Dr Ignacio Arce, Director
Spanish Archaeological Mission to Jordan

Ignacio Arce

Coenobium, Palatium and Hira: The Ghassanid Complex at al-Ḥallābāt

1. Introduction

One of the main goals of the ongoing research and excavation that is being carried out at Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt since 2002[1] has been to clarify the transformation of the complex, and changes in its use, throughout its history, with a neutral approach that does not favour any period in particular. As a result of this research, a completely new picture has emerged, with evidence for a more complex evolution of the site in historical and architectural terms. This study is being conducted in the context of a wider one that analyses the evolution of architectural structures in the region from Late Antiquity to the Early Islamic period in the region[2]. This study encompasses all aspects, from building techniques to the physical transformation and changes in use experienced by these structures, as well as the political, social and economical evolution that can be elicited from those changes.

A detailed analysis of Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt and its principal conclusions can be obtained in previous publications that present and interpret the evidence in full[3]. The aim of this paper is to present a in-depth analysis of the phasing and physical trans-formation of the complex during the pre-Umayyad period, specifically from the mid-6th to the mid-7th centuries AD, which is most probably attributable to the Ghassanid *phylarchs* and related to its socio-political, religious and military context.

Some of the hypotheses and conclusions which have been elicited from the evidence of this phase were totally unexpected (e.g. the co-existence of a monastery and a pre-Umayyad palace within the same precinct). For this reason, these data and related hypotheses have been cautiously and exhaustively double-checked before being presented to the scientific community as firm conclusions[4]. As a result of this cautious approach, in the first publication (Arce 2006) the existence of a Ghassanid *palatium* was proposed as the most plausible hypothesis, as it best corresponded with material evidence related to sequences of transformation and use during the 6th century AD. At this stage, its use as a monastery was not contemplated as the relevant evidence had not been uncovered[5]. Later, after the appearance of new evidence during the current excavations, the possible existence of a chapel inside the complex was contemplated (see Arce 2007), albeit cautious-

the Programme for Archaeological Research Abroad.

[3] See Arce 2006, Arce 2007, and Arce, in press.

[4] These hypotheses have found full meaning when related to historical studies carried out by Prof. Irfan Shahid on the Ghassanids. His work on the transitional period from Late Antiquity to Islam provided a solid historical background for these hypotheses to become truly conclusions, which reciprocally support and illustrate the historical account based on his historical and documentary research.

[5] Notwithstanding David Kennedy's reference about a missing inscription, recording the transformation of the structure into a monastery (see Arce 2006: 42 and note 22). At that time, evidence for the existence of a chapel had not been uncovered. Furthermore, this hypothesis did not fit well with the palatine character of the reception halls (already uncovered and demonstrated to be pre-Umayyad).

ly as no parallels for this unusual typology existed (owing in part also to its unusual association with a palatine structure, for which there were no parallels either). Finally, weight of evidence drove us to a more definitive interpretation[6]: after the dismissal of the *limitanei* and the agreement – *foedus* – between the Ghassanids and Emperor Justinian in 529 AD, the Tetrarchic q*uadriburgium* (then heavily damaged, most probably by an earthquake in 551 AD) was re-occupied, rebuilt and transformed into a monastery and palatine complex during the 6th century AD, and was most probably surrounded by a semi-permanent settlement or camp – *hira* – and an agricultural estate. This was most probably done by the Ghassanid *phylarchs*, thereby creating a complex that would subsequently be taken over and further refurbished by the Umayyads in the 7th century AD (FIGS. 1 and 2).
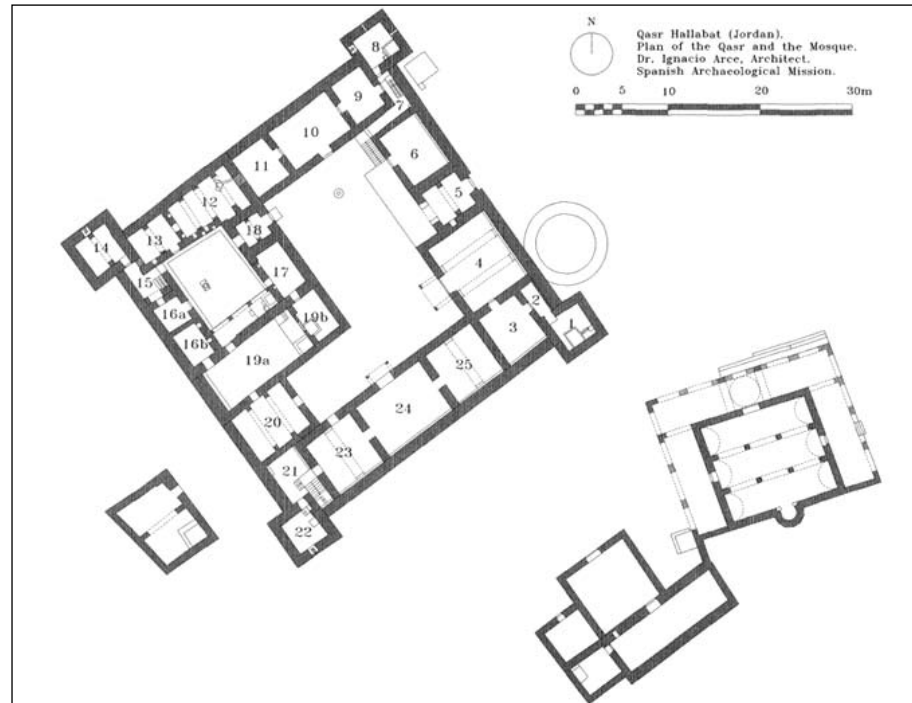
2. The Political and Military Context of the 6th Century AD

2.1 Consequences of the New Frontier Defence Strategy[7]

The military reorganization of the frontiers of the Byzantine Empire carried out by Justinian had a direct effect on the *limes orientalis* that stretched from the Black Sea to the Red Sea. It involved the diocese of Oriens and the Armenian provinces of the diocese of Pontus. The *limes orientalis* was divided into two major segments: Armenian and Arab. The first, running from the Black Sea to the Euphrates, was put under the control of Sittas as *magister militum per Armeniam*. Similarly, in the southern segment (the *limes arabicus*), Justinian placed as many tribes as possible under the command of Arethas ibn Jabala, who ruled over the Arabs, bestowing on him the dignity of kingship (see Shahid 2002: 21). In both cases the intention was to unify the command of all the territories and military forces under a single officer, in order to optimize resources and guarantee maximum efficiency against the increasing military threats.

In the Armenian section, the recruitment of indigenous forces[8] was decided upon because of their better knowledge of the territory. In the Arabian sector, the change was more radical as the *limitanei* of the regular army were withdrawn from their garrisons on the external frontier (the *limitrophe*[9]), as

1. Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt: plan.

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[6] Presented in Arce 2006a and b and Arce, in press.

[7] To better clarify the changes that took place in the region during the periods under consideration, it is advisable to review the socio-political and military context. We here summarize aspects that are of major interest for our discussion, using as main sources Parker 1985 and 2006, Kennedy 2004 and Shahid 2002.

[8] See Malalas, *Chronographia*, quoted by Shahid 2002, p. 23.

[9] *Limitrophe* literally means lands set apart for the support of troops on the frontier and thus describes the borderlands occupied by the Ghassanids (Shahid 2002 p. xxxiii). It corresponds to the so-called *badiya*, or steppic area inhabited by *bedw*, lying between the actual desert (*sahra*) and the cultivated lands where the cities were located.

2. General view after restoration.

this area was assigned directly to the Arabs under Ghassanid command. A major distinction between the two sections was that the *magister militum* of the Armenian sector was commander-in-chief of all the Roman forces at his disposal (both *stratiotai*, regular Roman troops who were Roman citizens, as were their commanders, and *scrinarii* or indigenous troops), whereas the Ghassanid phylarchs only commanded the *foederati, or* indigenous allies, of Oriens. Unlike the Nabateans and the Palmyrenes, whose territories were annexed and who became assimilated as citizens and *rhomaioi arabs*, the Ghassanids were allies (*foederati*) rather than Roman citizens (*cives*) which, according to Shahid (2006: 116) helped them to retain a strong Arab identity and established a basis for the Arabisation of the region.

In Arabia and Palestina, regular Roman soldiers (*stratiotai*) under the command of a Roman / Byzantine *dux* kept control of major cities and their hinterlands. Meanwhile, Arab *foederati* took over military duties on the frontier (*limitrophe*), which had until that time been occupied by the *limitanei* (frontier guard forces), thereby becoming de facto *limitanei* themselves[10].

The *limitanei*, garrisoned in their forts, had been performing static guard duties distinct from the duties of a mobile field army. This might have become monotonous and affected their combat preparedness, leading to inefficiency. This, together with the increasing risks posed by the raids of the Saracens (nomads and pastoralists) and the threat of the Sassanian army, especially that posed by their Arab allies the Lakhmids, led to a radical change in defence strategy. This involved the final dismissal of the *limitanei* by Justinian, who was dissatisfied with their performance, and the total reorganization of the *limes orientalis*.

Only a unified army of all the Arab *foederati*, under a single commander and using similar strategies and tactics to those of the attackers (nomadic pastoralists who were raiding the region), could shield the region from such threats. This was the role played by the Ghassanids as *phylarchs* of all the Arabs in the Roman provinces since 502 AD (a role that had been played before them by the Tanukh and the Salih tribes in the 4th and the 5th century AD respectively). The conclusion of a new *foedus* with the Banu Ghassan[11] after the death of Jabala marked a new era. The *basileia* (kingship) and the *archiphylarchia*[12] conferred on Arethas in 529 AD marked a major change in the political

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[10] Apparently due to the slow pace of replacement, all three categories of troops are mentioned in the Provincia Palestina in the sixth century: *foederati, limitanei* and *stratiotai*.

[11] The analysis of newly discovered documents has led to the conclusion that in 529 AD, in order to defend the territories corresponding to this 'gap', two brothers — Arethas and Abu Karib — were endowed with a *phylarchia* and a *basileia*. The latter was responsible for the southern area, Palestina Tertia province (which included Sinai and western Arabia). The former was responsible for the central and northern areas, i.e. Provinciae Arabia, Phoenicia Libanensis, Syria Salutaris and Euphratensis, broadly speaking located between Palmyra and Wadi Hasa. These documents include the Petra papyri, a Greek inscription from Samma in the Golan, a Syrian ecclesiastical document from al-Nabk in Syria and the Sabean 'dam inscription', which lists the Near Eastern rulers who sent embassies to king Abraha, the Ethiopian conqueror of Yemen (see Shahid 2002: 29). Despite this separate phylarchy, Arethas remained supreme commander-in-chief of the entire federation.

[12] *Phylarchos* originally meant the commander or chief of a *phyle*, or tribe; later it also came to mean a foreign lord or chief in a treaty relationship with Byzantium (Shahid 2002: 10). He was also nominated *patricius* and *stratelates*, which was the Greek equivalent of *magister militum* (ibid: 26).

and military role assumed by the Ghassanid kings. This change would determine the historical events to come, which would in turn illuminate those that occurred at Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt.

In political terms, the *foedus* of 502 AD that had been established with Jabala, Arethas' father, was narrower in scope than the consecration of Arethas as 'king' in the *foedus* of 529 AD. This would necessarily be reflected in the sort of architecture demanded by these new monarchs, who would have required a 'theatre' in which to perform their new role as kings of all the federate Arabs and in which to receive allegiance from their subjects and clients.

In addition, the fact that the Ghassanid army was partly a frontier force and partly a mobile field army must be taken into account[13]. It was therefore dependent on the effective control of water sources for its logistical bases. This would explain the location and use of some of the fortifications — towers — that were built or refurbished, such as those at Haliorama and probably at Burquʻ and Ḥallābāt itself. As a frontier force, the Ghassanid army had long before participated in the Persian wars with its mobile army, but with the new *foedus* they now added the duties of watchmen of the frontier to their responsibilities. For that reason, their strategy and tactics (especially under Mundhir) responded to a new style in frontier wardenship, not static and defensive, but mobile and aggressive (see Shahid 2002: 49-50). Accordingly, their main military contribution was cavalry (decisive at the battle of Callinicum where they deployed approximately 5000 cavalry troops), which would explain the location of one of their headquarters in Gaulanitis, source of the best Arab horses and famous for its pastures.

2.2 The Fate of the Fortifications of the Limes Arabicus

The gradual dismissal and replacement of the *limitanei* by the Ghassanid *foederati* for the defence of the *limes* was a radical change from the Diocletianic system of defence (which consisted of *comitatenses* in the interior and *limitanei* along the

borders[14]) and therefore dramatically changed the political, military and even religious character of the region. Gradually, forts that had housed the garrisons of the regular Roman Army for centuries were emptied and re-used in different ways, often as monasteries. In other cases, such as at Kastron Mefaʻa, they became extensions *intramuros* of the *vicus* (built and inhabited by the families of soldiers once the ban of marriage while serving the Roman Army had been lifted) which had hitherto grown *extramuros* in the shadow of the military forts. Others forts were completely abandoned, as at al-Lajjūn and Udhruḥ.

The detailed description by Procopius of the fortifications built under Justinian as part of this reorganization of the *limes* reveals a gap between Palmyra and Ayla, the defence of which was entrusted to the Ghassanids. According to Shahid, this gap was a further expression of Procopius' antipathy towards the Arabs: a "vested and premeditate silence would have deprived historians from an accurate and neat picture of the military and political situation of the region" (Shahid 2002: 27-37). However, in my opinion this silence of Procopius about the construction of new fortifications under Justinian in this region may be linked to the fact that such fortifications would have been useless for a mobile field army like that of the Ghassanid *foederati*. Such an army would not have been garrisoned in forts, but would have been based in temporary or seasonal camps: *hira / hirta* in Syriac.

