Images of Piety or Power? Conserving the Umayyad Royal Narrative in Qusayr ‘Amra

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Abstract This chapter focuses on the work of conservation at the site of Qusayr ‘Amra, a bathhouse located 80 km east of Amman, in Jordan. The site was built by the Umayyad prince Walid b. Yazid during the caliphate of his uncle Hisham, probably between 730 and 743 AD (111–125 H.), and its interior walls are covered by mural paintings. I explore how archaeology and conservation have contributed or interfered with the understanding of the monument, and how authenticity can be defined in a site that has seen at least three major conservation interventions. It will also discuss whether the paintings can really be defined as “Islamic Art,” fitting a narrative of royal power that uses symbols and iconographies that are borrowed from the cultures that preceded the arrival of Islam in the region.

Keywords Wall paintings · conservation · Islamic art · Umayyad dynasty · Jordan

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have been dedicated to the meaning and significance of the mural paintings of Qusayr ‘Amra and to their origin and inspiration.¹ Changes in the appearance of the paintings following conservation work conducted for the past five years are providing information that is bound to change our perspective on early Islamic art in a secular environment.² This chapter looks at the role that conservation has taken in defining the heritage management of this site, especially in terms of managing questions of authenticity, and how this discipline can either contribute to or interfere with our understanding of the original intentions of the patrons and artists that decorated this monument. I will also debate whether the site’s cycle of paintings—although certainly produced under the patronage of an Umayyad prince—can truly be defined as “Islamic art,” and how these paintings fit a narrative of royal power developed during the Umayyad and continuing into the Abbasid caliphate. Finally, I will consider the way that contemporary perceptions toward this monument by the local Bedouin community, Jordanian archaeologists and students, and Muslim visitors further complicate the work of conservation of “Islamic heritage,” suggesting that we consider the implications of our work for a range of nonexpert attitudes as described in this case study.

Qusayr ‘Amra is a magnificent bathhouse built by the Umayyad prince, Walid b. Yazid, during the caliphate of his uncle, Hisham, probably after 730 AD (111 H.) and before becoming caliph himself in 743 AD (125 H.). The building, located in the eastern *badiya* (semi-desert) of Jordan, 80 km east of Amman, is part of a larger complex that includes a *qasr* (palace), a watchtower, complex hydraulic systems, and other unexcavated structures. The paintings contained inside the bathhouse are considered by art historians and archaeologists as an outstanding and unique testimony to early Islamic art, which earned the site its inscription on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) World Heritage List in 1985.

Qusayr ‘Amra is commonly assigned to the broader group of “desert castles,” built during Umayyad times in the semi-arid and desert regions of Syria and Jordan. These structures belong to different typologies—caravanserais, palaces, agricultural estates, and, in rare cases, military structures—thus having various purposes, including political and strategic ones. They offered attractive spaces to engage the chiefs of local Bedouin tribes in political discussions while enjoying leisure activities, ensuring that

relations with them remained firm while strengthening Umayyad power in the region (Arce *in press*; Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007, 13–14). The bathhouse is the main monument building at the site, which displays in its interior a unique cycle of paintings, representing the most extended testimony of figurative art in Umayyad times. They are thus of fundamental importance to disciplinary understandings of the birth and evolution of Islamic art in terms of themes, iconography, and techniques.

