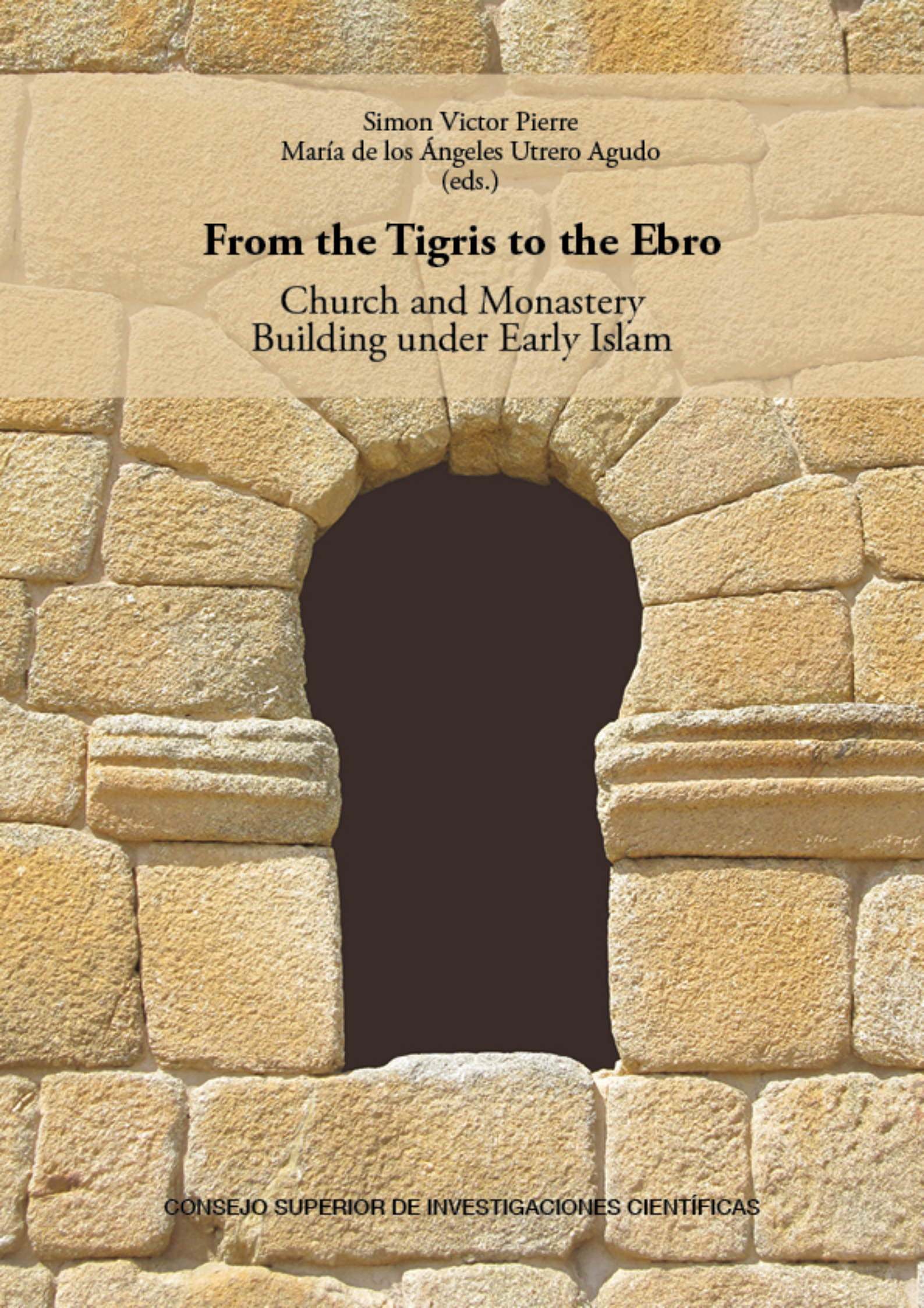




Simon Victor Pierre
María de los Ángeles Utrero Agudo
(eds.)

From the Tigris to the Ebro

Church and Monastery
Building under Early Islam

CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS

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From the Tigris to the Ebro
Church and Monastery Building under Early Islam

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Madrid, 2024

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TABLE

ACADEMIC PROFILES.....	11
INTRODUCTION	17
CHURCH AND MONASTERY-BUILDING. THE EARLY ISLAMIC DYNAMISM OF CHRISTIANITY Simon Pierre (Institut français du Proche-Orient)	
PART 1: CHRISTIAN CONTINUITY AND AFTERMATH IN TRANSJORDAN	
CHAPTER 1	27
CONSTRUIRE, EMBELLIR, RÉNOVER, REMPLOYER. QUEL DEVENIR POUR LES ÉDIFICES DE CULTE CHRÉTIENS DE JORDANIE AUX PREMIERS SIÈCLES DE L'ISLAM ? Anne Michel (Institut Ausonius, UMR 5607 Université Bordeaux-Montaigne-CNRS)	
CHAPTER 2	85
CHURCHES IN NORTH-EASTERN JORDAN AFTER THE ISLAMIC CONQUEST. REVISION OF MATERIAL REMAINS AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES Piero Gilento (Inrap, ArScAn [UMR7041], OrAM team)	
CHAPTER 3	109
TWO CASES OF CHURCH ESTATE IN EARLY ISLAMIC SYRIA AND JORDAN, THROUGH THE ARCHAEOLOGY Pauline Piraud-Fournet (MSCA European Commission & Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)	
PART II: CHURCH BUILDING IN THE NORTH DURING EARLY ISLAM	
CHAPTER 4	127
CHURCHES' BUILDING IN NORTHERN IRAQ FROM THE LATE SASANIAN TO THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD Narmin Ali Amin (Salahddin University-Erbil) and Simon Brelaud (University of California, Berkeley)	
CHAPTER 5	149
CREATING NEW CHURCHES AND MONASTERIES IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA: THE SEVENTH TO NINTH CENTURIES Philip Wood (Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations)	
CHAPTER 6	165
VARIETY IN THE DECORATION OF THE CHURCHES OF ṬŪR 'ABDĪN DURING THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD Elif Keser-Kayaalp (Hacettepe University)	
PART III: SYRIAC, COPTIC, AND AFRICAN CHURCHES, AND THE ISLAMIC LAW	
CHAPTER 7	187
BUILDING AND DESTROYING "NEW CHURCHES" AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC LAW: THE SYRIAC CASE (FIRST-SECOND CENTURY AH) Simon Pierre (Institut français du Proche-Orient)	
CHAPTER 8	211
«TU LES AUTORISES À CONSTRUIRE DES ÉGLISES?». RÉFLEXIONS SUR LES LIEUX DE CULTE CHRÉTIENS D'AL-FUṢṬĀṬ À L'ÉPOQUE PRÉ-FATIMIDE Audrey Dridi-Basilio (Sorbonne University)	
CHAPTER 9	227
CHRISTIANITY AND THE FATE OF CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS FROM THE EARLY 8 TH TO 11 TH C. MAGHREB Hafed Abdouli (University of Sfax) and Anna Leone (Durham University)	

PART IV: NEITHER VISIGOTHIC NOR FRANKISH. THE ANDALUSI CHURCH

CHAPTER 10	237
THE ANDALUSI CHURCH UNDER ISLAMIC RULE. EPISCOPAL SEES IN THE LIGHT OF THE WRITTEN RECORD	
Jesús Lorenzo Jiménez (Universidad del País Vasco – Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea)	
CHAPTER 11	253
BEYOND 711: BUILDING AND AFTERLIFE OF CHURCHES IN AL-ANDALUS	
María de los Ángeles Utrero Agudo (Escuela de Estudios Árabes/Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología en Roma, EEA/EEHAR-CSIC)	
CHAPTER 12	267
ESCULTURA ALTOMEDIEVAL CRISTIANA EN AL-ANDALUS: PROPUESTA METODOLÓGICA Y PRINCIPALES RESULTADOS	
Alejandro Villa del Castillo (Consejería de Educación de la Comunidad de Madrid)	

PART V: ON THE BORDER. LATER EXCHANGES AND REVIVALS IN SICILY AND ARMENIA

CHAPTER 13	289
MONASTERI E ISTITUZIONI RELIGIOSE NELLA FRONTIERA ARABO-BIZANTINA DELLA SICILIA ORIENTALE: PER UNA NUOVA AGENDA DELLA RICERCA	
Lucia Arcifa (Università di Catania) and Michelangelo Messina (Università di Catania)	
CHAPTER 14	317
ARMENIAN ARCHITECTURE DURING THE LATE PHASE OF ARAB OCCUPATION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHURCHES OF SHIRAK PROVINCE OF THE LATE-9 TH TO MID-10 TH CENTURY	
Armen Kazaryan (Moscow State University of Civil Engineering, MGSU)	

واحتجّ أن عامة الكنائس التي بمصر لم تُبنَ إلّا في الإسلام في
زمن الصحابة والتابعين

They argued that most of the churches in Egypt
were built under Islam, during the period of the
Companions and the Followers.

(Al-Kindī, Kitāb al-Wulāt wa kitāb al-Quḍāt,
ed. Rhuvon Guest, Beirut: Père Jésuites,
1908, p. 132)

ACADEMIC PROFILES

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SIMON BRELAUD

Simon Brelaud received his PhD from Sorbonne University in 2018, with a thesis on Christianity in the Sasanian Empire (third–seventh century). The scope of his current research concerns the Roman-Persian border,

as well as the history of Christianity in the Levant and especially among the Arabs. He has been involved in archaeological and epigraphic projects in Iraqi Kurdistan, Jordan and Turkey, notably with *Recueil des inscriptions syriaques de Turquie* and the development of “E-Twoto”, a digital palaeographic tool for analysing Syriac inscriptions. He held a fellowship at the University of Tübingen and is currently Avimalek Betyousef Visiting Assistant Professor at University of California, Berkeley.

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Philip Wood is the Tejpar Professor of Inter-Religious Studies and Head of Education at Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, in London. He recently completed a monograph for Princeton University Press, *The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, 750-850*, and he co-edited a volume with Leif Stenberg, *What is Islamic Studies? European and North American Approaches to a Contested Field*. He leads a research project, funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, on Group Formation and Maintenance in the Abbasid Caliphate, 750-1000.

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SIMON PIERRE

Simon Pierre holds a Ph D in History of Medieval Islam from Sorbonne Université (Paris), with a specific

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AUDREY DRIDI

Audrey Dridi is a Ph D candidate in History of Islam at Sorbonne University. Her research focuses on the Christians of Egypt in general - and of al-Fustāt in particular - in the first centuries of Islam, and is based on the analysis of literary, archaeological and papyrological sources. She is particularly interested in the history of Christian (and Jewish) places of worship in the Egyptian capital during the pre-Fatimid period. In 2018, she co-ordinated the collective work *Chrétien du monde arabe. Vers une pluralité des sources et des approches* (in *Annales Islamologiques*) with Séverine Gabry-Thienpont.

ANNA LEONE

Anna Leone is Professor in Archaeology at Durham University (United Kingdom). Her research focuses primarily on late Antique North Africa. She has published two monographs on the transformation of urban areas in North Africa in the transition from Paganism to Christianity and the early Islamic period, two edited volumes and several articles on the transformation of urban and rural areas in Late Antique North Africa and the impact of Christianisation. She is also actively engaged in the protection of heritage in conflict. She is currently directing the project “Partnership for Heritage” funded by Aliph and the Cultural Protection Funds in the

regions of Tataouine (Tunisia) and Nafusa (Libya). She is conducting archaeological investigations at the sites of Iunca and Ksar Lemsas as part of a research project to reassess the military strategy of the Byzantine Empire in North Africa. She is working on the publication of the excavations conducted at Dibsi Faraj on the Euphrates in Syria in the '70s.

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JESÚS LORENZO JIMÉNEZ

Jesús Lorenzo Jiménez was awarded his Ph D in History in 2008. At present, he is employed as a lecturer at the University of the Basque Country (Spain). His research focuses on al-Andalus, conceived as an Islamicate society in which it is possible to recognise the convergence of different social and cultural patterns. In this context, he has paid special attention to the study of the Andalusian frontier society of the Ebro Valley in the period between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, seeing it as a place of exchange and hybridisation. From a methodological point of view, he has combined the study of written sources with that of archaeological finds, also owing to his participation in archaeological excavations carried out by different research groups in Spain, Italy, Libya and Cyprus. His research has been published in several publications, including journal articles, book

chapters and books. Currently, he participates in a project of study and edition of Andalusian Christian Arabic texts, funded by Gerda Henkel Foundation.

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ARMEN KAZARYAN

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INTRODUCTION

CHURCH AND MONASTERY-BUILDING. EARLY ISLAMIC DYNAMISM OF CHRISTIANITY

SIMON PIERRE¹

This book gathers the works authored by historians, archaeologists, and art-historians, Byzantinists, and Islamicists, specialising in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in the Western Mediterranean and Middle East. The volume delves into the continuation of Late Antique structures and practices into the early Medieval period. The primary objective of the fourteen chapters is to explore the use, reuse, development, extension, and transformation of Christian buildings from the seventh to the tenth century. We aim to examine diverse approaches, methodologies, and hypotheses regarding the necessary changes and potential continuities in Christian building practices during early Islam. The spatial framework spans the central and western regions of the “abode of Islam (*dār al-Islām*),” from post-Sasanian Iraq and Armenia to post-Visigothic Spain, through post-Byzantine Syria-Palestine, Egypt, and Africa. This volume represents the continuation of a series of academic that explores the transitional period between Late Antiquity and Early Islam in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. These events include *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam* [...] by Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (1992), the proceedings of a congress held in Lyon in September 1990; a conference on changing settlement patterns in the Bilād al-Shām that was convened in Damascus in November 2006 and edited by Karin Bartl and ‘Abd al-Razzaq Moaz (2009); and a colloquium on the dynamics of occupation and settlement in the Diocese of the East and the Bilād al-Shām, *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbassides*, which took place in Paris in October 2007 and was subsequently published in 2011 by Antoine Borrut, Muriel Debié, Dominique Pieri, Arietta Papaconstantinou, and Jean-Pierre Sodini.

The aim of this study is to examine the religious and communal aspects of the construction, use, and abandonment of churches and other Christian buildings from a comparative analysis perspective that considers both the archaeological and the textual evidence. In this regard, the 2012 workshop on *Les églises syriaques*,

organised by the *Société d’études syriaques* in Paris and published the following year under the direction of Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet (2013), is a significant point of reference for those who work on Syria and Iraq. More recently, the conference *Christianity in Iraq at the Turn of Islam*, held in Erbil in 2019 by Narmin Ali Amin, Julie Bonnéric, and Barbara Couturaud has been published in Beirut (2023), resulting in an increased knowledge of west-Sasanian churches from an architectural as well as an institutional perspective. The present work seeks to expand the scope of previous research by advocating for interdisciplinary cooperation, with particular focus on the first three centuries of the Hijra, and a geographical span that covers most of the territories in the Mediterranean and the Middle East that came under caliphal rule.

Islam, which commenced with the Arab conquests (*circa* 630-717 CE), is commonly regarded as a major break from the preceding cultures, regardless of their proto-Byzantine, Persian, or Germanic substrate. The Sasanian Empire collapsed in two short decades and the Eastern Roman Empire gradually withdrew from four of its most important dioceses (East, Egypt, Africa, and Hispania) in less than a century. Although Christianity did not hold an official or dominant status in the provinces of the Sasanian East (such as Iraq, Azerbaijan, Fārs, the Gulf, etc.), it became increasingly prevalent during its latest decades (late sixth and early seventh centuries; see Carter 2008; Robin and Tayran 2012; Payne 2015; Brelaud 2018; Bonneric 2021).

Yet, after the “conquests (*futūḥ*),” the new Medina-based authority had embraced a religion, later called *islām*, and rapidly placed Christian cities and ecclesiastical hierarchies under a “protected” status known as *dhimma*. Among other things, this status imposed strict limitation

¹ Institut français du Proche-Orient.

on the public expression of Christian worship, especially the construction of new churches and monasteries. Nearly all the sources – Arab-Muslim, Greek-Byzantine, Syriac, Latin, or Coptic – agree on this. However, most were written during the Abbasid period, which coincides with the conquest of Sicily, but not with those of early Islam. In both late Islamic legal-historical literature and Orientalist historiography, the timeline is commonly based on the so-called *shurūt* (“clauses”) established by the second caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-644). Concerning the issue at hand, all the preserved versions of the text formally prohibit Christians from building any “new” church or monastery, either urban or rural, anywhere in the Caliphate, while also strictly regulating their restoration and reconstruction, as in Abū Bakr al-Turtūshī’s (d. 1126) work on al-Andalus:

You and us have settled that we shall not “make new” (*ḥ.d.th*) monastery (*dayr*), church (*kanīsa*), cell (*qallya*) and tower (*ṣawma‘a*) for monks, either in our cities or their surroundings. We shall only restore (*j.d.d.*) what has fallen into ruin (*kh.r.b*) or is located in a plot (*khittā*) owned by Muslims, by day or by night (1872, 135).

The *shurūt* are regarded as a positive and normative text restricting the construction rights of the *ahl al-dhimma* to the restoration of buildings, only those located outside “Muslim neighbourhoods (*amṣār al-Muslimūn*)”. Moreover, the *shurūt* associate church ban with a list of prohibitions including restrictions on clothing and behavior, ringing the *simandron*, or being disloyal to the rule of Islam.

However, this generalising and universal text not only contradicts the rapidly growing archaeological evidence, from the Bilād al-Shām to the Emirate of al-Andalus, including Fustāt and Ifriqyā (as demonstrated by Michel, Gilento, Piraud-Fournet, Amin and Brelaud, Kayaalp, Abdouli and Leone, Utrero, Villa del Castillo, and Kazaryan in this volume), but it is also at odds with numerous textual references to post-conquest church foundations across the former Roman and Sasanian territories (as indicated by Amin and Brelaud, Wood, Dridi, Pierre, Abdouli and Leone, Lorenzo, Arcifa and Messina, in this volume). Indeed, there is no indication of church bans and destruction before the time of al-Mahdī (r. 775-785) or even Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809), as already shown by Jean-Maurice Fiey (1980), and this purportedly consistent and ancient document is barely attested before the tenth century. Indeed, Milka Levy-Rubin has

demonstrated that there is no evidence for such a fixed and comprehensive list of religious and communal prescriptions before the end of this century (2004; 2011). This might indicate that the *shurūt* were compiled and forged, or at least (according to Noth 2004, and more recently to Yarbrough 2022) that they began to circulate widely only after the end of the early Islamic period. Fiey even suggests that the “covenant” may have been written during the reign of caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861).²

Events between the Arab-Medinese conquests and the third/ninth century remain unclear owing to the paucity of textual sources between the late sixth and early ninth centuries CE, a problem that affects the study of Early Islam across the board. This lack of information reinforces the impression of a strict separation between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. It is worth recalling that this phenomenon is not unique to the territories of the *Dār al-Islām*; it is also attested in the Frankish or Anglo-Saxon West, as well as in what remained of what we call “Byzantium”, whose culture and institutions changed rapidly during this dark seventh century (Haldon 1990). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the extensive literature preserved for the ninth-tenth century will differ significantly in terms of themes and styles from that which dominated three centuries earlier (Robinson 2003). This is true not only for Arab-Muslim textual sources, but also for all the books of the subaltern churches. However, some hagiographic material and the increasing number of archaeological finds partially bridge this gap, highlighting continuity in the processes and basic trends that span the “long seventh century” (Gnasso, Intagliata and MacMaster 2015). This period stretches from the disastrous Sasanian invasion led by Khosro II son of Hormizd (r. 602-628) to the failed siege of Constantinople by Maslama son of ‘Abd al-Malik in 716-718. It appears that sources contemporary to the final written version of the *shurūt* attempt to retrospectively apply a rule they suppose to have been enforced since the 640s. Yet, the construction of churches and monasteries continued at a brisk pace under Islamic rule, at least until the mid-eighth century. Although the evidence suggests a gradual decline thereafter, serious restrictions began to be implemented only during the ninth century, when new *modi vivendi* between the Christian majority and the Muslim authorities began to crystallise.

Furthermore, some preliminary lists of prohibitions feature in the relatively early *Kitāb al-Kharāj* by Great Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf (d. 798), but few relate these lists to the

² The most recent studies on the “covenant” are Cohen (1999), Noth (2004), Levy-Rubin (2005; 2011, foremost 60-68, 70-75, 79-84 and 100-03), Fierro and Tolan (2013) and Sanjuán (2013).

forementioned caliph, pointing to other lawmakers instead. Early Abbasid literature not only ignores the “covenant” but also limits the implementation of these bans to Arab-Muslim city-camps (*miṣr*) such as Madīna, Kūfa, Fustāt, and Kairouan. Finally, these earliest Arab-Muslim legal testimonies from this initial phase of writing are consistent with the earliest Christian accounts for acts of destruction in this period. Thus, it can be argued that all of this evidence, put together, marks a relevant *terminus post quem* for a shift in policy during the late eighth and early ninth century. In reality, both the Arab-Muslim and the Christian “narratives about the conquests (*futūḥāt*)” primarily rely on the contrasting, diverse, and often contradictory recollection of capitulation treaties (*ṣulḥ-s*). These texts topically stipulated the protection of existing churches, while also implying – more or less explicitly – that building new ones was out of the question. Nonetheless, as pointed out by Robinson (2000, 12), “in prescribing conquest arrangements, conquest history thus describes post-conquest history”. Therefore, the primary concern is to outline the process which, during the two or three centuries before these stories of conquest were written, led to this ban on church building. To protect their rights, and in light of the ideology that became dominant during the ninth century, many Christian authors and officials tended to anticipate and back-project ecclesiological and architectural foundation of monasteries, bishoprics, and urban churches to before the conquests. Thus, since at that time many indigenous settlements and ecclesiastical institutions were likely non-existent or at best in their infancy, many *futūḥāt* narratives and *ṣulḥ* accounts must be reconsidered.

Understanding the consequences of this problematic paradigm is essential for the issues addressed in this volume. Historians and archaeologists have long presumed that no Christian cult building activity could have existed after the conquest, between 630 and 645 in the East, and 645 and 717 in the West. However, as we shall see, this prohibition was initially not thought to apply to existing, predominantly Christian cities, let alone isolated monasteries, which were actually expanded and branched out significantly. Archaeological and architectural remains, as well as ecclesiastical chronicles and monastic histories from the Abbasid period, provide numerous examples of such acts of foundation. It is now impossible to conceive that all the episcopal centres in the Middle East were built circa 637, by the time claimed by the authors of ‘Umar’s Pseudo-Covenant, and in the Mediterranean until the 700s-720s, just to remain frozen until the late Middle Ages. These consistent clues suggest that the ancient paradigm, while useful for Abbasid-period scholars in both Christian and Muslim communities, is no longer relevant for modern research.

The early Islamic and Marwānid periods were actually open to the expansion of Christianity among – at least – the non-Arab populations of the former Roman and Sasanian empires. Anti- or non-Chalcedonian currents which had been persecuted from the death of Justinian (565 CE), took advantage of the relative neutrality of the new rulers to emerge as independent, competing, and often preponderant churches in the Middle East. The building fervour of Melkite monastic communities is plainly expressed in some of the remains found in the ancient provinces of the Diocese of the East, as highlighted by Michele Piccirillo in the 1990s, particularly at the famous site of Kastron Mefaa (Umm Raṣās) in the Province of Arabia (1991; 1998). The caliphate promoted the development of ancient Christian centres while settling its palaces where great festivals and panegyrics were held, such as Mu’ta (Binggeli 2006), Dayr Ayyūb in the Ḥawrān, Ruṣāfa in Euphratesia (for example, Chrysostomides 2021). The survey and excavation of pre-Islamic Christian environments reveal a consistent pattern of post-Hijra resilience, or even *ex-nihilo* foundations and new developments. On the one hand, it is interesting that neither the Persian nor the Arab invasion of Egypt and the Levant left clear traces in the stratigraphy and Peter Pentz even spoke of an *Invisible Conquest* (1992). On the other hand, in Syria, cities such as Apamea, Palmyra, Baysān, and Gerasa continued flourishing and perhaps even underwent significant expansion during the Umayyad period while the government invested heavily on urban and commercial development (Walmsley 2007; Van Staavel 2016 – Irbimma presentation).

Similar research conducted in the western Mediterranean has also shown that some churches built before the Umayyad conquest were either remodelled and reused and others were even built *ex-nihilo*. Furthermore, Islamic construction techniques were also adopted by Christian workshops of craftsmen in cult buildings located outside the *dār al-islām* (Utrero 2017). Although exploring eighth- and ninth-century cities can be challenging owing to modern occupation, archaeological studies have identified the existence of churches and monastic complexes. While both the textual and archaeological records yield evidence of church-building in Cordoba until the ninth century, the same phenomenon is now being attested in other regions in the Iberian Peninsula (Utrero and Villa 2023). In Sicily, archaeologists are also studying structures from the early Fatimid period, although identifying Christian buildings can be difficult. Apart from urban centres, a number of Byzantine rural monasteries are known to have been founded in al-Andalus, Ifriqyā and Sicily in the eighth and ninth centuries. The re-dating of Late Antique sites has exposed new uses, substantial modifications, and

replacements dated to the Islamic period that were invisible to traditional archaeological methodologies (Arcifa, Bagnera and Nef 2012; Arce 2014).

This book aims to confront the dynamics of Christian expansion, conversion and community structuring as various paradoxical forms and attempts of adaptation to an Islamic confessional order whose development was itself gradual.³

The first part of this volume focuses on a region rich in remains of rural monasteries as well as urban churches which are usually associated with the Proto-Byzantine Period. Anne Michel addresses the gradual disuse of churches during the early Islamic period in Transjordan, which accelerated under the Marwanids (680s-740s), despite these churches being renovated and endowed with significant new decorations. While she confirms that the Arab-Medinese conquests did not cause any breakdown, she stresses the importance of placing this abandonment process within the broader economic, social, and historical developments undergone in the region. To illustrate it, Piero Gilento focuses on a small district in Southern Ḥawrān (Umm as-Surab, Umm al-Jimal and Umm al-Quṭṭayn), using stratigraphy and construction analysis. Despite the need for more precise absolute chronologies, there is no evidence of de-Christianisation or Islamisation, although these sites were generally abandoned, while the known instances of Arab-Islamic reuse appear to be unrelated and much later in time, during the Central to Late Middle Ages. In the same *Provincia Arabia*, Pauline Piraud Fournet compares the so-called “Palace of Trajan” in Bosra and a hypothetical hospice at Umm al-Surab. The archaeological evidence suggests that both buildings were probably owned by the church, although not strictly places of worship. This situation probably continued until the very end of the Umayyad period, indicating the continuity and even development of monastic and episcopal institutions during early Islam.

In the second part, the focus shifts from southern to northern Shām and Iraq, which witnesses a clearer perspective of continuity and even increase in Christian building activity. Narmin Ali Amin and Simon Brelaud discuss recent discoveries and their updated chronology in Iraqi Kurdistan and south-eastern Turkey, particularly Bāzyān and Qal‘at Shīla. This evidence partially bridges the gap between the lack of details in literary sources on the one hand, and material evidence for the continuity of church-building during the seventh century CE on the other hand. Philip Wood argues that the construction of churches and charitable institutions is

well-documented in hagiography and Christian chronicles from Northern Mesopotamia until the eighth century CE. This dynamism is a sign of Christian wealth and communal reproduction, as well as competition between lay elites and clerics. Finally, attitudinal changes towards church-building seems to postdate the Abbasid revolution. Indeed, Elif Keser-Kayaalp grants that, while archaeological evidence of such activity is scarce in cities, at least 30 churches and monasteries built in the small mountainous district of Tūr ‘Abdīn, in the border region between ex-Roman Jazīra and ex-Sasanian Mosul, can be attested. Her survey of church decorations reveals a range of approaches towards decorative details within a consistent style, confirming competition between elites, holy men, and also between rival confessions.

In the third part, the confrontation of material and textual evidence from Syriac to Roman/Moorish-Africa demonstrates that the construction of ecclesiastical and cult buildings was not prohibited before the end of the eighth century. Simon Pierre analyses the abundant textual evidence that attests the foundation of churches and monasteries during the seventh and eighth centuries, and a significant increase in investment under the Marwanids, possibly for Christian elites to protect their private wealth from taxation. Initially, construction was forbidden only in the Islamic capitals (*amṣār*). However, during the early Abbasid period, Christian public visibility gradually declined, with an inflexion point during the Byzantine invasion in 777, which triggered a pro-*sunna* reform and the crystallisation of new ideological and legal paradigm. Audrey Dridi shows that Egyptians then began as well to regard the churches in Fuṣṭāṭ (especially Qaṣr al-Sham‘) as pre-Islamic, although they had actually been constructed during the second half of the first century H. This only became problematic or scandalous during the early Abbasid period, leading to differing opinions and contradictory decisions by various governors, judges and scholars. Beside Syriac and Coptic worlds, North African Christianity has not survived today. While early textual sources post-date the Abbasid turnover, colonial archaeology either ignored or misdated the post-conquest evidence. This explains why Late Antique and Early Islamic churches are only beginning to be comprehensively addressed, thanks to Hafed Abdouli and Anna Leone.

In the fourth part, the focus shifts again to the development and adaptation of the Church of *Hispania* during the eighth and even the early ninth century, after the fall of the Visigoths. Jesús Lorenzo Jiménez examines the survival of episcopal sees in al-Andalus using late Latin and early Mozarabic ecclesiastical texts, as well as the works of Arab-Muslim geographers. Most of these bishoprics continued to exist and only a few

moved to new growing cities when their traditional towns and cities declined. Some were even created on the initiative of emirs or caliphs. Mirroring the textual data, the archaeological study of María de los Ángeles Utrero Agudo also reveals different processes of renewal and/or abandonment of earlier churches, while arguing that, initially, no churches were converted into, or were built upon by, mosques. On the contrary, the construction of new churches continued until the ninth century. Art history also confirms this trend, provided that not every piece is authoritatively dated as Visigothic. Alejandro Villa del Castillo contextualises the production and chronology of Iberian sculptures within their buildings, revealing resilience and innovations during the eighth and ninth centuries in Mérida, Cáceres, Toledo, and Palencia.

The final part comprises two chapters that explore “frontier (*thaghr*)” regions after the turning point of the mid-ninth century: Late-Byzantine Sicily, facing the Muslim Aghlabids and Fatimids, and Armenia under the Christian Bagratids and Artsrunids, and between the Abbasids, the Buyids, and the Macedonians. Lucia Arcifa and Michelangelo Messina challenge previous approaches that focused solely on hagiographic and propagandistic texts, which have limited our understanding of the interconnected reality of the period. Actually, Byzantine-style monasticism remained the main landmark of Christian Sicilians, especially in the rural communities of the centre and the East, astride changing political-administrative references. Thus, they played a pivotal role in the hierarchy of settlements and productive strategies.

Armen Kazaryan, in turn, highlights the rise in construction of Christian buildings between Eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan during the crisis of the Abbasid central administration as a – possibly conscious – revival of the classical “Armenian architecture” that spread during the Late Sasanian period and also during the first decades of Arab domination in the seventh century. He also compares it to the contemporaneous development of church architecture in the nearby Byzantine territories.

From Mesopotamia to the Western Mediterranean, architectural developments under early Islam show both continuity with the past and influences from the Byzantine and non-Byzantine Latin worlds. Christian buildings also bear witness of the dynamism of their respective institutional churches during the period in which *islām* as a religion emerged. Early Muslim scholars then began to address the development of churches and other places of worship in a world that was not yet hostile to Christianity, although it was ruled by Islam. Latin, Greek and Syriac sources illustrate that monks and their Arab neighbours and rulers experienced ambivalent reciprocal perception. The fact remains that settlements in all the regions that came under the political domination of the caliphate present signs of resilience, if not a culmination, of Church activity during the first three centuries of Islam.

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PART I

CHRISTIAN CONTINUITY AND AFTERMATH IN TRANSJORDAN

CHAPTER I

CONSTRUIRE, EMBELLIR, RÉNOVER, REMPLOYER. QUEL DEVENIR POUR LES ÉDIFICES DE CULTE CHRÉTIENS DE JORDANIE AUX PREMIERS SIÈCLES DE L'ISLAM ?

BUILDING, EMBELLISHING, RENOVATING, REUSING: WHAT FATE FOR CHRISTIAN BUILDINGS OF WORSHIP IN JORDAN IN THE FIRST CENTURIES OF ISLAM?

ANNE MICHEL¹

RÉSUMÉ

L'article explore la destinée des églises en Transjordanie entre la période préislamique et l'ère omeyyade. Les découvertes archéologiques des années 1980 ont révélé la persistance de la présence chrétienne jusqu'au VIII^e siècle, ce qui a conduit à un changement d'orientation des approches : de la question de la survie des communautés chrétiennes, elle est passée à celle de la continuité de la culture romano-byzantine à travers la formation des identités islamiques. L'étude constate une désaffection progressive des églises au cours de cette période, peu ayant été abandonnées avant la bataille de Yarmūk en 636, alors que la déprise devient plus fréquente au cours de la période omeyyade, en particulier dans les zones urbaines et dans le nord de la province. En revanche, dans les zones rurales telles que les villages des steppes et les établissements monastiques, les églises ont continué à être entretenues plus longtemps. Ce chapitre souligne l'importance de la nuance dans les évolutions et les changements sociaux, et questionne l'utilisation des événements politiques comme cadre chronologique. La datation des constructions et des évolutions survenues au cours de cette période sont difficiles à déterminer, car les méthodes archéologiques reposent sur la stratigraphie et la géologie qui fournissent des données relatives, mais pas des dates calendaires. Pour autant, il est possible d'utiliser certains éléments épigraphiques, céramiques, les tremblements de terre et les destructions iconophobes pour dater les églises et leurs modifications. Le sort des communautés chrétiennes au cours de cette période a été variable, certaines églises ayant été réutilisées à des fins domestiques ou artisanales, ou ayant été converties en mosquées. Néanmoins, il faut mettre en exergue un panorama complexe et diversifié, avec deux périodes distinctes séparées par le quart du VIII^e siècle. Au cours de la première période, les édifices religieux chrétiens sont généralement préservés et entretenus, certains sont modifiés ou réparés en fonction des circonstances locales, et les abandons sont rares. En revanche, après le quart du VIII^e siècle, l'abandon des églises devient plus fréquent, en particulier dans les zones urbaines, en raison de multiples facteurs changeants, comme les routes commerciales, les conditions climatiques et les politiques des régimes omeyyade et abbasside. Cela suggère une évolution nuancée et graduelle des modes de peuplement, plutôt que des changements brusques ou des continuités. En conclusion, l'autrice suggère d'étudier l'apparition et la multiplication des premières mosquées en relation avec le sort des églises et des établissements non religieux pour aider à comprendre l'évolution du territoire transjordanien pendant les VIII^e et IX^e siècles.

MOTS-CLÉS : Jordanie, Archéologie, Chronologie, Abandons, Transformations, Réutilisations

SUMMARY

The article explores the fate of churches in Transjordan from the pre-Islamic through the Umayyad period. Archaeological finds in the 1980s revealed that the Christian presence remained strong until the 8th century, leading to a shift in research focus from the survival of Christian communities to the continuity of the Roman-Byzantine culture and the formation of Islamic identities. The study examines the gradual disuse of churches during this period, and establishes that, while few were abandoned before the Battle of Yarmūk in 636, disuse became more prevalent during the Umayyad period, particularly in urban areas and in the northern regions. However, in rural areas, such as steppe villages and monastic settlements, churches continued to be in use for a longer period. The article emphasizes the importance of nuance in social processes and interrogates the importance of political events as a chronological framework for social change. Dating constructions and change during this period is challenging, as archaeologists rely on stratigraphy and archaeological sequences to establish relative chronologies, from which to infer absolute dates. Some materials, such

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as inscriptions, ceramics, and traces of earthquake-related and iconophobic destruction, have been useful tools to date churches and the transformations that they underwent over time. The fate of Christian communities during this period varied, and some churches were reused for domestic or artisanal purposes or were converted into mosques. The study highlights a complex and diverse scenario, with two clearly distinct periods either side of the first quarter of the 8th century. In the first period, Christian religious buildings were generally preserved and maintained, and some were even modified or repaired, depending on local circumstances, and abandonments were rare. However, after the first quarter of the 8th century, the abandonment of churches became more common, especially in urban areas, owing to multiple factors such as changes in trade routes, climatic conditions, and Umayyad and Abbasid rule. This suggests a nuanced and gradual evolution of settlement patterns, rather than abrupt shifts or continuities. In conclusion, the author proposes to study the emergence and the multiplication of the first mosques in connection with the fate of churches and non-religious establishments as a way to gain a better understanding of the evolution of Transjordan during the 8th and 9th centuries.

KEY WORDS: Jordan, Archaeology, Chronology, Abandonments, Transformations, Reuse

Jusqu'aux années 1970, on a considéré que l'arrivée des musulmans mettait un terme à la civilisation romano-byzantine au Proche-Orient. Les découvertes archéologiques faites depuis les années 1980 ont montré qu'il n'en était rien, révélant des traces d'une présence chrétienne au moins jusqu'au VIII^e siècle (Piccirillo 1984 ; 1995, 420). À la suite de ces découvertes, jusqu'au début des années 2000, les recherches se sont principalement attachées à retrouver les traces de la survie prospère des communautés chrétiennes (Schick 1991 ; 1995). Depuis le début des années 2000, les problématiques se sont infléchies, cherchant à cerner les modalités de continuité de la culture romano-byzantine et la formation des identités islamiques. Les recherches sont davantage marquées par un dialogue interdisciplinaire entre archéologues, historiens de l'art et historiens, entre byzantinistes et spécialistes de l'Islam et parfois, mais encore trop rarement, du monde hébraïque. Le colloque intitulé « Continuités de l'occupation entre les période byzantine et abbasside au Proche-Orient, VII^e-IX^e siècles », qui s'est tenu à Paris en 2007, en est représentatif, bien que les actes, parus en 2011, aient écarté quelques communications à caractère historique et celles dédiées à l'aire égyptienne (Borrut *et al.* 2011). Lors de cette rencontre, j'avais moi-même essayé de cerner le devenir des églises dans l'aire géographique correspondant au territoire de l'actuelle Jordanie – à savoir la majeure partie de la province d'Arabie et la partie orientale outre-Jourdain des trois provinces de Palestine – en étudiant leur abandon progressif. De fait, les églises abandonnées à la veille de la bataille du Yarmouk (636), qui scelle la défaite définitive des armées byzantines face aux troupes musulmanes, sont très peu nombreuses. Globalement un grand nombre est encore utilisé au cours de l'époque omeyyade, bien qu'un phénomène d'abandon se dessine à partir de cette période. Régulier et continu, il s'accélère à partir du quart du VIII^e siècle. Il semble plus précoce en ville et dans les régions les plus septentrionales, les édifices étant apparemment utilisés plus longtemps en milieu rural (bourgades de la steppe et implantations monastiques). Les informations

relatives aux régions les plus méridionales correspondant à la Palestine III étaient alors restreintes et ne permettaient pas de tirer de conclusions probantes. Dans cette étude, je n'avais alors pris en compte ni la nature, ni la fonction liturgique des églises, pas plus que leur devenir après leur abandon pour le culte chrétien (Michel 2011, 233-69).

La multiplication des découvertes, notamment dans le nord et le sud du pays, les travaux de prospection, le développement des études monastiques et de l'archéologie islamique permettent aujourd'hui de revisiter cette thématique sur le devenir de ces édifices, notamment en le restituant au sein du contexte général de l'évolution de l'occupation du sol. En effet, lorsque j'avais abordé cette thématique au colloque de 2007, je l'avais considérée sous l'angle de la permanence des édifices religieux chrétiens, cherchant à caractériser de façon quantitative et géographique leur persistance et leur disparition, plus que sur leurs modalités. Je chercherai cette fois-ci davantage à caractériser les processus à l'œuvre dans le devenir des édifices religieux chrétiens durant les premiers siècles islamiques, en donnant une image du paysage religieux chrétien dans sa diversité sur l'actuel territoire jordanien aux VII^e et VIII^e siècles.

I. L'ESPACE JORDANIEN ENTRE ANTIQUITÉ ET ISLAM

Il s'agit d'une zone géographique caractérisée par des hauts plateaux à l'est de la dépression formée par la vallée du Jourdain, de la Mer morte et du wadi Araba. Elle se subdivise en quatre grandes entités séparées par des wadis aux vallées profondes : le Nord (du Yarmouk au wadi az-Zarqa), la Balqa' (du wadi az-Zarqa au wadi Mujib), les hauts plateaux des anciens royaumes de l'âge du Bronze de Moab (entre le wadi Mujib et le wadi al-Hasa) et d'Edom (du wadi al-Hasa à la mer Rouge). Ce territoire correspond, durant l'Antiquité chrétienne, à la majeure partie de la province d'Arabie, à la frange orientale de la Palestine I (à l'est



Fig. 1. Cartes des églises connues pour la période 636-800.

du Jourdain) et à la moitié orientale des provinces de Palestine II (autour du lac de Tibériade) et de Palestine III (au sud) (Fig. 1). À partir du milieu du ^v^e siècle, cet ensemble géographique relève de deux patriarchats différents : l'Arabie est suffragante du patriarchat d'Antioche, tandis que les provinces de Palestine sont rattachées à Jérusalem (Michel 2001, 3)². La logique voudrait qu'on considère ces entités dans leur globalité, mais le poids des contraintes géopolitiques contemporaines m'ont conduit pour des raisons pratiques à me limiter au territoire de la Jordanie actuelle³. Lorsque j'ai abordé cette thématique au colloque de 2007, j'avais utilisé les événements politiques historiques comme cadre chronologique structurant pour ma réflexion (636, 660-725, 725, 750). Il ne m'apparaît plus aujourd'hui comme le plus pertinent, car il repose sur le postulat que la défaite byzantine face aux armées islamiques en 636 puisse servir de point de repère justifiant un changement radical. Or l'étude archéologique des vestiges matériels révèle une réalité beaucoup plus nuancée que l'histoire que l'on peut écrire à partir des événements politiques. Les évolutions et changements sociétaux sont souvent lents, même si certains événements jouent un rôle d'accélérateur parfois marquant.

1.1. Une chronologie ambiguë et des sources au maniement complexe

Le cadre chronologique apparaît ainsi particulièrement difficile à délimiter. En effet, étudier le devenir des églises aux premiers temps de l'Islam pose en premier lieu le problème des datations, sur lequel se sont focalisés une partie des débats scientifiques depuis les années 1990. Dater une construction, ses transformations, son abandon ou la modification de son usage reste aujourd'hui encore un véritable défi.

Les outils dont disposent les archéologues reposent toujours principalement sur l'analyse des stratigraphies sédimentaires et des élévations. Les remaniements des édifices religieux sont rarement étudiés dans les fouilles anciennes qui ont souvent effacé toute trace des derniers niveaux d'occupation, biaisant la perception de l'utilisation des églises au cours des deux premiers siècles de l'Islam. La nécessité d'études plus précises permettant d'établir des séquences chronologiques longues se révèle cruciale aujourd'hui. En l'absence des niveaux sédimentaires disparus, l'analyse du bâti reste une méthode

à même de combler partiellement ces lacunes (par ex. Gilento 2014), mais elles demeurent encore marginales.

Les datations calendaires restent plus difficiles à établir. Les données les plus utiles et les plus fréquemment utilisées pour dater les édifices religieux chrétiens et leurs transformations aux ^{vi}^e-^{ix}^e siècles reposent encore bien souvent pour les édifices du territoire jordanien sur les éléments épigraphiques, la céramique et les séismes. Chacune de ces méthodes porte cependant en elle des difficultés et reste parfois sollicitée sans la nécessaire prudence scientifique. Pour l'épigraphie, outre les problèmes liés à la détermination des ères employées qui compliquent la datation des nombreuses inscriptions présentes sur les pavements de mosaïque (Di Segni 2006-07), se pose également la difficulté de savoir, comme l'a rappelé Gatier (1992 ; 2003 ; 2011) à plusieurs reprises ce que ces inscriptions datent exactement : le pavement, une réparation, l'achèvement de tout ou partie du pavement qui a pu être réalisé en plusieurs fois du fait du financement par un système à caractère évergétique (Gatier 2011, 24-25) ? De plus, en raison de la fragilité du support et de leurs fréquentes réfections, les inscriptions sur mosaïques ne donnent que les dates les plus tardives, au contraire des inscriptions lapidaires, qui ont, elles, souvent disparu, ce qui peut induire une perception biaisée de la date des vestiges (Gatier 2003, 292). Dans ce contexte, les destructions iconophobes des pavements fournissent également un repère important puisqu'elles attestent que l'édifice était toujours utilisé au moment où elles ont été commises. Bien que leur date, leurs auteurs et leur signification soient encore débattues, une datation vers le quart du ^{viii}^e siècle semble faire consensus (Schick 1995, 180-219 ; Piccirillo 1996 ; 1998, 269 ; Ognibene 2002, 130 ; 132-36 ; Fowden 2004, 300-01 ; Bowersock 2006, 92-111 ; Reynolds 2017, 1-7).

La céramique est aussi souvent utilisée comme marqueur de chronologie, mais son utilisation pour la datation soulève des difficultés qui ne sont pas toujours prises en compte dans les rapports de fouilles et publications. Ainsi, si la connaissance des typologies s'est beaucoup affinée depuis les années 1980 grâce aux lots scellés sous des pavements portant une inscription datée (Alliata 1990-94 ; Alliata et Derosas 1993-95 ; Uscatescu 1995 ; 1996 ; 2001 ; Sanmori et Pappalardo 1997 ; 2000 ; Pappalardo 2003-07 ; Sodini 2016), les nombreuses variations régionales de la céramique commune (différences entre les régions septentrionales, le centre et la vallée du Jourdain

² Sur l'évolution du tissu ecclésiastique entre les provinces romaines tardives et les *jund* islamiques, on se reportera utilement à Levy-Rubin (2003).

³ Ce choix n'est d'ailleurs pas réellement incohérent, car il correspond à une région définie en partie par des limites géographiques qui existaient en partie dans l'Antiquité (Dépression du Yarmouk et fossé du Jourdain, de la mer morte et du Wadi Araba).

et les régions méridionales), la permanence des types, ou encore la terminologie fluctuante d'un auteur à l'autre compliquent la tâche du chercheur cherchant à établir une datation (Sodini et Villeneuve 1992 ; Sodini 2001 ; Villeneuve et Watson 2001). S'y ajoute l'imprécision des termes employés dans les publications : plutôt que de se référer à des siècles, la céramique est souvent qualifiée de « byzantine », « omeyyade », « abbasside » ou « mamelouke », reprenant ainsi une périodisation trop souvent établie à partir des sources littéraires se référant aux dynasties politiques, périodisation qui fait elle-même l'objet de débats dans la communauté des historiens des deux premiers siècles de l'Islam (Micheau 2012, 248-50). Ces identifications ont d'ailleurs parfois évolué au fil du temps dans la littérature archéologique, ce dont témoigne la problématique, identique, que signale Walmsley (2001, 633-34, spéc. n. 3, 634) pour les périodes ultérieures : si une forme de continuité des types est aujourd'hui bien attestée jusqu'au IX^e siècle, les X^e-XI^e siècles jouent maintenant le rôle de « *Dark Ages* » que tenaient auparavant les VIII^e-IX^e s., du fait de fouilles archéologiques peu nombreuses ou de chronologies céramiques mal construites⁴.

De même, les séismes, nombreux à la fin de l'Antiquité dans toute l'aire levantine (Ambraseys 2009 ; Salamon 2010), sont parfois sur-sollicités pour établir la périodisation des sites archéologiques, sans toujours prêter attention à son épicerie et son intensité (Russell 1985). Outre celui de 363 qui toucha la région de Pétra, seul celui de 746-749⁵ semble avoir eu un impact important sur les sites de la vallée du Jourdain (Ambraseys 2009, 230-37). Il existe notamment une preuve de reconstruction vraisemblablement en rapport avec ce même séisme dans l'inscription de l'église Mār Mēmā d'Ehden (Nordigian et Yon 2010).

Les sources littéraires, enfin, ont parfois été sollicitées également de manière excessive ; elles ne relatent guère de sièges violents, hormis pour la bataille de Fihl/Pella en 635, qui ne semble pas avoir eu d'impact sur les vestiges du site archéologique (Walmsley 1992, 378-80 ; 1995). Certaines sources monastiques, notamment la *Vie* d'Étienne le Sabaïte, témoignent d'une certaine liberté de circulation accordée aux chrétiens au cours du VIII^e siècle (Bianchi 2021, 195). Elle était certes tributaire d'autorisations administratives, comme en attestent les saufs-conduits exhumés par la papyrologie égyptienne (Raghib

1997 ; Vanthieghem 2014 ; Delattre 2019). Cela s'articule sans doute bien avec les nombreuses attestations textuelles et archéologiques de construction d'églises (Ali et Brelaud, Keser-Kayaalp, et Pierre, dans ce volume). Pour cette étude, bien que plusieurs raids et batailles aient eu lieu antérieurement, je retiendrai la date de 636 (bataille du Yarmouk) comme marqueur du début de la période islamique, puisqu'en scellant la défaite militaire des armées byzantines dans la région, elle marque une rupture dans l'histoire de ces régions. Cependant elle n'entraîne pas de modification immédiate. Il ne faudrait pas déduire de la rareté des textes et documents préservés qu'aucune administration solide et centralisée n'est mise en place avant la période omeyyade (660-750) (Micheau 2012, 195-209). Il semble au contraire qu'un certain nombre d'innovations administratives ont pénétré le registre papyrologique égyptien au cours du VII^e siècle (Sijpesteijn 2022). Cependant, cela n'implique donc ni une destruction ou un abandon massif des églises, ni de modifications immédiates de la société romano-byzantine.

2. RESTAURATIONS ET ABANDONS

Les églises prises en compte dans le corpus correspondent à celles érigées antérieurement à 636 ; on peut supposer que la plupart étaient encore utilisées à ce moment puisque les variations en termes d'abandons avant cette date et de constructions après celle-ci restent marginales (Michel 2011, 239-41 ; Gatier 2011, 22).

2.1. Continuité et restaurations

Le constat archéologique montre en effet qu'une grande partie des églises est encore utilisée sous les premiers califes et dans la première moitié de l'époque omeyyade : 91,8% des édifices l'étaient encore en 636, 81,3% en 660, 52,3% en 720 et seulement 27,9% vers 750 (Michel 2011) (Fig. 1)⁶. Cette longue chronologie est attestée par les inscriptions datées sur les pavements de mosaïque, qui permet d'affiner les typologies des céramiques trouvées sous les pavements, qui peuvent alors servir de marqueur chronologique pour les niveaux d'abandon. Ces derniers renvoient souvent au VIII^e, voire au début du IX^e siècle, avec toutes les réserves

⁴ Par méconnaissance, et en partie en raison de préjugés considérant l'absence d'occupation humaine à une certaine époque, une date plus haute ou plus basse est attribuée aux fragments de céramique.

⁵ La datation précise du séisme fait l'objet de débat, même si un consensus semble s'établir autour de l'année 749 (Tsafrir et Foerster 1992 ; Tsafrir 2014).

⁶ Ces proportions restent toutefois indicatives compte tenu de la difficulté qu'il y a à dater les abandons avec précision.

méthodologiques quant à la précision des datations évoquées *supra*. Il est en revanche souvent difficile de préciser si la nature de l'occupation de l'édifice à cette époque relève encore d'une utilisation liturgique ou si elle est différente. D'autre part, l'absence de réparation des destructions iconophobes attribuées au quart du VIII^e siècle (*cf. supra*) fournit aussi un indice de continuité d'utilisation des églises au moins jusqu'à ce moment, voire au-delà lorsque les dommages sont réparés. Ainsi, cette contribution ne prend-elle pas en compte les modifications intervenues avant le tiers du VII^e siècle dans les églises, sauf cas particulier. La démarche adoptée consiste à envisager le devenir des églises, d'abord au VII^e siècle, puis au VIII^e siècle.

Il apparaît que pour la première période, la majorité des édifices est encore utilisée dans sa fonction liturgique initiale sans modification majeure. L'étude des inscriptions datées sur les mosaïques de pavement permet d'en préciser certains aspects. Comme évoqué plus haut, les découvertes de pavements de mosaïque portant des inscriptions tardives ont parfois mené à conclure à l'existence de constructions *ex-nihilo* de nouvelles églises postérieures à la défaite des armées byzantines face aux troupes musulmanes. Cette hypothèse ne résiste pas à l'enquête pour les territoires d'outre-Jourdain comme l'ont montré notamment les travaux de P.-L. Gatier (Gatier 1992, 152 ; Schick 1995, 119-23 ; Michel 2011, 235-37), même en milieu monastique (Bianchi 2021, 196). On peut juste hésiter sur le cas de l'église F102 d'Auara-Humayma, dont la construction est attribuée avec prudence au milieu du VII^e s. ou au début du VIII^e d'après la céramique (Amr et Oleson 2013, 96 et 154) ; et qui est connue pour avoir été le lieu de résidence de la famille abbasside à l'époque omeyyade (Borrut 2011, 209-17). Il en va de même pour l'église de la Cour et la petite chapelle aménagée au sud de celle-ci dans le complexe Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas qui semblent remonter au premier quart du VIII^e siècle (Michel 2001, 396-97)⁷. Leur situation dans un groupe ecclésiastique plus ancien relève cependant d'un phénomène différent, dans la mesure où il s'agit en définitive d'un réaménagement – voire d'une réduction – de ce dernier qu'il y aurait lieu d'examiner en lien avec toutes ses phases d'occupation tardive.

Les inscriptions sur les mosaïques de pavement datées postérieures à 636 et antérieures à 720 sont au nombre de douze, dont neuf sont antérieures à 700 (Tabl. 1). Elle se répartissent majoritairement dans le nord et le centre de l'aire géographique considérée (Fig. 2). On compte sept édifices en Arabie : trois dans l'évêché de Bosra

(Saint-Jean de Khirbat as-Samra, Saint-Serge et Saint-Philémon de Rihab), deux dans celui d'Amman (Saint-Varus de Khilda et église basse de Quwaysma), et deux dans celui de Madaba (église de l'Acropole à Ma'in, Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas). Deux se trouvent en Palestine II (une mosaïque errante et l'église d'al-Badiya) et deux en Palestine III (églises d'al-Rabbah et de Lot à Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata). On constate ainsi une distribution égale dans toutes les provinces, proportionnelle au nombre d'églises connues dans chacune. Ces édifices sont plutôt implantés en milieu rural dans des bourgades (Umm al-Rasas, Rihab, Khirbat as-Samra, al-Badiya) ou en contexte monastique (Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata) et peu dans les grandes villes. Ces inscriptions commémorent le plus souvent la pose de pavements de mosaïques qui attestent l'existence d'une activité édilitaire en milieu chrétien au VII^e siècle. Leur nombre restreint ne permet cependant pas de la qualifier de florissante. En outre, il s'agit généralement – systématiquement pour celles datées du VIII^e siècle – de rénovations d'édifices plus anciens érigés à l'époque byzantine. Celles-ci sont soit de l'ordre de l'embellissement (Umm al-Rasas), de la rénovation presque complète de l'église (Khilda, Quwaysmah), ou de réparations d'envergure plus modeste (Ma'in), parfois liées à la modification du mobilier liturgique (Dayr 'Ayn Abata 606 et 691) (Piccirillo 2007, 107 ; Gatier 2011, 22). Ce constat soulève deux questions qui renvoient à la taille et à l'organisation des communautés chrétiennes de cette époque et aux relations qu'elles entretenaient avec les nouvelles autorités. S'il est vraisemblable que ce soient les communautés chrétiennes ou du moins leurs responsables qui sont à l'origine des travaux alors menés dans les édifices religieux chrétiens, le rôle joué par les autorités musulmanes et leur tolérance éventuelle est à interroger en parallèle à la mise en place progressive d'un empire islamique centralisé et unifié à partir des réformes de 'Abd al-Malik et à l'époque abbasside (Micheau 2012, 185-209). Contrairement au texte du pacte de 'Umar qui apparaît restrictif mais a été compilé au plus tôt au IX^e siècle, certains textes semblent montrer qu'une latitude locale était possible par rapport aux lois émises par l'autorité centrale. Avant le IX^e siècle, les restaurations d'édifices chrétiens semblent avoir été possibles, notamment s'il n'y avait pas d'agrandissement par rapport à la construction préislamique. Cependant, l'application et la ratification des traités signés avec les nouveaux dirigeants semblent avoir été variables localement. Elles apparaissent surtout liées à la capacité de négociation des communautés chrétiennes locales avec les autorités musulmanes, notamment quant à la propriété

⁷ Des fragments appartenant à une même plaque rouge ont été recueillis lors des fouilles sous le dallage des deux édifices, ainsi que des fragments de mobilier liturgique présentant des traces de représentation de figure abrasées.

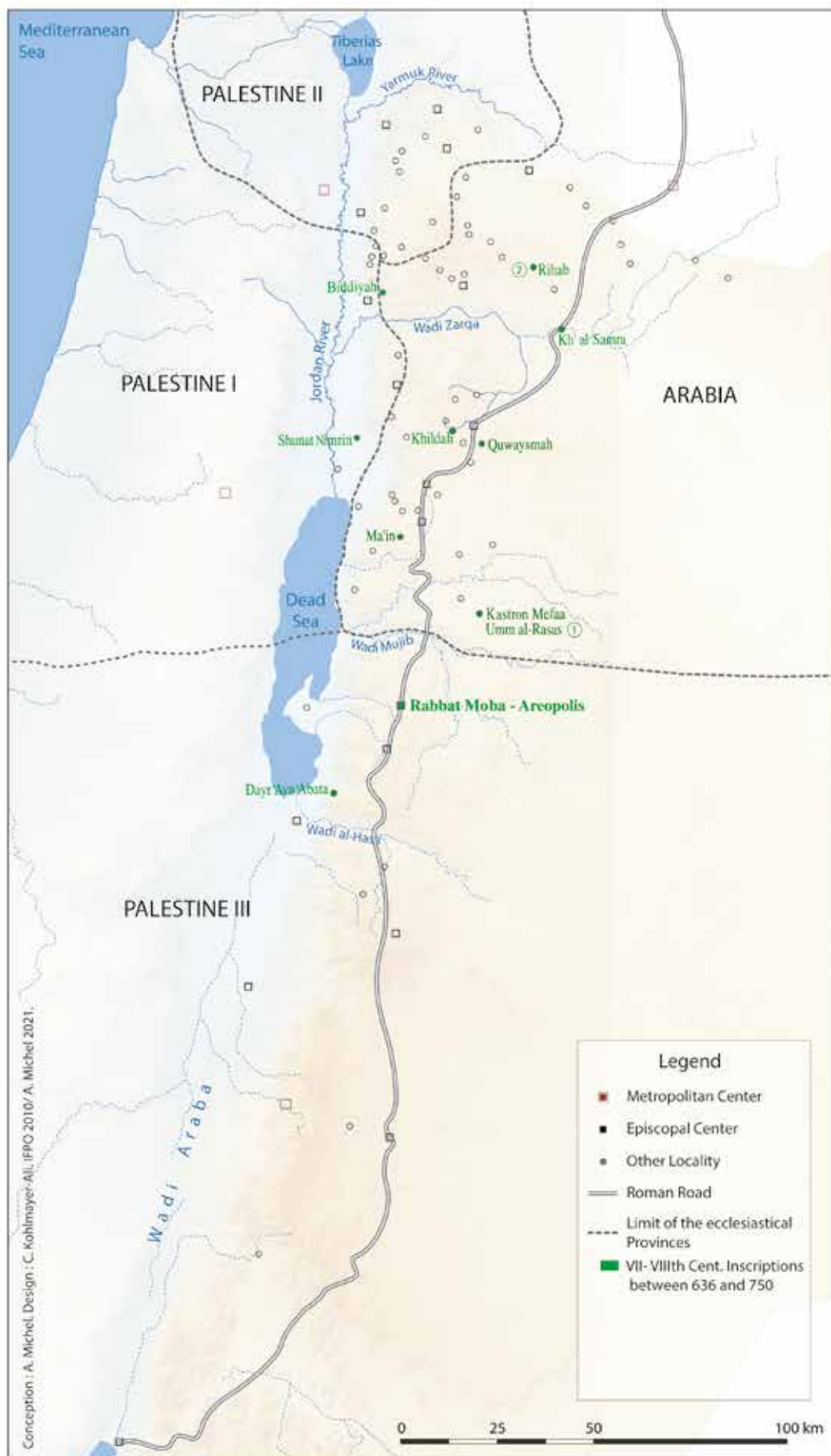


Fig. 2. Carte des nouvelles inscriptions connues pour la période 636-720.

Tabl. 1. Mosaïques posées entre 636 et 720.

Site	Edifice	Date	Événement daté	Réf. bibliographiques
Palestine I				
Shunah*	Égl. supérieure	- Fin VI ^e -début VII ^e s. - VII ^e -VIII ^e s.	- Pose mosaïque - Pose mosaïque	- Gatier, 2016, p. 71 - Piccirillo, 1982, pp. 340-341 - Piccirillo, 1984, p. 339 - Piccirillo, 1998, pp. 268-269
Palestine II				
Sud de la Décapole de part et d'autre du Yarmouk (Gadara – Hippos ou Scythopolis)	Église	- 647 ou 648 si ère de Gerasa (663 si ère d'Antioche)	- Mosaïque errante	- Gatier, 2007, pp. 170-173 - BE, 2008, 570 - Gatier, 2011, p. 10
Abila	Église D	- Epoque omeyyade avant 749	- Céramique omeyyade scellée sous le pavement d' <i>opus sectile</i> - Abandon attribué séisme 749 [les typologies céramiques ne sont pas précises]	- Michel, 2001, p. 116
Arabie				
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Serge	- 646 (540 Arabie) - 1 ^{er} février 661 - 691 (Georges de Bosra)	- Pose mosaïque - Décor de mosaïque	- al-Housan, 2018, inscr. 9 - SEG, 51, 2042 - Gatier, 2011 p. 10 - Di Segni, 2017, p. 316 - Bianchi, 2021, p. 196 - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 229 - al-Hussan, 2002, fig. 12 p. 83
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Philimos	- 662-663 (557 Arabie, 6e année indiction = 1er sept 662-20 mars 663)	- Restauration mosaïque	- al-Husan, 2018, inscr. 8, p. 34 - SEG, 51, 2043 - Di Segni, 2017, p. 316
Kh. es-Samra (Bos.)	Saint-Jean-Baptiste (égl. 95)	- 638/639 (sous Polyeucte)	- Pose mosaïque (3 ^e pavement après sol plâtré, puis dallé)	- Humbert, 1982, p. 500 - Humbert et Desreumaux, 1990, p. 261 - Gatier, 1998, pp. 391-392
Kh. al-Bediyeh (Ger.)	Égl. Sud	- 640/641 (703 Décapole) - 710 (douteux)	- Mosaïques géométriques - Inscription située devant le chancel	- al-Muheisen, 2002, p. 75 - SEG, 63,1619 - al-Muheisen, 2006, p. 86 [sans photo, ni transcription, ni traduction] - Hamarneh, 2011, p. 538
Khilda (Phil.)	Saint-Ouaros	- 687 (sous Georges de Philadelphie)	- Rénovation et embellissement : deux nefs et nouveau pavement	- Najjar et Sa'id 1994, p. 560, pl. 31-40 - SEG, 44, 1416 - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 227 - Hamarneh, 2003, pp. 231-232 - Hamarneh, 2011, p. 537 - Hamarneh, 2013, p. 63 - Gatier, 2011, p. 20 - Bianchi, 2021, pp. 196-197
Quwaysmah (Phil.)		- 717-718	- Restauration intégrale de l'édifice (suite séisme 717-718 ?) [constr. V ^e s. ; 1 ^{re} mosaïque au VI ^e s.]	- Piccirillo, 2002, pp. 227 et 230 - Schick, 1995, p. 126 - IGLS, XXI, 2, 53 - Gatier, 1992, p. 152 - Gatier, 2003, p. 293 - Gatier, 2011, p. 11

* Piccirillo (1982, 341) date la mosaïque supérieure des VII^e-VIII^e siècles, à la fois sur des critères stylistiques (motifs géométriques dépourvus de figurations animées) et d'après la céramique scellée entre les deux niveaux de pavements (typologies byzantine et omeyyade). Il considère l'abandon de l'édifice antérieur aux destructions iconoclastes car les deux oiseaux de la mosaïque supérieure sont préservés. Gatier (2016, 71) met en doute cette interprétation. Il attribue une date plus haute à cette mosaïque, à la toute fin du VI^e ou au tout début du VII^e siècle, car les noms des évêques de Livias et de Jérusalem qu'il restitue dans le texte de l'inscription de dédicace ne peuvent correspondre à une période au cours de laquelle le siège patriarcal était vacant, à savoir l'époque perse entre 614-631 et le début du pouvoir musulman entre 638 et 705. L'absence de représentations animalières et le style paléographique le conduit à exclure le VIII^e s.

Ma'in (Mad.)	Égl. de l'Acropole	- 719-720	- Nouveau pavement suite séisme 717-718 ? - ou restauration du pavement ?	- Piccirillo, 1989, p. 232 - Schick, 1995, p. 126 - De Vaux, 1938, pp. 226-258 - Gatier, 2003, p. 293 - Gatier, 2011 pp. 11 et 20
Umm al-Rasas	Saint-Étienne	- 718	- Réfection nef, suite séisme 717-718 ?	- Schick, 1995, p. 126
Palestine III				
Er-Rabbah (Aréop.)	Église	- 687	- Construction	- Zayadine, 1971, p. 75. - Cazini Gysens, 2002, pp. 484-485 (avec une erreur de frappe : 678) - Cazini Gysens, 2003, pp. 5 et 7 - SEG, 53, 1883
Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata (Zoar.)	Égl. de Lot	- 606 - 691	- Réfection sol collatéral nord réfection sol nef	- Gatier, 2011, p. 20 - Politis, 2012a, 403-409, n° 5

des bâtiments religieux chrétiens (Guidetti 2013, 252-54 et notes 93-95 ; voir aussi Pierre, dans ce volume, et Wood, dans ce volume).

Ainsi, pour cette première période couvrant tout le VII^e siècle, la majorité des édifices apparaît encore utilisée sans modification majeure de la fonction liturgique initiale. L'étude archéologique témoigne que de nombreux remaniements sont intervenus durant cette longue période d'utilisation. Sauf cas particulier, les modifications les plus fréquentes correspondent concernent le mobilier liturgique, le plus souvent liées à des nécessités endogènes au culte chrétien (Tabl. 2). Certains édifices, comme la cathédrale présumée de Gerasa, sont marqués par l'agrandissement de leur chœur, qui peut aussi être surélevé lors de la réfection (Fig. 3). Le sol peut être refait à l'occasion comme celui de l'église dite de la *Tabula Ansata* à Umm al-Rasas dans la première moitié du VII^e siècle ou Saint-Étienne au milieu de ce même siècle (Fig. 4). On assiste aussi parfois à la monumentalisation des clôtures de chœur comme l'attestent les nombreuses traces de retailles que comportent les rails maintenant les plaques de chancel, par exemple dans la cathédrale présumée de Gerasa (Fig. 5), la basilique du Mont Nébo ou l'église dite des Khader à Madaba. Si le chancel haut à poteaux-colonnettes apparaît peut-être dès la fin du VI^e siècle dans l'église d'Isaïe à Gerasa, l'aménagement reste rare et est souvent tardif ; il peut parfois prendre une forme plus monumentale avec l'introduction de colonnes dans la basilique du Nébo (Fig. 6) et dans l'église de la Vierge à Madaba. Ces remaniements du chœur s'accompagnent parfois d'un agrandissement des sièges du clergé. Ainsi,

à Khirbat as-Samra, dans l'église 90 et dans l'église 95 le banc des prêtres (*synthronon*) est aménagé dans l'abside au VII^e siècle en même temps que le sol du chœur est rehaussé (Michel 2001, 195-98). A Gerasa, dans le groupe ecclésial de Saint-Jean-Baptiste, le côté nord de celui de l'église Saint-Georges est prolongé vers l'ouest, qui est la dernière du groupe à avoir été utilisée (Michel 2001, 249) (Fig. 7). Au Nébo, enfin, la banquette presbytérale fut rehaussée aux VII^e-VIII^e siècles (Bianchi 2021, 80). La typologie de la table d'autel connaît aussi des modifications allant dans le sens d'une monumentalisation. Si la généralisation de la table d'autel (*mensa*) à quatre supports semble remonter au VI^e siècle (Michel 1998, 31 : 2001, 61-66), dès la fin de celui-ci apparaissent des tables à piétement maçonné, qui se rencontrent de plus en plus fréquemment aux VII^e et VIII^e siècles (Michel 2001, 67-68 ; Duval 2003, 76) (Fig. 8)⁸. Dans certaines églises également est ajouté un ambon, qui se présente comme une petite plate-forme surélevée, accessible par quelques marches depuis l'angle sud-ouest du chœur en Arabie et depuis son angle nord-ouest en Palestine (Fig. 9). La chronologie ne peut pas toujours en être déterminée avec précision. Comme l'installation apparaît presque toujours comme un remaniement postérieur aux pavements du VI^e siècle et que son emplacement est prévu dans ceux de la fin du VII^e comme à Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata (691) ou du début du VIII^e siècle comme à Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas (718), on peut raisonnablement attribuer sa généralisation au cours du VII^e siècle (Michel 2001, 86-87 ; Duval 2003, 99), même s'il semble apparaître plus tôt par endroits comme à Sainte-Marie de Pétra (Fiema 2001, 58, 77-78 et 80). Enfin, bien que cela

⁸ Ce type d'autel apparaît à Umm al-Rasas dans l'église des Lions, où il est postérieur à la mosaïque datée de 573 ou 588 (Michel 2001, 405-06), dans l'église de l'évêque Serge où il est mis en place sans doute au cours du VII^e siècle (Michel 2001, 385) ou à Saint-Étienne en 756 (Michel 2001, 393-94), dans l'église Saint-Paul postérieur à la mosaïque datée de 578 ou 593 (Michel 2001, 399-401), dans la chapelle M aménagée au VIII^e siècle (Michel 2001, 396-400), dans l'église de la Vierge à 'Ayn al-Kanisah dans une vallée proche du mont Nébo où il paraît contemporain de la mosaïque datée de 762 (Michel 2001, 361-63), ou encore la chapelle accolée au nord de l'église du monastère d'Aaron à Pétra, dans la phase attribuée à la seconde moitié du VII^e-première moitié du VIII^e siècle (Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 144-45).

Tabl. 2. Modification des aménagements liturgiques

Site	Édifice	Date	Nature modification	Réf. bibliographiques
Arabie				
Umm al-Jimal (Bos.)	Église de Julianos		- Adjonction <i>synthronon</i> - Sol plâtré par-dessus mosaïque	- Corbett, 1957, pp. 58-59 et 63, pl. XVIa-b
Hayyan al-Mushrif (Bos.)	Église n°1	- Peu après la conquête arabe	- Adjonction baptistère, avec un second pavement ?	- Hamarneh, 2011, p. 537
Khirbat al-Samra (Bos.)	Église 95		- Adjonction <i>synthronon</i>	- Humbert, 1982, pp. 499-500 - Humbert et Desreumaux, 1990, p. 261
Khirbat al-Samra (Bos.)	Église 90		- Adjonction <i>synthronon</i>	- Humbert et Desreumaux, 1990, p. 260 - Michel, 2001, p. 195
Gerasa	Groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste : Saint-Georges		- Agrandissement <i>synthronon</i>	- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 247 - Schick, 1995, p. 317 - Michel, 2001, p. 251 - Reynolds, 2017, p. 71
Khilda (Phil.)	Saint-Varus	- 687	- Adjonction autel deux massifs maçonnés enduits	- Najjar et Sa'id, 1994, pp. 550-551, figs. 5-6. - Michel, 2001, pp. 285-286 et tabl. 1 p. 63
Mont Nébo (Mad.)	Basilique de Moïse	- Ép. omeyyade ou post. 749	- Réfection <i>synthronon</i> - Réfection abside ?	- Bianchi, 2019b, p. 210 - Bianchi, 2021, p. 80
'Ayn al Kanisah (Mad.)	Chapelle de la Vierge	- 762	- Autel à piétement maçonné contemporain réfection mosaïque	- Piccirillo, 1995, p. 413 - Michel, 2001, pp. 362-363 et tabl. 1 p. 64
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Saint-Étienne	- 718 (nef) - 756 (chœur)	- Mosaïque, ambon prévu dans le dessin - Surélévation chœur, réfection clôture et autel à piétement maçonné	- Michel, 2001, pp. 393-394 et tabl. 4 p. 85
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église des Lions	? : post. à 573 ou 588 (date mosaïque)	- Réfection autel : autel à piétement maçonné	- Michel, 2001, p. 405
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Saint-Paul	? : post. à 578 (date mosaïque)	- Réfection autel : autel à piétement maçonné	- Michel, 2001, pp. 399 et 401
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église de l'évêque Serge	? VII ^e s.	- Réfection autel : autel à piétement maçonné (3 ^e état), post. à la mosaïque de 586	- Michel, 2001, pp. 384-385 - Hamarneh, 2011, p. 538
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église de la Cour	- VII ^e -VIII ^e s. (céramique)	- Aménagement autel 4 supports dans dallage	- Michel, 2011, p. 396 et tabl. 1 p. 65
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Chapelle M	- VIII ^e s. après l'iconoclasme (chancel mutilé remployé sous le dallage)	- Autel maçonné	- Michel, 2011, p. 397 et tabl. 1 p. 65
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église de la <i>Tabula ansata</i>	- Première moitié VII ^e s.	- Agrandissement du chœur - Dallage à la place de la mosaïque de la nef	- Piccirillo, 2003, p. 301, fig. 16 pl. 29, 23-24 pl. 12-13 - Pappalardo, 2003, pp. 304-305
Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata (Zoar.)	Église de Lot	- 691	- Ambon prévu dans le dessin de la mosaïque	- Michel, 2001, pp. 150-152 et tabl. 4 p. 84

ne soit étudié avec précision que dans quelques édifices, on constate la tendance à l'aménagement dans certaines églises de petites chapelles par la subdivision intérieure des espaces. Ainsi une chapelle dotée d'une table est-elle créée à l'époque omeyyade dans l'espace au nord de l'abside de Saint-Etienne d'Umm al-Rasas (Piccirillo 1991, 341-43 ; 1994, 89-90 ; Michel 2001, 393) (Fig. 10). Dans l'église

de Maléchios à Machéronte, c'est l'ensemble du collatéral nord qui est isolé et transformé en chapelle (Michel 2001, 374-75)⁹. Ainsi, durant cette première période qui suit la défaite militaire des byzantins et sous les premiers califes omeyyades, c'est une image assez diversifiée du devenir des églises qui se dessine. Sous le sceau de la continuité d'utilisation liturgique des églises, elle est marquée aussi

⁹ Toutefois, en l'absence de mobilier liturgique ou de vestiges univoques, il n'est pas toujours aisé de différencier l'aménagement de chapelles des réutilisations domestiques postérieures.

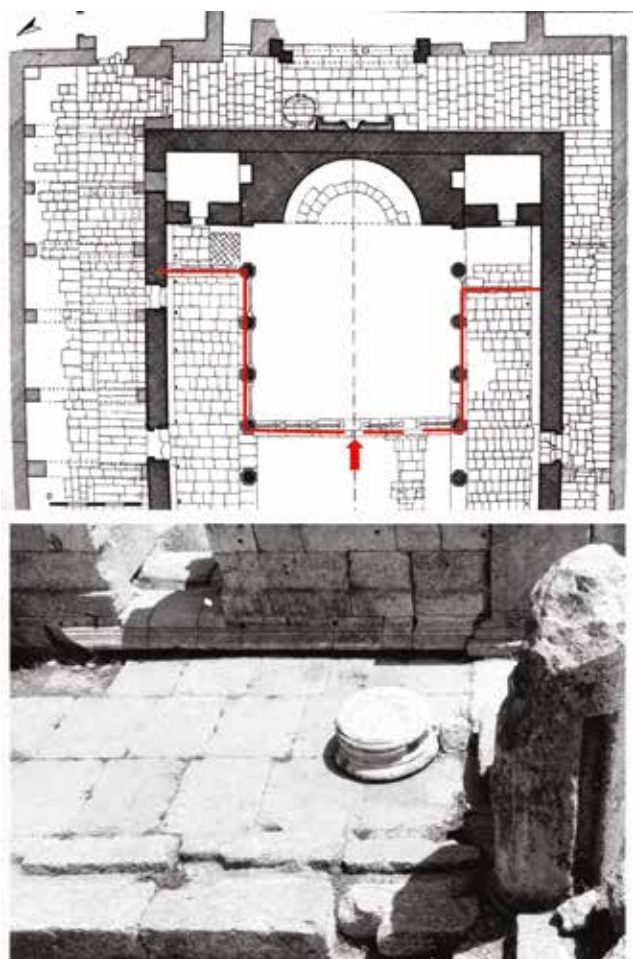


Fig. 3. Gerasa, cathédrale présumée. Extension du chœur aux collatéraux : le stylobate de chancel est étendu au collatéral à l'extrémité du collatéral et le sol est surélevé (disparu lors de la fouille de 1929) (plan Fisher, dans Kraeling 1938, pl. XXXI. Photo © A. Michel).



Fig. 5. Retaille du chancel de la cathédrale présumée de Gerasa © A. Michel.



Fig. 4. Umm al-Rasas, Saint-Étienne. Mosaïque du chœur posée en 756. Au centre apparaît la mosaïque du premier état © M. Schlicht.



Fig. 6. Mont Nébo, basilique de Moïse, stylobate de chancel. La clôture est monumentalisée par l'introduction de colonnes entre les portaux qui maintiennent les plaques. © M. Schlicht.

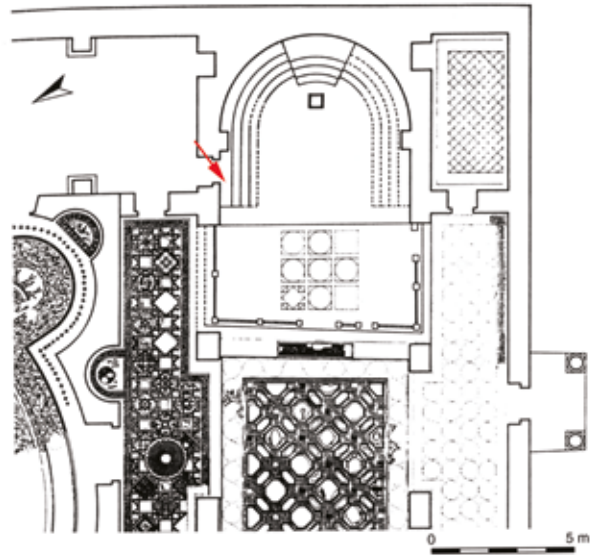


Fig. 7. Gerasa, Saint-Georges. Le synthronon a été prolongé vers l'ouest, venant condamner l'accès à la salle voisine depuis le chœur (Dessin C. Florimont, d'après Fisher. Dans : Michel 2001, 244, et © A. Michel).

bien par l'absence de nouvelles constructions *ex-nihilo* – sur les raisons de laquelle on peut s'interroger¹⁰ – que par l'absence d'abandons massifs, mais aussi par des remaniements et des travaux d'embellissement, qui donnent l'impression de communautés chrétiennes encore assez structurées et actives.

2.2. Le processus d'abandon

Cela ne doit pas masquer le processus d'abandon qui se dessine progressivement à partir de la seconde moitié

du VII^e siècle (Fig. 11). L'établissement de cette chronologie relève davantage de la conjonction de faisceaux d'indices archéologiques que d'évidences incontestables. La céramique¹¹, l'absence de mutilations iconophobes, et la présence d'une réutilisation ultérieure de l'église à des fins autres que liturgiques concourent à identifier ces abandons, mais en l'absence de données complémentaires, ces indices ne permettent qu'une datation approximative. Celle-ci peut être affinée lorsqu'une inscription datée est présente sur une mosaïque épargnée par les mutilations iconophobes, comme à Dayr Dariya, où le pavement intact est daté de 623-624 (Piccirillo

¹⁰ Faut-il l'attribuer à l'impact de la mise en place de l'administration musulmane ? À l'absence de nécessité constructive à ce moment du fait de l'importante vague édilitaire constatée au cours de la seconde moitié du VI^e et au début du VII^e siècle ? Ou aux deux phénomènes se renforçant mutuellement ?

¹¹ Ces indices s'avèrent particulièrement délicats à interpréter, en partie du fait de la variabilité typologique régionale des céramiques communes, mais aussi en fonction de la date à laquelle les fouilles ont été menées. L'exploitation du mobilier recueilli lors des fouilles anciennes reste délicate, d'une part parce que la connaissance de ces typologies était moins précise, et d'autre part parce qu'on a généralement prêté peu d'attention aux niveaux tardifs. La datation de l'abandon des églises de Gerasa, par exemple, s'avère ainsi particulièrement difficile à déterminer.



Fig. 8. Umm al-Rasas, Saint-Paul : piétement maçonné du dernier état de l'autel. Le détail montre l'emplacement réservé pour un petit reliquaire © A. Michel.



Fig. 10. Umm al-Rasas, Saint-Étienne. Chapelle aménagée lors d'un remaniement à l'extrémité du collatéral au nord de l'abside © M. Schlicht.



Fig. 9. Umm al-Rasas, église des Lions, chœur de l'église. Au premier plan à droite, l'escalier de l'ambon et la plaque dans laquelle étaient insérés les colonnettes supportant la plate-forme. © A. Michel.

2002, 225 ; 2005, 389), ou encore probablement à Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Khirbat as-Samra (Michel 2001, 197). Cependant, ce critère ne fournit aucun indice pour les édifices aux pavements exclusivement ornés de motifs géométriques, dont certains sont antérieurs aux VII^e-VIII^e siècles. Envisageons d'emblée la possibilité d'un processus progressif d'abandon de la steppe orientale de l'*Arabia* au cours de cette période, qui aurait pu impacter tout aussi bien les communautés chrétiennes que musulmanes. De nombreux indices suggèrent une occupation rurale des vallées et une dépopulation des hauts plateaux (Walmsley 2007, 350 ; Bianchi 2021, 205). Or, un tel retrait de l'agriculture d'openfield semble aussi identifiable dans le nord de la Syrie et en Haute-Mésopotamie, où il pourrait être corrélé à un développement plus intensif de l'irrigation par canaux fluviaux (Euphrate) ou par *qanāt* (voir l'ouvrage collectif de Bartl et Hauser 1996 ; Berthier 2001 ; Rousset 2010, entre autres). Il faut également prendre en compte l'impact d'un autre phénomène corrélé à la conquête et aux évolutions socio-économiques, la réorganisation du patriarcat de Jérusalem (Levy-Rubin 2003).

Concernant l'existence d'une réutilisation ultérieure du bâtiment à des fins autres que liturgiques, on est là encore tributaire de la datation attribuée à cette réoccupation ; il faut en outre tenir compte du hiatus chronologique potentiel qui existe entre l'utilisation liturgique de l'église et sa réutilisation pour d'autres usages. Parmi

les églises recensées, 22 ne présentent aucune trace de mutilation iconophobe et peuvent avoir été abandonnées avant la période à laquelle ces dommages ont été perpétrés, sans doute au quart du VIII^e siècle (Tabl. 3)¹². Ce sont surtout des chapelles, situées pour la plupart dans l'évêché de Philadelphie-Amman (Khirbat al-Kursi,



Fig. 11. Carte des édifices abandonnés dans la seconde moitié du VII^e siècle.

¹² On peut par ailleurs se demander si l'absence de trace d'iconoclasme est un critère pertinent pour dater l'abandon des églises s'il est utilisé seul sans avoir recours à la céramique contenue dans les remblais d'abandon : cela ne semble être le cas que pour l'église Saint-Georges de Khirbat al-Mukhayyat et Sainte-Marie de Pétra, les autres fouilles étant trop anciennes ou n'ayant pas fourni de remblai d'abandon.

Tabl. 3. Abandons des VI^e-VII^e siècles

Site	Édifice	Date	Indices	Réf. bibliographiques
Palestine II				
Abila	Église à trois absides A	- VII ^e -VIII ^e s. (2 ^e moitié VII ^e s. ?)	- Réoccupation omeyyade	- Michel, 2001, p. 114
Abila	Église à trois absides DD		- Réoccupation omeyyade	- Michel, 2001, p. 116
Qam (Cap. ?)	Chapelle 17.1	- Début ép. omeyyade	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Michel, 2001 p. 132
Kh. al-Duwayr (Pell. ?)			- Réoccupation omeyyade ?	- Melhem, 1998
Arabie				
Umm al-Jimal (Bos.)	Église double : bas. Nord	- Milieu VII ^e s. ?	- Céramique remblai	- Michel, 2001, p. 113
Kh. es-Samra (Bos.)	Saint-Pierre (égl. 78)	- Quart VIII ^e s.	- Médaillons bordure mutilés non réparés	- Michel 2001, p. 205
Khirbet es-Samra (Bos.)	Saint-Jean-Baptiste (égl. 95)	- 638 - Quart VIII ^e s.	- Pose 3 ^e sol en mosaïque - iconoclasme non réparé	- Desreumaux, 1990, p. 261 - Michel, 2001, p. 197
Al-Husn (Bos.)	Chapelle	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Melhem et Khasawneh, 1994 - Michel, 2001 p. 222
Khirbet Dariya (Ger. ?)	Saints-Cosme-et-Damien	- Entre 623-624 et le quart VIII ^e s.	- Date mosaïque - Iconoclasme non réparé.	- Piccirillo, 2002, ph. p. 225 - Piccirillo, 2005, p. 389
Yasilah (Ger. ?)	Église B	- VII ^e s.	- Abandon, puis réoccupation omeyyade de nature inconnue	- al-Muheisen, 1991, p. 6 - Michel, 2001, p. 166
Ras el-Dayr (Ger. ?)	Église de Michel et Gabriel		- Absence d'iconoclasme	- al-Muheisen, 2006 p. 98
Kh. al-Munyah (Ger.)	Chapelle	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Michel, 2001, p. 276
Gerasa	Église funéraire	- VI ^e -VII ^e s.	- Céramique remblai	- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 255 - Michel, 2001, p. 261
Gerasa	Église des Propylées	- Milieu VII ^e s.	- Réoccupation domestique omeyyade + artisanat	- Brizzi <i>et al.</i> , 2010, pp. 357-359
Gerasa	Chapelle d'Élie, Marie, Soreg	- Av. les destr. iconophobes	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Piccirillo, 1981, pp. 45-46 - Michel, 2001, pp. 272-274
Gerasa	Groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste : Saints-Cosme-et-Damien	- Av. les destr. iconophobes	- Absence iconoclasme	- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 248 - Michel, 1996, p. 168 - Michel, 2001, p. 251
Gerasa	Groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste : Saint-Jean-Baptiste	- Av. les destr. iconophobes	- Absence iconoclasme	- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 248 - Michel, 2001, p. 251
Suf (Ger.)	Chapelle Funéraire	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Hazim et Piccirillo, 2005, p. 490, pl. 65
Girmil (Houd) (Ger.)	Chapelle	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Nassar <i>et al.</i> , 2020, figs. 3-4, p. 412
Philadelphie	Église de la citadelle		- Réoccupation omeyyade	- Michel, 2001, p. 279
Philadelphie	Chapelle du Jabal al Akdar	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Michel, 2001, p. 283
Kh. al-Kursi (Phil.)	Chapelle	- Ép. omeyyade	- Absence d'iconoclasme - Céramique remblai	- Piccirillo et Amr, 1988, p. 368
Jubayah (Phil.)	Église	- Ép. omeyyade	- Iconoclasme non réparé	- Piccirillo, 1993a, p. 314
Suwafiyah (Phil.)	Chapelle	- Déb. ép. islamique	- Absence d'iconoclasme - Réoccupation domestique	- Van Elderen, 1970, p. 25
Khilda (Phil.)	Saint-Varus	- Entre 685 et le quart du VIII ^e s. (mil. VIII ^e s. selon les fouilleurs)	- Mosaïque restaurée en 685, mais iconoclasme non réparé (visages/ têtes ; bras-mains/ pattes soigneusement détériorés et non réparés) [attribué aux occupants époque mamlouke par les fouilleurs]	- el-Najjar et Sa'id, 1994, ph. 4 pl. 33, ph. 7 pl. 35, p. 556 - Piccirillo, 2002, fig p. 229
Esbous	Église de l'Acropole	- « Au cours de l'époque omeyyade »	- Absence d'iconoclasme - Réoccupation domestique omeyyade (céramique)	- Michel, 2001, p. 297
Massuh (Esb.)	Église Nord	- Fin VII ^e s. - déb. VIII ^e s. ?	- Absence iconoclasme - Réoccupation omeyyade-abbasside	- Piccirillo, 2000, pp. 497-498

Madaba	Église des saints Apôtres	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Lux, 1968, p. 108
Madaba	Crypte d'Éliane	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Michel, 2001, pp. 321-323
Kh. al-Mukhayyat (Mad.)	Église d'Amos et Casiseos	- Av. quart VIII ^e s?	- Dallage, mais absence d'iconoclasme dans la chapelle contigüe du prêtre Jean	- Michel, 2001, p. 351
Kh. al-Mukhayyat (Mad.)	Chapelle du prêtre Jean	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Michel, 2001, p. 351
Kh. al-Mukhayyat (Mad.)	Église de Lot et Procope	- Av. quart VIII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Michel, 2001, p. 347
Kh. al-Mukhayyat (Mad.)	Saint-Georges	- Mil. VII ^e s.?	- Absence d'iconoclasme - Céramique remblai	- Michel, 1998, p. 380 - Michel, 2001, p. 345
Kh. al-Mukhayyat (Mad.)	Monastère du wadi 'Afrat	- Mil. VII ^e s.	- Céramique : pas d'occupation postérieure à cette date	- Michel, 1998a, p. 406 - Pappalardo, 2007, pp. 577-579
'Ayun Mousa (Mad.)	Église de Kayanos	- 1 ^{re} moitié VII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme	- Piccirillo, 1998, p. 250 - Allia, 1990a, pp. 247-261 - Michel, 2001, p. 357
'Ayun Mousa (Mad.)	Église du diacre Thomas	- 2 ^e moitié VII ^e s.	- Absence d'iconoclasme - Céramique	- Piccirillo, 1998, p. 260 - Michel, 2001, p. 360
Ma'in (Mad.)	al-Dayr		- Réoccupation omeyyade - Céramique	- Piccirillo et Rusan, 1976, p. 370 - Michel, 2001, p. 370
Dibon (Mad.)	Église Nord		- Réoccupation omeyyade (céramique)	- Michel, 2001, p. 379
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église de la Niche	- VII ^e -VIII ^e s.	- Céramique remblai	- Piccirillo, 1994a, pp. 107-110
Palestine III				
Al-Lajjun	Église	- 551	- Abandon contemporain du camp militaire	- Michel, 2001, p. 152
Arindela	Église	- 2 ^e moitié VIII ^e s.	- « Pillage »	- Walmsley, 1997, pp. 499-500
Petra	Sainte-Marie (Petra Church)	- Fin VI ^e – déb. VII ^e s.	- Rénovation, stockage de matériaux - Incendie	- Fiema, 2001, pp. 80-94
Auara	Église basse C101	- Mil. VII ^e s.	- Réoccupation omeyyade - Céramique	- Schick, 2013, p. 295

Suwafiyah, chapelle du Jabal al-Akdar, Suf, Qam 17.1) et dans une moindre mesure dans ceux de Gerasa (Chapelle d'Elie, Marie et Soreg) et de Madaba (églises des vallées d'Ayun Mousa et de Khirbat al-Mukhayyat). Il faut y ajouter huit édifices présentant des mutilations iconophobes non réparées, dont l'abandon est donc a priori contemporain (Khirbat Dariya, Saint-Pierre et Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Khirbat as-Samra, Sainte-Sophie de Zaghrit, église des Khader à Madaba, église de l'Acropole à Esbous, églises de Jubaya et de Khilda). Enfin, la mention dans les rapports de fouilles d'une « réoccupation omeyyade », sans plus de précisions, n'apporte que peu d'éléments, car elle ne permet de dater précisément ni l'abandon, ni la réoccupation¹³. C'est le cas de onze édifices pour lesquels ces réoccupations sont qualifiées d'« omeyyades » en se fondant sur des typologies céramiques (église C 101 de Auara-Humayma en Palestine III, églises A et DD d'Abila, peut-être de Khirbat Duwayr en Palestine II, et les églises de Yasila, la chapelle du Jabal al-Akdar, les églises de Diban et de Massuh, le

Dayr de Ma'in en Arabie). Il faut y ajouter dix édifices dont l'abandon est attribué au VII^e siècle d'après la typologie de la céramique trouvée dans les remblais d'abandon (basilique Nord de l'église double d'Umm al-Jimal dans l'évêché de Bosra ; la chapelle de Khirbat al-Kursi dans celui de Philadelphie-Amman ; l'église funéraire de Gerasa ; le Dayr de Ma'in, Saint-Georges et l'église du Wadi 'Afrat à Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, dans l'évêché de Madaba, et l'église C101 d'Auara et Sainte-Marie de Pétra en Palestine III). Un édifice enfin, semble avoir été dépouillé de son mobilier liturgique après le milieu du VIII^e siècle (Arindela-Gharandal), alors qu'il ne fonctionnait sans doute déjà plus comme église, avant de connaître une réoccupation, probablement au XII^e siècle (Walmsley 1997, 499-500). Sur ce total de 53 édifices (soit environ 25% du corpus), si on ne considère que les 22 églises dépourvues de mutilations iconophobes, il apparaît que le phénomène d'abandon des églises reste minoritaire avant le VIII^e siècle ; si on prend en compte les réoccupations dites omeyyades, on peut également en

¹³ Est-elle immédiatement consécutive ou pas à l'utilisation liturgique de l'église ? Remonte-t-elle au début ou à la fin de l'époque omeyyade ?

conclure qu'il y a eu des églises abandonnées et réutilisées pour une fonction autre que liturgique dès cette époque (21 environ). Les abandons d'églises au VII^e siècle n'apparaissent donc pas majoritaires eu égard aux 160-180 édifices du corpus connu sur le territoire jordanien, mais ils existent. On peut en déduire qu'il s'agit d'un phénomène sans doute endogène, antérieur dans certains cas à l'arrivée des troupes musulmanes. Quoique discret, il s'amorce dès la seconde moitié du VI^e siècle et reste marginal jusqu'au milieu du VII^e s. Comme je l'avais montré en 2007, l'absence de caractère soudain ne permet pas de le lier à l'arrivée des musulmans (Michel 2011, 241 et 251-52), même s'il a pu être précipité ou accentué par l'événement. Le processus, minoritaire mais progressif, continu et général, montre des variations locales liées à des traités locaux avec les nouvelles autorités (Micheau 2012, 143-44), mais aussi à la géographie, au milieu (il est plus précoce dans les villes) et à la nature de l'édifice (en milieu monastique, les églises semblent persister plus longtemps). Cela confirmerait une tendance de long terme, commencée à la fin de l'époque protobyzantine, et achevée à la fin de l'époque abbasside (VI^e-IX^e siècles), indépendamment de la confession. Parallèlement, cela conduit à se réinterroger sur l'organisation des communautés chrétiennes, ainsi que sur leur nombre et leur place dans la société byzantino-omeyyade des premiers temps. Bien présentes lors de la conquête militaire, elles se réduisent peu à peu. Si la conquête ne semble pas avoir eu d'impact direct sur cette rétraction, la structuration progressive du nouvel état islamique et la mise en place de l'administration omeyyade peuvent avoir joué un rôle à partir du règne de 'Abd al-Malik (Micheau 2012, 185-209). Il semble vain, cependant, de rechercher une explication univoque : de la même manière que le processus est progressif, les causes l'ayant déclenché sont sans doute multiples. Il faut ainsi considérer le devenir de ces églises et communautés chrétiennes dans le cadre plus général des évolutions en termes d'occupation du sol, de transformation des réseaux d'échanges, en lien également avec les aléas climatiques et géologiques (séismes) qui marquent le Proche-Orient dès le VI^e siècle¹⁴.

En d'autres termes, le processus d'abandon des établissements chrétiens pourrait être en grande partie lié au changement démographique général de la région et devrait être comparé à l'évolution des cités tardo-antiques

d'Arabia. En effet, celles-ci tendent à être souvent abandonnées au cours du Moyen-Âge (*infra*).

2.3. Vitalité chrétienne et islamisation

Au début du VIII^e siècle encore, les témoignages de la vitalité des communautés chrétiennes existent donc. Toutefois, les données archéologiques laissent entrevoir une situation différente de celle du VII^e siècle, plus nuancée, même si le changement n'est ni radical, ni brutal. La permanence des communautés chrétiennes au VIII^e siècle est attestée par les sources littéraires et épigraphiques. Jusqu'au VII^e siècle la présence chrétienne s'exprime par une prédominance du grec, qui signe l'appartenance à l'élite (Gatier 1992, 152-53). Entre 662 et 685, cette prédominance du grec vacille, mais il reste une langue liturgique jusqu'au milieu du VIII^e siècle, dont témoignent par exemple les inscriptions d'Umm al-Rasas ou de l'église de la Vierge de Madaba, celle de 'Ayn al-Kanisa dans les vallées du Nébo, ainsi que le maintien des systèmes d'ères et l'emploi des noms de mois macédoniens dans les régions de Moab et en Palestine III, et romains ailleurs (Gatier 1992, 153).

Les sources littéraires, rédigées pour la plupart dans les milieux monastiques comme la *Vie* d'Etienne le Sabaïte (Lamoreaux 1999 ; Garitte 1959) qui vécut dans la laure de Saint-Sabas jusque vers 794, attestent une forte présence des communautés monastiques sur les deux rives du Jourdain (*Vie*, 17, Piccirillo 2002, 223 ; Hamarneh 2020, 52). Rédigée par son disciple Léonce de Damas vers 807, sa *Vie* ne signale pas de changement législatif spécifique dans la vie des moines qui soit liée à la mise en place de l'administration islamique ; ils n'apparaissent soumis ni au paiement du *kharāj* (taxe foncière) ni de la *jizya* (impôt par tête) (Piccirillo 2002, 223). Quelques pèlerins fréquentaient les lieux saints le long de la route menant au monastère du Sinaï (*Vie*, 64 ; Piccirillo 2007, 108 ; Bianchi 2021, 195)¹⁵ et une activité économique était maintenue par des marchands chrétiens (*Vie*, 36 ; Piccirillo 2007, 108 ; Bianchi 2021, 195). Selon Hamarneh (2020), cette persistance de la présence monastique tout au long de la période omeyyade pourrait être liée à une acceptation par l'autorité musulmane de ces sanctuaires en tant que lieux de vénération

¹⁴ A titre de comparaison, les prospections du programme « marges arides » dans le centre de la Syrie par l'équipe de Bernard Geyer ont bien montré l'impact des facteurs environnementaux sur la variation chronologique de l'extension et de l'exploitation humaine des territoires (Geyer 2001a ; 2001b ; 2011).

¹⁵ Au VI^e s., les buts de pèlerinage concernaient surtout la rive ouest du Jourdain autour de souvenirs liés au Nouveau Testament (Hamarneh 2020, 49) ; à l'est du Jourdain, ils étaient plutôt attachés aux souvenirs liés à l'Ancien Testament, en même temps que se développait la vénération envers les ascètes et hommes saints – dont beaucoup vivaient sur des sites associés à des traditions bibliques, qui firent l'objet de vénération après leur décès – Jean Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale*, Cyrille de Scythopolis et autres vies (Hamarneh 2020, 50).

musulmane, peut-être parce qu'ils correspondent aux 25 prophètes dits *nabīs*¹⁶, comme semblent le suggérer une inscription coufique à l'entrée de la grotte de Lot à Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata (Macdonald 2012, 417 ; Hamarneh 2020, 50-51)¹⁷ et de nombreuses lampes attribuées à la seconde moitié du VIII^e ou au début du IX^e siècle recueillies dans cette même grotte et au sol de l'église (Da Costa 2012, 258-78 et 288-91 ; Hamarneh 2020, 51).

Les mesures anti-chrétiennes apparaissent en fait plutôt à partir de la dynastie abbasside (Vie d'Étienne le Sabaïte, 29, 55-64 ; Schick 1995, 167-70 ; Patrich 2011, 209 ; Bianchi 2021, 201). En 798, le juriste arabe Abū Yūsuf mentionne ainsi dans le *Kitāb al Kharāj* (146-61), l'interdiction de construire des églises dans les établissements islamiques présents ou nouveaux (Schick

1995, 161-62 ; Levy-Rubin 2011 ; Micheau 2012, 144, 198 et 205 ; Bianchi 2021, 201-02 ; Pierre, dans ce volume). Ces mesures interviennent cependant plus d'un siècle après la victoire musulmane sur les armées byzantines, dans un contexte différent, à un moment qui voit « l'islam s'affirmer face aux autres monothéismes comme la religion constitutive d'un nouvel empire » (Micheau 2012, 205).

C'est dans ce contexte qu'il faut considérer les pavements mis en œuvre après le milieu du VIII^e siècle. S'ils existent en effet, ceux qui nous sont parvenus demeurent très exceptionnels (Fig. 12 et Tabl. 4) : on ne peut guère citer que la mosaïque du chœur de Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas (756), la mosaïque de l'église de la Vierge à Madaba (767), la restauration de la mosaïque de la nef

Tableau 4. Mosaïques d'époque abbasside posées après 750

Site	Édifice	Date	Événement daté	Réf. bibliographiques
Palestine I				
Shunah (Liv. ?)	- Église supérieure	- Fin VI-début VII ^e s. - VII ^e -VIII ^e s. ?		- Gatier, 2016, p. 71 - Piccirillo, 1982, pp. 341-342 - Piccirillo, 2001a, p. 632 - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 230 et p. 243
Palestine II				
Mar Liyas (Tisbeh-Litsib) (?)	Église d'Élie	- 623 - juin-juillet 775-776 (838 de l'ère de Pella, 14 ^e indiction)	- Premier pavement - Restauration mosaïque pièce monastique au sud de l'église	- Piccirillo, 2007, p. 100 - Bianchi, 2021, p. 194 - Di Segni, 2006, pp. 579-580 n. 2 - Piccirillo, 2007, pp. 99-100 - Mac Donald, 2010, pp. 78-79 - Piccirillo, 2011, pp. 109-110 - Gatier, 2011, p. 12 - Hamarneh, 2020, p. 43 - Bianchi, 2021, p. 138
Arabie				
al-Rasif (?)	Chapelle funéraire	- 785		- Di Segni, 2017, p. 316
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Nicéphore-Constantin	1 ^{er} quart du VIII ^e s. (623) sous Polyeucte de Bosra - 626 - 832 ?	- Restauration de la mosaïque endommagée avec deux chiffres indiquant l'année (ère de la création du monde) [Douteux ou peu fiable selon Piccirillo et Gatier]	- Piccirillo, 2007, pp. 98-99 - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 220 - Di Segni, 2006, pp. 578-579, n°1 - Piccirillo, 2011, p. 106 - Gatier, 2011, p. 15
Madaba	Église de la Vierge	- 767	- Pose du pavement (sur un autre plus ancien)	- Di Segni, 1992, pp. 255-257 - Gatier, 2011, pp. 12 et 21
'Ayn al-Kanisah (Mad.)	Chapelle de la Vierge	- 762	- Restauration	- Piccirillo, 1994c, pp. 527-530, pl. 25 - Piccirillo, 2001, p. 630 - Di Segni, 1994, pp. 531-532 - Di Segni, 1998, pp. 449-450 - Gatier, 2011, pp. 12 et 20
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Saint-Étienne	- 756	- Réfection de la mosaïque du chœur	- Piccirillo, 1994, pp. 251-252, n°8 - Gatier, 2011 p. 11

¹⁶ Nom d'origine biblique, parmi les groupes de saints les plus respectés de l'Islam (Hamarneh 2020, 50-51).

¹⁷ « Au nom de Dieu, le miséricordieux, le tout miséricorde, ô Dieu pardonne à Garir ses péchés, [ceux qui] sont passés et à venir ... et [soutiens-le d'une part] de ta récompense. Seigneur, tu es le meilleur soutien ».



Fig. 12. Carte des édifices religieux chrétiens connus au VIII^e siècle.

de la chapelle de la Vierge de 'Ayn al-Kanisa (762), la restauration d'une salle (monastique ?) attenante à la grande basilique de pèlerinage de Mar Eliyas (775-776) et une restauration à la datation controversée d'une mosaïque de Saint-Constantin de Riḥāb (832) (Di Segni 2006, 578-79, fig. 2 ; Gatier 2011, 15). Parmi ces cinq édifices, trois se

situent dans l'évêché de Madaba. Deux sont liés au milieu monastique (Mar Liyas et 'Ayn al-Kanisa), ce qui correspond à l'image d'une présence chrétienne monastique perdurant davantage qu'en milieu urbain ou rural telle qu'elle ressort de la vie d'Étienne le Sabaïte (*cf. supra*)¹⁸. Deux, enfin, correspondent à des édifices de pèlerinage (Mar

¹⁸ Cela n'étonne guère puisque les moines vivent à l'écart des communautés urbaines ou villageoises, plus perméables aux interactions avec les nouveaux venus, et qu'ils sont en partie épargnés par les taxes prélevées sur les terres et les produits et reversées aux nouvelles élites dirigeantes (Micheau 2012, 148).



Fig. 13. Madaba. Eglise de la Vierge. Mosaïque datée de 767. © M. Schlicht.

Liyas et Umm al-Rasas). On est frappé par la splendeur des pavements de mosaïques réalisés dans les églises au cours de cette période. Leurs caractéristiques formelles, les tapis ornés de vastes motifs d'entrelacs, sont semblables à celles mises en œuvre dans les premiers édifices islamiques. À titre d'exemple, la similitude entre les motifs de la mosaïque de l'abside des bains de Khirbat al-Mafjar (Qaṣr Hishām) et celle de l'abside de Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas est frappante. En outre, le médaillon central à entrelacs y présente des parentés singulières avec celui qui orne le centre de l'église de la Vierge à Madaba (Fig. 13). Enfin, la bordure d'entrelacs qui entoure ce dernier est elle-même très proche de celle qu'on trouve dans la résidence de Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat. Seul le budget semble avoir été plus important dans le cas des pavements princiers.

La pose de sols de mosaïque dans plusieurs églises à une date tardive ne doit cependant pas tromper : d'une part, leur nombre reste très limité eu égard au nombre d'édifices religieux chrétiens existants au début du VII^e siècle, et d'autre part, derrière ces pavements spectaculaires se cachent surtout de nombreuses réfections. Si ces dernières témoignent de la présence de communautés chrétiennes encore nombreuses et actives, la dynamique se modifie toutefois par rapport aux décennies qui ont suivi les victoires militaires des armées musulmanes.

2.4. Réfections des mosaïques et iconophobie

Les témoignages les plus évidents en sont fournis par la destruction puis la réparation des mutilations à caractère iconophobe que présentent de nombreux pavements. L'effacement de toutes les figures animées ou presque que l'on constate sur les mosaïques des églises des provinces d'Arabie et dans une moindre mesure de Palestine a déjà fait l'objet de nombreuses études (Duval 2003, 111-14 ; Reynolds 2017, 1-7, sur l'historiographie des recherches ; Schick 1995, 180-219 ; Piccirillo 1996 ; Ognibene 1998 ; 2002 ; Fowden 2004, 296-301 ; Bowersock 2006, 92-111 ; Sahner 2017 ; 2021). Je ne reviendrai pas en détail ici sur leur datation, leurs auteurs et leurs motivations. La communauté scientifique semble s'accorder sur le fait qu'il s'agit d'un phénomène différent de l'iconoclasme byzantin, qui peut remonter à une période autour du quart du VIII^e siècle (*cf. supra*). Les sources chalcédoniennes ne font guère état de persécutions ni même de pressions, qu'elles soient d'origine ecclésiastique byzantine, ou islamique, à propos de leurs icônes. En outre, les sources historico-juridiques musulmanes ne font généralement pas état des décors présents à l'intérieur des églises, mais se concentrent éventuellement sur leur visibilité extérieure (Lorenzo, dans ce



Fig. 14. Gerasa, Saint-Georges. Dommages iconophobes réparés avec de grosses tesselles blanches © A. Michel.

volume). Ainsi, que ces réfections aniconiques soient ou non consécutives à des mesures prises par le calife Yazid II en 723, que les dommages aient été perpétrés ou non par les musulmans, les chrétiens eux-mêmes ou les chrétiens sous l'ordre des seconds nous importe moins ici que le fait que ces dommages aient été réparés ou pas, et de quelle manière. En effet, la présence de réfections renvoie à une activité chrétienne et à l'utilisation des églises à des fins liturgiques après que ces dommages sont venus endommager les pavements.

Sur l'actuel territoire jordanien, une soixantaine d'édifices environ présentent des traces de mutilations à caractère iconophobe sur leur sol. Cela indique le chiffre minimal d'églises dont on peut supposer qu'elles étaient encore utilisées dans leur fonction liturgique au quart du VIII^e siècle. Il faut peut-être y ajouter celles qui possédaient un pavement géométrique ou un simple dallage pour lequel aucun indice d'abandon antérieur à cette période n'est attesté, comme par exemple l'église à trois absides D d'Abila. Parmi cette soixantaine de pavements de mosaïque mutilés, seuls sept n'ont connu aucune réparation (Khirbat Dariya, Saint-Pierre et Saint-Jean de Khirbat as-Samra, Sainte-Sophie de Zaghrit, église de Jubayha, église des Khader à Madaba, baptistère et chapelle Saint-Théodore de la cathédrale présumée de Madaba), ce qui suppose probablement un abandon de ces églises aux alentours du quart du VIII^e siècle. Ces édifices non réparés se situent principalement dans les contrées les plus septentrionales, dans

les évêchés de Bosra et de Philadelphie-Amman et dans une moindre mesure de Madaba (fig. 3). Cependant la majeure partie des pavements endommagés a été réparée (52 sur 59). Le plus souvent, la lacune est comblée avec de grosses tesselles blanches (38 édifices) (Fig. 14), ou très souvent aussi, des tesselles de même calibre que celles utilisées pour la mosaïque endommagée, possiblement les mêmes, mais réparties de façon aléatoire (28 édifices) (Fig. 15). Les deux modes de réparation sont souvent utilisés simultanément dans le même édifice et il n'est pas possible d'établir une distinction chronologique entre le choix de l'un ou de l'autre remaniement. De même, ces deux types de réparations n'apparaissent liés ni à une quelconque répartition géographique, ni au statut liturgique de l'église au sol endommagé. Dans quelques cas, on peut hésiter pour savoir si les dommages sont dus à une action iconophobe (destructions plus systématiques, mais pas toujours), à l'usure des pavements (usure irrégulière et figures qui ne sont pas toutes effacées systématiquement) ou à des dommages plus tardifs, consécutifs par exemple à une réoccupation ultérieure de l'édifice. Il y a lieu également de s'interroger lorsque ces dommages ne sont pas systématiques : n'auraient-ils alors concerné que les parties visibles, les autres parties de la mosaïque endommagée étant masquées lors des destructions, comme par exemple à Khirbat al-Badiya où un mur érigé directement sur le pavement est venu protéger la mosaïque ? Dans seize édifices enfin, un soin tout particulier a été accordé



Fig. 15. Umm al-Rasas, Saint-Étienne. Dommages iconophobes réparés : 1. avec des tesselles récupérées, placées en ordre aléatoire. 2. avec des motifs de substitution géométriques. 3. Avec des motifs floraux © M. Schlicht.

aux réparations : les figurées effacées ont été remplacées partiellement ou en totalité par des motifs de substitution (Piccirillo 1998, 270-76). Ce type de réparation apparaît essentiellement dans les églises d'Umm al-Rasas, mais on le trouve également dans les régions septentrionales où s'affiche une préférence pour les motifs de substitution géométriques (roues à rayons, trapèze, nœud de Salomon, losanges et diamants) ou inanimés (coupe, calice, amphore, flèches et arc) (Humbert 1983, 418). Les occurrences dans l'évêché de Madaba apparaissent plus diversifiées : aux motifs géométriques s'ajoutent des éléments végétaux (arbre, rameau, fleurs, boutons de roses, palmier, éléments en forme de cœur, trèfle ou pique) (Figs. 15-16) et plus rarement des figurations animales (poissons à Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas, animaux divers à 'Ayn al-Kanisa) (Fig. 17).

La réparation, souvent soigneuse, de la majeure partie des pavements indique la présence encore importante de communautés chrétiennes jusqu'au VIII^e siècle au moins. Cependant, sur la soixantaine d'édifices affectés par les dommages iconoclastes, une dizaine semblent abandonnés à partir de cette époque. Indépendamment la cinquantaine d'édifices restants qui pourraient être encore en usage, ne représentant déjà plus qu'un quart environ du corpus initial. On semble ainsi davantage en présence

d'une continuité d'utilisation d'édifices existants, d'une persistance de communautés dont l'importance numérique diminue progressivement, que devant un dynamisme des communautés chrétiennes. Cela tranche assez nettement avec la situation beaucoup plus favorable qui semble marquer l'espace mésopotamien, mossoulien, égyptien et ibérique à la même période, comme il apparaît dans ce volume.

3. RÉTRACTION GÉNÉRALE

Les réparations de fortune ou entraînant une diminution de la superficie de l'édifice qu'on peut observer dans un certain nombre d'églises renforcent cette impression. De fait, celles qui sont embellies avec faste se révèlent moins nombreuses que celles montrant des réparations qui semblent relever du simple entretien, voire même entraînent une réduction progressive de leur surface. Ces réductions apportées lors de la réparation des monuments, notamment dans les groupes ou complexes d'édifices en milieu urbain, mais aussi rural, témoignent d'une part d'une occupation assez longue de ces ensembles et d'autre part de l'abandon progressif et non violent de nombre d'entre eux (Tabl. 5)¹⁹.

¹⁹ Les données de fouilles sont parfois trop anciennes ou insuffisamment précises pour qu'il soit possible d'interpréter ces murs souvent érigés dans les entrecolonnements séparant nefs et collatéraux. Il reste souvent difficile de déterminer s'il s'agit de l'aménagement de chapelles à l'intérieur de l'édifice, de la réduction de sa superficie (comme par exemple à Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Khirbat al-Samra, ou Saint-Cyriaque de Quwaysmah), ou de vestiges liés à une réoccupation profane de l'édifice, comme le montrent plusieurs des églises d'Umm al-Rasas.



Fig. 16. Ma'in, église de l'Acropole. Dommages iconophobes réparés avec des motifs végétaux © M. Schlicht.



Fig. 17. Dommages iconophobes réparés avec des motifs animaliers. A gauche: 'Ayn al-Kanisah, chapelle de la Vierge. Les animaux ont été réparés © A. Michel. A droite: Umm al-Rasas, Saint-Étienne © M. Schlicht.

Tabl. 5. Réparation des dommages iconoclastes

Site	Édifice	Modalités de réparation*	Motif substitution : nature-localisation	Réf. bibliographiques
Palestine I				
Zia - Zay al-Gharbi		1./ 2.		- Piccirillo, 1993, figs. 660-661 pp. 318-319 et pp. 324-325
Palestine II				
Haufa al-Wastiyah		2. ? (plan, pas de photo)		- Abu Dalu, 1994 (en arabe), fig 5 p. 11
Kh. al-Burz (Sama al-Rusan)		1./ 2.		- Khasawneh, 1994 fig 4 p. 26, fig 9 p. 27
Qam	Chapelle 17.2 (chapelle de Jean ?)	1./ 2. + inscription syriaque		- Ta'ani, 1997, figs. 4, 6-10, pp. 17-18 (en arabe)
Mar Eliyas		2.	Géométrique, effacé médaillon circulaire nef + annexe nord	- Bianchi, 2021, figs. 123-124 pp. 138-139
'Ajlun	Chapelle dans le château	1.		- Piccirillo, al-Qudah, 2003, p. 316
Arabie				
Rihab (Bos.)	Sainte-Marie	1./ 2./ 3.	- Diamant - Arbre	- Michel, 2001, p. 221 - Piccirillo, 1981, ph. 339a pl. 75 et ph. 43a pl. 77
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Pierre	2.		- Piccirillo, 1981, ph. 34 pl. 70, pp. 81-82 - Michel, 2001, p. 219
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Paul	2.		- Piccirillo, 1981, ph. 22 pl. 63 - Schick, 1995, p. 443
Rihab (Bos.)	Sainte-Sophie	2./ 3.	- Diamant	- Piccirillo, 1981, ph. 3 pl. 52 - Michel, 2001, p. 216
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Philémon-Constantin	1./ 2./ 3.	- Diamant ou carré sur la pointe	- Di Segni, 2006, fig. 1 pl. 53
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Jean-Baptiste	2./ 3.	- Arbre [remplace personnages devant chancel]	- al-Hussan, 2002, fig. 17 p. 83 (arabe) - al-Hussan, 2018 fig. p. 36
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Serge	2.		- al-Hussan, 2002, fig. 16 p. 83 (arabe) - al-Hussan, 2018, fig. p. 31
Hayyan al-Mushrif (Bos.)	Église n°1	2.		- al-Muheisen et Tarrier, 1995, p. 520 - Michel, 2001, p. 208
Kh. es-Samra (Bos.)	Saint-Georges	1.		- Michel, 2001, p. 206
Kh. es-Samra (Bos.)	Église d'Anastase (Égl. 81)	1./ 3.	- Motifs géométriques (roue à rayons, trapèzes) [remplacent animaux]	- Humbert, 1983, p. 417 - Humbert et Desreumaux, 1982, fig. 2 pl. LI. - Piccirillo, 1993, fig. 612 p. 308 - Michel, 2001, p. 202
Kh. es-Samra (Bos.)	Église de l'Higoumène (égl. 82)	1.		- Michel, 2001, p. 201 - Humbert et Desreumaux, 1982, p. 177 - Humbert et Desreumaux, 1990, p. 262
Kh. es-Samra (Bos.)	Église de la Forteresse (égl. 29)	1./ 2.		- Humbert, 1986, p. 360 - Michel, 2001, p. 195
Gerasa	Groupe épiscopal : cathédrale, chapelle	2.		- Biebel, 1938, pl. LIXa-b
Gerasa	Église de Procope	0. (plâtre et marbre)/ 1.		- Biebel, 1938, pp. 338 et 340, pl. LXXXd-g ; pl. XXXIa-b
Gerasa	Église de la Synagogue	0. (marbre et plâtre)/ 2. + utilisation progressivement réduite ?		- Biebel, 1938, p. 324 pl. LXVIa

*Modalités réparation : 0 = plâtre ou autres matériaux ; 1= Mêmes tesselles remployées en désordre ; 2 = tesselles blanches ; 3 : Nouveaux motifs neutres ou géométriques.

Gerasa	Église de l'évêque Isaïe	1./ 2. + séisme mil. VIII ^e s.		- Clarck, 1986, p. 313, pl. VI, IX fig. 17 XVIII fig 35 - Michel, 2001, p. 265
Gerasa	Saint-Georges	0. (plâtre + fragment plaques chancel) 1./ 2.		- Biebel, 1938, p. 330, pl. LXXI
Gerasa	Saints-Pierre-et-Paul	0.		- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 254
Gerasa	Église funéraire	2.		- Biebel, 1938, p. 336
Kh. al-Bediyah (Ger. ?)	Église des Saints-Martyrs	?		- Nassar et al-Muheisen, 2013, p. 601
Zaghrat (Ger.)	Sainte-Sophie	1./ 2./ 3.	- Arc et flèches	- Hazim, 2003, p. 438, figs. 6-8 et 10-13
Khirbet Sa'ad (Ger. ? Bos. ? Adr. ?)		2./ 3.	- Palmiers-dattiers	- Sari, 1995, p. 528, fig. 1 pl. 80 - Michel, 2001, p. 223
Yasilah (Ger. ? Bos. ? Adr. ?)	Église A	2./ 3.	- Arbres [remplacent personnages]	- al-Muheisen, 1989, fig. 10 pl. 81, fig. 11 pl. 82 - al-Muheisen, 1990, fig. 2 pl. 70
Ya'amun (Ger. ? Bos. ? Adr. ?)	Église de l'évêque Léontios	1./ 2./ 3.		- Najjar <i>et al.</i> , 2001 p. 414, figs. 3 p. 415, 4 p. 416 (1.) - Turshan, 2010, pp. 621-622 (2.) - Nassar et Turshan, 2012, fig. 3 p. 215 (1.) - Hamarneh, 2018, p. 19, fig. 12-13 pp. 20-21 (1.), fig. 25 p. 30 (2.)
Quwaysmah (Phil.)	Église basse			- Schick et Suleiman, 1991, p. 327
Quwaysmah (Phil.)	Saint-Cyriaque (église haute)	2.		- Michel, 2001, p. 294
Tell el-Umayri Est	Saint-Serge	1.		- al-Sahmi, 2010, fig. 10 p. 39 - Bevan <i>et al.</i> , 2015, p. 52, figs. 4-5 pp. 52-53
Esbous	Église Nord	0./ Tesselles		- Lawlor, 1980 p. 100 - Michel, 2001, p. 300
Massuh (Esb.)	Église supérieure	1./ 2./ 3.	- Croix et édifice schématique [remplacent des oiseaux]	- Piccirillo, 1983, pl. 22 figs 14-19 (rép.), pl. 23 figs. 20-21 (rempl.) - Piccirillo, 1993 figs. 442-443 p. 253 (rempl.) - Piccirillo, 1998, p. 270; fig. 2. - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 75 (rép.), p. 243 (rempl.)
'Ayoun Mousa (Mad.)	Eglise du diacre Thomas	2. (bordure seulement, pas d'iconoclasme au centre de la nef)		- Piccirillo, 1993, fig 263 p. 187 - Piccirillo, 1989, p. 217 - Piccirillo, 1998b, pp. 255-256
Mont Nébo (Mad.)	Chapelle de la Vierge	1.		- Piccirillo, 1998b, p. 298 et fig. 74 p. 301
'Ayn al-Kanisah (Mad.)	Église de la Vierge	1./ 3.	- Éléments végétaux, pique [remplacent animaux] - animaux [restauration incomplète des anciens animaux]	- Ognibene, 1998, p. 380, figs. 1-2 p. 373, fig. 7-9 p. 377-379
Madaba	Église de la Carte	1.		- Michel, 2001, p. 311
Madaba	Cathédrale : nef	2.		- Michel, 2001, p. 308
Madaba	Cathédrale : baptistère	Non réparé (dommages non systématiques)		- Michel, 2001, p. 308
Madaba	Cathédrale : chapelle Théodore	Non réparé (dommages non systématiques)		- Michel, 2001, p. 308
Madaba	Église d'Élie	2.		- Piccirillo, 1994b, pp. 386, 388 et 391, pl. 3-5
Madaba	Église des Saints-Martyrs (des Khader)	0. (Plâtre avec incisions en arêtes de poisson)		- Piccirillo, 1989, note 4 p. 118 et photos p. 112. - Michel, 2001, p. 314
Madaba	Église des Sunna'	1. (Non systématique et réparations partielles)		- Piccirillo, 1993b, ph. 14-15 pl. 10-11, ph. 27 pl. 15.
Madaba	Église des Salayta	2.		- Van Elderen, 1972a, pl. VI A

Ma'in (Mad.)	Église de l'Acropole	3.	- nœud de Salomon, cercles entrelacés, écus de bandes polychromes cernées de fleurs [remplacent figures humaines et animales] - arbuste + amphore [remplacent un bœuf] (panneau oriental de la pièce de service nord - ou coll N?) - motif floral et boutons rose [remplacent léopard] (bordure nef)	- Piccirillo, 2002, p. 243 - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 243 - Piccirillo, 1998, p. 271, fig. 5. - Piccirillo, 1993, fig. 301 p. 198, fig. 305 pp. 200-201
Zizia (Mad.)	Église de l'évêque Jean	2./ 3.	- Trèfle	- Piccirillo, 2002, pp. 364-384 , pl. 15-33 pl. 22-31, ph. 33 pl. 30 - Piccirillo et Yaser, 2001, pl. 32 ph. 3 - Bianchi, 2021, p. 202
Nitl (Mad.)	Saint-Serge (égl. Sud) et égl. Nord	1.		- Piccirillo, 2001b, ph. 15 pl. 12 et 18 pl. 1 - Piccirillo, 2002, ph. p. 214
Machéronte (Mad.)	Église Ouest	1.		- Piccirillo, 1993, p. 246, fig. 414 - Piccirillo, 1995, p. 296 et pl. 29, ph. 5
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église de l'évêque Serge	1./ 3.	- motif géométrique et floral [remplace un oiseau] (près du presbyterium) - diamant (nef près de l'abside) - calice dans un rinceau (bordure nord de la nef) - amphore (bordure sud de la nef)	- Piccirillo, 1994, pp. 122-134 - Piccirillo, 1994, fig. 59 p. 161 - Piccirillo, 1998, p. 204, figs. 3-4 - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 243 - Piccirillo, 1994, fig. 22 p. 134
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Saint-Étienne	1./ 2./ 3.	- fleurs, diamants, arbrisseaux, feuilles, cercles [remplace frise des donateurs] (devant le presbyterium) - fleurs, diamants, arbrisseaux, feuilles, cercles, pique [remplacent chasseur] (rinceaux de la nef) - poisson noir [remplace scènes de chasse et d'amours pêcheurs] (bordure de la nef) - coupe, branche [remplacent volatiles] (coll. nord)	- Piccirillo, 1994, pp. 139-158 - Piccirillo, 1994, figs. 30-32 pp. 140-141 et 44 p. 151 - Piccirillo, 2002, p. 243 - Piccirillo, 1998, pp. 272-276, fig. 6-13 - Piccirillo, 1994, fig. 55 p. 159, 60 p. 161 - Piccirillo, 1994, fig. 58 p. 160 - Bowersock, 2006 3.9 p. 79 - Piccirillo, 1998, p. 277, fig. 15 - Piccirillo, 1994, figs. 61-62 p. 161
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église des Lions	1. remplacent les gallinacés [absides latérales] 3.	- réseau de losanges obliques [remplace donateurs] (près du presbyterium) - feuilles en forme de cœur (près de l'ambon) - rameau stylisé (nef 2^e registre) - poisson (nef, 3^e registre)	- Piccirillo, 2002, p. 243 - Piccirillo, 1992, pp. 224-225
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église des Rivières	2.		- Bujard, 1992, pp. 295-296 - Piccirillo, 1993, p. 240 et fig. 391
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église de Wa'il	1./ 2.		- Piccirillo, 1992, pp. 322-323, p. 332, figs 23, 28-29, 33-46. - Piccirillo, 2002, ph. pp. 249-250

Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Saint-Paul	1./ 2./ 3.	- réparent fleuves paradis (nef) - croix ; diamants [remplacent humain capriné] (nef devant le chancel) - médaillon circulaire [remplace taureau] (dans l'abside), [remplace buste Terre] (dans la nef)	- Piccirillo, 1997, p. 386, fig 5, p. 383, ph. 28 a-d pl. 34 - Piccirillo, 1997, p. 385, fig 5, p. 383, ph. 26 pl. 32, ph. 28b pl. 34 - Piccirillo, 1997, p. 382 et p. 385, ph. 29 pl. 34
Palestine III				
Petra	Jabal Harun, « narthex » de l'église	2.		- Hamarneh et Hinkkanen, 2008, pp. 254-258

3.1. Réductions en ville

Dans le groupe épiscopal de Gerasa/Jarash, par exemple, la cathédrale est reconstruite, mais sous une forme réduite, limitée à la nef centrale dont la longueur est raccourcie par un mur érigé à la hauteur de la cinquième travée depuis le mur de façade, qui est attribué, en fonction des chercheurs, entre la fin du VI^e - début du VII^e siècle (Brenk *et al.* 1997, 315-16 et note 13, 316) et le VIII^e siècle (Crowfoot 1938, 214) (Fig. 18). Quelques colonnes dressées devant ce mur font office de portique de façade (Crowfoot 1929b, 180 ; 1938, 214 ; Schick 1995, 316 ; Michel 2001, 240). Autour de l'église, on trouve une carrière, des boutiques, et une scierie hydraulique dont la construction a probablement débuté dès le courant du VI^e siècle dans le cryptoportique de l'ancien téménos du temple d'Artémis (Fisher 1938, 284 ; Lepaon 2015, 112-14 ; Pierrobon 1983-84, 87-109 ; 1986, 185-87 ; Seigne 2002). Ces transformations montrent qu'on est en

présence d'une église réduite destinée à une communauté qui s'était déjà modifiée (Makowski 2020, 365). La mosquée-cathédrale de la ville ne fut édifiée qu'au deuxième tiers du VIII^e siècle, et dans un espace très distant et complètement distinct du complexe épiscopal tardo-antique de Jarash. Ainsi, même si rien n'exclut qu'un autre édifice ait pu avoir été utilisé à cet usage avant la fin de l'époque omeyyade, la réduction de superficie de l'église cathédrale ne peut pas être attribuée à la pression de l'islam. À ce titre, Lorenzo, Villa et Utrero, dans ce volume, suggèrent également qu'aucune preuve ne vient confirmer l'idée de transformation d'églises en mosquées à la période du califat marwānide puis de l'émirat omeyyade d'Espagne. En outre, la construction de la (nouvelle?) grande mosquée prend place au sein d'un programme d'investissement public important, notamment de construction de boutiques autour du *cardo* et du tétrapyle sud (Walmsley 2007). Ce quartier était donc très dynamique, indépendamment des réfections de l'église.



Fig. 18. Gerasa, cathédrale présumée. L'édifice voit sa surface réduite par les murs construits dans la nef et le collatéral © M. Schlicht.

