SOLOMON'S THRONE/SOLOMON'S BATH:
MODEL OR METAPHOR?

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OF THE LEGENDARY FIGURES MENTIONED IN THE QUR'AN, Solomon is one of the most complex and multifaceted. He possessed both practical wisdom and a connection with supernatural forces. He could command the wind, communicate with birds and demons, some of whom constructed objects and buildings for him, and one of whom seized for him the throne of a female ruler, Bilqis. Solomon could make armor, possessed the wisdom to adjudicate disputes, and was fond of horses. In religious terms Solomon's role is somewhat ambiguous. He is said to have received a divine message, but also to have been arrogant, for which he sought a divine pardon. Death overtook him, as it does all mortals.

Across the Islamic period these various aspects of his personality varied in importance. The Qur'anic frame of reference for Solomon did ensure, however, that certain of them would retain a wide currency in the Islamic world, giving Solomonic imagery consistent features in different periods and regions. This consistency is an aid to the identification of Solomonic themes, even when an image or monument lacks any direct epigraphic or historical evidence which would connect it with that tradition.

Such is the case with the Umayyad palace complex known as Khirbat al-Majfar and in particular its bath hall. It lacks any direct historical documentation which could explain the rationale behind its decorative program, let alone any texts which establish a connection between its features and the attributes or accomplishments of Solomon. Nevertheless both the monument's architectural features and its sculptural program do contain elements which may reflect Islamic legends about Solomon, particularly his connection with baths and the special properties of his throne. Since there is no direct historical documentation in contemporary sources which could corroborate this hypothesis, archaeological and textual evidence must be assembled before this question can be addressed.

The Khirbat al-Majfar excavation yielded no inscriptions aside from a few graffiti scattered on the surface or in foundation trenches. Archaeological evidence was, however, sufficient to establish that the complex was begun during the caliphate of Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik (724-43), but that some of the buildings were still unfinished when they collapsed in the devastating earthquake of the mid eighth century. Baramki and Hamilton dated this earthquake to 746, but other, more conclusive information suggests January 18, 749: excavations at Bet Shean (Roman and Byzantine Scythiopolis) turned up a gold coin dated 131 A.H. (August 31, 748-August 18, 749), excavated from a jeweler's shop buried under earthquake debris.

The Khirbat al-Majfar complex had four main components: a palace, a mosque, a bath, and a courtyard with a domed fountain. Customarily a bath is assumed to be a subsidiary structure, a kind of service appendage to a residence, but in this case not only was the bath larger and more elaborately decorated than any of the palace rooms, it was also the first part of the complex to be built and the only one which shows signs of use. Thus, even though the upper story of the palace, which should have contained the private chambers of its owner, was unfinished when the building was destroyed, the pipes of the bath contained deposits of lime and ash that must have resulted from a significant period, perhaps years, of service.

The bath complex was also notable both for the divergent scale of its components and for its lavish decoration which included mosaic pavements, painted plaster, carved stucco, and stone-work. The core of the structure was a square hall with projecting exedrae on each side. In his excavation report Hamilton identified this chamber as a frigidarium, but later designated it as a "music room," partly as a descriptive term and partly to take issue with Ettinghausen's interpretation that it was a throne room. Here the neutral terms "bath hall" or "hall" will be used. Although the functional rooms of the bath located along the hall's northern side were small, the adjacent latrine was capacious. Three sections of the bath hall had particularly elaborate decoration: its entrance façade, its domed porch, and the small chamber attached to its northwest corner. The bath hall proper also contained some
figural sculpture, but it was too fragmentary to interpret.18

All three decorated areas—the bath-hall façade, its domed vestibule, and the northwest chamber—combine large areas of low-relief geometric or vegetal ornament with human and animal figures executed in high relief or even in the round. This contrast between two sculptural modes is particularly evident in the bath-hall façade and porch where figural elements were placed over or in front of vegetal and geometric ornament.19 Figural decoration was also concentrated in the upper zones of both structures.20 On the façade most of the sculpture was placed above the entrance portal. Three niches are assumed to have contained human figures, although only the central one, a bearded man standing on a pair of lions, labeled the “caliph,” was recovered.21 A row of bearded ibexes with pendants around their necks rested, somewhat precariously, on top of a cornice which surmounted the arch.22 Other animal sculptures, among them the head of a horse, were similarly perched along a lower molding (figs. 1–4).23

The bath porch was, if anything, more startling in its juxtapositions, for it had low-relief vegetal and geometric ornament both below and above the figural zone.24 Figures in high relief or in the round were also arranged in clear levels. The upper level consisted of niches about 1.5 meters high once occupied by nearly life-sized, brightly painted male and female figures. Most of the women are nude to the waist with a cloth draped around their lower torso, but one poorly preserved figure wears a different garment.25 Some of the men wear loincloths, but one is dressed as a Roman footsoldier with a scale-armor tunic.26 The zone of figures in niches was surmounted by a row of birds and had kneeling sheep and gazelles at its base, balanced on the top ledge of an acanthus cornice (figs. 3–4).27

This whole upper structure which filled the dome’s drum rested on pendentives covered with grapevines, but visually appeared to be supported by four male figures also wearing loincloths.28 These figures are described with derision by Hamilton who speaks of their conflicting roles of “Caryatid” and “juggler.”29 Certainly the execution of these figures lacks polish, but this does not exclude the possibility that their pose was intended to convey a message or that they had a meaningful connection with the upper zones of figures which they appear to support.

Hamilton is also critical of the placement of figures in the palace entryway, including life-sized figures in niches, horsemen standing on a cornice, and nude human figures on a vault covered by a dense tangle of grapevines inhabited by birds, monkeys, and pigs, which he describes as “awkward and incoherent.”30 Yet perhaps even this seemingly accidental placement of figural sculpture against the building, with birds and animals perched in rows along the cornices like so many pigeons on a roost, and life-sized human figures coming out of wall niches, was prompted not by incompetence but by the desire to create a specific impression in the mind of the viewer.

In his study, Walid and His Friends, Hamilton divides the figural sculptures into two groups on the basis of technique—one includes figures from the northwest chamber and domed porch, the other those from the palace entryway and bath façade. He also postulates two dates of execution and suggests that the bath façade sculptures were added only after Walid’s accession to the caliphate in 743.31

Both Hamilton and Hillenbrand concur that the totality of the figural decoration on the bath façade and porch had no symbolic significance beyond an obvious reference to traditional themes connected with princely pomp and pleasure. As Hillenbrand states, “It was not conceived and executed as an entity” and “implicitly disclaims political themes.”32 Although Hamilton’s suggestion of two phases in the execution of the sculptures is plausible, it need not imply the absence of an overall rationale in the choice and placement of the figures.

The question of whether the structure and decoration of Umayyad palatial complexes were based on a unifying concept or whether they represent a kind of accidental assemblage of recycled forms and themes continues to be debated.33 With respect to Khirbat al-Mafjar, most of the debate to date has focused on a portion of the central bath hall and on its highly decorated northwest chamber. A theory that both of these areas displayed Iranian royal symbols proposed by Ettinghausen was strongly disputed by Hamilton. Subsequently, Shaked provided additional evidence to support some of Ettinghausen’s hypotheses.34 Rather than joining in a debate over these portions of the building, however, we will focus on the sculptural ensemble on the bath-hall façade and porch in which we see a reflection of legends about Solomon’s throne and bath.

First, however, it is useful to review what is
known about the Umayyad vision of Solomon and how the stories about him contained in the Qur'an were viewed in the first Islamic centuries. Studies on the evolution of Islamic religious thought and practice have suggested that the Umayyad period was a critical moment in which explanations for Qur'anic texts were sought from a wide variety of sources. Where passages have strong parallels with the biblical narrative, the interpretations of persons familiar with Jewish and Christian sources were particularly important.

Scholars have identified the names of several individuals whose interpretations were appreciated by the first generations of Muslims. Some of them were qussās (sg. qāṣṣ), popular preachers or storytellers whose explanations of the Qur'anic text helped the expanding community of believers understand the faith's doctrines. They probably laid the foundation for the important aspects of Qur'anic analysis later codified as tafsīr, and subsequently, some of their interpretations were incorporated into historical texts such as Tabari's annals.

Major changes in the religious traditions which accompanied the formal codification of commentaries in the Abbasid period have made it difficult, however, to reconstruct the religious and cultural climate of earlier decades. Fortunately some texts preserved in an Abbasid recension still provide important clues as to the attitudes of the preceding period. Two texts useful for understanding the early Islamic vision of Solomon are the Kitāb al-Tijān fi Mulk Himyar of Wahb ibn Munabbih (654–729 or 732) and the tafsīr of Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 767). Muqatil was probably a qadī by profession and his tafsīr is said to contain colorful elements drawn from the tradition of popular preachers who often included comments about Qur'anic legends in their sermons.