As a result, no substantial fortifications would have been built *ex-novo* at that time in this southern stretch of the *limes,* at least in the *limitrophe* under Ghassanid control, as there would have been no need for them. A few towers, perhaps associated with a monastery as at Burquʻ, may have been built to protect strategic points such as crossroads or water sources, assuming there was no previous Roman structure fulfilling that function that could be re-used. It stands to reason that structures abandoned by the dismissed *limitanei* would have changed function and been refurbished. Some, such as Ḥallābāt, Dayr al-Kahf, al-Fudayn and probably

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[13] To illustrate the mobility of the Ghassanid army we can mention the battle of Qinnasrin / Chalcis that took place in 554 AD, during the 'Federates War' which lasted from the end of the second Persian War in 545 AD until the 'Endless Peace' of 561 AD. This battle took place in *Syria Prima*, in an area that should have been defended by the *stratiotai* of the regular Byzantine Army under the command of the *dux* of Syria, far away from the Ghassanid headquarters in Gaulanitis. This demonstrates how their role of

limitanei actually extended as far north as Sergiopolis, far from the area theoretically under their control. Another example of the great mobility of Arab *foederati* is the inscription dated 328 AD of Imru al-Qays proclaiming that he had fought in areas of the Arabian peninsula that were at a great distance from each other (Shahid 1984: 53; see also Shahid 2002: 49).

[14] Shahid 2002: xxxii.

Dayr al-Qinn, became monasteries. These could have controlled perennial water sources on behalf of the *foederati*, who may occasionally have camped nearby, or even have played a more complex role as at Ḥallābāt. Those which were not of strategic value would have been abandoned, like the huge and difficult-to-manage *castra* at al-Lajjūn and Udhruḥ, or would have been transformed into true cities, as at Kastron Mefaʿa.

Other new constructions and refurbishments would have had this mixed character, part religious and part palatial, that denote the complex political and religious agenda of the Ghassanids (as at Ḥallābāt). They range from audience halls with religious uses (or *vice versa*) like Mundhir's *praetorium* at Resafa, to monasteries with towers, whether for the defence of the monastery or to be used as watch towers to protect roads and / or strategic water sources (small-scale like Burquʿ, or larger ones like Haliorama / Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al Gharbī), to hostels (*xenodocheion*) that could offer help and rest to travellers and comfort to their bodies and souls, thereby combining religious, military and 'philanthropic' functions. More complex structures, always with a multi-layered function that may not have been primarily military, could include Usays and Dumeyr. Although the latter had a fort-like appearance, it is more likely to have been palatial – and perhaps monastic – compound, meanwhile the former had a more complex configuration with several buildings, among them a fort-like structure and remains of a monastic chapel – (according to Franziska Bloch pers. comm.) [15]. From all this a complex image of buildings and complexes fulfilling more than one function emerges, but all served a common aim: the political and religious agenda of the Ghassanids (which, as we will see, on some occasions responded to Byzantine interests, but on others resulted in open conflict).

2.3 Monasteries as Defensive Elements
Monasteries would have played a key defensive role on the *limitrophe* after the *limitanei* of the reg-

ular Roman Army had been replaced on the frontier by Ghassanid *foederati*. These fortified monasteries (and their towers) were able to act as watch posts that could alert nearby military stations and confront attackers (thanks to their fortifications), acting as a *vigilarium* of the Roman Army would have done in the past[16].

Some of these monasteries (whether built on the site of a former Roman fort or not) were associated with temporary or permanent camps (*hira*) and can therefore be considered as part of their logistical support. The Ghassanid *maslaha / hira* (fort and camp) on the *limitrophe* was manned by observant Christian troops, who performed their religious duties even in this difficult location. The monasteries established in the vicinity would also have played an important role in this respect[17]. A landscape of permanent buildings (like those at Ḥallābāt) arose out of this symbiosis between monasteries and camps. These buildings would have been surrounded by tents, which – in some cases – were subsequently replaced by additional buildings (as the case of Ḥallābāt shows[18]).

In other cases, monasteries were equipped with proper fortifications, built *ex-novo* to protect against attacks by nomads, as was the case at the *castrum-lavra* of St Catherine in Sinai after a request by the monks to Emperor Justinian (see Monferrer 1999: 82 and 91-3). Eventually two more *castra* were built in the vicinity and manned with 100 troops to protect the monastery more effectively (Monferrer 1999: 92).

3. Summary of Phasing at Ḥallābāt (FIG. 3)
According to our conclusions, the phases of use and related transformations that occurred at the Ḥallābāt complex can be summarized as follows[19]:

During the first phases (Ia, Ib, Ic and II), the structure of the Qaṣr had a clear military purpose as part of the defensive system of the *limes arabicus*, manned by *limitanei* and having all the requisite features and characteristics of a military structure.

Phase I (2nd-3rd century AD) corresponds to

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[15] Lenoir 1999.

[16] Lassus, J., *Sanctuaries Chrétiens de Syrie*. Paris, 1947, p. 269 & note 2 (quoted by Shahid 2002: 205).

[17] Regarding the location of troops near monasteries, it is noteworthy that troops who were grateful to Simeon the Younger for his aid in their victory over the Lakhmid king Mundir stayed with him after returning from battle.

[18] This would explain the scattered and "chaotic" pattern of houses in settlements such as Ḥallābāt, Umm al-Jimal or the outskirts of

Kastron Mefaʿa. It is revealing that some confusion was experienced when mapping these scattered buildings at Ḥallābāt, especially when trying to distinguish between the remains of these buildings and the "foundations" of bedouin tents which were pitched in the area until recently.

[19] For the sake of the reader and to facilitate the discussion we include this summary here. For a complete discussion see Arce 2006, Arce 2007 and Arce in press.
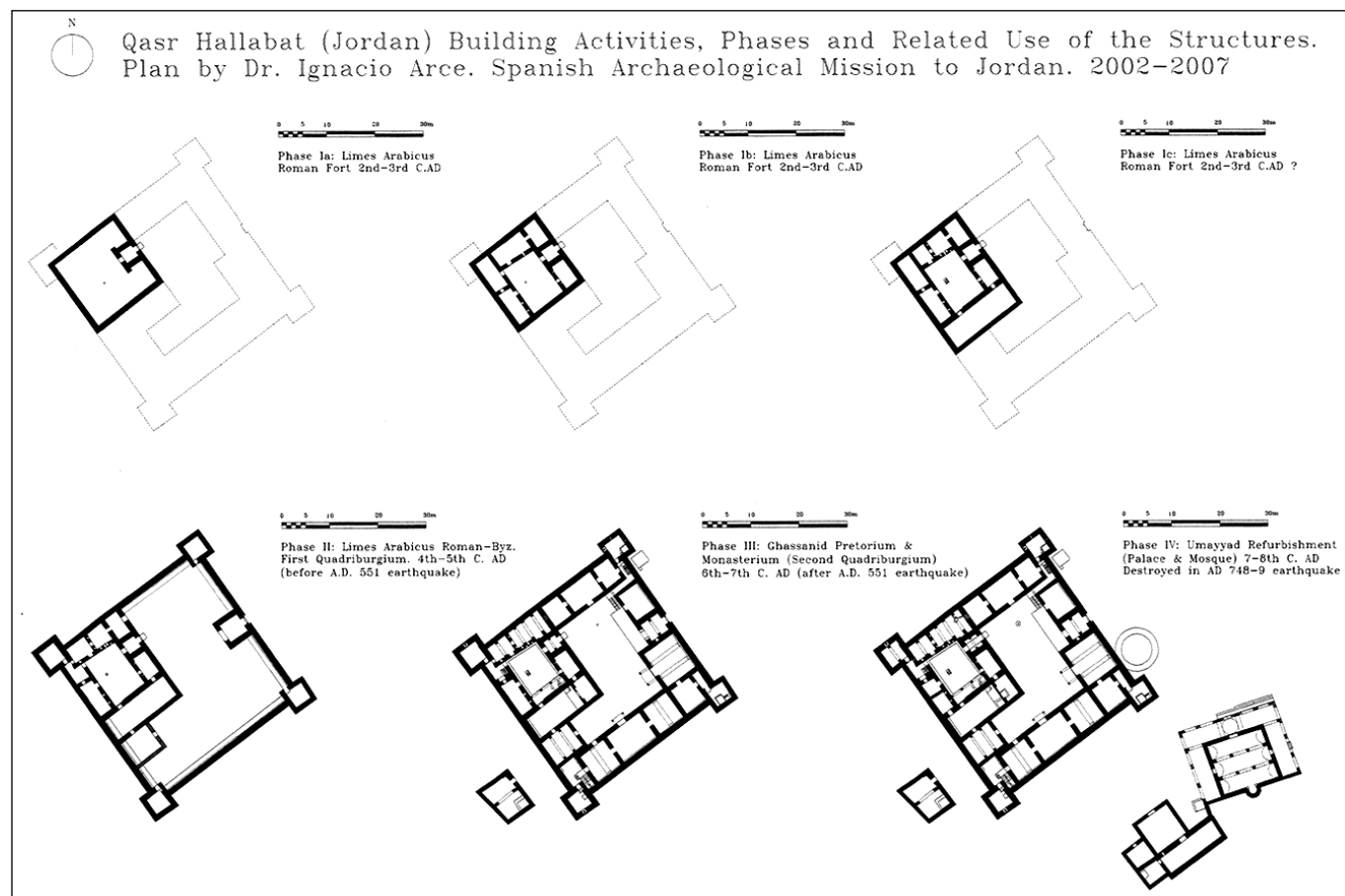
3. Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt: evolution of the complex and phases of use.

the 'first fort' or core building, which was 17.5m. square and located at the northern corner of the present building (FIGS. 3a, b and c). It was built of regular masonry consisting of well-dressed limestone ashlars with even, tight joins. Later, the building was internally sub-divided by means of partition walls that delineate several rooms around a central courtyard with a cistern (FIG. 3b). It was then enlarged on its south-eastern side with the addition of a room running from the NW to the SE façades (FIG. 3c).

During Phase II (end of 3rd / beginning of 4th century AD), an enclosure 38m. square (the 'first *quadriburgium*') was built around the **'first fort'** (FIG. 3d). It had corner towers[20] (including the N / NW one incorporated within the oldest fort) according to the well-defined typology for this period. The building technique of this first *quadriburgium* consists of roughly hewn limestone blocks which are indicative of rapid construction, perhaps in re-

sponse to the threat posed by the Persians. This episode of enlargement and transformation was almost certainly associated with the build-up of the frontier defences during the Tetrarchic period, which included the construction of many *quadriburgii* to host the *limitanei* units[21] which manned these fortified structures.

In Phase III (the so-called 'second *quadriburgium*'), there was an episode of refurbishment which included three distinctive features indicative of a change in use. First, the lack of a defensive capability in its newly refurbished perimeter walls and towers, second, the construction *intramuros* of a series of reception rooms with a clear representative function and, third, the transformation of the oldest fort into a monastery, which included the construction of an inner portico and chapel (FIGS. 3e, 4, 16 and 19). It's worth mentioning that the interventions that gave birth to the monastery may have been carried out in two stages: first, the aban-

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[20] Remains of these first towers can be seen incorporated within the present ones or as part of their foundations.

[21] In many cases these units were composed of *equites promoti indigenae*.
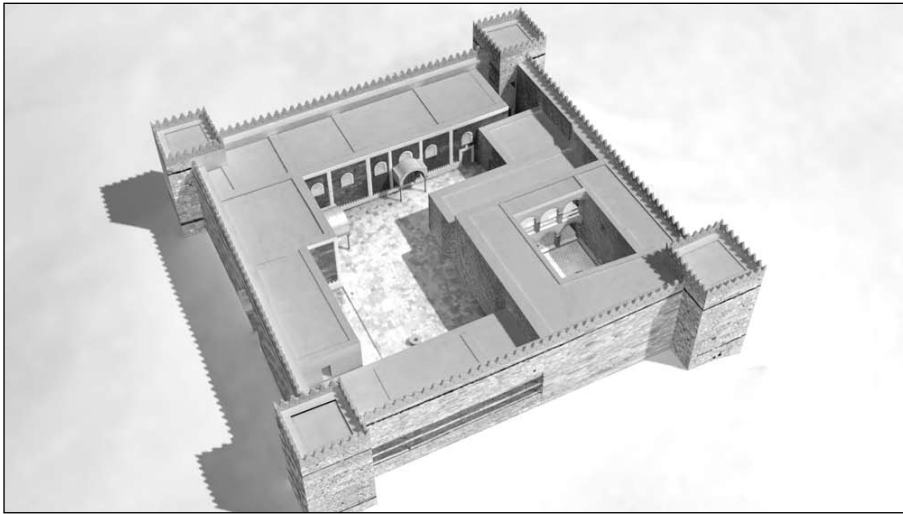
4. Reconstruction showing the complex in the late 6th century AD.

doned military structure would have been transformed into a simple monastery and, later, it would have been patronised and completely refurbished by the same rulers who built the adjoining palatine structures.

The latest building phase, Phase IV, which dates to the Umayyad period, re-used and redecorated the palatine areas of the complex with a clear and distinctive character, different from its predecessors in terms of materials, building techniques and decorative features, and transformed the monastery into kitchens, stores and service areas (FIG. 3f).

This refurbishment of the pre-existing palatine and monastic structures by the Umayyads, reinforces the hypothesis that dates the Phase III structures (the so-called 'second *quadriburgium*', including the basalt structures[22], and the refurbishment of the oldest fort as a monastery) to the second half of the 6th century AD. The lack of any dedicatory inscription[23] prevents us from making categorical assertions, but we can infer that at that time and in such a peripheral area of the *limitrophe*, only the Ghassanids *phylarchs* could have built and patronized a joint palatial and monastic complex like this (see *addenda* below on the hypothetical identification of the site).

