

First Experiences of Mshatta

by

Alexander Derrick Townson
B.A., McGill University, 1998

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History in Art

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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The early Islamic work of architecture known as Mshatta has been the subject of numerous studies since it was rediscovered by European travellers to Jordan in the late nineteenth century CE. In the absence of a dedicatory inscription, efforts were launched to establish the site's patronage. The current consensus is that it is an Umayyad structure likely built for the caliph Walid II during the period of his rule, which lasted from 743-744 CE. In my thesis, I examine the contextual evidence that supports Walid II's candidacy, as well as that which supports another possible patron, Yazid II. I then analyse Mshatta's façade from the perspective of an on-site viewer. Since the structure was never finished and the façade has been removed from its original context, my study involves some conjecture. However, this is necessary in order to determine how Mshatta was intended to be experienced by a first-time visitor.

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PU	Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University. Brünnow and Domaszewski Photograph and Drawing Archive.
RL	Robinson Library Special Collections, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Gertrude Bell Archive. Material used by permission of the Special Collections and Archives Librarian.

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INTRODUCTION



Figure ii **Photograph of Mshatta taken during the visit of Gertrude Bell.**
Image A232, RL.

We next came to some camps and flocks of the Beni Sakhr, the most redoubted of all the Arab tribes and the last who submitted to the Sultan's rule - "very much not pleasant" said Tarif - and now we were almost at the foot of the low hills and before us stood the ruins of Mashetta. It is a Persian palace, begun and never finished by Chosroes I [*sic*] who overran the country in 611 of our era and planned to have a splendid hunting box out in these grassy plains which abound with game. But his reign came to an abrupt close, Mashetta was abandoned and forgotten by all except the Arabs who wintered their flocks under its brick domes, until Canon Tristram rediscovered it. It is four square; a magnificently carved gateway leads into a great open court at the end of which stands the brick palace with a columned door, from which the arch has fallen in some earthquake, and roofed with great gaping vaults of brick, half fallen in. It looked indescribably beautiful and pathetic, standing solitary in the rolling plains with no inhabited place within 30 miles of it but the black tents of the Arabs. The day was soft and warm, the light glorious, with an occasional great soft cloud sending its long shadow over the plains, the beauty of it all was quite past words. We stayed about 2 hours, lunching and photographing - it's a thing one will never forget as long as one lives.¹

Gertrude Bell Thursday 22 March 1900

¹ Robinson Library Special Collections, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Letter of 22 March 1900, Gertrude Bell Archive. Material used by permission of the Special Collections and Archives Librarian.

The photograph on the previous page was taken during this unforgettable visit. It records one of the most famous works of early Islamic architecture in a way that would now be considered atypical. The emphasis is on the sheep huddled in the foreground, whose soft coats merge with scattered pieces of stone. If we let our eyes move away from the immediacy of this scene, we can observe in its setting the ruins of qasr al-Mushatta, or 'Mshatta' as it is more commonly known. Two energetic figures have climbed on top of its walls. They cut into the horizon, keen to demonstrate their mastery of the edifice.

Gertrude Bell wrote her letter after witnessing Mshatta in the very role that gave rise to its name, a place to winter one's flock. It is true that her trip was on the cusp of spring and that the sheep grazing in front of her might not have been the sort of guests originally expected, but her observations are important. They place Mshatta within a living environment. The site has taken on the guise of a historic monument in its present incarnation, but this is only one of several functions it has been ascribed. Bell's letter encapsulates the multiple roles of Mshatta: an object of travelers' curiosity; a forgotten site recently rediscovered; a ruin adapted for the use of local tribes; a palace built to facilitate royal pleasure but quickly abandoned. Bell attributed the site to the Sasanian ruler Khusraw II (r. 590-628 CE), whose short incursion into Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria¹) fits the pattern of abortive patronage that one would expect for a building never finished, but it could have been the result of any number of patrons.

The substance of this thesis is the impression created by the façade at Mshatta's entrance. If, after centuries of disrepair, the site had such a strong effect on Gertrude Bell, we can reasonably assume it was meant to have a comparable effect on its intended

¹ Now divided between Jordan, Syria and parts of Lebanon and Palestine.

visitors. To confirm this, I will approach the façade the same way as those who saw it for the first time. Such individuals may have had some conception of what lay behind the entrance, but their visual experience would have been something wholly new. The gradual exposure to carved elements on a multi-faceted surface would have contributed to an image of Mshatta formed by the successive accumulation of visual stimuli.

Since I am interested in how the façade might have worked as part of a visual experience, I will always be cognizant of the constraints imposed on the first-hand viewer when I am analyzing the site. Photographs, plans and diagrams will not be culled on the sole basis of their individual merits. While some are needed to provide contextualisation, the majority will serve to illustrate what the viewer might have observed. In choosing this tack, I am very much indebted to the work of Jean Sauvaget. His book, *La mosquée Omeyyade de Médine: étude sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique*, published in 1947, explains the *mihrab* (prayer niche) by considering the physical impediments to its observation within a hypostyle prayer hall.² His inclusion of the points of view of actual members of the mosque's congregation emphasizes the primary function of the structure. It may be possible to study every aspect of a building if we are detached from its purpose, but those who were to participate more directly would not have been so privileged.

In avoiding a purely taxonomic approach in favour of one that is more experiential, I am humbly emulating Oleg Grabar's book, *The Great Mosque of Isfahan*.³ His study has as its focus a vast, multi-generational structure that is connected to the city that surrounds it. My study concerns a much smaller building that did not expand in any

² Jean Sauvaget, *La mosquée Omeyyade de Médine: étude sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique* (Paris: Vanoest, 1947).

³ Oleg Grabar, *The Great Mosque of Isfahan* (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

significant way beyond its original enclosure wall. I am also considering just one part of this building, its façade. In spite of these differences, I have adopted a similar methodology of empiricism. Each chapter of Grabar's book walks the reader through the same mosque with a separate set of observational criteria. I will do the same for Mshatta.

The façade consists of a band of decoration centred on a diminutive doorway in Mshatta's southern wall. By making it the focus of this study, I am prompting a question that has often been asked of the study of Islamic material culture: why is there an emphasis on the study of ornament when the same is not done for cultures that have produced proportionally larger quantities of figural imagery? Given that the motif of the vine scroll, or "arabesque", has become almost a synecdoche of Muslim artistic design, the choice of methodological approach to the study of ornament can affect our perception of Islamic visual culture. Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*, first published in 1856, assigned entire cultural identities to decorative forms on the basis of a limited set of examples.⁴ The mosque of ibn Tulun and the Alhambra were his examples of choice, but he could have achieved the same with Mshatta.

One instance in which Jones did not constrain himself to ethnic boundaries was when expressing his opinion that ornament should serve a subsidiary role to architecture. At Mshatta, the presence and absence of figural imagery on the façade have been explained by virtue of location, but the decorations are not simply finishing touches that beautify an already impressive construction. They consciously work with their supporting structure to maintain the viewer's attention. One is not superior to the other.

⁴ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1928; first published 1856).

If anything, Mshatta offers the additional possibility that ornament can be empowered with its own message.

In his book, *Stilfragen (Problems of Style)*, first published in 1893, Alois Riegl took the extra step of tracing a path of ornamental development through various cultures.⁵ The methodology he established by doing this finds its parallel in the history of Islamic architecture. In several attempts to categorize a number of early Islamic buildings of uncertain function and date, Mshatta has been placed within a sequence of architectural progression. It has been described as the last and most grandiose of the Umayyad palaces, as the first of a series of ‘Abbasid palaces that were to grow unseemly large, and as a building that fits somewhere in between the two – as if those who built it consciously thought of themselves as transitional. For a time it was even considered pre-Islamic.

The motivation for tracing lines of development, or in Riegl’s parlance, “to have forged the various links of this chain in an unbroken sequence”⁶ is the search for origin. More recent studies, such as Yasser Tabbaa’s *The Transformation of Islamic Art During the Sunni Revival*, written in 2001, place greater emphasis on historical context, motivated by a desire to move away from the view of Islamic ornament as timeless.⁷ This new focus is not as easy to achieve as it might seem. Despite providing a thorough analysis of the setting that produced the art of the Sunni revival, Tabbaa cannot extricate himself from the roots of the artistic designs he describes: the political impetus for adopting the ornament known as *muqarnas* was the desire to express a renewed allegiance to Baghdad, the centre of orthodox Islam from which this form of architectural

⁵ Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. by Evelyn Kain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁷ Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art During the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

ornament likely originated.⁸ The ‘Abbasid capital of Baghdad also becomes a source of influence in the writing of Gülru Neçipoğlu, who sees the city as the generative centre for manuscripts that depict *giriş*, a form of “arabesque” consisting of interlocking geometric shapes and interlacing vegetal elements.⁹ Her book, *The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture*, published in 1995, suggests a Late Antique origin for *giriş*, whose heritage she believes is also shared with Gothic architectural drawings.¹⁰

As much as any historian, Tabbaa and Neçipoğlu are dogged by origins that fall outside the historical periods and geographical areas of the objects they are studying. This is unavoidable. The real thrust of their work is a well-informed contextualisation of Islamic art that takes into account regional and temporal variability. The palette of imagery available to artisans may include historical antecedents, but it is how these antecedents are understood within their new framework that is of greater importance. I will keep this in mind when considering symbols at Mshatta that derive from pre-Islamic prototypes.

Neçipoğlu’s study of the Topkapi scroll demonstrates that there is no need to be restricted by any one methodology. The chapters of her book include a general overview of Islamic scrolls, a discussion of the provenance of the Topkapi scroll, a wide-ranging study of geometric patterning, the contribution of mathematical sciences to ornament, and a technical analysis of *muqarnas* by Mohammad al-Asad. I will not be as ambitious as Neçipoğlu, but I will employ a similar array of methods in the study of Mshatta’s façade that together recreate a functioning entity.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹ Neçipoğlu *apud* Tabbaa 2001, pp. 8, 84.

¹⁰ Gülru Neçipoğlu, *The Topkapi Scroll – Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), p. ix.

I will begin with a bibliographical essay that covers the numerous studies of the site as well as more general works that have assisted the writing of my thesis. In chapter 1, which follows, I will establish the setting of Mshatta in terms of geological features, the network of routes that pass through Bilad al-Sham, the regional distribution of patronage, and the plan of the building. In conjunction with these aspects of the site's physical environment, I will summarize the presumed historical background of the period, as well as the biographies of the two most likely patrons.

Chapter 2 consists of a look at the façade writ large. Using formal analysis, I will ask the reader to assume the role of someone witnessing the site for the first time. The aim is to demonstrate that the recognition of the façade's features is determined by the distance between the observer and the enclosure wall. This chapter will also consider whether colour may have been intended for the façade, as well as the effects of less permanent additions such as a royal guard, hanging textiles and other portable objects.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how large-scale observations of the façade may have enabled the communication of a symbolic message. I will entertain just one such possibility, although this is to serve as an illustrative example rather than to provide a single answer to what the façade might mean. The theme I have chosen is military display in the form of shields, both worn by members of a ceremonial guard and as a form of repeated decoration.

The bulk of the interpretation of my thesis is in chapter 4, which offers a detailed analysis of the façade. By paying attention to subsidiary elements, I will determine the system used in the planning of the decoration. My first consideration will be the geometric principles of Umayyad decoration as they have been applied at Mshatta. I will

then enter into a larger study that suggests how the band of ornament might actually have been read, paying particular attention to the architectural surface onto which this ornament was placed. While it is unclear that a consistent narrative sequence is exhibited across the entire façade, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the composition is by no means static.

The goal of my thesis is to offer different ways of looking at the façade. In doing this, I am catering to the notion that the experience of Mshatta is one that is built in layers. Some of these are part of the design, and were to function both as an aesthetic display and as a sophisticated means of controlling the viewer. Others might have been the result of preconceptions brought by the visitor, some of which may have been common knowledge, but not all of which could have been anticipated. In my conclusion, I will summarize how Mshatta's patron attempted to present a set of thematically connected messages, irrespective of whether these messages would have been properly understood. Accepting that the set of observations I have chosen is limited, I will also suggest other means of interpreting Mshatta's façade.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A great deal of the pioneering work on Mshatta was not written in English. German was the language of choice, for the simple reason that by the early twentieth century, a significant portion of the building's façade had become an exhibit at the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. How it got there is a matter of a short-lived political dalliance between the Ottoman Empire and Imperial Germany. Diplomatic arrangements and national boundaries have long since changed, but the exhibit is still there, having barely survived the Second World War. A positive result of all this activity is that it brought an important example of Islamic architecture within the confines of Europe. It also sparked a fierce set of scholarly articles and books, many of which were at odds with each other. I will not refer to all of these works in my thesis, but I will include some of the seminal ones here.

Mshatta now figures prominently in all the surveys of Islamic art, most importantly in K.A.C. Creswell's mammoth *Early Muslim Architecture*. In the second part of the first volume¹¹, revised in 1969, there is all one needs to begin a study of Mshatta, including an exhaustive, chronologically-arranged bibliography. Many of the first hand observations in *Early Muslim Architecture* belong to others, but Creswell has compiled them into a useful archival resource. For anyone who calmly accepts Mshatta as a keystone in the canon of early Islamic architecture, it will be surprising to discover just how fragile the attribution of date and patronage were at one time. Several cultures associated with the region have been suggested as responsible: Byzantine, Sasanian, Ghassanid, Lakhmid and Umayyad. The last of this group is now agreed upon, but as

¹¹ K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 578-641, pls. 114-136.

recently as 1987, Oleg Grabar highlighted the uncertainty of this choice in his article, 'The Date and Meaning of Mshatta'.¹²

The lack of a dedicatory inscription or of a specific historical reference to Mshatta enables this dilemma to persist. I am not exclusively interested in this problem, although I will try to place Mshatta within its historical context. My chief concern is with observable phenomena, and much good work was done in this regard during the early stages of European rediscovery of the site. The plan of Mshatta most frequently employed is often attributed to Creswell's *Early Islamic Architecture*. However, Creswell distinctly referenced an earlier source: Rudolf Ernst Brünnow and Alfred von Domaszewski's *Die Provincia Arabia II*, published in 1905.¹³ It contains descriptions, photographs, schematic illustrations and pull-out plans for many sites in Bilad al-Sham. Brünnow and von Domaszewski were lucky to have visited the site while the façade was still in place. By 1903, two years before their book became available, this was no longer the case. The many photographs taken during their trip are now part of the photographic archive at the Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University. I have been very fortunate in gaining access to these photographs. I will draw upon them frequently.

The likely reason for the reuse of Brünnow and von Domaszewski's plan is its clear delineation of the building's surfaces, which allows for the quick identification of different structural components. This clarity would not have been possible without a study published the year before. In 1904, just a year after the Mshatta façade was shipped to Berlin, Bruno Schulz wrote 'Mschatta. I: Bericht über die Aufnahme der

¹² Oleg Grabar, 'The Date and Meaning of Mshatta', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), pp. 243-247.

¹³ Rudolf Ernst Brünnow and Alfred von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia: Auf Grund Zweier in den Jahren 1897 und 1898 Unternommenen Reisen und der Berichte Früherer Reisender*, vol. 2 (Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1905), pp. 105-176, 308-311, figs. 686-754, pls. XLV-XLVIII.

Ruine', which was included in the *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preuzischen Kunstsammlungen*, alongside Josef Strzygowski's 'Mschatta. II: Kunstwissenschaftliche Untersuchung' and several studies by Wilhelm Bode on subjects of a European bent.¹⁴ Bode had founded a department of Islamic art at Kaiser Friedrich Museum, and was a major influence in acquiring the carved components of Mshatta. The transportation of the façade to Berlin was arranged by Schulz. In 1932 it would take a prominent position in the newly built Pergamon Museum.

Schulz and Strzygowski are often referred to as a pair because of their complementary studies of Mshatta. Schulz contributed a series of impressively detailed drawings of the site; Strzygowski studied its imagery in an equally rigorous manner, making inventive, if not universally accepted, typological comparisons. Schulz's drawings impressed Creswell with their accuracy. Even in his plan of Mshatta, every block of masonry was apparently included, adding to the aura of authenticity. For someone unable to visit the site, this is the next best thing. The cross-sectional diagrams of Mshatta's internal rooms are all based on a ratio that includes the human size: one figure sits astride a horse at the entrance; another leans in between the crenellations of a reconstructed parapet; several are with spear in hand or engaged in discussion under the arches of the audience hall. In addition to Schulz and Strzygowski's early efforts, Ernst Kühnel published a booklet called *Mschatta* in 1933¹⁵, and Leo Trümpelmann produced

¹⁴ Bruno Schulz, 'Mschatta I: Bericht über die Aufnahme der Ruine', *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preuzischen Kunstsammlungen* 25 (1904), pp. 205-224, pls. 1-7; Josef Strzygowski, 'Mschatta II: Kunstwissenschaftliche Untersuchung', *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preuzischen Kunstsammlungen* 25 (1904), pp. 225-373.

¹⁵ Ernst Kühnel, 'Mschatta', in *Bilderhefte der Islamischen Abteilung*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Islamische Abteilung, 1933).

Mshatta: Ein Beitrag zur Bestimmung des Kunstkreises, zur Datierung und zum Stil der Ornamentik in 1962¹⁶.

Following these early efforts at establishing permanent descriptive records of Mshatta, a series of arguments about the site's origin began. The manner in which the building was constructed and the carvings of its ornament, particularly on the facade, reflected the visual culture of a handful of civilisations associated with the area: Byzantine, Ghassanid, Lakhmid, Sasanian, and Umayyad. The difficulty was that all of these answers are plausible. With the championing of Ernst Herzfeld, in a persuasively argued article, 'Die Genesis der Islamischen Kunst und das *Mshatta* Problem' that appeared in 1910, the case was settled on the Umayyads.¹⁷ It was not the last word on the subject, but it is the one contribution that has held up most firmly against scholarly scrutiny. Herzfeld believed that Mshatta was modelled on the Roman camps of Hira in Mesopotamia.¹⁸ Its design, therefore, ought to have been the result of an 'Iraqi overseer, whose workers came from regions Herzfeld identified as Syria, Egypt, Diyarbakir and 'Iraq. Much like Jones and Riegl, he reached this conclusion based on stylistic associations of components of Mshatta with specific cultures. More recently, in 2005, Thomas Leisten wrote about the importance of Herzfeld's study of the '*hira* style' in 'Mshatta, Samarra, and al-Hira: Ernst Herzfeld's Theories Concerning the Development

¹⁶ Leo Trümpelmann, *Mshatta: Ein Beitrag Zur Bestimmung des Kunstkreises, zur Datierung und zum stil der Ornamentik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1962).

¹⁷ Ernst Herzfeld, 'The Genesis of Islamic Art and the Problem of Mshatta', trans. by F. Hillenbrand and J. Bloom, in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. by Jonathan M. Bloom (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 69-86. (Original title: 'Die Genesis der islamischen Kunst und das *Mshatta* Problem', *Der Islam* 1 (1910), pp. 27-63, 115-144.)

¹⁸ For a recent evaluation of this theory see Thomas Leisten, 'Mshatta, Samarra, and al-Hira: Ernst Herzfeld's Theories Concerning the Development of the Hira-style Revisited', in *Ernst Herzfeld and the Development of Near Eastern Studies, 1900-1950*, ed. by Ann C. Gunter and Stefan R. Hauser (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 371-384.

of the Hira-style Revisited', an article that is part of a monograph entitled, *Ernst Herzfeld and the Development of Near Eastern Studies*.¹⁹

Herzfeld's article supported the notion that Mshatta was an Umayyad *badiya*, or desert encampment for occasional use, whose grandiosity could only have been sought by a reigning *khalifa* (a dynastic ruler of the Muslim Empire²⁰; plural *khulafa*'; *khilafa* refers to the office of the *khalifa*).²¹ Admitting that art history could not provide a date for the building, he deferred to a historical work of Henri Lammens, 'La badia et la hira sous les Omayyades: un mot à propos de Msatta'²², published the same year as Herzfeld's article, which suggested two possible patrons: the Umayyad *khulafa* ' Yazid II and Walid II. For Herzfeld, the weight of evidence pointed to Yazid II. Garth Fowden's recent book, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, published in 2004 arrives at very similar conclusions about the eponymous site.²³ In doing this, Fowden not only cements Herzfeld's belief that Mshatta and Qusayr 'Amra are closely related, but also that the patrons of both sites are from the same limited pool of two candidates. Where Fowden differed was in the notion that the patron need not have been a reigning *khalifa* at the time he had his building constructed.

Herzfeld also proposed that Umayyad architecture might be represented by a group of eclectically different buildings. This idea was later taken up by Robert Hillenbrand, in 'Islamic Art at the Crossroads: East Versus West at Mshatta', published

¹⁹ See *Ibid.*

²⁰ John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 169.

²¹ Robert Hillenbrand believes Mshatta is too large to be a *badiya*, and in turn too small to be a city. Robert Hillenbrand, 'La Dolce Vita in Early Islamic Syria: The Evidence of Later Umayyad Palaces', *Art History* 5, no. 1 (1982), p. 335.

²² P. H. Lammens, 'La badia et la hira sous les Omayyades: un mot à propos de Msatta', *Mélanges de la faculté orientale, Beyrouit* 4 (1910), pp. 345-350.

²³ Garth Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). See also Hillenbrand 1982, p. 21, f. 7.

in 1981.²⁴ For Hillenbrand, Umayyad art is diverse and unpredictable, as exemplified by the amalgam of Byzantine and Sasanian elements in Mshatta's façade. He concluded that although Umayyad art may not hesitate in showing its influences, it is original. "After Mshatta, there was no need to move the capital to Baghdad in order to infuse Islamic art with oriental elements; the rupture with the classical past was already final."²⁵

Hillenbrand was trying to break a link in Riegl's chain of artistic influence.

Mshatta has figured prominently in other analyses of the typological links of early Islamic architecture. Oleg Grabar's 'al-Mushatta, Baghdad, and Wasit', published in 1958²⁶, is the author's first attempt to establish a link between Mshatta and later works of architecture in 'Iraq. He continued this argument in 'Umayyad "Palace" and the 'Abbasid "Revolution"', published in 1963²⁷, and later in 'The Date and Meaning of Mshatta', published in 1987²⁸. More recently, in 1998, Michael Meinecke made similar links in reference to Raqqa, in his article, 'From Mshatta to Samarra: the architecture of ar-Raqqa and its decoration'.²⁹

Grabar has also written extensively about Umayyad ceremonial practices, which were the subject of his doctoral thesis of 1955, 'Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court'.³⁰ Parts of it later found their way into his influential book, *The Formation of*

²⁴ Robert Hillenbrand, 'Islamic Art at the Crossroads: East Versus West at Mshatta', in *Essays in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Katharine Orto-Dorn*, ed. by A. Daneshvari (Malibu: Endena Publications, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 63-86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁶ Oleg Grabar, 'al-Mushatta, Baghdad, and Wasit', in *The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti*, ed. by James Kritzeck and R. Bayly Winder (London: MacMillan, 1958), pp. 99-108, pl. II.

²⁷ Oleg Grabar, 'Umayyad "Palace" and the 'Abbasid "Revolution"', *Studia Islamica* 18 (1963), pp. 5-18.

²⁸ Oleg Grabar, 'The Date and Meaning of Mshatta', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), pp. 243-247.

²⁹ Michael Meinecke, 'From Mshatta to Samarra: the architecture of ar-Raqqa and its decoration', in *Colloque International D'Archéologie Islamique*, ed. by Roland-Pierre Gayraud (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1998), pp. 141-148.

³⁰ Oleg Grabar, 'Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1955).

Islamic Art, first published in 1973.³¹ He also published an article on the subject, 'Notes sur les cérémonies Umayyades', in 1977.³²

Several articles have also been written about aspects of Mshatta that are generally absent from surveys of Islamic art. Trümpelmann's 'Die Skulpturen von Mschatta', published in 1965,³³ provides the most thorough study of the building's statuary, which is now divided between the Staatliche Museen and the National Archaeological Museum in 'Amman. Kurt Erdmann, 'Ein Beitrag zur Datierung der Fassade von Mschatta'³⁴, published in 1951, is a comparative analysis of *graffito* found at Mshatta, which depicts a human figure in Sasanian headgear.

One of the most current studies devoted exclusively to Mshatta's façade is another work in German, Michael Meinecke and Volkmar Enderlein's 'Graben – Forschen – Präsentieren. Probleme der Darstellung Vergangener Kulturen am Beispiel der Mschatta-Fassade' published by the Staatliche Museen in 1993.³⁵ Unlike any of the articles and books that have been discussed to this point, it devotes its second half to the history of Mshatta's façade as an object displayed in variously configured museum rooms. This is subject matter for an entirely separate thesis, but it might interest the reader to know that the doorway through which one might once have passed in order to have audience with the *khalifa* is now the primary means of access to the office of the Director of the *Museum für Islamische Kunst*.

³¹ Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

³² Oleg Grabar, 'Notes sur les cérémonies Umayyades', in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. by Myriam Rosen Aylon (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1977), pp. 51-60.

³³ Trümpelmann, Leo, 'Die Skulpturen von Mschatta' *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1965), cols. 235-270.

³⁴ Kurt Erdmann, 'Ein Beitrag zur Datierung der Fassade von Mschatta' *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Congress of Orientalists* 2 (1951), pp. 614-619.

³⁵ Michael Meinecke and Volkmar Enderlein, 'Graben – Forschen – Präsentieren. Probleme der Darstellung Vergangener Kulturen am Beispiel der Mschatta-Fassade' *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 34 (1993), pp. 137-172.

Most of the early works on general aspects of Umayyad secular architecture were written in French. The most significant are: Max Van Berchem, 'Aux pays de Moab et d'Edom', published in 1909³⁶; Henri Lammens, 'La badia et la hira sous les Omayyades: un mot à propos de Msatta', published in 1910³⁷; Jaussen and Sauvignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie*, published in 1922³⁸; A. Poidebard, *La trace de Rome dans le désert de Syrie*, published in 1934³⁹; Jean Sauvaget, 'Remarques sur les monuments Omeyyades', published in 1939⁴⁰, and 'Châteaux Umayyades de Syrie: contribution à l'étude de la colonisation Arabe aux I^{er} et II^e siècles de l'hégire', published in 1967⁴¹.

Lastly, in addition to Fowden's book on Qusayr 'Amra, there are several books devoted exclusively to individual works of Umayyad secular architecture: Robert Hamilton, *Khirbat Al Maffjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley*, published in 1959⁴²; Oleg Grabar, Renata Holod, James Knutsad and William Trousdale, *City in the Desert: Qasr al-Hayr East*, published in 1978⁴³; Daniel Schlumberger, *Qasr el-Heir el Gharbi*, published in 1986⁴⁴; Stephen Urice, *Qasr Kharana in the Transjordan*, published in 1987⁴⁵. Of the books written on Umayyad religious architecture, Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture*,

³⁶ Max Van Berchem, 'Aux pays de Moab et d'Edom', *Journal des savants* (1909), pp. 293-309, 402-408.

³⁷ Lammens 1910, pp. 345-350.

³⁸ Jaussen and Sauvignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie*, vol. 3, 'Les châteaux arabes' (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1922), text and plates.

³⁹ A. Poidebard, *La trace de Rome dans le désert de Syrie* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1934).

⁴⁰ Jean Sauvaget, 'Remarques sur les monuments Omeyyades', *Journal Asiatique* 231 (1939), pp. 1-59.

⁴¹ Jean Sauvaget, 'Châteaux Umayyades de Syrie: contribution à l'étude de la colonisation Arabe aux I^{er} et II^e siècles de l'hégire', *Revue des études Islamiques* 39 (1967), pp. 1-53.

⁴² Robert Hamilton, *Khirbat Al Maffjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁴³ Oleg Grabar, Renata Holod, James Knutsad, William Trousdale, *City in the Desert: Qasr al-Hayr East* (Cambridge: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 1978), vols. 1, 2.

⁴⁴ Daniel Schlumberger, *Qasr el-Heir el Gharbi* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1986).

⁴⁵ Stephen Urice, *Qasr Kharana in the Transjordan* (Durham: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987).

published in 2001⁴⁶, offers a useful analysis of the relationship between the Umayyad mosque and palace in Damascus.

⁴⁶ Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

CHAPTER 1 – THE SETTING

The site chosen for Mshatta's construction is now located in Jordan (Figure 1), confined within national boundaries that separate it from the larger territory of Bilad al-Sham (Figure 2). It may be found roughly 24 km south and 7 km east of the ancient core of the Jordanian capital 'Amman, on the perimeter of the Queen 'Alia' International Airport (Figures 3, 4). Whatever travails first accompanied attempts to reach the building have been replaced by the security governing vehicular and pedestrian movement in the area, not to mention the regular distraction of aerial passenger traffic. The latter appears almost anachronistic when witnessed from within the complex (Figure 5). To approach the entrance from a distance greater than 180 metres, one would have to clamber over a barbed-wire fence surrounding the airport, walk across a runway, through several buildings, and climb once again over the fence, this time from the other side. All of these impediments make it exceedingly difficult to imagine what it would have been like to travel to Mshatta before the advent of motorized travel.

Geology

In spite of these clashes between different historical periods, there is one thing that links the environs of the site with its past: flat ground. This is the reason airport runways were laid out so close to an archaeological site. The growth of infrastructure may have altered the landscape surrounding Mshatta, but the geology and topology of the region have not changed significantly. The land that forms the base of the ruin is situated in the steppe east of the Jordan valley, several hundred metres above sea level. It is part

of a stable shelf abutting the mobile shelf of present-day Syria and Palestine (Figure 6).⁴⁷ As part of a plateau of Cretaceous sedimentary rock, it is composed at its upper layers of chalk, chert, marl and limestone (Figures 7, 8).⁴⁸ The last of these was to form a key building material when hewn into the blocks that compose the facing sides of the enclosure wall and the framing elements of internal passageways. Its softness when first quarried allowed it to be carved with relative ease, before it hardened into a more solid state befitting its often prominent locations.

Flora

Mshatta is situated in the Fertile Crescent, whose summers are hot and dry and whose winters are mild and damp.⁴⁹ During the summer, the flatter parts of this region, particularly southern 'Iraq, become dusty, as the sun eliminates most traces of moisture.⁵⁰ This phenomenon occurs at Mshatta for that very reason (Figure 9). A decline in Jordanian water resources over the last few decades, in concert with the associated dearth of irrigation, has further added to the dry feel of the area. Except for the hottest weeks, grass and scrub vegetation grows on the site, but these are not the only forms of plant life that may once have enhanced the landscape.

Sifting through a series of articles by Sauvaget, Grabar noticed a key point that was being made about early Islamic sites like Mshatta: although they may have facilitated

⁴⁷ Friedrich Bender, *Geology of Jordan*, trans. by Moh'd Kamal Khdeir, David H. Parker and U. Wilkening (Berlin: Gebrüder Borntraeger, 1974), pp. 16-18.

⁴⁸ U.S. Geological Survey, compiled for Water Data Banks Project, Multilateral Working Group on Water Resources, Middle East Peace Process, *Overview of Middle East Water Resources*. <http://exact-me.org/overview/p0607.htm>, <http://exact-me.org/overview/p0809.htm>

⁴⁹ Wilson B. Bishai, *Islamic History of the Middle East* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), p. 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

royal entertainments, most were also the nuclei of agricultural production.⁵¹ Under this hypothesis, water was brought in not only for the refreshment of people but also to provide sustenance for surrounding fields and meadows.⁵² This would have been all the more appropriate for a site like Mshatta, because it is on the eastern edge of arable land that was likely farmed.⁵³

The word 'Mshatta' is a label employed by local tribes, and loosely refers to a place to spend the winter. The building that now bears the name may have served this purpose, since not only do its remnants offer the possibility of shelter, but the seasonal fertility of the environs would have provided food for a flock: after spring and winter rains, grass covers the ground.⁵⁴ Considering that the word "Ukhaydir", which has been applied to a comparable structure in 'Iraq (Figure 10), translates as "little green (one)", seasonal vegetation appears to have played an important part in the function of these structures. The latter label is surprising because, as at Mshatta, only very scant patches of green surround the building at present.

More intense cultivation could have provided further growth than that which is possible with winter rain. At other sites such as Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi (Qasr al-Hayr West) and Khirbat al-Mafjar there is evidence for hydraulic works⁵⁵, which suggests once

⁵¹ Grabar 1963, p. 7; Sauvaget 1939, pp. 1-59.

⁵² Grabar 1963, p. 8.

⁵³ G. R. D. King, 'The Distribution of Sites and Routes in the Jordanian and Syrian Deserts in the Early Islamic Period' *Proceedings for the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 17 (1987), p. 97. Hillenbrand sees Mshatta as the exception to Umayyad residential structures, which otherwise are surrounded by irrigated land. He sees no indication that the environs of Mshatta were to be cultivated, although he admits that it may have been the intent to construct the building before beginning cultivation of the environs. Robert Hillenbrand, 'La Dolce Vita in Early Islamic Syria: The Evidence of Later Umayyad Palaces', *Art History* 5, no. 1 (1982), pp. 2-3, f. 19.

⁵⁴ King 1987, p. 97.

⁵⁵ At Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, a barrage with channels feeding water into an enclosure was built across an ancient *wadi* bed; at Khirbat al-Mafjar, a reservoir 700 metres from the palace collected water from an aqueduct. Creswell, K.A.C., *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, rev. by James Allen (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1989), pp. 135-136, 180.

profuse vegetal landscapes that have now been abandoned. The high water table at Ma'an has allowed its gardens to continue growing long after its enclosure walls have fallen. Whether or not one accepts the agricultural role of Mshatta, Sauvaget and Grabar's suggestion prompts a new visual appreciation of the site. Imagining the building with green outside its walls offers a very different picture from the one generally presented to us in contemporary photography. Until one gets close to the ruin, its piles of stone and crumbling brick vaults meld into the dirt below, forming a palette of almost indistinguishable colours. It is easy to overlook Mshatta.

Mshatta as *qasr*

Mshatta has been placed into the category of Umayyad *qusur* (singular *qasr*), formerly known by the misleading title 'Desert Castles'. This is a label applied to several secular buildings that were erected outside urban areas during the Umayyad *khilafa* (661-750 CE), the first Muslim dynasty. Their purpose has not yet been confirmed. It was once thought they were built to provide the Umayyad elite with a refuge from larger cities, hence the title.⁵⁶ In fact, they are not truly in the desert, nor are they castles. None of these sites appears to have been constructed with practical defensive purposes in mind. Moreover, the English title conveys a somewhat false notion of isolation, which was likely further exaggerated by the distant readership of the earlier accounts of the European rediscovery of these sites.⁵⁷ Although the Umayyad *qusur* such as Qasr

⁵⁶ Lammens 1910, pp. 345-350. A summation of the various theories is provided by Denis Genequand, 'Umayyad Castles: The Shift from Late Antique, Military Architecture to Early Islamic Palatial Building', in *Muslim Military Architecture in Greater Syria*, ed. by Hugh Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the problems of this view of Umayyad secular architecture, notably the *badiya* concept espoused by Lammens, Herzfeld and later Creswell, see Oleg Grabar, Review of *Early Muslim Architecture* by K.A.C. Creswell, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (1972), pp. 217-222.

Kharana and Qusayr 'Amra (*qusayr* meaning 'little *qasr*') now stand out in their solitude (Figures 11 and 12 respectively), they were once connected to other similar sites and larger urban centres by an important system of routes. Present-day Mshatta's location on the doorstep of international air travel echoes the position all of the *qusur* took within a transportation network that extended throughout Bilad al-Sham.

The *qusur* may not have been designed to fulfill the primary function of a means of escape from the city, but some of the Umayyad rulers were thought to have resided in them for that very reason. The seclusion of members of the aristocracy would be a source of frustration for the disenfranchised people of the *khilafa*, who ultimately took advantage of their leaders' absence from the administrative centres. As well as being places for escape, the *qusur* are thought to have been placed away from urban centres for other reasons. They may have facilitated contact with tribal groups from northern Arabia. Alternately, they could have demonstrated Umayyad authority over Bilad al-Sham in the form of urban-derived structures adapted for new regions.⁵⁸ These two roles are not mutually exclusive. In fact, all of the theories suggested for these buildings are plausible if one thinks of them in terms of how the ruling class intended itself to be perceived. The individual *qasr* may not have been practically built as a fully-working desert residence or as a fortified outpost, but the Umayyads may have desired to project this image.

⁵⁸ These two suggestions are noted in Genequand 2006, p. 4. The first is from Heinz Gaube, 'Die Syrischen Wüstenschlösser. Einige wirtschaftliche und politische Gesichtspunkte zu ihrer Entstehung' *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 95 (1979), pp. 182-209. The second is from Donald Whitcomb, 'The Misr of Ayla: New Evidence for the Early Islamic City' *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5 (1995), pp. 277-288 and Donald Whitcomb, 'Umayyad and Abbasid Periods', in *The Archaeology of Jordan*, ed. by Burton MacDonald, Russell Adams and Piotr Bienkowski (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 503-513.

Mshatta and its immediate environs

The label 'Mshatta' is by no means firmly linked to the site that now bears the name. During his visit to the Levant in 1899, the Reverend James Nies of Brooklyn spoke with one of the Banu Sakhr, the tribe about which Gertrude Bell was warned, and discovered a different understanding. For the Banu Sakhr, Mshatta was a hill overlooking the ruin on the lower plain. Nies accepted this view, and saw it as an indication that the two different entities acted together as part of a pilgrimage route.

Something like a half-mile to the northwest of the ruins there is a low hill which rises a little above the long line of plateau running north and south which here ends. On this hill there are numerous signs of former occupation and in its interior are many caverns of considerable size. I found also a long and deep cistern. When standing on this hill overlooking the desert, I pointed in the direction of the ruins which were in full view, and said to the Beni Sahr sheikh who accompanied me, "Over there is Mashita." He at once answered: "No! This on which we stand is Mashita; that is the khan." When it is remembered that the Damascus Hajj road passes close by both the hill and the ruins, that Mashita means "shelter" or "winter quarter," and that the Amawee and Abbasside khaleefehs did many things to alleviate the hardships of the Mecca pilgrims, and that not only the influence of Greek, but of Persian artists also, determined the early Arab architecture, it will be seen that the splendid ruin may be an unfinished attempt at an elaborate building to accommodate the Mecca pilgrims.⁵⁹

It is almost certain that Mshatta was never finished.⁶⁰ Less evident is whether the site was preceded by other construction projects. The hill Nies describes, whose earthworks

⁵⁹ James B. Nies, 'The Opportunity of the American School of Archaeology in Palestine' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 20, No. 1 (1901), p. 36. See also James B. Nies, 'Excavations in Palestine and what may be expected from them, and some observations made in 1899, during a series of journeys which covered the greater part of Eastern and Western Palestine', in 'General Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America December 27-29, 1900' *American Journal of Archaeology* 5, No. 1 (1901), p. 8.

⁶⁰ In an endnote to his section on Mshatta in *Die Provincia Arabia*, Brünnow quotes several early interpretations of the site, many of which draw the same conclusions about its state of completion. Tristram said the following: "One thing struck us much – the very small amount of *débris* strewn about. Except where the brickwork has become dilapidated, or the walls have been overthrown (evidently, as shown by the cracks, from the effects of earthquake), the appearance of the stones is rather that of unused material than of crumbling ruin. [...] The state of the external sculptured façade proves that it was never finished. As may be seen in the photographs, several of the stones have their sculptures incomplete. The masonry has been put into its place, and then carved *in situ*." Thomson: "It is very evident that the façade, and indeed the entire structure, at Mushatta was not only never finished, but it can be said that it was not even fairly commenced". Bliss: "I easily recognized with other travelers that the outside façade was never finished, indeed, the lack of fallen stones and of *débris* show that there remains *in situ* about all that ever was built [...] There is almost no debris". Vailhé: "Il est inachevé, comme l'ensemble du monument. Certains panneaux ne sont pas finis, d'autres sont à peine ébauchés." Gray Hill: "the appearance of the ruin

apparently preceded the Mshatta now known to us, is still clearly visible: from within Mshatta's walls (Figure 13), in oblique aerial views (Figure 14) and in overhead satellite photography (Figure 15), if not in the more predominant views of the general area.

The fact that Mshatta may have been built on an already established site conforms to a pattern of reuse that applies to some of the Umayyad *qusur*. The designs of the *qusur* have been attributed to an influence from Roman and Byzantine military forts built on the square *castrum* plan. While the *qusur* lack the defensive capability of their predecessors, they occupy the same geography, which was once the eastern edge of the Roman Empire. In many instances, the lack of thorough archaeological study makes it difficult to distinguish the Roman and Islamic buildings from one another.⁶¹ In some cases, such as Qasr Hallabat and Bakhra, this is because the Roman structures were appropriated for a new purpose after the Arab conquest.⁶²

The ruins Nies described were not necessarily Roman, since, as he has indicated, they were associated with the *hajj* (pilgrimage) route. Admittedly, this route may have served an earlier purpose related to trade, but one should also bear in mind that it was not exclusively Roman military architecture that provided a source of inspiration to the *qusur*. As Denis Genequand explains in his recent study of 2006, the *qusur* transplanted the domestic architecture of Roman Syria into a pseudo-military shell that reflected the power or status of the owner.⁶³ Equally important to the study of their design, as Genequand notes, are the pre-Islamic Arabian forts that were constructed from the second

fully supports the theory that the buildings were never finished, as there is nothing like the requisite amount of material on the spot for completion of the work; nor are there any other buildings near enough to make it probable that they were used up in construction elsewhere." Brünnow von Domaszewski 1905, pp. 143-147.

⁶¹ See Genequand 2006, pp. 4-6.

⁶² See *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

to the fourth centuries CE. They are rectilinear in construction, with towers placed at corners and along the walls. Those that have been excavated are situated in Saudi Arabia, but at least one is believed to have fulfilled the same functions of the Umayyad *qusur*.⁶⁴ The Banu Sakhr guide spoke of Mshatta as a *khan* (*caravanserai* or roadside inn). This it may have been, but in its grandiose size and extravagant façade, it would have been a *khan* that could accommodate or signify a royal presence. As such, the influence of Arabian forts and palatial residences may have been significant.

Mshatta bears the simultaneous traces of these Arabian structures and the Roman military outposts: it has a square enclosure wall buttressed with towers. However, as the largest of the *qusur* (its sides are twice the length of all but Qasr Kharana), it is the least like a frontier fort. Its architects may have had the desire to convey the illusion of defensive capability, yet they were little concerned with constructing a building that could withstand an actual attack: none of the towers permits an archer to fire an arrow. If Mshatta borrowed its basic function from an earlier foundation, this predecessor would have been the once-occupied hill on which Nies was standing. The choice to erect Mshatta at such a short distance from this more humble site indicates that it was to fulfill a role that took account of an already-established location within Bilad al-Sham. An Umayyad *khalifa* or *amir* (plural *umara*) - a military commander, leader, governor or prince⁶⁵, but in this instance a crown prince - may not have wished to reside in a simple cave when participating in the *hajj*.

In another description of his encounter with the Banu Sakhr sheik, Nies further clarifies the distinction between Mshatta and its collocated site.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Esposito 2003, p. 19.

I then inquired closely from both the Sheikh and the guide whether this distinction is always made by the Arabs, and was answered in the affirmative. [...] May we not venture to hope that this gives us a clue to the origin of those puzzling ruins? Especially when we take into consideration that, in addition to the caves, there is at least one very large rock-hewn cistern in "Tell Mashita." This hill, full of large caves and cisterns, is close to the Hajj road. It derived its name from the fact that it afforded shelter not only to the Arabs but to the Mecca pilgrims. It was probably at one time a station of the Hajj. Its cistern (the one I saw) is large enough to supply all the water needed by the pilgrims, and Amman is near enough to have supplied other necessities. What more natural, therefore, than that this place should be selected by one of the Omeiyad or 'Abbaside Khalifs for a magnificent khan to accommodate the Hajj?⁶⁶

Nies' discovery occurred at the same time Bell was writing her observations. It is a pity she was warned about the Banu Sakhr. The information provided by one of their tribe fits remarkably well with a much more recent analysis of the distribution patterns of early Islamic sites in Bilad al-Sham.

Transportation networks

Whatever the purpose of Mshatta, it was positioned within a system of roads that facilitated travel in the region. Nies' conclusion that it was to serve as accommodation for pilgrims on the *hajj* indicates that the site was chosen specifically because of its geographic location. This argument was also propounded by G. R. D. King in a more recent and detailed study of the principal routes in eastern Jordan and northern Arabia. He enlarged the data set, but his point was much the same: many of the Umayyad *qusur* were deliberately placed as way stations along three main lines of a state communication system, all of which connected Damascus to Madina in Arabia (Figure 16).⁶⁷ The easternmost route was the Wadi Sirhan, which followed a lengthy depression that gave access to good sources of water. In the centre was the lesser known Tariq Ubayr. These two routes explain many of the supposedly desolate structures that dot their now disused

⁶⁶ Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, p. 147.

⁶⁷ King 1987, pp. 91-105.

paths.⁶⁸ Both bypassed Mshatta by small distances, but this was not the case with the Darb al-Sham, which lay directly in line with the building (Figure 17). The same may be said of ‘Amman, the Umayyad administrative centre that the geographer Muqaddasi (b. 945/946 CE) regarded as the northern terminus of Wadi Sirhan and Tariq Ubayr.⁶⁹ Both ‘Amman and Mshatta were part of a large cluster of buildings and urban areas situated to the north of all three routes. The prominent association of Mshatta with the Darb al-Sham was not without reason. Prior to the birth of Islam, this route had an economic focus, with the movement of trade goods a primary concern. It later became a highly traveled *hajj* route, in a role that continued centuries after the end of the Umayyad *khilafa* in 750 CE.⁷⁰

King places Mshatta in a group with Qastal, a *qasr* located six kilometres to the west, and Zizya’, a village that is five kilometres south of Qastal (Figure 18). The name Qastal has been linked to the Latin word *castellum*. It also refers to the Umayyad settlement that contained the *qasr*. This settlement was dotted with cisterns, and possessed a water reservoir fed by a dam a kilometre to the east. Zizya’ possessed a significant water tank as well, which is still in use. King has linked the three sites because of their presumed association with the *khalifa* Walid II (r. 743-744 CE) and their proximity to one another and to the Darb al-Sham.⁷¹ The historian Tabari (838-923 CE) referred to Zizya’ as a stopping point for Walid II, then *amir* under his uncle Hisham (r. 691-743 CE), as his caravans returned from the *hajj*.⁷² Based on this reference, and the short distance to Zizya’, King saw Mshatta as a caravanserai-cum-palace where Walid II,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 99, 100.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

as *khalifa*, could have received those returning from the *hajj*.⁷³ This would explain the formal audience hall within the building, the structure's orientation towards the Darb al-Sham to the south, and the possibility of winter and spring pasturage for animals traveling in convoy with pilgrims.⁷⁴ The building, or at least its general environs, would continue in this role long after the end of the Umayyad *khilafa*, a fact attested to in later textual references, and by the Banu Sakhr guide accompanying Nies.

Regional patronage

Geography played an important role in determining where Umayyad construction projects took place. We have just observed that proximity to trade routes was an influencing factor in the choice of sites. In addition to this, specific sections of Bilad al-Sham were allocated to members of the Umayyad ruling class, prompting regional rather than trans-territorial building patterns. In his study of the patronage of early Islamic buildings, Jere Bacharach adds another voice to the argument that buildings associated with Walid II were to serve as caravan stops along the north-south pilgrimage and trade routes.⁷⁵ He also presented the hypothesis that the *khalifa* 'Abd al-Malik divided areas of land within his rule and assigned them to members of his family. These allotments would later become the centres of independent architectural patronage, which were aided in part by local agricultural revenues.⁷⁶ Should Bacharach be correct, his view coincides with similar ideas espoused by Sauvaget and Grabar. It also prompts us to think on much smaller terms. Even though a *khalifa* may have ruled over a vast territory, the major

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Jere L. Bacharach, 'Marwanid Umayyad Building Activities: Speculations on Patronage', *Muqarnas* 13 (1996), p. 37.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 30.

secular monuments for which he was responsible might have been clustered in more limited areas that were based on his landholdings before he ascended to power.

Comparing Bacharach's groupings of Umayyad secular buildings in Bilad al-Sham to what King has said about Mshatta, we arrive at a disjuncture. Bacharach's map of Marwanid sites (Figure 19) shows Qastal to be the work of a different patron: Yazid II (r. 720-724 CE). If this is correct, then King's grouping of Mshatta with Zizya' and Qastal, based on the singular patronage of Walid II, is suspect. Bacharach notes at the outset that little contextual evidence exists for any of these buildings, and that patronage need not be limited to *khulafa'*, but that it could include those *umara* who had not yet reached this loftier status.⁷⁷ His decision to assign Mshatta and the Citadel of 'Amman to the patronage of Walid II must be deemed somewhat arbitrary, given that he also states that 'Abd al-Malik gave his son Yazid II the territory around 'Amman.⁷⁸ These two sites are the exceptions in an area that is surrounded by sites that Bacharach has attributed to Yazid II: Bayt Ras to the north, Qastal to the southwest, and Muwaqqar to the east. Could it be that Yazid II passed the territory given to him by his father, 'Abd al-Malik, to his son, Walid ibn Yazid II (later Walid II)? This would allow either Walid II or Yazid II to be responsible for architectural works in the region. Herzfeld considered both father and son as possible patrons of Mshatta, based on the epigraphic dating of the comparable sites of Qusayr 'Amra and Muwaqqar.⁷⁹ The territorial apportionment of Bilad al-Sham gives further support to his belief. Yazid II was his preference, but the choice between the two is not clear.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ Herzfeld 2002, pp. 57, 68.

Historical background

Since there are two main candidates for the patronage of Mshatta, it is necessary here to provide their biographical details, as well as a broader outline of the *khilafa* into which they were born. This will give additional clarity to the context of the site and a better means to explain some of the imagery that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Like most early Islamic buildings, Mshatta lacks a dedicatory inscription and a firm date.⁸⁰ It is generally accepted to be Umayyad, but its unusually large size and prominent central axis give it much affinity with the 'Abbasid palaces of 'Iraq, notably Ukhaydir and the later and more grandiose palaces of Samarra. For these and other reasons, Grabar suggested that Mshatta was to serve as the projection of new 'Abbasid authority and power.⁸¹ Typological similarities give much support to this argument. Yet we must also remember Herzfeld's argument that Mshatta is an early Islamic structure for the very reason that it is part of a group of buildings so disparate that they could only have been constructed during the same period.⁸² When this is weighed alongside textual and pseudo-archaeological evidence, some of which will be discussed below, Mshatta displays a far greater frequency of links to the Umayyad period. I accept that the large part of the evidence is circumstantial, but as a whole it is sufficient to warrant an Umayyad dating. The detailed observations of Chapters 3 and 4 reveal that the façade of

⁸⁰ Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, whose *khan* was inscribed with a dedication by Hisham, is a notable exception. Creswell 1989, pp. 136-137. A copy of an inscription from Qusayr 'Amra is published in Jaussen and Sauvignac 1922, pl. LV and p. 98. For a discussion of this issue in relation to the Dome of the Rock, which contains several inscriptions, see Sheila S. Blair, 'What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?', in *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, vol. 1, ed. by Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 63.

⁸¹ Grabar 1987, pp. 243-247.

⁸² Herzfeld 2002, p. 57. The buildings he includes in this group are Qusayr 'Amra, Qasr al-Tuba, Muwaqqar and Qasr Kharana.

Mshatta displays many elements that can be considered characteristic of the Umayyad period and in particular Yazid II's rule.

The Umayyad *khilafa* was the first dynasty of the Islamic world (Figure 20). It is known primarily through later 'Abbasid historical sources, which portray most of their rival predecessors in a defamatory fashion. There is some cause for this later condemnation in light of the failings that led to the overthrow of the Umayyads by the 'Abbasids. From the outset, the Umayyad *khilafa* was beset with internal problems. According to Wilson Bishai, the problems were fourfold: a lack of clearly defined succession, tribal factionalism that superseded state loyalty, a repeated pattern of blood revenge, and discrimination against non-Arab Muslims, referred to as *mawali* (clients).⁸³ Hugh Kennedy offers additional reasons, of which the following two are significant. First, the majority of Umayyad rulers were regionally biased, favouring Bilad al-Sham at the expense of the Muslims of 'Iraq. This occurred in spite of the larger numbers of the latter, who also generated greater revenues for the *khilafa*.⁸⁴ Second, many who fell under Umayyad rule, particularly those in 'Iraq, wanted a *khalifa* who did not only claim religious authority, but who was truly Islamic in his principles.⁸⁵ Apart from 'Umar II, few would satisfy this need.

The Umayyads had many shortcomings, but as Kennedy points out, they also had some commendable features. Their *khilafa* was ruled by Arabs and dominated by the Arabic language and the Muslim faith, but it existed in a pluralistic environment without fostering any significant anti-Muslim sentiment; it displayed cultural self-confidence in

⁸³ Bishai 1968, pp. 206-209.

