In the Shadow of the Church

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In the Shadow of the Church

The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria

By

Mattia Guidetti

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Cover illustration: Interior of the Madrasa al-Halawiyya, Aleppo. Photo by Michael Greenhalgh.

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

This book is dedicated to Maddalena, Teresa and Maria Elena.
WIEN, May 2016

"In a while the curtain at the door was pushed aside and a tall man in gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses stepped into the room. He was casually dressed, in a lightweight jacket and trousers, and there was a look of distinction about him, in the manner of a gracefully ageing sportsman.... My interrogator examined the document and then, giving it back to me, he said: "But this does not explain what you were doing at the tomb. What took you there?" ... "But you are not Jewish or Israeli," he said. "You're Indian—what connection could you have with the tomb of a Jewish holy man, here in Egypt?" He was not trying to intimidate me; I could tell he was genuinely puzzled. He seemed so reasonable and intelligent, that for an instant I even thought of telling him the story of Bomma and Ben Yiju. But then it struck me, suddenly, that there was nothing I could point to within his world that might give credence to my story—the remains of those small, indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, had been partitioned long ago. Nothing remained in Egypt now to effectively challenge his disbelief: not a single one, for instance, of the documents of the Geniza. It was then that I began to realize how much success the partitioning of the past had achieved; that I was sitting at that desk now because the mowlid of Sidi Abu-Hasira was an anomaly within the categories of knowledge represented by those divisions. I had been caught straddling a border, unaware that the writing of History had predicated its own self-fulfillment."

"Over the next few months, in America, I learnt a new respect for the man who had interrogated me that morning in Damanhour: I discovered that his understanding of the map of modern knowledge was much more thorough than mine. Looking through libraries, in search of material on Sidi Abu-Hasira, I wasted a great deal of time in looking under subject headings such as "religion" and "Judaism"—but of course that tomb, and others like it, had long ago been washed away from those shelves, in the process of shaping them to suit the patterns of the Western academy."

AMITAV GOSH, *In an Antique Land* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 339–40, 342

• • •

"The various challenges represented by the sheer presence of demographic super-majorities of non-Muslims in post-conquest early "Islamic" societies are the Dark Matter of the early medieval Middle Eastern universe that historians need to take into account if they are to truly understand and explain the eventual shape Islam came to have. If we do not take seriously the question of how Muslims related to and appropriated the cultural traditions of the large conquered populations they found themselves ruling over by the middle part of the seventh century, our narrative and understanding of early medieval Middle Eastern and Islamic history will be depressingly familiar and predictable: quarrels and battles over conquest booty and succession between different interest groups within a small conquering elite who were concentrated in only a handful of places—one's mental map of the Middle East is essentially reduced to Medina, Kufa, Basra, and perhaps Khurasan."

JACK TANNOUS, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak* (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2010), 479.

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Acknowledgments

This work is the result of my post-doctoral research activity. It developed out of one chapter of my PhD dissertation, a work devoted to patterns of urbanization in the greater Syrian region between late antiquity and the Islamic period. By investigating the theme of continuity of town centers, I decided to further focus on the continuity of church buildings and their interaction with Muslim religious architecture.

During my research, I visited Syria several times. While writing this work Syria precipitated into turmoil and war with tragic consequences for the people and cultural heritage of the country. Though the loss of human lives cannot be compensated in any way, I hope peace and reconciliation will also be articulated around cultural heritage, making Syria a beautiful place once again.

The research benefitted from a series of fellowships and scholarships. Each of them provided me with the resources to carry out the study, as well as with a scholarly environment that had a great impact on the way I developed my investigation. Scholarly environments mean persons who directly and indirectly helped to shape my own work.

In Venice, under the direction of the late Gianclaudio Macchiarella, during my PhD research I had the chance to know and work together with Stefano Liuzzo, Lucia Sorbera, Yuri Marano and Cristina Tonghini. At Harvard, within the Aga khan Program directed by Gülru Necipoğlu, and later on thanks to a J. Paul Getty fellowship I conversed with Nadia Ali, Yusri Ali Hazran, Nicola Carpentieri, Ali Yaycioglu, Ralph Bodenstein, Sibel Zandi-Sayek, Francesco Giumelli, Nasser Rabbat, David Roxburgh and Barry Flood. Back to Italy, at the Kunsthistorisches Institute in Florence, as a Max-Planck fellow, I participated to the Art, Space and Mobility program under the direction of Gerhard Wolf, Avinoam Shalem and Hannah Baader. During the period in Florence, I enjoyed the academic camaraderie of Emanuele Lugli, Ashley Jones, Simon O'Meara, Raquel Gallego, Michelina Di Cesare, Fernando Loffredo, David Kim, Hiba Abid. Later on, in Edinburgh, I greatly appreciated the benevolence of Vicky Coltman, by then head of the Art History Department, and met Alain George, Andreas Görke, Andrew Marsham, Yuka Kadoi, Amanda Philipps, Dimitris Kastritsis, Silvia Perini, Luca Palozzi, and Simon Macdonald. After a fundamental period of writing granted by a Gerda Henkel scholarship, I finally moved to the University of Vienna at the Institut für Kunstgeschichte, under the direction of Markus Ritter. In Vienna I have the privilege to share my research and work with Nourane Ben Azzouna, Ilse Sturkenboom, Maximilian Hartmouth, Katharina Meinecke, Claudio Negrini, Sarah Kuehn, Susanne Compagnon, and Jessica Piccinini. Last but not the least, I am serving as adjunct professor in Islamic art at the University of Bologna and my experience at the Alma Mater Studiorum was enriched by meeting Caterina Bori, Giuseppe Cecere and Nicoletta Celli.

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Note on Transliteration

The transliteration of names and Arabic terms follows the IJMES transliteration system, but without the addition of dotted consonants and marking of long vowels. Exceptions consist of Arabic terms that are italicised in the text for which a full transliteration is provided and place names common in the literature for which instead the English form or a simplified version are used.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study analyzes the rise of Islamic religious architecture with a specific focus on the Christian context in which it occurred. It deals with urban religious architecture in the Syrian region (called "Bilad al-Sham" in Arabic and Islamic sources) from the seventh to the eleventh century (Figure 1.1). It scrutinizes the appearance of mosques in the newly conquered towns, the survival of late antique churches after the seventh century, and the interaction between these two forms of congregational worship. This interaction is explored with regard to mosques' positioning within the urban layout, worshippers' shared usage of sacred spaces, and the employment of Christian spolia (specifically marble columns) in the construction of mosques. The goal is to present the story of the rise of Islamic religious architecture from the perspective of the society in which the process transpired, and not as the "starting point" or the "beginning" of the development of Islamic religious architecture. Instead of studying the early religious architecture of Islam by invoking a teleological progression culminating in the mature forms and masterworks of the medieval period, the approach taken here is instead horizontal, analyzing what role, if any, was played by well-established and highly esteemed late antique sacred buildings in the Islamization of the Syrian region after the seventh century. This study focuses on extant urban locales and not on the new settlements and palaces established by Muslim patrons in order to run estates and rule the extra-urban territory.

This is a volume dealing with how Muslims transformed the urban sacred landscape in Syria after the seventh century. By that time, Muslims did not have yet developed strong narratives in order to root their presence outside of the Arabian Peninsula. The three centuries given to Christianity in order to rediscover and sanctify its own origins were not granted to Islam. Muslims started building places of worship a few decades after the conquest when not immediately after it. Jerusalem rose in importance relatively soon, becoming a place in which the presence of Islam was sanctified through the erection of the Dome of the Rock, built either in relation to eschatological beliefs or commemorating Prophet Muhammad's acknowledgment of late antique Jerusalem as a holy city. But what other sources of sacredness were available to Muslims after the conquest? The memorialization of the sites associated to the Companions of the Prophet and their deeds took a while to develop, whereas there was not any explicit indication of what sites (and why) should have been held sacred by the first generations of Muslims. The land they encountered was, instead, dotted with sources of sacredness. Christians made use of these places, pilgrims travelled from far away to visit them and their accounts echoed the experience they had of such a miraculous land. In 722, Willibald witnesses open-air baptism rites occurring on the banks of the Jordan River.[1] Peter of Bayt Ra's in the ninth century counts in the Syrian region forty Christian holy places either devoted to the memory of Christ or to the memory of the Prophets.[2] This list does not include dozens of holy sites devoted to Christian holy men, both within urban walls and in the rural areas, nor the numerous monasteries and convents scattered all over the region.[3] It was not only a matter of a prodigiously Christian

1 Hugeburc in Wilkinson 2002, p. 240.

2 Eutychius, *Demonstration*, vol. 1, pp. 134–62; vol. 2, pp. 166–207. The passage is described in Chapter 2.

3 Troupeau counts dozens of Christian convents active in the medieval Dar al-Islam according to written sources (Troupeau 1975, pp. 266–67). On the role of monasteries after the seventh century, see Fowden and Key Fowden 2004, pp. 159–92; Tohme 2009. With regard to the impact Christian monasteries had in Muslim society and literature, see Kilpatrick (2003) and Sizgorich (2013).

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FIGURE 1.1 *Map of early medieval Bilad al-Sham*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER HUGH KENNEDY, *AN HISTORICAL ATLAS OF ISLAM*, BRILL: LEIDEN, 2002 PP. 20–21

physical landscape, as also the passing of time and the rotation of seasons were celebrated according to a Christian calendar based on saints' festivities. Though Muslims introduced their own computation of time and the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca (though not related to a specific season), they inevitably made room to several Christian seasonal festivities into their calendar.[4] How, within such a sacred space and time, did Muslims accommodate themselves? How is it possible to disconnect the study of the rise of Islamic religious architecture from its overwhelmingly Christian context? What were the best sites for building mosques? Though Muslim prayer halls hold the status of sacred places by virtue of their orientation and because of the continuous gathering of worshippers, the magnet-like function of existent holy sites did affect the location and development of Muslim religious architecture. As sources of holiness during late antiquity helped to construct and coalescing the sense of community, how did Islam articulate its presence in the dense holy landscape of early medieval Syria?

Observing the picture provided by Islamic written sources about the transition from late antiquity to Islam, Crone comments:

"Whoever comes from the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity to that of the Arab conquerors must be struck by the apparently total lack of continuity: the Syria to which Heraclius bade his moving farewell seems to have vanished, not just from Byzantine rule, but from the face of the earth. …One comes straight from Late Antiquity to Classical Islam.[5]"

Such a passage aims at stressing the gap existing between what Islamic written sources have to say about the rise of Islam and what instead one can obtain by scrutinizing the evidence offered by material culture and contemporary non-Islamic sources. While the former present Islam as emerging from and consolidating in a sort of vacuum, the latter show several elements of continuity and the existence of a dense web of interrelations between late antique cultural and socio-economic processes and the nascent Islam. Scholars agree that the formation of Arabic-Islamic historiography had a turning point around the ninth-tenth century, when a new framework of interpretation of the past was imposed to the detriment of other existing alternative versions of the early history. Such a new framework was so influential to hide the previous historiographic debate, imposing a selective view of the events of early Islam that was instrumental for the agenda of the tenth-century elite.[6] A better assessment of the reliability of later Arabic-Islamic accounts of the rise of Islam helped in re-drawing the cultural cradle from which Islam emerged.

The early efforts to anchor Islam to the cultural paradigm of late antiquity, instead of presenting the latter as a simple preamble for charting the trajectory of Islam, were produced in the 70's, most notably by Peter Brown, who in *The world of late antiquity: AD 150–750* (1971) includes the lifetime of Muhammad and the dynasty of the Umayyads, and in *Society and the holy in late antiquity* (1982) depicts Muhammad as an example of "holy man" of late antique societies, and by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, who in *Hagarism: the making of the Islamic world* (1977) sketch the history of the seventh-century rise of a Jewish messianic movement that will eventually develop in what we know as Islam, drawing only on the available contemporary evidence and not on what later Islamic sources have to say on the topic.[7] Since then, despite some criticisms by scholars working on late antiquity in Latin Europe and with different points of view among Islamic historians, early Islam came to be firmly englobed into late antique studies, or, rather, late antique studies were expanded both

4 This theme is further explored in Chapter 4.

5 Crone 1980, pp. 11–2.

6 Robinson 2000, pp. 1–32; 2003, pp. 30–54; Hoyland 2012, pp. 1056–7; Borrut 2014, pp. 44–7.

7 Despite the main thesis of the book has been later rejected, the use of contemporary non-Muslim literature for analyzing early Islam has become the rule. See, Palmer 1993; Hoyland 2006; Suermann 2010.

chronologically and geographically so to include the eighth century and, at least, Western Asia, the Arabian peninsula and the Southern Mediterranean.[8] A late antique framework has also been adopted in Qur'anic studies.[9] Despite positions vary at this regards, a point shared by many scholars is the necessity to read the holy text of the Qur'an against other monotheistic traditions. The Qur'an was not an isolated work, but its text echoed and referred explicitly to texts circulating among Christians and Jews on the eve of Islam, so that its study requires an intertextual approach that irremediably anchors the holy text to its late antique context. Given the abovementioned weaknesses of later Muslim narratives, the text of the Qur'an itself can also offer insights on the context in which it was produced.

For several reasons, scholarship on Islamic art has been very sensitive to the late antique nature of early Islamic material culture.[10] It was the most influential Islamic architectural historian of the twentieth century, Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell (d. 1974), to definitely root Islamic art into late antiquity, though on the basis of a pejorative judgment of the artistic skills of Arabs during late antiquity and of Muslims in the early period. Given that Creswell considered late antique Arabia deprived of any substantial example of art and architecture, he explained the artistic feats of early Muslims as the result of a blind adoption or exploitation of the technology encountered during the conquests.[11] Indeed, though from various perspectives, with regard to the world of artistic forms Islam has never been presented as detached from late antiquity. However, a divergent approach on how to assess such a relationship and on how, eventually, integrate it into broader art historical narratives soon appeared. A reinterpretation of the quality of Umayyad reception of techniques, motifs, and aesthetics derived from late antiquity was initiated by Grabar in his groundbreaking *The formation of Islamic art* (1973). Creative re-adaptation replaced adoption as a favorite lens for reading the Islamic borrowings from late antiquity, or, as Rabbat aptly puts it:

"…a more critical generation of Islamic art historians attempted in the second half of the twentieth century to soften the negative effect usually associated with the notion of copying by proposing an intentionality to it, thus restoring to the Umayyads a certain cultural and artistic agency.[12]"

Though in some cases the search for agency became in itself a teleological mission, especially in the case of suggesting (and forcing) new hypothetical Islamic meanings to late antique motifs, such an approach remains valid and operative today.[13]

8 Fowden 2014, pp. 18–47 (in which pre-Brown positions on the topic are also discussed) and 92–100.

9 A synthesis of the developments of Qur'anic studies is offered in Neuwirth 2003 and Said Reynolds 2008. For an overview of the studies on Qur'an's origins covering publications from the 70's, with a focus on the Berlin-based research project Corpus Coranicum, see Bori (2014); for a concise overview of the most important issues debated by current scholars and the impact on contemporary Muslim believers, see Donner 2008 and 2011. Among the works published more recently on the locus of Qur'an between late antiquity and Islam, see al-Azmeh 2014.

10 The very same concept of late antiquity was coined in Vienna by a generation of art historians keen on moving east their scholarly focus (Elsner 2002; Rampley 2013, pp. 171–84); for an assessment of the role of Vienna school of art history with regard to the inclusion of Islam into European history, see Fowden 2014, pp. 18–36.

11 On Creswell's assessment of late antique Arabia material culture, see most notably King 1991; on the recent literature on late antique Arabian material culture, see below footnote 15.

12 Rabbat 2003, p. 79.

13 See for instance Bisheh's interpretation of the floor mosaics in the Umayyad palace of Qasr al-Hallabat: "The important question raised by this mosaic, however, has not to do with its prototypes and sources, but with whether those borrowed elements had been assimilated, adapted to a new context, and given a specific meaning" (Bisheh 1993, p. 53). The obsession for the search of an Islamic iconography in early Is-

Despite the peculiar trajectory of art history among the branches of Islamic studies (according to which early Islamic art is locked into late antique artistic parameters), the growing concern among historians about the necessity to include early Islam into the late antique period, and the exciting, at times challenging, historiographical debate occurring in the last years add relevant points for the topic discussed in this book. A first theme concerns the place of Arabia during late antiquity. Despite some scholars see Islam to fully develop only once outside of the Arabian Peninsula (and therefore Arabs to meet late antiquity out of Arabia),[14] a growing literature is reinforcing the idea that during late antiquity Arabia was fully integrated into what are considered the two main late antique artistic foci: the Sasanian Empire and the Byzantine Mediterranean area.[15] A second point is the idea that Islam, as a religious belief, took its shape within a certain period of time. This is true to the extent that, according to some scholars, the very early period should be seen as something distinct from classical Islam. Donner, for instance, defines the group that coalesced around Muhammad as the "community of the believers," a monotheistic group open to Christians and Jews. Only later, starting with the end of the seventh century, this community developed religiously into what we know as Islam.[16] At the same time, even scholars who retain the idea that Islam was, at least *in nuce*, already existent during Muhammad's lifetime, they nevertheless share the opinion that it is with ʿAbd al-Malik that acceleration in the creation of Classical Islam occurred.[17] The caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walid I take on a huge importance here, because, as it will be discussed in the following chapters, the network of Muslim places of worship started to emerge under these two Umayyad caliphs. As a side effect of this, one has to convene that it might be misleading to perpetuate the appellation of the seventh-century conquest as "Islamic," rather preferring Arab or perhaps avoiding any definitive label.[18]

When combined, these two points have an enormous impact on one of the major themes treated in this book. With regard to the conversion of religious buildings, for example, some scholars argue that, when compared to the conditions of polytheists under Christianity, one of the main differences of the conversion of non-Muslim communities and buildings to Islam was the conquering nature of Islamization. As Bayliss puts it, the former was

lamic secular art is analyzed in Ali and Guidetti 2016. Though each assessing in a different way the impact of the late antique legacy on early Islamic art, several recent, important works had investigated the period: Flood's *The Great Mosque of Damascus: studies on the making of an Umayyad visual culture* (2001); Fowden's *Qusayr ʿAmra: art and Umayyad elite in late antique Syria* (2004); Bowersock's *Mosaics as history: the Near East from late antiquity to Islam* (2006); George's *The rise of Islamic calligraphy* (2010); *Byzantium and Islam: age of transition, 7th–9th century* (2012); Nees' *Perspective on early Islamic art in Jerusalem* (2016); Milwright's *The Dome of the Rock and its Umayyad mosaic inscriptions* (2016). With regard to archaeology, extremely useful surveys highlight the vitalization brought by Islam to trade, settlement policies, and infrastructures by also including the continuity of non-Muslim communities under the new rule; such is the case of Magness' *The archaeology of early Islamic settlement in Palestine* (2003), Walmsley's *Early Islamic Syria: an archaeological assessment* (2007), Avni's *The Byzantine–Islamic transition in Palestine: an archaeological approach* (2014), as well as the multi-authorial *Residences, castles, settlements: transformation processes from late antiquity to early Islam in Bilad al-Sham* (2008).

14 See, for instance, Sharon 1998.

15 King 1980; Robin 1980; 1991; 2012; Finster 2010 (1996); Hoyland 2001; 2009; Franke and Gierlichs 2011.

16 Donner 2002–03; 2010.

17 Hoyland 2006; al-Azmeh 2014, pp. 516–17.

18 On this see the review by Donner to Hoyland's recent book (2014) on the conquests (Donner 2015). While Donner sees the conquest inspired by a profound religious impetus, though not an Islamic one as the early community of Mecca and Medina was inspired by the creed of the "believers," according to Hoyland, while the first nucleus of Islamic belief was already developed in Mecca and Medina, the necessary strength for fighting against Sasanians and Byzantines was offered by Arab ethnic and linguistic identity ties.

the outcome of coercive forces emerging from within the society itself, while Islam came from an external realm.[19] Though this might be true to a certain extent, the above-mentioned recent literature has cast the study of the movement of people and ideas that eventually brought Islam to the scene in the same mold of other late antique migrations, formation of ethnic identities and conversions to monotheism. In other words, recent scholarship perceives and depicts the rise of Islam on a post-Roman late antique scenario, making the emergence of Islam on the Mediterranean shores a phenomenon from within and not from the outside.[20]

A third important point of reflection offered by the recent historiographic debate on early Islam has to do with periodization.[21] As the subdivision of history into pieces affects is content, this point is relevant for the present work, especially given that late antique Christian material in the period after the seventh century is discussed. In fact, if we take for definitive that it is impossible to understand the development of early Islam (including its holy text) out of the parameters of late antiquity,[22] how should we approach the following period? *Late antiquity: a guide to the post-classical world* (1999) edited by Brown, Bowersock and Grabar takes the demise of the Umayyad caliphate as a turning point in the history of Islam, thus confirming Brown's assumption of the year 750 as a moment of change. This, at least among late antique historians working on the Mediterranean, has been taken as a *terminus ante quem* for studies on late antiquity, on the basis that with the movement of the caliphal capital to Baghdad the formerly Mediterranean-focused Islamic world turned East.[23] This periodization has been only recently challenged by Fowden, who argues to include what he defines the "maturity" of Islam into the same picture together with Christianity and Judaism, thus calling for "the first millennium" as an effective periodization in history, especially considering the growing interest for a global approach in university courses and textbooks.[24] Though it might be too early to assess the repercussion of such a proposal, Fowden is right in the fact that from an Islamic perspective it does not help to take the year 750 as a year of change in the way we subdivide history. As noted by Morony and, more recently, Borrut, historical processes (including artistic ones) move well beyond the years of rule of sovereigns, thus making unuseful a subdivision of history along dynastic lines. Borrut, for instance, argues that what is usually described as the Umayyad period, defined, on the bases of years of rule, as running from

19 Bayliss 2004, p. 30.

20 Late antique studies offer the historiographical tools developed with regard to the ethnogenesis of the European peoples along the border of the Empire to the study of the emergence of the new Arab identity in the fourth century (see Hoyland 2009; Fisher 2011, pp. 264–67). More recently al-Azmeh seems to suggest that such a framework might also explaining the later (early medieval) historiography produced by Arab-Muslims as an effort in order to make order and sense of their own existence as a people on the world scenario (2014, p. 512).

21 For an outline of the different modalities followed in order to subdivide Islamic history into parcels, see Khalidi 1998; more recently a special issue of *Der Islam* has been devoted to the topic; particularly relevant for the early period are the articles by Donner (2014) and Borrut (2014).

22 Both *A companion to late antiquity* (2009) and *The Oxford handbook of late antiquity* (2012) include at least one chapter on the origins of Islam.

23 See, among other works, Cameron's *The Mediterranean world in late antiquity, 395–600* (1993) that was revised in *The Mediterranean world in late antiquity, 395–700* in the second edition (2012), thus reflecting the growing importance of the seventh century in late antique studies in the past two decades. For a similar observation on the Cambridge History of Islam, see Hirschler and Savant 2014, pp. 11–12. A different geographical perspective is offered by Morony (2004) who stresses the economic impact of the legacy of Sasanian Iran on the nascent Islamic economy, thus integrating the "East" into the late antique picture. See also the comments by Fowden 2014, pp. 96–115.

24 Fowden 2014 (for a concise overview, see Fowden 2011).

661 to 750, would be better enclosed by a periodization 692–804, within the broader frame of the era of the First Islamic Empire.[25] Economic, administrative and theological processes started under the Umayyads, and most notably under ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walid I, will develop uninterruptedly up to the tenth century.[26] It is also important to stress how time coordinates cannot be disconnected by geographical locales, as discernments of change and turning points might vary according to the space perception of the observer.[27] Furthermore, multiple chronologies might be at work simultaneously according to the topic of investigation.[28]

In order to fully include non-Muslim buildings within the account of the rise of Islamic architecture, a periodization designation such as "early medieval" is here deemed preferable to other terminology, such as "early Islamic" (usually referring to the period from the seventh to the ninth century). With early medieval I aim to define a period starting somewhere in the late seventh century, when Muslim subjects started defining themselves as such in the public arena, with coins, inscriptions and religious buildings.[29] By looking at the continuity of churches under Islam, it is obvious that the approach taken in this work implies that several late antique features were not interrupted by the public assertion of a new monotheistic religion called Islam. However, though working within a paradigm of continuity, this research stresses the dramatic changes brought about by the appearance of Islam within late antique societies, undoubtedly a turning point for Syrian space coordinates. As time and space are necessary linked, this work anchors the Syrian area to the Mediterranean Sea, especially given the focus on late antique Byzantine churches in the aftermath of the seventh-century conquest. "Early medieval" has been used by Dodds with regard to Christian and Islamic Spain and, more recently, by Fenwick in a study on post seventh-century conquest North Africa. Both studies integrate Christian and Islamic material culture in delineating the history of two Mediterranean regions after the rise of Islam.[30]

"Early Islam" seems an unpractical definition especially while discussing the role Christian material culture had after the seventh century. Cameron defines "paradoxical" the term "Umayyad churches," used by Schick for those Christian buildings renovated under the Umayyads.[31] The paradox lies in the "Islamicness" embedded in the

25 Morony 1981; Borrut 2014. Such is the head-periodization adopted by Marsham in his *Rituals of Islamic monarchy: accession and succession in the First Muslim Empire* (2009). Though based on different premises, Borrut's periodization for the "Umayyad" period is similar to the chronology adopted by Schick in his book on the Christian communities of Palestine from the Byzantine to the Islamic rule and by Kaplony, in his volume on the Haram of Jerusalem. Schick sets the date of 813 due to an increasing number of churches abandonment in Palestine around 800 and the lack of restoration after violent earthquakes (1995, pp. 123–28). Kaplony (2002, pp. 4–5) divides the early history of the Haram into the pre-Marwanid period (324–685) and in the Marwanid period (685–813). The year 813 corresponds to what the author interprets as a period in which previous arrangements were no longer valid.

26 Hawting 2000, pp. 1–10; al-Azmeh 2014, pp. 510–27. A different chronology is suggested with regard to the Red Sea by Power in *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the caliphate, AD 500–1000* (2012); see also the rather early (1968) Goitein's suggestion to take 500–850 as the time frame for the period defined "Arabism and Arabic Islam." Though drawing on "ethnic-nationalist conceptualizations" (Donner 2014, p. 36), such a time frame results worthy of attention as it does not take the fall of the Umayyads as a necessary turning point and anchors the beginning of Islam into late antiquity.

27 Hirschler and Savant 2014, pp. 7–13 and Borrut 2014.

28 Fowden 2011, p. 168; Borrut 2014 (the latter engages with the theories of Koselleck).

29 The possibility that some of the processes ascribed to ʿAbd al-Malik were started by Muʿawiya (r. 661–680), should not be excluded (see Whitcomb 2016).

30 Dodds 1990; Fenwick 2013. With regard to the later period, see Snelders' study on Mosul area (2010) in which "medieval art" is deemed a reasonable term in order to discuss "Christian-Muslim interaction" in the thirteenth century.

31 Cameron 2012, p. 205.

term Umayyad, and things do not get better when we consider that the floor mosaic of the apse of the Church of St. Stephen in Umm al-Rasas was renovated in the year 756, therefore after the demise of Umayyads as well as after what has been taken as the possible new chronological limit for late antiquity.[32] Walmsley has lamented how pottery definitions based on dynasties or cultural realms might lead to chronological misinterpretations, while Di Segni has reassessed Christian epigraphical material to the post-conquest period after it was assigned too hastily to a Byzantine date on the assumption that the conquest overlapped with a cultural terminus.[33]

Suggesting the formative period of a separate cultural entity (Islam), "early Islam" designation is not conceptually dissimilar from such terms as "early Christian" art and archaeology (the product of a new civilization emerging from Roman times), denoting the earliest stages of Christian (religious) material culture. A designation such as "early Christian" is highly problematic in that it emphasizes the caesura brought about by the rise of Christianity and disregard the non-Christian and not-religious contemporary processes.[34] Similarly, the term "early Islam" is useful, while focusing scholarly attention on "pure" Islamic artworks, or, alternatively, on those features deemed valuable as the first bricks of the (artistic) structure of Islamic art that eventually came to be identified during the Middle Ages. Implying a consistent overlapping of artistic identity with confessional identity, the moniker "early Islam" as a period designation establishes a sharp break with what is pre-Islamic, while, at the same time, forcing non-Muslim material to adapt to the framework considered valid for explaining the "progression" of Islamic art and architecture. It is a viewpoint that places non-Islamic material culture within a narrative that, despite the recurrent presence of caveats explaining that the "Islamic" in Islamic art is not about Islam as a religion but should be understood in broader cultural terms, is generally confined to describing the achievements of the Islamic civilization. Thus, non-Muslim material culture that was produced or survived under the rubric of Islam is presented as a sort of island (a single chapter among many other chapters) within the sea of Islam.

The repercussions of such an approach are discernible in the ways in which the fate of Christian churches under Islam has usually been described. On the one hand, churches are said to have been "safeguarded" and "protected" by Islam, by virtue of the directives governing the life of *dhimmi* (non-Muslim monotheistic) communities. According to such a "Muslim" perspective, churches were "frozen" on the day of the conquest, and their communities, shrinking in number with the passing of time, became more and more insignificant for explaining the (Islamic) society in which they resided.[35] On the other hand, churches are said to have "survived" the "Islamic" conquest, and are presented as tangible evidence of the endurance and persistence of Christians under Islam. According to such an "eastern Christian" perspective, Christians witnessed their faith under a monolithic Islam defending their separate identities from external pressures. These identities were preserved through language, church rituals, as well as through art and architecture, which are often interpreted according to sectarian-based stylistic criteria.[36] Although clearly distinct and possibly including an analysis of the contacts and

32 Piccirillo 1994; Ognibene 2002, p. 116. On a redefinition of the chronological transition between Umayyads and Abbasids, see, however, Borrut 2014.

33 Walmsley 2007, pp. 52–55; Donner 2014, pp. 25, 30–31; Di Segni 2003a. Fenwick makes a similar statement about North Africa and the continuity of churches after the seventh century (2013, pp. 27–8).

34 This is the reason, for example, for such elaborate conundrum-title as *Age of spirituality: late antique and early Christian art, third to seventh century*, the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1977–78, which includes a chapter (chapter 4) on the Jewish realm.

35 Such is, for instance, the approach taken by Tritton (1930).

36 See the case of Fiey's analysis of Christian Mosul (1959) and compare it with the much more dynamic picture offered more recently by Snelders (2010).

interactions occurring among different religious communities, both narrative approaches tend to separate religious communities that lived within the same society. They segment non-Muslim communities into boxes defined either according to the Muslim-oriented paradigm of *dhimmitude*, or on the basis of eastern Christian religious identity frameworks.

Indeed, such an arrangement accords with a society in which all individuals belonged to a specific religious community and, consequently, were marked by a defined sectarian identity. The point of the present study is not to refute the existence of distinct and, at times, separate religious circles (though, as discussed below in Chapter 4, the distinction between religious communities was not an ahistorical given—as the work of some theologians might suggest—but was continuously constructed and negotiated), or to deny the importance for individuals of belonging to these communities. This book stems from the belief that such a configuration runs the risk of overlooking important artistic phenomena and artificially separating into different chapters and books things that were once more interconnected than is generally assumed. The point here is to recount a period by including—to use Nasser Rabbat's definition of Umayyad art—the "dialogic" dimension that inevitably arises from the coexistence of diverse religious groups within the same society. Within such a dimension, this book explores the realm of sacred architecture.

The idea of multi-religious towns in which some spaces, including those devoted to worship, were shared by members of diverse religious communities might convey an idea of the period as one featuring intercultural *convivencia*—a harmonious society marked by tolerance and an almost complete absence of frictions between different communities; this would anachronistically apply modern categories of tolerance and coexistence back to a much earlier time. Instead, this study sheds light on a set of solutions developed and implemented in order to solve practical problems. It is about members of different religious sects and communities tolerating each other, not on the basis of a proactive choice, but in reaction to transformed political and cultural circumstances.[37] The study recounts how different communities struggled to find their place within the new order that followed the seventh century. This study assumes that the rise of Islam drastically altered the Syrian sacred landscape, but also that any narrative of the period is incomplete without considering the most important sacred architecture existing in the area (late antique churches and sanctuaries) and the way the large majority of the society (Christians of different denominations) reacted to, and made sense of, the changes brought about by Islam.

The end of the period "early medieval" in this book coincides with the termination of the pattern this research identifies as having started with the late seventh century. It falls around circa the mid-eleventh century coinciding with the arrival of Seljuk Turks on the eastern Mediterranean coast. Again, however, the periodization is dictated by the research itself and, besides being subjective and liable to criticism, can coexist with other concomitant chronologies related to investigations in germane fields.

The research for this book emerged out of a desire to fill an apparent gap in the scholarship. This breach has to do with the vanishing of churches from the accounts about Islamic religious art and architecture. Keeping in mind what said above about the nature of Arabic-Islamic written sources on the early period, it is instructive in this regard to contrast a statement by Creswell, a scholar who generally maintained a positivist approach towards Arabic-Islamic sources, with a passage by the Christian writer Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (circa 840), commenting on the fate of churches on the aftermath of the conquest.

"In these early days, the Muslims, when they conquered a town in Syria, usually took one of the churches and used it as a mosque, or merely

37 "Toleration," instead of tolerance, is a better term for encapsulating the daily interaction with others who adhered to a different religion (Kaplan 2007, pp. 7–12).

divided one of the churches if the town had surrendered without resistance."[38]

"The cathedral churches which had been unjustly confiscated from our people by Heraclius and given to his co-religionaries, the Chalcedonians, have continued to languish in their possession until the present day. For at the time when they were conquered and made subjects to the Arabs the cities agreed to terms of surrender, under which each confession had assigned to it those temples which were found in its possession. In this way the Orthodox were robbed of the Great Church of Edessa and that of Harran; and this process continued throughout the west as far as Jerusalem."[39]

Creswell draws his reconstruction of the early period on what later Arabic-Islamic sources say occurred after the conquest. As the second passage implies, however, his face-value assessment of later accounts should be questioned. Dionysus, a Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) patriarch, laments the fact that Chalcedonians were given the possession of the great churches but does not mention that Muslims took possession of churches, discouraging to accept Creswell's statement on conversion and partition of churches in the early period. Despite all this, Creswell's authoritative narrative on the conversion of churches into mosques in the early days crystallized into a sort of mantra, never fully questioned or deconstructed.

Some simple questions, however, come to mind: What does it exactly mean, as some Arabic-Islamic literary sources seem to imply, that churches were partitioned and used by Christians and Muslims at the same time? Reinforcing the picture drawn by Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, the examination of further textual and archaeological evidence shows that most prominent urban churches were not affected by the conquest, to the extent that their monumental presence is also seen in much later periods. How should we make sense of this apparent contradiction? When, exactly, were late antique urban churches replaced by mosques? How was the coexistence between the places of worship of distinct religious communities articulated? Was there any relation with the concomitant conversion of the society to Islam? And within this context, what was the role of the massive use of Christian spolia in Muslim buildings? Moreover, was the use of Christian spolia paralleled by a discourse on Christian churches in literary texts?

Churches in the post-conquest period find their most important advocate in Piccirillo, who discovered and published several Christian floor mosaics dating to the post-conquest period (the final section of his *The mosaics of Jordan* [1992] is entirely dedicated to the Umayyad era). Piccirillo's insights are collectively discussed in Schick's *The Christian communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule: a historical and archeological study* (1995), thus far the most comprehensive survey on Christian religious architecture during the transition period. Schick's work addresses the fate of Christian communities in Palestine after the conquest, focusing on their religious buildings, including both archaeological materials and historical events (such as caliphal edicts, earthquakes, and anti-Christian riots). Schick's work is the first systematic effort to offer "Umayyad" or "early Islamic" churches a historical context. When compared to Fattal's renowned scholarship on Christians under Islam (*Le statut légal des non-Musulmans en pays d'Islam*, 1958, which also includes a section on the fate of churches under Islam), Schick's work has the enormous virtue of concentrating on one single geographical space and a definite chronology as well as featuring data obtained from both texts and archaeological findings.

This book is not devoted to the transition period and not, at least not exclusively, to the life of Christian churches after the seventh-century conquest. It aims to integrate churches into an account of the rise of Islamic religious art and architecture. It seeks to explore whether, why, and how

38 Creswell 1958, p. 7; see also Creswell 1969, vol. 1, p. 17.
39 Palmer 1993, p. 141.

the ubiquitous presence of churches and Christian holy sites had an ultimate impact on the planning, building, and decoration of Muslim religious sites.

Chapter 2 addresses the concerns posed by the dearth of information on religious architecture related to the early years of Islam following the conquest. It analyzes the nature of the seventh-century conquest, focusing on the continuity of late antique urban centers and particularly late antique ecclesiastical complexes. It then shows to what extent the unreliability of later written sources on the post-conquest period that has been largely discussed by scholars of Islamic history, affects our understanding of the religious architecture of that era. In this section a special focus is put on the cities of Hama, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

Chapter 3 tackles the problem posed by the partition of some churches between Christians and Muslims, cited in some medieval Arabic-Islamic written sources. The fact that Muslims, after the conquest, obtained their own mosques by converting a share of congregational churches or simply using churches as mosques by reorienting the buildings according to their ritual customs, has somehow calcified into a given in modern studies on the post-conquest period, but never discussed in detail. The chapter investigates each instance in which the partition is said to have occurred, showing the limits of an acritical acceptance of the idea that basilicas were shared, an idea espoused in modern secondary sources. It then outlines one possible pattern implemented in order to make room for mosques in such a densely Christian urban landscape.

Chapter 4 examines the coexistence of different religious communities in urban locales. It initially searches for models by comparing the legal status of non-Muslim sacred architecture under Islam with configurations deployed in other cultural contexts, as well as examining the treatment of religious spaces during other periods of transition and conversion. Worshippers are then situated in the framework of the sacred landscape of early medieval Syria. Primary sources offer plenty of evidence for a better understanding of the pietistic attitudes of worshippers within such a sacred environment, as well as of the reactions of the religious elites. Finally, the chapter explores how the coexistence of diverse religious communities and the transformed political roles in the aftermath of the conquest affected the way devotion was visually expressed.

Chapter 5 concerns the use of spolia in the early medieval period. The analysis centers on the reuse of marble artefacts in sacred architecture and, more specifically, the transfer of columns from churches to mosques. The chapter explores the reuse of Christian marble spolia as regards both material evidence and written sources. Literary evidence yields important insights into the perception of churches in Muslim circles as well as provides a means of classifying the considerable search and reuse of Christian columns in early medieval mosques in the Syrian region. Technical issues related to the transportation of huge marble artifacts such as columns are also analyzed. The chapter ends with an overview of the growing scholarship on spolia with regard to Islamic art, also highlighting parallels with the medieval Latin world.

Chapter 6 offers possible explanations for what appears to be the Muslim obsession with Christian columns. Marble artifacts played an important role in the creation of an Islamic religious visual culture and columns' portability also helped connect buildings on a physical as well as conceptual level. The latter feature may have also been one of the reasons for emphasizing the transfer of columns from specific Christian structures to Muslim ones. The chapter also looks into the possible sacral associations of marble columns, by virtue of the nature of their material and vertical form.

Lastly, chapter 7 offers some explanations for the failure of early medieval interactions between churches and mosques in the Syrian area during the Middle Ages (eleventh to fifteenth century). The chapter focuses on the rise of a new attitude

toward churches in the context of the subsequent, dramatic Islamization of the sacred landscape. Beginning in the eleventh century, churches started to be directly converted into mosques, and the sites of former churches were often used for the building of new mosques or the enlargement of existing ones. Because the modalities of using spolia also depended on how the source of spolia was perceived, the radical shift in Muslims' attitude toward churches is reflected in the way material from Christian churches had been treated since the eleventh century.

CHAPTER 2

After the Conquest: The Entangled Lives of Churches and Mosques

Cities and Churches after the Conquest

Scholars agree on the relative absence of looting during the seventh-century conquest of Bilad al-Sham.[1] The primary battles between the Arab and Byzantine armies occurred in the open field, such as at Muʿta in 629 (Byzantine victory), Ajnadayn in 634 (Arab victory), and on the river Yarmuk in 636 (Arab victory, which despite not being the last, nonetheless paved the way to the definitive conquest). Beyond the major battles, the conquest took also place through sieges of the main cities that, as regards the Syrian region, ended with the fall of Tripoli in 644. When studying the sacred landscape of late antique cities after the conquest, the process and nature of the Arab advance are crucial elements. Existing sacred sites, such as the great churches at the center of many cities in the Syrian region, were powerful political and religious symbols, and therefore affected by the change of rule. What did exactly happen to them? Were they considered important by the conquerors? How are they described in the written sources devoted to the seventh-century conquest? Were churches the focus of specific legal arrangements?

Arabic-Islamic accounts produced by historians from the beginning of the ninth century onward are the first type of documents available on the conquest. Figures such as al-Waqidi (d. 822), al-Baladhuri (d. 892), and al-Tabari (d. 923) relate the events of the fourth decade of the seventh century within the context of the political-cultural landscape of the societies they lived in, that is, at least one hundred and fifty years after the events in question. As emphasized by modern historians, among the weak points of written sources are the attempt to narrate the conquest as an Islamic event and to reposition a specific social group in the contemporary political arena. Retelling the narrative of the conquest in a new way meant introducing a new tradition into the discussion, legitimating some communities' claims to the detriment of others. Hence, these reconstructions are only partially reliable, not so much because of the chronological distance from the events, but because of the layer added by the authors seeking to relate the conquest to the current sociopolitical reality. The reading of these accounts should therefore be contextualized, taking into consideration the authors' presumed agenda.[2]

The pacts of surrender established at the time of the conquests might have included some features of the very early agreement offered by the Prophet Muhammad to the people of Medina. Known in the Arab-Islamic sources as the "Charter of Medina," this document is considered the first sociopolitical systematization following the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad. In Medina, after the hegira of 622 (the migration of Muhammad and his acolytes from Mecca to Medina that

1 See, for instance, Kennedy 2007 and Hoyland 2014, among the most recent contributions on the seventh-century conquest (on the debate around the nature of such a conquest see above in the introductory chapter). The only area in which disruption has been observed is the coastal line of Palestine (Elad 1982; Taxel 2013). The archaeological evidence of a decline matches Binggeli's observation about the interruption of late antique fairs in the coastal cities of Palestine after the conquest; fairs that, instead, continued unaltered in the centuries following the conquest in the rest of Bilad al-Sham (Binggeli 2012).

2 An exhaustive explanation of this kind of processes appears in Robinson 2000, pp. 1–32. On the Abbasid process of re-writing the history of the previous centuries and its implications on the historiography on "early Islam," see Borrut 2011 (I thank Caterina Bori for pointing me to Borrut's article). See also above, in the Introduction.

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marks the historical beginning of Islam), different groups united into a single community (*umma*) adhering to the previous Arab traditions and recognizing Muhammad as the authority. The alleged presence of a dozen Jewish groups in Medina was resolved by granting them the right to participate in the *umma* with specific duties, albeit in keeping with their religious conviction. A similar proposal was made to those Arabs who remained pagan believers; they were likewise accepted into the community, although with diminished rights when compared to those of other members. The bases of this "charter," which is known only through works dated at least one hundred and fifty years after the conquest, together with the traditions related to Muhammad's actions toward the population of the Arabian peninsula in the very early expansionist phase, might have constituted a sort of template for the treaties concluded between the conquering army and the cities that surrendered during the conquest of Syria and Palestine.[3] This idea was recently developed by Donner, who argues that the Medina Charter was an ecumenical proposal by Muhammad's early community of believers (*mu'minin*) to other monotheists. Among the latter were the Medinese Jewish groups, whereas, once the expansion of the "movement of believers" reached the northern fringes of Arabia, a similar offer was allegedly put forward to communities of Christians, Jews, and Samaritans.[4] This would help explain the safeguarding of the social and cultural life of the conquered communities (including their religious architecture); according to this interpretation the conquest was not a coercive action directed at subjugating (and eventually converting) enemies, but, rather, an effort to integrate the "conquered" people into the monotheistic believers' movement. Such a view insists on the fact that all the earliest definitions of the community gathered around Muhammad describe such group as "believers" (*mu'minin*) and neither Muslims nor Arabs.

The earliest secure document attesting the nature of the relations between the conquerors and local communities is a papyrus dated to the year 680, recently discussed by Hoyland. It affirms that the community of the town of Nessana (in the Negev, in present-day Israel) was granted the "protection (*dhimma*) of God and His Messenger." The Arabic text of the papyrus includes a reproach to the local authority, who was allegedly mistreating the population. This is the earliest evidence of the existence of a "protection" granted to non-ruling communities, although the nature and details of the pact lack further explanation.[5]

Traditional accounts focus on the typology of conquest of each city, as according to its violent or peaceful nature descended different arrangements involving property and taxation issues. These accounts, however, define arrangements that only developed later; with regard to taxation, for instance, it is more likely that in the post-conquest period more unsystematic, negotiable and informal exchanges of money occurred between communities.[6] It is likely the new rulers took over public spaces, whereas those properties belonging to the ruling elite abandoning the city were equated to booty and reassigned to the new masters.[7]

3 Fattal 1995, pp. 1–5 (on the "constitution"), 6–60 (on the constitutive elements of the treaties); Donner 2010, pp. 72–75. De Prémare (2002, pp. 88–99), who accepts that some sections of the text might be among the earliest documentation of the post-revelation period, defines it "charter" rather than "constitution." He stresses how Medina is not explicitly mentioned in the text, and points out how *mu'minin* is better translated with "those who guarantee" (that the pact exposed in the charter is made effective) (I thank Caterina Bori for pointing me to De Prémare's ideas and book).

4 Donner 2010, pp. 90–118; see also Donner 2002–03; a succinct overview of Donner's view on this topic is to be found in his review of Hoyland's *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Donner 2015).

5 Hoyland 2015.

6 Papaconstantinou 2010.

7 For Damascus, see al-Baladhuri, pp. 123–24; for Qinnasrin, see Eutychius, *Annales*, vol. 2, p. 19; on Antioch, see al-Baladhuri, p. 147. For more on this question in general, see Dauphin 1998, vol. 2, pp. 367–70. Several members of the elite moved after the retreat of the Byzantine army,

Given the weaknesses of Arabic-Islamic sources on the post-conquest transition, non-Muslim voices are extremely important. Palmer and Hoyland's examinations of non-Muslim accounts of the conquest present a wide range of views on the seventh-century transition.[8] Also in this case, one should approach the literary material with great care, because, in both the irenic and polemic accounts, personal agendas might have played a significant role. The seventh-century writer John Bar Penkaye characterizes the conquest of northern Mesopotamia as a "divine work," stressing the extent to which it occurred in a peaceful manner, in the absence of war or combat. The biographer of Mar Gabriel, emphasizes that the Arabs afforded him latitude to build new constructions for Christian worship.[9] This same theme recurs in the Jacobite descriptions of the conquest of Egypt, according to which the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria, Benjamin the 1st (626–65), would have given Egypt up to the Arabs to free his own community of the persecutions of the Chalcedonians and their patriarch, Cyrus.[10] In the case of John, the Coptic bishop of Nikiu (a town located northwest of Fustat, as Cairo was known in the seventh century), the description of the situation is ambiguous; on one hand he writes that the Arab yoke was worse than the pharaohs' hold over the Israelites, while on the other hand he openly states that no looting occurred in the churches under the rule of the governor ʿAmr b. al-ʿAs (r. 634–36).[11] In some cases, Christian sources include the looting and destruction of monasteries among the cruel episodes of the conquest.[12] It is important to note that some of these monasteries were located in rural areas, far from the protective walls of main towns and cities.

Generally speaking, non-Muslim accounts frame the conquest in the context of a teleological vision of history, whereby reward and punishment are meted out in response to the actions of Christian communities. Such is the case in a homily by the Chalcedonian Anastasius of Sinai (who died shortly after 700), in which Arabs are compared to the biblical Amalek, sent by God to punish the Israelites for their evil behavior. Similarly, God would have sent the Arabs to punish the monothelite doctrine adopted by the Byzantine elite, a choice that in Anastasius's view offended Orthodoxy. To make his argument, Anastasius cites the fires destroying the cities of Caesarea and Jerusalem. However, it is also worth mentioning that this section of the text was the *pars destruens*

which relocated year after year to the north, later settling in the Taurus mountains. Their properties, and, eventually, related places of worship as palace or family chapels, were handed over to the new Muslim elite. Archaeologically, this phenomenon might have been brought to light in a lavish residential unit excavated in Damascus, in which both the Byzantine and Umayyad layers offer important findings, such as fragments of mosaics and decorative elements (Saliby 1997). The problem is identifying the existence of a clear shift in the property of the residential unit; considering the continuity of the local community; in fact, there is nothing to suggest that the patron of the post-conquest layer was a Muslim and not a Christian (Shboul 1994, pp. 96–97). Written sources also mention another case. In Cyprus, after the conquest of Constantia in 648, Muʿawiya, who led the naval attack before being appointed as caliph, is said to have taken up "residence with due ceremony in the bishop's palace" (*Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, as quoted in Palmer 1993, pp. 174–75). It should be mentioned, however, that in the case of Constantia the conquest occurred by force, a military assault from the sea. Thus, taking up residence in the bishop's palace probably had a symbolic meaning.

8 Palmer 1993; Hoyland 1997; see also Suermann 2010.

9 Brock 1987, p. 57.

10 The interrelation between historiography and hagiography in the writing of the early Islamic Christian sources on the end of Byzantine rule in Egypt has been thoroughly analyzed by Papaconstantinou (2006). An analysis of Syriac sources (Harrak 2005) shows that it took almost one century for the conquest to be interpreted as a historical event. With this development, the biblical references shifted from the Book of Daniel and its apocalyptic perspective to the Book of Isaiah and its historical account.

11 Hoyland 1997, pp. 132–33, 154–56. On churches in Alexandria in the aftermath of the conquest, see McKenzie 2007, pp. 256–58.

12 Fattal 1995, pp. 180–91; Schick 1995, pp. 112–38; Hoyland 1997, pp. 117, 119, 120, 154, 180.

of a rhetorical discourse aiming at attacking the scheming Byzantine regime.[13] The teleological framework into which the conquest is inserted helps explain the apocalyptic tones often taken in the texts. The apocalyptic interpretation was an option for both Jews as well as Christians, with Arabs presented as an instrument of God willing to dispense relief or punishment to specific communities as needed.[14]

On the Christian side, one may also discern a reorganization following the presence of a changed political rule. No longer protected by the Byzantine governors and separated from Constantinople, the Melkite communities faced the challenge of a new monotheistic belief (Islam, in its earliest phase of constitution), as well as the claims of other Christian minorities.[15] The latter interpreted the coming of a new power as an opportunity to reshuffle the deck within inter-Christian relations, especially after the tumultuous years following Heraclius's victory over the Persians and the reestablishment of the Constantinopolitan orthodoxy.[16] This process is made explicit in the historical narratives produced by the Christians shortly after the conquest, aimed at situating each community in the best possible place under the new regime.[17] This included the Melkites, who were soon able to restore their own primacy at the court of the Umayyads (661–750).[18]

On a pragmatic level, Christian leaders established direct channels of authorization with the new authorities (and therefore of legitimization within Christian circles), in matters such as new buildings for their own community and the freedom to continue practicing particular church customs. A good example of this is the trajectory of Athanasius bar Gumoyé,[19] a Jacobite (Syrian Orthodox) entrepreneur who, in the late seventh century, was granted by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik the privilege of erecting new churches both in Fustat (Egypt) and his native city, Edessa. Other similar cases are known: the above-mentioned building activities of the abbot Gabriel in northern Syria; John of Daylam, who received authorization and funds from the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik to build two monasteries and one church in Fars (Iran); and the example of Simeon of the Olives, who met the local authority, the provincial governor, and the "great king of the Arabs" to obtain permission to build Christian places of worship around and within the city of Nisibis (Turkey).[20] All of these instances of negotiation attest to intense building activity on the part of Christians following the conquest. This is confirmed as well by archaeological findings regarding churches in the eastern Mediterranean region. Michele Piccirillo's excavations brought to light ecclesiastical structures erected in the early medieval period, or restored and newly dedicated after the seventh century.[21] The epigraphic studies conducted by Di Segni reveal a similar scenario; the dates of several ecclesiastical foundations should be revisited in light of the continuity of Christian patronage in the decades after the conquest.[22] New churches

13 Hoyland 1997, pp. 102–03.

14 Lewis 1950; Crone and Cook 1977, pp. 4–6.

15 Kennedy 1986; Levy-Rubin 2003; Griffith 2006.

16 On Heraclius's efforts to reestablish the Chalcedonian doctrine, see Kaegi 2003, pp. 192–219.

17 On this phenomenon in the written sources, see Hoyland 1997, pp. 179–82, and Papaconstantinou 2006.

18 Papaconstantinou (2008, pp. 134–39), however, stresses how it can be misleading to consider the Jacobites, the Chalcedonians, as well as other affiliations as monolithic groups. Furthermore, at least in the very early period, the new rulers also acted as neutral referees among different denominations.

19 *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* (*I*), pp. 229–30; Bar Hebraeus (b), vol. 1, pp. 104–05; *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 2, pp. 476–77. See also Guidetti 2009, p. 3 and Dubié 2016, pp. 54–56.

20 Hoyland 1997, pp. 203–05, 168–71. According to the eleventh-century chronography by Elias Bar Šinaya (p. 108), the cathedral of Nisibis was founded after the conquest.

21 See the case of Umm al-Rasas, where St. Stephen's church was dedicated in the year 756 (Piccirillo and Alliata 1994) and, for further post-conquest Christian mosaic floors, Piccirillo 1998.

22 Di Segni 2003; according to Di Segni several dated inscriptions were previously misinterpreted as the possibility of an early medieval dating was ruled out.

were built, while other ones were restored; such is the case of Edessa's St. Sophia, whose restoration after an earthquake was directly sponsored by the caliph Muʿawiya.[23]

To return to Arabic-Islamic sources, a second text that might be useful in determining the status and properties of non-Muslims is a literary-juridical set of regulations known as the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* ("Pact of ʿUmar"). Allegedly ratified by the caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Aziz (r. 717–20), it contains a series of prescriptions that the non-Muslim population were expected to follow. The list adopts a standardized format, it includes guidelines aiming at regulating the public life of non-Muslims under Islam, and is often interpolated by geographers among the descriptions of a major city or in passages focused on the legal status of the conquered populations.[24] The contents focus on the rights and duties of the *dhimmi*, those communities worshipping a monotheistic faith based on a written revelation that are free from the necessity of adopting Islam and protected by the Muslim authorities in exchange for the payment of a tax. These prescriptions make the text a helpful document for analyzing medieval Islamic society, but one that appears less useful if viewed as a description of the after-conquest scenario. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Aziz is sometimes misinterpreted as ʿUmar b. al-Khattab, the second caliph after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (r. 634–44) so to backdate the first implementation to the period of expansion of Islam. The most plausible hypothesis assumes that the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* is a collection of regulations produced over a number of years by jurisprudents in reaction to the interrelations between different religious communities. By invoking the name of ʿUmar, later regulations were retrospectively projected onto the period of the origins, and hence legitimated and authenticated.[25] Furthermore—and this point is particularly relevant with regard to sacred buildings—the frequency of the reenactment of these regulations suggests that their enforcement was largely intermittent.[26]

In all late jurisprudence, the time of the conquest and the first period of Islamic rule were considered vital in order to assess the properties of non-Muslims. Thus, according to the *shurūṭ ʿUmar*, non-Muslims' possession of the churches granted to them during the process of the conquest was hereby confirmed.[27] According to all versions of the pact, these were inalienable properties. The restoration of these properties was also allowed, although, in the view of some legal experts, on the condition that the size of the building after the restoration remained the same as when the local community surrendered.[28] In general terms, what the early formulators of regulations

23 *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 2, p. 457; *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, p. 497.

24 Tritton 1930, pp. 5–17. Regulations dispose the superior status of Muslims, limit the public performance of non-Muslim religious processions and rites and order non-Muslims to look different from from Muslims with regard to the dressing code and language habits.

25 Recently, several scholars have backdated the origins of the directives, and advanced the theory of the existence of a nucleus datable to the age of the conquest: Noth 1987, 2004; Cohen 1999. For an introduction to the concept of *dhimma* in early Islam, see Bosworth 1982. In his dissertation, Miller (2000) focuses on the canonization of the "Pact of ʿUmar," stressing the fact that it was probably one of the codes related to the *ahl al-dhimma* circulating in the early period that became canonical only later. More recently, Levy-Rubin (2011) has argued that the regulations included in the "Pact of ʿUmar" were adopted by surrounding cultures (especially the Sasanians). They were implemented in the eighth century, when Muslims expressed a rising need to distinguish among various communities. According to Levy-Rubin, the directives, especially those formulated as *ghiyar* (differentiation), aimed at creating a distinguishable class-based society, in which classes were defined according to religious affiliation.

26 Levy-Rubin (2011, pp. 99–112) suggests that the pact was regularly enforced while a different view is expressed by Papaconstantinou (2013, p. 150).

27 See the complaints by Dionysius of Tel-Mahre in the above-quoted passage (see in the Introduction) (Palmer 1993, p. 141).

28 According to the Hanafi jurisprudent ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Wafaʿi, the restoration materials were also supposed to be the same as those of the original building. The focus was apparently on the overall appearance of the

and the later jurisprudents agreed on was the prohibition against building new structures, especially in those cities newly founded by Muslims. However, this prohibition was rarely enforced; as mentioned above, Christians founded several new churches under the Islamic rule, and this was also true for a recently established city such as Baghdad (founded in 762), in which quite soon, places of worship were established for the Christian population.[29] These directives were apparently sporadically implemented by Muslim authorities. When necessary, the regulations were deployed to regulate the "life" of non-Muslim buildings within the Islamic world. In early-ninth-century Jerusalem, for instance, the restoration of the dome of the Holy Sepulchre was contested by Muslim authorities on the grounds that it was rebuilt larger than it was before the intervention, an unacceptable alteration, because measurements of holy structures did play a role in Christian-Islamic relations.[30] Another directive indicated that churches (or synagogues) razed to the ground were not recoverable to use, as restoration was allowed only to repair damages and not as a means of rebuilding from scratch.

The regular payment of certain sums of money guaranteed the preservation of the status of *dhimmi* ("protected"), including their churches. One witness to such an arrangement in regard to churches was the pilgrim Willibald, who, during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land (723–26), observed that local Christians had to make repeated payments to prevent Muslims from tearing down the basilica erected in Nazareth.[31] The ownership of most churches by Christians is confirmed by a list of sacred sites in the region compiled by Peter of Bayt al-Ra's in the ninth century. The list includes twenty-eight holy places said to be the repositories of the relics of Christ "and places of His sanctification." Other holy sites are those related to the prophets, of which Peter of Bayt Ra's counted twelve; all are said to have been placed by God "in the hands of those who believe in Christ," and served as pilgrimage destinations in his days. Each of these important sanctuaries is described in the ninth century as property of Christians.[32]

Overall, the surrender pacts concluded between the new rulers and the conquered communities at the time of the conquest can be said to

building, which should not have been modified (Fattal 1995, pp. 174–78).

29 Denoix 2008, pp. 130–32; Guidetti 2013, p. 253.

30 Eutychius, *Annales*, vol. 2, pp. 55–57.

31 Willibald, p. 260; Pringle 1993–2009, vol. 2, pp. 116–23. Something similar is suggested in the work of the so-called "Maronite Chronicler"; the Jacobites are said to have annually paid Muʿawiya 20000 gold denarii in order to avoid problems in their relationship with the Islamic authorities (Hoyland 1997, p. 135). In Willibald's account the money paid by Christians in order to save the Church of Nazareth is paralleled by the ransom paid by Willibald and his group in order to get a valid safe-conduct to travel the Holy Land and escape the imprisonment in Homs (Aist 2009, pp. 242–45).

32 Eutychius, *Demonstration*, vol. 1, pp. 134–62; vol. 2, pp. 166–207; the text is misattributed to Eutychius, the early-tenth-century Orthodox Patriarch of of Alexandria (Griffith 2009, p. 82). The churches related to the life of Christ are those of Nazareth, Bayt Zakariya (nearby Jerusalem); Bethlehem (two); the river Jordan (Baptism); Cana (Galilee); Magdala (near Tiberias); the Mount Gennesaret; Capernaum; Banyas (Golan Heights); Kursi (near Tiberias), Nain (Galilee); Mount Tabor; Tyre; the Place of the Sheep (Jerusalem); Siloam (Jerusalem); Jericho; Tiberias; al-ʿAzar; Mount of Olives (two); Mount Zion; the Resurrection (Anastasis, Jerusalem); the Holy Upper Room of Zion (Cenaculum); Emmaus; the "Place of the Coals" (Tiberias); Gethsemane; St. Paul (Kawkab, Damascus). Two further sites where Christ was memorialized were the Church of the Theotokos (Constantinople) and the Church of St. Peter (Rome). By contrast, the churches related to the lives of the prophets are the following: Mount Sinai (the prophet Moses); Mount Horeb (the prophet Elijah); the mount where Moses died (near the Dead Sea); the Convent of Aaron; the tomb of Isaiah; Siloam (Jerusalem); the tomb of Jeremiah (Alexandria); the tomb of Daniel (Thalsus); the tomb of Samuel (Ramah); the tomb of Zechariah (near Jerusalem); the tomb of Amos (near Jerusalem); the Church of Homs (St. John); al-Ruha/Edessa (mandilion). Outside Bilad al-Sham, a church in Constantinople houses the body of St. John.

have granted those communities church properties, while also allowing them a certain latitude in their social practices. By contrast, the regulations assembled in the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* tended to erode this latitude and limit the non-Muslim presence in public spaces.

The arrangements established at the time of the conquest were binding, and affected Islamic building activity in the conquered cities. This is seen in the case of the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus. The large compound, which previously was occupied by the pagan temple of the city, at the time of the conquest was property of the local Christians, presumably the Chalcedonian community, which had there an important church perhaps obtained by reusing the remains of the *cella* of the temple.[33] Muʿawiya (r. 661–80) and ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705) both tried unsuccessfully to convince the Christian community to give up its possession of the precinct where the church was located. Al-Walid's (r. 705–15) final decision was to requisition the entire site, raze the Christian church and a very early, tiny mosque erected nearby, and, ultimately, build the new, Great Mosque.[34] In order to build a great mosque in the center of the capital of the caliphate, al-Walid had to violate the original treaty and negotiate compensation. In exchange for renouncing their rights to the church property, Christians were given back some churches located on the outskirts of Damascus that were not included in the pact of the conquest and therefore transferred to the hands of Muslims.

In a few cases, Muslims failed in their efforts to modify the urban layout. This is manifested in the reasons given in written sources explaining the foundation of the city of al-Ramla. According to Yaqut al-Hamawi (d. 1229), Sulayman b. ʿAbd al-Malik (governor of Palestine before 715), through the intercession of his Christian secretary, Ibn Batrik, asked the people of Lydda for a mansion near the notorious Church of St. George. Lydda was the provincial capital, and once Sulayman was appointed governor he decided to glorify his presence with a palace. Situated in close proximity to the church, the mansion was possibly the palace of the bishop. The request was rejected by the Christians, prompting Sulayman to threaten to raze the church. Subsequently, a member of his court advised him to model himself on his brother al-Walid and his father, ʿAbd al-Malik's, actions: securing lasting fame through building patronage. Eventually, he decided to build a city ex-novo, al-Ramla, not far from Lydda, and to relocate the seat of the governorship there.[35]

These two examples embody contrasting phenomena: on the one hand the pressure exerted by Muslims to have monumental buildings erected within conquered towns; on the other, the degree of latitude given to non-Muslim communities to preserve and utilize their properties (especially sacred architecture). One option was to break the agreement, as in the case of Damascus; alternatively, it was also possible to build elsewhere so as to circumvent the binding treaty, as in the example of al-Ramla. It is here worth pointing out that several new sites, both urban and rural, were planned after the seventh-century conquest. Sites such as Ayla, Anjar, and al-Ramla, for instance, indicate how, in the decades after the conquest, the new rulers either chose or were forced to settle in newly established towns.[36] In addition, rural sites formerly identified as castles or palaces, such as Khirbat al-Mafjar and Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi, developed into towns, which served to house the army, provide land to be exploited, and as a means

33 Khalek 2006, pp. 24–26; see also George *forthcoming*.

34 Al-Baladhuri, p. 125.

35 See al-Jahshiyari, p. 48, and Yaqut al-Hamawi, v. al-Ramla. On the foundation of the city according to archaeological findings, monumental remains, and the analysis of written sources, see Sourdel 1981; Luz 1997.

36 In the cases of Ayla and al-Ramla the new town was deliberately located near late antique settlements: Whitcomb 1994, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d, 1998; 2000; Walmsley 2007, pp. 77–80, 105. Something similar took place later in al-Rafiqa (775), which was established in the Abbasid period close to the late antique (and early medieval) city of al-Raqqa (Callinicum).

of maintaining contact with the rural and semi-nomad communities.[37]

However, when such settlement policies are put in perspective, it appears that the great late antique cities retained or regained their earlier importance. This is true to the extent that, among medieval cities, geographers and travelers do not mention any newly-established foundation with the exception of al-Ramla. For different reasons, settlements such as Anjar and Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi did not develop into medieval cities (despite the fact that they had a medieval phase, though reduced when compared to the initial planning). At the same time, through the Arabization and Islamization of their communities and landscape, cities such as Jerusalem, Aleppo, and Damascus, also became Islamic cities.

Narratives about Early Mosques and Presumed Cases of Conversion of Churches into Mosques

Later written sources insist that as soon as they settled in the conquered cities, early Muslims were in search of places to pray. The debate on the nature of early Islam, in the sense of both the religion and the state, however, points to the scarcity of archaeological and material evidence related to the first seventy years after the hegira.[38] All early mosques excavated thus far belong to the Umayyad era (661–750) or a generic "Early Islamic" period.[39] Furthermore, the great mosques built by the Umayyads have not been archaeologically investigated to the fullest extent, so that the existence of possible previous phases of construction remains largely unknown.[40]

However, non-Muslim written sources provide some details on very early mosques. In Amida (Diyarbakır), the local bishop Theodotus (d. 698) cites an early mosque, a sacred building that probably served the Muslim garrison that settled in Amida after the conquest.[41] Adomnán also mentions mosques in relation to the pilgrimage in the Holy Land performed around 670 by the Gallic pilgrim Arculf; in Damascus and Jerusalem he observed modest but separate and discrete places of worship for the "infidels," as he described the new rulers.[42] As it will be discussed below, building activities on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem might have even started earlier, a few years after the conquest. Though no material remain of these very early mosques has been unearthed so far, contemporary sources seem to suggest that the conquerors might have started rather early to build places for their own communities.[43]

At the same time, later written sources, while rich in details about early mosques, were often the product of manipulation. Especially texts written at the time of the medieval Islamic reconquest of Bilad al-Sham contain opportunistic references to the seventh century. Such is the case of the Seljuk victory against the Byzantines in the eleventh century and the Zankid defeat of the Franks in the second half of the twelfth century. The two conquest processes, the one of the seventh and the one of the eleventh-twelfth century, were ideologically linked, as, in the Muslim perspective, the medieval reconquest of large part of the Syrian area was to

37 Genequand 2012, pp. 379–96.

38 De Prémare 2002, pp. 23–25; Johns 2003, pp. 411–18. With regard to the extant earliest Islamic documents (the earliest ones are a papyrus with a receipt of taxes dated to the year 642–43 and the inscription of Zuhayr dated to the year 644–45), see Hoyland 2006.

