

The Umayyad complex on the Citadel in Amman:

A Landscape of Authority

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عمان مركز السلطة: المجمع الأموي في جبل القلعة

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Abstract

In the Umayyad period Amman was the capital of al - Balqa , a sub – governorate of Jund Dimashq (the military province of Damascus), which indicates its importance in the Umayyad administrative system.

The construction of Dar al - Imara was accompanied by the rebuilding of the citadel's surrounding walls which in the Byzantine period were in a state of disrepair the layout of Dar al - Imara is regular and is clearly the product of a carefully thought out plan. The complex included a reception hall , a mosque , a uq and a bath , the constituent elements of an Islamic city. This became like a separate city hiding in the shadows of the surrounding walls and shut off from the bustle of downtown Amman. Visitors seeking audience with the governor were obliged to wait at the monumental gateway and then walk through a courtyard and a paved colonnaded street before being presented. The Dar al- Imara thus became not only an administrative centre but also a symbol of authority and power.

Keywords: Dar al-Imara; medina(city); power and authority; segregation.

الملخص

كانت عمان في العصر الأموي عاصمة البلقاء تتبع إداريا جند دمشق مما يدل على أهميتها في النظام الإداري الأموي. رافق بناء المجمع الأموي إعادة تشييد أسوار جبل القلعة التي كانت مهدمة في العصر البيزنطي اشتمل هذا المجمع (دار الإمارة) على قاعة الاستقبال، المسجد، الحمام، وسوق، أي العناصر الرئيسية المكونة للمدينة الإسلامية، وبالتالي أصبح هذا المجمع بمثابة مدينة قائمة بذاتها ومنعزلة بأسوارها وأبراجها عن المدينة في وسط البلد. كذلك صار على الزائر الذي يرغب في مقابلة الوالي أن ينتظر عند البوابة الضخمة، وإذا سمح له بالدخول أن يسير عبر ساحة مكشوفة ثم شارع مبلط يليه ساحة أخرى وأخيرا قاعة الاستقبال. وهذا يعني أن دور دار الإمارة لم يعد يقتصر على كونه مركزا إداريا بل صار أيضا مركزا للسلطة ورمزا للقوة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مدينة إسلامية، مدينة

عمان، دار الإمارة، السلطة الأموية

Introduction

The resumption in 1989 of the archaeological investigation and architectural restoration of the Umayyad complex on the citadel in Amman by the Spanish Archaeological Mission (SAM) under the direction of Antonio Almagro uncovered new features which clarify the plan and spatial organization of the complex. What emerged is effectively the best preserved Government House (Dār al- ‘Imāra) known in the Fertile Crescent. The planning of the complex (Fig: 1) seems to have been envisaged as a single integrated entity whose completion would have taken several years. Although the available data do not allow the assignment of the complex to a specific date or patron, the proposed date of ca. 730 for its construction seems reasonable (Almagro, 1983: 207; Northedge, 1992: 87-8). The questions of chronology, typology, construction technique and style of decorations have been meticulously documented by both Almagro and Northedge (Almagro, 1983: 1994:417-27; Northedge, 1992) that there is no need to cover the same ground again, though it would be impossible to avoid recapitulating some of their findings. It will suffice here to list the main constituent elements of the complex and comment on the salient features, which are significant for its understanding. The complex comprises a mosque, a market (Sūq), monumental gateway, a bath, residential and administrative quarters, and an official ensemble (Qasr); thus, it includes all the constituent elements of an urban Islamic settlement or Medīna.

Since we know that the Umayyad city of Amman was located in the downtown area near the present al- Hussaini mosque, we can conclude that we have on the citadel what amounts to a city within a city, a city being understood here in the sense of limited settlement with a specific function, in this case administrative. Enclosed by rebuilt substantial walls and soaring high on the upper terrace of the citadel hill, it dominated the lower city and emphasized the separation of government from the city and its inhabitants. However, unlike Wāsit in Iraq where security and protection were major concerns for the redoubtable governor al- Hijjāj bin Yūsuf, hence its double walls and ditch (al- Ma’adidi, 1976: 166-20), Amman was a tranquil city and security alone is not sufficient to explain the citadel complex and its layout; other considerations or ideas must have been at work. To understand these ideas it is necessary to examine the Umayyad complex and identify its constituent elements. These will be described briefly starting from the south.

