

When I studied the books made for sultans and produced in palace workshops in Timurid Herat, in the Safavid realms of Shah Abbas as well as in Ottoman Istanbul, I found that not only was there production of new books, but that sultanic books that had, for whatever reason, become worn, had missing or incomplete illumination, illustration, or binding were restored and reworked (TS. H. 1654, TS. H. 1510, TS. H. 362; Add 25900, MET. 63.210.28, and others). Consequently, I think the time has come to write, and this is not restricted to the art of painting of fifteenth-century Herat, the full range of the arts of the book, together with their codicologies, their biographies, the identities of their patrons, and the relationship between the patronage of the arts of the book and those of other arts in neighbouring cultures.

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ALAIN GEORGE:

*The Umayyad Mosque of Damascus: Art, Faith and Empire in Early Islam.*

264 pp. London: Gingko, 2021. £60. ISBN 978 1 9099 4245 5.

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A brief excavation of part of the Damascus Great Mosque's courtyard in 1962–63, of which only a handful of photographs survive (pp. 48–49, 114), revealed foundations of the massive temple of Zeus/Jupiter/Hadad, and patches of mosaic floor probably from the church that was eventually intruded into its temenos. From the diameter of a huge fluted column fragment that had fallen from a great height and lay amid the walls, it is deduced that the temple rivalled those at Baalbek and surpassed those at Palmyra and Jerash. From the dig's abrupt halt, as a result of "blackmail" according to the Syrian excavator A. Bounni (p. 231, n. 26), it may be deduced that the *awqāf* authorities were nervous about what else might be found.

Among scholars, though, there is increasing interest in what lies behind, or under, the carefully curated facade of the Muslim historiographical tradition's Quranic and early caliphal narratives. Even at the time, it was recognized that the Umayyads' move from the Hijāz to Damascus exposed them to a civilization whose Christian monks were as seductive to some as its thinly clad dancing girls were to others. Hence for example the growing fascination of Quranic philologists with the impact in Arabia of Christian Syriac writers like Ephrem of Nisibis or Jacob of Serugh. Alain George's erudite, fascinatingly illustrated and beautifully presented book focuses tightly on a building project executed in a mere decade (705–15), while "re-embracing the monument in its full complexity" (p. 41) inflicted by a long history of fires and earthquakes. But it may also be understood by the more general historian as a contribution to what "Christoph Luxenberg" called a *Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*.

Since 2001, the go-to reference has been Finbarr Barry Flood's *The Great Mosque of Damascus* (Leiden: Brill). Flood highlighted parallels with the East Roman emperor's palace in Constantinople. George takes his cue instead from exultation over the destruction of the church by al-Walīd I's court poets Jarīr, al-Farazdaq, and al-Nābigha, and in the mainly Quranic foundation inscription on

the qibla wall. George somewhat alarmingly disclaims knowledge of Greek, Syriac, and Latin: references to translations not editions, along with maladroitly accented Greek, show he is not unduly modest. He takes at face value Christian authors who improbably claim the temple was converted into a church as early as the late fourth century (p. 54), and fails to notice that his supposedly earliest source, Moses of Chorene, is now placed in the eighth or even ninth century, not the fifth. Nevertheless, he succeeds in highlighting al-Walīd's powerplay with the "slit-nose" emperor Justinian II (685–95, 705–11), and his success in forcing the Christian ruler to contribute to the construction of a Muslim sanctuary. Excellent use is also made of the Aphrodito papyri's evidence on the mosque project, to display the reach of a state that successfully maintained East Rome's fiscal apparatus in kind as well as coin, thanks notably to the Damascene Christian Maṣūf family. Not to forget the HR aspect: probably nearly all the artisans who worked on the mosque were Christians, though there is no record of disciplinary action after their employer discovered hidden graffiti of pigs, as happened at Medina (88). Among other aspects of continuity was the extravagant consumption of olive oil by the mosque's lighting system, which may hint at one reason why oil-producing areas of Syria in, for example, the limestone hills behind Antioch, remained prosperous into Abbasid times despite being in a frontier zone.

The most recent photographs in this richly illustrated book are dated 2010. Since then, few non-Syrian scholars have entered the mosque's precincts. One notes though the extensive use here made of Oxford's <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/photo-archive> (and cf. <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/landscapes/>). Orientalist paintings here argued to preserve crucial architectural details, and the earliest photographic images, daguerreotypes of 1842 just three years after their invention, show nineteenth-century Europeans already fascinated by the Umayyad mosque. The publication of this volume will refresh and extend that awareness. Nevertheless, the monument still has many secrets to yield, to the archaeologist and the photographic archivist, but also the philologist in the case of the Treasury "genizah" now scattered between Damascus, Istanbul and perhaps Berlin, and replete with documents of all three Abraham traditions (see now A. D'Ottone Rambach and others (eds), *The Damascus Fragments* (Beirut, 2020)).