The paintings display a rich and articulated iconographic repertoire, where a variety of themes with no apparent unity blend together images, texts, and narratives borrowed from Greek mythology and Sasanian traditions, as well as Byzantine-style portraits, hunting scenes, depictions of animals and birds, court scenes, dances, and even a reference to the Prophet Jonah. The building opens on a main audience hall, parted in three longitudinal aisles, each covered with a vaulted roof and decorated by paintings. The decoration here is divided in two registers: a lower register, from the ground floor to a height of approximately 1.8 meters, and an upper register, up to the top of the walls and also including the vaults. The lower register is characterized by paintings representing marble slabs and *opus sectile*.³ The upper register hosts a variety of scenes from leisure activities to professional tasks and possibly political engagements. A so-called throne room displays on its south wall a representation of a prince seated under a baldachin. In the main hall, a small opening on the eastern side of the room leads to the bath complex, characterized by a small changing room (*apodyterium*) with a barrel vault, a warm room (*tepidarium*) with a cross vault, and a hot room (*caldarium*) with a dome. All these rooms are decorated with mural paintings in the upper part of the walls and ceilings; the lower parts were originally covered with marble slabs, and, in the *caldarium*, also with wall mosaics, all of which have disappeared.⁴ Walls in the main hall feature a number of Arabic Kufic inscriptions: a *basmala* (Imbert as cited in De Palma et al. 2012, 335–336),⁵ and a second inscription that was discovered as part of conservation work in 2012, which contains the name of the prince that commissioned the building, Walid b. Yazid, who became caliph in 743.⁶ Cleaning work also revealed images, including a completely naked swimming naiad and a boat with fishermen pulling up a net full of fish (Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007, Pl. 31). This is not the only example of naked or bare-chested female figures, and these are not exclusively found in Qusayr ‘Amra, as they are also present in decorative stuccoes in Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi and Khirbet el-Mafjar (Fowden 2004a, 72–73). Despite these potentially contradicting features,

the inscription of this site in the World Heritage List in 1985 recognized the uniqueness of the paintings and their role in the formation of “Islamic art.”

CONSERVATION AT QUSAYR ‘AMRA: REVEALING THE AUTHENTIC?

The uniqueness of Qusayr ‘Amra as a conservation site lies in the relatively good state of preservation of its mural paintings. This may be due to a series of factors: the remoteness of the area where the site is located, the use of the building as a shelter by the Bedouin tribes of the region, and the layers of soot generated by campfires lit in its interior that contributed to protecting the paintings from deterioration or vandalism. Moreover, some graffiti left on the walls by pilgrims and travelers between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries seem to indicate a certain respect for the site and the mysterious representations that must have fascinated the travelers who stopped there on their way to Mecca. The first substantial conservation effort was conducted between 1974 and 1975, by a team from the Madrid Archaeological Museum. The cleaning of the site revealed many more details than what Musil and the painter Mielich had recorded in their short survey of the site in 1901, when they also used some hard chemicals in order to see the paintings below the soot layers, resulting in some damage. Moreover, in order to enhance the figures, the Spanish conservators decided to outline their profiles with new paint, in some cases adding details, without documenting or announcing this intervention. This work (Almagro Basch et al. 1975), a French-Jordanian project conducted between 1989 and 1995 (Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007), and the most recent conservation project that started in 2010 that has taken advantage of advances in conservation methods and tools, have together transformed—in some cases quite radically—our understanding and interpretation of the figures represented on the walls of the monument (De Palma et al. 2012; De Palma 2013).

Four Arabic inscriptions have so far been identified in Qusayr ‘Amra, and they provide us with a clear indication of the owner of the building: Walid b. Yazid. However, only the one recently rediscovered on top of the western aisle’s south wall mentions him explicitly by name. The inscription found on the baldachin of the throne (in the so-called throne room) is a simple invocation mentioning the prince as the heir apparent (Imbert 2007). The third inscription, on top of the south wall of the eastern aisle of the main hall, references David and Abraham. The fourth inscription, located below a scene representing the prince and his attendants on the south wall of the western aisle, is the largest and framed in a *tabula ansata*.⁷ Conservation work confirmed this to be a *basmala*, written in very large characters. With the

Fig. 6.1 Two of the “kings” before and after conservation. The 1975 intervention did not allow the perception of the “real” quality of the paintings (Photographs by Gaetano Palumbo, 2012)

exception of the *basmala*, all other inscriptions begin with *Allahumma* (O Allah), each asking God to provide blessing, forgiveness, or virtue to the prince. The one asking for virtue is associated with the representation of the Prophet Jonah just below it, and on the same wall we have the prince attended by a scribe, a servant, and two children who are perhaps his sons. Conservation of this scene revealed the character in the center of the composition to be a portrait of al-Walid, himself, and not a woman, as almost all scholars had previously supposed (De Palma et al. 2012, 175ff.; Fowden 2004a).

