

EVA R. HOFFMAN

BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: THE WALL PAINTINGS OF SAMARRA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ABBASID PRINCELY CULTURE

Be of good health, Commander of Believers, clad in
the garments of one whose hands are divinely aided,
one made victorious;

Take up a new life in the splendour of
the new palace, and its exquisite beauty...

You came to it, and alighted at the most fortunate of
halting-places;
you observed it, and saw the most beautiful prospects:

Flourish there, (enjoying) long life and blessings
whose cheerfulness will endure throughout the ages.

—al-Buhturi, celebrating the completion
of the Ja'fari palace at Samarra¹

The inspiration for this essay is Oleg Grabar's groundbreaking *The Formation of Islamic Art*.² While new material has come to light since this work was published, it is a great credit to its author that his main arguments are as creative and thought provoking today as they were in 1973. The questions that he poses there continue to inspire my students to study Islamic art, much as they inspired me then. This essay will grapple with questions, first introduced in Grabar's book, concerning the development of the early Islamic palace and the "princely cycle."³ In particular, it will focus on the wall paintings of the so-called *ḥarīm* in the palatine complex at Samarra, founded in 836 by the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim. Previously called the Jawsaq al-Khaqani, this complex is referred to in the most recent literature as the Dar al-Khilafa (figs. 1–8, 10–11, 15–16).⁴ I will not analyze the specifics of the full program of wall paintings but rather will focus on strategies for studying these paintings: first, on the position of the Samarra paintings in Abbasid art and second, on their broader implications for Abbasid art and their role in the formation of early Islamic art. As my conclusions will demonstrate, *The Formation of Islamic Art* has stood the test of time exceptionally well. Adding relevance to this tribute article is the consideration of the 1912–13 documentation of the

wall painting by the renowned scholar and excavator of Samarra, Ernst Herzfeld, whom Grabar has named as a mentor in his own intellectual journey.⁵ This is therefore in every sense a study of continuities.

The palatine city of Samarra has loomed large in both medieval and modern times, occupying a place between history and mythology.⁶ It served as the Abbasid capital for only fifty-six years, between 836 and 892, after which the Abbasid caliphs returned to Baghdad. Despite the short-lived ascendance of Samarra, however, its ambitious size and breathtaking achievement became the yardstick by which to measure all other imperial projects undertaken in the Islamic realm and beyond. The excavation and documentation of the site, begun in earnest in 1911 and having continued for nearly a hundred years, not only inform us about Samarra itself but also suggest what the legendary palaces of Baghdad may have looked like and contained. The palaces of Samarra, furthermore, have been proposed as the visual equivalents of the mythical palaces described in *The Thousand and One Nights*.⁷ Regardless of its difficult and complex excavation history and the fragmentary condition of its remains, which are widely dispersed throughout museums of the world, the site of Samarra is critical in defining Abbasid art.⁸

The art of the Abbasids in Baghdad and Samarra is widely perceived by scholars as a watershed. The familiar narrative, often repeated in the scholarship and in surveys, goes as follows: early Islamic art came into being as a convergence, in varying degrees, of the pre-Islamic visual sources of the conquered territories—Western, Greco-Roman "classical" sources on the one hand, and Eastern, "oriental" sources on the other. The art of the first Umayyad dynasty is viewed as synthesizing these traditions while always retaining its strong local Mediterranean roots. With the relocation of the Islamic imperial capital under Abbasid rule from the Umayyad Mediterranean center of Damascus to the Mesopotamian center of Baghdad, the Abbasids, according to the generally accepted view, broke with

the Western-dominated Greco-Roman visual tradition of their Umayyad predecessors and reoriented their dynastic identity toward the traditions of the East, most immediately the Persian, Sasanian heritage. The new “beveled style” of stucco ornament, the development of lusterware ceramics, and the wall paintings published in the corpus of Samarran art with photographs and colored drawings by Ernst Herzfeld have all been used to support this claim of a novel dynastic style that was then disseminated throughout the Islamic empire, establishing a distinctive Abbasid identity.⁹

In this essay, I wish to reconsider the dominance of this Eastern trajectory and, in the process, to destabilize altogether the East-West binary for the study of early Islamic art. Instead, I would suggest a more holistic approach that engages East and West through a discourse of cultural exchange and the creation of a local Iraqi style. This will require both a closer look at the specific visual evidence and the consideration of that evidence within the broader context of court art beyond the Abbasid period. In this way, a far more integrated scenario of dynamic networks of interaction and connections will emerge, linking East and West, past and present.

THE CONTEXT IN SCHOLARSHIP: DISCOURSE OF EAST AND WEST

First, it will be instructive to look back to the early twentieth century, a time of pioneering work in Islamic art and archaeology and the development of theoretical models for cultural origins that would result in the construction of the East-West divide and would subsequently place early Islamic art and the Samarra excavation in the continuum of this framework.¹⁰ The East-versus-West binary had its genesis in the polemical debate waged at the turn of the twentieth century over the origins of late antique and medieval art.¹¹ More than anything else, this debate over whether or not the visual sources emanated from the “Orient” or from the “Roman” Mediterranean sphere focused the attention of scholars on the art of the period between the third and the seventh century, a period that had routinely been dismissed as a moment of artistic decline and decadence between the ancient and the medieval eras. This period was now defined by Alois Riegl as encompassing a multicultural period-style, for which he coined the designation “late antique.”¹² On one side of the debate, Riegl advocated continuities with

the broadly defined Greco-Roman tradition. At the other extreme, Josef Strzygowski argued for origins in the “oriental” East, in opposition to the Mediterranean “classical” tradition.¹³ Strzygowski championed an “East Aryan” art stemming from Iran, Armenia, and inner Asia Minor, which he linked to the traditions of Northern Europe. Recent historiographical studies have thoroughly exposed and deconstructed the politics of these theories and the entanglement of this debate over art-historical styles with the early-twentieth-century search for national identity and claims of ethnic purity that would eventually lead to the unimagined horrors of the Nazis.¹⁴ Thus the vitriolic nature of debates concerning the origins, sources, and lineage of medieval art stood for much more. Art and history became sites of political contention.¹⁵

The debate over East versus West gained further momentum and meaning as spectacular archaeological discoveries were being made throughout the Middle East during the early twentieth century.¹⁶ These discoveries became the testing ground for theories on stylistic origins and were offered as evidence for the truth of one position or another in this controversy. The disagreement among scholars over the dating of the monuments unearthed, ranging from the second to the ninth centuries, resulted in the exploration of Islamic art as the expanded arena in which to stage the battle between East and West and as the focus of a study of origins. In particular, the Mshatta façade, which had been installed in the late antique gallery of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in 1904, became the most celebrated site of controversy, with proposed origins ranging from Roman (second century), Parthian (third century), or Ghassanid (fifth–sixth century) to Umayyad (eighth century)—the latter fiercely advocated by Ernst Herzfeld and ultimately accepted.¹⁷

Vehemently opposed to Strzygowski’s assertion of “oriental” sources, Herzfeld argued for the juxtaposition of East and West in the formation of a new Islamic style in the Mshatta façade.¹⁸ With his subsequent excavation at Samarra, begun in 1911, followed by his work on pre-Islamic Iran, Herzfeld’s own scholarly focus moved eastward. Despite this, it must be emphasized that Herzfeld never advocated for exclusively Eastern sources, nor did he dismiss the notion of a Mediterranean Greco-Roman heritage for Samarra. He linked the art of Samarra to Mshatta, which he claimed stemmed from a synthesis of pre-Islamic Greco-Roman and Lakhmid (southern Mesopotamian) sources. In this way Herzfeld recon-

ciled East and West through an elaborate theory that posited the mediation of a Roman model through a sixth-century southern Mesopotamian “Hira style.”¹⁹ In the end, he was true to his times: the quest to identify specific sources and origins stood firmly at the heart of his scholarship. This may explain why, when his theories for the sources of his proposed “Hira style” were rejected, his broader conclusions about synthesis were also not given the attention they deserved. Ironically, well after the storm of early- and mid-twentieth-century political agendas had abated, the scholarship of early Islamic art continued to be framed by the East-or-West discourse of origins. To be sure, this discourse has survived without the impassioned political agendas, but rather as a solely “stylistic” method to identify the constituent parts of the newly created Umayyad art and also to mark distinctions between Umayyad and Abbasid art.²⁰

THE SAMARRA PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS IN THE EAST-WEST DISCOURSE

The Samarra wall paintings, as iconic Abbasid works, have served to carry forward the powerful narrative of the East-West discourse. While certain links to the Greco-Roman Mediterranean tradition, seen, for example, in the inhabited acanthus scrolls (figs. 1a, 1b, and 2), have been noted, the style of most of the paintings has been associated with an Eastern orientation. Scholars have suggested that they are connected to works from Central Asia and Chinese Turkestan, possibly brought to the Abbasid court by Turkish mercenaries. This Eastern orientation has been viewed as a defining characteristic of the new, authentically Islamic style, labeled the “Samarran style,” which in turn has been claimed as the foundation for the development of later monumental painting in Fatimid Egypt and, by extension, even in Norman Sicily.²¹

Why has this Eastern orientation gained such a powerful hold, surviving into our own time, in defining the Samarra paintings in the scholarship? To be sure, connections with the art of the East can be made in both subject matter and style. The Abbasids had inherited local pre-Islamic Sasanian traditions in Iraq and Mesopotamia, the lands that served as the center of gravity for their empire, and they incorporated the visual traditions from the more eastern reaches of the empire as well. Furthermore, they pursued trade along eastern routes that extended to India and China, as evidenced

by imported pottery from China as well as local imitations of Chinese ware found at Samarra.²² In particular, however, I would like to highlight a key piece of “evidence” that has been used to define and corroborate the “Samarran style” as Eastern: the extraordinary colored drawings of the Samarra wall paintings made by Herzfeld at the excavation site. Since the time of their publication, along with Herzfeld’s photographs, in his volume *Malereien von Samarra*, it is the drawings—rather than, with few exceptions, the photographs—that have been reproduced and studied.²³ In what follows, I will analyze the use of these drawings, tracing both their contributions to our perception of the paintings and the limitations of their use for study.

