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# ISLAM, ICONOCLASM, AND THE DECLARATION OF DOCTRINE

By G. R. D. KING

The attitude of the early Islamic state towards figurative representations is often cited as a source contributing to the establishment of officially-supported iconoclasm within the Byzantine Empire in A.D. 726.<sup>1</sup> Islam has generally adopted a position opposed to the representational in secular art, and the exclusion of all figurative motifs from Islamic religious art is clear from the first, yet this attitude is not necessarily to be regarded as intrinsically iconoclastic in the true sense of the word; indeed, outside Arabia itself, the only evidence of iconoclasm until the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in 132/750 is confined to the well-known attack on images and statues carried out on the orders of Yazīd II. b. 'Abd al-Malik (101–105/720–724). This much discussed outbreak of iconoclasm is well documented by Islamic and Christian sources,<sup>2</sup> but the very fact that it is so specifically associated with Yazīd's Caliphate suggests that it was considered unusual at the time. Although Christian sources carefully record the difficulties of their communities under the Umayyads, the absence of references to image-breaking under Caliphs before Yazīd implies that his action was a rarity worthy of comment: under normal circumstances, it would seem the Muslims left the Christians to use icons and representations or not, as they wished.

The connexion between Islam and Byzantine iconoclasm, and specifically between Yazīd and Leo III, the instigator of imperial iconoclasm, was alleged very early on in the Byzantine sources. During the Second Council of Nicaea in A.D. 787, assembled to condemn iconoclasm and to support the newly re-established iconodule rule in the Empire, it was stated that Leo III had introduced iconoclast doctrine into Byzantine territory in imitation of Yazīd II's actions inside the Caliphate.<sup>3</sup> The charge was repeated by Theophanes in the early ninth century<sup>4</sup> and by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nicephorus

<sup>1</sup> In an extensive bibliography on Iconoclasm the following touch particularly on the Islamic attitude to images: H. Lammens, 'L'attitude de l'Islam primitif en face des arts figurés', *Journal Asiatique*, 11<sup>me</sup> série, vi, 1915, 239–79. T. W. Arnold, *Painting in Islam* (New York, 1965), 1–40. G. Ostrogorsky, 'Les débuts de la querelle des images', *Mélanges Charles Diehl* (Paris, 1930) I, 235–55. G. Marçais, 'La question des images dans l'art musulman', *Byzantion*, VII, 1932, 161–83. K. A. C. Creswell, 'The lawfulness of painting in early Islam', *Ars Islamica*, XI–XII, 1946, 159–66. *Idem*, *Early Muslim architecture*, (2nd ed. Oxford, 1969), I/1, 409–14. Bishr Farès, 'Philosophie et jurisprudence illustrées par les Arabes. La querelle des images en Islam', *Mélanges Louis Massignon* (Damascus, 1957), II, 77–109. A. A. Vasiliev, 'The Iconoclastic edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (hereafter *DOP*), 9, 10, 1956, 25–47. A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasm byzantine* (Paris, 1957). R. Paret, 'Textbelege zum islamischen Bilder- verbot', *Das Werk des Künstlers. Studien zur Ikonographie und Formgeschichte Hubert Schrade zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1960, 36–48. G. E. von Grunebaum, 'Byzantine iconoclasm and the influence of the Islamic environment', *History of religions* [Chicago] II, 1, 1962, 1–10 (reprinted for private circulation, University of Chicago). O. Grabar, 'Islamic art and Byzantium', *DOP*, 18, 1964, 69–88. *Idem*, *The formation of Islamic art*, New Haven and London, 1973), 75–103. *Idem*, 'Islam and Iconoclasm', *Iconoclasm: Papers given at the ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, University of Birmingham, March 1975, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 45–52 (hereafter *Iconoclasm*). S. Gero, 'Notes on Byzantine Iconoclasm in the eighth century', *Byzantion*, XLIV, 1974, 23–42. L. W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental background of the Iconoclastic controversy* (Leiden, 1974) 10–33. P. Crone, 'Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm' *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 1980, II, 59–95.

<sup>2</sup> Vasiliev, loc. cit. A. Grabar, op. cit., 93–112.

<sup>3</sup> J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova, et Amplissima Collectio* (Florence, 1757), XIII, cols. 197,200 [Greek]; 198–99 [Latin].

<sup>4</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883) I, 401–2.

(d. A.D. 828).<sup>5</sup> Vasiliev even suggests<sup>6</sup> that the individual who persuaded Yazīd to adopt iconoclasm was the same person who appeared shortly afterwards in the Empire advising Leo to move in the same direction. It is possible that the Iconoclast party within Byzantine territory was encouraged to imitate Yazīd's activities, but in terms of doctrine and iconography, iconoclasm had deeper roots within Christianity itself. It did not need Islam to invent Christian opposition to images; the extensive use of icons in the Christian world was sufficient to stimulate a profound objection to them among those Christians who felt that alien, pagan-like practices had intruded into their religion. As to charges made within the Christian world that iconoclasm was the creation of the Muslims or that Leo III and his supporters were 'Saracen-minded', these were more in the nature of insults than precise references to a theological position. Epithets cast at one another by disputing Christians do not necessarily signify a deep understanding of Islamic attitudes in a period when Byzantine knowledge of Islam was limited.