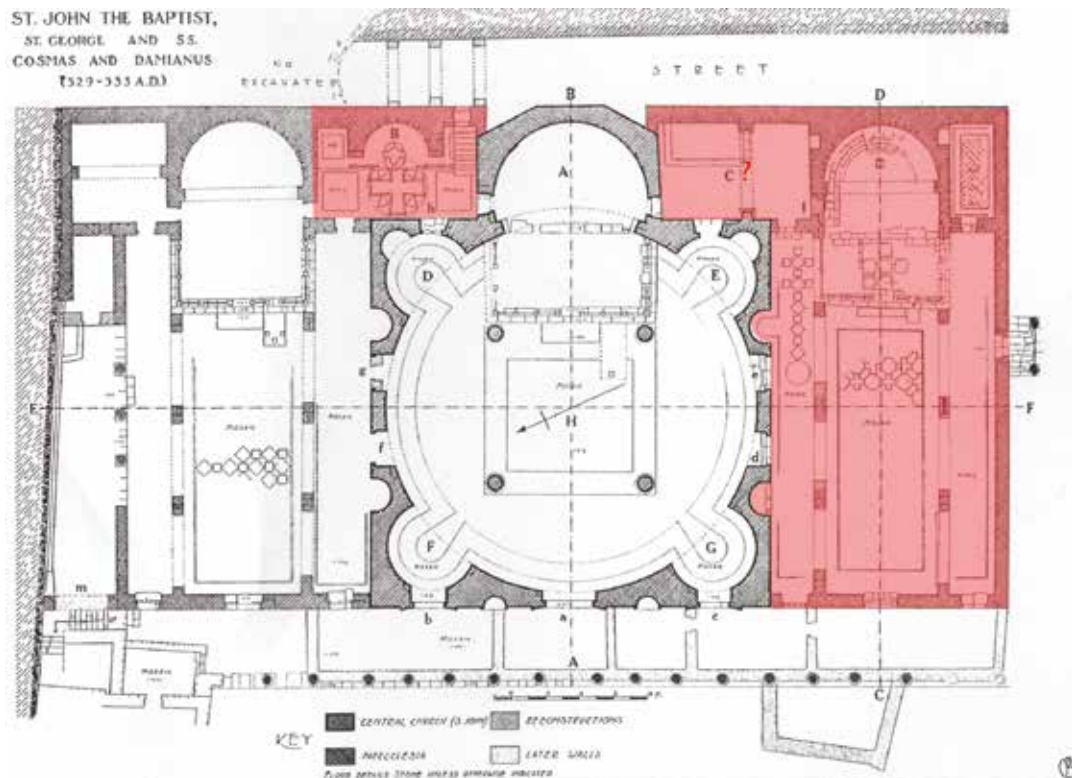


Fig. 19. Gerasa, groupe ecclésiastique de Saint-Jean-Baptiste (Plan Fisher, dans Crowfoot 1938, pl. XXXVIII). Les parties en rouge sont celles utilisées au VIII^e siècle (le reste du complexe est abandonné ou réutilisé pour d'autres fonctions).

Toujours à Gerasa, dans le groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saints-Cosme-et-Damien est abandonné antérieurement à la crise iconophobe ; le mobilier liturgique en avait été soigneusement ôté avant l'abandon (Crowfoot 1938, 248 ; Michel 2001, 251) (Fig. 19). Le baptistère est conservé, mais ne communique plus qu'avec l'église voisine, dédiée à saint Jean-Baptiste, qui est alors restaurée, puis abandonnée, à une date sans doute aussi antérieure à la crise iconophobe comme semble l'attester l'absence de mutilation de son pavement de mosaïque. C'est peut-être à la suite de son abandon qu'est ouverte la porte qui permet d'accéder au baptistère depuis la rue qui longe le complexe au sud. Le sol de l'église méridionale du complexe, dédiée à Saint-Georges, a fait l'objet de mutilations iconophobes qui ont été réparées (Fig. 14), parfois avec des éléments de mobilier liturgique. Le *synthronon* est agrandi, venant condamner depuis l'accès le chœur à la chapelle annexe nord (Fig. 7). Sans doute dès la fin du VII^e siècle²⁰, des structures à caractère domestique sont aménagées dans l'*atrium* du groupe ecclésiastique, de même que, probablement, dans la pièce au

nord du collatéral septentrional de Saints-Cosme-et-Damien, qui est qualifiée de « tardive » par le fouilleur (Crowfoot 1938, 242). Ces deux exemples et les récents travaux archéologiques menés dans la ville montrent que Gerasa était une ville encore prospère après la bataille du Yarmouk (Gawlikowski 1992 ; Lichtenberger et Raja 2018 ; 2019a) et que le paysage urbain y était encore dominé par les églises aux VII^e-VIII^e siècles (Makowski 2002, 364). La construction d'une grande mosquée à la toute fin de la première moitié du VIII^e n'est venue que très partiellement le modifier (Walmsley et Damgaard 2005).

De la même manière, à Fihl/Pella de la Décapole, les fouilles de l'église du complexe civique ont montré une occupation de l'édifice jusqu'au milieu du VIII^e siècle, marquée par une rétraction progressive de l'église. À l'accès monumental aménagé à l'ouest et à un bâtiment à étage, sans doute à usage ecclésiastique, construit contre le collatéral nord de l'église au début du VII^e siècle, succède une reconstruction plus réduite de l'église (Smith et Day 1989, 91-92 ; Michel 2001, 125 ; Walmsley 2011, 138-39)²¹. L'accès monumental est abandonné ; la porte

²⁰ Ces datations doivent être considérées avec précautions du fait de l'ancienneté des fouilles ; en l'état actuel, sans une reprise de travaux de terrain supposant relevés et datations archéométriques, on peut davantage décrire une séquence d'occupation que la caler réellement dans le temps.

²¹ Si la séquence chronologique proposée est fiable, il faut rester prudent quant à la datation de chacune des phases que les fouilleurs ont déterminée en fonction des événements politiques (invasion perse de 614, conquête musulmane de 635) et des séismes de 658-660, 717 et 749 (cf. les réserves émises à ce sujet *supra*).

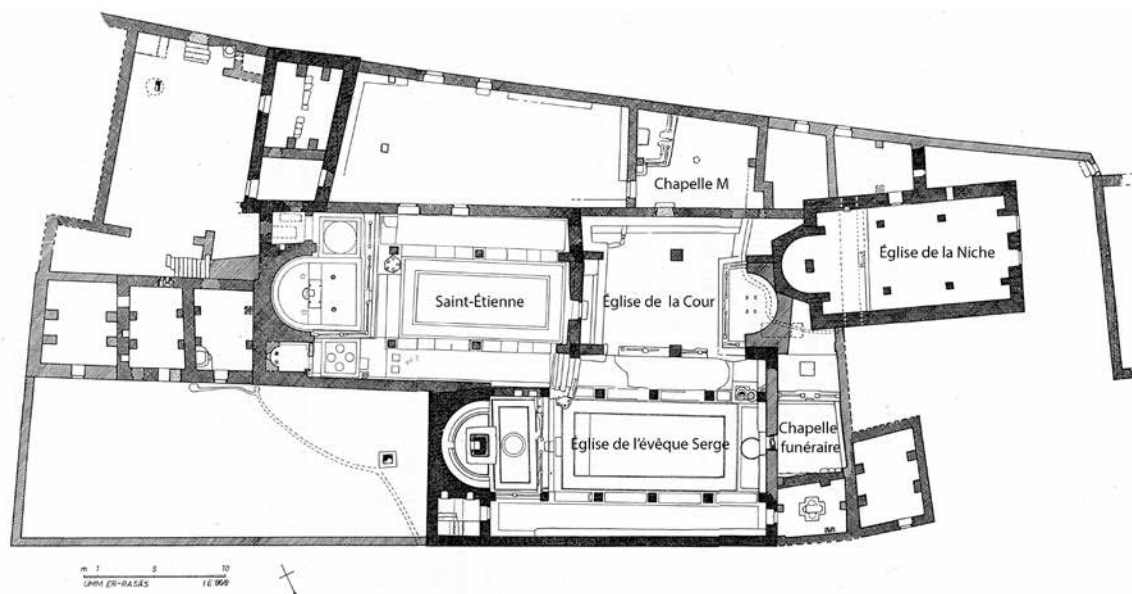


Fig. 20. Plan du complexe Saint-Etienne d'Umm al-Rasas (plan Alliata, dans Piccirillo 1991b, fig. 3, 275).

occidentale de l'atrium condamnée pour transformer la cour en enclos pour animaux ou étable, et le bâtiment septentrional est subdivisé en pièces plus petites destinées à un usage résidentiel non ecclésial. Ces remaniements, dès cette période, semblent indiquer un appauvrissement de la communauté chrétienne (Smith et Day 1989, 9 et 92-94). Le séisme en 717 aurait endommagé les toitures et les murs de l'église, qui aurait alors été sécularisée, et dépouillée de son mobilier liturgique, puis abandonnée. Une occupation domestique se serait poursuivie dans les dépendances septentrionales jusqu'au séisme de 749 (Smith et Day 1989, 94 ; Schick 1995, 425-26). Ce type d'évolution se retrouve également dans la grande basilique funéraire péri-urbaine à cinq nefs de Gadara (site d'Umm Qays). Construite sans doute à une date assez haute, dès la fin du iv^e siècle (?), elle est dotée au vi^e siècle d'un *atrium* digne de son statut d'église de pèlerinage, tandis qu'un escalier extérieur mettait en communication le collatéral sud de l'église avec la crypte sous-jacente aménagée autour d'un ancien mausolée (Weber 1998, 445-48). À l'époque omeyyade et abbasside, suite à un séisme ou à un déclin du pèlerinage, l'église est réaménagée : la construction de murs dans l'entrecolonnement limite désormais l'édifice à l'espace de la nef centrale et à l'extrémité des collatéraux. On n'y accède plus que par deux portes, à l'ouest et au nord, et le collatéral sud sert désormais de cour (Weber 1998, 449). Cette évolution générale, et le rôle d'accélérateur du séisme de 749, ne sont pas propres aux établissements chrétiens. En effet,

certains investissements publics omeyyades à peine achevés, comme le marché de Scythopolis-Baysân en Palestine voisine, sont également abandonnés au même moment (Walmsley 2007).

3.2. Milieu rural et monastique

Ce processus de rétraction progressive se constate aussi en milieu villageois, quoique de façon moins nette. Dans le complexe Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas, les traces d'occupation renvoyant aux vii^e-viii^e siècles sont nombreuses (Michel 2011, 381-97) (Fig. 20). Une partie est incontestablement de nature religieuse : autel maçonné dans l'église de la Niche (Michel 2001, 384), baptistère et chapelle funéraire devant la façade de l'église de l'évêque Serge, mutilation et réparations de la mosaïque de cette dernière et de Saint-Etienne, aménagement de la chapelle martyriale au nord de l'abside de celle-ci (Fig. 10) (Michel 2001, 393), aménagement de la petite chapelle M dans une petite salle au sud de l'église de la Cour probablement après la crise iconophobe (Michel 2001, 396)²². Mais il est possible que certaines parties du complexe n'aient alors déjà plus été utilisées à des fins religieuses : la céramique omeyyade et abbasside ancienne des couches d'abandon semble indiquer que l'église de la Cour est abandonnée à la fin du viii^e siècle. Il en va de même du baptistère : un four associé à un muret érigé 40 cm au-dessus du pavement renfermait de la céramique

²² Des fragments de mobilier liturgique dont certains comportaient des motifs figuratifs abrasés ont été découverts sous le dallage de la petite chapelle (Acconci 1994, n° 1, 3, 6-9, 290-93).

abbasside (Michel 2001, 388). La chapelle M semble être utilisée à des fins religieuses au moins jusqu'au IX^e siècle, date d'une monnaie retrouvée dans les remblais d'abandon, époque où elle fut peut-être transformée en étable (Michel 2001, 397).

Cette tendance à la réduction progressive des édifices qui suggère une rétraction des communautés chrétiennes, ou du moins de leurs moyens, ne se limite pas au milieu urbain ou villageois. Elle touche aussi les communautés monastiques, dont les sources littéraires attestent pourtant la longévité. Si les données archéologiques le confirment, elles donnent cependant une image plus nuancée des conditions matérielles d'existence de ces communautés. En témoignent par exemple les vestiges des implantations monastiques de Dayr al-Qattar al-Bizanti sur la péninsule du Lisan. Des ermitages disséminés dans un wadi y sont associés à une chapelle et une église construite au VI^e siècle (Holmgren et Kaliff 2016). Aux VII^e-VIII^e siècles, le pavement de mosaïque de l'église semble avoir été réparé à la suite de mutilations iconophobes. Après la destruction de la majeure

partie des installations monastiques, peut-être consécutives au séisme de 749, la chapelle au moins aurait été reconstruite, attestant encore une présence chrétienne au milieu du VIII^e siècle (Holmgren et Kaliff 1997, 324). Lors de cette phase, le sol de la chapelle est couvert d'une épaisse couche de plâtre, alors qu'une niche est aménagée dans son mur sud (Holmgren et Kaliff 1997, 324). La façade occidentale de l'église, située à l'est de la chapelle à laquelle elle est reliée par un couloir dallé, est étayée par des sortes de contreforts, peut-être érigés dans la seconde moitié du VIII^e siècle à en juger par les monnaies datées entre 757 ou 807 qui ont été découvertes dans le remblai contre la façade de l'église (Holmgren et Kaliff 1997, 331-32).

Un phénomène analogue a été bien mis en évidence dans le petit monastère d'Aaron à Pétra (Fig. 21). L'ensemble monastique, sans doute érigé dans la seconde moitié du V^e siècle ou au début du VI^e siècle, se composait d'une église à trois nefs, contre le mur nord de laquelle s'adossait une chapelle (phases VI-VII = phase 2 de l'église). Ces deux édifices constituaient le cœur d'un

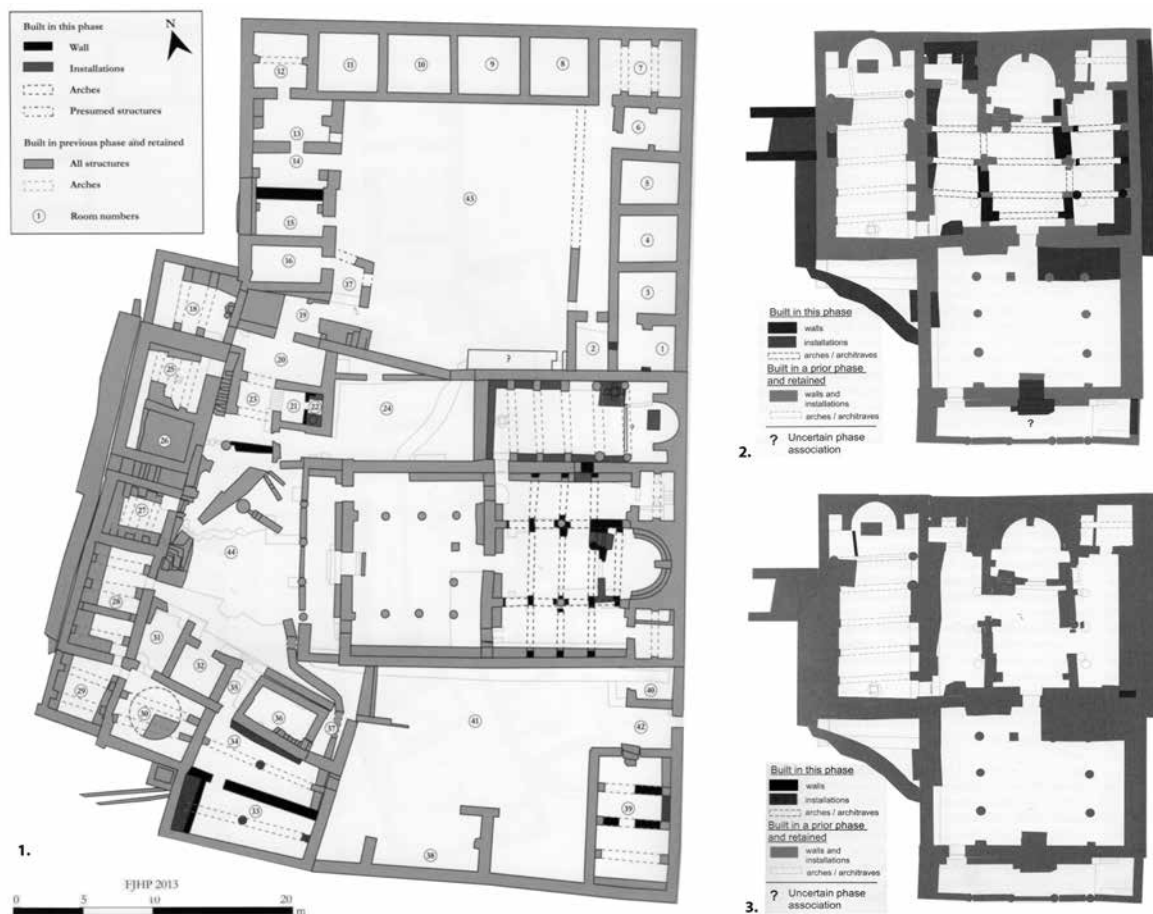


Fig. 21. Jabal Harun, monastère d'Aaron. Plan des différents états de l'église et de la chapelle de la seconde moitié du VII^e siècle aux IX^e-X^e siècles. 1. État dans la seconde moitié du VII^e s. (d'après Fiema et Frösen 2016, 596). 2. État vers le milieu du VIII^e s. (d'après Fiema et Frösen 2008, fig. 81, 148). 3. État aux IX^e-X^e s. (d'après Fiema et Frösen 2008, fig. 107, 160).

complexe qui se développait autour de trois cours situées au sud, à l'ouest et au nord. La cour sud servait d'entrée au complexe, celle du nord est considérée comme une hôtellerie pour pèlerins par les fouilleurs (Juntunen 2016, 74-107 ; Whitting 2016, 108-13)²³ au moins dans la phase suivant la construction. Celle de l'ouest correspondrait au secteur domestique occupé par les moines. Le complexe a connu une longue occupation marquée par de multiples remaniements dès le milieu du VI^e siècle. La longueur de l'église avait alors déjà été raccourcie de moitié et l'espace auparavant occupé par les quatre travées occidentales réaménagé en un *atrium* précédé par une sorte de vestibule (phase IX = phases 4-5 de l'église) (Fig. 22.1). Il en a été de même de la chapelle qui fut dotée d'une couverture reposant sur des arcades transversales. Le sol de l'*atrium* devait être surélevé peu après, en même temps qu'une mosaïque était posée dans le vestibule (phase 5) (Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 133-35). La dépose du dallage de certaines pièces de la cour nord pour en réparer d'autres semble indiquer une diversification de leur usage à des fins d'habitat et d'artisanat, dont atteste l'abondance du mobilier recueilli. Ces réfections vont de pair avec une forme d'appauvrissement dès cette époque, car de nombreux blocs de remplois sont utilisés pour ces aménagements. Dans la première moitié du VII^e siècle, l'église et la chapelle connurent des remaniements substantiels de leurs aménagements liturgiques (phase XI = phase 7) consécutifs à de nouveaux dommages (phase X = phase 6), qui semblent avoir moins affecté le reste du complexe, se limitant aux toitures et à des chutes d'enduits. De nouvelles destructions attribuées au séisme de 749 précipitèrent l'abandon progressif du complexe²⁴. Après cet événement, l'église ne semble plus être utilisée qu'à des fins domestiques, tandis que les fonctions religieuses se limitent désormais à la chapelle (Fig. 22.2). Dans le reste du complexe, à partir du milieu du VIII^e siècle, les cours septentrionale et méridionale semblent largement abandonnées, ne présentant que des traces d'occupation sporadiques, tandis que des indices d'une occupation plus pérenne, liée selon les fouilleurs à une activité monastique, sont attestés dans les salles ouest de la cour occidentale (Lahelma *et al.* 2016, 53-58). Très rapidement, peut-être à la suite d'une réplique d'un séisme, cette occupation s'interrompt et l'activité se limite aux IX^e-X^e siècles à la récupération de matériaux dans l'église

(Fig. 22.3), parallèlement à un processus de dégradation progressif qui s'accroît au fil du temps, tandis que la fonction religieuse se transfère sans doute à partir du XIV^e siècle vers le mausolée islamique construit sur le sommet de la montagne.

Ainsi, les embellissements et réparations en nombre relativement élevé des églises au cours du VIII^e siècle ne doivent-ils pas masquer le processus d'abandon qui se dessine progressivement à partir de la seconde moitié du VII^e siècle. Concomitant avec le phénomène de réduction qui apparaît dans certains édifices, cette diminution du nombre de lieux de culte chrétiens s'accroît rapidement à partir du quart du VIII^e siècle. Les édifices embellis restent bien moins nombreux que les églises témoignant d'une réduction progressive de leur surface, phénomène le plus souvent mis en valeur par les fouilles récentes, plus attentives à la stratigraphie et à la chronologie sur ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui le « temps long »²⁵. Les bâtiments réparés le sont au mieux à l'identique, voire le plus souvent, dans le courant du VIII^e siècle et à l'époque abbasside, sous une forme plus réduite (Nébo, Jabal Harun, Pella église du Complexe Civique, Gerasa groupe épiscopal présumé et groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste, église funéraire à cinq nefs de Gadara, installations monastiques de Dayr al-Qattar al-Byzanti, complexe Saint-Serge de Nitl) (Tabl. 6) (Bianchi 2021, 206). Le phénomène se constate aussi bien en milieu urbain (Jerash, Pella, Gadara), que villageois (Umm al-Rasas) ou monastique (sanctuaire d'Aaron à Petra, Dayr al-Qattar al-Byzanti). On notera toutefois que ces dernières églises semblent utilisées plus longtemps. De façon somme toute assez logique, le processus apparaît en particulier dans les groupes complexes, certaines parties étant réparées et d'autres non réutilisées après des dommages dus à des causes variées (séismes, usure...). Ainsi, l'abandon se fait dans la plupart des cas progressivement, sans désertion brutale de l'édifice. Il est difficile de l'attribuer à une causalité unique : diminution de la taille et des ressources des communautés en général et de leur capacité à réparer, ou de leurs besoins (Makowski 2020, 324 ; Avni 2011, 328-29), impact spécifique sur les communautés chrétiennes de la mise en place de la nouvelle administration omeyyade puis abbasside, notamment à partir du règne de 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705), conversions... Il faudrait aussi mettre en parallèle

²³ L'identification se fonde sur des comparaisons avec les autres hôtelleries du Proche-Orient protobyzantin, l'accès à l'édifice, indépendant du reste des autres bâtiments, l'aspect stéréotypé des pièces qui bordent la cour, et l'absence de pièces à caractère domestique pouvant être associée à une cuisine.

²⁴ Les fouilleurs l'associent à celui du 18 janvier 749, bien qu'ils reconnaissent que ce séisme, attesté dans les régions syro-palestiniennes, ne l'est pas historiquement à Pétra (Lahelma *et al.* 2016, 53).

²⁵ Une étude attentive systématique des rapports de fouille et une attention accrue portée aux dernières phases d'occupation pour les fouilles actuelles montrerait sans doute que ce phénomène a été plus fréquent qu'il ne le semble.



Fig. 22. Carte des édifices réutilisés à des fins non religieuses à l'époque islamique.

cette autre image qui se dessine à partir du début du VIII^e siècle concernant la manière d'occuper les centres urbains et le territoire : en effet, les fouilles récentes y révèlent de plus en plus souvent les traces d'une activité constructive ou artisanale, en même temps que se développent dans la steppe de grands établissements ruraux islamiques (Genequand 2012). Les églises n'apparaissent plus dorénavant comme le meilleur marqueur quant à l'occupation du territoire ; elles ne donnent d'indications que sur le devenir des communautés chrétiennes.

4. ISLAMISATION ET RÉOCCUPATIONS

Par ailleurs, si ces abandons d'églises se font plus nombreux au cours des VIII^e et IX^e siècles, la datation de leur désaffectation pour le culte chrétien reste difficile à préciser. En effet, la fin de l'utilisation religieuse d'une église n'est pas toujours synonyme de son abandon définitif. Il faut alors distinguer ce qui relève de sa réutilisation pour une autre fonction. Certaines ont pu être laissées à l'abandon ou utilisées comme carrière de pierre,

Tabl. 6. Réduction progressive de la surface des édifices de culte chrétiens

Site	Édifice	Date	Nature réduction	Réf. bibliographiques
Palestine II				
Pella	Église Est	- Début ép. omeyyade jusque milieu ix ^e s. [datations peu fiables]	- Nature ? église ? - Occupation. Nature ? - Citerne dans l' <i>atrium</i>	- Smith, 1973, pp. 164-165 - Schick, 1995, pp. 426-427 - Michel, 2001, pp. 124-125
Pella	Église Ouest	- Ép. omeyyade - Séisme 717 ? - 748	- Église réduite - Reconstruction : autre usage ? Puis occupation domestique - Abandon suite séisme ?	- Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1992, pp. 162-163 - Schick, 1995, pp. 424-425 - Michel, 2001, p. 121
Pella	Église du Complexe civique	- vii ^e s. - 658-660 (séismes) - 717 (séisme) - 749 (séisme)	- Bâtiment commercial (?) empiétant sur le portique de la cour au nord de l'église - Reconstruction réduite église et réaménagements domestiques (phase 4) - Abandon, carrière, activités sporadiques - 7 chameaux tués dans l' <i>atrium</i> - Abandon, déplacement de la population vers la vallée	- Smith et Day, 1989, pp. 92-94 - Schick, 1995, pp. 425-426 - Michel, 2001, p. 125 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 380
Gadara	Basilique funéraire à cinq nefs	- 2 ^e moitié du iv ^e s. - vi ^e s. - Ép. omeyyade et abbasside	- Construction - Centre de pèlerinage - Dommages séisme (ou juste déclin du pèlerinage qui fait qu'on ne reconstruit pas à l'identique ?) > Reconstruction partielle	- Weber et Hübner, 1998, p. 449 fig. 2a-b - al-Daire, 2001, p. 560 - Makowski, 2020, p. 366 (cite al-Daire, 2001)
Arabie				
Khirbet es-Samra (Bos.)	Saint-Jean-Baptiste (égl. 95)		- Pièce aménagée dans le collatéral nord de l'église	- Humbert, 1982, p. 500, pl. 122 - Humbert et Desreumaux, 1990, p. 261 - Piccirillo, 1984, p. 338 - Michel, 2001, p. 199, figs. 166-167 p. 198
Gerasa	Groupe épiscopal : Saint-Théodore	- 633	- Destruction séisme ; 746 ? - Carrière de pierre - Habitat dans l' <i>atrium</i> , étables	- Crowfoot, 1938, pp. 223-224 - Crowfoot, 1929a, p. 19 - Crowfoot, 1929a, p. 25
Gerasa	Groupe épiscopal : Cathédrale	- Début vii ^e - I ^{re} moitié viii ^e s.	- Dommages - Nef raccourcie de cinq travées > nef unique	- Crowfoot, 1929b, p. 180 - Crowfoot, 1938, p. 214 - Schick, 1995, p. 316 - Michel, 2001, p. 240
Gerasa	Groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste : Saints-Cosme-et-Damien	- Av. iconoclisme et apr. un séisme	- Abandon - « Bain » dans l'exèdre	- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 248 - Michel, 2001, p. 251
Gerasa	Groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste : Saint-Jean-Baptiste	- Iconoclisme - Fin vii ^e s. ? - Milieu viii ^e s. ?	- Quelques dommages non réparés > affectation à un autre usage (inconnu) - Maintien baptistère + adjonction porte sur la rue - Structures domestiques dans l' <i>atrium</i> de l'église - Séisme	- Michel, 2001, p. 251 - Crowfoot, 1938, p. 242 - Crowfoot, 1938, p. 248
Gerasa	Groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste : Saint-Georges	- viii ^e s. (iconoclisme réparé grossièrement + céramique et monnaies)	- <i>Synthronon</i> agrandi	- Crowfoot, 1938, pp. 247-248 - Schick, 1995, p. 317 - Michel, 2001, p. 251 - Reynolds, 2017, p. 71 - Gatier, 1985, p. 305 - Brenk, 2003, p. 19
Gerasa	Église de la Synagogue	- viii ^e s.	- Utilisation progressivement réduite ? - Iconoclisme réparé (tesselles en désordre)	- Crowfoot, 1929c, p. 215 - Crowfoot, 1938, pp. 240-241 - Michel, 2001, p. 255
Quwaysmah (Phil.)	Église haute (Saint-Cyriaque)	- Ép. omeyyade	- Mur de partition de l'église	- Piccirillo, 1984, pp. 335 et 339-340
Massuh (Esb.)	Église Nord	- Fin vii ^e s. ?	- Arcades transversales (au lieu longitudinales) + changement largeur nef centrale + restauration mosaïque (tesselles blanches)	- Piccirillo, 2000, pp. 496 et 498

Madaba	Église des Apôtres		- Collatéral sud isolé du reste de l'église et dépourvu d'iconoclasme	- Lux, 1968, p. 108, pl. 14a-b - Michel, 2001, p. 328
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Saint-Étienne	- Mosaïque 756 - IX ^e s.	- bouchage de portes - réduction progressive à la chapelle M	- Piccirillo, 1994, pp. 108-110 - Michel, 2001, pp. 381-397
Palestine III				
Dayr al Qattar al Byzanti (péninsule du Lisan)	Chapelle byzantine	- VI ^e s. ? - VII ^e -VIII ^e s. - 749 (séisme) - Ép. islamique : 757 ou 807 (monnaies remblai contre façade église)	- Construction : église + chapelle + ermitages dans le wadi - 2e phase : iconoclasme ? - Destruction majeure partie monastère ; reconstruction plus modeste chapelle (encore sanctuaire chrétien au début de l'Islam) - Grosse couche de plâtre sur le sol de la chapelle + niche dans le mur sud de la nef - « Contreforts » contre la façade ouest de l'église - Dernière phase : construction de pièces à un niveau plus élevé, avec de nombreux vestiges en bois	- Holmgren et Kaliff, 2016, pp. 4-5 - Holmgren et Kaliff, 1997, p. 324 - Holmgren et Kaliff 1997, p. 332
Pétra	Monastère d'Aaron	- 749 (séisme) - IX ^e s. - Jusqu'au XIII ^e s.	- Abandon église ; chapelle conservée pour le culte - Chapelle : plus de fonction religieuse, mais traces d'activité monastique sur le site - Fréquentation	- Mikkola <i>et al.</i> , 2008, p. 148 - Mikkola <i>et al.</i> , 2008, pp.148, 159-164 - Mikkola <i>et al.</i> , 2008, pp. 148, 164-170 - Fiema, 2016, pp. 506-567 - Bianchi, 2021, p. 206

même si la simple étude des rapports de fouille n'en permet que rarement l'identification. Les placages muraux en pierre et le mobilier liturgique, par exemple, n'ont pas toujours été retrouvés *in situ* (Schick 1995, 132). La dépose soigneuse de mosaïques, à l'époque omeyyade, dans les églises de Numérianos et de Julianos à Umm al-Jimal, ainsi peut-être que dans les églises de Nitl, de l'évêque Serge et à Saint-Étienne d'Umm al-Rasas, peut indiquer le emploi des tesselles (Schick 1995, 132). À en juger par le soin avec lequel se sont effectuées ces spoliations, il est vraisemblable que cette récupération des matériaux, lorsqu'on peut l'établir, se soit faite de manière encadrée et structurée plutôt que sous forme de récupération désordonnée sur des ruines. La situation a dû en outre être extrêmement variable en fonction de l'implantation urbaine ou rurale, mais aussi de la présence ou non de traces d'occupation humaine structurées à proximité²⁶.

Toutefois, même si certaines églises désaffectées ont pu servir de carrière de pierre, ce n'est probablement pas le destin majoritaire de ces bâtiments. En effet, la fin de l'utilisation d'une église pour le culte chrétien ne marque pas nécessairement l'abandon systématique de l'édifice lui-même, ni celui du site. Il n'est pas non plus obligatoirement synonyme de baisse démographique, la diminution

ou la disparition d'une communauté chrétienne n'impliquant pas celle de la communauté humaine. Le devenir des églises doit donc être envisagé dans le contexte plus large de celui du site dans lequel il est implanté. Il convient de distinguer la fin de l'utilisation comme église, l'aménagement ou la réaffectation du bâtiment à d'autres usages de son abandon définitif. L'examen attentif des rapports de fouilles montre que ces réaffectations ont en fait été assez fréquentes, même si leur datation et leur nature restent difficiles à déterminer, souvent du fait de l'état très dégradé des vestiges qui en sont conservés, de l'absence d'attention qui leur a été portée (*cf.* déjà Schick 1995, 129) ou de leur mauvaise publication. L'étude des rapports de fouilles révèle au moins 55 occurrences de réutilisation profane d'églises après leur abandon pour le culte chrétien, soit un quart de l'ensemble du corpus). Cette réoccupation n'est le plus souvent attestée que par des dépôts de céramique qui ne renseignent ni sur la nature de l'occupation (domestique ou artisanale ?), ni sur les occupants (chrétiens ou musulmans ?). Cependant, elle est parfois marquée par des murs secondaires maladroïtement construits, sans lien avec l'usage liturgique de l'église, soit directement sur le sol de mosaïque de l'église, soit sur un niveau de remblai, par la condamnation de

²⁶ Les études qui ont pu être menées sur la façon dont ont été traités les monuments religieux païens à la fin de l'Antiquité montrent que leur démontage s'est souvent effectué de façon structurée et soignée, par lots (March 2004 ; Seigne 2014). On peut se demander s'il en est de même pour les édifices chrétiens, que ce remploi soit le fait des communautés chrétiennes elles-mêmes ou des nouvelles autorités musulmanes.

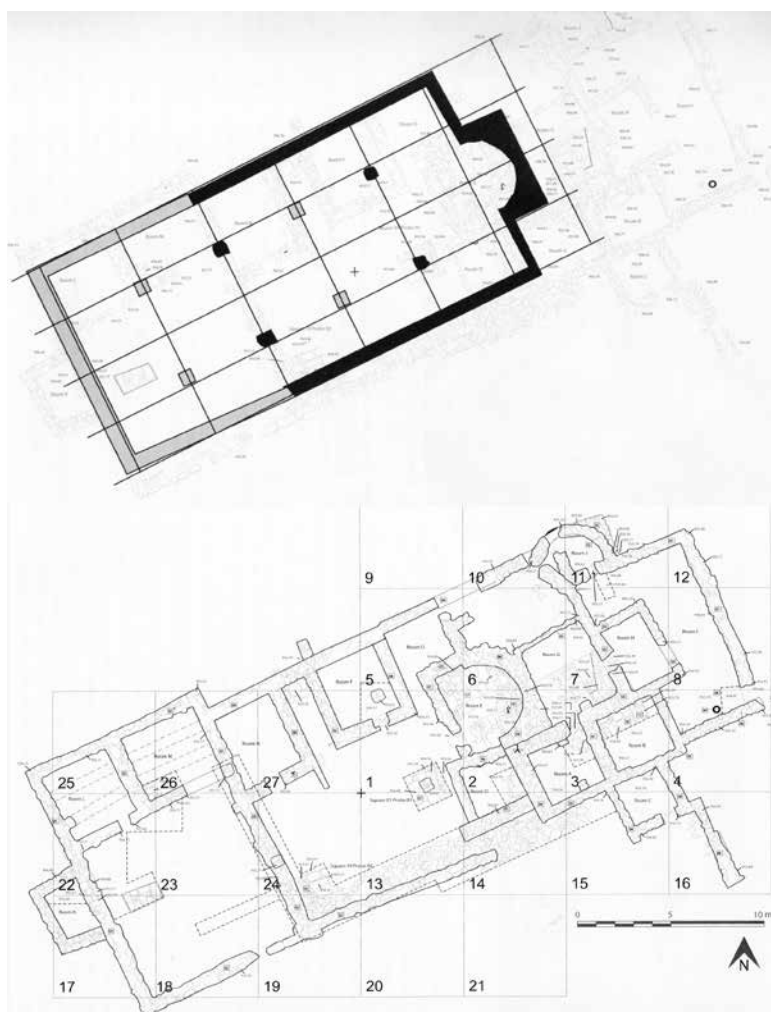


Fig. 23. Auara, église B100. Restitution du plan de l'église et relevé des structures domestiques ultérieures érigées à son emplacement d'après Oleson et Schick 2013, figs. 6-3 et 6-4, 164-65).

portes et de fenêtres, par des fours et dépôts cendreaux qui viennent attester d'une occupation prolongée après l'usage religieux chrétien de l'édifice (Schick 1995, 130-31 ; Reynolds 2015, 367-68). La nature de l'occupation semble alors le plus souvent domestique (Tabl. 7). Elle est identifiée par des murs venant partitionner l'espace et former des pièces de dimensions restreintes, le plus souvent dans la nef (Khilda, églises du *Castrum* d'Umm al-Rasas, église B100 d'Auara (Fig. 23), église funéraire à cinq nefs de Gadara, église d'al-Badiya (Fig. 24), ou dans un collatéral de l'église (Saint-Paul, église des Lions et église de la Tabula Ansata à Umm al-Rasas (Fig. 25), Saint-Georges de Rihab, pièce au nord du collatéral nord de Saints-Cosme-et-Damien de Gerasa), parfois dans une des salles annexes du chevet (église nord de Massuh, abside sud de Saint-Varus de Khilda, église de la citadelle d'Amman, église d'Isaïe à Gerasa, église Basse C 101 d'Auara), voire l'abside elle-même (Khirbat ad-Dariḥ). Des constructions domestiques peuvent venir s'appuyer contre un des murs extérieurs de l'édifice (contre le mur nord à Umm al-Surab, à l'est de l'abside dans la basilique A d'Abila, contre le mur sud dans l'église du

diacre Thomas à Ayoun Mousa, sur et tout autour de l'église à Girmil - Houd dans le diocèse de Gerasa), sans qu'on puisse déterminer si l'église était alors abandonnée pour le culte chrétien, sauf lorsque ces bâtiments viennent en condamner l'accès. Le portique oriental des *atria* constituait fréquemment aussi un lieu privilégié pour l'aménagement d'espaces domestiques (église nord de Massuh, Saint-Varus de Khilda, Yajuz, Saints-Pierre-et-Paul, groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste et Saint-Théodore de Gerasa). La nature domestique de la réoccupation est attestée par la présence de foyers (église à cinq nefs de Gadara, complexe Saint-Serge de Nitl, Sainte-Marie de Pétra, église 29 de Khirbat as-Samra, église de la Tabula Ansata et Saint-Paul d'Umm al-Rasas). Une activité de stockage (Sainte-Marie de Pétra), artisanale ou pastorale est aussi parfois évoquée (étables dans l'*atrium* de Saint-Théodore de Gerasa, l'église de l'higoumène-église 82 de Khirbat as-Samra, boutiques de maçon et de forgeron respectivement au nord et au sud des propylées d'accès au complexe épiscopal présumé de Gerasa). Enfin un usage funéraire de ces secteurs apparaît parfois, comme à Saint-Georges de Rihab, où des sépultures sont venues

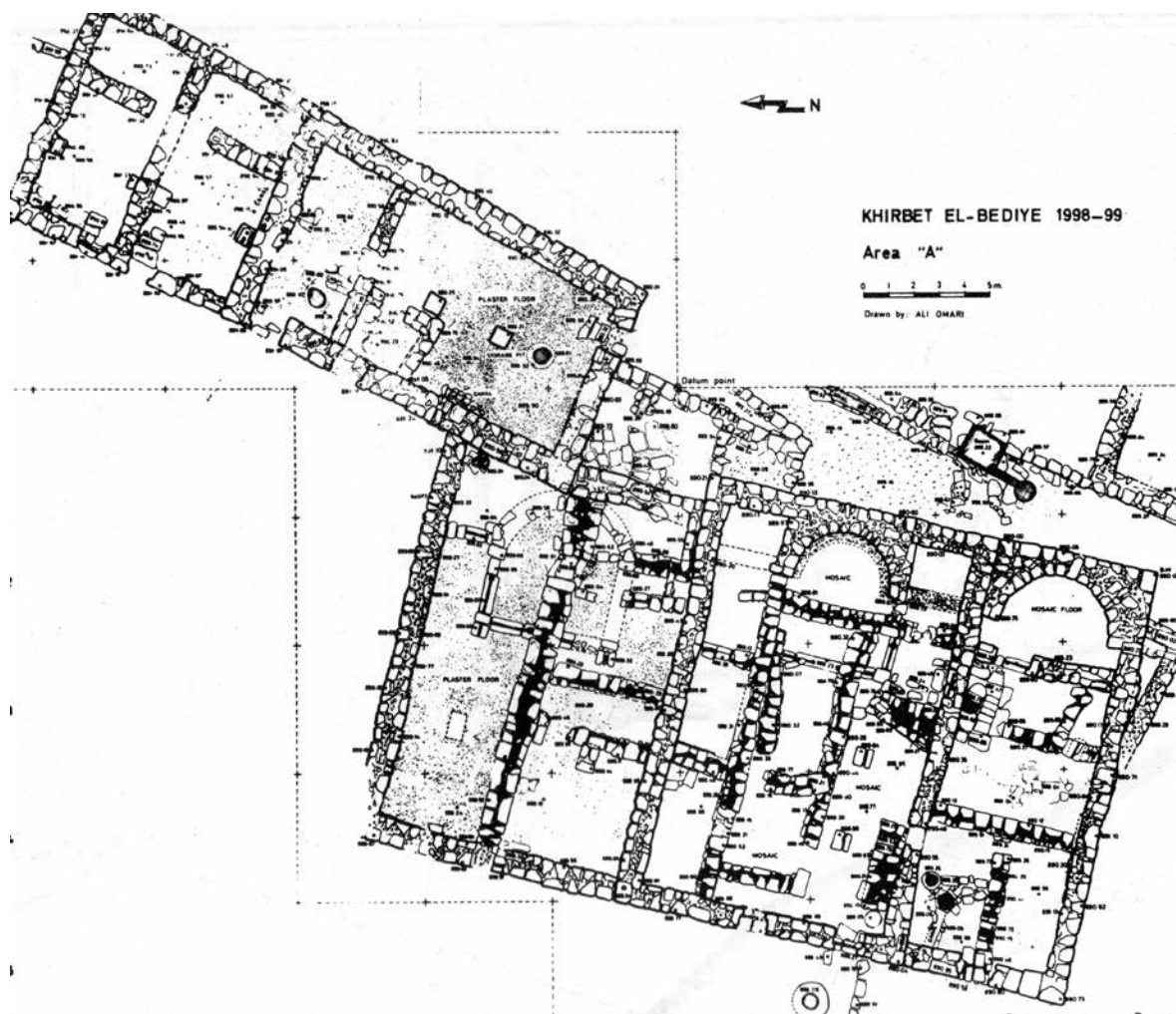


Fig. 24. El-Bediyeh. Plan des églises et des structures domestiques ultérieures (d'après Hatamlah 2000, 22).



Fig. 25. Umm al-Rasas, église de la Tabula Ansata. Pièce à usage domestique aménagée dans la moitié ouest du collatéral sud de l'église. © M. Schlicht.

Tab. 7. Réoccupation profane des églises

Site	Édifice	Date	Nature occupation	Réf. bibliographiques
Palestine II				
Gadara	Basilique funéraire à cinq nefs	- Ép. islamique	- Murs dans les entrecolonnements de la nef centrale - Domestique : deux pièces dans la partie occidentale de la nef centrale - Four dans l'angle sud-est de l'église	- Weber et Hübner, 1998, pp. 445 et 449
Qam	Chapelle 17.1	- Début ép. abbasside	- Domestique + porte entrée église bloquée	- Tarawneh, 1990, p. 12 - Schick, 1995, p. 432 - Michel, 2001, p. 132
Pella	Église du Complexe Civique	- XII ^e s. - XIII ^e s. (ép. abbasside et mamlouke)	- Abris temporaires dans les absides	- Smith et Day, 1989, p. 94
Abila	Église à trois absides A	- Ép. omeyyade	- Vestiges dans le collatéral sud - Construction à l'est de l'abside - Tessons omeyyades dans la réfection du plâtre des absides	- Schick, 1995, p. 239 - Michel, 2001, p. 114
Arabie				
Umm al-Jimal (Bos.)	Église de Numérianos	- Ép. « omeyyade »	- Nature inconnue : édifice public ?	- Schick, 1995, pp. 470-471 - Michel, 2001, p. 181
Umm al-Surab (Bos.)	Église Nord	- Islamique ?	- Bâtiments domestiques adossés à l'abside ?	- King, 1988, pp. 48-51 - Michel, 2001, p. 189
Ya'amun (Ger. ? Bos. ? Adr. ?)	Église	- Omeyyade	- Domestique - Céramique - Réparation mosaïque - Portes entrée condamnées	- Najjar <i>et al.</i> , 2001a, p. 414 - Najjar <i>et al.</i> , 2001b, p. 6
Yasilah (Ger. ? Bos. ? Adr. ?)	Église B	- VII ^e s. - Ép. omeyyade - Ép. islamique	- Abandon - Fonction inconnue - Cimetière - Réoccupation fonction administrative	- al-Muheisen, 1991, p. 6 (sans argument)
Rihab (Bos.)	Saint-Georges	- Inconnue (post. à la mosaïque de la 1 ^{re} moitié du VI ^e s.)	- Murs tardifs angle sud-ouest - Sépultures	- al Hussan, 2001, fig. 25 p. 86 et fig. 26 p. 87
Rihab (Bos.)	Sainte-Marie	- Restaurée en 583	- Murs dans les deux premiers entrecolonnements	- Piccirillo, 1981, pp. 82-83, pl. 72 - Piccirillo, 1984, p. 338
Khirbet es-Samra (Bos.)	Église de l'higoumène (égl. 82)	- VIII ^e s. (sans précisions)	- Artisanale (atelier)	- Humbert et Desreumaux, 1990, p. 262
Khirbet es-Samra (Bos.)	Église de la Forteresse (égl. 29)	- Ayyoubide (XII ^e -XIII ^e s.)	- Artisanale (atelier) - Réoccupation domestique : foyer + céramique	- Hmbert, 1986, p. 360 - Humbert et Desreumaux, 1990, p. 260 - Schick, 1995, p. 378 - Michel, 2001, p. 195
Khirbet es-Samra (Bos.)	Saint-Jean-Baptiste (égl. 95)	- Ép. omeyyade	- Murs isolant la nef du collatéral nord (occupation domestique ou liturgique ?)	- Humbert, 1982, p. 500
Khirbet es-Samra (Bos.)	Saint-Pierre (égl. 78)	- Inconnue	- Atelier	- Humbert, 1985, p. 433
Gerasa	Église de l'évêque Isaïe	- Ép. omeyyade - Ép. mamlouke (XV ^e s.)	- Bouchage portes sauf deux - Réparations en cours (stockage tuiles, aire de travail du mortier sur le sol) - Abandon - Aménagement pièce dans l'abside nord + céramique mamlouke (contemporain réoccupation théâtre nord)	- Clark, 1986, p. 313 - Clark, 1986, p. 315
Gerasa	Église Synagogue	- Occupation omeyyade	- Banc contre le mur nord de l'église + escalier à l'ouest - Occupation domestique dans l'atrium - Murs secondaires dans l'église	- Crowfoot, 1929c, p. 215 - Crowfoot, 1938, pp. 172-173, 241 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 381

CONSTRUIRE, EMBELLIR, RÉNOVER, REMPLOYER. QUEL DEVENIR POUR LES ÉDIFICES DE CULTE CHRÉTIENS DE JORDANIE...

Gerasa	Saints-Pierre-et-Paul	- VIII ^e s.	- Condamnation portique occidental - Murs dans le portique oriental de l'atrium	- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 254 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 381
Gerasa	Église des Propylées	- Milieu VII ^e s.- milieu VIII ^e s.	- Réoccupation domestique omeyyade + artisanat + foyers	- Brizzi <i>et al.</i> , 2010, pp. 357-359
Gerasa	Groupe de Saint-Jean-Baptiste	- Inconnue	- Occupation domestique Saints-Cosme-et-Damien + l'atrium [Saint-Georges toujours utilisée]	- Crowfoot, 1938, pp. 242, 244, 248-249 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 381
Gerasa	Groupe épiscopal - boutique nord Propylées - boutique sud Propylées	- Inconnue	- Artisanale : forgeron - Artisanale : maçon	- Crowfoot, 1938, p. 204 - Michel, 2001, p. 240
Gerasa	Groupe épiscopal - Saint-Théodore	- Inconnue	- Habitat et étables dans l'atrium	- Fisher, 1938, p. 284 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 380
Gerasa	Groupe épiscopal : Bains Placcus	- Omeyyade (monnaies « arabes »)	- Nature ?	- Fisher, 1938, p. 269 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 381 - Lepaon, 2015, pp. 112-114
Gerasa	Groupe épiscopal : « Clergy House »	- Omeyyade (monnaies « arabes »)	- Nature ?	- Fisher, 1938, pp. 274-275 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 381
Girmil (Houd) (Ger.)	Chapelle	- « Omeyyade »	- Habitat sur et autour de l'église	- Nassar <i>et al.</i> , 2020, p. 411
al-Bediyeh (Ger. ?)	Église et chapelle Sud	- Post-omeyyade (abbasside) - Ép. ayyoubide et mamlouke	- Murs tardifs + sol dallé dans les nefs sur les mosaïques géométriques datées de 640 - Céramique - Portes église bouchées - Ouverture d'une nouvelle porte large de 90 cm - Pièces habitat 2,50 m x 3,20 m - Zone artisanale potiers ou métallurgistes	- al-Muheisen, 2002, pp. 75 et 85 - al-Muheisen, 2006, pp. 87-88 - Hatamlah, 2000, fig 2 p. 22 (plan) - al-Muheisen, 2002, p. 81 - al-Muheisen, 2002, p. 82 - al-Muheisen, 2002, p. 88
Yajuz (Phil.)	Église	- Inconnue	- Murs dans les portiques de l'atrium	- Michel, 2001, p. 288
Philadelphie	Saint-Georges	- IX ^e s.	- Nature inconnue	- Michel, 2001, p. 282
Philadelphie	Église de la Citadelle	- Ép. omeyyade	- Occupation domestique (salle sud-est) - Céramique - Citernes et canalisation le long mur sud	- Zayadine, 1977-1978, pp. 35-37, pl. 17-22 - Bagatti, 1973, pp. 277-283 - Michel, 2001, p. 279
Khilda (Phil.)	Saint-Varus	- Ép. mamlouke	- Domestique - Double mur nord - Mur est-ouest entre les piliers (remblai 5-10 cm sur le sol mosaïque à la base du mur) + mur nord-sud (mur soutènement remblai) - Murs de partition directement sur la mosaïque et doublant le mur nord de l'église - Pièces dans l'abside sud, nef sud et atrium. - Dommages aux mosaïques	- Najjar et Sa'id, 1994, pp. 549-550 - Michel, 2001, 106, p. 286
Suwafiyah (Phil.)	Église	- Début ép. islamique - Puis XII ^e -XIII ^e s.	- Domestique (murs, sols, céramique) - Céramique	- Van Elderen, 1970, p. 25 - Michel, 2001, p. 290
Esbous	Église Nord	- Ép. omeyyade - Ép. mamlouke	- Domestique (murs sur la mosaïque) - Cimetière	- Lawlor, 1980, p. 98, pl. XVIII 2-3 - Lawlor, 1980, p. 95 pl. XVIII 1
Esbous	Église de l'Acropole	- « Au cours de l'ép. omeyyade »	- Réoccupation domestique omeyyade (céramique)	- Michel, 2001, p. 297
Massuh (Esb.)	Église Nord	- Fin ép. omeyyade - ép. abbasside	- Occupation domestique salle annexe nord-est + pièces façade	- Piccirillo, 2000, p. 498
'Ayoun Mousa (Mad.)	Église du diacre Thomas	- Ép. omeyyade	- Salle dallée à usage domestique dans la cour sud	- Piccirillo, 1990b, p. 246 et fig. 6, ph. 60-63 pl. 18-19 - Piccirillo, 1998, p. 260

Nébo (Mad.)	Monastère	- Fin VIII ^e - début IX ^e s.	- Salle 103 : céramique dans la four (au sud-ouest du monastère) - Citerne atrium basilique (pas d'élément byzantin), - Activité de reconstruction 2 ^e moitié du VIII ^e s.	- Bianchi, 2021, pp. 97-108 - Bianchi, 2021, pp. 109-(115)-117
Khattabiyah (Mad.)	Église de Jean et Élie	- IX ^e s. ou post.	- Céramique glaçurée	- Van Elderen, 1972b, p. 95 - Schick, 1995, p. 369
Ma'in (Mad.)	al-Dayr	- Ép. omeyyade	- Domestique ?	- Piccirillo, 1976, p. 70 - Michel, 2001, p. 370
Nitl (Mad.)	Saint-Serge	- 2 ^e moitié VIII ^e - 1 ^{re} moitié IX ^e s. - Ép. mamelouke	- Domestique probable décharge ? - Traces de foyers	- Hamarneh, 2006, pp. 412-413 - Hamarneh, 2006, pp. 414-415
Dhiban (Mad.)	Église Nord	- Ép. omeyyade	- Occupation signalée au sud de l'église dans le secteur du baptistère	- Michel, 2001, p. 379
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Saint-Paul	- Post. au milieu du VII ^e s. (env. IX ^e -X ^e s.)	- Pièces d'habitation (nef sud) - Banquette contre le mur de l'église entre la porte est et la porte centrale, - Vasque de pierre près de la porte occidentale, - Four sous l'éboulis des arcs du portique, - Mur irrégulier entre l'arc écroulé et le mur oblique au sud-ouest	- Michel, 2001, p. 399 - Piccirillo, 1997, pp. 393-394 - Sanmori et Pappalardo, 1997, pp. 402-405 - Pappalardo, 2002, p. 405
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Église des Rivières (Nord)	- IX ^e s. env.	- Domestique (hiatus : dépôts entre sol et vestiges)	- Bujard, 1992, pp. 298-299 - Michel, 2001, p. 415
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Église du Palmier (Sud)	- IX ^e s. env.	- Domestique (hiatus : dépôts 10-50 cm entre sol et vestiges)	- Bujard, 1992, pp. 298-299 - Michel, 2001, p. 417
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Église de Wa'il	- IX ^e s. env.	- Domestique ?	- Alliata, 1992, p. 322 - Michel, 2001, p. 409
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Église des Lions	- Post. à 725 (hiatus ou pas ?)	- Domestique : four sur remblai dans l'angle sud-ouest	- Piccirillo, 1992, pp. 212 et 215 - Michel, 2001, p. 407
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Chapelle des Paons	- IX ^e -X ^e s.	- Domestique : <i>tabun</i>	- Michel, 2001, p. 403
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Chapelle M	- IX ^e -X ^e s.	- Étable ?	- Michel, 2001, p. 397
Umm al Rasas (Mad.)	Église de l'évêque Serge : baptistère	- VIII ^e -IX ^e s.	- Domestique : mur 40 cm au-dessus sol - Four avec cendre et céramique « abbasside »	- Michel, 2001, p. 388
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église du Reliquaire	- VIII ^e s. ? IX ^e s. ?	- Abandon - Puis réoccupation domestique	- Pappalardo, 2006, pp. 389 et 398
Umm al-Rasas (Mad.)	Église de la Tabula Ansata	- "tardif" (post. à la seconde moitié du VII ^e s. : VIII ^e -IX ^e s. ?)	- Domestique salle dans le collatéral sud au sud de la porte centrale + four à l'extérieur de cette salle	- Piccirillo, 2003, pp. 292-293, 296-297, ph. 7-8 pl. 4-5, 29-30 pl. 16, 31-33 pl. 17-18 - Pappalardo, 2003, pp. 305 et 323, fig. 13 p. 304, fig. 18,5
Palestine III				
Dayr 'Ayn Abata (Zoar.)	Eglise de Lot	- Omeyyade et abbasside	- Nature inconnue	- Michel, 2001, p. 152 - Politis, 2010, pp. 21-22 - Politis 2012b, pp. 372-376
Kh. ed-Dharih	Église	- VII ^e -VIII ^e s.	- Domestique	- Villeneuve, 2011, p. 327
Arindela	Église	- XII ^e -XIII ^e s.	- Domestique ?	- Walmsley, 1997, pp. 499-500
Pétra	Sainte-Marie (Petra Church)	- Fin VI ^e -début VII ^e s.	- Domestique - Four - Stockage dans l'atrium et collatéral sud de l'église	- Michel, 2001, p. 161 - Fiema, 2001a, pp. 80, 94-06 et 431
Jabal Harun (Petr.)	Église et atrium	- 2 ^e moitié du VIII ^e s. ?	- Domestique	- Frösen et Fiema, 2008, pp. 148-159 - Fiema, 2016, pp. 562-566 - Reynolds, 2015, pp. 367-368

Udruh	Église	- Date ? (la localité figure sur la mosaïque de l'acropole de Ma'in en 719-720)	- Inconnue	- Michel, 2001, p. 155
Auara	Église F102	- 749 ? - Milieu du VIII ^e -IX ^e s. (occupation jusqu'aux X ^e -XII ^e s.)	- Destruction de l'église (séisme) - Réoccupation domestique	- 'Amr et Oleson, 2013, pp. 96 et 154 - Oleson, 2016, pp. 273-276
Auara	Église B 100	- Fin ép. omeyyade - début ép. abbasside (fin VII ^e -début VIII ^e s.)	- Domestique : murs secondaires à l'intérieur de l'église (habitat permanent ou semi-permanent combiné à des activités pastorales et agricoles)	- 'Amr et Olseon, 2013, pp. 166 et 215-216 - Oleson, 2016, pp. 276-277
Auara	Église C 101 (égl. basse)		- Domestique dans la pièce au nord du chevet avec remploi d'éléments de mobilier liturgique	- Schick, 2013, p. 295

endommager les pavements de mosaïque de l'église, dans l'église nord d'Esbous ou l'église B de Yasilah.

La datation de ces réutilisations reste toutefois souvent imprécise et difficile à établir ; l'absence ou la présence d'iconoclasme, réparé ou non, la céramique recueillie dans les remblais d'abandon de ces réoccupations fournissent parfois des indices. Mais le plus souvent les rapports de fouilles restent vagues, qualifiant ces occupations d'« arabes », d'« islamiques », d'« omeyyades », d'« omeyyades-abbassides », ou donnent des fourchettes larges du type « VIII^e-IX^e siècles », « IX^e-X^e siècles » qui rendent, en l'état des recherches, la comparaison entre les sites délicate et toute étude régionale presque impossible. Ces vestiges renvoient pour la plupart à une occupation postérieure à l'utilisation religieuse du bâtiment, mais ne permettent que rarement de préciser s'il y a eu un hiatus entre la fin de l'utilisation religieuse de l'édifice et sa réutilisation pour une autre fonction. Elle a pu parfois intervenir presque immédiatement comme le suggérait Schick (1995, 131) pour l'église nord de Dibon, l'église nord et l'église de l'acropole d'Esbous, Saint-Jean et Saints-Cosme-et-Damien de Gerasa, ou Saint-Jean Baptiste de Khirbat as-Samra. Cependant, à plusieurs reprises, l'édifice semble ne pas avoir été réinvesti aussitôt, ce dont témoignent les murs érigés sur un remblai couvrant de sol de l'église, par exemple à Khirbat al-Bediya, à Khilda, ou dans les deux églises du *Castrum* et l'église du Reliquaire d'Umm al-Rasas. Par ailleurs, la réutilisation partielle des murs de l'édifice indique que la structure architectonique en était encore perceptible et qu'on avait conscience de l'existence du bâtiment²⁷, ce qui semble indiquer une continuité d'occupation des sites, sans qu'il soit possible de préciser s'il s'agit des mêmes populations. Ces réoccupations attestent néanmoins une présence humaine et témoignent d'une attitude pragmatique de réutilisation

des bâtiments existants. Dans quelques cas, cette réoccupation semble remonter à une époque ultérieure, qualifiée de « *middle islamic* » dans les rapports de fouille. Elle est de nature variable d'un édifice à l'autre : funéraire dans l'église Nord d'Esbous, domestique sans l'église 29 de Khirbat as-Samra et à Khilda après un hiatus, artisanale à Khirbat al-Badiya (potiers et métallurgistes). Elle reste de nature inconnue dans l'église d'Isaïe à Gerasa, l'église F 102 d'Auara, à Suwafiyah et à Khattbaiya, étant simplement attestée dans ce dernier édifice par de la céramique glaçurée (caractéristique de l'époque de Sāmarrā', IX^e siècle). L'étude laisse ainsi entre-apercevoir une situation qui plaide pour une continuité de l'occupation humaine au moins jusqu'au IX^e siècle. Cela va dans le même sens que l'activité humaine mise en évidence à l'époque abbasside par les recherches récentes menées dans les différents centres urbains, comme à Jarash (Rattenborg et Blanke 2017 ; Blanke 2018 ; Walmsley 2018 ; Lichtenberger et Raja 2019a ; Blanke et Walmsley 2022, 90-99). Ce sont maintenant les X^e-XII^e siècles qui apparaissent comme les « âges sombres » (Walmsley 2001). Il appartiendra aux recherches futures, pour progresser sur la compréhension de la chronologie et la nature de l'occupation des églises postérieure à leur utilisation liturgique, de différencier les occupations des VIII^e-IX^e siècles de celles des XII^e-XIII^e siècles.

Parmi ces réoccupations, il faut enfin signaler l'aménagement de mosquées sur l'emplacement de certaines églises. Les découvertes de tels cas se multiplient, mais ils restent marginaux (Fig. 26). Les vestiges n'en sont pas toujours bien conservés et leur identification reste souvent délicate, se limitant à une simple mention ou évocation dans les rapports de fouilles, comme c'est le cas pour l'église de Numérianos à Umm al-Jimal, l'église funéraire à cinq nefs de Gadara (Fig. 27), celles d'Haufa el-Wastiyah, de Kh. Dariya, de Khattabiyah et de Dayr

²⁷ Ces réimplantations ne se font pas dans un secteur remblayé dont le souvenir de l'occupation antérieure se serait perdu.



Fig. 26. Carte des mosquées implantées sur d'anciennes églises.

al-Qattar al-Byzanti (Tabl. 8). Cette implantation d'un édifice religieux dédié au culte musulman à l'emplacement d'une ancienne église est en outre très difficile à dater : parmi les quatre édifices clairement attestés, trois remontent en fait très probablement à l'époque ayyoubide ou mamlouke (Sama, Umm al-Surab, Riḥab) (Fig. 28). La mosquée de Nitl, simplement adossée au mur nord

de l'ancien complexe Saint-Serge, est attribuée à l'époque ottomane (Londino 2003, 446 ; Hamarneh 2006, 421). Il en va de même pour le sanctuaire islamique érigé sur le sommet de la montagne d'Aaron de Petra, qui vint peut-être remplacer un ancien sanctuaire chrétien²⁸. Si on ignore tout de la date de la mosquée découverte à Khirbat al-Badiya (al-Muheisen 2006, 90), celle-ci est

²⁸ Ce dernier était distinct du monastère lui-même, aménagé sur une terrasse en contrebas du sommet. Mais cela ne reste qu'une hypothèse, aucune fouille n'ayant été menée sous le sanctuaire musulman (Fiema 2016, 566 ; Miettunen 2008, 34-37).

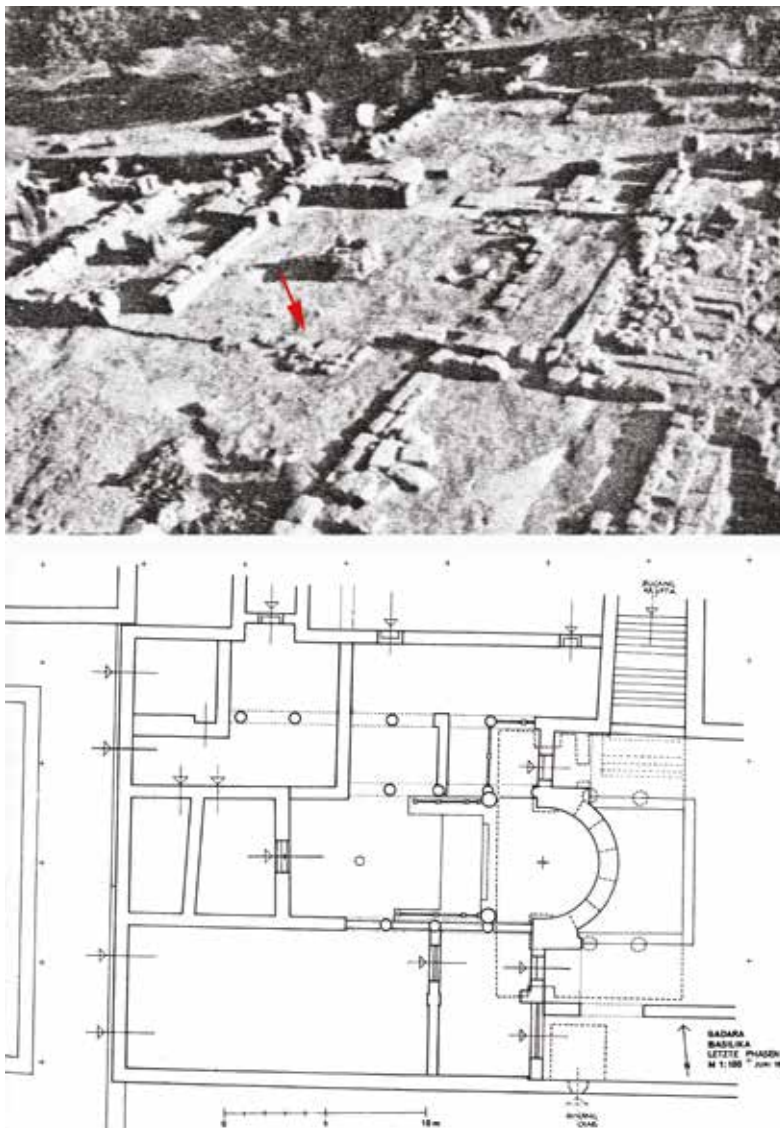


Fig. 27. Gadara, mosquée aménagée dans l'ancienne nef de la basilique funéraire à cinq nefs [d'après-Weber 1998, fig. 2B, 447 (dessin U. Hess) et fig. 4, 448 (ph. A. Gyldenholm)].



Fig. 28. Rihab, mosquée construite sur l'église n°3 © APAAME_20111002_MND-0547. Cliché D. Kennedy. Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East.

Tab. 8. Transformation en mosquée

Site	Édifice	Date	Vestiges	Réf. bibliographiques
Palestine II				
Gadara	Basilique funéraire à cinq nefs	- Ép. ayyoubide-mamlouke ou peu après les croisades	- Aménagement mosquée dans nef centrale - Mur condamne l'entrée de l'abside - Ajout mihrab en saillie à l'extérieur mur sud - Accès par le nord pour être dans l'axe d'un mihrab ? - Céramique	- Weber <i>et al.</i> , 1990, p. 325 et fig 3, n°4, p. 271 ("Early Islamic Mosque") - Weber et Hübner, 1998, p. 449 - al-Daire, 2001, p. 580
Khirbet al-Burz		- Post. Ép. omeyyade : iconoclasme réparé avec les mêmes tesselles en désordre [sauf si réparation va avec la mosquée]	- Chapelle annexe sud transformée en mosquée - Adjonction mihrab - Céramique omeyyade et abbasside	- Khasawneh, 1994, fig 1 p. 28 (en arabe) - Michel, 2001, p. 138 - Walmsley, 1992, p. 281
Khirbet Dariya (Pell. ?)		- Ép. omeyyade	- ?	- Karasneh, 1997 (en arabe), p 32 - Michel, 2001, p. 137
Arabie				
Sama (Bos.)	« monastère » Saint-Georges	- Omeyyade-abbasside - Ép. ayyoubide ou mamlouke ?	- Minaret	- Gilento, 2014, pp. 29-30 - King, 1983b, pp. 132-136 - Schick, 1995, pp. 130 et 448 - Michel, 2001, p. 187
Umm al-Surab (Bos.)	Saints-Serge-et-Bacchus	- Omeyyade ou abbasside ? - Ayyoubide-mamlouke	- Typologie construction - Type taille de pierre, - Organisation avec escalier intérieur autour pilier central, - Condamnation abside/ porte accès « prothesis », - Occupation dense de la région à cette époque-là	- Gilento, 2014, pp. 29-30 - Anastasio <i>et al.</i> , 2016, pp. 307-309 - King, 1983b, pp. 120, 123, 133-136 - Schick, 1995, pp. 130 et 477
Umm al-Jimal (Bos.)	Église de Numérianos	- Ép. « omeyyade »	- Blocs manquants au centre du mur sud	- Schick, 1995, pp. 130 et 471
Rihab (Bos.)		- Ép. mamlouke	- Mosquée sur église	- al-Hussan, 2001, figs. 10-11 - al-Hussan, 2002, fig. 23 p. 85
al-Badiyah (Ger. ?)		- Ép. omeyyade	- Mosquée sur sommet voisin (Zone C) de l'église (zone A) (pas de transformation)	- Hatamlah, 2000, pp. 18-20, fig. 3 p. 23 (plan) - al-Muheisen, 2006, fig. 2 p. 84
Nitl (Mad.)	Saint-Serge	- Ép. ayyoubide-mamlouke - Ép. ottomane	« A ridosso del diakonikon e della cappella absidata della chiesa sud » - Mosquée sur le narthex	- Schick, 1995, p. 130 - Londino, 2003, p. 446 - Hamarneh, 2006, p. 421
Khattabiyah (Kufayr Abu Sarbut) (Mad.)	Église-mosquée	- Ép. mamlouke ?	- Mosquée sur église	- Piccirillo, 1988, p. 461 - Piccirillo, 1993a, fig. 408, pp. 244-245
Palestine III				
Dayr al-Qattar al-Byzanti	Ermitages		- Ambiguïté [pas d'argumentation claire]	- Holmgren et Kaliff, 2016, p. 5
Petra	Sanctuaire d'Aaron	- XIV ^e s.	- Sanctuaire musulman à la place de l'église : ambiguïté	- Holmgren et Kaliff, 2016, p. 5
Auara-Humayma		- Ép. abbasside	- Église + mosquée en même temps au SO du Qasr	- Schick, 2007, p. 353

érigée sur un tell voisin de l'église ; il s'agit donc d'une situation différente puisque l'aménagement de l'édifice ne résulte pas d'une réoccupation d'un édifice chrétien. D'une manière générale, ces édifices n'ont pas été étudiés pour eux-mêmes. Il semble que leur chronologie soit majoritairement postérieure à l'époque dite *Early Islamic* (omeyyade-abbasside).

L'absence de mosquées érigées sur l'emplacement des églises ou à leur proximité immédiate renvoie par ailleurs à la problématique de la naissance des lieux de culte musulmans, qui devrait être envisagée parallèlement au devenir des églises aux VIII^e et IX^e siècles. Elle peut être en effet un bon marqueur pour restituer l'évolution des anciennes provinces d'Arabie et de Palestine à cette période. Au-delà du nombre de musulmans présents dans les *ajnād* d'al-Urdunn et de Filastīn, il faut aussi envisager la question en termes d'occupation du sol, les édifices de culte étant a priori érigés dans des lieux où se trouvaient les musulmans. On a souligné pour le courant du VIII^e siècle la tendance à l'occupation rurale des vallées et à la dépopulation des hauts plateaux (*supra*), alors que simultanément se multiplient les fondations de *villae* islamiques (aujourd'hui appelés *qusur*) souvent éloignés des villages chrétiens, dans le sud de la Palestine, et en Transjordanie dans la Balqa' au début du VIII^e siècle (Hamarnéh 2013, 65-66 ; Bianchi 2021, 205 ; Bujard 1997 ; Bujard *et al.* 2001). Les sources arabes nous informent que sous les califes omeyyades, le travail agricole était donné à des musulmans et à des chrétiens, liés à leur maître par des liens de dépendance (*Mawali*) (Hamarnéh 2013, 65-66 ; Sahnér 2017, 27-34). La propriété des terres était laissée aux chrétiens, mais ils devaient reverser des taxes aux nouveaux maîtres (Micheau 2012, 148)²⁹. Or, les premières mosquées connues sont souvent associées à des *qusur* islamiques, par exemple à Umm al-Walid et Khan az-Zabib (vers 710-720) (Bujard et Haldimann 1988, 110-12, pl. XIX ; Bujard 1997 ; Bujard *et al.* 2001, 213-16), Qastal (fin VII^e-début VIII^e siècles) (Carlier et Morin 1987, 236-39 ; 246, fig. 15 ; Addison 2000), Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt (première moitié du VIII^e siècle) (Bisheh 1980, 73-75) ou Quṣayr 'Amra (Genequand 2002). Elles apparaissent aussi dans d'anciens villages à Khirbat el-Badiya (al-Muheisen 2006, 90) ou Riḥāb (al-Husan 2002, 85, fig. 10-11 et 23), peut-être dans d'anciens monastères à al-Fadain (Mafrāq) (Humbert 1986, 357 ; al-Husan 2001, fig. 6 ; 2002, 74-77, fig. 4), mais aussi dans les grands centres urbains, comme sur la citadelle d'Amman (Amagro et Jiménez 2000), à Jarash (milieu

du VIII^e siècle) (Walmsley et Damgaard 2005). Toutefois, le faible nombre des mosquées et les difficultés posées par leur datation ne peut être envisagé qu'en lien avec la problématique des conversions. Cela renvoie également à l'hypothèse parfois évoquée du partage des lieux de culte entre chrétiens et musulmans (Piccirillo 1998a, 278), du fait des allusions décelées dans les textes arabes (Bashear 1991, 273-82), mais il s'agit peut-être davantage d'une notion de contiguïté des lieux de culte musulmans et chrétiens plutôt qu'un partage *stricto sensu* (Guidetti 2013).

La difficulté à dater la construction de ces édifices est aussi un obstacle : souvent qualifiées d'omeyyades, ces mosquées s'avèrent en fait rarement antérieures au VIII^e siècle. Néanmoins, l'étude de ces constructions, envisagée parallèlement au devenir des églises et des établissements non religieux des VIII^e et IX^e siècles, peut être un bon marqueur pour restituer l'évolution des régions transjordanienues.

CONCLUSION

En définitive, l'étude des églises aux premiers temps de l'Islam dans les anciennes provinces de Palestine et d'Arabie dessine un panorama varié, dépourvu d'homogénéité. On peut distinguer deux grandes phases, qui s'articulent autour d'une date voisine du quart du VIII^e siècle. Pendant plus d'un demi-siècle après la bataille du Yarmouk, de la défaite des armées byzantines à cette période, s'impose l'image d'une persistance des édifices religieux chrétiens dans leur fonction d'origine, faisant l'objet de remaniements, embellissements, reconstructions, réparations de fortune, qui sont liés avant tout à des circonstances locales propres aux différentes communautés chrétiennes³⁰. La prospérité qu'on décèle parfois reste cependant très localisée dans les bourgades rurales concentrées le long de la *via nova traiana*, qui semblent s'épanouir à la fin du VI^e ou au début du VII^e siècle et perdurer au VIII^e siècle. Les abandons d'églises restent rares, même si l'image semble légèrement différente dans les grands centres urbains. Après le quart du VIII^e siècle, vers la fin de l'époque omeyyade, l'abandon des églises s'accroît, davantage en milieu urbain dans un premier temps. Divers facteurs concourent sans doute à l'accélération d'un phénomène qui semble s'être amorcé de façon très marginale dès la fin du VI^e siècle (Michel 2011, 239). Ils sont d'ordre naturel, tels les séismes ou

²⁹ Néanmoins les pratiques semblent avoir été variables d'une région à l'autre sous les premiers omeyyades, l'empire islamique n'étant pas encore centralisé (Micheau 2012, 153).

³⁰ Cela rejoint le processus décrit par Avni (2011, 328-29) sur l'évolution des villes proche-orientales de l'Antiquité tardive.

les modifications climatiques³¹, qui entraînent des modifications de l'occupation du sol, de l'exploitation du territoire et des réseaux d'échanges, mais aussi d'ordre politique et administratif : la pression accrue de l'administration omeyyade à partir du règne de 'Abd al-Malik, son durcissement à partir du règne de d'al-Walīd (r. 705-715), puis la mise en place du régime abbasside entraîne peu à peu une hausse des conversions. Durant cette période, si on assiste à un phénomène de réduction de certaines églises qui paraît indiquer une rétraction progressive des communautés chrétiennes, d'autres cependant font encore l'objet d'embellissements, souvent dans les bourgades rurales ou en milieu monastique. En contexte urbain, des indices de l'utilisation d'églises dans leur fonction liturgique y subsistent parfois jusqu'à l'orée du ix^e siècle. En effet, plusieurs exemples montrent que les édifices peuvent être entretenus, même si les réfections restent souvent d'envergure modeste, témoignant d'une part de la persistance de communautés qui continuent d'entretenir et réparer leurs églises, après des séismes notamment, mais aussi peut-être de leur appauvrissement, de la diminution du nombre de leurs membres ou de leur capacité d'organisation (Makowski 2020, 368). L'abandon des édifices urbains semble apparaître de façon plus rapide (Michel 2011, 252), peut-être sous la pression exercée par la présence des élites omeyyades dans le nouveau *Jund al-Urdunn* (Walmsley et Damgaard 2005, 362-63 ; Sahner 2017, 34-38 ; Makowski 2020, 368), mais surtout avec la présence croissante de musulmans vivant à proximité des mosquées nouvellement construites, comme par exemple à Amman sur la citadelle (Schick 1995, 131). Cependant, la diminution ou l'abandon du nombre des églises ne scelle pas l'abandon des villes³².

Les traces d'occupation les plus longues, jusqu'à l'orée, voire la première moitié du ix^e siècle, apparaissent surtout autour des bourgades rurales développées à partir d'un *castrum* qui longeaient la *via nova traiana* (Umm al-Jimal, Umm al-Quttein, Khirbat as-Samra, Riḥab,

Jiza, Dhiban, Nitl et Umm al-Rasas). La prospérité économique de ces bourgades – qui n'ont vraisemblablement plus de rôle militaire aux vi^e-vii^e siècles³³ et qui ont sans doute été épargnées par les armées perses qui sont passées plus à l'ouest et le long de la côte – témoigne de l'importance du rôle joué par les évergètes locaux tout au long du vii^e siècle (Piccirillo 2007, 99-100 ; Bianchi 2021, 194)³⁴. L'adjonction fréquente de baptistères à ces ensembles ruraux leur confère un statut urbain qui témoigne de leur prospérité, par exemple à Umm al-Rasas, à Hayyan al-Mushrif ou au mont Nébo (Hamarneh 2011, 532). Ces observations rejoignent le constat déjà établi par A. Walmsley, qui identifie trois étapes succédant à la conquête islamique au nord du wadi Mujib. A la continuité urbaine visible jusqu'au début de l'époque abbasside succède, à partir du deuxième quart du ix^e siècle, une période de contraction. Cette dernière est marquée par une stabilité rurale comptant de nombreuses communautés villageoises prospères, les anciens centres urbains se contractant jusqu'à s'intégrer à cet ensemble de villages (Walmsley 1992, 382)³⁵. De façon analogue, les établissements ruraux liés à des communautés monastiques (*laures*, *ermitages*, *cenobiae*) semblent aussi avoir perduré davantage, au moins jusqu'au ix^e siècle, parfois même jusqu'au xii^e siècle (Bianchi 2021, 209), comme à Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata (Politis 2012b, 372-76), à Dayr al-Qattar al-Byzanti (Holmgren et Kaliff 2016, 5), au Nébo (Bianchi 2021, 212), Pétra (Fiema 2016, 565-66), mais il s'agit davantage d'une présence que de réfections³⁶. L'implantation monastique de 'Ayn al-Kanisah fait exception (Bianchi 2021, 210-11). Le déclin progressif de ces sanctuaires au ix^e siècle semble corrélé à la diminution de la population monastique³⁷. Ce déclin général du mouvement monastique est attribué à des changements externes (politiques, culturels, sociaux, économiques) (Bianchi 2021, 201-05), mais aussi internes (crise spirituelle au sein des communautés monastiques qui en change la nature et mène à leur réduction) (Bianchi 2019a, 112-13 ; 2021, 206-07).

³¹ Les travaux menés par l'équipe de B. Geyer sur les marges arides de Syrie ont bien montré l'impact des modifications climatiques sur ces régions (Geyer et Rousset 2001 ; Geyer 2011).

³² En témoigne le programme de constructions religieuses et administratives menées dans la seconde moitié du vii^e siècle, surtout entre le règne de 'Abd al-Malik (685-705) et Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik (724-743) (Cf. Walmsley 2005, 362-64 et 376-77).

³³ Il n'y a pas d'occupation militaire en Arabie aux vi^e-vii^e s., dont le territoire est peut-être alors contrôlé par des groupes arabes fédérés (Fiema 2002 ; Hamarneh 2011, 531, n. 23).

³⁴ Dès la seconde moitié du vi^e s., les constructions d'églises sont beaucoup plus nombreuses à la campagne qu'en ville (Hamarneh 2011, 532 ; Di Segni 2017, 293).

³⁵ Les régions au Sud du wadi Mujib – correspondant à la moitié orientale de l'ancienne province de Palestine III – sont identifiées comme appartenant à un ensemble culturellement différent, aussi bien selon les sources islamiques que par l'archéologie.

³⁶ Une fréquentation du monastère est attestée au Nébo dans la salle 103 et par la céramique homogène produite par la citerne de l'atrium de la basilique (Bianchi 2021, 100-21). Les dernières réfections des édifices religieux connues au Nébo sont effectuées au début du vii^e siècle dans la chapelle de la Théotokos en (603-308) et à Dayr 'Ayn Abata (605-607).

³⁷ Il s'agit d'une tendance générale attestée pour la vallée du Jourdain, mais les sources et données précises pour la Transjordanie font défaut (Bianchi 2019a, 112 ; 2011, 197).

L'abandon des édifices religieux chrétiens se révèle donc être un processus lent et régulier, marqué par des coups d'arrêts. Initié avant l'arrivée de l'Islam (*cf. supra* et Walmsley 2001, 634 ; Di Segni 2017, 299), il est marqué par un changement plutôt qu'une rupture. Les premières modifications se développent dans les villes au cours du VIII^e siècle avec l'apparition progressive des premières mosquées qui peuvent témoigner d'un phénomène accru de conversions (Walmsley et Damgaard 2005 ; Walmsley 2011 ; Makowski 2020, 368). Parallèlement se dessine une prospérité relative en milieu rural et en milieu monastique, marqués par une occupation chrétienne plus longue : d'une part les nouveaux établissements ruraux *omeyyades* (*qusur*) ne se mélangent pas aux villages, et d'autre part il n'est pas certain que la législation islamique se soit appliquée dès l'origine aux moines, comme semblent le montrer certains passages de la Vie d'Étienne le Sabaïte (Piccirillo 2002, 223-24 ; Bianchi 2021, 195). Néanmoins, le phénomène de contraction s'accroît et les édifices religieux sont souvent reconvertis aux IX^e-X^e siècles pour une utilisation domestique ou artisanale. Ils n'apparaissent que très rarement réaménagés en mosquées, dont la datation précise reste par ailleurs généralement délicate à établir. Il convient sans doute aujourd'hui moins de s'interroger sur le devenir des édifices chrétiens en termes d'abandon et de persistance qu'en termes de modifications des schémas d'occupation du sol. Ce processus de transformation est à l'œuvre dès le VI^e siècle, même si la prospérité ne paraît pas décliner de manière apparente ; les mentalités et les habitudes changent, la société de l'Antiquité tardive se transforme. Le phénomène est accentué par l'arrivée des Arabes musulmans, mais ni l'arabisation, ni l'islamisation n'en sont la cause. La désaffection et l'abandon des édifices de culte chrétien n'est pas à voir en termes de rivalités religieuses, mais dans le contexte général de contraction démographique des communautés humaines de la région (Schick 1995, 135 ; Di Segni 2017, 299). La baisse démographique va de pair avec celle du nombre d'édifices religieux utilisés ; les vestiges

archéologiques montrent que les abandons d'églises se sont presque tous produits de façon pacifique et progressive, ce qui mène à penser que le phénomène est sans lien direct avec le fait d'être chrétien.

Les données quant au devenir des églises après leur abandon pour le culte chrétien restent fragmentaires et éparses, mais elles sont en définitive relativement nombreuses. Les indices évoquant une réoccupation de nature domestique apparaissent assez fréquents, même s'ils ne font que très exceptionnellement l'objet d'une étude spécifique dans les rapports de fouille³⁸. On peut toutefois se demander si dans certains cas cette réutilisation des bâtiments, souvent attribuée aux IX^e-X^e siècles en raison des typologies céramiques recueillies dans les remblais, n'est pas en fait plus tardive. Cela peut être le cas lorsque sont mentionnés des fours de type *tābūn*, l'existence de remblais sous les murs de refend construits dans l'église ou encore la présence de céramique glaçurée, qui n'apparaît guère avant les IX^e-X^e siècles. Il appartiendra aussi aux recherches et travaux futurs de s'interroger sur le hiatus potentiel entre ces réoccupations et l'abandon de l'église pour le culte chrétien. La transformation de certaines églises en mosquée, phénomène assez rare et plutôt tardif, en tout cas sans doute postérieur aux deux premiers siècles islamiques, conduit à s'interroger sur le sens d'une telle transformation et sur les relations entre chrétiens et musulmans. C'est donc un tableau très nuancé, et progressif, qui ressort de l'étude ; il incite à envisager la problématique d'une part davantage en termes de modifications des schémas d'occupation du sol plutôt qu'en termes de continuités et ruptures, d'autre part en fonction d'études régionales. D'une manière générale, la thématique du devenir des églises sous les premiers siècles de l'Islam ne doit plus être abordée aujourd'hui en considérant les édifices de culte chrétiens isolément, mais en les restituant dans leur contexte et en interrogeant, au-delà de l'aspect religieux, l'ensemble des données relatives à l'occupation du territoire. Cette approche semble aujourd'hui la plus adéquate pour appréhender leur place et leur rôle dans la société au fil des siècles.

³⁸ Cependant on constate qu'une attention accrue leur est dédiée dans les publications les plus récentes, notamment avec la prise en compte diachronique de l'histoire de l'édifice avec la généralisation de la méthode stratigraphique ; voir par exemple la magistrale étude du monastère d'Aaron près de Pétra (Fiema 2016), de l'église Sainte-Marie de Pétra (Fiema 2011a), du sanctuaire de Lot à Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata (Politis 2012a, 115-58), celle des bâtiments d'Humayma (Oleson et Schick 2013, 161-320 ; Oleson 2016).

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CHAPTER 2

CHURCHES IN NORTH-EASTERN JORDAN AFTER THE ISLAMIC CONQUEST. REVISION OF MATERIAL REMAINS AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

IGLESIAS EN EL NORESTE DE JORDANIA DESPUÉS DE LA CONQUISTA ISLÁMICA. REVISIÓN DE LAS EVIDENCIAS MATERIALES Y PERSPECTIVAS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

PIERO GILENTO¹

SUMMARY

This chapter discusses data collected during recent fieldwork in churches located in several villages in north-eastern Jordan (Mafraq Governorate), with the aim of contributing to reconstruct their building history after the Islamic conquest. The methodology used is based on the archaeological stratigraphy of standing structures and the analysis of construction techniques, i.e., Building Archaeology. At the same time, the objective limitations of this methodology are addressed, notably the scarcity of absolute chronological references. For this reason, the need to focus on specific construction materials (such as mortars and plasters) and their chronology, and for collaboration with other disciplines, such as archaeometry, is highlighted. The need for targeted stratigraphic excavations which can help answer specific research questions raised by the archaeological analysis of standing buildings is also emphasised.

KEYWORDS: *Ḥawrān, religious, stratigraphy, building technology, archaeometry*

RESUMEN

Este capítulo presenta la información obtenida gracias al reciente trabajo de campo desarrollado en varias iglesias localizadas en diferentes villas del noreste de Jordania (gobierno Mafraq), con el fin de contribuir así al conocimiento de la historia de su construcción después de la conquista islámica. La metodología empleada, la arqueología de la arquitectura, se basa en la aplicación de la estratigrafía arqueológica a las estructuras construidas y al análisis de las técnicas constructivas. Se exponen además los límites objetivos de esta metodología, especialmente los que afectan a la obtención de referencias cronológicas absolutas. Por esta razón, se subraya la necesidad de centrarnos en el estudio de ciertos materiales constructivos (como morteros y enfoscados) y sus cronologías, así como en la colaboración con otras disciplinas, tales como la arqueometría. Se enfatiza igualmente la necesidad de poner en marcha excavaciones arqueológicas dirigidas a responder preguntas específicas puestas de manifiesto por la previa aplicación del análisis arqueológico de los edificios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Ḥawrān, religioso, estratigrafía, tecnología constructiva, arqueometría*

In his research on the *Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule*, Schick (1995) focuses on the issue of the continuity of use or abandonment of churches in Palestine after the Islamic conquest with the aim to understand the fate of the Christian communities that built these structures, and continued to use them in part, at least until the early ninth century. The construction activities (occupation/re-occupation, abandonment) recorded in these buildings

are indicators that can be useful to understand the history of the communities that built them. The intersection of the archaeological and the written sources presents a setting in which some churches were built *ex novo* or underwent important repairs in the early Islamic period. These data were confirmed by another work published a few years later, in which Di Segni (1999) contextualised a large amount of dated inscriptions from public buildings in Palestine and Arabia, a significant proportion of

¹ Inrap, ArScAn (UMR7041), OrAM team.

which is related to Christian churches and monasteries. This research concludes that during Justinian's reign construction projects were mainly concentrated in cities. In the same period, however, the villages continued showing their constructive vitality, which was to increase considerably, overcoming that in cities, from the reign of Heraclius onwards and into the Umayyad period. In some villages, such as Rihab and Khirbat as-Samra, churches were restored or built between the sixth and the eighth centuries (Di Segni 1999, 165). However, for another important group of church buildings we do not have the same wealth of sources (i.e., inscriptions, mosaics or data from archaeological excavations), which makes it much more difficult to understand the phases of reoccupation and/or abandonment in the early Islamic period. In fact, although only a few churches show evidence of total abandonment after ceasing to function as such (Schick 1995, 129), and most of them present clear traces of continued use, they are very difficult to date. Defining the chronological framework of reoccupation/construction of these buildings is crucial to outline their history and therefore that of the communities that built and used them over the centuries. In this context, building archaeology, through the stratigraphic analysis of standing structures, can help to identify and better define these phases by inserting them in a constructive relative chronological framework. This can provide useful information to target subsequent analyses with which to further clarify the chronology of these buildings. This analytical and cognitive process is presented below, and the first results achieved are discussed.

1. CONTEXT AND METHOD

Starting from this premise, our discussion focuses on a set of nine churches located in archaeological sites in the Mafraq Governorate: Umm al-Surab (St. Sergius and Bacchus church, North church, West church and Two Arches church), Samā al-Sarhān (St. George church and North church) and Umm al-Quṭṭayn (North-east church). All these buildings, except for two, show clear traces of reoccupation with respect to their primary function as a church, but at the same time still present unresolved chronological questions. In addition to these, our discussion also considers two churches from the site of Umm al-Jimāl (i.e., West church and Numerianos church) (Fig. 1). Most of the buildings listed above have already been the subject of research dating back to the early twentieth century, mainly owing to the work of Howard Crosby Butler, who described, drew, and photographed them (Butler 1909; 1920). In the description of some of these churches Butler recognises construction

phases dated to the Islamic period. In the general discussion of these buildings, these references were very limited and were not investigated in depth by Butler, probably for two reasons. The first one, was Butler's social and cultural context, which prompted him to focus on the analysis and recording of Christian architecture. The second, are the objective difficulties of establishing construction phases owing to the state of preservation of some of the buildings (which are in some cases very difficult to read because of the degree of collapse of the structures) and the lack of supporting field research methodologies to the study of ancient architectural remains, such as, for example, Building Archaeology. It was only with Geoffrey King's (1983) research that the issue of occupation phases during the Islamic period, for instance in the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus at Umm al-Surab and the church of St. George at Samā al-Sarhān, began to be discussed. If the results of King's research in these two villages relied on architectural analysis and the collection of surface pottery, the church of Numerianos at Umm al-Jimāl was instead investigated years later through archaeological excavation, which revealed an occupation phase during the Umayyad period (Schick 1995, 470-71). Therefore, if archaeological excavation has provided precise chronological indicators (at least for the apsidal area) for the latter, the architectural study of the two churches at Umm al-Surab and Samā al-Sarhān provided important information which needed to be investigated further. For this reason, the material remains of these buildings will be revisited in this chapter by inserting them in a broader regional perspective and comparing them with other buildings in the same cultural and geographical context. This is a limited corpus of buildings which, nevertheless, stands as a significant sample to apply the principles presented in this chapter. All of these buildings are built in basalt, and their archaeological and architectural analysis presents two main methodological challenges. The first one concerns the use of basalt as almost only building material, and its reuse in different historical moments; this greatly complicates the identification and analysis of the changes introduced on the structures over time (Bessac 2010). The second concerns the complexity of archaeological excavation and, therefore, the scarcity of data that can help better define occupation phases in these buildings. Regarding the first point, despite the difficulties inherent to the stratigraphic reading of these buildings, the aim of research is to analyse standing structures in order to outline the relative chronology of the main construction activities. In addition to taking into consideration the stratigraphic sequences of wall structures, particular architectural elements that could be regarded as indicators of reoccupation are examined: i.e., tower structures and walled up apses. On the one hand,



Fig. 1. Plan of the Jordanian Hawrān with the main sites cited in the text (Image by Stefano Anastasio in Anastasio, Gilento, and Parenti 2016, 300, fig. 1).

the towers built leaning in part on the apsidal structures of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus at Umm al-Surab and the church of St. George at Samā al-Sarḥān are reanalysed to try to better frame their chronology. On the other hand, attention is also paid to the walls that close the apses of these two churches and of other church buildings, such as the West church in Umm al-Surab, and the Numerianos church and the West church in Umm al-Jimāl (Butler 1913). In the latter instance, the analysis of the photographic material produced by Howard C. Butler's 1904-05 mission provides fundamental clues to date this wall and thus reopen many questions about the reliability of these architectural elements as indicators of the reoccupation of churches in the past (Gilento 2022a, 55). The intersection of the stratigraphic analysis of the structures with the technological study of the masonry also allows for the creation of a chrono-typological atlas of masonry techniques. This is a helpful tool to reflect on the subsequent phases of occupation of the churches and present a comparative overview of this phenomenon in the regional level (for a detailed presentation and discussion of the chrono-typological atlas, see Gilento 2022b). Great care has been taken to collect samples of plasters and mortars. The sampling was preceded by the stratigraphic analysis of the structures, so the samples are all contextualised, at least in terms of the relative chronology. The analysis of mortars and plasters not only opens a window into the production of these construction materials, but also can help to date them, owing to the presence of embedded charcoal fragments, which can be dated

by ^{14}C .² These archaeometric analyses present alternative and comparative chronological indicators to those yielded by archaeological excavation, which remain hard to come by and limited in number. This limitation is due to various practical and logistical issues. Indeed, the interior of some of these buildings is, in some instances, filled by collapsed basalt blocks, which are sometimes 1.50-2.00 metres in height, making operations very complex, time-consuming, and expensive. Basalt blocks are difficult to move manually, and mechanical tools are not always available to help with the job. For this reason, the study of standing structures is an important first step, capable of yielding primary data, that must precede any other research program (such as archaeological excavation). In this way, the intensive study of the architecture at Umm al-Surab has resulted in the identification of a fourth church in the village, which is currently completely covered by an extensive structural collapse, and which will be presented for the first time in this chapter. The analysis will also include the north church at Samā al-Sarḥān, which is simply mentioned by both Butler and King. Although all the buildings mentioned in the text have been visited at least once and have been the subject of a preliminary analysis accompanied by a photographic survey, not all buildings have been treated in the same degree of detail. On some, in fact, specific analyses have been carried out, while on others I focus for the time being on the preliminary stratigraphic analysis of the structures, which has, however, allowed for the collection of data that will be useful to design future, more targeted research.

² The dating of charcoal fragments can yield, at least, a terminus *post-quem* for the production of mortars. For an updated view on issues about the dating of mortars, see *Archeologia dell'Architettura* XXIV (ed. Vecchiattini 2019).

2. THE ANALYSIS OF MATERIAL STRUCTURES

2.1. Umm al-Surab. A brief history of research and first results on its occupational trends

The first study of religious architecture at Umm al-Surab was carried out by Butler, who visited the site between 1904 and 1905 (Fig. 2). On that occasion, he studied the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and its northern complex in detail, taking a photo of the interior of the church and drawing plans and sections (Butler 1909). Interest in the religious architecture of the site resumed in the early 1980s, when King (1983a; 1983b), within the framework of a wider survey of northern Jordan, undertook a new study of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and discovered two further churches: the North church and the West church. The mission of the University of Siena, directed by Prof. Roberto Parenti, worked at the site from 2009 to 2012, focusing on the study of construction techniques and working again on the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and on the West church (Parenti 2012; Gilento 2014; 2015). In 2017, a new mission of the University of Paris

1-Panthéon Sorbonne and the CNRS with the collaboration of the Ifpo (Institut Français du Proche Orient) and Yarmouk University (Irbid) began a global study of the village in which architectural data is combined with spatial analysis together with the study of the pottery and archaeometric-archaeobotanical analysis. The whole site was subject to a surface survey, and two archaeological excavations were carried out in so-called Area A, located in the south-eastern part of the village, in 2018 and 2019 (Gilento and Blanc 2017; Gilento *et al.* 2018). The latter activities have brought to light a stratigraphic sequence that spans from the Late-Roman period (third-fourth century) to the late Umayyad-early Abbasid period (eighth-ninth century), and the reoccupation of the area in the early thirteenth century to the fifteenth century. Crossing these data with the information yielded by landscape archaeology and building archaeology revealed the occupation of the site in the Roman period, the traces of which are now especially visible in the south-western sector of the site. In the Late Antique period, the urban space was clearly organised, with religious and domestic buildings arranged according to a south-east/north-west axis. In this period, the church of Sts. Sergius



Fig. 2. Umm al-Surab. General plan of the site with the church buildings indicated in red. (Drawing by Piero Gilento. Topography by Gourguen Davtian).

and Bacchus occupied a leading position in the centre of the village, while the other three churches were arranged around it in the northern and western sectors. For the Umayyad period, the data at our disposal to date suggests that there was no hiatus in the occupation of the village after Late Antiquity and a contraction of the central and eastern sectors in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods; this was characterised by the reorganisation of houses and the space around them, including the street layout. In these periods, the churches seem to have been reoccupied and simultaneously perform another important function in the village economy, which was to provide good quality material for the construction or repair of other buildings.

2.1.1. *The church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus*

The best-preserved building of the site is the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. The complex comprises a three-nave church and another building to north (probably a monastery) with ten ground floor rooms arranged in two levels around a rectangular courtyard in which lies a cistern (Fig. 3). On the first level of room 16, traces of a mosaic floor have been found. An inscription on the lintel of the church's main door (no longer in situ) dates its foundation to 489 (Fig. 4). The apse is semi-circular and is flanked to the north and south by two quadrangular rooms. The one to the north (i.e., the *prothesis*) was used as a foundation for the construction of a tower, about 9 m high, which tapers towards the top. Regarding the reuse of this building in later periods, Butler had already observed and written about a medieval wall that closed the chancel arch. Butler dated the transformation of the nave into a mosque to the same period (Butler 1909, 96). Concerning the tower, however, Butler believed that it belonged to the same construction phase as the church (i.e., the fifth century) and that the internal stairs were added only later to use the tower as a minaret for the mosque. These two markers of Islamic reoccupation, i.e., the wall that closes the chancel arch and the tower on the *prothesis*, were contextualised and subsequently rediscussed by King (1983a). Unfortunately, these two markers lacked in any clear chronological references. King pointed out the presence of surface pottery from both the Umayyad and the Ayyubid/Mamluk periods, leaving the discussion about the date of the structural transformations undergone by the church open. Currently, this wall, which had a door

to enter the apse, is no longer in place because it was dismantled by the Department of Antiquities during a recent restoration project (Fig. 18d-e). More recent research in building archaeology has actually brought to light at least seven building phases³ and we can confirm King's hypothesis concerning the reoccupation of the church, at least for a part of the building complex, in the Early Islamic period, as a sounding opened in one of the rooms in the northern complex (n. 14, see fig. 3) yielded pottery dating back to the Early Umayyad (and also probably Early Abbasid) period in the pavement's bed (Gilento and Blanc 2017, 7-9).

Regarding the construction of the tower, the stratigraphic analysis has clearly established that this was built after the Late Antique structure. The interface between the masonry belonging to the *prothesis* and that of the tower is clearly identifiable. While the first is made up of quarried and squared elements laid in place on regular courses, the second one is made of reused materials, which, nevertheless, require the presence of good masons with the knowledge and the skill to use and put this heterogeneous material in place. There were, however, no precise chronological indicators to move from a relative to an absolute chronological framework. This was instead based on the analysis and dating of mortar and plaster samples (Gilento, Pesce and Pesce 2019). The seven mortar samples yielded three lumps of charcoal, which had been mixed (deliberately or otherwise) into the mortars, the radiocarbon dating of which has provided some of the first absolute chronologies for the whole site.⁴ The importance of these dates in a context in which absolute dates are so difficult to come by cannot be overstated.

- The first charcoal sample, dated between 401 and 539 (95% probability), was taken from the joint between the lintel and the first course of basalt stones of the entrance door on the first level of the monastery, showing that this part of the complex and the church were built in the same period.

- The second sample is dated to the second half of the thirteenth century (1221-1282, 95% probability) and was found embedded in the plaster that covers the walls and the arches of the cistern, providing a terminus *ante quem* for their construction.

- The third ¹⁴C dating, obtained from a piece of charcoal found in the mortar bedding of the joints of a door in the courtyard of the church, is dated to 1241-1296 (93% probability).

³ Some of the results achieved in this building have already been presented (Gilento 2014), and this is a reinterpretation of this work based on new available data.

⁴ The dating was performed by the CNA-Centro Nacional de Aceleradores of the University of Seville. The author wishes to thank its director, Francisco Santos Arévalo, for this collaboration.



Fig. 3. Umm al-Surab. Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (in yellow) and its northern complex (in green). The red dots mark mortars samples taken for analysis and dating (Drawing by Piero Gilento).



Fig. 4. Umm al-Surab. Façade of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (Photo by Piero Gilento 2020).

Therefore, the study of these materials can improve our understanding of the production cycle of different building techniques and suggests the presence (or absence) of specific knowledge and skills and, consequently, of specialised craftsmen. Chemical and physical analyses of mortars and plasters provide indicators for the production technology used in different periods. Results demonstrated that mortars were exclusively made of lime in the Late Antique period, whereas in the Islamic period they were based on a mixture of lime and gypsum.

To summarise the above data, it can be said that the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, dated to the late fifth century, was renovated in the Late Antique period and continued to be in use in the Umayyad (and probably until Early Abbasid) period, although it is unclear whether it was still being used as a Christian church or for other purpose. A major seismic event, probably the earthquake of 749, completely destroyed the building.⁵ A large chronological gap separates the late eighth-early ninth centuries and the second half of the thirteenth century. In the late thirteenth century, significant construction activity is documented in the area of the northern complex, where the cistern was re-plastered and the jamb of one of the doors was rebuilt together with a portion of the adjacent masonry. Although these are not physically connected to the structure of the tower, it is argued that this construction is linked to this building phase. The data yielded by the archaeological excavation of Area A which, as noted, demonstrate a phase of occupation dated to the Ayyubid/Mamluk period (for a first discussion of the pottery found in the excavation of Area A, see Al-Bashaireh *et al.* 2021) supports this hypothesis. The high tower was probably built at the same time to serve as minaret for the village mosque. The choice to reoccupy the church as a mosque may have been dictated by practical considerations, such as the presence of large sections of standing walls and the ready availability of abundant high-quality construction material, including both structural and decorative fragments. Material was reused in both the construction of the tower and the rehabilitation of some wall sections in the church, as well as in the reconstruction and decoration of some village houses. Before becoming the mosque of the village in the Ayyubid/Mamluk period, the church had therefore been a source of materials for new buildings and it is likely that, by that time, the inhabitants of the village had lost the memory of the ancient church, and therefore its symbolic and religious value.

2.1.2. North church

This architectural complex is located in the northernmost sector of the site and was not identified by Butler during his 1904-5 survey. King (1988, 48-51) was the first researcher to make a detailed description of the structure, draw a ground plan, and take photos during his survey between 1980 and 1981 (Fig. 5). The current state of the building has not changed much since King's work. It is, in fact, a completely collapsed structure, rectangular in shape and oriented south-east/north-west, of which ten rows of the southern section of the façade are preserved, topped by a row of shelves, which suggests the presence of an original porticus (Fig. 6). The architectural complex consists of two buildings. The first one is a three-nave church (internal dimensions 14.60 m long, 12.20 m wide) the central of which ends to the east in the apse flanked by two quadrangular rooms. The second building, which abuts the church to the east, presents similar dimensions (14.44 m long and 12.40 m wide). This strongly suggests that both buildings belong to the same construction phase. The function of this second building remains unclear, but the presence of a series of mangers, already identified and drawn by King, on the northern wall of rooms 17.1.f and 17.1.g, suggests that the building was used to keep animals. The orientation of the plan and its internal organisation and dimensions resemble the plan of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, which situates it in a fairly clear chronological horizon in the late fifth-early sixth century. The archaeological analysis of the few standing wall sections has revealed that the building has a fairly homogeneous construction history, as no traces of reconstruction have been recorded after its abandonment, which was also probably triggered by the earthquake of 749. These first observations have recently been confirmed by an archaeological sounding carried out in the building located to the east of the church, which yielded ceramics dating back to the late Umayyad period.⁶ This dating could also apply to the adjacent church, which seems to follow the same construction history as its annex. The combination of the data yielded by building archaeology and archaeological excavation confirms that the building was continuously occupied throughout the late antique and the Umayyad periods. At present, it is impossible to tell whether it continued operating as a church or whether its functions changed after the Islamic conquest. After its abandonment it served as a quarry: the decorative

⁵ About the earthquakes that affected the village of Umm al-Surab between the Byzantine and Mamluk periods, see Gilento *et al.* (2022).

⁶ The sounding was carried out as part of the *HolyHost Project* funded by the European Commission (Horizon 2020) and directed by Pauline Piraud-Fournet, whom I would like to thank for the data provided and the discussion on the dating of the building.

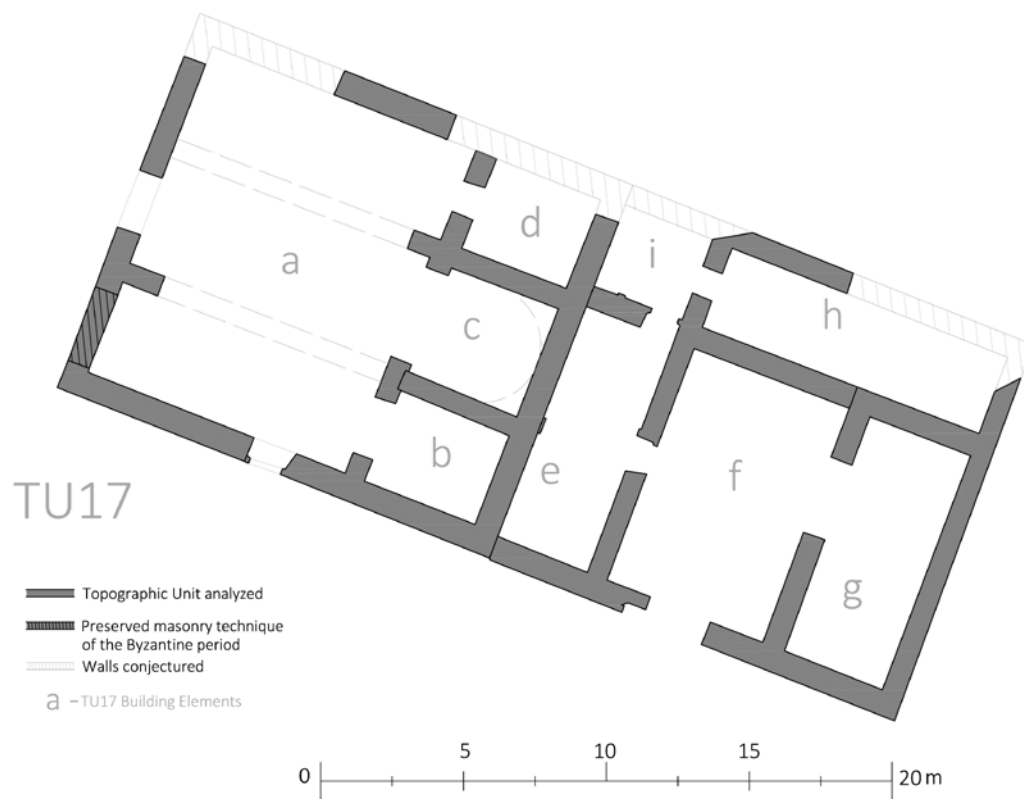


Fig. 5. Umm al-Surab. North church, plan of the church and its eastern complex (Drawing and topography by Piero Gilento 2017).



Fig. 6. Umm as-Surab. North church, façade (Photo by Piero Gilento).

elements and the squared stones were reused in other buildings in the village in later periods in the history of the site. Unlike the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, it was no longer reoccupied in the Medieval period, probably owing to its peripheral location in the medieval village.

2.1.3. West church

It is located in the eastern sector of the village within Topographic Unit 10, on abrupt terrain that descends steeply towards the south. The building was not identified by Butler and, again, the first to make a description, draw a plan, and take photographs was King (1988, 40–47). The church was already in an extremely precarious state of preservation during King's survey. Compared to King's description and photographs, the church has further deteriorated due to continuous clandestine excavation activities, which have affected the wall structures, undermining them and in some instances causing them to collapse. The roof of the apse has in fact collapsed recently, like a large section of the southern perimeter wall of the nave. Despite this, a new plan of the building was drawn, together with a photogrammetric survey of the standing structures. Research on this building is still ongoing and what follows is only a brief architectural description, focusing above all on some stratigraphic aspects.

The building comprises five spaces (Fig. 7). The nave (10.1a) and the apse (10.1e) form the main body, which measures a total of 12.95 m and is oriented east/west, a different angle to that featured by the other three churches in the village. A large number of white mosaic *tesserae* (approximately 3–4 cm sides), rather coarse in shape and typologically different from those found in the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus were found inside the nave. A small trapezoidal body (10.1d), defined by King as a sacristy, is located in the southern sector of the apse and has two entrances: one immediately south of the apse and the other on the southern perimeter wall. The latter connects the sacristy with the outside, making for an atypical church plan for the region. Two other quadrangular rooms are located to the south of the southern perimeter wall, on which they lean; 10.1c is directly connected to the nave through a door which was narrowed after its original construction, of which only the western jamb, incorporated into the existing wall, is preserved; 10.1b, however, preserves no direct doorway into the nave, although traces of a former door are visible. The façade, although in a poor state of preservation, still shows the three entranceways that gave access to the nave. The lintel of the main door, decorated by a cross inscribed in a circle, has collapsed but is still located near the entrance (Fig. 8). Owing to the poor state of preservation of the north perimeter wall, the two entranceways described by King are unrecognisable, with the exception of a single jamb. The façade is built in squared stones laid out in regular

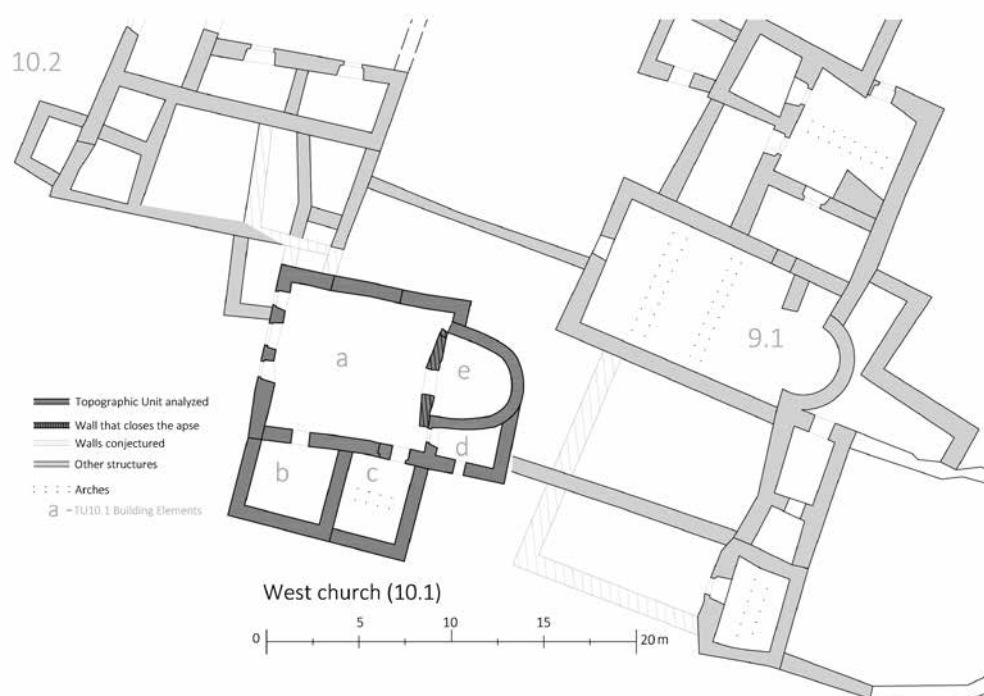


Fig. 7. Umm al-Surab. West church, general plan (Drawing and topography by Piero Gilento 2017).



Fig. 8. Umm al-Surab. West church, façade. The lintel with the inscribed cross is visible in the foreground and the wall that closes the apse in the background (Photo by Piero Gilento 2017).

courses, which is reminiscent to the technique used in the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and in the North church. The apse was blocked by a rough wall, turning this space into a room connected to the nave by a small door with two finely decorated capitals reused on the jambs. The soil level of the apse is about 0.55 m lower than the current one in the nave and is likely the original level of the church before it began undergoing renovations. Thus far, no chronological indicators have been found to date these renovations, and the poor state of preservation of the structures does not allow for a better definition of building volumes and stratigraphic relationships. What can be said is that the church, unlike the North church, for instance, has undergone several renovations over time, which have mainly affected the southern perimeter wall of the nave and the two connected rooms, and which certainly post-date the Late Antique and Umayyad periods. The wall that seals the apse could in fact be a modern phase linked to domestic activities.

2.1.4. *The Two Arches church*

The fieldwork undertaken in 2018 in the western sector of the village detected a structure that consisted of a rectangular room oriented south-east to north-west, with two partially preserved arches. This room was flanked to the north by a building complex, partially preserved on two levels and with a quadrangular courtyard covered by a roof (now collapsed), supported by an arch whose two pillars are still preserved. The spatial

organisation and the construction techniques used in the arch pillars recalled the nearby church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. The analysis of the remains has outlined an apsidal structure, oriented to the south-east and aligned with the complex of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. Further comparison of the data available identified the new building as a church with an adjoining complex to the north (Fig. 9). This architectural complex is part of Topographic Unit 9 (TU9), in the easternmost sector of the village's western district, on a gentle slope that leads to the modern road. The West church (see above) is situated immediately to the south-west of the complex, at a distance of about two metres, while a large courtyard, which divides TU9 from TU10, lies to the west. The architectural complex (9.1) consists of two large buildings: the first (9.1.a) is a single-nave church and the second is the northern complex (9.1.e-f-g). These two buildings are separated by a rectangular room (9.1.d). The nave measures 7.25 x 12.65 m; it is divided by two parallel arches and ends to the east on a semi-circular apse. The nave is currently covered by the debris of the roof and two arches, which forms a layer of rubble, 2.5 m thick, over the original floor (Fig. 10). Therefore, the entrance of the building erected upon the layer of late antique debris is substantially higher than that of the original church. At present we lack enough data to date the seismic event that caused the total collapse of the Byzantine building, but the evidence collected from the excavation of the North church (see above) points to the 749 earthquake as a likely candidate. Unlike the North church, however, this building has, at

least, one reoccupation phase, the discussion of which will focus on architectural stratigraphy and masonry techniques, which are currently the only indicators with which to suggest a relative chronology. The outline of the Byzantine architectural complex can be made out both by a direct reading of the material remains and by the aerial photo taken in 1978 by the Spanish archaeological mission in Jordan.⁷ The apse, which has a semi-circular plan, is partially visible today, and its southern part presents the lintel of an entranceway that led to a flanking room (9.1.b). No trace remains of the specular room on the north side. A sizeable section of the outer apsidal wall is clearly visible in its northern part, from inside a room built in the modern age that abuts the ancient structure (Fig. 11). The nave, rectangular in shape, is marked by the presence of two parallel arches (now collapsed), oriented north-south and distant from each other 2.60 m. These arches must postdate the Byzantine phase. No traces of a second level have been attested for the church. A lintel and entranceway, almost completely obliterated by debris, is preserved in the eastern section of the nave's northern perimeter-wall. This opening led to a room (9.1.d) to the north of the church, rectangular in shape (6.15 m long and 3.00 m wide), which could be interpreted as a transitional space (a corridor?) between the church and the northern complex. This consists of a quadrangular courtyard (9.1.e, 6.75 m x 6.50 m in size), covered by a flat roof (now collapsed) supported by a diaphragm arch, of which only the two well-finished pillars survive today. The complex spread on two levels that are still visible on the western wall of the courtyard. This is marked by two ground-level doors that lead to one single room each (9.1.f-g). The room to the north (9.1.f) still preserves the original roof, while the roof of the southern room (9.1.g) has been rebuilt, as suggested by an additional pillar. Above these two rooms, on the first level, two more rooms are accessed through a staircase that is still partially visible from the courtyard. A door, flanked by a niche, opens into the north room in the western façade of the courtyard, on the first floor. The first floor comprised another rectangular room (9.1.d) above the corridor. The complex could also be entered through an opening in the north perimeter wall. If, as suggested above, this description corresponds to the late antique layout, the remains indicate at least one phase of reconstruction followed by the abandonment of the building. The reconstruction phase is clearly visible both on the southern perimeter wall and on the façade and its

north-west corner, which seems to have been completely rebuilt. As noted, the arches also seem to belong to this reconstruction phase. The typology of the door and the masonry techniques used in these wall sections are in fact very different from those used in the late antique phases of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and in the North church. Indeed, in the Two Arches church, part of the visible walls are built exclusively with reused elements and the wall is laid out in regular sequences of two headers and one stretcher. The technique, which is fairly uncommon in the village of Umm al-Surab, was executed by workers that did not cut or dressed the stone blocks regularly, but were skilled in making the most of the material available. Together with the stratigraphy, this masonry technique is the only (relative) chronological indicator to date this reconstruction phase. It is similar to that found in the tower of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, which perhaps suggests an Ayyubid/Mamluk occupation phase. Further analysis is necessary to verify this hypothesis and to establish the function of the complex in this later phase.

Although the data are still very partial, we can suggest a first chronological reconstruction of the building history of the complex:

1. Late Antique phase, including the construction of the church and the north complex. This phase is reflected in the general layout of the building, which is perfectly oriented with the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and with the North church, and in some masonry features. It is unclear if the church was occupied until the Umayyad period and with what function. What is clear is that the building suffered an extensive collapse, especially in the area of the church. Although, also in this case, the earthquake of 749 appears as a plausible working hypothesis, the structure's current state of preservation is too compromised for a more detailed hypothesis to be put forward.

2. A likely Medieval phase, in which the structure of the church was rebuilt, and two parallel arches added. To date, this phase has not been documented in the northern complex, which, in any case, was cleared of the debris of the collapsed roof of the courtyard at some point in its history. The only available chronological marker for this reconstruction phase are the masonry techniques, which are typologically akin to those used in the Ayyubid/Mamluk phases of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. In the medieval period, the complex may have been used for domestic, rather than religious, purposes.

⁷ The author would like to thank Antonio Almagro for making the photographic material of the Spanish archaeological mission in Jordan, stored at the Escuela de Estudios Árabes in Granada (EEA), available, and for the continuous and fruitful exchange of ideas during the secondment carried out in Granada as part of the *ACTECH* project.

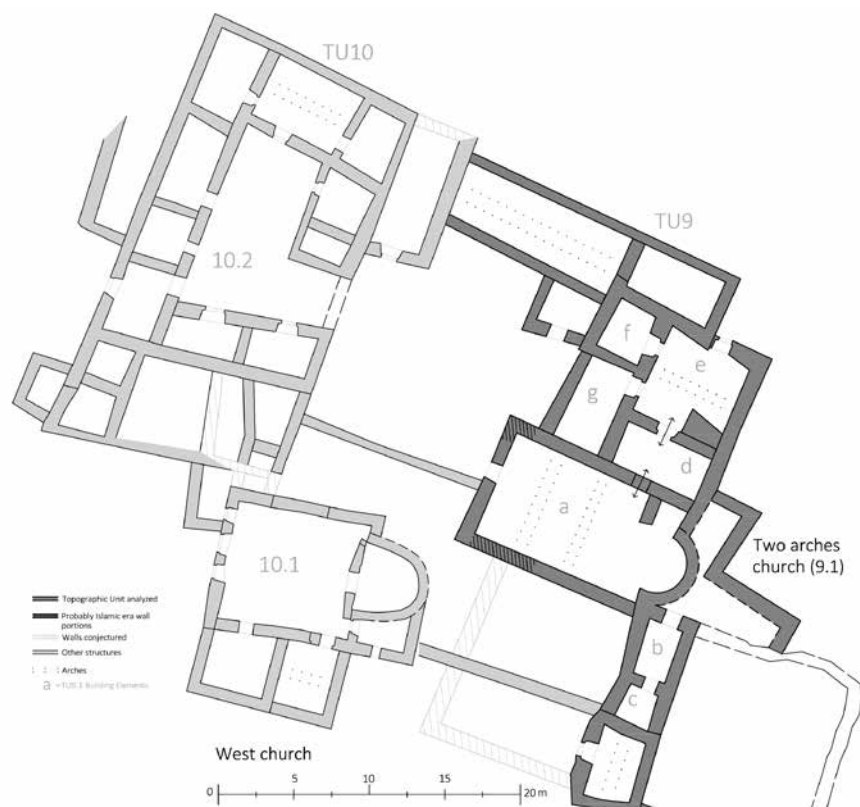


Fig. 9. Umm al-Surab. Two arches church. General plan of the church and its northern complex and likely southern annexes (Drawing by Piero Gilento; Topography by Gourguen Davtian).



Fig. 10. Umm al-Surab. Interior of the Two arches church, view from east (Photo by Piero Gilento 2018).



Fig. 11. Umm al-Surab. Two arches church. Partial view of the apse from the interior of a recent building (Photo by Piero Gilento 2018).

2.2. Samā al-Sarḥān

This small village (3 hectares of recognizable area in Antiquity) is located 8 km to the north-west of Umm al-Surab; the centre of the village is occupied by a tell, from which a scattered settlement, mostly houses, develops. Samā was also studied by Butler (1909, 86), who pointed to the presence of a completely ruined church to the north of the site. The building's materials were reused in the Ḥijāz Railway bridge, 3 km to the west of the village, which is still visible today. Based on the visible remains, the church presents a single nave and a semi-circular apse, oriented in a south-east direction. A corridor separates the church from another structure located to the south, of which only a limited section of the north wall is preserved. The visible remains display regular courses of quarried and dressed masonry, which is typologically close to the technique used in the churches of Umm al-Surab. No traces of later reconstructions were attested, but the fact that much of its building material was taken away to be reused in other structures severely limits our analysis.

2.2.1. St. George church

This building complex was analysed and recorded by Butler (1909, 83-86) and later re-examined in detail

by King (1983b; 1988), who suggested at least three construction phases, as later confirmed by our analysis (Fig. 12):

Period I. A church with a central nave, side aisles, and a semi-circular apse without flanking rooms. The basalt blocks were quarried and squared and laid out in regular courses, traces of which are preserved on the façade, the chancel arch and the apse wall.

Period II. Addition of some rooms to the north of the church, which probably were part of the monastery, and which are related to two inscriptions (or one in two parts) dated to 624-625 (Littmann 1909, 44-45, inscr. no. 24 and 25). This extension of the religious complex was built when the region was under Sassanid rule, and for this reason it is a document of great importance. The technique used combines quarried and reused elements, and, although the masonry is still laid out in regular courses, the workmanship is cruder than in the previous period.

Period III. The church was thoroughly reformed. Part of the northern section of the apse was demolished (or it collapsed), the apse was closed by a wall (still *in situ* today), and a tall quadrangular tower was built on top of these two structures, with a staircase revolving around to a central pillar. The construction technique used in the tower, which makes exclusive use of reused elements, is similar to that found in the tower of Umm

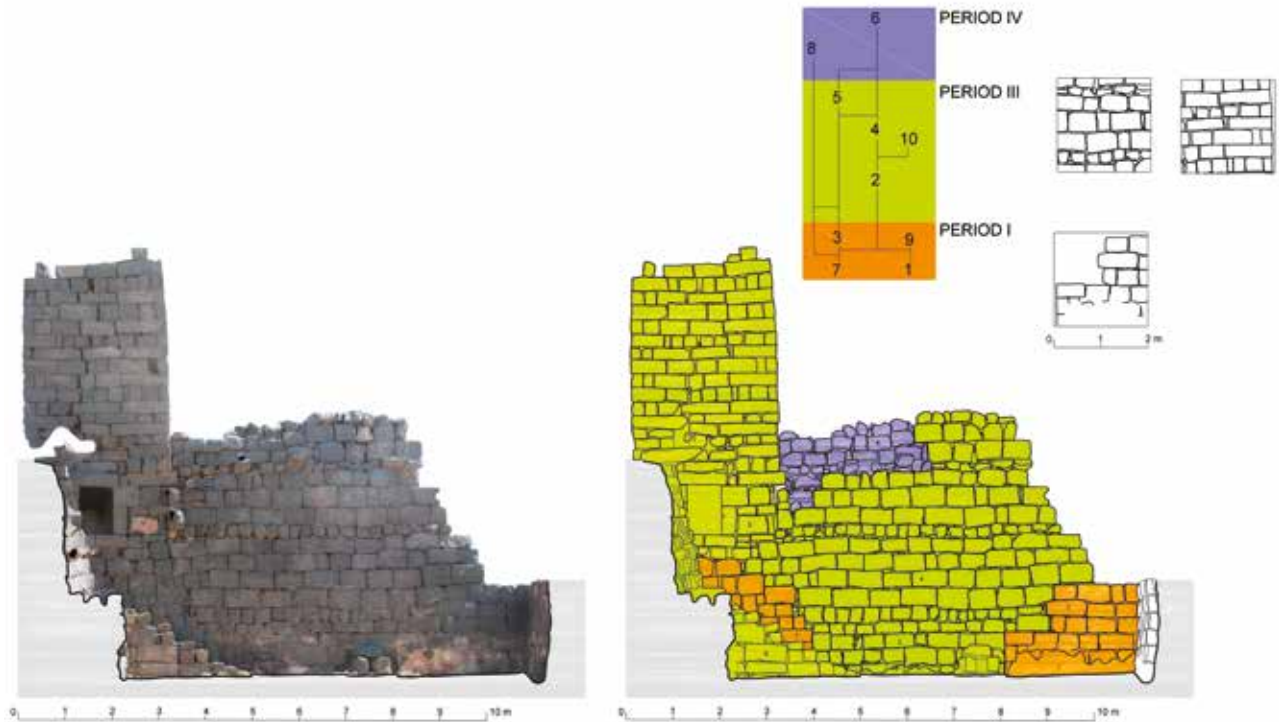


Fig. 12. Samā al-Sarḥān. St. George church, stratigraphic analysis of the internal eastern section, looking the chancel arch and the tower (Photogrammetry, analysis and drawing by Piero Gilento 2018).

al-Surab, which supports King's (1983b, 133) dating in the Ayyubid/Mamluk periods. Unfortunately, later reconstructions and restorations have cancelled, like in Umm al-Surab, the possibility of verifying the presence of the mihrāb in the southern perimeter wall.

The religious complex of Samā was used by the Christian population at least until the first half of the 7th century. Based on the surface pottery collected by King, it appears that in the Umayyad period the building continued to be occupied. The analysis of the material structure does not indicate that the structure underwent major changes during this period, suggesting that its function did not change, although there is no material confirmation for this. The building's function, however, changed in the Middle Ages, when the church was turned into a mosque.

2.3. Umm al-Quṭṭayn

Umm al-Quṭṭayn is the second largest village in north-eastern Jordan after Umm al-Jimāl, which it is located 24 km to the west. Butler's photographs show that the village was one of the best preserved in the area. It was severely damaged in the 1930s during the repression of the Druzes and later by large-scale urban expansion. Today, the ancient settlement pattern of the village, which has been

absorbed by modern constructions, is almost unrecognizable, as already described by Geoffrey King during his survey of the area between 1980 and 1981 (King 1983a). In fact, King could not find any of the three churches and two chapels mentioned by Butler, but identified four other churches (or chapels) that do not match the location and plans described by Butler (King 1983a, 82-83). King's work was very timely and includes photographs and plans of the structures he identified as churches. Our observations will focus on only one of the buildings identified by King, which he named North-east church.

2.3.1. North-east church

With this name, King referred to a building, identified during his survey in the 1980s, that had gone unnoticed by Butler during his survey in the early 20th century. Compared with the site's overall state of preservation, this building remains relatively well preserved. It presents a single-nave, oriented north-west to south-east, with a semi-circular apse protruding from its south-eastern end. A series of rooms, probably on two levels, are located south of the church and were intended to serve as a monastery, or in any case were auxiliary structures for the church. The south, west (façade), and east (apse) walls are still-standing, while the northern one is



Fig. 13. Umm al-Quttayn. North-east church, view from north-west (Photo by Piero Gilento 2017).

almost completely collapsed, dragging down the roofing system, of which only a section upon the apse survives. Satellite images indicate that the roofing system collapsed between 2011 and 2014 (Fig. 13). The single nave has three different accesses. The interior of the southern and northern perimeter walls is characterised by respective sets of five engaged pillars, made with reused squared stone blocks. The Latin inscription reported by King (1988, 66-72) is still visible on the southern wall, facing the north-western entrance. The chancel area is currently the best preserved in the complex, and several building activities can be detected. The two arches in the apse were rebuilt to support a new roof, using in both cases material from other building phases or other materials like two Greek inscriptions. A big hole, caused by looters, exists at the centre of the nave, and there is another, smaller one in the apse, near the southern door, i.e., a little entranceway that connects the nave with the southern rooms. The view of the external front of the apse has changed from King's survey in the 1980s, and several building activities characterised by different masonry techniques can be distinguished. The oldest masonry techniques used regular ashlar with an average height of approximately 25 cm and it is preserved only in the six lower courses. A door was open in the original apse, built with this technique, in a later construction phase. This door reuses a lintel with an engraved cross. Another cross is visible on one ashlar reused in one of the arches located in the apsidal area. It

is unlikely that the building continued functioning as a church when the opening was made in the apse. In any case, whoever reoccupied the building used the best basalt blocks available, from both a technical and a decorative point of view. A wall built in well-finished ashlar abuts the southern sector of the apse (Fig. 14). A door located in the southern part of this wall gives way into a rectangular room with some mangers in its southern perimeter wall. This room is linked with a series of smaller quadrangular spaces in the western sector. There is clear evidence to argue that this complex of several rooms in the southern area of the church was organised in two levels. In one of these rooms there is a funicular arch made in well-finished ashlar with some traces of plaster. Probably, this southern complex is related to the development of the site and the arrival of monks and, therefore, the rooms could belong to a monastery. The walls of this southern complex display a liberal use of mortar in the joints, probably as a result of the partial reconstruction and consolidation of the structures. The façade of the church (western perimeter wall) is now a standing wall combining two different building techniques, both of which use roughly-dressed ashlar (Fig. 15). The traces of a door, which is probably not the original one (because of the reused elements in the jambs), correspond to the main entrance of the building, which in a following phase was reconstructed at the same time as the renovation of the façade. The masonry techniques used in the apse and in the façade are different



Fig. 14. Umm al-Qutayn. North-east church, view of the exterior of the apse (Photo by Piero Gilento 2017).