Artists’ drawings made on site during the early-twentieth-century expeditions add a fascinating layer to the history and historiography of the monuments at these sites. In general, these drawings provided important documentation, especially given the dual realities of the limited access to the monuments and the danger of their deterioration after excavation. A comparison of Herzfeld’s photograph of the wall painting whose subjects are known as the “Samarra Dancers” with a more recent photograph, taken in 1995 by Bernard O’Kane, illustrates the considerable paint losses suffered in the intervening years (figs. 3 and 4). Herzfeld was a brilliant draftsman, and his meticulous, almost forensic approach is legendary. The importance of his direct recording of the paintings in situ—both of their detail, which was already fading, and of their color, which was unavailable in early-twentieth-century black-and-white photography—cannot be overstated. His arrangement of the material in *Malereien von Samarra*, with each drawing appearing on the page either preceding or following its companion photograph, allows easy reference and direct comparison between drawings and photographs. The colors and geometric and floral patterns offer a sense of the dazzling textiles that were so much a part of court life described in the texts, but that so rarely survived over time.²⁴ The drawings bring to life colors described in the texts as “pistachio green,” “iridescent peacock,” “chickpea,” “wax,” “tin,” “pearl,” and “sand.”²⁵ Details of geometric and floral patterns still visible in the paintings at the time were reproduced by Herzfeld, probably with great accuracy.²⁶ The drawings also allow us to make out the forms of the figures, which appear faded in the photographs (fig. 5). A series of fragments of bare-chested girls, which Herzfeld reconstructed as dancers

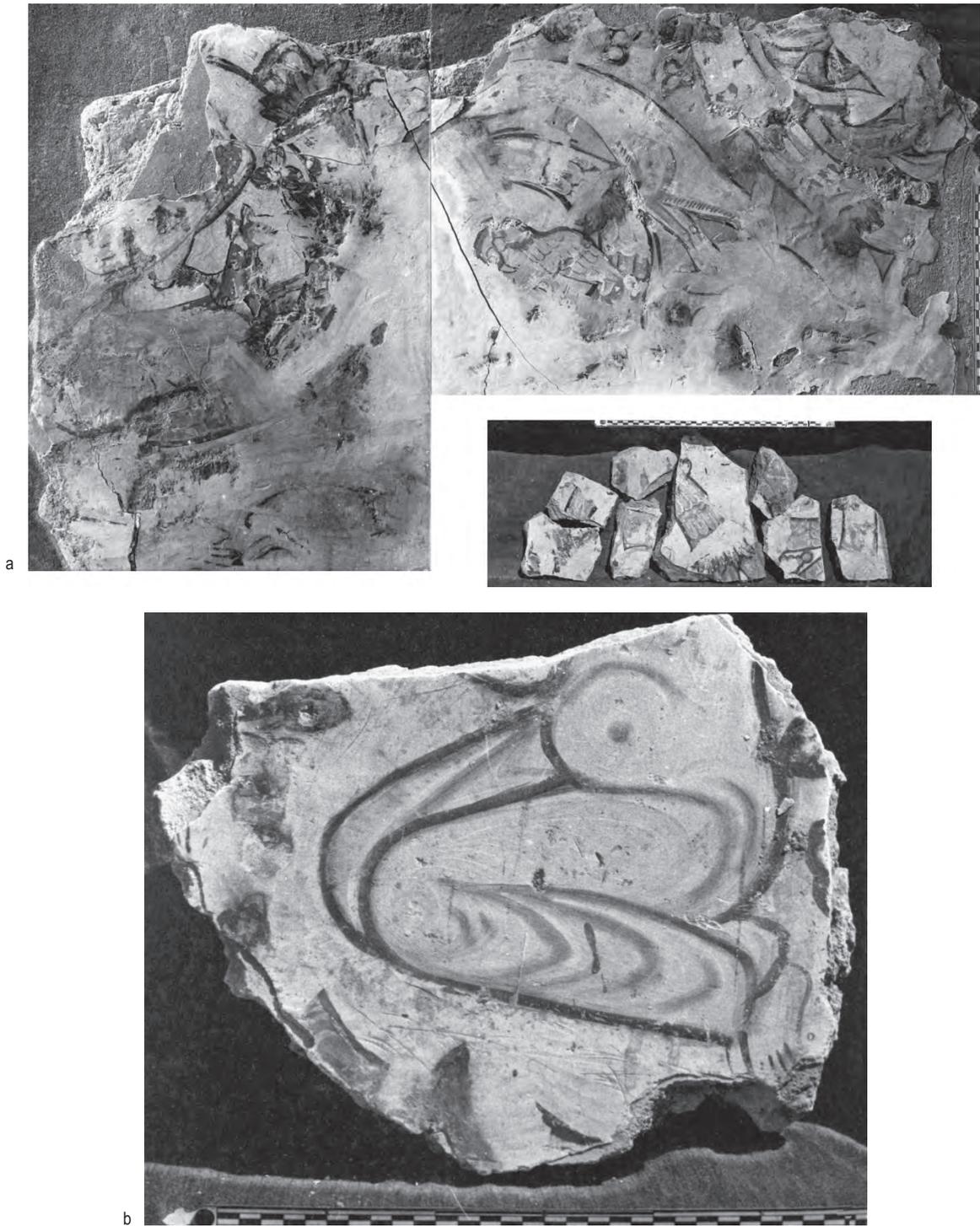


Fig. 1a. Photographs of wall-painting fragments showing acanthus scrolls. Fig. 1b. Photograph of a wall-painting fragment showing a seated figure within an acanthus scroll. Dar al-Khilafa, Samarra, ninth century. (After Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* [Berlin, 1927], pls. XI and XVI, respectively)



Fig. 2. Drawing of an acanthus scroll. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pls. XII–XIV)

(figs. 6–8), facilitates our visualization of the richness of color and design;²⁷ in addition, the graphic outlines of his drawings allow us to decipher the faded forms in the photographs as figures with long braids falling over their breasts and torsos that accentuate their delicate bodies and the elegant curves of their waists. Such comparisons demonstrate Herzfeld’s virtuosity as an artist and his intention to reproduce the details with accuracy.²⁸

Artists’ drawings, however, are never exact reproductions. Two well-known cases illustrate this point. First, the drawings by the artist Alphons Mielich that were made for Alois Musil’s publication of Qusayr ‘Amra were greeted with skepticism even in their own day.²⁹ The uncertainty was compounded by the facts that no complete set of photographs of the wall paintings was taken at the time of the expedition and that restorations undertaken in the 1970s were problematic.³⁰ Ironically, the panels removed from the site by Mielich, which are now in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, remain the only “original” unrestored pieces (fig. 9).³¹ A second instance is the case of Sasanian palaces, information about which, as pointed out by Lionel Bier, had been based on incomplete and problematic architectural drawings made by Oscar Reuther in *A Survey of Persian Art*.³² In the final analysis, artists’ drawings simply cannot substitute for photographs. When used alone, without reference to photographs, discrepancies in both subject matter and style are unavoidable, even in the case of Herzfeld

and his scrupulous documentation practices of precisely outlined drawings made in the interests of legibility and clarity. By their very nature, drawings are interpretations, by both the artist and the viewer, of the works they copy.

I believe that scholars’ continued use of Herzfeld’s Samarra drawings has contributed to furthering the East-versus-West binary that characterized the debate at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the primary motivation for using the drawings instead of the wall paintings themselves might have been for practical reasons of legibility (e.g., figs. 3 and 5), naturalization of the drawings into the scholarship has resulted in defining and illustrating an “Eastern” orientation for the Abbasid Samarra paintings, especially in contrast to Umayyad painting, which has been aligned with the opposing Mediterranean Greco-Roman tradition.

Based entirely on Herzfeld’s reconstruction drawing (fig. 10), one Samarra painting, the so-called *Huntress* (fig. 11), has been described as follows:

The main figure has often been compared with the huntress Diana, but the face has a distinctly oriental cast, with its long hooked nose and fleshy cheeks, as has the bunch of black hair at the back and the slender curl on the temple. She seems animated, as do her prey and the dog, but the movement is both petrified and exaggerated, an effect further accentuated by the expressionless gazes of both huntress and prey. The decorative spots on the animal and the patterned fall of the huntress’s



Fig. 3. Photograph of the “Samarra Dancers.” (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. I)



Fig 4. More recent (1995) photograph of the “Samarra Dancers.” (Photo: Bernard O’Kane, courtesy of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul)



Fig 5. Drawing of the "Samarra Dancers." (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. II)



Fig. 6. Photograph of a wall-painting fragment showing a female figure. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. XXII, right)



Fig. 7. Photograph of a wall-painting fragment showing a female figure. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. XXII, left)

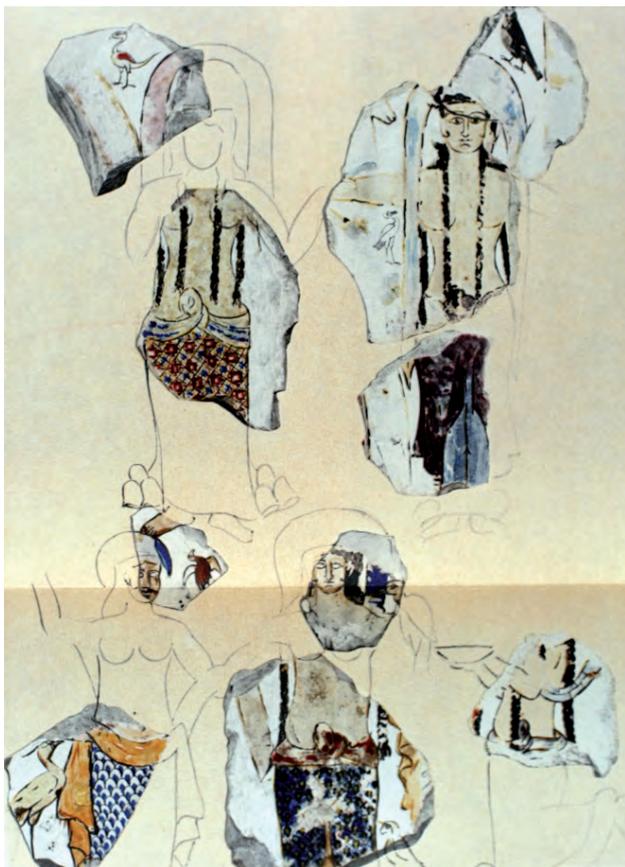


Fig. 8. Drawing of fragmentary female figures, with lower bodies covered by garments. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. XXI)

garment contribute to the unrealistic quality of this skillfully composed work.³³

Of all Herzfeld's drawings, that of the "Samarra Dancers" (fig. 5) has been the most widely disseminated and influential.³⁴ Through its comparison to figures in Umayyad paintings, the conclusion of the "Eastern" orientation for the Samarra paintings has been made even more convincingly. When compared to the ample, full-bodied Umayyad form of the equally well-known figure of the bather at Qusayr 'Amra (fig. 12), which stands and moves naturalistically in space, the figures of the "Samarra Dancers," as mediated through Herzfeld's drawing, have been described as timeless, static, symbolic works in which volume replaces the flesh of their Umayyad counterparts. Thus characterized, the "Samarra Dancers" have been interpreted as a manifestation both of the more formal mood of the Abbasid court and of its Eastern heritage, expressing a



Fig. 9. Semi-clad figure in a niche. Wall-painting fragment from Qusayr 'Amra, Umayyad, early eighth century. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, inv. no. I 1264. (Photo: courtesy of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)

linearity, symmetry, physiognomy, and iconographical trope rooted in the Sasanian royal arts.³⁵

Such comparisons between Umayyad and Abbasid works, however, are not without problems. The most serious flaw stems from the use of Herzfeld's Samarra drawings rather than the original works as reflected in his photographs. When the drawings are considered alongside the photographs, it becomes immediately obvious when and where liberties have been taken. Such a comparison will tell a different story about the Samarra paintings, one that is not dominated by the East-or-West narrative but that rather presents a more integrated view of the material.



