Part One

Origins and Context

Chapter I

Islamic Art and Byzantium*

According to Eutychius, a Melkite priest from Alexandria, who died in AD940, the following event is said to have taken place in Qinnasrin, in northern Syria, sometime in the latter part of the thirties of the seventh century, during the Muslim conquest of Syria. An Arab force, under the celebrated general Abu ʿUbaydah, had signed a truce of one year with the Christians of Qinnasrin in order to allow those Christians who so desired to leave Syria and to follow Heraclius into Anatolia. A line was established between Christian and Muslim possessions and the line was marked by a column (*ʿamud*) beyond which the Muslims were not to go. With the agreement of Abu ʿUbaydah, the Christians painted on this column a portrait of Heraclius seated in majesty (*jalis fi mulkihi*). One day, however, an Arab Muslim rider, who had been practicing horsemanship, accidentally defaced the representation of the Byzantine Emperor by planting the point of his spear in its eye. The head of the local Christian community immediately accused the Muslims of having broken the truce. Abu ʿUbaydah agreed that a wrong had been done and asked what reparations could be offered. The Christian answered: "We will not be satisfied until the eyes of your king are put out." Abu ʿUbaydah suggested having an image of himself so mutilated, but to no avail, since the Christians insisted that the likeness should be of the Muslims' highest authority (*malikukum al-akbar*). Finally Abu ʿUbaydah agreed, and the Christians then made an image of ʿUmar, the caliph of the time, whose eye was then duly put out by one of their riders. The Christian *patricius* concluded the whole affair by saying to the Muslim general: "Indeed, you have treated us equitably."[1]

Like most good stories, this one is probably apocryphal, especially in the wealth of its details, since other accounts of the conquest of Qinnasrin do not mention events which could have made it possible and since it comes from the ecclesiastical milieu of Christian Arabs within the Muslim Empire, among whom a whole body of stories developed tending to minimize the

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[1] Eutychius, *Annales*, ed. by L. Cheikho and others, in *Corpus Script. Christ. Orient., Scriptores Arabici*, 3rd Ser., 7 (Beirut, 1909), p. 19.

tragedy of the Muslim conquest. Yet the story certainly reflects the spirit of the time and may serve to define our subject by focusing our attention on two central points: the period with which we are primarily going to deal and the type of problem posed by that period.

First, then, it may serve to define the chronological framework of this paper. The event it describes is supposed to have taken place at the very beginning of the Muslim conquest; it identifies a crucial moment in the political and cultural contacts between Byzantium and the Arabs, when the buffer world of pre-Islamic Arabs, who basked at a distance in the glow of high Byzantine culture, was about to become the Islamic Empire, the strongest power of the Near East and the Mediterranean since the days of ancient Rome. [70] Nothing will be said of the period which preceded the Muslim conquest. The monuments which are definitely Ghassanid or Lakhmid are few and do not seem to have developed original styles, techniques, or functions, although further research may some day modify this picture; nor were the artistic contacts which the Arabs of Arabia had with Byzantium through trade and through the Christian Church more than secondhand. In greater part, they were fleeting impressions of mediocre objects. Occasional texts do refer to a more profound impact of Christian art, but their usefulness for archaeological purposes is often questionable.[2] Altogether, the relations between Arabs and Byzantium until the formation of the Muslim Empire were not relations of cultural equality. After the seventh century the two empires were to become powerful bastions of two independent cultures confronting each other.

But if the peculiar contact at Qinnasrin may serve to indicate the upper limit of a study of Byzantine–Arab contacts in the arts, can one also define a lower limit that is equally valid historically? This problem is more complex and requires some elaboration. A crucial phase during which the art of the Arabs and that of Byzantium were closely related to each other was the era of the creation of the first Islamic classicism, that is, the first syntheses between the Near East and the Mediterranean, on the one hand, and, on the other, the new political, social and religious entities elaborated by the Prophet and his immediate successors. This era is usually associated with the Umayyad and early 'Abbasid periods (661 to about 800), and it has long been recognized that in monuments of early Islamic art as diverse as the Dome of the Rock, the desert baths of Qusayr 'Amrah, or the wooden beams of the Aqsa Mosque, considerable direct or indirect Byzantine influences can be detected. In this early period, especially in Syria and Palestine, Byzantium played the part of one of the many parents who brought a new Islamic art to life.

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2   There has not yet been any attempt to put together systematically the information which exists in pre-Islamic poetry concerning Arab knowledge of Christian art, but such knowledge existed (cf. R. Ettinghausen in N. Faris, ed., *The Arab Heritage* [Princeton, 1946], p. 252; C. J. Lyall, *The Mufaddaliyat* [Oxford, 1918], p. 92 ff.).

In later centuries a different and more complex series of relationships may be defined. In Cordoba, the Muslim Arab caliphs apparently repeated an early Islamic practice and, in the tenth century, called on Byzantine artists to decorate parts of their great mosque.[3] But, in a more general sense, a constant stream of influences flowed in both directions. The Byzantines acquired a taste for Islamic objects and an Orientalized aspect was given both to the court of the Constantinopolitan emperors and to many a church treasure.[4] At the same time, the Arab world continued to seek or to feel the impact of the art of Byzantium. Thus the Fatimid caliphs in Cairo, whose ceremonial was closely related to that of the Byzantine emperors, borrowed or imitated Byzantine [71] artistic techniques, such as cloisonné enamel.[5] Even later, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when a new art of book illustration developed among the bourgeoisie of the Fertile Crescent and Mesopotamia, models directly or indirectly derived from one of Byzantium's most developed media of artistic expression were commonly used. The dependence of Arabic Dioscorides manuscripts or of the *Automata* of al-Jazari on Byzantine models has often been shown, especially by Professor Weitzmann,[6] and it has often been pointed out that many stylistic devices commonly used in the illustration of so purely Arabic a book as the *Maqamat* of Hariri were derived from Byzantine or, at least Christian, models.[7] After the thirteenth century and, at the high level of the princes, even much earlier the rule of Turks or Kurds and the taste of Iran introduced a component into Islamic culture and art which is no longer Arab and is, therefore, outside our specific concern, even though it is evident that in the monuments of Seljuq or Ottoman Anatolia or in the Persian miniatures of the fourteenth century there are numerous features clearly related to Byzantium.

These few examples are sufficient to show that artistic contacts existed between the world of Byzantium and the world of Arab Islam, and that these contacts continued over many centuries, or at least throughout the

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[3]   Several versions of this event exist, and there is a need for a thorough study of the various texts referring to it. The main account is in Ibn Idhari, *Bayan*, ed. by G. S. Colin et E. Lévi-Provençal (Leiden, 1951), 2, pp. 237–8. It might be added that columns are supposed to have been brought from Byzantium for the palace of Madinah al-Zahra (ibid., pp. 231–2), but this statement is not very credible.

[4]   A. Grabar, "Le succès des arts orientaux à la cour byzantine sous les Macédoniens," *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 2 (1951).

[5]   M. Canard, "Le cérémonial fatimite et le cérémonial byzantin," *Byzantion*, 21 (1951). On the question of cloisonné enamel, see P. Kahle, "Die Schätze der Fatimiden," *Zeitschrift d. deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, N.F.*, 14 (1935), p. 345 and *passim*. Concerning specific works of art, it is difficult, in the present state of research, to do more than hypothesize that much in the development of Fatimid imagery reflected direct or indirect Byzantine influences.

[6]   K. Weitzmann, "The Greek Sources of Islamic Scientific Illustrations," *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld* (Locust Valley, 1952).

[7]   H. Buchthal, "'Hellenistic' Miniatures in Early Islamic Manuscripts," *Ars Islamica*, 7 (1940).

major phases of artistic creativity in the Arab world. After the middle of the thirteenth century, in the Mamluk art of Egypt or in the late medieval art of Morocco or Spain, Byzantine elements, even though not completely absent, are quite rare and contribute little to the definition of these artistic traditions. Similarly, in Byzantine art, after the conquest of Anatolia by the Turks, Oriental themes, when they exist, are no longer those of the Arab world.

Having thus defined the period within which Byzantine–Arab relations were meaningful, one could draw up a roster of such mutual influences, study their frequency at certain times, explain this frequency, and discuss the stylistic or thematic changes and modifications which one or the other of the two cultures introduced into the elements they borrowed or used, after that day in the fourth decade of the seventh century when a first contact was established between the new Muslim state and Byzantine art. The interest of this type of investigation is self-evident and coincides with well-established practices in the history of art. This is not, however, the aspect of the subject of Islamic art and Byzantium which I propose to examine. The story of Abu 'Ubaydah at Qinnasrin has more far-reaching implications than merely those of symbolizing a contact. Its more striking feature is its suggestion that, from the very first moment of meeting, the two cultures did not quite understand each other. It is quite obvious that Abu 'Ubaydah, in proposing first to have his own picture [72] painted and in agreeing then to having instead a likeness of 'Umar, did not take very seriously what seemed to him a peculiarity of the Christians with whom he dealt; conversely, it is also clear that to the Christians the image of Heraclius on a column separating two armies had a meaning far greater than that of a landmark.

But here a problem emerges, for, on the one hand, a continuity of contacts and influences existed, and, on the other, there appears at the very beginning a misunderstanding in regard to the significance of images and objects. Should we assume that this misunderstanding was peculiar to the early period and was later to be repaired? Or should we conclude that, through centuries of demonstrable formal or iconographic relationships, there was a more profound lack of understanding between the two artistic traditions? If there was, can one discover its reasons or the significance of the contacts? Considered from this point of view, our problem becomes less that of identifying specific themes than that of suggesting the ways in which artistic traditions grew in relationship to each other. The problem could be examined either by looking at what Islamic art meant to Byzantium or by studying the significance of Byzantine art to the Arabs. It is to the latter that I should like to direct my attention. I propose to analyze in some detail two questions which bear on the problem with particular force: first, the transformation of a Byzantine–Christian material culture into an Islamic one and the impact of this transformation on art, and, second, the iconography of power in early Islamic art. These two topics differ considerably in kind; while the second concerns the deliberate creation of a set of visual

symbols with precise meanings, the first derives from the automatic inheritance by the Muslims of several provinces of the Byzantine Empire. Together they may serve to answer the fundamental questions posed by our story and by the unique historical circumstances in which Islamic art and culture were born: what did the Muslim Arab world know and understand of Byzantine art? How did the Muslims use what they knew? What effect did their use of it have on Islamic art?

