

The Umayyad Town Planning of the Citadel of 'Ammān

The City Walls and Gates of the Citadel

Our current knowledge regarding the citadel of 'Ammān during the Umayyad period has considerably increased thanks to the recent excavations and investigations carried out, which despite the fact that they were not excessively extended, have allowed us to increase, in particular, our knowledge concerning its town planning organization.

The excavations and studies carried out by C. Bennett and A. Northedge in the 1970s (Northedge 1992), revealed important information on the citadel's defense system and on some of the residential areas inside. In his monograph on 'Ammān in Islamic times, Northedge outlines some features of the street structure that the excavations he had carried out with C. Bennett had brought to light. All this information has currently been far surpassed both in terms of the city wall system and the street structure of at least the upper terrace of the citadel (FIG. 1).

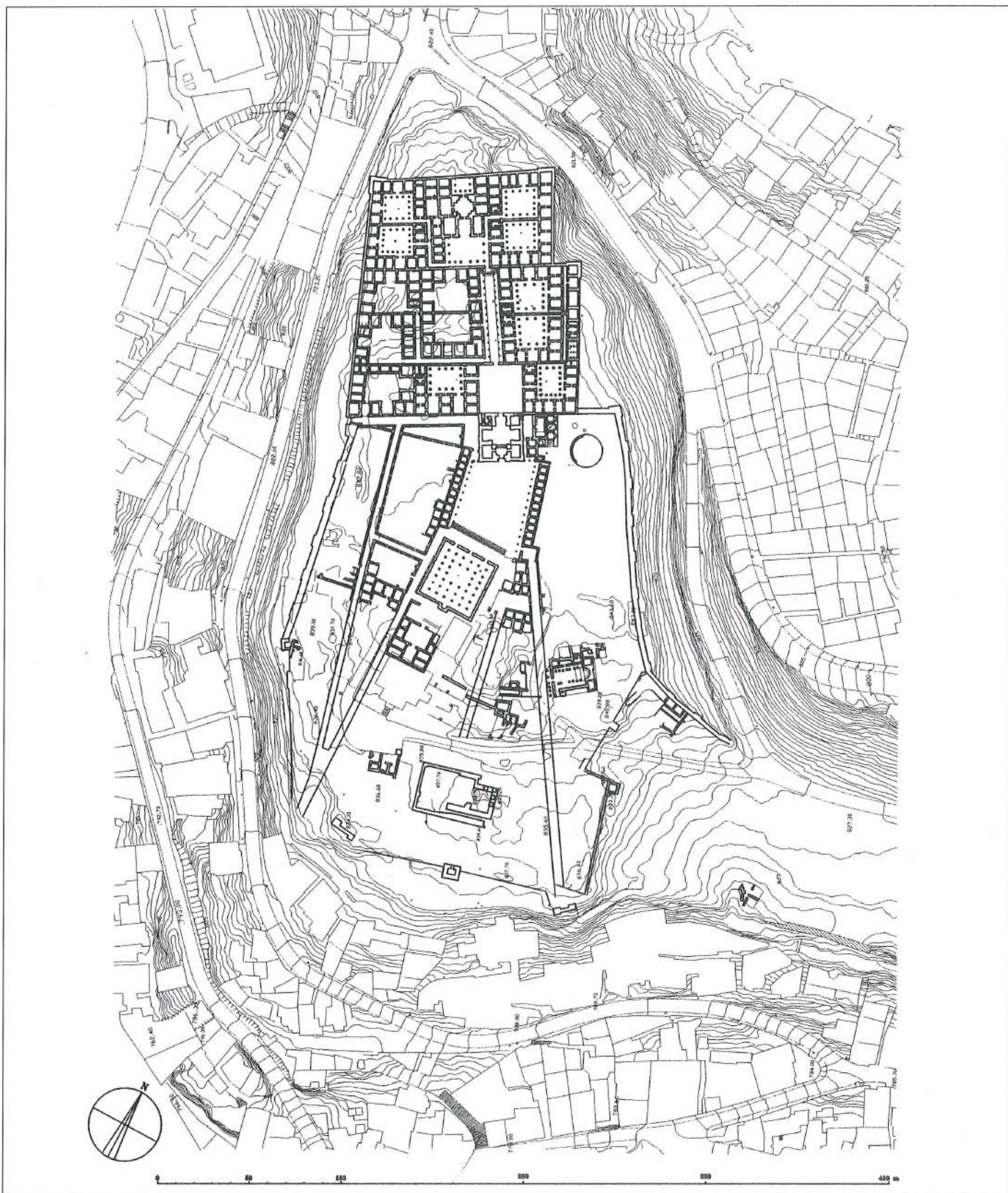
The soil removal carried out at the eastern and western slopes of the citadel during the last two years by the Department of Antiquities has allowed the identification of the perimeter of the citadel in the Umayyad period, while showing that those limits certainly remained like in Roman times at least in the north extreme, although the Ammonite city spread out over a considerably bigger area and reached lower levels of the hill. The Umayyad citadel, which was inhabited by a Muslim elite and undoubtedly coexisted with a lower city that kept on being center of many activities, was defined by a clear perimeter set by the walls and by a town plan which, in spite of its reliance upon earlier structures, was radically transformed.

