

Settlement Patterns in Islamic Jordan: The Umayyads and their Use of the Land

An earlier scholarly generation interpreted the Umayyad *quṣūr* as reflections of an atavistic longing on the part of the ruling elite for a bedouin lifestyle. Affection for the desert and a wish to hunt may have formed a part of the Umayyads motivation to build their *quṣūr* where they did. Yet, nevertheless, other reasons and roles for their *quṣūr* may be sought in the light of more recent research, and increasingly it appears that individual Umayyad foundations served a variety of roles. The degree to which *quṣūr* tended to meet specifically Umayyad needs and interests may be measured by the absolute neglect of so many sites by the Abbasids. A reconsideration of the contexts of Umayyad *quṣūr* in al-Balqa' and in Palestine suggests a number of reasons for the location of particular *quṣūr*.¹

1. Al-Balqa' and the Eastern Desert

As a result of recent excavations and surveys in Ḥawran and al-Balqa', we are now quite well informed about the extent of settlement in the sown land of Jordan in the Umayyad period. Indeed, more is known now of this area in many respects than the equally important areas of Palestine and Syria. Judging from the sites so far investigated, it seems in general that the farmland of Ḥawran and al-Balqa' continued settled into the Umayyad period, prolonging the occupation of the same areas in Byzantine, Roman and earlier times. In Ḥawran, excavations at Umm aj-Jimal indicate settlement in the Umayyad period, and surface sherding from further east in the Ḥawran suggests the same at the villages as far as Umm al-Quṭṭayn.² The

Umayyad period settlement of Buṣra has long been known from the Mosque of 'Umar of 102/720-1, but the apparent extent of settlement in the countryside of Ḥawran in Umayyad times is much more impressive when the sherd evidence is considered.

In north-west and western Transjordan, in al-Balqa', a similar picture of continuity emerges from Byzantine times through to the Umayyad period, with villages still settled, and little or no evidence of a sharp break in occupation with the onset of the Islamic period. At Abila (Qweilbeh)³, at Beit Ras⁴, and further south at Pella (Fiḥl)⁵, Jarash⁶, Amman⁷ and Ḥesban⁸, excavations have all pointed to an Umayyad period settlement following on from Byzantine period settlement. Further south in al-Balqa', survey and excavation have also suggested the same pattern of Umayyad period use of sites settled in Byzantine times. Much of this area is agricultural today, and there is no reason to doubt that the villages and small towns of Ḥawran and al-Balqa' would have stood amidst farmed land in the early Islamic period, just as in earlier times.

Given the evidence of extensive agrarian activity in al-Balqa' and Ḥawran, it is harder to see some of the desert *quṣūr* of the Umayyads as quite the isolated buildings that they once seemed to be to earlier visitors. Indeed, al-Qaṣṭal, Qaṣr al-Mushatta and Qaṣr al-Muwaqqar can hardly be regarded as lying in remote desert: rather, they are set on or close to the margin between *bādiya* and sown land. Even *quṣūr* in the desert to the east are not so remote, least of all in a desert with higher levels of activity

¹For an important discussion related to issues discussed in this paper, see H. Gaube, 'Die syrischen Wüstenschlosser. Einige wirtschaftliche und politische Gesichtspunkte in ihrer Entstehung', *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 95 (1979), p. 182-209.

²B. de Vries, 'The Umm al-Jimal Project, 1972-1977', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 244 (1981), pp. 53-72; *idem*, 'The Umm al-Jimal Project 1972-1977', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 26, (1982), pp. 97-116; G. King, C.J. Lenzen and G.O. Rollefson, 'Survey of Byzantine and Islamic Sites in Jordan: Second Season Report, 1981', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 27 (1983), pp. 405-417, 420-427.

³W.H. Mare, 'The 1982 Season at Abila of the Decapolis', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 28 (1984), p. 41. However, he refers to the destruction of a church which seems associated with the early Islamic period; he allows that this destruction may be as late as A.D. 746.

⁴C.J. Lenzen, R.L. Gordon and A.M. McQuitty, 'Excavations at Tell Irbid and Beit Ras, 1985',

Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan 29 (1985), pp. 156, 159.

⁵A. McNicoll, R.H. Smith and B. Hennessey, *Pella in Jordan* 1 (Canberra 1982), pp. 123-157.

⁶A.N. Barghouthi, 'Urbanization of Palestine and Jordan in Hellenistic and Roman Times', *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 1, ed. A. Hadidi (Amman 1982), pp. 209-229.