Fig. 15. Umm al-Qutayn. North-east church, façade (Photo by Piero Gilento 2017).

in many ways. The latter probably underwent more than three different rebuilding phases. Based on all of this, a first summary of the relative chronology of this architectural complex can be suggested:

1. The construction of the single-nave church with four arches, ending in a semi-circular apse. The most representative masonry technique is the one used at the apse. According to King, this church, and the southern complex, were connected to the military garrison stationed in Umm al-Qutayn (King 1988, 71).

2. The reconstruction of the façade and of the perimeter walls.

3. The construction of the rooms in the southern sector (a monastery?). The masonry techniques used still show substantial skill (quarrying and squaring of the stones), but the stratigraphic relationships show that the walls of these rooms were built after the church. This may mean that it is a later construction phase, but without abandoning the technological traditions of Late Antiquity.

4. The reconstruction of the façade, including walling-up the main door and opening a new one in the apse.

The North-east church presents clear evidence reoccupation, but there is a lack of data (inscriptions, archaeological excavation, etc.) concerning absolute chronology. It would seem that at least two or three construction phases fall within the Byzantine period, followed by a construction phase in which the function of the church changed, as strongly suggested by the opening of a doorway in the apse. This is an extremely interesting complex whose remains need investigating in depth. Our preliminary survey has highlighted different construction techniques (masonry and arches) and the abundant use of mortars and plaster in the reconstruction phases of the church. The analysis and dating of these materials may provide yield useful data to better define the complex's construction history in the future.

2.4. Umm al-Jimāl

This is the most important archaeological site in the Jordanian Hawrān, in terms of both size and the state of preservation of its buildings. Its location, not far from three important urban centres such as Bosra to the north (23 km), Amman to the south, and Gerasa to the southwest, certainly played a major role during several historical periods. The site is 33 hectares in size, and it was surrounded by a defensive wall built during the Roman period, of which a monumental gate and other public buildings, such as a *castellum* and a *praetorium*, remain. Approximately 128 houses have been recorded. In Late Antiquity, the site witnessed the construction of fifteen churches, which were described, photographed, and drawn in detail by Butler (1913). Other scholars have subsequently worked on the churches of Umm al-Jimāl, such as the Julianos church (Corbett 1957). Since the 1970s, the American mission directed by Bert de Vries has been researching the site at large (de Vries 1998), and a valorisation project has recently been completed. In this context, surveys and soundings were carried out in some churches (North/East church, Double church, Julianos church, and Numerianos church) and research is currently underway in the West church. Below we report some observations, concerning two churches, made during multiple visits to the site since 2017.

2.4.1. West church

According to Butler this is one of the largest, well-preserved, and most beautiful churches in Umm al-Jimāl (Butler 1913, 187) (Fig. 16). It lies outside the city wall,

but it is connected to the city by some walls. The first survey of the building was published by Schumacher in 1897, and Butler drew the plan and took some photographs during his visit on the site between 1904 and 1905. Today, the church is in a relatively good state of preservation because the façade and the whole southern arcade with its four arches, are still standing just like Butler recorded them. His comparison of the church plan and elevations with models that he recorded in Northern Syria is interesting. He argues: “this church is foreign to the region in which (it?) is located.” The church has three naves divided by two arcades made by arches standing on square piers. The apse is flanked by two quadrangular rooms. The façade presents two square towers that abut to it, between which an arch originally stood, following a model present in Northern Syria in the church of Qalb Lawza/eh. The towers are later than the façade, as Butler noted, and as it is still possible to appreciate today. The main indication of the fact that the towers are later than the façade are the stratigraphic relationships and the masonry techniques. Concerning the latter, while the façade features well-squared ashlar, the towers were built with roughly hewn blocks. The two towers are not structurally linked to the façade but simply lean on it. Based on this, it can be argued that the towers were built to buttress the façade, but this must be investigated further. The norther portion of the façade is, in fact, presents serious structural damage, and the fact that it is still standing could well depend on the support of the two towers. The towers could, therefore, be a structural solution adopted in antiquity to solve structural problems in the church, owing to construction defects or damage caused by a seismic event. About the arches Butler writes: “the broad arches of the nave were built of very shallow voussoirs, i.e., voussoirs which were long in the soffit but very short from extrados to intrados, and these were brought together upon small impost blocks, not nearly so large as the piers upon which they rest.” Butler underlines the peculiarity of the roofing system of the apse, in particular the half dome built with mortar mixed with volcanic scoria and “the side aisles were roofed with flat slabs of stone resting upon the aisle walls and upon a corbel course above the nave arches.” It is to be noted that the first pillar of the southern arcade starting from the apse (i.e., from the east) abuts the pillar that delimits the apse, which is typologically different from it and which supports some remaining ashlar of the original apsidal arch, now collapsed. The apse is currently closed by a wall built with reused ashlar and a door gives access to its interior. It is to be noted that Butler doesn't mention this wall. According to Butler, the very well finished building materials were reused in Roman buildings, and we can



Fig. 16. Umm al-Jimāl. West church, façade (Photo by Piero Gilento 2017).

confirm that some decorative elements from the façade seem to have been reused. This may suggest the presence in the building of a phase predating the church, or the use of building material from nearby structures in its construction. Based on this, although at first sight presents a rather homogeneous construction, the presence of various building phases that have more or less modified its original state can be recognised. Research on this architectural complex is underway by the Umm al-Jimāl project and I hope that soon we shall have more data to reflect on its construction history. The West church was included in our analysis to reflect on one of its peculiar constructive elements: the wall that closes the apse. Not having many analytical tools at our disposal, in this instance we used old photos. The original photograph of the façade of the West church at Umm al-Jimāl taken by Butler in 1905 (scanned at high resolution) reveals a detail of the interior of the church that is difficult to perceive in the original publication of the photograph and its online version. The image captures a small portion of the interior of the apse with the semi-dome still in situ. The current condition of this part of the building is very different: in fact, the semi-dome has collapsed, and the apse is walled up, as noted above. In this case the photograph is an essential tool to establish a clear chronological milestone, indicating without doubt that the wall is not ancient, but instead a modern built after 1905.

2.4.2. *Church of Numerianos*

Like the West church, the Numerianos church has been included in this paper for different reasons (Fig. 17). The first one concerns its stylistic and typological affinity with the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus at Umm al-Surab, comparisons with which will be revealing. It is to be noted that these two buildings are among the few in Butler's corpus to present clear evidence of occupation during the Medieval period. In the Numerianos, this is suggested by various features, for instance the wall that closes the apse. Finally, the church has been the subject of archaeological survey, which has provided data that can be discussed and contextualised in a broader perspective. The building is a three-nave basilica with a colonnaded porch on the façade. The joint analysis of the two churches reveals that the two masonry techniques used in both churches, although very distinct in terms of technique, are identically organised and arranged. The lower sections were built in carefully-finished masonry with L-shaped joints, while the upper sections were built in rough masonry. Any building project that chose to combine these two techniques had to follow precise rules, not only to do with structure, but also with form and cost. The lower stonework required highly-specialised workmen, and it was much more complex, time-consuming, and costly, than the technique used in the upper sections. Moreover, the façades were endowed



Fig. 17. Umm al-Jimāl. Numerianos church, current state of the interior (Photo by Piero Gilento 2017).

with porticoes whose roofing (the support brackets are clearly visible in the photographs) cleanly divided the visual perception of the space, largely concealing the upper sections which, for this reason, were built paying less attention to form. The lower section, in contrast, employed a stylistically-attractive building technique, in part because it could be admired up-close. Furthermore, Butler's photographs show that the apses of the two churches were walled up. The wall that closed the apse is still partially preserved in Umm al-Jimāl, while the wall that closed the apse in Umm al-Surab was recently dismantled. At the time of Butler's survey, the northern sector of the interior of the church was well preserved, with the presence of three arches still-standing on two squared pillars that supported part of the upper gallery. Currently the church is in a poor state of preservation, having been used as a quarry for the construction of other buildings. To the north of the church, a courtyard with a circular cistern is surrounded by rooms arranged on two levels which could have been the monastery, like in the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. Butler mentions an inscription "in the south east angle of the court" (III, insc. 240) adding: "This is one of the few buildings in Umm al-Jimāl, if not the only one, which shows unmistakable evidence of Moslem occupation. ...It may be... that this church was the only building restored or altered for Moslem uses" (Butler 1913, 194). After opening several soundings in the church in the first half of the

1980s, Schick dated the abandonment of the church to the Umayyad period. In particular, a large number of fragments from this period were found in the apse. According to de Vries the building has three main phases dated to the late 6th-early 7th centuries: 1. The church, 2. The northern cloister, 3. a flagstone court to the west of both structures. De Vries also writes that the church was remodelled in several phases. Like the southwest door, the apse was blocked by a wall, but according to de Vries, this does not mean that the church was turned into a mosque because there are no religious evidence for this change. The church was seemingly used as a church during the early Umayyad period because the *synthronon* was probably added during a remodelling of the church at this time. The chancel area also dates to the Umayyad period and can be represented by the different layers of plaster floor laid out after the removal of the chancel screen's foundation stones.

3. DISCUSSION

When the data presented above is seen in context (Tab. 1), it emerges that only two out of the nine churches analysed present *in situ* inscriptions dated to the pre-Islamic period. These are the foundation inscription of the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (489) and the inscription of a probable reconstruction at the

church of St. George in Samā al-Sarhān (624-625). For the Islamic period, the information is even more sparse, as no inscriptions have survived. To date, archaeological excavations have been carried in three of the nine church buildings considered in our research: Numerianos church at Umm al-Jimāl and North church and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus church in Umm al-Surab. The data yielded by these excavations are extremely important to define the history of these buildings, and even more valuable if they are integrated into a broader perspective for the historical reconstruction of regional settlement dynamics. In any case, these are very limited investigations both in size and time of realisation, partly for the reasons set out at the beginning of this contribution. Sometimes excavations undertaken in extensive architectural complexes have only affected small rooms, which can provide only a very partial idea of the general construction dynamics of the building. In this context, our research has tried to introduce a complementary working methodology in order to increase the data at our disposal and contribute to the scientific debate. This is the methodology of building archaeology, which uses archaeological stratigraphy to analyse material features and possesses fairly effective working tools, such as chrono-typology. Like all working methods, it has its limitations. In our case, the most important limitation is related to absolute dating. For this reason, we have combined stratigraphy and chrono-typologies with the analysis and dating of building materials, such as mortars and plasters. Below, I discuss the data that has resulted from this work.

All the churches show traces of occupation after the Islamic conquest, with the exception of the North-east church in Samā al-Sarhān, which, however, needs to be examined in more detail. As our analysis deepened, we realised that defining the ways and chronologies of occupation after the Islamic conquest is an even more complex task that foreseen. In fact, only three buildings present reliable data concerning their occupation during the Umayyad period, including the North church at Umm al-Surab and the Numerianos church at Umm al-Jimāl. Both complexes have been the subject of archaeological excavations which have revealed levels of occupation that do not go beyond the late Umayyad period. The study of standing buildings seems to confirm this trend, because no construction phases postdating the Byzantine/Umayyad periods have been found. The third building is Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Umm al-Surab, in which obvious traces of occupation in the Umayyad period were found in one of the rooms of the monastery. At the same time, this complex was also occupied in the Ayyubid/Mamluk period, together with the church of St. George in Samā al-Sarhān. If in the first instance the analysis and dating of mortars and plasters have yielded absolute chronologies that demonstrate a clear occupation in the 13th-14th century, the reoccupation of the church of St. George matches the chronology of the tower/minaret in Umm al-Surab. This architectural element is in fact present only in these two buildings within the whole corpus under analysis. It is typologically very characteristic and technically

Table 1. Contextualization of the data

Site	Church	Chronological reference (inscription)	Traces of occupation after the Islamic conquest	Time of reoccupation	Tower/Minaret	Walled up Apse	Type of occupation
Umm al-Surab	Sts. Sergius and Bacchus	489	YES	Umayyad, Ayyubid/Mamluk	YES	YES	RELIGIOUS
Umm al-Surab	West Church	-	YES	Modern (?)	NO	YES	DOMESTIC
Umm al-Surab	North Church	-	YES	Umayyad	NO	NO	-
Umm al-Surab	Two arches church	-	YES	Modern (?)	NO	NO	DOMESTIC
Samā al-Sarhān	St. George Church	624-625	YES	Ayyubid/Mamluk	YES	YES	RELIGIOUS
Samā al-Sarhān	North-east of the village	-	-	-	NO	NO	-
Umm al-Quttayn	North-East	-	YES	Modern (?)	NO	NO	DOMESTIC
Umm al-Jimāl	Numerianos		YES	Umayyad	NO	YES	RELIGIOUS (?)
Umm al-Jimāl	West Church		YES	Modern (?)	NO	YES	DOMESTIC

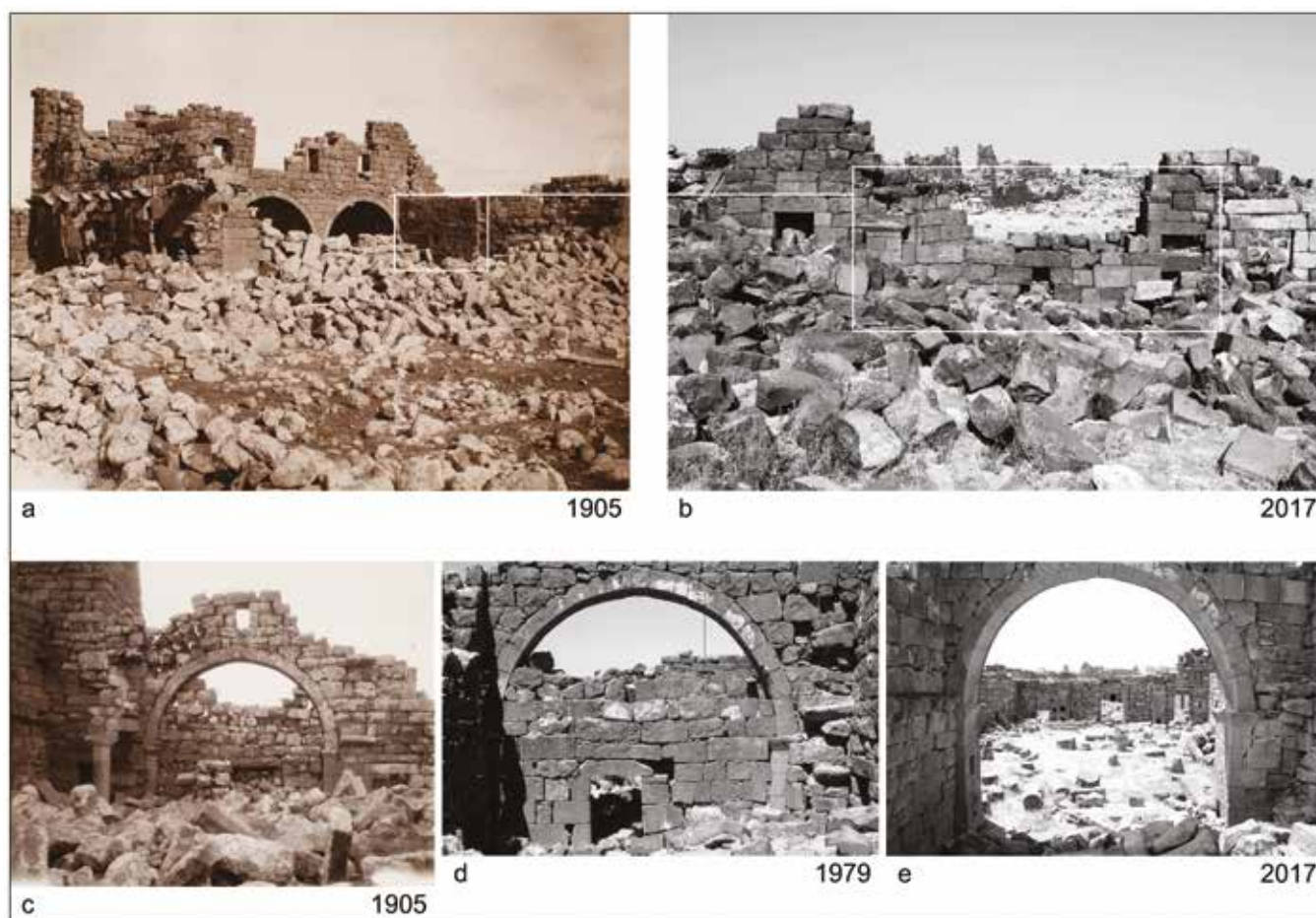


Fig. 18. Walled-up apses in churches in northern Jordan. Umm al-Jimāl, Church of Numerianos: a. view from the south-west in 1905 (Butler 1913, ill. 172. Howard Crosby Butler Archive, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University); b. interior, looking east, with part of the apse still walled up (photo: author, 2017). Umm as-Surab, Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus: c. interior from the west with the apse blocked by a wall (Butler 1909, ill. 79. Howard Crosby Butler Archive, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University); d. apse from the east with the wall that closes the apse still in situ (photo: F. Villeneuve 1979); e. apse from the east with the dismantled wall (photo by the author 2017).

complex element, which requires the presence of skilled workers to be built. The typological and technical similarity of both construction projects leads us to assume that they were built in the same period. The analysis of the masonry techniques deployed supports this hypothesis. In fact, in both instances the material was reused by relatively specialised workers. Therefore, the tower-minaret is architectural evidence of occupation of these two villages in the Ayyubid/Mamluk period, mirroring a trend that has already been attested for example in nearby Bosra. The walling-up of the apses must also be re-appraised, in light of the new data. Five of the nine churches analysed had their apses closed by a wall (Fig. 18). This suggests that the closure of apses was an architectural phenomenon that affected many churches of the region, probably in relation to a change in the function of Christian religious buildings in the Islamic period (King 1983b). This hypothesis was followed by B. de Vries in his interpretation of the

closure of the apses in the church of Numerianos and the West church (de Vries 2000, 44). However, de Vries warned that, based on preliminary observations, the wall that closes the apse of the West church could be “attributed to 20th-century domestic remodelling” (de Vries 2000, 44, n. 17). As noted above, de Vries’ intuition was confirmed by the analysis of an old photo of the West church façade taken by Butler which shows that the wall that currently closes the apse is a structure built after 1905. This observation must force reflection on the modern and contemporary reconstruction, with the same material and with similar techniques, of centuries-old structures, which sometimes make it very difficult to distinguish ancient changes and reconstructions from modern and contemporary work without the aid of historical documentation. In the same way, four of the buildings analysed show traces of reoccupation that could be related to more recent periods.

In a functional level, the situation is equally complex. If the towers of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Umm al-Surab and of St. George in Samā al-Sarhān can safely be argued to have acted as minarets, and therefore that the two churches were reoccupied as mosques in the Middle Ages, in all the other churches much more caution is needed. B. de Vries, for instance, argued that the church of Numerianos continued to function as such, but for the North church and the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Umm al-Surab we have no evidence to support that they retained their function during the first Islamic dynasty. Similarly, all the other buildings seem rather to have been given domestic functions in much more recent times. In all instances, the churches have been used over time as large open-air quarries for the supply of excellent building material by local builders, for whom recycling was a major practice, and a progressive and inevitable loss of local *savoir-faire*, mainly linked to the end of primary quarrying and stone dressing. At the same time, other construction types (masonry techniques and pointed arches) and production technologies (plasters and mortars) were introduced, marking a new phase in construction in the region. Two of the nine buildings analysed seem to show no traces of occupation after the Umayyad period. These are the North church at Umm al-Surab and the North-east church at Samā al-Sarhān. Both are located in rather marginal areas in their respective sites, reflecting the contraction of Byzantine/Umayyad villages in the Middle Islamic period.

4. CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

The conclusions will be of two types: historical and methodological. From the historical point of view, what clearly emerges from the data reorganised and discussed above is that most churches show traces of reoccupation after the Islamic conquest. Defining the how and when of this occupation is more complex. Three of the nine churches have yielded evidence of occupation during the Umayyad period. For the remaining buildings, although subsequent construction phases are clear, it is currently impossible to situate them in a well-defined chronological context. For one church only, Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (Umm al-Surab), we have reliable evidence of occupation in the Ayyubid/Mamluk period, the outcome of a multi-year research project dealing with both stratigraphic and archaeometric issues. We believe that the church of St. George follows the same sequence, but in this instance, we have relied on typological comparisons (the tower-minaret) and not absolute dating. In the other buildings some indicators, such as masonry techniques and architectural typologies (arches), lead us to argue for

an occupation in the medieval period. However, more research is needed, because some construction techniques may actually correspond to even more recent periods. Regarding the function of these buildings and their occupants after the Islamic conquest, we possess very little data, as noted in the discussion. B. de Vries argued that the Numerianos church continued to be used as such during the Umayyad period. For the other two churches in which archaeological soundings have been carried out, however, we cannot push the interpretation too far, because the excavations are currently too limited and the data is qualitatively and quantitatively insufficient to arrive to this kind of conclusion.

Some 8th century written sources (papyri and mosaic inscriptions) demonstrate construction activity in churches in relation to Christian people. Unfortunately, the data provided by our research, which mainly refer to material culture, are still too weak to be able to confirm this trend in the geographical area covered by the present paper. Shick's work in this regard still remains a fundamental point of reference precisely because of the richness and heterogeneity of the data analysed. In our case, however, the situation is different because of various factors that we have presented and discussed throughout this paper. In this regard, a reflection on the working methodology is necessary to put the research into perspective. First, some specific issues (such as the functionality of the spaces from a diachronic point of view) can only be addressed through archaeological excavations. For this reason, it is necessary to carry out a systematic archaeological excavation plan over several years. In this regard, building archaeology becomes an essential working tool because it can provide precise indications to plan the soundings. However, we have seen that building archaeology can be a rather limited methodology if not toadied by absolute dating systems. In this sense, the analysis and dating of mortars is certainly one of the most effective tools currently at our disposal. Even in this case, however, the limitations need to be taken into consideration. The analysis and dating of mortars are reliant on a preliminary study of the structures and sampling strategy, without which the results can sometimes be of little value. The mortars must be removed only after the stratigraphic reading of the structures has been carried out and there is a very clear idea of the construction context. To this we must add the possibility of sample contamination. Only by taking into consideration all these factors will it be possible to make the best use of the available data and therefore to present a consistent historical narrative. In the near future, many historical issues could be explored through to a multi-building work plan that integrates building archaeology, targeted archaeological excavation, and archaeometric analysis and dating of construction materials.

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CHAPTER 3

TWO CASES OF CHURCH ESTATE IN EARLY ISLAMIC SYRIA AND JORDAN, THROUGH THE ARCHAEOLOGY

DOS EJEMPLOS DE IGLESIAS-ESTADO EN LA SIRIA Y JORDANIA PALEOISLÁMICAS A TRAVÉS DE LA ARQUEOLOGÍA

PAULINE PIRAUD-FOURNET¹

SUMMARY

The fate of Christianity during the early centuries of Islamic domination can be examined through the archaeological study of two buildings that may have belonged to the Church but were not places of worship. The first is the so-called “Palace of Trajan,” the possible residence of the metropolitan archbishop of the Provincia Arabia in Bostra/Bosra. The second is a potential charitable hospice in Umm al-Surab, an ancient village in the same province. They were built during the late fifth or sixth century AD and remained inhabited until the mid-eighth century. Archaeological research suggests that their inhabitants in the late Umayyad period may have been Christians and that they may have retained their original function until that period.

KEYWORDS: Bosra, Provincia Arabia, ancient Church, hospice, bishop palace

RESUMEN

El destino del cristianismo durante los primeros siglos de la dominación islámica puede examinarse a través del estudio arqueológico de dos edificios que pertenecieron a la Iglesia, pero que no eran espacios de culto. El primero es el conocido como “Palacio de Trajano”, posible residencia del arzobispo metropolitano de la provincia de Arabia en Bostra/Bosra. El segundo es un posible hospicio caritativo en Umm al-Surab, una antigua villa en la misma provincia. Ambos fueron construidos a finales del siglo V o el siglo VI y permanecieron en uso hasta mediados del siglo VIII. La investigación arqueológica sugiere que durante el periodo omeya temprano sus habitantes pudieron ser cristianos y que estos edificios mantuvieron su función original hasta entonces.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Bosra, provincia de Arabia, Iglesia antigua, hospicio, palacio episcopal

The fate of Christianity during the early centuries of Islamic domination can be examined through the archaeological study of two buildings that may have belonged to the Church but were not places of worship. They were built in the basaltic region of Hawrān, currently astride southern Syria and northern Jordan, and their well-preserved remains have recently been subject to archaeological research. The first part of this paper provides a description of the so-called “Palace of Trajan,” the possible residence of the metropolitan archbishop of the *Provincia Arabia* in

Bostra/Bosra, and a summary of what we know about the city in the early Islamic period. The second part presents a complex that comprises a church and a potential hospitality building in the village of Umm al-Surab, not far from Bosra. This facility is likely to be one of the charitable hospices mentioned by ancient lapidary inscriptions elsewhere in the province. The study of the occupation of these structures during the early Islamic period is likely to increase our understanding of the activities and authority of the Christian Church at that time.

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1. A POSSIBLE BISHOPS' PALACE IN BOSRA

The Palace of Trajan is located in the small city of Bosra, in the basaltic region of Hawrān in south modern Syria. During the Roman and Byzantine periods, Bosra was the capital of the province of Arabia. The heart of the ancient city is traversed by broad colonnaded streets forming the matrix of the city, including the main civic and public buildings, such as two large bath complexes, a market, and an agora. The old legionary camp stands on the northern edge, while a massive theatre, an amphitheatre, and a hippodrome sit to the south. To the south east and east, there are two large water reservoirs. Since the nineteenth century, many scholars have worked to reconstruct the history of the site through the study of lapidary inscriptions, archaeological excavations, and the analysis of the well-preserved architectural remains, including public and religious buildings and urban dwellings (Fig. 1) (Dentzer-Feydy *et al.* 2007; Dentzer *et al.* 2002). In the 1980s, the French Archaeological Mission in Southern Syria (MAFSS) undertook excavations in the south-eastern sector of the city to uncover the remains of the potential largest Nabataean sanctuary. Eventually, they found the largest church in Byzantine *Provincia Arabia*. According to the archaeological material, the huge central-plan church was built in the late fifth century or the early sixth century CE (Dentzer 1988; Blanc *et al.* 2007). The identification on the southern side of the church of the remains of a possible monumental baptistery (Blanc and Piraud-Fournet 2021), as well as the discovery in the axis of the church choir of the potential location of the *cathedra* (the bishop's throne), led to the idea that this church may have been the city's cathedral, or main church.

Subsequently, the French Archaeological Mission focused on the neighbouring buildings, in particular on the impressive remains of a large ancient residence. While the church of the south-eastern district of Bosra is the largest known church in the province, this nearby residence is also the largest domestic building identified to date. The good state of preservation of the structures as well as the architectural analysis allow for the reconstruction of a complex residence, consisting of four multi-storey buildings arranged around a square peristyle courtyard (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) (Piraud-Fournet 2003; 2022a; 2022c). The modern name of this building is Palace of Trajan, even if it probably had nothing to do with Emperor Trajan, who conquered the region in CE 106. As a matter of fact, the archaeological analysis of the building and the excavations date the construction of the Palace to the late fifth or the early sixth century CE, at about the same time as the great church nearby (Piraud-Fournet 2022a; 2022c). The Palace had nearly eighty rooms, of

which a dozen were large, between 30 and 50 square metres. Most of the largest rooms stood in the northern and southern wings, on the first and second floors. In the southern wing, an intermediate level was sandwiched between the two floors. The northern wing presents a room with an alcove, which is a common feature in wealthy houses in Hawrān (Villeneuve 1997; Piraud-Fournet 2014a). On the second floor of the southern wing, the remains of a large reception hall are still visible. It is a large apartment 120 square metres in size, with an entrance on the north, two large semi-circular apses to the eastern and western sides, and one recess or alcove to the south. In 1909, the American explorer Butler (1914, 259) saw an open loggia to the west of the western apse, which was still standing at the time. The three semi-circular and rectangular apses opened onto the central square through large arches. The analysis of the construction techniques used in this basaltic region, as well as known parallels, suggest that the central room was covered by a concrete dome supported by a drum pierced by windows (Fig. 4) (Piraud-Fournet 2022c). This formed a sort of triconch hall, similar to those found in the wealthy residences of the western Roman Empire. Probably, most of the rooms in the building were occupied without interruption from Antiquity to the 1980s, as attested by evidence of repeated emptying, cleaning, and repairing. Only one part of the building, the western wing, was found collapsed on itself. This is where we conducted excavations, providing a stratigraphic sequence and chronological information about the occupation history of the site. From 2007 to 2009, excavations were conducted in the southern half of the western wing, leading to the discovery of a private bath complex, 235 square metres in size (Fig. 5) (Piraud-Fournet 2010b). The destruction levels sealed a nearly four-metre-thick stratigraphic sequence, yielding data with which to reconstruct the history of the baths and, by extension, of the palace at large. The excavations revealed that the baths had undergone many changes over time, including a final major reorganisation during the Umayyad Period. In this final stage, the baths were organised as follows: two doors led to the main room, which was probably a room for changing and resting, from the courtyard and perhaps directly from the street outside of the palace; in the west, a door gave access to a latrine that could accommodate nearly ten people; the central bay extends into a sort of recess with a circular basin, which can be interpreted as a foot bath, although its depth of 50 cm seems excessive; at the end of this recess, past the basin, a door opened to a small room that led eastwards to a stairwell that climbed to the second floor and the reception 'triconch' hall, and southwards to the complex, which was specifically dedicated to bathing; the bath complex included a small corridor leading southwards



1. Nabataean Arch	20. North-South colonnaded street	42. Legionary Camp
2. Large church complex	21. Central Baths	43. Baths of the camp
3. "Palace of Trajan"	22. Central Arch	44. Al-Jahîr spring
4. Church of Sts. Sergius, Bacchus and Leontius	23. Cryptoporticus, Forum, Macellum	45. Hypothetical Church
6. Eastern reservoir	24. Tetrapylon and circular piazza	46. Umayyad Farm
7. South-Eastern reservoir	27. Western Gate (Bab al-Hawâ')	47. Building from the Byzantine Period
10. Roman Theatre, Citadel	28. North-West city wall	48. North-Eastern Gate
11. Hippodrome	30. "House St. George"	49. Church 1
12. Amphitheater	33. Nice Ancient houses	50. House 2 "Palace Saint-Sergius"
14. Residential area and Church	35. Al-Omari Mosque	51. Ancient House
15. Southern Baths	36. Hamman of Manjak	52. Ancient House
17. Est-West main street, Nymphaeum	37. Basilica of Bahira	53. Ancient House
Monumental exedra	40. Al-Mabrak Mosque	
	41. Eastern city wall	

Fig. 1. Map of Bostra-Bosra. © Th. Fournet 2007.



Fig. 2. Southern façade of the upper floors of the “Palace of Trajan” (The façade of the ground floor is still unearthed). © P. Piraud-Fournet 2016.

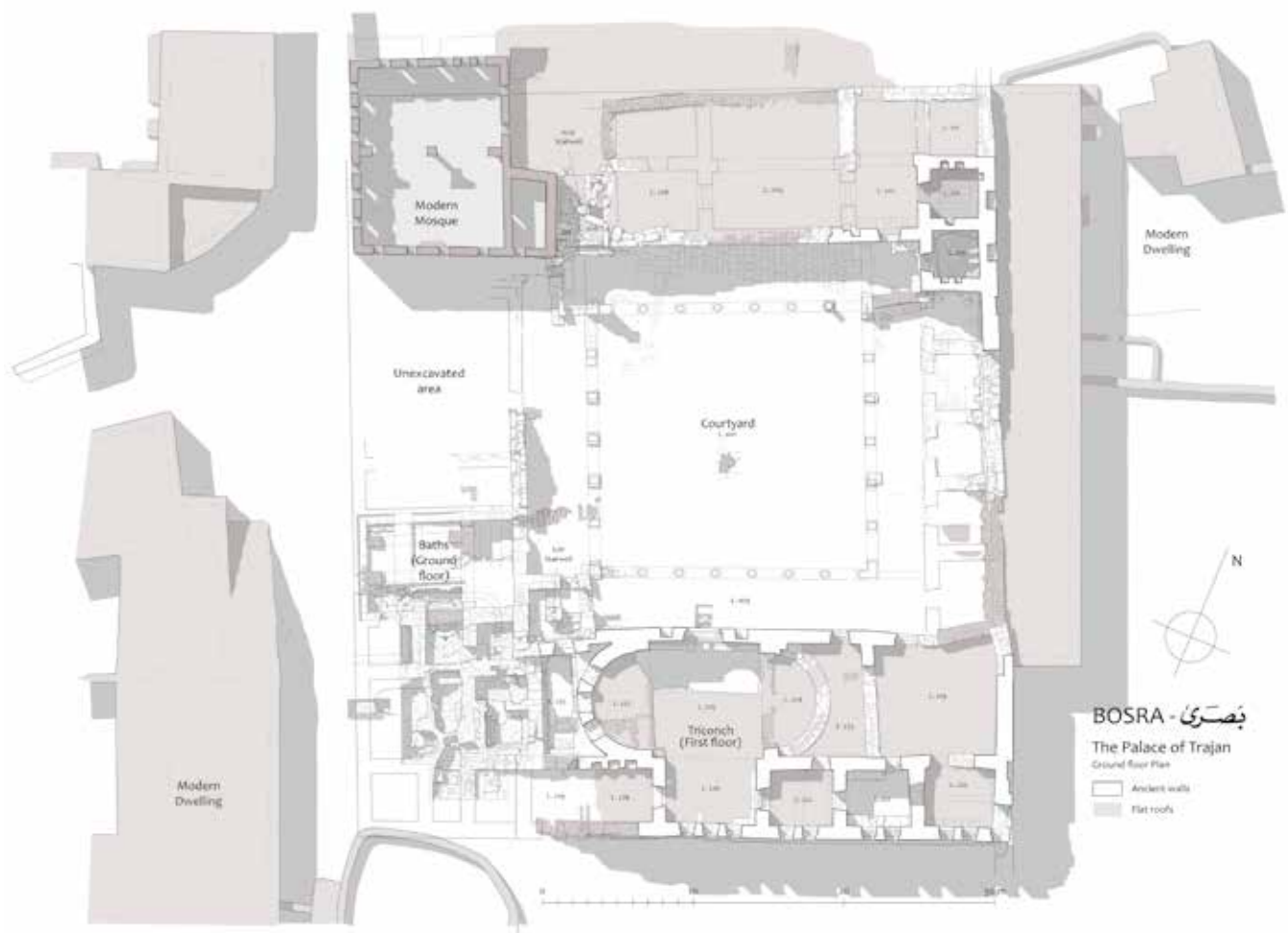


Fig. 3. Plan of the upper floor of the “Palace of Trajan”. © P. Piraud-Fournet 2016.

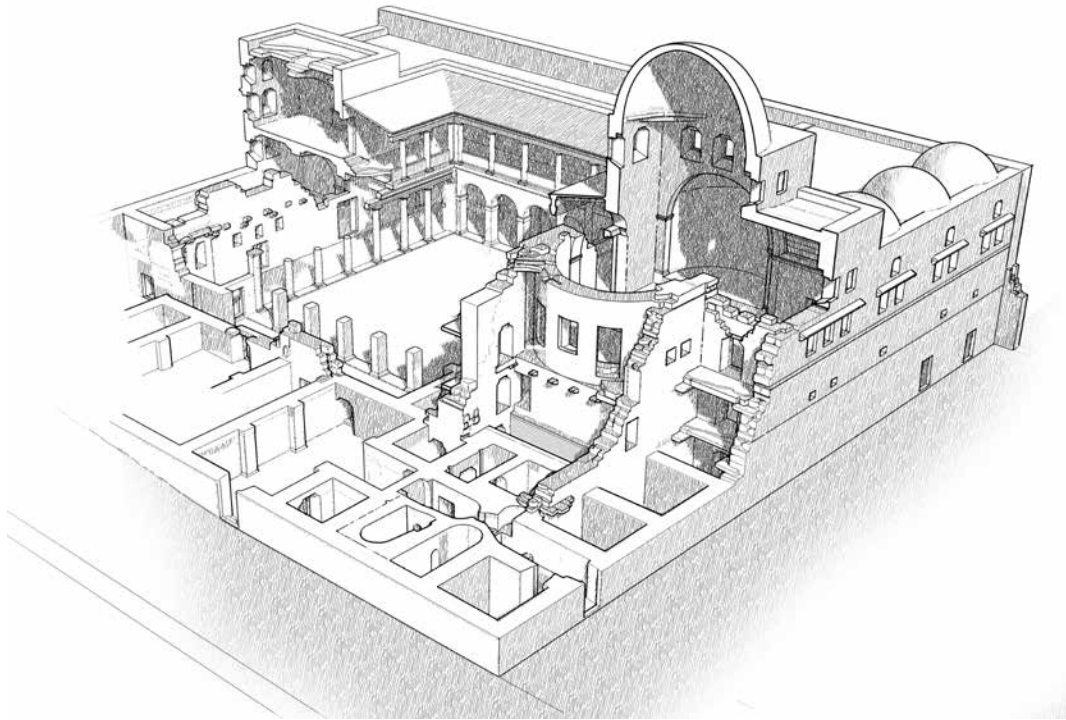


Fig. 4. Proposition of reconstruction of the "Palace of Trajan". © P. Piraud-Fournet 2016.

to a square room fitted with benches and a bathtub in a semi-circular niche; this bathtub was filled from the water tank built further east; to the west, the corridor gives access to a row of three rooms, all built above a hypocaust; each presents an apse containing a tub (Fig. 6); a small rectangular recess fitted with a heated marble seat, perhaps a massage table, is still visible in the first of these rooms; a furnace was found on the southern side of this first hot room. An underground channel ran through the baths, from the basins of the three heated rooms through the bathtub, the recess, and the latrines, which were thus flushed clean with bath water. The channel probably joined a street sewer located outside the Palace further west. The analysis of the pottery and coins² allows us to date the last major reorganisation, which included the modernization of the facilities, to the Umayyad Period (seventh century CE). This agrees with the bath's formal features, which are characteristic of the period, i.e. rows of small rooms furnished with individual basins (Piraud-Fournet 2013; 2014b).

Furthermore, the material that corresponds to the abandonment of this bathing complex dates to the end of the Umayyad Period (eighth century CE). The baths were looted shortly after they were abandoned. However, some remains found in situ and others found in the destruction layer attest that the walls and floor were lined

in limestone and marble slabs, *opus sectile*, stucco, and stone tiles. The discovery of window glass fragments and glass *tesserae* in blue and green allowed us to restore windows and a mural mosaic in the latrines. During the Abbasid period (ninth century), after the baths were abandoned, the most valuable materials were retrieved. However, among the abandoned items was a small decorative marble plaque depicting a simplified capital with a small cross at the top, and this encourages us to assume that, even in the late Umayyad Period (mid-eighth century), the palace still belonged to a Christian (Fig. 7). Furthermore, in addition to the size of the Palace, features such as the central courtyard surrounded by four wings, triconch hall, and loggia, the wealthy baths contribute to distinguish this residence from village houses in this basaltic area as well as from most of the other dwellings identified in Bosra (Piraud-Fournet 2014a). They also allow comparisons with upper class residences identified in other major Near Eastern cities. Thus, the largest known house in the *Provincia Arabia* may have been both a residence and a building for official receptions, belonging to a wealthy and significant Christian figure, even by the late Umayyad period.

Since Bosra was the seat of the political elite in the *Provincia Arabia*, hosting both the governor and the metropolitan, the Palace of Trajan could have been the

² The pottery was studied by P.-M. Blanc (CNRS) and the coins by C. Augé (CNRS).

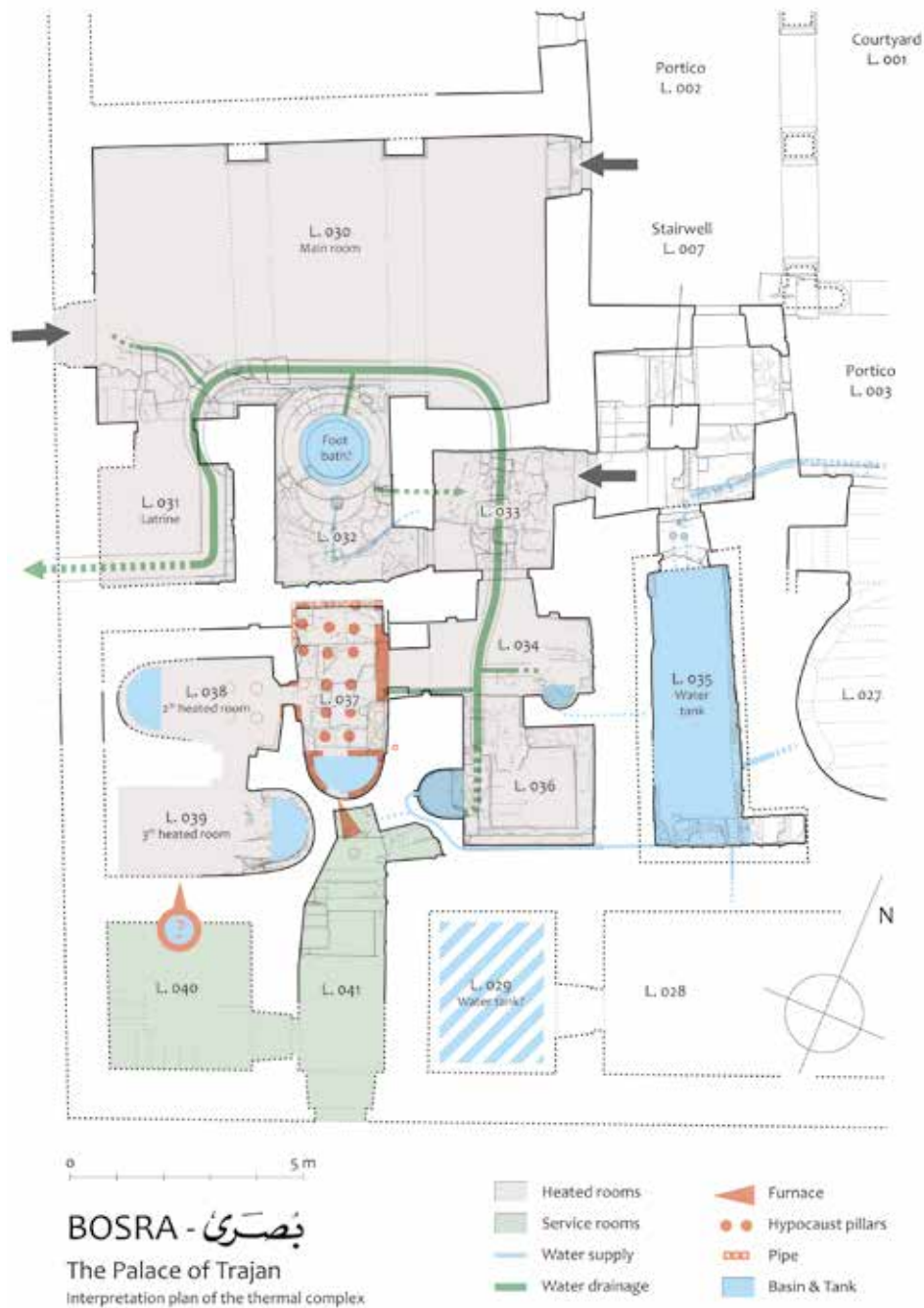


Fig. 5. The “Palace of Trajan” Bath complex. © P. Piraud-Fournet 2016.

residence of these local representatives of the imperial and ecclesiastical power. However, an inscription indicating the construction of a palace for the governor in AD 490 was uncovered in the city centre, far from the Palace of Trajan but near a large building with a monumental entrance at the centre of its main façade.³ This location can be explained by the fact that, especially

during Late Antiquity, the governor’s functions included overseeing the maintenance of public and civic buildings that were an inescapable feature of the imperial capital cities. The maintenance of classical buildings and monuments would also explain why the city centre of the provincial capitals, such as *Scythopolis* or Bosra enjoyed little ecclesiastical investment.⁴ On the other hand, since

³ *IGLS XIII/1*, inscription 9123, 194-95; Sartre (1985, 123).

⁴ According to a study comparing the city of *Gerasa* to the Province capital of *Scythopolis* (Kennedy 2000, 203-04).



Fig. 6. Remains of a basin in Room L. 037. © P. Piraud-Fournet 2016.



Fig. 7. Decorative element uncovered in the "Palace of Trajan" Bath complex. © P. Piraud-Fournet 2009.

most Christian cult buildings are located in the eastern sector of Bosra, particularly the possible major church with the seat of the metropolitan, we can assume that the Palace of Trajan, built in its vicinity, was his residence. This hypothesis is also supported by a comparative study of the Palace of Trajan and other episcopal Palaces elsewhere in the Roman Empire (Piraud-Fournet 2003; 2010a).⁵

It can be assumed that the wealthy Christian living in the Palace of Trajan in the late Umayyad period was still at the time the leader of the local Church. According to M. Sartre, in the late Byzantine period, the population of Ḥawrān was largely won over to Miaphysism, and this shared feature with the Christianised Arab tribes may have made them favourable to the Muslim invaders at the time of the conquest, even if the main city Bosra had remained "the citadel of imperial and Chalcedonian authority in Arabia" (Sartre 1982b, 198-202). According

to the Arabic sources studied by Ory (2007, 81),⁶ the peace treaty with the Arab generals that ended the fighting was not concluded by the province's governor but by the bishop of Bosra, who was at the time (634) «metropolitan Theodoros» (Sartre 1985, 116), acting on behalf of the Byzantine emperor.⁷ Indeed, during the sixth century the archbishop had acquired an essential role, replacing the municipal magistrates (Feissel 1989, 818). In a first phase, the agreement signed between the attackers and the governor would have resulted in the imposition of an annual tribute of food, oil, and vinegar on the population. In a second phase, Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-644) is said to have imposed the payment of taxes such as the personal tax (*jizya*) paid by non-Muslims, the Muslim's voluntary payment to the community (*zakāt*), paid by converts, and the land tax (*kharāj*) paid by all landowners. At the time of the conquest, Bosra was famous in the Hijaz as an essential stop for merchants

⁵ For a more detailed and argued analysis, see Piraud-Fournet (2003; 2010a).

⁶ Another hypothesis regarding the conquest of the city is in Sartre (1982b, 198-202).

⁷ The work of Philip Wood supports Ory's thesis, see Wood in this volume and Wood (2021).

coming from the Arabian Peninsula, and also because of its palaces.⁸ According to Clive Foss, Christians and Muslims lived together (Foss 1997, 242-67); while the Muslims and the administration settled in Bosra, the absence of mosques in the villages suggests that the rural population remained Christian. Bosra was progressively converted to Islam, and while undergoing no major cityscape changes, new monuments were erected, mosques in particular. The size and central position of 'Umar's great mosque testifies to the hold of Islam over the city in the seventh-eighth centuries. The city kept close relations with Mecca and Medina, supplying these cities with wine and cereals, for instance, and became an essential stage in the pilgrimage route.

Epigraphic testimonies support the idea that an ecclesiastical hierarchy remained more or less in place at the time to supervise the Christian communities (Gatier 2012, 28), even if according to a letter from Pope Martin I, Bosra no longer had a bishop in 649 (Sartre 1985, 118). However, a few bishops are mentioned by texts or inscriptions after the conquest, even though it is difficult to date their time in office with precision. An inscription discovered in a church in Rihāb, dated to 661 by Gatier (2012, 10 and n. 37) and to 691 by Piccirillo (2002, 135) – at any rate, after the Muslim conquest – mentions a certain George, potentially the metropolitan of Bosra who ruled over the Christian community of the ancient province. Two other bishops are also attested: Stephen, mentioned by John Damascene, who could have served sometime between the early seventh century and the mid-eight century, and Jacob, mentioned in an epitaph found in Bosra, which could be dated from the late seventh century to the first half of the eighth century (Sartre 1985, 116-118). These figures may have been among the latest occupants of the Palace of Trajan.

2. A POSSIBLE CHARITABLE HOSPICE IN UMM AL-SURAB

In order to identify the owner of the Palace of Trajan, it seemed useful to describe the building's environment and the city's Late Antique landscape more precisely. For instance, the buildings raised in Bosra during the

sixth century, which were listed by M. Sartre, included a *ptocheion*, which was literally a poorhouse, built by Emperor Justinian.⁹ This structure has yet to be identified among the ancient remains of the city. However, its existence led us to consider another type of Christian building: charitable facilities built in the Near East at the request and with the support of the Church, between the fourth and the seventh centuries. Indeed, ancient texts and inscriptions mention the construction of *xenodocheia*, *pandocheia*, *gerokomeia*, *nosokomeia*, *diakonia* etc. during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods; these terms could be used to designate inns, charitable hostels, hospitals, hospices for the poor, pilgrims and travellers, or for the sick, lepers, the elderly, orphans and so on. Some archaeological features are likely to distinguish these hospices from other buildings. In addition to the scarce data provided by ancient texts, the identification of such buildings relies on the analysis of all types of hosting or accommodation buildings, whether they have a mercantile or charitable vocation.¹⁰

Xenodocheia and *pandocheia* are mentioned in inscriptions found in Ḥawrān (Fig. 8), and a hospice of this sort may have been identified in Umm al-Surab (Piraud-Fournet 2022d). Following a survey undertaken in 2018, an archaeological excavation was carried out in this building in 2021 to try to document its architectural features and function.¹¹ Umm al-Surab is a small village, located in the northern governorate of Mafrāq, modern Jordan, just to the south of the border and 12 km to the north of the larger ancient village of Umm al-Jimāl. These two villages are among the three hundred ancient villages identified in the basaltic region of Ḥawrān. In Antiquity, Umm al-Surab was on the road that connected *Bostra* to *Gerasa*. The ancient village is organised around an ancient Christian complex dedicated to Saints Sergius and Bacchus, including a church, several auxiliary buildings, and a monastery (Fig. 9) (Gilento, in this volume). The buildings form two clusters that extend to the east and west. To the north of the village, a little separated from it, in the vicinity of a large cistern, stand the remains of two adjoining buildings (Fig. 10). Their square shape and dimensions are fairly similar, with c. 225 square metres each, but their layouts are not. To the west are the remains of a church

⁸ Indeed, a legend about the birth of Prophet Muhammad suggests that in Late Antiquity, the palaces of Bosra were praised. "*Quṣūr Buṣrā min arḍ ash-Shām*", *al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-Rusūl wa-l-Mulūk*, (éd. De Goeje *et al.*), Leyde 1879-1901, vol.1, 968; *Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, (coll. *Rawai' at-turath al-Arabi*), vol. 2, 156; I warmly thank M. Hammad and F. Villeneuve for finding these references. See also Ory (2007, 79).

⁹ Procopius, *Buildings*, V, 9, 22, Feissel (2000, 99), Sartre (1985, 127), *IGLS XIII/1* and 2, 9132 and 9137.

¹⁰ For more details, Piraud-Fournet (2021; 2022d). See also Wood, in this volume.

¹¹ By Pierre-Marie Blanc (CNRS-ArScAn), Gourguen Davtian (CNRS-CEPAM) and Pauline Piraud-Fournet (ArScAn-Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne). The author warmly thanks the two researchers for their contribution to this work.

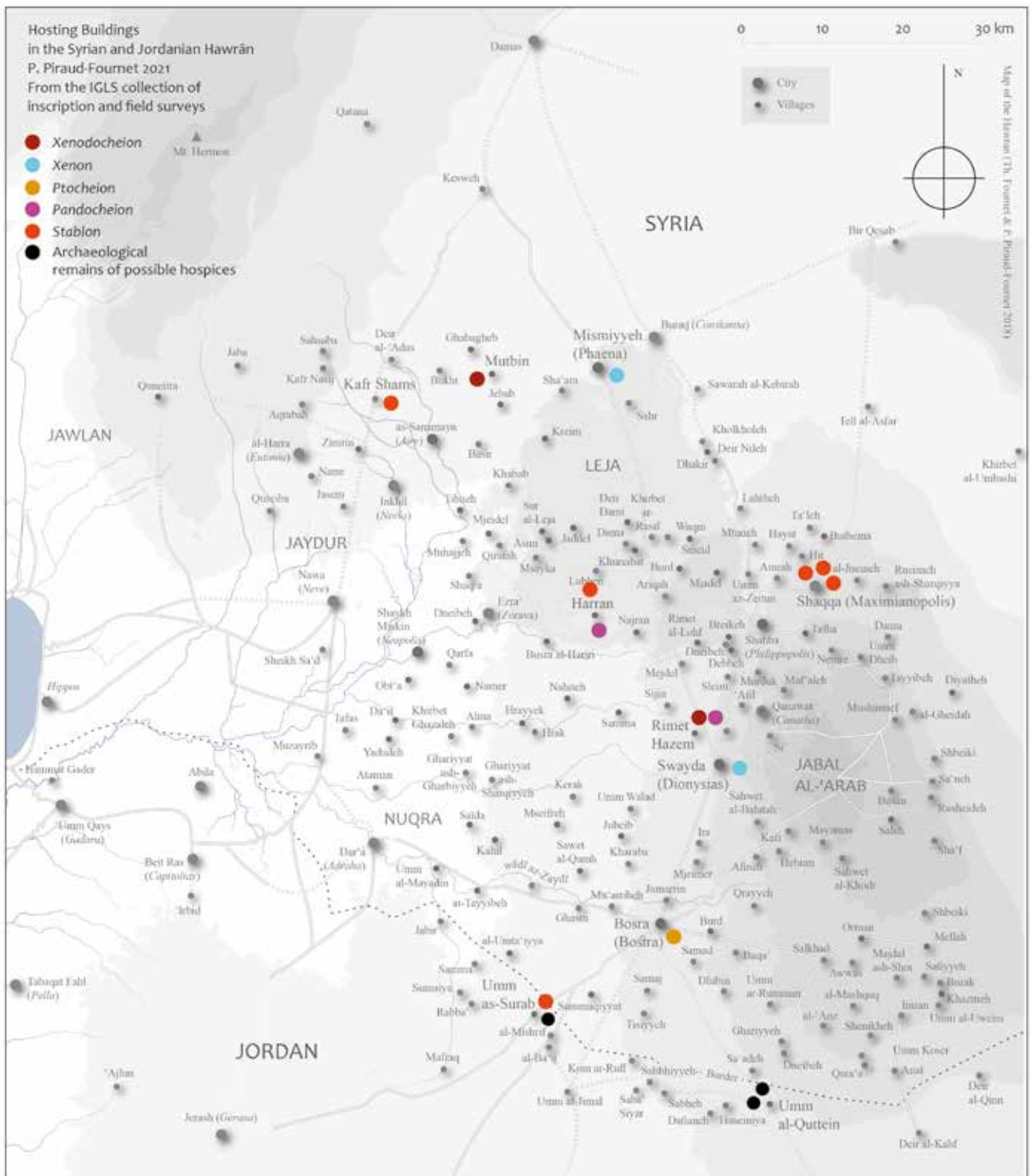


Fig. 8. Map of the Syrian and Jordanian Hawrān with ancient cities and villages. Hosting Buildings identified through the texts.
© P. Piraud-Fournet 2022.



Fig. 9. Aerial Photograph of Umm es-Surab Village. Crédit: A. Almagro 1978, photogrammetry: P. Gilento 2018.

(14 m × 16.5 m), referred to as the “North Church,” and to the east is an annex (14 m × 15.3 m) built against the chevet of the church (Fig. 11).¹² Both buildings were entirely made of well-cut basalt ashlar, but they were found collapsed on themselves, probably as a result of an earthquake. The remains did not show evidence of reuse in the medieval or modern periods. The church and the annex were not given the same attention. Whether by looters or by the Department of Antiquities, the church was cleared of most of the collapsed blocks, while the annex still preserves all of its structural elements, collapsed on themselves. In both buildings, the lower courses of the walls are still visible, and in some areas the preserved elevations stand as much as three metres tall. The clearings carried out in the church show the broad outline of its plan. It was accessed through a door, which was in line with the apse, in the western façade. The corbels that crown this façade on the outside suggest that it featured a portico and a covered porch in front. Secondary access was provided by another door in the south wall of the church. Inside the church, the remains found *in situ* make it possible to reconstruct two arcades

separating three naves, while a central apse at the east side of the church marks the location of the choir. The choir or the church is framed to the north and the south by two rectangular rooms.

The other structure located to the east is not structurally bonded to the church, but it abuts its external eastern façade. As King (1988, 50) noted, the walls of the annex are narrower and poorer in construction than those of the church. The entrance to the annex was at the centre of its southern façade, leading to a central main room that gave access to two elongated rooms to the east and west. The western room led to two other rooms located further north. Regarding the four lateral rooms, it is easy to reconstruct the roofing system, which in this area follows a classical model, made up of joined slabs supported by one or two rows of corbels at the top of the walls. However, it is harder to argue for this solution for the roof over the central room which is too wide (6 m), since the span of the slabs cannot exceed 2.5 m. No evidence of arches (i.e. corbels and slabs), which could have acted as intermediate supports for the roof, have been detected among the rubble found in the central room. The width

¹² This complex was first surveyed and described in King (1988, 48-51, fig. 6).



Fig. 10. In the foreground, Collapsed Annex Building of the Northern Church. © P. Piraud-Fournet 2018.

of the room and the relatively small quantity of collapsed blocks within it suggest that this may have been a courtyard. Furthermore, ancient houses in Ḥawrān often have an upper floor, which is usually accessed by flights of steps embedded in the facades and galleries. In the annex, the facades are not preserved to a sufficient height to be sure of the existence of an upper floor, but the volume of collapsed blocks does not rule this possibility out. Further excavations are needed to answer these questions.

No particular arrangement can be found in these rooms, but at least eleven cupboards with troughs were found embedded in the walls. These facilities are a typical feature of ancient dwellings in the basaltic region of Ḥawrān, always located on the ground floors. They are usually identified as mangers for animals, including cows, sheep, horses, donkeys, mules, and camels (Piraud-Fournet 2022b). There are three in the western room, three more, perhaps four, in the eastern room, and five in the northern back wall of the central main room or courtyard. In Ḥawrān, mangers are generally set inside

houses, within the largest room and the lateral smaller rooms on the ground floors. However, in Umm al-Surab, mangers were also set up outside, e.g. some have been attested in the back wall of the courtyard in the small monastery of Saints Sergius and Bacchus.

According to King (1988, 50), the construction techniques used in the annex suggest that this building postdates the church, and that it may have even been built after the church had fallen into disuse, as late as the Mameluk period. However, we argue that the construction of the two buildings is more or less contemporary, and that the different techniques could rather reflect different construction phases and the fact that the construction of the annex would have benefited from less funding than that of the church. Clarifying this point was one of the goals of the excavation.

Regarding the function of this complex, the close association of church and annex is reminiscent of some facilities attested in Northern Syria and Palestine, and suggests that the building was used for charitable

¹³ This is presented in more detail in Piraud-Fournet (2021). The building's features recall the charitable inns for travellers and pilgrims identified in the provinces of Palestine and on the outskirts of Jerusalem (Hirschfeld 1990; Magne and Talgam 1990; Elter and Hassoune 2008; Fiema *et al.* 2016; Voltaggio 2011; Whiting 2016); they were always associated with a chapel or a church and most often with a monastery. It is also reminiscent of complexes identified by Jean Lassus in Northern Syria, at Brād and Sheikh Sleimān (Lassus 1947), as possible charitable hostels, always in association with a church. Several inns were identified, in the outskirts of Deir Si'mān, near the Sanctuary of St. Symeon Stylite (Tchalenko 1953). These hospices were managed by the monks, but physically independent from the monastery in order to protect the everyday life of the monks and perhaps to keep away foreigners and travellers from the monastery's permanent inhabitants.

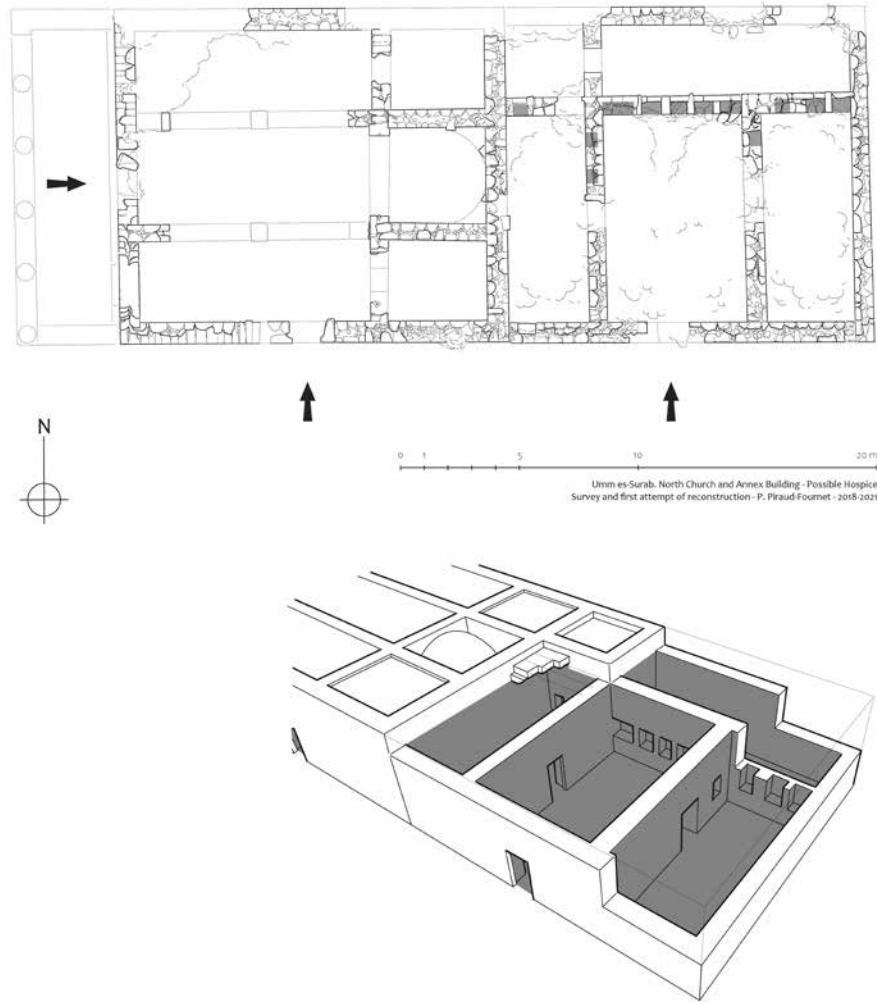


Fig. 11. Umm es-Surab. The North Church and Annex Building. Plan and first attempt of reconstruction.
© P. Piraud-Fournet 2021.

hospitality and accommodation.¹³ This interpretation is supported by the peripheral and isolated location of the building, to the north of the village, which would have kept strangers, foreigners, and the sick away from the dwellings of villagers and monks. Furthermore, the building's layout is different from those of other houses in the village, and the lack of any evidence for an enclosed courtyard in front of the house suggests that it may have been open to passers-by.¹⁴

At first sight, the remains show no evidence of reuse or transformations. Two soundings were opened in two different areas of the annex and, as expected, the Late Antique-Early Islamic period structures were found directly beneath the destruction rubble (Fig. 12). Among the main results, are the complete *in situ* skeletons of

at least two animals that lay directly under the fallen ashlar, in front of the two easternmost troughs of the eastern room of the building. These animals were most likely trapped and crushed by the violent destruction of the building. A preliminary assessment identified them as donkeys.¹⁵ Importantly, the excavation allowed the building to be dated. The study of the pottery found in the construction layers dated it back to the Byzantine period (sixth century) while the pottery of the last occupation phase is dated to the Umayyad period (eighth century).¹⁶ No excavation has been conducted in the nearby church to date. However, most churches in the region date back to the fifth-sixth century, and it can be assumed that the construction of the annex does not postdate that of the church by much. Although

¹⁴ A similar interpretation was advanced for the inn in the village of Sergilla in northern Syria (Charpentier 2013).

¹⁵ We warmly thank the archaeozoologist Hervé Monchot (Sorbonne Université-Orient & Méditerranée).

¹⁶ The pottery was studied by Pierre-Marie Blanc during the 2021 campaign.



Fig. 12. The troughs under the destruction rubble. © P. Piraud-Fournet 2021.



Fig. 13. Metal plate decorated with a cross. © P.-M. Blanc 2021.

the function of this self-contained complex cannot be established with any certainty, the combination of similar-sized building and church and the fact that they are built together and isolated from the village leads to the belief that the annex was built to serve the church. Furthermore, while it is not possible to ascertain if the function of the annex changed between the sixth and the eighth century, the presence of donkeys (rather than, for instance, cows or sheep), matches with the interpretation of the building as an inn for travellers, even to the late Umayyad period. Eventually, the excavation

of the destruction layer near the main door yielded a small and very thin copper plate and a very small fragment of possibly another one. The best-preserved one is pierced on the edges with height small holes, intended to fix the object on a support, a clothing, or a piece of wood for example. It is decorated in the middle with twenty small, embossed points arranged to form a cross (Fig. 13). The function of this item is unclear, but its presence in the remains of the last occupation phase of the site suggests that the inhabitants were still Christian at the time.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the identification of the complex located in the northern margin of the village of Umm al-Surab as a hospice remains hypothetical and uncertain. However, the excavations established that in the mid-eighth century, long after the Islamic conquest, the North Church complex was still inhabited, and the finds support the hypothesis that the Church was still alive and active at this time. Eventually, the complex was violently destroyed, most probably by an earthquake, and definitely covered with a very massive rubble. Research on this building should be pursued further, since the traces of the last occupation phase are available and accessible, directly under the eighth-century rubble. This would allow for a more in-depth exploration of the function of this building during the Umayyad period. Regarding the Palace of Trajan, the excavations highlighted the fact that its function did not change from the Byzantine to

the Umayyad periods, and, revealed that the owner left the palace, or at least abandoned the bath complex, at the very end of this period. The reasons for this abandonment are not clear. However, the identification of the owner of the Palace of Trajan in the late Umayyad period as the leader of the local Church is not trivial, since it can be related with some crucial, and oft-revisited, historical phenomena such as the flight of the Byzantine elites from the cities following the Islamic conquest (Balty 2000, 176) and the appropriation of the main urban residences by the conquerors (Ibn 'Asâkir, *Tārikh Dimashq*, 1, 134, 126, 128). On the basis of the archaeological remains identified in the Palace of Trajan, it can be assumed that in the late Umayyad period, the city's largest palace was still occupied by a person who was rich enough to transform and maintain a luxurious private bath and powerful enough to display a decorative element bearing a Christian cross.

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PART II

CHURCH BUILDING IN THE NORTH DURING EARLY ISLAM

CHAPTER 4

CHURCHES' BUILDING IN NORTHERN IRAQ FROM THE LATE SASANIAN TO THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD¹

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE IGLESIAS EN EL NORTE DE IRAK DESDE EL PERIODO TARDO SASÁNIDA AL PALEOISLÁMICO

NARMIN ALI AMIN² AND SIMON BRELAUD³

SUMMARY

This article addresses the building process and the features of the churches and monasteries in Sasanian and post-Sasanian northern Mesopotamia. Through the reading of ancient literary sources in which Christian buildings are mentioned, it is evident that throughout the Sasanian period, visible Christian architecture was developed which was subsequently maintained and refined in the early Islamic period. However, in these accounts, there remains a distinct lack of detail pertaining to the form of Christian architecture, particularly regarding the churches. In addition, very few remains clearly dated to the late Sasanian period have been identified to the north of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. In recent years, in both Iraqi Kurdistan and south-eastern Turkey, important archaeological discoveries have been made, which have allowed us to partially bridge the gap between the large number of churches mentioned in ancient literary sources, and the meager material evidence. In this paper, ongoing study of sites such as Bāzyān and Qal'at Shilā, near Erbil and Kirkuk respectively, are compared with other archaeological evidence and literary descriptions.

KEYWORDS: Syriac Christianity, Sasanian Empire, cult of the saints, crosses

RESUMEN

Este trabajo se ocupa del proceso de construcción y de las características de las iglesias y monasterios en el periodo sasánida y post-sasánida en la Mesopotamia septentrional. La lectura de las antiguas fuentes literarias que mencionan los edificios cristianos evidencia que a lo largo del periodo sasánida se construyó arquitectura cristiana y que esta fue mantenida y mejorada durante el periodo paleoislámico. Sin embargo, estos relatos carecen de detalles relacionados con la forma de la arquitectura cristiana, particularmente de las iglesias. Además de esto, pocos restos se pueden datar claramente en el periodo tardo sasánida al norte de la zona de Seleucia-Ctesifonte. En los últimos años, tanto en el Kurdistán iraquí como en el sureste de Turquía, se han producido importantes descubrimientos arqueológicos que permiten en parte rellenar ese vacío existente entre el gran número de iglesias mencionado en las fuentes literarias y la pobre evidencia material. Este trabajo presenta el estudio en curso de los yacimientos de Bāzyān y Qal'at Shilā, junto a Erbil y Kirkuk respectivamente, y se comparan con otras evidencias arqueológicas y descripciones literarias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cristianismo sirio, Imperio sasánida, culto de los santos, cruces

During both the Sasanian period and the subsequent Islamic caliphates, the Christians of eastern Mesopotamia lived as subjects of ruling dynasties that did not share their religion. This has implications for this population's church buildings. These Christians belonged to a range of branches, the most prominent of which were

the Church of the East, and the Miaphysite ('Severian') Church. While at least since the beginning of the 4th century, remarkably visible Christian buildings multiplied across the eastern Roman Empire, the construction of similar buildings did not enjoy the same support on the other side of the border, in the Sasanian Empire

¹ We would like to thank G. De Beaurepaire, Heritage Architect, in charge of several heritage building restorations in Northern Iraq, and S. Pierre for their useful comments on an earlier version of this article.

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(3rd-7th centuries). Then, with the Umayyad and especially the Abbasid dynasties, northern Iraqi Christians became closer to the centres of power. As such, this demographic provides a valuable case study on the evolution of church building and restoration processes at the turn of Islam, under non-Christian rulers. Our study also aims at assessing the impact of the presence and later disappearance of the Roman-Persian border on the development of regional architectural styles.

Our article focuses on the north-eastern parts of Mesopotamia (Fig. 1), during the Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods. This region bordered the Roman Empire, on the ʿAbdīn side, an area renowned for its construction of Christian buildings from the 4th century onwards, built with the support of both local bishops, and sometimes, even the emperor (see Keser-Kayaalp, in this volume). Within Sasanian territories, it was also contiguous with eastern Armenia, where the funding of church building was facilitated by local rulers and aristocrats. Exchanges of artistic and architectural influences with these two neighbouring areas were crucial. Sasanian Armenia is not directly considered in

this article, not because it has been sufficiently studied, as Hauser (2007, 93, n. 2; 2008, 30) seems to note. Rather, the reason is that the policy of church building there followed a different pattern: i.e., the Christianised aristocratic and royal elites had a bigger role than in Mesopotamia. However, a more detailed comparison between the remains of the same period in Armenia and Mesopotamia would be valuable.

It should be pointed out that north-eastern Mesopotamia never formed an administrative unit, neither in Sasanian nor Islamic times, however, by looking at the evidence from literary sources (mostly East Syrian) one does identify a set of features which are rather specific to the region of the Sasanian provinces of Arwayēstān, Nōd-Ardaxšīragān and Garmēgan (Syr. Bēt ʿArbāyē, Adiabene, and Bēt Garmay).⁴ One of our objectives is to assess whether the particularity of the Christian environment in northern Iraq can be followed from a material point of view. Indeed, Okada (1991) attempted to outline a new category of architecture, “neither Sasanian nor Islamic,” which would better define the churches built in southern Mesopotamia and around the Persian

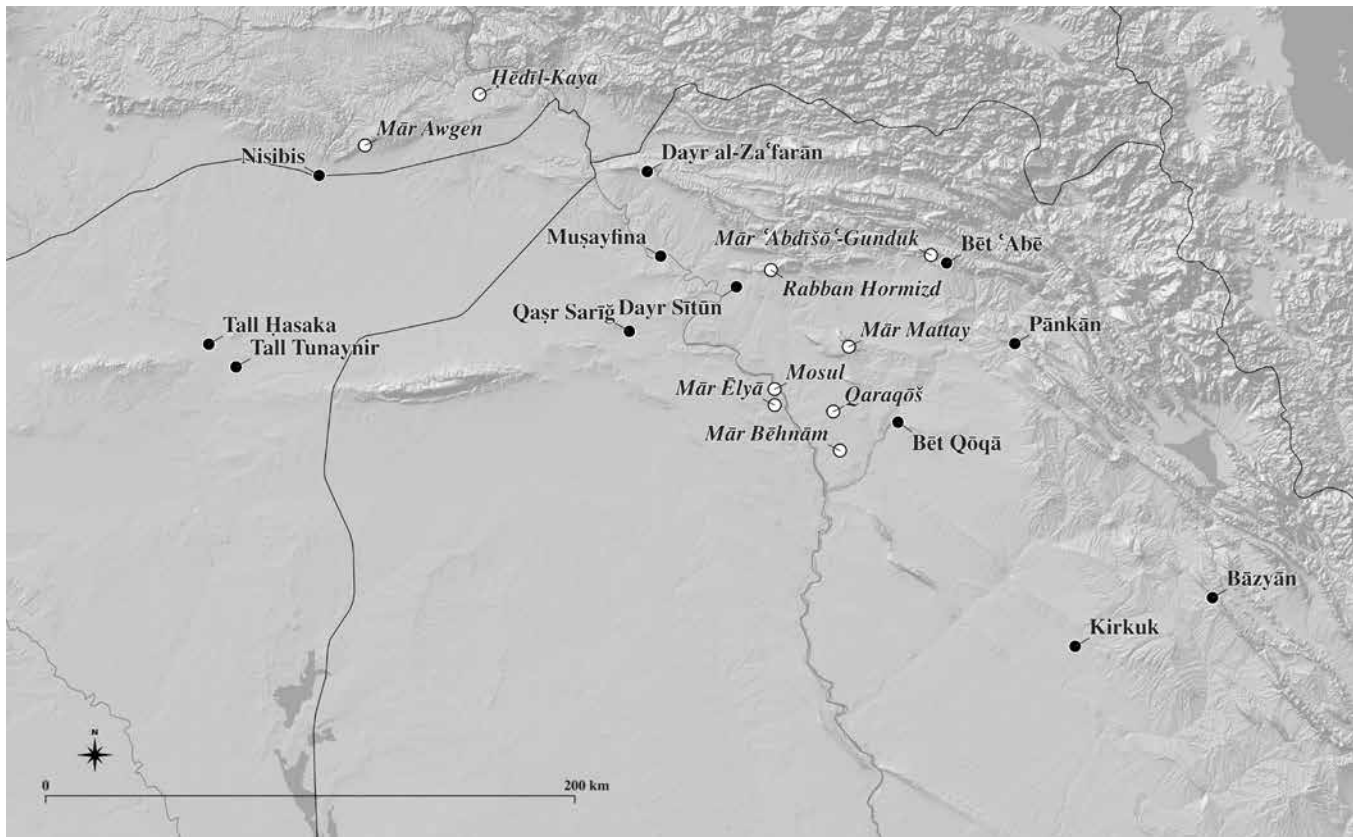


Fig. 1. Map of the sites mentioned in the article.

⁴ Some characteristics are rather historical (early Christianisation from nearby Osrhoene, some persecutions that occurred in the northern regions, strong influence of the Nisibis school, large base of Kashkarian monasticism, etc.), others rather sociological (such as the distinctive onomastics of the Christians of northern Sasanian Mesopotamia; see Brelaud 2021a, 17-26).

Gulf (see also Simpson 2018; Bonnéric 2022). The criteria chosen to survey these southern churches are both the masonry (predominantly brick), the nave system (one or three, with columns or pillars), the layout (rectangular, with a square-shaped apse). Do the churches of northern Mesopotamia have characteristics that could be distinguished from this southern architectural model?

Regarding northern Iraq, we can first rely on the ancient explorations and descriptions of Christian buildings, from the pioneer works of Sarre and Herzfeld (1911-20), Bell and Mango (1982), up to more recent studies, such as the ones of Amin (2018) on the Christian architecture of Kurdistan. As far as the remains of the churches are concerned, Hauser (2007, 2008; 2019) has gathered evidence for the territories falling within the sphere of influence of the Church of the East, thus excluding Sasanian Armenia. Now, more recent excavations and surveys, especially in the autonomous province of Iraqi Kurdistan, but also in southeastern Turkey, have refined our knowledge of the region. Still, the dating of many of these buildings is problematic; it remains necessary to refer to literary sources, especially to clarify the historical context until the shrinking of Christian communities in the late Abbasid Period (circa 9th-10th centuries), which will be the chronological limit of this study.

In order to understand the pace of church building in north-eastern Mesopotamia during the Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods, we will first set the chronology of this process as can be drawn from literary sources. Then, we will outline the state of our knowledge from an archaeological point of view. Finally, we will attempt to identify possible regional features in the architecture and decoration of the earliest Christian buildings.

I. CHURCHES IN SASANIAN AND POST-SASANIAN BĒT 'ARBĀYĒ, ADIABENE, AND BĒT GARMAY

References to the construction of churches can be collected from a wide variety of literary sources (hagiography, hagiography, martyrology, ecclesiastical synods, etc.).⁵ Thus, the writing of monks' lives flourished at the end of the Sasanian period; it bears witness to the vitality of monastic communities in northern Mesopotamia, which were one of the promoters of the construction of Christian buildings. Among other examples, Thomas of Marga (9th century) accounted church foundations with their endowments that provided monasteries with long-term supplies (Budge 1893, trans., 243-45, 652-53).

The same author recorded discussion between the eighth-century Metropolitan Īshō'yahb of Adiabene and the monks of Bēt 'Abe about building a new church in their monastery, and the concerns that even this large community with the support of the Metropolitan might not be able to see the process through to completion (Budge 1893, trans., 395-99). The monastic biography genre is of great value for the broader study of societies in which these monasteries were embedded (several studies follow up on the pioneering research of Villagomez 1998, such as Barzock 2021; Berti and Gomiero forthcoming).

Rather than listing all the literary references to the churches in northern Iraq, we highlight here three key moments that can be pointed out regarding the building and restoration process, stressing in each case the sponsors of these constructions:

1.1. Parthian and Early Sasanian period (before the early 5th century)

No Christian building has been identified on archaeological grounds for this period. Their mentions in literary sources come mainly from apocryphal or late sources, where authors could over-project the realities of their time onto earlier periods. This is comparable to the well-known discrepancy between literary records and material traces collected for the Roman Empire before the Edict of Milan, 313 AD. The East Syrian sources thus dwell on the apostolic foundations of the different churches, in order to underline the antiquity of the Christian anchorage; this is the case of regional chronicles –*History of Karka d-Bet Slok*, *Chronicle of Arbela*– or apostolic hagiography –*Acts of Mar Mari* (Bedjan 1891, 507-35; Mingana 1908; Jullien and Jullien 2001). Later on, monastic hagiographers in the Persian Empire applied the same approach by making the foundation of monasteries, and thus of their church, as early as possible, especially through the story of Mār Awgīn, an ascetic from Egypt, deemed to have introduced monasticism in the area of Nisibis as early as the 4th century (Jullien 2008). Anchoring monasticism as far back as possible in the time can also be found in the *Life of Mār Yāwānān*, regarding the Persian Gulf (especially Payne 2011b). Just as difficult to use is the mention of the churches destroyed by Sasanian religious and political rulers during the persecution of the 4th century, in the *Persian Martyrs' Acts*. For example, concerning the 4th century, the author of the *Martyrdom of Simeon bar Sabbā'ē* stated the destruction

⁵ For a historical discussion on church building in this region, especially on the other side of the ancient Roman-Persian border, see Wood, in this volume. A similar reflection but focusing on Adiabene, has been provided by Berti and Gomiero (forthcoming). For the broader archaeological and historical context, see Nováček and Wood (2020).

of churches when the *catholicos* was executed in the Sasanian capital Ctesiphon (§14: Smith 2014, 29); the soon-to-be martyred Bar Šabyā is said to have founded a large number of churches and monasteries in Merw (Brock 2011).

The diverse Christians of this period did of course develop their own places of worship; the question is rather to what extent these buildings were visible or hidden from the authorities. Presumably, the early Christian tradition of house churches (*domus ecclesiae*) was once effective in the Persian Empire, at least until the enforcement of its ban stated by the 13th canon of the Synod of Isaac in 410 AD. This rule is part of a set of Western canons (i.e. from the Roman Synods) adopted at that time by the East Syrians (Chabot 1902, ed. 27, trans. 266-67). Interestingly, still in the 6th century, *Catholicos* Abā is said to have set up in a house what the author of the account calls “a church,” ܥܕܬܐ *edā*, by installing an altar. He fasted and prayed there all day (*History of Abā*, §24: Jullien 2015, ed. 25, trans. 28). Finally, the excavator of Tall Tunaynīr suggests that Phase 1 – “Late Roman/Byzantine Period” – of the Area 1 church may have been a “house church” (Fuller *et al.* 2018, 92), which is somewhat unclear from the plans provided in Fuller and Fuller (1994).

One major building from this period must be mentioned: the cathedral complex of the church and baptistery of Nisibis, which has been studied from the beginning of the 20th century until now (Fig. 2). The baptistery was transformed into a church and dedicated to Jacob of Nisibis, allowing the building to remain in use until today (Sarre and Herzfeld 1920, 339-43; Bell et Mango 1982, 70-72; Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan 2013; Gaborit *et al.* 2013). The church and its baptistery were built under Roman rule and belong to a Western, or Levantine, architectural tradition. After Nisibis came under Persian control in 363 AD, and the establishment of a school in the city around a century later, which drew in a large number of students, one would expect the architecture of this church and baptistery to have had an influence elsewhere in Sasanian territories; however, as outlined later in this paper, the evidence for this is scant. Further south, Tall Tunaynīr on the east bank of the Khābūr river, Syria, was apparently inhabited at the time of the devolution of this region to the Persians; archaeologists consider that the earliest phase of the Area 9 church (future monastic church) may date from the 4th-5th centuries (Fuller *et al.* 2018, 96).

1.2. Middle Sasanian Period (from the early 5th century to the mid-6th century)

In 410 AD, the first synod backed by the *Šāhān Šāh* allowed the building of Christian sanctuaries in the Sasanian Empire, although the Persian king himself did not finance any construction – this is a time when, according to Christian hagiography, episodes of exactions against Christians had continued to occur. Parish and rural churches are never mentioned for this period, as the communities were mainly settled in an urban context. One exception is in the canon 2 of the Synod of Joseph, 554 AD, that mentioned “churches of a village,” ܥܕܬܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ *edātā da-qritā* (Chabot 1902, trans. 356). For the most part, initiative seems to come from the local Sasanian bishops, whether in the patriarchal city of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, in Karkā d-Bēt Slōk, or in Arbela. However, this policy was initially implemented partly with Roman support: the Roman Emperor Theodosius II (r. 408-450) himself is said to have funded the decoration of a church of in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and later in Bēt Lapāṭ in Khūzestān (*Chronicle of Siirt*, I: Scher 1910, 327; *Acts of Pērōz*: Bedjan 1894, 256). Before, the figure of Mārūtā of Mayferqat (today Silvan, Turkey) was instrumental in the process of making the Christian buildings in Persia visible. Indeed, despite being a bishop of a city in the Roman Empire, Mārūtā played an important role in the commemoration of the Persian martyrs. He is said to have collected



Fig. 2. Baptistery of Nisibis, 359 AD; Mor Yakup, Nusaybin (RIS Turkey Project).

records of the persecutions, as well as the bones of the saints, some of which he brought to his own city (renamed *Martyropolis*), as well as to have contributed to the building in the Persian Empire of *martyria*, syr. ܡܪܬܝܪܝܐ *bēt sāhdē*, i.e. shrines devoted to the martyrs (Payne 2011a; Brelaud 2022). As a border town like Nisibis, but located on the Roman side, Mayferqat must have been one of the crossing points between the two empires, as well as with Armenia; here again, the architecture of this town must have had an impact on the new constructions in the Sasanian Empire, and vice versa. Unfortunately, almost no remains from the 5th or 6th century have been preserved in Mayferqat, except through some photographs taken by G. Bell in 1909 and 1911 (Bell and Mango 1982, 58-65; Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 115-31).

Description of churches concerns only prestigious buildings, first among them the aforementioned *martyria*. They were located within the cities, or on their immediate outskirts (Brelaud 2022). Aside from its polysemy,⁶ the word “church,” ܥܕܬܐ *’edā*, is used by East Syrian authors and in Syriac inscriptions to identify the gathering place of the community but also the building complex around it. Therefore, it was in a “church” that the envoys of the *Catholicos* Bābōē (r. 457-484) were housed in Nisibis, when they had to bring a message of support addressed to the Western Fathers (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, XI.9: Chabot 1899, 437). Indeed, the 7th canon of the Synod of Isaac ordered, as early as 410, that “a house to receive strangers/refugees” be set up “in all the churches,” ܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܪܬܝܪܝܐ *bkulhēn ’edātā* (Chabot 1902, Syr. 25, trans. 265). The whole worship building or the nave are quite often referred to as a “sanctuary,” ܬܗܠܐ *hayklā*, (though) not always limited to the location of the altar, before the apse, which is designated as ܡܕܒܗܐ *madbhā* “altar” or ܩܢܟܐ *qankā* “apse” (Dauvillier 1952, 14; Desreumaux 2010, 282-83; Desreumaux 2013, 499-502).

From an archaeological point of view, some Christian buildings are clearly dated to this period in the north of the Sasanian Empire, in Sasanian Armenia: a particularly remarkable example is the church of Tekor, Turkey. Early Armenian churches follow the characteristics of more western churches, especially Syrian ones. The question arises as to when architectural forms more specific to this region are defined, such as the centred churches covered with a dome. This type of plan was utilised in the eastern Roman Empire, for example at Mayferqat, a

frontier town at the gates of Armenia: the church al-‘Adrā’ (now destroyed) has been dated to the 6th century by G. Bell, using comparisons with the Hagia Sophia church at Thessaloniki (Bell and Mango 1982, 61-65, fig. 42, pl. 51-67; Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 123-31). It is not yet known whether such architectural forms considered characteristic of Armenia were already adopted in this region at this time; indeed, these churches have undergone many alterations thereafter. Across the entirety of Sasanian Mesopotamia, only one building would be dated to this period: the church excavated by the German mission inside the round city of Wēh-Ardashīr (Ctesiphon). The mid-6th century dating proposed by the archaeologist O. Reuther is grounded on the proximity of the masonry of the church to that of Tāq-e Kisrā, the monumental *iwān* of Husraw I (r. 531-578) located a few hundred metres to the southeast (Reuther 1930, 9-15; Cassis 2002, 64-66; Kröger 2007, 139-41). Finally, this is the period when the Miaphysite ascetic Aḥūdemmeh is said to have founded a sanctuary and monastery dedicated to St. Sergius, which has been identified by Fiey (1958; Oates 1962), with the site of Qaṣr Sarīj, near Balad/Eski Mosul.

1.3. Late Sasanian/Early Islamic Period (mid-6th century - 9th century)

With the monastic reform of Abraham of Kashkar (588 AD) in Persia, semi-coenobitic monasteries were founded in Mesopotamia and Khūzestān, including their places of worship (Villagomez 1998, 50-61, 139). The listing of the monastic churches could be achieved by following the locations of monasteries (Jullien 2008): notably, the surviving church of the Monastery of Mār Abraham of Kashkar, on Mount Izlā, has structures that have been dated to the late 6th/7th century (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 46-49). The abbots thus became new agents of church building, in a context of gradual competition for the spiritual leadership over the believers between the different Sasanian Christian confessions, the Dyophysite (“Church of the East”) and the Miaphysite (“Jacobite,” “Syriac Orthodox”).⁷ In theory, monastic churches were expected to be located outside the cities. Finally, the local Christian aristocracy provided greater support for the construction of churches, a phenomenon that had begun almost a century prior in Sasanian Armenia. This late Sasanian period was the time of a progressive

⁶ As in English, the Syriac word *’edā* refers both to the building where the believers gather for Christian worship, and metaphorically to the whole Christian community.

⁷ Pierre (2022) suggests labelling the two Churches, either Dyophysites or Miaphysites, located in the eastern territories as ‘East Syrian’, so as to stress the geographic anchorage of these two denominations.

Christianisation of the countryside, which was encouraged by the spread of monasticism, and, probably by the conversion to Christianity of large landowners (Wood, in this volume). The question remains as to whether Christian peasants were obliged, or even able, to go to monasteries in order to access a place of worship.⁸

The ambiguous policy of the last Sasanian rulers—especially Husraw II (r. 590-628)—towards the Christians, which was simultaneously supportive and punitive, is well known (Villagomez 1998, 36; Payne 2015, 164-98). This was manifested, among other things, by the building of some churches on royal funds. This is the case of the Treasury of the Holy Cross (after 614) and the Monastery of St. Sergius of Bēt Madāyē, built on the orders of Husraw II. The favourable socio-political climate towards Christians continued under his successor Shērōē-Kawād II (r. 628) (Thomas of Marga: Budge 1893, trans. 124).

The Arab-Islamic conquest did not mark a break in the process of church building in northern Mesopotamia, as testified both by the literary sources and the archaeological study of settlements (Nováček and Wood 2020; Berti and Gomiero forthcoming; Keser-Kayaalp, and Pierre, in this volume). Some new church foundations were built in the early Islamic period. Moreover, Christians were able to restore the sanctuaries because of natural decay or depredation. Indeed, varied destructions occurred, not always caused by political authority, followed by subsequent repair: Mār Tōmā Church in Mosul was destroyed by mobs arguing over the legitimacy of these buildings during the reign of al-Mahdī (r. 775-785; Fiey 1959, 20-21 and 147; Pierre, in this volume), several monasteries were pulled down by Ya'lā b. Himrān of the Banū Taym around 800 AD, including that of Margāna, of Job the Persian, and that of Bēt Neštorus (Budge 1893, trans. 555; Fiey 1965, 124, 151, 161, 163); the famous convent of Bet Qōqā was destroyed a little bit later, and immediately restored; a Kurdish raid in 849/50 sacked the convent of Īshō'zka in Adiabene, known as "*Jaṣṣ* convent" (Fiey 1965, 194 and 196), the Mar Aḥudemmeḥ church of Takrit was destroyed by the 'Arabs' —*Tayyāyē*— in 1089 (Fiey 1959, 34). It must be noted that significant destruction took place, especially in Erbil, at the time of the Mongol attacks, in the second half of the 13th to the beginning of the 14th century, which did not completely spare the Christians. Elsewhere, looting took place, such as that of 1295 AD, recorded in a famous inscription in the church at Mār Bēhnām (Harrak 2018, 70-72); this led to projects of embellishment of the churches in later

years, or restoration rather than rebuilding as at Dayr Sītūn (Curtis 1997).

The wealth of evidence seen in literary source of the creation of monastic foundations during the early Islamic period leads one to believe that a significant number of old Christian archaeological remains in northern Mesopotamia can be dated to this time. The regional architecture and pottery are not always well dated, which gives primacy to literary sources to date the buildings according to the context, based on plausibility. There is no doubt that the Christian presence was very important in the early Islamic period, yet it is difficult to identify many archaeological remains, ruins or the earliest phases of the preserved buildings, either in Northern or Southern Mesopotamia (Okada 1991; Bonnéric 2022). This is ultimately a different scientific question from that of Christianity in the Persian Gulf, where archaeological sites are known, but literary sources do not provide much information (Carter 2008; Payne 2011b; Bonnéric 2022). Hauser (2019, 436-37) outlined why ancient Christian remains are rare in this region: there have been numerous reconstructions of certain buildings and significant destruction since the Seljuk period. It should also be mentioned that minimal archaeological study of Christian buildings dated to the period before the "Syriac Renaissance" (12-13th centuries) has been carried out. Finally, de Beaurepaire also pointed out to us that certain building materials, such as plaster mortars, require regular maintenance, without which the walls would disappear in a few decades due to the rainy winters of northern Mesopotamia.

2. OLDEST CHRISTIAN REMAINS IN NORTH-EASTERN MESOPOTAMIA

Two sets of Christian archaeological sites can be ranged according to their date of foundation and the duration of their occupation. In each case, problems arise with dating categorisation.

2.1. Ancient Church ruins: Christian buildings to identify and date

These sites have been abandoned or destroyed, and therefore allow archaeologists to access the oldest layers of use (See n° 1-15, Fig. 3). Unfortunately, the last two centuries also led to the destruction of more recent

⁸ The study of the geography detailed by the hagiographers or martyrologists provides a clue to the location of these Christianised places in the Sasanian and post-Sasanian period (Brelaud 2022).

Sites	Oldest remains' date	Enclosure	Southern atrium	Courtyard fountain	Bet yata	Bet qaddis/sabde	Baptistry	Church entrance	Naves	Sanctuary	Annexes	Bema	Masonry	Stucco ornaments	Double columns	Arches	Iconography
Baptistry of Vologesis, Nisibis	359 AD					✓	W	1?	apse	2?		ashlar					mouldings and sculpted ornaments
Cathedral, Nisibis	4th/5th C.						W?	5	apse			ashlar					
Tall Tunaynir, Monastery (Area 9)	4th/5th C.		(W Narthex)	✓		✓	W; S	1	apse	2		rubble	✓				2 crosses, marble panels
Mār Tahmizgard, Kirkuk	Late 5th-6th C.	probable	✓		?	✓	W; S	1?	straight	2		rubble	✓	✓	✓		
Tall Tunaynir, Church (Area 3)	Late Roman/Byzantine		corridor		?	?	W; S	1	straight >apse	1		rubble	✓	✓	✓		painted lintel
Wēh-Ardašīr	Mid-6th C.	✓	✓		?		S; N	1	straight	2		brick	✓		✓		draped, painted statue
Mār Abraham of Kashkar, Izla	Late 6th C.	✓					S	1	apse	2		rubble?			?		vegetal ornamented capital
Qasr Srij	6th C.	probable	✓		?	?	W; S	3	apse	2	?	ashlar					
Musayfina	Ca. 6th C.	✓	✓		?		W; S	3	apse	2		ashlar					
Mār Awgin, Izla	6th/7th C.?-before 1271	✓	✓		✓	✓	S	1	straight	2		rubble?					
Hasaka	Late 6th/7th C.?	?	portico			✓	S; N	3	straight	2	✓	rubble	✓	✓			crosses
Bāzyān	Late 6th-12th C.	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	W; S		straight	✓	✓	rubble	✓	✓			crosses
Dayr al-Za'faran, Bet Nuhadra	Ca. 7th C.	✓					?		?								
Dayr Sītūn	Ca 7th-13th C.	?	?			?	W	3	apse	2		rubble					
Al-Chenisa', Takrit	Ca. 7th-14th C.	✓	N	✓	?	✓	N	3	straight	✓	✓	brick					2 eagles, crosses; holy man's portrait
M. Sergius & Bacchus (mosque), Takrit citadel	Ca. 7th-11th C.	-	?			✓	S; N	3	?	✓		brick	✓				
Chapel, Takrit citadel	Ca. 7th-11th C.	-	?	✓			W; S?; N	3	straight		✓	brick	✓				
Qal'at Šila	Ca. 8th C.	✓	✓	✓	?		S	3	straight		✓	rubble					
(Hānī) Pānkān	Umayyad	✓	?				?		?								

Fig. 3. Table of the oldest churches in North-Eastern Mesopotamia.

(‘Ottoman’) churches, whose ruins are not included in this paragraph.

Let us briefly clarify the difficulties archaeologists face in dating these buildings, with the case example of the fortified church of Bāzyān, in the province of Sulaymaniyya, former Bēt Garmay (Déroche and Amin 2013; Amin *et al.* 2022). The ruin was almost completely cleared by a first Iraqi excavation in the late 1980's. Unfortunately, the stratigraphy of this excavation is not known to us; for instance, we cannot precisely locate where the coins of Husraw II were discovered. Since 2011, the site has been studied by a French-Iraqi Kurdish team. The pottery unearthed is common and relatively homogeneous; some forms are precisely of the 8th-9th centuries. This regional pottery is currently under study, and the chronology is gradually being confirmed. A type of pottery with printed motifs is one of the remarkable features of ceramics dated to the late Sasanian and early Islamic periods (6th-7th centuries). It is undoubtedly a Christian-production ceramic, characterised by the association of crosses with animal motifs common to Sasanian art (Fig. 4). Similar

printed motifs were found in southern Mesopotamia, with a slightly different style; Bāzyān ceramics' motifs are closer to those identified at Dayr Sītūn or Nineveh (Fig. 1).⁹ This type of pottery was not always found in or near a church, but there is no doubt that communities that visibly expressed their Christianity in this way had buildings for worship. Bāzyān may have been occupied as late as the 12th century, according to the dating of some of the votive cross designs on plaques (Fig. 5) (Amin and Desreumaux 2018).

Another hint of dating is epigraphy. Armenian inscriptions, for example, enable us to date the oldest churches of Tekor and Etchmiadzin to the 5th century (Kazaryan, in this volume). With regard to north-eastern Mesopotamia, apart from the Aramaic incantatory bowls, Syriac epigraphy is rather late compared to what is found in Osroene and Syria, where churches and monasteries were mentioned on mosaics and stone inscriptions as early as the 5th century.¹⁰ In Iraq, the earliest evidence comes from Takrit or southern Mesopotamia: Ctesiphon, al-Ḥīra, Tall al-Ukhayḍir; according to Harraḳ (2001;

⁹ Sarre and Herzfeld (1920, 225-26), Simpson (2013). M. Ahmad (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin) is currently undertaking an exhaustive study of it.

¹⁰ Although late, the 13th-century inscriptions of Mār Bēhnām monastery are valuable for our understanding of the ancient labels given to the church' rooms (Desreumaux 2010; 2013).



Fig. 4. Christian Sasanian pottery: crosses and animals printed on jars: sherd from Takya, near Bāzyān (Bāzyān mission).

2010, 612-23),¹¹ these inscriptions date from the late Umayyad to the Abbasid period. The Syriac epigraphic record of two sites in Syria that appear to belong to the same cultural environment, Tall Tunaynīr and Ḥasaka, should be included in this set (Fuller and Fuller 1994, 41; Khoury and Riba 2013, 103; Fuller *et al.* 2018, 99, 101-02). Most of them are *ostraca* copying religious texts or administrative documents; few funerary and dedicatory inscriptions were found near the churches of the Takrit citadel or the nearby site of 'al-Chenisa'. Therefore, the early epigraphic tradition of eastern Mesopotamia does not yet help to refine the dating of the Christian ruins for the Sasanian period.

The overview of Christian archaeological evidence from the Persian territories drawn up by Hauser¹² can first be completed by examining important sites, not always well considered, such as Mār Tahmizgard's martyrdom Church in Kirkuk. This sanctuary may have been founded in the 5th century; most of the preserved remains may date from the late Sasanian to the Abbasid period. It was destroyed at the beginning of the 20th century, but documented by Herzfeld in 1907-1908, and Bell in 1911 (Sarre and Herzfeld 1920, 330-34; Bell and Mango 1982, 74-78, fig. 48-49). The plan and architecture of this building are especially valuable for

the study of Christian pilgrimage sites in this region. In addition, in 2018, Amin was able to briefly consult the report of the excavation carried out in 1987 on the Bābira (بابيرة) Church at the Iraq Museum archives. Archaeologists have estimated that the foundations of this square building, which is now submerged under the waters of Lake Mosul, date back to the Sasanian period. On the other hand, recent discoveries in north-eastern Mesopotamia deserve further investigation and allow for more accurate comparisons:

- Three churches in the Takrit district were excavated by archaeologists from the Iraqi antiquities in the 1990s: "al-Chenisa" located east of the city, which was part of a monastic complex; two churches on the citadel of Takrit, one of which was probably the chapel of the Miaphysite metropolitan, while the second was later transformed into a mosque (Harrak 2001; briefly mentioned in Hauser 2019, 439);

- The church of Ḥasaka was excavated in the 2000's by the Syrian antiquities service; we agree with Khoury and Riba (2013, 98) on the inclusion of this church in the East Syrian tradition, because of its location, and its artistic and architectural features;

- A church (Area 3) and a monastic complex (Area 9) in Tall Tunaynīr, in Syria, located along the ancient Roman-Persian border: in line with the previous remark, we propose to include this site in the Sasanian/post-Sasanian category of churches (Fuller and Fuller 1994; Fuller *et al.* 2018). The special interest of this site is that it provides *ostraca* and pottery inscribed in Syriac, yet unpublished, with the names of some monks and some information about their daily life in the past; it could be compared to the corpus of *ostraca* from Takrit (Harrak 2010).

More recently, various sites have been prospected in Iraqi Kurdistan that are worthy of excavation:

- Qal'at Shilā, near Koy Sanjaq, Iraq, was explored in 2015 by a team from the University of Innsbruck, joined by N. A. Amin (Salaḥaddin University, Erbil). Surface ceramics were collected, and the plan of a church drawn. The abandonment of the site has been estimated to the mid-8th century (Amin 2019, 52-54; Nováček and Wood 2020, 6-9; Nováček 2022, 85-86). The site is currently surveyed and partially excavated by a team from the Freie Universität, Berlin;

- Khānī Pānkān is located between Erbil and Rawanduz and it is currently being explored by a team

¹¹ The Syriac *ostrakon* found under the floor of the sanctuary of the church of Ctesiphon could be earlier than the middle of the 6th century, if we accept the chronology of the building's development given by the archaeologist (Kröger 2007, 144, fig. 8).

¹² Hauser (2007; 2008; 2019) counted "fourteen churches" for the entire former Sasanian territory, presumably to be understood as churches with visible structures from Late Antiquity. The churches excavated in the 1990's at Takrit (Iraq) are mentioned in the third article but are almost not considered.



Fig. 5. Votive cross motifs on plaque, Bāzyān (Bāzyān mission) and Ḥasaka (Khoury and Riba 2013, 103; Fuller et al. 2018, 106).

from Gabru University, Hungary, associated with Salahaddin University, Erbil. The work is ongoing; therefore, no report of the surveys and excavations have been published yet; the plan of the site provided below is a tentative scheme of the complex layout. The folk tradition identified the site as a caravanserai (*khān*), although the pottery is dated to the Umayyad period. It seems to us that its layout can be related to the monastic complexes in the area (see below), especially since an East Syrian style cross was discovered there. The housing of ascetics or the hosting of pilgrims within the site could explain the resemblance of the plan to a guesthouse or a late caravanserai (Brelaud 2021b; see Wood, in this volume). An excavation in the eastern part would therefore be very welcome, in order to locate a possible church.

Finally, relevant Christian sites have been located, but not yet excavated. Dayr al-Za‘fāran of Bēt Nuhadrā –not to be confused with its Turkish namesake in the Tūr ‘Abdīn, near Mardin– is a convent founded in the early 7th century according to monastic hagiography (Fiey 1965, 742–47; Amin 2018; Yūsifī 2022). It has been identified with a completely ruined site, which could provide valuable evidence of a monastic complex of this period if archaeologically explored. Another remarkable site, Qaṣr Sarīj, near Balad (Eski Mosul), whose upper

walls are visible on several photographs, would deserve a detailed excavation (Fiey 1958; Oates 1962).

At least five ruins dated to the Late Antique–Early Islamic period are urban or suburban churches: Wēh-Ardashīr, Mār Tahmizgard of Kirkuk, the two ones of Takrit Citadel, and Ḥasaka (Fig. 6 and 7). In contrast, the other places of worship were more likely to have come from the countryside or even from very isolated areas; they are probably monastic establishments.

These church remains are the oldest identified ruins of Christian buildings. Some other Christian monuments may have been founded earlier, but have not survived, or have been so altered that their earliest levels are no longer visible today.

2.2. Ancient foundations rebuilt or modified in medieval period

Another set of Christian buildings has visible remains dating at the earliest to the Atabeg period (12th century), while literary sources testify to an earlier foundation (often Sasanian or early Islamic periods). The case is similar to many churches in Armenia: For example, the cathedral of Etchmiadzin, which is known by textual tradition

to have been built no later than the end of the 5th century (Kazaryan, in this volume). Restorations and reconstructions sometimes extend into the modern period, which often hinders the study of the earliest levels. Old ruins such as the site of Khirbat Dayr Sītūn, around Lake Mosul, or Tall Tunaynīr, show several phases of reconstruction, from the late Sasanian period to the 12th-13th centuries (Curtis 1997; Fuller *et al.* 2018). The study of the churches still in use today would therefore require a real architectural analysis and a building archaeology ("archéologie du bâti"), which has not yet been carried out, in order to sort out the phases of construction and remodelling of these buildings still standing.

This includes many monasteries founded gradually as part of the monastic reform of started by Abraham of Kashkar (†588) which are still in use today (Fig. 3): Rabban Hormizd in al-Qosh (Fiey 1965, 533-47; Brelaud, 2013), Mār Mattay on Mount Alpap (Fiey 1965, 759-69; Amin 2018), and Mār Bēhnām south of Qaraqosh (Fiey 1965, 665-8; Harrak 2018). But the latter, as well as the small *martyrium* of Mār Bēnā located southeast of Koya, could be medieval foundations (Amin 2019, 54-56; Nováček 2022, 87-88). We can also add monastic buildings that were only abandoned in contemporary times, such as Mār 'Abdīshō' in Gunduk, 20 kilometres north-east of 'Aqra (identified with the convent of 6th-century ascetic Mār Ḥadbshabā by Fiey 1965, 253-57), or Mār Ēliyā convent in Mosul –whose founder was a 6th-century monk from al-Ḥīra– (Fiey 1965, 639-59). Besides, various medieval churches on the edge of the Tūr 'Abdīn (Turkey) should also be included in the Sasanian/Post-Sasanian ensemble, because they were located on the Persian side of the border; starting with the key monasteries of Mār Awgīn and Mār Abraham of Kashkar in Mount Izlā, near Nisibis (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 44 and 46-49), but also sites further east such as Mōr Basōs and Mōrt Shūshān Monastery in Ḥidil/Kaya (Chabot 1893, 63 and 66; Şan 2018, 38-39, 237-41). Finally, the patronage of some buildings stresses the memory of the martyred saints of Persia: for instance, the different Mōr Sōbō and Mōr Dōdō churches, currently belonging to Syriac Orthodox rites (Keser-Kayaalp 2022, 29, 151 and 191).

For several urban parish churches, the foundation in the Sasanian period is not certain even in literary sources. In Mosul and the Nineveh Plain, the earliest identified remains date to the 12th or 13th century, although the main part of the building is later (ca. 18th century): Mār Shim'ūn al-Ṣafa, Mār Gīwargīs, and al-Tāhira of the Chaldeans in Mosul; Saints Sergius and Bacchus, Mārt Šmūnī, Mār Zena in Qaraqosh; Mār Yoḥānān Daylomāyā nearby; and some churches in Karamlīs and Bartella (Fiey 1959; Amin 2018; Hauser 2019, 436;

Beaurepaire 2021). There is also *Ulu Camii* in the citadel of Kirkuk, i.e., the ancient church *Maryam'āna* –“Mary the Mother”– apparently dating from before the 13th century, which was later converted into a mosque (Sarre and Herzfeld 1920, 329-30; Bell and Mango 1982, 78; Amin 2018). In addition, determining the date of foundation of many small parish churches still in use today, either in ruins or used for another purpose altogether, is very difficult: some could be leftovers or remodelling of monastic churches founded in the post-Sasanian period, while others could be much later rural foundations: this is the case of many as yet unexcavated single-nave churches found in the diocese of 'Aqra (Fiey 1965; Amin 2018), and further north and east, of the churches in the Hakkari Urmia region, which belong to the same historical tradition, but whose chronology is not yet well known (Dauvillier 1976, 367 and 372; Hellot-Bellier 2013; Khoury 2019, 542-44).

Finally, the last category that could be identified is that of churches restored or even founded from the Ottoman period (16th-20th century). Several churches were built in the major cities as a result of the permissions granted by decrees in the context of the *Tanzimat* (1839-76), such as the Dominican church in Mosul –Our Lady of the Hour–, built in 1866 (Beaurepaire 2021, 310-16). As such, a question that presents itself is whether there earlier cases of foundations *ex nihilo*, or were they simply restorations or reconstructions of earlier buildings? This question goes far beyond the scope of this article, and the expertise of its authors. The ongoing architectural and archaeological investigation of G. de Beaurepaire on the churches of Mosul, will be very valuable in this respect. Yet, this still-unclear chronology of the archaeology of the Iraqi churches limits the study of the evolution of their features over time. We intend here to identify some trends, based on the oldest material evidence, as well as on the rare testimonies of literary sources. Indeed, the details of the buildings given by the hagiographers are rather meagre, as ancient authors mainly focused on the exploits of the founders and the ascetic monks.

3. ARCHITECTURAL AND ARTISTIC FEATURES OF NORTHEAST MESOPOTAMIAN CHURCHES

From a range of analytical criteria, we attempt to identify the regional features of the churches in northern Iraq, comparing them with those in the south. A parallel with the western regions is also needed. The first effort in this direction was made by Amin (2018), who pointed out the modest aspect and simple architecture of the churches in northern Mesopotamia compared to the nearby buildings of Tūr 'Abdīn. Then, Harrak (2013),

working primarily on medieval and modern churches categorised Mesopotamian churches as having a tripartite sanctuary, a monumental wall separating the altar room from the nave, and a huge “royal gate.” Harrak also emphasised the decline in the use of the *bema* in Mesopotamian churches. As we will see, this typology cannot be applied to the more ancient periods, in which Mesopotamian churches boasted a range of features that resist this categorisation.

3.1. Square fortifications

Churches excavated or surveyed on the outskirts of cities –such as at Takrit, perhaps Kirkuk– or in the countryside were surrounded by a wall (Desreumaux 2010, 280-81) measuring from one-metre-wide, up to two metres, such as Bāzyān (Fig. 6). For the latter, a second, narrower wall enclosed a succession of rooms to the south of the fortress (Amin *et al.* 2022). At Bāzyān, Qal’at Shilā, and Muṣayfina (‘Abū 1987), the churches were stuck to the centre of the eastern wall; this is not the case at ‘al-Chenisa’ of Takrit. No church has been discovered either inside the complex of Qona Qal’a (Nováček and Wood 2020, 10, fig. 9) or that of (Khānī) Pānkān in Adiabene (unpublished), but the almost square shape and the proportions of the compound lead us to include them in the present category of buildings. Mār Tahmizgard of Kirkuk is an example of a walled pilgrimage church in an urban context (Sarre and Herzfeld 1920, 331).

For some churches, the excavations only focused on the worship building; hence, the settings of the immediate surroundings are not known. In the case of Qaṣr Sarīj, the enclosure can be guessed from satellite images (36° 32’31.30”N 42° 31’11.08”E). Even if they were not fortified, the cult buildings seem to be contiguous to a courtyard (Thomas of Marga: Budge 1893, trans. 310). According to Thomas of Marga (9th century), gates of the churches were preceded by *stoa* or porches, *prostōon* προστόον, Budge 1893, trans. 430, 462-63). The church was thus never limited to a hall, but formed a minimal, girdled complex, even in urban areas.

In contrast to the rectangular or polygonal enclosures of southern Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf –notably in ‘Ayn Shā’ya and Kharg (Okada 1991, 73; Steve 2003)–, the fortifications of several northern church complexes form clear square complexes. This was possible when the

complex was built on a small plateau, not when it clung to the slope of a mountain –like Rabban Hormizd and Mār Mattay monasteries. Their sides vary between 30 and 50 metres. The layout of the Bāzyān fortress is thus very similar, if slightly larger, to that of Muṣayfina, north of Mosul, which is now submerged.

Literary sources mention the fortification of certain churches –such as Bēt Qōqā¹³– and monasteries –Nērab Barzay (Thomas of Marga: Budge 1893, 632-33). R. Payne has related this architectural feature to the legendary fortresses mentioned by ancient hagiographers where saints were buried (Payne 2011a, 106-7). According to ancient authors, the martyrs Kardag in Melqi (near Arbela) and a certain Mār Sābā in Tadeq (in Bēt Zabday) were buried in the fortresses that had served as their residences during their lifetime. Thus, the fact that these martyrs were great lords living in castles allowed the hagiographer to explain, through an entertaining narrative, why the saint’s shrine was fortified; rather than detailing the involvement of monks –or local aristocrats according to Payne– in the development of the cult of saints and the development of large and fortified pilgrimage complexes in the post-Sasanian period. At Bāzyān, the construction of the wall took place shortly (if not immediately) after the construction of the church; this would tend to favour the hypothesis of the construction of a monastic complex, rather than the setting up of a sanctuary within a previous fortress. This does not exclude the possibility that Bāzyān had an earlier aristocratic residence, since an older structure was identified during the excavation (Déroche 2013, 339-43).

From a security point of view, it is unlikely that such walls really allowed a defence in case of major attacks; however, it enclosed and marked the property of the monastery, and protected the area from small assaults. This is similar to the large walls that surround monasteries from the Roman East –e.g., Saint Catherine of Sinai, Mar Saba of Judea. These walls, studded with towers, signalled a prestigious residence; this is therefore not a reliable dating feature as such fortifications are found in the area from the Hellenistic period up to the Abbasid period. Certainly, these church and monastic fortifications preceded the periods of greater attack in the 12th and 13th centuries. Bāzyān’s later utilisation, until the 18th century, or as a post relay, was likely a result of the safety provided by its ancient walls (Amin *et al.* 2022, 123).

¹³ In Adiabene, during the time of Sabriṣhō’ of Bēt Qōqā (first half of the 7th century), “The Arabs tried hard to penetrate the church, which nevertheless had only weak walls (مع صغر سورها), without succeeding” (*Chronicle of Siirt*, §96: Scher 1919, 585).

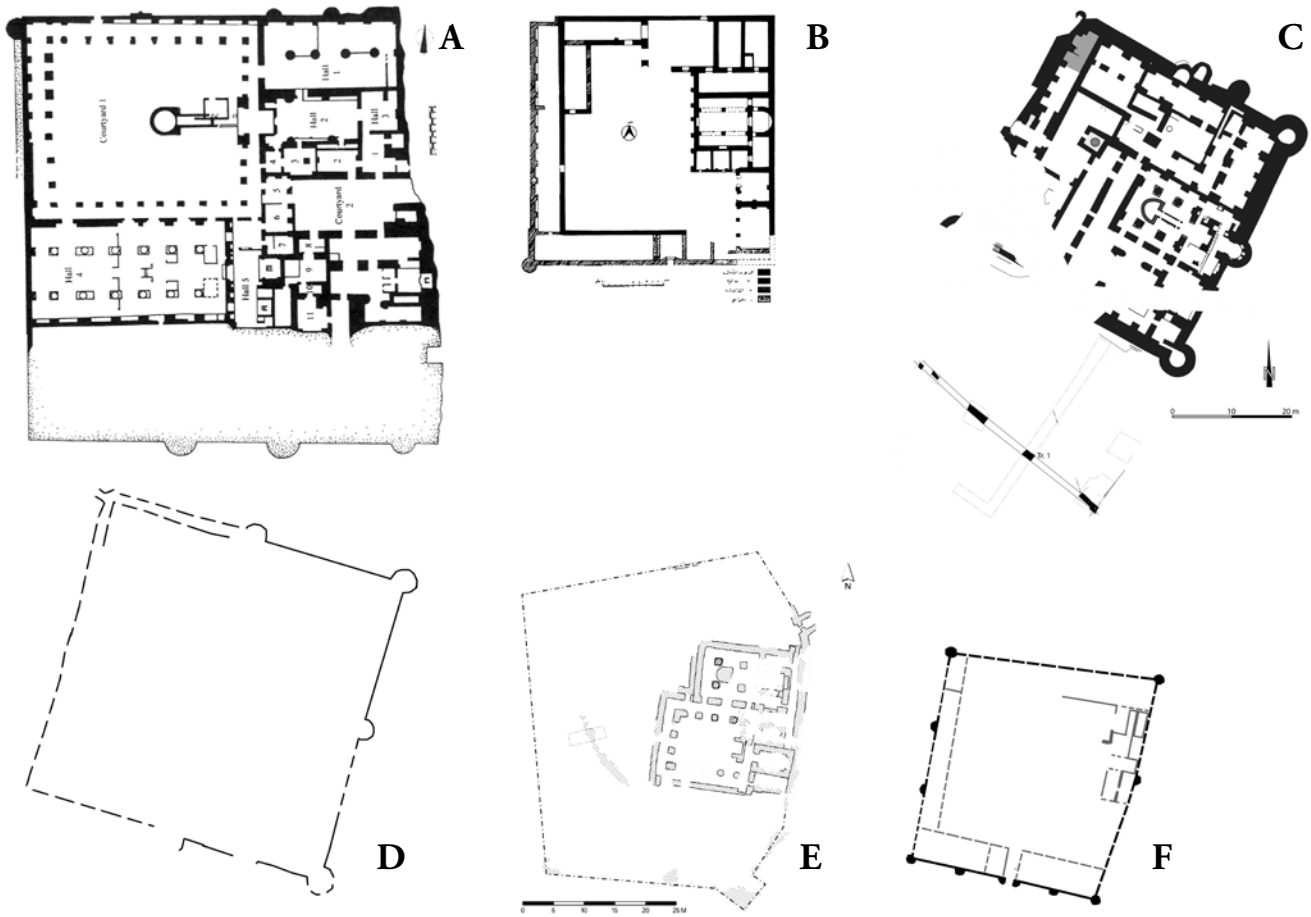


Fig. 6. Plans of the fortified compounds A: 'al-Chenisa' (Harrak 2001); B: Muṣayfina (ʿAbū 1987); C: Bāzyān (Amin *et al.* 2022); D: Qona Qal'a (Nováček and Wood 2020, 10, fig. 9); E: Qal'at Shilā (Nováček 2022); F: Khāni Pānkān.

3.2. Developments outside the church (*bēt šlōtā*, *bēt sāhdē*, and baptistery)

The facilities around the cult building are not always known, due to lack of extensive excavation. In an excavated site such as the monastic church at Tall Tunaynīr (Area 9), several structures have been excavated: a wine press, a potter's workshop and a refectory were adjacent to the church, highlighting the vibrant economic history of this monastic community (Fuller and Fuller 2018). Wells have also been found at several sites, mainly in monastic compounds, possibly linked to liturgical practice: in room west of the Takrit citadel's church, in the middle-western part of Bāzyān complex, a basin in the courtyard of 'al-Chenisa' monastic site, and perhaps also in Qal'at Shilā, a pool in al-Tunaynīr monastic complex (Dauvillier 1976, 6; Harrak 2001, 22; Déroche 2013, 330; Fuller *et al.* 2018, 100; Amin 2019, 53). We will focus here on the facilities related to the cultural function of the churches.

The presence of a *bēt šlōtā* is thus not always easy to identify in the atrium south of the church (Fig. 7).

Yet, this apse or niche in a wall which allows for external services, especially in summer, is well attested in the neighbouring Tūr 'Abdīn at least as early as the 8th century (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 183-85; Keser-Kayaalp in this volume). In the territories long under the obedience of the Church of the East, *bēt šlōtā* can be spotted on later churches in Mosul, datable to the 12th and 13th centuries, often with tombs inside: Mar Shim'un al-Ṣafa, Saint Meskinta, and al-Ṭāhira of the Chaldeans (Fiey 1959, 116, 122 and 133; Harrak 2013; Beaurepaire 2021, 278-85 and 342-57). In Mār Bēhnām complex, a Syriac 13th century-inscription labelled as *bēt šlōtā* the niches outside the western wall of this church, under a portico (Desreumaux 2010, 286; Harrak 2018, 94-97). No such layout can be seen on the plan of Qaṣr Sarij, so we find it difficult to consider that its portico could also have served as a *bēt šlōtā* as wrote Harrak (2022b, 33). For earliest periods, such settings might be highly suspected within the *atrium* of the church of Qal'at Shilā. The presence of a *bēt šlōtā* is by no means certain –though not to be excluded– in the *atrium* of other sites under study: Qaṣr Sarij, Takrit, Bāzyān, Muṣayfina, and Takrit.

In light of the current evidence, the hypothesis would rather be that this architectural development was late in the East Syrian environment, perhaps influenced by the more western church architecture from ʿTūr ʿAbdīn.

Rooms contiguous to the sanctuary may have been used for the burial of clerics. The identification of *bēt qaddishē* or *bēt sāhdē* is highly probable in a huge complex such as ‘al-Chenisa’, and the tomb of a Metropolitan of Takrit was discovered within the complex of the citadel church, at Takrit (Harrak 2001). Very few archaeological

excavations have found bones, reliquaries, or clear burial locations. However, several ancient authors indicate that saints or clerics were sometimes buried inside the church itself, which shows that the tombs were not always located in a side room (Brelaud 2022). One example is the Bishop of Adiabene Māran’ammeh buried near the *qestromā*: Thomas of Marga quotes a homily that recalls the location of the tomb. Elsewhere, the East Syrian author states that it is in the *bēt teshmeshtā*, i.e. the sanctuary (Budge 1893, trans. 341-42, 551).

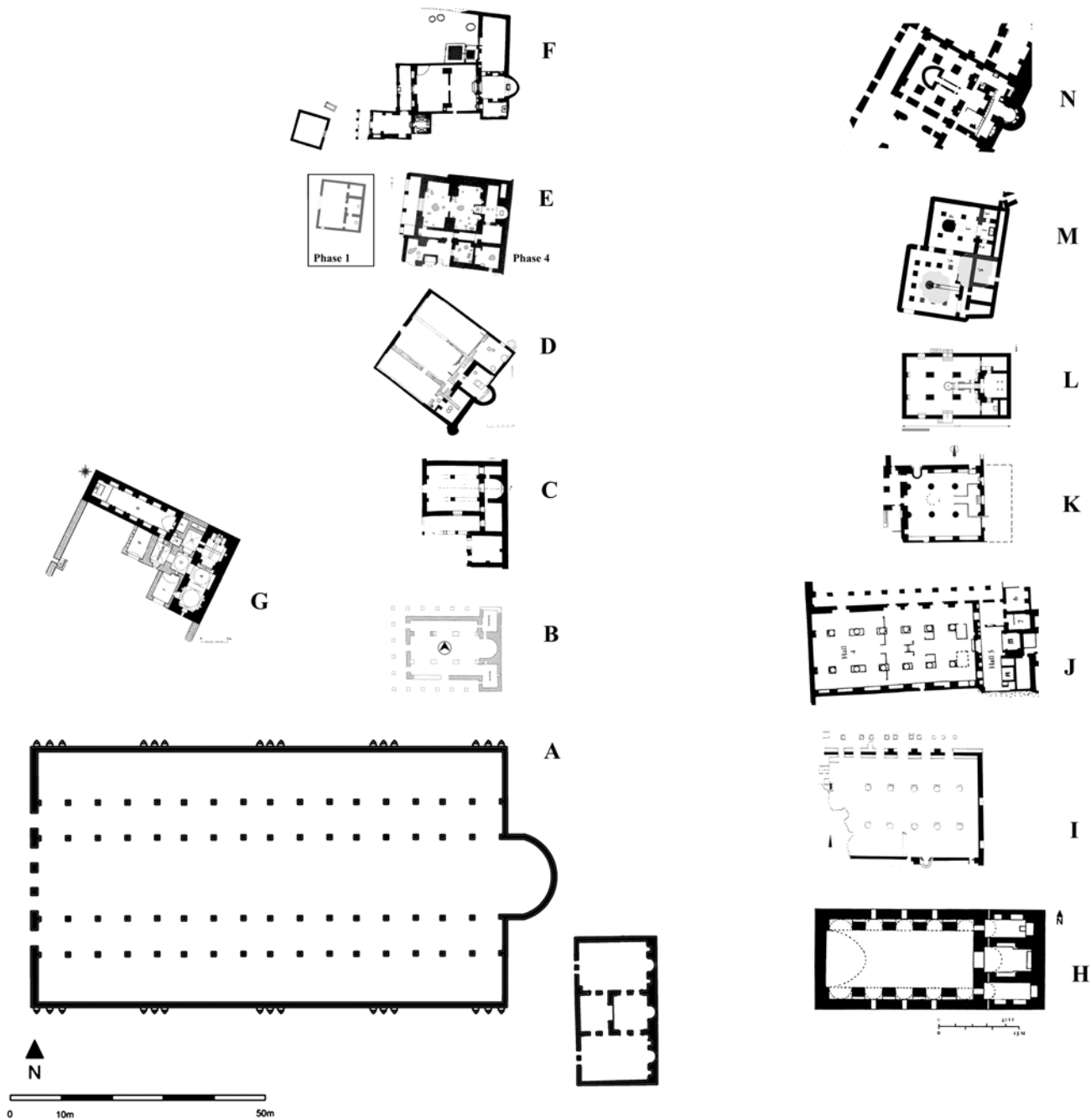


Fig. 7. Plans of ancient north-eastern Mesopotamian churches. Left–A: Nisibis (cathedral and baptistry); B: Qaṣr Sarīj; C: Muṣayfina; D: Dayr Sitūn; E: Tall Tunaynīr (Area 1); F: Tall Tunaynīr (Area 9); G: Mār Tahmizgard, Right–H: Wēh-Ardašīr; I: Takrit citadel’s mosque (cathedral?); J: ‘al-Chenisa; K: Takrit citadel’s church; L: Ḥasaka; M: Qal’at Shilā; N: Bāzyān.

Finally, another important room is the baptistery. Theoretically, it defines whether a church is a parochial one or not, but as noted below, at least one case comes from a monastic church. According to *Catholicos* Īshō'yahb III, the baptistery is meant to be located on the west side of the church, however it seems that this rule was not always followed, and has potentially evolved over time (Dauvillier 1976, 366).¹⁴ Indeed, the baptistery discovered in the church at Ḥasaka in Syria was the annex to the south of the sanctuary with its baptismal font abutting the eastern wall (Khoury and Riba 2013, 95; Fuller *et al.* 2018, 105). Of note the baptistery included a reliquary. Such an association between the baptismal room and the bones of the saints is found in the complex of Mār Tahmizgard in Kirkuk, since according to E. Herzfeld, a baptistery was located in a hall adjacent to the *bēt sāhdē* (Sarre and Herzfeld 1920, 331). A baptismal font has been placed in the south-east hall of the monastic church (Area 9) of Tall Tunaynīr (Fuller *et al.* 2018, 97), and perhaps also in Dayr Sītūn church in its third phase of construction (Curtis 1997, 375; Harrak 2022, 44-45). Therefore, there is little evidence of baptistery for the ancient churches' remains in northern Mesopotamia, while baptismal fonts from the 12th or 13th century onwards are known in Mosul and the Nineveh Plain and always located at the south-east corner of the church.¹⁵

3.3. Various layouts for the worship building

The churches were oriented towards the east, but in a more or less precise way (Fig. 7). The entrances to the worship building can be from the other three sides. It seems that the entrance from the south is the most common pattern, with the exception of the church of Dayr Sītūn. Two trends emerge: the combination of western and southern entrances is often found in large enclosures that can be described as monastic (Muṣayfina, Qaṣr Sarīj, Bāzyān, Tall Tunaynīr), while the entrance from both the north and the south is found in more urban settings (Ḥasaka, Takrit, Wēh-Ardashīr). There is thus a slightly different pattern from what is observed in Syria and western Mesopotamia: the two entrances to the south are found both in the churches of Ṭūr 'Abdīn (the "hall-type" of Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 169) and in the Syrian Antiochene churches (Khoury 2019, 547), which

often have an additional access from the West, and sometimes from the north. In contrast, the "transverse-hall" monastic churches of the Ṭūr 'Abdīn are only accessible from the western wall (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 202).

The layout of the churches has common characteristics: a long nave, roughly divided into three aisles—except Wēh-Ardashīr and Tall Tunaynīr—, covered with vaults. The plan is therefore very simple: is it a local adaptation of the *basilica* plan of the churches that spread in the West from the beginning of the 4th century or a basic innovation that draws on the ancient Mesopotamian architectural heritage? Millet (1916, 15-53) called it an "oriental basilica," while Isaac (1982) followed by Amin (2018) used the formula "Assyrian basilica" to emphasize a geographical rather than a confessional anchorage of this type of plan. Hauser (2019) classified among the West Syrian churches those whose plans were "centered." In his catalogue, the witnesses were quite limited for the North (Qaṣr Sarīj, Muṣayfina, Bāzyān). In fact, other quasi-square-nave churches should be included in this set: citadel of Takrit, Qal'at Shilā, and Ḥasaka. Therefore, it seems difficult to consider all of these examples to be West Syrian—i.e., Syriac Orthodox—, especially in the more eastern regions (eastern Adiabene and Bet Garmay) where the Miaphysite presence is little known from the texts.

An important feature of the ancient Mesopotamian churches' plan is the rectangularity of the sanctuary and its eastern annexes. Few straight chevet sanctuaries have been identified in the West, in Syria; the one-nave church of Qirqbīze and a few chapels (Khoury 2019, 498-99). According to Dauvillier (1976, 359), this was a legacy of Babylonian sacred and domestic architecture, as well as the entrances on the longest side of the nave. Hauser (2019), has convincingly put forward a more technical reason, observing the evidence from southern Iraq and the Persian Gulf: it is above all the use of mudbrick that explains the regularity of the lines of the walls, the semicircular shape of the apse being difficult to achieve with this material—the argument is less strong for fired bricks, however. The straight-walled sanctuaries are particularly clear in the southern Mesopotamian set of churches (Okada 1991; Bonnéric 2022), shown here by the church at Wēh-Ardashīr. They are very similar to those of Qal'at Shilā and Ḥasaka, but a little less so for Bāzyān, 'al-Chenisa'. In the case of Tall Tunaynīr, the first mud-brick church in Area 3 ("Late Roman/

¹⁴ In the late 6th century, *Catholicos* Īshō'yahb I did not mention a baptistery or baptismal font in the canons concerning baptism in his Law Code, but as Harrak (2022) said, the patriarch did not "discuss church architecture".

¹⁵ The designation of the building adjacent to the mausoleum of Mār Bēhnām as a baptistery is a hypothesis of Harrak (2018, 56-59); it is not certain.

Byzantine levels”) had a rectangular sanctuary; a first prominent apse would have been built in the second phase of construction, in the Umayyad period; then the apse would have been further reworked in the Abbasid period (phase 3; Fuller *et al.* 2018, 92).