The Muslims themselves gave only occasional indications of serious concern with the principle of Christian worship through icons in the Umayyad period; apart from Yazīd's curious and short-lived attack, the Muslims seem simply not to have cared greatly about the matter. They took an interest in the content of Christian representations from time to time, when the subject-matter offended or contradicted Islamic beliefs. But it was the issue of doctrine, its statement and counter-statement, that was of far greater interest to the Islamic world, whether in disputing Christian practices or expounding the beliefs of the Muslims. The matter of representations of God had already been settled in Islam in the lifetime of the Prophet: the inconceivable was beyond encompassing by any artistic repertoire; and meanwhile idolatry was suppressed and the pre-Islamic religious images were overthrown inside Arabia itself. The pagan idols of Mekka were destroyed by the Muslims in 8/630, and although the Prophet may have spared a picture of Mary and Jesus in the Ka'ba, he nevertheless destroyed the rest of the numerous images which it had housed before his entry to Mekka. The great number of idols in the houses of the Quraysh were likewise removed, while missions were sent to destroy other pagan idols elsewhere in Arabia. Some sites associated with the *Jāhiliyya* seem to have been avoided ever after.<sup>7</sup> However, with paganism and idolatry suppressed, the Muslims do not appear to have extended their destruction of images thereafter to the Christian communities they encountered; they may well have disapproved of the widespread use of icons in worship by many in the Near East, but they seem to have left these Christians to pursue their own customs. The silence of the Christian and Islamic sources suggests that no long-sustained and total repression of Christian images ever took place in the early Islamic period to match in effectiveness the suppression of pagan idols in Arabia carried out by

<sup>5</sup> Nicephorus, 'Antirrheticus tertius Adv. Constantinum Copr.', *Patrologiae Graecae*, c, cols. 528, 529, 532, 533 [Greek]; cols. 527, 530, 531, 534 [Latin].

<sup>6</sup> Vasiliev, loc. cit., p. 28, n. 12; p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> F. V. Winnett and W. L. Reed, *Ancient records from North Arabia*, (Toronto, 1970), 34. For studies of pre-Islamic idolatry and the religious environment at the time of the Prophet, see H. Lammens, 'Les sanctuaires préislamites dans l'Arabie occidentale', *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale, Université Saint-Joseph* (1926) XI, fasc. 2, 39-173; *idem*, *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'Hégire* (Beirut, 1928); Toufic Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l'Arabie centrale à la veille de l'Hégire* (Paris 1968). Fahd (249 ff.) suggests that Arabian pre-Islamic religion had been heavily influenced by the Hellenistic tradition of representing deities of various types in painting and sculpture, a tendency which had greatly increased prior to Islam. The various statuettes and wall-paintings excavated at al-Faw in south-west Saudi Arabia substantiate this point, at least as far as stressing the degree of Hellenistic influence on pre-Islamic Arabian art (see A. R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Faw* (Riyad, 1981)).

the Prophet. Where objections were expressed to Christian practices regarding images, they related to matters of doctrine raised by specific pictures, most frequently concerning the role of Jesus in Christianity.

For the early Muslims, the underlying religious meaning attached to what was represented was of greater importance than the fact of representation as such. The *Jāhiliyya* idols in Arabia had been destroyed first and foremost because they were idols and thereafter, beyond Arabia, objections to Christian pictures were made because of what they portrayed, not because of the fact of portrayal in itself. It seems that while it did not matter especially to the Muslims in the early Islamic period if the Christians chose to portray Jesus, they cared very greatly about the way Christians regarded Jesus. The Muslim attitude towards the cross as the sign of the death, Ascension and Resurrection of Jesus is interesting in this respect: the cross had become at once the universal sign of Christianity in the Near East and also the sign of the Byzantine Empire. In its religious and political guises, the crucifix was more objectionable to the Muslims than any picture, and its suppression is encountered in the Umayyad period more often than the destruction of pictures. The theological controversy underlying this suppression, articulated on the Islamic side by a steady and consistent succession of doctrinal statements on issues contesting Christian theology, is far more characteristic of the early Islamic period than iconoclasm; by its very nature this dispute could not transfer its scene of operations to the Byzantine Empire, however 'Saracen-minded' Leo III may have become.