⁷A. Northedge, 'A Survey of Islamic Buildings at Amman', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 22 (1977-1978), pp. 5-13; C.-M. Bennett, 'Excavation at the Citadel (al-Qal'a) Amman, 1977', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 23 (1979), pp. 151-159; *idem*, 'Excavations on the Citadel (al-Qal'a), Amman, 1978, fourth Preliminary Report', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 23 (1979), pp. 161-170; A. Almagro Gorbea, *El Palacio Omeya de Amman I, La Arquitectura* (Madrid 1983).

⁸J.A. Sauer, *Heshbon Pottery, 1971* (Michigan 1973), pp. 39-49.

than in modern times. Qaşr al-Muwaqqar, on the edge of the cultivated land, is only 20kms from Qaşr al-Mushash, while Qaşr al-Hallabat is only 27kms from Umm aj-Jimal.

This may have been a sufficient distance for an Umayyad prince seeking the life of the *bādiya*. Yet rather than fulfilling a desire for isolation, the *qaşūr* may have served the needs of the Umayyad traveller. Many of the *qaşūr* of eastern Jordan and southern Syria related to routes between Arabia and Syria. This writer has discussed this issue elsewhere, drawing attention to the coincidence of the siting of many of the *qaşūr* with routes running through Wadi as-Sirhan, through Baier, or through Ma'an and Amman, roughly the course of the Hijaz Railway.⁹ There seems a likelihood, therefore, that some of these *qaşūr* in the desert may have served a caravanserai purpose, at least for the aristocracy or the high officials of the state as they moved between Bilād ash-Sham and Arabia. Such a role does not exclude the purpose of also being the centres of agricultural estates, nor does it exclude the possibility that Umayyad princes used the *qaşūr* to live the life of the *bādiya* and to hunt. It seems unlikely that many of the *qaşūr* served a single purpose, but rather a diversity arising from the needs of the regime.

Even where *qaşūr* clearly had an agricultural element, or exploited water facilities, there seems to be a variety of roles met by the Jordanian and the Syrian sites. At Qaşr al-Hallabat, the elegant rebuilt residence of the Umayyad period is accompanied by an enclosure 270m × 220m with sluices, which Ghazi Bisheh has suggested was used for cultivating vines, olives and other fruits.¹⁰ This rather modest enclosure contrasts with the very different facilities at Qaşr al-Mushash to the south, with a total of 16 water storage or catchment facilities. Only two *qanawat* and rows of stones suggested grape production, and all else suggested pastoral activity.¹¹ The water may well have been used by travellers, but the provision of so many rain-fed water tanks at one place seems to point to investment to aid a pastoral community of sheep and goat herders. A similar use may be proposed for the dam at Wadi Jilat to the south. Whatever its origins it was in use in Umayyad times, and to this day the water trapped in the silt behind the dam is used by the bedouins to water their flocks as well as for their personal use.¹²

The Umayyad *qaşūr* on the edge of the sown land, al-Muwaqqar and al-Qaştal, also appear to have had an agricultural element. A water tank exists at al-Muwaqqar

but the site has long been so badly damaged that the best information available to us on it remains that gathered by Brünnow and Domaszewski.¹³ However, the recent excavations and investigations around al-Qaştal by Patricia Carlier and F. Morin have shown the remains of a dam and a reservoir in the immediate vicinity of the Umayyad palace, and this site too proves to have had an agricultural element to it.¹⁴ Al-Muwaqqar is generally accepted to date from the Caliphate of Yazid II b. 'Abd al-Malik, while it is clear that al-Qaştal was important for al-Walid II and 'Abbas b. al-Walid II who both resided there: recently, however, Carlier and Morin have speculated that its origins might be associated with the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, a point which has still to be securely established.¹⁵ However, apart from their own particular agricultural features, the complexes at al-Muwaqqar and al-Qaştal also straddle the desert and the sown land to an extent that seems almost symbolic. Standing at al-Muwaqqar on the eminence where the *qaşūr* once stood, one gazes to the west towards the dark earth of the farmland of al-Balqa'. To the east is the desert, the *bādiya*, extending towards Qaşr al-Mushash and Wadi as-Sirhan far beyond it. Much the same is true at al-Qaştal, which stands likewise on a slight rise, with the desert to the east; to the west is the farmland of which the estate around al-Qaştal was a part. By thus straddling the perimeter between desert and sown and surveying both, al-Muwaqqar and al-Qaştal seem to encompass the Umayyads' dominion of the settled lands of Bilad ash-Sham and the deserts, the land of the farmers in the west and the pastoralists of the steppes to the east.