Indeed, the layout of the sanctuaries and its two adjacent rooms is less regular in northern Mesopotamia, where the use of stone dominates (see below the section on masonry). Three churches have an apse sanctuary, similar to the Roman-type *basilica*, in the border town of Nisibis (Fig. 7).¹⁶ In Dayr Sītūn, the apse is even visible from the outside and not hidden by a straight eastern wall. The situation is a bit singular at Bāzyān, where the sanctuary does have a square plan,¹⁷ but is lined with a prominent apse that follows the shape of the interior of a tower—it could be a *bēt sāhdē* set behind the sanctuary. Moreover, the two rooms located on either side of the sanctuary allowed circumambulation around the ‘holy of holies’, but could also serve as a *diakonikon* and a *bēt qaddishē* (Desreumaux 2010, 285; Brelaud 2021b). As for the covering of the sanctuary, ‘al-Chenisa’ of Takrit alone seems to be a tangible example of a dome above the sanctuary (Harrak 2001, 16-17; Hauser 2019, 439), while there was probably a 2nd floor above the one of Bāzyān church, due to the presence of stairs (Déroche 2013, 334).

Finally, what these Sasanian/post-Sasanian churches have in common is that they never follow the centred or triconical plan found in Tūr ‘Abdīn or Armenia. Similarly, none have a transverse nave (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 202), except for Mōr Basōs and Mōrt Shūshān of Hīdīl, but this church is located near Tūr ‘Abdīn (Şan 2018, 38-39).

3.4. The *bema*: a liturgical furnishing inside the church

The *bema* designates the platform (made of stone or wood) used for the reading of the Holy Scriptures in the middle of the nave (Dauvillier 1952); it is therefore disconnected from the altar room. In northern Mesopotamia, *bemata* have been identified at three sites, at least, corresponding to two types: a platform sustained by little columns—following the description of the *bema* provided by the 6th-century *Sogitha on the Church of Edessa* (Loosley 2012, 69-70)—in Ḥasaka and

in the citadel church of Takrit; a semicircular platform in Bāzyān and Qal‘at Shīlā; in addition, there is the *bema* of the church of ‘al-Chenisa’ whose form has not been drawn by archaeologists (Fig. 7). Given all these attestations, it is not very likely that the development of *bema* was only Miaphysite, as suggested by Hauser (2019, 437-38). This platform is a feature of the earliest Syrian church in Antiochene and the Limestone Massif (4th-6th centuries), then declined along with the settlement of this region (Loosley 2012, 125-26); it is also almost absent of the remains in Tūr ‘Abdīn (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 143-45). However, Dauvillier (1952, 29) has shown that the liturgical prescription of the use of the *bema* survived and was still referred to by West Syriac authors, at least until the 14th century. In fact, East Syrian *bemata* are later than the West Syrian ones, underlining a preservation of its use in the East; the famous *bema* of al-Ṭāhira of the Chaldeans in Mosul—unique as it was affixed to the western wall of the church—, set in the 13th century, is one of the last examples (Fiey 1959, 133; Harrak 2013; Beaurepaire 2021, 278-85 and 342-57).

This liturgical arrangement is also important for the discussion of the difference between parish and monastic churches. Presumably, it was only present in churches where the lay audience had to be distinguished from clerics and ascetics. Yet three of these churches appear to belong to monastic complexes (‘al-Chenisa’, Bāzyān, and Qal‘at Shīlā). Should it therefore be considered that laymen could attend services in a monastery church, which at first glance goes against the testimony of the East Syrian ecclesiastic law (Brelaud 2021b, 209-15)?

Lassus (1950, 249) has already noted that the presence of a *bema* could be paired with the cult of martyrs in the Church of the East, based on the testimony of an anonymous liturgical manuscript of the 11th century. One should remember that the chronology of the cult of the saints is significantly different from what is known in the Roman Empire: it is from the 5th century onwards that the bishops first, and then perhaps also certain monasteries in the 6th century, promoted the commemoration of the death of martyrs who had been executed under the Sasanians (Payne 2011a; Brelaud 2022). These remains would confirm the accessibility of the monastic churches to the neighbouring believers, at least during the early Islamic period.

¹⁶ Mayferqat also had a 5th or 6th century Roman-type *basilica* (Bell and Mango 1982, 58, 60, 65, fig. 40, pl. 39, 40-46; Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 118-23) which, although located in the Roman Empire, may have influenced the architecture of some nearby Sasanian churches.

¹⁷ The description in Hauser (2019), should be therefore corrected.



Fig. 8. Stone masonry of Bāzyān (Bāzyān mission) and Ḥasaka (Khoury and Riba 2013).

3.5. The primacy of stonework in the North

Masonry is a key criterion that distinguishes between Mesopotamian church architecture in the south and the north: brick is used more in the former region, while stone prevails in the latter –of course, there are counterexamples. Regional masonry differs according to the availability of local stone, coupled with other materials (wood, brick, or mud) and the construction techniques that these materials enable: cut limestone in the mountains, the dark gypsum of the Mosul area (*frash*) or limestone rubble in the plains. The latter allows for masonry of loose rubble with plaster mortar; the rapid setting of the plaster allows for the construction of vaults, without the use of wooden vaulting. The prominence of this plaster architecture is seen further south: for example, before being *catholicos*, Abā (6th century) prayed in Ctesiphon in a place named the “lime” or “white church,” *ܥܕܬܐ ܕܥܥܫܬܐ* *‘edā d-gašēstā* (*History of Abā*, §5: Jullien 2015, ed. 8, trans. 9). This type of masonry has often related to Sasanian architecture, notably by Rich (1836); it is in fact found elsewhere in the mountainous regions or in the foothills of the Zagros. For instance, Bāzyān’s masonry consists roughly of layers of limestone rubble, sealed with a local plaster used as mortar (*qašel*) (Fig. 8). The facing of the walls is not done with ashlar, but with a local plaster coating (*juss*), also used as mortar for arches and vaults. Similar construction thus occurs locally: at Dayr Sītūn around Mosul Lake, at Qal’at Shilā, perhaps also at Khānī Pānkān; further west, at Ḥasaka closest to the Roman-Persian border; but it is also found in some southern churches, notably at al-Quṣayr, near Kerbala (Atiyah and Bonnéric 2022, 56). In fact, it is an architecture typical of regions plentiful in stone but poor in wood, making it almost impossible not only to build heavy wooden frames, but also to burn lime for lack of firewood. It was therefore successful further west, perhaps

in a more refined manner, as at Gola west of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, outside the sphere of influence of the Church of the East (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 143-46; Labedan-Kodaş and Bağlayıcı 2022). It also had significant longevity –as long as it was maintained by regularly applying plaster coatings–, and it was the masonry of medieval churches, as in Rabban Hormizd, Mōr Basōs and Mōrt Shūshān in Ḥidil (Amin 2018). For sites in the ‘Aqra region and the northern mountains, stone masonry with a larger format is also observed, as at Mār ‘Abdīshō’ in Gunduk; there, wood is sometimes used for roofs rather than rubble stone vaults.

So far, fired brick does not seem to be used in this region for ancient buildings; it is only used very occasionally for restorations, for example at Bāzyān, and perhaps also in the Bābira church (now submerged under the Mosul Lake). No building in the study area seems to follow the model of some Ṭūr ‘Abdīn churches, probably from the late Umayyad Period, with alternating ashlar masonry for the walls and a vaulted roof of fired bricks (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 175-77). In contrast, further south, at Takrit, and Wēh-Ardashīr (Ctesiphon), mud brick takes the place of stone rubble, also covered with plaster. However, in the medieval period, brick is increasingly used in the Nineveh plain: this is the case for the monastery of Mār Bēhnām, or mud brick for many buildings in old Qaraqosh. The selection of quality materials (such as stone or fired brick) for the construction of churches and the use of mudbrick for other buildings, starting with houses, is often observed.

Two buildings in the Bēt ‘Arbāyē stand out for their use of ashlar stone for the facing: Qaṣr Sarīj and Muṣayfina, both northwest of Balad (Eski Mosul). This brings these buildings closer to the architecture of the churches of the Limestone Massif in Syria... the careful molded ornaments less. Should we therefore see here the trace of Roman Syrian architects, or even of an affiliation with the Miaphysites? In fact, it is likely to be one of the

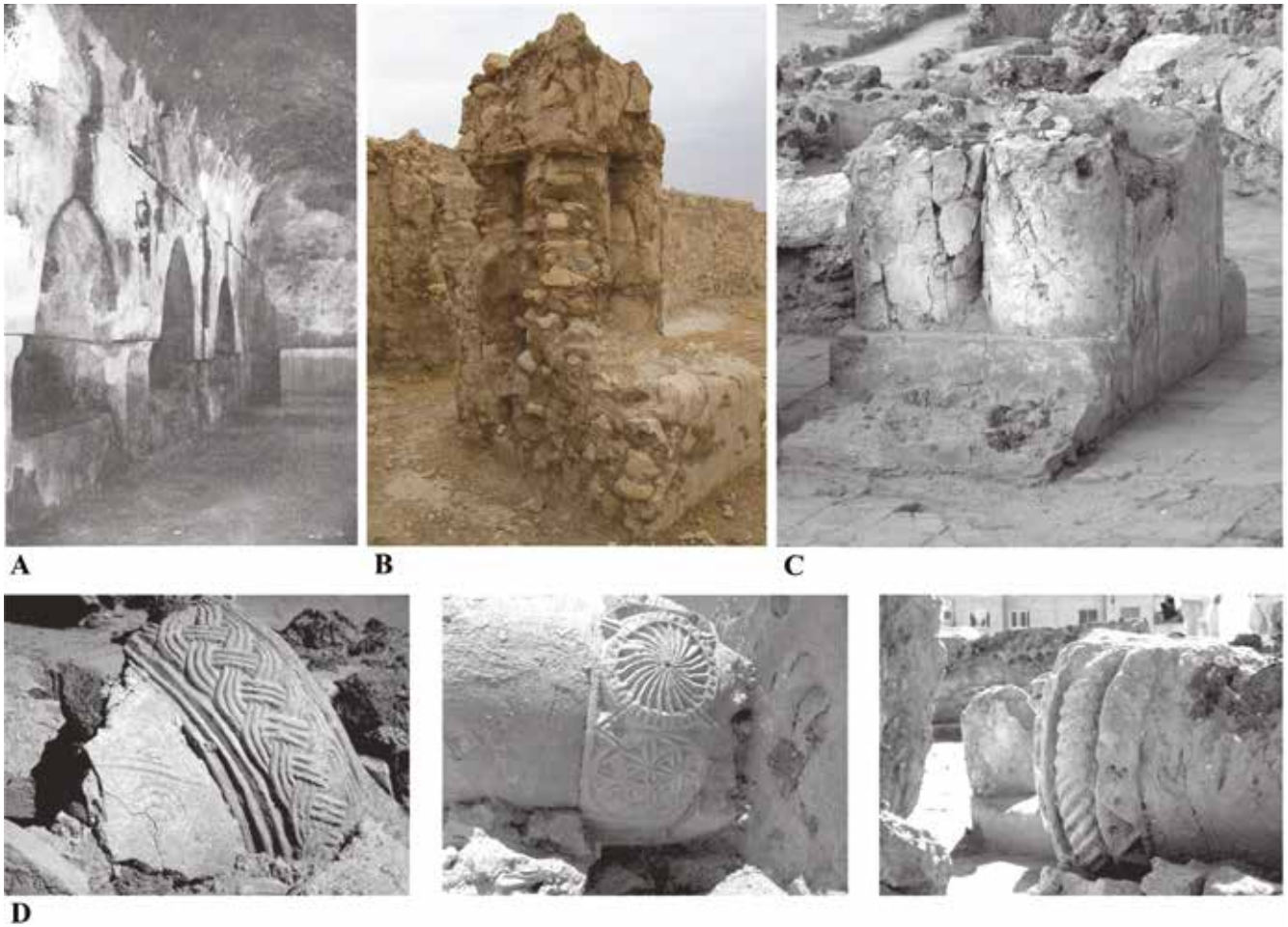


Fig. 9. Architectural ornaments in A: Kirkuk (Bell and Mango 1982), B: Bāzyān (Bāzyān mission) and C-D: Ḥasaka (Khoury and Riba 2013).

few cases where nearby buildings have had an impact on local architects or patrons: the church of Nisibis of which only the baptistery built by Bishop Vologeses in 359 remains (present-day Mor Yakup Church in Nusaybin), which had been part of the Sasanian Empire since the late 4th century, or the monastery of Abraham of Kashkar on Mount Izlā (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 46-49); or across the border, the *martyria* and churches of Mayferqat (nowadays destroyed), at the gates of Sasanian Armenia, or the early monasteries and churches of Ṭur ‘Abdin from the 5th century onwards.

Stone thus prevails in the north, in two very different types of masonry: rubble and mortar masonry and ashlar stone. On the other hand, the more extensive excavation of Tall Tunaynīr shows that on the same site, mortar and rubble masonry (Area 9) may have been used at the same period as mud brick (Area 3; Fuller *et al.* 2018, 96-97). The account of the rebuilding of the monastery of Bet ‘Abē at the behest of the eight-century Metropolitan Īshō‘yabb of

Adiabene shows the more prestigious character of mortar (and rubble) masonry – *gaṣā* “gypsum, plaster”–, as opposed to mudbrick masonry – *ṭīnā* “mud”–. Thomas of Marga, who recorded this account, details the materials ordered by the saint to replace the old mud-brick church: “fired bricks” – *lebne shgīrātā*–, but also stones – *kēpē*–, which he had fetched from along the great Zab, nearly 40 kilometres from the monastery, both to build the walls, but also to be pounded and prepare the mortar/plaster (Budge 1893, trans. 397-400; more on this excerpt in Pierre, in this volume).

3.6. Iconographic and architectural designs

The decorations distinguish quite clearly two types of church architecture with regards to their position according to the Roman-Persian border, apparently even after its disappearance in the early Islamic period.

¹⁸ A special case in iconography is the mosaic of Tall Ḥwārīs, south of Rānya, discovered during the construction of the Dokan Dam (Costa 1971). If the building from which it comes is identified as a church (which is not done by the excavators), it would be a unique example of this technique in Mesopotamian churches. If the technique is rather western, the theme of the mosaic is very common in the Middle East, whereas the iconographic style is rather Sasanian.

First, mosaic was not used for church pavements in Sasanian and post-Sasanian Mesopotamia.¹⁸ Second, the churches of eastern Mesopotamia do not have molded or vegetal decorations in stone comparable to those found in the churches of Tur 'Abdin. On the other hand, they do have refined decorations carved in plaster, whether at Bāzyān, Hasaka (Khoury and Riba 2013, 103, fig. 13). One also encounters double columns that, along with low vaults and arches, anchor these buildings in an architecture more closely related to Persia, in use with certain evolutions from the Sasanian period to the Abbasid period: see the Mār Tahmizgard Church in Kirkuk, Bāzyān, and Hasaka (Sarre and Herzfeld 1920, 332; Khoury and Riba 2013, 101, fig. 12; Amin *et al.* 2022, 134-35). Many of the plaster and stucco decorations must have disappeared from the sites studied.

As far as iconography is concerned, it is reduced to painted crosses on the walls, but above all to crosses on independent and mobile plaques at Bāzyān (Amin and Desreumaux 2018), Hasaka (Khoury and Riba 2013, 103, fig. 14) and Tall Tunaynīr (Fuller *et al.* 2018). These sculpted plaques (Fig. 5) have an iconography similar to that of the Armenian *khatchkar*, but their use was not the same: no large, massive stela is found in the Mesopotamian environment. No pictorial compositions or frescoes have been found in Iraq before the baptismal scene in the church of Mār Gewargis, Qaraqosh, from the 13th century A.D., of Syrian Orthodox origin (Bas Snelders 2007). However, one should not dismiss the idea that the walls were decorated. Thus, Thomas of Marga describes the roof of the church of Neḥshōn in the diocese of Salākh reinforced with painted plates and beams (Budge 1893, trans. 311).

Unfortunately, no architectural or decorative elements have been published for the churches of Takrit, which would provide a good example for a miaphysite environment.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Archaeology clearly confirms a significant Christianisation of the north of the region, with a visible form of Christian worship from the Sasanian period onwards. Having noted the general characteristics, we would now like to raise the question of identifying the churches according to geographical criteria, or according to Christian denominations, as some researchers have done, or even according to their ecclesiastical function (parish or monastic churches).

4.1. Can we identify regional features?

The most ancient remains of churches in north-eastern Mesopotamia do not really allow us to find a clear architectural specificity. These buildings are characterised by a certain architectural diversity (sanctuaries with apse or straight wall, ashlar or rubble masonry, or brick) and innovations in terms of decoration (low arches, double columns, sculpted stucco, ornamented crosses).

These combined features, as well as the absence of certain particularities (stone decorations, *bēt ṣlōtā?*) would be the only mark of regional patterns. This study must of course be continued, making the most of the forthcoming archaeological excavations on some of the major buildings presented here, but also making systematic comparisons: while the study of churches in a Sasanian context has already been proposed (Okada 1991; Simpson 2018; Hauser 2019), we call for a better consideration of influences and differences with neighbouring early Christian buildings, those of Sasanian Armenia and the Roman Tūr 'Abdīn. Besides, practical adaptations to the local material, as proposed by Hauser (2019, 442) or De Beaufort (2021, 44-48), should be better considered to the analysis of the plans.

4.2. Can we distinguish churches according to their religious denomination?

Several scholars, including Wallis Budge and Fiey (1959, pl. II-III), and more recently Hauser (2019), have defined the typical plan of the "Chaldean-Nestorian church" and the "Syrian-Jacobite church." This model may be applied on a broader scale, on geographical basis: distinguishing Western churches from more Eastern buildings. However, these researchers relied significantly on more recent, medieval or even modern buildings, as their analysis preceded the excavation of many archaeological evidence presented above. The fact that Lassus (1950, 237) found the illustration of the plan of the Syrian churches in a Nestorian –and not a miaphysite– manuscript of liturgical prescriptions from the 10th-11th century highlights the limits of this bipartition. In addition, it should be remembered that from antiquity onwards, some buildings may have changed obedience, passing from the Church of the East to the Miaphysite Church of Persia and vice versa.¹⁹ Should it be understood, then, that this required architectural rearrangements? The situation became even more complex in

¹⁹ See, for example, Bar 'Ebrāyā's account of church exchanges between Nestorians and Jacobites (Budge 1893, trans. 284, n. 1).

modern times with the gradual shift to the Catholic Church of most East Syrians and some Syrian Orthodox.

One should note that the idea of a visible distinction between communities is not historically aberrant: for example, Abraham of Kashkar imposed a particular “tonsure” on his monastery’s monks in order to distinguish them from the “Severians,” i.e., from the Miaphysites (Jullien 2008, 119-24). With regard to church construction, however, a reading of the literary sources does not suggest that a precise plan was thought out by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, apart from the basic structure of a sanctuary, a nave and annexes. Thus, the presence of liturgical furnishings is mentioned in the liturgical reform of *Catholicos* Īshō’yahb of Adiabene in the 7th century, but builders were in no way constrained as to the form of the buildings (Harrak 2022).²⁰ Thomas of Marga’s famous metaphorical description of the church, for example, does not allow for the drawing of a standard plan (Budge 1893, trans. 542-43).

Archaeology does not support this architectural distinction according to religious denominations. For instance, two sites are associated by literary sources with the Miaphysite milieu in Iraq: Qaṣr Sarīj near Balad/Eski Mosul and Takrit on the Tigris. Now, the architecture and plan of these churches differ: the former follows a plan with an apse sanctuary, with ashlar masonry that could be described as ‘Roman’ or ‘Syrian’, while the latter is more ‘Eastern’ with straight-walled sanctuaries and mud-brick masonry. Of course, Western influence is evident in the architecture of Qaṣr Sarīj. Muṣayfina shares two characteristics with the latter: the use of ashlar and an apse sanctuary. This does not, however, make it a miaphysite site: architectural influence may have contaminated all religious denominations, as we proposed above. Indeed, the plan of the Muṣayfina complex is one very similar to

that of Bāzyān, whose decoration clearly anchors it in a Mesopotamian-Iranian architecture.²¹

The observation of all the criteria gathered below, and not only the analysis of the plans, leads us to reject the identification of church types according to the designation East Syrian or ‘Nestorian’, Syrian Orthodox or “Severian/Jacobite.”

4.3. Can we differentiate between parish churches and monastic churches?

The cases of Bāzyān or al-Chenisa of Takrit show that the function of churches is not always obvious to identify. First, several clues indicate that they were monastic churches: a large, fortified enclosure, a dense occupation inside, with a floor. But the presence of a *bema* in these churches should mean that the liturgy was also intended for the lay believers.

This raises the question of the layperson’s access to monastic churches. This question could be resolved with reference to Bonnéric’s proposal to characterise certain buildings as “monastic churches of pilgrimage,” noting that architectural arrangements allowed circulation and access to the relics of the convent, probably not only for ascetics (Brelaud 2022, 218-19; Bonnéric 2022). It is known that in the Abbasid period, the Islamic genre of the *Kutub al-Diyārāt* developed the idea of laymen passing through and visiting Christian monasteries, according to a fantasised vision of monasteries that made them practically places of pleasure rather than asceticism (Binggeli 2015, 189-91; Brelaud 2021b, 220). However, behind the literary topoi, one can read there the indication of a progressive evolution of the rule of reclusion in certain urban monasteries. It is therefore possible to accept an oft-blurred boundary between parish and monastic churches.

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²⁰ It has been discussed whether he was rather the *catholicos* of the 11th century. An important focus of his reform was the consecration of churches. It does not provide any information about the plan of the churches.

²¹ We have recently proposed the identification of its East Syrian founder: the ascetic and then metropolitan Sabrišō’ of Bêt Garmay who was active in the first half of the 7th century (Amin *et al.* 2022, 137-38). We cannot therefore follow Hauser (2019, 437-38), when he classifies Bāzyān among the Syrian Orthodox churches, or even link it to the churches of the Limestone Massif in Syria. He based his assessment solely on the form of the plan and does not consider other elements, such as masonry, architecture, and ornament.

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CHAPTER 5

CREATING NEW CHURCHES AND MONASTERIES IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA: THE SEVENTH TO NINTH CENTURIES

LA CREACIÓN DE NUEVAS IGLESIAS Y MONASTERIOS EN EL NORTE DE MESOPOTAMIA: SIGLOS VII AL IX

PHILIP WOOD¹

SUMMARY

The construction of churches and welfare institutions like religious schools and xenodocheia were an indication of Christian communal wealth, as well as being a means of community reproduction. But their construction indicates other contexts as well, such as competition between lay elites and Christian confessions. Here I focus on hagiographies and chronicles from northern Mesopotamia. These allow us to chart the extensive construction of churches in the seventh and early eighth centuries, when the caliphal tax regime was much lighter than it was over the frontier in Byzantium. They also allow us to track the change in the attitude towards church construction by the Muslim government after the Abbasid revolution. After this point, construction and maintenance did continue, but only with the permission of the government and through the agency of specific clerics, at least in the cities.

KEYWORDS: Church Building, Hagiography, Historiography, Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Simeon of the Olives, Tax exemption, Economic History, Abbasid Caliphate

RESUMEN

La construcción de iglesias e instituciones asistenciales, tales como colegios religiosos y xenodocheia, fue un indicio de la riqueza comunitaria cristiana, además de ser un medio de reproducción comunitaria. Pero su construcción refleja también otros contextos, como la competencia entre las élites laicas y las confesiones cristianas. En este texto, me centro en las hagiografías y crónicas del norte de Mesopotamia. Estas fuentes nos permiten visibilizar la extensa construcción de iglesias en el siglo VII y principios del VIII, cuando el régimen fiscal califal era mucho más débil que en la frontera de Bizancio. Estos documentos permiten también rastrear el cambio de actitud hacia la construcción de iglesias por parte del gobierno musulmán después de la revolución abasí. Después de este momento, la construcción y el mantenimiento de iglesias continuaron, pero solo bajo el permiso del gobierno y gracias a la intervención de algunos clérigos, al menos en las ciudades.

PALABRAS CLAVE: construcción de iglesias, hagiografía, historiografía, Dionisio de Tel-Mahre, Simeón de los Olivos, exención de impuestos, historia económica, califato abasí

Historians of Middle Eastern Christianity have tended to view the maintenance and creation of new churches and monasteries through the prism of toleration. Indeed, the history of non-Muslims in lands that now have a Muslim majority often has the implicit purpose of characterising Islam or Muslims as ‘tolerant’ or ‘intolerant’, or at least of a specific group of Muslims as more or less tolerant.

Certainly, I do think it possible to chart the expansion and abatement of Christian institutions through church survival. This is not simply a question of Muslim expropriation of church buildings as mosques, though this did occur. More often, the pattern is of Christian communities that were unable to maintain churches, whether because of impoverishment, emigration or conversion.² Churches and monasteries were also places where welfare

¹ Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations. My thanks to the anonymous reviewers and to the editors for their helpful suggestions.

² Humphreys (2014) uses the survival of church buildings as a sign of the survival of the fund-raising structures that supported them (as well as Christian communities that could provide these funds). Wood (2021a, ch. 3) argues that tithe structures became much more sophisticated for the Miaphysite church in the Abbasid period, on the basis of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre and the West Syrian canons.

was provided to Christians and where new generations of Christians were educated in the faith, so the survival of religious buildings is not simply an index of Christian institutions, and the willingness to fund them, but also of the community's ability to reproduce itself and to make community membership attractive in the future.³ The survival of church buildings or of episcopal organisation can be both important testimonies to the survival of Christian communities more broadly.⁴

However, the creation of church building need not only reflect a relationship between the number of parishioners and the capacity of church institutions to create, maintain and staff buildings. Two other significant contexts are the motivations of aristocratic donors and the competition between rival confessions. I intend to examine these contexts using two Miaphysite saints' lives, the Garshuni *Life of Theodota of Amida* (d. 690s)⁵ and the Syriac *Life of Simeon of the Olives* (d. 734) before concluding with scenes from the Syriac history of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (r. 818-45), preserved in Michael the Syrian (d. 1199). I use these texts to chart the development of substantial monastic federations in the seventh and eighth centuries, before the development of a less hospitable political climate for Christian elites under the Abbasids. I focus on northern Mesopotamia, an area that, while politically peripheral, hosted monasteries that would play a central role in the political lives of the Miaphysite church and the Church of the East until the eleventh century and beyond.

I. ARISTOCRATIC SPONSORSHIP

Firstly, the creation of religious buildings was not simply a response to the existence of a flock in need of

ministry. It could also be a form of elite display, where an aristocracy created churches to show off its wealth to its rivals, as well as to ensure a place in heaven and a memorial after death. Church building might show us the existence of a wealthy Christian aristocracy, but we cannot presume that it was proportionate to the needs or numbers of the laity.⁶ Indeed, instead of thinking about church-building solely through the prism of Muslim/non-Muslim competition, we might also use it as data for the continuation of questions of aristocratic power that have been a prime issue in the historiography of the sixth century. Irrespective of the fact that the new rulers of the state happened to be Muslims, we can still ask how the relationship between the state, the aristocracy and the peasantry developed after the Islamic conquests, considering the construction of churches as a form of elite display.⁷

The seventh century saw a profusion of new churches in rural locations. Outside cities like Damascus, where Muslims settled in the aftermath of the conquest, smaller towns and villages in Tur Abdin saw large numbers of new churches and monasteries (Guidetti 2009; Keser-Kayaalp 2013; 2016; 2018; 2021).⁸ A similar process has been argued for the eastern coast of Arabia, where ceramic evidence can now be much more precisely dated and now points towards a seventh century expansion of cenobitic monasticism (Carter, 2008; Insoll *et al.*, 2022 Bonneric, this volume). Though we do not have the kind of archaeological evidence for Iraq that matches other regions, recent surveys in Adiabene have identified new monasteries and churches, often associated with fortified settlements (Nováček and Wood 2020). The *Book of the Tower* identifies monastic founders across Iraq according to the reign of the patriarchs of the Church of the East. These show a clear pattern in which monastic foundations

³ For welfare institutions see, e.g. Mazza (2011, 278); Wiparczycka (1972, 110-14); Mayer (2009); Jones (1964, 901, 934). Piraud-Fournet (this volume) provides an example of *xenodocheia* in Bostra. There was a *xenodocheion* at Nisibis attached to the theological school: Reinink (2003, 165-66). Examples of monasteries donating food to the poor: *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin* LXXIV; Thomas of Marga VI. 13; *Life of Rabban Bar Idua* 153/230.

⁴ Note the study by Carlson (2015), which uses the survival of episcopal structures in Iraq to argue for the persistence of Christian institutions in Iraq into the thirteenth century. Fiey (1993) remains very important for the mapping of episcopal structures in Miaphysite and Church of the East contexts.

⁵ The *Life of Theodota* can be fairly securely dated to the early eighth century and was composed in Samosata. Hoyland (1997, 156-60). Garshuni is Arabic written in Syriac script. I am very grateful to Jack Tannous for allowing me to use his forthcoming translation, which is cited by folio pages in the manuscript. There is a Syriac version of the *Life of Theodota* from Mardin that I have not been able to use here. The dating of the *Life of Simeon of the Olives* is more complex, and is treated below.

⁶ Bowden (2001) on Roman Macedonia. *Synodicon Orientale* 147/408 contains a good example of this phenomenon from 585, where aristocrats are warned not to found monasteries merely for vainglory, without properly endowing their foundations and without the permission of bishops. A ruling from 676 also insists that the laity should only build monasteries with episcopal permission: *Synodicon Orientale* 217-8/483.

⁷ Aristocrats might also use church construction as a way of exercising direct patronage, such as through the selection of priests (Thomas 1987). Aristocratic sponsorship could be crucial for spreading (or impeding) the spread of a state endorsed orthodoxy in the Roman world (Shaw 2011, 204, 538, 647). The creation of estate churches has been characterised as part of a wider attempt to turn aristocratic estates into a self-contained world, which limited the mental and social horizons of tenants (Hickey 2011, 86, with notes 145-46). Decker (2009, 49-51) considers church and monastic institutions themselves as estate owners.

⁸ It is not necessary to follow Palmer (1990, 186) in assuming that all of the churches attested for this period were reconstructions of pre-Islamic foundations. Also note Ruffini (2011), for the construction of two substantial churches in Nessana in the seventh century.

are concentrated in the period 580-720, with a long tail that runs into the end of the eighth century.⁹

The Transjordan may be something of an exception. Here Gatier (2011) has recently challenged Piccirillo (2002)'s dating of church construction to the seventh and early eighth centuries on the basis of building inscriptions. Gatier objects that many of these inscriptions do not necessarily commemorate church construction itself, rather the addition or refurbishment of a mosaic. Anne Michel's survey (this volume) of the churches of the Transjordan suggests that around 50% had been abandoned by c. 700. Nevertheless, the pattern of the re-use of buildings may indicate that church abandonment was more an indication of changing patterns of land use, rather than Islamisation. For instance, Gilento (this volume) notes that the church of Umm es-Surab was only repurposed in the thirteenth-to-fifteenth century, though it had been abandoned much earlier, and there is no sign that its new inhabitants had any sense that it had once been a place of worship. At any rate, the large amount of excellent archaeological work that is being done in this region should not lead us to the false conclusion that it was especially typical: the Transjordan was a marginal area, where relatively high levels of settlement had only been sustained by significant investment by the Roman state (Northedge 1992, 40, 50; Mittmann 1970; Humphrey 1995; also Decker 2009, 193-97, on the Negev).

Indeed, the construction of new churches in the seventh century is much more marked in parts of the caliphate or the Caucasus than in Byzantine Anatolia (Whittow 1996, 91). The pattern may be explained by the relative retreat of the state in the aftermath of the Roman defeat: the caliphate, as yet, only imposed relatively light taxation on rural elites, who continued to extract the same (or larger) sums of money from the peasants who lived on their land.¹⁰ And a portion of this money was channelled into building new churches.

Our hagiographic sources acknowledge the agency of aristocrats in this process, though they often try to subordinate it to the agency of their saintly heroes. For instance, in the *Life of Theodota of Amida* (881) a local

magnate, the Illustriya (always referred to by his title rather than his proper name) builds a monastery, but it is presented as a deathbed command of the saint, rather than the magnate's own initiative. Likewise, in the *Life of Simeon of the Olives*, the hagiographer acknowledges that a fortress in the mountains was built by the noblemen Abraham and Lazarus, but he credits the initiative for the construction to Simeon (§8).

This pattern was further complicated by the recent disappearance of empires that had once supported other religious confessions, Zoroastrians in Iraq and Chalcedonians in the Tur Abdin. Saints' lives set in Iraq in the early seventh century describe the conversion of Persian aristocrats after receiving cures for infertility and victory in battle following the intercession of Christian saints.¹¹ Some would go on to give away all of their possessions and found new monasteries, bringing their slaves and retainers as the first monks (e.g. *Chronicle of Seert*, PO 13, 454). And members of Persian aristocratic houses would go on to become patriarchs of the Church of the East in the mid-seventh century, when their social networks helped them to win support and funding from their aristocratic peers (Wood 2013, 225). In Nisibis in the 650s, the patriarch Ishoyahb III urged his co-religionists to press home their advantage over local Zoroastrians who were now deprived of the protection of the Sasanian state (Payne 2009). Monastic foundations memorialised the name of an aristocratic family for future generations, though hagiographies also record important negotiations with aristocrats who tried to keep control of the monastery's resources or tried to interfere in the way the monastery was run (eg. Thomas of Marga II. 43). To some extent, this may show the creation of monasteries to meet an unmet need, but it also shows families that bore Iranian names and who were probably of Zoroastrian origin who were now investing their wealth into Christian religious institutions (Nováček and Wood 2020).

For the Tur Abdin this pattern is more muted: the sources do refer to conversion to Miaphysite Christianity among local Jews and pagans, but this did not create a new Christian elite that patronised church institutions.

⁹ This text was published by Gismondi and ascribed to Amr b. Matta, but more recent research has ascribed the shorter, fourteenth century *Book of the Tower*, which contains these lists of monastic foundations, to Mari b. Sulayman. Key studies are Holmberg (1993) and Yarbrough (2022).

¹⁰ Note how local leaders were able to step into the breach in areas that the state had abandoned, such as coinage: Bates (1984, 393-94). There is a good example of local production from Cyrrhus in Schulze (2017). Note Gyselen (2009) for sub-Sasanian Christian examples, from Istakhr (types 26-8) and Susa (type 39), cf. Treadwell (2008, 359-63). Malek (2019, 678-82) shows Byzantine style cross on steps coins, several with Pahlavi or pseudo-Pahlavi legends. At 372, Treadwell suggests that the profusion of localised copper issues suggests the continuation of municipal taxation. Sarris (2011, 959 and 1059) emphasises that the removal of a strong state removed constraints on aristocrats' ability to draw wealth from peasantries.

¹¹ E.g. *Chronicle of Seert*, PO 13: 546 for the relationship between Babai the scribe and Rouzbeh the marzban of Hira; 552 for the conception of the child king Ardashir III (d. 630) after the prayers of Babai of Nisibis.

On the other hand, Miaphysite holy men do seem to have been able to co-opt local Chalcedonians. Simeon struck up a good relationship with George son of Lazarus of Anhel, a Chalcedonian with political authority over the Tur Abdin, who used his influence to gather workers to let Simeon build a church. George was initially suspicious, probably for sectarian reasons, but changed his mind when Simeon performed a healing miracle at Anhel (§40-43).¹² Theodota's friend the Illustriya of Dara is similarly an important political figure, and Andrew Palmer may well be correct to assume that he was a Chalcedonian as well.¹³ It is unclear if either George or the Illustriya actually became Miaphysites, if they had done the texts would probably make more of it, but the hagiographies do imagine that the end of the seventh and the early eighth centuries was a period when Miaphysite-Chalcedonian distrust was put to one side and when magnates with Chalcedonian backgrounds were prepared to patronise Miaphysite institutions.

2. INTER-CHRISTIAN RIVALRY: MIAPHYSITES AND THE CHURCH OF THE EAST

The seventh-century boom in monastic foundations might also be seen as a response to the appearance of a new proximity between confessions that were deeply opposed. Miaphysites targeted the Arab populations of the Jazira and the vicinity of Hira in the late sixth century, where they set up their own monasteries and theological schools.¹⁴ And by the last decades of the Sasanian empire they had won over the significant monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul and a number of important villages. Miaphysite success here seems to have owed much to the support of patrons close to the shah, such as Gabriel of Sinjar, who could supply money and state troops (*Life of Rabban Bar 'Idta*, 158/239).

The construction of churches and monasteries in Iraq at this time was, in part, a reaction to this Miaphysite encroachment. For instance, the *Chronicle of Seert* (PO 13: 473) reports the creation of a new see centred on the city of Haditha, on the edges of the area now controlled by the Miaphysites (Fiey 1966, 326-27, 331). One can

also detect a much sharper tone in the saints' lives of this period: the Miaphysites appear as the villains of the *Life of Rabban Hormizd*. Miaphysite monks impregnate a prostitute and kill her, before blaming Hormizd for the deed (61/90 ff.). When Hormizd enters the monastery of Mar Mattay he finds that the abbot Ignatius is actually a sorcerer and that the monks are worshipping a demon: the denouement of the saint's life is a duel between the sorcerer and an angel that protects Hormizd against his magic (95/121 ff.).

A good indication of the mutual antipathy of Miaphysites and members of the Church of the East is the refusal to accept one another's sacraments. There is a scene in the *Life of Rabban Hormizd* where the saint and his Miaphysite rivals both baptise a child in the presence of the Muslim ruler of Mosul. After Hormizd had baptised the child, the Miaphysites attempt to do the same, only for the water to part around the boy (71/105). The point here is that the Miaphysites' sacraments are invalid: only members of the Church of the East are able to conduct a valid baptism (*Chronicle of Seert* PO 13: 277).

Similar anxieties about confessional boundaries can be seen in Miaphysite texts. The *Life of Theodota of Amida* is much concerned with the saint's ability to detect sinners of many different kinds, but 'Nestorians' appear on several occasions and they seem to be novel opponents in this context. Their presence is seen to render the eucharist invalid for everyone who attends: a devil who has taken possession of a 'Nestorian' taunts the Theodota, 'he is a Nestorian, and I rejoice in him because he took communion with the blessed ones and on account of him they will perish apart from Jesus' (865).¹⁵ In a later encounter the hagiographer comments that a man was 'baptised with the baptism of Nestorius', which seems to deny that the different confessions share a single sacrament (879).

It is worth emphasising that this is a major step change from the kind of sectarian polemic that had been seen in the Roman world half a century before. At this point, Chalcedonians and Severan Miaphysites had certainly condemned one another's beliefs, but there is no sense that they believed that one another's baptisms or ordinations were invalid: faithful Miaphysites might avoid Chalcedonian communion, but to insist on the

¹² The *Life of Simeon of the Olives* §41 does not state George's confession explicitly, but I think it is implied: 'George the headman or governor (*malkā*) of Anhel, did not have much faith in the holy men of our region, that is the Suryaye, because he had been brought up in the west, with the Romans and had adopted their habits, and, for this reason, he had no faith [in the local holy men]'. I have slightly adapted Brock's translation.

¹³ *Life of Theodota* 871. Another *illustriya* was based in Samosata and was a native of Harran (*Life of Theodota* 863). On the presence of Chalcedonian elites in Tur Abdin see Palmer (1990, 162, 166) and Hoyland (1997, 158). See Palmer 1990-91 and 2006's discussions of the text. The use of a Roman title may indicate an individual who had been in government service, and hence make it more likely that he adhered to Chalcedonianism.

¹⁴ *Life of Abudemmeh*, PO 3: 25-27; *Chronicle of Seert*, PO 7: 143-4; PO 13: 473, 543.

¹⁵ Also note *Life of Theodota* 868 for a 'Nestorian' ascetic whom Theodota exposes. See Palmer (1990, 89), who comments on the monastery's dependence on itinerant, but possibly untrustworthy specialists.

re-ordination of priests who had changed confession had been a boundary that very few would cross (Michelson 2014, ch. 2; Menze 2008; Ford 2018).

This situation of the early seventh century had become much more charged. Perhaps one reason was that the removal of political borders between the Roman and Sasanian empires meant that different communities increasingly came into contact with one another (Wood 2013, 237-38; Dauvillier 1948, 273-74; Fiey 1978). When 'Nestorians' knocked down the church built by the Miaphysite Simeon of the Olives in Nisibis (§38), we should remember that he was trying to set up shop in a city that had been a stronghold of the Church of the East for many centuries, which had once lain on the Sasanian side of the old frontier. Secondly, a great deal of church property had changed hands several times in the course of frequent changes of government in the Sasanian Empire and in parts of the Roman empire that the Sasanians had occupied, and this likely led to feelings of resentment.¹⁶ And finally, the possibility of large populations crossing confessional boundaries and/or acquiring patrons with links to the government may have intensified competition and prompted bishops to expand their institutional coverage over notional Christians who had no regular contact with priests or sacraments, and may have had little strong sense of belonging to one confession rather than another.¹⁷

3. MONASTERIES AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

One purpose of hagiography is to chart historical relationships between places. When stories report the miracles of holy men, in healing the sick or infertile, in averting natural disasters, the purpose is not only to demonstrate that God has acted through a human being, but also to establish a relationship between the places that the holy man founded and the place where the

petitioner came from.¹⁸ In some cases, there may even have been people who claimed descent from men and women who had been healed or even converted at the hands of the holy man: their family narratives may be endorsed in a hagiography, which in turn gave them an incentive in spreading the entire saint's life, and in an active practice of devotion towards the sites associated with the saint.

In describing the foundation of monasteries, hagiographies also issued an invitation to their readers or listeners to contribute to the story themselves by making their own donations. Often the recipients of miracles give donations, though they are never obliged to do so directly, and such stories may have encouraged the faithful to make their own donations, either when their prayers had been answered or in the hope of future miracles.¹⁹ In addition, hagiographic narratives offered a role to elite donors as co-founders.

Several examples relating to the monastery of Qartmin in the Tur Abdin exemplify this phenomenon very well. Firstly, the so-called Qartmin trilogy, translated and edited by Andrew Palmer, describes three holy men, Samuel (d. 410?), Simeon (d. 433?) and Gabriel (d. 648?). Though the trilogy was probably composed in the ninth century it often dwells on the physical features of the monastery and explains them by reference to the activities of the holy men, such as the great kneading stone that was transported by Gabriel (LXXI-II) or the angels who lifted an ancient stone and left it there without support (XVIII). These accounts evoke the antiquity of the monastery as a source of pride: as the *Life of Simeon of Qartmin* (XXIV) comments: 'Brothers, you have a duty to know the holy place in which you dwell...we have a duty to follow zealously in our master's footsteps'.²⁰

These accounts begin in the early fifth century and record the gifts made to the monastery by the emperors Honorius (d. 423), Arcadius (d. 408) and Theodosius II (d. 450) (XXVII-XXVIII; XXXII).²¹ In a similar vein,

¹⁶ Michael the Syrian X.23 and XI. 3 for the successive confiscations of churches in Edessa under Maurice and Heraclius; Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical History*, I. 265 relates the multiple changes of patronage under Khusrau. *Chronicle to 819*: 10 depicts the monastery of Qartmin as the beneficiary of Khusrau II's decision to place many Chalcedonian properties in the hands of the Miaphysites. For the Sasanian empire note the scene in the *Life of Rabban Bar 'Idta* 158/239, which describes the role of state support in the Miaphysite acquisition of the monastery of Mar Mattai from the Church of the East. Further see Wood (2022a and 2022b).

¹⁷ Tannous (2018) calls these uncatechised populations 'simple Christians'. His flagship example (eg. Tannous 2018, 669-75) is taken from John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, PO 17: 229 ff., which describes a mountain population that has no knowledge of the sacraments at all.

¹⁸ The terminology of the 'holy man' to describe the heroes of Christian hagiography was pioneered in Brown (1971), and revisited in Howard-Johnston and Hayward (1999).

¹⁹ E.g. *Life of Simeon of Qartmin* XI (a boy who is healed is promised to the church as a servant of the monastery); XIV (the father of a boy who has been healed builds a church and distributes food, drink and incense); XXXI (villagers adorn the house of prayer when the plague is lifted); XXXIX (a wealthy man of Maypherkat gives large donations after his wife bears a son). For the phenomenon of the children of those who are cured of infertility being promised to a monastery, see Papaconstantinou (2012). Donations were solicited widely and the donations of more humble people are celebrated in inscriptions in Salah in 753 as well as in the hagiographies: Palmer (1990, 186-87).

²⁰ This is the *Life* of the fifth century Simeon, not the eighth century Simeon of the Olives. Both men were associated with the monastery of Qartmin. Palmer (1990, 17) proposes a date of c. 550-650 on stylistic grounds.

the *Life of Gabriel* states that the emperor Anastasius (d. 518) sent many craftsmen to adorn the monastery, using stone transported from the coast (LIX).²² This reference to Anastasius is especially marked in the text because it breaks the chronological development of the *Life of Gabriel* as a successor to the *Life of Simeon*: Gabriel was active in the early-to-mid seventh century, but the hagiographer disturbs the chronological unity of the text to stress Anastasius' role as a patron of the monastery and the subsequent flight of monks in the Tur Abdin because of Chalcedonian persecution (LXI). Anastasius' role as the last Miaphysite emperor, and a patron of Severus of Antioch (d. 538), was well known, as was the Chalcedonian persecution that followed, and the hagiographer may have stressed this here (rather than the earlier patronage by Arcadius) because he wished to stress Qartmin's Miaphysite credentials in particular.²³ At any rate, I suggest that one reason that the Qartmin hagiographers drew such attention to imperial patronage was that it allowed later donors to step into a tradition that went back to the Roman emperors. In a period of Muslim rule, this was a tradition that could not be equalled by more recent foundations, but it also meant that no new donor could ever hope to eclipse these gifts made in the distant past.

4. HAGIOGRAPHY AS FOUNDATION CHARTER: THE *LIFE OF SIMEON OF THE OLIVES*

Thus one purpose of hagiographic writings is to encourage readers to see themselves as characters within the narrative and, on that basis, to encourage them to act in favour of the monastery, often by donation. But another function of the narrative is to lay claim to objects or land by describing how the monastery had acquired them. This use of narrative as a charter of possession does not

remove the need for written documents to register the transfer of land or the payment of taxes. Nevertheless, claims to property were not necessarily negotiated at the level of the state administration or even by the literate. One effect of explaining how land or possessions came to be owned in a saint's life was to disseminate such stories widely amongst the faithful and to render them part of common knowledge: if everyone knew that a given field or book or liturgical vessel had long been the property of the monks then this might help to mobilise public opinion against anyone who disagreed. Likewise, the depth of the stories that described donations was not just a matter of verisimilitude, but it also gave living people who were linked to the donor, or to a place, a further motive to repeat the tale.

A good example of the role of hagiography as a foundation charter is the early eighth century *Life of Simeon of the Olives*.²⁴ This tale begins with the discovery of a great treasure by Simeon's nephew David, while he is out hunting during a period of service for a local lord named Shahrbaraz. David does not tell his lord, but goes in secret to take part of treasure to his uncle. Simeon uses some of this money to feed the poor, orphans and widows but the rest he uses to buy farms and fields for the monastery of Qartmin, as well as houses, shops, mills and gardens. By these means, 'the monastery of Qartmin acquired possessions the likes of which do not exist anywhere in the world' (§22). Here it is worth stressing the way that the list is ordered: the hagiographer does not want to imply that Simeon ignored his charitable duties, and it may be that, in using the saint's life to discuss Simeon's development of a portfolio, he also needed to fend off potential criticisms from his readers.

Simeon's purchases are not limited to the vicinity of Qartmin, but he also buys entire monasteries in their own right. He buys the monastery of the pillar, where he had spent time as a stylite, as well as the surrounding

²¹ Palmer (1990, 55-72) discusses the parts of the monastery attributed to fifth century emperors. Associations with ancient rulers may be later inventions intended to exaggerate the importance of a foundation.

²² Palmer (1990, 17) suggests a range of dates for different parts of the *Life*, with the latest *terminus post quem* as 819. Hoyland (1997, 123-24) suggests an eighth century date because of the text's interest in defending Christians' rights to beat a wooden gong (*semantron*), which was not initially a problem, at least in extant sources that can be securely dated. The *semantra* are a marked issue for the *shurūt Umar*, and this might also indicate a mid-ninth century date.

²³ The reign of Anastasius and the persecution of Ephrem of Antioch (d. 545) are consecutive scenes in the second part of the history of John of Ephesus (d. 586), which were copied in the eighth century *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (wr. 775), so we can reasonably see these scenes as active parts of the Miaphysite historical imagination. On the events themselves see Frend (1972, chapters 5-7) and Alpi (2009).

²⁴ Tannous (2016) and Hoyland *et al.* (2021) provide introductions to this text, which has recently received its first edition. All surviving manuscripts are nineteenth or twentieth century copies. A colophon to a now-lost manuscript lists the date of composition as 799 but there are scenes in the extant life that look like later additions. Simeon died in 734, a date that is known from the Syriac *Chronicle to 819*, and this is probably our firmest datum about the historical Simeon (Palmer 1990, 12). But there are many anachronisms in the *Life of Simeon*. The name Shahrbaraz is a mistake: the historical Shahrbaraz was a short-lived ruler of the Sasanian empire and died in 630: Hoyland (2021, 9), Tannous (2016, 32). Simeon is also said to have had a meeting with the caliph al-Ma'mun, who died in 833 and another excursus mentions events that occurred as late as 971 (The refortification of the citadel of Haythum, §10). Hoyland (2021, 6-7) and Tannous (2016, 30 and 34). Palmer (1990, 161) refers to a note appended to the manuscript that states that it was copied in Harran by Rabban Gabriel, nephew of John of Beth Svrina, who was bishop in c. 1170. See also Hoyland (1997, 168-71).

fields, water, springs and estates, and he planted 12,000 olive trees around it, 'based on the water of its springs'. This spring water is explicitly said to be a rarity in a desiccated region like the Tur Abdin. 'He brought these plants from a great distance, from regions far away and planted the olives with great care.' He enclosed these groves with walls and thorny hedges and brought it hired men to work it (§22).

This investment in the olive grove brought Simeon his name. It was a long term investment, which took five years to yield a crop, and the monastery's tradition of olive cultivation was credited to Simeon's knowledge. We may be given a snippet of this advice when the hagiographer tells us that the monks were always careful to collect the fallen olives rather than shaking them down (and presumably risk damaging the trees) (§23). The hagiographer tells us that the olive oil was used for lighting in Qartmin and all the churches of the Tur Abdin. This may be a case of a partial truth: the oil may well have been given out for this use, and these gifts may have cemented the fame of the monastery and its close relations with other churches in the region, especially if the water sources necessary to cultivate olives were rare. But the number of olive trees is huge, and it seems likely that some of the oil was sold for private uses, and that the hagiographer found it unseemly to dwell on the sale of goods by monks.²⁵

Simeon began to use his wealth to build and endow churches and monasteries. The first of these, the church of Mar Simeon in the village of 'Arbuba, lay in the vicinity of the monastery of Mar Saul, where Simeon had caused a spring to gush from the rock and healed a sick man (§24-5). Later he went to Nisibis and bought the site of an ancient ruined monastery from a local ruler, one Peroz (§26). Here he built or renovated four monasteries (Mar Elisha; Mother of God, Mar Dometios, Mart Febronia [§ 27, 37, 45-6]) and a church (Mar Theodore [§37]), and built a hostel (§28), the only one in Nisibis, as well as a bathhouse (§48), a mill-house (§47), as well as mill-stones for Mar Elisha (§27), and gardens, shops, sheepfolds and houses to support the churches and

monasteries as an endowment, as well as contributing to the upkeep of Qartmin.²⁶ He even built a mosque and madrasa in Nisibis to generate good will with his Arab Muslim neighbours (§27).²⁷ The churches that Simeon built were all subordinated to Qartmin in the sense that Qartmin received money and produce that was not consumed locally, and when 'believers went to receive communion on the feast day of their church, the monks [of Qartmin] would take the first fruits for themselves' (§48). These donations were passed on by the patriarch Julian himself.

The final part of the *Life* deals with the period after he had been made bishop of Harran in 700 (§53ff.). At this point, we are told that Simeon became very famous, and was much loved by 'believers and outsiders' and that he was a frequent visitor of the monasteries outside Edessa as well as to the monasteries that he had founded in Nisibis (§59). He also visited two of Qartmin's subordinate monasteries at Shirwan and Sinjar, together with other bishops (§78).²⁸ Later he founded the monastery of Lazarus in his home village of Habasenus, and donated books to it and caused many priests and deacons to live there (§83). Finally, the hagiographer records Simeon's lavish personal gifts to Qartmin, including numerous books, priestly garments and liturgical instruments (§85-7).

For our purposes, it is noteworthy that the *Life* does not record resistance to Simeon building churches or acquiring monasteries in the countryside. But to build monasteries in Nisibis, in the face of local opposition from members of the Church of the East, he needed powerful allies. These included a Chalcedonian aristocrat, George of Anhel, who arranged for workers on Simeon's building projects when 'Nestorians' had been prevented from working for Simeon. But Simeon's other allies were Nisibene Muslims, for whom Simeon allegedly built a mosque, and any citizens who might have benefited from having a bath-house and an inn in the city. These investments might have been intended to generate revenue, but they also provided new civic amenities. In an environment where the state was relatively absent

²⁵ Decker (2009, 66) estimates that Qartmin would have had an annual income of between 418 and 1515 solidi from an olive plantation was about 480 *iugera* of land (120 ha.). Decker (2009, 151) notes that olive oil was ideal for long-distance trade because it lasted a long time and had a variety of uses (cooking, medicine, lighting, cosmetics, bathing).

²⁶ Needless to say, we should not necessarily regard all the lists of Simeon's foundations in his *Life* as historical. In particular, the association of Simeon with tax exemptions may have provided an incentive to monasteries to claim to have been founded by Simeon (though this may also have involved an admission of subordination to Qartmin).

²⁷ Further on Nisibis and its churches, see Fiey (1977). Keser-Kayaalp (2021, 29 and 242) is sceptical that this depicts a real event and regards all of Simeon's alleged activities in Nisibis as an interpolation in the *Life*, though she considers the reports of building in the Tur Abdin to be accurate. She comments to me that the Nisibene passages are too detailed to be credible. Of course, it is hard to corroborate individual data from this localised hagiography and the Nisibene material may have been inserted into the text. Nevertheless, the construction of a mosque by Christians seems a strange thing to invent, and has no obvious literary precedent or parallels, to my knowledge. The *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin* (XC) only attributes the construction of a 'house of prayer' (*beth slūā*) for the Muslims and does not mention a madrasa.

²⁸ Brunner (2021, 59-66) discusses the location and function of Shirwan, which had been founded as a Sasanian border fortress.

and was not interested in building in what was now an out-of-the-way location like Nisibis, such investments were a source of urban infrastructure. Furthermore, Kyle Brunner (2021, 68) has argued that the Church of the East was in crisis in the 690s, when the catholicos Henanisho was opposed by John, bishop of Nisibis, and this might have provided an ideal timing for Simeon's intervention in the city.

Simeon's foundations also extended the political and economic network of Qartmin. Money and goods that were generated from mills and farms that exceeded what was needed for upkeep were sent on to Qartmin. And the tithes paid to Qartminian churches were passed on to the home monastery.²⁹ We might see Qartmin and its network of subordinate monasteries and churches on the model of the great estates of Egypt in the sixth century, where a portfolio that was geographically distributed allowed the estate to have access to a wide variety of agricultural products, and where bad weather in one location might be mitigated by good weather in another.³⁰

Simeon's foundation of mills might also reflect a wish for self-sufficiency. A ratio of mills to farmers or bakers was always likely to be high, which made mills an important bottle-neck in the production of bread. Possession of a mill could provide a steady income, since even poor users could be charged a percentage of the milled flour in lieu of a cash payment. But it also ensured that Qartmin would not be dependent on anyone else to mill the wheat or barley grown on its farms. Perhaps this search for autarky was a response to living in a relatively peripheral, inland area, where access to goods from distant places, such as an altar stone brought from the coast, was a matter of some note (§38).

These links between Qartmin and subordinate churches and monasteries were not simply about economic extraction, they also ensured that personnel associated with the monastery could be trained and develop local connections while serving as priests or deacons. Many of the locations that are emphasised here, especially Simeon's see of Harran, would become longstanding monopolies of the monks of Qartmin that would endure into the tenth and eleventh centuries (Wood 2021a, 68; Palmer 1990, 8-13).³¹

One distinctive feature of the Miaphysite church in this period was the dominance of rural monasteries. The *Life of Theodota* takes place almost entirely in

monasteries or on the road between monasteries. It was here that synods were held and patriarchs resided and were elected and buried, and bishops were often consecrated in monasteries and sometimes governed their sees based in monasteries as well. The patriarch might possess the title 'patriarch of Antioch', but in practice the patriarch tended to reside in a monastery to which he had a close connection (Wood 2021a, 16-18; Hage 1966, 10-18). All of these activities had formerly taken place in cities during the sixth century, but they had been displaced into monasteries during the Chalcedonian persecutions of the sixth century, and this had meant a re-direction of educated personnel and lay patronage into monasteries in relatively remote areas (Frend 1972, 294-95, 320). Some monasteries became important sites for the translation of Greek patristics into Syriac (Millar 2015); the creation of curricula of philosophy and theology (Tannous 2013, discussing the monastery of Qenneshre) and the copying of new manuscripts (Brock 2005; Mango 1983).

Qartmin is a very rich example of how a monastery safeguarded its independence in a changing world: it is still, even now, one of the two major monasteries of the Tur Abdin and a major centre for Syriac culture. The range of investments that were subject to Qartmin did not only ensure its economic security, but also gave its monks the political influence that helped it to permanently control the sees of the Tur Abdin and Harran, the capital of the Marwanid caliphate in the 740s, and to secure several of its monks the office of patriarch.³²

5. A MUSLIM CONTEXT: EXEMPTION FROM TAXATION

Churches and monasteries in the Roman world were often exempt from taxation (Bingham 1852, 172; Delmaire 2008; Elliott 1978). Indeed, tax exemption might work fairly well as a definition of religion in the pre-industrial world: it was a right claimed by monks, clergy and religious buildings in many different contexts in China, India and Iran at this time as well, irrespective of the fact that monks and clergy participated in a variety of economic activities (Pohl and Gingrich 2017; Macuch 2004). But there was some doubt over whether or not monks were able to preserve these rights under Muslim

²⁹ For the later development of tithing in c. 800, see Wood (2021a, ch. 3).

³⁰ Note Decker (2009, 205) for mixed farming as a means of spreading risk.

³¹ The ongoing dominance of Qartmin over sees in Tur Abdin and Harran can be traced in Appendix III of MS, which lists the home monasteries of almost all bishops consecrated by the Severan Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch.

³² Patriarchs from Qartmin include Ishaq of Harran (755-56), Athanasius Sandalaya (756-58), David of Dara (762-74), Theodosius (887-96), Dionysius III (958-61) can be traced in Appendix III of MS. Many of these are celebrated in the *Chronicle to 819* and the related *Chronicle to 845*.

rule and some of the seventh century papyri suggest that monks were indeed subject to taxation in the aftermath of the Arab conquest (Gonis 2004; Foss 2009, 16).

The response of Christian leaders was to preserve 'ancient documents' that clarified this situation by setting out the promises made to individual monasteries or cities by prominent Muslim leaders, and the repetition of these claims in other texts such as histories and hagiographies (Fattal 1958, 203-13, 270-74). Some of these claims were produced at a fairly small scale and really take the form of political favours in response to miracles or gifts. These tend to be set in the late seventh or early eighth century. One example is the *Life of Rabban Hormizd* (70-71/104-5), which narrates the holy man's competition with the Miaphysites for the favour of Uqba and Ali, the governors of Mosul (66/98 ff.; 103-4/153-4).³³ Another is the *Life of Theodota*, which describes a promise by the Illustriya of Samosata who has been put in charge of taxing the region of Amida to exempt a monastery from taxation and to pay Theodota's poll tax (871). The Illustriya's promise is made after his subordinate Sergius is possessed by a demon, that is, he makes this arrangement in response to Theodota's demonstration of his power, rather than an acknowledgement of ancient rights (863-4). Likewise, the *Life of Simeon of the Olives* records the gifts he made to Peroz, the governor of Nisibis, in order to acquire the sites of his monasteries (§26). We might also note the meeting between the missionary John of Daylam (d. 738) and al-Hajjaj (d. 714), Abd al-Malik's governor of Iraq, which was written fairly soon after the events it describes (Brock 1982, 131, §26-31).

Other examples are recorded in later sources, written in the early Abbasid period (c. 750-850), but set in the seventh century, often during the conquests. In a debate recorded by the jurist Abu Yusuf (d. 798), the city of Edessa is said to have concluded a very early treaty with its first Muslim conqueror (though neither the Christians nor the Muslims could claim to actually possess such a document in the late eighth century) (Calder 1993, 136-37). According to his ninth-century *Life*, Gabriel of Qartmin (d. 648) is said to have received a document from the caliph Umar at the time of the conquests who promised that his monastery would be exempt from taxes (LXXI). And the monks of Gubba Barraya in northern Syria possessed a document (*sigilyūn*) that was said to have been from the caliph Ali, which they used to rally support for their cause among the Alids of Baghdad during their

schism with the patriarch Dionysius of Tel-Mahre in the early ninth century (MS XII. 12 [IV, 510/III, 57]).

The third, and most impressive, example comes from the *Chronicle of Seert* (written in the tenth or eleventh century), which purports to preserve two documents, written in a verbose style and concluded by long signatory lists, which were written by Muhammad himself to the Christians of Najran (*Chronicle of Seert*, PO 13: 601 ff. Wood 2021b). Unlike the other promises of tax exemption or rights, these 'documents' do not simply deal with individual monasteries or cities, but pertain to the entire Christian population that is under Muslim rule.

These sources do not allow us to determine whether or not the Muslim conquerors really did produce documents to set out the terms of conquest. But I think that the pattern of the agreements that are reported in the sources is striking. The earliest sources report ad hoc arrangements that make no assumptions that Christian institutions should hold specific rights in common. Many of the men of power in these early stories are not themselves Arabs, but they are often elites (like Peroz or Illustriya) with ties to older empires who had found useful roles for themselves under the new regime. These early eighth century tales hold a greater ring of truth than the later stories. The latter are often written in the ninth century but set in the early seventh, when tax rates, rights and political links were said to have been established by the first caliphs or the early conquerors, which was a difficult precedent for later Muslim rulers to ignore. If these relationships were widely believed to have been true, then this might have exerted an attraction for other religious institutions to associate themselves with a famous saint (such as Simeon of the Olives) so that they could share in the special arrangements that he had made.

The stories in the *Chronicle of Seert* are the most ambitious: their sheer length and complexity implies an increasingly literate society, and the author has added numerous cross-references to Muslim stories about the Prophet to add to its verisimilitude. The number of protections that Muhammad is said to have given to the Christians also suggests a changed environment, in which Muslim authorities were now threatening to destroy or expropriate religious buildings or prevent their repair; charge taxes on monks; conscript Christians into the army or force Christian women to marry them (*Chronicle of Seert*, PO 13: 612). In other words, the elaborate protections that are made in the document are a response to threats that were actually made against Christians in tenth century Iraq.

³³ The *Life of Rabban Hormizd* was probably composed in the generation after the saint's death in 670, though there are later 'accretions and distortions' (Hoyland 1997, 190-91).

6. BANNING THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHURCHES

A common theme of the Muslim legislation on the subject of the rights of the protected people is that they should be banned from the construction and repair of churches. This is a prominent theme in the so-called *shurūt Umar*, the ordinances that were attributed to the caliph Umar b. al-Khattab in the era of the Muslim conquests, but which were probably composed during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 861), who tried to shore up his unsteady reign by underscoring the differences between Muslims, Christians and Jews. Milka Levy-Rubin further situates al-Mutawakkil's decree against a background of the growing anxiety about Christians impinging upon Muslim spaces and following practices that Muslims might find objectionable (the sale of alcohol and pork, ringing the *semantra* for church services or conducting processions). She plausibly argues that these rulings reflected both a growing Muslim population, and Christian migration to cities that had been founded since the conquests. In these cases, the jurists argued that conquest agreements, and the rights that they claimed, only pertained to individual cities and not to the new foundations, and they increasingly argued for universal rules that would apply to all Christians (Levy-Rubin 2011, 63-84; further developed in Pierre, this volume).³⁴ The creation of state-level discriminatory legislation (and the attribution of this to an early caliph) was, in a sense, the fulfilment of this process.

With the later emergence of the *shurūt Umar* in mind, it is worth stressing that there is no sign in any of the hagiographies set in the seventh and early eighth centuries that church building was controversial on its own terms for the Muslim authorities. It was certainly necessary to grease the right palms to get access to a building site or labourers, but opposition to the creation of religious buildings often came from church institutions, who did not want established monasteries to be eclipsed or were unhappy with the attitude of a would-be monastic founder, or from other groups of Christians (as Simeon of the Olives found in Nisibis).

A sign that church-building was viewed as a controversial activity was the requirement for the patriarch or

bishop to acquire a diploma (*sigilyūn*) from the caliph or a governor. The first examples are seen during the reign of Marwan II in the 740s.³⁵ But increasingly, this kind of state guarantee was necessary because of the threat from Muslims, whether government officials or from the Muslim urban crowd. However, it is notable that all of the diplomas that are mentioned in the medieval Syriac chronicles, ultimately depending on Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (d. 842) are for church construction in cities (in this period, Edessa, Harran, Amida, Takrit, Mosul and Maypherkat) (Hage 1966, 59-61). What went on in the countryside may have been less monitored or visible, and consequently attracted less controversy.

There is no suggestion in most of these narratives in the *Life of Simeon of the Olives* that Muslim governments objected to the creation of religious buildings, especially in rural locations.³⁶ There is one passage in the *Life* that seems to contradict this pattern. It describes Simeon's encounter with the caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 833) in which he overcomes Muslim, Jewish and 'Nestorian' opponents in a debate in Baghdad (§31-35). After his victory, the caliph honours him with many gifts and orders that the 'laws of the Christians' be established in all the realms of the Tayyaye (Arabs/Muslims). Al-Ma'mun gives him a diploma (*sigilyūn*) to this effect and gives him the honorary title 'abu Qurra'. However, this is obviously an interpolation: the historical Simeon had died almost a century before, and the Simeon of the *Life* is modelled on the Chalcedonian disputant Theodore abu Qurra. So the scene does not reflect a Marwanid period reality, in which the caliph had to issue a document to permit church building, but rather the understanding of a later interpolator, to whom caliphal permission had become a crucial requirement for church-building on the scale of Simeon's enterprise.³⁷

The first report of a government official destroying a church comes in 785, when a *muhtasib* destroyed churches 'built in the time of the Muslims' and free slaves belonging to Christians (MS XII. 1 [478/3]). The *muhtasib* was an official role responsible for policing 'moral behaviour' through 'encouraging good and forbidding evil', as well as overseeing weights and measures used in the market (Mottahedeh and Stilt 2003). In this

³⁴ I am agnostic on the problem of whether or not real documents were actually issued at the time of the conquest, for which see the debate between Yarbrough (2016) and Levy-Rubin (2016).

³⁵ In Wood (2021a, 88), I wrongly supposed that the creation of a church in Antioch under the patriarch Elias employed a *sigilyūn*, but this is not the case. I thank Simon Pierre for this correction.

³⁶ Note also the roughly contemporary building of churches described in Thomas of Marga II.39 (Marwanid period); IV.9 (early 800s?); V. 11 (mid 800s, a church built by a missionary to the pagans of Moqan) and the foundation of a martyrion by Eustathius of Dara, described in MS XI. 17 (IV, 451/II, 481), in c. 710.

³⁷ It is unclear to me whether the construction of buildings in Nisibis (§26ff.) should similarly be classed as part of this interpolation (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 29).

instance, the *muhtasib*'s moral policing included ensuring that Christians and Muslims were both publicly reminded of the official hierarchy, in which Muslims were treated as superior to Christians in law and rights. The wider context for the *muhtasib*'s actions may have been the state's destruction of churches near the Byzantine frontier in response to recent Byzantine military success and the fear of a Christian fifth column (Theophanes 430).³⁸

Our second example comes from Harran in 819, when the new emir Ibrahim began to investigate newly built churches in the city. He was informed by the local pagans (who may have been a local majority) that these had been built after the Arab conquests and that they were a source of scandal to the Muslims of Harran. He immediately destroyed part or all of several Miaphysite churches in Harran, as well as those of the Church of the East, Chalcedonians and Jews. But all of the religious confessions later came together and appealed to Ibrahim and he allowed them to rebuild what he had only recently destroyed (MS XII. 11 [505/47]). In this instance, it seems that the new governor responded to an initial impression that local Muslims were scandalised, but backed down when different confessions showed themselves able and willing to cooperate. Nevertheless, his destruction might have still showed the extent of his powers, and implied that Christian institutions only existed on sufferance.

The third example is more lengthy and describes the situation in Edessa in 825: [Yaqdan, governor of Edessa] wrote to the chief (*rīshana*)³⁹ of Callinicum to excite his anger against the Edessenenes and against Theodosius, their metropolitan. This chief, who was an enemy of the Christians, presented the letters to the emir Muhammad [Abd Allah's brother]. The latter, who was a young man, was cajoled by the words of the judge. He ordered the destruction of all new buildings, and they demolished the church of the forty martyrs, the *diaconion* and sacristy of the cathedral... and the rest of the buildings of Theodosius. They also destroyed the Chalcedonian nunnery and their church, and they built a new mosque on the *tetrapylon*, opposite the old church named Beth Shabta...[then] the citizens of Edessa were required to give up their slaves so that they could be made Muslims. When they saw these things, the Muslims of Harran were

encouraged to destroy the church and to persecute the Christians [in Harran]. MS XII. 13 (513–14/61–62).

This scene describes the destruction of recent buildings, that had been put up by Dionysius' brother, the bishop Theodosius, in order to create space for new Islamic buildings that could dominate the cityscape.⁴⁰ Guidetti (2009) has pointed to many examples of domed mosques being built in city centres to dominate urban space. But the outright destruction or confiscation of churches in this way was highly unusual before the Crusades (the cathedral in Damascus was an atypical and controversial example). Even here, most of the destruction was of peripheral buildings, rather than churches proper.

The narrative also gives a clear impression of a chain of command: the governor cannot simply act independently but rather has to write to the chief in Callinicum, who then has to communicate with Muhammad. Muhammad has executive independence, but he is ultimately subject to his brother 'Abd Allah in Egypt, to whom Dionysius had close contacts (Wood 2021a, 176). Dionysius stresses the accountability of government at this point: even though the demolition of churches under Yaqdan and Muhammad goes ahead, Dionysius' overarching aim is to depict his appeal to a higher source of justice as an effective strategy for an active patriarch like himself. Dionysius and Theodosius were successful in getting 'Abd Allah to prevent further destruction, but we should also note that Yaqdan's career hardly suffered for his actions. Dionysius implies that Yaqdan was being punished by God when he was killed in battle with rebels, but it also excused him from having to admit an uncomfortable truth, that Yaqdan remained unpunished and retained his office.

Part of the rhetoric of Dionysius' history is to represent caliphal government as fundamentally just: it is only undermined by the irresponsible behaviour of governors that the caliph al-Ma'mun himself doesn't know of. Dionysius describes the suffering of Christians and the destruction of property during rebellions against the caliph, such as the war of Nasr b. Shabath, who seized Edessa during the fourth *fitna* (MS XII. 7 [492/27]). And it is credible that Muslim mobs in Harran did destroy Christian churches, both to seize money or building materials and to demonstrate Christian inferiority (e.g. MS XII. 18 [529/86] for

³⁸ The fears about Christians are shown in the accusations of treason or blasphemy made against higher clergy, often by their Christian opponents (George of Beltan MS XI. 26 [IV, 476–77/II, 527–8]; Cyriacus of Takrit, MS XII.5 [IV, 487/III, 18], Dionysius MS XII. 14 [IV, 519/III, 68], Theodore of Antioch, Theophanes 430). Also see MS XII. 19 (IV, 531/III, 89) for the (plausible) case of Shmouna of Edessa. Signes-Codoñer (2014, 396–97) discusses the possibility that Chalcedonians in Palestine were hoping for a Byzantine reconquest. Simon Pierre's article in this volume gives several other examples of church destruction from this region in the late eighth century and detailed discussion of the ban and its enforcement. He argues that Byzantine raids in 777 were a stimulus for this ban.

³⁹ The term seems to be used here colloquially to mean 'the most important man' rather than 'governor', since he is later identified as a judge.

⁴⁰ The author seems to assume that the reader will already know who Yaqdan is, so this may be a case where Michael the Syrian has edited out an earlier scene that might have given us further context.

the destruction of a church in 826). On this last point, we should also note that Christian ownership of Muslim slaves was also seen as an intolerable inversion of the proper order (Lewis 1992, 8; Friedmann 2003, 162).⁴¹ The freeing of the slaves can then be read as both a symbol of the weakness of Christian elites in the new order and an effort to change the local demographic balance in favour of the Muslims.

However, Dionysius situates these events either before or after the reign of his patron al-Ma'mun, who he credits with bringing peace to the land (and supporting his own claims as patriarch).⁴² Dionysius' rhetoric seeks to endorse the caliph's monopoly of violence and the justice of his law: for Dionysius, the caliph, and he alone, does have the right to demolish churches, and it is a mark of his own effectiveness as patriarch that he is able to convince the caliph to preserve the churches and to remit taxes on the rented buildings, shops and gardens whose revenue supports them (MS XII. 16 [IV, 522-23/III, 74]).

CONCLUSIONS

Elka Klein (2013), in her landmark book on the Jews of thirteenth-century Barcelona, makes an important distinction between autonomy by design and autonomy

by default. It is a distinction that would also fit the evidence that we have examined here. The world evoked in the *Life of Simeon of the Olives* and the *Life of Theodota* was one where the Muslim authorities were relatively peripheral and are only encountered in small numbers and in cities. When holy men negotiate with the powerful, it is often with locals who are appointees of the Arabs. In this environment, churches and monastery building was stimulated by a low tax regime and by interconfessional competition.

This ecclesiastical infrastructure survived the disempowerment of local aristocracies in the region as the state strengthened its grip, through higher rates of taxation (Robinson 2016), the employment of new men from Khurasan and Central Asia (Gundelfinger and Verkinderen 2020) and suspicion of the employment of Christians in high-placed roles by a growing Muslim population (Yarbrough 2019). But this survival was contingent on cultivating an 'autonomy by design', where the patriarch represented the caliph's rule as fundamentally beneficent. Dionysius played his role as an advocate to al-Ma'mun well, but it was a very vulnerable position, which depended on the favour of his successors and their ability to restrain their own subjects. In conditions of political strife, the patriarch's ability to advocate for his co-religionists, and his ability to defend his own authority, dwindled in turn.

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CHAPTER 6

VARIETY IN THE DECORATION OF THE CHURCHES OF ṬŪR 'ABDĪN DURING THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD

VARIEDAD EN LA DECORACIÓN DE LAS IGLESIAS DE ṬŪR 'ABDĪN DURANTE EL PERIODO PALEOISLÁMICO

ELIF KESER-KAYAALP¹

SUMMARY

Based mainly on hagiography, it has been argued that a loose, taxation-based provincial administration existed in Northern Mesopotamia in the Early Islamic period. Local elites were not much affected by the conquest, and the power of some urban Christian notables might have increased. As in Syria, Muslims were probably more concerned with controlling building activity in the cities, presumably because they primarily settled there, but were less engaged or more tolerant in the countryside. In line with this argument, the archaeological evidence for church building in the cities after the Arab conquest is scarce. On the other hand, in Ṭūr 'Abdīn, a rural landscape which has been densely settled by the Syriac community until the beginning of the twentieth century and which is dotted with villages and monasteries, churches and monasteries were built or rebuilt in the Early Islamic period. Without careful archaeological field surveys, it cannot be said for certain that villages existed in the region along with the monasteries from early on. There might have been fewer villages in the region before the Arab conquest, when it was mainly a refuge area for the exile miaphysite monks, but the number of settlements may have increased when the region lost its frontier character and was no more under the Byzantine rule.

Gertrude Bell was the first to suggest a date after the Islamic conquest for four churches (Mor Quryaqos at Arnas, Mor 'Azoz'el at Kfarze, Yoldath Aloho at Hah, and the Monastery of Mor Ya'qub at Salah) in Ṭūr 'Abdīn. Of these, three are village churches and one a monastic church. However, building activity after the Arab conquest was not limited to them. It has been suggested that at least around thirty of the churches and monasteries that have survived in Ṭūr 'Abdīn were probably built or rebuilt in the late seventh and eighth centuries. Along with inscriptions, brick work, presence of bēt šlūtō (outdoor oratory), the dating of these monuments has been based on architectural sculpture.

This chapter presents a detailed survey of the architectural sculpture of these churches and monasteries, on which there has been no study, except noting that it was an abstract version of earlier traditions. Although it is difficult to date the village churches in Ṭūr 'Abdīn with precision, this study illustrates a group of buildings that are coherent in style but varied in the details. It draws attention to variety in the sculpture of apse archivolts, friezes, apse cornices, and façades. It is noticed that the plans and decoration of churches sought variety in the sixth century and that this trend continued. It is argued that this variety may have resulted from the dynamics, if not competition, between elites, holy men, and different confessions.

KEYWORDS: churches, monasteries, architectural sculpture, variety, classical decoration

RESUMEN

A partir principalmente de la hagiografía, se ha argumentado que la administración del periodo paleoislámico en el Norte de Mesopotamia era imprecisa y estaba basada en los impuestos. Las elites locales no se vieron demasiado afectadas por la conquista y el poder de algunos nobles cristianos de las ciudades incluso se habría incrementado. En Siria, los musulmanes estaban más preocupados en controlar la actividad constructiva en las ciudades, probablemente porque se asentaban principalmente en estas, que en el nivel de tolerancia en las zonas rurales. En línea con esta argumentación, la evidencia arqueológica respecto a la construcción de iglesias en las ciudades después de la conquista árabe es escasa. Por otro lado, en Ṭūr 'Abdīn, un paisaje rural que ha estado densamente habitado por la comunidad siríaca hasta los inicios del siglo XX y por ello notablemente ocupado por poblados y monasterios, se construyeron y reconstruyeron iglesias y monasterios durante el periodo del islam

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temprano. Ante la ausencia de trabajos arqueológicos, no se puede confirmar que estos poblados y monasterios fuesen anteriores. Debe haber algunos asentamientos previos a la conquista árabe, cuando esta zona fue área de refugio para los monjes miafisitas exiliados, pero el número de asentamientos debió verse incrementado cuando la región perdió su carácter de frontera y dejó de estar bajo control bizantino.

Gertrude Bell fue la primera en sugerir una fecha posterior a la conquista islámica para cuatro de las iglesias de ʿAbdīn (Mor Quryaqos en Arnas, Mor ʿAzoʿel en Kfarze, Yoldath Aloho en Hah, y el Monasterio de Mor Yaʿqub en Salah). Las tres primeras son iglesias de poblados y la cuarta es una iglesia monástica. Sin embargo, la actividad constructiva después de la conquista árabe no se limita a estos ejemplos. Se ha sugerido que al menos unas treinta iglesias y monasterios de ʿAbdīn fueron posiblemente construidas o reconstruidas a finales del siglo VII y durante el siglo VIII. Junto a sus inscripciones, técnica de ladrillo y la presencia del bēt šlūtō (oratorio exterior), la datación de estos monumentos se ha basado además en la escultura arquitectónica.

Este trabajo presenta un examen detallado de la escultura arquitectónica de estas iglesias y monasterios, de la cual no se había realizado hasta ahora un estudio y apenas se había señalado que era una versión abstracta de tradiciones anteriores. Aunque es imposible datar con exactitud las iglesias de ʿAbdīn, este trabajo analiza un grupo que es coherente en estilo, pero diverso en sus detalles, llamando la atención sobre la variedad escultórica de las arquivoltas del ábside, los frisos, las cornisas de los ábsides y las fachadas. Se evidencia que las plantas y decoración de estas iglesias respondían en el siglo VI a una variedad que se mantuvo posteriormente. Se argumenta también que esta variedad puede haber sido el resultado de las dinámicas, sino de la competición, entre las élites, los hombres santos y las diferentes confesiones.

PALABRAS CLAVE: iglesias, monasterios, escultura arquitectónica, variedad, decoración clásica

In a volume that explores the different ways in which “control was established outside urban settlements in the late Antique and early Islamic world,” my article “Church Building in the ʿAbdīn in the First Centuries of Islamic Rule” (Keser-Kayaalp 2018) suggested that around thirty of the surviving churches and monasteries in ʿAbdīn seem to have been built, or rebuilt, in the late seventh and eighth centuries. ʿAbdīn is a limestone plateau in the eastern part of Northern Mesopotamia (Palmer 1990; Keser-Kayaalp 2021), a frontier region which was frequently a stage of the war between the Byzantines, to whom it belonged until the early seventh century, and the Sasanians, who held the nearest city, Nisibis, just to the south. Since 640, when the Arabs conquered Mesopotamia, ʿAbdīn has been under Muslim rule. However, until the twentieth century it was populated mostly by Syriac Christians, a community for whom it retains its sacred character even today. This remarkable cultural landscape is dotted with medieval churches and monasteries. In that article, I based my tentative dating on lateral piers, inscriptions, textual material, brick work, the presence of an outdoor oratory, and crosses in apse conches, as well as on architectural decoration in apse archivolt and cornices (Keser-Kayaalp 2018, Appendix 202-205). Recent scholarship on different conquered regions (some of which are addressed in

this volume) further supports the argument that, during this period, ʿAbdīn may have witnessed a boom in the construction of churches and monasteries.

There may be many different dynamics behind these building practices. The building of monuments has been proposed as a way to reconcile defeated groups by providing them with a medium to represent themselves in return for their loyalty. When the building in question is a church, it is a show of “extending the privilege to access resources” and this, it has been argued, was “a powerful tool to exercise control over individuals and groups” (Delattre, Legendre and Sijpesteijn 2018, 1, 6). While Muslim rulers issued the necessary authorisations, it was probably the wealth of the local elites,² enhanced perhaps by a low tax regime, competition between confessional groups, as Philip Wood argues in this book, and their desire for prestige (Durmaz 2021), that drove the building or rebuilding of churches and monasteries.

Based on a tenth-century inscription and a, probably, contemporary sculpture, Durmaz discusses how “architectural and aesthetic innovations in churches contributed to the construction of the local prestige of villages.” According to her, local elites used “Novelty” as an expression of prestige. The church of Mor Dimet at Zaz, on which Durmaz focuses, is a typical hall-type church with an archivolt devoid of any significant architectural

² For the definition of the elite during the Early Islamic period, see Hagemann *et. al.* (2020, 18-44), where it is defined in the context of the early Islamic Empire as “individuals and groups of individuals who were in a position or had the potential to influence social, political, economic, and religious processes and decision-making in their communities. These communities existed on every level of organisation, from the village to the court, the Church to the army, and merchants to qādis”.

sculpture. Nevertheless, based mainly on a tenth century inscription that provides a *terminus ante quem* and some distinct but limited figurative decoration, she convincingly argues for the patron's intention to create a visual vocabulary (Durmaz 2021).³

The architectural sculpture of the earlier churches in the region has received much attention in the literature, and the continuity of its classical features has been emphasised (Mundell 1977). Attention has been drawn to the seventh and eighth-century decoration of some churches, which has been described as an abstract version of the classical tradition and as a link to the classicising motifs of the twelfth-century Islamic architecture of Northern Mesopotamia. The other point which has received attention is the non-figural aspect of these sculptures (Brock 1977; Mundell 1977). However, it needs to be pointed out that some distinctive animal motifs bring variety to the decoration of these churches. In this paper I shall focus on the variety displayed by the architectural sculpture of those churches and monasteries in Ṭūr 'Abdīn which were probably built in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Varietas, a word borrowed from Latin, is used in modern scholarship to "describe combinations of different forms that emerged as an alternative to the traditional orders" (Niewöhner 2021, 30). For Late Antiquity, it has been understood as an aesthetic principle, achieved not only by spolia but also by purposefully-produced architectural elements (Niewöhner 2018, 246). Variety is an aspect of creativity and engages the subjectivity of the viewer. Given the relative conservatism in plan types in Ṭūr 'Abdīn, decoration and inscriptions were the media through which patrons expressed themselves. Through building decoration, patrons in general sought to demonstrate their culture and good taste, while each patron expressed his individuality and originality by introducing variations. The main and most conspicuous places for such a display were the archivolt and the apse cornice. In some of the churches that we shall discuss below, we shall see variations in the detail of sculptures even within single buildings. However, we shall mainly use the notion of variety to address a group of buildings that are geographically, chronologically, and stylistically close. We shall challenge Krautheimer's (1986, 301-04) description of the architecture of the region as "primitive folk-architecture" and his interpretation of the complex architectural sculpture of the region as imported from Syria, though in fact it has little to do with the sculpture

found there (for some similarities and differences see Naccache 1992, vol. 1, 197; Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 233).

The churches of the Ṭūr 'Abdīn belong to two main plan types. The first comprises village churches with single longitudinal naves, a narthex on the south, and a semi-circular apse in the east, which is usually flanked by rooms. The second includes monastic churches with transverse naves laid in a north-south direction. Village churches are entered from the south through a courtyard and often have an apse in the east for open-air prayers, a feature known as a *bēt šlūtō*. Two doors, one for men and one for women, lead to the nave. The roof of the nave is supported by lateral arcades on the north and south walls.

Most churches in Ṭūr 'Abdīn that pre-date the Arab conquest are monastic churches with transverse plan type (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 202). Monastic churches are entered from the west through a narthex, which is sometimes an open arcade. In some, there is separate access from the south through one of the two side-chapels flanking the altar-room. Here, the floor is not raised above that of the nave, as in the village-churches, nor is there a high arch of the apse open to the hall. Only in Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalaḥ is the low entrance to the altar-room decorated with sculpture: an arch roughly shaped like a horseshoe resting on pilasters, to which we shall return.

Despite conservative attitude in the use of the unusual transverse plan of monastic churches, details of decoration present a wealth of variety. The main church in the monastery of Mor Gabriel is a typical transverse-hall type church. The outside of the apse wall is flat. Inside, the opening to the sanctuary is not decorated with architectural sculpture. The wall mosaics in the apse are remarkable not only for their beauty, technique, and iconography, but also for being some of the very few wall mosaics from the sixth century that survive in situ to the east of Constantinople (Mundell and Hawkins 1973). The same sanctuary also has an opus sectile pavement with no parallel in the Ṭūr 'Abdīn region. The construction, or at least the decoration, of this church has been interpreted as an offshoot of construction works in Dara (Anastasiopolis), a city which was built in the sixth century with substantial imperial support (Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan 2017).

Imperial patronage of Mor Gabriel was mentioned also in the *Qartmin Trilogy* (Palmer 1990, see Wood in this volume), although, it should be noted that the text was written later, probably in the tenth century, using earlier texts (Palmer 1990, 14). There may be many

³ The desire of the village elites to dominate the nearby landscape and its church has never ceased. One recent example is the bust of a patron in the courtyard of the church in Kalaat al-mar'a. Today, although living in other parts of the world, the faithful from the village reinforce their connection with their birthplace by restoring their ancient churches (Keser-Kayaalp 2016a).

possible reasons behind Emperor Anastasius' patronage of this church: his sympathy for the Miaphysite cause; his wish to support a community that lived near the border; and a wish to secure God's support in protecting the empire. This monastery had been an episcopal see, and was considered holy. Therefore, it is not surprising to find decoration that is unique and peculiar. However, the examination of other monasteries also reveals features peculiar to them that cannot be seen elsewhere and that, in fact, also point to strong patronage, even if this is not mentioned in the surviving textual sources.

The Church of Mor Hananyo, which is the main church of Dayr al-Za'farān, has a transverse plan too but it is achieved with a different layout. It has a square nave with small conches on the north and south sides and a large conch with a raised floor, like the apse of a village church, at the east end. It has a large apse archivolt, very different from the apses of other monastic churches in the region, which usually have a tiny opening to the central sanctuary. The church's architectural sculpture is elaborate and carefully carved, which would have made it an expensive endeavor (Fig. 1). The sculpture in the church is almost identical to the sculpture in the archivolt of the church of Deir Metinan (Mor Doniyel monastery), (Fig. 2) located around 60 km northwest

of Mardin. It is similar to the arch decoration recorded in Martyropolis (Bell-Mango, 1982, Pl. 49 = Gertrude Bell photograph S_178), fragments in Dara (Fig. 3), and the Yoldath Aloho Church in Amida (Brands 2002, tafel 92). The main difference with these is the form of the palmettes⁴ and the absence of a meander. Palmettes in Dayr al-Za'farān, which are more abstract and are attached to one another, are similar to those in the bands of Rusafa (Brands 2002, tafels 72, 73).

In the Church of Mor Hananyo, the archivolt, the cornice, and the niches on the west wall have different bands of ornament, presenting a remarkable variety. A cornice runs all along the triconch nave, turning into an archivolt in the apse and in the southern and northern conches. This cornice has the following sequence: (from top) palmettes, bead and reel, flutes, egg and dart (with diagonal leaves replacing darts), dentils, vine scroll (which turns to an acanthus scroll in some points), palmettes, bead and reel (Mundell 1981, 516). At the peak of the archivolt there is a cross with the Greek letters alpha and omega.⁵ There is another cornice at the upper level of the main church, just under the modern cross-vault. The cornice displays the following sequence: palmettes, bead and reel, dentils, and acanthus roll. In some parts of this cornice, birds replace palmettes in the



Fig. 1. Apse archivolt of the Church of Mor Hananyo in Dayr al-Za'farān.

⁴ There are several different forms of palmettes in the region. Mundell Mango used the term split palmette to describe the floral half palmettes in Dayr al-Za'farān and in later churches, which are discussed here, in which the different parts are adjacent to one another. Philip Niewöhner uses the word split palmette for the palmettes in St. Polyeuctus, in which the half palmettes are in fact divided by a motif.

⁵ These letters appear also in the cross in the conch of one of the niches in the western wall, flanking the entrance to the church. The closest parallel to this feature appears in the top of the archivolt of the church at Qalb Lozeh (Naccache 1992, vol. I, 197).



Fig. 2. Apse archivolt in Deir Metinan (Mor Doniyel monastery).



Fig. 3. Arch fragment in Dara.



Fig. 4. Cornice under the vault in the Church of Mor Hananyo in Dayr al-Za'farān.



Fig. 5. Archivolt of the side niches in the Church of Mor Hananyo in Dayr al-Za'farān.



Fig. 6. Western wall of the Church of Mor Hananyo in Dayr al-Za'farān with the niches flanking the door and the vases on the cornices.

highest band (Fig. 4), recalling the birds on the pilasters flanking the apse-archivolt of Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalaḥ. It seems like the workmen enjoyed some freedom to experiment in the less visible parts of the church. Masons seem to have aimed to break the symmetry (which is strongly felt as one enters) with some small details. For example, the vine scroll in the apse archivolt, which is composed of leaves and grapes in the left (to the north), turns into a scroll with two different types of leaves in the right (to the south) (Fig. 5). The frieze flanking the northern and southern conches has an acanthus scroll on the east and a vine scroll in the west. In the niches flanking the door, the one has a cross with alpha and omega in a wreath, while the southern one has a scallop shell (Fig. 6). The bosses on the frieze above these niches are also different.

Although both are amphorae, the one on the right is more three-dimensional. The one on the left is flatter but its surface is better articulated.

The archivolt continues as a cornice all around the interior and bears ten bosses: two in the shape of amphorae and eight in that of plaited baskets. Bosses continued featuring in the later sculpture of the region, especially in the cornices that run inside apse archivolts and usually at the same height as the cross in the conch (see below). The exterior of this church is also decorated with an animated scroll forming a cornice near the roofline, which distinguishes it from other relatively plain monastic churches. The entrance to the church is flanked by niches. Here, a wish to break the symmetry with decoration can also be perceived. The niche on the left has a shell and the



Fig. 7. Entrance to the Church of Mor Hananyo in Dayr al-Za'farān.

one on the right an amphora from which stems a vine scroll that fills the whole conch (Fig. 7). Just above the amphora there is a cross. The decoration on the door-jambs features a band of eight-segment leaves, which are found nowhere else in the church. The acanthus scroll and palmettes which flank these leaves with blank fascias are similar to those inside the church.

The *bēt qadishē* (burial chamber), which is located just to the south of the church, is also remarkably decorated. The archivolt on the east displays exactly the same band sequence as the church's apse archivolt. The entrance to this space is also flanked by niches, whose conches are both decorated with scallop shells flanked by leaves. The arches of these niches and the other arches inside the *bēt qadishē* are profiled but void of any further decoration, unlike the church. This is the case also with the door. The decoration on the door of the church is limited to two dolphins flanking a pearl and a cross. This iconography identifies the space as Christian and indicates its burial function as dolphins represent resurrection and salvation and bear the souls of the dead to the other world (Ferguson 1954, 15).

The main church of the monastery of Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalaḥ has the transverse-hall type plan that characterises the monastic churches of the region. It has a portico-like narthex, like Mor Gabriel's main church, but some important features distinguish it from Mor Gabriel, which is the largest and most canonical transverse-type church. First is the five-sided apse protruding from the east wall.

In the late fourth and fifth centuries, polygonal apses started to appear in Constantinople and Asia Minor. In the sixth century, they became more common in Asia Minor, Greece, Cyprus, the Aegean islands, and the Balkans. We also find a few in Palestine and Syria (Serin 2004, 47). Graziadei, who plotted the distribution of polygonal apses on the map (Graziadei 2019), did not include the polygonal apses of Northern Mesopotamia in his analysis. Apart from Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalaḥ, we find it also in the cathedral of Dara (five-sided like Mor Ya'qub) and in the church at Ambar (three-sided). The presence of this relatively rare feature (Graziadei 2019) in a local monastery may suggest an attempt to achieve variety by merging global forms with local traditions.

The decoration of this church also shows a great deal of variety. There is a floral wall painting in a reddish-brown colour in the lunette over the apse's doorway. The pilasters flanking the doorway feature deep carvings that depict rows of birds (Fig. 9). On the façade, the cyma cornice with dentils runs along the roofline and the contours of the south façade. Several crosses of different shapes appear both inside and outside the church as bosses attached to the walls. A lion-head-and-cross composition is present on the cyma recta cornice on the entrance to the sanctuary (the room to the south of the apse) (Fig. 8). Given the use of the lion as a symbol of strength, majesty, and courage, the lion-cross composition can be associated with the power of Christ. The lion on this doorway, while marking the holiness of the place



Fig. 8. Lion head on the cornice of the southern façade of the Church of Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalaḥ.



Fig. 9. Pilasters under the apse arch of the Church of Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalaḥ.

within, may also symbolise the protection of the community and those leading the liturgy. Animals with crosses are not rare in Late Antique architectural sculpture, especially on sarcophagi in the west. However, the crosses on the sarcophagi from Late Antique Constantinople and Asia Minor are not generally accompanied by animals (Niewöhner 2020). Animals feeding from crosses are attested in eight-century Carolingian art (Kitzinger 2019, 54-58). When considered together with the dolphins that flank a cross on the entrance of the *bēt qadishē* at Dayr al-Za'farān, we can argue that animal motifs were used as spatial markers.

For the purposes of comparison, the transverse hall-type church at Ambar (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 112-14), although only near ʿAbdīn, should be considered. Solidly built with ashlar masonry, it is almost devoid of architectural sculpture, with the exception of the wreath-like decorations on the lintel of the door opening to the sanctuary, just below the Greek inscription (Mundell Mango 1982b, 48). Is it because it was hastily built (close to the battlefield?), or is it because it was an imperial construction, and the ones built by locals were more elaborate? The latter is a suggestion that contradicts the usual or common assumption that buildings erected under the imperial patronage were more elaborate.

However, this assumption may be dismissed when we consider the monasteries of Deir Salib in Çatalçam, and Mor Abraham in Midyat, which have the same plan. Their masonry is suggestive of an earlier chronology but they are also almost devoid of sculpture. When one thinks of Mor Gabriel having architectural decoration only in the form of mosaics and opus sectile, one wonders if Deir Salib in Çatalçam and Mor Abraham in Midyat are also earlier examples of the same phenomenon. Dayr al-Za'farān and Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalaḥ, which have distinct architectural sculpture, are probably later. Another later example with a distinct decorative feature

is the monastery of Mor Yuḥannon of Kfone, dated to the late sixth or the early seventh century (Palmer 2010, 201) where we find conches in the apse that resemble those in the Church of Yoldath Aloho at Hah and in the church of the East Syrian monastery of Mar Abraham. In Mor Yuḥannon of Kfone, only the capitals of the colonnades, with uncut acanthus leaves, remain (Fig. 10).

Considering two other sixth-century churches, the churches of Mor Sovo in Hāḥ and Mar Abraham of Kashkar, both of which have hall-type plans, allows us to search for differences between churches of the East and West Syrians. The latter is the church of an East Syrian monastery, known as the 'Great Monastery' on Mt. Izla, founded by Mar Abraham of Kashkar in 571. Abraham undertook reforms in monastic life and is known as 'the Father of the Eastern monks' (Jullien 2008). The church of Mar Abraham has been dated to the sixth century based on its delicate sculpture around the apse (Mundell Mango 1982b) (Fig. 11). It is not well-preserved today, but the deep carving style of the archivolt of the Church of Mor Sovo at Hah is easy to recognise (Fig. 12).

Mundell Mango (1982b, 67) argued that the decoration of Mar Abraham is clearly different from other sixth-century sculpture in the region, in fact, it is more Constantinopolitan than classical, with deep motifs made with an a-jour technique. It does not have bead and reel or dentils but three rows of leaves. The decoration of loose fragments found at the site, in addition to those reused around the window frames, is similar to eighth-century sculpture in ʿAbdīn. After the Arab conquest, when the border shifted to the west, the sculptors from ʿAbdīn might have travelled to this region which is just to the south. The apse conch of the church, with small niches topped with shell-shaped conches, was probably similar to the decoration of the apse in Yoldath Aloho at Hāḥ. The busts on the column capitals of the monastery church of Mar Abraham further distinguish



Fig. 10. Capitals of the colonnades in the apse of the Church of Mor Yuhannon of Kfone.

this church because of their similarity to Sasanian models (Compareti 2018, 27). Before the Arab conquest, there seems to have been an intention to differentiate the architecture adopted by different denominations. That is to say, in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn West Syrians used transverse halls for their monastic churches, whereas East Syrians used hall-type churches, which is a plan type used in village churches in West Syrian environments. However, in sculpture, it is more difficult to argue that stylistic preferences were intentional.

A contemporary of the church of Mar Abraham, built probably as the cathedral of the bishopric of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, is the church of Mor Sovo at Ḥāḥ. Little has survived of its sculpture. Mor Sovo was regarded as the prototype of village church in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, and is, in fact, the only village church which can be dated with some certainty to the sixth century (Bell and Mundell Mango 1982, 113).

Although there are traces of earlier foundations in many churches in the region, the building or rebuilding of a remarkable number of them may be dated to the seventh and eighth centuries. After the Arab conquest, the urban-centric approach adopted by Muslim rulers may have created a power vacuum in Northern Mesopotamia, where local elites continued to flourish but depended even more than before on the smaller communities as a result of the change of rule. In light of this, it can also be argued that the number of villages, and/or their authority, probably increased after the Arab conquest (Keser-Kayaalp 2018).

Like monastic churches, village churches are also remarkably conservative in terms of plan types. However, distinction and variation was also sought in the details. In

plan, their main difference was the treatment of the side rooms of the apse. Variety inside the churches was mostly achieved through decoration. The architectural sculpture concentrates on the liminal places that separate the degrees of sanctity. The most remarkable sculpture in these churches is on the apse archivolt that separate the sanctuary from the nave, and on some of the doors that lead to the nave. The sculpture in these churches abandoned deep-carving and became heavily stylised. Ousterhout (2019, 280) calls them bands of desiccated classical motifs. I have shown the increasing abstraction and the introduction of plaiting, flower-like motifs, and interlaced circles to the repertoire (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, fig. 4.1).

Although limited to the apse curve, apse archivolt and doorways, the sculptural details in these churches are always different. To illustrate the variety, I shall start with the Church of Mor Simeon at Habsenas. I shall use this church as a reference point in my discussion of other examples. Although it is not the most remarkable instance, I have chosen it because it is mentioned in the *Life of Simeon of the Olives* with the following words: “He restored and rebuilt the church from the foundations, adorning it with all sorts of fine and beautiful fittings. Formerly it had been dedicated to Mor Simon Peter, but from that day on, until our own day, it has been called the church of Mor Simeon of the Olives.” Although there are problems with the text (Tannous 2016; Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 29), the author of the *Life* is claimed to have been Job, the Habsenas-born nephew of Simeon’s nephew, David. This connection allows us to trust most of the text (Hoyland 2021, 5), perhaps especially so in connection with building works in Habsenas,



Fig. 11. Apse archivolt of the Church of Mar Abraham on Mount Izla.



Fig. 12. Fragment of the apse archivolt of the Church of Mor Sovo in Hāḥ.

of which there is mention of two monuments which are backed up by standing monuments. No archaeological confirmation exists for his other activities.

The cornice in the apse conch consists of bands of palmettes, rosettes with a small circle in the middle, and a crudely made vine scroll (Fig. 13). Similar rosettes exist in the cornice of the apse conch of Yoldath Aloho at Hāḥ (Fig. 14). In Arnas, the cornice comprises palmettes, fascia, and a narrower vine scroll (Fig. 15). In Mor ‘Azo’el at Kfarze (Fig. 16) and Yoldath Aloho at Hāḥ (Fig. 14), the palmettes are joined together with circular knots. In Mor ‘Azo’el at Kfarze, rows of plain fascia are followed by two rows of dentils (Fig. 16) and this church is the only church with dentils in its apse conch. In Yoldath Aloho, dentils do not exist in the cornice but is abundant elsewhere in the church (see below).

The apse archivolt in Mor Simeon at Habsenas is decorated with palmettes, bead and reel, acanthus scroll, and palmettes (Fig. 13). In Mor ‘Azo’el at Kfarze, the archivolt is made up of palmettes, bead and reel, bands of plain fascia, a band of vine scroll, plain fascia, and another band of palmettes (Fig. 17). The carving at Mor Quryaqos in Arnas is slightly deeper (Fig. 18). However, this might be an impression caused by the fact that other churches were plastered more thoroughly than this one. One important difference in the decoration of the apse archivolt of this church is the presence of plaiting. Plaiting was also used in Yoldath Aloho at Hāḥ (Fig. 19), under the capitals, and probably in the apse archivolt,



Fig. 13. Archivolt and cornice of the apse of the Church of Mor Simeon at Habsenas.



Fig. 14. Cornice of the apse of the Church of Yoldath Aloho at Hāh.



Fig. 15. Cornice of the apse of the Church of Mor Quryaqos at Arnas.



Fig. 16. Cornice of the apse of the Church of Mor 'Azo'el at Kfarze.

although we cannot determine this with certainty, as it is badly damaged.

The Church of Mor Yohannan in Qelleth stands out. The apse archivolt is much lower (about 1 metre) than other examples and it is slightly more pointed (Fig. 20). The piers closest to the apse do not block the apse, but are planned carefully, with openings on their sides leading to the rooms flanking the apse (as at Mor Abraham Kashkar; for a plan, see Mundell Mango 1982b). The decoration of the apse archivolt is identical to Mor 'Azo'el's in Kfarze but lacks a cornice running inside the apse conch or a large cross in the apse semi dome. The apse differs from others in that it is not semi-circular. This part may have been destroyed in the past and rebuilt as it is today, but it may equally have been originally built as a rectangle. This is suggested by the fact that the church is recorded, in the colophon of a liturgical book dated to 1487 (Barsawm 2008, 429), as being dedicated to John of Dailam (d. 738), an East Syrian saint, so the church may have actually been an East Syrian church, which tend to have straight-backed sanctuaries, both inside and outside (Okada 1991; Cassis 2002; Bonnéric 2021, fig. 5;

Hakkari region: Sinclair 1987, vol. 1, 36). Palmer thinks that the East-Syrian community settled in Qelleth in the decade following the Persian conquest of Dara in 573. He thinks this church was built at that time and was later dedicated to John of Daylam after his death in 738.

If our dating system of the sculpture is correct, we can argue that the church may have been built in the eighth century. According to his Life, John of Dailam visited the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (684-705) in Damascus and was granted permission to build churches and monasteries "throughout our entire empire wherever he wants! His expenses will be provided from my royal treasury." The caliph wrote another letter to the effect that "tribute was not to be exacted from any of the priests, monks, teachers and leaders of the Christians" (Brock 1981-82, 173, see Pierre and Wood in this volume). If there was competition between the East and West Syrians, John might have wanted to build in West Syrian territory, and thus the church might have even been built personally by him. According to this argument, East Syrians used the same plan (except for the arrangement of the apse) and the same sculptural types in the village churches. According to Palmer, this



Fig. 17. Apse archivolt of the Church of Mor 'Azo'el at Kfarze.



Fig. 18. Apse archivolt of the Church of Mor Quryaqos at Arnas.

church became West Syrian around year 1000, and its patron saint was adopted by the Syriac Orthodox. His Life was rewritten to claim that he had built a church to the Mother of God in one of his monasteries (Brock 1981-82, 173). When the church was adopted by the West Syrians, they may have replaced the flat wall of the apse with a curved one. Simon Pierre has suggested that the church was always West Syrian and its dedication was changed after this saint, and his monastery near Mosul, were appropriated by the Miaphysites.

The hall-type village churches of Ṭūr 'Abdīn are plain on the outside. The only exception is Mor 'Azo'el in Kfarze, on whose western façade a cross is flanked by frontal lion heads (Fig. 21). Their faces are completely round and two-dimensional, unlike the Ṣalah lion mentioned above. The lions in Mor 'Azo'el rather recall



Fig. 19. Arches and capitals in the Church of Yoldath Aloho at Hāh.

medieval Seljuk lions (Öney 1969, 13), looking as if they were carefully placed as an original part of the design of the western façade, which is heavily restored. In the case of the monastic church of Mor Ya'qub in Ṣalah, the lion belongs to a doorway; in Mor 'Azo'el it is located between two windows on the western façade. Just



Fig. 20. Apse archivolt of the Church of Mor Yohannan at Qelleth.

as the church dominates the landscape, we can think of them as dominating or protecting their surroundings. These lion heads flank a cross. A cross flanked by two stags is found on a sixth- or seventh-century architectural fragment from Egypt, now in Dumbarton Oaks Museum, whose catalogue entry reads “Crosses flanked by animals and vine scrolls portray the natural world, not as a chaotic wilderness, but as a controlled domain, subdued under a triumphant God at its center.”⁶ For the Ancient Egyptians, the stag was a wild beast that was subdued by the image of Horus. With Christianity, the cross, instead of Horus, is used to represent the power over chaos. Similar imagery is also found in Islamic iconography, where the ruler dominates the two lions, i.e. his enemies (Snelders 2010, 293). In the case of Mor ‘Azo’el in Kfarze, the lions may represent the past and present rulers of the region. The Syrian Orthodox may have been culturally linked to the Roman world, but after falling under Muslim Arabs rulers, they may have felt to be between two powers, using the cross to symbolise the peace that comes with the Christian faith.

In terms of the architectural form and of the sculpture on the façade, the Church of Yoldath Aloho in Ḥāḥ is the most remarkable. Although it is in a village, it does



Fig. 21. Frontal lion heads on the western façade of the Church of Mor ‘Azo’el at Kfarze.

not have a hall-type plan. Its closest parallel is Dayr al-Za‘farān, but it is indeed very different from it in terms of scale and the compact articulation of its space. Other close parallels can be found in Armenia and Jordan (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 222-23). This church certainly owes its glamour to the special conditions prevailing in the village of Ḥāḥ, which was the centre of the bishopric of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn. From 614, the bishop of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn resided in the Monastery of Mor Gabriel in Qartmin, but a separate bishop, who was based in or near Ḥāḥ, was consecrated briefly in the mid-eighth century (Palmer 1990, 31). Furthermore, the Chronicle of Zuqnin tells a story of a false prophet who managed to attract groups of people to Ḥāḥ in 769/770. He was called Marutha, and the chronicle depicts him as an evil cheater. The chronicle says “All the territories rushed to him, bringing many bonds, along with gold, silver and display vessels.” He was so famous that other religious men were claimed to be jealous of him. When the bishop Mor Cyriacus realised that his flock was not listening to him, he appealed to the Patriarch and got him imprisoned, but people continued visiting him there (Chronicle of Zuqnin; Harrak 1999, 252). Although this is not mentioned in the chronicle, after getting rid of Marutha the bishopric might have re-established its authority with a glorious church that stood out in terms of plan and decoration and thus displayed the wealth and culture of the bishop. It is perhaps not surprising that this, the most remarkable church in the region, is dedicated to Yoldath Aloho, the Mother of God, perhaps also as a statement to the East Syrians, with whom, as we shall mention below, there was considerable competition.

The apse archivolt is the worst preserved part of the decoration of the church, but the palmettes, a vine scroll, and plaiting can still be made out. The vine scroll stems

⁶ Hanson, <http://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/36492>

out of vases, like in Yoldath Aloho and Dayr al-Za'farān. The arches on the other sides are plainer, having profiled fascia with a vine scroll coming out of a vase. The cornice in the apse conch is also different from the cornice in other parts of the church: plain fascia, palmette, bead and reel, plain fascia, flower-like motif, and plain fascia again. At the same level, a cornice runs all along in the interior of the church but this time it comprises palmette, bead and reel, and repeated circles connected with intersecting rhomboids.

In the corners, where the two arches meet, there are impost capitals with garlands, acanthus leaves, circles at their tops, and large plaiting in the lower band (Fig. 19). The horseshoe-shaped arch is the dominating feature of the whole design, especially in the narthex, seen both in the side entrances but also in the arcades (Fig. 22). The apse archivolt, the niches in the apse conch, the doors leading to the narthex from the south and north, and the arches of the portico all have horseshoe-shaped arches, which, although they have pre-Islamic origins, became especially common in the Umayyad period (Petersen 1996, 24).

Like horseshoe-shaped arches, dentils also appear everywhere in the church: under the squinches, in the narthex, in the doorway, in the small apse niches, recalling the sculptural unity in Mor Ya'qub at Ṣalāḥ. In the seven niches of the apse, there are dentils and interlacing circles (like a guilloche with knot interlaces), and shell-shaped fluted conches with bosses at the bottom. These bosses are either decorated with a flower or a flower-like cross (Fig. 14). Variety also reaches the column capitals under the niches. Four of them have garlands coming out of two circles. In two of these, between the garlands, there is a vase whose background recalls wind-blown leaves with a scale pattern. The other two are relatively deeply-carved acanthus capitals. The outer two capitals and outermost half-capitals have acanthus leaves but lack garlands or circles at the top. However, they seem to have had two rows of dentils like the rest of the capitals in the niche, although they are heavily damaged.

A cornice with dentils runs along the narthex. The entrance from the narthex to the naos is flanked by two engaged columns (Fig. 23), whose capitals feature garlands that meet in the two intersecting circles with lozenges. In this instance, the leaves of the capitals are uncut acanthus. The lintel above these capitals projects beyond the capitals and has a row of dentils and a floral band similar to the one in the cornice following the apse conch. The doorway has been further decorated with another frame, which points to a later date. There is also a trace of a recent renovation. The capitals of the engaged columns in the portico of the church, now blocked with additions, present the same style.

The large apse cross stands on a base and has bulbous endings on all four arms. A dove, depicted flying downwards, features at the top of the cross, recalling that on the keystone of the apse archivolt of the church in Arnas, except that the latter flies upwards (Fig. 18). Given the debate about the aniconic character of sculpture in Syrian Orthodox churches (Mundell 1977), it is noteworthy that an animal figure occupies the most prominent location in the church, as a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Gero 1976). In the apse cross of Ḥāḥ, a flower features at the point where the arms converge, surrounded by foliates on four sides. The Kfarze cross is identical to the cross in Yoldath Aloho in Ḥāḥ, except for the dove at the top in the latter. The cross in Mor Simeon at Habsenas is plastered heavily and no trace of the base or decoration remains, except for an indication of a dove flying downwards at the top. The cross in the apse of Arnas is plainer compared to other crosses. There is no foliage around, and no bosses on the point where the arms intersect. It presents bulbous endings and a base at the bottom. The most decorated apse cross in the region is the one in Deir Ṣalib, some of whose fragments were reused in the *bēt ṣlūtō* (Fig. 24). The cross's arms present beads and reels, with some larger reels at key locations, like the intersection of the cross's arms and in the extensions of their endings. Foliage surrounds the intersection.

Just below the apse cross at Arnas, there is a square-shaped boss made of foliage with four larger leaves at the corners. The boss on the cornice of Mor Simeon, in the same location, is almost identical to the Arnas boss (Fig. 25), recalling the winged palmette in the Mary Magdalen church in Ḥāḥ (Fig. 26) which Mundell compared to the sculpture in the Early Islamic palace of Mshatta (743/4) (Mundell Mango 1982a, 127) where we also find split palmettes. In Kfarze, the boss in the same location is a cross surrounded by foliage.

Another two significant examples that illustrate sculptural variety in the region are the churches of Mor Samuel in Ḥāḥ (Fig. 27) and Yoldath Aloho in Serhevdana (Fig. 28), near Der Qubbe, in the territory of Beth Qusṭān. In the latter, there are bands of palmettes, bead and reel, interlacing circles, and rosettes similar to those in the lintel of Mor Samuel and in the apse cornices of Yoldath Aloho in Ḥāḥ, Mor Simeon in Habsenas and Mor 'Azozo'el in Kfarze, followed by a row of small boss-like circles and a band of flutes. The latter is not found in other potential eighth-century examples, but it exists in Dayr al-Za'farān, Deir Metinan, Martyropolis, and Dara (all of them dated to the sixth century; some have been mentioned above). However, in Serhevdana, the technique is crude and, in addition to the flatness of the band's details, the whole arch is flatter and not as profiled as the sixth-century examples. However, like sixth-century examples, this



Fig. 22. Narthex of the Church of Yoldath Aloho at Hāh.



Fig. 23. Entrance to the Church of Yoldath Aloho at Hāh.

moulding presents more bands than other eight-century examples; while using a new repertoire, it is clearly influenced also by older decorative styles. In the Church of Mor Samuel in Hāh, the whole arrangement is the product of reused fragments. The crown of the door features a band of rosettes at the very top row, two plain fascia, and a band of dense plaiting. The centre of the lintel is occupied by a square boss. These bosses are common in apse cornices, as previously noted. The lintel of the door presents a band of palmettes, a vine scroll, and palmettes with plain profiles in the middle.

Although we find variety in the number, order and decoration of bands, seventh- and eighth-century churches of the region are stylistically coherent. Masons were probably moving from site to site and tailoring the sculpture to the patron's taste while trying to make unique, customised ornaments. The sophistication of churches such as Yoldath Aloho in Hāh, which display a holistic approach in which sculpture is designed to fit architectural elements may reflect the knowledge, taste, or power of the patron or the mason.

In many villages today, the church is the only building with ancient parts, probably because the houses were made of mudbrick (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 228). Later in time, village churches started to appear like small castles. On the particular saint's festival, the community gathered in the church dedicated to the saint (Durmaz

2021), as remains the practice today. The church served the prestige of the village and the local elite.

While talking about the seventh and eighth centuries, our focus has been on community village churches. But, what about monasteries? Did they continue displaying the same variety found in the sixth century? New, smaller-scale monasteries were founded, such as Mor Sergius and Bacchus in Hah, Mor Lo'ozor in Habsenas, and Mor Yuhannon in Hāh. These foundations may be motivated by the need to secure private wealth from the fiscal administration, as argued by Pierre in this volume. Mor Yuhannon in Hāh can be dated with some certainty to 739/740 by an inscription (Palmer 1987, A2) After the Arab conquest, not only the monastic foundations, but also the churches within them, were downscaled (Keser-Kayaalp 2018).

In the context of intra-village, -elite, and perhaps -bishop competition, the wish to attract attention may have resulted in the building of a stylite tower in the monastery of Mor Lo'ozor. Simeon of the Olives is recorded to have been the bishop of Harran at the time. Simeon brought the relics of Mor Lo'ozor from Harran and built a monastery and "a column for recluses" in a monastery dedicated to Mor Lo'ozor (Palmer 1990, 105-07, and 217, figs. 37 and 38). In Mor Ya'qub in Şalah, an inscription just below the vault (most likely dated to 752-55 like the rest of the inscriptions in the church)



Fig. 24. *Bēt ṣlūtō* of Deir Salib (fragments of cross on the arch).



Fig. 25. Cross and cornice of the apse of the Church of Mor Quryaqos at Arnas.



Fig. 26. Lintel on the door of the Church of Mary Magdalen at Hāh.

lists the name of the benefactors (25 in number), some of whom are from “the village,” and the amount of money that they gave (Palmer 1987, B2). Some gave one *zuzō* and others over a hundred. Although the list includes the names of all of them, the top rows are reserved for the donors who gave the most money. It is not easy to read this inscription from the ground level, so it was probably not meant to display elite status but to secure a place in heaven. In a much smaller church built in the days of patriarch Athanasius and bishop Lazarus (739/40), namely the monastery of Mor Yuhannon in Hāh, G...

(the name could not be read by Palmer because it was heavily damaged) built the monastery, and it is stressed that “nobody helped him” (Palmer 1987, A2). As such, these individual efforts were praised to secure a place in Heaven for the donors.

These inscriptions and hagiography encouraged the patrons to build further buildings. Accounts of encounters with Muslim rulers, in the *Qartmin Trilogy* with Umar, and in the Life of Simeon of the Olives with Caliph al-Maʿmun (anachronistically), have been interpreted as a result of the anxiety that bans on church-building caused in the hagiographers of the period (Tannous 2016, 326; Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 241; Wood this volume). By referring to earlier periods, they aspired to be given the same sort of treatment in their own day, but these accounts probably attracted the attention of local elites and local governors. In *Qartmin* it was not only a matter of the caliph’s good will but also that of the memory of the emperors, as the *Qartmin Trilogy* mentions the emperors Honorius, Arcadius and Anastasius (Palmer 1990, 55). However, naming these emperors may have been more than a call for tolerance and “the good old days” for the monastery, but also an attempt to raise funds. In this volume, Philip Wood



Fig. 27. Entrance to the apse in the Church of Mor Samuel at Hāh.

suggests “that one reason that the Qartmin hagiographers drew such attention to imperial patronage was that it allowed later donors to step into a tradition that went back to the Roman emperors.”

It is difficult to be certain concerning the building activity of Simeon of the Olives because of the lack of remains except in Habsenas (mentioned above); however the account of Simeon’s patronage of a mosque and a *madrassa* next to the Church of Mor Theodore in Nisibis, exaggerated descriptions of the decoration of the church, and the account that the construction of the Church of Mor Theodore was hindered by the East Syrians three times, show that building was an important tool used by different confessions in their struggle for territorial control (Brunner 2021, 48). The picture provided by the *Life* is that the Church of Mor Theodore in Nisibis was built with the permission of the caliph, and the support of the local rulers, despite the resistance of the East Syrian community. The adoption of a city which had an East Syrian past by the West Syrians may have been a strong motivation, besides the desire to present the image of a powerful Syrian Orthodox bishop able to build in an important city like Nisibis, at a time when the Arabs were no longer tolerant towards church-building.

It is clear that the tensions between East Syrians and West Syrians became more visible during this period, probably because, as Wood argued, with the removal of political borders they came into closer contact. Based on his study of Syriac inscriptions for the museum of Mardin, Andrew Palmer argued that there was a late eighth-early ninth century cemetery of East Syrians in the necropolis of Dara, which was an important frontier city founded by emperor Anastasius in the early sixth century. Mundell



Fig. 28. Apse archivolt of the Church of Yoldath Aloho at Serhevdana.

(1975, 226) suggested that East Syrians and their clergy might have already lived in Dara when it was taken by the Persians in 573. Excavations have now started again in Dara, so we may learn more about this from new finds.

In his discussion about Asia Minor during the wars of the seventh and eighth centuries, Howard-Johnston hypothesised that leadership in the villages could not be transmitted within elite families but had to be earned; in consequence, community leaders sought help from holy men (Howard-Johnston 2019, 149-50). In Northern Mesopotamia, the *Life of Mor Theodotus of Amida* (d. 698) is often brought to the fore to discuss the help lent to saints by members of the ruling elite. The governor (*illustriya*)⁷ of Dara told Theodotus that “As long as you live, it [i.e., the saint’s monastery] will pay no poll-tax to the king. I shall pay it out of my own private funds,” and the *Life* continues: “That is how Theodotus came to the monastery of St Abai. They built themselves a cell above the monastery and lived there” (Hoyland and Palmer 2023, 127.5) And later, Theodotus built his own monastery near Mor Abai (Hoyland and Palmer 2023, 191-197.1). Theodotus needed the help of the governor, but, the governor seemingly also needed him: “His reputation spread throughout the province. The sick and the distressed came to him and he prayed for them” (Hoyland and Palmer 2023, 127.6). Just after mentioning the governor’s invitation to build a monastery of his own, the *Life* claims that Theodotus healed an Arab and a Nestorian. Unlike the *topos* of the encounter between a holy man and a secular ruler, which describes the efforts of the former to persuade the latter to support their communities (Hoyland 2021, 8, mentioned also by Wood in this volume), in the *Life of Theodotus* the emphasis is on the secular ruler’s insistence and invitation.

⁷ See Simon Pierre’s explanation in: <https://ifpo.hypotheses.org/10345>

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it is frustrating that we still cannot precisely date any of the churches of ṬŪr 'Abdīn. With field-works and archaeology, this may change in the future. It is clear that there are different types of decoration in the region. The most remarkable among these are the deep classical motives dated to the sixth century and the more abstract versions of them with additional ornamental bands dated to the Early Islamic period. However, one can still argue that these differences resulted from the activity of different workshops, a tempting explanation, especially if the abstract ornaments in Limestone Massif are taken into account (most churches in Naccache 1992). I think that it would be fruitful to undertake a detailed survey to compare this sculpture with the sculpture in Islamic buildings. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Islamic architecture was also trying to find its own forms. We do not have evidence for Early Islamic architecture in the region, but the appearance of classical forms in the Great Mosques of Diyarbakır, Silvan, and Harran (Mundell 1982a) points to a remarkable transitional period marked by continuity with classical motifs. The fact that this was a frontier region related to the Roman world may have been the motivation behind this insistence in the early period, but in later periods these motives may have been regarded as drawing a link with the Christian world.

The variety I have presented here may illustrate the desires of elites or bishops to stand out and show their power and knowledge. However, this variety can also be a result of the creativity and initiative of the masons. They may, in fact, have been working for the same patron

in several places. At least three different workshops can be identified in the sixth century. The late-sixth century carving at Mor Abraham represents classical sculpture as preserved in Persian Nisibis (Mundell 1982a, 122). The decoration of the pilasters of Mor Ya'qub in Ṣalah is also different from Dayr al-Za'farān or Mor Sovo in Ḥāḥ. Elaborate sculpture may not necessarily mean imperial patronage but may indicate strong monastic communities. Among the stylistically-similar churches, which I have tentatively dated to the seventh-eighth century, not two are identical; some have more bands and the decoration of these bands changes from one church to another. Like Dayr al-Za'farān, Yoldath Aloho in Ḥāḥ is remarkable for the distribution of sculptural decoration. Therefore, variety was a feature of monasteries before the Arab conquest, and the phenomenon has been shown to extend to the villages also.

It seems appropriate to close by repeating Mundell Mango's observation: "It is often impossible to link precisely a particular decoration to its patron who may have been Chalcedonian, Monophysite or Nestorian" (Mundell 1977, 59). Hagiography shows that building and decorating churches and monasteries was an important spatial marker, not only for holy men, but for the secular authorities too. The churches and monasteries of ṬŪr 'Abdīn are usually seen as a unit, based mainly on their conservatism in terms of plan. This article also shows that a degree of unity in the style of decoration does also bring these monuments together and upholds the image of ṬŪr 'Abdīn as a distinct cultural landscape. On the other hand, variety in details testifies experimentation and competition between elites, holy men, and different confessions.

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PART III

SYRIAC, COPTIC, AND AFRICAN CHURCHES, AND THE ISLAMIC LAW

CHAPTER 7

BUILDING AND DESTROYING “NEW CHURCHES” AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC LAW: THE SYRIAC CASE (FIRST-SECOND CENTURY AH)

CONSTRUCCIÓN Y DESTRUCCIÓN DE “IGLESIAS NUEVAS” Y LA EVOLUCIÓN DEL DERECHO PALEOISLÁMICO: EL CASO SIRIACO (SIGLOS I-II DH)

SIMON PIERRE¹

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I address how and when church-building became problematic during the early Islamic period in the Syro-Aramaic regions of Northern Syria and Mesopotamia. First, I focus on the evidence provided by ecclesiastical Syriac sources concerning ongoing constructions during the seventh century, when it appears that no legal restrictions operated. Moreover, even under the Marwānīd caliphate, whose social and ideological system was driven by more confessional principles, an impressive number of testimonies suggest an increase in the number of monastery foundations, which may have been a way to shelter private wealth from taxation. Things seem to have changed during the early Abbasid period. The sources are contradictory: some new laws were introduced in Syria against Christian proselytism, but no evidence of such limitations upon church building in the Jazīra is attested before the 770s. Also, legal evidence and theory suggest that, at least during the first half of the second century AH (720-770), there were two hermetic categories in urban settlements: 1/ the construction of churches was authorised within the indigenous, Aramaic-speaking, madīnas; 2/ in the miṣrs (amṣār) however, where Arab-Muslims were supposed to hold a privileged position, the very visibility of Christian cult and social habits and practices was gradually banned, especially church-building. Finally, the growing hostility crystallised in traditions that commanded churches in the amṣār to be destroyed, even if such orders were neither systematic nor effective. The turning point of this story could be the disastrous invasion of Northern Syria by Byzantine general Michael Lakhanodrakon, in 777. Indeed, for the first time in a century, a caliph decided to lead the army in person to repel the enemy in Cilicia, and a significant policy of sunna enforcement and reform was launched by al-Mahdī through a so-called muḥtasib. Emir ‘Alī b. Sulaymān al-‘Abbāsī was especially committed to this military, as well as ideological, counter-offensive. It struck the Syriac Orthodox church, as recalled by an inscription on the southern wall of the church of Ehnes̄h, in Northern Syria. After this date of 779-780, the region of the Byzantine frontier, the thughūr, endured a process of military colonisation that matches the development of new legal paradigms: the “miṣrization” of indigenous madīnas. It consisted in their transformation into miṣr-like towns or neighbourhoods, where the law of the amṣār was to be applied and “new churches” had to be destroyed. Gradually, the growing number of Muslim inhabitants in the cities of Ḥarrān or Edessa led to their miṣrization too, if not simply to the downright breach of their treaties (ṣulḥ), like in Takrīt and Mosul. At this stage, governors were frequently caught between the antagonistic pressures of Christian and Muslim elites, and also had to face contagious destructing riots staged by Muslim mobs. Every decade, in ca. 190, 200, 210 and 220 AH, “new churches” were demolished, and then for the most part reconstructed, a regularity that perhaps reflects a legal principle that has not yet been elucidated.

KEY WORDS: al-Mahdī, Mu‘āwiya, Dionysius of Tell Mahrē, Abū Yūsuf, Takrīt, Thughūr

RESUMEN

Este capítulo se ocupa de cómo y cuándo la construcción de iglesias se convirtió en un problema durante el periodo islámico temprano en las regiones siro-araméas del Norte de Siria y Mesopotamia. Primero, me centro en la evidencia facilitada por las fuentes siríacas en torno a las construcciones del siglo VII, cuando aparentemente no había restricciones legales al respecto. Es más, durante el califato Marwānīd, cuyo sistema social e ideológico estaba dirigido por principios confesionales, un importante número de testimonios evidencian el incremento de fundaciones monásticas, las cuales pueden haber sido además una manera

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de defender la riqueza privada de los impuestos. Las cosas parecen cambiar durante los primeros momentos del periodo abasí. Las fuentes son entonces contradictorias: algunas leyes nuevas contra el proselitismo cristiano son introducidas en Siria, pero las restricciones respecto a la construcción de iglesias en la Jazīra no se evidencian antes de la década del 770. Igualmente, la evidencia y teoría legal sugieren que, al menos durante la primera mitad del segundo siglo de la Hégira (720-770), dominaban dos categorías hermenéuticas en los asentamientos urbanos: 1) la construcción de iglesias estaba autorizada dentro de las madīnas indígenas aramaico parlantes; 2) en el amṣār, sin embargo, donde se supone que los árabe-musulmanes gozaban de una posición privilegiada, la visibilidad del culto, hábitos y prácticas sociales cristianas fue desvaneciéndose gradualmente, especialmente en lo que a la construcción de iglesias se refiere. Finalmente, la creciente hostilidad cristalizó en tradiciones que ordenaban la destrucción de las iglesias del amṣār, incluso cuando estas órdenes no eran ni sistemáticas ni efectivas. El punto de inflexión de este proceso pudo ser la desastrosa invasión del Norte de Siria por el general bizantino Miguel Lacanodraco en el 777. En efecto, por primera vez en un siglo, un califa decidió conducir el ejército personalmente para repeler al enemigo en Cilicia, y una importante política de refuerzo de la sunna y de reforma fue lanzada por al-Mahdī a través de la conocida muḥ-tasib. El emir ‘Alī b. Sulaymān al-‘Abbāsī se comprometió especialmente con esta contraofensiva militar e ideológica. Golpeó la iglesia siríaca-ortodoxa, como conmemora la inscripción del muro sur de la iglesia de Ehnesb, en el norte de Siria. Después del 779-780, la región de la frontera bizantina, el thughūr, soportó un proceso de colonización militar que coincide con el desarrollo de nuevos paradigmas legales: la “miṣrization” de las madīnas indígenas. Esta consistió en la transformación en miṣr de ciudades y barrios, donde la ley del amṣār fue aplicada y las “iglesias nuevas” tuvieron que ser destruidas. Gradualmente, el crecimiento del número de habitantes musulmanes en las ciudades de Ḥarrān o Edessa condujo también a su miṣrización, sino simplemente al incumplimiento total de sus tratados (sulḥ), como en Takrīt y Mosul. En este momento, los gobernadores se vieron atrapados con frecuencia entre las presiones antagónicas de las élites cristianas y musulmanas, y tuvieron que enfrentarse además a los contagiosos disturbios destructores organizados por las turbas musulmanas. Cada década, ca. 190, 200, 210 y 220 AH, “iglesias nuevas” fueron destruidas y después gran parte de ellas reconstruidas, una regularidad que parece reflejar un principio jurídico que todavía no estaba claro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: al-Mahdī, Mu‘āwiya, Dionisio de Tell Maḥrē, Abū Yūsuf, Takrīt, Thughūr

INTRODUCTION

In the late second/eighth century, the social organisation of the Middle East was being reshaped into a new confessional order in which denominations and churches became synonymous with indigenous ethnicities and people. The Christian clergy became “the main representatives of their communities,” especially before Muslim rulers (Wood 2020, 377). Thus, the display of crosses, the ringing of the *simandron* (*nāqūshā/nāqūs*), and foremost the construction of churches, became identity markers for communities as well as the symbol of the power and influence of their clerical elites. In modern Europe, mosques, minarets, adhan and other visible manifestations of Muslim worship have also recently come to be regarded as problematic in some media and political debates, and even in public legislation. Obviously, the environment of the early medieval Middle East was much more diverse and heterogeneous, and Christianity was not only the hegemonic religion, but the oldest one. Thus, churches and their public rituals might have also been regarded as a challenge to the supremacy of the early Islamic caliphate, its elites, and its official religion while the late Umayyad and early Abbasid empire struggled to impose Islam as the sole legitimate political and ideological system.