Montgomery Watt<sup>8</sup> has suggested that those *sūras* of the Qur'ān which declare God's Oneness and deny that He would have offspring had initially been directed against the followers in Arabia of the 'daughters of God'. What was only an aspect of Islam's concern with its opponents in Arabia took on a greater importance as an issue of contention in the conquered Byzantine Near East, where the Muslims were confronted with an indigenous Christian population at the centre of whose theology was the Trinity. With the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus, ruling an extensive and well-organized series of Christian communities and confessions, and opposed by the Byzantine Empire in the north, the Muslims seem to have consciously asserted those elements of Islam that most distinguished it and over which they were most in dispute with their non-Muslim subjects. This assertion of Islam's doctrines was pursued with single-mindedness in a number of highly public directions. Thus, insofar as opposition to Christian practices occurred, the Muslim authorities concentrated on those ideological points that conflicted with Islam, that is, the doctrines of Jesus as the Son of God, and the Trinity. However, at the same time, Christian buildings in the Near East were extensively decorated by paintings and mosaics among which figured pictures of Christ alone or with the Virgin, while representations of the cross were ubiquitous, not only carved on buildings and in paint and mosaic, but also on portable objects. More intrusive still in the urban centres of the Near East was the display of crosses in church services and in public processions above all. It can be of little surprise, therefore, that when the Muslims began to state their doctrines by means of public monuments and assertive policies during the Caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, there should also have been a spate of objections raised to the cross as well as to the subject-matter of representations of Christ. Yet these objections cannot be taken as Islamic iconoclasm, nor did the Christians themselves seem to have regarded them as such. Textual evidence suggests that prevention of the public

<sup>8</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford, 1956), 318.

display of crosses under the Umayyads was more common than recorded incidents involving objections to Christian representational art. Other cases of destruction of the fabric of Christian buildings that took place in the Caliphate outside Yazid's reign seem to have stemmed simply from a desire to loot the rich source of wood, marble, columns and other valuables that the churches and monasteries held.

An Egyptian source, Severus b. al-Muqaffa', compiling from authors contemporary with the events described, provides a view of conditions as Christians in Egypt perceived them under the Umayyads, compensating for the scarcity of contemporary literary material elsewhere in the Caliphate. Severus and his sources record meticulously the impediments endured by the Monophysite church in Egypt under the Umayyads, and yet even here it is only in the Caliphate of Yazid II that any reference is made to the suppression of Christian pictures. In view of the silence of Severus on iconoclasm under other Caliphs, one must assume that it simply did not exist or was so rare that incidents went unrecorded. Instead, Severus mentions attacks on Christian symbols and pictures of a quite different significance. In 67-70/686-689, 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Marwān, the governor of Egypt and brother of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, ordered Christian crosses in gold and silver to be destroyed in Egypt.<sup>9</sup> This was a somewhat ambiguous act for it could just as well have been intended to deprive the Christians of their valuable crosses for the sake of the metal, since Severus mentions no destruction of crosses in materials other than gold and silver. Yet on the other hand, the attack was directed solely against crosses, and the ideological significance of the event is reinforced by the accompanying action taken by 'Abd al-'Aziz: he ordered Qur'an-based declarations to be fixed to the churches in Miṣr and the Delta, reading: 'Muḥammad is the great Apostle of God, and Jesus also is the Apostle of God. But verily God is not begotten and does not beget.'<sup>10</sup> The statement of so central a point of dispute between Islam and Christianity, summed up on the Christian side in the cross as the sign of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, could not have been more explicit or succinct.

A series of similar doctrinally-based attacks on Christianity are recorded in Egypt and also in Bilād al-Shām during the remainder of the Umayyad period. In 76/695 the Byzantine Emperor, Justinian II, was deposed in favour of Leontius. On that day 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Marwān ordered the suspension of the Christian liturgies in Egypt. The Muslims objected to the Christian doctrine which they took to hold that God could take a wife and produce a son, and 'Abd al-'Aziz himself also objected to the divisions of the Christian sects on matters of doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Towards 86/705 al-Aṣḥab b. 'Abd al-'Aziz complained specifically of a picture representing the Virgin and Jesus carried in a procession at a monastery in Ḥulwān; he expressed his objection to the Christian regard for Jesus by asking who Christ was that he should be worshipped as God.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Severus b. al-Muqaffa', 'History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria III, Agathon to Michael I (766)', edited, translated from the Arabic into English, and annotated B. Evetts, *Patrologia Orientalis*, v, 1910, 25.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25. There appears to have been the beginnings of such a move against crosses in Mu'awiya's time: cf. J.-B. Chabot, I. Guidi, H. Hyvernat and B. Carra de Vaux, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syri, Chronica Minora*, Series Tertia, iv (Paris, 1903), trans. into Latin from the Syriac, 55-6.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

دخل الى دير حلوان نظر الى الصور مزينة كما يجب وكانت صورة السيدة الطاهرة مريم والسيد المسيح في حفصتها.

Yet although al-Aṣḅagh resented the subject-matter of the picture he did not have it destroyed: the whole thrust of his attack was on christological doctrine, and the existence of the representation as such was incidental to the issue. Indeed, the very fact that al-Aṣḅagh objected to this one picture in the procession rather than any other indicates that his complaints were not directed at pictures in themselves. Another incident involving a picture, recorded by Severus, took place between 127/744 and 151/768; here again it was Christian doctrine which was attacked by a Muslim rather than the representation itself.<sup>13</sup> As in the case of al-Aṣḅagh, the incident was provoked not by the existence of a representation but by the subject-matter and its implications: Christ crucified.