The significance of the siting of Qaşr al-Muwaqqar and al-Qaştal goes beyond mere symbolism, and is part of a far more widespread need that motivated the Umayyads to build in the areas that they did. Umayyad caliphs and princes residing on the edge of al-Balqa' and in the *bādiya* to the east were able to retain close contact with the tribes whose support was necessary for the Syrian-based regime. Most significant of these tribes were Banī Judhām and Banī Kalb. Their support was vital for the Umayyads and these two tribes, powerful in their own regions in pre-Islamic times, were to retain their pre-eminence in the new context of an Umayyad Islamic Caliphate.

Judhām before Islam had been a shepherd-herding tribe whose lands reached Tabuk, Wadi al-Qura and even the *ḥarra* of al-Madina;¹⁶ they dominated the Ḥisma and Madyan, and appeared as settlers at Ma'an, Udhrūḥ,

⁹G.R.D. King, 'The Distribution of Sites and Routes in the Jordanian and Syrian Deserts in the Early Islamic Period', *Proceedings of the 20th Seminar for Arabian Studies* 17 (1987), pp. 91-105.

¹⁰G. Bisheh, 'The Second Season of Excavation at Hallabat, 1980, I', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 26 (1982), pp. 138-143.

¹¹King, Lenzen and Rollefson, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-392; Bisheh, 'Qaşr Mshāsh and Qaşr 'Ain al-Sil: Two Umayyad Sites in Jordan', paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilād al-Shām, University of Jordan, 24-29 October 1987.

¹²King, Lenzen and Rollefson, *op. cit.*, pp. 392-398.

¹³R. Brünnow and A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia* (Strasbourg 1905) II, pp. 182-189.

¹⁴P. Carlier and F. Morin, 'Recherche archéologique au Château de Qastal (Jordanie)', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 28 (1984), pp. 343-383; *idem* 'Qastal, un château du désert en Jordanie', *Archaeologia* 206 (Oct.-Nov. 1985), pp. 46-57; *idem*, *Qastal al-Balqa'* (1986); *idem*, 'Qastal', *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Band 33 (1986), pp. 187-206.

¹⁵*Idem*, 'Qastal' (1986), pp. 205-206.

¹⁶H. Lammens, 'Le Califat de Yazid I^{er}', *Melanges de la Faculté Orientale, Université St Joseph* (1906), pp. 598-601, 603-604, 617; C.E. Bosworth, 'Djudhām', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, Vol. II, p. 573; U.R. Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam Qaba'il al-'Arab*, 3rd ed., I (Beirut 1982), pp. 174-175; A. al-Wohaibi, *The Northern Hijaz in the Writings of the Arab Geographers 800-1150*, (Beirut 1973), p. 50.

Amman and Gaza. With the coming of Islam they rapidly became important in the Umayyad period, and appeared in new territories, including the neighbourhood of Ṭabariyah in Jund al-'Urdunn, as well as at al-Lajjun and as far west as the outskirts of 'Akka. They also appeared in the neighbourhood of Beit Jibrin in Jund Filistin. Their northern borders ran up against the land of Banī Kalb, with whom they maintained good relations, while in the west they extended across Sinai to the Egyptian frontier. The Judham were in Mu'awiya's camp and supported him in his conflict with the Caliph 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Mu'awiya is said to have gone to the *bādiya* of Judham, while under Yazīd I, one of their main leaders, Rawḥ b. Zinbā', was appointed governor of Palestine. They supported the succession of the Marwanids in 64/684 and they retained close relations with the Umayyad regime until its fall. They remained dominant as the principal tribe of much of al-'Urdunn and Filistin until the late third/ninth century when they appeared as supporters of the Tulunids.

The lands that Judham encompassed in eastern Jordan were those very areas which bordered the farmlands of al-Balqa' and in which the Umayyads built their concentration of desert *quṣūr* between the sown land and al-Azraq. Certain more clearly caliphly or princely estates — including al-Muwaqqar, al-Qaṣṭal, al-Mushatta and Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat — were in neighbourhoods where the Judham would have dominated among the tribes. From *quṣūr* such as these the Umayyad caliphs and 'umara' could maintain contact with their tribal supporters in this part of the desert, many of whom would have been Judham. Maintaining the allegiance of the major tribes of Syria was crucial to the sustenance of the Umayyad state and the loyalty of Judham and their manpower would have been a vital part of this political structure. The relationship between the Umayyad leadership and Judham, and with other tribes in the neighbourhood of the Transjordanian *quṣūr*, would have been reaffirmed and reinforced by the access of the tribes to the Umayyads. The Umayyad leadership would have received the tribes, or at least their leading shaykhs, sitting with them and being open to hearing their needs and their views. Such access would not have been confined to Judham, but in this area of the country, the *quṣūr* were conveniently placed in relation to their territory.