Our perception of early Islam is based on legal and historical sources from the first century of the Abbasid dynasty (ca. 750-850), a period of increasing hostility towards Christians and Christianity. During the second half of the second century AH (ca. 770-820), pietists and zealot scholars tried to compile legal precedents from the legendary companions in order to restrict both the clergy’s influence and the visibility of Christian worship. Thus, as testimonies from the first 150 years of Islam are few, modern scholars are at risk to back-project this later *zeitgeist* on earlier pre-Umayyad and Umayyad practices and ideals. As a matter of fact, framing their contemporary issues and problems according to the principles of primitive Islam was the leitmotiv of Muslim scholars, including those who worked on the rights of church building and rebuilding. Syriac sources illustrate this critical time, as they reflect the rise of conspiracy theories that associated church-building with Byzantine enemy plots, arguments that resemble some that are being wielded in modern Europe against Muslim buildings and public worship:

1) In 180/796 some “Muslims (*mshallmōnē*)” of Edessa accused local Christians of plotting with and spying for the “king of the Romans,” with the aim of “having the great church demolished.” However, the righteous and rational caliph Ḥārūn al-Rashīd disallowed

and punished them for this fanciful defamation (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 483).

2) A decade later, the schismatic Gūbbans from the region between Aleppo and Manbij attempted for the Caliph to suspect the loyalty of Patriarch Cyriacus, even though they were neighbours at Raqqa (r. 177/793-202/817). They charged him for spying for the Romans and building churches in “the border of the Romans (*thūmō d-Rūmōyē*).” As a sign of the growing rigidity towards Christian building, their denunciation resulted in a much more dramatic wave of church destructions (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 489, below, 206-07).

In both instances, church building was deliberately conflated with Byzantine funding, and thus, with supporting the enemy. Actually, in both cases, the accusation is based on the breach of several clauses (*shurūt*) concerning church-building in the early lists of bans. Indeed, the Great Qādī Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798, below, 199) was at that time copying similar lists linking it together with a) helping the enemy and b) ringing the *simandron*. Moreover, exactly like modern European states do today with Muslims, caliphs and regional emirs hesitated between two opposite strategies to control their Christian subjects and their communal churches:

1) Organising, centralising and hierarchising the various subject denominations through the promotion of the patriarchal authority, even by granting them official recognition (*sigillion*) and Muslim guards (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 462, 469-70 and 476-77; *Zuqnīn*, 104; 813, 244, 248 and 251).

2) Fastening and/or triggering schisms and the atomisation of these autonomous Christian churches (like the Gūbbans in Northern Syria and the Mosulis/Takritans in Iraq, see Wood 2021) or more simply declaring the universal right to create as many new communal churches as they wished (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 517).

During the early twentieth century, mosques were built in Europe with state funding – the Great Mosque of Paris in 1926 for instance – a long time before our recent post-9/11 atmosphere and its impact on European public opinion. We assume that, in the same way, Christian buildings were erected during the early Islamic period, long before the rise of an anti-Christian atmosphere that eventually led to the prohibition of new churches in the late 2nd century AH. However, evidence about these constructions during the 20s/640s-150s/760s is not always

easy to find in textual sources. Indeed, even the need to prove the antiquity of their churches only arose among Christians when they had to be defended against the threat of destruction; as pointed out by Robinson (2000, 13): “as far as confessional relations are concerned, it is in the early Abbasid period that conquest history clearly began to matter.” Yet, lists and even isolated mentions of ancient cult buildings appear in the *ṣulḥ*-s (capitulation treaties) preserved by the clergy, as some of them quote fiscal privileges for clerics, exceptional rights to ring the *simandron*, or even specific authorisations to build new churches. Again, this literature reflects the interests of communal elites to focus on legal issues of the late second/eighth century in order to confirm their privileges. In doing so, a Syriac Orthodox patriarch like Dionysius of Tell Mahrē (r. 818-845) even completely re-wrote the history of the conquest as a story of liberation from the Roman and Chalcedonian yoke (Van Ginkel 2006). However, these narratives are for the most part contradictory, as is the account of Muslim commentators. Moreover, this literature was generally compiled by Muslim scholars, like al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), and their contents are only known in their mid-third/ninth century form.

In any case, the early Christian and Muslim literatures suggests that, in the late eighth-early ninth century CE, legal scholars and *qādī* completely ignored the “*shurūt* of ‘Umar,” even if similar lists of bans began to circulate during the 150-70s/770-80s, as Milka Levy-Rubin brilliantly demonstrated.² Moreover, concerning the regulations of the *shurūt* against “new churches,” it seems that early legal texts only focused on creating privileged rules for Arab-Muslim city-camps (*miṣr*, pl. *amṣār*) where, indeed, Christian buildings began to be prohibited before the mid-second century (Levy-Rubin 2011, 64-70). During the Umayyad period, the *miṣr* was interpreted as an *ex-nihilo* foundation for Arab immigrants, an exceptional *dār hijra* (Crone 1994) where hegemony of pure Islam could prevail. This singular paradigm stood in opposition to indigenous cities (*madīnas*), ruled by more tolerant laws – the specific features of which depended on each *ṣulḥ*. This contrast was emphasised by historians from the same mid-to-late eighth century CE, like Abū Mikhnaḥ, Sayf b. ‘Umar, al-Wāqidi or al-Madā’inī. In this context, the ban on Christian constructions in the *amṣār*

² While Noth (1987) suggests that early scholars’ ignorance of the *shurūt* could be attributed to its relatively minor status, Levy-Rubin (2011) argues that this explanation is tantamount to denying the text’s existence altogether.

³ Often, this theoretical distinction was difficult to apply in several indigenous towns (*balad*) which, according to the textual and archaeological evidence, only began to grow during the early Islamic period. This is for example the case of stations on the two roads that ran across Northern Mesopotamia, the *castra* on the Euphrates (‘Āna, Hīt) and the Tigris (Gāzartā, Balad, Mosul, al-Sinn, Ḥadītha and Takrit), there is no evidence of pre-Islamic churches in these new Islamic-era cities.

became an important feature during the late Marwānid and early Abbasid period.³

Summing up, there had been no general rule against church-building before the second/eighth century, even if the situation was gradually changing. Thus, the first two centuries of the Hijra can be divided into three phases:

1) The second part of the “long Seventh century” (Wood 2016, 258, see also 266) was a “period of symbiosis” (Fowden 1999, 178) marked by continuity with the Late Antique expansion of Christianity. During this “Indian Summer” (Robinson 2000, 57), under the Umayyad dynasty, while the imperial church became permanently split into several communal churches, missions and conversions remained active, as well as the construction of churches and monasteries. Indeed, the early conquerors were not hostile to the Christian elites and faith, and their neutrality promoted a “free market of religions” (Wood 2013, 223) for “simple Believers” (Tannous 2018), especially in the Syriac speaking environment of Jazīra and Mosul. Indeed, hagiographic texts contain many testimonies of the foundation of churches and monasteries, some of which can be verified through archaeology.

2) During the mid-2nd/8th century, there was a more drastic policy of church bans, above all in the *amṣār*, while the need to request the emir’s authorisation became more systematically enforced in indigenous cities.

3) Finally, both Christian and Muslim sources point to five decennial waves of church destructions, between Hārūn’s entry in Northern Syria in 180/796 and al-Muṭaṣim’s first anti-Roman expedition in 220/834. Some of them follow periods of relative freedom of building or rebuilding, while others testify to a stricter enforcement of bans that look like the early drafts of what came to be called – after the mid-third/ninth century at the earliest – the “*shurūt* of ‘Umar.”⁴

I. BUILDING CHURCHES UNDER THE Umayyads: Late Antique Continuity and Early Islamic Changes

No hiatus in church-construction is attested from before the conquest in the 10s-20s/630s-640s until the Second civil war (*fitna*, 60-72/680-92). As a matter of fact, the contemporary *Life of Marūtā* even ignores any of the Medinese conquests, while its author highlights Heraclius’ invasion of Iraq (77-78). During this indefinite transitional period, the first Miaphysite bishop of Takrīt was even able to erect the town’s first cathedral

(Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiasticum*, 2, col. 123). Therefore, in contrast with Marwānid-era evidence, mentions of early buildings are not clearly distinct from those of the pre-Islamic period. Moreover, the hagiography mentions the (unproblematic) foundation of several churches and monasteries under the proto-dynasty of the Sufyānids (*ca.* 23-64/644-84).

1.1. Seventh century continuity

The future Catholicos of the Dyophysite (“Nestorian”) church of the East (Iraq and Iran), Ishō‘Yahb III (r. 28/649-39/660) was bishop of Nineveh at the time of the Medinese conquest. However, he was clearly much more concerned about a Miaphysite church just built in the suburb of Nineveh with the support of a “local governor (*shallīṭā d-tamen*)” (Ishō‘Yahb, *Letters*, (E44), 82). His contemporary, Rabban Hormizd, also had to suffer these “heretics from Balad and Mosul,” the Miaphysites (“Jacobites”), bribing the “great governor of Mosul” to gain his support for rebuilding the monastery destroyed earlier by the Dyophysites (*Life of Rabban Hormizd*, 64, see the symmetrical situation in the *Life of Aḥūdemmeḥ*, 30-31). At the same time, Sabr-Ishō‘, the Dyophysite Metropolitan of Bēt Garmay, also “built in this monastery [of Bēt ‘Abē] a splendid temple, at great expense” (Thomas of Margā *Governors*, 66-68 and 73-74), while a “new convent was built in the land of Dasen” (Ishō‘Dnaḥ, *Chastity*, 43-44). Meanwhile, the Miaphysite leader of Takrīt, Abraham Bar Ishō‘, also founded a church of Sergius and Bacchus (Bar Hebraeus *Ecclesiasticum*, 2, col. 133).

It was not only the Miaphysites that were supported by the secular authority (syr. *shūlṭōnō*; ar. *sulṭān*). Later Nestorian hagiography in Arabic depicts the viceroy of the East and adoptive nephew of caliph Mu‘āwiya, ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād al-Thaqafī (d. 67/686), offering “good actions (*birr*: ex-votos)” to the martyrdom of a Kufan saint called ‘Abdā b. Ḥanīf, who had once healed him (*Chronicle of Seert*, II-2, 269). The church of the East seemed to suffer no restriction from the Arab-Muslim emirs in Iraq, and especially not with regard to church-building, as it is shown by Canon 2 of the council held in Dērēn island (modern Baḥrayn) and led by Catholicos George in 56/676:

All churches and monasteries which are built [...] in a city or its region, must be built with the knowledge and permission of the bishop, and must be arranged according to

⁴ Yarbrough (2022) even shows that the so-called *shurūt* text was actually never presented in its latest form before the 4th/10th cent., and spread only in the 5th/11th cent.

his order. The believer [...] who wishes to build a church or a monastery in a town or in its region, must inform [the bishop of] its intention [...] and thus secure his permission [...]. If there are places lacking in churches or convents, it is up to the bishop to provide for their foundation (*Synodicon Orientale*, 217-18).

Based on Canon 2, during the 50s/670s, no anti-Christian regulation seems to have challenged the authority of bishops to found new churches even in the Arabian province of Baḥrayn. In fact, the canon reveals that they were much more concerned by local heretics, informal “holy men,” and even powerful secular elites (below, 196). Moreover, the same year, after part of the church of Edessa was destroyed by an earthquake, caliph Mu‘āwiya in person ordered – and seemingly funded – its reconstruction. The reason was, according to the Greek common source (Conterno 2015) “the zeal (*spoudè*) of the Christians” (Theophanes *Chronographia*, 356). A later Syriac writer adds a plausible explanation of what appeared to him as unorthodox – and thus unlikely – behaviour (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 436-7 and 1234, 288, see also Agapius, *Tārikh*, 233). However, even during the late Marwānid period, an Eastern hagiographer wrote about the assistance that John of Daylam (d. 120/738) received from caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65-85/685-705), and also from his viceroy in Iraq and Iran, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (r. 75/695-98/717), the right to build new monasteries in Iran. He confirms that the saint even had access to “the treasury (*bēt gaze*) of the kingdom” (*Life of John of Daylam*, 139-40).

Some of the evidence used below is quoted in Keser-Kayaalp’s (2019, 202-05; partly based on Bell and Mango 1982, 162-63) inventory of early Islamic-period church building and rebuilding. The following is an attempt to complement it, using more Syriac sources.

1.2. Marwānid-period monasteries

The above noted *Life of John of Daylam* focuses first on his evangelical mission in the north-eastern frontier of the caliphate, the Alborz mountains. Born in Ḥadītha on the Tigris, he is perhaps the most representative illustration of the expansion of the Syriac neo-apostolate towards the Far East, Central Asia and even Tang China, during the seventh and eighth centuries CE. The second part of his *Life* focuses on his works and actions as an abbot near Rayy. First, as a missionary and builder saint, he heals the Pagan/Muslim princes to obtain building permission and privileges for his churches. Indeed, after having saved the life of the daughter of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik:

The king [...] wrote for him a royal letter to his governor (*shallitā*) who was established in Iraq and Fārs (Bēt Arāmāyē and Parsāyē) to “authorise this holy man to build churches and monasteries in all our empire.” [...] From Damascus, he went to al-Ḥajjāj who wrote the same; he travelled [...] to the vicinity of Raggān (Rayy) city; and he built there a great and prosperous convent (*‘umrā*) and installed there many brothers (*Life of John of Daylam*, 139-40; see also Wood, in this volume).

Around the same time, similar testimonies exist about the authority of the Miaphysite Syriac secretary of finances in Egypt, Athanasius Bar Gümōyē (about this figure read Debié 2015, 177-78). He was famous for being a powerful confidant of the caliph’s brother, emir ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 685-704), and especially for sponsoring sacred buildings in Fuṣṭāt and/or Ḥulwān (see Dridi, in this volume), as well as in his fatherland in Edessa (a baptistery and a church of the Mother of God, 1234, 1, 295-96).

About the same time, according to Bar Hebraeus, the Miaphysite Maphrian of the East under the Mongol Ilkhanate, his predecessor metropolitan Denḥā (r. 68-109/688-727) also established a (third) church in the citadel of Takrīt, which he dedicated to the Mosuli martyr Aḥūdemmeḥ (Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiasticum*, 2, col. 147). There, alongside the Great Mosque, a ruined basilica is called Mār Aḥūdemmeḥ to this day. However, as this name probably used to refer to the whole episcopal complex during the Central Middle Ages, it would be injudicious to identify both buildings. It would make more sense for the remains to belong to the church built earlier and attributed to Marūtā (above, 192). In any case, these remains are reminiscent of East-Syriac post-Sasanian architecture (Harrak 2001, 36), with a circular *bēmā*-ambo as well as a *shqaqūnā* corridor similar to those discovered in the church of Tall Ḥassāk in the Upper-Khābūr region (Khoury and Riba, 2013) (Fig. 1). Here, one shall underline that no evidence can support the hypothesis that these architectural features could reflect Christological views (see the comparison with Dyophysite buildings in Amin and Brelaud, in this volume). In any case, the shape of the church of Takrīt resembles that of a nearby Miaphysite oblong and monastic “church of the Ḥaṣṣīsiāns (Fig. 2).” According to an inscription, its convent was the see of the bishop of Karmā “Mār John Bar Kēfā” (Ins. 148 277) in 709-10. He was a companion of the first metropolitan, John Sābā (r. 66-68/686-88), and of his successor Denḥā (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 438 and 448). As all textual information concurs to date the beginning of this Miaphysite history to this period, it can be suggested that the whole monastery complex was relatively new in 709-710. At some point however, its apse was modified to be adorned with Sasanian-style doubled

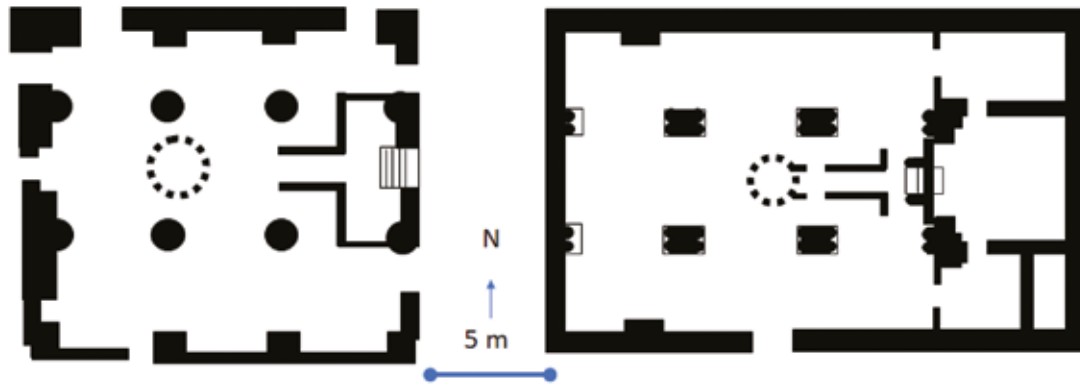


Fig. 1. The “church of Aḥūdemmeh” in Takrīt (left) and the church of Tall Ḥassāk (right) (author’s drawings).

half-columns (Harrak 2001, 16-17), a pattern also present in Tall Ḥassāk (Khoury and Riba 2013), and above all in eighth century Umayyad princely architecture.

Indeed, Dyophysite East-Syriac monastic histories confirms the uninterrupted construction of churches and convents during the Marwānid era (72-132/692-750). For instance, bishop Ishō‘Dnaḥ of Baṣra of the early third/ninth century lists a dozen new monastic buildings for the 80s-160s/700s-760s (examples below, 196). In one case, he even gives an accurate Hijra date for the death of his 90-year-old founder: Bar Saḥdē of Ḥarbā in 128/746 (*Chastity*, 9: 5) which proves a Marwānid-period foundation. In another example, Joseph of Shahr-Zūr, in the Western Zagros, “came [...] to the vicinity of the city of Balad [and there...] built a convent (*Chastity*, 110: 48).” In the West-Syrian world, a very peculiar martyrological legend assigns the death of a tribal Christian Arab chief (*rēshō*) (assumed to be from the tribe of the *Taglibōyē*) to ‘Abd al-Malik’s brother, Muḥammad b. Marwān (r. 74/694-90/709). Yet, Michael the Great does not know anything about him, except that a monastery was “built above his tomb,” probably as a martyrium, by (a bishop?) called Eustathius of Dārā (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 451).

There is also evidence for the foundation of new Miaphysite cathedrals (“great churches”) during the early Marwānid period. For instance, the Syrian-orthodox patriarch Elias of Gūbbā Barrāyā (r. 89-105/708-724) entered Antioch under Yazīd II (r. 101-5/720-24), “for the first time after 203 years” of Dyophysite (Chalcedonian) hegemony. His first action was to “consecrate a new church which had been built under his care” (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 456). An Umayyad-period Chronicle from the monastery of Qarṭmīn, in the Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, states that “the Catholic church of the Jacobites, which is in Ḥarrān” was erected (819, 13) the very same year Muḥammad b. Marwān adopted the city as the headquarter of the new province of Jazīra, in 79/698-99. The next year, Simeon of the Olives, abbot of Qarṭmīn, was elected bishop of

Ḥarrān, in this new church (819, 13). Being in charge of the Miaphysites of Northern Mesopotamia, Simeon extended his influence to the neighbouring, but deeply Nestorian, metropolis of Nisibis (819, 14). In the *Trilogy of Qarṭmīn*, the hagiographer claims that the bishop added an extra-building to the new Jacobite church “a *Bêt Ṣlūtō* for the Arabs” (*Life of Gabriel*, 90; on this specific feature see Keser-Kayaalp 2013, 273 and 280; 2019, 194-95).

From an archaeological point of view, we can rely on the accurate stratigraphic and isotopic dating of the “monastic church” in the suburb of the fortified town of Ṭunaynīr, on the middle course of the Khābūr River. It began as a house, which was modified during the first/seventh century with the addition of a perpendicular nave and a classical tripartite sanctuary room (phase 2). However, its final plan, with a central apse, a western narthex, and a southern portico only appears during phase 3, most probably under the Marwānids (Fuller and Fuller 1994, 43-45; Fig. 3). This building shows similar features to those found in two churches in the Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, the Mother of God in Ḥāḥ and St. James in Ṣālāḥ, both of which were in part (re-)built during the second/eighth century (Keser-Kayaalp 2019, 185). All these plans closely resemble that of the neighbouring “monastic church” of Ambar south of Dārā (Keser-Kayaalp, in this volume). Consequently, its date in the sixth century CE (Mundell Mango 1982, 48-52), based on the “*shurūt* ‘Umar” terminus, perhaps needs reconsidering.

To mention but one example, in the Marwānid urban and agrarian project of al-Bakhrā’ in the Palmyrene desert, the *qibla* wall of the mosque sits on the northern wall of a church, like in Takrīt. As both lay outside the Roman-Byzantine *castrum* (Genequand 2004, 235-37), it could also indicate an early Islamic date. Indeed, even in the Islamic town project of ‘Anjār (‘Ayn al-Jār), in Central Syria, a one nave square building with an eastern apse and a chancel appears to fit the ex-nihilo planned layout of the north-western quarter. It is not impossible that it was a

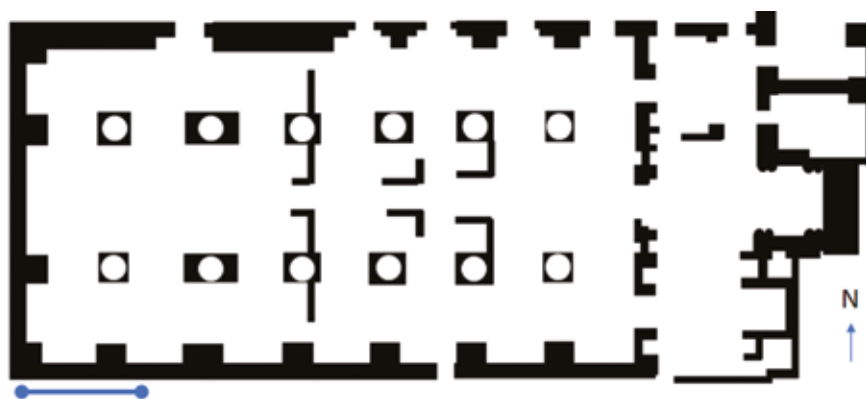


Fig. 2. The church of the Ḥaṣṣīṣians at Karmā (Kanīsa al-ʿAbid) (author's drawing).



Fig. 3. The church of Tunaynīr according to Fuller and Fuller (author's drawing).

church, as textual sources recall the building of churches in Ḥulwān, another new city founded by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān (d. 85/704) in Egypt (Dridi, this volume). It might have some connection with the well-attested presence of a large number of Christian Mosuli and Nisiban craftspeople – and also of one Edessan and one Aleppine – who engraved their names and clerical titles in Syriac letters in the nearby stone quarries of Kāmid al-Lawz *ca.* 96/715 (Mouterde 1939, ex: Kāmed 10, 16, and 29-30).⁵ Moreover, the presence of these Easterners and Aramaic-speaking workers and contractors certainly helps to understand the spread of (post-)Sasanian-inspired decors into post-Roman Syrian castles like Kharrāna, ʿAmmān, or Mushattā (see Arce 2008). In the post-Sasanian East,

many structures were built using mudbrick, and these Mosuli workshops were probably adapting it to the stone palatial architecture of post-Roman Syria.

Yet, the monastic history of Bēt ʿAbē, written after 217/832 by Thomas of Margā (*Governors*, 126; on this text and author, read Gomiero 2022), recounts that “Mār Ishō ʿYahb intended to pull down the mud temple that [...] Ishō ʿYahb the Catholicos had built, and to build another one of lime (*Governors*, 203 and 205, see also Amin and Brelaud, this volume).” This is a very important clue 1) that the first “temple” was erected in mudbrick during the 30/650, after the conquest, and 2) that it was still possible to rebuild a church even during the early Abbasid period. While recalling that “the monks who lived in his days counselled him not to do so on account of the difficulty of the undertaking,” the hagiographer ignores any potential Islamic prohibition or pressure. Another relevant story in the same work associates “lime” with “stones,” in connection with the construction of another new church in the town of Shalimat *ca.* 130/750 (*Governors*, 124). Jointly taken, these two stories might suggest that early religious constructions in Northern Iraq were generally made in mudbrick during the first/seventh century, and that stone and lime were adopted during the second/eighth. This could be a clue of the encounter of the muddy Eastern and the stony Syrian architectures. It could also be a sign of the economic growth during the early Islamic period, which allowed Christian complexes to be extended and reconstructed with more expensive materials, as it is attested in most post-Sasanian regions (Carter 2008; Bonnéric 2021).

As a matter of fact, evidence for monastery-building under the Marwānids is overwhelming, especially in the

⁵ See also the letter from Aphroditō: P. Lond.IV.1434, l. 25-26 (Bell, ed. 310, trans. 87; Phamenoth 20: “By letter from the *sumboulos*, from ʿUbayd son of Shuʿayb; letter about the *aggareutos* of ʿAyn al-Jār (*Aiénalgréra*) returned to Babylon” (*Famth k dl epistol tou sumbou dl Oubééid ui Szōéip Berd r agga Aénalgréra apostrr éi/Babul*).

hagiographic compilation of Ishō‘Dnaḥ of Baṣrā, a contemporary of Thomas of Margā. At least nine new founders can be found for the first half of the Second century AH:⁶

- 1) Abbā Ṣlibā in Bēt Nūhadrē (*Chastity*, 52, no. 102).
- 2) Rabban Safrā near Mār Eugenius of Izlā, close to the Miaphysite Tūr ‘Abdīn (*Chastity*, 57, no. 109).
- 3) John in Qardū, anathemized under Timothy (second half of the second century AH; *Chastity*, 58 and 66, no. 112 and 126).
- 4) Atqen in Bēt Nūhadrē (*Chastity*, 61, no. 119).
- 5) Būkt-Ishō‘ in the Zinay area (*Chastity*, 60, no. 118).
- 6) Abraham of Bēt Hālē and Gamrē (Kufa), in Hit, a bridge on the Euphrates between Kufa and Takrīt (*Chastity*, 61, no. 120).
- 7) Three monasteries by Gabriel of Kashkar (d. 738-9) in Bēt Garmay, one of which was destroyed ca. 181-82/797-98 (*Chastity*, 61-62, no. 121, same year as the Edessan conspiracy theory, above, 190).
- 8) Hnān-Ishō‘ in the region of Ḥadītha on the Tigris (62, no. 122).
- 9) Abbā Shammāshā near al-Anbār (63, no. 123).

According to Brock (1980-81, 13), the monastery of Mār Eugenius in Mount Izlā, the activity of which is only attested from the seventh-eighth century CE, was (re-)built during the Marwānid period.⁷ A symmetrical phase is attested in the West-Syrian world (Keser-Kayaalp 2019, 205), where Athanasius Ṣandalāyā, first metropolitan bishop of the province of Jazīra (r. ca. 121-37/740-55), undertook the erection of both an impressive cathedral in his see of Mayyafāriqīn, and a monastery at Tell Beshmē in the hills east of Edessa (Wood 2020, 367). Interestingly, two epigraphic testimonies prove this building activity: the first lays 16 kilometres north-west from Edessa (modern Büyük Keşlik) where “in the year 1059 AG (130/747-8)” a small “*dayrō* was founded” (syr. *ettaqqnat* is ambiguous) “by the care and effort of Muqīm the priest” (Moritz 1898, 138-41). The second piece of evidence is an inscription dedicating the church that “was built (*etbanni*)” for Mār Mēmā in the Lebanese village of Ehden. This construction followed a “great earthquake in Qābā, when its villages (*qūryas*) collapsed.” Unfortunately, the date is incompletely preserved,⁸ but Jean-Baptiste Yon suggests 1062 (132-3/750-1), shortly after the famous earthquake of January 131/749 (Yon and Nordguian 2010, 64-66).

The verb used in all these mentions vary, but it is generally a derivative of root *b.n.y* which can always be equivocal for “building” and “rebuilding.” Nevertheless,

none of these occurrences is ever specified as referring to a reconstruction and, thus, the parsimonious hypothesis would be to infer a new building. Summing up, the evidence does not suggest administrative ban or even restriction on the building and rebuilding of churches, at least in rural and/or monastic areas.

1.3. Laypeople investment and fiscal evasion

The above noted Canon 2 of 56/676, issued by the council of Dērēn implicitly shows that powerful laymen posed substantial competition to bishops. Although they received no preliminary episcopal endorsement, they were asking for consecration after “church or monastery [were] built in any town or village.” Indeed, the eastern Dyophysite monk Bar Penkāyē (ca. 67/687) complains that so many monasteries had been founded, in several of which “there is no one to open the doors (*Rīsh Mellē*, 147).” Michael Morony (1974, 126) and Wood (2018, 259-260) have pointed out that lay aristocrats (*bar ḥērē*, *bnay ḥērē*, *dihqāns*, possibly of *mawālī* status) had erected monasteries during the mid-second century AH. Thomas of Margā repeatedly criticises the foundation of most of these as being secularly motivated and rejoices of their abandonment or destruction. In one case, the founder, Ḥujayr, who undertook to build a convent without the consent of the metropolitan Aḥā (r. ca. 130/750), is presented as a “believer” but with “Mazdean customs.” Here, I assume that Thomas was elaborating on a legend grounded on the name of the “ruins,” “Ḥujayrābād,” which “are still known to this day (*Governors*, 136).” In contrast, the patronage of another rich layman rejoices the author: Shūbhā-l-Ishō‘, the member of a wealthy household of merchants who migrated from Hīra to Mosul in the early eighth century CE, dedicated his share of the family wealth to the monastery of Bēt ‘Abē. However, he was in the position to negotiate with the abbot to receive an equivalent grant of land (at Bēt Ḥabbā), to create his own autonomous branch there (Thomas of Margā *Governors*, 253-254). In secular terms, he seems to have transformed his cash capital into a prosperous land asset, a *villa rustica* under monastic status. This legal transfer resembles the *waqf* system that was just developing at the same time in Muslim neighbourhoods. Shūbhā-l-Ishō‘ perhaps expected to benefit from the tax exemption enjoyed by monasteries as, according to another Nestorian hagiographical chronicle, “it is not allowed to tax monks, bishops or

⁶ On these new Iraqi buildings, see also Amin Ali and Brelaud, this volume.

⁷ See also Fiey (1977, 135) and other references in Keser-Kayaalp (2019, 202-03).

⁸ “1xx2” AG: between 1002 (71/690-1) and 1092 (163/780-1) AG.

anyone vows himself and bears wool or retreats to the mountain from the cities (*amṣār*) with anything from the *jizya* or the *kharāj* (*Chronicle of Seert*, II-2, 292).” This general – and probably apocryphal – law is repeated in many other *ṣulḥ* collected by this anonymous Eastern-Syriac writer, probably contemporary to Thomas of Margā in the third/ninth century (*Chronicle of Seert*, II-2, 270, 278, 292, 299-300). In one instance, however, the author notes that the tax exemption is still of application “until today in this country” of Bēt Garmay (Kirkuk and al-Sinn, *Chronicle of Seert*, II-2, 313).

According to his Marwānid-period hagiographer, a similar exemption for “all the priests, monks, professors and chiefs of the Christians in all our empire” is said to have been obtained by John of Daylam (*Life of John of Daylam*, 139, above, 193). Thus, these repeated hagiographical claims suggest that this was certainly neither a systematic nor a universal privilege. Indeed, *ca.* 100/720, a *jizya al-ruhbān* is attested in an Egyptian manuscript (Munich Inv. Gr 294, l. 7 identified by M. Tillier and N. Vanthieghem).⁹ And Michael the Great also claims that, at the exact same time, the good caliph ‘Umar (II) b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99-101/717-720) “forbade and abolished taxes (*sheqlē*) on houses, legacies, and shares as well as rents levied for the churches, the convents and the poor (*Chronicle*, 456).” Moreover, half a century later, a contemporary of Shūbhā-l-Ishō ‘and Thomas of Margā, *qādī* Abū Yūsuf also suggests that monasteries could be acting as a sort of tax-haven. He reports that so-called vows of poverty of “the people of the *ṣawma*’s (recluses and stylites, see Pierre, 2020) and those who have become monks (*mutarahhibūn*) and residents (*qā’im*)” were potentially wealthy people trying to optimise their taxes. They have “transferred (*ṣayyarū*) what is theirs to someone who spends it on the convents” (Abū Yūsuf *al-Kharāj*, 135). To avoid tax evasion through investment in Christian sacred land, Abū Yūsuf commands “that the *jizya* is taken from them and that the person in charge (*ṣāhib*) takes it.” In other words, the best way to force monasteries not to grow at the expense of the public good was to regard the superior or abbot as legally responsible for the taxes levied on the wealth of his “monks.”

Abū Yūsuf’s recommendation probably reflects that the rules had been tightened shortly before the text was written, not only concerning earlier fiscal tolerance or flexibility on monasteries, but also within the frame of the spread of laws regulating and limiting Christian buildings.

2. THE TURN OF THE 140-80s/760-90s

Late-eight century stories reflect sudden restrictions on Christian religious architecture. Prohibitions accumulated gradually, mostly in those quarters reserved for Arabs-Muslims, the *amṣār*. These early restrictions led the competing churches to adapt to the new setting, like in, unexpectedly, exchanging their churches between Dyophysites and Miaphysites. Finally, the military crisis of the late 770s appears to have been a decisive turning point for the early enforcement of ever-tighter Islamic rules in Northern Syria.

2.1. Uncertainties and paradigm shifts

Ishō ‘Dnaḥ of Baṣra celebrates a bishop of Balad, Cyriacus the Great, who “built a magnificent cathedral church” (*Chastity*, 53-54, no. 101-02) under the rule of metropolitan Cyprian of Nisibis (r. *ca.* 121-150/740-67; Elias of Nisibis, *Chronicle*, 169 and 179). As Balad had been a Miaphysite-held town, this testimony perhaps bears witness of a new building. Yet, at the same time, in Cyriacus’ country of birth, Tīrhān, the Dyophysite bishop obtained that “a church for the Nestorians be built in Takrīt” (Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiasticum*, 2, col. 155-57 [trad. M. Mazzola]), which was the Miaphysite metropolitan see in the opposite side of the Tigris. Moreover, it appears that this “small church” “outside the city wall, by the Tigris,” was the result of a negotiation with the Jacobite metropolitan Paul of the Knūshyō (r. *ca.* 110-156/729-773, according to the contemporary *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 60, 107 and 178). To accept this construction, the latter asked him “to go to Nisibis and ask the Nestorians there: ‘Return the Jacobite churches that you took by force from them’ [...] and he supplicated the elder metropolitan Cyprian [...] and they returned the celebrated church of Mār Domitius.”¹⁰ This (extramural) concession for an *ex-nihilo* new church in the Jacobite metropolis is consistent with the identical foundation in Balad at the same time. However, the need to use an earlier “retroceded” foundation in the Nestorian-held metropolis of Nisibis as a bargaining chip might be the sign of a change, of a gradual decrease of official tolerance regarding the building of new churches.

According to Theophanes the Confessor (d. 817-18), Syria began to endure what Jean-Maurice Fiey calls the “Mansuran vexations.” Indeed, the apanagist governor

⁹ If it is not the *min jarba al-ruhbān*: “from the monks’ host”?

¹⁰ It is impossible to precisely date this exchange. Bar Hebraeus’ alleged date of 150/767 is most likely an extrapolation from the date of Cyprian’s death, but this really should be taken solely as the *terminus post quem* for the events.

Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Alī (r. 137-151/755-769), the Abbasid caliph’s uncle (Borrut 2011, 446-51) is associated with a dramatic increase of segregation and discrimination policies towards Christians. And the first measure, in 138-9/755-6, was of course the prohibition to “build new churches (*néai ekklesiiai*),” (*Chronographia*, 430) which suggests that this had been a normal practice until then.¹¹ In the following year, the above noted fiscal privileges were abolished (*Chronographia*, 430-31, quoted Levy-Rubin 2011, 101-02), which was a hard blow for investment and building in rural monasteries. Moreover, the Christian elites who were supposed to sponsor these constructions were expelled from public office in 141/759 (*Chronographia*, 431).

Finally, Theophanes dates the prohibition of all public processions and cross displays a decade later, in 150/767 (*Chronographia*, 439). This point is important, because this item is commonly associated with church building in the pre-*shurūt* lists of bans that were then flourishing in Islamic scholarship (below, 204-05). As a matter of fact, after the temples in Balad and Takrīt, new urban churches cease to be mentioned while the very last rural monasteries were being created. However, it is to be noted that the chronicler of Zuqnīn, a contemporary monk from the region of Amid, in Northern Mesopotamia, who stopped writing ca. 158/775, makes no mention of church being destroyed. Moreover, if he complains about huge vexations and harassment, all he refers to are instances of desperately prosaic fiscal bullying, which affected Muslims as well. Therefore, he is forced to admit that he cannot count the victims as martyrs, because the oppression had no religious motivation (*Zuqnīn*, 173-74). Thus, if erecting new churches was possible in Balad and Takrīt, already difficult in Nisibis at the same period, and theoretically forbidden in Northern Syria, there is no sign of any attempt to knock down such “illegal” churches.

One of the many Abbasid-period legends that describes the archetypal misconducts of the last important pro-Umayyad governor of Iraq, Khālīd b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī (r. 105-20/724-38), accuses him of building a church for his Christian mother in Kūfa. At his time, it is to be assumed that this was still regarded as acceptable outside the Islamic city-camp (*miṣr*), but the outrage in this instance occurred because Khālīd ordered its construction inside. Ibn al-Kalbī (late second century AH) even suggests a location for the “church [...] which is now the Sikka al-Barīd in Kūfa (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 286).” Al-Balādhurī then quotes additional – detailed but contradictory – traditions he received from various Iraqi informants. Some stated that the governor

only arranged a private church “inside the Palace of Command (*Qaṣr al-Imāra*)” to convince his mother to join him in Iraq (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, 9, 63-64). Nevertheless, others even explained that the church in question was actually built... in Syria, where she lived. Therefore, most of these legends might have been produced on the basis of snippets of information, like a single poetic distich attributed to al-Farazdaq (d. ca. 110/730), who claims: “He built a church with a cross for his mother/ and for the churches he destroyed our mosques!” As such, two generations later Ibn al-Kalbī and al-Haytham b. ‘Adī could only guess its location: “in the post office, or maybe/also in the neighbourhood of the *Labādiyyūn* (etc)” (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, 9, 63-64).

In fact, this chimeric legend reflects many apologetic hyperboles that spread in this headquarters of the pietist milieu in Iraq against their pro-Umayyad governor. Grievances against Khālīd were many, and a “group of Kufan” testified that, for the inauguration of the mosque’s basin, he asked “a bishop to ‘Invoke upon us the *baraka*, for, by God, by your invocation, I pray for myself against the propaganda of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib!’” Finally, some peddled in far-fetched slander: “He ordered the muezzins not to call for prayer until the Christians had struck their *si-mandron* (*nāqūs*, al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, 9, 63-64).” This last accusation is a clear narrative inversion of one of the bans listed alongside church building and procession making, later gathered as clauses of the “*shurūt* of ‘Umar.”

2.2. Bans on Christian visibility (only) in the *amṣār*

Khālīd’s anti-Umayyad opponents obviously wanted him to be regarded as the worst Muslim ever born, and crypto-Christianity offered good ammunition for this argument, especially during the early Abbasid period. However, the important thing here was not church building *stricto sensu*, even with undue use of public money, but its occurrence inside the *miṣr* of Kūfa. This archetypal Islamic abode was supposed to have been built by and for the conquerors and the emigrants (*muhājirūn*) on God’s path. Indeed, Khālīd was also accused of granting the same right to Christians in Baṣra, the southern *miṣr* of Iraq. On the one hand, this legend strongly suggests Christian/Muslim cohabitation within the *amṣār*, as textual and archaeological evidence also demonstrates, for instance in Umayyad Fuṣṭāṭ (Dridi, this volume). This fact might explain the recognition of several locations of “ancient” churches within the *amṣār* throughout the Abbasid era.

¹¹ See the consistent dating of the latest inscriptions at Umm al-Raṣāṣ in Gatier (2011).

On the other hand, these tropes about Khālid's crypto-Christianity were, as well as many other archetypal misbehaviours, a mean to draw the line between the good tradition (*sunna*) and the wrong innovation (*bid'a*). On this matter, Great Qādī Abū Yūsuf quotes a tradition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d. 67/687) that clearly distinguishes between the two types of urban settlements:

1) In the *amṣār* founded by the Arabs, they must refrain from making new (*h.d.th.*) building of any church (*binā' bī'a aw kanīsa*), ringing the *simandron* (*nāqūs*), displaying wine, or having pigs.

2) However, in the cities (*madīnas*) founded by non-Arabs (*'ajam*) [... they] have the right to do what is said in the established documents: the Arabs have a duty to honour it (*al-Kharāj*, 162).

What the verb *h.d.th.* means here is unclear. It could be the same as "building a new construction," as in Theophanes' *néa ekklesiāi*, or simply "renew," "restore" or "reconstruct." The various possible interpretations may lead to different legal consequences. Indeed, the root's possible double – or triple – meaning became quite useful when scholars and emirs began to tighten the legislation regarding religious freedom during the first century of Abbasid rule (132-232/750-846). Its interpretation might have evolved from newly-built churches (*ca.* 150/767) to their expansion (*ca.* 200/816), then to re-building (*ca.* 220/834), and finally even to restoration of old churches (for the precise timeline see below, 206-07). In any case, whatever the original meaning was – probably that of Theophanes – the ban was originally restricted to the *amṣār*. This is why anti-Umayyad Iraqi storytellers insisted on Khālid al-Qasrī's reversal of the ethical and legal order regarding *adhan* and *simandron*, or mosque and church. The purpose of these accounts was to depict *simandron* and churches as an evil to expel from the *miṣr* to protect *adhan* and mosques. This reassessment of the Islamic hierarchy was exactly what a *muhtasib* was supposed to do: prescribing what was good and forbidding what was wrong.

In reasserting this, the second/eighth-century inhabitants of the conurbation of Kūfa-Ḥīra (syr. 'Āqūlā) were in fact defining an essential principle: the *miṣr* (Kūfa) was a *colonia* for Muslims, and Christian presence there had to be limited, if not segregated. In contrast, indigenous *madīnas* (like Ḥīra) consisted in autonomous *municipia*, free to behave according to what their *ṣulḥ* granted them. Thus, the events and their narrative development during the 110-40/730-60 brings another consistent clue for the dating of the early prohibition of non-Muslim public buildings or processions within the *amṣār*. Indeed, much of the ornamental, architectural, and epigraphic features that have been discovered in the monasteries of Ḥīra date back to this century of church bans in Kūfa (al-Kaabi

2012). This could be a sign of the confessional rationalisation of the two urban spaces. This also might replicate and explain emir Maslama b. Mukhallad's choice before the "*jund*" of Fustāt to let the Christians build a church (*ca.* 62/682), on the basis that it was "not in your *qayrwān* (also in Dridi, this volume)." Judge Ibn Lahī'a (r. 155-74/772-90) transmitted this information a century later (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 159) just like his contemporary (and superior) Abū Yūsuf quoted Mukhallad's contemporary, Ibn 'Abbās (above). Both seem to have been convinced by the argument that, as long as the sacred abode of the Muslims was safe, Christians could erect whatever they wished "outside, in their land! (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 159)." Thus, Ibn Lahī'a recognises and accepts that many churches in Egypt were indeed Islamicate buildings (below, 203).

Traditionists 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211/827) and Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224/838) take from Ibn 'Abbās that "in every *miṣr* that the Arabs made (*maṣṣara*), no people of the *dhimma* build churches (*bī'a*)." The ban on wine, pigs, and, of course, ringing the *simandron* was also to be enforced ('Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 6, 60, no. 10 002 and 10, 320, no. 19 234; Abū 'Ubayd, *Amwāl*, 126, no. 269. Al-Ṣan'ānī also quotes al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) who was said to have explained the good *sunna* "that the churches that are in the *miṣr*-s, old and new (*al-qadīma wa-l-ḥadītha*), should be destroyed." Interestingly, this tradition also proves that churches had actually been built in Muslim cities, at least until his and Khālid al-Qasrī's time. It also indicates that the bans were getting tighter: it was not only church-building that was forbidden anymore, but even the simple presence of churches in the *miṣrs*. Indeed, al-Ṣan'ānī also quotes Wahb b. Nāfi's claim that "the ancient (*al-qadīma*) churches (*kanā'is*) [...], I witnessed that they were destroyed; then they were rebuilt [... and] Umar [II] destroyed them a second time" ('Abd al-Razzāq *Muṣannaf*, 6, 60, no. 10 001 and 10, 319-20, no. 19 231-2; Levy-Rubin 2011, 65 and 75-76).

In other words, pre-Islamic churches in the *amṣār* were fictionally said to have been destroyed during the Medinese conquests. Paradoxically, it was assumed at the same time that these Islamic cities had no pre-Islamic roots. In consequence, the very existence of these churches was the unbearable evidence of Umayyad-period constructions. The righteous Caliph 'Umar II was then presented as having struggled to enforce the original *sunna*, which was in fact just being invented. Thus, he logically had to forbid the evil practice of Christian constructions/reconstructions during the previous century. Scholars were advising the Abbasid rulers to imitate his example: 1) To let no ancient church be renewed in the *miṣr*-s, and 2) if possible, to destroy all of them because

in a *miṣr*, every church had to be recognised – theoretically but erroneously – as a post-Islamic one.

Again, in all the three traditions quoted above, neither the construction ban nor the destruction order was to be applied in indigenous *madīnas*.¹² Moreover, ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s Medinese tradition establishes that “in places where a *ṣulḥ* was signed, the Muslims are to fulfil (*yafū*) [it...]” (‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 6, 60, no. 10 002 and 10, 320, no. 19 234). As for Ibn Abī Shayba, he clearly states that “only in a city established or settled by the Arabs, where there was no contract (*‘ahd*), could the rules of the Muslim *miṣr* be applied” (Ibn Abī Shayba *Muṣannaf*, 6, 467; quoted by Levy-Rubin 2011, 65). Thus, indigenous communities were authorised to build – or at least enlarge or repair – churches and monasteries as long as they did not interfere with an Islamic urban settlement.

2.3. The crisis of 161-3/778-80, the “zealot (*muḥtasib*)” and the Mahdī

We have seen that even if the Abbasid governor Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Alī had already forbidden “new churches” in Syria in 138/755-6, the strict enforcement of this ban is never attested in the Jazīra before the author of Zuqnīn stopped writing his chronicle in the mid-150s/770s. While the *sigillion* (two-seals letter) became essential in the Caliph’s relationship with the Patriarchs, local emirs also gave sealed approvals to most of the construction demands emanating from the country’s prelates (Wood, in this volume; and below, 207). Nevertheless, the situation of the *dhimmīs* was gradually becoming more difficult, and contemporaries witnessed the sudden emergence of controversial fiscal practices like tagging the hands, in 156/773 (Theophanes *Chronographia*, 446 and 456; Zuqnīn, 123-24).

When, “al-Mahdī,” nicknamed as the eschatological “guide” of the *umma*, ascended to the position of Caliph (r. 158-69/775-85), the gap between the ban on new churches and reality reached intolerable levels. An exceptional testimony of this period is the epigraphic chronicle written on the southern wall of the church of Saint Sergius of Ehresh (modern Gümüşgün, 37°12’/37°50’), on the Upper-Euphrates, between Edessa in the Jazīra and Mar’ash in Northern Syria. In a unique sentence

for the year 163/779-780, the author recalls the forced conversion of Christian Arab people of Qinnasrīn, and the destruction of churches (Palmer 1993, 49; Fig. 4).¹³ The chronicle is framed by mentions of the Nativity and the Crucifixion, and five dates in between about the two major events of 1) the Hijra and 2) the battle of Ṣiffin 37/657, and also two more confidential and local events: 3) a famine in 64/683-4 and 4) a period of “darkness” in 74-5/693-4 (see also Debié 2015, 122-23). Then, a bizarre gap of 84 years separates this date and 5) the last line devoted to the year 161/777-8. It recounts the traumatic deportation “in captivity (*shebyō*)” of the Miaphysite inhabitants of the humid “valley (*‘umqō*) of Mar’ash” into Thrace “in the Land of the Romans (*Bēt R(h)ūmōyē*).” This communal catastrophe was written just before the date devoted to the Crucifixion and was thus supposed to make eschatological sense of the four much earlier dates in the seventh century CE.¹⁴

Finally, the incident of the destruction of churches of 1091 AG (163/779-80) was added afterwards as an eighth date, by a different hand – or a hastier one – as shown by the much worse calligraphy (Palmer 1993, 63-64):

The commander of the Believers (*amīrō d-mhaymnē*) came and entered (*‘all*) as far as the Jayḥūn and came back. He ordered churches to be pulled down (*d-neta’qqrān*) and the Tanūkōyē to become Muslims (*nhaggrūn*).

This second writer even forgot the name “Mahdī,” which was added on the block below. It is striking that the very wall where the chronicle was written (the southern one) most likely belongs to a recent (south-eastern) extension of an earlier church (below, 201). Thus, the latest inscription was added to draw a link with the traumatic context of the massive invasion of Byzantine general Michael Lakhanodrakon (Palmer 1993, 70), and of the military reaction of the caliphate.

Actually, all Greek, Syriac, and Arabic chronicles of the early ninth century CE recall this sudden event as a dramatic threat for the *dār al-Islām* (Theophanes *Chronographia*, 451-52; al-Wāqidī in al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 189, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 485-86; Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē in Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 479). More than traumatic only for the Syrian Orthodox community of Mar’ash, Lakhanodrakon’s assault was a warning-shot for the entire caliphate. Indeed, before this invasion,

¹² In this regard, the good reformer ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is also invoked in Syriac Christian apologetics as having restored the tax exemptions of the clergy and other ecclesiastical institutions (above, 199), on this “Umayyad hero” see Borrut (2011, 283-315).

¹³ Discovered by Chabot (1900, 287-88) and re-edited by Pognon (1907-08, 148-51, no. 84, pl. XXXIV); quoted by Brelaud, Daccache and Ruani (2020, 2).

¹⁴ The uniformity of the epigraphic version suggests that there was a first text, written or perhaps already engraved on the church in a first phase, during the eschatological moment of the 70s/690s.



Fig. 4. The church of Ehnes and its annalistic inscription (a) drawing of the church according to Palmer, 1993, 49 (my drawing) (b) Year 1089 (777-78) in the epigraphic chronicle (picture J.-B. Yon); (c) Year 1091 (779-80) in the epigraphic chronicle (picture J.-B. Yon).

there had only been an earlier, and very moderate and distant, threat in “Armenia IV” in *ca.* 153/770. Even though it was a far-off location, the caliphate had foreseen the potential consequences and “the inhabitants from Germanikéia [Mar’ash]” were pre-emptively “deported to Palestine (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 445).” But Michael Lakhanodrakon’s offensive was the first in more than 80 years to really endanger Northern Syria (see Bonner 1996, 72-74). Thus, it can be suggested that “year 1091” AG (163/779-80) was added as the direct consequence of “year 1089” AG. The event was quite memorable as the first direct participation of a Caliph in an invasion in Roman territory. Indeed, al-Mahdi’s

involvement in Northern Syria explains why he also had to deal in person with the Christian Arab troops of Tanūkh, who lived in a suburb of Qinnasrīn, the very army’s headquarters (*jund*).

In Michael the Great’s late composition, the account of their forced conversion (*Chronicle*, 478-479), well attested in at least two Arab-Muslim chronicles (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 145; al-Ya’qūbī, *Ta’rikh*, 2, 480), lays in the column dedicated to civil history. As for the destructions of “churches that were built at the time (*etbnīn b-zabnō*) of the *Tayyōyē*,” he wrote it in the *alia* (inner) column. His version suggests 1) that only *ex nihilo* buildings were targeted, but also 2) that al-Mahdi not only forbade them

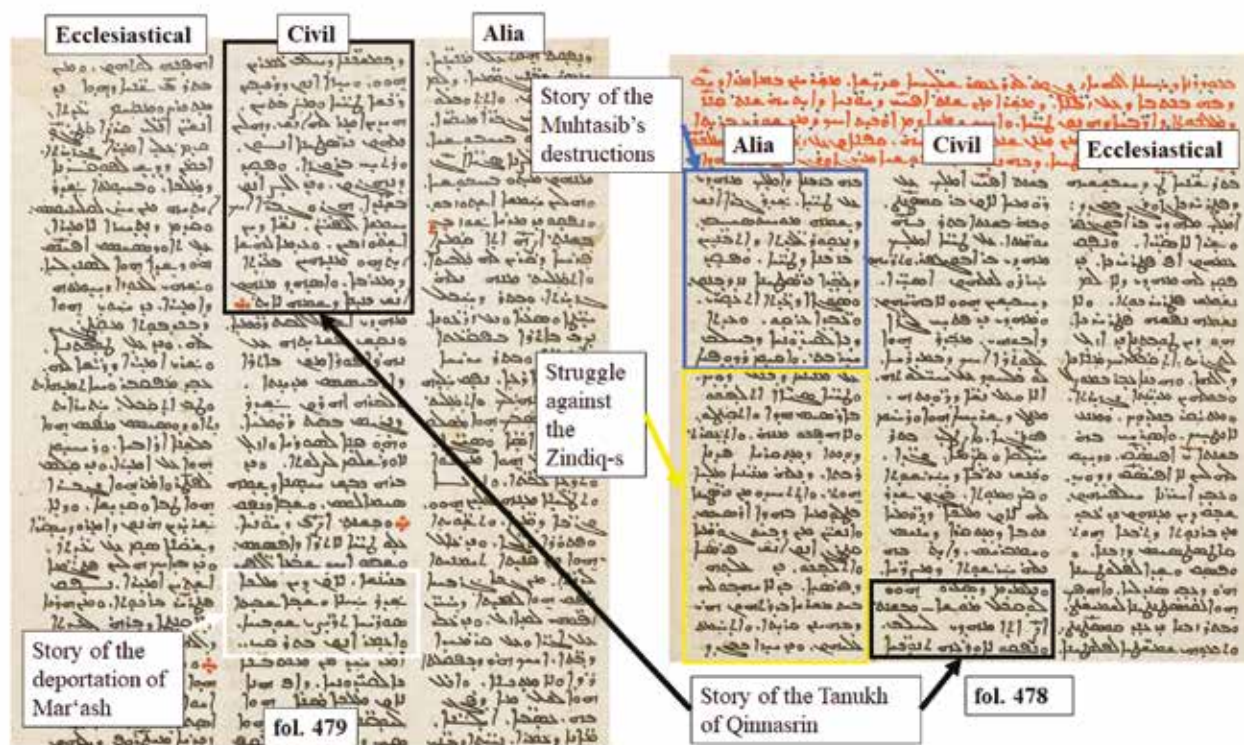


Fig. 5. Double page 478 and 479 of Michael the Great (Ms Aleppo 250); showing the distribution of the events of 162-63/779-80 into both civil and alia columns; source : <https://w3id.org/vhmm1/readingRoom/view/500917>

but undertook “to pull down (*ne’qūr*)” all the churches suspected of having been erected after the conquest. To the best of my knowledge, it was the first time such destructions were implemented outside of a traditional *miṣr*. Michael the Great lays the responsibility for these exactions with “a man called *Mūhtasīb*” (*Chronicle*, 478; Fig. 5). Obviously, he misunderstood his source and mistakes the role for a name (see Wood, in this volume).

Moreover, it has to be said that, at this stage, *muhtasib* was not yet the official title of the *ṣāhib al-sūq* that it became under al-Māmūn (r. 198-216/813-33), but a more informal “prescriber of the good and preventer of the evil” (Cahen *et al.* 2012, “Ḥisba”). This is exactly what Theophanes translates (from the Arabic?) a “zealot (*zēlōtēs*),” called “Moukhesias” (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 452-453). This figure appears to have been concerned with the new churches but also – and foremost – with the slaves of the Christians that could be considered Muslims (“converted” for Theophanes), and were to be freed or “sold” to Muslims buyers (according to Michael; also Wood, in this volume). Both were attacks against Christian property, collective (represented by the churches), and private (by the slaves). The third issue is obviously the forced conversion of Christian elites. Theophanes described this event in the province of Homs (Mid-Northern Syria). If this is connected with the Syriac textual – and epigraphic – tradition about the forced conversion of the Christian Tanūkh of Qinnasrīn, it is plain that both concern people that could be regarded as Muslims by virtue of their

military service or public office, which were previously declared closed to Christians, in 141/759 (above, 198). As a matter of fact, this sequence of forced (re-) conversions of Christianising military or administrative officers sounds as the very context of the sudden spread of Chalcedonian neo-martyrs – and neo-martyrdoms – during the 150s-60s/770s-80s (see Sahner 2014, 95).

Actually, an Arab-Islamic information (*khavar*) converges in referring to a *muhtasib* of caliph al-Mahdī, but in this case called ‘Abd al-Jabbār. He was sent to the same military zone of Northern Syria (Dābiq), but in this case to repress the Manichean *zindīq*-s heresy (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3, 449). Michael is also aware of their persecutions, which he quotes in the same column (Fiey 1980, 35; see also Shahid 1984, 424-25), though without direct reference to the *muhtasib* (Fig. 6).

Summing up, Lakhanodrakon’s *razzia* in Northern Syria was such a threat for the safety of the Islamic Empire that it pushed Caliph al-Mahdī to take the lead of the army as far as the Jayhān/Pyrame. Thus, he invented what was to become a legal tradition for his successors, which can be connected to the contemporary emergence of the *jihad* incentive ideal. Indeed, al-Mahdī also reacted to this shock on the ideological level, especially by adopting a policy of Islamisation of the *jund* and of repression of every kind of non-conforming elites. Why did his *muhtasib* also order the destruction of churches? First, it reflects a caesura in the long-term evolution of Muslim scholars regarding the Christian clergy (Pierre 2022). Second, in

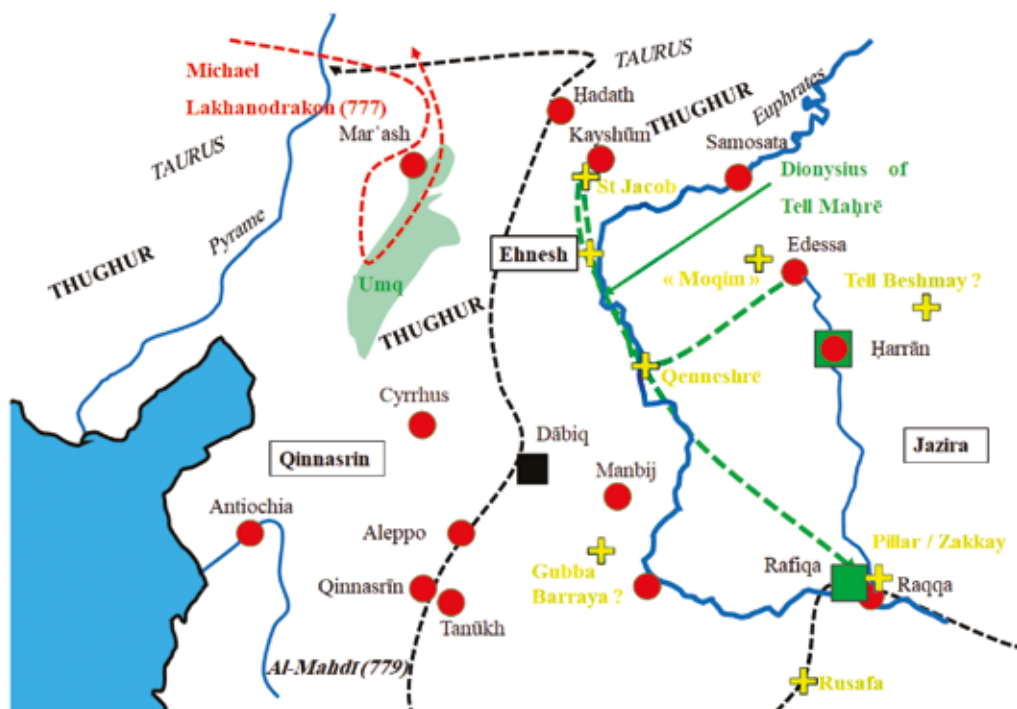


Fig. 6. Map of Northern Syria between 160/777 and 210/825.

a list that Abū Yūsuf copied in his *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, the prohibition of new churches features as first clause. Thus, even if they remained legal outside the *amṣār*, they were a sticky point in all political reform towards the *dhimmīs*. Third, it appears that the issue was already raised to the Caliph on his way from Baghdad to Northern Syria:

When al-Mahdī entered Mosul, the Christians came to complaint (*mazālim*) to him because of the destruction of their church (*bī'a*). [...] Because some people of the church (*bī'a*) known as St Thomas (Mār-Tūmā) [...] had brought into the [territory] of the church something that was not there [before]. Thus, the Muslims mobilised in Mosul and the people gathered and destroyed it (al-Azdī, *al-Mawṣil*, 244, mentioned by Fiey 1980, 20-21; Wood 2020, 371, n. 79).

This Arab-Muslim *khbar* from Mosul thus appears to have been the first step in al-Mahdī's (and his *muḥtasib*'s) dramatic reformation policies to right wrongs in the Jazīra, Qinnasrīn, the *thughūr*, Homs, and Damascus, between 162/779 and 163/781 (depending on the source). In Mosul, the Muslim community had accused a Christian local community of “annexing into (*aḍāfa ilā*)” their church a building that did not appear in the original cadastre.

Yet, the severity of the destruction sentence – probably imposed by the first local *qādī* of the city, Bakkār b. Shurayḥ al-Khawlanī, appointed in 156/774 (al-Azdī, *al-Mawṣil*, 225) – appears to have been unusual, and surprising for the Christians: a sign of a shift in the *sunna* paradigms. Nevertheless, al-Mahdī ruled on the case, and it is interesting to note that he needed no recourse to either a precedent of caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 12-23/634-644) or to a Prophetic *ḥadīth*. He sovereignly condemned “the Christians to extract 400 cubit (*dhirā'*)¹⁵ as a compensation for their illegal extension, without ordering any further destruction. As legislator and *imām*, he recognised the *sunna* professed by the Muslim elites, but he still wanted to transact with the Christian leaders. Then, “he ordered a mosque to be built with his money,” which could have been regarded as illegal by later scholars. This kind of pragmatic deal may be the reason why, before the 150s/770s, the anonymous of Zuqnīn does not mention any enforcement of the ban on church-building after Šālih b. ʿAlī ordered it in Syria.

However, during the 150s-80s/770s-800s, it seems that a more radical pietist party opposed this. One of al-Mahdī's closest officials and cousin ʿAlī b. Sulaymān b. ʿAlī, appointed to govern Jazīra and Qinnasrīn during

his reign (Bonner 1996, 79), was probably one of the most motivated *muḥtasib* – in the non-official earlier sense of the later word. Indeed, after he was promoted *wālī* of Egypt (ca. 169-71/785-87) (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* 3: 521), al-Kindī admiratively recounts that “he acted with the ‘(well-)known (*ma'rūf*),’ and repelled the ‘rejected (*munkar*)’ and alcohol,” in an accurate definition of the goal of the *ḥisba*. Among his numerous *sunna*-reforms he is best known as the *wālī* who “destroyed the new churches (*kanā'is al-muḥaddatha*; Dridi, this volume).” After he was dismissed, his successor questioned both the great scholar al-Layth b. Sa'd (d. 175/791) and the first *qādī* of Egypt ʿAbd Allāh b. Lahī'a (r. 155-74/772-90). The latter “argued that most of the *kanīsas* in Egypt had been built “under Islam, during the time of the companions and successors” and thus all “the churches destroyed by ʿAlī b. Sulaymān we rebuilt” (al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 99-100). The respected scholar and judge clearly agreed with the policy of tolerance for churches, even when deemed to have been constructed during the early Islamic period. Their policy was, therefore, opposed to the one that Moukhesias/ʿAbd al-Jabbār adopted under al-Mahdī in Northern Syria.

Why Northern Syria and why during al-Mahdī's counteroffensive? My hypothesis is that this has something to do with the symbolic Islamisation of this region in the frontier, when ʿAlī b. Sulaymān, before being appointed in Fuṣṭāt, first undertook the fortification and Arab-Muslim colonisation of the Taurus city of al-Ḥadath (modern Gölbaşı), which means that he created a *miṣr* (below, 205). Then, as a governor of Jazīra, he ordered the *sūq* of al-Raqqā to be relocated outside the walls of the indigenous *madīna* (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 180 and 190): another essential task for a *muḥtasib*, especially in its final later form. Some churches were destroyed all over Northern Syria because they looked recent, especially when, as in Mosul in the same year, they had had an extension room – a southern narthex, a *parecclesion*, a *martyrion*, or a *bēt šlūtō* (etc., see Keser-Kayaalp, 2019 and this volume) – added. It might be exactly the same kind of room as the one built on the southern side of Ehresh, on whose wall the exceptional chronicle was written after 161/777-78 (Fig. 4). Why the church of Ehresh was spared in 163/779-80 remains unknown. However, as it stands, the latest chronicler was clearly aware of the links between all the traumatic events that occurred in the same *thughūr* region: threatened by the Byzantine offensive and by al-Mahdī's counter-offensive, and also concerned by his *muḥtasib*'s actions around Dābiq, and by the forced conversion of the Tanūkh of Qinnasrīn (Fig. 6).

¹⁵ 400 cubits equals 250 m in length or 163 m².

The Byzantine invasion of 777-8 was certainly not the only reason behind this huge reformist movement. However, it seems to have been a decisive trigger for it, as the sudden acceleration of military events also caused a rush of legal literature about war (*siyar*) (De Jarmy 2022, 86-87). This was related to the rise of the Prophet's figure – and ‘his’ caliphs – and especially to their involvement in the (sometimes eschatological) war against the Romans. And al-Mahdī probably was the first caliph to ‘fulfill’ this military ‘duty’ as well as being the first to focus so much on the symbolic war against non-Islamic ideas and behaviours. In this way, the reformer took upon him the burden to restrict the liberties of the dhimmis, to ban or convert non-Muslims in the Islamic armies and administration and, of course, to forbid church building.

3. FIVE DECENNIAL WAVES OF DESTRUCTIONS: EXTENSION OF THE *MİŞR* DOCTRINE TO THE INDIGENOUS *MADĪNAS*

In the introduction, I cite Patriarch Dionysius of Tell Mahre's description of the conspiracy theory invented in 180/796-7 by the Muslims of Edessa in order to demolish the church (above, 190-91). Their fanciful denunciation of a collusion of Syriac Christians with the Byzantines shows how church building and rebuilding had then become a matter of intercommunal systemic competition before the caliphate.

On the one hand, Muslims were using the new anti-Christian principles defended by “zealots” to compel the imamate to back their interests. On the other hand, Christians requested help by appealing to the pragmatic administration of the *sulṭān*. In Dionysius' tale, the general secretary of caliph Hārūn, vizir Yaḥyā b. Khālīd b. Barmak,¹⁶ advises the good king to reject these accusations (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 483). If the Christians of Edessa were not guilty of spying for the enemy, their *ṣulḥ* was to be respected. Thus, ‘Umar II's authority was invoked to defend both extreme options, and he was even cited for a balanced opinion: “Do not destroy any church [...] and do not *ḥ.d.th* any church [...]” (Abū ‘Ubayd, *Amwāl*, 126 (no. 262); al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2, 1371; see Levy-Rubin 2011, 101).” It could also be alleged that the city of Edessa had become an Islamic *mīṣr* through demographic change. The impending question was then to define what was or was not a *mīṣr*, as by then many Muslims lived in mixed neighbourhood in the *madīnas*.

3.1. “Miṣrization” of the Middle East

At that time, Great *Qādī* Abū Yūsuf was among the first legal experts to write an entire treaty on the relations between the state and non-Muslims, especially Christians in Syria and Iraq. In one case, he states on his own authority – with no *isnād* at all – that they cannot “*ḥ.d.th* the building of *bī‘as* or *kanīsas* in a *madīna* apart from those on which they have received the *ṣulḥ* and have received the *dhimma*: then this *bī‘a* or *kanīsa* is theirs.” Therefore, the theoretical principle, later inscribed in the “*shurūṭ* of ‘Umar,” depended on what was written in the peace treaty. However, it is unclear whether the churches in question were listed in these *ṣulḥ*s. According to this hypothesis, freedom of *ḥ.d.th* church (from now on in the sense of repair/rebuild) was restricted to what was reputedly built in pre-Islamic times. But this could also be an allusion to the fact that some *ṣulḥ*s continued authorising new churches.

At the close of the eighth century, Abū Yūsuf still knew nothing about any “*shurūṭ* of ‘Umar” either, but he quotes various lists of bans. The longest one is attributed to the companion and conqueror of Syria Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 18/639), through a fanciful *isnād* passed by the semi-legendary Makhūl the Syrian (d. ca. 110/730), and “a man.” It consists of twelve points: naturally, the first (no.1) ban regards the “*bīya‘* and *kanā‘is*” which are to be “left (alone?)” as long as the Christians “do not *ḥ.d.th*” any. However, many other points (no. 6, 10, 11, and 12) regard publicity of the Christian cult (crosses, *simandron*, banners, processions, and feasts). A closer analysis of the text shows that no. 10 and 11 were modified before Abū Yūsuf copied them:

10. They shall not sound their *simandron*-s <either> before our call to prayer <or during theirs> [...]

12. They shall not bear weapon on the day of their feast <nor shall they have weapon in their homes.>

The *wa-lā* is not introducing an added complementary proposition, it is here to contradict the earlier one. Indeed, it could be alleged that, during Makhūl's time, the *simandron* was only forbidden before the *adhan*, as in Khālīd al-Qasrī's inverted misbehaviour (above, 198). The point was to avoid disturbing or delaying the *adhan*. It is likely that it was only later that its noise was banned every time. Likewise, under the Marwānids, weapons were banned for obvious security reasons during mass religious festivals. It was probably only later that wearing swords was prohibited for *dhimmīs* all the time.

¹⁶ Robinson (2000, 12) understood him to be Yaḥyā b. Aktham, a confusion based on other evidence presented by Fiey (1980, 70) for 200/815-6, see below, 205-06.

The second interesting observation of this list is that points 6 and 7 only ban crosses and pigs outside a “Muslim environment,” or “Muslim houses,” which means *miṣr*-like cities or neighbourhoods. This implies that Abū Yūsuf still allowed public crosses in indigenous cities (Abū Yūsuf, *Kharāj*, 152; partly cited by Lévy-Rubin 2011, 71-72). Indeed, he firmly establishes it elsewhere: “It is tolerated for them to live in the *amṣār* and the markets of the Muslims, [...] but not to sell either wine or pigs, and without displaying crosses [...] (*Kharāj*, 140).” In other words, there were segregated spaces: 1) on the one hand the Muslim neighbourhoods (*amṣār*), where the *sunna* was to be enforced and Christian visibility reduced, and 2) on the other hand the indigenous neighbourhoods (*madīnas*) where Christians were free to do whatever they wanted, with the sole condition that they would not disturb the Muslims. Abū Yūsuf’s younger colleague al-Shaybānī (d. ca. 188/804) had more extreme opinions; he thought that Christians were not welcome at all in the *amṣār*, like, for instance, in the new Islamic city of Rāfiqa, founded ca. 155/772, where he had been appointed *qādī*. However, he is perhaps more tolerant regarding their need to “make new (*h.d.th*)” churches in their indigenous towns and villages, like, for example, in the twin city of Rāfiqa, the ancient *madīna* of Raqqal Callinicon. This reasoning probably explains the decision by governor ‘Alī b. Sulaymān to relocate the market between the two cities (above, 203). His contemporary al-Shāfi‘ī also agrees on the exceptionality of the *miṣr*, defined as a “city conquered by force, or a country (*bilād*) where there was no *dhimmī*,” but also, of the complete freedom to renovate and even expand the churches in the “villages” of the non-Muslims (al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm*, 4, 218; more details in Levy-Rubin 2011, 79-84).

For that theoretical purpose, al-Shaybānī is among the first to extend the definition of the *miṣr* to many categories of former indigenous cities and towns where “Muslims have undertaken to set up a *miṣr*.” In other words, Muslims could seize an indigenous land, village or even city and turn it into a Muslim *colonia*. This new kind of *deductio* implied the compelling order “to take and destroy their *bī’a*-s and their *kanīsa*-s from this place” (al-Shaybānī, *Aṣl*, 7, 549-550). A *qādī* of the next generation, Abū ‘Ubayd (d. 224/838), defines three categories of “*miṣr*-making (verb *maṣṣara*):” 1) the Arabian “converted” cities, 2) the regular foundations as Kūfa and Baṣra, and 3) any city “conquered ‘by force’ (*anwat^m*) that the *imām* [caliph] did not ‘return’ to its inhabitants by sovereign decision.” Abū ‘Ubayd provides here an interesting

illustration: “like in the [Byzantine] frontier (*thughūr*),” where he coincidentally just had been appointed *qādī* of Tarsus (Abū ‘Ubayd, *Amwāl*, 179, no. 269).” Thus, this helps to explain the legal reasoning behind the first systematic destruction of churches in 163/779-80: it occurred between Dābiq, Mar‘ash, al-Ḥadath and Ehresh: which is the perimeter of the *thughūr* of Qinnasrīn.

Indeed, when ‘Alī b. Sulaymān was appointed in Egypt, he was replaced in Northern Syria by his cousin ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ṣāliḥ (r. 168-181/785-797),¹⁷ who, according to a Syriac witness, ordered in 177/793 “that churches standing west of the Sanga River be demolished, and that a wall be erected with their carved stone.” Apparently, this was only ordered for practical reasons and, fortunately for us, the church of Ehresh was spared, probably because of its more remote location. However, this was not the case of the closer town of Kayshūm (30 km away) where, according to Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē, “the great church was razed” (1234, 2, 3). Strikingly, Michael the Great quoted the same information, but mixed it up with the conspiracy theory of Edessa in 180/796-97 (*Chronicle* 482). However, could a hinterland city like Edessa also be regarded as a *miṣr*? This was perhaps the case according to the definition given by a master of Ibn Abī Shayba: a place which was “established or settled by the Arabs” (*Muṣannaf*, 6, 467). In other words, this process of “*miṣrization*” of indigenous cities in the Northern provinces of the caliphate was the second step for the enforcement of church bans outside historical *amṣār*.

Nevertheless, al-Shaybānī recalls that the segregated spatial system implied the reciprocal right for the Christians whose town had become a *miṣr*, “to build [a church] outside the *miṣr*,” as a replacement (al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl*, 7, 549-50). This is perhaps the case of the churches in Qūbbē, a site probably outside the city centre of Ḥarrān (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 505 and 529 and 1234, 2, 10-13 and 29-30, see below, 207).

3.2. Ḥarrān, Edessa, Mosul and Takrīt as new Muslim *amṣār*?

Finally, after the use of the stone blocks for the walls at Kayshūm and the aborted plot in Edessa, the first real order to demolish churches in the *thughūr* was issued by Hārūn in 191/807 (interestingly the same year Abū ‘Ubayd was appointed in Tarsus). As this instruction is left unexplained in our sources – no punishment for helping the enemy, no wall to build, no “new church”

¹⁷ Al-Mahdī, al-Hādī, and al-Rashīd alternated the cousins Banū Sulaymān (‘Alī) and Banū Ṣāliḥ (al-Faḍl then ‘Abd al-Malik) in Qinnasrīn, Jazīra, or both (also Khalīfa, *Tārīkh*, 440-41; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 180 and 190; Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 479).

argument – Fiey defines it as the first instance of anti-Christian persecution (Fiey 1980, 44). Indeed, he underlines that al-Ṭabarī conflates this event with the order to “the *ahl al-dhimma* in Baghdad to adopt an appearance and clothing different from the Muslims” (al-Ṭabarī *Tārikh*, 3, 713). A contemporary informant of the tenth-century historian al-Azdī also mentions the “dress code (*libās*)” restrictions imposed in Mosul the same year, but he does not connect it with any instance of church destruction. Moreover, in Abū Yūsuf’s *Kitāb*, a decade earlier, the *libās* and other related issues were recorded in separated lists. As such, this historical information (*khabar*) establishes a significant *terminus post quem* for the early merge of these distinct categories of anti-Christian policy and dispositions concerning churches and *simandra*.

However, the coincidence is striking, and a Syriac text also confirms that, the same year, “an order was issued to destroy the churches in the region of the frontier (*tagrō* from ar. *thaghr*, pl. *thughūr*), and every new church.” This is the third piece of evidence that we have, after the events of 163/779 and 177/793, indicating that this issue was related to the Byzantine frontier issue, and above all the first to say so explicitly. Here, it is connected with the second conspiracy theory mentioned in the introduction, when the schismatics from Gūbbā Barrāyā accused Patriarch Cyriacus of building churches in the “Land of the Romans” (*Bēt R(h)ūmōyē*) (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 488-90). In other words, church-building in the *thughūr* was presented as complicity with the enemy, as it could be put under Byzantine control. Actually, it is not certain that Hārūn waited for the Gūbbā denunciation to order these destructions. However, Michael’s likely source, Dionysius of Tell Mahrē (d. 230/845), was obsessed by them and also needed to discharge the righteous Caliph of this deleterious command. Thus, the Patriarch choses to emphasise the diabolic zeal of Hārūn’s vizir, who even extended the demolitions to Antioch and Jerusalem.

Dionysius had good reasons to be obsessed with the Gūbbāns, as they became his worst enemies during his Patriarchate (r. 202-30/818-45; Wood 2021). He also accuses them of looting his monastery of Qenneshrē after it was attacked by rebels/bandits ca. 194/810 during the early months of the fourth *fitna*. This episode was certainly traumatic as it was, he claims, “the first convent to be burned under the empire of the Arabs (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 490-91).” This event is our best-starting point for the issue. Actually, a few months later, other rebels, Naṣr of Kayshūm – where Dionysius exiled himself at the Mār Jacob monastery – and ‘Amr, his ally from Samosata, arrived “in Ḥarrān and Edessa,” where they “burned many villages, churches and monasteries.”

All these events were undoubtedly a major precedent, although they were probably driven by greed rather than ideological reasons.

That said, at their arrival in the city, the same “Arabs from Edessa” than 15 years ago, again invited the rebels to extort a huge amount of money from the Christians while threatening to pull down the “*ciborium* of the church of the Christians” (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 492; Wood 2019, 376). This resembles the fine that legitimate governors levied from Christian communities for their churches. Indeed, the withdrawal of the central authority actually facilitated the rebuilding of churches in all the north-western regions. And Dionysius makes it clear that the rebels preferred “tribute (*madōttō*)” to conversion, and “many returned from the mosques to the churches (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 513).” Thus, as such the rebel’s rule seems to have been favourable to the building and restoration of churches, as when the pro-Abbasid governor Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī took back Ḥarrān ca. 200/815-16, he had to order the destruction of many churches that were whitewashed with lime and looked “new” (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 505; 1234, 2, 10-13).

This unprecedented decision reflects the changing atmosphere during the *fitna*. It reflects more hostility towards Christian constructions, but also perhaps stronger impact of emotions of the mob. Indeed, Dionysius explains that the governor was afraid as “many Muslims/Arabs are scandalised because you let them build [...] and that you received a gift for it,” in a clear allusion to a “fine”. In fact, after being visited by the hierarchs of the various churches’, Ibrāhīm allowed them to rebuild. These Christian elites probably had to afford heavy contributions for their proofs – like *ṣulḥs* – to be examined. In other words, they had to pay to enjoy the protection of the governor against the violence of the mob. Indeed, that same year, the Christians in Mosul, “collected 100,000 dirhams” to bribe *qādī* al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Ashyab (r. 199-206/814-21) “on the condition that he ruled in favour of building (*yahkum bihā hattā tubnā*).” Naturally, according to the apologetic tone of this *khabar*, he refused the money (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārikh Baghdād*, 8, 456). Interestingly, unlike in the same city in 162-63/779, it was not the Christians anymore who “exaggerated the scandal,” but the Muslims. In contrast to events in Fuṣṭāṭ in 171/787, when the *qādī* accepted the fact that the churches were post-Islamic, a generation later his peer ordered the “new church (*bī’a al-muḥaddatha*), [...] to be destroyed because [...] it was established, upon the presentation of the evidence (*li-thubūt al-bayyina ‘indahu*), that the church was new (*muḥaddatha*),” i.e. built under Islam (al-Azdī, *al-Mawṣil*, 340; quoted by Fiey 1959, 25 and

then Robinson 2000, 11-12). Summing up, the emotion of the common people and the arguments of the pietist party were now putting officials under constant pressure: any verdict in favour of the Christian rival elite would be regarded evidence of bribery.

Just a decade later, in 210/825, a new wave of destructions occurred in Northern Syria and Mesopotamia. We know that it began in Takrīt as an anti-tax reaction of “Arabs” or “Pagans,” who accused the metropolitan bishop Basilius of authorising *simandron*, pigs and wine at the expense of Muslims. The revolt ended with the supposed abolition of the *ṣulḥ* and the subsequent destruction of churches (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 506-07 and 513), which probably means that the city was turned into a *miṣr*. Described as a contagion, this legal and popular frenzy “spread” from Takrīt, as the “Arabs of Ḥarrān [...] seeing these things, were inclined to demolish the church and molest the Christians;” and finally reached Samosata. Here again, Dionysius prefers to charge the devastations to a malicious Chalcedonian scribe, and not to the young and inexperienced emir of Qinnasrīn-Jazīra, Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir (Wood, this volume). Dionysius’ brother was the bishop of Edessa, and he gives a list of the “the *diakonikon* and the sacristy [north] of the cathedral, the small *atrium* [external narthex] of the baptistery” but also the full “church of the XL Martyrs [...] and the basilica” and many other “constructions” (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 514) that were considered as new buildings and thus threatened with destruction. Dionysius and his brothers went to the elder brother of Muḥammad, ‘Abd Allāh, who was in Egypt, and they obtained a *sigillion* edict to have these churches protected or rebuilt (Wood, this volume). The good emir even stated that “the poor Christians did not even reconstruct 10 percent of the churches destroyed and burned by [the Muslims/the rebels?] (1234, 2, 16).” In exchange, the bishops offered to pay and reassess the *jizya* (“*qaraqat* = poll tax,” Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 516) a more official kind of “fine” or “bribe.”

None of these destructions were final, and the right to build new churches was never abolished, provided an emir gave a *sigillion*, as illustrated by the restored and reshaped monastic churches in the Miaphysite “world of Dionysius” (Wood 2021):

1) Inscriptions of the Dayr Suryānī in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn in Egypt show that the church was finished a few months after the death of his predecessor Cyriacus (202/817) (Innemée and Van Rompay 1998; Van Rompay and Schmidt 2001).

2) A few years after his election, in the early 210s/820s, Dionysius also obtained a *sigillion* to rebuild Qenneshrē and, perhaps, “other churches,” from the self-appointed emir of Northern Syria ‘Uthmān b. Thumāma (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 507).

3) A bilingual inscription at St Jacob of Kayshūm testifies that it was “built in the time of the blessed Dionysius and Theodore the bishop, Mārī was abbot.”¹⁸ It can be dated anytime between Dionysius’ election (and departure from Kayshūm) and the appointment of Theodore’s successor in the 840s (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 754-55, no. 55 and 92).

4. EPILOGUE: A DECENNIAL HYPOTHESIS

Evidence for church extensions and constructions in Edessa before the wave of destructions in *ca.* 210/825 can be extrapolated to Ḥarrān, where the first demolitions date back to *ca.* 199/815. Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē mentions two demolished churches in the neighbourhood of Qūbbē: the Theotokos and also “a part of Saint George.” It is surprising that the church of Aḥūdemmeh, attested eight years later in the same place according to colophons (*ca.* 208-09/823-24; see Wright 1870, 147-48, 151-52 and 154 – BL Add 14 485-14 487 and a mention in Wood 2021, 127) is not mentioned as having been attacked this year.

Thus, it can be hypothesised that, on the one hand, like in Mosul in 162/779, the “part of Saint George” at hand was an illegal extension of the church. It may have consisted in a narthex, a parecclesion, a *bēt ṣlūtō* or, any kind of chapel, *prothesis*, or *martyrion*, like the south-eastern room with the inscription of Ehresh, or again like the “*diakonikon*, sacristy or *atrium*” erected by Dionysius’ brother in Edessa. On the other hand, the church of Aḥūdemmeh was built only between 200/815 and 218/824, following emir Ibrāhīm’s reconstruction order. As such, Mār Aḥūdemmeh was probably a church founded within the extension of St George that was first demolished and then reconstructed, and then officially dedicated to this saint. Finally, the only evidence concerning Ḥarrān and the churches of George and Aḥūdemmeh concerns a third wave of destruction in 220/834, once again caused by a riot of the Muslim “crowd (*shūqōyē*).” It proves at this stage the very existence of the church of Aḥūdemmeh as a “newly built” one (Michael the Great *Chronicle*, 519; 1234, 2, 29-30; Wood 2021, 105).

¹⁸ Moritz (1898, 131-35); BAH 12 / IGLS 1, 58-61; Gatier (2011-12, 28) Gr. *Ἐν τοῖς ἐμέραις διονυσίου patriarchῆς καὶ Θεόδωρος ἐπίσκοπος*; Syr. *Etbannī b-yawmay ṭūbtōtō Mār(i) Dyntyūs Patrikō Sūryō, w-Mār(i) Tāyūdūrō epīqūpō, Mārī rēsh dayrō*.

From the closing years of al-Manṣūr's reign, list of bans for *dhimmīs* within the *ṣulḥ* texts they were able to reach, were intended to precisely define what was or was not tolerable, inside and outside the *amṣār*. The gradual spread of prohibitions against Christian worship visibility matches a broader increase in hostility against Christianity, and the more frequent ideological recourse to the good *sunna*. Lakhanodrakon's invasion of Northern Syria in 150/777 was not the cause of this intolerant *zeitgeist*, but it may have been the trigger for its sudden acceleration, perhaps not unlike the West's reaction to 9/11. Muslim Scholars, pious *muḥtasibs*, local elites and Arab-Muslim crowds saw their interests, logics, and views drawing closer to each other, leading to a focus against Christian cult and church-building (Levy-Rubin 2011, 74). At first, even if these zealots were willing to destroy all the churches built after the conquest, pious but rational *qāḍī*-s were aware this was legal nonsense. In Mosul in 162/779, and again in Fuṣṭāṭ in 171/787, this pragmatic policy explains the somewhat apologetic tropes used by Christian writers: 1) calumnious denunciations and illegal attacks by the evil crowds, in opposition to 2) the good princes acting with justice and restoring rights.

However, the following generation of religious scholars began to establish that all ex-nihilo buildings were theoretically prohibited (Wood 2020, 371-76). The pressure on emirs and caliphs that were still willing to help the Christian clergy in exchange for – legal or illegal – money, as they could no longer invoke diverging *sunnas*, most of which had been forgotten or corrected, was becoming unbearable. According to this hypothesis, the numerous instances of church destruction, especially in Northern Syria, Mosul, and the Jazīra during the lifetime of this generation of scholars reflect a redefinition of the *miṣr* as a place completely or partly occupied by Muslim settlers. It can be suggested that Edessa and Ḥarrān were in turn being transformed into *miṣrs*, as a consequence of the restoration of the caliphal order after the end of the *fitna* in the 210s/820s. From an ideological point of view,

accepting a “fine” was increasingly regarded as an anti-Islamic bribe. Nevertheless, in application of pragmatic policies, clerical elites could still manage to obtain special authorisation (*sigillion*) from the emirs, like ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir and ‘Uthmān b. Thumāma in the 210s/820s, to build, rebuild, or repair their sacred rooms.

However, a bizarre point still remains to be addressed here: the five waves of church destructions between 180 and 220 occurred in quite regular ten years interval. Dionysius himself noted this fact, when he recounts that, in 210/825, Muslims “assembled and asked [‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir] to order that the churches that had been newly built in the ten years before be destroyed (1234, 2, 16).” This could simply be the author counting the numerical interval of time since the events of 200/815-6. However, as this decennial pattern continues again until ca. 220/835, it is possible that Dionysius' comments are revealing an underlying logic. This ten-year timeframe is perhaps to be linked to an Islamic custom: first, a property exploited for more than ten years and one day is deemed to become the property of its user. Second, a ten-year prescription period is also currently connected to the legal precedent of Ḥudaybiya (6/628), when a ten-year truce was agreed with the impious Meccans. The latter was regarded as a paradigm for the liceity of treaties, the *ius ad bellum* with enemies of Islam, beginning with the Byzantines. Perhaps judges and crowds were trying to avoid for “new churches” becoming ten-years old, and thus applied a ten-year *aggiornamento*. Perhaps this was an issue specific to the Christian cities of the *thughūr* where the Muslims wanted to “make a *miṣr*” and, thus, abolish the “laws of the Christians” (*‘ahd* or *ṣulḥ*). As such, they may have attempted to do so every ten years, destroying churches to build mosques or walls. Perhaps, this ten-year pattern began with the Ṭāhirid restoration of the year 199/815. Could it, maybe, have started as early as Ḥārūn's first order to pull down churches in the *thughūr* and even in Edessa, in ca. 180 and/or 190? (Table 1).

Inscriptions/colophons/ other texts	Al-Azdi	1234	Michael the Great	Date
Ehnes inscription: 777: invasion of Michael Lakhanodrakon			Spring 777: invasion of Michael Lakhanodrakon	160
Theophanes and Ehnes inscription :779 church destructions in Damas	Early 779 : complaint of the Christians in Mosul because of an extension of the church of St Thomas destroyed by Muslims		spring 779: counter-offensive of al-Mahdī, actions of his <i>muhtasib</i> , destruction of churches in the thughur, forced islamisation of crypto-Christians/crypto-Muslims	161-2
al-Kindī: ‘Alī b. Sulaymān destroys churches in Fustāt in 785-87, his successor and his qadi orders reconstruction				170-1
		793 : church destructions in the <i>thughūr</i> because of the building of al-Ḥadath		177
Ishō‘-Dnah: ca. 797-98: Destruction of a Nestorian monastery in Beth Garmay		Hārūn refuses to destroy the church of Edessa on false accusation from local Arabs	Oct. Nov. 796 : refuses to destroy the church of Edessa on false accusation from local Arabs	7/180
			ca. Oct. Nov. 806 : church destructions in the <i>thughūr</i> on false accusation from local schismatics (Gūbbōyē); church destructions in Antiochia and Jerusalem	11/190
			ca. 810-12 : villages, churches and monasteries burnt in the Jazīra // destruction of the monastery of Qenneshrē by a local raider, Rabī‘a al-Naṣrī	195-6
			ca. 811-13 : extortion of the northern rebels (Naṣr et ‘Amr) in collusion with local Arabs to save the churches of Edessa (especially the <i>ciborium</i>)	196-7
al-Khaṭīb : 815-6: the <i>qāḍī</i> of Mosul refuses money from the Christians	815-6 : Mosulian Muslims expose a new church to the <i>qāḍī</i> and show a <i>bayyina</i> that proves the need to destroy it	Aug. Sept. 815 : Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī destroys new churches in Ḥarrān, especially an extension of St George, because he is suspected of having taken money; then he grants them right to reconstruct	Aug. Sept. 815 : Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī destroys new churches in Ḥarrān, especially an extension of St George, because he is suspected of having taken money; then he grants them right to reconstruct	1/200
Inscriptions: ca. 817-8: Construction of Dayr Suryānī in Egypt?			‘Uthmān b. Thumāma grants a <i>sigillion</i> for the reconstruction of Qenneshrē	202-3
Colophons: 824-5: construction of the church of Aḥūdemmeḥ?			ca. 825: Basilius of Takrīt provokes Muslim riots, and abolition of the <i>ṣulḥ</i> , and destruction of churches	209-10
Inscriptions: ca. 825 Dionysius finishes Dayr Suryānī?		825- early 826 : Arabs from Edessa, Ḥarrān and Samosata ask ‘Abd Allāh to pull down the churches reconstructed within the last “10 years”; he refuses	825-6 : Yaḡdan, qadi of Edessa destroys the new churches built by Theodorus since the 190s/800s; delegation to ‘Abd Allāh in Egypt; riots arrive also in Ḥarrān where other mimetic destruction occurs; ‘Abd Allāh orders reconstruction in Edessa	7-12/210
Inscription: ca. 830 Dyonisius (re)builds St Jacob of Kayshūm			Case of the abolition of the <i>ṣulḥ</i> of Mosul: destruction of the cathedral by order of the great qadi, complaint of the patriarch to al-Ma‘mūn; he asks the <i>ṣulḥ</i> as a <i>bayyina</i>	214-5
		Jan.-sept. 835: re-destruction near Ḥarrān of St George of Qūbbē and its apparently new extension, Mar Aḥūdemmeḥ	Easter 835: re-destruction near Ḥarrān of St George of Qūbbē and its apparently new extension, Mar Aḥūdemmeḥ	3/220
		mars 836: <i>Ibid.</i> + Abū Ishāq (al-Mu‘taṣim) orders of destructions		3/221

Table 1. Seven decennial destructions? Fair to dark: ancient to recent

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«TU LES AUTORISES À CONSTRUIRE DES ÉGLISES ?».
RÉFLEXIONS SUR LES LIEUX DE CULTE CHRÉTIENS
D'AL-FUṢṬĀṬ À L'ÉPOQUE PRÉ-FATIMIDE

“DO YOU ALLOW THEM TO BUILD CHURCHES?”
REFLECTIONS ON THE CHRISTIAN PLACES OF WORSHIP
OF AL-FUṢṬĀṬ IN THE PRE-FATIMID PERIOD

AUDREY DRIDI-BASILIO¹

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'intéresse aux lieux de culte chrétiens (églises et monastères) d'al-Fuṣṭāṭ à l'époque pré-fatimide. Dans un premier temps, nous proposons une réflexion sur les premières églises construites dans la capitale. Contrairement à la croyance tenace selon laquelle les églises du Qaṣr al-Šam' sont préislamiques, nous rappelons, en nous appuyant sur des données archéologiques, que ces édifices datent en réalité de la deuxième moitié du VII^e siècle, en particulier sous le gouvernorat de 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān (r. 685-705). Leur édification est contemporaine (ou postérieure de quelques années) de la construction de la première église édifiée au nord de Fuṣṭāṭ, à l'extérieur du miṣr, entre 667 et 680. La zone choisie par les conquérants pour y construire leur camp était donc initialement vierge de tout établissement religieux, bien que des monastères et des églises se trouvaient probablement au nord et au sud de ce site. En s'étendant, Fuṣṭāṭ engloba les différents lieux de culte chrétiens qui avaient été édifiés dans sa périphérie. Ces églises permettaient probablement d'accueillir une population chrétienne grandissante, parmi laquelle on retrouve les travailleurs venus de la campagne pour être employés dans les différents chantiers de la capitale, au premier chef à l'arsenal de Babylone. Deux nouvelles églises melkites sont par ailleurs construites à l'époque du calife al-Mā'mūn (r. 813-833). Une fois la phase intense de construction passée, dès la fin du VIII^e siècle, les sources décrivent une période où la crispation entre les communautés se cristallisa autour des lieux de culte. En 785, plusieurs églises de construction récente furent détruites à Fuṣṭāṭ, avant d'être réédifiées quelques années plus tard. Les reconstructions d'édifices tombés en ruine, à l'initiative de l'élite chrétienne de la capitale, suscitèrent parfois l'opposition de la foule musulmane, souvent galvanisée par des lecteurs du Coran. Finalement, la décision de détruire ou de reconstruire une église dépendait à cette époque des gouverneurs, conseillés par des spécialistes du droit, et désireux de maintenir une certaine paix sociale. L'exemple de l'église Abū Šanūda dont la restauration suscita un certain émoi dans les années 930 est à ce titre particulièrement probant. Fuṣṭāṭ constitue donc un cas d'espèce particulièrement important dans la constitution du corpus normatif déterminant le statut des lieux de culte non musulmans en terre d'Islam.

MOTS-CLÉS : al-Fuṣṭāṭ, église, Qaṣr al-Šam', Mu'allaqa, forteresse de Babylone, église Saint-Serge

SUMMARY

This article examines Christian places of worship (churches and monasteries) in al-Fuṣṭāṭ during the pre-Fatimid period, beginning with the study of the earliest churches built in the capital. Contrary to the persistent belief that the churches of the Qaṣr al-Šam' are pre-Islamic in date, the archaeological data indicates that these buildings date from the second half of the seventh century, particularly during the governorship of 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān (r. 685-705). Their construction is contemporary (or later, by a few years) with the first church built north of Fuṣṭāṭ, outside the miṣr, between 667 and 680. The area chosen by the conquerors to build their camp was therefore initially left untouched by any religious establishment, although monasteries and churches probably stood to the north and south of it. As it expanded, Fuṣṭāṭ encompassed the various Christian places of worship that had been built in its periphery. These churches probably made it possible to accommodate a growing Christian population, including the Christians who had come from the countryside to work in the various building sites in the capital, most notably the arsenal of Babylon. Two Melkite churches were also built during the rule of caliph al-Mā'mūn (r. 813-833). After this period of intense construction activity, from the end of the eighth century onwards, the sources describe a period in which these

¹ Sorbonne University. Je remercie Peter Shehan et Nicholas Warner qui ont mis au point la carte qui a servi de base à notre travail cartographique.

places of worship stirred up tensions between the different religious groups in the city. In 785, several newly built churches were destroyed in the capital, only to be rebuilt a few years later. The reconstruction of ruined buildings, initiated by the Christian elite of the capital, sometimes triggered the opposition of the Muslim mob, often galvanised by readers of the Qur'ān. Ultimately, the decision to destroy or rebuild a church depended on the governors, who were advised by legal specialists and who tried to maintain a certain degree of social peace. The example of the Abū Shanūda church, whose restoration caused some tension in the 930s, is particularly interesting in this respect. Fuṣṭāṭ thus constitutes a particularly important case in the constitution of the normative corpus that determined the status of non-Muslim places of worship in territories under Islamic rule.

KEYWORDS: *al-Fuṣṭāṭ*, church, *Qaṣr al-Sham'*, *Mu'allāqa*, fortress of Babylon, church of St. Sergius

INTRODUCTION²

Quiconque s'aventure aujourd'hui dans les ruelles de Maṣr al-Qadīma (le Vieux-Caire) ne peut être que frappé par la densité exceptionnelle des lieux de culte non musulmans, majoritairement chrétiens, que recèle ce quartier dit « copte ». Lors de ma première visite de ce quartier qui abrite la forteresse de Babylone³, en 2009, un vieux monsieur dont l'avant-bras était tatoué de la croix copte s'était empressé de me dire à quel point la majestueuse *Mu'allāqa* était ancienne (*qadīma ḡiddan*). « D'avant l'Islam ? », avais-je demandé. « Évidemment ! », avait-il répondu. Une confirmation de la construction des églises du Qaṣr avant l'Islam se trouvait d'ailleurs dans un ouvrage ancien, mais faisant toujours référence⁴ *The Arab Conquest of Egypt* de Butler (1978, 238) : « churches had clustered within the walls [of the fortress] from the very beginnings of Christianity ». Peu de références historiques confirment cependant cette hypothèse⁵, à telle enseigne que l'historien anglais reconnaissait lui-même un certain mutisme des sources à ce sujet : « little is told of the buildings which stood in the interior of the fortress when 'Amr pitched his camp against it [...] » (Butler 1978, 247). S'appuyant sur une tradition rapportée dans le *Kitāb Futūḥ Miṣr* du Pseudo-al-Wāqidi⁶ (1825, 60), dont la véracité historique est douteuse, Alfred J. Butler confirme d'ailleurs le caractère préislamique de la *Mu'allāqa* :

قال لما كبس جيش ارسطوليس لعسكر المسلمين وهم في صلاتهم يوم الجمعة ورجعت دايرة السوء على الكافرين وقتل ماسيوس ابن عم الملك ارسطوليس وقتل جنده الاربعة الاف فارس ولم ينج منهم أحد وهلكوا عن اخرهم غضب الملك وحلف بمينا بما يعتقد من دينه لا بد ان ياخذ بتارة من المسلمين فامر حباه ان يجمعوا امراء واكابر دولته وعظماء بطارقه الى كنيسة المعلقة في قصر الشمع

Quand l'armée d'Aristūlis⁷ cerna les troupes des musulmans, alors que ces derniers étaient en train de prier, le vendredi, le cycle du mal retomba sur les incroyants. Māsiūs, le cousin paternel du roi Aristūlis, fut tué ainsi que les quatre mille cavaliers qui composaient son armée. Aucun d'entre eux n'en réchappa, ils périrent tous jusqu'au dernier. Le roi [Aristūlis] se mit en colère et il jura solennellement, [au nom] de tout ce en quoi il croyait, qu'il fallait se venger des musulmans. Il ordonna à ses chambellans [*hāḡib* pl. *hūḡḡāb*] de réunir ses chefs, les grands de son royaume et les hauts dignitaires de son patriarcat dans l'église suspendue [*al-mu'allāqa*] dans le Qaṣr al-Šam'.

I. CHRONO-TOPOGRAPHIE DES PREMIERS LIEUX DE CULTE CHRÉTIENS D'AL-FUṢṬĀṬ (FIG. 1)

Ce texte est révélateur des défis auxquels l'historien est confronté lorsqu'il s'agit de reconstituer la topographie religieuse d'une ville à partir de sources anciennes. Le recours à l'archéologie s'impose, lorsque c'est possible, pour démêler le vrai du faux, les faits historiques de la légende.

² Nous avons fait le choix de donner plusieurs extraits de sources éditées (en arabe). Je suis reconnaissante à Mathieu Tillier d'avoir relu et corrigé l'intégralité de mes traductions. Je reste évidemment responsable des erreurs qui pourraient subsister.

³ La forteresse de Babylone fut construite vers l'an 300 par l'empereur romain Dioclétien (r. 284-305) (Sheehan 2010, 1).

⁴ D'autres historiens situent également la construction des églises du Qaṣr al-Šam' avant la conquête arabe. C'est par exemple le cas de Badawy (1947), Loukianoff (1953) et Habib (1967).

⁵ En revanche, la croyance en le passage de la Sainte Famille dans les églises de la forteresse de Babylone contribue à ce que ces édifices soient présentés comme ayant été construits au début de la chrétienté. Voir par exemple Jullien (1891, 962-66) ou, plus récemment, Zanetti (1993, 21-68).

⁶ Sur cette source, voir Scheiner (2012, 151-76).

⁷ Si l'on apprend dans le texte d'al-Wāqidi qu'il s'agit du gouverneur romain de l'Égypte, l'identification de ce personnage reste confuse. D'après Benjamin Hendrickx (Hendrickx 2013, 56), il pourrait s'agir d'une distorsion du nom Héraclius, empereur romain d'Orient de 610 à 641.

LÉGENDE:

- Édifices religieux détruits au moment de la conquête de l'Égypte par 'Amr b. al-Āṣ
- Église préislamique dont la localisation est précise
- Église préislamique dont la localisation est approximative
- Église édifée après la conquête dont la localisation est approximative
- Église édifée après la conquête dont la localisation est approximative
- Mosquée
- Dayr (monastère ou complexe ecclésial) dont la localisation est précise
- Dayr (monastère) dont la localisation est approximative
- ✕ Lieu de culte détruit sous l'Islam
- ✦ Lieu de culte restauré sous l'Islam

ÉDIFICES RELIGIEUX REPRÉSENTÉS SUR LA CARTE:

1. Église de la Vierge Marie (*al-darağ*)
2. Église Saint-Michel
3. Église Saint-Menas ou Abū Qīr
4. Église Saint-Théodore
5. Église al-Martūti
6. Églises du quartier d'al-Qarāfa qui auraient été détruites au moment de la conquête
7. Église Ibn Laqlaq
8. Église du Maḥras Qusṭanṭīn
9. Dayr Saint-Mercure ou Abū Ṣayfayn
10. Église Abū Ṣanūda
11. Église Saint-Marie
12. Mosquée de 'Amr b. al-Āṣ
13. Mosquée d'Abū-l-Su'ūd
14. Mosquée de Zayn al-'Abidīn
15. Dayr Saint-Menas
16. Église Saint-Georges
17. La « première église » de Fuṣṭāṭ
18. Mosquée Sayyida Zaynab
19. Mosquée Ibn Ṭūlūn
20. Mosquée Sayyida Nafisa
21. Dayr al-Quṣayr
22. Dayr al-'Izām

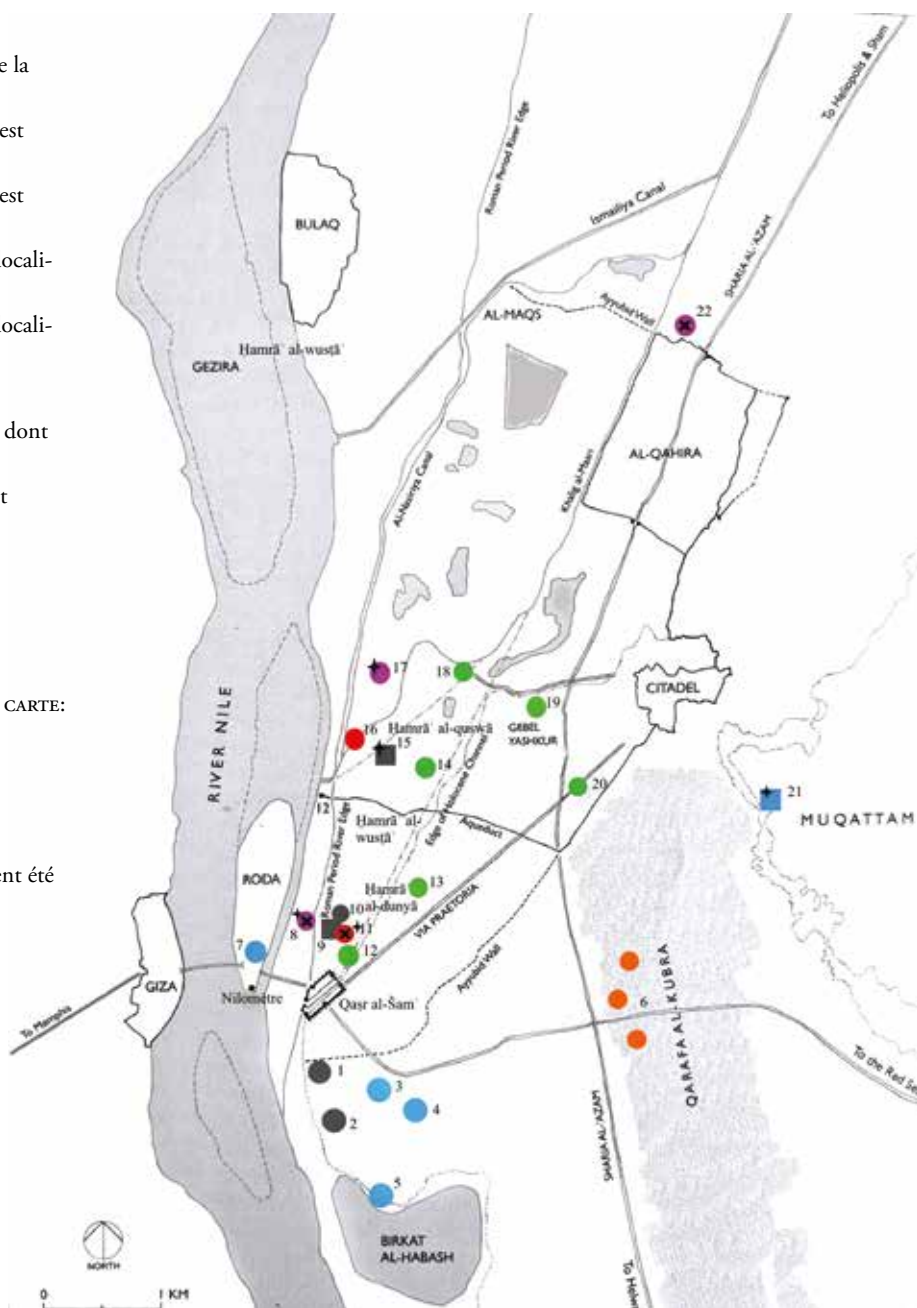


Fig. 1. Carte des lieux de culte de Fustat adaptée à partir du fond de carte (Sheehan 2010, 1).

1.1. Les églises du Qaṣr al-Šam' (Fig. 2) et de Ḥulwān

En l'occurrence, les résultats des fouilles archéologiques⁸ démentent fermement les informations fournies dans ce texte du Pseudo-Wāqidī⁹: la Mu'allaqa, au même

titre que les autres édifices religieux de la forteresse de Babylone, n'a pas pu exister avant – ni pendant – la conquête arabo-musulmane. Qu'aient existé un oratoire ou un autel à destination de la garnison stationnée dans la forteresse n'est pas impossible. En revanche, il fallut

⁸ Nous nous appuyons sur les travaux de l'*American Research Center in Egypt* (ARCE) dont les fouilles – suivant une méthode stratigraphique essentiellement – ont été menées par l'équipe de l'archéologue Peter Sheehan entre 2000 et 2006 (Sheehan 2009, 4 et 2010, p. XI). Sur la nature de ces excavations et les méthodes utilisées, voir Sheehan (2010, 8-20). Nous renvoyons également à Gascoigne et Sheehan (2022), pour une synthèse récente sur les données archéologiques dont nous disposons sur le Qaṣr al-Šam'.

⁹ Ce texte est en effet à rattacher au genre littéraire que Rudi Paret a qualifié de « littérature légendaire des *fuṭūḥ* » dont l'objectif n'est pas la reconstitution de la réalité historique (Paret 2017, 163-75).

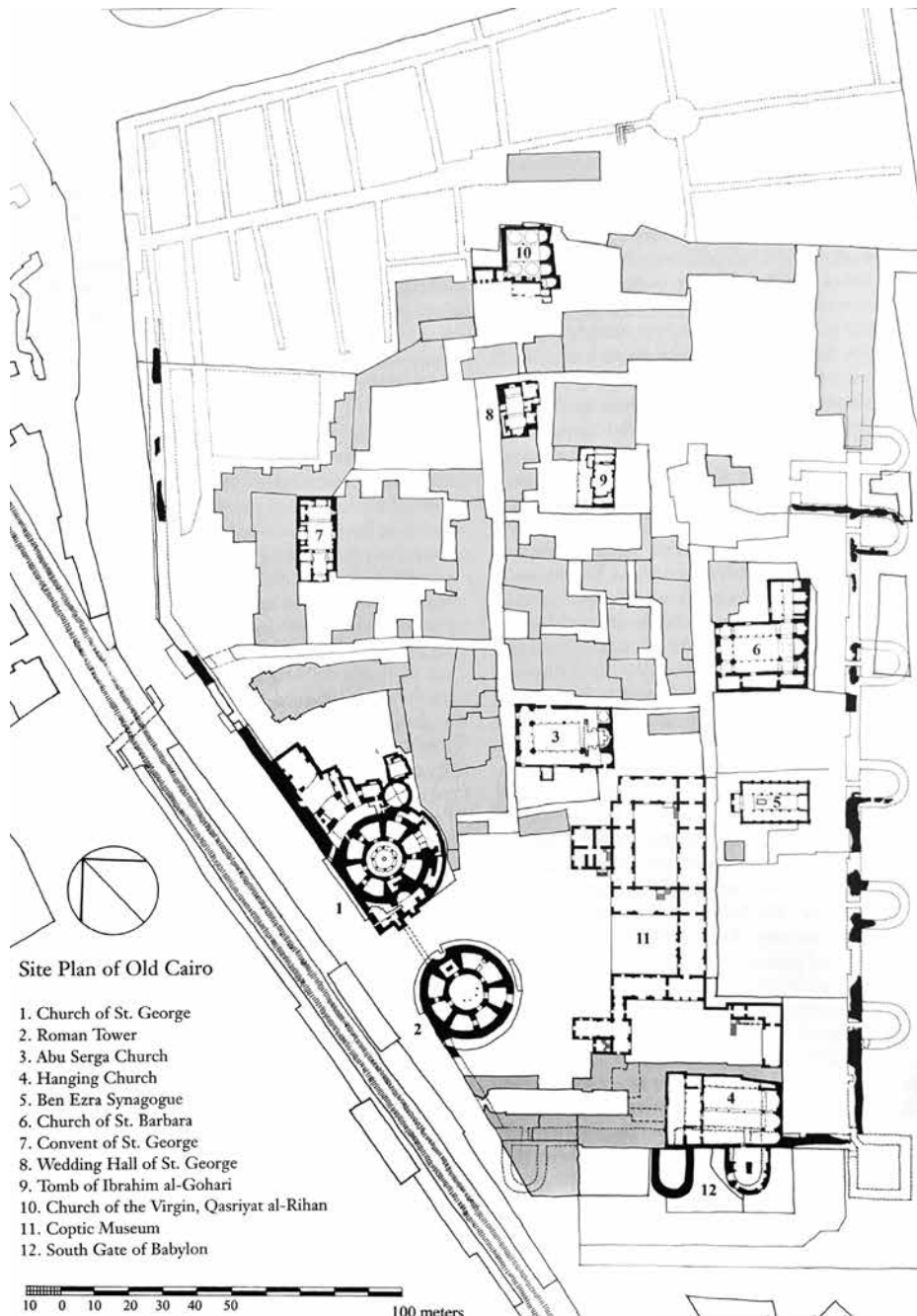


Fig. 2. Plan du Qaṣr al-Sham et de ses lieux de culte (Sheehan 2010, 3).

attendre le comblement du canal de Trajan, qui traversait la forteresse, à la fin du VII^e siècle selon les résultats de l'analyse stratigraphique, pour que le fort perde son caractère militaire et qu'y soient édifiées des églises. Au surplus, la localisation de Mār Ġirġīs (Saint-Georges) et de Saint-Serge, de part et d'autre de l'ancienne entrée du canal, plaide encore en faveur d'une construction plusieurs décennies après la conquête. En effet, le fait que les façades de ces édifices se trouvent au centre de l'ancien canal prouve que ces églises n'ont pas pu être érigées avant la conversion du canal en une route (Sheehan 2010, 85-86).

Les fouilles les plus récentes montrent que les églises localisées dans la partie sud du Qaṣr al-Šam' – Saint-Michel

et la Mu'allāqa – ont été édifiées durant la deuxième moitié du VII^e siècle. Ainsi les premiers édifices chrétiens pourraient avoir été construits entre 644 et 668, sous les gouvernorats de 'Utba b. Abī Sufyān (r. 644-665) et 'Uqba b. Āmir (r. 665-668) et d'autres dans les années 680-690 (Sheehan 2010, 35, 40, 85) en particulier à l'époque de Maslama b. Muḥallad (r. 668-681) et de 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān (r. 685-705 sur ce personnage, voir Mabra 2017). Construire ces lieux de culte à l'intérieur d'une forteresse ne relève probablement pas de la stratégie de défense. Cela a davantage à voir avec le fait que le Qaṣr, situé en dehors du site originel de Fuṣṭāṭ, devint rapidement un quartier à dominante chrétienne. Immédiatement, ou presque, après la conquête, il fut laissé en l'état par

les conquérants (Sheehan 2010, 84) puis transformé en bien inaliénable¹⁰ (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 114) ce qui contribua sans doute à la construction d'édifices religieux non musulmans. Les sources dont nous disposons sur ces églises, si elles permettent de les localiser précisément, sont d'un maigre secours pour dater leur édification. Il est néanmoins clair que le gouvernorat de 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān (r. 685-705) constitua une période-clé pour la construction des églises de la forteresse de Babylone (Garcin 1982, 152 ; Sayyid 1998, 27 ; Sheehan 2010, 35-40). D'après Eutychius (m. 940), 'Abd al-'Azīz autorisa Athanase¹¹, l'un de ses secrétaires chrétiens, à y faire édifier deux églises (Eutychius 1909, vol. 2, 41) :

وكان له كاتب يعقوبي يقال له أتناس فاستأذنه في أن يبني كنيسة في
قصر الشمع فأذن له بذلك فبنى كنيسة ماري جرجس وكنيسة أبو قير
التي داخل القصر

Il ['Abd al-'Azīz] avait un secrétaire jacobite nommé Athanase (Atanās). Ce dernier lui demanda la permission de construire une église dans le Qaṣr al-Šam' et ['Abd al-'Azīz] la lui accorda. Alors, [Athanase] construisit l'église Saint-Georges (Mārī Ġirġis) et l'église Saint-Cyr (Abū Qīr) qui se trouvent à l'intérieur de la forteresse.

Le toponyme « Saint-Georges » est connu au sein de la forteresse. Il y avait même deux édifices dédiés à ce saint : une église et un monastère, ce dernier étant également connu sous le nom de *dayr al-Banāt* (Ibn Duqmāq 1893, 108). L'identification pourrait s'en tenir ici : l'église Saint-Georges du Qaṣr al-Šam' est celle construite à l'initiative d'Athanase. Nous devons cependant rappeler une autre hypothèse, formulée par Paul Casanova, et qui nous semble tout à fait plausible. Selon lui, c'est l'église Saint-Serge, située dans le même quartier, qui est l'œuvre du secrétaire chrétien. Son argumentaire est fondé sur deux faits : d'une part, une confusion entre les deux toponymes, Ġirġis/Ġurġa et Sarġiūs/Surġa, est probable ; d'autre part, Saint-Serge a probablement été édifiée en même temps que sa voisine¹², l'église Saint-Barbe, connue avant le transfert des reliques de la sainte au x^e siècle sous le nom de Saint-Cyr (Coquin 1974, 117)¹³.

Il s'agit donc probablement de l'église dont il est question dans le texte d'Eutychius. L'église Saint-Serge est d'ailleurs l'une des rares pour lesquelles nous disposons d'un récit de fondation : dans la *Vie d'Isaac d'Alexandrie*, Mena de Nikiou situe la construction de cette église au moment de la nomination du patriarche Isaac en 689 (Mena de Nikiou 2009, 62), ce qui corrobore l'hypothèse de Paul Casanova. Il est étonnant que les dates d'édification des églises soient si rarement mentionnées dans les sources, tant chrétiennes que musulmanes. On peut supposer, sans qu'il soit possible de vérifier cette intuition, que les auteurs médiévaux chrétiens aient préféré laisser le doute planer sur la datation précise de ces lieux de culte. Sans doute valait-il mieux croire qu'ils remontaient à l'époque préislamique¹⁴. Quant aux sources musulmanes, elles s'intéressent davantage à la question des localisations – en particulier la littérature des *ḥiṭaṭ* (Ibn Duqmāq, al-Maqrīzī) – et aux événements marquants (reconstructions, destructions, élections patriarcales) qui entourèrent la vie de ces églises.

Ces églises du Qaṣr al-Šam' répondaient très probablement à l'afflux d'une population chrétienne de plus en plus nombreuse à partir des années 670. Ces chrétiens, majoritairement originaires de la campagne égyptienne, étaient mobilisés dans le cadre de projets urbanistiques à Fustāt (Garcin 1982, 152) et notamment à l'arsenal, construit en 674 (Bouderbala 2008, 135). Les fouilles archéologiques montrent clairement que l'on passe, à la fin du vii^e siècle, de la « ville arabe » à la « ville mêlée » (Gayraud 1998, 438). Cette dernière phase, à partir des années 680, est caractérisée, par endroits, par une paupérisation du bâti qui se manifeste non seulement dans la taille des habitations, plus réduite, mais aussi dans l'emploi de la brique crue (en lieu et place de la brique cuite) pour leur construction. Comme le suggère Roland-Pierre Gayraud, ces nouvelles habitations, construites à la hâte, sont probablement celles des chrétiens venus travailler dans les chantiers de la ville (Gayraud 1998, 439) et amenés à fréquenter les églises de la zone.

Le gouvernorat de 'Abd al-'Azīz ne fut pas seulement marqué par l'édification des églises de la forteresse de Babylone. Ce dernier transféra, en 699, le siège

¹⁰ Si le verbe *awqafa* utilisé par Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam est anachronique (Bouderbala 2008, 114), il désigne ici le fait de ne pas avoir soumis la forteresse au partage en lots fonciers (*ḥiṭaṭ*) concédés après la conquête aux conquérants organisés en tribus.

¹¹ Il s'agit d'Athanase Bar Ġumayyē. Voir Minā de Nikiou (2009, 56) et Michel le Syrien (1901, 475-76). Originaire d'Édesse en Syrie, il occupa le poste de chef du *diwān* de 86/705 à 112/730. Il avait également la charge de la collecte des taxes après la mort du fils aîné de 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān, al-Asbāḡ, en 86/705. Ses trois fils étaient également impliqués dans l'administration. Voir Sijpesteijn (2013, 57).

¹² Voir à ce sujet le *Synaxaire éthiopien* (PO XV, 552) qui situe l'édification quasi-simultanée de Saint-Serge et Saint-Cyr sous le patriarche Jean III (681-89) : « Dans les jours de ce Père furent construites l'église des saints Sergius et Bacchus et l'église des saints Abba Cyr et Jean à Qeṣra-Goubā'ē, en Égypte ». Toutefois, c'est à un certain André, dont nous n'avons trace nulle part ailleurs, qu'est attribuée la construction de l'église.

¹³ Au surplus, la notice consacrée à sainte Barbe dans le *Synaxaire arabe jacobite* mentionne l'ensevelissement de ses reliques « dans l'église d'Abou Kir » (*Synaxaire arabe jacobite*, 1909, 403-04).

¹⁴ Voir les contributions de Pierre et Wood dans ce volume.

du pouvoir politique à une vingtaine de kilomètres au sud de la capitale, à Ḥulwān, alors que la peste menaçait Fuṣṭāt (al-Kindī 1912, 49). Il y autorisa la construction de plusieurs lieux de culte chrétiens (Ps.-Severus b. al-Muqaffa' 1910, 42¹⁵), aux frais d'une élite chrétienne proche du pouvoir :

وأمر لهم أن يبنيوا بيعتين في حلوان وكانوا الأساقفة ينفقون من عندهم
على عمارتهما ووكّل الوالي بعمارتهما غريغوريوس أسقف القيس

Il [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān] leur [les évêques]¹⁶ donna l'ordre de construire deux églises à Ḥulwān et les évêques financèrent sur leur fond propre leur édification. Le gouverneur chargea Grégoire, évêque d'al-Qays¹⁷, de superviser leur construction.

Un premier édifice est l'église Saint-Georges (Eutychius 1909, vol. 2, 41) construite à l'initiative des chambellans melkites de ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān. Ce petit (*ṣaġīr*) édifice est également connu sous le nom d'église des chambellans. Un second lieu de culte fut en outre érigé quelques années plus tard selon les témoignages d'Eutychius et d'Abū al-Makārim (m. ap. 1209) : il s'agit du monastère Sainte-Marie (Eutychius 1909, vol. 2, 41 ; Abū al-Makārim 1895, 67).

1.2. Des églises préislamiques ?

Si les églises du *Qaṣr* – et *a fortiori* celles de Ḥulwān – sont d'époque islamique, d'autres préexistaient effectivement à la conquête arabo-musulmane. Les excavations menées au niveau d'Iṣṭabl ʿAntar¹⁸ ont montré que ce plateau était désert lorsque les Arabes s'y installèrent (Gayraud 1998, 437). Néanmoins, cela ne signifie pas que la zone où s'installèrent les conquérants était totalement vierge et n'abritait pas, à une certaine distance du site choisi par les conquérants arabo-musulmans, des églises et des monastères. Une population autochtone

relativement nombreuse vivait au sein de bourgs disséminés notamment sur la rive occidentale du Nil dont certains étaient même de véritables villes. C'est par exemple le cas de Babylone¹⁹ – située au sud du site choisi par les conquérants arabo-musulmans mais dont nous ne connaissons pas précisément les contours – qui était un évêché dès le IV^e siècle (Butler 1884, 179²⁰). On peut également citer Tandunias (Umm Dunayn) et Héliopolis (ʿAyn Šams) au nord, ou encore Ġīza et Memphis (al-Manf) au sud. L'archéologie confirme une fois encore cette hypothèse d'une occupation ancienne continue (Gayraud 1998, 437) depuis au moins le VI^e siècle av. n. è. (Sheehan 2010, 1). L'historien mamelouk al-Maqrīzī affirme par ailleurs qu'à la veille de la conquête se trouvait, entre la forteresse de Babylone et la montagne du Muqāṭṭam²¹, vers le sud, un grand nombre d'églises et de couvents (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 1, 286, 360) :

وفيما بين الحصن والجبل عدة كنائس وديارات للنصارى، أكثرها في
الموضع الذي يعرف اليوم براشدة

Entre le fort (*ḥiṣn*) et la montagne (du Muqāṭṭam), il y a de nombreuses églises et monastères des chrétiens, dont la majorité se situe à l'endroit connu aujourd'hui sous le nom de Rāšida.

Cette zone située au sud du *Qaṣr* a été identifiée par Rhuvon Guest (Guest, 1907, 62) comme le cœur de la ville de l'antique Babylone. Certains édifices y furent détruits au moment de la conquête, selon le témoignage d'Abū al-Makārim (1895, 54) :

وكانوا الرهبان بها في صوامع وديارات وبيع كثيرة العدة هدموها
المسلمين العرب الذين وصلوا مع عمر ابن العاص وكان فتوح مصر في
المحرم سنة عشرين هجرية

Il y avait là des moines dans des ermitages et des monastères et de nombreuses églises que détruisirent les Arabo-musulmans qui arrivèrent avec ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ lors de la

¹⁵ Sur cette source complexe, dont le véritable auteur n'est pas Sévère mais un certain Mawḥūb b. Maṣṣūr b. Mufarriġ, voir Den Heijer (1989), Pilette (2013) et Camplani (2020).

¹⁶ Ces derniers ne sont pas nommés.

¹⁷ En Haute-Égypte, au nord d'al-Mīnyā.

¹⁸ Au sud-est du *Qaṣr* al-Šam'.

¹⁹ Le toponyme « Babylone » apparaît dans la documentation papyrologique en arabe (voir par exemple P.Cairo. Arab. 286), copte (P.Lond. IV, 1550, par exemple) et grecque (P.Lond. IV, 1335). Il ne s'agit pas d'un simple équivalent de Fuṣṭāt puisque les deux toponymes sont parfois utilisés côte à côte, comme dans le P.Lond. IV, 1335 qui évoque les granges de Babylone et les *muḥaġīrūn* de Fossaton. Dans ce dernier exemple, on voit que Fuṣṭāt est utilisé pour désigner les *ḥiṭaṭ* tandis que Babylone est associé à un élément topographique précis (ici les granges, mais il peut également s'agir des greniers ou de l'arsenal). Voir à ce sujet Boud'hors (2022).

²⁰ Alfred J. Butler s'appuie sur Jean Moschus qui mentionne Zosimus, évêque de Babylone. On trouve également la mention d'un évêque de Babylone nommé Cyrus dans les *Actes du Concile d'Éphèse* et dans le premier *Acte du Concile de Babylone* (*Vitae Patrum. Liber X.* (1628), 676).

²¹ Sur le Muqāṭṭam, le monastère melkite al-Quṣayr a probablement été édifié à la fin du IV^e siècle à l'époque de l'empereur romain d'Orient Flavius Arcadius (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 62).

conquête de l'Égypte au mois de muḥarram de l'année 20 de l'hégire [642]²².

D'autres, à l'inverse, furent épargnés. C'est vraisemblablement le cas d'une église qu'al-Maqrīzī décrit comme « très ancienne (*qadīma ǧiddan*) » et qu'il situe au sud de la forteresse. Cet édifice est, au surplus, nommé d'après le toponyme de Babylone (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 4, 1065) :

كنيسة بابليون: في قبلي قصر الشمع بطريق جسر الأفرم، وهذه الكنيسة قديمة جداً، وهي لطيفة، ويذكر أن تحتها كنز بابليون وقد خرب ما حولها

Église de Babylone (Bābliyūn) : au sud du Qaṣr al-Šam' sur le chemin de *ǧīsr* [digue] al-Afram²³. Cette église est très ancienne et belle. On dit qu'au-dessous d'elle se trouve le trésor de Bābliyūn et que ses alentours étaient en ruines.

Charalambia Coquin a identifié cet édifice comme étant l'église de la Vierge Marie ou église des degrés (*al-daraǧ*) (Coquin 1974, 179). D'autres églises situées à proximité étaient probablement présentes au sud du Qaṣr al-Šam' au moment de la conquête : Saint-Théodore et Saint-Ménas (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 4, 1065). Plus au sud, à proximité du *Birkat al-ḥabaš* se trouvait également une zone abritant des lieux de culte chrétiens, probablement anté-islamiques. Le seul pour lequel les indices nous semblent suffisants est l'église al-Martūtī dédiée à Marie (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 56-57) :

وعرف بها بيعة السيدة الطاهرة مرميم المعروفة بالمرتوتى داخل قبة وكانت في القدم معبد لبني اسرائيل لما كانوا في العبودية بارض مصر ولما ورد سيدنا يسوع المسيح الى مصر ووالدته بالجسد ستنا السيدة العذرى الطاهرة والشيخ البار يوسف النجار من الشام جلسوا في هذا المكان الذي فيه صورة السيدة الآن قبالة المذبح المقدس وأنشأها القبط على اسم السيدة فأما أنها عرفت بالمرتوتى وهي لفظة بالرومي متيرتا اعنى ام الله الكلمة

Il s'y [dans le quartier du *birkat al-ḥabaš*] trouvait l'église (*br'a*) de Notre Dame Immaculée, Sainte-Marie, appelée Martūtī. [Une de ses reliques] se trouve à l'intérieur de la coupole. Elle était dans le passé un temple (*mā'bad*) des fils d'Israël (Banū Isrā'īl) quand ils étaient en esclavage en

Égypte. Quand notre seigneur Jésus Christ arriva en Égypte depuis la Syrie, accompagné de sa mère dans la chair, notre Dame la Vierge Immaculée ainsi que du vieil homme juste, Joseph le charpentier, ils s'assirent dans ce lieu dans lequel il y a maintenant une image de Notre Dame devant le saint autel. Les Coptes la [l'église] firent construire et [lui donnèrent] le nom de Notre Dame. Quant à l'appellation « Martūtī », elle provient du mot grec Matirtā qui signifie Mère de Dieu la Parole.