4. Description and Interpretation of the Phase III Transformations

We can distinguish between two episodes of building activity during this phase, which is dated to the 6th century AD: first, construction within the walls of the 'second *quadriburgium*' which was devoted to palatine use and, second, the transformation of the former 'first fort' into a monastery (FIGS. 2 and 3e). Both entailed the transformation of the original military structure in response to the changes in the *limes* defence strategy described above. Consequently, all the Phase III transformations resulted in the loss of the defensive character of the building, especially in the case of the perimeter wall area where, for example, the towers were transformed into latrines and stores.

4.1 The Palatine Area

Following a major destruction (most probably resulting from the 551 AD earthquake), the structure of the *quadriburgium* was rebuilt on identical lines[24]. The towers and stretches of the perimeter wall belonging to this phase were well-constructed of medium-size limestone ashlars, laid in regular courses, with courses of basalt headers placed at certain heights to bind both faces of the wall (FIG. 2).

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[22] Which provide a clear *post quem* date, thanks to the fragments of the Anastasius edict carved on them. For the hypothesis that these came from a structure in a nearby city, which collapsed in the 551 AD earthquake (the same that is thought to have destroyed the 'first *quadriburgium*' at Ḥallābāt), see Arce 2006, Arce 2007 and Arce, in press.

[23] It is ironic that on a site so rich in inscriptions, not a single reference to this period has survived. Clearly, the Umayyads were

meticulous when defacing any visual reference to the previous rulers and lords of Ḥallābāt. See also Note 5 re. the monastery's missing inscription.

[24] For this reason we use the term 'second *quadriburgium*', despite the fact that it was no longer a military *quadriburgium*, but a completely new building with new uses, and a new internal arrangement albeit externally it was almost identical to its predecessor.

The building now included new internal masonry partition walls, constructed in the same manner as the external wall, but using only basalt stone (FIGS. 5a and 7). These walls define three main units, or clusters of rooms, respectively comprising rooms 9, 10 and 11 (in the NE section), rooms 23, 24 and 25 (in the SW section) and rooms 3 and 4 (in the SE section, including the south tower, 1). The layout of the first two units is almost identical, with a main room flanked by two smaller ones[25]. From one of the smaller rooms, there is secondary access to the nearby towers, which have a store-room below and a latrine above, with an outlet located downwind. The importance of the main room is emphasised by its size, decoration and direct access from the court. Furthermore, in the SW cluster, room 24 was spanned by an elaborate wide-spanned ceiling supported by a cantilevered basalt cornice[26], while the flat ceilings of the lateral rooms were supported by diaphragm arches. A separate, less important, unit is that around room 6, situated north of the main entrance, room 5, to the complex. **An external staircase was added to provide access from the main courtyard to the rooms above, which probably functioned as guard-rooms**[27].

Room 4 is different from the other halls because of its orientation, more or less, towards the east (like the monastic chapel), the presence of two N-S diaphragm arches to support the ceiling, and the absence a second flanking room. Also unique are the traces of carved crosses and palms on the springers of the two diaphragm arches. Additionally, this room gave sole access to tower 1 (via room 3 and corridor 2), which was thereby deprived of its own access to the courtyard, as were the other towers. Tower 1 is also unusual, not only because it is the only one without a latrine on its upper floor, but also because it is lacks a constructed staircase, with the result that it would have been necessary to use a ladder to access it. This might relate to some special use for the upper room, perhaps as a strongroom — *bayt al-mal* — or as a cell. The question of whether room 4 (and, indeed, the whole SE cluster of rooms: 1, 2, 3 and 4) could have had a further religious function, such as a palatine chapel or an *oratorio* secluded from the monastery church[28], remains open. It is noteworthy that its entrance, covered by a canopy (see below), was aligned to face the door of room 20. This room 20 therefore acted as a 'narthex' for the monastic chapel and for those coming from the palace (intended both as an access point and 'buffer zone' between the former and the latter - see plan).

We should emphasize the 'shared', i.e. political and religious, use that occurs in Ghassanid audience halls (the case of Mundhir's **hall** at Resafa is paradigmatic[29], as it was apparently used not only as a church, but also as a venue for conferences). **Room 4 at** Ḥallābāt could also have been used in this way. Indeed, if we take into account the fact that this type of 'shared' use occurred at Ḥallābāt on the scale of the entire complex, i.e. a monastery next to a palace, it is perfectly plausible that the same could have applied in the case of one of its halls. Fowden, referring to Mundhir's *Pretorium*, remarks: "to suggest that church and audience hall were mutually exclusive categories is simply to miss the point" (Fowden 1999: 168). Our conclusions show that the same can be said of palaces and monasteries[30].

This shared use of buildings in the Byzantine realm can be seen as a symbolic expression of the effective unification of Church and Empire that came into being after Constantine. This is evident, for example, at the "Golden Octagon" built beside the Imperial Palace on the Orontes island at Antioch. Owing to its location, Krautheimer (1981: 89) has inferred that it was simultaneously both a cathedral and palatine chapel, and thus would have hosted very different ceremonies with both political and religious connotations.* This would be the

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[25] This sort of arrangement is very different from the typical Umayyad scheme (the so-called 'Syrian *bayt*'), comprising a central oblong room flanked by two pairs of lateral rooms opening on to it.

[26] Similar to those found at Umm al-Jimāl, in the main building of the "barracks", in the main hall of the *Pretorium* – above the cruciform hall – and in the late entrance to the court of house XVII (amongst others).

[27] Mural paintings imitating marble were added to room 6 in the Umayyad period, when it was probably also used as a reception hall.

[28] Shahid points out that towers in monasteries could also have been places of retreat for solitary monks - a place of seclusion for those who lived in a *koinobion* but nevertheless wanted to contemplate in solitude. He notes that these seclusion towers sometimes had their own chapels (Shahid 2002: 205 and note 247).

[29] See Brands 1988; Fowden 1999: 168; and Shahid 2002: 129.

[30] Much later, another zealous Christian monarch, Philip II of Spain, would build his Escorial palace following the same concept, sharing the premises of the palace building with a monastery served by monks from the Order of St. Jerome (an order patronised by the Spanish kings).

* It could even seen as an antecedent of the mixed political and religious, funtions given to congregational mosques in Islam.

antecedent for those built by Justinian (and later by Charlemagne) as part of their palatine complexes. Even more relevant to our discussion is the case of the *Chrysotriclinos*, or "Golden Triclinium", of the Great Palace of Constantinople. As was the case with Roman audience halls, this had simultaneous religious and civil functions, serving as an audience hall for the 'divine majesty' of the Emperor and as a palatine chapel (Krautheimer 1981: 91).

Decoration

These rooms were principally designed as reception halls and were therefore lavishly decorated, both internally and externally. The degree of richness in their decoration varied with their importance: for instance, room 24, probably the most important one, was lined with marble slabs (fixed with metal **cramps** and mortar – see FIGS. 5a and b) and had a mosaic floor fringed with black and white stone *tesserae*. The marble wall cladding remained in use into Umayyad period, but the original floor mosaic was completely removed (owing to the political message it conveyed) and replaced with a new mosaic with glass *tesserae* and a guilloche fringe[31] some time during the Umayyad period (FIGS. 6c and d). All the **extant** rooms probably had mosaics, of which only traces survive in the palatine area and church (also removed by the Umayyads because of their religious connotations). At the monastery, all mosaics that did not convey any obvious religious message were kept for practical reasons; some were even restored.
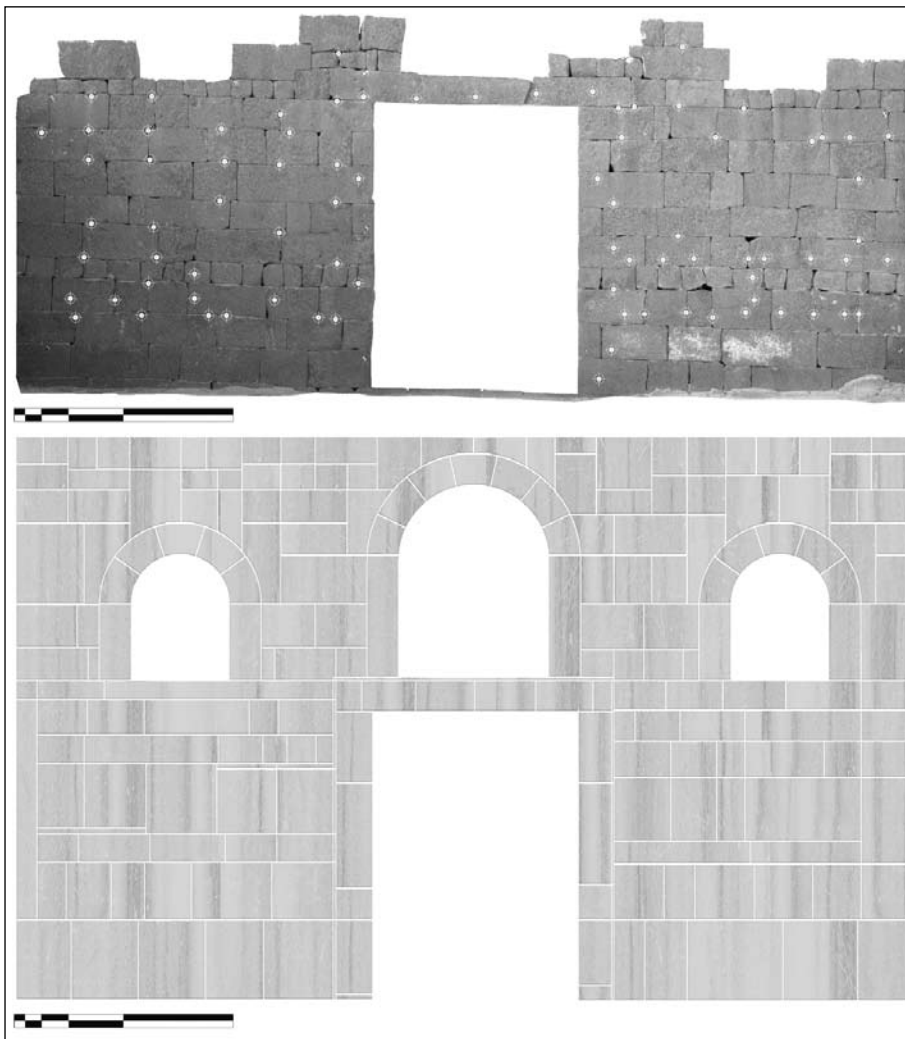
5. Ḥallābāt room 24 (reception hall). A: Mapping the holes drilled / carved on the basalt-built northern wall to take the metal cramps which held the marble slabs that lined this reception hall in place. Note, at floor level, traces of the thick (2 to 4cm.) mortar layer used to fix the slabs and even traces of the marble slabs themselves. B: Reconstruction of the marble panelling according to the material evidence, *viz.* (cramp holes and imprints of the slabs on the fixing mortar).

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[31] This stratigraphic evidence was the proof that triggered the hypothesis of a pre-Umayyad palace, taken over and subsequently refurbished by the new Muslim rulers. Just a few *tesserae* of the fringe of the original mosaic survived under the new one, but these were enough to prove the assertion.
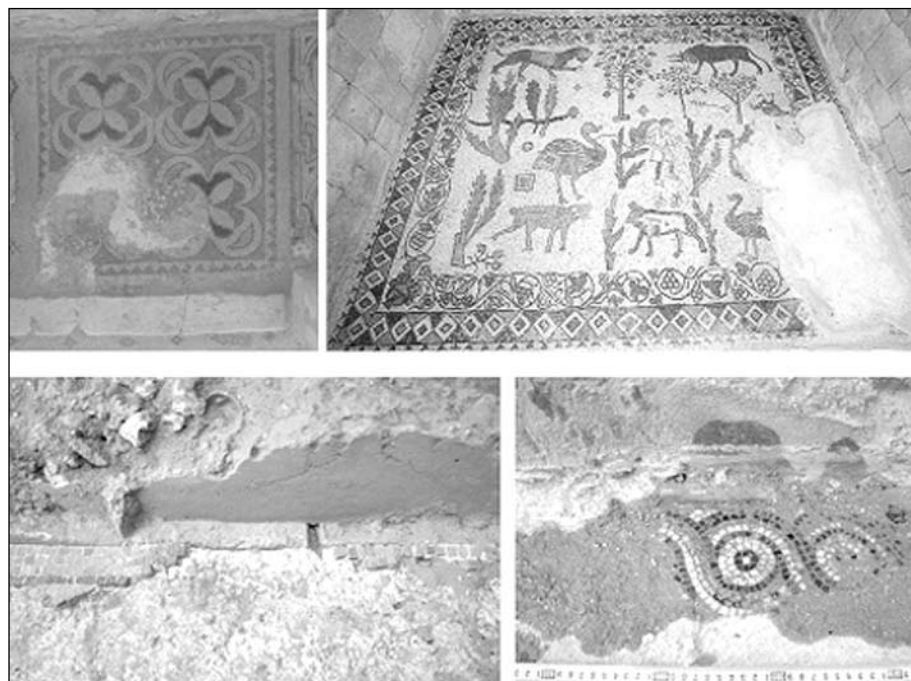
6. Ḥallābāt, pre-Umayyad mosaics. A: Monastery, portico mosaic (see also Arce 2006: fig.12 and Arce 2007: figs. 17 and 18). B: Palace, room 11 mosaic (Piccirillo 1993: fig. 776). C: Palace, hall 24 pre-Umayyad stone mosaic laid at the same level as the marble cladding (removed). D: Hall 24, Umayyad glass mosaic applied over the remains of the previous one and against the marble cladding.

The Mosaic in Room 11

The discovery of mosaics (or traces of them) of the pre-Umayyad period, not only in the area of the former monastery (FIG. 6a) and chapel, but also in the audience halls, has led to a re-assessment of the unique mosaic in room 11 (FIG. 6b) which had been attributed to the Umayyad period (along with others uncovered in the palatine area by Bisheh[32]).

This mosaic is notable because of its technical characteristics and themes, both of which are quite different from the rest of the 'Umayyad' mosaics at the site. It has been suggested that these may have been created by different mosaicists (Piccirillo 1993: 350), but without inferring a different date.