The field of conservation tackles this site in terms of the challenge of managing issues of authenticity, as each modern intervention left a trace on top of the original layers. Conservation principles consider that newer interventions can rightly claim to have revealed paintings closest to the original, but modern interventions have also modified the conditions of the building and its paintings. While the 1975 “enhancements” caused wrong attribution and interpretation—even causing several scholars to declare that the paintings were not of great quality (Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007, 7)—the latest conservation work is now calling into question the interpretation and understanding of the areas of the monument that remain to be cleaned, reevaluating the artists’ technical skills and the background that brought them to create this masterpiece (Fig. 6.1).

IS THE ART OF QUSAYR ‘AMRA “ISLAMIC”?

The complexity of the iconography found in Qusayr ‘Amra has provided grounds for debate among art historians and archaeologists since the site was published by Musil in the early twentieth century, and contributes to

the debate on what it means to speak of “Islamic art.” While Grabar (1973, 2) has argued that “Islamic art” does not define religion, but rather, a cultural movement that modifies and spreads over local traditions, Wijdan Ali (1999) considers that the appropriation of motifs and symbols derived from other cultures and the term “Islamic” are not in contradiction. According to Ali (1999, 13), Islamic art

can include any artistic manifestation created by a Muslim or non-Muslim artist that adheres to Islamic aesthetics, principles and concepts, and that is created for the spiritual, intellectual, and physical usage and enjoyment of Muslims or non-Muslims living within the sphere of Islamic thought and civilization.

This broader definition of “Islamic art” includes, especially for the early centuries of Islam, all the artistic traditions with which Muslims entered into contact and from which they chose, according to Ali, whatever suited their taste and beliefs. On the issue of figurative representations, Ali (1999, 14–15) insists on the fact that the two sayings attributed to Mohammed forbidding figurative representations were intended to discourage idolatry in places of worship, and did not mean a total ban of this artistic form, referring in particular to the miniature artistic tradition of Iran, Afghanistan, India, and Ottoman Turkey. In addition, in their extensive essay fittingly entitled “The Mirage of Islamic Art,” Blair and Bloom (2003, 152) consider that most Islamic art was not made for the purposes of the faith, citing a lack of evidence to support the claim that artists and patrons would have called the art they produced “Islamic.” They consequently argue that the notion of an “Islamic” tradition in the arts and architecture in places where Islam was the main religion is a Western construct—a product of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scholarship (Blair and Bloom 2003, 153). Within a Western perspective, then, the art of Qusayr ‘Amra is Islamic, given that it is the product of artists who clearly worked under the patronage of an Umayyad prince, and who used iconographic motifs that were readily available in the common repertoire of late antique art—especially Byzantine and Sasanian—to celebrate the power of the Umayyads. However, if the term “Islamic” is used to indicate not religion, but rather, the influence that Islam has on all aspects of life in the Muslim world, then it becomes more difficult to justify the presence and categorization of so many non-Islamic elements in the wall paintings of this monument. In this perspective, the art of Qusayr ‘Amra may not be “Islamic” after all but may rather

represent a phenomenon of acculturation or cultural appropriation by the Umayyads, used to reinforce their claims over newly conquered lands through the deployment of symbols and iconographies that were still well known and remembered from previous narratives of power.

An example of this process is the presence of Jonah that was revealed by conservation work at different locations among the mural paintings of Qusayr ʿAmra (Fig. 6.2). This intriguing feature raises the question of whether this composition makes reference to the virtue that the prince would like God to help him achieve.