Bien qu'un tel texte, construit sur la croyance dans le séjour de la Sainte-Famille en Égypte, doive être appréhendé avec prudence, il va dans le sens de notre hypothèse d'un édifice préislamique. On voit mal l'intérêt, pour la population chrétienne de Fustāt, de construire une église si loin de la capitale. Aussi al-Maqrīzī la décrit-elle comme une église « ancienne (*qadīm*) », ce qui sous sa plume désigne souvent les édifices construits avant la conquête (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 4, 1077). La zone méridionale n'était pas la seule à abriter des édifices pré-islamiques. Al-Maqrīzī mentionne en effet un territoire situé au nord de la forteresse de Babylone habité au moment de la conquête et au sein duquel on trouvait probablement des églises et des monastères (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 2, 209) :

وكان فيما بين موضع القاهرة ومدينة الفسطاط، ممّا يلي الخليج المذكور، أرض تعرف في القديم منذ فتح مصر بالحمراء القصوى، وهي موضع قناطر السباع وجبل يشكر، حيث الجامع الطولوني وما دار فيه. وفي هذه الحمراء القصوى عدة كنائس وديارات للنصارى خربت شيئاً بعد شيء، إلى أن خرب آخرها في أيام الملك الناصر محمد بن قلاوون

Il y avait, entre le site du Caire et la ville d'al-Fustāt, à proximité du canal (*ḥaliǧ*) susmentionné, un territoire connu dans les temps anciens, depuis la conquête de l'Égypte, [sous le nom] de Ḥamrā' al-quṣwā. C'est le lieu des Ponts aux lions²⁴ (*qanāṭir al-sibā'*) et de la montagne de Yaškur, où se trouvent la mosquée toulounide et les habitations autour de cette dernière. Dans cette Ḥamrā' al-quṣwā, il y avait de nombreuses églises et monastères des chrétiens, qui sont peu à peu tombées en ruines, jusqu'à ce que le dernier édifice soit abandonné à l'époque du sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn.

²² Si l'information, qui, à notre connaissance n'apparaît nulle part ailleurs, est difficilement vérifiable (et d'autant plus douteuse qu'Abū al-Makārim écrit cinq siècles après les faits qu'il décrit et ne cite pas sa source), il est possible d'établir un parallèle avec les destructions d'églises à Cordoue après la conquête en 711, peu vraisemblables elles aussi (Moléat 2012, 160 ; voir également les contributions d'Utrero et de Villa dans ce volume).

²³ Le quartier du *ǧīsr* al-Afram est l'ancien quartier des Banū Wā'il, non loin du cimetière sud de la Qarāfa (dit « Grand Qarāfa »). Sur ce quartier, voir Abū al-Makārim (1895, 133).

²⁴ Au sujet de ce lieu, voir Al-Maqrīzī (2002, vol. 3, 450). Il y établit l'équivalence entre *qanāṭir al-sibā'* (appellation de l'époque mamelouke) et Ḥamrā' al-quṣwā (appellation initiale, post-conquête). Lorsque la *ḥiṭṭa* a disparu, elle s'est transformée « en désert » (*ṣaḥrā'*) peuplé d'églises et de monastères.

Le monastère Abū Mīna (Saint-Ménas)²⁵, qui aurait été fondé au IV^e siècle selon l'hypothèse de Władysław Kubiak (1987, 46)²⁶ ou encore de l'église Abū Marqūra (Saint-Mercure)²⁷ (Habib 1967, 61) pourraient avoir été édifiés avant l'Islam. Ce quartier des Ḥamrā', au nord de Fuṣṭāṭ et divisé, du nord au sud, en trois sous-quartiers – al-Quṣwā, al-Wuṣṭā' et al-Dunyā – devint plus tard l'un des principaux quartiers chrétiens de la capitale, abritant au moins cinq églises²⁸ (Dridi 2015b, 34), sans qu'il y ait pour autant d'homogénéité confessionnelle (Denoix 1992, 91).

À l'est de Fuṣṭāṭ, le monastère d'al-Quṣayr, situé sur le mont Muqaṭṭam, est lui aussi présenté comme préislamique par Abū al-Makārim (1895, 62) :

الدير المعروف بالقصير على قرنة الجبل الشرقي وهذا الدير يشرف منه على بحر النيل المبارك وطرا انشاء ارغاديوس الكبير ابن تدروس الكبير ملك الروم على قبر معلّم القديس ارسانيوس وسماه باسمه

Le monastère (*dayr*) appelé al-Quṣayr est sur le sommet (*qurna*) de la montagne orientale. Ce monastère domine le fleuve sacré du Nil et Ṭurā. Arcadius le Grand²⁹, fils de Théodore le Grand, empereur des Romains, l'a fondé sur la tombe de son précepteur (*mu'allim*), saint Arsène (Arsāniyūs), et a donné son nom au monastère³⁰.

Malgré la présence d'églises préislamiques, dont nous sommes probablement loin d'avoir établi la liste exhaustive, et la constitution progressive d'un quartier chrétien

dans le Qaṣr al-Ṣam', une église, présentée dans les sources comme « la première église » de Fuṣṭāṭ, fut érigée au nord de la ville.

1.3. La « première église » de Fuṣṭāṭ

Cette église fut construite entre 667 et 682, période correspondant au gouvernement de Maslama b. Muḥallad (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, 132) :

أول كنيسة بنيت بفسطاط مصر... الكنيسة التي خلف القنطرة أيام مسلمة بن مخلد فأنكر الجند ذلك وقالوا له اتقرّ لهم أن ويبنوا الكنيسة؟ حتى كان يقع بينهم وبينه فاحتجّ شرّ عليهم مسلمة يومئذ فقال انها ليست في قبروانكم وإنما هي خارجة في ارضهم فسكتوا عند ذلك

La première église à avoir été construite à Fuṣṭāṭ [...] est celle qui se trouve derrière le pont³¹, [édifiée] au temps de Maslama b. Muḥallad, [ce qui provoqua] l'indignation [des membres] du *ḡund* qui lui dirent : « Tu les autorises à construire une église ? », et ils faillirent en arriver au drame. Maslama s'expliqua alors et leur dit : « Elle [l'église] ne se trouve pas dans votre camp de garnison (*qayrawān*) mais à l'extérieur, dans les terres qui leur appartiennent ». Ils se résignèrent donc³².

Ce premier édifice religieux chrétien construit à l'époque islamique se trouvait donc à une certaine distance du camp³³, dans sa partie nord³⁴. Un autre passage

²⁵ Situé dans la Ḥamrā' al-wuṣṭā' (intermédiaire), au nord de la Ḥamrā' al-dunyā (la plus méridionale) et au sud de la Ḥamrā' al-quṣwā (la plus septentrionale).

²⁶ Il ne cite aucune source pour étayer sa conjecture. Cependant, nous donnons du crédit à cette intuition en nous appuyant sur un passage des *ḥiṭaṭ* dans lequel al-Maqrīzī affirme que cette église « était en grande vénération chez les chrétiens depuis les temps anciens (*min qadīm al-zamān*) » (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 4, 1067). Il est cependant intrigant qu'un autre passage des *ḥiṭaṭ*, également consacré à cette église, fixe la construction de l'édifice en 735 (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 4, 1065). Al-Maqrīzī s'appuie ici sur al-Kindī (al-Kindī 1912, 77-78). Étant donné que Saint-Ménas était un *dayr*, autrement dit un complexe ecclésial contenant plusieurs églises, on peut imaginer qu'il s'agit de la construction d'une nouvelle église à l'intérieur du *dayr* en 735. Chez Abū al-Makārim, les verbes utilisés ne sont pas *ibtanā* ou *ahdaṭa* – qui signifient tous deux « construire » – mais *ḡaddada*, restaurer (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 39). Ailleurs, on lit que ce sont les églises Saint-Georges et Saint-Jean situées à l'étage de Saint-Ménas qui furent restaurées (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 38), ce qui confirme notre hypothèse.

²⁷ Saint-Mercure appartient au *dayr* Abū Ṣayfayn, dans la Ḥamrā' al-dunyā (la plus méridionale). Elle fut construite « dans des temps anciens (*fī l-qidmi*) » (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 45). L'archéologue Peter Grossman expliquait d'ailleurs à son sujet qu'elle était « peut-être l'unique église encore debout qui remonte à une fondation préislamique » (Grossman 1991, 321). Ce serait également le cas, d'après lui, de l'église Abū Ṣanūda, également située dans le complexe d'Abū Ṣayfayn.

²⁸ L'église des Chambellans, Saint-Ménas, Sainte-Marie (al-Damṣiriyya), Saint-Shénouda, Saint-Mercure. W. Kubiak avance quant à lui le nombre de treize églises et monastères dans la zone (Kubiak 1987, 101).

²⁹ Il s'agit de l'empereur (auguste) Arcadius qui règne de 383 à 408. Il est le fils aîné de Théodose I^{er}.

³⁰ On retrouve ce texte avec davantage de détails dans les *ḥiṭaṭ* (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 4, 1030).

³¹ Ce pont est probablement celui qui fut construit en 688 par 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān au nord de la ville (Ibn Duqmāq 1893, 120 ; al-Maqrīzī 2002-04, vol. 3, 485). Abū al-Makārim rappelle d'ailleurs que le quartier de la Ḥamrā' al-wuṣṭā' était également connu sous le nom d'al-Qanṭara, le pont (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 38). L'église était donc probablement située dans le quartier situé au nord de la Ḥamrā' al-wuṣṭā', c'est-à-dire dans la Ḥamrā' al-quṣwā.

³² Traduction de S. Bouderbala (2008, 283), légèrement modifiée par nos soins.

³³ Pour comprendre la localisation de ce premier édifice à distance du camp, voir Dridi (2015a, 117-19).

³⁴ À l'époque de Maslama b. Muḥallad, le système tribal en *ḥiṭaṭ* était toujours actif à Fuṣṭāṭ. L'église se situait donc dans l'une des *ḥiṭaṭ* des tribus byzantines (en l'occurrence les Banū Yanna et des Banū al-Azraq) dont certains membres étaient probablement restés chrétiens. C'est donc moins « en dehors du camp », que se trouvait cette église que dans le territoire qui appartenait aux chrétiens (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1999, 129).

des *Futūḥ Miṣr* permet d'ailleurs d'identifier l'église en question et d'éclairer davantage la dernière partie de l'extrait précédent :

قال واقطع عمرو بن العاص حين ولي وردان مولاه الارض التي خلف القنطرة التي غربيتها ابو حميد الى كنيسة الروم التي هناك.³⁵

Lorsque 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ fut nommé gouverneur, il accorda en concession (*aqṭaʿa*) à son *mawla* Wardān³⁶ une terre située derrière le pont, qu'Abū Ḥumayd aliéna à l'église des Grecs (*kanīsat al-rūm*) qui se trouve là-bas.

Ainsi le premier édifice chrétien de Fustāt n'a-t-il pas été construit par, et pour, des Coptes, comme certains ont pu le croire (Bouderbala 2008, 135)³⁷, mais par des chrétiens *rūm*-s qui composaient l'armée de 'Amr. Nous savons, de surcroît, que cette zone septentrionale, en plus d'abriter un lotissement (*iqṭāʿ*) appartenant à des chrétiens d'origine byzantine, comportait également deux concessions collectives (*ḥiṭat*) accordées à des tribus non arabes (*ʿaḡam*) surnommées al-Ḥamrā', « les Rouges », qui donnèrent leur nom au quartier (al-Maqrīzī 2002, vol. 2, 38). Ce sont probablement eux qui construisirent cette première église³⁸ dont nous ne connaissons pas le nom³⁹ mais dont nous savons qu'elle fut édifée non loin de l'église Saint-Georges dans la Ḥamrā' al-quṣwā (Abū al-Makārīm 1895, 31). Aussi l'argument selon lequel cet édifice avait été construit en dehors du camp de garnison est à nuancer : l'église se situe bien à l'intérieur, dans une *ḥiṭta*, mais dans un territoire qui n'appartient pas aux Arabo-musulmans.

Dès lors, comment expliquer qu'une nouvelle église fut construite au nord de la ville, environ trois décennies après la conquête, alors même qu'un certain nombre d'édifices religieux étaient à la disposition de la population chrétienne de la ville ? La distance est probablement un facteur déterminant. Si le monastère Saint-Ménas, qui abritait plusieurs églises (Abū al-Makārīm 1895, 38) se situait un peu plus au sud dans la Ḥamrā' al-wuṣṭā, on peut imaginer que sa localisation, à quelques kilomètres, n'en restait pas moins rebutante. En outre, la question

des rites n'est probablement pas décisive. On sait qu'en effet les chrétiens, laïcs, ne tenaient guère compte de ces questions liturgiques⁴⁰ et choisissaient plutôt l'église la plus proche de chez eux pour, par exemple, assister à la messe. Un autre argument mérite que l'on s'y attarde : cette construction pourrait être considérée comme le « résultat d'une thésaurisation » comme l'explique l'archéologue Bernard Bavant. Lorsque, dans un milieu donné, des églises principales existaient déjà – ce qui est vraisemblablement le cas des Ḥamrā' – des édifices secondaires pouvaient être édifés, moins pour répondre aux besoins réels d'une communauté que pour trouver un débouché à une « accumulation de surplus » économique par les fidèles (Bavant 2013, 44).

1.4. Le sort des églises de rite chalcédonien

Si, au lendemain de la conquête, certaines églises, préislamiques, furent conservées et d'autres construites, des sources suggèrent qu'à ces modifications de l'empreinte topographique chrétienne s'ajouta un mouvement de substitution entre les édifices de rite chalcédonien et les lieux de culte miaphysites. D'après le patriarche jacobite Michel le Syrien (r. 1166-1199), qui s'inspira probablement d'un passage des *Annales* d'Eutychius, le patriarche Benjamin proposa aux musulmans de leur livrer Alexandrie si ces derniers parvenaient à rendre aux miaphysites les églises que les chalcédoniens leur avaient dérobé (Eutychius 1909, 56 ; Michel le Syrien 1901, 433 ; al-Maqrīzī 2004, vol. 4, 997). Aucune source ne livre pourtant explicitement le nom de ces édifices :

[Le patriarche] Benjamin partit, se rendit chez les Ṭaiyayē et leur promit de leur livrer Alexandrie, si seulement ils voulaient chasser Cyrus et lui rendre les églises. Ils en firent la promesse et la confirmèrent par des serments. Il revint, et fit connaître la chose à ses partisans, et ceux-ci livrèrent Alexandrie aux Ṭaiyayē [...] Alors Benjamin entra en possession des églises, et depuis cette époque jusqu'à aujourd'hui, les chalcédoniens n'ont pu prospérer

³⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (1922, 136).

³⁶ Abū 'Ubayd Allāh Wardān al-Rūmī (m. 53/673) était le compagnon, *mawla* et intendant des finances de 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ.

³⁷ Sobhi Bouderbala suggère un lien de corrélation entre l'édification de cette première église et la construction de l'arsenal sur l'île d'al-Rawḍa.

³⁸ Si l'on sait que la tribu juive des Banū Rūbīl était convertie à l'islam, rien ne dit que c'était le cas des tribus chrétiennes des Banū Azraq ou des Banū Yanna.

³⁹ Il a pu s'agir d'un « édifice secondaire » à l'instar d'une chapelle, d'un oratoire, ou encore d'une maison de prière non consacrée. Il est également possible d'imaginer que l'église ait été abandonnée avant d'avoir été consacrée. En effet, la consécration d'une église avait rarement lieu immédiatement après sa construction. On attendait le plus souvent que les édifices soient suffisamment dotés pour procéder à l'installation des reliques (Lauwers 2007, 148).

⁴⁰ Sur cette question, voir la thèse de Bastien Dumont, *La polémique chalcédonienne et l'émergence d'une nouvelle organisation de l'Église au Proche-Orient durant le premier siècle de la domination islamique (des années 660 à 710)*, soutenue à Paris 1 en décembre 2022.

à Alexandrie et en Égypte, ni même habiter, si ce n'est en petit nombre ; et les orthodoxes ont occupé les églises et les monastères jusqu'à ce jour.

Or ce texte est à appréhender avec un œil particulièrement critique : non seulement les miaphysites ne livrèrent pas Alexandrie aux musulmans, mais en plus ces églises, à supposer que la confiscation fut effective, furent assez rapidement restituées aux melkites, contrairement à ce qu'avance Michel le Syrien. En effet, selon la tradition historique, les chalcédoniens purent progressivement reprendre possession de leurs lieux de culte en 725 au début du califat de Ḥiṣām b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 724-743). Ils furent également autorisés à élire un nouveau patriarche, Côme⁴¹, après environ quatre-vingt-dix ans de vacance du siège patriarcal (al-Maqrīzī 2004, vol. 4, 1001). Il semble, cependant, que les melkites ne récupérèrent l'intégralité de leurs édifices religieux qu'à l'issue d'un long processus : sous le patriarche Michel I^{er} (744-767), certains d'entre eux se plaignirent au patriarche Côme de ce qu'aucune des églises de Fuṣṭāṭ ne leur avait été rendue (Ps.-Severus b. al-Muqaffā' 1910, 119)⁴²:

واصحاب تاوفيلكتس الخلقوني ويدعى قسما قالوا له لنا كنائس بمصر
يغلبوا عليها التاوضوسيون يعني القبط عند اخذ ملك الروم وليس لنا بيعة

Les amis de Théophylacte le Chalcédonien, également appelé Côme, lui dirent : « nous avons beaucoup d'églises à [Fuṣṭāṭ]-Miṣr dont les Théodosiens, c'est-à-dire les Coptes, se sont emparés lorsque le pouvoir des Byzantins (Rūm-s) fut renversé. [Maintenant], nous n'[y] avons plus d'églises.

À Fuṣṭāṭ, le premier édifice dont les melkites purent reprendre possession est l'église Saint-Michel du Qaṣr al-Šam' à l'époque du patriarcat de Côme et du califat de Ḥiṣām b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 724-743) (Eutychius 1909, vol. 2, 46) :

وكان كلما مات أسقف مدينة من مدن مصر صير عليها بطرك اليعقوبية
اسقفاً فصارت مصر علوها وسفلها يعقوبية ما خلا كنيسة ميكايل التي
في قصر الشمع فان الملكية امسكوها وكانوا يصلون فيها

À chaque fois que mourait un évêque d'une des villes d'Égypte, le patriarche jacobite y envoyait un évêque. Alors

l'Égypte, du nord au sud, devint jacobite, à l'exception de l'église [Saint-]Michel qui se trouve dans le Qaṣr al-Šam' et que les Melkites avaient saisie et dans laquelle ils priaient.

Ainsi, après l'élection de Côme, les chrétiens melkites de Fuṣṭāṭ purent-ils reprendre possession d'une église stratégiquement située à proximité du centre de la capitale et de l'arsenal de l'île de Rawḍa, située à l'ouest de Fuṣṭāṭ, au nord-ouest du Qaṣr al-Šam'. Cet extrait semble montrer que la supposée confiscation des églises chalcédoniennes était en réalité une progressive substitution. À une date que les sources, dans l'état actuel de nos connaissances, ne nous permettent pas de déterminer, les melkites eurent la possibilité de récupérer le monastère Saint-Georges, également situé dans la forteresse. Néanmoins, il faut attendre le ix^e siècle, sous le califat d'al-Mā'mūn (r. 813-833), pour que deux églises melkites soient édifiées – ou plutôt réinvesties – à Fuṣṭāṭ. D'une part, l'église des Apôtres fut édifiée à l'intérieur du monastère al-Quṣayr (Abū al-Makārim 1893, 63), d'autre part un autre édifice de rite chalcédonien fut construit au nord de Fuṣṭāṭ, dans le quartier d'al-Qanṭara (Eutychius 1909, vol. 2, 58) :

ولما دخل المأمون إلى مصر بنا له قبة على جبل المقطم فنزل فيها
وكانت تسمى قبة الهوى وكانت مع المأمون فرائشين نصارى فبعدت
عليهم الكنائس التي في القصر فاستأنوا المأمون في بناء كنيسة يصلون
فيها تكون بالقرب من قبة الهوى فأذن لهم بذلك. فبنوا كنيسة يصلون فيها
وتسمى كنيسة مرترمير التي في القنطرة المعروفة اليوم بكنيسة الروم.
وكانت قبل ذلك تسمى كنيسة الفرائشين

Lorsqu'al-Mā'mūn vint en Égypte, il se fit construire une coupole sur la montagne du Muqaṭṭam et s'y installa. On l'appelait « la coupole de l'air » (*qubbat al-hawā*). Des chambellans (*farrāṣūn*) chrétiens accompagnaient al-Mā'mūn. Or comme les églises de la forteresse (*qaṣr*) étaient [trop] éloignées⁴³, ils demandèrent la permission à al-Mā'mūn de construire une église où prier à proximité de la coupole de l'air. Alors il les autorisa puis ils construisirent une église pour y prier. C'est l'église Sainte-Marie (Mart Maryam) qui [se trouve dans le quartier d'] al-Qanṭara et qui est connue aujourd'hui [sous le nom] d'« église des Byzantins (*kanīsat al-rūm*) ». Avant cela, elle s'appelait « église des chambellans ».

⁴¹ La date de l'élection de Côme est problématique. Si al-Maqrīzī avance la date de 725, le début de son patriarcat est traditionnellement fixé à 742, ce qui correspond à la date donnée dans l'*Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Ps.-Severus b. al-Muqaffā' 1910, 105). Eutychius, quant à lui, fait débiter le patriarcat de Côme en 731 (Eutychius 1909, vol. 2, 45).

⁴² David W. Johnson a démontré que l'auteur de ce récit était un contemporain écrivant dans la deuxième moitié du viii^e siècle, ce qui donne d'autant plus de crédit à cette information (Johnson 1977, 103-16).

⁴³ Le Qaṣr al-Šam' abritait deux églises melkites : Saint-Michel et Saint-Georges, deux édifices dont on ne connaît pas précisément la date de construction mais qui existaient probablement avant la construction de l'église Sainte-Marie d'al-Qanṭara sous le califat d'al-Mā'mūn.

Si le fait qu'il s'agisse d'une construction *ex nihilo* ne fait ici aucun doute, ce n'est pas le cas dans le récit qu'en donne Abū al-Makārim qui utilise le verbe *ḡaddada*, restaurer, pour désigner la nature des travaux. En outre, l'église Sainte-Marie étant également connue sous le nom d'église des Byzantins, nous formulons l'hypothèse qu'il s'agit en fait de la première église de Fustāt, qui portait justement ce nom et qui était située dans le quartier d'al-Qanṭara. Ainsi l'église restaurée au IX^e siècle pourrait bien correspondre à cet édifice ancien, probablement laissé à l'abandon.

2. DES TENSIONS AUTOUR DES LIEUX DE CULTE CHRÉTIENS D'AL-FUṢṬĀT

Le VIII^e siècle s'inscrit dans un contexte de crispation interreligieuse qu'un récit rapporté par Abū al-Makārim met en lumière : vers 725, des chrétiens des Ḥamrā' se plaignirent auprès du *wālī* d'un groupe de musulmans qui empêchait leurs femmes et leurs enfants d'aller à l'église, notamment pendant le Carême (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 38).

2.1. Destruction et restauration d'églises dans le quartier des Ḥamrā'

Dix ans plus tard, en 735⁴⁴, le gouverneur al-Walīd b. Rifā'a (r. 729-736) autorisa la restauration du monastère Saint-Ménas⁴⁵, situé dans la Ḥamrā' al-dunyā (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 38-39) :

فصل الدير المعروف بالشهيد ابو مينا صاحب الثلاثة اكاليل النازلة عليه من السماء وهو من اهل نقوس وجسده الطاهر مدفون في كنيسة مريوط جدد بناها في خلافة هشام ابن عبد الملك ابن مروان في ولاية الوليد ابن رفاعه باهتمام من جماعة من النصارى الساكنين بهذا الخط في ستة ومائة هجرية [...] وكان في هذا الصقع جماعة من رؤساء النصارى ففسح لهم في تجديد كنائسهم فابتدوا بعمارة الحمراء وتجديد ما هدم منها

Chapitre sur le monastère connu sous le nom du martyr Abū Mīnā [Saint-Ménas] aux trois couronnes qui descendirent du ciel sur lui. Il était originaire de Naqyūs et son corps pur est enterré dans l'église de Maryūt. [Le monastère] fut restauré sous le califat de Ḥiṣām b. 'Abd al-Malik

b. Marwān et sous le gouvernement d'al-Walīd b. Rifā'a à la charge de quelques chrétiens vivant dans ce quartier en 106 de l'hégire [...] et il y avait dans cette contrée plusieurs chefs des chrétiens et ils furent autorisés à rénover leurs églises et ils commencèrent à reconstruire [le quartier des] Ḥamrā' et à restaurer ce qui y avait été détruit.

Ce récit est intéressant à plus d'un titre : il montre non seulement que des reconstructions d'édifices religieux chrétiens étaient autorisées à Fustāt à cette époque, mais aussi que ces restaurations étaient prises en charge par des élites chrétiennes, sans doute proches du pouvoir, comme c'était déjà le cas à l'époque de 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān. Ceci va dans le sens de la description que W. Kubiak propose du quartier des Ḥamrā' comme étant très homogène du point de vue socio-économique (Kubiak 1987, 99). Cependant, cette reconstruction ne manqua pas d'embraser le quartier des Ḥamrā' mais aussi l'île d'al-Rawḍa – où la présence chrétienne était également très forte (Kubiak 1987, 105) – qui furent le théâtre de heurts entre des récitateurs du Coran (*qurrā'*), menés par un certain Wuhayb al-Yaḥṣūbī, et la garde du gouverneur (al-Kindī 1912, 77-78) :

الوليد بن رفاعه أذن للنصارى في ابتناء كنيسة بالحمراء تعرف اليوم بأبي مينا فخرج وهيب غضباً فأتى إلى إثر [ابن] رفاعه ليفتك به فأخذ وقتل وهو الذي يقال له أين صلاتك يا وهيب وكان وهيب مدرّياً من اليمن قدم إلى مصر ثم خرج القراء على الوليد بن رفاعه غضباً لو هيب فقاتلوا الوليد ابن رفاعه بجزيرة القسطاط

Al-Walīd b. Rifā'a autorisa les chrétiens à [re]construire une église, [située] dans les Ḥamrā', connue aujourd'hui [sous le nom] d'Abū Mīnā, ce qui provoqua la colère de Wuhayb qui se rendit chez Ibn Rifā'a pour le tuer mais celui à qui l'on [avait l'habitude] de dire « qu'en est-il de ta prière, Ô Wuhayb » fut saisi et mis à mort. Wuhayb était originaire du Yémen et était venu s'installer en Égypte. Par la suite, les récitateurs du Coran, en colère à cause de [ce qui était arrivé] à Wuhayb, affrontèrent [la garde d'] al-Walīd b. Rifā'a sur l'île de Fustāt⁴⁶.

Ces tensions pouvaient ponctuellement aboutir à la destruction d'édifices religieux chrétiens, « un acte lourd de sens » (Aillet 2010, 122), qui constituait une rupture temporaire du pacte de protection de la *ḡimma*. En effet, qu'il s'agisse d'actes de vandalisme perpétrés par la foule

⁴⁴ Abū al-Makārim place la restauration de l'édifice en 725 (Abū al-Makārim 1895, 38-39) mais il s'agit probablement d'une erreur puisqu'il précise bien que cette reconstruction eut lieu sous le gouvernement d'al-Walīd b. Rifā'a qui débuta en 729. On trouve bien la date de 735 dans le *Kitāb al-Wulāt* (al-Kindī 1912, 77-78).

⁴⁵ L'église avait été partiellement détruite suite à la transformation d'une pièce consacrée à la fabrication du pain eucharistique en une chapelle dédiée à Saint-Georges (Dridi 2015a, 119).

⁴⁶ Le contexte est assez similaire à celui de Kūfa, lorsque des musulmans défendirent une politique hostile aux églises contre les décisions du gouverneur de l'Irak, Ḥālid al-Qaṣrī. À ce sujet, voir la contribution de Simon Pierre dans ce volume.

ou d'une décision des autorités politiques, la destruction d'une église mettait en lumière l'incapacité à protéger les non-musulmans en terre d'Islam. Si des gouverneurs acceptaient les reconstructions des édifices les plus vétustes, d'autres n'hésitaient pas à ordonner leur démolition. C'est ce qui se passa en 785, lorsque l'église al-Damširiyya⁴⁷, dédiée à Marie, dans la Ḥamrā' al-dunyā fut détruite sur ordre du gouverneur abbaside 'Alī b. Sulaymān al-'Abbāsī⁴⁸ (r. 786-788) (al-Kindī 1912, 131) :

هدم الكنائس المحدثه بمصر فهدم كنيسة مريم الملاصقة لكنيسة أبي
شودة وهدم كنائس محرس قسطنطين وبذل له خمسون ألف دينار في
تركها فامتنع

Il détruisit les églises récemment construites à [Fuṣṭāt]-Miṣr, et l'église de Marie, attenante à l'église Abū Ṣanūda, et celles du *maḥras* de Constantin⁴⁹. On lui proposa cinquante mille dinars pour les épargner mais il refusa.

Ce passage des *Wulāt* est particulièrement intéressant car il permet non seulement d'identifier des lieux de culte du quartier des Ḥamrā' et leur localisation relative mais également de mettre en exergue des temporalités différentes concernant la construction de ces derniers. Les églises détruites sont en effet celles qui sont considérées comme récemment construites (*muḥaddata*), conformément à ce que l'on trouve dans le pacte de 'Umar et dans la plupart des ouvrages de droit (Fattal 1958, 74). L'église d'Abū Ṣanūda, probablement plus ancienne⁵⁰, fut d'ailleurs épargnée. Ce texte confirme donc que, dans le dernier quart du VIII^e siècle, le statut juridique des églises n'était pas clairement fixé, comme en témoigne ce récit d'al-Kindī sur le gouverneur 'Alī b. Sulaymān (r. 786-787) qui permit la reconstruction des édifices démolis (al-Kindī 1912, 132) :

أذن موسى بن عيسى للنصارى في بنیان الكنائس التي هدمها علي بن
سليمان فبنيت كلها بمشورة الليث بن سعد وعبد الله بن لهيعة وقالوا: هو
من عمارة البلاد واحتجوا أن عامة الكنائس التي بمصر لم تبني إلا في
الإسلام في زمن الصحابة والتابعين

Mūsā b. 'Īsā [r. 787-789] autorisa la [re]construction des églises détruites sous l'ordre de 'Alī b. Sulaymān. Elles furent toutes reconstruites sur le conseil d'al-Layṭ b. Sa'd

et de 'Abd Allah b. Lahī'a qui dirent : « Elles font partie des monuments de la ville ». Ils donnèrent comme argument que la plupart des églises qui se trouvent à Fuṣṭāt avaient été construites à l'époque islamique, sous les Compagnons (*ṣaḥāba*) et les Successeurs (*tābi'ūn*).

Les arguments avancés par les deux juristes (*fuqahā'*)⁵¹ sont d'une importance capitale. Le premier montre qu'un siècle et demi après la fondation de Fuṣṭāt, les églises de la capitale sont considérées comme faisant partie intégrante du tissu urbain et de l'architecture de la ville. En outre, les deux lettrés estimaient que dans la mesure où la plupart des églises furent construites sous les Compagnons et les Successeurs, il était juridiquement acceptable de construire des lieux de culte en terre d'Islam. Cette position d'al-Layṭ b. Sa'd et de 'Abd Allāh b. Lahī'a est tout à fait contraire à celle du droit classique, et les différencie radicalement de Mālik b. Anas et plus largement de l'école médinoise qui triompha en Égypte un siècle plus tard, déclarant illégale la construction d'églises et de synagogues en terre d'Islam (Dridi 2015a, 123-24). La question de la restauration des lieux de culte chrétiens à Fuṣṭāt continua de susciter des débats entre les juristes de la capitale mais aussi, de façon récurrente, des soulèvements populaires jusqu'à la fin de la période pré-fatimide.

2.2. Controverses juridiques et émeutes anti-chrétiennes : des édifices religieux menacés au X^e siècle

À ce titre, l'exemple de l'église Abū Ṣanūda localisée dans la Ḥamrā' al-dunyā nous a semblé particulièrement éloquent. L'historien Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī rapporte par le menu les débats qui opposèrent différents juristes de la capitale, dans les années 930, au sujet de la restauration de cette église tombée peu à peu en ruines (Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī 1998, 334-35) :

قال ابن زولاق: اتفق أن كنيسة أبي شودة انهدم جانبها وبذل النصارى
مالاً كثيراً ليطلق لهم عمارتها فاستفتوا الفقهاء. فأفتى ابن الحداد بهدم
عمارتها ووفاقه أصحاب مالك وأفتى محمد بن علي بأن لهم أن يرموها
ويعمروها. فثارت العامة به وهموا بإحراق داره فاستتر، واحاطوا
الكنيسة. فبلغ ذلك الأمير فاغتاظ فأرسل وجوه غلمانه في جمع كثير،
فاجتمع عليهم العوام ورموها بالحجارة فراسلوه، فأرس إلى ابن الحداد

⁴⁷ Cette église appartient au complexe monastique d'Abū Ṣayfayn (Saint-Mercure). Voir Coquin (1991, 710-11).

⁴⁸ La destruction de ce lieu de culte coïncide avec la réaffirmation de l'interdiction de consommer de l'alcool et de s'adonner à des jeux d'argent (Ibn Taḡribirdī 1929-72, vol. 2, 62-66). Sur le contexte idéologique de la politique de 'Alī b. Sulaymān, voir la contribution de Simon Pierre dans ce volume.

⁴⁹ Nous ne sommes pas parvenus à identifier ce toponyme.

⁵⁰ La première mention de cet édifice religieux dans les sources apparaît dans l'*Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Ps.-Severus b. al-Muqaffa' 1910, 106) sous le patriarcat de Michel I^{er} (743-767) mais il est probable que cette église ait été construite bien avant. Kubiak (1987, 45-46) formule d'ailleurs l'hypothèse (sans pouvoir la démontrer) d'une construction préislamique de cet édifice. Nous serions encline à suivre cette hypothèse, étant donné que l'église Abū Ṣanūda fut épargnée, quand d'autres furent détruites, à l'époque du gouverneur 'Alī b. Sulaymān al-'Abbāsī (786-788).

⁵¹ À leur sujet, voir Khoury (1941, 189-202 ; 1975, 6-14).

فقال اركب إلى الكنيسة فإن كانت قائمة فاتركها على حالها، وإن كانت دائرة فاهدمها. فتوجه ابن الحداد وصحبه علي بن عبد الله بن النواس المهندس وكثير الزحام، فلم يزل يرفق بهم باللفظ ويلين لهم القول ويعلمهم أنه معهم حتى فتحوا الدروب. ودخل الكنيسة فأخرج جميع من فيها النصراني وأغلق الباب ودفع المهندس شمعة. ودخل المذبح وكشفه وقال يبقى خمس عشرة سنة ثم يسقط منها موضع ثم يبقى إلى تمام أربعين سنة ويسقط جميعها. فأعاد الجواب فتركها ولم يعمرها، فلما كانت سنة ست وستين عمرت كلها ولو تركت لسقطت

Ibn Zūlāq [m. 997] dit : un bas-côté de l'église Abū Šanūda s'effondra, et les chrétiens dépensèrent une forte somme d'argent pour qu'on les laisse reconstruire leur édifice. On consulta les juristes ; Ibn al-Ḥaddād délivra une *fatwā* conseillant de le détruire, ce que les mālikites approuvèrent. Muḥammad b. 'Alī délivra [en revanche] une *fatwā* conseillant de laisser [les chrétiens] restaurer et reconstruire [leur église]. Le peuple (*ammā*) se souleva contre ce-dernier et fut sur le point d'incendier sa maison. [Muḥammad b. 'Alī] se cacha, tandis que le peuple assiégeait l'église. Quand il en fut informé, l'émir se mit en colère et envoya les officiers de sa garde (*wuḡūh ḡilmāni-hi*) à la tête de troupes importantes ; mais la populace se retourna contre eux et leur jeta des pierres. [Les soldats] envoyèrent prévenir [l'émir], qui fit dire à Ibn al-Ḥaddād : « Rends-toi à l'église ! Si elle tient debout, laisse-la en état, et si elle tombe en ruines, détruis-la. Ibn al-Ḥaddād se mit en route, en compagnie de l'architecte (*muhandis*) 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Nawwās, et la foule s'accrût. Il s'adressa avec gentillesse et douceur, les informant qu'il était de leur côté, jusqu'à ce qu'ils lui ouvrent les ruelles. Il entra dans l'église, fit sortir tous les chrétiens qui s'y trouvaient, et ferma la porte. Il tendit une bougie à l'architecte, qui entra dans le sanctuaire (*maḍbah*) et l'inspecta. « [L'église] résistera pendant encore quinze ans, déclara-t-il, puis une partie va s'écrouler. Elle subsistera encore quarante ans, et s'écroulera entièrement ». [Ibn al-Ḥaddād] rapporta la réponse [à l'émir], qui laissa l'église en l'état, sans la reconstruire. En [3]66 (976-977), elle fut entièrement reconstruite. Si elle avait été abandonnée, elle se serait écroulée⁵².

Ce texte montre clairement qu'alors même que les corpus de droit sont globalement fixés au x^e siècle, le statut des églises de Fustāt continue de déclencher de nombreuses controverses parmi les *fuqahā'*. Ces divergences sont finalement peu surprenantes, mais elles mettent en évidence un certain arbitraire autour du sort réservé à ces édifices. Ce texte met également en exergue la radicale hostilité de la foule (*amma*) vis-à-vis de la restauration des édifices religieux non musulmans, et le péril que pouvait représenter cet acteur sans visage pour le maintien de

l'ordre social. Nous le voyons bien ici : le gouverneur finit par faire appel au *muftī* Ibn al-Ḥaddād dont l'avis initial, favorable à la destruction de l'édifice, correspondait à celui de la populace. Dans le même temps, il renonce à ordonner la démolition de l'édifice et conditionne sa destruction à l'état du bâtiment. Ainsi les autorités juridiques ou civiles avaient-elles tout intérêt à statuer *in fine* en faveur d'un *statu quo*, c'est-à-dire le maintien sans modification de l'église en question : permettre sa reconstruction, tout comme valider sa destruction, aurait pu avoir comme conséquence des attaques contre les édifices religieux chrétiens et une explosion de violence dans la capitale. Il faut néanmoins noter qu'à l'époque qui nous préoccupe, et contrairement à l'époque mamlouke (Dridi 2015c), ces accès de violence restèrent relativement rares à Fustāt.

CONCLUSION

En un peu plus d'un siècle, la garnison musulmane de Fustāt, construite *ex nihilo*, se transforma en une capitale multiconfessionnelle abritant au moins une vingtaine de lieux de culte chrétiens, auxquels s'ajoutent trois synagogues. Les églises et monastères déjà présents en périphérie de la zone choisie par les conquérants pour y édifier leur nouvelle capitale, mais aussi les édifices construits à l'époque islamique à l'instar de ceux du Qaṣr al-Šam', furent progressivement englobés par une ville qui connut un essor urbain important aux premiers siècles de l'Islam. Au surplus, nous avons montré que la première église située à Fustāt était bien située à l'intérieur du *miṣr* dans un territoire qui appartenait à des tribus qui comptaient des chrétiens d'origine byzantine. En outre, la présence et l'intégration progressive de populations non musulmanes et de leurs édifices religieux dans la capitale ne manqua pas de créer des tensions entre les différents groupes religieux en l'absence d'un corpus juridique clair fixant le statut des lieux de culte chrétiens. Si la décision de restaurer ou au contraire de détruire une église dépendait le plus souvent de la libre décision du gouverneur, plus ou moins soumis aux pressions de la populace, on constate que les rares églises détruites par le temps ou à la suite d'une décision de l'autorité politique ont pu être reconstruites au cours de la période, esquissant une véritable continuité topographique chrétienne sur la période pré-fatimide. Fustāt, par son statut original de *miṣr* devenu ville, constitue donc le creuset d'une réflexion normative portant sur les lieux de culte non musulmans en terre d'Islam qui fit jurisprudence dans tout le monde arabo-musulman.

⁵² Traduction de Mathieu Tillier (Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī 2002, 131).

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CHAPTER 9

CHRISTIANITY AND THE FATE OF CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS FROM THE EARLY 8TH TO 11TH C. MAGHREB

CRISTIANDAD Y EL DESTINO DE LOS MONUMENTOS CRISTIANOS EN EL MAGHREB DE LOS SIGLOS VIII AL XI

HAFED ABDOULI¹ - ANNA LEONE²

SUMMARY

This paper addresses the issue of the Christian continuity after the Byzantine Empire, in North Africa. This aspect has never been explored comprehensively, the analysis is particularly difficult due to the limited sources, and the major problems related to destruction of stratigraphic evidence occurred during the colonial periods. The paper reconsiders the textual and the limited archaeological evidence critically, with the aim of outlining trends in the data along with directions for future work. The main focus is on Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (Ifriqiya and Barqa) between the 8th and the 11th c.

KEY WORDS: Christianity, Monasticism, ribāṭs, early Islam

RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda el tema de la continuidad cristiana después del Imperio bizantino en el norte de África. Este aspecto nunca se ha tratado de manera integral, ya que el análisis es particularmente difícil debido al carácter limitado de las fuentes y a los problemas derivados de la destrucción de la evidencia estratigráfica durante los períodos coloniales. Este trabajo reconsidera críticamente lo limitado de las evidencias arqueológicas y textuales, con el objetivo de poder observar tendencias en los datos y proponer direcciones futuras de trabajo. El foco principal se pone en el África Proconsularis, Bizacena, Tripolitania y Cirenaica (Ifriqiya y Barqa) entre los siglos VIII y XI.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cristiandad, monasticismo, ribāṭs, islam temprano

For years, traditional scholarship has treated the end of Christianity in North Africa as a sudden event that occurred immediately after the Arab conquest. An overall study of the continuity or end of Christianity in North Africa has long been missing, for numerous reasons. First of all, it is due to the nature of the available data. Most church excavations, in the colonial periods, were conducted eschewing stratigraphic methodologies and structures were often interpreted first with the assumption that religious buildings had been abandoned immediately after the Arab expansion. Unfortunately, lost data cannot be retrieved, and there is little value in discussing architectural features still in use after the Arab conquest as we simply do not know their origins. In recent times some attempts at filling this gap have been made by Handley (2004) and Valérian (2011), which provided

some material and evidence for discussion, albeit mostly text-based. We intend here to re-engage with this matter by pulling together the textual and the limited archaeological evidence, with the aim of outlining trends in the data along with directions for future work. At the outset it can be argued, based on the little material available, that the Christian community maintained a very strong presence at least until the 11th c. and likely into the 12th c.

I. THE PAUCITY AND DIFFICULT INTERPRETATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Archaeological evidence is very scanty, but in a few cases, this limited material allows the identification of building use after the Islamic conquest. Recent work

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in some churches has demonstrated continuity. A good example is provided by Carthage; here the continuity of use of a church is recorded in the northern suburbs of the city.

The church of Bir Ftouha confirms that the tradition of pilgrimage continued in the 6th c. and the 7th c., which saw construction of an underground memorial dedicated to an eastern saint, Julian of Antioch.³ The complex remained in use in the late 7th c. and archaeological data do not show clearly when the basilica went out of use; it is probable that the building continued to be in use in the 8th c. and 9th c., when it was transformed into a house (Stevens *et al.* 2005, 571-77). Continuity of use has been suggested also for the small Church V in Sbeitla (Sufetula, Tunisia) built in proximity to a small fort (Duval 1964). The cemetery and church in Mactar (Tunisia) also appear to have been in use at the beginning of the Islamic period (Picard 1957). Evidence of an early Islamic burial has been recorded in Basilica I of Bulla Regia, in the north of Tunisia. An Umayyad coin hoard⁴ was found in the tomb; the finding has prompted the suggestion of continuity of use of the church after the Byzantine period (Baratte *et al.* 2014, 39). A cemetery likely associated to a church has been recorded in Leptis Magna in proximity to the Severan Forum, where two churches are located, one along the colonnade street and the basilica inside the forum. The forum was fortified in the Byzantine period, and 8th and 9th c.-tombs were excavated in the area surrounding the fort (Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 1953).

Always In Tripolitania, in Sabratha (Sabra in Arabic), the so-called Basilica I resulted from the transformation of the city's civil basilica, which had been abandoned in the second half of the 4th c. probably due to an earthquake. The church was probably erected between the end of the 5th c. and the early 6th c. employing reused materials. During the excavations conducted by Bartoccini numerous graffiti, which are unfortunately no longer visible, were identified on the baptistery of the church.⁵ The close proximity to a city funerary sector in use in the 8th c. and 9th c. may provide evidence of continuity of use of the whole religious complex.⁶ It must be said that the Roman city of Sabratha appears to have been a rather limited settlement after the Arab conquest. In the 9th c. Al-Ya'qūbi described the city as a settlement containing

numerous statues and ancient stones (Al-Ya'qūbi 1967, 99). In the same century, Qudāma Ibn Ja'far referred to Sabra as a settlement in ruin (Ibn Ja'far 1981, 124). However, the settlement had a resurgence in the Fatimid period when, according to Ibn Hawqal in the 10th c., Sabra was the arrival point for many trading caravans who were obliged to stop in the city in order to pay taxes (Ibn Hawqal 1992, 71). In this phase the city had become, according to Al-Muqaddasī, a fortified settlement surrounded by palm and fig trees (Al-Muqaddasī 1991, 224). It is therefore arguable that while the city was outside of the major networks immediately after the conquest, it continued to be occupied by a small community of Christians and was later transformed, although research focused on the period in the city after the Arab conquest is lacking.

This very limited set of evidence suggests that some churches, those we may consider small and perhaps with limited monumental appearance, continued to be in use. In some other cases scholars have posited continuity of use after the Arab conquest, but the supporting data are extremely scanty. All cases suggest that a Christian community continued to live and bury people near and around churches. It is arguable that Christian communities in some parts of the former city, as well as the location of these communities, also determined when churches in other parts of the city were abandoned. Notably, the existence of these clusters of Christian communities seems to be confirmed by ancient sources.

2. MONASTICISM

One of the main arguments in past scholarship used to explain the rapid end of Christianity in North Africa is that, in comparison with the east, North Africa did not have a strong monastic tradition, which would have somehow guaranteed the continuity that is instead recorded elsewhere (for a synthesis, see Handley 2004). Despite numerous textual evidence referring to the presence of monastic communities, very few monastic complexes have been identified archaeologically. We know from sources that Augustine founded his order in North Africa, and many large monasteries were present

³ On the eastern Saints entering North Africa see Duval (1982).

⁴ The coins were found in tombs that were excavated inside the church and cut the mosaics decorating the floor (Duval 1969, 220 and 229). Unfortunately, there is not specific indication of the type of coins, therefore if it is not possible to elaborate more details consideration on the dating.

⁵ The results of the excavation conducted in Basilica I have never been published. Further excavations were conducted during the period of the British protectorate and have been published by Kenrick (1986).

⁶ Christian burials marked with a cross have also been identified in the Temple of Hercules. The chronology suggested is post-6th c. (Aiosia 2012).

in the territory.⁷ Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that these monastic sites continued to exist after the Arab conquest, at least until the 11th c. This evidence is proved by some archaeological data combined with inscriptions. A good example is provided by two cases in Cyrenaica.⁸

The presence of a monastery has been suggested for the Ras al Hilal, in the Derna district. Although the excavations have not been very accurate, there are a few elements that seem to show continuity of use. The mosaics were plastered over but all the chancel fittings remained visible, suggesting that the church continued to function (for a detailed description, see Reynolds 2003, 327). The site is mentioned in the 12th c. by al-Idrīsī as Al-Bandariya (Al-Idrīsī 1989, 318-19), and in the 13th c. in the *portolani* for navigation as Bonandrea (Kretschmer 1962; Hardy-Guilbert and Lebrun-Protière 2010, 93; Ducène 2016, 84). In the church, the name Andrew appears in many graffiti on the walls, and for this reason it has been suggested the religious building may have been dedicated to the apostle Saint Andrew.

Moreover, there is a fragmentary text inside the church that refers to 'Dayr'. This word is normally used to refer to Christian monasteries in both medieval texts and modern topography, especially in the East.

The continuous presence of Monasteries in North Africa after the Arab conquest is confirmed archaeologically by the Latin inscriptions at the Christian necropolis of 'Ain Zara (14 km southeast of Tripoli) which appear to have been continuously in use until the 10th c. (for a complete publication, Aurigemma 1932). Continuity of use has also been recorded at En-Ngila (18 km southwest of Tripoli), where the Christian inscriptions cover a time span from AD 945 to AD 1021. For instance, in En-Ngila we have an inscription dated between AD 950 and AD 1021 that refers to *ABA LAURENTIUS MONACUS DULCISSIMUS*. From the same funerary area another inscription dated at the same period refers to the *MONACUS PETRUS*. Similar evidence has been recorded at 'Ain Zara. These data provide evidence of the continuity of monasticism in both Cyrenaica and Tripolitania at least until the 11th c.

The remains of a large monastic site whose function continued probably after the Arab conquest have also

been recorded in Cyrenaica at Sirat Al Jamil (suburb of modern Beida). The site developed as a farm and in Late Antiquity was enlarged with the addition of a church; the two parts of the complex combined have been interpreted as a monastery. The structure was in use until at least the middle of the 7th c. and probably beyond, although its continuity as a monastic site is not certain due to the lack of detailed excavations (Kenrick 2013, 118-20).

These data point to the presence of monks and monastic complexes and offer new elements for discussion. We know that there was a strict connection and interest between Muslims and monastic communities. Muslims in the 8th c. and 9th c. in particular looked well upon monasticism, as they were particularly impressed by Christian monks met through the conquest of new territories. Muslims assimilated many ideas and practices from these monks, and in due course fused the idea of the *jihād* with an ambivalent understanding of Christian monasticism (Sahner 2017). This admiration is reflected also in some passages of the Koran (5.82), praising priests and monks who do not behave arrogantly. The attention by the conqueror towards the monastic communities is confirmed by Muslim reports indicating that the Prophet offered special protection to the monks when the armies conquered new areas (Livne-Kafri 1996; Pierre 2022). A strong link between fortified monasteries in the Byzantine period and the *ribāṭs* has been suggested, indicating possible continuity in practices. La Martire (2018) speculates that both Byzantine monastic buildings and *ribāṭs* are related ideologically and architecturally, suggesting a continuity also in the management, organisation, and role of the two structures. The Christian monasteries would have also influenced ideologically the setting of the *ribāṭs*.

There is one case that speculates at the transition from a Byzantine fortified monastic building into a *ribāṭ*. Al-Bakrī (11th c.) refers to the *ribāṭ* Burj Abī Sulaymān, looking over the harbour of Carthage. It has been suggested that this new early Islamic fortification was built on top of the monastery of Solomon.⁹

Therefore, it is arguable that, at least for one century, monastic complexes continued to thrive within the

⁷ For some discussion on the issues of monasteries funded by Augustine and their identification, see Leone (2007).

⁸ Another piece of evidence, still unpublished, comes from the church in Ptolemais, or Tolmeita, more commonly referred to as the 'West Church'. See Stucchi (1975, 554-55, and 1987), Bonacasa Carra (2009), Kaniszewski (2011, 41-44), Misiewicz and Rekowski (2015, 141-42), Ward-Perkins and Goodchild (2003, 180-91). It has been described as 'a building of severely simple design', but nevertheless has a 'purposeful simplicity' (Ward-Perkins 1943, 131). It is in fact a fortified complex and the geophysical survey has demonstrated that the building was extended substantially beyond the church. The church also contains all over the internal and external walls a large number of Kufic inscriptions and graffiti, one of which seems to provide some suggestion of the effective function of the building. Among the graffiti, and dated to the period immediately after the conquest, is a graffito which refers to 'Dayr'. For a full edition of the inscription, see Boubtana (2019).

⁹ Al-Bakrī (1992, vol. 2, 702), Lézine (1956, 21), Ennabli (1997, 40-41). On the localisation of this site see Lewicki and Kotula (1986), Abdouli (2005, 41-43) and Mahfoudh and Altekamp (2019, 102-03).

region. The inscription at Ra's al-Hilāl that refers to 'Dayr', bearing evidence of fortified structures, offer some possible interpretations. It is possible that the church was only part of a much larger, as yet uncovered, monastic complex (or one that was removed by later spoliations), and this was the prayer room. There is also the possibility that the church continued to be attended as such and the inscriptions were incised by monks.¹⁰ Either way, this evidence in particular offers the strong possibility that at least immediately after the Arab conquest the building continued to be used for Christian practices. Similar inscriptions have also been found in Jordan at Qaṣr al-Ḥalabat; here it has been suggested that the complex had a period in which it was used as a monastery and was later transformed into a fort (Fowden 2004).

3. TEXTS AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Church and monastic evidence suggest on the one hand the presence of monasteries, and on the other the continuity of use of some churches that became the focal point for Christian communities living in a city.

The existence of these communities is also well attested by textual evidence. Early Arabic sources in North Africa refer to the Christian presence up to at least the 10th c. century, but only three bishops are attested to in this last phase.¹¹ Although the archaeology remains silent due to data loss, Arabists indicate that Christianity in North Africa ended at the time of the Almohads; following a decree from the Almohad Caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min b. 'Alī dated to 1160 (554 H.) issued the call for conversion or death of the Christian population of Tunis (Al-Tijānī 1981, 347; Ibn al-Athīr 1997, vol. IX, 258).¹² An edict in 850 (235 H.) from the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil established that Christians and Jews had to wear symbols on their clothes (Al-Ṭabarī 1967, vol. 9, 171-72; Mansouri 2007, 128-30; Handley 2004, 303). Immediately after the conquest and for a few centuries, the relationship between the different religious communities was probably tolerant and varied on a regional basis (Idris 1954; Mansouri 1999; Hantati 2000; Oulddali 2017). For instance, in the Jebel Nafusa, at Sharwas, a 10th c. century inscription refers to equality between Muhammad, Judaic patriarchs, and Jesus

(Qur'an 3. 136; Lowick 1974-75; Al-Warfalli 2007, 84; Handley 2004, 305).

In the Nafusa, Al-Shammākhī (Kitāb al-siyar 1992, vol. 2, 407-408) refers to Christian women married to Muslim Ibadis men. Al-Bakrī (d. 487 A. H./ 1094 C.) also indicates evidence of religious tolerance, making reference to the church at Abū Mīnā, located on the route between Alexandria and Barqa (Cyrenaica), where a part of the monument was in use as a mosque (Al-Bakrī 1992-1913, vol. 2, 647). This shows Christians and Muslims sharing the same religious space; in a few cases, this may have occurred immediately after the conquest.

More evidence is available in Tripolitania. In all three major cities a number of Christian cemeteries have been excavated and dated to the early Islamic period. Oea (Tripoli) for instance still had a bishop in the 11th c.¹³ Indeed, al-Bakrī presents information, dating back to the time of Al-Warrāq (10th c.), of a Coptic (Christian) community living in the area around Tripoli at a distance of three days walking from the west to the site called Banī al-Sābrī,¹⁴ two days walking to the east until the end of Hawwāra's territory (Al-Bakrī 1992-1913, vol. 2, 653). A Christian community is recorded in the centre of Oea/Tripoli until the 10th c. as attested by al-Mālikī, who refers to the biography of a 10th c. figure, Abū al-'Abbās al-Tanmzīlī, and narrates a dispute between the two communities over an ancient stone (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 2, 390-91). It narrates that the Christians were in the process of restoring a church and wanted to use a stone taken from a derelict mosque. Despite the presence of the large Christian cemeteries of En-Ngila and 'Ain Zara, where inscriptions continued to be displayed in Latin into the 10th c., a church has never been identified. However, Oea presents several difficulties in terms of archaeological remains, due to the long period of occupation of the city and the major destructions brought by the Ottoman and Italian colonial periods.

Considering Cyrenaica again there is a large set of texts that refer to the presence of Copts. In the region numerous geographical and topographical texts refer to the presence of villages whose inhabitants were Christians, or to the presence of churches. We are presenting a few here, only those that we think most probably continued to be used as churches.

¹⁰ There is evidence of the habit of writing graffiti on the walls of ribats, praising their support. La Martire (2018, 119) and Barceló (2004, 137).

¹¹ For a complete list of all the Bishops in North Africa, see Fedalto (2008). For a detailed discussion on the last Bishops mentioned in the 10th c. in North Africa, see Talbi (1990, 332).

¹² For a more detailed discussion see Talbi (1990, 328-29), Molénat (1997, 399-400), Prevost (2007) and Handley (2004, 307-08).

¹³ For a full discussion on Christian evidence in Tripolitania, see Ward-Perkins and Goodchild (1953), Di Vita (1967), Gualandi (1973) and Leone (2019).

¹⁴ On the identification of this site see Lewicki and Kotula (1986).

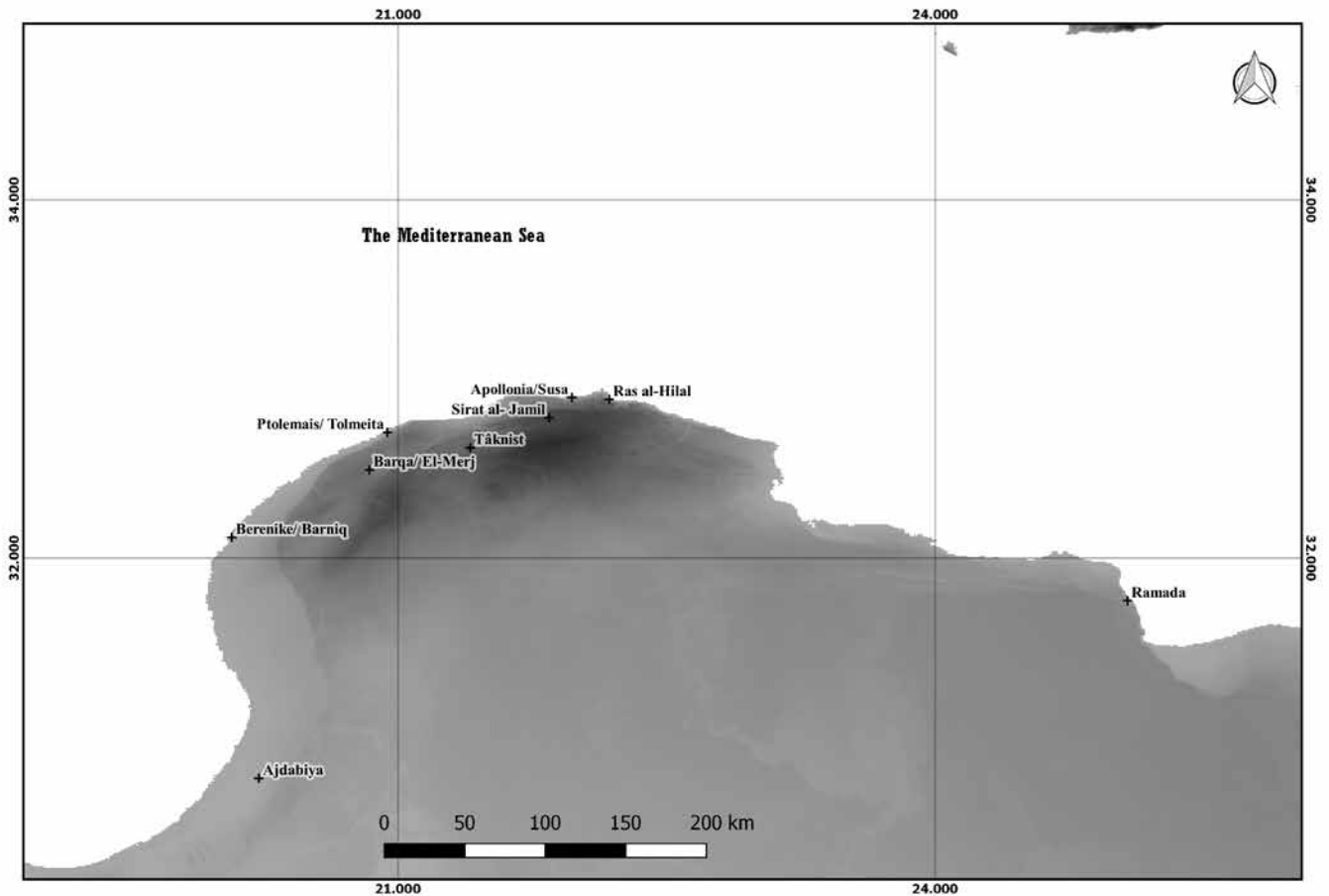


Fig. 1. Map with location of Christian sites in the region of Barqa (credit Hafed Abdouli).

Among the numerous references, it is worth mentioning the case of Tâknist, which is named by Qudāma Ibn Ja'far as a Christian village (Ibn Ja'far 1981, 121). The sources indicate that the settlement was the second stop along the road to the city of Barqa (modern El Merj) on the route to Alexandria in Egypt (Ibn Khurdādhbeh 1889, 84; Ibn Ja'far 1981, 121-22). Located around 31 miles to the west of Barqa, the site has been traditionally identified with the modern village of Tâknis (Fig. 1), as its distance from the ancient site of Barqa seems to correspond. However, this identification is doubtful, since there is no clear evidence of Christian structures on the site.

Abdouli based the location of the modern settlement at 33 miles from Barqa, corresponding to the distance indicated by Qudama Ibn Ja'far, and suggested that the site must be identified with Olbia (modern Gasr Libya). This settlement was developed in particular at the time of Justinian and acquired the name of Theodoria. The

east church bears a famous mosaic combining pagan and Christian iconography, well-dated to the 6th c. by an inscription; while for the west church, Ward-Perkins and Goodchild identified two phases, one in the 5th c. and one during the late 7th c.; also in this case we have evidence from a number of later graffiti on the walls.¹⁵

CONCLUSIONS

When combining the textual and archaeological evidence, it appears that there is a clear difference between the written documents, which depict the presence of Christian communities clustered within the cities, as well as monasteries and monks that may have even influenced the development and setting of the *ribāṭs*. It is very likely that the reason for this discrepancy is the paucity of archaeological data and the lack of stratigraphic work. However, this may not be the only reason.

¹⁵ For a discussion on the site, monuments, and mosaics see Alföldi-Rosenbaum and Ward-Perkins (1980), Ward-Perkins and Goodchild (2003, 267-82) and Stucchi (1975, 3949).

It is striking that, unlike the Middle East, churches do appear to have been modest after the Arab conquest, and there is no evidence to date of building activities occurring in churches after the Arab conquest. Perhaps this difference with the east has to be seen within the regulations which were applied to North Africa after the conquest.

Bosanquet (2020, 195-200) has discussed Al-Nawādir's book of Ibn Abī Zayd, (d. 996) who distinguishes between "*ṣulḥ* lands," where the population submitted peacefully to the Muslims with treaties and went on living, and "*anwa* lands" that were conquered without a treaty.¹⁶

In the case of the '*anwa* land, according to the Malikite legal doctrine, building of new churches (*ihdāth*) was not permitted and existing churches were to be destroyed as the territory now belonged to Muslims. In the case of *ṣulḥ* land, it was forbidden to restore churches that were derelict, unless this was stipulated in

the treaty. Churches could be used, but without enlargement and refurbishment. If villages were 100% Christian then churches could be built (Ibn Abī Zayd 1999, 3: 376; Bouchiba 2017, 159-60; on this legislation, see Pierre, in this volume).

It is extremely difficult for us today to propose with any certainty the continuity of use of some churches as such after the Arab conquest; in almost all cases the excavators assumed that even when there was continuity of use, the building must have changed function. This interpretation often occurred despite the lack of any clear evidence that this actually happened. Although it has been generally accepted by Arabists that there is no certainty that these laws were put into practice,¹⁷ and despite the limited data, the archaeology suggests that probably interventions in the churches were minimal after the conquest, and therefore extremely difficult to identify, even if Christian communities maintained an active presence in the territory of North Africa.

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¹⁶ For further discussion, see also Guidetti (2016).

¹⁷ See Wood and Pierre in this volume.

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PART IV

NEITHER VISIGOTHIC NOR FRANKISH. THE ANDALUSIAN CHURCH

THE ANDALUSI CHURCH UNDER ISLAMIC RULE. EPISCOPAL SEES IN THE LIGHT OF THE WRITTEN RECORD

LA IGLESIA ANDALUSÍ BAJO EL GOBIERNO ISLÁMICO. SEDES EPISCOPALES ANDALUSÍES A LA LUZ DE LOS TEXTOS ESCRITOS

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SUMMARY

Taking the premise that bishoprics were a central institution for the medieval Church as the starting-point, this article aims to study the survival and disappearance of episcopal sees in al-Andalus between the 8th and 13th centuries. To do this, I have examined references to bishops and Andalusí sees in the written record, dividing the sources according to their origin and the circumstances in which they were written. First, early medieval Christian texts written in the Iberian Peninsula; second, Arabic Christian texts written in al-Andalus; third, Arabic Islamic texts, mostly written in al-Andalus, with special attention to the Collectio Canonum Arabicorum Ecclesiae Andalusiae; and fourth, Latin texts written in the Christian kingdoms during the period of the conquest (12th-13th centuries). This compilation does not aim to be exhaustive, but simply outline the processes undergone by the institutional structure of the Andalusí Church.

The record reveals, first, that several sees – those mentioned in the texts for sure, but likely more – survived until at least the moment of their last mention; second, that some sees moved to a different city when their original location went into decline, so that they could continue carrying out their function within the government structure; and third, that new sees were created during the Andalusí period, either on the initiative of governors or of the emir or even caliph himself. This leads me to conclude that the relationship between the Church and the Islamic rulers was, by and large, cooperative, far from the resistance trope espoused by some historians.

KEYWORDS: *Al-Andalus, Church, episcopal sees, capitulation pacts, Andalusí Christians, Islamicate society, Arab Christianity*

RESUMEN

Partiendo de la premisa de que el obispado es una institución básica en la Iglesia medieval, este artículo tiene por objeto conocer la pervivencia o no de las sedes episcopales en al-Andalus entre los siglos VIII y XIII. Para ello se ha realizado un estudio de las referencias tanto a obispos como a sedes episcopales andalusíes en la documentación escrita a lo largo de este periodo, diferenciando las fuentes en función de su origen y las circunstancias bajo las que se crearon. Primero, los textos latinos cristianos peninsulares de época altomedieval, en segundo lugar, los textos árabes cristianos andalusíes, en tercer lugar, los textos árabes islámicos, fundamentalmente de origen andalusí, y finalmente, los textos latinos redactados en los reinos cristianos en época de las conquistas, ya en el pleno medievo (ss. XII-XIII). No se pretende ofrecer un elenco exhaustivo de sedes, sino solo trazar un bosquejo que permita conocer las vicisitudes por las que pasó la estructura organizativa de la Iglesia andalusí.

El resultado del estudio evidencia, primero, que varias sedes –cuando menos las que se mencionan en los textos, pero seguramente más– pervivieron al menos hasta el momento de la última mención; segundo, que hubo sedes que se desplazaron de su ciudad de origen cuando esta entró en declive, para ir a ubicarse en las nuevas fundaciones realizadas por el poder islámico; y, en tercer lugar, que durante el periodo andalusí se crearon nuevas sedes por iniciativa de gobernadores, pero también por iniciativa de emires. De todo ello se deriva que la relación entre la Iglesia y el poder islámico fue sobre todo de colaboración, lejos del modelo de resistencia planteado por buena parte de la historiografía.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *al-Andalus, Iglesia, sedes episcopales, pactos de capitulación, cristianismo andalusí, Islamicate society, cristianismo árabe*

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Despite the spirit of concord that exudes capitulation pacts,² reflected in the word *ṣulḥ*, the Islamic conquest brought traumatic changes to the Church (Fig. 1). These changes happened not so much from a religious perspective, as the freedom of worship and ritual was guaranteed – that is, the conquerors were unconcerned by this – but from the political: with the conquest, the Church lost its prominent role and became subsidiary to a state that identified with another religion. Bishops were relegated to the position of local representatives of a social group, the Christians, vis-à-vis the state, with which it had no option but to collaborate to keep its *status*, as established in the capitulation pacts. The survival, disappearance, and, as it shall be seen, change of seat or *ex novo* foundation of episcopal sees, is a reliable weather-vane to trace degree of integration of the Church within the Islamicate political apparatus. The importance of the institution, therefore, transcended the religious sphere,

that is, the survival of a set of religious beliefs, to fully adopt a political role.

Tracking Andalusí bishops is an arduous task. It is as if History had decided to conceal their existence. Their lack of visibility can be explained by the very nature of the written sources, be they Christian, in both Latin and Arabic, or Muslim (always in Arabic). From the point of view of the Latin Church, Christians living in al-Andalus were always suspect of heresy and collaborationism, and their testimonies were taken with corresponding wariness. Some religious ideas developed in al-Andalus were regarded as heretic by Rome, such as adoptionism in the 8th century, which, according to the available evidence, was inspired by Islam (Epalza 1995).

Perhaps the virtual disappearance of Christian chronicles – which must have existed, as they existed in the Eastern churches – can be explained by the shadow of heterodoxy that hovered over Andalusí Christianity.

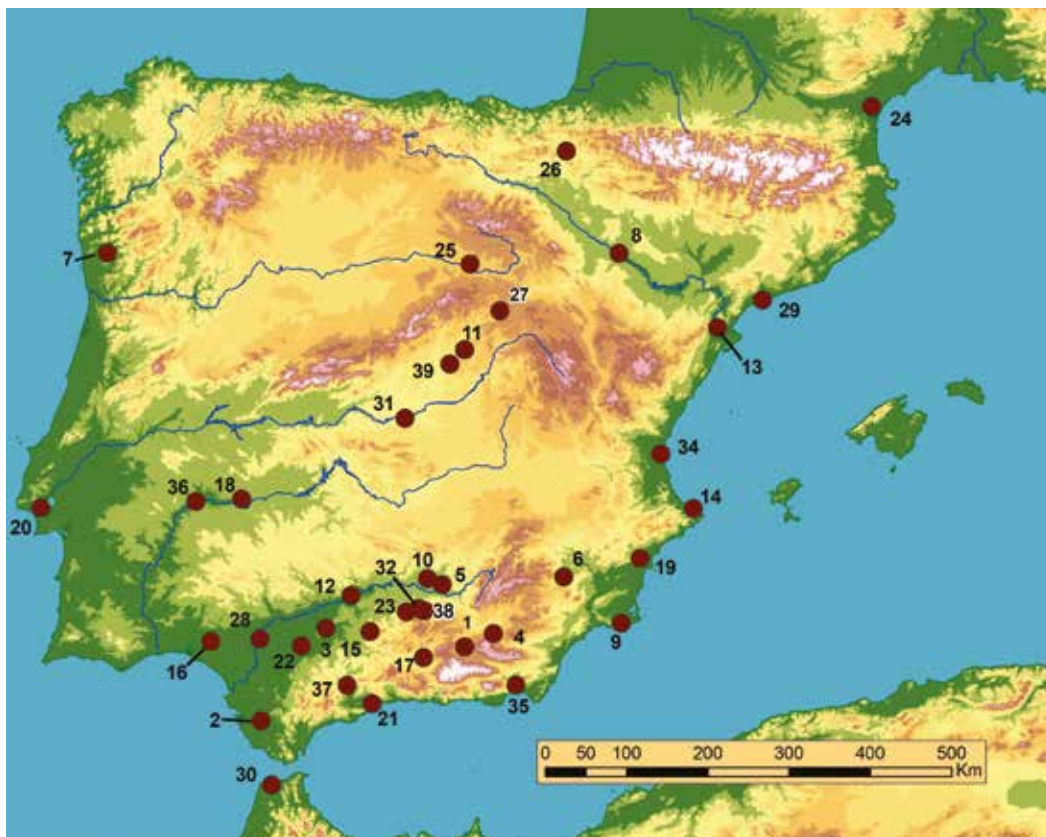


Fig. 1. Places mentioned in the text. Map created by J. Lorenzo Jiménez using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license. Copyright © Esri.

² It is unlikely that the clauses contained by capitulation pacts resembled those conveyed by the chronicles, which mention a generic amount payable by each inhabitant, without distinction, as *jizya*. This stands in stark contrast with the detailed censuses recorded in Marwānī, papyri, which often register the name of individuals, their possessions, and the amount to be paid in tax. See a compilation of pacts in the Arabic-Islamic chronicles in Hill (1971) and compare with GPBM records or with the examples presented by Trombley (2014). In any case, this is of little relevance for the purpose at hand: it is immaterial whether these pacts were written in the 7th-8th centuries or the 9th century, because what they reflect is the conquerors' indifference, in the former case, or that of their descendants, in the latter, towards the religion and conversion of the conquered. On the veracity of conquest pacts see Noth (1989; 1994, 64-76).

The only known Andalusí Christian chronicle, the *Continuatio Isidoriana Hispana*, currently known as *Mozarab Chronicle*,³ written in Latin, only reaches 754, by which time the influence of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula was still limited. Although it is suspected that the written production of Andalusí Christians in Arabic must have been significant, very few of these texts have been identified to date. For a number of reasons, not least the nationalist ideology that dominated the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, these texts have not begun to be edited until recently.⁴

Islamic chronicles, for their part, give little away concerning episcopal sees, because the subjects of these chronicles are not every individual living under Islamic rule, but only the members of the *umma*, the Islamic community, which transcends the religious sphere to acquire a political meaning (Denny 1977; Donner 2010). In these chronicles, bishops only feature when their actions had an effect on the Islamic community, which happened rarely. Finally, the information conveyed by Latin texts written in the Christian kingdoms between 11th and 13th centuries is not much more useful, because they focus on the character behind an event – this bishop or that – than in their see, as if the chronicles were unconcerned about the existence of bishoprics beyond the borders of the kingdom in which the text was written. In addition, the religious factor is always considered secondary to the political.

Owing to the incidental nature of the written references, the evidence about Andalusí episcopal sees is dispersed and shows significant chronological gaps; the predominant note is silence. This has led some authors to assume that the bishoprics simply disappeared; some have argued that only those near Córdoba survived, while those farther from the centre of power progressively vanished (Acién 2009; Aillet 2010, 45-91). Epalza (1985-86) even argued for a temporal hiatus between the Visigothic and the Andalusí Church: for the most part, he claimed, 10th-century Andalusí Christians were not the heirs of Visigothic Christians, who had disappeared soon after the Islamic conquest, but Christians who had migrated to al-Andalus after the conquest to assume

military or administrative roles; he referred to them as “neomozarabs”.

Continuity is, in my opinion, the only possible answer. I argue that an uninterrupted line can be traced between Visigothic sees and, at the very least, those mentioned in the texts, with special emphasis on their last time they are mentioned. First, because interruption necessarily means assuming that Christians were suppressed in al-Andalus, something that we know happened nowhere else in the Islamic world; this is proven not only by capitulation pacts, but by the direct testimony of oriental Christians. On the other hand, it seems difficult to accept that the same people who had suppressed Christians would decades later accept the foundation of new episcopal sees, which openly challenged ‘Umar’s edict.⁵ Concerning continuity beyond Córdoba, I think that the late mention of bishops in peripheral regions, such as Tortosa in the mid-11th century and Lisbon in 1147, suggests that many more must have existed and operated normally far away from Córdoba. They are simply not mentioned because their bishops did not do anything of note in the eyes of Latin and Arabic chroniclers.

I. EARLY LATIN CHRISTIAN TEXTS (8TH-10TH CENTURIES)

My first group of sources includes texts written in Latin by ecclesiastical authors, that mention Andalusí bishops. An important document within this group is a very brief text inserted in the *Codex Aemilianensis* (Currently in Real Biblioteca del Escorial [catalogue no. d.I.1], folio 360), which presents, under the section *Incipiunt nomina defunctorum episcoporum spalensis sedis uel toletane atque eliberritane sedis* (*Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum* [CSM, XVII-XVIII, n. 10]), the uninterrupted list of bishops in the metropolitan sees of Spalis (Sevilla) and Toletum (Toledo), as well as the list of suffragan bishops in Eliberri (next to Granada), from their foundation to 956.⁶

The number of bishops for each see varies widely. The list for Spalis features 43 names, only nine of which

³ Indeed, this is not the original title of the work, but the title made up by the editor López Pereira in 1980. The use of the term *mozarab* is very rare until the 19th century. In this century, Simonet adopted it to distinguish Christians living in al-Andalus (that is, *Spanish Christians*) from those living elsewhere in Dār al-Islām, known as *ḍimmiyūn*. The term *mozarab* and concept were promptly accepted by historiography, which used them systematically to refer to the deeds of these Christians. In this way, the texts in Latin written by Andalusí Christians were compiled in 1973 under the title *Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum* by J. Gil. The volume included the *Continuatio Isidoriana*, entitled for the very first time *Chronica Muzarabica*. Some years later, in 1980, López Pereira edited and translated the same text under the title *Crónica Mozárabe de 754*. This constructed a past for the term, which was projected back to a time in which it was not used. See the terms of this debate in Barceló (1997, 254-57) and Aillet (2012, 5-16). On the title of the *Continuatio Isidoriana* in the successive editions see López Pereira (1980, 18-20).

⁴ On the Christian Arabic texts in al-Andalus and their editions, see Monferrer-Sala (2018).

⁵ On this text, see Fattal (1958) and Levy-Rubin (2011).

⁶ The date features in the list of Bishops of Toledo: “Iohannis era dccccxxxiii obit”, according to the editor (CSM, XVII-XVIII, n. 10).

fall within the Andalusí period, that is, since 711. The thirty-fifth place is taken by Oppas, who probably was the metropolitan bishop of the city at the time of the Muslim conquest.⁷ The list for Toletum features 45, with Sinderedus in thirty-seventh place, followed by another eight names. As we shall see when we deal with the *Continuatio Isidoriana*, Sinderedus may have occupied the metropolitan see at the time of the Muslim conquest (CHI, 226).⁸ Concerning Eliberri, the only non-metropolitan see in the document, the list mentions 68 bishops. The only name that can be associated with an Andalusí date is Egila (or Agilianus, as the name is spelled in the text), in the forty-fifth place in the Aemilianensis list. This bishop allegedly received three letters from Pope Adrian I between 785 and 791 (MGH, 636-48, *epistulae* 95-7).⁹ In any case, the Aemilianensis lists do not seem to be exhaustive, because other texts mention bishops that do not appear in them.¹⁰

Beyond this exceptional document, references to Andalusí bishops in Latin texts are few and far between, and are predominantly incidental in nature. For instance, with the aforementioned *Continuatio Isidoriana Hispana*, the only known Christian chronicle to be written in al-Andalus. The chronicle goes from 627 to 754, and thus covers the conquest of the Regnum Gothorum by the Arabs and the first few decades of Islamic rule. The chronicle gives an account of the invasion from the perspective of the Christian clergy, presenting a stark view of the shock caused by the military disarticulation of the Visigothic political system and the relegation of the Church from its previous dominant position.

Concerning bishops, the chronicle records the flight to Rome of the Metropolitan Bishop of Toledo, Sinderedus, whom the chronicler accuses of “abandoning his flock”

(CIH, 226).¹¹ The see, however, was not left vacant, as Sinderedus was replaced by Cixila (CIH, 274), who is also mentioned in the list of the Aemilianensis (CSM, XIX, n. 10); in contrast to his predecessor, Cixila earns the praise of the chronicler. In this way, the text presents an opinion that was likely to be widespread among the clergy people that witnessed the conquest: despite this disaster, the bishops’ duty was to stand fast with their flock even if this meant accepting a secondary role in the new structure of the state. In addition, the *Continuatio* mentions a bishop, named Fredoarius, in Acci (identified as Guadix) in 719 (CIH, 242-3).¹²

In the following decades, the see of Toledo appears to have been very active. This is suggested by texts that record internal ecclesiastical disputes, especially concerning Elipandus, Metropolitan Bishop of Toledo between 785, the date of his earliest letter, and his death in 805 (*Elipandi Epistola*, in CSM, 80-1). Other names mentioned in relation to these disputes are the aforementioned Egila of Eliberri (the addressee of Pope Adrian I’s letters (MGH, 647), bishop from 785 to 791, and Hetherius of Oxoma, bishop from 778 and 785, who died in Liébana (Carriedo Tejedo 2002, 78). This see is also mentioned in the *Albeldense* chronicle for the year 882 (Calb, XII, 9). Several decades later, Albarus referred to a bishop called Teudula (the see is not mentioned), who opposed Elipandus and who, therefore, must be dated to the closing years of the 8th century (CSM, 182, *epistula* IV). Another letter, dated to 764, was signed by Félix, Bishop of Córdoba (CSM, 55).

During the central years of the 9th century, emirs ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II (822-852) and his son Muḥammad (852-886) promoted the organisation of councils, a common strategy for Islamic rulers to monitor ecclesiastical

⁷ This matches with the *Ad Sebastianum* version of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*. This is, however, far from unproblematic, because the *Rotense* version of this same chronicle makes Oppas Bishop of Toledo (CAIII, 202-3. The *Continuatio*, for its part, names Sinderedo as Bishop of Toledo in 711, in contradiction to the *Rotense* (CHI, 226). Ibn al-Qūṭīya, on the other hand, referring to the children of Alamundo, son of Wittiza, mentions Sāra and two younger sons: an unnamed Metropolitan Bishop (*miṣrān*) of *Ishbīliya* and ‘Abbās, perhaps Oppas, who allegedly died in *Jillīqiya* (TIA, 12-3).

⁸ He was succeeded by Cixila, also mentioned in the list. About him, the *Continuatio* says: “Huius tempore uir sanctissimus et ab ipsis cunabulis in Dei persistens seruitio Cixila in sede manet Toletana et quia ab ingressione Arabum in suprafatam ecclesiam ecclesia metropolim est ordinatus. Fuit enim sanctimoniis eruditus, ecclesiarum restaurator et <secundum> scriptu<ras> spe, fide et caritate firmissimus meritis eius innotesceret cunctis.” (CIH, 274).

⁹ The signatories of the XVI Council of Toledo, held in 693, include a Ceterius, which may be the Ceterius that takes the fortieth place in the Aemilianensis list.

¹⁰ For instance, Iohanes Spalensis, who attended the council held in Córdoba in 839 (*Concilium Cordubense*, in CSM, 141) and corresponded with Albarus Paulus of Córdoba (*Albari Epistulae* I-IV in CSM, 151-201). The same author mentions other *Spalensis* bishops not in the list, especially Teudula (*Albari Epistulae*, IV, in CSM, 181) and Reccafredus (*Vita Eulogii* 4, 6 y 7, in CSM, 332, 333 and 334). The latter must have been an important character, as he was bishop of Egabro, Corduba and Spalis (*Concilium Cordubense*, CSM, 136).

¹¹ *Qui et post modicum incursum Arabum expabescens non ut pastor, sed ut mercennarius Xpi oues contra decreta maiorum deserens Romanie patrie sese aduentat.*

¹² The attitude of bishops (fleeing or staying) can be read in political terms and not only, as it has traditionally been done from a strictly religious angle. If it is accepted that the sons of Wittiza led the faction that fought against Rodrigo for the throne, calling for the aid of the Muslims, it is plausible to think that bishops supporting Rodrigo had to flee, while those that had supported the victorious side could stay. Compassion for the defeated side was never a characteristic of the Visigothic kings.

developments. Different texts mention four, held in Córdoba in 839, 852, 859 and 862, although only the acts of the first survive. According to these, the council was attended by the bishops of Toletum, Ispalis, Emerita (Mérida), Acci (Guadix), Astigi (Écija), Corduba, Egabro (Cabra), Malaca (Málaga) and Eliberri (CSM, 140-1).

The other councils are mentioned in Abbot Samson's *Apologeticus*, dated to 860. Samson stands as the archetype of Christian cleric working for the emir, specifically as interpreter of emir Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān in his meetings with Latin emissaries, a highly consequential position that implies that he had the emir's complete trust (*Apologeticus*, CSM, 554). The *Apologeticus* contains not a single word against Islam or Islamic rule. Instead, the text attacks Christian counts and bishops who abused their power to accrue personal wealth, or who had acquired their position illegally, especially Count Servando and Hostegesis, Bishop of Malaca (Malaga). The text also records Christological debates, which were resolved in a council held in the capital of the emirate, Córdoba, in 859, the acts of which are lost. However, Samson lists the bishops who presented their opinion in this council: those of Emerita (Mérida), Beatia (Baeza), Egabro (Cabra), Astigi (Écija), Basti (Baza), Urci (unknown place, next to Almería), Ilici (Elche) and Assidona (Medina Sidonia) (*Apologeticus*, CSM, 553). It must be emphasised that these are not all the attendees, only those that presented their theses. The text also mentions the see of Corduba (Córdoba).

In contrast with Samson, Eulogius and Paulus Albarus voiced contrary opinions against Islam, representing two isolated instances of anti-Islamic dissidence in al-Andalus.¹³ Eulogius was the leader and ideologist of the so-called 'voluntary martyrdom' movement, which unfolded in Córdoba in the mid-9th century, and Paulus Albarus was his disciple and the disseminator of his ideas.¹⁴ Their texts are eminently doctrinal in nature and openly opposed the wave of Arabisation sweeping over al-Andalus in the mid-9th century. They express their

nostalgia for a rapidly vanishing past, crushed under the weight of Arabic culture, language, and patterns of behaviour, which had been willingly adopted by the indigenous Christian population.¹⁵

Although Eulogius and Albarus aimed to denounce the repression and persecution suffered by the Christians, the fact is that they unwittingly convey the exact opposite: only two extreme crimes such as blasphemy against the Prophet and apostasy can attract punishment from the *cadi/qāḍī*. Their texts mention up to seven *basilicae* and eight monasteries in Córdoba and its hinterland alone, some of which had been founded by Eulogius during the reign of emir 'Abd al-Raḥmān II, in open contradiction of the clauses of 'Umar's edict (*Vita Eulogi*, CSM, 332).

Similarly, Eulogius's mentions of bishops show no trace of secrecy or of a return to the catacombs: much to the contrary. Eulogius, despite portraying himself as a virtual outlaw, corresponds with, and receives assistance from, several Andalusī bishops, including Iohannes and Reccafredus, both bishops of Spalis, Venerius, Bishop of Complutum (Alcalá de Henares) (*Memoriale Sanctorum*, in CSM, 406 and *Eulogi Epistula III*, in CSM, 500), Wistremirus, Bishop of Toletum (*Memoriale Sanctorum*, in CSM, 336 and *Eulogi Epistula III*, in CSM, 500), Sisemundus, Bishop of Segontia (Sigüenza) (*Eulogi Epistula III*, in CSM, 500), and Senior, Bishop of Caesaraugusta (Zaragoza) (*Eulogi Epistula III*, in CSM, 499-500).

2. CHRISTIAN TEXTS IN ARABIC

Andalusī Christian literature in Arabic remains little known. The two main reasons for this are: first, language, because most specialists in western Christianity cannot read Arabic, while Arabic-speaking researchers are generally more interested in Islam; and second, ideological, as historiography has often, and strongly, argued

¹³ Nothing like this was to happen again until four centuries later, and in a very different context. On the *polemica* between Christians and Muslims, see Alonso Acero (1999, 517).

¹⁴ Four of Eulogius's five works were copied in the so-called 'códice ovetense', dated to the 9th century. The manuscript was discovered by Pedro Ponce de León, Bishop of Plasencia, and edited by Ambrosio de Morales in 1574. The codex is lost, and only the 1574 copy survives. Eulogius's fifth work, which gives an account of the death of some of his followers, is preserved in a manuscript dated to the 9th-10th century. See Colbert (1962) and Mellado Rodríguez (2018). Albarus's *Vita Sancti Eulogii Toletani* is preserved in the so-called *Códice de Azagra* (BNE, Mss/10029), dated to the 9th-10th century.

¹⁵ As recorded by Albarus Paulus's *Indiculus Luminosus*: "Heu pro dolor, legem suam nesciunt Xpiani et linguam propriam non aduertunt Latini, ita ut omni Xpi collegio uix inueniatur unus in milleno hominum numero qui saluatorias fratri possit rationauiliter dirigere litteras, et repperitur absque numero múltiples turbas qui erudite Caldaicas uerborum explicet pompas, ita ut metrice eruditiori ab ipsis gentibus carmine et sublimiori pulcritudine finales clausulas unius littere coartatione decorent, et iuxta quod linguae ipsius requirit idioma, que omnes uocales apices commata daudit et cola, rithmice, immo ut ipsis competit, metrice uniuersi alfabeti littere per uarias dictiones plurimas uariantes uno fine constringuntur uel simili apice." (CSM, 314-5).

for the incompatibility of the Arabic language and Christianity.¹⁶

The fact is that Andalusī Christians soon adopted Arabic as their everyday language. As well as Albarus of Córdoba's famous testimony in the mid-9th century, when he decried that young Christians were unable to write a letter in correct Latin but could compose verses in Arabic (CSM, 314-5), we have the early translation of liturgical texts into Arabic. Especially revealing is the translation of the Psalms by Ḥafṣ b. Albar al-Qūṭī, whose text is headed by a poetic composition in which he praises a bishop called *Bālans*, that is, Valens, likely the Bishop of Córdoba (Dunlop 1954, 144; Koningsveld 1984, 206-07).

Ḥafṣ b. Albar's case is anything but exceptional. We know of several churchmen that knew Arabic and Latin, especially among bishops, who played a mediating role between the Christian communities and the emirs and, later, the caliphs. As noted, abbot Samson worked as an interpreter for 'Abd al-Raḥmān II or for his son and successor Muḥammad. Arabic chronicles report embassies led by bishops, especially to the Christian kingdoms, of which more shortly.

The most outstanding Christian ambassador was Rabī' ibn Zayd al-Usqūf, known by his Christian name Recemundus, Bishop of *Iliberri* in the third fourth of the 10th century, during the heyday of the caliphate. Johannes Gortzensis reports that Recemundus was fluent in Arabic and Latin,¹⁷ which earned him a job as ambassador of the Caliph of Córdoba, first at the court of Otto of the German empire and later in Constantinople. In 961, he wrote the *Kitāb fī Taḥṣīl al-Azmān wa-Maṣāliḥ al-Abdān*, best known as *Calendar of Córdoba*, which he dedicated to caliph al-Ḥakam II. There are no reasons to doubt this bishop's commitment to Christianity, but rather the opposite: he must have been highly regarded in Europe at the time, as shown by Johannes of Gortz's testimony and the fact that Liutprand of Cremona dedicated the *Antapodosis*, written around 960, to him (LH, 1, 3). He was also a prestigious physician, which explains his place in Ibn Abī Usayba's '*Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*' (UAFTA, 492).

Among these documents, one of the most interesting in terms of contents and volume is *codex* 1623 of the

Real Biblioteca del Escorial, dated to 1049, as established in folio 333r. Its 433 folios contain an Arabic translation of the *Collectio Canonica Hispanica*, that is, the norms enacted by councils held in, and in force during, the Visigothic period.¹⁸ The text, which is also known as *Collectio Canonum Arabicorum Ecclesiae Andalusiae* (hereafter CCAEA), is fully written in Arabic, except for sporadic comments in Latin.

One of the few Latin glosses, in 309v and 310r, is of great value to understand the changes undergone by episcopal sees during the Andalusī period (see appendix 3). The document conveys a list of bishops present in a council in Toledo, but no date is given. The scribe, therefore, simply listed the bishops (or their representatives) in attendance, next to the name of their respective sees. Comparing this list with council acts allows us to infer that the council in question was the fourth council of Toledo in 633: both the attendance lists and the names of bishops and their deputies coincide almost completely.¹⁹ The document was initially written in Latin and then translated into Arabic, the Latin names being simply transcribed into Arabic characters. The list, however, presents a unique feature: a scribe – not impossibly the same – wrote the Latin names of the sees, in round Visigothic script, over the toponyms in Cufic script.

Comparing the versions of the toponyms in Latin and Arabic makes it easy to recognise that the Arabic ones are a direct transcription: the metropolitan sees are mentioned with the same denomination in both (Ishbīliya [Sevilla], Narbūna [Narbonne], Mārida [Mérida], Brāqara [Braga], Ṭulayṭula [Toledo] and Ṭaraqūna [Tarragona]), just as most of the suffragan sees (Banbalūna [Pamplona], Qurṭuba [Córdoba], etc.).

In a few instances, however, there are discrepancies that cannot be attributed to a mere phonetic transcription, because the toponyms are plainly different. In all probability, it was because of these that the Latin scribe used the original text in Latin as a reference. The first of these discrepancies concerns Urçi, which appears in Visigothic script over the Arabic *Jayyān*. Although the exact location of the Roman and Visigothic Urçi remains controversial, all Latin texts place the city on the coast.²⁰ According to council acts, the city sent bishops to the councils of Toledo almost without interruption from

¹⁶ Surprisingly, Simonet was one of the few Arabists to pay attention to Andalusī Christianity. In his *Historia de los mozárabes de España* (1897-1903), he laid out a doctrine that was to persist for decades. It is only in recent decades that this doctrine has been challenged, and we are still a long way from flushing out some of his ideas from university textbooks.

¹⁷ "Tandem exitit inter palatina officia Recemundus quidam, ad prime catholicus, et litteris oprime tam nostrorum quam ipsius inter quos versabatur linguae Arabicae institutus" (VJAG, 374).

¹⁸ For this important unedited manuscript see Kasis (1994), Abu-Haidar (1987), Echevarría Arsuaga (2007 and 2014).

¹⁹ According to the version in SIH, 385-389. Using this Latin gloss as reference, the only significant difference, apart from the order in which the attendees are listed, is the absence of *Iria*.

²⁰ For instance, in Pomponius Mela, Pliny and Ptolemy. See García Antón (2006) and Casado Baena (2007).

633 (Council no. IV) to 693 (Council no. XIV). In addition, abbot Samson names this city as the see of one of the bishops who absolved him in the council held in 859 (*Apologeticus*, CSM, 553).

The adjective “urcitane” is written over the Arabic *Jayyān*, which is easily identified with the modern Jaén. The first occurrence of *Jayyān* is in Ibn Ḥayyān’s *Muqtabas* II, which mentions several characters from this city. Ibn Ḥayyān also refers to the construction of the Friday Mosque there in 825-6 (210 H.), during the reorganisation of the Andalusi urban network (MQ-II-1, 177r). The city is mentioned again, in the context of the *fitna*, in the very next decades of the 9th century, as a fully consolidated *madīna* and capital of a *kūra* (MQ III; KMM-II, 893; RM-I, 183-4; SA-I, 65, 110; MB-II, 195).

With the available evidence, it is not possible to say whether *Jayyān* was founded *ex novo* or was the heir of an earlier foundation, but nothing suggests continuity between the city and an earlier Visigothic enclave, least of all Urci: the names Urci and *Jayyān* are clearly unrelated as Jaén is very far away from the coast where the episcopal see of Urci most probably was. Finally, I would point out that four other episcopal sees are documented in the hinterland of Jaén, Tucci (Martos), Mentesa (La Guardia de Jaén), Baetia (Baza) and Castulona (Linares). This indicates the probable express will to create episcopal sees in this area during the emirate, either in an *ex novo* foundation or an existing one, and for this new see to replace Urci. New city, new see.

The second discrepancy between Latin and Arabic toponyms concerns Complutum, which is written over the Arabic *Wādī l-Hijāra*. Founded in 412, Complutum sent a bishop to a council for the first time in 597, and it is recurrently found in later lists. The see is also mentioned in Eulogius’s letter to the Bishop of Pamplona, as one of the bishoprics that sheltered him in his frustrated trip to Gaul, approximately in 850 (*Memoriale Sanctorum*, in CSM, 406).

The name *Wādī l-Hijāra* is unequivocally Arabic in origin and can be easily identified with Guadalajara. The earliest mention of this toponym is related to an event

in 863: the marriage of the city’s *ṣāhib*, a Berber called Azrāq, with the daughter of Mūsā ibn Mūsā, one of the *aṣḥāb* in the Ebro frontier (TIA, 111-2). *Wādī l-Hijāra* appears again in the 10th century in relation to frontier developments, and in the 11th century as one of the most important cities in the *taifa* of Toledo. Archaeological studies have revealed that the *madīna* was fortified during this period.²¹ CCAEA only reports the move of the episcopal see of *Complutum* to *Wādī l-Hijāra*, a new Muslim foundation, but provides no date for this event nor the circumstances that led to this event. Archaeology, however, attests to the decline of the first old *civitas* and the distinct emergence of the second *madīna*.²²

If the previous examples concern the relocation of episcopal sees to adapt to the new Andalusi urban structure, others refer to a change of name to express Andalusi administrative circumscriptions. In this way, several sees had the genitive or *idāfa* “of Tudmīr” added to their name: *Ilj Tudmīr* (Ilici, Elche) and *Balansiya Tudmīr* (Valentia, Valencia). Both Ilici and Valentia feature in the acts of the Fourth Council of Toledo, and also in the CCAEA. During the Visigothic period, both cities were part of the Cartaginense province, with capital in Toletum; four centuries later, they were in all probability still under the ecclesiastical authority of Toletum, as suggested by the *Etymologiae*, but were in the administrative *kūra* of Tudmīr.

Located in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula, *Tudmīr* corresponds to the territory ruled by Count Teodomiro at the time of the conquest. Teodomiro signed a pact with the invaders in 715, leading to the creation of the *kūra*.²³ This circumscription has no ecclesiastical or administrative Visigothic or Roman precedent.²⁴ The addition of the genitive or *idāfa* “of *Tudmīr*,” clearly Andalusi, suggests that the copyist was updating the list, which implies that both bishoprics were active.

More changes in episcopal sees during the Andalusi period can be inferred from folios 4r and 4v in the same manuscript. The first lists the civil provinces in Hispania in the aftermath of Diocletian’s reform in the end of the 3rd century: *Tāra[q]ūna* (Tarraconensis), *Qarṭajāna*

²¹ Cuadrado Prieto and Crespo Cano (2018, 171-73) date the foundation of the city, originally called *Madīnat al-Farāj*, in the late 8th or early 9th century, under the rule of the Banū Salīm. See the same article for an up-to-date review of the evidence.

²² Torres Balbás (1959) dated the abandonment of old Complutum to the 10th century. According to him, a new settlement, Qal’at ‘Abd al-Salām (modern Alcalá), emerged near the old city and eventually absorbed what was left of the former Roman city. This, if correct, suggests that the move of the bishopric to *Wādī l-Hijāra* predates the consolidation of Qal’at ‘Abd al-Salām, or the new enclave would have also absorbed the episcopal see. In any case, this is nothing but a hypothesis built on a hypothesis. About the decline of Complutum, see also Rascón Marqués and Sánchez Montes (2006).

²³ It is to be noted that, of the two cities, only *Ilsh* is mentioned in Tudmīr’s capitulation pact, which is reported, among other sources, in al-‘Uḡrī’s *Ṭarṣī‘ al-aḥbār* (TA, 4-5). In fact, al-‘Uḡrī explicitly leaves *Balansiya* outside of the *Kūra* of Tudmīr and makes it the capital of its own *kūra* (TA, 17-19). For the pact of *Tudmīr* see Franco Sánchez (2014).

²⁴ Nothing in Diocletian’s territorial reforms resembles, even remotely, the *kūra* of *Tudmīr*. About the alleged continuity of Roman administrative boundaries during the Andalusi period, see Lorenzo (2020). The earliest mention of this territory is the famous pact of Count Teodomiro, although the date of the creation of the administrative division is less certain.

(Carthaginensis), *Bitāqa* (Baetica), *Lujadāniya* (Lusitania), *Jilliḡiyya* (Gaellecia)²⁵ and *Ṭanja* (Mauretania Tingitana).

In all probability, the scribe's source is Isidore's *Etymologiae*,²⁶ written in the early 7th century, the oldest copy of which, the so-called *Codex Toledano*,²⁷ is dated to the 9th century. The text reads: *Tarraconensem, Cartaginensem, Lusitaniam, Galliciam, Baeticam, et trans freta in regione Africae Tingitaniam*" (*Etymologiae*, XIV-29; SIH, 1118-9; VTR/14/3, fol 120r). Interestingly, the last page of this manuscript contains the transcription of this text in Arabic script, written by an unknown hand at a later date *Karāsī al-Andalus sitta: Tarakūna, Qarṭājana, Bī[ti]qa, Lushidāniya, Jillīḡiyya, Ṭanja*." Following this, the unknown scribe added the list of metropolitan sees in Arabic and, under them, their dependent sees in Latin (see appendix 1).

The main difference between Diocletian's and the ecclesiastical divisions concerns the denomination of circumscriptions: while in Diocletian's division circumscriptions were named after provinces, the ecclesiastical ones were named after the metropolitan see. Other differences spring from geopolitical factors, which makes them easy to date. First, the *Cartaginense* province, with capital in Carthago Spartaria, disappeared and was replaced by the diocese of Toledo. Although the II Council of Toledo of 527 mentions the existence of a province called Celtiberia or Carpetania, whose capital may have been Toledo, the city did not take over as capital of the ecclesiastical province from Carthago, under Byzantine rule since ca. 552, until the synod held in 610. When the Visigoths conquered the city in 622 the situation remained unchanged: Carthago lost its metropolitan character, being replaced by Bigastrum (Ceheguín, Murcia), while Toledo, which was also the royal capital, maintained it until the fall of the *Regnum Gothorum* in 711 (Ripoll 2000, 385-86; Ripoll and Velázquez 2000, 538-46; Collins 2004, 74).

The second difference with Diocletian's division concerns the incorporation to Hispania of the diocese of

Septimania, with capital in Narbonne. The city had been annexed by the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse in 462. With the help of Theodoric the Great, the Visigoths held on to the diocese after the debacle at Vouillé in 507, and kept it until the Muslim conquest in 711 (Ripoll 2000, 375-78; Gómez Salinero 2017, 33-38).

A third change is the disappearance of Mauretania Tingitana.²⁸ The incorporation of the province in the diocese of Hispania dates back to 285, during Diocletian's reign, and no change in status occurred until the Vandal conquest of 429. The brief Vandal occupation was followed by a period in which the diocese was independent, under the rule of local tribes, which lasted until the Byzantine conquest of 534. The Byzantines held the territory, at least nominally, until the Muslim conquest of ca. 690 (Villaverde Vega 2001). No mention of any Bishop of Tingi can be found either in Hispanic or in African council acts.²⁹

As noted, the list of dioceses in folio 4r of the CCAEA matches that in the *Etymologiae*. On the reverse of this folio the episcopal sees are divided by diocese and framed by architectural decoration; the lists of episcopal sees, with their metropolitan capital at the top, are separated by columns. However, if the list in folio 4r matches that in the *Etymologiae*, the one in folio 4v features a few, but significant, differences.

One is the presence of two sees that did not exist during the Visigothic period, and which are, therefore, Andalusí foundations: *Wādī l-Hijāra* and *Baṭalyaws*. We have already examined the first case, although its presence here confirms that the lists refers to the Andalusí period. Concerning *Baṭalyaws*, modern Badajoz, the city was founded, according to Ibn Ḥayyān, in 875, on the initiative of emir Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān. He wanted to reward 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Marwān al-Jillīqī for fighting alongside him, although he was later to turn against his sovereign. This period was marked by rebellion, the *fitna*, so, according to Ibn Ḥayyān, Ibn Marwān joined the "infidels from beyond the frontier

²⁵ In the Arabic texts, *Jilliḡiyya* is the name that refers to the Kingdom of Asturias and, since 914, León.

²⁶ References to the new division can be found in earlier sources, although the manuscripts on which they are written are more recent than those to which I refer here. The earliest reference to this division is found in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, written in the 5th century. The earliest manuscript copies of this work are 14th-15th-century copies of a 9th-century manuscript, now lost. See Neira Faleiro (2005). Al-Bakrī (KMM, 891-93), for his part, claims to give an account of Diocletian's division (which he attributes to Constantine), but in reality he is referring to the ecclesiastical division which, as we shall see, differs slightly from Diocletian's administrative division.

²⁷ Originally deposited in Toledo's cathedral, it is currently in the Biblioteca Nacional (Catalogue no. VTR/14/3).

²⁸ According to the denomination of the *Historia Gothorum Pseudoisidoriana* in the *Codex Escorialensis* R-II-18, dated between 8th and 9th centuries: Toledo, Spalis, Emereta, Terracona, Bracara and Narbona. See González Muñoz (2000, 53-56).

²⁹ Villaverde Vega's (2001, 335-36) attempt to explain this absence highlights that not a single reference to the bishop of Tingi attending councils, or indeed to the city as an episcopal see, exists. Villaverde Vega reports funerary inscriptions that mention bishops in the territory of Tingitana, but none of them specify the see in which they ruled.

(*ahl al-shirk*)³⁰ and helped the *muwalladūn*, that is, the indigenous groups, against the Arabs, only to return to the emir's authority (*al-tā'a*) at a later date (MQ-III, 53-4).

In reality, and despite Ibn Ḥayyān's determination to present the *fitna* in ethnic and religious terms, what we know about this character is typical of the rebellious warlords (*aṣḥāb*) of the late 9th century. They were rebels that acted opportunistically in a context of war of all against all, and whose only aim was to plunder, regardless of the religious and ethnic origin of their victims. There is, therefore, no reason to link the foundation of the see with alleged pacts between al-Jilliḳī and the *ahl al-shirk* (the "infidels from beyond the frontier") and even less with him having *muwallad* origins. Needless to say, no evidence exists that he was originally a Christian or that he ever converted.

Following this solitary mention to the see, very little can be said about its foundation, other than setting a *post quem* date in 875, and later development. In any case, the fact that it appears in the CCAEA suggests the creation of a brand new bishopric during the Andalusī period.

The second difference between the list in this folio and the mysterious list at the end of the *Etymologiae* is that it contains seven ecclesiastical provinces instead of six: *Taraqūna*; *Narbūna*; illegible, probably *Tulayṭula*; *Mārida* (not *Lujadāniya*, that is, Lusitania); *Brāqara* (not *Gaelecia*); illegible, probably *Ishbīliya*; and *Tanja*. The fact that this surprising see of *Tanja* features alongside the names of metropolitan sees, and not among the administrative provinces, seems to suggest the creation of a new diocese in North Africa before 1049 but after the codex of Toledo, which, as noted, is dated to the 9th century.³¹

The question is whether the scribe that wrote the CCAEA list mistook ecclesiastical dioceses with Diocletian's circumscriptions, or whether this implies the creation of an episcopal see in *Tingīl/Tanja* under Islamic rule. In my opinion, there is sufficient ground to rule out the former option: the copyist tried to list ecclesiastical provinces as they stood in 1049. One argument in favour of the error hypothesis is that the author of the CCAEA list uses ecclesiastical, i.e. metropolitan, denominations, rather than Diocletian's provincial ones. In addition,

the list features Toletum instead of Carthago, in line with the city's capital status during the Visigothic period. Revealingly, the scribe included *Wādī l-Ḥijāra* and *Batalyawus*, of Andalusī origin, among the suffragan sees.

The second option, the creation of a bishopric in North Africa under the ecclesiastical authority of Hispania by the Islamic Andalusī rulers, is also rife with difficulties. As it is the only reference, this issue must be handled with great caution. In any case, the creation of an episcopal sees under Islamic rule is nothing but normal. The earliest instance dates back to the late 7th century, when 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān, governor of Egypt, commanded the Coptic and Melkite bishops to build churches in his palatial city of Ḥalwān (KSAB, 139; Drīdi, in this volume).

Closer examples, in geographical and chronological terms, may also be found, like the creation of episcopal sees in the Maghreb, on the initiative of Muslim rulers, mentioned in papal letters dated to the 11th century. A letter by Pope Leo IX, dated to 1053, refers to the Bishop of Gummi, which is identified as al-Mahdiya (Courtois 1945), a city founded by the Fatimid Caliph al-Mahdī in 921 to establish his court. Years later, in 1076, a letter by Gregory VII reports the departure of a bishop called Servando, who was anointed in Rome, for Bougie/Bijāya, as requested by emir Ḥammādī al-Nāṣir. Yet, the city was just founded by this emir in 1068 as his new capital, after abandoning Qal'at Banū Ḥammād (Idris 1962, 267-371; Talbi 1990; Prevost 2007, 472; Brett 2017, 41-45).

Should the see in Tanja be an Andalusī foundation and can we establish a date for it? This date must be later than the composition of the *Codex toledanus* and before the *Qanūn*, which points to the 10th century, during the Córdoba caliphate. It is worth recalling that Umayyad Caliphs, and especially the *ḥājib* Muḥammad ibn Abī 'Āmir al-Manṣūr, actively intervened in Northern African affairs, where the Fatimid caliphate and, later, the growing strength of the Zirid dynasty posed a direct threat to the Umayyads. Córdoba sent troops, but also carried out important public works, such as the fortification of Tangiers, which had been without a city wall until then, according to Ibn Ḥawqal and al-Bakrī (KSA, 79; KMM-2, 781-83).³²

³⁰ I have translated this as "infidels from beyond the frontier" to avoid the confusion that might result from using an abstract term such as "polytheists" or "Christians", because the expression used in the original carries the connotation of "enemy Christians", in contrast to "friendly Christians", the *naṣārā*. See Lapidra (1997).

³¹ In fact, it does not necessarily postdate the codex as such, but the intervention of the scribe that added the name of the sees in an unknown date.

³² Ibn Ḥayyān wrote that the city walls were built in 973, that is, during the caliphate of al-Ḥakam II. See Gurriarán (2018, 248-75).

3. ARABIC-ISLAMIC TEXTS

As noted, Islamic Arabic chronicles only mention bishops incidentally, that is, bishops are alluded to in the texts not to report the existence of a prelate or even a Christian community, but when bishops participated in one way or another in events involving the Islamic community (*umma*). They are, in consequence, scarce, but their value for the issue at hand cannot be overstated.

The earliest such mentions appear in the context of the *fitna* that swept over al-Andalus in the last quarter of the 9th century. This period of civil strife was described in detail by Arab chroniclers, such as Ibn Ḥayyān, who also gives some details about the activity of bishops during the *fitna*, as well as attesting the survival of old bishoprics and the creation of new ones, in line with what can be inferred from the CCAEA.

The first newly created bishopric was *Bajjāna*. According to Ibn Ḥayyān's *Muqtabas*, a bishop from *Bajjāna* called 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥassān was, along with the Metropolitan Bishop (*miṭrān*) of *Ishbīliya*, 'Abbās b. al-Mundir, and Ya'qūb b. Mahrān, the Bishop of *Ilbīra*, part of a episcopal delegation sent by Caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III to *Jillīqiya*, i.e. the Kingdom of León, in 941 to discuss the liberation of the prisoners captured by King Ramirus II in 939 (MQ-V, 467). Again, bishops that enjoy the caliph's full trust, put in charge of a delicate diplomatic mission with the fate of important captives at stake.

While the sees of *Ishbīliya* and *Ilbīra* are well known from the Visigothic period, that of *Bajjāna* is completely new which means it is an Umayyad foundation. Some authors, such as Aillet (2010, 85-87), have identified it with Urci, although the CCAEA makes it clear that this bishopric moved to *Jayyān*, so we must assume that this is a new foundation. As pointed out by Acien (2010, 27), however, the city had disappeared by the mid-9th century, and only its memory remained, for instance, in al-Bakrī (*Ursh, wa-hiya Bajjāna*) (KMM-II, 892). By then, the episcopal see had moved elsewhere, as reflected in the CCAEA.

The city of *Bajjāna*, the precursor of Almería, was highly significant for Caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III. The original settlement was founded by so-called *bahriyyūn*, that is, seamen from North Africa, in 884, when the *fitna*, the civil war that devastated al-Andalus in the late 9th and early 10th century, was in full swing. *Bajjāna* was founded

as an independent city, and it enjoyed considerable autonomy at a time in which Córdoba lacked the resources to impose its authority. However, the city's inhabitants eventually joined emir 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, who had come to power in 912. Thereafter, the new emir always favoured the city, especially as his authority consolidated, defeating all rebels and becoming caliph in 929.³³

The same passage of the *Muqtabas* mentions another newly minted episcopal see: Bobastro (*Bubasht.r*), the city founded around 880 by the rebel 'Umar b. Ḥafṣūn.³⁴ Ibn Ḥayyān alludes to the existence of a bishop in the city, called Ja'far b. Maqsim, and to his role as mediator between the rebel and the emir 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (MQ-V, 113-4, 140).

The creation of a bishopric in the city is far from being a rebellious act. As noted, it was by no means exceptional, and often the sovereigns are directly behind these foundations. Also, it is worth nothing that, in his chronicle, Ibn Ḥayyān spares no invective for 'Umar b. Ḥafṣūn, but this bishop Ibn Maqsim seems to be in his good books. The question is, therefore, if the foundation of an episcopal see in Bobastro is not an act of rebellion, but yet another of those rituals in which the rebel tried to emulate the emir.

The above noted ecclesiastical division is mentioned by al-Bakrī, a 11th century Andalusi Muslim geographer (KMM, 891-3). He introduces the list with the sentence "Constantine (*Qunṣṭanṭīn*)" and divides it (referring to al-Andalus) into six frontiers (*hudūd*),³⁵ which he then lists: first, *madīnat Narbūna*, followed by 5 *mudun*; second, *madīnat Brāqara*, followed by 10 *mudun*; third, *madīnat Tarakūna*, followed by 14 *mudun*; fourth, *madīnat Tulayṭula*, followed by 19 *mudun*, including *Wādī l-Hijāra* and *madīnat Ursh*, "which is *Bajjāna*;" fifth, *madīnat Mārīda*, followed by 11 *mudun*; and finally *madīnat Ishbīliya*, followed by 16 *mudun*, including *Jayyān* and *Marshāna*. It is obvious that this author did not reflect the division of al-Andalus into *kuwār*, but simply copied from an ecclesiastical Arabic source, the *mudun* being episcopal sees.

4. THE FINAL SOURCE: 11TH-13TH LATIN CHRONICLES

Latin sources from the time of the conquest of al-Andalus and Arabic-Islamic sources share one feature: they mention Andalusi bishops only incidentally, as though

³³ Al-Himyarī gives a detailed description of the city (RM-I, 79-80).

³⁴ The cradle of 'Umar ibn Ḥafṣūn's rebellion in the 880s, this city has generated an enormous bibliography, between Spanish nationalism, that turned 'Umar ibn Ḥafṣūn's into a symbol of anti-Arab movements, and those who, in the late 20th century, saw this revolt as the result of the clash between two different social formations: Islam and feudalism. See an overview about the historiographic debate on the figure of Ibn Ḥafṣūn in Fierro (2014).

³⁵ About the meaning of this word, see Lorenzo Jiménez (2019, 13-14).

both regarded them as something foreign. They do, however, reveal the existence of bishoprics which, in other circumstances, would have been regarded as gone, as often no other mentions to them exist since the remote Visigothic period.

Concerning Dertosa (Tortosa), which we know through Bishop Paternus, who visited Santiago de Compostella in 1064 to negotiate with Alfonso VI on behalf of al-Muqtadir, *malik* of the *taifa* of Zaragoza between 1046 and 1081. Years later, Count Sisenando Davides offered Paternus the bishopric of Coímbra, which had just been taken by León, and Paternus accepted around 1080 (Carriedo Tejedo 2014, 222-54). Something similar occurred with the see of Dianium, Denia, which disappears from the record during the Visigothic period to re-emerge in 1058, when it was offered to Gislbert, Bishop of Barcelona in 1058. The document mentions the existence of an episcopal see in Daenia, already known in the Visigothic period, and another in Orihuela, of which no prior reference exists.³⁶ However, the authenticity of this text has been challenged (Barceló 1983; Mesa Sanz 2019; Bruce 2020, 182-91).

Two chronicles mention bishops, the anonymous *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi*, and Jiménez de Rada's *Historia de rebus Hispaniae*. The former describes the siege, conquest, and sack of Lisbon by crusaders on their way to Jerusalem, in 1147. The text features two mentions to Bishop of Lisbon; in the first, the chronicler points out the important role played by the prelate in the defence of the city against the crusaders (EL, 114),³⁷ while the second recounts the death of the bishop, whose throat was slit by the assailants (EL, 176).³⁸

The latter chronicle, Jiménez de Rada's *Historia de rebus Hispaniae*, was written around 1243. The chronicle mentions the bishops of Assidonia, Elepla and Marchena, as well as a bishop called Clemens, whose see is not specified. These bishops sought asylum in Toledo after the Almohad conquest in 1143 (HRH, 118-9) (see appendix 3). The sees of Assidonia and Elepla are known from the Visigothic period, but not Marchena, which does not seem to stem from an older see; had that been the case, Jiménez de Rada would have provided its Latin name. Jiménez de Rada's presentation of the facts seems to imply that Marchena was an Andalusí foundation: while the first two sees in the list are referred to as *assidonensis* and *eleplensis*, in the last one he dispenses with the genitive and uses a preposition ("of Marchena"). The archbishop chronicler did not bother to latinise the name, in all probability Arabic in origin. Like in previous instances, everything suggests that the city is

an Andalusí foundation, which was later endowed with an episcopal see. The city, *Marshāna*,³⁹ is mentioned by al-Bakrī as one of the *mudun* dependent on *Ishbiliya* (KMM, 1493). If, as suggested above, al-Bakrī is presenting a list of episcopal sees, the date of composition of *Al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik*, that is, the 11th century, would stand as an *ante quem* date for the creation of the see.

CONCLUSIONS

Until the 9th century, most sources that mention the Andalusí church are the Christian Latin documents preserved in monasteries in the north of the Iberian Peninsula. The production of these documents slowed down from the 10th century onwards, perhaps as a result of the gradual adoption of Arabic by Andalusí Christians as everyday language, and then in ritual, like in Syria and later in Egypt. In all probability, the documents written in this language in the context of the Andalusí church were lost forever, like most Andalusí documents in Arabic. Islamic chronicles were uninterested in Andalusí Christians, so mentions are few and far between, like in Latin chronicles, which, as the account of the sack of Lisbon demonstrates, saw the Andalusí Church as a foreign thing. The result of this is scarce, disperse, and largely incidental information. However, some conclusions can still be drawn.

First, many of the Roman and Visigothic episcopal sees remained active until at least the 13th century. This is clear from the list of bishops in Spalis, Toletó and Iliberri, but also from the occasional mention of other sees, such as Córdoba, Málaga, Acci, Tortosa, and Lisbon. These mentions should not be regarded as exhaustive, that is, it must not be believed that only sees that are mentioned existed, at the time when they were mentioned; these references must instead be taken as the reflection of a broader continuity over time, including the survival of sees that do not feature in the record. There is no reason to think that they disappeared; in fact, what the available evidence suggests is that many did not disappear and that the Muslim rulers themselves supported their existence.

This can be inferred, first, from the relocation of episcopal sees, following the creation of new cities, like *Jayyān* and *Wādī l-Hijāra*, but especially of new episcopal sees like *Bajjāna* or, perhaps, *Tanja*. The same phenomenon is unfolding in North Africa under the Fatimid caliphate, with the creation of a see in al-Mahdiya, and in the Hammādi

³⁶ "...confirmamus Mayorcas et Minorcas insulas Baleares et episcopatum civitatis Denie et episcopatum civitatis Orioleaf..." (Bruce 2020, 182, n. 768).

³⁷ *Dato utrimque signo, ipso civitatis alcaie super murum cum episcopo et primiceriis civitatis stantibus pax induciarum, ut quid velint dicant, utriusque sancitur.*

³⁸ *Episcopum vero civitatis antiquissimum, preciso iugulo, contra ius et fas occidit.*

³⁹ In BNF ms. Arabe 2218, fol 254 -copy of the 13th century- appears the word *mrshā* and, in the margin, *-nah*.

court, with the creation of a bishopric in Bougie on the initiative of emir al-Nāṣir. The organisation of councils in Córdoba, three of which are known, and the promotion of bishops, like Recemundus, also point in this direction. The creation of bishoprics like *Bubastr's* or *Batalyaw's* must not, therefore, be regarded as a rebellious act: they are framed by the attempt, in this case by rebel rulers, to emulate the emir.

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APPENDICES

1.- Isidore of Seville. *Etymologiae*, XIV-29

Karāsī al-Andalus sitta: Tara[q]ūna, Qarṭājana, Bitāqa, Luṣidāniya, Jilliḡiyya Tanja. Miṭrāniya Mārida: Pace, Elisipona, Ossonoba, Egiaunia, Gonibria, Beseo, Lameco, Calabria, Salamantica, Abela, Elbora, Gaurio. *Miṭrāniya Iṣbīliya laḥā min al-karāsī:* Italica, Asidona, Elepla, Malaca, Eliberri, Astigi, Gordoba, Egabro, Tucci; *Miṭrāniya Tarakūna:* Barcinona, Egara, Gerunda, Enpurias, Ausona, Urgello, Ilerda, Dertosa, Gesaragusta, Osea, Pampilona, Auca, Galahurra, Tirassona; *Miṭrāniya Ṭulayṭula:* Oreto, Bea tia, Mentesa, Acci, Basti, Urci, Setabis, Ilici, Valentia, Valeria, Segobrica, Segobia, Arcavica, Gompluto, Segontia, Oxuma, Palentia. *Miṭrāniya Brāqa:* Dumio, Portucale, Tude, Auriense, Locu, Britonia, Asturica, Iria. *Miṭrāniya Narbūna:* Beteris, Magalona, Nemauso, Luteba, Carcasona, Elena (VTR/14/3, fol. 163v).

2.- Palaeographic transcription of the list of bishops in CCAEA, fol. 319v & 320r

مطارنه الاندلس سب

- انا يشيدر اسقف مطران اشبيليه امضيت هذه الحكمة [-] انا اشكلوة اسقف مطران نربونه كنيت ورضيت /
 انا اصطين اسقف مطران مارده حضرت وكنيت [-] انا يليان اسقف برافره كنيت ورضيت /
 انا يشنن اسقف مطران طليطلة حضرت وكنيت [-] انا اودخنن اسقف مطران طرفونه كنيت بدى راضيا / هذه جميع مطارنه الاندلس السنه /
 انا برطور اسقف لمكة كنيت lamicensis [-] انا ميسن اسقف كرسى اطنابه كنيت egitanensis /
 انا كمكروندس اسقف اشترفه كنيت asturicensis [-] انا ايانويس اسقف اغاروه كنيت agarensis /
 انا طودويس اسقف عبله كنيت abelensis [-] انا اصطين اسقف اوشونه كنيت ausunensis /
 انا فرطلس اسقف الانه كنيت elenensis [-] انا كنيبيوس اسقف بلنسيه كنيت aplentina desanctiantoninus /
 انا بيطين اسقف بعشطره كنيت ugastensis [-] انا بنبيوس اسقف فوريه كنيت بدى caunensis /
 انا اوسابيوس اسقف بشتيه كنيت bastitane [-] انا بواس اسقف ليله كنيت بدى eleplensis /
 انا مرجالوش اسقف جيان كنيت urcitane [-] انا يواس اسقف طرطوسه كنيت dertosane /
 انا لوديراط اسقف فرطيه كنيت cordobensis [-] انا يرمان اسقف دومييه كنيت dumiensis /
 انا ثونيط اسقف جرنده كنيت gerundensis [-] انا كلرنش اسقف اش كنيت accitane /
 انا ششلد اسقف انبوريش كنيت anpostanus [-] انا ايلاريوس اسقف وادى الحجاره كنيت conplutensis /
 انا غيبنيوش اسقف قلهره كنيت cala gurritane [-] انا شريزه اسقف قلبريه كنيت calabriensis // 320 /
 انا رماروش اسقف نامشه كنيت nemausensis [-] انا رناريوش اسقف ارجاله كنيت orcellentane /
 انا فلورننن اسقف شاطيه كنيت situbitane [-] انا اينسيوس اسقف استجه كنيت astigitane /
 انا انشيليت اسقف برفال كنيت portucalensis [-] انا افرى اسقف التيونيه كنيت olisiponensis /
 انا اطاريش اسقف البيره كنيت eliberritane [-] انا شابلوه اسقف اوريط كيبب Oretarius /
 انا فرشتوش اسقف لارده كنيت Ilerdensis [-] انا اشطاشيوش اسقف طوده كنيت tudensis /
 انا مشطاح اسقف بلنسيه ثدمبر كنيت ualentina [-] انا شدلث اسقف وشغه كنيت oscensis /
 انا انطونيوش اسقف شعريه كنيت sagubriensis [-] انا انشريف اسقف شعوبيه كنيت sagubienensis /
 انا سربننن اسقف ألج ثدمبر كنيت ilicitanus [-] انا ابرجيوش اسقف يبالفه كنيت Italicensis /
 انا مطوبيوس اسقف برطانيه كنيت brittaniensis [-] انا مداريوش اسقف باجه كنيت pacensis /
 انا البينيوش اسقف طرمونه كنيت tyrassone [-] انا بسفونيوش اسقف لگه كنيت lucensis /
 انا بزوليون اسقف سرفسطه كنيت cesaragutanus [-] انا فطروش اسقف بطاريش كنيت beterreensis /
 انا الدشكوش اسقف شغنه كنيت saguntiensis [-] انا شسينكلش اسقف البيره كنيت olborensis /
 انا ليشوش اسقف بتهوه كنيت uesecisis [-] انا ثوداط اسقف فيره كنيت segubrensis /
 انا اكله اسقف شلمنطيه كنيت salamanticensis [-] انا اوشابيوش اسقف بلاريه كنيت ualeriensis /
 انا ايله اسقف اخشوميه كنيت oxmensis [-] انا بعفوب اسقف منتيشه كنيت mentesane /
 انا جنطور الفس خليف فتنس اسقف تنس كنيت بدى tucitani [-] انا رناتوش الفس خليفه ارملا اسقف قلبريه كنيت بدى conimbriensis /
 انا بمانيوش اسقف اشيدونه كنيت asidoneis [-] انا انطوليوش اسقف لطنايه كنيت بدى lutuensis /
 انا برشبارنيوس اسقف فستلونه كنيت بدى castelonensis [-] انا بونش الفس خليفه شباريوش اسقف برجلونه كنيت barcinonensis /
 انا مركش الفس خليفه داود اسقف اوريه كنيت auriensis [-] انا اصطين ارجدافن شيش اسقف مغلونه كنيت magalonensis /
 انا دمتال ارج ديافن سلام اسقف فرشونه كنيت arcuiensis [-] انا دماريوش ارجدافن حلبيه فرتارى اسقف اركيفه carca'sonensis /

3.- Jiménez de Rada. HRH, 118-9

“Fuit etiam ibi alius electus nomine Clemens, qui fugit a facie Almohadum Talaueram, ibique diu moratus uitam finiuit, cuius contemporaneos memini me uidisse. Venerunt etiam tres episcopi, Assidonensis, Eplensis et tercius de Marchena, et quidam archidiachonus sanctissimus, pro quo etiam Dominus miracula operabatur, qui Archiquez arabice dicebatur”.

List of the places mentioned in the text and their ubication in the map.

	Latin name	Arabic name	Current name
1	Acci	<i>Ash</i>	Guadix
2	Assidona	<i>Awshūna</i>	Medina Sidonia
3	Astigi	<i>Astīja</i>	Écija
4	Basti	<i>Bashṭa</i>	Baza
5	Beatiensis		Baeza
6	Bigastri		Ceheguín (Murcia)
7	Braccara	<i>Brāqara</i>	Braga
8	Caesaraugusta	<i>Saraqūṣṭa</i>	Zaragoza
9	Carthago Spartaria		Cartagena
10	Castulona	<i>Q.shṭaluwna</i>	Linares
11	Conplutum		Alcalá de Henares
12	Corduba	<i>Qurṭuba</i>	Córdoba
13	Dertosa	<i>Ṭurṭūsa</i>	Tortosa
14	Dianium, Daenia		Denia
15	Egabro		Cabra
16	Elepla	<i>L.b.la</i>	Niebla
17	Eliberri, Iliberris	<i>Ilbīra</i>	Atarfe (Granada)
18	Emerita	<i>Mārida</i>	
19	Illici	<i>Ilj Tudmīr *</i>	Elche
20	Lyxbona	<i>Alashbūna</i>	
21	Malaca		
22	Marchena	<i>Marshāna</i>	Marchena
23	Mentesa	<i>Mantisa</i>	La Guardia de Jaén
24	Narbona	<i>Narbūna</i>	Narbona
25	Oxoma	<i>Akshshuwmya</i>	Osma
26	Pampilona		Pamplona
27	Segontia		Sigüenza
28	Spalis, Ispalis	<i>Ishbīliya</i>	Sevilla
29	Tarraco	<i>Ṭaraqūna, Ṭarakūna</i>	Tarragona
30	Tingi	<i>Ṭanja</i>	Tangier
31	Toletum	<i>Ṭulayṭula</i>	Toledo
32	Tucci	<i>Tūsh</i>	Martos
33	Urci		?
34	Valentia	<i>Balansiya Tudmīr *</i>	Valencia
35		<i>Bajjāna</i>	Pechina
36		<i>Batalyaws</i>	Badajoz
37		<i>Bubashṭ.r</i>	Bobastro
38	Urci*	<i>Jayyān</i>	Jaén
39	Conplutum*	<i>Wādī l-Hijāra</i>	Guadalajara

* According to Ms. 1623, fol. 319v-320r

BEYOND 711: BUILDING AND AFTERLIFE OF CHURCHES
IN AL-ANDALUS

MÁS ALLÁ DEL 711: CONSTRUCCIÓN Y CONTINUIDAD
DE LAS IGLESIAS EN AL-ANDALUS

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SUMMARY

This chapter aims to present an archaeological perspective of different case studies in the Iberian Peninsula in order to better understand the fate of Christian churches in the early Islamic period in the Iberian Peninsula (eighth-tenth centuries). I argue for the conversion of churches into mosques, the erection of mosques upon churches, and the different processes of renewal and/or abandonment of earlier churches as well as the construction of new ones from 711 onwards.

KEYWORDS: Mozarabic, monastery, Christian, Islam, mosque

RESUMEN

Con el fin de estudiar el destino de las iglesias cristianas durante los primeros siglos del Islam en la península ibérica (siglos VIII-X), es nuestra intención, desde una perspectiva arqueológica y mediante el análisis de diferentes ejemplos, abordar los procesos de conversión de iglesias en mezquitas, de construcción de mezquitas sobre iglesias, de renovación y/o abandono de iglesias previas y la construcción de otras nuevas a partir del 711.

PALABRAS CLAVE: mozárabe, monasterio, cristiano, islam, mezquita

In recent decades, the archaeological and the written records have been mobilised to update our knowledge about al-Andalus and the coeval northern Christian kingdoms. Within this process of historiographical renewal, the afterlife of late antique churches and the construction of new ones after the arrival of Islam to the Iberian Peninsula in 711 have been part of a wider discussion that began in the 1990s, concerning the chronology and the characterization and interpretation of late antique (fifth-seventh centuries) and early medieval (eighth-tenth centuries) Hispanic architectural culture (updated by Caballero and Utrero 2013). But the fate of Christian buildings has also been discussed in relation to the possibility of continued church construction in al-Andalus from the early eighth century onwards (generally known as Mozarabic churches) (Garen 1992, 301-04; Fierro 1995, 246-47; Caballero 2000, 225-26; 2009, 15-16; García Sanjuán 2013; Arce 2014; Azuar

2016, 80-82; Utrero 2024), and the transformation of late antique Christian churches into, or their occupation by, new mosques (Calvo 2007; 2011, for general views). The latter phenomenon also involves the difficult issue of identification and dating of earlier structures, which are not necessarily late antique churches, eventually turned into mosques.