As we deal with Islamic art and with Islamic civilization in general, we find that the man-made setting within which the culture grew and from which its art developed is of particular significance in determining the relationship between Byzantium and the Arab world. In Syria and Palestine the Arabs inherited a complete and complex entity with well-known physical, human, economic and artistic characteristics. To a degree, the same is true of Egypt and of North Africa, but our archaeological information there is much less complete. In northern Mesopotamia also the Muslims took over a Christian province previously ruled by Byzantine emperors, but a considerable difference exists between the medieval Jazirah and the other provinces, for its incorporation into the Muslim world changed its character: what had been exclusively a frontier area was transformed into an important agricultural and commercial center. Only Syria and Palestine became Muslim without immediate alteration in character, with practically no destruction brought about by the [73] conquest itself, and with a considerable archaeological documentation. An analysis, then, of the character of the art and culture of the Muslims in Syria and Palestine may serve to illustrate a central aspect of our problem: it may show us how the new civilization used those elements of the Christian–Byzantine world which fell into its hands unscathed.

As far as the main cities are concerned, little was changed. A new type of building was introduced, the mosque, which in almost all instances known in Syria was located on the site of some older sanctuary. The most celebrated example is at Damascus, where the church of John the Baptist was destroyed and the Great Mosque erected in its stead.[8] It is well known that practically all the elements of construction of this mosque (Fig. 1) are characteristic of the architecture prevalent in Syria under Byzantine rule; also that there was a major innovation in the composition of the plan (Fig. 2): the peculiar relationship between court, portico and deeply recessed sanctuary is new and is probably derived from the earlier House of the Prophet in Medina. There is, however, another point which I should like to stress and to which I shall return several times: as one compares this new building with what preceded it, the striking feature is that the new Islamic composition

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[8]   Basic bibliography in K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, I (London, 1932), p. 97 ff.; important interpretations by J. Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade de Médine* (Paris, 1947), p. 95.
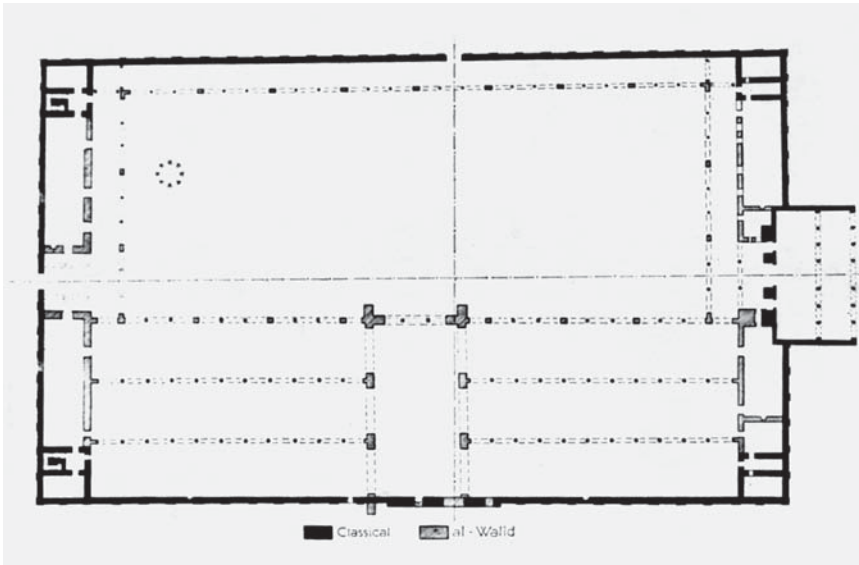
1   Damascus, Great Mosque. Court

re-established the unity of the classical Roman architectural ensemble which had been abandoned by the intervening Christian church, for the Umayyads used as the foundation of their mosque the shape and the dimensions of the Roman *temenos* and developed their religious structure within the mold created by Classical Antiquity. On the other hand, the Christian building was of much smaller dimensions and could not use the frame provided by the classical construction.

In Jerusalem the celebrated Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque also exhibit techniques of construction and partially of decoration characteristic of Christian art, but what is ultimately the most remarkable feature of the new Muslim creation – the *Haram al-Sharif* – is again the fact that the Muslims, for political and historical, but especially for ideological, reasons, gave a new holiness to the most ancient sacred spot in the Holy City.[9] In other instances, as at Hamah, Christian churches were converted into mosques.[10]

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[9]   O. Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Ars Orientalis*, 3 (1959).

[10]   The matter has been debated, but K. A. C. Creswell's latest discussion seems to have secured the point ("The Great Mosque of Hama," *Aus der Welt der Islamischen Kunst, Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel* [Berlin, 1959]).

Except for mosques, however, very little is known of the physical changes introduced by the new culture into Christian cities that had been taken by treaties, usually with considerable limitations on the freedom of action of the Muslim settlers. One example exists of a new city of the early Muslim period in Syria and Palestine – the city of Ramlah, about whose early state unfortunately almost nothing is known.[11] In all likelihood little change was forced upon these cities. Yet the very fact that there was a new culture altered the character of some of their forms of life. The new masters influenced the sounds [74] of the city in that most early treaties prohibited the use of the *semantron* and of religious processions. They affected the ceremonies of the city in that banners, crosses and religious symbols had to be kept inside buildings. And, as for monuments, it is worth noting that minarets, according to the most plausible traditions, appeared first in the conquered cities of Syria.[12] Their shape (Fig. 3) derived from the Roman *temenos* towers of Damascus or from church towers, but a new Islamic meaning was given to these high square towers: not only were they used for calling the faithful to prayer – a function presumably of equal significance in new and purely Muslim cities – but they also served the more important purpose of symbolizing the presence of the new faith in the midst of a predominantly non-Muslim population.

In the cities, then, one may assume a continuation of older patterns of life and construction, with the addition of only a few new architectural

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[11]   Cf. G. LeStrange, *Palestine under the Moslems* (Cambridge, 1890), pp. 303–8.
[12]   There is no recent study of the minaret and its origins; the older bibliography is summarized in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, I, pp. 38–40.

3   Damascus,
Great Mosque.
Minaret

compositions serving precise new needs but without as yet the use of many new forms or techniques; it is probably only the mood of the cities that changed, but this mood cannot be reconstructed with the evidence in our possession.

In the countryside, on the other hand, things seem to have been much more complicated. What evidence can be reconstructed may be summarized as follows.[13] During late Hellenistic and Roman times a striking development took place in the whole of Syria, Palestine and Transjordan, as enormous investments in hydraulic equipment (cisterns, canals, dams, aqueducts, water-works of all types) brought about a tremendous growth of the agricultural infrastructure of the area. The whole region which extends from the Euphrates at Rusafah through Palmyra and the Hawran and then straight south to the gulf of 'Aqabah became as busy agriculturally as it had always been

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13   For a more detailed statement of the problem, see O. Grabar, "Umayyad 'Palace' and 'Abbasid 'Revolution,'" *Studia Islamica*, 18 (1963). [Reproduced in this volume as Chapter VII.]

commercially. Under the Christian emperors the development of the area did not stop; perhaps it even increased, as cults of saints, cenobitic practices and other phenomena which have frequently been analyzed created a sort of fashion for inaccessible places of retreat, most of which required a minimal supply of water.[14] The financial bases and economic justification of these numerous settlements are not well known, except in the case of northern Syria, where G. Tchalenko has shown that the cultivation of olive trees and the manufacture of olive oil, principally for export, were the major occupations of these settlements.[15] An additional cause for the growth of agriculture was the necessity of feeding and caring for the large numbers of local and foreign pilgrims attracted from the whole of Christendom to the Holy Places of Syria and Palestine. The architectural typology of this period has not been studied [75] in all of its details, except in the instance of churches and in the small area studied by Tchalenko, but even a cursory examination of travelers' reports indicates a tremendous variety of buildings, from churches to simple farmhouses. It is striking to note, however, that there are almost no extant examples of true palaces in this whole agricultural area, the single exception being Qasr ibn Wardan, whose strictly Constantinopolitan inspiration has been noted more than once.[16] Such palaces as existed were in the cities, where the larger landowners or the representatives of the government lived.

As the Muslim conquest took place, this whole area fell into the hands of the Arabs, and, with the creation of the first Muslim Empire, almost all the identifiable economic reasons for the continued existence of the area began to disappear. Trade with the outside world dwindled considerably, as far as cheap commodities were concerned, in spite of several attempts to revive it; holy places were no longer visited by Christians as commonly as before; the wealthy investors from the cities emigrated, as did Byzantine officials. Yet no destruction took place and, according to the practice of the conquest and of Islamic law, most of the land thus abandoned by the owners fell into the category of booty to be distributed by the new state among members of the ruling family and their allies.[17]

As the new owners took over, a most remarkable change began to affect the whole area: in a few decades it became covered with palaces or at least very large and very rich private houses. Some thirty to forty early Islamic castles remain which were built on land the hydraulic infrastructure of

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[14]   Christian Palestine was discussed in some detail at a symposium held at Dumbarton Oaks in 1955. The extraordinary development of Christian Syria and Palestine is made abundantly clear by the well-known older explorations of de Vogüe, Butler and others, and, more recently, by the work of N. Glück (summarized in *Rivers in the Desert* [New York, 1959]) and the explorations of the Franciscan fathers in Jerusalem (B. Bagatti and S. J. Saller, *The Town of Nebo* [Jerusalem, 1959]).