39 Walmsley and Damgaard 2005, fig. 6.

40 Genequand 2008, p. 13. See the attempt to establish a chronology of the early phases of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem: Grafman and Rosen-Ayalon 1999; Johns 1999, p. 62. The excavations carried out in Damascus between the 1940s and the 1960s have not been published (see Bounni 2004).

41 Palmer 1990, p. 167; 2006, p. 124, note 32.

42 Adomnán in Wilkinson 2002. The historicity of the figure of Arculf has recently been challenged, as Adomnán might have drawn inspiration from existent textual traditions and not from an eye-witness (O'Loughlin 2007; ideas expanded by Nees 2014 and 2016, pp. 33–57).

43 For a discussion of the possible "archetypal models" for the mosque, see Sauvaget 1947; Grabar 1968; Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 34–38, 66–68; Grafman and Rosen-Ayalon 1999; Johns 1999; Ayyad 2013.

give back to Muslims what was theirs since the mythical origins of Islam back in history. Let's look at one example of such a strategy.

When Edessa (al-Ruha/Urfa) was recaptured by the Muslims in 1084, two churches (dedicated to St. John and to the Mother of God) were said to have been transformed into mosques. The thirteenth-century anonymous Syriac source containing this detail describes the minaret standing over the building, which had previously been a church.[44] The motivation the Syriac source deduces for the conversion of the churches in Edessa is particularly important; according to the anonymous author, at the time of the seventh-century conquest the two churches were used as Muslim places of worship. This implies that these sites were thought to be *originally* Islamic, so that the eleventh-century transformation was intended to return them to Islam. However, these churches were established before the Islamic period (the Church of the Mother of God is even said to have been restored in the late seventh century), and other sources mention early Muslims in Edessa as praying in a modest mosque built in front of the Great Church of the city and not as having converted churches into mosques. It is thus clear that the reference to an alleged Muslim use of these churches in the seventh century was specious, designed to provide (invented) legal grounds for the conversion of two churches into mosques.[45]

Elsewhere, as in the case of Aleppo, the reference to the early period was explicitly announced by the building itself. In 1150, Nur al-Din established a religious institution (Madrasa and Qastal al-Shuʿaybiyya), complete with a public fountain (*sabīl*), on a public street, a few meters from the Gate of Antioch (Bab Antakiya). Two inscriptions on the facade connect the twelfth-century monument with the past. Little remains of the first inscription: "Prince of the believers ʿUmar b. al-Khattab (might) God (be satisfied) with him … in the year 545 (H)"; this was all Herzfeld made out of this inscription.[46] The second inscription contains quotations of three Qur'anic verses (IX, 108; LXXII, 18; IX, 18),[47] the first of which reads: "In the name of God… You are never to pray in it. A mosque founded on piety from the very first day is more worthy for you to pray therein. In it are men who desire to be cleansed—and God loves those who cleanse themselves."[48]

Both inscriptions refer to the period of introduction of Islam into the town, a reference perhaps meant to recall the memory of a mosque supposedly built on the site after the conquest of Aleppo in 637 and attributed to ʿUmar. Ibn al-Shihna, quoting Ibn Shaddad, who, in turn, cites al-ʿAzimi (d. after 1161), reinforced the association; in his view, the medieval madrasa was built on the site of the first Muslim place of worship in Aleppo, located close to Bab Antakiya.[49] Herzfeld and Sauvaget argue that the early mosque was the readaptation of two spans of the arcade of the cardo, which were transformed into a closed space by building up a walled structure.[50] Sauvaget even hypothesizes that the mosque could have leant to the "the monumental arch erected at the front of the colonnade avenue," perhaps a tetrapylon.[51] As in other cases of very early mosques,

44 *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, vol. 2, pp. 35–36.

45 Guidetti 2009, pp. 3–5. The eleventh-century conversion was temporary, as these two churches are listed among those in which the Latin rite was officiated under twelfth-century Frankish rule; Röhricht 1887, pp. 295–97.

46 The inscription is located on the main entablature, partially covered by the roof placed over the basin of the fountain. The Arabic text is published in Herzfeld 1942–48, Part II, p. 31.

47 See Raby 2004, p. 296 (see pp. 294–301 for an overall discussion on Madrasa al-Shuʿaybiyya).

48 Translation in Khalidi 2008.

49 Ibn al-Shihna, pp. 79–80.

50 Sauvaget 1931, p. 76; 1941, vol. 1, pp. 74–75; 1944–45, p. 223. On the repercussions of this transformation in the urban fabric of early medieval Aleppo, see Neglia 2009, pp. 186–89.

51 "L'arc monumental érigé en tête de l'avenue à colonnades" (1931, p. 76). Sauvaget suggests that the Aleppo mosque was similar to the one in Latakia, citing the reconstruction of the coastal city by Van Berchem and

FIGURE 2.1 *Façade of the Madrasa al-Shuʿaybiyya, twelfth century, Aleppo*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

however, caution is needed as all references on such an early place of prayer pertain to the medieval period. As observed by Raby, in the medieval Madrasa al-Shuʿaybiyya references to the past and to the memory of an alleged early mosque were strengthened by a classicizing Ayyubid entablature. The medieval Kufic inscriptions juxtaposed with elements of the Corinthian order (such as cavetto, dentils, and vine and palmette scrolls) made explicit the presumed Islamic antiquity of the site[52]—an antiquity that might have served to increase the sacredness of the site and, in turn, Nur al-Din's patronage and not necessarily reflected the "real" presence of a mosque in the seventh century (Figure 2.1).

Indeed, inscriptions, architectural fragments, and literary passages all coalesce to connect

Fatio (1914, vol. 1, pp. 289–90). A tetrapylon is also mentioned by Bar Hebraeus, in relation to the construction of a mosque in Edessa in 825; Bar Hebraeus (c), vol. 1, p. 360. With regard to Aleppo, Allen (1999) further suggests that the tetrapylon, which had lost its main function by the seventh century, was used as the porch of the new religious building. It should be added that Anjar, founded by the Umayyads in the early eighth century, was provided with a classicizing tetrapylon, showing how such a monumental typology retained its original functions also after the seventh century. With regard to Damascus, though the only evidence for its existence has to be found only in later texts, Herzfeld and Sauvaget agree on accepting the tradition about the mosque of Khalid b. al-Walid located in the cemetery outside Bab Tuma, as the first mosque where the prayer was performed in Damascus (*Description de Damas*, vol. 5, p. 388; Herzfeld 1942, vol. 2, pp. 66–68; Sauvaget 1944–45, p. 221).

52 Raby (2004, pp. 294–301) states: "explicitly and implicitly, the references were to the earliest days of Islam" (299). See also Flood 2001b, p. 61.

medieval buildings to the time of the "origins" of Islam. The references to ʿUmar, who, from the eleventh century onward, began to be regarded as the mythical founder of seventh-century mosques in cities that he had never visited, suggests that medieval claims to the "Islamicness" of a site in the period after the seventh-century conquest were disconnected from what *really* occurred. The contemporary and frequent reenactments of the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* should be considered part of the same strategy. In a time of Islamization such as the late medieval period, deep and dramatic changes transforming medieval cities and societies were enabled and legitimized by allusions to figures, practices, and buildings of the period of the origins.[53] Dozens of new mosques and Muslim sacred structures appeared in Bilad al-Sham in between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and, simultaneously, a discourse creating a legitimizing backdrop emerged by rooting their foundations back in time. For this reason, the use of medieval narratives as a means to obtain knowledge of early religious architecture appears problematic.

The manipulation of the events of the seventh-century conquest started quite early, as manifested in the case of the very early mosque established in Damascus after the conquest. In the absence of systematic archaeological excavations, the most important source on the site of the Great Mosque of Damascus prior to its construction (705) is the above-mentioned passage by Adomnán, abbot at the British isle of Iona in the late seventh century, who relates the alleged pilgrimage in the Holy Land performed around 670 by the Gallic Arculf. With regard to Damascus, the latter describes two distinct places of worship for Christians and Muslims: "A Saracen king seized power there and reigns. A great church has been built there in honor of St. John the Baptist, and in this same city a kind of church has also been built for the infidel Saracens (*sarracenorum ecclesia incredulorum*), which they attend."[54] Most Muslim accounts of the seventh-century conquest, however, do not contain such details, insisting instead on the modalities of the conquest. Al-Baladhuri (d. 892) relates how two Muslim commanders entered Damascus almost simultaneously and gathered in the center of the city, in the quarter of the coppersmiths. Because one commander (Khalid b. al-Walid), entering from the west, offered Christians to capitulate, the area of the city he conquered is said to have been granted to Christians. By contrast, the second commander, Abu ʿUbayda, conquered the eastern portion of the city by force, so this side was requisitioned by Muslims.[55] Though the church—which stood within the *temenos* (holy precinct) of the former pagan temple—is not quoted by al-Baladhuri, later authors identified the meeting point with the church located in the center of the town. It followed that the western half of the "church" was granted to Christians, whereas the eastern half was requisitioned and converted into a mosque.[56] From this narrative, several modern scholars inferred that for a time Muslims and Christians prayed within the same building, which was supposedly partitioned between the two communities.

This description contradicts Adomnán's account, which focuses instead on the presence of two discrete places of worship for the two communities. The notion that the city was divided into two halves—one for the Muslims and one for the Christians—also appeared dubious to the early medieval historian al-Waqidi (d. 822), who stated

53 Often, the traditions about ʿUmar are readapted in a medieval scenario, with "ʿUmar the mosque-builder" invoked as part of the new strategy regarding the places of worship; Johns 1999, pp. 109–10.

54 Adomnán in Wilkinson 2002, p. 195.

55 Al-Baladhuri, pp. 121–23.

56 Creswell 1989, p. 60; for a translation of al-Baladhuri's passage, see: Le Strange 1890, pp. 241–42.

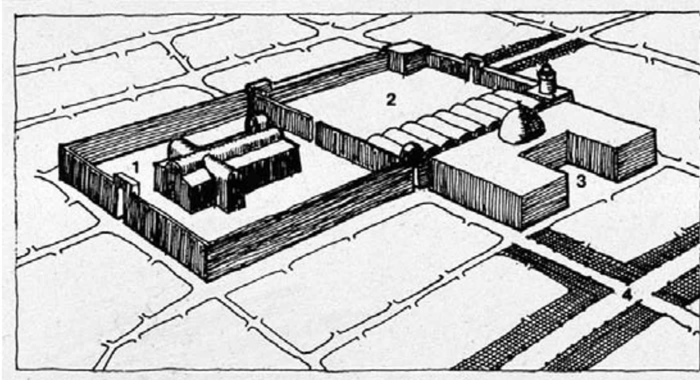

FIGURE 2.2
Hypothetical reconstruction of the very early mosque (n. 2) built within the temenos in Damascus (636–706)
AFTER ALSAYYAD 1991, (FIG. 3) (COURTESY OF NEZAR ALSAYYAD.)

that in the copy of the treaty he was able to consult in Damascus, there was no trace of any "half" of houses and churches of Damascus given to Muslims. He doubted the veracity of the "double conquest" posited by some scholars, describing how Muslims occupied the properties left by the inhabitants fleeing the city after the retreat of the Byzantine army.[57]

Among modern scholars, Creswell was the first to conclusively explain how, after the capitulation of Damascus, Muslims deployed a portion of the precinct of the church (the ancient Roman *temenos*) to build their own first mosque, and how, therefore, the two communities did not share the same building. The mosque was the modest house of worship described in the seventh-century Adomnán's text, and was a building separate from the nearby Christian church (Figure 2.2).[58] Subsequently, after the contested construction of the Great Mosque in 706–15, the memory of this early configuration was probably manipulated, and new narratives created. The insistence on the modalities of the conquest in later Arabic-Islamic narratives was due to the need of making the conquest process fit into juridical categories created in a later stage and, eventually, legitimizing the Muslim ownership of the whole site.

The passage by Creswell quoted in the Introduction mentions cases of churches converted into mosques "in the early days."[59] Given the general orientation of most basilicas and the geographical position of Syria, it would have been enough to use the southern wall of the church as the qibla wall. Some possible cases have been proposed by scholars: two churches in northern Jordan, at Umm al-Surab and Sama, the Numerianos and the West churches at Umm al-Jimal, and possibly the Church of Bishop Isaiah at Jerash.[60]

57 Al-Waqidi's work is only known through quotations by later authors (al-Baladhuri, p. 123).

58 Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 180–96, figs. 99–100.

59 Creswell 1958, p. 7.

60 King 1983; Lenzen 1988, p. 183, and 2003, p. 86. The number of churches in late antique cities of the eastern Mediterranean largely exceeded the worshipping needs of the local population (see Umm al-Jimal, for instance, in which each church is supposed to have served a different extended family; see De Vries 1993; Walmsley 2007, pp. 43–44). This might have allowed Muslims to take one of the churches without affecting the overall equilibrium in the sacred landscape within conquered towns. Archaeological evidence in this regard, however, is meagre. With regard to the town of Sbeïtla (today Tunisia), for instance, four out of the six late antique basilicas erected in the town were abandoned during the early medieval period, though this might be related to the shrinking of the population and its resources and not to the transformation of any of these churches into mosques (Fenwick 2013, pp. 21–23).

The apses of the churches of Umm al-Surab and Sama were walled off and eventually demolished, while two squared towers provided with staircases were erected possibly at the time the apses were obliterated. However, no mihrab was clearly located along the perimeter of the churches and the chronology is also not clear; the transformation of these churches could have taken place either in the post-conquest period or later in the Ayyubid or Mamluk eras (1171–1516), when a new phase of occupation of the sites is attested.[61] Furthermore, a conversion of the buildings to a secular usage cannot be excluded.[62] In both churches at Umm al-Jimal, a wall was built in front of the apses, and, although the excavator of the site remarks how "Islamic symbols" have not been found, it has been suggested that a qibla was "possibly" demarcated in the southern walls prior to ca. 720.[63] In Jerash, Lenzen suggests that the blocking of the doors of the Church of Bishop Isaiah was connected with the addition of a mihrab on the south wall and therefore to the conversion of the church into a mosque, dating all these transformations to the eighth century. However, this interpretation has been challenged, and it is worth noting that in the same period a congregational mosque was established in Jerash, with no impact on any extant church.[64]

But even including these contested cases, it is evident that the conversion of churches into mosques was by no means the rule in the early period of Islam.[65] Scholars cite the city of Hama as one of the early cases in which a church was converted into a mosque through the reorientation of the building. A mihrab was allegedly obtained in the southern "longitudinal" wall of the Church of St. John, while the eastern apse was destroyed, unveiling the Roman wall connected to the temple, standing on the site before the Christianization of Syria.[66] In 1982 the repression of insurgents by the Syrian army included the total obliteration of the Friday mosque in Hama. Despite the reconstruction was largely based on how the building looked like before its destruction, the empirical observation reveals the superimposition of different phases (Roman—Byzantine—Medieval/Islamic), but does not provide a secure means for determining the exact date of the conversion (Figure 2.3). The only evidence for dating the mosque is a passage by Abu al-Fida', connecting the conversion of the church to the seventh-century conquest: "They made the church called 'the great' into a mosque. This mosque is in the high

61 In favor of a conversion of both buildings into mosques, with a preference to an early Islamic date, are both King (1983) and, with a specific stress on Umm al-Surab, Gilento (2014). It should be noted that amongst the examples King quote to strengthen the plausibility of a post-conquest date for the conversion of the churches into mosques, is the Great Mosque of Damascus, despite the case of Damascus is completely different as the mosque was built ex-novo and was not the outcome of the conversion of a church (King 1983, pp. 134–35).

62 Butler describes civic towers associated to residences in sites such as Sabhah, al-Safiyeh, Burak and Umm al-Kutten of the Jordanian-Syrian region of Hawran (1909, pp. 115, 126, 127, 141).

63 Compare Lenzen (2003, p. 86) with De Vries (2000). The latter, the excavator of the site, in fact writes: "Such conversion consisted of the construction of a blocking wall across the apse … and, possibly, the creation of a qibla by removing some masonry blocks from the interior face of the south wall. Though Christian symbols are prevalent throughout the churches and houses, no Islamic symbols have been found at the site" (De Vries 2000, p. 44).

64 Compare Lenzen, inclined to interpret each doubtful case as a conversion (1988, p. 183), to Clark (1986, p. 313), who, instead, connects the blocking of the doors with the effort by Christians to maintain a low profile amid an Islamizing society. On the Friday mosque of Jerash, see Walmsley and Damgaard 2005.

65 Assessment also expressed by Schick in his work on the Christian churches in Palestine (1995, p. 130).

66 Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 17–20, fig. 8; the same text also appeared in Creswell 1959, pp. 48–53; cf. Riis 1965.

FIGURE 2.3 *View of the Great Mosque of Hama*
AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE, IMG42754 (PHOTO ©AKTC BY MICHEL ÉCOCHARD).

(superior) market in Hama, and was later renovated by al-Mahdi of the Banu Abbas."[67] If one accepts the account by Abu al-Fida', Hama would have been the only main city in which such a conversion occurred in the earliest days of Islam. "Conversion" here implies that the building was used for a form of worship different from the original one, and, at the same time, that the general structure was preserved with no major changes in the architecture. The building would then have been used exclusively by the new religious community.

However, the reliability of the account by Abu al-Fida' is problematic; the author wrote his text in ca. 1321, almost seven hundred years after the reputed transformation, without quoting any specific earlier source. In addition, the passage referring to Hama follows one devoted to Damascus. The author seems to support the abovementioned narrative of the "double conquest" of Damascus, according to which the eastern portion of the church would have been occupied by Muslims. Perhaps inspired by this contested narrative on Damascus, Abu al-Fida' possibly decided to backdate the conversion of Hama's late antique church into a mosque to the time of the conquest. Furthermore, Abu al-Fida' participated in the siege and conquest of Acre, one of the last Latin strongholds and lived, therefore, during a period of dramatic confrontations between Muslims and Christians, a context that possibly had an impact on his work as a historian.[68]

Today, the building appears as a palimpsest. Carved reliefs on the facade of the eastern wall of the prayer hall date to the third century, as do at least four of the capitals supporting the "house of the treasure" (*bayt al-māl*) in the mosque's courtyard.[69] All of these items clearly belong to the Roman structure that stood on the site prior to the erection of the church. The Byzantine remains number eight capitals, two small basalt arches located atop the western wall (only one of which remains in situ), and a fragment of a limestone chancel decorated with acanthus scrolls and a small cross, nowadays located in the courtyard of the mosque, though, as already said, the actual appearance of the mosque is the product of post-1982 events (Figure 2.4). A Greek inscription carved in the basalt lintel gives the date 595 and the patronage of Maras and Cosmas. All of this pre-Islamic material is encapsulated within "Islamic" elements such as the courtyard, the facade of the prayer hall, the minaret, and the exterior walls of the complex.[70] It should be added that the southern and northern wall of the sanctuary as they were standing before 1982 were the result of a seventeenth-century refurbishment and they seemed not to be perfectly superimposed to previous ones. The interior, pillars, ceilings and vaulting system were also dated to the seventeenth century. Creswell and Sauvaget diverge on the date of the mosque. While Creswell describes the mosque as a late antique Christian basilica (built on the site of a Roman temple), converted for Muslim usage,[71] Sauvaget argues that the mosque was built in the early period of Islam using Roman and Christian spolia.[72] The prayer hall, however, contains some features suggesting that the building was not originally built as a mosque, but rather, at least in regard to the sanctuary, a church. The ratio of the longitudinal (east–west, in the Syrian region this means the qibla wall) and latitudinal (north–south) walls differs from that of other early medieval examples, as it results in 1, 5. In all cases in which the longitudinal (qibla) wall of a mosque is longer than the latitudinal wall the ratio is much higher. The closest ratio can be found in the mosque of the Umayyad complex of Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi (1, 74), where, however, the mosque is

67 Abu al-Fida', vol. 1, p. 168.

68 Herzfeld 1942–48, Part III, pp. 46–47.

69 Riis 1935.

70 Riis 1937.

71 Creswell 1932, vol. 1, p. 14 (reprinted in 1959, pp. 52–53), and 1969, vol. 1, pp. 20–21.

72 Sauvaget 1947, pp. 103–07.

FIGURE 2.4 *Roman and late antique material reused in the Great Mosque of Hama*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

inserted within a palatial structure.[73] Furthermore the remains of the supports of the original arcades running parallel to the qibla wall, would suggest a central nave larger than the two lateral ones. This feature, common in Christian architecture, appears an exception when compared to other early medieval mosques with longitudinal arcades, in which, instead, supports tend to be equidistant so to create aisles of the same width (Figure 2.5).[74]

The mosque should be contextualized within the sacred landscape of the city. A Friday mosque located on the river Orontes is attributed to Nur al-Din (1146–74), who refurbished extant mosques (see the case of and Harran) or built new mosques, adding a second congregational mosque to the extant one (as was the case of Mosul).[75] According to Ibn Jubayr (1185), Hama consisted of a "lower" and an "upper" city, both provided with a great mosque. The former developed along the banks of the Orontes, and this is where Nur al-Din built his new mosque in the

73 The comparison is adapted by the comparative approach developed by Walmsley and Damgaard (2005, pp. 372–76) with regard to early mosques. Here, however, only the size of the prayer hall is taken into account.

74 See the exception represented by the mosque of Harran in which not all the aisles parallel to the qibla wall are of the same width, though without presenting any rationale in articulating this difference (Creswell 1969, vol. 1, fig. 489).

75 Nur al-Din's patronage has been studied by Elisséeff (1949) and Tabbaa (1982, vol. 1, pp. 34–138). For Nur al-Din's mosque built ex-novo in Mosul, see Tabbaa 2002.

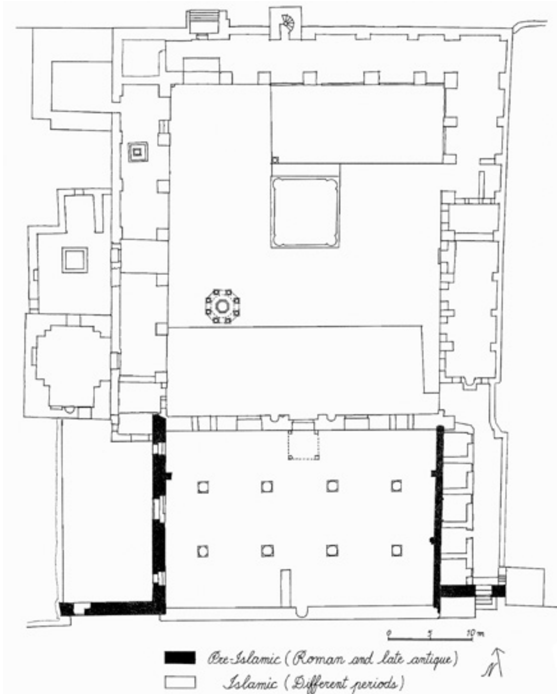

FIGURE 2.5 *Plan of the Great Mosque of Hama*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER CRESWELL 1932, FIG. 2.

twelfth century, whereas the latter spread around the citadel, where the "high market," mentioned by Abu al-Fida' in relation to the mosque "obtained" from a church, was located.[76]

To further complicate Hama's sacred landscape, Christian floor mosaics relating to a religious structure were discovered in 1983. The site is located just south of the modern Orthodox cathedral of Hama, only two blocks from the church-mosque already discussed.[77] The mosaics are dated to the first quarter of the fifth century, and traces of a medieval phase of the building have also been uncovered. It appears safe to say that there were at least two Christian structures in Hama during late antiquity, while during the twelfth century, at the peak of the Islamization of Syria, Hama was home to two great mosques.[78]

The conversion of the church into a mosque occurred during the early Middle Ages, although when, exactly, is unclear. One should be cautious in taking Abu al-Fida''s date of the conversion, because, alongside the problematic nature of the source itself, if this was the case, Hama would represent the only notable city where such a conversion occurred in the seventh or eighth century. Abu al-Fida' mentions an inscription referring to the mosque's renovation by the caliph al-Mahdi (775–85), who is credited with commissioning considerable renovations in Jerusalem (al-Aqsa Mosque), Mecca (Kaʿba), and Medina (the Mosque of the Prophet). Furthermore, features such as the dome of the treasury in the courtyard of the mosque of Hama are supposedly Abbasid innovations, initially added to the Great Mosque of Damascus in those same years.[79] It is tempting

76 Ibn Jubayr, p. 259.

77 Zaqzuq 1985 and 1995 (the medieval phase is discussed on p. 237); Piccirillo 2007.

78 Though the phenomenon possibly first appeared in eighth-century Baghdad, the addition of a second great mosque to some cities became established starting with the eleventh century. This practice was legally contested, because it was in the great mosque where on every Friday was pronounced the *khuṭba*, a sermon in which the political authorities ruling over the community praying in the mosque were acknowledged. In other words, each community (both urban and rural) was supposed to coalesce around one great mosque, to the extent that, initially at least, it was a congregational unit to define a town. Both the growth of the Muslim population in relation to the size of the extant great mosques and the distance between each great mosque in relation to the density of the population, were taken into account by medieval jurisprudents in order to discuss the lawfulness of newly established great mosques. In doing so, towns came to consist of the co-existence of various congregations. These aspects are notably discussed by Johansen (1981, pp. 144–52) and, with regard to al-Andalus, by Calero Secall (2000). This topic is also addressed by Rania Abdellatif with regard to Ayyubid Syria in her current PhD research (*Rethinking the Mosque. Congregational Mosques under the rule of the Zangids, Ayyubids and Early Mamluks, 12th–14th Century*).

79 Dussaud 1927, p. 23. O'Kane (2009, pp. 219–23) suggests an early-eighth-century date for the conversion of the church into a mosque. The evidence he relies on for such an argument is the presence of round arches in one portion of the courtyard before 1982 destruction of the mosque and the hypothetical Umayyad "invention" of the dome of the treasure. While it is true that round

to theorize that the "renovation" quoted in the inscription designated the extension of an earlier (and smaller) mosque located beside the church, and the definitive conversion of the church into a mosque. This process might also have included the addition of the "dome of the treasure" and other architectural elements, for instance, the arcades of the courtyard, probably inspired by the Great Mosque of Damascus. At the same time Christians were likely redirected to other local Christian churches, such as the one discovered in 1983 and which show evidence for a continuity of use up to the medieval period.[80]

All of the cases discussed thus far suggest four points. First, the existence and nature of mosques in the very early period after the conquest are extremely difficult to assess. As a matter of fact we only rely on what some contemporary non-Muslim authors have to say in *passim* on the new rulers' building activities. Second, the medieval rise of an Islamic sacred landscape that supposedly replaced the Christian *terra sancta* dictated an agenda dominated by the need to anchor the surrounding sacred landscape in the (mythical) time of the origins of Islam, although monuments clearly emerged as the outcome of later decisions. Third, mosques and churches intertwine at different levels. While, on the one hand, early mosques truly arose in the middle of a Christian landscape establishing a dialogue with churches, the narratives conveyed in medieval written sources tend to speciously present mosques as *sic et simpliciter* substitute for churches. Finally, in the period following the seventh-century conquest converting churches into mosques was rarely an option. Churches were mainly safeguarded and mosques not built in their places. Each of these elements also appears in the cases of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, where, once again, the rise of Islamic religious architecture was interwoven with the life of churches.

arches got rarer with the end of the Umayyad caliphate, the dome of the treasure was rather an early Abbasid innovation thus suggesting a late eight century date. Though not definitive, the circumstantial evidence on conversion of churches to mosques discussed in this volume makes an early Umayyad date rather unlikely.

80 I thank Alastair Northedge for pointing to me the possible post-conquest function of the numerous late antique churches existent within each town (on this point see also above, footnote 60).

Mosques near the Basilica of the Nativity and the Holy Sepulcher

One version of the account of the seventh-century conquest of Bethlehem transmitted by Yaqut al-Hamawi (d. 1229) asserts that on the advice of a monk, the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khattab decided to build the first mosque in the place of a *ḥaniyya*, an arcaded building. This was done in order to save the Basilica of the Nativity, which otherwise, at least according to Yaqut, would have been chosen as a place of worship by early Muslims. The narrative aims to place the survival of the Basilica of the Nativity (through an ad hoc decision by ʿUmar) within a medieval context in which, on the one hand, passages such as "it is incumbent upon us that in every place where there are Christians we should erect a mosque" were attributed to that same ʿUmar,[81] and, on the other hand, the sacred landscape was undergoing a dramatic transformation, with more and more mosques popping up and churches disappearing. Bethlehem's *ḥaniyya* also appears in Eutychius's *Annals*, a work dated to the first half of the tenth century. Eutychius does not expressly mention the Basilica of the Nativity, but only refers to a space occupied by Muslims, the *ḥaniyya*, within a Christian site in Bethlehem. He mentions the arrogance of contemporary Muslims, and uses the authority of the seventh-century caliph ʿUmar to strengthen the arguments of his own Christian community. According to Eutychius, in the seventh century ʿUmar only allowed Muslims to pray in this Christian structure one at a time, prohibiting them from touching anything of the building or performing or calling for a congregational prayer within the structure. Eutychius mentions ʿUmar's directives (or at least

81 Yaqut al-Hamawi, v. Bayt al-Lahm.

his own version of them), because, in his time, Muslims removed some of the mosaics decorating the sacred space, inserted several inscriptions, and began calling for and conducting congregational prayer.[82] Because the source mentions the existence of a *ḥaniyya* turned toward the qibla (south), this passage is commonly interpreted to mean that the arched building was a portion of the southern nave of the Christian Basilica of the Nativity.[83]

Such an interpretation, however, clashes with the passage by Yaqut. The latter highlights how the *ḥaniyya* was a building distinct from the Basilica, and he identifies it as the place where David and Solomon were thought to be buried. Indeed, there exists a long tradition of locating the tombs of the members of Jesse's family in the city where Jesus Christ and David were born.[84] During late antiquity the alleged site of the burials, also known during late antiquity as the Basilica Sancti David, was situated, according to the Pilgrim of Bordeaux (330), not far from the Basilica of Constantine, and, in the words of the Piacenza Pilgrim (570), "medium miliarium" from the town center of Bethlehem.[85] The fact, however, that the memory about the burial site of David and Salomon was subject of several transfers in the Middle Ages makes difficult to exactly pinpoint the site Yaqut is referring to.[86] According to Yaqut, Muslims were "laying on the Christians the service of lighting it with lamps and keeping the building clean and in repair," thus confirming Eutychius' insight that a Christian structure was involved. Some form of Muslim-Christian cooperation seems evident, suggesting that the place chosen by Muslims was related to a Christian site, in turn associated to the memory of Solomon and David. The *ḥaniyya* mentioned in the sources, therefore, might have been a building within the compound of the Basilica of Sancti David or a structure within the premises of the complex of the Nativity, though not within the Basilica itself. Al-Harawi (d. 1215) describes it as the "Mihrab 'Umar" and not as a mosque, thus confirming the site was a small oratory.[87]

To sum up, early medieval Muslims chose not to use or transform the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Instead, they used, at least at first for individual prayers, a structure, turned toward south, attached to a Christian building later associated with the burials of David and Solomon. In the tenth century, Muslims started to claim the exclusive property of the site, transforming what according to al-Harawi was the shrine (mihrab) of 'Umar into the mosque of 'Umar mentioned by Yaqut. The adaptation of the site to the congregational needs of Muslims provoked tensions with Christian worshippers.

Before arriving in Damascus, the seventh-century pilgrim Arculf visited Jerusalem, where he encountered al-Haram al-Sharif: "There was also a renowned place, where once the magnificent Temple was built close to the eastern wall. Now there is a quadrangle house of prayer (*orationis domum*) of the Arab Muslims (*Sarraceni*), built crudely by setting planks and beams on some remains of ruins. They attend this place: it is said that this hall can hold three thousand men at once."[88]

The early mosque probably stood on the site of what became the eastern portion of the later al-Aqsa Mosque. The latter was built under 'Abd al-Malik and al-Walid I and, together with the Dome of the Rock, formed the Muslim sacred

82 Eutychius, *Annales*, vol. 2, p. 18.

83 See, for instance, Pringle (1993–2009, vol. 1, p. 138) and Verstegen (2013).

84 Eusebius, pp. 24–25.

85 Bordeaux pilgrim, p. 19; Antoninus Martyr in Wilkinson 2002, p. 107.

86 Nallino 1918–1919. It is worth noting that, with the passing of time, the site lessened in importance for the Christians, who started to associate the burial site of David and Solomon with Jerusalem. Transference of sacred sites was a common practice. Early on, the nativity of Christ was also associated by both Christians and Muslims with the Church of Kathisma (further discussed in Chapter 3); later in the Middle Ages Christians transferred the site of the narrative to Bethlehem, while Muslims focused their worship of Christ and the Virgin to al-Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem.

87 Al-Harawi, p. 70.

88 Adomnán in Wilkinson 2002, p. 145.

axis in Jerusalem.[89] Adomnán defines the building as an *orationis domus*, though the three thousand worshippers the building held suggest that it functioned as a congregational mosque.[90] Also worth mentioning is the opposition between the memory of the glorious temple (*templum magnifice*) and the modest condition of the mosque (*vili fabricate sunt opere*). Although the building hosted congregational prayer, the quality of its construction was not as high as that of the later Umayyad structure. The date of construction should be situated between the conquest of the city in 635 and Arculf's alleged pilgrimage in ca. 680. The account of Sebeos, a seventh-century Armenian bishop, whose work ceases in ca. 661, helps narrow the date to the beginning of the sixth decade of the seventh century; in one passage he mentions Hagarens's building activity on the Temple Mount. A further anonymous Georgian text discussed by Flusin places the Muslim intervention on the Temple Mount as early as under the patriarchate of Sofronius (who died in 639–40, a few years after the conquest): "They brought with them some men; some were forced while others moved of their own will. They were supposed to clean up the site and build that cursed thing for their prayer, a building they call 'mosque' (*midzgitha*)."[91]

This evidence confirms how, from very early on, Muslims started to organize their worship in the main cities. With regard to Jerusalem, however, two medieval texts suggest that this was not the only place of worship. These texts are connected to the abovementioned overlap between the (often invented) memory of the early period during the medieval era and the intertwined trajectories of churches and mosques in this region during the early Middle Ages.

The first text is a passage by Eutychius (early tenth century): "In our time … they intruded in the same way in the staircase at the gate of the Church of Constantine, where [the caliph] ʿUmar prayed. They took half of the vestibule of the church (*dahlīz al-kanīsa*) and they built a prayer hall (*masjid*) which was called Masjid ʿUmar."[92] As in the case of Bethlehem, Eutychius connects events occurring in the early tenth century with those transpiring under the seventh-century caliph ʿUmar. The second text is probably related to the "new" mosque, built or enlarged in the tenth century. It is an inscription discovered in 1897 in the southeastern corner of the complex of the Holy Sepulcher and then transported to Istanbul, where it was deposited in the Tiled Kiosk Museum (before it was annexed to the Istanbul Archaeology Museum) (Plate 1).[93] The inscription reads: "From the Purified Residence was issued the noble order to safeguard this mosque and its construction and to forbid the entrance of any person of al-Dhimma with the excuse of…or for any other reason. Be careful not to contravene this order and to apply it as it is, God willing."[94]

Although arriving at different conclusions, Clermont-Ganneau, Van Berchem, and Busse connect the inscription to the mosque named after

89 Grafman and Rosen-Ayalon 1999, pp. 1–7, fig. 5; Kaplony 2002, pp. 29–31. One tradition assigns Muʿawiya a role in the early Umayyad transformation of the Temple Mount into al-Haram al-Sharif; see Elad 1995, pp. 23–24; Johns (quoting a forthcoming work by Raby) 1999, p. 62; Whitcomb 2016, pp. 20–22.

90 See Marsham 2013. As mentioned above, the same author characterizes a place of worship in Damascus as an "ecclesia," without, however, specifying the number of people the building can hold at one time. Such a reconstruction of the early phase of the mosque of Jerusalem has recently been challenged by Nees (2016, pp. 5–32). According to him, before al-Walid I, the whole compound of al-Haram al-Sharif was used a place of prayer with a focus on its very centre and, more specifically, on the Dome of the Chain, the earliest Muslim structure erected in the area (2016, p. 61).

91 Sebeos, vol. 1, pp. 102–03; Flusin 1992, p. 21. Creswell connects the construction of this very early mosque to ʿUmar, who died in 644 (Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 32–34).

92 Eutychius, *Annales*, vol. 2, pp. 18–19.

93 The limestone slab is today displayed in the Museum of Islamic and Turkish Arts (No. 2517) in Istanbul. The slab is erroneously described in the museum card as an Umayyad inscription from Jerusalem.

94 The Arabic text is published in Clermont-Ganneau 1896, p. 308; Van Berchem 1922, p. 54.

ʿUmar.[95] According to Van Berchem, the inscription dates to the reign of al-Hakim (996–1021) or al-Mustansir (1036–1094), while Clermont-Ganneau, who considers the mosque one of the outcomes of the 937 riots in Jerusalem, dates it to earlier in the tenth century. Given that it is not a foundational inscription, it was possibly added to an existing building. A Fatimid date (969–1073) is confirmed by paleography and by the authority issuing the order. One is tempted to connect this building in the core area of Christian Jerusalem with the events occurring under the caliph al-Hakim (996/1000–1021), which included heavy damages to the Holy Sepulcher (refurbished the following years, thanks to the help of the Byzantine ruler). What these events mean, is that for a period the area surrounding the Holy Sepulcher was characterized by a series of upheavals concerning matters of property and worship.[96]

Before analyzing the thread connecting the tenth-century mosque to early Islam, it is worth saying a few words about its subsequent existence. As pointed out by Busse, under the Crusaders the Muslim place of worship was probably annexed to the Monastery of the Canons that was built near the complex. After the Muslim reconquest, a new "mosque of ʿUmar" was erected in 1193 by al-Malik al-Afdal on the southern side of the Holy Sepulcher, although it is difficult to determine whether the new mosque of ʿUmar was built after the memory of the Fatimid one (Figure 2.6).[97]

Eutychius further explores the connection between the present and the past in a second passage. He writes that when ʿUmar entered Jerusalem in 638, he met with the Melkite patriarch Sophronius, and that the first place he visited was the Holy Sepulcher:

"Then ʿUmar entered the city with his companions and sat in the courtyard of the Holy Sepulcher (*ṣaḥn al-qiyāma*). When it was time for the prayer, he said to the patriarch Sophronius: "I want to pray." The patriarch replied: "Pray there, where you are." ʿUmar told him: "Not here." Therefore, the patriarch made him enter the Church of Constantine and had a mat prepared in the middle of the church. But ʿUmar told him: "I will not pray here, either!" Hence, ʿUmar got out on the staircase on the eastern gate of the church. After having prayed alone there, he sat down again, and told the patriarch Sophronius: "Do you know, patriarch, why I did not pray in the church?" He replied: "O commander of the believers, I do not know the reason." "If I had prayed within the church"—said ʿUmar—"it would have taken over and you would have lost its property. In fact, the Muslims after me would have all said: 'Here ʿUmar prayed!' Therefore, give me a papyrus so that I can write you a *sijill*." ʿUmar wrote a *sijill* establishing that Muslims could not pray in the staircase but only one person after another, and that the congregational prayer and call for prayer were prohibited. He wrote everything on the *sijill* and gave it to the patriarch."[98]

This episode perfectly accords with Eutychius's passage on the troubles caused by Muslims in his day in both Bethlehem and Jerusalem. In the latter, during his lifetime, Muslims requisitioned a portion of the narthex of the Holy Sepulcher, an action that Eutychius argues was unlawful given that, in the seventh century, ʿUmar had conducted himself differently. Likely memorializing the prayer proffered by ʿUmar, Muslims wanted to transform a shrine at the gate of the Holy Sepulcher into a proper mosque where people would gather. It seems that in early medieval times ʿUmar's authority was invoked by Christians as

95 Clermont-Ganneau 1896, pp. 302–62; Van Berchem 1922, pp. 53–67 (inscription in note 24); Busse 1993, pp. 73–82.

96 Coüasnon 1974, pp. 54–57; on al-Hakim and Jerusalem, see Pruitt 2013 (see more on this in Chapter 7).

97 Busse 1993, pp. 81–82 ; Coüasnon 1974, p. 61.

98 Eutychius, *Annales*, vol. 2, p. 17. In this context, *sijill* should be understood as a written guarantee issued by an authority for an individual or a community (see EI Online for a discussion of the term).

FIGURE 2.6 *The Mosque of ʿUmar, view from the medieval portal of the Holy Sepulcher, 1192, Jerusalem*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

well as Muslims. Therefore, in the tenth century, aspects of what ʿUmar did and did not do with regard to churches were utilized by different actors. As Muslims summoned ʿUmar's example to push for an alteration of the urban fabric, the same was done by Christians in order to maintain the status quo established in the early medieval period. According to Eutychius, the fact that churches were granted to Christians in the seventh century was an unsurmountable argument, especially within the parameters of Muslim jurisprudence.

If any Muslim structure existed in the area of the Holy Sepulcher shortly after the conquest, it was most likely an oratory and not a mosque. This supposition is bolstered by the fact that neither Arculf nor Bede,[99] nor indeed any Muslim source,[100] refers to the presence of a mosque in the proximity of the Holy Sepulcher in the early medieval period. As will be shown in Chapter 4, it is also possible some Muslims routinely entered the Holy Sepulcher, suggesting that, to a certain extent, the entire complex was considered sacred by Muslims. It is no accident that the architectural program on al-Haram al-Sharif launched by ʿAbd al-Malik, creating a sacred axis for Muslims, emulated the complex of the Holy Sepulcher (the basilica along with the rotunda of the Anastasis), with the purpose of diverting believers from the holiest among the Christian sites in the eastern Mediterranean.[101]

Two final considerations are in order. Eutychius shows how, at least up to the late tenth century, attacks on or threats to ecclesiastical properties were likely to be repulsed by Christian authorities, elites, and theologians. Christians had a prominent voice in the public arena, a prominence that will also be discussed in Chapter 5, in the context of analyzing the transfer of materials from churches to mosques. The appropriation of the ʿUmar tradition embodies this attitude; this served as a good strategy for preserving late antique buildings, which were not only lavish monuments but living sacred spaces for the Christian majority of the population. Second, this chapter delineated two distinct waves of Islamization in Bilad al-Sham. Although the result of a continuous process, the transformation of both society and the sacred landscape underwent abrupt acceleration in conjunction with specific events such as the fierce clashes between elites embracing different systems of worship and the establishment of a new dynasty whose sense of leadership also included the religious discourse. The first wave of Islamization dates to the seventh and eighth centuries, while the second wave began with the arrival of the Turks in northern Syria and concluded with the final defeat of the Crusaders under the Mamluk Baybars in the thirteenth century (the latter period is further discussed in Chapter 7). However, while in the first wave of Islamization churches largely remained in the hands of Christians, this was no longer the case during the second wave. Furthermore, although churches were at first mainly safeguarded, every following development affecting the sacred landscape, including the conversion of churches into mosques in the medieval era, was somehow retrospectively projected onto the early period. Since the early ninth century, both the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the successive period of the four caliphs became sources of exemplary legal and religious decisions. These eras' legitimizing and canonizing function meant that they were seen as having features and merits that in actuality they did not possess.

Within such a context, all phases of the lives of sacred buildings—their construction, reuse, conversion, and destruction—provide insight into the processes of change affecting the society. The next chapter addresses the fate of late antique churches and sacred landscape during the Umayyad period, when Bilad al-Sham was chosen as the core area of the whole Dar al-Islam and several congregational mosques were erected.

99 Adomnán, p. 145; Bede, pp. 215–22.

100 Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 32–35. Al-Makin repeats Eutychius's passage in its entirety; Clermont-Ganneau 1896, p. 320, note 1.

101 Elad 1995, pp. 24–26; Grafman and Rosen-Ayalon 1999, pp. 1–7; Flood 2001, p. 175, fig. 82.

CHAPTER 3

The Contiguity of Churches and Mosques

Chronological uncertainties as to the various phases of mosque development prevent a full assessment of the alleged process of converting churches into mosques in the post-conquest period. Relying mainly on written testimony from later periods, scholars have explained the process through a paradigm dominated by the concept of the "partition."

According to this paradigm, during the first stage Muslims would have forced Christians to share a portion of their great churches with them, whereas in the second phase the entire building or site would have been used as the congregational mosque of a city. The second step implied either the conversion of a church into a mosque or its destruction and replacement with a new building.[1] Direct observation confirms how, in many cities—from Aleppo to Homs, from Diyarbakır to Damascus—medieval mosques stood on sites formerly occupied by churches. The lack of any in-depth archaeological investigations, however, precludes a complete understanding of what really happened to the main churches once cities were conquered and Islamized. It also impedes the development of a solid chronology for each phase. When, specifically, did Christians stop using churches or Christian sites? Uncertainty also prevails as to the nature of the phase in which buildings (or sites) were shared. That is, how, exactly, did Muslims share a basilica with Christians? The theory that churches were partitioned does not rely on any material remains, but is only supported by literary evidence, which, as will be shown in this chapter, is very generic and lacking in detail.

Some medieval texts (mainly geographic), in fact, state that a half (or a quarter or a third) of churches were transformed into mosques shortly after the seventh-century conquest. Further complicating the issue is the fact that other traditions note the tendency of some early Muslims to pray in various churches.[2] Although the latter practice is not presented as related to the partition evoked by other sources, it seems to strengthen the likelihood of the partition; if some or most Muslims were used to worshipping in churches, then it

1 Although the different phases characterizing the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus (in the first phase, the mosque flanked the church and in a later phase, a new, larger mosque was built on the ruins of both buildings) have been repeated ad nauseam in secondary literature (Grabar 2001b, p. 508), the scholarship is still permeated by a certain vagueness as to what really happened in the case of most mosques. Quoting a substantial number of predecessors in footnote 1 of his article on the subject, Bashear takes for granted that Christians and Muslims routinely shared the same building (Bashear 1991, p. 267). Donner seems to suggest he believes Muslims shared with Christians the church in Damascus: "The best-known example, of course, is the believers' use of the Church of St. John in Damascus as their place of prayer … The usual interpretation of this process—at least as far as the Church of St. John in Damascus is concerned—is that the Muslims 'appropriated' part of the church, later all of it, and converted it to their mosque, in the process barring the Christians from holding their worship there" (2002–03, pp. 51–52). Khalek suggests that for the earliest phase both options are likely: "it is possible to consider either a space which enclosed two separate prayer areas or one structure divided into two spaces" (2006, p. 29), and this "because it was common for churches throughout the conquered territories to be converted into mosques" (2006, p. 35). Hoyland outlines these possibilities as well: "Very commonly Muslims made use of churches, which were then either converted or simply divided" (1997, p. 564). See also King 1983, pp. 134–35, and Schick 1995, p. 130. Kennedy seems more cautious, dismissing as unlikely the traditions concerning the partition of St. John's Church at Homs, but he nevertheless seems to accept the traditions about the partition of the church in the *temenos* at Damascus (Kennedy 2007, p. 86).

2 Bashear 1991; Elad 1995, pp. 138–41.

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easily follows that the early Muslim community requisitioned a fraction of Christian churches to be utilized as mosques, later appropriating the entire structures and expelling the Christians from the area.

This chapter tries to understand what, precisely, literary sources mean when they say that a portion of a church was used by Muslims and, consequently, to discern early Muslim attitudes toward church architecture when it came time to build large congregational mosques in the conquered cities.

Deconstructing the Paradigm of Partition

Literary sources describing the partition of churches between Christians and Muslims were first fully addressed by Creswell, in a passage devoted to the early history of congregational mosques such as the Great Mosque of Hama and the Great Mosque of Damascus.[3] Creswell argues against the possibility that the church in Damascus was partitioned between Christians and Muslims, and in favor of the presence of two discrete places of worship for the two communities, the church used by Christians and the tiny mosque built in the courtyard of the church, which was the *temenos* of the previous temple. This had been the case before, in 706, al-Walid I ordered the destruction of both the church and the early mosque and the construction of a large congregational mosque. At the same time, however, Creswell does not fully dismiss other cases of partition suggested by written sources, but only raises some general doubts as to the authenticity of those sources. Furthermore, at the beginning of the volume, he seems to imply that early mosques were often converted churches or portions of Christian buildings adapted as Muslim places of worship.[4] This is the reason why, quite paradoxically, the same scholar who definitively destroyed the myth of the partition of Damascus's main church between Christians and Muslims, is also often cited as an authority for the partition paradigm.

Literary sources describe the phenomenon of the partition in the following cities: Damascus, Diyarbakır, Homs, Aleppo, and Cordoba. To this list, Bashear adds Hit, Tiberias, and possibly al-Ramla. Let us first tackle the five cities reported in Creswell's list.[5] As far as Damascus, as already noted in Chapter 2, Creswell (relying on the works of Miednikoff and Caetani) has unquestionably proven how in the aftermath of the seventh-century conquest it was the area of the *temenos* (the precinct of the earlier Roman temple), and not the church itself, that was shared by the two communities. He also asserts that the tradition of the partition with regard to Damascus's church appears for the first time in Ibn ʿAsakir's work in the twelfth century, when it was included in one of the numerous versions of the treaty between Muslims and the Christians of Damascus following the conquest. This specific version of the pact was later handed down by Ibn Shakir, but it is important to

3 Creswell 1969 (first edition 1932), vol. 1, pp. 17–20. Creswell cites all the cases of partition according to sources, disclosing that in the eighth chapter he will argue against the partition in relation to the Great Mosque of Damascus. In these three pages, he then discusses the case of Hama as an example of a church converted into a mosque by rotating the orientation of the building by 90 degrees and imagining the implementation of several other modifications in the structure. As already mentioned in Chapter 2 of this study, the situation of Hama is more controversial than indicated by Creswell; the topic is also briefly discussed by Tritton (1930, pp. 38–42). Despite later authors' interpretation of Tritton's words (see, for example, Elad 1995, p. 138), Tritton does not conclude that Muslims used a portion of churches as mosques, but only refers to the written traditions concerning Homs and Hit. Furthermore, he also dismisses as a "myth" the alleged partition of St. John's Church of Damascus.

4 See footnote 37 in the Introduction; Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 187–96, as well as p. 17.

5 Bashear 1991, p. 267. Hit, located to the northwest of Baghdad (al-Baladhuri, p. 179), has only been surveyed; the material available on early medieval Tiberias was recently reassessed by Cytryn-Silverman (2009); al-Ramla is a city founded *ex novo* by Muslims.

observe how there is no mention of it in sources prior to the twelfth century.[6]

In the case of Diyarbakır, the only reference to a partition of the main church appears in al-Waqidi's *Futūḥ al-Shām*. However, the problems with this particular work are various; one is that, as already pointed out by Van Berchem, the author of the text today known as *Futūḥ al-Shām* is probably not al-Waqidi himself but Pseudo-al-Waqidi (a much later, post-Crusades writer evoking or inspired by the al-Waqidi quoted by al-Baladhuri in the ninth century).[7] For this reason, his account of the seventh-century conquest has to be read with caution. Another problem, as Palmer has brilliantly explained, is that the passage on the transformation of two-thirds of the main church of Amid (the Arabic name of Diyarbakır) into a mosque only appears in a German translation of the text, but not in the Arabic edition.[8] This translation was used by Van Berchem to claim the partition of Diyarbakır's main church between Christians (one-third) and Muslims (two-thirds) after the conquest, and since then has been accepted by scholars (such as Creswell). Furthermore, the same Van Berchem noted how the idea of the partition suggested by the German translation of Pseudo-al-Waqidi's *Futūḥ al-Shām* is at odds with other evidence (medieval epigraphy and an eleventh-century description of the town). Despite the difficulties, he ultimately insisted in presenting the partition as plausible.[9]

The possible partition of Aleppo's main church relies on a passage by al-Baladhuri, in which he states that Muslims requisitioned "half of their homes and churches."[10] The source does not say that the main church was partitioned, and in fact might be referring either to the properties left behind by the Byzantine elite or to the requisition of half the properties and estates for accommodating the new residents. In any case, it seems to reflect a matter of land and building properties (a pressing issue with the growth of the Muslim population) rather than the division of single units into two halves.

With regard to Homs, the sources are contradictory. On the one hand, some Muslim historians and geographers describe the city's church as divided between Christians and Muslims. One-quarter of the Great Church, according to al-Baladhuri (an unspecified fraction according to Ibn Hawqal, one-half in the account of al-Muqaddasi and al-Istakhri), was converted into a mosque shortly after the seventh-century conquest.[11] On the other hand, when he visited the city in ca. 722 the Christian pilgrim Willibald described the Church of St. John the Baptist (according to him built by Helen, Constantine's mother), without mentioning any Muslim presence.[12] Furthermore several Muslim authors also refer to the building as a "church" and not a "mosque"; Ibn Rusta (tenth century) counts the church of Homs as among the finest stone buildings in the Syrian area, whereas al-Isthakhri (early tenth century)—albeit in a passage that mentions the partition—considers the

6 Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 188–90.

7 Strzygowski and Van Berchem 1910, p. 13 n. 2. In fact, al-Waqidi's early Islamic text is known only through excerpts quoted by later authors, among them al-Baladhuri.

8 Palmer 2006, pp. 130–31, nn. 53–55. See al-Waqidi, vol. 2, pp. 107, 110. The translation by B.G. Niebuhr and A.D. Mordtmann is based on a manuscript preserved in the Royal Library of Copenhagen, Denmark.

9 Strzygowski and Van Berchem 1910, pp. 51–52; Creswell, in both the 1932 and 1969 editions of *Early Muslim Architecture*, notices the inconsistency among Christian sources on the main church, the architectural evidence, and Pseudo-al-Waqidi's account (vol. 1, pp. 127–28; vol. 2, pp. 185–86).

10 Al-Baladhuri, p. 147.

11 Al-Baladhuri, p. 131; al-Istakhri, p. 61; Ibn Hawqal, p. 176; al-Muqaddasi, p. 156.

12 Hugeburc in Wilkinson p. 236. A similar description also appears in the *Hodoeporicon of S. Willibald* in which, however, "Emesa" becomes "Edessa," with a curious merging of the Christian features of the two cities: the legacy of the Apostle Thomas and King Abgar from the Edessan tradition, and the story regarding the head of Saint John the Baptist from Homs (*Hodoeporicon of S. Willibald*, London: Palestine's pilgrims text society, 1891, p. 12). The city is however on the road between Tartus and Damascus, where Homs is actually located.

church one of the greatest in Bilad al-Sham.[13] Finally, the church devoted to St. John is included in the list of Peter of Bayt al-Ra's as one of the churches in the hands of the Christians.[14] Despite the uncertainty of the sources, the case of Homs is among the most recurrent examples in order to invoke the partition.[15]

Moving to al-Andalus, in the western Mediterranean, Cordoba represents a case in point of the persistence of the paradigm. The first reference to a possible partition of the Church of San Vicente in the period from the conquest of Cordoba in 711 to the beginning of the construction of the Great Mosque in 785, appears in a passage by the fourteenth-century historian al-Idhari, and was later taken up by al-Maqqari in the seventeenth century.[16] The historian al-Razi (tenth century) is quoted by these later authors as the authority on this tradition. However, another al-Razi's passage on the origins of the Cordoban mosque cited by Ibn Hayyan (eleventh century) does not mention the partition of the mosque. It focuses, instead, on the connection between the ninth- and tenth-century development of the mosque and the earlier house of worship founded by the Muslim conquerors of al-Andalus in the early eighth century.[17] As Ocaña Jiménez and Calvo Capilla more recently have argued, the tradition concerning the partition of the church is only one of the strategies deployed by the tenth-century Umayyad elite of Cordoba in order to claim the city's direct derivation from post-conquest and Umayyad Damascus, a derivation that was at one time familial, political, and material.[18]

As did Creswell in 1932 in the case of the Great Mosque of Damascus, Ocaña Jiménez ten years later characterized the alleged partition of the church by Christians and Muslims as the product of "the fantasy of our historians" (*fantasía de nuestros historiadores*).[19] He argues for the existence, at the time of the conquest, of a set of buildings designated as "church" (*kanīsa*) in Arabic. Among them was the Visigoth Cathedral of San Vicente (which he supposes was transformed into a mosque), along with other related buildings maintained by Christians. Although hypothetical, his reconstruction of early medieval Cordoba includes two separate places of worship in close proximity and does not include any partition or sharing of a single building by the Muslim and Christian communities. Félix Hernández's archaeological excavations conducted on the site of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the 1930s (the findings of which were never published, but cited by Ocaña Jiménez) are of little help in clarifying the period between the conquest and the beginning of ʿAbd al-Malik I's building campaign of 785–86. More recently, Marfil Ruiz revised the documentation

13 Ibn Rusta, p. 92; al-Istakhri, p. 61.

14 See Chapter 2, footnote 30.

15 Among others, see Kennedy 1986, p. 328. Saliby and Griesheimer argue that shortly after the conquest (637), the church was converted into a mosque (Saliby, Griesheimer and Duval 1999, p. 389).

16 Ocaña Jiménez 1942, pp. 352–55.

17 Calvo Capilla 2010, pp. 283–92.

18 Among the tools employed in the rhetorical and material "arsenal" are: emphasizing the early conquerors' role in establishing the first religious foundations, the partition, the growth of the Muslim community in the city, negotiations with Christians, the Muslim purchase of the second half of the church, the conceding of other churches to the Christians (in Cordoba this was seen in the authorization to build new churches *extra muros*; in Damascus, in the return of some churches on the hills surrounding the city), the demolition of extant buildings, and, finally, the construction of a great congregational mosque. As for the material aspects of the derivation, see the "Byzantine" origins of the mosaics of the two mosques and the shell as the distinctive decorative features of the mihrab area (Ocaña Jiménez 1942; Flood 2001, pp. 47–65; Calvo Capilla 2007 and 2010).

19 Ocaña Jiménez 1942, pp. 357–58. In her brilliant work on early medieval Spain, Dodds seems to miss Ocaña Jiménez's point when she affirms that the Spanish scholar "accepts the tradition literally" (Dodds 1990, p. 60, p. 153 n. 60). Ocaña Jiménez's position is elaborated much more fully and, as noted above, among other things, he strongly dismisses as *fantasía* the possibility of a real partition.

of these excavations, launching a new phase of archaeological investigations.[20] Agreeing with Ocaña Jiménez's proposal that there was no partition, he further argues that the complex of San Vicente was most likely composed of two very closely situated churches and other ecclesiastical buildings (such as the bishop's palace).[21] He also claims that, according to Arabic sources, Christians were granted the possession of the main church, making it plausible to imagine that, after the conquest of Cordoba in 711, Muslims requisitioned a different area of the ecclesiastical compound.[22]

This overview shows how the paradigm of the partition, which was developed in order to explain the step-by-step requisition of cities' most sacred places by early Muslims, relies on extremely weak foundations. But there is more. As mentioned above, in the absence of material evidence, the partition has been evoked only through selected passages of literary sources; however, what is striking is the utter lack of any reference to the partition of churches in Christian (Arab, Syriac, Greek, or Armenian) sources. This point is relevant, prompting questions into the very notion of the sharing of sacred buildings between Christians and Muslims. If—as several scholars suggest—the partition was a common practice in the aftermath of the seventh-century conquest, the absolute silence of Christian theologians and historians on the subject requires explanation. The lives of Christian communities would undoubtedly have been unsettled by the presence of non-Christians within their churches, and, at the same time, the turmoil caused by the presence of a new religious community in what until a few decades earlier had been largely Christian-dominated cities did not go unreported. As will be shown in the next chapter, Christian elites (like their Muslim counterparts) were worried by what they saw as the excessive intermingling among members of different religious communities. They even lamented Muslims' attendance at services and prayers within churches. However, in their writings there is no mention of either the partition or the frequent presence of Muslims in one-third or one-half of their churches.

It is tempting to try to determine the reasons for the uncritical acceptance and transmission of the idea of partitioning the same place of worship between two communities. In Europe, after the Protestant Reformation, some existing churches were used by various communities either at different times of the week or after a division of the sacred space. In addition, curtains or balustrades to demarcate specific subspaces within Christian places of worship were common, up until recent times, whenever a subdivision of the community into smaller units was necessary. Separation of the genders or isolation of the catechumens was achieved through the use of mobile or temporary walls, similar to those hypothesized to account for the Muslim usage of a fraction of churches in the first centuries of Islam.[23]

20 Marfil Ruiz 1999, 2006 and 2007.

21 The "double churches" are scrutinized according to geographical locale in a multiauthored volume edited by Caillet and Duval (1996).

22 See Ocaña Jiménez 1942, pp. 348–51. Ocaña Jiménez suggests that Muslims requisitioned the church, granting Christians the rest of the ecclesiastical complex (p. 357). Marfil Ruiz argues, however, that sources claim that Christians were granted the church located in the western part of the city. The latter church is identified by Ocaña Jiménez as the Church of San Vicente (p. 349). See, however Arce-Sainz (2015), who argues that no firm traces of any late antique ecclesiastical structure exist on the site of the Great Mosque of Cordoba.

23 I thank Emanuele Lugli for this suggestion. On the cohabitation between Lutheran and Catholic communities, churches and liturgies in early modern Europe, see Kaplan 2007 and Spicer 2013; The theme of gender separation in early Christian churches has been recently explored by Berger (2011, pp. 52–60). Boards, grilles and curtains were used to differentiate spaces within churches. Separate doors also allowed to divide worshippers at the entrance according to their gender, though other subdivisions, related to the age, ecclesiastical status and liturgical actions, were then enforced within each group. In early modern times, the archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo (d. 1584), is praised

From a broader perspective, the available material for the Syrian region provides clear evidence of two phases. The first is the late antique transformation of city centers through the edification of Christian complexes; the second is the medieval reassessment of those same urban areas through the appearance of Islamic sacred spaces, manifested in the construction of madrasas, tombs, and smaller shrines to accompany the congregational mosques. Because there is also evidence that several churches were safeguarded and used after the seventh-century conquest, and the idea of partition (as Creswell and Ocaña Jiménez argued in the 1930s and 1940s, respectively, for Damascus and Cordoba) seems an unsatisfactory explanation, the objective now is to trace a historical line of development from late antiquity to the Middle Ages. Early medieval Bilad al-Sham (from the seventh to the eleventh centuries) requires an explication that takes into account both the continuity of churches and the emergence and consolidation of Islamic architecture.

"Contiguity": Churches and Mosques in the Conquered Cities

The process behind the foundation of the Great Mosque of Damascus (see Chapter 2) shows the closeness of the relationship between the places of worship of the Muslim and Christian communities. In 706, al-Walid I reiterated his proposal to buy the site where the church was located (a proposal also made previously by ʿAbd al-Malik and Muʿawiya); following the Christian community's rejection of his offer, al-Walid I requisitioned the entire compound and destroyed both the church and the early mosque, and ultimately embarked on the building of the Great Mosque of Damascus.[24] Two phases of the foundation are therefore distinguishable, with the year 706 serving as a watershed; the first period after the conquest saw the Muslim prayer hall and the church standing close together, while the second period witnessed the new, large congregational mosque's domination of the site and the church's disappearance from the area.

A few years later, the Muslim community of Aleppo was also given a congregational mosque. If any earlier mosque ever existed (see Chapter 2), it probably came to be considered too small for the increasing Muslim population. At the same time, the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus could have encouraged the province's elites to copy the glory of the capital.[25] Under the patronage of either al-Walid I, or one of his brothers Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik (governor of the region where Aleppo was located, called Jund Qinnasrin, up until 710) and Sulayman b. ʿAbd al-Malik (governor of the same region up until 715, when he was appointed caliph, succeeding al-Walid I), the construction of the congregational mosque was planned in the area of the Great Church of Aleppo (Figure 3.1).

A narrow street on the western side of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads (the current name of the congregational mosque, founded in the eighth century and rebuilt and enlarged several times since then) divides the wall of the mosque's precinct from a line of shops. In front of the northwestern side of the mosque, where an entrance door to the courtyard of the mosque is located, rises the portal of a medieval madrasa founded in 1149 and known as al-Halawiyya.[26] Whereas the outer shell of the madrasa (its portal and the inner courtyard) is in accordance with twelfth-century Syrian architecture, the prayer hall

for having substituted courtains with unmovable wooden boards: "fece tramezzare le chiese con tavolati di legno fermi, per dividere le donne dagli uomini, avendo prima ordinata questa divisione con certe tende di tela, acciò si stesse ne' luoghi sacri con la debita riverenza: ma per maggior fermezza volle, che in questa occasione fossero di legno, e bene stabiliti; per il cui ordine egli ovviò a molti scandali e peccati" (*Vita di San Carlo Borromeo*, p. 154).

24 Al-Baladhuri, p. 125; Eutychius, *Annales*, vol. 2, p. 3.

25 In the case of Aleppo, see Ibn Shihna, p. 62 (passage quoted below in Chapter 6).

26 Guyer 1914; Écochard 1950–51; Allen 1986, pp. 1–23.

FIGURE 3.1 *Aerial view of Aleppo (detail), circa 1940*
AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE, IAA104221 (PHOTO ©AKTC BY MICHEL ÉCOCHARD).

displays several architectural fragments of the late antique Christian building that once stood in its place (Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3). Of the four original exedras of the church, only the western one is still standing; the southern and northern exedras were modified because of the building's new axis, with the mihrab area on one side and a new room with the entrance to the prayer hall of the complex on the opposite side. In place of the eastern exedra, where the apse of the church once stood, a wall was erected to separate the courtyard of the madrasa from its prayer hall (Figure 3.4).[27]

Written sources reveal that the church was transformed into a mosque in 1124 (the building was by then shifted from a west–east to a north–south axis), while prior to this date the structure had been used by one of Aleppo's Christian communities, most likely the Chalcedonians.[28] The cathedral complex of Aleppo was composed of a main church developed around a tetraconch structure, a shrine probably located in an underground crypt, a sepulchral area, a garden, a bath,[29] and probably some buildings for the clergy.[30] Muslims did not touch the church, but erected their congregational mosque in the place of other buildings and spaces located within the church compound. Therefore, from 715, when the mosque was built, until 1124, when the church was converted into a mosque, the city center of Aleppo was characterized by the coexistence of the main places of worship of Christians and Muslims.[31] The

27 Écochard 1950–51.

28 On the Muslim and Christian versions of the conversion of the church into a mosque, see Ibn al-Shihna, pp. 82–83; *Anonymi auctoris Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, vol. 2, pp. 69–70.

29 Gatier (2001) has discussed an inscription related to a public bath dated to the Byzantine period which should have been located in the area of the Great Church of the city (perhaps, but not necessarily, connected with the bath known as Mughan, described as the bath of the sanctuary by Ibn Shaddad).

