

# The Mosque–*Dār al-Imāra* Complex at ‘Anjar: Preliminary Notes from a Multi-layered Exploration of Ceremonial Spaces in the Marwānid Period\*

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## Abstract

*Located in a corner of the Biqā‘ Valley, midway along the ancient route linking Beirut to Damascus, ‘Anjar remains one of the most significant—though least understood—Umayyad foundations in Greater Syria. With a plan shaped in strict accordance with the criteria of Hippodamian urbanism, the town constitutes a unique trait d’union between the classical urban tradition and the foundations of the early Islamic empire. This notwithstanding, and despite the importance of the site having been recognized and emphasized by many scholars, its origins, history, purpose, and patronage remain major enigmas in the field. This paper will discuss some insights surfaced from an analysis of the mosque–dār al-imāra complex in ‘Anjar with the aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the site’s use and meaning in the Marwānid period.*

## Introduction

In the regional panorama of towns and extra-urban settlements dating to the first century of Islamic history, the site of ‘Anjar stands out for several unmatched characteristics. From its location (on the fringes of a large marshy lake),<sup>1</sup> to its size<sup>2</sup> (too big for a *qaṣr*

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1. The existence of extensive wetland in close proximity to the site is documented as early as the fourth century BCE by the Greek historian Theophrastus, who described a large lake located in a mild depression between Mount Lebanon and another low mountain, where sweet flag grew in the summertime (Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants and Minor Works*, vol. 2, *On Odours. Weather Signs*, trans. A. Hort [London: W. Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons], 247–8). A new predictive model of these wetlands—which lasted in the area

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but too small for a proper *madīna*), to its strongly classical-looking appearance, and the unbalanced ratio in its zoning pattern,<sup>3</sup> everything seems to prevent ʿAnjar from fitting into any of the established categories of early Islamic urbanism.

A few attempts have been made to explain the enigmatic nature of the site. Among them, that by Robert Hillenbrand<sup>4</sup> remains the most comprehensive so far produced. After trying to frame ʿAnjar within virtually any possible settlement type from Roman antiquity to early Islam—suggesting it to have been a late Roman *colonia*, a very large country residence, an administrative center of the Umayyad peripatetic court, a place of refuge, a hunting lodge, an “instrument of segregation”<sup>5</sup> intended to accommodate and separate a specific tribal grouping from the others, a garrison point, or a market-city—Hillenbrand concluded that none of these models alone can yield a full understanding of the site.<sup>6</sup>

However, despite having exhausted the range of possible labels to attach to ʿAnjar, Hillenbrand has undoubtedly provided the most thorough possible interpretation of the site’s purpose and meaning, even if he has not entirely solved the enigma of its unique nature. What is made clear by his analysis of the site is that ʿAnjar must be viewed within the wider program of the systematic colonization of the Syrian countryside by the Umayyads,<sup>7</sup>

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until the intensive Mamluk drainage work of the eighth/fourteenth century—has been recently established by cross-referencing the geographical data provided by textual sources with remote sensing surveys and GIS. See G. Abou Diwan and J. Doumit, “Ancient Wetlands of the Biqāʿ: A Buffer Zone between the Hinterlands of Sidon and Berytus in the Roman Period,” *Bulletin d’archéologie et d’architecture libanaises* 16 (2016): 215–52.

2. ʿAnjar’s enclosure measures 370 by 310 meters, making the site three times larger than the largest of the *quṣūr*, the so called “Large Enclosure” at Qaṣr al-Ḥair al-Sharqī, measuring 167 meters in length; see D. Genequand, “From ‘Desert Castle’ to Medieval Town: Qaṣr al-Hayr al-Sharqī (Syria),” *Antiquity* 79, no. 304 (2005): 350–61, at 351.

3. In particular, the fact that the housing was confined to only one of the four quadrants. Hillenbrand has calculated that the housing quadrant might have accommodated no more than twenty-six households; see R. Hillenbrand, “ʿAnjar and Early Islamic Urbanism,” in *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G. P. Brogiolo and B. Ward-Perkins, 58–98 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 75. Barbara Finster has remarked that without stratigraphic evidence—of which there is none—it is impossible to precisely date the houses built *intra muros* in ʿAnjar; see B. Finster, “ʿAnjar: spätantik,” in *Residences, Castles, Settlements: Transformation Processes from Late Antiquity to Early Islam in Bilad al-Sham, Proceedings of the International Conference held at Damascus, 5-9 November 2006*, ed. K. Bartl and A. R. Moaz, 229–42 (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2008), 229. In a recent article, Beatrice Leal has reported abundant evidence of the multiphasic nature of the so-called residential quadrant in ʿAnjar, attesting that some of the houses were turned into shops, workshops, and even a church at a later, conceivably post-Umayyad, time; see B. Leal, “ʿAnjar: An Umayyad Image of Urbanism and Its Afterlife,” in *Encounters, Excavations and Argosies: Essays for Richard Hodges*, ed. J. Moreland, J. Mitchell, and B. Leal, 172–89 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2017), 182–4. These later superimpositions, however, do not disprove the fact that the original quadrant was planned and built as an integral part of the Umayyad project. In a recent monograph, Giuseppe Labisi has shown that the architectural and spatial characteristics of the residential *insulae* in ʿAnjar, along with the evidence provided by the graffiti found *in situ*, constitute, in fact, enough proof to consider them Umayyad in dating; see G. Labisi, *Dwelling Models of Umayyad Madāʿin and Quṣūr in Greater Syria* (Oxford: BAR Publishers, 2020), 24–31.

4. Hillenbrand, “ʿAnjar.”

5. Idem, “ʿAnjar,” 88.

6. Idem, “ʿAnjar.”

7. Idem, “ʿAnjar,” 91.

even though, as he warns, the current limited state of knowledge prevents the formulation of a more precise hypothesis in this regard.

More recently, Beatrice Leal has interpreted ‘Anjar as an imperial show-capital that also functioned as an important trading center.<sup>8</sup> Expanding upon one of Hillenbrand’s suggestions, Leal argued that the plethora of shops at the site, far from being a mere “unthinking replication of a classical model,”<sup>9</sup> were in fact used for commercial purposes and constituted a precise reference to the dynasty’s promotion and control of trade.<sup>10</sup> In her view, the emphasis on the commercial dimension of ‘Anjar should be understood in terms of a demonstration of the wealth and economic strength of the empire: two crucial aspects in the construction of imperial identity in the Marwānid period.<sup>11</sup>

Although these studies have shed some light upon ‘Anjar’s meaning and purpose and revealed the multilayered complexity inherent to the site’s nature, they inevitably remain tentative and partial in the light of the fragmentary state of knowledge of the site. Indeed, even though the Umayyad ruins have been the subject of prolonged studies,<sup>12</sup> the lack of a comprehensive publication of the results of their excavation,<sup>13</sup> the highly speculative restoration works the site underwent, and the fact that its ceramic material was never studied and not even partially published (and that it mysteriously vanished along with the other archaeological finds during the Lebanese civil war) represent insurmountable obstacles to an adequate understanding of the site. Moreover, apart from the pioneering and very general work of Leon Marfoe in the 1970s,<sup>14</sup> this part of the Biqā‘ Valley has never been the subject of a systematic archaeological survey,<sup>15</sup> with the result that the territory

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8. Leal, “‘Anjar.”

9. Hillenbrand, “‘Anjar,” 97.

10. Leal, “‘Anjar,” 180.

11. Idem, “‘Anjar,” 181.

12. The ruins were first documented by the Deutsche Baalbek Expedition (1901–4) and identified with the remains of Chalcis ad Libanum; see D. Krencker and W. Zschietzschmann, *Römisch Tempel in Syrien* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1938), 182–91. For many years, scholars agreed on this identification (J. P. Rey-Coquais, “Notes de géographie syrienne antique,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 40 [1964]: 287–312, at 290; G. Schmitt, “Zum Königreich Chalkis,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 98 [1982]: 110–24, at 111; H. Seyrig, “Les dieux syriens en habit militaire,” *Annales archéologiques arabes syriennes* 21 [1971]: 67–70) until Jean Sauvaget recognized the site as the Umayyad foundation of ‘Anjar on the basis of sound textual and archaeological evidence; see J. Sauvaget, “Les ruines omeyyades de ‘Andjar,” *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* 3 (1939): 5–11. See also idem “Notes de topographie omeyyade,” *Syria* 24 (1944–5): 96–112. The site was thoroughly excavated—and almost simultaneously heavily rebuilt—between 1953 and 1975 by the Direction Générale des Antiquités du Liban under the guide of archaeologist Maurice Chehab and architect Haroutun Kalayan.

13. No report was ever published of the over twenty years of archaeological investigations. Maurice Chehab only authored a very short article focused on the Great Palace (M. Chehab, “The Umayyad Palace at ‘Anjar,” *Ars Orientalis* 5 [1963], 17–25), while the first comprehensive discussion and complete plan of the remains was published in 1979 by Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell (K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture: Umayyads, A.D. 622–750*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, part 2 [New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979], 477–81).

14. L. Marfoe, *Between Qadesh and Kumidi: A History of Frontier Settlement and Land Use in the Biqa, Lebanon* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1978).

15. Recent survey work concentrated on the Baalbek Hinterland (B. Fischer-Genz and H. Ehrig, “First Results of the Archaeological Survey Project in the Territory of Ancient Heliopolis-Baalbek,” *Bulletin d’archéologie*

and context of ʿAnjar remain almost entirely unknown. This situation has forced scholars like Barbara Finster—who conducted research at the site in the early 2000s<sup>16</sup>—to restrict the focus of their studies to the material aspect of the ruins which, abstracted from their stratigraphic context and heavily compromised by controversial modern rebuildings lend themselves to essentially descriptive research.