Such attacks on pictures on doctrinal grounds linked to the role of Jesus need to be seen in the context of opposition to crosses or their public display in the early Islamic period, an instance of which has been mentioned above. At some time after the Muslim conquest of Damascus and before 86/705, a governor of the city, 'Amr b. Sa'd, issued an order that no crosses should appear in public there.<sup>14</sup> This led to civil disturbances when Jews of Damascus took the governor's words as licence to destroy all crosses, including those fixed to buildings, one of which was on the Church of St. John the Baptist; the site was already shared with the Muslims who used the eastern part as a mosque. The governor responded to these excesses by punishing the Jews, saying that he had intended only to prevent the prominent display of crosses by the Christian community, rather than the destruction of those fixed to buildings.

This desire to remove crosses from public display led the Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz (99-101/717-720) to forbid the Christians to show their crosses, according to al-Ya'qūbī.<sup>15</sup> That he objected to crosses seems confirmed by a letter to 'Umar from the Emperor Leo III: <sup>16</sup> this was apparently written in reply to an earlier communication from 'Umar to Leo, and the nature of Leo's reply indicates that the Caliph had asked about Christian regard for the cross and pictures, since Leo's letter explains the honour shown to the cross and the lesser respect shown to pictures. 'Umar's preoccupation with the cross and with representations combines the concerns already shown in these directions in Egypt by his father and his brother, as-Aṣḅagh. 'Umar's concern over the Byzantine Christians' reverence for pictures also presaged Yazīd's own far more extreme picture-breaking activities. However, Yazīd went further than his predecessor and cousin, 'Umar, ordering attacks on images, as well as breaking crosses rather than simply forbidding their display. Yet while his attack on images was unusual by comparison with the actions of earlier Caliphs, Yazīd's actions were nevertheless motivated by the same ideological hostility to Christian practices as his predecessors had been.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 149-50. In this case a young Muslim speared a picture, but merely to parody the action represented, the spearing of the crucified Christ on Calvary by a soldier. Yet no complaint was made by the Muslim regarding the fact of representation.

<sup>14</sup> *Chronicon Anonymum ad A.D. 819, I, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syri*, Series Tertia, xv, Syriac text; xiv, trans. Latin from the Syriac, I.-B. Chabot (Louvain, 1937), 205. In fact E. de Zambaur (*Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de l'Islam* (Hanover, 1927), p. 28, n. 3) states that as the Umayyads resided at Damascus there were no governors appointed to the city; he lists no governor by the name of 'Amr b. Sa'd. See also A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their non-Muslim subjects* (London, 1930, repr. 1970), 105-6.

<sup>15</sup> al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb el-Kharādj*, annotated, trans. from the Arabic into French, E. Fagnan, as *Le livre de l'impôt foncier* (Paris, 1921), 196.

<sup>16</sup> A. Jeffery, 'Ghevond's text of the correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III', *The Harvard Theological Review*, xxxvii, 1944, 269-332.

<sup>17</sup> Severus, 72-3.

The Muslim campaign against crosses is more comprehensible when it is recalled how ubiquitous the motif was in the Near East, where it was shared by both those Christians who accepted images and those who seem to have dispensed with them. In certain cases, the cross seems to have replaced the image of Christ in the apses of churches, although the loss of the wall decorations of so many churches in the Near East makes it impossible to decide how widespread this was. The cross was a motif that persisted even in the most aniconic decorations in the Near East, the work in some cases of Christian groups apparently averse to representational art, to judge by their surviving decorations. The cross as the principal motif of official Byzantine Iconoclastic art within the territory of the Empire had its antecedents in the Near East in the pre-iconoclastic and, indeed, in the pre-Islamic period. Given the geographical distribution of these cross-based decorations, it is difficult to be sure whether they should be associated with Christians of Monophysite persuasion, Nestorians, or with some less precise affinity. Had the Muslims been much concerned with the principle of the use of images by Christians, they might have been expected to feel rather more in sympathy with those Christians whose decorative motifs imply an aversion to icons and representational art in a religious context. However, the scattered surviving evidence of monuments for Syria, Jordan and elsewhere in the area suggests that it was these same anti-image Christian groups who made particular use of the cross, the symbol so offensive to the Muslims, in their church ornaments.

Although most of the paintings and mosaic decorations of the churches of the Near East have now fallen from the walls, the stone-built churches of Jordan and Syria of the fourth–seventh centuries A.D. abound in crosses in low relief and incised, carved on lintels over doorways and elsewhere; many of the villages and towns, in Jordan at least, were still inhabited in the Umayyad period. Furthermore, sufficient fragmentary decorations survive on walls or as floor mosaics to indicate the existence of a non-figurative decorative tradition that included the cross and was the alternative convention to the representational Christian decorative tradition recorded in the great cities of the Near East. One of the most thoroughgoing non-figurative decorations appears in a small underground chapel on the outskirts of Ḥimṣ in Syria near the site of Bāb al-Ṣibā,<sup>18</sup> dated to between A.D. 471 and 514. The motifs consist of various types of bejewelled cross, simple foliage and inscriptions. A similarly cross-based decoration occupies the apse of a chapel in a basilica at Ruṣāfa-Sergiopolis: <sup>19</sup> the magnificent painted cross is almost destroyed but it raises the question of what decorated the apses of other churches in the area whose mosaics and paintings are now lost. A completely non-figurative decoration in mosaic appears in the church of Mār Gabriel in the Ṭūr ‘Abdīn area in south-eastern Turkey, in which a cross filling the apse of the church is the main feature: other motifs include architecture, foliage and inscriptions on a gold mosaic ground. The church has been associated with Monophysite patronage from