The Mosque

The mosque was preeminently placed on the highest point of the citadel and sat over a platform that was reached by a stairway of six steps as broad as the northern façade of the mosque (Fig: 2). The interior is a simple hypostyle with seven rows of six columns. In the middle was a court created by eliminating two columns from the fourth and fifth rows starting from the qibla wall (Almagro and Jéminez, 2000:459- 75). The front part (Muqaddam) was three bays deep, while the other three sides were two bays in depth. In the middle of the qibla wall was a concave niche (Mihirāb), 2.90m, in diameter, set in a rectangular sailient; to the

west of the Mihrāb opened a narrow door which led to a court- house with rooms and iwans. The appearance of shallow rectangular buttresses on the inner and outer faces of the perimeter walls and at the corners led Almagro and Jéminez to assume that the columns carried intersecting arcades with shallow vaults presumably covering the bays (Almagro and Jéminez, 2000: 462; Fig: 11). This is a curious arrangement for a Syrian Umayyad mosque and anticipates its appearance in the 9th century Tunisian mosques such as the great mosque of Susa, Bū Fatata, and al- Zaytouna as reconstructed in a later phase, as well as the nine-bay mosque at Balkh in northern Afghanistan. (Creswell, 1989:351- 335; Fikri, 1961: 225- 60; Golombek, 1969: 173- 189). Terry Allen suggests that this form of mosque is suitable for official ceremonial, and points to a series of nine – bay mosques of the late eighth century in Arabia, added to lodges along Darb Zubaydah. (Allen, 1988: 80- 81).

This official aspect fits the Citadel mosque, in the sense that its use was confined to the bureaucrats associated with the governor. To the south, west, and slightly further to the east of the mosque ran streets (Zikak).

The presence of such a mosque in a palace or government-house is fully in the tradition of Umayyad palatial buildings, but no one would have predicted the location of the citade's mosque on analogy with other known sites because the mosque is usually placed in close juxtaposition to Dār al- 'Imara (cf. Below). It should be recalled here that the Umayyad congregational mosque of Amman stood on the site of the present al -Hussaini mosque in the downtown center. As reconstructed by Northedge, it measured 57.1 X 39.7 m and the covered front measured 39.7 x 14.00 m. (Northedge, 1989: 140-63;1992: 63-9). Originally the covered front was three aisles deep with eight arcades running perpendicular to the qibla wall. In the middle of the qibla wall was a large Mihrāb, 3.58m. in diameter, set in a rectangular salient. Thus the similarities between the congregational mosque and the one on the citadel are striking, though the latter was apparently intended for the elite groups living on the citadel hill where evidence of Umayyad housing has been discovered to the south and west of the mosque (Harding, 1951: 7-16 Northedge, 1992:140 ff). These houses may have extended southward as far as the northern perimeter wall of the temenos of Hercules temple.

To the north of the mosque is a large courtyard (Rahba) flanked on the east and west sides by porticoes and a row of eleven shops(Suq) (Fig: 1).

The monumental gateway

Situated to the north of the Rahaba, is the best known and most discussed structure variously identified as a vestibule, audience-hall, reception hall and gatehouse (Almagro, 1994:417; Northedge, 1992: 75ff) The structure which is built on the remains of a late 4th early 5th century building (Almagro, 1994: 417) is a square, tower- like monument which projects beyond the south wall of the official compound. It is entered through a recessed, tall arched doorway; a landing and three steps lead down to the interior which has a square center with extended recesses that form a cross-in-square plan. The arms of the cross are barrel- vaulted on the north and south, and covered with semi-domes with elliptical outline of

what has been called, "counterfeit squinches" (Creswell, 1940: 114) Window -sills on the roof noticed by architect Ignacio Arce, who is in charge of the restoration works, indicate that the central square space was covered by a dome, most likely of wood. Three registers of blind niches decorated with stylized floral motifs carved in low relief articulate the interior (Northedge, 1992: 89 -98; Fig. 47-54). The satellite spaces between the arms of the cross are filled with barrel-vaulted rooms- probably intended to house guards- except the northwestern room which has a spiral staircase leading to the roof. The northeastern room which opens onto a court to the north has a short stair built into the thickness of the wall, east of the doorway; this stair leads to a rectangular court which precedes the Bath complex. Along the western façade of the gateway, near its southern end, is a double door-jamb with a springer for an arch. Apparently a gate was intended to be built here to control a path which ran parallel to the western facade and connected with a street that led to a gate opened in the western perimeter wall of the complex. Although the design, construction and decoration of the structure give the impression that some ceremony took place here, we are informed by Grabar that the Umayyad gateway, though solidly built and lavishly ornamented, was essentially a place for waiting (Grabar, 1973: 148). It was the place where visitors would be screened and then wait before being announced to the -'Āmil. The gate may also have been the place of greeting where upon arrival the governor ('Āmil) was met and received. Rather than being a reception hall, the gateway with its monumentality and grandeur became an instrument for expressing the authority and power, delegated to the governor by the caliph, and for heralding the official quarters beyond. In this respect the monumental gateway presages future development in Islamic architecture as exemplified in the palaces of Baghdad (Bāb al- Dhahab) and Samarra (Bab al-'Āmma).