In order to address some issues stemming from the analysis of the published material, in 2017 I carried out a first short survey at the site. This preliminary fieldwork centered on the mosque site and highlighted a set of evidence—which I have discussed in a recent article<sup>17</sup>—that suggest that the building site, contrary to prevailing beliefs, underwent a set of complex architectural events. This, along with the remarkable abundance of late antique *spolia*, and hints found in the written sources,<sup>18</sup> provided a basis for speculation that the Umayyad *madīna* might not have been founded entirely on virgin soil.

Following this lead, in 2020 I conducted further research in ʿAnjar as part of a postdoctoral residence at the American University of Beirut. Although not confirming a pre-Islamic date for the site, these fieldwork activities<sup>19</sup> produced a fresh body of data that suggests that the Islamic settlement may not be the result of a unitary project. This paper will not present in detail the results of this second survey (which I plan to publish in full in the future),<sup>20</sup> nor a comprehensive exploration of the set of unsolved issues that the site still raises.<sup>21</sup> Instead, it will discuss some insights that surfaced from my initial multilayered examination of

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*et d'architecture libanaises* 9 [2005]: 135–8), the area of Kamid el-Loz and the Anti-Lebanon (D. Bonatz, N. Ali, and C. Jauss, “Preliminary Remarks on an Archaeological Survey in the Anti-Lebanon,” *Bulletin d'archéologie et d'architecture libanaises* 6 [2002]: 283–307), and the Niha and Ferzol Valleys (P. Newson and R. Young, “The Archaeology of Conflict-Damaged Sites: Hosn Niha in the Biqāʿ Valley, Lebanon,” *Antiquity* 89 [2015]: 449–63). Since 2016, Paul Newson has been leading a fieldwork project with the aim of documenting the morphology of settlements in the Graeco-Roman period in an area comprised between the Chtaura-Anjar region and the headwaters of the River Orontes; see P. Newson, “Archaeological Landscapes of the Bekaa: Past Results and Future Prospects,” *Berytus* 56 (2016): 257–80. It is hoped that this investigation will soon provide new insights into the settlement development and land use in this part of the Biqāʿ, with important repercussions for the understanding of ʿAnjar’s relation to its immediate hinterland.

16. B. Finster, “Researches in ʿAnjar, I. Preliminary Report on the Architecture of ʿAnjar,” *Bulletin d'archéologie et d'architecture libanaises* 7 (2003): 209–44; idem, “Vine Ornament and Pomegranates as Palace Decoration in ʿAnjar,” in *The Iconography of Islamic Art, Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. B. O’Kane, 143–62 (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2005); idem, “Researches in ʿAnjar II. Preliminary Report on the Ornaments of ʿAnjar,” *Bulletin d'archéologie et d'architecture libanaises* 11 (2007): 143–65; idem, “ʿAnjar: spätantik oder früislamisch?”

17. A. Santi, “ʿAnjar in the Shadow of the Church? New Insights on an Umayyad Urban Experiment in the Biqāʿ Valley,” *Levant* 50:2 (2019): 267–80.

18. See the reference to the so-called “Letters of the Archimandrites” in H. Chehab, “On the Identification of ʿAnjar (ʿAyn al-Jarr) as an Umayyad Foundation,” *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 42–8, at 43; and Santi, “ʿAnjar,” 12.

19. The fieldwork was carried out in collaboration with Raffi Gergian, director of the Southern Biqāʿ at the Direction Générale des Antiquités du Liban. Regrettably, the social turmoil triggered by anti-government protests and the outbreak of the pandemic seriously compromised the planned activities.

20. A detailed report of the survey, co-authored by Raffi Gergian, is currently in progress.

21. Such as the kind of population ʿAnjar was meant to lodge, the reasons behind the disproportion in the zoning pattern, and the site’s role in its micro- and macro-regional context.

the mosque–*dār al-imāra* group with the ultimate aim of contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the functional role of ‘Anjar in the Marwānid period. Moreover, it will try to show that the neat image of a monophasic ‘Anjar we are acquainted with should be considered, to some extent at least, the reflection of a deliberate manipulation of the archaeological evidence resulted from the heavy, indiscriminate modern interventions at the site, rather than a real entity.

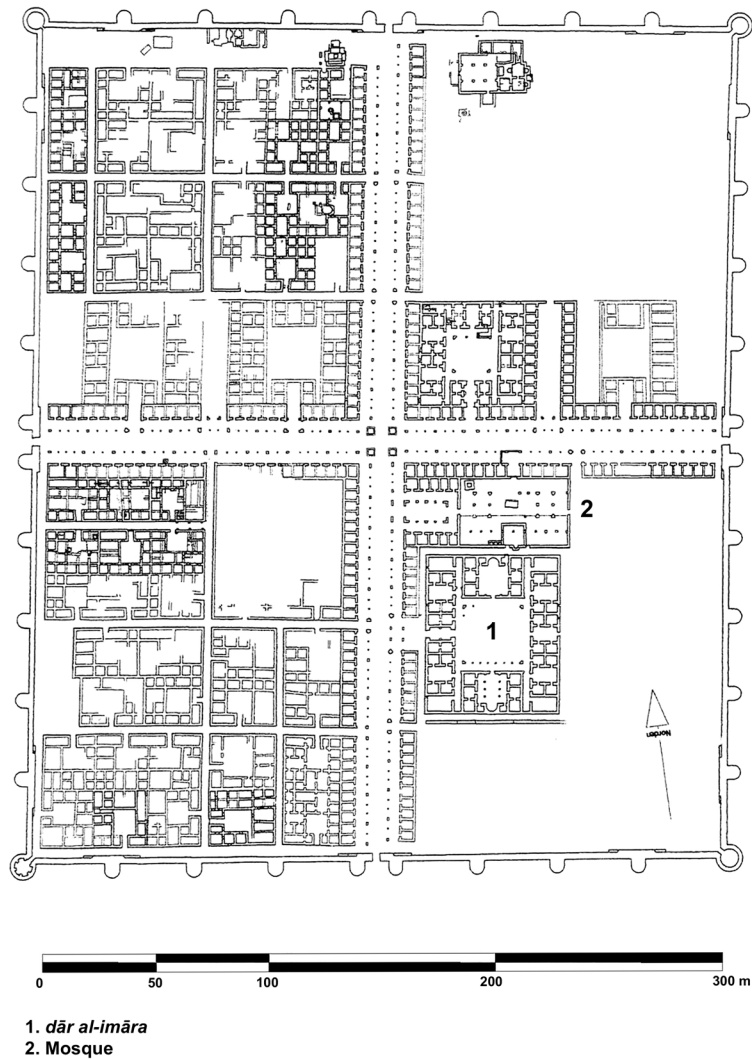


Figure 1. Plan of ‘Anjar (Reworking after Finster 2003)

### The Mosque–Dār al-Imāra Pairing

The mosque–*dār al-imāra* pairing in ‘Anjar is located in the south-eastern quadrant of the town, at the crossing of the *cardo* and *decumanus* (Fig. 1). The presence of this particular architectural pairing, which represents the most iconic feature of early Islamic urbanism, suggests that ‘Anjar served as, or at least was planned to be, an important administrative and ceremonial center for the Marwānid dynasty. In his classification of Umayyad building

activities, Jere Bacharach had no doubts that the mosque in ʿAnjar was a congregational one by virtue of its association with the *dār al-imāra*, and that the presence of the combination rightly qualified the settlement as a *madīna*,<sup>22</sup> showing that the use of the term in early Syriac accounts was anything but casual.<sup>23</sup> Apart from Bacharach’s comment, however, the presence of the pairing in ʿAnjar has never received the attention it deserves. As the only example of a mosque-palace complex of the pre-modern Islamic world to have been entirely excavated,<sup>24</sup> it constitutes an extremely valuable resource for exploring the functional use of such a pairing and shedding some light on ritual practices in the Marwānid period.

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22. J. Bacharach, “Marwanid Umayyad Building Activities: Speculations on Patronage,” *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 27–44, at 35.

23. An anonymous Syriac chronicle from the year 846 CE (E. W. Brooks, “A Syriac Chronicle of the Year 846,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 51 [1897]: 569–88) is one of the only two sources, along with the *Chronographia* by Theophanes the Confessor (Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia* [Bonn: Weber 1839–41], 1:577), which records the foundation of ʿAnjar in the reign of al-Walīd I. It is noteworthy that the Syriac Chronicle describes the foundation as a *madīna* and uses the toponym *ʿIn Gero*, which Brooks securely identified with the *ʿAin Gar* mentioned by Yaʿqūbī (Brooks, “*Syriac Chronicle*,” 581, n. 7).