Fig. 10. Drawing of the "Huntress." (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. VI)

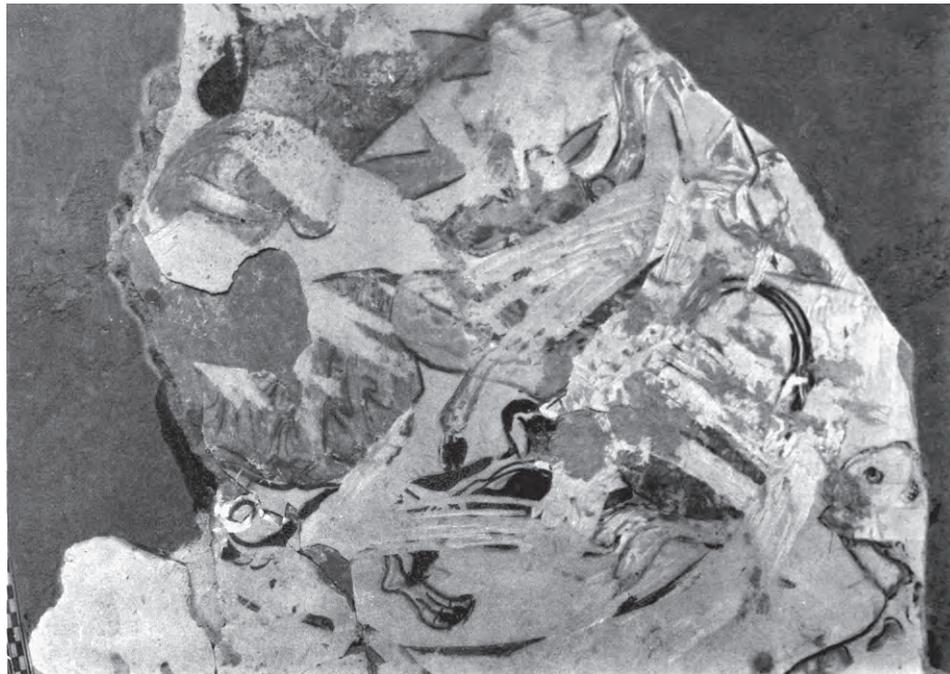


Fig. 11. Photograph of the "Huntress." (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. V)



Fig. 12. Female bather, wall painting from Qusayr 'Amra. (After Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* [Geneva, 1962], 31)



Fig. 13. Silver-gilt vase with female figures, Sasanian or post-Sasanian. Inv. no. S-35, the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. (Photo: reproduced with permission of the State Hermitage Museum)

Herzfeld's drawings were by no means arbitrary reconstructions. In order to fill in missing areas of the design, he made use of surviving details in neighboring paintings—such as the “pearl border” adopted to complete the bottom of the frame on the motif of the “Samarra Dancers”—and also looked to the themes of dancers, musicians, and attendants from known precedents in Umayyad and pre-Islamic court art. His drawing of the fragmentary acanthus scroll and the animals inhabiting it (figs. 1–2) were rendered according to subjects and naturalistic styles familiar from villas in the late antique Greco-Roman world.³⁶ For the reconstruction drawings of human figures within the acanthus scroll (fig. 2) and the “Samarra Dancers” (fig. 5), Herzfeld summoned up a different model: he clearly had in mind parallel subjects of dancers and attendants

that had become known on luxury Sasanian silver-gilt objects (fig. 13).³⁷ From minimal surviving remnants of a figure within the acanthus scroll, for example, he developed the motif into a fully animated female figure holding a scarf over her head.³⁸ Fragmentary remains of three other figures in the acanthus scroll were fully imagined in the drawing as court entertainers—a dancer, a musician, and a figure holding a bowl of fruit. All the Samarra figures were endowed with “Eastern” physiognomies and completed with accessories based on Sasanian models. Herzfeld also transcribed and interpreted certain stylistic details, such as the rippled hems on the garments of the “Samarra Dancers” and other figures, in terms of comparable details represented in the figures on Sasanian metalwork. While his impulse to connect the Samarra works

to the nearby, local pre-Islamic Sasanian context was reasonable and may have been perfectly plausible, the relationship between the “Samarra Dancers” and Sasanian precedents is far more complex, as will be shown below. In any case, the reconstruction drawings go well beyond the surviving Samarra material and must therefore remain, to some degree, conjectural.

Even where the Samarra paintings survived more fully, there are noticeable discrepancies of style between the drawings and the paintings visible in the photographs. Herzfeld filled in missing sections of garments and elaborated on the poses of the “Samarra Dancers” to suggest the figures in motion—dancing and pouring liquid into bowls—again reminiscent of the motifs on Sasanian metalwork. In the photograph, however, the nature of their activities is far from certain (fig. 3); while the figures are symmetrically paired in action, with outer arms raised at the elbow and inner ones crossing in the center, it is unclear what objects they hold. There are no bowls to be seen, and while a knee of the figure on the right seems to be raised, no feet are visible in the photograph. The physiognomies of the figures in the wall painting have been described as “Eastern,” but the linearity and elongation is further exaggerated in the drawing, resulting in an even more “Eastern” appearance. More fundamentally, however, one wonders whether this physiognomy should be defined as “Eastern” or simply as “local” (i.e., Iraqi-Mesopotamian). In addition, the natural curve of the waist of the right-hand figure, visible in the photograph, is de-emphasized in Herzfeld’s drawing, where, rather than imparting any sense of the body underneath, textile folds take on a life of their own, resulting in a stiffer, more ornamental and formulaic rendition than in the more naturalistic painting. Rather than approximating the details of garment folds in the painting, the swirling folds in the drawing may be best understood as translating designs created for metalwork (e.g., fig. 14), a medium that Herzfeld certainly had in mind when he drew these figures.³⁹ There are also striking differences between Herzfeld’s photograph (fig. 15) and his drawing (fig. 16) of another fragmentary figure: the gradations in shading and highlighting observable in the photograph are missing in the drawing, which shows a precisely outlined skirt with folds reduced to stark contrasts.⁴⁰ Similarly, the fragmentary figure seated within the acanthus scroll is schematized in the drawing, with undefined stomach and thighs and unshaded garment



Fig. 14. Silver-gilt ewer with female figures, Sasanian, sixth to seventh century. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, gift of Arthur M. Sackler, S1987.117. (Photo: courtesy of Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC)

(fig. 2).⁴¹ The photograph, on the other hand, reveals the garment to be hugging the body, showing the natural curves of the stomach, buttocks, and thighs and the feet tucked under the buttocks (fig. 1b).⁴² Without the graphic mediation of the drawings, these naturalistic details fit comfortably within the figural heritage of the Greco-Roman world. Comparison between the photographs and the drawings of an enigmatic group of painted portraits on ceramic bottles found under the pavement of a room adjacent to the *ḥarīm* shows, in almost every case, that in the drawings figural forms are more rigid and flattened (figs. 17–20).⁴³ Lost in the drawings is the sense of transience that the photographs reveal. Where the faces in the drawings appear frozen, the highlights and shadows visible in the photographs capture the mobility of the



Fig. 15. Photograph of a wall-painting fragment showing part of a figure covered by a garment. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. XVIII)



Fig. 16. Drawing of the fragment shown in fig. 15. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. XIX)

facial features, with their expressive and convincing gazes. Once again, these features may be associated with the visual tradition of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world.

From the forgoing analysis, I would suggest that it is no longer possible to define the Samarra paintings in terms of an exclusively “Eastern” orientation. The Abbasids did not turn their backs on the Mediterranean heritage, nor did they sever ties to the Umayyad visual tradition. It is significant that when the photographs of the “Samarra Dancers” are compared to the ample, modeled forms of the well-known figures in the Umayyad paintings from Qusayr ‘Amra (fig. 12), the Abbasid figures do not depart nearly as dramatically from their Umayyad predecessors as they do when Herzfeld’s drawings are used for comparison. Yet it would be equally wrong to swing the pendulum back, away from the East and exclusively in the direction of

the Greco-Roman tradition. While definitive conclusions regarding the Samarra paintings ultimately must await the full study of all of the extant fragments, the paintings point the way to more fluid boundaries and continuities, and any explanation of their production must be far more nuanced.⁴⁴ It is clear that there was more interplay between East and West than is usually acknowledged.

A particularly compelling and undistorted comparison may be made between the Samarra paintings of the dancers and semi-clad figures and an unrestored painting of a full-length figure in a niche from Qusayr ‘Amra (fig. 9).⁴⁵ The semi-clad Samarra figures are strongly related to the Qusayr ‘Amra figure in terms not only of motif but also of body style, which is modeled through subtle gradations of light and shadow, adopting slimmer proportions than the fleshy body type of the Qusayr ‘Amra bather. This comparison



Fig. 17. Photographic detail and full view of a painted ceramic bottle depicting a robed male figure. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. LX)

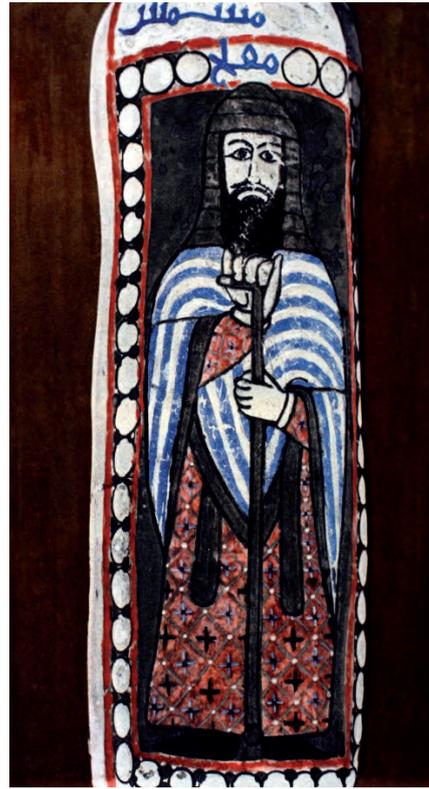


Fig. 18. Drawing of the bottle shown in fig. 17. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. LXI)

may be extended to some of the other nude and half-dressed figures at Qusayr 'Amra.⁴⁶ Yet there were also other Umayyad stylistic variations of this shared late antique motif, such as in the well-known stucco female figures from the Umayyad palace estate of Khirbat al-Mafjar.⁴⁷ In all these cases, whether from Samarra or from Umayyad sites, there was no single model but rather a range of possibilities for shared continuities with past traditions of late antiquity, both Eastern and Western. In the final analysis, all these figures represent individual, local translations of these traditions.⁴⁸

Indeed, Herzfeld recognized the integration of diverse cultures during the period of the early Islamic empires. By 1910 he had already proposed a model of synthesis of the pre-Islamic visual traditions under the Umayyads. He also pointed out continuities between Umayyad and Abbasid art as, for example, the link between the Umayyad palace of Mshatta and early Abbasid palaces.⁴⁹ Following his lead, scholars identi-



Fig. 19. Photograph of a fragmentary painted ceramic bottle showing the head of a figure. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. LXVIII)



Fig. 20. Drawing of the bottle fragment shown in fig. 19. (After Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. LXVII)

fied specific “Eastern”—Sasanian—and “Western”—Byzantine—stylistic and thematic sources in the visual programs of major Umayyad state and private monuments and have shown how these sources were used to advance the Umayyad message of imperial glory and hegemony.⁵⁰ In most of these studies, however, the discussion has been framed in terms of an East-or-West discourse. It is not my intention here to perpetuate the binary model nor to advocate for one tradition over the other. What I would like to propose instead is a model of greater interplay and interactivity between these traditions, providing for cultural intersections that are less hierarchical and more nuanced.