⁸⁴ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East From the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), p. 116.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

its official language and in its new faith; it was politically and economically self sufficient.⁸⁶ According to Kennedy, there was no real Umayyad foreign policy because it would have been unnecessary to engage in diplomatic relations with people who were thought to be destined for defeat.⁸⁷ Commercial links were established through the Indian Ocean, a peace treaty was negotiated with Nubia, and a military encounter with the Tang Chinese ultimately led to appeasement, but for the most part the Umayyads were ignorant of the world outside their empire, and saw it as further territory to be conquered.⁸⁸ As we shall soon see, there were factions within the Umayyad Empire and even several *khulafa'* who took exception to this expansionist view.

Dynastic succession

The Umayyad *khilafa* began with the assumption of power by Mu'awiya I in 661 CE after the murder of 'Ali, the last of the *rashidun*, or Rightly Guided, *khulafa'*. The Umayyads were the descendants of Umayya ibn 'Abd Shams, who belonged to the Quraysh tribe from Mecca. Although from the same tribe, they were split into two separate lines: the first three Umayyad *khulafa'* belonged to the Sufyanid line, descended from Abu Sufyan ibn Harb; the last eleven were descendants of Marwan ibn Hakam ibn Abi al-'As (Figure 21). Mu'awiya's decision to establish hereditary succession countered

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-121. The idea of the Umayyad *khilafa* as an Arab empire belongs to Wellhausen. Julius Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, trans. by M.G. Weir (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1927). Original title: *Das Arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1902). Kennedy accepts this view because of the preference given to Arabs by the Umayyad ruling class. Kennedy 2004, pp. 116-117. Hawting suggests that the idea of an Arab national consciousness should be conceived in cultural rather than racial terms. G. R. Hawting, 'Umayyads' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 10, ed. by P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 840.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

the Sunni principle of an elected *khilafa* and is one of the main reasons the Umayyads have been viewed negatively in later periods.⁸⁹

Damascus would become the political capital of the Umayyads, but during Mu'awiya's time in power, the Umayyad *khilafa* was more of a confederation of interdependent states than it was a centrally-organized empire.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, Mu'awiya had imperial pretensions that led him to imitate the Byzantine emperors: he made use of a palace court, a royal entourage and a personal bodyguard.⁹¹ In this regard, he must also have been emulating the Sasanian shahs. He established a sense of imperial dignity through hereditary succession, but in nominating his son Yazid to be his heir he upset the Hashimiyya clan in Medina.⁹²

Yazid I ascended to power on his father's death in 680 CE. It was during this year that Husayn, the grandson of the *rashidun khalifa* 'Ali, was murdered and beheaded in Karbala after an attempt to unite with Hashimiyya supporters against Yazid I.⁹³ Subsequently, the Hashimiyya of the Hijaz, under the leadership of 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr, declared secession. This resulted in a siege of Mecca by the Umayyads, which ended prematurely with the death of the *khalifa* in 683 CE.⁹⁴

Mu'awiya II took over from his father, and exacerbated the divisions between the Yaman, or southern Arabs, who wanted a member of their own to control the *khilafa*, and the Qays, or northern Arabs, who supported the leadership of ibn Zubayr.⁹⁵ The Qays believed in territorial expansion and the preferential treatment of Arab Muslims, whereas

⁸⁹ Hawting 2000, p. 840.

⁹⁰ Kennedy 2004, p. 83.

⁹¹ Bishai 1968, p. 168.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170; Kennedy 2004, p. 89.

⁹⁴ Bishai 1968, p. 171.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

the Yaman defended the rights of non-Arab Muslims and disapproved of expansion.⁹⁶ It is generally assumed that the division between these two groups was on tribal lines, but it may instead have been caused by allegiances to different political parties or interest groups⁹⁷ or perhaps factions within the army.⁹⁸ Mu'awiya II died in 683 CE after a reign of only a few weeks, as the last of the Sufyanid *khulafa'*. He left his successor, Marwan I, with an empire whose governorates were falling under the increasing influence of ibn Zubayr.⁹⁹ Marwan I died an old man in 685, at which point 'Abd al-Malik acceded to the throne.

'Abd al-Malik would enact a series of reforms that brought stability to the *khilafa'*. Before doing this, he needed to end the schism with the Hashimiyya. He negotiated a peace treaty with the Byzantine Empire and focused inward. Taking advantage of the dissatisfaction of 'Iraqi Arabs with ibn Zubayr's choice to remain isolated in Mecca, he led his army in an attack on ibn Zubayr's brother, Mus'ab, who controlled 'Iraq.¹⁰⁰ Opting for death rather than surrender, Mus'ab walked into the opposing forces and was promptly killed with a cavalryman's lance. His head was severed and sent to 'Abd al-Malik. When the *khaliifa* arrived in Kufa to receive the allegiance of local tribes, he is said to have stood on Mus'ab's head. After learning that three other heads had been carried to the same location because of factional conflict, 'Abd al-Malik ordered the demolition of the building in which these unpleasant events had occurred.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ David Stephan Powers, 'Translator's foreword', in Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk)*, vol. 24 'The Empire in Transition', trans. by David Stephan Powers (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. xiv.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Patricia Crone *apud* Hawting 2000, p. 844.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; Kennedy 2004, p. 90-91.

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy 2004, p. 98.

¹⁰¹ Bishai 1968, p. 178.

Following the death of Mus‘ab, ‘Abd al-Malik sent a warrior named Hajjaj after ibn Zubayr in Mecca. After an eight-month siege that ended in 692 CE, the rival to ‘Abd al-Malik’s *khilafa* was dead. Hajjaj later became governor of ‘Iraq, and ‘Abd al-Malik began his reforms.¹⁰² The Umayyads developed a professional Syrian army, which supported a newly-developed centralized bureaucracy whose official language was Arabic.¹⁰³ The Dome of the Rock was constructed, the Aqsa mosque rebuilt, and coinage was unified into a single epigraphic form that did away with earlier imitations of Byzantine and Sasanian coins. Several inscribed stone milestones indicate that ‘Abd al-Malik had also planned significant development of infrastructure within Bilad al-Sham, likely financed by booty acquired in ‘Iraq and coins issued by his new mints.¹⁰⁴

When he died in 705 CE, ‘Abd al-Malik left his son Walid I with a stable empire. The latter was faced with little internal opposition, and engaged in further building projects, public charity and a series of campaigns in Transoxiana, eastern Persia and Spain.¹⁰⁵ Following Walid I’s death in 715 CE, his brother Sulayman began a two year reign that destabilized the *khilafa* by provoking renewed conflict between the Qays and the Yaman.¹⁰⁶ After his death in 717 CE, the great-grandson of ‘Umar I became *khalifa*. ‘Umar II was viewed as the most pious of the Umayyad rulers. He was also the most reconciliatory. Under his reign, foreign wars were forbidden, the highly contentious taxation of the *mawali* ended, the practice of cursing ‘Ali in the Great Mosque of Damascus was abandoned, and efforts were made to end the feud between the

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 179; Kennedy 2004, pp. 100-102.

¹⁰³ Bishai 1968, p. 180; Kennedy 2004, p. 103.

¹⁰⁴ Blair 1992, p. 67.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182; *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁶ Bishai 1968, p. 194.

Hashimiyya and Umayyads.¹⁰⁷ The resultant diminution of the treasury from the changes in tax collection was a new cause for rebellion, but ‘Umar II died before his authority could be challenged, leaving the way for someone who would undo many of his changes.

Yazid ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (Yazid II)

Yazid II, the ninth Umayyad *khalifa*, assumed power in 720 CE. At the outset of his reign, he faced opposition in ‘Iraq led by Yazid ibn Muhallab al-Azdi. The revolt was a result of the long-standing Yamani dissatisfaction with Umayyad rule.¹⁰⁸ In August 720, ibn Muhallab was defeated by forces led by Yazid II’s half-brother, Maslama ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, who would later become governor of ‘Iraq. The latter was dismissed in 720/721 CE after failing to send surplus revenues to Damascus.¹⁰⁹ Yazid II gained further unpopularity with a violent suppression of a rebellion by the Kharijites, a Muslim sect.¹¹⁰ He also reinstated taxation of the *mawali*, leading to their disaffection.¹¹¹ For these reasons, he is thought to have renewed the hostilities between the Qays, whom he favoured, and the Yaman.¹¹² However, as has been noted, it may be wrong to consider this a struggle between two tribes. ibn Muhallab was supported by members of tribes other than his own, and later by members of the Syrian army in ‘Iraq, while members of his own Azd tribe took positions against him.¹¹³ Lammens and Blankinship offer a similarly nuanced interpretation. They argue that Yazid II was not strictly anti-Yaman,

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197; Kennedy 2004, p. 107.

¹⁰⁸ Henri Lammens and Kh.Y. Blankinship, ‘Yazid II’ in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 10, ed. by P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 311.

¹⁰⁹ Powers 1989, p. xv.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*; Bishai 1968, p. 198.

¹¹² Bishai 1968, p. 198.

¹¹³ M.A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation*, vol. 1: *A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 136; Powers 1989, p. xiv.

but rather tried to achieve a balance between the two factions. Their claim is supported by the fact that Yazid II was on good terms with the Syrian Yaman, to whom he gave the governorship of the province of the West and Jazira, including Azerbaijan and Armenia, in addition to Khurasan, prior to its annexation by the province of the East.¹¹⁴ It would seem, however, that this particular example of the acceptance of the Yaman was due to the generally preferential treatment of the Syrians under the Umayyads. In addition to suggesting Yazid II sought inter-factional balance, Lammens and Blankinship mention that his reign included a period of poor relations between the Syrian Umayyads and the Kufans, as well as the general displeasure of the *mawali*.¹¹⁵ Attempts to institute taxation on the latter led to revolts against Yazid II's governors in Khurasan and North Africa.¹¹⁶

Yazid II also broke 'Umar II's command to end all foreign wars. During his brief tenure, he initiated campaigns against the Franks in France and Sardinia, the Byzantine Empire in Sicily and Anatolia, the Khazars in Caucasus and the Turks in Transoxiana.¹¹⁷ He also departed from 'Umar II's religious tolerance by issuing an iconoclastic decree that ordered the destruction of all figural imagery.¹¹⁸

The veracity of the accounts of Yazid's order is spurious. The purported words of its author demonstrate a specifically anti-Christian iconoclasm: "the crosses should be broken in every place and [...] the pictures which were in the church should be removed".¹¹⁹ Non-Muslim sources attribute the decree's enactment to a desire to secure a longer reign based on the promise of a Jewish magician from Tiberias called

¹¹⁴ Lammens and Blankinship 2000, p. 311.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Robert G. Hoyland 1997, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), p. 104. See also pp. 112-113, 334-335, 596, 655, f. 88. The sorcerer's prophecy includes a reference to "all effigies", which Schick interprets as a prescription to avoid specifically anti-Christian hostility. Schick 1995, p. 215.

Tessarakontapechys.¹²⁰ When Yazid II died only two-and-a-half years later, Walid II had the sorcerer executed for his inaccurate prophecy.¹²¹ We must treat these sources about Yazid II's iconoclasm with caution, since they are removed from the Umayyads in time and in geography, and they bear the traces of denigration. The historian Severus ibn Muqaffa' (d. 987 CE), whose writing has been used in the identification of Mshatta, also wrote about the effects of the iconoclastic edict from the Egyptian perspective. Yazid II is the only *khalifa* he mentions who prohibited Christian images. However, he also makes reference to the removal of crosses in 686-689 CE by order of 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Marwan, governor of Egypt and brother of 'Abd al-Malik. This action appears to have been undertaken for doctrinal reasons.¹²² According to the historian Ya'qubi (d. 897 CE), even the conciliatory *khalifa* 'Umar II forbade the display of Christian crosses.¹²³

A similar decree to Yazid II's edict was issued in 726 CE by the Byzantine Emperor Leo III, who at one time had cooperated with Arab troops in an act of rebellion against the emperor Theodosius.¹²⁴ The very practice of iconoclasm by Christians was thought by some within that community to be the influence of Muslims.¹²⁵ This accusation was intended as slander, but it has some basis in actuality given Leo III's interaction with Arabs.

Yazid II's personal life was equally eventful as his public one. He was reputed to have a taste for wine and poetry, and was fond of two singing female slaves, named Hababa and Sallama. The passing of Hababa is said to have caused the death of the

¹²⁰ Hoyland 1997, p. 539; John of Jerusalem and Theophanes *apud* Schick 1995, p. 215.

¹²¹ Schick 1995, p. 216.

¹²² King 1985, pp. 270-271.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

¹²⁴ Bishai 1968, p. 195.

¹²⁵ G.R.D. King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 2 (1985), p. 268.

khalifa from grief.¹²⁶ Her influence on Yazid II and the latter's frivolity may have been exaggerated.¹²⁷

Upon Yazid II's passing, Hisham, the fourth son of 'Abd al-Malik, took over the *khilafa*. His nineteen-year reign re-established internal stability, and stimulated numerous construction projects in rural areas. These included not only the building of palaces but also cultivation, whose profits surpassed those derived from taxation.¹²⁸ In spite of this relative internal stability, the factional discontent allowed to fester throughout the Umayyad period led to the creation during Hisham's reign of the then-secret 'Abbasid movement. Led by a Hashimiyya named Muhammad, the 'Abbasids conspired to overthrow the Umayyads. The movement may have had an earlier origin, since, according to Tabari, three of its emissaries were sent to Khurasan in 718-719 CE, during Yazid II's reign.¹²⁹

Most of Hisham's visible problems came from outside the Umayyad Empire, in the very same regions and from the same people against which Yazid II had started his military campaigns: the Khazars in Caucasus, the Berbers in North Africa and the Turks in Khurasan.¹³⁰ It was also during Hisham's rule that Zayd, the grandson of Husayn, attempted unsuccessfully to install himself as *khalifa*. Sadly, he was beheaded just like his grandfather.¹³¹ In 743 CE, Hisham's life came to an end. His *khilafa* was followed by that of his nephew, whose accession he had sought to prevent.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

¹²⁷ Lammens and Blankinship 2000, p. 311.

¹²⁸ Kennedy 2004, p. 111.

¹²⁹ Powers 1989, p. xv.

¹³⁰ Kennedy 2004, pp. 108-109.

¹³¹ Bishai 1968, p. 201.

Walid ibn Yazid II (Walid II)

Walid II's father, Yazid II, had nominated his son to succeed his brother Hisham. Hisham was initially fond of his nephew, but changed his opinion after disagreeing with Walid II's lifestyle, which is reputed to have been overly debauched.¹³² Walid II's allowances were eventually reduced and some of his associates were punished.¹³³ As a result, he removed himself from court and relocated to a remote residence, one of many such palaces that he would occupy after coming to power.¹³⁴ It should be noted that Hisham sought, against the wishes of Yazid II, to secure one of his own sons as a successor. This upset Walid II, already embittered from a lonely upbringing at Hisham's court.¹³⁵ Hisham's reasons for sanctioning Walid II appear to have been based on nepotism as much as they were based on his nephew's behaviour. According to Tabari, Hisham asked Walid II to annul the oath of allegiance sworn to the latter in favour of Hisham's son Maslamah. After Walid II refused to do so, Hisham conspired in secret to effect this change.¹³⁶ Walid II was genuinely fearful of his uncle. When messengers rode on horseback to tell him about Hisham's death, he treated their arrival with great apprehension.¹³⁷ There was also a larger political motivation behind the desire to remove

¹³² Hugh Kennedy, 'al-Walid II' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 10, ed. by P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 128. For a study of the more entertaining aspects of Walid II's lifestyle, see Hillenbrand 1982, pp. 1-35 and Robert Hamilton, *Walid and His Friends: an Umayyad Tragedy (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art VI)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹³⁶ Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk)*, vol. 26 'The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate', trans. by Carole Hillenbrand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 89.

Hisham would later become furious about Maslamah's involvement in Walid II's wanton pursuits. *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Walid II: his opponents sought to reverse the territorial ambitions of his father Yazid II.¹³⁸

At the beginning of his brief reign, Walid II made some initial attempts to win favour by increasing the stipends of his supporters and by providing slaves to the handicapped.¹³⁹ Tabari elaborates on these benefactions in detail.

When al-Walid came to power he made provisions for the cripples and blind amongst the people of Syria. He gave them clothing and ordered that each of them should have a servant. He made available perfume and clothing among those with large families to support and he increased what Hisham had given them. He augmented the stipend for everyone by ten dirhams and then, after that increase of ten, he made a further of ten for the Syrians in particular. He doubled the allowances of those of his family who came asking for his help. When al-Walid had been heir-apparent, he used to give food to those who came to him on their way back from the summer campaign. At a staging-post called Zizya' he would also feed for a period of three days people returning from the pilgrimage. He would give fodder to their riding animals and would refuse nothing that was asked of him: "If you (just) say 'Let me see,' it is a promise with which the suppliant will be satisfied." al-Walid replied: "I do not train my tongue to say anything that I am not accustomed to doing."¹⁴⁰

Although there is a reference to the preferential treatment of the Syrians, the general image of Walid-II conveyed by this passage is one of compassion. It differs markedly from the hedonistic reputation for which he is now known. As well as elaborating on Walid II's character, Tabari's passage demonstrates the early connection of the *khalifa* to Zizya' and the *hajj* route, when he was still just Walid ibn Yazid II. Mshatta may very well have been intended to provide Walid II with a grand means of greeting these returning pilgrims. If the *khalifa* frequented Zizya' as *amir*, and was known for doing so, he would have had a particular attachment to the area that stayed with him through life. This is a much more reliable reason for attributing Mshatta to Walid II than the character traits that may or may not be reflected in the building's architecture.

¹³⁸ Shaban 1999, p. 153.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Tabari 1989, vol. 26, p. 105.

Despite his early display of altruism, Walid II permitted the persecution of the Yaman when *khalifa*. One of these Yaman, the popular governor of ‘Iraq, Khalid ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Kasri, was tortured to death.¹⁴¹ Walid II also took action against those he thought had opposed his accession, flogging Sulayman ibn Hisham, and executing other members of the Marwanid family.¹⁴² The Yaman eventually turned against him, nominating Yazid III as his successor.¹⁴³ Shaban suggests Walid II’s overthrow was also due to the Syrians’ dissatisfaction with constant campaigning throughout the empire.¹⁴⁴ He also notes that the term ‘Yaman’ was applied to all those who rebelled against the Qaysi policies of Walid II, regardless of tribal affiliation.¹⁴⁵ Irrespective of the actual tribes to which its members belonged, the Yaman took control of Damascus during Walid II’s absence, and sent a force under ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hajjaj ibn ‘Abd al-Malik to the palace of the *khalifa* at Bakhra, south of Palmyra. It was here that Walid II was killed on 15 April 744 CE, after a short siege.¹⁴⁶ He had begged unsuccessfully for his life, and then resigned himself to read from the Qur’an during his last moments.¹⁴⁷

A series of brief tenures followed the death of Walid II. Yazid III was in power for only six months when he died, but long enough to spark a rebellion by the Qaysi faction of the Umayyads.¹⁴⁸ Ibrahim took over in 744 CE, but was defeated by the Qays under Marwan at the battle of Baalbek.¹⁴⁹ His fate was better than most. He abdicated after being in power less than three months, surviving the change in government. The

¹⁴¹ Shaban 1999, p. 153.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* and Kennedy 2004, p. 112.

¹⁴³ Bishai 1968, p. 203.

¹⁴⁴ Shaban 1999, p. 155.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Kennedy 2000, p. 128.

¹⁴⁷ Bishai 1968, p. 203.

¹⁴⁸ Bishai 1968, p. 204.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Umayyad warrior Marwan intended to avenge Walid II's murder, but with both of the sons of the *khalifa* murdered by the Yaman, he ended up being nominated to become *khalifa*.¹⁵⁰ As Marwan II, the last of the Umayyad *khulafa*, he briefly restored peace.¹⁵¹ His ruthlessness in exhuming and crucifying the corpse of Yazid III and in murdering the Yamani supporters of the deceased *khalifa* brought him into open conflict with the Yaman.¹⁵² To compound these problems, several natural disasters occurred at this time. A plague, a famine and an earthquake ravaged Syria, and permanently weakened what little stability Marwan II had achieved.¹⁵³ Under these circumstances, the 'Abbasid movement gained the confidence to come out into the open. Its leader, Abu Muslim, engaged Marwan II's forces on the river Zab in February 750 CE. Marwan II fled to Egypt, but in August of the same year he was killed in battle south of Fustat.¹⁵⁴

The date and patronage of Mshatta

When describing the buildings of Walid II, Bacharach refers to a scholar who has exercised caution by attributing Mshatta to the late Umayyad period only, and not to a specific patron.¹⁵⁵ He was referring to Ghazi Bisheh, who wrote an article about a baked brick found during clearance work at the site in 1964 (Figure 22). The brick was roughly inscribed with weathered letters that might have read as follows.

In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful.
From Sulayman ibn Khaysan to Khayla

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Kennedy 2004, p. 115.

¹⁵² Bishai 1968, p. 205.

¹⁵³ Kennedy 2004, p. 115. Mshatta's present ruined state has been explained, in part, by this earthquake. However, the site's location on a stable shelf must have saved it from the more severe effects that occurred on the mobile shelf of Palestine and present-day Syria.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁵⁵ Bacharach 1996, p. 43, f. 93. The plaque at the entrance to the site is similarly cautious. It declares: "QASR AL MUSHATTA, UNCOMPLETED 8TH CENTURY Umayyad PALACE".

Ibn ... peace and God's mercy
 And blessings be upon you. I praise God to you
 ... the Muslims.¹⁵⁶

Bisheh identified the family of Qaysan as *mawali* to a tribe that filled many administrative positions during the *khilafa* of Walid I and afterwards.¹⁵⁷ From this family, a Sulayman ibn Qaysan was active in 'Iraq, where he held a government position since Yazid II's time as *khalifa*.¹⁵⁸ He worked during the tenure of several *khulafa*', including Walid II, whose death notice he was asked to deliver to high-ranking Syrian officials.¹⁵⁹ His final days were spent in Damascus, where he was put to death after the overthrow of the Umayyad *khilafa* in 750 CE.¹⁶⁰

Bisheh supplies a further means of dating Mshatta in the form of two bronze coins found in a room along the southwest wall of the site in 1984 (Figure 23). The larger and more legible of the coins came from the mint of Ramla, whose earliest products have been dated to 719-720 CE, the same time Yazid II came to power. This provided Bisheh with a *terminus post quem*, from which he derived two conclusions: one, Mshatta was constructed towards the end of Umayyad rule; two, the Persian features of the building may be explained by the connection between 'Iraq and the Balqa' region of Bilad al-Sham that is implied by the inscription on the brick.¹⁶¹ For Herzfeld, the connection with 'Iraq existed at the level of labour, and involved the hands of workmen who participated alongside others in Mshatta's construction. In either instance, the Sasanian quality of

¹⁵⁶ Ghazi Bisheh, 'Qasr al-Mshatta in the Light of a Recently Found Inscription' *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 3 (1987), p. 194.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

some of the imagery on the façade, which will be studied in the chapters that follow, may have been the result of more than just artistic borrowing.

Bisheh was cautious in arriving at his conclusions, and for good reason. The coin provides no *terminus ante quem*, and the *terminus post quem* of 719 CE is by no means definite, since the context of the find is not provided. If we take the evidence of the coin and inscribed brick in conjunction with the art historical analysis of Herzfeld and the regional studies of King and Bacharach, the candidacies of both Yazid II and Walid II become stronger. By collecting the little archaeological evidence that exists for Mshatta, Bisheh supports only a late Umayyad date, and in doing this, offers a note of caution for the many unqualified attributions of the site to the patronage of Walid II.

The brick inscription does not provide an answer to the question of who built Mshatta, but neither does the more often quoted textual passage that was first used to link the site to Walid II.

Since, however, his people hated him, he began to build a city named after himself in the desert, for he gave his name to it; but the water was fifteen miles distant from it. He collected workmen from all quarters, and built that city by means of forced labour; and on account of the multitude many died every day from the scarcity of water; for though the water was carried thither by twelve hundred camels daily, yet this was not enough for them; the camels being divided into two convoys, six hundred carrying water one day, and six hundred the next. Then al-Walid was attacked by a man named Ibrahim, who killed him, and seized the government instead of him. Ibrahim released the enslaved workmen, who departed each one to his own place.¹⁶²

This recounting of the dramatic end of Walid II was written by the historian Severus ibn Muqaffa' (d. 987 CE). It assisted Lammens in deciding between Yazid II and Walid II as the possible patron of Mshatta. He took Severus' account of a water supply fifteen miles distant to accord with Wadi Mujib (Figure 24).¹⁶³ Wadi Mujib is in fact more than twenty miles, or thirty-two kilometres, away. The difference may be negligible, but not

¹⁶² Severus ibn Muqaffa', trans. by Evetts from Lammens *apud* Creswell 1969, p. 631.

¹⁶³ Lammens *apud ibid.*

when one considers much closer sources of water: the reservoir at Zizya' and the set of cisterns on a nearby hill that Nies described. Moreover, since Severus was a Christian based in Egypt, writing during a later period, his reliability is somewhat suspect.

If the time of writing is an indicator of authority, then we must also pay attention to the Umayyad poet Kuthayyir 'Azza (d. 723 CE), who composed a poem that refers to "the two Qastals" and "Muwaqqar". Brünnow understood "the two Qastals" as being Qastal and Mshatta, which in turn led Creswell to conclude that, Brünnow's identification being correct, Mshatta would have already been in existence before 723 CE.¹⁶⁴ Brünnow took the fact that the word '*qastal*' would not have been used for a contemporary building to suggest a date for Mshatta that was pre-Islamic, and specifically Ghassanid (of the kingdom ruled by Arab Christian phylarchs, vassals of the Byzantine Empire, from 220 – 638 CE).¹⁶⁵

Although Brünnow did not believe Qastal was Islamic, he established a *terminus ante quem* that is within the Umayyad period. Should Qastal have been related to Mshatta and Muwaqqar based on regional patronage, then the evidence of Kuthayyir 'Azza's poem in combination with the coins and brick inscription from Mshatta allow us to postulate a narrower timeframe for Mshatta, 719-723 CE, which coincides with the period of Yazid II's reign. Yazid II's association with the region is also demonstrated by an inscription found on a capital from Muwaqqar (Figure 25), the site mentioned in Kuthayyir 'Azza's poem. The inscription dates to 722-723 CE, and specifically refers to Yazid II's order to construct a water reservoir.¹⁶⁶ The problem is that these references, just like that of Severus, are vague in describing geographical settings and architectural

¹⁶⁴ Brünnow *apud ibid.*, p. 625.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

structures. We will never be entirely sure of the buildings the two authors were recording in these important pieces of evidence.

Another building commonly assumed to be the product of Walid II's patronage is Qusayr 'Amra (Figure 12). Its many frescoes with scenes of hunting and of dancing women (Figure 26) fit conveniently with the debauched activity that is often used to define the character of his rule. In the most recently published book on the site, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, Fowden supports Walid II's candidacy¹⁶⁷, while at the same time remaining open to alternatives. Because Qusayr 'Amra is, among other things, a hunting lodge, Fowden believes it must have been built for someone with a general interest in the Balqa' region and who may have spent several years there as *amir*.¹⁶⁸ Both Yazid II and Walid II satisfy this requirement. Fowden first considers the case of Walid II's father, Yazid II, in spite of the latter's edict in 721 CE against images. According to historical records, this edict affected a statue of a female from a bath house in Fustat.¹⁶⁹ As Fowden explains, iconoclastic activity within Jordan was aimed primarily at Christians, and may have taken only a short-term effect.¹⁷⁰ Under these circumstances, figural imagery on an Islamic building would have been of lesser consequence. Indeed, almost no figurative mosaics, fresco paintings or statues in Muslim

¹⁶⁷ See Fowden 2004, pp. 148-151, which examine Walid II's character, pp. 157-159, which note the resemblance of Mshatta to Qasr al-Tuba, p. 160, which suggests the incomplete state of Walid II's construction projects may be due to his loss of allowance or assassination after a brief reign, p. 161, which notes that Walid ibn Yazid II's spent much longer as *amir* than his father, and pp. 162-163, which provide the comparative example of Khirbat al-Mafjar, which has also been attributed to Walid ibn Yazid II's patronage while *amir*.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁶⁹ ibn 'Abd al-Hakam and al-Kindi *apud Ibid.*, p. 146. See also King 1985, p. 277. Hoyland argues that the Muslim sources that refer to the edict are later derivations from Christian sources. Hoyland 1997, p. 335, f. 237.

¹⁷⁰ Fowden, pp. 146-147.

buildings suffered from iconoclasm during the Umayyad period.¹⁷¹ Moreover, since Yazid II was not noted for being especially pious, Fowden suggests that he could have enjoyed figural imagery within the private setting of Qusayr ‘Amra.¹⁷² At Mshatta, he could not have enjoyed this privilege. Its façade portrays images of animals in a clearly open setting.

That the interior of Qusayr ‘Amra was meant to be private would be disputed by those who see the building as a formal audience hall. Moreover, an enclosed space is not necessarily a private space. An example of this is the reception hall of the Umayyad palace at the Citadel of ‘Amman, a square structure (Figures 27, 28) situated at the southern entrance to the palace area (Figure 29).¹⁷³ It is only after passing through this hall that one enters into the private areas of the palace. The interior walls of the audience hall are decorated with a band of blind arcades (Figures 30, 31). If one were to unfold the hall’s internal sides, the room would exhibit carved decoration that is displayed the same way as at the façade of Mshatta.¹⁷⁴ In this respect, the entrances to the two buildings function in the same way.

Should Qusayr ‘Amra have been a more public space, its frescoes are anomalous. Their survival has led King to question whether the structure had been built by the time of Yazid II’s reign.¹⁷⁵ He could have asked the same of Mshatta, for which there is less uncertainty about the access to decorative elements. Its façade displayed figural imagery,

¹⁷¹ Robert Schick, ‘The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study’, in *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), p. 205. Schick does not mention the bath house in Fustat. He believes that iconoclasm had no effect on Islamic buildings.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁷³ See Alastair Northedge, *Studies on Roman and Islamic ‘Amman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 74-88, figs. and pls. for a detailed survey of the Umayyad palace.

¹⁷⁴ I owe this idea to Dr. Marcus Milwright.

¹⁷⁵ King 1985, p. 277.

which would have been seen by many, should the site have been observed by pilgrims returning from the hajj. A retinue of guards may have restricted access to the entrance, thereby hiding the façade from general view, but this consideration would not apply if the building were to have been occupied only seasonally. The interior, which may have been less accessible, was to include several female statues, as indicated by three surviving fragments. One of these statues is now in the National Archaeological Museum in ‘Amman (Figure 32) and two are in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Figures 33, 34). They did not suffer the same fate as the female statue from the bath house at Fustat.

If Yazid II did in fact engender iconoclasm (the concentration of iconoclastic damage at Christian sites close to Muwaqqar, where he built his cistern, is the best evidence we have¹⁷⁶), his own lifestyle was reputedly far from sacrosanct. The very entertaining aspects of Walid II’s biography that often serve to justify his association with the more lavishly decorated Umayyad buildings have their parallel in Yazid II, whose personal life has already been noted. In addition to enjoying poetry and the company of his two slaves, Hababa and Sallama, he was known to consume alcohol.¹⁷⁷ So much did he love Hababa, that he sequestered himself with her at Bayt Ras in northern Balqa’. There they enjoyed a day of eating and drinking the region’s wine until Hababa died after choking on a seed playfully tossed into her mouth. The *khalifa* died of heartbreak soon after.¹⁷⁸ This is a death as astonishing as that of Walid II, whose brief *khalifa* ended in murder. If Walid II’s premature death can be used to explain the unfinished state of Mshatta, so may that of Yazid II.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹⁷⁷ Fowden 2004, p. 147.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

Neither *khalifa* had a large amount of time for building projects. If Yazid II's edict were more serious than we now believe, there is nothing to rule out Mshatta being built prior to 721 CE, before more stringent iconoclasm could take effect. The Ramla mint could have produced the coin found at the site in 719 CE, when Yazid II was *amir* on the cusp of becoming *khalifa*. The timeframe is very short, but this has not been a determining factor for those who have accepted that Walid II built Mshatta during a reign that lasted from only 743-744 CE. Admittedly, Walid II also had the resources to begin such a project while *amir*, if one accepts that Khirbat al-Mafjar is the result of his earlier patronage.¹⁷⁹

The plan

Having established a context fraught with some uncertainties, it is now time to turn our attention to the layout of Mshatta, which is less open to dispute. The plan of Mshatta has figured prominently in many arguments about the building's origin and about its position within a sequence of early Islamic architecture. It is a key component of any study of the building, but we must remember that the audience for which the building was intended might not have placed as much emphasis on two-dimensional parsing of the structure. In its completed state, the building would not have allowed for a privileged observation of all its component parts, certainly not from an elevated angle. Mshatta's designers were privy to structural and planning information, as was its patron, but to bless visitors with this knowledge, rather than permitting only a gradual exposure to limited facets of Mshatta's structure would be far too empowering. It is more likely

¹⁷⁹ Hamilton 1959, p. 232.

that the visitors had an idea of how the building was constructed based on the verbal translation of other similar structures.

Although the site has changed considerably with time, an impression of permanence has been created by the reuse of the same overhead plan (Figure 35). This plan is commonly attributed to Creswell, but it was first used in Brünnow and Domaszewski's *Die Provincia Arabia II*. It must have been based on an accurate drawing by Schulz, which offers an approximation of the ruined state in which he found the site, down to the individual pieces of rubble (Figure 36). Brünnow conveniently cleared away the detritus of this earlier version and allowed Mshatta to be presented in the form of an architectural drawing.

In Brünnow's configuration, Mshatta is defined by the following: 1) a single entrance to the south; 2) a square enclosure wall built of limestone masonry that is 144 metres to each inner side (147 on the outer sides); 3) towers abutting the exterior of this wall, most of which are circular (excepting two semi-octagonal towers flanking the entrance) and solid (excluding four that were to serve as latrines); 4) three tracts that run parallel to the main axis of the building, which is roughly aligned with magnetic north, varying by a declination of twelve degrees east. Since Mshatta was never finished, the horizontal focus of these tracts does not necessarily reflect the intended layout of the completed project. As aerial photographs demonstrate (Figures 3, 37, 38), the side tracts show the signs of foundation walls. These suggest that rooms were to fill most of the internal areas of Mshatta except for a large courtyard in the middle. This would have created an emphasis on a central space, which would have worked alongside the focus of the main axis.

Of the buildings that were to surround the main courtyard, only the complex at the north was built to anything near completion (Figure 39). From a base of limestone courses (Figure 40), its supporting walls of baked brick culminate in vaulted ceilings (Figure 41). Looking at its plan (Figure 42), one can discern three semi-circular exedrae that combine to form the space that is the apex of the north-south axis.¹⁸⁰ The building was entered by a portal of three arches that no longer stand (Figure 43), but which fell consistently enough to allow Schulz to reconstruct their intended appearance (Figure 44). On the southern side of the central tract are the traces of a foundation for an entrance block that was to consist of a narrow vestibule opening into a small courtyard (Figures 45, 46). A mosque was intended for the southeast portion of this section (Figure 47), as identified by a *mihrab* niche (Figure 48) in the *qibla* wall (aligned with the direction of Muslim prayer).¹⁸¹

All of these components of Mshatta's internal structure are contained within an enclosure wall that ranges from 3 to 5½ metres in height. This protective barrier is easy to overlook in its foreshortened state, but one must remember that it would have been forbiddingly higher if finished. The buildings that have just been described could not have been observed without first walking through the entrance. The importance of this point of entry into Mshatta explains the location of the elaborately carved façade that once stretched outward from either side of the door jamb (Figure 49). It was made of the same limestone employed for the rest of the wall. Very little of the facade remains *in situ* (Figure 50), since most of it was removed in 422 separate cases to the Staatliche Museen

¹⁸⁰ A close look at the plan will reveal that the true apex is one of the four latrines. This fact would not have been visible to the visitor traveling through Mshatta on foot, since this more private area is hidden from view. We may assume that the patron would not have wished to emphasize the utilitarian features of his building.

¹⁸¹ Creswell 1969, p. 127.

zu Berlin in the winter of 1903/1904 with the consent of the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid II.¹⁸²

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 596, f. 1.

CHAPTER 2 – THE FAÇADE

Mshatta was designed to be experienced, even if its abandonment mid-construction prevented this from ever occurring. While one cannot disavow the fragmentary nature of its scattered remnants, a composite and imaginative reconstruction is not only worthwhile but necessary. Keeping in mind the perspective of someone with feet on the ground, exposed to a multi-faceted architectural complex, will allow us to understand what the designers intended. To achieve this, it will be necessary to think about the façade as if it were still *in situ*. This will affect matters such as verb tense, and references to the cardinal directions when speaking about portions of the façade.

Successive layers

Had the ambitious project reached completion, its visitors would have experienced it in a deliberately layered fashion. This may be said of not only the building but also the sculptural relief work that occupies its façade. Both elements were intended to work in tandem. Just as an individual walking into and through the building would have been exposed to progressively changing spaces, so would someone viewing the façade have been presented with patterns and details, the recognition of which varied based on their distance from the observer's eyes. In the case of the former, three-dimensional architectural space is the determining factor. With the latter, an ostensibly two-dimensional surface, onto which are projected framing elements and relief carvings, achieves this desired effect through different degrees of depth and shadow: segments that protrude significantly from the façade's surface are discernible from considerable distances, while subsidiary and low-relief portions only become apparent at close range.

The decoration of Mshatta's façade occupies two segments of wall that flank the entrance (Figure 51). The outer edges of these segments are roughly equidistant from the north-south axis of the building, which acts as an axis of symmetry. The cross section of the southern enclosure wall indicates a pattern that has been duplicated from the centre outwards: a short and thick section of wall frames the side of the doorway; it is met by an octagonal tower, the other side of which is a section of wall just over 13 metres long that terminates in a circular tower. Like the architecture it adorns, the decoration also displays elements of symmetry. A zigzag band divides the wall into equilateral triangles, each of which has at its centre a rosette.¹⁸³ On either side of the central axis, there are ten triangles, each resting on its hypotenuse (because some of these are on the sides of the towers, the complete sequence of triangles cannot be observed in one glimpse). Their opposite consists of ten triangles, each with one angle pointing downward. In addition to these complete triangles, there is a half triangle either side of the door and at both ends of the façade. Adding everything together, there are 11 upright and 11 inverted triangles per side, for a conveniently even sum total of 44 triangles across the entire façade.

This makes for straightforward formal analysis, but in its apparent overall simplicity, the Mshatta façade belies a bewildering design that on closer inspection is at once symmetrical and asymmetrical. The evenly divisible façade just described is defined by the elements that appear most prominently to the visitor approaching from a distance. Both the rosettes and the molded band that forms the zigzag dominate the composition because of the extent to which they protrude from the flat surface of the wall (Figure 52). It is not just the forms of these features that define the façade but also the

¹⁸³ One can only assume the inverted triangles on the eastern wing of the façade were meant to contain rosettes, since the eastern portion of the ornamental band was missing its upper layers even during Tristram's visit in 1872. See Creswell 1969, p. 601.

deep shadows they cast. The manipulation of light by the means of deeply carved ornament is a technique that Herzfeld linked to northern 'Iraq.¹⁸⁴ This effect cannot be wholly recognized in the present-day museum setting of the Mshatta façade, which, for practical reasons, prevents observation from a distance and allows only a more subdued light than that cast upon the façade when still in place.

Photographs taken of Mshatta before sections of the southern wall were removed suggest the facile recognition of a simple pattern: a multi-triangular motif (Figure 53). This is even noticeable in images which, in spite of being slightly out of focus or grainy in their quality, still manage to convey a clear visual message (Figure 54). In the succinct and repetitive mode that makes possible its communication to the observer, it is overpowering. Its straightforwardness obscures a surprising level of detail, not only in the architecture concealed behind the swath of interconnecting triangles (that in its uniformity almost flattens the projecting towers), but in the very triangles themselves.

The satisfaction of being able to recognize a distinct pattern draws the visitor's attention to the central portion of the southern wall and, in turn, the entrance. Within the interior of the triangles are elaborately carved subsidiary decorations (Figure 55). Some of the upper sections of the upright triangles, and the larger part of the inverted triangles, remain undecorated (Figure 56). This indicates two things: first, the rosettes and zigzag were likely pre-carved before the installation of the blocks in the wall, while the subsidiary decorations were carved in place (Nowhere is this clearer than at the western edge of the façade, where an octagonal rosette is cut vertically in half (Figure 57), with no attempt to form a transition between the rosette and the rectilinear moulding that surrounds it); second, the carving of the inner parts of the triangles proceeded from the

¹⁸⁴ Herzfeld 2002, p. 55.

ground up. This may be explained by a practical necessity tied to the construction plan of the building. The carving did not wait for the completion of Mshatta's walls. As the walls grew in height, so did the ornament.

This unusual way of carving is the opposite of the more frequently adopted practice of moving from the top downwards when applying mosaic or fresco decoration, a custom that allows for the reuse of scaffolding. By proceeding in the reverse manner at Mshatta, the unfinished product emphasizes the very organic nature of the façade. At the base of the inverted triangles are the stems of plants that sprout upward, filling the space they are given. The relief sculptors worked in a manner that followed the growth pattern of these plants, turning the façade into a veritable garden.

In *Early Muslim Architecture*, Creswell dissected the plan of Mshatta in order to demonstrate a successive symmetrical subdivision into three (Figure 58).¹⁸⁵ In their design and in the way one was to experience them, Mshatta's façade and the interior building it adorned worked together using some of the same principles of geometrical organisation. The façade is split into two even parts on either side of the doorway. In turn, each wing is divided by the zigzag into two rows of triangles: those that are upright and those that are inverted. The scenes within the decoration of individual triangles are divided in two by an axis of symmetry that is at right angles to the triangle's base and continues to the apex. This is especially noticeable in the triangles containing pairs of animals that face each other (Figure 59).

A close examination of the triangles shows that in most cases, the animals that face each other are not mirror images. In some instances, they are not even facing the same species of animal. In Figure 59, for example, it is a zebu (humped ox) that stands to

¹⁸⁵ Creswell 1969, pp. 581-582.

the west and not a lion. Although the lion predominates on the western wing, his position is often replaced by mythological creatures. This would have surprised anyone making the quick and erroneous presumption that the symmetrical quality of each triangle, and the overall preponderance of lions, meant that the pattern of facing lions was repeated throughout. To the viewer with time for a detailed observation, the discovery that one of the mythological creatures is a half human centaur would elicit even greater surprise. There are even wholly human figures depicted in a triangle situated near the entrance. Such a bold choice of subject matter to depict within eyesight of anyone crossing the threshold shows that the patron of Mshatta had no qualms about the employment of figural imagery in prominent locations.

Based on the previous observations, there are several questions that may be asked. How long could the visitor have lingered before passing through the enclosure wall? Would this visitor have been able to inspect the façade from one end to the other in order to obtain some form of a reading? Or would it only have been possible to view the façade from a position directly in line with the main axis, due to the constraints of having to follow an orchestrated and perhaps processional route? If the patron of Mshatta intended to communicate one or more messages, then a sculptural vocabulary understandable to the contemporary viewer would have been a necessity. There are elements of the façade that portray universally familiar royal iconography. Less clear is whether one can determine any form of narrative coherence in the overall programme, either arranged linearly as one would read a text, or planned in a manner that would take into consideration the unique position of a visitor.

Mshatta's designers may not have been concerned about the viewer's ability to observe the façade properly and to understand its meaning. An elaborate design thwarting attempts to understand its meaning by virtue of its sheer complexity would, in itself, have a considerably overwhelming effect. Could an alternative "viewer" of the façade have been the patron of the site, who wished to propagate a message in the physical form of limestone, but who had less concern about the successful transmission of its minutiae? If this was the case, then one must also consider the vantage point of the host.

In an article that explores the Hellenistic and Persian influences on Mshatta, Robert Hillenbrand describes the façade in terms of its relationship to internal arrangements.

The royal presence is blazoned forth at the outset by the prodigally rich tapestry of vegetal and figural ornament in carved stone which bedecks that area of the façade which corresponds to the royal quarters, and only that area.¹⁸⁶

These likely deliberate connections indicate a reflection of the royal interior on the outside. Given that the interior might not have been known to all those observing the building from the exterior, the relationship that Hillenbrand has described remains the purview of an individual of elevated status (and perhaps his retinue) privy to a unique perspective because of his placement within Mshatta's enclosure walls. The point of view from a position at the apex of the internal audience hall does not allow a viewing of the façade with the naked eye. Nevertheless, the awareness that a message was being presented in an enduring form would have assisted the self-aggrandisement of the building's patron.

¹⁸⁶ Hillenbrand 1981, vol. 1, pp. 80.

Hillenbrand spoke of the façade as a tapestry. It is a surprising choice of word, which suggests a broadening of the study of Mshatta beyond the analysis of raw limestone. Thinking of the façade as a textile opens up new considerations of its function, its colour, and the influence of the portable arts. Unfinished work and decay have rendered many elements of the overall conception of Mshatta irretrievable, but we cannot assume that further decoration was not intended for the façade or for other parts of the structure. Nor can we assume that stone was the only material intended for decorative purposes. Less durable materials were employed in the construction of the complex, such as wooden tie-beams in the northern building.¹⁸⁷ It is equally conceivable that further decoration in the form of colour, stucco, and perhaps even mosaic, may have been desired. More perishable forms of decoration, such as textiles or other forms of hanging ornamentation, may also have been intended for the structure, once complete.

Colour

Potentially analogous uses of stucco in combination with limestone may be found in the comparable site of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, which suggests the slight possibility that stucco decoration may have been intended for higher levels of Mshatta's enclosure wall. As for colour, Schulz observed a red background to the acanthus leaves of the rosettes of the triple entrance to the basilical hall (Figure 44).¹⁸⁸ Creswell believes the red suggests the roses were prepared for gilding, a practice that commonly used red clay as a background colour.¹⁸⁹ Further evidence for colour is provided with a Corinthian

¹⁸⁷ Creswell 1969, p. 586.

¹⁸⁸ "Der Grund der Rosetten, auf dem die Akanthusblätter sitzen, zeigte Reste von Bemalung in roter Farbe." Schulz 1904, p. 217.

¹⁸⁹ Creswell 1969, p. 586.

capital used as *spolium* in the main aisle of the audience hall that is now located in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Figure 60). Its background was blue and its stems and leaves were in gold painted over red.¹⁹⁰ A diversity of colour was further demonstrated by the clearance work of Dr. ‘Auni Dajani in 1963, during which *cipollino* columns were discovered. Now reinstalled (Figure 61), they provide a green marble tinge that adds to the spectrum of colours already observed, particularly since they were to be capped by coloured *spolia* capitals. Green was also intended for the lower parts of the walls of the northern building. Creswell, Schulz, and Jaussen and Sauvignac all discovered blocks of green stone, some of which had been sliced into slabs likely for use as dado panels.¹⁹¹ Just as the repetition of forms chosen for the façade brought unity to disparate sub-components, so were the colours of the audience hall and surrounding rooms to provide a greater sense of cohesion to the larger building complex.

It is likely no coincidence that the four colours detected at Mshatta – red, blue, gold, green – are the same four colours that were used to paint ivory during the Byzantine period. A recent study by Carolyn Connor of one hundred Byzantine ivories has revealed that artists covered the natural grain and colour of ivory in bright hues.¹⁹² This paint is now largely undetectable because it adheres poorly to ivory. The same loss of colour occurred at Mshatta, where only traces of colour remain. If one accepts the connection Terry Allen has made between the carving of leaves and grapes on Late Antique ivories

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 586.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 590. He refers to Schulz 1904, p. 214 and pl. VI, as well as Jaussen and Sauvignac 1922, p. 221.

¹⁹² Carolyn L. Connor, *The Color of Ivory: Polychromy on Byzantine Ivories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

and the stone carving at Mshatta¹⁹³, further credence is given to the application of Byzantine ivory painting techniques to early Islamic stonework.

The presence of this colour within a royal setting is recorded in reference to Mu'awiya's palace at Damascus. Like Ukhaydir, it was known as 'the Green One'.¹⁹⁴ Although situated in an urban setting, it was paved with green marble and surrounded by gardens.¹⁹⁵ 'Abbasid poetry also makes reference to the colour green, particularly Buhturi's description of the Ja'fari palace, which was known for its lake.

The wind effects its passage through its regions,
and stumbles from weakness and fatigue,

Drawing along a stream of flowing waters,
like a sharp, burnished blade:

When it settles in the center of the green
lake, the latter casts over it the hues of marble.

You'd think it the waters of a sea
which plays tricks on the eye; for it is the water of clouds.¹⁹⁶

The poem may date from a later period, but it would not be unreasonable to think of the colour palette at Mshatta as an earlier example of a palatial decorative tradition.

If strong evidence exists for the colouring of the inside of Mshatta, it is less certain that the exterior continued this mode of ornament. There is no overt evidence of paint on the fragments of façade that remain *in situ*, although the Department of Antiquities of Jordan has performed no research in this matter.¹⁹⁷ The façade's exposure to the elements would have caused the washing away of much of the paint, if it were ever there. At the same time, the aging of limestone could also have caused it to develop a

¹⁹³ Terry Allen, *Five Essays on Islamic Art* (Sebastopol: Solipsist Press, 1988), pp. 49-50.

¹⁹⁴ Hillenbrand 1982, p. 3

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Buhturi *apud* Julie Scott-Meisami, 'The Palace-Complex as Emblem. Some Samarran Qasidas', in *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. by Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 73-74.

¹⁹⁷ Personal communication, Dr. Ghazi Bisheh, 22 November 2005.

patina that was never originally intended. As it now stands in Berlin, the stone wall presents a confusing array of colour that seems to vary from block to block (Figure 62). Scientific tests performed by the *Museum für Islamische Kunst* to examine what appeared to be traces of paint concluded that variation in colour on some sections was caused by the leaching of chemical elements intrinsic to the stone.¹⁹⁸ These tests were not performed on specimens from the site in Jordan. If leaching has occurred at Mshatta, it has conformed by coincidence to the borders of the different forms on the façade. Sections of the moulding from the eastern side of the façade that are still in place show a differentiation between dark and light colours in the rows of anthemia that follow the length of the hollow moulding (Figure 63).

We may never be able to confirm whether Mshatta's facade was to be painted or if there were even the intention to do this. Having a profusion of carved ornament on display to an external audience was bold enough. Adding colour to that may have been an unusually stultifying move. Nonetheless, the strong evidence for a consciously planned programme of colour on the interior suggests that this was to extend further than just into the private spaces. External decoration was not anomalous to Umayyad art, nor was the presence of gold on outer surfaces unknown, as demonstrated in H. R. Allen's reconstruction of the original appearance of the Dome of the Rock (Figure 64).¹⁹⁹ But Mshatta was not a site of religious pilgrimage, nor was it protected by the confines of a sanctuary of prominent geographic elevation. It was exposed and vulnerable. Should it have been built for only seasonal occupation, as some have suggested, the brilliant effect

¹⁹⁸ Personal communication, Prof. Dr. Claus-Peter Haase, 2 September, 2005.

¹⁹⁹ H. R. Allen, 'Some Observations on the Original Appearance of the Dome of the Rock', in *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and Early Islam*, ed. by Jeremy Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 197-214.

of gold leaf or pigment, accentuated in turn by the strong sun, would have been far too strong a temptation for despoilment.

Very little attention has been given to the colour scheme of Mshatta, in spite of its importance to our understanding of the larger architectural programme of which it forms a part. If we were to consider the colours that might have graced the façade, in conjunction with those that may have been displayed by adornments to other parts of the building, such as textiles and other portable objects, we would have a more complete picture of the site as it was meant to be seen. We would also be open to a better-informed interpretation of the façade. Forms alone were not the only means of impressing a visitor. In studying Mshatta, it will be beneficial to consider the variety of media that may have been used in the final product, however transient any particular medium may have been. Several analogies have been made between Mshatta's sculpted relief elements and motifs observed on other non-architectural sources. Such comparisons present the Mshatta façade as a visual metaphor that has transformed the perishable into the enduring form of stone. Egyptian and Greek stone temples adopted the organic forms of wooden antecedents, as did the Late Antique churches of Ethiopia.²⁰⁰ Mshatta's stonemasons may very well have adapted ideas used previously by those specializing in other crafts. If this were the case, then some of the unusual features of the building may be a result of transposing the small into the large.

A better understanding of the material culture known to the builders of Mshatta is required. It will elucidate the functional role the relief carvings played in a living building, whose seemingly intransigent stone remnants obscure the less durable addenda

²⁰⁰ See Creswell 1989, p.4. The Ethiopian buildings were built of stone, but imitated alternating courses of stone and wood. Because of this, Creswell suggested they were the architectural source for the Ka'ba.

that may have been intended. With such considerations, Mshatta becomes a more flexible organism that could have changed to suit the occasion and to accommodate the patrons and residents occupying its rooms.