24. Other mosque-*dār al-imāra* groups are known to have existed in the main cities of the *dār al-Islām* but were never thoroughly excavated. The earliest extant remains of a *dār al-imāra* were located by the *qibla* side of the Friday Mosque in Kūfa and have been extensively excavated by the Directorate of Antiquities in Iraq, but much uncertainty remains on their dating and their relationship with the mosque, whose early Islamic phases have been lost. For a recent discussion on the topic, see A. Santi, “Early Islamic Kūfa in Context: A Chronological Reinterpretation of the Palace, with a Note on the Development of the Monumental Language of the Early Muslim Élite,” *Annali, Sezione Orientale* 78 (2018): 69–103; idem, “Reinterpreting the Miṣr: New Insights for a Revised Chronological Attribution of the Mosque-*Dār al-Imāra* Combination in Kūfa,” in *Proceedings of the 11th ICAANE*, vol. 2, ed. O. Adelheid, M. Herles, K. Kaniuth, L. Korn and A. Heidenreich (Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 2020), 509–20. An early Islamic mosque-palace group is reported by medieval sources to have existed in Baṣra, Kūfa’s twin *miṣr*, but no systematic archaeological investigations have been carried out at the site of old Baṣra yet; see al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State, Being a Translation from the Arabic, Accompanied with Annotations, Geographic and Historic Notes of the Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān of al-Imām Abu-l-ʿAbbās, Aḥmad ibn-Jābir al-Balādhurī*, trans. F. C. Murgotten (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1924), 60–6; see also L. Massignon, “Explication du plan de Baṣra,” in *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref 1963), 61–87. In Wāsiṭ, the excavations brought to light the Umayyad mosque-*dār al-imāra* complex, but only the first of the two buildings was extensively excavated, leaving the extension, form, and plan of the palace utterly unknown; see F. Safar, *Wāsiṭ: The Sixth Season’s Excavations* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1945). Another archaeologically attested case is in Jerusalem, where excavations revealed a palatine complex beyond the south and east wall of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf directly connected to al-Aqṣā mosque through a bridge; see M. Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 324–41, 355–9. However, the results of the excavation still await a comprehensive publication and the date of the complex is still the object of debate among scholars. In Iṣṭakhr, Donald Whitcomb suggested that a *dār al-imāra* stood by the *qibla* side of the mosque based on satellite pictures; see D. Whitcomb, “The City of Istakhr and the Marvdasht Plain,” in *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Iranische Kunst und Archäologie: München, 7.-10. September 1976*, 363–70 (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1979). Recent excavations carried out at the site, however, were unable to confirm this hypothesis; see A. Jaia and L. Ebanista, “Excavations at Istakhr in 2012: The Test West of the Site of the Mosque,” in *Istakhr (Iran), 2011-2016: Historical and Archaeological Essays*, ed. M. V. Fontana, 303–44 (Rome: Sapienza Università di Roma, 2018). In Damascus, the Umayyad palace, al-Khaḍrāʾ, was reportedly placed in the south-eastern part of the *qiblī* wall of the mosque, but no remains have been found to date; for a discussion of the Qubbat al-Khaḍrāʾ and its relationship with the Umayyad Mosque, see B. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

The two buildings are connected, as is customary, by the *qibla* side of the mosque, with the *dār al-imāra* located in the direction of prayer. In contrast to other known examples, however, they do not share the *qiblī* wall but are separated by a narrow road. Two matching doors, one opening on the northern side of the *dār al-imāra*, and one in the *qiblī* wall of the mosque, allowed direct transit from a small room in the palace to the central space of the prayer hall and were conceivably reserved for the use of the ruler or his representative.

Despite being the only two buildings in the south-east quadrant—according to Maurice Chehab, no remains of any other structures were found elsewhere in this area—the mosque and the *dār al-imāra* are not centrally placed or symmetrically aligned. The presence of a peculiar monumental atrium<sup>25</sup> preceding the western door of the mosque results in the building being shifted eastward by several meters with respect to the palace, which could be said to break the symmetry of the Hippodamian grid. Apart from the monumental atrium, the mosque follows the classical Damascene prototype, with its long sides oriented towards the *qibla* (which roughly coincides with the geographic south in ‘Anjar), a central courtyard flanked by *riwāqs* on three sides, and a hypostyle prayer hall with columns bearing arches (Fig. 2).<sup>26</sup>

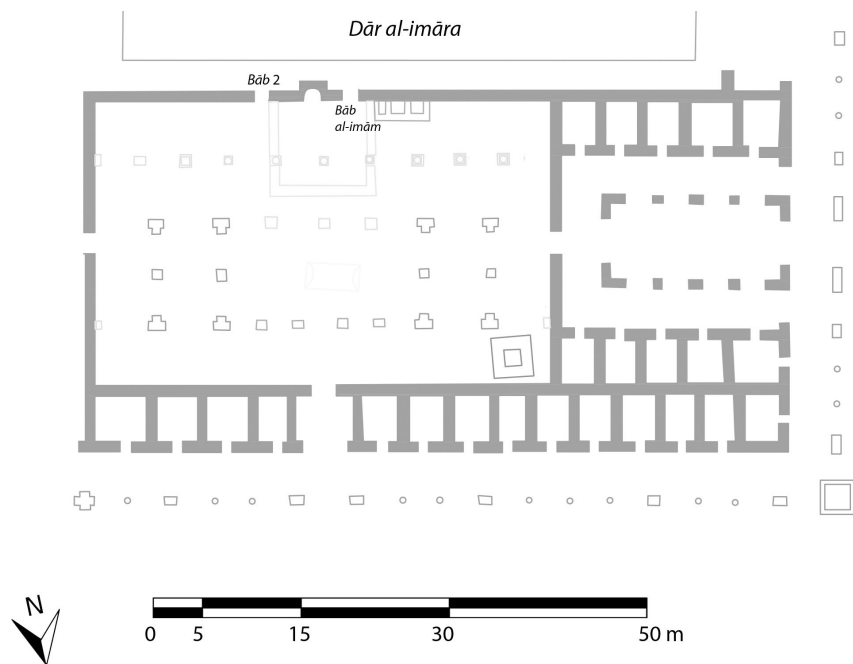


Figure 2. ‘Anjar: Plan of the mosque (© Santi A.)

25. In my previous article I interpreted this atrium as an element suggesting that the building was originally oriented toward the east. The presence of similar monumental atriums framed by shops and facing a colonnaded road is well documented for Byzantine churches in the region, and this, along with other elements, induced me to put forth the provocative idea that the mosque of ‘Anjar might have been built over a previous basilical church (Santi, “‘Anjar,” 11). This hypothesis, although intriguing, should be put on hold while awaiting further data from new excavations, as the absence of stratigraphic evidence makes it impossible to make more substantial and well-founded remarks.

26. For a detailed description of the building, see Finster, “Researches in ‘Anjar I,” 229–32.

Unlike the Great Mosque of Damascus, however, the sanctuary here is only two aisles deep and, surprisingly, lacks a central transept in front of the *miḥrāb*. This is a very unusual feature, as comparisons with coeval mosques in the Syrian region and beyond<sup>27</sup> abundantly show that the visibility of the prayer niche was one of the main concerns of planners and builders in the Marwānid epoch.<sup>28</sup> The lack of such a concern in ʿAnjar is striking, as the *miḥrāb* not only lacks a transept emphasizing its presence, but does not even fall in the middle of the adjacent intercolumn. Rather, the central column of the prayer hall was placed directly opposite it, deviating from the usual pattern. Remarkably, this odd arrangement was not dictated by the need to preserve the centrality of the *miḥrāb*, since the niche is shifted about one meter toward the east of the center of the *qiblī* wall, with the result that it also falls outside the optical axis of the northern entrance, which is correctly placed in the exact center of the northern wall.

Such an arrangement strongly suggests that the *miḥrāb* was not taken into account when the general layout of the building was planned, or at least when the mid-row of columns in the prayer hall was raised. This implies—as I have pointed out in a previous article<sup>29</sup>—that at least some of the columns in this row pertain to an earlier building phase than that of the *miḥrāb*. Whether this phase predates al-Walīd’s epoch or indicates a sudden change in the building plans that occurred in Umayyad times is hard to ascertain. Significantly, however, there is no evidence to indicate that the *miḥrāb* was added to the *qiblī* wall at a later stage.<sup>30</sup> The small, precisely cut ashlar forming the gradient of the niche fit perfectly into the inner face of the *qiblī* wall, indicating that the wall and the niche were built at the same time as part of a unitary project (Fig. 3). Consequently, if our arguments are valid, the central columns of the prayer hall existed before the *qiblī* wall was built. If this was in fact the case, it would be extremely unusual, as the *qiblī* wall was typically the first feature to be laid out and built in a mosque, giving the whole building the right orientation toward the

27. See, for instance, the Umayyad congregational mosques in ʿAmmān (A. Almagro and P. Jiménez, “The Umayyad Mosque of the Citadel of ʿAmmān,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 44 [2000]: 459–75); Jarash (A. Walmsley and K. Damgaard, “The Umayyad Congregational Mosque of Jarash in Jordan and its Relationship to Early Mosques,” *Antiquity* 79 [2005]: 362–78); Ramla (M. Rosen-Ayalon, “The White Mosque of Ramla: Retracing Its History,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 56 [2006]: 67–83); Ruṣāfa (D. Sack, *Resafa IV: Die Große Moschee von Resafa* [Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1996]); Tiberias (K. Cytryn-Silverman “The Umayyad Mosque of Tiberias,” *Muqarnas* 26 [2009]: 37–61); al-Aqṣā II (R. W. Hamilton, *The Structural History of the Aqsa Mosque: A Record of Archaeological Gleanings from the Repairs of 1938–1942* [London: Oxford University Press, 1949]).

28. In this regard, it is important to point out that there are indeed other known cases of mosques with *miḥrābs* misaligned, missing a transept, or obstructed by columns or pillars. Remarkably, however, all of them date from later times. Some examples include: the ninth/eleventh-century mosque at Qanat Tepe in Nishapur (C. K. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Some Early Islamic Buildings and their Decoration* [New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986], 264–65); the Ghaznavid mosque at Mt Rāja Girā, Udegram (U. Scerrato, “Research on the Archaeology and History of Islamic Art in Pakistan: Excavation of the Ghaznavid Mosque on Mt Rāja Girā. Second Report, 1986,” *East and West* 36, no. 4 [1986], 496–511); and the sixth/twelfth-century mosque found in Segesta (A. Molinari, *Segesta II: Il Castello e la Moschea [scavi 1989–1995]* [Palermo: Flaccovio, 1997], 95–9. I want to thank Maria Vittoria Fontana for acquainting me with these cases.