[15]   G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord*, 3 vols (Paris, 1953–58).

[16]   Butler on Qasr ibn Wardan; K. Swoboda, *Römische und Romanische Paläste* (Vienna, 1924), p. 156 ff.

[17]   For references, see Grabar, "Umayyad 'Palace' and 'Abbasid 'Revolution'".
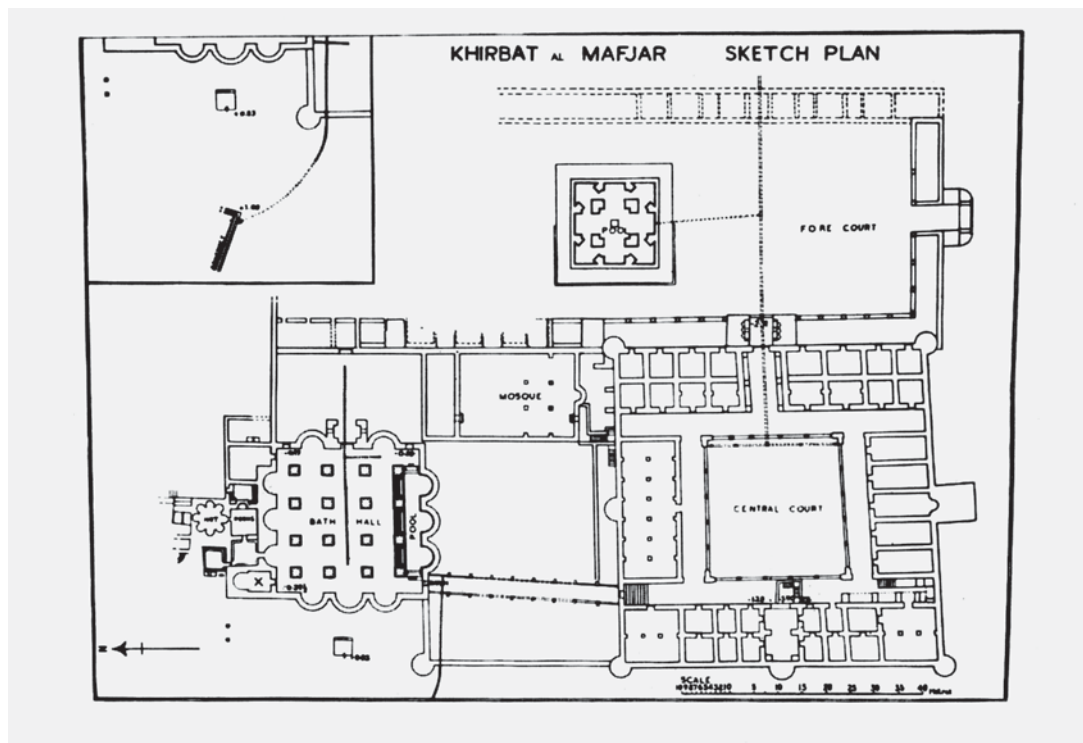
4   Khirbat al-Mafjar. Plan

which was pre-Islamic; the neighboring farmhouses and often the very stones of the palace itself were also pre-Islamic, but the main buildings were new.[18] What these buildings were can easily be seen in the six examples which can be analyzed in some detail: Jabal Says and the two Qasr al-Hayr in Syria, Khirbat al-Mafjar and Khirbat al-Minyah in Palestine, and Mshatta in Transjordan. All these are square, fort-like structures with strongly emphasized gateways (Fig. 4), small mosques, luxurious baths, and an extraordinary wealth of mosaics, paintings, stuccoes, stone sculpture and other symbols of rich life. Agricultural and ecclesiastical settlements were transformed into manorial enterprises. At times, the old agricultural exploitation probably continued; at other times, what had been a site of extensive farming was transformed into parks, game preserves and other characteristic features of high princely living. Altogether the area acquired an aristocratic residential character developed by and for the major princes of the dynasty. Amenities of high urban living, such as baths, were introduced into a land which fell, so to speak, by default into the hands of the Arabs and whose earlier functions could not be continued in the same fashion.

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[18]   A complete list of these settlements has not yet been made; the fullest is that compiled by J. Sauvaget ("Remarques sur les monuments omeyyades," *Journal asiatique*, 231 [1939]); cf. also Grabar, "Umayyad 'Palace' and 'Abbasid 'Revolution'".

This phenomenon explains, among other [76] things, the constant reference in texts to peregrinations of Umayyad princes.[19] These texts should be interpreted not as expressions of an unproved traditional nomadism, but as references to visits to agricultural enterprises or to estates.

So far our analysis has suggested that the phenomenon of the Umayyad castles in Syria should be explained by the existence of the infrastructure of an agricultural organization which had been carried on, if not always created, by the Byzantine world. It remains to be seen whether the formal characteristics of the castles were as original as their existence.

In a general way they were, like the mosques, a new combination of old forms. The square with round towers and a central porticoed courtyard belongs to a characteristic type of fortress and palace found in the Mediterranean area and in Mesopotamia.[20] This central enclosure was the main residential area in which the princes lived and received. The throne room was often on the second floor, over the entrance, but in most instances has not been preserved. Throne rooms extant on the ground floor exhibit a ubiquitous "basilican" plan, as at Minyah (Fig. 5) and Mshatta (Fig. 6), although in the latter case the plan was modified by introducing an Oriental relation of covered hall to court and by the addition of a triconch.[21] Baths also became a standard feature of these palaces; the small rooms actually used for bathing (Fig. 7) were taken directly from a type of small bath which had developed in Syria and has already been found in Dura-Europos. But the significant feature of the Umayyad bath is the extraordinary transformation of the *apodyterium*; at Qusayr ʿAmrah it was turned into a throne-room, at Khirbat al-Mafjar into a spectacular centrally planned hall (Fig. 4). The architectural origin of the latter is still unclear but, by analogy with Qusayr ʿAmrah and for reasons to be suggested presently, it can be assumed also to have been an official secular hall. Mosaics, usually without any figurative elements, have been found on the floors of these palaces; they range from the superb geometric designs of Mafjar and Minyah to the badly preserved and still unpublished ones at Qusayr ʿAmrah.[22] Rich stucco sculptures and mural paintings not only served decorative purposes, but also depicted various

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[19]   The texts have been gathered repeatedly, for instance, by H. Lammens, "La Badia et la Hira sous les Omeyyades," *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale, Univ. St. Joseph*, 4 (1910).

[20]   H. C. Butler, *Princeton University Expedition, II, Architecture*, 2 vols (Leyden, 1919–20), A, p. 145 ff.; B, pp. 47 ff., 63, etc; A. Poidebard, *La trace de Rome dans le désert de Syrie* (Paris, 1934), *passim*.

[21]   Latest discussion in I. Lavin, "The House of the Lord," *The Art Bulletin*, 44 (1962), p. 11, where the appropriate bibliography will be found.

[22]   For Mafjar, see R. W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar* (Oxford, 1959), p. 327 ff.; for Minyah, the only publication is that of O. Puttrich-Reignard, "Die Palästanlage von Chirbet el Minje," *Palästina-Hefte des deutschen Vereins vom Heiligen Lande*, Heft 17–20 (1939), with a drawing in color; the Qusayr ʿAmrah mosaics are to be published by K. Kessler in the forthcoming volume in honor of K. A. C. Creswell.
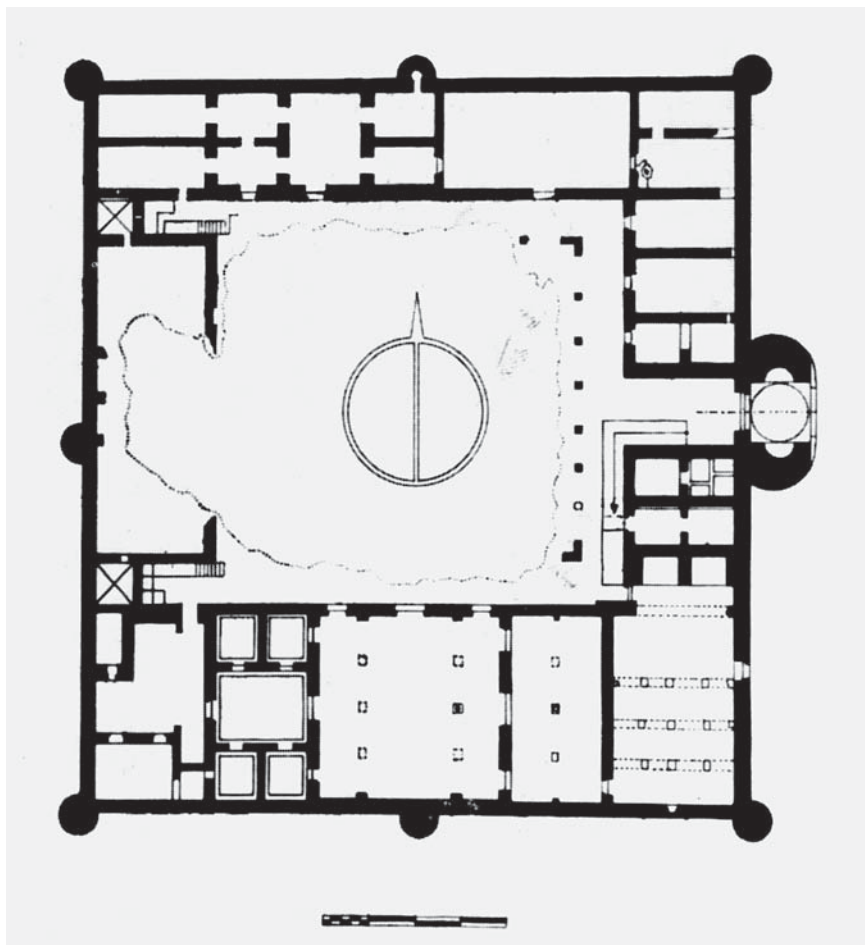
themes of a royal iconography of pleasure and power.[23] This use of the
bath as a ceremonially significant part of the palace is not entirely new,
since it does find parallels in Roman imperial art and in some of its
provincial manifestations, but, within the Umayyad [77] culture, it should
be considered as an architectural expression of the *majlis al-lahwa*, that is,
a place which was used for a ceremonial entertainment; traditional Arab
customs, such as the recitation of poetry, were expanded to include official
drinking, dancing and music in the Sasanian manner, as well as various
other activities, such as banqueting, which relate the Umayyad practice to
those associated also with Roman *triclinia*.[24]

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[23]   Cf. below and, for the interpretation of a mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafjar, R. Ettinghausen,
Arab Painting (Geneva, 1963), p. 38.