The Bath complex

To the east of the monumental Gateway, and separated from it by a rectangular court, is the Bath complex (Almagro 1999:81-111). It is of the same general type of Umayyad baths with a large vestiary with benches and arm-rests followed by the sequence of cold, warm and hot chambers*1. The bath can be reached through two entrances one from the outside through a passageway in the northeastern corner of the Rahba, thus implying a public use, and another, as mentioned before, from the northeastern vaulted room of the gateway where a constricted stair lead to the rectangular courtyard before the bath. There is nothing unusual about the arrangement of the bath except its curious location in relation to the official quarters of the palace complex (cf. Below).

To the north of the monumental gateway is a square courtyard almost identical in size with the gateway itself. The courtyard is flanked on the east and west sides by residential units, each consisting of a central court surrounded by porticoes and rooms and iwans placed on three sides (Almagro, 2000: 433- 56). The square courtyard opens onto a columned street about 50m. long, through a door in the center of the north wall. The street is flanked by additional self-contained architectural units similar to those flanking the square courtyard. At the far end of the columned street there is a door, now reached by three steps, which

opens onto the eastern portico of a rectangular courtyard. To the north of the courtyard is an open fronted iwan flanked by two vaulted rooms which connect with both the iwan and the courtyard. Behind the iwan is a cruciform domed chamber which was paved with polychrome mosaics (Olávarri, 1985:54; fig.28-9). Each of the four recesses which form the cross contains a door which connect with side rooms and an open court behind to the north, thus forming a true Persian Shahartaq (A four- way arch). In the southwestern corner of the cruciform chamber is a barrel-vaulted cubicle which may well have served as a closet for the robes and other paraphernalia of reception. This part which includes the audience-hall and the domed throne –chamber is clearly the focus of the whole complex in which the official functions of the governor were acted out. In fact the whole upper rectangle may have been confined to the use of the governor's household, his wives, children and servants.

Government houses existed in every provincial capital; in Amman, however, we have the best and most complete example of such a building. It was completed around the year 730, at a time when the Umayyad caliphate increasingly directed its attention to the East as a reaction to a series of unsuccessful attempts to conquer Constantinople (Gibb, 1958: 219-33). This led to a closer identification with Iran, an identification reflected in art, architecture and above all in court ceremonials which find echoes in the Umayyad complex on the citadel. A look at the plan of the Umayyad complex (Fig.1) shows that the layout though not symmetrical and deviates from strict axiality, a feature which can be explained by the existence of earlier buildings which had to be adapted to new usages and functions, it nevertheless reflects a coherent, well thought-out plan with emphasis on a north-south axis. Two features are immediately apparent in the layout. First, the whole complex formed a world unto itself, separated from the lower city and its population. Second, the arrangement and emphasis on the central tract, with a monumental gateway at one side and an audience-hall and throne-chamber at the other, has a decidedly formal quality.

Anyone seeking audience with the governor would find himself waiting and being screened at the gateway, then propelled into the courtyard followed by a street controlled by a door at both ends, then another courtyard and finally to the open fronted iwan and the domed chamber. This arrangement, with movement along a clearly defined path, reflects the growth of royal ideas and testifies to the growing exclusiveness of the ruler. Not only shapes were taken over from the Sasanian tradition but also concepts of royal ceremonial. These concepts are also reflected in the epistles (Rasā'il) of Abū al-'Ālā' Sālim bin 'Abd al-Rahmān, the head of Diwān al- Rassā'il during the caliphate of Hisham bin 'Abd al-Malik (105-25A.H / 724 – 743 A.D), and the better known 'Abd al-Hamīd al –Kātib, the secretary of the last Umayyad caliph Marwān II (127-32 A.H/744-50A.D), whose writings emphasize Persian concepts of rule, obedience and absolute authority (al-Jābirī, 2001: 131-70).