29. Santi, “ʿAnjar.”

30. Finster, “Researches in ʿAnjar I.”



correct *qibla*.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, all mosques built under Umayyad patronage from the time of al-Walīd I onward were planned with a centrally located *miḥrāb*, which always acted as the pivot of the architectural composition and the ultimate focal point of the building.

In an attempt to shed some light on the apparent incongruities of the plan, the new survey work targeted the remains of the columns of the prayer hall and the adjacent architectural elements. Significantly, this fieldwork showed that some of the observations I discussed in my previous article<sup>32</sup> need, in fact, to be reassessed. In particular, I argued there that the columns in the prayer hall should all be considered as pertaining to an older building phase, as I wrongly interpreted the remains of the foundation platforms of some of them as plinths. During my recent survey of the building, thanks to the valuable help of Raffi Gergian and the DGA working team, it was possible to carry out an accurate cleaning of the column bases and the floor of the mosque, which made possible a far clearer understanding of their different features and their stratigraphic relationship.

As a first remark, the second survey substantiated what the preliminary study had already foreshadowed,<sup>33</sup> namely, that the traditional interpretation of the nearly squared enclosure surrounding the *miḥrāb* as a *maqṣūra* should be reconsidered. Even though the loss of the small finds and archaeological stratigraphy prevent us from assigning a precise dating to this phase, enough evidence subsists to make it clear that it was extraneous to the original plan. The stratigraphic relationship between the structure and the adjoining features (in particular the paving slabs of the prayer hall and the three central columns of the first row), the building material, and masonry style leave no doubt about it being a later addition,<sup>34</sup> possibly a subsequent restriction of the prayer hall as attested in other coeval mosques in the region such as the Friday mosques in Jarash<sup>35</sup> and Ruṣāfa (Fig. 4).<sup>36</sup>

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31. A. Walmsley, “The Friday Mosque of Early Islamic Jarash in Jordan,” *Journal of the David Collection* 1 (2003): 111–31, 124; idem, *The Danish-Jordanian Islamic Jarash Project, Season Report 2008* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2008), 6, 21.

32. Santi, “‘Anjar.”

33. Idem, “‘Anjar.”

34. Although Finster claimed that “The quality of the wall and the size of the blocks correspond to the masonry of the Great Palace” (Finster, “Researches in ‘Anjar I,” 231), which made her interpret the structure as a *maqṣūra*, the building technique used for the realization of this structure, lacking any kind of bonding material, has nothing in common with that identified in the mosque’s walls, in the adjacent market, or in the walls of the palace. The massive, substantial blocks composing this structure resemble in size and finishing some foundation blocks found in various rooms of the Great Palace, with the significant difference that they do not function as foundations here, since they were clearly laid upon the paving slabs of the prayer hall. This confirms the posteriority of the structure to the floor and puts into question the fact that it was part of the original plan, suggesting rather that the blocks were Umayyad *spolia* reused here at a later date. It also casts doubt on the interpretation of the enclosure as a *maqṣūra* as claimed by M. Chehab and Finster. Coeval mosques in the region do not provide any fitting comparisons for this kind of enclosure, while, according to written sources, early *maqṣūras* were light wooden structures that would not have survived up to today. The use of such massive foundations for a wooden structure is inexplicable and suggests that instead these blocks were set in place to sustain a far heavier burden: possibly a roofed wall.

35. Damgaard, “The Umayyad Mosque of Jarash,” 193.

36. Sack, “Resafa IV,” 44–5.



Figure 3. 'Anjar: the *mihrāb* (Photo by the author, 2017)



Figure 4. 'Anjar: the so-called *maqṣūra* (Photo by the author, 2017)

The analysis of the remains of the middle colonnade of the prayer hall raised further important questions about the alleged monophasic nature of the mosque. There, it was possible to identify three different building techniques in use for the construction of the nine columns of the arcade, which allowed their division into three main groups. The first one, comprising the first three columns starting from the east, is characterized by the presence of a nearly square foundation platform and a smaller square plinth carved from the same block of stone, which probably used to bear a baseless column shaft (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5. ‘Anjar, inner arcade of the prayer hall of the mosque: remains of the 3rd column from the east (Photo by the author, 2020)**

The second group, encompassing the last two supports to the west, features reused Attic bases with square plinths bonded to square foundation platforms by a thick layer of mortar (Fig. 6).<sup>37</sup> Finally, the three central columns of the row are distinguished by the fact that their Attic bases, square plinths, and foundation platforms were all carved from one piece (Fig. 7). Some targeted cleaning made it possible to ascertain that the dressed faces of the square plinths seamlessly turn into coarse rocky foundations at a depth of about 10 centimeters under the floor level. Unlike the other foundation platforms, which feature a roughly levelled surface bearing visible signs of dressing, the lower parts of these supports, whose extension in width and depth cannot be defined due to the presence of the paving slabs, look like rock in a natural state (Fig. 8). Remarkably, the supports of this type are set at a lower level than the others in the row, being the plinths of the bases partially covered by the paving slabs—whereas in all the other cases the foundation platforms protrude slightly above the floor level.

37. This type of mortar, white/reddish in color and rather clear, has not been found elsewhere in the mosque, where the use of a grey mortar with big black inclusions prevails. This may indicate that these columns also date to a different building phase than the rest of the mosque, even though no further evidence has been found to support this hypothesis.



**Figure 6.** ‘Anjar, inner arcade of the prayer hall of the mosque: remains of the 9th column from the east (Photo by the author, 2020)



**Figure 7.** ‘Anjar, inner arcade of the prayer hall of the mosque: remains of the 5th column from the east (Photo by the author, 2020)



**Figure 8.** ‘Anjar, inner arcade of the prayer hall of the mosque: remains of the 5th column from the east, detail (Photo by the author, 2020)

One might argue that the different building techniques employed in the making of the columns were responses to different structural exigencies in different parts of the building, such as the need to sustain a heavier load in correspondence to the monolithic bases and foundations of the three central columns. An analysis of the possible roofing solutions for

the prayer hall, however, disproved this hypothesis. The emplacement of the columns and the regular width of the intercolumns and naves suggest that the mosque in ‘Anjar was covered by a tiled, gabled roof carried on wooden beams of the same kind as those of the mosques of Jarash and Ruṣāfa, and that the weight of the roof was regular along the whole length of the colonnade (Fig. 9). Since there is no structural justification for the use of different building techniques, we should consider the possibility that they might instead have some chronological significance.

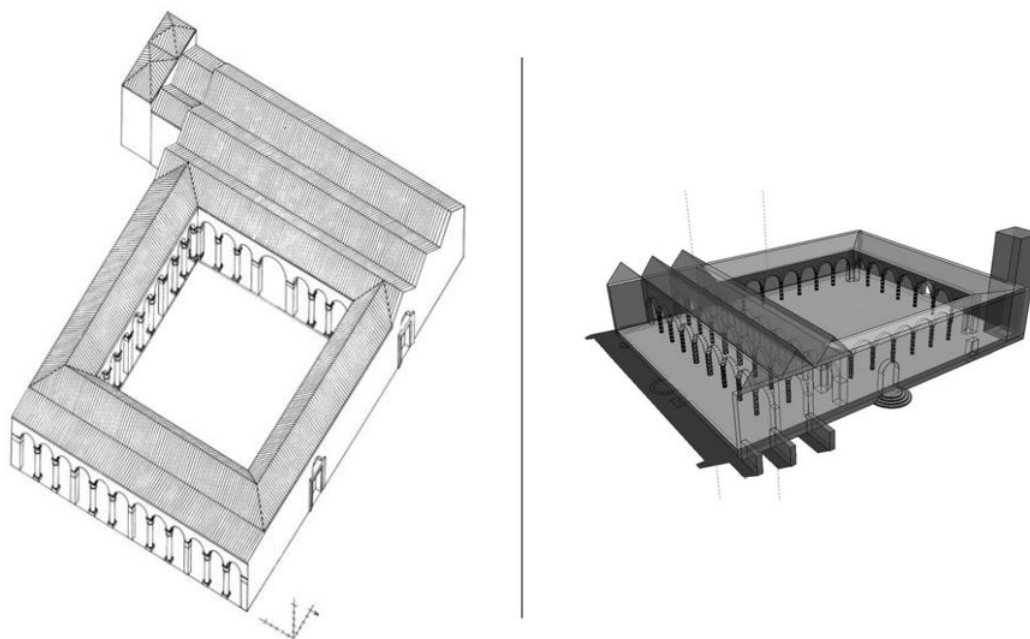


Figure 9. Isometric views of the Umayyad mosques of Ruṣāfa (left, after Sack 1996) and Jerash (right, after Damgaard, 2011)

As for the first three and last two columns of the row, the presence of substantial foundation platforms of probable Umayyad making<sup>38</sup> suggests that we should consider the bases associated with them—of the standard Attic type carved together with a square plinth, typical of the Syrian region in Roman and Byzantine time<sup>39</sup>—as being Roman or late antique

38. The finish of the blocks composing the foundation platforms of these columns is not dissimilar from that of the Umayyad T-pilasters found in the *saḥn*, which might suggest the same dating for these features.