Ibn Munabbih's biography, as reconstructed by R. G. Khoury, underscores his role as interpreter of biblical traditions for the Umayyad dynasty and later generations of Muslims. Wahb was one of six brothers born into a family of mixed Iranian and Yemeni ancestry. His great-grandfather, al-Aswar, had come to the Yemen as a member of a Persian and Yemeni ancestry. His great-grandfather, Wahb ibn Munabbih (654–729 or 732) was evidently transmitted to his sons, two of whom, Hummaam and Wahb, achieved eminence in religious studies.

Wahb gained renown for his knowledge of biblical traditions and is said to have known both Hebrew and Aramaic; he was also known for his exemplary piety. Accounts that Ibn 'Abbas, the traditionist, declared Wahb to be the most learned of men are probably legendary, but even in its present state the Kitāb al-Tijān attests to his intimate familiarity with Jewish, Arabian, and Iranian lore. Some of this knowledge may have come from his mother, said to be descended from the rulers of Himyar, but his text also reflects the unusual amalgam of cultures and religions characteristic of sixth- and seventh-century Yemen.

Professionally Wahb ibn Munabbih served as a qadī in San'ā', a position to which he was appointed by the Umayyad caliph, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Aswā' around 717. The Kitāb al-Tijān confirms that he was also skilled as a qāṣṣ, or reciter of religious tales, a combination of skills particularly characteristic of religious leaders in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods.

Wahb is said to have been consulted by the caliph Mu'awiya and Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik on religious matters. A tradition preserved in Tha'labi's Qisas al-Anbiyā' describes his conversation with Mu'awiya about the special features of Solomon's throne. Walid allegedly sought Wahb's aid in interpreting a Hebrew inscription discovered during the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus which no one could read; Wahb was able to link it with the reign of Sulayman b. Da'ud.

Despite its abbreviated state, one can sense in the Kitāb al-Tijān the power of the qāṣṣ to render the Qur'anic message intelligible to the community of believers through his dual skills as entertaining storyteller and moralizing preacher. In Ibn Munabbih's text these two goals—instruction and entertainment—work in tandem. He creates a lively narrative of Solomon's relationship with Bilqis by skillfully blending quotations and paraphrases of the Qur'anic text with extra-Qur'anic details to create a new whole which at once endows the principals with credible personalities and makes the Qur'anic text more meaningful. In addition, his stress on the story's moral...
and religious message recurs at intervals like a refrain. Thus he frames a description of Solomon's supernatural attributes with a stress on their role in a divine plan beginning with the statement that God gave Solomon powers not granted to anyone before or since so that he might rescue Bilqis from her arrogant disregard for God's omnipotence (qudrah) and concluding that God's real goal was making Solomon guide her and the Himyartes to the true faith.  

Ibn Munabbih's text deserves a detailed analysis, but here three passages will be summarized—the discussion of Solomon's powers, the role of his throne, and his connection with baths. In describing Solomon's unique powers, Ibn Munabbih combines quotations and paraphrases of themes treated in suras 21, 27, 34, and 38. They describe Solomon's command of the wind, his ability to communicate with both animate beings and inanimate things, and his power to force demonic creatures to do his bidding, particularly to erect buildings or collect pearls.

Here a section of this text will be translated. Qur'anic quotations will be both italicized and identified, and paraphrases will be followed by parenthetical references to their apparent source.

To Solomon [he submitted] the wind. The morning one blew a month['s journey] and the evening one blew a month['s journey] (34:11/12). The birds shaded him. He [God] taught him the language of the birds and the language of all things (27:16). No matter which thing uttered His [God's] praises he [Solomon] understood that praise (21:79). The mountain traveled with him, indeed the wind carried it as it repeated its praises (of God) (34:10). People, jinna, and shaytān were made subservient to him (21:82, 34:12/13). As God—may his praise be great—said: all builders and pearl-divers (38:36/37).

This nucleus of attributes established Solomon's role as builder, and his mobility permitted his connection with buildings and regions quite distant from one another. Ibn Munabbih notes that Solomon could travel anywhere he pleased, but specifically links him to Tadmur (Palmyra) in Syria, Istakhr (Persepolis) in Iran, and Kabul in Afghanistan.

The Qur'anic text insists repeatedly on Solomon's ability to command the wind and to make it carry him wherever he wished, but gives few hints about how he traveled. Comments in Ibn Munabbih and Tabari, however, show that he was believed to move from place to place with his entire entourage in what was, in effect, a portable palace complete with kitchens and stables. Ibn Munabbih describes how Solomon arranged his entourage during those journeys:

He commanded the wind to carry his throne (ajarsh) and he ordered it to carry the chairs (karāšā) of his companions. Then he sat on his throne. He seated the men on his right and left, and he placed the jinn behind him in this way—some sitting, some standing. Then he said to the wind, "Carry us," and to the birds, "Shade us." Then the wind carried him and the birds shaded him and his companions among men and jinn from the sun. The horses were standing and the cooks sitting in their stalls at their work.

This Kitāb al-Tijān description omits some details found in other early accounts cited by Tabari in his history. One given on the authority of Ibn Ishaq (d. 709) explains the preparations needed for such a journey. Whenever Solomon went to war, a wooden platform was constructed to transport his army, their mounts, weapons, and accouterments. When everything was in order on the platform, Solomon commanded a gale (āsif) to lift this structure and when it was airborne a gentle breeze (rūkhā) propelled it. Another description cited by Tabari on the authority of Muhammad b. Ka'b al-Quradi (d. 756) makes the same differentiation between a violent wind which lifts the platform and a breeze which carries it while also stressing that Solomon's traveling entourage stretched over a distance of one hundred parsangs and was divided evenly between humans, jinn, birds, and animals, with each occupying twenty-five parsangs. His immediate household consisted of a thousand women—three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines—each of whom had a separate glass enclosure (bayt min qawāfir) on that wooden support.

Yet another description of how Solomon was transported from place to place with his retinue gives the demons (shayātīn) a role. It is in Tabari's tafār to explain sura 34:12 which describes Solomon's control over the wind. When it was stationary, the platform was supported by demons, but when he wished to move, it was lifted by demons and a whirlwind until a gentle breeze carried it along. A belief that demons could take on the form of winds links these two seemingly disparate features; it is reflected in a statement attributed to the Prophet that mentions God's creation of three categories of jinn: one of chthonic creatures—snakes, scorpions, and reptiles; another with human form and character; and a third which resembles the winds.
Islamic conception of Solomon’s mode of locomotion: he moved about on a platform large enough to hold his entire army and retinue. When it was at rest it was supported by demons, and when he wished to travel it was propelled by those same demons metamorphosed into winds. This notion that Solomon’s throne was a mobile royal household is mentioned much more frequently in Islamic sources than is his personal ivory-and-gold throne so vividly described in the Bible (I Kings 10:18–20, and Chronicles 9:17–19), which had lions flanking its arms and guarding each end of its six steps.

Two Qur’anic passages refer to Solomon’s throne, but neither mentions specifically this lion-protected throne. Sura 27 describes how Bilqis’s throne (‘arsh) is seized for Solomon by the jinn (27:23, 58, 41–42) and sura 38 how God places an interloper on Solomon’s throne (kurṣī) as a test of his devotion (38:34/35). Commentaries stress the opulence of Bilqis’s golden and jewel-encrusted throne, but rarely discuss that of Solomon.

Despite the silence of Tabari and other Qur’anic commentators on the subject of Solomon’s lion-protected throne (probably precisely because it is from the Bible), its distinctive features were known in Islam. The lion-protected throne was represented in paintings and even used as a model for actual thrones. Although the pious shaykhs of Abbasid Iraq may have excised discussion of Solomon’s throne from their chronicles and commentaries, legends about it persisted in other literary contexts probably because it served as an example of sculpture or tamthāl (pl. tamāthil), as an example of the “marvels” (‘ajā‘īb) known from various periods and regions, and because it could be used in conjunction with Solomon’s role as ruler and judge. A link between the lion-protected throne and the administration of justice was of particular importance for early Islamic rulers because both the first caliphs and the Ummayads were involved in the resolution of disputes and the dispensation of justice.

Given his knowledge of biblical traditions, it would be logical to assume that Wahb b. Munabbih mentioned Solomon’s lion-protected throne in his writings. His Hadith Da‘īd preserved in the Heidelberg Papyrus (dated 844) describes three disputes adjudicated by David and Solomon together but breaks off at the beginning of Solomon’s reign. However, a later text, the Qisas al-Anbiyā’ of Tha’labi (d. 1035), cites a conversation between Wahb b. Munabbih and Caliph Mu‘awiya, which connects Solomon’s throne with the practical administration of justice.