Before conservation work clearly revealed this feature on the south and north walls of the western aisle, only a small scene under the throne of the prince on the back wall of the throne room was visible, representing Jonah being thrown into the sea with a marine monster approaching.⁸ Jonah's story is found both in the Bible and in the Qur'an, and the presence of the prophet in proximity to the prince not once, but twice, certainly carries symbolic value.⁹ Fontana (2012) sees this as a demonstration of the fact that early Islam needed "to relate its origin to a universal past, replacing

Fig. 6.2 One of the numerous representations of Prophet Jonah found in Qusayr ʿAmra (Photograph by Gaetano Palumbo, 2012)

Judaism and Christianity, but as a new sponsor of God's legacy and speaking the same language." What remains unclear, however, is why the artists decided to paint these episodes in three different locations in the building rather than in a logical sequence.

Imbert (*in press*) argues that the inscriptions at Qusayr 'Amra should not be seen in association with the paintings; rather, he argues that together with the paintings, they provide an intimate portrait of al-Walid and give a glimpse of his aspirations to power. Fowden (2004a), on the other hand, looks at Qusayr 'Amra's paintings through the lens of Arab ode poetry (*qasida*), arguing that

all [paintings] were...loosely linked together by the architectural framework that contained them, and by a general theme of princely panegyric or at least celebration of princely life. The resemblance to the qa[si]da extended, in other words, beyond the shared themes of love, hunting, and panegyric...to embrace also a fundamental structural affinity.

This is illustrated in the *qasida* "panel" structure, which is also how the paintings in Qusayr 'Amra can be described. However, Fowden (2004a, 315) concludes that the paintings at the site "attest a rather advanced stage of Mediterranean inculturation (sic) on the part of the Umayyad patron and his immediate circle."

Alami (2011, 69) is convinced instead that there is a strict and unequivocal relationship between early Islamic architecture and the principles of Arabic theory of language and poetics. The symbolic association between *qasida* (praise hymns) and *madih* (panegyrics), palatial architecture and use of space, and continuous references to Bacchic culture (including wine poetry and sexual references) are arguments used by Ali (2008) to support the idea that Abbasid caliphs adopted a henotheistic position to enforce their power through the definition of sacred kingship and the acceptance of ancient Near Eastern models of authority. In this perspective, we must look at numerous Dionysian references (e.g., vines, grapes, panthers, music, dances) in the paintings of Qusayr 'Amra,¹⁰ and I would argue that they should be seen not as a sign of al-Walid's eccentricity or interest in the Classical world but rather as part of a symbolic repertoire of themes and motifs that support the image of the caliph's power (Fig. 6.3).

Against the doctrine that took shape in the early centuries of Sunni Islam, in which the caliph should be an elected steward of the Muslim community

Fig. 6.3 Standing figure holding a basket of grapes, flanked by a feline (a panther?)—perhaps a representation of Dionysus (Photograph by Gaetano Palumbo, 2014)

and successor of the Prophet, the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties used the title *Khalifat Allah* (successor to God) to imply a notion of kingship (Al-Azmeh 2001, 74–77; Crone and Hinds 2012, 11–16). Marsham (2009) thinks that the references to Adam, Abraham, and David—all found on the south-facing walls and thereby facing Mecca—are particularly relevant for al-Walid’s claim of a covenant between the Umayyad dynasty and God himself. In early Qur’anic exegesis, Adam is humanity’s representative in taking the first covenant with God, Abraham is the founder of Islam, and while David is the king chosen by God.

