

Predators and Geometric Mosaic at the Bath of the Umayyad Palace at Qastal - Jordan A Comparative Study

Mohammad Nassar, Nizar Turshan & Khaled al- Jbour

Abstract: *The Western Bath at Qastal, an early Umayyad period is one of the most important structures with geometric mosaic pavements in Jordan. The purpose of this study is to examine the individual designs in comparison with others to understand the influences of the region and beyond. Wherever possible, comparative examples have been chosen from sites that are relatively close so that a comprehensive overview of mosaic production in the region may be made possible. The predators' motif scene found in the two Islamic sites of the Bath at Qastal, and khirbet Al - Mafjar is among the very few examples from the Islamic periods that can be compared with similar examples in the area and elsewhere. This type of mosaic picturing humans and animals was rare during the Ummayyad period due to religious reasons. Therefore, it never appeared in worship places such as mosques. This indicates that this type of mosaic was no more than a personal effort made by the owners of those palaces who might not have thought of their religious dimensions, either. Every effort had been made to discern the major sources of influence at Qastal, and in particular those coming from Asia Minor and elsewhere outside of the region.*

Keywords: *Jordan, Bath, Al-Qastal, Al - Mafjar, Mosaic, Geometric, predators, lion attacking bull, Leopard attacking deer, decoration, motif.*

The Western Bath at Qastal location is an early Umayyad period, some 25 km to the south of Amman. It is about 768 m. above sea level (Fig. 1).

The site of Qastal was visited and described by some early travelers. The first archeologists who reported archaeological remains and the first exploration of the site were R. Bruennow and A. von Domaszewski in 1897 (Bruennow and von Domaszewski 1905: 95-103, figs. 681, 683). They worked and drew the first plan of the site. In 1934, the site was mentioned by N. Glueck (Glueck 1939: 73), and studied by H. Gaube (Gaube 1977: 67-86). Excavations continued on the site by Patricia Carlier and Frederic Morin who excavated at Qastal palace and drew a plan of the Mosque. A survey and three excavation campaigns by Directed by P. Carlier and Ghazi Bisheh from the Department

of Antiquities of Jordan began in March and July - November 1983, 1985 and 1987 (Carlier and Morin 1984: 343-383; 1987: 221-246). The site at Qastal, dates back to 744 AD (Al-Walid II era) (Creswell 1989: 173-177; Haddad 2009: 4; 2014-2015: 14, 60-62).

The Western Bath mosaics pavements

There appeared two main different mosaic



Fig. 1: Qastal View.



Fig. 2. Mosaic Pavements / western bath at Qastal.



Fig. 3. A Band of alternately inverted T- shape Pattern.



Fig. 4. Three-Strand guilloche.

pavements on the floor of the western bath at Qastal. The first includes a geometric mosaic motif, and the second consists of a rare predator. This study of both types includes a description, an analysis and a comparative study. Mosaic Pavement Construction technique is used in the pavements construction. As is usually appeared in a large mosaic pavement, each has a foundation composed of several layers. This method was common during the Byzantine period (Turshan and Nassar 2011: 340-349; Nassar and Turshan 2012a: 208-225; 2012b: 225-235; Nassar 2013: 67-77; Arinat, 2016: 1957-1970; Nassar 2016: 93-105).

1: Geometric mosaic

The panels of both rooms of the bath (Fig.2) are enclosed by three borders extending around all four sides. The outer and interior sides are decorated with a band of alternately inverted

T-Shape motives, while the middle border is decorated with a three-strand guilloche motif.

Band of alternately inverted T- shape Pattern.

The outer and the interior borders are decorated with a row of a band of the alternately inverted T-Shape motives (fig. 3). The colors are white and black. In general, they are counterchanged. It seems that the band of alternately inverted T- shape design is rare in the area from the Umayyad Period only in Qastal, but we can compare other examples from the Byzantine period from the area and others, similar to the floor of the Church on the Acropolis at Ma'in, which dates to AD 719/720 (de Vaux 1938: 227-258; Piccirillo 1985: 339-364; 1997: 196, 197, Pls.297, 298, 200). Here, the colors are red, white and black, while on those at the western bath are black and white.

