

HIAA SYMPOSIUM 2008: “*SPACES AND VISIONS*”

University of Pennsylvania

Program (as of May 5, 2008)

DAY 1 (October 16, 2008)

Theme: “Out of Late Antiquity”

Keynote speaker: Alan Walmsley, University of Copenhagen

Archaeology, Materiality, and Meaning in Things: Formative Processes in the First Islamic Centuries

Archaeology in the last thirty years has inundated Islamic studies with huge amounts of raw data, but with it only sporadic analysis and even less explanation, especially that accessible to the non-specialist. This situation has both clarified and complicated matters enormously. The problem is not only with the volume of data, which will (as always in archaeology) take what seems to be an inexplicably long time to appear in print, but also the very nature of that material: what questions can (and can not) be asked of it, its applied uses in formulating cultural history, the often intellectual obfuscation that haunts archaeological analysis, and how such approaches and results relate – if at all – with past and current studies in Islamic art. Adding to the confusion is the blatant unreliability of earlier archaeological work in the Middle East, especially that dealing with the formative Islamic periods, an outcome of the often accidental nature of the discoveries and the disinterest, if not neglect, of the excavators. Hence the archaeology of Islam, especially early Islam, has struggled to free itself from a sadly tainted chapter in the history of the discipline, while seeking connectivity to contemporary trends in approaching the history of art.

With the above in mind, this paper sets out to evaluate the contribution of, and understanding derived from, the last thirty years of archaeology in the Middle East, especially that undertaken in Bilād al-Shām. The abandonment of conventional art historical approaches, long unfashionable in archaeology, have encouraged the adoption of more contemporary methodologies that are more compatible with the new types of data produced by archaeological research. In turn, these developments have influenced the nature of archaeological investigation at Islamic-period sites (mostly). To some, this advance has created a certain intellectual distancing between archaeology and art history, but that perceived disparity is considerably more apparent than real. Modern intellectual discourse permits, indeed encourages (requires?), a multiplicity of approaches to achieve a common objective, in this case a deeper, more encompassing, and more meaningful understanding of the formation and development of Islamic society and culture. Not only are fresh perspectives brought to bear on long-standing issues, such as urban continuity and change or the intention(s) and function(s) of the ‘desert palaces’ of Bilād al-Shām, but completely new questions have been formulated, and are currently being addressed, on matters as diverse as the development of economic systems, material culture as an agent of social change (not just a passive reflection of it), evolving dietary practices, religious interaction, and changes to the natural and human environment. Some instances of recent developments in these fields will be discussed in the context of this paper. From these perspectives, a clear argument can be made for general compatibility – even an

accelerating convergence – of contemporary practice in archaeology and art history, especially from the perspective of theoretical approaches. Hence, there is a great deal of common ground between the two disciplines if archaeologists and art historians actively seek and emphasize that which is shared, and not what separates (or, better, defines) us.

Session 1.1

Session Leader: Alastair Northedge, Université de Paris

Session Topic: *The Relationship of Archaeology and Art at the Beginning of Islam*

Speakers' Abstracts and Bios:

Yumna Masarwa, Paris

Early Islamic Military Architecture: The Umayyad Ribats of Palestine

The Islamic conquest of the Levant itself during the 40's of the 7th century was the foundation stone of the establishment of the Islamic frontier defense system. During this conquest, the inexperience of the Muslims in seafaring made it necessary to develop a military defense system in the coastal cities of Palestine in order to protect the coastline against the Byzantines, who hoped to have a chance to regain it. Consequently, a new type of military architecture was introduced in this region, and that is the *ribatat*. The development of the Islamic military defense system in the coastal cities of Palestine went through three stages, which depended on the progress of the Islamic conquest of *al-Sham* (633-648), as well as on the Byzantine attacks on these cities. The first stage took place in the time of Umar b. al-Khattab (634-644), the second stage happened in the reign of Uthman b. Affan (644-656), and the third stage occurred in the Umayyad period (661-750), during which an organized *ribat* defense system was born on the Palestinian coast. By using literary sources and archaeological evidence, this paper discusses the major efforts undertaken by the Muslim caliphs during these three stages to defend the Palestinian coastline.