<sup>18</sup> J. Sauvaget, ‘La chapelle byzantine de Bab Sbā’ à Ḥoms’, *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale, Université Saint-Joseph*, xiv, fasc. 1, 1929, 3–20. The Necropolis Choziba of the Monastery SS. John and George in Palestine has painted crosses on the walls like those of the Bāb al-Ṣibā’ chapel (O. Meinardus, ‘Notes on the Laurae and monasteries of the Wilderness of Judaea, I’, *Studium Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus*, xv, 1965, 241–3). Does this reflect an aversion to representational art, or is it that in the chapel at Ḥimṣ and the Palestinian Necropolis, the cross was felt to be appropriate in a funerary context?

<sup>19</sup> J. Lassus, *Sanctuaires chrétiens de Syrie* (Paris, 1947), 299–300, fig. 109. M. Mundell, ‘Monophysite Church Decoration’, *Iconoclasm*, 67–9.

Antioch and dated to A.D. 512.<sup>20</sup> At Karabel in Lycia a monastery church apse is decorated only with a cross and a *tabula ansata* in relief, formerly mosaic-covered, and dating from the pre-Islamic period.<sup>21</sup> In Armenia, crosses seem to have been set up in many parts of the country,<sup>22</sup> while in areas which were familiar to the Arabs of the *Jāhiliyya* and to the early Muslims, crosses were also widespread: the churches excavated at Hira<sup>23</sup> and on Kharg island in the Arabian Gulf,<sup>24</sup> attributed to the pre-Islamic period, were decorated with simple crosses, while in Yemen, a certain Azqir<sup>25</sup> set up crosses which were subsequently destroyed in the pre-Islamic period in an anti-Christian attack. In a description of the sixth-century A.D. church of Abraha in Ṣan'ā, crosses and stars in mosaic are mentioned, but no reference is made to figurative motifs.<sup>26</sup>

For the Christians, the cross was the sign of Christ and it was accepted as an object of reverence or respect even by those Christians who rejected images. It was protection from evil, the worker of miracles, and the emblem of the Christian world and the Byzantine Empire. After the rediscovery of the True Cross by Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine I, and the appearance of the cross in the sky over Jerusalem in A.D. 351, the cross motif spread widely in the Christian world, often in luxurious and exotic forms, as the symbol of the religion of the Christian Empire. In the final war of the Empire and the Sassanians, wood of the True Cross was carried off to Iran after the sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 614. This trophy was brought back once again in triumph by Heraclius, and paraded through the Near East in celebration of the Christian victory. In the meantime, the ideological prominence of the cross as the sign of the Christian Empire had been further emphasized by Heraclius who included it on his coinage. In view of the cross's role as the principal emblem of the Empire, its significance for the Christians and its ubiquity, it is little surprise that, like the Sassanians before them, the Muslims should subsequently have concentrated their attacks on this sign within the Caliphate. The cross had already had a long history as the concrete manifestation of doctrinal conflict between the Christians and other groups: not only had the Sassanians attacked Christianity through the cross but so too had pagans and Jews at various times, while the Paulicians were to attack and break crosses within the Empire itself. It was the prominence of the symbol as the summation of Christianity that led to its being so treated by such diverse opponents, while for the Muslims, the issue of the Christian view of Jesus and the cross was also particularly offensive doctrinally inasmuch as it emphasized the role ascribed by the Christians to a prophet shared by the two religions.

As well as forbidding the display of crosses on occasion, and sometimes physically attacking them, the Umayyads also showed some concern to adapt into innocuous forms the cross that figured on early Islamic coin issues in the

<sup>20</sup> E. J. W. Hawkins and M. C. Mundell, 'The mosaics of the Monastery of Mār Samuel, Mār Simeon and Mār Gabriel near Kartamin', *DOP*, 27, 1973, 279-96.

<sup>21</sup> R. M. Harrison, 'Churches and chapels of central Lydia', *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, 1963, 131-2.

<sup>22</sup> S. der Nersessian, 'Une apologie des images du septième siècle', *Byzantion* XVII, 1944-45, 58-87. P. J. Alexander, 'An ascetic sect of iconoclasts in seventh century Armenia', *Late classical and mediaeval studies in honour of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.* (New Jersey, 1955), 151-60. N. G. Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy* (The Hague, 1967), 164 ff.

<sup>23</sup> D. Talbot Rice, 'The Oxford excavations at Hira, 1931', *Antiquity* VI, 1932, 280-3. *Idem*, 'The Oxford excavations at Hira', *Ars Islamica*, I, 1934, 51-73.

<sup>24</sup> R. Ghirshman, *The Island of Kharg* (Tehran, 1960), 10-14.