Functional considerations

Thinking about what could have been painted on Mshatta's stone surfaces, draped on its interior brick walls or placed on its floors presents us with an enhanced means of studying the building. Based on an account by Khatib al-Baghdadi (1001-1072 CE) in the *History of Baghdad*, which details an embassy from the Byzantine Empire to Baghdad in 917 CE, Grabar concluded that the naked walls and rooms of Islamic palaces have little meaning on their own.²⁰¹ Specific areas within these buildings were rarely assigned functions. Instead, they were prepared to suit the demands of the occasion. The spectacle presented to the Byzantine ambassadors, as we can visualize it based on Khatib's description, consisted of very few conventional elements of architecture. The author chose instead to focus on what Grabar calls "movable things temporarily arranged for this ceremonial occasion".²⁰² While Mshatta's façade stands out in its own right for its stone carvings, its full identity could have been formed by the addition of such objects.

The final point Grabar derived from Khatib's text was that the *khalifa* rarely appeared except at the end of ceremonial occasions.²⁰³ Whether or not Mshatta was meant to be a palace, its plan provides a guide as to how architecture may have kept a *khalifa*, or *amir*, from being seen until the end of a visit. With only one entrance, the

²⁰¹ Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art, Revised and Enlarged Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 159-164.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

audience hall is placed at the farthest point away from where the visitor would have passed into the building. The alignment of the façade with the internal location of the ruler serves to announce in stone what is to come in flesh. Any premature presentation of the *khalifa* might suggest he was less grand than the position to which he laid claim. In this respect, it is understandable that none of the chronicles of the ‘Abbasid period mentions an appearance of the ruler at the entrance to a palace.²⁰⁴

The ruler may have been absent from the entrance, but he figures prominently in most historical descriptions of ceremonial activity, which focus more on the person of the *khalifa* and his trappings than on the buildings surrounding him. One of the few components of palatial architecture that receives much attention in the historical sources is the gateway. As recounted in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitab al-Haddaya wa al-Tuhaf)*, the gate features in the description of the Byzantine embassy to Baghdad in 917 CE. It is described only after an exhaustingly long list of accoutrements that were presumably a more important part of the spectacle.

The vizier Abu al-Hasan ibn al-Furat spoke to al-Muqtadir [Abbasid caliph, r. 908-932 CE] concerning the bringing of the two envoys before him, and the latter directed what the vizier should reply to them. Ibn al-Furat ordered the chieftains (*awliya'*), army generals (*quwwad*), and the soldiers of various ranks to come early to al-Muqtadir's house and to line up in [perfect] order on horse-back, from the Sultan's palace (Dar al-Sultan) to Dar Sa'id. They mounted their horses [accordingly] and placed themselves along the road in this formation, in fine attire and full arms (*silah*). He also ordered that the courtyards (*rihab*), vestibules (*dahaliz*), and passageways (*mamarat*) of the Dar al-Sultan be filled with men [bearing] full weaponry and that the other palaces should be furbished with [all] furnishings and the rooms (*dur*) be decorated. He went on supervising all this personally until he had finished. The number of the draperies (*satur*) hung up came to thirty-eight thousand, according to what was reckoned in the budget (*'amal*) prepared by 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hawari, the keeper of the furniture treasury (*khizanat al-farsh*). Among these were twelve thousand five hundred curtains of gold brocade, [some] with medallions (*jamat*) containing images of horses, camels, elephants, and lions, and [some] having inscriptional bands (*tiraz*) beautifully embroidered in gold [thread]. [There were] also twenty-five thousand five hundred large Chinese, Armenian,

²⁰⁴ Dominique Sourdel, 'Questions de cérémonial 'Abbaside' *Revue des études Islamiques* 28 (1960), p. 127.

and Wasiti drapes (*sutur*) with designs, as well as [those of] embroidered (*mutarrazah*) linen voile (*dabiqi*) and other kinds. Eight thousand [of these twenty-five thousand five hundred] were found with embroidered [or woven] inscriptions (*tiraz*) citing the commissioner's order ('*amaluhu*) and names such as that of al-Ma'mun, al-Mu'tasim, al-Wathiq, al-Mutawakkil, al-Mu'tazz and al-Muktafi, and the rest of the drapes were inscribed with the names of others. Twenty-two thousand pieces of floor furnishings: carpets and runners (*nikhakh*) from Juhum, Armenia, and Dawraq were spread, all of them, in the passageways and courtyards [leading] from the New Public Gate to al-Muqtadir bi-Allah's residence, and on these the army generals and the Despot's [Byzantine emperor] envoys walked. [This was] apart from the floor furnishings that were spread in the private chambers (*maqasir*) and sitting halls (*majalis*). A hundred resting places (*marqad*) were furnished with sofa-like mattresses (*maratib*) of heavily embroidered brocade, and carpets all bearing [images of] flowing rivers. The curiosities (*tara'if*) and elegant (*mustatrafah*) equipment in the treasuries, made of gold, silver, precious stones, and pearls, were displayed along with teak wood (*saj*) utensils. The two envoys of the Despot, together with Ibn 'Abd al-Baqi, the interpreter, rode out on mounts on Thursday, the twenty-fourth of Muharram. They were ushered through the vestibule of the Great Public Gate (*Bab al-'Ammah al-A'zam*) to the pavillion (*dar*) known as *Khan al-Khayl* [the Horse Stable]. The greater part of this pavillion comprised porticoes (*arwiqah*) with marble columns (*asatin*). On one side of the room there were five hundred horses with various kinds of silver and gold saddles (*markab*) but without coverings (*aghshiyah*). On the other side there were five hundred horses covered with brocade saddle cloths (*jull*) and blinkers (*baraqi'*). Each horse was held by one of the *Shakiriyyah* bodyguard. Then the envoys were led from this room to the passageways and vestibules of the [wild] animal enclosure (*hayr al-wahsh*). Here were herds of tamed animals of various kinds, which came up close to people, sniffing at them and taking food from their hands. Then they were led out to a hall (*dar*) inside which were four elephants, each attended by eight persons, together with two giraffes, which amazed the envoys. Next they were led out to a hall containing a hundred lions (*sab'*), fifty on the right side and fifty on the left, each held by a lion-trainer (*sabba'*) and having an iron chain around its neck. Then they were led out to the new Jawsaq. This was a pavillion (*dar*) [built] between two gardens (*bustanayn*), in the center of which was a pool thirty cubits long, built of Qal'i lead (*rasas qal'i*) [or tin] surpassing polished (*majluwwah*) silver [in appearance]. Opposite this garden lay a grove (*bustan*) with four hundred palm trees, all of the same height, each coated (*mulabbas*), from the base up to the beginning of its top (*jummar*), with carpentered (*nijarah*) teak wood. The majority of these palm trees bore wonderful unripe dates (*busr*). The grove was surrounded by large citron (*utrujj*) [trees], all bearing [fruit].²⁰⁵

The passage repeats a theme of dividing inanimate and real objects into pairs, which is a theme that will be examined in further detail in Chapter 3. More relevant to the current discussion is the reference to a gate, which is identified as being public. Because of the gate's position at the point of entry into the palace, it was likely familiar to more than just

²⁰⁵ Ghada Qaddumi, trans., intro., biblio. and notes, *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 150-152.

those who were permitted to meet with the *khalifa*. In this respect, it functioned like the reception hall at the Citadel of 'Amman and the entrance façade at Mshatta. The public's greater awareness of this part of the palace's architecture probably led to the public gate's inclusion in the long list. It is overwhelmed in a description that pays far greater attention to the humans, animals and portable objects that were assembled to impress the two Byzantine visitors. Hillenbrand was justified in referring to Mshatta's façade as a hanging tapestry. If the practices recorded in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* were employed in the Umayyad period, not only could textiles have added to the range of visual stimuli, but they also could have mirrored architectural decoration. The two envoys witnessed numerous textiles decorated with roundels that contained depictions of various animals: horses, camels, elephants, and lions. Later, they were exposed to some of these same animals – elephants, giraffes, horses, lions - in bodily form. The textiles to which the envoys were first exposed announced what they were to see later. At Mshatta, the façade works in the same way, if on a more limited scale. As we shall see in Chapter 4, there are many equally exotic animals on the ornamental band. What is more, a sculptural lion was found within the ruin of Mshatta's interior buildings (Figure 65). This suggests an echoing at Mshatta of the experience of those who sought an audience with Muqtadir: animals were first announced in the tapestry-like limestone frieze of the façade, and later appeared within the structure's interior as fully-modelled sculptures. Like the column capital and rosettes of the audience hall, it also shows traces of paint.

The *Book of Gifts and Rarities* was compiled in the fifteenth century from an eleventh century manuscript. It falls after the time period in which Mshatta was built, but it is one of the few sources that provides detailed accounts of early Islamic ceremonial

activity. As Grabar ascertained from an earlier translation of the passage above, the official gateway was the only part of the palace that had a dedicated function of formal reception.²⁰⁶ Mshatta is not a building as grandiose as the ones described above. Nonetheless, the importance of the entrance to the 'Abbasid palace within the context of an official embassy suggests that functional considerations may explain why the most decorated portion of Mshatta is at its entrance. Even if Mshatta were not meant to be a palace, an Umayyad *khalifa* or *amir* would likely have received *hajj* pilgrims in a similar, if less elaborate, manner.

A further parallel may be drawn with the 'Abbasid city Samarra. The gate to one of its palaces has been directly compared to the façade at Mshatta. This is Bab al-'Amma of Jawsaq palace of the Dar al-Khilafa. Jawsaq differs architecturally from the palaces of the Umayyads, but its residential apartments have been compared to the *buyut* (rooms or houses, singular *bayt*) of the Syrian *qusur*.²⁰⁷ The Bab al-'Amma may be even more closely associated with one of the *qusur*: Mshatta. From a few fragments of the stucco decoration of its great *iwan* (vaulted space), Herzfeld managed to reconstruct a pattern with a triangular frame (Figure 66) that he compared to Mshatta's repeated triangle pattern.²⁰⁸ While there are similarities in the ornamentation at both sites, this example demonstrates that function, and not only artistic borrowing, is a factor in the choice of

²⁰⁶ Grabar 1987, p. 162.

²⁰⁷ Alastair Northedge, 'The Palaces of the Abbasids at Samarra', in *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. by Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 60.

²⁰⁸ Ernst Herzfeld, 'Mshatta, Hira und Badiya: die Mittelländer des Islam und ihre Baukunst' *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 42 (1921), pp. 104-146, and fig. 14. See also Creswell 1989, p. 313, and K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979), vol. 2, p. 235. Creswell proposes a reconstruction that forms six-lobed rosettes from the stucco fragments. As he notes, this configuration of the Bab al-'Amma's decoration further resembles the façade of Mshatta. Alternatively, Terry Allen suggests that Late Antique stone dado revetments, and not Mshatta's façade, were the source of influence for Bab al-'Amma. Allen 1988, pp. 11-12.

architectural decoration: both Bab al-‘Amma and the ornamented entrance at Mshatta were to serve as the point of entry into larger and more private areas. Function eventually superseded the originally intended meaning of the decoration, as suggested by the fact that at Mshatta, the façade is carved in high relief, whereas at Bab al-‘Amma, the design is in much flatter stucco ornamentation. The details of the latter are harder to distinguish from a distance, particularly since their shallow carving does not benefit as much from the effects of shadow. Furthermore, at Bab al-‘Amma, the decoration is placed within a sheltered space that does not allow natural light to highlight the stucco in an even fashion. By the time the decorative ideas that inspired Mshatta’s designers reached the artisans working at Samarra, some of the practical aspects of their effect on an audience had been abandoned.

Marble

If we are to consider the transference of decorative techniques from one material to another, there is another important example to be found at Samarra. This is the so-called ‘bevelled style’, which is found in the dado stucco panelling that covered the walls of several rooms of palaces and houses. The lozenge pattern of one particular dado panel (Figure 67) evokes Mshatta’s zigzag. It is as if a second row of triangles has been joined to the first by aligning the bases or points of each. Allen has drawn a connection between the bevelled style and book-matched or ‘quarter-sawn’ marble veneer, which is obtained by sawing pieces of marble into four matching symmetrical sections that are placed alongside each other.²⁰⁹ Marble panels such as these have been used for the decoration of two well-known works of Umayyad architecture: the Dome of the Rock and the Great

²⁰⁹ Allen 1988, p. 13, f. 28.

Mosque of Damascus.²¹⁰ They were also employed at Hisham's palace in Damascus to pave the floors and cover the walls of the audience chamber.²¹¹ Quarter-sawn marble also appears to have served as a model for the geometric patterns of not only the stucco at Samarra, but also mosaics (Figure 68) and a painted fresco from Nishapur.²¹² Given that marble patterns were often likened to water by Roman and Byzantine writers²¹³, the repeated triangular pattern at Mshatta might have been viewed with this metaphor in mind. This being the case, the zigzag provides the missing element of water to the vegetal scenes that fill its triangles. When viewed in this manner, the façade has a much greater affinity to paradisiacal imagery, such as the mosaics that adorn the Barada panel of the Great Mosque of Damascus.

In Buhturi's description of the Ja'fari palace, poetry referred to the green colour of marble in palatial settings. It also described the patterns within marble, as in verses written by the 'Abbasid *khalifa* ibn Mu'tazz (r. 866-869 CE).

May God cause abundant rain to fall on the lands of Qaysum and Gharab,
and Samarra and the Jawsaq – ruined.

And the peerless Kamil – no friendly soul there (now),
after (the days of) noble, munificent kings –

Whose patterns of marble smiled at
a ceiling ablaze with the fire of pure gold.

My acquaintance with it, when it was peopled and joyous,
was heedless of the disasters of Time and its calamities.

There lions of a realm strutted
around a crowned Imam;

²¹⁰ Although little of the original paneling remains. Marcus Milwright, "'Waves of the Sea': Responses to Marble in Written Sources (Ninth-Fifteenth Centuries)", in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. by Bernard O'Kane (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), f. 18. See also Allen 1999, pp. 206-209.

²¹¹ Milwright 2005, p. 213.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

Then his Turks turned treacherous – and they were transformed into owls, crying of loss and destruction.²¹⁴

In writing about Samarra in a yearning fashion, Mu‘tazz personified not only the patterns of marble, but also the effect of gold decoration. When combined with the image he creates of strutting lions, his *ekphrasis* could just as easily have been applied to the decorative materials and motifs of Mshatta.

Textiles

Returning to the association between architectural function and ornament, there is another form of portable object whose style may have been adapted to other media. The entrance gate played an important role in ceremonies, but as I have noted, the *khalifa* was not present at this stage, since he was hidden from view. If the façade were to have played a part in his initial concealment, it would have replicated another very important visual device composed of textile material. The choice of a curtain as a means of concealing a *khalifa* was a practice of long standing. Known as a *sitr* (plural *satur*), it was meant to prevent visitors from approaching a ruler without a chamberlain’s authorisation.²¹⁵ The term *sitr* was employed during the Fatimid period (910-1171 CE), but it corresponds to the *velum* used by Roman and Byzantine emperors.²¹⁶ It referred to a veil that concealed the *khalifa* at the beginning of an audience ceremony, and which could only be removed by a chamberlain who held the function of *sahib al-sitr*.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Scott-Meisami 2001a, p. 78.

²¹⁵ Sourdel 1960, p. 132.

²¹⁶ H. Halm, ‘Sitr’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 9, ed. by C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 685.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Sauvaget wrote about a textile curtain being employed for the ceremony of audience with the *khalifa*. During this ceremony, the ruler would place himself at the end of the main axis of his palace, facing the entrance. From behind the curtain, described as red in Sauvaget's example, the *khalifa* could be saluted by visitors, but only after they were officially announced to him.²¹⁸ A textile screen in the colour red would have acted as a visual reminder of the status of the *khalifa*.²¹⁹ Yazid II was known for his preference for using such a device.²²⁰ During the early Fatimid period, etiquette was such that one had to prostrate oneself once the *sitr* had been raised and the eye of the *khalifa* fell on the visitor.²²¹ This was the case when Ikhshid presented himself to the 'Abbasid *khalifa* Muttaqi (r. 940-944 CE), a ruler of limited power at a time when the *khilafa* had lost much of its lustre. Concordant with this decline was an increased emphasis on royal protocol.

Given its widespread use in official ceremony, the curtain could very well have been employed at Mshatta, if not necessarily by a *khalifa*. Had this been the case, the unblemished line of sight that follows the prominent north-south central axis from the threshold right into the throne room would have been broken. Shadows and pedestrian activity may have impeded an entirely clear view, but under normal circumstances the entire structure allows the recognition of detail on the human scale from one end to the other (Figure 69). With the prevalence of royal symbols such as lions and mythological creatures on textiles of the Umayyad period, it is feasible that in hiding a royal personage, a curtain would have replaced him with representative signs of his authority. The façade

²¹⁸ Sauvaget 1947, pp. 130-131.

²¹⁹ al-Jahiz, *Kitab al-Taj* apud Hillenbrand 1982, p. 26, f. 82.

²²⁰ Mas'udi apud *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

at Mshatta may have functioned in the same way, by replacing the *khalifa* with images that represented him, as is done very explicitly in the statues of rulers on the facades of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi and the bath house of Khirbat al-Mafjar. This association between the façade and the *khalifa* is mirrored in the strict correspondence that Hillenbrand observed between the width of Mshatta's façade and the audience hall that lay behind. It also explains the typological similarities between parts of the façade's decoration and textiles.

Mshatta's designers may have been inspired by woven fabrics, particularly those of Sasanian origin. Ernst Kühnel suggested such an inspiration for the subsidiary decoration of one of the triangles on the western end of the façade (Figure 70). He compared the repeated circles within this triangle to medallions attached to a base line.²²² Kühnel's point has been made by others, notably Hillenbrand who, in referring to the earlier work of Kurt Erdmann, observed that the smaller decoration of Mshatta's façade functioned like a tapestry hanging on a wall, and could be associated with Sasanian precedents.²²³

Hillenbrand's simile took a step beyond Kühnel by giving the façade a functional role like that of the *sitr*. His approach echoes the metaphors of Arab poets and writers who described the ornamentation of buildings as if the apparel of humans. Robert Irwin has cited a trend of poets comparing the more lavishly decorated palaces to a bride made ready for a bridegroom.²²⁴ The poet 'Ali ibn Jahm did such a thing when writing about a lake in the Haruni palace of the 'Abbasid *khalifa* Mutawakkil (r. 847 – 861 CE).

²²² Ernst Kühnel, 'Some Notes on the Façade of Mshatta', *Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honour of Professor K.A.C. Creswell*, (London: American University in Cairo Press, 1965), p. 133.

²²³ Hillenbrand 1981, vol. 1, p. 72.

²²⁴ Robert Irwin, *The Alhambra* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 33.

As if it were, with the gardens enclosing
It, a bride displaying herself to her suitor²²⁵

Irwin draws attention to a comparable inscription from the Sala de la Barca in the Palaces of the Alhambra, which reads “Praise be to God. My finery and my diadem dazzle those already endowed with beauty [...]”.²²⁶ Similarly, the Persian poet ‘Unsuri (1031-32 CE) employed personification when he dedicated the majority of a *qasida* to a palace-complex built by Hasan ibn Ahmad Maymandi, a vizier of the Ghaznavid ruler, Mahmud. In his poem, the decorative bands on the palace walls are likened to the golden embroidery on royal robes. For both, he used the word *tiraz*, which can refer to an inscribed armband worn on one’s sleeve.²²⁷ It is not without reason, therefore, that Grabar has compared the façade at Mshatta to the *tiraz* armbands on official Arab clothes, which were worn to signify new periods of rule.²²⁸ Even entire palaces were personified. There is an ‘Abbasid palace at Samarra, whose present name, ‘Ashiq, translates as ‘the lover’.²²⁹

Ikat

Following on Lisa Golombek’s observation in ‘The Draped Universe of Islam’ that brickwork, stucco or tiles might have functioned like clothing for a building²³⁰, Marcus Milwright noted strong similarities between the wavy lines of the *ikat* textiles of Yemen (Figure 71, also known as *washi* or ‘*asb*) and variegated marble.²³¹ This material, which has a design of repeated lozenges (and, in turn, triangles), formed the covering of

²²⁵ Scott-Meisami 2001a, p. 74.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²²⁷ Scott-Meisami 2001b, pp. 25, 27.

²²⁸ Grabar 1987, p. 247.

²²⁹ Northedge 2001, pp. 44-45.

²³⁰ Lisa Golombek, ‘The Draped Universe of Islam’, in *Content and Context of the Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, ed. by Priscilla Soucek (Universtiy Park: Pennsylvania State, 1988), p. 34.

²³¹ Milwright 2005, p. 216.

the Ka'ba in pre-Islamic times.²³² Milwright suggests that the marble used to line the Ka'ba during the time of Walid I might have echoed the qualities of varicoloured *ikat* hangings in a more durable material.²³³ Should this have been the case, it gives further support to the notion that Umayyad architecture might have evoked portable objects such as textiles in more durable and permanent forms. Moreover, the repeated pattern of lozenges on *ikat* fabric may be equated with the zigzag pattern of Mshatta's façade. Mshatta would have served a primarily secular function, but the practices of its architects and decorators could very well have been adopted from works of a religious nature. Furthermore, the *khalifa* Sulayman was reputed to love *washi*, and insisted that everyone at his court wear the material in his presence.²³⁴ If true, this demonstrates a further possible use of textiles at Mshatta.

Ceramics

It was Herzfeld who suggested in 1910 that the ornament of Mshatta is portable art transferred to architecture.²³⁵ For Kühnel, the zigzag and circles of the façade were ideas inspired by Arab folk art, such as pottery and clothing, which was separate from the Hellenistic or Sasanian traditions.²³⁶ While a purely Arab source of influence on the façade is plausible, especially when considering the pre-Islamic Arabian palaces discussed above, it is unlikely that ceramics were used as a model. The portable arts were not plentiful during the Umayyad period, a fact which has been used to explain the

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Mas'udi *apud* Hillenbrand 1982, pp. 11-12.

²³⁵ Herzfeld 2002, p. 53.

²³⁶ Kühnel 1965, p. 132.

difficulty of transmitting Byzantine ideas into Islamic architecture.²³⁷ Of the Umayyad pottery that does survive, most examples are humble in their decoration, and would not have been deemed appropriate for the decoration of structures belonging to the Umayyad ruling class. That being said, zigzag decoration was employed on Umayyad ceramics, as can be seen on a pottery bowl (Figure 72). The example is very roughly executed, but it suggests that more refined portable objects, perhaps of metal, may have been sources of inspiration for the façade of Mshatta. If familiar with the poetic personification of rooms of palaces, the visitor to Mshatta could have seen in its ornamental band the effect of these smaller objects. Such a viewer might not only have seen a monumental effect influenced by the portable arts, but rather the portable arts on a monumental level. When considering the most distant views of Mshatta, it is important to realise that the entire façade would have appeared diminutive within the baseline of the horizon.

Stucco

Among the examples of ornamentation included in the metaphorical descriptions of Arab poets, Irwin also listed marble, tile, stone and stucco.²³⁸ Stucco does not appear to have played a prominent role at Mshatta. Aside from the employment of plaster to line the floors and sides of basins at the site, there are no fragments to prove its more decorative application.²³⁹ It is possible, however, that the technique of carving in stucco

²³⁷ Hillenbrand 1981, p. 69.

²³⁸ Irwin 2004, p. 33.

²³⁹ The basins outside the northern enclosure wall are believed by Dr. Ghazi Bisheh to have been employed for the pressing of grapes, as suggested by irregularly shaped stone divisions and a sump. He interprets a basin on the interior of the southern wall as serving to prepare lime. Personal communication, 27 Aug, 2005.

was applied to the limestone of the facade.²⁴⁰ Alternatively, the limestone ornament at Mshatta may have provided the inspiration for later examples of decoration in stucco. In an article that considers Mshatta's place in Islamic architectural history, Grabar suggests its ornament is a forerunner of the Samarran stucco styles rather than a continuation in limestone of the stucco ornament from Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi or Khirbat al-Mafjar.²⁴¹ However, by sequestering Mshatta as a unique centrepiece within the chain of influence, we risk ignoring the possibility that different decorative materials could have been employed simultaneously at the same site.

At Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, whose façade is now reassembled in the National Museum of Damascus (Figure 73), decorated stucco panels were placed in front of a matrix of layers of bricks interspersed with tiles and wooden cross-beams. Within the mid-level band of the decoration, we may observe alternating square and lozenge shapes. Although this decoration is not composed of a consistently repeated pattern of lozenges, it does offer a much earlier example of triangular stucco ornament than the bevelled Samarran style. In their original position, the building's stucco panels were situated above an intermediary layer of burnt brick, below which was a base of limestone two metres high.²⁴² If one is to compare just the first levels of construction, Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi and Mshatta resemble each other in material composition and in height. Mshatta differs because its base level of limestone is decorated, but the example of Qasr al-Hayr demonstrates that not all levels of Umayyad structures need have been composed of the

²⁴⁰Hillenbrand made the connection because of the repetitive and stiff nature of vegetal border. Hillenbrand 1981, p. 72. Thomas Leisten is of the opinion that the angle of carving on the eastern part of the façade resembles that used in plaster decoration in regions further east of Mshatta. Personal communication, 21 Feb 2006. Finbarr Barry Flood makes the same assessment, with the additional suggestion that ivory carving techniques may have been borrowed. Personal communication 23 Feb 2006.

²⁴¹ Grabar 1987, p. 245.

²⁴² Schlumberger 1986, p. 9.

same materials. However, given the resemblance of Mshatta's facade to the architectural decoration of earlier Syrian churches, which are composed throughout of stone, it would have been unusual for Mshatta's exterior to continue in a material other than limestone. If stucco were to have been used at Mshatta it is more likely that it would have been applied to the internal brick walls.

In summary, what began as a simple foray into human perceptions of a straightforward band of ornamental carving has revealed a structure of startling complexity. For the viewer moving towards Mshatta, the façade that at first appeared unitary in its design of repeating triangles acquires additional meaning in layers of detail. As the distance between the viewer and the façade shortens, the ornamental band becomes successively subdivided into newly-defined spaces. Should the façade have been accompanied by additional decoration in the form of colour or textiles, its visual effect would have been further enhanced. In conjunction with these less permanent additions, the viewer's knowledge of the imagery found on portable arts, and an awareness of poetry may have informed the understanding of the façade. The fact that the only extant decoration on the exterior is from the ornament surrounding the entrance need not mean that it was intended to be the only form of decoration at the site. In all likelihood, it was to play a part of a much larger visual programme.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FAÇADE AS REPRESENTATION

The observations of the previous chapter indicate that the ornamental band at Mshatta could have been at the centre of a multimedia experience. The effort required to make this possible might have been squandered if it did not achieve some form of communication with an audience. Should Mshatta have been a place for an Umayyad *khalifa* or *amir* to receive visitors, whether returning from the *hajj*, as part of a foreign embassy, or taking part in princely pleasure at private country residences, the message would have to convey authority. To determine how the façade could have communicated this sort of message, I will draw on a wider body of symbolism from poetic and literary traditions. These will be used to demonstrate first that Mshatta's façade could have been understood in a personified sense, and second that it may have represented rows of aligned shields and troops in formation. I note with caution that the literary material I have selected is drawn from textual sources later in date than Mshatta, since few records of court life survive from the Umayyad period.²⁴³ It is evident from the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* that Sasanian aulic practices were employed by the 'Abbasids. Less clear is whether this was a conscious revival as the 'Abbasids came into greater contact with the Sasanian culture of 'Iraq, or whether these practices continued unabated through the Umayyad period, when there existed an awareness of Persian traditions.

A show of strength

Mshatta's façade projects power by repeating large numbers of basic forms within a carefully defined framework. In doing this, it reinforces the significance of each

²⁴³ The most thorough summation of ceremonial practices at the Umayyad court is Grabar 1955.

individual motif. It also achieves dominance by overwhelming the viewer with large numbers of images. By placing similar images within triangular compartments of the same size, a semblance of order is created. Although there is evidence of variation within the subsidiary decorations, including representations of vegetal growth and animal conflict, the depiction of unpredictable movement is curtailed by their framing within a structured environment. All relief carving is made to fit within the angular space of the façade's moulding. By demonstrating an ability to arrange the imagery of Mshatta within rectilinear constraints, Mshatta's patron may have implied an ability to order the natural world. In this respect, the façade acts somewhat like the royal menageries of the Byzantine and Early Islamic worlds.

This message of royal control over the natural world may be observed in much of the poetry that concerns Samarran palaces. In a poem written to celebrate the accomplishments of the *khalifa* Mutawakkil, the poet Buhturi (820-897 CE) describes the gardens and lake of the Ja'fari palace as creations of the *khalifa*.

Outside the moral realm, nature is senseless and soulless in its workings, rejecting empathy and destroying man-made beauty. In the gardens and the lake, nature is recreated by the caliph. This creation is beautiful and beyond harm because it is the fruit of his spiritual power and protected by it. Only within this realm can life unfold itself in freedom and innocence.²⁴⁴

Julie Scott-Meisami speaks of this poem as a metaphor for the unattainable greatness of works of the *khalifa*.²⁴⁵ Mshatta may have acted in the same way by portraying in the façade its patron's unique ability to order the natural world. Should its viewers have been familiar with poetry such as that written by Buhturi, or similar oral traditions, they would have had little difficulty in extrapolating this message.

²⁴⁴ Scott-Meisami 2001a, p. 71.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

If one considers the relationship between each of Mshatta's triangles and the human viewer, the façade dominates not only in size and quantity, but also in its elevated position. When on foot, the observer's head is level with each triangle's base. This may have motivated the carvers to situate most figural imagery in the lower portions of each triangle, although this may also have been done because of the baseline provided by the bottom side of each triangle. In either case, the human viewer is forced to arch the head backward in order to take in the whole of each triangular composition (Figure 74). Had the base moulding been placed lower down, the spectator would not have been forced into this subservient position. For the viewer on horseback (or camelback), a position of superior status, the centre of each triangle would be at the more equivalent eye level. However, the façade's designers did not seem to have taken this into account, since they designed it to be seen primarily from below. This fact is evident because the upper portions of the zigzag were left uncarved (Figure 75). These flat surfaces are not always concealed, but they emphasize the fact that the façade's sculptors worked from the bottom up, and presumably expected the viewer to observe their work in the same manner.

Emulating the shahs

The effect of numerical dominance is at its most noticeable when the spectator is standing close to the enclosure wall and looking along the facade (Figure 76). From this angle, we are presented with a row of rosettes that evokes objects hanging on a wall. The practice of placing large numbers of ornaments on palace walls is recorded in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*. In the foreword to Ghada al Hijjawi Qaddumi's translation of the

book, Grabar compares the descriptive passages of the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* to the *Book of Ceremonies (De Cerimoniis)* of the Byzantine court.²⁴⁶ Both evince an interest in the presentation of costly items within the setting of formal ceremonies. As a result, Grabar asks if the parallels are accidental or the result of a common ancestry in the Roman Mediterranean.²⁴⁷ One might also ask about the influence of the Sasanian court, particularly since Jahiz (c. 776-868/869 CE) wrote in great detail about Sasanian ceremonial activity.²⁴⁸ The *Book of Gifts and Rarities* also pays tribute to the pageantry of the long defeated Sasanian shahs, whose mantle was inherited by the increasingly confident 'Abbasid *khulafa'*. It contains overt references to the looting of clothing, weaponry and jewels belonging to Khusraw II.²⁴⁹ These were prized not only for their material value, but also for their association with the head of the Sasanian Empire, whose legendary status persisted even to the time of Gertrude Bell.

In a section entitled 'Chapter on Notable Days and Gatherings on Special Occasions and Crowded Festivities', the reception of visitors to Ctesiphon by Khusraw II is described in detail.

When they received envoys from either Arab or Byzantine (Rum) kings, the Sasanid kings (*al-Akasirah*) would command their army to arrange itself in ten cavalry detachments, each comprising ten thousand horsemen, all with gilded coats of mail (*jawashin*), glittering lances (*hirab*), plate-armor (*duru'*), and gilded standards (*a'lam*), [extending] from Sabat at al-Mada'in (Ctesiphon) to the throne room (*Iwan*). Then the envoys were led past the detachments one after the other, until, as they approached the door of the throne room, he [the king] was revealed to them. There were two *iwans* opposite each other with an open area in between. In the middle was a dome (*qubbah*) twenty cubits high [colored] deep red (*urjuwan*), covered with brocade curtains (*ajillah*) woven with red gold threads, and having glass panes (*jamat billawr*) in red, yellow (*asfar*), white, and other colors (*asbagh*). A gold chain (*silsilah*) was placed in the

²⁴⁶ See Averil Cameron, 'The Construction of Court Ritual: the Byzantine Book of Ceremonies', in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. by David Cannadine and Simon Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 106-136.

²⁴⁷ Qaddumi 1996, p. ix.

²⁴⁸ Personal Communication, Dr. Marcus Milwright, 6 Feb 2007.

²⁴⁹ Qaddumi 1996, p. 170. See also Avinoam Shalem, 'The Fall of al-Mada'in: Some Literary References Concerning Sasanian Spoils of War in Mediaeval Islamic Treasuries' *Iran* 32 (1994), pp. 77-81.

middle of the dome, at whose end was suspended the “Qunqul,” the crown that looked like a man’s turban studded (*murassa’ah*) with large pearls (*durr*), precious stones (*al-jawhar*), and rubies (*yaqut ahmar*). The king would sit under this dome with the crown hanging over his head.²⁵⁰

Ctesiphon was captured in 637 CE by the Muslim armies, who were immensely influenced by the material wealth of the Sasanian shah. Just like the structure described in the passage above, a dome for the audience hall of Mshatta has also been postulated (Figures 77, 78).²⁵¹ If built, Mshatta’s dome might not have been designed to contain glass panes, but it could have been composed of brick. The colour of Mshatta’s brick alone is reddish (Figure 79), but if the dome were to have been painted red as well, it could have added to the red of the *sitr* and of the painted components of the stone ornament. I noted above the presence of a red background on the rosettes of the entrance to the throne room at Mshatta, and the gilding of a capital from the same area. Alternatively, if blue were used, it could have evoked the dome of heaven. Or perhaps decoration in mosaic or fresco was intended.²⁵² In this respect, the *caldarium* at Qusayr ‘Amra (Figure 80), although serving a different purpose, is a suitable comparative example.

My concern is with the outer decoration of Mshatta, but the suitability of its inner architecture for ceremonies such as the one described above supports the relevance of the text. Turning our focus onto the activities that occurred outside the palace at Ctesiphon, we should note the reference to detachments of cavalry lining a processional route. Similar details were observed in the account of the Byzantine envoys to Muqtadir’s court in Baghdad, which I quoted in Chapter 2. The gathering of riders would not have been

²⁵⁰ Qaddumi 1996, p. 146.

²⁵¹ Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 388; Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, p. 125.

²⁵² Vailhé inferred that the recessing of bricks in the audience hall indicates they were to receive a decoration of marble or mosaic. Vailhé *apud* Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, p. 146.

possible in the round palace-city of Baghdad, where only the *khalifa* was allowed to ride on horseback²⁵³, nor would it have been allowed in the immediate environs of the Byzantine court at Constantinople²⁵⁴, a city whose palatial architecture may have been imitated in Damascus.²⁵⁵ At Mshatta, however, there was nothing outside the enclosure wall to prevent the display of mounted formations. A thirteenth-century painting by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti from a manuscript of rhymed prose stories called *maqamat*, written by Hariri (1054-1122 CE), depicts horsemen preparing for a parade in an anticipatory pose one could imagine preceding the arrival of a *khalifa* (Figure 81). These riders are not sufficiently organized to have satisfied Khusraw II's exacting requirements, but perhaps that is because they are civilian rather than military.

The enumeration of vast quantities of soldiers is a theme repeated throughout the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*. The account of the Byzantine embassy to Baghdad included a reference to a public gateway and descriptions of lavish textiles and exotic animals. In the remainder of the text recounting this visit is a listing of vast quantities of arms and armour, displayed independently of a human cortege.

Then the envoys were ushered into the palace known as 'al-Firdaws' [Paradise], which contained innumerable and priceless quantities of equipment and richly colored fabrics (*washy*). Five thousand gilded coats of mail (*jawshan*) were hung in the vestibules of al-Firdaws.

Then they were led out into a long passageway, three hundred cubits long. On its two sides were hanging about ten thousand leather shields (*daraqah*), helmets (*khudhah*), [egg-shaped] helmets (*baydah*), plate armor (*dir'*), mail armor (*zaradiyyat*), ornate quivers (*ji'ab*) and bows (*qisiy*).²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Sourdel 1960, p. 123.

²⁵⁴ I infer this from Liudprand of Cremona's account of his visit to Constantinople in the tenth-century. Liudprand of Cremona, *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by F. A. Wright (London: Routledge, 1930), p. 236.

²⁵⁵ Flood 2001, pp. 163-171. Liudprand expressed his displeasure at having to dismount before entering the Byzantine court. Liudprand 1930, p. 236.

²⁵⁶ Qaddumi 1996, p. 152.

The effect described here bears an affinity to the order and repetition of triangles and rosettes on Mshatta's entrance façade. It is unlikely actual representations of shields were depicted at Mshatta, but the visual effect is the same. The presence of uniformly aligned troops in the vicinity of the building's entrance would have matched the ornamental band. If one accepts Hillenbrand's reconstruction of the completed façade, which places a mirror image of Mshatta's zigzag on a second, superimposed band (Figure 82),²⁵⁷ the resemblance to multiple layers of hanging shields is even stronger.

Carved representations of shields on entrance walls can be found in a later work of architecture, which supports the idea that military symbols were employed for Islamic buildings through which one had to pass in order to enter a precinct. Bab al-Nasr, or "Gate of Victory" (Figure 83), built during the reign of Mustansir (1036-1094 CE), the eighth Fatimid *khalifa*, displays decorative forms that are in the shape of shields.²⁵⁸ As one of the entrance gates to the city of al-Qahira, its function is comparable to Bab al-'Ammā and in turn to the entranceway at Mshatta. Unlike Mshatta, Bab al-Nasr demands that the viewer look up to the second of three storeys in order to identify the small shapes that decorate the towers.

Mustansir's rule was characterized by a period of political unrest that lasted until order was restored in al-Qahira in 1073 CE by Badr Jamali, the newly appointed commander-in-chief.²⁵⁹ It was this commander who, in 1087 CE, chose to replace the brick walls of al-Qahira with stone, resulting in several new gates, including the Bab al-Nasr. The timing of this change has led Avinoam Shalem to see the new gate as an

²⁵⁷ Hillenbrand 1994, p. 389.

²⁵⁸ Avinoam Shalem, 'A Note on the Shield-Shaped Ornamental Bosses on the Façade of Bab al-Nasr in Cairo' *Ars Orientalis* 26 (1996), pp. 55-64.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

analogue to the strengthening of Fatimid rule in Egypt.²⁶⁰ When we consider that Mshatta is linked to patrons whose rule was characterized by periods of dramatic instability, the motivation for decorating its façade may have been the same as for Bab al-Nasr.

Poetic evocation

In the first analysis of Mshatta's façade, I established the relationship between the façade and the inner architecture of the building it adorns. Following this line of thought, the military symbolism of the façade has its corollary in the building plan. In 'Mshatta, Hira und Badiya: die Mittelländer des Islam und ihre Baukunst', Herzfeld emphasized the influence of the 'hira style' on Mshatta.²⁶¹ This style was referred to by the 'Abbasid historian Mas'udi (c. 896 – 956 CE) in a story that reveals the importance of metaphor in Islamic architecture.

MUTAWAKKIL'S PALACE OF THE TWO WINGS

During his reign, Mutawakkil constructed a building according to a plan unknown until that time, which was known as al-Hiri, 'Of the Two Wings and the Loggias'. The idea was suggested to him by one of his courtiers, who, in the course of an evening's conversation, told him that a king of Hira, of the dynasty of Nu'man of the tribe of the Bani Nasr, had a passion for war and, wishing always to have it constantly in mind, had had constructed at his capital of Hira a building which would evoke an army drawn up in battle lines. The loggia of the palace – intended as the king's reception room – represented the centre of the army. The two wings symbolized the right and left flanks and were for the use of the most important members of the court. The right-hand wing was the royal wardrobe, while the left-hand one served as a repository for drinks. The loggia of the palace stretched over the centre and the two wings, and the three gates of the palace led to it. This is the building which is still today called 'The Two Wings' and also 'al-Hiri', in memory of the town of Hira. The people had similar houses built in imitation of the style of the palace of Mutawakkil – and it has remained famous down to our own day.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Herzfeld 1921, pp. 104-146.

²⁶² Mas'udi, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, trans. and ed. by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989), p. 240.

Mas'udi was writing about the 'Abbasid *khalifa* Mutawakkil (r. 847 – 861 CE), who decided to build a palace that emulated one constructed by a Lakhmid king at Hira, the Lakhmid capital. It was to have two wings that evoked an army drawn up in battle formation. Herzfeld tried to identify the palace of Mas'udi's description with Balkuwara²⁶³, but as Dominique Sourdel has pointed out, this supposed innovation of the 'Abbasids is not unprecedented if one considers two earlier examples of tripartite divisions in palatial architecture: Ukhaydir and Mshatta.²⁶⁴ To some extent, the distinction does not matter. What is more important is that poet and patron shared a sense that the 'Abbasid palace was evoking the earlier structure. The two need not have looked the same.²⁶⁵ Whether or not it was obvious that Mshatta may have been laid out as if an army in battle, or that the solid towers could not allow archers to defend the site, a visitor acquainted with the oral history of Hira would have had a pre-formed image of the militaristic plan of the building. As Milwright has suggested, it may be inferred from Mas'udi's account that the primary characteristics of the plan and the iconography were transmitted orally rather than by the aid of drawings.²⁶⁶ The actual plan of the structure did not play as important a role in this respect.

The Umayyad *qusur* have often been linked to Late Antique military architecture. However, although there may have been a continuity of forms, the military function was eventually abandoned, with similarities being relegated to external features, notably

²⁶³ Its internal arrangement is tripartite. See Alastair Northedge, 'The Palaces of the Abbasids at Samarra', in *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. by Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 52, figs. 8, 9.

²⁶⁴ Sourdel 1960, p. 128.

²⁶⁵ See Richard Krautheimer, 'Introduction to an Iconography of Medieval Architecture' *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes* 5 (1942), pp. 1-33, for a discussion of this matter in relation to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

²⁶⁶ Marcus Milwright, 'Fixtures and Fittings. The Role of Decoration in Abbasid Palace Design', in *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. by Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 21-28.

enclosure walls.²⁶⁷ If we are to consider fortified precursors, the recent suggestion of pre-Islamic residences in Arabia is equally relevant.²⁶⁸ As for the internal layouts of the subdivided apartments of the *qusur*, they derive not from military sources but from late Roman domestic architecture.²⁶⁹ Genequand suggests that in some cases, the placement of decoration on the exterior of the *qusur* must have reduced their martial appearance.²⁷⁰ At Mshatta, however, the presence of elaborate decoration reduces the fortified aspect of the outer wall, while at the same time presenting a façade that is organised along martial themes, even if these are embedded within a complex frieze. Taking into account the military symbolism of the facade, as well as the possibility of additional hanging armour and ordered troops, it becomes clear that the impression of military strength and not actual defensive capability was desired. For Genequand, this external military appearance was sought because it reflected the power or status of the patron and in turn the Umayyad elite.²⁷¹

There is also a Persian tradition of writing poetry about palaces. The Ghaznavid panegyrist Farrukhi Sistani (d. 1037 CE), who worked in the court of Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030 CE), exceeds Mas‘udi’s military symbolism in a poem about a palace that belonged to Amir Yusuf.

Especially that palace which has been built at his gate:
 that is no palace, but a heaven, filled with suns and moons.
 In place of latticed windows [*panjara*], around it is a silver coat of mail;
 in place of a parapet, its tower wears a golden helmet.
 It is a feasting place [*bazm-gāh*], but when you look at it from afar,
 it looks like a battlefield [*razm-gāh*], from so many swords and shields.
 Its awnings [*sāyabān-hā*] are lowered, and beneath them, the palace

²⁶⁷ Genequand 2006, p. 25.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

is like a Simurgh which has cast its feathers at its feet.²⁷²

Within the Islamic world, it was not only the Arab poets, but also the Persians, who adopted the tradition of personifying the rooms and features of palaces.

Writing in the tenth century, not long after the reign of Mutawakkil, the Lombard bishop Liudprand of Cremona (c. 922-972 CE) produced descriptions of his embassy to the Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963-969 CE) at Constantinople. They are in some ways similar to those found in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*.

On the fourth of June we arrived at Constantinople, and after a miserable reception, meant as an insult to yourselves, we were given the most miserable and disgusting quarters. The palace where we were confined was certainly large and open, but it neither kept out the cold nor afforded shelter from the heat. Armed soldiers were set to guard us and prevent my people from going out, and any others from coming in. This dwelling, only accessible to us who were shut inside it, was so far distant from the emperor's residence that we were quite out of breath when we walked there – we did not ride.²⁷³

This passage is filled with hyperbole, if not of the exuberant sort found in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*. It demonstrates that while someone visiting a foreign culture may not have been as impressed as his hosts may have thought, the same basic constraints were endured, notably the inability to ride on horseback and the subsequent exhaustion experienced when having to walk great distances. A spectacle of mounted troops would have had an even more significant effect on someone who had been made to walk on foot.

The Byzantine court in Constantinople may seem far removed from Umayyad Syria, but the relationship between the Hagia Sophia and the Great Palace are topographically reminiscent of the relationship between the Great Mosque of Damascus and the now vanished Umayyad palace in Damascus, the Khadra'.²⁷⁴ With this

²⁷² Scott-Meisami 2001b, pp. 28-29.

²⁷³ Liudprand 1930, p. 235.

²⁷⁴ Flood 2001, pp. 163-172. See pp. 147-159 for a summary of what is known about the Khadra'.

connection in mind, I shall consider one last example. When it was still standing, the Imperial Palace of Constantinople was entered by all through a monumental vestibule known as the *Chalke*. It was probably in front of this building that Liudprand was made to dismount, as Cyril Mango ascertained from an account by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905-959 CE).²⁷⁵ A physical balustrade marked the location where only the emperor, and perhaps his close relatives, could ride on horseback. Constantine VII also describes the practice of hanging shields outside the Byzantine imperial palace. On occasions when the Empire had declared war on an enemy, three items were displayed outside the *Chalke* to indicate mobilisation: a cuirass, a sword and a shield.²⁷⁶ Instead of the hundreds of shields lining the walls of palaces, here only one was necessary. In this regard, the message is closer to Bab al-Nasr with its limited number of shields, than to the façade of Mshatta. Unlike either of these later examples, the hanging of three martial objects outside the vestibule in Constantinople was only temporary. If the patron of Mshatta were familiar with the practice that occurred at the *Chalke*, by choosing to make his message permanent, he could very well have made a statement about being in a permanent state of conflict. Considering that Yazid II had initiated a series of campaigns against numerous different people on several continents, this is a plausible explanation.

In writing about Muslim visitors from Tarsus, Constantine VII describes a division of people into two groups, one to the side of the Numera (the Baths of

²⁷⁵ Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. by J. J. Reiske (Bonn: Weber, 1829) *apud* Cyril Mango, *The Brazen House* (Kobenhavn: I commission hos Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959), p. 80.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Zeuxippus), and the other towards the vault of the Milion.²⁷⁷ The word chosen to describe this group, *νάχωμα*, is of unknown meaning, but is thought to be a miscellaneous assemblage of sailors, Turkish guards called *Tulmatzi*, and Russians.²⁷⁸ Mango believed these two groups to be an honour guard that stood either side of the *Chalke*.²⁷⁹ The positioning of two groups of flanking soldiers at the entrance to the palace precinct in Constantinople is an alternate means of expressing the dualistic organizational principle that guides the decoration flanking Mshatta's entrance. Were Mshatta's façade to have been complemented by a guard such as was the Byzantine custom, a repetition of a binary theme would have reinforced the patron's message while conforming to the principle of dualistic layering. According to Sauvaget, during the most solemn ceremonial occasions, the attendants of the *khalifa* would group themselves in two rows along the lateral walls of the reception hall, leaving the central passage free for those who wished to speak to the *khalifa*.²⁸⁰ One could imagine guards placing themselves on either side of the nave of Mshatta's audience hall, perhaps even standing under the lateral arches that form this nave.

In an analysis of references to the exchange of gifts in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, Grabar proposes a "shared culture of objects", none of which has a geographical or historical home.²⁸¹ The commonality was free of religious attachment, and applied to court behaviour and practices.²⁸² The wide-ranging textual evidence considered in this chapter would support this hypothesis. Taking into account the relationship of Mshatta's

²⁷⁷ Mango 1959, p. 97-98.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Sauvaget 1947, p. 132.

²⁸¹ Oleg Grabar, 'The Shared Culture of Objects', in *Byzantine Court Culture*, ed. by Henry Maguire (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Library and Collection, 1997), p. 126.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 129.

façade with the function of the building it adorns, the ornamental band is shown to be a well-planned means of communicating with the viewer. The effectiveness of this message would likely have been dependent on the coordination of the façade with ceremonial troops and perhaps a display of large quantities of arms and armour. Also, we must not forget that a visitor with knowledge of poetic evocations of architecture would better understand the military symbolism of a palatial complex. This last factor is something the patron could not control.

CHAPTER 4 - THE FAÇADE AS NARRATION

In the previous chapter, I considered Mshatta's entrance façade from a single interpretive standpoint: military symbolism. The purpose was not to demonstrate that Mshatta's façade has a single message. Even if just one meaning were sanctioned, it may not have been understood by all as originally intended. Mshatta stands as a solitary entity within the textbooks that categorize it, but a functioning palace of its size would have involved a large number of individuals, from the patron to the planners and executors of its construction, from a royal retinue to guards and visitors. The cultural and social diversity of each of these groups could not have been uniformly realigned under the authoritative banner of the Umayyads. In some instances, the *khilafa* would not have wished to do this, since, in its early stages, it willingly adopted the administrative traditions of the regions it conquered. Moreover, if visitors came from outside these regions, the effective communication to them of a unitary visual message would have been even more unpredictable.

Given that I have as my aim the perspective of Mshatta's audience, I will limit the analysis of this chapter to the optical phenomena that present themselves to the human viewer. This viewer is not the privileged individual who may carefully study images of Mshatta from slides or archived photographs. Such records are necessary in the reconstruction of the intended physical experience of Mshatta, but they become a crutch if we are not constantly vigilant of the additional information they contain. By this, I mean that it is now possible to collect an assemblage of images that present the façade of Mshatta as an entity discernible in its entirety, which would have been physically

impossible for the statically positioned viewer. This is an important concern for the issues that will be addressed in this chapter.

The martial aspects of Mshatta's façade are made apparent at the large level, mainly in the high relief of the ornamented moulding. This accords with textual descriptions that express little concern for individual details or variations when describing masses of arms and armour. If it is the collective group that is being identified, and not its individual components, the principles of military alignment, repetition and order are apparent in both the framing elements of Mshatta's decoration and in the written records of armed formations. The understanding of Mshatta's façade is affected by the distance of the viewer from the band of ornament, since the moulded elements as a whole cannot be properly ascertained from a position close to the enclosure wall. With a magnification of the façade, either by walking towards it or by enlarging a photograph, specific aspects of its ornament can be understood, but the visual effect made possible by the repeating of many triangles and rosettes is lost.

Having looked at the façade at a large scale, with an emphasis on its uniformity, it is now time to turn our attention to the small scale. We will begin by looking more closely at the moulded rosettes, which are far from being copies of the same model, not only in their outer shape, but also in their internal design. The link between these rosettes and basic geometrical principles will be extended to the whole band of the façade. At Mshatta, the underlying geometry that normally serves only as a temporary guide has been brought to the front in emphasized permanence. Unfinished plaster decoration from Khirbat al-Mafjar will serve as a comparative illustration of this point. With a demonstration of variation in the rosettes, I will then entertain the notion that Mshatta's

façade may be read as one would a text. In order to do this, I will make recourse to cross-sectional diagrams. These will help account for the effect of protruding towers on the viewer's lines of sight. Those triangles that remain prominent in spite of the protuberance of architectural features will be given special attention. The evidence for a sequential progression from triangle to triangle will be weighed on both sides of the façade, with due consideration given to the importance of the central, ceremonial axis. It will be shown that there is narrative change throughout the façade, but that it is not balanced and gradual throughout the entire composition. The more detailed formal analysis of this chapter will echo that of the previous one: dualistic notions are present at the smaller level of Mshatta's façade, which evinces two separate but related narratives on either side of the main doorway.

The rosettes

I shall begin with the examination of variances within the moulded components of the façade. The rows of acanthus leaves and anthemias are patterned consistently the length of the decorated band. The rosettes, on the other hand, demonstrate that different visual messages coexist within the same features. This may not have been readily apparent to the viewer. With one notable exception (Figure 84), all are positioned within the centres of triangles.²⁸³ Whether situated above or below the zigzag, they convey an impression of uniformity in their size and shape when viewed from afar (Figure 85). If the viewer were to make the assumption that all the rosettes are of the same basic shape,

²⁸³ Two exceptions were likely intended, but this cannot be confirmed due to the absence of all the upper rosettes on the eastern wing of the façade.

the focus of attention would turn to the carvings that surround them. A choice of what aspect of the façade to observe is forced, because all details cannot be absorbed at once.

