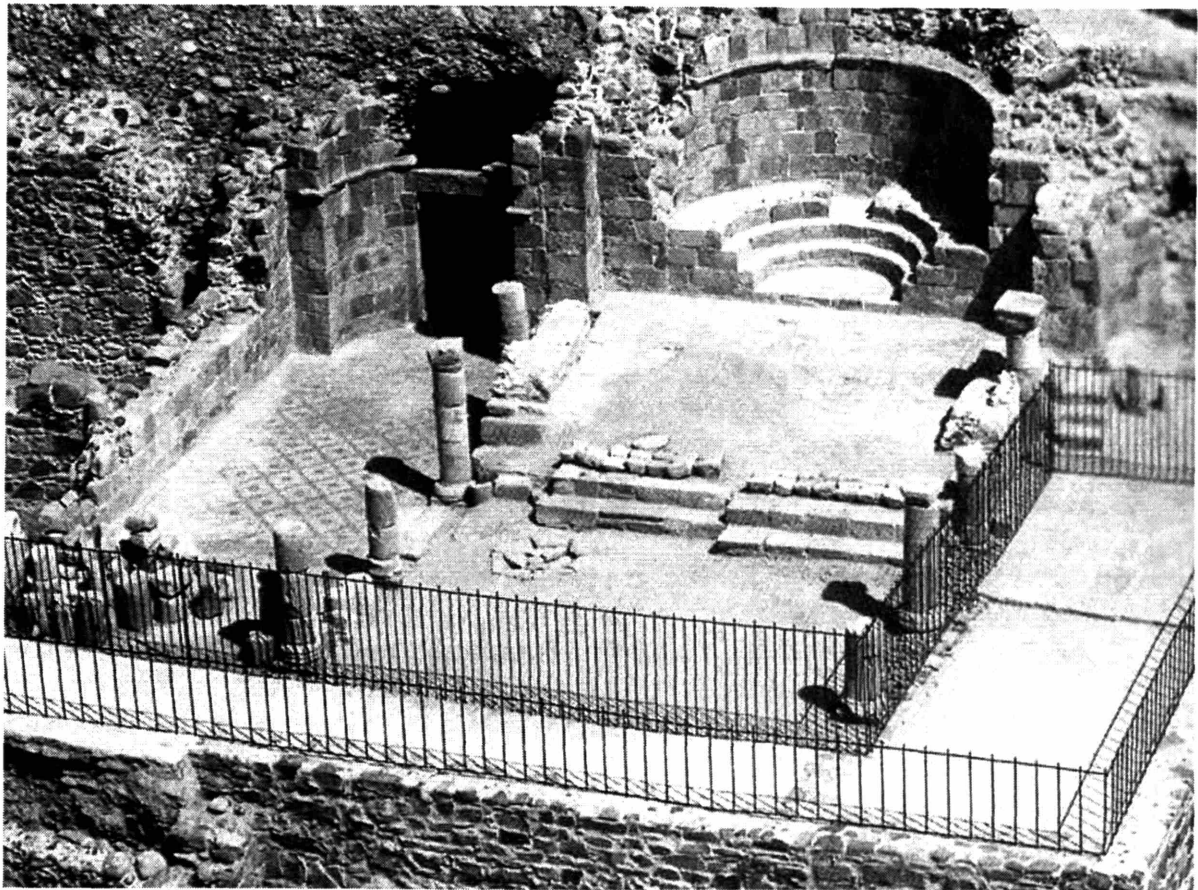**Figure 11a   Three-apse basilica at the Monastery of St. Lot at Ghor al-Safi in Jordan, aerial view. Reproduced in *The Umayyads: Rise of Islamic Art* (Beirut, 2001), 182.**

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[53] Richard Krautheimer, "The Constantinian Basilica," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 21 (1967), 117-140; Kenneth G. Holum, "Basilica," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, 337-338.
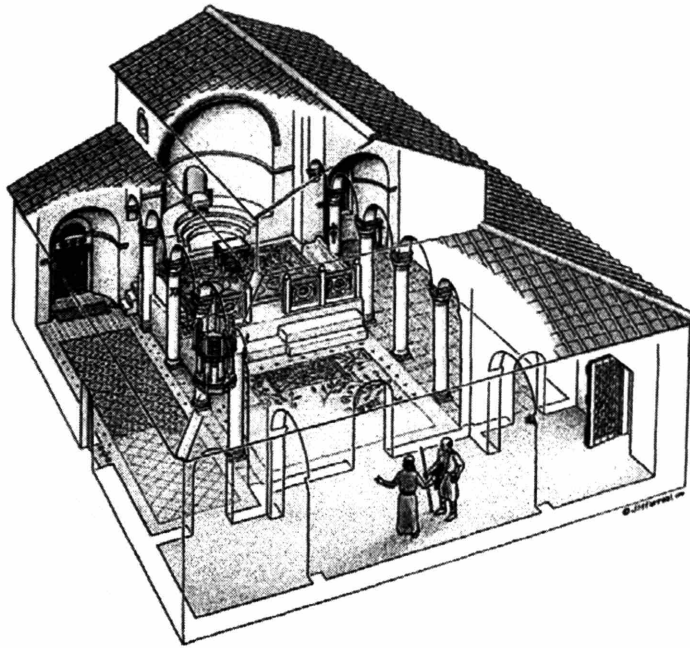
Figure 11b   Elevation of the basilica of Monastery of Lot, Ghor al-Safi, Jordan. Reproduced in *The Umayyads: Rise of Islamic Art* (Beirut, 2001), 180.

Other common features of Christian late antique architecture in *Bilad al-Sham* were martyria and baptisteries. Both martyria and baptisteries fulfilled important roles for late antique Christians, respectively the demarcation of a holy site and the marking of an individual's full admission into the Christian community. The centrally planned martyria, which are usually round, octagonal, or cruciform, were erected over holy sites or a saint's tomb. In plan these martyria were derived from ancient *heroa*, tomb temples, or monuments of Roman funerary architecture like the Mausoleum of Diocletian at Split. Baptisteries, on the other hand, did not conform to a specific type and ranged from simple to elaborate, and usually included a *piscina* (font) or a water receptacle. Both martyria and baptisteries were often associated with episcopal complexes and were built near or

adjoining a basilical church, as at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem where both a martyrium and a baptistery are integrated into the Church. Occasionally congregational churches, such as the octagonal cathedral at Antioch and the octagonal church at Umm Qays/Gadara, were also centrally planned. In general, however, the basilica was better suited to the liturgical requirements of a congregational church in which the service involved a linear procession from west to east.[54] In fact, the organization of space inside the basilica also reveals that there was a gradual increase in sacredness from the door to the altar, located at the east end of basilica. The altar is the most sacred place in any church because, according to Christian practice, it is there that Jesus Christ is available to the believer through the Eucharist. The rites of the Eucharist were open only to fully baptized Christians. Hence, the nave and the front of the basilica was devoted to clerics and baptized Christians, whereas the catechumens were kept at the back of the basilica, along with the penitents, and were escorted out of the church directly after the sermon and before the Eucharist was given.

The Christianizing of the built environment further altered the shape of cities. Sections of the cities were deliberately abandoned, in particular those linked to pagan shrines. New active centers emerged, often around the main cathedral. By the sixth century, in many of the prosperous cities of *Bilad al-Sham*, churches competed in size and splendor with former temples. In Apamea, for example, the cathedral complex grew to cover 12,000 square meters, and the city center moved away from the area of the major

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[54] For more on Christian architecture in Late Antiquity see for example, Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th ed. rev. (New Haven, 1986); and Cyril Mango, *Byzantine Architecture* (New York, 1985).

temples to the new Christian complex. Beginning in around 384, the temple of Zeus Belios was desecrated and partially damaged. This partial destruction was followed by a more insulting desecration: In the fifth century, the temple became Apamea's dump, and the road leading from the *cardo* to the temple and the once-thriving agora was blocked by latrines.[55] In fact the building of new Christian complexes commonly accompanied the abandonment or desecration of the temple complexes.

Temples suffered varying fates. Most often, the temples were used as quarries for the new buildings. For example, Gerasa/Jerash, had two major cultic centers, one devoted to Zeus and the other to Artemis. At the end of the fifth century, the temple of Zeus was partially demolished and its stones were used to adorn nearby churches. The vaulted corridors of its lower terrace were transformed into Christian oratories and residential units, possibly for a monastic community.[56]The temple of Artemis became a quarry (and later a ceramic factory in the Umayyad period), and many of its stones and decorative motifs were used in the construction and decoration of new churches, for example, one of the temple's frieze blocks was placed on the door of the late-fifth century Church of St. Theodore. The temple of Hercules at the citadel in Amman was closed in the fourth century, and by the fifth century the *temenos* was quarried for the citadel church.[57] In fact, *spolia*, reused building materials, from abandoned pagan temples (and sometimes other

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[55] B. Caseau, "Sacred Landscapes," 39

[56] Jacques Seigne, "Jerash: Le sanctuaire de Zeus et ses abords," *Contribution française à l'Archéologie Jordanienne* (Amman, 1986): 40-48.

[57] J. M. C. Bowsher, "The Temple of Hercules, a Reassessment," in A. Northedge, et al. *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman I: History, Site and Architecture*. British Academy Monographs in Archaeology 3. (Oxford, 1992): 136-37.

public buildings) are frequent features of late antique Churches and imparted a new aesthetic in architecture. Sometimes the *spolia* were adopted unconsciously, and sometimes they seem to have been chosen deliberately as status symbols of a venerable architectural heritage.

Temples were sometimes transformed into churches. A noteworthy example is the transformation of the temple complex of Baalbek. At the end of the 4th century, the altars of Jupiter's Great Court were torn down and a basilica was built using the temple's stones and architectural elements. The remnants of the three apses of this basilica, originally oriented to the west, can still be seen in the upper part of the stairway of the Temple of Jupiter. Similarly in the late fourth century, the Hexagonal Forecourt, between the Propylaea and the Great Court, was covered with a dome and transformed into a church.[58]

The archaeological evidence indicates that while most temples were transformed into churches, quarried or destroyed by the end of the fifth century, others remained standing (a possible reason for their survival might be due to the tremendous difficulty of dismantling such massive structures.) At Scythopolis/Baysan, for example, a second-century temple built on a colossal vaulted podium in the city center, remained standing even after the massive earthquake hit the region in the mid eighth century.[59]

Between the fifth and the seventh centuries, the cities and towns of *Bilad al-Sham* also saw the transformation of other major civic buildings, such as theaters and baths (the

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[58] M. Lyttelton, *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1974), pp. 87–93, 216–21, 229–41; F. Ragette, *Baalbek* (London, 1980).

[59] G. Foerster and Y. Tsafrir, "The Bet Shean Project. B. Centre of Ancient Bet Shaen –North" *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 6 (1988): 25-27.

fate of baths is discussed in the next section). Theaters, like the temples and baths, were seen as bastions of pagan culture. Both literary and archaeological evidence points to the disuse of theaters in many regions by the sixth century. In 502, the emperor Anastasius abolished the spring celebrations in the theater at Edessa, probably in response to the opinions of local ecclesiasts who were against theatrical performances.[60] Typical of these negative responses is the statement attributed to a local cleric from Edessa, Jacob of Sarug, which describes theatrical performances as "dancing, sport and music, the miming of lying tales, teaching which destroys the mind, poems which are not true, troublesome and confused sounds…lying canticles composed according to the folly invented by the Greeks."[61] Given such vehement local opposition to theatrical performances, it is unlikely that the theater at Edessa survived Anastasius' edict. The *Life* of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger, who lived near Antioch, describes in detail various aspects of late sixth-century urban life. However, there is no mention in this chronicle of the theater or any theater performances, and it can be assumed that by then the theater had been closed down, dismantled, or converted to serve a different function.[62] Archaeological evidence has also pointed to the closure and the destruction of many theaters. In Gerasa/Jerash, the stage of the north theater was filled in the sixth century and one can safely assume that the theater

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[60] H. Kennedy, "From *Polis* to Madina," 7.

[61] Quoted in J. B. Segal, *Edessa, the Blessed City* (Oxford, 1979), 163-5.

[62] H. Kennedy, "From *Polis* to Madina," 7.

fell into disuse at about the same time.[63] Additionally, the theater in Pella/Fihl was converted into smaller structures by the end of the fifth century.[64] However, despite the concerted efforts of the Christian officials to destroy theaters, many theaters continued to function unabated, and in some instances these performances were even defended by Christians. For example, in the sixth century, a Christian sophist, Choricius of Gaza, defended mimes against their critics by claiming that the mimetic art remained the basis of poetry and rhetoric, and was the heir to the revered Greek theatrical traditions.[65] The abandonment and destruction of theaters became more prevalent in the seventh century, and by the end of this century, the "stage" was moved to churches, where Christian priests started to dramatize portions of their homilies.[66]

Along with the Christianization of *Bilad al-Sham*, other factors contributed to the transformation of the urban and rural landscapes. By the beginning of the sixth century, the focus of commercial and social activities that had been previously conducted in large communal spaces, such as in the agoras, moved to the main streets. This shift resulted in a process of urban infilling often referred to as "encroachment."[67] Archaeological excavations have shown that in late-sixth century Gerasa/Jerash, for example, makeshift

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[63] V. A. Clark, "The Jerash North Theatre: architecture and archaeology 1982-83 Part II: The archaeology of the Roman Theatre," in Zayadine, ed. *Jerash*, 233-35.

[64] R. H. Smith, et al. "The 1980 Season at Pella of the Decapolis," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* ccxliv (1981): 17-21.

[65] T. D. Barnes, "Christians and the Theater" in *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon papers I*. William J. Slater, ed. (Ann Arbor, 1994), 161-180.

[66] ibid.

[67] H. Kennedy, "From *Polis* to Madina," 11-13, 16-18, 21-22.

structures began to be built in the south *cardo* and the oval forum, and by the seventh

century the forum had been completely converted into a large domestic quarter.[68] Urban

infilling is also evident in late sixth-century Scythopolis/Baysan and Umm Qays/Gadara,

where shops, houses and other structures were built out of *spolia* over the walkways and

paved streets of the town center.[69] [Figure 12]

**Figure 12   Encroachment onto the Cardo using *spolia* at Umm Qays/Gadara
(Photograph by Conrad Schmidt)**

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[68] C. S. Fisher, "The 'Forum'," in C. Kraeling, ed. *Gerasa*, 157-58; C. Kraeling, "The South Tetrapylon," ibid., 103-5, 113-115; L. Harding, "Recent Work on the Jerash Forum," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 81(1949), 12-20.

[69] G. Foerster and Y. Tsafrir, "City Centre (North); excavations of the Hebrew University expedition," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel. The Bet She'am Excavation Project (1989-1991)* 11 (1993), 18-32.

Changes in methods of transportation also contributed to encroachment. A commonly

accepted view suggests that wheeled transport disappeared from the Middle East between

the fourth and the eighth centuries.[70] Wheeled transport was replaced by pack animals.

Unlike wheeled vehicles, pack animals, such as camels or mules, did not require that

streets must be free of obstacles, and could easily navigate a winding narrow path. Thus,

the broad colonnaded streets were no longer needed, and their space was gradually taken

over by stalls and shops.[71] Urban infilling and the quality of construction do not necessarily

reflect a decline, but like the Christianization of the cities and towns, does reflect the

adaptability of cities to the changing needs and attitudes of Late Antique society.

Concurrent with the transformation of the urban environment, relative stability and

population growth in southern *Bilad al-Sham* brought about the conversion of some

Roman legionary camps into small towns. At Umm al-Rasas (*Kastron Mefaa*), a new

domestic quarter was built north of the fourth-century Roman fort, and by the late-sixth

century, the military camp was converted into domestic quarters with a number of

churches.[72] Similarly, the Nabataean foundation and later Roman military settlement of

Humayma (*Auara*) experienced a building boom in the fifth and sixth centuries during

which domestic quarters and churches replaced the military installations.[73] Conversely, the

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[70] See, Richard Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge, 1975).

[71] Kennedy, "From *Polis* to Madina," 26.

[72] J. Bujard, "Les églises géminées d'Umm er-Rasas," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 36 (1992), 291-306.

[73] J. P. Oleson, et al. "The Humeima Excavation Project, Jordan: preliminary report of the 1992 season," *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* 12 (1993): 461-502.

northern border of *Bilad al-Sham* saw an increase in the building of fortifications,

especially after the brief Persian invasion in 540, during which the important city of

Antioch was sacked and burned. There are over a dozen dated fortifications from the latter

half of the sixth century in the Orontes valley, including the barracks at Androna (al-

Andarin) and the complex of Qasr Ibn Wardan. As Hugh Kennedy has suggested in his

article on the last century of Byzantine Syria, the rise in the building of such fortifications

was not only a reaction to the Persian threat but also due to the increasing tensions between

the settled people and the nomads after the dissolution of the Ghassanid hegemony in the

mid-sixth century.[74] [Figure 13]

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[74] H. Kennedy, "The Last Century of Byzantine Syria," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 (1985): 164-66. For more on the nomads in Late Antique *Bilad al-Sham*, see F. M. Donner, "The Role of Nomads in the Near East in Late Antiquity (400-800 CE)," in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* eds. F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys. (Madison, WI, 1989), 73-85.

Figure 13   **View of the outpost complex of Qasr ibn Wardan in Syria. A palace, church and barracks comprised the complex. Reproduced in Michel de Grece, *Syria Hellenikoi Apoechoi*, (Athens 1993), 155, fig. 279.**

Archaeological excavations have also highlighted the explosive growth of

settlement in the rural hinterland of *Bilad al-Sham*. Most of these settlements were built

approximately between 350 and 550. Detailed regional surveys conducted in the past three

decades have revealed a steady rise in the number of smaller villages, hamlets, and

farmsteads in the rural areas, as well as the proliferation of agricultural installations for the

pressing of grapes and olives, two important industries in Late Antiquity.[75] Typical are the

results of four large surveys on the Jordan plateau and Rift valley. Each of these surveys

identified an unchallenged peak in the number of occupied sites between the fourth and

late sixth centuries. However, all of these surveys also suggest that most of these sites were

abandoned by the early seventh century.[76] The reasons behind the abandonment of these

settlements had to do, largely, with events that occurred in mid-sixth-century *Bilad al-*

Sham.

A series of natural disasters starting in the mid-sixth century changed both the

urban and rural landscapes. In October of 541, the bubonic plague made its first

appearance in the Mediterranean world, and quickly spread to *Bilad al-Sham,* where it

struck in repeated waves. One of the main consequences of this fatal epidemic was

widespread population decline especially in urban centers.[77] A comparison with medieval

and modern recurrences of the same disease shows that the loss of a quarter of the

population is a reasonable guess.[78] The deaths from the recurring outbreaks also resulted in

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[75]Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia."

[76] J. Johns, "Islamic Settlement in Ard al-Karak," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 4 (1992): 360-66; J. Mabry & G. Palumbo. "Wadi Yabis survey, 1987," in D. Homés-Frédericq and J. B. Hennessy, *Archaeology of Jordan III.* (Leuven, 1989): 275-305; idem, "Environmental, economic and political constraints on ancient settlement patterns in the wadi al-Yabis region," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 4(1992): 312-18; S. T. Parker, "The *Limes* and settlement patterns in central Jordan in the Roman and Byzantine periods," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 4 (1992): 321-324.

[77] Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Plague in the Early Medieval Near East," Ph. D. Dissertation. Princeton University, 1981.

[78] P. Allen, "The 'Justinianic' Plague," *Byzantion* 49 (1979): 11-12.

economic and administrative disruptions. As a result trade between the hinterland and cities declined, and many villages and farmsteads, such as those in the limestone massif region in northern Syria were abandoned by the late sixth century.

In addition to the devastating plague, a series of severe earthquakes hit *Bilad al-Sham* in the mid-sixth and early-seventh century. These earthquakes inflicted considerable damage on many cities and towns. For example, according to the late-sixth-century chronicle of John Malalas, Beirut was completely destroyed by the earthquake of 550.[79] Similarly, much of Antioch –including its most celebrated building, the octagonal Great Church- was destroyed in the earthquake of 588.[80] However, as Foss has pointed out in his work on the destruction of Ephesus, the real disaster of these seismic disturbances lies not in the immediate damage of the earthquakes themselves, but in the inability of most of the cities to rebuild due to the ensuing economic decline.[81] The earthquakes also contributed to the abandonment of agricultural cultivation,[82] which in turn further exacerbated the economy of much of the rural hinterland. Furthermore, subsequent political and administrative disruptions in the early seventh century made it impossible for many of the cities and towns to recover from the negative consequences of the plague and the earthquakes.

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[79] John Malalas, *Chronographia* ed. and trans. J. P. Migne. Patrologia Graeca, xcvii (Paris, 1865), 704.

[80] H. Kennedy, "Antioch: From Byzantine to Islam and Back Again," in *The City in Late Antiquity*, J. Rich, ed. (London and New York, 1992), 181-198.

[81] C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1979), 103-5.

[82] A. Watson, "Agriculture," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, 280.

The seventh century was a period of turmoil throughout the region. In 613, the Sasanian Empire managed to invade and occupy most of *Bilad al-Sham*. This occupation lasted until 628, when the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius (r. 610-641), reconstituted his army and brought the war to the heart of the Sasanian Empire, where he persuaded the Persians to withdraw their troops from the occupied Byzantine territory.[83] There is little evidence, either archaeological or literary, about what the effect of this occupation had on the building activities in the region.[84] What little evidence there is from this period suggests that some cities, such as Antioch and Aleppo, were sacked. Jerusalem also suffered extensively from the Sasanian occupation: It was besieged and taken by storm in 613; most of its Christian population was deported to Persia; its principal churches were destroyed; and the Persians carried off the True Cross of Christ back to Persia.[85] Less than a decade after the expulsion of the Persians, *Bilad al-Sham* was again conquered, this time by the Arab-Muslim armies from the Arabian Peninsula.

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[83] Warren Treadgold, *A History of Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, CA, 1997), 293-301.

[84] Michael Morony, "Syria under the Persians 612-629 AD," in Muhammad A. Bakhit, ed. *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilad al-Sham during the Early Islamic Period up to 40H/640 AD. The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham.* Vol. 1 (Amman, 1987), 87-95.

[85] M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule: A Political History of Palestine from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (New York, 1984), 261-265.

2.3 Transition to Islamic Rule: The Re-Orientation, Arabization and Settlement of Bilad al-Sham in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries

The Islamic conquest of *Bilad al-Sham* was neither especially violent nor particularly destructive. This does not mean that there was not bloodshed or disruption: The Byzantine armies were defeated and cities, like Damascus and Caesarea, were taken by siege and storm, refugees were driven from their homes, and some clerics were forced to flee. However, compared to later invasions of the region, like those of the Mongols or the Crusaders, neither the literary sources nor the archaeological records show evidence of extensive destruction.[86] In fact, the Islamic Conquest of *Bilad al-Sham* was in some instances perceived favorably by some segments of the population. For example, a mid-eighth-century Jewish apocalypse, *The Secrets of Rabbi Simon Ben Yohay*, presents the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem as a positive event in an eschatological drama: "Do not fear, son of man, for the Holy One, blessed be He, only brings the Kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from the wickedness. He raises up over them a Prophet according to his will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in greatness... 'How do we know they are our salvation?' The Rabbi asked. Then he answered: 'Did not the Prophet Isaiah say this...'"[87] Also, the Jacobite patriarch, Michael the Syrian, who wrote in the

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[86] See for example, K. G. Holum, "Archaeological Evidence for the Fall of Byzantine Caesarea," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 286(1992): 73-85.

[87] Quoted in P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), 3-4; B.J. Kedar, "The Arab Conquests and Agriculture," *Asian and African Studies*, 19(1985): 3-5.

twelfth century but relied heavily on earlier sources, considered the Arab conquest a delivery from the tyranny of the Byzantines: " ... to avenge them God brought the sons of Ishmael from the south to save us from the hands of the Romans."[88] Furthermore, most cities and towns willingly surrendered to the Muslim armies by treaty (*sulh*), which ensured personal, civic, and religious rights upon payment of poll and land taxes. Even in the few cases where the cities and towns, such as Tiberias/Tabariyah, Ascalon/'Asqalan, and Antioch/Antakya, renounced their original agreements with the Muslim conquerors, treaties were renegotiated and military retribution was avoided.[89]

Nevertheless, the emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and the subsequent spread of Islamic power in the seventh century was an event of momentous and permanent significance. Not since Alexander the Great in the 330s BCE, had a single force been successful in uniting such a vast region under a single power: Within thirty years of the initial march from the Arabian Peninsula in the third decade of the seventh century, the new Islamic world spanned from North Africa to Khurasan in Central Asia. In part, the coming of Islam was a revolutionary phenomenon that radically and rapidly changed the worlds it affected. Yet, in another sense its very success implies that it maintained and preserved to varying degrees some kind of operating and cultural equilibrium.

The most palpable feature of the Islamic conquest was that it brought a new religion to the regions it conquered. However, despite the military domination of the

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[88] J. B. Chabot, trans., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarch jacobite d'Antioch* vol. 2, (Paris 1899-1910) p. 412.

[89] Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, ed. M. J. de Goeje. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1866.

Muslims, the spread of this new religion was relatively slow. Given the nature and the

dearth of primary source materials, it is almost impossible to assess the progress of

conversion during the early Islamic period. While there is no comprehensive study of

conversion rates in early Islamic Syria, Richard Bulliet's model of conversion to Islam,

albeit based on data from Persian biographical dictionaries, suggests that the conversion to

Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries was indeed slow.[90] In addition, Christianity

remained entrenched in many areas of *Bilad al-Sham*, Judaism continued to be practiced,

and churches continued to function and be renovated well into the Umayyad period.[91] For

example, two well-known churches in modern-day Jordan, the Church of Saint Stephen at

Umm al-Rasas and the Church of the Virgin in Madaba, clearly demonstrate that churches

continued to be used throughout the first two centuries of Islamic *Bilad al-Sham*. The floor

of the circular central nave of the Church of the Virgin is adorned with a mosaic panel

whose central medallion (according to a dedicatory inscription) was paved under the

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[90] Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 104-113. For a more recent review of Bulliet's study, see M. Morony, "The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment," in M. Gervers and R. J. Bikhazi, eds. *Conversion and Continuity: Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto, 1990), 135-150.

[91] For more information on the fate of the Christian Church during the Early Islamic period see for example, H. Kennedy, "The Melkite Church from the Islamic Conquest to the Crusades," in *The 17ᵗʰ International Byzantine Congress: the Major Papers* (New Rochelle, NY, 1986), 325-343; A. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: the Early History of Tur 'Abdin* (Cambridge, 1990), 149-181; Cynthia J. Villagomez, "The Fields, Flocks, and Finances of Monks: Economic Life at Nestorian Monasteries, 500-850," Ph.D. dissertation, (UCLA, 1998). For more on Judaism in the early Islamic period see for example, M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (Cambridge, 1992), 490-776; A. Cameron, "The Jews in Seventh Century Palestine," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994): 75-93. For survival of churches in the early Islamic period see for example, R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule: a Historical and Archaeological Study*. Studies in late antiquity and early Islam; 2. (Princeton, 1995).

auspices of the Bishop Theophane of Madaba and dates to the mid eighth century (c.