30 Sauvaget 1941, pp. 58–60.

31 Tabbaa (1997, p. 16) in the introduction to his work on medieval Aleppo notices in *passim* the coexistence of the church and the mosque. See also Neglia (2009, p. 191, fig. 98), who, in her morphological analysis of Aleppo, provides a plan of the coexistence of the church with the mosque adopting the reconstruction

FIGURE 3.2 *Late antique capital in the Madrasa al-Halawiyya, Aleppo*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 3.3 *Late antique pilaster capital reused in the medieval wall of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads, Aleppo*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 3.4 *Courtyard of the Madrasa al-Halawiyya, Aleppo*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

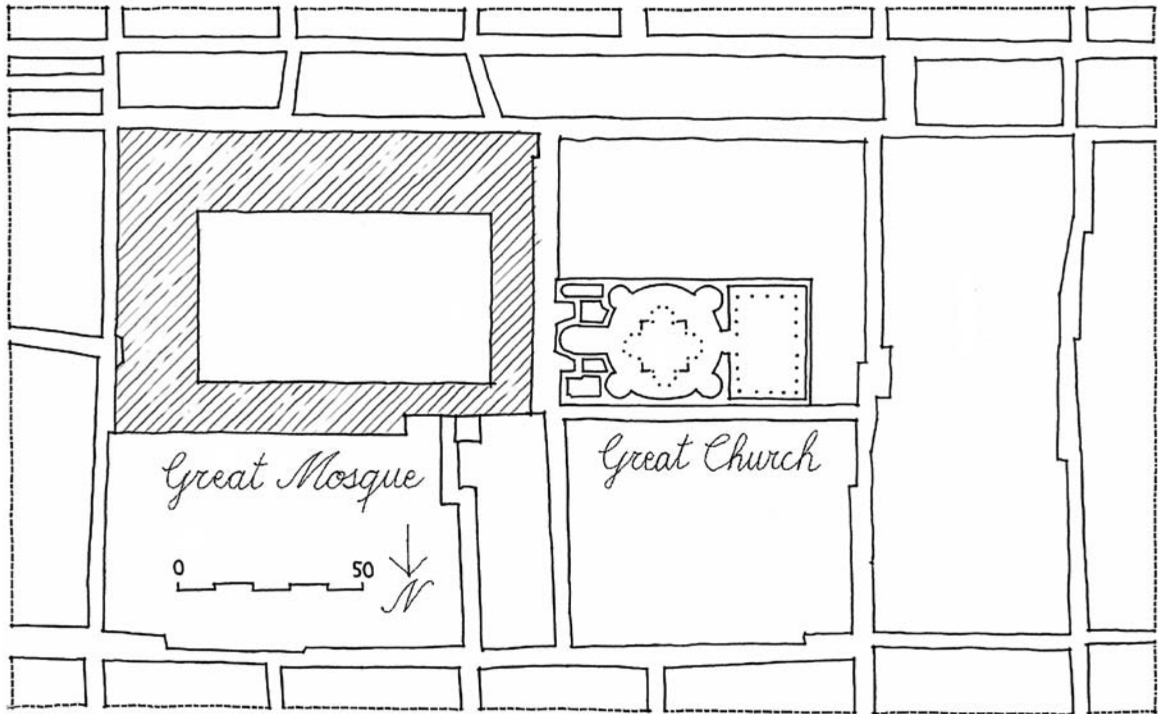

FIGURE 3.5 *Reconstruction of the early medieval phase (715–1124) of the main church and mosque of Aleppo*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER ÉCOCHARD 1050–1951, FIGS. 3 AND 4.

church and the mosque stood beside one another (Figure 3.5).

The case of Aleppo is of paramount importance for an understanding of the conversion of churches into mosques. First and foremost, the two buildings' special relationship in the early Middle Ages is still observable in the architectural remains, and, second, the literary sources in this regard are generous and detailed. Al-Baladhuri notes that, at the time of the seventh-century conquest, estate properties were guaranteed to the local communities, with the exception of a space in the city reserved for the building of a mosque.[32] The leading historian of pre-modern Aleppo, Ibn al-Shihna, a native of Aleppo but longtime resident of Cairo, writes that the congregational mosque was built in the area of a garden: "in the place of the great mosque there was a garden attached to the Great Church" (*kāna mawḍuʿa masjidiha al-ʿaẓam bustān li-l-kanīsa al-ʿuẓmā*).[33] Another passage describing the church before 1124 specifies that "this altar was in the Great Church, which was located beside the western door of the congregational mosque" (*hādha al-haykal kāna fī al-kanīsa al-ʿuẓmā allatī mawqiʿuha tijāha bāb al-jāmiʿa al-gharbī*).[34]

of the church as hypothesized by Guyer; see Guidetti (2009, fig. 2) who, instead, adopts the reconstruction of the church offered by Écochard.

32 Al-Baladhuri, p. 147. This is but one of the versions of the surrender of Aleppo reported by al-Baladhuri. It is unclear whether he is referring to the earliest place of worship allegedly built at Bab Antakiyya (apparently erected in a public area) or to the site beside the main church where the Great Mosque was constructed in the early eighth century.

33 Ibn al-Shihna, p. 61.

34 Ibid., p. 82. While Arabic-Islamic textual sources do not mention this, it has also been suggested that the Great Mosque reused the agora of Aleppo, or part of it (see Sauvaget 1941, vol. 1, pp. 47–48 and Neglia 2009, pp. 189–90).

Written sources and material evidence related to Aleppo detail that in 715 the congregational mosque was built in the compound housing the main church of the city, though without interfering with its usage. It seems beyond doubt that there is no trace of any "partition." More than four centuries later, in 1124, the church was converted into a mosque, whereas in 1149 the building was once again modified, transformed into the prayer hall of the Madrasa al-Halawiyya. During the early medieval period, when the mosque was enlarged due to restorations following destructions, fires, and the growth of the city's Muslim population, the expansions occurred toward the south, to the detriment of market shops, and not the west, where the church was located.[35] The situation of Aleppo makes clear that, notwithstanding the pivotal role of Damascus's new congregational mosque, which gave rise to the construction of mosques in other cities, the replacement of a Christian main church with a Muslim main mosque was not the rule. Aleppo, instead, seems to follow the early phase of the Great Mosque of Damascus (636–706), when Muslims chose to locate the mosque beside the extant church and not in its place.

The case of Aleppo might perhaps also clarify the ambiguities of written sources surrounding Homs, a city located two hundred kilometers to the south. Describing Homs, Ibn al-Fakih al-Hamadhani outlines the relationship between its church and mosque, writing, "among the marvels of Homs there is a figure (*ṣūra*), situated over the door of the congregational mosque (*bāb masjid al-jāmiʿ*), which is located next to the church (*bi-janb al-biʿa*)."[36] It is important to underscore that that the passage says "next to" and not "within" or "inside." The same prepositional phrase appears in al-Tabari's account, in a passage mentioning the anti-dhimmi decrees (decrees directed against the non-Muslim communities) issued by the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (mid-ninth century): "He ordered the destruction of the altars and churches of the city and the transformation of the church next to the mosque (of the city) into a mosque" (*al-biʿa allatī ilā jānib masjidiha fī al-masjid*).[37] Here, it is not so important to ascertain whether the decree was effectively enforced (in fact, the church of Homs was still described as a marvel in the tenth century, so that when sources say that a building was destroyed it is not clear what sort of damage they are referring to),[38] as, instead, to emphasize the relative position of the two buildings.

In 1988, the remnants of an octagonal foundation were discovered on the eastern side of the medieval mosque (Figure 3.6). The mosque, a fairly irregular trapezoid, might be assigned to the medieval period, though its exact date of construction is unknown; al-Harawi (d. 1215) mentions the existence of only one great mosque in medieval Homs, offering evidence that the medieval structure might be the refashioning of a previous mosque.[39] As shown by the stratigraphic data, plan, and remains of floor mosaics displaying urban vignettes—a motif common in the Syro-Jordanian region since the fifth century—the octagonal edifice was instead a late antique Christian building.[40] Although it is unknown for how long the Christian structure remained in use, it is easy to infer that the remains were part of the Christian complex, alongside which the early congregational mosque was established.

35 Sauvaget 1941, vol. 1, pp. 109–43; Eddé argues that the period of decline of the Christian population (and the concomitant rapid growth of the Muslim sector) in northern Syria—Aleppo included—occurred between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries (1999, pp. 452–72, in particular 453–55).

36 Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadhani, p. 112.

37 Al-Tabari, vol. 3, p. 1422.

38 As argued by Flood (2002, p. 647), terms such as "destruction" or "obliteration" of a building (or, alternatively, of an image) should be read with cautious as the term might refer to a simple intervention aiming at invalidating a specific function of the building.

39 Al-Harawi, pp. 8–9. The mosque of Homs is often attributed to Nur al-Din, though it is not included in the list provided by Elisséeff (1949).

40 Saliby, Griesheimer and Duval 1999. On mosaic vignettes in church floor mosaics, see Duval 1999b.

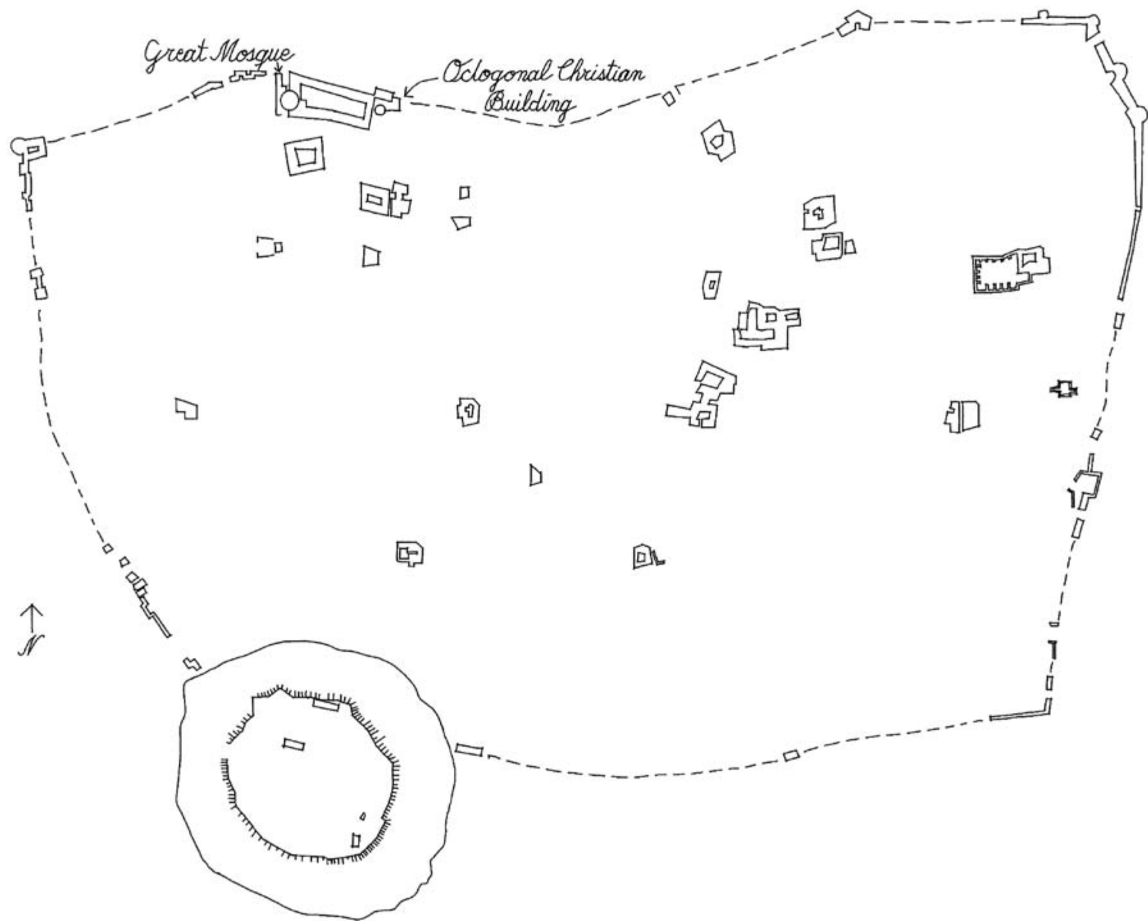

FIGURE 3.6 *Plan of the city of Homs*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER SALIBY, GRIESHEIMER AND DUVAL 1999, FIG. 1.

The contradictory evidence on Homs offered by written sources—which variously suggest that a portion of the "church" was shared with Muslims and that there was contiguity between two independent buildings—together with the discovery of a late antique ecclesiastical structure in its environs, suggest that the word "church" was not used consistently. "Church" was a vague term deployed to indicate both the whole sacred compound in which a church was located (the Arabic term *kanīsa* was generally preferred to convey such a meaning) and a single consecrated building (for which the Arabic term *biʿa* was widely favored). Hence, the narrative concerning a portion of a late antique church used by Muslims (a quarter, a half, or an unspecified fraction, depending on the author) might refer to the division of an entire sacred precinct within which a church was situated.[41] This idea is reinforced by the nature of late antique ecclesiastical complexes, often consisting of a set of buildings, varying from one or

41 It is worth mentioning that, in the case of Homs, the narrative regarding a "quarter" of the church also appeared dubious to Caetani, who argued on behalf of a mistake in the transmission of the text. Quoting Miednikoff, Caetani argues that in the al-Baladhuri passage the word *rabʿ* (meaning "quarter," but also "neighborhood") was erroneously transmitted (1905, vol. 3, p. 430). Key Fowden (Fowden and Key Fowden 2004, p. 164) highlights the need for a comparative study of terms related to churches and monasteries to be found in Arabic-Islamic sources.

more basilicas, baptisteries, service rooms, lodging areas, courtyards, at times all enclosed into a walled precinct.[42]

Using Aleppo as a point of comparison, we might hypothesize that the situation in Homs developed in the following way: Between the seventh-eighth century and the unknown date of the refashioning of the mosque as it stands today, the early congregational mosque stood beside the main church. The mosque was built in the precinct of the "church" (called *kanīsa* in the Arabic sources), perhaps replacing some secondary buildings that had marked the late antique ecclesiastical compound. When the mosque was rebuilt, perhaps in the Abbasid time as said by al-Tabari or later as suggested by al-Rusta's description—the enlargement or reconstruction was carried out at the expenses of another, larger section of the church site.

Examining the extant sources reveals the same pattern in other cities as well, of which Mosul is a case in point. In a passage on the different accounts of the massacre that occurred in the city in 750,[43] the historian al-Azdi (early tenth century) cites the existence of a church (*biʿa*) adjacent to one of the mosque entrances: "the people enter the mosque through the door of the mosque located adjacent to the church" (*dukhūl al-nās al-masjid ʿalā bāb al-masjid mimmā yalī al-biʿa*).[44] This sort of "equilibrium" in Mosul was again disturbed in the twelfth century with the building of a new congregational mosque by Nur al-Din.[45] In this instance, the new mosque was not erected over the former one (henceforth called "the old mosque," *al-masjid al-ʿatīq*) but on a new site. However, from the seventh-century conquest up to the Middle Ages, the only great mosque in the city stood next to an extant church.[46] It is possible that the earliest mosque was the one built by the Umayyad governor Saʿid b. ʿAbd al-Malik, together with a market, a monastery, and the renovation of Mosul's road system and city walls.[47]

It appears safe to say that, during the early medieval period, congregational mosques were generally added to existing urban fabrics rather than substituting for extant sacred spaces. This was also the case with Edessa, where the congregational mosque was erected only in 825. Prior to this date, the city, whose population was mostly Christian, was provided only with a small house of worship for serving the Muslim garrison in the city.[48] The ninth-century mosque was realized by transforming a tetrapylon structure located in front of the "old church." Michael the Syrian adds that some work was undertaken for this transformation.[49] The "old church" was most likely the Church of St. Sophia, together with the Holy Sepulcher, among the most renowned churches in the Dar al-Islam.[50] Furthermore, and this point is central

42 As exemplified by Eusebius' description of the cathedral of Tyre as consisting of a walled enclosure and a set of cloisters provided with fountains (Guidetti 2014, pp. 19–20), urban late antique main churches were complexes provided with several architectural spaces, both consecrated and devoted for other uses (on Syria, see Butler 1907 and 1909; Lassus 1947; on Palestine, see Ovadiah 1970; Tsafrir 1993; on Jordan, see Piccirillo 1993; Michel 2001; with regard to the phenomenon of the double churches, also widespread in the eastern Mediterranean, Caillet and Duval 1986).

43 Robinson 2000, pp. 131–41.

44 Al-Azdi, p. 147. The same al-Azdi reports that a church was attacked by a mob because it had expanded using part of the estate of a nearby mosque (Fiey 1959, pp. 20–21).

45 Tabbaa 2002.

46 Even though al-Azdi writes *masjid*, he seems to be denoting the congregational mosque of Mosul (Robinson 2000, pp. 74–75). Commenting on this passage, Robinson, although only in a brief note, observes that "early mosques were not infrequently built adjacent to—or even onto—pre-existing churches." He then quotes the case of Damascus as presented in the *Kitāb al-ʿuyūn* and of Homs according to Ibn Hawqal (Robinson 2000, p. 74 n. 91).

47 Khamis 2002, p. 146.

48 Al-Baladhuri, p. 178. On early medieval Islamic architecture in Edessa and its relationship to Christian church architecture, see Guidetti 2009.

49 *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 3, pp. 61–62.

50 Bar Hebraeus, vol. 1, p. 360. For an overview of the status of late antique churches within the Dar al-Islam according to Muslim sources, see Guidetti 2014, pp. 14–16.

for the current discussion, despite the fact that the space was formerly a public building (a tetrapylon) that had probably previously served as a synagogue (in fact, the sources refer to it as a *bethschabta*, house of the day of prayer), at the time it was used by Muslims the structure was part of the complex of the "old church." Though it served no liturgical function, the building was utilized as a gathering place by eminent clergymen (*primores*) after morning services.[51] The order to convert the building followed the local Muslim administration's decision to identify those Christian buildings built or modified after the conquest (see Chapter 2). Indeed, one of the charges often levelled against non-Muslims was that they disobeyed the law barring them from increasing or otherwise modifying their immovable properties. These laws, which will be further discussed in the next chapter, were not implemented uniformly, as some areas or cities were allowed more latitude than others.[52]

Finally, although its geographical location and important Christian past distinguish Edessa's history from that of other cities under Islamic rule, it is worth noting that its current congregational mosque was rebuilt in the twelfth century, when the city was reconquered by Muslims, at the Crusaders' expense.[53]

Located east of Edessa, Mardin might have experienced something similar. In 1170, an "atrium" was added to "the mosque of the Arabs," causing great anxiety on the part of the local Christian population.[54] Although the chronology of the two buildings is uncertain, it is likely that before this date the mosque and the church to which the atrium (a narthex?) belonged were located beside one another. The mosque apparently "invaded" the Christian building, somehow altering the "balance" that had existed up until that point.[55] Another example in the area that emerges from scrutiny of the written sources is Nisibis, a city located a few kilometers to the east of Mardin. Here, in the early eighth century, Simeon (d. 734), the Jacobite abbot of the monastery of Qartmin and bishop of Harran, asked the governor of al-Jazira region and the caliph for permission to undertake new construction. Once granted the authorization, he built within the city a great church for his own community and, in order to honor the caliph, a large mosque adjacent to the church, along with a school. Simeon is said to have self-financed these structures, and to have been rewarded with gold, silver, and admiration by the Muslim authorities.[56] It was therefore a Christian patron who was responsible for adorning Nisibis with both a church and a mosque. The two building' contiguity paralleled examples from that time in several other conquered cities of Bilad al-Sham.

All of these cases might be used to shed light on the contradictions, discerned but not explained by Van Berchem, with regard to Diyarbakır, inserted, as mentioned above, among those instances in which the "partition" of the church was said to have occurred.[57] Nasir Khusraw's account of 1045 preceded the building of the medieval congregational mosque dated, on the bases of epigraphy, to around 1091. The Persian traveller mentions a great church (*kilīsay-i ʿaẓīm*), provided with a dome and located close to a mosque (*nazdīk masjid*); both structures are described as being built with a local

51 Bar Hebraeus, vol. 1, p. 360.

52 Ibid. In the nearby city of Harran, the churches built after the seventh-century conquest (Michael the Syrian also makes mention of synagogues as well) were attacked shortly before 825 by the local Muslim governor. That governor, however, allowed the same buildings to be repaired (*Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 3, pp. 47–48). On the degree of local communities' autonomy in the early medieval northern Mesopotamia area, see Robinson 2000, pp. 33–62.

53 Gabriel 1940, vol. 1, pp. 280–83; for the date (approximately between 1146 and 1191), see the epigraphic evidence (*Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, vol. 10, n. 3450); Ibn Kallikan reports that Nur al-Din built a congregational mosque in Edessa (Ibn Kallikan, vol. 4, p. 410 n. 715: "al-ʿAdil Nur al-Din").

54 Bar Hebraeus, vol. 1, p. 560.

55 English-language scholarship on early medieval Mardin is extremely sparse; a brief description of the Great Mosque appears in Creswell 1998.

56 Hoyland 1997, pp. 168–71.

57 Strzygowski and Van Berchem 1910, pp. 51–52.

FIGURE 3.7 *Late antique material reused in the late eleventh-century Great Mosque of Diyarbakır*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

black basaltic stone.[58] It was probably the Battle of Manzikert (1071) that prompted political and military developments, such as the decision to modify the monumental center of Diyarbakır, the old city of Amida. A new building was erected, in part with spolia taken from the church complex that once stood there (Figure 3.7).[59] Interestingly, the new mosque was modelled after the Great Mosque of Damascus, with a monumental transept intersecting the three naves of the prayer hall parallel to the qibla wall (Figure 3.8). At the same time, the idea of building a new mosque over the ruins of both a late antique church and a smaller, simpler mosque reprised what had been done in Damascus in the early eighth century.

As described by Nasir Khusraw, before the medieval phase the Great Church and the first mosque were contiguous to one another. Despite each Christian community having claimed its own church as the most important of the city, the Great Church was the one founded by Heraclius for the Chalcedonian community in the early seventh century, on the site of an earlier Christian foundation.[60] This building was later restored in 770, an effort that made the church as glorious as in its original state.[61] According to Theodotus, a

58 Nasir Khusraw, p. 11.

59 The latest analysis of the reuse of spolia in the medieval congregational mosque in Diyarbakır appears in Raby 2004, pp. 301–03.

60 Palmer 2006, pp. 130–36.

61 Dionysus of Tell-Mahré, p. 96.

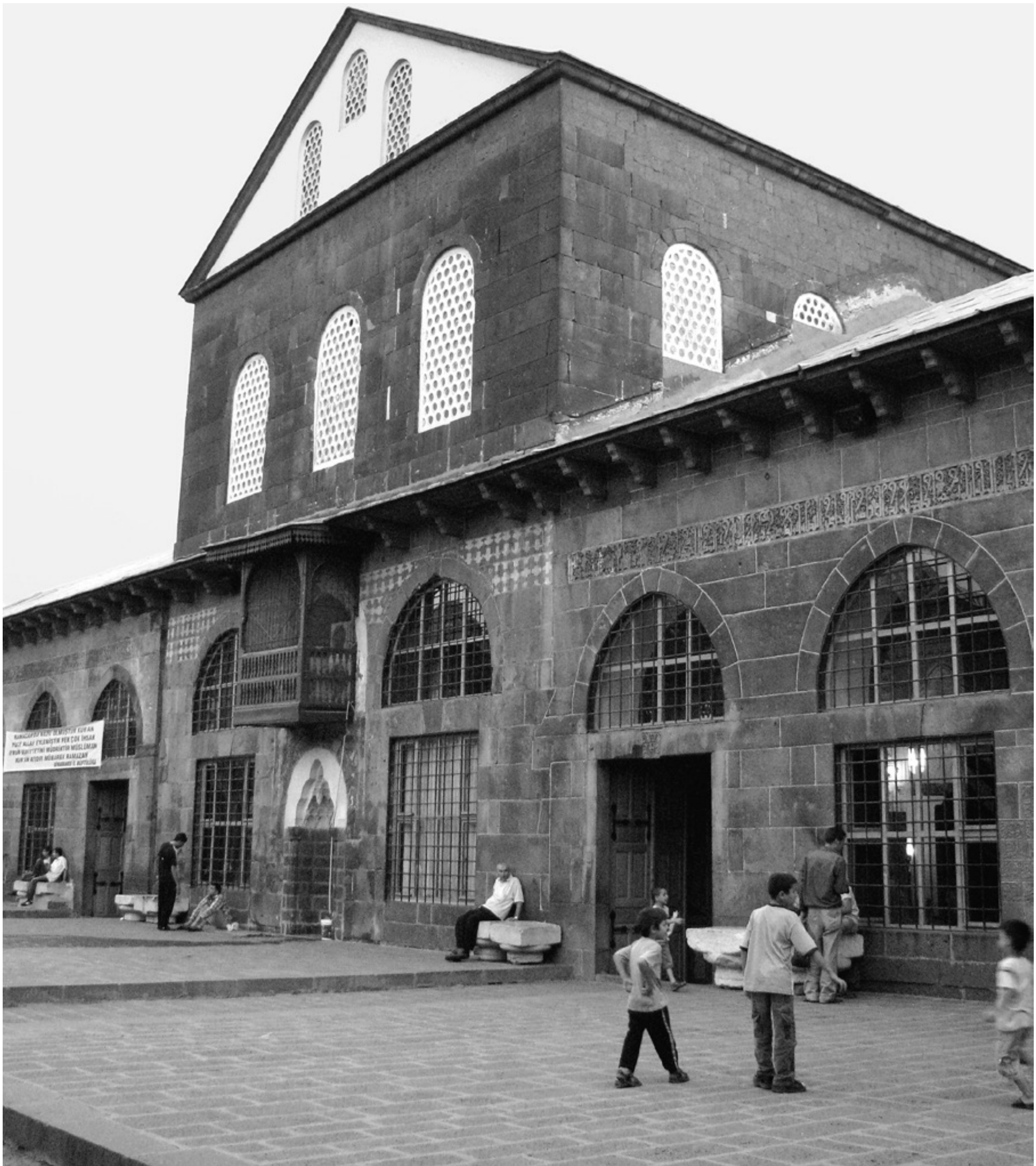

FIGURE 3.8 *Façade of the prayer hall of the Great Mosque of Diyarbakır*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

mosque (*masjid*) was erected shortly after the conquest of Diyarbakır.[62] Neither Theodotus (d. 698) nor Nasir Khusraw (1045) says anything about the requisition of a "portion" of the church by Muslims; the latter, instead, highlights the "contiguity" of the two buildings. Finally, as to the "problem" posed by Pseudo-al-Waqidi's earlier-cited passage:

62 Palmer 1990, p. 167; 2006, p. 124 nn. 32, 130; Hoyland 1997, pp. 156–60; Robinson 2000, p. 43.

Whereas the partition of the main church is (for unknown reasons) only mentioned in Niebuhr and Mordtmann's German translation of *Futūḥ al-Shām*, the modern Arabic edition of the Pseudo-al-Waqidi text, probably originally written in the twelfth or thirteenth century, states that the church (called St. Thomas's Church) was converted into a mosque (*ʿamalū al-biʿa al-kabīra jāmiʿ* and *banawā al-biʿa al-maʿrūfa jāmiʿ*) after the conquest.[63] Evidently, this account clashes with both the passage in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* referring to the restoration of the church founded by Heraclius in 770, and Nasir Khusraw's portrayal of Diyarbakır from 1045. It is not mere speculation to argue that Pseudo-al-Waqidi depicts a medieval phase when, as shown by epigraphy and the reuse of late antique spolia in the facades of the courtyard, the mosque was built to the detriment of the church. Similarly to the Abu al-Fida''s fourteenth-century description of the conversion of St. John's Church of Hama (discussed in Chapter 2) and other similar cases, Pseudo-al-Waqidi's passage appears to be part of a strategy deployed by medieval authors to use the period of the origins in an instrumental manner. Pseudo-al-Waqidi probably wrote the history of the seventh-century conquest of Diyarbakır with a nod to contemporary events; his text mixes accounts of the conquest with information and developments occurring in a later period.

All the above-mentioned cases of mosque development share some common elements. When it came time to build a congregational mosque, the site selected was often an urban area adjoining an extant main church; in some instances, a mosque was realized by requisitioning a portion of a church precinct, whereas in other cases a plot of nearby land was preferred. Apparently, the partition of churches cited by written sources refers to the partition of church compounds, as several textual passages insist on the presence of two distinct, albeit contiguous, places of worship. Furthermore, it is also noticeable how often this arrangement was dismantled in the eleventh or twelfth century, suggesting that the adjacency of churches and mosques in many city centers was a relatively long-lasting feature.

In addition to the case of Aleppo, architectural remains help us reconstruct this pattern in other urban locales as well. Al-Rusafa, located in the Syrian desert steppe (*bādiya*), is an example of this. Under the caliph Hisham b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 724–43), the city was enlarged, and new constructions were built both within and outside the city walls.[64] Within the walls, Umayyad additions included the congregational mosque and a new market area (*sūq*) located to the west of the ecclesiastical complex.[65] Outside of the city precinct, a palatial area was planned to serve as the seasonal residence for the caliph and his court and where, according to al-Tabari, Hisham b. ʿAbd al-Malik would ultimately be buried.[66] One point worth observing in the Umayyad elite's interest in al-Rusafa is its echo of the strategy formerly deployed by Byzantine rulers. Sixth-century patronage helped cement the alliance between Byzantine authorities and the Jafnid Arab confederation. The city was embellished by both imperial (Byzantine) and local (Christian-Arab) acts of patronage; the walls, the cisterns, and the Basilica of St. Sergius transformed a garrison outpost into a vibrant settlement, confirming al-Rusafa's status as a pilgrimage center (Figure 3.9).[67] Eighth-century Muslim

63 Al-Waqidi, pp. 107, 110.

64 Yaqut al-Hamawi, v. Rusafat Hisham and Rusafat al-Sham.

65 De' Maffei 1985, pp. 109–15; Ulbert 1986, 1992; Sack 1991, 1996; Foote 2000.

66 Otto-Dorn 1957; Sack 2008; al-Tabari, vol. 2, p. 1737.

67 Shahid 1995, vol. 1.2, pp. 949–62; Key Fowden 1999, pp. 77–100, 149–73. Ghassanid leaders might have sponsored the construction of a cistern within the city; what is certain is that the phylarch al-Mundhir (r. 569–82) erected in the sixth century a public building located just outside of the urban walls. The latter has been interpreted either as a civic hall where the Ghassanid phylarch would have met his audience or as a church where the piety of the growingly powerful al-Mundhir would have acquired a monumental form (Mendl 1928, pp. 299–326; Sauvaget 1939; Tchalenko 1953, vol. 1,

FIGURE 3.9 *The Great Mosque and the Complex of St. Sergius, al-Rusafa*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

intervention in the city did not erase the Christian layout of the urban fabric, but instead helped contribute to its promotion. In fact, the congregational mosque was built on the northern side of the courtyard of the great basilica dedicated to Saint Sergius. The mosque appropriated one-third (the northern side) of the porticoed courtyard, which was used as the qibla wall (Figure 3.10). Muslim worshippers had access to the courtyard through a door located on the qibla. On the opposite corner of that same open space, and accessible from the courtyard as well, was the room in which Saint Sergius's relics were located, with its monumental ceiling. The courtyard came to act as a kind of buffer zone or contact area between the two communities (Figure 3.11).[68] The qibla, rightly oriented toward the south and toward the shrine of Saint Sergius, epitomized the tribute paid to the great pilgrimage center worshipped and attended, among others, by Arab tribes, a segment of eastern Mediterranean society that early Muslims aimed at integrating into their ruling policy.[69] Considered an exception within the early medieval Islamic so-

p. 262, n. 1; Brands 1998; Key Fowden 1999, pp. 149–72; Falla Castelfranchi 2007, p. 158).

68 Tohme 2009, 137–41.

69 Borrut 2014, pp. 56–58. Writing in the early thirteenth century, Yaqut al-Hamawi described *intra moenia* al-Rusafa as a vivacious city, characterizing the *extra moenia* palatial area as a site in ruins (Yaqut al-Hamawi, v. Rusafat Hisham, Rusafat al-Sham). During the medieval period, a Jewish presence in the city is also recorded, perhaps connected to the city's role in the commercial network of the region up until the rise of the Mongols, whose changes to trade routes had a

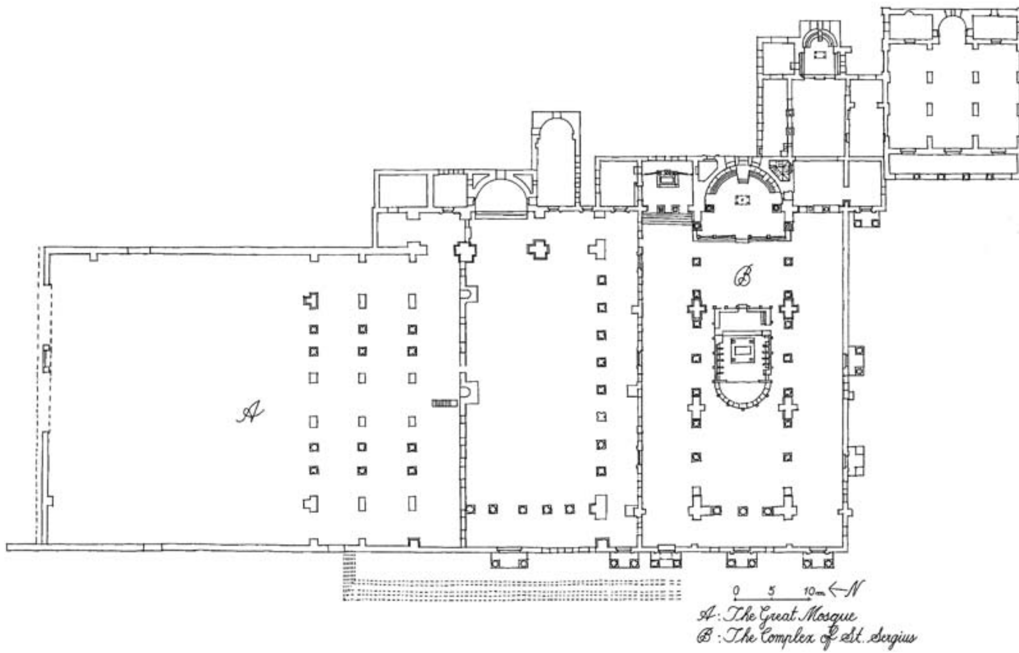

FIGURE 3.10 *Plan of the Great Mosque and the Complex of St. Sergius in the city of al-Rusafa*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER ULBERT 1986, FIG. 1.

FIGURE 3.11 *The courtyard between the Great Mosque (left side) and St. Sergius' Church (right side) in al-Rusafa*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

cieties, the case of al-Rusafa has been interpreted both in terms of Muslim political negotiations with Christian Arabs and in regard to the religious homage paid by Muslim Arabs to a saint particularly dear to their Christian-Arab contemporaries. Both possibilities seem likely, but the important point here is to show the frequency of contiguous worship in early medieval Syria. In al-Rusafa, furthermore, the evidence reveals the interlocking nature of the two places of worship, thus suggesting a greater cohesiveness between the two buildings than elsewhere, a point that will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Somewhat similar to the situation of al-Rusafa, though on a much smaller scale, is the evidence from the site of al-Bakhra' (Syria). This housed one of the tetrarchic fortresses built to safeguard the Roman Empire's borders (as can be deduced from a Latin inscription dated to 293–305). During the late antique and early medieval periods, the fortress was enlarged and a settlement built around it. Places of worship were also added; a three-aisled church was included just outside the main entrance of the fortified area, while, later on, a mosque was placed alongside the church. The outer side of the northern wall of the church was used as the qibla wall of the mosque, and the entrance to the church on that side was blocked off. Under the Umayyads, al-Bakhra' served as the stronghold of Nuʿman b. Bashir, a companion of the Prophet, while the caliph al-Walid b. Yazid died there in 744. The mosque contains no evidence of a mihrab, although it possibly still resides underground. This case of al-Bakhra' appears similar to that of al-Rusafa—although there is no reference to the worship of any particular saint in al-Bakhra', and, more importantly, the dates of the two buildings' usage remain unclear. The mosque probably dates to the post-conquest period, but it is thus far uncertain for how long the church was in use following its foundation in late antiquity.[70]

Archaeological evidence shows how, in other locales, a mosque was built in the vicinity of a church but not adjacent to it. By way of example is the congregational mosque of al-Bara, one of the villages of the Syrian central massif included in the work of the renowned archeologist Tchalenko (who dates the mosque to the medieval period) and recently investigated by Charpentier (who instead suggests that the mosque be backdated to the Umayyad era). The mosque was added to the central core of the town, where the main church and a bath complex were located. In the Umayyad period the mosque, probably outfitted with a pavement mosaic and well-cut dressed stone walls, was almost the same size as the main church of al-Bara (from which it was separated by the thermal complex), eventually reduced during its medieval reoccupation. Another church adorned with mosaics stood in the same area to the east of the bathhouse. Charpentier stresses how the building techniques employed in the mosque for the semi-dome of the mihrab were similar to those seen in the village's churches.[71]

All the cases examined thus far belong to the northern part of Bilad al-Sham. However, the evidence is more meager as to how the pattern of coexistence and contiguity was implemented in the southern portion of the province. The early-twentieth-century modernization of Bilad al-Sham concealed the relationship between the late antique ecclesiastical complex and the Umayyad congregational mosque in downtown Amman (in

negative impact on the city (Caquot 1955; Key Fowden 1999, pp. 183–85).

70 Genequand 2004. Butler mentions the existence of a mosque obtained from a previous structure just south of a church found in the site of Faʿlul (located east of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿman). Both buildings were in ruins at the time of his visit. According to him, column shafts of yellow marble and Corinthian capitals were carried from the nearby church when the building south of it was converted into a mosque. The absence of any chronological data about the abandonment of the church and the conversion of the building into a mosque does not allow understanding the exact relationship between the two buildings (Butler 1907, p. 97; Greenhalgh 2009, p. 270).

71 Tchalenko 1953, vol. 1, pp. 388–90; Charpentier and Abdulkarim 2008; on the nearby church labeled "E5," see Fourdrin 1992.

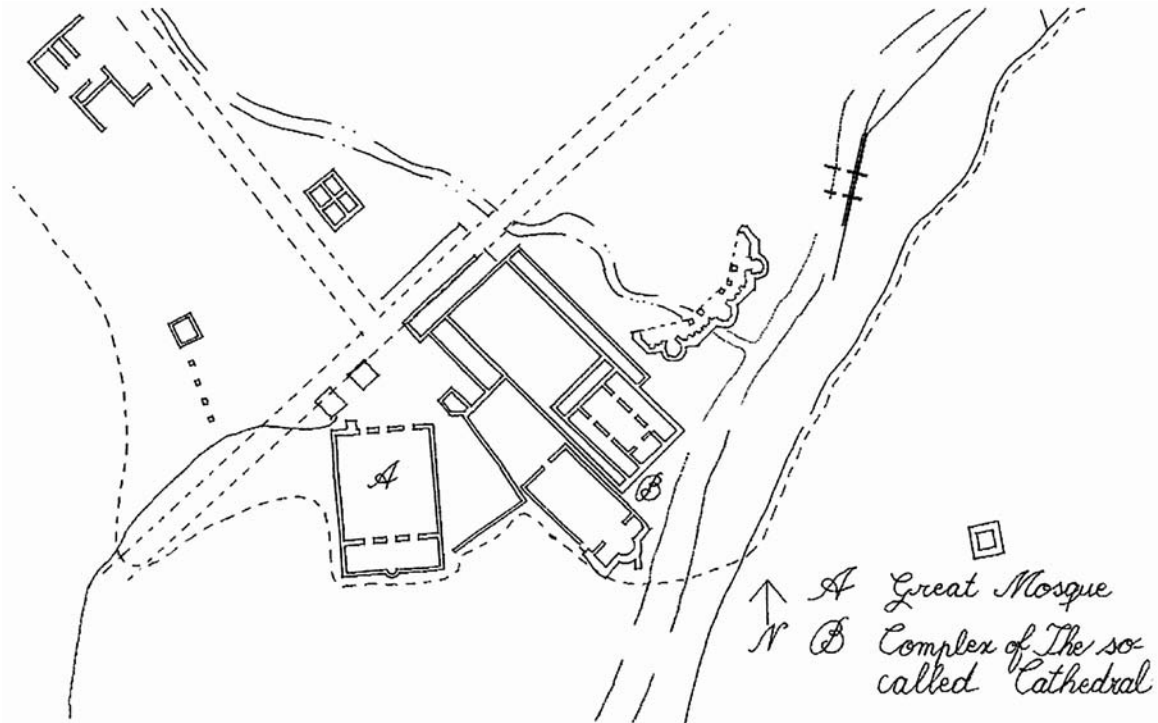

FIGURE 3.12 *Plan of archeological remains of downtown Amman*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER NORTHEDGE 1992, FIG. 14.

present-day Jordan). In 1922, a new congregational mosque was built on the ruins of the early medieval structure, in the lowest point of the valley, housing the Roman and late antique city center.[72] Slightly smaller in size when compared to other eighth-century Muslim foundations,[73] the mosque was described by al-Muqaddasi in the tenth century, with special reference to the courtyard mosaics.[74]

The monumental architectural program planned atop the citadel, along with the construction of the mosque below in the valley, reflect the early Muslim settlement's importance in the city. The Christian community, however, with its bishop and numerous churches, continued to comprise the majority of the population for a period after the seventh-century conquest.[75] Of Amman's numerous churches, some standing remnants of the "cathedral" were still visible in the late nineteenth century.[76] The complex was located in the valley between the congregational mosque (which was added later) and the Roman *nymphaeum* (shrine dedicated to the nymphs). The "cathedral" appears to have consisted of a number of buildings; in fact, the structure identified as an Ayyubid *khān* (inn) and situated next to the main church was probably built in the medieval period over a second church that once stood parallel to the main one.[77] Whereas the two late antique buildings are exactly perpendicular to the decumanus (main urban street on the east–west axis) and oriented toward the southeast, the mosque, located only twenty meters to the west of the church, is turned approximately 45 degrees, with its qibla wall facing south (Figure 3.12). Both the presence of a squared

72 Northedge 1992, pp. 64–65, n. 8.
73 See Walmsley and Damgaard 2005, fig. 6.
74 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 175.
75 Bagatti 1973; Schick 1995, p. 245.
76 Conder 1889, pp. 54–56.
77 Northedge 1992, pp. 59–61, figs. 5, 14, pl. 7b.

FIGURE 3.13 *View of the late antique "cathedral" of Amman in the year 1881*
PEF-P-4134 (PHOTO ©THE PALESTINIAN EXPLORATION FUND BY LIEUT. A.M. MANTELL).

minaret and the building's orientation were fundamental for the structure's identification as a mosque.[78] At the same time, photographs taken prior to 1922 reveal a building with several features common to late antique churches (Figure 3.13). The entrance wall of the mosque was composed of finely dressed limestone ashlars and included four round arched windows and three entrances. The central portal had a segmental relieving arch, while the two lateral doors had relieving round arches (Figure 3.14). Because of these features, and because the minaret was considered a later addition, Butler interpreted the mosque's northern wall as the wall of a late antique church. The extent of Butler's influence is reflected in the fact that in 1922 the remnants of the mosque were destroyed (and replaced by a modern mosque) based on his view that they constituted the ruins of a church.[79]

Recent archaeological researches contributed in delineating the post-conquest phase of Tiberias, which was included by Bashear among those cities in which the "partition" of churches between Christians and Muslims occurred. The archaeological assessment by Cytryn has placed the mosque in the place of what was previously thought to be a covered Byzantine market (Plate 2). During its second phase, dated to the final part of the Umayyad period, its structure would resemble that of the Great Mosque of Damascus, especially because of the central transept dividing the prayer hall in two halves, though with much diminished proportions. On the eastern side of the mosque a basilica building might be interpreted as the governor's palace (*dār al-imāra*), while on the south-western side a pre-existent bathhouse was enlarged. The Great Mosque, built along the cardo, was probably standing on an abandoned Roman building.[80] This arrangement reinforces the idea that, on top of building

78 Northedge 1989.
79 Northedge 1992, pp. 47–69.

80 Cytryn-Silverman 2009 (figure 1 of the article offers a large map of the area of the mosque including also the position of the church).

FIGURE 3.14 *Remains of the Great Mosque of Amman in the early twentieth century*
CRESWELL ARCHIVE EA.CA.5438 (PHOTO ©ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD).

settlements ex-novo, Muslims settled in the conquered towns.[81] On top of this, recent excavations have clarified the phases of the Christian church located only a few meters north of this complex.[82] Around the same time the mosque was erected, the church, which embodied a special relationship with the holy Christian sanctuary built on top of the Mount Berenice overlooking Tiberias, was reduced to a single-aisle basilica. The life of the church, however, continued, as revealed by a tenth century Kufic inscription related to the burial of a Christian individual recovered just outside of the church.[83] The addition of a minaret in the north-eastern corner of the mosque in the ninth-tenth century has also been suggested, providing evidence for the Islamisation process in Tiberias and the concomitant erosion of its Christian landscape.[84] Such reconstruction places Tiberias

81 Whitcomb (1994) argues early Muslims establish separate settlements, including Syria among the regions in which "*amṣār*" (garrison towns) were the favorite settlement pattern. Harrison (1992) hypothesizes that in Tiberias too, early Muslims established a separate garrison on the northeastern side of the late antique town. His interpretation seems to prove incorrect by the latest assessment by Cytryn. In North Africa the tendency of early Muslims to live in separate garrison or extra-muros settlements has instead been recently highlighted by Fenwick (2013, p. 29).

82 Cytryn, fortcoming (I thank Katia Cytryn for sharing with me her forthcoming article).

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid. It might be useful at this regard, to compare Tiberias in the early medieval period with Aleppo (Guidetti 2014). Both mosques were constantly enlarged and in

FIGURE 3.15 *The mosque built within the "Southern Church" Complex, Shivta*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

among the towns in which the new mosque was added a few meters away from an important local church.

A telling case of the contiguity between churches and mosques in southern Bilad al-Sham is traceable in Shivta (also known as Subeita), located in the central area of the Negev in Israel. Here, a small mosque abutted the northern wall of the baptistery of the southern ecclesiastical complex (Figure 3.15). The new house of prayer was located a few meters away from the three-aisled basilica. It has been theorized that the site of the mosque was formerly a courtyard with a cistern in the middle. The prayer hall presents a curved mihrab niche whose construction blocked off one of the entrances to the baptistery without, however, damaging it (Figure 3.16). The mosque was therefore added to a church complex in one of the public areas related to the ecclesiastical properties.[85] Furthermore, a new staircase was built to allow entrance to the mosque from the nearby public street, located on a lower level. Some stones inscribed with crosses were reused as steps for this purpose and placed so as to render the crosses highly visible (Figure 3.17).[86] To the same early medieval period also belong a series of Kufic inscriptions, the content of which ranges from Qur'anic quotations to general blessings.

both cases a minaret was added later on (in Aleppo the minaret was added in the eleventh century), in the corner of the precinct overlooking the contiguous church.

85 Avni 1994, pp. 87–88. For the continuity of the Christian use of the church, see Negev 1974, p. 415.

86 Peers 2011.

FIGURE 3.16 *The mihrab of the mosque of Shivta*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 3.17 *Slabs with crosses incised reused in the stairway leading to the mosque of Shivta*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

The inscriptions were recovered from both within the mosque and another Christian complex (called the "North Church") elsewhere in the town. Although there is no evidence concerning the actual usage and function of the "North Church" at the time the inscriptions were added, it should be noted that Christian imagery, including crosses, were not touched and how inscriptions were limited to a room in the courtyard outside the prayer hall. It seems the case of Shivta was not unique, though a fully assessment of the role these Muslim inscriptions in Christian sacred spaces might have in elucidating Christian-Muslim relations during the period after the conquest is yet to be gained.[87] Inscriptions were also added to the courtyard of the late antique synagogue of Khirbat Susiya, a village located south of Hebron. The earliest Arabic inscription is dated to the early ninth century and two concave mihrabs were also found, one in the southern wall of the portico and one built between two columns in the southern section of the portico, suggesting the courtyard of the complex was converted into a mosque.[88] However, in the case of Khirbat Susiya, at the time the courtyard was converted into a mosque the synagogue was most likely no longer in use, as its prayer hall, though "it did not suffer a deliberate destruction" (i.e. signs of burning), was however divided into two halves by a wall that destroyed the bema and part of the floor mosaic. The religious identity of the settlement during the early medieval period and a possible Jewish presence along the Muslim community using the mosque remain therefore uncertain.[89]

Written sources indicate that the pattern of contiguous churches and mosques was at times followed outside of the Syrian region as well. One is the case recorded by Ibn Khallikan and al-Isfahani with respect to the mighty Khalid b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qasri, the governor of Kufa under the Umayyads in the second quarter of the eighth century.[90] The two authors report that al-Qasri ordered the building of a church beside the qibla wall of Kufa's congregational mosque in honor of his Christian mother (*ẓahr al-qibla li-l-masjid al-jāmiʿ bi-l-kūfa*).[91]

Returning to Syria, other towns are recorded as having elicited questions because of the addition of a mosque to the existing urban fabric. These towns include Baʿalbak and al-Raqqa. At the time of the conquest, the former was a Christian city, housing Greeks, Persians, and Arabs.[92] Baʿalbak retained a level of importance after the conquest, as reflected in its designation as a minting center on several coins. A mosque was discovered in what had been the Roman forum of the city; it has been dated to the medieval period, although its history and usage are as of yet not firmly established.[93] Al-Raqqa, the antique town of Callinicum located north of al-Rusafa not far from the shores of the Euphrates, was home to numerous Muslims who settled there after the conquest. Scholars have focused on the new settlement, named al-Rafiqa, founded under the Abbasids in the proximity of al-Raqqa, which was located only about five hundred meters away. The establishment of the new town did not mean the decline of the late antique city. Al-Raqqa was a bishopric seat as late as the twelfth century, while

87 Moor 2013. For other similar evidence in the Negev area, see: Magness 2003, p. 189; Moor 2013, pp. 108–09; Avni 2014, p. 336. See also the Kufic inscriptions added in the seventh-eighth century in the crypt of the church of Khorvat Berachot, located 20km. south of Jerusalem (Drory 1979, pp. 324–26); and a similar graffiti in the Complex of Qalʿat Simʿan in northern Syria (Littmann 1949, p. 93). It is worth noting that the addition of a Muslim oratory in the courtyard of a church is exactly what happened in the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem during the early medieval period (see Chapter 2).

88 Magness 2003, pp. 100–03 (I thank Avinoam Shalem for the reference to the synagogue of Khirbat Susiya).

89 Magness 2003, pp. 101–02; Avni 2014, pp. 254–55.

90 Hawting 2000, pp. 81–83.

91 Al-Faraj al-Isfahani (a), vol. 22, pp. 14–15; Ibn Khallikan, vol. 2, p. 193 n. 213.

92 Al-Baladhuri, p. 130.

93 Gaube 1999, pp. 76–77.

also home to a Jewish community, as mentioned in Benjamin of Tudela's pilgrimage account.[94] Before founding al-Rafiqa, early Muslims had settled in al-Raqqa. The growth of modern al-Raqqa unfortunately precludes a full understanding of the early medieval phase of its history, although several photographs from the early twentieth century show the congregational mosque towering over the city.[95] The mosque appears to have been established in the city center, but its relationship to the buildings of the Christian communities remains unknown.

Finally, one more site of considerable importance in the post-conquest period is worthy of investigation: the town of al-Jabiya. Located in southern Syria, al-Jabiya was a Christian-Arab settlement. The ruins were described by scholars such as Dussaud and Caetani in the early twentieth century and consisted of monumental buildings, suggesting that the site was more than an ephemeral encampment.[96] Al-Jabiya was famous for the Church of St. George;[97] at the same time, the new rulers are said to have visited the town in the early decades after the conquest to the extent that in 685 a gathering was held there with the purpose of determining who would succeed Muʿawiya as caliph as well as how to oppose the self-proclaimed caliph Ibn al-Zubayr, then threatening the Umayyad dynasty.[98] Written sources also record ʿAbd al-Malik and his court as having spent time in al-Jabiya during the seasonal move from Damascus to al-Sinnabra.[99]

Examination of the written and architectural evidence reveals the frequency with which Muslims would build a congregational mosque near an extant and active church in a central area of a city. Within this general pattern, there appears to be several nuances. In some cases, a mosque would be adjoined to one side of a church; in other cases, it would be built over a requisitioned section of a church compound; and in still other cases, it would be erected in the proximity of a church but without any direct contact with it. Al-Walid I's replacement of a church with the congregational mosque in Damascus seems to have been an exception, perhaps to be explained by the role of capital played by the city. Instead, the earlier arrangement in Damascus, with a place of prayer for Muslims erected in the precinct of the church as a distinct and separate building, might have provided a model. The evidence discussed above also shows how the term *kanīsa* in medieval Arabic sources probably denoted an entire ecclesiastical complex and not only a single prayer hall. For instance, when in his *Risāla* al-Jahiz (early ninth century) cites the "division of the churches" (*muqāsimat al-kanāʾis*) among the contents of the pact enforced by the pious "Ancients" (the early Muslims), it makes sense to assume that he is referring to the division of church complexes.[100] Likewise, when other Arabic sources mention "a quarter" or "a half" of a church, it is likely they are denoting the area or compound of a church. Therefore, we may conclude that there was no actual partition of Christian basilicas, but rather the edification of discrete Muslim buildings within the same areas of churches. Eutychius' passage on the tensions about the courtyard of Holy Sepulcher (see Chapter 2) conveys the idea that the erection of mosques nearby churches was perceived as an intrusion. His complains were caused by the changes to the previous situation imposed by Muslims in the tenth century. While a process of erosion of Christian sites' centrality in the urban fabrics is noticeable, the evidence gathered in this paragraph helped at refining nature and

94 Meinecke 1996, pp. 5–30; Benjamin of Tudela, p. 32.

95 Herzfeld 1911, vol. 1, pp. 156–61, figs. 69–70; vol. 2, pp. 349–64, figs. 318–44; vol. 3, pls. 63–70; Heidemann and Becker 2003, p. 268, fig. 10.2.

96 Dussaud 1903, pp. 44–49 (see also 1927, pp. 332–33); Caetani 1905, vol. 3, pp. 927–28. In modern times, the site has served as one of the bases of the Syrian Army, precluding any further study of the area.

97 Noeldeke 1876, p. 430; 1887; Shahid 2002, pp. 96–104; 2003, p. 233.

98 Al-Tabari, vol. 1, pp. 2108, 2360; vol. 2, pp. 474–76; Caetani 1905, vol. 3, pp. 920–40.

99 Al-Baladhuri (b), p. 200.

100 Al-Jahiz, p. 19.

chronology of such progression. In the following paragraph, the establishment of the pattern of contiguity between cities' churches and mosques will be situated in the context of other urban patterns that arose after the seventh century.

Mosques, Markets, and Administrative Complexes

In addition to contiguity to churches, early Muslim authorities also explored other urban patterns and strategies in regard to the placement of mosques. As mentioned above (Chapter 2), in Jerusalem the idea of building a mosque in the courtyard of the Holy Sepulcher was dismissed in favor of the mostly-empty area of the Temple Mount. Although it is unknown whether that area was suggested by the Christian patriarch Sophronius or by a converted Jew, the outcome of the decision was the coexistence of Christian and Muslim places of worship in that city, albeit not located close to one another.[101] Furthermore, after the Dome of the Rock was built, al-Aqsa Mosque was enlarged and al-Haram al-Sharif came to consist of several Muslim sacred spaces. These developments elevated Jerusalem's stature among the religious centers of Islam and beyond, with the city subsequently characterized as both the most important Christian pilgrimage center (for all communities and denominations) and one of the holiest for Muslim pilgrims as well.[102] These sacred spaces were distinct and situated in different areas of the city. The uniqueness of Jerusalem's religious status and other contingencies notwithstanding, other cities would come to embrace a similar arrangement, with the congregational mosque built in a different sector than, and detached from, the Christian quarter.

This pattern is evident in cities such as Bosra, Jerash, and Palmyra, where the growing Muslim communities—likely in the second quarter of the eighth century—utilized urban buildings left unattended or unused during the late antique period. Each of these cities had an important Byzantine phase. Although the numbers and sizes of the communities are unknown, it is unanimously accepted that the majority of their respective populations in the immediate aftermath of the conquest were Christian. Walmsley and Damgaard, for instance, describe eighth-century Jerash as follows:

"Nevertheless, the Jerash mosque was sizable enough for its provincial role. As a rough calculation, the prayer hall could have held over 450 worshippers and the full mosque obviously many more. It suggests, perhaps, the presence of a sizable Muslim community at Jerash, at least at times, during the first Muslim centuries, and a town population, probably mostly Christian, of several thousands to match."[103]

Similar statements have been made about Bosra.[104] In the post-conquest period, Jerash retained its role of provincial center, while Bosra lost its local provincial authority and became merely one of the stations of Muslim pilgrimage leading south (and eventually serving as a peripheral pilgrimage site). Palmyra, for its part, became a Muslim center by virtue of the alliance between the Marwanid branch of the Umayyad dynasty and the Banu Kalb, an Arab tribe settled in the Palmyrene.[105]

In each of these three cities, a new mosque was built along a public street in place of buildings no longer in use. In Jerash, the mosque was built on the site of a decommissioned Roman bathhouse, in Bosra the mosque was erected over the ruins of an unspecified building, whereas in Palmyra the mosque arose over an abandoned Roman building accompanied by a peristyle. In Bosra, the two main Christian complexes (the cathedral and the second

101 Kaplony 2002, pp. 29–31.

102 Elad (1999) has explained the process of sanctification of several sites in Jerusalem by early medieval Muslims.

103 Walmsley and Damgaard 2005, p. 371.

104 Foss 1997, pp. 237–45.

105 For Jerash, see Walmsley 2003; Walmsley and Damgaard 2005; for Bosra, see Meinecke et al. 2005; for Palmyra, see Genequand 2008.

tetraconch church dedicated to Saints Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius) were located in the northeastern sector of the city, with the mosque situated on the western side of the cardo. In Jerash, the cathedral stood between the southern and northern decumani, with access on the cardo, while other churches were in the western sector of the city, and the mosque was built on the corner between the south decumanus and the cardo. As for Palmyra, whose size was reduced during late antiquity (despite Justinian's refurbishment program),[106] the most notable Christian structure was located in the western sector of the city, whereas the mosque was erected to the east of the tetrapylon.[107]

Given the position of these early eighth-century mosques with regard to their respective urban fabrics, scholars have persuasively highlighted the buildings' relationships to the market areas built or renovated by their early Muslim patrons. Bosra's mosque seems to have occupied a section of the portico of the nearby market street. Palmyra's mosque was erected near the Umayyad *sūq*, the first "Muslim" market discovered through archaeological excavations;[108] and a close association between its mosque's foundation and commercial expansion has also been suggested for Jerash. In the latter, the mosque was surrounded by shops realized by converting the porticoes of the two main roads into commercial units and adding new commercial structures to the circular facade of the tetrakionion (the circular square where a tetrapylon was usually located) (Figure 3.18).[109] Therefore, the Muslim sector of the city was generally focused on the marketplace area, whereas the Christian quarter was largely concentrated to the north, in the vicinity of the local monumental cathedral.

106 Procopius, p. 127; Zanini 1995.

107 For a brief overview of early medieval Palmyra, see Gawlikowski 2008. The exploitation of abandoned urban sites for building early mosques and the preservation of late antique Christian foundations are also features of the Islamization of al-Andalus in the eighth century (Calvo Capilla 2011, pp. 135–40).

108 As'ad and Stepniowski 1989.

109 Walmsley and Damgaard 2005, p. 377; Simpson 2008.

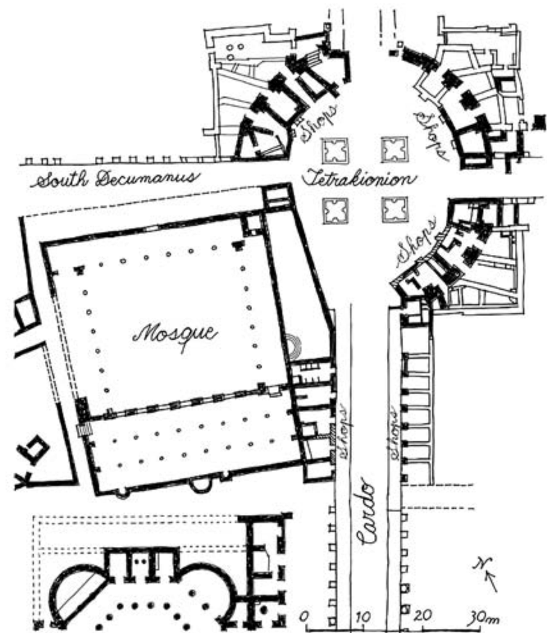

FIGURE 3.18 *Plan of the Great Mosque and market area of Jerash*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER SIMPSON 2009, FIG. 3.

Umayyad patronage played a direct role in revitalizing commercial areas in the conquered cities. This is seen in the mosaic inscriptions set in stone frames, located on both sides of the market entrance to the city of Baysan (Scythopolis) (Figure 3.19). The glass mosaics display a Kufic script in gold on a bluish background and include an invocation to God and the names of the caliph Hisham b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 723–43) and the governor of the Jordanian province (Plate 3).[110] The change in rulership made visible in gold on the walls of the gate of Baysan's marketplace reverberated in the city's financial transactions as well. Among the findings in the marketplace, one object in particular attests to the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule: a circular weight of approximately 84 grams, made of a copper alloy. As

110 Khamis 2001. For the role markets and industrial endeavors played in the revitalizing of conquered cities in the eighth century, see Foote 2000; Rahal 2000, pp. 166–87; Walmsley 2000, especially pp. 276–83.

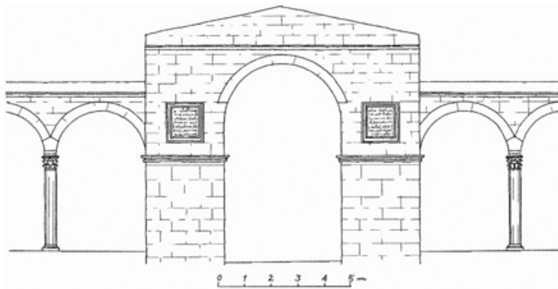

FIGURE 3.19 *Reconstruction of the façade of the marketplace of early medieval Baysan*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER KHAMIS 2001, FIG. 3.

shown by Miles and Khamis, this weight embodies one of the intermediate steps in the Muslim adoption and adaptation of late antique examples. It features the same shape and typology as its late antique predecessors, while substituting formulas and symbols.[111] Around the margins, the Kufic script communicates both the phrase *basmala* ("in the name of God") and the concept of *shahada* (the profession of faith), whereas within the inner circle, in the place where the cross often surmounting the Greek letters would indicate the value of the weight, it instead mentions the Muslim authority supervising (and guaranteeing) its manufacture. Under the new rule, trade activities were implemented for the whole population. Three balances chronologically dated to Baysan's Umayyad phase (before the 749 earthquake) show notches marking the weight in Greek as well as Arabic, suggesting that "business was carried out with both Greek-speaking and Arabic-speaking customers."[112] Written sources describe the rise of new mercantile areas in other cities as well, such as al-Raqqa, Damascus, and Homs.[113] New mosques were therefore also established in urban areas revitalized by the presence, renovation, or foundation of marketplaces.

The new market of al-Rusafa added in front of the St. Sergius complex at the time of the establishment of the new congregational mosque, shows how marketplaces often accompanied places of worship.[114] After all, both church and market were places that, due to their high volume of attendance, offered great public visibility for the new form of worship.[115]

Another pattern identified with regard to the foundation of congregational mosques is the association between places of worship and administrative centres such as the Dar al-Imara, or governor's palace, where local authorities resided.[116] Both written and material evidence indicates that mosques were often established alongside the Dar al-Imara. Mosques became the place where the authority made itself visible, especially during the Friday prayer. Palaces and mosques were at times even physically connected so as to allow the members of the court to move easily between the two. This was easy to plan in newly established towns such as Anjar (in present-day Lebanon) and Ayla (in present-day Jordan, where, however, the mosque likely dates to the Abbasid period) (Figure 3.20).[117] The same pattern was also followed in Jerusalem, where a palatial area was established on the southern and western sides of al-Haram al-Sharif, connected to the prayer hall of al-Aqsa Mosque through a private passage (Plate 4). Also similar was the case of Damascus, where the caliphal palace, or al-Khadra, located south of the

111 Miles 1962; Khamis 2002, pp. 148–54.

112 Tsafrir and Foerster 1997, p. 144.

113 Al-Baladhuri, p. 179; Yaqut al-Hamawi, v. Dimashq; Madelung 1986, pp. 170–72. New market areas were also established in Arsuf and Tiberias, although they were founded closer toward the Abbasid period (Roll 1987).

114 Ulbert 1992.

115 Binggeli (2006–07; 2012) has shown the vitality long after the seventh-century conquest of seasonal fairs related to Christian sites, during which pilgrimage rites were accompanied by trade activities.

116 Bacharah 1996.

117 On Anjar, see Chehab 1963 and Chehab 1975, 1978, 1993; Northedge 1994, pp. 234–44; Hillenbrand 1999. More recently, Finster reconsidered the Umayyad settlement (2003 and 2005). On Ayla (Aqaba), see Whitcomb 1994c, 1994d, 1998; on pre-Islamic Aqaba, see Meloy 1991; Parker 2000, pp. 133–34; 2002; 2003.

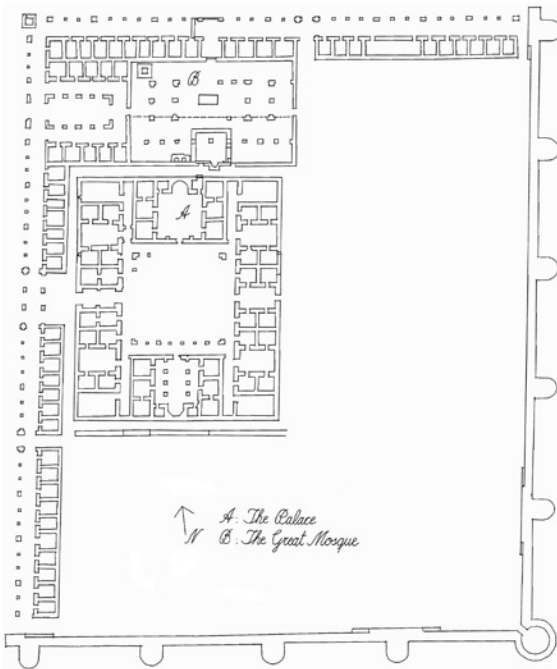

FIGURE 3.20 *Plan of Anjar (detail), Lebanon*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER FINSTER 2009, FIG. 01.

prayer hall, led directly to the qibla area of the mosque by means of a ceremonial gateway.[118] In the case of Cordoba, in ninth-century Umayyad al-Andalus, the palace and mosque were physically connected through a suspended gallery crossing the street, which facilitated the ruler's passage from one building to the other.[119] These examples help us understand why, in several cases, the palace was located beyond the qibla wall (Jerusalem, Damascus, Anjar) or linked to the mosque via a passage near the qibla wall (Cordoba); in both configurations the ruler, along with his deputies, had the option of reaching the maqsura (the protected area within the prayer hall to accommodate the court) in the area of the mihrab without passing in front of other people. It has been shown how this close relationship between palace and mosque was one of the distinctive features of mosque architecture under the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) and how this pattern was abandoned under the Abbasids, who were more inclined to build their palaces in secluded areas and parade through the city to reach the congregational mosques.[120]

Again, however, this pattern should not be considered antithetical to the contiguity detailed above. In the above-cited case of Kufa, the mosque adjacent to the church was likewise in direct relation to the Dar al-Imara in which the governor resided.[121] The same can be said of the satellite city of Fustat, established in the early eighth century under the governor ʿAbd al-Aziz at Helwan (Egypt), who had built its palace and mosque, as well as churches, for his dignitaries.[122] Another place where the church was set in direct connection to the Dar al-Imara compound is the Amman citadel. The most recent archaeological findings show how the late antique Christian complex located near the entrance underwent a restoration and remained in use after the conquest. The compound consisted of a three-aisled basilica, with several auxiliary buildings on its northern side. The ecclesiastical complex stood a few meters south of the street leading to the marketplace, in between the portal of the palatial complex and the mosque. The small congregational mosque located outside the grandiose Umayyad complex at the top of the citadel (provided with two different reception halls, residential quarters, and water facilities), was probably also attended by individuals beyond the immediate circle of the palace residents.[123]

118 On Jerusalem, see Ben Dov 1976, 1993; Rosen-Ayalon 1989, pp. 8–12; on Damascus, see Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 40–41; Flood 2001, pp. 147–72.