Whereas the other mosaics with figures were composed of a series of interlaced braids enclosing medallions, with the figures placed both in the medallions and in the spaces left between them, this was the only one with a single field of representation containing the main figures. It is enclosed by a double frame: an external one composed of lozenges, and an internal one of vine scrolls with bunches of grapes stemming from four jars placed in the corners. The field is divided by a central axis defined more clearly in the upper section by a tree of life, which separates an ox and a strange lion with human face. Below the latter, a snake, also with a human head and bearded face, creeps be-

tween the bushes, while below the former there are two fruit trees and a bird placed upside down. In the central and lower section of the field, the axial composition is not so clear, as it is composed of two rows of three figures each. The central one portrays a hunter with bare feet carrying a hare on his shoulder and leading an ostrich by a rope, while he walks towards a second ostrich on his right, with a bird on top of it. In the lower register, a sheep confronting a ram and a third ostrich complete the composition.

Although the design and composition is very naïve, combining common Christian-inspired themes of the Byzantine period (ox and lion confronted or eating side by side, tree of life, the sequence of animals etc.), the use of human faces applied to animals is really unusual and disturbing as it seems to conceal a message, the meaning of which is obscure to us. It might represent the fight between good and evil, personified in these animals with human faces. In any case, it does not seem at all like an iconographic design devised for an Islamic palace. Consequently, the hypothesis of a pre-Umayyad date for this mosaic (which would associate it with the Ghassanid complex) could be put forward. In any event, it was preserved in the Umayyad period for a reason that remains as obscure as its symbolism – most probably both issues

[32] It was considered Umayyad by both Dr Bisheh and Father Pic- cirillo (Bisheh and Piccirillo 1993: 350-1 and figs 774-776).

are closely related[33].

Canopies, an Architectural Device for Framing Divine and Earthly Might

The entrances to these rooms were further enhanced with the construction of canopies over their doors (in rooms 4 and 24, but not in room 10)[34]. These structures are certainly pre-Umayyad (as the mortar used in their construction proves — see Arce 2006a and b, in press), although like the rest of the palatine areas they were redecorated with new motifs bearing a new political message (FIGS. 7 and 8d).

This architectural element — a porch composed of a barrel vault supported by two beams, resting on two columns and usually placed over an important doorway — had extraordinary success in Late Antiquity, being introduced to many buildings, both religious and civil, even after they had been completed (the church of Qalb Lozeh — see FIGS. 8a and b — is a relevant example). Its popularity continued into Umayyad period, as the case of the Dome of the Rock shows[35] (FIG. 8c).

This element is, in my opinion, a derivation — both formally and symbolically, but on a smaller

scale — of the arched lintel of a *fastigium*[36], the glorification façade under which the Emperor presented himself to his subjects after holding private audiences indoors in the *salutatoria* or reception halls (see Krautheimer 1981: 90).

It was used, depicted and built in different contexts (e.g. mural paintings, cultic or prestige ivory objects, churches and palaces), but was always related to religious as well as political issues, framing figures of saints or mighty rulers. Amongst examples with a religious character, we can mention a consular diptych where the canopy frames the Archangel Michael carrying a globe crowned by cross and sceptre (FIG. 9a), an ivory case panel where the canopy shelters a Virgin *Theotokos* receiving the gifts of the three Magi (FIG. 9b) and an ivory casket with the figure of St Menas under a canopy, amongst the faithful (FIG. 9c).

There are also examples of these arched structures sheltering royal / imperial *personae*, as in the socle of the obelisk at Constantinople, where the Emperor Theodosius II is depicted with his sons, Arcadius and Honorius, and the Emperor Valentinian II, receiving the homage of the barbarians and attending the games at the Hippodrome un-

7. Ḥallābāt: reconstruction of the canopy from the entrance to room 4 (during the Ghassanid period). Note the white plaster decoration applied to the basalt-built walls.

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[33] We know that all mosaics from the pre-Islamic period which were in the chapel and palatine reception halls were destroyed. Only those from the former monastery court with geometric decoration, or no evident symbolic meaning, were kept for practical reasons. Why then was this one not removed? Perhaps because it made reference to a local tradition or myth that had full meaning at that time, and was not against Islamic beliefs. For the time being, unfortunately, no satisfactory answer can be found to this question.

[34] The one from room 24 was the most evident, as traces of mortar in the shape of an arch over the entrance and holes carved into the wall clearly indicated its location. The one from room 4 was

detected because of traces of mortar left on the floor by the base of its right column. Later, the retrieval of the door, with carved holes for the beams, from the rubble of the jambs confirmed our initial hypothesis. There are no traces of a canopy in room 10.

[35] Nonetheless, it has been demonstrated that these canopies, although built in the Umayyad period, were not part of the original design of the building, as was the case at Qalb Lozeh, but were a 'trendy' addition (see Allen 1999: 209 and fig 11).

[36] Originally, this term designated the crest or ridge of a roof (also the pediment of a portico, so-called in ancient architecture because it followed the form of the roof). The most outstanding surviving example is that of the Diocletian Palace at Spalato.

8. Canopies. A and B: Qalb Lozeh church, Syria: traces of two canopies with gable and semi-circular profiles respectively. C: Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock: canopy. D: Ḥallābāt: traces of a canopy at the entrance to hall 24; note traces of mortar from the vault and holes for the supporting beams.

der a canopy supported by two columns, or in the diptych of the Empress Ariane (in this case it is a domed and isolated canopy, or baldachin), or even in the Umayyad period, at Quṣayr ʿAmra, where the Caliph is depicted seated on a throne under a canopy and, apparently, a *fastigium* (FIG. 9d).

It is clear that these architectural elements were designed to frame the gates of buildings, structures or halls of great political or religious significance[37], or, as we seen above, buildings that served both functions simultaneously. In our case it is clear that they were placed at the doors of the two main audience halls of the palatine section of the complex, emphasising the concept of political and religious might.

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[37] More elaborate porches (usually surmounted by a dome) were built at the entrance of several Byzantine and Umayyad structures. The latter include the qaṣr and bath / audience hall of Maf-

jar at Jericho, or even mosques, such as the one recently discovered by at Ḥallābāt itself (Arce, forthcoming).

9. Representation of canopies in objects and mural paintings. A: Consular diptych representing Archangel Michael carrying globe crowned by the cross and a sceptre (British Museum). B: Ivory case panel depicting a Virgin *Teothokos* receiving the gifts of the Magi (British Museum). C: Ivory casket with the figure of St Menas (British Museum). D: Quṣayr 'Amra: Umayyad Caliph seated under a canopy on a throne.

Aestheticising Politics, Politicising Aesthetics: the Bi-chromatic (Black and White) Decoration

The bi-chromatic decoration on the Ḥallābāt structures dating to the 6th century AD deserves special mention. It can be found on different elements and used various techniques, for instance, the combined basalt / limestone masonry of the external walls, or the application of decorative white plaster to the black basalt walls of the main courtyard.

In the first case, the bi-chromatic effect could be viewed as a natural result of combining different kinds of stone on the basis of their mechanical properties and the different use given to each of them[38], but it is clear that this combination was also exploited for its aesthetic value[39] (FIGS. 3, 14c and d) and, perhaps, some sort of political meaning.

An even more deliberate decorative intent in the use of this black and white combination can be seen in the second case, where white plaster was applied to define architectural elements and depict figurative ones. Amongst the former are 'pilaster-like' elements (actually are vertical gutters) and a dado crowned with globular elements (FIG. 10), whilst amongst the latter is a frieze of animals, including lions, gazelle, camels, dogs, onagers etc. (FIG. 11). There were also plaster roundels, e.g. above the door of room 23, or on the *intrados* of the arches of some other rooms), that with a symbolic or representative feature, such as a monogram, or a cross as in the ceiling of the monastery portico (see above).

When all these features are taken into account,
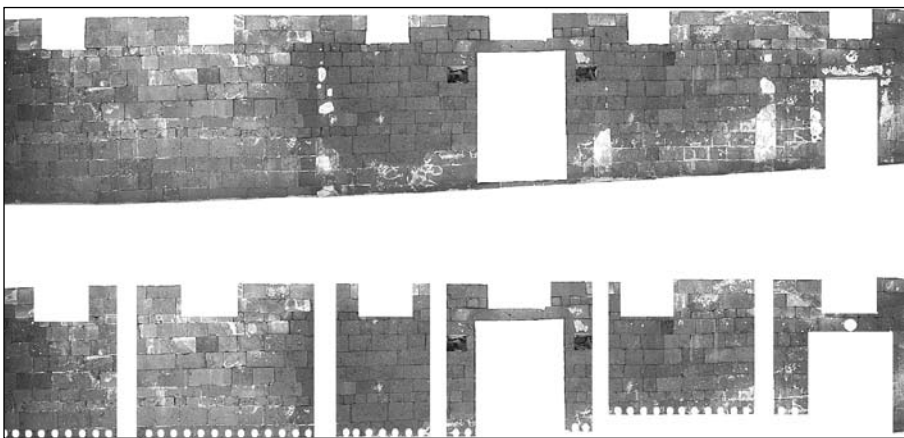
10. Ḥallābāt: reconstruction of the bi-chromatic decoration of the court walls (note the canopies with the same colour scheme). A: Traces of decorative plaster applied to the basalt-built walls of the main court in the palatine section of the complex. B: Reconstruction of the decorative pattern of the white mortar plaster; note the combination of 'pilasters' and the dado with the crown of 'heads'.

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[38] Owing to the mechanical properties of basalt, it was used for courses of headers at regular heights (one in every six courses) in order to bind the two faces of a wall (constructed of limestone laid in courses of stretchers, following the traditional *emplekton* technique.

[39] This could be seen (together with the bi-chromatic red and white combination of brick and stone) as one of the first stages in the development of *ablaq*, a decorative feature that would become widespread - almost iconic - during the Ayyubid - Mamluk period (see Arce, forthcoming).
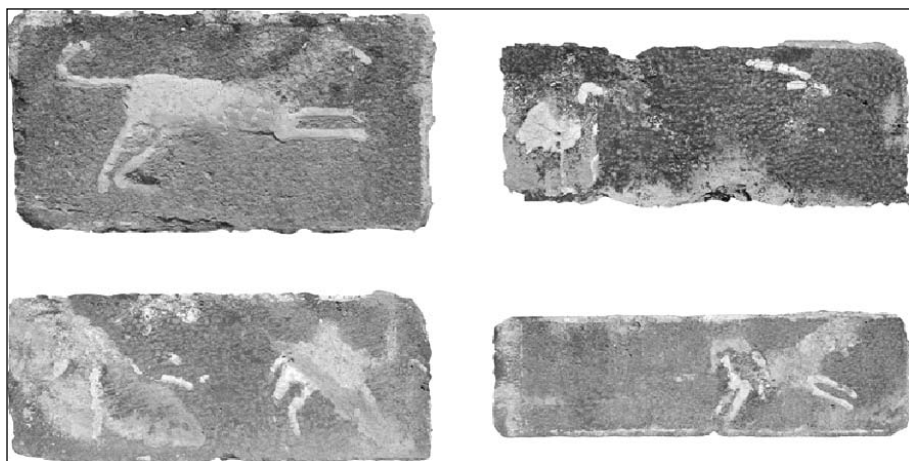
11. Ḥallābāt: white plaster figures of animals applied to basalt ashlars from the main court.

we realise that this chromatic combination is no coincidence. This impression is reinforced when we consider that this is not an isolated case in the region, as other examples exist in nearby structures dating to the 6th century AD (directly or indirectly associated with the Ghassanids). This is also the case with important structures from Umm al-Jimāl, namely the *praetorium*, the so-called "barracks" building and some other towers (**e.g. that of house XVII**). In these buildings, we find the same decorative patterns, applied with the same technique and the same kind of mortar (FIG. 12). We find window frames and 'pilasters' applied to façades (e.g. the N façade of the *praetorium*, or the W and E elevations

of the 'barracks'). In the towers, a clear decorative pattern can be identified, with horizontal bands of white plaster applied to correspond with the floors, and vertical ones at their edges (e.g. the 'barracks', house XVII etc.). These horizontal bands recall those from the Ḥallābāt towers and NE façade, built with alternate courses of basalt and limestone. They also recall the pattern found in the representation of the towers of walled cities in the floor mosaic[40] from the church of St John the Baptist at Khirbat as-Samrā, which dates to the same period (see Piccirillo 1993, figs. 592 and 596).

Important symbolic elements were also applied with the same bi-chromatic design. In the façades
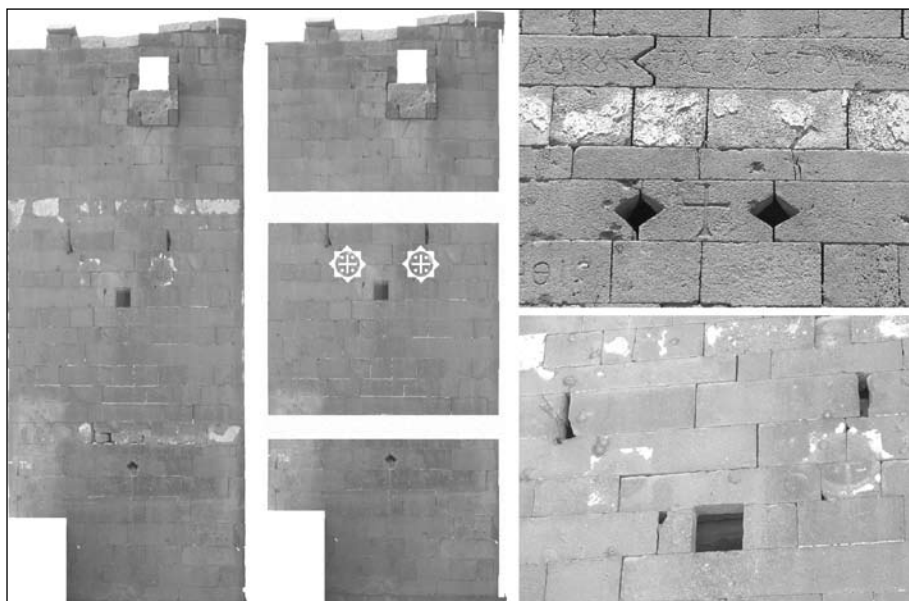
12. Antecedents and parallels of the black and white decorative patterns (I). Parallels of white plaster decoration on black basalt background from nearby 6th century AD Ghassanid buildings at Umm al-Jimāl: tower of the so-called 'barracks' building, N façade. Present condition and reconstruction of the decorative pattern in plaster. Note the eight-pointed star emblem framing a roundel and a cross with four knobs between its arms.

