

Preface

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The subject of how one lived in the earliest Islamic palaces and castles is one that has not been much addressed, but it is one that has much to say about the beginning of Islamic society.

The problem is of course that ways of life in early Islam is a subject not easy to access, because most of the Arabic texts which describe the period were written or at least finalised in the 3rd century of Islam (9th century AD) and later, in a world that had much changed from the first and second centuries (7th- 8th centuries AD). One can never be certain to what extent those texts are delivering a real experience, or to what extent an idealised vision of the past, seen from a world that had changed from some two centuries earlier, while non-Muslim textual sources had not much knowledge of, or interest in, the differences of Muslim society.

The subject of the earliest Islamic society is one that has provoked much debate in the last decades. The difficulties of the textual sources evidently lead us to archaeology as an alternative, as we find here. Archaeology is a contemporary source, free of human prejudices. Only it can be difficult to understand its significance. In 2003, Jeremy Johns published an article 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: the first seventy years'.ⁱ This article, which suggests that there is little to find from archaeology on the question of the origins of Islam, is the typical work of a historian, framing the issue as the historians have always framed it: if the source does not precisely speak of events in a limited time frame, it is irrelevant, and it is true that there are few dated archaeological remains from the first seventy years of Islam. However, in archaeological evidence you can compare the before and after, to see what has changed in the longer perspective, and that is what we have in this work. What in the life of the society does archaeological evidence tell us was new at the beginning of Islam, at least for the elites?

The division of the plan of early Islamic, mainly Umayyad, elite residences into apartments – the five room groups or *banā' al-Hiri* – surrounding one or more audience halls, with a bath attached or not to a further audience room, was certainly new. There is nothing like it in Roman-Byzantine palatial architecture. There is one example in Sasanian palatial architecture, 'Imārat-i Khusraw at Qasr-i Shirin, attributed to Khusraw Parviz (591-628). It is an isolated case, and one wonders about the plan and dating of the mainly unexcavated site – perhaps the apartments were

added later, in the Islamic period.

That is not to say that the plans of the individual room groups or apartments were new. They were not. As our author has well shown, ancestors for the plans of the five room groups existed in Roman Syria, and the *ṭwān* of the *banā' al-Hirī* begins in Parthian Mesopotamia in the 2nd century AD.

The division of the plan of palaces into apartments certainly represented a societal change, as it lasted a long time. Emerging in early Umayyad architecture, the last known case is the Château Sud at Lashkari Bazar in Afghanistan (388-421/998-1030). At the greatest extent, in the Ja'farī palace of al-Mutawakkil (245/859-247/861) at Samarra', there are circa ninety apartments extending 600m from the audience hall, though not of the same plan as those discussed in this work, leaving aside the apartments dependant on the workshops and service buildings, no doubt intended for their staff.ⁱⁱ

Although there is little in the texts to illuminate the use of these apartments, other than the statement that the crown prince al-Muntaṣir possessed an apartment (*bayt*) in al-Ja'farī,ⁱⁱⁱ we do have the evidence of the *ribāt* of Sousse, with its reuse of the plan of the Umayyad *qasr* for a different, non-familial purpose, without apartments, as mentioned in our author's work below. It is evident that Umayyad princes, as their Abbasid successors, bearing in mind that not all these buildings belonged to the caliphs themselves, were faced with an accommodation problem – large retinues of close family dependants, each of whom was thought to deserve their own living space. Of course, what we see in the archaeological remains is the architects' interpretation of how to settle this retinue, an architectural tradition which developed slowly, and represented a requirement that was elsewhere, and later, resolved in other ways – the history of the Islamic palace is long and complex.^{iv}

Evidently, the material in this work speaks also to the history of the Harem, that is the closed familial residence. Evidently, in the Umayyad period, as in the time of the Prophet, a closed residence for the family of the prince did not exist. The castles and palaces of early Islam were indeed familial, with large numbers of apartments

ⁱ Johns, J., 2003, 'Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: the first seventy years', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 46,4, 411-435.

ⁱⁱ Northedge, A., 1999, 'The Ja'fari palace of al-Mutawakkil', *Damascener Mitteilungen* 11, 345-64.

ⁱⁱⁱ Evidently the *bayt* of a crown prince would not be as small as the apartments described here. Normally the eldest son would have a separate establishment, as did al-Mahdī at al-Rusafa in Baghdad.