119 Creswell 1989, p. 293.

120 Grabar 1955, Chapter 1; Necipoğlu 1993b, pp. 5–11.

121 Massignon 1934; Mustafa 1963; Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 46–58.

122 On the palace-city of Helwan, see Abu Salih al-Armani, pp. 154–57; al-Maqrizi, vol. 1, pp. 568–72; and Kubiak 1997.

123 Arce recently addressed the importance of the ecclesiastical complex on the citadel beyond the seventh-century conquest (2005; 2008, p. 199). For the archaeological excavations carried out in the mosque area, see Almagro and Jiménez 2000.

As seen in the above discussion, the new rulers were eager to build their congregational places of worship in thriving urban areas. Marketplaces as well as areas housing cities' most important churches were especially sought-after locales. So, too, were governor's palaces, which, however, functioned as a sort of appendage of congregational mosques rather than dictating their position. This functional explanation will be further explored in the next chapter, but before doing so, we will first address the cultural importance of extant churches, as holy places for much of the early medieval population, including Muslims.

Muslims' Attraction to Churches

As shown by the endurance and mixed character of fairs originated in late antiquity and related to Christian holy places and festivities long after the seventh-century conquest, early medieval Muslims lived in a space and in a time that were largely ruled by Christian religiousness.[124] Indeed Muslims strove for establishing new holy places (see, for instance, the development of the tombs of the Companions at Mu'ta in the ninth century) and holy dates (the most important one being the hajj), but, also given the minority status of Muslims in the area, this process took some time to consolidate.[125] As the rhythm of life in the early middle ages was still articulated within a Christian paradigm, it is not surprising Christian holy places exerted on Muslims a considerable fascination. Focusing on written sources, Bashear investigated the attraction several churches had for Muslim visitors, concentrating on passages describing early Muslims praying in churches.[126] This phenomenon is radically different from the idea of the "partition" evoked by those sources, discussed above, mentioning a quarter or a half of various churches being used by Muslims. It also relies on different evidence, namely, the accounts of individual Muslims said to have attended or prayed in churches. It is interesting to note that in the sources examined by Bashear, churches are never described as former churches converted into mosques but merely as conventional Christian buildings.

One important feature of passages citing the Muslim use of churches is the preponderance of churches related to the lives of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, two of the Christian holy figures most venerated by Muslims, also appearing in the Qur'an. Some traditions artificially and retrospectively invoked the Prophet Muhammad who, during his (mystical) journey to Jerusalem, reputedly entered a few churches such as the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and, in Jerusalem, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary at the Garden of Gethsemane, the Tower of David, and the Church on the Mount of Olives. This might have provided a sort of ex post facto source of legitimization for the late-seventh-century and later Muslim practice of entering churches. The general tone of the traditions, in fact, focuses on the matter of lawfulness of visiting churches.

Besides the Prophet Muhammad, other important figures of the early days were cited. 'Umar b. al-Khattab as well as some Companions of the Prophet and early Umayyad caliphs and governors are said to have entered, visited, and prayed in exactly the same sites as the Prophet, with the addition of the Mihrab Maryam (the place where

124 Binggeli 2006–07; 2012.

125 Some (see Borrut's review in BSOAS 75.3, 2012, pp. 570–72) aspects of Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in the early period have been dealt with by McMillan (2011); the importance of the participation to the hajj in early Umayyad time has recently been stressed by Sijpesteijn (2014) who analyzes a papyrus mentioning an invitation to perform the pilgrimage. Around the eighth century Medina as well became the focus of pilgrimage, especially with regard to those places canonized as associated to the Prophet Muhammad (Munt 2014, pp. 123–47). One of the earliest sacred associations developed by Muslims in Bilad al-Sham was related to the commemoration of the Companions of the Prophet: Cobb 2002; Binggeli 2006–07, pp. 569–71; more recently the topic has been addressed by Nancy Khalek.

126 Bashear 1991.

Mary secluded herself when she became pregnant with Jesus—which Muslim sources located in Jerusalem) and Golgotha at Jerusalem, a church in Egypt, and a vaguely specified church in Damascus (perhaps the church in the *temenos* prior to its destruction in 706). A mihrab is said to have been added to sites such as the Tower of David (although the nature of this building before it was the focus of Muslim interest remains unclear), while, at the same time, the Mount of Olives and the related church, memorializing the site from where Jesus was believed to have ascended into heaven, became a place of Muslim pilgrimage as well, before the founding of a nearby mosque associated with the figure of ʿUmar.[127] Bashear argues that traditions favoring Muslim attendance at churches began to disappear (and, conversely, reproaches against the use of churches started to appear) around the mid-eighth century, suggesting that by this period an alternative and independent network of Islamic sacred spaces had emerged and was fully operational.[128]

The traditions collected by Bashear do not cite any partitioning of churches, but in a few cases have a few words to say about what Muslims should do (or not do) once they are inside a church. Among them: Muslims should not care about the presence of non-Muslims, but should rather turn toward the qibla and pray. In one instance, a tradition attributed to the Syrian Khalid b. Maʿdan (early eighth century) cites the prohibition against Muslims buying altars (or sanctuaries, *biʿa*) within churches. Bashear explains this as part of the shift in Muslim attitudes toward churches; as new Muslim places of worship began to appear, churches were no longer necessary and its attendance no longer tolerated.[129] At the same time, the prohibition suggests that earlier on it was possible to purchase an altar or a shrine within a particular church (honored because of the Christian or biblical figure worshipped within it), to be used as a qibla for Islamic prayer. It should be noted how neither Muslim congregational prayer nor conversion of these places into mosques is mentioned in this regard (Bashear makes the point that the topic of conversion never arises in these genres of traditions). It is reasonable to imagine that individual Muslims or very small groups of Muslims entered particular Christian spaces willing to conduct their personal prayers as a means of paying homage to these sites.

Further evidence of the ephemeral nature of the Muslim presence in churches is the absence of any visible material remnants of this presence. An interesting, though still ambiguous, case is the Kathisma Church, located on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem and recently excavated by the Israel Department of Antiquities (Figure 3.21).

An octagonal building, containing a large and prolonged apse on its east end and decorated with mosaics, was built in ca. 456 around a rock, which appears as the ultimate reason for its construction.

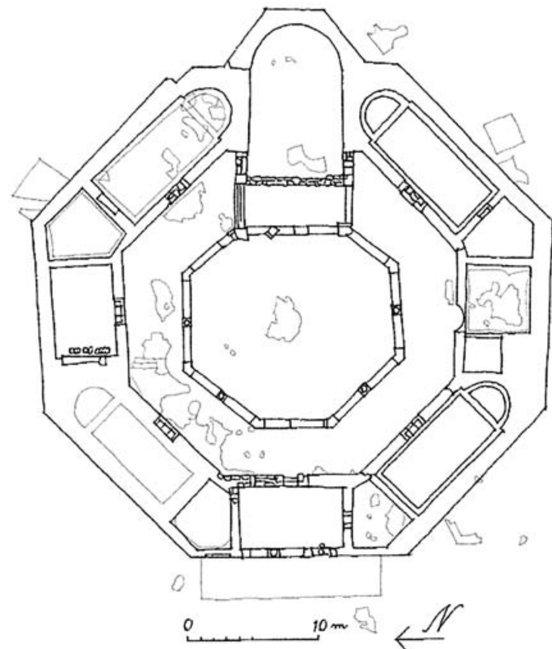

FIGURE 3.21 *Plan of the Church of the Kathisma in the eighth century*
SAFA MAHMOUDIAN AFTER AVNER 2010, FIG. 6.

127 Le Strange 1890, pp. 218–20; Elad 1995, pp. 138–41, 144–46.

128 Bashear 1991; Elad 1995, pp. 138–41.

129 Bashear 1991, p. 276.

Eight pillars, replaced by columns in the second phase, divided the interior of the church between the central space housing the rock and the first octagonal ambulatory surrounding it. Around the first octagon ran a second octagonal frame containing service rooms and four small chapels with apses. Water was channeled to the rock from a nearby source and was most likely used to produce eulogias with holy water.

In general terms, the structure derived from the typology of martyria, buildings erected around something, such as a body, a cenotaph, or a specific site (such as a rock), regarded as worthy of veneration. The rock in the Kathisma Church was considered the place where Mary had rested on her journey toward Bethlehem (*kathisma* in Greek means "seat").[130] Because of the geometry of the plan and the rock around which it was built, the Kathisma Church has been seen as one of the possible sources of inspiration for the Dome of the Rock, erected in Jerusalem in 692.[131]

That Muslims were aware of this structure is clear from the discovery of a niche between the ambulatory and the exterior octagon on the southern side of the building. The mihrab shape of the niche, the direction of its orientation, and its possible date suggested by the finding of one early-eighth-century coin, led the director of the excavation, Rina Avner, to theorize that the niche served as a mihrab for Muslims praying within the Christian building. To the same phase of construction belong some additional floor mosaics, displaying similarities to those of the Dome of the Rock. Both the winged crown motif and the composition featuring one large palm tree flanked by two smaller ones were created concurrently for the two buildings.

The Kathisma Church was likely among the Christian sites venerated by early Muslims because of its connection to the lives of Mary and Jesus. Jesus' birth is narrated in the Qur'an (XIX: 23–26) in a passage whose unusual narrative tone mentions the miraculous properties of a palm tree whose dates nourished Mary.[132] It has also been argued that the site was selected by Muslims as a sort of "Islamic nativity shrine intended to honor Isa (Jesus) and Maryam through a commemoration of the former's birth."[133] The site's power of attraction diminished in the centuries that followed, and it was ultimately abandoned by the eleventh century. It is interesting to observe how, on the one hand, Christians focused on Bethlehem all the events related to the birth of Jesus, while Muslims identified the sacred space of al-Haram al-Sharif as the place of his birth (the "Cradle of Jesus").[134] This accords well with Bashear's above-cited hypothesis of an increasing search for distinctive Muslim spaces after an early period in which some sacred sites and sources of holiness were shared between Christians and Muslims. The main issue regarding the Kathisma Church is to fully assess the Christian use of the site following the Muslim "intrusion." After the "intrusion," the eastern apse was blocked off, suggesting perhaps that Christians were banned from the church. At the same time, an inscription related to the Christian presence in the eight-ninth century has been found in one of the outer rooms on the southern side of the building.[135] Indeed, a full assessment of the nature of the Christian presence on the site after the seventh century is crucial for the present discussion.

Thus, congregational mosques' appearance in the sacred landscape seems to loosely coincide with the emergence of Muslim traditions hostile to the visitation and attendance of churches as well as the beginning of the *faḍāʾil* traditions, aiming at glorifying the virtues of Muslim Syria.[136] Visitation and attendance did not mean that churches

130 Avner 2006–07.

131 Grabar 2006, pp. 96–107; Avner 2010.

132 On this, see Mourad 2002.

133 Shoemaker 2003, p. 35.

134 Grabar 2006, p. 148.

135 Di Segni 2003b.

136 Cobb (2002) has shown that the traditions concerning the "virtues" of Syria and Palestine emerged early on after the seventh century.

were partitioned, but, rather, that Muslims, especially, but not only, newly-converted Muslims, were attracted to Christian holy sites. As shown in this chapter, from the start both prayer halls and congregational mosques comprised separate buildings from churches. Mosques represented an alternative to churches and were not (with the exception of Damascus) planned as physical replacements for them. Chapters 5 and 6 will address the ways in which the layout and decoration of mosques were intended to make Muslim places of worship as attractive as churches. Before moving to this, however, further comparisons and reflections on the role of the confessional context in the process of creating new places of worship are needed. As mentioned above, to suggest a consistent coincidence between the date of the conquest and the existence of a solid Islamic religious identity is misleading. The formative process out of which the new Muslim religious identity came to light is reflected in the way the new rulers, and, though at a slower pace, their loyal communities, made sense of the existent sacred landscape and, in turn, in the way extant non-Muslim communities coped with the changes brought by the seventh-century conquest.

CHAPTER 4

In and Out of Place

The present chapter offers a context to the history of places of worship outlined in the previous chapters. The early Middle Ages in the Mediterranean are a period during which confessional demography was dramatically altered. The edification of mosques was one of the elements of the conversion process to Islam. The case of mosques is intriguing because, on the one hand, they could have served a growing, expanding Muslim community, while, on the other hand, as highly visible landmarks, they could also be used to promote conversions. In other words, congregational mosques in the eighth century were both the result and the inceptor of processes of conversion to Islam. Eighth-century congregational mosques are also ideally located at the conclusion of the very early period that followed the revelation to Muhammad, a period about which, as said above, material culture related to an "Islamic" identity is rarely found. Such mosques made also clear that Islam, as a distinct religious system and as a related political authority, was, by the eighth century, formed and to remain for a long time. This chapter will assess two aspects. Firstly, it will scrutinize whether or not the contiguity between churches and mosques, identified as a recurrent pattern in the eighth century, had consistent parallels in other contexts characterized by processes of conversion. Secondly, an explanation of what in practical terms a process of conversion in the aftermath of the seventh-century conquest could mean and how this complex process was translated in visual terms will be offered.

The Coexistence of Religious Communities and the Location of Places of Worship

In the seventh century, the treaty arrangements established between the conquerors and the conquered communities had a binding nature, one that any subsequent intervention in the city had to take into account. With regard to the decision to have congregational mosques erected contiguous to extant churches, Muslims may have implemented practices and norms already in existence during late antiquity. More broadly, the overall system regulating the life of minority communities and their relationship to the ruling authorities might have heavily depended on late antique patterns. Some of the traditions collected under the name of the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* or (conditions/regulations of ʿUmar), discussed in Chapter 2, can be fruitfully compared with the regulations issued in the late antique Byzantine Empire. The Theodosian Codex, dated to 423, for instance, established that no more synagogues could be built within the empire, and that the existing ones had to remain in their present condition (*synagogae de cetero nullae protinus extruantur, veteres in sua forma permaneant*).[1] This was perfectly paralleled in the *shurūṭ ʿUmar*, in the prohibition against building new churches and in the limitation in restoring old ones.[2] Another issue was the actual implementation of such norms—often disregarded in both cases—but the regulations manifest similar features. Muslim concerns regarding the *nāqūs*, the bell distinguishing the Christian liturgy, also reflect the continuity between late antique and early medieval attitudes toward religious minorities. The *shurūṭ ʿUmar* banned the use of the *nāqūs* in public areas, restricting its use to churches. Several accounts enrich our knowledge of the actual implementation of the norm, which was part of a broader move to control the "acoustic environment"

1 Juster 1914, vol. 1, p. 465, n. 1 (C. Th. 16.8.25).

2 Tritton 1930, pp. 5–17.

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in pre-modern Mediterranean societies.[3] Once seated on the minbar in the mosque of Damascus, the Umayyad caliph al-Walid I is said to have been disturbed by the sound of a *nāqūs* coming from a nearby church (possibly the church within the *temenos*, prior to its destruction). This is given as one of the reasons for having the Christian complex destroyed, despite its protection by the treaty established during the conquest.[4] A similar tradition is preserved in both Ibn Shakir's and al-ʿUmari's fourteenth-century texts, which explicitly refer to the period when Muslims and Christians shared the ancient *temenos*, and had two discrete but nearby houses of worship. According to al-ʿUmari, the issue eventually led to the definitive confiscation of the ancient *temenos*: "the open-air portion of the site in which Muslims prayed had become too confining for them"; moreover, "they were 'irritated by the noisy beating of the call to prayer of the monks.'"[5] In Kufa, in lower Mesopotamia, the church the governor Khalid al-Qasri had built in honor of his Christian mother disturbed the Muslim neighbourhood because of its "audibility": al-Isfahani describes how the call of the *muʾadhdhin* answered the beat of the *nāqūs*, and how every time the preacher (*khaṭīb*) climbed up the minbar, the Christian believers raised their voices.[6] The necessity to respond to, and possibly overcome, the "distinctive sound" of the "other" community is also mentioned with regard to Jerusalem; as Livni-Kafri argues, early on, this concern was integrated into eschatological traditions, according to which these "daily confrontations" prefigured the announcement of what was to occur on the day of Christ's definitive return on earth.[7] As with several other concerns legally codified in the *shurūṭ ʿUmar*, the formal prohibition against using the *nāqūs* reflected issues that started probably to arise as soon as Muslims came to consolidate into a well distinguished alternative to other religious communities.[8] Late antique Christian-Jewish relations offer again a valuable point of comparison with regard to the issue of the audibility of places of worship. In the last quarter of the sixth century, the Jews of Terracina, an important city on the Appian Way in the Italian Peninsula, complained to Pope Gregorius I about having been repeatedly evicted from their synagogue by the local bishop. The alleged reason was that their singing (*vox psallentium*) bothered the implementation of offices in a nearby church. In his letter of 591, Gregorius Magnus authorized Terracina's bishop to confiscate the synagogue on the condition that the latter find within the city walls (*intra ipsum castellum*) a plot of land on which the Jews could erect a new synagogue.[9] This decision was in line with the general legal framework aiming at circumscribing Jews' initiatives. Freedom of worship was guaranteed to Jews on the condition that their songs and prayers not be heard in nearby churches.[10]

Two processes are here under scrutiny. The first is identifying the useful terms of comparison for the norms regulating how Muslims coped with the presence of large non-Muslim communities within their territories. Within this framework, the second is the impact these norms and regulations had on the transformation of sacred architecture—in other words, what strategies and legal formulae

3 Horden and Purcell 2000, pp. 421–22.

4 Al-Masʿudi, vol. 3, p. 375.

5 Khalek 2011, p. 77, n. 77; see also Flood 2001b, pp. 62–63.

6 Al-Faraj al-Isfahani, vol. 22, p. 14.

7 Livne-Kafri 2004, pp. 352–53.

8 The interfaith debate concerning the "acoustic environment" remains a constant as well in later medieval Mediterranean history. While Constable (2010) mainly focuses on post-Reconquista Iberia, in Syria, too, bells were exploited during the post-Crusade period in the encounter between Christians and Muslims (2010, pp. 90–94). See also the donation of two bells by the Muslim al-Zangi to the Jacobite community of Edessa in 1146, whose use was later prohibited because of their "noise" by the Ayyubid al-Malik al-ʿAdil in the early thirteenth century (Guidetti 2009, n. 117). "Battles of the bells" were also common in Europe during the "confessional age" (Kaplan 2007, pp. 209–11).

9 Gregorii I Papae, pp. 104–05 (II. 6).

10 Katz 1933, p. 122; Rabello 1988, vol. 2, p. 680.

were implemented to enlarge the space of the places of worship of a new and dominant religious community.

The Sasanian Empire might have also offered a useful model for norms regarding the status of minorities. During late antiquity, the different religious communities living under the Sasanians, whose official religion was Zoroastrianism, gradually came to be treated as social-legal entities. The notion of "protected" communities, conceived on the basis of "protection and internal autonomy" in exchange for paying taxes and rendering loyalty to rulers, might in fact have been one of the characteristics of the Sasanian legacy to Islam.[11] Within the Sasanian Empire, numerous Jewish and Christian groups experienced the status of "protected communities" in return for taxation, something later applied to their coreligionists under Islam. It is also possible that the very experience of "being minorities" under both Sasanian and Byzantine rule was shared across the border by members of sympathetic Christian groups communicating in Aramaic.[12] The poll tax (*jizya*) later charged to non-Muslims by the new rulers (regarded as a type of compensation for the failure to adopt Islam; Qur'an, IX: 29), has been explained as "a concrete continuation of the taxes paid to earlier regimes" (both Sasanian and Byzantine).[13]

With regard to the process of adding new holy places to an already existent sacred landscape, it is hard to assess whether or not did the Arabian Peninsula in the days of the Prophet Muhammad offer any template. Medina was composed of a series of satellite settlements and populated by both pagans and Jews. The settlement in town of Muhammad and his Companions who have migrated from Mecca included the establishment of a Haram (sacred area) in the valley of Medina.[14] One passage of the Charter of Medina (see Chapter 2) stipulates the inviolable nature of a portion of the town for the people involved in the agreement, including some Jewish tribes and clans residing in the area who were allowed to retain their own religion (*dīn*).[15] The available written evidence, however, describes the Haram of Medina in late antique Arabian terms: a space in which fauna and flora were protected and any activity of hunting and harvesting prohibited. Also because of the short term coexistence of different religious communities, if any, the arrangement regarding the houses of worship of Jews and Muslims went unreported.

The later corpus of Islamic traditions (*ḥadīths*) does not offer directive concerning the position of the mosque, with the exception of the prohibitions against trading in it or associating it with a grave.[16] These were, however, proscriptions, which likely suggest the existence of such practices; mosques were in fact located close to markets, whereas the graves of the holy heroes of the very early days, as much as of the pre-Islamic figures acknowledged by Islam, became, with the passing of time, attractive sites for Muslims.[17]

The only evidence for a normative text mentioning the proximity of mosques with churches appears in one of the versions of the *shurūṭ ʿUmar*. One passage encourages the contiguity of mosques with churches: "it will be possible for me (ʿUmar) to take (the portion) of the *qibla* of the precinct (*ḥayr qibli*) of their churches for the

11 Morony 1974; Hoyland 1997, pp. 17–18, Levy-Rubin 2011, pp. 8–31, 116–36.

12 Segal 1955; Stroumsa 2007, p. 165.

13 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., v. Djizya.

14 Serjeant 1978; Rubin 1985; Lecker 2004; Munt 2014, pp. 42–93.

15 Donner 2010, pp. 72–75, 227–32.

16 See Wensinck 1960, pp. 153–55; Ayyad 2010, pp. 143–47. Jewish traditions, instead, suggest the best site for sacred architecture as a rabbinical prescription directs that a synagogue be built at the highest point of a city, taking the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem as a model. This tradition is quoted by Wharton (2000, p. 204), who points out how the synagogue of Jerash seems to have abided by such directives.

17 It must be added that a veneration for the graves of the Companions seem to have developed only in the early ninth century, under the Abbasids (Munt 2014, pp. 118–19).

mosques of the Muslims because these are in the centre (*awsaṭ*) of the cities."[18]

The thirteenth-century author Ghazi b. al-Wasiti assembled traditions and anecdotes on the history of the relations between Muslims and *dhimmi*. The above passage, referring to Syria, deserves attention for two reasons. The first part seems to be an exact description of the configuration in several cities described so far. The qibla side of the precinct of the churches (that is, the portion of church complexes directed toward the south) requisitioned by or given to Muslims, perfectly matches what occurred, for example, in Aleppo. Given the nature of these traditions, however, it is more likely this was but a crystallization in the normative and legal handbooks of the existing and ongoing modus operandi. In other words, the use of the southern part of a precinct would presumably have allowed Muslims to leave extant, consecrated Christian buildings intact, to have their mosques rightly orientated and not aligned with churches, and, finally, to have their mosques situated in strategic and central locales. The second element worthy of consideration is the reference to churches' centrality in the cities. In addition to their religious roles, churches' importance at the time of the seventh-century conquest also lay in their location within an urban fabric. They often occupied a strategic position; al-Baladhuri, describing the conquest of Rur in Sindh (modern Rohri, Pakistan), observes that in the Indus region a Magian temple often stood in the center of the cities, a situation he likens to other places where Buddhist temples, Christian churches, and Jewish synagogues were erected on the same site.[19]

In cities with a long urban tradition, the Great Church was built either in the area where the Hellenistic or Roman temple once stood (the patterns for this conversion are discussed below), or in the middle of areas urbanized during late antiquity.[20] The shrinking of the size of cities like Palmyra, for instance, totally changed the urban balance between center and periphery when compared with the previous, classical period.[21] By only focusing on the location of churches, and temporarily dismissing their religious and sacred qualities, it is possible to assimilate churches to markets and the main urban axes. All of these were places that played an important role in social life, hence operating with the utmost degree of functionality (to serve the population) and visibility (to impress it). Through the treaty, the new rulers maintained control over the properties of the former government elite, who took flight with the Byzantine army. Palaces, houses, and plots of land were included among the new properties.[22] This was perhaps also the case with regard to parcels of church precincts. The bishop's palace or the clergy's residence often stood within these precincts; such structures were associated with authority by the local population,

18 Gottheil 1921, p. 390.

19 Al-Baladhuri, p. 439.

20 The locale of congregational churches in the Christianization of Roman cities depended on several factors. It should be noted that, whereas the Islamization of Christian towns occurred, at least in the Syrian region, within a generally favorable economic framework, the Christianization of Roman towns took place amid the aftermath of a contraction of urban life, on both an economic and a demographic level. Generally speaking, the locale of episcopal churches depended on the availability of building plots and on the generosity of donors. Private residences were sometimes transformed into churches, which, in turn, and with the passing of time, were enlarged into greater complexes. Intra-muros churches, when not in the center of cities, were strategically situated in relation to urban life (main gates, road axes, and the like). With regard to early Christianity, besides intra-muros, extra-muros churches also played an important role, a phenomenon not replicated with regard to mosques in the early medieval period. Extra-muros foundations were often related to cemetery areas (Marano 2012, pp. 163–64, 180–81).

21 According to Kennedy (2007, p. 68), the plague of the second half of the sixth century reduced the population in the Levant by approximately one third, with clear repercussions for the development of the urban fabric.

22 Kennedy 2007, pp. 85–87.

and, thus, considered fitting venues for displaying the new rule.[23]

The idea of building mosques nearby churches, however, is still with no direct sources of inspiration. The status of Jewish and Christian communities under Byzantine and Sasanian rule offer a consistent parallel for explaining the legal status of *ahl al-kitāb* under Islam, but not for the position of religious buildings in multireligious cities. It has been suggested that the religious and social processes related to the de-paganization in the Mediterranean might also have had an impact on Islamic practices.[24] As regards the transformation of the sacred landscape, it is worth noting how the most important Islamic building, the Kaʿba in Mecca, was the result of transforming a pagan sanctuary into a monotheistic one. According to the Muslim narrative, up to the time of the Qurʾanic revelation, waves of paganism had periodically diverted Arab society from the path of monotheism. The latter was introduced to Arabs by Adam, reintroduced by prophets such as Noah and Abraham, and ultimately reformulated by Muhammad.[25] The Kaʿba's trajectory as a sacred building follows this path. Originally conceived as a place of worship of God for Adam, the Kaʿba fell later into a state of disrepair. Abraham rebuilt it as a monotheistic temple, but because of the spread of paganism the building was corrupted as a polytheistic temple. Muhammad recovered the original form of worship, and in so doing he transformed a late antique pagan temple into a monotheistic one.[26] Written sources tell us the conversion implied the obliteration of pagan idols (a possible calque of what hagiographic literature claims Christian saints had done throughout late antiquity),[27] the erasure of figurative images depicting angels and prophets, and a new focus on the black stone, located at the eastern corner of the structure. Though contemporary non-Muslim sources confirm the centrality of the Kaʿba since an early period,[28] such a linear account seems the product of later Islamic sources that accentuate the rise of Islam as a monotheist burst within a pure polytheist context.[29] Pre-Islamic rituals traditionally associated with the black stone and the Kaʿba, such as pilgrimage and circumambulation, were adopted by Muhammad. However, given that it was considered a monotheistic place *ab initio*, the Kaʿba was not converted into a place of prayer, but, rather, into a center toward which all other prayers were to be directed, and, although several passages in the Qurʾan seem to legitimate the conversion of pagan temples into mosques, the archeological evidence in this regard is extremely scarce. In other words, the conversion of temple cellas—whatever form they took in late antique Arabia—into mosques, seems not to have been implemented.[30] In *ḥadīth* literature, the Companions of the Prophet are said to have carried out the destruction of several other idols, though there is no mention of the fate of the surrounding structures. In the case of Dhu al-Khalasa, known in pre-Islamic times as the "southern Kaʿba"—to distinguish it from Mecca's Kaʿba, known as the "northern" one—the entire complex was apparently destroyed by Jarir Abdallah al-Bajali on Muhammad's orders.[31] Muhammad

23 A possible related case is that of Salamis-Constantia in Cyprus, in which the conqueror—said to be Muʿawiya—reportedly used the bishop's palace as his residence (Palmer 1993, pp. 174–75) (see above Chapter 2, footnote 7).

24 Fattal 1995, p. 178; Caseau 2001, pp. 23, 29–30. See also Stroumsa 2007, pp. 151–53.

25 Elias 2012, pp. 108–11.

26 Ibn Ishaq, pp. 552–55. A site's restoration to its previous and original form of worship is also offered in the *Vita Constantini* as the explanation for the destruction of Hadrian's temple in Jerusalem and the construction of the complex of the Holy Sepulcher over the rediscovered cave of the sepulcher of Christ under Constantine (Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, vol. 3, pp. 26–29).

27 Caseau 2001b, pp. 79–86.

28 Hoyland 1997, pp. 547–50.

29 Hawting 1999, pp. 20–44.

30 Johns 1999, pp. 95–96.

31 See also the destruction of three of the most important shrines of pre-Islamic Arabia besides the Kaʿba at Mecca: the sanctuaries of Manah at Qudaid, Allat at al-Taif,

reportedly advised the Banu Hanifa to convert (perhaps temporarily) the church (*biʿa*) of a monk into a mosque by cleansing it with water. The same focus on purifying a Christian place of worship to conduct a Muslim prayer within—rather than indications of how "physically" a church could have been converted into a mosque (direction of prayer, mihrab, decoration)—appears in one further tradition. The caliph ʿUmar is said to have given the same advice on the means of purifying a church, to the Muslim community of the city of Najran.[32] As Bashear observes, the only early tradition concerning the conversion of a space formerly occupied by a different place of worship as a site for a mosque, can be seen in the town of Ta'if, where the Prophet allowed local Muslims to build a mosque on the site of the previous pagan temple.[33] However, as said above, evidence drawn from later Islamic texts might be misleading, and, as the physical religious landscape of late antique Arabia is still far from being fully assessed, practices of conversion in Arabia before and after Muhammad are difficult to ascertain.[34]

Within the larger Syrian region, the three centuries prior to the advent of Islam were marked by the process of Christianization, a development that implied the transformation of the sacred landscape. Saradi-Mendelovici argues that because of the slow pace of Christianizing the population, and in order to locate a balance within a mixed society, the empire and church authorities were prudent in their actions toward pagan society.[35] In actuality, the late antique Mediterranean architectural landscape was identifiable as well through pagan buildings; for instance, as late as the eighth century, a temple was considered appropriate in the pavement mosaics of St. Stephen's Church at Umm al-Rasas, for conveying the cityscape of Neapolis.[36] This is hardly surprising, given that in sixth-century Palestine, notwithstanding the peak of Christianization, several pagan shrines remained active and attended by the population.[37] With regard to the conversion of pagan temples into Christian churches, recent scholarship has shown how the transition was less traumatic than is suggested in primary literary sources.[38] Archaeological excavations reveal how the transformation of a temple into a church did not accord with the actual jettisoning of the pagan use of the building. There was a hiatus between a temple's abandonment and its eventual conversion into a church, to the extent that "possibly Philae represents the only completely unambiguous case of immediate change-over in cultic use from an active pagan temple to a regular church."[39] The reasons for transforming the sacred landscape were thus manifold. The end of a pagan temple's life was a multifaceted process that included ruinous decay, destruction, and, ultimately, the Christian adoption and modification of the site after its abandonment. Ideological motivations and related legal underpinnings also varied, encompassing moves to perpetuate the sacredness of a site in order to

and al-Uzza at Hurad; as related in the *Kitāb al-Aṣnām* (Ibn al-Kalbi, pp. 12–23).

32 Sabiq 1985, p. 75. Najran is among the Arabian sites in which written sources mention the existence of churches prior to Islam (King 1980).

33 Bashear 1991, pp. 274, 277, 279. It is worth mentioning that sprinkling water was also used by Christians to transform regular houses into purified houses of prayer. In the case of Christians, however, the cleansing was accompanied by an invocation of Christ (Yasin 2009, p. 39).

34 The picture offered by Finster stresses the role of Christian communities and their churches in late antique Arabia; similarly to what occurred in the Mediterranean area the life of temples seems to have stopped in between the fourth to the sixth century (2010, pp. 68–70).

35 Saradi-Mendelovici 1990, pp. 47–50.

36 Bowersock 2006, pp. 77, 113–22.

37 Bar 2008.

38 Caseau 2001b. Yet, primary Christian sources seem to reflect the growing involvement of church officials, rather than civic authorities, in tackling the issue after the legal implementation of the prohibitions against pagan activities (Fowden 1978; for the anti-pagan legislation, see Bayliss 2004, pp. 9–11).

39 Hemmel, Gotter, and Hahn 2008, p. 12; see also Caseau 2001b, p. 105.

facilitate conversions from the old religious order to the new one, to eradicate the temple as a symbolic assertion of the Christian victory over paganism, or, more mundanely, to destroy a temple due to the need to take possession of the plot of land for new construction.[40] The nature of pagan building and the associated rites triggered different responses among Christians. Most concerns were about the presence of demons that supposedly inhabited the sites; one response was to occupy a site after its purification, whereas a second option was to leave a building abandoned so as not to disturb such supernatural forces (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).[41]

In the early period, Christians had to accommodate themselves within a landscape dominated by temples, some of which, despite the increasing legislative acts aiming at suppressing them, were still in use and served as sacred foci for the population. In some cases, coexistence also meant a certain degree of interaction between different communities. This might have been related to the popular veneration of specific figures, as well as of natural sites related to beliefs concerning miraculous healing.[42] Cruz-Uribe has recently studied the archaeological evidence unearthed in the Kharga Oasis in Egypt. The first results show how, in the early Byzantine period, when temples were still important civic and religious landmarks for the local population, the new churches backed by the imperial authorities were built in the same area as temples, although without directly interfering with the (pagan) worship of the local population.[43] In the case of the large temple of Seth, at Hibis, the capital of Kharga Oasis, early Christians simply built their church adjacent to the temple, as a sort of lean-to, attached to the temple wall, with doors side by side. This pattern might have also been followed in other cases.[44] It also appears likely that even immediate conversions, such as the abovementioned building of a church on the site of the temple of Philae under Justinian, occurred after three centuries of

40 Bayliss 2004, pp. 4, 26; Hemmel, Gotter, and Hahn 2008, pp. 7–9. As regards such practices in Egypt, Bagnall dates the disappearance of temples from the Egyptian sacred landscape to the period beginning with the time of Constantine and ending with the Council of Chalcedon. The temples were plundered, reused as military garrisons, or transformed into churches. Bagnall, however, also stresses how, archaeologically, "there is precise information about the abandonment of very few temples" (1996, p. 264; see also pp. 53–54, 261–68). For more general and extra-architectural aspects of the transformation of sites from pagan to Christian, see Trombley 1993–94, vol. 1, pp. 123–86.

41 Caseau 2001b, pp. 82–86; Bayliss 2004, pp. 59–61. Outlining a comparison with the alleged Islamic conversion of churches into mosques, Bayliss quotes Hasluck (1927–29). Hasluck's work is informed by an anthropological quest concerning the transference of sacredness, analyzing an impressive quantity of (unfortunately) de-historicized data. Apart from a few regional surveys (for Ottoman Istanbul, see Kırımtayıf 2001), there is no existing survey or database regarding the conversion of churches into mosques.

42 See Gregory 1986, pp. 236–42; Bayliss 2004, pp. 44–46. Gregory emphasizes how the "religious expression of late antique paganism had little in common with the stories of the Olympian gods ... Instead it was much concerned with the wonders of the magicians and the supernatural feats of the 'sophists' such as Maximus and Iamblichos. Their activities and those of their rivals, the Christian holy men, touched people directly and spoke to their common and individual fears" (1986, pp. 241–42). In Egypt, the "Red Monastery" of Sohag was built in the vicinity of sacred buildings dating from Hellenistic and Roman times, within a sacred area dating back to the Pharaonic era (Capriotti Vittozzi 2005; Falcioni and Pietrangeli 2005). On the interactions between Christians and pagans, especially in the fourth century, see Török 2005, pp. 86–97; for a particular focus on Alexandria, see Kiss 2007, pp. 191–95.

43 Professor Eugene Cruz-Uribe, "Christians Lost in the Desert: Work at Kharga Oasis," part of ARCE lecture series, UC Berkeley, May 18, 2008.

44 See, for example, the settlement of 'Ayn el-Tarakwa in the Kharga Oasis, where in the northern half of the urban enclosure a church was situated before the entrance of the temple's sanctuary; Ikram and Rossi 2007, pp. 169–72. With regard to Greece, see Gregory's list of sites in which Christian basilicas were built in close proximity to important pagan sanctuaries (1986, p. 236).

FIGURE 4.1 *The Church of St. George, sixth century, Ezraʿa*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

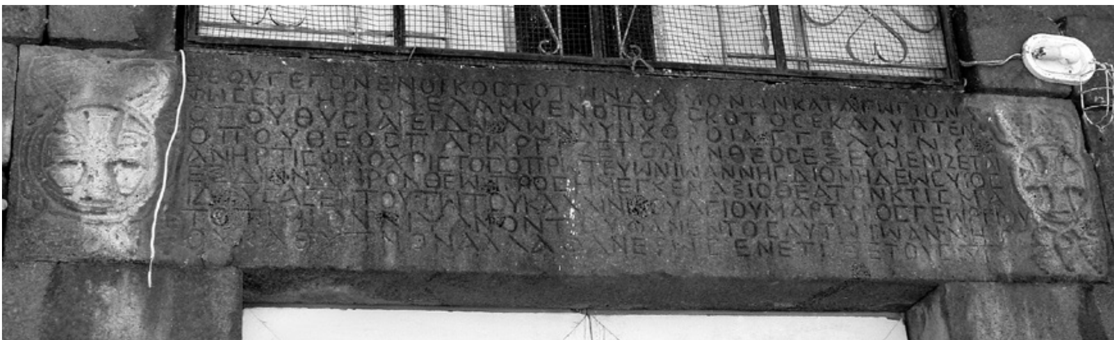

FIGURE 4.2 *Lintel of the main gate of the Church of St. George; according to the inscription the church replaced a residence of demons (a temple), sixth century, Ezraʿa*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

transition in which churches had coexisted with active temples.[45] Cruz-Uribe's ongoing research, together with the recent systematization of the data related to the disappearance of hundreds of

45 The Christianization of the temple included the carving of crosses and Greek inscriptions in praise of the bishop Theodore, the removal of heads and limbs that had originally appeared on the wall reliefs, the whitewashing of the reliefs on the interior of the temple, and the installment of an altar in the former *naos*

temples across the Mediterranean region, provides the early process of Islamization in Bilad al-Sham with an important parallel. Furthermore, Bayliss's category of the "*temenos*-church"—the "church constructed within the walls of an ancient sacred precinct yet without incorporating any standing remains"—might include instances of the "coexistence of pagan and Christian worship or veneration within a communal compound."[46] This does not mean that early Muslims adopted the modus operandi of Christians toward pagans, but, instead, that similar circumstances led to similar solutions. The parallel, in fact, is also evident, as far as the cultural and social conditions of a ruling minority professing a faith different from that of the majority of the population. In this regard, late antique Byzantine rule in Egypt and early medieval Islamic rule in Syria manifest similar patterns.

When examining religious sites within a process of conquest and conversion, two factors should be taken into account. On the one hand, the new religious elite was in search of a dominant and strategically located site for the new place of worship, while, on the other hand, certain extant sites, by virtue of their sacred traditions, essentially functioned as magnets for the faithful. Not only were worshippers accustomed to attending such sites, in some cases even beyond their own religious affiliation, but, especially in the context of the three Abrahamic religions, narratives intermingled, often making the sacredness of one place dependent on another one. Capernaum is a good case in point. There, Christians initially had a *domus ecclesiae*, and, later, a larger octagonal foundation close to the extant synagogue, both devoted to the figure of St. Peter. With regard to this decision, two different explanations have been set forth. The first contends that the preservation of the synagogue, which came to be dominated by the new Christian buildings, was necessary in order to reinforce the Christian account of Christ's rejection of the synagogue and recruitment of the early apostles from a nearby village; the second stresses the strength of Capernaum's Jewish community that eventually forced Christians to locate their church as close as possible to, but separate from, the synagogue preserving the memory they intended to honor.[47] Though diverging in their analysis of the power relations between the two communities, both theories maintain that Christians wanted their sacred site located near the synagogue of Capernaum, and that the sacredness of the second depended upon the first.

When the process of conversion is put into perspective, it is evident that Islamic attitudes toward non-Muslim communities and places of worship moved along established paths. Coexistence and contiguity, two features characterizing early medieval Muslim interaction with other communities and sacred buildings, were also experienced and similarly articulated in other contexts, including the late antique Mediterranean area, as the result of efforts to negotiate between the desire for distinction expressed by the new belief and the endeavor to come to terms with active and numerous communities provided with powerful sacred sites and buildings.

Communities' Encounters

Following a well-established pattern, direct conversions of sacred sites were rare in the post-conquest

(the innermost most sacred chamber of the temple); Nautin 1967. The Christianization process of the island of Philae, along with the geopolitical context for the decision to do so, has been highlighted by Trombley (1993–94, vol. 2, pp. 225–39) and Hahn (2008). See also the case of Aphrodisias, in which the temple was converted into a church during the second half of the fifth century. While the temple was left abandoned before being converted to a church, local pagans, who during antiquity had inhabited the city together with Christians and Jews, remained attached to the site (Chaniotis 2008).

46 Bayliss 2004, p. 7.

47 Wharton (2000, pp. 201–02) argues the first hypothesis, whereas Brenk (1991), and, after him, Grabar (2006, pp. 100–01), favor the second one.

period. Rather, the coexistence of different places of worship was more often the case. Though often located alongside one another, churches and mosques comprised separate buildings. Since buildings used as mosques and churches were discrete entities, what about the communities using them? One paragraph of Chapter 3 deals with traditions of Muslims praying within some churches. How did people interact with other communities' members and respective places of prayer? What were the steps within the process of conversion (a somewhat long process that eventually made Muslims the majority of the population)?

Recent literature on conversion in the early centuries of Islam has made clear that conversion can no longer be understood as a radical break from one system of belief to a new one, but rather as a multi-generational process during which more and less important elements of different belief systems are lost and acquired.[48] With regard to two different processes of conquest, as in late antique Syria and late medieval Anatolia, Walmsley and Kafadar, an archaeologist and a historian, respectively, use notions such as "resiliency" and "plasticity" to analyze the changes underwent by the conquered society.[49] In fact, there is an inherent ability in social groups to cope with abrupt changes that provides them with adequate resources to face the disappearance of an old order and rapidly accommodate to a new one. On the political level, for instance, it has been noted how Christian communities subordinated under the Byzantines exploited the post-conquest situation to negotiate a better place in the decision-making process.[50] At the same time, on a cultural level, different groups developed their own means of adapting to the new world dominated by Islam.

The adoption of the Arabic language by the Melchite communities (Melkite was the name of Chalcedonians living under Islam) is a case in point. Although within Christian circles, Greek was not entirely abandoned, the time elapsing between the works of two Melkite theologians such as John of Damascus (676–749), who wrote in Greek, and Theodore Abu Qurra (750–823), who instead used Arabic, illustrates the changes occurring within some Christian communities in the Dar al-Islam. Arabic slowly entered the life of Melkite Christian communities initially as a daily language, later in the liturgy, and finally as the language for holy texts.[51] According to the ninth-century Arabic polymath al-Jahiz, who in his *Risāla fī radd ʿalā al-naṣārā* (*Response to the Christians*) discusses the interactions between Christianity and Islam, the contacts between the two communities, including the spread of Arabic among Christians, was supposedly made easier by the fact that several Arab groups had been Christianized prior to Islam.[52] It should be mentioned, however, that elsewhere in the Mediterranean, in regions where Arabs did not have a significant presence before Islam, as had been the case in Syria, the ease with which Christians dropped their "original" language for the one brought by the conquerors alarmed some contemporaries. In ninth-century Spain, Paulus Alvarus lamented the attraction exerted by the "new" Arabic literature on the Andalusian Christian youth. According to Alvarus, the risk was that they would lose their Latin traditions.[53] As shown by Iskander,

48 Tannous 2010; Papaconstantinou 2015; Sizgorich 2015.

49 Kafadar 1995, pp. 19–28; Walmsley 2007, pp. 146–48.

50 See, for instance, the Syrian Orthodox Theodotus, who was appointed the "head and judge of the Christian ethnos" in the city of Amida (Diyarbakır); Palmer 2006, p. 127.

51 The notion that Melkite Christians embraced Arabic in the eighth century has been firmly argued by Griffith, who also emphasizes how Arabic became a distinctive cultural attribute of the Chalcedonians living in the Dar al-Islam (1997b, pp. 24–30; 2008, pp. 45–74). A slightly different view is set forth by Mavroudi, who argues, instead, on behalf of a prolonged presence of Greek among Christian circles (2008, p. 322).

52 Al-Jahiz, pp. 14–15.

53 Paul Alvarus, pp. 314–15. Cantarino (1978, pp. 54–60, 108–9) stresses the existence of different reactions among Christians to the Muslim rulers. The term "mozarab," for instance, was coined within the Christian

the Christian Coptic text the *Apocalypse of Samuel* (variously dated from the late eighth to the early eleventh century) mainly deals with issues related to the increasing likeness and intermingling of Christian Copts and Muslim Arabs in early medieval Egypt. Among the threats to Coptic identity cited by Samuel, the bishop of Qalamun, were the use of Arabic names by Copts and the adoption of the Arabic language by priests even within the sanctuaries. In the face of these threats, Copts who resisted Arabization received promises that they would enter heaven.[54] From the perspective of the elites, the adoption of Arabic was perilous; if, on the one hand, Arabic would have enabled clergymen and intellectuals to engage in interreligious debates at the caliphal court,[55] on the other, it also allowed new theological definitions and expressions to invade the life of Christian communities. In fact, even slight changes to the definition of one's belief carried the risk of sliding toward another faith. As argued by Tannous, the path from "being Christian" to "being Muslim" was a fraught one, in which conversion was but the last of numerous stations or a process involving generations.[56]

The Chalcedonian ninth-century author of *The Summary of the Ways of Faith* underlines the radical differences between the Christian and Muslim understandings of the same theological formula:

"So their saying *lā ilāha illā Allāh* [there is no God but Allah] and what we say is one in words but very different in meaning. That is because when we the assembly of Christians say *lā ilāha illā Allāh* we mean by it a living God, endowed with a living Spirit which enlivens and lets die, an intellect which gives determination to whatever it wills, and a Word by means of which all being comes to be."[57]

This theologian also describes a group of Christians who had started to define their own faith through the "language" and "tenets" of Muslims; according to him, these Christians are "the hypocrites among us, marked with our mark, standing in our congregations, contradicting our faith, forfeiters of themselves, who are Christians in name only." He identifies the causes of this slide from the rails of orthodoxy as such: "a group born among them, grown up with them, and educated in their culture. They conceal their faith, and disclose to them what suits them." Indeed, the Islamic milieu in which the new generations of Christians were raised prompted this inclination to "accommodate," in order to suit the idiosyncrasies of Islam with regard to Christian faith. The latter mainly concerned the nature of Christ: "Although they give voice to something of the confession of Christ our Lord, they voice only that in which those who govern their affairs [the Muslims] agree with them, and that to which they have no objection against them."[58] Similar themes echo in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, a Western Syrian chronicle addressing events prior to the year 775. Addressed in particular are some converts to Islam, labelled as "renegades," described as professing a "new, lower Christology," and for whom Christ was "only" the word and spirit of God.[59]

It is worth mentioning that a similar course of events may be seen in al-Andalus, where a theological gray zone between Islam and Christianity

milieu as a pejorative to denote that part of the Christian population (both commoners as well as the Church hierarchy) that was more collaborative with the new masters (see also Griffith 2008, p. 152).

54 Iskander 1998, pp. 224–27; see also Parker 2013, pp. 232–33; Peers 2007, p. 37; Hoyland 1997, p. 286.

55 A summary of the reasons and repercussions for the adoption of Arabic by Christian communities is offered in Griffith 2008, pp. 45–105.

56 Tannous 2010, vol. 1, pp. 395–96, 417–19, 431–33.

57 Griffith 1990, p. 23.

58 On this text, see Khalil Samir 1986 and Griffith 1986 and 1990 (consisting of articles dedicated to the unpublished text, preserved in the British Library: Or. Ms. 4950). A partial Arabic edition of the text is provided in Maʿluf 1903; see Griffith 1986, pp. 124–25. All passages come from Griffith's translation of some sections (1990, pp. 18–24; 2008, pp. 58–59).

59 Tannous 2010, vol. 1, pp. 435–37.

is in evidence. The Christian scholars Paul Alvarus (d. 861) and Eulogius (d. 859) both remark on the existence of a malicious Christian faction denying the divine nature of Christ. Members of this group were used to identifying Christ through the terse formula of *verbum dei*, an exact replica of the Islamic expression for defining Jesus, acknowledging Jesus as a prophet but not the son of God. According to the two theologians, this was the outcome of the (dangerous) effort to soften the differences from the Muslim faith by modifying some Christian tenets.[60]

Returning to the eastern Mediterranean, the work of the Melkite bishop of Harran, Theodore Abu Qurra (ca. 755–830), is also infused with similar concerns. The *Treatise in Defense of the Veneration of Holy Icons* addresses developments among Christians that he found alarming. For example, he describes Christians who stopped worshiping icons: "Abba Yannah, our brother, you who are here with us in Edessa, have informed us that many Christians are abandoning the prostration to the icon of Christ our God."[61] Abu Qurra is here referring to the famous holy icon of Edessa (the Mandylion), deemed as having not been made by human hands. While the intra-Christian theological discussions concerning iconomachy remain in the background of the author's text, his focus is on the harmful influence of the "Anti-Christians, especially those claiming to have in hand a scripture sent down from God" (the Muslims), who "are reprimanding them for their prostration to these icons, and because of it they are imputing to them the worship of idols, and the transgression of what God commanded in the Torah and the prophets, and they sneer at them."[62] Continuing, Abu Qurra writes of how the pressure exerted by ruling Muslims on the local population gave way to the phenomenon of self-censorship: "The Christians in whose hearths the ridicule of strangers' lodges" were deceived by the influence of the anti-Christians, namely Muslims and Jews. Eventually, he asks his coreligionists to stand firm in their belief and orthodox traditions before the reproaches of the anti-Christians, because "anyone who abandons this practice cuts himself off from what the others deserve."[63]

In the seventh and eighth centuries one can observe two theoretical poles, "orthodox" Christianity and "orthodox" Islam (with the latter in its formative stage), joined by the bridge of conversion. Along this bridge, one may locate the daily religious practices of the vast majority of the common people. These in-between positions were acrimoniously criticized by those who constantly patrolled orthodoxies' boundaries (theologians, Christian clergymen, Muslim legislators), for fear that the intermingling of the members of the different communities would serve to dissolve their religious and social differences.[64]

Although the exact rate of conversions from Christianity to Islam is unknown, most scholars agree that the majority of the population in Syria and Palestine were Muslim by the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[65] The slow erosion of the Christian population was due to forced and mass conversions, as well as to conversions made for reasons of convenience or expediency (in order to change one's civil status and therefore, especially in the later period, alleviate the tax burden).[66] At the same time, it is also likely that some community conversions, especially in rural areas, occurred because of the increasing weakness of the Christian institutional network. The latter was supposed to provide the population with sacraments, basic

60 Paul Alvarus, pp. 201–10, 281; Eulogius, pp. 375, 487. On the issue of Adoptionism in al-Andalus, see Colbert 1962, pp. 64–85. On the Christological compromise that emerged within Christianity in the face of Islam, see Coope 1995, pp. 45–47.

61 Theodore Abu Qurra, pp. 28–29.

62 Ibid., p. 29.

63 Ibid., pp. 93–95.

64 Tannous 2010, vol. 1, p. 379.

65 This conclusion has been arrived at through various methodologies: Bulliet 1979, pp. 104–13; Levtzion 1990, pp. 289–311; Schick 1995, pp. 139–58; Rubin 1998; Eddé 1999, pp. 452–72, esp. 453–55; Heyberg 2000, vol. 3, pp. 147–56.

66 Levy-Rubin (2000) articulates the nature of mass conversions by focusing on the case–study of Samaritans under the Abbasids.

teaching, and political representation at the various offices of the ruling authority.[67] A similar path seems evident in Egypt and Spain. According to De Epalza, the shrinking of the Mozarabic population in al-Andalus stemmed from the decrease in the number of church officials; this was also the reason given in the *Apocalypse of Samuel* to explain apostasy with regard to Copts in Egypt: "Some of them will deny Christ because of the troubles that are upon them, and because of their inability to find somebody to teach them or to comfort them in their troubles, so they will not have the help of teaching."[68] Among the consequences of Christian clergymen's diminishing presence within the Islamic world, it is also tempting to include the decay of church buildings themselves. More than the result of explicit anti-Christian legal acts, the latter perhaps stemmed from the absence of officiants, attendees, and funds, causing churches to fall into a state of disrepair and slowly falling out of use.[69]

Conversions were also facilitated by interfaith marriages. Athanasius of Balad, Western Syrian patriarch of Antioch (683–87), denounces some Christians who attended pagan festivals, among which he likely includes Muslim festivities, as well as the increasing number of marriages between adherents of different beliefs.[70] These marriages also concerned Jacob, bishop of Edessa (d. 708), and Anastasius of Sinai (late seventh century), while also appearing among the dispositions of the Nestorian synod of 676.[71] Anastasius, member of the Chalcedonian community, cites the case of a woman prevented from worshipping Christ because of her marriage to a Muslim, in addition to the instance of a man who confessed to have converted back and forth from Christianity to Islam many times.[72] Jacob of Edessa, clergyman of the Western Syrian Church, addresses the growing apostasy among Christians, citing as an example those who converted to Islam and then returned to Christianity, and the difficulties in taking the Eucharist for Christian women who were married to Muslims.[73] As recurring phenomena, conversions were included among the signs announcing the Last Judgement in the eschatological writings that spread within Christian circles in the aftermath of the conquest.[74] Although narratives of martyrdoms, such as the one involving ʿAbd al-Masih al-Najrani al-Ghassani, suggest that moving from Islam to Christianity was much more difficult than the reverse,[75] Christianity also attracted new converts.[76] Two passages in the above-cited *Risāla fī radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*, by al-Jahiz, denounce Christians searching for contradictions in the Qurʾan, using these arguments to proselytize among the illiterate and the poor.[77] Other instances of conversion from Islam to Christianity are to be found in the lives of Christian saints. In the Arabic life of St. Stephen Sabaita (725–94), the Melkite saint is said to have converted a Muslim who assisted one of his lenitive performances.[78] Miracles attributed to St. George and more specifically

67 Tannous 2010, vol. 1, pp. 381–95. A contraction in the Christian religious population is also highlighted by McCormick (*Breve Commemoratorium*, pp. 66–75) in commenting the figures outlined in the survey of the Holy Land ordered by Charlemagne.

68 De Epalza 1992, pp. 153–56; Iskander 1998, p. 227.

69 Chapter 7 addresses the modalities and reasons for the collapse of the late antique Christian sacred landscape.

70 See Hoyland 1997, pp. 147–49.

71 On Jacob of Edessa, see Anastasius of Sinai, pp. 773–74 (Quaestio 123); *Synodicon orientale*, pp. 223–24; Hoyland 1997, p. 604; see also Tannous 2010, vol. 1, pp. 524–28; Simonsohn 2015, pp. 201–03.

72 Hoyland 1997, p. 382. On the legal repercussions of such conversions, see Simonsohn 2013.

73 See ibid., pp. 161–63.

74 See, for instance, the Pseudo-Methodius's *Apocalypse*: "Many of those who were the sons of the Church deny the true faith of the Christians, the holy cross and the glorious sacraments. Without coercion and torture and beatings they deny Christ and stand on the side of the infidels" (pp. 54–55).

75 Hoyland 1997, pp. 381–83.

76 Griffith 2008, pp. 147–51.

77 Al-Jahiz, pp. 14, 19. Furthermore, according to al-Jahiz, even the growth of sects within Islam should be ascribed to the negative example of the large number of Christian confessions (Ibid., pp. 19–20).

78 Leontius of Damascus, pp. 81–83.

located at the Palestinian sanctuary of St. George in Lydda, include stories of Muslims converted to Christianity once confronted with the divine powers of the place and of the saint's icon.[79]

At the same time, the regulations included in the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* clearly manifest how Muslims were also increasingly anxious to distinguish who belonged to which community. There is an interesting overlapping of intentions among the reproaches included, for instance, in the *Apocalypse of Samuel*, such as complaints concerning the adoption of Arabic names and daily Muslim customs on the part of Christian believers, and some of the prescriptions in the *shurūṭ ʿUmar*. In the latter, Christians are required to refrain from using an "Islamic" name (*kunya*), as well as avoid dressing and behaving like Muslims.[80] This convergence of interests between Christian and Muslim elites shows how the actual boundaries between "being Christian" and "being Muslim," and the precise definition of what this "being" meant in daily practice, were transgressed.[81] The decision to make apostasy from Islam punishable by death was probably enforced in the very early period because of the high rate of conversions on the grounds of expediency, alongside the presence of individuals disguising their Christian faith behind a Muslim facade.[82]

This religious scenario might help explain the phenomenon of Muslims attending churches, cited at the end of Chapter 3. A Syriac fragment preserved in the British Library mentions that Muʿawiya (661–80) performed a prayer at Golgotha and at the Tomb of Mary at Gethsemane, when he was crowned caliph in 661.[83] Despite the fact that a mosque was already in existence in Jerusalem (according to Arculf, it could hold three thousand people), the caliph deemed it important to appear in two churches in Jerusalem. As Marsham recently argued, this decision was at once political and ideological; not only was the vast majority of the population Christian, but Umayyad rulers were also consciously reenacting what ʿUmar was said to have done after the conquest in the 630's, as well as the same ceremony and rituals that late antique rulers had conducted when they were appointed.[84] Muʿawiya was echoed by ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (r. 717–20), who is reported, instead, to have summoned people to a church in Damascus (perhaps the Church of St Mary, possibly the cathedral of Damascus in the early medieval period) when he was appointed caliph.[85]

Apart from the need to pray in churches in the absence of mosques, some churches also drew worshippers because of the holy figures venerated. In addition to Mary and Jesus, some saints were also worshipped by Muslims; the closeness

79 *Saint Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean, Saint Georges*, pp. 267–72; 275–76; 294–310.

80 Fattal 1995, pp. 60–66; see al-Jahiz, who blames Christians for taking Muslim names and deliberately disregarding the appropriate dress code (p. 18).

81 Tannous 2010, vol. 1, pp. 379–81, 399–406, 505–08. Commenting on the conversion of the synagogue of Jerash into a church around the year 530, Wharton (2000, pp. 200–05) argues it was the result of a violent act perpetrated by Christians against the Jewish minority. She assumes that, within an environment marked by mass conversions to Christianity, some Jewish holy spaces were seen as an obstacle to the development of a solid and cohesive Christian identity. This is reflected in texts by Christian theologians such as John Chrysostom, which echo the fear that the attendance of synagogues by Christians would lead to an excessive intermingling between the communities. Other evidence indicates that in several cases people were accustomed to attending sacred structures belonging to another faith, by virtue of the soothing powers or prestige associated with these sites. According to Wharton, Christian authors' laments over the absence of precise and definite boundaries between Christians and Jews would have constituted the intellectual framework for the "erasure of the Jewish space." Differently Walmsley argues the building conversion followed the religious conversion of a local social group to Christianity (2006, p. 123).

82 Ibid., pp. 437–51.

83 Creswell 1969, vol. 1, p. 35; Hoyland 1997, pp. 135–39.

84 Marsham 2013.

85 Bashear 1991, p. 278. On the churches in Damascus before and after the seventh century, see Nasrallah 1985 and 1992.

of the early eighth-century mosque to St. Sergius's shrine in al-Rusafa was probably less the result of a political act to please Christian Arabs than it was devotion to the saint.[86] In one passage, al-Jahiz explains that the main reason for the great esteem in which the Christian religion was held by Arab Muslims was that Arabness linked Christians and Muslims. He mentions all the Arabic groups who were Christianized prior to Islam, and the respect in which Christianity was held by Muslim commoners and the elite.[87] This sense of respect also emerges in passages by the Nestorian patriarch Isho'yahb III ("Not only they [the Muslim Arabs] do not oppose Christianity, but they praise our faith, honor the priests and saints of our Lord, and give aid to the churches and monasteries") and Jacob of Edessa, who recommends that priests deliver the blessing of saints to non-Christians as well.[88] The incorporation of the supposed relics of St. John the Baptist, called the "Forerunner" in the Islamic tradition, into the new Great Mosque of Damascus (an event followed by a flourishing of traditions surrounding St. John's relics throughout Syria), is further evidence testifying to the importance of certain saints and pre-Islamic prophets for the early Muslim community.[89] St. George's sanctuary at Lydda also retained a special status among Muslims; it appears in Islamic eschatological traditions as among the places where the end of the world would be announced. It was later visited by the caliph Mahdi (775–85) during the seasonal celebrations related to the harvest and dedicated to the saint.[90] As well, living holy figures also attracted Muslims, as was the case of St. Stephen Sabaita:

"He cured the sick. Those who were afflicted and suffering he consoled with words both pure and beneficial for the soul. The sadness of the downcast he cut out with the knife of the Holy Spirit, filling their hearts with joy.… He denied no one, but received all with the same respect, not favoring one above another. He showed mercy and compassion not only to Christians, but also to Muslims."[91]

After all Muslim calendar in the Syrian region also included Christian festivities such as Easter, Pentecost, Nativity, St. Barbara, Calends, Holy Cross, and the feast of Lydda (St. George).[92] As the majority of the population was still Christian, not only the landscape and the holy figures were largely Christian, but also the time and its articulation were expressed according to the Christian calendar.

However, the interest in Christian holy sites was fluid, and, especially in the early period, subject to controversial stances. It has already been mentioned in Chapter 3 that soon thereafter, churches were no longer recommended as places of worship for Muslims. Busse has pointed out the case of the Church of the Agony and the Tomb of

86 See the remarks by Key Fowden (1999, pp. 179–83) on the role of St. Sergius as a surrogate for Jesus in the early Islamic period; cf. Caseau (2001, p. 47), whose interpretation places more emphasis on the Umayyad political agenda.

87 Al-Jahiz, pp. 14–15.

88 Quoted in Hoyland 1997, p. 181 and p. 162 (see also Donner 2002–03, p. 49).

89 Ibn Asakir, vol. 2.1, p. 10; see also the detailed discussion in Khalek 2011, pp. 85–134.

90 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 176; see also the entry "al-Ludd" in Yaqut al-Hamawi.

91 Leontius of Damascus, p. 131. See also Fournet's reinterpretation of a graffito from the monastery of Bawit (2009); see also Sijpesteijn 2007, p. 454. This new reading posits the graffito as an eighth-century visitation to the Christian holy place by a Christian *mawlā* (client of a Muslim), accompanied by a Muslim who also wanted his name recorded under the cross and invocation to Jesus.

92 Al-Muqaddasi, pp. 182–83. Most feasts are described by al-Muqaddasi as related to agriculture seasonal activities. No wonder that Muslims, after having "relied heavily upon the Coptic calendar, particularly in matters that required scheduled payments or farming," under the Fatimids formulated a tax year "in order to standardize taxation through the adoption of a uniform solar-based system (synchronous with the Coptic year and months)" (Mikhail 2014, pp. 129, 132).

Mary. Both located in the vicinity of the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, they occupied a different status according to Islamic tradition: Ibn al-Murajja (eleventh century) reports that whereas prayer was prohibited in the former, Muslim prayer was recommended in the latter.[93] In some cases, Christian authorities complained about the Muslim presence within churches; for example, Jacob of Edessa denounces the presence of some Muslims as disrupting services.[94]

The examples discussed thus far in this chapter suggest that in the course of creating an Islamic-oriented society, reciprocal interactions occurred. Among Christian communities an effort to please Muslim standpoint on some theological issues seems to have emerged. At the same time differences did exist between the devotional needs of Muslim and Christian communities, and new mosques were erected as separate buildings to fulfill Muslim necessities. The building of mosques was part of the construction of a distinct Muslim identity. Within this mixed religious society, the line dividing Muslims and Christians, however, was made fluid by both people's daily practices, as well as the flow of conversions (especially to Islam). In other words, the undeniable efforts of religious-political elites to police this boundary speak to the desire to articulate and enforce differences between communities, as well as to the frequent disposition of the members of these communities to transgress them.

Art and Identity in Early Medieval Bilad al-Sham

The rise of Islam in Christian societies not only affected the way Christians began to define their belief, but also how they developed representations of their faith. This also included the ways in which Christians (or at least some segment thereof) reformulated the appropriate decoration of their churches.

Although it is difficult to identify the precise dates for the changing attitude toward Christian material culture, the appointment of ʿAbd al-Malik as caliph in the year 685 can be safely deployed as a turning point. This marked the beginning of an ambitious program of architectural patronage in the conquered cities, and transformed the relations between different religious communities. Around this time, the public side of Christian worship also started to be regulated.[95] Among the first intrusive dispositions affecting Christians' material possessions dealt with the public display of crosses, interpreted both as fixed stelae on display in public places and as portable objects carried during ceremonies. ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705) is said to have prohibited the display of crosses outside churches.[96] His brother and the governor of Egypt, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. Marwan (d. 705), ordered the destruction of all Christian crosses in gold and silver.[97] Although the governor's entourage is well known for its inclusion of several Christians, among them clergymen,[98] the order was corroborated by a proactive theological assertion issued by that same governor. He decreed that written declarations stating, "Muhammad is the great Apostle of God, and Jesus also is the Apostle of God; but verily God is not begotten and does not beget," be hung on church gates in Cairo and in the Delta.[99] This paralleled his brother ʿAbd al-Malik's actions in

93 Busse 1987, pp. 287–89.

94 Hoyland 1997, pp. 161–63.

95 See the discussion on the Islamic character of the new rule as thoroughly presented by Hoyland (2006). However, the date of 685—even accepting the warnings and corrections proposed by Hoyland—remains a clear turning point in the history of the early Islamic state, especially when considering the patronage of religious buildings and the minting of a new, distinctive Islamic coin.

96 Fattal 1995, p. 183.

97 Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (Severus), Part III, vol. 5 (1910), p. 25.

98 Abu Salih al-Armani, pp. 154–57; Rizzitano 1947, pp. 325–59; Morimoto 1994, pp. 362–65.

99 As quoted by King 1985, p. 270; see also Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (Severus), Part III, vol. 5 (1910), p. 25.

