subito@ Dokumente aus Bibliotheken e.V.

# Lieferschein

Universitaetsbibliothek Augsburg

- Dokumentlieferung –
Postfach Postfach

D-86135 Augsburg

Tel.: ++49-821-598-5386
Fax: ++49-821-598-145459
Email: Subito@Bibliothek.Uni-Augsburg.DE

**Empfänger**

Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

Bibliothek

D-14193 Berlin

Wallotstrasse 19

## Angaben zur Bestellung:

Bestelldatum: 2013-03-26 09:37:22
Bestellnummer: SUBITO:VE13032600493 E000021149
Name des Bestellers: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin
Benutzerkennung: SLS02X00192

Lieferdatum:
Lieferpriorität: NORMAL
Aktueller Lieferweg: Email
E-Mail Adresse: biblio@wiko-berlin.de

Bemerkungen zur Auslieferung:

## Angaben zum Dokument:

Signatur: 74 74/LD 2247
Autor:
Titel: Journal of Roman archaeology
Jahr: 2004
Band / Jahrgang: 15
Seiten: 282-304
Aufsatzautor: Fowden, G.
Aufsatztitel: Late antique art in Syria and its Umayyad evolutions
ISSN:
ISBN: 1047-7594
CODEN:

Ihre Bemerkung zur Bestellung:

subito
Dokumente aus Bibliotheken e.V.

# subito Urheberrechtshinweis

Die Bestellung und Nutzung der über subito gelieferten Aufsatzkopien unterliegen den urheberrechtlichen Bestimmungen. Mit der Registrierung bei subito verpflichten Sie sich, diese einzuhalten, d.h. insbesondere, dass die Kopien ausschließlich zum eigenen Gebrauch bestimmt sind und nicht an Dritte weitergegeben werden dürfen. Sie dürfen ohne Genehmigung des Verlags nicht zum Wiederverkauf, Wiederabdruck, zu systematischer Verteilung, Emailversand, Webhosting eingeschlossen institutionelle Repositorien/Archive oder jedweden anderen kommerziellen Zweck verwendet werden.

Sofern Sie eine Lieferung per Email oder FTP erhalten, dürfen Sie die Kopie nur einmal ausdrucken und müssen diese anschließend dauerhaft löschen.

Die Kopien sind mit einem Wasserzeichen versehen, welches ein Urheberrechtsvermerk enthält. Das von subito e.V. angebrachte Wasserzeichen darf nicht entfernt werden.

# JOURNAL OF ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY

VOLUME 17 2004

*

ARTICLES, ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORTS AND NOTES

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

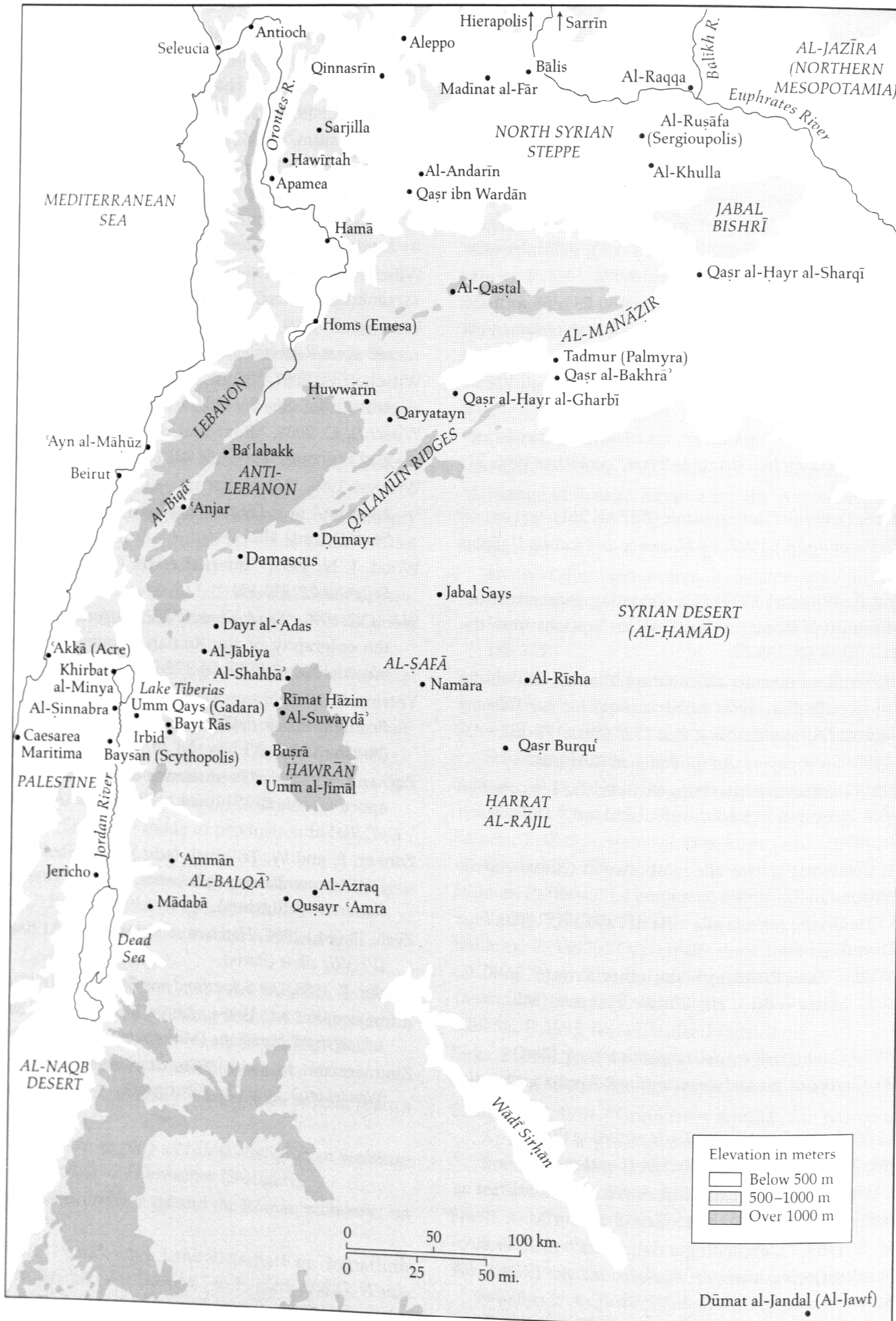


Fig. 1a. Map of Umayyad Syria (drawn by B. Nelson)

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

# Late-antique art in Syria and its Umayyad evolutions

Garth Fowden

## Introduction

Except when recalling the story of Abraham's assault on the idols in his native city — in other words, the dawn of monotheism — the *Qur'ān* wastes little space on arguments about images.[1] This indifference to contemporary idolatry it shares with the gospels, but not at all with the Jewish scriptures or Christian patristic literature. For ancient Israelites as for early Christian bishops, idolatry was an omnipresent pollution. For Jesus in the bosom of Jewish Palestine, and apparently also for Muḥammad in the early 7th-c. Ḥijāz, it was not.

Yet images both polytheist and Christian were hard to avoid in the Roman provinces Muḥammad's followers conquered, above all in populous and wealthy Syria.[2] Even the wide spectrum of figural depiction Syrian archaeology continues to reveal today can barely hint at the Aladdin's Cave that greeted the Muslim invaders.[3] The mosaics of Jordan provide an especially compact and abundant corpus of evidence concentrated between the 5th and 8th c.: they document a revival of classical forms in the age of Justinian, with figural compositions reflecting living knowledge of Greek mythology and poetry, accompanied by an impressive elaboration of geometrical motifs.[4] Much of this rich visual vocabulary was still in use in the 630s, and survived to adorn the great period of Umayyad building that began in the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705).

As was natural, the invaders' reactions were not a unison. Some liked what they saw. One anecdote (that rings true because it belies the austerity often imputed to him) has ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb acquiring in Syria a silver censer decorated with images, and presenting it to the Prophet's mosque in al-Madīna.[5] Another story concerns Aws b. Thaʿlaba al-Taymī, a noted leader

---

*Frequently cited abbreviations:*

| | |
|---|---|
| Album-Goodwin | S. Album and T. Goodwin, *Sylloge of Islamic coins in the Ashmolean* 1 (Oxford 2002) |
| Donceel-Voûte | P. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban* (Louvain 1988) |
| *E.I.* | H. A. R. Gibb *et al.* (edd.), *The encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edn., Leiden 1960- ) |
| *H.C.* | J.-M. Mayeur *et al.* (edd.), *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours*, t.4 (Paris 1993) |
| *K.I.* | J. Sourdel-Thomine and B. Spuler, *Die Kunst des Islam* (Berlin 1973) |
| Piccirillo | M. Piccirillo, *The mosaics of Jordan* (Amman 1993) |
| *Q.'A.* | M. Almagro *et al.*, *Qusayr ʿAmra: residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de Jordania* (2nd edn., Granada 2002) |
| *Q.H.G.* | D. Schlumberger, *Qasr el-Heir el-Gharbi* (Paris 1986) |
| Schick | R. Schick, *The Christian communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule* (Princeton 1995). |

1 G. R. Hawting, *The idea of idolatry and the emergence of Islam: from polemic to history* (Cambridge 1999) 55-66; G. Monnot, "Wat͟haniyya," *E.I.* 11.176b.

2 By 'Syria' are intended the regions currently called Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan.

3 Schick, *Christian communities*, pays careful attention to which floor mosaics in churches were or were not still visible under the Umayyads. His assertion (204-5) that mosaics in secular buildings were not disfigured is invalidated by the newly-discovered Dionysiac mosaic from a house in Jarash that was still in use in the Umayyad period: I. Z'ubi, P.-L. Gatier, M. Piccirillo and J. Seigne, "Note sur une mosaïque à scène bachique dans un palais d'époque Byzantine à Jérash," *LibAnn* 44 (1994) 539-46. See also V. Egan and P. Bikai in *AJA* 103 (1999) 502-5, including figs 14-16 (Nabatean cultic reliefs still visible into the Umayyad period at Khirbat al-Dharīḥ southeast of the Dead Sea). Muslim tradition placed Syria among the chief sources of the pre-Islamic Arabian idolatry that had gradually adulterated Abrahamic monotheism: Hishām b. al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-aṣnām* 5 (Atallah).

4 Piccirillo 15, 23, 25-26.

5 Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-aʿlāq al-nafīsa* 66 (de Goeje).