At the north extreme of Jabal al-Qal'a, the large structure of the Roman temenos served as the perimeter for the new *qasr* and suffered only slight modifications, in order to rebuild part of those structures which certainly were almost in a state of ruin at the beginning of the eighth century. At the rest of the citadel, an important defense sys-

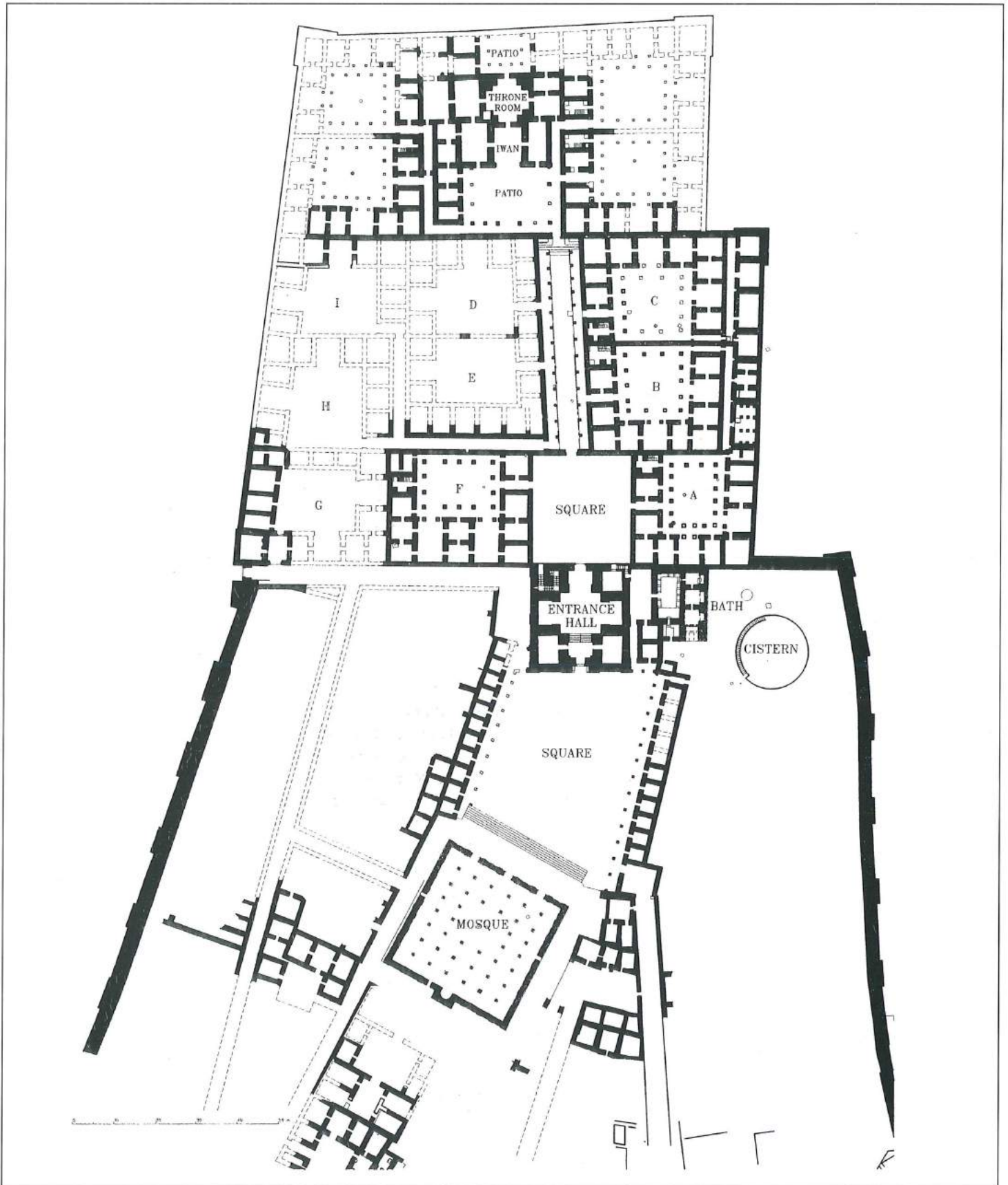
tem was built, composed of an enclosing wall with solid towers which had very little exterior projection. This wall, although it has later important reinforcements, is to be dated to the Umayyad period. The western gate, which is situated exactly on the southern edge of the Roman temenos (FIG. 2), is undoubtedly contemporary to the wall, despite the fact that the northern flank of the gate is the Roman tower on the southwest corner of the temenos. However, the south side of the gate is similar to those on the wall leading towards the south and therefore they must be contemporary.