Jerusalem, where bronze plaques bearing inscriptions overtly contradicting the Christian view of Jesus, while emphasizing Muhammad's role on the Day of Judgment, were affixed to the four entrances to the Dome of the Rock.[100] However, one source observes that the first effort to censor the public display of crosses occurred as early as the period of the four caliphs, specifically under ʿUthman (r. 644–56).[101] With time, apparently, the idiosyncrasy strengthened. As described by al-Yaʿqubi, the anti-Christian dispositions issued by the caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (r. 717–20) included the prohibition against showing crosses in public. In the correspondence between this caliph and the Byzantine emperor Leo III, as transmitted in the Armenian *History of Ghevond*, doubts concerning the correctness of worshipping crosses and images were raised on the Muslim side. According to the Islamic narrative, Jesus should be acknowledged as one of the prophets, but not as the son of God; and he was also said not to have died on the cross.[102] In the parting of the ways between Islam and the other monotheistic traditions crosses came to be identified with a Christian symbol, and one, moreover, that had political ties to the Byzantine Empire. As shown by Fowden, the terms of the discussion are also visible in coin production. The invention of a purely epigraphic Islamic dinar was probably also triggered by the new solidus issued around 692 in Constantinople, depicting Christ and the emperor holding crosses. In the early period, the new rulers adapted Sasanian and Byzantine coins by adding short Arabic inscriptions to the margins, and, in the case of typologies with crosses, erasing the horizontal bar; in doing so, they were erasing the symbol of Byzantium and Christianity, as well as a vision of Jesus contrary to Muslim ideals. Coins were continuously exchanged between Byzantium and the Umayyad caliphate, especially because, as the result of a peace treaty in the late seventh century, the Umayyad caliphate found itself in the position of providing Constantinople with a yearly sum. Within this context, the iconography of coins was significant, besides its weight in gold. The new Byzantine coin, initially issued in 692, probably constituted the response to the Muslim adaptation of a Byzantine typology through the inclusion of an Arabic inscription expressing the Islamic devotion of faith. The Byzantine coin depicted Christ the Pantocrator for the first time, while moving the portrayal of the emperor to the reverse. A few years later, ʿAbd al-Malik issued the first purely aniconic and epigraphic gold coin, which later became the standard type for the Umayyad caliphs.[103]

Another possible intrusion into material culture in the new rulers' early relations with non-Muslims may be seen in the decree supposedly issued by the Umayyad caliph Yazid II (720–24), known as the "Edict of Yazid II." The earliest version of the edict is in Greek, and is part of the report the presbyter John of Jerusalem submitted at the Second Council of Nicea (787). According to him, under the influence of a Jewish advisor who promised him a long rule, Yazid II issued a decree prohibiting every type of representational painting and likeness of living beings both in churches and public spaces, and therefore ordered their destruction. Two and a half years later, the decree was withdrawn, such that surviving and newly made pictures were restored to their places. Greek, Latin, Armenian, and Syriac versions of the edict exist and, despite some differences, they seem to be in accord as far as their essential core. Syriac sources, for instance, add details such as that the order was implemented by some Muslim officials, and that books were also included in the decree. By contrast, Arabic (Islamic) sources quoting the

100 Necipoğlu 2008, pp. 48–49; Avner 2010, p. 44.

101 Palmer 1993, pp. 169–70.

102 Jeffery 1944; Griffith 2008, pp. 29–32.

103 Fowden 2004b, pp. 296–301; Robinson (2005, pp. 35–39) and Heidemann (2010, pp. 166–86) stress, instead, the roles of intra-Muslim debates and the Kharijite and Zubayrid revolts during the "second fitna" (civil war). See also Bacharach (2010, pp. 16–25), especially with regard to the monetary and political aspects of ʿAbd al-Malik's reforms.

edict are rare, and only appear as late as the tenth and fifteenth centuries. Al-Maqrizi (1364–1442) also mentions that crosses were broken. The detail concerning the cross only appears in the late tenth-century Arabic Christian version of the edict written by Severus b. al-Muqaffaʿ, who adds that a heavier taxation was imposed on Christians.[104] As such, written sources on the subject are problematic, prompting such questions as: Why do earlier Muslim texts not mention the edict? Was the edict actually enforced? What was its real impact on Christian properties?

At the time Vasiliev studied the traditions of the Edict of Yazid II, archaeological findings seemed to verify its contents. Crowfoot and Quibell had already respectively linked the destruction of figurative mosaics in some churches of Jerash (Jordan) and the mutilation of paintings and sculptures in a monastery in Saqqara (Egypt) to the edict.[105] With the passing of time, more material has been linked to the edict. This material largely consists of a series of floor mosaics from late antique churches in the Palestinian region, in which figurative motifs were partially or totally removed and replaced with inanimate subjects, such as geometric patterns and representations of plants and leaves.[106]

In 718, a floor mosaic was laid in the Church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Rasas (near Madaba, Jordan). The mosaic features figurative motifs, suggesting that the non-figurative decision was made later. In fact, those figurative motifs were obliterated, and, by the year 756, a new and non-figurative mosaic pavement was added in the presbytery area. At first glance, the time frame seems to justify the alleged connection between the "corrections" of the floor mosaics and the Edict of Yazid II. An excellent example of "mosaic correction" is the so-called "panel of the benefactors" in the Church of St. Stephen (Plate 5). The panel is located in the central nave, in front of the steps leading to the presbytery. It consists of a series of seven standing figures, some of them enhanced by attributes such as an amphora, a quadruped, or a lamb, alternating with seven pomegranate trees of the same size. The figures are personifications of the benefactors who contributed to the building and decoration of the church, as stated in the Greek inscription. The "correction" (the iconoclastic intervention) may be identified with two main features: first, the image of each figure seems to have been cut out of the floor mosaic, and, second, this void was then filled by new and reshuffled old tesserae. Whereas the lighter ones were used for the background, the colored tesserae composed new, geometric, and nature-derived subjects lined up vertically in place of the figures. Among the latter are multi-petal leaves, roses, and stylized trees. Despite the erasure, the different texture of the second tesserae layer renders the previous figures somewhat recognizable. This also stems from the fact that a few details of the figures were saved from the erasure, such as the head of a lamb or the fingers of humans' hands.[107] Verstegen argues the visibility of the camouflage made the modified Christian floor mosaics sort of hybrids, enabling at the same time to match new expectations about religious art and the mental reconstruction of the original image.[108] This latter detail makes the Church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Rasas comparable to that of St. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. The early sixth-century Theodorician mosaics decorating the lateral walls of the central nave were corrected a few decades after the city was conquered by Justinian. The new Byzantine ruler wanted to erase the Arian officials from the mosaics in the main church of the city. While new tesserae with a different mixture for the lime were used for such replacements, the profiles of the original figures were left visible.[109]

104 Vasiliev 1956; Guidetti 2010.
105 Vasiliev 1956, p. 45.
106 Schick 1995, pp. 180–219; Ognibene 2002, pp. 97, 467–85; Shiyyab 2006, pp. 38–160.
107 Piccirillo and Alliata 1994, pp. 158–61; Ognibene 2002, pp. 310–21.
108 Verstegen 2012, pp. 88–89.
109 Rizzardi 2011, pp. 98–100.

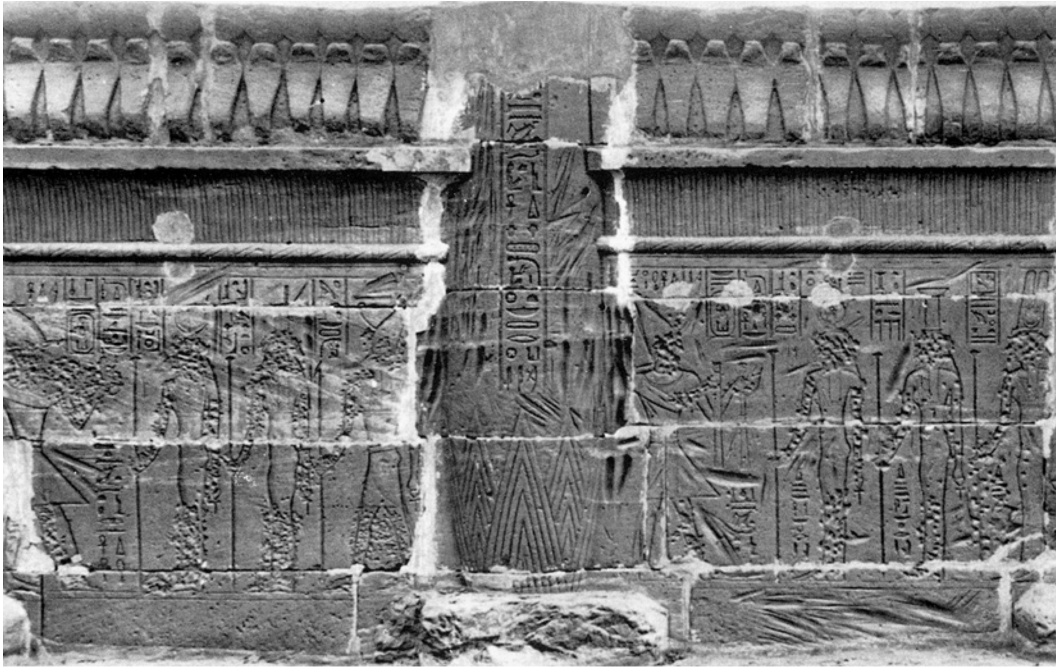

FIGURE 4.3 *Partial erasure of Pharaonic reliefs, detail of the northern wall of the Naos, Temple of Philae* (AFTER NAUTIN 1967, FIG. 14) (WITH PERMISSION).

Although the reasons for the erasure were different—in Ravenna, the correction was the result of a sort of *damnatio memoriae*—, in both cases the visibility of the previous layer was functional for the audience, a visibility facilitated by the material quality of the mosaics.[110]

Similarities, however, are absent from the final picture; in Umm al-Rasas, a figurative panel showing human and animal figures was converted into a non-figurative one, in which geometric and nature-derived motifs came to dominate the whole scene. The avoidance of any kind of representation of living beings (and not just sacred figures) led scholars to characterize such an approach as "iconophobic." In some instances, only the faces and limbs were corrected in Palestinian mosaics, while the body was left untouched. Such is the case, for example, of two putti in a Nilotic scene from the same Church of St. Stephen (Plate 6). This treatment of bodies is strikingly similar to that seen in Christians' alleged intrusions in Pharaonic reliefs when the temple of Philae was transformed into a Christian house of worship during late antiquity (Figure 4.3).[111]

110 As observed by Urbano, drawing on Hedrick's work on *damnatio memoriae* in the late Roman world (form of dishonor according to which a person must not be remembered), this was the result of a deliberate strategy of damnation of memory, according to which erasures would allow the beholders to remember the act (and the reason) of the erasure itself. As Urbano puts it, "Given the extent of the modifications executed under Bishop Agnellus, it would appear that these hands, which could have easily been replaced with white tiles, were left intentionally, a subtle reminder of the purgation and charge to 'remember to forget'" (Urbano 2005, pp. 92–98; quotation p. 98). In the Islamic context, *damnatio memoriae* was the reason for another mosaic correction; one of the mosaic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock was altered by al-Ma'mun, who replaced the name of the founder, 'Abd al-Malik, with his own name, though the date of foundation remained unaltered (Grabar 2006, pp. 59–60).

111 Nautin 1967, pp. 25–26. It thus seems that the motivation for at least some of these corrections was "moins de faire disparaître les traces de l'ancien culte

With regard to Palestinian floor mosaics, the concern with figural subject matter seems to be connected to the circulating Islamic attitudes vis-à-vis images and worship. In fact, an evident difference is apparent from the theological discussions occurring in the heart of Byzantine iconomachy that tended, instead, to focus on the nature of Christ and the lawfulness of worshipping the representation of holy figures. In the *corpus* of *ḥadīths*, the sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, held to be the second source of Islamic jurisprudence after the Qu'ran, *hubris* (arrogance) is the main sin attributed to the artist, as his work is understood as challenging the creative nature of God, an exclusively divine attribute. God is presented as the only dispenser of "spirit" and "life"—in other words, the only Creator. This echoes a late antique rabbinical text according to which "A person can draw an image on a wall, but cannot place within it a soul or a spirit, innards and guts. God, however, is not so limited. He draws an image within an image and places within it a spirit, innards and guts."[112] The late antique root of the Islamic attitude toward the act of creation is reinforced in a Qur'anic passage, III: 49–53, which describes Jesus as the prophet of God, who breathes life into a clay figure of a bird. This anecdote is reminiscent of two distinct passages from apocryphal Gospels such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Arab Gospel on the childhood of the Savior, describing the miracles performed by the child Jesus in order to show his playmates that he was the son of the Creator.[113]

Examining the evidence of cases such as the panel of the benefactors at Umm al-Rasas, most scholars agree that the care with which specific figurative motifs were erased, combined with the attention given to the reconstruction of the mosaic surface following the erasure, suggest that, on the one hand, the decision to censor every figurative motif was related to the rise of Islam and, on the other, that the damage and the successive reassembling were carried out by the Christian communities themselves.[114] In order to explain such a change of attitude, scholars have insisted on the pressure exerted by the new rulers after the conquest. In particular, there has been a tendency to explain the modifications in churches in light of the above-discussed evidence gathered by Bashear concerning the presence of Muslims entering and praying in churches.[115] In other words, going beyond the contents of the above-mentioned Edict of Yazid II, several scholars argue that the mosaics were corrected in order to make Christian sacred spaces suitable for Muslim worship. Indeed, in one passage, Bashear cites the Shafiʿi and Hanafi prohibitions against praying in front of pictures hanging on walls or before pictures on floor rugs.[116] Though these proscriptions appeared much later than the case of the Palestine mosaics, Bashear's passage obviously supports the notion that the erasure of figurative images in churches was directly related to the physical presence of Muslims in Christian buildings.

Though appealing, this hypothesis presents several problems. For one, the churches affected by the correction of floor mosaics do not present

que d'empêcher ces démons d'exercer leur action malfaisante. Par un procédé qui n'était pas différent de celui de l'envoûtement magique, on croyait les immobiliser en mutilant leur effigies" (p. 25). Similar attitudes toward pagan statuary are highlighted by Caseau; the feet, hands, and the head (the abode of the special senses) of statues were mutilated in order to prevent demons from inhabiting the stone artifacts (2001b, pp. 117–21). For the magical potential of images, see Freedberg 1989, pp. 82–98. The theme will be further explored with regard to early Islam in a forthcoming publication by Flood.

112 Fine 2000, p. 187.

113 Rizzardi 1989, pp. 127–28.

114 Schick 1995, pp. 180–219; Piccirillo 1996; Ognibene 2002.

115 Piccirillo 1994, p. 161; Griffith 1997, p. 7; Ognibene 2002, pp. 140, 146; Bowersock 2006, pp. 109–11.

116 According to al-Bukhari, Ibn Abbas—a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad—used to pray in churches, except for those containing statues and sculptures (al-Bukhari, vol. 1, Chapter 54).

any niche of the mihrab, which came to be a constitutive and salient feature of Muslim places of prayer as early as the beginning of the eighth century. The abovementioned case of the mihrab added to the Kathisma Church indicates that a mihrab would have been added in the event that Muslims decided to accommodate Christian churches to their collective worship. Furthermore, Bashear discusses evidence mainly related to holy sites devoted to the figures of Jesus and Mary, whereas the iconophobic correction to mosaics seems to be a widespread phenomenon in minor and rural churches as well. It thus appears difficult to argue on behalf of the existence of a Muslim congregation for each religious building presenting a correction in the mosaics. In one case—in the "Upper Church" of Massuh (Jordan)—the figurative subject was replaced by a cross; while this modification constituted compliance with the non-figurative prescriptions, it still did not make Muslim usage of the structure any easier. As noted above, Muslims had a strong repulsion for the Christian cross.[117] Another problem in using Bashear's findings on the use of churches by early Muslims to explain the disfiguration of floor mosaics is that, in contrast to the late seventh century, when Muslims did not yet possess their own mosques, the second quarter of the eighth century presents a completely different picture. Every town had its own mosque, obviating the need to use churches as surrogates for mosques. Finally, written sources are totally silent on the phenomenon—a fact that is not of minor significance. As shown in the second paragraph of this chapter, Christian writers were generally alarmed by cases of excessive intermingling between Christian and Muslim worshippers, and took note of it.

All of this does not mean that Muslims did not enter churches or perform prayers in the most prestigious and sacred Christian buildings. Indeed, they did, at least until they were prevented from doing so by the increasing opposition of theologians. However, the evidence suggests that Muslim prayer in churches was quite an inconsistent phenomenon and the result of practices from below, probably related to the pious example of early Muslims venerating Christian figures and the flow of conversions from Christianity to Islam. Furthermore, it was not a matter of collective prayers, an occurrence that was watched over and eventually sanctioned by the religious elites.

Maguire arrived at a radically different interpretation of the Palestinian mosaics.[118] Although Ognibene evokes the hypothesis that, despite other scholars' conclusions, a stronger connection existed between the corrections in floor mosaics of early eighth-century Palestine and Byzantine iconomachy, Maguire undoubtedly gives this theory a more coherent contextualization.[119] He explains the cases of iconophobic interventions in floor mosaics in terms of a general shift in the attitude toward nature evident in Byzantine culture of the iconoclastic period. Whereas, Maguire argues, in early Christian art nature was ubiquitous and blended with the representation of sacred subjects, subsequently, the iconoclasts pushed the iconophiles to acknowledge the alleged pagan and magical connotations of nature-derived subjects, and, as a result, to set them aside in favor of an approach to church decoration that was more sober and centered on the icon. Commenting on the evidence from the churches of Palestine, Maguire posits how the act of removal and destruction often seems to follow a specific rationale, in the sense that personifications of natural elements (such as rivers) rather than other living beings were preferred targets. He couples this observation with the lack of evidence of any harm to sacred images, and with the content of one inscription from the non-figurative floor mosaic of the Church of the Virgin in Madaba (ca. mid-eighth century), in which the beholder is invited to look at "Mary the Virgin Mother of God and on Christ whom she bore, king of all, only son of the only God." Maguire observes that the inscription

117 Piccirillo 1993a, pp. 42, 252, fig. 443.

118 Maguire 2012, pp. 35–47.

119 Ognibene 2002, pp. 146–47; Maguire 2012, pp. 11–47.

depicts Christ in true anti-Islamic terms (Jesus is said to be the son of God), and, moreover, that it implies the presence of a sacred icon depicting the Virgin and Christ. All of this would make the decoration of the church responsive to the concerns about nature, sacred representation, and pagan idolatry expressed in the debates between iconophiles and iconoclasts in Byzantium, rather than to the new aesthetic tenets dictated by Islam. Iconophiles, deeply involved in the pan-Christian debate surrounding idolatry, the role of personifications of natural elements, and the nature of Christ, would then have been responsible for the corrections made to the floor mosaics.[120]

The picture drawn by Maguire, however, is not as precise as he claims. His assertion concerning the absence of actions against holy images in the Jordanian region relies on the ruinous state of late antique church structures. It is obvious how the lack of architectural and archaeological evidence does not in itself constitute a solid argument, and, in at least one case, in the semi-dome of the apse of the Church of the Priest al-Wa'il, the face of a haloed figure with a book in his left hand was hammered and erased, manifesting a kind of iconoclastic attitude.[121] In addition, the preference given to "classical" personifications over other living beings described by Maguire is not so absolute; in several instances, the choice was not so clear-cut, and, as noted above, a special emphasis often seems to have been placed on the faces, hands, and legs of both animals and humans, regardless of their iconography or symbolic meaning.[122]

One further point worthy of attention is that the same range of subjects was also targeted in Jewish contexts. In fact, besides specific Jewish iconography, late antique Palestinian synagogues displayed the same type of subjects as churches, including personifications of months and natural elements. Given the similarities of the decoration, one scholar has set forth the possibility that a single workshop created floor mosaics in late antique Palestinian churches and synagogues.[123] For instance, the central panel of the main nave floor of the synagogue of Naʿaran was decorated in the late fifth–early sixth century with a zodiac wheel, with an image of Helios on a quadriga at its center and the personifications of seasons at the corners. Below is a larger panel composed of a series of interlaced *scuta* (shields), each filled with figurative *emblemata* and dedicatory inscriptions. Above the central panel, close to the Torah niche in the synagogue, is the "Jewish" section; a representation of the Torah niche is flanked by two menorahs, while below is the scene of Daniel with the lions. Subsequently, although the date is uncertain, the depictions of all humans and several animals visible on the mosaic floor were first erased and then patched up (Figure 4.4).[124] As with churches, the correction within synagogues often focused on faces and limbs. Another parallel is that damages were subsequently repaired, so as to maintain at least the integrity and functionality of the floors. Scholars have explained these modifications either as a reaction to the sixth-century Christian excesses in venerating icons and relics or, alternatively, in terms of a shift in artistic attitude related to the rise of Islam in the area.[125] For the sake of our

120 Maguire 2009; 2012, pp. 35–47. The inscription in the church of the Virgin in Madaba is also discussed within the context of the debate on aniconism by Fowden (2004b, pp. 295–96).

121 Piccirillo 1993a, p. 318; Ognibene 2002, pp. 146–47. On the bases of the chronology of damages and restoration of Christian floor mosaics, Maguire's hypothesis has recently been rejected by Schick (2015).

122 Piccirillo 1982; Flood 2012 and forthcoming. See footnote 111 above. The focus was apparently on the potentiality of an image or a statue of a living being to be activated through a ritual formula so as to operate as an intermediary or an avatar of a god.

123 Fine 2005, p. 88.

124 Vincent 1961.

125 The first interpretation, and therefore a sixth-century date for the modification of the mosaics, is argued by Barber (1997, pp. 1033–36), the second, implying, instead, an eighth-century date for the changes, is put forward by Fine (2000, pp. 192–94; 2005, pp. 121–23) and Bowersock (2006, pp. 106–08).

FIGURE 4.4 *Chariot of the Sun at the center of the Zodiac, mosaic, Synagogue of Naʿaran* (AFTER VINCENT 1961, PL. XXI) (WITH PERMISSION).

discussion, the existence of another religious community, such as the Palestinian Jews, which shared a similar artistic language and iconographic repertoire and which, at a certain moment, through the material act of correcting mosaics, started voicing a similar discomfort with figurative images, seems to reinforce the hypothesis that the phenomenon was related to events occurring within the region.

One further comparison, this time between churches and mosques, allows one to focus on a particular aspect of the Christian correction of the mosaics. In several cases, among them the panel of the benefactors in St. Stephen, Christian figurative subjects were substituted with nature-derived ones such as leaves, flowers, and plants. Here, nature, though without the pagan appendix of personifications, comes to the foreground. However, nature-derived subjects do not appear in corrected Jewish floor mosaics, but only in Christian ones. Flood suggests that their appearance in mosaic floors should be related to Islamic *ḥadīth*s concerning the lawfulness of reproducing images of living beings. One *ḥadīth*, for instance, recommends that artists and craftsmen depict "trees" rather than "soul-full" subjects. This was the kind of advice that apparently governed the correction of several mosaics in Christian churches.[126] This connection between the Christian iconophobic attitude and the rise of Islamic visual culture is further corroborated by another reference highlighted by Griffith. In his above-cited early ninth-century treatise, the Christian bishop Theodore Abu Qurra repeatedly refers to Muslims, though not directly but by paraphrasing. Manifesting a deep knowledge of Islamic sacred texts, he quotes the *ḥadīth* that threatens the makers of pictures with the menace of being asked by God, on the day of Resurrection, to blow the spirit into the figures they created. In another passage, he characterizes Muslims as those accustomed to portraying trees alluding to the contemporary Islamic religious aesthetic, as seen, for instance, in the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus (and further strengthened, in Islamic terms, by the *ḥadīth* pointed out by Flood).[127]

In reusing material from late antique buildings, Muslims were at once transforming "soul-full" subjects into "soul-less" ones. Maguire mentions one of the capitals of the Great Mosque of Qayrawan, whose decoration consists of an eagle recarved and transformed into a leaf. As noted by Flood, similar examples are described by Wilkinson in his catalogue of the capitals in al-Haram al-Sharif. At least two examples attest to the decision to transform the representation of a winged eagle into a sprig, which, according to new, Muslim standards, was considered an inanimate subject (Figure 4.5).[128]

126 Flood 2012 and forthcoming.

127 Griffith 2009, pp. 76–82; Theodore Abu Qurra, pp. 53, 55.

128 Flood 2012, p. 117; cfr. Wilkinson 1987, pp. 49, 51 (while the Aghlabid mosque of Qayrawan was built in the ninth century, Wilkinson dates the modification to al-Haram al-Sharif material to the Abbasid era, as he argues that before the Abbasids several capitals displayed figurative motifs; p. 205); Maguire 2012, p. 41, fig. 1.20. The property of trees to grow and bear fruit was identified and highlighted as a possible inconsistency in Muslim arguments by Theodore Abu Qurra in his *Treatise in Defense of the Veneration of Icons* (Theodore Abu

FIGURE 4.5 *Detail of a capital from al-Haram al-Sharif open air museum, Jerusalem* (AUTHOR'S PHOTO) (WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE ISLAMIC MUSEUM AND AL-AQSA LIBRARY, JERUSALEM).

The conversion of human and animal motifs into leaves and trees in several Christian floor mosaics, together with the similar attitude developed in early Islam both in theory (religious texts) and in practice (sculpture of capitals), is another argument on behalf of the confining of Christian iconophobic acts to the Islamic sphere of influence. Even in the case of the presence of an icon—as evidenced by the inscription in the Church of the Virgin at Madaba—it should be recalled that, as revealed by Griffith, all Islamic polemics fault the Christian practice of worshipping icons and the cross, but not their very existence as honored objects.[129] These are also the bases of the Christian patriarch Stephen al-Ramli's late ninth-century text on the defense of the cross, in which he argues that the cross is "the marker for the qiblah for Christians," to which they perform "a prostration of honor, not of worship," a type of prostration he later compares to the esteem in which the Kaʿba is held by Muslims.[130] It was perhaps a sense of honor and not worship, after all, that prevented the icon with the Virgin Mary and Jesus located in the treasury of the pagan Kaʿba from being destroyed, along with statues and representations of pagan gods, angels, and biblical prophets when Muhammad conquered Mecca in 622.[131]

It has been argued how the correction of floor mosaics in several Jordan-Palestinian churches was the outcome of neither the Edict of Yazid II, nor the direct presence of Muslims within churches. At the same time, the terms of the intra-Christian debate on the nature of images do not fully accord with all the features displayed by iconophobic acts. Arbitrarily enforced, the edict was, more likely, a reflection of the increasing pressure of Muslims on Christian communities as conveyed in non-Muslim sources.

In a recent essay, Griffith, who previously argued in favor of the importance of Muslims praying in churches, briefly comments on Theodore Abu Qurra's reference to the existence of "accommodating Christians" who were ready "to adjust their public religious behavior" in light of the rise of Islam, and the role that this "adjustment" played in the corrections of floor mosaics.[132] The abovementioned evidence elucidates the different reactions of Christian communities in the face of the rise of Islam. New positions regarding the nature of Jesus, theological formulae, and the function of images and objects in worship emerged in response to the pressure exercised by the ruling Muslim communities in the public sphere. It is thus worth speculating that floor mosaics were corrected in order to adapt their use by a community of "accommodating" Christians, who—without stepping out of Christian community, that is, without converting—were nonetheless keeping in mind Muslims' criticisms in their expressions of faith.[133] Papaconstantinou stressed how important is to understand where and how the "breaking point" was constructed in every specific process of conversion.[134] When, in other words, an individual stepped out of its own community and embraced a different religious community. The above-mentioned floor mosaics show the flexibility of one group in adapting to new rules without breaking the line; a plasticity that extended the community's boundaries by including aspects belonging to another, not mutually exclusive, system of belief.

In order to explain Jewish communities' fascination with figurative art and the classical late antique repertoire of personifications and representations of nature, along with its later rejection in favor of a more sober, non-figurative, and purely

Qurra, p. 55; Griffith 2009, pp. 78–79). Interestingly the latter point was allegedly also raised by al-Mujahid, an early medieval Muslim theologian, who is said to have argued that because of bearing fruits trees too should be considered "living beings" and therefore avoided (see Naef 2011, p. 24).

129 Griffith 2009, p. 72.

130 Elias 2012, p. 70.

131 King 2004.

132 Griffith 2009, pp. 83–84.

133 This possibility is also explored in Guidetti 2010.

134 Papaconstantinou 2015, p. xxii–xxiii.

symbolic religious art, Fine argues that the allure of "the aesthetics of the new colonial power" was a defining factor. Earlier, Jewish laymen had pushed to have figurative art introduced into synagogue decoration in order to engage with the prevailing aesthetic of late antique Christian society; subsequently, Jews reverted to non-figurative decoration in order to assimilate it into the new visual language developed by Islam.[135] Such a reading connects art to collective identity, and, in turn, to power relations among religious communities. It is indeed possible that Christian communities activated similar mechanisms in response to the rise of Islam. The case of the so-called synagogue/church of Jerash is explicative in this regard.[136] The floor mosaics of the synagogue were covered (though preserved) by a new layer of mosaics when the building was transformed into a church. Later the new Christian mosaics were disfigured allowing the Christian community to continue worshipping in a church adapted to the new and dominant religious aesthetic precepts. However, as stated by Eastmond with regard to thirteenth-century art in Caucasus, art is by no means only reflecting the fully constructed identity of a given society, but contributes in creating and shaping it.[137] The ambiguity or hybridization (in Verstegen's terms) of the defacement of Christian floor mosaics in some Palestinian churches, might suggest an effort to please a diversified audience, exactly as a "lower Christology" tried to reconcile two different religious conceptions avoiding a definitive conversion.

Indeed, the contiguity of the places of worship delineated in the first two chapters meant that, though buildings were intended as separate and distinct, because the two religious systems themselves were separate and distinct, they came to occupy the same, often central, urban area. The model of organizing the coexistence of different religious communities under the same rule followed previous arrangements, before Islam entered the scene. At the same time, as also often happens in multireligious societies, worshippers seem to have easily transgressed the boundaries between communities. Religious buildings were a key feature in creating and fostering a communal identity. Their construction and consolidation in the early medieval period was patronized by the caliphal elite (in the case of mosques) and church and local elites (in the case of churches). Though the elites were apparently very careful to reinforce the separation between communities and to stigmatize any effort to overcome that separation, sacred buildings themselves carry the evidence of the inescapable intermingling of churches and mosques as well as related worshippers. While in this chapter the corrections to some Christian floor mosaics are attributed to Christian communities that accepted the reproaches of Muslims concerning worshipping habits in sacred places, in the next two chapters the focus will be on the attitude of Muslim patrons toward churches and the material with which they were decorated. Churches were in the center of cities, were the focus of devotional practices, and were also visited by Muslims. Their magnetic attraction is reflected in the way Muslims sought to appropriate them in their own sacred places.

135 Fine 2000, esp. p. 194; 2005, pp. 57–134.

136 Kraeling 1938, pp. 185–87; 204–08; plate XXXVII, fig. a (on the reasons for the conversion of the synagogue into a church, see above footnote 81).

137 Eastmond 2000, p. 39.

CHAPTER 5

Material Transfers in the Early Medieval Mediterranean: Marble Columns from Churches to Mosques

Christian Columns and Marble Material in Early Medieval Mosques

There is no better evidence of the importance of marble in the post-conquest period than the numerous faux marble slabs in buildings erected by Muslim patrons. In secular architecture, this is manifested, for instance, in sites such as Qusayr ʿAmra, Khirbat al-Mafjar, and Balis, all princely or caliphal residences built within larger settlements and dating to the first half of the eighth century.[1] In the absence of real marble, the dadoes of the most prestigious rooms were decorated with paintings emulating the visual and coloristic effects of marble. This was also true of some columns, as reflected in both material and literary evidence. Hamilton published the image of a column from the al-Aqsa Mosque (Figure 5.1), in which the painted marble effects of the plastered surface of a limestone column are clearly visible.[2] The painted wavy lines emulate the effects of real marble, as seen in some of the veneers used in the Great Mosque of Damascus (Figure 5.2). As recently noted by Nees, the painting of marble effects also reached early Qur'anic manuscripts, in which depictions of columns with fluting, colored shafts, are sometimes used as sura dividers.[3] According to Wilkinson's classification of the capitals of al-Aqsa mosque, the capital topping the column published by Hamilton is part of the "Abbasid basket and bowl capitals," a distinct production inspired by late antique/Christian examples produced under the Abbasids. This is in accordance with a passage by al-Muqaddasi, contrasting columns re-erected under the Abbasids after an earthquake with the earlier "beautiful core," made of real (reused) marble.[4] As suggested by these examples, marble was so highly esteemed that, whenever it was not available, its aesthetic effects and materiality were artificially created. One section of this chapter clarifies some issues concerning the availability and transportation of marble in the early medieval period. What follows here (although many buildings have changed or disappeared since their foundation) is an outline of marble Christian material, especially columns, reused and displayed by early Muslims in mosques.

In this regard, it is first important to note that geology was conceived differently in the pre-modern era, and that the perception of marble in comparison to other stones was based on criteria such as the appearance, hardness, and coloristic qualities of the material. In fact, in the pre-modern era, "marble" was defined as a "fine, hard stone that could be used for sculpture or high-quality architecture"; as such, the word "marble" at that time encompassed a "whole range of marbles and breccias, as well as granites, porphyries, diorites, basalts and indeed some of the finer limestones."[5] This is also evident in Umayyad stone sculpture,

1 Vibert Guigue and Bisheh 2007, pls. 114, 118; Hamilton 1959, pl. 74; Leisten 2009, pp. 390–91.

2 Hamilton 1949, figs. 2 and 4, pl. 3.

3 Déroche 2004; see George (2010, pp. 76–79), in which he compares the horizontal ornamental bands of the Qur'anic fragment "Marcel 13" with the wall mosaics of the Dome of the Rock; Nees 2016, pp. 104–05.

4 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 168; cf. Hamilton 1992, pp. 143–44.

5 Ward-Perkins 1992, pp. 13–14.

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FIGURE 5.1 *Plastered column from al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem*
(AFTER HAMILTON 1949, PLATE 3, FIG. 4) (WITH PERMISSION).

which was mostly limited to limestone. In fact, given that the quarries were closed, marble could only be had as spolia, and whenever finer marble artifacts were no longer accessible or patrons preferred newly carved pieces, limestone was the only quarried stone available for resembling the glistening effects of marble.

As far as al-Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, Wilkinson's work provides useful information concerning the reuse of pre-Islamic material. Both the long history of the site and the list of sovereigns ruling over Jerusalem,[6] make the analysis of the Umayyad phase, promoted by ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walid I (but probably already started under Muʿawiya),[7] quite difficult. According to Wilkinson, 80 percent of the column capitals in al-Haram al-Sharif's structures are datable to the pre-Islamic period. Of these, more than 90 percent are Byzantine, while the rest belong to the Roman period.[8] The Umayyad production, mostly concentrated in the building known as Bab al-Rahma (the Golden Gate), displays stylistic features (lack of volume in the volutes and an increasing number of rows of leaves) similar to some examples from Egypt. This was possibly due to the Egyptian origins of the stonecutters, as there is evidence of craftsmen sent to Jerusalem from Egypt in the early eighth century.[9] The Abbasid portion of the building,

6 The changes brought about by these dynasties to al-Haram al-Sharif and its surroundings are revealed by Grabar (2006, pp. 159–89).

7 Johns 1999, p. 62 (referring to a forthcoming work by Raby), see also Whitcomb 2016, pp. 20–22.

8 Wilkinson 1987, pp. 75–78; 1992, p. 125.

9 Wilkinson 1987, pp. 6–12, 29–35. A papyrus discovered in Aphrodito and referencing the early eighth century (Papyrus 1366) contains the statement: "being (?) for the same work … 2 labourers and 1 carpenter. … On receiving the present letter, therefore, send the said labourers and the skilled workman by your faithful man with instructions to hand them over … their wages in gold … them and their wages … in accordance with the powers given by our demand notes … furnishing their … places" (Bell 1911–12, p. 374). However, it must be said that the style of the pilaster capitals might also have been connected to their function; sixth-century materials today in the Madrasa al-Halawiyya in Aleppo differ according to whether the capitals are top pilasters or columns. The former are much less voluminous than the latter, perhaps due to the need to maintain the smoothness of the walls, certainly not a concern in the case of capitals topping freestanding columns. While Rosen-Ayalon (2011, pp. 175–76) seems to agree with the Egyptian connection of some marble pieces, a critical view of Wilkinson's stylistic appraisal is expressed by Talgam (2004, pp. 32–34).

FIGURE 5.2
Marble veneers in the eastern portico of the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

instead, visible in the extension of the mosque, was instead more loosely inspired by previous examples, and seems to have been the product of local craftsmanship.[10]

Among late antique capitals in al-Haram al-Sharif, a certain number were removed from churches, although it is difficult to establish the exact provenance. Wilkinson suggests that these capitals were taken, "searching among the ruins," which at that time was a necessity not only for Muslims, but perhaps also for the court of Byzantium.[11] It is important to note how in the case of both the Umayyad and Abbasid productions, limestone columns and pilaster capitals emulated late antique pieces. Wilkinson argues that this was because churches were the newest buildings in the area, some of which were renovated in that period, such that church-like Corinthian-style capitals produced by Muslims were designed to compete with those found in churches.[12] At the same time, we should also imagine that, given the vast discrepancy in the number of late antique capitals versus newly carved ones, there was a need to make the style of the latter conform to that of the former. Furthermore, there was no alternative model for producing capitals; the earliest evidence of the emergence of a new typology of capitals is related to the early Abbasid al-Raqqa (ca. 770). Although firmly rooted in the vocabulary of late antique sculpture, al-Raqqa's alabaster capitals (used also in churches, as shown by the cross appearing in the capital in Plate 7) manifest a decisive step in the move toward the abstraction of natural elements.

To return to al-Aqsa, an important aspect of the reuse of Christian capitals in the mosque was their presentation. The first rationale for the reuse gave priority to the richest carved capitals. These were apparently displayed in order to frame and embellish the most important spaces in the sanctuary, such as the main nave and the area in front of the mihrab. A corollary of this criterion was the deliberate reuse of Christian capitals decorated with figurative motifs, consisting of Christian symbols such as birds, animals, winged figures, and crosses. As mentioned in Chapter 4, figural decoration appears in disguised form on capitals (Figure 4.5), but, in other instances, representations of living beings were covered with stucco or simply erased.[13]

10 Wilkinson 1987, pp. 36–74. Among the Abbasid elements, Wilkinson also counts some late antique capitals reworked in the early medieval period (pp. 48–53).

11 Wilkinson 1992, p. 126.

12 Wilkinson 1987, pp. 34, 75–78. These include the limestone capitals carved in the second half of the eighth century for the third rebuilding of al-Aqsa Mosque (Hamilton 1992). Furthermore, the practice of copying late antique examples in a relatively humble material like limestone was also in effect in Byzantium (Sodini 2002, p. 135). More broadly, antiquity as a source of inspiration for Umayyad art has been discussed by Finster (2009) and, more recently, Rabbat (2015) (I thank Katharina Meinecke for pointing me to Rabbat's article).

13 In at least one case stucco was used to disguise the symbol of the cross (Wilkinson 1987, p. 203).

According to Wilkinson, because so many other richly carved capitals were available, the display of figurative capitals in prominent spaces of the mosque was a deliberate decision. As this availability rendered senseless the notion of displaying disguised capitals in important spaces, capitals were likely corrected or disfigured only in a later, second phase. Thus, if one follows Wilkinson's interpretation, these capitals were originally displayed with figurative features and perhaps even selected, one may speculate, because they were figurative.[14] While it is unclear what prompted Muslims to deploy figurative capitals in such hierarchical spaces in a mosque, the evidence from al-Aqsa Mosque confirms how the reuse of non-Muslim material was largely governed by a combination of building needs as well as other, selected decisions.[15] Among the reused material in al-Haram al-Sharif, Williams has briefly discussed five late antique marble slabs decorated with carved acanthus wreaths reused in the dados of both al-Aqsa and Dome of the Rock. At least two of them had crosses in the center of the wreaths, which profile remained visible after they were erased. Two of the slabs were mounted upside down and the two pieces reused in al-Aqsa Mosque were painted over. The chronology of the reuse and modification of such pieces is however difficult to assess.[16]

As regards the provenance of columns reused in al-Haram al-Sharif, one possibility was the monumental Church of the "Nea" (New Church of the Mother of God). Ben Dov claims that some stones and columns from the Nea were reused in the Muslim palace built around al-Haram al-Sharif.[17] The church was erected in ca. 533 by the emperor Justinian, and was later ruined during the Persian invasion that took place in the early seventh century.[18] However, hypotheses concerning the abandonment of this church vary. Ben Dov argues that the church was no longer in use after the Persian invasion, whereas Schick writes that the church was only partially ruined during the Persian occupation, as written sources suggest that it "continued [to be] in use throughout the period [602–813]."[19] Natural disasters also played a role in the building's life; the late eighth-century earthquake that also partially destroyed the nearby al-Aqsa Mosque, might have caused its final abandonment.[20] This theory also fits with a passage in the *Breve Commemoratorium*, stating that the church had been ruined by a recent earthquake.[21] The Nea had been discussed by Procopius (sixth century), who also handed down an account of the miraculous discovery of a quarry pointed out by God during the search for building material. Procopius praises the columns, and describes them as located not only in the church, but also in the porticoed area around

14 Wilkinson 1987, pp. 205–14; 1992, pp. 134–39, fig. 4. This view has recently been supported also by Nees, with regard to both capitals displaying crosses and animals (most notably eagles) (2016, pp. 110–25). As investigated by Onians (1988, pp. 59–70), late antique Christians amassed elaborate Corinthian and composite capitals in the most important locations of their churches.

15 A similar case is seen at the Great Mosque of Sfax (Tunisia). Here, a late antique Christian relief displaying a Greek inscription and two peacocks flanking a cantharos with bird-filled vine scrolls in the background, was reused on a wall of the prayer hall of the mosque. Marçais and Golvin argue that the relief, with its figurative content, was deliberately inserted into the masonry at the time of the Fatimid reconstruction of the mosque (tenth century), and partially hammered only in a later period (Marçais and Golvin 1960, pp. 36–39).

16 Williams 1913; the author argues for a Crusader reuse of the marble slabs. A lintel with a similar iconography (and the cross left visible) was reused in the masonry of the Umayyad palace built at the south-western corner of al-Haram al-Sharif (Nees 2016, fig. 5.10). For similar reuses in Umayyad palatial contexts, see below footnote 54.

17 Ben Dov 1985, pp. 239–41; on the Nea Church, see Vincent 1912, vol. 2, pp. 918–19; Wilkinson 1990, pp. 99–102; Avigad 1993.

18 Schick 1995, pp. 332–33.

19 Ben-Dov 1985, p. 241; Schick 1995, pp. 227, 333.

20 Ovadiah and Gomez de Silva 1981, p. 223.

21 *Breve Commemoratorium*, pp. 216–217.

the basilica, as well as two other unusually large freestanding ones before the entrance.[22] Hence, it is possible that the Nea Church was only partially restored to its devotional function by the patriarch Modestus after the liberation of the city from the Persian occupation, such that Muslims reused some of its material—such as the columns from the porticoes—while the church was still in use. Subsequently, after the earthquake, the church was probably abandoned, with additional material potentially made available for the renovation of Muslim buildings ruined by the same natural event.

As mentioned above, the Great Mosque of Damascus was built by the caliph al-Walid I between 706 and 715 on the ruins of a former church. Many restorations and changes affected the original construction, but it was one event in particular—the devastating fire of the year 1893—that definitively destroyed the prayer hall.[23] Among the scholarship from prior to that year, the works of Wilson and Porter are especially significant. Wilson's observations, partially reported in an 1897 article by Spiers, give some details about the nature of the material reused in the Great Mosque of Damascus, especially the column capitals in the prayer hall.[24] Spiers writes that columns in the mosque were antique and transferred from other buildings; he then refers to capitals and dosserets (impost blocks) of Byzantine origins.[25] He quotes an 1865 excerpt from Wilson's diary, containing a more detailed depiction of the mosque's interior. St. John's cenotaph is described as a cave located in the eastern half of the prayer hall. While the western half of the prayer hall displayed a large number of original columns, still intact and well preserved, the eastern half, according to the diary entry, contained several columns of smaller size, along with non-monolithic columns composed of different fragments. As regards the capitals, the differences between the two halves of the prayer hall are repeated; the western half appeared more homogeneous, and, even if ruined, all the capitals are described as Corinthian. In the eastern half, some Corinthian capitals are given as differing in size from that of the supporting columns, while others are described as Ionic and still others as Islamic, in particular those belonging to the area of St. John's shrine.[26] Figure 5.3 dated to before the 1893 fire shows a portion of the eastern side of the prayer hall of the mosque. For the most part, the image confirms Spiers's account; capitals are Corinthian, and at least two capitals look slightly smaller than the columns they top. Other similar images show how the two capitals in the area of the cenotaph are of Islamic production. The capitals are a modern, "Muslim" contribution, probably inserted in the Ottoman period, when the aedicula was erected on the place where the alleged grotto with the relics of St. John the Baptist was uncovered in the year 706. It is worth observing that the capitals are not described as "Christian," but "Corinthian." Though the two labels sometimes overlap, this choice might refer to the preponderance of pre-Christian material. The Roman origin of the capitals is also evident in the courtyard, where, according to Falla Castelfranchi, the only Byzantine/Christian capitals are those topping the small columns on the second tier of the western gallery.[27]

Generally speaking, the traces of the church originally located on the site of the Great Mosque of Damascus are few and far between. One of them is the Greek inscription carved on the Roman gate located on the southern wall of the

22 "A great number of columns brought from this place (a near hill pointed out by God), of very great size, and of color that resembles flame, that stand, some above, some below, and some around the porticos that encircle the entire church" (Procopius, p. 142). The two gigantic columns might have been the result of the effort to transfer to the church the visual memory of the temple of Solomon and its two freestanding pillars. This will be further discussed in the next chapter.

23 Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 169, 187.

24 Spiers 1897.

25 Ibid., p. 287.

26 Ibid., p. 299. See also the description by Porter (1855, vol. 1, p. 65).

27 Falla Castelfranchi 2006. I thank Alain George for his insights on the reuse of material in the Great Mosque of Damascus.

FIGURE 5.3 *View of the eastern portion of the prayer hall before 1893, Great Mosque of Damascus*
HTTPS://WWW.LOC.GOV/ITEM/2004670458 (PHOTO ©THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS BY MAISON BONFILS).

mosque, originally one of the entrances to the church precinct; another is a (now lost) second inscription recovered by Christian workmen during a restoration in the early nineteenth century that reputedly mentioned that the church was founded under Theodosius (379–95), "restored" by Arcadius (r. 395–408), and dedicated to St. John the Baptist.[28] As regards the nature of the late antique church, it has been suggested that the structure served as the cella of the Roman temple converted to Christian usage with only a few changes and additions. Such had been the case of the temple/church of Baʿalbak, to which the church of Damascus is directly compared in a passage of the *Chronicon Paschale*, a comparison that helps explain why so little "Christian" material is visible in the mosque.[29]

Despite the absence of material evidence concerning the very early mosque of Medina, written sources include several details pertaining to the supports used in the prayer hall. The first enlargement was said to have been carried out by the caliph ʿUthman in 649, and included the replacement of perishable material (palm trunks) with stone columns. These columns likely consisted of superimposed stone drums joined by iron clamps, and their use continued after the reconstruction of the mosque, ordered by al-Walid I between 707 and 710. The shafts of the eighty-five columns (seventeen for each of the five rows) were

28 Porter 1855, vol. 1, pp. 71–72.

29 Khalek 2006, pp. 22–26; George forthcoming.

coated with gypsum and plaster, and then polished to look like marble. Other sources state that marble columns were deployed in the mosque, but not in its southern part (the qibla side).[30] Marble was also used in the mosque in the paneling of the lower walls. The scarcity of marble columns is worth pointing out, as this is something confirmed by written sources mentioning al-Walid I's transporting of material to Medina.[31] In the various accounts of the transport, columns are never mentioned, and generic marble is cited only once by al-Baladhuri. The high demand for marble in the early eighth century (due to the building of the Great Mosque of Damascus at that time), combined with Medina's remoteness from the Mediterranean, might have impeded the use of marble in the mosque. Nevertheless, the effect sought in polished plaster was the luminosity of marble.

The congregational mosque of San'a', in present-day Yemen, also features several reused capitals. Located in a garden near the renowned pre-Islamic palace of Ghumdan, the mosque was enlarged under al-Walid I. Spolia were deployed in the porticoed courtyard, as well as in the sanctuary. Creswell, not usually inclined to interpret the presence of spolia beyond its pragmatic role as building material, characterizes the use of spolia in the Great Mosque of San'a' as the outcome of "a deliberate layout affecting the whole building."[32] The Christian spolia include two figurative reliefs displayed on both sides of the qibla gate of the mosque. They appear to have been defaced, although the date of their defacement and the original setting are unknown.[33] More significantly, in the prayer hall, stone capitals with crosses were placed right in front of the mihrab; the capitals are decorated with stylized acanthus leaves surmounted by a cross (Figure 5.4). The style of both the leaves and the cross are reminiscent of Ethiopian art—an unsurprising similarity given that Ethiopia's sphere of influence during late antiquity extended to Yemen. Finster suggests that the capitals might have been removed from the cathedral of San'a', although other churches are likely sources as well. She argues on behalf of a political motivation for the capitals, as Christian spolia in a mosque would symbolize the overcoming or replacement of the old religion with the new one. Finster also remarks, however, that this literal reading of spolia as spoils of war does not accord with the fact that crosses were left untouched, and thus visible in the most sacred area of the sanctuary in front of the mihrab.[34]

In Syria, some Christian columns were perhaps reused in Bosra, in the so-called "mosque of 'Umar," located along the cardus in a marketplace area, attributed by Creswell to the caliph 'Umar II (717–20).[35] While Greenhalgh observes that the columns of the mosque as well as those of the main late antique church of the city were made of the same marble (*cipollino*), a recent German publication on Islamic Bosra points out how the columns of the sanctuary might have been taken from the Roman theater.[36] According to the latter study, the columns in the Bosra mosque appear heterogeneous: some are short and lacking pedestals; most are not monolithic; and, as far as the style of the capitals, Ionic were preferred in the *riwaq*s (corridors) of the courtyard.

Columns from Roman structures were also utilized in the mosque of al-Bahra, which also featured the use of a milestone from a nearby region.[37] The remains of the mosque of al-Rusafa offer additional evidence of the reuse of building material in early mosques. As mentioned above,

30 Sauvaget 1947, pp. 71–73; Bisheh 1979, pp. 162, 214–15.

31 Bisheh 1979, pp. 201–03.

32 Creswell 1989, p. 86.

33 Lewcock, Smith, and Serjeant 1983; Creswell 1989, p. 86; al-Madaj 1993; Flood 2006, pp. 159–60.

34 Finster 2009, pp. 275–76. Though recent whitewashing of some capitals left visible the carving beneath the surface, it should not be excluded that in the past the crosses on the capitals were hidden under a layer of plaster or stucco.

35 Creswell 1989, p. 130.

36 Greenhalgh 2009, p. 259; Butler 1907, pp. 281–86; Meinecke, et al. 2005, pp. 57–58.

37 Genequand 2004.

FIGURE 5.4 *Christian capital reused in the prayer hall of the Great Mosque of San'a'*
COURTESY OF RONALD LEWCOCK.

the congregational mosque built by the caliph Hisham b. ʿAbd al-Malik (724–43) occupied the northern portion of the rectangular courtyard attached to the complex of St. Sergius (also called Basilica A). As the courtyard, surrounded on three sides by a portico, was probably already damaged by an earthquake or ground erosion, Muslims reused the available material in situ. Other material was moved to the mosque from a nearby church, the so-called Basilica B, in all likelihood also ruined by an earthquake prior to its consecration.[38] Most spolia have been reused in the foundational structures of the buildings and were therefore not visible. The poor state of the remains does not allow understanding how columns and pillars were arranged, though the bases of the columns are late antique and the same holds true for the door jambs of the western entrance. While the reuse of neutral building material was the outcome of an obvious pragmatic choice and did not probably emphasize the "Christian" origins of the material, the lintel planned to be reused in the northern gate of the mosque seems to have been chosen according to some qualitative criteria. The lintel bears a Greek inscription that mentions the peripatetic movement of the relics of St. Sergius from the Basilica B to the Basilica A, thus apparently reinforcing the link between the new Muslim foundation and the source of sacredness of the site.[39]

The Great Mosque of Qayrawan, in present-day Tunisia, built slightly later than the examples discussed thus far and located outside the Syrian region, contains a remarkable use of Christian and marble spolia. The first nucleus of the mosque was established shortly after the conquest, but its monumental aspect was planned by Ziyadat Allah b. Ibrahim (836) and completed under Abu Ibrahim Ahmad (862), both members of the Aghlabids (800–909), a dynastic vassal of the Abbasid caliphate. Further additions (such as the pavilioned entrances of the mosque) were supplemented later, during the Middle Ages.[40] Its plan followed that of al-Aqsa Mosque, with eleven aisles perpendicular to the qibla wall, interrupted by a larger and higher central nave leading to the main mihrab. The mosque displays the great variety of marble available in antiquity in the Mediterranean. In fact, the columns and capitals are mostly Roman and late antique (only two are pre-Roman), and, as with al-Aqsa Mosque, there are also some ninth-century copies of pre-Islamic units.[41] Around 60 percent of the capitals in the prayer hall are of late antique vintage, and richly carved late antique capitals surmount all twelve columns in the area beneath the dome before the mihrab.[42] Marble is also used in the niche of the mihrab, composed of sculpted and openwork rectangular panels. One of the panels has a Latin inscription on the back, suggesting its identity as a reworked secondhand artifact.[43] This might also be the case of the marble capitals sculpted under the Aghlabids after late antique examples.[44]

Among the reused capitals, many display figurative reliefs (eagles and lambs) and, as seen elsewhere, the explicitly Christian symbol of the cross

38 Sack 1991, p. 196; Caseau 2001, p. 47.

39 Konrad and Sack 2010, pp. 69–71 (I thank Katharina Meinecke for pointing me to this article); Sack 1996, pp. 11–13; pl. 13; plan 11; Gatier and Ulbert 1999 (for the translation of the inscription, see p. 179).

40 Fikri 1934, pp. 15–20.

41 Ewert and Wisshak 1981, vol. 1, pp. 15–20, 31–54; figs. 18–24; pls. 36–49; Harrazi 1982, vol. 1, pp. 195–212. Blocks with Latin inscriptions were used in the lower courses of the minaret of the mosque. The fact that they were set upside down is discussed by Bloom "as if to proclaim that the old order had been reversed" (Bloom 2015, p. 72).

42 Ewert and Wisshak 1981, vol. 1, figs. 21–22.

43 Golvin 1970, vol. 3, pp. 223–39; Bloom remarks the presence of a partially hidden signature of the Arab stonecutter (re-)carving the slabs (2015, p. 64).

44 Harrazi 1982, vol. 1, p. 212.

FIGURE 5.5
Christian capital reused in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Qayrawan
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

(Figure 5.5).[45] Some, but not all, figurative reliefs were erased, and, in a few cases, revised (as at al-Aqsa), in order to transform the figurative motif into a nature-derived one.[46] As far as the chronology of the setting and erasure of figurative capitals, Harrazi's explanation, that the capitals were altered in a stage subsequent to the construction, is similar to the one offered by Wilkinson in the case of al-Aqsa.[47]

The excellent preservation of the ninth-century core of the Great Mosque of Qayrawan provides scholars with good evidence for understanding the motivations for the use of spolia. As in al-Aqsa Mosque, the mosque of Qayrawan manifests the tendency to accumulate the most highly decorated pieces in the most prominent locations (entrance to the prayer hall, area of the mihrab). Furthermore, the layout of columns and capitals was dictated by the search for symmetry based on the form of the capitals and the color of column shafts (Figure 5.6). Symmetry is manifested in the axis created by the central nave, extending to the two flanking aisles. The mihrab niche is flanked by two small porphyry columns, a symmetrical arrangement also visible in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (Cairo), dating to the year 876–79, a mosque in which otherwise pillars were preferred to columns (Plate 8). Symmetry in the Great Mosque of Qayrawan is also present in the portico, especially around the entrances of the sanctuary.[48] There is more: Ewert and Wisshak argue a deliberate use of spolia in the Great Mosque of Qayrawan, in which density of decoration and symmetry based on the qualities of marble play a distinctive role. They also stress the importance of the area in front of the mihrab, arguing on

45 Crosses are shown in capitals number 301, 369, 371, 389, and 401 (Harrazi 1982); the capitals are all located in the porticoed courtyard.

46 Maguire 2012, pp. 41–42.

47 Harrazi (1982, vol. 1, pp. 213–16) argues that the damage occurred under the Zirid dynasty (973–1148) as a reaction against the liberal approach toward representational art championed by the Fatimids. With regard to al-Haram al-Sharif, while Wilkinson argues the defacement occurred in the Abbasid period (Wilkinson 1987, p. 205), Nees pushes for a late medieval date (2016, pp. 141–43).

48 Ibid., p. 214. Harrazi invokes Deichmann's ideas on symmetry in Latin religious architecture during the early Middle Ages, highlighting how the guiding principles ruling the reuse were similar (Deichmann 1940 and 1975).

FIGURE 5.6 *Central nave, Great Mosque of Qayrawan, ninth century*
DEUTSCHER ARCHÄOLOGISCHEN INSTITUT, ABTEILUNG MADRID, WIS-R-108-77-04 (PHOTO ©JENS-PETER WISSHAK).

behalf of the existence of a hidden plan within the prayer hall that emanates from the mihrab niche. Its layout would have been defined by the location of columns and capitals according to the nuances of marble or the types of decoration. Not visually apparent in the mosque, the "building within the building" could only be revealed by those who planned it; an octagonal design, realized by connecting specific columns in the prayer hall, was intended as a reference to the Dome of the Rock, and, together with the more explicit reference to al-Aqsa in the plan of the sanctuary, as a more general allusion to al-Haram al-Sharif and Jerusalem.[49]

49 Ewert and Wisshak 1981, vol. 1, pp. 31–56, fig. 23. Nees argues the study of marble shafts in the Dome of the Rock might also reveal a special arrangement of columns in the building (2016, pp. 105–07). The exploitation of marble's coloristic qualities is also evident

The cases of Muslim religious buildings containing crosses visible on capitals and columns (Dome of the Rock, al-Aqsa, San'a', Qayrawan) are puzzling.[50] Possibly, the cross was not yet considered a symbol of religious differentiation, as in a later period, but it should also be noted that crosses were eliminated from public view from a relatively early date, as part of the new Muslim elite's appropriation of public space (see Chapter 4). It is tempting to suggest that Christian material was deliberately left recognizable, leaving visible crosses and figurative motifs in order to make clear, and even underscore, its provenance. It seems inaccurate to understand these spolia as spoils of war; the crosses were not defaced (at least not coherently), and the capitals contain no evidence of inversion, a strategy sometimes used to subvert and therefore negate the original function and meaning of an architectural piece. While Chapter 6 will explore other possible interpretive paths, it is worth mentioning the case of the reuse of dressed stones engraved with crosses (including a lintel) in the early mosque of Shivta (in the Negev) as steps connecting the mosque to the nearby square. Peers considers how their placement underfoot was in line with a similarly apotropaic function in church contexts, though other, different rationales cannot be excluded.[51]

Other Christian material was reused in secular architecture. Two instances are visible among the remains of Anjar (in present-day Lebanon); a cross is displayed on one side of a capital of the arcades in the main street's colonnade, while a cross containing a Greek prayer to Mary is clearly visible on a column now standing in the courtyard of the main palace of the town (Figure 5.8). However, its current location might not have been the original one, because, as observed by Finster, the investigations carried out in the 1950s also included the reconstruction and relocation of several ruined parts. Chehab suggests that the column possibly was originally located in the nearby mosque (since the bases in the mosque would fit with the shaft of the column). He also argues that the column might have been removed from a church dedicated to Mary (because of the inscription engraved on the shaft). Finster agrees with Chehab's suggestion, and, as with San'a', asserts that the reuse of such an explicitly Christian element was motivated by political factors.[52]

A further example is an incised cross on one of the small columns of a baluster in the complex of Khirbat al-Mafjar (Figure 5.7).[53] At

in al-Hakam II's intervention in the Great Mosque of Cordoba (tenth century) (Ewert and Wisshak 1981, vol. 1, pp. 72–93). The tenth-century phase of the mosque of Cordoba, however, was carried out with new marble material, and not spolia (Peña 2009, p. 255; I thank Professor Dede Fairchild-Ruggles for pointing this out to me). For the columns of the Emiral phases of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, see Cressier 1984–85.

50 In Alexandria the so-called western mosque (destroyed in the nineteenth century) was allegedly built (the date of foundation is unknown) on the site of the Church of Theonas. Some of the material of the church was reused in the mosque: such is the case of two columns that on the shaft display the monogram of Christ and a cross carved in relief (McKenzie 2007, p. 258, figs. 407–09).

51 Peers 2011. Peers's interpretation of the crosses in the mosque of Shivta, according to which early Muslims followed the Christian use of crosses on some church floors, fits perfectly with the picture of early medieval Shivta suggested by the coexistence of the church and the mosque in the same compound (see Chapter 3). Moor (2013, n. 197), by contrast, interprets the presence of crosses underfoot as a "classical," anti-Christian feature, and, as such, as an element inconsistent with the contiguity between the church and the mosque that she accepts. This is the reason that she is inclined to believe that the stones with crosses were located on the staircase during the modern-day renovation of the structure.

52 Finster 2003; 2009, p. 279.

53 Hamilton 1959, figs. 1–2, pl. 12.

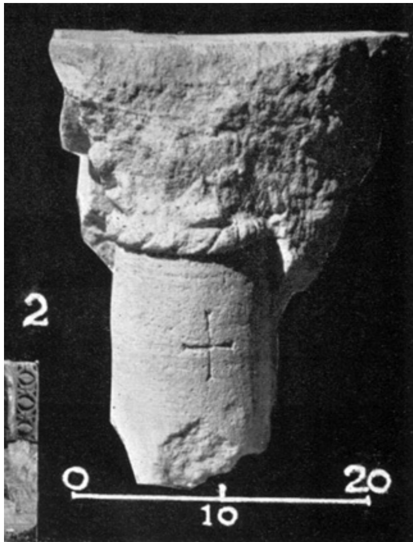

FIGURE 5.7 *Cross incised on a column in the pavilion balustrade, Khirbat al-Mafjar* (AFTER HAMILTON 1959, TABLE XII, FIG. 2) (WITH PERMISSION).

Huwwarin (in Syria, located between Damascus and Palmyra), a lintel with a cross was redeployed as the threshold of one of the entrances of the castle (the date is unknown, possibly Umayyad), while in Khirbat al-Minya (in present-day Israel, at the northern end of the lake of Galilee), other marble fragments from Christian contexts were reused in an Umayyad palace. While some Christian slabs bearing crosses were reused, some instances show the obliteration of crosses contained in medallions. In turn the modified slabs became the model for newly carved pieces that followed an identical decorative scheme avoiding the depiction of crosses.[54]

To summarize, it is clear how, during the first two centuries after the conquest (roughly between 650 and 850), Umayyad and early Abbasid patronage gave rise to a considerable demand for marble, especially columns and capitals. Almost all the marble used to meet this demand came from previous buildings or was recovered in stockpiles of this material. A broader look at the Mediterranean reveals how this was not surprising. According to Sodini, starting around the seventh century, throughout the Byzantine Empire as well new construction was based on the reuse of existing material. During the early Middle Ages (from the seventh to the eleventh centuries), reuse was a necessity, given the difficulty in finding and obtaining new marble from quarries.[55]

Economic and pragmatic factors certainly played a role in the decision to erect buildings with spolia. What is striking, however, is the amount of Christian material reused in early mosques, along with the deliberate decision not to hide, but instead almost emphasize, the Christian provenance of some artifacts. That congregational mosques were erected in mostly Christian cities, often in the vicinity of late antique churches that still functioned as such, should not be forgotten. The sociopolitical context was different from reusing material from abandoned Roman ruins or, as shown by Sodini, in the case of early Christian material redeployed in a Byzantine context. Does this sociopolitical context imply that Christian material was interpreted as belonging to a radically different culture? Should, in other words, the fact that Christian material was reused in mosques necessarily imply an anti-Christian political or religious overtone? Was the Christian provenance of the material perceived as ideologically clashing with the Muslim function in which the piece was reused? While these questions will be addressed in the next chapter, the analysis of literary sources confirms that churches were

54 Finster 2009, pp. 276–79; Ritter 2012, pp. 117–18 (I thank Markus Ritter for discussing his article with me).

55 Sodini 2002, pp. 138–40. In his view, it was only after the eleventh century that the use of spolia began to take on deliberate meaning; it was either ruled by sophisticated aesthetic values or encapsulated in the notions of "trophy" or "talisman" (pp. 141–42).

FIGURE 5.8 *Christian column with carved cross and Greek inscription located in the "great palace", Anjar*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

rich and sought-after sources in the building of early medieval Muslim sacred architecture. It also adds an important element not deducible from the material remains themselves: that Christian material was not only recovered from nearby ruins but also transferred, or said to have been transferred, from remote locales. And, given the challenges in transporting marble, the longer the distances traveled by spolia, the more deliberate was the decision governing their reuse.[56]

Literary Evidence of the Reuse of Christian Columns in the Early Medieval Period

The mosque of Ahmad b. Tulun, built in 876–79 in Cairo, is striking for its absence of columns; pillars appear in their place. Modern-day interpreters explain this innovation (in regard to the Mediterranean region) in terms of Ahmad b. Tulun's Iraqi origins provenance, and his plan to build a mosque similar to those of Samarra, the caliphal capital where he grew up. His mosque in Cairo contains pillars instead of columns, stucco, and a half-helicoidal minaret.[57] However, late medieval written sources provide a different explanation for this peculiarity. The absence of columns is connected to Christian churches. Set forth by al-Qalqashandi, such an interpretation holds that Ahmad b. Tulun wished to have a mosque without columns because columns were only available in Christian chapels and churches. Al-Maqrizi, expands the same account and claims that Ahmad b. Tulun was told by the architect that around three hundred columns were needed for the construction, and that these could only be obtained from churches throughout Egypt, causing distress to the Christian communities. Ahmad b. Tulun reportedly refused to adopt this plan, and, eventually, a Christian architect who had previously worked for him, proposed a new plan for the mosque involving no columns, except for the two pairs flanking the mihrab (Plate 8).[58] One century later (972), the mosque of al-Azhar was built in the same city, featuring an extensive reuse of Christian late antique material, suggesting that Ahmad b. Tulun's mosque was the result either of the embrace of an Iraqi architectural pattern (a reference that, however, failed to be absorbed in local Cairene historiography) or of the deliberate decision to avoid a huge plunder of Christian material.[59] What is important for the current discussion is how "columns-within-mosques" in early medieval Islam were related to Christian churches, and, at the same time, how churches were said to be the property of the Christian community at the time of this "missed" Cairene reuse.

Early and late medieval written sources discuss several instances of transfer of marble columns from churches to mosques. The genre of written sources taken into analysis varies from a Greek world chronicle, to a Syriac ecclesiastical history, to an Islamic encyclopedic work, to a local Islamic history. Despite the questionable veracity of the accounts, the following collation of literary sources might be used to infer Muslims' perception of churches and marble columns' role in the economy of early medieval sacred architecture in the region.

Literary sources ascribed the earliest case of the transfer of material from churches to mosques, to the mosque of Kufa, in present-day Iraq. According to al-Baladhuri (d. 892), unspecified building material for the first mosque, said to have been built in 638, was transferred from the nearby city of al-Hira, the former capital of the Christian-Arab dynasty of the Lakhmids. However, the reference is to palaces, and the type of material is not

56 Esch argues how it is through the analysis of the demand for, rather than the availability of, spolia, that it is possible to determine the motivation for the reuse of such material (1999, p. 105).