Permission to copy may be obtained only from *JRA* (jra@JournalofRomanArch.com)

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

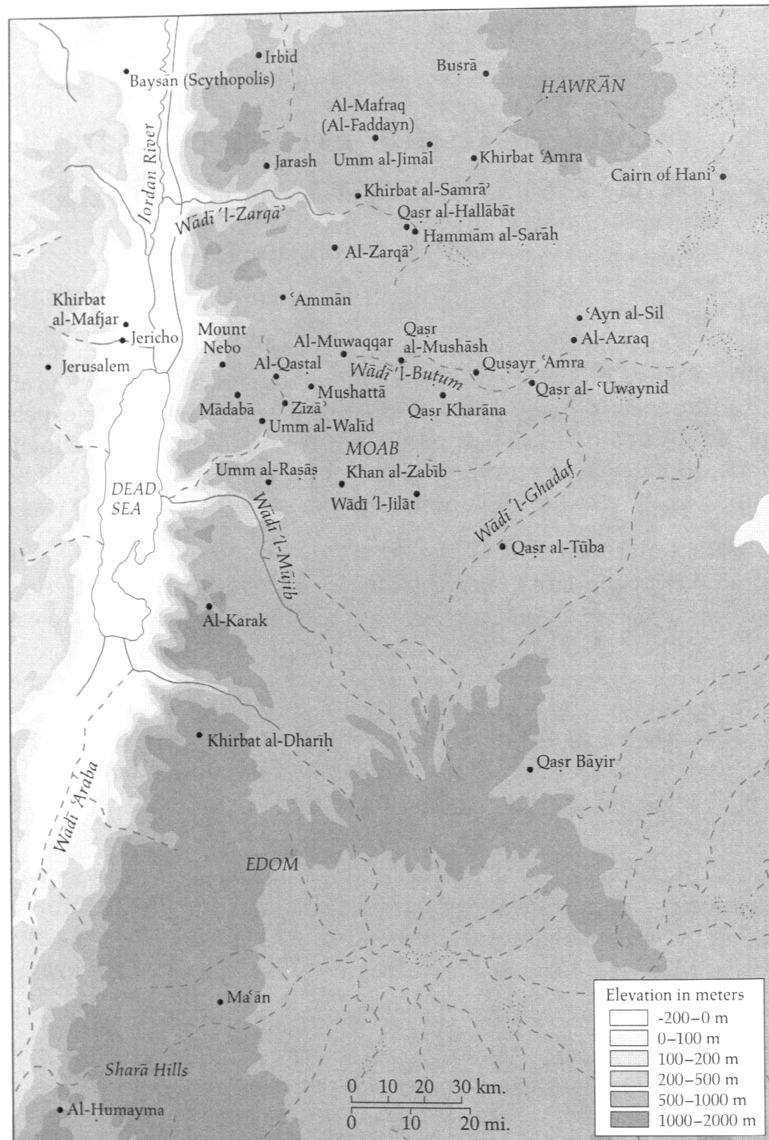


Fig. 1b. Map of Umayyad Syria south of Buṣrā (drawn by B. Nelson)

leader of the Arabs in Khurāsān, who declaimed before the Caliph Yazīd I (680-83) some verses about a sculpture of two young women which had impressed him when he was passing through Palmyra.[6] But not everyone shared ʿUmar's or Aws's sensitivity — in fact, Yazīd's response to Aws's poem was to congratulate him on having shown, as an Iraqi, a receptiveness to a work of art that the Arabs of Syria had ignored. And in time, as the specific Muslim sensibility in matters artistic gradually evolved, downright hostility to figural images became commoner. This was articulated, not infrequently, through stories about the heroic first generation of Islam, and especially the Prophet's companions. The pious pretended, for example in various *ḥadīth*, that ʿUmar had refused to enter churches because they contained images.[7] As for his silver censer, a governor of al-Madīna in the time of the Caliph al-Mahdī (775-85) eventually got round to having the images (*tamāthīl*) with which it was decorated hammered flat. Amidst all this confusion, a need came to be felt for Prophetic example; hence

---

6 Hishām b. al-Kalbī in al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 355 (de Goeje); al-Madā'inī in Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* 2.17-18 s.v. 'Tadmur' (Beirut 1955-57 edn.); Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 160-61 (al-Hādī; cf. G. Levi della Vida, *E.I.* 10.400-1.

7 S. Bashear, "Qibla musharriqa and early Muslim prayer in churches," *Muslim world* 81 (1991) 274-75, 277, etc.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

the emergence of stories that involved Muhammad in encounters — either face-to-face or through lieutenants who turned to him for guidance — with idols or icons in Makka and its environs.[8] These tales are best read in the context of Syria. About the more general strictures on images that were attributed to him, there will be more to say later.

The Aws anecdote usefully underlines the wide chronological and therefore stylistic variety of the art that Muslims came into contact with. Indeed, D. Schlumberger observed long ago that it was one of the characteristics of Umayyad art, not to be influenced only by what was current, but to draw on whatever was still visible that happened to appeal, no matter how old it was.[9] Umayyad eclecticism was tempered, it is true, by a conviction — unmistakeable when we survey the whole corpus of their commissions — that places of prayer should be decorated only by non-figural art, while representations of humans and animals are best kept for secular environments.[10] But this aniconism or, as some have it, iconophobia (avoidance of figural images, to be distinguished from more aggressive iconoclasm, which seeks to destroy them) is the only self-consciously Islamic trait in Umayyad artistic production, which otherwise draws heavily on the late-antique heritage, and effects a seamless transition from the pre-Islamic visual world to what much later, external observers were to call Islamic art, even if many of its tropes were not fresh inventions but developments from the arts of, in this order, Constantinople, Ctesiphon, and provincial traditions such as the Palmyrene or the Nabatean.[11] This 'seamless transition' was, of course, much facilitated by the fact that the artists responsible for it were Christians or Jews, or at least of Christian or Jewish background. It is not only their work that gives this away, but also the absence of any evidence that the invaders involved themselves directly in artistic production. This circumstance allows us to study churches and monasteries that long after the conquests continued to be decorated or redecorated by the subject populations, with the traditional intermingling of figural and non-figural art, and also, in parallel, the remoulding of the tradition by the same or related artisans, working on projects commissioned by the new Muslim ruling class.

Here I aspire only to provide some indication of artistic trends in immediately pre- and post-conquest Syria, in the light of the most recent published discoveries (fig. 1a-b); there can be no question of comprehensive coverage. First, I will look at the continuing late-antique repertoire, both in the relatively straightforward Umayyad secular milieu, and in the more sensitive zone of mosque decoration. But the overwhelming bulk of the surviving art comes from churches, so a relatively lengthy discussion is then devoted to the evolution of this art in its new, Muslim, environment, and in particular to the rôle of the figural image. This leads naturally into a treatment of the spread of aniconism, especially among the Muslims. By contrast, the iconoclast movement that emerged at Constantinople in the 720s evoked little response in Syria; but the leading theoretical opponent of iconoclasm was John of Damascus, and it seems appropriate to close with a few words about John's ideas in their Muslim context. One wonders, though, how much of Syria's flourishing artistic scene John was familiar with at first hand. Could one imagine him visiting one of the desert residences of the Umayyad élite, with some of whose members he may have been on familiar terms? One thing is sure: the Christian and Mus-

8 E.g., al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka* 1.168-69 (Malḥas) (painting of Mary the mother of Jesus in the Ka'ba ordered to be preserved by Muḥammad); al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī* 873-74 (Jones), and in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1.1648 (de Goeje) (an idol of the goddess al-'Uzzā destroyed by Khālid b. al-Walīd).

9 D. Schlumberger, "Les fouilles de Qasr el-Heir el-Gharbi (1936-38): rapport préliminaire," *Syria* 20 (1939) 359-60 = *Q.H.G.* 24; cf. R. Ettinghausen, O. Grabar and M. Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic art and architecture 650-1250* (New Haven 2001) 49.

10 Occasional exceptions: Baḥshal, *Ta'rīkh Wāsiṭ* 68 ('Awwād) (Wāsiṭ); K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim architecture: Umayyads A.D. 622-750* (2nd edn., Oxford 1969) 21-22 (Iṣṭakhr, Qazwīn); J. Wilkinson, "Column capitals in the Ḥaram al-Sharīf," in J. Raby and J. Johns (edd.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem* (Oxford 1992) 125-39, esp. 138 (Al-Aqsā' Mosque, Jerusalem).

11 T. Allen, "The arabesque, the beveled style, and the mirage of an early Islamic art," in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys (edd.), *Tradition and innovation in late antiquity* (Madison 1989) 209-44.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

Fig. 2. Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī: personification of Earth, fresco, 724-43). National Museum, Damascus (*K.I.* pl. XII).

Fig. 3. *Ktisis* mosaic, *c.*500-550. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick and Fletcher Funds, 1998 (1998.69); purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, and Dodge and Rogers Funds, 1999 (1999.99)

lim art that is my subject is rarely discussed as part of the same cultural atmosphere. It is hoped that doing precisely that will help stir some new perceptions.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

**The continuing late-antique repertoire**

Direct evidence for secular art commissioned by Umayyad patrons before ʿAbd al-Malik is scanty. It is, for example, only from a literary source that we discover how ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād, who governed ʿIrāq from 675/76 to 683/84, decorated his residence at al-Baṣra with pictures (presumably paintings) that included 'a fierce lion, a barking dog and a butting ram' rendered, one imagines, in the Sasanian manner, since that was the general flavour of ʿUbayd Allāh's administration.[12]

It is in the metropolitan province of Syria, though, and after the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, that we find the bulk of the evidence for the sort of secular interior decoration commissioned by ʿUbayd Allāh at al-Baṣra. Fortunately, this evidence is overwhelmingly not literary but archaeological, and some of it has not even needed to be excavated. As is well documented in every handbook of Islamic art, the late antique Syrian tradition of figural representation was abundantly patronised by the Umayyad élite for the decoration of the many 'desert castles' or *quṣūr* (sing. *qaṣr*) it constructed especially across an extensive region stretching from al-Rusāfa near the Euphrates to the Wādī Mūjib east of the Dead Sea. The *quṣūr* were multi-purpose installations that served as bases for a range of pursuits, from hunting to cultivation of diplomatic contacts with the tribes. They will also have provided accommodation for eminent or official travelers, and required a more or less extensive infrastructure, including water-gathering and cultivation in order to feed residents and visitors.[13] If their decoration is our main interest, then the functional aspects of the *quṣūr* that will most detain us will be the pleasurable along with the diplomatic, in the general sense of the presentation of the owner whether prince or notable.

Located west of Palmyra, close to an important pass through the low mountain chain that projects northeastwards from Damascus towards the Euphrates, Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī belonged to the Caliph Hishām (724-43): luckily, one part of the architecturally homogeneous complex is dated by an inscription to the year 727.[14] Its surviving (excavated) decoration consists mainly of stucco reliefs, with some paintings. One isolated sculpture consciously imitates Palmyrene funerary art,[15] while the gate-house sheathed in Sasanian-style stucco decoration and adorned with a stucco portrait of a prince dressed in the Sasanian manner[16] was an extravagance inconceivable on a Roman building of this sort. Despite the hostility between the two empires, Sasanian art had not been unknown in Roman Syria.[17] But the Umayyads took Sasanian manners to heart, revelling in the knowledge that they were the heirs of mighty Kisrā, the Iranian king of kings. Still, what one more commonly encounters at Qaṣr al-Hayr al-Gharbī, among both the stucco and the painted figures, is frontally- and schematically-rendered forms, with large staring eyes (fig. 2) that closely recall the pre-Islamic (or Late Roman) Syrian aesthetic (fig. 3).[18] Two frescoes that adorn the floor of stairwells communi-

12 Yāqūt 1.530 s.v. Al-Baydāʾ; cf. C. F. Robinson, "ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād," *E.I.* 10.763-64. Depictions of animals in action are especially characteristic of Sasanian art: see the numerous illustrations in R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parther und Sasaniden* (Munich 1962).

13 On the functions of the *quṣūr* see G. Fowden, *Quṣayr ʿAmra: art and the Umayyad elite in late antique Syria* (Berkeley 2004) 272-90.

14 *Q.H.G.*

15 M. Meinecke, "Die frühislamischen Kalifenresidenzen: Tradition oder Rezeption?" in K. Bartl and S. R. Hauser (edd.), *Continuity and change in Northern Mesopotamia from the Hellenistic to the early Islamic period* (Berlin 1996) 143 and pl. 6c-d.

16 *K.I.* pls XI, 48a, 59.

17 M. M. Mango, "The continuity of the classical tradition in the art and architecture of Northern Mesopotamia," in N. G. Garsoian, T. F. Mathews and R. W. Thomson (edd.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the formative period* (Washington, D.C. 1982) 118-19; R. Farioli Campanati, "Considerazioni sui pavimenti musivi cristiani della Giordania," in M. Piccirillo (ed.), *I mosaici di Giordania* (Rome 1986) 161-62; C. Kondoleon, *Antioch, the lost ancient city* (Princeton 2000) 130-38.