Well before the political unification of the Islamic empire, cultural and visual intersections were common between the Sasanian and Mediterranean realms. Whatever the specific forms of these various contacts, it is clear that these realms can no longer be discussed in monolithic terms, nor can they be considered sepa-

rate from each other. Herzfeld’s impulse to connect the Samarra paintings to the local pre-Islamic Sasanian art was well founded. It is, however, the popular conception of Sasanian art as exclusively “Eastern” that must be debunked. Writing on the complexity of these cultural relations in late antiquity, Prudence Oliver Harper has observed, “Sasanian Iran and Mesopotamia were never isolated culturally from the lands on the eastern and western borders, and both a receptiveness to foreign modes and a reverence for traditional imagery were important factors in the court art of the Sasanian period as they had been in more ancient Achaemenid times.”⁵¹ Notwithstanding the complex relations between the Sasanian and Mediterranean realms, visual exchange occurred across these boundaries. It has been noted, for example, that the female “dancers” on Sasanian metalwork vessels (figs. 13–14) belong to the same visual universe as the Greco-Roman female figures variously

serving as maenads from the Dionysian entourage or as allegorical representations of the hours, seasons, and months. All of these can be further related to a wide repertoire of mythological subjects.⁵² Sharing a mix of ornament and figures and representing merrymaking and mythological subjects with origins in both the Greco-Roman and the Sasanian realms, the comparable late antique, third-century Sasanian mosaics at Bishapur in Fars, Iran, and those from Roman and Byzantine Antioch are excellent examples of the interaction between these realms.⁵³

While the conventional and widely held view defined Sasanian art as abstract and emblematic in contrast to Roman-Byzantine naturalism, in both traditions there existed a wide range of styles with significant overlap, from abstract and hieratic to naturalistic.⁵⁴ The permeability of stylistic boundaries is aptly exemplified by a full-sized, headless painted stucco statue now in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (fig. 21).⁵⁵ It is a Sasanian work excavated from the Christian Church of Qasr bint al-Qadi at Ctesiphon and executed in the characteristic Greco-Roman style, complete with naturalistically draped robes that could well have served as a local precedent for the garments of the Samarra paintings. The statue, identified as representing a saint, was buried face down, in the characteristic Christian fashion. This should come as no surprise, since the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia was in fact a multicultural city populated by a majority of Aramaeans, Arabs, and Syrians who spoke Aramaic and practiced Christianity and Judaism. The Persian ruling class was in the minority here. Even at the easternmost reaches of the Sasanian Empire, it is possible to note the intersection between the styles of these Sasanian and Mediterranean spheres. For example, a plate from northeastern Iran (fig. 22), while not a royal object itself, has a representation of the hunt, a theme of royal authority. Using conventions of space and composition that are generally associated with the Greco-Roman realm, the scene is set in a landscape with the action continuing beyond the rim of the plate. The hunter turns in space with his spear held behind him, and his body is built up in high relief.⁵⁶

Archaeological discoveries attest to many other instances of geographically and historically far-reaching cultural and visual exchanges. The third-century Hellenized paintings from Miran in Chinese Turkestan represent evidence of early contact between Central Asia and the Mediterranean.⁵⁷ Through the portability of objects, the scope and networks of exchange



Fig. 21. Painted stucco figure from Qasr bint al-Qadi at Ctesiphon, Sasanian. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, inv. no. Kt.W.292/1.7727 (Photo: courtesy of Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)

were ever expanding, resulting in even more possibilities of East-West variations and intersections. It was not at all unusual for precious objects to travel far from their place of production. Sasanian objects with Greco-Roman mythological subjects have been found



Fig. 22. Silver-gilt plate depicting a figure hunting boars, Sasanian, northeastern Iran. Private collection. (Photo: courtesy of the collection)

in tombs in western China, ostensibly placed there as prized possessions of the deceased.⁵⁸ Late Roman plates have been found in Crimea, Azerbaijan, and Eastern Europe. Mixed hoards of objects of Byzantine, Sasanian, and post-Sasanian origin, dating from the sixth to the thirteenth century, have been found together in the Kama Valley above the Volga River, probably having arrived there through Central Asian trade. Other hoards found in Eastern and Central Europe contain silver of Byzantine, Sasanian, and Avar origins.⁵⁹ Yet beyond the value of these objects as specific models for adoption in their new locations is their place in the establishment, over time, of patterns of circulation and exchange of ever-familiar vocabulary that crossed the boundaries of East and West through multiple instances and layers of contact. The fluidity of exchange explains the standoff in the East-versus-West debates of the early twentieth century. Both sides were

partly right and partly wrong. Each side could make justifiable claims for East or West because elements from both East and West could be located and interwoven in the monuments under discussion. There was no cultural purity. Visual styles were neither static nor limited to any individual tradition. This does not deny the existence of local or regional styles but rather recognizes the potential for flexibility and dialogue among these regional styles.

The range and combinations of themes and styles that moved across networks of exchange between these multiple late antique pre-Islamic traditions set the stage for the Abbasid Samarra paintings. Dismantling the East-West discourse at this earlier stage helps us to refocus our study of Abbasid art away from the dissection of sources and origins and toward the appreciation of Abbasid art as a synthetic cultural mix with a plurality of continuities expressing its own distinct identity.

In no way does this suggest either an undifferentiated past or a diminished consciousness of the past on the part of the Abbasids. Instead of asking which particular stylistic or geographical traditions provided a foundation for Abbasid art, we should ask how the Abbasids perceived and negotiated these more fluid stylistic and thematic possibilities. How did they weave together dynamic new intersections? And how, visually, did they value and express their relationship to these past traditions?

A DISCOURSE OF PRINCELY CULTURE

Above all, the fluidity of style and theme to which the Abbasids were heirs speaks to an overriding discourse of princely culture, about which Oleg Grabar has observed, “the art of the princes in the early Middle Ages—and perhaps at all times—was not tied to any single culture but belonged to a fraternity of princes and transcended cultural barriers.”⁶⁰ The “family of kings” collapsed boundaries of time and space, bringing together a continuum of great rulers, past and present, East and West, interweaving mythological, biblical, historical, and contemporary monarchs throughout ancient and medieval realms.⁶¹

The Abbasids’ consciousness of their place within the broader sphere of princely culture goes a long way to explain why, as scholars have pointed out, the Dar al-Khilafa complex in Samarra relates to such a wide range of palaces. Rather than following any single typological model, this complex is related to a multiplicity of traditions.⁶² The Abbasids drew on architectural models and integrated spolia from both East and West. The themes of seclusion and formality in the Dar al-Khilafa may be traced back to the palaces of the ancient Near East, well before their appearance in imperial Rome and Byzantium.⁶³ Al-Mansur’s round city of Baghdad has been related to the late antique palatine cities of the late Roman Tetrarchy.⁶⁴ The tenth-century geographer al-Mas’udi tells us that the Abbasid caliphs made use of the Lakhmid palace of Khavarnaq, which provided a model for their construction of a new type of audience hall. The Lakhmid palace was located in Hira, a multicultural capital and center for a mix of pagan Arab, Persian, and Byzantine cultures. It was also reported that the Abbasid caliph al-Muktafi reused material from the Arch of Chosroes (Taq-i Kisra) in his tenth-century Taj Palace in Baghdad.

Exchanges of gifts and emissaries between royal courts

contributed to the creation of a shared standard for the image of royalty, court culture, and display. The frequently cited reception at the Dar al-Khilafa palace in Baghdad given in 917 by the caliph al-Muqtadir for an emissary sent by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos probably reflected similar ceremonies at the palaces of Samarra, which were repeated in Baghdad when the Abbasid court returned in 892.⁶⁵ Such receptions echoed earlier ones that were held at the Sasanian court for Byzantine and Arab envoys, and that were in turn adopted by the Umayyads in Spain and the Fatimids in Egypt.⁶⁶ Royal practices involving the staging of the ruler’s appearance on a throne and the decoration of throne rooms were similarly widespread in Sasanian and Byzantine court culture alike. Raised thrones screened by curtains that effectively dramatized the appearance of the ruler while at the same time controlling and restricting his visibility were almost universally adopted among royalty and are preserved in both visual representations and literary descriptions from Umayyad through Fatimid times.⁶⁷ In addition to the sharing of these practices, specific accessories belonging to previous or rival rulers were especially prized. For example, a set of precious gold window grilles that would provide the ruler with privacy as he viewed ceremonies and processions from his throne was looted from the Abbasid palace of al-Qa’im in Baghdad and then used by the Fatimids in Cairo.⁶⁸ The spectacle of the ruler enthroned under a dome with a crown suspended over his head is repeated by Sasanian and Byzantine emperors, and its occurrence has been suggested, in an Umayyad context, at the palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar.⁶⁹ The throne in a second-story throne room of the Ja’fari Palace, north of Samarra, built by the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil, was surrounded by a painted scene of a crowned ruler flanked by attendants. This formula was later echoed at Lashkari Bazaar in Bust, the palace complex built for the Ghaznavid rulers, vassals of the Abbasids.⁷⁰

It is in the context of the shared palace decoration of the “princely cycle,” showcasing the prince enthroned or engaged in royal pastimes of prowess and pleasure, that the “Samarra Dancers” and the wider repertoire of maenads can be understood. The meaning and identity of these figures were shaped by the broader princely context as well as by the specific palaces for which they were made. In a broader context the “Samarra Dancers” resonated with the maenads in the Sasanian and Greco-Roman realms and comparable figures that populated the Umayyad palaces, including

those at Khirbat al-Mafjar and Qusayr ʿAmra. In their specific realm, they represented an Abbasid interpretation created according to the requirements of this particular palace and its users and must be studied in their own right. In both their collective and their specific identity, however, the “Samarra Dancers” represented the continuum of court art past and present, extending well beyond its dissection into mere Eastern or Western sources.

THE REPRESENTATION OF CONTINUUM

Rulers expressed their relationship to the past through the insertion of the royal image within the continuum of princely rule and through the visual representation of the continuum itself. Faithful transmission of the line of succession and display of royal prerogatives and emblems were critical in establishing authority. Thus, although the Abbasids had vanquished their immediate predecessors, the Umayyads, they viewed themselves in relation to the Umayyads and focused on establishing themselves as their legitimate heirs. After gaining control of the vast empire that had been unified under the Umayyads, they did not fail to learn from them, despite the prevalence of anti-Umayyad polemics in Abbasid written sources. The Umayyads provided the Abbasids with the most immediate and abundant models for the visual representation of the theme of dynastic succession in both public and private palace monuments. It is in the context of continuum that we may gain insight into how the past Byzantine and Sasanian visual traditions were used and what they meant both to the Umayyad rulers and to their Abbasid successors.