[24]   The demonstration of this point is beyond our immediate subject. It has been treated in
my doctoral thesis at Princeton University, *Ceremonies and Art at the Umayyad Court*
(1955), and I hope to return soon to some of these problems.

6   Mshatta. Plan
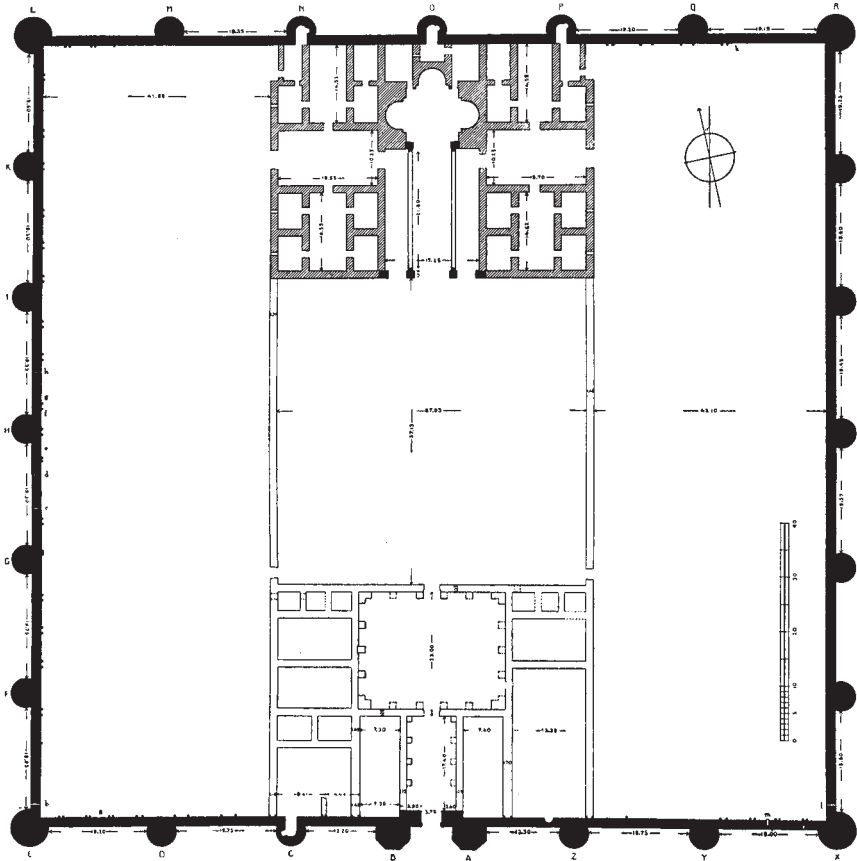
While most of the architectural components of these palaces and many of the habits of life enjoyed in them find parallels in the Mediterranean tradition, the specific combination of functions illustrated by the palaces cannot be explained as a Byzantine Christian type modified by various characteristics of a new taste. For, except for a few depictions on mosaics in North Africa,[25] there is no evidence that the combinations of forms and purposes which appear in Umayyad palaces were characteristic of secular architecture of the Near East before the Muslim conquest. Even the Tunisian mosaics are over a century earlier, and it is hardly likely that they exerted an impact on early Islamic palaces. Furthermore, the obviously makeshift arrangement of a plan like that of Khirbat al-Mafjar (Fig. 4) and the anomalously composite character of a façade like that of Qasr al-Hayr (Fig. 8) suggest that the Umayyads were in fact creating something new, that they were searching for some kind of formal entity that would tie together functions which had not, until then, been organized. It is in this fashion that one can explain the

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[25]   Swoboda, *Römische und Romanische Paläste*, pl. V.
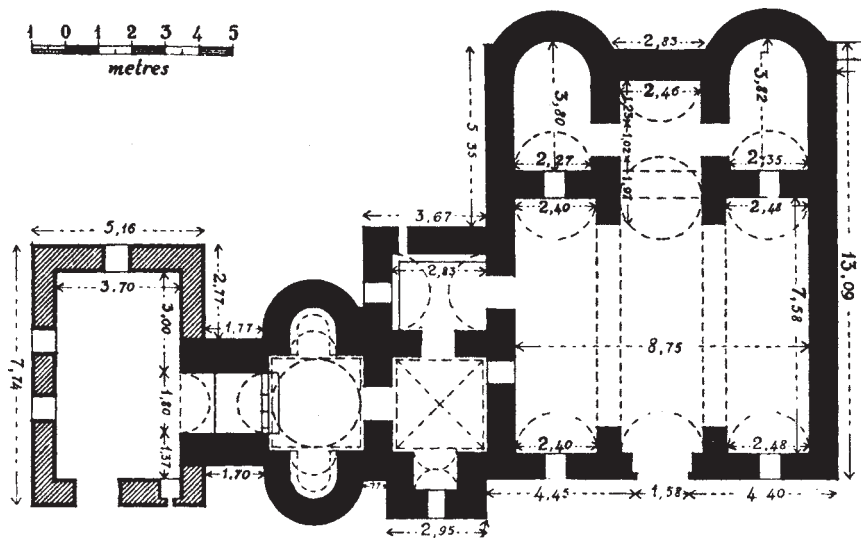
progression from Khirbat al-Minyah (Fig. 5), with its mosque and official halls bursting the straitjacket of the fort-like castle, to Mshatta (Fig. 6), unfinished but superbly planned as a single entity. The other palaces fit between these two extremes as various steps in the direction of a complete composition. This very progression and the frequently inferior quality of the architecture contribute toward the argument that no real models existed for the Umayyads in Syria and Palestine or, for that matter, in Iraq.

Indeed, the Umayyad palace – when seen in the context of the Byzantine architecture which preceded it in Syria and Palestine – appears as an original creation, made possible by the peculiar combination of four features: a highly developed agricultural infrastructure created several centuries earlier; the emigration of large landowners; the existence of an aristocratic ruling group; and the availability of themes, ideas, tastes and modes of behavior drawn from the entire breadth of the newly conquered world and amalgamated with older Arabian habits. But, and this point is crucial, what was thus created resembled in many aspects Roman and late antique palace architecture rather than Byzantine. The apparent fortification, the tremendous display of decoration, the comparative seclusion, the relationship to cultivated land – all are features which are close to Spalato, Piazza Armerina, Pliny's villas, especially the *Villa Urbana*, or North African manors.[26]

[78] However, the significance of the Umayyad palace does not lie merely in the peculiar fashion in which it developed or in the manner in which its

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[26] This is a point with which I have dealt in papers presented at the Centro Italiano di Studi sull' alto Medioevo in Spoleto in April 1964 and at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in Philadelphia in February 1964. The papers will be published in the journals of these two organizations, respectively.

8   Qasr al-Hayr.
Façade, as
reconstructed in
the Damascus
Museum

9   Qasr al-Hayr. Sculpture on façade

function and its architectural characteristics relate it to older types of building. It became also the crucible to which themes and ideas from the whole length and breadth of the newly conquered world were brought; there were borrowings from the past of that world, as in the case of Palmyrene sculpture imitated at Qasr al-Hayr (Fig. 9),[27] or from its far-flung provinces, as in the case of paintings or sculptures inspired by Central Asian art.[28] It is in this crucible that a new Islamic decorative art was created; elements from many areas were mixed together, at times incongruously, as in a fragment from Mafjar (Fig. 10) in which a flat frame of interlocking circles serves as a background for strangely projecting busts. In this development of decorative themes Byzantine art played an important part, but only as one of the contributors to a new series of syntheses. For the formation of early Islamic palace art, the conquest of a large world with an immense wealth of styles and objects was as important as – if not more important than – the location of the palaces in an area formerly ruled by Byzantium.

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[27]   This sculpture was published by D. Schlumberger, "Les fouilles de Qasr el-Heir Gharbi," *Syria*, 20 (1939), pl. XLVI, 2.

[28]   Many sculptures from Khirbat al-Mafjar (Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*, pls XLIV, 4 and LVI) and paintings both from Mafjar and from Qasr al-Hayr (the latter for the most part unpublished) seem clearly to have been inspired by Central Asian works of art.

The palaces were doomed before their art had developed to its fullest extent. The fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750 led to the almost immediate abandonment of the whole agricultural area in which palaces have been found. The cities of Syria and Palestine also declined, but the impact of the Umayyad creations remained for many centuries and in many regions. The persistence of mosaic decoration in Cairo as late as the fourteenth century; the square minarets of Morocco; the fact that so much of the architecture in the Arab world continued for so long to depend on the arch and the column rather than on vaults; the persistence of ornamentation with a clear organization of vegetal forms, such as can be seen in Fatimid Egypt or in Spain; the plan imposed on the mosque of Damascus by the old sanctuary of the city; all these and many others are features which remained Muslim because they were naturalized in Umayyad Syria and Palestine. At the same time, what emerged from the palaces or the city mosques to have a lasting effect on Islamic art was not Byzantine art but a number of techniques and a large number of motifs. However, the brilliance and wealth of Byzantine Syria and Palestine and the peculiar ecology inherited by the Arabs were the principal factors that made possible the brilliance and wealth of the Umayyad art of Syria and Palestine. These are all the more remarkable when compared to the primitive simplicity of Umayyad art in Iraq. Umayyad art was not a province of Byzantine art, but the extraordinary fact that there was an identifiable art sponsored by the Muslim Arabs a few decades after their emergence from Arabia is to [79] be attributed to the setting which they inherited from Byzantium and which they transformed in ways and for reasons peculiar to them.