18 Compare, e.g., *K.I.* pls. 44 and XII = fig. 2 here (Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī) — as also 55, 57, 64a (from the

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

cating with the upstairs caliphal apartments demonstrate clearly the Umayyads' joint East Roman and Sasanian artistic heritage. A mounted hunter with musicians is thoroughly Iranian in conception,[19] while a personification of Earth (*Gē*) holding a cloth full of fruit, accompanied by marine centaurs and surrounded by a vine-scroll border is deeply impregnated by the Greek and Roman tradition, manifest also in the subtle modeling of her face (fig. 2).[20]

These striking and well-preserved frescoes, along with the inscription that dates the complex and, roughly, the paintings too, make Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī an outstanding document of Umayyad art. Neither epigraphically dated nor of such high quality, yet still more important thanks to the extent of its paintings, the variety and exceptional interest of their subject-matter, and the mostly adequate and often excellent state of their preservation, is the little bath-house at Quṣayr ʿAmra in the Jordanian desert east of ʿAmmān, which was probably built by the flamboyant al-Walīd b. Yazīd while he was heir apparent to Hishām (724-43), with parts of its decoration being finished during his 15-month caliphate (743-44).[21] Here once again there are Sasanian elements in the whole — for example, the couch throne and cushions on which a princess reclines in the hall's W aisle; but the overall impression is of a last flowering of the late-antique art of Syria, often with direct borrowings either from Greek mythological imagery — a bathing beauty, for example, modelled on Aphrodite, and the zodiac filling the dome of the *caldarium* — or from the Christian art of East Rome, notably in the Adamic image of the enthroned patron (see further below).[22] The famous painting of the 6 kings not only includes Kisrā wearing what is unmistakeably intended to be a Sasanian crown, but also derives conceptually from the Sasanian tradition, in that it appears to reflect an old Iranian story about how the kings of the world had once upon a time gathered to do homage to the lord of Ctesiphon, earth's central, richest and most powerful kingdom. But the artistic style of the painting is overwhelmingly East Roman.[23]

In general, the art of the *quṣūr* — Khirbat al-Mafjar near Jericho is another such structure rich in decorative elements[24] — juxtaposes East Roman and Iranian elements rather than blending them.[25] This is apparent too in the earliest caliphal-period coinage, which adopts or adapts types from East Roman and Sasanian mints, but does not usually mix them.[26] Under the

---

Umayyad complex at Khirbat al-Mafjar near Jericho) — with the mosaic of *Ktisis* (*c*.500-50) recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: H. C. Evans, "Fragment of a floor mosaic with a personification of Ktisis," *BMMA* spring 2001, 16-17 (fig. 3 here).

19 *K.I.* pl. XIII, and cf. R. Hillenbrand's comments, 174-75; also M. Carter in P. O. Harper, *The royal hunter: art of the Sasanian empire* (New York 1978) 77-78. M. Mode, *Sogdien und die Herrscher der Welt: Türken, Sasaniden und Chinesen in Historiengemälden des 7. Jahrhunderts n.Chr. aus Alt-Samarqand* (Frankfurt am Main 1993; and cf. the revised English version, with abundant new illustrations: www.mlucom6.urz.uni-halle.de/orientarch/ca/afras/bibl.htm) 116 and n.364, argues that the mounted hunter's carefully-depicted weaponry and quiver are all Sogdian in style.

20 *K.I.* pl. XII, and cf. R. Hillenbrand's comments (172-73) with Christian parallels in A. Schmidt-Colinet, "'Velum und Kolpos': Ein paganer Bildtopos und seine *interpretatio christiana*," *Mitteilungen zur spätantiken Archäologie und byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 1 (1998) 29-46.

21 *Q.'A.*; Fowden (supra n.13). The best account of al-Walīd is Ḥ. ʿAṭwān, *Al-Walīd b. Yazīd: ʿArḍ wa naqd* (Beirut 1981).

22 *Q.'A.* 50 fig. 22, 103 figs 72-73, 125 fig. 85, 127 fig. 86 (bathing beauty; cf. M.-O. Jentel in *LIMC* 2(1), 159 no. 111; 2(2), 164 pl. 111, for Aphrodite); 48 fig. 20, 119 fig. 81 (zodiac); 145 fig. 94 (enthroned prince). How familiar the patron and/or his artisans were with the content and meaning as well as the iconography of Greek mythology is another question: Fowden (supra n.13) 257-65.

23 *Q.'A.* 50 fig. 22, 135 fig. 89, 139 fig. 92; Fowden (supra n.13) 197-226, discussing *inter alia* Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān* 429, on the Dukkān at Kirmānshāh.

24 R. W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar: an Arabian mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford 1959).

25 Besides the frescoes just mentioned, note also the two princely portraits in stucco, one Sasanian and one Roman, also found at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī: *K.I.* pls 38, 59, and the comments by Hillenbrand ibid. 163-64, and by K. Brisch on 182-83.

26 See below p. 297. For some slight evidence of iconographic contamination, see R. Milstein, "A hoard of

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

Umayyads there is at times a striking faithfulness in the use of these adopted artistic forms, though one may doubt whether their significance was always fully grasped — for example, Quṣayr 'Amra's artists almost certainly modelled their bathing beauty on an image of Aphrodite purely for aesthetic reasons, without any wish to allude to the Greek goddess or indeed her analogues in Semitic polytheism.

**Mosque decoration**

Another feature of *qaṣr* decoration is its thoroughly secular, not to say downright hedonistic, spirit. Except occasionally in its epigraphy,[27] it barely alludes to Islam. Admittedly, the *quṣūr* do normally include a mosque, and some specimens of geometrical decoration have been preserved.[28] But only in one or two surviving metropolitan cultic structures can one still form some impression of the limits of what was deemed appropriate ornament for a house of prayer. Here again, one finds oneself in the presence of artistic forms whose consonance with the pre-Islamic Syrian norm is striking. Admittedly, one has to allow that new meanings were being injected into the old forms; but the forms themselves are quite traditional in appearance. Leaving aside functional items such as the *minbar* and *miḥ rāb*, on account of the scarcity of decorated examples that are definitely pre-750,[29] and the Umayyad mosque in San'ā' because the undeniably pre-Islamic elements in its decoration are simply re-used architectural members from a nearby church,[30] we are left with the usual suspects: 'Abd al-Malik's Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and al-Walīd I's central mosque in Damascus. Yet, in a way, these are enough. The use of sawn sheets of veined marble as cladding in both these structures, and the mosaics with their elaborate vegetal decoration, along with architectural forms at Damascus, place these buildings in an apparently unbroken line of descent from the Christian art of the East Roman Empire.[31] In the Dome of the Rock there are Sasanian reminiscences too,[32] more integrated than tends to be the case in Umayyad secular art, though this may be a false perspective created by insufficient evidence.

The only striking innovation in mosque decoration was not, then, an addition to the old repertoire but a subtraction — that of the human or animal form. Something, though, had to fill the vacuum thus created; and the East Roman tradition proved once more to be full of resource. For all that secular East Roman art, as also the ecclesiastical art of the Chalcedonian

early Arab figurative coins," *IsrNumJ* 10 (1988-89) 11; Album-Goodwin 47 esp. n.259.

27 See, e.g., below p. 303 and n.107.

28 E.g., 'A. al-Q. M. al-Ḥuṣān, "Aḍwā' 'alā 'l-muktashafāt al-atharīya al-ḥadītha fī mashrū'ī ḥafrīyāt al-Fudayn wa-Riḥāb — al-Mafraq min khilāl a'māl al-tanqīb mā bayna al-a'wām 1991-2001 m.," *ADAJ* 46 (2002) 75-76, on the mosque at al-Faddayn (al-Mafraq).

29 For a list of surviving Umayyad *miḥrābs*, see E. Whelan, "The origins of the *miḥrāb mujawwaf*: a reinterpretation," *Int. J. Mid. East Stud.* 18 (1986) 221 n.62 (and cf. above, n.28, for one of the many more recently discovered specimens, with decoration. Although concerned to identify a specifically Muslim (i.e., religious rather than [*pace* Sauvaget] largely secular) rationale for the introduction of the *miḥrāb*, Whelan does concede (215) that "the semicircular niche was a cliché of late antique architectural decoration". Note its suggestive use as a frame for a cross — e.g., in the 6th-c. silver book cover from the Kumluca treasure: S. A. Boyd and M. M. Mango, *Ecclesiastical silver plate in sixth-century Byzantium* (Washington, D.C. 1992) S22 (pls. after p. 88).

30 R. Lewcock, G. Rex Smith, R. B. Serjeant and P. Costa, "The architectural history and description of Ṣan'ā' mosques: The Great Mosque," in R. B. Serjeant and R. Lewcock (edd.), *Ṣan'ā': an Arabian Islamic city* (London 1983) 333, 335-36, 346.

31 Jerusalem: M. Gautier-van Berchem, "The mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," in Creswell (supra n.10) vol. 1, 213-322. Damascus: G. H. Salies, "Die Mosaiken der Grossen Moschee von Damaskus," *XXXV Corso di Cultura* (Ravenna 1988) 295-313. Marble cladding in Constantinople: Procop., *Aed.* 1.10.19-20. On the wide popularity of architectural forms in pre-Islamic mosaic art, see Piccirillo 26, 34-35.

32 O. Grabar, *The shape of the holy: early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton 1996) 88.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

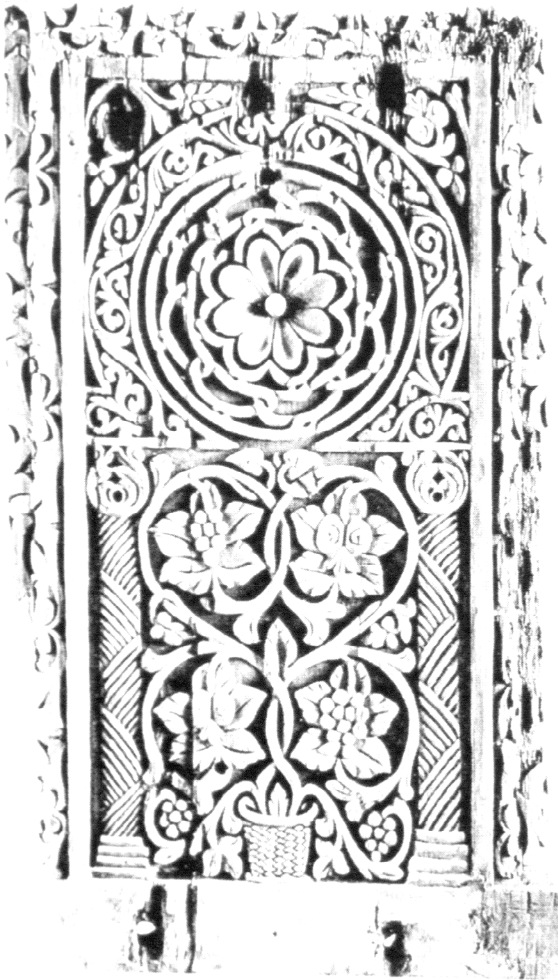

Fig. 4. Al-Aqṣā Mosque, Jerusalem: carved wood panel no. 9E; late Umayyad/early Abbasid (R. W. Hamilton in Hillenbrand in Johns [infra n.38] 291 fig. 62).

