

## Building Patterns in Umayyad Architecture in Jordan

Over recent years, several studies have been conducted with the hope of linking a number of constructions to the Umayyad period. These buildings, until just recently, had been the subject of dispute and were even considered to belong to other periods. Today, the findings reported in these studies have enabled us to analyse, in greater detail, the type of architectural structures built during the Umayyad period, despite the fact that such an analysis is essentially restricted to palatial or luxurious residences.

This present study, therefore, intends to focus on buildings of residential nature, always keeping in mind the scarce number of identifiable examples of Umayyad religious architecture that can be found today in Jordan [essentially confined to the mosques of Qaşr al-Ḥallabat (Bisheh 1982), al-Qaştal (Carlier and Morin 1984) and Umm al-Walid (King, Lenzen and Rollefson 1983), with the addition of the Qaşr al-Mushatta mosque (Creswell 1969: 583), now an integral part of its palatial ensemble]. All of these mosques share several common features: a tremendous sense of simplicity; a two-to-three naved oratory lying parallel to the *qibla* where the naves are pillared and support a series of arches defining the division between each nave; and a reduced version of a circular *miḥrab* (with the exception of a rectangular *miḥrab* in the Qaştal mosque; Carlier and Morin 1986), with no apparent decoration, at least none that has survived up to the present day.

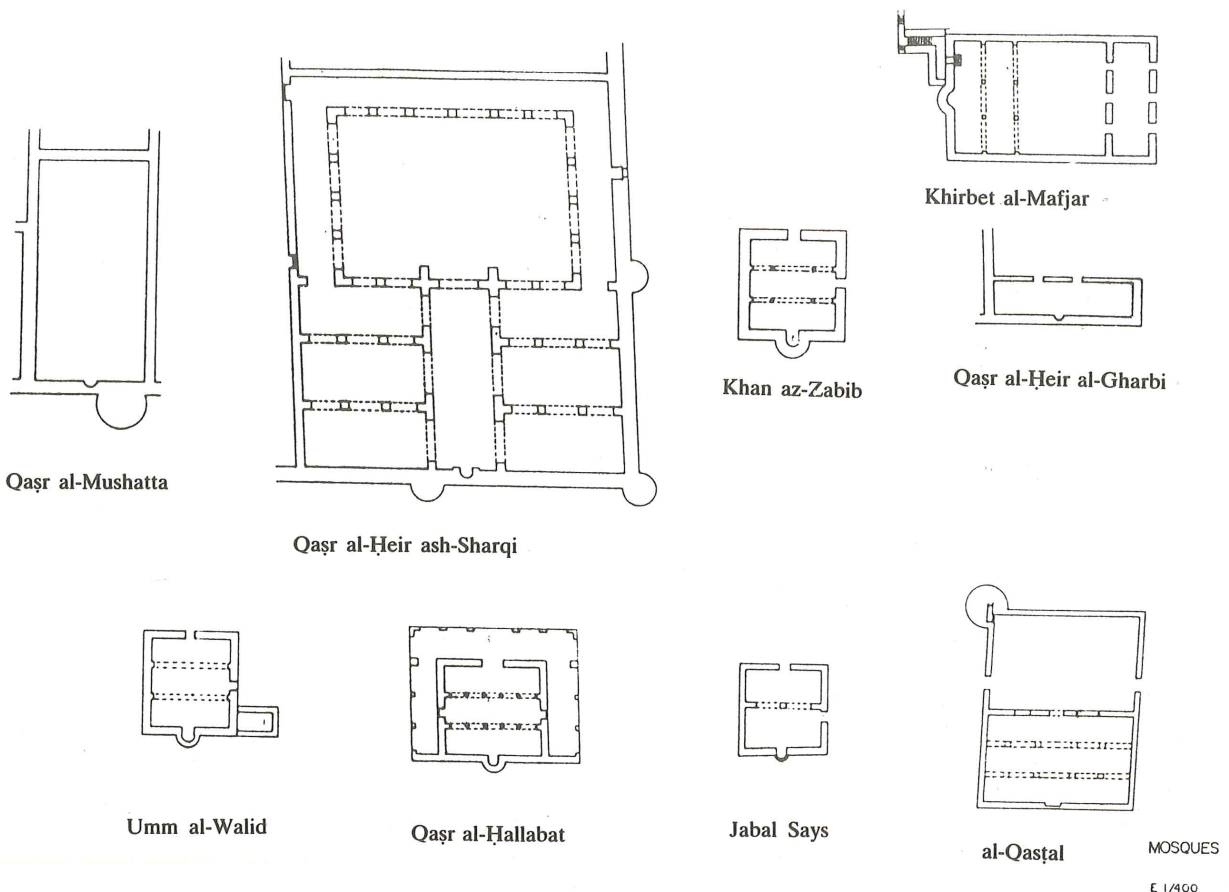
Known examples of mosques built during the Umayyad period in Jordan are still much too scarce to make it possible to establish any type of design pattern or scheme to specifically define this type of construction. If we study the outstanding features present in the examples found throughout Bilad ash-Sham, despite the fact that there are no absolute models and that features vary from one example to another, the nave-parallel-to-qibla type, based on the Damascus model, tends to dominate (FIG. 1).