From a survey of the setting in which early Islamic art was created, I turn now to my second topic: the consideration of an iconographic theme.

It is only in the past two decades that iconographic studies have begun to revolutionize our knowledge of Islamic art and to replace the romantic

10   Khirbat al-Mafjar. Sculpture from Palace entrance

conception of a purely decorative art. The task of so changing our vision has been the almost single-handed work of R. Ettinghausen, who, beginning with an article published in 1943,[29] has been continuously pointing out that the most characteristically "decorative" objects and motifs possess also a level of social, intellectual, or even religious meaning hitherto rarely seen.

Without denying the considerable ornamental values developed by Muslim artists, as early as for the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock, it remains true that these artists and their patrons on numerous occasions used works of art to express certain ideas. For our purposes here the interest to be found in an analysis of such a theme is quite evident, since the creation of an iconography imposes on the patron or on the artist a deliberate choice of subject-matter. Furthermore, if we recall that from its Arabian past the new Muslim art could draw almost nothing, it follows that it was from the rich heritage of the Mediterranean and of the Near East that its main themes were borrowed; and thus the question of the conscious uses of Byzantine art is raised. I have chosen the theme of power as expressed in monuments because it was one of the first to be developed, because, due to the high positions of its sponsors, it is one of the better-documented themes, and also because it was a theme hardly peculiar to Islamic art, but characteristic of all imperial arts, and it was brought to particular intensity in the art of Late Antiquity and of Byzantium.

There are two main periods and two groups of monuments around which I should like to develop the theme: the Umayyad period and its palaces and mosques, and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and their illustrated books. In discussing these monuments, however, I shall stress only their specific relation to Byzantine art, it being assumed that there are other coordinates through which many of them can and should be understood.

The first group of monuments occurs in the Umayyad period, when, in the later part of the seventh century and in the first two decades of the eighth – more particularly under the rules of 'Abd al-Malik and of al-Walid I – the Muslim princes established the first elements of a characteristically Muslim imperial organization. Together with various administrative and other practices, there appeared also the first elements of a visual symbolic system which will serve to identify the Islamic world. The main purpose of this system was to symbolize power, i.e., to emphasize the existence, the greatness and the individuality of the new world. Its first characteristic expression occurred on coins. There, as is well known, the Muslims had first used Byzantine and Sasanian types [80] (Fig. 11) with very few modifications;[30] then changes began to occur: new inscriptions with the caliph's name, new iconographies, such as

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29   R. Ettinghausen, "The Bobrinski Kettle," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 24 (1943).

30   The basic publications are by J. Walker, *Arab–Sassanian Coins* (London, 1941) and *Arab-Byzantine and Post Reform Umaiyad Coins* (London, 1956). See also G. C. Miles, "Mihrab and 'Anazah," *Archaeologica Orientalia …* (Locust Valley, 1952).

11   Arab–Byzantine coin

12   Arab–Byzantine coin

13   Arab–Byzantine coin

14   Arab–Byzantine coin

15   Post-reform Umayyad gold coin

a caliph's portrait (Fig. 12), a peculiar *orant* (Fig. 13), or, in a rare instance, a search for a specifically Muslim iconography. In a celebrated coin (Fig. 14) published by G. Miles the main themes were symbols of Islamic power, a *mihrab* (or merely a niche of honor) and the *'anazah,* the lance of the Prophet. The significant points about this coin, however, are that it remained an extreme rarity and that, for reasons to be suggested presently, its very Islamic symbolism was not continued. In fact, sometime thereafter, probably in 695, a new Muslim coinage (Fig. 15) was established in which words alone, the profession of faith and the qur'anic verse of the mission of the Prophet to the

16   Damascus,
Mausoleum of
Baybars. Mosaic
fragment

world, expressed the new culture. This coinage remained standard, with only minor exceptions, almost until today.

At the very same time, in the Dome of the Rock and in the mosque of Damascus, respectively, the imagery created was of crowns suspended around a sanctuary and of an idyllic landscape. This imagery is, again, an expression of power, power of the victory of Islam over its Christian and Sasanian antagonists and power of the idealized complete world ruled over by the Muslims. The proposed justifications for these interpretations have been given elsewhere by R. Ettinghausen and myself,[31] but the point which I should like to stress here is that in none of these instances do we find human or animal representations, even though practically all symbols and images of power in Antiquity tended to center around human or animal symbols.

The exact iconographic themes of Damascus and Jerusalem do not seem to have been used again in the following centuries, and it is not very clear whether their apparent revival in a few instances by early 'Abbasid caliphs,[32] and especially under the Mamluks in the late thirteenth century (Fig. 16),[33] should be given the same precise meaning or whether these examples of architectural themes in mosaics were mere ornaments, probably imitating Damascus mosaics. Although in the intervening centuries the theme of power did not disappear, it tended to find expression not so much through organized imagery as through epigraphy and architectural compositions.[34]

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[31]   Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 20 ff.; O. Grabar in *Ars Orientalis*, 3.

[32]   The case in point is that of the crowns and royal insignia of conquered princes of Afghanistan which were hung in Mecca, al-Azraqi, *K. Akhbar Makkah*, in F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, I (Leipzig, 1858), p. 155 ff.; Grabar, in *Ars Orientalis*, 3, pp. 50–51.

[33]   These mosaics in the mausoleum of Baybars have often been mentioned, but have not yet been properly published.

[34]   This point cannot be demonstrated in the context of this paper, but the highly organized plan of Baghdad – city and palace at one and the same time (cf. O. Grabar, "Mshatta, Wasit, and Baghdad," *The World of Islam*, ed. by R. B. Winder and J. Kritzeck [London, 1959]; and the forthcoming studies by D. J. Lassner) – the very remarkable inscriptions

[81] The conclusion, therefore, would be that, after a few essays in coinage, the Muslim world abandoned, at least for a while, an official imagery of power and replaced it with certain monumental symbols and especially with the written word. This change, which has long been recognized, though perhaps not quite in these terms, was usually attributed to Islamic iconoclasm, but the difficulty with this hypothesis is that the evidence, derived from works of art, of opposition to representations of living beings precedes any theoretical statement of an Islamic opposition to images, the latter not being evident before the second half of the eighth century.[35] It can hardly be doubted that the Muslim interpretation of the Qur'an and perhaps a generally iconoclastic tendency among the Semitic population of the Near East theologically justified the later doctrine and brought about its general acceptance with respect to religious art. It remains true, however, that a conscious refusal to use representations for official purposes and their partial replacement with words had occurred before any systematic formulation of any doctrine took place. An explanation for this phenomenon can be provided if we consider the setting within which the Muslim search for a symbolism of power took place.

However one is to interpret the specific changes in coinage brought about by Justinian II, it is clear that a complex iconography of Christ was used on the new coins, and many recent studies have pointed out in general the intellectual and emotional intricacies of religious art in the sixth and seventh centuries which led to the great iconoclastic quarrel.[36] Furthermore, even though specific styles varied, the basis repertory of iconographic themes and motifs used in the Christian and imperial arts of early Byzantium was one issued from Antiquity and basically common, or at least understandable, to the whole Christian world. The choice confronting 'Abd al-Malik, al-Walid and, even more urgently, al-Hajjaj, was either to invent a new iconography (thus the *mihrab* and lance of the American Numismatic Society coin, Fig.

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on the mosque of Ibn Tulun (E. Combe, J. Sauvaget, G. Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* [Cairo, 1931 and ff.], no. 682), or on the so-called Juyushi mosque (ibid., no. 2753 and O. Grabar, "The Earliest Islamic Mausoleums," *Ars Orientalis*, 6, forthcoming), or, finally, the bejeweled axial nave and series of domes built by al-Hakam II in Cordoba – all of these examples would indicate that very precise architectural practices and official epigraphy served to show the sovereign character of buildings.

[35] The problem of the sources of an Islamic opposition to images is still incompletely solved. The latest formal statement on the strictly Islamic side of the subject is by K. A. C. Creswell, "Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam," *Ars Islamica*, 11–12 (1946); see also R. Paret, "Textbelege zum islamischen Bilderverbot," *Das Werk des Künstlers, Hubert Schrade zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1961). The problem, however, has to be considered in the light of contemporary Byzantine ideas, on which see E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 8 (1954); and A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin* (Paris, 1957). There is also the question of the so-called edict of Yazid II, A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 9–10 (1956). On this, see below, note 40.

[36] See the works quoted in the preceding note, and J. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* (New York, 1959).

14) whose meaning would miscarry since it would not fit the existing formal vocabulary of the Mediterranean and of the Near East, or to use the formal vocabulary (as on early coins) which, while familiar, would inadequately identify the novelty and uniqueness of the new empire and the new faith, for the Umayyads could hardly in one generation acquire the sophisticated practice of imagery which characterized Byzantium. Faced with this dilemma, the Muslims tried both alternatives, but soon discarded imagery, and, as we have seen, adopted the techniques of Byzantium without its formulas. Thus, to avoid the pitfalls [82] inherent in the use of a highly developed iconography, the Muslims changed the rules of the game.