Church, was wholeheartedly figural, vegetal or geometric designs often spread across vast areas of floor or vault, without any figural elements intervening; while the art of the anti-Chalcedonian Churches inclined much more towards non-figural composition, even if portable icons were far from uncommon.[33] In other words, aniconic decoration had long been very familiar in all the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. Its conventions had been carefully thought out, and they often reveal a historical development more coherent than that of the images — it is, after all, by the vegetal and geometrical elements in their frames that late-antique Syrian mosaics are now most effectively dated.[34] In order to gratify their Muslim masters' proscription of the animate form in mosque decoration, the Umayyads' artists took this inherited profusion of decorative form — trees, vines and other vegetation; knotted interlacings like strap-work, and other geometrical ornament; and architectural forms either realistic or fantastical — and spread it all over their buildings' surfaces, as they had already been accustomed to do in their own churches (if we assume the artists were of Christian origin). The inventiveness of pre-Islamic geometrical ornament had often been dazzling, with human and animal figures thoroughly subordinate. So it did not take much, in the Muslim world, for vegetal and geometric designs eventually to assume an independent existence of their own.[35]

Among the buildings that survive, these aniconic modes of decoration are already in sole possession of the Dome of the Rock and of the Damascus mosque — in which latter, precisely because of the relatively realistic depiction of buildings and ornamental trees, the absence of human and animal forms is particularly conspicuous. There is only one place where the actual *shift* from figural to non-figural may be exactly and unambiguously traced in the stones. It is Mushattā south of ʿAmmān, a *qaṣr* full of figural art, by turns serenely elegant or grossly suggestive, whose spectacular façade is encrusted with tentacular, inextricably complex vine-ornament embracing — almost suffocating — figures both animal and human, who only disappear in that section of the facade which adjoins the mosque's *qibla*-wall, the direction of prayer: there, the vegetal screen brooks not even the smallest animate intruder.[36]

---

33 M. Mundell, "Monophysite church decoration," in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (edd.), *Iconoclasm: papers given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, 1975* (Birmingham 1977) esp. 60, 73, 74.

34 Cf. Janine Balty, "Doro Levi, *Antioch mosaic pavements*: cinquante ans après," *Byzantion* 71 (2001) 305: "Les modèles iconographiques se transmettent, évoluent et se combinent, sans règle fixe, au fil des siècles."

35 Allen's lucid article (supra n.11), esp. 217-25, places the maturation of this whole process in the 10th c.

36 *K.I.* pls. 62-64, and K. Brisch's comments at 184-85. Note also the mosaic from an 8th-c. private house in al-Ramla, Palestine, part of it decorated with representations of animals, while one section is set aside for a depiction of a (correctly oriented) *miḥrāb* filled with a pious, partly Quranic inscription: M. Ros-

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

As was natural, the Umayyads' interest in the inherited vocabulary of vegetal, geometric and architectonic ornament became manifest not just through their more wholesale deployment of it, but also in the evolution of its forms. This is perhaps a daring statement to make, given that so much has been lost on the Roman side — if it had not, then the (fragmentarily preserved) Iranizing decoration of S. Polyeuctus in Constantinople, for example, would probably seem less exotic and puzzling than it does.[37] But we can at least say with certainty that the surviving wood carvings from the al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem, whether they are late Umayyad or early Abbasid, show on the one hand a marked indebtedness to East Roman decorative forms, but at the same time a creeping geometricization of vegetal motifs that is one among several pointers to the 9th-c. art of Sāmarrā' (fig. 4).[38]

**Church decoration, figural and non-figural**

By the 8th c., patronage for the best builders and artists came increasingly from Muslim sources. A symptom of this is the superior quality of the mosaics in palaces and mosques compared to churches, for the former "are technically more accurate and the tesserae are better cut" than those in churches — which are, in their turn, technically and stylistically inferior to equivalent 6th-c. work.[39] Still, the Church did not immediately become an aesthetic backwater. Given the various ways in which pre-Islamic artistic traditions evolved or at least were unaccustomedly juxtaposed — East Roman jostling Sasanian, for example — once their practitioners entered the employ of Umayyad patrons on secular or religious projects, one might expect there to have been repercussions on ecclesiastical art too. Christian communities continued to repair old church buildings, perhaps even to commission new ones,[40] and not a few of these sites have been excavated over the past century. Our evidence is abundant, especially the mosaic floors, which often survive even when a building's stone foundations have been robbed. But that very abundance, and in particular the giddying rate at which new specimens are being uncovered, makes interpretation or even an overview ever more difficult, with generalizations prone to be speedily undermined. Although a significant number of floors contains carefully dated inscriptions, the dates are not always easy to decipher, while it can be hard to determine for exactly which parts of a given floor the date is valid.[41]

---

en-Ayalon, *Art et archéologie islamiques en Palestine* (Paris 2002) 58-59.

37 Cf. G. Fowden, "Constantine, Silvester and the church of S. Polyeuctus in Constantinople," *JRA* 7 (1994) 274-84, esp. 282, with references to J.-M. Spieser.

38 R. Hillenbrand, "Umayyad woodwork in the Aqṣā mosque," in J. Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and early Islam* (Oxford 1999) 271-310, esp. 308-10.

39 Piccirillo 47; id., "Les mosaïques d'époque omeyyade des églises de la Jordanie," *Syria* 75 (1998) 269.

40 P.-L. Gatier, "Les inscriptions grecques d'époque islamique (VIIe-VIIIe siècles) en Syrie du Sud," in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (edd.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe-VIIIe siècles* (Damascus 1992) 147-48, 155; Schick 119-23. Note also the table of dated inscriptions in Jordan in B. Hamarneh, *Topografia cristiana ed insediamenti rurali nel territorio dell'odierna Giordania nelle epoche bizantina ed islamica, V-IX sec.* (Vatican City 2003) 240-41.

41 For this latter reason, two important floors bearing late dates are *not* here taken into account:
1) In the church of S. George, Dayr al-'Adas, south of Damascus, a Greek inscription in the N aisle gives the date 722. But the nave mosaic is dominated by humans and animals to an extent unparalleled in churches at this late date: a camel caravan (labelled in Greek with letters that differ from those in the aisle inscription), a scene from the hunt, a grape harvester and a bird trainer. This floor may belong to the 7th c.: against the earlier interpretation espoused by Donceel-Voûte 45-54 and R. Farioli Campanati, "Il mosaico pavimentale d'epoca umayyade della chiesa di S. Giorgio nel Deir al-Adas (Siria)," in A. Iacobini and E. Zanini (edd.), *Arte profana e arte sacra a Bisanzio* (Rome 1995) 257-69, see now P.-L. Gatier, "Le témoignage des inscriptions grecques de l'époque islamique au Proche-Orient (VIIème-VIIIème s.)," unpublished paper submitted to the colloquium "Islam and late antiquity," Budapest, January 2003, p.7.
2) An unpublished church floor uncovered in 1996-97 at Jabalīya (Gaza), has a vine scroll embracing portrait busts, depictions of wild and domesticated animals including birds, and scenes from rural life.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

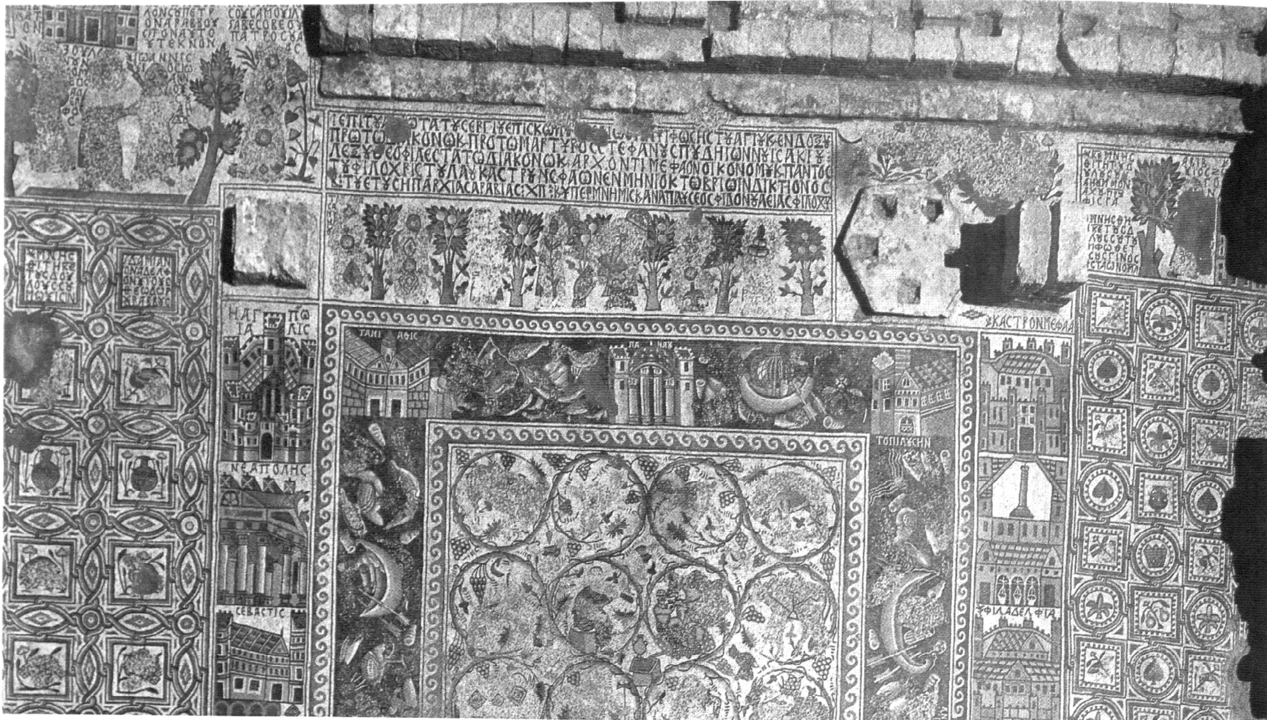

Fig. 5. Church of S. Stephen, Umm al-Raṣāṣ: floor mosaic; 718 or earlier (Piccirillo 210 pl. 34).

This is not the place to discuss every problem raised by this impressive corpus of floors. It seems best to concentrate on what eventually became the most burning issue for artists seeking to prolong their Christian tradition in the context of a Muslim society: the rôle of the figural image.

Two things need to be made clear at the outset. First, floor mosaics make up the overwhelming bulk of our evidence, but are only exceptionally adorned by *sacred* images,[42] which were probably, however, found on walls and vaults in considerable quantities.[43] Secondly, there is no necessary link between aniconic decoration and an Islamic environment, since Christians had a long tradition of using purely geometrical or vegetal ornament in the decoration of church floors.[44] This was particularly so in the church's most holy part, the sanctuary, where representations of humans are rarely found on the floor, though animals were admitted, usually in a symbolic rôle.[45] Accordingly, when we find at Nabhā in the Biqā' valley a church

An inscription dates 'the whole work' to 732, but there are signs that this was inserted into a pre-existing floor. The mosaics have not been published: my thanks to J.-B. Humbert and C. Saliou for discussing them with me, and providing photographs and plans. On the site generally, see M. Sadek, "Gaza," *Dossiers d'archéologie* 240 (1999) 62-63; Y. M. Abu Hassuneh and J.-B. Humbert, "Redécouverte de la Gaza byzantine: le chantier de Jabaliyah," *Dossiers d'archéologie* 240 (1999) 66-67; J.-B. Humbert, "The rivers of paradise in the Byzantine church near Jabaliyah-Gaza," in M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (edd.), *The Madaba Map centenary 1897-1997* (Jerusalem 1999) 216-18; J.-B. Humbert *et al.*, "Mukheitem à Jabaliyah, un site byzantin," in J.-B. Humbert (ed.), *Gaza méditerranéenne: histoire et archéologie en Palestine* (Paris 2000) 121-22; C. Saliou, "Gaza dans l'antiquité tardive: nouveaux documents épigraphiques," *RBibl* 107 (2000) 405-6.