With a decision to scrutinise the rosettes, the viewer would realise that these moulded components of the façade can be categorized into two types: the upper, octagonal version and its lower, poly-lobed and floral counterpart (Figure 86). The difference may have been intended as a means to distinguish between the two levels of the composition. We must also remember that the viewer's head would have been closer to the lower rosettes. This may have influenced the selection of a particular rosette for the lower portion of the façade. Given the greater pictorial efforts in the triangles falling below the zigzag, a curvilinear rosette may have been thought to integrate better into the winding vegetal scene surrounding it.

Another possible explanation for the choice of two types of rosette is that the angular versions on the upper register are not all placed onto flat surfaces. The decoration of the façade is often malleable, adapting to Mshatta's architecture because of a symbiotic and at times constraining kinship. On the semi-octagonal towers that flank the entranceway, the base of each upright triangle is determined by the length of each side of the tower (Figure 86). A relationship between the size of the segments of the zigzag and the architecture they adorn has been carefully established by Mshatta's designers. On the flat stretches that join the semi-octagonal towers to the subsequent round towers, the triangles fit evenly between the protrusions in the enclosure wall. The complexity of the ratios of size that define the façade suggests that a considerable amount of forethought was required to enable the decoration to be so well-placed.

Both styles of rosette are designed so they may be sectioned if necessary. We have already noted the rosette on the western extremity of the façade, which is sliced in half (Figure 87). There is also a rosette split by the doorway, just like the triangle that frames it (Figure 88). There are also several rosettes whose upper and lower halves do not match. These alterations occur on flat surfaces, but there are also distortions of rosettes when the surface that supports them deviates from a two-dimensional plane of 180° . This occurs with the semi-octagonal towers, and with the points at which the towers meet the enclosure wall (Figure 89). At the corners formed by the conjunction of the semi-octagonal towers and the enclosure wall, an angle of 90° is formed. Additionally, at each corner of the half-octagon that forms the towers, an obtuse angle of 225° is created (assuming each internal angle is 135° , as would be the case with a full octagon). The method of tailoring the rosettes to accommodate for these zones of transition is not consistent. At the first right-angled space, immediately to the west of the doorway, the rosette in question is displaced to the side (Figure 84), allowing it to retain its pre-formed, flat consistency. Elsewhere, modifications have been made. At the next right-angled space on the other side of the tower, a rosette is placed in the centre of the triangle and bent inwards, requiring a change to the standard form (Figure 90). The opposite of this can be found at each edge of the tower, where an obtuse angle forces the rosette to be bent backwards (Figure 91). In this configuration, the flat edges of the octagonal rosettes are more appropriate than the curved lobes of the floral rosettes. The two bottom edges of each rosette recede in a manner that accentuates the angled planes that are formed when the inverted triangles are folded backward over the vertical axes of the tower's edges.

The rosettes may have been placed into the wall in a regulated manner, but their interiors vary throughout the façade, with little concern for the dualistic division of the upper and lower registers. Some internal patterns have been repeated, but many are unique. Strzygowski rendered all of the rosettes and sorted them typologically, as was the methodological norm in nineteenth-century studies of ornament (Figure 92).²⁸⁴ If we scan his illustrations, the effect is very much the same as that which we would see if we were to look into a kaleidoscope and rotate its cylinder. At Mshatta, instead of bits of glass, basic vegetal elements are repeated and reconfigured: pine cones, sunflowers, vine tendrils, anthemias.²⁸⁵ By removing the context from the rosettes, we are prevented from interpreting how they functioned within the rest of the carvings. A useful purpose is served, however, in that the motifs of one rosette can more easily be compared to another with Strzygowski's diagram. It would have been far more difficult for the contemporary viewer to achieve this given the larger scale of the finished product.

Planning Umayyad architectural decoration

Geometry guided the ornament of Mshatta, even if the skill required for its draughting might appear unsophisticated when compared to later examples of what Neçipoğlu calls “dynamic radial grid systems whose rotational symmetries were far more complex than their late antique and early Islamic counterparts, which were based on simpler rectilinear grids with diagonal coordinates”.²⁸⁶ The advent of new systems of

²⁸⁴ See, for example, Jones 1928.

²⁸⁵ For a study of the mathematics of kaleidoscopes, see Roe Goodman, ‘Alice through Looking Glass after Looking Glass: the Mathematics of Mirrors and Kaleidoscopes’ *American Mathematical Monthly* 111 (2004), pp. 281-298. Goodman's study considers reflection groups in Euclidean geometric space, which was familiar to Muslim scholars acquainted with Euclid's *Elements*.

²⁸⁶ Gülru Neçipoğlu, *The Topkapi Scroll – Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), p. 103. It has recently been argued that

geometrical design in the thirteenth century has been attributed in part to the greater availability of paper, which facilitated written diagrams.²⁸⁷ Their appearance might also have been inspired by a treatise on geometry written by Abu Wafa Buzajani (939-997 CE).²⁸⁸ However, as Bloom notes in an essay on the transmission of designs, Buzajani's texts were never intended to serve an instructional purpose for those practicing the trades, irrespective of their literacy.²⁸⁹ No evidence exists for visual architectural plans or even textual guides prior to the first Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century.²⁹⁰

Bloom accepts that a universal system of architectural notation would not have been employed in the early Islamic period, except for more complex and exceptional buildings.²⁹¹ He suggests that the memory of already extant examples was the primary guide in developing new buildings.²⁹² The composition of these new structures was determined more by the background of the individual labourer than by architectural drawings.

A team of mosaicists, for example, is thought to have worked in Bethlehem at the Church of the Nativity in the 690's, then in Jerusalem at the Dome of the Rock, and finally in Damascus at the Umayyad Mosque. Similarly, the appearance in Umayyad architecture of "foreign" techniques, such as brick vaulting at Mshatta, can be explained more easily by the use of corvée labor from Mesopotamia or Iran than by the use of verbal or visual systems of notation.²⁹³

by 1200 CE, a conceptual breakthrough allowed *giriḥ* – a term employed by Neçipoğlu to describe the geometric Islamic ornament that came into use during the late eleventh century – to be formed by the tessellation of equilateral polygonal tiles decorated with lines. By the fifteenth century CE, these polygonal shapes were formed into quasi-crystalline patterns, five centuries before the British mathematician Roger Penrose developed a theoretical label to describe such a phenomenon. Peter J. Lu and Paul J. Steinhardt, 'Decagonal and Quasicrystalline Tilings in Medieval Islamic Architecture', *Science* 315 (2007), pp. 1106-1110.

²⁸⁷ Jonathan M. Bloom, 'On the Transmission of Designs in Early Islamic Architecture' *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), p. 26 and Tabbaa 2001, p. 166.

²⁸⁸ Tabbaa 2001, p. 166.

²⁸⁹ Bloom 1993, p. 21.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 24.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The process of transplanting architectural ideas was facilitated by the relatively short distances artisans had to travel during the Umayyad period.²⁹⁴ Bloom's analysis accords with Herzfeld's subdivision of the workforce at Mshatta into different groups. However, it bespeaks the problems of correlating architectural styles with specific cultures. It is difficult to differentiate between two equally plausible explanations for Mshatta's brick vaulting: first, that its designers drew from examples from further east; second, that the workers who assembled it came from more eastern areas. Either way, are we fully justified in forming a direct connection between the patron and the cultures that inspired his building?

Presumably, there was a wide social gap between *corvée* labour and the aristocracy. When we take into account the fact that the most detailed example of *graffito* yet found at Mshatta depicts a ruler in Sasanian headgear (Figure 93), and that this act of concealed vandalism was likely the creation of a workman, Bloom's hypothesis may hold true. This quickly sketched carving was not intended for official view. While it may have served to illustrate a decorative idea, its location on what would have become an unexposed side of a block indicates that it was not to be part of the finished ornamental programme. This brings into question the level of influence Mshatta's patron and the project's supervisors had on the façade's cultural imagery, since in this instance, Sasanian-like images appear to have come with ease to the individual artisan.²⁹⁵ The patron, like the workman, may have been familiar with Sasanian imagery from portable objects such as coins, textiles, ceramics and metal ware. Yet in adhering to interpretations of the façade that see in its imagery representative components of

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ A carved representation of a cross was executed in the same general area and would also have been concealed in the finished version of Mshatta. Schulz 1904, p. 223.

Sasanian artistic vocabularies, or for that matter those of the Late Antique, we must accept that it is difficult to determine whether these effects were deliberately intended by those who sponsored the project.

The practice of making architectural plans may not yet have become widespread at the time of Mshatta's construction, but it is hard to imagine that the calculations needed to fit the triangles and rosettes into a well-designed enclosure wall were transmitted purely by word of mouth or established by impromptu on-site innovation. Admittedly, the proportions of the plan are not exact. The apparent symmetry and systematic subdivisions only hold up when rounding to the nearest metre. Brünnow and von Domaszewski's measurements indicate that some dimensions vary when compared to their counterparts on the other side of the building's central axis (Figure 35): the western tract is 41.88 metres wide, the eastern tract is 42.10 metres wide; the flat segments of the façade are 13.20 metres on the west and 13.50 metres on the east. The high amount of variance at these small levels of measurement do not point to an exclusive bias in size of east over west, but they do indicate that a certain amount of flexibility was allowed during the construction of the building's walls.²⁹⁶ Nevertheless, if we accept that the framing elements of the façade were pre-carved before their installation, some degree of diagrammatic planning must have been undertaken, at least for the decorative aspects of the complex.

²⁹⁶ On the basis of variances in interstitial spaces around Mshatta's enclosure wall, Frederick Jones Bliss concluded that "the place had not been laid out with perfect symmetry". Frederick Jones Bliss, 'Narrative of an Expedition to Moab and Gilead' *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1895), p. 230.

A triangular base for ornament

A good illustration of the technical methods employed in laying out ornamental patterns on Umayyad secular architecture may be found in the plaster decoration of Khirbat al-Mafjar, particularly in an unfinished balustrade panel (Figure 94). It leaves ample traces of the guiding matrix of lines and hatches that were to assist in the carving of repeated and equal-sized motifs. Based on this evidence, Hamilton inferred a set of tools that would have been used to establish the layout of a pattern on a still-moist panel laid flat on the ground: a ruler, a scoring tool, a blunt point, a pair of dividers, and a taut string.²⁹⁷ The last of these tools would not have been as effective on a harder material like limestone, but the procedure followed to create the pattern on the balustrade panel may help us to understand the layout of Mshatta's façade.

The draughtsman first marked the horizontal axis of the panel with a flick of the string, and ruled the outlines of the borders and central field with a sharp point. Two vertical scratches across the top and bottom borders marked the axes of the central scrolls in each. The main field was then divided into eight horizontal strips by six lines drawn parallel to the axis; these were ruled with a point and coloured red.²⁹⁸

One of these horizontal strips may be equated with the decorative band at the base of Mshatta's façade, since it also consists of a row of upright and inverted triangles. Moreover, if Hillenbrand's proposal of a second band of decoration at Mshatta is correct, then the geometrical design of the façade is even more closely in line with the multiple horizontal bands of the balustrade panel. The difference in scale between the balustrade panels and the decorated portion of Mshatta's facade is significant, leading one to question whether the same tools Hamilton proposes could have been employed at

²⁹⁷ Hamilton 1959, p. 273. The change from a linear to a polygonal framework in later examples of Islamic geometric ornament, suggested by Peter Lu and Paul Steinhardt, indicates that after 1200 CE, the tools mentioned by Hamilton, while not abandoned, would have yielded to the guiding shapes of tiles. See Lu and Steinhardt 2007, p. 1106.

²⁹⁸ Hamilton 1959, pp. 273-275.

Mshatta. If not, they might still have served to make a smaller, preliminary version of the zigzag as a guide to the stonemasons. Paper may not have been widely employed at the time, but perhaps small-scale plans could have been carved into plaster or stucco, as is the case with a Mongol-period drawing of *muqarnas* from Takht-i Sulayman.²⁹⁹

The subdivision of Khirbat al-Mafjar's bands took place as follows.

The next stage was carried out with the dividers or compasses. The centre line from the middle point outwards was nicked off into lengths equal to the sides of an equilateral triangle inscribed between the horizontals. This was not an exact fraction of the length of the field, but left a remainder over at each end. The nicking was done with the dividers fixed, the pivot being moved forward at each step and placed on the arc just made. From these points intersecting arcs were then notched on the horizontals above and below, giving the tips of equilateral triangles based on the axis of the panel. So the process was repeated until the top and bottom borders were reached. The points were then joined up with red lines, the whole surface thus being set out with a lattice of equilateral triangles based on the horizontals.³⁰⁰

This lattice is demonstrated in the thick lines of an illustration provided by Hamilton (Figure 95). Although the decoration of the completed panels would have concealed the triangular underpinnings that assisted their carving, the transient geometrical guidelines share a common method of execution with the more overt zigzag pattern on Mshatta's façade.

While the plan of Mshatta may have been held together by a successive subdivision into three, at Khirbat al-Mafjar, the ornament was based on a series of subdivisions into equilateral triangles. As Hamilton noted, the lengths of these triangles were not a precise fraction of the length of the whole panel. With measurements beginning at the centre, a remainder was left over at each end. For Mshatta's façade, the inverse is true. The bases of the upright triangles at the eastern and western extremities

²⁹⁹ See Yvonne Dold-Samplonius and Silvia L. Harmsen, 'The Muqarnas Plate Found at Takht-I Sulayman: a New Interpretation' *Muqarnas* 22 (2005), pp. 82-91, and Armen Ghazarian and Robert Ousterhout, 'A Muqarnas Drawing from Thirteenth-Century Armenia and the Use of Architectural Drawings during the Middle Ages' *Muqarnas* 18 (2001), pp. 141-154.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

about the edges of the composition, with those that follow fitting evenly into the spaces between towers. Space is left over at the entrance, forcing the inverted triangles to become distended. Their downward-facing points are stretched laterally (Figure 96) and, as we have observed, the rosette on the western side is oddly placed, although it does sit directly above the eastern side of the triangle's point. This arrangement could have been easily avoided with a widening of the doorway. If deliberate, it allows the rosette to face directly to the south and not at an angle, which would have been the case had the rosette been placed in the corner as elsewhere. The effect of placing the rosette in this manner is like that of the shields at Bab al-Nasr, which also face directly in the direction of those passing through the gateway. It would seem that the unique position of the rosette that flanked Mshatta's doorway was motivated in part by function.

Returning to the geometric layout of the façade, the impression we are given is that the measuring of the lengths of each triangle began on the outer edges of the decorative band and proceeded inwards, towards the middle of the façade. If this did in fact occur, what does it suggest about the planning and reading of the façade? Did they also progress from the outer edges inward? The actual carving proceeded vertically, but the planning of the details that were to be carved may have followed a common Umayyad technical practice of establishing geometrical frameworks for ornament.

Khirbat al-Mafjar was built of more materials than just plaster. Its mosaics and external limestone sculptures are connected to the stucco decoration by a commonality of design. This suggests that the method of establishing triangular guiding schemas may have been extended to different forms of ornament. Looking at another plaster panel, this time from the entrance hall to the palace, what at first appears to be different design - a

flat base with repeated protruding human heads (Figure 97) – is revealed to have the same underlying pattern. Hamilton also established a geometrical scheme for this panel (Figure 98).

The pattern is in effect a chainwork of beaded medallions so spaced that their centres, and the centres of the knots that link them, lie on the intersections of a grid of equilateral triangles. Human busts peer this way and that from the medallions.³⁰¹

In spite of the curvilinear appearance of the decoration it is a triangular substratum that makes the knotted design possible. Several other decorative components of the mansion in other media suggest the application of the same technique, such as some of the mosaic floor panels of the bath hall (Figure 99) and the sculpted ornament of the palace gate tower (Figure 100). This last example is a linked chain of poly-lobed roundels comparable to the rosettes at Mshatta not only for stylistic affinities but also because it is sculpted in limestone and bedecks an external tower. Remnants of limestone slabs indicate that trial efforts were undertaken to establish patterns for decorating Khirbat al-Mafjar's stone work (Figure 101). A matrix of isosceles triangles was employed for these carved sketches, and was likely used for some of the wall paintings in a form that Hamilton has referred to as a "diamond pattern" (Figure 102). There is a unity of underlying geometry throughout Khirbat al-Mafjar's decoration, which applied equally to the plaster balustrade panels, mosaics, and external limestone ornament. It follows, then, that Mshatta's limestone façade may have been established using the same techniques applied to other materials. Unusually, the triangles that might have been used temporarily to establish the ornamental composition of Mshatta's façade have been brought to the forefront. The moulded zigzag pattern may be covered in vegetal

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

ornament, but there is a conscious effort to make its angularity visible instead of concealing it under a more pronounced curvilinear cover.

Geometry and plans

Although a geometrical basis is evident in the decoration of early Islamic works of architecture, Bloom's hypothesis about the transmission of architectural ideas would suggest that two-dimensional geometric designs were not used as readily in the layout of the buildings that supported this decoration. An example of asymmetry in early Muslim architectural planning is the Great Mosque of Qayrawan, the overhead view of which reveals a dramatic distortion of the building's enclosure wall and hypostyle arcades (Figure 103). The building was altered during several phases of construction, which complicates the analysis of how its original planning was undertaken. The contemporary viewer might not have paid any attention to its deviation from a rectangular grid, which would be less evident at ground level. This is supported in earlier buildings, such as the small enclosure at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi (Qasr al-Hayr East), whose secular function, layout (Figure 104), and date of construction are much closer to Mshatta, as is its entrance (Figure 105). Its plan deviates from a rectilinear grid as much as the plan of the mosque at Qayrawan. Yet if one imagines a person walking towards its flat entrance, the impression likely conveyed was one of a building conforming to architecture built with right angles.

One of the more surprising revelations about Mshatta is that its plan is also skewed, if subtly so. This feature has been forgotten with the widespread adoption of Brünnow and von Domaszewski's plan of the site. A close observation of a satellite

image (Figure 106) betrays a side of the enclosure that is not straight: from the south-west corner to the north-west, the width of the enclosure gradually grows larger. The difference is not as extreme as at Qayrawan, but it reinforces the fact that the overhead layout of an Umayyad structure need not be as precise as views from the ground might imply.

Textual confirmation of the value placed on the experience of architecture comes during later periods, such as for the mosque of Taza, Morocco, which was expanded during the reign of Abu Ya‘qub Yusuf (r. 1286 to 1307 CE). In reading its inscription, Bloom concludes that the audience of the time would have noted only changes in the depth of the mosque’s bays, and not the direction of these bays or their number. The latter were given importance on two-dimensional plans but not in observations from within the mosque.³⁰²

The difference in the way architecture is perceived, from one based on the experience of three-dimensional space to one grounded in the use of such abstract concepts as plans, sections, and elevations, is enormous and important. It can be dated somewhere about the year 1250, probably earlier in the eastern Islamic lands and later in the west; it seems to have been due to the emergence and widespread use of notational systems, which were themselves probably due to the increased availability of paper in the Islamic world.

Changes in architectural notation undoubtedly occurred, but we should not conflate the transmission of designs, a purview of those responsible for constructing buildings, with the experience of visual phenomena by a wider audience. One cannot say that new systems of notation caused all viewers to shift their focus onto a schematized two-dimensional space. The distinction Bloom makes between the two modes of perception does, however, suggest that the experience of three-dimensional space may have held greater sway prior to the advent of the new notational systems he describes. If this is the

³⁰² Bloom 1993, pp. 22, 26.

case, then our consideration of the imaginary viewer's experience of Mshatta is lent support.

Reading the façade

Up until this point, we have made the assumption that Mshatta's visitors brought with them preconceived notions, which may have included aspects of geometric planning, military symbolism, or poetic descriptions. Rare would be the case of someone visiting the site with a mind free of these associations, but even in the absence of culturally formed ways of seeing, the façade's diverse visual stimuli would have made an impression on the viewer. The effectiveness of the patron's decorative message hinged on the viewer's fluency with the artistic vocabulary employed at the site, but it was also dependent on the coherence of the overall programme and the time given to read the façade. A closer examination of how the façade may be perceived based on the position of the observer will provide the best means to determine whether the façade was meant to be "read" as one would a narrative text, and if there were more than one way of doing this. Paul Huguenim's drawings of the façade in Brünnow's *Die Provincia Arabia II* (Figures 107a&b, 108a&b) will provide a point of reference for this analysis, as will diagrams indicating the distribution of figural images on the façade (Figures 109a&b).³⁰³ I have chosen to number the triangles from the centre outwards in these diagrams. In the figure labels, I will refer to individual triangles based on which side of the façade each is on, and that triangle's allocated number. This takes account of the building's axis of symmetry that divides the eastern and western halves of the building. It also supplants

³⁰³ The latter was suggested to me by Dr. Marcus Milwright. I have based my diagram on a similar version kindly provided to me by Prof. Thomas Leisten, who has also considered distribution patterns on the facade.

the well-established alphabetisation of the triangles from west to east. By doing this, I am avoiding the bias of reading the façade in only one direction.

In the large quantity of literature on Mshatta, there are some suggestions of interpretative possibilities that see in the façade more than just a band of repeated ornament. One of these offers a progressive reading from one end to the other. It is a nascent observation, but it is as worthy of consideration now as when it was written in 1906.

2° La merveilleuse décoration de la façade semble devoir être interprétée comme l'apothéose de la vigne. C'est une sorte de texte en images qui a son unité, à condition d'être << lu >> de droite à gauche et non, comme on l'a fait jusqu'ici, de gauche à droite. La vigne est d'abord représentée en fleurs, puis se développant graduellement, à divers états de maturité, jusqu'au moment où elle est envahie par toutes les bêtes de la création qui se régalent de ses grappes. Au sommet du dernier (et non du premier) panneau triangulaire et dominant ainsi tout l'ensemble, émerge des pampres une figure humaine, coiffée d'une sorte de bonnet phrygien et ayant un caractère dionysiaque, peut-être bien orphique (motif très populaire en Syrie, qu'on retrouve au temple de Si'a et autres lieux et qui, dans certains cas, peut avoir un rapport avec le culte de Dusarès, le Dionysos nabatéen).³⁰⁴

Charles Clermont-Ganneau was reviewing Brünnow and von Domszewski's *Die Provincia Arabia*, at a time when the question of who built Mshatta was still very much a matter of debate and speculation. Preceding the passage quoted above, Clermont-Ganneau offered that the construction of "Mechatta" might have been the initiative of a Lakhmid.³⁰⁵ This assertion is now believed to be wrong, but there is a spirit of inquiry in the writing that is not as prevalent now that Mshatta's Umayyad patronage has been generally accepted. The enthusiasm of rediscovery allowed Clermont-Ganneau to present an interpretation of the façade that has sadly never been taken up.

³⁰⁴ Charles Clermont-Ganneau, Review of *Die Provincia Arabia* by M. Brünnow, vol. 2, in *Recueil d'archéologie orientale* 5 (1906), p. 206. I am grateful to Dr. Finbarr Barry Flood for bringing this interpretation to my attention.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Leaving aside the potentially important Dionysiac themes, let us consider the mode of viewing that Clermont-Ganneau has suggested and how this might have been accomplished. A viewing of the façade that moves from one end to the other, instead of taking in the whole of the decoration at once, applies the methodology of reading texts to the interpretation of images. Why not, then, facilitate the process with a script more legible to the literate? If we consider that envoys to the early Muslim empire came from not only Arabic-speaking regions, but also from other parts, such as the Byzantine Empire, the decision to decorate in images rather than text may have accommodated those who were not polyglots. Alternatively, the decision to use images at Mshatta may reflect the fact that the few inscriptions that do exist on Umayyad buildings – particularly religious buildings such as the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus – do not serve narrative functions. They are there as much for the patron of the buildings as they are for the people viewing them. For those who did not read Arabic, or who simply did not understand inscriptions, a guide may have been provided to facilitate the full appreciation of one of these buildings.

Should images have been employed to reach an audience that included non-Arabic speakers, it would be impossible to remove all linguistic associations from the façade. The decision to begin a reading from the right or the left would have been largely affected by the primary language of the observer. When Clermont-Ganneau refers to a common reading of Mshatta's façade from left to right, it was not without coincidence that this habit was practiced by European scholars accustomed to following the same process with their own languages. Whatever reasons gave rise to Clermont-Ganneau's reversal of this way of reading, beginning from the right and moving to the left would

have mimicked the very same process necessary to read inscriptions in Arabic. It would also have acknowledged that the right is the auspicious side in Islamic culture. Did Mshatta's designers make a conscious choice for the façade to be read in this manner, or were they following a widespread cultural practice largely unaware of what they were doing? From the perspective of a Greek or Latin speaking Byzantine observer, the necessity to read from right to left would have been confusing. But only a significant amount of forethought would have allowed this problem of communication to be considered. As written records of ceremonial occasions frequently indicate, the desire to make the visitor comfortable was often far from the receiving host's concerns.

Would it have been physically possible for the viewer to perform a reading of the façade from right to left? Clermont-Ganneau's suggestion is greatly facilitated by the presentation of the façade in publications replete with conveniently displayed photographs and drawings. Creswell took great pains to photograph each triangle in a calm and undisturbed setting, and at perfect right angles from the wall and from the ground. This allows for the best possible study of the schematic outline of the subsidiary carvings without being physically present, but it is not necessarily how the contemporary viewer was meant to see the carved limestone blocks. In *Early Muslim Architecture* and other publications, many readers may inadvertently find themselves making an holistic assemblage of Mshatta's triangles from flat pages of text into a flat plane of the imagination, which misconstrues the actual setting.

An interrupted view

The conventional means of studying the remains of Mshatta – photographic studies and artistic renderings - have their limitations. To get a better sense of the actual experience of the site, the methodology of another scholar will help us in evaluating Clermont-Ganneau's proposal that the façade was meant to be read linearly. In his comparative study, '*La mosquée et le palais*', which forms part of *La mosquée Omeyyade de Médine: étude sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique*, Sauvaget deduced that it was not the *mihrab* that oriented the faithful to the direction of prayer, but the entire wall at the end of the prayer hall.³⁰⁶ He reached this conclusion by a considered study of the visibility of the *mihrab* within the context of a hypostyle hall (Figure 110 – another apparently skewed plan). Although portions of the entire *qibla* wall may have been within the line of sight of the majority of congregants, a single, small and centred prayer niche would have been obscured by the various pillars and columns supporting the roof of the structure. Only those situated along the main axis would be free from these obstructions. To Sauvaget, the *mihrab* indicated the place of the *imam* and not the ritual orientation.³⁰⁷ In making this claim, however, he neglected to mention that, in addition to obscuring the structure that marks the *imam*'s position during the ceremony of the *khutba*, the columns of the prayer hall also obstruct the *imam*.

The direct analogy at Mshatta would be the central throne room of the audience hall, whose plan is of the same apsidal form that Sauvaget believed was shared by the mosque and the basilica. Like the *imam* and his congregation, the patron of Mshatta and his audience would be subject to the same distortions of visibility, which allowed the

³⁰⁶ Sauvaget 1947, p. 146.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

receiving host to be seen by some and hidden from others. As with the mosques of Sauvaget's description, visitors proceeding along Mshatta's main axis would have had a clear view of someone situated in the northernmost portion of the apsidal area. However, if the *sitr* were to be employed, it would have countered this very facilitation of sight into the apex of the throne room. Without the cover of textiles, the converse view from Mshatta's basilical audience hall looking south is comparable to the *imam*'s line of sight from the *mihrab* towards his audience. A very good illustration of this perspective (with a bit of its own latter-day obstructions in the form of rubble) is provided by one of Brünnow's photographs, taken when the façade was still in place (Figure 111). The present-day view is cleared of rubble and years of accumulated dirt, but it is also cleared of the façade (Figure 112).

Less obvious, but equally relevant, is the application of Sauvaget's methodology to the exterior of buildings. If we were to position ourselves at the eastern extremity of the decorated portion of Mshatta's enclosure wall – the “beginning” of Clermont-Ganneau's reading – the laws of perspective would allow us to see only up to points where stone blocks meet our radiating lines of sight (Figure 113). This works well for the flowers that develop into different stages of maturity, but when the “beasts of creation” start to invade and partake in the fruiting grapes, things become complicated. The two semi-octagonal towers that flank the entrance get in our way. In the absence of a clearly presented textbook facsimile of the façade, the only way to read every segment in sequence is by walking along the wall and placing oneself in front of each scene long enough in order to take in all of its elements. Without the privilege of being able to move around in this fashion, the areas immediately to the left of each tower become dead

zones. Of these, the dead zone west of the western semi-octagonal tower contains a high frequency of confronting animals, as is well illustrated in one of Brünnow's photographs (Figure 114). Is it possible that the relative obscurity of this part of the façade led to the repetition of this motif instead of the introduction of new imagery? If this is the case, similar considerations may have affected the choice of imagery surrounding the other entrance tower.

In his reading from right to left, Clermont-Ganneau placed a large part of his emphasis on the westernmost triangle, which fits into the last position within this conception. The triangle's identity is established by comparing it to its opposite, the easternmost triangle. This is not fully justified, because none of the limestone blocks above the latter's rosette was in place at the time Clermont-Ganneau published his observations. This much is evident from one of Brünnow's photographs taken almost a decade earlier (Figure 115). The final triangle on the left may conclude a narrative progression, but if we are to compare it with its counterpart on the east, another consideration presents itself: both extremities of the façade are equal bookends to the whole composition. In the absence of evidence for figural imagery on the upper portion of the last triangle on the east, the perfectly formed circles at its base, with pearl borders and several inner layers (Figure 116), distinguish it from all others on the eastern wing of the façade. Returning to the western wing, we may observe that the last triangle on the west (Figure 117) also has well-formed circles at its base, with pearled borders, if missing the layering of smaller circles within the larger ones.

In spite of this resemblance, it is the summit of the westernmost triangle that prompts Clermont-Ganneau to declare the imagery found in this part of the façade to be

in a position dominating the entire composition. The reasons for this dominance are not made entirely clear, other than the fact that the human figure Clermont-Ganneau identifies is located above all other animals in the frieze. It is worth looking more closely at this image, because there are details in one of Brünnow's photographs that provide a richer illustration of how this unique figure works in relation to his surroundings. Hillenbrand believed this was the only human being on the façade, and questioned whether its headgear might actually be a *qalansuwa tawila* (a hat worn by the Umayyad *khulafa'* when leading Friday prayer), as part of a rebus for Walid II.³⁰⁸ A stone version of a diminutive *qalansuwa* suspended from a chain was found at Khirbat al-Mafjar, where it was apparently used in mockery of the Sasanian tradition of suspending a crown above the shah (Figure 118).³⁰⁹ In addition to noting Clermont-Ganneau's interpretation of the Dionysiac themes of the image, Hillenbrand offered the idea that the façade might evoke Solomonic associations, since Solomon is celebrated within Islamic tradition for his rule over the animal world, and over the part-human *jjins*, which may have been represented by the centaurs of the façade.³¹⁰

At first sight, particularly in its present-day setting, the human bonneted in what appears to be a Phrygian cap stands awkwardly, with only the faint outlines of eyes and two parallel lines that define a nose (Figure 119). His head is disproportionately large for the rest of his body, which is defined on its right side by a vertical joint between two adjoining blocks. If we scrutinize Brünnow's black and white photograph, taken with the blessing of the sharp contrasts provided by natural light, and when the façade was in a

³⁰⁸ Hillenbrand 1982, pp. 12, 29, f. 140.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*. See also Priscilla Soucek, Review of *The Formation of Islamic Art* by Oleg Grabar, in *Iranian Studies* 8/4 (1975), pp. 254-263, and Priscilla Soucek, 'Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor?', *Muqarnas* 23 (1993), pp. 109-134 for analyses of the Solomonic themes at Khirbat al-Mafjar.

better state of preservation, the imagery is wholly different (Figure 120). What at present appears to be an infantile body for an unusually large head is in fact the profile of a seated animal facing eastward, into the rest of the façade.³¹¹ This animal has been referred to as a dog by Henry Baker Tristram³¹², and described as “cat-like” by Creswell.³¹³ Its anatomy and facial features - noticeably the ears - do give it a feline appearance which, when added to its size, make it comparable to many of the other animals of the façade. It is likely a lion, and at the least would have played an iconographic role comparable to that of the animals at the base of other triangles.

The lion’s posterior is in an adjoining block, whose border gives the false impression that the front of the animal is a separate entity attached to the human head that is directly on top. The magnified view of Brünnow’s photograph shows an unusually naturalistic rendering of a human face. The Phrygian cap bonneting the head is much more distinct, but it is the sculptural qualities of stone turned into flesh that shatter any notion that Mshatta’s façade is pure “arabesque”. Prominent brow and cheekbones distend skin over a wide-eyed face and toothy grin. Eyelids are visible. So are pupils, which reveal that the face is looking at an angle downward and to the east. The head is more naturalistic than a sculptural fragment of a male head found within the northern audience hall complex (Figure 121). The lips and nose of the latter are reasonably human-like, but the eyes are disproportionately large, although they may have seemed less so with additional painted details.

³¹¹ The renderings of Mshatta’s façade in *Die Provincia Arabia* also recognize this animal. See Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, pl. XLVI.

³¹² Henry Baker Tristram, *The Land of Moab: Travels and Discoveries on the East Side of the Dead Sea and Jordan* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873), p. 196.

³¹³ Creswell 1979, p. 597.

The Phrygian-capped head dominates in several ways: by casting its animated glance over the composition, a glance that reflects the parallel if more serene gaze of the lion; by its position in a region of elevated height and stature relative to the viewer; by making itself more visible than it would have been if positioned lower on the façade, particularly to those who are not situated directly in front of it. The triangle it occupies suffers the least from the obstruction of the tower that flanks the western side of the entrance. As a cross-sectional view indicates, its position at the extremity allows it to remain within the line of sight of the viewer much more readily than if it were situated in the triangles to its immediate east (see Figure 113). It is difficult to get a sense for this perspective at the Staatliche Museen, since most of the eastern portion of the façade was not shipped to Berlin. There is also the constriction of a museum wall that prevents one from taking a position to the right of the eastern octagonal tower (Figure 122). Within the setting of the museum, the most approximate view of the westernmost triangle as viewed from a position at the eastern end of the façade (Figure 123) is based on a position shorter in distance from the façade than what would once have been permissible. Admittedly, it is difficult to focus on the details of the last triangle from this range, but as Brünnow's photograph indicates, the illumination of bright sunlight would have rendered the lion and face more distinct from their surroundings. They stand out because of their flatness and lighter colour relative to the deep shadows of the vines that fill the rest of the apex of the triangle (Figure 117).

The positioning of the human head in an elevated position, atop a seated lion, is reminiscent of the bath porch façade at Khirbat al-Mafjar (Figure 124), where decorative sculpture is in the more malleable form of plaster (Figure 125). In both examples, a

human figure dominates one or more lions. At Khirbat al-Mafjar, this dominance is established by the act of standing directly on the animals below, in a manner comparable to depictions of Byzantine and Persian rulers.³¹⁴ The moulded frame of Mshatta's façade prevented the inclusion of this exact motif. The space at the top of the decorative band at Mshatta was constrained because of acute angles, which forced a head to become a metonymic symbol taking the place of a larger human body. The head dominates the lion because it is higher, but it would not be unwarranted to consider a kinship between the human and the animal.

The image of a human placed atop a lion might also be a reference to King Solomon's gold and ivory throne, which had a lion flanking each arm, and six lions guarding each of its steps.³¹⁵ In its configuration, it also resembles Sasanian silver plates, which depict a shah seated above two lions (Figure 126). Another possibility is that the face represents the sun, as part of an auspicious astrological symbol of the sun in Leo.³¹⁶ This was seen as an extremely fortunate conjunction of planets, and has its corollary in later metalwork, such as a late twelfth/early thirteenth-century ewer from Herat (Figure 127). The body of the ewer is decorated with signs of the zodiac, including a depiction of the sun in Leo (Figure 128). James Allen has suggested that this and other images on the ewer are symbolic of the battle between darkness and light.³¹⁷ If true, a depiction of Leo on Mshatta's façade may have had additional meaning within the context of Zoroastrianism. A fourth-century silver Sasanian plate, labeled 'The Triumph of

³¹⁴ Robert Hamilton notes the similarity between the clothing on the statue at Khirbat al-Mafjar and Parthian Hatra, Taq-i-Bustan and an image of Khusraw on a silver bowl in the Hermitage museum, Hamilton 1959, p. 230.

³¹⁵ The *Bible*, I Kings 10:18-20 and Chronicles 9:17-19 *apud* Priscilla Soucek, 'Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor?' *Muqarnas* 23 (1993), pp. 109-134.

³¹⁶ I owe this idea to Dr. Marcus Milwright.

³¹⁷ James Allen, *Islamic Metalwork: The Nuhad es-Said Collection* (London: Sotheby, 1982), p. 53..

Dionysos', contains what may be the same imagery, in the form of a stylized sun held above a lion that is drinking from a vessel (Figure 129). In their placement at the bottom of triangles, drinking out of fountains, the lions of Mshatta's façade emulate the configuration of this Sasanian plate. Furthermore, the vintaging scene of the plate, with its vine scroll and Dionysiac theme, has strong parallels at Mshatta. In this one portable object we have much of the iconographic palette used to carve the western side of the limestone façade.

The lion at Mshatta might appear calm, but for visitors to Islamic palaces, this animal was meant to instill a very opposite feeling: terror. This was the effect intended for two envoys of the king of China who brought a claim for land tax to the Samanid ruler Nasr ibn Ahmad ibn Isma'il ibn Ahmad ibn Nuh ibn Asad in 938 CE.

Then they reached the lion keepers and saw the lions with gold collars (*qala'id*) and chains (*salasil*), their attendants standing [by]. The envoys were completely confused. The chamberlains led them on, saying to the interpreter, "Tell them to have no fear, the lions are trained." When they came to the first group of keepers, their souls almost departed from them with fear. When they reached the chamberlains, they kissed the ground and greeted them in the manner appropriate for kings, but each chamberlain prostrated himself and rubbed his cheek and forehead in the soil (*turab*), saying that he is [only] the dog of the slaves of the Lord of Princes.

Then they took them by the arm to lead them to the second group of keepers (*hajabah*). The lion keepers moved the lions behind [the envoys], who fainted and soiled themselves. So they brought them rosewater (*ma' al-ward*) and camphor; they sprinkled the rosewater on their faces and made them inhale the camphor.³¹⁸

Physical and emotional reactions may here be exaggerated, but that does not matter. It is the desired, and not necessarily achieved, effect that is being described. This was not lost on the carvers of Khirbat al-Mafjar's statuary, who depicted the lions at the feet of the human figure in an overtly fierce manner, as is easily recognizable in photographic images and in the words of Hamilton.

³¹⁸ Qaddumi 1996, pp. 160-161.

The figure stood on a pedestal, the front of which was carved in relief with two squatting lions looking to the front and glaring fiercely. Their tails, passing between their hind legs, were held aloft and framed an eight-pointed medallion of split palmettes round a central daisy.

These beasts, too, were washed over with golden-brown paint.³¹⁹

If Mshatta's lions were to be enhanced with the same gold-brown colour, they would have stood out from the façade to a similar, if lesser, extent than rosettes decorated in gold leaf.

In terms of the formal composition of the statuary at Khirbat al-Mafjar, what is important is the contrast between the frighteningly animated faces of the lions and the composed visage of a human that is believed to have been attached to the statue at one time.³²⁰ The figure has little concern for the creatures at his feet. His calm confidence echoes that of the keepers described in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, who were in control of the conveniently chained lions in their charge, without much cause to worry. The *amir* or *khalifa* for whom they were working would most certainly not have wanted to appear perturbed.

The comfortable relationship between a *khalifa* and otherwise fearsome animals is elaborated in the prelude to the encounter between the Chinese envoys and the lion keepers.

Then came the gilded throne (*sarir*), which was studded with precious stones. The crown was placed on the throne, and Nasr was seated at the lower forefront (*sadr*) of the throne, with the men of religion. Over him he had a quilt (*duwwaj*) stuffed with [fine] feathers from the temples of pheasants (*tadruj*). Its exterior was of heavily embroidered [or encrusted] (*muthqal*) black pure silk (*khazz*). Under the blanket he placed two lions, leaving their heads out. Both were trained, and each of them rested its head on Nasr's thigh. Earth was set beneath the carpet on which he was seated. He ordered the lions'

³¹⁹ Hamilton 1959, p. 229.

³²⁰ Hamilton inferred that the statue, including the head, was situated in the central niche above the entrance to the bath because of the smaller size of the two side niches, which would not have allowed the display of sculpture of this size. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-102, 228.

attendants [to come so] that, when the envoys reached them and passed by one group of keepers, to move the lions behind them.³²¹

Had the envoys known the lions were so well trained, they might not have been as terrified. We can imagine the lion seated atop the rosette at Mshatta as equally well trained, and as calm as the lions resting on ibn Nasr.

Hamilton believed the statue of the human figure at Khirbat al-Mafjar was directly linked to the patron of the palatial complex, but he questioned whether it was a direct representation of a living person, or an emblem of an institution. Certain that it stood for a ruler, “for the lions were the attribute of sovereignty”, he made the further inference that the label *khalifa* could be applied based on the evidence of a royal symbol on an object brought to his attention by Oleg Grabar. This was a lead seal found at Gezer, produced during ‘Abd al Malik’s reign. It was stamped on the reverse with two facing lions underneath the word “*filastin*”. From this, he reasoned that in the region of Umayyad Palestine, a group of two facing lions was a form of heraldry officially associated with the *khilafa*.³²² This conclusion is based on just one small object, but if it is correct there is reason to apply it to the persistent imagery on the western wing of Mshatta’s façade. If it is an Umayyad building and the iconography of facing lions was in the employ of the highest levels of Umayyad authority, then part of Mshatta’s decoration may be ascribed to a repeated stamp of the *khilafa*. In place of the word “*filastin*” is the more generic symbol of royal authority, the rosette. In the case of the last triangle on the left, one could suggest that an area other than Palestine, perhaps an alternate principality, was being referred to by the Phrygian capped head. On the other

³²¹ Qaddumi 1996, p. 160.

³²² Hamilton 1959, p. 231.

hand, the more eastern choice of headgear could have been adopted as representative of rulership in general.

Hisham has been associated with Khirbat al-Mafjar because of the appearance of his name on a fragment of marble found *in situ*.³²³ Accepting that the complex was likely built during the reign of the *khalifa* Hisham, Hamilton suggests that the bath house fits with the character and career of Walid ibn Yazid, or Walid II, who may have had it constructed while *amir*.³²⁴ He is careful to do this only after presenting a series of important, but mainly unanswered questions about the statue of the human figure: was it a portrait or a symbol of an institution? Did it depict the reigning *khalifa* or the personified concept of Umayyad succession? Was it the *khalifa* or just a *khalifa*?³²⁵ The difference might have been of little concern to the spectator, for whom the symbol and the person of the *khalifa* might have been the same, whereas it could have been a consideration for the owner of the bath, on whose orders the statue was created.³²⁶ I have taken into account this type of distinction with the façade of Mshatta, whose meaning may have differed between the patron and the viewer, regardless of whether or not this was consciously desired.

Hamilton asks a final series of questions about the association between the statue and the building's owner, who may not have been the sovereign. Did the statue confer princely approbation? Did it display loyalty to the *khalifa*? Was it a sign of royal ownership? If not, did it possess talismanic virtue for a Muslim owner?³²⁷ These well-

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 231-232.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

placed questions may be asked of the human face on Mshatta's façade, which is even less clearly a depiction of the ruler of the Umayyad *khilafa*.

Views from the centre

Returning to Clermont-Ganneau's idea of a progression that works from right to left, we must ask ourselves if the practical necessities of the building and the basic geometric principles that govern its structure favour such a reading. Why in a structure with so many dualistic components and symmetrical subdivisions into two (with minor variations) would the façade not follow the rules of the architectural fabric that supports it? There are two semi-octagonal towers at the doorway, and just as they affect the reading of the façade from right to left, so do they affect a reading from left to right (Figure 130). As mirror images of each other, they offer a compelling case for a binary reading of the façade. Two readings may be performed from one extremity to the other, but in doing this, not only is there repetition, but one ignores the building's central axis. If we are to begin a reading of the façade from the eastern or western end, are we not more justified in ending this reading at the central doorway? Equally plausible is a reading that begins from the centre and progresses outwards in both eastern and western directions.

Based on the plan of Mshatta (Figure 35), the floor plan begins anew on opposite sides of the central axis, in an image that is reflected, if also somewhat distorted. While the façade may have deviated from this trend, it is more likely that it echoed the spatial relationships on which the building was founded. As we shall see after a closer observation of the façade, the ornamental band is linear and unitary in its zigzag band,

but its two sides present two separate but symmetrical messages. Just as the plan indicates a slightly different configuration of rooms on one side of the axis when compared to the other, so does the façade do the same with its imagery. All of Mshatta hinges on the axis, which is also directly correlated to the ceremonial route within the complex. It is possible that the ceremonial route outside the building may have progressed parallel to and alongside the enclosure wall as the palace was approached. This would have permitted a reading of the façade beginning at one end, but the reading would have ended half way through, once the entrance was reached.

If we are to take into consideration the royal ceremonials recounted in textual sources, whether pertaining to the courts of the ‘Abbasids, Umayyads, Byzantines or Sasanians, a singular reading of the façade becomes suspect. What should remain linear is the position of the viewer along the central axis, and the perspective this placement affords. In observing the outside enclosure wall from a North-South route, irrespective of the distance from the building, it is a bipartite arrangement of the façade that presents itself most readily. This accords with the effect of grouping military personnel into two subsets around the entrance to a palatial compound. At the *Chalke* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ description, these subsets were not only differentiated militarily, but also culturally, one side including ethnically Turkish and Russian soldiers.³²⁸ Although they fronted the vestibule of the Imperial Palace, Mango established their position based on their closeness to two additional pieces of architecture: the Numera (the Baths of Zeuxippus) and the vault of the Milion.³²⁹ The *Book of Gifts and Rarities* describes

³²⁸ Mango 1959, p. 98.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98. Another example of this division in two may be found in a fresco from the audience hall of the Ghaznavid Southern Palace at Lashkari Bazar, which depicts a Turkish guard divided into two groups of 2000. It is described in Daniel Schlumberger and Janine Sourdél-Thomine, ‘Lashkari Bazar: une

dualistic groupings as well, but instead of defining the division of these two groups according to the main axis of a building that separates them, they are defined by their position relative to the *khalifa*. Given that the *khalifa* was placed at the apex of a ceremonial route, the two practices are very close.

Seeing double

While the person of the *khalifa* was given exclusive attention in textual sources, the experience of a palace like Mshatta and all that this involved – architecture, decoration, people – was based on the separation of observable phenomena into two parts. In the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, groupings of people within the throne room are established by their location to the ruler’s left or right. According to the “Chapter on Notable Days and Gatherings on Special Occasions and Crowded Festivities”, the Sasanian shah Khusraw II would place on either side a specific group of people when receiving a plaintiff.

The king would place on his right a hundred young boys (*ghulam*) from among the sons of kings, whom he had dressed in colored brocade clothes and short tunics [with short sleeves] (*qaratiq*); around their waists [they wore] girdles of red gold (*dhahab ahmar*) studded with various precious stones. On his left side stood the sons of his representatives in the various frontiers of the kingdom (*marazibah*), wearing short tunics [with short sleeves] (*qaratiq*), with girdles (*manatiq*) around their waists and [holding] in their hands gilded iron poles (*a'midah*). The king had forty chosen slave girls, twenty seated on his right side and twenty on his left, [holding] musical instruments in their hands, [decked in] the most beautiful adornments (*zinah*) and most perfect attire (*ziyy*). Interpreters were [also there] in the king’s presence.³³⁰

In this instance, gender affected the distinction between the shah’s right and left. The “slave girls” demonstrated uniformity across both sides, if divided into two equal

résidence royale Ghaznevide et Ghoride’, in *Memoires de la délégation archéologique Française en Afghanistan*, vol. 18 (Paris: Boccard, 1978), 1A *L’Architecture*, pp. 61-64, which suggest a Sasanian influence, and *Planches*, pls. 121-124.

³³⁰ Qaddumi 1996, p. 147.

groups, but for the male gender, the shah chose to place members of the aristocracy on his right and more remote delegates from the fringes of his empire on his left. In addition to these two groups being distinguishable by their dress, they also represent different strata within the upper echelons of Sasanian society. The sons of kings were presumably the higher ranking individuals within the shah's entourage, brought close by their physical position during rituals, but also by virtue of their noble birth and ties of kinship. Grouping them together in a specific location relative to the sovereign might have been influenced by a superior regard for positions oriented to the ruler's right hand. Another silver Sasanian plate illustrates this type of scene (Figure 131). In addition to depicting lions at the ruler's feet, as in the example noted above (Figure 126), it portrays two groups flanking the ruler's side. In this regard, it displays simultaneously some of the imagery used to decorate Mshatta's façade and aspects of court ceremony that were likely in use during the Umayyad period.

Did the two sides of Mshatta's façade also evince such a distinction, borrowed and adapted by the Muslim conquerors of the Sasanian Empire? From the perspective of the *khalifa*, when seated in the throne room and facing south to receive guests, the western half of Mshatta falls to the right. This is the same side that possesses the repeated imagery of facing lions. Assuming the right side of the *khalifa* was superior and that the lion imagery symbolizes Umayyad rule, the western side of Mshatta's façade is aligned with the Umayyad aristocracy. To borrow Hamilton's idea, this might not be a reference to a specific region of Umayyad rule or a specific ruler. It could represent a

general assemblage of Umayyad *umara* subservient to the *khalifa*, or the very idea of Umayyad monarchic authority.³³¹

Applying this method of interpretation to the eastern wing of the façade could, in turn, lead to a separate association of specific imagery with the left hand of the *khalifa*. The representatives of the frontier regions of Khusraw's realm stood to his left in the passage quoted above. At Mshatta, they are replaced by representations of Khusraw's former realm itself, which had turned into an outlying appendage of the Umayyad Empire. Under this hypothesis, the winged palmettes on the eastern portion of Mshatta's façade could be linked to the winged crowns of the Sasanian rulers.³³² One could also make an association with a winged figure found at the top of a Sasanian silver plate, which depicts two lions flanking a drinking vessel (Figure 132), or the winged horses facing each other on a Byzantine copy of a Sasanian silk (Figure 133). The silk is one of many that demonstrate the application of textile decoration to stone carving at Mshatta. Its winged horses are evident on the western portion of the façade. Should the eastern portion of the façade have been observing a ban on animal imagery, its winged palmettes could also be explained as mythological animals with all but the wings removed.

Taking a particularly distinct example of one of these palmettes from the facing triangle on the eastern semi-octagonal tower (Figure 135, detail), it is tempting to see in the stem that supports the palmette a pole akin to those described in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*. It might also represent the *qadib* (baton) held by the *khalifa* during ceremonial

³³¹ For more recent versions of this idea, see Nasser O. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 123.

³³² See Oleg Grabar, 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', in *Jerusalem: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, Volume IV* by Oleg Grabar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 1-46. (First published in *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 19-34)

occasions.³³³ Could it be that the pairing of the human face with the lion, one superimposed on the other, is comparable to this pairing of a winged crown and a pole, one also superimposed on the other?

In addition to considering the façade as composed of two equal sized parts, one could also consider the two southward facing sides of the semi-octagonal towers (Figures 134, 135) as standing in for the two symbolic sides of the *khalifa*. As Bab al-Nasr has shown us, the facing sides of buttressing towers are prioritized as locations for emblematic imagery on gate-like structures. On the southward facing side of Mshatta's western entrance tower, the scene is more symmetrical than most, with one of the most clearly presented images of leonine iconography (Figure 134). Its two lions have the same manes and facial features, with two separately sprouting vines growing behind them like trees. The counterpart on the south side of the other tower displays the already noted image of a winged palmette on a stem. In these two triangles, we have the two main representative images of the façade.

Dar al-Harb and Dar al-Imara

The splitting of decoration into two halves for the purpose of analysis has been applied in the study of other early Islamic palatial complexes. The presumed position of the *khalifa* within an architectural setting and the ensuing extra-corporeal division of his two sides is at the centre of Richard Ettinghausen's interpretation of a mosaic from the bath hall at Khirbat al-Mafjar (Figure 136). The mosaic's coloured *tesserae* fill a semi-circular floor space in an appendage to the main bath building (Figure 137). Based on its form and opulence, the room was ascribed the label *diwan* by Hamilton. This choice of

³³³ See Sauvaget 1947, p. 131.

word arose from his belief that the apsidal area fulfilled a functional role as an audience hall or throne room within courtly life.³³⁴ In his later book, *Walid and His Friends*, he would refer to it as a *bahw*, where the *khalifa* could sit, screened in by a curtain.³³⁵ With his back to the apse, the *khalifa* would have had at his right two gazelles grazing peacefully from leaved branches, and on his left the contrasting scene of a gazelle being attacked by a lion. Ettinghausen read this image as a pictorial expression of the polarity between the *Dar al-Islam* (“the Abode (or Realm) of Islam”), during which the *khalifa* reigned in peace, and the *Dar al-Harb* (“the Abode of War”).³³⁶ He supported his argument with reference to similar imagery in mosaics from Antioch, textual evidence from the Gospel of St. Matthew with pastoral Palestinian origins (Matthew 25: 31-46), a third-century Christian sarcophagus, and a sixth-century wall mosaic from the Arian phase of S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.³³⁷

The evidence is all decidedly Christian. Obviously aware of the constraining effects of a set of examples limited by faith, Ettinghausen then considered the cultural context of the *diwan* image. In doing this, he shifted from typological to ethnographic methods.