In Umayyad times, the citadel had another gate which permitted access to the temenos of the Temple of Hercules, on the southeastern corner of the upper terrace. Through the today disappeared propylaeus, documented by Conder and Butler (Conder 1889: 37; Butler 1907: 44), and through a large staircase, access was gained to a gate built in Roman times and later transformed by the Umayyads, who made it narrower (Northedge 1983: 453; Wood 1992: 114). At this gate, which was probably the main connection with the lower city, started one of the main streets of the citadel, as we will see later on.

According to the topography and the inner streets structure, we believe that another gate existed on the southwest corner of the upper terrace, although there is no evidence for it because its location has not been excavated yet (Northedge 1983: fig. 13). These three gates and the inner architectural elements are the basic features used to organize the urban structure. The two last mentioned gates appear to be pre-existing gates. The one possessing the propylaeus is clearly a preserved and reused Roman gate. A street starts at this gate and leads to the North, towards the northern Roman temenos and more exactly to the pre-Umayyad building, which was located where the entrance hall of the *qasr* is placed today. According to its layout, this street seems to be of the Byzantine period at least, because it passed by the church placed on the east side of the citadel, and the facade of which opened to the street.



1. The citadel of 'Ammān with its Umayyad urban layout.



2. The central and north area of the citadel in Umayyad times.

The Square and its Elements

The principal nucleus of the urban reform of the citadel was the layout of a large square located at the center of the upper terrace of Jabal al-Qal'a. This square, which presents a somewhat irregular trapezoidal plan, is laid out as an element of town planning that breaks with pre-existing structures and, at the same time, as an organizing element that defines the new function of the citadel. Its layout and form are due to the decisions adopted according to the organization of the newly created architectural elements and to the reuse of pre-existing features.

Three basic elements are laid out around this public space: the palace, the *sūq* and the mosque (FIGS. 2-6). These three elements, characteristic of any Islamic city, present an absolutely original layout regarding our current knowledge about the early Islamic cities. The mosque is located at the most important place, practically at the highest point in the citadel. In order to build it up, an over elevated artificial platform, which rested upon former structures, was made. The palace is placed opposite the mosque and the remains of a Byzantine building were reused to organize its access (Almagro 1994); this Byzantine building could have had a similar function as propylaeum of a praetorium, which might have been where the temenos of a pagan temple was. The reuse of a pre-existing building and the canonical need to turn the mosque towards south (towards Makka) established a certain unavoidable basis for the shape of the square that, in spite of this determining factors, was masterfully designed.

The *sūq* was situated on the two sides of the square which were not occupied by the above-mentioned buildings. The treatment of its structure is very simple. The most elemental and common form of construction of the commercial organization was the building of small rooms in a row, with a doorway in the front, and protected by a simple portico. This arrangement, typical since the Hellenistic and Roman periods, can be found in the first urban patterns of Islam. 'Anjar (Cresswell 1969: 478) Tadmur/ Palmyra (As'ad 1988-89) and Baysān (Bugod 1997: 80) have similar series of shops. In these cases, however, the shops are placed on streets, but not at large public spaces. 'Ammān's *sūq* shows a big contrast with well known cases such as 'Anjar, where the two main streets, flanked by porticos and shops, do not have a square. Even the small open space surrounded by shops, situated near the mosque and the main palace, is almost independently located from these buildings, and we can consider it a building with a commercial use rather than a public open area. In the cases of Baysān and Tadmur, commercial streets were organized by narrowing the ancient urban paths of the respective Roman cities. The narrowing of these paths caused them to lose of part of their splendor. At 'Ammān, as well as at 'Anjar, we can see a

new town plan which, although it takes advantage of former elements and shapes, is destined to solve new concepts and urban needs.