42 For examples see R. Talgam, "Similarities and differences between synagogue and church mosaics in Palestine during the Byzantine and Umayyad periods," in L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss (edd.), *From Dura to Sepphoris* (JRA Suppl. 40, 2000) 93-95, 102-3.

43 See, e.g., M. Piccirillo, "Iconofobia o iconoclastia nelle chiese di Giordania?" in *Bisanzio e l'Occidente: arte, archeologia, storia* (Rome 1996) 173-91; A. Acconci, "Su alcuni lacerti pittorici di Umm er-Rasās–Kastron Mefaa," ibid. 193-205; T. Waliszewski, "The wall mosaics," in Z. T. Fiema *et al.*, *The Petra church* (Amman 2001) 300-4.

44 See the portfolio of plans presented by Donceel-Voûte, *Pavements*.

45 Farioli Campanati (supra n.17) 159.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

parts (only) of whose entirely geometrical floor were laid in 746, there is no particular reason to wonder whether "a change in attitude towards figural representation had occurred"[46] — and anyway the date in the Nabhā inscription has also been read as 646.[47]

The last more or less securely-dated mosaic floors with figures were produced, on present evidence, in Jordan in the years between 717 and 720 — the reign, incidentally, of 'Umar II, the only Umayyad to go down in history as a pious Muslim and therefore, presumably, no friend to imagery in sacred places. At two of the three sites in question, it can hardly be said that the figures are the focus of the composition; but they are unmistakeably there. The al-Quwaysma mosaic (3 km south of the centre of 'Ammān) dated to 717-18 has just birds.[48] As for the acropolis church at Ma'īn west of Mādabā, dated 719-20, it boasted a decent collection of small animals, though totally overwhelmed by the geometrical design that proliferates around them.[49]

The third site is the church of S. Stephen at Umm al-Raṣāṣ, south of Mādabā.[50] Because of an inscription at the E end of the nave, just in front of the sanctuary, the date of which is now, after much debate, generally read as 718, the abundantly figural mosaics that cover the nave, showing the hunt, grape harvest and pastoral scenes, tend to be assigned to the same year (fig. 5). Even if one were to be much more prudent and assign to this late date only the panel that contains the inscription itself, still one would have to include the 7 donors depicted immediately under the text, and in all probability others too who appear in similar but undated panels at the E end of the N and S aisles.[51] Until *c*.720, then, we can be sure that unabashedly figural decoration was entirely welcome in the churches of Jordan. In the rest of Syria, evidence of such late date is simply lacking. But in principle there is no reason why the situation should have been any different, at least as regards the Chalcedonian (Melkite) communion, which most churches in Jordan served.[52]

At some point, though, these figures of 718, and all the others that populate the vine-scroll in the main nave 'carpet', were disfigured through deliberate extraction, scrambling and re-setting of the tesserae that composed them. Both here at Umm al-Raṣāṣ, and in the numerous other churches (such as Ma'īn) where something similar happened, there is a reasonable tendency to assume that the *terminus post quem*, if not necessarily the direct cause, was the edict against images that Caliph Yazīd II issued in the year 721.[53] (Those who accept this con-

46 *Pace* L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the iconoclast era (ca 680-850): the sources. An annotated survey* (Aldershot 2001) 33, and cf. the observation on 35 that after 722 (or rather 732, in the light of Jabalīya) "geometric ornament prevails".

47 A.D. 746: C. Ghadban, "Inscriptions grecques et latines de Nabha," *Ktéma* 5 (1980) 108-10; J.-P. Rey-Coquais, "Inscriptions grecques inédites, découvertes par Roger Saidah," in *Archéologie au Levant: recueil à la mémoire de Roger Saidah* (Lyon 1982) 408 n.31. A.D. 646: Donceel-Voûte 397 esp. n.8 (the style of the mosaics has "très peu en commun avec des pavements omeyyades").

48 Piccirillo 266-67.

49 Piccirillo 36 (on the mosaics' naturalism), 194-201; Schick 398-99.

50 S. Ognibene, *Umm al-Rasas: La chiesa di Santo Stefano ed il "problema iconofobico"* (Rome 2002). For the date see Janine Balty, "Les mosaïques d'Umm al-Rasas et la date de 718," *JRA* 11 (1998) 701-2, and A. Michel, *Les églises d'époque byzantine et umayyade de Jordanie, Ve-VIIIe siècle* (Turnhout 2001) 391-94 ; but note the cautious remarks of Piccirillo (supra n.39) 266-68. I am obliged to P.-L. Gatier for discussion of the dating and interpretation of these mosaics.

51 M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas–Mayfa'ah* 1: *gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano* (Jerusalem 1994) 139-41, 149-54, 244-46, 249-52.

52 For Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian ('Jacobite'/'Monophysite') episcopal sees east of the Jordan, see G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia ecclesiastica orientalis* (Padua 1988) 744-53, 1032-46; G. Troupeau, "Églises et chrétiens dans l'Orient musulman," *H.C.* 440-41; some supplementary information in Michel (supra n.50) 426-33. Jordan is thus doubly atypical of Greater Syria, being almost uniformly Chalcedonian and having preserved so many dated mosaic floors from the Umayyad period: contrast Donceel-Voûte 469, on those of Syria and Lebanon. Jordan was fashionable with the Umayyads, witness her many *quṣūr*.

53 On the date of the edict, see A. A. Vasiliev, "The iconoclastic edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721," *DOP*

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

Fig. 6. ʿAyn al-Kanīsa, floor mosaic, 6th c. and 762 (Piccirillo, *LibAnn* 44 [1994] photo 1).

nection are of course obliged by numerous surviving undisfigured mosaics to concede that the edict's application was neither immediate nor very extensive.) Given the disfiguring of the nave mosaic at S. Stephen's, one is also bound to wonder whether the exquisite geometrical mosaic laid in the sanctuary in March 756[54] may not have been *deliberately* aniconic, though there is an earlier, still largely unexplored mosaic underneath it which may well also have been aniconic, as was normal in sanctuaries. There is a suggestive floor too at ʿAyn al-Kanīsa (Mt Nebo), where a figural mosaic laid in the 6th c. was disfigured at some date about which it is hard to be precise; while a whole section of the same floor (perhaps significantly, the nave, not the sanctuary) was replaced in 762 with a purely geometrical design (fig. 6).[55] In other words, a figural mosaic was here broken into and disrupted by a geometrical floor, which was also assigned its own separate inscription. Here, at least, there does seem to have been a deliberate decision to avoid figural depictions, even at the cost of aesthetic disharmony.

What, then, may have been the motivations behind this aniconism? Our literary sources suggest that the increasingly dogmatic iconoclasm which emanated from Constantinople after the 720s found no echo in the caliphate.[56] In fact, the Chalcedonian congregations were strongly opposed to it.[57] Many of the defaced images had depicted secular human figures or animals, which were inoffensive to Constantinople's iconoclasts,[58] while the careful resetting of the tesserae, so that floors could continue to be used, makes it unlikely that the interventions were the work of hostile Muslims.[59] In default of a purely religious motivation, perhaps there were social or political calculations behind these acts of disfigurement?[60] The most natural explanation may be that they were committed by

---

9-10 (1956) 45-47. Some sources suggest the edict was not issued until shortly before Yazīd's death in 724, which might go some way towards explaining its apparently limited effect: see also infra 300-01. I am grateful to G. Bowersock for discussion of this point, in particular.

54 Piccirillo and Alliata (supra n.51) 136-38, 242-44; Ognibene (supra n.50) 60-63. This date is not controversial.

55 M. Piccirillo, "Le due iscrizioni della cappella della Theotokos nel Wadi ʿAyn al-Kanisah–Monte Nebo," *LibAnn* 44 (1994) 521-30.

56 *Pace* M.-F. Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIII$^{e}$-IX$^{e}$ siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène," *Travaux et mémoires* 12 (Paris 1994) 193 n.77.

57 Schick 210-11.

58 Schick 211-13. We have no defaced religious scenes because such were rarely placed on floors, which are what usually survives. A fresco of a saint or prophet that had been gouged with a pick was recently discovered in the church of the priest Wāʾil at Umm al-Raṣāṣ. But given the expert disfiguring of the mosaics in this same church, it is by no means clear, *pace* Piccirillo (supra n.43) 182-83, that the scattered pick marks, most of which missed the face, were intended as iconoclasm.

59 In one instance, a bird was replaced by a cross: Piccirillo (supra n.39) 270 fig. 2, 278. For recently discovered evidence that Christians in Jordan may have resumed use of figural decoration while East Rome was still in the grip of iconoclasm, see M. Piccirillo, "Mosaici tardo-romani e ommaiadi. Nuove scoperte in Giordania. 1994-1996," in D. Paunier and C. Schmidt (edd.), *Actes du VIII$^{ème}$ Colloque int. pour l'étude de la mosaïque antique et médiévale* (Lausanne 2001) vol. 2, 444-58, esp. 450-52.

60 This must certainly have been why the mythological floor in a private residence at Jarash was disfigur-

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

Fig. 7. Church of the Virgin, Mādabā, floor mosaic, 767 (Piccirillo 50 pl. 2).

Christians in the hope that a 'goodwill' gesture of this sort might avert any more intrusive or destructive manifestation of Muslim distaste for images, such as that foreshadowed in Yazīd's edict.[61] And the habit of abstention from images — not just secular images on floors, but also the holy icons and their reverencing — will gradually have turned into an indifference to them, even a certain incomprehension.[62] Nonetheless, the suspicion persists that politico-religious calculations had no monopoly in the minds of the 'iconoclasts'. There may have been an aesthetic explanation too — after all, one of the obvious differences between 'Early Christian' and 'Middle Byzantine' interior decoration was that church floors everywhere ceased to be decorated with figural designs, even in the Christian empire itself. This was an evolution in taste, not theology, and certainly nothing to do with Islam.

Our last exhibit is the church of the Virgin at Mādabā, the stunning geometrical nave pavement of which was recently dated to 767, though once again the reading of the relevant inscription has been much disputed (fig. 7).[63] In the central medallion a metrical text reads:

Παρθενικὴν Μαρίην θεομήτορα καὶ ὃν ἔτικτεν
Χ(ριστὸ)ν παμβασιλῆα Θεοῦ μόνον υἱέα μούνου
δερκόμενος καθάρευε νόον καὶ σάρκα καὶ ἔργα
ὡς καθάραις εὐχαῖς αὐτὸν θ(εῖο)ν λαόν[64]

Beholding the Virgin Mary Mother of God
and Christ the king of all, whom she bore,

ed: supra n.3.

61 Schick 209-19.

62 Cf. S. H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the monasteries of ninth-century Palestine* (Aldershot 1992) V, 58, quoting Theodore Abū Qurra; Auzépy (supra n.56) 190-93, 203-4.

63 Piccirillo (supra n.39) 263-65; cf. D. Feissel in *REG* 109 (1996) 654 no. 504.

64 P.-L. Gatier, *Inscriptions de la Jordanie* 2 (Paris 1986) 127-28, but in l.4 (ὡς expressing purpose, with aorist optative) following M. Piccirillo, "La chiesa della Vergine a Madaba," *LibAnn* 32 (1982) 383, and *SEG* 32 (1982) 428 no. 1545 ('three hexameters plus one irregular penta- or hexameter').

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

only son of the only God, purify your mind and flesh and deeds,
that you purify with prayers this people of God.