Three- Strand guilloche

The middle border of both rooms (fig. 4) consists of three-strand motives on a white background. It seems that this example is the only one in the region from the Umayyad period. Similar decorations can be found at other Jordanian sites dating back to the Byzantine period, for example the Bird and Fish Mosaic at Madaba (Piccirillo 1989a: 140; 1997: 132, Pl. 163, 162; Nassar n.d, fig.1.1.5).

There are three similar examples in the northern aisle of the Church of Saint George from Mount Nebo area dating to AD 535/536, (Saller and Bagatti 1949; Piccirillo 1997: 178, 179, Pls. 244, 246). They are dark green, yellow, and white on a dark red background. In the chancel of the Deacon Thomas Church at Uyun Musa (Piccirillo 1989a: 203-224; 1997: 187, 188, 189, Pls. 266, 269; Nassar n.d, fig. 1.1.15), the colors are red, light red, and dark green on a dark red background; and in the

nave of the Church of Kaianus at Uyun Musa (Piccirillo 1997: 190, 191, Pls. 276, 277) the colors are red, dark green, red, and light red on a white background. Another example is at the north aisle of the Church on the Acropolis in Ma'in, which dates back to AD 719/720 (de Vaux 1938: 227-258; Piccirillo 1985: 339-364; 1997: 200, Pls. 302, 304, 312). Here, the colors are black, dark red, dark green, and yellow on a white background. There are also two examples at Umm al-Rasas in Jordan. One is in the northern aisle of the Church of the Lions that dates back to AD 574 or 589 (Piccirillo 1989b: 266-268; 1997: 236, Pls. 373, 376). Here, the colors are white, red, dark red, and yellow on a dark red background; and one is in the apse and Chancel of the Church of the Palm Tree (Bujard 1993: 291-306; Piccirillo 1997: 241, Pl. 393). The colors are red, dark red, yellow, and dark green on a white background.

The pattern is also known from the west bank such as the nave of the Church of the Nativity which dates to the earlier of the Constantine era (Harvey 1935: fig. 102; Madden 2012: 152, 153, fig. 4). Similar decorations can be found at other Syrian and Lebanese sites of the Byzantine period, for example from Hadadine site (Aleppo Museum), which dates to the 6th century AD. Also it is clear in both aisles of Basilica at Qabr Hir dating to AD 575 (Donceel-Voute 1995: 91, 93, 97, 99, figs. 3, 12).

Interlocking Scuta Pattern

The decoration of the panels of both rooms (1, 2) comprises interlocking scuta with concave upper and lower edges (figs. 5, 6). The scuta are engraved on a square in such a way that there is space on the sides for a semicircle, and in the corners some birds, such as ducks and partridges, are clear. Both pairs of shields are decorated with a two-strand guilloche. The octagonal center has some animals, as the

case of the first room a lion jumping on a bull, while in the second room we find the leopard attacking a deer.

A similar decoration can be found at other Jordanian sites of the Byzantine period. For example, the nave of the Western Church at Yasileh (fig. 7) dates back to the middle of the 5th century or the beginning of the 6th century AD (Nassar and al-Muheisen 2010: 182, figs. 4, 8, 10). Here, a pair of shields, one is decorated with a two-strand guilloche and the other is decorated with a rainbow pattern. In the octagonal center of the scutae is a fan. The colours of the scuta and the fan are dark red, light red and light blue on a white background, while in case of the Castal there are two pairs of shields decorated with two strand guilloche.

The Interlocking Scuta design is found at several sites in Jordan Byzantine era; for



Fig. 5: Interlocking Scuta Pattern / Room 1.



Fig. 6: Interlocking Scuta Pattern / Room 2.

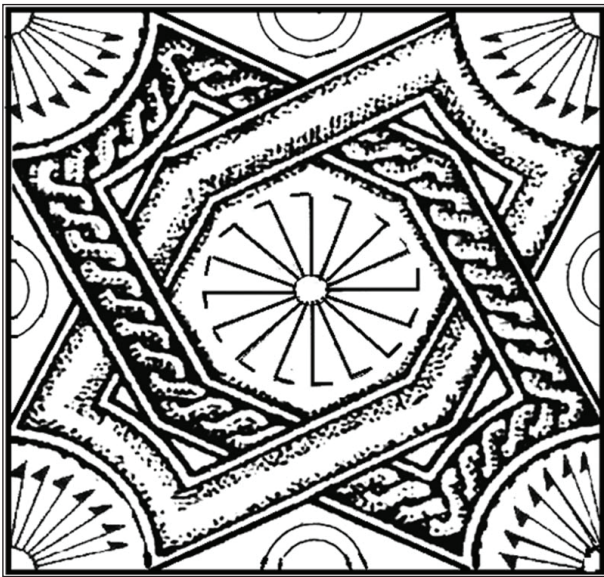


Fig. 7. Interlocking Scuta Pattern Yasileh.