To appreciate the balance struck at Damascus between imperial display and imperial piety, comparison with other Umayyad projects can help. Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock for example, both in its provocative siting atop the Jewish temple and in its own mainly Quranic foundation inscription, is even more triumphalist, and explicit in its theological polemic against Trinitarianism. The bath house at Qūṣayr 'Amra, which offers by contrast an intimate key-hole view of the Umayyad elite, deploys (less expensively) the same taste for luxury that the Damascus mosque turned to God's glory. But the best clue to the mosque's spirit and intention, alongside the contemporary poets, was the long-vanished foundation inscription preserved by the 12<sup>th</sup>-c. Damascene Ibn 'Asākir (without the 80-volume publication of whose *History*, completed in 2001, this book would have been a poorer thing). The medley of Quranic texts deployed in al-Walīd's inscription focuses almost exclusively on praising Allah, and George does not reject the traditional interpretation of the mosque's extensive wall mosaics (1950s–60s restoration discussed with conspicuous tact: 36–38; helpful new drawings by Farah Dabbous 200–03) as evoking the heavenly courts. But he wants it multi-layered and polysemic too – especially of eschatology and universal Umayyad dominion. Ch. 5 concludes with a beautiful evocation of the mosque's appearance according to the classical Arabic writers, and especially its part in the everyday routine of the citizenry. The next and final chapter draws a comparison with the literary technique of the

Quran itself, and defines the mosque as principally a shrine for the presumably large and lavish codex or codices (cf. F. Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads* (2014) 140–42) surely displayed within it, while through its minarets and muezzins it functioned as a giant transmitter of God's Word each and every day across the city and out into the whole world.

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ANDREW J. NEWMAN (ed.):

*Iranian/Persianate Subaltern in the Safavid Period: Their Role and Depiction. Recovering Lost Voices.*

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After an introduction by Andrew Newman, in which the origin and use of the term “subaltern” is discussed, in chapter 1 Jaimee Comstock-Skipp is at pains to show that a number of single-page paintings of kneeling captive warriors were not Turcoman prisoners as art historians have submitted, but were Shibanid Uzbeks. The fact that the “Uzbek” army included many Turcoman as well as Chaghatay, Qazaq and Qirghiz troops is not considered. Because in Safavid painting tradition written texts accompanied images of captives the author argues that these single paintings, not having such texts, indicate the subject's subaltern status.

In chapter 2 Alberto Tiburcio argues that after the Afghan occupation of Iran in 1722, the Jewish community of Kashan was able to negotiate its separate religious status. Because negotiation between religious and socio-economic groups was the norm in Iranian society, the analysis would have been of greater interest if the author had compared the Jewish case with similar earlier events and with other similar groups (Christians, Zoroastrians). The Dergesons (p. 69) are Dargazinis

In an interesting analysis (ch. 3) Selim Güngörürler shows how the Anatolian Qizilbash were no longer a mobilizing factor in the Ottoman–Safavid strife for power, after Iran, which had become Shi'itized (unbeknown to the Anatolian Qizilbash), had concluded peace with the Ottomans in 1639.

In chapter 4 Barry Wood discusses the “Anonymous histories of Shah Esma'īl”. Whether the ethnic and religious stereotypes used in these texts are typical of the lower classes is debatable. It is quite likely that these texts were written by members of the elite as Safavid political propaganda rather than representing “the imagination of those outside the sphere of the powerful”. After all, the detailed knowledge of the events related in these texts implies that the authors were not only literate, but had access to the official chronicles. Moreover, because paper and copying were expensive, an underclass storyteller would not have been able to produce such texts.

In chapter 5 Babak Rahimi concludes that because sources on Muharram processions are almost exclusively European (the author forgot to list those written by the Portuguese in Hormuz in the 1550s) this limits the understanding of the inner experience by its participants. Therefore, using textual and visual material sources, especially Hoseyn Kashefi's (d. 1504) *Rowzat al-Shohada*, may provide a better opportunity to do so. Although Rahimi makes a valid point, his suggestion falls short of a being a viable alternative. As >99 per cent of the population had never