[40] According to the dedicatory medallion, the mosaic was laid as part of a renovation in 639 AD "at the time of the Archbishop Theodore". Therefore it is an image that records the condition of the building at the end of 6th or beginning of 7th century. AD, i.e. during the Ghassanid period.

of the 'barracks' tower are roundels with traces of plaster emblems inside geometrical plaster frames. In the E façade we can see two square elements with circular medallions framing what seem to be traces of a *chi-rho* monogram[41] (FIG. 12), whilst in the N façade, two eight-pointed stars frame roundels with a cross[42]. The same decoration can be seen on other 6th century AD monasteries' towers from Hawran, like at Shaqqa, Mallah or Buraq.

It would be tempting to relate this architectural bi-chromatic decoration with the green and white that it is said to have distinguished the robes of the Ghassanid kings[43]. Unfortunately, the written sources are vague and graphic ones are non-existant.

Nevertheless, we have identified what we are convinced are the origins and antecedents of this decoration (including the materials and techniques involved) in the Sabaean / Himyarite region of Yemen[44], from where the Ghassanids migrated to *Oriens* in the 5th century AD, apparently after one of the major collapses of the Marib dam. This hy-

pothesis is extremely important as it is in agreement with the historical antecedents of the Ghassanids and reinforces the strong Arab identity claimed by them in their quest for a symbolic decorative language of their own. Outstanding samples of this sort of decoration can be found at Sanaʿa, in houses and in the congregational mosque (FIG. 13). There we found not only the same plaster 'pilasters' applied to walls of black basalt (very common in that region as well), but also alternating courses of different coloured stone (FIG. 14). In these buildings, which are still in use today, it is clear that these 'pilasters' are functional as well as decorative, as they acted as open gutters to channel rain-water off the flat roofs. This would explain their characteristic cross-section, with two laterally thickened edges which would channel water downwards[45]. In the same Himyarite cities antecedents and parallels can be found for the pattern applied to the towers (i.e. horizontal and vertical white bands on a black background, corresponding with edges and floors)

13. Antecedents and parallels of the black and white decorative patterns (II). A: Ḥallābāt court showing the white plaster 'pilasters', the dado with a crown of heads and black and white decoration of the Ghassanid period canopies. B: Sanaʿa, Yemen: congregational mosque, external S façade, white plaster 'pilasters' — actually gutters to carry rainwater from the roof.

[41] This can be elicited from the scratched and pecked pattern applied to the dressed surface of the stone façade, which was intended to offer a better 'grip' to the plaster letters applied to it. It is interesting how the "sgraffiato" technique developed, taking advantage of the expressive value of the materials available. Regarding its origins and antecedents, see below.

[42] It is not clear if there were four knobs — representing Christ's wounds — between the arms of the cross or if there was just an *alpha* and *omega* hanging from the horizontal arms. The ones

from the southern façade were simple roundels of plaster, most probably bearing crosses.

[43] Cheiko, L. (1991) *Shuara al-Nusranya*, Vol.1 Beirut, p. 648, note 5 (in Arabic).

[44] In contrast, these patterns are not found in the Hadramawt valley in eastern Yemen, where whole buildings — or at least the upper part of them — are usually completely whitewashed.

[45] Apparently this system was also found in Jordanian vernacular architecture until recently (Isabelle Ruben, pers. comm.).

and frames around the windows (see FIGS. 15 and 12; compare also with the examples from Umm al-Jimāl). It seems clear that the same patterns were reproduced in these new buildings in *Oriens* as a reminder of the places in Yemen which from which the Ghassanids had fled decades earlier.

It could be argued that the date of these Yemeni buildings and their decoration is later than our examples from Jordan. Unfortunately, there is currently no reliable dating for these particular buildings. It would be necessary to search for new examples, ideally in well-dated buildings. Nevertheless the most significant examples, those from the congregational mosque at Sanaʿa, could well be as old as the mosque itself, which was built by the Umayyad Caliph Walid I.

Besides this architectural decoration, at Ḥallābāt we also found the aforementioned animal silhou-
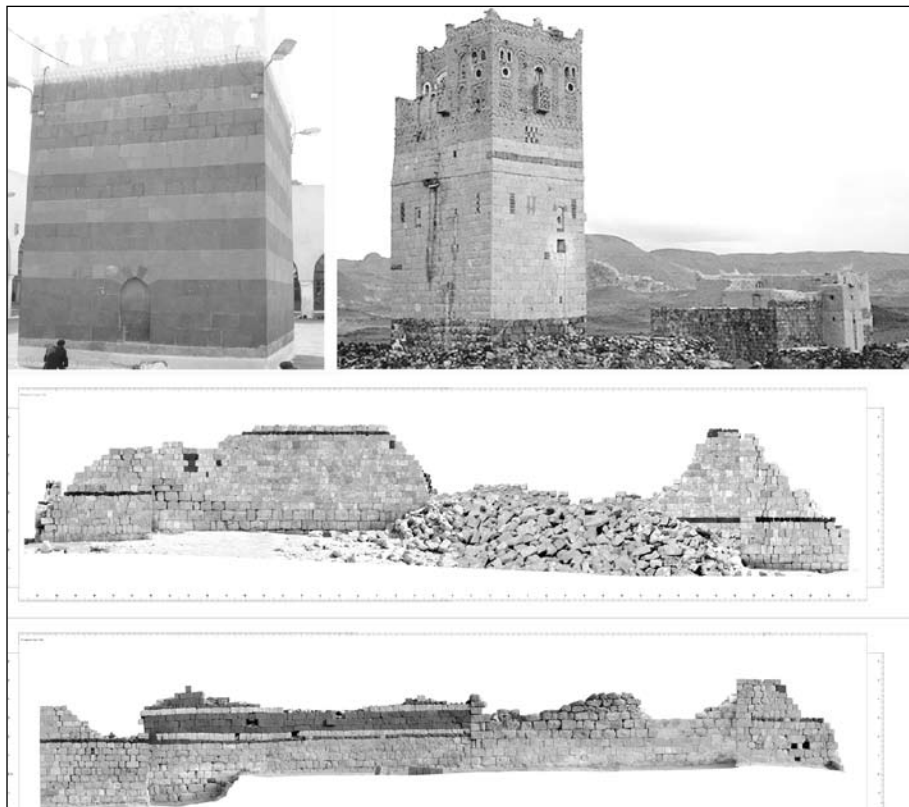
14. Antecedents and parallels of the black and white patterns (III). A: Sanaʿa, Yemen: congregational mosque, structure in the court with alternating courses of different colour stones. B: Tower near Sanaʿa, Yemen; note its basalt base and the upper band of basalt stone in the limestone masonry work. C and D: Ḥallābāt: NE and NW façades of the Qaṣr showing mixed masonry of limestone stretchers with courses of basalt headers.

15. Antecedents and parallels of the black and white decorative patterns (IV). Sanaʿa, Yemen: two tower-houses; note the pattern of white plaster applied in horizontal bands, vertical edges and around the windows.

ettes, modelled in white plaster and still attached to fallen basalt ashlars. These figures were probably arranged in a continuous freeze around the court, in a manner that is no longer found in Yemen because of the shift towards simple geometrical decoration, probably related to the increasing aniconism of Islamic societies.

This aspect of our research is extremely important because in Yemen we have found not only the anecdotal origin of a decorative pattern, but also the source of the imagery chosen by the Ghassanids in their quest to (re)create an image of power, in a visual language of their own with a distinct 'Arab' identity, for their new **public** buildings in *Oriens*. For that purpose, they delved back into their memories for images of buildings in Sana'a, Marib, Hajjara etc. which they had left decades earlier, thereby creating their own idiosyncratic identity within the context of the powerful Byzantine Christian visual culture.

Other Figurative Elements

In this context, some other fragments of figurative elements (beside the plaster figures mentioned above) should be noted. First, the fragments of marble figurines found in the cistern of the main courtyard: two represent birds, most probably eagles, and the other a horseman wearing a tunic and riding a saddled galloping horse, whilst holding a whip in his right hand (FIG. 18b). The naturalistic nimbleness that can be guessed at in this fragmentary figure is reminiscent not of a *cataphract*[46], but of a lightweight horseman. In any event it embodies the Ghassanid enthusiasm for horsemanship. In addition, a number of fragmentary of animal figures carved in limestone (two eagles and the head of what seems to be a panther) were recovered at the site[47].

Did a Ghassanid 'Imagery of Power' Exist?

As for the question of whether the Ghassanids developed an architectural or decorative style / visual culture, peculiar to them and with political and religious propagandist aims, the abovementioned remains strongly suggest that some attempts in that direction were made. This poses several questions, in the sense that it is logical that their pursuit of an imagery of power of their own ought to have been linked, in visual terms, to that of the Byzantine Empire to which they owed allegiance and from which their legitimacy was derived. At the same time, it is logical that they would have attempted to emphasise specific characteristics that defined an individual and idiosyncratic Arab Ghassanid identity that differentiated them from the Byzantines and Arab *rhomaioi*. These differences were related to their position as allies (*foederati*) rather than citizens (*cives*) of the Empire and, more importantly, to their idiosyncratic identity as Arabs, warriors and **adherents of the Monophysite postulates**[48]. As we have demonstrated, this 'Arab' imprint was sought in the imagery of the Yemeni cities they came from, demonstrating their affiliation with an 'Arab' urban culture of their own.

The Pursuit of a Political and Religious Identity

After being granted the title of kings (*basileus*) by the Byzantine Emperor, it's logical to assume that Ghassanid self-image, in political terms, would no longer be that of mere *foederati* of the Byzantine Empire, but of monarchs with rising power and a clear will to leave their political and religious imprint on the territories under their control[49].

In the same way as Mu'awiya adopted the pomp and circumstance of royalty whilst governor of Damascus, in order to gain the respect of foreign ambassadors[50],

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[46] A heavily armour horseman

[47] It is difficult to date them, especially the latter ones which could be Umayyad, although no clear parallels exist. The marble figurines seem to be pre-Umayyad.

[48] Shahid 2006: 123.

[49] The Ghassanids were settled on state-owned lands that were legally Roman / Byzantine rather than Arab Ghassanid territory. This was not ceded to them, but was made available for them to settle on, not as *cives*, but as *foederati* permitted to do so by the terms of the *foedus*. The fact the Ghassanids were *foederati* de jure but *limitanei* de facto could imply that there had been changes in the terms of the *foedus*, by which they were granted those lands. Actually, *limitanei* received grants of land which they cultivated, so the Ghassanid adoption of the role and lands of the former might imply that they too received land grants (see Shahid 2002). This character of state-owned land could be a reason for the seizure of Ghassanid property by the Umayyads, as the latter

typically steered away from confiscation of private property.

[50] Mu'awiyya's behaviour provoked initial criticism from Caliph Omar, who nevertheless quickly came to appreciate the reasons behind it and approved the move. Mu'awiyya's adoption of royal pomp would be the starting point for the Umayyads in their quest for a protocol and imagery of power of their own. It would be interesting to know what they borrowed directly from the Byzantines and what they borrowed from the adopted and adapted Ghassanid version of Byzantine protocol, which was clearly biased by their Arab and Monophysite identity. The Umayyads took over Ghassanid **public buildings and even cities**, so it would be logical for them to have borrowed elements of a Ghassanid protocol that was already adapted to Arab manners (see note on Jabiya and Jalliq below; re. this encounter see Baladuri Ansab al-Ashraf, ed. I. 'Abbas, Bibliotheca Islamica Beirut 1997 IV.1, p. 147; re. the results see Flood 2001 and Arce 2006b).

the Ghassanid *phylarchs*, as kings (though clients of the Byzantine Emperor), also sought their own protocol and palatial 'theatres' in which to enact their own pomp[51], receive the allegiance of the Arab tribes under their new royal command and to play out their own clientele policy (as the Umayyads would do, in many cases in the very same venues[52], one hundred years later).

In religious terms, the situation was similar[53]: the Ghassanids were doubtlessly zealous defenders of the Christian faith, but followed the Monophysite creed in open antagonism with the Diophysite one that was supported by the imperial court[54] and the Hellenised cities in which the majority of the region's population lived[55]. This deep division between the Diophysite, Greek-speaking inhabitants of the cities (mostly Roman citizens after Caracalla`s edict and followers of a 'Hellenistic Christianity') on the one hand, and the Aramaic-speaking Monophysite villagers (plus the Arabic-speaking pastoralists of the *badiya*) — a subdued and repressed society permanently under suspicion (whether pagans or newly converted followers of a more 'Abrahamic' or Semitic Chistianity) — on the other, marks a social, cultural, political and religious fracture between two societies that we could define as the 'internal border' of *Oriens*[56].

Strategies, Opportunities and Risks

Conscious of their position as newcomers in this divided society, the Ghassanids played an intelligent game — that would be imitated by the Umayyads — trying to win over that part of society closest to them in cultural terms and political status, and from which they could obtain the extra support required to attempt to gain political and religious control of the region. Accordingly, the Ghassanids promoted monasticism to facilitate the Christianization of the pastoralists and partially-settled inhabitants of the *limithrophe*. By doing this they were simultaneously trying to gain converts to their religious faction and supporters for their political agenda[57]. Thus, as *phylarchs* of all the Arabs and as patrons of Monophysite monasticism, they developed a perfect combination of a patron and client policy that was aimed at gaining political, religious and military support among the inhabitants of the *badiya*[58].