It is clear that the Dar al-Imāra on the citadel was not merely a center of administration, but also the setting of the official ceremonials which set the ruler apart from other men. Yet there are certain peculiarities in the organization which

are not consonant with royal ceremonials associated with the layout of the complex. For instance, the bath to which the governor retired to nourish his body and spirit is tucked away in a corner next to the monumental gateway. It was reached from the official quarters not through an imposing door and passage but by means of a constricted stair built into the thickness of a wall. Likewise the mosque which was set on an elevated platform as if to announce the presence of Islam in a predominantly Christian city, was placed across a court (Rahba) at the opposite end of the gateway instead of being set in close juxtaposition to Dar al-'Imāra. Moreover, the mosque is approached by a broad stairway and access to it was possibly through a central, tall archway which would have been a fitting entrance for the governor. Yet the south wall of the mosque is pierced by an opening. In most congregational mosques from the Umayyad period, the caliph or his representative entered directly into the mosque from a door opened in the qibla wall to the right of the Mihrāb. Was the courtyard house excavated recently behind the south wall of the mosque a resting place for the governor before entering the mosque? Or was it a residence for the leader of Prayer ('Imām)? Was the governor himself the leader of prayer as we should expect, or was this function delegated to an 'Imām? Finally what was the relationship between this mosque which was relatively large to accommodate a sizable congregation and the congregational mosque, in the lower city? Though we cannot answer these questions with certainty, they show a certain dichotomy between the location of the official quarters with its attendant ceremonial aspect on the one hand, and the siting of the mosque and the bath on the other. A certain tension, between closedness or isolation and openness and linkage can be observed.

Ironically this major Umayyad foundation was used as a government house for only a short time, may be no more than two decades. The powerful earthquake of January 749 (Tsafirir and Foerster, 1992:231-5), the coldest month of the year, destroyed most of the buildings, and the residents barely had time to recover when the Abbasid's overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in 750. In the post earthquake period the spacious houses and courtyards were divided up into smaller units and the new houses were poorly built in the midst of the ruined buildings and abandoned structures sprang kilns, ovens and large basins for the preparation of lime which transformed the citadel into a semi-industrial area (Almqgro, 2000: 444ff; Personal communication from Ignacio Arce). When al-Maqdisi visited Amman in the second half of the 10th century, the monuments on the citadel were clearly in a dilapidated condition. His account which includes a description of the inhabitants of Amman as an ignorant bunch (Juhhāl) possibly because the majority were Shī'ites mentions no palace except the enigmatic palace of Goliath (Qasr Jālūt) perhaps a reference to the monumental gateway which was still standing, though its function had changed and its Umayyad association had long been forgotten (al-Maqdisī, 1967:175). In the Abbasid period the Dār al-'Imāra apparently was transferred to the lower city, perhaps to the area in front of the Nymphaeum where recent excavations by the Dept. of Antiquities uncovered many reused carved stones, friezes, column drums and capitals. (Waheeb et-al. 1995.199-38).

* It is a pleasure to present this essay to Dr. Fawzi Zayadine a friend, colleague and scholar intecognition, ike many others in the Dept. of Antiquities of Jordan, I have benefited from his knowledge and wide ranging academic interests.

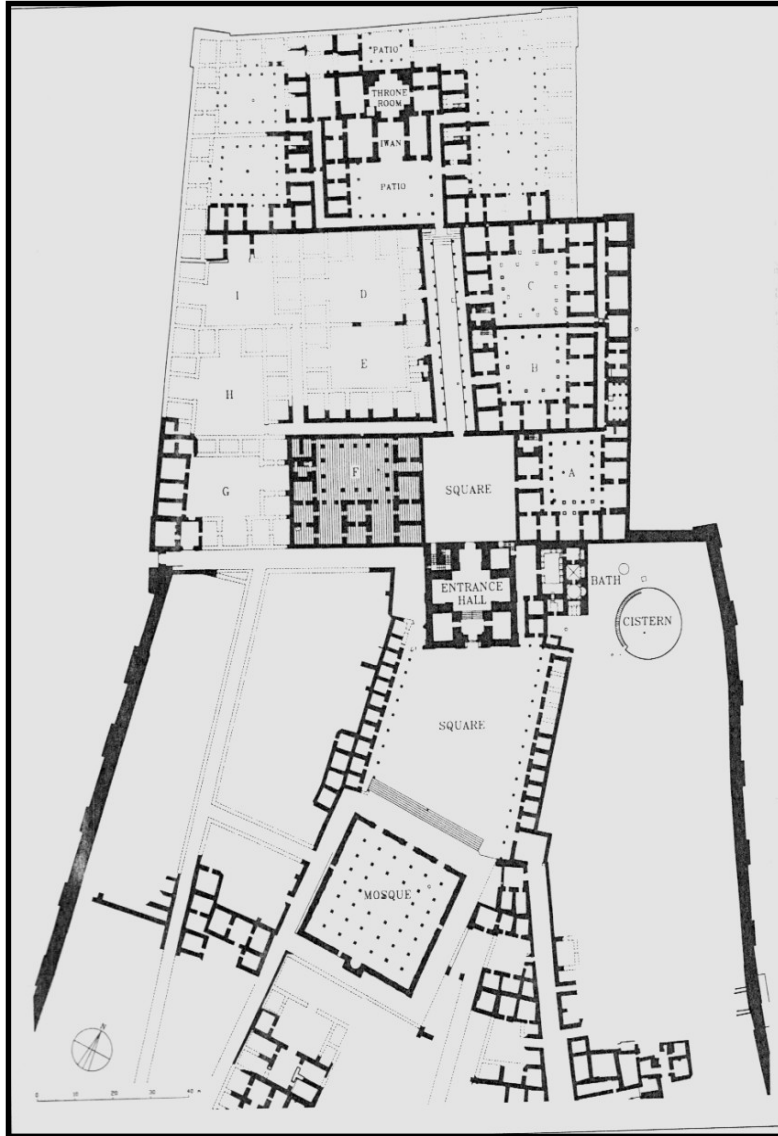
1. Recent discoveries at Humaima and Wadi Rum warrant a reexamination of the origins of the Umayyad baths. They show that this type of small bath was an old Romano-Nabataean tradition which goes back to the 1st century. M.S.Reeves , The Roman Bath-House at Humeima, Unpublished M.A thesis, 1996 Univ. of Victoria, B.C.
2. A limestone incense burner currently displayed in the Archaeological Museum in Amman (J.1663) shows four arches supporting a cupola pierced by arched openings, a miniature replica of the throne-chamber. Cf. "La Voie Royale: 9000 Ans d'Art au Royaume de Jordanie, Mussee du Luxembourg- 26 Nov.1986 –25 Jan. 1987" P. 276; fig.269