This close relationship between the ruling power and its tribal supporters is something that has occurred in Bilad ash-Sham and Arabia into modern times. The tradition of meeting tribal leaders on religious holidays and other occasions of state, and maintaining personal contact with them, that can still be seen in the region, is an aspect of political life that one can readily see existing in Umayyad times. It is for reasons such as these that peripatetic rulers

and 'umara' of the Umayyad family would have used residences like al-Qaṣṭal, al-Muwaqqar, al-Mushatta and al-Ḥallabat, among others. The location of the *quṣūr* is thus to some extent explained by proximity to the lands of a powerful tribe, and also by their ease of access, being on major communications routes of the state. Thus one can understand why Yazīd II should have chosen to have a residence at al-Muwaqqar, and both al-Walīd II and 'Abbās b. al-Walīd II should have resided at al-Qaṣṭal. If Patricia Carlier and Frederic Morin are right, then 'Abd al-Malik thought it to be of advantage to take up residence at al-Qaṣṭal much earlier. The importance for the Umayyads of the area of al-Qaṣṭal, al-Muwaqqar and the *bādiya* to the east may go back to a still earlier date, for as already mentioned, Mu'awiya b. Abī Sufyān himself went to stay in the *bādiya* of Judham. The particular region seems to be that where the Umayyads were to build in later times, for when Mu'awiya stayed in the *bādiya* of Judham, it was to the area of al-Masharif to which he went.¹⁷ This area is now the *diyār* of Banī Ṣakhr, and is the very same *bādiya* east of the Hijaz Railway and the old pilgrim road where the Umayyad *quṣūr* are concentrated. The association of this district with the Umayyads thus seems to go back to the foundation of the regime.

It is interesting to observe that even in modern times the sites of al-Muwaqqar and al-Qaṣṭal retain a relationship to the *bādiya* to the east that is reminiscent of their role in the second/eighth century. Today, and in the recent past, all this part of the desert has been the *diyār* of the Banī Ṣakhr bedouin. At al-Muwaqqar is the residence of a leading *shaykh* of the Banī Ṣakhr, no distance from the old palace of Yazīd II. At al-Qaṣṭal the new residence of Shaykh Shiblī al-Fayiz of the Banī Ṣakhr has been built on the edge of the ruins of the old Umayyad *qaṣr*. It seems no accident that prominent *shaykhs* of the tribe dominating this district today should elect to live like the Umayyads before them, on the margin of the *bādiya*, where they are in contact with the pastoralists in the desert, and on main roads, in close contact with Amman.

If the hypothesis that the *quṣūr* were intended to facilitate the Umayyads' contacts with the tribes is valid for al-Muwaqqar and al-Qaṣṭal, then it may well be valid at other sites as well in the area. Qaṣr al-Mushatta is relevant to such a hypothesis for it too is close to the sown land, standing only 6.7 kms to the east of al-Qaṣṭal, and it almost certainly related to al-Qaṣṭal in some way. Elsewhere, I have suggested that one purpose for which al-Mushatta was intended by al-Walīd II was as a suitable setting for him to receive the returning pilgrim caravan each year. This practice, as crown-prince, he had undertaken formerly just to the south at Ziza. However, at other times of the year,

¹⁷Lammens, *op. cit.*, p. 621-622; Kaḥḥāla, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 174 refers to the *Masharif* as being Judham territory.

al-Mushatta would have fulfilled the same purpose as al-Qaṣṭal and al-Muwaqqar — a residence where the caliph could receive visiting tribal leaders and other notables, with its audience hall as the magnificent setting in which the visitors sat with the caliph. In a recent paper, Robert Hillenbrand has rightly drawn attention to the fact that the surroundings of al-Mushatta lack any overt agricultural remains, in contrast to many other Umayyad *quṣūr*.¹⁸ Yet in winter and in spring, after rain, lush thick grass grows here, covering the hills around, explaining the bedouin name for the site of “wintering place”. It was a natural grazing place for nomads with sheep and goats, a natural destination for shepherd tribes like Judhām, as it still is for Banī Ṣakhr. Given that the natural environment of al-Mushatta was one where sheep-raising tribes would gather, it seems only logical that the caliph should select this area to build his palace, if his intention was to maintain close contact there with tribal supporters.