The results in a study of residential architecture prove to be even more varied. While examples of great palaces or prosperous private homes abound, there are few known examples of the common urban residence. Hence, it is necessary to establish certain hypotheses. Primarily, no

modifications in the region's urban living style were effected during the Umayyad period, logically implying considerable continuity in the then-current way of living and in the architectural forms housing the city's most common functions. Moreover, given the eminent sense of religious tolerance inherent to the Islamic faith, Christian religious typologies continued to be built even after the Muslim conquest (Piccirillo 1984).

Therefore, the most outstanding or apparent changes that would have affected the existing architectural forms or types would correspond to those designed to fulfill new functions, such as those related to the new religion, or to the change in power and the new ruling class. Hence, it is not by mere coincidence that the greater part of the architecture attributed to the Umayyad period in Jordan, including the period's urban architecture, corresponds to palaces or prosperous private residences belonging to the new oligarchy who sought to forge a new image and mark the change of power, as O. Grabar has pointed out (Grabar 1973: ch. VI). We shall therefore focus on this type of architecture, even though we are unfortunately lacking in more detailed information on the humbler urban residence.

It is, nonetheless, interesting to study the few existing examples, as they do enable us to establish patterns and schemes which are comparable to more sumptuous models. As mentioned earlier, the examples of Umayyad houses which have survived in their entirety are few. These examples basically comprise the house discovered by G.L. Harding (Harding 1951) at the site of what is presently the Jordan Archaeological Museum on Jabal al-Qal'a in Amman, that discovered by Gawlikowski in Jarash (Gawlikowski 1986) and ruins of others found in Amman (Bennett and Northedge 1978) and Ṭabaqat Faḥl (McNicol and Walmsley 1982; the complete ground plans of which remain unknown). In each of these Umayyad houses, several constants are apparent. Each has a courtyard, generally irregular in form, which functions as an element of distribution. All of the rooms to the house have either direct or indirect access to the courtyard. Access from outside the house or from the street is gained through one sole exterior door and a series of hallways and small



1. Plans of Umayyad mosques in Bilad ash-Sham.

vestibules. Entrance from the outside to the courtyard is direct, and no L-shaped passages are used to obstruct the vision of the visitor. Another common feature is at least one main room opening directly off the courtyard. Lastly, a hierachal arrangement is apparent in the remaining rooms, many of which are only indirectly connected to the courtyard by way of other rooms.