example, three parallels are in Madaba area in the nave of the Church on the Acropolis at Ma'in dating back to AD 719/720 (de Vaux 1938: 227-258; Piccirillo 1985: 339-364; Piccirillo 1997: 200, Pls. 302, 304, 312). We find here the Interlocking Scuta decoration spread on the floor of the nave. Also, here there is a pair of shields; one is decorated with waves and the other with a ribbon twist motif. The octagonal centre is destroyed, and the corners are decorated with a fan shape. The colours of the scuta and the fan are dark red, light red, and light blue on a white background.

The second one is in the nave of the Upper at Massuh - east Hesban, (Piccirillo 1983: 335-346; 1997: 252, Pls. 435, 437). We find here that the Interlocking Scuta decoration is spread on the floor of the nave. Also, here there is a pair of shields; one is decorated with a rainbow motif, and the other with a ribbon twist motif. Most of the octagonal centre of the scutas are destroyed and decorated with a fan shape. The colours of the scuta and the fan are dark red, light red and light blue on a white background. The third one in the nave of the Church of the Holy Fathers at Khattabiyah (Piccirillo 1989a:

309-313; 1997: 244, PL. 405, 407). We find here the interlocking scuta decoration spread on the floor of the nave. Also, here there is a pair of shields; one is decorated with a rainbow motif and the other with a two-stand guilloche. The colors are dark red, dark green, yellow on a white background. A similar example is in Amman, in the northern aisle of the Church of Saint Kyriakos at al- Quwaysmah (Piccirillo 1984: 329-340; 1997: 268, Pl. 489). We find here the Interlocking Scuta decoration spread on the floor of the aisle. Also, here there is a pair of shields; one is decorated with a rainbow motif, and the other with a ribbon twist motif. The octagonal center of the scuta is decorated with a geometrical motif and the corners are decorated with a fan shape. The colours are dark red, light red, and light blue on a white background.

Moreover, the Interlocking Scuta decoration appears in the two examples in Gerasa, in the north aisle of the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damianus. Here, there is a pair of shields; one is decorated with a rainbow motif and the other with a two-strand guilloche motif. The octagonal center of the scuta is decorated with a fan and the corners decorated with fan. The second one is in the northern intercolumnar of the nave of the Procopius Church, dating back to AD 526 (Piccirillo 1997: 286, 287, 292, 293, Pls.535, 560).

Parallels are at the west bank area, in the the nave of the Horvat Berachot church (Tsafrir and Hirschfeld 1979: 307-309, pl. 17; Hachlili 2009: 222, fig. XI-1a). Here, the design motif speards on the all the nave has a pattern consisting of four pairs of interlocking scuta which meet in a circle and form a four-point star of lozenges. Also, here there is a pair of shields; one is decorated with a two-stand guilloche and the other with a rainbow pattern. In addition, we find in the octagonal center of the scuta some

animals such as a lion and a bull. The second example is in the lower panel of Na'aran Synagogue (Hachlili 2009: 222, fig. XI-1b), here the design of the pattern similar to the last example.

The pattern is also known from the northern part of the Levant on the floor of the south aisle of the Kaoussie Church at Antioch on the Orontes, dating from AD387 (Campbell 1988, 43-44, Pl. 129). It has a pattern consisting of four pairs of interlocking scuta which meet in a circle and form a four-point star of lozenges. Each of the octagons, circles and lozenges contains another motif, among them are rosettes, chevrons, inscribed lozenges and pin-wheels. The colours here are white, black, three shades of grey and two shades of beige, pink and red.