It was clear that this divergence of interests with the Byzantine Empire and Diophysite Church would eventually result in open conflict. This conflict was never solved because the Ghassanids never became true Roman citizens and their quest for an Arab and Monophysite identity, as part of their own agenda, was incompatible with the condition of *cives* and a permanent source of political and religious conflict with the Byzantine imperial power[59].

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[51] Regarding this point, the panegyrics of their courtier poets at Jabiya, which are among the highest achievements of Arab poetry, should be noted.

[52] The most remarkable example is Jabiya, one of the capitals of the Ghassanids (and certainly the most important 'Arab' city in the region), that under Mu'awiya became the Umayyad capital of Bilad al-Sham for twenty years (until the establishment of Damascus as capital of the Caliphate when he became Caliph). Similarly, Yazid made Jalliq (the second Ghassanid capital) one of his residences. Other examples, such as Qasṭal, Usays, Haliorama / Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbi, confirm this fact.

[53] The consequences in terms of visual culture, liturgy etc. are still unclear (see below).

[54] Except under Emperor Anastasius, who was Monophysite.

[55] For the question about the existence of a specific Monophysite religious imagery see below.

[56] Control of this 'internal border' was one of the main tasks of the Ghassanids as *foederati*. This was also one of the reasons why the Byzantines mistrusted the Ghassanids, as on occasions the latter were seen by the former as proponents of '**divide and rule**', siding with one party in conflicts they were supposed to control and arbitrate (see their behaviour during the Nu'man revolt). On the author's hypothesis of the existence of a "Double Frontier" ("internal" and "external") see Arce 2008, in press.

[57] At a certain point their intentions became far too obvious, for instance when Jacob Baradeus tried to establish new bishoprics, not linked to urban parishes (under the control of the Diophysites) but

to monasteries of the desert *limitrophe* (patronised by the Ghassanids and under his own religious authority and control). See below.

[58] See Arce 2006, in press.

[59] This conflict can be ascertained from the increasing mutual distrust that became apparent after the Ghassanid withdrawal from the alliance (firstly under Jabala - the first Ghassanid *phylarch* allied to Rome — when Monophysitism was persecuted after the death of Anastasius, and secondly under Mundhir). As a result, the federate tribes, without Ghassanid control and without subsidies, started pillaging the cities and their hinterland. This mistrust was worsened with the suspicions of Rome towards Harith, fearing the creation of an independent state. The conflict finally reached a critical point with the attempt of Emperor Tiberius to eliminate Mundhir (which triggered the second Ghassanid withdrawal, from 582 to 584 AD), the subsequent exile of Mundhir to Sicily on the orders of Emperor Maurice, and the revolt of his son Nu'man (who avenged his father by ravaging Syria, Palestine and Arabia, killing the Governor of Bosra and assaulting villages and Roman military bases before being captured and exiled to Constantinople himself). As a result of all this, the *Phylarchate* was disolved. When it was restored in 602 (when the Byzantine Empire realized that they could not keep *Oriens* in peace without the collaboration of the Ghassanids), it was so feeble and diminished that it did not withstand the Persian attack against Palestine in 613 AD. The Persian invasion, despite Heraclius' victory, finished off the Ghassanids, when Jabla Ibn al-Ayham (the last Ghassanid

'Building' a Political and Religious Identity

This political and religious agenda implied an ambitious program of which we have more written records than material remains, at least until now. Regarding the discussion of how much the Ghassanids built anew, and how much they refurbished or rebuilt existing structures, we can say that this issue is similar to the debate about some of the Umayyad building enterprises[60] (the cases of Haliorama / Qaṣr al-Ḥayr, Usays, Qasṭal and Ḥallābāt itself are remarkable examples). Concerning this point, the apparent inconsistency between the silence of Procopius in his list of 'buildings' in the area (see below) and the list of Hamza (naming those related to the Ghassanids *phylarchs*), might have a perfectly logical explanation, *viz*. when the Ghassanids are associated with a structure in the "list of Hamza"[61] it might not mean that they built it, but that they renewed or restored it, as per the inscription from Dakir in Trachonities (see Shahid 2002: 45 and 48).

This does not deny that the Ghassanids implemented intensive building programmes (for which

they deserved the title of *philoktistai*), but would imply that this activity was devoted more to the construction of palatial and religious structures than military ones, on the basis of their new political status as kings, their religious strategy of supporting the Monophysite Church and its monastic endeavours, their distinctive military strategies and tactics (i.e. those of a mobile army, not garrisoned in forts, but patrolling the frontier). The latter did not required large *kastra*, but towers protecting strategic points, such as crossroads or water sources, and other means of logistic support, e.g. permanent buildings for the seasonal camps required by their mobile army and peripatetic courts[62]).

4.2 The Monastic Area

The second group of building activities of Phase III are related to the transformation of the remains of the oldest 'first fort' (Phase I structure) into a monastery. They consist mainly of the construction of a second floor over the rooms around the internal court (FIGS. 3 and 16), reached by a staircase (FIG. 18c) built in room 15, and the construc-

16. Ḥallābāt: Monastery built within the premises of the inner (oldest) Roman fort; general view after restoration.

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phylarch, since 609 AD) was incapable of keeping control of the federate tribes under his command and witnessed them change sides during the Battle of Yarmuk, deserting the Byzantine ranks and thereby hastening the end of the *phylarchate* and Christian *Oriens*. Jabla eventually changed sides himself, when apparently he adopted Islam, starting a trend that, owing to his position and prestige, was followed by many Monophysite Arabs (although he eventually apostatized, refusing to obey the command of the new Umayyad lords, and fled to Byzantium, some authors do not support, even, his conversion to Islam).

[60] We have to take into account the evident differences: the former were vassals of the Byzantine emperors, the latter the new abso-

lute masters of the region, wealthier and with no political constraints.

[61] The *Chronography* or *Annals* of Hamza al-Isfahani (*Tarik sini muluk al-ard wa al-anbiya*) is a chronology of pre-Islamic and Islamic Arab dynasties, and one of the most important sources for study of the Ghassanids (see Shahid 2002: 306-341).

[62] Hamza al-Isfahani uses the terms *sayyarat* and *jawwab* ('itinerant king who wanders from one palace to another'), something that, as Shahid (2002) points out, does not mean they were nomads, but that they had an itinerant court (as did the Spanish kings, before a fixed capital was established in the 15th century).

tion of a two-storied[63], three-arched portico on its southern side (FIG. 17). The arches of this portico are built of finely dressed limestone blocks. They bear crosses in their key stones and directly abut the fabric of the 'first fort' internal partition walls. The building technique employed recalls that used in the walls of the 'second *quadriburgium*', in that the ceiling of the portico was built by means of basalt beams, covered with plaster and mural paintings of a cross within a circle. Finally, the fact that the key stones of the three arches bear this kind of cross[64] dates this architectural intervention to the period after it fell in disuse as a military structure and its consequent abandonment by the *limitanei*, but before the Islamic period.

Closely related to the portico are the wine press basins in its E corner, and the mosaic pavements[65] that cover the court and portico floors (FIG. 6a). Apparently these three elements (portico, basins and mosaics) were built simultaneously over a short period of time[66]. It is important to mention the traces of wall paintings (eventually whitewashed) on the south wall of the portico representing, amongst other features, a soldier (probably a representation of St Sergius[67]) as well as the aforementioned traces of a cross on the ceiling basalt beams (FIG. 19a).

The technique of these mosaics and some of their decorative patterns seem to correspond to the 6th century AD[68]. It is noteworthy that these mosaics incorporate some old restorations, indicating that they do not belong to the final refurbishment of the building in the Umayyad period, but to an

17. Reconstruction of the monastery court showing the two-storey portico.

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[63] The assessment of the material remains, particularly the existence of an 'extra' number of voussoires with the same dimensions as those from the lower arches and the distribution of their fallen remnants after the earthquake, led to the conclusion that an upper portico, similar to the lower one, existed.

[64] It could be argued that the crosses might subsequently have been carved on to a pre-existing structure, but the fact that the central one was protruding (because of this it was carved away in the Islamic period, whereas the other ones were simply concealed under a coat of plaster) indicates that the central cross at least was carved at the same time the key stone was cut and erected, not later.

[65] The pattern of the mosaic from the court is a simple grid of squares placed at 45 degrees without any further decoration. The one placed under the portico has two different panels: the first consists of a series of interlaced circles with baskets, birds

and a chalix with a fish, whereas the second has a cross-like pattern achieved by the combination of interlaced circumferences. The design and display of the mosaic patterns indicates that the mosaic was laid at the same time as or later than the wine press basins, as the former respects the location of the latter (see Arce 2006 and 2007).

[66] The arch behind which the basin is located was apparently blocked up immediately afterwards.

[67] The main Monophysite saint, to whom many Ghassanid churches were devoted.

[68] Similar motifs and techniques can be traced in the apse of the church at al-Fudayn – al-Mafraq, the lower Church at Quwaysma (rebuilt in AD 717), in the northern aisle of St Stephen's Church at Umm ar-Raṣāṣ, and at the Deacon Thomas Church in 'Uyūn Mūsā valley (see Piccirillo 1993: fig. 263).

earlier one (see Arce 2006: fig. 18).

The rooms around the court were devoted mainly to dormitories, but a kitchen and winter refectory have also been identified (rooms 13 and 12 respectively (FIGS. 18a and b)). The former was kept in use during the Umayyad period, while the latter was devoted to storage, with a wine press being built in its NE corner. The NW tower (14) was refurbished like the other ones, adding a latrine to the upper floor and using the lower room as a kitchen store (there was a door giving direct access to the kitchen; this was blocked in Umayyad period with the addition of another wine press).

The chapel (*catholicon*)

The transformation of room 19 into a chapel intended for the use of the monastery is remarkable for in spatial and liturgical terms. At its eastern end, a small area just three metres deep was separated from the rest of the room by means of a triumphal arch (FIGS. 20 and 21). This arch was built with well-cut masonry voussoirs, with a rough dress-

18. Ḥallābāt monastery. A: Staircase in room 15 leading to upper floor. B: Computer-generated reconstruction of the SW corner of the court portico. C: Computer-generated reconstruction of room 13 (kitchen). D: Remains of room 12 ('refectory'; the door seen at the end gives access to the kitchen).
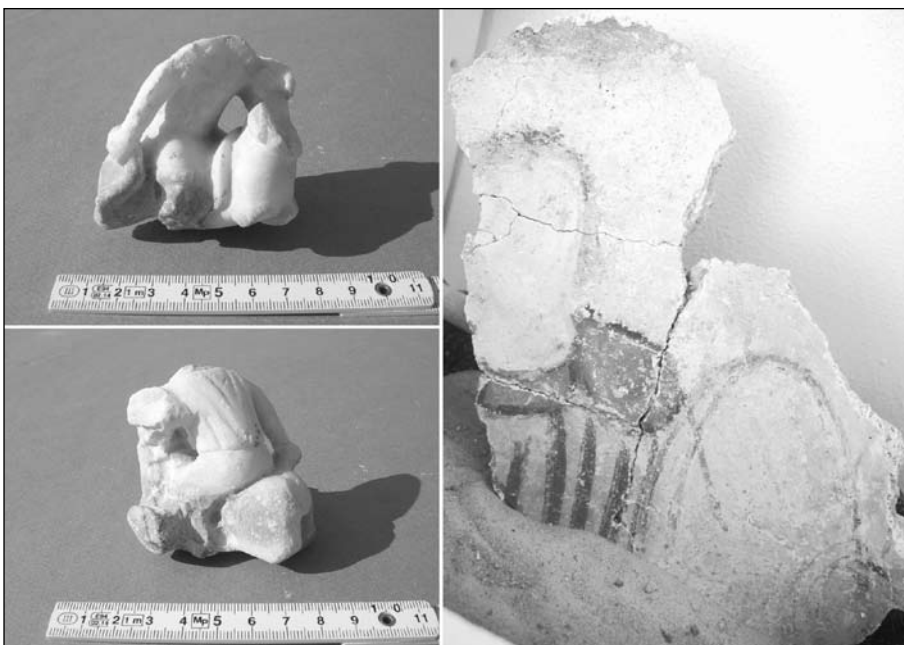
19. Ḥallābāt. A: Marble figurine of horseman; fragment found in main courtyard cistern. B: Traces of mural paintings from the portico of the monastery court, representing a soldier (probably St Sergius).
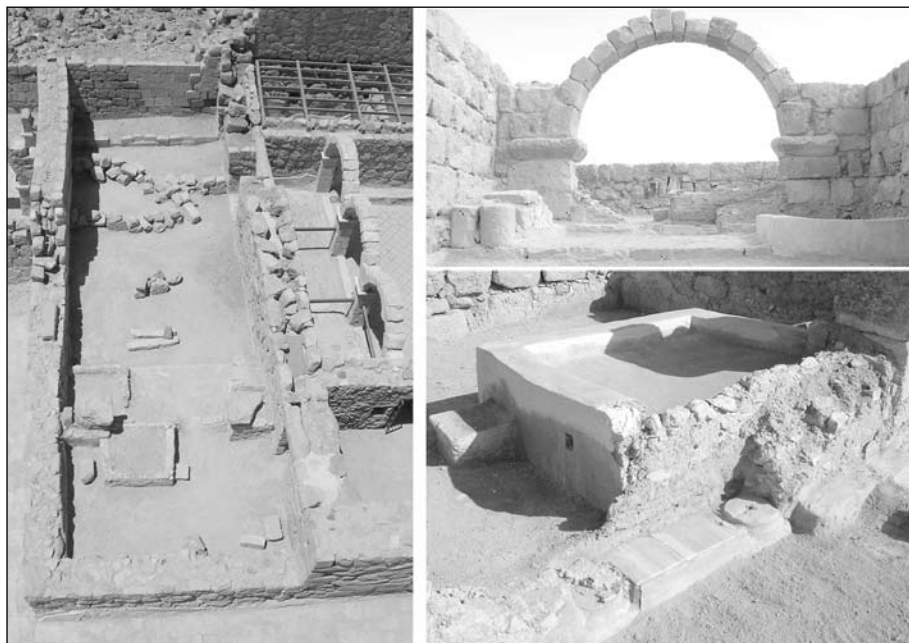
20. Ḥallābāt: Monastery chapel. A: Remains after excavation. B: Triumphal arch after restoration. C: Marble threshold and bases of columns supporting the screen (*'iskana'*) between the nave and the *presbyterium*; note remains of the Umayyad blocking wall that separated the *presbyterium* from the nave and the wine presses built against it.