Compared to other mosaic inscriptions, the language is abnormally elevated, theological, indeed anagogical.[65] But it raises a material problem: even these spiritual verses imprinted on an abstract design may point to the presence in front of the spectator (probably in the apse) of a mosaic or fresco,[66] in this case depicting Mary holding Christ the King. If the allusion is indeed to such an image, then the geometric floor can hardly have any deliberately aniconic meaning: the choice of motif must have been purely aesthetic, and we are reminded that other churches too, even if their floors were geometric, may nonetheless have been decorated with figural images on their walls or vaults. The quality of the floor mosaic in the church of the Virgin at Mādabā proves that such decorative schemes were not yet beyond the pocket or skill of Christian communities in this part of the caliphate. An alternative hypothesis is that of a portable icon placed on a stand, over which a veil might be drawn if hostile Muslim officials were on the prowl — a solution that was indeed envisaged by certain legists, in the case of Muslims who desired to pray in churches.[67] In that case, there would still be room for the supposition that the floor was aniconic for political reasons. That is one of the drawbacks of archaeological evidence — a proliferation of ambiguities, or at least of explanatory choices without any criterion for how to make them.

If, though, we set side the images (and the lack of images) to concentrate on the text, one thing is certain: this is an unambiguously anti-Islamic floor, though in a language that passing Muslims could be relied upon not to understand. It is at once anti-Islamic, and politic. Its taut, forceful wording packs the punch of an icon of God's birth. Its purpose, surely, is to reassure the waverer by re-asserting the incarnational foundation of his or her belief, but also by reaffirming the unicity of the Christians' God, so insidiously questioned by Muslims. With the Mādabā inscription we find ourselves in the polemical world of the iconodule writers John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurra. But the polemic is indirect. Virtually invisible to Muslims, the Mādabā inscription can be compared to ʿAbd al-Malik's Arabic inscription in the Dome of the Rock, virtually invisible to Christians. Both warn their own faithful against the other side's blandishments. It is to the theoretical and verbal rather than the archaeological approach to iconography that we must now turn — to the world of John of Damascus, though it was ʿAbd al-Malik who, whether first or merely most conspicuously, transferred the argument from the realm of image to that of the word.

### The spread of aniconism

It is particularly in the matter of aniconism that one is tempted to get behind the monuments (though they often remain more eloquent than any literary account) and try to uncover the practical but also theoretical preoccupations of the patrons and perhaps their artists too. Although the roots of aniconism in the monotheist, and especially the Jewish, tradition reach very deep, it is in the early 690s that we find the first symptoms of the phase in this story that interests us here.

---

65 Compare Photius's homily 17.6 (A.D. 867), on the unveiling of the Haghia Sophia apse mosaic: 'Before our eyes is set up motionless the Virgin carrying the Creator in her arms as an infant, (depicted) in painting as she is in writings and visions, an interceder for our salvation and a teacher of reverence to God, a grace of the eyes and a grace of the mind (χάρις ... διανοίας), carried by which the divine love in us is uplifted to the intelligible beauty of truth' (transl. C. Mango, *The art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1972] 190).

66 Piccirillo (supra n.64) 383; Brubaker and Haldon (supra n.46) 35-36.

67 Bashear (supra n.7) 280. On the no doubt fictional but possibly 8th-c. literary disputation between a monk and an Arab notable who visited his monastery, attended church and desired to discuss both the Trinity and the theology of images, see Hoyland (infra n.80) 465-72; S. H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: the case of the monk of Bêt Halê and a Muslim emir," *Hugoye* 3 (2000). Note the monk's initial diffidence about engaging in theological discussion with a Muslim visitor.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

At that time, tensions seem to have arisen over the caliphate's exports of papyrus for writing on, and over the flow of East Roman currency into the caliphate. The outermost sheet of papyrus rolls produced in Egypt bore, in pre-Islamic times, a sort of official stamp containing date, place of manufacture and name of official responsible.[68] It might also include the sign of the cross[69] or even, according to Arabic writers, a religious invocation, though no such has been found.[70] For a time even after the Arab conquest, these East Roman protocols continued to be tolerated;[71] but during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik[72] they were replaced by a bilingual Greek and Arabic *bismi 'llāh*.[73] According to the 9th-c. Arabic historian al-Balādhurī, this provoked the Roman emperor to threaten reprisals:

> If you leave that out, well and good; otherwise, you shall see on the *dīnārs* an allusion to your prophet that you will not care for.[74]

Rather than back down, ʿAbd al-Malik decided to mint his own coins.

The caliphate had started out by simply adopting the East Roman and Sasanian currency that was already in circulation. Even when, in 651 in ʿIrāq and the East, and quite possibly during the reign of Muʿāwiya (661-80) in Syria, it began to mint its own coins, the designs remained in essence those of the two pre-Islamic empires: eventually, the cross on the 'Arab-Byzantine' coins lost its cross-bar, but the fire altar on the reverse of the 'Arab-Sasanian' types was usually kept in place.[75] Clearly there was at this stage a relaxed attitude to the religious symbols of the old empires — a sensible stance, given the need to maintain confidence in the currency during politically disorienting times. This policy also had a recent precedent in early 7th-c. Georgia, whose Christian princes had imitated Sasanian coinage, while substituting a cross for the sacred flame issuing from the fire altar on the reverse.[76] It seems safe to assume that the Umayyads' 'Arab-Byzantine' and 'Arab-Sasanian' coinages, complete with imperial portraits borrowed from these enemy empires, will have struck most of their subjects as a natural expedient. Still, there is evidence that some Christians resented the alterations made to the crosses on the coins.[77]

---

68 C. J. Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana* 3: *non-literary papyri* (Princeton 1958) 129-30, pl. 2. Not a watermark, *pace* J. Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (Berlin 1902) 135; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin 1991-97) vol. 1, 10.

69 Kraemer ibid. 329 no. 194.

70 ʿAwāna b. al-Ḥakam al-Kalbī (d. 764/70), in al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 240; A. Grohmann, "Zum Papyrusprotokoll in früharabischer Zeit," *JÖBG* 9 (1960) 4-5, 11.

71 Grohmann ibid. 2-5; Kraemer (supra n.68) 215 and pl. 5 (early years of ʿAbd al-Malik).

72 From remnants of the characteristic *Schraffenschrift* not clearly apparent on his photograph (or on Kraemer ibid. pl. 6 [60]), Grohmann ibid. 5-13 concluded that a bilingual papyrus dated A.D. 674 already bore a bilingual protocol.

73 Grohmann ibid. 13-14; R. G. Khoury, *Chrestomathie de papyrologie arabe: documents relatifs à la vie privée, sociale et administrative dans les premiers siècles islamiques* (Leiden 1993) 15-18.

74 Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 240; cf. Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* 1, 296-97 (Ṭawīl), and further references in P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's caliph: religious authority in the first centuries of Islam* (Cambridge 1986) 26 n.12.

75 'Arab-Byzantine' coinage: in a series of influential articles, M. Bates proposed a late dating under ʿAbd al-Malik even for the most straightforward imitations or adaptations of East Roman coinage, without Arabic legends: see, e.g., his "Byzantine coinage and its imitations, Arab coinage and its imitations: Arab-Byzantine coinage," *ARAM* 6 (1994) 381-403. In favour of an earlier dating under Muʿāwiya at least for the more strictly imitative coins, though not for those with religious legends, see Album-Goodwin 74-112, esp. 106-7; C. Foss, "The coinage of the first century of Islam," *JRA* 16 (2003) 753-60. 'Arab-Sasanian' coinage: M. G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim conquest* (Princeton 1984) 38-51; Album-Goodwin 1-73.
For a convenient collection of illustrations of the issues here discussed, see M. L. Bates, "History, geography and numismatics in the first century of Islamic coinage," *SchwNumRund* 65 (1986) 263.

76 D. M. Lang, "Notes on Caucasian numismatics," *NC* 17 (1957) 139-40 and pl. XVII.4.

77 *Chronicon Maroniticum* p. 71 (ed. E. W. Brooks in I.-B. Chabot, *Chronica minora* 2 (Louvain 1904); Eng.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

The 'Arab-Byzantine' coinage's reception across the frontier will have been even less sympathetic. Some issues looked very like recent or current East Roman coinage; but it could hardly escape notice when, under ʿAbd al-Malik, crosses were modified or the Muslim confession of faith added: 'In the name of God: there is no god but God alone; Muḥammad is the messenger of God'.[78] Next came the so-called 'standing caliph' type, dated between A.H. 74 and 77 = A.D. 693-97, its iconography still figural but distinctly Arabized, and again accompanied by the *shahāda*.[79] Finally, from A.H. 77 (A.D. 696-97) onward, ʿAbd al-Malik abandoned his adaptations of East Roman models and issued an entirely new, aniconic and purely epigraphical coinage with mostly Quranic texts and, for the first time, a significantly lower weight.[80]

There is a much discussed passage in the Greek chronicler Theophanes (d. 818) which describes the political fall-out from these developments. Drawing, it is widely agreed, on a Syriac chronicle translated into Greek, Theophanes states[81] that the East Roman emperor Justinian II (685-95, 705-11) foolishly broke his peace treaty with 'Abimelech' (i.e. ʿAbd al-Malik), in part because 'he refused to accept the minted coin that had been sent by Abimelech because it was of a new kind (νεοφανές) that had never been made before'. ʿAbd al-Malik then, for diplomatic reasons of his own, asked Justinian

> to accept his currency, seeing that the Arabs could not suffer the Roman imprint on their own coins; and inasmuch as the gold was paid by weight, the Romans did not suffer any loss from the fact that the Arabs were minting new coin.

Since the innovations in the caliphal coinage must have been substantial[82] in order to constitute even a partial *casus belli* (the other part had to do, according to Theophanes, with Cyprus), while ʿAbd al-Malik's emphasis on the fact that he is still sending the same *weight* of tribute is a clear allusion to the lower weight of the epigraphic coinage, there can be little doubt that this episode was a consequence of the introduction of the epigraphic coinage in 696-97. Theophanes, though, assigns the incident to A.M. 6183, i.e. A.D. 690-91, so it looks as if a clash that came to a head only *after* Justinian II's deposition has been assigned by mistake to his first reign, quite possibly because there had already been some friction about the changes to the caliphal coinage that had been effected before 695 — for example, the combination of East Roman imperial images with Islamic slogans. Still, the reason for breaking the peace treaty will have been mainly the Cyprus problem.

That there had indeed been tensions between Constantinople and Damascus about numismatic matters, even before Justinian's deposition, is confirmed beyond serious doubt by a remarkable development in the East Roman coinage, unmistakeably attested by the coins themselves but ignored by the historians both Greek and Arabic. Though there is no conclusive evidence for the date, it was probably in 692 that Justinian, anticipating ʿAbd al-Malik, likewise issued a radically new coinage (gold and silver), in which he banished his own image to the reverse and placed on the obverse a most striking icon of Christ *pantokratōr* — Christ as God, depicted very much in the Greek manner, recalling ancient images of Zeus. And when Justinian returned to the throne in 705, he restored the Christ icon to the coinage (which in his absence had reverted to more traditional types), though this time with a quite different,

---

transl. in A. Palmer, *The seventh century in the West-Syrian chronicles* (Liverpool 1993) 32.

78 Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq* (ed. S. al-D. al-Munajjid, *Muʿjam Banī Umayya* [Beirut 1970]) 39, says ʿAbd al-Malik first inscribed the Prophet's name on his coins in A.H. 70 = A.D. 689-90.

79 For a variant on the 'standing caliph' type, with an obverse legend reading simply *muḥammad rasūl allāh* (and therefore representing the Prophet?!), see Album-Goodwin 98; Foss (supra n.75) 758.

80 For the texts on the epigraphic coinage see R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton 1997) 699-700. On the metrology see P. Grierson, *Dark Age numismatics: selected studies* (London 1979) XV, esp. 247-48.