None of these features are considered to be new nor inventions of the period. The house-with-courtyard is one of the oldest known architectural forms, particularly prevalent in the Mediterranean area and surrounding regions. The plan of the most modest Roman or Byzantine house was very similar, an inheritance from the Hellenistic and earlier periods. What is of interest is how these patterns, which are ambiguous, can be compared to the patterns found in more luxurious residences and, at the same time, how these patterns evolved to the more distinctive forms that more clearly define the attribution of these architectural arrangements to the Arab-Muslim culture.

Different typologies can be established in the architecture of the more sumptuous residences; either independent or grouped structures appearing in more or less compact ensembles. The independent type of construction corresponds to buildings organised around a courtyard; the courtyard generally being porticoed and two stories high, with the upper ground plan generally following the same guide-lines as the lower. This arrangement, considered a more orderly expression of the same pattern seen in the urban residences mentioned earlier, in some cases may appear in groups forming more extensive buildings or ensembles.

Rooms open off the courtyard and are either directly or indirectly connected to it. These rooms form secondary structures arranged around a main hall from which two or four adjacent rooms radiate. Other rooms may be added to this three- or five-room-group, yet there is no repetition of any particular type of pattern from one case to another. These secondary structures are arranged in varying numbers all along the perimeter of the courtyard, and the

number of structures appears to obey no special reasoning.

Those structures based on a main hall and two to four smaller-sized adjacent rooms, known as *buyut*, appear to comprise the simplest type of room-unit, and can be compared to similar, albeit not as regular, structures found in the urban house (FIG. 2). This functionally-logical pattern also appears in earlier houses, corresponding to the type assigned to the aedile. This pattern is well-defined in Roman times in the Governor of Buṣra Palace (Creswell 1969: 515), and later I believe this feature is identifiable in the Umm aj-Jimal praetorium (De Vries 1982: FIG. 11). In the Roman house, moreover, the main hall or *oecus* (from which other side rooms would almost always open off, even in cases where the greater complexity of this type of residence assigned the room functions and forms of access that were considerably more independent) generated ensembles comprised of three juxtaposed spaces. The most pronounced difference is that while in the Roman residence these three juxtaposed cells are the only ones in the entire house, the Umayyads tended to have multiple units of this type. I feel that such a pronounced difference is clearly indicative of a type of social organisation which is markedly different from the Umayyad precursors, even though they make use of the preceding architectural forms.

As mentioned earlier, the side rooms tended to vary in number between two or four, with the latter solution dominating in the majority of the desert palaces. The two-side-room pattern appears to be more characteristic of palaces of Persian influence, as is the case in Amman (Almagro 1983). Yet no specific functional reason appears to exist explaining these differences, and it would seem that they are based on either technical reasons related to the actual building of the structure (the wall dividing each of the side rooms counteracts the thrust of the ceiling over the main hall, and that of each side room) or based on reasons related to tradition.

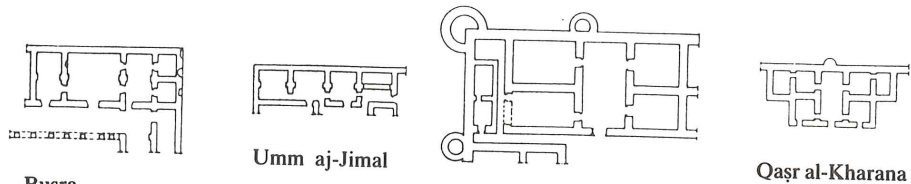
The problem posed is that of discerning what functions were assigned to each of these structures and what daily living was like within each. Detailed narrations describing daily life in the houses or palaces of this period do not abound, a fairly common occurrence in Arab literature. References to the architecture of the period are few, essentially poetic in nature, difficult to interpret and, in any case, fairly inconcrete. It does seem apparent, however, that the different architectural forms bore no excessive relation to the functions carried out within, as the way of life was not determined by set schemes or forms, and even less related to a specific architectural framework. The main hall of the *bayt* must have been the site where most of the daily occurrences took place, apt for receiving, conversing, for an artisan to carry out his profession, a place to eat and, in some cases, even to sleep. The side rooms would have served as places to store domestic artifacts or as sleeping quarters. The more private rooms, many times solely connected to the main hall, appear to have been restricted