57 These features are however problematic: stucco is only partially similar to Samarra examples (late antique Mediterranean patterns are also discernible), while the spiral form of the ninth-century minaret is only hypothetical.

58 Creswell 1969, vol. 2, p. 333.

59 On the use of spolia in the al-Azhar mosque, see Barrucand 2002 and 2005.

specified.[60] Later on, around the year 670, Ziyad b. Abihi (governor of the Iraqi region until 673), enlarged the mosque and ordered that new material be quarried at Ahwaz (located in present-day Iran), connected via rivers to Kufa through the city of Basra. The latter quarry was not of marble but sandstone, and columns were not monolithic but composed of several stone blocks, allowing the ceiling to be elevated much higher than with the use of marble monolithic columns.

The earliest Islamic building purportedly decorated with wall mosaics and columns transferred from a church is the Kaʿba in Mecca, when it was rebuilt by Ibn al-Zubayr in 684. This is described in the following passage in the tenth-century *Murūj al-dhahab* (*Meadows of Gold*), by the Baghdad-born al-Masʿudi:

"Ibn al-Zubayr received some mosaics from Sanʿaʾ. They were realized under the patronage of Abraha, the Abyssinian, for the church he had built in that place. He also received three marble columns carved with reliefs decorated with sandarac and paintings of different colors, imitating gold. Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt the Kaʿba, … enlarged the new construction by seven cubits and used the mosaics and the columns from Sanʿaʾ. He opened two new doors, one to enter and another to exit. The Kaʿba remained in these conditions until al-Hajjaj defeated Ibn al-Zubayr. Then al-Hajjaj wrote ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwan, asking him about the enlargement carried out by Ibn al-Zubayr. ʿAbd al-Malik ordered him to destroy the enlargement and bring the building back to the size the Quraysh gave it at the time of the Prophet."[61]

Because Ibn al-Zubayr's reconstruction predates the Dome of the Rock (692) by seven or eight years, it constitutes the earliest example of a religious site decorated in an overtly "Christian" style. King, who interprets the reuse of artifacts from Sanʿaʾ as literally trophies stripped from the church, underscores how Muslims inserted the most Mediterranean and Byzantine elements among Islamic decorative motifs through an Arabian intermediary, such as the church in Yemen.[62] However—and this makes the case less paradoxical then it might seem at first glance—the Great Church of Sanʿaʾ was built by the king Abraha in the sixth century also thanks to the help of the Byzantine emperor Justinian, who allegedly sent over craftsmen, mosaics, and marble. Construction material for the church of Sanʿaʾ was also recovered from the castle of Marib, an important local building attributed to Bilqis, the queen of Sheba.[63] The passage mentions the columns were decorated with golden carved reliefs, though no further detail about their formal features is added.

Archaeological findings are gradually shedding light on the late antique period of the Arabian Peninsula. Although places of worship do not seem a primary concern of recent excavations, these findings are increasingly revealing the Red Sea's interconnection to the nearby Persian and Mediterranean regions.[64] What is worth noting is Ibn al-Zubayr's reputed role in stimulating the monumentalization of Muslim religious buildings, and, more specifically (and paradoxically), the rise of the Umayyad aesthetic. Rival of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, Ibn al-Zubayr ruled over Mecca and Medina as well as Egypt, Arabia,

60 Al-Baladhuri, p. 286. Creswell (1989, p. 7) mentions marble columns, but this is not what al-Baladhuri writes in his text.

61 Al-Masʿudi, vol. 3, p. 282 (paragraph n. 1956). Creswell (1989, p. 16) also mentions marble windows were transferred to the Kaʿba.

62 King 1980.

63 Serjeant and Lewcock 1983; Finster and Schmidt 1994.

64 Finster 2010; Franke and Gierlichs 2011. The latter important publication, which summarizes the most recent discoveries in Saudi Arabia, is notable for the absence of any relevant information concerning late antique places of worship of Christian and Jewish communities in the area. At the same time, the available evidence for the eastern portion of the peninsula indicates ecclesiastic and monastic activities up until the first centuries following the seventh-century conquest (Carter 2008).

Iraq, Iran, and part of Afghanistan (r. 680–92). He was very active in promoting his claim to power: refurbishing the Kaʿba, implementing a more cohesive interrelation between rituals and a sacred place such as Mecca, and minting the first coins in which Muhammad was quoted.[65] It has been suggested that the inclusion of Muhammad's name in Umayyad coins, along with its appearance in 691 in the monumental inscription of the Dome of the Rock, constituted a response to the Muhammad-based claims to power asserted by the rival Ibn al-Zubayr and his governors.[66]

It is also worth considering the presumed provenance of the material—"al-Qalis," or "al-Qullays," was the Great Church of Sanʿa'. Among Abraha's goals when he built the church in the sixth century was to Christianize those Arabs still worshipping pagan gods, by diverting their attention from the Kaʿba to the new church.[67] The magnificence of the church, which acquired an imperial character through its association with Justinian, was displayed both through the architecture and the glistening decoration.[68] It is also important to note that Abraha was connected to the life of the Prophet Muhammad, because in 570, around the time of the Prophet's birthday, the former led a military expedition against Mecca.[69] The church remained in use at least up until the eighth century. Al-Masʿudi mentions that only three columns were plundered at the time of the renovation of Mecca's sanctuary; the church is described in relation to the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Saffah (750–54), and was again looted under the caliphate of Abu Jaʿfar al-Mansur (754–75), by the local governor al-ʿAbbas b. al-Rabiʿ.[70]

The following passage refers to ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwan's order in ca. 692 to restore the Kaʿba to its "original" form. By this is meant its "pre–Ibn al-Zubayr," form, namely, the Kaʿba's early seventh-century renovation promoted by the Quraysh family, to which Muhammad himself is said to have contributed.[71]

"Abd al-Malik gave instructions for the rebuilding of the temple of Mecca and wanted to remove the columns of Gethsemane. Now Sergius, son of Mansour, a good Christian, who was treasurer and stood on close terms with ʿAbd al-Malik, as well as his peer, Patricius surnamed Klausys, who was prominent among the Christians of Palestine, begged him not to do this, but to persuade Justinian, through their supplication, to send other columns instead of those; which, indeed, was done."[72]

This passage comes from the chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785), handed down in the Greek chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor. The difficulty for Muslims to obtain columns from important and functioning churches here emerges for the first time. In a joint effort with a prominent representative of the Christian community, the Christian treasurer of the caliph was able to redirect the caliph's request to the Byzantine emperor, and in the process, save the columns of one of the

65 Robinson 2005, pp. 35–39.

66 Johns 2003, pp. 424–33; Hoyland 2006, pp. 396–98. Robinson argues that one cannot overestimate Ibn al-Zubayr's use of material culture in his self-promotion, such that "if one knew only the contemporaneous coins and none of the later histories, one would conclude that Ibn al-Zubayr was the ruler and ʿAbd al-Malik the rebel" (2005, p. 36).

67 Ibn Hisham, p. 21.

68 With regard to the architecture of the church, Finster and Schmidt (1994) question an earlier interpretation by Serjeant and Lewcock (1983), suggesting instead that it was a three-aisled basilica with a transept; a domed sanctuary, perhaps flanked by lateral rooms; and an upper gallery over the two lateral aisles. More recently a new plan of the church, based on a square format, has been argued by Robin (paper delivered at the conference "Holy places in Islam," University of Edinburgh, 15–17 June 2015).

69 Ibn Hisham (a), pp. 21–30.

70 Ibn Kathir, vol. 2, pp. 170, 176; al-Azraqi, vol. 1, p. 141.

71 Robinson 2005, pp. 95–100.

72 Theophilus of Edessa, p. 187 (Theophanes the Confessor, p. 510; Greek year 6183).

Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.[73] A church at the "Gethsemane" is mentioned by Peter of Bayt Ra's in the ninth century (see Chapter 2).[74] The vague indication might also refer to the Church of the Agony or the Tomb of the Virgin Mary. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, the latter was particularly esteemed by early Muslims. Some Islamic traditions even associated the presence of two "special" columns (held sacred by Christians and likewise honored by early Muslims) with the Tomb of Mary (see Chapter 6). However, Christian accounts locating the two columns in the nearby Church of the Ascension, combined with the vagueness of Theophilus of Edessa's passage, do not allow one to identify precisely which columns were targeted by Muslims. Indeed, there is no information on whether columns were ultimately sent by the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (r. 685–95 and 705–11).[75] At the same time, all the buildings in the Gethsemane area remained in use long after the seventh-century conquest, as well as after the attempted transfer of material originally ordered by ʿAbd al-Malik. It is also noteworthy that the Kaʿba was connected to the Great Church of Sanʿa' at the time of Ibn al-Zubayr and to an important church of Jerusalem a few years later under the rule of ʿAbd al-Malik.[76]

The transfer of columns from specific churches is also evoked with regard to the Great Mosque of Damascus. The source is the same, above-cited *Meadows of Gold*, by the tenth-century polymath al-Masʿudi, and refers to the Umayyad caliph al-Walid b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 705–15) and a church situated in Antioch.[77] Together with Jerusalem and Alexandria, the city was one of the patriarchal seats of the Orthodox (Melkite) Church under Islamic rule, whose jurisdiction included the Orthodox (Melkite) community of Damascus.

"In Antioch there are the churches of St. Barbara and St. Mary; the latter is a circular foundation and it is one of the marvels of the world for its structure and height. The caliph al-Walid b. ʿAbd al-Malik carried off some of its columns of alabaster and marble in order to use them in Damascus's mosque. The columns were transported by water to the southern coast close to Damascus. Most of the columns, however, remained in the church, and could be admired up until the present."[78]

The long journey referenced in this passage—from Antioch to Damascus—is reminiscent of the "imaginary odyssey" of Roman columns envisioned by the abbot Suger, to be transferred from Rome to the cathedral of St. Denis in Paris (see below).[79] Also of note is the coincidence between the alleged reuse of Christian material by the Umayyads and the survival of the church from which the material is said to have been taken. According to al-Masʿudi, the Church of St. Mary in Antioch was still visible at the time he wrote his text (tenth century). There is not a triumphal tone in al-Masʿudi's passage; rather, the emphasis is on the material quality of the columns (marble and alabaster) and their provenance (a church of the highest order).

A copper-gilt dome was said to have been transferred from a church of Baʿalbak to al-Haram al-Sharif by the same al-Walid I. This was likely a small, domed structure: a ciborium or a canopy, perhaps provided with marble columns, probably

73 "Sergius, son of Mansour" is discussed in Shboul and Walmsley (1998, p. 269).

74 See, however, the possibility that the church was no longer in use after the year 614 and since then confused with the nearby Church at Dominus Flevit (Schick 1995, pp. 351–53).

75 Nasir Khusraw is probably referring to this movement of columns from Syria toward Mecca (p. 94).

76 Later on al-Azraqi mentions the shipping of columns from Syria and Egypt for the renovation sponsored by the caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775–85); see Grabar 1985, p. 5; Abdellatif 2012, p. 176.

77 Al-Masʿudi's interest in Christians and their churches within the Dar al-Islam is addressed by Shboul (1979, pp. 289–95).

78 Al-Masʿudi, vol. 3, p. 339 (paragraph n. 1292).

79 Panofsky 1979, pp. 90–91.

reused to cover one of the holy spaces in al-Haram al-Sharif of Jerusalem.[80]

Sulayman b. ʿAbd al-Malik, al-Walid's brother, was governor of Palestine before he was appointed caliph (r. 715–16). He decided to settle in Lydda, the late antique provincial capital, but, as mentioned above in Chapter 2, given the difficulties in finding a plot of land on which to erect his palace, he decided to establish a new town nearby, known as "al-Ramla."[81] In the new town, he also built a congregational mosque and, according to al-Jahshiyari (d. 942),

"When Sulayman b. ʿAbd al-Malik decided to build the mosque of al-Ramla, he expressed the desire to have some columns from the Church of St. George [of Lydda] transferred there. He asked the bishop for them and the latter wrote to Byzantium [Bilad al-Rum]. The answer he received indicated a cave near al-Darwam, where there were still columns of the same type used in the building of the church. The caliph took them, and he built the mosque: so the Church of St. George was saved."[82]

A similar, although slightly different account is given by al-Muqaddasi (d. 991), who writes that the columns were pursued when the caliph Hisham b. ʿAbd al-Malik (723–43) decided to build the minaret of the mosque of al-Ramla. It was reported to him that Christians had buried some columns they expected to use in the construction of a church called "al-Baliya." The caliph, al-Muqaddasi continues, threatened to raze the church of Lydda if Christians did not reveal the location of the stockpile. Eventually, Christians pointed out where they had buried the columns, described as "thick, tall, and beautiful."[83]

In al-Jahshiyari's version, "Byzantium" is again invoked as a possible "authority" over Christian material in the caliphate, whereas in the second version Muslims exerted their pressure directly over local Christians. In truth, relations between Muslims and Christians were not purely oppositional (colonizers vs. colonized, rulers vs. ruled), but more nuanced; Christians were co-opted by the new rulers. According to al-Baladhuri, in the case of al-Ramla it was a Christian, named Batrik b. al-Naka, who oversaw the building of the congregational mosque and the related palace.[84]

Despite the foundation of al-Ramla, Lydda continued to flourish. Al-Muqaddasi (d. 991) speaks of the existence of a mosque in his time, whereas the Church of St. George remained one of the most important shrines of the region.[85] The church was visited and described by Anastasius of Persia in the year 637, and is apparently portrayed in the Church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Rasas (in present-day Jordan) among the vignettes of the mid-eighth-century mosaic floor.[86] The church was a transregional sanctuary renowned in the early medieval period as the site of the festival of St. George, in which even the caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775–85) purportedly once took part.[87] At the same time, the church was also deemed sacred by early Muslims, who identified it as one of the possible locales for the apparition of Christ fighting the anti-Christ, an event signaling the end of the world.[88]

80 Eutychius, *Annales*, vol. 2, p. 42. According to Creswell (1989, p. 37), this testifies to al-Walid's efforts to "copy certain features of Christian churches." Finster identifies such reuse of a Christian artifact as an expression of sovereignty over non-Muslims (2009). The passage is further discussed by Necipoğlu (2008, pp. 28–29) in relation to minor structures built around the Dome of the Rock under al-Walid.

81 Sourdel 1981, pp. 394–95; Luz 1997, pp. 47–48 (see also above, Chapter 2).

82 Al-Jahshiyari, pp. 48–49.

83 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 165.

84 Al-Baladhuri, p. 143. "Batrik" in this context refers to a "patricius," a member of the laity acting on behalf of the Christian community. For an overview of the role of Arab Christians at the Umayyad court, see Shboul 1994; Shboul and Walmsley 1998.

85 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 176.

86 Schick 1995, p. 389; Duval 1994, pp. 182–83.

87 Yaqut al-Hamawi, v. "Ludd." Al-Muqaddasi (p. 183) includes the Feast of St. George among the Christian celebrations observed by Muslims because of its relationship to the seasons of the year.

88 Elad 1995, pp. 134–35.

Further north, in Aleppo, the new congregational mosque built in 715 also made use of Christian material. As shown in Chapter 3, the mosque was erected in the vicinity of the main church of the city, with its fine-looking sixth-century marble columns and capitals. At the same time, the mosque is said to have competed with the Great Mosque of Damascus. It probably displayed a plan similar to that of the Damascus mosque, with a central transept intersecting the three aisles of the sanctuary. In addition, the mosque's conformity with that of the caliphate capital was expressed through marble decoration, ornaments, and mosaics.[89] In the words of Ibn Shaddad, a thirteenth-century Aleppine scholar,

"I was told that Sulayman b. ʿAbd al-Malik built the mosque (of Aleppo) and embellished it so as to compete with the work of his brother al-Walid in the mosque of Damascus. That same al-Walid is, however, also said to have built the mosque. The builder brought to the mosque the furnishings (*ālāt al-kanīsa*) of the church of Cyrrhus, one of the wonders of the world. And, someone said that the king of Rum (the Byzantine emperor) offered seventy thousand dinars for three columns that were in the church, but al-Walid refused."[90]

Unfortunately, the present-day appearance of Aleppo's mosque follows several restorations in the aftermath of earthquakes and fires.[91] In the course of these renovations, pillars were substituted for columns, while the ornaments cited in the above passage have since been lost.[92] Yet, Cyrrhus has not been excavated, so that its early medieval history is not well known. It was possibly transformed into a stronghold, due to its location near the new border with Byzantium, though written sources assign the town a bishop up to the eleventh century.[93] Procopius includes Cyrrhus among those cities that were beneficiaries of Justinian's patronage—a fact that might mean it received above-average religious constructions in the sixth century, which likely survived the conquests of the seventh century.[94] In its alleged rivalry with the congregational mosque of the caliphate capital, the mosque in Aleppo is said to have been embellished with material from a "wonderful" church; the splendor of the material is suggested by the amount of gold offered for the columns. Muslims, however, declined the offer. The Abbasids subsequently succeeded in transferring the mosque ornaments to al-Anbar, the city on the bank of the Euphrates in southern Mesopotamia (today located near al-Falluja, in Iraq), which was one of the Abbasid capitals prior to the founding of Baghdad.[95]

Like their predecessors, the early Abbasids were susceptible to the allure of marble. According to Michael the Syrian, who writes in the twelfth century, when the caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–75) decided to build a new palace in al-Raqqa (ca. 770),[96] he requisitioned the transfer of some columns from Edessa:

"At the time of the Arabs, its [Edessa's] solid wall was destroyed. The wall dated back to the time of

89 Ibn al-Shihna, pp. 61–62; Herzfeld 1942–48, Part IV, pp. 118–20.

90 Ibn Shaddad, p. 31.

91 The civil war that erupted in Syria in 2011 affected the status of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads of Aleppo. As the historical town became the site of combat, the eleventh-century minaret was bombed, with the resulting fires gravely damaging the sanctuary and the porticoes of the courtyard (Guidetti and Perini 2015).

92 Herzfeld 1955, vol. 1, p. 173.

93 Al-Baladhuri (p. 149) states that, on behalf of the population, some monks surrendered during the conquest. Cyrrhus eventually became a frontier garrison for the city of Antioch; Cumont 1917, pp. 221–36; Frézouls 1954–55, pp. 116–20. The early medieval period of Cyrrhus was recently surveyed by Straughn (2006, vol. 1, pp. 207–18).

94 Procopius, pp. 71–73.

95 Musil 1927, pp. 353–57; Djaït 1986, pp. 311–19. Christians and Jews inhabited the city, and Muslims evidently established an *extra-muros* palace-city (al-Baladhuri, p. 287; Lassner 1980, pp. 156–57).

96 Al-Tabari, vol. 2, p. 1737.

Seleucus [the generic name for the Hellenistic Seleucid dynasty], and was praised, among others, by Mar Ephrem. The cause of its demolition was as follows: under his rule, al-Mansur built a palace at al-Raqqa. He asked the people from Edessa for a few marble columns piled up in their main church. They refused to give him the material, and he got furious. They rose up against him out of fear. He laid siege against the city and ruined the Church of Mar Sergius. At some point, various astute men left the city in secret, conspiring with the caliph to deliver the city, if he swore to never mistreat anyone. He swore not to kill, make captives, nor change their condition or take anything away from the city but a white horse, which he would eventually kill by way of revenge. They did not understand the meaning of the word "horse," until he took possession of the city. Then, he made clear that by "horse" he meant "wall." Thereupon, he razed the wonderful wall of the city of Edessa, and not a single tower stood after the devastation, but the one through which waters flew out to the mills."[97]

In this instance, the presumed final destination for the columns was a caliphal palace and not a mosque.[98] Once more, however, Christians refused to yield to the caliph and give him what he asked for, some columns that had been hoarded and not used in the church. Eventually, despite the caliph's vengeance, the building remained intact and thrived, and the church continued to serve the Melkite community of Edessa. The renowned late antique monument was abandoned, collapsing only in the aftermath of the Crusades (see Chapter 7).[99]

97 Michael the Syrian, vol. 3, p. 279.

98 That same caliph, al-Mansur, is said to have transferred an iron gate from Wasit to his own palace in Baghdad, while four others from the same city were used as city gates. When Wasit was built (under the Umayyads), these other gates, in turn, were transported there from the pre-Islamic town of al-Zandaward (Lassner 1980, pp. 180–81).

99 Guidetti 2009.

Outside the Syrian region, on the North African coast, some further evidence is offered by Qayrawan, where, as previously described, the ninth-century congregational mosque displayed a large number of late antique Christian spolia. Some of these columns are apparently referenced in a twelfth-century anonymous Moroccan text: "With regard to the mosque of Qayrawan, there are two red columns embellished in yellow; they are so beautiful that it is impossible to find anything similar. They were in one of the churches of the Greeks, and it was Ghassan b. al-Nuʿman who transferred them to the mosque of Qayrawan. The columns are in front of the mihrab, supporting its dome."[100]

This text clearly refers to two porphyry columns, which were given golden decoration (perhaps gilded capitals), and were located before the mihrab (supporting the last bay of the main nave, being the only ones in the mosque made of Egyptian porphyry).[101] A further passage by al-Bakri (d. 1094) sheds light on the columns' alleged origin: "Ghassan destroyed and rebuilt the whole structure with the exception of the mihrab. There, he transferred two red columns with yellow patches that were of incomparable beauty. [He took them] from a church that is the place today known as al-Qaysaryya in the suq al-gharbiyy."[102] Commenting on this passage, De Slane asserts that the columns came from Sabra, located two kilometers southwest of Qayrawan, while Harrazi, partially misinterpreting the reference, claims that it is likely that the columns were purchased in the market cited by al-Bakri.[103] As Talbi argues, Qayrawan was not founded by Muslims, but probably emerged out of the late antique layer of an older city.[104] Whether the city was in ruins when it was conquered is unknown, as is the fate of its churches; according to al-Bakri, the church was

100 *Kitab al-istibsar fi ʿajaib al-amsar*, p. 114.

101 Ewert and Wisshak 1982, fig. 21.

102 Al-Bakri, vol. 2, p. 673 (paragraph n. 1126).

103 Al-Bakri (b), p. 53, n. 1; Harrazi 1982, vol. 1, pp. 215–16.

104 Talbi 2003; cf. Lézine 1967, pp. 62–63.

in the place "today known" (*al-maʿrūf al-yawm*) as the al-Qaysaryya (a market area), although the date of its conversion is not known.[105]

In tenth-century Umayyad al-Andalus, marble columns and glass mosaics were again associated with Christians. Wall mosaics were said to have been sent to the Great Mosque of Cordoba by the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros Phocas; the transport also reportedly included a master supposed to teach local artisans the art of mosaic.[106] As mentioned in Chapter 3, this was part of a strategy to present tenth-century Cordoba as the new Damascus, emphasizing the Umayyad capital's connection to Constantinople. Slightly earlier, in 955, a diplomatic mission sent from Cordoba to Byzantium returned home with gifts, including 140 columns, eventually allotted to the city-palace of Madinat al-Zahra, located ten kilometers west of Cordoba.[107]

The thrust of each passage quoted in this section is consistent with the material evidence discussed above, wherein the church is the only specific building type related to the use of spolia in congregational mosques. The uncertain veracity of each passage notwithstanding, what clearly emerges is how written sources, both Christian and Muslim, manifest a clear effort to present mosques as connected to churches. The churches involved in the narratives were often among the most revered by contemporaries, and, in some cases, were famously sacred places. A final point worthy of mention is that, in some cases, Christians had the option of rejecting the injunction, refusing to give Muslims the desire material. This affirms their rights over ecclesiastical buildings, discouraging the interpretation of material transfers from churches to mosques only through the paradigm of spoils of war. This element of the failure in reusing Christian columns and the variety of the details included in the different accounts suggest the lack of one single matrix for all these passages. In other words the only recurrent *topos* is the reference to churches, which is an element that reflects the entanglement between the buildings of the Muslims and the legacy of late antique Christian architecture.

In the case of the eleventh-century abbey of Montecassino, in Italy, it has been suggested that, despite abbot Desiderius' claims to have transported columns from Rome to the abbey, it is likely he also took columns from the much closer Roman town of Casinum.[108] If in his case referring to Rome was instrumental in increasing the aura of his new medieval abbey, something similar might have happened with the reference to Antioch, with regard to the columns allegedly

105 Some Latin Christian inscriptions recovered in Qayrawan and dating to the early eleventh century show the presence of a local Christian community that was still using Latin as the liturgical language (Mahjoubi 1966, pp. 93–96). More recently, the Christian community's continuity in the aftermath of the seventh-century conquest in North Africa has been investigated by Prevost (2007 and 2012). Prevost highlights the difference between "Rumi" and "Afariqa" Christians; while the former spoke Greek and were connected to Byzantine rule, the latter were presumed to be autochthonous Christians speaking *al-lisān al-laṭīnī al-ʾifrīqī* (the African-Latin language) (2007, p. 472). A broader overview on the passage from late antiquity to the early medieval period in North Africa, including the continuity of Christian communities, was most recently offered by Fenwick (2013).

106 Calvo Capilla 2010, pp. 293–97. James (2006) investigates the different stages of production of glass mosaics in late antiquity, and the impact that a better understanding of techniques such as glass creation, coloring, and the execution of mosaics could have on the assessment of elusive questions such as Constantinople's role in the dissemination of glass mosaics and, more broadly, the notion of center vs periphery in the Byzantine Empire. The eastern Mediterranean coast, for instance, was home to several sites of glass production (potentially also important sites of mosaic making), both before and after the seventh-century conquest (pp. 34–35). For remains of wall glass mosaics from the churches of Palestine otherwise known for their floor mosaics, see Piccirillo 1986, p. 233.

107 Cutler 2001, p. 254. Recently, Calvo capillo (2014) has presented the fragments of Roman sarcophagi recovered in the excavations at Madinat al-Zahra.

108 Greenhalgh 1989, p. 127.

brought to Damascus for the construction of the Great Mosque. In other words, narratives reported in the written traditions contribute in shaping an image of the monument rather than only reflecting or reinventing the reality.

Before giving a brief overview of the debate around spolia in Islamic art historiography, we will examine some further documentary evidence concerning the acquisition and transport of marbles during the period of the building of the earliest congregational mosques in the Dar al-Islam.

Modalities of the Acquisition and Transfer of Materials

One of the key issues surrounding spolia is the availability of marble quarries in the early medieval period. As Greenhalgh observes, this question impacts the debate over the meaning of reuse and spolia.[109] Yet, this point should not be considered the only criterion for evaluating spolia: in the case of early medieval Syria, extant and operational churches were targeted despite the existence of other available disengaged material, suggesting that the mere availability of material did not in and of itself govern architectural and decorative practices.

The traditional view holds that most marble quarries in the Mediterranean area had been closed by the late sixth century.[110] This view was taken up by Goodwin, who argued that no marble was quarried prior to the late Middle Ages, so that all marble deployed before that date and following the sixth-century closure of the quarries was the result of reuse.[111] By contrast, Greenhalgh maintains that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that early medieval Muslims resorted to quarries; however, this evidence is inferred from the sheer volume of early Muslim construction (that supposedly prompted the need to locate new material), and literary sources (medieval Islamic texts describing mountains from where the material was extracted).[112] Further documentary material is available to assess the question. Recently, a wreck was discovered only three miles away from Marmara Island, near Constantinople and dated to the seventh century. The boat was laden with ceramics (that helped in dating the cargo) and marble: columns and unfinished basket capitals that had apparently left the place of extraction and first manufacture.[113] This finding seems to indicate that material was still extracted and sent out in the seventh century; this discovery seems to suggest the postponement of the closure of the Proconnesian marble quarry, if not others.[114]

In addition, the examination of marble material in al-Haram al-Sharif and other Islamic sites might be helpful in this regard. As mentioned above, around one-fifth of the capitals used in al-Haram al-Sharif area were of Islamic production; according to Wilkinson, they were all made of

109 Greenhalgh (2009, p. 116) argues that, given that material for mosque construction was taken from stockpiles or ruined buildings, the search for the meaning of the reuse appears insignificant. An opposing point of view is set forth by Esch (see n. 56), who highlights the importance of the demand for spolia, while Parra emphasizes the topographical and cultural provenance of spolia (including ruins) as an important index for deciphering the reasons for their use (1983).

110 Sodini 1989.

111 Goodwin 1977.

112 Greenhalgh (2009, pp. 89–139). "Indeed, the Moslems did too much building for supplies of ancient material to suffice" (p. 139). An example of the literary evidence available on this topic is an al-Baladhuri passage on the Iraqi governor al-Hajjaj who, around the year 700, is said to have extracted columns for the enlargement of the mosque of Basra in the nearby mountains of Ahwaz (al-Baladhuri, p. 277).

113 Gunsenin 1998, p. 309, n. 1. I thank Andea Paribeni for pointing me to this work.

114 The same hypothesis emerges from one of the miracles of St. Demetrius (seventh century), according to which a bishop from North Africa miraculously received by boat some porphyry columns and slabs just quarried out of Mt. Porphyry in Egypt, and originally planned to use them in an ambo in honor of St. Victor in the city of Marseille (Lemerle 1979, vol. 1, p. 235, and vol. 2, pp. 166–69).

limestone, and they can be dated to the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Although limestone was also used in late antiquity, all capitals produced after the seventh-century conquest for al-Haram al-Sharif were apparently made of limestone rather than marble. This is also confirmed by the eighth-century capitals from Qasr al-Muwaqqar, among the most renowned examples of Umayyad sculpture. Consisting of capitals after late antique examples sculpted entirely in ochre limestone, these works are dated to the 720s.[115] Clearly, early medieval Muslims did extract new material, but this was limited to limestone, as at the quarry of Kamid, located seventeen kilometers away from Anjar, a newly established town founded in the very early eighth century in present-day Lebanon.[116] As mentioned above, limestone was appreciated in antiquity because of its marble-like luminosity.

In the early medieval period, all "real" marble (in modern-day terms) was therefore reused. The sources for marble were various. According to written sources, columns had a concrete economic value, suggesting that existing marble artifacts were traded. With regard to the columns in Qayrawan, al-Bakri cites a proposal made by the Byzantine court: "They say that before the columns were transferred, the sovereign of Constantinople offered them their weight in gold; so that Muslims rushed to store the columns in the mosque. All who saw these columns said that he had never seen anything like them."[117] It is difficult to discern to whom the proposal was made: the Muslims or the local Christians. The two columns were in a church, in a city housing a bishop up until the early Middle Ages. There was likely a sale of these kinds of material. Ibn Kathir mentions that the two green marble columns supporting the dome in the Great Mosque of Damascus were bought by al-Walid from Harb b. Khalid b. Yazid b. Muʿawiya for 1,500 dinars each.[118] As mentioned above, in the case of the columns from Cyrrhus, Byzantine authorities reportedly offered 70,000 dinars for the three columns. The idea was probably to ransom material formerly in a Byzantine church built after imperial commission. One dinar consisted of 4.25 or 4.55 grams of gold depending it refers to the Muslim dinar or the Byzantine solidus, amounting to around one hundred kg of gold for each column. While the amounts cited in the written sources obviously differ too much to be deemed reliable, some columns were evidently for sale. Ibn Sasra recounts that the caliph al-Walid collected marble, columns, and stones for his mosque in Damascus, adding that nothing was removed without there being payment (*bilā thaman*).[119] The practice of paying for luxury materials continued up until the Middle Ages; according to Abu Shama's *Kitāb al-rawḍatayn*, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, the Venetians (*banādika*) started to sell in Egypt and in Syria marble furnishings (*ālāt rukhkhām*) they had just plundered from the churches of the Byzantine capital.[120] Around the same period (1170–90), Christians in Egypt also purchased some pillars "on the market" in order to restore the Church of St. Mercurius in Cairo, burned and almost totally destroyed by a Muslim mob.[121]

115 Hamilton 1948; Barsanti (2007) highlights the variety of the sources of Qasr al-Muwaqqar capitals, varying from late antique Mediterranean examples to Sasanian ones.

116 Mouterde 1939; Ory 1967. The geographer al-Dimashqi (late thirteenth century) observed the presence of white, green, and variegated marble quarries in the environs of Latakia (present-day Syria). Indeed, Latakia is renowned even today for its marble, but the lateness of the evidence does not allow one to postulate that marble was quarried in the seventh and eighth centuries. In the case of Cordoba, the tenth-century phase was carried out with newly quarried marble, whereas the previous phases made extensive use of spolia (Peña 2009).

117 Al-Bakri, vol. 2, p. 673 (paragraph n. 1126).

118 Ibn Kathir, vol. 9, p. 148.

119 Ibn Sasra, vol. 2, p. 119.

120 Abu Shama, vol. 5, p. 154. The French translation seems incorrect; *ālāt rukhkhām* are not "*sculpture de marbres*," but, instead, denote the general furnishings or decoration of a church.

121 Abu Salih al-Armani, p. 120.

Another example from the early medieval period indicates how columns were available to an assortment of individuals. A passage in the *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* mentions the pillaging of some churches by Muslims in northern Egypt in the second quarter of the ninth century. According to the same source, the Coptic bishop was able to restore the churches to their former beauty, with marble sent from Cairo and Alexandria.[122] Under orders of the local governor, Muslims carried columns off from various churches of Nestorian and Chalcedonian Christians of Alexandria. These included the Church of St. Menas:

"And when he looked at the building and its ornaments, and saw the beauty of the columns and coloured marbles that it contained, he marvelled and was amazed and said: 'This is what the (Muslim) prince needs' … and then set to work and robbed the church of its colored marbles and its unequalled pavement, which was composed of all colors and had no match, nor was its value known. And when the marble arrived at the city of Alexandria, so that it might be forwarded to the court, the father [the Coptic patriarch] was greatly grieved for the church."[123]

In this instance, the columns and marble panels were plundered, and, once all the material was gathered in Alexandria, then sent by sea to the Bilad al-Sham coast. According to the same Coptic source, pillaging was sometimes sanctioned by law; such was the case of an edict issued under caliph al-Walid I allowing Muslims in Egypt to dispose of "the colored pillars and marbles that were in churches."[124] Building materials were also part of the tax burden of some provinces, as indicated by a Greek papyrus from Aphrodito that mentions the transport of fifteen palm trunks from the Egyptian province to the regional capital of Babylon (Cairo) to be used in the representative palace of the caliph.[125] In certain cases, the plunder and search for material appear to have been an essential aspect of military missions, so that, for instance, soldiers were "required to bring back from the country of Rum [Byzantium] on [their] expedition a qafiz of mosaics and a square cubit of marble."[126]

At the same time, ruins were also available as sources for marble. As witnessed in Nasir Khusraw's description (1046), such was the case of Beirut and, more generally, the Syrian region:

"The whole plain thereabouts abounds in marble columns, capitals, and bases, all of carved marble—round, square, hexagonal, and octagonal—and of a kind of stone so hard that iron makes no impression on it. Yet, there is no mountainous terrain nearby from which the stone might have been quarried, and all the other stone there is soft enough to be hewn with iron. In the outlying regions of Syria, there are more than five hundred thousand of these fallen columns, capitals, and bases, and no one knows what they were or from where they were brought."[127]

122 *History of the Patriarchs*, pp. 512–15. Abu Salih al-Armani notes the area of al-'Arish, in the northern Sinai Peninsula, as one of the richest areas for marble, although it is not clear whether the marble was stockpiled (p. 167).

123 Ibid. A slightly different version can be found in Abu Salih al-Armani (Munich Ar. 2570), ff. 103a–b.

124 Vasiliev 1956, pp. 41–42.

125 Bell 1911–12, pp. 369–73 (see discussion of papyrus cited in n. 1433, which also mentions the sending of skilled workmen to Damascus for the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus).

126 Al-'Umari, vol. 1, p. 191.

127 Nasir Khusraw, p. 19; cf. p. 54 regarding the region of Alexandria. Papaconstantinou (2012) recently discussed a papyrus recovered in the Egyptian city of Oxirhynchus and dated to the fourth century, describing columns and capitals of a series of buildings; the length, diameter, style of capitals, and type of marble are all detailed. The buildings enumerated seem to have been abandoned, and some columns are said to be lying on the ground. The papyrus was probably a report ordered to save the material from disrepair and either reuse it in other buildings or stockpile it for future use.

A similar situation might have been the case at Cyrrhus at the time of Yaqut al-Hamawi (d. 1229), who, in his dictionary, refers to a city with an ancient heritage and still-visible monumental ruins.[128] As noted above, it was also common for marble to be stockpiled during antiquity. This was often a state-run operation that allowed for a more efficient organization of the building process; both newly extracted and reused materials were stockpiled.[129] During late antiquity, Christian authorities apparently stockpiled marble for use in the restoration of churches or the building of new ones. Such was the case of the above-cited materials that, according to al-Muqaddasi's account, the inhabitants of Lydda had hoarded for building a church at al-Baliya.[130] The Church of St. Sophia in Edessa was likely a similar case. Al-Mansur desired, but did not obtain, some (small) columns piled up in the church, probably for future projects within the same ecclesiastical area.[131] As regards the columns hoarded in nearby Lydda for the construction of a new church, the term used is *al-mughāra* indicating a cave or an underground cavity. Ibn ʿAsakir used this word to describe the crypt in which the relics of St. John the Baptist were allegedly found during the construction of the congregational mosque of Damascus.[132] In the Great Mosque of Qayrawan a column bears a Kufic inscription reading "li-l-masjid" ("for the mosque"), a possible lettering intended to reserve the column for the building of the mosque once the marble piece was still in the stockpile or in the previous structure.[133] This would fit the abovementioned passage by al-Bakri about a bid proffered by Byzantine authorities for some columns before they were transferred to the mosque.

The transport of this material accorded with the usual practices of late antiquity; transfers by sea were obviously preferable to moving marble by land. The long-distance journeys mentioned in the sources probably did occur. Marble quarries were often located far from building sites, so that, in the case of newly quarried material as well, transport was a forced expenditure. A rough idea of the impact of transportation costs on the final amount in antiquity is given by the price reported for the transfer of a column to the Greek temple of Didyma (in present-day western Turkey) from a quarry located approximately fifty kilometers from the town. Transportation alone amounted to one-third of the total cost of the column, which included the extraction, cutting, and, once on-site, the erection, dressing, and final sculpting of the piece. Despite the fact that much of the distance occurred over water, the cost of the carriage by road doubled the transfer by sea.[134] Thus, it is not surprising that the two abovementioned columns from the Church of St. Mary in Antioch were moved south to Damascus by water, as much as possible.[135] In addition, the material said to have been requisitioned from Egyptian churches in the ninth century was first gathered in Alexandria and then sent to the Syrian coast by sea. And from the North African coast, more precisely, Carthage, building material was moved to Damascus under ʿAbd al-Malik, according to Ibn Saʿid al-Gharnati, a writer who was born in Granada and died in Tunis in 1286.[136] The volume of material possibly transported by boat is

128 Yaqut al-Hamawi, v. "Qurs." One should keep in mind that the city of Cyrrhus probably flourished until the tenth or twelfth century, so that by Yaqut's time it had been abandoned.

129 Greenhalgh 2009, pp. 120–24.

130 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 165.

131 Michael the Syrian, vol. 3, p. 279; Guidetti 2009, p. 9.

132 Ibn ʿAsakir, vol. 2, p. 10.

133 Saadaoui 2008, p. 296.

134 The breakdown of costs is as follows: extraction and cutting, 13151 drachmas; transport, 12938 drachmas (8895 over land and 4043 over sea); erection, 2426 drachmas; dressing and final sculpting, 10272 drachmas. The total amount came to 38787 drachmas (Ward-Perkins 1992, p. 20). One of the miracles attributed to St. George was to have miraculously transported from the quarry to the site of Lydda, where a church was erected in his honor in the sixth century, a beautiful column donated by one of his devotees (*Saint Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean, Saint Georges*, pp. 273–75).

135 Al-Masʿudi, vol. 3, p. 339 (paragraph n. 1292).

136 Fagnan 1924, p. 9.

revealed in the findings of the wreck of the Marzamemi (called Marzamemi II), which sunk off the southeastern Sicilian coast. Dated to the sixth century, the single load consisted of 28.3 cubic meters of material, for a total weight of two-three hundred tons. The twenty-eight columns—with related capitals and bases—together with the screen, small columns, marble slabs for an ambo, and the altar, were loaded onto a mid-sized boat (25×6m.). The whole set of "Proconnesian" and "*verde antico*" furnishings has been interpreted as a sort of prefabricated church sent from the vicinity of Constantinople to the province of Byzacena (in present-day Tunisia).[137]

Roads were used whenever transportation by sea was not feasible. The transport of marble in the early medieval period via road poses a problem because of the vehicles available at the time. Archaeological evidence and historical records suggest how large roads were apparently less and less operable after the seventh-century conquest. The case of the large cardo of Palmyra, encroached on by dozens of small shops, implies that wheeled wagons, necessitating wide roads with reliable paving, were no longer in use. As Kennedy has shown, the fabric of classical cities began to be transformed much earlier than the conquest, and Bulliet has emphasized the social and economic changes that led camels to be adopted as the main means of transportation, with the consequent abandonment of wheeled wagons for carrying loads.[138] Indeed, it is not surprising that in Ibn Sasra's chronicle, the passage on the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus mentions "the camel drivers which used to carry stones to Bab al-Ziyada."[139] The appearance of camels had significant repercussions in the area of trade, while also impacting the organization of a network of shelters along the main roads.[140] However, both the size and weight of marble columns do not accord with such a picture; as indicated in several mosaics, marble columns could only be transported on wheeled wagons (Plate 9).[141] Greenhalgh has argued that, in addition to advancing military aims, ʿAbd al-Malik's efforts to restore and improve portions of the existing road network, might have also been related to the need to move building materials between different localities.[142] Besides extending the chronology of the road network to the reign of al-Walid I, numerous milestones mention the order to repair the roads, and, in one case, the levelling of a difficult mountain pass.[143] This line of reasoning might help explain the apparently nonsensical nature of ʿAbd al-Malik's and al-Walid I's endeavor to renovate a road system that was on the verge of collapse due to changing economic circumstances. The enormous problems posed by the need to move monolithic columns and other building materials to new sites of construction, makes likely the possibility that a mixed system of transportation was in effect in the early medieval era. Some of the wagons observed by the pilgrim Arculf in the late seventh century were likely operational up until the early eighth century, rendering a network of well-paved roads a primary necessity.[144]

Spolia in the Historiography of Islamic Art

The vast reuse of material in the early medieval Islamic world paralleled what, since late antiquity, was a process common in the entirety of the Mediterranean area. This is reflected in how spolia

137 Kapitän 1969 and 1980; Sodini 1989, p. 168; Paribeni and Berlinghieri 2015, pp. 1034–036.

138 Kennedy 1985 (see p. 26 for a reference to Bulliet's work); Bulliet 1990, pp. 224–36.

139 Ibn Sasra, vol. 2, pp. 121–25.

140 Bulliet 1990, pp. 224–36.

141 *Catalogue des Musées et Collections Archéologiques de l'Algérie et de la Tunisie* (Paris: Leroux, 1907), vol. 15, pl. 9; see fig. 6 in Bulliet 1990.

142 Greenhalgh 2009, p. 136.

143 Sharon 1966; Elad 1999; Cytryn-Silverman 2007.

144 Kennedy (1985, p. 26) notes that the seventh-century text describing Arculf's pilgrimage to the Holy Land mentions that in Judaea "there are very few waggons or even carts" (Adomnán, p. 188).

are treated in the secondary literature as, since its inception, historiography on spolia in Islamic art has mirrored and expanded upon germane works related to late antique and medieval Europe. With regard to the coinage of the term, the concept of spolia entered art history within antiquarian circles in early-sixteenth-century Rome, to denote fragments of classical architecture reused in buildings of later periods.[145] The idea was then developed by art historians, and a recent historiographic review of the term shows how "spolia" is now more broadly deployed to include all instances of artifacts reused in another setting.[146] Because the study of spolia in Muslim culture originated in the earliest publications on the Latin West, Islamic art historians have initially adopted the paradigm in which cases of reuse constitute a barometer of a given period's relationship to antiquity. Thus, at least initially, discussions of spolia have merged into discussions of Islam's ties to the "classical heritage."

Grabar notably addresses the subject in two articles devoted to the memory of antiquity in the Islamic world. He proposes classifying the various instances of the reuse of classical/antique motifs (including artifacts) in Islamic art according to their degree of continuity with the original classical or antique iconography and function.[147] Grabar briefly touches on the issue of the ruins of the past, rediscovered amid a new phase of urban expansion in the Middle Ages.[148]

Grabar's analyses reveal no trace of any comparison with other artistic systems, such as that of medieval Europe. Rather, despite the similarities in their handling of some antique and late antique forms, Grabar insists on the differences between the contemporaneous Umayyad and Carolingian dynasties. More generally, he also highlights the distinctiveness (when compared with the Latin Christian world) of the Islamic approach to antiquity in the arts. Because "its original meaning faded away," antique art is treated and adapted in Islam from a visual and technical rather than intellectual and ideological perspective.[149] A similar sort of rupture with the categories of classical antiquity emerges in an article by Rogers, which approaches the various instances of the reuse of antique material from the vantage point of their consistency (or, more often, lack of consistency) with the original sense of harmony and proportions canonized in the Greco-Roman world.[150] A corollary of this

145 Brenk 1987, p. 103; Kinney 2001, p. 138. The term "spolia" comes from a Latin word indicating the removed hide of an animal, and also used to refer to the "spoils of war."

146 Kinney 2006, p. 233.

147 Grabar 1971 and 2001. To a certain extent Grabar seems to refer to Brilliant's groupings into *spolia in se* and *spolia in re* (1982). Whereas *spolia in se* consists of real pieces moved from one site or building to another, the notion of *spolia in re* extends the idea of spoliation to include the imitation of specific styles, motifs, and themes. The act of conceptual spoliation implicit in *spolia in re* stems from the admiration of models considered exemplary and authoritative (or "meaningful"), and therefore worthy of being quoted in a new work.

148 Grabar 2001, p. 800. Though not cited in Grabar's article, this aspect of spolia is thoroughly addressed in the literature on the Latin West. Greenhalgh's works devoted to medieval Italy and Gaul (1984 and 1989), shed light on the importance of demographic variations within the reuse of antique spolia. The rise in population in the late medieval era led city-states to discover and reoccupy urban areas once densely populated but abandoned, due to the demographic decrease during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Similar is the case of the massive program of construction carried out in the Syrian region under the Zengid and Ayyubid dynasties (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), for instance, necessitated a vast use of material, which was offered by the ready-made finely cut or decorated material of the ruins of the past.

149 Grabar 2001, p. 815. A complete different approach to the similarities manifested by the Umayyads and the Carolingians is offered by Cagiano de Azevedo (1970). He argues that, although independently, the two dynasties similarly fostered the legacy of the late antique world as much as the aesthetic and interest in antiquity.

150 Rogers 1971. Although he does not directly discuss spolia, his approach is the same as that of Adhemar's article "Influences of the Antique in French Medieval Art" (1939), which describes spolia as "subsumed into the larger categories of 'antiquities' and their 'survival' as was typical of the Warburgian approach" (Kinney 2006, p. 242).

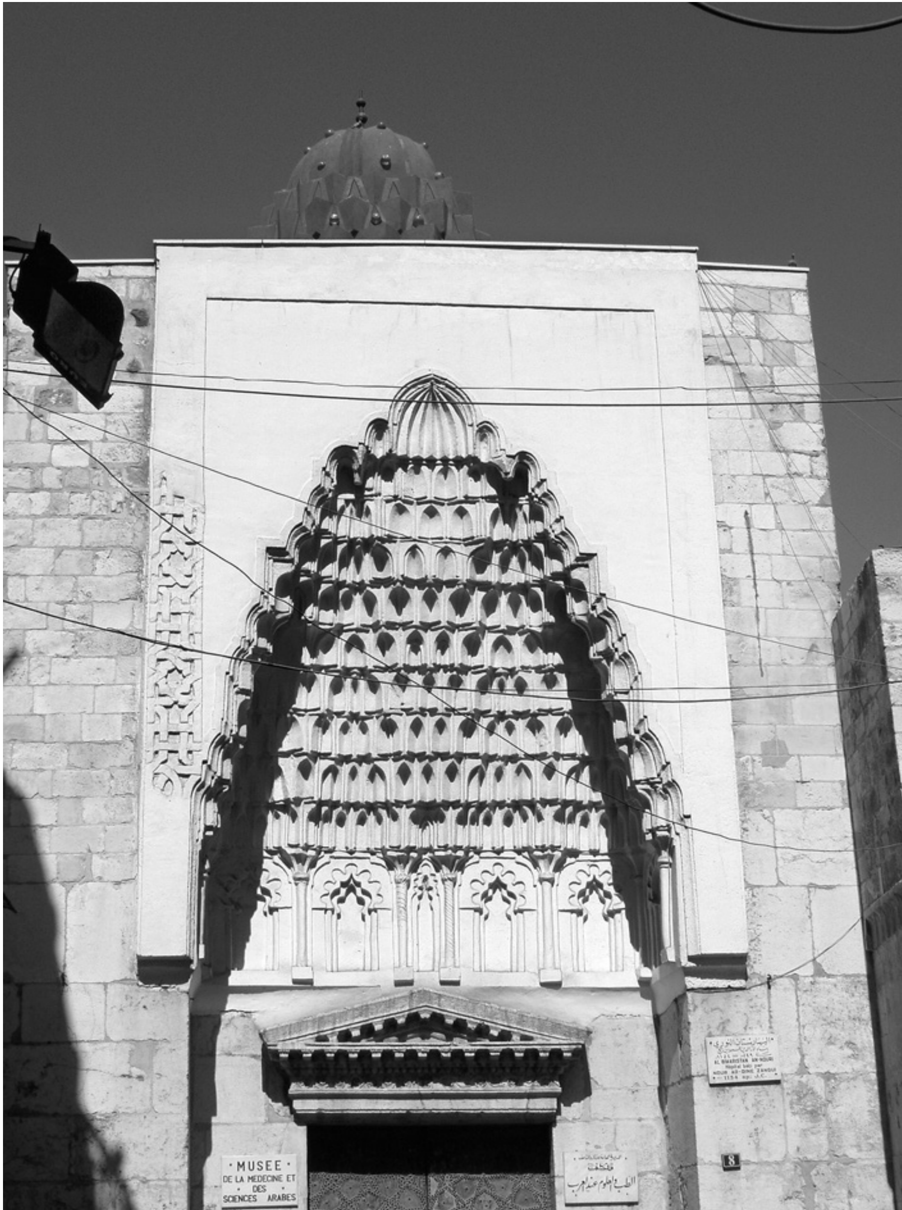

FIGURE 5.9 *Classical pediment reused in the portal of the Maristan of Nur al-Din, 1154, Damascus*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

type of approach is the production of aesthetic appraisals as a means of evaluating specific Islamic endeavors. Such appraisals may vary greatly, based on factors such as the epoch, background, and agenda of modern commentators. Just to cite one example, the classical pediment niche below the muqarnas-vaulted entrance of the Maristan of Nur al-Din in Damascus (1154) is variously described in positive terms as the module for the architectural composition of the entrance as a whole (Grabar), as "abruptly juxtaposed" (Allen), and as "visually awkward" (Raby), whereas its incorporation into the medieval entrance is deemed "magnificent" by Rogers (Figure 5.9).[151]

151 Grabar 2001, p. 809; Allen 1986, p. 57; Raby 2004, p. 300; Rogers 1971, p. 352.

Hillenbrand has also investigated Islamic art's consistency with regard to the classical canon. On the one hand, he considers as of paramount importance Byzantium's role as a filter for Islam's access to classical antiquity, while, on the other hand, he emphasizes the reshuffled nature of classical ideas and elements in Islamic architecture.[152] Hillenbrand insists on this pastiche-like character of Islamic art, especially during the early period, as, for instance, in the case of the façade of the palace of Mshatta (Jordan).[153] This phenomenon is explained through Islam's direct link to formerly separated geographical areas, as well as through the transfer of craftsmen and workshops across regions, encompassing discrete building traditions and artistic legacies up until the seventh-century conquest.[154]

All of this literature explores the differences between cultural systems. In other words, the underlying thread among their works is the search for the congruity, or lack thereof, between a copy and its model. As such, medieval Islam is in most cases characterized in terms of its break from the cultures it superseded: the ways in which the Islamic handling of antique material and architectural ideas deviated from the presumed original.

In addition, spolia have also often been discussed in publications addressing border areas, such as al-Andalus and the region across the Indus River. Consequently, the reuse of architectural fragments or objects seized by the Muslim conquerors has been traditionally cast within a paradigm of violent confrontation and ideological assertion of triumphalism. As such, spolia were interpreted in their literal sense as trophies or spoils of war.[155] Though each case presents unique features, a similar approach has in the past also largely dominated the interpretations of the reuse of non-Islamic material within the core of the Islamic realm. Crusader and Pharaonic artifacts are said to have been perceived as something extrinsic to Islam, the appropriation of which would enable Muslim dynasties to emphasize their defeat of unfaithful cultures. According to this view, political and religious domination was expressed through the appropriation of fragments of the conquered societies.[156] Furthermore, as regards the initial Islamic period, the early twentieth-century view of late antique Arabia as a society lacking any interest in architecture has led scholars to include spolia within the mix of early Muslim pragmatic absorptions of "foreign" artistic and architectural practices.[157]

As summarized by Kinney, the first cohesive iconographic efforts in the analysis of spolia may be seen in post–World War II German historiography. Hamann-Maclean, with regard to Charlemagne's use of spolia in Aachen, was the first to evoke the magical and political reuses of material in the early Middle Ages, whereas the first publication on the "meaning" of medieval architecture that included a section on spolia was by Hamann-Maclean's fellow countryman Bandmann.[158] Following this and similar lines of interpretation, starting with the early 1990s, several Islamic art scholars shifted their focus to the context of the reuse, and began investigating on a case-by-case

152 Hillenbrand 1986.

153 See, for instance, Hillenbrand's analysis (1981) of the Mshatta facade.

154 The importance of the movement of craftsmen and workshops in explaining "changes" in medieval Islamic artistic production has been thoroughly investigated by Meinecke (1996).

155 Kinney 2006, p. 233.

156 An overview of such an approach is given in Hillenbrand 2009. Summarizing the various definitions of spolia, drawn from the categories established by Esch (1969), Hillenbrand, in the case of Islamic architecture, leans toward a literal interpretation of spolia as spoils of war. Non-Islamic column capitals in Egyptian medieval mosques have been analyzed by Meinecke-Berg (1985); see also Barrucand 2002 and 2005.

157 Creswell 1969, vol. 1, pp. 10–11. From such an approach, it easily follows that "Moslems were not over-concerned about 'correct' classical proportions for columns and capitals" (Greenhalgh 2009, p. 302).

158 Hamann-MacLean 1949–50; Bandmann 1951; Kinney 2006, p. 243.

FIGURE 5.10 *Detail of the minaret of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads, 1091, Aleppo* (DESTROYED IN 2013) (AUTHOR'S PHOTO).

basis the possible meanings of spolia in medieval Islamic architecture. In the 1993 special issue of *Muqarnas* dedicated to Grabar, Tabbaa published an article on the survival of classicizing architecture in northern Syria, contributing to one of the most heated debates in the scholarship on medieval Islamic architecture. Eleventh- and twelfth-century northern Syria witnessed a "wave" of antiquarianism, involving the use of spolia as well as the creation of classicizing architectural elements, a development that has been interpreted via notions of survival, revival, and renaissance. The buildings range from the Madrasa al-Shuʿaybiyya in Aleppo to the recently destroyed (April 2013) minaret of the mosque in that same city, featuring classical elements such as entablatures, cornices, and trusses, together with medieval Islamic motifs, such as friezes with inscriptions (Figure 5.10).

Other instances of this phenomenon are marked by the use of pre-Islamic spolia placed side by side medieval Islamic artworks, such as newly carved capitals and epigraphy friezes in the western facade of the courtyard of the mosque of Diyarbakır, and the muqarnas semi-dome atop the pediment niche in the above-cited portal of the Maristan of Nur al-Din in Damascus.[159] Raby is right in pointing out how "classical" is a somewhat vague moniker to denote the "antiquity" referenced in all these buildings. In fact, these examples draw on both Greco-Roman and late antique models, which differ extensively.[160] The scholarly debate mainly focuses on the reasons for the emergence of an architectural language deeply rooted in local traditions. Continuity, revival, and renaissance are what is at issue; the analysis stems from issues of style, craftsmanship, and material, with the goal of arriving at the possible meanings behind the references to the past in medieval Islamic Syria. The motivations for the use of spolia might have varied according to the particularities of each situation, ranging from the need to provide visual substance to anti-Christian polemics or intra-Muslim disputations, to the wish to visually corroborate implicit or explicit references to earlier periods in accordance with a patron's agenda.[161]

In the abovementioned 1993 issue of *Muqarnas*, Redford published an article on the reuse of classical and Byzantine reliefs in the architecture built by the Rum Seljuks in Anatolia.[162] Redford argues that antique figurative reliefs in the massive medieval walls of cities such as Alanya and Konia operated as apotropaic devices; the defensive nature of the walls was strengthened by the addition of symbolic paraphernalia. Within the same circle of patronage, the creation of faux Roman masonry and frescoes in Alanya and Aspendos was guided

159 Herzfeld 1942–48, Part II, pp. 30–32; Rogers 1971; Tabbaa 1986, pp. 228–29; Allen 1986, pp. 1–22; Tabbaa 1993; Flood 2001b, pp. 61–62; Raby 2004; Gonnella 2010, 113–14.

160 Raby 2004, pp. 289–94.

161 Herzfeld was an exponent of the "survivalist" theory of spolia: "To re-use antique material is a rule since the early Muhammadan period. Here it is done out of appreciation for the beauty of the pieces. But the antique style of the buildings of that period is something different; it is not spontaneous or learned imitation, but a continuous tradition of workmanship" (1942–48, Part II, p. 39). Allen, more inclined to "revivalism," embraces the notion of strong cultural continuity in Syria, but stresses the radically new approach manifested in medieval buildings. He contrasts the mature medieval attitude to the "haphazard," earlier approach to the practice of reuse: "This variety in the reinterpretation of sources shows that classical motifs were not merely worked unconsciously into the repertoire of the architects of the region's classicizing monuments. In Palestine, Syria, and the Jazirah, the homelands of the architects involved, finely decorated stones from pre-Islamic monuments were re-used consciously, in contrast to the haphazard and opportunistic reuse of such material in the early Islamic period, when older stones were not used in appropriate locations but simply as convenient building material" (Allen 1986, p. 46). Tabbaa, who, like Herzfeld, embraces the survivalist theory, has tried to reframe the subject by underlining the distinctive local characteristics and distinguishing between new creations and the perpetuation of an archaic style. The large number and apparent illegibility of spolia in medieval northern Syria only make sense when seen against the backdrop of the exceptional continuity of the local architectural tradition. In his view, it is necessary to speak of a regional architectural school, which, though with irregularities, has continued since late antiquity (Tabbaa 1993). Raby (2004) accepts the use of the term "revival" only for a few examples, but explains that it is misleading to connect the reuse of pre-Islamic artefacts in medieval architecture to a nonspecific reference to the past, or to a generic classical past. Each instance has its own particular explanation, ranging from a reference to the *exemplum* of the early Islamic period (Madrasa al-Shuʿaybiyya in Aleppo), to a polemic quotation of previous medieval dynasties (Great Mosque of Diyarbakır), to a reference to the prophetic era (Great Mosque of Harran), to a widely encompassing reference to the Syrian geographical region through the use of a well-known and widespread pattern of decoration (Maristan of Nur al-Din in Damascus).

162 Redford 1993.

by an aesthetic principle in which ancient fragments were inserted into medieval gates and walls of Sinop and Konia as emblems of legitimization for the local rulers.[163]

An increasing emphasis on the context of reuse and its specific historical circumstances led the way for approaches radically different from those adopted in previous scholarship. Since Redford's article on Seljuk architecture, the apotropaic potential of spolia, for instance, has become one of the key concepts in the interpretation of spolia in medieval Islam.[164] As shown by Heiden, Flood, and Gonnella with regard to different geographic regions, spolia were often deployed with prophylactic aims in specific locations of medieval Islamic buildings, such as entrances, gates, and portals.[165] Artifacts displaying features such as non-Arabic inscriptions and an "antique" figurative iconography were particularly valuable, since they were easily identifiable as "different" from the context in which they were inserted. Because they were "foreign" to Islamic culture, they became indistinct symbols of past civilizations. The sense of unfamiliarity and extraneousness was what struck medieval Muslims. Such interpretations, in fact, contend that the specific historical origins of these spolia were irrelevant.[166] As Flood describes, the apotropaic and talismanic merit of the images on the reused reliefs was enhanced by their "perceived antiquity," rather than by individuals' comprehension of their actual iconography.[167]

An important step promoted with this approach is the newfound focus on the reception and perception of spolia by medieval Muslims.[168] In this sense, recent studies have accepted a broader meaning of the term, including within its purview "any artifact incorporated into a setting culturally or chronologically different from the time of its creation."[169] Indeed, the "difference" between the moment of creation and the time of reuse is what distinguishes spolia so that they "must be seen as products of at least two artistic moments, and of two different intentions."[170] Ancient materials and fragments were deployed to fulfill new needs and aesthetic criteria, reused in order to perform different roles from those for which they were originally intended.[171] The removal from the original setting, combined with the frequent inconsistency with the architectural context in which the reused

163 The impact of antique and Byzantine art on Seljuk architecture has also been discussed by Macchiarella (2006 and 2008). A different interpretation for the reuse of classical and Christian artefacts and iconography by Artuqids and Seljuks is suggested by Yalman (2012). She stresses the impact the spiritual work by the contemporary al-Suhrawardi might possibly had in the portrait of the ruler as a cosmic ruler, including in reusing spolia from the past.

164 It is here worth noting Esch's remarks (1999) on the different value given to the use of spolia by modern scholars. As summarized by Bloom in a review of *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (2013) in which an article by Esch on this very same topic is included: "the archaeologist wants to bring the *spolium* back to its original home, while the art historian wants to investigate how the piece was received" (Bloom at http://dx.doi.org/10.3202/caa.reviews.2013.15).

165 Heiden 2002 and 2009; Flood 2006; Behrens-Abouseif 2014.

166 Gonnella 2010, pp. 113–14.

167 Flood 2006, p. 160.

168 Ibid., pp. 143–44.

169 Kinney 2006, p. 233.

170 Kinney 1995, p. 57; see also Flood 2006, p. 146.

171 Another approach to the topic, while also focusing on the final destination of the reused artifacts rather than their provenance, insists on the importance of the aesthetic appreciation of spolia. On the Madrasa al-Shamiyya in Damascus, see Flood 2001b; on the medieval refurbishment of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, see Flood 2009 (but see also Abdellatif—2012, pp. 175–76—, who highlights the possible economic reasons in the practice of reuse material in the medieval al-Aqsa Mosque); on several sites in northern Syria, see Gonnella 2010, pp. 111–13; on the Crusader portal reused in the Mamluk complex built by al-Nasir Muhammad in Cairo in the early fourteenth century, see Sherif 1988, pp. 82–120, and Harding and Micklewright 1997, pp. 58–60.

material is inserted, is no longer described in pejorative terms, but, rather, as an element enhancing the eccentricity of spolia, because they served to draw the attention of the beholders. In this regard, it is noticeable how the emphasis on context and reception also distinguish Harris' and Shalem's studies on the relocation of Islamic objects in the Latin world.[172]

By focusing on function and form, as well as the material value of the objects reused in a second context, new studies are increasingly questioning the validity of a literal definition of spolia as "spoils of war," extending it to include objects transferred across religious and political borders.[173] As juridical sources address issues about reusing ruins (including of mosques and churches) into new buildings, they have recently been highlighted as important evidence for the perception of spolia in medieval Muslim societies.[174]

More recent scholarship on the use of spolia in the medieval Latin world also offers another interpretative pattern that is worth taking into account when scrutinizing the eastern Mediterranean societies. In the abovementioned work, Bandmann connects spolia to sacred places. He argues that while a building could be erected on a sacred site, it could also be possible to transfer holiness from one place to another by moving spolia. Some instances of the transfer of spolia, such as from the Temple of Sol Invictus in Rome to the Constantinian basilica in Constantinople in the fourth century, or from Ravenna to Aachen in the late eighth century, exactly fulfilled this purpose.[175] This interpretation of spolia—as new buildings' links to others from the past (or, alternatively, to other cultural contexts)—appears in the definition of spolia provided by Esch in 1969.[176] Abbot Suger's attempt of reusing Roman columns in the enlargement of the abbey of St. Denis (outside Paris) in 1137 is a case in point. Abbot Suger wanted to connect the new, twelfth-century building to the remains of the Merovingian core of the church (seventh century). Toward this end, he searched for marble columns that would cohere with the existing ones. Given the scarcity of newly quarried marble columns in the twelfth century, he explored the possibility of transferring marble columns from Rome, where columns were beautiful and abundant, to Paris, even describing in detail what has been defined as the hypothetical "odyssey" of these columns: from Rome by sea to Gibraltar, then north to Normandy and, finally, via the Seine to Paris.[177] Ultimately, divine providence directed him to a nearby quarry where he found what he was looking for. Columns from the quarry were considered as beautiful as those available in Rome and therefore worthy of being paired with those of the seventh-century church. Their beauty made them look as ancient as those in Rome, or at least ancient

172 Harris 1995 and Shalem 1996.

173 See the case of the pillars of the Qutb mosque in Delhi, as discussed by Flood (2009, p. 250), who rejects an interpretation based on the notion of triumphalism, arguing instead that through the erection of pillars Muslims appropriated and enacted a local cultural practice of Indian kings. Also very promising is the study launched by Alibhai (M.A. thesis, 2008) on the case of Christian bells reused and adapted as Muslim lamps in North Africa and al-Andalus.

174 Van Staëvel (2008) discusses North-African juridical sources dealing with the reuse of material from mosques to new constructions; see also Saadaoui 2008, p. 299. Mahfoudh has shown the importance of juridical sources for a better assessment of the perception of Classical and late antique ruins in medieval Tunisia (Faouzi Mahfoudh, "Perception de l'Africa antique à travers les sources arabe," paper delivered at the International workshop of the excellence cluster "Topoi," *Transformation of Ancient Spaces in Late Antiquity*, Berlin, 10–11, 2011). Marano (2015) has more recently discussed the importance of juridical sources for a comprehension of the phenomenon of the reuse in late Classical Rome.

175 Bandmann 1951, pp. 146–47 (trans. 2005). "The plunder of spolia should be understood as an inversion of the requirement to situate a building at a holy place; the holy place can just as well be transferred piecemeal" (p. 147).

176 Esch 1969.

177 Panofsky 1979, pp. 90–93.

enough to harmonize with the ones deployed by the Merovingians. Suger also mentions that a wall mosaic was inserted in a tympanum of the church.[178] Wall mosaics, widespread in contemporary Rome and southern Italy, were unusual in twelfth-century Frankish religious art, and this is reflected in Suger's description of the use of mosaics as *contra usum*. Brenk shows how consciously the abbot Suger shaped a textual image of the new cathedral related to papal Rome in order to strengthen its majesty. The insertion of a "foreign" element, such as the wall mosaics, fulfilled this very purpose. At the same time, the columns obtained from the nearby quarry were rhetorically compared to the noblest surviving examples available in Rome. Suger even explicitly compares his new Church to St. Peter's in Rome. Furthermore, Brenk argues, Suger weaved into his description the example of the abbey of Montecassino, built by the abbot Desiderius (1066).[179] Abbot Desiderius is said to have gathered material, such as marbles and columns, in Rome, and to have transferred the precious load from the harbor of Rome south to the Garigliano tower, then by riverboats expressly (and expensively) leased for this purpose along the river Garigliano, and finally by wagon up to the hill where the abbey of Montecassino was located. St. Denis was therefore said to derive its legitimacy from Rome, but at the same time to participate in the contemporary network of abbeys that came to characterize medieval Europe.