The numerous water tanks at Qaṣr al-Mushash and the seeming scarcity there of traces of agrarian activity may also be related to the pastoral economy of the district. The amount of water that the cisterns of al-Mushash would store would have been welcome to the shepherds of Judhām who inhabited this area, and al-Mushash could have been designed to improve the lot of the supporters of the Umayyads in the district. Similarly, the dam at Jilat would have been of advantage to shepherds because of the water that it trapped behind it. Even today it is still used by bedouins as already pointed out. If it was of Umayyad origin, then its existence could be explained as yet another effort to provide useful facilities for the bedouin herders of sheep in this part of the desert.

The *quṣūr* and other sites in the land occupied by Judhām have been stressed because these account for so many of the Umayyad desert sites in Jordan. However, further to the east at Qaṣr Burqu‘ is a very different environment. Burqu‘ stands on the edge of the lava plain, the Ḥarra, and it is far from any farmed land. At first sight, this *qaṣr* fulfils the image of a remote retreat in the *bādiya*, where an Umayyad prince would hunt and live a bedouin life. This was probably an aspect of Qaṣr Burqu‘’s existence, especially since game would doubtless have been attracted by water that pools behind a dam near the *qaṣr* during winter and spring. The fact that Burqu‘, according to an inscription of 81/700-701, was used by al-Walīd, son of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, while al-Walīd was still *amīr*, is significant in itself. As his father’s eldest son, he was an important figure in his own right. I have explained elsewhere how Qaṣr Burqu‘ stood on a route from Wadi as-Sirhan through to Qaṣr al-Bayda and Jabal Usays and

beyond either to Damascus or to central Syria.¹⁹ This explains the decision in pre-Islamic and Umayyad times to build at Burqu‘, and the hunting may well have attracted an Umayyad prince. But al-Walīd’s presence in the area takes on political significance when it is considered that Burqu‘ was within the vast territories traversed by the Banī Kalb b. Wabara.

Banī Kalb were camel rearers, occupying the territory between the Nufud in the south and extending in the north to Palmyra and towards the Euphrates. Their territory encompassed the Samawa desert between Iraq and Syria and in the west, their territory approached Ḥawran.²⁰ Burqu‘ therefore lay in the heart of Banī Kalb land, and given the tribes’ close relations with the Umayyad regime, the existence of a residence of the caliph’s eldest son cannot be divorced from its political context. Although the Banī Kalb were Christian at the advent of Islam and played little role in the Islamic conquest, they rapidly became a major factor in Umayyad power in Syria. Mu‘awiya married Maysūn, from a leading family of the aristocrats of Kalb, and Yazīd b. Mu‘awiya spend much of his youth in the neighbourhood of Palmyra with his mother and his uncles of Kalb.²¹ Although Banī Kalb suffered reverses in later years at the hand of Qaysite tribes, they still seem to have retained their lands, for they appear in the deserts of central Syria in later times.²² It seems no accident that the eldest son of the caliph should have maintained a residence in the heartland of such an important tribe, who were allies of the Umayyads. The contacts of the Banī Kalb with the ruling family cannot be better demonstrated than by the decision of al-Walīd to restore Qaṣr Burqu‘ to use it as a residence where he would receive the people from the surrounding area, and would be living among the tribesmen of Kalb.

Given the extent of the lands of Banī Kalb, other desert *quṣūr* may be related to the Umayyads’ connections with the tribe. An aspect of Qaṣr Jabal Usays, where al-Walīd resided as caliph, may have been to allow him to retain contact with the Banī Kalb, in the same way as the *quṣūr* in al-Balqa’ of Jordan would have made access easy between the Judhām and the Umayyads. Furthermore, the domination of the desert as far as Palmyra and the Euphrates by Banī Kalb suggests that Qaṣr al-Ḥeir al-Gharbi and Qaṣr al-Ḥeir ash-Sharqi, perhaps, would also have allowed the Kalb access to the Umayyad princes or caliphs using these sites.

2. Palestine: al-Minya and al-Mafjar

In contrast with the concentration of Umayyad *quṣūr* in al-Balqa’ and in the *bādiya* of Syria, there are very few

¹⁸R. Hillenbrand, ‘Islamic Art at the Cross-roads: East versus West at Mshatta’, *Essays in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Katharina Otto Dorn*, ed. A. Daneshvari (Malibu 1981), p. 67.