This same arrangement must have been at once clear to any Arab. To this day in his daily life the right hand is the proper, good and clean one, while the left is considered improper and unclean. Right and left are even significant in warding off the evil eye; when Arab boys begin to wear earrings, in order to look like girls, only the right lobe is pierced, for the left is associated with bad luck.³³⁸

Would this association hold sway for the historical viewer of the mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafjar? Could this viewer have distinguished between the right of the *khalifa* and the

³³⁴ Hamilton 1959, pp. 63-64.

³³⁵ Hamilton 1988, pp. 38-42.

³³⁶ Richard Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: Three Modes of Artistic Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 45.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

audience's right without confusing the two? A more recent interpretation of the mosaic by Doris Behrens-Abouseif addresses this problem of orientation. For someone situated within the apse and facing outward, the whole image is upside-down, since the tree has its roots on the outer edge of the composition.³³⁹ One might wonder how much of the actual image would have been visible from either perspective if someone – a *khalifa*, or anyone else for that matter – was sitting or standing on top of it.

Behrens-Abouseif also believed that the hidden and private location of the room denied it the more public function of a ceremonial throne room.³⁴⁰ She nonetheless accepted the notion of a contrasting association between the right and left, and supported this with more culturally relevant examples from the Umayyad period, notably excerpts from two poems by Walid II that were included in the appendices to *Walid and His Friends*.³⁴¹ One refers to a running animal: “We caught and would have killed an antelope / That ran auspicious [*sic*] from the right”.³⁴² The other to a drinking ritual: “Pass the cup round to the right / Don’t pass it to the left!”.³⁴³

In Behrens-Abouseif's reversal of the orientation of the mosaic, the lion falls on the right-hand side. Providing further examples of poetry, she makes the additional claim that the lion is auspicious because of its association with masculinity.³⁴⁴ The gazelle, in turn, evokes the female, giving the entire composition an erotic meaning of sexual conquest, which is extended to the intertwining branches of the tree and even the private

³³⁹ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, ‘The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafjar’, *Muqarnas* 14 (1997), p. 14.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁴² Robert Hamilton, *Walid and His Friends: an Umayyad Tragedy (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art VI)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 168, appendix 3; p. 195, no. 101.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 122, appendix 3; p. 188, no. 64.

³⁴⁴ Behrens-Abouseif 1997, pp. 14-15.

function of the room.³⁴⁵ Mshatta's facade may just as easily be subject to these varied readings, since many of its triangles present animals in two groups, separated by vegetation growing from a single source within the centre of the triangle's base. At Mshatta, the right side of these images is determined somewhat differently, because the triangles are raised vertically from the flat ground.

It is difficult to say whose point of view is the correct one. It might very well be that two points of view are incorporated into Umayyad palatial design, which fits conveniently with the binary philosophy that pervades Mshatta. Discounting the differences in perspective between the *khalifa* and his visitors, both the host and his guests have one thing in common: they cast their glances from points on a central axis, all of which offer views of two similar but ultimately distinguishable sides of the complex. If there is a connection between the dualistic groupings of humans participating in royal ceremonies and the architecture that formed their backdrop, it is imperative that we consider a reading of the façade that is taken from a position in line with the entrance and the route that follows into the throne room. This is the point of observation that allows most readily a balanced perception of two halves of the palace, and two halves of its fronting façade.

A ceremonial cortege proceeding towards Mshatta in the direction of the entrance and aligned with the main axis would have been offered a simultaneous view of both wings of the façade. This possibility would have disappeared at closer distances, when the subsidiary carvings come into focus but the two sides of the ornamental band are not observable in their entirety due to the obscuring effects of the abutting towers (Figure 138). The inability to see parts of the facade emphasizes the triangles that remain visible,

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

particularly those that frame the eastern and western ends of the decorated band, which we have observed, and those that directly surround the doorway. They are not all frontally placed, but they remain observable until the threshold is crossed. Those located to the immediate left and right of a viewer who is about to pass through the doorway demand attention (Figures 139, 140). Because they are perpendicular to the approaching viewer's line of sight, they are difficult to perceive from a distance. Once the more private space of the palace precinct is about to be entered, they become more visible with a turning of the head.

The triangle on the viewer's right (Figure 141) is remarkable for the intricacy of its carving and the forethought required to execute its many curled tendrils and finely detailed leaves and grapes. It is unremarkable because it lacks identifiable images apart from repetitive vegetal motifs. Of this vegetal ornament, Strzygowski noted that the stem of the plant stays thin throughout instead of tapering after it shoots from the vase at its root.³⁴⁶ In Creswell's words, the goal was uniformity, "everything in fact being done to give an even effect to the whole field".³⁴⁷ This is in contrast to the opposite triangle on the viewer's left (Figure 142), which emphasizes figural imagery. The triangles that follow further to its immediate west present animals on a solid linear base. Here, however, the bending vines define the positions of the figures. Much of the space is taken up by animals, human and otherwise, which are encircled by tendrils in a manner comparable to the inhabited vine scrolls decorating many mosaic floors in Bilad al-Sham. Creswell offers the following description based on a photograph taken in the Staatliche Museen:

³⁴⁶ Strzygowski 1904, p. 314.

³⁴⁷ Creswell 1969, p. 601.

This is the first triangle without a chalice. Two thick vine stems grow directly out of the ground in the centre, cross each other, and form two large central and four smaller circles as in D, F, and G. Each of the two central circles contains a quadruped looking outwards, but they have weathered badly and it is difficult to say what they are. The filling of the left lower circle has half crumbled away, but the circle above it contains a bird. The right lower circle contains a small, roughly executed human figure, striding outwards and carrying a basket full of grapes, whilst the upper circle is filled with a large five-pointed vine leaf on which are three grapes at the point of junction with the stalk. Nearly half the upper triangle has weathered away, but it appears to have contained a bird. The kernel of the rosette has suffered badly, but Schulz's reconstruction [...], which agrees with Brünnow's description, appears to be justified.³⁴⁸

It is not quite the first triangle without a chalice, even if we read the façade from left to right. Two others make an earlier appearance: the westernmost triangle (Figure 117), and the third triangle from the left (Figure 143). However, it is the first triangle that does not contain a chalice after a long sequence of triangles that display this feature prominently.

The two vine stems that are then described as crossing each other are loosely comparable to the tree in the lion-gazelle mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafjar, whose imagery Behrens-Abouseif interpreted as erotic. Creswell identified this triangle based on the absence of a chalice, but it may be further distinguished by the two central animals that are facing away from each other. Nowhere else does this occur. If the purported symbol of Umayyad rule in Palestine was two facing lions, then this image is its opposite. Could it be a message about the nature of the rule of the *khalifa* at the time, even if he were not the direct patron of Mshatta? To address this question, we should look at more than just the central portion of the triangle in isolation from its surrounding elements.

In the right corner is a human figure holding a basket full of grapes. The woven strands that make up this basket are evident in one of Brünnow's photographs (Figure 144). The human is cornered by the angle of the triangle, unaware of the animal to the rear. Unlike the triangle with the human face in a Phrygian cap, here the beast is in a

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 600.

lively and dominating state. If this is a depiction of a threat to a human, there has been no attempt at personification in the form of a gazelle. This might be because the human is male, although the wide hips and large buttocks of the figure also conform to evocations of the female ideal in statuary of women found at the site, one of which is in the National Archaeological Museum, 'Amman, and two of which are in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Figures 145, 146, 147 respectively). The statues conform to the physical type of woman known during the *khilafa* of 'Abd al-Malik as *qu'd al-nikah*, "a woman with well-creased buttocks and heavy breasts, full in flesh, every part of her body pressing some other part".³⁴⁹ Another explanation is that the figure is meant to be a *putto*, which is depicted as a baby with a large head in Late Antique mosaics, such as at the church of Santa Costanza in Rome. *Putti* are often associated with vintaging scenes, not only in Late Antique art, but also in Sasanian silverware, such as a sixth-century bottle (Figure 148), whose inhabited vine scroll is filled with birds in the same manner as at the façade of Mshatta.

As Brünnow's photograph indicates, much of the triangle had weathered badly decades before Mshatta's façade was struck by a bomb during the Second World War. The upper portion of the rosette in particular is heavily worn. Several photographs display people standing on top of the enclosure wall right above this triangle, as happened when Gerturde Bell visited the site (Figure 149). It is conceivable that the rosette and that of its neighbouring inverted triangle were used as foot steps to ascend the façade. The poly-lobed rosette, being lower, would have provided an anchor for the foot on its upper side, while the higher octagonal rosette would have acted as a step on its lower portion. This is further evidence for the impractical nature of the palace's design.

³⁴⁹ Hillenbrand 1982, p. 17. Source unknown.

A completely fortified structure would hardly provide such an easy incentive for the scaling of its walls, regardless of how high they were supposed to be.

Referring to the lower left corner of the triangle, Creswell observed that the filling of its vine circle had “half crumbled away”. He made no further attempt to interpret its contents, but a closer inspection of the details suggests that this may have been another human figure. This was not noticed by Brünnow. Huguenim’s illustration of the façade in *Die Provincia Arabia II* (Figure 150) did not identify any imagery within this portion of the triangle. Yet in Brünnow’s original photographs (Figure 151) and the present-day remnants in Berlin (Figures 152, 153), there is evidence for this figure being a male with his back to the corner. It is difficult to ascribe a sex to the figure given its poor state of preservation, but his anatomy is different from the other human in the corner: he is taller, has narrower hips, and is not crouched over like the basket holding figure. Moreover, when compared to the fragment of a male statue found at Mshatta (Figure 154), the two may be seen to follow the same conventions for depicting the male figure. The rough state of preservation of this figure is probably due to wear and aging, but there is also the slight possibility it was a victim of iconoclasm.

Unlike the figure in the opposite corner, this person is clearly being threatened. His knees are arched parallel to each other and in the direction of what is most likely a lion. The lion, in turn, is in an aggressive posture with its mouth open and its left paw raised. To counter this action, the human supports himself by standing on the circular tendril, and angling his left shoulder and arm towards the lion while defending his other side. Raised high above his head and as far as possible from the approaching lion is his right arm.

The side of the façade that contains this image corresponds with the right hand of the *khalifa*, but if this scene is a reflection of the *Dar al-Islam*, then all is not well. In its current poor state of preservation it is still possible to identify the object in the man's right hand. The faint traces of an outline and the large knob that forms its centre show it to be circular. Within the band of this disc are at least three visible dots, which imply it has a pearly border. It is a miniaturized version of the pearl-bordered roundels found in the final triangles on the western and eastern ends of the façade, and in turn on numerous textiles. Its size relative to the figure suggests that it represents a diadem. By virtue of its position as far as humanly possible from the aggressive lion, it is not only the male figure that is being threatened but also, and more importantly, the diadem. There is a twofold reversal of the serenity of the image of Umayyad rule found elsewhere. First, the lions are facing outward rather than inward, which is the case for the rest of the façade. Second, they are in no way dominated by human figures. Unlike the final triangle on the west, in which the human face differs from the lion in elevation, here the two are at a level position and have become proportionally closer in size.

The diadem of kingship

Mshatta's imagery has often been explained with the help of Sasanian antecedents, and here a very valid comparison with sculptural relief work from the Iranian plateau is necessary. On a rock carving from Naqsh-i Rostam, a highly schematized scene displays the investiture of Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, by the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda (Figure 155). There are no lions present, but both figures are astride horses that face each other just like the lions at Mshatta. At

the centre of the scene is a diadem, symbol of the act of investiture, which is held by Ahura Mazda and about to be grasped by Ardashir. A similar scene is found in a carved niche at Taq-i Bustan, where Khusraw II also receives a diadem, with part of its border beaded, from Ahura Mazda (Figure 156). Because the pageantry of ceremonies involving Khusraw was emulated during the early Islamic period, at least by the 'Abbasids, it is not unfounded to consider the imagery associated with the Sasanian shah's reign as influencing Umayyad architectural design, particularly of palaces, even if these two specific examples were not directly seen by the designers of Mshatta's façade. Portability would have played a role in the choice of imagery available to Mshatta's designers. More pertinent parallels exist between the human figure holding a diadem at Mshatta and Sasanian silverware, especially a silver dish that portrays a centrally-placed ruler with a diadem being proffered to him by a figure on his right (Figure 157), and a silver plate with an informal depiction of a Sasanian shah holding a diadem in front of a female figure (Figure 158).

Based on its position right beside the door, the triangle would be fresh in the minds of the visitors who had just passed inside the enclosure wall. As we have noted, textual descriptions of royal ceremonies indicate a conscious effort to frighten visitors with seemingly wild lions. If this association had not yet been made by the visitor, it would become much clearer if a lion were to appear during the later stages of a ceremony. From the point of view of the guest, the carved image of a human might have been nothing more than a mirrored reflection. Given that the lions face away, which is atypical for the façade, and that the human figure is oddly dynamic and diminutive when compared to the majestic Sasanian figures, the iconography of this triangle may have

been altered with the audience in mind. In this interpretation, the diadem belongs to the ruling class of the visitor, who might not necessarily have been an Umayyad. This being the case, the image reflects the relationships of the Umayyads to other dynasties, and more specifically the concept of a brotherhood of kings, which has been attributed to a fresco of six kings from Qusayr 'Amra. Should the image have been a veiled threat, which might be possible given the lion's aggressive stance towards the human figure, it anticipates later examples of coded language disguised as ornament. The carved images on a tenth-century ivory pyxis from Spain, including confronting animals, have been interpreted as a warning to Mughira, the brother of the *khalifa* Hakam II (r. 961-976), not to interfere with dynastic succession.³⁵⁰ That being said, one should exercise caution in reading too much into the carving at Mshatta, since the human figure's stance may simply be a form of *contraposto*, which was common during the Late Antique period.

In another triangle much further west on the façade (Figure 159) is an image whose configuration is largely similar to the rock carving at Naqsh-i Rostam. On close observation we can recognize that a platform of trampled animals is found in both instances. This is more readily apparent at Naqsh-i Rostam, where horses stand on top of figures that are clearly human, whereas at Mshatta, the trampled figures appear not to be so: the animal on the left resembles a hare, while that on the right is less clearly identifiable, although it could possibly be a hyena or a dog. Creswell did not notice these figures, or perhaps he did not see them as distinct from the vegetation to which they might have appeared attached, as if simply leafy addendae to the main vines.

In the middle, below the rosette, is a richly decorated amphora, out of which, to right and left, rise two vine stems which coil themselves into great circles, two large ones below

³⁵⁰ Francisco Prado-Vilar, 'Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets From al-Andalus' *Muqarnas* 14 (1997), pp. 19-41.

and a smaller one above, from which further tendrils rise up into the upper part of the triangle. The entire field thus forms a single whole for the first time. In each of the two middle circles stands a winged griffin-like animal facing the other; the left is four-footed and has a fox-like head with long pointed ears, whilst that to the right, with its clearly indicated mane, rather resembles a hyena, but it only possesses forelegs, for its hind-quarters merge into a mass like a cluster of grapes.³⁵¹

The griffins stand in a pose reminiscent of the horses bearing the Sasanian shah and the Zoroastrian god. If not making direct contact with the creatures under their feet, they are almost on top of them, with only the thin circular vine separating them. This vine acts more as a means of emphasizing the griffins than as a means of separating the scene into sections. Like the Sasanian rock carving, the overall image at Mshatta is symmetrical in the placement of its four main groups of figures. The adoption of the Sasanian iconographic tradition suggests that in this triangle at Mshatta the symbol of the griffin stands in for Umayyad supremacy, which is physically dominating any opponents. In this interpretation, the seated lion in the final triangle on the viewer's left, at the western extremity of the façade, displays the securing of rule after a successful elimination of conflict. This is only but one possible interpretation, but it demonstrates that on the western portion of Mshatta's façade there may be a progression of scenes from the palace entrance to the final triangle at the western end. Alternatively, given that the triangle with the dominated animals is still visible from the central axis when at close range to the entrance (Figure 160), its imagery may have been influenced by its visibility from the centre rather than its position in a sequence.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 599.

Animation in stone

It has been my choice to present these three triangles on the western portion of the façade as a foray into the idea that the decorated band is more than just pure ornament. If a message were intended, it would only be understood if its components were read in the right order. Moreover, the meanings of individual triangles within this message are greatly altered if viewed out of sequence. To determine the flow of the narrative, we must consider more than just the three triangles described above, which are separated by significant gaps. If a true linear narrative were projected onto Mshatta's facade, then one would have to find evidence for a progression from one triangle to its direct neighbour. The hint of this is present on at least two other triangles that have not yet been considered.

One of these is located on an inward facing side of the western semi-octagonal tower, which is in clear line of sight for the centrally placed viewer (Figures 160, 161). It is situated to the immediate west of the triangle containing two human figures, from which it differs because of its centrally placed chalice – the first of a series proceeding from west to east that has this feature. It is also the first triangle that contains a griffin, which drinks from the right side of the chalice. A lion does the same on the left. In the bottom corners, instead of humans, there are a lion on the right and, according to Creswell, “an animal difficult to identify” on the left.³⁵² The ears of this animal bear some resemblance to those of a creature that Creswell identified elsewhere as a hare (Figure 162)³⁵³, and to the trampled animal described above (Figure 163). The presence of this animal in numerous places may be the playful recasting of the same motifs in

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 600.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

varied positions, but it could also be the same animal in different stages of a trajectory. In the triangle presently in question, it is portrayed as uninhibited, while in triangle 7 West (Figures 159, 163), it is trampled and defeated.

Proceeding to the subsequent triangle on the west (Figure 164), two lions face a chalice, but they do not drink from an undisturbed pool of water. Directly in front of their open mouths are circular objects. Looking at the next triangle to the left (Figure 165), it becomes apparent that these two objects are not decorative extensions to the bowl. For in the place of plain spheres are the heads and extended bodies of two birds emerging from the water. In reaction to these newly present creatures, the lions are more overtly aggressive, not only in their bared teeth and open jaws, but in the raising of their paws, an action noticed by Creswell.³⁵⁴ Here, more than anywhere in the façade, is the indication of a conscious effort at narrative progression, and one that moves westward. Scanning quickly from right to left, the birds rise as if alive.

There is one problem with the simulated motion made possible by these two triangles. One of the triangles is placed on a side of the semi-octagonal tower that faces away from the central axis, and consequently does not come into full view of the visitor approaching Mshatta from the south. There are several reasonable explanations for this apparent oversight. The most obvious is that the façade's design did not take into account the obstructing effects of the enclosure wall's architecture, and in turn ignored the viewer. This would negate the idea that specific imagery was deliberately placed in prominent locations. Less obvious, but also plausible, is that the choice of imagery on these triangles was made specifically because of the obscuring effects of the towers. If a viewer on the central axis were not able to see all of the triangles, then that may be the

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

very reason for the high degree of repetition in some of their motifs. In the corners formed by the juncture between the western semi-octagonal tower and the wall, and on the tower itself, there is a very high frequency of confronting animals (Figure 109a). Rather than placing in this part of the façade a series of new images that would have been partly obscured, there may have been a conscious decision to display the same basic iconography, with variations in the types of animals chosen. This is not to say that the scenes of confronting animals are without meaning.

The scenic progression of the two triangles we have just analysed is confined to a limited area of the façade. Less evidence exists for a transition from triangle to triangle across the entire decorative band. That does not necessarily disprove the notion that the entire façade is a narrative. The decision to animate just two triangles within the façade reflects an overall sense of movement along the façade, even if this movement is not as clearly coordinated on the larger scale. As static as the weathered limestone remains, the façade is imbued with motion. Vegetation changes from space to space, about to explode through its geometric confines; humans and animals either languish or tense themselves in threatening poses; carefully delineated rosettes rapidly change their internal layout from one triangle to another.

Our efforts so far have been concentrated on reading the façade's western wing. There is a simple reason for this: figural imagery allows itself to be more readily distinguished. The eastern wing's almost exclusive focus on the vegetal makes the task of identifying patterns and compositional trends more difficult. For the human observer, it is far easier to recognize the outlines of animals than the leaves and branches of plants and fruits, which continue in almost unbroken links within each triangle. It may very

well be that the details of this part of the façade were not meant to be easily identified. It has been said several times that the presence of a mosque directly behind the wall justified the absence of figural imagery, although there are several animals directly to the east of the doorway (Figure 166), and the sections of purely vegetal imagery cover much more than just the region opposite the inner mosque's *qibla* wall.³⁵⁵

The façade's eastern blocks were probably left behind at the site because the absence of animal imagery did not make them attractive to the archaeologists who quarried the façade for their patrons. This may be why Clermont-Ganneau's reading from right to left jumps across this part of the façade without mentioning any significant changes. In his words, the vine is first represented in flowers and then gradually develops to various stages of maturity before the "beasts of creation" begin to invade.³⁵⁶ This interpretation is somewhat justified in that the first two triangles on the east are almost filled, if not with flowers, then with some form of bud that outnumbers the tendrils from which they sprout. The offshoots from the main vines grow in number and in complexity in the subsequent triangles on the west, eventually becoming thicker as the western wing of the façade is broached.

Something in this progression from east to west, however, is not quite right. The flowers at the beginning of this reading blossom before they have been given a chance to grow. At the larger level, the sequence Clermont-Ganneau described is not gradual when the ornamental band is viewed as a whole. The eastern and western wings of the façade do not fit into one linear story. They are unique in their separate uniformities, which

³⁵⁵ Hillenbrand believes the presence of these animals disproves the theory that figural imagery is absent from the eastern portion of the façade because of the mosque on its other side. Hillenbrand 1982, p. 28, f. 140. In strict terms, the portion of the façade which corresponds exactly with the southern wall of the mosque does not include any figural imagery.

³⁵⁶ Clermont-Ganneau 1906, p. 206.

emphasize the bipartite construction of the enclosure wall's decoration. Several descriptions of the eastern section of the façade mention its delicate quality in comparison to the west.³⁵⁷ Thin and tightly wound curls of vegetation fill a group of triangles that differ from the thick, almost branch-like vines on the west. This clear distinction is most visible in the abrupt change that occurs between the first complete triangle to the east of the entrance (Figure 167) and the half triangle that is squeezed to the side of the door frame (Figure 168). Instead of being considered part of the west or east sides of the façade, the half triangles should be combined into a separate entity: a central triangle separate from the rest of the façade. Their rosettes contain the same inner design, which unifies them.

Reading the eastern half of the façade

The eastern wing of Mshatta's façade may be uniform when compared to its western partner, but we can still find within it a sequential flow of imagery that begins from the building's centre outwards. After the similarities of the first two triangles east of the doorway, the third, which we have observed already, shows signs of something new. In the words of Creswell, "But in the centre is an object like a tree crowned with a winged palmette [...]. A smaller example of the same motif can be seen near the left corner."³⁵⁸ The object supporting this motif sprouts separately from the main vine, whose stem stands to its immediate west (Figures 135, 168). Crowning it is the winged

³⁵⁷ Tristram: "The side east of the gateway is without animal figures, excepting two on the panel next the gate. The façade is even more delicately sculptured than the other side, but with fruits and flowers only, festoons of vine leaves and grapes predominating." Vaillhé: "A droite, sauf le premier panneau, l'ornementation se limite à l'élément végétal; les animaux disparaissent, mais les rinceaux deviennent plus délicats, plus finement agencés: il y a là une curieuse évolution". Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, pp. 143-147.

³⁵⁸ Creswell 1969, p. 601.

palmette, which Creswell compares to a similar but smaller version in the left corner (Figure 169). This other example is not only smaller, but it also appears as if flying in the air, while still attached to the vine. In this sense, its winged appearance is taken almost literally, as it tries to lift itself from the more naturalistic elements of its surroundings. There is something here of the delightful sense of play in the manipulation of symbolic meaning.

Whatever the form of the winged palmettes in this triangle, their feathered wings are rooted in what look like innumerable bunches of grapes that dangle everywhere. It is no accident that the same thing occurs on the western wing of the façade. As quoted above, Creswell compared the posterior of a winged creature there to a cluster of grapes (Figure 170).³⁵⁹ The creature's left shoulder, which sprouts a feathered wing, is also composed of one of these clusters. This is even more significant, because it shows a typological trend of pairing grapes, or at least grape-like objects, with wings that grow from them. This may have been a means to avoid figural imagery on the eastern wing of the façade, although winged palmettes were used extensively in Sasanian art.

Winged crowns

Moving to the east is the next triangle, which had mostly fallen over when Brünnow visited the site, and was not included in Huguenim's drawings of the façade in *Die Provincia Arabia II* (see Figure 108a, triangle 4 East). It contained what Creswell labeled a "curious motif" that is repeated at least three times within the triangle (Figure 171).³⁶⁰ He compared it to the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock, and noted that Josef

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 599.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 601.

Strzygowski called it a “*Flügelpalmette*”, without explaining how the German word for winged palmette accounted for any distinction.³⁶¹ Certainly it is reduced in detail with simple lines that render it less naturalistic. Its smaller size allows it to fit inconspicuously into its surroundings without betraying the fact that it is an anomaly not present in the western section of the façade. These are, however, but matters of style. The *Flügelpalmette* and the winged palmette are structurally identical. Both possess a sheath that splits into two symmetrical leaves or wings. At their centre is a bud that sprouts a pointed tip. Two small leaves curl symmetrically from either side of the blossom’s base. These supposedly vegetal ornaments are comparable to the symbol of Sasanian royal power, the winged crown, which has also been identified in the vineal mosaics of the Dome of the Rock. In its simplest form, the crown exists as a diadem, either seen from the front (Figure 172/6-8), or from above (Figure 172/9-11). Of the frontal views, one type of crown from the octagon is structurally similar to the *Flügelpalmette* (Figure 173, right). Another type of mosaic crown from the drum of the dome’s inner octagon bears a particularly strong resemblance to the larger winged palmette at Mshatta (Figure 173, left). If the winged palmette stands in for griffin-like animals at Mshatta, then it is entirely possible that the same imagery at the Dome of the Rock was a non-figural means of portraying such creatures. The motifs at both buildings may have been derived from a standard Umayyad royal image of facing lions or other animals.

At the Dome of the Rock, the image has been connected to jeweled diadems, described by Grabar as “symbols of holiness, power and sovereignty in the official art of the Byzantine and Persian empires”, which are found exclusively on the inner octagon of

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 601, f. 3.

the drum.³⁶² While Marguerite van Berchem attributed their presence in that location to the glittering effect of a large amount of natural light that shines through the drum,³⁶³ Grabar promoted an alternative idea: the jeweled decoration was to surround a central, holy area.³⁶⁴ The logic works at the Haram al-Sharif, but can it be applied at Mshatta? If winged motifs are placed such that they surround a holy area, then at Mshatta this holy area is everything to the south of the façade. The presence of a *mihrab* on the inner side of the southern enclosure wall indicates the palace was consciously oriented towards Mecca. Its façade faces in a direction of reverence just like the inner drum of the Dome of the Rock. Should the ornamental band have been associated with *ikat* textiles, known to have adorned the Ka‘ba, a religious message may have been implicit in Mshatta’s decoration. However, the façade’s placement at the entrance of a secular building distinguishes it from the decoration on the centrally-oriented inner walls of one of the most sacred buildings of Islam.

The winged palmette may not have played as important a role as the more recognizable crowns in the most holy area of the Dome of the Rock. According to Grabar, the mosaics of the drum were redone by artists who misunderstood the original design and transformed it into something purely decorative.³⁶⁵ In spite of this possible misunderstanding, the winged palmettes of the present mosaics accord remarkably well with the entirety of the decoration, particularly because of the unifying feature of jeweled ornament. Whether gems or pearls, these jewels do not cater to any distinction between the natural and the artificial. They are even employed to form clusters of grapes (Figure

³⁶² Grabar 2005, pp. 23-24.

³⁶³ Marguerite van Berchem *apud* Creswell 1969, pp. 196-197.

³⁶⁴ Grabar 2005, p. 21.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21, f. 81.

174), which suggests that the transformation of organic objects into precious stones may have been intended for Mshatta's façade, where many parts of animals and fruits are formed by what appear to be grapes, whether depicted individually or in bunches. The addition of colour to Mshatta's façade may have assisted in rendering these grapes more like the gems of the Dome of the Rock's mosaics. It would also have allowed the small dots on the diadem held aloft by a human figure in the triangle near the entrance, as well as the pearled borders of the perfectly formed circles on either end of the façade, to take on the guise of jewels of a crown.

In an article on Mshatta's façade, Erdmann has compared the palmettes to standard depictions of crowned Sasanian rulers.³⁶⁶ The strength of this link is reinforced by the piece of *graffito* at Mshatta that depicts a human wearing a crown not much different from the winged palmettes on the façade (Figure 93). Erdmann attempted to associate this figure with the reign of a specific Sasanian shah.³⁶⁷ There was cause for this comparison, since Sasanian coinage minted by a ruler who placed his official portrait on the obverse may very well have provided the basis for the *graffito* and for the choice of how to carve the winged palmette on the façade.³⁶⁸ It was likely not a direct influence, but rather the influence of Arab-Sasanian coinage, which borrowed its imagery from some of the more renowned Sasanian rulers, notably Yazdagird III and Khusraw II. These coins were in common usage until the reforms of 'Abd al-Malik, which occurred only a few decades before Mshatta's construction, and until the 770s CE in some eastern regions. Doubtless, many would still have been in circulation in the early eighth century.

³⁶⁶ Erdmann 1954, pp. 242-245.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

³⁶⁸ I am grateful to Dr. Finbarr Barry Flood for the suggestion to consider numismatic sources for Mshatta's imagery.

The crowns displayed on many of these coins are of the feathered variety (Figure 175), which have a greater affinity to the decorations of the Dome of the Rock and Mshatta than other versions of royal Sasanian headgear.

A parallel effort to establish influences from Arab-Byzantine coinage on the imagery of Mshatta's façade, and the western wing in particular, is not as easy, since typological connections between these two forms of visual expression are not readily apparent. If evidence for this were to exist, it would give further weight to the notion that the façade displays two separate artistic traditions. Given that the administrative systems of the Byzantines and the Sasanians were absorbed into the newly conquered lands of the Muslim Empire, the concurrent borrowing of numismatic designs from two different cultures ought to have had its corollary in other artistic endeavours. Taking into account Mshatta's location in a region within close proximity to a plentiful tradition of Late Classical imagery, but somewhat more distant from the Iranian plateau, Sasanian metalwork and coins may have been the most readily available and convenient means of reference for those wishing to employ Sasanian imagery. Byzantine motifs, on the other hand, were found in more sources than just currency and other small portable objects, since some of the former lands of the Byzantine Empire, and their associated material remnants were now under the control of the Umayyad *khilafa*. Although the duality in pre-reform coinage may not be directly reflected in Mshatta's façade, we should not abandon the idea that the two separate cultural traditions of the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires were strong influences.

The next triangle in our reading from the centre outwards is the last complete triangle from the eastern segment of the façade that was taken to Berlin (Figure 176).

Apart from the left portion of the subsequent triangle (Figure 177), the remaining triangles have now largely disappeared, apart from the base moulding still *in situ* (Figure 178), and some fragments. Luckily, several series of photographs were taken before the disappearance of these triangles, most notably those used in Brünnow's *Die Provincia Arabia*.

In this last triangle that Creswell was able to scrutinize, many details remain unmodelled, but enough of the carving has been executed to allow us to conclude that it contained mainly naturalistic leaves and grapes, with no winged palmettes (Figure 179). It was positioned on the east face of the semi-octagonal tower, which removed it from direct view of anyone walking along the central axis. At the present day, the triangle is very difficult to observe given its closeness to one of the museum's walls. Its position on the outer side of the tower might explain the lack of any motifs that stand out from the vegetal background, although the triangle on the opposite side of the tower (Figure 167) was similarly devoid of non-naturalistic features in spite of its prominent position in direct view of the entrance.

The following triangle, with only its western side preserved in Berlin (Figure 180), is also composed primarily of vegetal imagery. There is one motif that stands out: a "*Flügelpalmette*". To its left is a circular branch of a vine scroll whose interior has been heavily damaged and whose details are difficult to recognize. The effect was the same for a central basin, which remains at the site in Jordan (Figure 181) and was also present in Brünnow's photograph (Figure 182). The damage is likely due to weathering, but it is an odd coincidence that it occurred in exactly the same location as in the triangle in which we identified the image of a human. In the unlikely event that this is also an

instance in which figural imagery was once present, the presence of such an image may be justified by the fact that it is not on the direct exterior of the mosque.

The following triangle (Figure 183) is given little attention by Creswell, who does not record two small rosettes within the subsidiary decoration. They are placed symmetrically in the left and right corners of the triangle. If there is a transformation of winged vegetal ornament from the centre eastwards, then perhaps it is also true that these rosettes fit into a changing pattern. Their position hints that they are the precursors of the larger and more geometrically precise roundels in the final triangle on the east (Figure 115).

The next triangle presents an image that on first sight is unlike anything within the entire façade (Figure 184). It appears prominently in part because of its unfinished state, which has allowed it to stand out from its surroundings more than originally intended. The bottom of this object is shaped like the basins on other triangles, but the remainder is formed by its merger with the vines that grow from it. Strzygowski compared the tendrils of this strange image to the tentacles of a cuttle-fish.³⁶⁹ The identification is a simile, but in making it, Strzygowski has addressed the willingness of Mshatta's designers to disturb the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate. In the symmetrical sprouting of its vines upward and outward, the motif's external form is nothing but an enlargement of the winged palmette in its variant forms, and in turn the feathered Sasanian crown. Better proof of this association comes from part of the internal mosaics from the drum of the Dome of the Rock (Figure 185). Both images are delineated in the same manner and contain the same stream of spherical objects within two main tendrils (Figures 186, 187). At Mshatta, a cluster of grapes appears to feed into the tubular structure of one of the

³⁶⁹ Strzygowski 1904, p. 317 *apud* Creswell 1969, p. 602.

tendrils. If this is a stylized allusion to the process of wine making, it conforms to Dionysiac readings of the façade. Alternatively, if the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock suggest that the grapes of Mshatta are precious stones, then this image exploits a blending of symbols and their respective meanings. Paradisiacal fruit produces the wine that satisfies princely pleasure and which transforms itself into the jeweled paraphernalia of regal authority.

The closeness in style of this notable motif at Mshatta and its equivalent at the Dome of the Rock is a strong indication that replication occurred based on patterns known to artisans working on more than one site. Bloom's hypothesis that the transmission of architectural ideas was made possible by the movement of *corvée* labour within Bilad al-Sham³⁷⁰ would support this argument with one contention: the decoration at Mshatta is carved into limestone, while that at the Dome of the Rock was formed by an assemblage of *tesserae*. If the same group of craftsmen were employed at the two sites, it must have included both masons and mosaicists. Guiding illustrations may have been required to transmute ornamental designs when applying them to different construction materials. The closeness of Mshatta's architecture, and also its decoration, to that found at other sites suggests that some form of recorded samples of the more complex decorative designs must have been carried to different construction projects within the lands controlled by the Umayyads. It is hard to imagine that the "cuttle-fish" motif at Mshatta was reproduced by culling a remembered experience. Pattern books, such as those owned by workshops of marble carvers and mosaicists, may have provided the means to decorate the façade with its more complex imagery.

³⁷⁰ Bloom 1993, pp. 22, 22.

Not forgetting our consideration of the position of the viewer, the triangle that holds this image is within line of sight of someone positioned on the central axis (Figure 138). It would only have passed out of sight at close range, at which point the entrance towers would have hindered its scrutiny. The visitor would have noticed it prior to the imagery directly flanking the doorway. Better to announce a palatial or royally sanctioned building from afar with a symbol that conforms to a standard established in the recent past. Like ‘Abd al-Malik, the patron of the Dome of the Rock, Mshatta’s patron may have wished to solidify his authority in the face of contention to his rule with a permanent work of architecture. We must also remember that the image is on the other side of the *qibla* wall of the palace mosque. With the façade being an unusual external reflection of decoration normally reserved for more private spaces, one of the decorative motifs that covers the most internal and sacred areas of the Dome of the Rock is here turned inside out in conjunction with the holy space that falls on its other side, and perhaps the *qibla* to the south.

This leaves us with two triangles on the eastern wing. The first of these dispels any notions of a gradual narrative sequence. Apart from traces of circular vines, it is completely filled with many copies of the same simplified winged palmette, or “*Flügelpalmette*”, motif that we have previously observed (Figure 188). They sprout from the centre of the base and multiply throughout the rest of the triangle. Creswell described them as “tulip-like forms” and compared them to similar objects in the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock (see Figure 185) and a lintel from Qasr al-Tuba (Figure 189).³⁷¹ These very same motifs form decorative bands at the Dome of the Rock, further cementing the ornamental similarities between that site and Mshatta, where they are also

³⁷¹ Creswell 1969, p. 602.

placed in a linear order, but only directly under the rosette (Figure 190, left). Elsewhere, they are not left much room (Figure 190, right). In the preceding triangles to the west, the small winged palmettes grow in size. Here they grow in number.

The final triangle on the east reinforces this new sense of plenty (Figures 115, 191). The only vines that can be observed in it sprout from under a central circle that tramples them just like the defeated animals on the western wing of the façade (Figure 159). If this circular object, ringed with pearls like a diadem, is a symbol of authority, then its firm and weighty position above the crushed tendrils conveys another message of dominance. We have already noted the compositional similarities between this triangle and its opposite on the western end. The two may be seen as capping a progression from the central axis outwards. On the western side of the façade, the narrative began with early stages of tension, reinforced by the aggressive stances of lions and lion-like animals. Gradually, these frenetic scenes changed into ones of calm dominance by the victorious aggressors. On the eastern side of the façade, palmettes appeared infrequently at first, constrained by the vines to which they were attached. Moving to the east, they multiply and take flight, eventually gaining numerical superiority and usurping all the space they are given. As the beasts of the western wing of the façade changed in form and disposition, so did the palmettes on the eastern wing, as they became cross-pollinated with crown imagery.

CONCLUSION

It was for good reason that Ernst Herzfeld chose Mshatta to make his argument about the genesis of Islamic art. In this one structure, so many of the themes that enliven and, at the same time, confound the study of Umayyad architecture are present. Anyone who might be tempted to dismiss the secular buildings of the Umayyad period as merely derivative, aimlessly eclectic, and ill-suited to their intended purposes, will have a quick change of mind after a first-hand observation of the façade in Berlin. Much has been written about this museum piece and the site it was taken from, but comparatively little attention has been paid to the individual details of the ornamental band as part of a working building. From a methodology of formal analysis it has been possible to demonstrate the carvings were part of a carefully planned design. The façade's complexity is perhaps the reason many have avoided looking at the decoration of Mshatta in detail.

The façade as it was intended to be displayed works best with a visitor on the move. The distance between the viewer and the enclosure wall determines what patterns may be recognized. At first, the façade appears flat, as if on a level background. At this stage, the building's illusory qualities supersede its true physical nature. As the entrance is approached, the viewer recognizes that initial perceptions were not entirely accurate. New visual details accumulate in successive layers, guided by an axis that is parallel to the wall's outer surface. At close range, a perpendicular form of visual layering also occurs on either side of the building's processional axis, as the façade and the structure behind it are divided into eastern and western halves. Here, the layers do not pile one on top of another from the façade outwards. Instead, they accumulate in both directions

from either side of the doorway to the two extremities of the façade. The two wings of the façade roughly divide the figural from the vegetal, the Late Antique from the Sasanian, and the West from the East. Yet in doing so, they follow a similar compositional outline, with similar scenes occurring equidistant to the central axis of the building but on opposite sides of the doorway.

The decision to split the façade into artistically different halves likely had several causes. It may have been the result of how the building was to be approached. Should visitors have come from the west, a plausible scenario given that Zizya' and Qastal were in this direction, they would have been exposed to the figural imagery of the western wing of the façade before reaching the entrance. In this scenario, the eastern wing would be less significant, since it would have been observed only glancingly before the entrance was breached. This could explain the lack of figural imagery on the eastern portion of the façade. A visitor returning from the *hajj*, and coming from the south, would not have been presented with such a limited view. In this instance, the position of the mosque behind the enclosure wall is a better explanation for the absence of animals on the eastern wing of the façade.

As well as functional considerations, other factors contributed to the façade's composition. The wide-ranging motifs we have observed indicate a sophisticated culling of different cultural heritages. In attributing specific portions of the façade to cultural influences, however, we must be careful not to divest Mshatta of its Umayyad identity. Artists and stonemasons may have brought ideas from their cultures of origin, but they also had access to patterns more commonly available at the time. When speaking of influence both culture and mobility must be considered. Workers who were able to travel

long distances may have had a strong influence on the design of Mshatta's façade, but so did objects that were able to do the same. This is why so many images of Sasanian origin were carved in spite of the site's location in Bilad al-Sham.

Beyond the artistic efforts expended in the design and execution of the façade, the success of the composition is contingent on the viewer. Depending on the function of Mshatta, this viewer could have been a number of things: a religious person returning from the *hajj*, a local tribal member seeking audience with a member of the Umayyad ruling class, an envoy from a foreign empire on an official diplomatic visit. All three types of visitors could have come to Mshatta, whether the building was to be a palace, a fortified outpost, a *caravanserai*, or even a small city. The diversity of these backgrounds could not have been entirely anticipated. It is perhaps for this reason that images widely known through portable objects were employed. Oral tradition could also have played a part. Poetic evocations of buildings provided architects with an idea of how to plan their projects, but they also provided the viewer with preconceived notions that were brought when visiting new sites. Of greater importance than a building's actual construction was the way it was believed to have been constructed. In this respect, the tripartite plan that is emphasized in studies of Mshatta would have had little consequence for the spectator on foot. There is also the possibility that the façade could have been explained by a guide, in which case the viewer would have had the privilege of enhanced understanding.

Mshatta's façade does not appear to have a narrative that moves with regularity through each triangle. There is evidence for change and succession in some of its scenes, but there is also significant repetition of the same iconography, primarily facing lions and

winged palmettes. Although these images were widespread, their meaning within the context of the ornamental band at Mshatta may only have been fully understood by a cultured and intelligent viewer. This may not necessarily have been a consideration of Mshatta's patron and architects, who could have ignored the viewer when designing the structure. The *khalifa* may have had the only full grasp of the façade, and he might have wished this to be so. Mshatta's relief carvings are effective because they work in tandem with the surfaces they adorn. Architecture and its decoration were just accessories to the person of the *khalifa* and his entourage, who are the almost exclusive focus in descriptions of royal ceremonies.

If Mshatta were designed to serve chiefly for self-aggrandisement, then it fits the character of the two *khalifas* who have been suggested as the site's patron. Walid II has been given disproportionate attention because of his lavish lifestyle, but he does have legitimate claims to the site because of his early involvement in the area, particularly as overseer of the *hajj*, whose pilgrims passed by Mshatta. But Yazid II was also associated with the same region of Bilad al-Sham, as confirmed by a local inscription. Moreover, numismatic and epigraphic evidence from Mshatta, while without proper archaeological context, derives from the period of Yazid II's rule. The iconoclastic edict of 721 CE might rule out his patronage of a site replete in figural imagery but, as I noted, this was enacted chiefly on Christian images, and mainly crosses. Less disputable is Yazid II's initiation of external military campaigns and the rebellious events that took place in 'Iraq during his tenure as *khalifa*. These can be seen as having corollaries at Mshatta. The martial aspects of Mshatta's façade may reflect the state of conflict that came with Yazid II's territorial ambitions. Furthermore, the inclusion of Persian imagery on the eastern

wing of the façade, in the very cardinal direction of its origin, could address the fact that ‘Iraq was demanding the increasing attention of the Umayyads based in Bilad al-Sham. By prominently displaying imagery from the Persian areas of the Umayyad Empire, Yazid II could have announced his claim on the region.

In order to provide better evidence for the patronage of Mshatta, a more thorough study of the purpose of the *qusur* is required. Mshatta is now identified as a palace, but Sauvaget described the site as a city, within which was a mosque and a palace, otherwise identified as the audience hall.³⁷² He believed that, in this configuration, Mshatta was functionally identical to the city of ‘Anjar. Like the Umayyad *qusur*, ‘Anjar’s layout, which is framed by a rectilinear enclosure with four gates, has been compared to the *castrum* plan. The decoration of its palaces included triangles with facing animals and vessels sprouting vines.³⁷³ For this reason, the typological similarities between Mshatta and ‘Anjar that were observed by Sauvaget may be extended from the functional to the decorative.

The Umayyad dating of ‘Anjar has been questioned recently due to a lack of archaeological work, as well as the absence of any reference to Umayyad patrons in the Arabic sources.³⁷⁴ Syriac and Greek chronicles record a *madina* (city) called ‘Ayn Jara that was founded by al-Walid I, whose rule ended in 715 CE.³⁷⁵ These chronicles

³⁷² Jean Sauvaget, ‘Les ruines Omeyyades de ‘Andjar’ *Bulletin du musée de Beyrouth* 3 (1939), pp. 7-8.

³⁷³ See Barbara Finster, ‘Vine Ornament and Pomegranates as Palace Decoration in ‘Anjar’, in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. by Bernard O’Kane (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 146, 149. A tympanum from the Great Palace (Finster 2005, fig. 9.4) has greater affinity to the Bet Alpha synagogue mosaic than to Mshatta (I owe this comparison to Dr. Finbarr Barry Flood), but the fragment of a frieze from the small palace (*Ibid.*, fig. 9.8) is remarkably similar to Mshatta’s façade.

³⁷⁴ See Hafez K. Chehab, ‘On the Identification of ‘Anjar (‘Ayn al-Jarr) as an Umayyad Foundation’ *Muqarnas* 19 (1993), pp. 42-48.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

attribute the construction of ‘Anjar to al-Walid I’s son, al-‘Abbas.³⁷⁶ al-‘Abbas did not succeed his father, but he eventually gained the favour of Yazid II, who allowed him some authority in Asia Minor.³⁷⁷ Even accepting only the association of ‘Anjar with al-Walid I, the site is close in date to Yazid II’s accession to power. Interestingly, ‘Anjar was also left unfinished.³⁷⁸ There are other comparable examples, such as early Islamic Ayla, a *madina* whose circular towers buttress a quadrangle in the same manner as at Mshatta. These similarities deal only with one particular type of architectural complex, the *madina*, the ascribing of whose function to Mshatta has become contentious.³⁷⁹ Mshatta might not have been designed as a *madina*, but it may have been functionally similar. That we know so little about its intended role indicates that the site needs to be understood within a wider architectural context than just the well-known palatial structures to which it is often compared. It is only with a more thorough study of the functional purposes of the Umayyad *qusur* that we will fully understand their decoration.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁷⁸ The interruption of work may have been due to al-Walid I’s death, or simply cold weather. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-46.

³⁷⁹ The text written by Severus ibn Muqaffa’ that has been used to identify Mshatta referred to a city. The disavowal of this identification has been based, in part, on the belief that Mshatta cannot have fulfilled the role of a *madina*. See, for example, Hillenbrand 1981, p. 67, which argues that Mshatta is too small to be a *madina* and too large to be a *badiya* or *hira*. Bisheh 1987, p. 193, f. 4, notes that “the term *Medina* (city) which al-Walid is alleged to have started to build in the desert does not fit al-Mshatta, where no settlement exists even if the term is understood in the narrow sense of its usage”.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1 Map of Jordan. Google Earth, screen capture 5 May 2007.



Figure 3 Satellite images of Mshatta. Google Earth, screen captures 9 April 2007.



Figure 4 Looking south toward the Queen 'Alia International Airport from within Mshatta.



Figure 5 View from within Mshatta of an aeroplane landing.

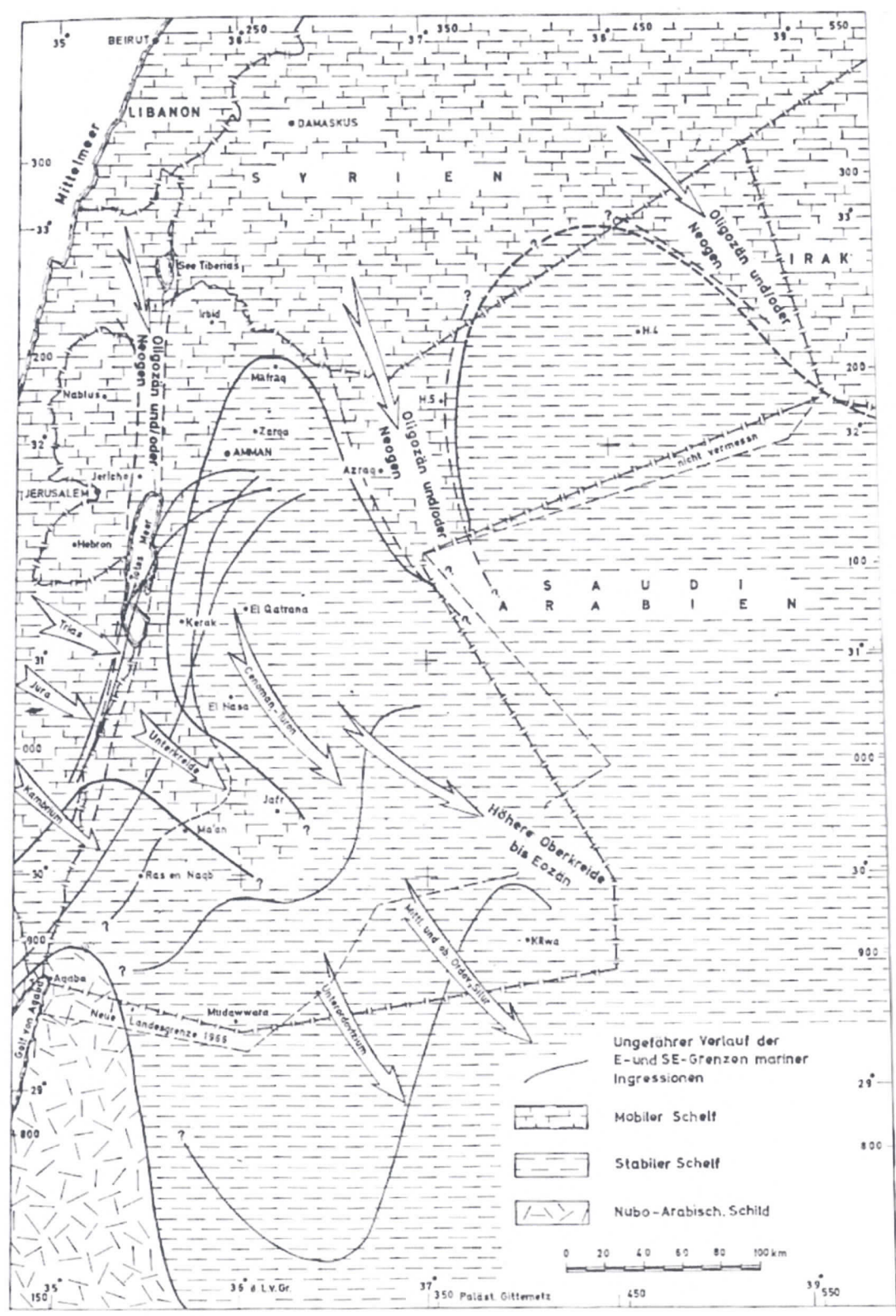


Figure 6 Geology of Jordan: mobile and stable shelves. Bender 1974, p. 18.