As argued by Settis, Rome became the focus of several new centers in the early Middle Ages. Columns and generic spolia were transferred from Rome to distant, growing towns, because these objects were believed to carry with them the aura of Rome, which was at once imperial and religious. Playing a synecdochal role, fragments stood for the whole, and, much like quotations of classical literature inserted into new literary texts, pieces of Rome placed into a new building served to remind the audience of the legitimacy of the religious foundation, as well as the claims of its patron (Figure 5.11).[180] As if in a game of mirrors, the monumental spoliation of Rome, which began in late antiquity, was reflected and magnified through the literary topos of the search for marble, recording—often adventurous and miraculous—searches for Rome. At once monumental and literary, the web linking Rome to the Theodoric palace in Ravenna in the early sixth century, and both Rome

FIGURE 5.11 *Roman capital reused in the Cathedral of Pisa, eleventh-twelfth century*
LABORATORIO FOTOGRAFICO, DIPARTIMENTO DI CIVILTÀ E FORME DEL SAPERE, UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA, PHOTO N. 35309 PHOTO ©LABORATORIO FOTOGRAFICO, DIPARTIMENTO DI CIVILTÀ E FORME DEL SAPERE, UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA.

178 Ibid., pp. 46–47.

179 Brenk 1983. By stressing the existence of an ideological link with papal Rome mediated through the example of Montecassino, Brenk's interpretation radically departs from the commentary to Panofsky's text of 1979. According to Panofsky (pp. 230–31), the "odyssey" of the columns was a pure literal construct adapted from Leo of Ostia's passage on the abbey of Montecassino.

180 Settis 1984, pp. 376–98.

and Ravenna to Aachen in the late eighth century, is a case in point.[181]

Settis provides a coherent framework in which the real and alleged reuses of material spolia as well as the literary quotations of classical works are envisioned in Latin medieval societies' relationship to the past. He summarizes three different attitudes that post-classical societies developed toward antiquity: *continuità*, *distanza*, and *conoscenza*.[182] He differentiates between the Middle Ages and the early modern period by opposing the terms of *auctoritas* (authoritativeness) and *vetustas* (ancientness). Within the specific frame of Latin culture in the Italian peninsula, *auctoritas* implies the "persistence" of the validity of antique *exempla* into the medieval period. It is based on the idea of familiarity and continuity (*continuità*) between antiquity and the Middle Ages. By contrast, *vetustas* implies a radically different approach to antiquity, enabled by the existence of a definitive cultural distance (*distanza*) between antiquity and a "new" era. This chronological and cultural hiatus allows for the existence of antique revivals on the basis that antiquity, a period sealed off in the past, has come to be considered an era in which prescriptive models could be found.[183] Distance from antiquity might eventually lead to the rediscovery of the laws governing its structure, to an all-around knowledge (*conoscenza*) of its cultural traits and, finally, to its replication.

Settis's work includes an analysis of the modalities through which the *auctoritas* of antiquity was activated in the Middle Ages. Particularly relevant for the present volume is how the sense of *romanitas* was embedded into spolia. Spolia allowed *romanitas* to be infused into works commissioned by medieval patrons who were in search of Roman—and therefore early Christian and imperial—legitimacy. For this reason, the reuse of antique spolia in medieval architecture and literature, rather than being a mere citation of antiquity, becomes a *translatio romae*. Spolia were removed—or claimed to have been removed—from Rome to new medieval centers, as they were considered surrogates for Rome itself.[184] Settis explores how specific "architectural objects" took on meaning by virtue of both their real or alleged provenance, but also the role they assumed in the new context. His interpretation, therefore, keeps one eye on the origins of spolia (as perceived by medieval patrons or observers) and another eye on the specific context of their reuse.

Since the late antique period onwards, Rome was a source of meaning, deriving from its aura of imperial and Christian capital. In turn, the same churches later said to have been linked to Rome would eventually become Roman surrogates, thereby continuing and transmitting the idea of Rome. Late antique Mediterranean art offered a paradigm for producing references between buildings that would be taken up in later centuries by a host of actors, including Muslims who resettled in the regions formerly dominated by the Roman and Byzantine empires.

181 Theodoric promoted the conservation of Roman buildings ("nova gloria vetustatis") and, at the same time, he ordered the transfer of loose marble material from Rome to his palace in Ravenna, so to stress his connection with the "historical tradition of Rome." In the late eighth century, Charlemagne imported material from both Ravenna and Rome for his palace chapel in Aachen (Brenk 1987, pp. 107–09).

182 Settis 1984.

183 Ibid., pp. 484–86.

184 In addition, local Roman antiquities of provincial towns, once recovered and reused in new medieval contexts, played a similar legitimizing role. To reuse local Roman stones, buried underground during the period of urban crisis and rediscovered amid the medieval expansion (such was the case of Modena) was to reenact the aura of the imperial and early Christian urban origins; it meant to visually give new life to the past glory. Whenever this was not possible—as at Pisa or Venice—non-local Roman spolia contributed to the creation of new centers, together with texts, *inventio* of relics, and saints' attributes (Parra 1983). Other examples of material transferred from Rome to new medieval centers are discussed in Greenhalgh 1984, pp. 128–30, 137–38, 147–48; Settis 1984, pp. 386–95.

CHAPTER 6

More Christianorum: Marble and Columns in Early Medieval Mosques

Though it is clear that in the case of marble columns the material was collected from all kinds of sites—abandoned buildings, Roman ruins, Christian churches, secular buildings, stockpiles—written sources prefer to highlight only the provenance (or the alleged provenance) from churches. Why was it so important to connect early mosques and their decoration to churches? What were the reasons that writers also mentioned the unsuccessful reuse of columns from churches? Why do written sources include references to churches when narrating the "mythical" origins of a certain mosque? Why were columns included in the description of the "merits" of mosques? And, finally, how should the movement of columns be interpreted in light of the sacred landscape depicted in the first four chapters?

The nature of spolia was scrutinized in the previous chapter. As discussed, far from being identified only through the connotation of the "spoils of war," the term "spolia" encapsulates the reuse of material in a subsequent context. This chapter addresses the role of marble spolia (especially columns) in the shaping of aesthetics and the sacred landscape of early medieval Syria. While the quality of the material's features will be the focus of the first section, the use of marble as an "expression of power" will be analyzed in the second section, and the importance of columns—as distinct objects with a specific cultural function—will be at the core of the last part. The three different readings, however, are not discrete and alternative explanations of the reasons for reusing material in the early medieval period. The backdrop for this movement of material is the Mediterranean Sea, a cultural (and geological) context central to the development of the Islamic interest in marble and columns.

Marble and the Aesthetics of Polychromy

To approach marble columns' role in the economy of the décor of early medieval religious architecture, it is worth quoting in full the abovementioned passage by al-Muqaddasi's on al-Aqsa Mosque's prayer hall:

"During the Abbasid time an earthquake destroyed most of the building with the exception of the area of the mihrab. When the caliph was informed about what happened he realized that what was available in the treasury was not enough for the restoration. He wrote to the governors of the provinces, as well as to the commanders, ordering to undertake the building of a colonnade each. The order was carried out and the building was restored steadier than it was before. The most ancient core remains, however, extending up to the limit of the marble columns, as the more recent section starts where pillars of concrete stand."[1]

Despite all efforts, including painting plastered to replicate the veining of marble (Figure 5.1), differences between materials were visible. According to reconstructions based on textual sources, the same juxtaposition of marble and non-marble columns also occurred in the mosque of Medina after al-Walid I ordered its enlargement.[2] Marble was preferred both because of its glistening quality, stemming from its crystalline nature, and the variety of color nuances: two features of central importance in the decoration of religious sites.

1 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 168. In Arabic, the two different materials are described as *rukhkhām* (marble) and *asāṭin al-mushayyada* (plastered pillars).

2 Sauvaget 1947, p. 72; Bisheh 1979, pp. 214–15.

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As mentioned above, most decorated capitals were concentrated in the core area of the sanctuaries and outstanding columns (because of their size or marble type) used to mark out the entrances, main naves, and mihrab areas. In addition, a diversity of marbles was also deployed in the arrangement of columns; patterns of symmetry were obtained by coupling identical or similar marble shafts in order to create relations and correspondences between parts of a building. This was only possible when a great heterogeneity of marbles and columns was used in the sanctuary.

The wide palette offered by the different kinds of marble, varying from greens, reds, and yellows, to gray and white hues, alongside its glistening quality, made it a valued element in the overall aesthetics of Muslim religious buildings. Under the Umayyads, marble was also used for paneling the lower section of walls. Such was the case of the Dome of the Rock, the Great Mosque of Damascus (Figure 5.2), and, as shown by Sauvaget, the mosque of Medina after the renovations of al-Walid I.[3] For paneling, the favorite technique was the use of quartered marble veneer. Though there is no explicit indication that such material was reused, it is likely that marble veneers were spolia from other buildings or newly created by the reworking of existing pieces. This is indicated in the relatively smaller size of marble veneers used in Umayyad buildings when compared with the larger slabs decorating late antique Byzantine churches. The technique exploits the veining of marble by juxtaposing thin slices cut from a single block. In the most recurrent pattern, two or four similarly decorated slices are juxtaposed so to as allow the veneers to create irregular rhomboidal designs. The procedure is also called the "book-matched technique," as the different slices are opened as if they are two pages of a book. In the case of a pattern of four pieces, the effect is created by flipping two slices beyond the first two. In each case, only the visible side is polished, allowing the marble's shine to contribute to the building's decoration. The effects achieved with this technique are striking such that in the tenth century an author such as al-Muqaddasi remarked how in the Great Mosque of Damascus,

"among the wondrous things is indeed the arrangement of the colored marble (slabs) and how the veining in each follows from that of its neighbour; and it is such that, should a knowledgeable person come during a whole year he might discover every day some new patterns and motivs."[4]

Al-Muqaddasi here perfectly captures the process of artistic creation studied by Trilling and Onians with regard to late antiquity.[5] What is most prominent here is what Trilling describes as the "transfer of responsibility from the artist to the viewer," a process carried out in Damascus by the patterns only suggested by the veining of marble and created in the mind of the beholder. The miraculous nature of the images evoked by the marble veining lies in the divinely created features of marble, which stonecutters sought to unveil and reveal to mankind.[6]

Another prominent element in the decoration of Umayyad religious structures was gold. Gold can be admired in the glass wall mosaics, in which a foil of gold was inserted in between two glass layers. In addition, gold was also painted over marble in the Great Mosque of Damascus, according to al-Muqaddasi,[7] and in some capitals on display in the Islamic museum of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, where traces of the material are still visible (Plate 10). In the Damascus mosque, a marble frieze, called "al-karma" in primary sources because of the vine scrolls in relief, was also gilt, while gold decorated the mihrab as well.[8] In the Dome of the Rock, the raised portions of all the

3 Sauvaget 1947, pp. 78–83.

4 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 158.

5 Onians 1980; Trilling 1998, p. 121; see also Milwright 2005.

6 For some, such a visual process is valid today too: on the web one finds comments on a marble slab set during modern restorations on the exterior dado of the Dome of the Rock that would portray the devil's face.

7 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 157.

8 Flood 2001, pp. 57–68; Le Strange 1890, p. 236.

copper- and bronze-plated coverings applied to beams and lintels were gilt, as well.[9] Wood furniture was also painted in gold; the beams in the sanctuary of the Great Mosque of Damascus were painted in gold, while the vine scrolls that adorned the wooden semi-calotte of the mihrab in the Great Mosque of Qayrawan were rendered in a yellowish brown on a dark background as if they were gold.[10] The above-mentioned (Chapter 5) dome, said to have been transferred from a church of Baʿalback to al-Haram al-Sharif by al-Walid I, was copper-gilt.

The loss of furnishing like lamps, thuribles, carpets, and rugs, all of which were clearly much more perishable objects than the items described thus far, comprised a major lacuna preventing a complete understanding of the interior of Islamic sacred sites of the early period.[11] According to Nasir Khusraw, brocades covered the wooden ceiling of the Kaʿba in Mecca, while lamps were suspended between columns.[12] In Damascus, variegated rugs and silk curtains hung on the walls (presumably in the absence of marble veneers), while in medieval times the openings of the prayer hall to the courtyard were not closed by wooden panels and doors, as they are today, but only framed by curtains.[13] In the mid-eleventh century, the portion of al-Aqsa sanctuary before the mihrab was described as "filled with Maghrebi carpets, lamps, and lanterns each hung by a separate chain."[14]

Besides their architectural functions, marble columns and capitals therefore played a role amid the plethora of elements in the overall decoration of sacred buildings. And they were perceived as such by the writers engaged in amplifying the sites held sacred by the Muslim population. The same array of materials was also included in the descriptions of contemporary churches.

According to al-Idrisi (1099–1165), the Basilica of the Nativity had a marvelous appearance, with the marble, columns, and gold mosaics arranged at the time of its construction.[15] Arrayed with Byzantine brocades, with large quantities of gold visible throughout, the Holy Sepulcher as experienced by Nasir Khusraw was "extremely ornate, with colored marble and designs."[16] In the case of the basilica built on the site of the burning bush on Mount Sinai, later called St. Catherine, the pavement consisted of white marble slabs, while the walls were decorated with variegated marble veneers on the lower section, and gold and colored glass mosaics on the upper portion.[17] Gold, transparent crystal, and white marble were the main elements in the decoration of the Great Church of Edessa,[18] while the churches built in the sixth century in the Arabian Peninsula displayed gold and silver furnishings, brocade curtains, colored wall mosaics, and golden ceilings.[19]

A Coptic theological-liturgical encyclopedia of the thirteenth century includes instructions on how to properly build and decorate churches. According to this text, lamps should be hung often and shine as brilliantly as if they were stars in the sky, and they should be alternated with ostrich eggs, as the latter invite the worshipper to focus on prayers and meditation (in the same way, writes the Coptic author, that ostriches focus on their eggs before hatching). The floor should be covered

9 Creswell 1989, pp. 26–29. Another early Islamic marble frieze, decorated with a series of arches in relief and now on display in the Islamic museum of al-Aqsa Mosque, shows traces of gold.

10 Le Strange 1890, p. 236; Creswell 1989, pp. 324–25.

11 Flood (2012b, p. 266–8) highlights the correspondences between architectural depictions in late antique and early medieval religious manuscripts belonging to the Islamic, Christian and Jewish traditions. Hanging lamps play a primary role in such religious architectural scenes.

12 Nasir Khusraw, p. 100.

13 Ibn Sasra, vol. 2, p. 120; ʿAbd al-Basit al-ʿIlmawi (1896), p. 423.

14 Nasir Khusraw, p. 34.

15 Al-Idrisi, as quoted in Le Strange 1890, p. 299.

16 Nasir Khusraw, p. 48.

17 Abu Salih al-Armani (Munich Ar 2570), f. 110v.

18 *Traduction de la Chronique Syriaque anonyme (1234)*, p. 443.

19 Yaqut, v. Dayr Najran; King 1980; Shahid 2002, pp. 161–62.

with mats to avoid worshippers' becoming dirty with dust while prostrating.[20] Clearly, mats were used in the absence of prized materials such as marble.

It is striking to observe how medieval Latin pilgrims focused their writings on distances between buildings and their measurements, as well as the miraculous events that occurred on a given site, or the miraculous properties of specific objects (including columns, as discussed below, in the last section of this chapter).[21] Of course, these sources were intended to fulfill a specific function; they were not meant to call attention to a region for its beauty, but, rather, to illuminate the sacredness of the sites in the origin of Christianity. Yet in a few instances, texts focus on a structure's décor, alongside highlighting the landscape and its sacredness. In the case of the Church of the Ascension Adomnán lingers over the lamps hanging in the windows of the church, which brilliance lighted up all the Valley of Jehoshaphat, while, in the case of the Holy Sepulcher, Adomnán mentions the remarkable size of the twelve columns supporting the rotunda and the first-rate marble paneling the aedicule at its center, also decorated with gold sheets.[22] More detailed is the description of the aedicule given by the so-called Piacenza Pilgrim (ca. 570):

"there are ornaments in vast numbers, which hang from iron rods: armlets, bracelets, necklaces, rings, tiaras, plaited girdles, belts, emperors' crowns of gold and precious stones, and the insignia of an empress. The tomb is roofed with a cone which is silver, with added beams of gold."[23]

Grabar highlights the parallels between the Christian tendency to adorn sacred sites with jewels and insignia of power, and the wall mosaic decoration of the inner octagon in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.[24] Several other elements of the décor of early medieval Muslim sacred structures have parallels in late antique (and early medieval) Christian art. The practice of adorning lower walls with book-matching marble veneers was widespread in churches. Furthermore, as shown by Milwright, reactions such as the one cited above by al-Muqaddasi, were similar to those expressed by Byzantine chroniclers in their descriptions of religious buildings.[25] As shown by Flood, similar was the tendency, starting in late antiquity and continuing into the early medieval period, to suspend lamps and pearls in religious buildings. At that time, light emanation as a vision of Paradise was a major element in the aesthetic experience of sacred spaces.[26] With regard to mosaics, Kitzinger remarks, striking similarities can be observed between the vine rinceaux in the wall mosaics of the atrium of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (mosaics dated to the late sixth–early seventh century) and those in the late-seventh century Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Figures 6.1–6.2).[27]

20 Ibn Siba', pp. 753–56. The text is briefly discussed by Shahid (2009, pp. 289–90). The interchangeability of pearls and ostrich eggs, in addition to their role together with suspended lamps in the iconography of light of churches and mosques in the medieval period, has been notably addressed by Flood 2001 (pp. 35–47). In note 140 (p. 42), Flood invokes images predating the modern restoration of Christian and Muslim religious buildings in which suspended ostrich eggs are still visible.

21 The texts of (Latin) Christian pilgrims on the "holy land" are gathered in Wilkinson 2002.

22 Adomnán in Wilkinson 2002, p. 171.

23 Piacenza Pilgrim in ibid., p. 139.

24 Grabar 2005 (originally published in 1959), pp. 20–34; Grabar's citation of the passage by the Piacenza Pilgrim has been recently discussed by Necipoğlu (2008, p. 55).

25 Milwright 2005. Milwright also suggests how the effects of marble veining had a (South) Arabian counterpart in the production of a kind of textile known as *ikat*, manifesting similar patterns. However, borrowings were interchangeable; making specific reference to late antiquity, Gonosová stresses the role of carpets and rugs for the diffusion of the grilled geometric patterns in religious architectural decoration (1981, p. 294).

26 Flood 2001, pp. 15–56.

27 Kitzinger 1976, pp. 167, 214–15.

FIGURE 6.1 *Wall mosaic rinceaux, narthex of the Church of Haghia Sophia, late sixth–early seventh century, Istanbul*
DUMBARTON OAKS RESEARCH LIBRARY AND COLLECTION MS.BZ.004- HS.BIA.1240 (COURTESY OF IMAGE COLLECTIONS AND FIELDWORK ARCHIVES, DUMBARTON OAKS, TRUSTEES FOR HARVARD UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C.).

FIGURE 6.2 *Detail of wall mosaics on the outer façade of a pilaster in the Dome of Rock, late seventh century, Jerusalem*
CRESWELL ARCHIVE EA.CA.196 (COURTESY OF THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY).

As far as the symmetrical use of marble shafts, late antique and early medieval churches in the Eastern Mediterranean region are difficult to scrutinize, given the changes introduced in the later medieval period. Textual evidence is of little help in this regard, with the exception of the Tomb of the Virgin in Jerusalem, which, according to al-Harawi's description, seems to have been dominated by symmetrical patterns. There were sixteen columns in the building, eight of red granite and eight of green marble; the same alternation can be seen in the six columns located at each of the four entries to the building.[28]

Common to all the material used to decorate religious buildings was brightness, namely, the possibility of illuminating an entire structure, not only through windows and openings, but also through the glares of light produced by the decorative skin applied to a building. Whereas paintings absorb light, glass mosaics, metals like gold, marbles, and precious stones refract it, creating bright waves.[29]

28 Al-Harawi (Ali of Herat), as quoted in Le Strange 1907, p. 210. The building described by al-Harawi, including the underground crypt, was probably built in the late sixth century by the emperor Mauritius (Bagatti 1975, pp. 15–18).

29 Cagiano de Azevedo 1970, pp. 234–35. With regard to the early period of Islam, a case in point is the mihrab of the cave located in the outcrop over which the Dome of the Rock was erected. Besides the specific Muslim iconographical associations with the mihrab, its main feature, a black polished circular stone placed

These properties made marble and mosaics the preferred media for artistic expression in late antiquity. As described by the ninth-century historian Agnellus, metrical Latin verses in the gold and glass mosaics decorating the narthex of the fifth-century St. Andrew chapel in Ravenna emphasized the presence of light: "Either light was born here or has been captured and here freely rules" (*Aut lux hic nata est, aut capta hic libera regnat*).[30] In late antique Mediterranean religious architecture the marble veneers and columns, capitals with inlaid gilt decoration, and bronze bands applied to the structural features served to conceal the rigidity of the supporting architectural elements.[31] The marble paneling in the lower part of the walls and the mosaics in the upper part (mosaics could be easily adapted to vaulted architecture) had the effect of "breaking through" the walls, thereby capturing the celestial atmosphere.[32] The aesthetic principle underpinning such decorative paraphernalia was active longer than the traditional limits assigned to late antiquity. The *Vita* of St. Stephen Sabaita (who lived in Palestine, 725–794), written by his disciple Leontius of Damascus, tells of the evocation of Paradise in glistening gold mosaics:

"This very night, after I finished my night office, a certain bewilderment came over me and I had a vision. I saw a great and very beautiful temple. Its roof was sparkling and shining with a beautiful light, with gilded mosaics of diverse colors, with objects radiant and exquisitely wrought, and with columns with gilded capitals. It was adorned with every splendor and delight. In it also were a joy and a happiness that are beyond words and without compare, as well as a delight that cannot be described. …Know, my sons, that this strange vision and this temple and the beauty in it are without doubt the Kingdom of Heaven and the everlasting joy which is in it."[33]

The translucent qualities of materials were exploited in many ways. The idea of dazzling the eye of the beholder with refracted or transmitted light, was common to both churches and mosques. In the Kaʿba, a crystalline stone said to be from Yemen and set in the roof, dispersed light throughout the building.[34] A similar feature can be seen in the church of "al-Qalis," the Great Church of Sanʿaʾ in Yemen, in which a slab of alabaster was placed in the dome exactly at the point where the sun rose, so as to allow the light from the East to illuminate the church.[35] This very same strategy was later replicated in the Great Mosque of Sanʿaʾ in order to illuminate the area of the mihrab: alabaster slabs (still in situ) capped three lantern domes above the mihrab area.[36] In both cases the direction of prayer was a source of light mediated by the pellucidity of the alabaster. As noted by Rabbat, Nabigha's early eighth-century poetical ekphrasis of the mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus underlines the material quality of glass and gold, as it makes transpire the effect of luminosity and shine produced by its sight.[37]

Only by experiencing the combined effect of each material and technique can one appreciate the overall impact of such sacred spaces. Cagiano de Azevedo argues that polychromy was the dominant aesthetic in Carolingian and Umayyad reconfigurations of late antique Mediterranean aesthetics. His vision of polychromy is based on

at its center, was appreciated because it reflected light. Flood explains the possible connection of such objects to the late antique Judeo-Christian plaques with inlaid glasses and stones, whose main function was to evocate the "luminescent manifestation of the divine presence" (1999, pp. 330, 357–58).

30 Agnelli Ravennatis, p. 50; Michelis 1955, pp. 91–103; James 1996, pp. 4–8.

31 Gonosová 1981, pp. 6–10.

32 Cagiano de Azevedo 1970, pp. 231–33.

33 Leontius of Damascus, p. 125 (Arabic version, pp. 139–40).

34 Nasir Khusraw, p. 100.

35 Al-Azraqi, vol. 1, p. 139.

36 Serjeant, Lewcock and Smith 1983.

37 Rabbat 2003, p. 90. In Jerusalem, reflections of the first morning sun on the golden surface of the Dome of the Rock were instead later praised as a marvel by al-Muqaddasi (p. 170).

two underlying assumptions. First, it is not the result of a layer of color applied to architecture, but, instead, derives from the very material used to build or decorate a building; thus, the colored quality of marble, bronze, glass, and gold is exploited in the planning of the décor of a built space. Second, a material's color—that is, the perception of its very nature—is not stable but variable, stemming from spatial and temporal coordinates. The perception of a marble veneer, for instance, whose color derives from the texture of the marble, is subject to modifications according to the source of light and its constant movement during the day, as well as to a beholder's movement throughout a building.[38] Polychromy finds a close correlate in the aesthetics of *varietas*, a concept coined by Brenk after Latin sources with regard to spolia in the Latin West. This term denotes the rationale for the late antique use of spolia as well as contrast the relationship between architecture and décor in late antiquity and the classical world.[39] The homogeneity and order of architectural canons dictated by the Roman world's embrace of *decorum* were abandoned in late antiquity in favor of a more heterogeneous accumulation and juxtaposition of materials. As such, variegated marble objects of different provenance such as columns were purposely selected and displayed in the Latin West as in the Islamic world.

The closeness of the Muslim concept of *decorum* to aspects of Christian aesthetics did not go unnoticed in Muslim circles. On the one hand, one finds relatively commonplace descriptions, in which individual elements are recognized as similar to those in Christian churches. Commenting on Kufa's Great Mosque, refurbished around 670 by the Umayyad governor Ziyad b. Abihi, al-Tabari (d. 923) notices how the ceiling, said to have previously been in a Sasanian structure, resembled the ceilings of Byzantine churches (*al-kanāʾis al-rūmiyya*).[40] Later on, al-Harawi (d. 1215) compares the mosaics in the sanctuary's dome of the Great Mosque of Damascus with those visible in Byzantine churches.[41] On the other hand, some Muslims were deliberately blaming the artistic language developed and spread throughout the empire by the Umayyads in order to prompt criticism of the Damascus-based dynasty. The caliph al-Walid I was supposedly reproached by Uban b. ʿUthman b. ʿAffan, resident of Medina and son of ʿUthman, the third caliph appointed after Muhammad's death, on the grounds that the mosque of Medina was renovated "in the manner of churches," while people in Medina were used to building "in the manner of mosques."[42] The "manner of mosques" evoked

38 Cagiano de Azevedo 1970, pp. 239–41, 251–55, 258–59. The importance of glistening, brightness, and brilliance in Byzantine aesthetics has been notably addressed by James (1996). In addition, Franses (2003, p. 22) comments on the metallic and reflective qualities of gold, as opposed to the absorbing features of painting hues: "To paint in gold is to paint in light rather than to represent it." I thank Alain George for pointing me to Franses's article. See also Janes 1998, pp. 139–52.

39 Brenk 1987, pp. 105–10.

40 Al-Tabari, vol. 1, p. 2489–92; see also Creswell 1989, pp. 9–10; Greenhalgh 2009, pp. 101–2. The resemblance is not further explained, and it is a matter of speculation as to whether it concerned the (possibly mosaic) decoration of the ceiling or its structural qualities (such as a wooden truss ceiling). The reused ceiling was probably originally in a Christian church, then moved to a Persian imperial palace, and finally relocated to a third context: the mosque. Juynboll, analyzing an equivalent passage by Ibn al-Athir, argues that the ceiling was transferred from a Persian royal palace in al-Hira (1989, p. 69, n. 246). During the sixth century, al-Hira was among the main centers of Arab Christianity (Shahid 2002, pp. 160–64).

41 Al-Harawi, p. 39.

42 Al-Samhudi, p. 74. Bierman (1998, pp. 53–54) asserts that Uban was referring to the use of gold and wall mosaics, as these were imperial media to which very early Muslims were not accustomed. However, the overall layout and décor of the new mosque diverged from earlier examples of religious architecture, while the marble veneers and columns also implied an aesthetic difference from earlier Islamic buildings. While Schenkluhn (2006) has recently readdressed the question of copying in medieval Western architecture

by Uban was most likely based on a much more sober decoration, since the mosque established by the Prophet Muhammad was remembered as a modest structure. As a result, traditions related to the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions would call for refraining from the adornment and monumentalizing of Islamic places of worship.[43] The act of decorating mosques with gold was generally seen by experts on religious matters as an act of conceit and was therefore abhorred. This emerges in a *ḥadīth*, attributing the excess of decoration and the abuse of gold to buildings of Christians and Jews.[44] Amid the backdrop of such views, Flood notes the concern over the waste of wealth when gold was accumulated and not distributed, an attitude commonly found also among late antique Christian theologians.[45] Evidently, the aesthetic choices of the Umayyads, particularly ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walid I, were marked by a vast use of economic resources for their sacred buildings. While wall mosaics, marble, and columns played a distinctive role in this process, "local" Christian churches sponsored by Byzantine as well as local Christian elites well into the Umayyad era, provided Muslims with close *exempla* of the very sense of *decorum* that was experienced by most segments of the population on a daily basis.[46] It has been suggested that Medieval Latin patrons aimed, by searching and using marble and well-dressed stones, at renovating in their sacred buildings the *more romanorum* because it was considered to be appropriate for sanctifying a space.[47] Similarly, early Muslims were eager to express in their mosques what can be called the *more christianorum*, on the basis that the way Christians were used to adorn their churches was appropriate to distinguish a space as holy for Muslims as well.

Columns as Links of an Architectural Network

Textual passages cited in the previous chapter comprise a useful corpus of evidence to evaluate the reuse of Christian material in early mosques. As noted above, requests for material also arise with regard to churches still in use, although at the same time, plenty of Roman ruins were available, as were several Christian buildings in disrepair due to abandonment, earthquakes, and the recent Persian invasion.[48] According to written sources, columns were requested from renowned churches, buildings that besides being used by local communities were also among the best built and decorated constructions in the area.

The contemporaneity of this massive request for material alongside the dramatic political and religious transformations occurring since the second half of the seventh century, led scholars to speculate on the possible ideological reasons governing the reuse.[49] According to this interpretation, the

(he discusses formulae appearing in Latin written sources such as "in modum," "ad instar," "ad similitudinem"), the verisimilitude of the mosque with churches is neither further explained in the Arabic text on Medina, nor clarified by the expression itself (in Arabic: "you have built churches"). See also Becker (1912, in Hawting 2006, p. 67) who argues, instead, that the innovations reproached to the Umayyads were Muslim adaptations of Christian features such as the mihrab, the minbar and the maqsura.

43 Ayyad 2010, pp. 179–92.

44 Sunan Abi Dawud, n. 448.

45 Flood 2009, p. 35; the theme is further developed in Flood forthcoming. For Christian theologians alarmed at the waste of resources, including the excessive decoration of churches, see Janes 1998, pp. 85–86, 153–57.

46 Wall mosaics, for instance, were not a prerogative of imperial foundations, but, as shown by Liz (2006), a widespread visual device also used in locally sponsored churches.

47 Greenhalgh 1989, pp. 124–26.

48 In small villages or in the countryside, and more generally where local communities did not possess the financial resources to preserve their architectural heritage, it is highly probable that Christian authorities were not able to support and organize the reconstruction or refurbishment of ruined churches (Schick 1995, pp. 49–67).

49 Greenhalgh 2009, pp. 141–67; Finster 2009.

display of Christian marble materials in mosques was a politically motivated act aimed at visualizing and making explicit Islam's military supremacy over the enemy. Architecture and the vestiges of past civilizations and dynasties also comprised an assertion of power.[50] Might was manifested through architecture, and, according to this logic, the display of plundered material was a forceful statement.

Yet the circumstances of the early medieval Muslim reuse of Christian material suggest a more nuanced approach. The first issue to keep in mind is that some cases of reuse were unsuccessful (because of the opposition of Christian communities), thereby undermining the notion of power attributed to triumphalist spolia. Second, Muslim written sources, while supposedly not ideologically averse to such a reading, do not indulge in triumphalist explanations when describing the search for and the supplying of marble columns.

To praise a given geographical area, Muslim geographers and historians commonly focus on the architectural landscape, highlighting the most renowned buildings. Such is the case of the tenth-century Persian geographer and historian Ibn al-Fakih al-Hamadhani; according to him, the Syrian region can boast the bridge of Adana, the bridge of Sanja, the church of Edessa, and the walls of Antioch.[51] In a few instances, authors include mosques in this landscape, the strategy being to make mosques participate in the network of the best buildings ever erected. By revisiting the literary topos of "the wonders of the world," al-Muqaddasi emphasizes that atop al-Hamadhani's list, the church of Edessa is replaced by the Mosque of al-Aqsa, which, in turn, after being ruined by an earthquake, is replaced by the Great Mosque of Damascus.[52] The abovementioned (Chapter 3) church of Edessa (the Church of St. Sophia) remained in use throughout the early medieval period; it was built in the "pre-Islamic era," as was the case of the Hellenistic pharos of Alexandria and the Roman bridge of Sanja (an arched bridge across the Euphrates), the other two marvels mentioned in the passage. By replacing masterworks of antiquity, mosques took legitimate part in the cultural landscape of the Dar al-Islam. Al-Muqaddasi, who was born and raised in Bilad al-Sham, speculates on the role of some churches in the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem:

"The caliph al-Walid beheld Syria to be a country that had been long occupied by the Christians, and he noted there the beautiful churches still belonging to them, so enchantingly fair; and so renowned for their splendor, as are the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the churches of Ludd and Edessa. So he sought to build for the Muslims a mosque in Damascus that should be unique and a wonder to the world. And in like manner, is it not evident that his father, ʿAbd al-Malik, seeing the greatness of the martyrium of the Holy Sepulcher and its magnificence, was moved lest it should dazzle the minds of the Muslims and hence erected over the Rock, the dome which is now seen there?"[53]

This passage not only contains recognition of the *exemplum* embodied by the architectural legacy of local Christians, but also a reference to the possible contemporary terms of comparison for the new Muslim buildings. The "model" for al-Walid and

50 Indeed, to reinforce such an association one might evoke passages such as the following by Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406): "the monuments are a proportional indicator of power, and dynasties are remembered for their monuments" and "the vestiges left by [a given] dynasty are proportional to its power" (Ibn Khaldun, vol. 1, p. 345, also quoted by Greenhalgh 2006, p. 13). It should be added that Ibn Khaldun comments upon the practice of reusing material from ruins. He perceives the reuse of material from abandoned buildings as a sign of decadence, on the grounds that a civilization reduced to the use of spolia would lack the skills necessary to finding and working with new material (vol. 2, pp. 744–45).

51 Ibn al-Fakih al-Hamadhani, p. 50.

52 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 147.

53 Necipoğlu 1993, p. 169; Arabic text in al-Muqaddasi, p. 159.

ʿAbd al-Malik's building included all of these structures. Though it is likely that the Dome of the Rock was erected as a kind of counterpoint to the Christian churches surrounding it, most notably the Holy Sepulcher,[54] at the same time it also joined churches in comprising the sacred landscape of Bilad al-Sham. In another version of al-Muqaddasi's above-mentioned revision of al-Hamadhani's list, al-Aqsa Mosque is said to be superior to the Great Mosque of Damascus by virtue of the qualities of the church the mosque was facing; the Holy Sepulcher was seen as bestowing its aura on the mosque built by the Muslims.[55]

It is worth noting that two of the three churches cited in al-Muqaddasi's passage are also mentioned as alleged sources of columns for Muslim buildings. As mentioned above in Chapter 5, in the case of the Church of St. George in Lydda the transfer failed, and Muslims were redirected to other sources where similar material could be found. With regard to the Great Church of Edessa, columns stored in the church for future use are said to have been transferred to the palace of al-Mansur, the early Abbasid caliph. The fact that the same churches simultaneously served as both exemplary architectural structures and a much-desired source of material for Islamic buildings, suggests the extent to which the place of origins of columns did matter; from a Muslim perspective, columns that were, or were alleged to have been, in specific churches were more important than others. Columns carried the architectural authority of renowned buildings. Among their possible functions was therefore to connect buildings so as to give mosques access to the network of the most famous architecture of the Syrian region. In other words, they were both tangible and visible links that authenticated Muslim claims to be builders as skilled as those who previously filled Bilad al-Sham with ingenious works. At least up until the tenth–eleventh century, the aim of using and invoking buildings related to different cultures was not supremacy over past civilizations, but, rather, participation in the existing physical landscape.

Once the chain was unlocked, other nodes could be established. In turn, early Muslim religious buildings became—to continue the network metaphor—transmitters. Such is the case of Aleppo, where, as above-mentioned in Chapter 5, the Umayyad mosque was founded in reference to the Great Mosque of Damascus: "the Great Mosque of Aleppo rivalled that of Damascus in its decoration, marble paneling, and mosaics. It is known that Sulayman b. ʿAbd al-Malik sought to equal the work his brother al-Walid had realized in the Great Mosque of Damascus."[56] By virtue of its decoration, the Great Mosque of Aleppo could compete with the monumental mosque of the capital of the Umayyad caliphate. An additional passage relating the transfer of marble furnishings from the mosque of Aleppo to the mosque of al-Anbar, in Mesopotamia, by the time of the fall of the Umayyad caliphate, should be interpreted along these lines. "By the time the Abbasids seized the heritage (*athār*) of the Umayyads, they transferred to the mosque of al-Anbar marbles and ornaments from the mosque of Aleppo."[57] As mentioned above in Chapter 5, some columns displayed in the mosque of Aleppo were said to have been taken from the renowned Great Church of Cyrrhus. With the passing of time, those same early medieval buildings (such as the Great Mosque of Damascus and al-Aqsa Mosque) that had acquired their reputation in relation to extant pre-Islamic buildings, in turn, became exemplary models for further Muslim structures. Architectural features and decorative material functioned as connectors, physically and virtually linking monuments among them.[58]

The notion that the Umayyads created a recognizable network of buildings featuring similar and recognizable aesthetic elements has been set

54 Grabar 1959, pp. 52–58; Rabbat 1989, pp. 16–18.

55 Al-Muqaddasi, p. 168, n. h.

56 Ibn al-Shihna, p. 62.

57 Ibn Shaddad, p. 31.

58 Such line of interpretation is argued by Rosser-Owen (2014) with regard to the reuse of caliphal Cordoban capitals in Morocco during the medieval period.

forth by Flood.[59] Through the dissemination of a recognizable imperial style, probably developed at the court of Damascus, Flood argues, al-Walid I put his dynasty in dialogue faraway cities and asserted its dominion over a vast territory. Buildings had a diverse audience, ranging from the Muslim community to non-Muslim communities under Islam, which were said to be attracted by displays of wealth and lavishness, to the Byzantine Empire, whose court came to be introduced to early Muslim architectural feats through the accounts of diplomats. As the conquest of Constantinople was one of the targets on Umayyad caliphs' agenda, Byzantium's architecture and visual culture were consequently quoted in Damascus to convey "a vision of Umayyad aspirations for the future."[60] Citing the abovementioned passage by al-Muqaddasi, Flood stresses the impact of the Holy Sepulcher's presence in Jerusalem on a building such as the Dome of the Rock. In this chapter it is argued that late antique/Christian aesthetics reverberated throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and not only in Jerusalem or within the borders of the Byzantine Empire. The consistency within and dissemination of the Umayyad program likely echoed a similar imperial strategy. However, its immediate and nearest referents were the dozens of churches scattered throughout the main cities and used by the majority of the population. The daily perception of such a presence is no better explained by the cities' sacred landscape, detailed in the first part of this volume: mosques were often built in front of churches, sharing with them the central zones of the most populated areas. Unable and unwilling to substitute churches for mosques, early Muslims first and foremost aspired to elevate their own buildings to the standard embodied by the finest churches.

Writing in regard to early Ottoman architecture, Necipoğlu defines the practice of acknowledging the magnificence of existing buildings and the goal of seeking to both equal and surpass them, as the competitive discourse of architecture.[61] The outstanding technical features and magnificent decoration found in buildings standing around Muslim structures stimulated a reaction. Such was also the case of early Muslims in the face of the inherited legacy of late antiquity. Yet what distinguished the early modern Ottoman meditation on the Byzantine heritage of Constantinople and the Umayyad "challenge" to the Christian sacred landscape inherited by Muslims in the seventh century, is the fact that, in the latter case, Christian churches—including those in Byzantium as well as those in the caliphate—though often founded during late antiquity, did not belong to the past or to another era. They were active sources of "sacredness," playing an important role for different communities. This aspect will be discussed further in the following section, but to clarify the importance of this distinction suffice it to consider the Church of St. George in Lydda. This structure was a monumental late antique sanctuary attended by thousands of pilgrims, a place where an inter-religious festival related to the seasonal cycle of nature was celebrated and with which early Muslims associated eschatological beliefs. In other words, in the early medieval era churches were not only magnificent skeletons to be admired for their technical features, but living and pulsating bodies retaining huge symbolic capital.

Sacred Columns

In pre-modern times, columns were by no means only cylinders of polished marble. They were also

59 Flood 2000, pp. 184–236.

60 Ibid., p. 235. On the role the canonization of Kufic script had in the dissemination of an imperial ideology, see George 2010, pp. 89–94.

61 Necipoğlu 1993. A further difference from the early medieval context is the availability, with regard to the Ottoman period, of texts articulating the relationship to "antiquity" from an architectural viewpoint. In this regard, as argued by Necipoğlu, parallels can be drawn with the contemporary reflections on the past developed in Renaissance Italy.

objects with an existence of their own besides serving as architectural supports. This can be seen in two examples, the first secular and the second religious. Freestanding columns celebrated rulers' victories or civic triumphs, while also functioning as landmarks, especially when tall and large in size and built in special urban locales. Such is the case of the Column of Trajan in Rome, a Doric column with a spiral frieze relief portraying the emperor's military campaign, topped by a bronze statue of the emperor himself.[62] Erected in 113 AD, the column visually communicated the emperor's triumph, both didactically through the frieze and the base inscription, as well as visually, due to its size and position within the Forum in Rome.[63] Trajan's column prompted a series of replicas, both in Rome as elsewhere. Constantinople's landscape was littered with commemorative columns, featured in travelers' impressions of the city (Figure 6.3). In medieval Arabic-Islamic written sources, the "memories" of the outstanding architecture of Constantinople include the column topped by an equestrian statue erected by Justinian (r. 527–565) in the Augustaeum, a square located between the Church of Hagia Sophia and the Great Palace.[64]

The verticality of columns also communicated a sense of sacredness. This subject has been notably explored by Eliade, who argues that pillars rooted in the ground and elevated to the heavens functioned transculturally as cosmic axes, allowing a community to converse with the transcendent world.[65] Freestanding sacred pillars were considered cosmic supports of the heavens and, consequently, the world. Among the examples described by Eliade is the temple in the region of Heresburg (today, Obermarsberg, Germany), erected around an idol called Irminsul. The temple was built by the Saxons, and the idol was a colossal tree trunk. The worship of Irminsul was still active in the late eighth century, when Charlemagne waged war against the Saxons and razed the pagan temple. Among the chroniclers of Charlemagne's *gesta*, the Benedictine monk Rudolph of Fulda (d. 865) explains the etymology and cultic functions of the idol, which was considered a "universal column as it supports everything" (*universalis columna quasi sustinens omnia*).[66] The strength of the local devotion to this column reappeared later, in the church of St. Michael in the nearby city of Fulda. Within the church, the crypt was built around a central column, reinterpreted as the figure of Christ. As shown by Onians, the column's location at its center, and its interpretation as the figure of Christ, likely contributed to the translation of pagan practices into a Christian language. From a socio-religious perspective, the transfer of meaning was related to the Christianization of the local population that had been accustomed, up until a few decades earlier, to worshipping the gigantic tree of Irminsul.[67]

Symbolic pillars detached from architecture were common in the eastern Mediterranean during late antiquity as well as following the conquest. One exemplary case is the commemorative column raised in front of the gate at Kastron Mefa'a (today known as Umm al-Rasas, a small town in the Byzantine province of Arabia). The presence of this column is indicated by two floor mosaics dated to the sixth and eighth centuries. In both mosaics, a column is depicted standing before a gate of the walled *castrum*; while in the earlier vignette the column is surmounted by a cross, the later depiction only shows a column topped by what appears to be a spike or a pin. Duval notes how the column was possibly erected in Roman times, when it was probably crowned by the statue of an emperor. Later, in the Christian era, this

62 Onians 1988, pp. 51–53; Coarelli 2000.

63 Yegül 2014, pp. 210–14. He stresses the importance of the shaping of the torus as a laurel wreath as part of the column's victory message.

64 El Cheikh 2004, pp. 146–47; for the Ottoman encounter with such a column-cum-statue, see Raby 1987.

65 Eliade 1967 (ed. or. 1965), pp. 34–36.

66 Eliade 1967, pp. 35–36; Rudolph of Fulda, p. 676.

67 Onians 1988, pp. 79–84. I thank David Roxburgh for pointing me to Onians's book.

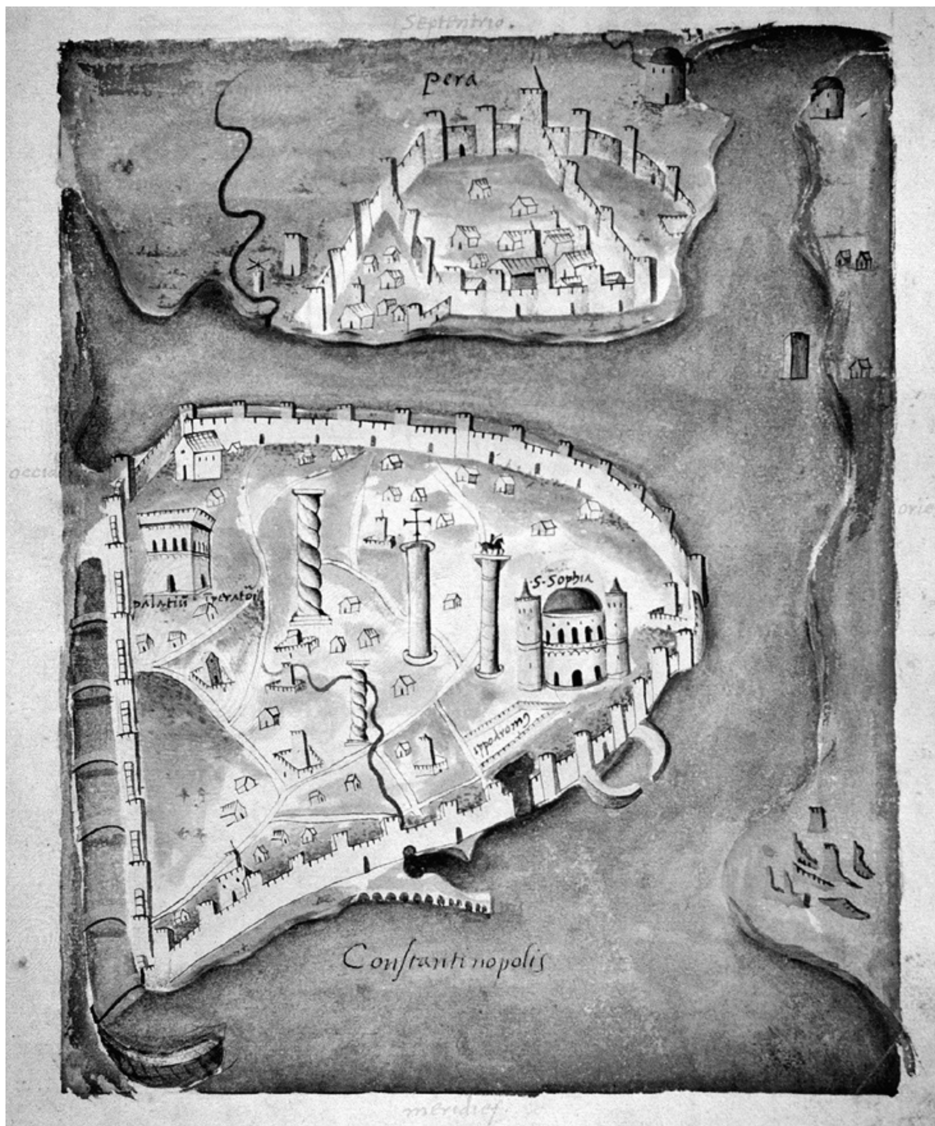

FIGURE 6.3 *View of Constantinople, early fifteenth century* (FROM BUONDELMONTI, LIBER INSULARUM ARCHIPELAGI); VENICE, BIBL. MARCIANA, MS. LAT CL. X, 123, FOL. 22R. (COURTESY OF THE BIBLIOTECA MARCIANA).

was replaced by a cross, which, though not in this specific case, was often combined with a globe (see Plate 11).[68] Bowersock expands on Duval's interpretation, and explains the absence of the cross in the eighth-century mosaic panel in light of the prohibition against the public display of crosses, implemented by Muslim authorities in the early period (see Chapter 4).[69] Here, one observes the renewed significance of a freestanding column from the Roman era in the early medieval period; the column, positioned in front of the city gate,

68 Duval 1994, pp. 167–71.

69 Bowersock 2006, pp. 66–69. For more on the early Muslim attitude toward the public display of Christian religious symbols, see Griffith 1992.

was a symbol around which coalesced the successive identities of the local community (Plate 12).[70]

Freestanding columns were maintained in several cities of the Syrian region up until the Middle Ages. Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) mentions a column topped by a statue in Anastasiopolis (Dara), comparing it with another one visible in the city of Neocesarea (Niksar).[71] Some freestanding columns had apotropaic values. In the eleventh century, a column in Maʿarrat al-Nuʿman located at the city gate worked as a talisman against scorpions.[72] The column bore a non-familiar inscription, and the Persian traveler who described it was probably facing a reused column, an example of spolia being appreciated in the medieval era for apotropaic qualities.[73] Columns in the surroundings of Antioch comprised a similar instance.[74]

Freestanding columns were integrated into the memory of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Among the renowned architectural elements of the temple was the pair of columns situated at the entrance of the vestibule. They are described in the Bible, named Yakhin and Boaz (likely meaning "may he establish" and "in strength"), and a reference to them could also be found in Josephus Flavius.[75] In the Second Temple, the two columns were replaced by two columns flanking the entrance, which were decorated with clusters of golden grapes.[76] Since the final destruction of the temple in 70 AD, the "pair of columns" together with the vine decoration have been adapted, in a process of visual synecdoche, as concise and symbolic images of the Jerusalem Temple. In Jewish coins dated to the period of Bar-Kokhba's revolt (132–35), the columns flanking a gate-like structure represent Solomon's sanctuary portal, while bunches of grapes complete the invocation of the Temple.[77] As regards early Islam, it has been noted how the visual legacy of the Temple of Solomon might have had an impact on the décor of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.[78] The persistence of representations of spiral and knotted columns as visual expression of the Solomonic legacy in the area of al-Haram al-Sharif has also been noted.[79] Whereas medieval textual sources minimize Christians' possible role as active transmitters of the Solomonic legacy to Islam, the remnants of material culture suggest a different reality.[80] Early Byzantine artistic achievements reveal solid connections with both the figure of Solomon and the iconography of the Temple, the famed place of worship whose size and proportion were dictated directly by God. In late antiquity, the image of the Holy Sepulcher and an image inspired by the "Jewish representations of the temple-tabernacle" came together in popular Jerusalem souvenirs such as Christian votive pilgrims' *ampollae*.[81] Since

70 Heidemann (2010, pp. 25–34) further develops the idea, connecting the column on a stepped platform with a globe and cross visible in Jordanian floor mosaics with the pillar represented on Islamic coins. The iconography of the column would have been transferred to coins, although without the explicit Christian symbol of the cross, in order to affirm "a non-religious symbol of civic pride" (p. 32).

71 Bar Hebraeus (*Chronicon Syriacum*), vol. 2, p. 80.

72 Nasir Khusraw, p. 14.

73 Flood 2006, pp. 155–62. Flood explains the role of amulets and talismans and the modalities of their functioning in medieval Islam, comparing these processes with those in contemporary Byzantine culture.

74 Guidi 1897, pp. 25–27; Hacken 2006, p. 208.

75 Jeremiah, LII, 20–23; Book of Kings, VII, 1 22; Josephus Flavius, VIII, Chapter 3. 4; Goldhill 2005, pp. 28–29.

76 Josephus Flavius, XV, Chapter 11.3.

77 Patrich 1993.

78 Soucek 1976, p. 98. Rabbat argues that the decision to sanctify Mount Moriah stemmed from the link established by the early Umayyad caliphs with the figures of David and Solomon (1989).

79 Tuzi 2002, pp. 60–4.

80 For instance, the sources reported by Soucek (1976, pp. 78–95) stress the role of Kaʿb b. al-Ahbar, a Jew who converted to Islam, in the process of deciding to make the site of the temple ruins a holy place for Muslims. Christians are presented as careless toward the Mount Moriah (pp. 89–95), while the adoption of the Temple site by Muslims is depicted as a way of deemphasizing the Christian sanctuaries (p. 110).

81 Kühnel 1986, p. 151.

the early Christian era, the image of Jerusalem included echoes of the Temple. Constantine introduced references to the Temple in Christian Rome, mainly through the pergola honoring the memory of St. Peter in the homonymous basilica, in which spiral columns fulfill this purpose.[82] In Byzantine Constantinople, the two most prominent buildings erected in the sixth century, dedicated to St. Polyeuktos and St. Sophia, contained references to the Temple of Solomon, especially through the omnipresence of vines in the decoration.[83] Vine-based décor also appears in the *karma*, the gilded marble vine frieze on the qibla wall of the Great Mosque of Damascus. Flood argues that a Solomonic reference was formulated at the Umayyad caliphal court through the mediation of churches in Constantinople.[84]

In Jerusalem, the Christian appropriation of the site of the Temple and its legacy is not entirely clear. A monastery or a Christian quarter was possibly built on the southern side of the Temple area, though it is likely the area of the Temple itself was left unoccupied.[85] Busse suggests that a portion of the Temple legacy was transferred to the Holy Sepulcher, when Golgotha became the new center of Jerusalem.[86] A further Christian association with the area of the Temple arose through the figure of Mary, whose sanctity in late antique and early medieval homilies is often compared to that of the Holy of Holies.[87] Byzantine interest in the Temple's legacy might also be observed in another Jerusalem building, the so-called Nea, a complex of buildings including a monastery and a hospital, located not far from the Temple Mount. In the previous chapter, Procopius's account of the miraculous discovery of marble for its construction was mentioned. His description highlights the columns' importance in the building:

"The church, then, is supported by a great number of columns brought from this place, of very great size, and of a color that resembles flame, which stand, some above, some below, and some around the porticoes that encircle the entire church, except on the side turned toward the east. Of these columns, the two that stand before the door of the church are of very unusual size, and probably second to no columns in the entire world."[88]

The columns' provenance, as well as that of the two standing columns placed before the door to the church, appears significant. It has been suggested that Procopius's account tries to somewhat hide the fact that construction material had been taken from the ruins of the Temple Mount, particularly the royal portico.[89] Procopius writes that

82 Tuzi 2002, pp. 29–37, 75–98. For two Carolingian bibles, in which the late antique iconography of the Temple of Solomon is still recognizable though conflated with the late antique representation of the *palatium*, see Pippal 1998. In the Latin world, a shift in the iconography of the Temple took place at the time of the transformation of the Dome of the Rock into the *Templum Domini*, under the Crusaders' rule over Jerusalem (1099–1187), such that the Islamic commemorative building came to represent the Temple of Solomon (Rosenau 1979, pp. 33–43; Blair Moore 2010).

83 Harrison 1983a, p. 277; 1983b; 1989, pp. 137–44. Meyendorff 1987, p. 392. The attribution of the exclamation "I have vanquished thee, o Solomon" to Justinian at the time of the completion of St. Sophia seems apocryphal, as it appears only in the *Treatise on the Dignities and the Offices*, compiled between 1347 and 1368 by Pseudo-Kodinus, though it probably originated earlier (Barker 1966, pp. 182–83). However, the Greek *kontakion* probably composed for the inauguration of St. Sophia contains explicit references to Solomon; see Palmer and Rodley 1988, pp. 146–47, 150. The legendary reference to Solomon's palace of Aydincik in the eight porphyry columns in Hagia Sophia by an early Ottoman source belongs, instead, to a later and different tradition (Yerasimos 1990, pp. 135–37).

84 Flood 2001, pp. 68–87.

85 Grabar 1959, p. 11; Mazar 2004.

86 Busse 1987, pp. 282–85.

87 Avner 2010, pp. 40–41 (also referencing the works by Cunningham). This association facilitated the adaption of the plan of the commemorative Kathisma church, dedicated to Theotokos, in the conception of the Dome of the Rock (pp. 42–44).

88 Procopius, p. 142.

89 Ben-Dov 1985, pp. 239–41.

amid the shortage of marble, God pointed out, "in the nearest mountains, a bed of stone of a kind suitable for this purpose."[90] The second element shows the pervasiveness of the legacy of the Temple of Solomon. The two freestanding columns "of unusual size" placed, according to Procopius's description, just in front of the church entrance, referenced the pair of gargantuan columns that were originally in the Temple and, subsequently, part of its visual image.[91]

It is also worth noting that a possible reuse of marble material from the Nea Church in early medieval al-Haram al-Sharif has been suggested, although the exact chronology of the church is far from clear.[92] Besides the possibility of such a direct material connection, the memory of the Temple of Solomon, its visual image as conveyed in written texts, was translated into Arabic lore from early on. The two columns are mentioned by Ibn al-Fakih al-Hamadhani (tenth century). While describing Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis), he quotes Wahb b. Munabbih, a Yemeni scholar of Jewish origins (seventh–eighth centuries), who writes of David founding the bases of the mosque (*assasa asās al-masjid*) and Solomon completing the construction of the temple (*al-bayt*).[93] Wahb b. al-Munabbih's passage looks as a perfect transcription of biblical accounts about the Temple.[94] What emerges is that within the legacy of the Temple of Solomon, pillars and columns of exceptional nature might have retained a marked symbolic value. All three late antique and early medieval monotheistic communities drew from this legacy (Figure 6.4).

During late antiquity, specific columns became the focus of worshipping practices. In his *Church History*, Evagrius Scholasticus (d. ca. 600) describes the visit he paid to the religious complex built around the column atop which St. Simeon the Stylite lived, having separated himself from society. By that time, the saint's body had already been transferred from the region of Antioch to Constantinople; at the site (Qalʿat Simʿan, forty kilometers northwest of Aleppo in Syria), it was the stone column, or, more accurately, its ruins, around which a monumental complex was built in the fifth century, to become the real object of veneration (Figure 6.5).[95] Evagrius describes how peasants used to dance and walk around the pillar at night.[96] The Complex of Qalʿat Simʿan remained active up until its abandonment in 1017, though it is unclear what kinds of activities occurred there

90 "Which either had existed there in former times and been concealed, or was then created. Either story is credible to those who regard God as the cause of it: for we, measuring everything by our human strength, think that many things belong to the region of the impossible, while for God nothing whatever is difficult or impossible" (Procopius, p. 142). The intervention of God in the miraculous discovery of marble and columns was later evoked in Lanfranco's search for marble in Modena (Greenhalgh 2009, pp. 280, 387–92) and Suger's refurbishment of Saint-Denis (see Chapter 5). In the Georgian tradition, St. Nino, the female saint who Christianized Georgia in the fourth century, is said to have received a monumental column from heaven while establishing the earliest church in Mcxeta (Patsch 1985, pp. 322–24).

91 Tuzi 2002, pp. 29–95. This was also perhaps echoed by the presence of two teak-wooden beams within a cupola structure located in the eastern section of the cathedral of Sanʿa'. The two beams were named after two idols over which burials Abraha built the cathedral in the sixth century. People are said to have paid reverence to the two beams (Bosworth 1999, p. 217; I thank Elizabeth Fowden for sharing this reference with me).

92 More specifically, the findings in the Umayyad palace complex have been associated with the Nea Church; Ben-Dov 1985, p. 241; see Nees (2016, pp. 107–08) who suggests pavonazzetto marble shafts might have been taken from the Nea Church and reused in the Dome of the Rock.

93 Ibn al-Fakih al-Hamadhani, p. 99.

94 Jeremiah, Chapter 52, 20–23; Book of Kings, Chapter 7, 15–22.

95 Eastmond 1999; Peña 2000, pp. 96–101; Castelfranchi 2006, pp. 169–70. The complex was an act of imperial patronage and consisted of a cruciform basilica, monastery, and pilgrimage facilities. The nearby complex of Simʿan Daği celebrated St. Simeon the Stylite the Younger, and was instead built thanks to the donations of pilgrims and visitors (Ratliff 2012, pp. 94–95).

96 Evagrius of Epiphania, pp. 58–59.

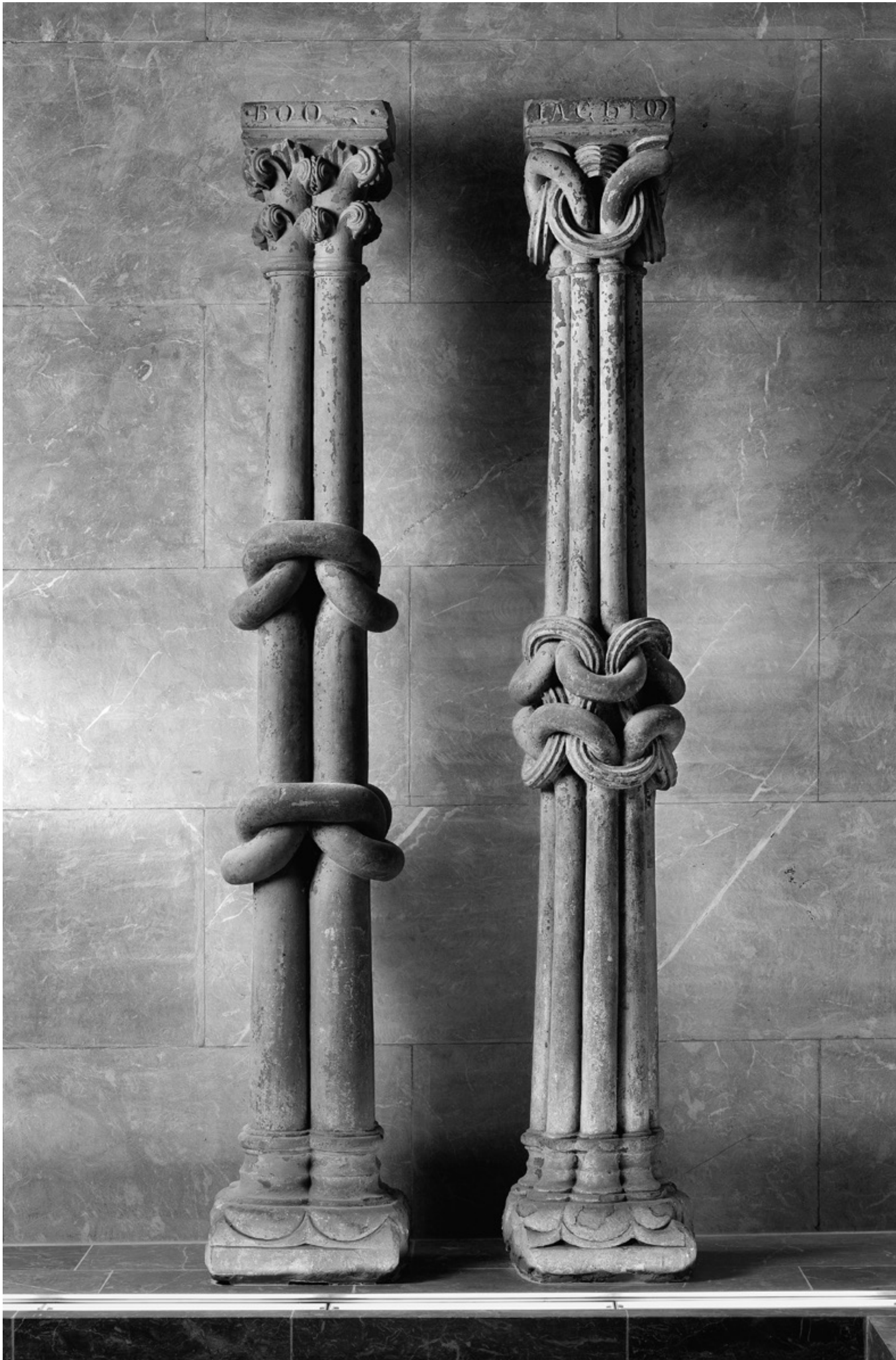

FIGURE 6.4 *Couple of columns named "Jachim" and "Booz", thirteenth century, Cathedral of Würzburg* (PHOTO @MUSEUM AM DOM WÜRZBURG BY PETER EBERTS).

FIGURE 6.5 *Remains of the pillar of St. Simeon at Qalʿat Simʿan, Syria*
COURTESY OF GYÖRGY THALER.

after the seventh-century conquest.[97] At the same time, however, there is an abundance of evidence concerning the existence of anchorites living atop columns and pillars in the early medieval eastern Mediterranean. According to the *Anonymous Chronicle of 1234*, the caliph Abu Bakr (d. 634) advised his generals "not [to] force the stylite from his high perch [or to] not harass the solitary." In fact, "they [the sylites] have devoted themselves to the service of God."[98] In his *Life*, St. Simeon of the Olives, the bishop of Harran who died in 734, is said to have built outside one of the gates of Nisibis (present-day Nusaybin, located in Turkey on the border with Syria), a large monastery provided with "a high column for anchorites."[99] In the document believed to be a report ordered by Charlemagne on the status of church properties and their communities in the Holy Land (early ninth century), two hermits residing on columns are mentioned on the site of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and one in the city of Nablus in Samaria.[100]

97 Biscop 2006, 82–83; According to Ratliff, "there is limited evidence of activity" at Qalʿat Simʿan after the seventh-century conquest (2012, p. 94). In a miniature (fol. 2r) of the Menologion of Basil II (Biblioteca Vaticana, gr. 1613), St. Simeon the Stylite is honored by a group of Arab men. Cutler argues that they are Muslims (because of the headgear) paying homage to the memory of the saint (Cutler 2002, p. 49, fig. 13). Finally, it should be noted that, although different sources are in accordance in placing the death of the caliph ʿUmar II (d. 720) in Aleppo, one shrine said to be his burial site was erected beside the complex of St. Simeon the Stylite at Qalʿat Simʿan (Donner 2010, p. 223). For Arabic graffiti in the main church of the complex, see Littmann 1949, p. 93.