While scholars have taken pains to distinguish specific Sasanian and Byzantine sources for the themes and styles of the major Umayyad monuments, it is clear that the Umayyads themselves were more interested in representing an integration of diverse political and cultural traditions than in maintaining the stylistic distinctions of earlier sources. It was through the unification of these traditions that the full scope of Umayyad conquest and imperial glory could be expressed. Surely the most celebrated representation of Umayyad political triumph and legitimate succession over past rule was the depiction of jewels and crowns in the mosaics on the drum of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.⁷¹ Significantly, these recognizable insignia of Byzantine and Sasanian imperial rule

are shown together, side by side, in a rather uniform local style and are not separated by their Sasanian and Byzantine (Greco-Roman) stylistic components (figs. 23 and 24). Similarly, in the representation of the so-called family of kings in the bathhouse of the palace of Qusayr ʿAmra, the identities of the kings are expressed primarily through dress and inscription, and not necessarily through opposing styles of representation.⁷² The mosaic, painting, and sculptural decoration of the palatial monuments at Khirbat al-Mafjar and Qasr al-Hayr West have also been interpreted with reference to conquest and hegemony, expressing continuities with themes and styles from the diverse Greco-Roman and Sasanian traditions and the deliberate integration of these legacies.⁷³ Style contributed to these continuities, and, in some instances, specific styles may have been used to express particular ideological messages. Nevertheless, a range of variables, such as the composition of the workforce of artists and the strength of local traditions, also contributed to the choice of style. Ultimately, style must be studied on a case-by-case basis, one monument at a time.⁷⁴ Over and above the particular messages of stylistic distinction, it was the complementarity and synthesis of the so-called Greco-Roman and Sasanian themes and styles that expressed the legitimacy of Umayyad succession. It is this message that was inherited and carried forward by the Abbasids, as part of the much larger theme of royal continuum.

The scope of the continuum, its expression through visual display, the value of certain legendary royal objects, and the transmission of these objects among Islamic rulers and beyond are all well documented in the incomparable compendium *The Book of Gifts and Rarities* (*Kitāb al-hadāyā wa ʿl-tuhaf*) by Ibn al-Zubayr.⁷⁵ One such prized acquisition, which signified legitimate universal dominion for its possessor and could ostensibly be traced from the beginning of time to the Abbasid period, was a fragment of a mirror that, according to legend, had been God’s gift to Adam. The two versions of this legend vary in the details of the fragment’s transmission. In the account by al-Waqidi (d. 823), ʿAbd-Allah b. Sawwar al-ʿAbdi, the governor of Sind under the Umayyad caliph Muʿawiya, received it as tribute from the king of Qiqa:

Learned people say that Allah—the Powerful and Glorious—sent it down to Adam when his offspring multiplied and spread over the earth. Adam would look into it to see whomever he wanted in his present condition,

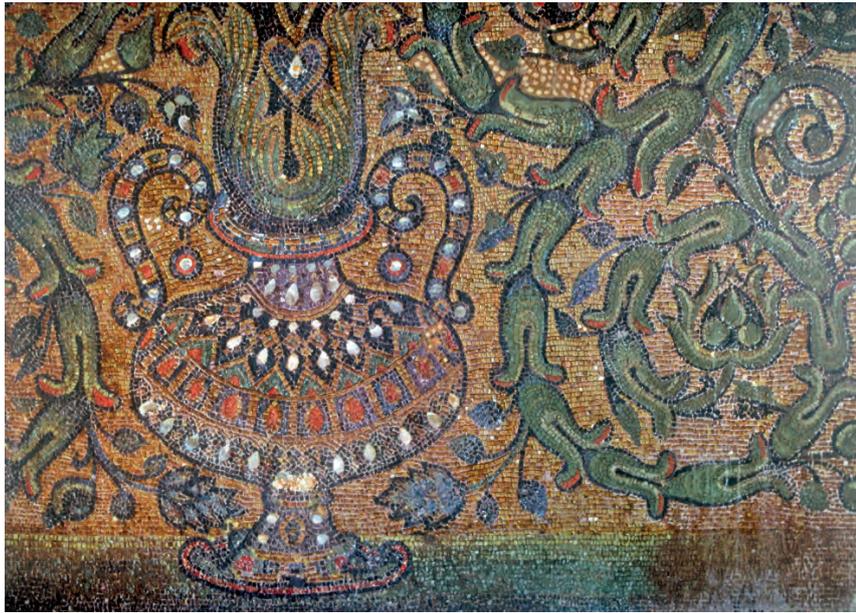


Fig. 23. Vase with acanthus scroll. Detail of mosaic decoration (in the so-called Mediterranean style), Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. (After Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 21)



Fig. 24. Foral motif. Detail of mosaic decoration (in the so-called Sasanian style), Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. (After Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 18)

good or bad. ‘Abd-Allah b. Sawwar sent the fragment to Mu‘awiyah, with whom it remained as long as he lived. Then it came into possession of the Umayyad kings and stayed in their treasury until the time of the Abbasids, who acquired it along with whatever [else] they had taken from the [Umayyad] wealth.⁷⁶

A second version is reported by ‘Umar b. Shabbah al-Numayri (d. 875), who records that ‘Isa b. ‘Abd-Allah told him that King Solomon (*Sulaymān b. Dāwūd*) had retrieved Adam’s mirror from the devil. After Solomon’s death, the devils recaptured it, leaving only a fragment, which was inherited by the Jews,

until finally it reached the exilarch of the Jews (*Ra’s al-Yalūt*), who gave it as a gift to [the Umayyad ruler] Marwan b. Muhammad b. Marwan during his wars with the Abbasids. Marwan would then rub it, place it on top of another mirror, and see things that displeased him. When this had gone on for a while, he threw it away and beheaded the exilarch of the Jews. One of [Marwan’s] slave girls then took it and kept it with her. When [the Abbasid] Abu Ja‘far al-Mansur became caliph, he already knew of it, and so he inquired about it. He was informed that it was in the possession of a slave girl of Marwan. He searched for it until he found it. [Then] it remained with him where he would look into it. It remained in the caliph’s treasuries for a long time; then it was lost.⁷⁷

In this second version, the mirror is used to prove the rightful and divinely ordained victory of the Abbasids over the Umayyads. The Abbasid caliph's retrieval and restoration of the mirror after its disposal by his Umayyad predecessor can be seen as a parallel to Solomon's retrieval of it from the devil, confirming the Abbasid ruler as the new Solomon.

With each transfer of dynastic power, treasures representing and corroborating the authority and legitimacy of that power followed. "When the rule passed to the Abbasids, the Great Pearl (*durra*) of the Umayyads was also transferred to them."⁷⁸ A ruby ring stone known as *al-Jabal* (the mountain) had passed from Sasanian kings into the Abbasid treasury until the time of al-Musta'in.⁷⁹ Al-Ma'mun obtained "a large gold brazier studded with precious stones too numerous to be evaluated. It was said that it had belonged to the Persian [king] Yazdagird b. Shahriyar and that its value was too high to be assessed."⁸⁰ Then with the passing of power from the Abbasids to the Fatimids of Egypt, *al-Hāfir*, a ruby that weighed seven dirhams, and a ruby ring stone owned by Ibrahim, son of the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi, were transferred to the Fatimid treasury.⁸¹

Particular attention is given to exemplary kings of the past, legendary and real. Possession of objects believed to belong to them lent an aura of legitimacy to the current ruler's own royal image and strengthened the chain of continuity with past traditions. From a Persian horseman who was killed in battle, the Umayyads came to possess the armor said to have belonged to Khusraw (a Sasanian king), Heraclius (a Byzantine emperor), al-Nu'man (a Lakhmid king), the Khaqan (ruler of the Turkish tribes), and Dahir (a king of India). The swords of Khusraw and al-Nu'man were sent to the caliph 'Umar "for the Arabs to hear of [the matter] as they knew of these two persons." The passage continues, "... Sa'd sent Khusra[w]'s finery, his crown, and his garments to 'Umar for the Muslims to see and the Arab [tribesmen] to learn of them."⁸² The admiration of Khusraw by the Umayyads was demonstrated when 'Umar had a man with "the best figure among the Arabs in the region of Madina" brought to him and proceeded to dress him in Khusraw's costumes, crown, and weapons in order to display Khusraw's finery.⁸³

Among these exemplary rulers of the past, King Solomon and Alexander the Great enjoyed special status; hence regalia associated with these rulers were

especially prized. Associations with the Temple of Solomon were obvious in the case of the Dome of the Rock.⁸⁴ Within the context of the contemporary Umayyad ruler and of Umayyad exegesis on the Qur'anic story of Solomon, Priscilla Soucek has related the sculptural program on the façade and porch of the Umayyad bath hall at Khirbat al-Mafjar to Solomon's throne and bath.⁸⁵ References to Solomon spread as far as Iran, as demonstrated by the representation of the Solomonic legend on a post-Sasanian, eighth-to-ninth-century Iranian plate.⁸⁶ During the conquest of Andalusia, furthermore, a lavish dining table purported to have belonged to Solomon was plundered and given to the Umayyad ruler al-Walid I.⁸⁷ Later, in tenth-century Spain, the players may have changed, but the language and aura of Solomonic association were carried forward in the form of an enigmatic and ambiguous bilingual inscription on a bronze bird, dated by Grabar to 962, now in the Louvre. The inscription reads *+OPVS SALOMONIS ERAT* in Latin and *amal 'Abd al-Malik al-Naṣrānī* in Arabic. While there are various possibilities of specific interpretation, the inscription points to a broader cross-cultural signification within the Muslim-Christian Mediterranean arena.⁸⁸ In a qasida by 'Ali b. al-Jahm celebrating al-Mutawakkil's renovation of the Haruni palace, the Abbasid caliph succeeds Solomon, and his palace outshines that of Solomon:

You build as a proof for the Muslims
Against their apostates and unbelievers,

Marvels not seen by any Persian
nor by Greece, in all their lives.

Courts through which the eyes roam,
Fatigued by their vast expanses;

The lofty dome of a realm—as if the stars
had conveyed to it their secrets.

Embassies fall and prostrate themselves to it
When it appears before their eyes...