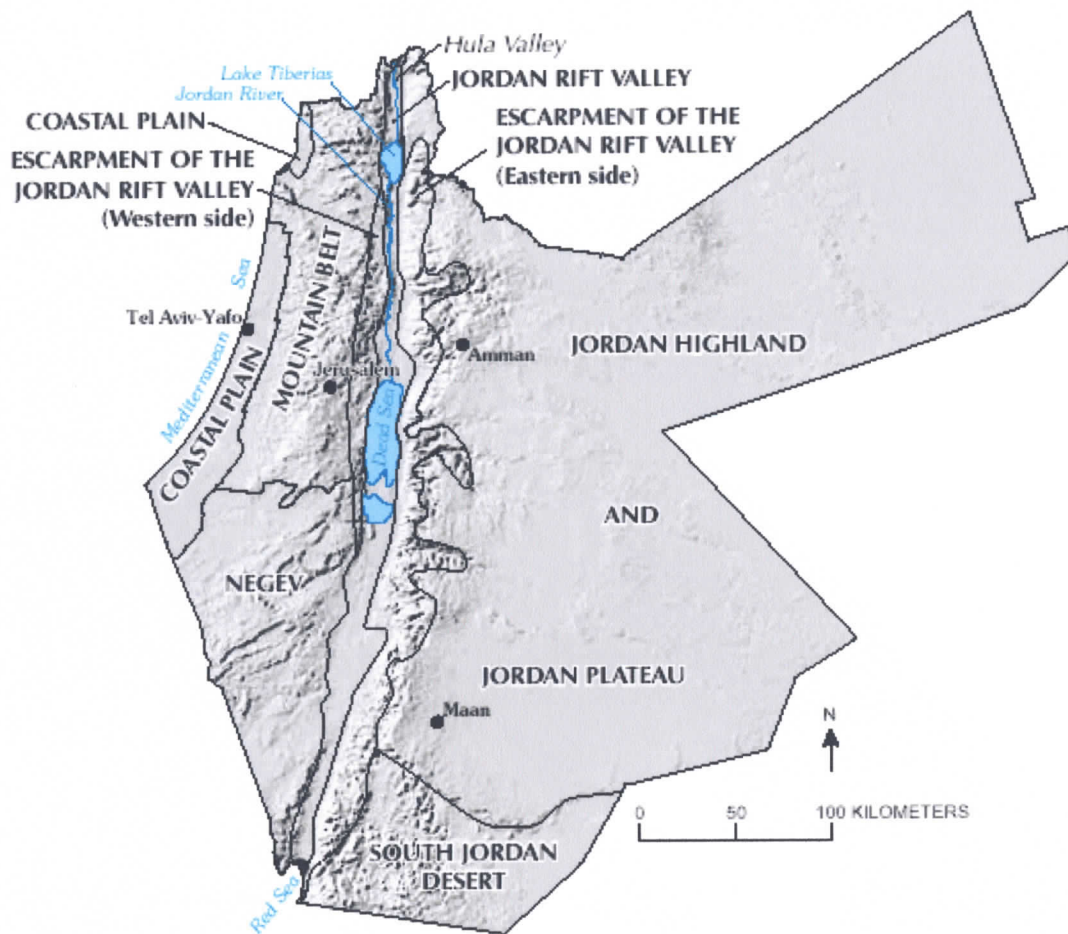
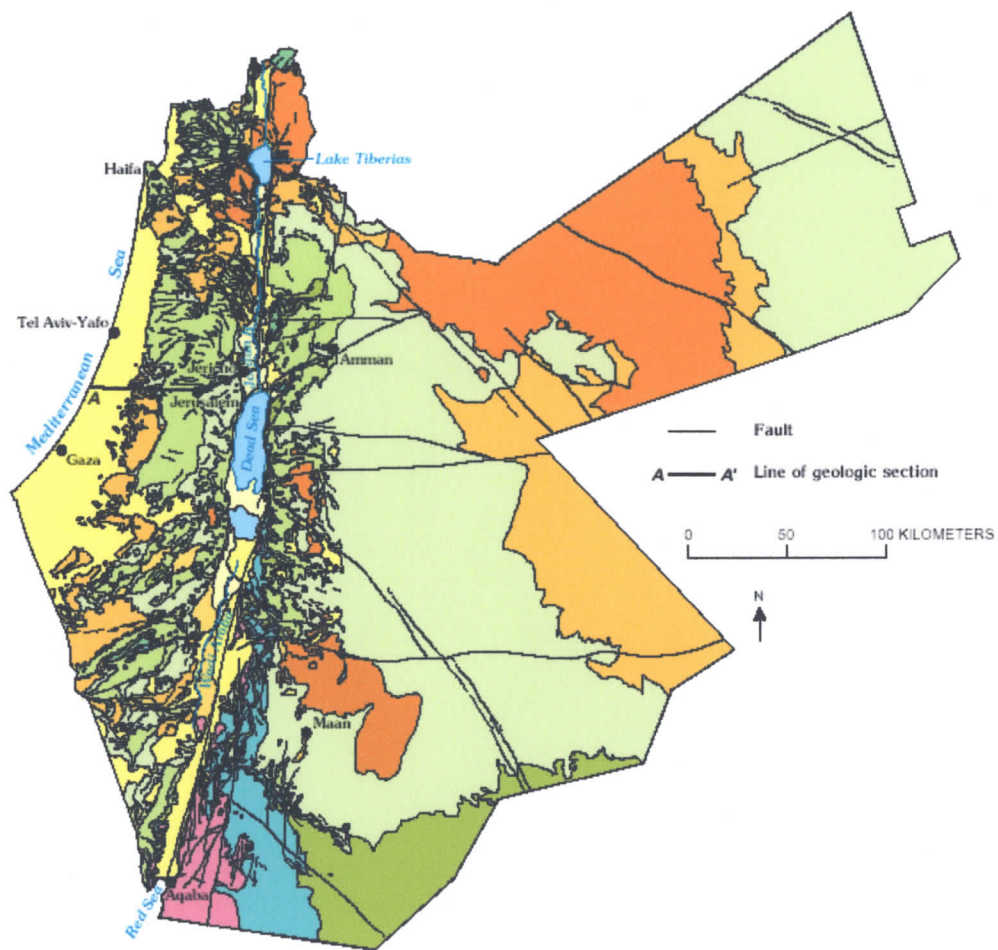


Figure 7 Geography of Jordan. U.S. Geological Survey 1998, <http://exact-me.org/overview/p0607.htm>, 9 April 2007.



System/ Series	Stage	West of Jordan River and Wadi Araba		East of Jordan River and Wadi Araba		This report	SEDIMENTARY ROCKS Unit description
		Group	Unit	Group	Unit		
Tertiary	Eocene		Advat Ta		B5	Ta	Chalk, limestone, chert, marl. Generally aquitard; limestone layers are water bearing.
	Paleocene				B4	Ks Kc	
Cretaceous		Upper	Seno- nian	Mount Scopus	Ks		B3 B2/A7
	Turo- nian		Judea	Kj	A1/A6		
	Ceno- manian		Kc				
Lower	Albain	Kurnub	Kk	Kurnub	K	Kk	Sandstone, dolomite, marl, sand, shale, clay, sandy limestone. Upper part mostly consists of shale and carbonates forming aquiclude; lower part mostly consists of water-bearing sandstone. High salinity in vicinity of Jordan Rift Valley.
	Aptian						

Figure 8 Geology of Jordan: sedimentary rocks. *Ibid.*, <http://exact-me.org/overview/p0809.htm>, 9 April 2007. (Table truncated).



Figure 9 View of dust trails from vehicle traffic outside Mshatta.



Figure 10 External view of Ukhaydir.
Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001, p. 53.



Figure 11 Aerial view of Qasr Kharana. Kennedy and Bewley 2004, p. 222.



Figure 12 Aerial view of Qusayr 'Amra. *Ibid.*, p. 224.



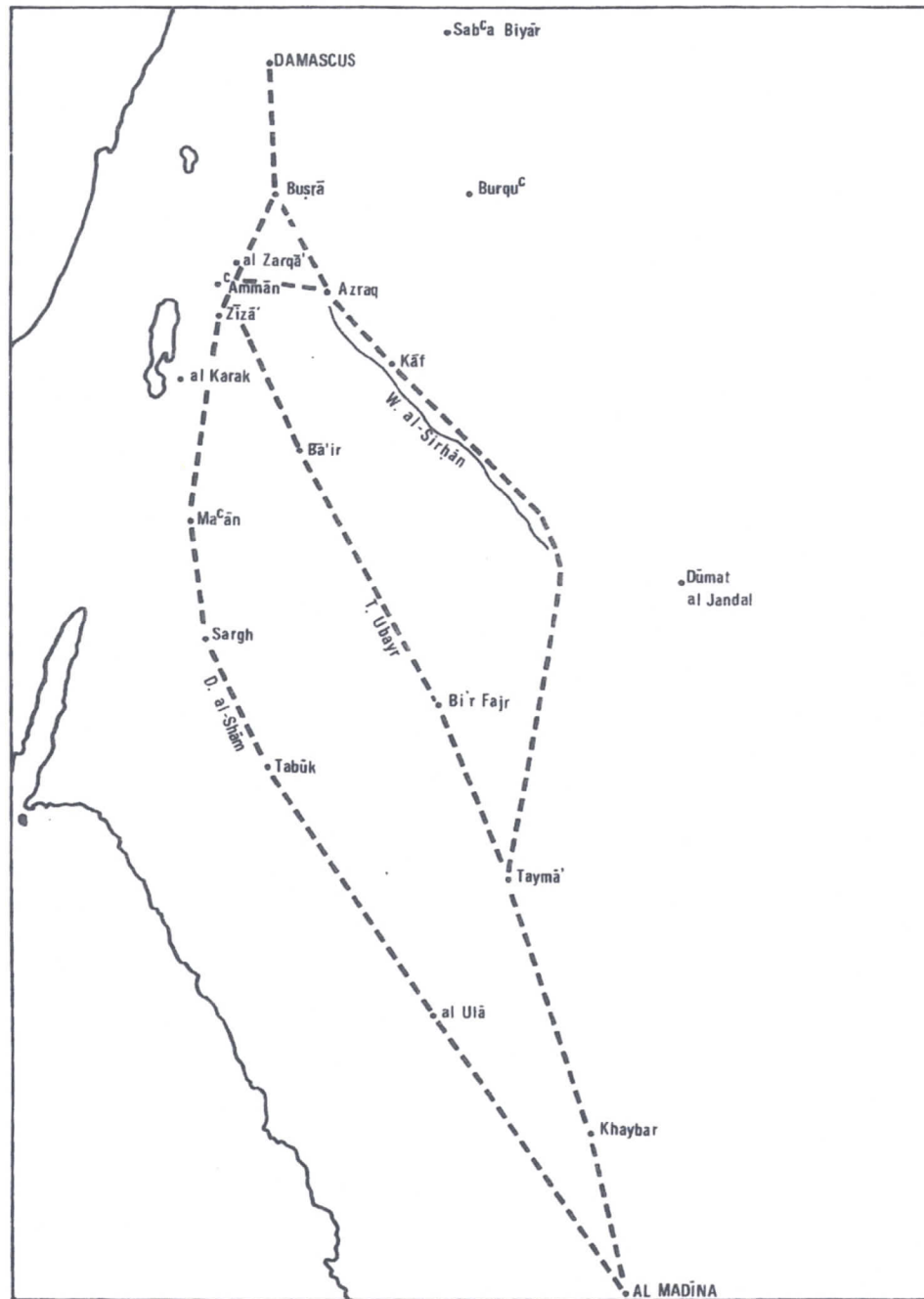
Figure 13 View from within the enclosure wall of the hill north of Mshatta.



Figure 14 Aerial view of the hill north of Mshatta.
Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001, p. 40.

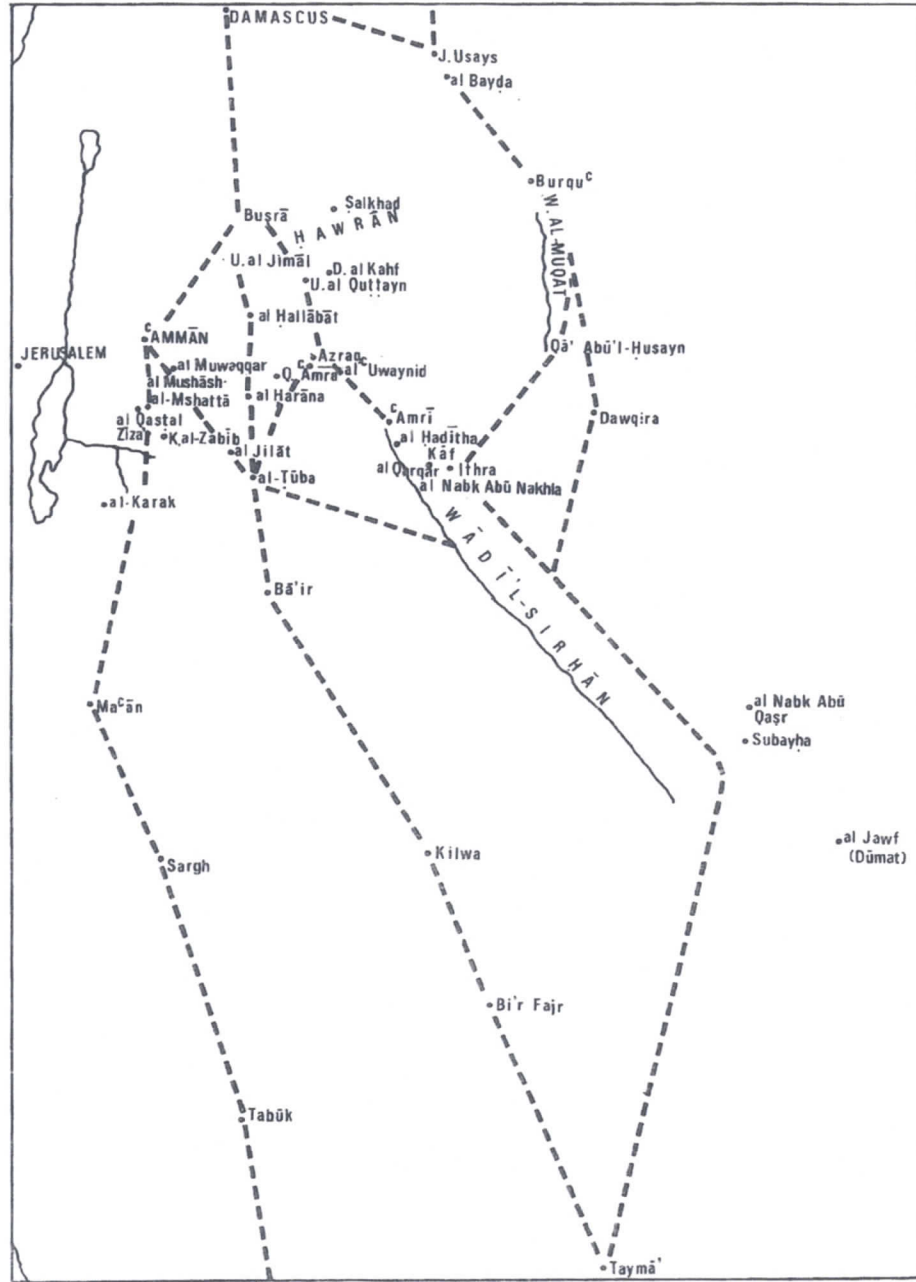


Figure 15 **Satellite view of the hill north of Mshatta.**
Google Earth, screen capture 5 May 2007.



Map 1: Wādī'l Sirḥān, Tarīq Ubayr and Darb al-Shām

Figure 16 King 1987, p. 104.



Map 2: Desert routes in eastern Jordan and northern Arabia

Figure 17 King 1987, p. 105.

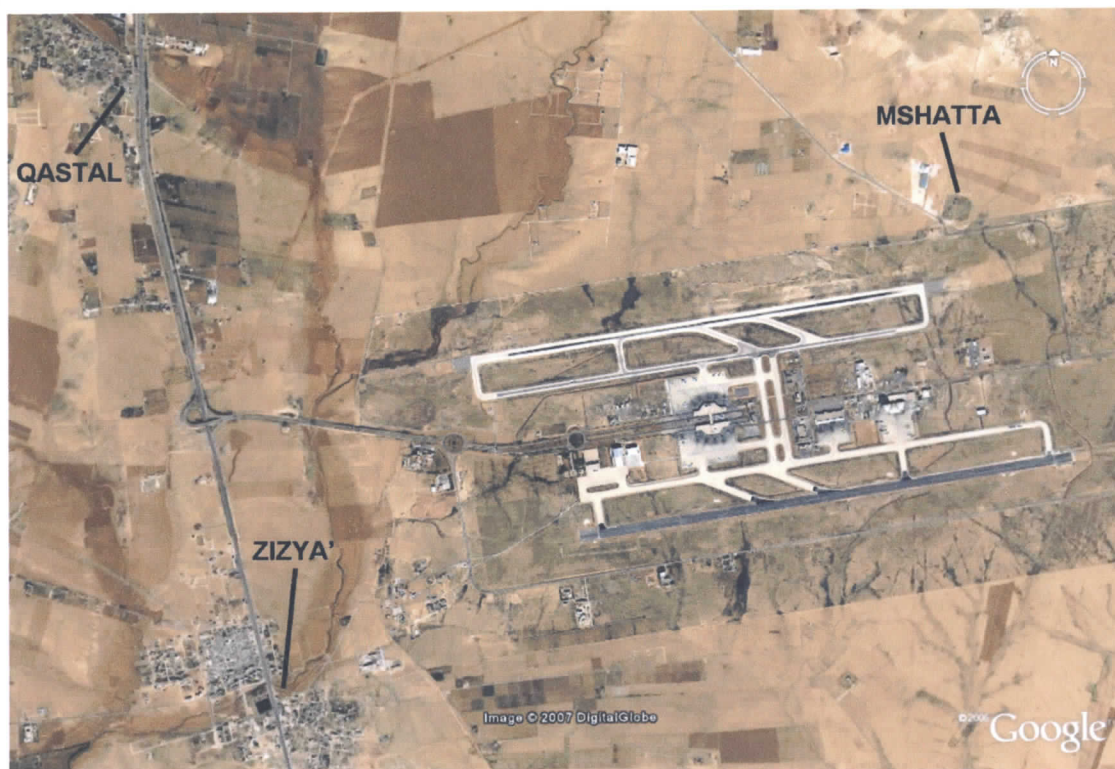


Figure 18 Qastal, Zizya' and Mshatta. Google Earth, screen capture 5 May 2007.

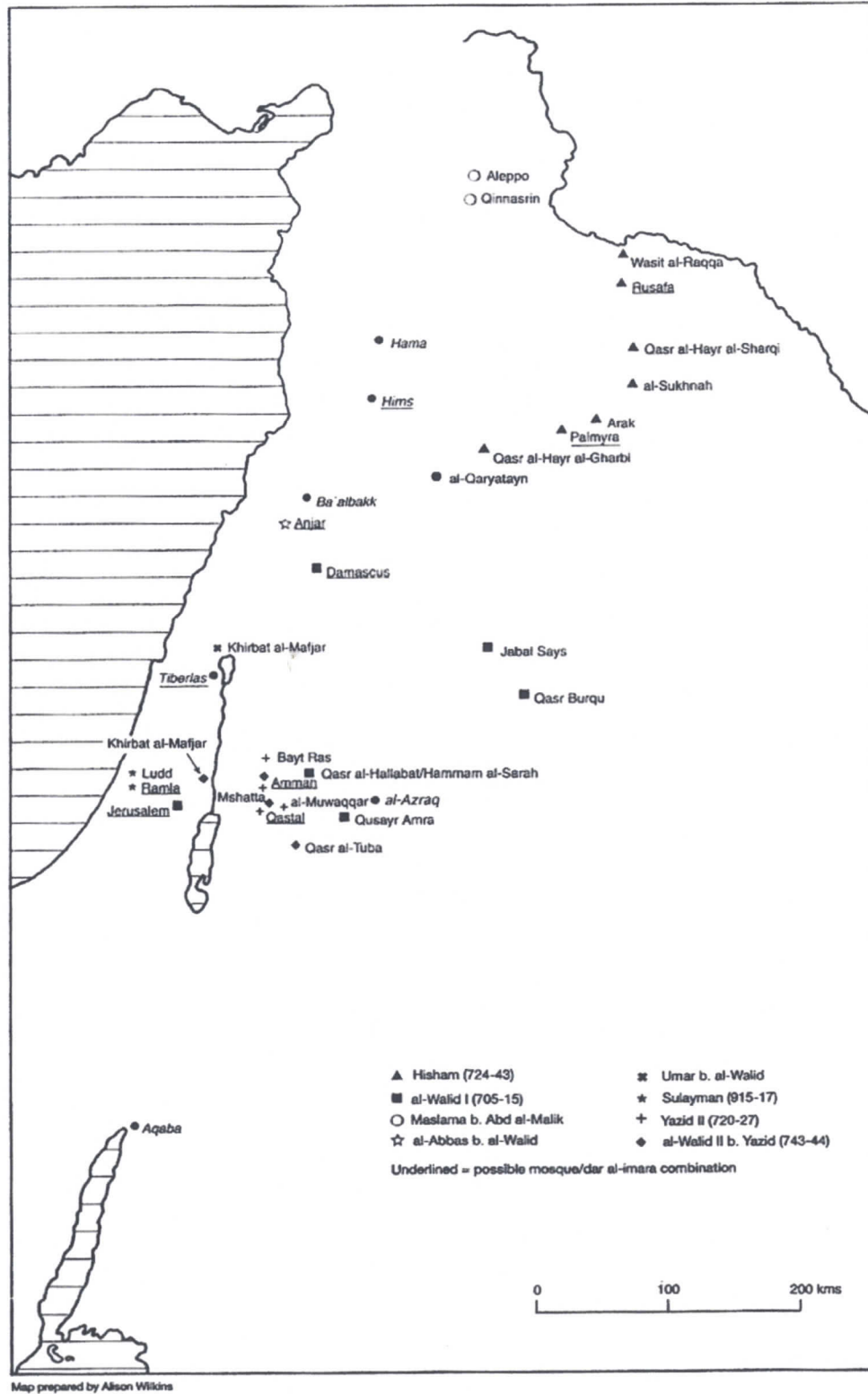
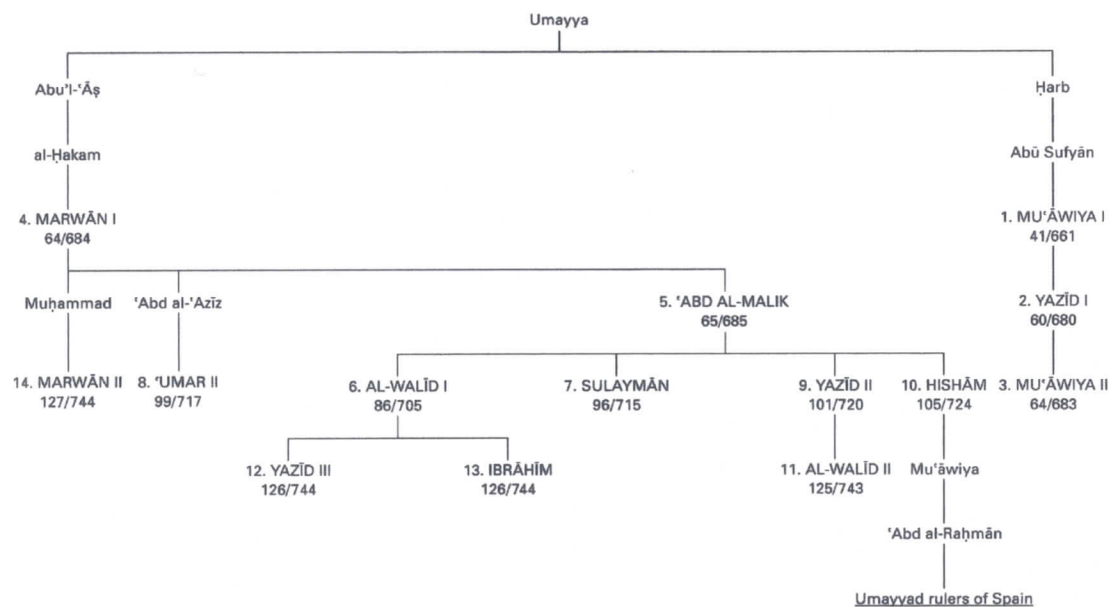


Figure 19 Marwanid sites in Bilad al-Sham. Bacharach 1996, p. 29.

Following is a list of the Umayyad caliphs and their dates:

1. Mu'awiya I	661-680
2. Yazid I	680-683
3. Mu'awiya II	683
4. Marwan I	683-685
5. Abd al-Malik	685-705
6. Walid I	705-715
7. Sulayman	715-717
8. Umar II	717-720
9. Yazid II	720-724
10. Hisham	724-743
11. Walid II	743-744
12. Yazid III	744
13. Ibrahim	744
14. Marwan II	744-750

Figure 20 Bishai 1968, p. 193.



2 The Umayyad Caliphs (reigning caliphs are numbered with dates of accession)

Figure 21 Kennedy 2004, p. 397.



Figure 22 Inscribed brick from Mshatta. National Archaeological Museum, 'Amman, inventory number J. 9883.

4. Bronze coins of the post-reform period, found at Mshatta.

5. Reverse of coin (shown on left in FIG. 4), minted at Al-Ramla, Palestine, and found at Mshatta.

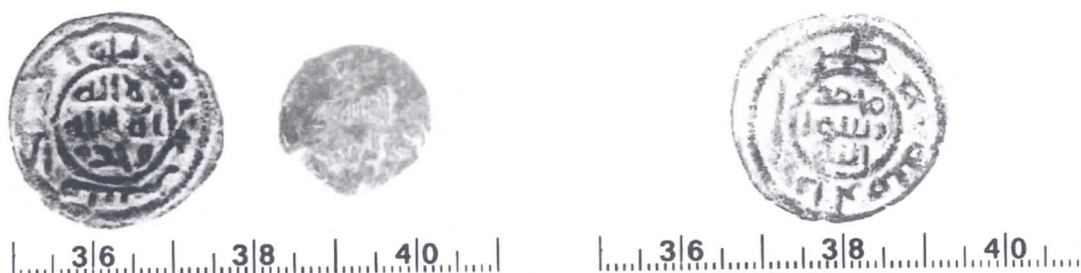


Figure 23 Bronze coins found at Mshatta. Bisheh 1987, p. 197.



Figure 24 Wadi Mujib.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/zerega/282427579>, 9 April 2007.

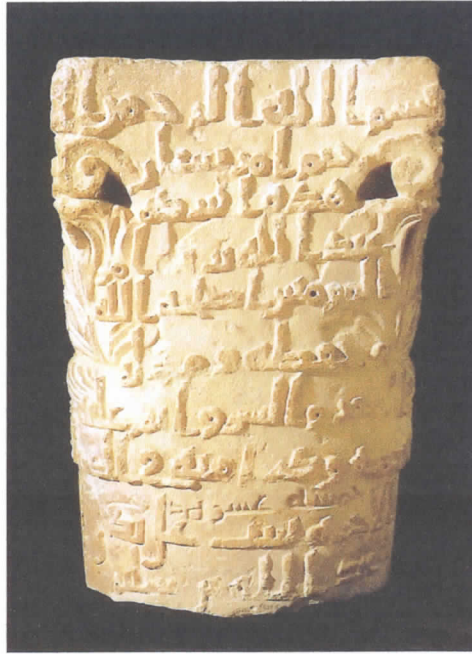


Figure 25 Capital from Muwaqqar. Museum With No Frontiers 2000, p. 118.



Figure 26 Frescoes on the vault of the audience hall, Qusayr 'Amra.

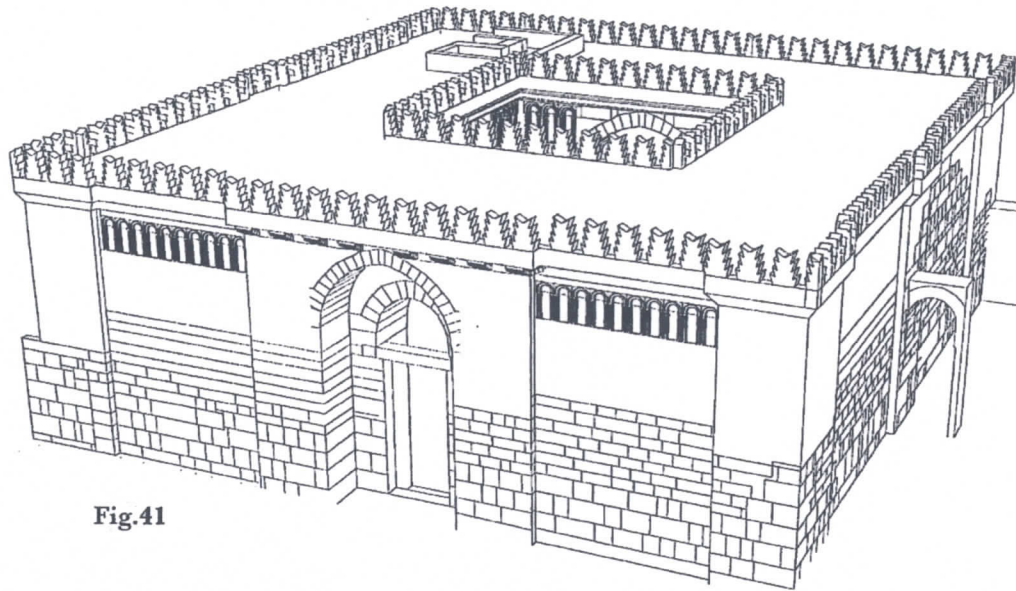


Fig.41

Figure 27 Schematic of the reception hall of the Umayyad palace at the Citadel of 'Amman. Northedge 1992, fig. 41.



Figure 28 Reception hall of the Umayyad palace at the Citadel of 'Amman, with reconstructed dome.

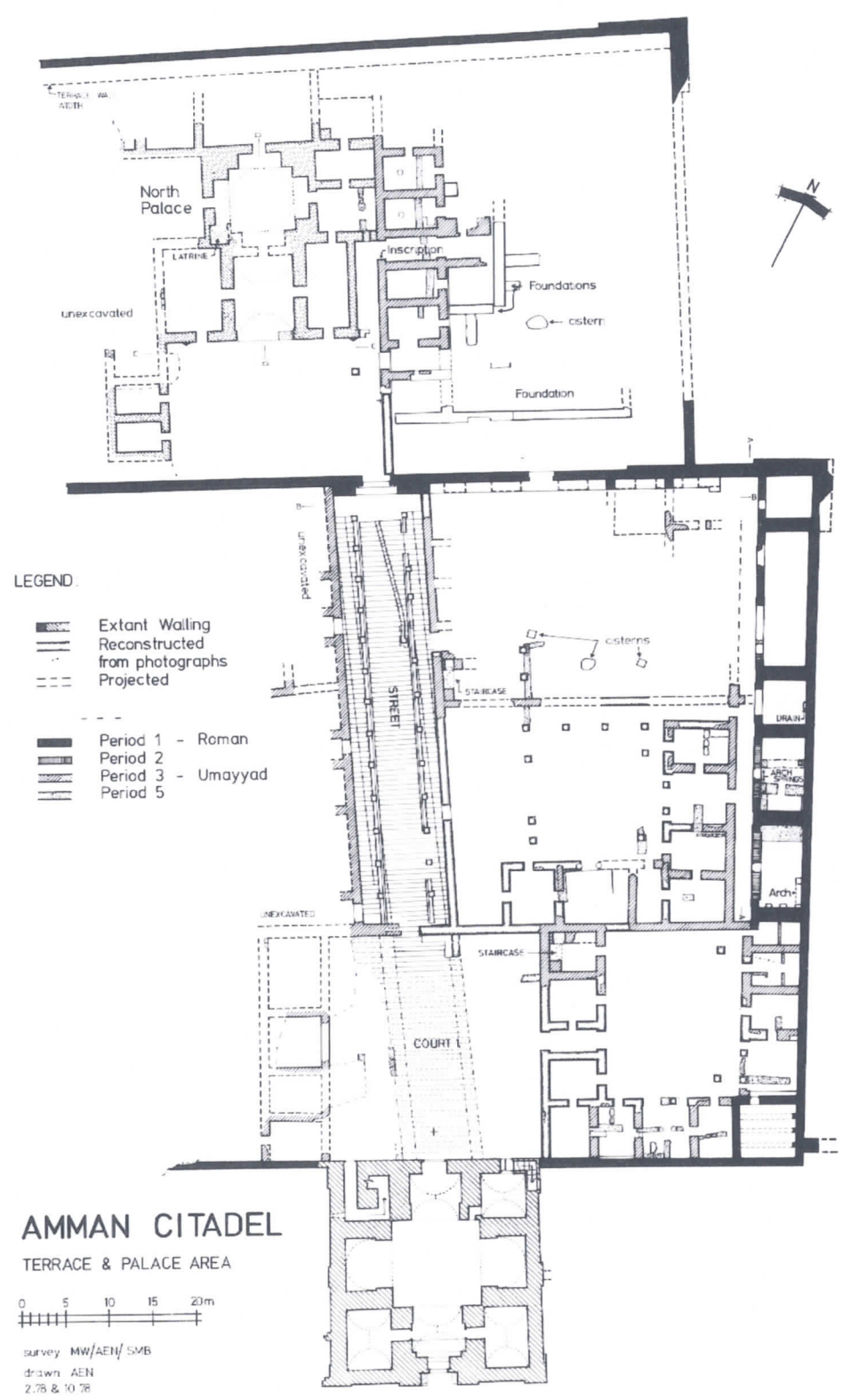


Figure 29 Plan of the Citadel of 'Amman. *Ibid.*, fig. 29.

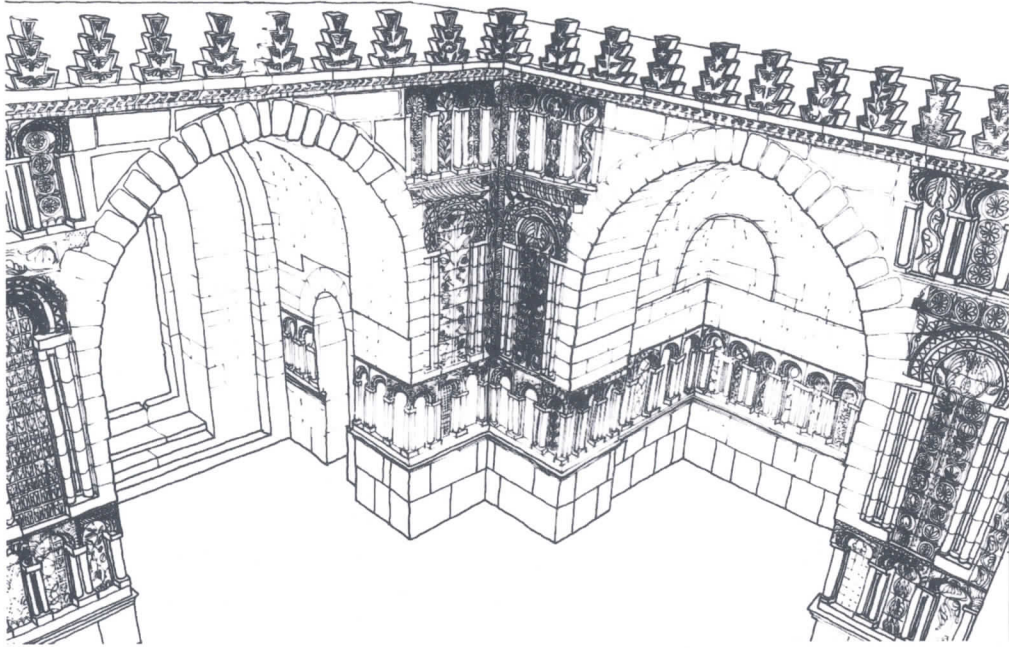


Figure 30 Schematic of the interior of the reception hall of the Umayyad palace at the Citadel of 'Amman. *Ibid.*, fig. 40.



Figure 31 Interior of the reception hall of the Umayyad palace at the Citadel of 'Amman.



Figure 32 Female statue from Mshatta, now in the National Archaeological Museum, 'Amman.



Figure 33 Female statue from Mshatta, now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inventory number I. 6172.



Figure 34 Female statue from Mshatta, now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inventory number I. 6173.

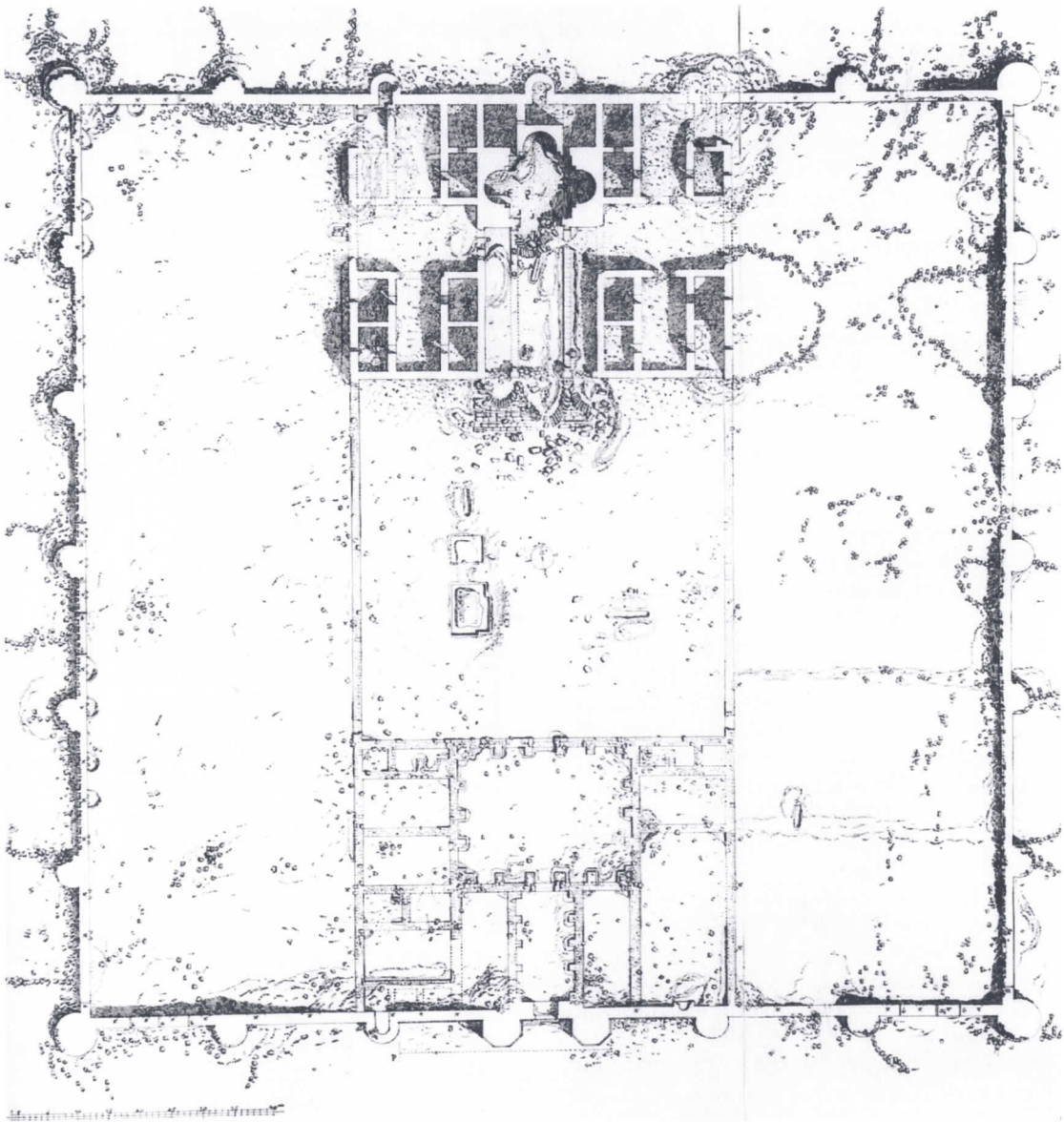


Figure 36 Plan of Mshatta. Schulz 1904, pl. I, *apud* Meinecke 1992.

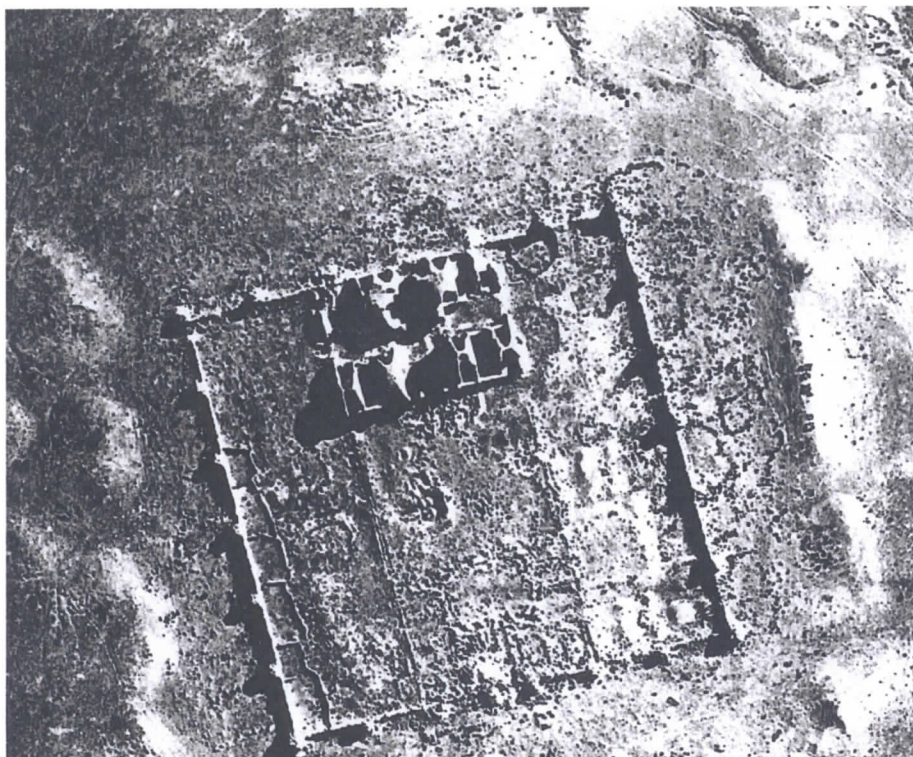


Figure 37 Aerial view of Mshatta. Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pt. 2, pl. 118.



Figure 38 Aerial view of Mshatta. Kennedy and Bewley 2004, p. 218, detail.



Figure 39 Audience hall, Mshatta.



Figure 40 Section of wall, audience hall, Mshatta.



Figure 41 Brick vaulting, audience hall, Mshatta.

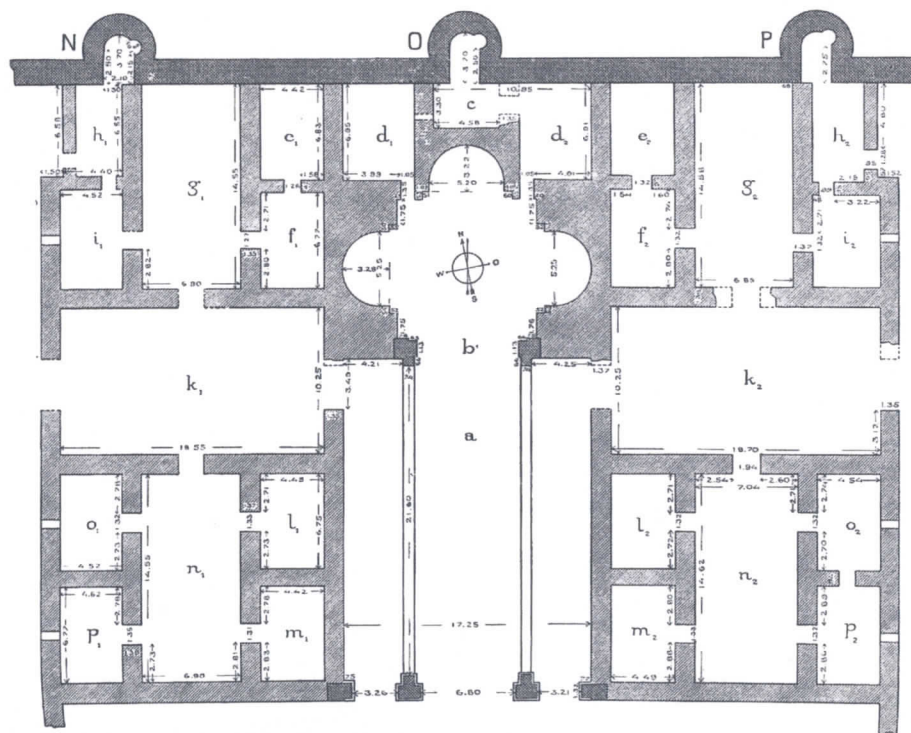


Figure 42 Plan of the audience hall, Mshatta. Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, pl. CXIX.



Figure 43 Entrance to the audience hall, Mshatta.

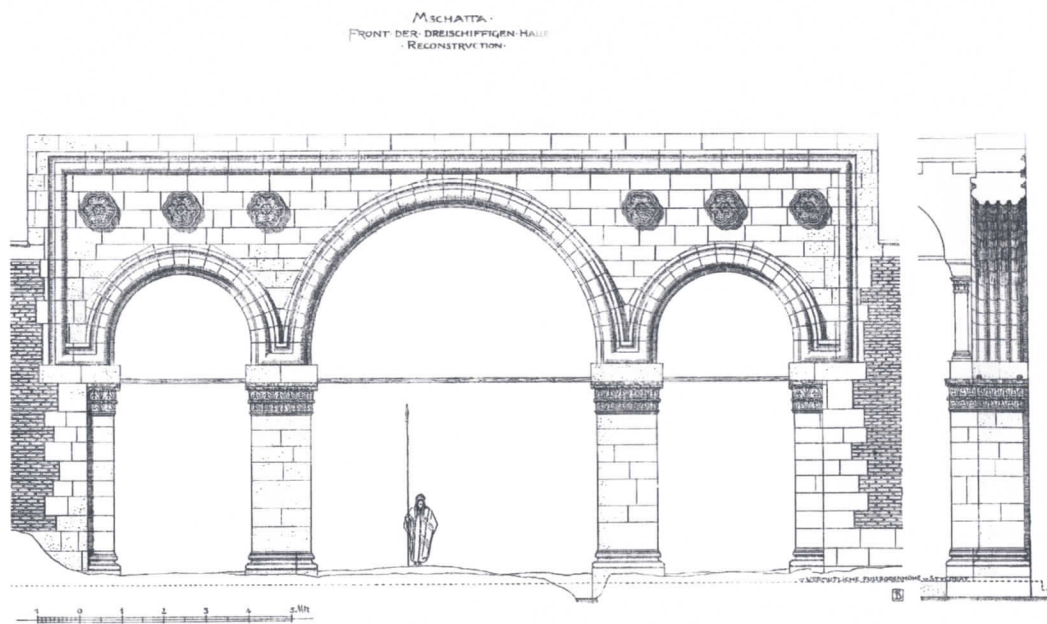


Figure 44 Reconstruction of the entrance to the audience hall, Mshatta. Schulz 1904, pl. IV.



Figure 47 North-east view of the mosque, Mshatta.



Figure 48 *Mihrab* of the mosque, Mshatta.



Figure 49 View of the Mshatta façade *in situ*.
Schulz 1904 *apud* Meinecke 1992, p. 138.



Figure 50 View of the present-day remnants of the Mshatta façade still in Jordan.

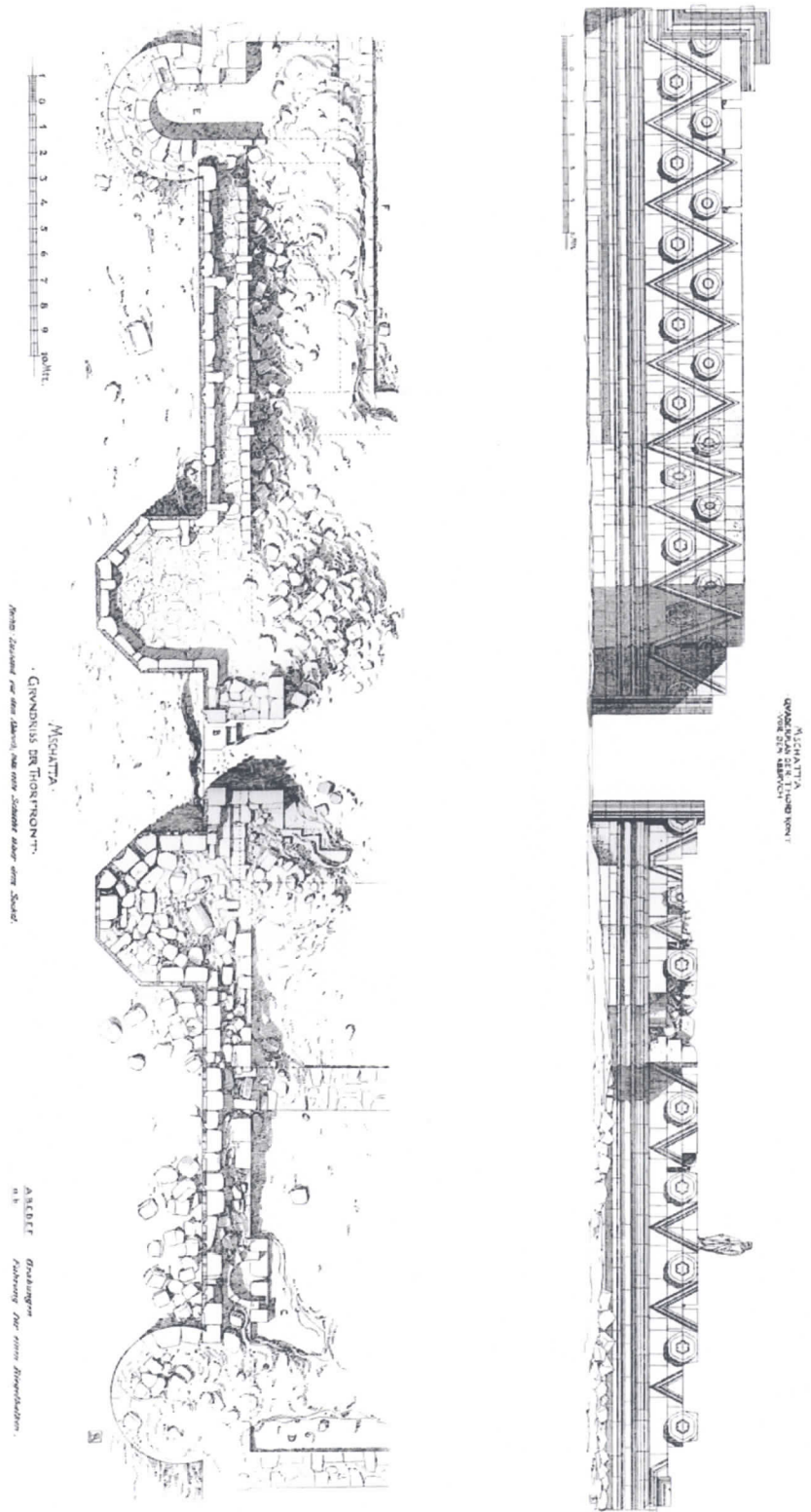


Figure 51 Schematic of the Mshatta façade. Schulz 1904, p. 2.



Figure 52 Profile of the Mshatta façade.



Figure 53 View of the Mshatta façade *in situ*. Negative 430, PU.

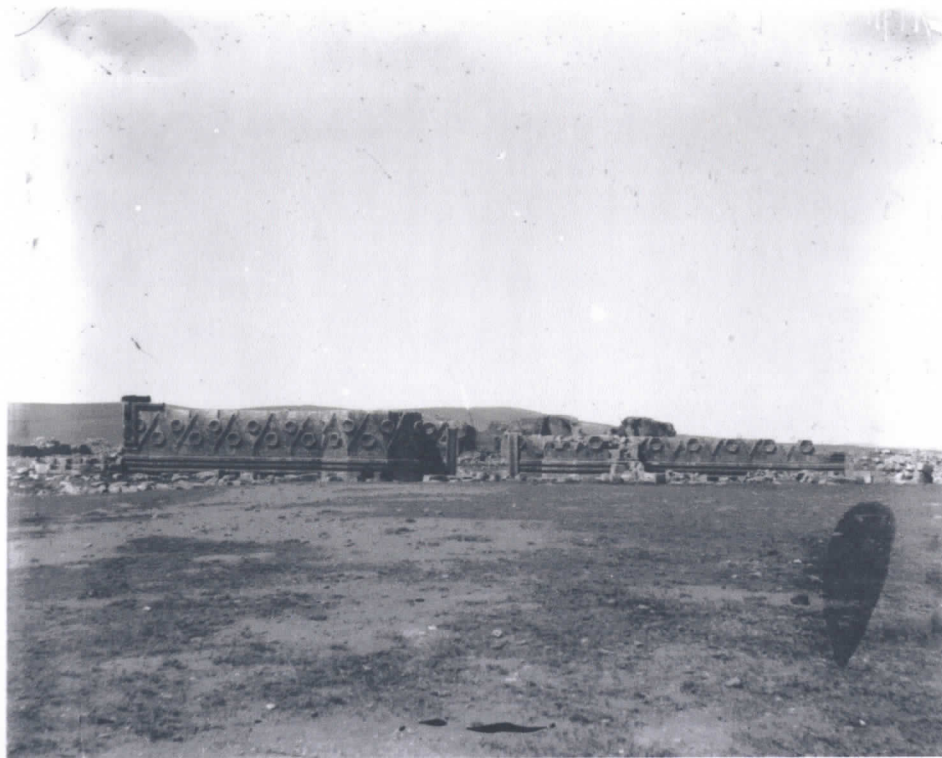


Figure 54 View of the Mshatta façade *in situ*. Negative 432, PU.