756CE). [Figures 14]

Figure 14   Mid-Eighth Century Inscription in the central Medallion of the Church of the Virgin in Madaba. (Photograph by Conrad Schmidt)

Similarly, the mosaic pavement of the Church of St. Stephen bears two dedicatory

inscriptions on either side of the presbytery, which indicate that the church was paved in

the mid-eighth century by the mosaicists, Stauranchius and Euremius. Another dedicatory

inscription, which runs along the step of the presbytery, records that mosaic work was also

undertaken in the early eighth century.[92][Figure 15]

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[92] M. Piccirillo, "The Umayyad Churches of Jordan," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 28 (1994), 333-341.
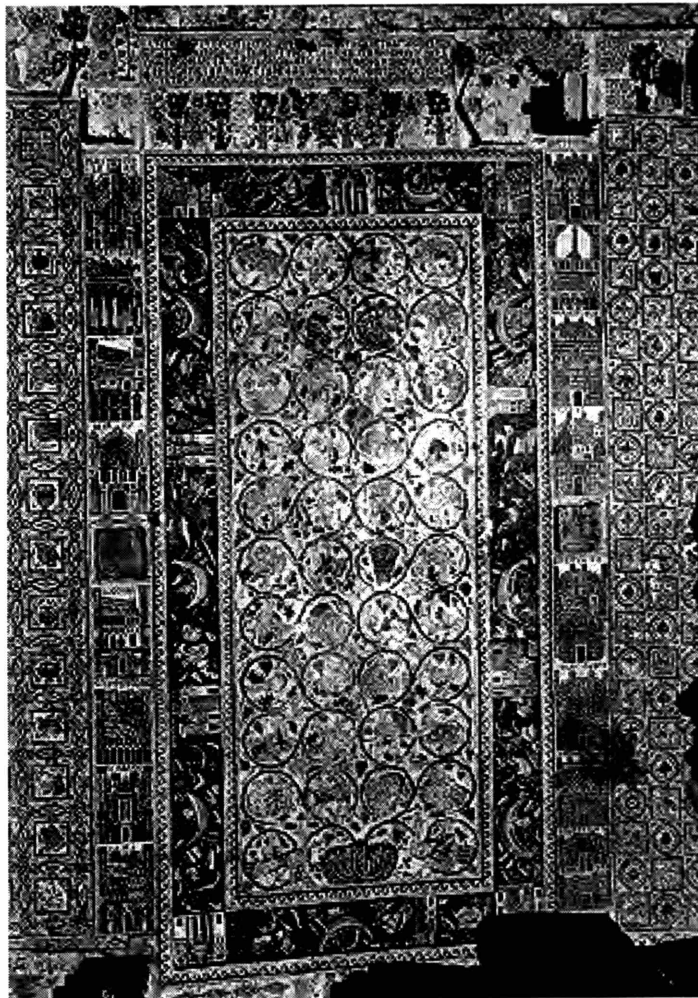
Figure 15   **Mosaic Pavement of the Church St. Stephen at Umm al-Rasas. Reproduced on http://198.62.75.1/www1/ ofm/fai/rasas/FAIras4.jpg**

While, the subject of the fate and role of non-Muslims during the early Islamic period is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it should be noted that, at least initially, the new Muslim rulers had no motive to force the conversion of those whose beliefs were reasonably inoffensive (i.e. not polytheistic). Thus, monotheistic non-Muslims, the so-called "People of the Book" (*ahl al-Kitab*), were recognized as members of the

community, but were obliged to pay a special tax (*jizya*) in return for a protected status (*dhimma*).[93]

However, the Islamic conquest had profound and far-reaching outcomes, especially within the context of the geopolitics and the cultural identity of the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. The first outcome to affect not only *Bilad al-Sham* but the rest of the Mediterranean world as well as Mesopotamia and Persia, was the transformation of the role of the Arabs within the social order. While Arab groups did have a long and established presence in both the rural and the urban regions of *Bilad al-Sham*, the Arabs had not been autonomous for centuries. With the coming of the Muslim Arabs to the region, the status of the Arabs shifted from subject class to ruling class.

Furthermore, the Islamic conquest led to a radical reorientation of the whole region. Within a quarter of a century after the Islamic conquest, the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiyah (r. 661-680) moved the capital to Damascus, and for the near century duration of the Umayyad period, *Bilad al-Sham* formed the core of the nascent Islamic empire. Consequently, *Bilad al-Sham* underwent a reorientation in strategic and geopolitical terms. Moreover, the coastal and northern towns of *Bilad al-Sham* were transformed strategically, and to a certain extent demographically, from Byzantine strongholds into Arab Muslim frontier outposts (*thughur*) confronting Byzantium. Literary sources briefly mention the fate of the coastal towns, such as Acre, Tyre, Ascalon and Tripoli, in the first decades after

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[93] See for example, C. E. Bosworth, "The Concept of *Dhimma* in Early Islam," in B. Braude and B. Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*. Vol. 1 (New York, 1982), 37-51; D. C. Dennet, *Conversion and the Poll-Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950).

the Islamic conquests, and subsequently under the Umayyads. According to al-Baladhuri,

for instance, the first two Caliphates encouraged soldiers to settle in the coastal cities as

well as the inland border towns, which for the most part had been abandoned by their

previous inhabitants. According to al-Baladhuri, the soldiers who settled in these cities

were granted increases in pay. Apparently, however, despite this official policy, there was

no great flow of settlers, and Mu'awiya brought in non-Arabs, mostly Persian settlers to

these cities.[94]

Furthermore, under the Umayyads, the importance of the old leading families of

Mecca and Madina diminished, and the new government depended primarily on the native

Arab tribes of *Bilad al-Sham*. The over two decade tenure of Mu'awiya as governor of

Bilad al-Sham before he became Caliph in 661, allowed him to establish strong ties with

the prominent Arab tribes, such as the Quda'a (led by the Kalb tribe) of central Syria.

These tribes were instrumental in maintaining stability in *Bilad al-Sham* throughout the

Umayyad period.[95] In addition, with the establishment of a new Arab Muslim polity, *Bilad*

al-Sham's cultural links with the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and Mesopotamia were greatly

strengthened.

However, it is important to stress that Early Islamic *Bilad al-Sham* did not discard

its Hellenistic heritage. Indeed, during the seventh and eighth centuries, Greek culture

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[94] Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*. For a review of the written sources see, A. Elad, "The Coastal Cities of Palestine during the Early Middle Ages," in L. I. Levine ed., *Jerusalem Cathedra*, v.2 (Jerusalem, 1982), 146-67.

[95] See for example, G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*. 2nd rev. ed. (London, 2000); M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation I (AD 600-750)* (Cambridge, 1971)

continued to thrive in *Bilad al-Sham*, perhaps even more vigorously than in Constantinople itself.[96]In fact, Cyril Mango has written, "the most active center of Greek culture in the eighth century lay in Palestine."[97] Furthermore, despite the fact that Muslim rule replaced Byzantine rule in *Bilad al-Sham*, it cannot be said that such a radical change affected the other areas of life and culture of the region.

The influence of precedent administrative measures is also apparent in the organization of the Muslim military provinces, the *ajnad* (sing. *jund*). While the exact origins of and logic behind the *ajnad* system remains a subject of debate among scholars,[98] the new administrative divisions replaced the provincial boundaries of the Byzantine Empire, and *Bilad al-Sham* was divided into four, and later five *ajnad*, where the major cities retained their precedent role as administrative centers, and continued with their earlier responsibilities, especially the collection of taxes from the surrounding district

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[96] Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*. Chapter 6.

[97] C. Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest," in *Scrittura, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio*, ed. G. Cavallo et al., I (Spoleto, 1991), 149-50.

[98] Irfan Shahid sees a Byzantine origin for the *ajnad*, see his articles, "The Jund System in Bilad al-Sham: Its Origins," in M. A. Bakhit and M. Asfour, eds., *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham. Bilad al-Sham during the Byzantine Period*, vol. 2(Amman, 1986), 45-92; "Heraclius and the Theme System: New Light from the Arabic," *Byzantion* 57(1987), 391-406; "Heraclius and the Themen System: Further Observations," *Byzantion* 59 (1989), 209-43. On the other hand, John Haldon and Alan Walmsley argue that the *ajnad* were a direct result of the Muslim conquests. See for example, John Haldon, "Seventh-Century Continuities: the *Ajnad* and the 'Thematic Myth'," in A. Cameron ed., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East 3. State, Resources and Armies,* Studies in Late Antiquity and Islam 1 (Princeton, 1995), 379-423; and A. G. Walmsley, "The Administrative Structure and Urban Geography of the Jund of Filastin and the Jund of al-Urdunn," PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 1987.

(*kurah*).[99] At the same time, many of the Byzantine-era administrators retained their jobs after the Muslim conquest.

Furthermore, until the reign of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685-705), Greek remained the language of administration. In addition, the financial administration of the Muslims continued to follow, to a certain degree, the procedures of the precedent Byzantine administration for at least fifty years after the Islamic conquests. During this period, the chief financial secretaries and taxation officers continued to be drawn from the same Hellenized Syrian or Arab Christian families that had served the Byzantine administration.[100] In fact, employment of non-Muslims in the Umayyad court and administration continued until the demise of the Umayyad dynasty.[101] The process of the Islamization of the urban and rural landscapes was slow and in many ways was similar to the preceding pattern of Christianization.

Perhaps one of the more tangible ways that the Muslim settlement affected the landscape of seventh and eighth century *Bilad al-Sham* was through agriculture. During the first two centuries after the Muslim conquests, new crops, such as sugar cane, rice, cotton, bananas, indigo and citrus fruits, were introduced. At this time, other established crops, such as dates, grapes, and figs, were improved. The introduction and cultivation of these

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[99] For the *ajnad* see for example, A. G. Walmsley, "The Administrative Structure and Urban Geography of the Jund of Filastin and the Jund of al-Urdunn: the Cities and Districts of Palestine of East Jordan during the Early Islamic, 'Abbasid and Early Fatimid Periods," Ph.D. thesis (University of Sydney, 1987);

[100].Ahmad Shboul, "Change and Continuity in Early Islamic Damascus," *Aram* 6 1 & 2(1994): 67-102.

[101] See for example. A. Palmer, et al. *The Seventh Century in West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), 202-204.

crops has been dubbed the "Medieval Green Revolution."[102] The rural areas of *Bilad al-Sham* were the most immediate beneficiaries of this "revolution," where various agricultural development projects were undertaken.

Even though the Arabic literary sources do not give much attention to Early Islamic agricultural activities, archaeological evidence demonstrates that agriculture was a priority during the first two centuries of Islamic rule. Ownership of agricultural estates by the Umayyad elite was popular and geographically widespread throughout *Bilad al-Sham*. The acquisition of previously unoccupied land and its transformation into an agricultural plot was a common way for early Muslim elites to avoid paying higher taxes: For undeveloped land one paid the *'ushr* ("tithe") rather than pay the higher *kharaj* ("land tax") required for developed land. Well-known since the seminal studies by Jean Sauvaget and Oleg Grabar are the expansive agricultural estates associated with some of the so-called *qusur* ("desert-castles") of the *badiyah* (the steppe lands of *Bilad al-Sham*), although not all these estates were new foundations.[103] Correspondingly, the agricultural activities were not limited to the elite circle. Smaller farms were also common features of the landscape of *Bilad al-Sham* during the early Islamic period. For example, an excavated early Islamic farm at

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[102] A. M. Watson, "A Medieval Green Revolution: New Crops and Farming Techniques in the Early Islamic World," in A. L. Udovitch ed., *The Islamic Middle East, 700-1900. Studies in Economic and Social History* (New Jersey, 1981); idem, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World: The Diffusion of Crops and Farming Techniques, 700-1000* (Cambridge, 1983).

[103] See for example, J. Sauvaget, "Les Ruines Omeyyades du Djebel Seis," *Syria* 20 (1939): 239-56; idem, "Chateaux Umayyades de Syrie. Contribution à l'Etude de la Colonisation Arabes aux Ier et IIe Siècles de l'Hégire," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 35 (1967):1-49; Oleg Grabar, "Umayyad 'Palace' and the 'Abbasid 'Revolution'"; idem. *Formation of Islamic Art.*

Evrona in the Negev Desert, included about 300 hectares of new fields from previously

rocky and uncultivated land. Furthermore, excavations on this site have revealed that a

wide variety of crops, including almond trees, wheat, barley, peaches and olives were

planted on this farm.[104] Similarly, an early Islamic small farm, known today as Qasr Ain el-

Sil, in the Jordanian *badiyah*, included agricultural installations such as an oil press as well

as a grain mill.[105][Figure 16]

Figure 16   **General View of the Early Islamic farm of 'Ain al-Sil (Photograph by Conrad Schmidt)**

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[104]U. Avner and J. Magness, "Early Islamic Settlement in the Southern Negev," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 310(1998): 39-57.

[105] G. Bisheh, "Qasr Mshash and Qasr 'Ayn al-Sil: Two Umayyad Sites in Jordan," in *The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham during the Umayyad period, 24-29 Oct. 1987*, Muhammad Adnan al-Bakhit and Robert Schick, eds. (Amman, 1989), 81-103.

The provision of water on a major scale was a crucial part for these agricultural complexes as evidenced by dams, aqueducts, canals, reservoirs, sluices, wells and cisterns identified near many of these *qusur*. At the Umayyad site of al-Muwaqqar near Amman, for example, one of the most important remains is a vast reservoir (still in use today), which, as confirmed in an inscription on the capital of a column from the nearby *qasr*, was built by the Umayyad caliph, Yazid II (722-723).[106] [Figure 16]
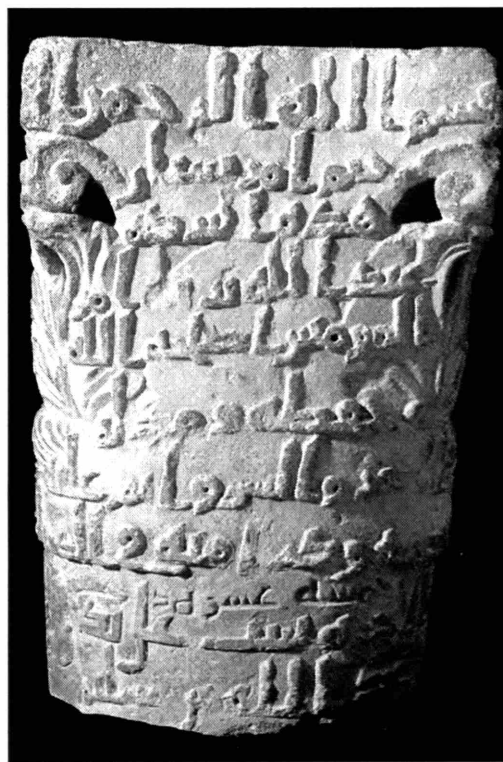

Figure 16   Capital with Kufic Inscriptions from the al-Muwaqqar Water Reservoir, Jordan Archaeological Museum, Amman. Reproduced in *The Umayyads: Rise of Islamic Art* (Beirut, 2001), 118.

As well as supplying the estates and their associated buildings, the water was directed to field systems (often enclosed) where farming and probably animal breeding was

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[106] M. Najjar et al. "Taqrir Awwali 'an Nata'ij al-Tanqibat al-Athariyah fi Baldat al-Muwaqqar," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 33 (1989): 5-12.

practiced. A well-documented example is Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi ("west"), built in 727.

The archaeological evidence indicates that many water channels and a canal came from a

pre-Islamic dam of Wadi Harbaqah, sixteen kilometers south of the *qasr*. A garden was

enclosed by walls measuring 1050 by 442 meters, and was supplied with water from a

2.75-meter thick artificial barrier that channeled the winter rains into the agricultural

enclosure.[107] Another interesting example of agricultural cultivation is associated with the

site of Qasr al-Hallabat in the *badiya* of Jordan. The water supply for this *qasr* and its

adjacent land was provided by an elaborate system. It has a large reservoir, an adjoining

smaller reservoir, and eight cisterns that were supplied with water by an underground

canal. The water was needed to irrigate an irregularly shaped enclosure, measuring 270

meters north-south by 220 meters east-west. This enclosure was probably used for

agricultural purposes, either crop cultivation or animal husbandry.[108] The careful water

management around most of the *qusur* and in the smaller farms of Early Islamic *Bilad al-*

Sham allowed agriculture to be practiced at a profitable level, which allowed for the rise of

a demesne farming culture in the hinterland. In addition, as will be discussed in the fourth

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[107] D. Schlumberger, "Les fouilles de Qasr el-Heir al-Gharbi (1936-1938) Rapport preliminaire," *Syria* 20 (1939): 195-238, 324-73; Creswell, K. A. C. *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, rev. J. W. Allen (London, 1989), 135-42.

[108] Ghazi Bisheh, "Excavations at Qasr al-Hallabat, 1979," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 24 (1980): 69-77; idem. "The Second Season of Excavations at Hallabat, 1980," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 26 (1982): 133-44; idem. "Qasr wa Masjid al-Hallabat fi al-Urdunn," in *Al-Mu'tamar al-Tasi' lil Athar fi al-Watan al-'Arabi, March 16-22* (Sana'a and Tunis, 1985), 80-92; idem. "Qasr al-Hallabat: An Umayyad Desert Retreat or Farm-land," *The Second Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, ed. Adnan Hadidi, vol. 2 (Amman, 1985), 263-265.

section of this dissertation, water management also allowed for a surge in bath building during the Umayyad period. [Figure 17]

Figure 17 **The South-East Dam of al-Qanatir. This is one of two massive stone dams located in central Jordan dating to the Umayyad period. These dams were used to collect and store rain water that was used to irrigate the** *qusur.* **(Photograph by Conrad Schmidt)**

As the Muslims settled in *Bilad al-Sham*, they started to assert their religious presence through the building of mosques. Unlike churches, mosques were not consecrated buildings. Indeed, many early mosques were not always buildings. Following the example of the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina, many early mosques, such as those dated to the end of the seventh century in the Negev, were simple stone enclosures, often located on a hilltop, facing south toward Mecca and adorned with a *mihrab*. Such early mosques served

nearby settlements and accompanied the dispersal of the Muslim settlers.[109] In newly

founded cities such as Basra and Kufa, the mosque was set up in the center of the city.

These mosques, like the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina, also functioned as the civic
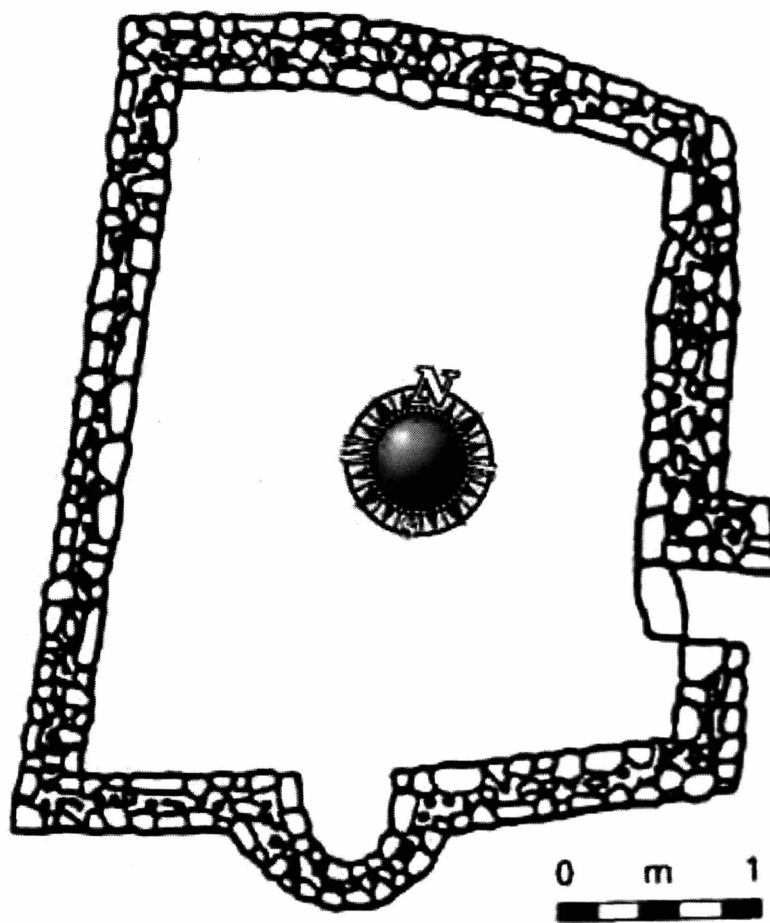
center of these new cities. [Figure 18]

Figure 18   **A Drawing of an Early Islamic Mosque from Horvat Sharav. Reproduced in the Negev. G. Avni, "Early Mosques in the Negev Highlands: New Archaeological Evidence on Islamic Penetration of Southern Palestine,"** *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* **294 (1994): 90.**

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[109] G. Avni, "Early Mosques in the Negev Highlands: New Archaeological Evidence on Islamic Penetration of Southern Palestine," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 294 (1994): 83-100.

Many of the *qusur*, such as at Qasr al-Hallabat and Umm al-Walid, also included a small

mosque adjacent to the main residence building. [Figures 19a and 19b]

Figure 19a   View of Mosque at Umm al-Walid, J. Bujard et al. "Mission archeologique Suisse en Jordanie," published on http://www.maxvanberchem.org/en/activite.cfm?scientific=43&activity=1&arty=39#article
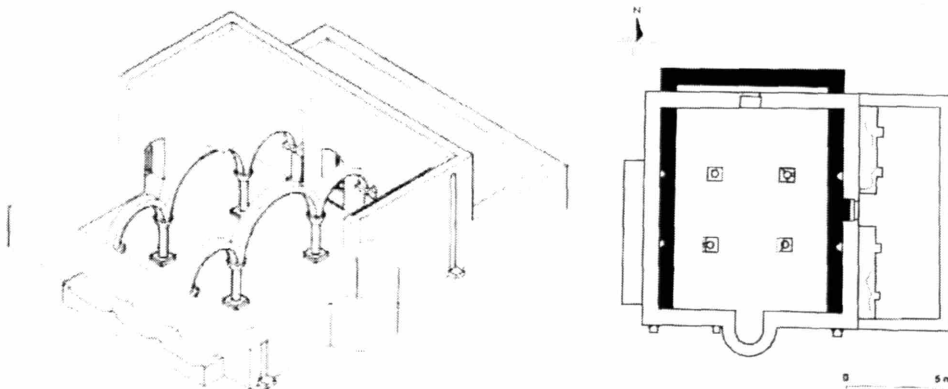

Figure 19b Elevation and Plan of the Mosque of Umm al-Walid. Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*, Islamic Art in the Mediterranean Series. Museum With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 93.

However, in older cities, the Muslims had to find a place for their mosques. The location of these religious buildings was determined in part by the availability of space as well as by a wish to secure a central and convenient location. Like the Christians of the late fourth century, the Muslims either avoided monuments of the old religion by building new structures, or they converted churches into mosques, prayed in Christian churches, or more commonly, they built their mosques adjacent to holy places of the old religions and eventually replaced their buildings. Regardless of their location, all known mosques before the Marwanid Umayyads (the early 680s) were simple and unadorned structures, easily distinguished from pagan temples, Jewish synagogues, and Christian churches. An often-cited example of such a structure is recorded in the account of Arculf, a Christian pilgrim from Gaul, who visited Jerusalem in 670 CE. While Arculf is clearly impressed by the lavish Byzantine churches, he was not impressed by the simplicity of the early mosque in Jerusalem.[110] However, the simple mosques of the main cities of early Islamic *Bilad al-Sham* were soon replaced by more lavish structures starting with the reign of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685-705).

Under 'Abd al-Malik, specific measures of "Arabization" and "Islamization" of certain symbols of the state were formally started. These measures were completed gradually under his sons and successors. One of the most important measures introduced during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik was the minting of coins. While it has been generally

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[110] For more on early mosques see for example, Oleg Grabar, "La mosquée de Damas et les origines architecturales de la Mosquée," in *Synthronon: Art et Archéologie de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1968), 107-114; idem. *The Formation of Islamic Art* rev. ed. (New Haven, 1987); Sulieman Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches, *The Muslim World* 81 (1991): 268-282.

assumed that the Muslims started minting coins soon after the conquest, Michael Bates has

argued that the Muslims did not issue any coins at all until 691-692. Before that date, the

gold and copper coins used in *Bilad al-Sham* were imported from Byzantium, and the

silver coins from Iraq and Iran. It was during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik that a series of

experimental coins were introduced. These early issues reflect important stages in the

creation of an early Islamic iconography. The early issues used Byzantine coins as

templates, but were "Arabized" to reflect ascendancy of new Muslim Arab empire. An

early example, new coin-type, the so-called "standing caliph," appeared in Damascus

between 694-697. On the obverse, these coins show a standing figure dressed in a long

robe with a sword-belt and an "Arab" style headdress (*Kufiyyah*), and framed by the

Arabic inscription, "In the name of God, there is no God but Allah, He is alone,

Muhammad is the messenger of God." The reverse side depicts the depiction of a modified

cross (the cross was a common motif of Byzantine coins) with an Arabic inscription, "In

the name of God, this *dinar* was struck in the year (...)." In 696-697, 'Abd al-Malik

introduced reforms that restricted the decoration of coins to epigraphy, an effort that

contributed to the unification of the nascent Islamic empire.[111] [Figures 20a and 20b]

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[111] See, Michael Bates, "The Arab-Byzantine Bronze Coinage of Syria: an Innovation by
'Abd al-Malik," *A Colloquium in Memory of George Carpenter Miles* (New York, 1976);
ibid. "History, Geography and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage,"
Revue Suisse de Numismatique 65 (1986), 231-62.

Figure 20a   Obverse and Reverse of Bronze Coin of the Arab-Byzantine Type. Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*, Islamic Art in the Mediterranean Series. Museum With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 173.

Figure 20b   Obverse and Reverse of Gold Dinar of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*, Islamic Art in the Mediterranean Series. Museum With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 174.

The coinage reform is perhaps the most tangible manifestation of 'Abd al-Malik's

Arabization policies, which also included the Arabization of the tax registers, the official

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stationary, as well as the milestones on the major roads of the Empire. However, these Arabization measures need to be understood in their specific context.

To begin with, it is important to point out that Arabic had been from the very beginning the official language. Arabic, the language of the Quran, was used for correspondence, diplomatic agreements, and commercial transactions since the very beginning of Islam. Arabic was also the first language used in the first *diwan* (the record of the names of the Muslim soldiers and their entitlement to stipends) of Muslim warriors established by Umar (r. 634-44 CE), and continued to be used in the army records and official correspondence of the Umayyads in *Bilad al-Sham* and elsewhere.[112] Moreover, Arabic, with its many regional and tribal dialects, was the language spoken by not only the Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula, but also by the indigenous Christian Arabs of *Bilad al-Sham*. Hence, the Arabization measures of 'Abd al-Malik should not be seen as radical departures from previous practices, but rather as corollary (and official) assertions of the new political and religious identity of the Muslim state.

Similarly, in the realm of visual culture, the significance of these measures is particularly apparent in the new religious monuments commissioned by 'Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walid I (r. 705-715), notably the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque of Damascus in Syria. Both these buildings represent the only examples of extant

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[112] Shboul and Walmsley "Identity and Self-Image", 257. In rare instances, the *diwan* was compiled in Greek, see Hugh Kennedy, "The Financing of the Military in the Early Islamic State," in A. Cameron, *Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East III* (Princeton, 1995): 361-378.

monumental religious architecture of the Early Islamic period.[113] My purpose here is not

to offer another analysis and interpretation of either of these two monuments, but rather to

underline their role within the larger context of the significance of the Arabization and the

Islamization measures of the late seventh and early eighth centuries.