The new layout of the square makes it not only a commercial area but also and essentially the organizational nucleus of the new city. Not only were the two most important buildings or complexes situated on this square: the mosque and the palace, but also the principal streets which connected the outer wall gateways lead to the square. In this way, the new urban space plays a leading role as the center of the street network and the most outstanding feature in the urban functions of the new Muslim society.

Streets

The Umayyad city was surely constructed by taking advantage of the former street network. The main street, which starts at the south gate permitting access to the temenos of the Jupiter Temple and leading to the northern temenos, must have been constructed in Roman times or at least in the Byzantine period, because the church facade on the eastern side of the upper terrace opened onto this street. The excavations carried out by C. Bennett and A. Northedge in Area B brought to light the existence of this Byzantine street whose layout was preserved (Northedge 1992: 145). It appears probable that at that time this street lead to a building that existed prior to the Umayyad vestibule. We lack information to enable us to know the function of this Byzantine building. It may have been a monumental gate to gain access to an area intended for a praetorium or main residence, emulating the Chalke of the imperial Palace of Constantinople (Almagro 1994).

From this building, another street or avenue lead towards one of the gates of the northern wall of the supposed Roman temenos (Almagro 1983: 133). This street or avenue was paved with large slabs and had a protrusion on the sides of the path, which was later covered by an Umayyad earth floor. However, with a slight rectification of the course, this street was preserved in the Umayyad organization of the palace. There is no evidence of a pre-Umayyad layout of the street that goes along the edge of the mosque on the west side and seems to connect a supposed doorway situated at the southwestern corner of the citadel, although there is no evidence against this hypothesis either.

The pre-existence and reuse of the street network presented no obstacle to the Umayyad creation of a new urban concept, obtained by the layout of a big public space, which was the framework of the principal architectural elements of the citadel and organizational nucleus of the street network at the same time. This big space, skillfully laid out to make pre-existing elements compatible with the new layout of the buildings, inherits former architectural and urban traditions and innovates for later tran-



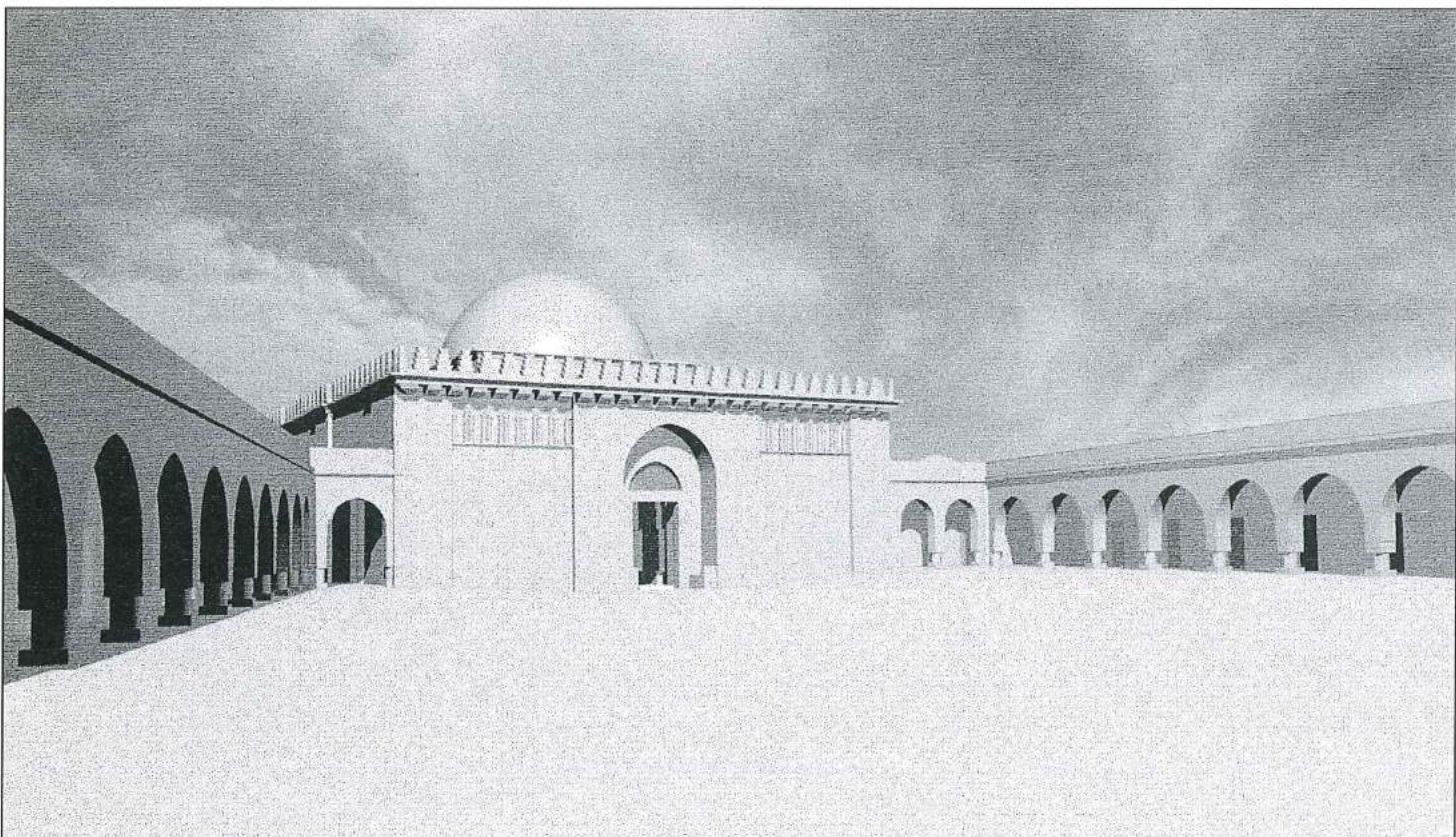
3. The mosque, the square and the entrance hall from the south.