Tha’labi’s narrative opens by citing sura 38:34/35, which describes how God tested Solomon’s devotion by depriving him of his throne. Then Tha’labi abruptly shifts to a consideration of the throne itself, which he connects with Solomon’s role as judge because its awe-inspiring appearance would prevent witnesses from giving false testimony. The link between these two seemingly disparate elements lies in the traditional explanation of the offense for which God was punishing Solomon—namely, allowing favoritism to influence his ruling in a dispute. In this incident, recounted by Ibn ‘Abbas, he ruled in favor of the relatives of one of his favorite wives because of his affection for her rather than on the merits of their case. The incident of Solomon’s throne is also linked by commentators to sura 38:25/26 in which David, designated by God as caliph, is enjoined to rule justly or face divine retribution.

Tha’labi’s description of Solomon’s throne is unusually elaborate and contains many details not given in the Bible, several of which recall the mechanical throne seen in Constantinople by Liutprand of Cremona during his mid-tenth-century visit. The steps of the ivory-and-gold throne were flanked by lions who stretched out their paws to aid Solomon’s ascent. The whole apparatus rotated. It was surrounded and protected by palm trees, grapevines, eagles, and peacocks. The vegetation was made of gold and encrusted with rubies and emeralds, and the birds shaded Solomon and also scattered musk over him. When he was finally installed on the throne a dove would present him with “the Torah” (al-tawrah) which he would use in issuing verdicts. Solomon’s throne was flanked on the right by a thousand elders of the Israelites and on the left by a thousand jinn. Birds shaded the assembled company. When witnesses appeared before Solomon, the whole throne structure made two quick rotations.

The alleged conversation between Mu‘awiya and Wahb b. Munabbih contains a simpler description of Solomon’s rotating throne and centers on its lion protectors, bird canopy, and its value in forcing witnesses to give true testimony. This mechanical throne is said to have been made by one of Solomon’s jinn named Sakhr (lit. “solid rock”). This meeting may well be legendary but its import, the linking of one of Solomon’s magical attributes with the pursuit of justice, is in consonance with both Mu‘awiya’s documented
interest in legends and with the moralizing tone of the early Islamic *qiṣāṣ* tradition.66

Other Islamic authors connect Solomon’s lion-protected throne with the likenesses or sculptures mentioned in sura 34:12/13. Among the things made for Solomon by the jinn were "whatever he wanted of mihrabs (*maḥārīb*), likenesses (*tamāthil*), basins (*jifān*) like pools, and fixed cauldrons." Tabari’s *tafiṣr* demonstrates that religious scholars were perplexed by the Qur’anic linking of Solomon with “likenesses.”67 One of the few commentators to connect sura 34:12/13 with Solomon’s lion-protected throne is Shaykh Tabarsi. *His Majmaʾ al-Bayān*, composed ca. 1130, is noted both for following certain Shi‘a practices and for its voluminous and discursive commentaries in which he often presents differing points of view to allow his readers to reach their own conclusions. Tabarsi’s remarks about Solomon’s throne combine the biblical tradition with some of the features mentioned by Thaʾlabī. This throne, intended to be awe-inspiring, had a pair of lions at its base and a pair of eagles perched on its flanking columns. Whenever Solomon “wanted to mount the throne, the two lions stretched out their paws and when he was sitting upon it, the two eagles spread out their wings and shielded him from the sun.”68

Both Thaʾlabī and Tabarsi also describe how after Solomon’s death Bukhtnassar (Nebuchadnezzar) tried to ascend this throne but was struck by the paws of its lion supports, and Thaʾlabī adds that Bukhtnassar’s leg ached the rest of his life.69 This juxtaposition of Solomon and Bukhtnassar parallels a statement attributed to Wahb ibn Munabbih by Ibn Qutayba: “Among world rulers there were two believers and two idolators. The two believers were Sulayman ibn Daʿud and Dhul Qarnayn. The idolators were Nimrud and Bukhtnassar.”70

Statements about Solomon in various Islamic texts confirm his extraordinary prestige as a model ruler and judge in the early Islamic period. Particularly extravagant praises of him occur in remarks attributed by Tabari to Wahb ibn Munabbih, in a description of Asi b. Abijah, a monotheistic ruler who is linked to the traditions of Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon. Here, Solomon emerges as the most powerful of this distinguished company. He has the greatest wealth and dominion over all creatures, but more particularly, he is termed *raʾs al-ḥukamāʾ wa l-mulūṭ* ([he who is] preeminent among sages and kings).71 The prominence accorded to Solomon in these statements raises the question of whether he played a particular role in the local South Arabian variety of monotheism, labeled by A. Beeston and others as “Rahmanism.”72 Solomon, with his combination of practical and esoteric knowledge, would appear to be the perfect candidate to mediate between the demon-inhabited landscape of pagan Arabia and the more intellectualized world of monotheism.

Further information about the early Islamic understanding of Solomon is evidently contained in an important, but as yet unpublished, source, the *Nihāyat al-ḥarab fi akhbar al-Furs wa l-Arab* ascribed to the Pseudo Asmaʿī.73 This text, which has a complex literary pedigree, appears to be a mid-ninth-century work drawing on sources of the late Umayyad period. It traces the history of the world from the time of the creation, combining traditions of various regions, but it gives special emphasis to the traditions of ancient Iran and of the Yemen.74

Both versions of Solomon’s throne, his airborne retinue and the lion-protected seat of judgment, are connected primarily with Solomon’s official roles as warrior, ruler, and judge. However, the third aspect of his legacy to be considered here, Solomon’s bath, is linked to more private and intimate aspects of his life. Scattered references which link Solomon with baths are found in other Islamic sources, but only Wahb ibn Munabbih’s *Kitāb al-Tijān* provides a plausible rationale for this association; Tabarsi’s history, however, also provides additional details. These two accounts contain a more expansive discussion of Solomon’s relationship with Bilqis than does the Qur’anic version in sura 27:20–44/45. Wahb’s narrative as a whole presents a skillful blend of Qur’anic citations and additional dialogue between the various characters which gives the story a kind of emotional immediacy.75 (In quotations given below the Qur’anic texts are again italicized.)

In the Qur’anic version an unnamed queen enters Solomon’s palace and, thinking its floor is wet, uncovers her legs. When he reassures her that what she sees is only a glass pavement, she pronounces her submission to Solomon and her adherence to Islam, whereupon the Qur’anic text shifts to another theme.

Wahb’s fuller version explains both why Solomon had a reception chamber with a glass floor and how Solomon reacted to the queen’s conversion to Islam. Wahb reiterates, at intervals, the religious purpose of Solomon’s relationship with
Bilqis, namely to rescue her and her subjects from the errors of idolatry. At the same time, his narrative has the atmosphere of a romance in which the lovers test each other before deciding to unite, and their union follows her acceptance of Islam.

In Wahb’s version Bilqis is the only surviving child of a marriage between Hadhad b. Sharhabil, the ruler of Himyar, and a female jinn. After Bilqis had succeeded her father and ruled seven years, Solomon, his retinue, and soldiers were transported to Arabia where the two corresponded and finally met. As he came to know Bilqis, Solomon, attracted to her beauty and impressed with her intelligence, decided to marry her. This decision alarmed his demonic servants because they feared Bilqis would help Solomon to keep them enslaved.

One of their number, Zawba’ah, described as “an ‘i‘fit among the jinn,” a phrase which echoes the Qur’anic description of the demon who procured the throne of Bilqis for Solomon (sura 27:39), promised the others to turn Solomon against Bilqis. His leading role in this story may stem from the fact that as the embodiment of a whirlwind he was one of those forced to transport Solomon and his retinue. To cool Solomon’s ardor for Bilqis he claimed that she, like all those born to a jinn, had hoofs like a donkey and hairy legs. When Solomon demanded proof, Zawba’ah constructed the palace with a glass floor in which the fish seem to be swimming.

When Bilqis was summoned to enter this chamber she saw the fish and uncovered her legs in order to wade into the water. When Solomon saw her and looked at her two legs and the thick black hair on the white of those legs, he said to her, “don’t bare your legs; it is [only] a palace paved with glass.” Realizing his superiority, Bilqis offered herself to Solomon and acknowledged the primacy of his religion.

Wahb follows this passage with further details about their courtship, portraying Solomon as hesitant because of Bilqis’s hairy legs. In a passage typical of his colloquial style, Wahb recounts the conversations of Solomon, Bilqis, and the jinn. First Bilqis tries to entice Solomon, saying, “O Prophet of God, the pomegranate is not appreciated until it is tasted.” Solomon then rebuts her, saying, “Only what is sweet to the eye is sweet to the mouth.”