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (built in 692) is a centrally planned, domed

structure that stands over a rock on the Noble Sanctuary (*Haram al-Sharif*), a paved terrace

that is believed to have once supported the Temple of Solomon. While the original purpose

of this building remains a controversy, its placement and design make it a conspicuous

rival of the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulcher, whose dome could be seen from the

Haram. In both construction and decoration, the Dome of the Rock owes much to the Late

Antique traditions of *Bilad al-Sham*. The overall design has a number of precursors in the

centrally planned churches of Christian architecture. The veined and patterned marble

panels that decorate the lower walls combined with the intricate glass mosaics that adorn

the drum of the dome are Byzantine in style and execution. Only the absence of the

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[113] The literature on these two monuments is extensive. For the Dome of the Rock, see for example, A. Elad, "Why did 'Abd al-Malik build the Dome of the Rock? A Reexamination of the Muslim Sources," in *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, pt. 1, eds. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns. Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, 9 (Oxford, 1993), 33-58; Oleg Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*; idem. *The Shape of the Holy, Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, 1996); Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Dome of the Rock, the Ka'ba, and Ghumdan: Arab Myths and Umayyad Monuments," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), 57-65; Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989), 12-21; idem. "The Dome of the Rock Revisited: Some Remarks on al-Wasiti's Account," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), 67-75; and M. Rosen-Ayalon, "The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Haram al-Sharif: An Iconographic Study," *Qedem* 28 (1989). For the Mosque of the Damascus, see for example, A. Bahnassi, *The Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus* (Damascus, 1989); F. B. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Making of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden, 2001); G. R. D. King, *The Origins and Sources of the Umayyad Mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus*, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of London, 1976.

representation of the human figure and the Quranic inscriptions reveal it as an Islamic monument.

The Mosque of Damascus (706-715) is one of a series of congregational mosques that were built or renovated in the urban centers of the Umayyad Empire during the caliphate of al-Walid I.[114] The Mosque is built on what is arguably the religious heart of Damascus, a site on which monumental religious buildings had been erected since at least the Aramean period. By the early eighth century, the site had been occupied by an Aramean temple dedicated to Haddad, a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter Damascenes, and a cathedral dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Like the previous edifices built on this site, the Mosque of Damascus replaced (and effectively erased) the remains of the previous religions and asserted the ascendancy of Islam. In addition, the decoration and design of the Mosque, like those of the Dome of the Rock, were extrapolated from precedent examples, to represent a new imperial and religious identity that would be understood by the local population of *Bilad al-Sham*.[115]

Hence, both the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of Damascus (and possibly the other associated congregational mosques of al-Walid) symbolize, not only the consolidation of Umayyad legitimacy within the Islamic domain, but also perhaps the assertion of Islamic Arabic identity in the face of the continuing Byzantine threat, and

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[114] The other mosques, which include the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, have since been either extensively rebuilt or destroyed. However, the Mosque of Damascus does retain much of its original character in spite of several disastrous fires and numerous repairs and restorations.

[115] See for example, Nasser Rabbat, "The Dialogic Dimension in Umayyad Art," *Res* (Spring 2003): 78-94.

function as prominent signs of the rising imperial status of the Umayyads. Like the administrative measures, in terms of procedure, style, and technique, these magnificent religious monuments were consciously and conspicuously shaped by a dialogue with the Late Antique traditions of *Bilad al-Sham* and belong to their Late Antique milieu. Therefore, the coming of Islam and the Arabization and Islamicization measures did not disrupt or deflect the course of Late Antique artistic and architectural production.

In addition, the entrenchment in and indebtedness of early Islamic society to the culture of pre-Islamic Late Antiquity is also expressed in the secular realm, most notably in the Umayyad bathhouses.

III. Continuity and Innovation: Baths and Bathing in Pre-Islamic Late Antique *Bilad al-Sham*

3.1 Introduction

The bathhouse is arguably one of the most ubiquitous building types in both the rural and urban landscapes of Roman and Late Antique *Bilad al-Sham*. The abundant physical remains of baths dating from the fourth to the late-eighth century stand in eloquent testimony to this fact. Indeed, baths appear in almost all types of settlements: from cities, towns, and hamlets to religious sanctuaries and frontier forts. The popularity of bathhouses is perhaps due to the fact that baths fulfill practical as well as pleasurable roles: you went to the bath to get clean, to relax and to interact with people. In many ways, baths in Roman and Late Antique Bilad al-Sham (and elsewhere in the former Roman World) were the foremost location for social interaction. Even those bathhouses that are dubbed "private" by modern scholars –such as those that are located in domestic settings- were hardly private by today's standards. Such bathhouses were designed to accommodate more than one bather and were often used for entertaining guests.

In addition, the bath as a building type is arguably the most remarkable (and flexible) cultural institution to survive the transition from the Roman world to the Medieval Islamic world. Indeed, the Islamic bath (*hammam*) is the direct and only descendant of the Roman prototype to survive.[1] The bathhouse was adapted and integrated into early Islamic culture, and quickly became one of the most important features of the

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[1] Japanese baths, the Finnish sauna and the Native American sweat-lodges come from different roots. For more on these baths, see for example, J. Pentikainen, ed. *The Finnish Sauna, the Japanese Furo, the Indian Inipi: Bathing on Three Continents*, (Helsinki, 2001).

Islamic architectural landscape. Thus, the fate of baths in Bilad al-Sham provides the

student of Late Antiquity with a suitable case study for examining the relationship between

the post-Classical visual cultures of Bilad al-Sham to those of Early Islam.

As was discussed above, literature on late antique baths (both pre-Islamic and

Islamic) is rather limited, especially when compared to the vast scholarship on Classical

(especially Roman) baths (see Introduction).[2] In fact, until relatively recently, the tradition

of bathing in late antiquity was considered to be practically non-existent. However, new

studies have demonstrated that public bathhouses (contrary to previously held beliefs) did

not disappear with the fifth-century barbarian invasions of the Western Roman Empire, but

continued to be built or used in a limited capacity in that part of the empire well into the

Middle Ages when they eventually fell out of use.[3] In contrast, while baths continued to be

used in a limited capacity in the pre-Islamic Late Antique East until the Islamic conquests,

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[2] Recent works that include extensive references to scholarship on Classical baths include, H. Manderscheid, *Bibliographie zum römischen Badewesen* (Munich, 1988); M. Pasquinucci, ed. *Terme romane e vita quotidiana* (Modena, 1987); Janet DeLaine, "Recent Research on Roman Baths," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 1 (1988): 11-32; F. Yegül, *Baths and Bathing*; I. Nielsen, *Thermae et Blanea. The Architecture and Cultural History of Roman Public Baths*; M. Weber, *Antike Badekultur* (Munich, 1996); and Garrett G. Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* (Michigan, 2002).

[33]For Medieval baths in Europe, see for example, Paolo Squatriti, *Water and Society in Early Medieval Italy, AD 400-1000* (Cambridge, 1998); D. Boisseuil, *Le thermalisme en Toscane à la fin du moyen âge: les bains siennois de la fin du XIIIe siècle au début du XVIe siècle* (Rome, 2002); C. Gouedo-Thomas, *Usages de l'eau dans la vie privée, au moyen age à travers l'iconongraphie des manuscrits à peintures de l'Europe septentrionale (XIII-XVIe siècle)*, (Villeneuve d'Ascq Cédex, 1998); J. Caskey, "Steam and Sanitas in the Domestic Realm: Baths and Bathing in Southern Italy in the Middle Ages," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58 no. 2 (1999), 170-195; S. Arnold, "Baden und Badenwesen im Mittelalter," *Denkmalpflege in Baden-Württemberg* 25 no. 1 (1996), 23-29; F. Romana Stasolla, *Pro labandis curis: Il balneum tra tardo antichità e Medioevo*, Tardantico e Medioevo Studi e Strumenti di Archeologia (Rome, 2002).

bath building surged with in the nascent Islamic Empire and became (and in many areas

continue to be) synonymous with Muslim society in subsequent centuries. Even though,

Early Islamic baths are often included in studies of both Classical and later Islamic

bathhouses, they are generally considered to represent an intermediary form of bath

architecture.[4] However, the transformation of the Roman bath into the medieval Islamic

hammam, while often alluded to, has yet to be mapped out. Moreover, literature on the

hammam in general is relatively slim when compared to scholarship on other building

types in Islamic cultures, such as mosques, caravanserais, madrasas, mausoleums, or

palaces. In fact, bathhouses are rarely discussed in detail in surveys of Islamic

architecture.[5]

In addition, much of the early scholarship devoted to the *hammam* does not address

historical topics, but rather either recount the medicinal and therapeutic benefits of

frequenting the *hammam* or describe the *hammam* within the context of an exotic Orient.[6]

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[4] See for example, A. Lezine, *Architecture romaine d'Afrique: recherches et mise au point* (Paris, 1961) 28-35; M. Écochard and C. Le Cœur, *Les bains de Damas* 2 vol. (Beirut, 1942-3).

[5] For general works on Islamic architecture see for example, George Michell, ed. *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*, reprinted ed. (New York, 1995); R. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning* (New York, 1994); and R. Yeomans, *The Story of Islamic Architecture* (New York, 2000).

[6] See for example, P. Conner, "On the bath: Western Experience of the Hammam," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* (1987): 34-42. Travel literature and/or early accounts of the *hammam* are too numerous to cite here, see for example, Edward W. Lane, *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* (London, 1836); Richard Madden, *Travels in Turkey, Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1824-27* (London, 1829); Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. and annotated by Malcom Jack (London, 1994); Rosaire Di Stefano, *A Flanc de Bou-Kornine: receuil de souvenirs* (Villers-sous-St. Feu, 1985);

Indeed, a mid-nineteenth century British author and diplomat, David Urquhart, was so

impressed by the hygienic and therapeutic elements of the *hammam,* which he visited in

Spain and Morocco, that he included detailed plans for the construction of a *hammam* (or

as he coined it "Turkish Bath") in his book, *The Pillars of Hercules.*[7] Upon returning to

London, Urquhart introduced the *hammam* to the British Isles, by building several

bathhouses, the most famous of which are baths at Jermyn Street in London.[8] By the

1870s, the "Turkish Bath" had appeared through out Europe, in the major cities of the

United States, and in Sydney, Australia.[9] The Western "Turkish Bath," thus, became

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Alfred S. Gubb, *Winter in Algiers: with notes on Hammam Rirha Biskra and Other Places of Interest in Algeria* 9th ed. (London, 1912).

[7] David Urquhart, *Pillars of Hercules or a Narrative of Travels in Spain and Morocco in 1848,* 2 vols. (London, 1850). See also, N. Avcioglu, "David Urquhart and the Role of Travel Literature in the Introduction of Turkish Baths to Victorian England," in *Interpreting the Orient: Travellers in Egypt and the Near East,* eds. Paul and Janet Starkey (Ithaca, 2001), 69-81; Malcolm R Shifrin, *Victorian Turkish baths* www.victorianturkishbath (May 2004).

[8] N. Avcioglu, "Constructions of Turkish Baths as Social Reform for Victorian Society: the Case of the Jermyn Street Hammam," in *The Hidden Iceberg of Architectural History. Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Architectural Historians of Great Britain,* eds. C. Cunningham and J. Anderson (London, 1998), 59-78.

[9] The introduction of the "Turkish bath" in English speaking countries is described in the *New York Herald of Health* XLII (1892): 244-245. See also, for example, G. W. Hanger, *Public Baths in the United States* (Washington DC, 1904); Clive Faro and G. Wotherspoon, *Street Seen: A History of Oxford Street* (Melbourne, 2000); Shifrin, *Victorian Turkish Baths*; B. Ladd, "Public Baths and Civic Improvement in Nineteenth-Century German Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 14(May 1988), 372-93; P. W. Robinson, "The Delights of the hammam: Turkish baths in Calderdale, c.1862-c.1940," *Transaction of the Halifax Antiquarian Society* 2 (1994), 79-85; K. Feireiss, ed. *Water Temple: Gründerzeit and Jugendstil Public Baths* (London, 1994)

synonymous with health and hygiene during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[10]

In addition, the *hammam* was a popular subject with artists and writers.[11] As the paintings of the Orientalist school, such as those by Ingres and Gérome, attest, the bathhouse was, like the harem, a sensual mysterious and hence compelling and popular subject, that quintessentially represented the "enigmatic" Islamic world.[12] Even today, a visit to the *hammam* is often promoted by tourist agencies (and tourism ministries) as the ultimate experience of the "exoticness" of Islamic cultures.[13] In addition, the *hammam* has been in recent years a popular setting for movies and novels set in the Middle East and

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[10] See for example, M. Hanson, *The Curative Powers of the Turkish Bath: facts and opinions by the best medical authority in the world* (Milwaukee, 1872); Sir E. Wilson, *The Eastern, or Turkish Bath: its history, revival in Britain, and application to the purposes of heath* (London, 1861); John Fife, ed. *Manual of the Turkish Bath: heat a mode of cure and a source of strength for men and animals –from the writings of Mr. Urquhart.* (London, 1865).

[11] Since the early twentieth century, the bathhouse has also been closely associated with gay culture. For more on this topic see for example, A. Berube, "The History of Gay Bathhouses," *Journal of Homosexuality* 44 no. 3/4 (2003): 33-53; G. Chauncey, *Gay New York: the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (London, 1995), Chapter 8; W. Leap, ed. *Public Sex/Gay Space* (New York, 1999).

[12] See for example, R. Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: 2000); J. Thompson, *The East –imagined, experienced, remembered: Orientalist Nineteenth Century Painting* (Dublin, 1988); H. Gill, *The Language of French Orientalist Painting* (Lewiston, NY, 2003); G. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Leon Gérome with a Catalogue Raisonné* (London, 1986); V. Bajou-Charpentreau, *Monsieur Ingres* (Paris, 1999); N. MacMaster and T. Lewis, "Orientalism: from Unveiling to Hyperveiling," *Journal of European Studies* 28 no. 1-2 (March/June 1998), 121-135.

[13] See for example, http://www.turizm.net/turkey/tips/turkishbath.html; http://www.yementourism.com; http://granadainfo.com/hammam/bathsindex.htm. In addition, "bath" products associated with the *hammam*, such as towels, soaps and pumice stones, are also often sold as tourist souvenirs.

North Africa.[14] Despite the popularity of the *hammam*, a comprehensive monograph

devoted to its history and its role in Islamic cultures has yet to be written.[15] However, the

relevance of early Islamic bathhouses lies not only in their relationship to Classical baths

or to the later *hammams*, but also in the inferences that can be drawn from these baths that

allow for a better understanding of Early Islamic cultural history.

The only extant examples of Early Islamic bath architecture date to the Umayyad

period. Both the literary and archaeological evidence indicate that baths were important

and prevalent features of the Umayyad architectural landscape. Not only were existing

bathhouses renovated and reused during this period, but many new ones were also built. As

is discussed in the next section in more detail, there are at least a dozen extant Umayyad

baths in Bilad al-Sham, which represent a stylistically and geographical cohesive group.

Arguably, these bathhouses illustrate better than any other early Islamic architectural

grouping the relationship between the pre-Islamic and Islamic architecture. The Umayyad

baths appear in a variety of contexts, including administrative complexes, military camps,

cities, palaces, as well as agricultural complexes.

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[14] For films, see for example, *Hammam: the Turkish Bath* (1997); and *Asfour Stah* (1990). For novels see for example, Faysal Khartash, *Hammam al-niswan* (Beirut, 1999); C. Delay, *Le Hammam* (Paris, 1985); V. Staraselski, *Le Hammam: nouvelles* (Paris, 1993); K. Nasseri, *Chroniques d'un enfant du hammam* (Paris, 1998).

[15] There have been a few picture-books that are devoted to the *hammam*, see for example, P. Meunier, ed. *Hammams: les Bains Magiciens* (Paris, 2000). Other works often explore the *hammam* as part of a universal history of bathing, public baths, and bathrooms, see for example, F. de Bonneville, *Le Livre du Bain* 2nd ed. (Paris, 2000); M. Aaland, *Sweat: the Illustrated History and Description of the Finnish Sauna, Islamic Hammam, Japanese Mushi-buro, Mexican Temescal, and American Indian and Eskimo Sweat Lodge* (Santa Barbara, CA, 1978).

The acceptance and popularity of the bath in Early Islamic culture is often

attributed to the importance in Islam of physical cleanliness and the stipulation for ritual

ablution (*ghusl* and/or *wudu'* depending on the level of impurity) for those who are ritually

impure.[16] While religion may have contributed to the popularity of baths in the first two

Islamic centuries, primary literary sources (both Arabic and non-Arabic) pertinent to this

period give no indication that baths were adopted for this purpose. Rather, when one

examines (as will be detailed below) the literary material and the archaeological record, it

becomes clear that the context of bathhouses in early Islamic and Umayyad society was

secular rather than religious. Indeed, the bath played an important role in Umayyad culture,

and its adoption and transformation by the Umayyads cogently demonstrate that Umayyad

architecture was not only cognizant of but also consciously engaged with the architectural

traditions of pre-Islamic Late Antiquity. Therefore, given that the roots of the Umayyad

bath lie within the context of late antique architecture of Bilad al-Sham, it is necessary to

examine the evolution of bath architecture in this region during the pre-Islamic period.

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[16] *Ghusl* is literally the ablution of the whole human body that is performed after the believer declares his/her intention (*niyya*) to do so. Ghusl is obligatory as a purification following acts of a sexual nature, following menstruation, and lochia. *Ghusl* is also performed on a corpse prior to burial. Islamic law (*fiqh*) recognizes many other forms of *ghusl* which are *sunna* and the list and the number vary according to the different schools or sects. In general *ghusl* is recommended prior to the Friday prayer, the two feasts (*Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*), as well as before performing the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). For more on *ghusl* and ritual purification in Islam, see for example, G. H. Bousquet, "La Purete Rituelle en Islam (Étude de fiqh et de sociologie religieuse)," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 138 (1950): 53-71; I. Goldziher, *Die Zahiriten* (Leipzig, 1884).

3.2 Baths and Bathing in a Christian World: the Syrian Bathhouse in Pre-Islamic Late Antiquity

The Architecture of the Bathhouse between the Third and the Seventh Century CE

Cleansing the body is a central component of the human experience. Indeed, the importance of cleansing the body is not only a hygienic practice, but also one that has been associated with ritual cleanliness for millennia. Bathing structures, such as basins or bathtubs, had long fulfilled these needs. However, the story of the bath as a social space starts sometime in the fifth century CE, with the introduction of the Greek gymnasium. By including bathing facilities into its regular program, the gymnasium created the social and architectural context for one of the first forms of communal bathing, and exerted a formative influence in the subsequent development of baths. The Greek public bath (*balaneion*) existed at least from the fifth century BCE, [1] and was introduced into Bilad al-Sham by the mid-fourth century CE. [2] The gymnasium was conceived as an institution for both the intellectual and physical training of the youth (*ephebes*), and was an integral part of Greek culture. In fact, the dissemination of Hellenic culture went together with the diffusion and adoption of the gymnasium.

Gymnasia became centers of learning, where traveling scholars, rhetoricians, philosophers, doctors, poets, and musicians were encouraged to stay and give lectures or performances. [3] The larger audiences and increased educational activities necessitated the

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[1] R. Ginovés, *Balaneutiké, Rescherches sur le bain dans l'antiquité greque* (Paris, 1962), 6.

[2] An exact date for the introduction of Greek baths into Bilad al-Sham is impossible due to the scarcity of archaeological remains.

[3] Yegül, *Baths and Bathing,* Chapter 1.

construction of libraries and auditoria in many of the Hellenistic gymnasia. In addition,

banquets, sacrifices, games, and inauguration anniversaries of deified rulers were also

associated with gymnasia.[4] It was through the gymnasia that Hellenistic culture was

primarily disseminated into Bilad al-Sham.

By the second half of the fourth century BCE, the gymnasium had developed a

more or less standardized form: a peristyle building with rooms around a colonnaded

courtyard, and an extension of sports grounds and running tracks outside.[5] At about the

same time, hot water bathing facilities were added to the gymnasia. The inclusion of hot

water bathing led to the modification of existing gymnasia to include thermal facilities,

which in time, came to dominate all the other parts of the building. In addition, new

structures that were solely dedicated to bathing were erected. During the early stages, these

structures were simple and functional buildings characterized by a number of rectangular

or irregularly shaped rooms clustered around one or more circular chambers (*tholoi*).

Hipbaths often lined these rooms, but the *tholoi* were designed specifically for hot bathing.

In the simpler structures, these rooms were heated by braziers or by the steam from the hot

water. More elaborate baths used a furnace-boiler combination embedded in the thick wall.

The furnace was stoked from the outside, while the boiler supplied hot water directly to the

bathing room. These baths eventually replaced previous bathing practices (which had taken

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[4] A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City* (Oxford, 1940), 221-23, 325; Yegül, *Baths and Bathing*, 8.

[5] Yegül, *Baths and Bathing*, 9-10.

place in private individual basins or tubs) with communal bathing. Thus, the cleansing of

the body became associated with a social meaning.

By the second century BCE, Rome had replaced Greece as the dominant power in

Mediterranean. At this same time a form of the Greek bath was adopted by the Romans.[6]

The Roman bath quickly spread throughout the Empire and by the second century CE

replaced the Hellenistic-style baths in the eastern portion of the Empire.[7]

Under the Romans, important changes to bath design were introduced. (Given the

scope of this dissertation, it would be impossible to cover all the details associated with the

development and regional variations of the Roman bath. Therefore, I will give a general

outline of the development, main features, and functions of the Roman bath.) At this time,

the layout of the bath started to correspond to gradations in temperature. This was largely

made possible by important discoveries in heating techniques particularly the hypocaust

system of heating the floor -which was raised on short pillars (*pilae*)- by hot air. [8] The

suspended floor (often referred to as a *suspensura*) was, usually, a relatively thin layer of

mortar/concrete (0.2-0.4 meters thick) with crushed brick and gravel aggregate, topped by

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[6] While most scholars agree that Greek baths had a strong influence on Roman baths, the exact origins of the Roman baths is still debated. For a cogent assessment of the main hypotheses regarding their origin and development, see G. Fagan, "The Genesis of the Roman Public Bath: Recent Approaches and Future Directions," *American Journal of Archaeology* 105 no. 3 (July 2001), 403-26.

[7] For more on the pre-Roman baths in Bilad al-Sham see for example, David B. Small, "Late Hellenistic Baths in Palestine," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 266 (1987): 59-74.

[8] The true hypocaust was developed by the end of the 2nd century BCE, seemingly independently, in both Greece (the fourth phase of the baths at Olympia) and Italy (Stabian Baths, Pompeii). Yegul, 356-370.

a thin layer of lime mortar as bedding for a marble slab or mosaic paving. This floor is laid

on a smooth bed of either tiles or stone slabs, supported at their corners by the pillars. The

pillars, which varied in height between 0.6-1.5 meters, were generally constructed of

bricks, stone or even terracotta pipe sections.[9] The introduction of wall heating systems by

the early first century CE was another crucial technological advance that facilitated the

heating of large spaces. The heating of the walls was typically done by using either hollow

terracotta box-tiles (*tubuli*) or by *tegulae mammatae* (large square tiles with projecting

bosses at their corners). *Tubuli*, which opened onto the hypocaust, were fastened on the

structural surface of the wall (by either mortar or metal clamps) and then covered by a thin

layer of mortar that was subsequently encrusted by a marble or a stucco veneer. The

tegulae mammatae were attached to the structural wall with either nails or clamps, with the

hollow space between the tiles and the wall communicating with the hypocaust. These

innovations allowed for more accurate climate control in the various rooms of the baths:

the heated area of the wall surface could be varied and the number of heated walls was

controlled. The heated walls also provided protection against moisture condensation: Even

though the air in the room could be quite steamy, the walls stayed dry.[10] The heart of the

entire heating system was the furnace (*praefurnium*), which was generally a simple low

brick arch that opened directly to the hollow space under the floor of the room to be

heated. The opening (often referred to as the "stoke hole") varied in size, and often spur

walls were extended into the hypocaust to increase the draft. Most of these furnaces also

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid, 363-365.

heated the boiler(s), which supplied the adjacent room(s) and pools with hot water. A

bronze boiler was typically placed over the furnace. Boilers were encased in masonry for

heat insulation. The fire was made directly on the floor under the arch, or inside the short

projecting walls directly in front of the arch. The fuel most commonly used was wood,

although olive refuse was also often used in areas where olives were a major crop,[11] such

as in many regions of Bilad al-Sham. The heating system derived its advantages from its

low drafts and non-stop, slow burning qualities, because temperatures produced in the

furnace were not very high. The boiler supplied the adjacent room(s) and pools with hot

water.[12] The number of furnaces and boilers depended on the size and the complexity in

design of the bath. [Figure 21]

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[11] R. J. Forbes, "Heating" in *Studies in Ancient Technology*. Vol. VI 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden, 1966), 36-57.

[12] For more on the heating and water management of Roman baths see for example, T. Rook, "The Development and Operation of Roman Hypocausts," *American Journal of Archaeological Science* 5(1978), 269-82; and H. Mandersheid, "The Water Management of Greek and Roman Baths," in O. Wikander, ed. *Handbook of Ancient Water Technology* (Leiden, 2000): 467-535.
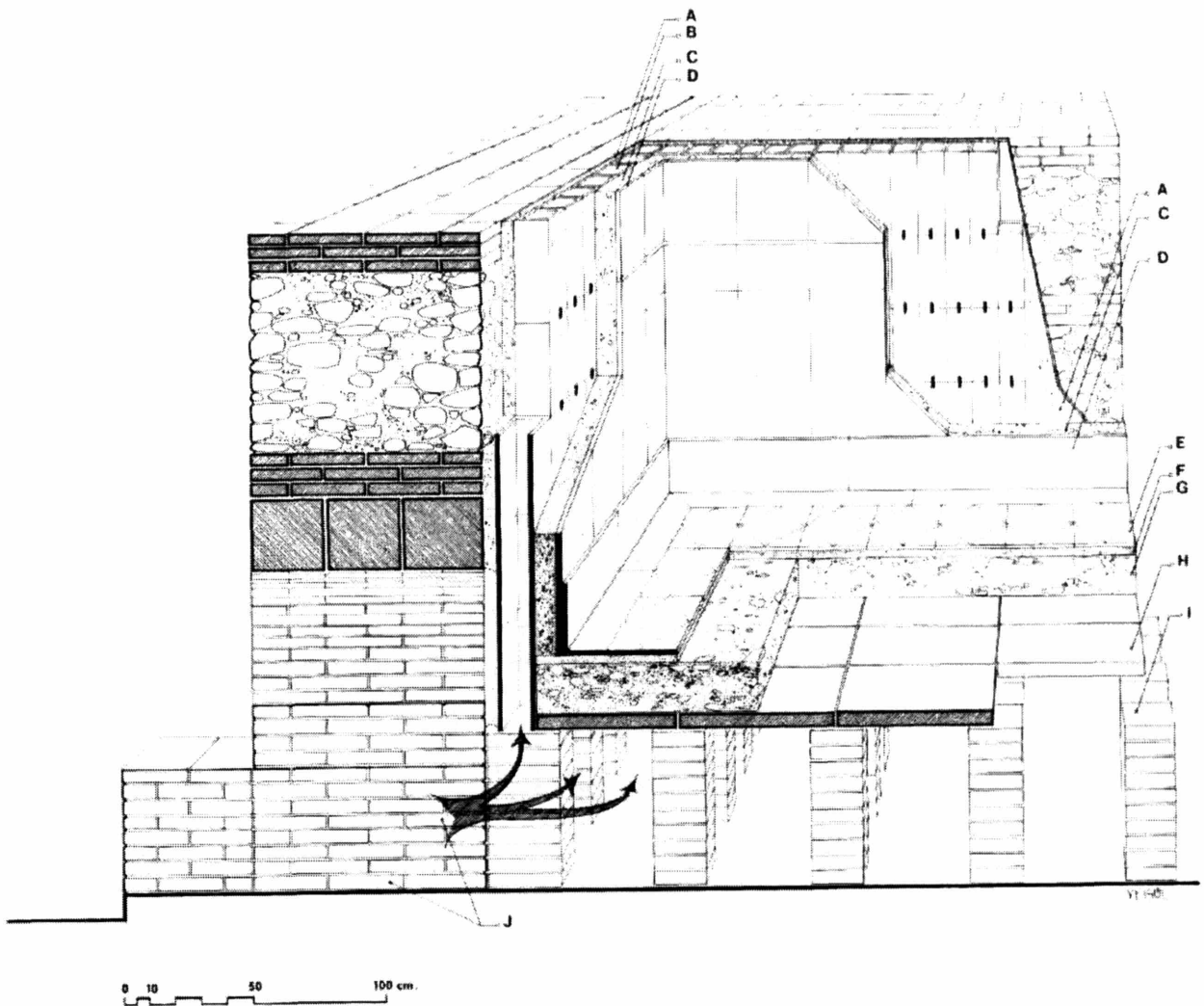
Figure 21   Schematic Hypocaust System of a Roman Bath after Yegül. A. lime mortar;
B. *tubuli*; C. crushed brick mortar; D. marble revetment; E. floor paving; F. mortar; G. sub-
floor mortar/concrete; H. tiles (*bipedales*); I. Brick pillars (*pilae*); J. furnace opening
(*praefurnium*). Reproduced in Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, p. 358, Fig. 442.