21. Ḥallābāt: Monastery chapel. A: View after the restoration; note doors leading to monastery court (on the right) and to room 20, which act as a 'narthex' or filter between the chapel and palatine courtyard. B: Computer-generated reconstruction of the chapel (mosaic patterns from the floor are hypothetical).

ing[69], springing from low piers with projecting springers. This is indicative of a functional distinction of this area from that of the rest of the room, which was therefore roughly oriented towards the east.

The floor level of the area behind the arch and up to 1.8m. in front of it was raised 25cm. higher than the rest of the room by means of a platform defined by a step, created by kerbstones running

from wall to wall. At the northern end of this raised platform, which clearly corresponds to a *presbyterium*, are the remains of the steps of the *ambo* or pulpit, which probably stood as a structure on columns projecting into the area of the nave.

The spatial division and importance of this section of the room was further enhanced by means of two marble columns[70] placed under the arch (FIG. 20c) and the construction of a thin wall in the lat-

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[69] This rougher technique leads one to think that the arch (and consequently the transformation of room 19 into a chapel) pre-dates the refurbishment of the rest of the monastery, including the delicate portico of the court. This would indicate that the monastery could have been founded some time earlier than its 'patronised' enhancement and refurbishment (involving the construction of

the portico, upper floor etc.), which was contemporary with the palatine refurbishment (corresponding to the "second *quadriburgium*" or Phase III).

[70] The columns are of too large a diameter to support an altar, which would block access to the *presbyterium*), and too close to each other to support a baldachin.

eral spaces between the columns and arch piers[71]. Traces of a painted red skirting stripe decorated the base of this wall. The threshold of this chamber was further enriched by two small square marble slabs placed between the columns. Related to this decoration are traces of a mosaic floor that once covered the entire floor of room 19[72]. A bench running from wall to wall was placed at the foot of the nave. The discovery of a *pavonazzetto* marble reliquary (re-used in Umayyad period as a mortar) indicates that it might have been a *martyrion* chapel, corresponding to the increasing devotion of Christians towards saints' relics during the 6th century AD, especially after the martyrdoms of Najran[73].

The means of accessing the chapel illuminates the way it was used by the inhabitants of both sections of the complex. From the monastery, it is reached through a door of 'standard' height in the wall that divides both spaces. From the external court (the palatine area), access is through room 20 which acts as a 'narthex' or antechamber, acting as a true filter dividing and relating both sections of the complex. The access to the chapel from this 'narthex' room is through a very low door that forces the approaching person to bow when entering the sacred space, (similar to the 'humility door' in the Nativity Church at Bethlehem).

Religious Art and Liturgical Issues
Like their 'political' imagery, the artistic expression of the Ghassanids in religious terms would reflect not only their allegiance to the Christian faith, but also the peculiarities of Monophysitism, the latter acting as a statement of their own idiosyncratic religious identity and, consequently, their differences with Byzantium and the Diophysite Chalcedonian Church.

It is generally assumed that, during the 6th century AD – the golden age of Byzantine art under Justinian — provincial art was a reflection of the former, with some peculiarities depending on local taste and influences. Although architecture re-

sponded to liturgy and liturgy responded to theology, it is difficult to know how these differences would have been reflected in the actual construction of churches and religious structures. Actually, the subtle differences of liturgy and related sacred spaces in the different regions and provinces in *Oriens* at that period have not yet been clarified. Besides, almost no reference exists to Monophysite art and architecture, with the exception of *al-Jawara al-Nafisa*, or "The Precious Pearl" treatise, which is discussed below

As a result, we can only attempt to elicit some basic data about the characteristics of this simple monastic church. The most remarkable feature is the physical separation of the nave and the *presbyterium* by means of the triumphal arch and above-mentioned arched 'screen' that, as has been pointed out, could be described as a *proto-iconostasis* (see below re. *iskana*). Another remarkable characteristic is the square apse and the apparent position of the altar (in the shape of a *mensa*, underneath which the aforementioned reliquary would have been placed) against its back wall. In the region, there are several examples of churches with square apses dating back to that period. The most remarkable is the Deacon Thomas Church at 'Uyūn Mūsā, dated by inscriptions to 540 AD[74]. At Khirbat as-Samrā, the St John Church has a square apse with only a semicircular, two-step *sinthronon* built within it[75]. Samrā churches 20 and 81 also have square apses, as does the northern church of lower Herodion in Palestine, and the monastic chapel of Khirbat al-Kursī near Mādabā.

***Al-Jawara al-Nafisa* ("The Precious Pearl") Treatise[76]**
The only treatise on Monophysite liturgy that also makes reference to architectural features is from Coptic Egypt and dates to the 13th century AD. It is entitled *al-Jawara al-Nafisa* ("The Precious Pearl") and contains a chapter "*about the construction of a church and its resemblance with the tabernacle*",

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[71] It seems that a marble chancel stood in that place before the wall was constructed. There is not enough evidence to suggest that the blocking of the space between the columns and arch was implemented throughout the entire remaining space, which resulted in a narrow door of which the columns became the jambs.

[72] The traces of this mosaic resemble those of the oldest one found in room 24 (see above).

[73] The Arabic sources distinguish pilgrimage centres (called *mahjuj*, i.e. a site to which a pilgrimage is made) from other *martyria* and monasteries which had relics, but were not considered as such.

Amongst the former, the most important — in addition to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem — for the Monophysites were Resafa - Sergipolis (Brands argues that Mundhir's *pretorium* would have been a *martyrion* built on the site of the saint's martyrdom and burial, see Brands 1998), St Simeon and Mahajja (south of Damascus -see Shahid 2006:119 and notes 7 and 8).

[74] Piccirillo 1993: 186 and figs. 263-269.

[75] See above and Piccirillo 1993: 599, 617 and 620.

[76] See Shahid 2006: 131-3 and J. Perier 1991, quoted by the former.

where it states that it must be oriented towards the east ("*its eastern end must be built in the course of twenty days of the Coptic month of Baouneh*"), that its length must be twenty four cubits and its width twelve cubits, that it should have three gates (one for women, one for men and one for those bringing votive offerings in secret), and that its Holy of Holies should be domed.

Only small churches could have been built according to such detailed and strict prescriptions (which seems neither practical nor logical in general terms, but entirely adequate for small monastic communities living in the desert). Surprisingly, and probably by chance, our small church conforms almost exactly to these recommendations. Its apse is oriented to the east, the length of its nave is almost exactly twenty four cubits (11.69m. equivalent to 24 cubits of approx. 0.49m.), whilst its width is of ten rather than twelve cubits (i.e. approx. 5m.). It has three doors: one for monks coming from the *coenobium*, one for the courtiers coming from the palatine area and a third one giving access to the *presbyterium* from a lateral chamber, room 17, connected with the monastery court and which might have been used as a *pastophorium*. Finally, the depth of the *presbyterium* is exactly the span of the triumphal arch that separates it from the nave (2.82m. equivalent to six cubits of 37cm.). This would have allowed for a small dome of six cubits diameter over the *presbyterium*, in a balanced composition from both proportional and constructional points of view, thereby complying with all prescriptions of the treatise.

In another chapter, devoted to "*the lamps and the ostrich eggs placed among them*", it is stated that the church should be generously lit during Mass, that the lamps of the east end and *iskana* (the part of the temple secluded by a veil — probably derived from the Greek *skenos* or "screen") should be fed with olive oil and kept lit day and night. This *iskana* area would correspond to the area behind the arch and above-mentioned columned screen (see FIGS. 20 and 21).

An interesting parallel, worthy of note, is Abraham's Church of al-Qalis (*ecclesia*) in Sana'a[77], built by King Abraha in the 6th century AD. According to Serjeant's reconstruction, it would be

quite similar in plan and proportions to the one at Ḥallābāt. However, there are some problems with the dimensions in Serjeant's reconstruction. These do not fit with the single nave scheme of the drawn plan. The plan indicates that its width was 40 *dhira* (a unit of 0.48m. equivalent to a cubit) and 40 plus 80 *dhira* long. It also had a domed, square *presbyterium* of 30 by 30 *dhira*. Most probably, there has been a *lapsus calami* regarding these figures, because they would result in a nave 19m. wide and 57m. long, dimensions that are not possible for a single nave church as drawn in plan. In contrast, if we apply the prescriptions of *al-Jawara al-Nafisa*, drawing a 20 by 40 (plus 20) cubit (*dhira*) single nave plan, we would have a church almost identical in proportions to that drawn by Serjeant, these dimensions being more logical and appropriate for a single nave church.

Monasteries as Instruments of *Propaganda Fide* and Territorial Control

A deep-rooted and diverse monastic culture developed in the region during the 5th to 7th centuries AD. There are innumerable references to monasteries, hermits, *stylites* and different congregations of monks, especially along the desert fringes. Many of these monasteries were established, as at Ḥallābāt, on the sites of former Roman forts of the *limes arabicus*. A pattern of re-use, implying more than simple reoccupation of abandoned buildings by religious communities, can be elicited. Monasteries were essential for the policy of conversion, owing to the geographical conditions of the region. As a matter of fact, Arabs became acquainted with Christianity through contact with monks leading a contemplative life in the desert. Syriac missionaries played an essential role in conversion, and the construction of monasteries played a pivotal role in their activities. Contemporary accounts indicate the existence of close ties between pastoral communities and monasteries, which are crucial in gaining an understanding of the evolution of these sites in general, and Ḥallābāt in particular[78].

The strategic location of these places at crossroads, near well-travelled routes[79] or perennial water sources, had long made them meeting points for local pastoral populations, travellers, merchants

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[77] Serjeant and Lewcock 1983 (quoted in Johns 1999: 100 and fig. 23).

[78] For a more in depth review of these issues see Arce 2006a, in press.

[79] In our case, as well the abundant sources of water in the vicinity, the nearby presence of the Via Nova Traiana connecting Boṣra and 'Amman should be noted, as should the routes towards Azraq and Wādī Sirḥān,.

and pilgrims (who could occasionally be sheltered and fed in the monasteries), which explains this pattern of re-use. In many cases, monks took advantage of the abandoned Roman forts (as at Ḥallābāt) because they had precisely the same strategic location they were seeking. Actually, the Romans had carried out a policy that ranged from containment to repression of the local nomadic tribes, but which was similar in territorial strategic terms. Consequently, they tended to site their forts in areas that were important for tribal gatherings, access and transit. As we have seen, the transformation of these forts into monasteries did not mean that they played no further role in the defensive strategy of the Ghassanids regarding the *limitrophe*, but simply that the means and approach adopted were radically different. The location of some monasteries at important crossroads or on difficult stages of harsh routes would explain the use of these buildings and their towers as both watch posts and reference points in the landscape that would help travellers to orient themselves[80]. At night, these towers functioned as lighthouses (*phanarion* in Greek, or *manara* in Arabic), a fact that is frequently mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry.

Religion and Politics

After the defeat of the Salihids (the Arab federate tribe which had until then held the *phylarchy*), the Byzantines gave the Ghassanids responsibility for the defence of the *limes*, as well as the role of regional political leaders as *phylarcs* of the federate tribes[81]. They demonstrated religious zeal in promoting the institution of monasticism (which had been so important in their own conversion), not only as an expression of their Monophysite faith, but also as part of their political strategy for the effective control of the region under consideration, which included the Hellenised cities as well as the desert fringes.

Ten years after the *foedus* of 529 AD that made Arethas king, he succeeded in his efforts to resuscitate the Monophysite church[82]. It was further empowered with the nomination of Theodore as presiding Bishop of the entire Arab federate Church in *Oriens*, who — like Jacobus Baradeus — reinforced and promoted the Monophysite faith. The close relationship between *phylarch* and Bishop was the basis of a political and religious strategy of reciprocal support, with the common aim of expanding Monophysite Christianity among the pagan inhabitants of the *badiya* / *limitrophe* and, in so doing, gained political and military support for the Ghassanids. This policy accelerated under Harith ibn Jabala and, by 535 AD, the Monophysite creed was predominant in the East, with the exception of the Diophysite strongholds of Jerusalem and Antioch.

The social and political importance of monasticism, especially among the Monophysites, can be seen in the previously mentioned attempt by Jacob Baradeus to create a separate, parallel Monophysite hierarchy, with new sees based in monasteries. These stood in opposition to the sees of the Diophysite Church, which had been named after the main cities. This dichotomy between an urban, settled population with a city-based religious hierarchy loyal to the Diophysite or Chalcedonian 'orthodox' church, and the nomad and pastoralist 'parishes' associated with Monophysite monasteries is of great importance in gaining an understanding of the dynamics of the fierce internal struggles of the Christian Church in pre-Islamic times and the consequent socio-political disruption in these territories[83]. This patronage was thus an essential element of Ghassanid policy as new rulers of Bilād ash-Shām (albeit on behalf of the Byzantine emperor). The discovery of a complex such as Ḥallābāt, which combines a Ghassanid palace and monastery within a single complex, is especially illuminating

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[80] This, like the hydraulic and agricultural infrastructure and logistical and medical support offered by monasteries, is an example of the *philantropia* (intended to benefit the people living in the desert) that helped to spread the Christian faith among the pastoralist nomads of the region. Wayfarers and caravaneers would rely on the monastic structures that were established in traditional locations, which would offer them improved and well-kept traditional resources, as well as new ones, together with spiritual relief and guidance.