This chapter aims to present an archaeological perspective of different case studies in the Iberian Peninsula in order to better understand the fate of Christian churches in the early Islamic period in the Iberian Peninsula (eighth-tenth centuries). I argue for the conversion of churches into mosques, the erection of mosques upon churches, and the different processes of renewal and/or abandonment of earlier churches as well as the construction of new ones (Fig. 1). All these issues are approached from an archaeological perspective, which intends to stress the relevance of stratigraphy for

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temporal sequences and, especially, for the gaps in these sequences, in order to improve our understanding of the processes of continuity and discontinuity reflected by the material evidence.

1. FROM CHURCH TO MOSQUE?

No material evidence exists for the conversion of any church into a mosque, or for the partition of buildings for their simultaneous use as a church and as mosque. Although some potential examples have been put forth, detailed examination shows that this type of transformation did not actually take place or, at least, that it was not a common phenomenon. This sort of transformation involves the reorientation of the former building, the introduction of a *mihrab*, and probably others related

repairs that are not always easy to trace in the archaeological record.

This is the case of the rural church of El Gatillo (province of Cáceres), built in the early sixth century and modified several times during the eighth century before its final transformation into an Islamic house and later abandonment. Within this sequence, a small niche introduced in the south-eastern corner of the south-western room (baptistery) was thought at first to be a *mihrab* (Caballero 2003). This hypothesis was later rejected after the revision of the archaeological evidence, and it was concluded that this was merely the support of a baptismal font added in the eighth century, when the church was still operational, along with other repairs (Caballero and Sáez 2009, 161 and 178; Caballero 2009, 24-25).

The basilica of Casa Herrera, close to the town of Merida (province of Badajoz), was also built in the early



Fig. 1. Map with the sites mentioned in the text: 1- El Gatillo (Cáceres). 2- Casa Herrera, (Badajoz). 3- Las Vegas de Pueblanueva (Toledo). 4- Montinho das Laranjeiras (Algarve). 5- Los Hitos (Toledo). 6- Idanha-a-Velha (Idanha-a-Nova). 7- Recopolis (Guadalajara). 8- Tolmo de Minateda (Albacete). 9- Guarrazar (Toledo). 10- El Germo (Córdoba). 11- Monte da Cegonha (Beja). 12- Cerro da Vila (Algarve). 13- Algezares (Murcia). 14- Son Fradinet (Mallorca). 15- Milreu (Algarve). 16- Las Mesas de Villaverde (Málaga). 17- Santa María de Melque (Toledo). 18- San Pedro de La Mata (Toledo). 19- Santa Lucía del Trampal (Cáceres). 20- Valdecanales (Jaén). 21- Almonaster (Huelva). 22- Mértola (Alentejo). 23.- São Cucufate (Beja). 24- São João de Azinhais (Setúbal). 25- Trujillo (Cáceres). Property of the author.

sixth century and was in use without interruption until the early eighth century. The excavation carried out in the 1990s found a space attached to the southern door, almost square in plan (3 m long and 3 m wide) and with rounded corners. This structure was also thought to be the niche of a later mosque (Ulbert 1991, 200), but no further reasons apart from the plan can be presented. On the other hand, ninth- and tenth-century Arabic inscriptions engraved on the still-standing columns in the hall of the basilica led Barceló (2002; also Calvo 2007, 164-65) to argue that the church was reused as a jail during that period, when the original building was almost in ruins. Meanwhile, Sidarus and Teichner (1997, 183) held that these inscriptions had a funerary meaning. In this sense, it must be remembered that the basilica is surrounded by graves that reuse sixth-century impostes and columns, which probably come from the building, which necessarily means that the funerary features postdate the ruin or destruction of the church. Finally, although these graves reuse late antique elements, they show no indication of being Islamic (Ulbert and Cruz 1991, 197-201). They might belong to Christian people who keep using the location of the ruined church, which still held meaning for them, but as a cemetery.

A third example is the mausoleum of Las Vegas de San Antonio or Pueblanueva (province of Toledo), built in the second half of the fourth-century. Hauschild (1978) suggested that the addition of three walls to form a new rectangular space could be interpreted as the sanctuary of a late antique church. A marble slab altar dated to the sixth-seventh century, reused to cover of a north-south-oriented grave, along with the presence of longitudinal cuts in the ground, thought to be a trace of the chancel screens, and the discovery of a belt buckle in another tomb, also dated to the late sixth and the early seventh century, are, in this view, further evidence for this conversion. Hauschild (1978, 332) was, however, not entirely convinced about the space being used as a sanctuary and being contemporaneous to the original building.

Hauschild (1978, 339) is also cautious with the suggestion that the small south-eastern added structure could be a *mihrab*. The feature is semi-circular in plan, 1 m wide and 70 cm long and was built in rough masonry bound with mud. Islamic pottery was also found. Recent works (De la Llave and Escobar 2017, 39-40) have reported twelve further graves, all of which reused materials, probably from the original mausoleum, and dated this semi-circular structure to an uncertain moment in the mid-sixth century. Bearing in mind all the evidence, the conversion of the mausoleum into a church with the introduction of the chancel screens and the addition of a rectangular space once the former was no longer in use

seems plausible (the latter addition has three doors and it could be a narthex, De la Llave and Escobar 2017, 38). Not enough data exists to confirm the conversion of the church into a mosque (*contra* Calvo 2007, 165; Caballero 2009, 31).

Regarding the Portuguese site of Montinho das Laranjeiras, in the nearby town of Alcoutim (region of Algarve), an earlier cruciform building was thought to have been turned into a mosque by transforming the atrium into a mausoleum and by opening a *mihrab* in a feature previously interpreted as a later south-eastern apse (Catarino 2005-06, 122-24). However, the partial destruction of the site by the river and by late-nineteenth century archaeological works makes it quite difficult to establish the sequence. Reservations about the transformation of the cruciform building thought to be a church (Utrero 2009, 141-42), about the interpretation of the surrounding structures (caliphate-period settlement or monastery), which were occupied until the thirteenth century, and about the relationship between them, make the interpretation of the site highly hazardous, including the date and transformations undergone by the original construction (several interpretations by Coutinho 2003; Caballero 2009, 33; Fernandes 2009, 265-67; Real 2014, 264-65 and 287).

Finally, a new example has recently been added to this corpus, the rural site of Los Hitos (Orgaz, province of Toledo), where a complex that comprises several buildings, including a sixth-century palace and a seventh-century single-nave church, have been documented (Morín *et al.* 2019). A rectangular niche with rounded angles, attached to the eastern wall of the church apse has been interpreted as the *mihrab* of an eleventh-century mosque, although the settlement was reoccupied earlier, in the ninth and tenth centuries (Morín *et al.* 2019, 72). Later, the excavators admit that the mosque could date to the tenth-eleventh centuries, and report that a *qibla* wall with two doors was also recorded, and that the funerary porch of the church was reused as an ablution room (Morín *et al.* 2022, 229). This sequence and interpretation of the complex has been recently challenged (Villa *et al.* 2022, 52-59) and the unusual orientation, towards the northeast, and location, offset to the north of the apse, of the *mihrab* has been highlighted (Calvo 2020, 42-43).

2. MOSQUES UPON CHURCHES?

This process of conversion has nothing to do with the construction of mosques upon places previously occupied by other buildings that were either in a ruinous state or already destroyed on purpose to make room for the

new mosque. Archaeologically, there are two challenges to be here considered. First, defining the function and type of the preceding building or buildings, which are especially common in previously-inhabited and densely-built urban centres. Second, measuring the time gap between the earlier constructions and the new mosques, whose builders did not necessarily know where they were building. Reoccupation of a place does not necessarily mean continuity in use. Furthermore, the orientation required by mosques probably made it quite difficult to reuse earlier structures and urban layout.

The mosque of Zaragoza is among the earliest ones, probably built ca. 730. Recent excavations on the site of the cathedral have revealed that the eighth-century mosque was built on an unbuilt plot, close to the former pagan temple of the Roman forum, breaking the alignment of the latter and of the surrounding Roman streets (Hernández Vera 2004). Remains of alabaster ashlar foundations could belong to the earliest phase of the mosque, while the building's expansion of the mid-ninth century might have involved seven naves and a *mihrab* (semi-circular interior and projected rectangular exterior).

Along with this example, the cases posed by Cordoba, Toledo, and Seville deserve a more in-depth approach, since they were important late antique urban centres and the mosques of which have recently been subject to archaeological attention, adding new data to the debate.

Concerning Cordoba, the discussion focuses on the identification of earlier structures thought to be Christian churches dated to the sixth century. The Great Mosque of Cordoba was built in 786 by emir 'Abd al-Rahmān I, and is probably the most paradigmatic example for the issue at hand. The presence of the basilica of San Vicente, which is claimed to be the main building of the episcopal see, has been argued about since the first excavations in the hall and the courtyard of the mosque, led by the architect Félix Hernández in the 1930s. Hernández disappointedly admitted that no traces of a proper early Christian or Visigothic ecclesiastical building were found in either place (Vicent 1976, 176). As recently highlighted by Arce (2015, 13), Hernández did not publish the results, probably because they were quite different to what he had expected. A few years after Hernández's works, based on the contradictory late Islamic written record, Ocaña (1942) argued for the existence of the basilica of San Vicente beneath the Mosque. This has remained the prevailing opinion since, despite the lack of any material evidence and the clear rejection

of the idea by Gómez-Moreno (1951, 19-20), who was witness of Hernández's interventions and who provided a brief but clear description of the evidence.

Together with Hernández's and Gómez-Moreno's notes, research by Marfil (2000) and the accurate and critical historiographic, documentary, and archaeological reviews recently published by Calvo (2007, 166-77), Caballero (2009, 28-30) and Arce (2015), clearly suggest that the hitherto known material remains cannot be identified as a church. The basilica-like building found in the courtyard does not have the required orientation and seems to have had several rooms and two lateral *exedrae*, and can be interpreted as a late Roman *porticus*, according to Gómez-Moreno (1951, 19), or an industrial complex, according to Caballero (2009, 29). The plan of the construction found under the hall is even more uncertain. It was built in rough stonework and rested on top of floors of Roman mosaic.² The area seems to house walls of different periods (they rest on different elevations and the physical relationships are awkward) so their interpretation as the remains of a single building, as suggested by Sánchez Ramos (2009; criticised by Arce, 2015, 35-37), appears implausible. Not without reservations, further remains have been recently interpreted as administrative or civil buildings belonging to the episcopal see and located in the south-western sector of the mosque (synthesis in León and Murillo 2009). Archaeological works recently undertaken in areas of the courtyard already excavated by Hernández have recorded a fifth-century building, thought to be part of the episcopal complex, which was monumentalized during the sixth century (León and Ortiz 2022). If the church of San Vicente was in the location of the Great Mosque, it is yet to be discovered.

In addition, Villa's (2020) recent analysis demonstrates that some sculptural elements were transported from the basilica of Santa Eulalia, in Merida (province of Badajoz), to Cordoba, a distance of nearly 200 km, and reused at the Great Mosque once the building of Santa Eulalia was dismantled in the mid-ninth century. These conclusions suggest that the reused materials were not local, and thus that they might not belong to the alleged episcopal church of San Vicente beneath the Mosque (Marfil 2000, 125). Finally, the large group of pieces on display in the Visigoth Museum of the Basilica of San Vicente, located within the Mosque, is actually a collection of heterogeneous pieces of different origins (Merida and Cordoba), production, and chronology (sixth to ninth centuries), whose context is unknown, so

² Vicent (1976, 176) also mentions that Hernández argued that no traces of an apse were found and that the hypothetical main nave was too narrow for a major building.

they cannot be used to argue for the presence of a church underneath the Mosque (Utrero and Villa 2023, 117).

The former mosque and later medieval church of Santa Catalina and convent of Santa Clara, which probably dates to the late tenth century (Calvo 2007, 163), lies close to the Great Mosque. Excavations in the 1980s revealed foundations that were thought to be part of a cruciform church set within a rectangular floor plan, with three semi-circular apses at the eastern end and a northern entrance (Marfil 1996). Dated to the late sixth century and associated with the nearby episcopal church of San Vicente and with the mosaics, the remains are similar to those found in the Great Mosque in style and building technique (Marfil 2000, 130-34).

This reconstruction, however, has been challenged (Caballero 2009, 30; Utrero 2009, 143-44; Sánchez Ramos 2010, 262-64; Utrero and Villa 2023, 116). Neither traces of the three apses, which allegedly faced northeast, nor liturgical elements have been discovered. Given that the walls cut across the mosaics, they must have been built later. In addition, the mosaics face different directions, which indicates that they might not be contemporary. Moreover, walls and mosaics have different orientations and most of the walls were reconstructed on the assumption that they formed a symmetrical plan, but only the south-eastern walls were actually excavated. In view of the evidence, Santa Clara seems to be a housing complex most likely dated to the sixth century, or even earlier, whose anomalies might be explained by the fact that several of its structures were reused and date from different periods (at least Roman and Late Roman).³ Ecclesiastical or domestic, this building was already ruined and thereby abandoned when the mosque was built four centuries later, so its constructors had no intention to rebuild or reuse their ruined and probably not even visible spaces.

Moving to the city of Toledo, the recent excavations at the mosque of Tornerías, which is not mentioned in the written sources before the late twelfth century, and whose chronology is therefore contested, dated its construction to the ninth-tenth-century (Ruiz Taboada 2021). Previous archaeological works had already revealed an earlier structure built in reused ashlar stone blocks bound with a strong mortar. This structure was first thought to be a Roman hydraulic construction (Lavado and Martín 1986, 498; Lavado 1988, 36), but the recent excavations date it to the seventh-eight centuries and interpret as a building with four naves, whose function is unclear (Ruiz Taboada 2021, 238 and 241).

Also in Toledo, the mosque of Bāb al-Mardūm (or Cristo de la Luz), dated by its frontal inscription to 999-1000, has been revealed by archaeological excavation to have been constructed upon two main structures. First, the north-south Roman road leading to the nearby gate (named Valmardón) in the former city wall, originally built in the second half of the first century AD; and second, a Roman apsidal construction of unknown function (Ruiz Taboada and Arribas 2007; 2010). Tornerías and Bāb al-Mardūm must therefore be added to others sites in the urban centre of Toledo in which archaeology has found no trace of churches beneath later mosques (Moreno 2018, 166-67).

Finally, the excavations at the current church of San Salvador of the city of Seville, which stands on the mosque built by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II in 829, have found traces of neither late Roman buildings nor late antique churches, as was previously held (synthesis by Amores 2009, 70-71). Although the mosque reused Roman and late antique elements, this does not mean that a previous building was necessarily located at the site in which the later mosque was built. This conclusion, which was also reached with regard to the Great Mosque in Córdoba, is also applicable to the late-ninth or early-tenth mosque of Almonaster (province of Huelva; Jiménez 1975), today the church of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción. Although Roman and late antique elements were also discovered there, no traces of a basilica were found (Jiménez 1992, 117). Furthermore, the recent review of the materials has led to the conclusion that said elements date to the sixth century and were produced by workshops in Mérida (Villa 2020, 121; 2021, 59).

Three final examples must be taken into account, as they are situated in late antique urban centres. Until recently, the building in Idanha-a-Velha (region of Idanha-a-Nova, Portugal) was interpreted as a late antique three-aisled basilica, oriented from north to south, lacking a sanctuary but with two baptismal fonts (Almeida 1962, 163-79). This construction is relevant for the case at hand because it has been recently interpreted as a mosque (Torres 1992; Caballero 2009, 34) or an early medieval church (Fernandes 2006), but also as a civil building, based on the archaeological analysis of its standing structure (Caballero 2006, mainly on the presence of surrounding rooms and upper-storey doors, which do not fit with a liturgical building). The debate about the building's function remains open, but what seems to be clear is that the existing building should be dated to the early medieval period and that the fonts belong to a late

³ A probable late antique *domus* for Ordóñez *et al.* (2013, 358). A doubtful interpretation as an ecclesiastical building or *domus* by Ruiz-Bueno and González-Gutiérrez (2017).

antique construction that was already destroyed when this later structure was built.

The geomagnetic mapping of the town of Recopolis (province of Guadalajara), thought to have been founded in the late sixth century, has revealed a large building (20 metres wide, 40 metres long; Henning *et al.* 2019, 742), oriented to the south-east. This orientation is completely at odds with that of the huge structure identified as a Visigothic palace, occupied in the eighth century by workshops and storerooms and abandoned in the mid-ninth century, and the nearby church, which was presumably abandoned in the late eighth and early ninth centuries (Olmo 1988, 163). There is some indication that this building could correspond to a mosque, which again does not overtake the late antique church, but occupies a new space located 250 meters away. More archaeological research is needed to confirm this hypothesis and date this unexpected building.

Finally, the same seems to apply to El Tolmo de Minateda (province of Albacete, see below), where inscriptions on pottery suggest the presence of a mosque, but again not over the early seventh-century Christian complex discussed below (Gutiérrez Lloret 2020, 139). Remains of the likely mosque have not been yet identified.⁴

3. RENOVATION OF OLD CHURCHES

The archaeological record demonstrates that the arrival of Islam did not imply the immediate destruction or abandonment of Christian buildings in al-Andalus, but rather that some of them survived and were renovated during the eighth and ninth centuries. Archaeology also suggests that Christians were capable not only of renovating and keeping existing churches open, but of building new ones, especially in the immediate aftermath of the 711 events, when Christians were still in the majority. Both the renovation of existing churches and new constructions must be regarded as evidence of the survival of Christian communities with enough resources to develop and manage these building projects (Arce 2014). Chronologically, these examples span from the early eighth to the tenth century, although the data is too sparse to draw a clear evolutionary line, which includes renovations, repairs, and brand-new projects. These constructions were abandoned only later for reasons that are not strictly related to the arrival of Muslim population groups.

Although old excavations often disregarded early medieval layers, recent archaeological research has attested many instances of repairs and renovations that indicate the continued use of churches beyond 711. The above noted instance of El Gatillo, built in the early sixth century and subject to frequent transformations in the eighth century (Phases 3 and 4) before being briefly turned into an Islamic house (no later than the ninth century) and abandoned (Caballero and Sáez 2009; Caballero 2009, 24-25 and 32), is only one example among many. The basilica of Santa Eulalia of Mérida (province of Badajoz), built in the fifth century, was still in use during the eighth century and was only destroyed during the following century (Mateos 1999, 89-90 and 201). As noted, its sculptural materials were then dismantled and transported to Cordoba, where they were reused at the Great Mosque (Villa 2020). The basilica in Tolmo de Minateda, built in the late sixth century or early seventh century, was still in use in the eighth century, but then fell to ruin and was occupied by an Islamic settlement in the turn of the ninth century (Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia 2013, 293). A group of geminated window frames (*ajimeces*), all of which were found in the destruction levels of the episcopal complex or reused in other Islamic structures, have been related to late antique constructions (Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia 2013, 276-77) or, alternatively, to early medieval structures and repairs dated to the eighth century (Caballero and Utrero 2013, 142-43; Villa 2021, 87 emphasises that one of these window frames actually reuse a late antique chancel screen).

At the well-known site of Guarrazar (province of Toledo), where the famous late seventh-century gold Visigothic crowns were found in the mid-nineteenth century (for their meaning, see Caballero and Moreno 2013, 189-92), new data from geomagnetic and GPR survey as well as excavation suggest that the structures detected in area 3 of so called Terrace 3b (Eger 2007, 287) could correspond to a huge building supported by columns, divided into three naves and thought thereby to be a church (Rojas *et al.* 2017, 572). However, no archaeological trace of the apse has been attested, and only one infantile grave has been found to date (Rojas *et al.* 2017, 586). The building was reused as a domestic space (with masonry foundations and mud brick walls) from the late eighth to the tenth century. The building, alongside an L-shaped structure situated on the same terrace, could be part of a monastic complex (Rojas *et al.* 2017,

⁴ An additional, but much later, example could be added to this category: the mosque at Sa Nitja (province of Menorca), probably dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries (Kirchner 1999), which is situated at a distance of ca. 170 m from the late antique basilica (Sales *et al.* 2019), but close to the coast.

586; Rojas 2017, 417). There is no archaeological evidence concerning the church's foundation date, so the building has been dated based on sculptural-stylistic criteria. The allegedly contemporary L-shaped building has been cautiously dated to between the mid-seventh century and the first half of the eighth century (Rojas 2017, 411-12). On the other hand, the examination of both old and new sculptural fragments from the site and the basilica make it possible to suggest a chronology spanning the mid-eighth and the ninth century (Villa 2021, 117-20). In conclusion, although the construction date for the presumed church is uncertain, it seems to have been in use at least throughout the ninth century, so it can be regarded as another example of church survival.

Elsewhere the evidence is less clear but still eloquent. The church of La Coria (province of Cáceres) is argued to have been built during the Visigothic period and to have been still in use by the Christian community living in the suburbs of the city of Trujillo during the early Islamic period (Franco 2020, 141-42). The double-apsed basilica of El Germo (province of Córdoba), built in the early sixth century, was later renovated (phase 3, undated) and occupied by several tombs containing copper coins dating to the first half of the eighth century (718-756). The definitive ruin of this church does not predate the twelfth century (Ulbert 1978, 91-92). The late antique church of Monte da Cegonha (Vidigueira, region of Beja) was renovated during the seventh and eighth-centuries (Alfenim and Lopes 1995, 398-99). A monastic church, vaguely dated to the Visigothic or the Islamic periods, was built in the Roman villa of São Cucufate (Vidigueira, region of Beja), but it seems clear at least that it was still in use during the Islamic period (Alarcão *et al.* 1995, 385-87). Finally, the villa of Cerro da Vila (Vilamoura, region of Algarve) includes a three-aisle basilica erected upon an earlier Roman factory with seventh and eighth-century graves that could reflect the use of the Christian building during that period (Teichner 2006, 216).⁵

Finally, although Islamic remains have been discovered at other sites, the data available is insufficient to determine the kind of transformation that took place in these churches. It is thus not possible to establish with any certainty if they were occupied by Christians or Muslims, and if the former church kept its original function or was given a new one. This is the case, for instance, in the above noted sites of Casa Herrera, Montinho das Laranjeiras, and Recopolis. Similar conclusions could be drawn from the late sixth-century church of Algezares

(province of Murcia), in whose interior "Arabic" pottery was found and put in relation to architectural features that reused late antique sculpture as building material (Mergelina 1940, 8); from the seventh-century basilica of Son Fradinet (province of Mallorca), in whose apse ceramic materials dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries were found (Ulbert and Orfila 2002, 293-95); and from the Portuguese site of Milreu (Estói, region of Algarve), where a still standing marble column, whose context is lost but which probably came from the Roman nymphaeum/mausoleum, and which was in use between the early eighth and early tenth centuries, displays funerary inscriptions in Arabic. Its function is, however, uncertain (Teichner 1994; Sidarus and Teichner 1997, 184; domestic for Caballero 2009, 32).

4. CONSTRUCTION OF NEW CHURCHES

Concerning the foundation of new early medieval churches in al-Andalus, the written record is scarce and is primarily focused on Córdoba and its hinterland in the mid-ninth and tenth centuries (Arce 2003; Molénat 2012). About twenty Christian sites have been identified in this area, some of which were founded after the original Islamic settlement and were still in use in the tenth century (León and Murillo 2017, 154-55; Arce 2021, 146-47). However, there are no examples of an archaeologically-recorded church in Córdoba, except for the late antique shrine of Cercadilla, located on the outskirts of the city and still in use during the Islamic period, as attested by the funerary tombstones found in its cemetery (Hidalgo 2002; Caballero 2009, 28). A group of Christian tombstones with inscriptions dating from the mid-ninth to the early eleventh century must also be considered evidence of the presence of Christians in the early medieval period in al-Andalus (Azuar 2016, 82-88; Barceló 2019).

Along with these cordovan examples and some other churches known only through their foundational epitaphs (882, São João de Azinhais, Torrão, region of Setúbal; an unidentified tenth-century temple at Mértola, region of Alentejo; both inscriptions in Barroca 1995, 22-27 and 50-53), a number of earlier Christian constructions has recently been located and examined in al-Andalus: Las Mesas de Villaverde (province of Malaga; Martínez Enamorado 2004), Santa Lucía del Trampal (province of Cáceres; Caballero and Sáez 1999), Santa María de

⁵ Others sites (Carranque and Las Tamujas, both in the province of Toledo; and Segóbriga, province of Cuenca) have yielded sculptural evidence dating to the eighth century onwards, which could also reflect continuity of use. However, these elements lack context, so they cannot be used as reliable evidence (a summary in Villa *et al.* 2022).

Melque (province of Toledo; Caballero and Moreno 2013) and San Pedro de La Mata (province of Toledo, Utrero *et al.* 2016).⁶ While Las Mesas is dated to the late ninth century, El Trampal, Melque, and La Mata must be dated to the late eighth century based on the results of archaeological excavation and the analysis of their standing structures. They were all founded on places where no earlier Christian constructions existed, and their final fate was very different. However, all of them had a monastic function, as shown by their spatial organisation, the closure of certain rooms, the distribution and enclosing of spaces, and their relationship with other surrounding areas. The monastic rooms at Melque and Trampal have only been partially excavated.

At Las Mesas de Villaverde, identified as Bobastro, mentioned in the written sources within the framework of 'Umar Ibn Ḥaḥṣūn's ninth-century uprising against the Emirate in the region of Malaga, a rock-cut church was first documented in the early twentieth century (Mergelina 1927; Gómez-Moreno 1951, 356). A second church with identical plan, but built in masonry and with what seems like a baptistery, was found 1 km away from the former, but close to the Islamic fortress. This church is also dated to the late ninth century based on its similarities with the rock-cut church, and is also understood to be related to 'Umar Ibn Ḥaḥṣūn's revolt (Martínez Enamorado 2004). There is no data concerning their abandonment, although we have to bear in mind that the rock-cut temple remained unfinished for unknown reasons, which means that it was never used as a church (Utrero and Álvarez 2021, 289-90). Both buildings are related to an urban settlement, which remains largely unexplored, where other churches and also mosques could exist, according to the written record (Martínez Enamorado 2004).

At the site of Melque, not only the church, but also the monastic rooms and estate, protected by a masonry wall and surrounded by four dams, have been explored in depth (Caballero and Moreno 2013, with previous references). This huge complex comprises several enclosures, which must be related to stock-keeping activities, as shown by the fact that at least two of the dams (known as Melque Ia and IV) were built over the foundational phase of the monastery (Barahona 2020, 267). Furthermore, two other dams (Melque II and V) were probably built shortly after the two earliest ones (Barahona 2020, 267). At first, an Emirate-period settlement, which was only occupied sporadically, took over the area of the monastery, later to

expand onto the immediate surroundings of the church in the mid-ninth century (Caballero 2009, 33; Caballero and Moreno 2013, 191). Whether the second set of dams was built by the monastic community or by the Muslim settlers, it is difficult to say. On the other hand, a wall was built to protect the southern side of the church (Caballero 2009, 26) while the complex still operated as a monastery. Finally, the settlement occupied an area that had not been inhabited before, and the elements reused in the church (Roman marbles for liturgical accoutrements and pottery for the *opus signinum* pavement) were brought from elsewhere. The location of Melque, close to ancient roads and paths, must be thereby understood together with the farming activity suggested by the presence of the dams (Barahona 2020, 270).

In the nearby of Melque, the granite church of La Mata was built directly on a rocky platform where, again, no previous settlement existed. Its spatial organisation, with direct accesses to both the exterior and the surrounding rooms, and the presence of two sets of chancel screens closing off the space before the apse, confirm again that this was a monastic church. However, probably due to structural problems, it soon fell to ruin and was not rebuilt until the late medieval period, so it is difficult to know whether the monastery was completed by the time the church collapsed or if, in contrast, its construction had not even started (Utrero *et al.* 2016, 52-53).

At Trampal, the excavations revealed a previous construction, partially dismantled and reused in the foundations of the early medieval church. The earlier building probably extended to the east of the later church, but its chronology and function are uncertain (Caballero and Sáez 1999, 33-34 and 324). Although the walls of the church reuse Roman construction materials (granite for the ashlar stones and marble for the decorative elements), they probably come from nearby, where different Roman settlements are known, but not from the site itself. Finally, 600 m away from the church of Santa Lucia, at the place called Santiago, there is the chance that another church existed already from the seventh century (Caballero and Sáez 1999, 22). Excavations are needed to confirm both date and function, but also to establish if both of them were in use at the same time, in the late eighth and early ninth century, or if the church of Santiago had already been abandoned when Santa Lucia was built. The church of El Trampal was abandoned during the second half of, or, more likely, the late ninth century and was not reformed until the late medieval

⁶ The sites of Torrico and Ambruz (both at the province of Cáceres), where emirate-period materials along with two probable churches (that of Ambruz dated by C14 to the early tenth century) have been recorded, are also worth mentioning, although further research is needed (Franco 2020, 142).

period (Caballero and Sáez 1999, 41 and 327). Like Melque, El Trampal is also close to two dams, but further archaeological studies are required to determine if they are older, contemporary, or even later than the original monastery (Caballero and Sáez 1999, 22 and 324).

Finally, in addition to these standing monastic buildings, a group of ten rock-cut structures were identified years ago as early medieval churches in al-Andalus. They are located mainly in the province of Malaga, with a few examples in the nearby provinces of Jaen, Cordoba, and Granada (Puertas 2006). However, these structures are of uncertain date (seventh or ninth to tenth centuries?) and function (are they all churches?), owing to the unclassifiable typologies of their plan and the limitations of the archaeological method in the study of rock-cut features (Caballero 2009, 22-24), but also to the lack of liturgical or decorative elements or nearby necropolises that could help to identify them. The only exception is the rock-cut feature of Valdecanales (province of Jaen), which comprises three caves and whose main façade is decorated with a series of twelve horseshoe arches including shell patterns in relief. It has been dated to either the Visigothic (Vaño 1970; Hauschild and Schlunk 1970) or the Islamic period (Riu 1972), although both proposals are merely based on the decorative programme on the façade. Recent studies also fall short of suggesting a date for other rock-cut examples in al-Andalus (for instance, Giribaile, Jaén, Gutiérrez Soler *et al.* 2005; San Torcuato in Guadix, Granada, Reyes *et al.* 2011), so they cannot be used as reliable proof of Christian construction projects in al-Andalus. In any case, these instances have little to do, in terms of construction and form, with the rock-cut church of Las Mesas de Villaverde (Utrero and Álvarez 2021, 290-91).

CONCLUSIONS

In light of the arguments presented above, it must be concluded that none of the earliest mosques hitherto known in the Iberian Peninsula were built upon previously destroyed or abandoned churches. Similarly, there are no clear examples of churches converted into mosques, or partitioned to be used simultaneously as a church and as mosque. Since most urban mosques are situated in cities that were densely populated in the Roman and/or Late Antique periods, the discovery of previous structures underneath mosques is unsurprising, but these features do not necessarily belong to earlier Christian churches.

On the other hand, topographical coincidence does not mean continuity of use or of meaning, as some buildings seem to have come to ruin much before the construction of the mosques and were probably unrecognisable (and even invisible) for the builders of the latter. Finally, also from a methodological perspective, the frequent reuse of Roman and Late Antique elements (mainly architectural sculpture) in the mosques cannot be understood as evidence of a previous church on site. In order to better understand these sculptural elements, it is essential to establish their places of production, use, reuse, and discovery, as illustrated by the materials from Merida reused in the mosques of Cordoba and Almonaster. The evidence indicates that these elements moved from place to place, came from different regions, sometimes over long distances, and were reused over and over again. Between the sixth century, when these sculptures were produced, and the eighth (Cordoba) and ninth-tenth centuries (Almonaster), when they were reused, they may have been moved many times.

All the examples examined so far seem to demonstrate that early Muslims chose to build separate constructions for their mosques rather than taking over and adapting existing churches. Although there might have been instances of churches turned into mosques, this does not seem to be the general rule.⁷ Transforming a church into a mosque was not such an easy task either. Churches had to be purified and reoriented to fit the Islamic ritual, activities which were closely monitored and subject to tight rules by the Islamic state in order to avoid or minimize them (Calvo 2011, 151). A new mosque was probably therefore always preferred.⁸

The renovation of old churches and new foundations demonstrate that Christian communities, and with them, their churches, survived throughout the eighth and ninth centuries and even later, as shown by the tenth-century examples commented above. In this regard, according to the written sources, it seems that an ecclesiastical network remained in place in the former Roman province of Baetica during the eighth and ninth centuries, especially in the city of Córdoba (Aillet 2013, 292 and 310; Arce 2021, 154) and its territory (Monferrer-Sala 2022, 189-92). Although we know of no churches in the city, several necropolises and funerary inscriptions betray the survival of Christian communities even as late as the eleventh century (Azuar 2016, 82-88; Barceló 2019; León and Murillo 2017, 156-60). In other regions (such as Mérida, Toledo, Zaragoza, and Šarq al-Andalus), according again to the written

⁷ Similar conclusion by Schick (2008, 48-52) for the former Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

⁸ Bursi (2021) demonstrates also how written sources testify the Muslim respect for Christian sacred spaces and how unusual was thereby the conversion of a church into a mosque.

sources, Christian communities may have survived until the twelfth century, but their churches and their ecclesiastical connections are unknown (Real 1998, 36-37; Aillet 2013, 293; Monferrer-Sala 2022, 188).

In contrast, the rural monasteries documented by archaeology to have been founded in the late eighth century were abandoned during the ninth century (Melque and Trampal), and those founded in the Late Antique period, but still in use after the Islamic conquest, were also abandoned no later than the ninth century (El Germo, Santa Eulalia, Monte da Cegonha). This demonstrates that the fate of churches in al-Andalus after the Islamic conquest followed diverging trajectories of the Christian communities responsible for building, managing, and using them. Their abandonment cannot be linked directly to the arrival of Islamic people, as also indicated by the written record (Calvo 2007, 159-64). These constructions actually demonstrate that these communities survived for at least one century. However, examples like Guarrazar and São Cucufate clearly illustrate how difficult it is to draw the line between the seventh century, that is, the Visigothic period, and the eighth century, already in the Islamic period.

The number of renovated or newly built churches in al-Andalus from the early eighth century onwards also reflects the level of building activity and of the related technical, material, human, and economic resources of Christian communities. However, the data available does not allow for an evolutionary line to be drawn, or to establish how gradual was the decline of these communities over time.

In my opinion, this review confirms at long last that al-Andalus was not different from other Islamic territories, where new evidence demonstrates that Christian building activity continued beyond the arrival of Islam. Earlier churches were repaired and others were newly built. Examples, attested by both the written record and archaeology, from the Near East (Schick 2008; Michel 2011, for Jordan; Gatier 1992, for South Syria) and North Africa (Talbi 1990; Prevost 2007, for Tunisia) do not only confirm that Christian communities were capable of building and maintaining their ecclesiastical buildings during the early Islamic period and even later, but also that the Islamization process in these territories cannot be understood without taking this relevant fact into consideration.⁹

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⁹ See also Dridi and Pierre in this volume.

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ESCULTURA ALTOMEDIEVAL CRISTIANA EN AL-ANDALUS: PROPUESTA METODOLÓGICA Y PRINCIPALES RESULTADOS

EARLY MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN SCULPTURE IN AL-ANDALUS: A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL AND MAIN RESULTS

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RESUMEN

Hasta hace apenas tres décadas, la investigación focalizada en la escultura tardoantigua y altomedieval hispana ha sido abordada bajo un paradigma metodológico de tipo formalista y comparativo. La ausencia de investigaciones basadas en una metodología arqueológica y centradas en la producción de tales piezas, unido a la extendida creencia acerca de la supuesta prohibición de levantar iglesias durante los primeros siglos de la historia de al-Andalus ha conducido a su datación indiscriminada en el período visigodo.

Gracias al análisis arqueológico de las iglesias altomedievales peninsulares más significativas, ha sido posible contextualizar estas piezas y conjuntos de ellas dentro de la secuencia constructiva obtenida para los propios edificios, y, por lo tanto, elaborar propuestas argumentadas de datación. Esta nueva perspectiva metodológica basada en la arqueología ha permitido reformular el primitivo modelo explicativo de base formalista.

En el marco de este nuevo modelo, la mayor parte de las innovaciones documentadas en materia escultórica a lo largo de los siglos VIII y IX solo pueden explicarse en el contexto de un nuevo ambiente técnico originado a partir de la llegada de los talleres orientales tras la invasión islámica de la península en 711.

En este artículo se expone un resumen de la propuesta metodológica implementada en nuestro proyecto de tesis doctoral, así como de los resultados para el contexto constructivo cristiano de los siglos VIII y IX en al-Andalus. Se defiende que este fue un periodo que experimentó cierta continuidad con respecto al pasado de época visigoda, pero también donde se dio una gran creatividad, y en el que tuvieron lugar importantes novedades en materia decorativa, funcional y tecnológica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: taller, relieve, península ibérica, mozárabe, arqueología de la arquitectura, arqueología de la producción

SUMMARY

Until recently, the study of late-antique and early medieval Iberian sculpture was framed by traditional approaches dominated by a stylistic perspective based on the analysis of decorative features. This has led to the consideration of this type of sculpture as a chronological marker even in the absence of stratigraphic evidence. As such, the lack of archaeological research concerning the production of these pieces after 711 has led most researchers to automatically regard them as having been made during the Visigothic period.

However, the archaeological analysis of the most significant early medieval Iberian churches has made it possible to contextualise these decorative pieces within the constructive sequence of the buildings themselves and therefore to refine their chronology. This has, in turn, enabled us to reconsider some traditional perspectives.

The methodological guidelines of the Archaeology of Production, together with the information yielded by the stratigraphic record, have allowed for a new paradigm to explain late-antique and early-medieval Iberian sculpture to be outlined. Most of the innovations documented can only be explained in the context of a new technological environment created by the arrival of eastern workshops in 711.

Until recently, historiography did not recognise the existence of Christian decorative sculpture in the territory of al-Andalus, a position that is maintained even today by the traditional Visigothist model. To counteract this view, it has been shown that sculpture continued being produced in the southern half of the Peninsula between the eighth and ninth centuries. This is, in

¹ Consejería de Educación de la Comunidad de Madrid. Las conclusiones presentadas en este trabajo son el fruto de la investigación llevada a cabo con motivo de mi tesis doctoral, dirigida por los doctores Luis Caballero (CSIC) y Francisco J. Moreno (UCM), defendida en 2018 y recientemente publicada (Villa 2021). Parte de este trabajo se debe al proyecto «Arqueología de las iglesias hispánicas del siglo x: la circulación de modelos arquitectónicos y decorativos (III)» (PID2020-116931GB-I00, financiado por MCIN y AEI).

addition, a period that witnessed significant, both decorative and functional, innovations, although in other areas there is a considerable continuity with sixth- and seventh-century sculptural production. In fact, it can be argued that innovation was only possible because of these productive continuities.

KEY WORDS: *workshop, relief, Iberian Peninsula, Mozarabic, archaeology of architecture, archaeology of production*

La síntesis que presentamos en este trabajo tiene por objetivo el análisis la escultura cristiana (arquitectónica y litúrgica) producida en la península ibérica entre los siglos VI y X desde una perspectiva metodológica arqueológica y productiva, un enfoque bien diferente de la metodología de corte formalista y comparativo a la que tradicionalmente había estado sometida. Como resultado de este análisis a gran escala ha sido posible atribuir una parte significativa de esta escultura a una serie de talleres activos en territorio andalusí entre los siglos VIII y X (caracterizados a lo largo del punto 2), los cuales intervinieron en la decoración sobre todo de iglesias y monasterios, aunque también de otros edificios civiles de promoción cristiana.

1. APUNTES METODOLÓGICOS

Este trabajo partía de un ingente y desordenado conjunto de piezas, que en su mayor parte se encontraban descontextualizadas y/o fuera de los edificios altomedievales para los que fueron talladas. Se analizaron la mayor parte de las tipologías conocidas de escultura arquitectónica (cimacios, impostas, celosías, modillones y ciertas basas, fustes y capiteles) y de mobiliario litúrgico (aras o soportes y tableros de altar y canceles), excluyendo, por lo general, el estudio sistemático de los capiteles. Estos, por su volumen cuantitativo y por sus singularidades productivas, deben ser objeto de un trabajo monográfico que someta a estas piezas a la metodología propuesta de base arqueológica (*corpus* reciente y estudio formal de capiteles tardoantiguos peninsulares en Domingo 2011).

1.1. Punto de partida metodológico, hipótesis y objetivos

La mayor parte de los escasos edificios decorados altomedievales de la península ibérica carecen de documentos que permitan establecer de forma inequívoca su fecha de construcción, y, junto con las piezas desplazadas y descontextualizadas (que constituyen la mayoría) cuentan con importantes problemas en lo relativo a su cronología. Además, bajo la premisa (nunca constatada por la arqueología) de que no se construyeron templos cristianos de nueva planta en el territorio y época del dominio

islámico peninsular que arranca en 711, la práctica totalidad de la escultura hispana meridional había sido atribuida de forma automática y sin apenas discusión al período visigodo (siglos VI al VII, desde Gómez-Moreno 1919, y sobre todo a partir de Camps 1940).

Hasta hace pocos años, la investigación ocupada del estudio de la escultura altomedieval hispana se ha llevado a cabo en el marco metodológico de análisis tradicionales propios de la historia del arte, donde la metodología formalista, basada exclusivamente en las características decorativas de las piezas (el estilo), ha sido la predominante (destacando los *corpora* de Cruz 1985 para Mérida, de Sánchez Velasco 2006 para Córdoba o el de Barroso y Morín 2007 para Toledo). De entre los métodos manejados en este marco, se debe destacar el comparativo. Este se fundamenta en el empleo de paralelos formales, los cuales, frecuentemente, se han aplicado de un modo acrítico e indiscriminado.

Esta problemática, sin embargo, no ha sido exclusiva de la disciplina historia del arte, sino que ha afectado de igual manera a la arqueología. Durante largo tiempo, los arqueólogos han asumido las propuestas cronológicas basadas en el estilo, y, paradójicamente, elaboradas sin base arqueológica (estratigráfica ni tipológica; problemática similar en este mismo volumen en los trabajos de Michel, Gilento, Keser-Kayaalp y Ali y Brelaud). Esta práctica ha conducido al conocimiento y a la cronología de la escultura tardoantigua y altomedieval hispana hacia a un callejón sin salida, donde persiste la siguiente argumentación circular: tras el análisis estilístico (formal y comparativo) de una pieza determinada, su cronología es aceptada tanto por historiadores del arte como por arqueólogos, y empleada para datar los estratos y contextos arqueológicos donde aparecen otras semejantes, y, más allá, para datar otras piezas o fragmentos similares aparecidos en estos mismos estratos o contextos. Por lo tanto, se puede concluir que la escultura altomedieval hispana se había convertido en un fósil arqueológico, aún a pesar de la falta de los imprescindibles análisis estratigráficos y tipológicos.

Este marco metodológico tradicional ha proporcionado un modelo explicativo aparentemente seguro en el que se han ido acomodando nuevas piezas y conjuntos de ellas (modelo definido en lo fundamental por Schlunk y Hauschild 1978). Debido a esta aparente seguridad, hasta hace poco más de veinte años, ni arqueólogos

ni historiadores del arte han considerado necesario el estudio individual ni la revisión de la cronología de la escultura hispana. Por el contrario, a la mayor parte de la historiografía tradicional le ha parecido suficiente su inclusión en categorías cronológico-culturales preestablecidas (paleocristiano, visigodo, asturiano y mozárabe), siempre caracterizadas a partir de laxos criterios estilísticos, entre los que destacan los de corte formalista y comparativo.

Solo a partir de los últimos treinta años los argumentos arqueológicos han sido incorporados al estudio de la arquitectura, y, por extensión, de la escultura altomedieval hispana. Gracias al análisis arqueológico de los alzados (arqueología de la arquitectura) de las iglesias altomedievales más relevantes de la península ibérica, sus sistemas decorativos han podido ser contextualizados en la secuencia arquitectónica de los edificios, y, más allá, ha sido posible aportar hipótesis argumentadas de cronología (Caballero y Arce 2007 para las iglesias meridionales del siglo VIII; Utrero 2016, para el ámbito asturiano del siglo IX). Ante el hallazgo de nuevas evidencias estratigráficas y tipológicas, esta nueva perspectiva metodológica ha hecho posible la revisión de los postulados cronológicos tradicionales.

Muy en relación con la disciplina de la arqueología de la arquitectura, y en parte como consecuencia de su aplicación, a lo largo de los últimos años se ha desarrollado un nuevo horizonte metodológico, cuyo objetivo es, partiendo de la secuencia arqueológica observada en los edificios, el conocimiento de los talleres escultóricos y constructivos involucrados en su construcción y decoración (Caballero y Utrero 2014). Esta línea de investigación, denominada arqueología de la producción, trasciende los análisis estilísticos tradicionales y ofrece grandes posibilidades para definir otros parámetros clave de las piezas, como son las técnicas de talla, las particularidades de su puesta en obra o la procedencia del soporte pétreo.

Seguindo los postulados de la arqueología de la arquitectura y de la arqueología de la producción ha sido posible la creación de un nuevo modelo explicativo para la arquitectura y la escultura altomedievales hispanas. En él, una parte de las características (formales, pero también productivas) que presentan la arquitectura y la escultura tradicionalmente atribuidas a época visigoda solo pueden ser explicadas en el marco de un nuevo ambiente técnico originado tras la llegada de talleres orientales a la península ibérica tras el 711. Por lo tanto, esta perspectiva renovada permite atribuir una notable proporción de la escultura altomedieval peninsular a la actividad constructiva de los cristianos en al-Andalus.

Frente a estudios precedentes, restringidos al ámbito local o regional, abordamos el análisis de la totalidad del territorio peninsular. Este marco territorial amplio permitió obtener un conocimiento más preciso acerca de la

presencia, expansión y movilidad de los talleres escultóricos por el territorio, un fenómeno hasta entonces escasamente documentado. La adopción de este marco temporal y geográfico amplio ha permitido el valorar una muestra numerosa de piezas, que resulta altamente significativa, y, más allá, alcanzar unas conclusiones en nuestra opinión más sólidamente fundamentadas que aquellas obtenidas de trabajos de territorialidad y tiempo restringidos.

La propuesta metodológica defendida parte de la premisa de que todas las piezas escultóricas están realizadas por un taller determinado, el cual puede pertenecer a una agrupación mayor de talleres similares (o grupo de talleres), los cuales en todo caso se imbrican en un marco productivo determinado (el denominado ambiente técnico), el cual es propio y exclusivo de un momento histórico determinado. En síntesis, se propone desplazar el objeto del estudio de la pieza aislada a su taller responsable, reemplazando los conceptos de influencia y paralelo (tan ambiguos y subjetivos) por los de movilidad de talleres y transmisión de conocimientos técnicos, subordinando todo ello a las relaciones temporales que presentan las piezas, obtenidas a partir de los métodos estratigráficos y tipológicos.

El objetivo general ha sido el de crear una tipología arqueológica de la escultura hispana de los siglos VI al X, realizada con el mismo rigor metodológico que caracteriza a las tipologías arqueológicas habituales, como las cerámicas o las numismáticas. El eje vertebrador de la ordenación tipológica son los talleres aludidos, a cada uno de los cuales se atribuyen una serie de tipos escultóricos. El resultado se ha presentado en forma de catálogo de tipos escultóricos, un recurso hasta ahora inexistente para la amplitud geográfica y cronológica mencionadas (Villa 2021, II).

1.2. Métodos

Para alcanzar los objetivos descritos, se ha desarrollado una metodología fundamentada en la arqueología. La estratigrafía aporta al yacimiento, al edificio e incluso a algunas piezas individuales (aquellas con más de una fase de talla) una secuencia histórica relativa. La tipología (esto es, el conocimiento de los tipos que forman parte de cada estrato), por su parte, aporta cronologías, que en algunos casos son absolutas.

De un modo complementario, también la historia del arte aporta sus métodos propios, el formal y el comparativo, los cuales se suman a los arqueológicos descritos. Además, se tienen en cuenta otros, como el histórico (a través del análisis crítico de las fuentes textuales y epigráficas contemporáneas) o la llamada arqueometría (análisis físicos o químicos realizados sobre las piezas y edificios objeto de estudio).

Utilizando los métodos descritos, esta investigación forma parte de las disciplinas relacionadas de la arqueología de la arquitectura y la arqueología de la producción. La arqueología de la arquitectura incorpora los métodos estratigráfico y tipológico al estudio de los edificios históricos. Así, la decoración de estos edificios ha pasado de ser interpretada como la suma de elementos individuales descontextualizados a ser considerada en el concepto más amplio de sistema decorativo, es decir, un conjunto escultórico concebido, planificado y realizado según un plan específico (Caballero y Arce 2007). La arqueología de la producción, por su parte, se focaliza en el estudio del conjunto de operaciones necesarias para transformar un producto en otro diferente. En este campo se analiza el proceso llevado a cabo por constructores y decoradores, desde la fase inicial del proyecto hasta la terminación del producto (lo que se conoce como «cadena técnica operativa»; Caballero y Utrero 2014, para el alto medievo hispano).

En el marco de la arqueología de la producción, las tres categorías o principios fundamentales en los que se estructura y agrupa la producción escultórica se concretan en la obra (que se corresponde con cada sistema decorativo realizado para un edificio), el taller (que puede realizar diferentes obras) y el ambiente técnico (al que corresponden un conjunto de talleres). Estos tres principios aseguran que las piezas realizadas bajo unos mismos parámetros (no solo formales, sino también técnicos y tecnológicos) pertenecen a unos mismos sistemas decorativos (obras o edificios), talleres o ambientes técnicos, y cuentan, además, con una datación similar:

1. Principio de unidad del sistema decorativo. Los métodos estratigráfico y tipológico permiten reconocer la unidad y la contemporaneidad de las piezas que lo componen. Este principio solo es aplicable a los escasos sistemas decorativos conservados *in situ* en sus edificios.

2. Principio de unidad de la producción del taller. Definimos el «taller» como la entidad productiva responsable de un conjunto de obras caracterizadas por la repetición de unas mismas variables, una homogeneidad productiva que permite a su vez la atribución a posteriori de otras piezas homólogas. Por lo tanto, el taller no es una categoría cerrada, sino abierta, donde se van acomodando los nuevos hallazgos de piezas.

En el taller se transmiten los conocimientos técnicos relacionados con la producción, que son aprendidos a través de la práctica y transmitidos de maestro a discípulo, lo que dificulta la introducción de innovaciones, ya sean formales, funcionales, técnicas o tecnológicas (Caballero y Utrero 2012).

Las obras de un taller en particular también suelen aparecer en un territorio específico y responden a un patrón de dispersión coherente (por ejemplo, alrededor

de una ciudad o en una misma región, salvo excepciones). La existencia de varios talleres similares da lugar a lo que se conoce como «grupos de talleres».

3. Principio de unidad de ambiente técnico. Cada ambiente técnico aglutina un conjunto de talleres similares. El ambiente técnico tiene sus propias características productivas y solo puede existir en un momento histórico determinado. A cada horizonte temporal corresponde, por lo tanto, un ambiente técnico específico.

Aquí se defiende que la fuente primaria fundamental para el conocimiento de la escultura altomedieval han de ser las propias piezas escultóricas, seguidas de las fuentes escritas y epigráficas. Los datos proporcionados por estas dos últimas, que rara vez aportan información más allá de vagas e imprecisas referencias a la construcción de un edificio o a sus promotores, se nos presentan frecuentemente de forma retórica y confusa, cuando no deliberadamente falsa. Tanto los textos como la epigrafía han de ser, por lo tanto, criticados, contextualizados y subordinados en cada caso a la secuencia arqueológica proporcionada por los métodos estratigráficos y tipológicos.

1.3. Proceso de análisis

Dependiendo de si las piezas se encuentran en contextos primarios o en otros contextos, se debe optar por estrategias diferentes. Los conjuntos y piezas conservados *in situ* (es decir, en su *contexto primario*), son, si bien los más escasos en número, los que aportan más información y de mejor calidad. Debido al mencionado «principio de unidad de taller», aquellos edificios que aún contienen sus sistemas decorativos *in situ* se utilizaron como referencia para el resto de piezas desplazadas. Así pues, el proceso a seguir para las piezas conservadas en contextos primarios es el siguiente:

a. Estudio de los sistemas decorativos de los edificios altomedievales conservados, realizados en el marco del análisis estratigráfico de sus alzados (arqueología de la arquitectura).

b. Discriminación y estudio de piezas reutilizadas en el edificio altomedieval (si las hubiere), las cuales proporcionan valiosos indicios de cronología relativa.

c. Análisis de las piezas talladas *ex profeso* para el edificio, a partir de una serie de variables de análisis. Para el análisis de los conjuntos escultóricos y de las piezas individuales se propone la caracterización de una serie de variables tipológicas, que permiten definir tipologías escultóricas (y por tanto los mismos talleres). Estas variables son los materiales pétreos empleados, el tipo de talla, las herramientas utilizadas, el modo de talla (es decir, la relación entre la escultura y los talleres constructivos), el repertorio decorativo, la función o uso del

elemento y su ubicación topográfica (o lugar de su hallazgo). Estas variables no tienen validez diagnóstica por sí solas, sino en su conjunto. Es la suma de todas o de gran parte de estas variables lo que permite asignar las piezas con mayor o menor garantía de precisión a un contexto productivo particular.

d. Estudio de la relación existente entre los talleres constructivos y los decorativos, una relación que puede manifestarse de distintas formas: piezas realizadas en un taller externo al edificio, luego trasladadas a este lugar y puestas en la obra por los constructores; piezas talladas en el lugar de construcción del edificio, teniendo en cuenta las dimensiones del espacio que van a ocupar; y piezas talladas sobre los propios muros de los edificios una vez que estos han sido levantados.

Pero, como ya se ha precisado, las piezas conservadas en contexto primario representan una minoría, siendo (si bien también escasas) más habituales aquellas halladas en *contexto secundario*. Se entiende por piezas en contexto secundario aquellas halladas en contexto arqueológico, que

fueron reutilizadas aún en época altomedieval, encontradas bien en edificios o bien en excavaciones arqueológicas. Su cronología se debe establecer siempre en base a criterios estratigráficos (emanados del estudio del edificio o del yacimiento en cuestión) y tipológicos, a partir de su relación con otras piezas halladas en contexto primario.

Finalmente, quedan las piezas encontradas en *otros contextos* (aquellas que comúnmente se denominan como «descontextualizadas»), que en términos cuantitativos suponen la inmensa mayoría y que requieren estrategias de análisis diferentes. De este amplio conjunto de piezas, tan solo algunas muestran más de una fase de uso (piezas pluriestratificadas), las cuales aportan valiosos términos *ante-* y *post- quem* que proporcionan cronologías relativas para ellas mismas y para otras de su mismo taller, grupo o ambiente técnico. Son aún más escasas las piezas con epigrafía asociada, y esta rara vez aporta una fecha precisa para su talla. El resto de piezas y talleres que carecen de alguna de estas referencias (estratigráficas o epigráficas) se debe clasificar, en función



Fig. 1. Mapa de situación de los hallazgos escultóricos atribuidos a los talleres cristianos en al-Andalus (siglos VIII y X). Leyenda: A (taller de Almedra); B (taller de Barcelona); C (taller de Conimbriga); CII (horizonte Córdoba II); L (taller de Lisboa); Mar. (taller de Marmelar); Mel. (taller de Melque); M-T (taller de Mérida-Trampal); R (grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos); SPM (taller de San Pablo de los Montes); T (taller de Tarragona); Tier. (taller de Tiermes); TR (grupo toledano de talla en reserva). Los asteriscos indican traslados posteriores como piezas de acarreo (autor).

de sus características productivas y siguiendo el principio de identidad tipológica, en el taller, grupo o ambiente técnico correspondiente.

2. LOS RESULTADOS: LA ESCULTURA ARQUITECTÓNICA Y LITÚRGICA CRISTIANA EN AL-ÁNDALUS

A continuación se expone una visión sintética de conjunto de la producción escultórica realizada para los cristianos (comúnmente conocidos como mozárabes) en al-Andalus (Fig. 1).²

No solo se ha constatado una importante actividad escultórica (y, por extensión, arquitectónica) cristiana, sino que la producción de estos talleres constituye una renovación del panorama productivo precedente, y que permite a su vez explicar el tránsito entre la escultura tardoantigua meridional y la altomedieval del norte peninsular. Se trata de un período que presenta importantes novedades tanto en el campo decorativo como en el funcional, si bien en otros aspectos se constata una notable continuidad con la escultura anterior de los siglos VI y VII (como es la existencia de talleres estables en torno a un centro de producción, y la continuidad en el empleo de ciertas tipologías funcionales y temas decorativos tradicionales). Fue, en efecto, precisamente esta continuidad en la producción entre la Tardoantigüedad y la Alta Edad Media la que permitió la implementación de las mencionadas innovaciones. Si para el siglo VII apenas podemos identificar edificios que con seguridad fueran decorados

en esta época en el caso de los siglos VIII y IX contamos con cinco iglesias decoradas, conservadas en alzado, cuya cronología está sólidamente apoyada en argumentos arqueológicos: Santa Eulalia de Mérida (en su última fase de uso), Santa Lucía del Trampal (Cáceres), Santa María de Melque, San Pedro de La Mata (ambos en Toledo) y San Juan de Baños (Palencia).

2.1. Mérida

Mérida, antigua capital de la diócesis de Hispania y posterior metrópoli eclesiástica, fue el principal centro escultórico peninsular tardoantiguo, y aquel que concentra una buena parte de la escultura fechada en época visigoda (siglos VI y VII). Precisamente esta tradición escultórica ininterrumpida de más de dos siglos fue lo que posibilitó la continuidad de sus talleres tras la invasión islámica, así como la proyección de la actividad escultórica al menos hasta mediados del siglo IX.

De los cuatro períodos en los que estructuramos la producción escultórica de Mérida, los siglos VIII y IX se encuadran en el último de ellos (Mérida IV) el cual aglutina la producción de los talleres de *Mérida-Beja II*, *Mérida-Trampal*, *Melque*, *Almendral* y *Marmelar*. Partiendo de unos modos de producción (talleres afincados en Mérida que suministraban piezas al resto del territorio) y una tecnología (talla a dos planos y a bisel) tradicionales, se constatan sobre todo novedades temáticas, como son los roleos de hojas lateralizadas y racimos con borde y las cintas de doble cabo con punteado interior. Desde



Fig. 2. Relieve del grupo de arbustos, hojas acorazonadas y retícula procedente de Usagre (Badajoz, cortesía de Elena Gimeno, Villa 2021, nº 197).

² La nomenclatura empleada para nombrar los talleres, así como la numeración de las piezas mencionadas está tomada de Villa (2021). Para una relación completa de bibliografía, fichas catalográficas de las piezas y otros detalles remitimos a la consulta de este trabajo.



Fig. 3. a: Dintel de ventana avenerado de Almendral, obra del taller homónimo (Villa 2021, nº 402); b: imposta procedente de la provincia de Badajoz decorada por el taller *Almendral* (*infra*) que reutiliza un fragmento de friso del taller de *Mérida-Beja* (*supra*, Villa 2021, nº 157) (autor).

el punto de vista funcional, se introducen impostas de bóveda decoradas en forma de frisos continuos (novedad relacionada con el desarrollo de una arquitectura completamente abovedada, que supone una novedad en el siglo VIII, Caballero 2013), así con ventanas monolíticas abocinadas con derrame en forma de venera.

La mayor parte de las tipologías funcionales tanto de escultura arquitectónica como de mobiliario litúrgico se crean a lo largo de los dos primeros siglos del centro escultórico emeritense (VI y VII), mientras que en el siguiente período se documentan novedades sobre todo a nivel de repertorio. Es el caso del denominado *grupo de talleres de arbustos, hojas acorazonadas y retículas*, donde aparecen nuevos temas vegetales (arbustos simétricos, hojas acorazonadas y tréboles, Fig. 2) y geométricos (cuadrícula con cruces abiertas y patadas y estrellas de ocho puntas).

Fuera de la ciudad de Mérida, existen piezas de este grupo en Badajoz, Toledo, Tortosa (Tarragona),

Idanha-a-Velha, Dumio (ambos en el tercio norte de Portugal) y Palencia (en la cripta de San Antolín), aunque muchas de ellas debieron ser trasladadas en forma de *spolia* desde el siglo IX en adelante (*vid. infra*). Existe cierta duda sobre la verdadera cronología del grupo, si bien la estratigrafía nos informa de que es en todo caso posterior al siglo VI (una de sus piezas reutiliza un epígrafe funerario de época visigoda, Fig. 2), siendo muy probable su datación en época andalusí, entre los siglos VIII y IX.

Uno de los talleres más relevantes del centro productivo de Mérida es el de *Mérida-Beja*, localizado en torno a estas dos ciudades, y cuyo origen es posible que se remonte al siglo VII. Presenta rasgos diferenciadores sobre todo en el apartado decorativo, que consiste en la repetición de unidades ornamentales en un esquema de cuadrícula (Fig. 3b), y tallos dispuestos en círculos que contienen hojas y racimos de uvas enfrentados. El taller funcionó en Mérida y en sus alrededores, empleando mármol blanco



Fig. 4. Decoración de roleos, hojas digitadas y racimos con borde del *taller de Mérida-Trampal* (a: Santa Eulalia de Mérida, Villa 2021, nº 350; b y f: El Trampal, nº 334 y 336; c: Burguillos del Cerro; d: Usagre; e: Montánchez, nº 335) (autor).

aparentemente reutilizado, así como en las localidades de Mértola y Beja (en el Alentejo Portugués), (utilizando aquí mármol gris del tipo São Brissos), donde posiblemente se instaló un pequeño centro de producción. Hay, además, otras piezas atribuidas documentadas en Almendral (Badajoz), Badajoz y Toledo. La producción de este taller (antes no reconocido como tal) se había datado en los siglos IX y X por la presencia de sus piezas en Badajoz, ciudad fundada en esa época (875, Cruz Villalón 1994/95). Sin embargo, se pudo determinar que la mayor parte de las piezas visigodas y altomedievales de la ciudad de Badajoz son fruto de saqueos posteriores, y proceden, por lo tanto, de otros lugares (*vid. infra*).

El taller de *Mérida-Beja* tiene dos fases de producción, una en el siglo VII y otra en el VIII y IX. Según la información estratigráfica, la primera fase es anterior a los siglos VIII y IX, ya que una de las piezas fue reutilizada en esta última época por el taller de *Almendral* (Villa 2021, nº 154; Fig. 3b). La última fase del taller (siglos VIII y IX) se distingue de la precedente del siglo VII por la incorporación del tema novedoso del racimo con borde. La producción de este taller en su segunda fase andalusí estuvo ampliamente distribuida por las zonas de Mérida, Beja, Badajoz, Almendral y Santa Amalia (las tres últimas en la provincia de Badajoz).

El taller *Mérida-Trampal* constituye el ejemplo prototípico de taller escultórico de esta época. Gracias a la conservación *in situ* de parte del sistema decorativo de la iglesia de San Salvador de Monesterios (habitualmente conocida como Santa Lucía de El Trampal, Cáceres, de mediados del siglo VIII), se ha podido comprobar que el taller suministró las piezas acabadas del edificio, donde fueron aparejadas por los constructores sin necesidad de intervención del taller decorativo. Las creaciones de este taller están documentadas tanto en la propia Mérida (halladas en las excavaciones de la basílica de Santa Eulalia, que debió ser reformada en esta época, así como descontextualizadas, en otras ubicaciones), como fuera de ella, pero relativamente cerca de la ciudad (yacimientos Terrón Blanco, Burguillos del Cerro, Montánchez, Usagre-Badajoz-, y El Trampal, Fig. 4).

El taller de *Melque* está estrechamente relacionado en sus aspectos productivos con el de *Mérida-Trampal*, y como aquel estuvo asentado en Mérida. La única obra que podemos atribuirle con certeza se encuentra en la iglesia de Santa María de Melque (Toledo), adonde fue trasladada tras su talla en Mérida. La obra se compone principalmente de elementos de mobiliario litúrgico (aras de altar, tableros y largueros; elementos hallados en las excavaciones del espacio de la iglesia), junto con algunas



Fig. 5. Decoración emeritense de época visigoda reutilizada en una columnilla procedente del monasterio de Santa María de Melque (Villa 2021, nº 376) (autor).

muestras de escultura arquitectónica (celosías y columnas, recuperadas en los edificios monásticos).

Además del mencionado taller emeritense, en la iglesia y monasterio de Melque intervinieron también otros dos talleres, uno encargado de la talla de estuco (cuya cronología se establece igualmente en el siglo VIII), y otro perteneciente al denominado *grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos* (del período Toledo III, al que se atribuye la escultura arquitectónica de los edificios monásticos, en particular sus impostas de granito y una cruz con laurea).

Melque constituye el encargo más alejado de la ciudad de cuantas obras se han atribuido a los talleres de Mérida, sin que por hoy sea posible explicar su realización a tan larga distancia del lugar de destino. Además de los argumentos arqueológicos y productivos que permiten datar el edificio en el siglo VIII (Villa *et al.* 2022), cabe añadir que la obra del *taller de Melque* debe ser posterior al siglo VII, ya que entre la escultura tallada para el monasterio se encuentran piezas que amortizan relieves de época visigoda (como sucede con una columnilla hallada en el patio monástico, Villa 2021, nº 373, Fig. 5).

De nuevo en Mérida, se conoce la existencia de otros dos talleres de los siglos VIII y IX. No existen en pie



Fig. 6. Inscripción funeraria visigoda de *Cantonus*, reutilizada como imposta decorada por el *taller de Almendral* (derecha, Villa 2021, nº 400) (autor).

edificios que aún conserven relieves atribuidos al *taller de Almendral*, cuya producción se distribuía por la propia Almendral, Badajoz y Mérida. Este taller introdujo como novedad la tipología funcional de los dinteles de ventanas monolíticas con apertura en forma de venera (una tipología hasta entonces desconocida), y su cronología viene establecida por su relación tipológica con otros talleres emeritenses: el *taller de Almendral* es necesariamente posterior a la primera fase del siglo VII del *taller Mérida-Beja* (ya que recicla una de sus piezas, Vila 2021, nº 154, Fig. 3b), y también lo es a otras manifestaciones de los siglos VI o VII (como prueba la reutilización de la inscripción funeraria visigoda de *Cantonus*, nº 397, Fig. 6).

El *taller de Marmelar*, que formaba parte del pequeño centro productivo de Beja, utilizó como material la variedad local de mármol de São Brissos. No se conocen edificios asociados al taller, si bien la mayor parte de su producción conocida fue reutilizada en la iglesia bajomedieval de San Pedro en Vera Cruz de Marmelar. Comparte con el *taller de Almendral* el empleo de dinteles monolíticos con abertura en forma de venera (Fig. 7a). La producción de este taller se distribuye por Vera Cruz de Marmelar, Marmelar, Moura, Serpa y Beja (todos en la región del Alentejo, en Portugal). El taller conocía y recreaba algunos de los tipos funcionales y decorativos del mencionado *taller Mérida-Beja*, por lo que cronológicamente debe ser posterior a este. Asimismo, comparte gran parte de las novedades temáticas (las cintas de doble punta con puntos) y tipológicas (las impostas de bóveda) que aporta el período Mérida IV en el que se sitúa.

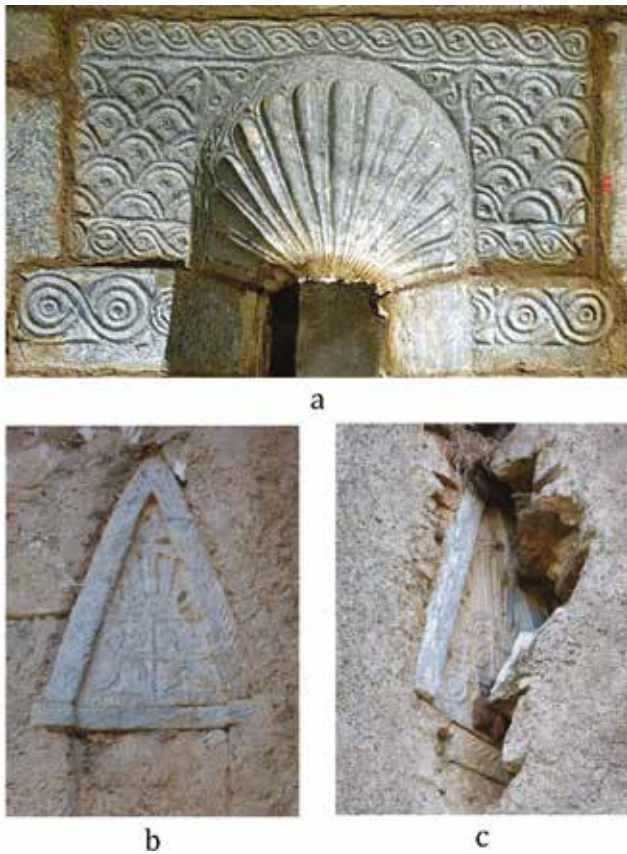


Fig. 7. Decoración escultórica del *taller de Marmelar* (piezas hoy reutilizadas en la iglesia de San Pedro de Vera Cruz de Marmelar) (Villa 2021, nº 420 y 426, cortesía de M^a. Á. Utrero y autor).

La producción del centro escultórico de Mérida debió finalizar a partir de mediados del siglo IX, debido a las transformaciones sociales, políticas y urbanísticas que experimentó la ciudad en ese momento (conversiones de cristianos al islam, pacificación de la ciudad por ‘Abd al-Rahmān, construcción de la Alcazaba y abandono de la basílica de Santa Eulalia). Tras la fundación de la cercana Badajoz (875), Mérida debió ser abandonada por las élites eclesiásticas y por la cada vez más merma da comunidad cristiana, finalizando así a promoción de edificios cristianos decorados. No obstante, se puede rastrear la presencia de algunos de sus escultores en el norte cristiano (al igual que sucede con el centro de Toledo en la misma época), a los que se atribuyen, entre otras, algunas piezas del conjunto de *Tierra de Tábara* (Zamora, *vid. infra*).

2.2. El saqueo de los mármoles emeritenses entre los siglos IX y X

Como consecuencia de la ordenación tipológica del conjunto de la escultura altomedieval peninsular, se percibió un fenómeno el cual, si bien había sido puntualmente referido en las fuentes textuales contemporáneas, no contaba hasta entonces con un respaldo material. Se traslada del expolio, traslado y reutilización de una porción considerable de la escultura emeritense. La constatación del fenómeno de las piezas desplazadas y reutilizadas (circunstancia hasta la fecha no considerada por la investigación especializada) cuenta con importantes implicaciones metodológicas, ya que repercute directamente en la definición y caracterización de sus talleres escultóricos responsables, obligando al investigador a plantearse en todo momento si el lugar de hallazgo de cada pieza estudiada coincide con su lugar de producción y de primer uso.

Tras el fin de la producción escultórica en Mérida, algunas de las piezas decoradas de la ciudad y de sus alrededores fueron expoliadas, trasladadas a otros lugares y reutilizadas. En este momento, entre los siglos IX y IX, piezas realizadas varios talleres emeritenses, y fechadas a lo largo de la vigencia del centro escultórico (incluyéndose piezas precedentes de época romana) fueron indiscriminadamente saqueadas y trasladadas (Villa 2020).

Las piezas trasladadas (halladas en ocasiones a grandes distancias) se identifican por su atribución a los talleres emeritenses, por su talla sobre mármoles lusitanos y por la excepcionalidad tipológica que representan en sus lugares de hallazgo. En la mayoría de los casos documentados, las piezas han sido reutilizadas o asociadas (o existen indicios para suponerlo) a edificios islámicos de los siglos IX o X (en el centro y sur de la península) y cristianos de la misma cronología (en el caso del norte peninsular). Este saqueo debió tener sus raíces en el valor que claramente se le daba al mármol utilizado en las piezas de la ciudad, aunque pudieron darse otras posibles implicaciones simbólicas. Más allá de la arqueología, las fuentes textuales islámicas contemporáneas también describen a menudo este expolio, traslado y reutilización de materiales³ (Villa 2020).

Se tiene constancia de una importante colección de *spolia* en Badajoz, donde se ha documentado la presencia de piezas de hasta seis talleres distintos, pertenecientes

³ Al- Maqqarī (1843, 99) nos informa de que tras la toma de Narbona por Hishām I en 793, la población sometida fue obligada a transportar materiales procedentes de la demolida muralla de la ciudad hasta Córdoba. Ya en el siglo IX ibn Ḥayyān (2001, 182) nos informa de que ‘Abd al-Rahmān II habría ido «revolviendo todas las comarcas en busca de columnas (...) y llevándolas a la residencia califal de Córdoba». También los autores al-Rāzī, al-Himyarī y Al-Ruṣāṭī nos comunican, a través de distintos pasajes que se refieren a un mismo episodio, que el entonces gobernador de Mérida, ‘Abd Allāh (bajo cuyo mandato se levantó la Alcazaba en 835, donde precisamente se reutilizaron *spolia* de los siglos VI y VII), habría hecho acopio de ciertos mármoles, tomándolos de las ruinas de algunos edificios de la ciudad, entre los cuales se menciona la muralla (Villa 2020).

todos ellos al centro escultórico de Mérida. El traslado debió producirse tras la fundación de la ciudad por parte del muladí (cristianos que abrazan la religión islámica) Ibn Marwān (fallecido *ca.* 890). En contra de lo que defendía la bibliografía precedente (Cruz 1994/95), no se han localizado evidencias claras de la existencia de un taller en la ciudad de Badajoz entre los siglos ix y x, sino que por el contrario todas las piezas pertenecientes a esta época pertenecen en realidad a talleres de Mérida, y debieron ser trasladadas en época posterior a su talla desde allí.

En Córdoba existe otro conjunto de *spolia* emeritense muy significativo, en este caso reutilizado en su mayor parte en la segunda fase de su mezquita aljama, levantada a mediados del siglo ix. Aquí aparecen cantidad de piezas del taller de *Santa Eulalia II*, responsable de la decoración de la basílica homónima de Mérida en la segunda mitad del siglo vi. Este hecho, unido a la larga distancia cubierta con este traslado, ha conducido a plantear la hipótesis de un expolio selectivo por parte del poder emiral cordobés de los mármoles de la que fue basílica martirial de Mérida, y su posterior reutilización en la aljama de Córdoba con probables fines de apropiación simbólica.

El mismo fenómeno está documentado en la ciudad de Toledo, donde gran parte de las piezas trasladadas están asociadas o reutilizadas en construcciones islámicas de los siglos ix y x, como sucede con la conocida como pilastra del Salvador, reutilizada junto a otras piezas emeritenses en aquella iglesia -que fue mezquita- (Fig. 8), o con la pilastra de las Santas Justa y Rufina, en este caso sirviendo de apoyo a un arco de herradura de tipología califal.

Más allá de al-Andalus, los *spolia* de Mérida también aparecen en el territorio cristiano del norte, donde las piezas se encuentran frecuentemente asociadas o reutilizadas en iglesias altomedievales. En el territorio de los reinos cristianos de León y Castilla (no confundir con la actual comunidad homónima) destacan los ejemplos de San Juan de Baños, Quintanilla de las Viñas, Santa María de Wamba, la ciudad de León, y Santa Cristina de Lena, a los que habría que sumar otros casos dudosos en Idanha-a-Velha, Dumio y Palencia. En territorio catalán se pueden encontrar ejemplos en las ciudades de Lleida y Tortosa (Villa 2020).

2.3. Toledo

En época andalusí, Toledo llegó a rivalizar con Mérida como el centro escultórico peninsular más importante. La producción más destacada se concentra en el período denominado Toledo III (contemporáneo de Mérida IV y como aquel, fechado entre mediados del siglo viii y mediados del ix), al que pertenecen el aludido *grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos* y el *grupo de talleres de talla en*



Fig. 8. Pilastra de la iglesia de El Salvador de Toledo (Villa 2021, nº 114, autor).

reserva, así como otros talleres que perpetúan las tipologías creadas en época visigoda (*San Pablo de los Montes*, en Toledo y, algo más alejado, el de *Tiermes*, en Soria). También se atribuyen a este período unas pocas piezas aisladas con representaciones figurativas humanas, todas de taller desconocido (como sucede con la trasera de la pilastra del Salvador, cuyos relieves de temática cristológica fueron tallados aprovechando una antigua pilastra de época visigoda, Fig. 8).

El período Toledo III presenta las siguientes características: cuenta con talleres centralizados en la ciudad de Toledo, desde donde los escultores se trasladaban a los edificios para los que realizaban la escultura, trabajando a pie de obra y generalmente con piedra local (como está claramente documentado en la iglesia de San Pedro de La Mata, Utrero *et al.* 2016); se documenta la introducción de un nuevo repertorio decorativo (como son los roleos vegetales de tallos hendidos y hojas lateralizadas, sujetos por abrazaderas y con variedad de hojas y frutos colgando, en relación con otros relieves islámicos de la ciudad, Fig. 9b; así como veneras, tondos gallonados y cintas con puntos, Fig. 10), mientras se recurre a temas anteriores de época visigoda (como son los típicos círculos secantes, que ahora son sistemáticamente cóncavos y con cruces en el interior); la introducción de nuevas tipologías funcionales como las impostas de bóveda (anteriormente

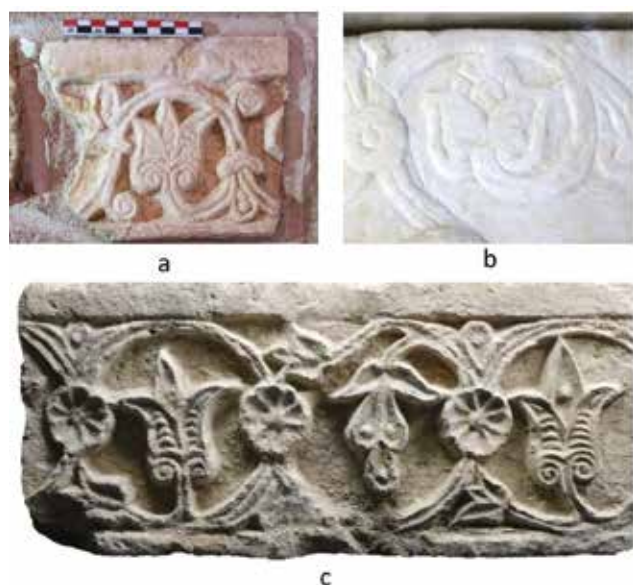


Fig. 9. Frisos de roleos del grupo de talleres toledano de roleos y su relación con otros relieves islámicos: a y c: Guarrazar (Villa 2021, nº 459 y 457); b: tablero taifa de Toledo depositado en el Taller del Moro (cortesía de J. M. Rojas y autor).

desconocidas para los talleres toledanos, Caballero 2013) y el mobiliario litúrgico; la supervivencia de la talla a dos planos y el biselado con cincel, y la introducción de la talla denominada *en reserva* (destacando los contornos y excavando el interior de las figuras). La producción escultórica propia del ambiente de Toledo III es, en gran parte de las características señaladas, equivalente al período contemporáneo de Mérida IV.

El grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos (producción no reconocida hasta ahora como tal grupo) se databa hasta hace unos años en la segunda mitad del siglo VII, a partir de testimonios formales, documentales y epigráficos, y se ha relacionado directamente con su impulso por parte de la monarquía visigoda toledana (fundamentalmente a partir de la síntesis de Schlunk y Hauschild 1978). Hoy, sin embargo, se cuestiona la validez de estos argumentos, y se propone un modelo explicativo diferente apoyado en criterios estratigráficos y tipológicos, el cual es, a su vez, coherente con el conjunto de la producción escultórica peninsular durante los siglos VIII y IX (Villa *et al.* 2022).

La estratigrafía y la tipología nos informan de lo siguiente: que los talleres de roleos se datan en una época posterior al siglo VII (debido a la presencia de sendos cimacios emeritenses de los siglos VII y VIII reutilizados en la iglesia de San Juan de Baños, cuya decoración pertenece a este grupo decorativo, Villa 2021, nº 202 y 246); que sus piezas se encuentran *in situ* en un conjunto construido en la segunda mitad del siglo VIII (el monasterio de Melque, en particular la imposta nº 477), y, a partir de los datos conocidos en la actualidad, que las piezas del grupo fueron amortizadas solo a partir de mediados



Fig. 10. Piezas con representación de veneras del grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos (a: Vega Baja de Toledo, Villa 2021, nº 440; b: San Juan de Baños, nº 441; c: Guarrazar, nº 442; d: San Pedro de La Mata, nº 443; e: Oreto, nº 445; f: Quero, nº 484) (autor).

del siglo IX. Además, desde una perspectiva productiva, se ha comprobado que un taller toledano de este grupo trabajó conjuntamente con otro taller de Mérida IV (siglos VIII y IX) en el conjunto escultórico de Oreto (Ciudad Real, Fig. 11 y 12d), mientras que la decoración de San Juan de Baños en su conjunto solo puede explicarse dentro del contexto productivo de los territorios de León y Castilla en la segunda mitad del siglo IX (*vid. infra*).

Además de los lugares mencionados, se conocen otras piezas atribuidas a este grupo en el yacimiento de Guarrazar (Guadamur, Toledo, Fig. 9a y c), en el edificio de Los Hitos en Arisgotas (Orgaz, Fig. 12b), en Quero (Toledo, Fig. 10f), en Villaviciosa de Odón y en Arroyomolinos (ambos en Madrid) y en el yacimiento de Segóbriga (Cuenca, Fig. 12c).

El grupo toledano de *talla en reserva* (siglos VIII-X, Fig. 13a) también presenta cierta continuidad temática con respecto a la escultura precedente de época visigoda (a partir de la representación del tema tradicional de los círculos secantes), además de introducir nuevos temas vinculados al arte islámico contemporáneo emiral y califal, particularmente, los temas de roleos de hojas vueltas generando composiciones en forma decoración. Una importante innovación técnica de este grupo fue

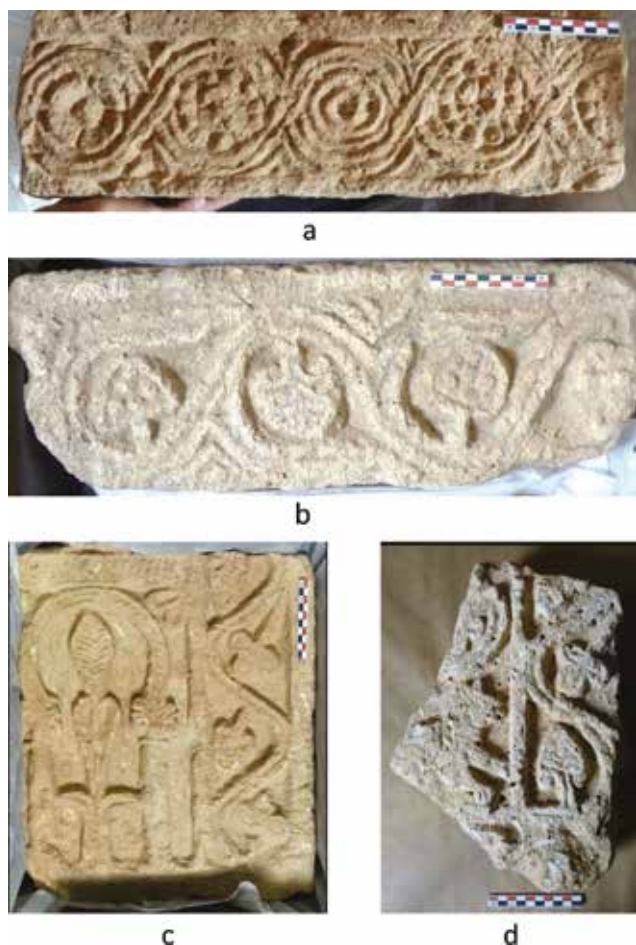


Fig. 11. Piezas del conjunto de Oreto (Villa 2021, nº 515, 519, 520 y 521), obra de los *talleres toledanos de roleos* (autor).



Fig. 12. Tableros de cancel atribuidos o relacionados con el grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos (a: Córdoba, Villa 2021, nº 547; b: Los Hitos en Arisgotas, nº 499; c: Segóbriga, nº 525; d: Oreto, nº 523) (autor).



Fig. 13. Piezas del *grupo toledano de talla en reserva* (a: Moreruela de Tábara, en Zamora, Villa 2021, nº 621; b: Toledo, nº 533) (autor).

la introducción de la talla en reserva, que había caído en desuso desde la época tardorromana.

La producción escultórica cristiana en Toledo debió finalizar hacia el siglo IX o poco más tarde. Al igual que sucede en Mérida, talleres y escultores toledanos se trasladaron al norte peninsular, donde colaboraron en la segunda mitad del siglo en la decoración de San Juan de Baños y en el conjunto de *Tierra de Tábara*, entre otros lugares.

2.4. Córdoba

En Córdoba, discreto centro escultórico que arranca en el siglo VII, se localiza un pequeño conjunto de escultura cristiana de los siglos VII y IX. Una parte de ella mantiene las tipologías creadas en época visigoda (período de Córdoba I), a las que suma ciertas innovaciones procedentes del arte islámico contemporáneo. El resto de la escultura de los siglos VII y IX en Córdoba se enmarca en el período de Córdoba II, al que se atribuyen reducido número de piezas, algunas de las cuales están relacionadas con la producción de Toledo III (en concreto con los conjuntos Los Hitos y Arisgotas, Fig. 12a). Destaca también la incorporación de tipologías funcionales



Fig. 14. Dintel con doble arco de herradura y alfiz de Córdoba (Villa 2021, nº 549, autor).

de estructura típicamente islámica, como sucede con un dintel monolítico de ventana con doble arco geminado y alfiz (Fig. 14).

2.5. Occidente peninsular

Los talleres documentados en la zona central del actual territorio de Portugal se caracterizan por el empleo técnicas de talla conservadoras (tallado en dos planos y en bisel) y por el uso de materiales de origen local o regional. Tanto el repertorio decorativo como ciertas tipologías funcionales utilizadas (como sucede con las impostas de bóveda) son claramente propias de los siglos VIII y IX, sin que se perciban relaciones con la escultura precedente de época visigoda. Ninguno de los talleres documentados en este territorio parece haber constituido un verdadero centro escultórico, sino que su producción se caracteriza por un escaso volumen y una limitada proyección temporal.

El *taller de Lisboa* apenas guarda relación con el resto de la producción peninsular. Su repertorio decorativo depende directamente de modelos decorativos orientales omeyas de principios del siglo VIII (Fig. 15).

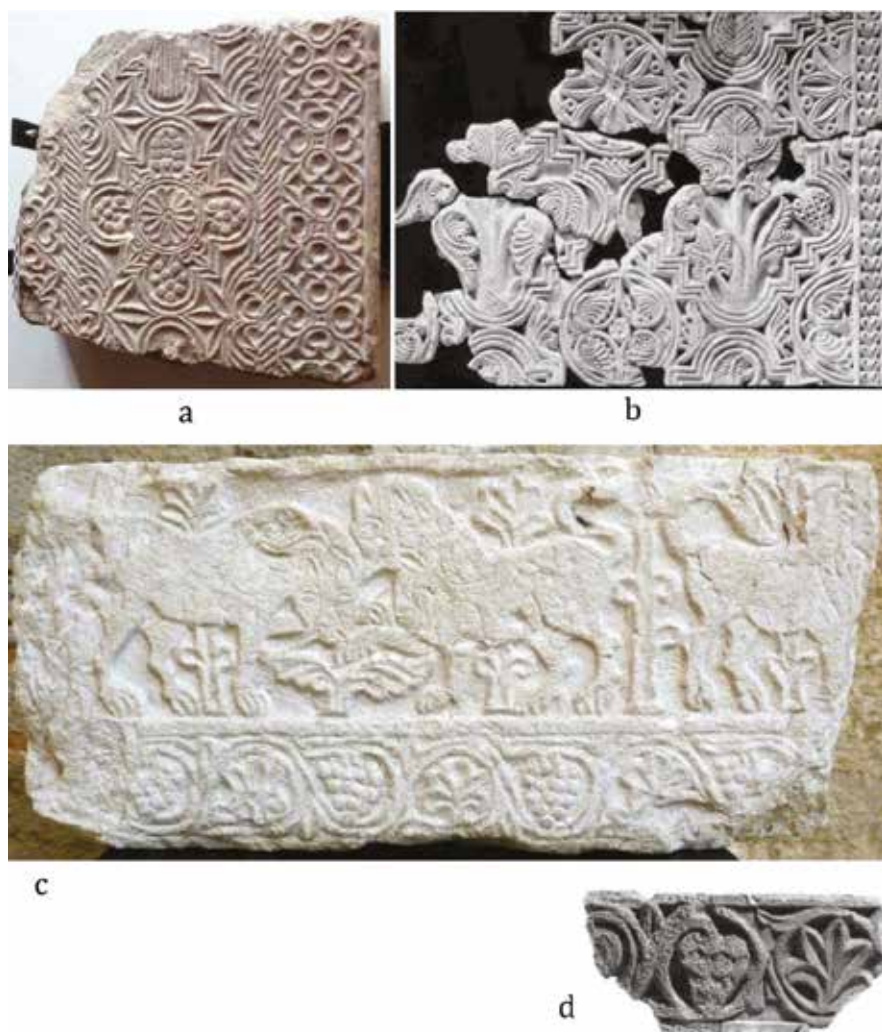


Fig. 15. Piezas del *taller de Lisboa* y sus posibles modelos omeyas orientales: a: Lisboa (Villa 2021, nº 555); b: estuco de Hirbat al-Mafjar (Hamilton 1959, Pl. XLVII); c: Lisboa (Villa 2021, nº 552); d: Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi (Real 2000, 57, fig. 7, e) (autor).



Fig. 16. a: Larguero de cancel del taller Conimbriga (Museo Monográfico de Conimbriga) (autor); b: tablero de cancel de Roma (Museo di Roma, lapidario, nº 41231, Betti 2003, 154).

En cuanto a los temas, destacan de forma excepcional la representación de animales, tanto cuadrúpedos como aves. Las únicas relaciones que presenta este taller con otros a escala peninsular son a nivel de ambiente técnico,

concretamente con la producción contemporánea de los horizontes Mérida IV y Toledo III (por el empleo común de roleos de hojas lateralizadas, hojas digitadas y racimos con borde). El taller, del que se conocen escasas piezas atribuidas, parece haberse instalado en la ciudad de Lisboa y en su entorno.

Otro de los talleres más relevantes del entorno portugués se situó algo más al norte, en torno a la ciudad de Conimbriga (*taller de Conimbriga*). Además de en este yacimiento, sus piezas aparecen en las localidades cercanas (Eira Pedrinha, Coimbra, Soure, Abiul, Tomar y Lorvão). La producción de este taller se relaciona doblemente con la producción escultórica contemporánea. Por un lado, sus escultores son conocedores de las innovaciones temáticas que tienen lugar en el centro productivo de Mérida entre los siglos VIII y IX (como sucede con los consabidos roleos y racimos con borde). Por otro lado, los mismos temas con idéntico tratamiento se repiten en la escultura contemporánea italiana y centroeuropea (Fig. 16). En la actualidad, no es posible determinar si los escultores del *taller de Conimbriga* eran conocedores del ámbito emeritense o centroeuropeo, o si todos estos talleres contaron con un sustrato común.

A este taller se deben los dinteles arcuados de dos vanos tallados y decorados más antiguos de los que tenemos conocimiento. Esta tipología aparece en la iglesia zamorana de cronología discutida de San Pedro de La Nave, donde un escultor conocedor de este taller intervino



Fig. 17. Piezas atribuidas y relacionadas con el *taller de Conimbriga*: a: imposta de San Pedro de La Nave; b: dintel de Abiul (Villa 2021, nº 560) (autor).



Fig. 18. Piezas del taller de Pla de Nadal: a-c: frisos o impostas; d: fragmento de estuco tallado; e-f: fustes torneados (Villa 2021, nº 573 a 581) (autor).

en la decoración ejecutada por el denominado como *primer taller de La Nave* a finales del siglo IX (aspecto apreciable en la talla de los racimos con borde de la iglesia, idénticos a los realizados por el taller *Conimbriga*, Fig. 17).

La única obra conocida del taller de Nazaré, un taller regional o local de escaso alcance, fue para la iglesia de São Gíão (Nazaré, Portugal). Sus tipos funcionales, técnicos y decorativos parecen no hacer más que repetir inercialmente modelos conservadores propios de los talleres de Mérida.

Existen aún dos construcciones tradicionalmente datadas en época visigoda, pero que, tras el análisis estratigráfico y productivo de su escultura, su cronología se debe establecer a mediados del siglo IX. Se trata de las iglesias de São Frutuoso de Montélios (Braga, Portugal) y de São Torcato en Guimarães (también en Portugal). Ambas fueron decoradas por un taller asturiano itinerante, denominado *Oviedo-Lillo I-Braga*, y que intervino, junto a otro taller, en la decoración de la iglesia ovetense de San Miguel de Lillo (esta última ya en territorio cristiano del reino de Asturias). Los elementos que tienen en común todos los trabajos atribuidos a este taller son su repertorio decorativo (roleos vegetales geometrizados y rematados en zarcillos, molinillos y círculos con flores de

seis pétalos en su interior) y la técnica de talla empleada, que en este caso es exclusivamente a bisel. Dado el carácter itinerante del taller, los trabajos se realizaron en cada caso *in situ* y a pie de obra utilizando materias primas locales, bien extraídas *ex novo* de la cantera o bien reutilizadas. Se puede establecer su cronología de mediados del siglo IX a partir de los siguientes argumentos: la fecha conocida para la construcción de San Miguel de Lillo (mediados del siglo IX, único edificio decorado por el taller que conserva *in situ* parte de su decoración, aportando así garantías estratigráficas), la reutilización de algunas de sus piezas (en concreto del conocido como tablero del grifo de Lillo) por el posterior taller de *Lillo II-Tuñón* (de finales del siglo IX, Villa 2021, nº 652), y la utilización del trépano, recurso documentado exclusivamente la escultura de Montélios.

2.6. Levante peninsular

En época visigoda (siglos VI y VII) la producción escultórica del levante peninsular se atribuye en su mayor parte a los llamados *talleres del Sureste*, una producción bien documentada de la que contamos con abundantes



Fig. 19. Larguero de cancel del taller de Tarragona (Villa 2021, nº 582).

testimonios en los yacimientos de El Tolmo de Minateda (Albacete), Algezares (Murcia) y Segóbriga (Cuenca), entre otros. Ahora, en los siglos VIII y IX, la producción escultórica cristiana se organiza en torno a los talleres relacionados de Valencia, Pla de Nadal, Tarragona y Barcelona. La escultura debida a ellos se caracteriza por su clara diferenciación tipológica con respecto a los precedentes *talleres del Sureste* de época visigoda. Se trata en todos los casos de talleres urbanos y rurales, que cuentan con poca o con ninguna movilidad y de muy escaso recorrido temporal. Todos ellos introducen novedades temáticas, funcionales y tecnológicas solo explicables en el ambiente técnico altomedieval de los siglos VIII y IX.

En la zona de Valencia se documentan los talleres de *Valencia* y *Pla de Nadal*, que se caracterizan por una serie de rasgos comunes, como son la ausencia de un centro de producción definido, el uso de materiales locales extraídos *ex novo* de las canteras, la talla *in situ* sobre el edificio (al menos en el caso de Pla de Nadal, Fig. 18), y la utilización de un repertorio decorativo (roleos de tallos hendidos y hojas lateralizadas) y de unas tipologías funcionales novedosas, como sucede con las impostas y los frisos.

La cronología del siglo VIII de estos talleres se sustenta en la relación tipológica con la producción de los *talleres*

toledanos de roleos (Toledo III), en la utilización de estucos tallados como complemento de las piezas en el caso del taller de Pla de Nadal (Fig. 18d, procedimiento documentado por primera vez en el alto medievo en la península Ibérica en la segunda mitad del siglo VIII, en la puerta de los Visires de la Mezquita de Córdoba y en la iglesia de Santa María de Melque), y el tallado de fustes cilíndricos a torno, una tecnología desconocida en la península desde su abandono al final del período romano.

Más al norte, se identifican los talleres urbanos de *Tarragona* y de *Barcelona*, ninguno de los cuales guarda relación con la producción precedente de época visigoda, sino con la de los siglos VIII y IX. Ambos presentan rasgos ajenos a la escultura hispana, lo que podría explicarse por la importación de modelos europeos del otro lado de los Pirineos. El taller de *Tarragona* se caracteriza por la utilización de un repertorio novedoso en relación con los talleres de Mérida IV (en forma de roleos vegetales y de hileras de perlas), y por el reciclaje de mármoles de época romana y visigoda. La técnica es conservadora, empleándose la talla a dos planos y a bisel. Se conoce la intervención de este taller en la basílica del anfiteatro, un edificio construido en época visigoda, y seguramente reformado entre los siglos VIII y IX.

Desde una perspectiva estratigráfica, el taller es cronológicamente posterior a un epígrafe funerario fechado entre los siglos V y VII, el cual se recicla para la talla de un larguero de cancel (Fig. 19; Villa 2021, nº 567).

El taller de *Barcelona* estuvo principalmente activo dentro de la propia ciudad. Fuera de ella solo se documenta una pieza aislada en el cercano monasterio de Sant Cugat del Vallès. Su repertorio decorativo combina elementos tradicionales (círculos secantes) con otros más novedosos (como son los temas vegetales en composiciones cuadriculadas, relacionadas con la producción del taller de *Lisboa*). A nivel técnico introduce el uso del trépano, una herramienta desconocida en la Península desde fines de la época romana (cuando se abandona) hasta finales del siglo VIII. Como soporte, nuevamente se utilizan materiales reciclados, probablemente de la propia ciudad. Dada la pronta incorporación de Barcelona a la órbita carolingia (Marca Hispánica, 801) se debe considerar la posibilidad de que una parte de su producción escultórica esté relacionada con el ámbito ultrapirenaico, cuestión que deberá ser desarrollada en un futuro.

El taller de *Zaragoza*, del que se conoce un escaso número de relieves (algunos de ellos tableros de cancel) procedentes de esta ciudad, constituye el ejemplo más tardío de taller escultórico cristiano documentado en el territorio de al-Andalus. Además de las notables similitudes que presenta con la decoración islámica zaragozana contemporánea, la obra del taller se relaciona estrechamente con la escultura de San Miguel de Escalada (León,



a



b

Fig. 20. a: Tablero de altar de San Miguel de Escalada (Villa 2021, nº 764); b: tablero de cancel del taller Zaragoza (nº 758) (autor).

iglesia consagrada en 913, Fig. 20). Sin otras referencias, la actividad del taller de Zaragoza se puede encuadrar entre finales del siglo ix y el siglo x.

3. CONTINUIDAD DE LOS TALLERES

MERIDIONALES EN EL NORTE CRISTIANO

Tras la desaparición de los grandes centros de producción de Mérida y Toledo a mediados del siglo ix, ciertas características de esta escultura meridional se repiten en el norte cristiano. En algunos casos, son los mismos escultores los que parecen emigrar, de manera que encontramos producciones idénticas a las documentadas en el sur peninsular (así sucede en San Juan de Baños, en el primer taller de La Nave y en el conjunto de Tierra de Tábara).

En otros casos, como sucede en el ámbito asturiano del siglo ix, el conocimiento de la producción escultórica meridional es indirecto, encontrándose unos mismos patrones decorativos, si bien ejecutados con distinto tratamiento (caso del segundo taller de La Nave, y de los de Saamasas, Lillo I, Oviedo-Lillo I-Braga, Pravia, Bendones



a

b

Fig. 21. Piezas del taller de Almendral (a: Moreruela de Tábara, en Zamora, Villa 2021, nº 615; b: Mérida, nº 399) (autor).

y Lena II). Las relaciones señaladas entre la escultura del norte y la del sur se dan siempre entre los siglos viii y ix, y en ningún caso con anterioridad, en época visigoda.

Un caso paradigmático de taller meridional emigrado es uno de los que colabora en la decoración de San Juan de Baños. En la obra escultórica de Baños intervinieron al menos tres talleres, todos ellos de diferente procedencia y formación. La mayor parte de las piezas se atribuyen al grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos (Toledo III). Este taller reprodujo algunas de las características de su escultura realizada en Toledo, incorporando además novedades propias del ambiente técnico septentrional del siglo ix, como son los dinteles de arcuados (ajimeces) decorados, desconocidos en Toledo. Un segundo taller o escultor leonés se encargó de la decoración de las impostas de cintas de las estancias laterales, cuya intervención también se documenta en el conjunto zamorano de Tierra de Tábara. El tercer taller, responsable de la talla de los capiteles, es de origen desconocido. Finalmente es posible que un cuarto taller castellano relacionado con el conjunto escultórico de Valeránica de Tordómar (Burgos) decorase parte del mobiliario litúrgico de la iglesia. Esta asociación de tres o cuatro talleres de distinta procedencia (toledanos, castellanos y leoneses), en un mismo edificio es indicativa de unos modos de producción desconocidos

en época visigoda, y habituales en al ambiente productivo norteño de los siglos IX y X. Como argumento adicional para reforzar esta propuesta cronológica se cuenta el reempleo en la construcción de dos cimacios emeritenses (reutilizados en los extremos orientales de las arquerías), datados entre los siglos VII y VIII pero que no debieron ser trasladados al lugar antes de mediados del siglo IX, cuando se documenta el expolio generalizado de los mármoles de Mérida.

El conjunto de *Tierra de Tábara*, hoy descontextualizado y disperso, debió ser un caso similar al descrito de Baños. En este conjunto se documenta la participación de varios talleres cuyas cronologías (establecidas en cada caso por diferentes argumentos) confluyen en el siglo IX: el grupo de talleres toledanos de roleos (Toledo III), el taller de Almendral (Mérida IV, Fig. 21), así como el asturiano taller de Pravia y el primer taller de La Nave.

4. A MODO DE CONCLUSIÓN: EL CAMBIO EN LOS MODOS DE PRODUCCIÓN. ENTRE LA ANTIGÜEDAD TARDÍA Y LA ALTA EDAD MEDIA

El final de la producción escultórica cristiana en al-Andalus a mediados del siglo IX supuso la desaparición de sus modos de producción asociados. Ahora, en el norte cristiano, estos modos cambiaron a partir de mediados del siglo IX. Por un lado, desapareció el sistema basado en talleres de largo recorrido establecidos en los grandes centros de producción (como sucedía anteriormente con Mérida, Toledo y Córdoba). En su lugar, se documenta en el norte la existencia de talleres o escultores itinerantes, los cuales trabajaban siempre por encargo, desplazándose a los edificios donde se demandaba su presencia. Por otro lado, se dio la ya mencionada costumbre de la asociación ocasional de diferentes talleres o escultores para decorar en un mismo edificio.

La ausencia de una producción centralizada y la colaboración ocasional de diferentes talleres o escultores

rompió con la homogeneidad que caracterizaba a la producción meridional de los siglos VI al IX. Ahora, en los siglos IX y X, la labor de los talleres o escultores quedó supeditados a las exigencias de cada proyecto arquitectónico y de sus promotores, lo que de alguna manera redujo su potencial creativo. Dado que cada proyecto arquitectónico era único y respondía a unas necesidades y a unas circunstancias particulares, en ningún caso aparecen dos sistemas decorativos iguales, y, más allá, escasean las piezas que resultan ser idénticas (mientras que estas abundan entre la producción propia de los modos de producción meridionales precedentes).

Este nuevo modo de producción basado en talleres itinerantes trajo consigo una importante innovación tecnológica: la práctica de tallar o acabar *in situ* la decoración, sobre el edificio ya construido. Este modo de talla, hasta ahora desconocido, se documenta por primera vez en la península ibérica a finales del siglo VIII en la puerta de los Visires de la mezquita de Córdoba, y, siempre en combinación con la talla a pie de obra, se generaliza a partir de finales del siglo IX (por ejemplo, en obras de los talleres mozárabes leoneses, así como en los edificios de San Pedro de La Nave y de Quintanilla de las Viñas).

Desde un punto de vista técnico, la innovación más destacable dentro del ámbito peninsular fue la recuperación y el uso sistemático del trépano, antes casi desconocido (salvo en el caso del mencionado taller de Barcelona, si bien su cronología se puede establecer en esta época). El uso de esta herramienta debe emplearse como un discriminante cronológico para la datación de la producción escultórica posterior al siglo VIII. Las técnicas tradicionales de talla (como son la talla a bisel y la talla a dos planos) coexistieron con el trépano, junto con otras técnicas documentadas solo a partir del siglo VIII (como sucede con la talla en reserva). Finalmente, en lo relativo a la materia prima, la extracción de piedra nueva de cantera de origen locales o regional se volvió la práctica más común, relegando la reutilización de materia prima a una práctica ocasional.

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PART V

ON THE BORDER. LATER EXCHANGES AND REVIVALS
IN SICILY AND ARMENIA

MONASTERI E ISTITUZIONI RELIGIOSE NELLA FRONTIERA
ARABO-BIZANTINA DELLA SICILIA ORIENTALE:
PER UNA NUOVA AGENDA DELLA RICERCA

MONASTERIES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS
AT THE ARAB-BYZANTINE FRONTIER OF THE EASTERN SICILY:
FOR A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

LUCIA ARCIFA E MICHELANGELO MESSINA¹

RIASSUNTO

La riflessione storiografica sulla presenza dei cristiani nella Sicilia islamica è stata fortemente condizionata dalla tipologia di fonti disponibili: fonti agiografiche relative alle vite di santi monaci focalizzate essenzialmente sul IX-X secolo; fonti archivistiche e cronache della seconda metà dell'XI secolo relative alla conquista normanna e alla conseguente azione di fondazione e rifondazione di monasteri di rito greco. L'utilizzo di tali fonti ha influenzato la percezione del contesto, indirizzando la lettura entro categorie propagandistiche che non sempre consentono di penetrare nella complessa realtà sociale ed economica che si costruisce tra IX e XI secolo. L'ultimo decennio è stato caratterizzato da una significativa inversione di tendenza con nuove riflessioni sulla presenza cristiana nella Sicilia islamica e sul monachesimo greco, sovente il solo punto di riferimento delle comunità cristiane, in un contesto marcato dal progressivo indebolimento della rete dei vescovadi isolani.

Il riconoscimento e la messa in valore di questo specifico profilo dei monasteri italogreci nel contesto della frontiera arabo-bizantina, ancora poco esplorato, comporta la necessità di rinnovare l'analisi territoriale esplorando la loro collocazione spaziale, i legami con le comunità rurali da una parte e con i kasta eminenti, punto di riferimento politico-amministrativo. Emerge una dimensione sociale dei monasteri che travalica l'impressione di isolamento di queste fabbriche nel territorio e che, in attesa di indagini archeologiche specifiche, comincia a cogliere significativi legami con la struttura gerarchica dell'insediamento nella Sicilia mediobizantina e islamica.

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Frontiera arabo-bizantina, Sicilia medio bizantina, monachesimo greco-ortodosso, vescovadi, aristocrazia bizantina, Taormina*

SUMMARY

The historiographic analysis concerning the presence of Christians in Islamic Sicily has been strongly influenced by the type of sources available. The latter are represented by: hagiographic texts on the lives of holy monks which focused essentially on the 9th-10th centuries; diplomatic sources and chronicles from the second half of the 11th century relating to the Norman conquest and to the subsequent foundation and re-establishment of Greek orthodox monasteries. The use of such written documents created a bias in the perception of their historical context, skewing the interpretation towards propagandistic categories that do not always allow us to understand the complex social and economic reality between the 9th and 11th centuries. In the last decade, new research has focused on Greek Orthodox monasticism in Sicily as the main religious, social and territorial reference point for Christian communities, at a time when the diocesan network seems to have suffered the brunt of the confrontation with the Muslims. The specific – and mostly unexplored – role of the Italo-Byzantine monasteries requires new analytical perspectives which take into account territorial aspects such as their spatial distribution, as well as their links with rural communities and main kasta, which represented changing political-administrative references in the region. The literary image which characterised past architectural studies on monasteries as isolated elements within the territory has been questioned in virtue of their emerging social dimension: further targeted archaeological investigations will provide significant evidence of their pivotal role in the hierarchy of settlements and productive landscapes of mid-Byzantine and Islamic Sicily.

KEYWORDS: *Arab-byzantine frontier, middle-byzantine Sicily, Greek-orthodox monasticism, bishoprics, byzantine aristocracy, Taormina*

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I. QUADRI GENERALI: PERCORSI STORIOGRAFICI TRA NOVECENTO E XXI SECOLO

La riflessione storiografica sulla presenza dei cristiani nella Sicilia islamica, condotta nel corso della seconda metà del secolo scorso, è stata fortemente condizionata dalla tipologia di fonti disponibili: fonti agiografiche relative alle vite di santi monaci focalizzate essenzialmente sul IX-X secolo; fonti archivistiche e cronache della seconda metà dell'XI secolo relative alla conquista normanna e alla conseguente azione di fondazione e rifondazione di monasteri di rito greco, intrapresa dal conte Ruggero (c. 1030-1101) nella Sicilia nord orientale (Val Demone; Borsari 1963; von Falkenhausen 1978, 137-55; Filangeri 1979; von Falkenhausen 1986, 135-74; Scaduto 1982).

L'utilizzo di tali fonti, in cui è evidente il ricorso a espedienti retorici, ha influenzato la percezione del contesto, indirizzando la lettura entro categorie ideologiche che non sempre consentono di penetrare nella complessa realtà sociale ed economica che si costruisce tra IX e XI secolo. Le fonti in questione, infatti, da un parte consentono di intravedere la posizione sociale crescente acquisita dalla figura del monaco nella società medio-bizantina, la sua mobilità e la complessa rete di rapporti sovraregionali con altre parti dell'impero; nel contempo esse ricostruiscono le vite attraverso il paradigma della fuga, del movimento centrifugo da ovest verso est, dai territori precocemente islamizzati della Sicilia occidentale verso i centri della Sicilia orientale ancora in mano bizantina (Taormina, Rometta) fino al loro rifugiarsi nell'Italia Meridionale (Calabria, Basilicata) a seguito del progredire della conquista islamica e delle grandi battaglie nei principali centri di resistenza bizantina (Re e Rognoni 2014, 119-28).

Sull'altro versante, le cronache della conquista normanna (Malaterra 1927-28) e i diplomi di fondazione dei monasteri italogreci di fine XI secolo sottolineano il rapporto di asservimento della popolazione cristiana del Val Demone verso il potere islamico, i mali sopportati, i guasti alle fabbriche patiti nel corso della guerra di conquista, la dimensione di 'nascondimento', di mera sopravvivenza della comunità cristiana tra IX-metà XI secolo, finalizzata ad una propaganda della conquista normanna in chiave di liberazione dal nemico saraceno, nel quadro di una più ampia giustificazione dell'azione militare intrapresa con l'appoggio del papato. Il testamento dell'egumeno Gregorio del monastero di S. Filippo di Fragalà,² in particolare, consente di accertare l'esistenza di fondazioni monastiche risalenti *tempore Agarenorum* "al tempo dei

discendenti di Agar", i.e. i Musulmani; questi riferimenti unitamente a ulteriori accenni delle fonti di età normanna forniscono un quadro piuttosto rado (e già da tempo noto) di monasteri italogreci esistenti in età islamica e concentrati per lo più nel nord-est dell'isola.

Questo quadro così ancorato al dato scritto ha fortemente disincentivato una ricerca archeologica specifica. Per certi versi la cronologia avanzata della conquista islamica in Sicilia, a partire dai primi decenni del IX secolo – congiuntamente alla rapida 'islamizzazione' dei territori della Sicilia occidentale – ha giustificato ulteriormente una scarsa attenzione per un tema che ha piuttosto classicamente riguardato i territori del Medio e Vicino Oriente nel contesto della fase precoce dell'espansionismo islamico. La letteratura archeologica del Novecento appare dominata dall'assunto di una sostanziale scomparsa di testimonianze cristiane dopo l'VIII secolo; nella Sicilia orientale in particolare la datazione di testimonianze architettoniche e pittoriche di età medio-bizantina tende a rintracciare nel IX secolo un *terminus ante quem* per la datazione di eventuali testimonianze cristiane, modellato aprioristicamente sulle date desunte dalle Cronache della conquista islamica che vedono nel corso del IX secolo la caduta dei *kastri* di Butera, Ragusa (848/9; 865), Modica (844/5), Noto (863/4; 865/6) e della stessa Siracusa (878).

La mancanza di indagini archeologiche unitamente al ritardo nell'individuazione dei markers archeologici specifici per l'VIII e IX secolo ha incentivato ulteriormente un approccio squisitamente storico-artistico per una serie di testimonianze architettoniche la cui cronologia risulta scarsamente definibile. È il caso degli edifici a pianta centrica, le cosiddette 'cube' diffuse essenzialmente nella Valle dell'Alcantara, la cui destinazione (monastica, chiese rurali?) e datazione (VIII-XI secolo) restano ancora incerte (Giglio 2003; Margani 2005).

Nell'ultimo decennio a fronte di una precisazione dei fossili guida per la stratigrafia di VIII e IX secolo è iniziata una significativa inversione di tendenza, volta a isolare, come tema specifico, la riflessione sulla presenza cristiana nella Sicilia islamica (Nef 2008). Il tema è stato posto a proposito di due città precocemente conquistate -Palermo (831) e Agrigento (828)- per le quali è oggi possibile elaborare una prima riflessione sull'occupazione degli spazi urbani e sulla dislocazione degli edifici di culto. Emerge da una parte la continuità delle aree sepolcrali che sembrano mantenere le scelte funerarie delle comunità paleocristiane e bizantine precedenti la conquista, dall'altro una certa marginalizzazione dei luoghi di culto

² Per il testamento dell'egumeno Gregorio, si veda Falkenhausen (1983) e le notazioni sul contesto storico in Martin (2018, 15-30).

rispetto al nucleo principale della *madīna* (Ardizzone e Pezzini 2014, 281-300).

La ricerca storico-artistica per converso ha ripreso su nuovi presupposti l'analisi di alcune importanti testimonianze pittoriche già note, superando il 'tabù' di una datazione posteriore al IX secolo: cominciano a emergere in questo senso importanti testimonianze pittoriche di una produzione artistica cristiana databile tra IX e X secolo che riguarda chiese rupestri all'interno di *kastra* come nel caso di Modica (Falla Castelfranchi 2005, 155-63), oratori devozionali nel caso di Siracusa (Arcidiacono 2019a, 171-96), chiese rurali nel caso di Pantalica, in cui è evidente la stretta connessione del linguaggio pittorico con le correnti artistiche coeve della Cappadocia e di area costantinopolitana (Arcidiacono 2019b, 203-28).

Di grande interesse ai fini di un più puntuale inquadramento dei complessi processi che interessano i contesti monastici tra IX e X secolo risultano i nuovi dati archeologici provenienti dal monastero di S. Pancrati presso Cava d'Ispica (RG) (Fiorilla *et al.* 2021, 407-35): ad una fase iniziale databile al VI-VII secolo, cui si ascrive il primo edificio religioso con planimetria a triconco, segue tra fine VIII e inizi IX secolo una seconda fase edilizia che trasforma la chiesa mononave in basilica a tre navate. La presenza di strutture murarie all'esterno della chiesa in connessione con i muri perimetrali dell'edificio ha consentito di accertare la presenza di corpi aggiunti e di un recinto perimetrale a delimitare il complesso ecclesiastico. L'attestazione di vasi con filtro e catini carenati tra X-XI secolo sembra confermare la continuità di vita dell'abitato circostante anche in età islamica; meno evidente, allo stato attuale dell'indagine, il destino dell'edificio religioso e del monastero che, secondo gli autori dell'indagine, potrebbe lasciare intravedere la persistenza delle istituzioni monastiche nella struttura sociale della Sicilia islamica.

Esistono dunque oggi le premesse per una presa in carico della tematica e per la costruzione di una nuova agenda delle ricerche che, allo stato attuale delle nostre conoscenze, può oggi limitarsi ad una più puntuale messa a fuoco delle questioni e dei campi di indagine (Arcifa 2018).

2. UN QUADRO PECULIARE DI RIFERIMENTO:

LA FRONTIERA ARABO-BIZANTINA

La frontiera arabo-bizantina e il suo progressivo divenire rappresentano una dimensione fondamentale sul piano socioeconomico oltre che geopolitico, innescando, peraltro, un processo di diversificazione territoriale di cui

è necessario tener conto nella valutazione archeologica dei contesti.

Andrà dunque valutato in modo specifico il ruolo assunto dalle comunità cristiane, in ambito rurale e urbano, all'interno di territori che tra IX e X secolo sono profondamente segnati dalla dimensione del *thaghr* "marca di frontiera" sia nel caso dei territori occidentali precocemente islamizzati, sia nel caso di quelle aree in cui il confronto tra Bisanzio e Islam passa attraverso assedi, ratifiche di accordi, pagamento di tributi: una accentuata mediazione tra le due parti in cui, come vedremo, i monaci e i monasteri assumono un ruolo di primo piano.

Questo contesto abbraccia in prima istanza la Sicilia orientale a est del fiume Platani. Nel corso del IX secolo tende a restringersi ulteriormente secondo un processo che in modo non lineare è tuttavia scandito da momenti topici quali la caduta delle rocche di Modica e Ragusa, Noto, Butera, nel sud est dell'Isola, cui farà seguito la caduta di Siracusa nell'878; alla fine del IX secolo, in concomitanza con la fase fatimide della conquista, il conflitto si concentrerà essenzialmente nella cuspide nord-orientale dell'Isola in connessione al controllo dello Stretto di Messina; in questa fase la dimensione della frontiera abbraccerà sostanzialmente i territori montuosi del massiccio nebroideo-peloritano e del versante settentrionale dell'Etna e si impegnerà su una serie di centri lungo la dorsale peloritana quali Taormina, Rometta, Demenna, *Miq.š.*³

Per oltre un secolo, fino alla caduta di Taormina e Rometta nel 965, questi territori costituiranno un terreno di scontro e di confronto che, oltre che sul piano militare, coinvolge istituzioni politiche e religiose. Come vedremo a breve, i monasteri italo-greci sembrano svolgere un ruolo importante, contribuendo all'inquadramento della popolazione e al mantenimento della struttura socioeconomica di questi territori. Un ruolo che allo stato attuale delle ricerche sembra emergere dalle fonti di varia natura (agiografiche, narrative) ancor più che dalle indagini di tipo archeologico. La dimensione della frontiera fa in qualche modo da sfondo alle vite avventurose dei monaci, plasmando la dimensione socioeconomica dei monasteri italogreci fin qui fortemente sottaciuta dagli studi storico-archeologici.

Ad un'analisi più approfondita delle agiografie dei secoli IX-X, che tenga conto di altri tipi di fonti per una più efficace contestualizzazione, sembra possibile leggere in modo molto pregnante il rafforzamento del ruolo delle istituzioni monastiche nel quadro socioeconomico dell'Isola, nonché il loro pieno inserimento in questa società peculiare rappresentata dalla Sicilia islamica e dalla sua dimensione di *thaghr min thughūr al-Rūm* ("una delle

³ Per una nuova analisi e nuova proposta di interpretazione di questo toponimo ripreso dalle fonti arabe, *infra*.

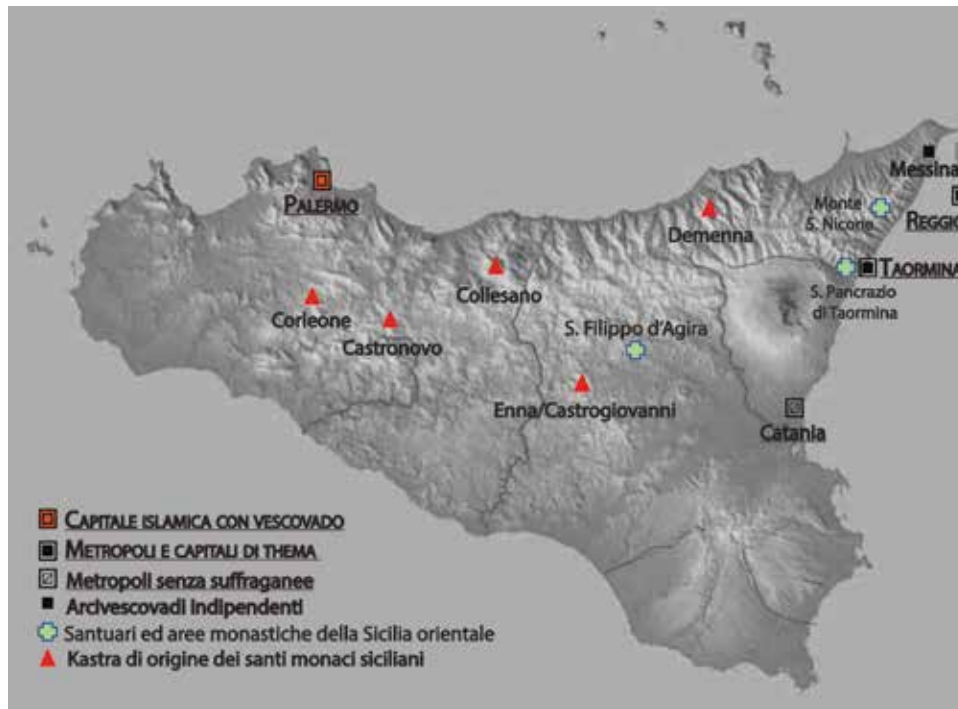


Fig. 1. Carta delle istituzioni monastiche in Sicilia citate nelle agiografie dei monaci siculo-calabresi in relazione alle diocesi note per il tardo IX-X secolo (elab. M. Messina).

[marche di] frontiera con i Romani”), secondo la definizione di Ibn Ḥawqal (1992, 120). Il primo dato interno alla letteratura agiografica da sottolineare è proprio la netta inversione di rotta sui protagonisti di queste fonti: già Vivien Prigent ha sottolineato il forte indebolimento della rete episcopale siciliana, in questa fase, la cui disintegrazione progressiva è testimoniata tanto dall’assenza di fonti sfragistiche⁴ quanto dalle mancate citazioni in liste conciliari ed in opere come la *Diatyposis* di Leone VI (886-912); la produzione agiografica riflette questo indebolimento, registrando un evidente disinteresse per figure di santi vescovi ed in generale appartenenti al clero secolare, proprio a partire dal tardo IX e nel corso del X secolo (Prigent 2014, 89-102) (Fig. 1).

Questa inversione di tendenza è il riflesso del declino della rete vescovile nell’isola che si consuma nel corso del X secolo; una crisi, secondo Prigent, tutta interna all’evoluzione della chiesa imperiale, connessa al reclutamento dei titolari delle sedi siciliane all’esterno del clero isolano, dopo la fine dell’iconoclasmo, e la conseguente residenza in Oriente dei vescovi titolari per lunghi periodi. L’indebolimento della struttura diocesana deve aver rafforzato istituzioni religiose quali i monasteri che restano il solo punto di riferimento delle comunità cristiane. Un riferimento che, come evidenzia l’analisi che segue, travalica il ruolo religioso includendo precise forme

di rappresentanza politico-istituzionale, nel caso delle trattative a fronte di accordi, pagamento di riscatti ecc., in virtù delle strette relazioni con le élites aristocratiche locali di cui spesso i monasteri sono diretta emanazione.

Lucia ARCIFA

3. MONACI E MONASTERI NELLE FONTI

AGIOGRAFICHE ITALO-GRECHE: VALORIZZAZIONE DELLE ARISTOCRAZIE LOCALI E RIDEFINIZIONE DELLE POLARITÀ TERRITORIALI

In quest’isola progressivamente privata dei suoi riferimenti vescovili, fu probabilmente uno sviluppo piuttosto naturale quello che portò il monaco ed il monastero ai vertici della rappresentatività aristocratica dei Cristiani di Sicilia, in quel periodo compreso tra il IX e l’XI secolo in cui per la cristianità siculo-calabrese sarebbero fiorite numerose figure di santi monaci: questi soppiantarono irrimediabilmente la figura del vescovo come protagonista del paesaggio agiografico almeno fino al consolidamento della conquista normanna (Pricoco 1992; Follieri 1998; Motta 2004; Re 2011; Re e Rognoni 2014; Prigent 2014). L’analisi complessiva del *corpus* agiografico italogreco consente di delineare le due direttive di questo processo che resero il monaco il principale riferimento

⁴ Tra X e XI secolo il dato sfragistico registra il solo sigillo di Leone metropolita di Sicilia: Prigent (2014, 100).

per la ridefinizione del paesaggio cristiano in questa frontiera arabo-bizantina: da un lato, la progressiva centralità della figura del monaco nel mondo sociale cristiano e la sua rappresentatività per le comunità tra Sicilia ed Italia meridionale; consequenzialmente, l'importanza dell'*instrumentum* monastico nella riqualificazione territoriale e nell'adesione ai principali processi di valorizzazione di aree che, nelle diverse fasi di questa frontiera, assunsero una centralità che risulta perfettamente contestuale alle principali scelte politiche e socioeconomiche delle aristocrazie locali e dell'Impero.

Ad una analisi complessiva, il nutrito *corpus* di fonti agiografiche italo-greche riflette lo sviluppo diacronico e geografico del paesaggio cristiano bizantino tra l'VIII e l'XI secolo tra Sicilia ed Italia meridionale (Messina 2022a). Dovendo rinviare ad altra sede i ragionamenti sul gruppo più antico con figure non monastiche,⁵ in questa sede si è scelto di valorizzare due macrogruppi in particolare, ricollegabili rispettivamente a paesaggi agiografici lievemente diversi:

a) Il primo è relativo alla tradizione agiografica che collega due *bioi* del gruppo più antico – San Pancrazio di Taormina e San Fantino di Taureana – con la valorizzazione di un mondo monastico impostato tra la cuspide nord-orientale dell'isola e la Calabria meridionale, avente come riferimento istituzionale i monasteri fondati nella cosiddetta Eparchia delle Saline:⁶ i santi monaci che vi giungono e vi passano la maggior parte della loro vita esicastica sono S. Elia il Giovane da Enna (Rossi-Taibbi 1962), S. Elia lo Speleota da Reggio (*AASS Septembris* III 1868, 843-888) e S. Nicodemo di Kellarana (Saletta 1964).⁷ Su questo gruppo di santi che vive in grotte e monasteri di questa eparchia che si "affaccia" sull'isola – l'immagine è quella di un noto passo del *bios* di S. Elia il Giovane – si possono evidenziare due aspetti principali che risultano importanti in questa analisi. Il primo è relativo alla fondazione del monastero di Seminara da parte

di S. Elia il Giovane, santo originario di Enna dalla vita estremamente densa e segnata da relazioni mediterranee tra i due imperi: per questa istituzione, probabilmente ulteriormente rifiorita nella tarda età islamica, sappiamo che dovette essere effettivamente beneficiaria di δωρεά ("donazioni") dell'imperatore Leone VI (Rossi-Taibbi 1962, 120-21) o comunque di personaggi legati alla casata imperiale, grazie alle quali la μονή di Sant'Elia avrebbe sempre portato l'appellativo βασιλική ("imperiale");⁸ inoltre, quest'area monastica sembrerebbe la più legata al territorio di Taormina ed al destino di alcuni areali della cristianità della cuspide nord-orientale, come si evince dall'esempio dell'Altissima Montagna di San Nicone che esamineremo a breve.

b) Un altro gruppo, ricollegabile alla tradizione di S. Filippo di Agira ed al monastero fondato sul suo sepolcro,⁹ ha per protagonisti santi nati nella "famosissima Sicilia" (ἡ τῶν νήσων περιφανὴς Σικελία), in zone ove il controllo musulmano di Palermo ed Agrigento è ben consolidato, ovvero in "rocche che hanno ottenuto l'*amān* (*al-qilā* 'al-*musta* 'mana)" come Collesano, Corleone e Castronovo, cui si aggiunge il caso più complesso di San Luca da Demenna:¹⁰ un primo punto comune tra questi santi sarebbe dunque il loro probabile statuto di *musta'minūn*, abitanti di quella "Sicile conquise" di cui discuteremo a breve (Nef 2013); un altro elemento è appunto la loro formazione monastica presso il monastero di San Filippo di Agira il "cacciatore di demoni" (Cozza-Luzi 1891-92, 39). In questi *bioi*, l'isola diventa progressivamente il posto dove gli "eserciti degli Agareni" (Ἀγαρηνῶν στρατιά) trasportano i prigionieri catturati in Sud Italia,¹¹ mentre i protagonisti in Calabria fondano monasteri dedicati a santi siciliani – come il "santissimo santuario di Filippo il cacciatore di demoni" (πάνσεπτον ναὸν τοῦ πνεύματος διώκτου Φιλίππου) presso Lagonero (Cozza-Luzi 1891-92, 148-49, 165-66) – e condividono il paesaggio religioso con coloni Siracusani e Tauromenitani, ciascuno con la

⁵ Composto, appunto, dai *bioi* di martiri e protovescovi, vescovi e confessori ambientati in modo nettamente prevalente in Sicilia, la cui data di composizione sembra mantenersi entro il IX secolo; per l'analisi di questo *corpus* più antico, Pricoco (1992), Follieri (1998), Motta (2004), Re (2011), Re e Rognoni (2014), Prigent (2014). Le tradizioni agiografiche pre-islamiche che hanno portato alla formazione di questo primo nucleo più antico presentano, in realtà, una complessa stratificazione letteraria, profondamente legate anche al contesto di riproduzione delle diverse copie disponibili, *ibidem*, part. Re (2011, 245-48).

⁶ Circoscrizione amministrativa bizantina della Calabria meridionale, Guillou 1976.

⁷ Su questo gruppo di santi in particolare e sul posizionamento del loro spazio agiografico, Strano (2019).

⁸ Documento del 1062, diploma di Roberto il Guiscardo duca di Puglia e di Calabria; Ménager (1981, 44). Cf. Peters-Custot (2009, 180), Benoit-Meggenis (2017, nn. 157-58). Altro esempio di monastero imperiale in Sud Italia è quello di San Pietro di Taranto (τοῦ ἁγίου Πέτρου τοῦ βασιλικοῦ), gestito in carismatico da uno spatarocandidato, Cristoforo Bochomakè (Benoit-Meggenis 2017, n. 159-60).

⁹ Per un inquadramento storico-letterario dell'agiografia di san Filippo attribuita al monaco Eusebio, nonché sul suo rapporto col resto del *corpus* agiografico ed innografico, Pasini (1981, 1988, 2000a, 2000b e 2018).

¹⁰ Centro fortificato con relativo territorio fondamentale per il controllo della rotta tirrenica lungo la cuspide nord-orientale, corrispondente oggi ai centri posti intorno a San Marco d'Alunzio (ME), Nef (2005), Arcifa *et al.* 2022), Messina (2020).