<sup>25</sup> J. W. Hirschberg, 'Nestorian sources of North-Arabian traditions on the establishment and persecution of Christianity in Yemen', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, xv, 1949, 324-5.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Azraqi, *Ta'rikh*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, 1858, I, 88-90. G. R. D. King, 'Some Christian wall-mosaics in pre-Islamic Arabia', *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, x, 1980, 37-43.



former Byzantine provinces. However, this matter was only really resolved with the Umayyad coinage reform of 77/696 which finally established a purely Islamic coinage tradition. Because of the very nature of coinage, the Caliphate's coin issue had a public effectiveness and significance with respect to iconography that other administrative decisions lacked. Thus, while it is of interest, the removal of crosses from official brands in Egypt under the governor Usāma b. Zayd al-Tanūkhī was less far-reaching in impact. Usāma had every monk branded on the left hand with the name of his monastery in about 96/714 and although Severus<sup>27</sup> comments on the absence of the cross from the brand, it is hardly surprising that the Islamic administration should have erased from its administrative system a symbol so antipathetic to its own ideological position. Nevertheless, this eradication of Christian symbolism from Islamic contexts does not appear to have been pursued consistently: for instance, Qaṣr Burqu' in eastern Jordan is a pre-Islamic site rebuilt by al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik in 81/700 in which a cross survives undefaced,<sup>28</sup> although it is of course possible that it was once obscured by plaster. However, a similar example exists further south in the desert at Kilwa, where the sixth-century A.D. Byzantine settlement has a cross incised on a lintel, with Kufic inscriptions nearby indicating the subsequent use of the site by the Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Yet despite these isolated exceptions, the overriding Umayyad objective in the main urban centres was to assert Islamic principles, and in contesting Christian ideology, no vigorous campaign could ignore the cross.

An Umayyad counter-offensive to the doctrine of the Trinity, the role of Jesus in Christianity, and the cross, was a corollary of Muslim objections to the display of the cross and representations of Jesus and other figures. As we saw, in Egypt 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān fixed Qur'ān-based inscriptions on churches to contest aspects of Christian doctrine which the Muslims disputed, while in the same period, the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik addressed the issue in a far more grandiose way with the construction of the Dome of the Rock in 72/691 in Jerusalem. Oleg Grabar has suggested that the building of the Dome of the Rock combined the symbols of victory with an assertion of the position of Islam as the successor and supplanter of the other two monotheistic religions of the Near East.<sup>30</sup> The selection of *sūras* in the mosaic inscription inside the building stresses precisely those points on which Islam and Christianity were in dispute, and which 'Abd al-'Azīz had already raised in his public notices in Egypt: these *sūras* variously refer to God's blessings on His angels and on the Prophet Muḥammad, and to the unity of God who takes none unto Himself and has no son. The People of the Book are warned not to stray from the tenets of their religion and it is stated that the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was a Messenger of God; the Oneness of God is asserted and the Trinity is specifically denied.

The same Islamic ideological declarations, which so precisely contradicted Christian doctrine, were reasserted shortly afterwards with the coinage reform

<sup>27</sup> Severus, 68. Usāma also added the date according to the *hijri* calendar; this is hardly surprising and was in the spirit of the times.

<sup>28</sup> H. Field, *North Arabian Desert archaeological survey, 1925-50* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 57-8, 150-8. H. Gaube, 'An examination of the ruins of Qaṣr Burqu'', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities* [of Jordan], 1974, xix, 93-100.

<sup>29</sup> N. Glueck, 'Christian Kilwa', *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, xvi, 1936, 9-16; *idem*, *The other side of the Jordan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970) 51-4.

<sup>30</sup> O. Grabar, 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock', *Ars Orientalis*, iii, 1959, 33-62. C. Kessler, 'Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock: a reconsideration', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1970, 2-14. An interesting attempt to create a new Islamic iconography of symbol and text appears in a floor mosaic in Palestine described by M. Rosen-Ayalon, 'The first mosaic discovered in Ramla', *Israel Exploration Journal*, xxvi, 2/3, 1976, 104-19.

of 'Abd al-Malik, mentioned above. Again, the *sūras* selected summarized the main points of conflict with the Christians; the Unity of God, and by implication the role of Christ.<sup>31</sup> J. D. Breckenridge has suggested very reasonably that 'Abd al-Malik's reformed coinage was a response to the coinage issued by Justinian II between A.D. 692 and 695 which carried the image of Christ on the obverse with the cross behind the head, the emperor carrying a cross on the reverse, and the inscriptions *Servus Christi* and *Rex Regnantium*. No combination of Christian images and words could have so precisely offended against all the points of Islamic doctrine which were currently being expounded by the Muslims. It was the issue of ideological offence rather than any inherent Islamic opposition to representations on coins that led to the Muslim rejection of Justinian's coins and caused 'Abd al-Malik to respond with a thoroughly Islamic coinage.