The painting of the “six kings” on the western wall of the main hall of Qusayr ‘Amra (Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007, Pl. 28),¹¹ together with the image of the enthroned prince on the southern wall of the “throne room” (Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007, Pl. 15), is perhaps the clearest political statement used by al-Walid (Fig. 6.4).¹²

Fig. 6.4 The so-called Six Kings panel, either representing the kings defeated by the Umayyads, the six regions of the Earth, or the recipients of Prophet Mohammad's embassies (Photograph by Gaetano Palumbo, 2013)

The kings are clearly represented with their hands turned towards their right, in the act of paying respect. The recent discovery that the main figure represented in the scene to the right of the kings is male (and not female, as previously thought) confirms the idea that the kings are indeed honoring the prince, as maintained by some scholars (Fowden 2004a; Grabar 1954, 1980). Earlier interpretations (Creswell 1932) saw in this scene a representation of the kings defeated by the Umayyads, based on Musil's (1907) interpretation of the second king from the left as Roderic, the Visigoth king of Hispania defeated by the Umayyads in the battle of

Guadalete in 712 AD (93 H.). Grabar's (1954) view is that this scene finds its roots in the Sasanian tradition of the "Kings of the Earth," with the Umayyads claiming to be "the descendant and heir of the dynasties it had defeated." Fowden (2004a, 197–226, 2004b) wrote extensively on the topic, reaching the conclusion that this representation of "six kings" (plus a seventh, the prince, or rather the Umayyad dynasty) finds its inspiration in the Sasanian conception of the Empire in the center of the earth surrounded by six geopolitical regions (India and Sub-Saharan Africa, Arabia, North Africa and Spain, Rum, Turkic Central Asia, and China), which in his opinion correspond to the kings represented in the painting. This Sasanian worldview would have then been appropriated by the Umayyads for their own definition of kingship. Di Branco (2007) thinks instead that this scene is a reference to the sending of embassies by Mohammed to the "six kings of the Earth" in the year 6 H (628 AD), and in particular to the Byzantine Caesar, the Sasanian Chosroe, the Abyssinian Negus, the Egyptian Muqawqis (the Coptic patriarch), the Ghassanid philarch (al-Harit b. Abi Simr), and the lord of Yamamah (Hawdah b. Ali al-Hanafi). If Di Branco's hypothesis is correct, why should they be paying homage to al-Walid? Did the artists perhaps intend to have the kings pointing to the large *basmala* inscription, which is also located just to the left of the kings' figures? In this case, the kings would be represented as recognizing the truth of Allah's word and the authority of Mohammed as his representative. This interpretation may not be so far-fetched: Although Walid b. Yazid did not enjoy a good reputation,¹³ recent interpretation credits him with theologically significant innovations, especially with respect to the role of the caliph as Allah's representative. According to Judd (2008),

[Walid b. Yazid] cannot be dismissed as a drunken playboy or a reckless failure as caliph. Instead, despite his obvious faults, he was theologically literate and formulated doctrinal foundations for even his most egregious actions. While he may have been the Umayyad family's most pernicious sinner, he may also have been their most competent religious thinker.

As Qusayr 'Amra's patron, Walid b. Yazid undoubtedly left a clear mark on the paintings. However, contrary to some interpretations, they are not the illustration of his hedonism or are they there to fulfill one person's "dream." Rather, they perfectly fit the Umayyad narrative of power, drawing elements from Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian

repertoires and ideals that best described the Umayyad worldview, and especially its notion of kingship.¹⁴ These elements were re-elaborated into a new visual paradigm, which resulted in Qusayr ‘Amra as the most complete expression of the Umayyad concept of *Khalifat Allah*.

WHAT CAN QUSAYR ‘AMRA DO FOR “ISLAMIC HERITAGE”?