2: Predators motif

The study of the Predators at the western Bath at Qastal location includes two scenes of predators. The first one is a lion pouncing on the back of a bull in the center of the Scuta in room 1 (figs. 2, 5, 8). The second scene includes a leopard and a deer in the center of the Scuta in room 2 (figs.2,6, 15). We can make a comparison to know where this type of art spread, especially during the Islamic and Byzantine periods to know the nature of the relationship between the Islamic and Byzantine arts.

2: 1. A lion on the back of a bull

Predators are rare scenes during the Umayyad period. We find here a lion attacking a bull and standing on its back (fig. 8). The colors are brown, yellowish, and green on a white background. It seems that it appears only in the western bath at Qastal, while we find one example from the same period coming from Khirbat al-Mafjar Bath in Jericho (Fig. 9) (Piccirillo 1997: 344, Pl. 760), but here, the lion is attacking the back of a deer. The colors are brown, yellowish, and green



Fig. 8: a lion attacking the back of a bull /Qastal-Western Bath.



Fig. 9: a lion attacking the back of a deer/ Khirbat al-Mafjar.



Fig. 10: Church of the Deacon Thomas/ Mount Nebo.



Fig. 11: a lion attacking a deer, Great Palace Mosaic Museum/Istanbul.



Fig. 12: a lion attacking a bull/ Archeological Museum Sparta.



Fig. 13: a lion attacking an onager /Hadrumetum-Tunisia.



Fig. 14: a lion attacking an onager / Archeological Museum, Tunisia.

on a white background.

In a parallel study, the sence of the lion attacking a bull is seen from the Byzantine and Roman periods, which spread, especially, in both the Byzantine and Islamic arts. There are some examples from the Byzantine period near of the Qastal location. For example, on the floor of the Church of the Deacon Thomas - Sanctuary at Mount Nebo, (Uyun Musa) Fig. 10) which dates to the Byzantine period (Piccirillo 1989a: 216-223; 1997:187, Pl. 266), is a scene of a lion facing a zebu (Bull), which is sometimes called a humped ox). It seems that the lion is attacking the bull.

Furthermore, the scene of the lion attacking the back of other animals is also rare from the Byzantine period in the area. We find one example from the Great Palace Mosaic Museum in Istanbul (fig. 11), which dates back to the Byzantine period (Trilling 1989: 38. Fig. 1; Patacı and Lafli 2019: 124, fig. 149).

There are other examples from outside the area but from the Roman periods. For example, we find three examples from Tunisia; the first one is from Sparta, now in the Archeological Museum of Sparta (fig. 12). It dates back to the Roman period (Archeological Museum Sparta). Here, a lion is grabbing a bull in his neck. The colors are black, and yelloish on a white background, while the second one is from Hadrumetum (Sousse), now in the J. Paul Getty Museum (fig. 13). It dates back to AD 150-200 (Belis 2017: 34, 35). We see here a lion attacking an Onager.

Finally, the third example is from the ancient Roman city of Thysdrus from El Djem- Tunisia (fig. 14). It dates back to the third century (Archeological Museum, El Djem). Here, the clolors are yeloshis, and gry on a black background.

2: 2. A Leopard attacking a deer

The scenes of leopards attacking deer are rare from the Umayyad period in the region and outside (fig. 15). The colors are brown, yellowish, green on a white background. It seems that this scene appears only in the western bath at Qastal, while we compare some examples from the Byzantine period. For example, the scene of leopard attacking deer comes from Asia minor. We find the same scene coming from the Great Palace Mosaic Museum in Istanbul (fig. 16). It dates back to early Byzantine, circa: 6th century AD (Bardill 2004). Here, we see a scene of two leopards attacking a deer. The colors are brown, yellowish; green, and black on a white background.

Furthermore, the scene of the Leopards attacking deer dates back to the Roman Era. We find one example from the region. It comes from Homs in Syria (fig. 17). It dates back to 462 AD (Chazen Museum of Art). Here, the leopard is chasing the deer for hunting. The colors are brown, yellowish; green, and black on a white background.