¹⁹King, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp. 92-93.

²⁰J. W. Fück and A. A. Dixon, ‘Kalb b. Wabara’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, Vol. IV, pp. 492-494; Kahhāla, *op. cit.*, 3, pp. 991-992.

²¹H. Lammens, ‘Etudes sur le regne du Calife Omayyade Mo’awia I^{er}’, *Melanges de la Faculté Oriental, Université St Joseph* 1 (1906), pp. 150ff, 190ff.

²²Al-Ya’qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, trans. into French from the Arabic, G. Wiet (Cairo 1937), pp. 170-171.

quṣūr west of the river Jordan. Assuming that our archaeological information is accurate, the only major sites comparable to the *quṣūr* to the east are Qaṣr Khirbet al-Minya and Qaṣr Khirbet al-Mafjar. This is clearly no reflection of the relative importance of Palestine for the Umayyads. Their lavish patronage of Jerusalem and its mosques, the foundation of ar-Ramlah and the continuing activity at Caesarea all serve to indicate the high regard in which the Umayyads viewed the country. Given its numerous towns and villages and their agricultural land, it is tempting to suppose that the Umayyads merely left the peasantry to continue to farm the fertile countryside. It was this unbroken line of agricultural activity which al-Maḳḳisī was still to see and to describe in the fourth/tenth century: indeed, it seems plausible that his description of the flourishing agricultural economy of Palestine at that date would have held true for the Umayyad period as well. In such a well-established agrarian regime, there was no need for the type of agricultural project that so often surrounds the Umayyad *quṣūr*. The Umayyads' latifundia-like agricultural investment projects appear to have been concentrated in suitable wastelands, and there was no rationale in disrupting the already flourishing farming economy that prevailed in most of the country west of the river Jordan and the Dead Sea.

However, the two Umayyad *quṣūr* in Palestine, al-Minya and al-Mafjar, retain elements that are shared with the *quṣūr* elsewhere in the *bādiya* regions of Jordan and Syria. At the same time, both are unusual insofar as they are in some of the hottest, most humid places in the region, at least in summer. Although the Arab geographers are enthusiastic in detailing the crops that grow in the Jordan Valley near Jericho (al-Mafjar lies 2.5kms north of Jericho/Ariḥa), al-Maḳḳisī is clear in his comments on its heat.²³ Still worse was Ṭabariyah/Tiberias, near al-Minya, where he refers to the effects that the climate was said to have on the people, who were said to go naked from the heat. In summer, Ṭabariyah was hot and unhealthy, but the numerous hot springs were its attraction as a resort, and for the treatment of illness.²⁴ At first sight, to build *quṣūr* in places which are so unpleasant in summer seems curious. Yet when the highlands of Syria and Jordan are cold in winter, the more clement climate of the Jordan Valley and the lake shore of Ṭabariyah would be a positive virtue. Furthermore, the hot springs of the Ṭabariyah area and the ostentation luxury of al-Mafjar imply that there was a strong element of the resort about both al-Minya and al-Mafjar. A peripatetic Umayyad court can well be imagined descending to either the Ṭabariyah area or to the

Jordan Valley in winter to avoid the harsher climate of the highlands.

The location of Qaṣr Khirbet al-Minya can be explained on other levels as well. Grabar and his colleagues have pointed out the existence of an agricultural estate around al-Minya, traces of which could be seen in former times.²⁵ Although much of the evidence had been eradicated before Grabar and his colleagues investigated the site, he leaves no doubt that it had been a country residence surrounded by farmland, situated in a place where waters naturally gather. To this extent, as he points out, al-Minya was comparable to other Umayyad sites with agricultural estates around them.