Beyond an art historical interpretation of the site that is carried out in conjunction with conservation interventions, the recent development of a site management plan at Qusayr ‘Amra further complicates the issue of how to interpret the site’s imagery. This management plan was conducted in consultation with the local community, the Bani Sakhr Bedouin tribe. As part of the planning process, seminars and activities were also organized for students from the Faculty of Heritage and Tourism at the Hashemite University in Zarqa, including the use of formal interviews with tourists visiting the site. An interesting split was noticed between these different demographics. The local community had an understanding of the antiquity of the site and of its origin as a place belonging to a Muslim prince, but for them the value of the place was associated with the natural environment, which includes a *wadi* (valley) rich in water during winter and spring, and a growth of ancient terebinth trees, where one could find excellent pasture and hunting grounds (it is important to note in this regard that the themes of hunting and water are a constant presence in the paintings of Qusayr ‘Amra). The monument in their perception is an accessory that is conducive to the persistence of their traditional mode of life and production in a particular environment. This engagement with stakeholders strongly suggests that, despite changes in the interpretation of the “Islamic art” of Qusayr ‘Amra, the site does not have an “Islamic” value for some groups. The local intellectual community, instead, feels strongly that the monument is part of an “Islamic” heritage, although not in a religious, but rather in a political sense. Archaeologists and art historians, in contrast, are excited about the new discoveries derived from the conservation activities, as they provide new data on the evolution of artistic techniques and figurative motifs in the first centuries of Islamic power in the region (pers. comm.).

Most Muslim visitors did not seem to have problems with the representations found on the walls of Qusayr ‘Amra, as they seemed willing to trace a distinction between public and private spaces, although some of them were perplexed at the presence of a *basmala* under the image of the

prince and his attendants. But also in this case they were seeing this as a historic site, with little bearing on religious matters or Islam. The students that assisted in the project and their professors were from different regions of Jordan, not from the local Bedouin community. Several of them expressed strong opposition to defining this monument "Islamic." Some, following a more rigid interpretation of the Qur'an, thought that the figurative representations depicted on the monument could not qualify as "Islamic art," and while the monument may have belonged to Walid b. Yazid (who is still seen in a very negative light by many Muslims), they were convinced that it must have been decorated by Christian artists. Others, however, held a more liberal attitude, in line with the approach of the majority of archaeologists, and did not have any issue with considering the art "Islamic," and the monument an excellent example of a heritage ("their" heritage) reaching far back to the origins of Islam in the region.

Attitudes and perceptions toward this monument among the Jordanian and, in general, Muslim communities, display an entire spectrum of opinions and preconceptions, ranging from a definite attribution to the sphere of "Islamic art" (with the additional value of being one of the monuments where the formation of "Islamic art" can be studied), to a variegated acceptance of it also as "Islamic heritage," to a total rejection of it being Islamic on the basis of what are perceived as blasphemous contents. These examples show that, especially for the formative period of Islam, contemporary Muslim societies are split on the value systems that should be adopted to understand and explain apparent contradictions in the way early Muslim societies approached the matter of artistic representation. This is also partly due to Western scholarship, which has imposed categories that may not properly reflect the relationships between the private and the public sphere in Muslim societies across time. A disjunction between the public and the intellectual elite is also at play here, as the latter has not been able to inform and interest the public in the depth and complexity of Islamic heritage beyond simplistic and reductive understandings. In the case of Qusayr 'Amra specifically, and with respect to the figurative arts produced in an Islamic context more generally, it is perhaps useful to speak of "Islamic heritage(s)," in order to maintain, on one hand, the idea that Islam does permeate all aspects of life, including artistic expressions, and on the other hand, to admit that within Islam there are groups that look at heritage through lenses that are not exclusively focused on Islamic principles and dogmas.