Classifying Roman bath architecture typologically and chronologically is a

complex (and in many ways an impossible) task. The shape of baths varied greatly, with

variables such as regional variations and patronage influencing their design. Furthermore,

the design of Roman baths did not change too much over time, which makes it difficult to

classify baths in chronological terms. However, even in the most experimental of Roman

baths the plan roughly reflects the order in which the rooms were used: a sequence of cold,

tepid and hot rooms (*frigidarium*, *tepidarium* and *caldarium* respectively). Outside this

circuit, baths also usually included the *palaestra* (where a visit to the baths often began

with physical exercise), a swimming pool (*natatio*), sweating rooms (the *sudatorium* and

laconicum), a changing room (*apodyterium*), as well as latrines. [Figure 22]

**Figure 22   Model of a Typical Roman Bath at the Saalsburg Museum. Reproduced by
Barbara McManus on http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/bathmodel3.jpg**

In Roman society bathing was rooted in the rhythm and structure of daily life. The

warm, clear water, the shiny marble surfaces, the steamy atmosphere of vaulted rooms all

created an atmosphere of relaxation, comfort and wellbeing. In addition, the apparent

classless world of nudity encouraged friendship and intimacy. Bathing was also a prelude

to and part of the preparation for the pleasurable experience of dinner, an artful and highly

social affair that was the culmination of the Roman day.[13]

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[13] Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World*, 100-143. For more on the bath as a locus
of leisure and relaxation in the Roman world, see for example, A. Dalby, *Empire of
Pleasure: Luxury and Indulgence in the Roman World* (London, 2000).

Roman baths can be divided into two main types: *thermae* and *balneae*, although at the time the two terms were not rigorously differentiated. Publicly funded *thermae* were exceptionally large baths similar to the Greek gymnasia and incorporated hygienic, athletic, recreational, educational and social activities. [Figure 23a] Whereas the *balneae* were smaller structures that were not conceived as monuments to uphold a civic image. *Balneae* were often experimental in design and subject to local variations. [Figure 23b] While both *thermae* and *balneae* were common throughout Bilad al-Sham, the majority of both Roman and late antique baths in this region belong to the *balneae* category.
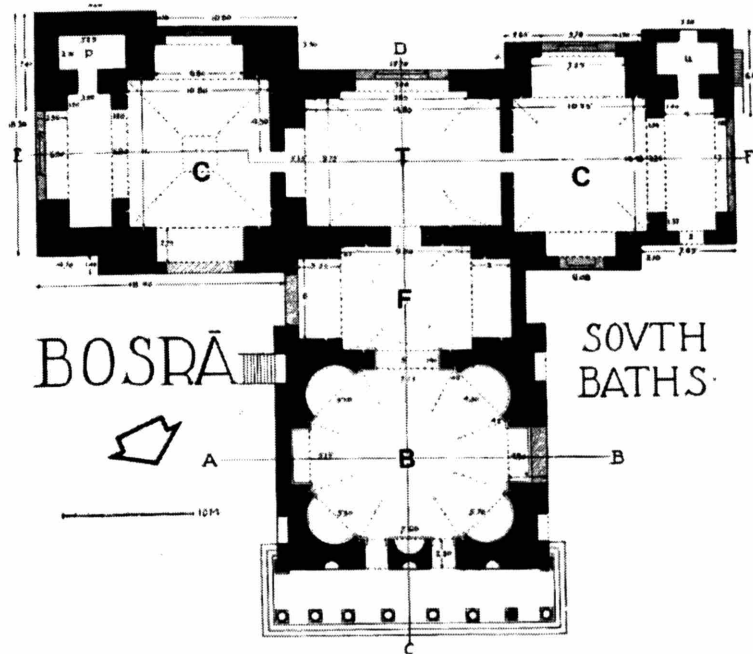
Figure 23a   **Plan of the South Baths (*thermae*) at Bosra, Syria, mid-second century CE. After H. C. Butler, *Ancient Architecture in Syria. Southern Syria*, Section A. Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions in Syria in 1904-5 and 1909 (Leiden, 1919), reproduced in Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, p. 328, fig. 415 (top)**
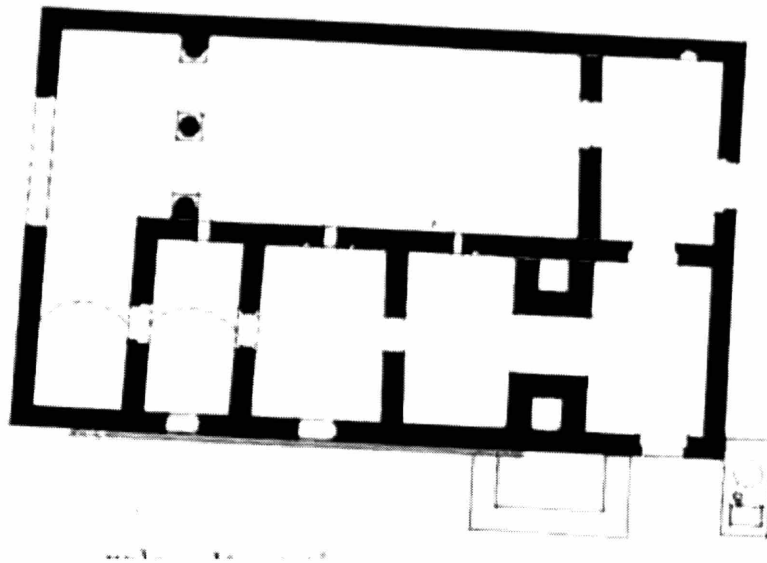
Figure 23b   Plan of the Late Roman balneum at Sinsarah, Syria, third to fourth century, CE. Reproduced in Georges Tate, *Les Campagnes de La Syrie du Nord du IIe au VIIe Siècle*. Vol. 1, Institute Français D'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, (Paris, 1992) p. 70, fig. 105.

The earliest Roman baths in Bilad al-Sham came with the conquest of the region, and were often associated with legionary settlements. Most of these baths were of the small-bath category. For example, the bath at Ramat Rahel in modern day Israel was built by the soldiers of the Tenth Legion, who were stationed in Jerusalem during the second and third centuries CE.[14] In addition, the legionary baths were not only used by the Roman army, but also by the Romanized inhabitants of the adjacent towns. Such baths are found in the eastern frontier town of Dura Europos. These three baths dating to the early third century CE have a core of five rooms (emphasized by dark outlines below) and were

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[14] Aharoni, "Excavations at Ramat Rahel," *Biblical Archaeologist* 24 (1961): 112.

probably built for the civic facility, each serving a different quarter of the town.[15] [Figures 24a, 24b, and 24c]
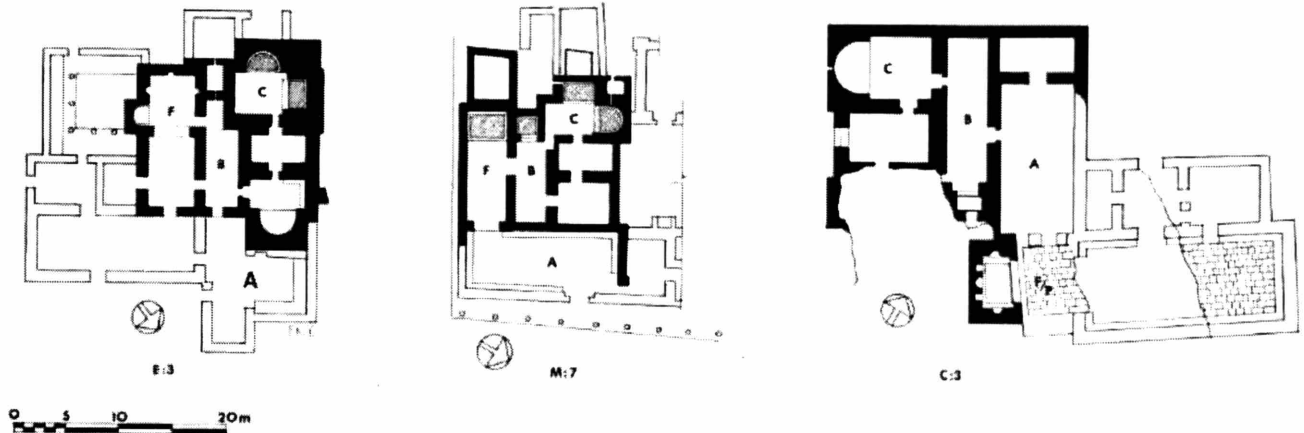
Figures 24a, 24b, 24c   Plans of Bath E-3, M-7 and C-3, Dura Europos, after Brown, "The Roman Baths," reproduced in Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, p. 339, figs. 423, 424, and 425.

In the larger Roman cities of Bilad al-Sham, most notably Antioch, several baths have been uncovered.[16] Among the half dozen baths that were uncovered in Antioch, two smaller baths, Bath E (c. 305-350 CE) and Bath A (c. 220-240 CE) correspond closely in plan to the baths of Dura Europos. The similarities can be noted in the tightly packed grouping and quasi-axial formation of the small, vaulted apsidal units of the heated zone but especially in annexed spaces that appear to have functioned as halls for reception, entertainment or lounging. [Figure 25a and Figure 25b] The composition of the smaller baths was the model on which late antique models were based.

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[15] F. E. Brown, "The Roman Baths," in *The Excavations at Dura Europas, Preliminary Report of the Sixth Season, 1932-33*, ed. M. I. Rostovtzeff (New Haven, 1936): 47-77.

[16] F. Yegül, "Baths and Bathing in Roman Antioch," in *Antioch: the Lost City of Ancient City*, C. Kondoleon, ed. (Princeton, 2000): 146-162.
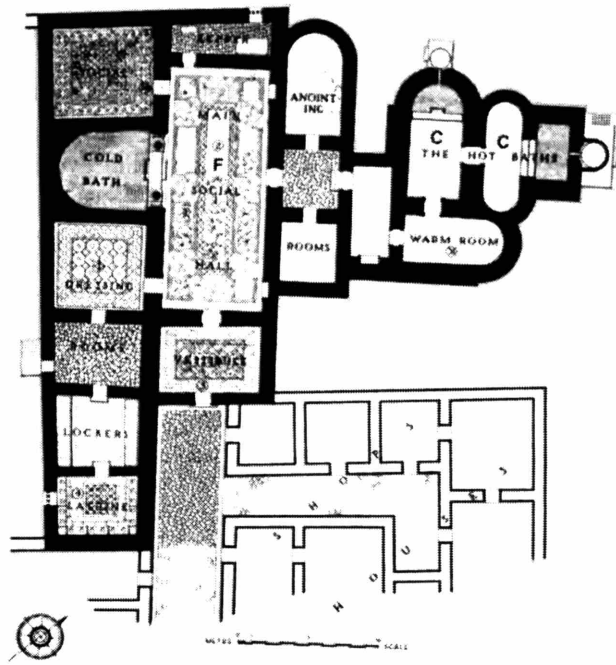
Figure 25a   **Plan of Bath E in Antioch, after Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Princeton, 1947), reproduced in Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, p. 340, figs. 426.**
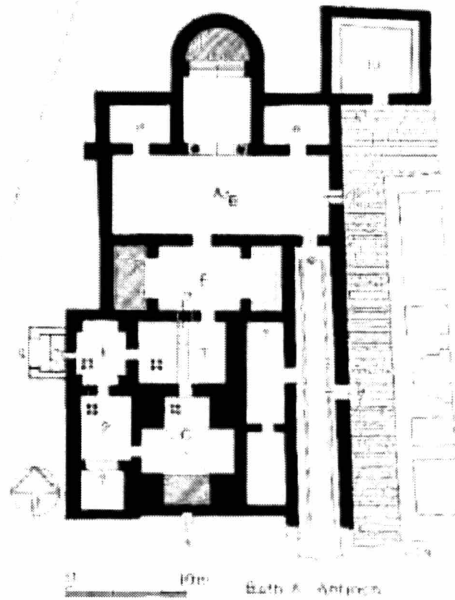

Figure 25b   **Plan of Bath A in Antioch, reproduced in Yegül, "Baths and Bathing in Roman Antioch," in *Antioch: the Lost City of Ancient City*, C. Kondoleon, ed. (Princeton, 2000): Fig. 7.**

However, baths were not only built by the Romans but were also adopted by the

local populations of Bilad al-Sham. By the second century CE, Roman style baths were

incorporated into the architectural repertoire of the Nabataeans, and several examples of

Nabataean baths survive from that period (in Petra, Mampsis, Oboda, and Wadi Rum).[17]

Like the other Roman baths in the region, the Nabataean examples also belong to the

balneae category. One important example of such a bathhouse is located in Wadi Rum in

the Hisma Desert in Jordan where the remains of a Nabatean "Villa"-Bath complex, known

as the Eastern Complex (dated between the first and second centuries CE), were recently

excavated. The Complex is located just east of the Nabataean temple. Excavations have

uncovered a luxurious "Villa" that included paved courses, covered painted plaster walls

and imported shells and a bronze female figurine. The small bath adjacent to the "Villa"

has an apodyterium, a frigidarium, a pool, a room that probably functioned as a sweat

room or as a tepidarium, as well as a caldarium.[18] [Figure 26a and Figure 26b] Unlike

Roman bathhouses, no hypocausts have been uncovered. However, a great deal of gray-

faced wall plaster was found in the soil fill in the *tepidarium* and *caldarium*. This darkened

plaster is present on at least two successive layers of plastering, and indicates that soot

accumulated while the plaster was still on the walls. This would suggest that both the

warm and hot rooms were heated by a brazier rather than by a hypocaust. It is significant

that the Nabataeans who settled at Wadi Rum would go to the trouble of constructing such

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[17] A. Negev, *Nabatean Archaeology Today*. Hagop Kevorkian Series on Near Eastern Art and Civilization (New York, 1986), 36, 43-45, 48-49.

[18] D. Dudley and B. Reeves, "The Wadi Ramm Recovery Project: Preliminary Report of the 1996 Season," *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* XLI no. 16 (1997): 81-106.

an elaborate bathhouse. This bath is located in a region where the annual water supply averages only 95 mm a year. The construction of a multi-room bathhouse in this location must have been a very conscious decision. The Nabataean's motivation for constructing this bath may have been to provide a luxury retreat for an important person, as a source of revenue from travelers on the caravan route, or to fulfill a purification requirement of Nabataean religion (as many baths are located in close proximity to Nabatean temples.)[19] Likely, the true answer encompasses all three possibilities. Unfortunately, however, the role of baths in Nabataean culture remains unexplored. What is significant for the purposes of this dissertation are the parallels that can be drawn to the later Umayyad bathhouses that were also built (often adjacent to luxurious residences) in the arid regions of Bilad al-Sham.
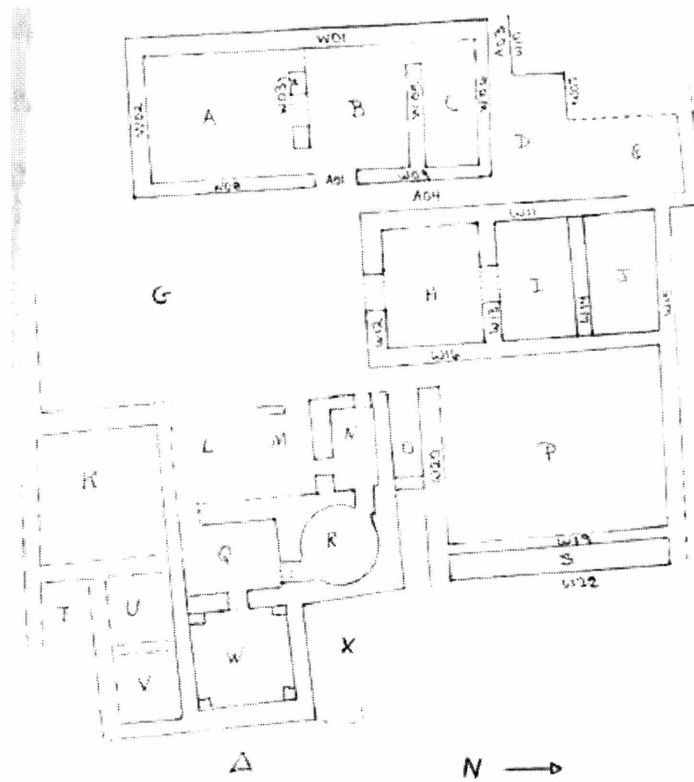
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[19] Ibid. 90-101.

Figure 26a   Sketch Plan of the Eastern Complex at Wadi Rum: The "Villa" (Rooms: A,B, C, P, H, I, J); the Bath (Rooms: L, M, N, O, Q, R, T, U, V) and Couryard (G). Reproduced from D. Dudley and B. Reeves, "The Wadi Ramm Recovery Project: Preliminary Report of the 1996 Season," *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* XLI no. 16 (1997): Fig. 1.

Figure 25b   The Nabataean Temple and the Eastern Complex (in the Foreground) at Wadi Rum. (Photograph by Conrad Schmidt)

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The translation of Roman bathhouses into a late antique environment was accompanied by alterations to their plan and size. These changes became apparent in the fifth century CE. One clear development was the growing preference for smaller bathhouses,[20] evident in the substantial modification of the majority of existing *thermae* complexes and the modest size of new baths.[21] For example, the central baths at Gadara/Umm Qays underwent a major renovation in the fifth century. Three large interconnecting rooms in the center of the bath were redesigned to reduce the size of the *caldarium* and to disconnect it from the *tepidarium*. A similar process is evident at Hammat-Gader/Emmatha, where the thermal mineral bath complex was substantially redesigned in the fifth century. Three outer warm pools were paved over while a large water pool was converted into a water installation with fountains.[22] Several factors contributed to the late-antique preference for smaller baths: namely the decline in the economy (discussed above), the reconfiguration of the late antique city (discussed above), as well as the advent of Christianity (discussed below).

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[20] It should be noted here that large baths (*thermae*) continued to be built, albeit in much smaller numbers. Several such baths were built in Antioch, at Scythopolis/Baysan; and at Caesarea. For the baths at Antioch, see for example, R. Stillwell, ed. *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*. (Princeton, 1941): 19-23; For Baysan/Scythopolis, see Tsafrir and Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis-Bet Shean in the fourth to seventh centuries," 113, 131-2; for Caesarea see, K. Houlm, *King Herod's Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (New York, 1988), 182-4.

[21] Kennedy, "From *Polis* to *Madina*," 8-11.

[22] Y. Hirschfeld, "Proposed Reconstruction of the Baths Complex and its Functions," in Y. Hirschfeld et al. *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader. Final Report* (Jerusalem, 1997) 125-155.

The majority of new baths that were built during late antiquity also demonstrate this preference for smaller baths. Several known examples from this period in Bilad al-Sham clearly illustrate the shape of bathhouses in pre-Islamic late antiquity. For example, there are two small bathhouses built in the Negev desert (at Abdah/Avdat and Ruhaybah).[23] These sixth-century bathhouses also belong to the *balnea* tradition, and consist of three small bathing rooms with a larger *frigidarium*.[24] However, the best examples of late-antique baths (and the closest to the later Umayyad bathhouses) are in northern Bilad al-Sham. As group these baths are among the best preserved in late antiquity and therefore on evidence of these baths, certain trends can be ascribed to late-antique bath architecture in Bilad al-Sham: the disappearance of the *palaestra*, the reduction of the *frigidarium*, the appearance of a spacious bath hall with a fountain or a pool, and the replacement of a large communal pool by small pools.[25]

One of the best-studied examples of this group is the bath at Serjilla (473 CE).[26] This building is composed of two core elements: on the north, a large rectangular hall with an interior balcony supported on Corinthian columns, and on the south a number of smaller bathing rooms arranged in a row next to it. Roman-style hypocausts and an adjacent

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[23] The bathhouse at Ruhaybah no longer exists, but was described in the early twentieth century.

[24] J. Shereshevski, *Byzantine Urban Settlements in the Negev Desert* (Beer-Sheva, 1991), 195.

[25] G. Charpentier, "Les Bains de Sergilla," *Syria* 71 (1994): 113-42; Yegül, *Baths and Bathing*, 329-339.

[26] The baths at Sergilla were first published in the late nineteenth century in M. de Vogüe, *Syrie centrale. Architecture civile et religieuse du Ier au VIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1865), pl. 55.

praefutnium heat the *caldarium*, last of the small rooms. Adjacent to the building is a rock-hewn cistern, which provided the needed water for the town of baths to function[27] While it is unclear how the large hall functioned within the context of bath architecture, it has been suggested that it served as an apodyterium-lounge area, which served as a changing room as well as a sort of community center. This combination indeed does embody the two roles of the public bathhouse: a place to get clean and to socialize. [Figure 27].

The role of the bathhouse as a meeting place is highlighted by the bath's proximity to a two-story meeting hall (commonly identified as an *andron*), which is separated form the bathhouse by a paved, open courtyard, but is definitely part of the complex.[28] [Figure 28] Archaeologists, most notably Butler, Tchalenko and Tate, have classified any building in this region that has a large meeting hall (that is not a church or a bath) as an *andron*. However the exact function of an *andron* is unclear and the *andron* has been ascribed the role of a community center, a chamber of commerce, a mayoral office, a banquet hall, and in this rare instance, according to Butler, a "café."[29] In short, the *andron* is best described as a meeting place.[30]

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[27] Chapentier, "Les Bains de Sergilla," 130-40.

[28] Butler, *Architecture and Other Arts*, (New York, 1903), 165.

[29] Ibid. 28-29; H. C. Butler, *Architecture. Section B. Northern Syria*. Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria 1904-5 and 1909 (Princeton, 1920), 123.

[30] For more on the *andron*, see, G. Tate, *Les Campagnes de La Syrie du Nord*, 72-77; and I. Peña, *Christian Art of Byzantine Syria* E, Brophy and F. Reina, trans. (Madrid, 1996), 185-89.
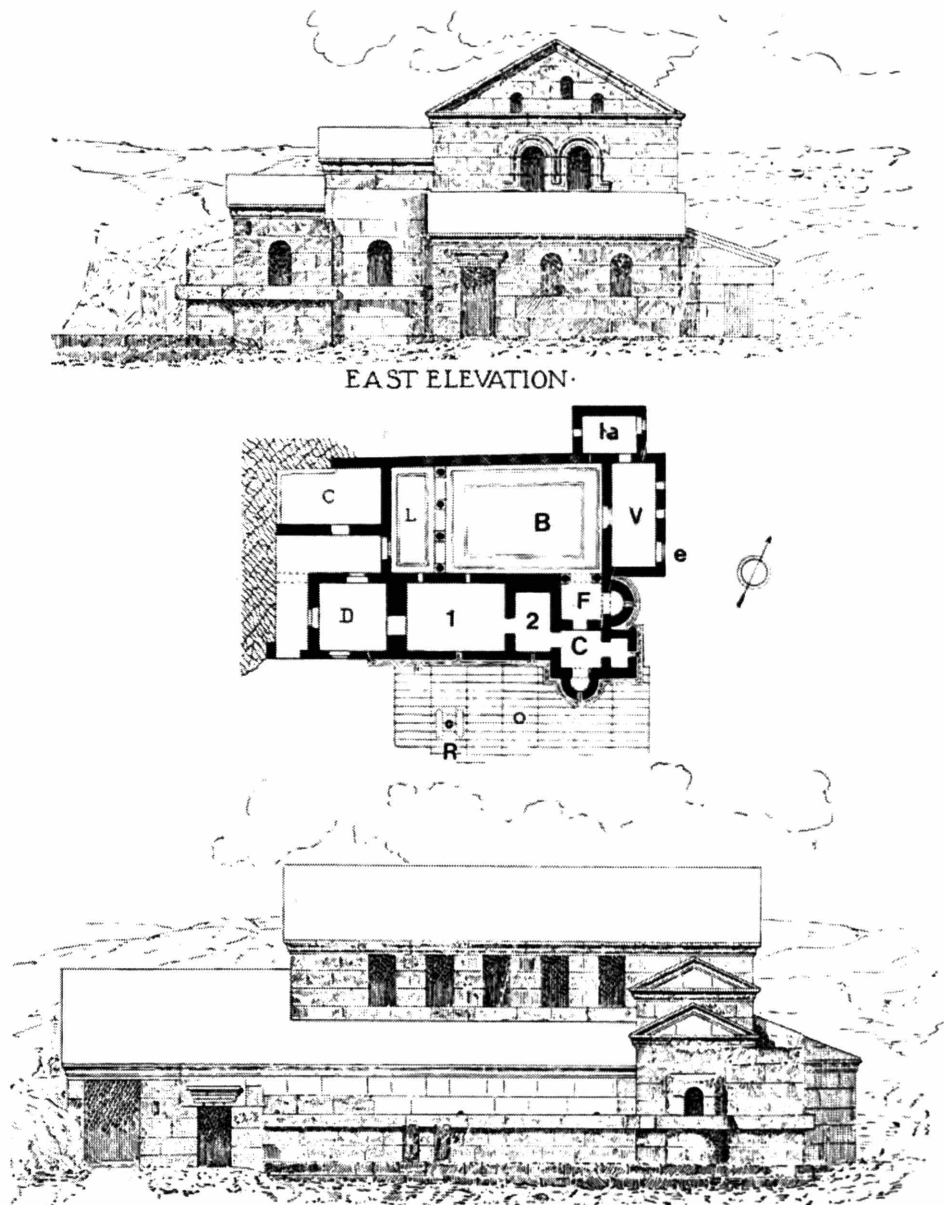
Figure 27 **Restored Plan and Elevations of the baths at Serjilla, Syria, 473 CE, showing the reduction in the size of the heated rooms and the introduction of a larger lounge-apodyterium. After Butler, reproduced in Yegül, *Baths and Bathing*, p. 332, Fig. 417.**
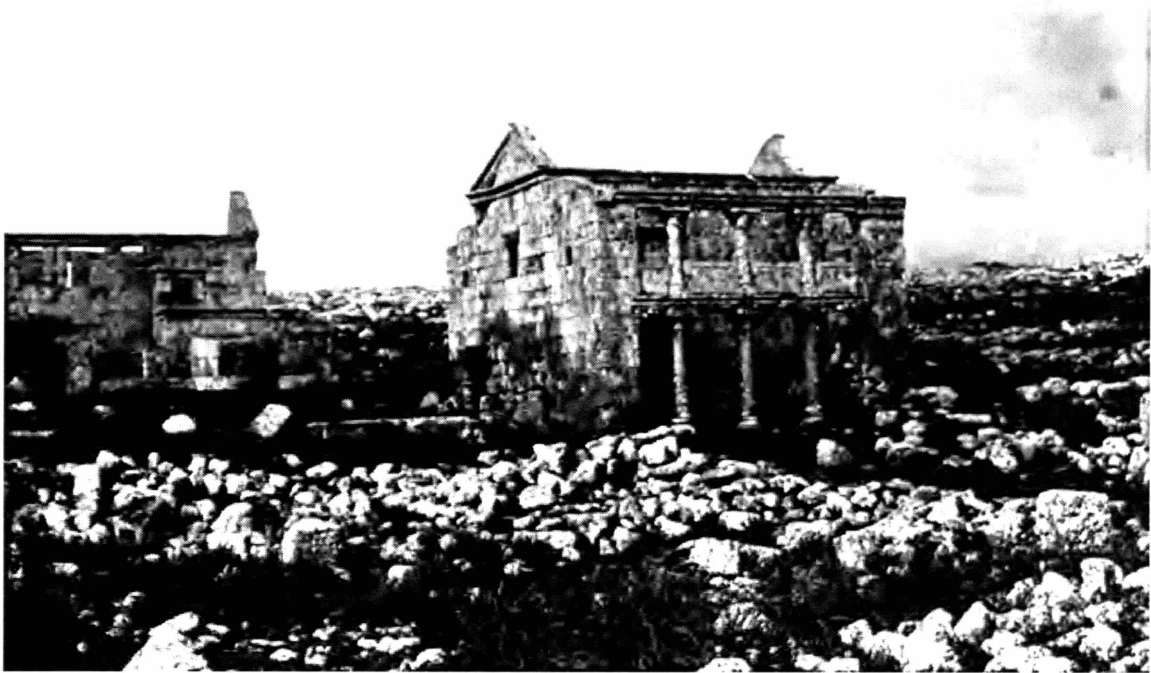
Figure 28   **General View of the Baths and the Andron at Serjilla, photographed in 1900 by Gertrude Bell. Gertrude Bell Photographic Archive B203, Reproduced on http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/photos/B_203.htm.**

The plan of the bath at Serjilla is closely paralleled in two smaller sixth-century baths in Mijleyya and Sinsarah, also in the limestone massif region of Bilad al-Sham. Both baths have the same double-core arrangement, a large rectangular apodyterium-lounge on the north, placed alongside five small chambers, three of which served as the bathing rooms and two as changing rooms.[31] [Figure 29a and Figure 29b]

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[31] G. Tate, *Les Campagnes de La Syrie du Nord du IIe au VIIe Siècle.* Vol. 1, Institute Français D'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, (Paris, 1992) p. 70.