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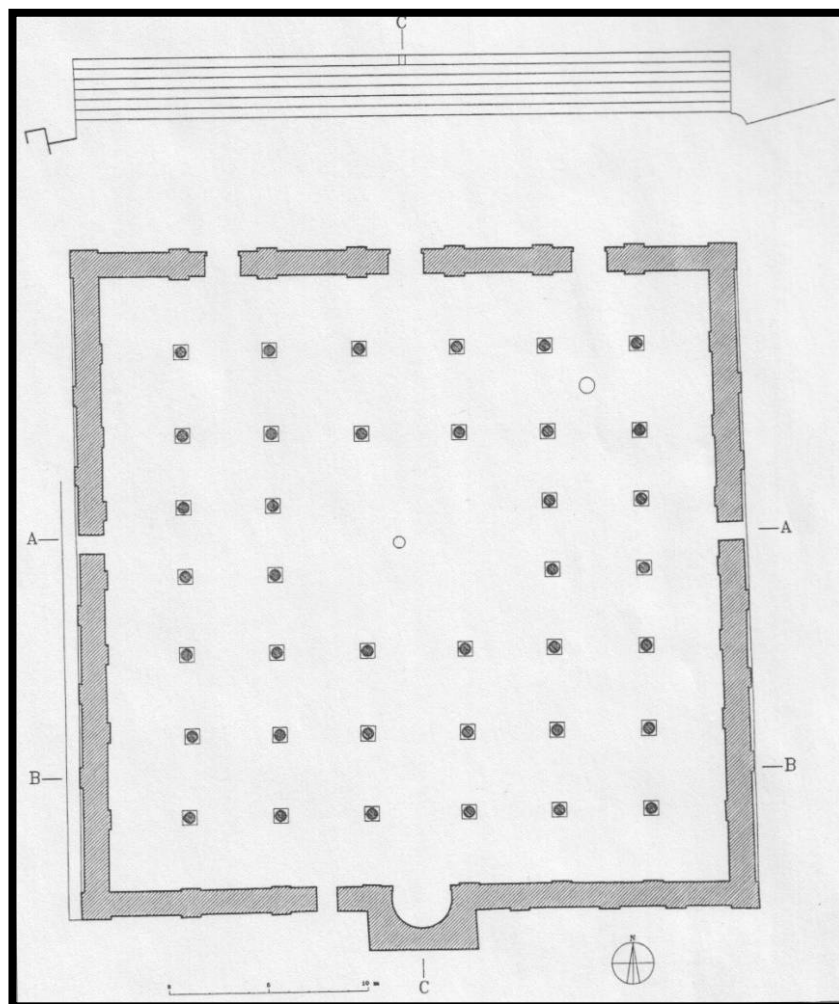
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List of illustrations

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2. The Mosque on the Citadel, Amman Plan (After Almagro)



1. General plan of the north part of the Amman citadel. (after Almagro, 2000)



2.Reconstruction plan of the mosque (after Almagro, 2000)