Eva Hoffman, Tufts University

The Samarra Dancers: Evidence for the Definition of an Abbasid Style

Since the publication of the corpus of Samarra wall paintings by Ernst Herzfeld in 1927, the Samarra Dancers have arguably become the most familiar, iconic works of Abbasid painting. The images of the Dancers have been used to support the claim of a new Abbasid dynastic style that broke with the western dominated Graeco-Roman visual tradition of their Umayyad predecessors and reoriented their Abbasid identity toward the traditions of the East, most directly the Persian, Sasanian heritage.

While definitive conclusions regarding the Samarra wall paintings ultimately must await the full study of all of the extant fragments, I contend that following the publication of Herzfeld's corpus of paintings, the repeated reproduction and analysis of Herzfeld's

colored drawings of the Dancers in the art historical scholarship have promoted the definition of an eastern orientation for Abbasid painting. I will argue that by analyzing the painting fragments and photographs alongside the drawings it is possible to reassess the style of Abbasid painting and tell a different story. The Abbasids did not turn their backs on Umayyad visual traditions. A careful examination of the evidence will point to more fluid boundaries and a plurality of continuities with pre-Islamic and Umayyad art, both east and west. The dismantling of the dominance of an eastern trajectory in defining Abbasid art will, furthermore, destabilize altogether the east-west binary through which the relationship between Umayyad and Abbasid art has been framed.

Ian Straughn, Brown University

Common Ground: Landscape emplacement and the art and archaeology of early Islamic Bilad al-Sham

When early Muslims began to organize a new society in the territories of the former Byzantine and Sasanian empires one of the major challenges that they faced was not from the armies or conquered peoples themselves but from the landscape. Indeed, al-Muqadassi notes that in the building of the great Mosque of Damascus al-Walid's was fundamentally an effort to divert the attention of Muslims from the attractive places still inhabited by the indigenous communities with which the new umma was to contend. Under the predominating division of labor between an art historical focus on the imperial aesthetics of architecture and the archaeological concern with questions of urban planning and the model for the Islamic city, the question of landscape, its transformation, and the theologico-political matrix of its production – particularly in the region of Bilad al-Sham in the earliest Islamic period – has lacked a coherent theoretical and methodological synthesis. This paper seeks to provide the conceptual and empirical underpinnings for synthesizing an approach to early Islamic landscape production by drawing on the growing body of literature within archaeology, human geography and anthropology that treats the landscape within the frame of Heideggerian considerations of dwelling. With the landscape so positioned as the object of study a new common ground can emerge between the archaeological record, the historical record and the art object that situates material culture more generally as key to understanding the practices of dwelling and how they are negotiated within a context of cultural contact. The site of Qinnasrin/Chalcis in northern Syria serves to demonstrate how material processes of landscape production variously employed strategies of appropriation, abrogation and accommodation within an emplaced narrative of past and present.

Ian Straughn's research and teaching interests focus on the emerging study of the archaeology of the Muslim World. This work was first developed while a graduate student in Anthropology at the University of Chicago and has continued as a member of the Joukowsky Institute faculty. More specifically his work has concentrated on understanding how Muslim societies have been shaped by the landscapes which they have constructed and conceived and by their relationship to the material world. A major aspect of his research has consisted of developing a methodology for bringing the archaeological and textual records into a productive dialogue about past societies.

Additionally, Straughn's work has sought to understand the relationship of materiality to religious experience and the place of archaeology in the study of religion.