Given Muslim objections to the cross and the doctrine of the Trinity, the mosaics decorating the interior of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem are remarkable for their selection of motifs if they are rightly dated to the Umayyad period<sup>33</sup>—although recently an attribution to the eleventh century A.D. has been proposed.<sup>34</sup> The iconography includes architectural backgrounds framing inscriptions declaring the doctrines of the Church, with the emphasis on the Trinity; these motifs are accompanied by crosses. In view of the campaign being waged by Muslims against christological doctrines, the decoration of the Church of the Nativity would seem to have been unyieldingly provocative. Even if it was erected under the tolerant Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik (105–125/724–743), there can be little doubt that the decoration was intended as a gesture in answer to the Muslim campaign to assert explicitly Islamic doctrines. In the circumstances, the absence of figures from the mosaics can hardly be regarded as an attempt to assuage the sentiments of Muslims. Instead the non-figural nature of this Christian doctrinal statement would seem to put it into the category of those non-figurative works produced by Christians in the Near East for internal Christian reasons, rather than because of any Islamic proscription on representations.

Apart from cross-based Christian decorations in which figures are avoided, some of which have already been mentioned, there are a number of floor mosaics from Syria, Palestine, Jordan and elsewhere which precede Islam and also exclude figures. A late fourth century A.D. basilica at Dibsī Faraj in north Syria has a floor mosaic with architectural and geometric motifs, but apparently no figures;<sup>35</sup> other floor mosaics without figures occur in the fifth century A.D. at Shepherd's Field in Palestine,<sup>36</sup> at Kfayr Abū Sarbūt near Madaba,<sup>37</sup> at the *Dayr* church at Ma'in,<sup>38</sup> both sixth century A.D., and in an exposed mosaic at

<sup>31</sup> J. Walker, *A catalogue of the Arab-Byzantine and post-Reform Umayyad coins* (London, 1956), II, liii ff. and 84 ff.

<sup>32</sup> J. D. Breckenridge, *The numismatic iconography of Justinian II (685–695, 705–711 A.D.)* (New York, 1959), 76.

<sup>33</sup> H. Stern, 'Les représentations des Conciles dans l'église de la Nativité à Bethléem', *Byzantion*, XIII, 1938, 456, gives a seventh-century A.D. date. J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine art* (London, 1970), 76–7; Beckwith gives a date after A.D. 694. E. C. Dodd, 'The image of the Word', *Berytus*, xviii, 1969, 52; Dodd gives a date of A.D. 730.

<sup>34</sup> Mundell, *Iconoclasm*, p. 67, n. 89.

<sup>35</sup> R. P. Harper, 'Excavations at Dibsī Faraj, Northern Syria, 1972', *Les Annales archéologiques arabes syriennes*, xxiv, 1974, 25–9.

<sup>36</sup> V. Tzaferis, 'Shepherds' Field (Beit Sahur)', *Israel Exploration Journal*, xxiii, 2, 1973, 118–19.

<sup>37</sup> M. M. Ibrahim, 'Archaeological excavations in Jordan, 1972', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities [of Jordan]*, xvii, 1972, 95.

<sup>38</sup> M. Piccirillo and M. Russan, 'A Byzantine church at ed-Deir (Ma'in)', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities [of Jordan]*, xxi, 1976, 68–70.

Rihāb. The last three are all in Jordan. Even where figures are included in floor mosaics, they are sometimes reduced in scale and prominence; thus, in the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian at Jerash, of A.D. 535, the donors are confined to positions off to the sides of the principal panel before the altar, a great inscription in a *tabula ansata*. Cumulatively, this evidence suggests that long before Islam there was a strong tendency among certain groups of Christians in the Near East to adopt non-figurative motifs in their churches, and, if the Jerash example is relevant in this context, to reduce the prominence of figures in favour of the inscription panel. Indeed, in general, in the non-figurative repertoire, art in the Near East reserved major roles for inscriptions of a religious nature, for symbolic devices and, as we have seen, for crosses, with the rest of the subsidiary areas filled by geometric and foliage motifs. Islam, then, can hardly be viewed as the progenitor of this development in Christian art, which was already well under way before the time of the Prophet. However, the process among Christians in the pre-Islamic Near East may well have been related to the revulsion which Jews too began to show in the sixth century A.D. for the representations which had previously been accepted in synagogues, and which arose from the increasing acceptance of representational religious art throughout Near East.

It would seem that Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik's brief iconoclastic campaign within the Caliphate had some effect, although of a specific and a limited character. Thus Severus bemoans the putting away of pictures under Yazīd, and al-Kindī and al-Maqrizī corroborate him.<sup>39</sup> It is natural that damage to certain Christian mosaics in Bilād al-Shām should be ascribed to this period of Umayyad iconoclasm,<sup>40</sup> and it is by no means unlikely that Yazīd's decree should have led to damage to mosaics at Madaba, Kfayr Abū Sarbūt, Jerash and Ma'in (although the last has been attributed to his predecessor, 'Umar II b. 'Abd al-'Azīz). Oleg Grabar has commented<sup>41</sup> on the concentration of this iconoclastic damage in Jordan. The damage may seem concentrated in part because the mosaics of this area are more familiar, but it may also reflect some internal and local Christian controversy, rather than any Islamic intervention. Nevertheless, it is a striking coincidence that Yazīd II built a large cistern at al-Muwaqqar, where he resided, in A.D. 104/722-723, which is only a short distance east of Madaba, Kfayr Abū Sarbūt and Ma'in: his other residence was to the north, at Bayt al-Rās near Irbid. In view of the brief duration of Yazīd's Caliphate, it has been suggested that Yazīd's edict had limited effect within the vast territories of the Caliphate; yet it is likely that his measures would have had some effect in the immediate vicinity of his residence at al-Muwaqqar, and in northern Jordan generally, because of his residence at Bayt al-Rās. This situation raises an interesting issue: if Yazīd did indeed ensure that figurative representations in the neighbourhood of al-Muwaqqar were excised, it is difficult to see how the paintings of Quṣayr 'Amra were not destroyed at the same time, situated as they are some 50 km to the east in an area that was frequented in the