There are two conclusions to be drawn from this analysis. The first is that Muslim theoretical iconoclasm followed a practical refusal to use representations for highly official purposes, and perhaps was influenced by this refusal, although it is possible that philosophical and intellectual iconoclasm developed, at least in part, independently of political and imperial considerations. The second is that Byzantine art was responsible for this early Muslim attitude; yet it is not a particular style or iconographic motif of Byzantine art that is involved here, but rather the fact of that art and of the ideological depth it had achieved.

It is in this context that I should like to remark upon a very curious phenomenon, about which much has been written: that of the use of Byzantine workers for the erection of Islamic monuments. I do not refer to the probably very numerous workers from everywhere – including Byzantium – who were attracted by the money and employment available in Umayyad times. I refer, rather, to the specific incident of al-Walid's request that workers be sent to him by the Byzantine emperor. The evidence gathered recently by Professor Gibb[37] has clearly shown that Byzantine workers were brought by al-Walid I to help decorate the great mosques of Damascus, Madinah, and perhaps Jerusalem. Professor Gibb also noted that for the Byzantines this action had one meaning and for al-Walid quite another. To the Byzantines it was an imperial act granting to "barbarians" the privileged use of highly technical training which, by its very quality, served to enhance the prestige of the Byzantine emperor and, presumably too, to bring the "barbarian" into the imperial fold. To al-Walid it was partly a way of "learning the ropes," as Professor Gibb has put it, for the Muslim caliph was anxious to possess all the characteristics of an emperor (one of these being the sponsorship of superb monuments for his own followers), and partly a way to impress the Christians of the empire. Thus, as in the story of Abu 'Ubaydah at Qinnasrin, opposite meanings were given to a single event.

But perhaps we may be able to go a step further. It was not technically necessary for mosaicists and decorators to come officially from Byzantium, for the examples of mosaics in the palaces and especially in the Dome of the

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37   H. A. R. Gibb, "Arab–Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 11 (1958).
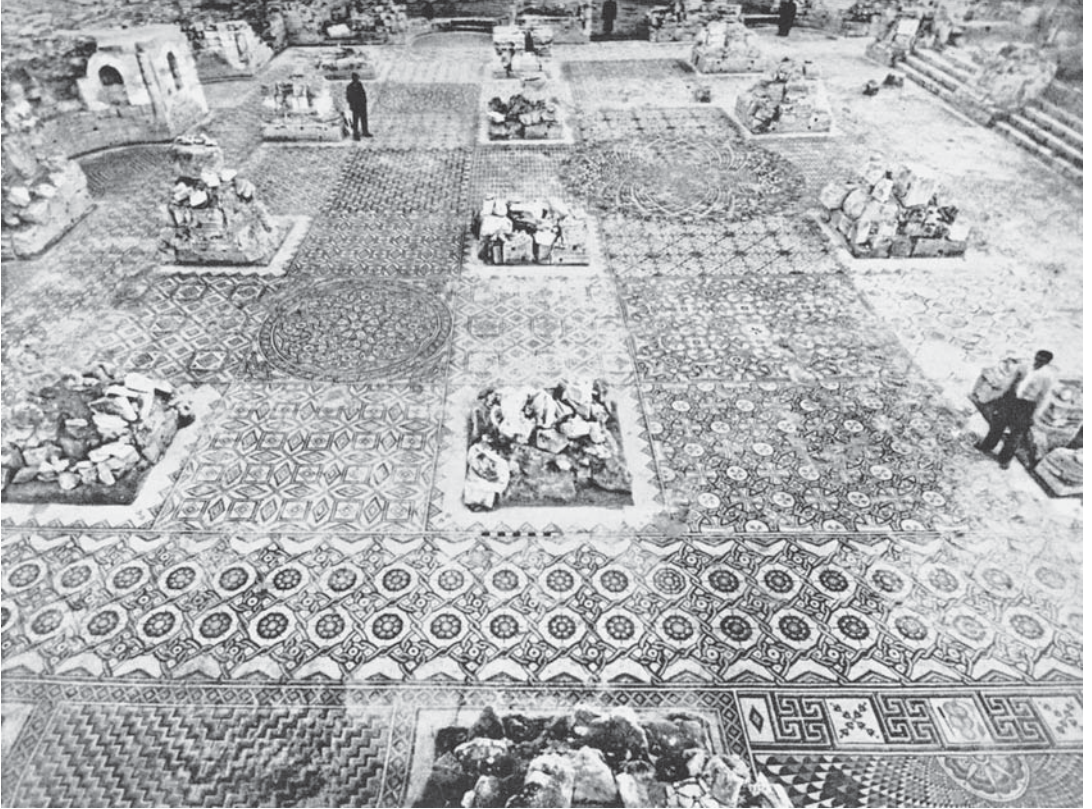
Rock are of as fine quality as those of Damascus, yet there is no evidence that they were done by Byzantine artists sent from Byzantium as part of a high-level treaty agreement. In fact, with regard to the Jerusalem sanctuary the circumstances of the times and the specific meaning of the building itself make it highly unlikely that any such artists could have been there. Furthermore, the iconographic program of the mosque of Damascus refers to specifically Islamic ideas and does not merely copy Byzantine models; and the palace mosaics, with their highly developed geometric designs (Figs 17 and 18), are the conscious choice, with modifications, of late antique models rather than [83] of the latest Byzantine styles. If workers were available in the Muslim Empire and if iconographic ideas had been developed by the Muslims, why did al-Walid send for artists from Byzantium? Two explanations for his action can be suggested. The first would derive from an element in the early Muslim state which has not yet been sufficiently examined in discussions of Umayyad culture. It may be defined as an almost messianic feeling that the Empire of Rome would surely fall to the Muslims.[38] Military and psychological

17   Khirbat al-Mafjar. Mosaic fragment

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[38]   M. Canard, "Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople dans l'histoire et dans la légende," *Journal asiatique*, 208 (1926).
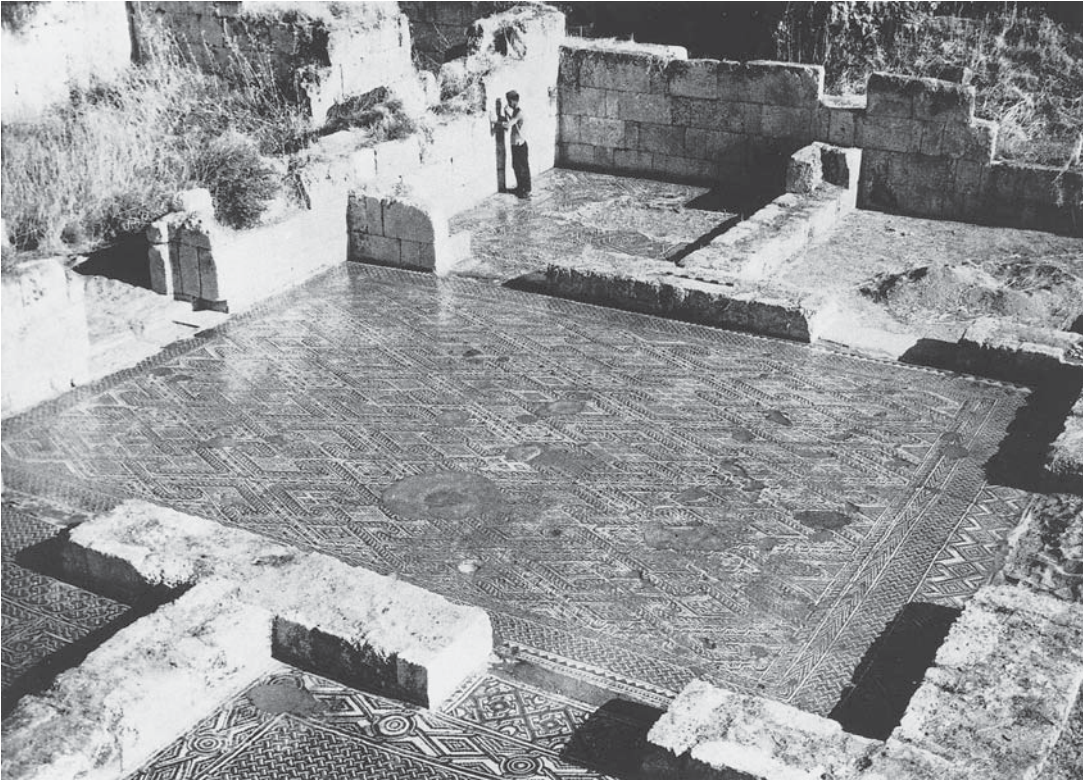
18   Khirbat al-
Minyah. Mosaic
fragment

hopes for this event collapsed after the failure of 717, but the call for artists
and artisans up to that date can be understood as having symbolized in fact
the subservience to the Muslims of the Byzantine emperor, who, like a
vassal, must provide his overlord with artisans. This explanation would be in
keeping with the interpretation of the iconography of the mosaics of the
Mosque of Damascus suggested by R. Ettinghausen, and with at least some
of the texts describing al-Walid's call for Byzantine artists, texts which
emphasize that it was the Muslim prince who gave the "orders." The second
explanation is simpler: al-Walid's request derived from snobbism, the
conviction that first-rate works could come only from Byzantium. Whether
or not the latter explanation is fully valid for the caliph may be open to
some doubt. It hardly coincides with his truly imperial ideas and construction
program. I would rather, therefore, suggest that, like the new Muslim coinage
and like the iconography of the mosque of Damascus and of the Dome of
the Rock, al-Walid's call for workers from Byzantium was meant to be a sign
of the Muslim prince's accession to universal power, the very theme of the
celebrated fresco of the Six Kings at Qusayr 'Amrah (Fig. 19).[39]