to the exclusive use of family members. The kitchen, or place where food was prepared, does not appear to have been situated in any of these rooms. Perhaps this function was assigned to the courtyard, as in the case of the desert bedouins, and a fireplace for purposes of heating, warming bread or preparing infusions was situated in the main hall. Nonetheless, there is no precise archaeological evidence, that we are aware of, confirming these conclusions, and other rooms connected to the courtyard, bearing no apparent relation with the *buyut* could also have served as the kitchen. The presence of latrines constitutes another architectural constant, there being one latrine per *bayt*.

The next problem posed is that of discerning why so many units or *buyut* were organized around one sole courtyard. Two causes could be deduced. One supposes a lack of formal resources to assign to each domestic function, thus obliging the architect to repeat a specific scheme as many times as was deemed necessary to occupy or fill up a preconceived space in relation to the importance of the building. In such a case, different functions would be assigned to like spaces, thus posing the difficulty of being able to assign the same number of functions to the number of spaces available. Another interpretation, which in our opinion would come closer to reality, is to suppose a type of tribal or patriarchal-family social arrangement occupying each of the buildings, in such a fashion that each secondary family unit would reside in a *bayt*. This would designate the courtyard as the site for community living and social interaction. It is difficult, however, to distinguish a hierarchal pattern between *buyut* in specific buildings, hence making it impossible to admit in such cases that the social or family hierarchal order was manifested in architectural forms.

This pattern found in the Umayyad house is most probably an adaptation of previous architectural forms designed to accommodate a type of social organisation deeply rooted to the clan or tribal concept, and could be considered a transposition from the bedouin camp system based on the use of tents to a permanent form of architecture.

In attempting to establish a typology to define these buildings or to study their evolution, two basic types may be discerned. The first would be the one-courtyard type off which several *buyut* would open. This model corresponds to the majority of the known palaces, such as al-Qaṣṭal (Carlier and Morin 1984), Qaṣr al-Ḥeir al-Gharbi (Schlumberger 1986), the minor enclosure of Qaṣr al-Ḥeir ash-Sharqi (Grabar *et al.* 1978: FIG. 6D), Khirbet al-Mafjar (Hamilton 1959), Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat (Bisheh 1982) and the unexcavated area of Quṣayr 'Amra (Almagro *et al.* 1975). The other type would be that comprising several groups of courtyards. Examples of this type are the Amman *alcazar*, the main enclosure of Qaṣr al-Ḥeir ash-Sharqi (Grabar *et al.* 1978: FIG. 23D) and Qaṣr al-Mushatta (Creswell 1969: FIG. 644). Qaṣr at-Ṭuba could be considered an intermedi-