98 Translated in Palmer 1993, p. 145.

99 Pahlitzsch 2009, p. 134.

100 *Breve commemoratorium*, pp. 209, 215. Though not discussing any specific evidence, Peña also argues in

The above-cited passage by Evagrius testifies how, in the absence of the saint (after his death) or his body, sacredness was transferred to the stone column he had been in contact with. Remnants of columns or pillars were considered holy objects, and as such were the focus of veneration. The circular movement around the column is also reminiscent of the votive circumambulation of baetyl worship widespread among eastern Mediterranean pagans, including in pre-Islamic Petra and the Arabian Peninsula.[101] An important feature of baetyls, often believed to be meteorites, is indeed the power of self-motion. Similar magic powers were also associated with columns during late antiquity; in 570, the anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza described a marble column surmounted by an iron cross and located not far from Lydda. The column is said to commemorate an event of the life of Christ. Christ was allegedly tied to this column to be scourged when the column "was lifted up by a cloud" so that Christ escaped the torture. The column was then placed back on the site visited by the Piacenza pilgrim nearby the city of Lydda. The fact the column was baseless was a proof that it was uprooted during the miracle. The Piacenza pilgrim mentions pilgrims climbing the column by steps and bringing lights and incense with them; people believed the column cured people possessed by demons.[102] Here, different roles were apparently ascribed to a single column; it was a landmark, but also a sacred object by virtue of commemorating a sacred event within the Christian history of salvation. However, the most important place commemorating the martyrdom of Christ was located in the center of the Basilica of the Holy Sion in Jerusalem. The marks left by Christ's hands were visible on a column placed in the center of the church. People put pieces of cloth around the marks and use them to treat sickness.[103] The column in the Basilica of the Holy Sion was also included in the diagrams of the church that accompany Adomnán and Bede's texts in several early medieval and medieval manuscripts (Plate 13).[104] The sacredness of these columns was visible (and tangible) in the marks on the surface of the shaft and enhanced by their alleged miraculous treating qualities, a further proof they marked sites where divinity made itself manifest.[105]

The memorial function of some stones, noteworthy for their color, ability to refract light or to be totally transparent, as well as rarity, has been highlighted with regard to the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad, biblical prophets, and Qur'anic sites (such as the palace of Ghumdan).[106] Marble columns played a similar role, with the features of marble surfaces helping to enhance the believability of the accounts relating columns to holy figures. Such a practice was widespread among late antique Christian communities. In the Church of St. George in Lydda, a column in the nave was tied to a wheel, one of the instruments of the saint's martyrdom. The column stood for the

favor of the continuity of the phenomenon of the stylites after the seventh centuury (1975, pp. 44–47, 64–65).

101 Castelfranchi 2006, pp. 169–70. Meteorite stones and "god-fallen images" in eastern Mediterranean paganism are addressed by Cook (1940, pp. 881–920). He also draws a comparison between the meteorite stone worshipped as the god Dousares in Petra (often represented as a standing pillar) and the black stone of the Kaʿba in Mecca (pp. 907–20). Ibn al-Kalbi describes stone worshipping among pre-Islamic Arabs in the peninsula. In one passage, he focuses on those stones resembling a living form (*aṣnām*) or images (*awthān*). In another passage, he slightly modifies this classification, reporting, "if a statue were made of wood, or gold, or silver, after a human form, it would be an idol (*ṣanam*); but if it were made of stone it would be an image (*wathan*)" (Ibn al-Kalbi, pp. 28, 46).

102 Piacenza Pilgrim in Wilkinson 2002, pp. 141–42.

103 Ibid., p. 140.

104 Wilkinson 2002, pp. 371–86.

105 In the land where Jesus Christ was said to have lived, sacred geography was based on the mapping of those places where he supposedly spent time, rather than on relics. This is the meaning of the "relics of Christ and places of his sanctification" in the text by Peter of Bayt al-Ra's (see Chapter 2).

106 Flood 1999, pp. 347–57; Milwright 2005, p. 216.

saint, as it is said to have bled for three hours on the day of his memory. A crack in the marble of the column reportedly gave signs to the pilgrims who entered the church, by testing their faith.[107] The same column is described by Adomnán (seventh century) as bearing a (carved) portrait of the saint and an impression in the shape of ten fingers related to a miracle performed by the saint.[108] Within the same church one further column bore a miraculous inscription, said to have been marked by St. George himself, detailing the location of one column donated by a devote within the church (second column of the right row).[109] Marble, with its natural indentions, had the material qualities to eternally show the signs of a holy presence. In medieval Egypt, one of the columns of the martyrium of St. Macarius's shrine had a mark believed to be left by the hand of Christ at the time of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt.[110] In Jerusalem, Willibald (722) mentions a marble column erected in front of the gate of the Mount of Olives and topped with a cross, to commemorate the site where a miracle saved the body of St. Mary from abduction.[111]

Muslims likewise associated columns with specific early figures who assumed importance with the passing of time. In the consecutive restorations and enlargements of the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, columns fulfilled such a function. The column of repentance was considered to be the column to which Abu Lubaba ʿAbd al-Mundhir (a Medinese who converted to Islam after a period of opposition to the Prophet) tied himself for a period of contrition. A further column just behind it was deemed the site in which ʿAli (the Prophet's cousin) guarded Muhammad during his nocturnal vigils. The column of ʿAisha was named after the Prophet's wife, because she had once enumerated the merits of praying close to that column. Another column, colored with saffron paste, indicated the area in which Muhammad stood for prayer and against which he leaned while pronouncing a sermon.[112] Columns were chosen for such a role because they were physical and tangible objects (marble playing a role in the sensorial experience of touching a column) and marked specific points within larger spaces.[113] The association of these columns or pillars (called *usṭuwān*) is still remembered today as it is included in the pious visit (*ziyāra*) to the Mosque of the Prophet of Medina (Figure 6.6). In this regard, it is worth mentioning the decoration of the

107 Epiphanius, p. 210. Indeed, certain objects were thought to have the potential to be animated by the power of God: "let them tell us why it is that from images, icons of the saints, by the power of God the Omnipotent, oil oftentimes flows. How does an inanimate, upright stele, pierced by an arrow, flow with a miraculous flow of blood like something of the nature of the flesh?" (Theodore Abu Qurra, p. 44).

108 Adomnán in Wilkinson 2002, p. 203; *Saint Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean, Saint Georges*, 344–45.

109 *Saint Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean, Saint Georges*, p. 275.

110 Abu Salih al-Armani, p. 221.

111 Willibald in Wilkinson 2002, p. 243.

112 Al-Bukhari, vol. 1, p. 481; Bisheh 1979, pp. 141–43. Ibn Zabala (ninth century) describes a column located in the residence of ʿUbayd Allah b. ʿAbd Allah b. ʿUmar b. al-Khattab in Medina as marking the spot from where, at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Bilal was used to recite the call for prayer (Munt 2014, p. 97). Again in Medina a stone in the prayer hall of the Banu Zafar was considered having magic properties because the Prophet was said to have seated on it (Munt 2014, p. 113), while also a marble slab in the Kaʿba in Mecca is said by Nasir Khusraw to mark one of the sites where the Prophet Muhammad prayed (Nasir Khusraw, p. 99).

113 Scholars have investigated the quality of columns of being interpreted as persons along the axis connecting Vitruvius to Renaissance artistic context (see Onians 1988, pp. 74–75; Rykwert 1996, pp. 27–36). The line of investigation mainly focuses on Western examples (Isidore of Seville's discussion of columns as human body parts and Hrabanus's correspondence between church building and ecclesiastical structures) with little or no reference to the non-European tradition.

FIGURE 6.6 *Medallion mentioning the sacred association of the pillar with the figure of the Prophet Muhammad ("pillar of the bed," located west of the "Room and Burial Chamber of the Prophet"), Mosque of the Prophet of Medina*
COURTESY OF KING FAHD GLORIOUS QURAN PRINTING COMPLEX.

pagan Kaʿba (prior to the changes introduced by Muhammad in 622); the six columns of the structure featured paintings representing trees, angels, the prophet Abraham, Jesus, and Mary, suggesting that the verticality of the supports paralleled that of the subjects.[114] Columns' place-marking and memorializing roles also contributed to the process of creating a mihrab. One of the earliest mihrabs was simply one bay within the prayer hall of the mosque of ʿAmr b. al-ʿAs in Cairo, which was demarcated by four columns surmounted by gilded capitals; the goal was to preserve the space of the original qibla area used by the tribe of al-Qays in the late seventh century, within the new and enlarged mosque.[115]

114 King 2004, pp. 219–20.

115 Whelan 1986, pp. 209–10. In the Great Mosque of Damascus, the caliph al-Walid I installed a column distinguished by an extravagant basket-like capital. The column was supposed to mark the grotto where the relics of St. John the Baptist were found during the construction of the mosque. Apparently once incorporated into the new mosque, the grotto was no longer accessible, so that the column functioned as a place marker. Flood argues that the column was an aniconic adaptation of the commemorative columns familiar in Byzantine cities (Flood 2001, p. 202), while Khalek adds how the column was a transposition of a recurrent element of the Christian iconography of St. John the Baptist into the new Islamic setting (Khalek 2011, pp. 97–116).

In some instances, Muslim devotion prompted the exploiting of the veining of marble to underscore particular sacred associations. According to al-Harawi, ʿAli's fingerprint was visible on a column in his sanctuary in the city of Homs; the alleged visibility of his imprint was aimed at making as solid as possible the site's connection with ʿAli. In addition, al-Harawi's account adds that some people said they actually saw ʿAli sleeping there, reinforcing the connection.[116] In Jerusalem, on one of the columns in the so-called mosque of the cradle (*masjid al-mahd*), located in the southeastern corner of al-Haram al-Sharif, some indentations were interpreted as the signs left by Mary while in labor.[117] As mentioned above (Chapter 2), the association of the Nativity with al-Haram al-Sharif was part of a larger process aimed at differentiating the Muslim worship of Jesus from the Christian one, after a period in which early Muslims followed Christian holy topography.[118] According to some traditions gathered by al-Maqqari, among the wondrous artifacts in the mosque of Cordoba were three red columns, one of which was inscribed with the name of the Prophet, another of which featured an image of Moses's staff and the sleepers of the cave, and the third allegedly displaying Noah's crow.[119] All images are described as "divine creations," a detail that

116 Al-Harawi, pp. 18–19. Leontius of Damascus (ninth century) tells the story of how the guardians of the chapel of the Baptism, built by Anastasius (r. 491–518) at the site on the Jordan river where Jesus was believed to have been baptized, mixed up Stephen of Damascus, a renowned ascetic who used to sneak into the chapel at night to pray, with John the Baptist himself (Leontius of Damascus, p. 73). The visitation of saints on sacred sites during the night is part the trans-cultural phenomenon of incubation, according to which worshippers were used to sleep in sacred places so to experience divinity in dream.

117 Grabar 2006, p. 148; Nasir Khusraw, p. 33; on the mosque of the cradle and the mihrab Maryam, see also Soucek 1998.

118 Guidetti 2014, p. 19.

119 Al-Maqqari 2002, vol. 1, p. 230.

helped at circumventing the practice of not having figurative images in religious spaces. Indeed, figurative images and inscriptions were produced by the veining of marble, or, to use Trilling's words, were suggested by the veining of marble and created by the minds of the beholders. In short, an artistic process that was the result of a collective enterprise: "Miraculous images could and did emerge spontaneously, because people knew what to look for."[120]

It clearly emerges how the custom of interpreting marble columns as potential bearers of meaning remained in place following the rise of Islam. One final example shows contact between the Christian and Islamic communities in this regard. Among the churches early Muslims used to visit and pay homage to was the Church of the Ascension, erected on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives was a place linked to inter-religious apocalyptic beliefs concerning the end of time. Early Muslims had a sort of veneration for this church; Safiyya, one of the Prophet's wives, and ʿUmar are said to have prayed there. Two Companions of the Prophet and three of their relatives are also said to have worshipped in the Church of the Ascension.[121] The church was a round, roof-less structure, built over the rock from where Christ was said to have ascended into heaven.[122] In 722, the church was mentioned by the Latin pilgrim Willibald. Within the church were two columns, and, according to the local lore, whoever was able "to creep between the wall and the columns would have remission of his sins."[123] The two columns are explicitly mentioned also in later Muslim traditions faulting the visitation to the church by Muslims. In his text on the merits of Jerusalem, in which he collects Muslim traditions concerning specific sites of the city and its surroundings, Ibn al-Murajja (early eleventh century) advises Muslims not to enter the Church of the Ascension and the Church of the Tomb of Mary in the Valley of Jehoshaphat because of the presence of the two columns. It appears Islamic traditions reflects a confusion about where exactly to locate the two columns.[124] As both the Church of the Ascension and the Tomb of Virgin Mary were attended by Muslims and located in the same area of Jerusalem, the tradition about the columns was attached to both sites.[125] By the time of Ibn al-Murajja, Muslims had their own network of sacred sites, alternative to the Christian one. After all, his work sought to cement the holiness of Muslim sites by offering a kind of pedigree for each of them. In the case of the Church of the Ascension, the importance of the site, and its association with figures of the early days of Islam, prompted Muslims to build a mosque near the church and to dedicate it to ʿUmar.[126] Why, Ibn al-Murajja rhetorically asks, should a Muslim visit and pray in a Christian building when a nearby Muslim holy place is available to commemorate the same site?[127]

The situation was obviously different in the early medieval period, when Muslims did not yet possess firm traditions, narratives, or a fully established alternative network of holy places. The power of certain holy sites, then, made some practices take a long time to die out. As regards the

120 Trilling 1998, p. 126. With regard to footprints, Patrizi, comparing similar attitudes in Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, suggests that this was a case of an aniconic iconography, as the footprints should be considered the negative of a corporeal body (2011, pp. 88–90).

121 Bashear 1991.

122 The church is thoroughly described by Adomnán, among others, in the seventh century; Wilkinson 2002, pp. 180–81. Remains of the late antique foundation have been unearthed; Corbo 1960.

123 Willibald, in Wilkinson 2002, pp. 243–44.

124 Elad 1995, pp. 139–40.

125 Despite Christian sources locate the two columns in the Church of the Ascension, Abu Bakr al-Wasiti (tenth–eleventh century) identifies the Tomb of Mary in the Gethsemane as the "church of the two columns" (*al-ʿamūdayn*) (Rabbat 1989, p. 16).

126 Le Strange 1890, p. 218.

127 According to Bashear, traditions opposing the Muslim visitation to Christian holy places already started to emerge in the eighth century (1991, pp. 278–79).

Church of the Ascension/Tomb of Virgin Mary, Ibn al-Murajja lingers over the two columns, pronouncing them idols and asking Muslims not to go through them. Prohibitions and warnings reveal the popularity of a practice that for whatever reasons came to be sanctioned. In this specific case, Muslim visitation to the Church of Ascension was authenticated by the abovementioned homage paid by early Muslim figures. In the early medieval period, several Muslims adopted the holy site, the physical building erected over it (the rotunda and nearby structures), and the eschatological-related ritual attached to two specific columns. While traditions circulated to reinforce the legitimacy of such worship, the slow emergence of an alternative Muslim building to commemorate the same site triggered the ban to enter the Christian structure and to continue the veneration of the two columns. It is worth reminding that one of the written traditions discussed in Chapter 5 focuses on some columns from the Gethsemane that were required by ʿAbd al-Malik. As said above, the Gethsemane is mentioned among those holy places in the hands of Christians by Peter of Bayt al-Ra's (see Chapter 2); a church probably stood in the place in which Jesus retired himself to pray.[128] At the same time the Gethsemane was a pilgrimage place located at the foot of the Mount of Olives and nearby the Tomb of the Virgin, so that it is possible this tradition reflects the ambiguity in Muslim sources about the exact location of the two columns that according to Willibald were located in the Church of the Ascension. The reputation of these two columns in Muslim circles might have provoked the desire to appropriate them.

Far from being mere architectural supports, columns also retained symbolic capital during the early medieval era. In the specific context of the late antique and early medieval eastern Mediterranean, columns were often related to the commemoration of holy figures and miraculous events. Marble added a significant aesthetic element; indentations and veining were interpreted as signs of sacredness, either as miraculous images or imprints left by those the column was meant to commemorate. With regard to columns, Muslims moved along the same lines as Christian communities; they even acknowledged the power of some columns in the Church of the Ascension, at least in the early period after the conquest. Marble columns, therefore, contributed to the creation of the sacredness of specific sites within Muslim circles as well. As such, the intense movement of columns from churches to mosques, especially when renowned churches were concerned, might have served to transfer holiness from popular and well-established devotional sites to new ones. This would fit Bandmann's idea (see Chapter 5) that, as spolia, columns had the potential of transferring meaning (sacredness) from one building to another one. Given the initial shortage of religious associations with the conquered land, Muslims worked along two parallel paths. On the one hand, they started associating holy figures (namely figures belonging to the circles leading the conquest) with specific sites. A case in point is the abovecited association of ʿUmar with the site of the Ascension. Another case concerns a relic connecting the Great Mosque of Damascus with the Muslim conqueror Khalid b. al-Walid. The relic was allegedly mounted on Bab al-Ziyada, a door located in the southwestern corner of the mosque (Khalid b. al-Walid was assumed to have entered Damascus from the western side).[129] On the other hand, Muslims seem to have increased the aura of their own holy places by connecting new mosques to renowned churches, a process analogous to the decision to build several new mosques in the shadow of existing churches.

It should be noted how all three explanations investigated in this chapter operate within a paradigm of continuity with late antique, and specifically Christian, practices. The reuse of columns was not dictated by the "study" of the past or the reinvention of ancient traditions within a

128 See above, Chapter 5, footnote 74.

129 Al-Harawi, trans. J. Sourdel-Thomine, pp. 37–40; see also Sourdel-Thomine 1952–54, p. 80.

new cultural paradigm. In Settis's formulation (see Chapter 5), there was no *distanza*, either chronological or cultural, enabling a meditation on the past (as was instead the case of the abovementioned Ottoman attitude toward late antique buildings in Constantinople).[130] At the same time, there is no trace of any intention on the Muslim side to "spoliate" Christian buildings in order to humiliate the communities worshipping in them. And on a visual level, every reuse of Christian material is analogous, as far as function and position within the larger architectural ensemble, its deployment in the original architectural setting. There is no trace of inversion, for example, while alterations are limited to the erasure of figurative elements (though not on a consistent basis). Muslims in the Mediterranean were evidently working within a late antique paradigm, according to which marble columns were important because of the extraordinary qualities of the material itself, which matched a religious experience based on the emanation of light; because of their rarity and role in making buildings renowned and appreciated, in accordance with trans-religious aesthetic standards; and, finally, because of the commemorative and religious values attached to them that, in turn, were conveyed and suggested by the material itself. Again invoking Settis's terminology, Christian churches and material were valid and active *exempla*, to which Muslims desired to link their own architectural feats. *Exempla* means here places and things endowed with a capital (*auctoritas*) exploitable by and transmittable to other locales in need of political and religious legitimization.

130 *Distanza*, instead, seems implied by Calvo Capillo (2014) in her discussion of the classical relief fragments recovered at Madinat al-Zahra (tenth century). She frames the reuse of Roman sarcophagi in the palatial area within the general interest for and translation of classical texts promoted by the caliphal court in al-Andalus.

CHAPTER 7

Epilogue

The Vanishing of the Late Antique Sacred Landscape

"Architectural history has traditionally been preoccupied with tracing the origins of buildings and describing their forms. I have argued here that the ends of the buildings—who destroyed them, why were they destroyed, what use was made of their remains—is equally important."[1]

Temple—church—mosque. The simple and easy narrative according to which mosques replaced churches finds its evidence in the urban sacred landscape of the Middle Ages. Such was the case during the Mamluk period (1250–1517), when late antique churches were definitively uprooted from the town centers and Friday mosques took their place. But in the previous chapters, it has been shown how, during the early medieval period (seventh through the eleventh centuries), Friday mosques, rather than replacing churches, were added to the existing urban sacred landscape, and how, with regard to their location, one of the preferred practices was to establish them contiguous with late antique churches. Why was this pattern later dismissed? Indeed, the urban layout described in Chapter 3 can barely be observed today. The downtown areas of most cities in the Syrian region feature a Friday mosque, often dating to the medieval period. Nowadays, when churches and mosques coexist in the same urban area, as in the Beirut Central District, this is the result of modern processes related to the formation of national states and identities, rather than a continuation of what occurred in the early medieval period.[2] The early medieval pattern simply disappeared during the medieval period proper. Churches did not evaporate, of course, but lost their centrality within the urban layout, a centrality "conquered" during late antiquity and preserved also after the seventh-century conquest. The main difference between the late antique Christianization of Roman society and the early medieval and medieval Islamization of the Syrian region was that Christian communities survived the Islamization of the sacred landscape. However, at least since the Middle Ages, churches were placed somewhat in the background, outside the town centers.

Bearing in mind the long process of the abandonment of pagan temples amid the Christianization of that area during late antiquity, it is worth asking questions such as: Were late antique churches directly converted to mosques during the medieval period? Or, rather, were churches abandoned, and only after a certain period of time, destroyed and taken over by Muslims? Were conversions of churches into mosques the result of a new agreement with non-Muslim communities?

As mentioned in Chapter 2, around the eighth–ninth century the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* canonized circulating practices, customs, and regulations dealing with non-Muslim sacred buildings. With the institutionalization of the Islamic rule and growth of the Muslim population, some new legal formulations were also added. Examined from a chronological perspective, the ninth century stands out as a period in which Muslim authorities made moves in the direction of abolishing some non-Muslim sacred structures. A possible ninth-century Abbasid date for the enlargement of earlier mosques

1 Wharton 2000, p. 214.

2 If one adopts Maqdisi's thoroughly elaborated framework, the construction of a central area with places of worship belonging to the different religious communities is part of the modern concept of *taʿāyyush* (coexistence), which, alongside its antithesis, *tāʾifiyya* (sectarianism), is part of the modern discourse surrounding the shaping of nation-states (Maqdisi 2000, pp. 166–74).

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to the detriment of late antique churches in Hama and in Homs, for instance, cannot be excluded (see Chapter 3). Material and textual evidence reveal both the vitality of non-Muslim communities in modifying their sacred buildings long beyond the seventh-century conquest, as well as the attempt to enforce the Islamic authority's norms regarding *dhimmi*s. The time that had elapsed since the conquest, combined with the latitude obtained by the various Christian communities, obviously obstructed a uniform application of any coherent legislation. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the same circumstances were used to manipulate the reality, in order to claim that many mosques already existed in the early period (exemplified, for instance, by the obliquity of the figure of ʿUmar that several narratives present as builder of mosques far beyond his possibilities), as well as pretend that churches should be safeguarded, no matter the real date of foundation or refurbishment.

The caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861) is also known for having issued a decree in the year 849 implementing some norms included in the *shurūṭ ʿUmar*. On the one hand, this later edict aimed at visibly distinguishing the members of different religious communities: the headgears, belts, and saddles of *dhimmi*s were to be different from those of Muslims; non-Muslims' children were forbidden from attending Muslim schools; while Christian and Jewish graves were ordered to have a different appearance from Muslim ones. On the other hand, the dispositions were intended to reduce the public exhibition of non-Muslim worship. The display of Christian crosses and Jewish chanting in the streets were thus proscribed. With regard to churches, the edict addresses only those constructions erected after the conquest, ordering their destruction. There is no mention of churches converted into mosques; the edit only states that one-tenth of the Christian houses should be requisitioned and transformed, if spacious enough, into Muslim places of prayer.[3]

3 Al-Tabari, vol. 3, pp. 1389–91 (vol. 34, pp. 89–92; English translation).

It should be noted that these anti-*dhimmi* norms were accompanied by a great stimulus for Muslims to act as required by law. Muslims were asked not to intermingle, i.e., not to act as non-Muslims. Churches were threatened, but, at least in theory, late antique churches were left untouched. Al-Mutawakkil's edict, said by al-Tabari to have been sent to all the governors in the Syrian region, elicited an obvious reaction among the Christian communities. These included the fabrication of documents affirming that ʿUmar or Muhammad had guaranteed specific land properties and rights to Christians. Such was the case of the pact that according to the *Chronicle of Séert* was found in a monastery at Birmantha in Iraq in the year 878 containing the alleged treaty established in the year 631 between the Christians of Najran and the early community of Muhammad, granting Christians a special place among the dhimmis.[4] Massignon discusses this passage together with another alleged pact of surrender preserved in an Ottoman copy at the Monastery of St. Catherine in the Sinai, positing the emergence of such documents perfectly suited to late ninth-century conditions, at the time when al-Mutawakkil reduced the autonomy of the *dhimmi*, prompting Christians to attempt to reorganize their communities in response to the new circumstances.[5] This parallels what Eutychius states occurred in Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the early tenth century, when Muslims started to intrude on Christian places of prayer. Apparently, Christians impugned the Islamic narrative concerning the time of the seventh-century conquest in order to defend themselves (see Chapter 2). But though al-Mutawakkil's order might have been very strict and

4 *Chronique de Séert*, pp. 601–18.

5 On the document in the Monastery of St. Catherine, see Moritz 1910, pp. 91–96; Massignon 1963, vol. 1, pp. 251–53. More recently, Wood has reassessed the evidence offered by the *Chronicle of Séert* highlighting the difficulty to distinguish between the work of the chronicler and those of his sources, also suggesting that it might also be the case that the very same invention of the discovery of the document at Birmantha should be ascribed to the tenth-century author of the Chronicle (2013, pp. 243–49).

consistently applied by the regional governors, the emphasis placed on the prohibition against intermingling, along with the way Christians defended themselves, suggests that the general social framework of this legal intervention still adhered to the paradigm of the early period.

A specific threat to Christian churches, no matter the date of their foundation, occurred under the Cairo-based Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (r. 996–1021), who extended his rule to parts of the Syrian region. As recently shown by Pruitt, al-Hakim's policies vis-à-vis churches were far from being the result of madness, as is often stated in the secondary literature.[6] Although early on in his rule, he continued his Fatimid predecessors' liberal policies toward *dhimmi*s, around the year 1000 chroniclers write of the conversion of two Cairo Melkite churches into mosques, followed by the relocation of the Melkite community in another quarter, and the requisition and destruction of a Christian burial site for the building of a new mosque. Later on, al-Hakim implemented much harsher policies toward *dhimmi*, especially Christians. Perhaps, as suggested by Pruitt, because of a rapprochement with Sunni Muslims, al-Hakim launched a season of proactive universalist Islamic initiatives, which included the destruction of churches. Partly pandering to increasing popular sentiment against *dhimmi*s as well as seeking to underscore his own legitimacy, al-Hakim exceeded the norms established by the *shurūṭ ʿUmar*, ordering the destruction of churches, regardless of when they were founded.[7] This no doubt intensified the confrontation with non-Muslims living in the Islamic world, especially given the fact that churches were threatened without need for a legal complaint or other rationale. Furthermore, among the churches destroyed were the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (destroyed in 1010), the very center of Christianity, which a few decades earlier was even looted by a mob, and the Church of St. George in Lydda, a sacred site that, as shown above, was also of great significance for local Muslims. Commenting on the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher, Yahiya al-Antaki (d. ca. 1066) state that only "things that were too difficult [to destroy] were spared."[8] The destruction of churches was paired with the building of new mosques, hinting at the actions of various subsequent Muslim rulers after the Crusades. In a few cases, written sources attest to the transformation of churches and monasteries into mosques and adjacent minarets.[9]

However, even al-Hakim's decisions were not totally irreversible. In the final years of his reign, he withdrew the order and allowed Christians to rebuild or restore their churches. Pious endowments of churches in and around Jerusalem were re-established, and a few years later the Holy Sepulcher was modestly repaired, while an agreement reached in 1030 allowed the Byzantine emperor to finance and carry out the reconstruction of the complex (reconstruction that effectively took place under Constantinus IX Monomachus, r. 1042–55).[10] What emerges is that popular pressure on Christians was heightened and manipulated by rulers such as al-Hakim according to their own agenda. On the other hand, as converted *dhimmi*s were permitted to return to Christianity, sacred buildings were, in turn, reconverted, and churches in disrepair restored.[11]

In other words, it is apparent that, as late as the tenth century, the guarantees negotiated by Christians at the time of the conquest were the only unalterable factors governing the status of churches in early medieval Islam. In Chapter 4, the weakening of the Christian network responsible for providing religious rituals and comfort, was highlighted as one of the causes of the shrinking of Christianity under Islam. This very same

6 Pruitt 2013.

7 Ibid., pp. 125–33.

8 Canard 1965; Ousterhout 1989, p. 69.

9 Pruitt 2013, pp. 128–29.

10 Ousterhout 1989, pp. 69–70. Gill (1984) examines the donations devoted to the renovation and establishment of places of worship in Jerusalem in between the seventh century and the Latin rule over the city.

11 Pruitt 2013, pp. 132–33.

weakening—together with the concomitant conversions to Islam—might have been an "internal" cause for the abandonment of religious structures such as churches and monasteries. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the moment when most scholars agree that Muslims comprised the majority in the eastern Mediterranean, was the same moment when the preponderance of mosques began to dwarf the number of churches.[12] As for "external" causes, given the importance of the seventh-century conquest, it is worth looking at other successive conquests. In this regard, two primary examples emerge. The first is the Muslim reconquest of large sections of northern Syria following the Byzantine occupation of the late tenth century, and the second is the defeat and expulsion of Latin armies from the eastern Mediterranean between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Antioch is a case in point; the city was conquered by Nichephoros Phocas II in the year 969, and remained under Byzantine rule for more than a century.[13] When the city was reconquered by the Seljuk troops in 1084, a new process of conquest was carried out, and this time the state of war gave rise to worsened conditions for Christians. This clearly emerges in the following passage by Bar Hebraeus:

"He opened the Great Church of Kawsyana [i.e., Mar Cassianus, the martyr], and took from it the furniture and curtains, the vessels of gold and silver, and the rest of the objects that had been deposited therein by the citizens, a vast quantity, and he made the church into a mosque."[14]

The conqueror, Sulayman b. Qutlumish, ally of the ruler of southern Syria, Abu Saʿid Tutush (1078–1095), looted the Church of Mar Cassianus and allegedly converted it into a mosque. Here, conversion and looting went hand in hand, spolia literally being the spoils of war. St. Cassianus was a much-appreciated late antique church in which Christian festivities were celebrated during the early medieval period, the most important church in Antioch after the cathedral standing in the palatine island.[15] According to Ibn Butlan (d. 1064), the church, surrounded by porticoes, had an office with several employees in charge of managing the presumably large revenues of the endowment.[16] In 1099, Antioch fell to the Crusaders, the earliest Latin conquest in the eastern Mediterranean. The Crusaders established their own Latin cathedral elsewhere, and, while Muslims were likely banished from St. Cassianus, the narthex of the church was still used as a Christian burial area.[17] It is therefore possible that the 1084 conversion did not affect the ecclesiastical structure, as the church was still recognizable as such a few years later.

Not long thereafter, the cathedral located near the Great Mosque of the Umayyads of Aleppo was also converted into a mosque. The event took place in 1124, when Crusaders laid siege to the city. Avenging the alleged desecration of Muslim shrines on the outskirts of Aleppo, Ibn al-Kashshab, the religious authority (*qadi*) of Aleppo, decided to

12 Schick (1995, pp. 123–29) notes how it is the lack of economic resources to impede Christians in Palestine from renovating churches after earthquakes, a phenomenon he first dates to the beginning of the ninth century. On this, see also Wood 2015, pp. 48–9. I thank Nasser Rabbat for pointing to me the importance of confessional demography (rather than battles, edicts and conquests) for explaining the alterations of the sacred landscape. As in chapter 4 some comparisons have been drawn from al-Andalus and western Islam, it is noteworthy what occurred in the Baleares Islands. In the thirteenth century Muslims were obliged by the Christian authorities to let Christian preachers into their mosques (Dufourcq 1966, p. 187). Preachers aimed at converting Muslims to Christianity and conversion was considered the easiest way to change the sacred landscape.

13 Kennedy 1992.

14 Bar Hebraeus (b), p. 229. In an article on iconoclasm, Flood discusses William of Tyre's report on the damages inflicted by Turks on Christian painted images in Antioch (2002, p. 648).

15 Kennedy 1992, p. 188.

16 Guidetti 2007, p. 40.

17 William of Tyre, vol. 1, p. 263; Kennedy 1992, p. 188.

FIGURE 7.1 *Level of the pavement of the church once standing in the place of the Madrasa al-Halawiyya, Aleppo*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

convert into mosques four of the city's churches, including the cathedral. Subsequently, in 1149, under Nur al-Din (r. 1146–74), the mosque obtained by converting the cathedral became the prayer hall of the Madrasa al-Halawiyya (Figure 7.1).[18] Clearly, wartime conditions led to the abeyance of existing norms and rules, thereby paving the way for significant changes in the sacred landscape. While in eleventh-century Antioch, local churches were targeted because they were identified with the Byzantine enemies, in the case of Aleppo churches belonging to local Christians were targeted as a means of indirect revenge against Latin Christians. Although the historical circumstances differed, the final result was similar. Furthermore, the wartime status enabled the reopening of discussions of what was granted in the earlier periods, by "inventing" a pre-Christian Islamic use of a given site to argue on behalf of its return to Islam. Such a strategy made it easier to approach "local" churches belonging to communities other than the Latin, which theoretically should not have been included in the post-conquest ordeal. This process, together with the Latin occupation or renovation of late antique churches in existence prior to their arrival, followed by the Muslim reconquest, resulted in the sudden deterioration of the Christian architectural heritage, whether "Latin" or "local."[19]

Before describing in detail what was actually involved in the conversion of a church into a mosque in the Middle Ages, it is worth observing how, amid the clashes between Greeks, Turks, and Latins, sacred buildings were surely affected by such developments, although not always immediately destroyed or converted. The evidence offered by Edessa enables a better understanding of how, even in wartime, the destruction and/or conversion of churches was a nuanced process, not only the direct outcome of the religious fervor of thugs attacking and desanctifying sacred structures. The Melkite cathedral of Edessa, the renowned St. Sophia, is a case in point; the church was damaged for the first time in 1032, during the fighting between Byzantines and Turks, and subsequently restored, as evidenced by the fact that it was home to an assembly of Christians in 1084. During the Latin occupation of the city, the church partially collapsed (1106), remaining in this state after the Muslim reconquest of 1144. Only later, in 1174 or 1184, St. Sophia was demolished, and a portion of its decorative material reused in the citadel of Edessa and the Great Mosque of Harran, in which two late antique capitals were displayed at both sides of the main entrance to the prayer hall. Another ecclesiastical structure of Edessa, the Church of the Apostles, was destroyed by Muslims when it was already in a ruinous state. It is instructive

18 Ibn al-Shihna, pp. 77–78, 82, 115; Allen 1986, pp. 7–9; Eddé 1999, pp. 452–58.

19 It should here be mentioned that, though not the subject of this work, extra-urban monastic settlements of late antique foundation were often preserved. This is the case, only to mention a few, of the monastery of St. Catherine (on Mount Sinai); Mar Musa (between Damascus and Homs), which had three successive cycles of wall paintings during the medieval period; the monastery of St. Saba (between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea); and a larger monastic area such as the Tur Abdin (in present-day southeastern Turkey).

to compare the impossibility of local Christians restoring churches under medieval Muslim and Latin rules with what occurred in the same city in the seventh century, when, following an earthquake, the cathedral restoration was directly sponsored by the caliph Muʿawiya. Even after the Islamic reconquest of Edessa in 1144, churches were not always converted into mosques; for example, St. Stephen was used as a granary, and St. Thomas as a stable. The same site of the destroyed St. Sophia was left untouched, as its ruins were seen and described by a Persian traveler in the fourteenth century.[20] While it holds true that since the early thirteenth century late antique churches were no longer standing in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as that since the eleventh century military clashes followed by Muslim reconquests have played a primary role in that process, it is possible that in certain cases there was a time lag between the abandonment of a building by Christians and the eventual reuse of the site or building itself as a mosque by Muslims.[21]

While the model and rationale of the new Islamization of Bilad al-Sham in the medieval period are beyond the scope of this book, it is nevertheless worth mentioning how recent studies have shown that Muslim sacredness under the Zangids, Ayyubids, and early Mamluks was not reliant on churches. Although the jihad ideology operated as a legitimizing factor for political authorities, the establishment of new religious foundations also depended on pious patrons and inter-Muslim sectarian disputes, the commemoration of "special dead" such as Sufi masters or patrons themselves, and the emergence of religious institutions such as madrasas, related to a network of Muslim scholars.[22]

Yet the conversion of churches into mosques did occur. In some cases, churches were not modified, and merely converted to Muslim use. A good example of such a transformation is the conversion of the chapel in the Latin fortress of the Krak des Chevaliers. The building remained structurally intact, while a niche was carved in the center of the southern wall, flanked by a small minbar (Figure 7.2). A similar case is a church in the town of al-Qara, located between Damascus and Homs. In this instance, when, under Baybars, the church was converted into a mosque, the apse was walled off, a niche opened on the southern wall, and the facade provided with an inscription (Figure 7.3 and 7.4). Similarly arranged was the conversion of the medieval Latin Church of St. Anne into the Madrasa al-Salahiyya, realized by Salah al-Din in the year 1192. The history of the site dates back to late antiquity, when a church was built over a natural cave and related to the birth of Mary (hence, dedicated to Anne). According to Muslim sources, the church was abandoned during the Abbasid era, and subsequently converted into a Dar al-ʿIlm, a place for the study of the sciences, under the Fatimids. Later, the Latins reconsecrated the site and built a new church in 1138.[23] Less clear is the fate of the attached monastery, which is mentioned as outfitted with personnel in the report of churches submitted to Charlemagne in the early ninth century.[24] Tamari argues the monastery, provided with a central court, a cistern, vaulted halls, and modest rooms, was used as the madrasa after Salah al-Din's transformation.[25] The church itself

20 The fate of late antique and early medieval churches of Edessa in the twelfth century is analyzed in Guidetti 2009 (pp. 13–18).

21 This was also the case of numerous churches abandoned with the shrinking of the population and its economic resources in the early medieval period: see Schick on Palestine (1995, pp. 129–30) and Fenwick on North Africa (2013, pp. 27–8).

22 Tabbaa 1997; Frenkel 2001; Talmon-Heller 2007; Mulder 2014.

23 Pringle 1993–2009, vol. 3, pp. 142–56; Strohmeier 2000.

24 *Breve Commemoratorium*, pp. 202–3.

25 Tamari 1968. He also speculates that the number of personnel listed in the report to Charlemagne (approximately thirty people) would correspond to the average number of residents in a medieval Muslim madrasa (pp. 340–45).

FIGURE 7.2 *Interior of the mosque of the Krak des Chevaliers, late thirteenth century*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

FIGURE 7.3 *Interior of the mosque of al-Qara, a former church converted in the thirteenth century*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

FIGURE 7.4 *Exterior of the mosque of al-Qara, a former church converted in the thirteenth century*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

was converted into a mosque. Structurally, however, the church was left untouched; an inscription was placed atop the main entrance, and a mihrab likely set on its southern wall. The *naskhi* inscription references Salah al-Din as the founder and assigns the madrasa to the Shafiʿi legists (Figure 7.5). In all these cases the church remained intact, though despoiled of its Christian decoration and converted into a mosque; the axis and proportions of the prayer hall easily reveal the original nature of the building. Despite with no direct evidence, it is such medieval pattern of basilicas conversion into mosques that modern commentators often retro-project to the early period of Islam.

The Madrasa al-Halawiyya in Aleppo, dating to 1149, presents a different scenario. The only remains of the church in the new building are some columns and pilasters with the related capitals of the central quadriconch (Figures 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 7.1). The eastern section of the church, where the apse was located when the building was used as a church, was destroyed in order to create the courtyard, although the actual configuration dates to the Ottoman period. The mihrab was located on the southern side, while an entrance room to the prayer hall was added on the opposite side, transforming the axis of the building from west–east to north–south. A new gate to the complex was also added at the time of the establishment of the madrasa. The late antique church had its entrance on the western side of the complex; the entrance to the madrasa is on the eastern side, in front of the gate of the nearby Friday mosque giving access to the courtyard. On the right side of the gate, a basalt slab with an engraved cross datable to the late antique period was set into the masonry

FIGURE 7.5 *Inscription celebrating the conversion of the Church of St. Anne into a mosque, Jerusalem*
COURTESY OF MASSIMO GUIDETTI

FIGURE 7.6 *Late antique christian basalt slab from an unknown church reused in the medieval entrance to the Madrasa al-Halawiyya, Aleppo*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

(Figure 7.6). The gate belongs to the family of late twelfth-century monumental gates in Aleppo, consisting of a vaulted entry bay displaying foundational inscriptions and stone decorative elements.[26] The inscription placed on top of the gate says that the structure was renovated, and a *Hanafi* madrasa established in the year 1149. Nur al-Din, the patron, is described in the inscription as a victorious holy warrior who, among other things, has purified Muslim society with his sword (Figure 7.7).[27] This marked the final and irreversible disappearance of the late antique cathedral from the urban fabric of Aleppo.

26 Allen 1986, pp. 1–22.
27 *Thesaurus d'Épigraphie Islamique*, microfiche 12011 (RCÉA, n. 3137).

FIGURE 7.7 *Portal of the Madrasa al-Halawiyya, 1149, Aleppo*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

A New Place for Christian Spolia in Islamic Art

In the aftermath of the Crusades, the number of Christian buildings shrank. Conversely, the quantity of Islamic architecture rose, and, among other features, also came to dominate the rural landscape, which was somewhat littered with late antique Christian foundations throughout the early Middle Ages.[28] Some specific figures stand out as champions of Islam in the phase that followed the defeat of the Latin armies, in particular, Nur al-Din (r. 1146–74), Salah al-Din (r. 1174–93), and the Mamluk Baybars (r. 1260–77). Though perhaps too simplistic to credit a few individuals with a century's worth of developments, it is evident that under the rule of Nur al-Din, Salah al-Din, and Baybars the sacred landscape of Bilad al-Sham experienced dramatic changes. It is worth remembering how the landscape formed in the medieval period, though slightly modified during the centuries that followed, was not revolutionized as much as the relations with non-Muslims are concerned, a contributing factor in shaping the modern Western understanding of the relations between Islam and *dhimmis*.

After the conquest of Acre carried out by Salah al-Din, written sources openly portray his rule as a period in which the sacred landscape was dramatically altered; he is said to have "cast down the cross and set up the call to prayer" and replaced altars with minbars and churches with mosques, so that the "people of the Qur'an succeeded the people of the Cross."[29] Similar language is employed in describing the achievements of Baybars in the aftermath of his victories over the Latins and the Mongols (1260).[30] In the marble plaque he hung in the newly restored castle of Safad (1267–68), Baybars is celebrated for having "brought it [the fortress] back to the believers" and for "striving to substitute the *naqus* with the *adhan* and the Gospel with the Qur'an." On the main gate of the newly established shrine (*maqam*) of Nabi Musa (1269–70), built within an area marked by an abundance of Christian monasteries, the inscription emphasizes the conquests carried out by Baybars against the impious Latins.[31] Earlier on, under Salah al-Din, a seasonal festivity (*mawsim*) in the name of Musa was likely established in the area in place of Christian Easter.[32] Both landscape and the cyle of time were Islamized. The clear overtones accompanying the celebrations of the successes as well as acts

28 Frenkel 2001, p. 169.

29 Flood 2001b, p. 55.

30 Frenkel 2001, pp. 161–63.

31 *Thesaurus d'Épigraphie Islamique*, microfiches 2223 and 2246 (RCÉA, n. 4589 and 4612); Frenkel 2001, pp. 161–62 ; Taragan 2006–07.

32 Cohen 2007.

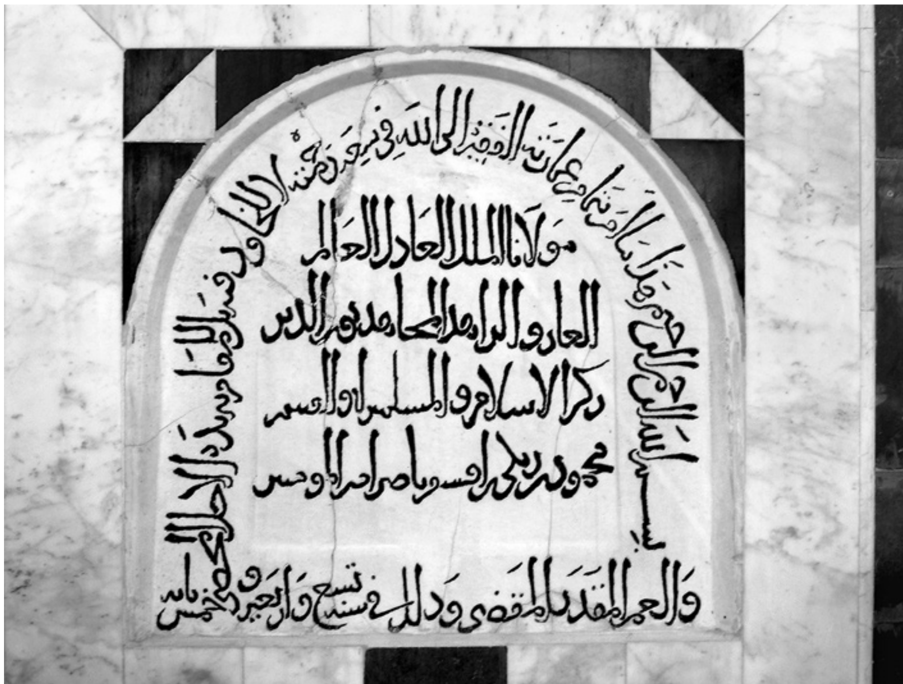

FIGURE 7.8 *Foundational inscription of the Maristan of Nur al-Din, 1154, Damascus*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

of patronage of the two rulers, suggest that the victories over the Latin enemies had a visible counterpart in the damage inflicted to their architecture. The jihadist rhetoric informing inscriptions and textual images (a rhetoric, instead, largely absent at the time of the seventh conquest, because not developed yet) would suggest that spolia accordingly took on re-signification. Such can be seen in the treatment of some Christian spolia used in medieval Islamic buildings.

One blatant example of the ways in which Christian marble pieces were "improperly" reused by Muslims is the foundational inscription of the Maristan al-Nuri, a madrasa-like medical structure, built in Damascus by Nur al-Din in the year 1154–55. The building is noteworthy for the reuse of the earlier cited classical pediment under a muqarnas vault set into the frame of the main gate, a combination remarked on by modern scholars (see Chapter 5 and figure 5.1). Today located in the east-facing vaulted hall (*iwān*), the inscription appears on a horseshoe-shaped Christian altar of white marble. The altar, decontextualized and set vertically, is the base for the black inscription that praises the "cornerstone" (*rukn*) of Islam and Muslims, the "holy fighter" (*mujāhid*), Nur al-Din, for having established the institution (Figure 7.8).[33] Another instance of the so-called improper use of Christian marble may be found in the Madrasa al-Sibaʿiyya, dating to the sixteenth century, in which two marble altars are set vertically, flanking the main mihrab. The inscription on one of them bears the name of the Seljuk ruler Abu Saʿid Tutush (d. 1095), manifesting the practice of reusing Christian altars in mosques launched prior to the time of Nur al-Din, more precisely, the period of the Seljuq reconquest of some former Islamic territories in northern Syria. In the same Maristan al-Nuri of Damascus, the southern *iwān* has a flat mihrab consisting of two small engaged columns and a bichrome arch

33 *Thesaurus d'Épigraphie Islamique*, microfiche 7809 (RCÉA, n. 3164).

framing another Christian marble altar.[34] The subverting of the Christian original function continued in the small outward mihrab in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Homs, in which the back wall of the mihrab is constituted by a further marble altar bearing a Mamluk inscription.[35] As far as columns, an excellent visualization of the new context for Christian artifacts is evident in the inversion of two small columns (with capitals) in the fourteenth-century mihrab of Abu al-Fida', in the late twelfth-century Great Mosque of Nur al-Din of Hama, in Syria. Here, the two Romanesque capitals, most likely transplanted from a Latin church, were deployed as the bases for the columns. Various scholars have observed how in medieval Islam, inversion was often used to humiliate the enemy following a military defeat.[36]

The (other) Great Mosque of Hama, the one that formerly was a church, displays a large number of reused artifacts from the Roman and Byzantine periods (discussed in Chapter 2). Several columns earlier redeployed as supports for the Dome of the Treasury were modified in the late fifteenth century, during the Mamluk era. *Naskhī* Mamluk inscriptions were incised in the marble (Figure 7.9). The inscriptions had a religious and juridical character and dramatically altered the appearance and function of the columns, transforming them into a type of surface for the display of public texts within a sacred space.[37] This carefully commissioned epigraphic work is in obvious contrast to much earlier Arabic inscriptions on columns, as with the inscriptions engraved on two columns of the Round Church of Baysan.[38] In the latter, the inscriptions are engraved along the axis of the shaft, suggesting they were executed after the column collapsed and was placed on the ground. Dating from the early ninth century onward, the inscriptions, although carefully written, seem to be the extemporaneous work of several individuals, who also left their signatures.[39] Another famous instance of medieval spoliation (cited in

FIGURE 7.9 *Mamluk Naskhi inscriptions added on reused columns, dome of the treasury, Great Mosque of Hama*
ERNST HERZFELD PAPERS, SERIES 4: PHOTOGRAPHIC FILES, 1903–1947; FSA A.6 04.GN.3109 COURTESY OF THE FREER GALLERY OF ART AND THE ARTHUR M. SACKLER GALLERY

34 Flood 2001b, pp. 46, 50–53.

35 Ibid., pp. 48, 53.

36 Herzfeld 1942–48, Part 3, pp. 46–47, fig. 77; Flood 2001b, p. 57.

37 Sauvaget 1932, p. 22.

38 Nocera 2013, p. 18.

39 In Baysan Jewish inscriptions also appear, though, as noted by Harris (Nocera 2013, p. 18), were most likely written after the Arabic ones. In turn, Baysan inscriptions look slightly different from those seen in some churches in the Negev (see Chapter 3), as the former were added to the columns once the building had collapsed after an earthquake. Recently, a group of Christian inscriptions in Arabic consisting of individual pious invocations have been recovered from a church in Udruh (southern Jordan) and dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth century (al-Salameen, Falahat, Naimat

Chapter 5) concerns the transfer of the portal of a Latin church from Acre to Cairo, later reused in the Mamluk Complex of al-Nasir Muhammad b. Qalawun (1295–1303). Here, the object is given a new context, radically dissimilar from the original one. In this sense, in spolia in the Middle Ages the emphasis was placed on the difference between the original use and context and the final destination. In one case marble and columns were saved from being looted. It happened in Bethlehem, when the plan of a certain Mamluk sultan to remove the precious material to Cairo was allegedly foiled by the appearance of a serpent.[40] It should be however noted that was a miracle, and not a negotiation as occurred in the early medieval period, to save the Basilica of the Nativity.

The reuse of Christian material often coincided with the ultimate disappearance of centuries-old churches. As part of the improvement of the route from Cairo to Damascus (the two capitals of his sultanate), Baybars built the bridge of Jindas, a small distance north of Lydda. Two *naskhī* inscriptions accompanied by a pair of lions reference Baybars's patronage. Though not stated in the inscriptions, the reused masonry was probably removed from a Latin church, perhaps, as suggested by Clermont-Ganneau, that located in Lydda.[41] Attacked by al-Hakim and later rebuilt by the Crusaders, this church was eventually destroyed by Salah al-Din in 1191, after he captured the city; the site was not then used for building a mosque, but was left in ruins.[42] Circa eighty years later, part of those ruins were reused for other elements of the infrastructure, including the thirteenth-century bridge. At the end of this long process of destruction and reconstruction, started in the eleventh century with al-Hakim, the church finally disappeared from the landscape of Lydda. Ruins were left standing until, in the nineteenth century, a modern church was rebuilt on the site.[43]

The "displacement" of Christian spolia became effective, perhaps even symbolic, in a post-conquest scenario, because Islamic religious architecture offered a different setting that made spolia highly visible in the new context. Even in those cases in which Christian material was reused because of its craftsmanship or material beauty,[44] the parameters for the recontextualization were based on the contrast with the existing Islamic architecture and decoration. Around that same time, for instance, a new style for capitals emerged. Although the sphere of influence of early Abbasid Samarra capitals was relatively far-reaching, it was only later, as shown by Barrucand with regard to Cairene architecture, that new Islamic types of capitals (the bulbous and the muqarnas forms) were fully embraced and gained widespread visibility.[45]

Conclusion

This book sheds light on the prominence of urban churches in early medieval Syria. As we have seen, late antique ecclesiastical complexes were preserved long after the seventh-century conquest, and, together with Christian communities, continued to be an integral part of the religious and architectural landscape of the early Middle Ages.

The evidence gathered in this work suggests that the process followed by Muslims in building mosques was the result of the progressive parting of Islam and its related ritual architectural

and Abudanh 2011) (I thank Zakariya Na'imat for the reference to this article).

40 Pringle 1993–2009, vol. 1, p. 139.

41 *Thesaurus d'Épigraphie Islamique*, microfiches 2297, 2298 (RCÉA, n. 4660, 4661); Clermont-Ganneau 1888; Frenkel 2001, p. 165.

42 Pringle 1993–2009, vol. 2, pp. 9–25.

43 The current church dates to the nineteenth century, when a Muslim shrine, called the mosque of al-Khidr, was also built on the site. Here, the contiguity of the church and the mosque is the result of modern appeasement among local communities in coincidence with the increasing interest of missionaries for the holy places of Palestine.

44 Flood 2001b and 2009.

45 Barrucand 2002 and 2005.

forms from a shared late antique heritage. The trajectory of Islamic religious architecture in the eastern Mediterranean might be described as a slow search for self-sufficiency, having started, instead, by depending from late antique Christian sacred places and their visual forms. Such a quest roughly parallels the shaping of a cohesive religious and state identity, though, it is worth underlining how art and architecture span a life-time which might sometimes be at odds with contemporary social and religious changes. This aspect creates a sort of anachronism, which could be seen, for instance, in thirteenth-century al-Harawi's perception of the eighth-century wall mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus. According to him the mosaics of the mosque had no equals but in churches, because this is where mosaics were used to be admired in his days. According to al-Harawi's mindset, tuned on medieval Islamic aesthetics (in which mosaics were notably absent), the mosaics visible in the Great Mosque of Damascus, pertained to another, late antique and early medieval attitude, which he defines "Christian."[46] This, as explained in the introduction, is related to the fact that contemporary phenomena, such as new medieval buildings and the persistence of early medieval ones, might pertain to different chronologies. This overlap of chronologies creates a possible distortion in the interpretation of buildings in later eras.

Conversion is a crucial issue throughout the book. It is about the conversion of individuals and groups to Islam as well as of pre-existent places of worship to an Islamic use and form. As explained in Chapter 4, the conversion of the majority of the population to Islam, beyond being a long process that took centuries to occur, it consisted of an irregular itinerary. It included, especially in the early centuries, various positions that tried to negotiate the growing, dominant monotheistic standpoint promoted by Islam with the necessity and desire to not step out of the Christian communities. At the same time, church sites were not directly converted into mosques, though Muslims intruded and started eroding the urban space dominated by churches up to that point. Eventually, as in the case of the transformation of Roman cities into Christian ones, the conversion of late antique urban centers to Islam did happen. During the three-four centuries of transition, as suggested by the Palestinian churches floor mosaics and the Christian aesthetics featured by several early mosques, the dialogic coexistence between different communities had an impact on respective places of worship. While separated and distinct, identities of individuals, groups and buildings were stretched and shaped in order to meet expectations beyond those of the community they supposedly belonged to.

With regard to inter-religious coexistence, the early Middle Ages were not a compact, homogeneous era. After an initial period, in which it was probably customary for Muslims to visit churches, during the eighth century Muslims were dissuaded and even deterred from entering churches, as new, large, independent sacred spaces for Muslims were increasingly made available to the population. At the same time, firmer narratives aiming at rooting Islam in the Syrian area emerged, while a growing need for differentiating between members of the respective religious communities was expressed by both Christian and Muslim elites. From the ninth century on, ever-increasing attacks on ecclesiastical structures by mobs, combined with rulers' promulgation of edicts and implementation of harsher norms, intensified the pressure on *dhimmi*s. The late tenth century witnessed a return of Byzantines to the area, with consequent war conditions that ultimately resulted in a new approach to non-Muslim properties. Concomitantly, the Christian population diminished as conversions to Islam increased. This also meant that the ecclesiastical network providing

46 The appearance of mosaics in medieval Mamluk buildings might be read as a sort antiquarianism, given that a chronological and cultural *distanza* (in Settis' terms) had by then been established between the model (Umayyad mosaic decoration) and its re-adaptations (Mamluk mosaics); see Rabbat 1997 and Flood 1997.

services to believers became loose, while churches became too numerous and costly to be cared for.

At the same time, however, the early medieval period was also marked by consistency, in that specific urban solutions developed in the century following the seventh-century conquest as a means to accommodate Muslims and their places of worship within a predominantly Christian landscape, generally endured for a long period. Churches were not converted to mosques, nor partitioned between Christian and Muslim believers. Instead, congregational mosques were often erected in the proximity of existing great churches, sometimes abutted to their walls or built within the same estate, or in the same vicinity. General rules related to the orientation of sacred buildings led to a scheme in which the mosque is placed perpendicularly with respect to the church. However, such a relationship does not appear with any degree of uniformity. In al-Rusafa, the qibla wall of the mosque was set parallel to the side wall of the Complex of St. Sergius. In Aleppo, instead, it is the eastern apsidal wall of the Christian building that faces the side wall of the mosque, with a narrow street dividing the two buildings. In some other cases, mosques were built in different areas, often in conjunction with the expansion of marketplaces. Here, issues related to the correct orientation of the qibla might have affected mosques' relationship with the urban context in which they were inserted. The early mosque of Palmyra is one such case, although the reverse is also true: that preexisting circumstances—the plot of land available, the nature of the terrain—had primacy over a correct orientation.[47]

The sites chosen for the building of mosques in the early medieval period may be explained in a variety of ways. Though mosques' contiguity with churches is affirmed in one legal tradition, it does not seem to be governed by a specific norm. One problem emerging in textual sources is the availability of space for new buildings in the conquered cities. Some treaties, beyond granting the existing properties to Christians, seem to have included a clause related to the right of the new rulers to have a building plot for the mosques, although the position of such sites is never clearly indicated. Urban centrality was also apparently of great concern in Muslims' interest in great churches, likely for two reasons: first, as a means of controlling and exploiting the most thriving areas of cities and, second, as a result of transcultural attitudes according to which sacred architecture should be located near existing sacred sites whenever possible. The latter aspect assumes that Muslims were keen on acknowledging already existing sacred areas, located either in town centers or otherwise strategically situated with respect to urban life. As far as churches, however, Muslims went further. Far from being aliens landing in an unknown territory, early Muslims recognized several aspects of Christian sacredness, and the act of searching for closeness to sources of holiness as churches with relics or holy rocks, might suggest a strategy of paying homage to and capitalizing on these special loci. Whether the variations were due to differing attitudes toward the Christian holy site is something that only further discoveries and investigations might reveal. From the vantage point of everyday Muslim believers, who soon also began to include former Christians, churches were powerful places, infused with a specific history of salvation, and effective at providing people with a sacred vessel in which deliverance was explained, offered, and shared with a community. The eastern Mediterranean society in the early Middle Ages was "a reality in which converts maintained close contact with their former religious communities," including their place of worship.[48] From the

47 See Bonine 1990, a case study of Morocco. On the ways in which orientation was structured and canonized in medieval Islam, see King 1995.

48 Simonsohn 2013, p. 652. With regard to eighth-century Cordoba, Gomez-Moreno argues that the portion of the former Church used by Muslims was required by those Christians who had recently converted to Islam

perspective of Muslim patrons, churches occupied a space within the society, a space that was at once physical and symbolic. This space was respected for legal and cultural reasons, and, indeed, as we have seen, churches were safeguarded, visited, and even revered, but at the same time and in the long run, their prominence in the sacred landscape was ultimately be eroded.

Early mosques were free of the limitations imposed by preexisting holy narratives. However, this does not mean that mosques were not sanctified, but, rather, that the sacredness of a mosque arose after its establishment or, for those dependent on nearby churches, that sacredness was acquired from a non-Muslim source.[49] Indeed, their sacred nature also occurred as a result of the Friday communal ritual held in a purity status in which the earliest community of believers (that gathered around the Prophet Muhammad) was commemorated and somehow reenacted by Muslim communities all throughout the Islamic world.[50] With the passing of time, sacredness was reinforced through narratives and objects.[51] Early medieval Muslims developed pure and independent Muslim narratives about sites and figures that were useful in the Islamization of the Syrian region. Buildings and objects, as well as narratives circulating about them, concurred in the shaping of an Islamic landscape.

In this book, I maintain that it is exactly within this process that some columns, together with the narratives circulating around them, played a prominent role. Once their pedigrees were clearly formulated, shared, and acknowledged by many, marble columns contributed to the intensification and concretization of mosque's sacredness. If the efficacy of spolia depends on their ability to be recognized as something different from the context in which they are reused, Christian materials in early mosques operated as spolia by virtue of their real or alleged provenance from churches. In fact, the reuse did not include any change in the function of pieces, or any visible distortion of their aesthetic features.[52] The display of crosses, figurative imagery, and the discourse that emerged around marble material transplanted from churches to mosques, infused this practice of reuse with meaning. The study of the early and late medieval reuse of marble columns in the Latin West has highlighted the topographical function of some

and wanted to continue worshipping in the same area: "…mas cuando éste se escindió entre mozárabes cristianos y los renegados, estos últimos hubieron de reclamar su derecho a servirse del edificio adaptándolo a su nueva religión" (1951, p. 19).

49 As regards the first three centuries of Islam, the list of "commemorative buildings" compiled by Grabar (1966) includes only the Dome of Rock (691) and the Qubbat al-Sulaybiyya in Samarra (862), while the earliest preponderance of commemorative buildings are dated to the tenth century. Already in the eighth century some cities started to have a certain number of small mosques; with regard to Kufa, Haider has shown the role played in the growing sectarianism within the Muslim community by the traditions attached to each place of prayer (2009, pp. 163–68).

50 In this sense, mosques shared with churches a fundamental difference when compared to pagan sacred spaces; whereas in the latter the sacred space was the "locus of the divinity," the former were "sacred for the activity that went on" inside them (Yasin 2009, p. 34; on the importance of collective prayer in early churches, see pp. 34–44). For a history of the early development of congregational prayer in Islam, in which a constitutive element was the "Salutation to the Prophet" and which structure under the Umayyads was highly dependent on the Christian congregational service, see Becker 1912.

51 Cobb (2002) has analyzed the efforts to develop traditions in order to sanctify the Syrian region prior to the Crusades. See Mourad (2004), who draws an interesting analysis of the continuity of Christian ascetic practices after the seventh-century conquest and the role this had in shaping the experience of early Muslim pious figures. On this see also Fowden and Key Fowden 2004, pp. 162–64.

52 See, however, the abovementioned exception represented by the erasure of the figurative imagery of some capitals on an unknown date.

spolia.[53] In particular, Settis has shown the extent to which early and late medieval patrons consistently sought to reference Rome in their religious structures.[54]

This volume asserts that Christian spolia in early mosques served a similar topographical function. Early medieval Islam did not have any monumental center from which to derive legitimacy. At the same time, the very heart of the early medieval caliphate had an abundant supply of Christian sacred spaces that exerted their power among Muslims. Christian spolia and the discourses surrounding them were used to situate early mosques within an existing sacred topography. This is epitomized in the reuse of marble columns, transferred for their aesthetic qualities and because they helped mosques to acquire the legitimacy they needed to be considered on a par with the most renowned sacred sites inherited from late antiquity. Perhaps equally important was the sacredness assigned to specific marble columns within mosques; in this case, a common practice within Christian communities was replicated by Muslims to fill the gap between the two types of places of worship. Both the aesthetic materiality of marble and the place-marker, commemorative function of columns were exploited by early medieval Muslims as a strategy to associate sacred figures with specific sites. In the early period after the conquest, churches became one of the sources of authentication for the rising Islamic religious architecture, one of the loci from which ideas concerning the transmission of sacredness to believers, were drawn; the transfer of columns participated in this process.

53 Raff 2008, pp. 111–25.

54 Settis 1984.

This study has demonstrated how, in general terms, the template and patterns of Islamization developed during the formative period lasted up until the eleventh century. Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the Syrian region was definitively Islamized, late antique churches eventually disappeared, and some Christian sites were converted to the Muslim faith. Cities were reshaped in order to serve the majority of the increasingly Muslim population. Narratives anchored medieval events in the seventh century, providing Muslim communities with a period of origins, an aspect missing during the first wave of Islamisation in the early period. The period of origins served as a means to authenticate and root medieval practices, including the creation of Islamic sacred spaces and the suppression of Christian ones. The practice of reusing Christian material in Islamic structures was also manifested during the medieval period, although the intent to contrast the aesthetic and original function of the objects within the new Islamic setting became more noticeable. In general terms, but with some obvious exceptions: during the early medieval period, Christian spolia were organically absorbed into Muslim sacred architecture and considered important because of their provenance; but later on, during the late medieval period, and especially after the Muslim reconquest of the Syrian area, spolia were integrated in the manner of foreign bodies, acquiring value precisely through their quality of being out of place. At times, they were literal trophies of war, but their distinctiveness within coherent Islamic surroundings also made them beautiful objects infused with magical and apotropaic qualities.

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PLATE 1 *Arabic inscription from the mosque at the Holy Sepulcher, tenth century, Jerusalem*
MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC AND TURKISH ARTS, ISTANBUL, NO. 2517 AUTHOR'S PHOTO WITH PERMISSION OF THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC AND TURKISH ARTS.

PLATE 2 *Aerial view of the site of the Great Mosque of Tiberias from the south*
PHOTO ©THE NEW TIBERIAS EXCAVATION PROJECT BY DAVID SILVERMAN AND YUVAL NADEL

PLATE 3 *Building inscriptions from Baysan marketplace gate, stone and gold-glass mosaic, year 737/738*
ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY: 1977–4094 PHOTO ©THE ISRAEL MUSEUM, JERUSALEM BY MEIDAD SUCHOWOLSKI.

PLATE 4 *Aerial view of Jerusalem with the Umayyad palatial area in the bottom-left corner juxtaposed to al-Haram al-Sharif*
PHOTO ©ANDREW SHIVA.

PLATE 5 *Panel of the benefactors, Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Rasas*
AFTER PICCIRILLO 1994, FIG. 37 COURTESY OF THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND, MT. NEBO.

PLATE 6 *Nilotic scene, Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Rasas*
AFTER PICCIRILLO 1993, FIG. 230 COURTESY OF THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND, MT. NEBO, AND THE AMERICAN CENTER OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH, AMMAN.

PLATE 7 *Alabaster capital of "al-Raqqa" typology (from a church), ninth century*
THE DAVID COLLECTION, COPENHAGEN, N. 2/2001 PHOTO ©THE DAVID COLLECTION BY PERNILLE KLEMP.

PLATE 8 *Mihrab of the mosque of Ibn Tulun, 879, Cairo*
PHOTO ©UNIVERSITÄT WIEN, INSTITUT FÜR KUNSTGESCHICHTE BY ARMIN PLANKENSTEINER.

PLATE 9 *Detail of a mosaic showing the transfer of a column on a chariot, Roman period, Museum of the Bardo, Tunis*
DAE-BL023013 PHOTO ©DE AGOSTINI / ARCHIVIO J. LANGE.

PLATE 10 *Remains of gilt decoration on a capital once employed in the Mosque of al-Aqsa and today in al-Haram al-Sharif open air museum*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE ISLAMIC MUSEUM AND AL-AQSA LIBRARY, JERUSALEM.

PLATE 11 *Mosaic vignette depicting Kastron Mefa'a (Umm al-Rasas), Church of the Lions, sixth century, Madaba*

AFTER PICCIRILLO 1993, FIG. 337 COURTESY OF THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND, MT. NEBO, AND THE AMERICAN CENTER OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH, AMMAN.

PLATE 12 *Mosaic vignette depicting Kastron Mefa'a (Umm al-Rasas), St. Stephen, eighth century, Umm al-Rasas*

AFTER PICCIRILLO 1993, FIG. 221 COURTESY OF THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND, MT. NEBO, AND THE AMERICAN CENTER OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH, AMMAN.

PLATE 13 *Representation of the Basilica of Holy Sion, from* The holy places *by Adomnán, thirteenth-century manuscript from the Rein Abbey, Austria*
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