If Solomon had been brought,
by his demons, some tales about it,

He would have known surely that the Hashimites
Surpass him through their eminent majesty...⁸⁹

These themes continue in the Fatimid realm as well. There are two accounts of gifts by Byzantine emperors of saddles belonging to Alexander the Great. In one account, "three heavy saddles of enamel inlaid with

gold...from the saddles of Alexander, son of Philip the Greek” were given by the Byzantine emperor to the Egyptian Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir.⁹⁰ In the second account, one fabulous saddle had a note attached in the handwriting of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz:

The Byzantine Emperor offered us this saddle and the bridle after we entered Egypt. And [the minister] mentioned that it was one of six saddles that had belonged to Dhu al-Qarnayn [Alexander the Great] and were transferred from him to the Byzantine treasuries. [He added] that al-Mustansir kept it as it was, making no changes in it.⁹¹

The special attention given to this object by the caliphs identifies it as a marker of legitimacy and status, enabling the Fatimids to view themselves as the heirs of the imperial Greek heritage of “Alexander, son of Philip the Greek.” Alicia Walker has shown that the Fatimids and Byzantines shared in the notion of the princely model of Alexander.⁹² With the transfer of Alexander’s saddle from the Byzantine treasuries to the Fatimid realm, however, the Fatimids could claim their place in the line of succession from Alexander the Great. Given the status of Solomon and Alexander, it seems only natural that one of the great palaces of mystery and wonder, the legendary City of Brass in *The Thousand and One Nights*, should be attributed to one or the other of these two rulers.⁹³ In the context of the continuum of princely identity, the discourse of an East-or-West binary loses its relevance. By maintaining visual continuities with Umayyad and pre-Islamic traditions both Eastern and Western, the Abbasids articulated their relationship to the past, authenticated their rule, and established their rightful place within the international family of princes.

AN ABBASID IDENTITY

In addition to securing the connection to the past, the integration of diverse visual traditions also launched the new Abbasid art and culture. The combinations and interplay of disparate heritages have been emphasized here as a defining characteristic of the Samarra wall paintings, and it is in this way that those paintings are emblematic of the accomplishments and originality of the early Islamic period as a whole. The integration highlighted here in the visual sphere follows the broader historical phenomenon observed by Marshall

Hodgson for the early Islamic period, between ca. 700 and 1000, in which the caliphate unified various cultural strains. As Hodgson noted with regard to the Abbasid period, “...the most prominent cultural activity is that of weaving into a new whole diverse heritages: the Hellenistic and the Christian, the Jewish, the Iranian, and the Jahiliyya Arabian.”⁹⁴ The success of the early Umayyad and Abbasid empires was measured not in terms of separate regional achievements but rather in terms of the “active integration” of varied cultural strains.⁹⁵

During this imperial period, the implications of a cumulative and continuous synthesis were far reaching, extending to all aspects of Umayyad and Abbasid cultural and intellectual formations. Beginning as early as the mid-eighth century and continuing into the ninth and tenth centuries, the Abbasid court sponsored what has been described as one of the major intellectual movements in human history—the translation into Arabic of a full range of scientific and learned works.⁹⁶ These translations from disparate sources—Persian and Sanskrit as well as Greek—lent authority to and provided the foundation for the pursuit of original studies in Arabic in science, medicine, and philosophy. Ultimately, the Arabic translations were integrated into the greater and more prolific Abbasid undertaking of generating original works in Arabic. Similarly, in the realm of literature, much pre-Islamic and non-Arabic material had been collected and absorbed into early Islamic culture. Then, during the Abbasid imperial period, Persians and non-Arabs began composing new prose and poetry in Arabic, the language that would unify the empire.⁹⁷

As in the intellectual and literary spheres, visual identity and cultural synthesis for the Abbasid court were much more than the sum of preexisting visual traditions. The painting of the “Samarra Dancers,” for example, combines the themes and styles found in the collective princely realm, East and West, but its synthesis cannot simply be broken down into its constituent parts. The work owed its success and originality to the contemporary Abbasid context for which it was made and in which it was used.

In grandeur and immensity, the Abbasid Dar al-Khilafa palace in Samarra was intended to surpass all palaces past and present. The Samarra wall paintings functioned within the context of the celebrations and pageants that would take place there.⁹⁸ Thus, while the themes of the paintings came from the wider traditional princely repertoire and preserved their link to

this recognizable repertoire, these works would also take part in actual court activities enacted there, blurring the boundaries between representation and reality. The paintings fully blended in with the sight and display of the actual enthroned ruler, crowned and robed in royal finery and surrounded by his living entertainers and entourage. Similarly, the works visually complemented the real-time poetry and musical performances described in the sources, while, fused within the festivities being enjoyed, the themes represented on the walls were further echoed by portable objects and treasures displayed on appropriate ceremonial occasions.⁹⁹ The consciousness of this merging of the natural and visual worlds is clearly expressed in literary descriptions from *The Thousand and One Nights*, as analyzed by Doris Behrens-Abouseif:¹⁰⁰

We found ourselves in a room covered with a silk carpet, under a dome that rested on a hundred pillars, at the base of each of which stood a bird or a beast dipped in gold. We sat and began to admire the carpet, which, with its gold ground and patterns of white and red roses, repeated the colors and patterns of the dome. In the room, resting on tables, there were more than a hundred trays of crystal and gold, set with all kinds of jewels. At the upper end of the room, numerous lovely couches, covered with fabrics of various colors, stood, each before an arched window that opened on a garden.¹⁰¹

In the continuation of this passage, the garden appears as if it were a floor carpeted with the same floral pattern. A natural pond is surrounded by beautifully dressed women, who play music as the birds sing.

“Active integration” finds its full expression in Abbasid art. The synthesis of traditional princely art and the display of royal treasures from the past would conjure up notions of continuity and time-honored authority, while the interactivity among the full ensemble—users, decoration, and furnishings—would convey the originality of each monument in the present. It was through the orchestration of life and art that this brilliant Abbasid synthesis was achieved, and that the palaces of Samarra and Baghdad became the exemplars of luxury and grandeur in their own time. The convergence between the real and the imagined provides insight into the contemporaneity of the palaces and also explains why these palaces and the memory of their brilliance would continue to serve as the paradigms for princely fantasy, within the Islamic realm and well beyond it.¹⁰²

This brings us full circle to *The Formation of Islamic Art*, in which Oleg Grabar has observed:

...the greatest achievement of these centuries was the successful creation of a monumental setting for the new culture, that is, a consistent body of forms different from other contemporary ones while utilizing in large part the same elements. The attitude as well as the setting were conscious attempts at self-definition, at formulating with the terms of older cultures a language of visual forms that would serve the needs of the new culture and maintain its separate identity.¹⁰³

*Department of Art and Art History, Tufts University
Medford, MA*

NOTES

Author's note: I wish to thank Sheila Canby, Michael Chagnon, Massumeh Farhad, Christoph B. Konrad, Jens Kröger, Alastair Northedge, Bernard O’Kane, and Mariam Rosser-Owen for their generous help with information and images.

1. As quoted by Julie Scott-Meisami, “The Palace Complex as Emblem,” in *A Medieval City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. Chase F. Robinson (Oxford, 2001), 76.
2. Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, 1973; rev. eds. 1978, 1987). Citations henceforth are from the 1973 edition.
3. Grabar, *Formation*, 145–78.
4. Alastair Northedge, *The Historical Topography of Samarra* (London, 2005), 133–50, with full bibliography.
5. Grabar, *Formation*, 12–15.
6. Ernst Herzfeld, *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik* (Berlin, 1923); idem, *Die Malereien von Samarra* (Berlin, 1927). I am greatly indebted to the recent excellent scholarship on Samarra and on Ernst Herzfeld; for these see Northedge, *Historical Topography of Samarra*, 133–50; Ann C. Gunter and Stefan R. Hauser, eds., *Ernst Herzfeld and the Development of Near Eastern Studies, 1900–1950* (Boston and Leiden, 2005); Thomas Leisten, *Excavation of Samarra*, vol. 1, *Architecture: Final Report of the First Campaign 1910–1912* (Mainz am Rhein, 2003); Alastair Northedge, “The Palaces of the Abbasids at Samarra,” in Robinson, *Medieval City Reconsidered*, 29–67; Alastair Northedge, “An Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph at Samarra (Dar al-Khilafa or Jawsaq al-Khaqani),” *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 143–71.
7. For the history of the archaeological excavations see Leisten, *Excavation of Samarra*, 1–32; Ann C. Gunter and Stefan R. Hauser, “Ernst Herzfeld and Near Eastern Studies 1900–1950,” in Gunter and Hauser, *Ernst Herzfeld*, 3–44; Jens Kröger, “Ernst Herzfeld and Friedrich Sarre,” in Gunter and Hauser, *Ernst Herzfeld*, 45–99; Alastair Northedge, “Ernst Herzfeld, Samarra, and Islamic Archaeology,” in Gunter and Hauser, *Ernst Herzfeld*, 385–403. For the suggested connection to the literary tradition of *The Thousand and One Nights* see Grabar, *Formation*, 166. For the genesis of this literary work see nn. 93 and 100 below.
8. For the distribution of the Samarra material see Sheila Canby,