<sup>39</sup> *The governors and judges of Egypt or Kitāb el-Umara' (el-Wulāh) wa Kitāb el-Qudāh of el-Kindī* (E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, xix, Leiden and London, 1912, ed. R. Guest), 71-2. al-Maqrizī, *al-Khiṭāt*, ed. Būlāq (1270/1852), II, 493.

<sup>40</sup> R. de Vaux, 'Une mosaïque byzantine à Ma'in (transjordanie)', *Revue Biblique*, XLVII, 1938, 255-8. Pointing out that the iconoclastic damage at Ma'in was repaired in A.D. 719-720, de Vaux attributes the damage to 'Umar II, rather than to his cousin Yazīd II. Yet it might be considered that internal Christian disputes akin to those that led to Jewish destruction of pictures in synagogues were the cause of this vandalism, if it predates Yazīd's reign.

<sup>41</sup> O. Grabar, *Iconoclasm*, 45 has suggested that this damage could have been the result of Monophysite or other internal Christian changes.

Umayyad period. After all, a cousin of Yazīd in Egypt had a statue in his bath house destroyed as a result of Yazīd's edict and the prominence of the owner of Qūṣayr 'Amra would have been no guarantee of the paintings' protection from the iconoclasm of the Caliph. Did Qūṣayr 'Amra escape because it had not yet been built in Yazīd's reign?

Despite this localized evidence in Jordan for Yazīd's activities, the effects of his suppression of representations, and certainly the iconoclastic tendencies of the early Muslims in general, have been exaggerated. While the early Muslims constructed religious buildings devoid of figures, they built palaces in which figurative art abounded: even under the 'Abbāsids a sculpture of a horseman surmounted the palace in the Round City of Baghdād.<sup>42</sup> Within Palestine itself, there appears to be no significant break in production of icons between the sixth century A.D. and the ninth, confirming the view that such image-breaking as occurred was confined to Yazīd's reign.<sup>43</sup> While the Muslims generally left the Christians to produce and use figurative representations as they saw fit, for their own part, they drew on the available repertoire of art to promote Islamic doctrine in a region where much of the iconography was already shared by Christians, Jews and pagans. The Muslims drew on those features of the artistic repertoire which it was permissible to use in mosques; with the Qur'ān at the heart of their religion, with the ancient Arabian tradition of public inscriptions (and, it seems, literacy in pre-Islamic Arabia), and with the fact that the inscription was already widely used in the Near East by Christians, Jews and pagans (at Edessa), it seems inevitable that the Muslims should have written the statements with which they enunciated their own tenets and countered their opponents. This element in Islamic art arose from entirely internal reasons within Islam and the Arabian tradition, and proceeded to develop upon the artistic repertoire of the Near East.

On the Christian side, concern over the graven image was an ancient problem,<sup>44</sup> with opinions sharply divided on the issue long before Yazīd II. Furthermore, the essentials of what was to constitute official Byzantine iconoclastic art within the Empire existed in Bilād al-Shām well before the doctrine took hold of the state. For whatever reason, certain Christians in the Near East had employed a non-figurative repertoire for several centuries before Islam. The loss of so many mosaics and paintings in the Near East from the Byzantine period makes this tradition seem shadowy. Yet ironically, the existing evidence suggests that the iconography represented by this tradition was, if anything, more disturbing to Muslims than the icons and pictures which decorated so many churches in the region, with the cross and inscriptions promulgating Christian doctrine in terms as explicit and direct as those in which the Muslims themselves were stating their own doctrines under the Umayyads.

<sup>42</sup> It might be added that even at Sāmarrā in the third/ninth century, evidence of aversion to representations among the élite is unclear, or at least, ambiguous. Paintings decorated the private chambers of the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim, and although a number of painted containers with representations on them were found broken, this may have been because of what they had contained—wine—rather than because of the representations. The fact that not all of these containers had been broken seems to confirm a lack of concern for the images on them (cf. D. S. Rice, 'Deacon or drink: some paintings from Samarra re-examined', *Arabica*, v, 1958, 15–33).

<sup>43</sup> K. Weitzmann, 'Loca Sancta and the representational arts of Palestine', *DOP*, 28, 1974, 31–55.

<sup>44</sup> N. H. Baynes, 'The icons before Iconoclasm', *The Harvard Theological Review*, XLIV, 2, 1951, 93–106. E. Kitzinger, 'The cult of images in the age before Iconoclasm', *DOP*, 8, 1954, 84–150. Dodd, loc. cit.