After a month’s delay Solomon had decided to marry Bilqis but remained concerned about her hairy legs. This time “a virtuous man among the jinn” says: “O Prophet of God, is her hair the only thing you detest?” He said, “Certainly.” [The jinn] said “I’ll leave her for you like unblemished silver.” [Solomon] said, “Do it.” This jinn’s solution was to construct a bath for Bilqis and to make depilatory paste from the lime encrusted in the bath pipes. This action is commented upon by Wahb or one of his editors who expatiates on the importance of this deed: “Some scholars say that the first depilatory was that made for her, and the first bath was the one made by that jinn. That one jinn made for her two paved palaces and [practiced] various crafts.”

The Kitab al-Tijân is unusual for the clarity with which it explains how Solomon became associated with baths, but several other authors repeat aspects of this story. Tabari links the jinn only with the invention of depilatory paste, omitting any reference to bath structures. However, both Mutahhar ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi and Tha‘alibi mention Solomon’s connection with baths. Tha‘alibi’s comments come in a chapter on awā‘il, the first occurrences of various things. He describes Solomon as “the first person . . . to set up baths,” and credits him, not the jinn, with the invention of depilatories. This discovery is linked with Solomon’s desire to remove the hair from Bilqis’s legs, but no mention is made of their marriage. Tha‘alibi indirectly confirms the early date of a link among Bilqis, Solomon, and baths by quoting a pre- or early-Islamic verse which refers to the use of depilatories in the time of Bilqis.

Mutahhar ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi (fl. 966) also lists both “the extraction from the earth of depilatory paste” and “the construction of baths” among Solomon’s accomplishments. His text adds a further dimension by noting that Persians claim the same powers for Jamshid as those attributed by “the Muslims and Peoples of the Book” (the Jews?) to Solomon (control over jinn, men, and demons, comprehension of the speech of animals and birds, and command of the wind).

The remark that Persians attribute bath-building to Jamshid in the fashion that Muslims (and Jews?) do to Solomon is also made by Tabari in his account of Jamshid’s six-hundred-year-long reign. This passage ascribed to “Persian scholars” also describes Jamshid’s ability to travel in a “chariot” (‘ajala) carried by demons:

From the year 150 to the year 250, he fought the demons (shayātīn) and jinn, causing great slaughter among them and humiliating them. They were subjected [to doing forced labor] for him and had to follow his
orders. From the year 250 to the year 316, he charged the
demons with cutting stones and rocks from the
mountains and making marble, gypsum, and chalk. They
also were directed to erect buildings and baths with
[these materials] and with clay. He also charged
them with producing depilatories and with transporting,
from the oceans, mountains, mines, and deserts,
everything useful for mankind, such as gold, silver, and
all other meltable precious metals, as well as different
kinds of perfumes and medicines. They carried out all
those orders of his. Jamshid then ordered the manufac-
ture of a glass chariot. He harnessed the demons to it,
mounted it, and went on it through the air from his
home, in Dumbawand, to Babil in one day. That was the
day Hurmuzruz of Fawardin Mah. Because of the mir-
cle people saw him perform on that occasion, they
established the day as New Year's Day (nawrūz). He
ordered them to establish this day and the following
five days as a festival.90

This passage and the one from al-Maqdisi's text
cited above demonstrate the complex manner in
which Solomonic legends and those connected
with the Persian ruler Jamshid had become inter-
woven.91 This occurred before the advent of Is-
lam as the term used for Jamshid's demon-trans-
ported vehicle 'ajala (wagon or chariot) shows.
In Ibn Munabbih's Hadīth Diwād the related word
'ajal is used to describe Solomon's wind-borne
vehicle.92 Both terms suggest a link between these
legends and various apotheosis stories of late
antiquty. There may even be traces of this apo-
theosis tradition in the sculptural program of
Khirbat al-Mafjar.

Ibn Munabbih also connects Solomon with
Istakhr, a town linked with the ruins of Persepolis
in Islamic sources.93 This site has strong ties to the
Jamshid legends, particularly those connected
with the festival of Nawruz.94 In later Persian and
Indian literary traditions and pictorial representa-
tions the figures of Jamshid and Solomon be-
come so interdependent that the two sometimes
appear to be different aspects of the same perso-
a, a process through which Solomon can even be
linked with Nawruz and Jamshid's solar attrib-
utes.

Although by the tenth century, if not earlier,
Persian sources ascribe the invention of baths to
Jamshid, this innovation is more securely linked
to Solomon, especially in the Arab tradition.
Thus, the tenth-century Syrian author Muqadda-
si identifies "Solomon's bath" (Hammm Sulay-
man) as being among the ruins of Istakhr/Perse-
polis.95 More commonly, however, Solomon is
connected with hot springs or baths in the Yemen
or Syria,96 most persistently with those in the
vicinity of Tabariyya (Roman Tiberias), on the
western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The proxim-
ity of this site to Khirbat al-Mafjar gives these
associations a particular importance for the hy-
pothesis proposed here that the structure and
decoration of the Umayyad bath and palace com-
plex at Khirbat al-Mafjar were intended to con-
jure up in the minds of its users legends sur-
rrounding Solomon's bath, as well as those
connected with Solomon's throne.

Two different areas near the city of Tiberias
had hot springs famous since antiquity for their
curative powers: one is just south of the Roman
and Byzantine settlement, the other some dis-
tance to the southeast, in the Yarmuk valley. Both
areas contain structures identified by Islamic
authors such as 'Ali al-Harawi and Nasir-i Khus-
raw as baths erected by Solomon. The springs and
baths connected with them were considered one
of the world's "marvels" because from the ground
emerged water so hot that no additional heating
was needed.97

The marvel of the Tiberias bath is illustrated in
a late-fourteenth-century manuscript now in
Oxford, the Kitab al-Bulhan (fig. 5). The scene,
which has lost its original title, is identified in a
later hand as "hammmām tabariyya." In the illustra-
tion this bath has two stories, a lower one occu-
pied by the bath's furnace and two demons and
an upper one for bathers. Because of its demonic
fire-tenders the illustration evokes the literary
tradition of Solomon's bath, except that presum-
ably at Tiberias the demons would have been
underground whence the hot springs issued.
Unfortunately there is no text associated with this
painting.98

In addition to Islamic sources, the city of Tibe-
rias and its baths are also described in an anony-
mous Syriac chronicle completed in 1234 and
published by I.-B. Chabot in a Latin translation. It
contains a description of damage inflicted on the
city and its surroundings in the devastating mid-
eighteenth-century earthquake which also destroyed
Khirbat al-Mafjar:

The earthquake overturned the entire city of Tiberias,
except for the house of a barber named 'Isa. Thirty
synagogues of the Jews were destroyed and [also] the
wonders that were in that city. The baths built by King
Solomon, of marvelous construction, were completely
overthrown and collapsed. There was also in this city a
spring of purgative waters bestowed by God for the
people's cure and beautiful shrines were built over
it and there were latrines built in the area around it for the use of those who came to be purged. . . . All these facilities were devastated and destroyed.99

Recent excavations at Tiberias have confirmed the veracity of this description, which differentiates between a large bath and smaller structures near the spring. The “baths built by King Solomon” should probably be connected with a large bath erected in the Byzantine period, in the southern section of Tiberias, and said to have “a magnificent mosaic pavement,” which was destroyed in the earthquake of 749.100

More recent excavations near the springs in the southern suburb of Hammath-Tiberias have, however, uncovered a structure similar to that described in the Syriac text. Although also destroyed by the earthquake of 749, this building was subsequently rebuilt and continued to be used into the tenth century.101 This section of the city had buildings on either side of a main street. On the street’s western side was a nine-room building (about 250 meters square) equipped with reservoirs, latrines, and systems for both running water and drainage.102 Information in the Syriac text combined with archaeological evidence tells us that during the first half of the eighth century there was a large bath on the southern side of Tiberias proper known locally as “Solomon’s bath.” After the earthquake this structure was not rebuilt as were smaller buildings adjacent to the hot springs. Later Islamic authors often associate Solomon with buildings adjacent to those springs, or even with the more distant baths in the Yarmuk valley.103

What gives the baths and springs near Tiberias particular importance for the question of whether there is a link between the legends about Solomon’s bath and the design and decoration of Khirbat al-Mafjar is the fact that the Umayyad dynasty owned property in its immediate vicinity and that several members of the family are known to have frequented the area. References to properties owned by various Umayyad family members are scattered through Islamic sources and have yet to be collected and analyzed in a systematic fashion. However, even without such a synthetic study, certain features of the manner in which property was acquired and transmitted are discernible. The various treaties of capitulation granted to conquered cities provided the Islamic leaders with substantial holdings in diverse sections of the conquered territories. From remarks made by Baladhuri it would appear that land or property thus acquired was transmitted within the ranks of the caliphs and their families not only from person to person but also from dynasty to dynasty. He was able to list the owners of land in the Arabian community of Fadak from the lifetime of the Prophet to the reign of the Abbasid al-Mutawakkil (847–61).104 Other sources indicate that members of the Umayyad family with holdings in different areas often traveled between them in the course of a year, whether to manage their properties better or to enjoy activities appropriate to a given region or climate.