- "Islamic Archaeology: By Accident or Design?" in *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections 1850–1950*, ed. Stephen Vernoit (London and New York, 2000), 132–35. See also the web-based project by Mariam Rosser-Owen and Christoph B. Konrad, which will assemble and catalogue all the Samarra materials from the German excavations, <http://www.samarrafinds.info/>. I am grateful to Mariam Rosser-Owen and Christoph B. Konrad for information about and access to this website. For a scientific analysis of the paintings see Lucia Burgio, Robin J. H. Clark, and Mariam Rosser-Owen, "Raman Analysis of Ninth-Century Iraqi Stuccoes from Samarra," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 34 (2007): 756–62. I wish to thank Mariam Rosser-Owen for also sending me a copy of this paper.
9. For this narrative see, for example, Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250* (New Haven, 2001); Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London, 1999); Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art* (London, 1991), 20–32.
 10. For excellent historiographical studies see Gunter and Hauser, *Ernst Herzfeld*, and Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art*.
 11. For an excellent discussion with all relevant bibliography see Jás Elsner, "The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901," *Art History* 25, 3 (June 2002): 358–79.
 12. Alois Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna, 1927), repr. from the 1901 edition. Trans. into English as *Late Roman Art Industry* by Rolf Winkes (Rome, 1985). See also Riegl's 1902 article "Spätromisch oder Orientalisch," trans. as "Late Roman or Oriental?" in *German Essays on Art History*, ed. Gert Schiff (New York, 1988), 173–90; see also Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park, 1992).
 13. For Josef Strzygowski see Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation* (Sterling, VA, 2000), with all relevant bibliography, and idem, "Armenian Architecture as Aryan Architecture: The Role of Indo-European Studies in the Theories of Josef Strzygowski," *Visual Resources* 13 (1997–98): 363–80. See also Annabel Jane Wharton, *Refiguring the Post Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem, and Ravenna* (Cambridge and New York, 1995), 10–11.
 14. Elsner, "Birth of Late Antiquity," esp. 359–60 and 370ff. Also see Gunter and Hauser, "Ernst Herzfeld and Near Eastern Studies," 23–27.
 15. These ideas were played out in many other periods. For example, see Madeline H. Caviness, "A Politics of Taste: An Historiography of 'Romanesque' Art in the Twentieth Century," in *Romanesque: Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century, Occasional Papers from the Index of Christian Art in Honor of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum P. Hourihane (Princeton, in press 2007); and Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago and London, 2004), 1–104. For the most blatant use of art and history for the Nazi political agenda see Stephanie Barron et al., eds., *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles and New York, 1991).
 16. An excellent survey of these activities may be found in Gunter and Hauser, "Ernst Herzfeld and Near Eastern Studies," esp. 10–19. See also Stephen Vernoit, "The Rise of Islamic Archaeology," *Muqarnas* 14 (1997): 1–10; Stephen Vernoit, "Islamic Art and Architecture: An Overview of Scholarship and Collecting, c. 1850–c. 1950," in Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art*, 1–61, esp. 32–47; Robert Hillenbrand, "Creswell and Contemporary Central European Scholarship," *Muqarnas* 8 (1991): 23–35; J. M. Rogers, "From Antiquarianism to Islamic Archaeology," *Quaderni dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura per la R.A.E.* 2 (1974): 9–65.
 17. Ernst Herzfeld, "Die Genesis der islamischen Kunst und das Mshatta-Problem," *Der Islam* 1 (1910): 27–63, 105–44. Trans. as "The Genesis of Islamic Art and the Problem of Mshatta" in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Jonathan Bloom (Aldershot, 2002), 7–86; see also Thomas Leisten, "Mshatta, Samarra, and al-Hira: Ernst Herzfeld's Theories Concerning the Development of the Hira-Style Revisited," in Gunter and Hauser, *Herzfeld*, esp. 372–76.
 18. Herzfeld, "Genesis," 32 and 147; Leisten, "Mshatta, Samarra, and al-Hira," 375–76; Herzfeld's synthesis of East and West is discussed in Terry Allen, *Five Essays on Islamic Art* (Manchester, MI, 1988), 1.
 19. Herzfeld, "Genesis," 105; Leisten, "Mshatta, Samarra, and al-Hira," 374.
 20. The survival of this discourse for the study of Islamic art is parallel to the continued use of stylistic criteria by the generation of scholars of medieval art following Riegl and Strzygowski, as noted by Elsner in his "Birth of Late Antiquity," 374–76.
 21. See n. 9 above. For the connection to Central Asia see Ernst J. Grube, *The Classical Style in Islamic Painting: The Early School of Herat and Its Impact on Islamic Painting of the Later 15th, the 16th and 17th centuries* (Lugano, 1968).
 22. As demonstrated in the excellent exhibition, "Iraq and China: Ceramics, Trade, and Innovation," Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Dec. 4, 2004–July 17, 2005.
 23. Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* (Berlin, 1927). I wish to thank Dr. Jens Kröger for providing me with access to the original blueprints of Herzfeld's book during my visit to the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, in July 2007. For the rare questions regarding the accuracy of Herzfeld's reconstruction drawings see Jean Sauvaget, "Remarques sur les monuments Omeyyades," *Journal asiatique* 231 (1939): 1–59, and Northedge, "Ernst Herzfeld, Samarra and Islamic Archaeology," 397, where the author states, "Photographs were published of the fragments, together with watercolors reconstructing the images. The reconstructions have been widely published as representative of Abbasid wall painting, although no further investigation of the accuracy of the work has taken place."
 24. See Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pls. XX–XXI, LXIX, as examples. For the status and contextualization of textiles in Islamic art see Lisa Golombek, "The Draped Universe of Islam," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World: Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. Priscilla Soucek (University Park, PA, 1988), repr. in *Late Antique and Medieval Art of the Mediterranean*, ed. Eva R. Hoffman (Oxford, 2007), 97–114.
 25. Golombek, "Draped Universe," in Hoffman, *Late Antique*, 108; Ghada Hijjawi Qaddumi, trans. and annot., *Book of Gifts and Rarities: Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuhaf* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), paragraphs 159, 162–67, and passim. For the analysis conducted at the Victoria and Albert Museum of the wide range of colors in the fragments of Samarra see Burgio et

- al., "Raman Analysis of Ninth-Century Iraqi Stuccoes from Samarra," 758–61.
26. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pls. XXXVII–XLIII.
 27. Herzfeld, *Malereien*: compare the photograph, pl. XXII, to the drawings, XX and XXI, and other details, XXIII–XXVII.
 28. Dr. Jens Kröger of the Museum für Islamische Kunst is preparing a study on Ernst Herzfeld as an artist.
 29. See Garth Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley, 2004), 12–19, and Northedge, "Ernst Herzfeld, Samarra, and Islamic Archaeology," 397. For the drawing in the original publication of the monument see Alois Musil et al., *Kusejr 'Amra...Mit einer Karte von Arabia Petraea*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1907); also Antonin Jaussen and Raphael Savignac, *Les châteaux arabes de Qesejr 'Amra, Haraneh et Tuba* (Paris, 1922).
 30. Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 10–19; Martín Almagro et al., *Qusayr 'Amra: Residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de Jordania* (Madrid, 1975).
 31. Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 12 n. 20; 28.
 32. Lionel Bier, "The Sassanian Palaces and Their Influence in Early Islam," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 57 and n. 1.
 33. Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, 59 and fig. 84.
 34. Herzfeld, *Die Malereien*, pl. II.
 35. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 42–44, followed by Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 306.
 36. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, 22–27 and pls. XII–XIV and XXXIV.
 37. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, 18–32; see 20–21, figs. 5–6 for drawings of Sasanian works known to him in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. For photographs of these works see I. Smirnov, ed., *Vostochnoe serebro: Atlas drevnei serebrianoi i zolotoi posudy vostochnogo proiskhozhdeniia, naidennoi preimushchestvenno v predelakh Rossiiskoi imperii. Izdanie Imperatorskoi Arkheologicheskoi Kommissii ko dnuu piatidesiatiletiia eia deiatel'nosti* (St. Petersburg, 1909), nos. 80–81; and K. V. Trever and V. G. Lukonin, *Sasanidskoe serebro: Sobranie Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha: Khudozhestvennaia kul'tura Irana III–VIII vekov* (Moscow, 1987), nos. 18–19. See Grabar, *Formation*, fig. 99, where no. 19 is identified as post-Sasanian, Iran, 8th–10th century. For the repertoire of Sasanian silverware see Françoise Demange et al., *Les Perses sassanides: Fastes d'un empire oublié, 224–642* (Paris, 2006), 105 no. 43, and bibliography; Ann C. Gunter and Paul Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC, 1992), 191–201 and color pls. on 44–45, esp. no. 35, illustrated here as fig. 14, for a convincing comparison; Richard Ettinghausen, "Dionysiac Motifs," in his *From Byzantium to Sassanian Iran and the Islamic World: Three Modes of Artistic Influence* (Leiden, 1972), 3–10 (repr. in Hoffman, *Late Antique and Medieval Art*, 47–59); P. O. Harper, "Sources of Certain Female Representations in Sasanian Art," in *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: La Persia nel Medioevo* (Rome, 1971), 503–15.
 38. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, 22–27, and pls. XII–XIV.
 39. While the ewer illustrated in fig. 14 above offers a striking comparison to the "Samarra Dancers," its provenance seems to be undocumented before it entered the Arthur Sackler Collection, and it does not seem to have been known to Herzfeld. I thank Dr. Ann Gunter for information on the provenance of this work.
 40. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pls. XVIII and XIX.
 41. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pls. XII–XIV.
 42. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pl. XVI.
 43. Herzfeld, *Malereien*, pls. LX, LXI, LXVII, and LXVIII. On these bottles see D. S. Rice, "Deacon or Drink: Some Paintings from Samarra Re-examined," *Arabica* 5 (1958): 15–33.
 44. Fatma Dahmani is currently working on a comprehensive survey and analysis of the Samarra paintings for her PhD thesis, under the direction of Dr. Alastair Northedge.
 45. As previously noted, this painting was removed from the site by A. L. Mielich immediately after the excavation; it was sold to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in 1908 and is now displayed in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin. Musil, et al., *Kusejr Amra*, vol. 1, 210, and vol. 2, pl. 23; O. Grabar, "Umayyad Palaces Reconsidered," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 105, fig. 9.
 46. See, for example, Grabar, "Umayyad Palaces," figs. 3, 5, and 7.
 47. As illustrated, for example, in Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, fig. 57.
 48. See the important article by Claus-Peter Haase, "The Development of Stucco Decoration in Northern Syria of the 8th and 9th Centuries and the Bevelled Style of Samarra," in *Facts and Artefacts: Art in the Islamic World: Festschrift for Jens Kröger on his 65th Birthday*, ed. Annette Hagedorn and Avinoam Shalem (Leiden and Boston, 2007), 430–60; see also Michael Meinecke, "Early Abbasid Stucco Decoration in Bilad ash-Sham," in *Bilād al-Shām fi l'asr al-'Abbāsī*, vol. 2, *Bilād al-Sham during the Abbasid Period*, ed. M. 'Adnān al-Bakhit and Robert Schick (Amman, 1991), 226–67.
 49. In addition to Herzfeld, "Genesis," see Robert Hillenbrand, "Islamic Art at the Crossroads: East vs. West at Mshatta," in *Essays in Islamic Art and Architecture: In Honor of Katharina Otto-Dorn*, ed. A. Daneshvari (Malibu, 1981), 63–86.
 50. As, for example, in Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 19–40, and Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, 19–20 and 42–51. For recent work on the Umayyad estates see Lara Tohme, "Out of Antiquity: Umayyad Baths in Context" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005).
 51. Prudence O. Harper, "Silver Vessels," in Françoise Demange et al., *Glass, Gilding, and Grand Design: Art of Sasanian Iran (224–642)* (New York, 2006), 26. The long-standing and expanded contacts between East and West, extending back to the time of Alexander the Great, when the Greco-Roman culture reached Bactria (present-day Afghanistan, southern Tajikistan, and southern Uzbekistan), and other contacts between Iran, India, and Central Asia have been discussed by P. O. Harper, most recently in *In Search of a Cultural Identity: Monuments and Artifacts of the Sasanian Near East, 3rd to 7th Century A.D.* (New York, 2006). I am grateful to Michael Chagnon for this reference. These contacts are also summarized with full bibliography in P. O. Harper, "La vaisselle précieuse," in Demange, *Perses sassanides*, 73–74, and translated and abbreviated in Demange, *Glass, Gilding, and Grand Design*, 24–28.
 52. Themes from the Mediterranean world that were integrated into Sasanian metalwork include nilotic images, motifs related to Hercules triumphant over wild beasts, and representations of youths with winged horses. See Harper, "La Vaisselle précieuse," 73–74, and idem, *In Search of a Cultural Identity*, 57–96; see