The comparison in this research, which came from multiple regions, did not show any repercussions in Islamic art later after the Umayyad Era. It is clear that the artists of Hammam al-Qastal and Khirbat al-Mafjar followed the extent of the previous Byzantine artistic styles, and it seems that they did not intend to convey a social or religious idea. The artistic style only reflects the environmental life where these animals lived. It was referred to in Tunisia, Asia Minor, Jordan and Palestine. However, the Byzantine artistic tradition remained visible in the Umayyad mosaic art in a limited way and did not constitute any spread later in the Islamic periods. On the other hand, it looks as if it does not express any religious or social dimensions or reflections.

Conclusion

The mosaic artists at Qastal possessed great technical skill. The comparative study of the decorative elements increases our understanding of the relationship between Qastal and Byzantine sites. The artists, whether they were Muslims or Christians, had no difficulty using their experience of traditional



Fig. 15: a leopard attacking a deer/ Western Bath-Qastal.



Fig. 16: two leopards attacking a deer/ The Great Palace Mosaic Museum.



Fig. 17: Qasr Mosaic, Chazen Museum of Art-Madison / USA.

motifs, including those found in churches, to decorate the buildings of the new Muslim rulers.

Through the study of geometric decorative units that appear on the floors of the western bath at Qastal, we find many wonderful decorative units that extend their roots to Byzantine art. The Muslim artist was able to employ these decorative units in this palace, and this is illustrated by the comparative study of those units. So, it is for animal hunting scenes. There is no doubt that geometric motifs at Qastal belonging to Byzantine artistic conventions are clear. But we find that most of the geometric motifs come from Byzantine ornamental art, whether from the region, neighboring areas, or elsewhere, such as the band of alternately inverted T- shape Pattern (fig. 3); three - strand guilloche (fig. 4), and the interlocking scuta pattern (figs. 5,6).

Although most of the decorations have Roman and Byzantine roots, we find a clear stage in the

decoration of the floors of this bath, especially the scenes of predators (figs. 8, 15). These scenes indicate the interest in these decorations during the Umayyad period in the region which appeared also in khirbet al - Mafjer in Jericho -palestine. It can be said that the influence of Christian art on Islamic art has become obvious through this comparative study. This indicates that there was some kind of cooperation between Muslim and Christian artists in this field. The reason behind the emergence of these artistic forms in the Umayyad mosaics is no more than that it is an extension of the Byzantine art that preceded the Umayyad art, and the artists of the Umayyad era kept the same Byzantine artistic traditions. This is also evident in the geometric motifs.

The authors hope that these findings will further encourage the investigation of these artistic traditions in the region.

Dr. Mohammad Nassar: School of Arts and Design - the University of Jordan - Amman - Jordan.

Prof. Nizar Turshan: School of Archaeology and Tourism - the University of Jordan, Amman - Jordan.

Dr. Khaled al-Jbour: School of Archaeology and Tourism - the University of Jordan- Amman - Jordan.

ملخص: يعد الحمّام الغربي في قصر القسطل من الفترة الأموية المبكرة واحداً من أهم الأبنية ذات الأرضيات الفسيفسائية الهندسية، وتصوير الحيوانات في الأردن. يهدف هذا البحث لدراسة التصاميم الفنية ومقارنتها مع ما يماثلها، لفهم التأثيرات الفنية من المنطقة وخارجها؛ حيثما أمكن. وقد تم اختيار أمثلة مقارنة من مواقع قريبة نسبياً حتى يمكن الحصول على نظرة شاملة حول إنتاج الفسيفساء في المنطقة. إن مشهد الزخارف الحيوانية المفترسة التي وجدت في موقعين إسلاميين هما، حمّام القسطل، وقصر خربة المفجر من الأمثلة الإسلامية القليلة والتي يمكن مقارنتها بأمثلة محلية من المنطقة ومن أماكن خارجية، على الرغم من أن هذا النوع من الفنون نادر في فن الفسيفساء الأموية وخارج عن السياقات العقائدية في البُعد عن تمثيل الكائنات الحيّة البشرية والحيوانية، ولم تظهر في مبانٍ دينية كالمساجد مثلاً؛ ما يدل على أنها اجتهادات شخصية من قبل أصحاب تلك القصور، ولم يعتنوا بمسألة أبعادها الدينية. وقد حاول الباحثون تمييز المصادر الرئيسة للتأثيرات الفنية في القسطل، وبخاصة تلك القادمة من آسيا الصغرى وأماكن أخرى خارجية.

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