With respect to Tiberias, both medieval textual references and modern archaeology confirm this city’s importance in the Umayyad period. In addition to Umayyad-period buildings discovered both in the city itself and in its suburb Hammath, an excavation north of Tiberias at Khirbat al-Minya revealed the presence of an Umayyad palatial residence.105 The texts suggest, however, that the most important holdings of the Umayyad family were in or near al-Sinnabra (former Senabris), located south of the thermal springs.

Four generations of the Marwanid Umayyads can be connected with the Tiberias region or al-Sinnabra: Marwan, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik, and Yazid b. Sulayman b. ‘Abd al-Malik. Both Marwan and ‘Abd al-Malik appear to have used al-Sinnabra as a seasonal residence. Thus in Ansâb al-Ashrîf, Baladhuri describes both Marwan’s visit to al-Sinnabra while en route from Egypt to Damascus, and also the peregrinations of ‘Abd al-Malik over the course of a year, from one winter to another. The cycle begins and ends with a sojourn in al-Sinnabra which he left at the end of winter, moving from there to Damascus via al-Jabiya, then to Ba‘albak, and back to Damascus, before returning once more to al-Sinnabra. A bridge over the Jordan near al-Sinnabra linked it to the Damascus road.106

Al-Sinnabra also figures prominently in the upheavals which followed the assassination of al-Walid II in 744. The citizens of Palestine, probably in Ramla, sought to make Yazid b. Sulayman b. ‘Abd al-Malik caliph because he had been living among them and they trusted him. The inhabitants of Jordan, however, backed the candidacy of Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik. To quell these disturbances, forces loyal to Yazid b. al-Walid sent armed men to Tiberias where they began to plunder houses.107 In the ensuing confusion the citizens of Tiberias “went to the
residence of Yazid b. Sulayman and Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Malik, plundered their belongings, seized their riding animals and weapons, and returned to their own villages and houses.\footnote{108}

After order had been restored, the commander of the caliphal army convened the people of Jordan in al-Sinnabra and forced them to swear allegiance to Yazid b. al-Walid.\footnote{109}

Textual evidence connecting the Umayyad family with the region around Jericho and hence with Khirbat al-Mafjar is less detailed than for al-Sinnabra, so a broader approach must be used. In climate the Jericho region resembled Tiberias and was also a traditional winter residence, especially for persons residing in the colder parts of Filistin, such as Jerusalem or Ramlah.\footnote{10} Property adjacent to important springs in the Jericho region had a particularly high value and remained the property of Palestine's rulers from the Hellenistic through the Byzantine period. Both Herod and his son owned palm groves in the vicinity of Jericho. Herod also established a balsam plantation near the village of Naurath (Duyuk) five miles north of Jericho, and water from that same spring was used by his successor to irrigate a palm grove. Later both the palm trees and the balsam plantation were exploited for the profit of the Roman and Byzantine treasury. It is a measure of the high commercial value of balsam resin that Hadrian and his successors insisted that its cultivation continue despite opposition from the local population. For this reason a Jewish community is said to have remained at Naurath (Duyuk) until the sixth century.\footnote{111}

Given the long history of governmental control over the oases of Jericho, it is probable that the capitulation treaty for Jerusalem transferred some such property to the new Islamic rulers. Thus, it is not surprising to learn that Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik, the governor of Filistin during the caliphate of his brother al-Walid (705–15) and the founder of Ramlah, also had property near Jericho. His foundation of Ramlah is described by Baladhuri, and other Islamic authors mention its connection with him or other members of the dynasty.\footnote{112} A description of his Jericho property, however, appears to be found exclusively in the anonymous thirteenth-century Syriac chronicle, mentioned above in connection with the history of Tiberias.\footnote{113}

Despite the thirteenth-century date of its compilation, this text, which appears to be based on much earlier records kept in the Christian community, often gives details of their tribulations at the hands of Islamic rulers and provides a vivid account of various miracles and disasters. It is in this vein that the chronicle of 1234 mentions damage inflicted on Sulayman's property by the earthquake of 749. Hamilton refers to this passage in a postscript to his monograph on al-Walid and provides a partial translation, without bibliographical references, based on the unpublished work of a certain Robert Schick.\footnote{114} This text states:

The spring, however, which is situated near Jericho at which Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik had built citadels (arces), gardens (horti), and mills (mola), this spring itself stayed in its position, but the river which rose from it changed its course and receded six miles from the place in which it used to flow; thus it was that all the constructions made on this river by Sulayman perished.\footnote{115}

The Syriac author gives no specific source for this evidence, but his extraordinarily specific description of earthquake damage inflicted on Tiberias mentioned above, the accuracy of which has been confirmed by modern archaeology, gives his account high credibility. Both descriptions appear to have been based on eyewitness testimony, perhaps from monks who resided in the vicinity. A monastic community was established near Jericho in 475, and archaeological remains document a continuous Christian presence into the Islamic period.\footnote{116} Monks living in the Jordan valley are said to have supported themselves by making baskets and mats from palm fronds and to have scandalized their neighbors by raising pigs.\footnote{117} Some of the graffiti discovered at Khirbat al-Mafjar itself are said to have been written by Christian clerics.\footnote{118}

The spring near which Sulayman is said to have erected structures may be the twin sources of 'Ayn al-Nuwayima and 'Ayn al-Duyuk located four kilometers northwest of the ruins of Khirbat al-Mafjar and connected to it by an aqueduct. According to Hamilton, "About 700 m. north-west of the palace the waters were gathered in a reservoir or birkah, between which and the palace the fall of some 80 feet in the land was used to turn three or more water mills."\footnote{119} This water channel then continued northward along the western side of Khirbat al-Mafjar until it reached an unexplored mound located to the north of the bath hall and tentatively identified as a guesthouse or khān.\footnote{120} It is tempting to identify this unexplored northern mound, the mills and irrigation system with the structures erected for Sulayman b. 'Abd
al-Malik. If so, then this property may even have had a pre-Islamic imperial pedigree, and the hydraulic installations upon which it depended may have descended from those installed by Herod or his son to bring water to their palm groves and balms plantation.  

If the installations near Khirbat al-Mafjar and even its northern, unexcavated mound could be linked to the patronage of Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik, this does not necessarily mean that he was also responsible for the construction of the bath hall, mosque, and palace complex excavated by Hamilton. Nor need it invalidate the hypothesis advanced by Hamilton which links those buildings with the patronage of Walid b. Yazid b. 'Abd al-Malik. Taking as his point of departure the excavation of graffiti linking the buildings with the reign of Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik, Hamilton gradually evolved a theory that the complex had been erected toward the end of Hisham's reign for his nephew and successor Walid ibn Yazid (r. 743-44).  

Hamilton provides several reasons for this identification; he finds a pun or rebus for Walid's name in a mosaic decoration showing a knife beside a fruit with a green sprig attached. Literary accounts of Walid's revels also contain terms which Hamilton equates with specific features of the hall at Khirbat al-Mafjar—majlis al-lawh for the main bath hall, a birka, or stone basin, contained in an antechamber to the hot rooms, and a bahw, or intimate audience chamber, which he connects with the highly ornamented room attached to the northwest corner of the large hall.  

The anthology of poetic texts and images which Hamilton has assembled gives a convincing picture of Walid's life as it could have been enacted at Khirbat al-Mafjar, and Hillenbrand has collected further literary references about Walid's habits which might have affected the organization and decoration of his palaces. Despite the plausibility of Hamilton's arguments and the many detailed parallels between Walid's habits and the decoration of extant Umayyad structures provided by Hillenbrand, neither scholar was able to establish a definite historical link between Walid and Khirbat al-Mafjar.  

The evidence linking Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik with the area of Khirbat al-Mafjar can provide a foundation for establishing such a connection and may also help to explain certain curious features of this complex. If this property had belonged to Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik, then after his death in 717 it should have passed to another member of the dynasty, perhaps to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz or Yazid b. 'Abd al-Malik, his designated successors. If Yazid had been the beneficiary, then the property might have been transferred by him to his successor, Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik or his own son, al-Walid.  

Although this chain of inheritance must remain hypothetical, the possibility that the unexcavated northern mound houses the remains of an Umayyad residence earlier than the bath hall, mosque, and palace complex excavated by Hamilton would explain certain anomalies of those structures, such as why they were erected from north to south. In both the bath hall and the palace the northern wall was apparently the first to be erected. According to the excavators the bathing rooms were the first to be built; they were followed by the bath hall, the palace, the mosque, and the courtyard pavilion. This sequence explains how the bath complex could have had “some years” of use even before the palace was completed.  