39. The Attic-type base developed in Greece in the fifth century BCE and became a standard type of base in the eastern Roman provinces, in Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine (L.S. Meritt, “The Geographical Distribution of Greek and Roman Ionic Bases,” *Hesperia* 38 (1969): 186–204, at 196, n. 41–2). The Attic bases cut from a single block together with plinths were introduced in the region only in the first century BCE, presumably due to Roman influence, and continued to be used in Christian buildings up to at least the sixth century CE; see M. Burdajewicz, “Some Remarks on the Architectural Decoration of the North-West Church at Hippos (Susita),” in *Ex Oriente Lux: Studies in Honour of Jolanta Młynarczyk*, ed. K. Jakubiak and A. Łajtar (Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2020).

displaced *spolia* that were reused in Umayyad times in the construction of the mosque. In contrast, the technique attested for the three central columns, in which the foundation platforms appear to be seamlessly merged with the upper base-with-plinth element, doesn't find—to the best of my knowledge—any fitting parallel in antique, late-antique, or coeval buildings in the region. Nonetheless, since the bases-with-plinth represent perfectly fine examples of the Attic order in its eastern version, it is most likely that these composite pedestals also date to the Roman or Byzantine period. Nevertheless, the depth and substantialness of their foundations, and their being set at a significantly lower level than the others in the row, may be an indication that they stand in their original position rather than being reused *spolia*. In fact, this idea gains plausibility when considered in the light of the planimetric incongruencies of the building. As pointed out earlier, the major problem with the mosque of 'Anjar is the lack of any device emphasizing the visibility of the *miḥrāb* as a result of the eccentric placement of the column facing the niche. This occurrence is very hard to justify unless we consider the possibility that the planning of the *qiblī* wall was constrained by the pre-existence of the central columns.

In fact, this possibility seems likely even when we consider the relationship of the mosque with the adjacent *dār al-imāra*. An overall view of the complex (Fig. 10) reveals that the eccentric positioning of the *miḥrāb* was in part determined by the need to create an entrance in the *qiblī* wall to match the door on the northern wall of the palace. This allowed the caliph or his representative to access the mosque from the *dār al-imāra* through a direct and preferential access, the so-called “*bāb al-imām*.” This would imply that the complex is not the outcome of a unitary plan, but that the palace was probably laid out and built prior to the mosque, insofar as the planning and building of the *qiblī* wall were determined by the need to fit the arrangement of the palace.

If that was the case, however, and no pre-existing elements stood on the site of the mosque, the visibility and centrality of the *miḥrāb* could have been preserved by building the columns of the prayer hall in such a way that the niche would have fallen in the center of the adjacent intercolumn. The fact that this was not done and that, in addition, the easternmost of the three central columns falls just in the way of the second door in the *qiblī* wall (whose function will be discussed below) constitutes a further indication of the potential pre-existence of the central part of the colonnade before the building of the mosque in its final form. Even if one accepts the pre-existence of the columns to the *qiblī* wall, however, the visibility of the *miḥrāb* could have been preserved by simply placing it slightly to the east, so that it would have been at the center of the adjacent intercolumn. This solution was probably rejected to maintain a semblance of centrality of the niche in the *qiblī* wall.

It could be asked at this point why, then, was the palace not constructed with due attention to the pre-existing columns of the building to its north? In fact, this could have been the result of uncoordinated planning of the two individual buildings that made up the complex, along with the possible presence of further pre-existences at the site of the palace, which could have conditioned and constrained its planning and construction to some extent. In conclusion, what can be said with certainty is that, after a close and attentive look, the mosque–*dār al-imāra* complex in 'Anjar appears more like the result of a clumsy

attempt to harmonize a set of disjointed and possibly non-contemporary structures than the pristine outcome of a unitary project.

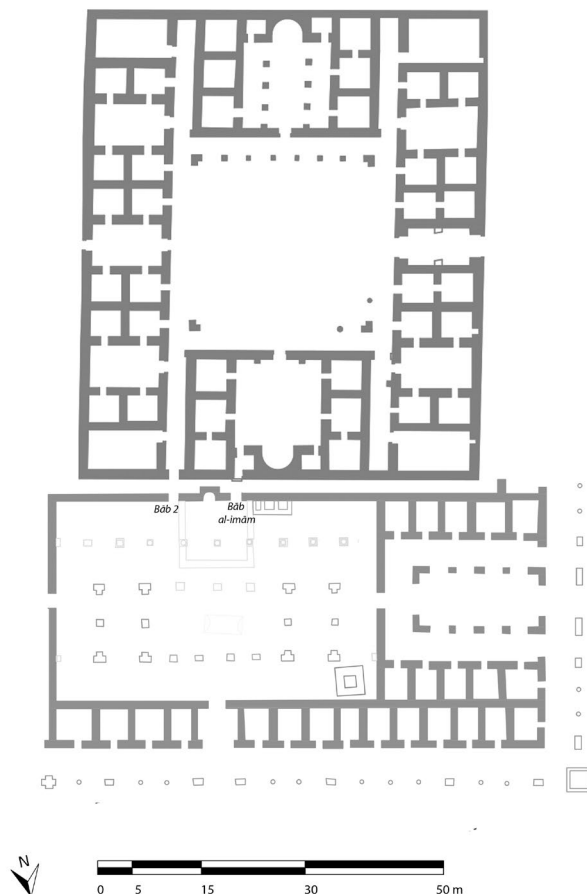


Figure 10. ‘Anjar: mosque–dār al-imāra combination (© Santi A.)

### Ceremonial Aspects of the Mosque–Dār al-Imāra Complex in ‘Anjar

The analysis just carried out allows us to acknowledge with relative certainty that the mosque gained its current form as a result of the conditioning of pre-existent structures, and to facilitate the transit of the caliph or his representative from a tiny room in the *dār al-imāra* into the central space of the prayer hall. The creation of this special path was considered important to the extent that the visibility and centrality of the *mihrāb*—normally the most important thing in a Marwānid mosque—was sacrificed. The emphasis given to the *bāb al-imām* to the detriment of the prayer niche suggests that the former retained a particular ceremonial significance.

In the search for a functional interpretation for this ensemble, it should be pointed out that the arrangement of the *qiblī* wall in the mosque of ‘Anjar and its relationship with the adjacent *dār al-imāra* closely recalls the layout of the Tulunid mosque–palace group in

al-Qaṭā'i<sup>c</sup>, present-day Cairo (Fig. 11).<sup>40</sup> This complex retains a special significance as it is the only case of a mosque–*dār al-imāra* combination whose ceremonial use is described in detail in the written sources. Even though nothing is left of the Tulunid *dār al-imāra*,<sup>41</sup> we know from historic accounts that it used to abut the *qibla* side of the mosque and gave direct access to the prayer hall through two doorways opened in the *qiblī* wall, one to the right and one to the left of the *miḥrāb*.

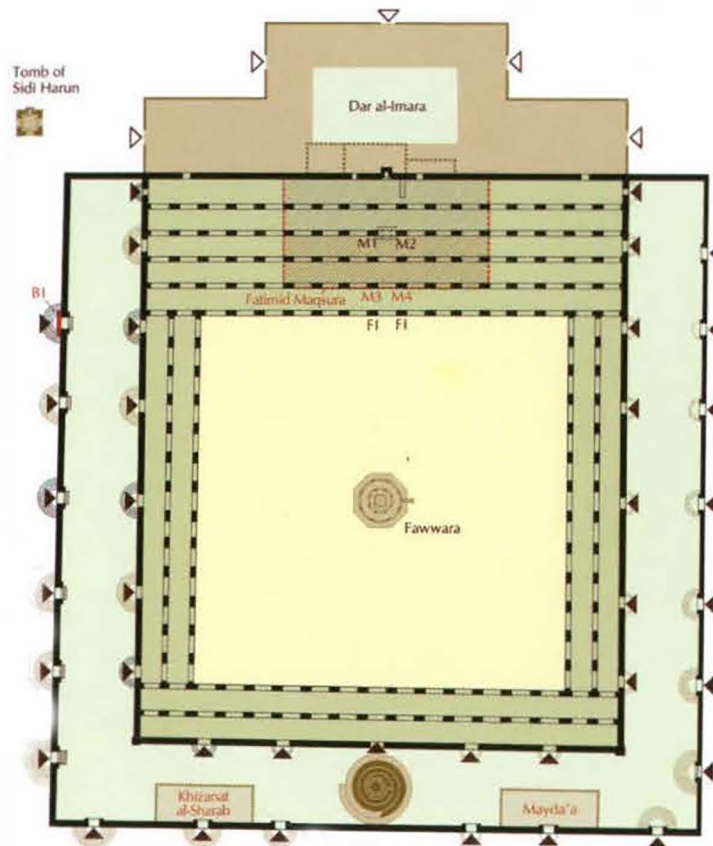


Figure 11. Tulunid *dār al-imāra*-mosque complex at al-Qaṭā'i (Swelim 2015)

Al-Balawī and al-Maqrīzī narrate that, on Fridays, Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn used to reach the complex from his residential palace in al-Maydān through the so-called *shāri<sup>c</sup> a<sup>c</sup>zam* (“Greatest Street”).<sup>42</sup> Once arrived in the *dār al-imāra*, he would have performed the ritual ablutions, changed his garments and robes, and perfumed himself with incense. When ready, he would

40. For a recent study of the complex and its ceremonial use, see T. Swelim, *Ibn Tulun: His Lost City and Great Mosque* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2015).

41. Some minor rooms on the *qibla* side of the present mosque have been interpreted as part of the lost *dār al-imāra*; see in this regard A. F. Sayyid, *La capitale de l'Égypte jusqu'à l'époque fatimide, al-Qāhira et al-Fuṣṭāṭ* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 48.