Figure 29a   **Plan of the Mijleyya Bath. Reproduced in Georges Tate,** *Les Campagnes de La Syrie du Nord du IIe au VIIe Siècle***. Vol. 1, Institute Français D'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, (Paris, 1992) p. 70, fig. 106**
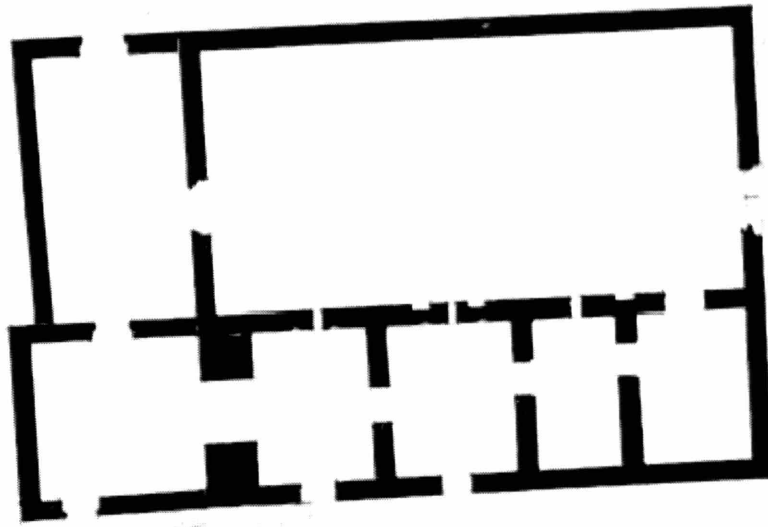

Figure 29b   **Plan of the Sinsarah Bath. Reproduced in Georges Tate,** *Les Campagnes de La Syrie du Nord du IIe au VIIe Siècle***. Vol. 1, Institute Français D'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, (Paris, 1992) p. 70, fig. 107**
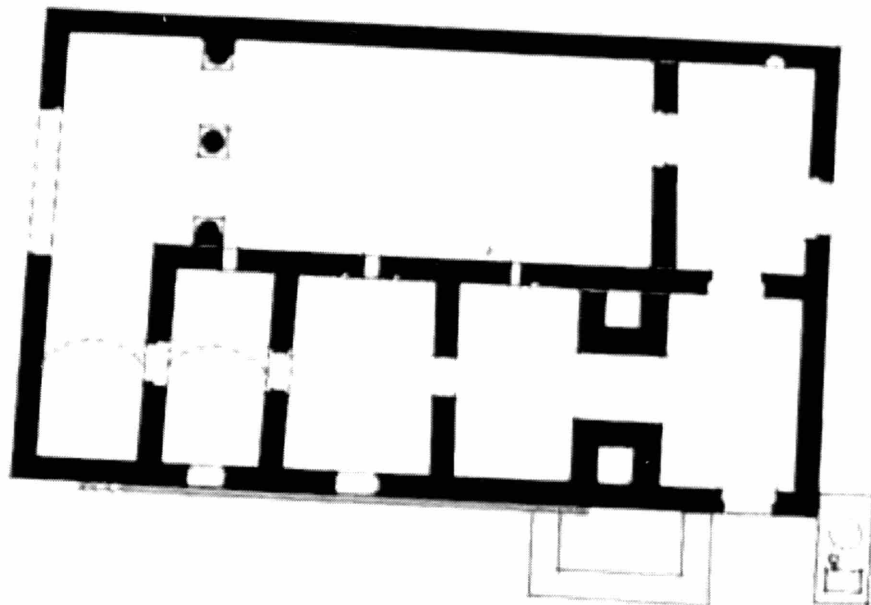
The bath model outlined above was not unique to the limestone massif. A remarkable

example that shares this model is the recently excavated bathhouse at al-Andarin/Androna

in the basalt massif (between the better known limestone massif to the west and the Syrian

desert in the east).[32] [Figure 30a] This bath provides both another example of late-antique

bath architecture in a non-urban setting as well as an index to the financial and

technological resources available in late antique Bilad al-Sham. Three seasons of

excavation have revealed a basalt and brick building (roughly 40 x 23 m) divided into four

parts: the entrance court on the east, the *frigidarium* on the north, the *tepidarium* and

caldarium rooms on the south, and the service area on the west. The relatively large size

and costly decoration of the building (in marble, glass wall mosaics, wall painting) suggest

a high level of funding. This is complemented by a verse inscriptions executed in high

relief, which record the building of the bath by a certain Thomas in c. 558 CE.[33] Even

though there is no additional apodyterium-lounge attached to this bath, the *frigidarium* is

incongruously larger than the bathing rooms [Figure 30b].

The above-discussed examples of late antique *balnea* (especially those of the

limestone massif and Androna) were the direct precedents of the Umayyad bathhouse. The

large halls, which often formed the core of the bath complex, became the most

distinguishing and characteristic design feature in the late-antique (both pre-Islamic and

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[32] Marlia Mundell Mango, "Excavations and Survey at Androna, Syria: The Oxford Team 1999," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 307-315; ibid. "Excavations and Survey at Androna, Syria: The Oxford Team 2000," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 57 (2003): 293-297.

[33] Marlia Mundell Mango, "Excavations and Survey at Androna, Syria: The Oxford Team 2000," 293.

Islamic) baths of Bilad al-Sham. More importantly, these halls replaced the Roman basilica and amphitheater. They functioned as community centers that reflected a new emphasis on political and cultural concerns for both assembly and entertainment functions. While these were, arguably, the functions of the public baths from their inception, the late antique baths of Bilad al-Sham (particularly in the Umayyad examples discussed below) elevated them to a new level of complexity and importance.
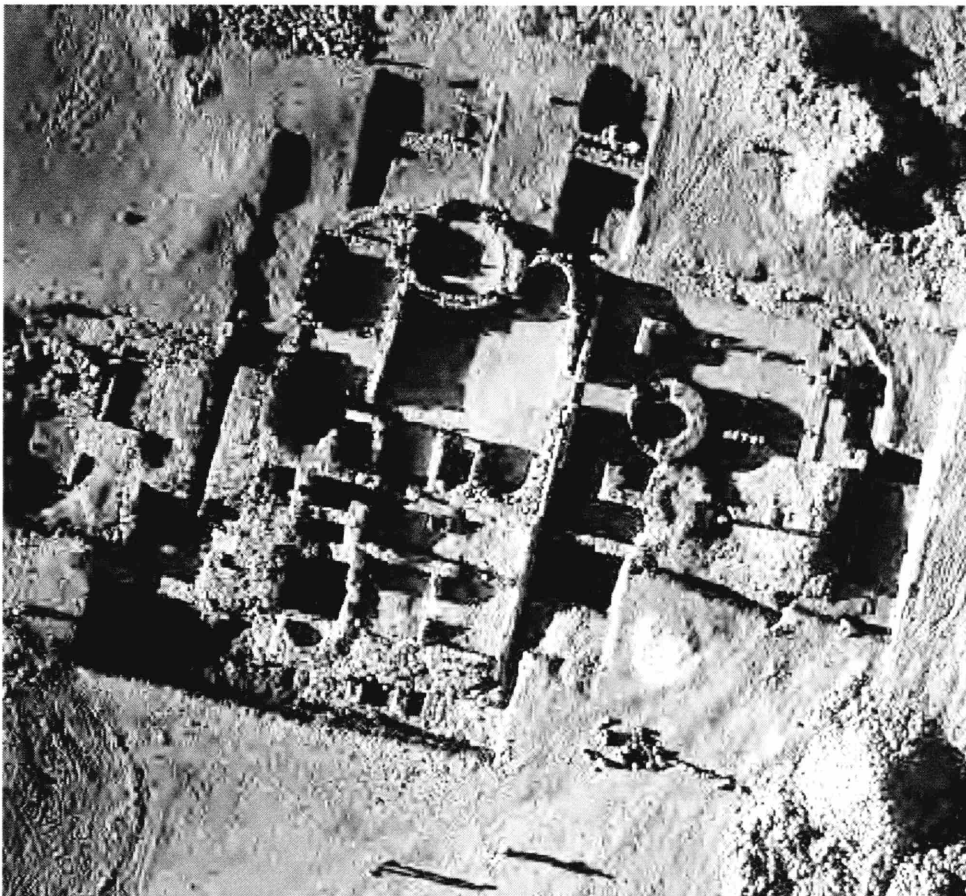

Figure 30a **Aerial view of excavations of bath (ca. 558) at Anderin, Syria (Photograph: Richard Anderson, reproduced in Marlia Mundell Mango, "Excavations and Survey at Androna, Syria: The Oxford Team 1999,"** *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* **56 (2002): Fig. 5.**

Figure 30b *Frigidarium* at the Androna Baths (Photo by Marlia M. Mango, reproduced in Marlia Mundell Mango, "Excavations and Survey at Androna, Syria: The Oxford Team 2000," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 57 (2003): Fig. 6.

Christian Attitudes towards Baths and Bathing

The preference for smaller bathhouses is also due to the advent of Christianity to the region. As discussed above, with Christianity came the replacement of civic monuments, such as the large state-sponsored *thermae*, with ecclesiastical commissions that often included smaller public baths. For instance, a new public bath commissioned by the Bishop Placcus was built in Gerasa/Jerash, and these baths were considerably smaller than the earlier Roman baths in Jerash. These baths, dated to 454 by their dedication were built adjacent to the ecclesiastical complex and were intended for the use of both clergy and the Christian citizens of Gerasa/Jerash.[34]

In addition, with the advent of Christianity, the bathhouse joined the ranks of the

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[34] Yegül, *Baths and Bathing*, 320.

pagan temple and the theaters (as discussed above) as the subject of scrutiny and criticism

by the Christian Church. However, the attitude of the early Church toward baths and

bathing is best described as ambiguous, that is, it was at once negative and positive. In fact,

bathing was never rejected or banned on grounds of Christian dogma. The closest the

Church ever came to a theologically based opposition to bathing was in the ascetic ideal

known as *alousia* ("the state of being unwashed") which was especially popular in the

remote and desert regions of Bilad al-Sham and Egypt. The practitioners of *alousia* were

mainly monks and hermits who believed that grace and saintliness could only be achieved

once one is able to completely ignore personal appearance. As an ascetic notion, *alousia*

anticipated the spirit's triumph over the body by rejecting bathing as the ultimate

expression of bodily luxury.[35]

Additionally, bathing was often condemned. According to an abbot named

Alexander, quoted in the *Pratum Spirituale*: "Our fathers sought the deserts and afflictions,

but we seek the cities and pleasures… Our fathers never washed their faces, but we are the

first to enter the public baths."[36] Even though *alousia* was practiced only by a small margin

of Christians, the notion that bathing is a physical luxury and is therefore against

spirituality was a major factor in the shaping of the Church's attitudes towards baths and

bathing. Accordingly, the rituals of a pagan institution that for centuries had symbolized

the cultivation of the physical aspects of life needed to be redefined to fit the tenets of the

new religion. Because Christianity valued modesty and self-denial, the Church was willing

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[35] Yegul, *Baths and Bathing*, 318.

[36] *Pratum Spirituale* , in Patrologia Graeca 87(3), cap. 168. col. 3036.

to accept the practice of bathing once pleasure was no longer associated with it. Hence, the

act of bathing became associated mostly with medicinal and hygienic activities.

Arguably, the curative properties associated with baths also helped the preservation

of the bathing tradition in many areas of Bilad al-Sham. Baths, and especially thermo-

mineral sites, continued to be used for "medical purposes." Some leading Church figures,

such as Saints Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, are reported to have frequented thermal

baths.[37] The role of the bath as clinic is related in the story of a member of the staff

working in the *Scrinium* of the Imperial Palace in Constantinople, who is said to have

taken ill with a spastic intestinal condition, and for two years spent his days and nights in

the capital's bathhouses hoping to relieve his pains.[38] Other sources relate that the sick,

who did not wish to expose an unpleasant physical condition to public view, preferred to

bathe during the off hours of the day or night. For example, an ailing deacon of the Hagia

Sophia during the reign of Heraclius (r. 610-641 CE), Stephanos, would go to the

bathhouse at noon or late in the evening in order not to be seen by others when bathing.[39]

In short, the Church's attitude about the medicinal benefits of bathing is perhaps best

expressed in the opinion of Barsanuphius, a hermit from Palestine, who was asked if it was

a sin to bathe if it were ordered by one's doctor. He responded: "Bathing is not absolutely

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[37] Ibid. cap. 232, co. 2922.

[38] Harry J. Magoulias, "Bathhouse, Inn, Tavern. Prostitution and the Stage as Seen in the Lives of the Saints of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," *ΕΠΕΤΗΡΙΣ: Εταιρεια Βψζαντινον Σπαδον* 38 (1971): 235.

[39] Ibid. 235.

forbidden to one who needs it –if you are ill, you need it; so it is not a sin. If a man is healthy, it cossets and relaxes the body and conduces to lust."[40]

The Christian attitude toward bathing was also reflected in the disappearance of certain phrases often found in dedications that expressed delight in the waters and the psychological effects on the bather. However, in a world where pagan values still lingered on, a certain amount of mixing symbols and terminology was inevitable. Even baths that were intended predominantly for the use of Christian communities were sometimes praised in inscriptions with the popular Late Roman descriptive formulas alluding to their "magical charm" (cariz), or the water's ability to deliver the bather from pain and care (a power attributed to the presence in the waters of pagan deities, nymphs, and Graces).[41] However, these phrases were eventually replaced by appropriate Christian symbols that sought to associate, though not necessarily equate, physical cleanliness with spiritual purity. An inscription on the lintel of the above-mentioned fifth-century bath in al-Andarin/Androna reflects the pride of the private patron and alludes to the magical charm of the waters, but here the message is unmistakably Christian: "I, Thomas, [acting] for the sake of all property owners, have given this bath, presenting this memory. What is the name of the bath? Health. Through this entering, Christ has opened for us the bath of healing."[42]

Another example of a private patron dedicating a bath to the Christian citizens of a

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[40] Quoted in A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602* v. 3 (Oxford, 1964), 328.

[41] Yegul, *Baths and Bathing*, 318.

[42] L. Robert, "Épigrammes relatives à des gouverneurs," *Hellenica* IV (1948): 80, no. 918.

town is found at the bathhouse in Serjilla (discussed above). The sentiments of the patron, named Julianos, are expressed in a mosaic dedicatory inscription in the apodyterium-lounge of the bath in which he and his wife dedicate the bathhouse to the citizens of Serjilla.[43] [Figure 31]

Figure 31   Mosaic Dedicatory inscription at the Bathhouse in Serjilla, Syria, 473 CE. Reproduced in Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, p. 333, fig. 418.

In addition, Church authorities were quick to denounce the libertine world associated with many baths. For example, the thermal baths at Emmatha/Hammat-Gader

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[43] Butler, *Architecture and Other Arts*, 288-293. Unfortunately, most of this mosaic pavement disappeared in the six years between the first and second Princeton expeditions to Syria (1899-1905).

were described in the fourth century by Epiphanius as a sinful place where the devil roams,

because men and women bathed together.[44] The "evil" of mixed bathing is also recorded by

John Moschos. The association between the devil and the sinful temptations of the baths

was quite common in late antiquity. A fifth-century version of the apocryphal Acts of Saint

John relates a story of how John exorcised a public bath from a wicked demon (reportedly

the spirit of the goddess Artemis.)[45] In another version of the same story, John confronted

and dissuaded a man from using the baths as a place where he could have relations with a

prostitute.[46] In fact, famous courtesans as well as common prostitutes met in the public

baths which were already frequented in the Roman period by prostitutes of both sexes.

Some of these baths were strictly for prostitutes and respectable ladies were not to be seen

near them.[47] Men went there not only to bathe, but to entertain their mistresses as in

sixteenth-century Italian *bagnios*. The fourth-to-sixth-century Baths uncovered in Ascalon

in 1986 by the Harvard-Chicago Expedition appear to have been of that type. The

excavator's hypothesis is supported both by a Greek exhortation to 'Enter and enjoy...'

which is identical to an inscription found in a Byzantine bordello in Ephesus, and by a

gruesome discovery: The bones of nearly one hundred newly-born infants were crammed

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[44] Epiphanius, *Panorion Haereticorum*, in *Epiphanios von Konstantia*, vol. 2 ed. K. Holl
(Leipzig, 1915), 30, 7.

[45] Yegül, *Baths and Bathing*, 317.

[46] W. Wright, trans. "The History of Saint John the Son of Zebedee," in *Apocryphal Acts of
the Apostles* v. 2 (London, 1871), 28-42.

[47] Claudine Dauphin, "Brothels, Baths and Babes: Prostitution in the Byzantine Holy
Land," *Classics Ireland* 3 (1996): 47-72.

in a sewer under the bathhouse, with a gutter running along its well-plastered bottom.[48]

Thus, the prostitutes of Ascalon (and elsewhere?) used the baths not only for enticing clients but also for surreptitiously disposing of unwanted births in the din of the crowded bathing halls. It is plausible that the monks were aware of this and that this (and not only the fear of temptation) was their main reason for equating baths with lust. Despite that, there does not seem to have been, on the part of the Church, a concerted effort to destroy the baths or to forbid bathing. In fact, baths continued to be built and frequented until the advent of Islam when they were readily adopted into that culture.

It is pertinent to note here, that the late antique Christians did not adopt bathhouses as the loci for ritual purposes. While it is true that many clerics did use the public nature of the bathhouse to conduct sermons, and readily went to the bath to get clean, the baths were rarely if ever used in a religious context. The ritual of baptism, while central sacrament of Christianity, was seldom (if ever) practiced in bathhouses, but was relegated to baptisteries. Baptisteries, in separate buildings or within a church, were erected throughout Bilad al-Sham. Perhaps the most elaborate of these is the baptism site (commonly called *al-maghtas*) on the east bank of the Jordan River. Recent excavations of this site, believed to be Biblical Bethany, where John the Baptist is believed to have baptized Jesus, has revealed several churches dating from the 2nd through the 5th centuries, as well as several plastered pools that were used for mass baptisms. [Figure 32]

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[48] L.E. Stager, 'Eroticism and Infanticide at Ashkelon', *Biblical Archaeology Review* XVII, No. 4 (July-August 1991): 5; and P. Smith and G. Kahila, 'Bones of a Hundred Infants Found in Ashkelon Sewer', *Biblical Archaeology Review* XVII, No. 4 (July-August 1991): 51

Figure 32 **Aerial view of the Byzantine Churches at the Baptism Site, Jordan (photograph courtesy of Lina Hashem)**

Another example of an early use of a pool in a baptistery dates to the early third century, from Dura Europos' *domus ecclesia*. This plaster-lined *piscina* is nearly one meter deep with a masonry ciborium was constructed on the west wall of the northwest room of the main building. It is decorated with scenes inspired from both the Old and New Testaments: Jesus as the Good Shepherd, Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, the Healing of the Paralytic, Jesus walking on the waves of Lake Tiberias, and Jesus and the Woman of Samaria.[49] Therefore, it can be ascertained that baths were not used for religious purposes, and that the shape of the late antique bathhouse was relatively unaffected by the advent of a new religion.

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[49]J. G. Davies, *The Architectural Setting of Baptism* (London, 1962), 23-25.

In addition, baths were also integral parts of episcopal palaces and monasteries. Bishops throughout the Byzantine world often built bathhouses adjacent to episcopal complexes. For example, the baths adjoining the episcopal palace in Ravenna were rebuilt and redecorated by Bishop Victor (537-545) with lavish marbles and mosaics.[50] Baths were often included in the architecture of monasteries throughout Bilad al-Sham. For example, the walled quadrilateral walls of a monastic complex founded in 474 CE by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Martyrius, just east of Jerusalem, included a refectory, a kitchen, cells, a church, tombs as well as a bath.[51] [Figure 33]
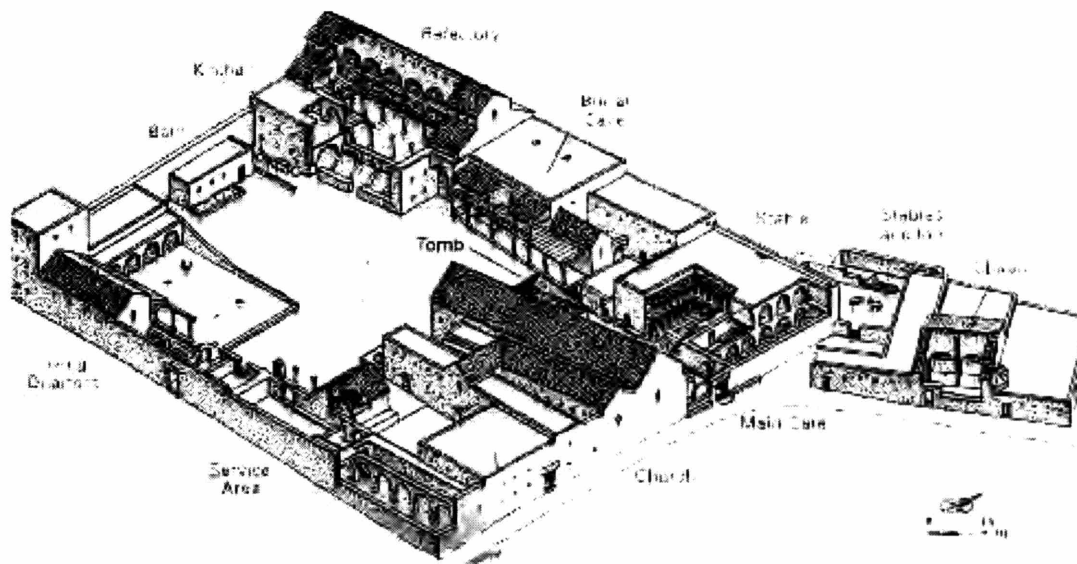

Figure 33   Reconstruction Drawing of the Monastery of Martyrius, 473 CE. Reproducedfrom Y. Hisrchfeld, The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period, p. 43.

[50] Yegul, *Baths and Bathing*, 319.

[51] Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzanitine Period* (New Haven, 1992), 42-5, 99. 197-8.

In addition, the bathhouse remained very much a part of the life and culture of the lay Christian communities. This is not surprising: The Church was the center of life, and all activities revolved around it. Most ecclesiastical complexes, while obviously connected with the Church proper, often included buildings (such as hostels and hospitals) that were not consecrated to liturgical use and were constructed to serve the community. By constructing such buildings, the Church sought to regulate both the secular as well as the religious environment of its parishioners. Therefore it is not surprising that the church should adopt (and accept) the concept of the baths.

IV. The Umayyad Bathhouse

4.1 Introduction: the Adoption of the Bath into the Islamic Repertoire

The early-medieval Arabic conquest literature, notably al-Baladhuri's *Futuh al-Buldan* (Book of the Conquests of the Provinces),[1] carefully relate the progression of the Muslim conquest and some of the details of the newly conquered landscape. One of the main landmarks that these accounts often relate is the presence and number of bathhouses in the conquered cities. The number of bathhouses seems to have been in direct correlation with the importance of the city or settlement. Even though these accounts provide no descriptions of the bathhouses themselves, they do indicate that the first Muslim settlers were quick to build bathhouses of their own. For example, in the early garrison cities of Kufa and Basra in Iraq several bathhouses were built. In Kufa there are five known early Islamic baths, and in Basra there were fourteen *hammams*.[2]

While little else is known about these early bathhouses, the literary sources do provide a few details about them. For instance, the first owners of the early Islamic bathhouses were the military aristocracy of the *ashraf*, as baths proved to be sound investments. For example, in Basra, we know of at least one very profitable bathhouse that is said to have grossed 1000 dirhams a day, which encouraged the building of many

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[1] A. al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*. Ed. By M. J. de Goeje. (Leiden 1866). See also, al-Waqidi, *Futuh al-Sham* Ed. By A. al-Sharqawi, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1935);

[2] Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh*, p. 281. Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa'l Muluk*. Ed. M. de Goeje Vol. II (Leiden, 1879), 702; Hisham Djait, *Al-Kufa, naissance de la ville islamique*. (Paris, 1986), 282-83.

additional ones.[3] The fact that these early baths were profitable means that a substantial

proportion of the population wished to visit them. In addition, given that the cities were

new, and therefore populated by Muslims, is persuasive evidence for the quick acceptance

of the custom of baths by the early Muslims. Unfortunately however we have no indication

of what these bathhouses looked like.

By the mid-seventh century, bathhouses had become regular features of the nascent

Islamic Empire, when new baths were built and older ones restored. At least one new

bathhouse one is said to have been built in Jerusalem immediately following the Muslim

conquest in the 630s.[4] In addition, excavations of the Byzantine bathhouse in Jerusalem

indicate that it was in use well into the Umayyad period.[5] Perhaps the earliest concrete

example of the Umayyads using bathhouses comes from the thermal baths at

Emmatha/Hammat-Gader, one of the most famous and largest *thermae* of Roman and

Byzantine Bilad al-Sham.

An inscription, uncovered in situ in the wall of the central alcove in the western

wall of the Hall of Fountains confirms that these baths were renovated during the reign of

the Muawiya, the first Umayyad caliph (r. 661-680). The text has nine lines carefully

engraved in a dense but clear Greek script, and reads: [Figure 34]

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[3] M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984), 269-270; Djait, 283.

[4] H. Sauvaire, trans. and ed. *Histoire de Jérusalem d'Hébron depuis Abraham jusqu'à la fin du XVe siècle de J. C. : fragments de la Chronique de Moudjir-ed-dyn* (Paris, 1876), 231.

[5] N. Avigad, "Excavations in the Jewish Quarter, of the Old City, 1969-1971" in *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968-1974.* Yigael Yadin, ed. (Jerusalem, 1976), 136.