The connection of Khirbat al-Mafjar with the patronage of Walid b. Yazid could also strengthen the hypothesis that this complex represents an attempt to translate legends concerning Solomon’s throne and bath into architectural terms. Before considering this question, however, it is first necessary to examine two examples of Islamic palatial architecture which are linked to Solomonic legends by both visual and literary evidence—the divan khana, or reception hall, of the Gulistan Palace in Tehran, and a portion of the Mughal palace in Lahore known as the Kala Burj (Black Tower).  

The divan khana may originally have been built during the time of Karim Khan Zand (r. 1750-79), but was substantially altered by the Qajars. In the reign of Fath ‘Ali Shah (r. 1797-1833) it acquired a throne known as the Takht-i Marmar inscribed with verses linking that ruler with Solomon. Fath ‘Ali Shah was also portrayed with Solomonic paraphernalia by his court painter, Mihr ‘Ali. Solomonic imagery also seems to have held a special fascination for the Mughal ruler Jahangir (r. 1605-27) who was compared to Solomon by his court poets and in architectural inscriptions. The most complete pictorial manifestation of his identification with Solomon comes in the decoration of the Kala Burj in the Mughal residence at Lahore now known as the Lahore Fort. This tower, located toward the middle of the fort’s northern façade, had a balcony (jharoka-i
jeweled clasp just below the breasts and a jeweled belt. The Qajar throne described and analyzed by Zuka, Tushingham, and most recently by Lerner is the most direct in its Solomonic themes (figs. 6–7). The throne consists of a horizontal platform on two levels supported by caryatid figures and by spiral-fluted columns. Three of the supports, two flanking the steps and a third beneath the royal seat at the rear, take the form of  divs who carry the tools. The throne’s lateral sides rest on the shoulders of six figures: two men and four women. The women on the right side support the throne on their right shoulder with the help of their left hands and hold a piece of fruit in their right hand. The man on the right carries what appears to be a sprig of flowers. The figures on the left side use their right hands to steady the throne on their left shoulders. Their left hands appear to be empty. Lions carved in the round guard the throne’s rear and lions in relief flank its steps.

The dress and adornments of both the men and women can be paralleled in Zand and Qajar court painting. The women wear belted short-sleeved tunics, which bare their breasts, over long skirts, and the men wear belted tunics over knee breeches and leggings. The men’s costume is similar to that worn by princes or courtiers for riding or hunting. The women’s dress resembles that of courtesans and entertainers with a jeweled clasp just below the breasts and a jeweled belt. The connection of this throne ensemble with Solomon and Fath ‘Ali Shah is made explicit by two qaṣidas inscribed in cartouches on the throne’s vertical surface. The first connects the throne with Fath ‘Ali Shah, and the second explores the meaning of its form and decoration and contains lines which identify it as a “Solomonic throne” (in takht-i sulaymān) and Fath ‘Ali Shah as “the Solomon of the Age” (Sulaymān-i zamān). The qaṣidas describe the throne as an ‘arsh, used in the Qur’an for both the throne of God and the one which the jinn seized for Solomon from the palace of Bīlqis, and they also use the more general words saflī and takht. Other verses mention its supporting statues of parīs as well as the guardian lions. These themes are combined with others drawn from the traditional Iranian repertory of royal glorification—comparisons of Fath ‘Ali Shah with Alexander, Jamshid, Faridun, and Dara and mention of the homage paid to him by foreign rulers.

The burden of this throne’s Solomonic message is contained not in its inscribed text, but rather in its structure and embellishment which echo long-standing textual traditions about Solomon and his throne. The placing of lions beside its steps and around its base connects it with the tradition of Solomon’s lion-protected throne. The differentiation between  divs and human figures among the throne’s supporters probably corresponds to beliefs about the various categories of supernatural beings. In Persian texts demonic creatures with animal attributes are described as  divs, whereas those with a human appearance are called parūs. For the theme of this essay the  divs are of particular interest. The fact that they carry tools links them with Qur’anic references to demons who were obliged to work for Solomon constructing buildings and diving for pearls.

Upon closer examination, the  divs’ tools appear to be those of stoneworkers, a detail which strengthens their link with the monument’s creation. The single  div at the rear holds a double-pointed tool, perhaps a tisha, or mason’s kernel hammer used to smooth the surface of stone in preparation for carving or final polishing. The pair of  divs flanking the stairs hold the kinds of tools used in the finishing process, that on the left has a chākhush, or mallet, used in conjunction with naqgarī, or sculpting chisels, to carve decoration or flutes; the curved implement carried by the  div of the right appears to be a large  suhan, or file used to smooth the background of a relief-carved panel. The tools of the  divs flanking the stairs also carry the signature of this monument’s human creator, the sculptor Muhammad Ibrahim Isfahani, a detail which emphasizes the symbolic role of the  divsculptors as Solomon’s or Fath ‘Ali Shah’s servants.

Considerable uncertainty surrounds the history of the chamber in which the Takht-i Marmar stands. Its monolithic limestone columns appear to have been pillaged from the Shiraz palace of Karim Khan Zand. The avidity with which the Qajars collected objects owned by previous rulers is well documented in the sources, but here the reuse of architectural materials may also have a symbolic function. Monolithic columns are associated in Islamic sources with Solomonic
structures, such as the masjid at Bayt al-Maqdis or Jerusalem, which may mean that they had a similar connotation for Karim Khan Zand. If so, they may have a link to the various traditions which interpreted Persepolis as a religious structure erected by Solomon. There was also the commonly repeated notion that the ruler of Shiraz was the heir to Solomon’s legacy.

If so, then the Takht-i Marmar may be a Solomonic throne constructed to fit into a chamber which itself recalled aspects of Solomon’s legacy. At the same time, this throne-room ensemble probably also was linked to the legacy of Jamshid, who too was closely associated with Shiraz. Aspects of this throne such as the addition of pāris and dīvūs as supporters could link it to Jamshid as well as Solomon because both had thrones propelled through the air by demons. Some verses of the qaṣīdas written about it use images of luminosity to describe Fath ‘Ali Shah, thereby connecting him with the solar aspects of Jamshid. Finally, this throne was used by Persian rulers for important ceremonial occasions, particularly the audiences held on Nawruz, traditionally associated with Jamshid.

Fath ‘Ali Shah’s throne thus integrates aspects of Solomonic legends with those connected to Jamshid. Texts cited above show that this process was already underway in the first Islamic centuries so that by the Qajar period such a combination was to be expected. The Takht-i Marmar clearly represents an attempt to draw upon a Solomonic legacy which had assimilated elements from the Persian royal tradition to enhance the status and prestige of its owner, Fath ‘Ali Shah, and by extension to bestow legitimacy on Tehran as a dynastic capital.

A similar amalgam is said to have been created by the court ceremonial of a tenth-century military leader from the Caspian area, Mardawij ibn Ziyar the Zilite, who controlled Isfahan, Rayy, and occasionally other sections of western Iran between 926 and 937. Mardawij had grandiose visions of removing the Abbasid caliphs and installing himself in their stead, and he developed a court ceremonial which combined features from the Sasanian tradition with those drawn from Solomonic legends. Ibn Miskawayh gives two descriptions of that ceremonial which appear to be based on eyewitness accounts:

He had had fabricated a great crown studded with gems, and Abu Makhład recorded how... he had seen him sitting on a golden throne on which he had placed a vast cushion, where he sat by himself; below him there was a throne of silver with a carpet spread over it and below that some large gilt chairs with other arrangements whose purpose was to assign the officials their proper order in the seating.

Abu Makhład remarks that the audience stood at a distance “gazing and speaking only in whispers, such was their awe and admiration for his greatness.” In another passage ibn Miskawayh relates this very theatrical court ceremonial to Solomonic precedents: “He seated himself on a throne of gold, below which was one of silver whereon the person whom he chose to favour took his seat. On the days in which he received official visits he arranged his army in lines at a distance from him... He used to say that he was Solomon son of David and his men the demons.”

The fusion of Iranian court ceremonial and Solomonic traditions evidenced in both the actions of Mardawij ibn Ziyar and the throne of Fath ‘Ali Shah invites comparison with the use of Solomonic themes in the decoration of a Mughal palace complex at Lahore built under the patronage of Jahangir. Here the Solomonic imagery had an internal and external component. It had both a painted vault over the darshan chamber and panels of figural tiles on the building’s exterior. In Mughal palaces the darshan chamber was normally adjacent to the ruler’s private quarters, so that Jahangir would have been accompanied to this chamber by members of his immediate household. Only the emperor was normally visible from the exterior because of screens which covered all the windows except the one he used to appear before his subjects.