The site also has other parallels with Umayyad *quṣūr*. As I have already observed, many of the *quṣūr* were on routes that were in use in the Umayyad period. Al-Minya seems to fall into this category as well. Grabar *et al.* refer to the fact that al-Minya registered as a halt on routes between Damascus and Cairo in Mamluk and Ottoman times.²⁶ This route was doubtless important in Umayyad times, given the wealth of Egypt, but it was also important as the same route passes through ar-Ramlah, the Umayyad town founded by Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik as the capital of the Jund Filistīn before 96/715. Inasmuch as the route between Damascus and ar-Ramlah, and then on to al-Fuṣṭāṭ, was a major artery of the Umayyad state, it is not surprising to find al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik building a *qaṣr* at al-Minya in 93-96/712-715. Ibn Khurrādādhbih (b. c. 205/820) describes the route from ar-Ramlah to Damascus passing by Ṭabariyah, which at least shows that the road was close to al-Minya at that date,²⁷ but later writers are more instructive. Ḥajjī Khalīfa, writing in 1101/1655, refers to the road from ar-Ramlah to Damascus actually passing by a halting place called *Mīna* between al-Lajjun and Qunayṭra.²⁸ R. Hartmann compiled the halting places between ar-Ramlah and Damascus on the basis of the itineraries of Ibrāhīm al-Khijārī (d. 1082/1671) and 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nabulūsī (1101/1690). Once again, a halt at *Khān al-Minya* appears, this time the fourth halt after al-Lajjun.²⁹ It does not seem unreasonable to consider that, if a halt was made at al-Minya at this late period, then the necessary halt in the Ṭabariyah region in Umayyad times would also have been at al-Minya. Thus the *qaṣr* of al-Walīd at al-Minya would have had the character of halting place on the road, as well as a royal residence. While its use in this context would have doubtless been restricted to the court or even the caliph himself, the parallel is very close to the role of a halting place that can be identified in many *quṣūr* in Jordan and Syria: as already

²³Al-Maḳḳisī, *Aḥṣān al-Taqaṣīm fī Ma'rifat al-'Aqālīm*, ed. M. de Goeje (Leyden 1967), p. 175.

²⁴Al-Maḳḳisī, *op. cit.*, p. 185; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, ed. F. Wustenfeld (Leipzig 1868) iii, p. 510.

²⁵O. Grabar, J. Perrot, B. Ravani and M. Rosen, 'Sondages à Khirbet el-Minyeh', *Israel Exploration Journal* 10 (1960), pp. 240-241.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 242.

²⁷Ibn Khurrādādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik*, ed. M. de Goeje (Leyden, 2nd ed. 1967), p. 78 (Ar.) p. 57 (Fr.).

²⁸Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Gihan Numa*, *Geographia Orientalis*, trans. into Latin from the Turkish by M. Norberg (1818; reprinted Osnabruck 1973), p. 561.

²⁹R. Hartmann, 'Die Strasse von Damaskus nach Kairo', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 64 (1910), pp. 699-700.

explained, many of these are set on major routes in exactly the same way as al-Minya.

Yet another reason suggests itself for the wish of the Umayyads to have a residence in the area of Ṭabariyah. As already observed, in the early Islamic period, Judhām extended their tribal territory into northern Palestine and they came to dominate the country between Ṭabariyah and the hinterland of 'Akka. Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, Yazīd I b. Mu'āwiya and 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān all maintained residences to the south of Ṭabariyah,³⁰ and in building at al-Minya, al-Walīd I was only continuing the association of his predecessors with the district. Given the presence of the Umayyads' Judhām supporters in the neighbourhood, it is very likely that al-Walīd took advantage of the fact to reinforce ties with the tribe through receiving its leadership at a *qaṣr* such as al-Minya, with its fine reception hall and mosque.

Turning now to the lavish Qaṣr Khirbet al-Mafjar, it too shares a number of features with al-Minya in terms of facilities and location. The winter climate at al-Mafjar made the place an attractive winter residence, even if the summers were excessively hot. Furthermore, there is no shortage of evidence that al-Mafjar had a large agricultural estate. The fine buildings and their decoration have tended to overshadow this aspect of the site, and the excavators admit to having not fully explored the irrigation systems related to the farmed land and the water supply of the *qaṣr*.³¹ R.W. Hamilton describes a walled enclosure extending about 2kms downhill to the east of the palace site, defined by a wall which was eroded nearly flush to the ground. It encompassed an area of 150 acres. He compared this to the *ḥeir* at Qaṣr al-Ḥeir ash-Sharqi and suggests that the enclosure at al-Mafjar was "partly irrigated and partly, perhaps, a grazing ground or covert for domestic animals or game."³² The site was set at a place where it could draw water from several springs to the west borne to the palace and to the farming area by *qanawat* and aqueducts. There is no doubt therefore, that al-Mafjar was carefully sited to gain as much advantage as possible from the neighbouring springs. To this extent it parallels al-Minya and other *quṣūr* in the *bādiya* of Jordan and Syria.