¹¹ Cozza-Luzi (1891-92, 49, 135). Cf. nel più breve *bios* di Cristoforo e Macario, rispettivamente padre e fratello di Saba, Cozza-Luzi (1891-92, 392-93): Κατ'ἐκεῖνον δὲ τὸν καιρὸν διεπέρασεν ἀπὸ τῆς Σικελίας πρὸς τὴν τῶν Καλαβρῶν γέαν ὁ ἐπάρατος στρατὸς τῶν θεοστυγῶν Ἰσλαμικῶν, καὶ κατεδεικνύτο αὐτὴν, λυγρῶς καταθεόντων καθ'ὅλου τοῦ θεύματος; una spedizione che costringe Saba con i suoi a trasferirsi in Latiniano, in particolare nel *choron* di San Lorenzo sul fiume τοῦ ποταμοῦ Σίγνου, dove si incontrarono anche con dei cittadini di Rossano.

propria μονή.¹² Il gruppo conta le due agiografie scritte da Oreste – monaco e poi patriarca di Gerusalemme, *infra* – e dedicate a Saba, Cristoforo e Macario da Collesano – le uniche giunte nell'originale greco (Cozza-Luzi 1891-92) – nonché le *vitae* di Leo-Luca da Corleone (*AASS Martii I* 1865, 97-102), Luca di Demenna abate di Armento (*AASS Octobris VI* 1853, 332-342) e Vitale da Castronovo (*AASS Martii II* 1668, 26-34), giunte solo in traduzione latina. Alcune di queste personalità avrebbero conosciuto, secondo gli agiografi, S. Elia lo Speleota, possibile espediente letterario per costituire l'immagine di un'unità generale del paesaggio cristiano italogreco (ad esempio S. Luca di Demenna, abate ad Armento, *AASS Octobris VI* 1853, 333). Questi personaggi hanno tutti l'obiettivo di colonizzare aree di recente acquisizione da parte di Bisanzio, ovvero il Mercurio ed il Latiniano, regioni storiche comprese tra l'odierna Basilicata e la Calabria settentrionale e in diretta relazione con i principi longobardi di Salerno e Benevento¹³ (Fig. 2). Sul piano storico, alcuni di questi *bioi* sono di una certa rilevanza poiché gli eventi riportati sembrerebbero perfettamente inquadrabili nella complessa serie di relazioni diplomatiche tra Fatimidi e Bizantini, così come nei rapporti con gli Ottoni (969-982) e le congiunte ambascerie romano-bizantine (Messina 2022a). È proprio questo network di aristocrazie cristiane siculo-calabresi in cui sono inseriti questi santi originari delle rocche che hanno ottenuto l'*amān* che, in qualche modo, potrebbe far riflettere anche sullo stesso statuto che i Musulmani hanno concesso agli abitanti di queste rocche della Sicilia centro-occidentale così come, probabilmente, ad altri centri della Sicilia orientale (*infra*). Intorno alla storicità della loro azione in Sud Italia, Annick Peters-Custot ha segnalato un interessante atto del gennaio 986, contenuto negli archivi dell'abbazia di Cava dei Tirreni vicino Salerno, con cui due proprietari longobardi fanno donazione della chiesa di San Giovanni da loro fondata a Saba, *presbiter et abbas*, ed a Cosma, *presbiter*, di cui si specifica *qui fuerunt natibi ex genere grecorum*: se per il primo, che si firma in greco Σάβας ἀμαρτολὸς ἡγούμενος ("testimone l'igumeno Saba"), è già stata proposta l'identificazione con il santo siciliano originario di Collesano (*Codex Diplomaticus Cavensis II*, n. 382, 233-34, Peters-Custot 2014, 188-89, nn. 41-44), per Κόσμας πρεσβύτερος ("il presbitero

Cosma") si potrebbe anche ipotizzare che si tratti del fratello di San Fantino il Giovane citato, insieme all'altro fratello Luca ed al resto della sua famiglia, come fondatore di monasteri nell'eparchia del Merkourion (Follieri 1993, 420-23, nonché *infra*). Tuttavia, il *bios* di San Fantino il Giovane, insieme a quello di S. Nilo da Rossano, si può considerare già appartenente ad un altro gruppo di *bioi*, ove santi di origine calabrese, compartecipano nel processo di occupazione dell'eparchia del Mercurio, finiscono la loro vita monastica riposizionandosi in relazione ad altre polarità religiose: San Fantino, originario della "terra di Calabria, che è vicinissima alla Sicilia" (χώρας δὲ τῆς Καλαβρίας, τῆς καὶ πλησιαιτάτα ἐχούσης Σικελίας, Follieri 1993, 402-03) e formatosi anch'esso da Sant'Elia lo Speleota, è considerato uno dei principali fondatori di cenobi e romitori nell'area, ma dopo aver lasciato la famiglia ad occuparsi della zona avrebbe finito i suoi giorni da monaco a Tessalonica (Follieri 1993, 400-71); S. Nilo da Rossano si spostò invece più a nord prima nel territorio di Salerno, poi a Serperi presso Gaeta ed infine nella Badia di Grottaferrata da lui fondata (Giovannelli 1966, 13-118).¹⁴

Come risulta evidente e a prescindere dall'effettiva storicità di eventi e personaggi di questi *bioi*, l'obiettivo principale della santità bizantina e del genere agiografico resta la valorizzazione di determinati areali geografici in una certa fase di questa frontiera centro-mediterranea: la rifunzionalizzazione paesaggistica del territorio e dei suoi santuari rappresenta, essenzialmente, la personificazione letteraria di nuovi poli di riferimento della cristianità, e la *paideia* di questi racconti edificanti mira anzitutto ad incanalare l'attenzione di aristocrazie cristiane laiche e monastiche verso queste aree.¹⁵ In questa prospettiva, l'immagine dell'*insula nostra* "agitata dalle violente incursioni dei Musulmani, e destinata all'abbandono dell'abitante cristiano" (*violentis agarenorum incursibus agitetur, et pro certo Christiano habitatore desoletur, Vita di S. Leo-Luca da Corleone, AASS Martii I* 1865, 99) andrebbe probabilmente letta in questa ricercata ripolarizzazione: è molto probabile, infatti, che per i *bioi* dei santi delle *qilā' al-musta'mana* l'obiettivo principale non fosse testimoniare l'esodo di aristocrazie cristiane dalla Sicilia, quanto piuttosto reindirizzarne il capitale sociale ed economico verso i nuovi fulcri nel Mezzogiorno bizantino.

¹² Sulla μονή dei Siracusani, posta nell'area del Merkourion, Cozza-Luzi (1891-92, 138-40); sulla τῇ τῶν Ταυρομενιτῶν περιφανεστάτῃ μονῇ, Cozza-Luzi (1891-92, 155-57).

¹³ Sul monachesimo nell'area del Mercurio, Burgarella (2003), Di Lorenzo, Martin e Peters-Custot (2016). Come esempio di quest'opera di proselitismo monastico nel mondo lucano, si può citare la fondazione dell'importante monastero di s. Elia di Carbone, opera di un discepolo di Saba alla fine del x secolo, Di Lorenzo, Martin e Peters-Custot (2016).

¹⁴ Su questo importante bios e sulla storicità degli avvenimenti ivi riportati, Luzzi (2004).

¹⁵ Malamut (1993). Sulla subordinazione dell'elemento storico alla valorizzazione del santo e del suo paesaggio con molti *topoi* letterari, Luzzi (2004, 175). La circolazione di questi testi non dovesse essere particolarmente ampia, rappresentando spesso opere d'uso liturgico o catechetico, utili alla formazione delle successive generazioni di monaci e a perpetrare il ricordo della fondazione, Malamut (1993) e Cilento (2000).



Fig. 2. Carta monastica della Calabria (IX-XII secolo) (Peters-Custot 2009, 600).

Allo stesso tempo, la valorizzazione socioeconomica delle aree monastiche rappresentate da questi santi monaci ridisegna geografie e polarità per la circolazione di beni e persone, un aspetto che risulta evidente nonostante non rappresenti l'argomento centrale delle agiografie.¹⁶ Si percepisce la capacità dei monaci di riposizionare capitale sociale ed economico, portando con sé la memoria storica di culti passati eventualmente valorizzati e reinterpretati o, in alternativa, sposando l'arrivo di ideologie e culti sopraggiunti e/o riformulati: il territorio viene così riplasmato seguendo gli sviluppi diachronici del mondo sociale, ed è oggetto della continua riscrittura del paesaggio storico da parte di comunità

cristiane dove i monaci sono ormai parte fondamentale delle aristocrazie "arcontali" (Cilento 2000, 67-88; von Falkenhausen 1978a; Guillou 1976; Zanini 2007), tematica su cui ci soffermeremo a breve in questo paragrafo. Sull'importanza socioeconomica dei monasteri, particolarmente eloquenti risultano le considerazioni di Michel Kaplan, per cui queste istituzioni sono delle "machines à acquérir des terres par milliers de modioi" e degli "organismes rompus à toutes les finesses de la mise en valeur économique, de la pression, discrète ou non, sur les faibles d'une part et sur la puissance publique de l'autre". Il fatto che spesso ai monasteri, oltre alle proprietà fondiarie (*proasteia*, *chorafia*, *metochia* gestiti da

¹⁶ A quelli già espressi si possono aggiungere gli eloquenti esempi di Luca di Demenna, abate di Armento che fu anche *oekonomus totius congregationis* (AASS Octobris VI, 340-41), o ancora dei familiari di San Fantino il Giovane, fondatori ed *oikónomoi* di monasteri, Follieri (1993, 418-23).

economi, etc.), siano associati anche vari tipi di fondazioni pie (fondaci, ospedali, rifugi per poveri ed anziani, scuole),¹⁷ contribuisce a renderli degli imprescindibili poli socioeconomici di riferimento per l'amministrazione territoriale, tanto quanto per la *cura animarum* soprattutto in milieu rurale, dotati di un certo grado di indipendenza legato alle modalità di formazione. Quando il monastero non è legato all'*oikos* ("proprietà") imperiale o di personaggi molto vicini alla corte, è fondata da quel ceto di *archontes* che componevano un'aristocrazia amministrativa e militare localmente disponibile, che fossero originari della regione o sopraggiunti successivamente (Kaplan 1983 e 1992, 281-319, part. 293-94; Guillou 1976; Cilento 1996 e 2000). In questa prospettiva, i monasteri rappresentano sia degli strumenti di valorizzazione delle risorse territoriali, sia delle istituzioni di riferimento per le aristocrazie regionali grazie al loro ruolo sociale e contestualmente amministrativo e politico-religioso. In questa frontiera, le reti monastiche diventano l'interfaccia sovragregionale con il centro dell'Impero, il fulcro degli interessi delle personalità imperiali che, contestualmente alla loro azione di governo del territorio, investono su determinate istituzioni o cercano di reindirizzarne il capitale sociale in altre aree di maggiore interesse in un preciso momento storico.

Il riconoscimento della rappresentatività monastica per le comunità rurali sembrerebbe evincersi anche dal paesaggio umano rappresentato nelle agiografie: a beneficiare o testimoniare i θαύματα dei santi sono tanto gli esponenti del ceto arcontale – "toparchi" (τοπάρχεις), "arconti" (ἄρχοντες) e uomini genericamente definiti κύριοι ("signori") e πλουσίοι ("ricchi") – quanto il ceto dei lavoratori della terra, specialmente rappresentati da quei μίσθοι ("salarati"; Kazhdan 1992, 77) che lavorano negli κτήματα ("possedimenti") e nei χωρία, tessuto insediativo ed economico del mondo rurale, la cui presenza in queste opere è ovviamente funzionale alla rappresentazione letteraria della *pietas* del santo (Cilento 1996 e 2000). Con "ceto arcontale" si intende invece una classe sociale variamente composta, presente tanto nelle opere letterarie quanto nei documenti, che a vario titolo è legittimata dalla detenzione di potere – laico e/o ecclesiastico, politico ed economico – e da contatti più o meno diretti con le autorità maggiori. Essi costituivano il ceto emergente dei *kastra*, ed il loro potere politico dipendeva direttamente dalla fortuna del *kastron* di riferimento.

Gli *archontes* partecipano dunque a vario titolo all'amministrazione territoriale, tanto da proprietari quanto da funzionari, ricoprendo varie cariche ed ottenendo titoli nobiliari di diverso livello; al tempo stesso, i monaci e le famiglie da cui provengono appartengono allo stesso ceto degli *archontes*, per il quale la via del monachesimo esicastico e cenobitico avrebbe rappresentato uno strumento per concentrare ed accumulare capitale sociale, economico ed amministrativo (Cilento 2000, 69-81).

Questa dimensione di rappresentanza delle aristocrazie locali da parte del monaco e, al tempo stesso, della sua potenziale indipendenza dalle gerarchie smantellate da conquiste e ripolarizzazioni dei due imperi, potrebbe aver rappresentato la fortuna stessa della figura del monaco anche in ambito diplomatico: tanto le fonti giuridiche quanto quelle cronachistiche sembrerebbero, infatti, rimarcare il ruolo di rappresentanza che i monaci avrebbero avuto per le élites cristiane regionali ed interregionali, in veste di personaggi chiave nella gestione degli equilibri tra comunità greco-cristiane della Sicilia islamica e l'Italia meridionale romea, aspetto su cui rifletteremo nel dettaglio più avanti. Qui si può giusto anticipare come, nel contesto di queste relazioni complesse, la letteratura agiografica avrebbe reso la liberazione di cristiani catturati dai Saraceni un tema fondamentale anche per la celebrazione della *parrhesia* del santo,¹⁸ e sebbene si tratti per lo più di scene stereotipate ed astoriche, non mancano casi con protagonisti dai contorni storici più delineati, che sembrerebbero la raffigurazione idealizzata di eventi realmente accaduti. Un caso molto noto è quello contenuto nella vita di S. Nilo di Rossano, relativo al riscatto dei tre monaci di un monastero di Calabria catturati dall'emiro kalbita Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī (969-982), per il quale il santo avrebbe trattato con il "segretario di quel Capo-tribù, il quale per fortuna, era un ottimo e piissimo cristiano" (Giovannelli 1966, 87).¹⁹

Proprio per una migliore contestualizzazione di questi rapporti tra comunità di Sicilia e cristianità italogreca in questa frontiera arabo-bizantina può essere utile, a nostro avviso, riflettere sui principali strumenti con cui il *sulṭān* ("potere centrale") sembrerebbe aver gestito le diverse parti di questo *thaghr*: un argomento che può aiutare a comprendere anche l'effettiva distribuzione ed estensione di questa rete aristocratica prevalentemente monastica che, almeno per tutto il corso del x secolo, sembrerebbe distribuirsi tra Sicilia ed Italia meridionale bizantina.

¹⁷ Cf. i contributi di Wood e Piraud-Fornet in questo volume, rispettivamente per la Mesopotamia e l'Arabia settentrionali.

¹⁸ Si tratta di un termine molto utilizzato nelle agiografie greche per definire la capacità del santo di tener testa ai potenti, di confrontarsi alla pari con loro, Cilento (1996 e 2000).

¹⁹ Sul complesso quadro sociopolitico in cui si inserisce S. Nilo e sulla storicità di molti degli eventi idealizzati nella sua agiografia, Luzzi (2004).

4. LE FONTI GIURIDICHE E CRONACHISTICHE ARABE: COMUNITÀ CRISTIANE E RAPPRESENTANZA MONASTICA IN SICILIA TRA BISANZIO E ISLAM

Si è già accennato alle difficoltà di impostare in modo pregnante la questione della presenza di popolazione ed istituzioni cristiane nel corso dell'età islamica, tra il tardo IX e il pieno XI secolo. In questa prospettiva, crediamo sia d'importanza cruciale valutare in modo più preciso il possibile apporto delle fonti giuridiche e cronachistiche arabe: tali fonti, ridefinendo la giusta prospettiva d'indagine, consentono di inquadrare in modo molto più pregnante non soltanto i quadri istituzionali delle comunità cristiane nella frontiera arabo-bizantina siciliana, ma anche di definire meglio il ruolo degli attori monastici nei sistemi socioeconomici basculanti tra Bisanzio e Islam.

I pochi studi squisitamente storico-filologici sulle comunità cristiane della Sicilia islamica risultano, allo stato attuale, di scarso interesse per le questioni storico-insediative e socioeconomiche (Bresc e Nef 1998; Nef 2013; Mandalà 2014; 2018). In questa sede può essere tuttavia utile recuperare in particolare due questioni trattate in un lavoro di Annliese Nef intorno a cristianità e *dhimmiyyūna* nella Sicilia islamica: la prima è la totale assenza di attestazioni del termine *dhimmī* in questa marca di frontiera; la seconda è la ripartizione tra quanto risulta sin dai primi decenni più saldamente controllato dal potere musulmano – una “Sicile conquise”, coincidente grossomodo con l'area delle *qilā' al-musta'mana* tra Palermo ed Agrigento – ed una rimasta ben più a lungo contesa tra i due imperi – la “Sicile qui échappe longtemps au contrôle arabo-musulman” (Nef 2013). Tra le due aree risulta ovviamente impossibile definire una linea precisa, in quanto profondamente connesso ad un divenire storico per il quale molte sono ancora le lacune storico-documentarie ed archeologiche per periodi cruciali di questa diacronia. Cionondimeno, queste due peculiarità possono considerarsi delle buone basi per impostare la discussione sullo statuto delle comunità cristiane di questo *thaghr*, ove la mancanza della definizione della *dhimma* potrebbe essere legata proprio alla considerazione pressoché unitaria di questa realtà frontaliere “partagée”.

Per ragionare ulteriormente su questi aspetti, può essere utile riprendere anche la definizione di *ahl al-ṣulḥ* riportata nel capitolo del *Kitāb fi'at al-amwāl* (“Libro sulla tassazione dei beni”) di al-Dāwudī (m. 1011) dedicato alla Sicilia: il giurista malikita riporta la definizione

di *ahl al-ṣulḥ* (lett. “la popolazione dell'accordo”), ovvero abitanti che continuavano a godere della proprietà delle loro terre pagando, al tempo stesso, una *jizya 'alā arḍi-him* ed un'altra *jizya 'alā jamā'imi-him*, la tassa fondiaria e quella di capitazione; quest'ultima decadeva su “quanti di loro si convertivano” (*man aslama min-hum*) (Al-Dāwudī 2008, 81; Abdul-Wahab e Dachraoui 1962, 411, 431).

La definizione *ahl al-ṣulḥ* impiegata da al-Dāwudī resta molto generica ed è influenzata, ovviamente, da una concezione del rapporto con l'*ahl al-kitāb* – e dunque la *dhimma* – ormai consolidata sul piano della letteratura giuridica, mentre risulta alquanto probabile che la realtà amministrativa soprattutto della fiscalità con le singole rocche e comunità cristiane dovette rimanere ben più fluida.²⁰ Cionondimeno, è la totale assenza del concetto di *dhimma* non solo per i Cristiani delle aree maggiormente contese, ma soprattutto per le rocche della Sicilia occidentale e per la loro peculiare definizione che ci conduce ad ulteriori riflessioni utili nel quadro complessivo: gli abitanti di centri come Castronovo, Corleone, Platani, Collesano e Caltabellotta, interessati da rivolte ancora nel corso del X secolo, nelle cronache vengono spesso definiti, appunto, come *ahl al-qilā' al-musta'mana*,²¹ un aspetto che farebbe pensare ad un loro inquadramento teorico più come *musta'minūn* (“persone [*ḥarbī*] che hanno ottenuto l'*amān*”) che non, appunto, come *dhimmī*. Si tratta di due concetti non sempre distinguibili soprattutto nelle fonti per i primi secoli dell'Islam,²² tuttavia è lo stesso al-Dāwudī che sembra proporre una distinzione piuttosto netta, in un *faṣl* dedicato specificatamente alle relazioni con l'*ahl al-ḥarb* (“la gente [abitante del territorio] della guerra”) ed allo strumento dell'*amān* per quegli *ḥarbiyyūn* che volevano passare nella *dār al-islām*. In particolare, l'autore riporta due situazioni relative allo statuto di ambasciatori e *musta'minūn*, cui risponde con una “controverta giuridica” (*ikhtilāf*, ovvero la trasmissione di diverse tradizioni non concordanti): “Si è discordi in merito a quell'ambasciatore che si converte (*fi' al-rasūl [alladhī] yuslimu*), o che voglia rimanere presso di noi al fine di diventare [parte della] *dhimma* (*aw yuridu al-maqām 'indānā, 'alā an yakūna dhimmī*)”:

Si risponde: gli è possibile farlo.

[Secondo altre tradizioni] si risponde: venga restituito a colui che l'ha mandato (*yarudd ilā man arsala-hu*)

Il *musta'min* che muore presso di noi [Musulmani] sia trasferito con i suoi beni ai suoi eredi, e se lo ha ucciso un

²⁰ Sul possibile rapporto tra *jizya* islamica e *kapnikon* bizantino, Nef e Prigent (2019).

²¹ Su questo argomento in particolare, Nef (2013, 121-26).

²² Per i primissimi decenni della storia islamica sembrerebbe infatti che tra i termini *amān*, *ahd* e *dhimma* non vi fossero nette distinzioni semantiche, Schacht (1991).

musulmano gli venga inviata anche l'indennità per la sua morte (*wa-man māta 'inda-nā min al-mustāminīna bu'itha bi-māl'-hi ilā warathat'-hi, wa-in qatala-hu muslim^{um} bu'itha bi-diyyat'-hi ilay-him*).

[In una tradizione diversa] si dice: i suoi beni diventano *fay'*. (*wa-qīla: huwa [i.e. al-māl] fay'^{um}*)" (Al-Dāwudī 2008, 141).

Questo passo risulta ovviamente importante anche per le questioni diplomatiche e i relativi beni mobili e immobili che coinvolgono, ma in questa prospettiva è importante perché induce ad una serie di riflessioni sul perché si sia scelto di definire come *mustāminūn* anche quei Cristiani di Sicilia che abitano in parti anche molto prossime ai principali centri di potere musulmani nella parte occidentale dell'isola. Ci si potrebbe interrogare sul fatto che sia in al-Dāwudī sia soprattutto nelle più specifiche fonti storiche si sia preferito utilizzare dei termini più diplomatici che non prettamente legati all'amministrazione di territori "presso di noi" (*'inda-nā*): di fatto, questo renderebbe gli abitanti di questi centri assimilabili quasi a degli *harbiyyūna*, ovvero degli abitanti della *dār al-harb* che, ottenuto il "salvacondotto" (*amān*), hanno la possibilità di rimanere in questo spazio conteso tra i musulmani e i loro nemici. Se da un lato questo renderebbe di fatto la stessa amministrazione del *thaghr* siciliano parte integrante della pratica della *ghazwa* ("razzia" gestita dagli emiri), dall'altro l'*amān* tutelerebbe le relazioni sociali ed economiche con le terre bizantine, a patto che queste non fossero condotte – almeno ufficialmente – a detrimento dei *muslimūn* (Al-Dāwudī 2008, 122-23).

Al tempo stesso, questo possibile legame tra le rocche *musta'mana* e Bisanzio tra IX e X secolo potrebbe spiegare anche perché, com'è stato segnalato per gli eventi intercorsi nella prima metà del X secolo, sembrerebbe esservi una correlazione tra spedizioni bizantine maggioritarie e rivolte degli abitanti di questi centri.²³ Sarebbero anzi proprio questi eventi ad ammorbidente la differenziazione tra le "deux Siciles" almeno sul piano meramente amministrativo-diplomatico: è probabilmente proprio la durevole permanenza di aree rimaste legate al Sud Italia bizantino a creare la necessità, per il *sulṭān*, di definire *amān*

e non *dhimma* questo peculiare rapporto con le comunità cristiane di Sicilia. Senza che sia possibile delineare con certezza per quanto tempo gli abitanti di rocche come Caltabellotta (*Qal'at al-Ballūt*), Corleone (*Q.r.llūn*), Collesano, Castronovo e tutti gli altri centri riottosi tra il IX e il X secolo sarebbero stati definiti *mustāminūn*,²⁴ questo statuto assegnato alle popolazioni dei singoli centri doveva probabilmente facilitarne la mobilità in un *thaghr* che sembrerebbe piuttosto variegato sul piano sociale e demografico: gli stessi termini *ahl* o *qawm*, utilizzati per definire gruppi di individui tanto nelle fonti storiche quanto in quelle giuridiche, poco o nulla dicono sugli sviluppi interni alla popolazione dei singoli siti nel divenire storico.²⁵ Altrettanto incerta è la possibilità che l'ultima ricorrenza del termine *mustāmana*, risalente alla rivolta del 969 (359H) in cui a farne maggiormente le spese fu proprio l'*ahl al-qīlā' al-musta'mana* (Ibn al-Athīr 1987, vol. 7, 322), si riferisca agli stessi centri precedentemente citati, trattandosi probabilmente di accordi di *amān/ṣulḥ/hudna* firmati puntualmente con le singole città e fortezze secondo le complesse variazioni negli equilibri tanto demografici quanto politico-militari e diplomatici: è attraverso questo tipo di accordi che il "sovrano di Costantinopoli" (*malik al-Qusṭanīniyya*) sembra consolidare costantemente il legame di lungo periodo con almeno una fetta piuttosto ampia della popolazione cristiana di Sicilia e Calabria, in quanto proprio l'imperatore si premurava a pagare la *jizya* "per la sua comunità" (*'an ahl millatihi*) (Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān 1986 [*Ifṭitāḥ al-da'wa*], 336-37).

È evidente che, per la comprensione dei complessi equilibri demografici interni al *thaghr* di Sicilia, sarà necessario intraprendere una onnicomprensiva analisi sociologica degli attori principali e della stessa gestione dei loro quadri di riferimento "concorrenti" tra le diverse parti del Mediterraneo.²⁶ In questo lavoro sui Cristiani di questa frontiera, è importante sottolineare e valorizzare come anche dalle fonti arabe coeve emerga in modo chiaro il ruolo che monaci e istituzioni monastiche avrebbero avuto come punti-cardine di questi equilibri: nello scorso paragrafo abbiamo

²³ Cf. gli eventi analizzati in Prigent (2010) per quanto concerne il periodo di Romano I Lecapeno e della sua politica in Italia meridionale e in Sicilia.

²⁴ Le "rocche che hanno ottenuto l'*amān*" su cui abbiamo notizie di rivolte sono: *Qal'at/Hiṣn al-Ballūt*, *Iblātanū* (da identificare con un centro lungo il fiume Platani, forse il sito di Monte della Giudecca), [*Qal'at*] *Mawr*, *S.t.r.*, *Ab.lā/Iblā*, *Qal'at 'Abd al-Mu'min*, *Qal'at Abi Tawr*, *Qal'at al-Mušāra'a* (Sant'Angelo Muxaro? *BAS* ita, cap. VII, 95, cap. XXXV, 382, n. 5). Sia per la *Qal'at 'Abd al-Mu'min* che per il *Ġabal Abi Mālik* Amari propone soltanto un possibile posizionamento in Sicilia occidentale sulla base degli avvenimenti, cap. XXXV, 380 ss. Ibn al-Athīr (1987, 6: 49, 114, 143-45; 7: 116-17).

²⁵ Sull'impossibilità di trarre elementi etnici o religiosi da questi termini, Nef (2010) e Nef e Prigent (2019).

²⁶ Oltre al tema delle comunità cristiane e del loro rapporto con il *balad al-Rūm*, trattato in questa sede, ci si prospetta di approfondire in altra sede anche il tema della gestione delle aristocrazie musulmane nella frontiera arabo-bizantina di Sicilia, le cui prime promettenti elucubrazioni sono state già evidenziate in Messina (2022).

analizzata la prospettiva delle fonti agiografiche, ove emerge una spiccata predilezione delle comunità bizantine coeve per santi monaci rispetto a vescovi e clero in generale a partire dal tardo IX-inizi X secolo; ci si può soffermare adesso sui dati dagli stessi trattati giuridici musulmani e dai racconti delle cronache arabe, da cui si traggono ulteriori elementi di riflessione su questa predilezione per il milieu monastico.

Particolarmente preziose risultano le informazioni contenute in diversi capitoli del terzo volume d'*Al-nawādir wa-l-ziyādāt 'alā mā fi al-mudawwana min ghayri-hā min al-ummahāt*, opera del giurista di Kairouan Ibn Abī Zayd (m. 996): in questo volume integralmente dedicato al *jihād*, è proprio l'attenzione per i diversi attori coinvolti in diplomazia, scambi di prigionieri e gestione di beni di bottino dei Cristiani tra *balad al-islām* e *balad al-Rūm* che permette di precisare molti elementi rimasti vaghi nel libro sull'imposta fondiaria di al-Dāwudī (Ibn Abī Zayd 1999, vol. 3, 60-63). In particolare, un paragrafo presenta un titolo particolarmente lungo ma suggestivo: "Sui monaci e sul divieto di ucciderli: i loro beni vanno mantenuti [in loro proprietà]? Sull'anziano, sull'uccisione dei diaconi, e sulla possibilità di chiedere la *jizya* su chi si fa monaco presso di noi" (*fi al-ruhbān wa al-nahy 'an qatl-him wa-hal la-hum amwāl-hum? Wa-l-ṣaykh al-kabīr, wa fi qatl al-šamāmisa, wa-hal tu'akhhadu al-jizya mimman tarahhaba 'inda-nā min-hum?*) (Ibn Abī Zayd 1999, vol. 3, 60). In questo paragrafo, a partire dal divieto di uccisione dei monaci attribuito allo stesso Profeta, si concentrano tutta una serie di fattispecie volte espressamente a delineare la distinzione di trattamento tra quanti "hanno legato le proprie anime a Dio, ovvero i monaci" (*alladhīna ḥabbasū anfus-hum li-Llāh, ya'nī: al-ruhbān*) e "coloro che invece è stato necessario prendere con la spada, ovvero i diaconi" (*mā fahaṣū 'an-hu bi-l-sayf, ya'nī al-šamāmisa*), fino a giungere al concetto chiaro e conciso di Ṣaḥnūn "si uccidano il prete ed i diaconi escludendo i monaci" (*Qāla Ṣaḥnūn: wa-yuqtalu al-qissis wa-l-šamāmisa bi-khalāfi al-ruhbān*). Stando alle diverse tradizioni riportate, i monaci sarebbero i Cristiani più portati al raziocinio (*i'tizāl*), sebbene talora percepiti in modo diverso a seconda che si tratti di monaci in "grotta" (*ghār*), su "colonna" (*ṣawma'a*, originariamente gli "stiliti", ma in questo testo possono forse intendersi anche come "eremiti" generici) o "celle/cenobi" (*dīyārāt*). Pur riservandosi di cambiare il loro atteggiamento al momento in cui palesino vicinanza ai *Rūm*, ai monaci è persino consentita la tutela giuridica dei loro beni contro le razzie di "truppe" (*sarāyā*) ed "eserciti" (*asākir*) dei Musulmani, sia per colui "che si fa monaco nella Terra dell'Islam" (*man tarahhaba min-hum fi arḍ al-islām*) (Ibn Abī Zayd 1999, vol. 3, 60-62), sia per il monaco che segnali alle truppe beni di propria pertinenza in terre da loro razziate, come risulta evidente nel seguente passaggio:

"Ibn Nāfi' ha riportato la tradizione di Mālik intorno al monaco che abbia un ovile o un piccolo campo nella Terra dei Romei (*qāla Ibn Nāfi' 'an Mālik fi al-rāhib la-hu al-ghunayma wa-l-zuray' fi arḍ al-Rūm*), secondo la quale dice: non venga preso di mira se esiguo, e non si colpiscano i bovini o le pecore se è noto che siano sue, e che abbiano un simbolo che ne consenta il riconoscimento, e che [il monaco] abbia informato su come riconoscerlo (*lā yu'raḍu la-hu wa-dhālaka yasīr, wa-lā yu'raḍu li-baqar-hi wa-lā li-ghanam-hi idhā 'urifa anna-hā la-hu wa-li-dhālaka wajh^m yu'rafu bi-hi, wa-mā adrā kayfa yu'rafu*)" (Ibn Abī Zayd 1999, 3, 62).

Pur nel loro interesse generale, questi passaggi riportati nei trattati di giurisprudenza rappresentano, ovviamente, dei tentativi di generalizzazione della società secondo precisi criteri interni al campo della giurisprudenza islamica, e non è semplice definirne l'aderenza con le complesse realtà sociali analizzate. Cionondimeno, un elemento come la possibile rete di istituzioni monastiche tra l'una e l'altra parte di questa frontiera risulta di estremo interesse considerando anche quanto segnalato nello scorso paragrafo. La possibilità di "segnalare" attraverso un "simbolo" evidente (un *wajh* che "informasse" della proprietà monastica di un bene) emerge in modo particolarmente simile anche nel già citato passo della *vita* di San Nilo di Rossano per il recupero dei monaci condotti in Sicilia da truppe dell'emiro Abū al-Qāsim: quest'ultimo avrebbe rimproverato il santo proprio per non essersi fatto conoscere precedentemente e, contestualmente, lo avrebbe invitato a raggiungerlo e ad esporre il suo stendardo presso il monastero, a tutela da qualsiasi altra azione di preda dei Musulmani (*supra*, n. 19).

Il diverso rapporto con clero e monaci segnalato nella giurisprudenza arabo-islamica coeva, nonché il ruolo stesso che i monaci potevano avere nella gestione della diplomazia tra i due imperi, si possono valutare in maniera piuttosto pregnante anche analizzando le informazioni disponibili dalla cronachistica. Si può confrontare ad esempio l'unica citazione di un "vescovo di Sicilia" con i diversi passi relativi a monaci che gestiscono armistizi e pagamenti di tributi: il solo passo in cui si cita un vescovo si ritrova infatti nella *Cronaca di Cambridge*, risalente all'anno 6433 AM (924/5), quando il ciambellano del Califfo (*ḥājib amīr al-mu'minīn*), dopo aver conquistato Bruzzano, giunse fino ad Oria e solo lì trovò e prese in ostaggio il "vescovo di Sicilia Leone ed il governatore della Calabria (*Lāwh usqufu Ṣiqillīyya wa-wālī Qillawriyya, Tārīkh jazīrat Ṣiqillīyya*, 169-70), un dato che potrebbe far pensare ad una sede del vescovado trasferita al di fuori dell'Isola. Se per questo evento la ricerca di questi due personaggi sembrerebbe piuttosto mirata all'impigionamento a fini ricattatori, in tre occasioni diplomatiche sarebbe stato direttamente coinvolto un monaco

con obiettivi mirati alla firma di armistizi ed allo scambio di prigionieri: dopo le rivolte del 948, risolte da al-Ḥasan il kalbita (948-953), fu un monaco (*rāhib*) a portare “il tributo per l’armistizio per i tre anni (*māl al-hudna li-thalāthat sinin*)”²⁷ insoluti; cinque anni dopo, dopo la sconfitta di Malakēnos nel 952/3, fu, l’anno seguente (6462 AM, 953/4), l’arrivo del “monaco Asdrubale/Assiropulo a convincere le armate di Farah/Faraj al rientro in Ifriqiya” (*Aṣ.rūb.l.s al-rāhib wa-‘aqada ma‘a-hum al-hudnat wa-raja ‘at al-‘asākir ilā Ifriqiya*) (*Tārīkh jazīrat Šiqillīyya*, 170); infine, abbiamo il caso del monaco Oreste, futuro patriarca di Gerusalemme e fondamentale riferimento per le relazioni bizantino-fatimidi di tardo x-inizi xi secolo, sulla cui missione diplomatica in Sicilia avremo modo di soffermarci a breve.

Per questo tipo di accordi, l’impero sembrerebbe trovare proprio nel milieu monastico i suoi agenti intermediari, come nel caso del *rāhib* per il pagamento del *māl al-hudna* (“il tributo per l’armistizio”) di tre anni nel 948, e gli eventi successivi sono altrettanto eloquenti per comprendere la scala di questa amministrazione diplomatica: dopo le vittorie in Calabria degli anni successivi, al-Ḥasan pose come clausola per la tutela della moschea da lui costruita a Reggio la minaccia che, qualora fosse stata danneggiata, “sarebbero state distrutte tutte le loro chiese in Sicilia e in Ifriqiya” (*hadamat kanāis-hum kull-hā bi-Šiqillīyya wa-Ifriqiya*, Ibn al-Athīr 1987, 7, 224-25). Sembrerebbe dunque piuttosto probabile che, almeno in questa fase, per “loro chiese” si debba intendere le istituzioni pertinenti a quei “Romei che si trovano in Sicilia” (*Rūm alladhīna bi-Šiqillīyya*) che, di lì a poco, avrebbero affiancato l’esercito bizantino in difesa delle rocche calabresi prima e di Taormina e Rometta poi (Ibn al-Athīr 1987, 239, 275-76, 284-85). In un quadro di questo tipo, le istituzioni monastiche tra Sicilia islamica ed Italia meridionale bizantina si definiscono sempre più come una potenziale rete interregionale di riferimento per entrambi i poteri imperiali, potenzialmente un tessuto connettivo fondamentale per la tenuta dell’economia dello Stretto di Messina (Messina 2022a).

In questo processo di progressiva ridefinizione delle polarità della cristianità siculo-calabrese, risulta di estremo interesse ricontestualizzare proprio le evidenze emergenti per la Sicilia orientale e le comunità ivi attestata nel lungo periodo: da un lato, nel corso del x secolo, le dinamiche di continuo basculamento amministrativo e diplomatico all’interno dell’isola potrebbero forse contribuire a spiegare quel ruolo di fulcro della cristianità siciliana assunto dal monastero di San

Filippo d’Agira, vera e propria frontiera tra le “rocche che hanno ricevuto l’*amān*”, da cui provengono i santi monaci, e quella “Sicile qui échappe longtemps au contrôle musulman” che rappresentava la testa di ponte per i rapporti con l’Italia meridionale bizantina. Ma è proprio nella diacronia di questo processo e nell’indagine su agenti e istituzioni che lo definirono che probabilmente si può comprendere in maniera sempre più netta il ruolo della Sicilia nord-orientale, vero e proprio territorio cardine per quei *Christiani tributari* greci che, alla fine dell’età islamica, sarebbero stati anche il nerbo aristocratico principale su cui si imposterà l’occupazione normanna dell’isola.

Per analizzare agenti ed istituzioni di questa parte dell’isola in particolare, nei prossimi paragrafi si presenterà il caso studio delle problematiche inerenti alla estrema cuspide nord-orientale dell’isola: con un primo paragrafo si propone la contestualizzazione storico-topografica della principale diocesi attualmente attestata sul piano storico (Taormina) e l’apparente ruolo dei monasteri fondati al suo interno; dall’altro, l’analisi dell’area monastica di San Nicone, attestata da fonti che consentono di coprire tutto il periodo VIII-XI ma purtroppo non ancora analizzata sul piano archeologico, rappresenta l’unico caso-studio che ci consente di riflettere in modo più pregnante e documentato sul possibile ruolo di lungo periodo dei monasteri come riferimento socioeconomico nella diacronia di questa frontiera.

Michelangelo MESSINA

5. LA DIMENSIONE TERRITORIALE DEI MONASTERI IN SICILIA NORD-ORIENTALE: IL RUOLO DI TAORMINA E LA SUA DIOCESI

Il territorio facente parte dell’antica diocesi di Taormina costituisce un distretto di grande interesse per il quale l’approccio archeologico e topografico consente di individuare già alcuni nodi particolarmente significativi. Si tratta di un territorio di grande rilevanza strategica specie nelle fasi finali dello scontro quando, dopo la caduta di Siracusa, Taormina assume un ruolo strategico per la tenuta di tutto il Valdemone bizantino. Dopo l’VIII secolo la militarizzazione di questa fascia territoriale si coglie perfettamente attraverso la fortificazione di una serie di punti forti, in connessione con l’esigenza di controllo della viabilità lungo il corso del fiume Alcantara, spartiacque tra il versante settentrionale etneo e il versante meridionale dei monti Nebrodi, da sempre via di penetrazione verso

²⁷ Ibn al-Athīr (1987, 7, 224). Ibn Khaldūn (2000, 266-67) riporta le medesime notizie, scrivendo però *jizya* al posto di *māl al-hudna* per indicare il tributo di tre anni pagato dal monaco.

l'interno dell'isola; in questa fase questo asse sostituisce per importanza strategica la via romana Catania-Termini spostando più a nord l'asse dei collegamenti tra la parte orientale e quella centro occidentale dell'isola. Il controllo di questa vallata garantisce in questa fase anche il rapido collegamento tra costa jonica e costa tirrenica attraverso le fiumare del Patrì e del Serianni presidiata dal sito d'altura di Rocca di Novara. La rilettura dell'epigrafe di Costantino sulla fortezza di Castelmola consente di collocare agli inizi del IX secolo la costruzione del recinto fortificato a protezione dell'accesso da ovest al *kastron* di Taormina;²⁸ è probabile in questa stessa fase la costruzione di un castello a presidio dell'ingresso portuale al porto di Naxos.²⁹ I recenti dati archeologici consentono di accertare la fortificazione dell'altura di Calatabiano tra VIII e IX secolo (Magro 2015; Arcifa c.d.s.) a controllo del guado sull'Alcantara, dove ancora nel XII secolo erano visibili i resti del ponte romano, mentre ancora da chiarire è il ruolo del sito di Castiglione che compare già nelle carte normanne come centro popolato.³⁰ Poco oltre Randazzo il sito archeologico di contrada Edera (Arcifa *et al.* 2020) va probabilmente interpretato come una sorta di *katouna*, di accampamento militare, lungo un importante punto di snodo attorno al massiccio etneo; mentre la recente e ancora inedita scoperta del sito fortificato di Rocca di Novara (Arcifa *et al.* 2022.) consente di chiarire l'esistenza di un importante punto di controllo a presidio di un passaggio essenziale tra la costa tirrenica e quella jonica lungo la viabilità naturale che sfrutta il corso del torrente Fantina affluente del Patrì.

Il territorio così determinato viene a formare una sorta di triangolo che ha la sua base sulla costa ionica tra Taormina e il torrente Macchia (Giarre – Riposto) e il suo ideale vertice in prossimità delle sorgenti dell'Alcantara, ad ovest di Randazzo; è un'area aspramente contesa come si ricava dalle cronache arabe già in occasione della

prima presa di Taormina del 902 e nei decenni successivi fino alla caduta del centro nel 962; lungo questo territorio alla metà dell'XI secolo si muoverà l'impresa di Maniace. In questo lasso di tempo, la rifondazione della *madina* di Paternò³¹ rafforzerà la presenza islamica sul versante meridionale dell'Etna, collocandosi a presidio degli itinerari di circumnavigazione del vulcano da sud-ovest e da sud-est. Da questa posizione di forza, una volta conquistata anche Catania nel corso del X secolo, prenderà forza la direttrice preferenziale da sud/sud-est seguita dalle truppe islamiche in direzione di Taormina: l'attestazione delle fasi islamiche a Nunziata di Mascali e al castello di Calatabiano, databili tra X e XI secolo, evidenziano la strategia perseguita finalizzata al rafforzamento del controllo della costa jonica e delle sue risorse economiche, in vista della conquista di Taormina.

È in questo difficile contesto di affrontamento tra X e XI secolo che secondo l'ipotesi di Vivien Prigent deve essersi verificata la scomparsa della rete episcopale siciliana; nel caso della diocesi di Taormina l'ultima menzione ufficiale della sede tauromenitana è quella della Notizia 7 risalente ai primi anni del X secolo (Prigent 2014, 99-100).³² La documentazione della prima età normanna, d'altra parte, ci restituisce sparuti ma interessanti elementi di valutazione sulla probabile persistenza di una gerarchia ecclesiastica in questo territorio: nel 1103 il diploma in greco del vescovo Iacobos relativo alla donazione del monastero di S. Giovanni di Fiumefreddo alla chiesa di Catania³³ consente di individuare un personaggio insignito della dignità vescovile, ma privo di sede, al quale precedentemente il conte Ruggero aveva donato il suddetto monastero, sito a sud di Taormina.³⁴ La donazione di Iacobos è fatta in favore del vescovo e categumeno Ansgerio e $\pi\alpha\sigma\eta\nu\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon(\lambda\phi\omicron\iota\varsigma)\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\mu\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \kappa\epsilon\rho(\omicron\iota\varsigma)$:³⁵ il riferimento ai confratelli sembra supportare l'identità monastica del

²⁸ Erroneamente datata alla fine del IX secolo da Guillou che la attribuisce allo stratega Costantino Karamallos (Guillou 1996, n. 185) essa va attribuita, secondo V. Prigent, a Costantino stratega e patrizio, in carica nei primi anni del IX secolo, unico tra i diversi omonimi attestati a portare il titolo di patrizio (Nef e Prigent 2006, 43-44).

²⁹ Sul tesoro monetale rinvenuto nei pressi di Capo Schisò composto da oltre 180 solidi, occultati nel corso dell'ultimo quarto dell'VIII secolo *cf.* Agnello (1953, 311), Fallico e Guzzetta (2002, 716); sulle fasi bizantine di Naxos si veda Lentini (2000, 13-39).

³⁰ Itato con un beneficio ecclesiastico e praticamente pensionato Ménager II (1959, 16). Secondo l'interpretazione di V. von Falkenhausen il vescovo Iacobos il titolare del vescovado di Taormina, un residuo dell'organizzazione di epoca bizantina o più semplicemente il capo della comunità cristiana della sua città responsabile di fronte alle autorità cristiane: von Falkenhausen (1978, 162).

³¹ Sui dati archeologici relativi alla ripresa insediativa di età islamica messi in luce nella collina storica di Paternò si veda Messina (2016), Messina (c.d.s.) e Messina *et al.* (2018).

³² Per il secolo precedente è nota la citazione di Zaccaria, prete costantinopolitano, inviato di Metodio a Roma, nominato vescovo di Taormina da parte del vescovo di Siracusa Gregorio Asbesta: Prigent (2014, 101).

³³ White (1984, 406. docum. del giugno 1144, Ind. VI), Menager (1956-57, 167-69, docum. del 20 maggio 1103, XI Ind.) e Longhitano (2003, 397).

³⁴ Un processo simile anche ad alcune rifondazioni di vescovadi nella Penisola Iberica durante la riconquista castigliana, *cf.* Lorenzo in questo volume.

³⁵ «e a tutti i miei attuali [con]fratelli»: ringrazio Cristina Rognoni per avere discusso con me il documento che è ora disponibile nella revisione critica all'interno del progetto Advanced Grant ERC DocuMult *Documenting Multiculturalism. Co-existence, law and multiculturalism in the administrative and legal documents of Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily, c.1060-c.1266*. (University of Oxford e Università degli Studi di Palermo dir J. Johns, N. Jamil, B. Pasciuta, C. Rognoni, U. Bongianino, D. Burt).

personaggio, grecofono.³⁶ Alla data di emissione del documento, 1103, la riorganizzazione delle nuove partizioni diocesane è in atto da almeno un decennio: l'antica diocesi di Taormina è stata soppressa e il suo territorio redistribuito tra le due diocesi di Catania e Messina. Il contesto normanno dell'ultimo decennio dell'XI secolo non giustifica in alcun modo l'attribuzione della dignità episcopale in assenza di una sede specifica e invita a collocare nei decenni precedenti, tra l'impresa di Maniace e i primi anni della conquista normanna, l'elezione vescovile presumibilmente associata in origine alla sede tauromenitana; nell'ambito della riorganizzazione diocesana normanna, il vescovo Iacobos citato dal nostro documento potrebbe avere mantenuto la dignità episcopale, pur essendo stato privato, di fatto, della titolarità di una sede. La perdita del documento relativo alla primitiva donazione del conte Ruggero non consente di verificare se si tratti di una sorta di risarcimento a seguito della soppressione della sede tauromenitana, o piuttosto di una conferma o riassegnazione di beni già nella disponibilità di Iacobos.

Non appare del tutto inverosimile, infatti, che i reiterati tentativi di ripresa di Taormina e del suo territorio da parte bizantina abbiano implicato anche un mantenimento in vita delle antiche partizioni diocesane e che dunque il vescovo Iacobos possa essere stato l'ultimo titolare della sede prima della sua soppressione voluta dal conte Ruggero. Di grande interesse, ai nostri fini, appare inoltre l'ipotesi relativa all'identità monastica di Iacobos, la cui elezione vescovile sembra maturare all'interno di quel *milieu* monastico italo-greco che costituisce la cifra peculiare di quest'area già dalla prima età bizantina e ancora tra IX e X secolo, fino alle soglie dell'età normanna.

Fin da età protobizantina questo territorio si segnala per la densità di insediamenti monastici che è possibile censire su base archeologica e/o documentaria. Essi sembrano disporsi privilegiando i grandi assi viari che interessano questo territorio nel lungo periodo: da una parte la viabilità nord-sud da Messina a Catania che ricalca la romana via Valeria (Sirena 2011), dall'altro la viabilità est-ovest che dalla costa jonica si dirige verso l'interno, seguendo il corso del Fiume Alcantara, circumnavigando il versante settentrionale e occidentale dell'Etna e proseguendo ancora in direzione di Enna. I dati mostrano

con una certa evidenza che questi monasteri si situano in continuità topografica con la grande proprietà tardo antica segnalata da *villae* e *stationes*.

A questo contesto potrebbe appartenere il monastero di S. Giovanni di Fiumefreddo (Fig. 3, n. 22), fulcro dell'attività di Iacobos *episcopus*; Iacobo aveva provveduto a restaurare ed accrescere il patrimonio edilizio e fondiario donatogli dal conte Ruggero, implementando la coltivazione a vigna dei terreni circostanti. L'identificazione di questo monastero, evidentemente preesistente all'arrivo dei normanni, resta ancor oggi incerta; tra le ipotesi più accreditate la sua localizzazione nei pressi del Fiumefreddo³⁷ in località la Chiesazza dove sono ancora visibili i resti di una chiesa medievale, non datata, la cui costruzione utilizza resti di mattoni romani; quest'area ricade all'interno della contrada Liberto-san Biagio dove sono stati rilevati i resti di una villa romana (contrada Torrerossa) e impianti produttivi (contrada Liberto).³⁸

Maggiormente ancorato al dato archeologico è il caso del monastero di Nunziata di Mascali, un caso studio di grande rilevanza che racchiude in sé molti dei temi di ricerca e tratti caratteristici delle dinamiche insediative di questo territorio che fa capo alla Piana di Mascali. Il sito è noto per la presenza dell'edificio normanno identificato con la prioria di S. Maria Annunciata (Fig. 3, n. 21) dipendente dal monastero di S. Agata di Catania. In anni recenti scavi archeologici in occasione del restauro hanno evidenziato la presenza di un edificio absidato datato tra VI e VII secolo dotato di mosaici a tema cristiano (Fig. 3, n. 14; Fig. 5). Piuttosto complesse e ancora da approfondire sono le diverse fasi costruttive e le modifiche subite dalla basilica paleocristiana, per la quale appare ben fondata la proposta di identificazione con il monastero di S. Andrea *super Mascalas* citato dalle *Epistulae* di Gregorio Magno (Gregorii Magni, *Ep.*, III 56, agosto 593), in relazione all'ordine impartito dal pontefice di distruggere il fonte battesimale e ricostruirvi un altare. I dati di scavo non chiariscono la continuità di vita dell'impianto nel corso dell'età tematica; un *folis* di Teofilo (829-842) rinvenuto a contatto con il pavimento della basilica paleocristiana sembra indiziare la sua persistenza ancora nel corso del IX secolo, lo scavo degli strati soprastanti il crollo del tetto mostra materiali datati tra XI e XII secolo (lo strato superiore) e tra

³⁶ Le ipotesi fin qui avanzate hanno piuttosto attenzionato gli aspetti connessi alla titolarità della carica di Iacobos: secondo Scalia Iacobos era titolare della diocesi di Taormina poiché Fiumefreddo apparteneva a questa diocesi (Scalia 1955-56, 43-44). Ménager invece considera la carica un residuo di epoca bizantina che 'dopo la conquista normanna ma prima della costituzione della diocesi latina di Catania onorato ma privato del potere fu tacitato con un beneficio ecclesiastico e praticamente pensionato Ménager II (1959, 16). Secondo l'interpretazione di V. von Falkenhausen il vescovo Iacobos il titolare del vescovado di Taormina, un residuo dell'organizzazione di epoca bizantina o più semplicemente il capo della comunità cristiana della sua città responsabile di fronte alle autorità cristiane: von Falkenhausen (1978, 162).

³⁷ Si veda a questo proposito l'ipotesi di G. Longhitano che propone di ubicare i resti del monastero di S. Giovanni nei pressi della contrada Liberti-san Biagio in località la Chiesazza dove sono ancora visibili i resti di una chiesa medievale non datata la cui costruzione utilizza resti di mattoni romani: Longhitano (2003, 392). Per una ulteriore proposta di ubicazione nei pressi del torrente Macchia, poco più a sud, Sorbello (2014, 29-30).

³⁸ Cf. Schede aree di interesse archeologico del Piano Paesaggistico della provincia di Catania - Dipartimento dei Beni Culturali - Assessorato BB.CC. della Regione Sicilia: www2.regione.sicilia.it/beniculturali/dirbenicult/bca/ptpr/documentazioneTecnicaCatania.html

viii e xi secolo lo strato inferiore. La probabile dismissione della basilica paleocristiana, d'altra parte, non necessariamente implica la fine dell'impianto monastico che ancora in età normanna mostra evidenti tracce di riorganizzazione edilizia. I materiali ceramici attualmente in corso di studio indicano anche per le fasi tardo islamiche la persistenza dell'insediamento rurale nell'area che mantiene intatta la sua vitalità tanto che alla metà del xii secolo Edrisi ricorda la popolosa *qarya* di Mascali.³⁹ Dati archeologici e documentari consentono di comprendere come il monastero nel tempo abbia rappresentato un fulcro territoriale importante ancora nel corso dell'età tematica e islamica, punto di riferimento per l'insediamento rurale circostante. La sua ricchezza appare connessa allo sfruttamento delle risorse boschive, congiuntamente all'impianto del vigneto in stretta relazione con la possibilità di esportazione dei prodotti grazie al controllo della sottostante insenatura di *Mascalas* (oggi identificabile nella Gurna di Mascali) (Fig. 3, n. 24): l'ipotesi di un suo uso quale bacino naturale,⁴⁰ destinato all'alaggio delle imbarcazioni, in connessione con l'istituzione monastica richiama le installazioni portuali ecclesiastiche indipendenti (*εκκλησιαστική σκάλα*), che registrano una crescita nel mondo bizantino tra vi e vii secolo (Arcifa c.d.s.). Per quanto scarsamente documentata per le fasi intermedie è evidente che il ruolo dell'istituzione monastica in questi secoli intermedi è alla base del 'successo' dell'area evidente nei documenti della prima età normanna, quando Mascali e il suo territorio sono interessati da una serie di attività economiche (cantieristica navale, coltivazione dei maiali, sfruttamento del bosco) di un certo rilievo (Arcifa c.d.s.), controllate oramai dal vescovo di Catania, nonché abate di S. Agata.

Ulteriori nuclei monastici si sviluppano verosimilmente nel corso dell'viii e ix secolo lungo la viabilità che dalla costa jonica si inoltra verso l'interno seguendo il corso dell'Alcantara. Le diverse cube disseminate lungo questo tracciato rappresentano la documentazione archeologica di una espansione del monachesimo italo-greco che valorizza questo distretto a cavallo tra Etna e il suo versante settentrionale e i Nebrodi (Arcifa 2018, 113-14). Per molti di questi edifici possediamo soltanto i resti architettonici a pianta quadrangolare sovente mal datati e di cui va ancora compreso il contesto territoriale del loro sviluppo (Giglio 2003; Margani 2005). Un areale di grande interesse è rappresentato dal territorio della media valle dell'Alcantara in relazione ad uno snodo viario di primaria importanza sia per le possibilità

di attraversamento del fiume prima delle Gole che per l'innesto dell'affluente S. Paolo-Torrente Zavianni, tratto finale di una via di penetrazione naturale dalla costa tirrenica verso sud attraverso il sistema di fiumare Patri-Fantina. A ridosso e a presidio di questo snodo sorgono i centri medievali di Castiglione e Francavilla (Fig. 4); il primo, quasi certamente, insediamento fortificato nel corso della media età bizantina nel contesto della fortificazione di quest'area la cui dimensione strategica emerge con tutta evidenza quale presidio del guado sull'Alcantara e dello sbocco della viabilità che staccandosi dal golfo di Tindari consente di superare la catena peloritana verso sud.

Dati archeologici e documentari consentono di inquadrare l'esistenza di due fondazioni monastiche che sembrano in stretta connessione con le dinamiche di popolamento di questo territorio in età altomedievale. Il monastero greco di S. Salvatore la Placa (Fig. 5, n. 3) è noto da una copia manoscritta tarda di un originale privilegio in greco del 1092 (Becker 2013, 127-30) con il quale il conte Ruggero incarica il monaco Clemente della riedificazione delle fabbriche, con il concorso degli uomini di Castiglione, dotando il monastero di terreni, boschi e campi tra il fiume Alcantara e il suo affluente S. Paolo. Attualmente le fabbriche dirute visibili sull'altura della Placa sono riconducibili alla costruzione di età normanna e poco possiamo dire del precedente monastero bizantino (Arcifa 2008).

Ben altra consistenza ha invece il secondo monastero noto come Cuba di S. Domenica (Fig. 5, n. 2) distante 2 km da Castiglione di Sicilia, centro attestato alla fine dell'xi secolo; si tratta di un edificio a pianta centrica cupolato, preceduto da un nartece oggi scomparso, variamente datato da età protobizantina fino al xii secolo (Fig. 6). L'appartenenza dell'edificio ad una fabbrica monastica è indiziata dai resti murari visibili fino al secolo scorso nel terreno immediatamente circostante. Le recenti indagini geofisiche e le analisi di termoluminescenza indirizzano ora ad una datazione della fabbrica o del suo restauro al ix-x secolo. Le rilevazioni effettuate al di sopra del portale d'ingresso e sulla ghiera dell'ingresso laterale consentono di concentrare i campioni attorno a due range cronologici principali: vi-vii secolo e ix-x secolo. A differenza di quanto ipotizzato dagli autori del campionamento (che hanno interpretato questi dati nell'ottica di due diverse fasi costruttive l'una di età protobizantina, l'altra mediobizantina) riteniamo che la presenza di mattoni di

³⁹ Bresc e Nef (1999, 337): «De là a Mascali, village (*qarya*) situé à l'angle du mont Etna orienté vers la mer, au sommet d'une haute montagne, bien peuplé d'autochtones et traversé en son milieu par des cours d'eau...».

⁴⁰ Dal lemma greco *μασχάλη* 'ascella' che, nel greco tardo, si amplia alla sfera semantica connessa ai termini 'baia insenatura'; cfr. Caracausi (1993, s.v. *Mascali*). Con riferimento al porto di Messina e alla sua forma falcata il lemma è già attestato in Strabone, *Geographica*, VI, 2, 3: «...ή μὲν Μεσσήνη τῆς Πελοποννήσου ἐν κόλπῳ κεῖται, καμπτομένη ἐπὶ πολὺ πρὸς ἑω καὶ μασχάλην τινὰ ποιοῦσης...».

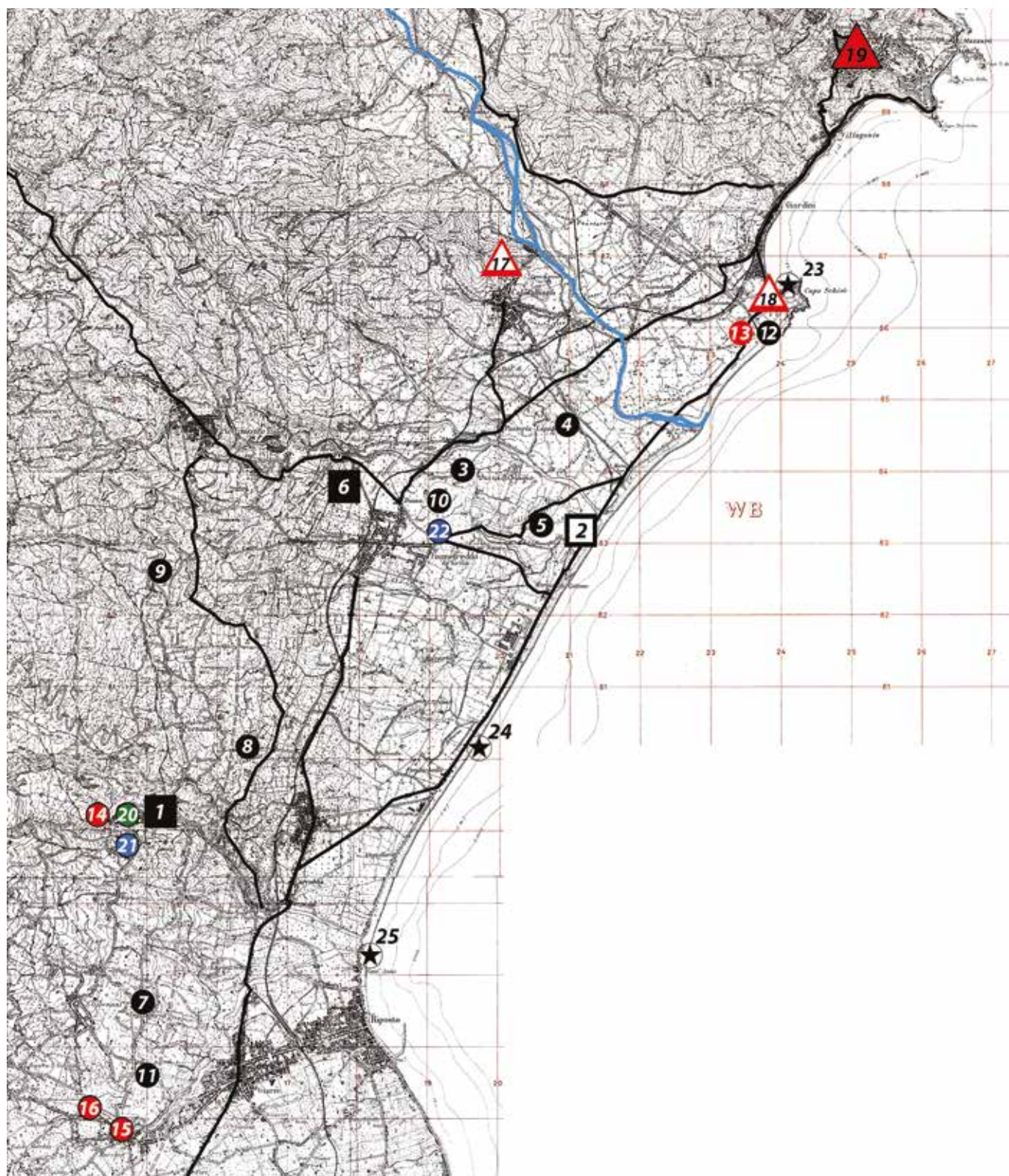


Fig. 3. Il territorio di Mascalì (CT) (I.G.M. 25.000): evidenze archeologiche, viabilità e gerarchie insediative tra tardo antico e altomedioevo (elab. G. Marino). Ville romano imperiali: 1. Nunziata (Mascalì), via dei Giardini; 6. Fiumefreddo, ctr. Torrerossa; Statio: 2. Calatabiano, contrada Pianotta. Siti rurali, area di frammenti fittili di età romana: 3. Calatabiano, ctr. S. Biagio; 4. Calatabiano ctr. Imperio; 5. Calatabiano chiusa Carpinato; 7. Giarre, Tagliaborse; 8. Mascalì, ctr. Cuzzulù; 9. Mascalì ctr. S. Venera; 10. Fiumefreddo; 11. Giarre, ctr. Coste; 12. Giardini-Naxos. Siti rurali di età bizantina, necropoli: 13. Giardini-Naxos; 14. Nunziata (Mascalì); 15. Giarre, alveo torrente Macchia; 16. Giarre, campo sportivo S. Giovanni. Fortificazioni, kstra minori bizantini: 17. Calatabiano, castello; 18. Giardini-Naxos, Schisò. Kstra/polis: 19. Taormina. Siti rurali di età islamica: 20. Nunziata (Mascalì). Priorie normanne: 21. Nunziata (Mascalì), S. Maria Annunziata; 22. Fiumefreddo, S. Giovanni. Porti, approdi, arsenali: 23. Naxos; 24. Mascalì, la Gurna; 25. Torrente Macchia/S. Anna.

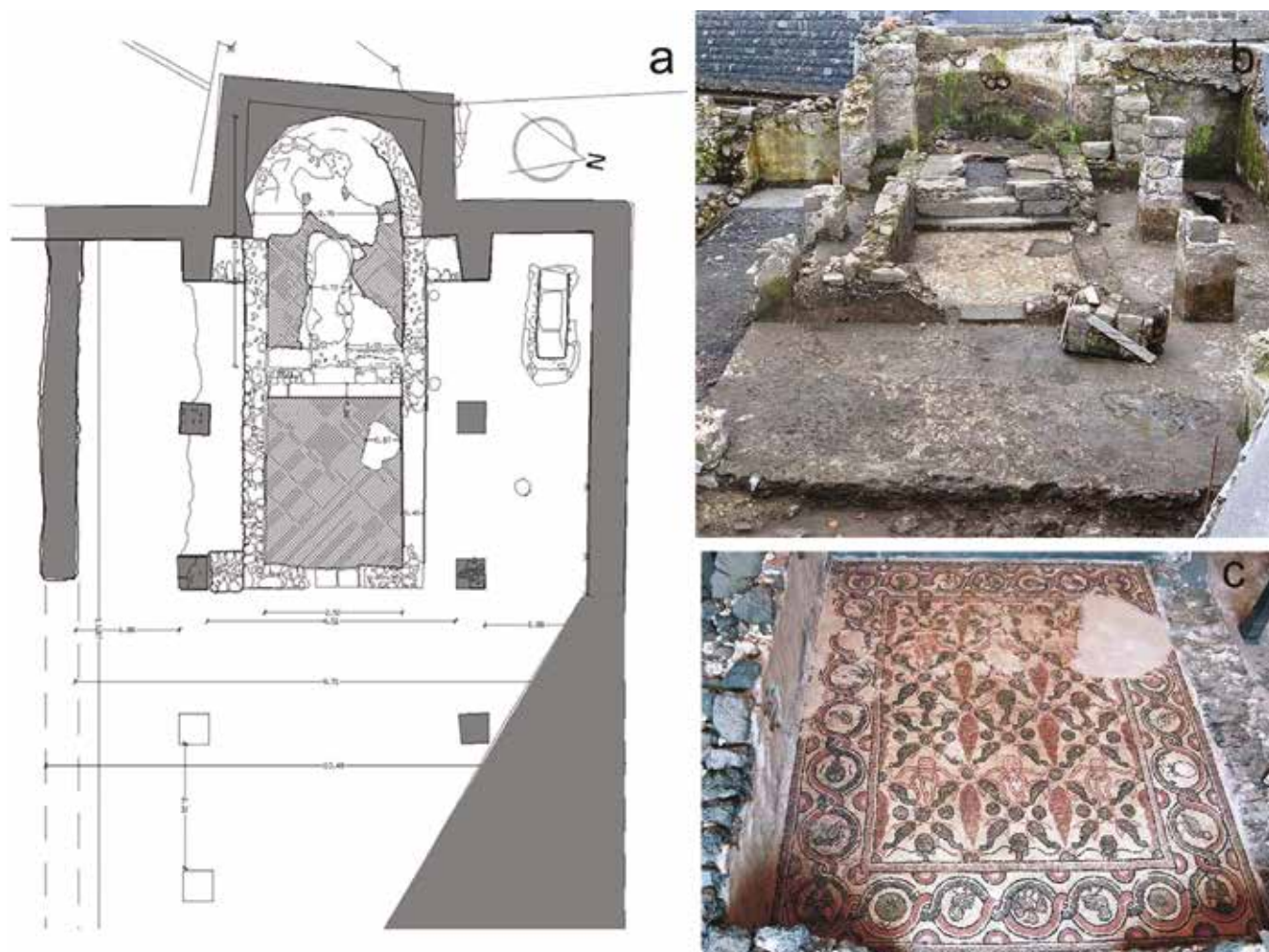


Fig. 4. Mascali (CT), basilica paleocristiana VI-VII secolo: planimetria e particolare dei mosaici (da BUDA, La Nunziatella, cit., 42 fig. 29; 50 fig. 44).

diversa datazione all'interno della stesse parti di fabbrica possa far propendere per un riutilizzo di materiale da costruzione precedente nell'ambito di una struttura architettonica estremamente coerente, che anche sul piano planimetrico sembra inquadarsi coerentemente con gli sviluppi dell'architettura mediobizantina di IX-X secolo. La sua rilevanza architettonica tradisce una committenza di rilievo che sembra poter rimandare a quelle élites aristocratiche cui abbiamo sopra accennato. In questo caso l'apparente assenza di un insediamento rurale nei pressi del monastero e la vicinanza con l'insediamento di Castiglione induce a ipotizzare un più stretto legame con questo centro di popolamento che, per il suo ruolo strategico in questa fase, potrebbe avere attirato nuovi investimenti da parte delle aristocrazie locali.

Il quadro ivi presentato è caratterizzato da un cogente deficit scientifico, che riguarda la quasi totalità di tutti i

siti e gli edifici chiesastici finora citati: l'impossibilità di coprire in modo soddisfacente la diacronia tra IX-XI. Alla mancanza di dati archeologici chiari e pregnanti, va aggiunta la complessa affidabilità delle tarde attestazioni documentarie delle rifondazioni, difficili da valutare nella loro significatività storica. Si può ad esempio evidenziare che le aree delle rifondazioni risultano, attualmente, completamente ignorate dal mondo agiografico sopra analizzato: le pochissime attestazioni di comunità cristiane per la cuspide nord-orientale non coincidono con quanto presentato per questo territorio, limitandosi alle notizie delle comunità di Rometta fondate dai santi di Collesano,⁴¹ ed alla provenienza da Demenna di s. Luca.⁴² L'unica testimonianza che può probabilmente coprire questa scarsa corrispondenza tra fonti è rappresentata da un'area monastica scarsamente considerata da studi precedenti, definita "l'Altissima Montagna di San Nicone", citata nel *bios* di

⁴¹ Nella τὴν τῶν Ἑρμιάτων πολίχνην, raggiunta "attraversando i deserti monti" (δι' ἐρήμων ὁρέων διαβιβάσας αὐτοὺς), Saba ed i familiari avrebbero lasciato un *laòs*, prima di trasferirsi in Calabria, Cozza-Luzi (1891-92, 45-46 e 384-86), cui si aggiunge il possibile *naon* di S. Michele Arcangelo nel non meglio posizionabile τοῦ Κρίσματος χώρον, da posizionarsi probabilmente in Sicilia nord-orientale e verosimilmente un *metochion* della confederazione monastica di San Filippo d'Agira, Cozza-Luzi (1891-92, 40-42 e 376-86).

⁴² Sul *kastron* di Demenna e sul suo ruolo in Sicilia nord-orientale, Nef (2005) e Messina (2020, nonché *supra*, n. 12).



Fig. 5. Il territorio di Castiglione di Sicilia (IGM 25.000, stralcio): 1 Castiglione; 2 Cuba di S. Domenica; 3 Monastero di S. Salvatore la Placa.

S. Elia lo Speleota (*infra*). L'approfondimento filologico sul centro di riferimento e sul suo territorio proposto in questa sede, con una contestualizzazione storico-topografica che consente di coprire i periodi bizantino, islamico e proto-normanno, può rappresentare un buon caso-studio sul possibile ruolo delle istituzioni monastiche tra amministrazione territoriale e diplomazia.

Lucia ARCIFA

6. ROCCA ED AREA MONASTICA DELLA “MONTAGNA” DI S. NICONO: UN IMPORTANTE CASO STUDIO NELLA DIACRONIA

I riferimenti alla “altissima montagna di San Nicone”, contenuti sia nelle agiografie bizantine, che nei documenti d’età normanna, consentono di identificare una interessante area monastica con fondazioni italogreche nel territorio di un importante *kastron* associato al controllo bizantino della Sicilia nord-orientale, ovvero la *qal’a* di *Miq.š* citata nelle fonti arabe (Al-Idrīsī 2002; Bresc e

Nef 1999): questo sito è stato già in passato identificato con il sito archeologico di Monte Scuderi (Fiumedinisi ME), sito d'altura posto lungo un importante nodo strategico a protezione della via di cresta lungo la dorsale peloritana, equidistante da Messina e Taormina, e che per le caratteristiche attualmente analizzabili è perfettamente inquadrabile nelle dinamiche storico-insediative della cuspidale nord-orientale tra il IX ed il X secolo (Arcifa *et al.* 2022). Il ritorno sulla corretta traslitterazione del toponimo arabo della rocca e l'analisi storica dell'area monastica ad esso associata offrono ulteriori, importanti spunti sul tema del rapporto tra centri demici di rilievo ed istituzioni monastiche del territorio, atte a favorire lo sfruttamento delle risorse ed il popolamento delle campagne nella complessa diacronia di questa frontiera.

L'altissimo monte di San Nicone prende il nome, appunto, dal culto nell'area del "megalomartire" Nicone, la cui agiografia attribuisce la morte alle persecuzioni di Decio (251), dopo aver praticato la vita monastica "vicina all'altissimo monte detto Taormina" (*juxta altissimum montem Tauromeniae dictum*, AASS Martii III, 440-46); a

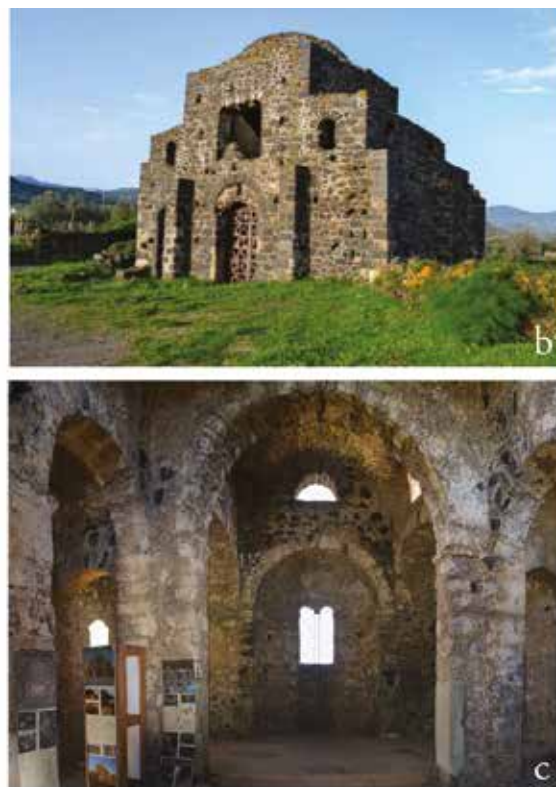
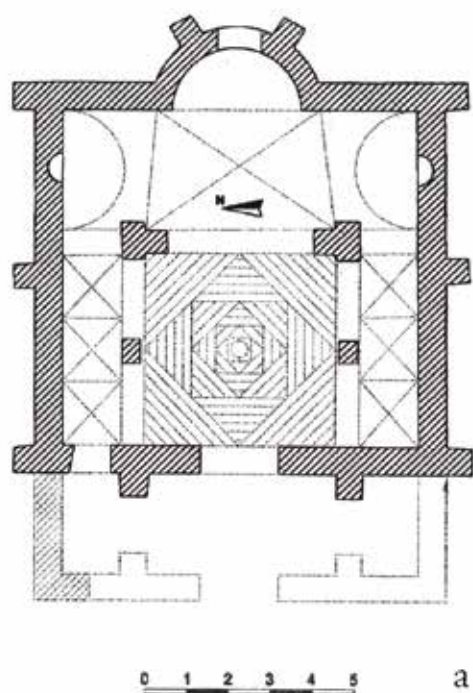


Fig. 6. Castiglione di Sicilia (CT), Cuba di S. Domenica.

quest'area consacrata al culto di questo santo sembrerebbe essere associato tra età bizantina ed età islamica un monastero per cui abbiamo due attestazioni nelle fonti, ovvero il "tempio" (*naos*) dedicato a Sant'Aussenzio (Auxentius): la prima attestazione riguarda la sua associazione al culto di Santo Stefano il Giovane, un martire delle persecuzioni iconoclaste morto nel 765 e registrato nei sinassari costantinopolitani, un aspetto che dovette donare una certa rilevanza al monastero in questione (Scorza Barcellona 1999, 218); risale invece già alla prima metà del x secolo – dunque nel pieno del periodo della frontiera arabo-bizantina nell'area – il passaggio di Sant'Elia lo Speleota "nel santuario di Sant'Aussenzio che si trova sulla strada dell'Altissimo Monte di San Nicone" (ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ ἁγίου Αὐξεντίου, τῷ ὄντι ὑπὸ τὴν ὁδοιπορίαν τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ βουνοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου Νίκωνος), dove avrebbe passato parte della sua vita eremitica insieme al compagno Arsenio, morto per mano musulmana alla sua partenza dopo aver scelto di abbandonare la vita eremitica (*AASS Septembris* III, 850-51).

L'associazione dell'Altissimo Monte di San Nicone ad una ὁδοιπορία ("strada") sembrerebbe ricalcare la stretta relazione di quest'area monastica con una viabilità fondamentale per le comunicazioni interne, imperniato sul sistema di *kastra* e *phrouria* ("torri d'avvistamento") della dorsale del Dinnamare su cui i Romei sembrerebbero aver impostato la difesa del territorio nel lungo periodo (Arcifa 2005 e 2019; Arcifa *et al.* 2022). Ma è proprio questa stretta relazione tra il *kastron*, l'area sacra e la viabilità principale che ci consente di tornare sul problematico toponimo *Miq.š*: l'analisi della tradizione manoscritta consente di rifiutare questa trascrizione del toponimo, proposta da Amari solo sulla base della sua lettura dei manoscritti di Edrisi (Al-Idrīsī 2002, 622; BAS ita., 118-19, n. 1; Bresc e Nef 1999, 337); l'osservazione di tutte le attestazioni di questo toponimo nelle edizioni critiche delle diverse fonti fa pensare piuttosto ad una lettura *Niqunūš* o in alternativa *Niquš*,⁴³ e dunque che la *qal'a* di *Niqunūš* delle fonti arabe possa essere riconosciuta nel καστέλλιον τοῦ Ἀγίου

⁴³ Ad una più attenta analisi della tradizione manoscritta di questo toponimo, si nota come la trascrizione *Miq.š* (مَيْقَش/مَنْبَس, Al-Idrīsī 2002, 622, n. 3) proposta finora sulla sola base della lettura di Amari dell'opera di al-Idrīsī risulta tutt'altro che scontata, anche perché hanno influenzato le letture di tutte le altre opere in cui è citata:

- Le lezioni dei tre manoscritti di al-Muqaddasī مَيْقَش / B دَنْقَش / C بَنْقَش – dove non ricorre in nessun caso la *mīm* – sono state corrette dal De Goeje in *مَيْقَش* proprio riprendendo l'edizione amariana (Al-Muqaddasī 1991, 55, 221, n. o);

- In tutte le altre edizioni dei manoscritti delle cronache, possiamo trovare in nessun caso ricorra la *mīm*, ma che nonostante tutto in ogni occasione corregge con *Miq.š*: بَيْعَش in Ibn al-Atīr, مَيْقَش in al-Nuwayrī e بَيْقَش in Ibn Ḥaldūn (Amari Bas ar., 242);

- Nell'unica opera la cui edizione non è stata curata da Amari, ovvero la cronaca di Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb, Abdul-Wahab riporta ulteriori lezioni del toponimo, che ricorre nelle varianti مَيْقَش e قَيْوَس (Abdul-Wahab 1910, 413, 479). Il confronto di queste versioni con la lettura topografica della zona ci consente di rileggere il nome di questa *qal'a* secondo due versioni alternative più probabili, ovvero *Niqunūš* o *Niquš* (نَيْقَش/نَيْقَش), il che renderebbe dunque il toponimo completo la *qal'at Niqunūš*, "la rocca di [san] Nicone".

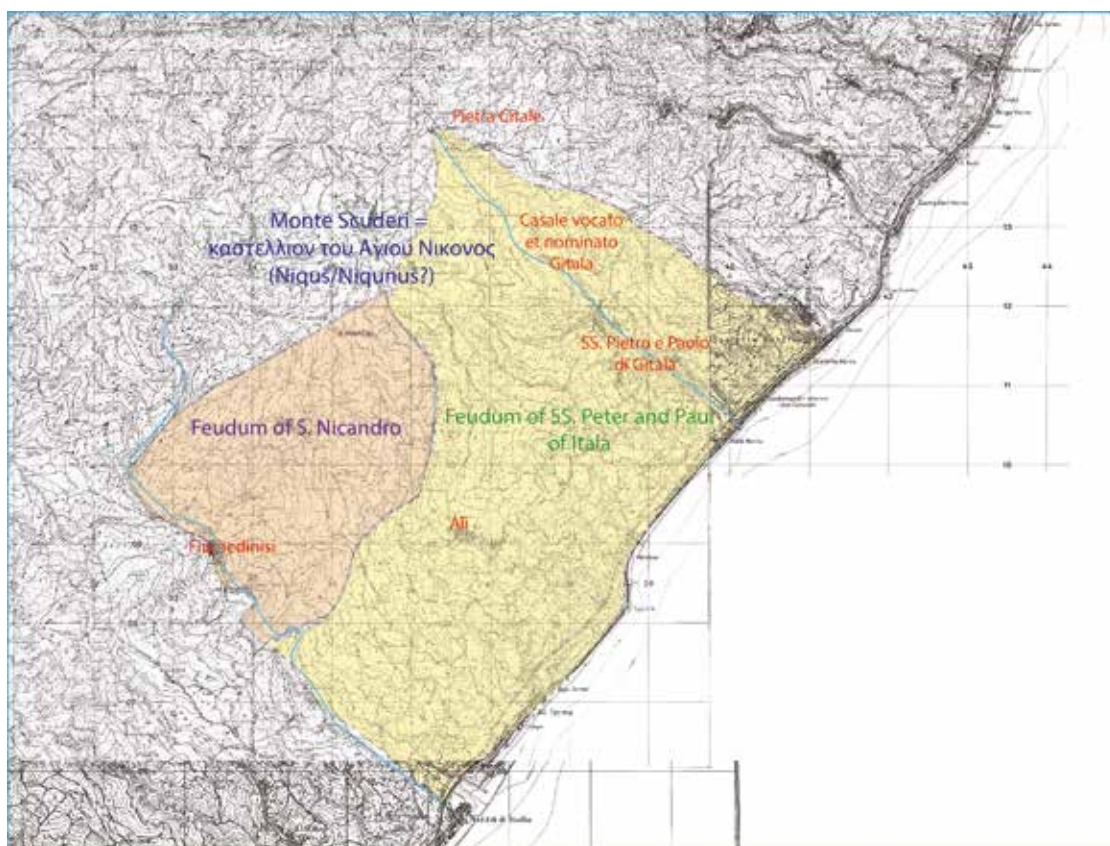


Fig. 7. Posizionamento approssimativo del καστέλλιον του Αγίου Νικονος sulla base dei riferimenti topografici segnalati nella documentazione della prima età normanna (elab. M. Messina).

Níkovo(ς), il “Castello di San Nicone”, e nel sistema fortificato attestato nella documentazione della primissima età normanna, relativa proprio alla rifondazione di eremi preesistenti – in particolare l'eremo con monastero di San Nicandro “sotto il castello di San Nicone” – al momento del consolidamento della Contea (Becker 2013, doc. 29, 131-35; doc. 34, 147-49) (Fig. 7). Seppure in modo problematico, l'analisi di questa documentazione di poco più tarda associata alla storia della “rocca di (San) *Niquunus*” ci può dire molto sul possibile destino di quest'area monastica in età islamica. Rileggendo le fonti arabe, gli episodi salienti per il sito di *Niquunus* sembrerebbero tre: 1) durante la campagna dell'emiro aghlabide Ibrahim II (875-902) del 902 che avrebbe condotto alla conquista “con la forza” (*anwar^m*) di Taormina ed all'assoggettamento di diversi siti siculo-calabresi, gli abitanti di *Niquunus* avrebbero accettato la dismissione delle fortificazioni in cambio dell'*amān*, insieme a Rometta e Demenna, e sulla base del ragionamento proposto nello scorso paragrafo possiamo ipotizzare che si trattasse di rocche soggette a pagamenti più o meno occasionali di tributi diplomatici (*supra*). 2) dopo un gap di diversi decenni – in cui si

inserisce verosimilmente l'episodio riportato nel *bios* di Elia lo Speleota – sappiamo che nel quadro delle lotte per la conquista di Rometta tra i conquistatori kalbiti ed il generale Manuele Foca, cugino dell'imperatore Niceforo II (962-969), il *wālī* al-Ḥasan b. 'Ammār fu in grado di bloccare gli eserciti romei dall'accesso alle fortezze posizionando parte delle sue truppe sul “vallone” (*maḏīq*) di *Niquunus*; 3) infine, sappiamo che la stessa *Niquunus* rientrava tra le *qilā'* siciliane che l'emiro Ġa'far (983-985) avrebbe dovuto restituire al monaco Oreste, ovvero lo stesso (futuro) patriarca melchita di Gerusalemme autore dei *bioi* dei santi di Collesano, che doveva ottenere anche tutti i prigionieri fatti durante le campagne kalbite degli anni precedenti (Abdul-Wahab 1910, 478/52 ss.; Ibn al-Khaṭīb 2003, vol.2, 347 ss.; al-Maqrīzī 1991, III, 60, no. 1081).⁴⁴ Ed è probabile che proprio al suo inserimento in queste trattative possa associarsi un'altra citazione, stavolta come ὁ ἅγιος νίκων, registrata nella sola versione greca della Cronaca greco-araba di Cambridge e relativa ad un suo “abbandono” qualche anno prima della missione, nel 978/9 (Cozza-Luzi 1891-92, 48, 80, 108, 116; *Chronique grecque de Cambridge*, 339), probabilmente in

⁴⁴ Questa campagna diplomatica, interessante proprio per il ruolo svolto dai protagonisti di queste trattative concluse con lo scontro con l'emiro Ġa'far, meriterà di essere approfondita in altra sede.

seguito alle operazioni di ripopolamento con *'ulamā'* e *ṣāliḥūn* condotte da Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī riportate per l'anno precedente (Ibn al-Athīr 1987, 7, 322, 362, 399-400).

Questo complesso quadro ci consente di riflettere proprio sulle dinamiche di occupazione di quest'area di frontiera da parte musulmana, per la quale possiamo riprendere alcune interessanti citazioni dai medesimi documenti normanni: se nell'area del καστέλλιον τοῦ Ἀγίου Νίκου(ς) registriamo le persistenze monastiche di cui si è detto, nell'area più a valle una serie di toponimi e microtoponimi – Alì, una probabile *qal'a* detta *Elcuyrrat*, cui si aggiungono *Elunzepa* (?) e probabilmente *Gitata* – si trovano associati ad un *χανδαχίος* – dall'ar. *khandaq*, “vallone, fossato” – e ad una *κατοῦνα* – “accampamento”, stavolta un termine medio-greco – ricollocabili invece lungo i “valloni” che consentivano gli accessi ai monti dal mare. Sebbene tali aspetti vadano sostanzianti con dati archeologici pregnanti, queste attestazioni documentarie potrebbero rimandare ad un controllo dell'area monastica e del suo sistema socio-economico attraverso l'occupazione degli accessi all'area montana dal mare: tale aspetto consentiva, da un lato, di controllare i centri demici associati alle comunità monastiche che garantivano lo sfruttamento delle preziose risorse territoriali – *in primis* le aree metallurgiche di Fiumedinisi, in relazione alle quali si pone anche la viabilità dell'eremo di San Nicandro;⁴⁵ dall'altro, il potere musulmano poteva impedire – come nel caso delle campagne degli anni 962-965 – l'accesso via mare a consistenti rinforzi bizantini che avrebbero potuto reimpostare il sistema fortificato del Dinnamare ed il *kastron* di *Niqunuš*. Il diverso approccio al controllo di questa frontiera da parte dei due imperi avrebbe avuto dunque una costante fondamentale: il mantenimento del ruolo socio-economico dei monasteri nel garantire lo sfruttamento del territorio e lo stesso popolamento degli insediamenti che vi si relazionano.

L'area monastica dell'Altissima Montagna di San Nicone, la cui analisi archeologico-topografica nel sistema insediativo di riferimento va ancora quasi integralmente impostata, potrebbe rappresentare un interessante esempio per un futuro studio del ruolo territoriale dei monasteri nella frontiera arabo-bizantina tra Sicilia e Calabria. Come vedremo in conclusione, per questo come per altri territori è molto complesso comprendere quali fossero le sedi diocesane di riferimento nel corso del x ed xi secolo, ma contestualmente il ruolo dei monaci e

delle loro istituzioni sembra sopperire almeno in parte al *vulnus* di rappresentanza comunitaria causato dalla crisi delle reti vescovili.

Michelangelo MESSINA

CONCLUSIONI

Con questo lavoro si è tentato di aprire una discussione multidisciplinare sul ruolo dei monasteri nel quadro sociale e nel tessuto insediativo delle comunità cristiane della frontiera siciliana, presentando in particolare alcuni casi-studio sulla Sicilia orientale. In sede di conclusione e come filo conduttore per tutte le riflessioni storico-territoriali ivi proposte, crediamo possa essere interessante rileggere un aspetto chiave per la comprensione di un processo di regionalizzazione delle strutture di rappresentanza territoriale e comunitaria della cristianità siciliana di questo periodo: il rapporto tra congregazioni monastiche di una certa importanza e la formazione e riorganizzazione delle gerarchie ecclesiastiche regionali e interregionali in seno al divenire storico della frontiera.

Le riflessioni proposte per il territorio di Taormina e la sua diocesi potrebbero rappresentare un possibile modello di rapporto tra comunità monastiche locali e vescovadi in seno a questa frontiera. La cittadina portuale etneopeloritana, vero e proprio baluardo della cristianità romea in Sicilia su cui Bisanzio avrebbe reimpostato le gerarchie insediative e le connesse strutture ecclesiastiche, divenne anche il fulcro dei rapporti diplomatici tra l'Impero ed il Califfato, ed in questa veste divenne verosimilmente anche la principale metropoli dell'isola.⁴⁶ Il pullulare delle strutture monastiche archeologicamente rilevate nel suo territorio potrebbe testimoniare una più frequente attestazione del binomio istituzionale confederazione monastica-vescovado che valorizzava, di fatto, il ruolo delle aristocrazie locali e regionali nella selezione dei prelati, formati entro le famiglie più o meno importanti che agivano nel tessuto socio-economico del territorio proprio attraverso la fondazione dei monasteri e la gestione delle proprietà associate. In questo senso potrebbe forse interpretarsi lo stesso esempio tardo della *μὴν* di S. Giovanni di Fiumefreddo, di cui si è proposta la possibile pertinenza a Iacobo ἐπίσκοπος come esponente del clero italogreco e dunque delle aristocrazie locali che ne influenzavano il capitolo (*supra*).

Date le carenze di questo resoconto storico e topografico, minato da una evidente scarsità di fonti

⁴⁵ Sulle risorse di quest'area e sulle sue miniere in particolare, Berdar *et al.* (1995).

⁴⁶ Per una riflessione sul ruolo ideologico e politico-amministrativo di Taormina a partire dalla seconda metà del ix secolo, nonché sulla sua possibile identificazione nella metropoli ἡ Σικελία, al 13° posto nella lista del patriarca Nicola I Mistico, Messina c.d.s., nonché *Nicholai I Constantinopolitani Patriarchae opuscola diversa*, Doc. 191A-B, 2-7.

documentarie ed archeologiche, soltanto l'allargamento delle prospettive d'indagine e la diversificazione delle domande possono contribuire ad arricchire l'indagine sulla cristianità siculo-calabrese di questa frontiera arabo-bizantina, e in particolar modo sul ruolo che i monaci ebbero nel mondo sociale di questo contesto storico peculiare. Come si è detto, in passato si era già accennato al possibile ruolo della comunità di San Filippo d'Agira come "vivaio" per i vescovi della diocesi di Palermo,⁴⁷ una prospettiva che si sofferma tuttavia soltanto sugli aspetti religioso-pastorali del rapporto monasteri-clero secolare.

D'altronde, anche per quanto concerne il quadro della Sicilia nord-orientale, su cui ci siamo concentrati nella seconda parte di questo lavoro, sono numerose le problematiche ancora aperte: per quanto concerne nello specifico l'area monastica dell'Altissima Montagna di San Nicone, non è facile comprendere con quali centri principali ed approdi si relazionasse, non avendo ancora contezza delle strutture insediative del territorio della sua *qal'a*; ancor più complesso è capire con quali centri urbani sedi di diocesi si relazionasse sul piano amministrativo ed economico, probabilmente ravvisabili tra Taormina, Messina e le diocesi suffraganee meridionali della metropoli di Reggio a seconda del periodo storico;⁴⁸ altrettanto impalpabili risultano gli eventuali rapporti con comunità e clero della Palermo cristiana di età islamica, qualora la gestione della fiscalità sulla "comunità" (*milla*) dei *Rûm* di questa parte dell'isola potesse passare anche tramite referenti della cristianità *musta'mana* della *madîna Şiqilliyya*.

Tuttavia, crediamo che tutti i fattori concorrenti evidenziati in questo lavoro consentano di reimpostare la prospettiva d'indagine sui monasteri anche ad una problematica più prettamente storico-topografica intorno alle dinamiche insediative sull'isola: anzitutto, l'interdipendenza tra le comunità dell'entroterra con istituzioni monastiche più o meno importanti nel lungo periodo e le principali città portuali con sedi del potere basculanti tra un impero e l'altro, che siano diocesi in pieno servizio o sedi assoggettate e/o tributarie e/o vacanti; tali città sarebbero come degli *emporia* contesi che furono anche i fulcri dell'imperialità dell'isola, facendo rimontare a livello mediterraneo la storia socioeconomica delle microregioni di questa come di altre parti del *bahr al-Rûm* ("Mare dei Romei", Picard 2015; Horden e Purcell 2000). Importanti

istituzioni monastiche fungono da centri propulsori della vita sociale ed economica del territorio e delle sue risorse umane e naturali, garantendone una certa continuità di sfruttamento, mentre la contesa intorno alle città portuali determina ed amplifica l'incertezza della possibilità di reindirizzare tali risorse tramite i flussi di ricchezze mossi dalle reti ecclesiastiche imperiali: un discorso che, per il Mezzogiorno, si può ampliare anche al di là del confronto Islam-Bisanzio, toccando ovviamente anche il problema del rapporto tra arcidiocesi latine e metropoli greco-bizantine tra Calabria settentrionale, Lucania, Campania meridionale e Puglia.⁴⁹

Potrebbe esser stata questa dimensione storica di incertezza delle polarità di riferimento a determinare la proliferazione di figure di *abbas* e *presbiter* o *episcopus*, in questo come in altri territori in cui la presenza di una importante istituzione monastica abbia comportato la preminenza delle aristocrazie ad essa legate nei capitoli dei centri vicini.⁵⁰ La formazione di importanti sedi monastiche nel territorio, rappresentazione del sostegno – effettivo o sperato – delle classi aristocratiche locali al mantenimento socioeconomico dei vescovadi, spiegherebbe in modo piuttosto pregnante anche gli strumenti di rifondazione delle diocesi impiegati dai Normanni: proprio Ansgerio, beneficiario della donazione di Iacobo, che fu allo stesso tempo arcivescovo ed abate del monastero di Sant'Agata a Catania, divenne indissolubilmente sia il principale vettore delle risorse socioeconomiche della diocesi verso il rinnovato polo di riferimento per la cristianità siciliana – la Roma dei Papi –, sia il riorganizzatore del territorio attraverso la detenzione di beni e privilegi chiave che gli garantirono il controllo sulle principali strutture socioeconomiche dell'Etna e della Piana di Catania.⁵¹

È proprio l'esempio tardo della donazione di Iacobo che può contribuire a definire una possibile problematica in parte comune con la storia del resto del Mezzogiorno italiano:⁵² in una società di frontiera dove il ceto degli *archontes* fu il principale referente della fiscalità diplomatico-militare di questa frontiera tra più imperi, in quanto rappresentante dei *kastri* principali con tutte le strutture amministrative ed istituzionali di riferimento, il monastero avrebbe rappresentato lo strumento principe con cui tali aristocrazie perpetrarono lo sfruttamento di un

⁴⁷ Considerata da Henri Bresc come l'unica diocesi della Sicilia "islamica", Bresc e Nef (1998, 9).

⁴⁸ Sul quadro diocesano siciliano e calabrese tra IX e X secolo, Guillou (1974, 123-26) e Prigent (2014).

⁴⁹ Un esempio prossimo possono essere considerate, ad esempio, anche le comunità monastiche dell'Italia centro-meridionale, poste sulla "falga" prima tra Franchi e potentati longobardi del Mezzogiorno e poi tra Impero latino e Bisanzio, Marazzi (2018).

⁵⁰ Oltre ai casi sopracitati per Saba e Cosma d'area salentina, si possono citare alcuni esempi dell'Italia meridionale bizantina e di Bari in particolare, come Mele *clericus* – altrove *subdiaconus* – et *abbas* [cu]stos et rector ecclesie sancti Gregorii, CDB IV, doc. 13, 26-28.

⁵¹ Sulla fondazione del vescovado di Catania con privilegi e beni assegnati dal Gran Conte Ruggero (Bresc 1995).

⁵² Per la prospettiva del Mezzogiorno altomedievale come territorio di frontiera, Wolf e Herbers (2018).

determinato territorio, qualunque fosse la loro condizione – prigionieri, *musta' minūn* o Romei in territorio di pertinenza romea. La valorizzazione di questa funzione di rappresentanza sociale ed economica per le comunità locali consente di reimpostare anche gli indirizzi della ricerca archeologica sulle strutture relative a queste istituzioni complesse: l'indagine sui monasteri di questa fase cruciale non può esaurirsi nella semplice individuazione e descrizione architettonica delle evidenze, ma va contestualizzata all'interno di un quadro più ampio in

cui la fondazione di monasteri e *metochia* viene interpretata come strumento per la riorganizzazione sociale ed economica tanto degli insediamenti vicini, quanto delle specifiche risorse territoriali con cui si relazionano. Nell'ambito di gerarchie territoriali costantemente riorganizzate nel divenire storico, il monastero si inserisce quale punto di riferimento della maglia insediativa di un territorio garantendone l'inquadramento religioso e lo sfruttamento economico.

Lucia ARCIFA e Michelangelo MESSINA

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CHAPTER 14

ARMENIAN ARCHITECTURE DURING THE LATE PHASE OF ARAB OCCUPATION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHURCHES OF SHIRAK PROVINCE OF THE LATE-NINTH TO MID-TENTH CENTURY

LA ARQUITECTURA ARMENIA DURANTE LA ÚLTIMA FASE DE LA OCUPACIÓN ÁRABE, CON ESPECIAL REFERENCIA A LAS IGLESIAS DE LA PROVINCIA DE SHIRAK DE FINALES DEL SIGLO IX A MEDIADOS DEL X

ARMEN KAZARYAN¹

SUMMARY

Representing the periods of development of Armenian architecture during the long period of Arab occupation of the former territory of the early Christian kingdom of Greater Armenia, from the mid-seventh to the mid-tenth centuries, this chapter focuses on the revival of church construction that followed the wane of Abbasid power. Emphasis is laid on the architectural features of a number of churches located in the western region of the province of Shirak (modern province of Kars, Turkey) and dated to the late ninth – mid-tenth centuries. This territory hosted all the centres of power of the new Bagratuni dynasty, which restored the Armenian Kingdom in 885. This entailed the renaissance of church architecture, represented by impressive cathedrals in Shirakavan and Kars and smaller churches in Oghuzlu, Horomos, Ani, etc. The period will be divided into several phases based on political events related to the kingdom's independence. Inspired by the models left by the "Golden Age" of Armenian architecture in the seventh century, in each of these phases, architects tried to replicate and interpret the architectural features of these models. The architectural heights reached in Ani from the 970s onwards cannot be fully understood without a thorough examination of these earlier developments. The chapter examines church construction under the early Bagratuni Kings within the wider context of Christian architecture during the Early Middle Ages.

KEY WORDS: *Armenian architecture, Bagratuni kings, ninth-tenth centuries, Shirak province, architectural plan, curved decoration*

RESUMEN

Con la explicación del desarrollo de la arquitectura armenia durante el largo periodo de ocupación árabe del entonces territorio cristiano de la Gran Armenia, comprendido entre mediados del siglo VII y mediados del siglo X, este capítulo se centra en el renacimiento de la construcción de iglesias que siguió a la marcha del poder abasí. Se pone el énfasis en las características arquitectónicas de un número de iglesias localizadas en la región occidental de la provincia de Shirak (actual provincia de Kars, Turquía), datadas entre finales del siglo IX y mediados del X. Este territorio albergaba todos los centros de poder de la nueva dinastía Bagratuni, restauradora del reino de Armenia en el 885, hecho que implicó el renacimiento de la arquitectura eclesiástica, representada por las imponentes catedrales de Shirakavan y Kars y por las más modestas iglesias de Oghuzlu, Horomos, Ani, etc. Este periodo se divide en varias fases de acuerdo a los eventos políticos relacionados con la independencia del citado reino. Inspirados en los modelos dejados por la arquitectura armenia de la «época dorada» del siglo VII, los arquitectos intentaron replicar e interpretar las características arquitectónicas de esos modelos en cada una de esas fases. La calidad arquitectónica alcanzada en Ani desde la década del 970 en adelante no puede entenderse sin un examen exhaustivo de este desarrollo previo. Este capítulo examina además la construcción de iglesias bajo los primeros reyes de la dinastía Bagratuni dentro del contexto mayor de la arquitectura cristiana de la Alta Edad Media.

FALTAN PALABRAS CLAVE: *Arquitectura armenia, reyes Bagratuni, siglos IX-X, provincia de Shirak, planta arquitectónica, decoración curva*

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INTRODUCTION

The Arabs arrived to Armenia² in the 640s, controlling it from the late seventh century to the mid-tenth century. And this was to leave a trace in both the local Arab and Armenian cultures. Theoretically, the coexistence of two cultures in the region must result in mutual correlations, and the historical record attests to both confrontation and close contacts between the Armenian nobility and the Umayyad and Abbasid administrations. The region “constituted the centre of military conflict between the Christian and Islamic worlds. It also embodied a border zone in which varied Christian and Muslim populations engaged in dynamic, if tense, cultural interaction. As such, it provides a fitting analogy to early medieval Spain” (La Porta 2013, 251). Architecture was not impervious to these cultural relations. In the main, this chapter focuses on a number of late ninth- to mid-tenth-century churches located in the western region of the province of Shirak (Kars, modern Turkey). These monuments have featured in the academic literature since the early twentieth century (Strzygowski 1918, 128-30, 193-96, 215-16, 693-700; Toramanian 1942, 303, 311-14); they were described in monographic reviews and in some encyclopaedic works (Arutyunian and Safarian 1951, 49-51; Tokarskiy 1961, 180-81; Cuneo 1988, 638-41, 680-83, 686-87; Donabédian and Thierry 1987, 116, 562). The most comprehensive examination to date was *Mnatsakanyan's* (1981), who reasonably argued them to belong to the so-called pre-Ani stage in the development of Armenian architecture, which preceded the most active construction phase in the kingdom's capital, Ani (961-1045). However, the Shirak monuments were not singled out by Mnatsakanyan as a specific phenomenon. Unfortunately, scholarship on the political history of the early Bagratuni's period is much more developed than research on its architecture (Yuzbashyan 1988; Garsoïan and Thierry 2007, 243-55; Pogossian 2012, 181-84).³

The aim of this chapter is to identify the main trends in the development of compositions and decoration of the churches of the western region of Shirak. This involves considering some aspects of the dissemination of Arabic and, more broadly, oriental motifs within the framework of the development of Armenian architecture under the Caliphate, until the formation of the

independent kingdom of Bagratuni with capital in Ani (961), when new stylistic changes occurred.

I. PERIODISATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH ARCHITECTURE UNDER ARAB DOMINATION

Since the Roman period, the Armenian plateau has been an arena for clashing world powers. During the early spread of Christianity, the region was contested by the Sasanian and the Roman empires. The Arabs were the first in a succession of Muslim conquerors, leading to a conflict-ridden situation that was to have an effect on the development of monumental architecture, notably on ecclesiastical buildings. In parallel, Islamic architecture slowly developed in the region, as illustrated by excavations in Dvin, which was the administrative centre of Umayyad and Abbasid province of Irminiya, which also included Iberia (Eastern Georgia, arm. Virk) and Aghwank or Caucasian Albania (modern Azerbaijan).

The development of church architecture during the Islamic period has only recently become a matter of debate. Previously, it was generally held that the construction of ecclesiastical buildings was arrested owing to the total subjugation of the region to its Muslim conquerors, but by the end of the twentieth century, specialists adopted a more critical approach, detecting numerous instances of Christian church-construction, which led to the conclusion that building activity continued throughout centuries of Islamic domination.

Three periods of development of Christian culture and architecture can be distinguished from the mid-seventh to the mid-tenth century: 1) the early decades of Arab presence in the region, from the 640s to the 690s, before the victory of the Marwanids; 2) caliphal direct rule, up to the mid-ninth century; 3) political and cultural revival during the formation of new kingdoms.

Military confrontation with Byzantium began with the earliest Arab raids into the central districts of Armenia in the 640s and the early 650s. The Arabs administered the country from Dvin, so their presence in the Ararat Valley limited the geographical frame of ecclesiastical building. However, the first fifty years of the Arab domination, until the turn of the eighth century, failed to stop the gradual development of church architecture, which

² Following La Porta (2013, 251, n. 1), the term Armenia is used “mainly as a geographic, rather than political, entity corresponding generally to the area known as ‘Greater Armenia’ bordered by Cappadocia to the west, the Kur river to the north, the Caspian to the east, and the Jazīra to the south”.

³ Often, the study of the cultural heritage in this province, in Eastern Turkey, has been difficult. Armenian researchers were unable to work there before the dawn of the twenty-first century and had to rely on archival records, mainly photos and drawings taken before 1920. The situation changed in the early years of the twenty-first century, which made it possible for me to conduct field surveys of monuments in the vicinity of Ani and Kars for twenty years, allowing for a renovated perspective.



Fig. 1. Talin Cathedral, 670-80s. View from the south-east. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2009.

reached an early peak during this period (Donabédian 2008; Kazaryan 2012). This flourishing for Early Christian architecture witnessed the construction of Zvartnots, the cathedrals of Arutch and Talin, and other impressive churches. Most of these constructions were built in mountainous areas, but Zvartnots and the cathedral of Dvin were built in the Ararat Valley, where the Arabs had settled transiently in the mid-seventh century. This geographical development of church construction, as well as the settlement of the Armenian elites in submountain regions, could suggest that the catholicoses and the nobility preferred to vacate the country's central regions (Kazaryan 2012, vol. 3, 9-10). According to the historiographer Hovhannes Draskhanakarttsi (early tenth century), Catholicos Nerses the Builder (641-661) restored the city of Dvin after its demolition during the first Arab raid of 639/640 (Tosunyan 1996, 86-87). As most architectural details in Dvin's cathedral are reminiscent of the cornices and archivolts in Nerses's main work, the church of Zvartnots, I have suggested that both buildings were commissioned by him (Kazaryan 2012, vol. 2, 479-91). All the churches he sponsored were unusual in terms of both iconography and innovative decoration.

Nerses the Builder's most solemn and famous building was the church of Zvartnots, a large three-storey rotunda with tetraconch in the core of plane. This building was not only the result of the development of local architectural

features, but also an outstanding example of the perception of Byzantine ideas and, above all, of the structures and details of sixth-century Justinian cathedrals. Early Byzantine churches, martyria and baptisteries in Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Ephesus appear to have impressed Armenian patrons and architects. Moreover, there is an obvious genetic link between Zvartnots and the big family of Syrian and northern Mesopotamian tetraconchs with ambulatory (Kleinbauer 1972). The architectural iconography of Zvartnots, dedicated to the celestial forces in awakening, was directly related to the period's ideas, particularly the image of Heavenly Jerusalem intertwined with specific features of the Rotunda of the Resurrection (Anastasis) in the Holy Land. Both sides of the circular wall of Zvartnots were decorated with blind arcades and, above of the outward of them, a broad ornamental frieze representing the theme of "heavenly paradise".⁴

Like in Zvartnots, most original church plans of the mid- and second half of the seventh century combined local architectural ideas with those borrowed from the late antique or early-Byzantine style; large triconch cathedrals in Dvin and Talin (Fig. 1), reminiscent of Bethlehem church, together with local four-pillar cross-domed structures; a Byzantine domed-hall combined with cross-domes in the cathedral of Arutch (Fig. 2); and even six- and eight-foil typical late antique plan executed with faceted exedras and deep niches (Ghazarian 2001;

⁴ The expression of these ideas in Zvartnots have been comprehensively addressed in recent publications (Kazaryan 2012, 2; Maranci 2015, both with extensive bibliography).



Fig. 2. Arutch Cathedral, 660s. Interior, view to the east. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2008.

Kazaryan 2012; 2016). This first period of prosperity is generally called the “Golden Age of Armenian architecture,” during which the main typological and stylistic features emerged, and some Armenian architects might have been among the leading trend-setters in eastern Christian architecture (Kazaryan 2012, vol. 1, 16-17).⁵

Based on the evidence, Sasanian influence ceased during this first period, without being replaced by any typically Islamic features (Kazaryan and Mikayelyan 2019).

From the early eighth century to the second half of the ninth century architectural development dropped dramatically. The historiography suggest that this reflects stricter Arab control (Harutyunyan and Safaryan 1951, 15-16) which brought four centuries of development of early Christian architecture to an end. The construction of new churches ground to an almost

complete halt. However, while also noting this pattern, Garnik Shakhvyan (2004) mentions some construction work in churches during this period. The Armenian nobles who led anti-Umayyad rebellions (Yuzbashyan 1988, 50-51; Martin-Hisard 2007, 222-30) were also the only patrons of church constructions. On the other hand, Karen Yuzbashyan (1988) mentioned the survival of the Mamikonian family until the last quarter of the eighth century and the increasing wealth of the Bagratuni family towards the end of the century, concluding that the decline in church construction does not reflect economic and cultural collapse. However, it reflects the restrictions enforced by Caliphate on the rights of Christians (Yuzbashyan 1988, 48-49).

The beginning of the Bagratid period, from the mid-ninth century to the mid-tenth century, witnessed the revival of Christian building activity under Arab-Islamic

⁵ According to Donabédian (2008), this ‘Golden Age’ must be dated from the 630s to the 680s.

rule. This process is related to the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate and the formation of autonomous Armenian principalities or local kingdoms. As a result, some of these kingdoms even tried to gain national supremacy and impose their authority over the whole country and the Caucasus at large. The Bagratuni kings received the title of *prince of princes* from the Caliphs, and later the title of *Shahanshahs*. This struggle for independence is probably the context of the earliest version of the famous Armenian epic “David of Sāsūn,” which was not completed until around the twelfth century (Harutyunyan and Safaryan 1951, 16).

The revival of church construction began with the reproduction of the achievements of the earlier flourishing of the seventh century. However, this revival is also characterised by new church plans and decorative features. The provinces of Shirak and Arsharunik, the domain of the Bagratunis (north), and also the Kingdom of Vaspurakan, of the Artsrunis (south), proved particularly suitable for this new architecture of worship. The third historical province of active Christian construction in the late ninth-early tenth century was Syunik (east), where numerous middle- and small-sized churches were erected in the mountains and especially in the coast of Lake Sevan. Most of these churches are very rich in terms of stylistic articulation but poor in decoration. However, this period also witnessed architectural innovation and the unprecedented combination of known plans and shapes. An impressive church dated to the late ninth-early tenth century is Poghos-Petros, in the Tatev Monastery, south-eastern Syunik, which presents a cross-domed structure supported by a single pair of free-standing square columns (Mnatsakanyan 1960, 99-118). The church’s ascetic image is mixed with some richly-decorated architectural details. This mirrors some distinctive aspects of the churches constructed by the Bagratunis in Shirakavan (or Erazgavors) and Oghuzlu, both in Shirak. These powerful aesthetics were developed under the rule of king Abas Bagratuni of Armenia in the 930s–950s. However, a full understanding of the national context of the architecture sponsored by the Bagratunis in the first half of the tenth century is absolutely impossible without mentioning the most impressive church of Surb Khach (Holy Cross), in the island of Aghtamar on lake Van, built by king Gagik Artsruni in the new centre of the Vaspurakan Kingdom in 915-921 (Fig. 3).

This corresponds with the short period of prosperity of the Artsruni kingdom and the long war between the Bagratuni kings and the Caliphate. Chronologically, Surb Khach was built between the construction of the two major cathedrals built by the Bagratuni kings in Shirakavan and Kars. A hiatus in the development of monumental architecture in Bagratid land did not



Fig. 3. Aghtamar, church of Surb Khach. Area of the south-western niche. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2001.

involve the complete interruption of all construction works for three or four decades. Several churches were built in other kingdoms, especially in Syunik and Vaspurakan.

The architectural plan of the palace chapel in Aghtamar, based on the interpretation of the earlier church of Soradir in Vaspurakan (late seventh or late ninth century), is of the tetraconch with corner niches type. The proportions and the outer perimeter of walls, which are divided into elegant vertical facets, were designed by an architect called Manuel. The best-quality sculpture is located on the smooth surfaces of the walls and present different techniques: from flat bar-relief to rather out-projected round sculpture. The reliefs of Aghtamar have no direct analogies in Armenian or Byzantine medieval architecture. Although similar motifs and iconography may be found, no parallels exist for the whole conception implemented by Manuel and his patrons, a spiritual leader and king Gagik. Some of the motifs are present in the courtly arts of Byzantium, the Abbasids, and the Buyids (Jones 2001, 227-30), but these are not the most significant among the Aghtamar reliefs.



Fig. 4. Shirakavan Cathedral. View from the south-west. Photo from the Archive of the History Museum of Armenia, early twentieth century.

The numerous attempts to determine the sources of Manuel's creativity have revolved around the iconography and the decorative programme. However, it seems more important to emphasise that cult buildings as a vehicle of sculptural scenes, the concept of which dates back to Classical antiquity, from the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (c. 353 BC) to the Ara Pacis in Rome (13-9 BC) and triumphal arches, was not realised again before the construction of Aghtamar. The church of Aghtamar conveys the correlate underlying message: that of the triumph of Christianity (Kazaryan 2019).

In many ways, Aghtamar is different from both its contemporaries and the architectural styles that followed. The monuments of Shirak and Syunik illustrate the tenth-century developments.

Also in the early tenth century, Catholicos Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi built a church that was unusual in both composition and decoration in the village of Byurakan; on the one hand, it revived the vaulted basilica type; on the other hand, it recalled the plastic decoration of found in the Dvin and Zvartnots cathedrals – founded by Nerses the Builder in the mid-seventh century (Thierry 1978-1979).

2. OGHUZLU AND SHIRAKAVAN, TWO APPROACHES OF THE REVIVAL OF ECCLESIASTIC ARCHITECTURE IN THE SHIRAK PROVINCE

The first four kings of the Bagratuni family successively resided in Bagaran, Shirakavan, Kars and Ani, where in 961 the coronation ceremony of Ashot III the Merciful took place.

Two large churches were built almost simultaneously in the western sector of Shirak, marking the advent of a new era in the province's architectural development. This was framed by the foundation of an Armenian kingdom by Ashot I Bagratuni (885-890) with the permission of Caliph al-Mu'tamid Billāh.

The cathedral of St Redeemer in Shirakavan (Yerazgavors; now Çamuşluçay) (Fig. 4) was erected by King Smbat I (890-914) near his residence in a village close to the fortress of Tignis, probably after the earthquake of 893 (Donabédian and Thierry 1987, 575). The church was examined by Toramanyan, Strzygowski, and Marr (Marr 1934, 121-23). The dome collapsed in the nineteenth century, and the main body of the church was blown up by the Turkish army in the mid-twentieth



Fig. 5. Shirakavan Cathedral. Remains of the brow of the window. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2013.



Fig. 6. Shirakavan Cathedral. Façade niche. Photo from the Archive of the History Museum of Armenia, early twentieth century.

century (Karapetyan 2015, 38-39). Toramanyan (1942, 312-15, fig. 223-26), who published the plan and photographs of the cathedral, argued that its architecture combined old and new forms; he admiringly describes the ornamented tops of the niches in the eastern and southern façades, the window contours, and the decorated oculi in the southern wall. Thierry (Donabédian and Thierry 1987, 166) notes the similarity of the cathedral's domed hall type to some seventh-century constructions, but also points to two novelties: cameras with apsidioles over *pastophoriae* and niches on three façades. Mnatsakanyan (1981, 176) rightly draws attention to the coincidence of proportions of the plan and its size

with those of Arutch cathedral. This church, dated to the 660s, may have impressed King Ashot I not only owing to its architecture but also to the history of its construction, ordered by the ruling prince of Armenia, Grigor Mamikonyan, during a period in which the country was in fact independent from both the Caliphate and Byzantium. Two hundred years later, the Bagratid dynasty's need to invoke the image and experience of Grigor Mamikonyan to restore the Armenian state may be behind the choice of model for the new cathedral. Moreover, Ashot I was the first king to rule over all Armenia since the end of the Arsacid dynasty in 428, so his aim may have been to adopt the Arsacid model



Fig. 7. Oghuzlu, church. View from the south. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2006.

in his cathedral. At the time, both Ejmiatsin and Dvin cathedrals were in all probability less well preserved than Arutch cathedral, which was also closer.

The cathedral destroyed in the 1950s-1960s can be examined mainly through photographs taken in the early twentieth century, including a general view of the building and some details of the façades, as well as through the measurement of the plan and elevation carried out by Toros Toramanyan, and by Nikoghayos Buniatov in 1914. The interior of the cathedral was spacious and characterful (Cuneo 1977, fig. XXXII b). It differed from Arutch cathedral in the placement of triangular niches not only on the eastern façade but also on the longitudinal ones and the introduction of narrow rectangular windows with decorated frames, a motif that was to spread to Ani. A pair of such windows, with an unusual relief cross between them, presented in the upper section of the southern façade (Donabédian and Thierry 1987, fig. 836). The other windows presented traditional archivolt with arms, the so-called brows. Their decoration is varied and reminiscent of the archivolt above the windows of the drum in Ejmiatsin cathedral (c. 620) (Fig. 5). The niche tops are formed with fan-shaped conical squinches, wide ornamented arches, and brows. Grinded geometric ornaments in the arches were unusual in earlier examples (Fig. 6). Almost a century later, Architect Trdat used such ornaments for the niches in Ani cathedral.

A less studied church is situated in the village of Oghuzlu, approximately 40 km from Kars (Fig. 7). The population of the village was Armenian-speaking until the conquest of the Kars region by Turkey in 1920, when the villagers fled their houses. The current villagers remember that the majestic church was destroyed in the 1950s. A long inscription on the eastern façade declared prince Hasan⁶ Gnt'uni as the builder of the church (not long before AD 895). According to a second inscription, it was restored in 1001 by the "Prince of Princes (*Ishkhanats Ishkhan*)" Ashot Pahlavuni. The triconch inscribed in the rectangle of the outer walls was complemented by a pair of pastophoria with apsidioles, and there were deep niches on both sides of the western arm. The direction of the vaulted ceilings and the structure of the pylons that separated the niches and the transverse exedrae are similar to pylons in churches of the domed hall type. For this reason, the composition of Oghuzlu is regarded as a synthesis of the triconch and the domed hall models. The essential difference lies in the direction of the vaulted ceilings of the niches: in the sides of the west arm in Oghuzlu, they are oriented longitudinally to the building's main axis, as is, uncharacteristically, correctly shown in the plan (Donabédian and Thierry 1987, fig. 802). From the outside, the main body, rectangular in plan, was divided by pairs of deep triangular niches on three façades (all except the western one). Like in Shirakavan cathedral, these niches were inspired by seventh-century 'Golden Age'

⁶ Many Armenian *ishkhans* had Muslim names until the Late Middle Age: Ablgharip Pahlavuni in Ani; Burtel Orbelian, the builder in Noravank; Hasan Jalal, the builder of the Gandzasar monastery.



Fig. 8. Oghuzlu, church. Fragment of the southern façade. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2013.

repertoires. They were designed to give structure to the compositions on the façade and to hint at the internal structure from the outside.

The interior decoration was modest. The main emphasis was placed on the rhythm of the vertically-segmented under-dome supports, which was echoed by the stepped arches. It was the logical continuation of a similar trend in interior decoration in seventh-century examples. The pillow-shaped profiled imposts of the under-dome arches, as well as the horizontal belt course passing around the apse directly under the conch, are particularly interesting. The latter was interpreted as a sort of cornice decorated with weaving zigzag belts, and it resembles some features in Arutch Cathedral, where all the outer cornices were similarly designed.

Like in Shirakavan cathedral, not only windows but also the niches were decorated with ornamented arches and unique brows. Squinches of the niches has a shell-like decoration (Fig. 8). Finally, the gateway, preserved until the 1950s was also richly decorated; besides the ornaments on the archivolts, the lintel was decorated with a relief depicting the enthroned Virgin and Child flanked by horse riders and angels (Donabédian and Thierry 1987, 562, fig. 803). Every detail was lavishly decorated, thoroughly worked out, and – in contrast with the typical simplification of seventh-century architecture – some elements are overflowing with detail. This might have been the result of Abbasid/Buyid artistic influence, vividly represented in the architecture of Middle Eastern Umayyad palaces from the early eighth century onwards (Qaṣr al-Mushatta 743-744; others). Another peculiarity of the Oghuzlu church is that the decorated on its walls were

strictly outlined; nothing violated the traditional restraint and monumentality of Armenian churches.

The photos of the dome of the church in Oghuzlu show that its huge drum presented eight windows and a blind arcade divided into sixteen sections. This elegant solution developed from the idea of the dome expressed in the Talin and Arutch cathedrals (it might have been standing in the ninth century).

3. CHURCHES UNDER KING ABAS BAGRATUNI

The Caliphate toughened its attitude towards the successors of Ashot I, and Smbat I Bagratuni (890-914) and his son Ashot II the Iron (914-928) were forced to wage a difficult war for independence. After the Caliphate recognised Ashot II as king of all Armenia (922), and especially during the reign of his brother Abas (928-953), church-building was resumed.

The churches built during King Abas's reign were different in style to those erected prior to the 930s. They reflected the stark historical context, and were characterised by minimal and simple decoration, while retaining the basic principles of the earlier architectural revival, addressing and rethinking the ideas of the "Golden Age".

The architect of the Apostles Cathedral in Kars (Fig. 9), King Abas's residence, copied the composition and even the size of the church in Mastara (640s) (Thierry 1978). A large monumental and central tetraconch with a wide domed square. The interior is spacious and forms a single, undivided hall. Only the inside and outside shape of the cupola differs from the model set out by Mastara.



Fig. 9. Kars Cathedral. View from the south-west. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2006.



Fig. 10. Kars Cathedral. Fragment of the dome. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2013.

Here, we unexpectedly find the development of the idea of the squinch-pendentive under-dome transition, characteristic of St Hripsime's Church in Vagharshapat (613), and, possibly, Ejmiatsin cathedral, reconstructed in approximately 620 (both in the Ararat Valley). A broad cylindrical drum with twelve evenly spread windows is reminiscent of the Arutch and Talin cathedrals. The external shape of the drum in Kars cathedral is clearly inspired by the external blind arcade decoration in these churches, as well as in that of Zvartnots. The figures of the apostles, laconic and conditional in style, were placed between the archivolts in the blind arcade (Fig. 10).

All the other known churches from the reign of Abas were built in monasteries, which were founded in large numbers under the Bagratids.

The tetraconch idea underlies the earliest construction phase in the Khtskonk Monastery, to the south of Ani (Donabédian 2018-19). Externally, the perimeter of the walls is similar to that in the churches of Mastara and Kars, but the internal structure is different. Additional chapel cameras were inscribed in the corners, and the domed square, which is located at the intersection of the deep arms of the cross, occupies a much smaller space. The design of the high drum goes back to the tradition of the older system, with twisted columns supporting the zig-zag cornice of the umbrella-type roof (Ejmiatsin, Zarnja).

During this period, the architectural type of the domed hall underwent significant changes, shrinking in size and adopting different proportions. A vivid example



Fig. 11. Horomos Monastery, Surb Minas. Interior. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2013.

of this transformation is the church of Surb Minas (or Surb Hovhannes), at the Horomos Monastery, which was used as the Bagratids' burial place. Located on the right bank of the Akhuryan River, a few kilometres from Ani, the monastery played an important role in the development of the spiritual life of the future capital of the kingdom. Notably, other Horomos churches built over the following hundred years developed the ideas of the composition displayed by Surb Minas, and the building's type of domed hall became the most common in the country's medieval monastic architecture (Fig. 11).

The length of Horomos was just over one third that in Arutch and Shirakavank, and the square's outer perimeter was 6.5 times smaller than in Arutch ($8.22 \times 13.15 = 108 \text{ m}^2$ and $19.2 \times 36.35 = 698 \text{ m}^2$). The proportions of the plan were more compact, mainly at the expense of shortening the lengthwise arms of the naos. An important compositional peculiarity in this church, which is clearly visible from the outside, was a shift of the cupola from the middle of the naos westward, where the apse and the arm are linked by one span roof (Baladian and Thierry 2002; Kazaryan 2015).

The oldest church at the Sanahin Monastery in Tashir follows the inscribed cross with four corner cameras

architectural type (Kharpakhchian 1973). The type was new, as it had no precedents in the early Christian period. This type of church, rectangular in plan on the outside and cruciform on the inside, was to become popular in monastic construction. It is worth noting that both Horomos and Sanahin were founded and further sponsored by the Bagratids.

The six-foil church built near the Ani Fortress was also probably erected during the reign of king Abas (Strzygowski 1918, 128-30; Karapetyan 2011, 94-102). It reproduces, in a more simple and somewhat coarse form, the composition of the church by Aragats Station, south of Ani, on the opposite side of the Akhuryan gorge (Turkish: Arpaçay) (Kazaryan 2016). Like its model, the Ani church comprised a two-stage system of conchs over deep arms (Fig. 12). Outside, the large surfaces of the walls were enlivened with relief crosses inscribed in circles, which was a especially popular motif in the fourth and the fifth centuries (Fig. 13). In this regard, the monument closely resembles the Cathedral of the Apostles in Kars and Surb Minas in Horomos, and the similarity of the decoration suggests that the church near the citadel of Ani is dated to the reign of Abas.

Another six-foil church, the so-called Shushanik, was founded (or restored) in the native centre of the clan of Bagratuni, Bagaran, in the tenth century (Nalbandyan, Harutyunyan and Hakobyan 2021). It was smaller and of elegant proportions. The Church of St. Grigor Lusavorich (or the church of Abughamrents), in the New Town of Ani, was built to the same arrangement of the architectural features and the upward-orientation of the interior forms suggest a date in the beginning of the heyday of the Ani school of architecture, and it is reasonable to assume that it was built by Trdat, the architect of the cathedral.

No new compositions were created in this second period of development of the post-Arab era, with the exception of the modernisation monastic church types. However, this was to play a role in the development of monastic architecture during the heyday of the Ani Kingdom (961-1045) and have a decisive impact on the architecture of the thirteenth century, when monasteries were the main centres of architectural development.

Compared with individual architectural forms and ornamentation of details in the churches in Oghuzlu and Shirakavan, where motifs of the seventh century were reproduced fairly accurately and skilfully, the buildings erected during King Abas's reign are characterised by primitivism and several transfer of forms. This applies to portals, blind arcades, profiling and ornamentation of cornices, and window frames. The Church of the Apostles in Kars stands as a typical example. These churches only remotely resemble their seventh-century models. Can this be attributed to the inability of the master builders



Fig. 12. Ani, six-foil church near the Citadel. Interior. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2012.



Fig. 13. Ani, six-foil church near the Citadel. Wall with the crosses. Photo by A. Kazaryan, 2012.

or to the difficulty of processing the basalt in which the Church of the Apostles was built? Probably both, although the factor was probably a new artistic principle, which can tentatively be associated with the ascetic orientation of the culture of the period. It also dominated the architecture of monasteries, especially in the highlands of the Lake Sevan basin.

Another issue is the penetration of exceptionally rare new motifs into the decorative repertoire, which can be associated with the master builder's interpretations of the patterns of Arabic art. Among them was a row of S-shaped elements on the archivolts of the arcature on the drum of the Church of the Apostles.

However, in most motifs, masters retained the traditional forms of Armenian architecture, among which braided forms held a prominent place. Fan-shaped diverging rays in the conical squinches of the outer niches feature in all of the period's churches in Shirak: Oghuzlu, Shirakavan, the oldest church in Horomos, the six-conch near the citadel of Ani, as well as the church of St Paul and Peter at the Tatev Monastery, located in Syunik.

CONCLUSION

The third period of architectural development in the Armenian plateau under Arab rule is an important phenomenon. Overall, monuments built in the lands of the Bagratuni kings during the second half of the ninth

and the first half of the tenth century reflect the broader development of architecture throughout Armenia. This also applies to the compositional principles, which were based on types created by seventh-century architects. Church construction, which was sponsored by the Bagratuni kings, reflects the mood and aspirations of the elites in a period of gradual deliverance from the Arab yoke, an era full of hopes and anxieties.

In the late ninth and the first half of the tenth century, architecture developed greatly after a long period in

which church construction in Abbasid Armenia ground to a complete halt. This architecture laid the path for further development, which, in the second half of the tenth century, led to a new period of splendour in the kingdom of Ani. However, this achievement lay not on the evolution of the architectural achievements of the first half of the tenth century, but, in many regards, on the abandonment of its principles and a focus on both the heritage of the seventh century and the Classical Greek-Roman tradition.

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This book is dedicated to the study of church and monastery constructions during the early centuries of Islam, spanning from post-Sasanian Iraq to Umayyad al-Andalus. It seeks to move beyond the paradigm of an Arab incursion that would immediately freeze the vitality of the Late Antique church, and stop its specific expression: the building of places of worship and convents. While Transjordan experienced a decline that affected most of the population, regardless of their confession, Northern Mesopotamia witnessed an opposite trend of human development, paralleled by the growth of Christian institutions. Textual attestations confirm various archaeological indicators of dynamism inclusive of non-Muslim institutions, especially in Northern Syria, Egypt, and North Africa. While the Middle East began to experience a policy of restrictions and limitations against "new" Christian buildings during the second half of the Second/Eighth century, the recently conquered church of Hispania continued to develop visibly and organise autonomously. Finally, the borderlands of Sicily and Armenia witnessed later and ambivalent developments of Christian institutions that maintained a connection between the *Dar al-Islām* and Byzantine Christendom.



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