Mattia Guidetti, Venice

The Early Islam in Front of the Byzantine Churches

In the last years an increasing number of Christian foundations dated after the VII century Islamic conquest has been revealed (Di Segni 2003; Walmsley 2007). New discoveries and reinterpretations of existing material allow the scholars to build up a more accurate description of the early Islamic society, in which, at least in the area formerly belonging to the Byzantine empire, the Christians were the majority of the population (Heyberg 2000). Meanwhile, in the literary field, the genre of the *kutub al-diyarat* could be seen to represent one possible cultural trace of relationships between the Muslim élites and the Christian monastic foundations in the rural areas (Troupeau 1975; Kilpatrick 2003).

Within this larger context, my paper would like to discuss the role of the Byzantine cathedrals in the Syrian and northern Mesopotamian conquered cities during the early Islamic period. With the exception of the Holy Sepulchre, their presence has been largely overlooked in the traditional explanation of the early Islamic culture. The extremely vague idea of the partition of their spaces with the Muslim believers, as it appears repeatedly in the manuals of Islamic art, has prevented deeper studies about their fate. One preliminary step would be to recognize that, for the most part, the urban Byzantine churches were in use up to the XI-XII century, and that the idea of partition seems unlikely because it is not supported by any decisive evidence, neither archaeological nor literary. This common opinion, therefore, needs to be completely redefined. Their continued existence after the VII century conquest however is not only important for the eastern Christian history and culture, but could shed a light on the processes of formation of Islamic art. To include in the "discourse" on Islamic art the new founded churches and these built before the conquest but still in use after it would be the second required step in the understanding and appreciation of their real value at that time.

In the first instance, the paper will focus on the different patterns of the Arab-Muslim settlement in Mesopotamia and in Syria. In the latter it seems that the "weight" of the conquered cities played a more decisive role than in former. See, for instance, the absence in Syria of cities like al-Kufa and al-Basra, and the importance of Damascus, Jerusalem, al-Rusafa and Harran only to name some. (In this sense I disagree with the relevance assigned by Whitcomb to the role of new Islamic urban foundations in the works on Qinnasrin and Ayla). Secondly, in challenging the idea of a "partition" of the churches, I will try to show how in the process of building the first prayer halls and mosques within the conquered cities there was a precise strategy toward the extant Christian cathedrals. The most of the new Muslim places of worship, in fact, were built beside or in front of the main churches of the cities, sometimes by confiscating part of their land property but always preserving their place of worship. Although it is possible that in southern Bilad al-Sham the pattern was slightly different (cf. Bosra and Jarash), it is however clear how the case of the destruction of St John's church of Damascus –

whose prayer hall however was not partitioned (cf. Donner 2002-3) – was an exception (Guidetti, forthcoming). Lastly,, I would like to offer some reflections on the role these churches and, in particular, their architectural elements such as columns and marble, eventually played in the construction of the early Islamic visual culture. A new formulation of the “reuse” of both structural and decorative architectural pieces will be suggested: the early Islamic period, in fact, offers a basically different attitude when compared to the better known and debated medieval practice (Raby 2004) to which it has been assimilated sometimes. (Greenhalgh 2007).

Based on published archaeological material and literary sources, the paper would like to show how the study of the Christian places of worship located within the caliphate belongs entirely to the study of Islamic civilization. The urban Byzantine churches, real, living and “physical” cultural traces of Byzantium, were the obligatory mirror the new mosques were facing. (cf. Flood 2001). Eventually the material relationship with the Christian churches could become a point of reference for the studying of the development of the Islamic art in this area until the major turning point of the XI-XII centuries (Rogers 1973; al-Tabbaa 1993 and 2001).