> In the days of Abdallah Muawiya, the
> commander of the faithful, the *clibanus* of the
> [baths] here was cleared and renewed by
> Abdallah son of Abu Hashim (or Abu 'Asim), the
> governor, in the month of December, on the fifth
> day, Monday in the 6th [year] of the indiction,
> in the year 726 of the colony, according to the
> Arabs the 42nd year, for the healing of the sick,
> under the care of John the Gadarene, the steward.[6]

The date is given by means of a threefold indication: the year of city era, the indiction, and the Hegira year. The year 42 A. H. began on April 25, 662, and the sixth indiction began on September 1, 662; and December 5, 662 was indeed a Monday.[7] The use of the Hegira beside the local era testifies to the official character of this inscription. On the other hand, it is the only mark of Islamization: the official and actual charge of the work was evidently a Christian and he had a sign of the cross engraved at the beginning of the inscription. The day chosen for the inauguration may also provide a hint about the predominant religion at this time and place: December 5 was St. Sabas' (also known as Mar Saba) memorial day, probably a meaningful date for the locals, since a monastery said to have been founded in 502 by St. Sabas himself, was still flourishing nearby in the seventh century.[8] However, what is pertinent here is that the renovation of bathhouses seems to have been a priority of the early Umayyad caliphate. This inscription along with

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[6] The Greek text is transcribed and translated by Leah di Segni in Y. Hirschfeld et al. *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader. Final Report* (Jerusalem, 1997), 239.

[7] Ibid. 240.

[8] J. Patrich, "The Sabaite Monastery of the Cave (Spelaion) in the Judean Desert," *Liber Annuus* 41 (1991): 429-448.

the discovery of several examples of Arabic graffiti dating to the late seventh and early

eighth centuries at this site (see Figure 2 above)[9] indicate that the tradition of bathing in

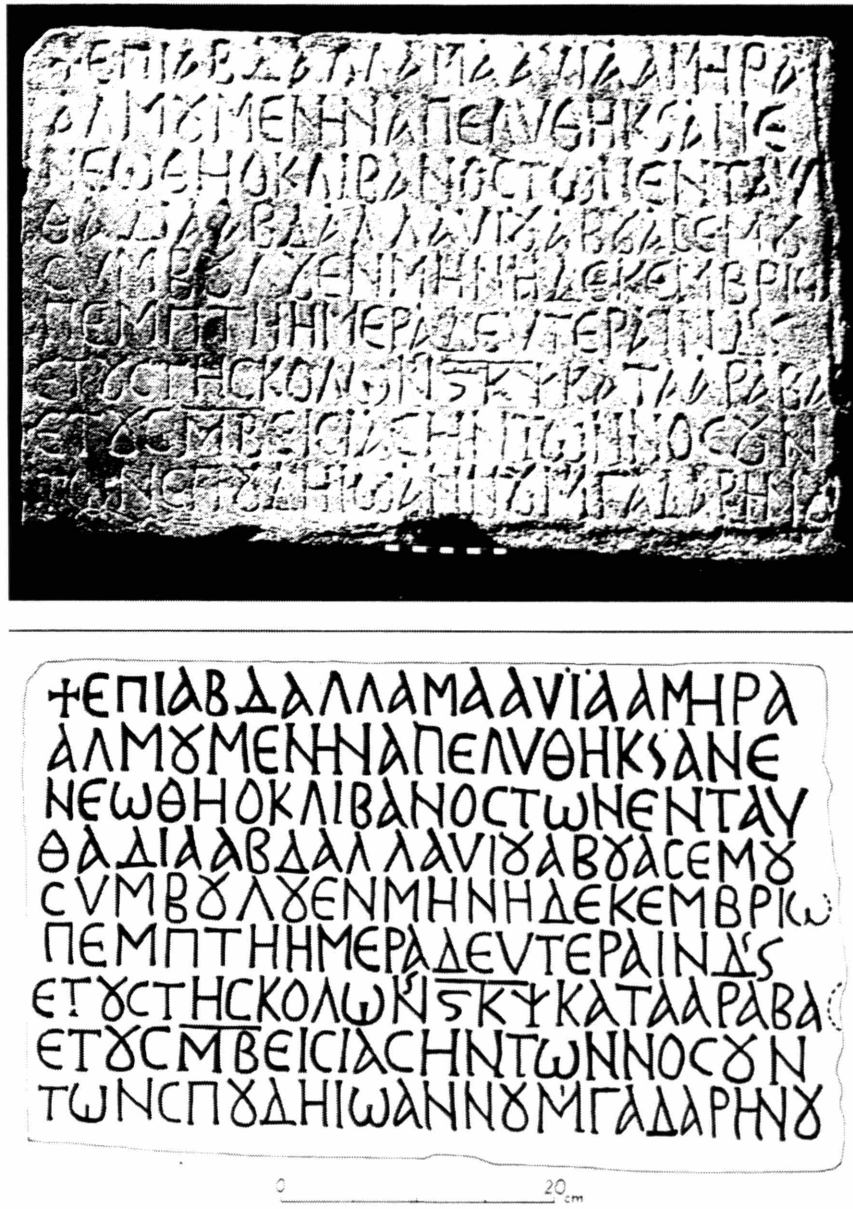Bilad al-Sham continued without interruption.

Figure 34 **Inscription 54, photograph and drawing. Hammat Gader. Reproduced in Y. Hirschfeld et al. *The Roman Baths at Hammat Gader: Final Report* (Jerusalem, 1997), p. 238.**

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[9] For a compilation of the Arabic graffiti from Hammat Gader see, ibid. 270-273.

Unfortunately, however, there are no other known bathhouses (either new or restored) that date to the early Sufyanid Umayyad period (661-680). However, over a dozen bathhouses survive from the Marwanid Umayyad period (680-750). These bathhouses aooear in most Umayyad secular complexes, and the majority of known art and architecture from the early Islamic period also dates to this latter period. As we have seen above, Abd al-Malik began a program of Arabization and Islamization in the late seventh century, and also instigated a building program, where Bilad al-Sham was the prime beneficiary.[10]

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[10] On hypotheses on Marwanid patronage of architecture in Bilad al-Sham see, Jere Bacharach, "Marwanid Building Activities: Speculations on Patronage," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 27-44.

4.2 The Umayyad Bathhouses Contextualized

The Umayyad Baths

There are over sixty known Umayyad installations in Bilad al-Sham, of which the

majority are the *qusur* that were built outside the urban areas, and most of the surviving

baths from this period were part of the *qusur* complexes. In addition to these *qusur*, other

Umayyad secular buildings, including residences, shops and ceramic kilns, have survived

throughout the region. Most of these secular buildings were built in pre-existing towns,

including Palmyra/Tadmur, Capitolias/Beit Ras, Abila/Quailaibah, Gerasa/Jerash,

Pella/Fihl, Gadara/Umm Qays, Hawara/Humeima, Umm al-Jimal and

Scythopolis/Baysan.[1] However, there are no indications that the Umayyads built any new

bathhouses in these towns, but in some instances, such as at Gadara/Umm Qays and

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[1] See for example, Hugh Kennedy, "The Towns of Bilad al-Sham and the Arab Conquest," in *Proceedings of the Symposium on Bilad al-Sham during the Byzantine Period.* Vol. 2. A. Bakhit and M. Asfour, eds. (Amman, 1986): 88-99; K. al-Asad, and F. Stepniowski, "The Umayyad Suq in Palmyra," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* IV (1989): 205-224; C. J. Lenzen and E. A. Knauf, "Beit Ras/Capitolias: A Preliminary Evaluation of the Archaeological and Textual Evidence," *Syria* 64 (1987): 21-46; B. Mershen and E. A. Knauf, "From Gadara to Umm Qais," *Zeitschrift des Deutsche Palaestina-Vereins* 104(1988): 128-145; Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis in the Fourth-Seventh Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 85-146; Alan Walmsley, "Pella/Fihl after the Islamic Conquest: a Convergence of Literary and Archaeological Evidence," *Mediterranean Archaeology* 1(1988): 142-159; A. Walmsley, et al. " Town and Village: Site Transformations in South Jordan (The Gharandal Archaeological Project, Second Season Report)," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan* XLIII: 459-478; A. Walmsley, 'The "Islamic City": The Archaeological Experience in Jordan'. *Mediterranean Archaeology* 13 (2000): 1–9; and John Oleson, et al. "Preliminary Report of the al-Humayma Excavation Project, 1995, 1996, 1998," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 43 (1999): 411-50 and for other early Islamic sites in the region see, Jodi Magness, *The Early Islamic Settlement of Palestine in Palestine* (Winona, IN, 2003).

Hawara/Humeima, there is evidence that the baths continued to be used well into the Umayyad period.[2]

New urban bathhouses do however appear in Umayyad settlements, rather than in pre-existing towns. For example, there are two baths documented at 'Anjar, a city founded by Walid I at the beginning of the eighth century. 'Anjar has the best claim of any early Islamic (pre-750) foundation to be a city. It consists of a rectangular enclosure, measuring 370 meters from north to south, and 310 meters from east to west, making it 11,470 square meters in size. The enclosure has four gateways corresponding to the four cardinal points. Regularly space towers, forty in all, articulate the walls. [Figure 35] The interior of the enclosure gives an invaluable picture of an Umayyad town in Bilad al-Sham, especially since the settlement was certainly built (if not finished) and probably abandoned within a short period of time (less than a century), and can thus be investigated without the difficulties caused by later buildings and reuse of the original structures.[3] The city is bisected by a colonnaded *cardo* running north-south and a *decumanus* running east-west. The southwest quadrant contains the primary residential district, and the southeast

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[2] For the baths at Umm Qays see, I. Holm-Nielsen, et al. "The Excavation of Byzantine Baths in Umm Qeis", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 30 (1986): 219-232. For the baths at Humeima see, B. Reeves, "The Roman Bath-house at Humeima in its Architectural and Social Context." M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1996, appendix C. Reeves speculated that the Islamic period name for the site (Humeima), which was different than the Roman and Nabataean period name (Hawara), might have meant "Little Bath" rather than "white" as was previously assumed.

[3] The relative lack of change imposed on the original layout by later occupation makes it possible to see 'Anjar a particularly clear example of the tendency (noted by Donald Whitcomb) for early Islamic cities in Bilad al-Sham to be orthogonally planned. D. Whitcomb, "The *Misr* of Ayla: Settlement of al-'Aqaba in the Early Islamic Period," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East II. Land Use and Settlement Patterns*, G. R. D. King and A. Cameron, eds. (Princeton, 1996), 160-61.

quadrant contains a mosque and a *dar al-imara* (governor's palace). The northern half of

the city contains two well-preserved courtyard buildings and two rectangular enclosures of

unknown function.[4] A bath is located to the east of the north gate, and in design

corresponds to those of pre-Islamic late antiquity: three small bathing rooms (the

frigidarium, tepidarium, and *caldarium)* with a larger hall that probably served as place of

social gathering. The distance of the bath from the palace suggests that it was for public

rather than private use. A second and smaller bath was uncovered slightly to the west of

the north gate, also with three bathing rooms and a slightly larger *apodyterium.*

Unfortunately, the excavations of 'Anjar have not been completely published (nor the

excavations completed).[5] And the role of the smaller bath is unclear.

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[4] K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture. Umayyads A. D. 622-750.* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1969), 480; R. Hillenbrand, "Anjar and Early Islamic Urbanism," in *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.* G. P. Brogiolo and B. Ward-Perkins, eds. (Brill, 1999): 62.

[5] M. Chehab, "Découverte d'un palais omeyyade à 'Andjar (Liban)," *Akten des Vierundzwanzigsten Internationalen Orientalisten-Kongresses München 28. August bis 4. Setember 1957,* H. Franke, ed. (Wiesbaden, 1959): 340-59; ibid. "The Umayyad Palace at 'Anjar," *Ars Orientalis* 5 (1963): 17-25.
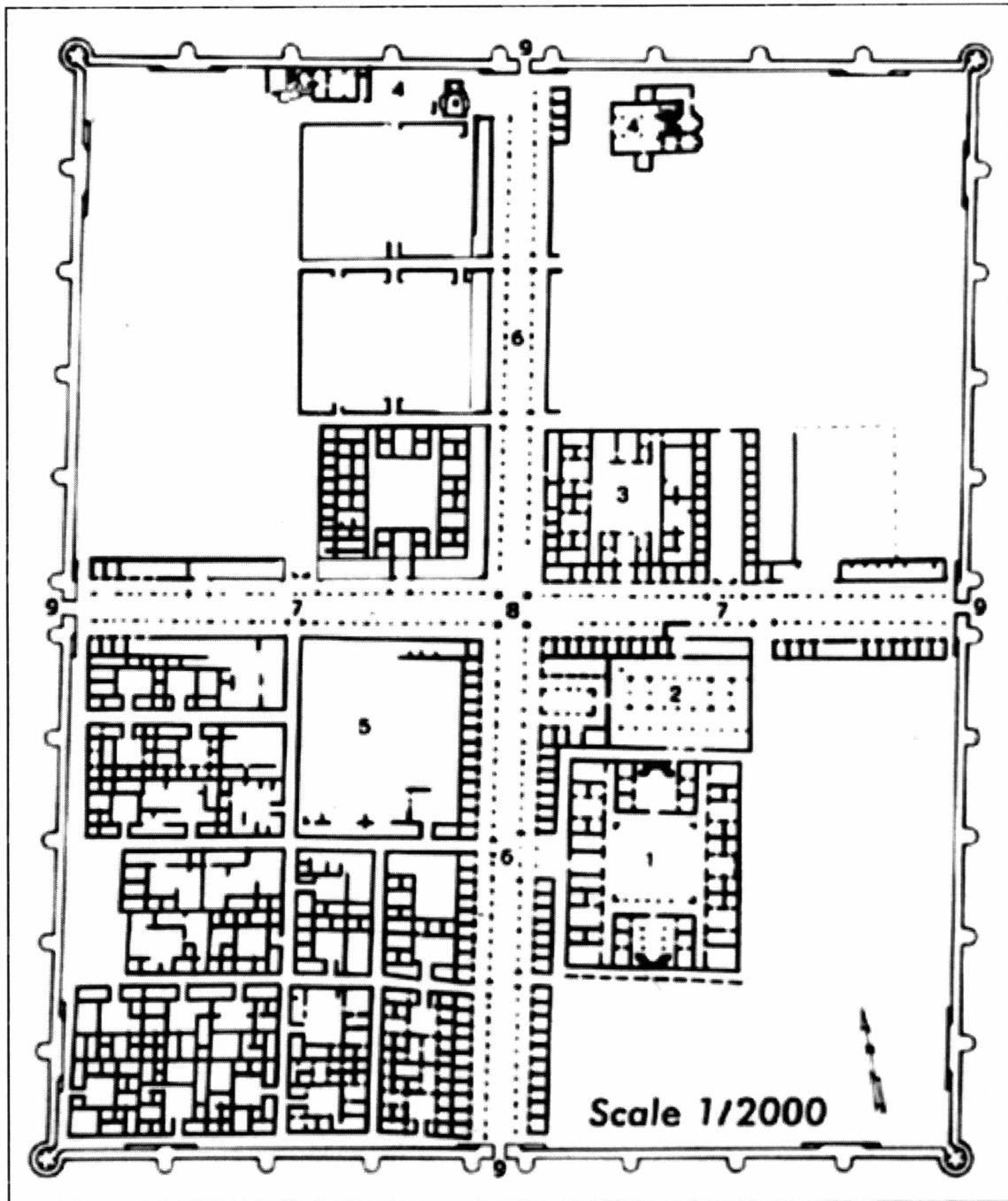
Figure 35 **Plan of Anjar, with "4" marking the bathhouses. Reproduced from**
http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/900/910/919/anjar1/excava.html

The location of the baths at 'Anjar seem to correspond to placement of bathhouses

in other Early Islamic settlements. In his analysis of the plan of early Islamic Ayla/Aqaba

on the Red Sea, Donald Whitcomb determined that there is a constant relationship in distance and direction of the bathhouse to the *dar al-imara* (or administrative center), with the bathhouse located to the north (or northwest) at 50-60 meter distance. Further, the bath is often located just east of the north gate, which appears to function as the principal entrance into most early Islamic cities. The city of Ayla is oriented with corners to the cardinal directions; nevertheless, the northeast gate appears to be associated with the direction of Syria and hence a functional "north." While there is no evidence for the location of a bathhouse at Ayla/Aqaba, there are reports that, during the building of the Corniche road (on this site), hypocausts were found east of the Syrian Gate. During the 1995 season of excavations, a large building, decorated with external pilasters, was found just northeast of the Central Pavilion. If this were the *dar al-imara* of Ayla, its location would be the predicted distance and direction from the putative bath and north gate[6] The same configuration of bath, north gate and *dar al-imara*, found at 'Anjar and Ayla/Aqaba seems to be also followed in the early Islamic settlement at Hadir Qinnasirin in northern Bilad al-Sham. Here again, the plan of the bath has not been delineated.[7] [Figure 36a and Figure 36b] The placement of the bathhouse, near the main entrance of the settlement and en route to the *dar al-imara*, is significant in that it suggests that the baths were perhaps the first stop for those wishing to meet with the governor. This suggestion is confirmed

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[6] Donald Whitcomb, "The Aqaba Project, 1997-98 Annual Report," http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/AR/97-98/97-98_Aqaba.html

[7] Donald Whitcomb, "Hadir Qinnasrin, 1998-99 Annual Report," http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/AR/98-99/98-99_Qinnasrin.html

when we look at the configuration of the bathhouses and governor's palaces in the urban
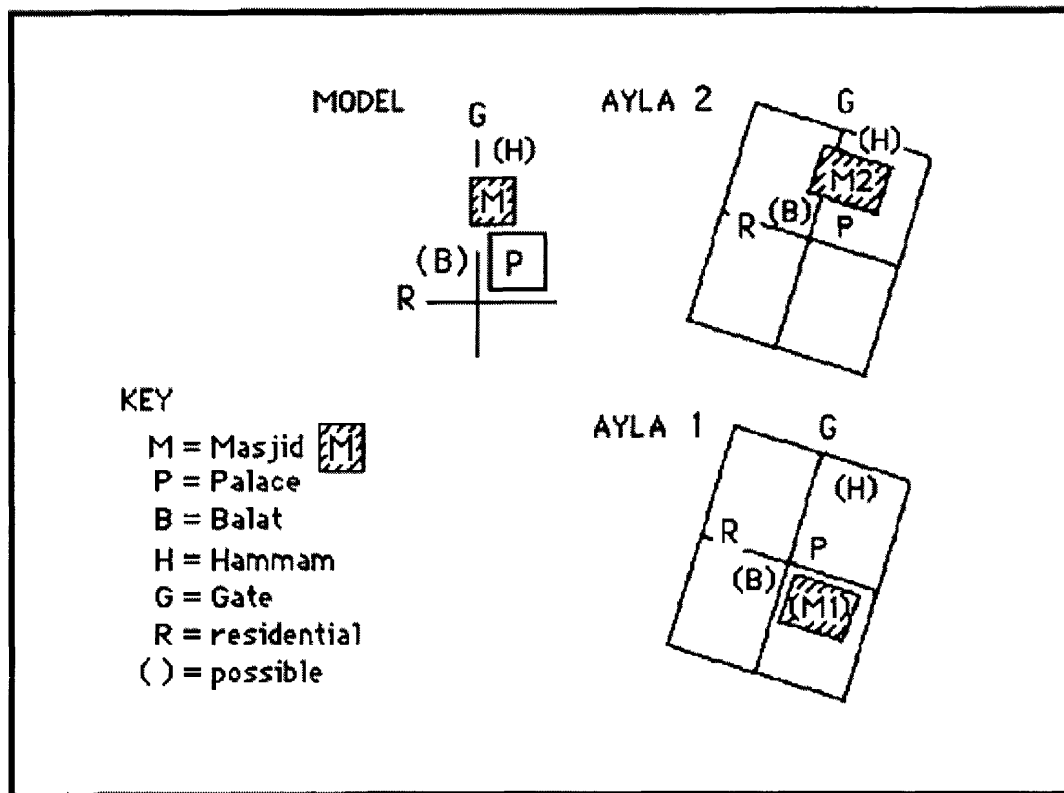
qusur in the region.

Figure 36a   Model for early Islamic development of Ayla. From "The Aqaba Project, 1997-98 Annual Report", http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/AR/97-98/97-98_Aqaba_fig1.html
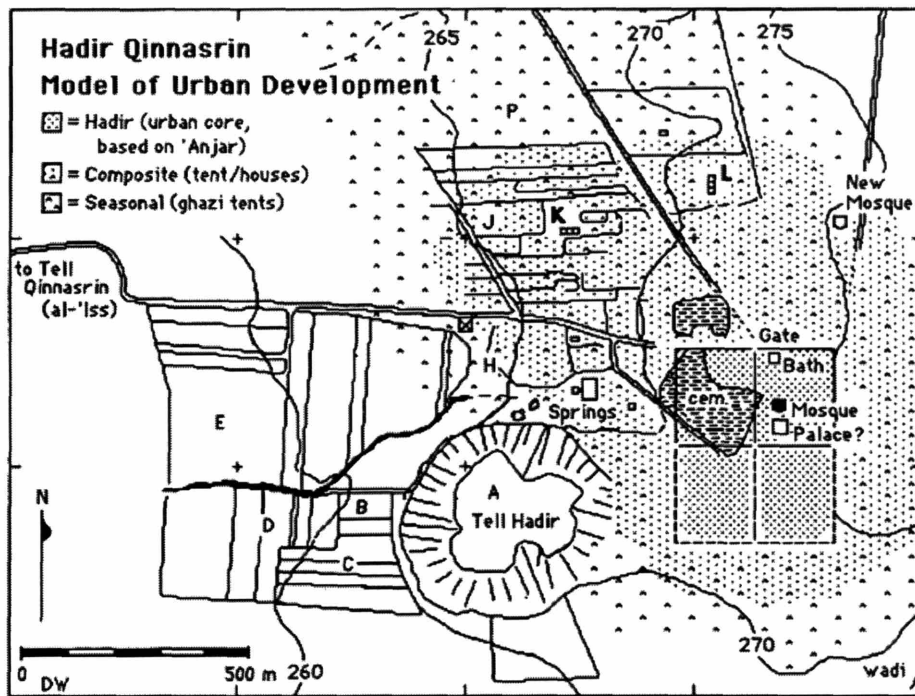
Figure 36b   Map of Hadir Qinnasrin, From "Hadir Qinnasrin Excavations, 1998-99 Annual Report. http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/AR/98-99/98-99_Qinnasrin_fig2.html

Even though, few urban-*qusur* have been excavated or identified,[8] the Umayyad

qusur at Jerusalem and Amman have been excavated. Unfortunately, the vestiges of the

Umayyad qasr in Jerusalem provide only limited information about how these *qusur*

functioned. However, a large bathhouse was discovered adjacent to the main entrance of

the palace-complex. [9] [Figure 37] Perhaps the best-preserved Umayyad urban qasr is that

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[8] Nothing remains of the palace in Damascus, and it is only known from literary evidence. Damascus seems to have been well provided with bathhouses at the time of Walid I (705-715), who is reported to have said that the city was known for its fruits and its baths, and that he wished that it also be known for its mosque , which he was about to start building. See, A. Ibn 'Asakir, *Tariskh Madinat Dimashq*, vol. 2, pt. 1., S. Munajjid, ed. (Damascus, 1954), 36.

[9] For the Umayyad palaces in Jerusalem see for example, M. Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: the Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem* (New York, 1985): 273-321.

of the Amman Citadel, which provides us with a relatively clear example of what urban

palatial complexes may have looked like, and the role of the bathhouse in them.[10]

Figure 37   **Remains of the Umayyad Palaces south of the Haram al-Sharif (Photograph Conrad Schmidt)**

The Umayyads claimed the ancient Citadel in Amman as their governor's

headquarters until 750 CE. Here the Umayyads built an extensive complex that bore the

main features of the majority of Umayyad foundations throughout Bilad al-Sham: a

mosque, a residential complex, a bath and an adjacent audience hall. [Figure 38a and

Figure 38b]

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[10] A. Northedge et al. *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman: The Excavations of Mrs. C. M. Bennett and other Investigations.* (Oxford, 1992).
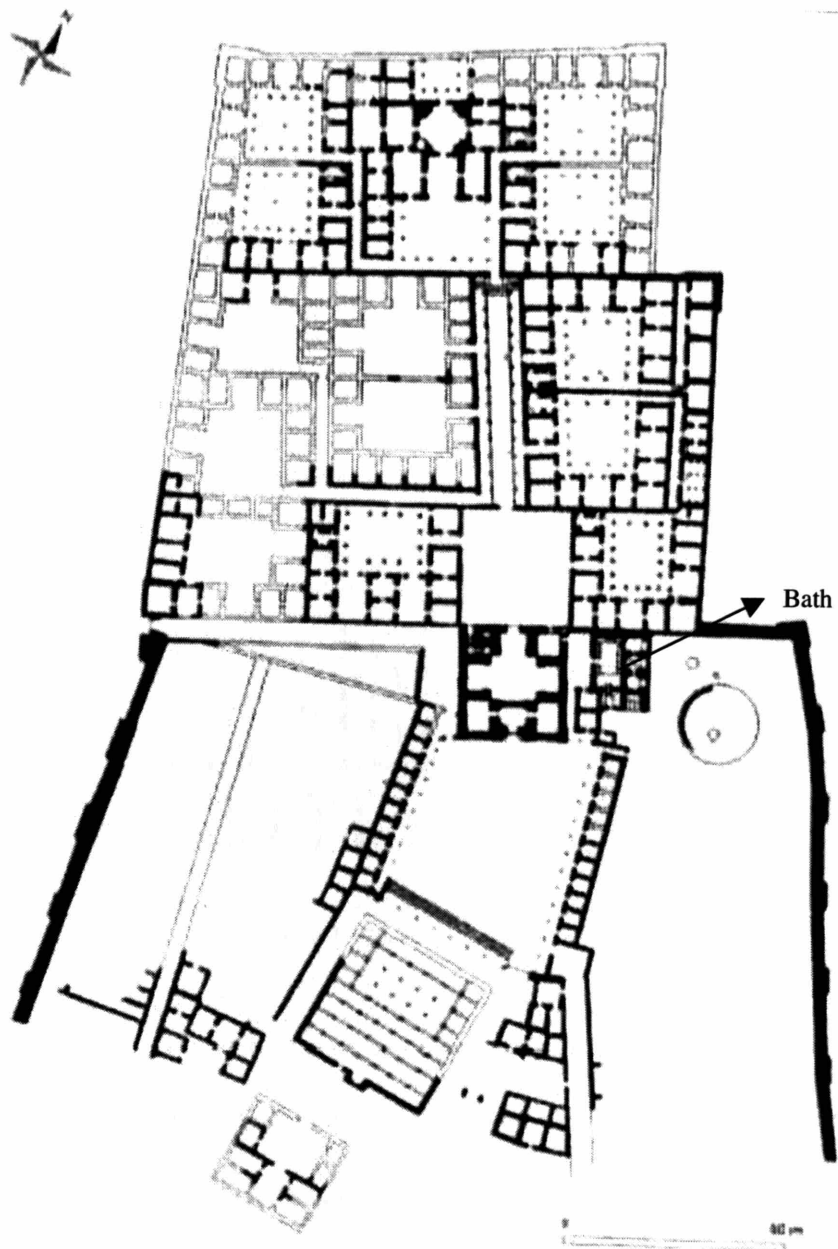
Bath

Figure 38a   Plan of the Umayyad Citadel Complex, Amman. Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*, Islamic Art in the Mediterranean Series. Museum With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 62.
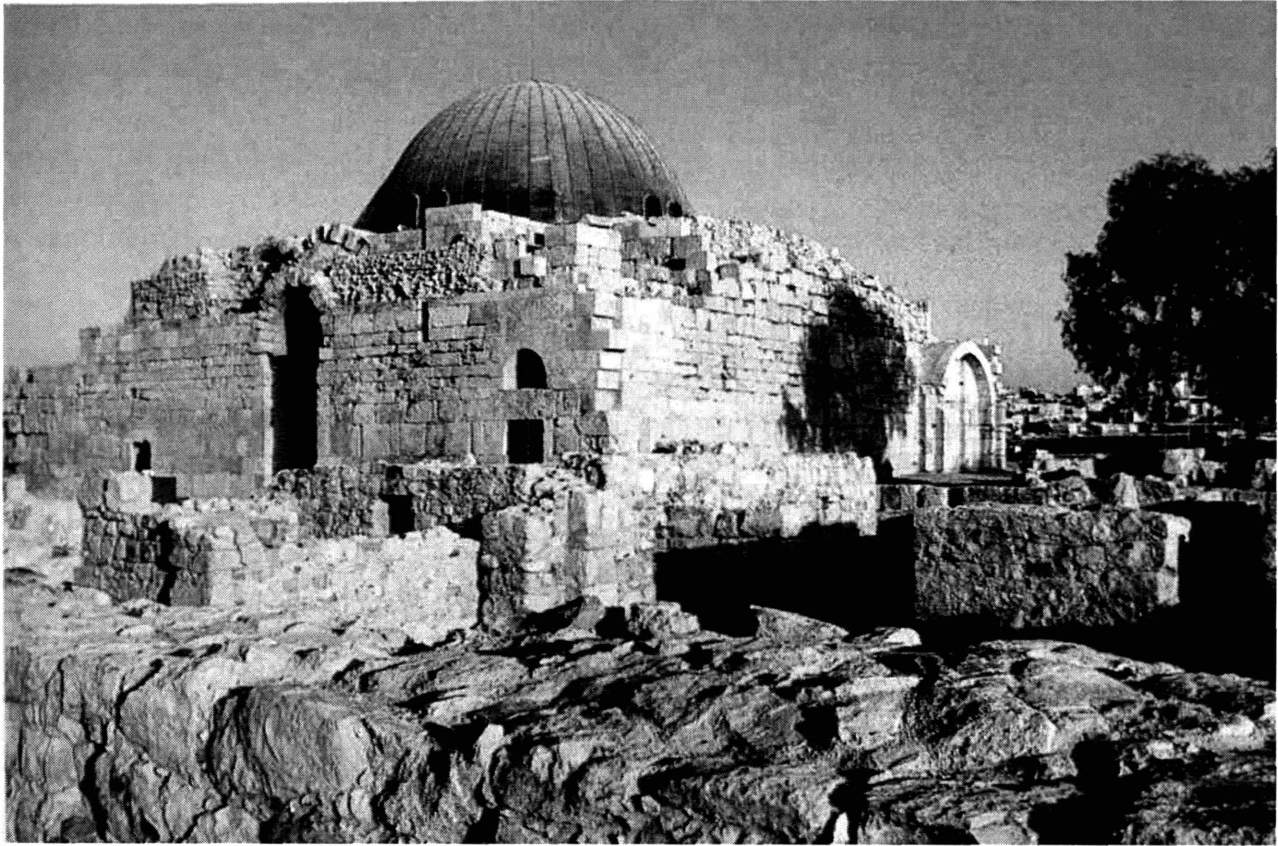
Figure 38b   **The Restored Audience Hall of the Umayyad Citadel Complex, Amman.**
Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*), **63.**

The Umayyad complex is divided into three enclosed areas dominated at the center

by the audience hall, which marked the entrance in to the complex itself. This hall is

cruciform plan, is covered by a central dome and semi-domes in the arms of the cross. Two

gates open from the south and north sides and two benches flanking the south gate were

probably intended for either guards or those waiting their turn to meet with government

officials. The interior walls are intricately decorated with two rows of stone-carved blind

niches that are framed by two engaged-small columns. [Figure 39] The hall is arranged

around a central square from which extend four arms of the cross. At each corner of the

building is a room. A door in the northwest room leads in to the bath complex. The plan of

165

the bath itself is straightforward and corresponds to the small bath type with an *apodyterium*, a *tepidarium* with water basins and a hypocausted *caldarium*. [Figure 40] Water pipes fixed on the eastern face of the wall collect rain into the nearby large circular water cistern. [Figure 41] Here again, we find the bath at the entrance of the complex.