In a recent paper, R. Hillenbrand revived a discussion of an irrigation project attributed to al-Walīd II. This was initially investigated by I. Braslavski in 1933, as a result of a reference in a Hebrew Apocalypse of the eighth century, *The Mysteries of Rabbi Simeon bar Jochai*.³³ It is said that Hishām's successor, i.e. al-Walīd II, planned to draw the

waters of the river Jordan to an area of land for irrigation purposes, but his infuriated courtiers killed him. Braslavski, followed by Hillenbrand, draws attention to the fact that al-Ṭabarī was aware of a river in the Jund al-'Urdunn which al-Walīd had dug. Hillenbrand has suggested that this diversion scheme may have been related to his vast and incomplete palace at al-Mushatta. This palace was left unfinished at al-Walīd's death and his successor, Yazīd III, was to promise not only to cease building projects but also to dig no rivers.³⁴ Given the elevation of Qaṣr al-Mushatta (730m asl), it seems more likely that al-Walīd's diversion scheme was associated with another site. The Jordan river falls from minus 208m at the shore of Lake Ṭabariyah to minus 394m at the Dead Sea. With Khirbet al-Mafjar at minus 200-250m and about 8kms west of the river Jordan it seems a likely candidate for associating with a major irrigation scheme. One can imagine a diversion started in the upper waters of the river Jordan being used to irrigate the land near al-Mafjar at about 150-200m lower.

Apart from the agricultural aspects of al-Mafjar, like other *quṣūr* it stands on or near a route that was important in the Umayyad period. Any traveller between Amman and the land to the east who crossed the lower Jordan to go up to Jerusalem would pass by Jericho (Ariḥa) before ascending the mountains to Jerusalem and ar-Ramlah beyond. Insofar as it is so close to Jericho, al-Mafjar thus conforms to the trend among so many other Umayyad *quṣūr*, being located close to a route relevant to the interests of the regime.

The persistent attachment of the Umayyad aristocracy to the *bādiya* of Jordan and to northern Palestine suggests itself in the distribution of *quṣūr* built by the Umayyads or developed by them. A number of factors explain this preference for the area. Insofar as the Umayyads were interested in developing waste areas like the *bādiya*, eastern Jordan was an appropriate area to exploit. L. Conrad first drew attention to an interesting passage in a work attributed to pseudo-al-Jāḥiẓ (third/ninth century), entitled *al-'Ibar wa al-I'tibār*. Reference is made to deserts and wastelands in the following terms:

"How many a barren waste has been transformed into compounds (*quṣūr*) and gardens by a group of people moving thither and settling there!"³⁵

This development and settlement of wastes is a process which very exactly parallels that underway in the second/

³⁰Lammens, 'Le Califat de Yazid I^{er}', pp. 463-464; K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford 1969), I², p. 403. For *Khirbet al-Minya* see also pp. 381-389.

³¹R.W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar, An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford 1959), pp. 5-7; See also C.R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine III: Judaea* (London 1883), p. 211.

³²Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³³Hillenbrand, *op. cit.*, p. 82, note 29; I. Braslavski, 'Hat Walīd II den Jordan ablenken wollen?

(Ein Beitrag zu den *Mysterien des R. Simeon b. Jochai*)', *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 13 (1933), pp. 97-100.

³⁴Al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leyden 1885-9) III, secunda ser., p. 1803; Braslavski, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³⁵L.I. Conrad, 'Historical Evidence and the Archaeology of Early Islam', unpublished paper to appear in the *Malcolm Kerr Memorial Volume*. I am indebted to Dr. Conrad for providing me with a copy of his paper prior to publication.

eighth century in the Jordanian *bādiya*.

However, the concentration on northern Palestine and the more northerly parts of the Jordanian *bādiya* by the Umayyads may in part be related to the need to retain communication with the capital, Damascus. This would explain the fact that so many of the *quṣūr* are on or near roads which would have provided ready communication with Damascus and other major centres in Bilad ash-Sham and Arabia. This interpretation would be related to the role of the *quṣūr* as well-sited residences of a peripatetic Umayyad governing class. The facilities created, to be used

by Umayyad caliphs and princes moving around Bilad ash-Sham, became more sophisticated over the lifetime of the regime, culminating in the great palatial foundations of al-Mafjar and al-Mushatta. But alongside these reasons, as suggested in this paper, there is a persistent coincidence between the location of *quṣūr* and the lands of the tribes close to the regime. The desertion of so many *quṣūr* in Bilad ash-Sham under the Abbasids tends to argue in favour of this political factor as a determinant in the siting of at least some of the *quṣūr* founded by the Umayyad leadership.