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[39]   O. Grabar, "The Painting of the Six Kings at Qusayr 'Amrah," *Ars Orientalis*, 1 (1954);
Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 30.
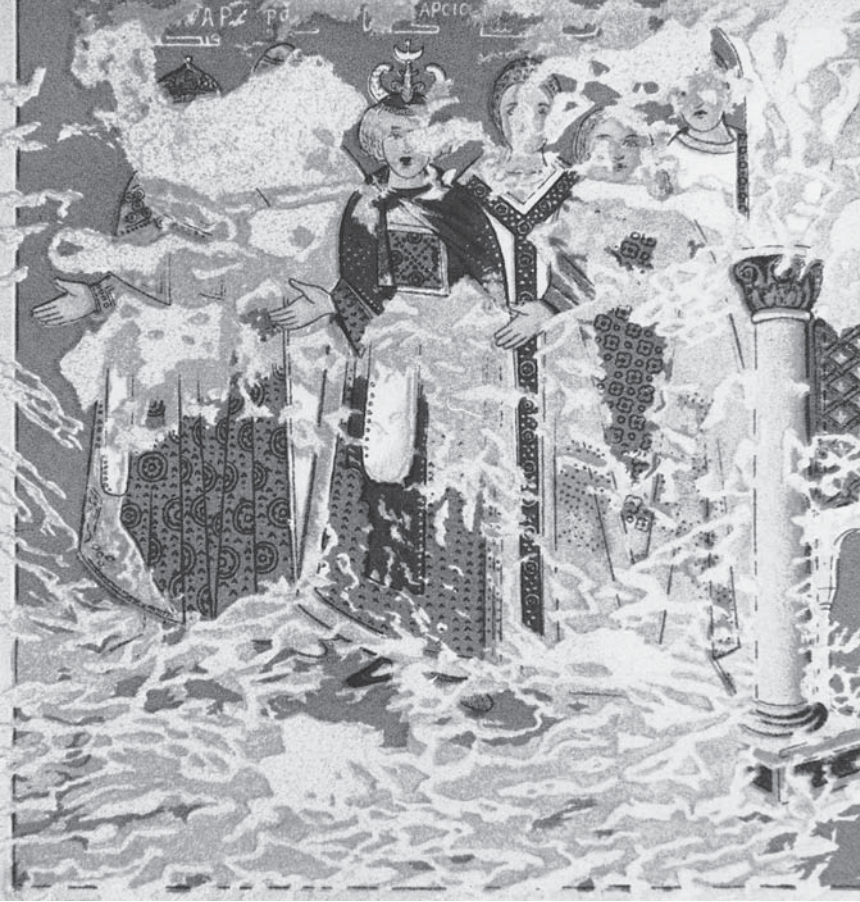
19   Qusayr
'Amrah. Fresco of
the Six Kings

But, as the defeat of Byzantium became impossible and as the Muslim world turned eastward, the events of al-Walid's reign became myths and the *Rumi*, the Byzantine, became the artist *par excellence,* later to be joined by the Chinese. The myth survived because the buildings of al-Walid in Jerusalem, Damascus and Madinah remained central sanctuaries in the succeeding history of Islam and because the early Muslim dream lingered, however hazily, in later historiography and legend. Thus, once again an important characteristic of the Islamic attitude toward the arts, i.e., the evaluation of the Rumi artist, derived from the peculiar situation of Byzantine and Arab relations in the early eighth century; in this instance, it was the result of an expression of power by al-Walid; the Muslim vision of the defeat of Byzantium led eventually to the assumption of the superiority of the Byzantine artist.[40]

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[40]   It could be noted that much in our analysis of early Islamic art finds parallels in early Christian art, where a similar dichotomy of opposition and attraction existed between the new faith and Classical Antiquity. The main difference is that Islamic culture did

[84] While coins and the decoration of mosques show an ultimate refusal to use more than Byzantine techniques, and while an attempt at imperial power by al-Walid led in part to the mythical eminence of the Byzantine artist, palace art reflects a quite different story. There also an art was developed whose aim was to glorify the prince and to emphasize his power. We could not have a clearer illustration of this than the celebrated fresco of the Six Kings at Qusayr 'Amrah (Fig. 19). Yet an important difference existed between the art of early Islamic palaces and the imagery or symbols on coins and in mosques, for palace art was designed primarily for private audiences. It was no less an art of power than the other, but its uses were more intimate and less accessible to the general public. Basically it revolved around a ceremonial theme much less Byzantine than Oriental, the theme of the royal pastime, in which the life of the prince was expressed through its association with hunting, games, banqueting, dancing, music, scantily clad females, etc.,[41] and it is these very activities that form the major subject-matter of the paintings of Qusayr 'Amrah and of the sculptures of Qasr al-Hayr and Khirbat al-Mafjar. The styles in which these themes were executed vary considerably from pseudo-classical to Central Asian and Indian, and each style poses separate problems of influences which cannot concern us here. In one respect, however, they do bear directly on our subject.

In every one of the three buildings I have mentioned there are representations of princes and attendants. In one palace, Qasr al-Hayr, there are two representations of princes, making a total of four royal images.[42] Two of

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not have the four centuries of incubation of Christianity before emerging as a unique political and cultural entity. It is in the light of these conclusions that I should like to place the edict of Yazid II, although a full treatment of the subject is beyond the scope of this paper. There is no doubt that political persecution of Christians took place at that time, as is evident from the fact that Christian sources (whether in Arabic, Greek or Syriac) are primarily responsible for the preservation of the edict. It also stands to reason that anti-iconoclastic milieux, in fighting their own battles in Constantinople, would have tended to assimilate their own enemies to the one caliph who clearly had persecuted them. That Yazid had become a "scapegoat" can be shown by the passage in Dionysius of Tell-Mahre which follows the text of the edict (trans. by J. B. Chabot [Paris, 1895], pp. 17–18); there Yazid is also accused of having created a fearful stench throughout the Muslim world by having ordered the killing of all white dogs, pigeons and roosters. The absurdity of the accusation suggests a "smear campaign" rather than a factual account. I would, therefore, prefer to consider the edict of Yazid as reflecting an anti-Christian program, which, because of contemporary Christian problems and later developments in both Byzantium and Islam, took an iconoclastic turn in the sources.

41   The precise demonstration of this point in Umayyad palaces, the textual evidence for its uses in ceremonies, and its Iranian origins have not so far been put together in print.

42   All these images have been published. Mafjar: Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*, pl. LV, 1 and 5; Qasr al-Hayr: Schlumberger, "Les fouilles," pl. XLV, and S. 'Abd al-Haqq, "I'adah tashyid jinah Qasr al-Hayr," *Annales archéologiques de Syrie*, 1 (1951), pl. 9²; Qusayr 'Amrah: A. Musil, *Kusejr 'Amra* (Vienna, 1909), pl. XV. The problem is whether these four figures are correctly interpreted as princes or caliphs. In the case of 'Amrah, there is absolutely no doubt about it, since the inscription around it refers to an *amir* (J. Sauvaget in *Journal asiatique* [1939], p. 14); in the instances of the Sasanian image at

these princes, one at Qasr al-Hayr (Fig. 20) the other one at Mafjar (Fig. 21), are clearly of Sasanian inspiration, and the considerable differences which exist between them suggest that they derived from representations rather than from actual vestimentary practices. The other two princes, from Qasr al-Hayr (Fig. 22) [85] and from 'Amrah (Fig. 23), just as obviously reflect Byzantine, or at least late classical, art, as do some of the attendants. For us the important points are that, in the more intimate atmosphere of the palaces, an iconography for princes did fully develop, and that its themes were adopted by the Muslims from conquered lands. But it was images of emperors, rather than of just any human figures, that were chosen as models, and this indicates the Muslims' awareness of the meaning of the imagery in the original works. Furthermore, the vestimentary variations of these images serve to illustrate yet another point, to which we have been led before: it is that in the early eighth century a prince could be represented only in Sasanian or Byzantine garb, for the Muslim princely image had not yet acquired proper iconographic values in any other system of clothing. However, in those instances where Muslim identification was essential, devices were found, either through a new kind of headgear as at Qasr al-Hayr[43] or, most significantly, through an inscription as at Qusayr 'Amrah, where the written word gives concrete meaning to an abstract iconographic *cliché* of a prince.

In any case, in these instances the role of Byzantine art is clear: it was one of the sources from which the new Muslim art chose elements which served to illustrate its own needs and practices. It is particularly unfortunate that, after a considerable documentation for the first half of the eighth century, there is almost no evidence from succeeding centuries which would allow us to trace the growth of an Islamic iconography of power, let alone the precise Byzantine sources of such an iconography. The shift of power toward the east certainly led to an increase in Iranian influences.[44]

It is only in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries that new documents once again come to light. At that time, in the midst of a sudden and

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Qasr al-Hayr and at Mafjar, there is no certainty, but considerable likelihood, because of the position of the statues on major entrances and because of other symbols of power (such as the crown at Qasr al-Hayr and the lions at Mafjar). The doubtful example is the second one at Qasr al-Hayr, which, according to the reconstruction in the Damascus Museum (*Annales archéologiques de Syrie*, pl. 8), was on the inner façade of the main part of the building and not quite in the center of the composition. Yet I fail to see what other meaning could be given to this fragment, inasmuch as the 'Amrah example makes it quite clear that Byzantine stylistic origins were indeed possible for princely images of Umayyad times.

43   See Schlumberger's remarks in *Syria*, 20 (1939), pp. 353–4.
44   Unfortunately, we are very badly informed concerning 'Abbasid or Fatimid visual symbols of power. It is possible that more thorough searches through texts may uncover interesting instances of the development of an idea which is not likely to have disappeared or to have been entirely sublimated into epigraphy. In the meantime, see M. Canard in *Byzantion* (1951) and D. Sourdel, "Questions de cérémonial 'Abbaside," *Revue des études islamiques* (1960).