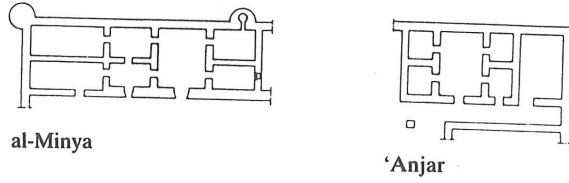


Buşra

Umm aj-Jimal

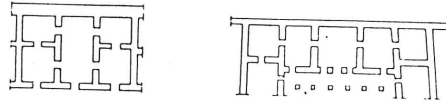
al-Qaştal

Qaşr al-Kharana



al-Minya

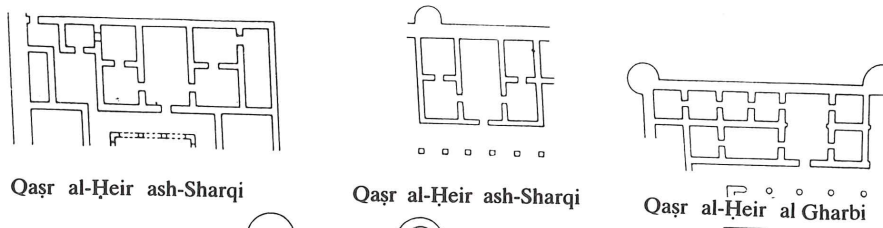
'Anjar



Jabal Says

Amman

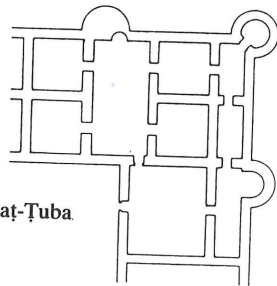
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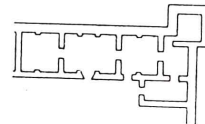
Qaşr al-Ĥeir ash-Sharqi

Qaşr al-Ĥeir ash-Sharqi

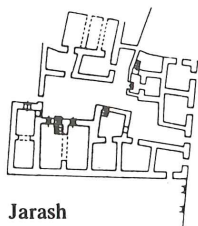
Qaşr al-Ĥeir al Gharbi



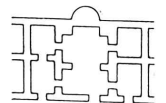
Qaşr at-Ṭuba



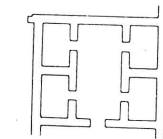
Qaşr al-Ĥallabat



Jarash



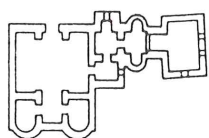
Khirbet al-Mafjar



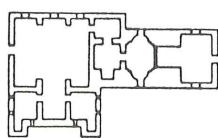
Qaşr al-Mushatta

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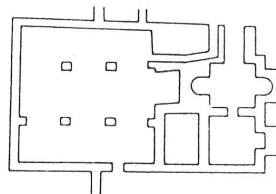
2. Plans of *buyut* in Bilad ash-Sham.



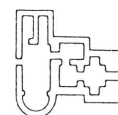
Quşayr 'Amra



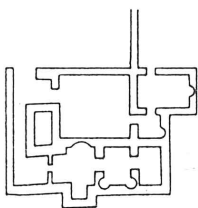
Hammam aş-Şarah



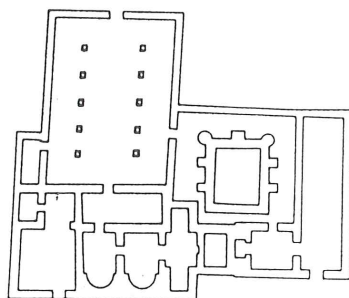
'Anjar



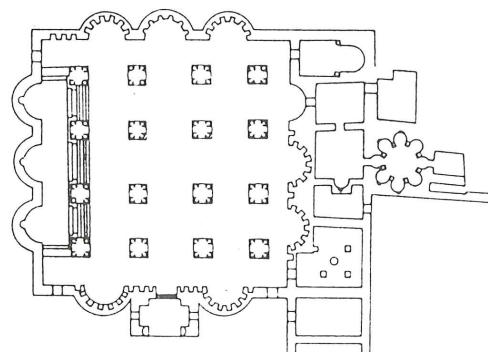
Jabal Says



Qaşr al-Heir al-Gharbi



Qaşr al-Heir ash-Sharqi



Khirbet al-Mafjar

BATHS

E 1/400

### 3. Plans of Umayyad baths in Bilad ash-Sham.

ate model as it is comprised of two similar and juxtaposed enclosures, yet with an independent exterior entrance. The case of Qaşr at-Ṭuba is particularly interesting in that it entails an element of evolution; each *bayt* has its own courtyard which is connected to a central, main courtyard. In Qaşr al-Mushatta, the *buyut* still visible today are arranged in pairs, each with its own courtyard. If Creswell's proposition proved to be true, the arrangement or lay-out of these external areas would correspond, as indicated earlier, to the courtyard group model (Creswell 1969: FIG. 661).