The room where Jahangir sat has a faceted vault embellished with figural paintings (fig. 8). Its apex contains a pair of simurghs in combat and is surrounded by concentric circles of small panels created by intersections of the vault’s ribs. Larger panels containing angels in flight alternate with small star-shaped units painted with birds. Lower zones of the decoration, no longer visible, appear to have contained demonic creatures whose appearance is vividly described by William Finch:

In the Gallery where the King useth to sit, are drawne overhead many Pictures of Angels, with Pictures of Banian Dews, or rather Divels, intermixt in most ugly shape, with long horns, staring eyes, shagge haire, great fangs, ugly paws, long tails and with such horrible diffimory and deformity that I wonder the poor women are not frightened therewith.

The vault paintings, which appear to have been...
executed between Jahangir’s accession in 1605 and Finch’s visit in 1620, show Solomon’s entourage in mid-flight and at the same time forming a protective canopy over the ruler’s head. The use of flying creatures who hover over the ruler’s head is one of the most characteristic themes in Solomonic imagery. Wahb b. Munabbih, as cited by Tabari, mentions this feature in his discussion of how Solomon first lost and then regained his ring and his throne. When Solomon had finally recovered his power, the birds reappeared hovering overhead, and “people knew that he was Solomon.”

In this Mughal ensemble the emphasis is on Solomon’s retinue which is permanently in attendance on the building both outside and inside. The exterior decoration consists of panels of mosaic tile inserted into niches along the fort’s northern and western walls of which only fragments survive. Some of them show demons dancing or being led by angels. Other panels contain animal combats. The theme of enslaved demons depicted on this palace, both inside and outside, is a second theme with clear Solomonic connections.

The Mughal decorative ensemble, however, has some features not met in other examples of Solomonic imagery. The integration of Solomon’s entourage into the structure of a vault has transformed it into a kind of celestial guard of honor. Mughal texts suggest that the vaults provided a visual symbol for the heavens and thus an appropriate setting for the luminous divine person. The interconnection of Solomonic legends and those of Jamshid in the Iranian tradition may have been one inspiration for this combination.

It would be interesting to investigate how frequently Mughal court poets used Solomonic imagery. Jahangir’s particular affinity for such themes may have been sparked by one of the Persians at the Mughal court. Paintings, which probably show a Mughal prince, perhaps the youthful Jahangir himself, in circumstances that stress his possession of luminosity, were painted by two Persians at the Mughal court, ‘Abd al-Samad and his son Muhammad Sharif. The painting by ‘Abd al-Samad is of particular interest because it makes a metaphorical equation between a Mughal prince (Jahangir?) and Jamshid and may have been intended as a Nawruz gift.

The basic design of the Kala Burj vault also reflects Iranian practice, for it echoes decorative schemes used in Safavid architecture. The division of the vault by ribs and the placement of figures within them are parallel to the scheme used in the vault of a palace pavilion discovered at Nayin, probably executed in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. In both cases flying creatures such as angels and simurghs are placed at the vault’s apex in star-shaped panels. The Nayin chamber differs from the one in Lahore, however, in its overall theme, which is devoted to the celebration of various famous lovers—Khusrav and Shirin, Layla and Majnun, Shirin and Farhad. Thus, the Lahore palace vault combines a scheme of Iranian inspiration with the hybrid literary tradition of Solomon and Jamshid to create a scheme which glorifies a Mughal ruler. The addition of exterior tile decoration with Solomonic components also effectively equates a larger section of the palace with Solomon’s platform throne.

With these two instances where Solomonic themes were expressed in Islamic palace architecture or decoration in mind, we can now consider whether the complex at Khirbat al-Mafjar was intended to portray a member of the Umayyad dynasty, possibly Walid b. Yazid, in the guise of Solomon and his retinue. When the sculptural decoration of the bath porch façade and of the domed chamber immediately behind it are viewed against the background of Solomonic legends, several features of the sculptural ensemble gain in significance. Neither Hamilton nor Hillenbrand sees a connection between the figures of these two areas, but the cross-section of the porch and façade gives several indications that these two parts of the building were designed as a unit (figs. 1–3). The “caliph’s” lion pedestal rests on the same level as the standing figures in the niches of the porch drum and the porch itself. The recumbent animals—gazelles, sheep, and ibexes—are also at almost the same elevation from the floor on interior and exterior.

Not only were these two areas designed as an ensemble, but they can also be understood as complementary sections of Solomon’s throne. The exterior figure of the “caliph” can be read as Solomon on his lion-protected throne which rests on the larger platform occupied by his concubines, male attendants, and various animals. This platform, in turn, is shown to be supported by jinn in human form who brace their legs against the dome’s pendentives in order to steady their heavy load. The throne ensemble is completed by a row of birds placed in a circle around the apex
of the interior niches. These appear to be the throne's avian sun shade, here shown at rest for the night.

If it is possible to connect both the standing figure and the recumbent gazelles of the façade with the sculptures of the bath porch, then perhaps other aspects of the façade design are also meaningful. Originally the central figure was probably flanked by two more figures who stood in niches to his left and right. Two lions flanked the arch of the entrance below, and they were in turn framed by the heads of horses. A row of crenellations completed the top of this façade.

Taken as a whole, the upper level of this façade bears a striking resemblance to the scene depicted on a silver plate discovered in Iran near the city of Qazvin (fig. 9). It shows a frontal enthroned ruler holding a sword and standing under an arch decorated with rows of birds and surmounted by crenellations. He is flanked by standing figures in Persian dress, and beneath his feet are two lions with outstretched paws. Both the rows of birds flanking the throne and the lion guardians below it link the plate with Solomonic legends. Although clearly reflecting Iranian royal iconography, and similar in its arch and crenellations to a Sasanian pavilion known as Taq-i Girra, the plate appears to postdate the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, and is perhaps from the eighth or early ninth century.

Khirbat al-Mafjar was situated on land which had belonged to the Umayyad family and dynasty from at least the time of Sulaymen b. ʿAbd al-Malik. Archaeological data linking the excavated structures with the reign of Hisham were also presented along with Hamilton's hypothesis that Walid b. Yazid was its patron. These connections give greater force to the pun in a poem which appears to link Walid with al-Ghawr or the area around Khirbat al-Mafjar. The passage occurs in an account of his quarrels with Hisham and a description of his life wandering from one of his estates to another. Indeed this poem, which also laments the need to wait for Hisham's death, is said to have been one of the catalysts for Hisham's revocation of Walid's allowance. Composed and recited by his companion ʿAbd al-Samad b. ʿAbd al-ʿAla, it draws upon astronomical imagery in comparing Walid's peregrinations to a star wandering in the heavens until it reaches its bayt or mansion in a declivity, or al-ghawr.

Have you not seen the star, when it came to rest
Hurrying in its mansion to a point of return?
It strayed from its proper path.
It came to the declivity (al-ghawr) and sought its place of rising.
I said while its actions amazed me
And its gleam shone making me hopeful,
"Perhaps the reign of Walid has come near,
And this is the eve of his ascendance."

It is tempting to extract from this poem a comparison between the image of a heavenly body which has reached its astrological home and the representation of al-Walid portrayed as Solomon on a lion-protected throne on the façade of the Solomonic bath at Khirbat al-Mafjar, ready to rise again when his time arrives. The addition of a Solomonic entourage which has also just landed on these buildings could provide another metaphorical reference to Walid's life, moving from residence to residence as he awaits his chance to rule. Walid refers to himself as the “son of David” in a poem composed on the eve of his marriage to Salma.
Whether or not the patron of Khirbat al-Mafjar was Walid b. Yazid, the question remains of how the idea of constructing a Solomonic bath could have arisen. Here the evidence is incomplete, but the proximity of Jericho to Tiberias with its strong Solomonic tradition may have been an important factor. Perhaps the familiarity of the Umayyads themselves with the Solomonic baths of Tiberias led to the idea of re-creating such a bath. It is even possible that the fame of the springs of Tiberias was a stimulus to the development of the entire legend of Solomon’s bath. Arabian traditions linking Solomon and his jinn with hot springs could have provided another stimulus for such a combination.

The three examples presented here provide an insight into the role of Solomonic themes in Islamic palatial structures. They demonstrate that those themes, although recognizable, were not static but were capable of change and adaptation. In the end, the Umayyad owner of Khirbat al-Mafjar, the Persian ruler Fath ‘Ali Shah, and the Mughal emperor Jahangir each shaped the Solomonic tradition according to his own self-image, using the legacy of Solomon to enhance his personal prestige.