Mattia Guidetti has obtained in 2006 his PhD at “Ca’ Foscari” University in Venice in Oriental Studies. His dissertation analysed patterns of continuity and change in art and urbanism between the world of Late Antiquity and Early Islam in the greater Syria area with a special emphasis on the Christian Arab population across the Islamic conquest. A parallel research has been conducted on the city of Edessa/al-Ruha/Urfa postulating the different phases in the relationship between churches and mosques during the Islamic middle ages, and in a broader sense the extent to which the Byzantine churches could have been involved in the early development of the Islamic artistic language. He was an Aga Khan fellow at Harvard University (2007 -2008), and holds a J. P. Getty post-doctoral fellowship (2008-9). His publications include: “The Byzantine Heritage in Dar al-Islam: Churches and Mosques in al-Ruha between the VI and the XII century”. *Forthcoming in Muqarnas*; “Churches and Mosques in the cities of Bilad al-Sham: coexistence and transformation of the urban fabric ”, in N. Rabbat ed., *Early Islamic Urbanism*, (Boston: Brill, *forthcoming*); “Problemi di ermeneutica nell’iconografia umayyade: Qusayr ‘Amra e Khirbat al-Mafgar”, (with G. Macchiarella), in A. Calzona ed., *Scritti in onore del prof. Quintavalle*, (Milano: Electa, 2007): 53-64; “L’antico in due edifici siriani medievali. La formazione dell’arte musulmana e il suo rapporto con l’antico: la Siria del XII secolo”, in C.A. Quintavalle ed., *Atti del VII Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Parma 21-25 settembre 2004*, (Milano: Electa, 2007): 11-9. He edited the book *Siria*, (collection of essays about the Syrian history), (Milan: Jaca Book, 2006).

Session 1.2

Session Leader: Jonathan M. Bloom, Boston College/Virginia Commonwealth University

Session Topic: *Fatimid Art*

Speakers’ Abstracts and Bios:

Alison Gascoigne, University of Southampton
Archaeology of the Fatimid Period

Much scholarly attention has focused on the undoubtedly important excavations in Fustat over the last half century. With the growth of Islamic archaeology as a discipline, however, recent and ongoing survey and excavation work has focused at a number of sites outside the capital. This paper aims to outline a range of archaeological sites in Egypt that were in use during Fatimid times, focusing on case studies at Tinnis, Aswan and elsewhere.

Alison L. Gascoigne held a British Academy post-doctoral fellowship at Cambridge University, before being appointed as Lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Southampton in 2007. Her principal research interests are the archaeology of provincial urbanism in the medieval Islamic world; and the analysis of archaeological ceramics.

Nicholas Warner, Independent Scholar, Cairo
Fatimid Cairo: a Reappraisal of Form and Content

This presentation will commence with a survey of extant Fatimid architecture in and around Cairo. The basis of the discussion will be the author's own map of the city and other cartographic sources, together with archival and current photographic documentation. This will be followed by an analysis, within the broader context of the city of al-Qahira and its satellite settlements, of a number of interesting remains that have come to light in the past decade. Finally, an attempt will be made to see how such fragmentary new data, as well as re-interpreted older data, further our understanding of the physical character of the Fatimid city.

Nicholas Warner is an architect trained at Cambridge University (UK), who has lived in Egypt since 1993. His primary research interest remains the Islamic Architecture of Cairo, but he has also participated in or directed a variety of projects related to the documentation, preservation, and presentation of historic structures and archaeological material throughout the country. These include projects in Quseir, Saqqara, Dakhla Oasis, Luxor, Sohag, Aswan and Cairo, where he worked for a number of years on the renovation of the Gayer-Anderson Museum. His recent books include *The Monuments of Historic Cairo: a map and descriptive catalogue* (American University in Cairo Press 2005) and *The True Description of Cairo: a sixteenth-century Venetian view* (Oxford University Press 2006).

Mina Moraitou, Benaki Museum, Athens
Fatimid Woodwork

On display at the Benaki Museum of Islamic Art are a number of woodcarvings which demonstrate the evolution and diversity of Islamic ornament from the 8th to the 19th century. The whole collection comprises about six hundred works of art in wood, mainly architectural elements such as doors, beams, inset panels of various sizes with vegetal, figural or epigraphical decoration, sections of furniture and wooden latticed windows (*mashrabiyya*). An important subsection is dated to the Fatimid period, a creative period in the history of Islamic art characterized by rich iconography and a varied ornamental vocabulary.