NOTES

1. See especially Almargo Basch et al., *Qusayr 'Amra: Residencia y baños en el desierto de Jordania*; Blázquez Martínez, *Las Pinturas Helenísticas de Qusayr 'Amra (Jordania) y sus Fuentes*; Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*; Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*; Fowden and Fowden, *Studies in Hellenism, Christianity and the Ummayyads*; Grabar, *The Paintings at Qusayr Amrah: The Private Art of an Umayyad Prince*; Musil, *Kuseir 'Amra*; and Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Qusayr 'Amra: Un Bain Omeyyade dans la Bâdiya Jordanienne*.
2. Conservation work at Qusayr 'Amra has been conducted since 2010, by a team of Italian conservators from the *Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro* (ISCR—Higher Institute for Conservation and Restoration) in partnership with the World Monuments Fund (WMF) and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.
3. *Opus sectile* refers to an ancient and medieval art technique in which cut stones of various types and shapes are set in walls and floors in order to make pictures or patterns.
4. For a comprehensive documentation and description of this monument, see the work published by Vibert Guigue and Bisheh (2007). High-resolution photographs of all the paintings were taken by the recent conservation mission and will be made available to the public in the near future on the websites of the ISCR at: <http://www.icr.beniculturali.it> and the WMF at: <https://www.wmf.org/project/qusayr-amra>.
5. A *Basmala* is the name of the Islamic phrase “*b-ismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*,” meaning “In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.”
6. The inscription cannot be read in its entirety, but in fragments only. The first of its three lines, however, does not leave any doubts as to the name of Walid b. Yazid. Imbert (as cited in De Palma et al. 2012, 332–333) proposes a first reading as being, “O God, make al-Walid bin Yazid virtuous the way you did with your pious servants! Surround him with the freshness of mercy, O Lord of the Worlds, and for your community, eternal . . . the religion the day of . . . all the . . .” A second reading is proposed in a new article (Imbert 2016, 332), where the second and third lines are given a slightly different meaning. The first line containing the name of the prince is confirmed in the second reading. As the inscription does not contain any reference to al-Walid already being caliph, we can date the building to the years when he was the heir apparent under the reign of his uncle, Hisham. Two C-14 dates, obtained from charcoal found in the *caldarium* and *tepidarium* of the bath, date the building and its use to the year 730 AD ± 20, thus confirming the epigraphic evidence (De Palma 2013, 427).

7. A *tabula ansata* is a tablet with dovetail handles, and in Roman and Byzantine contexts contained votive or dedicatory inscriptions; it is not rare in Islamic contexts as well (Blair 1992, 18–19; Fowden 2004a, 178; Sharon 1999, 54).
8. Most of this scene was detached by Musil in 1902 and is now at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.
9. On the left, the Prophet Jonah is represented above the figure of the prince, in a pensive pose, while on the right he is represented as sleeping under a tree—a reference to an episode narrated in the Bible in which he falls asleep after having failed to convert the people of Nineveh, and God makes a gourd tree grow so as to provide him with shade (Book of Jonah, Chapter 4, verses 5–6). In the Qurʾan (Sura 37, as-Saffat, 146), Allah makes the gourd tree grow “above him” on the beach where the marine monster casts him out (De Palma et al. 2012, 330–331, figs. 22–24). On the opposite wall, Jonah is represented as being swallowed by a marine monster and subsequently cast on the beach (Book of Jonah, chapter 4; Qurʾan, Sura 37, as-Saffat, verses 142–145.)
10. See, for example, the recently discovered painting of a panther besides the lower part of a standing figure holding a basket full of grapes on the vault of the western aisle (Figure 6.3), or the representation of Dionysus discovering Ariadne sleeping on a beach in Naxos, on the western lunette of the *apodyterium* (Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007, Pl. 64, left).
11. Inscriptions above the heads of the kings qualify at least three of them as kings or emperors: the Byzantine Caesar, the Sasanian Chosroe, and the Negus of Abissinia.
12. This representation finds interesting parallels in Byzantine iconography, such as Adam sitting on a throne in a Syrian mosaic (Fowden 2004a, 136), and in innumerable early Christian representations of Christ *Pantocrator* (i.e., “Ruler of All Things”).
13. Judd (2008) describes how Walid b. Yazid was vilified in Abbasid propaganda and taken as an example of Umayyad excesses.
14. According to Canepa (2009, 224), “The private appropriation of Roman and Sasanian cosmocratic ideals by the Umayyad elite provided the raw material for their eclectic imaginings of power, initiating a process of reinvention and reinvigoration that coalesced on a more public stage with the Abbasids and their successor states.”

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