42. Swelim, *Ibn Tulun*, 37.



have entered the prayer hall through the door on the left side of the main *miḥrāb* to attend the Friday prayer in front of the congregation of subjects.<sup>43</sup>

Although over a century and a change of dynasty separate the foundation of ‘Anjar and the building of the Mosque-Palace group in al-Qaṭā’i‘, the latter complex, being shaped upon a Samarran model,<sup>44</sup> descends directly from the tradition of mosque–*dār al-imāra* pairings of the Umayyad period.<sup>45</sup> This is also confirmed by the identical arrangement of the ceremonial spaces in the two complexes, which suggests that the group of rooms in the northern wing of the *dār al-imāra* of ‘Anjar, with their proximity and direct connection to the sanctuary of the mosque, had a function associated with the ritual preparation of the ruler for the Friday prayer as depicted in the report about Ibn Ṭulūn. An undocumented piece of evidence found during my last survey of the palace in ‘Anjar is worth mentioning in this connection. This comprises a rectangular tank excavated below the floor level of the south-eastern room flanking the northern audience hall, covered and bordered by finely cut and dressed blocks of limestone (Fig. 12).



Figure 12. ‘Anjar: *dār al-imāra*. Remains of a tank (Photo by the author, 2017)

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43. Idem, *Ibn Tulun*, 47, 127.

44. As observed by Matthew Gordon, in joining a downsized *dār al-imāra* to the Friday Mosque, Ibn Ṭulūn was following long-established early Islamic practice; at least two and possibly three examples of this arrangement occurred in Samarra. See M. S. Gordon, “Ibn Ṭulūn, al-Qaṭā’i‘ and the Legacy of Samarra,” *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 4 (2014): 63–77, at 69.

45. That said, during the Abbasid period, the *dār al-imāra* abutting the mosque gradually lost its residential functions and remained only as an administrative and/or ceremonial appendix to the Friday Mosque. For a detailed assessment of the development of the mosque–*dār al-imāra* combination in the Abbasid period, see F. Duva, *Persistenza e sviluppo del dispositivo ‘moschea del venerdì–dār al-’imāra’ nell’area iranica in periodo proto-abbasid* (PhD diss., Sapienza Università di Roma, 2021).

Traces of weathering and the remains of thick layers of hydraulic mortar suggest that it could have served as a water container, possibly as part of a structure intended for the performance of exclusive ritual ablutions.

As for the door on the right hand side of the *miḥrāb*, we know that in the mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn it was allocated for the use of the *khaṭīb*, the authority in charge of delivering the sermon on Fridays, and was connected to an adjacent room in the *dār al-imāra* for the exclusive use of the preacher.<sup>46</sup> On this note, it is key to point out that the *khaṭīb* became a government-appointed position only under the Abbasids, and in Marwānid times, when the mosque–*dār al-imāra* complex of Ḳanjar was designed, the office was still an exclusive prerogative of the caliph or his appointed governor.<sup>47</sup> This implied that, when attending the Friday prayer, the Marwānid leader had to display tokens of honor and authority traditionally associated with the figure of the *khaṭīb* in pre- and early Islamic times,<sup>48</sup> and pronounce the *khuṭba*, in this period an address of political nature rather than a religious sermon. Based on that, we must suppose that the function of the ancillary rooms of the northern audience hall in the *dār al-imāra* of Ḳanjar was not limited to ablutions, change of clothes, and fumigations, but also to the preparation of the *khuṭba* and storage of the insignia of the *khaṭīb*'s office, in particular, some kinds of elongated pointed objects—such as the lance (*ʿanaza*), staff (*qaḍīb*) or bow (*makhāṣir*)—which the *khaṭīb* held in his right hand during the *khuṭba* and which, due to their connection to imagery associated with the Prophet Muḥammad,<sup>49</sup> represented the ultimate symbols of caliphal authority in this period.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, written sources abundantly attest<sup>51</sup> that the entry of the *amīr al-muʿminīn* or his representative into the congregational space was strictly regulated, in the late Umayyad period, by a precise sumptuary code due to the need to exalt the religious component of the

46. Swelim, *Ibn Tulun*, 127.

47. “It is quite in keeping with the nature of early Islam and with that of the Arab *khaṭīb* that the ruler himself was spokesman and that he not only made edifying speeches from the *minbar* as *khaṭīb* but also issued orders, made decisions and pronounced his views on political questions and particularly questions of general interest. This was the case under the first four caliphs and the Umayyads, and the governors appointed by them also acted as *khuṭabāʾ*” (J. Pedersen, “Khaṭīb,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., 4:1, 109–11 (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009), 1,110).

48. Pedersen, “Khaṭīb.”

49. According to the tradition, the Prophet came forward as a *khaṭīb* after the conquest of Mecca (Pedersen, “Khaṭīb,” 1,110).

50. For the association of the staff with the *ʿanaza* of the Prophet, see G. C. Miles, “‘Anaza,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., 1:482 (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009); idem, “Miḥrāb and ‘Anazah: A Study in Islamic Iconography,” in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. J. M. Bloom, 149–66 (London: Routledge, 2002); L. Treadwell, “Miḥrab and ‘Anaza’ or ‘Sacrum and Spear’? A Reconsideration of an Early Marwanid Silver Drachm,” *Muqarnas* 22 (2005): 1–28; H. Munt, *The Holy City of Medina, Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 104.

51. See for instance al-Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d’or*, ed. and trans. C. Barbier de Maynard (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 5:402–3; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl mulūk)*, vol. 24, *The Empire in Transition*, trans. D. S. Powers (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 62.

caliphal office.<sup>52</sup> As Oleg Grabar demonstrated in his PhD dissertation, the use of particular types of headgear drawn from the Sasanian tradition, such as the *qalansuwa ṭawīla*<sup>53</sup> and the *tāj*,<sup>54</sup> which were associated with the secular, royal aspect of Umayyad authority, were categorically substituted, in the mosque, by the turban (*‘imāma*), the headgear of the Prophet.<sup>55</sup> This, along with the wearing of the “caliphal clothes” (*thiyāb al-khilāfa*),<sup>56</sup> and the performance of the ritual ablutions, allowed the caliph to enter a state of ceremonial purity<sup>57</sup> and complete his ritual transformation into the *imām* and heir to Muḥammad’s religious authority. The part of the *dār al-imāra* adjacent to the *qiblī* wall would have therefore acted as a liminal space for the ruler and the setting of this ritual transformation. Within the context of this functional interpretation, the location of the *bāb al-imām*, which in ‘Anjar falls within the optical axis of the northern door of the mosque to the detriment of the visibility of the *miḥrāb*, was probably an intentional device designed to emphasize the spectacular entrance of the ruler into the mosque, adorned with the insignia of his multifaceted office. This would have produced in the onlookers an affectively powerful and semiotically meaningful experience.

There is one particular piece of architectural decoration that was retrieved during Chehab’s excavation and which has been, unfortunately, very little studied, that may be of some interest in this context. It is a capital that is currently part of the arcade close to the north gate but which was probably located elsewhere originally<sup>58</sup> which portrays, inside a roundel surrounded by acanthus leaves, a frontal figure holding two objects in both hands (Figure 13).

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52. O. Grabar, *Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court* (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1955).

53. High, miter-like Persian headgear which was a symbol of royal authority in the Umayyad period. For an overview of the Umayyad attestations of the *qalansuwa ṭawīla*, both in art and in the written sources, see R. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: Three Modes of Artistic Influence* (Brill: Leiden, 1972): 28–34 and related plates.

54. A term that refers to the crown in a general sense.

55. Significantly, Muḥammad was referred to by the later tradition as “*ṣāḥib al-‘imāma*,” “the one who wears the turban”; see Y. K. Stillman, “*Libās*,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., 5:732–42 (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009), at 734. According to a saying of al-Ṭabarī, the turban was considered “the crown of the Arabs” in the early Islamic period; see A. Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 140. As rightly pointed out by Grabar: “The turban was the headgear of the caliph as *imām*, that is, as successor of the Prophet performing a religious ceremony” (Grabar, *Ceremonial and Art*, 59).

56. Y. K. Stillman, *Arab Dress: A Short History from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 34; Grabar, *Ceremonial and Art*, 63.

57. Many early traditions demonstrate the existence, since the early Islamic period, of definite rules regulating the attire in connection to the state of ritual purity or impurity of a person. Remarkably, some type of garments including the *‘imāma* were specifically forbidden for men in a state of ritual impurity (*iḥrām*); see Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 23.

58. Many architectural elements were moved and arbitrarily relocated during the restoration works directed by Houti Kalayan, as the unpublished photographic documentation of the DGA abundantly demonstrates.