There are, however, important qualitative differences among these three instances. In the Iranian example Solomon is essentially assimilated to the Iranian historical heritage; in the Mughal one, Solomon’s attributes become an extension of the Mughal language of royal pomp. In both cases the symbolism requires the ruler himself to participate. It is only when Fath ‘Ali Shah sits upon his throne or Jahangir appears at the window of his chamber that the ensemble is comprehensible. In the Umayyad building, however, Solomon is himself included in the sculptural ensemble. The placement of figures in the complex at Khirbat al-Mafjar conveys the impression that the structure had two levels. At ground level there was the functional building used by its Umayyad owner and his guests; just above their heads was a second structure populated by sculptures representing Solomon and his retinue of concubines, soldiers, demons, birds, and animals. Thus, Khirbat al-Mafjar may have had a double role as both a sumptuous private residence and a symbolic edifice created to evoke the memory of both Solomon’s throne and bath.

Ultimately, the particular fascination of Khirbat al-Mafjar as an example of the Solomonic palatine tradition is the manner in which it offers a glimpse of the beliefs and practices of Umayyad Islam. The building may be understood in part as an exercise of visual exegesis on the Qur’anic story of Solomon, but admittedly an exegesis based not on the deliberations of learned shaykhs in Abbasid Iraq but rather on the vibrant and mysterious evocations of the South Arabian qass, or storyteller, who sought to harness the power of a rich mythology to the task of Qur’anic explication.
Notes

3. Qur'an, shayṭān 21:82, 38:36/37–38; jinn 27:17, 39, 34:11/12. Some of the shayṭān were builders (bannūs) 38:36/37, as were some of the jinn who made mihrabs, likenesses (tamāḥī), and basins (qadūr) 34:12/13–15/14.
20. Hamilton, Khirbat al-Mafjar, figs. 50, 52, pls. CVII, CVIII.
22. Hamilton, Khirbat al-Mafjar, 240, pls. XLII, CVII.
24. Hamilton, Khirbat al-Mafjar, fig. 50, pls. XLIV, CVII, CVIII.


41. Muqatil b. Sulayman, although published recently in Cairo, is in practice unobtainable, except for the first and last (index) volumes, because of pressure from religious authorities at al-Azhar; Claude Gilliot, "Muqatil, grand exégète, traditioniste et théologien maudit," Journal Asiatique 279 (1991): 40 n. 1.

42. Khoury, Wahb b. Munabbih, 188-90.

60. Ibn Ishāq Ahmad al-Thaqalābī, Kitāb Qisas al-Anbiyā (Cairo, 1297/1880), 293, ll. 8–10.


63. Tha’labī, Kitāb Qisas al-Anbiyā, 292, ll. 3–19.

64. Tha’labī, Kitāb Qisas al-Anbiyā, 292 ll. 26–30.


69. Tha’labī, Qisas al-anbiyā, 293, ll. 1–5, Tabārī, Majma‘ al-bayān, 7:600.

70. Ibn Qutayba, Kitāb al-Ma‘ārif (Cairo, 1969), 32, ll. 2–3.


75. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 152–63.

76. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 152.

77. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 152, l. 16–153, l. 1.

78. Tabārī, Annales, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 582, l. 16–583, l. 2; Tabārī, History, 3:162.


80. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 161, ll. 5–18.


82. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 162, ll. 1–7, quotation ll. 6–7.

83. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 162, ll. 8–9.

84. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 163, ll. 10–11; for another example of Ibn Munabbih’s colloquial narrative style, see the dialogue between Luqman and his wife, trans. H. T. Norris, “Fables and Legends in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times,” in Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, 380–81.

85. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 162, ll. 11–12.

86. Ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 162, ll. 12–14. This may be an editorial commentary added by a transmitter or by Ibn Hisham.


91. Tabārī’s description of the jinn’s activities is very similar to a passage in Shaykh Tabārī’s tafsīr on sura 34:12/13 (Majma‘ al-Bayān, 7: 599, ll. 5–15). It would be instructive to compare Tabārī’s text with the descriptions of both Jamshīd and Solomon in the Pseudo-Asma‘ī, Nihāyat-ul-l’Arab fi Ahbār-l-Furs wa-l’Arab (for references, see above n. 73).


93. Wahb ibn Munabbih, Kitāb al-Tijān, 152, l. 13.


97. Muqaddasi, Ahsan al-Taqasim, 185, l. 11-186, l. 1; Abū al-Ḥasan `All, Kitāb al-Ishārāt, ed. J. Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus, 1953), 20, l. 16-21, l. 5.

98. Stefano Carboni, Kitab al-bulhan di Oxford (Turin, 1988), Or. 133, fol. 35v, pp. 8, 75-76, pl. 31. I would like to thank S. Carboni for drawing my attention to this illustration.


100. Although this building was excavated some years ago, the results were never published; Gideon Foerster, “Tiberias,” in Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land, ed. Michael Avi-Yonah and Ephriam Stern (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978), 4:1171-72.


103. The question of how and when the Byzantine bath became linked to Solomon may be discussed in a book on legends associated with Tiberias (A. Shitoni, Hamets Toerisa be-Halacha ube-Aggade [Tiberias, 1962]).


106. [Al-Baladhuri], Anonyme arabische Chronik, vol. 11, ed. W. Ahlwardt (Greiswald, 1893), 164, l. 16-165, l. 2; 200, l. 11-17; L. A. Mayer, “As-Sinnabra,” Israel Exploration Journal 2 (1952): 185-87; Le Strange, Palestine under the Moslems, 52-53, 335.


113. Anonymi Auctorii, Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens, 1:255.

114. Hamilton, Walid and His Friends, 175.

115. Anonymi Auctorii, Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens, 1:255. I would like to thank R. R. R. Smith for assistance in translating this passage.


120. Hamilton, Khirbat al-Mafjar, 2, 4, 6.

121. During the Crusader occupation of Jerusalem (1099-1187) sugar mills near Mount Dok were powered by a hydraulic system said to be of Herodian origin (Nachman Avigad, “Jericho,” in Israel Poes et Library: Archaeology [n.p., 1974], 121).


128. Hamilton, *Walid and His Friends*, 170, "the establishment in the Ghawr" is "as yet unrecognized among places named in published sources." Hillenbrand, "La Dolce Vita," 2, "in no single case is there precise evidence as to the patron or the date."


131. Yahya' Zuk'ar, *Tārīkhchah-i sākhtamānāh-yi arg-i sulān-i Tāhrān va ṣāḥib-ābād-yi ḥullū-i Gulistān* (Tehran, 1347/1970), 41-110. I would like to thank Judith Lerner for bringing this publication to my attention.

132. Ebba Koch, "Jahangir and the Angels:" 176, 184, 192, nn. 61, 63.


135. S. J. Falk, *Qajar Paintings* (London, 1972), fig. 14; Fath Ali Shah holds a staff surmounted by a hoopoe (hudhud), a bird traditionally identified as Solomon's messenger.

136. Koch, "Jahangir and the Angels," 176, 184, 192, nn. 61, 63.


140. Zuk'a, *Tārīkhchah*, fig. 38; Lerner, "Rock Relief," fig. 11.


142. Falk, *Qajar Paintings*, pls. 2, 42.


144. Zuk'a, *Tārīkhchah*, 93-99; the panels contain all of the first *qasida* but only eight of the thirty *bayt* of the second, nos. 1-3, 15-16, 20, 23-24.

145. Ll. 23 and 24 which also contains the poet's pen name "Ṣabā" and an ambiguous chronogram yielding the date 1221 (1806) or 1226 (1811), Zuk'a, *Tārīkhchah*, 93 n. 1, 95-96.


147. Zuk'a, *Tārīkhchah*, *qasida* 2, ll. 6, 7, 30.

148. Zuk'a, *Tārīkhchah*, *qasida* 1, l. 2, Alexander's mirror, l. 5, homage of the *quyasr* of Rum and the


Fig. 1. Bath porch façade reconstruction. Khirbat al-Majjar. After Hamilton.

Fig. 2. Bath porch façade reassembled plaster ornament. Khirbat al-Majjar. After Hamilton.
Fig. 3. Bath porch cross-section looking south.
Khirbat al-Mafjar. After Hamilton.

Fig. 4. Bath porch south wall and pendentives.
Khirbat al-Mafjar. After Hamilton.

Fig. 5. The Solomonic bath at Tiberias.
Oxford Bodleian Library, Or. 135, fol. 35v.
Fig. 6. Antoin Sevruguin. Photograph of audience before the Takht-i Marmar. Gulistan Palace, Tehran. Myron Bement Smith Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Archives.

Fig. 7. Antoin Sevruguin. Photograph of petitioner before the Takht-i Marmar. Gulistan Palace, Tehran. Myron Bement Smith Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Archives.
Fig. 8. Vault, Lahore, Kala Burj. Photo: Ebba Koch, 1980.

Fig. 9. Silver plate found at Qazvin. Tehran, National Museum.