Figure 39   **Detail of the Decoration of the Audience Hall at the Amman Citadel (Photograph by Conrad Schmidt)**

Figure 40   Bath at the Amman Citadel. Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*), 64.

Figure 41   Cistern at the Amman Citadel (Photograph Conrad Schmidt)

The above configuration is constant in all of extant Umayyad bathhouses, and variations occur only in the size and decoration of the bath-complex [Figure 42], and especially of the attached audience hall. Umayyad bathhouses have been uncovered at Qusayr Amra, Khirbet al-Minya, Jabal Says, Qasr al-Fudayn, Anjar, Qasr Amman, Khirbet al-Mafjar, Hammam al-Sarah, Qasr Mushash, Qastal, Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi, Madinat al-Far/Hisn Maslama, Qasr Balis, and Qasr Ayn al-Sil.
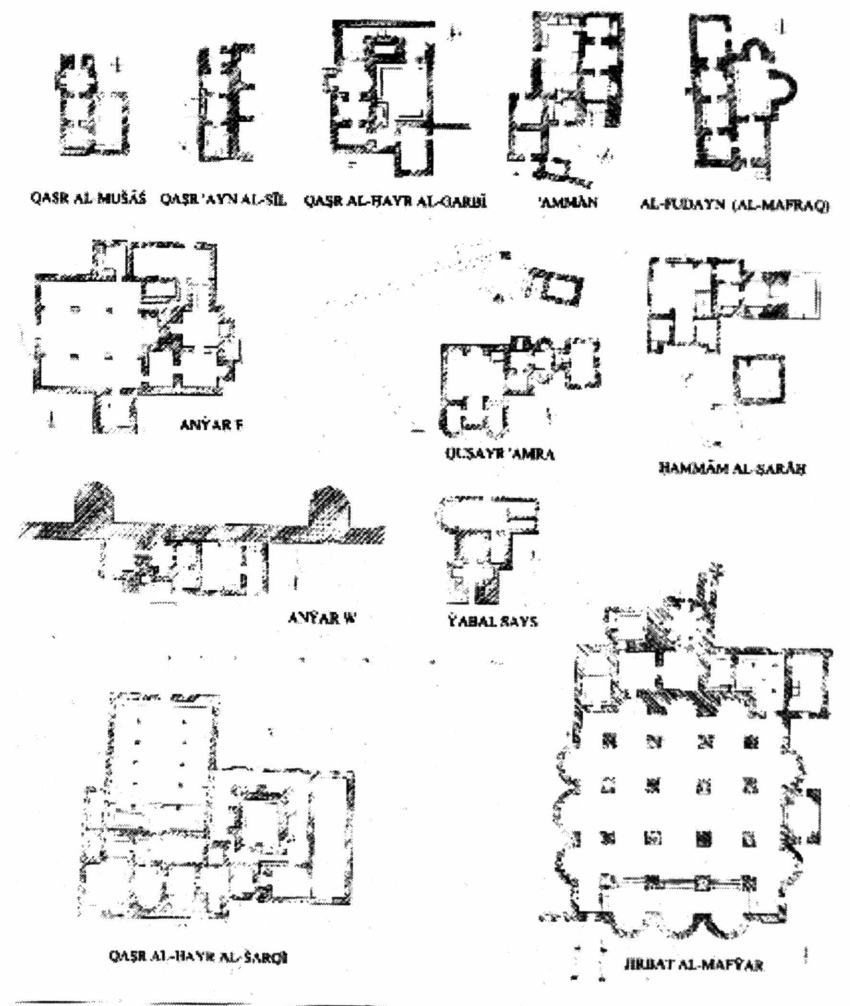

Figure 42   **Plans of most of the known Umayyad bathhouses. Courtesy of Rotch Visual Resources.**

As mentioned above, all Umayyad baths are made up of similar elements: a large audience hall and a sequence of smaller bathing rooms, regardless of whether they were are decorated. In addition these bath complexes share this makeup regardless of location (whether they are in the hinterland or in an urban setting).

Perhaps the two closest Umayyad baths in composition are those of Qusayr Amra and Hammam al-Sarah (a mere 5 km apart). [Figures 43a and 43b] Upon inspection, the plans of these two baths are practically identical, even though as discussed above, Qusayr Amra is lavishly decorated whereas Hammam al-Sarah is relatively austere. Both complexes consist of a reception hall and bathing rooms. In both Qusayr Amra and Hammam al-Sarah, the reception hall is divided into three irregular units that are covered with barrel vaults. At Qusayr Amra three small chambers are attached to the southern end wall, the middle one terminating in a plain wall, while the two side chambers are provided with shallow apses (inverting in other words the conventional plan of a Christian basilica.) At Hammam al-Sarah, the reception hall is rectangular in shape and measures 7.9 by 8.95 meters (compared to 7.58 by 8.75 meters at Qusayr Amra). At the back of this reception hall is an alcove with two doorways on the right and left sides that open into lateral rooms. Mosaic pavements have been uncovered in both buildings in the two small rooms that are annexed to the audience hall. At the back of the side rooms of Hammam al-Sarah, are two small rectangular latrines that project out of salients on the east wall. These small rooms were entered through low doors in the sidewalls of the middle alcove, and are the only part of the bath complex that allowed complete privacy. It is unclear how these rooms were used.

There is a small shallow pool (*piscina*) at the northern end of the east aisle. Shallow

pools of this sort, not designed for immersion, have been found in the halls of several pre-

Islamic as well as Umayyad bathhouses in Bilad al-Sham (such as the baths at Serjilla and

al-Andarin/Androna, as well as the baths at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi).[11] Alternatively, the

pool may have allowed the visitor to the complex to freshen up before taking his 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.[12]

In both cases, the part of the complex that was set aside for bathing is divided into

three small rooms, where the first room (*frigidarium*) was covered with a barrel vault, the

second (*tepidarium*) was covered with a cross vault, and the third (the *caldarium*) with a

dome. This vaulting sequence is the same as vaulting sequences of pre-Islamic baths, such

as those at Abda and Ruhayba (discussed above).[13] The same continuity with Roman and

late antique architecture is also apparent in the construction of the vaults with rubble

masonry. The general resemblance in appearance, plan, and vaulting technique and

sequence all suggest a close relationship between the two buildings, though Hammam al-

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[11]See, Charpentier, "Les bains de Sergilla;" 130; Mango, "Excavations and Survey at Androna," (2002), 311; D. Schlumberger, "Les fouilles de Qasr al-Heir el-Gharbi (1936-1938): Rapport préliminaire," *Syria* 20 (1939): 215 and 219.

[12] G. Fowden, *Qusayr Amra*, 38.

[13] G. Bisheh, "Hammam al-Sarah in the Light of Recent Excavations," *DaM* 4 (1989): 225-30.

Sarah's greater architectural sophistication (overall it is better constructed than Qusayr

Amra) may imply a slightly later date.[14]
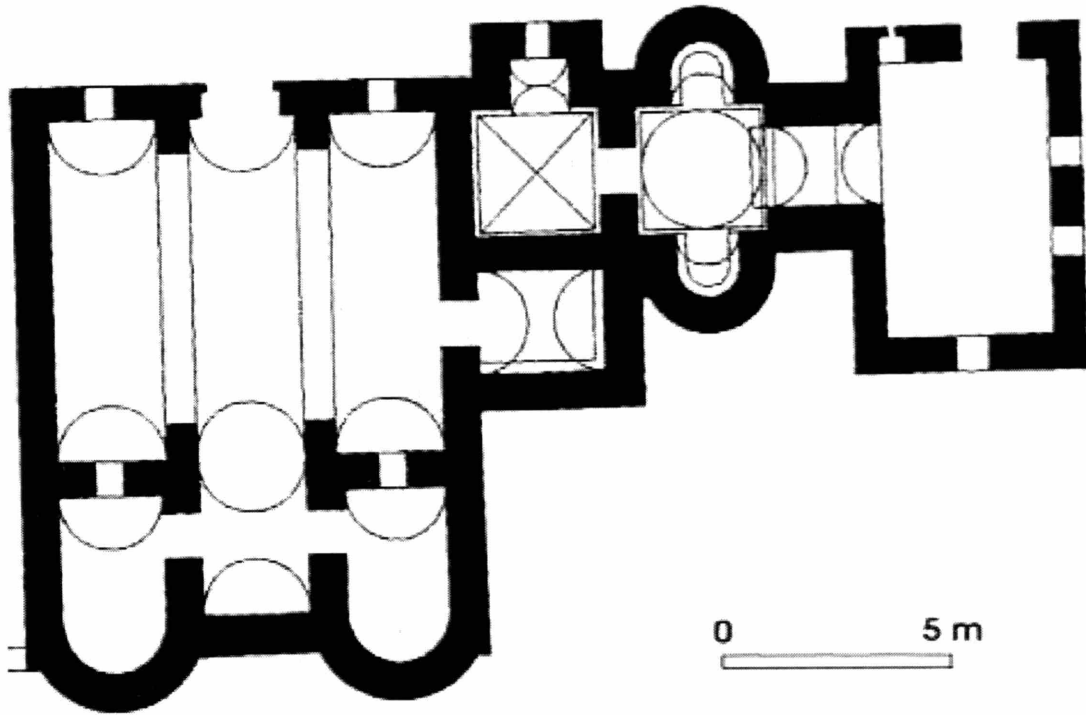

Figure 43a   **Plan of Qusayr Amra**   **Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al. *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art*, Islamic Art in the Mediterranean Series. Museum With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 121.**

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[14] Ibid.

Figure 43b   **Plan of Hammam al-Sarah**   **Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al.** *The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art,* **Islamic Art in the Mediterranean Series. Museum With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 127.**

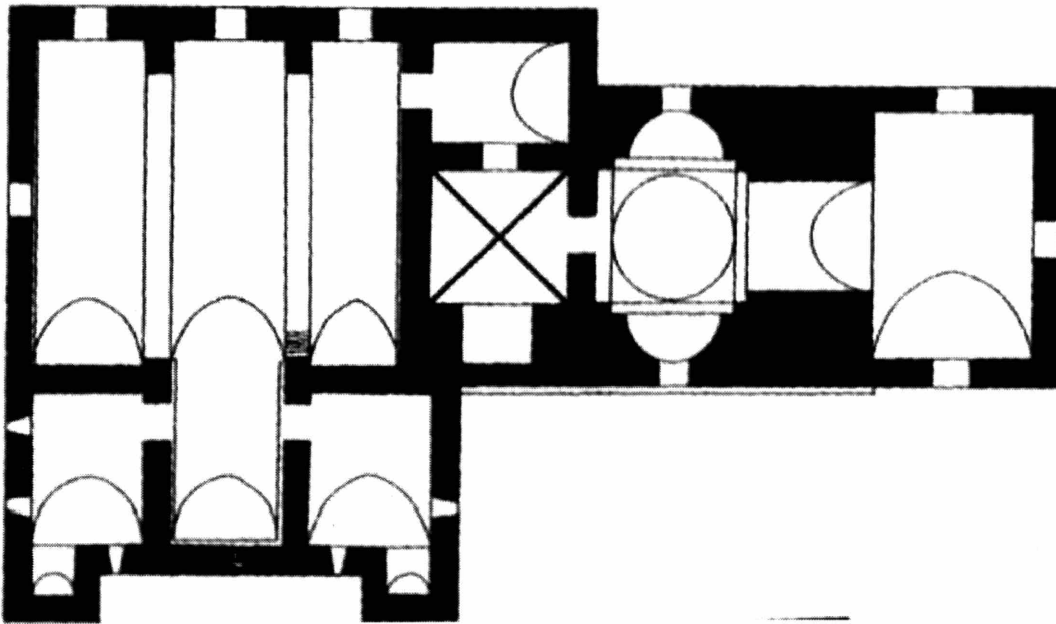Other notable Umayyad bathhouses are those at Qasr al-Hayr Sharqi, Jabal Says and Qasr al-Fudayn. The bathhouse at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi is part of a larger complex that includes three other structures: the Small Enclosure, the Large Enclosure, and the Outer Enclosure. The bath is located about sixty meters to the north-northwest of Small Enclosure. It is constructed of baked bricks and stone, and consists of three major units. In its configuration the bath is very similar to the Roman baths of Dura Europos (especially Bath C-3, see above). Of particular interest is a porticoed court, which is believed to have had a wooden roof with two large, rectangular marble lined pools annexed to the bath at

the north side. The pools were supplied with water by fountains high up on the back wall.[15]

The relationship of the baths and this "court" also bears comparison to the pre-Islamic late

antique baths at Brad in the limestone massif region of Bilad al-Sham [Figure 44a]. Apart

from the technological tour de force of the extensive water-supply system for which this

site has been especially admired, the presence of an elaborately designed court/hall at Qasr

al-Hayr al-Sharqi illustrates the importance accorded to a bath-related social function in

Umayyad society. [Figure 44b]

The most impressive architectural demonstration of the reception hall is at Khirbet

al-Mafjar. The bath complex at Khirbet al-Mafjar occupies a substantial part of a large

palatial complex that is more elaborate and more opulent than any example of its kind in

Bilad al-Sham. This site consists of a two-storied palace, a large rectangular peristyle

forecourt with an octagonal pavilion, as well as a pool and a mosque. [Figure 45] The bath

complex is composed of a very large (30 by 30 meters) hypostyle hall and a row of rooms

along the north side. One of the most unusual elements of this bath is a hypocausted,

domed octagonal *caldarium* defined by eight semi-domed, horseshoe shaped niches around

the periphery. The reception hall is divided into twenty-five square bays made by sixteen

pier clusters carrying Corinthian capitals. Three semi-circular apses articulate each side,

except on the entrance side, which has only two. The apses create a series of semi-domed

projections in the exterior, and the middle bay is developed as an imposing portal. Inside, a

large cold pool occupies the south side. The rest of the floor of this hall as well as those of

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[15] Oleg Grabar, "Three Seasons of Excavations,"*Ars Orientalis* 8 (1970): 65-86; Renata
Holod, "Qasr al-Hayr," *Archaeology* 23 (1970): 221-31.

the alcoves are covered with a mosaic pavement that consists of thirty-eight panels, each displaying a different geometric pattern. This remarkable hall has been the subject of considerable scholarly controversy in the last three decades. Some scholars have described it as a frigidarium, or a combination of frigidarium and apodyterium,[16] or as a "throne room and banquet hall."[17] I prefer a broader interpretation of this space as a place for entertainment (including banqueting –an activity that is traditionally compatible with bathing) as well as an audience hall.

A stark contrast to the size and opulence of the Khirbet al-Mafjar bath complex, is the bathhouse at Jabal al-Says. At Jabal al-Says, the bath complex measures 16 by 16 meters, and consists of a large tunnel-vaulted hall of about 4 by 10 meters,[18] which probably served as an audience hall, and the by now familiar sequence of three bathing rooms, which in their vaulting sequence follow those at both Qusayr Amra and Hammam al-Sarah.

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[16] See for example, R. Hamilton, "Khirbet al-Mafjar: the Bath Hall Reconsidered," *Levant* 10 (1978): 126-38.

[17] R. Ettinghausen, "The Throne and Banquet Hall at Khirbet al-Mafjar," in *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World* (Leiden, 1972), 17-65. This thorough and erudite study of the royal iconographical significance of the key decorative and architectural motifs seems to take every factor into consideration, except the immediate historical and architectural tradition of which the hall in question forms a part.

[18] K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 477
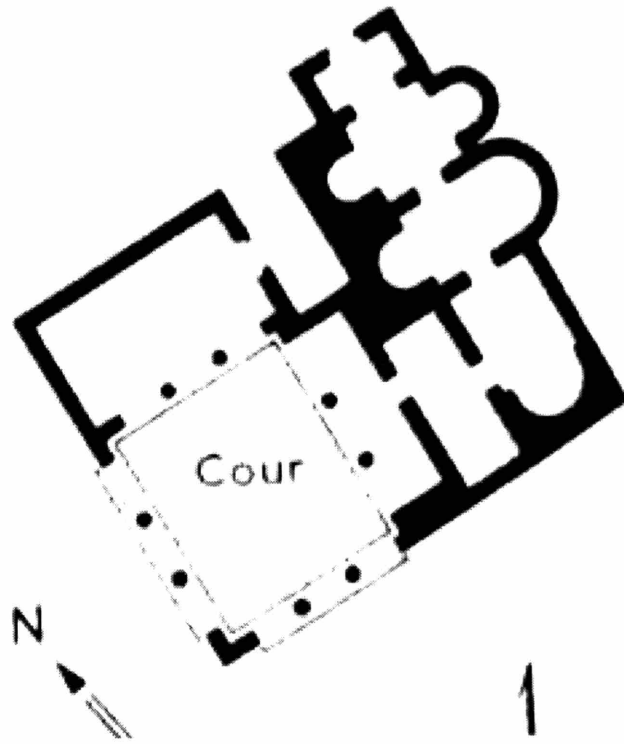
Figure 44a   Plan of the Baths at Brad. Reproduced in Yegul, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*. 416, no.1.
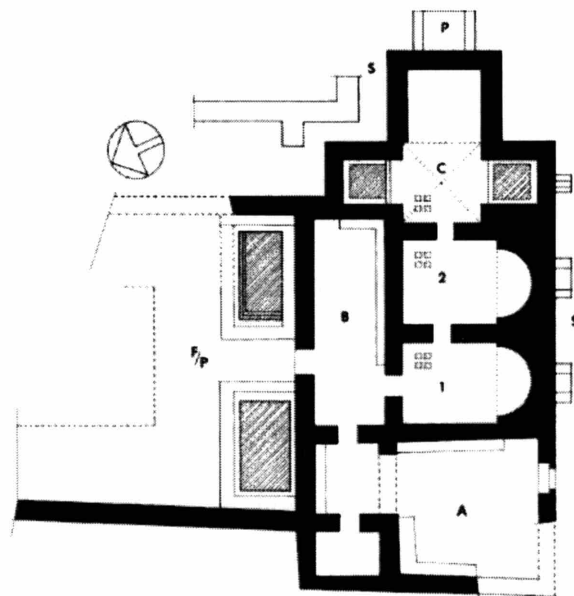

Figure 44b   Bath at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi. Reproduced in Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, fig. 427.

SOUTH

NORTH
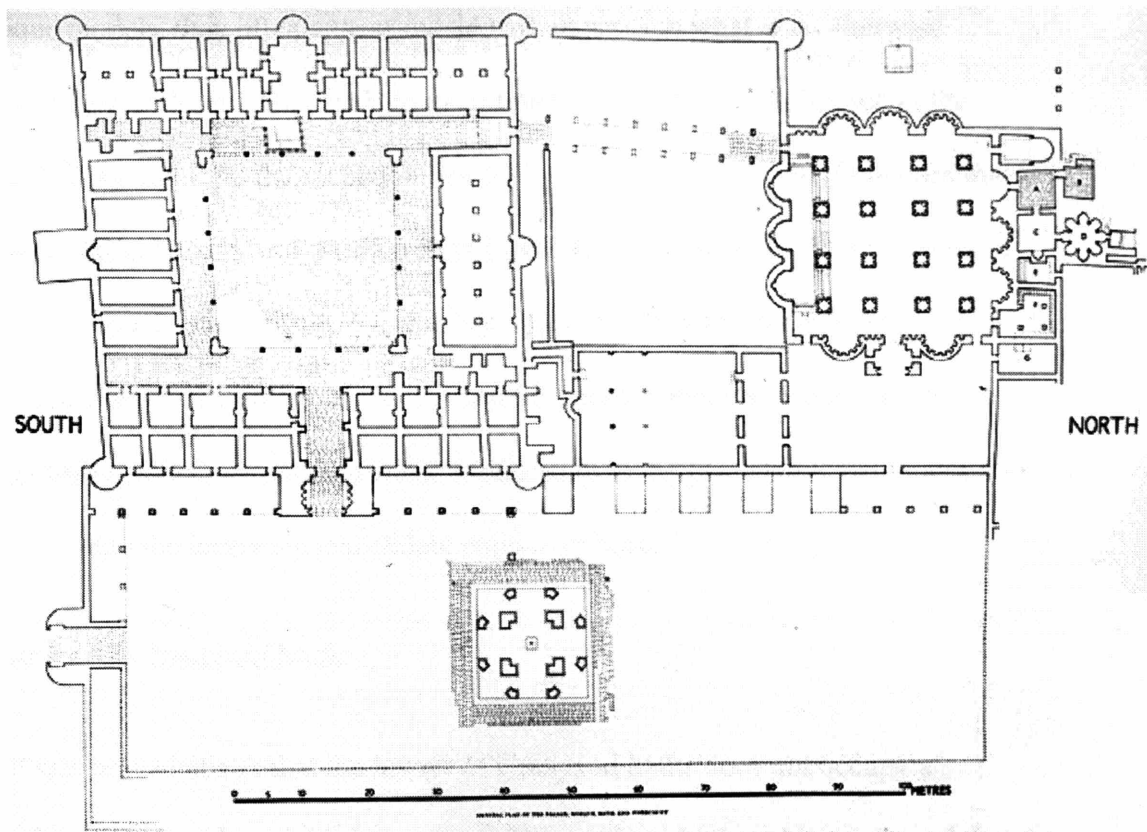
Figure 45   **Plan of Khirbet al-Mafjar. Reproduced in Hamilton,** *Walid and his Friends*,
Fig. 3

The configuration of the Umayyad bathhouses is reminiscent of the pre-Islamic

bathhouses, such as those at Serjilla and Andarin/Androna (discussed above). However,

these bathhouses differed in one significant way: When the plans of the pre-Islamic models

are compared to the Umayyad baths, we notice that the reception halls in the pre-Islamic

examples, while larger than the rooms of the bathhouse itself tend to be proportioned to the

adjoining rooms, whereas in the case of most of the Umayyad baths, the reception rooms

become much larger than the bathing rooms, and dominate the bath complexes. Another

striking feature is that the majority of the Umayyads formed important components of the

qusur or were part of the architectural administrative center of a new settlement, and unlike

late antique models, they often appear outside urban areas in what was otherwise

agricultural land or desert. This leads to the questions: why build bathhouses in the

hinterland? Why highlight the reception hall in the Umayyad bathhouse (a feature that is

common in both urban and extra-urban examples)? How are the Umayyad bathhouses

related to the visual culture of pre-Islamic late antiquity? What was the function of the

bathhouse in Umayyad culture? In order to answer these questions, one must look outside

Umayyad bath architecture and its formal relationship to the pre-Islamic bathhouse and

examine it within the larger context of late antique culture.

The Pleasures the Umayyad Baths

It was argued above that the layout of Umayyad baths does not occupy a

particularly unusual position in the spectrum of late antique bath architecture, and that the

main difference between the two traditions is the dominance of the reception hall. The first

question that comes to mind upon looking at the Umayyad bathhouses is: 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 assessing and reviewing

the roles of the Umayyad bathhouses, Oleg Grabar proposed that the answer may be found

in Islamic texts, particularly *Kitab al-Aghani*, that describe Umayyad ways of life and

ceremonies. From these texts, Grabar focused on the concept of *majlis al-lahwah*

(pleasurable gathering of friends) as the explanation of the role of these halls:

> A number of accounts indicate that next to the formal *majlis* for
> receptions there was also a *majlis al-lahwah*, a place for
> entertainment and pleasure. The main activities were drinking,

singing, listening to poetry recitals, watching dancers, and listing to musicians... [19]

The idea that bathhouses (and especially their associated audience hall) in Umayyad society were primarily loci of entertainment and luxury has often been repeated.[20] Indeed, when we look at the decoration of some of these bathhouses, it is clear that luxurious pursuits and entertainment were among their main functions. Indeed abundance, relaxation, and eroticism, music, and dancing seem to have been defining features of Umayyad bathhouse culture. However, as I argue below, pleasure was not the only function of these bathhouses, but rather that the bathhouse occupied a more nuanced role in Umayyad society. My intention here is to broaden our interpretation of how these bathhouses were used in Umayyad culture. In order to do that it is important to first explore all the roles that can be ascribed to the Umayyad bathhouse.