- also Ettinghausen, *Byzantium to Sasanian Iran*, 1–16; Harper, “Sources of Certain Female Representations in Sasanian Art,” 503–15; and P. O. Harper, “The Heavenly Twins,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 23 (1965): 188–95. See also the important fourth-to-fifth-century bowl with mythological subjects in the Freer Gallery of Art, 45.33, illustrated in Gunter and Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork*, no. 23, 148–56, and Central Asian works discussed in Boris Marschak, *Silberschätze des Orients: Metallkunst des 3.–13. Jahrhunderts und ihre Kontinuität* (Leipzig, 1986), illus. 15–18, and in Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe, eds., *The Road to Byzantium: Luxury Arts of Antiquity* (London, 2006), no. 90.
53. Françoise Demange, “Les mosaïques de Bishapur,” in Demange, *Perses sassanides*, 63–67; Anna Gonosová, “Exotic Taste: The Lure of Sasanian Persia,” in *Antioch: The Lost City*, ed. Christine Kondoleon (Princeton, 2000), 130–33 (repr. in Hoffman, *Late Antique and Medieval Art*, 40–46).
 54. Harper, “Vaisselle précieuse,” 73–74; idem, “Silver Vessels,” in Demange, *Glass, Gilding, and Grand Design*, 24–28; see also Althaus and Sutcliffe, *Road to Byzantium*, 122 and 161, cat. no. 92.
 55. Jens Kröger, “Die Kirche auf dem Hügel Qasr bint al-Qadi und weitere Zeugnisse christlichen Lebens im Bereich der sasanidischen Metropole Ktesiphon,” in *Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich*, ed. Arafa Mustafa, Jürgen Tubach, and G. Sophia Vashalomidze (Wiesbaden, 2007), 137–60, and Jens Kröger, *Sasanidischer Stuckdekor: Ein Beitrag zum Reliefdekor aus Stuck in sasanidischer und frühislamischer Zeit nach den Ausgrabungen von 1928/9 und 1931/2 in der sasanidischen Metropole Ktesiphon (Iraq) und unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Stuckfunde von Tah-i Sulaiman (Iran), aus Nizamabad (Iran) sowie zahlreiche anderer Fundorte* (Mainz am Rhein, 1982), 47–48, pl. 12.3. I am grateful to Dr. Jens Kröger for the reference to his recent publication and for discussing this important work with me.
 56. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity*, 124 and fig. 69, where it is related to another plate found in China, made a century earlier. Also in Demange, *Perses sassanides*, 92–93, cat. no. 32. I thank Michael Chagnon for these references. For a discussion of Central Asian works with connection to Greco-Roman themes see Marschak, *Silberschätze des Orients*, illus. 15–18.
 57. Mario Bussagli, *Painting of Central Asia* (Geneva, 1963), with color photographs, 18, 24–25. This earlier contact may help to explain the suggestion of the ultimate descent of the Samarra paintings from Miran: see Grube, *Classical Style in Islamic Painting*.
 58. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity*, 127ff., and P. O. Harper, “An Iranian Silver Vessel from the Tomb of Feng Hetu,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 4 (1990): 51–60.
 59. Marlia Mundell Mango, “Silver in Changing Contexts,” in Althaus and Sutcliffe, *Road to Byzantium*, 59–65, esp. 62–64.
 60. Grabar, *Formation*, 177; also, André Grabar and Oleg Grabar, “L’essor des arts inspiré par les course princières à la fin du premier millénaire,” in Oleg Grabar, *Studies in Medieval Islamic Art* (London, 1976), 845–92, repr. from *L’Occidente e l’Islam nell’alto Medioevo: 2–8 aprile 1964* (Spoleto, 1965).
 61. Grabar and Grabar, “L’essor des arts.” Also see the excellent analysis of the use of past imperial prototypes in the Byzantine world: Alicia Walker, “Exotic Elements in Medieval Byzantine Secular Art and Aesthetics” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004). I am grateful to Professor Walker for sharing her thesis with me.
 62. Grabar, *Formation*, 166–67; idem, “Umayyad Palaces Reconsidered,” 8; and the entire issue of *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), edited by Gülru Necipoğlu, which is devoted to premodern Islamic palaces. See esp. her introduction, “An Outline of Shifting Paradigms in the Palatial Architecture of the Pre-Modern Islamic World,” 3–24. For the theme of the ruined Persian palace in Arabic literature see Robert Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, 2001), 142.
 63. Irene J. Winter, “‘Seat of Kingship’ / ‘A Wonder to Behold’: The Palace as Construct in the Ancient Near East,” *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 27–55.
 64. For this and the information that follows on precedents for Abbasid palaces see Necipoğlu, “Outline of Shifting Paradigms,” 4–5. Also, n. 6 above, especially Northedge, “Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph at Samarra,” 143–71.
 65. Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, 148–54, paragraphs 161–62; trans. with notes in Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit, 1970), 86–91; also Grabar, *Formation*, 168–73, and Necipoğlu, “Outline of Shifting Paradigms,” 7.
 66. Necipoglu, “Outline of Shifting Paradigms,” 6–12. For the Sasanian reception see Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, 146–47, paragraph 159. For the Umayyads in Spain see D. Fairchild Ruggles, “Arabic Poetry and Architectural Memory in al-Andalus,” *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 171–78; D. Fairchild Ruggles, “The Mirador in Abbasid and Hispano-Umayyad Garden Typology,” *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 73–82; and D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain* (University Park, PA, 2000). For the Fatimids see Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994) and Paula Sanders, “Marāsīm,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden, 1960–2004), s.v.
 67. Sanders, “Marāsīm,” and idem, *Ritual, Politics, and the City*. For an example of an Umayyad curtained enthronement see Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra*, 115–41 and 128 n. 47, with comparisons to Sasanian and Roman precedents for the use of curtains.
 68. Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, paragraph 260 for Fatimid appropriation of a gold royal Abbasid ceremonial grilled window (*shubbāk*). Noted in Necipoğlu, “Outline of Shifting Paradigms,” 6–7.
 69. Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, 146–47, paragraph 159; for the crown suspended over the head of the Byzantine emperor see 197, paragraph 262. Richard Ettinghausen has suggested the presence at Khirbat al-Mafjar of a similar crown suspended from a dome over the enthroned ruler: see his “The Throne and Banquet Hall of Khirbat al-Mafjar,” in Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran*, 28–34.
 70. Necipoğlu, “Outline of Shifting Paradigms,” 9, and references there.
 71. As originally discussed in the classic article by Oleg Grabar, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 33–62, with revised interpretation in his book, *The Shape of the Holy* (Princeton, 1996), chap. 2, 52–116, with full bibliography; see also figs. 23–49 for excellent photographs of the jewels, crowns, and vegetal motifs in the mosaics. The Sasanian/Byzantine binary is avoided here. Curiously,

- however, this opposition has persisted in the scholarship.
72. Given the poor condition of the paintings of the six kings, it is difficult to evaluate distinctions between the styles of the figures. They are reproduced in Musil, *Kusejr 'Amra*, pl. XXVI, and M. Almagro et al., *Qusayr 'Amra* (Granada, 2002), 50, fig. 22; 135, fig. 89; and 139, fig. 92. For discussions of these paintings see Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 197–226, and Oleg Grabar, "The Paintings of the Six Kings at Qusayr 'Amrah," *Ars Orientalis* 1 (1954): 185–87.
 73. As interpreted, for example, in Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 29–39, where the focus is on the juxtaposition of the two opposing traditions to which the new Islamic rulers were now heirs: the more naturalistic "Greco-Roman" style and the abstract "Sasanian" style.
 74. As suggested by Grabar in "Umayyad Palaces Reconsidered," 97–98. Where different Byzantine and Sasanian stylistic modes in the mosaic program of the Dome of the Rock do appear, they seem to relate as much to design considerations and to placement within the architectural program as they do to matching the respective styles of their pre-Islamic sources.
 75. Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, 174–76, paragraphs 202–3.
 76. *Ibid.*, 174–75, paragraph 202.
 77. *Ibid.*, 175–76, paragraph 203.
 78. *Ibid.*, 179, paragraph 212.
 79. *Ibid.*, 183–84, paragraph 230.
 80. *Ibid.*, 186, paragraph 235.
 81. *Ibid.*, 193, paragraph 250; 182, paragraph 226.
 82. *Ibid.*, 169, paragraph 186.
 83. *Ibid.*, 172, paragraph 188.
 84. See Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 52–116, with references.
 85. Priscilla P. Soucek, "Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor?" *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 109–34.
 86. *Ibid.*, esp. 119–24. For the plate see 123.
 87. Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, 177–78, paragraphs 209, 211, and 212.
 88. Oleg Grabar, "About a Bronze Bird," in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object*, ed. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas (Ann Arbor, 2002), 124.
 89. Julie Scott-Meisami, "The Palace Complex as Emblem," 74–75.
 90. Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, 114, paragraph 98.
 91. *Ibid.*, 114, paragraph 99.
 92. Alicia Walker, "Exotic Elements," 407, and her paper, "Islamic Art and the Middle Byzantine Image of the Emperor," delivered at the Twenty-First International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21–26 Aug. 2006.
 93. See David Pinault, *Story-telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden and New York, 1992), 180–85; Mia I. Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-telling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden, 1963), 195ff. and esp. 217 and 224. I am grateful to Amira El-Zein for these references and for discussing *The Thousand and One Nights* with me.
 94. Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke (Cambridge and New York, 1993), 179.
 95. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History*, 178–81.
 96. These activities were pursued in a variety of ways, from a number of different directions. In some cases the translations were made directly from the Greek texts. In others they were derived through Pahlavi and Syriac intermediaries. Translators included Christians and Persians. See Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (London and New York, 1998). For the role of art in this phenomenon and for the development of the illustrated book see Eva R. Hoffman, "The Beginnings of the Illustrated Arabic Book: An Intersection between Art and Scholarship," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 37–52, and Eva R. Hoffman, "The Emergence of Illustration in Arabic Manuscripts: Classical Legacy and Islamic Transformation" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1982).
 97. Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert*, 70.
 98. As, for example, in Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts*, 136–38, paragraph 139; 148–154, paragraphs 161–62.
 99. Grabar, *Formation*, 171–72. Grabar has noted the importance of movable objects and their potential for arrangement and rearrangement to suit the occasion: "...the building was not a formal end in itself but a flexible support, a frame, like the stage or a theater, whose visible aspect could be modified to suit the need of the moment" (171). And "What unifies these monuments are not individual forms and their arrangements, nor even a body of functions, but a series of attitudes toward the very process of artistic creation" (211). See also Marcus Milwright, "Fixtures and Fittings: The Role of Decoration in Abbasid Palace Design," in Robinson, *Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered*, 105–7.
 100. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic Culture* (Princeton, 1999), 47–49. While *The Thousand and One Nights* is a fourteenth-century work, it probably was based on earlier, historical works reflecting actual Abbasid settings. For this and the question of origins see Muhsin Mahdi, "From History to Fiction: The Tale Told by the King's Steward in *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights*," in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, ed. Richard C. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge and New York, 1997), 78–105, and Andre Miquel, "The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society," in the same volume, esp. 7–10.
 101. *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Husain Haddawy, based on the text of the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript edited by Muhsin Mahdi (New York, 1990), 298, quoted in Behrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic Culture*, 47–48. See similar observations in Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, "Historical and Mythical Baghdad in the Tale of 'Ali b. Bakkar and Shams al-Nahar, or the Resurgence of the Imaginary," in Hovannisian and Sabagh, *Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, 15.
 102. For example, the Byzantine Bryas Palace of Theophilus, built in imitation of the palace in Baghdad: see Cyril Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972), 160; also the fantasy palaces in *The Thousand and One Nights*: see n. 93 above.
 103. Grabar, *Formation*, 211–12.