4. The square and the mosque from the terrace of the palace entrance hall.



5. The entrance hall from the south.



6. Virtual reality reconstruction of the entrance hall and the square (image by J. A. Fernandez).

scendental architecture at the same time.

We do not know if it was intentional or rather because of the existing determining factors, but the square presents a lack of axial layouts and breaks in a sense with the Roman urban guidelines. Its systems of tangential connections with the paths leading to the square recalls the Hellenistic town planning features, even though they show evident innovations such as the bent entrance, without perspectives, not even visuals, of the square space from the streets. This concept of urban space, which is very different from the examples of new town planning such as the layouts of the newly created Umayyad cities (like 'Anjar) or the Abbasid town planning at Baghdād (Cresswell 1940: 1-18) or at the palaces of Sāmarrā' (Northedge 1993), will become very successful in Western Islam, as demonstrated in Madīnat az-Zahrā' (Almagro *et al.* 1996: 211-216), where the approaches to the large areas preceding the *qaṣr* and the big reception halls are always corner-shaped and with a bent entrance, such feature assumed by later residential architecture. On the other hand, the free movement permitted on the streets is interrupted on arriving at the square, since everything appears to indicate that there were doors to close the access, thus starting a typical layout of the Islamic *sūq*.

Functionality and Symbolism

The organization and layout of this square deserves a more detailed reflection because of its originality in comparison with other known cases of the early Islamic town planning. The layout thus far considered normal for a mosque and the Dār al-Imāra, and the examples of al-Kūfa (Cresswell 1969: 26), Damascus (Cresswell 1969: 41), 'Anjar (Cresswell 1969: fig. 540) and Baghdād (Cresswell 1940: fig. 2), is contradicted in this case. At 'Ammān the square serves as a general framework for the mosque and palace, but it is clearly separated and even situated as an arrangement rivalry. According to all traces, the *qaṣr* had a more monumental appearance thanks to its huge gate-vestibule with its splendid dome, which must have attracted great attention. In order to lessen the difference between this more splendid building and the mosque, the latter was laid out on the highest place and was highlighted by a platform with a large staircase of seven steps. The simple shapes and simple spacial concept of the mosque, were balanced by a more dominant position.

This layout establishes a clear distinction between palatine area and religious area, even though there is a large square with trading functions between them, that could share other functions or even contend for them. In moments of a great influx of believers, the square could also be used also pray when there was not enough space in the mosque. It is also very probable that the square was used

to hold audiences, where the *amīr* might have used the vestibule terrace as a tribune. That would explain the existence of a large staircase at the building which could also have a ceremonial use. The square is conceived as a multi-functional space, which is also closed to increase the control of all the activities taking place: trade at the *sūq*, religious activities at the mosque and political functions regarding the *qaṣr*. At the same time, this layout establishes a clear relationship between the political, religious and economic aspects of life, and it bears a resemblance to later patterns of both utopian or even real examples of Renaissance cities, where the palace, the church and the market were laid out in urban spaces beautifully designed through the formal control of its imagery (Murray 1972: 72 figs. 89-94). In this case the building style of these two large complexes, *qaṣr* and mosque, which is clearly Oriental-Sasanian inspired, is laid out through an urban conception which is more integrated in the classic Western tradition.

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