The pleasurable role of baths and their associated activities in Umayyad bathing culture can be examined by looking at two examples where the decoration of the bathhouses are best preserved, at Qusayr Amra and Khirbet al-Mafjar. The surviving decoration of both Qusayr Amra and Khirbet al-Mafjar provide us with a glimpse of one side of what the world of an Umayyad prince may have been like, and add some credence to the notion of *majlis al-lahwah*.

Among the features of the frescoes of Qusayr Amra that has always caught the attention of art historians is the abundance of nudity, both male and female (young and

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[19] Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art,* 156.

[20] See for example, Hillenbrand, *"La Dolce Vita"*; and Hamilton, *Walid and his Friends.*

178

old). The appearance of the nude within the context of an "Islamic" structure has long

perplexed scholars and visitors alike, since this type of decoration seems to flout Muslim

ethical norms.[21] For example, Riegl assumed that nudes could not have possibly been

painted by any Muslim, and therefore went as far to as dating the building to the fifth

century.[22] However, we now know that the Umayyads not only approved of representations

of naked figures,[23] but also applied the Islamic ban on figural representation only in

religious building.[24] Among the figures at Qusayr Amra, the nudes seem to be the least

provocative, in that they are depicted in non-suggestive poses, such as bathing their

children. [Figure 46] In fact, it is the barely-dressed entertainers that provide a more direct

erotic charge. Their partial dress hints and suggests. At the very least they seek to draw

attention, unlike the unselfconscious nude bathers. Most of these figures are female

entertainers and are depicted in the reception hall, whereas the bathing nude figures are in

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[21] The Quran exhorts women to keep themselves covered, 24.31. For further traditions against nudity see, U. Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder: the Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the early Muslims: A Textual Analysis* (Princeton, 1995): 83-86.

[22] Garth Fowden, *Qusayr Amra*, 58.

[23] The subject of figural representation in Early Islam has been discussed in numerous publications. See for example, Oleg Grabar, "Islam and Iconoclasm," in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds. *Iconoclasm: Papers given at the ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975* (Birmingham, 1977): 45-52; G.R. D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* Vol. 48, No. 2 (1985): 267-77; G. S. Hodgson, "Islam and Image," *History of Religion* vol. 4, no. (1964): 220-260; and R. Schick, "Iconoclasm" in *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, 1995).

[24] There were exceptions, the mosque at Wasit is said to have had a large basin in the shape of a woman, from whose breasts water flowed. See al-Wasiti, *Tarikh Wasit*. K. Awwad, ed, (Beirut), 68.

the *tepidarium*. The female entertainers are presented in various dancing poses or playing

instruments. [Figure 47] Similar representations of female entertainers are found in the

architectural decoration at the bathhouse of Khirbet al-Mafjar [Figure 48], as well as on a

bronze brazier found in the bathhouse at Qasr al-Fudayn [Figure 49]. This brazier is one of

the most complete of all extant Umayyad heating-stands. Its perfection rests with the

craftsmanship, the rendition of relief and figurines in the round.[25] The arcaded sides remind

one of architectural decoration (such as those at Qusayr Amra, see for example, Figure

43b). It is interesting to note that the erotic imagery is only relegated to the reception hall

and absent from the bathing rooms.

Figure 46   **Bathing Women and Child from the tepidarium at Qusayr Amra.**
Reproduced in A. Almagro et al. *Qusayr 'Amra: Residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de*
Jordania **(Madrid, 1975)**

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[25] I. Kehrberg, "Bronze and Iron Brazier from al-Fudayn (Mafraq), Inv. Num. J 15700,
     15701, 15705," in *The Umayyads*, p. 67-68.

Figure 47   **Dancing Girl from the reception hall at Qusayr Amra. Reproduced in A. Almagro et al.** *Qusayr 'Amra: Residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de Jordania.*

Figure 48   **Dancing Woman from Khirbet al-Mafjar. Reproduced in Robert Hamilton,**
Walid and his Friends: An Umayyad Tragedy **(Oxford, 1988), Fig. 6.**
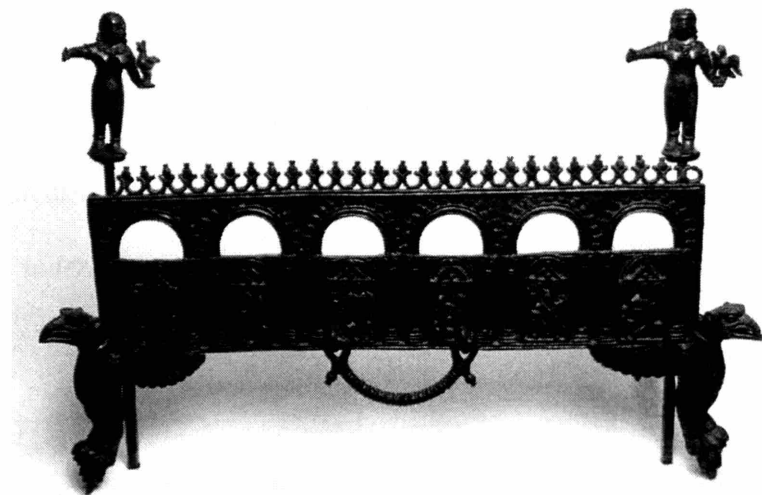

Figure 49   **Bronze and Iron Brazier from al-Fudayn. Reproduced in G. Bisheh, et al.**
The Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art, **Islamic Art in the Mediterranean Series. Museum
With No Frontiers (Beirut, 2000), 68.**

The poetic and musical culture that these depictions of entertainers and "decorative" women allude to was thoroughly Arab. Poetry was one of the Arabs' main modes of artistic expression, and despite all the controversy that surrounds the remnants of pre-Islamic and Early Islamic poetry,[26] this medium was extremely popular both before and after the coming of Islam. In addition, poetry was often sung rather than recited. Poets and singers of poetry were courted by the upper classes, and were often substantially rewarded for their talents. Women poets were rare, but women singers were common. [27] Indeed, one of the favorite companions, Hababa, of the caliph Yazid II was an entertainer. Yazid II is said to have first seen her when she was flinging a tambourine in the air, then catching it, while singing the song of a pre-Islamic poet.[28] The presence of these figures in the reception hall of the bathhouses indicates that one of the facets of frequenting the bath was to be entertained by the music and poetry of often beautiful (and semi-nude) women, prior to bathing.

Another common motif in bath decoration (as expressed in extant examples) is that of the hunt. The Romans had assigned the hunt, together with bathing, a prominent place among man's favorite diversions. "Hunting, bathing, having fun, laughing, that's the life!" ("*venari lavari ludere ridere occ est vivere*") proclaims a graffito on the forum at Timgad

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[26] For recent comments on the problematic nature of early Arabic poetry see, J. E. Montgomery, *The Vagaries of the Qasidah: The Tradition and Practice of Early Arabic Poetry*. (London, 1997): 8-9, 38-40.

[27] Garth Fowden, *Qusayr Amra*, 80.

[28] Ishaq al-Mawsili in Isfahani, *Kitab al-Aghani* 15.119.

in Algeria.[29] Indeed, many Roman baths were often adorned with images of hunting, as can be seen in the frescos at the Hunting Baths at Leptis Magna in modern-day Libya. [Figure 50] In addition, the hunt was a common motif in Arabic poetry.
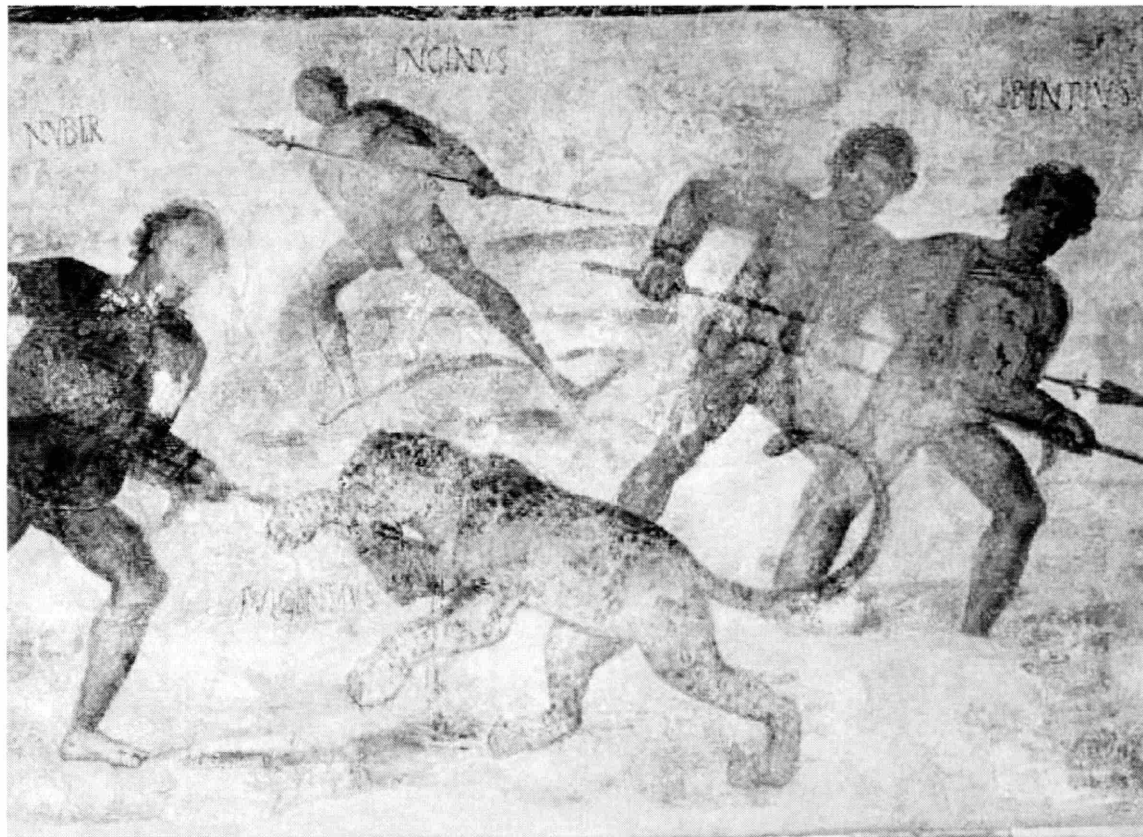
Figure 50   **Fresco from the baths at Leptis Magna. Reproduced on**
http://www.caravanserai-tours.com/images/libya/hunting_fresco.jpg

In addition hunting was one of the most important pursuits of the Umayyad elite, a pastime that was dear to Arabs above most others. In this preoccupation, the Umayyads addressed a theme that was important to both their Arab and non-Arab predecessors. At Qusayr Amra, hunting scenes adorn both the east and west walls of the reception hall. [Figure 51]

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[29] Quoted in K. Dunbabin, "Baiarum grata voluptas: Pleasures and dangers of the baths," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 57 (1989): 6-7.

Similarly, an exquisitely designed and executed mosaic pavement in an apsidal chamber adjacent to the bathhouse at Khirbet al-Mafjar shows a scene of a lion pouncing on a gazelle under a fruit tree while two other gazelles graze nearby. This is an image that is often repeated in Arabic poetry. [Figure 52] The meaning of these images is erotic, where the lion stands for the strong impulsive male lover, while the gazelle stands in for the beautiful pursued woman.[30] Moreover, these scenes may have acted as backdrops, perhaps even provocations for the recitation of the popular hunt-themed poetry and may have also served as suggestive accompaniments to the representations of the women. Therefore, these images, like the audience hall, worked on many levels.

Figure 51   **Hunting Scene on the east wall of the reception hall at Qusayr Amra. Reproduced in Garth Fowden, *Qusayr Amra*. Fig. 29**

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[30] See D. Beherns-Abouseif, "The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic at Khirbet al-Mafjar," *Muqarnas* 14 (1997) 11-18.
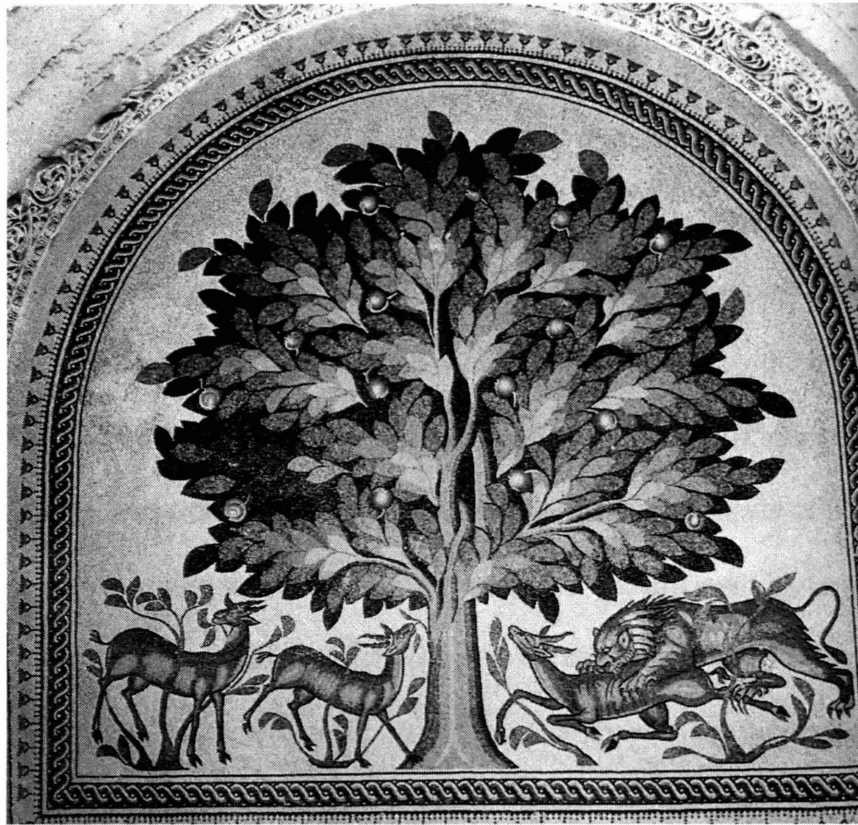
Figure 52   **Mosaic Pavement from Khirbet al-Mafjar. Reproduced in Robert Hamilton,**
Walid and his Friends: An Umayyad Tragedy **(Oxford, 1988), Fig. 18.**

Even though such images of entertainment and courtly pursuits do provide

compelling interpretations of how the bathhouses may have functioned, this interpretation

is very limited and does not address how the rest of the Umayyad bathhouses may have

functioned. I should point here, that the remainder of surviving Umayyad bathhouses

(other than Qusayr Amra and Khirbet al-Mafjar) were not as lavishly adorned (if at all).

Therefore a strictly iconographic study of bathhouses, based on the art at Qusayr Amra and

Khirbet al-Mafjar can only contribute so much to our understanding of how bathhouses

functioned. I believe that the key to understanding the Umayyad bathhouses lies within

their architecture and location. Therefore it is now necessary to turn our attention to the

role of the audience hall in pre-Islamic Bilad al-Sham and how these pre-Islamic models

might shed some light on how the bathhouses were used in the Umayyad period.

The Reception Hall in pre-Islamic Bilad al-Sham

The existence of reception halls was not uncommon in late-antique Bilad al-Sham.

The most notable of such a hall is a late sixth century building built by the Ghassanid ruler,

al-Mundhir (r. 570-581 CE), outside the walls of the city of Rusafa. [Figure 53a, 53b, and

53c] The building is positioned 150 meters northeast of the northern gate of the city. The

building is a cross-in-square stone building, measuring 17 meters in width and 20 meters in

length. A pyramidal wooden roof probably covered the central space, while barrel vaults

covered the main axes. Pendentive domes cover the small bays in the building's four

corners. At the eastern end an apse is flanked on either side by a separate, small rectangular

room. The arch that spans the apse is supported by piers to the south and north, while the

corner capital of the southern pier is adorned by a (now much damaged) bird with

outstretched wings.[31] A cross in relief marks the top of the apse cornice. The upper band of

the molding is decorated with an elaborate and finely carved frieze with marine motifs.

The lower band bears a Greek inscription that refers to al-Mundhir and secures the date of

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[31] H. Spanner and S. Guyer, *Rusafa, die wallfahrtsstadt des heiligen Sergios; mit 20 textbildern und 38 lichtdrucktafeln* (Berlin, 1926), 66.

the building to his in the late sixth century CE. This inscription, which reads: "the fortune

of Alamoundaros [al-Mundhir] triumphs," or more loosely, "Long live al-Mundhir."[32]

In 1939, Jean Sauvaget published an interpretation of this building as a secular

audience hall or *praetorium*, where al-Mundhir would meet his Arab confederates.[33]

Sauvaget believed that such a proclamation could only exist within a secular context and

cannot be part of the decoration of a church. This view has enjoyed almost universal

acceptance ever since.[34] However, recent studies of this building by Gunnar Brands and

Elizabeth Key Fowden have shown that Sauvaget's original interpretation is not

necessarily accurate.[35] In his study, Brands returned to the pre-Sauvaget interpretation of

this building, that it was in fact a church.[36]

In his article on this building Brands discusses in detail the building's position (in a

graveyard outside walled settlement), plan (basilical) and decoration (crosses and marine

motifs) and concludes that this building should indeed be identified as a church and not an

audience hall. The main flaw in Brands' argument, according to Key Fowden, is his

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[32] Translated from the Greek in Elizabeth Key Fowden, "An Arab Building in al-Rusafa Sergiopolis," *DaM* 12 (2000), 304.

[33] J. Sauvaget, "Les Ghassanides et Sergiopolis," *Byzantion* 14 (1939): 115-130.

[34] See for example two relatively recent examples with a wide readership: A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean in Late Antiquity* (London, 1993), 181; and B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire* (Oxford, 1990), 256.

[35] Gunnar Brands, "Der sogenannte Audienzsaal des al-Mundhir in Resafa," *DaM* 10 (1998), 211-235; and Elizabeth Key Fowden, "An Arab Building in al-Rusafa Sergiopolis," *DaM* 12 (2000), 303-324,

[36] For the pre-Sauvaget interpretation of the building as a church see for example, H. Spanner and S. Guyer, 60-63.

limitation to see the building within the larger context of Arab culture. Key Fowden also emphasizes the ecclesiastical role of this building but offers a more nuanced interpretation: the structure was built as a church but also functioned as an audience hall when the need arose.[37] This point is an antidote to Suavaget's absolute separation of the sacred and the profane. According to this view, the idea of the audience hall is salvaged and transplanted into the wider context of how a church functioned in the Arab Christian culture of late antiquity.

Figure 53a   **Exterior of al-Mundhir's Audience Hall, Rusafa. Courtesy of the Rotch Visual Collection, MIT.**

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[37] Key Fowden, "An Arab Building," 304-10.

Figure 53b Interior of al-Mundhir's Audience Hall, Rusafa. Reproduced on http://www.thais.it/architettura/Bizantina/indici/INDICE2.htm.

Figure 53c Apse of al-Mundhir's Audience Hall, Rusafa. Reproduced on http://www.thais.it/architettura/Bizantina/indici/INDICE2.htm.

The late-antique Arab church was a structure where the tribe would gather, both its settled and pastoralist members. Highly relevant to how these churches were used is a Syriac text, attributed to a sixth-century Arab missionary known as Ahudemmeh, in which the author insists that the Arab tribal chiefs give their names to any newly established churches. His reason was clear: "so that they would assist in every affair and matter of business, as much as they were needed."[38] This Syriac text does not spell our exactly what roles the chiefs played in the context of their churches, but that we do see is the linking of broader community affairs with the physical structure of the church through the person of the tribe leader.

In addition, there are churches that are intimately related to community leaders. For example, a martyrium dedicated to St. John the Baptist at Harran in the Laja' (in modern day Syria) has an extraordinary inscription dated to 568 CE.[39] This dedicatory inscription is carved in the lintel over the main entrance of the church and is in both Greek and Arabic (although the one is not simply a translation of the other). Both inscriptions do identify the dedicator as the Ghassanid phylarch, Sharahil. Both inscriptions give the date as 463 "according to the era of Bostra," [568 CE] which corresponds to the date of a victorious battle of the Ghassanids when they raided Khaybar.[40] Whether or not Sharahil participated in this battle is unclear, what is clear is that he chose to celebrate the Ghassanid victory in a

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[38] "The History of Ahudemmeh," in *Patrologia Orientalis* 3.1, ed. F. Nau (Paris, 1906) 27. Quoted and translated in ibid. 315.

[39] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, Vol. 2, Part 1: Toponymy, Monuments, Historical Geography and Frontier Studies*, (Washington D.C. 2002), 325-30.

[40] Ibid.

religious setting. The martyrium itself could have been intended as a victory monument not only to the saint, but also to the Arab conquerors of Khaybar. There is compelling similarity between this church and al-Mundhir's building in Rusafa, where the near-contemporary inscription also invokes victory.

Another useful parallel to the al-Mundhir building is the stone martyrium dedicated to the "holy martyr Thomas" outside the city walls of Anasartha/Khunasira in northwest Bilad al-Sham. Khunasira was a major market center for the agricultural fringe of the steppe. Here a Greek inscription states that a woman, named Mawiya, dedicated this martyrium in 425 CE.[41] The Arab dedicant of this martyrium used Greek alone. But the Arab association of the martyrium is undisputed because of the name Mawiya in the inscription. This building foreshadows the al-Mundhir building in its location outside the walls of a regional center on the steppe's edge. Both suggest the importance of permanent buildings as unifying points along the wide spectrum between settled and pastoral Arabs.

It should be noted here that Shahid's insistence, with reference to pre-Islamic Arabs of Bilad al-Sham, that they "were not nomads, but sedentaries, who had their own permanent establishments outside the big cities,"[42] seems to sacrifice an opportunity to appreciate how Arab buildings served to mediate between the very diverse population that

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[41] P. Mouterde and A. Poidebard, *Le limes de Chalcis: organisation de la steppe en haute Syrie romaine* (Paris, 1945), 194-195. The building is now destroyed. Irfan Shahid argues that Mawiya (of the inscription) is none other than the famous Tanukhid queen. I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in Fourth Century* (Washington, D. C., 1984), 222-38.

[42] Ibid. 227.

inhabited this region. The polarization of the population between nomadic vs. sedentary, sweeps away all the gray area in between.

Since we know from both literary sources as well as from archaeology that the Umayyads often occupied Ghassanid sites and actively modeled their architecture and imperial persona on the Ghassanids. (However, very few other Ghassanid monuments have been securely identified: a tower at Dumayr, a monastery at Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, and a church at Nitl in Jordan.)[43] In spite of this, literary sources do indicate that the Umayyads were directly influenced by their Ghassanid predecessors and continued to build on Ghassanid foundations as well as to practice similar policies when it came to securing the peace among and the support of the Arab tribes of Bilad al-Sham.[44] In addition, much of the strength of the Umayyad Empire was based on tribal alliances. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to see the reception halls that are associated with the bathhouses as proxies of the Ghassanid the tribal churches. As we have seen, bathhouses appeared in the majority of known Umayyad settlements (both urban and rural) and especially alongside the desert *qusur*. And in each case, these bathhouses incorporated an audience hall as part of the entrance into a larger complex (as in the case of Amman and Anjar for example) or as one

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[43] Irfan Shahid, "The Sixth-Century Church complex at Nitl Jordan, the Ghassanid Dimension," *Liber Annuus* 51 (2001): 285.

[44] Irfan Shahid, "Ghassanid and Umayyad Structures: a Case of Byzance après Byzance," in J. P. Rey Coquais and P. Canivet, eds. *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe-VIIIe siècles.* Actes du Colloque International, Lyon-Paris 11-15 Septembre 1990 (Damascus, 1990), pp. 299-308.

of the most prominent features of these installations (as in Qusayr Amra and Hammam al-Sarah) and were often adjacent to the residence of the Umayyad official.

Klaus Brisch has proposed that the Umayyads controlled their territories through means of a traveling court that would reside for much of the year outside of the capital.[45] At these temporary seats of government, notably at the *qusur*, Umayyad officials would receive elements of society, such as the Bedouin tribes, with whom they would have had little contact within urban centers. At these sites, tribal diplomacy would be practiced.

Tribal diplomacy and its physical expression and venue depend on the nature of the state to which the tribes must adapt their polity. In architectural terms, methods, forms, styles as well as some abstract ideas which had evolved in the non-desert (verdant) regions either Arab or non-Arab cultures affected what was built and to some extent what was done in those structures. In a broad sense, in conceiving the audience hall, any number of contemporary building types could be drawn on for architectural inspiration, ranging from direct replicas to reusing existing structures with minor alterations. In terms of what was done in these large halls, current "civilized" practices (such as bathing) were adapted. Thus, for example, we can recognize Byzantine courtly procedures and perhaps liturgies in the texts describing the Ghassanid court as well as that of the Umayyad court.[46] The combination of the bathhouse as the "civilizing" aspect of the audience hall is therefore easy to understand.

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[45] Klaus Brisch, "Das Omeyyadische Schlos in Usais, II." *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaologischen Institut. Kairo* 19 (1963): 141-87.

[46] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Volume II, Part 1: *Toponymy, Monuments, Historical Geography and Frontier Studies*. By Irfan Shahîd. (Washington, D.C, 2002): Appendix.

Therefore, it is not farfetched to consider these audience halls as spaces of diplomacy as well as of entertainment and social gathering. Here again, the Qusayr Amra frescos shed some additional clues. Upon entering this audience hall, one's attention is immediately drawn to the representation of an enthroned prince at the rear of the central aisle of the hall. Arguably, here must be where the spot where the owner of Qusayr Amra sat to receive his guests. In addition, one of the best-known images at Qusayr Amra, "The Six Kings," at the southern end of the of west wall, further highlights the political aspect of the audience hall. Here each king is identified with both a Greek and an Arabic inscription (the Greek is above their heads and the Arabic below)[47]as the emperors of Byzantium, Persia, and China; the Visigothic king of the Iberian Peninsula; the king of Abyssinia and a Hindu or Turkish king. These figures are symbolic representations for the whole political and cultural heritage of the world that the Umayyads had inherited.[48] In addition, they serve as an allegory and reminder of the important position of the representative of the Umayyad dynasty at Qusayr Amra. By incorporating the reception hall with bathhouse architecture, the Umayyads managed to fuse two important functions: maintaining political control over the Arab tribes (audience hall) and participating in a culture of leisure and luxury that were traditionally associated with the bathhouse.

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[47] As we have seen in the case of the martyrium of St. John the Baptist, bilingual inscriptions were not unknown in Bilad al-Sham.

[48] G. Fowden, *Qusayr Amra*, 205-210.

Continuity has been a theme of this dissertation, but an attempt has been made not to represent its workings too mechanistically. My aim has been to understand how the culture of late antiquity continued well into the Umayyad period. The Umayyad choosing and combining is distinctively a product of late antique Bilad al-Sham. As we have seen, this region had for centuries been part of the Greek, the Roman and then the Byzantine sphere. On the eve of the Muslim conquest it was among the most culturally vibrant provinces of the Byzantine Empire, not only for its native tradition, but for its Hellenism too, as one can see not only in its visual arts but also in its tradition of literary translation. It was only to be expected that Bilad al-Sham would pass these tastes on to its Muslim-Arab conquerors, and this is undoubtedly the main reason for the uniquely late antique spirit of Umayyad visual culture. It is not then, unduly limiting to characterize Umayyad visual culture as being essentially Late Antique Arab. By looking at the bathhouse as a representative of Umayyad architecture, I have attempted to illustrate that this architecture is not the last expression of late antiquity, nor is it merely the beginning of a new Islamic tradition, but is very much a vigorous participant in the visual culture of late antiquity.

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