^{iv} See the special number of *Ars Orientalis* 23, 1993, for a variety of approaches to the history of the pre-modern Islamic palace.

surrounding the reception hall - the *majlis* or sitting space of the men. But it was not to the exclusion of the outside world. There is no indirect entrance into the residence before the middle of the 3rd/9th century – one could walk or look straight in. The Harem, as the world of the Caliph and his innumerable concubines, belongs to the world of Abbasid Iraq

This work is certainly a fascinating introduction to ways of looking at this vital period, and is much to be welcomed.

Introduction

The proclamation of Mu‘āwiya ibn Abū Sufyān as caliph in 661 marked the creation of the Umayyad dynasty. Mu‘āwiya, former governor of *Bilād al-Shām*, moved the capital to Damascus and this province thus became the centre of the caliphate’s power from 661 to 750. During this period, the region saw the creation of extra-urban aristocratic settlements (*qaṣr*, pl. *quṣūr*) and newly-founded ‘cities’ (*madīna*, pl. *madā’in*) sponsored by the Umayyad elite and their entourage. The objectives of this study are threefold: to identify Umayyad architectural and living models in Bilād al-Shām; to understand the origins of these models and the influence of Islamic tradition on the Umayyad housing concept; and, finally, to understand the articulation within buildings and the function of ‘five room units’ or ‘Syrian *bayt*’^v and the *banā’ al-Ḥīrī* or ‘Persian *bayt*’.^{vi} In order to achieve these objectives, all the material published on the Umayyad houses of Bilād al-Shām built in *madā’in* and *quṣūr* has been collected, noting, the presence of the above-mentioned architectural models.

This work is in three parts: the first is dedicated to the apartments, the architectural models and their origins. The second covers the *madā’in* apartments of ‘Anjar, Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī, and ‘Ammān, and the *quṣūr* of Khirbat al-Mīnya, Qaṣr al-Kharāna, Jabal Says, Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, al-Ruṣāfa, al-Qaṣṭal, Khirbat al-Mafjar, Bālis, al-Fudayn, Qaṣr al-Tūba and Mshattā.^{vii} The third part includes two chapters: the fourth chapter is a compendium of the architectural models identified during this study. The fifth chapter discusses the housing models of the region that re-elaborate the plan of ‘five room unit’ or that

are grouped in *buyūt*; and also the Umayyad buildings located outside Bilād al-Shām which can be compared with Bilād al-Shām’s examples. Finally, the Umayyad housing model is discussed, along with its conceptual origins and application in the Umayyad context, taking into account the traditions of early Islamic Arabia, the dictates of Islamic apartment norms and the Late Antique domestic tradition. A catalogue of the analysed living units is presented in the Appendices.

^v In this study, the term ‘five room unit’ is preferred to ‘Syrian *bayt*’, theorised and used by Creswell (1979², I, 516-518); see also here Chap. 1.5.

^{vi} In this study the term ‘*banā’ al-Ḥīrī*’ is preferred to ‘Persian *bayt*’ (the latter theorised by Creswell, see here Chap. 1.5). The *quṣūr* that are not included in the examples mentioned above are: Rasm al-Sha‘ar (Schlumberger 1951), Qaṣr al-Ṣwāb (Genequand 2012, pp. 186-187), Qaṣr ‘Ayn al-Sil, Qaṣr al-Mushāsh (Bisheh 1989), Ma‘ān/al-Ḥammām (Parker 1986), Ma‘ān/Khirbat al-Samrā’, Ma‘ān/al-Mutrāb (Genequand 2012, 214), Jabal Says – residences T, G, M, P, L (Schmidt 2012, 74-96), Quṣayr ‘Amra (Almagro *et al.* 2002, 25-28), al-Ḥumayma (Oleson *et al.* 2002).

^{vii} Dwellings in pre-existing cities have been excluded as they do not fall into the two categories of *madā’in* and *quṣūr* and would therefore require a different methodological approach. These are, namely, the sites of Qaysariyya (Stabler – Holum 2008); Jerash (Gawlikowski 1986); al-Fīhl (Bourke 1992; Eastwood 1992; Walmsley 1992b; Walmsley 1997); Jerusalem (Mazar 1969, Ben-Dov 1971, Rosen-Ayalon 1989); al-Ramla (Luz 1997); Ayla / ‘Aqaba (Whitcomb 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1989a, 1989b, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 2006, 2010 and Damgaard 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013a, 2013b); Buṣrā (Sauvaget 1941, Seeden 1983, Sartre 1985, Piraud-Fournet 2003, 2016); Palmyra (Genequand 2012, 45-67); Aleppo (Herzfeld 1954-5, Sauvaget 1990 and Gonnella 2001); Qinnasrīn (Rousset 2012 and related bibliography).