81 Theoph., *Chron.* 365 (de Boor; transl. C. Mango and R. Scott).

82 And, as J. D. Breckenridge, *The numismatic iconography of Justinian II (685-695, 705-711 A.D.)* (New York 1959) 74-75, pointed out, widely disseminated; yet very few examples have survived of ʿAbd al-Malik's imitations of East Roman issues.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

distinctly Semitic image.[83] After his death this innovation was abandoned, only to be revived at the end of the iconoclastic period in the mid-9th c., no doubt with the implication that such extreme iconolatry had the authority of age and tradition behind it. In fact, Justinian's new coinage had been merely a transparent attempt to bolster his position against his many enemies at home, combined with a vulgar, needlessly provocative response to 'Abd al-Malik's irritating yet backhandedly flattering desire to have it both ways, copying East Roman coin types while adding Arabic legends to proclaim the caliphate's separate identity and new faith. While 'Abd al-Malik's experimentation quickly resulted in a dignified epigraphical coinage that proved immensely durable and could affront only die-hard doctors of the law and those Christians who knew Arabic,[84] the rulers of East Rome swung back and forth between coins with the Christ icon and coins without it. Then, from 726 onwards, they began to assault icons wherever they were to be found.

Only two coins of Justinian II have ever been found in Syria, whereas those of his immediate predecessor Constantine IV are relatively common.[85] Perhaps the Christ icons in particular were melted down to produce the new epigraphic coinage.[86] And it seems that hoards were only rarely deposited in Syria during the long period of peace between 'Abd al-Malik's pacification of the caliphate in 692 and the revolt against al-Walīd II in 744.[87] But even if it was indeed the case that few of Justinian II's new coins ever reached Syria, one would have been enough:[88] Christ as God was so blatantly unacceptable to Muslim sentiment, so completely immune to dialogue, that his apparition could only hasten production of the epigraphical, Quranic coinage. The response from Damascus, in contrast to the crude provocation from across the frontier, was measured and permanent.[89] Unlike Constantinople, which was heir to centuries of Christian thought and a minimum of two sides to every question, including that of images, the scholars who travelled back and forth between the Ḥijāz, 'Irāq and Syria were less encumbered with inherited baggage, and enjoyed far greater freedom to improvise. The substitution of general theological formulae for images on the coins was clever because it avoided an explicit condemnation of images; but it is likely that a theoretical consensus against figural art in places of

83 P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection* 2 (Washington, D.C. 1968) 568-70 and pls XXXVII-XLVI; cf. H. Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich 1990) 153-59.

84 Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 468, for the *fuqahā'*. Cf. Bates (1986, supra n.75) 255-56: "The most remarkable feature of this new coinage, considering its longevity, is the near total absence of any experimentation or fumbling in its adoption."

85 H.-C. Noeske, *Münzfunde aus Ägypten* 1: *Die Münzfunde des ägyptischen Pilgerzentrums Abu Mina und die Vergleichsfunde aus den Dioecesen Aegyptus und Oriens vom 4.-8. Jh. n.Chr.* (Berlin 2000), especially part 2, 573-76; G. Bijovsky, "A hoard of Byzantine solidi from Bet She'an in the Umayyad period," *RN* 158 (2002) 181, 183; and cf. more generally S. Heidemann, "The merger of two currency zones in early Islam. The Byzantine and Sasanian impact on the circulation in former Byzantine Syria and northern Mesopotamia," *Iran* 36 (1998) 96.

86 Cf. Heidemann ibid. 96-97.

87 R. Gyselen and L. Kalus, *Deux trésors monétaires des premiers temps de l'Islam* (Paris 1983) esp. 66 n.14; S. D. Sears, "An Abbasid revolution hoard from the Western Jazira (al-Raqqa?)," *AmJNum* 12 (2000) 181-82.

88 Also, theoretically, to give some ground to S. Blair's assertion "What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?" in Raby and Johns (supra n.10) 82, that "the standing emperor on the reverse of Justinian's *solidus* was transformed into the standing caliph on the obverse of 'Abd al-Malik's *dīnārs*". But standing emperors had been around long before Justinian II (Grierson [supra n.83] 68-69), and had indeed been deployed on Umayyad coppers, in all probability some time before 692 (Album-Goodwin 83, 95 n.67).

89 Damascus had had the recent experience of needing to respond to the earliest recorded use of the *shahāda* on coins by the Umayyads' Zubayrid opponents, who sought in this way to imply that they were the truer Muslims. In this case the Umayyads simply stole their enemies' thunder: cf. J. Johns, "Archaeology and the history of early Islam: the first seventy years," *JEconSocHistOrient* 46 (2003) 426-27.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

prayer was already crystallizing at this date, if only in order to justify the disappearance of long-familiar images from the coinage, particularly to those who could not read Arabic.[90]

What was still needed, though, was a simple story providing the Prophet's personal authority for this new stance. It seems likely that it was precisely in the 690s and early 700s that there began to circulate *ḥadīth*s according to which (in one of numerous variants) the angel Gabriel told Muḥammad that he had passed by his house the day before but had not entered because there were images inside, or a dog, or an impure person. D. van Reenen's recent examination of the chains of authorities for these *ḥadīth*s concludes that they began to circulate in *c*.720-75.[91] But van Reenen himself admits that dating by *isnād*s is perilous, and anyway that dating an *isnād* is not the same as dating the tradition (*matn*) itself. Also, he takes no account of either the historical narratives or the material evidence adduced above, in particular the aniconic decoration of the Dome of the Rock and the Damascus mosque. R. Paret, in an earlier discussion of the same problem, had at least taken ʿAbd al-Malik's monetary reform into account, in order to strengthen his argument that the *hadīth*s fit most naturally into the period 675-725.[92] They will, of course, have been a gradual growth, with some controversy occurring about precisely which images were to be disallowed — for example, were trees and plants permissible?

The edict banning images issued by the Caliph Yazīd II in 721[93] seems, as already noted, to have been of patchy effectiveness, and was perhaps intended only as a warning shot. But it does at least, as a gesture, make some sense when seen against this backdrop of traditionists busily creating an atmosphere in which the pious 'knew' that figural art was unacceptable — one can imagine this view gaining impetus under the conspicuously devout ʿUmar II (717-20). Even though Yazīd himself is depicted by our sources in terms that sharply contrast him with his predecessor,[94] still there must have been influential voices at his court demanding that the work of ʿAbd al-Malik, al-Walīd I and ʿUmar II be continued, in the direction of providing the caliphate with a more resolutely Muslim façade, capable of deflecting accusations that Islam was merely a heretical derivative from Christianity, propagated by a false prophet.[95] Christians' growing use of images offered a particularly convenient target for Muslims who wanted to mark themselves apart.

Since our pre-10th-c. sources for Yazīd's edict are nearly all Christian, while the archaeological record offers numerous examples of Christian images defaced at this time, but nothing for certain in synagogues, or in Muslim contexts either religious or secular,[96] it seems that Yazīd's intention was taken to be primarily anti-Christian, or rather pro-Muslim, in the sense that a gesture against the major threat to Islam might be thought to reinforce the separate Islamic identity that was gradually coming to be. Such reinforcement need not involve direct intervention in Christian places of worship; indeed, the tendency of all our evidence is to emph-

---

90 Note that iconic coinage persisted longer in the East, on silver until 704 and on coppper (with the addition of some East Roman iconographical elements) until about the end of al-Walīd I's reign: Album-Goodwin 29, 34, 45, 47. Images (of animals) even re-appeared on some Syrian coppers (only), two decades after the reform: Album-Goodwin 101.

91 D. van Reenen, "The *Bilderverbot*, a new survey," *Der Islam* 67 (1990) 27-77.

92 R. Paret, "Die Entstehungszeit des islamischen Bilderverbots," *Kunst des Orients* 11 (1976-77) 158-81; and cf. Griffith (supra n.62) vol. V, 70-71. Van Reenen's criticisms of Paret (ibid. 61-65) illustrate the difficulty of extracting history from *ḥadīth*s, but do not impugn the other evidence for anxiety about images from the 690s onwards.

93 Cf. Vasiliev (supra n.53) 23-47; Hoyland (supra n.80) 334-35.

94 Cf., e.g., al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab* vol. 3, 182-204 (Dāghir).

95 E.g., John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 100.1: ψευδοπροφήτης ... Μάμεδ.

96 Schick 202-4, 205 (but see supra n.3). For a statue of a female beauty, quite possibly Aphrodite, allegedly preserved in an al-Fusṭāṭ bath-house until it was destroyed in the reign of al-Yazīd, see Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* 113-14 (Torrey); al-Kindī, *Taʾrīkh Miṣr* 71-72 (Guest).

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

asize Muslim concern only with *public* manifestations of Christian cult.[97]

No source records any continuation of a formal, legally-articulated iconoclast campaign after Yazīd's death. Since we do have various anecdotes according to which his successor the Caliph Hishām (724-43) was prone to outbursts of austerity against musicians — he had a particular problem with lutenists, whose instruments he was prone to confiscate and sell, or else to break over their owner's head[98] — we may take this as confirmation that destroying images was no longer high on the political agenda. As we have seen, Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī's profusion of images was commissioned by Hishām, and Quṣayr ʿAmra's by his successor. Either the religious élite regarded images — outside the mosques they anyway controlled — as a minor issue, or the last Umayyad caliphs were indisposed to humour them.

**John of Damascus**

At Constantinople, by contrast, iconoclasm was now becoming a major political as well as theological issue. The history of this movement is not our concern here, nor is the degree to which it was a reaction to the rise of Islam. What ought to be of interest, though, is that the most effective opposition to Christian iconoclasm came, at this early period, from John of Damascus, who was a subject of the caliphate and both the son and grandson of senior Umayyad bureaucrats. He seems to have died in the 740s.[99]

John writes in Greek not Arabic, primarily for an audience in Constantinople and the territories subject to it. Neither in his defence of images nor in his polemical tracts against Islam does he make the slightest reference to Muslim aniconism or iconoclasm. But this lack of concern with the local situation in Syria is not very surprising, for the intellectual issues at stake in Christian and Muslim aniconism were quite separate. The primary concern of East Roman iconoclasts (as they are conventionally called) was that images of Christ (with which they were mainly concerned) are capable of conveying only his human nature, not his divinity. Far from depicting him in his unity, fully Man but also fully God (an obvious impossibility), they divide him by representing only his humanity. Inherently Nestorian therefore, they are unsuitable accompaniments to Christian worship.[100] The East Roman iconoclasts' acute awareness of Christ's divinity is undoubtedly that which distinguishes them most clearly from the Muslims, who for their part maintained that all figural images, not just images of divine or holy figures, are illicit, partly because in making them the artist arrogates to himself the Creator's prerogative, and partly because, particularly in places of prayer, they may encourage idolatry.[101] As a logical consequence of the first argument, strict Muslims rejected secular as well as sacred images (indeed the *ḥadīths* mostly concern images in houses, not places of worship); whereas Christian iconoclasts had no problem with paintings of human beings in non-sacred contexts.

If, then, there is any truth in the idea espoused by some writers, both ancient and modern, that there existed a causal connection between the rise of Islam and the East Roman iconoclast

---

97 Above p. 294. Schick 163-67.

98 Al-Madāʾinī in 1) al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* VIB, p. 67, sections 123-24 (ʿAthāmina), and 2) al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* vol. 2, 1733, 1737.

99 On his background and life, see R. Le Coz (ed.), *Jean Damascène: écrits sur l'Islam* (Paris 1992) 43-49; Hoyland (supra n.80) 480-84; V. S. Conticello, "Jean Damascène," in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* (Paris 1989- ) vol. 3, 1001-3. For summary and discussion of John's theology and defence of images, see A. Louth, *St John Damascene: tradition and originality in Byzantine theology* (Oxford 2002) 193-222.