20   Qasr al-Hayr. Sculpture of prince

21   Khirbat al-
Mafjar. Sculpture
of prince

22   Qasr al-
Hayr. Sculpture
of prince

widespread emergence of new techniques, new types of objects, new purposes, and new centers of artistic activity and production, the art of book illustration was created or revived. Two peculiarities of this new art concern us here. First, from what is known about it, by far the greater bulk was in Arabic, and some of its most typical examples consisted of characteristically Arab texts. Second, these books were intended mainly for a sophisticated urban community, a milieu quite different from that of the princes. The quality of the books was often expressed by their frontispieces, and these can be divided into two broad groups. One consists of a series of variations on the author portrait, in which Byzantine models were used almost systematically, as in an example from a Dioscorides manuscript (Fig. 24) and in a well-

23   Qusayr 'Amrah. Fresco of prince

known instance from the Vienna pseudo-Galen (Fig. 25);[45] incidentally, some of these instances are related more [86] closely to early Byzantine models than to later ones. The second group consists of a well-developed princely cycle, in which a tradition much more specifically Islamic, with considerable Turkish and Iranian elements, was depicted. Yet in the composition of frontispieces from an *Aghani* manuscript (Fig. 26) and from the Vienna Galen (Fig. 27)[46] there is a striking resemblance to earlier Byzantine compositions, as we know them, for instance, in ivories (Fig. 28), in which the upper and lower as well as the side borders – the latter arranged in two rows of figures – framed and enlarged upon the central theme.[47]

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45   The Dioscorides frontispiece was first published by A. Süheyl Unver, *Istanbulda Dioscorides Eserleri* (Istanbul, 1944), figs 1–2; for the Galen, see Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 92. See also R. Ettinghausen, "Interaction and Integration in Islamic Art," in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed. by G. von Grünebaum (Chicago, 1955), p. 119 ff., where some relatable examples are discussed.

46   The *Aghani* group was published by B. Farès, *Une miniature religieuse de l'Ecole de Baghdad* (Cairo, 1948); a considerable controversy developed around B. Farès' thesis, which does not concern our subject, but further literature included an important article by D. S. Rice, "The Aghani Miniatures," *The Burlington Magazine*, 95 (1953), and a second volume by B. Farès, *Vision chrétienne et signes Musulmans* (Cairo, 1961).

47   It should be pointed out that this particular arrangement was not peculiar to Byzantine compositions, but existed also in Manichean and Buddhist compositions of Central

24   Istanbul, Topkapi Saray. Ahmet III, no. 2147, frontispiece with portrait of Dioscorides

It seems apparent, then, that even in the thirteenth century, when the artists of the Arab world renewed the search for iconographic modes to add distinction to the newly created art of book illustration, they once again turned to Byzantine models which, by their presence, seemed almost magically to exalt the quality of the book. The practice could be pursued in other areas as well: in architectural decoration particularly a fascinating return to the use of classical themes on façades is apparent. The late D. S. Rice once showed me an extraordinary stone found at Harran in which a perfect fifth-century molding was dated by an inscription in the thirteenth century, and

Asia as well as in those of the Carolingian West, all probably having common roots in Roman art. For examples and relation to a frontispiece of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries in Istanbul, see now E. Esin, "Two Miniatures from the Collections of Topkapi," *Ars Orientalis*, 5 (1963); for Carolingian examples, see, for instance, Homburger, "L'art carolingien de Metz et l'Ecole de Winchester," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 62 (1963). A case can indeed be made to the effect that it was in Central Asia that the princes of the thirteenth century acquired a taste for such compositions, and the subject deserves a fuller investigation than it has received so far; however, the very Arab character of the illustrated texts leads me, at least for the time being, to prefer a western Byzantine or Roman background for this type of composition.

25   Vienna,
National-
bibliothek,
A.F.10, authors'
portraits

26   *Kitab al-Aghani*, frontispiece

on the façade of one of the monuments of Nur al-Din in Damascus, a completely classical lintel is surmounted by a very medieval *muqarnas* (Fig. 29). The same idea was applied to some of the coins minted in Northern Mesopotamia and in Anatolia,[48] on which images of Constantine and other Byzantine or Roman emperors appear.

Obviously the analyses and examples I have gathered for this study do not tell the whole story of the artistic relations between Byzantium and the Arab world; nor can I pretend to have mentioned all the elements in Islamic art that derived from or were fashioned in Byzantium. I have tried, rather, to present an interpretation of the systems of association between forms and functions and between images and needs which Byzantine art, for various historical and geographical reasons, imposed on the new culture. I have focused my attention on the Umayyad period in which documents are particularly plentiful and relations between the cultures especially strong, and in [87] the use of one illustrative instance I have tried to show that the practice was continued at later periods. The problem of Byzantine–Arab artistic relationships could be extended to deal with such subjects as the palaces of Theophilus in Constantinople and of the 'Abbasids in Baghdad, or with the uses of architecture evident under the Fatimids, or, even more strikingly, with certain very archaic features of the secular architecture of North Africa and Umayyad Spain. Even in a monument as

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48   R. Lane Poole, *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum*, IV (London, 1879), pl. V.

28   Ravenna,
Museo Nazionale.
Ivory diptych

Islamic as the Alhambra there are antecedents which extend to Byzantium and beyond.[49]

Three main conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, by the very nature of the history of the seventh century, certain clearly identifiable ecological practices in Byzantium and Syria created the extraordinary phenomenon of Umayyad palaces. Similarly, in later times the social contacts

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[49]   The bibliography on all these subjects, though fairly extensive, is not very enlightening from our point of view. Exceptions would be: A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin*, pp. 144–5; G. Marçais, *L'architecture musulmane d'Occident* (Paris, 1954), *passim*; and F. Bargebuhr, "The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 19 (1956), p. 217 ff.

29   Damascus,
Hospital of Nur
al-Din, façade

with Christian populations, the reliance on Greek scientific books, and, in a general sense, the Mediterranean orientation of most Arabic-speaking areas in the Middle Ages made inevitable the Arabs' knowledge of, use of, and reliance upon Byzantine themes.

Second, there are almost no instances of the Muslims having borrowed from Byzantium without there being an identifiable need within their culture, or of their having continued with old traditions without making modifications demanded by the new world. This statement may require some correction as one deals with certain details of ornamental themes, but it can be maintained with regard to official art. Islamic art used Byzantine art when it needed iconographic expressions. Byzantine art thus became an essential ingredient in the formation of Islamic art. However, if we examine the nature of the impact of the former upon the latter, we note that, despite the reputation of Byzantine emperors as patrons of art and possessors of artists and treasure, it was not Byzantine *art* but the *themes* of Byzantine art which were used by the Muslims. In the one instance of religious and imperial symbolism where the Byzantines had developed a complex iconographic and stylistic mode of representation, the Muslims declined to adopt any of it precisely because it was highly developed. What we must conclude, then, is that Byzantine art provided the new culture with a vocabulary and with the rudiments of a grammar, but that the language developed therefrom was a new one. During its development, as the need for new themes and modes occurred, the Muslims turned again and again to the wellspring of Byzantium, much as Renaissance word-makers, partly out of snobbery and partly out of a genuine need for new words, turned to Greek for a vocabulary, from which certain words have since become popular, while others have faded away as artificial and meaningless concoctions. The idea that for the Muslims Byzantine ways were a means, not an end, an essential element in the creation of a symbolic system, not the system itself, is clearly illustrated in a celebrated story concerning Mu'awiyah.[88] At one time he was upbraided by the Caliph 'Umar for having adopted the foreign ways of the Caesars and the Khosros. Mu'awiyah answered that Damascus was full of Greeks and that none of them would believe in his power if he did not behave and look like an emperor.[50] To answer, then, the question posed by my original story: the early Muslims never fully understood Byzantine art, but circumstances having forced it on them, they could not but be impressed by its existence.

The evidence I have presented leads us, however, to a third conclusion. One of the striking characteristics of the themes used by Islamic art, brought to it by Byzantine hands, is that so many of them are quite classical. The illusionist style of fragments of the Damascus mosaic decoration, the arch on column, the agricultural structure of Syria, the palace-villas, the

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[50]   The story has been related often. One of its earliest versions is in Tabari, *Annales*, ed. by M. de Goeje and others (Leiden, 1879 ff.), 2, p. 207.

compositions of frontispieces – and to these can be added other features not treated here, such as the shapes of mausoleums and vegetal decorative designs – all reflect the art of Antiquity, and almost never did the newer and emotionally deeper Byzantine mode make its appearance. Should we understand from this that, at the time of the formation of Islamic art in Syria and throughout the period of later Byzantine art, the classical mode was so lively that it was more easily adopted? Should Umayyad art be used, then, as a major document in the assessment of Antiquity in Byzantium? Or should we rather feel that the artistic language of Antiquity was wider in spirit, more abstract and more adaptable to new needs than the engaged art of Christian Byzantium? Answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this paper and beyond my competence, but, whatever the answers, the questions illustrate the deeper meaning of Byzantium to Islamic art. Far more than from any other artistic tradition which created Islamic art, it was from the Byzantine that the new culture most consciously – if not necessarily most often – and with due acknowledgement took its vocabulary of forms and images. This was so, in part, because the Byzantine world, more than any other, carefully nurtured the great inheritance it had assumed from Antiquity. It was so also because Byzantium was the one world Early Islam most wanted, and failed, to conquer. But, above all, it was so because, to the Islamic and especially to the Arab Middle Ages – as well as to the Christian and especially to the Carolingian West – Byzantium, even at its lowest and weakest moments, partook of that mysterious aura which at given periods of history has endowed certain cultures and countries with a prestige of artistic genius which, deservedly or not, they alone at that period possessed. Therein, more than in any precise artistic motif, lies what the late Louis Massignon, in an eloquent article,[51] has called the Byzantine mirage in the Arab mirror.

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[51]   L. Massignon, "Le mirage byzantin dans le miroir baghdadien d'il y a mille ans," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientale*, 10 (1950).