This paper examines two groups of woodcarvings which were acquired by Anthony Benakis from Egypt in 1948. The first group is a set of four decorative panels probably from a door and the other group consists of 22 panels of various sizes, four beams and a pair of shutters. This material is primarily unpublished. The first group, datable to the 11th century, is finely carved and decorated with real and fantastic animals as well as pairs of birds set within cartouches with leaf motifs. The second group is subdivided into two further groups according to the coloring of the surface. The motifs depict a variety of animals, birds, floral and geometric elements all carved in a similar manner and although rather simplified and flat they fit within the Fatimid aesthetics. Special attention though is given to the panels with geometrical decoration which do not appear typically Fatimid. The discussion analyses these motifs and places them within the standard Fatimid iconography through the examination of Islamic and Coptic woodcarvings and especially compared to panels from the church of Sitt Barbara and the church of Abu Saifain in Cairo. During this period there is a marked connection between Islamic and Coptic woodwork. For the purposes of this analysis this connection is particularly useful since there is no known provenance for these two groups and because the woodwork from Coptic churches may possibly be dated by tracing the history of the buildings.

Mina Moraitou received her Masters in Archaeology (subject Islamic art and archaeology) from the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in 1996 and her Postgraduate diploma with distinction in the history of Asian arts in 1992. She returned to Greece and has been working at the Benaki Museum, first in the Documentation and Systems department and after 1996 in the Islamic art department. Her interests lie in the art of the Arab world and especially Egypt. She has extensively contributed in exhibitions catalogues, has published articles and worked for the creation of the Museum of Islamic Art which opened in 2004.

Vivian B. Mann, Jewish Theological Seminary:
Fatimid Manuscripts in Hebrew and Arabic

During the medieval period, most of the world's Jewish population lived in Muslim lands, rather than in countries governed by Christians. The consistency by which Islamic law treated *dhimmi*s contributed to the continuity of Jewish life under Muslim rule from antiquity to the mid-twentieth century. Further, the lack of restrictive guilds like those in Europe, resulted in a high level of cooperation between Jews and Muslims within trades and professions. One example is described in a responsum of Maimonides

(1138-1204) that discusses the business arrangements between a Jew and a Muslim, a silversmith and a glass maker, who were partners in one Cairene atelier. This paper will examine the shared decorative motifs and compositions of Hebrew and Arabic manuscripts during the Fatimid period. In the light of texts like that of Maimonides, these commonalities suggest that Jews and Muslims shared ateliers or, at the very least, had knowledge of each other's workshop practices. The art of the books created in Andalusia and Christian Spain during the High Middle Ages continue to manifest a common tradition of manuscript decoration.

Vivian B. Mann is Director of the Masters Program in Jewish Art at the Graduate School of the Jewish Theological Seminary. For many years, she was the Morris and Eva Feld Chair in Judaica at the Jewish Museum, New York. Mann is the author of numerous articles on medieval art and Jewish art. Her latest book, *Art and Ceremony in Jewish Life. Essays in Jewish Art History* was published in 2005. She has been the recipient of a Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for Museum Professionals, and two Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, among other awards. In 1996, she was a Fellow at The Institute for Advanced Studies of The Hebrew University, and in 1999, she received the Jewish Cultural Achievement Award in Jewish Thought from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Session 1.3

Session Leader: Heather Ecker, Detroit Institute of Art

Session Topic: *Messianism, Kingship and Sacred Cities in the Islamic World*

Speakers' Abstracts and Bios:

Marianne Boqvist, Swedish Research Institute, Istanbul

Building Religious Legitimacy: Ottoman architectural patronage in 16th-century Damascus