In some cases, independent halls existed within the *buyut* or were even located outside the building. These halls were clearly conceived to fulfill functions related to protocol and were endowed with a designated position of distinction which clearly marked the social hierarchy order. Such is the case of the Northern Hall of the Amman Palace (Almagro 1983: 60-107) or the Basilican Hall with trefoil apse in al-Mushatta (Creswell 1969: 587).

In other instances, this type of audience hall was found in a completely autonomous building linked to a bath, an architectural pattern which was frequently repeated in Umayyad constructions and even perpetuated by the

Umayyads who settled in Córdoba. These halls, used for granting audiences or accommodating festive activities, are always connected to residential buildings such as those we have just described (see FIG. 3). In Quşayr 'Amra, this residential structure once stood just several hundred metres away. Hammam aş-Şarah (Creswell 1969: 498) must have been the *maylis* and bath of Qaşr al-Ḥallabat. In Khirbet al-Mafjar (Hamilton 1959), the bath was comparable in size to the residential building Qaşr al-Heir al-Gharbi (Schlumberger 1986), Qaşr al-Heir ash-Sharqi (Grabar *et al.* 1978: FIG. 42D) and Jabal Says (Brisch 1963) similarly had a bath and hall immediately next to them. 'Anjar (Creswell 1969: 480) likewise had its bath with basilican hall and ceremonial niche or area of distinction. Although this hall is, on occasions, considered an apodyterium, the form seen in Quşayr 'Amra, in Hammam aş-Şarah, in Jabal Says and above all in Khirbet al-Mafjar leads one to think that the bath must have played an important role in the Umayyad customs and ceremonies, as there seems to be no other apparent reason to explain this specific pattern (Grabar 1973: ch. VI). In fact, the palace built by the Umayyads of Córdoba, in the palatial city of Madinat az-Zahra, whose main hall was built by 'Abd al-Raḥman III

had a bath in its immediate proximity (Vallejo 1987). This particular bath cannot be explained as having a mere utilitarian function, as it occupies an entire contiguous side of the hall and leads out into the garden area, with numerous doors opening out into the same. This further goes to prove that for the Umayyads, the bath formed a part of the norms established by ceremonial protocol, perhaps referring to a symbol of some particular status or hierarchal position that was intended to be highlighted in some fashion. This is the only apparent reason for explaining the existence of independent buildings designated to fulfill this specific function, assigned such marked importance and endowed, in some cases, with a pattern of smaller audience halls. In cases such as Qusayr 'Amra and Hammam aş-Şarah, the halls are comprised of two alcoves, representing once again the *bayt* pattern with one central hall or room and two immediate side rooms.

The types of baths and their use was inherited by the Muslims from the Romans and the Byzantines, and they immediately became second nature to the Muslim peoples, perhaps because they were encountered all throughout the Roman Empire. The evolution of the bath, with the disappearance of the frigidarium, began somewhat before Muslim times, yet it is during this period that the bath began to decidedly evolve. The lay-out or architectural arrangement of the Umayyad bath presents a clearly distinct personality, distinguishing it from earlier and even later models.

To conclude, it can be affirmed that Umayyad architecture built in Jordan and in the areas immediately surrounding Jordan during the first half of the eighth century, inherited architectural forms and patterns from earlier periods, common to different civilizations that settled in the Mediterranean area, and to which the Umayyads combined Oriental elements originating from Persia and Sassania. Nonetheless, these elements acquired a personality of their very own either because they were adapted to meet new functions, such as in the case of the mosques, or they were used within a social organisation and type of living style that was in part different from the type of function housed previously by the same architectural structures. In a word, the Umayyad architecture of this region presents a clearly distinguishable personality both from its precedents and from the subsequent inheritance, influencing later Islamic architecture by setting the patterns that were followed until a clear differentiation between Muslim architectural forms and those of other cultures was established.

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