**Figure 13. Capital with relief featuring a possible caliphal portrait  
(Photo by the author, 2020)**

The poor state of conservation of the relief notwithstanding, the head of the figure seems to be characterized by long, coiffured hair and what looks like voluminous but short headgear, while the pointed object wielded in the left hand seems to be identifiable as a spear. Analogous Marwānid long-haired figures in frontal representation wielding weapons and wearing diadems/headgear have survived in different types of media<sup>59</sup> and are generally recognized to pertain to royal or princely iconography.<sup>60</sup> If we accept the possibility of this

59. Notably, on coins of the “standing caliph” type issued during the first phase of ‘Abd al-Malik’s monetary reform (S. Heidemann, “The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and its Religion on Coin Imagery,” in *The Qur’an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, ed. A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx, 149–195 [Leiden: Brill 2010], 175–6, figs 21–4), in two round stucco sculptures from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (D. Schlumberger, *Qaṣr el-Heir el-Gharbi* [Paris: P. Geuthner, 1986], 15, 22) and Khirbat al-Mafjar (R. W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959], 237–9, pl. XXXVI 3 and 7), by some interpreted as portraits of the caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik; and on less known objects such as a series of ivory carvings from al-Ḥumayma in southern Jordan (R. M. Foote, “An Abbasid Residence at al-Humayma,” in *Byzantium and Islam, Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century*, ed. H. C. Evans and B. Ratliff, 221–2 [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012]), a newly-discovered stucco panel from Building E at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (D. Genequand, “Les décors en stuc du bâtiment E à Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī,” *Syria* 88 [2011]: 351–78), and an ivory plaque kept at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (acc. no. 71.62, see M. Di Cesare, “A Note on an Umayyad Carved Ivory Plaque Kept at the Walters Art Gallery,” *Vicino Oriente* 21 [2017]: 197–210). For a recent discussion of the topic, see D. Genequand, “Two Possible Caliphal Representations from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī and Their Implication for the History of the Site,” in *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad Elites*, ed. A. George and A. Marsham, 147–74 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

60. Even though the lack of accompanying inscriptions makes it impossible to securely identify these portraits as caliphal representations—with the exception of the coins of the so-called “standing caliph” type—their connection with the spheres of authority, high status, and often even kingship is generally accepted as factual.

being a caliphal portrait—a belief shared by both Finster and the late Hafez Chehab<sup>61</sup>—then it could be speculated that the attributes of the figure might be a reference to the prophetic regalia abovementioned: in particular, the ‘*anaza*<sup>62</sup> and the ‘*imāma* of Muḥammad. If that were in fact the case, the image portrayed was probably not very different from that seen on Fridays in the mosque of ‘Anjar and could be a further indication of a caliphal presence in the foundation of the site.

Returning to the mosque–*dār al-imāra* combination, since in Marwānid times the *bāb al-khaṭīb* was not distinguished from the *bāb al-imām*, the door on the eastern side of the *miḥrāb* in the mosque of ‘Anjar needs an alternative interpretation. We have already discussed the reasons why the enclosure around the *miḥrāb* should be considered a later addition rather than an Umayyad *maqṣūra*. This implies that, originally, the *bāb al-imām* and the door east of the *miḥrāb* provided equal access to the central space of the prayer hall, which perhaps was enclosed in a more conventional wooden *maqṣūra*. The perfect alignment of the eastern *qibla* door with the termination of the north-eastern corridor of the palace suggests that the latter was, in turn, provided with a matching doorway, in the same way the small service room adjoining the apse of the northern hall has a door facing the *bāb al-imām*. In fact, the section of the northern wall of the palace aligned with the eastern *qibla* door is preserved only at the level of the foundation ashlar and, since its state has remained unaltered since the excavations,<sup>63</sup> the presence of a door in this spot can be confidently proposed (Fig. 14). This arrangement suggests that this entrance was used by a special category of subjects to enter the central space of the prayer hall directly from the palace and attend the Friday service in close proximity to the ruler. Indeed, we know from the sources that the political leader never remained entirely alone in the *maqṣūra*: the *ḥaras*, or caliphal guards, always stood behind him, along with members of the Umayyad family or other important individuals who were granted the privilege of being introduced into the royal enclosure.<sup>64</sup>

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61. The piece has been very briefly discussed by Finster, who interpreted it as a portrait of the Byzantine emperor (Finster, “Palace Decoration in ‘Anjar,” 155) or a portrait of the caliph with the attributes of the Byzantine ruler to symbolize his universal power (Finster, “‘Anjar: spätantik,” 233). It is not clear why Finster interpreted the image in these ways, and which element she specifically associated with a Byzantine royal iconography. The image has been republished in the recent posthumous publication of Hafez Chehab’s PhD dissertation, accompanied by a detailed description. Chehab securely identified it as a caliphal portrait due to the presence of the ‘*anaza*, “la lance qui était l’un des symboles de la puissance califienne.” See H. Chehab, *Les ruines d’Anjar, revu et annoté par G. Homsy-Gottwalles* (London: Lebanese British Friends of the National Museum, 2017–18).

62. The spear in this case could also represent a mere implement of war and/or “an instrument of God’s wrath against the nonbelievers,” as Luke Treadwell has interpreted its iconography in the famous series of drachms of the so-called *miḥrāb* and ‘*anaza* types (Treadwell, “Mihrab and ‘Anaza”).

63. This was verified thanks to unpublished pictures of the excavations made available to me courtesy of the DGA.

64. J. Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade de Médine* (Paris: Institut Français de Damas, 1947), 149–51.



**Figure 14. ‘Anjar, eastern *qibla* door of the mosque aligned with the end of a corridor of the adjacent *dār al-imāra* (Photo by the author, 2020)**

It can be suggested that in ‘Anjar the second *qiblī* doorway was intended as a device to allow the guards to enter the mosque simultaneously with the ruler without visually affecting the spectacular impact of his public appearance. On the other hand, using the second *qiblī* door was probably also regarded as a token of the highest honor reserved for special individuals or families. An interesting precedent exists in this regard in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, where numerous sources report the existence of a small door (*khawkha*) to the east of the *miḥrāb*, which was intended for the exclusive use of the descendants of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (Fig. 15).<sup>65</sup> This correspondence reveals that the mosque-palace group in ‘Anjar was shaped in accordance with a most celebrated architectural model and that the ritual dimension was an intrinsic, essential aspect of the site. In conclusion, whether the mosque-*dār al-imāra* group in ‘Anjar ever functioned as a ceremonial venue or not, what is evident is that the complex was designed to be, or to symbolically evoke at least, a setup for splendid ceremonies.

As a final remark, I would like to propose a connection between ‘Anjar’s vibrant ceremonial character and the alleged presence of pre-existing structures at the site which were hypothetically identified in this paper as part of the columns of the prayer hall, but whose extent and diffusion throughout the site area could have possibly been more substantial.

65. See A. Santi, “The role of Madīna in the Emergence of the Mosque-*Dār al-Imāra* Combination: A Preliminary Note,” *Vicino Oriente XXI* (2017): 211–23, at 218.

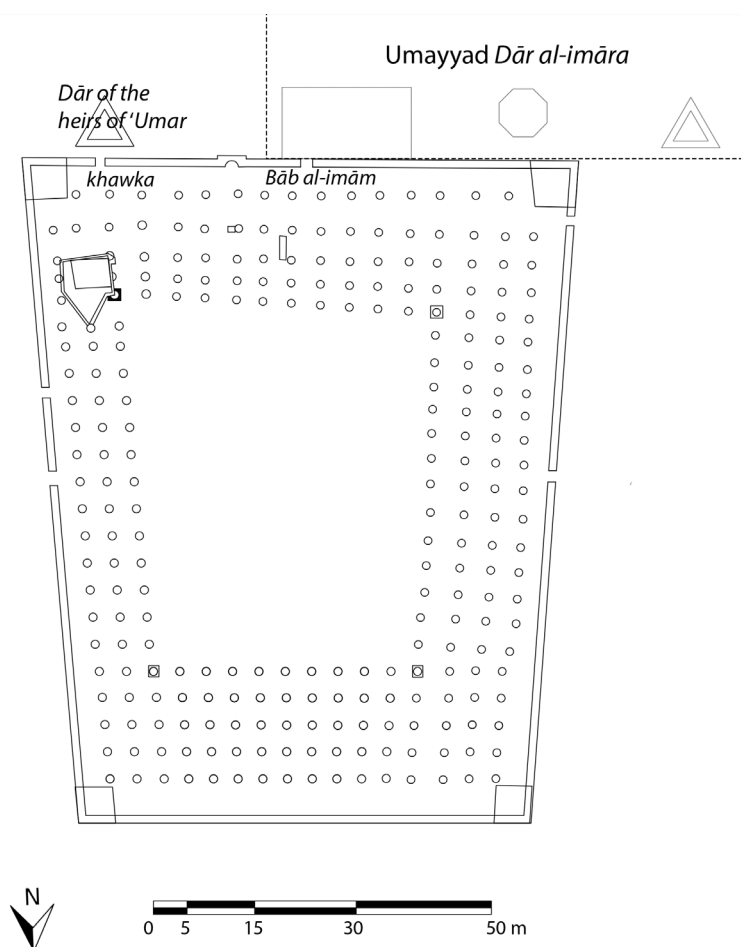


Figure 15. Medina, the mosque–dār al-imāra complex as reconstructed by the author (© Santi A.)

Although the existence of pre-Islamic vestiges at the site has been denied by the excavators,<sup>66</sup> the lack of documentation, the invasive rebuilding works, the loss of the finds, and the destruction of part of the archaeological evidence suggest that it would be wise to be cautious in advancing any categoric assumption in this regard. In fact, both Grabar<sup>67</sup> and Hafez Chehab<sup>68</sup> voiced doubts over whether ‘Anjar—whilst undoubtedly being an Umayyad construction project—should be definitely considered an Umayyad foundation *ex nihilo*. In

66. As I pointed out in my previous article, although M. Chehab in his paper asserted the Umayyad foundation of ‘Anjar *ex-nihilo* as a matter of fact, he also alluded indirectly to the pre-existence of an important Roman settlement at the site (Chehab, “Umayyad Palace,” 17). Moreover, his comment that the excavators at the site “often struck virgin soil” (Chehab, “Umayyad Palace,” 19), raises the question of whether they may occasionally have struck pre-Umayyad remains (see Santi, “‘Anjar,” 6).