Sussan Babaie, Visiting Scholar at the Getty Research Institute

Friday Prayer and Millenarian Promises on the Shores of the Caspian Sea

Rochelle Kessler, Independent Scholar

Fathepur Sikri: Piety and Politics Along the Agra-Ajmer Road

Christiane J. Gruber, Indiana University, Bloomington

Return, Retribution, and Reward: Messianism as Municipal Matter in Post-Revolutionary Iran

In 2003, after he was elected Mayor of Tehran, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmedinejad suggested that the body parts of anonymous (*gom-nam*) martyrs from the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) be scattered and buried in all major city squares of Tehran.

Although his plan was not approved, it revealed an explicitly sacralizing approach to Iran's capital city. It also disclosed the belief—traceable in a number of Islamic cities throughout the centuries—that urban space can be fashioned as a dramatic field for the deployment of religious values and for the transformation of daily movements into consecrated visitations to deceased saints, martyrs, and other champions of the Islamic faith. Moreover, the President's proposal showed how, in the case of post-revolutionary Iran, the formal vocabulary of city planning could be exploited in an attempt to expedite and implement a new age of peace and justice as consecrated by the vestigia (*asar*) of martyrs.

This paper seeks to explore how messianic concepts have affected the urban form and visual language of Tehran from the time of the Islamic Revolution (1979) until today. Particular interest will be paid to the practice of renaming streets and squares to reflect messianic values. It also will focus on the activities of the city's mural arts program, which promotes Khomeini as a semi-divine hero steering the *umma* towards ultimate salvation, the rewards of self-sacrifice in the realm of the (Shi'i) eschaton, and the promise of retribution in the afterlife through the metaphor of the liberation of Jerusalem, itself the location for the Day of Judgment and the raising of the Scales of Justice. These many urban forms and visual materials serve to underscore how the Tehran municipality, governmental agencies, and parastatal organizations have all contributed to the particular visual culture and urban shape of modern Tehran. More importantly, they also provide valuable evidence for the urbanization of messianism, thereby compelling the development of new theoretical models for the scholarly study of Islamic cities.

Christiane Gruber received her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 2005 and is currently Assistant Professor of Islamic Art at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her primary field of research is Islamic painting, in particular illustrated books of the Prophet Muhammad's Ascension (*Mi'rajnamas*) and depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. She is the author of *The Timurid Book of Ascension (Mi'rajnama): A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context* (Valencia, Spain: Patrimonio Ediciones, 2008). She also prepared the online catalogue of Islamic calligraphies in the Library of Congress (<http://international.loc.gov/intldl/apochtml/apochohome.html>).

Her research on post-revolutionary art in Iran is ongoing. She has published several articles on related topics, including: "Jerusalem in the Visual Propaganda of Post-Revolutionary Iran," in *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, eds. Suleiman Mourad and Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 2008); and "The Writing is on the Wall: Post-Revolutionary Murals in Tehran," *Persica* (2008).

Her research has been supported by Fulbright-Hays, the Mellon Foundation, the Max Planck Foundation, the American Research Institute in Turkey in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the American Institute for Iranian Studies

Workshop I: François Déroche, Biblioth`eque Nationale, Paris:
"On Qur'ans and Codicology"

The workshop will explore the contributions of codicology for art historians working on Arabic manuscripts. Material from the University Library could serve as a basis for the presentation.

François Déroche, PhD in History, Paris-Sorbonne (1987). Member of the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris (1973-1978), Researcher at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (1978-1983), Researcher at the French Institute in Istanbul (1983-1987), Professor at the Ecole pratique des hautes études, teaching History and codicology of the handwritten Arabic book (1990 to present). Publications include the catalogue of the Qur'an manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale (1983 and 1985), *The Abbasid tradition, Qur'ans from the 8th to 10th centuries [Khalili collection]* (1992), *Islamic codicology, An Introduction to the study of manuscripts in Arabic script* (2005).