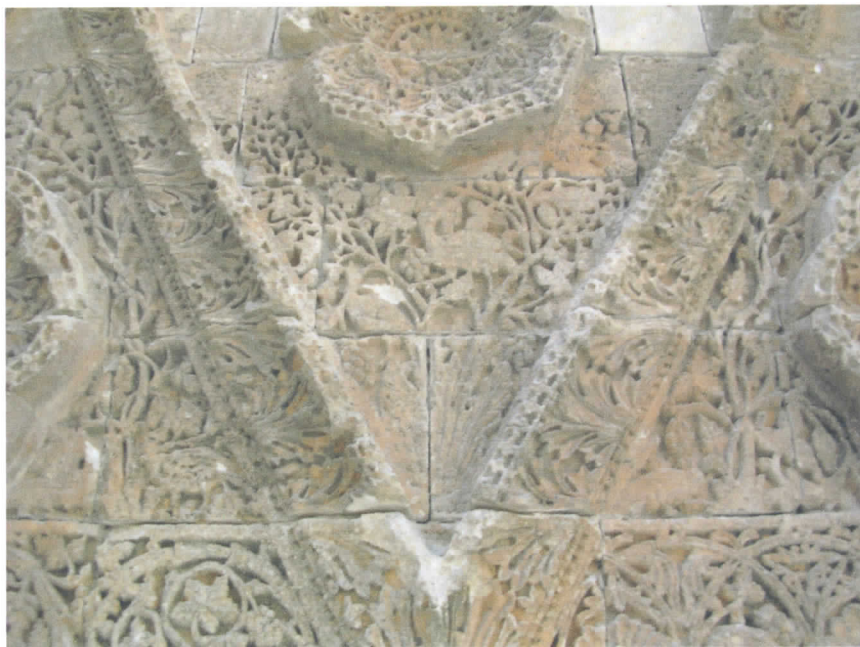


Figure 55 Subsidiary decoration of the Mshatta façade.



Figure 56 Undecorated portion of the Mshatta façade.



Figure 57 Half-rosette at the western end of the Mshatta façade.

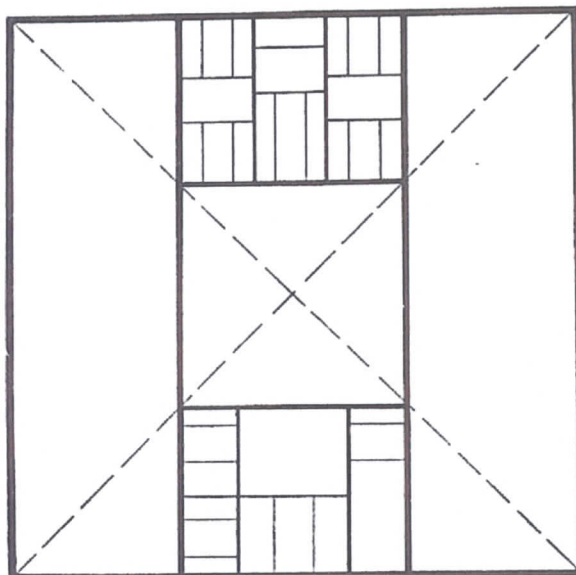


FIG. 635. MSHATTĀ: Diagram showing successive symmetrical subdivision of the interior into three.

Figure 58 Creswell 1969, p. 582.



Figure 59 Facing animals, Mshatta façade.



Figure 60 *Spolium* capital from Mshatta. Staatliche Museen inventory number I. 6170.



Figure 61 *Cipollino* columns, Mshatta.



Figure 62 Variety of colour in the Mshatta façade.



Figure 63 Variety of colour in a section of the Mshatta façade still in Jordan.

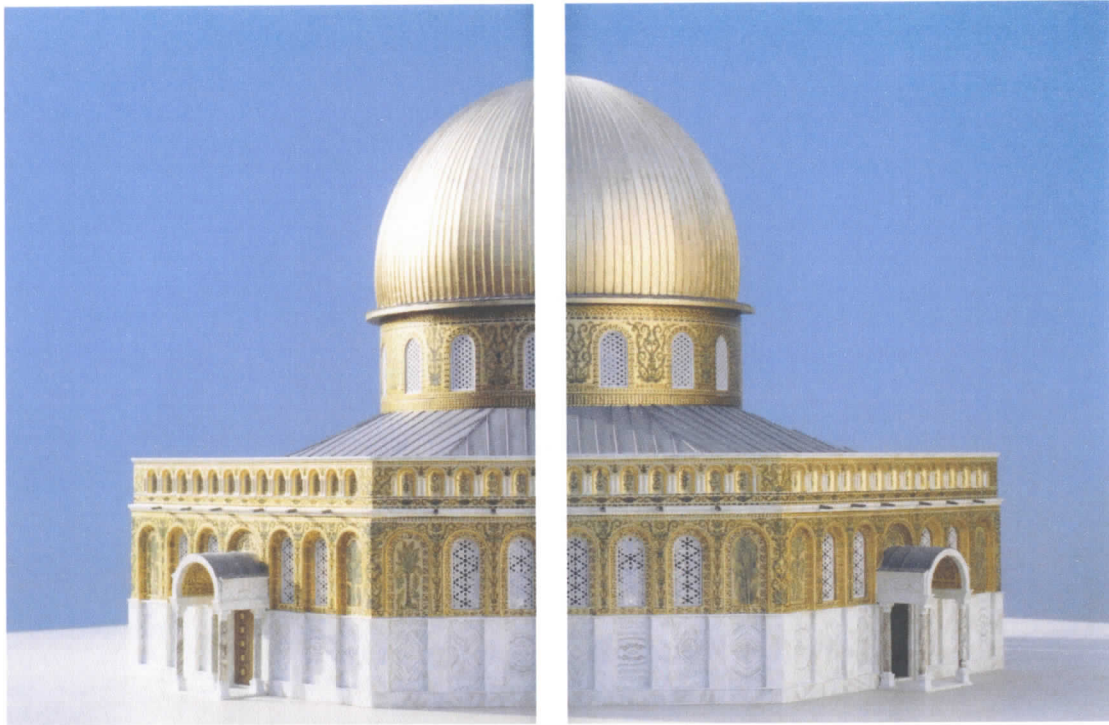


Figure 64 Reconstructed exterior of the Dome of the Rock.
Allen 1999, pp. 202, 203.



Figure 65 Statue of a lion from Mshatta. Staatliche Museen inventory number
I. 6171.

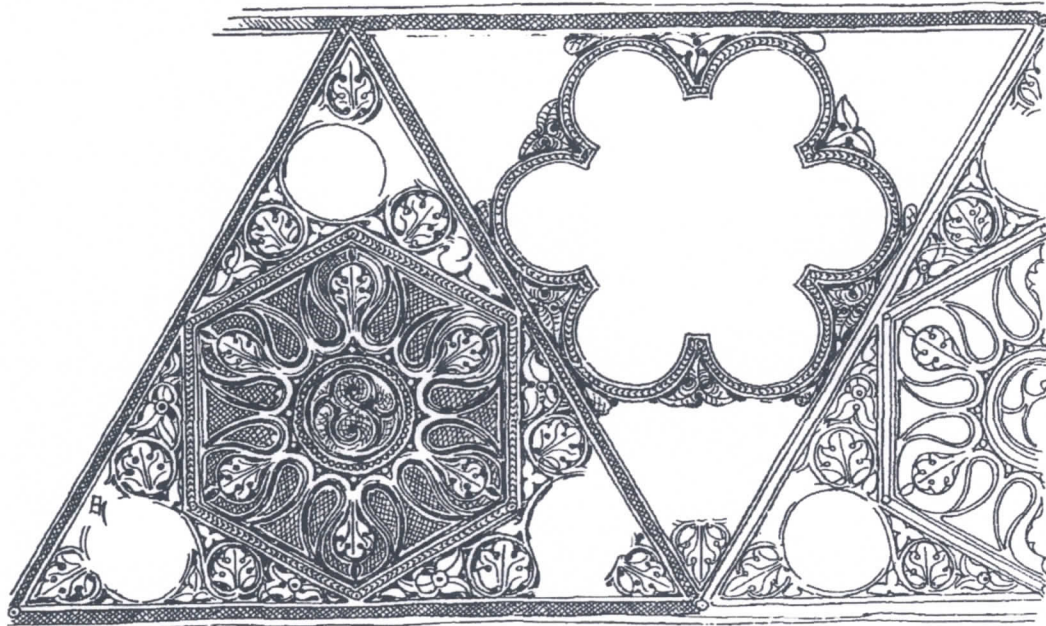


Abb. 14. Samarra, Djausaq, Sockelschmuck am Báb al-'amma

Figure 66 Reconstruction of the stucco decoration of Bab al-'Amma. Herzfeld 1921, p. 139.

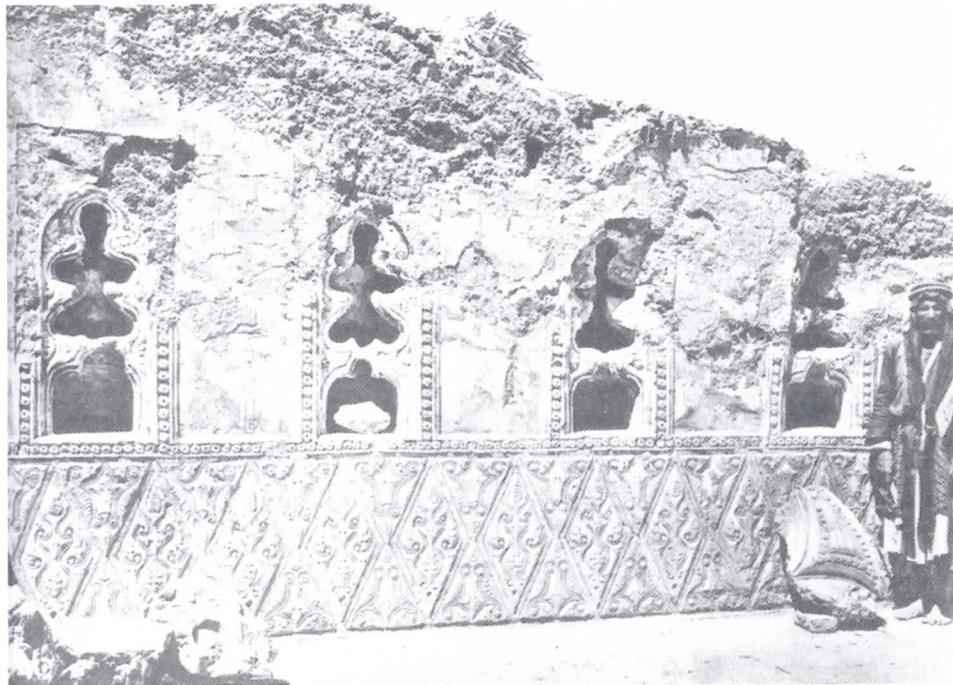


FIG. 31. West wall of room 11, House XIII, Samarra.

Figure 67 Stucco panel, Samarra. Allen 1988, fig. 31.



FIG. 12. Floor mosaic in the Bardo Museum, Tunisia, imitating quarter-sawn marble.

Figure 68 *Ibid.*, fig. 12.



Figure 69 Looking southward from within the audience hall, Mshatta.



Figure 70 Subsidiary decoration of a triangle from the western end of the Mshatta façade.

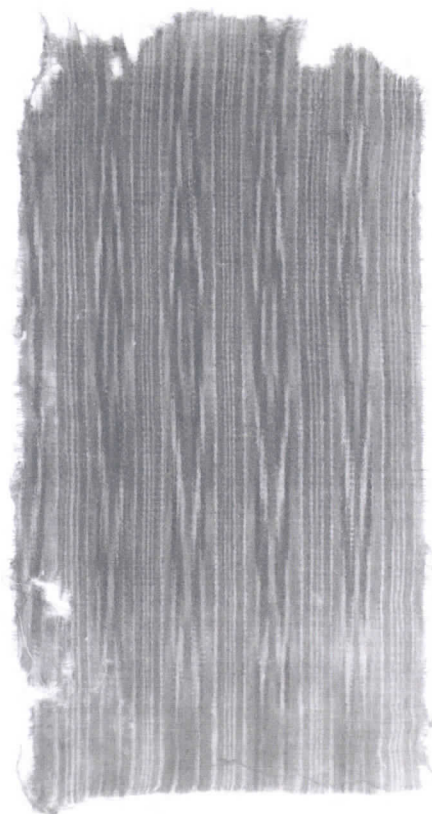
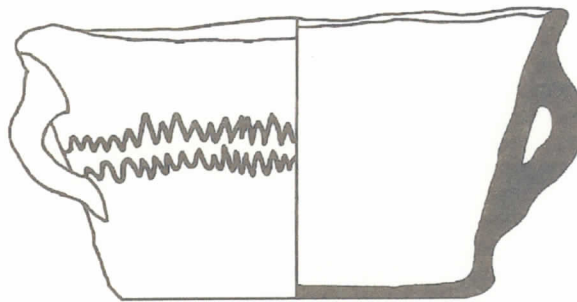


Figure 71 Cotton *ikat* textile, probably Yemeni, 10th century CE, Griffith collection. Milwright 2005, fig. 13.1, rotated.



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Figure 72 Umayyad pottery bowl. Hendrix, Drey and Storfjell 1996, p. 257.



Figure 73 Façade of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi. Brend 1991, p. 27.



Figure 74 Size of the Mshatta façade in relation to the human viewer.

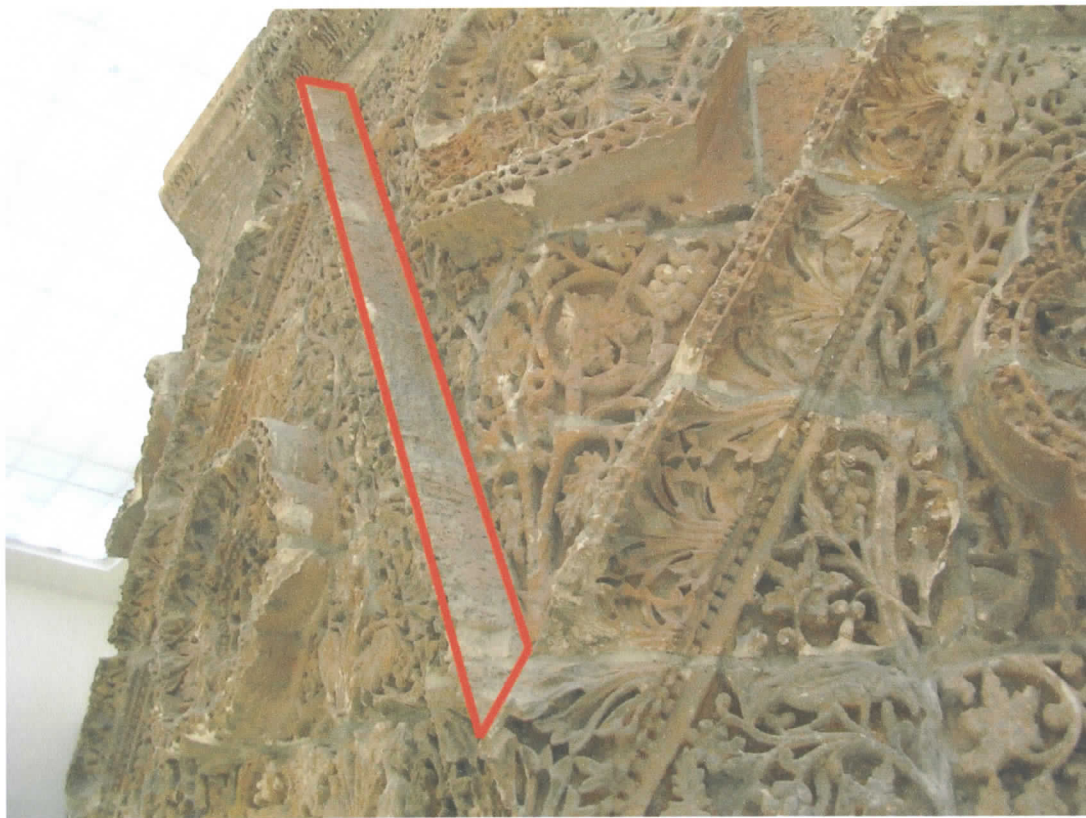
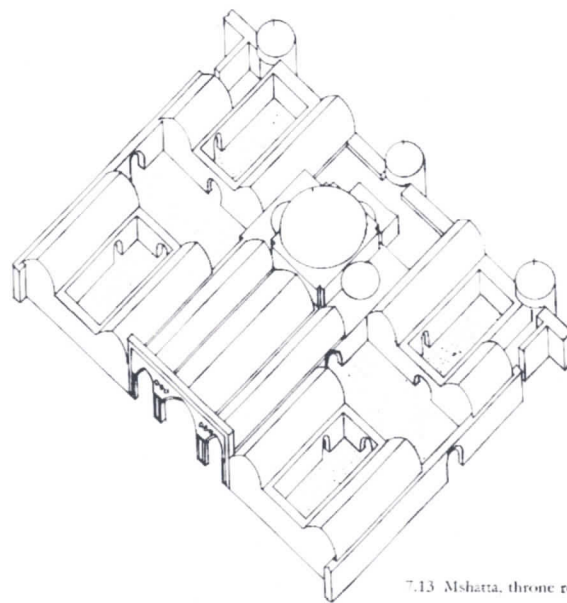


Figure 75 Undecorated portion of the zigzag, Mshatta façade.



Figure 76 View along the western wing of the Mshatta façade.



7.13 Mshatta, throne room complex

Figure 77 Reconstruction of the audience hall, Mshatta.
Hillenbrand 1994, p. 388.

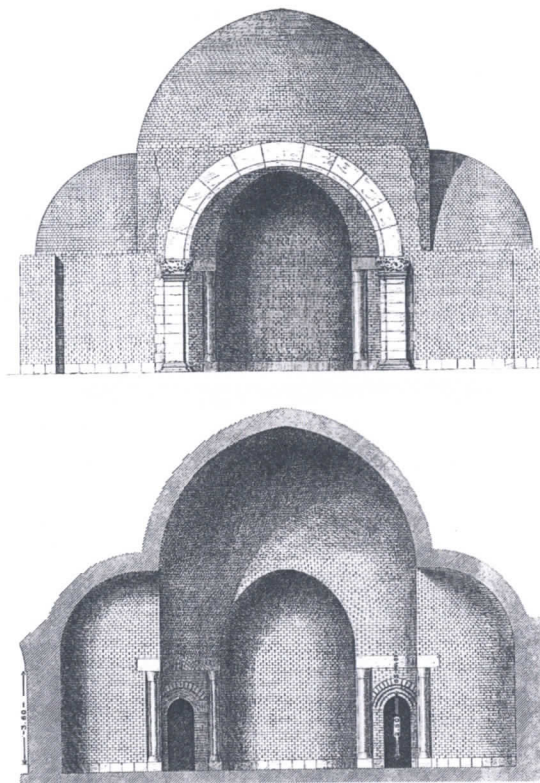


Figure 78 Reconstruction of the domes of the audience hall, Mshatta. Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, p. 125.



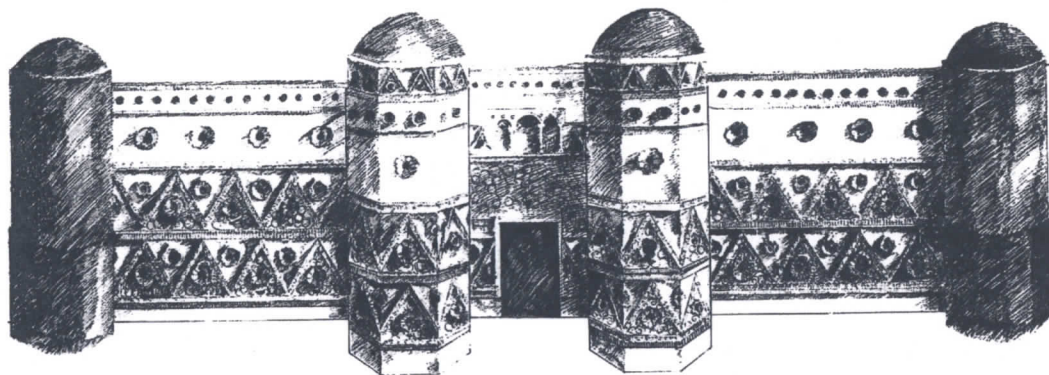
Figure 79 View of the brick walls of the audience hall, Mshatta.



Figure 80 View of the dome of the *caldarium* at Qusayr 'Amra.



Figure 81 Page from the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, MS Arabe 5847 (Schefer Hariri), painted by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, 1237 CE. Ettinghausen 1962, p. 118.



7.12 Mshatta, palace, proposed reconstruction of façade

Figure 82 Hillenbrand 1994, p. 389.



Figure 83 Bab al-Nasr. Image be182, GI.



Figure 84 Off-centre rosette, Mshatta façade.



Figure 85 Mshatta façade *in situ*. Negative 432, detail, PU.



Figure 86 View of the western octagonal tower, Mshatta façade, *in situ*. Image A229, RL.



Figure 87
Half-rosette,
western end of the
Mshatta façade.



Figure 88
Half-rosettes split by the doorway, Mshatta façade.

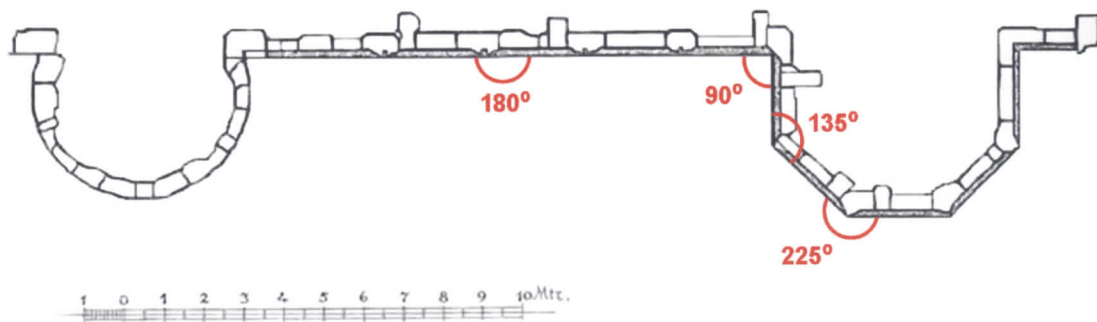


Figure 89 Angles of the Mshatta façade. Outline of western wing taken from Schulz 1904, p. 2.



Figure 90 Rosette in a right-angled space, Mshatta façade



Figure 91 Rosettes in obtuse spaces, Mshatta façade.

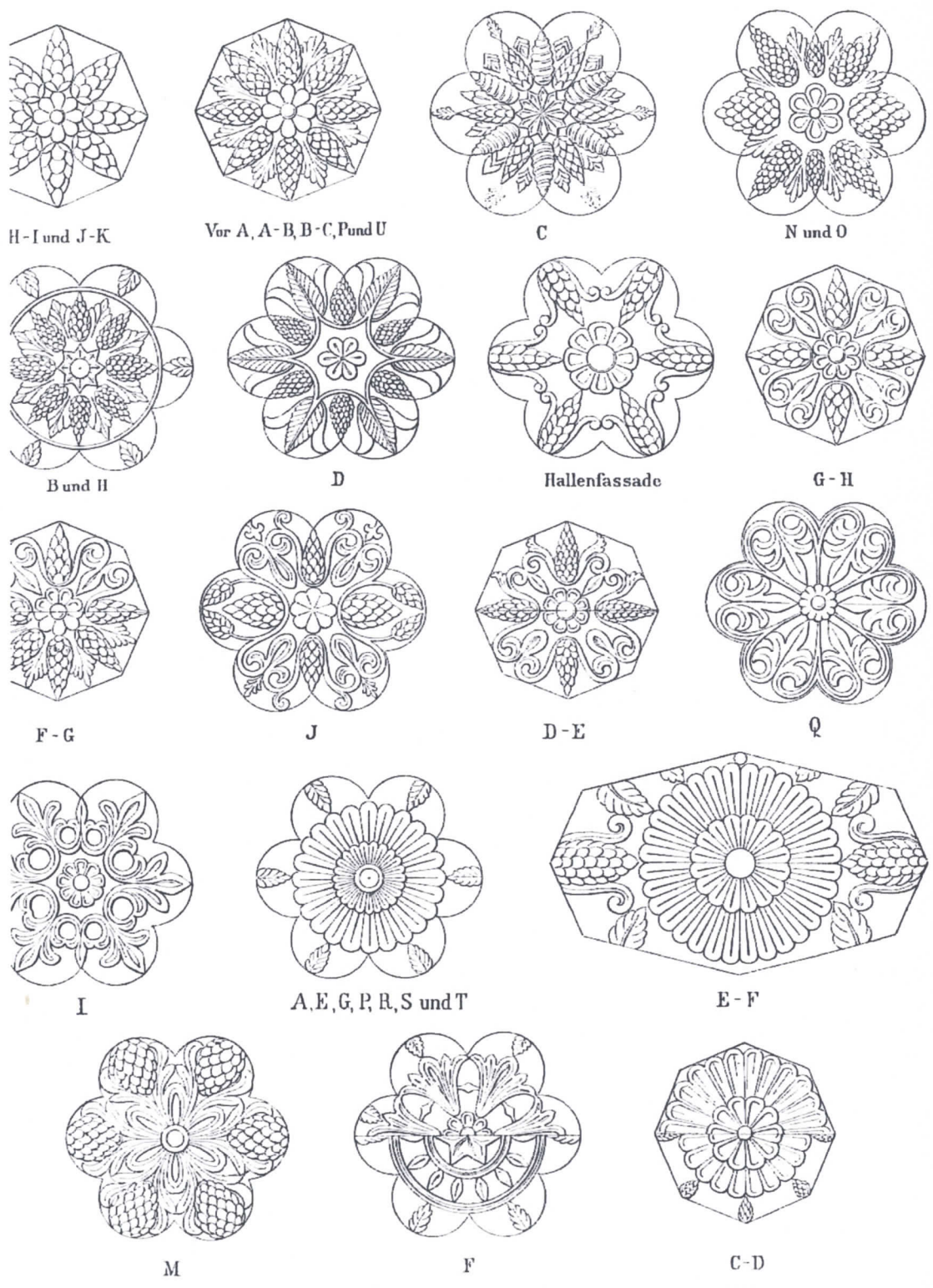


Abb. 75. Mshattafassade: Die Füllungen der großen Rosetten nach Typen geordnet

Figure 92 Schematic of Mshatta rosette types. Strzygowski 1904, p. 294.

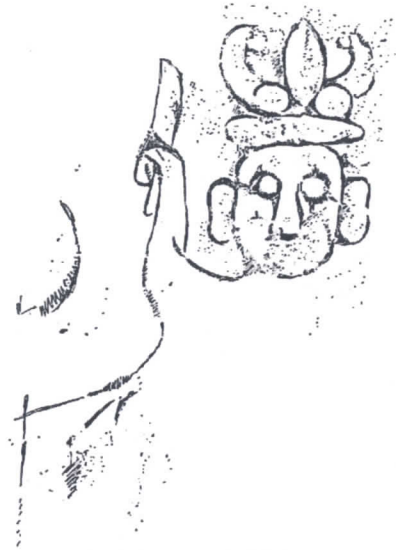
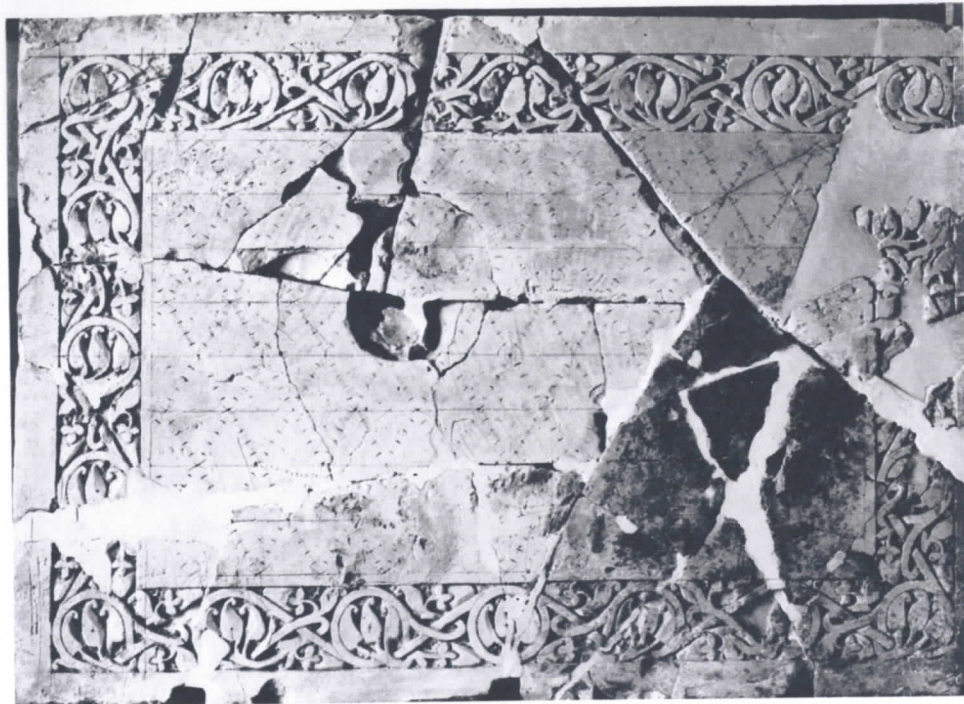


Abb. 15. Sassanidenkönig
auf einer Quader der Torfront

Figure 93 *Graffito from Mshatta. Schulz 1904, p. 223.*



BALUSTRADE PANEL 14 (2)

Figure 94 *Unfinished balustrade panel from Khirbat al-Mafjar. Hamilton 1959, pl. LXI.*

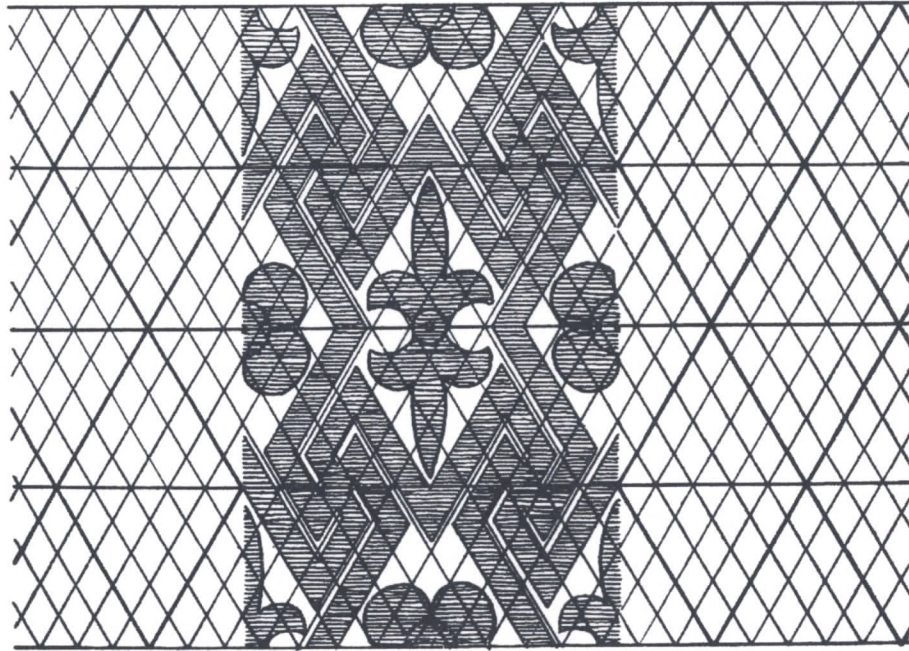


FIG. 232. Geometrical basis of panel 14 (2)

Figure 95 Hamilton 1959, fig. 232.



Figure 96 Distended points on the zigzag, Mshatta façade.

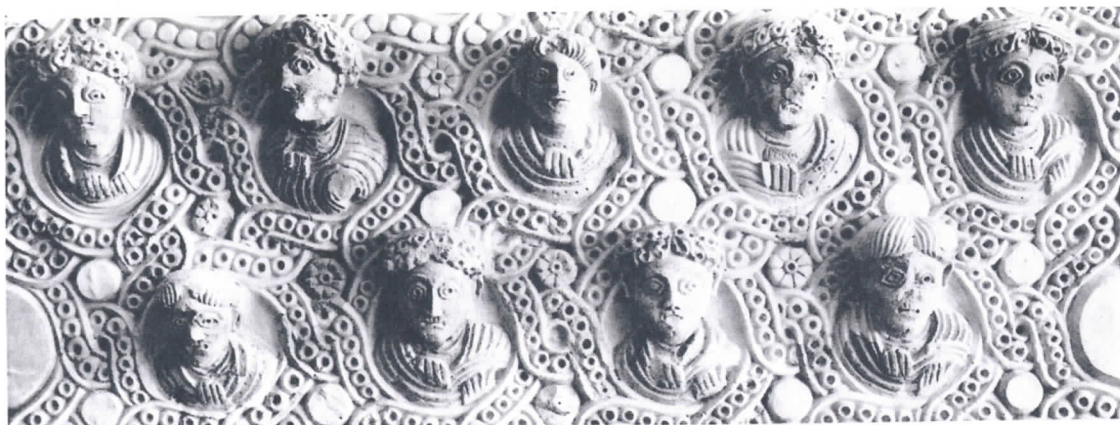


Figure 97 Plaster panel with protruding heads, Khirbat al-Mafjar.
Hamilton 1959, pl. XXXV, detail.

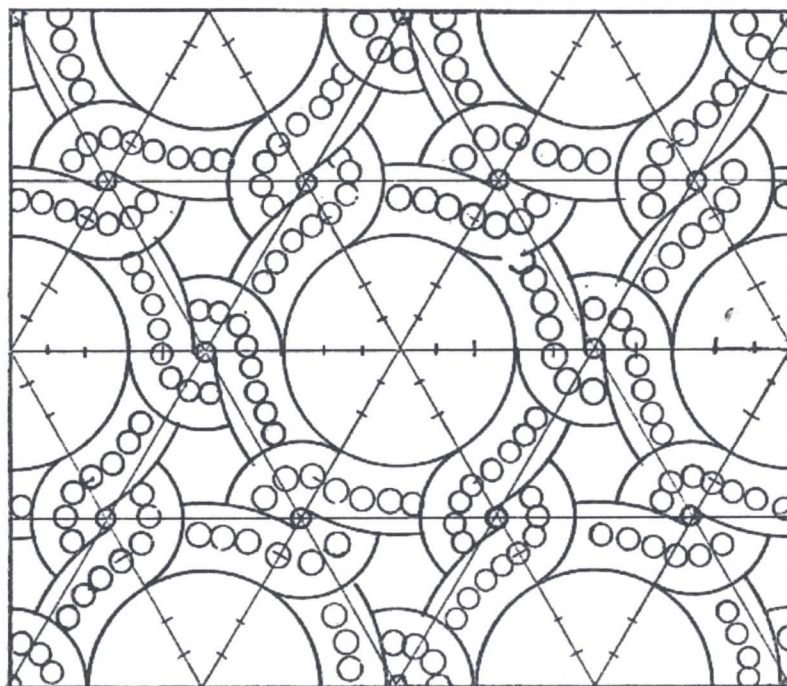
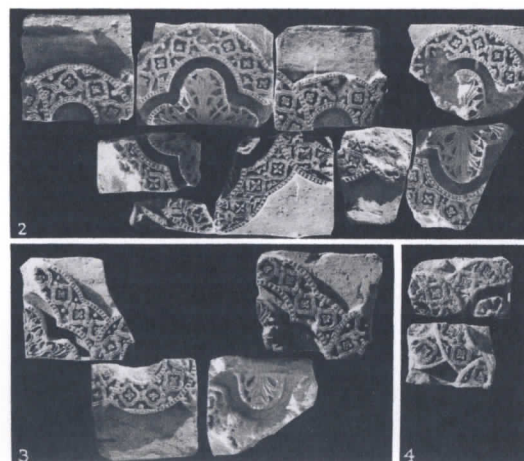
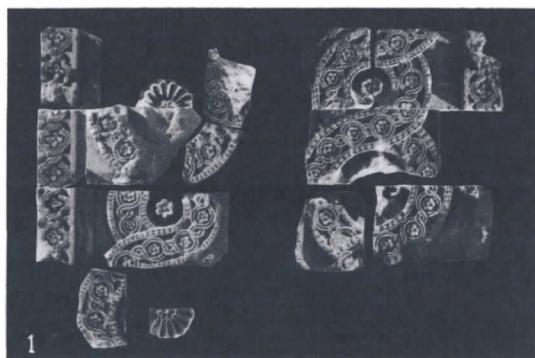


FIG. 123. Geometrical scheme of panel 5

Figure 98 Hamilton 1959, fig. 123.



Figure 99 Mosaic floor panels of the bath hall, Khirbat al-Mafjar.
Hamilton 1959, pl. LXXXVII, detail.



THE PALACE GATE TOWER, SCULPTURED ORNAMENT

Figure 100 Hamilton 1959, pl. XV.



Figure 101 Inscribed limestone test patterns, Khirbat al-Mafjar.
Hamilton 1959, pl. V, detail.

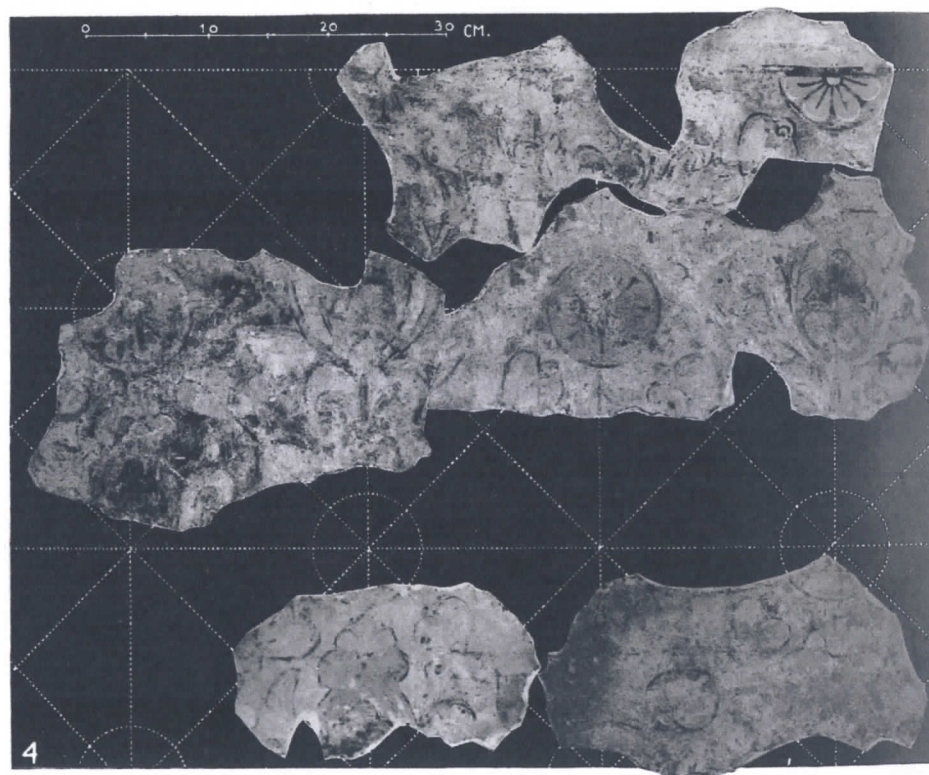
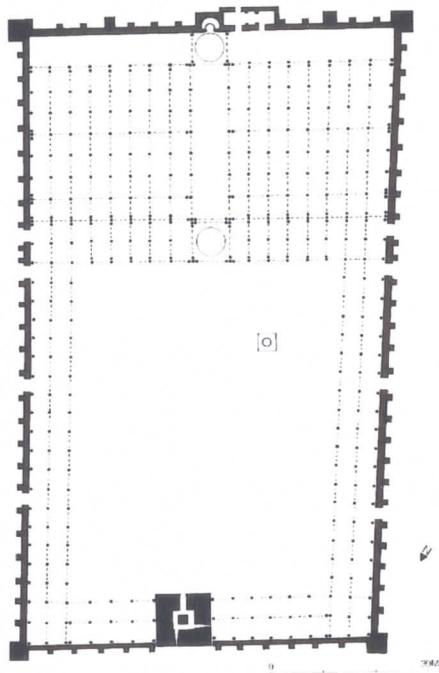


Figure 102 Wall painting fragments, Khirbat al-Mafjar.
Hamilton 1959, pl. LXXIV, detail.



30. Qayrawan, Great Mosque, 836, 862, and 875, plan

Figure 103
Ettinghausen, Grabar
and Jenkins-Madina 2001, fig. 30.

37. Qasr al-Hayr East, early eighth century, plan of small enclosure

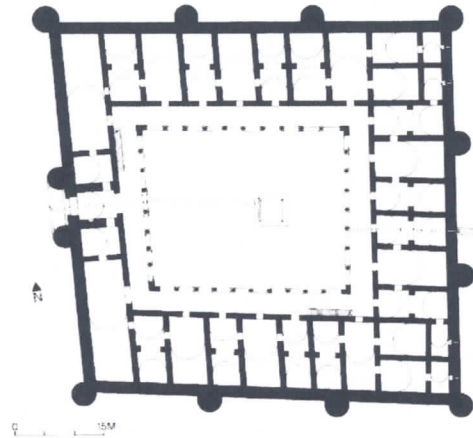


Figure 104
Ibid., fig. 37.



Figure 105 *Ibid.*, fig. 38, detail.



Figure 106 Google Earth, screen capture 6 May 2007.

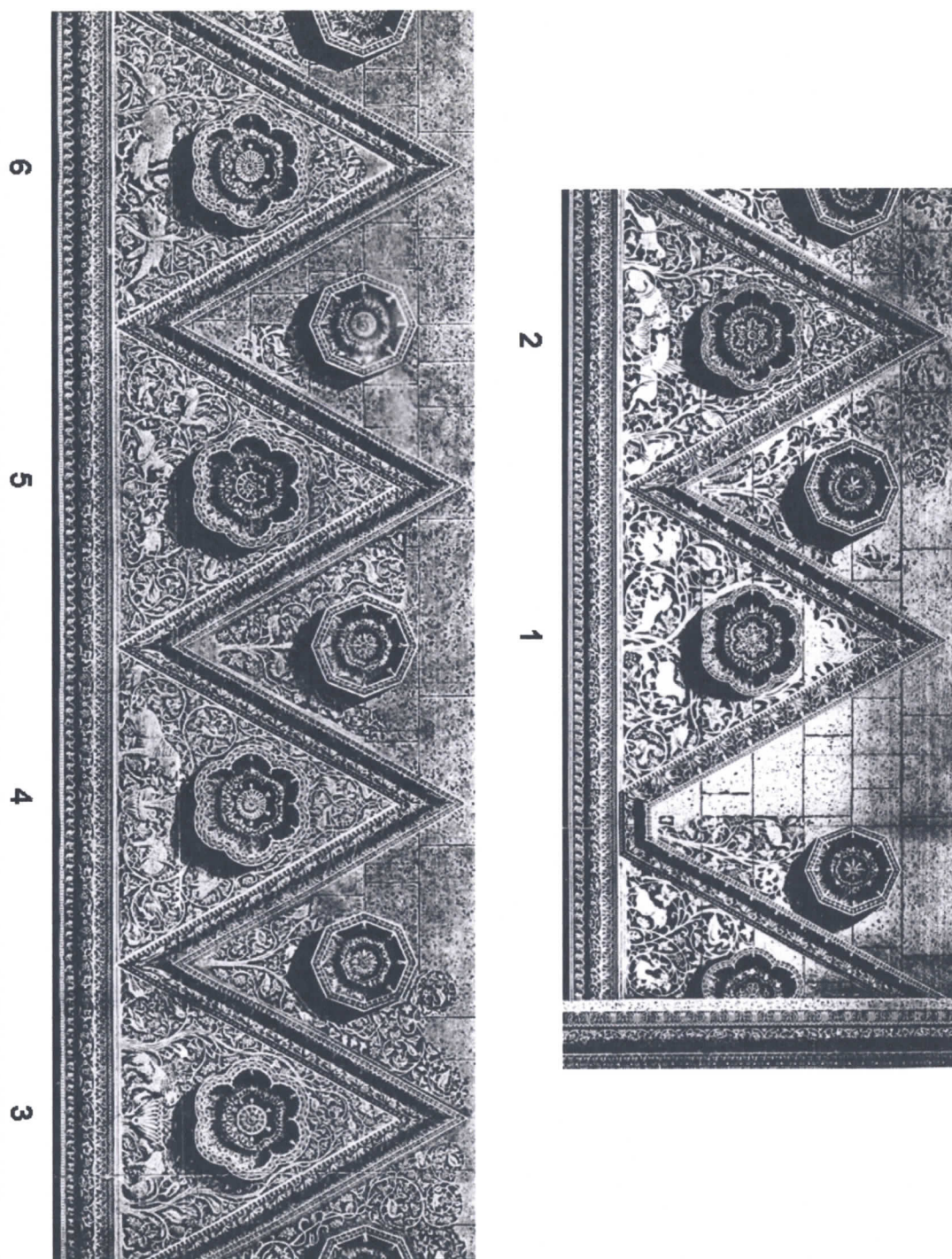


Figure 107a Western portion of the Mshatta façade, triangles 1-6 (numbered from the centre outwards). Façade illustrations taken from Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, pls. XLVI, XLVII.

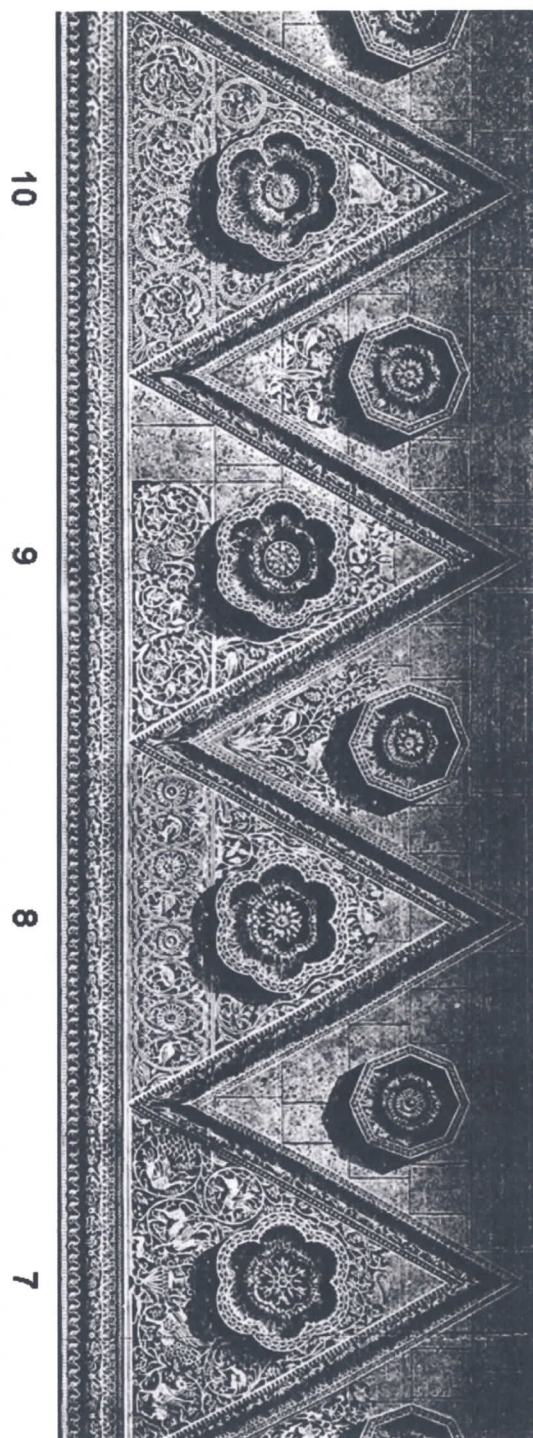


Figure 107b Western portion of the Mshatta façade, triangles 7-10 (numbered from the centre outwards). Façade illustration taken from *ibid.*, pl. XLVI.

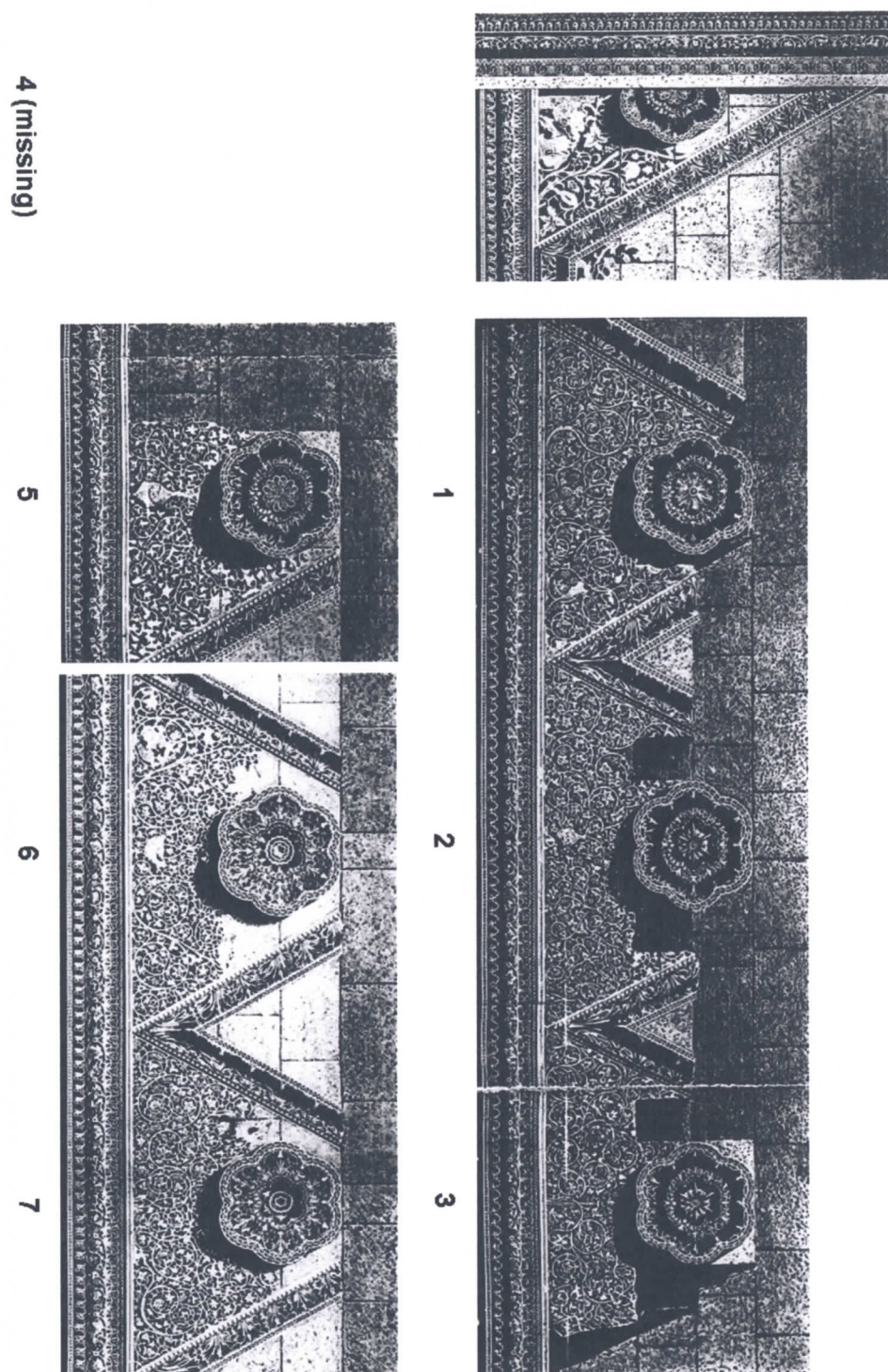


Figure 108a Eastern portion of the Mshatta façade, triangles 1-7 (numbered from the centre outwards). Façade illustrations taken from *ibid.*, pls. XLVII, XLVIII.