100 G. Dagron, "L'iconoclasme et l'établissement de l'Orthodoxie (726-847)," in *H.C.* 103-7.

101 For these two arguments, see respectively van Reenen (supra n.91) 43, 45, 47; P. Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine iconoclasm," *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980) 66-68. It is still possible to write as if Muslim aniconism applied only to the human figure: J. M. Bloom (ed.), *Early Islamic art and architecture* (Aldershot 2002) xii-xiii. On animals, see van Reenen (supra n.91) 52-53.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

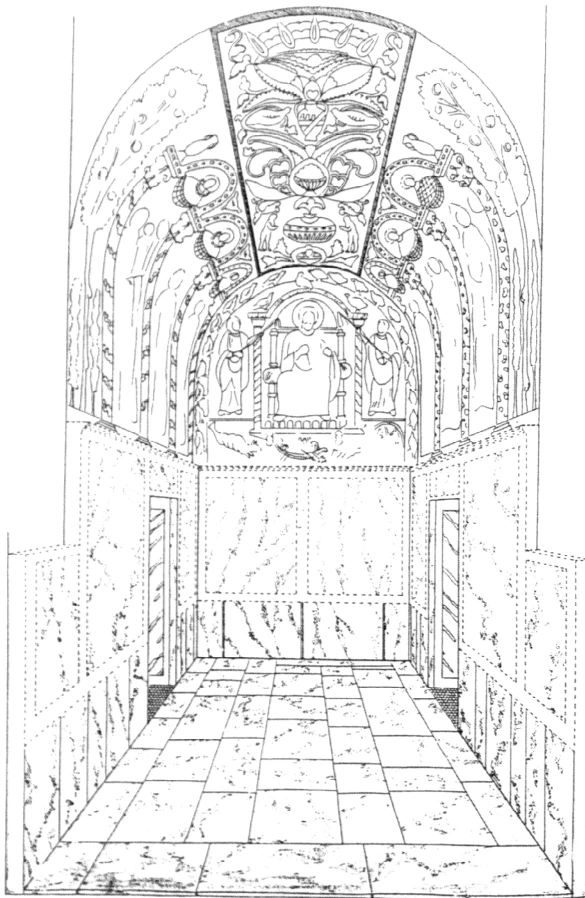

Fig. 8. Quṣayr ʿAmra: enthroned prince, fresco, before 743. (C. Vibert-Guigue, "La question de l'eau à l'époque omeyyade en Jordanie: approches iconographique et architecturale," *ARAM* 13-14 [2001-2] 562 fig. 25).

Fig. 9. Adam, mosaic, 5th or 6th c. Ḥamā Museum.

outburst of the 8th to 9th c.,[102] it can hardly have been because of the arguments offered by Muslim scholars for aniconism, but rather because sustained military defeat had made Christians sensitive to the charge that they, no less than the polytheists they had once condemned and rooted out, were guilty of idolatry. Nevertheless, in view of where he lived, his eminent social connections, and his composition of polemical tracts against Islam, John of Damascus was certainly aware of the relevance of his pro-image arguments to the intellectual debate between Muslims and Christians. In particular he knew that, by making icons of Christ, Christians proclaimed him fully divine as well as fully human. It was his humanity alone that justified manufacturing the image; but the point of the incarnation was to render God manifest. To make and reverence an icon of Christ was implicitly to reject not only the *Qur'ān*'s denial of the incarnation, but also its accusation that Christians practised 'associationism' (*shirk*).[103]

No less, then, than in his anti-Muslim polemic, John the iconodule participated in the intellectual encounter between Christians and Muslims that was imposed by the time and place in which he lived. We should not, of course, imagine the sort of encounter in which either side

102 Dagron (supra n.100) 101-3, surveys these views.

103 *Qur'ān* 9.30-31. For John of Damascus's response to Muslim denial of the Incarnation and accusations of *shirk*, see *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani* 7-8, and *De haeresibus* 100.4 (conveniently accessible, with commentary, in Le Coz [supra n.99] 242-47, 216-19).

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

aspired to learn from the other. Neither the *Qur'ān* nor the 6 oecumenical councils held to date left much room for that. Nor was John of Damascus any disinterested theorist of art — he was a Christian theologian of images. He refrains from commenting on the contemporary artistic scene in his native Syria, and it is hard to imagine him taking an educated layman's interest in the new Damascus mosque, or Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, or the paintings commissioned at Quṣayr ʿAmra by his younger contemporary al-Walīd b. Yazīd — with perhaps one exception. One *can* imagine John pausing in front of the portrait of the patron enthroned, that greets the visitor from the back wall of the alcove as he enters the Quṣayr ʿAmra bath-house hall through its main door (fig. 8). At least to the modern eye, this image invites comparison not only with the frontal portrait of the Roman emperor that became current from the late 3rd c. onward and was particularly popular in the mid-8th c., but also with the closely related iconography of the enthroned Christ.[104] Yet it is hardly likely that an Umayyad patron would have chosen to assimilate his own portrait to either of these types. There is a related and much more appropriate model closely to hand in a group of three mosaic depictions of Christ's forerunner Adam enthroned in glory, all from pre-Islamic Syria (fig. 9).[105] Not only is Adam a major figure in the *Qur'ān*, the first of the long sequence of prophets sent to mankind by God; he had also been God's first caliph, *khalīfa*, set over creation as its pinnacle and its guide.[106]

A portrait, or even an allusion to the portrait, of such a prominent figure from the *Qur'ān* is not, needless to say, what one would expect to find in a strict Muslim environment. But Quṣayr ʿAmra, with its hunting scenes, nude bathers, musicians and skimpily-attired dancing girls, never claimed to be that. The text inscribed on the arch that frames the enthroned prince at Quṣayr ʿAmra is a pious exclamation containing one of the earliest known epigraphical attestations of the designation 'Muslim';[107] so we are clearly in an environment that wishes to present itself (perhaps not to the hypercritical) as Islamic. Nonetheless, the patron remains fully committed to figural art. The Quṣayr ʿAmra portrait provides a striking legitimation and glorification of the caliphal office and its holder; and for those who recognize the Adamic allusion, there is a strong Quranic resonance, and a Biblical echo too. It is a classic example of religion reinforcing imperial iconography — and what is more, supreme and surely conscious irony, just when East Rome's iconoclast rulers were renouncing such opportunities, at least in the sphere of figural art, for example by removing Christ's image from the coinage, from the palace's Chalkē Gate, and from the vault above the emperor's throne in the Chrysotriclinus audience hall.[108]

Al-Walīd was not only deeply versed in Arab-Islamic culture,[109] but well informed too about

---

104 See in general Fowden (supra n.13) 115-41. Roman emperor: R. Brilliant, *Gesture and rank in Roman art* (New Haven, CT 1963) 204-8; A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (1936; London 1971) 196-200. Christ: C. Cecchelli, I. Furlani and M. Salmi (edd.), *Evangeliarii syriaci, vulgo Rabbulae, in Bibliotheca Medicea-Laurentiana (Plut. I, 56) adservati ornamenta* (Olten 1959) fol. 4b; R. Sörries, "Das Bild des Christus-Rex in der Sarkophagplastik des vierten Jahrhunderts: Überlegungen zum dogmatischen Hintergrund einer ikonographischen Idee," in G. Koch (ed.), *Studien zur frühchristlichen Kunst* 2 (Wiesbaden 1986) 135-59; R. Wisskirchen, "Der bekleidete Adam thront inmitten der Tiere: Zum Bodenmosaik des Mittelschiffs der Nordkirche von Ḥūarte/Syrien," *JbAC* 45 (2002) 144-45 and n.39.

105 Donceel-Voûte 102-16 and planche hors-texte 5 (Ḥawīrtah), 113 (Ḥamā Museum (fig. 9 here) and National Museum, Copenhagen); Wisskirchen (supra n.104).

106 *Qur'ān* 2.30-33.

107 *Allāhu[mma] i[ghfir] ?li-walī ['a]hd? al-muslimīn wa-'l- [mus]lima* (sic)... *'āfiya min allāh wa-ra[ḥ]ma.* I am grateful to F. Imbert for providing me with his reading of this inscription.

108 A. Grabar (supra n.104) 113-14; M.-F Auzépy, "Le Christ, l'empereur et l'image (VII$^{e}$-IX$^{e}$ siècle)," *ΕΥΨΥΧΙΑ: Mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler* (Paris 1998) 35-47 (doubting the story about the Chalkē icon). The emperor might still, of course, be associated with the Cross.

109 His instinctive sympathy was for the Arab element: Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist* 103 (Tajaddud); but his affected contempt for Islam could not prevent him from composing an exquisite and perfectly orthodox sermon, albeit in light verse: no. 37 (Gabrieli) = 115 ('Aṭwān).

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)

the bitter divisions that existed within the East Roman Empire. During his brief caliphate, virtually all of which he spent in the Balqā' region where Quṣayr 'Amra stands, he received ambassadors from both the arch-iconoclast Constantine V and his kinsman Artabasdus, who had recently rebelled and was courting the iconodules.[110] The paintings he commissioned for the Quṣayr 'Amra bath-house show him to have been a brilliant manipulator of the cultural cross-currents of his day, stealing from the Romans their artistic birthright, in order to test to the utmost the still negotiable conventions of art within the Islamic sphere. The ingenuity and irony, that could set Greek religious iconography to work in the service of the Islamic caliphate, would not have escaped John of Damascus, during his imaginary visit. He would have noticed how richly al-Walīd here confirmed his enemies' accusation that the Umayyads had corrupted the true Muslim caliphate into mere kingship, *mulk*, and specifically *mulk* in the style of Rome, that is Caesarism, *qayṣarīya*.[111]

But John would not have allowed himself to reflect long on these matters. For him, Islam itself was the corruption; and the sole true art, that of the icon, could exist only where an orthodox emperor ruled under the gaze of Christ, *rex regnantium*. What might become of that art when it was transplanted outside its proper context was of no concern to him, especially where it had been put to work by the false kingship of the Umayyads, or worse still the false religion of Islam. John's perspective was at once the fruit of a long theological — especially Christological — ripening, and the seed of a mentality which until our own times has encouraged Islam and Greek Christianity alike to claim a false autonomy — both in the mapping of their cultural evolution, and on the road to salvation.

Centre for Greek and Roman Antiquity, National Research Foundation, Athens

**Acknowledgements**

This article is a revised version of a paper presented to the Central European University Humanities Center and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme colloquium on 'Islam and late antiquity' in Budapest on January 24-26, 2003. I am grateful to Aziz al-Azmeh for issuing the invitation and for organizing an unusually fertile meeting; also to the anonymous referees, and to Yvonne Rizaki for help with the illustrations.

110 Theophanes, *Chronographia* 416 (de Boor).

111 *Mulk* instituted by Mu'āwiya according to the jurist Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab (d. *c.*712): al-Ya'qūbī, *Al-ta'rīkh* 2.232 (Dār Bayrūt edn.). *Qayṣarīya*: A. Shboul, "Arab attitudes towards Byzantium: official, learned, popular," in *ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΡΙΑ: essays presented to Joan Hussey for her 80th birthday* (Camberley 1988) 114; cf. Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, in A. Elad, "Why did 'Abd al-Malik build the Dome of the Rock? A re-examination of the Muslim sources," in Raby and Johns (supra n.10) 54 (text), 35 (transl.), reporting a tradition derived from Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 763), quoting an opinion expressed by the anti-caliph 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr (d. 692) about Mu'āwiya and 'Abd al-Malik.

Kopie von subito e.V., geliefert für Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (SLS02X00192)