[81] Under Emperor Anastasius the Byzantine world shifted towards Monophysitism. The first *foedus* with the Ghassanids was signed under his reign (in 502 AD) something that has been used to explain their attachment to Monophysite creed. In contrast, the

Tanukh and Salihids (the previous federate tribes to have been bestowed with the *phylarchate* in the 4th and 5th centuries AD respectively) were Diophysites.

[82] After his visit to Constantinople *ca.* 540 AD.

[83] The suspicion of the Byzantines about the Ghassanids' aims, using their influence over the federate tribes and their support and links with the Monophysite cause to create an Arab empire not subjected to Rome (as Oedenatus and Zenobia had attempted long before), was not baseless. The dichotomy faced by the Byzantines was their dependence on the Ghassanids for the defence of the *limes arabicus* on the one hand, and an increasing lack of trust in them on the other. See Arce 2008, in press.

of this strategy, which was expressed in physical terms by the support given to the construction of churches and monasteries.

Epilogue: Ghassanids and Umayyads — the Pursuit of Power by Arab Elites

In light of this new perspective on *Oriens / Bilad al-Sham* during Late Antiquity, it is easy to see the Ghassanids as forerunners of Umayyad strategies for political and territorial control, as well as a good example of transmission and adaptation in Late Antique culture.

The Ghassanids as Forerunners of Umayyad Strategies for Political and Territorial Control

Remoteness, in combination with access to routes and water sources, was also sought by the Umayyad elite in areas inhabited by the nomadic populations who backed them, both politically and militarily. The tribesmen on whose support their rule depended would require spaces for staging the clientele policy that was at the base of this relationship. The monasteries offered the requisite geographical and political framework for this 'play', as they had already done for several decades. This is a clear example of an adaptive adoption of pre-existing practices by the Umayyads in order to guarantee effective control of territory. In addition, and also as part of this territorial strategy, we should consider the settlement of hitherto mobile populations in pre-existing or newly-created cities: an essential component of a strong monetarised economy, dependant - like that of the Umayyad state — on trade and markets. This helps to explain why some monasteries were re-used and transformed by the Umayyads into small dwelling units that would eventually evolve into proto-urban settlements. This could be done thanks to the privileged locations of monasteries near water sources and crossroads, characteristics shared by other Umayyad quṣūr not necessarily related to pre-existing structures, that could facilitate their transformation into urban settlements and, eventually, into trade centres or stations for even larger communities: a useful factor in the strategy of territorial control practiced by the Umayyads.

We can conclude that from the 6th to the 8th centuries AD, many military structures from the limes arabicus underwent a process of transformation and re-use that took advantage of their strategic locations and which, in many cases, followed a recurrent and similar pattern. Ḥallābāt is a paradigmatic sample of this transformation of a military complex into a monastic structure, which was later combined with a palatine one. The final aim in all cases, despite the different approaches, was that of achieving effective control of a territory and its population by exploiting these strategic locations and their peculiar conditions (see Arce 2006b, in press). The settings where the Ghassanids acted out their palatine protocol and patronage of monastic institutions were, in many cases, re-used by the Umayyads. They were also the same locations where the Romans had implemented their own coercive strategies to control the same region and population several centuries earlier[84].

The re-use of former monasteries[85] and palaces as Umayyad quṣūr emphasises the socio-economic and political role that they played, and the continuity of similar strategies of control of these territories from the Roman to early Islamic period, with a shift from coercive policies towards more persuasive relationships between the successive overlords of the region and its population.

Christian Arab Culture and the Transmission of Late Antique Culture: a Forerunner of Inter-Cultural Merging Processes

Our work at Ḥallābāt sheds some light on the complex discussion of the relationship between the Ghassanids and Umayyads, in the sense of establishing what is Ghassanid, what is Umayyad and

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[84] This is also reflected in the takeover by the Umayyads of the Ghassanid capitals (and the takeover by the Ghassanids of the capitals of previous Arab *phylarchs*). It is well-recorded that Jabiya, one of the two Ghassanid capitals (identified with Gawlan / Gaulanitis, south of Damascus), was taken over by the Umayyads. Similarly, the second Ghassanid 'capital', Jalliq, was taken over by the Ghassanids from the Salihids (the Christian Arab tribe that preceded the Gassanids as leader of the Arab *foederati* of Byzantium in the 5th century AD), who in their turn had taken control of the premises from the Gallica legion from which its non-Arabic name was derived. This stands as proof that the symbolic, propagandistic and effective take over of previous seats of power did not only apply to capital cities in Late Antiquity, but also to less important but also power-related sites such as these.

[85] In general, we know that monasteries were accepted and respected, but exceptionally some of them were taken over by the Umayyad Caliphs (Haliorama, and now Ḥallābāt), in our opinion more for political reasons as key places in a network of territorial control. Also noteworthy is the fascination and attraction they exerted over different Caliphs, including that related to wine consumption.

what is a combination of both. The re-use of the palatine areas of the complex with a comprehensive redecoration of its surfaces, which presents a new message to the observer — with almost no changes to the built structure — is revealing.

The royal, almost imperial, character adopted by the Umayyad state (which diverged from the concept of a true Caliphate[86]), especially after Mu'awiya's reform which introduced the hereditary principle in place of an elective one, would initially find an ideal model in the adoption one century earlier of Byzantine protocol and architecture by the Ghassanids. These include the peripatetic court of the Umayyads that followed the Ghassanid model, requiring not just one palatine venue but several. This explains the early adoption of western traditions by the Umayyads, which would later shift towards Sassanian models with fewer political and religious connotations.

The utilitarian re-use of the former monastery at Ḥallābāt, and the reorganisation of the function and use of each section of the complex according to the new protocol procedures established for their clientele policy (in some aspects so close to that of the Ghassanids) is also very revealing. Last, but not least, the propagandistic value of the construction of the extramural mosque as a manifestion of the political and religious identity of the new rulers, should also be mentioned. This Ghassanid heritage, that at Ḥallābāt can be clearly distinguished in its material components and the functions and goals they were designed for, emphasises their common identity as Arabs (despite their differences in religious creed and political status). One of the key cultural elements shared by both was poetry, developed by the former and revitalised by the latter. Poetry was, at one level, a manifestation of a common Arabic cultural identity, but at another it functioned as a propagandistic instrument and key element in their respective palatine protocol. The idea that the same venues, albeit with different but related decoration, were theatres for a similar panegyric poetic demonstrations is a clear image that speaks clearly of the common cultural ground shared by Ghassanids and Umayyads as Arabs. These, together with the peripatetic character of their respective courts, are key elements in this 'common heritage'. In this case, what provoked the movement from the cities (hostile and Hellenised) to the badiya was

the need to sustain their tribal clientele policy (and not merely for purposes of sport and relaxation as Shahid (2002: 383) points out) that was the basis of their power as phylarchs or Caliphs / muløk. A tribal clientele policy was essential in a region that was tri-cultural, tri-ethnic and tri-lingual.

Accordingly, we believe that the strong Ghassanid influence underpinning what would become Umayyad culture, state and territory in Oriens / Bilad al-Sham is a basic element in understanding the latter, and therefore an essential (and so far missing) link in the analysis of the process of by which Late Antique culture was transformed into Early Islamic culture. The study of this process of adoption and adaptation of Late Antique culture to idiosyncratic Arab taste, as carried out by the Ghassanids, is essential if we are to understand similar processes carried out by the Umayyads one hundred years later. An appropriate analysis of these channels of cultural transmission is essential for understanding similar processes in other areas of the Mediterranean as well.

Bearing this in mind, it must be pointed out that it would be equally important to analyse the extent to which the Arab culture of the Lakhmids of Hira played a similar role as a vehicle of transmission for Sassanian culture and, more importantly, the extent to which these Arab people merged Roman — Byzantine and Partho — Sassanian cultural elements, as they had been exposed to both. Accordingly, we can affirm that if the Ghassanids can be considered forerunners of the Umayyads in whatsoever has to do with the adoption of Classical culture and the socio-political and religious context of Oriens, the Lakhmids could be seen as forerunners of the cultural hybridisation between east and west that would characterise Early Islamic / Umayyad culture. The extent and impact of both processes is still awaiting a proper study, although unfortunately the material evidence available is scarce at best, or disappeared long ago at worst.

Addendum: An Attempt to Identify the Ḥallābāt Complex on the Basis of Written Sources.
Prof. Shahid's detailed studies on the written sources related to the Ghassanids (especially on toponymy, historical geography and their built structures) allow us to attempt an identification of the site. Two of the main written sources, the *Chronog-*

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[86] Not a true Caliphate, not a true Islamic State, but a true Arab Empire.

raphy of Hamza al-Isfahani and the list of Syriac Monophysite monasteries (the so called *Letter of the Archimandrites*), both mention a site that would host a *dayr* / "monastery" and a *ṣarḥ* / "stately mansion" located close to an important body of water (*ghadīr*) in the area between Ḥawran and Balqā'.

In the *Chronography* of Ghassanid *phylarchs* compiled by Hamza el-Isfahani, which lists their building activities, there is a mention of a site that, owing to its location and toponym, could well be modern Ḥallābāt (which is certainly a modern name). He mentions that Tha'laba ibn 'Amr "*built 'Aqqa and Sarh al-Ghadir in the extremities of Hawran, next to or adjoining al-Balqa*'". Regarding the first place name, Shahid states that is clearly a corrupt reading which may be read as Baqqa, Raqqa or Shaqqa, of which he prefers the last (a site in the Trachonitis) as the most likely correction[87]. Our interest points to the second structure or complex. The term *sarh* implies a stately mansion, while *ghadir* implies a body of water. It may not be a coincidence that the toponym of the nearby Umayyad baths (which belong to the same complex as Ḥallābāt) is still *Ḥammām as-Saraḥ* today. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Ḥallābāt is a place with important water sources, of which the noteworthy hydraulic and agricultural system around the Qaṣr (and the *ʿammam* itself at Sarah) are the most obvious manifestation. Even today, Ḥallābāt has one of the main springs in Jordan, which is so productive that a bottled mineral water plant has been built there.

If the term *ghadir* referred to a pool rather than a stream, it might have related to the huge *birka* of the agricultural complex near the *qasr*, located in a depression at the foot of the hill where our building stands, which gathers water from its slopes and from a nearby *wadi*[88].

In the *Letter of the Archimandrites*, there is also mention of a *Dayr al-Ghadir* which Shahid suggests may refer to the same site. Besides, he notes "that the definite article in al-Ghadir suggests that the common noun *ghadir* has in this case become a proper noun, a specific place by that name" (Shahid, 2002: 325-6). Furthermore, Prof. Shahid underlines how Hamza refers to al-Ghadir when speaks of al-Mundir ibn al-Harith, in such a way that sug-

gests that al-Ghadir was a well-known name in the 6th century AD. He also mentions Wetzstein's hypothesis, which locates this place in a **tributary** of *Wadi Butum*, not far from our site. Two other sites in Syria are also mentioned, but in our opinion these are out of the question as they are in the Golan (Ghadir al-Bustan and Ghadir al-Nuhas), which openly contradicts the clear geographic location given by Hamza.

In our opinion, the most important reference is that of its location "*in the extremities of Hawran, next to or adjoining al-Balqa*'". This precision is remarkable, because in other examples the location is not so clearly stated. Actually, Ḥallābāt could be clearly defined on the basis of this geographical reference to a border location that is clearly reflected in the building materials used: white limestone from the Balqā' and black basalt from the Ḥawran.

The facts that the list of Hamza makes reference to a stately mansion, and the letter of Syriac monasteries to a *coenobium*, both related to a place called al-Ghadir, goes beyond mere coincidence as it reflects the dual nature, both civil and religious, of the complex. Each document would make reference to the character of the buildings they respectively list: royal civic / palatine enterprises in the first case, and religious (monastic to be more precise) in the second. To be more accurate, they would make reference not to a single structure with a shared use (as would be the case for Mundhir's *praetorium*) but to a monastery built immediately adjacent to a palatial mansion, which is the case of Ḥallābāt, where both 'buildings' were constructed within the same walled precinct of the former abandoned *limes* fort. The fact that Hamza clearly uses the term *bana* / "he built" in relation to the enterprise undertaken by Tha'laba at this site could lead to some doubts, as in our case that expression would have to refer to the refurbishment of a former Roman fort and not to a structure built *ex novo*. Nevertheless, we know that Hamza uses that term when referring to refurbishments that imply important changes in the previous structure. This clearly occurs in our case, as we have demonstrated that the level of reconstruction is so significant (structurally and formally, involving building techniques, materials, architectural typology and of course final use) that the

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[87] At Hayyat, near Shaqqa, there is one of the few buildings that have so far been identified as Ghassanid, while at Shaqqa itself there is a monastery with a fortified tower that would be dated in the 6th century AD.

[88] Although apparently refurbished or 'rebuilt' in the Umayyad period, this reservoir is certainly from an earlier period, most probably Roman.

result was a completely new and different building, notwithstanding the fact that it occupied exactly the same perimeter. All this would doubtlessly justify the use of the expression "he built" to describe or make reference to this intervention[89].

These fragmentary data therefore allow us to present for discussion the hypothesis that the complex of Ḥallābāt / Ḥammām as-Saraḥ was the site described in the written sources as *Sarh al-Ghadir / Dayr al-Ghadir* which, according to Hamza al-Isfahani, was built by the Ghassanid *phylarch* Tha'laba ibn 'Amr.

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[89] Contrastingly, we have demonstrated that the Umayyad interventions within the "*qasr*" (i.e.: the Ghassanid compound), were merely decorative, removing existing mosaics and mural paintings that bear any political or religious message, and applying new mosaics, stucco panels and mural paintings with their own imagery. Changing use just to some of the dependencies (merely the monastic ones).

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