67. O. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 168; idem, “Umayyad Palaces Reconsidered,” *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 93–108.

68. H. Chehab, “Les palais omeyyades d’Anjar, résidences princières d’été,” *Archéologia* 87 (1975): 18–25; idem, “Identification,” 42–8.

this regard, Chehab mentioned an interesting piece of evidence found in a document written in 569 as a declaration of Miaphysite faith and undersigned by 137 archimandrites from *Provincia Arabia* and *Phoenicia Libanensis*<sup>69</sup> known as “the letter of the archimandrites.” In particular, the scholar drew attention to one of the signatures, which reads: “I, Paulos, deacon and head of the monastery of ‘YNGD’ (or ‘YNGR’), have written by the hand of ḤLPY of the monastery of the God-loving ḤLPY of the village of DWRBYL.”<sup>70</sup> Interestingly the first toponym, which records the name of the place where Paulos’ monastery was located, has among its most probable readings “‘Ayn Jara.” As noted by Nöldeke,<sup>71</sup> however, the name may refer to the site of ‘Ayn Jara in Jordan, west of Jarash, which, in pre-Islamic times, was part of the ancient *Provincia Arabia*. This notwithstanding, Chehab pointed out that the second recorded toponym, the one where the epistle was signed, DWRBYL, while it has no correspondents in the area of Jarash, very much recalls the modern toponym of Turbul, a Christian rural agglomeration some two hours walk north of ‘Anjar. If we accept this identification, we may hypothesize that the toponym ‘Ayn Jara in this part of the Biqā‘ predated the Islamic conquest and might have been associated with a monastic precinct in the area.<sup>72</sup>

This hypothesis, although extremely tentative given the current fragmented state of archaeological knowledge of the site and its surroundings, appears to be especially intriguing in terms of the selection of this location by the Umayyads for the establishment of a settlement. Indeed, the area of ‘Anjar happens to be along the itinerary conceivably followed by ‘Abd al-Malik and his court every year when, with the coming of the summer heat, they moved from the monastery of Dayr Murrān on the western outskirts of Damascus<sup>73</sup> (where the caliph used to spend part of the spring) to Ba‘albak. Located on the ancient caravan road leading to Roman Heliopolis, on the only viable path through the marshy lake of the Biqā‘, and close to the karstic perennial springs of the Anti-Lebanon, the site of ‘Anjar must have been an ideal place for the caliphal caravan to break the one-day long journey to Ba‘albak, and even more so in the hypothetical presence of a monastic installation.<sup>74</sup>

69. The Roman province that encompassed the eastern Biqā‘ including the area of ‘Anjar.

70. F. Millar, “Christian Monasticism in Roman Arabia at the Birth of Mahomet,” *Semitica et Classica* 2 (2009): 97–115, at 111.

71. T. Nöldeke, “Zur Topographie und Geschichte des Damascenischen Gebietes und der Haurângend,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 29/34 (1876): 419–44, at 441; see also Chehab, “Identification,” 43.

72. I already advanced this hypothesis in my previous article; see Santi, “‘Anjar,” 277–8.

73. H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London: Routledge, 2015), 110.

74. Interestingly, Ghassanid Monophysite monastic installations were often strategically located at crossroads, near well-traveled routes or perennial water sources. This is strictly linked to their role as places of proselytism and territorial (and hence political) control in the pre-Islamic period, which underlies the pattern of re-use that linked Roman forts, monasteries, and Umayyad settlements in the shift between Late Antiquity and the Islamic era. This phenomenon, its roots, and its ramifications, have been thoroughly examined by Ignacio Arce in “Romans, Ghassanids and Umayyads and the Transformation of the Limes Arabicus: From Coercive and Deterrent Diplomacy Towards Religious Proselytism and Political Clientelism,” in *La Transgiordania nei secoli XII-XIII e le ‘frontiere’ del Mediterraneo medievale*, ed. G. Vannini and M. Nucciotti, 55–74 (Oxford: BAR



The tight relationship between the Umayyad court and monasteries in Greater Syria is proved by archaeology, as we know of at least seven Umayyad settlements built above remains of Christian monasteries, including al-Ruṣāfa, Qaṣr al-Hayr al-Gharbī, and Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt.<sup>75</sup> This relationship has been variously investigated and explained in symmetrical terms.<sup>76</sup> Monastic installations and Umayyad foundations in al-Shām shared a set of practical, spiritual, aesthetic, and political functions linked to diplomacy and the exploitation of the land. The role of Umayyad complexes in making the dynasty’s presence felt in rural areas, and facilitating surveillance of the tribes on which their authority relied, evokes parallels with the Ghassanid and Lakhmid use of monasteries, which often served as a backdrop for exhibitions of influence and control.<sup>77</sup> This, along with the ideal ecological setting and perfect strategic position of ‘Anjar,<sup>78</sup> could have played a role in the choice of the site for the foundation of a new *madīna* with ritualistic and ceremonial overtones.

### Conclusions

This paper has tried to highlight how the idea of a monophasic ‘Anjar entrenched in literature needs to be reconsidered, and how the site can still provide, if thoroughly examined, valuable glimpses into the Marwānid liturgy of state, court culture, and territorial policy. In fact, the particular configuration of the mosque–dār al-imāra pairing and the vibrant ceremonial character that emerged from its analysis makes of ‘Anjar a quite unique case among the *madīnas* of Bilād al-Shām.<sup>79</sup>

Although fitting the categorization of *madīnas* as defined by Denis Genequand<sup>80</sup> in terms of its size, orthogonal plan, fortified enclosure walls, economic, religious, political, and

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Publishers), 68.

75. But also, Qaṣr Burqu‘; al-Fudayn; Qaṣr al-Ba‘ij; Dayr al-Kahf; and Dayr al-Qinn. See E. K. Fowden, “Christian Monasteries and Umayyad Residences in Late Antique Syria,” *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 21 (2004): 565–81.

76. See in particular Arce, “Romans, Ghassanids and Umayyads.”

77. *Ibid.*, 56–7, 68, 70.

78. At the convergence of the roads leading to Homs, Tiberias, Sidon, Tyre, and Beirut (Chehab, “Identification,” 43).

79. None of the other Umayyad *madīnas*—let alone *qaṣrs*—of Greater Syria have a mosque–dār al-imāra complex matching the one in ‘Anjar, namely a dār al-imāra built along the *qibla* of a sizeable congregational mosque and provided with two doors connected to two doors in the *qiblī* wall of the mosque, normally to the right and to the left of the *miḥrāb*. In most *madīnas* (and normally in *qaṣrs*), the mosques are embedded in substantial palatine cities (as in Qaṣr al-Hayr al-Sharqī, the citadel of ‘Ammān, or Mshatta); in others, such as ‘Aqaba and Ramla, the case of a palace by the *qibla* side of the mosque has yet to be made by archaeology. This is particularly significant in the case of Ramla, which was expressly founded to serve as the capital of Filastīn, and the main residence of the caliph Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik. Recently, Gideon Avni reported the discovery, some eighty meters south-west of the mosque, of the remains of an opulent mansion which he tends to identify with Sulaymān’s dār al-imāra. The presence of a later Islamic cemetery on the *qibla* side of the mosque, and the fact that the *qiblī* wall was rebuilt and partially re-oriented at a later date, however, prevented the scholar from identifying the existence of a “canonical” mosque–dār al-imāra pairing there; see G. Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine: An Archaeological Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 165–7.

80. D. Genequand, *Les établissements des élites omeyyades en Palmyrène et au Proche-Orient* (Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2012), 154–9, 242–8.

residential functions, ʿAnjar is distinguished by the presence of a mosque–*dār al-imāra* complex shaped upon a genuinely imperial model, such as is typically found in *amṣar* such as Kūfa, Baṣra, and Wāsiṭ; imperial capitals such as Damascus (and, later, Baghdad); or cities endowed with exceptional religious and political significance such as Medina<sup>81</sup> and Jerusalem. This suggests that ʿAnjar was conceived as a reduced-scale, ideal model of an imperial capital, perhaps designed to host some important ceremony, or simply to evoke, symbolically, an imperial ritual setting.

This would add a further shade of significance to the phenomenon studied by Patricia Crone,<sup>82</sup> according to which Umayyad *ex-novo* settlements in Bilād al-Shām were functional in gathering personal entourages of *mawālī* and soldiers who could support their lord in war during the violent succession conflicts that bedeviled the Marwānid state.<sup>83</sup> Considered in the context of this functional interpretation, what could have been the meaning of a *madīna* whose symbolical core recreated the typical configuration of religious-administrative complexes of more substantial urban entities? Which kind of ceremonial required such configuration, and why ʿAnjar, of all the *madīnas*?

Regrettably, these and the other issues raised will remain unaddressed, and the hypothesis put forward unproven, until new archaeological evidence is made available. It is hoped that further investigations will be soon carried out at the site and the surrounding area, in the expectation that new light will be shed on the multifaceted function and rich history of ʿAnjar, which remain major enigmas for scholars in the field.

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81. The presence of a mosque–*dār al-imāra* pairing in Medina following the precise configuration described above (n. 79) seems to have existed in the city of the Prophet from at least the Marwānid period (Fig. 15). This is clearly emerging from an ongoing research project on the urban topography of Medina, which I am carrying out and the results of which I intend to publish in a forthcoming monograph.

82. P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

83. A. Northedge, “Early Islamic Urbanism,” in *Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture, First Edition*, ed. F. B. Flood and G. Necipoğlu, 155–76 (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 162.

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