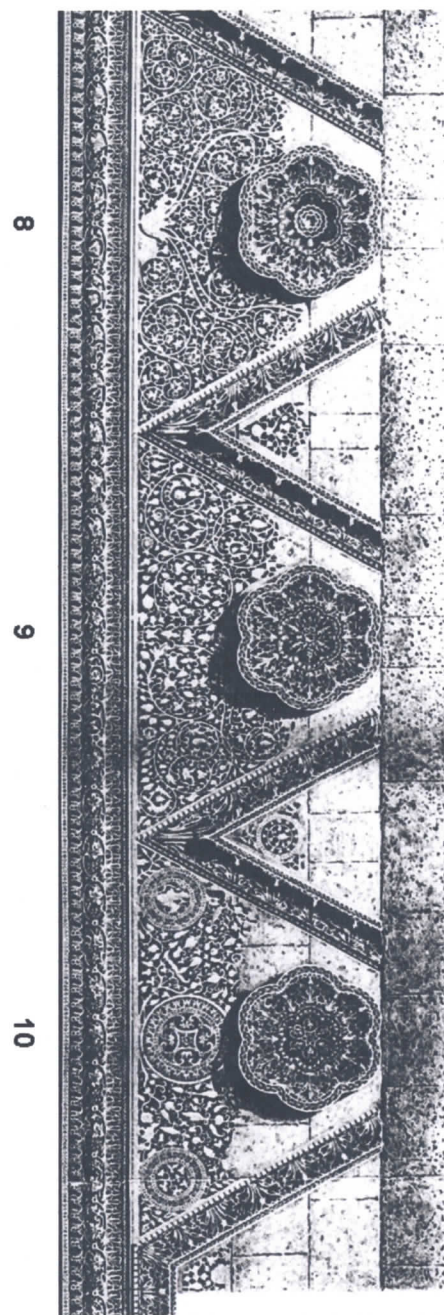


Figure 108b Eastern portion of the Mshatta façade, triangles 8-10 (numbered from the centre outwards). Façade illustration taken from *ibid.*, pl. XLVIII.

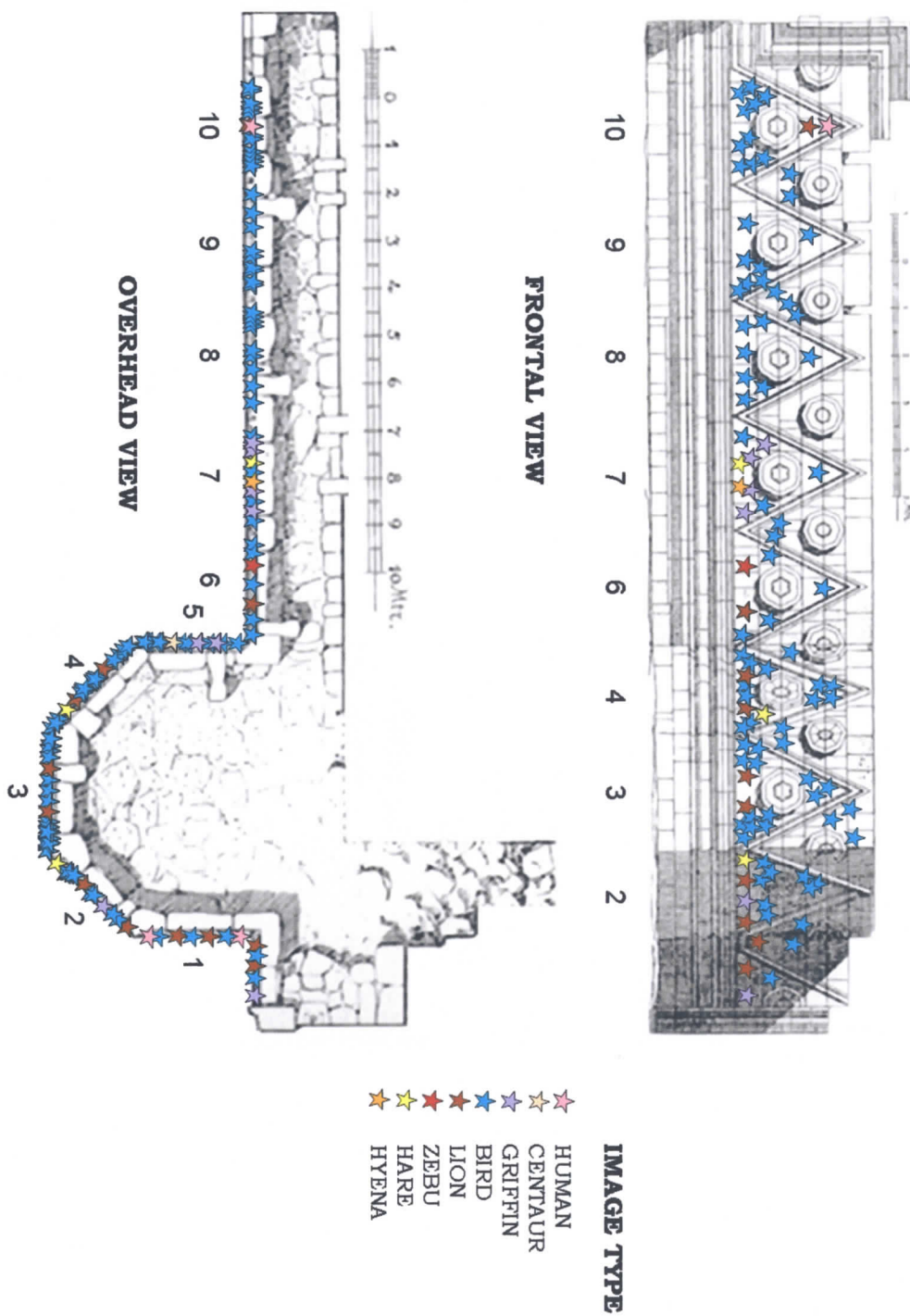


Figure 109a Distribution of images on the western portion of the Mshatta façade. Idea from Prof. Thomas Leisten and Dr. Marcus Milwright. Façade outline taken from Schulz 1904, p. 2.

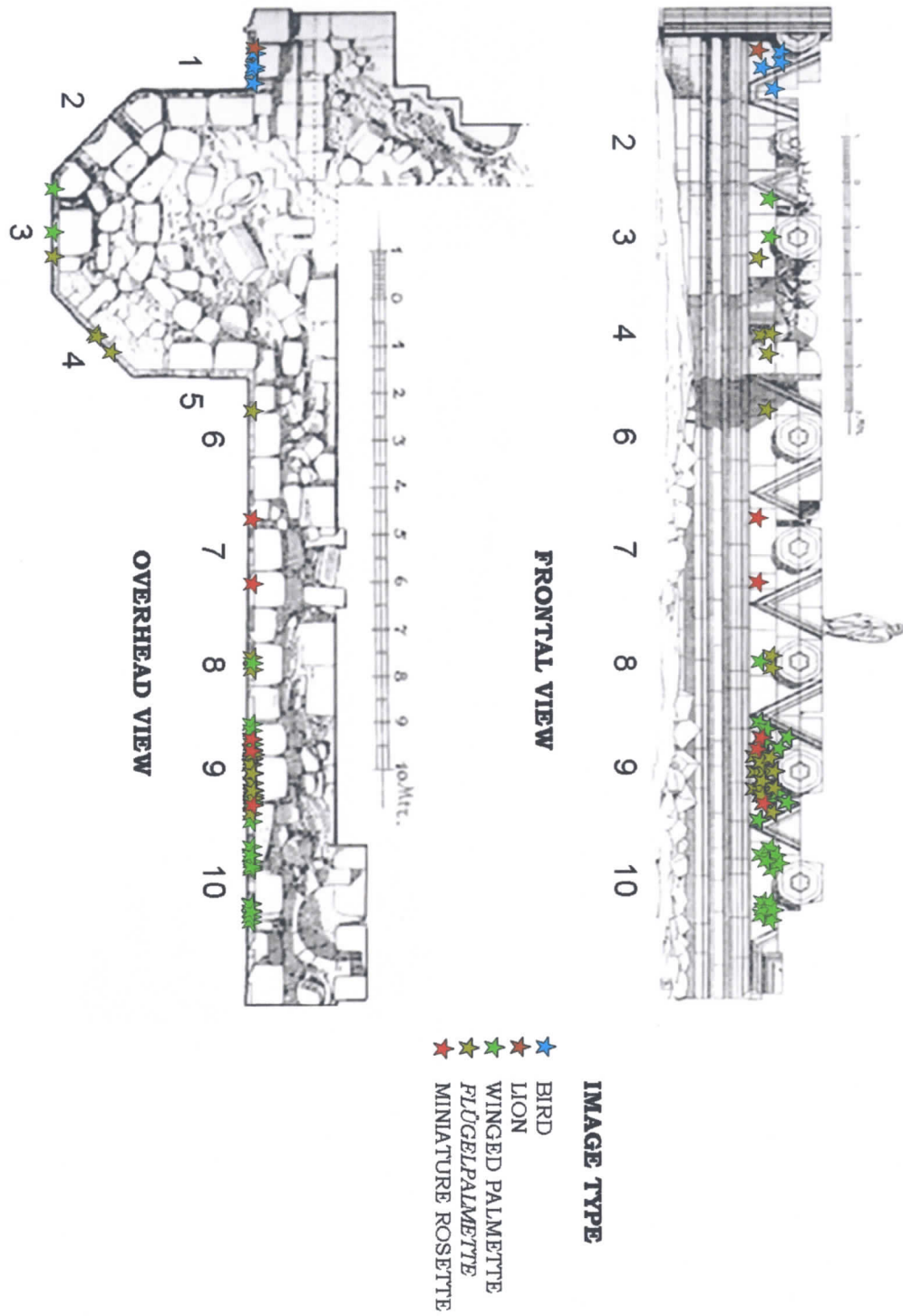


Figure 109b Distribution of images on the eastern portion of the Mshatta façade. Idea from Prof. Thomas Leisten and Dr. Marcus Milwright. Façade outline taken from *ibid.*

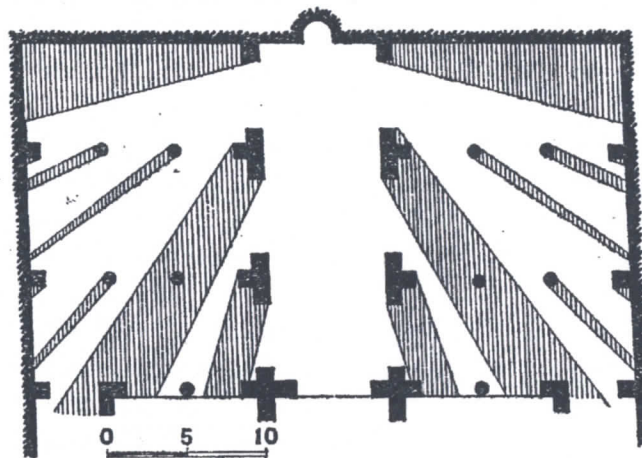


FIG. 19. — Mosquée d'ar-Roçafa :
diagramme montrant la visibilité du mihrab.

Figure 110 Diagram of the visibility of the *mihrab* in the mosque of Rusafa.
Sauvaget 1947, p. 146.



Figure 111 View of the entrance of Mshatta from the audience hall, with the
façade *in situ*. Negative 451, PU.



Figure 112 Present-day view of the entrance of Mshatta from the audience hall.

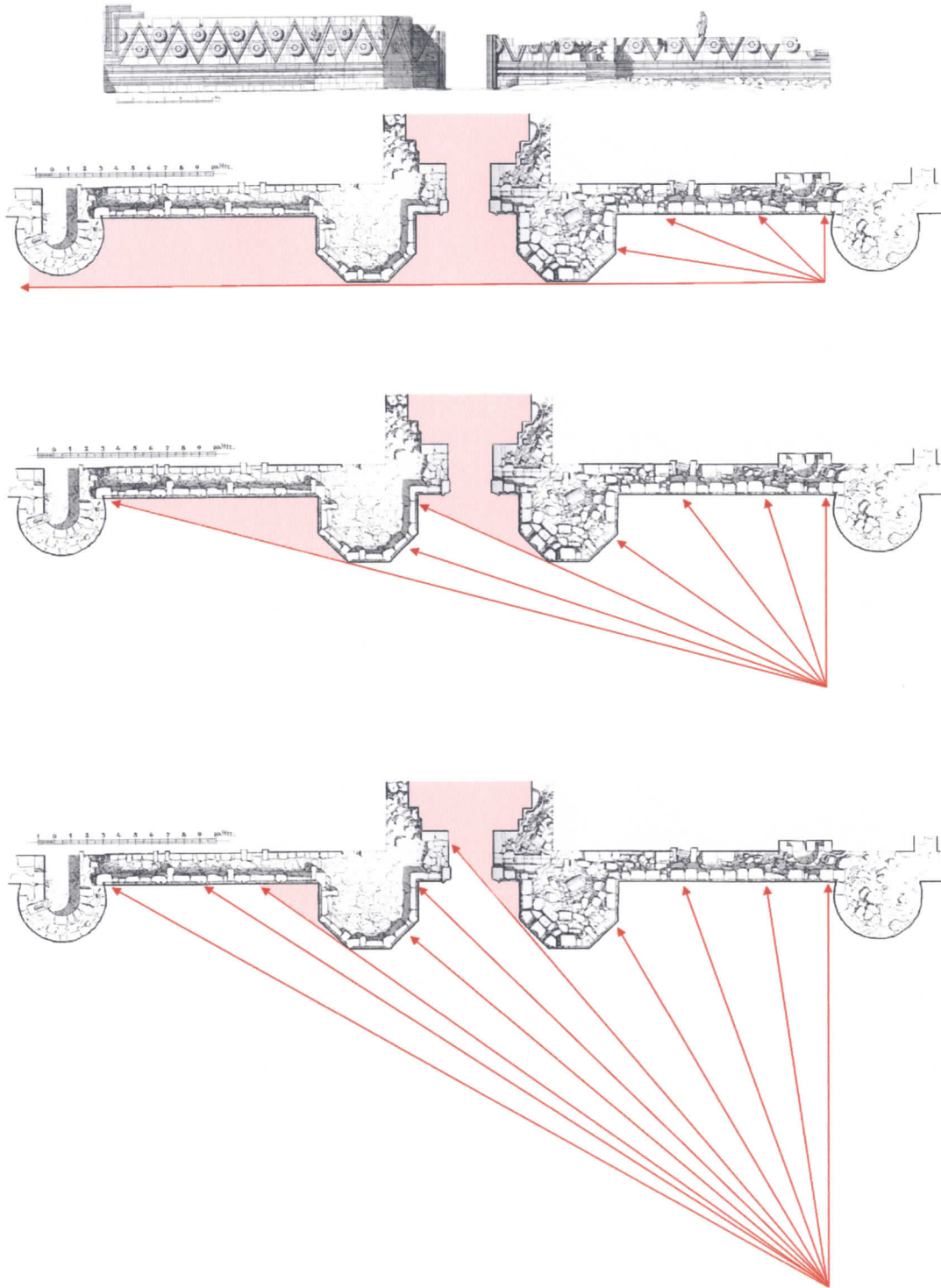


Figure 113 Lines of sight to the Mshatta façade when viewed from the east. Façade outline taken from Schulz 1904, p. 2.

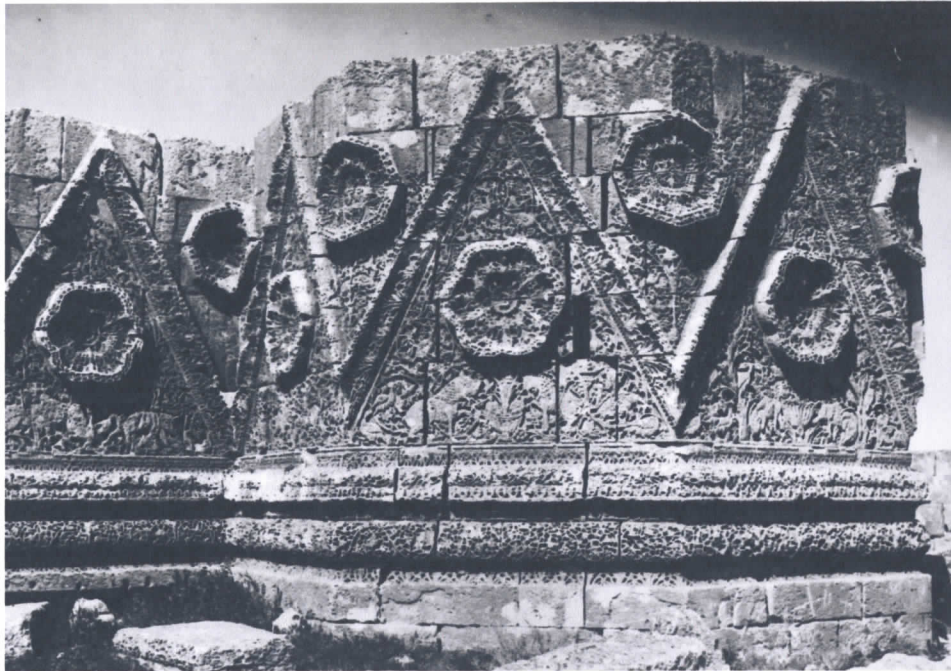


Figure 114 View from the western side of the western semi-octagonal tower, Mshatta façade. Negative 472, PU.

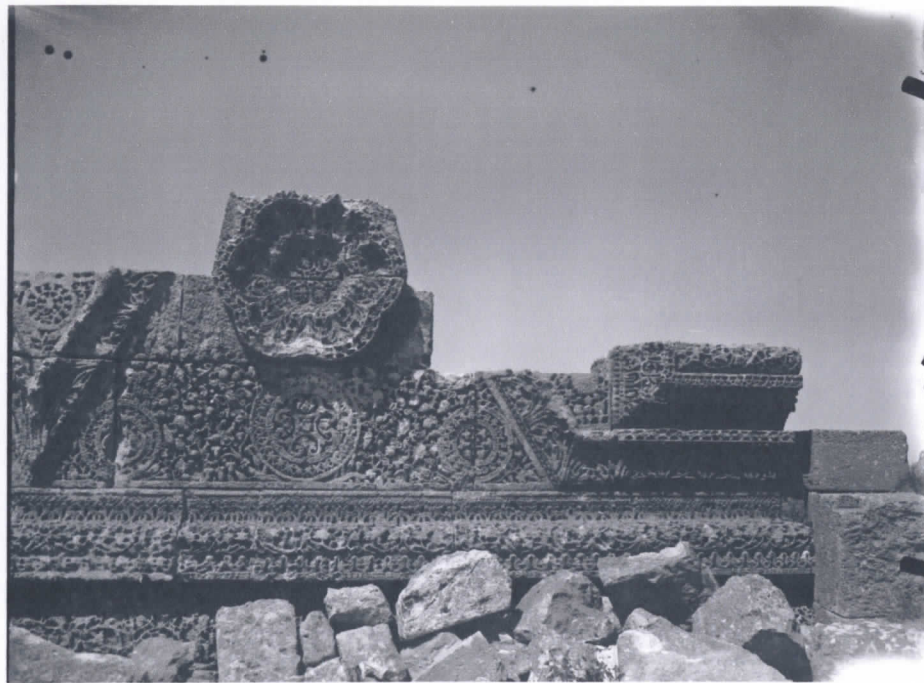


Figure 115 Easternmost triangle (10 East), Mshatta façade. Negative 525, PU.



Figure 116 Section of triangle 10 East, Mshatta façade, now in Berlin. Staatliche Museen inventory number I. 6165.

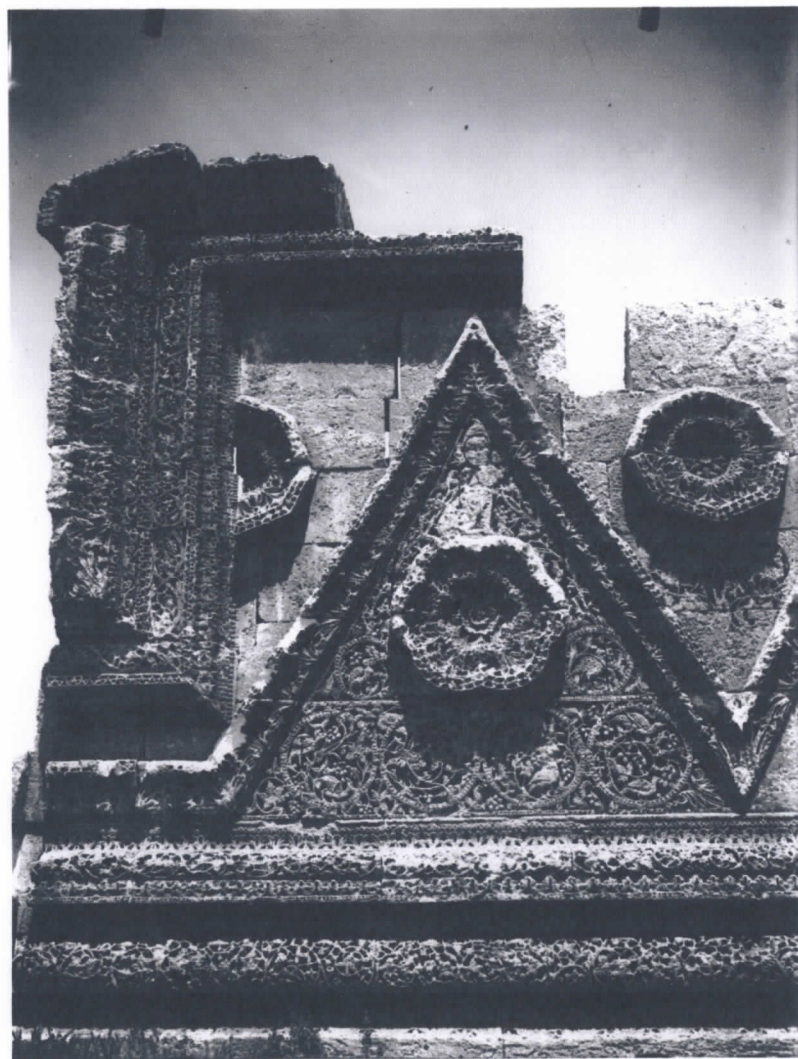


Figure 117 Westernmost triangle (10 West), Mshatta façade. Negative 477, PU.



Figure 118 Stone *qalansuwa*, Khirbat al-Mafjar. Hamilton 1959, pl. XII, detail.



Figure 119 Detail of westernmost triangle (10 West), Mshatta façade.



Figure 120 Detail of westernmost triangle (10 West), Mshatta façade. Negative 477, detail, PU.



Figure 121 Sculpture of male head, Mshatta. Staatliche Museen inventory number I. 6174.



Figure 122 Limit of the eastern wing of the Mshatta façade at the Staatliche Museen, Berlin.



Figure 123 Distant view of the westernmost triangle of the Mshatta façade at the Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

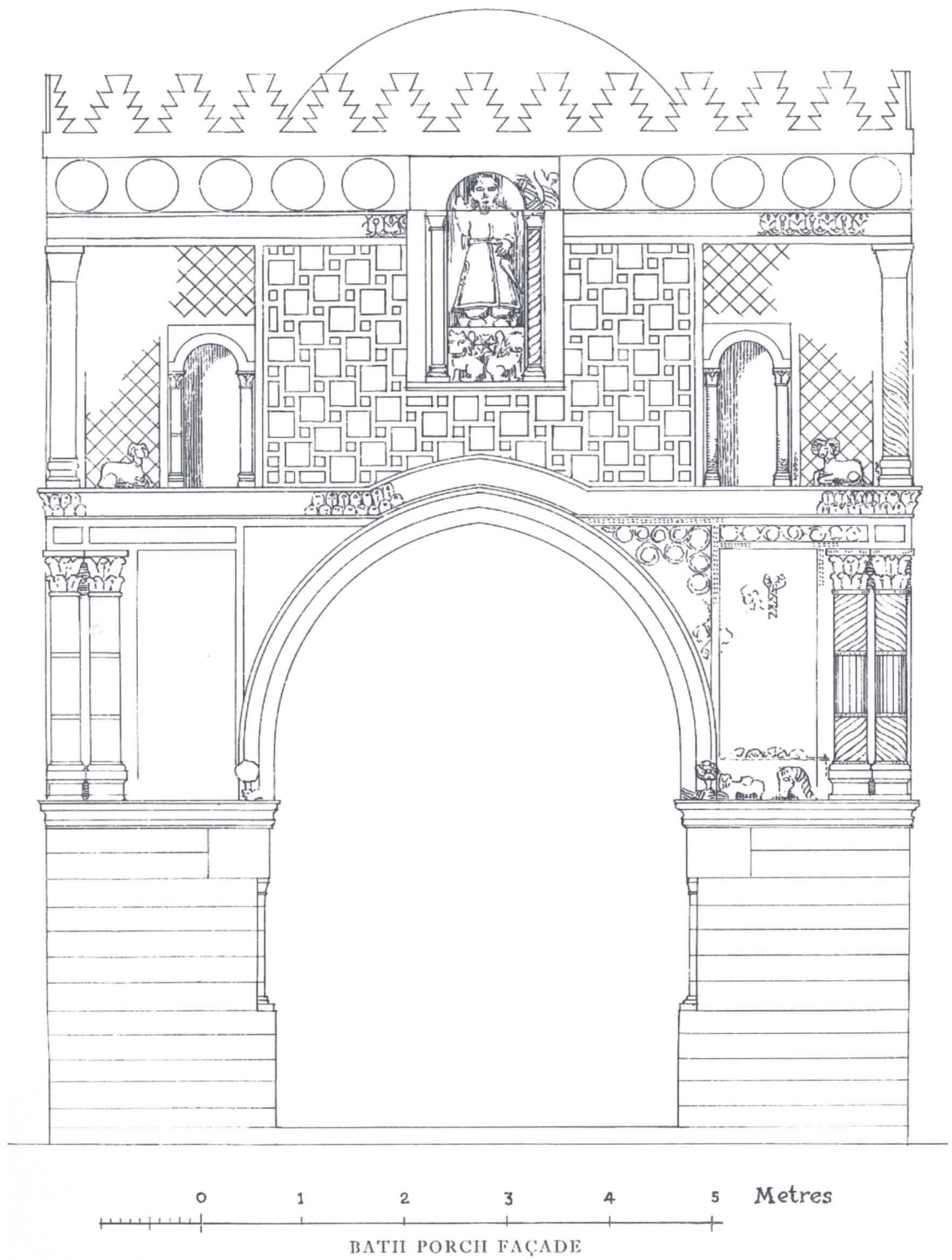


Figure 124 Hamilton 1959, pl. CVII.



Figure 125 Sculpture from bath porch façade, Khirbat al-Mafjar. Hamilton 1959, pl. LV, details.



Figure 126 Sasanian silver plate. *Sasanian Silver*, p. 102.



Ewer, Herat, late 12th or early 13th century.
Beaten brass with silver and copper inlay, 44.5 cm.
Reproduced from: James R. Allan, *Islamic Metalwork*. London: Sotheby, 1982.

Figure 127 Allen 1982, p. 47.



Sun in Leo

Figure 128 *Ibid.*, p. 50.



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Figure 129 'The Triumph of Dionysos'. Fourth-century silver Sasanian plate. Ettinghausen 1972, pl. III, fig. 10.

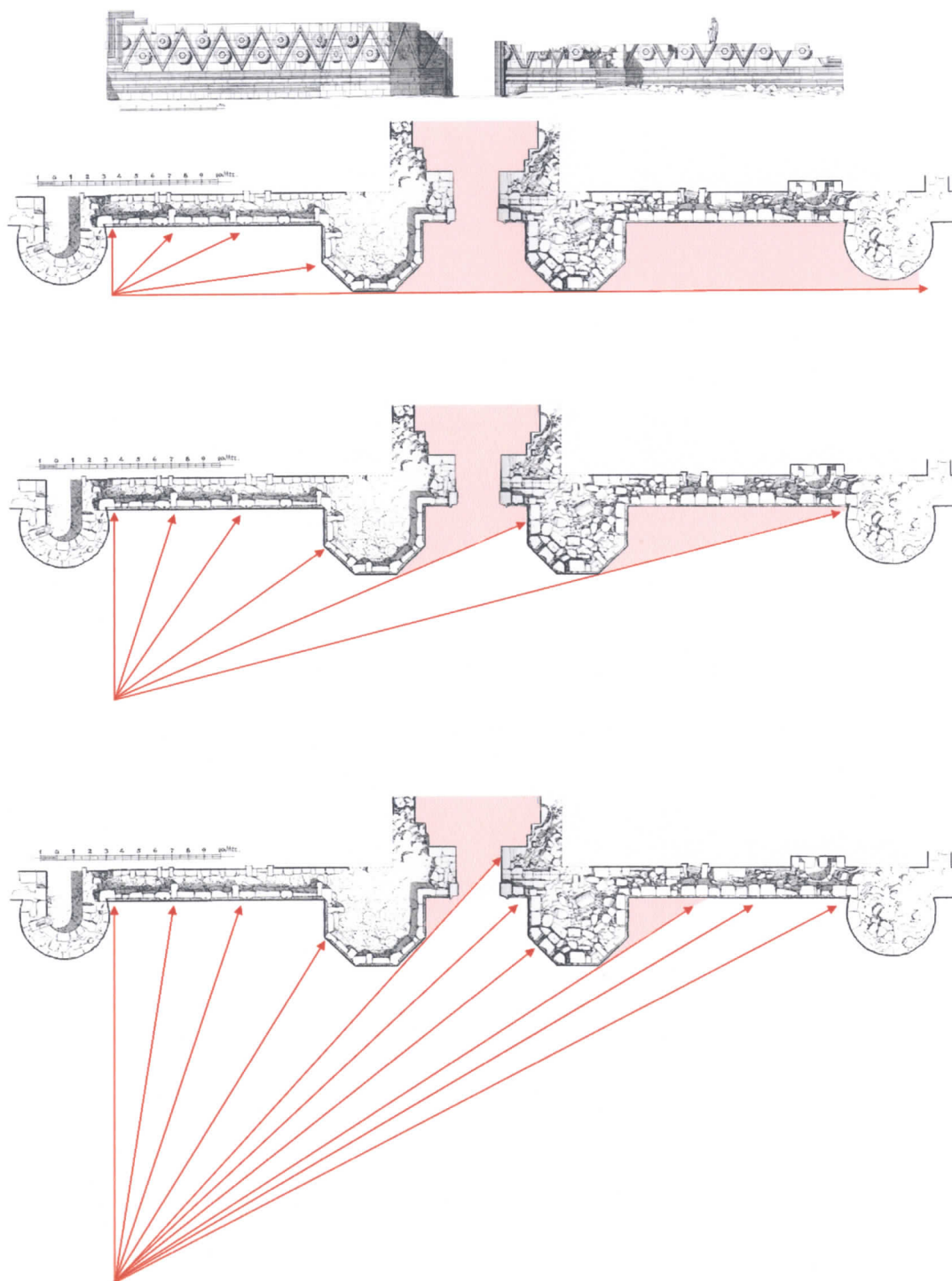


Figure 130 Lines of sight to the Mshatta façade when viewed from the west. Façade outline taken from Schulz 1904, p. 2.



Figure 131 Sasanian silver plate. *Sasanian Silver*, p. 100.



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Figure 132 Sasanian silver plate. *Ibid.*, p. 103.



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Figure 133 Byzantine copy of a Sasanian silk. Ettinghausen 1972, pl. XIII, fig. 47.



Figure 134 Facing triangle (3 West) and detail, western semi-octagonal tower.

Figure 135 Facing triangle (3 East) and detail, eastern semi-octagonal tower.

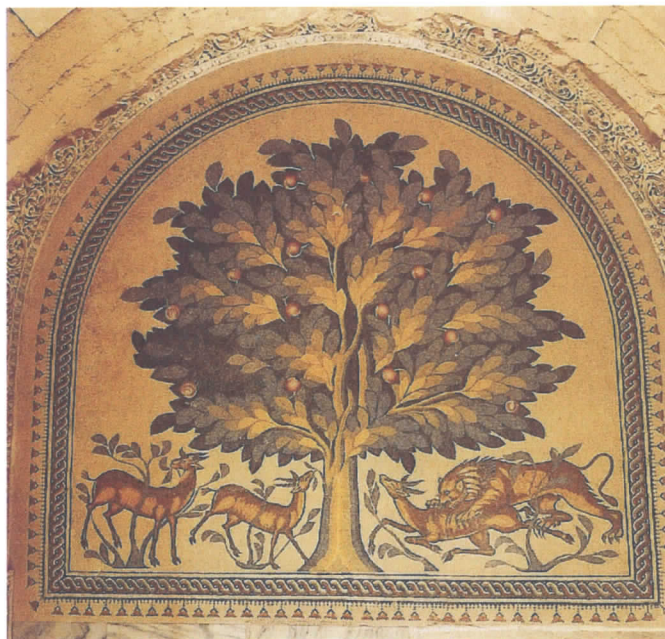


Figure 136 Bath hall mosaic, Khirbat al-Mafjar. Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001, fig. 47.

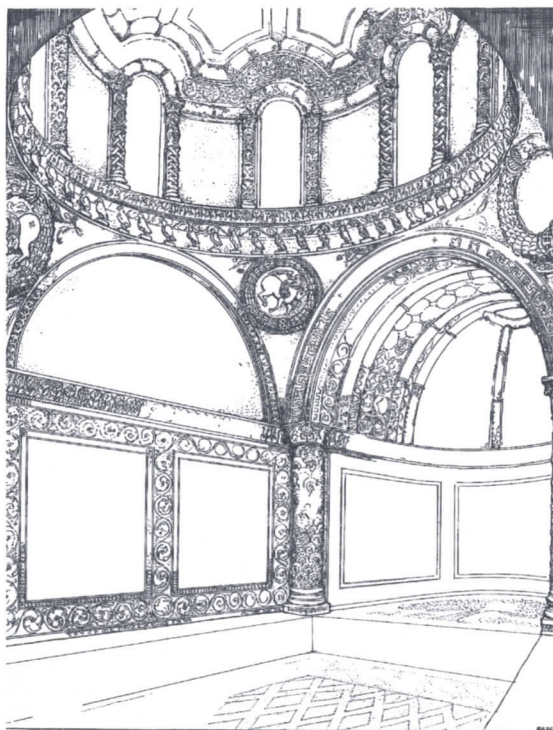


FIG. 26. *Diwan*; restored perspective view of the interior

Figure 137 Reconstruction of the *diwan* of the bath hall, Khirbat al-Mafjar. Hamilton 1959, p. 65.

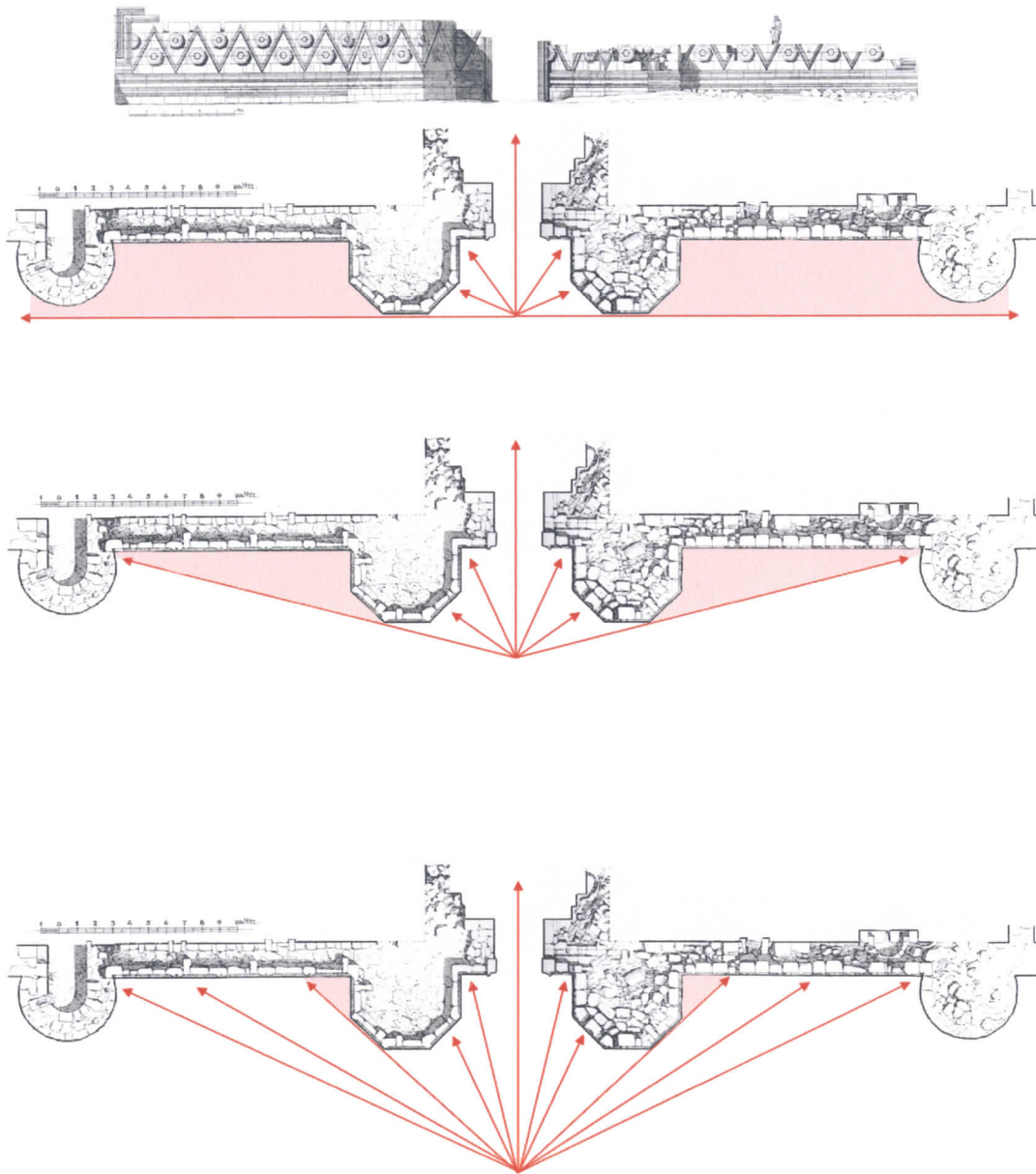


Figure 138 Lines of sight to the Mshatta façade when viewed from the south. Façade outline taken from Schulz 1904, p. 2.



Figure 139 West side of entrance, Mshatta façade.



Figure 140 East side of entrance, Mshatta façade.



Figure 141 Triangle 1 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 506, PU.

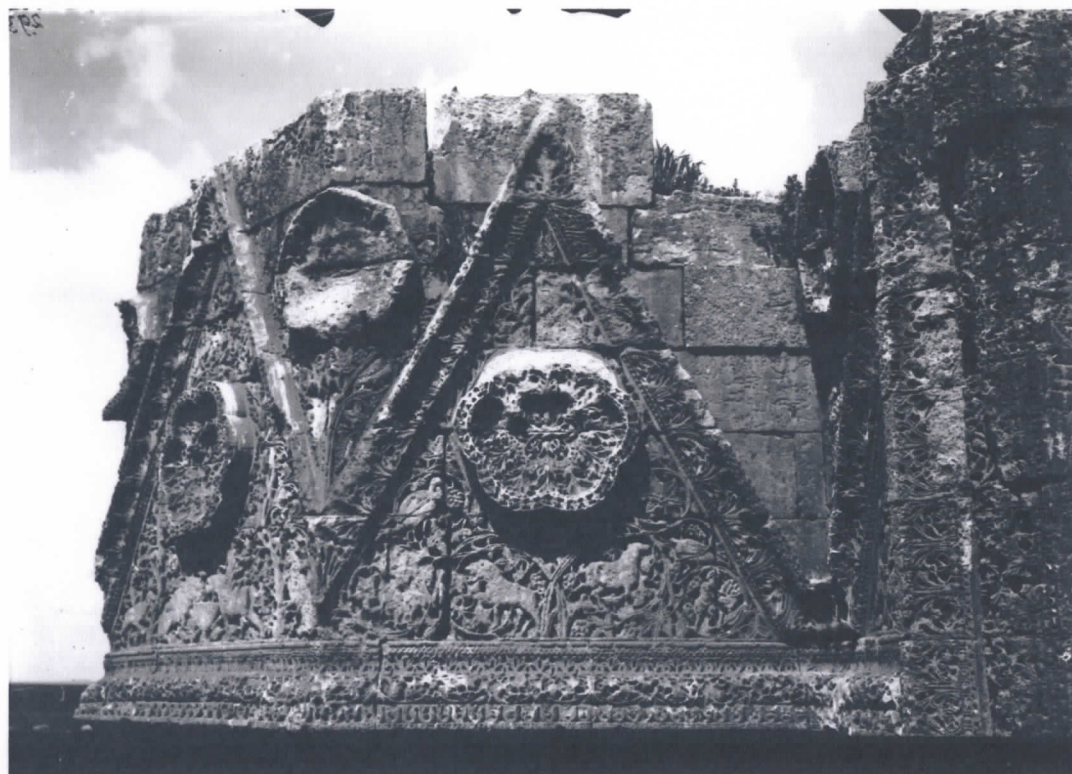


Figure 142 Triangle 1 West and detail, Mshatta facade.
Negative 500 and detail, PU.



Figure 143 Third triangle from the west (8 West), Mshatta façade.

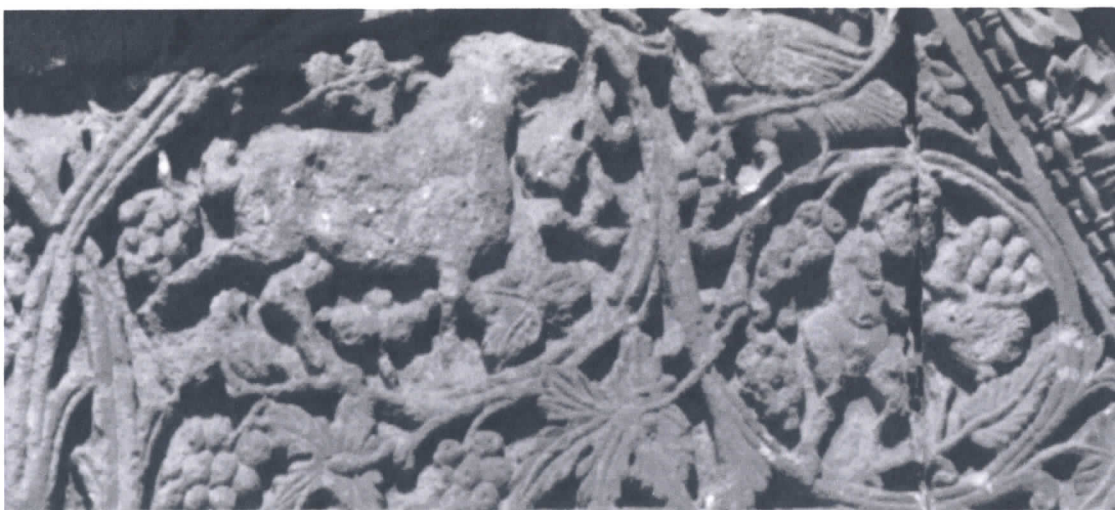


Figure 144 Detail of triangle 1 West, Mshatta façade. Negative 499, detail, PU.



Figure 145 Female statue from Mshatta, now in the National Archaeological 'Amman.

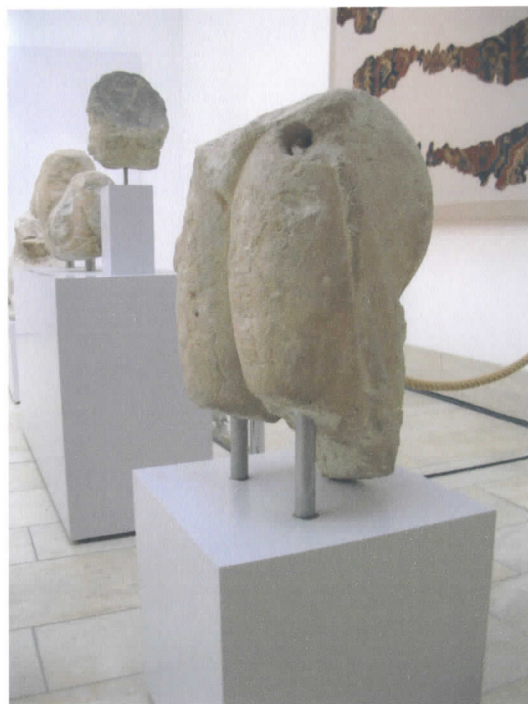


Figure 146 Female statue from Mshatta, now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inventory number I. 6172.



Figure 147 Female statue from Mshatta, now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inventory number I. 6173.



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Figure 148 Sixth-century silver Sasanian bottle. Ettinghausen 1972, pl. V, fig. 17.



Figure 149 Photograph of the entrance to Mshatta taken during the visit of Gertrude Bell. Image A233, RL.

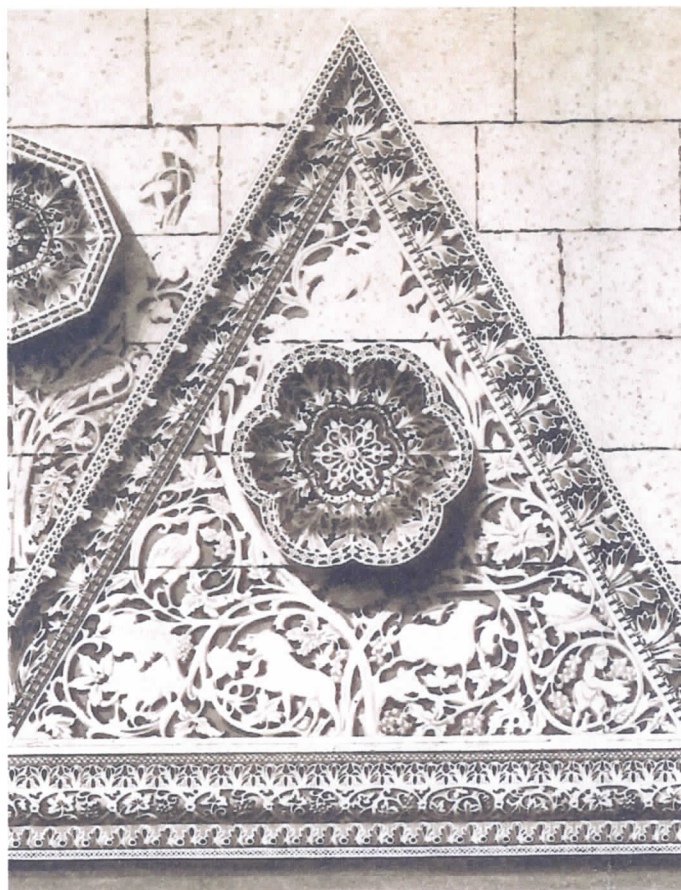


Figure 150 Illustration of triangle 1 West, Mshatta façade. Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905, pl. XLVII, detail.



Figure 151 Detail of triangle 1 West, Mshatta façade. Negative 499, detail, PU.



Figure 152 Detail of triangle 1 West, Mshatta façade



Figure 153 Detail of triangle 1 West, Mshatta façade, showing a human figure holding a diadem



Figure 154 Fragment of a male statue from Mshatta, now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inventory number I. 6182.



Figure 155 The investiture of Ardashir, Naqsh-e Rostam. <http://commons.wikimedia.org>, 9 April 2007.



Figure 156 Khusraw II receiving a diadem, Taq-i Bustan.
<http://commons.wikimedia.org>, 9 April 2007.

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Figure 157 Silver Sasanian dish. *Sasanian Silver*, p. 103.



Figure 158 Sasanian silver plate. *Ibid.*, p. 101.



Figure 159 Details of triangle 7 West, Mshatta façade.



Figure 160 View of triangle 7 West, Mshatta façade, from the central axis.



Figure 161 Triangle 2 West, Mshatta façade.



Figure 162 Detail of triangle 4 West, Mshatta façade.
Negative 493, detail, PU.



Figure 163 Detail of triangle 7 West, Mshatta façade.



Figure 164 Detail of triangle 3 West, Mshatta façade.



Figure 165 Detail of triangle 4 West, Mshatta façade.



Figure 166 Half-triangle flanking the east side of the entrance, Mshatta façade.



Figure 167 Triangle 1 East, Mshatta façade.



Figure 168 Triangle 3 East, Mshatta façade.



Figure 169 Detail of triangle 3 East, Mshatta façade.



Figure 170 Detail of triangle 7 West, Mshatta façade.



Figure 171 Detail of triangle 4 East, Mshatta façade.

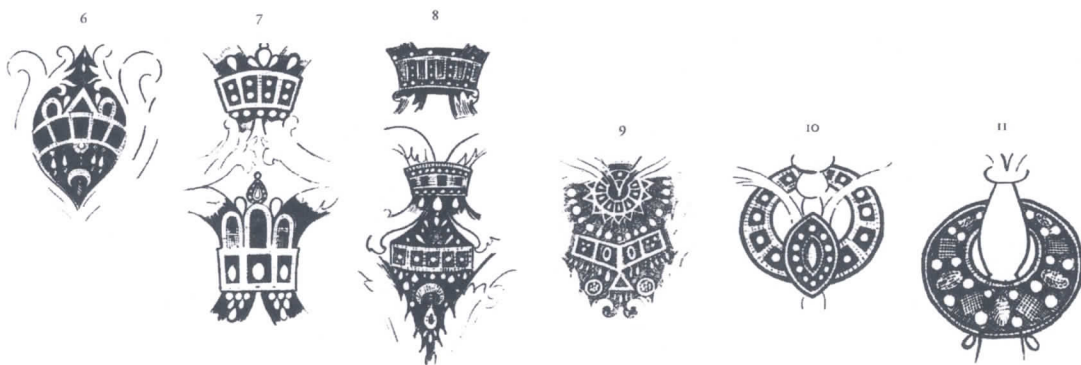


Figure 172 Illustrations of diadems from the mosaics on the octagon of the Dome of the Rock. Grabar 2005, p. 23.



Figure 173 Illustrations of mosaics on the drum of the Dome of the Rock.
Grabar 2005, pp. 21, 22.



Figure 174 Mosaic from the inner octagon of the Dome of the Rock.
Grabar 2005, p. 26.



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Figure 175 Khusraw type Arab-Sasanian coin. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amir ibn Kurayz. Album and Goodwin 2002, pl. 1, fig. 12.



Figure 176 Triangle 5 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 512, PU.



Figure 177 Section of triangle 6 East, Mshatta façade, now in Berlin.



Figure 178 Base of the eastern wing of the Mshatta façade remaining in Jordan.



Figure 179 Triangle 5 East, Mshatta façade.



Figure 180 Detail of triangle 6 East, Mshatta façade, now in Berlin.



Figure 181 Detail of triangle 6 East, Mshatta façade, remaining in Jordan.



Figure 182 Triangle 6 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 516, PU.



Figure 183 Triangle 7 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 519, PU.



Figure 184 Triangle 8 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 521, PU.

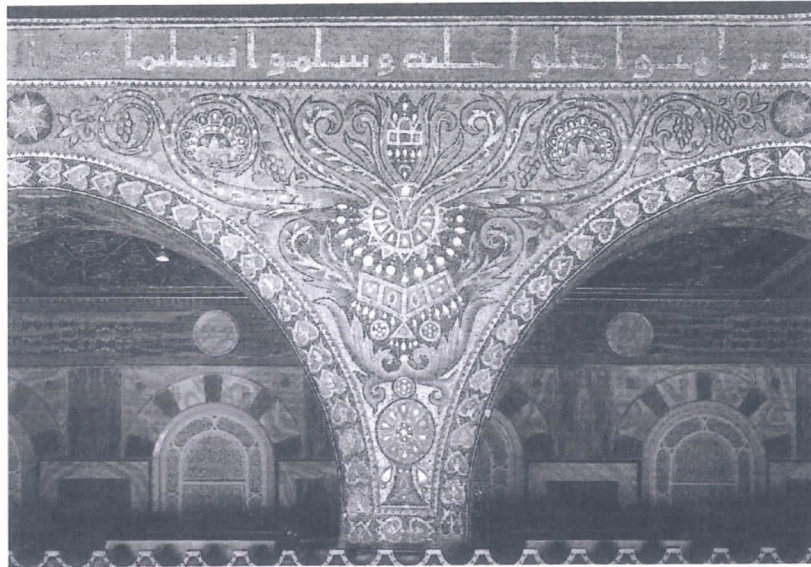


Figure 185 Mosaic from the inner octagon of the Dome of the Rock. Grabar 2005, p. 25.



Figure 186 Detail of triangle 8 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 521, detail, PU.

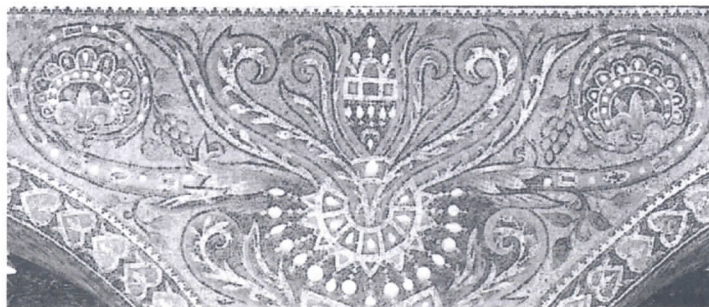


Figure 187 Detail of a mosaic from the inner octagon of the Dome of the Rock. Grabar 2005, fig. 25, detail.



Figure 188 Triangle 9 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 523, PU.



Figure 189 Limestone lintel from Qasr al-Tuba, now in the National Archaeological Museum, 'Amman. Inventory number J. 1950.



Figure 190 Fragments of triangle 9 East, Mshatta façade, now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inventory number I. 6164.



Figure 191 Details of triangle 10 East, Mshatta façade. Negative 525, details, PU.