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Краткий анализ отдельных доисламских мотивов в сюжетах дворцовых интерьеров Кусейр Амра и Мшатта эпохи правления Омейядов 661-750 гг.

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Аннотация. Целью статьи является краткий аналитический обзор отдельных сюжетов художественных декораций интерьеров замков Кусейр Амра и Мшатта Иордании в аспекте взаимодействия историко-культурных традиций данного региона. Научная новизна статьи состоит в определении особенностей художественного пространства дворцовых интерьеров (отдельных элементов) в контексте идейно-художественных программ данного региона как места взаимодействия различных культурно-религиозных традиций. Полученные результаты доказывают доминирующее влияние фактора религиозно-культурного синкретизма на начальном этапе развития мусульманского социума региона, что предопределило уникальный характер дворцовой архитектуры омейядского периода, способствуя поиску художественных решений в опоре на самые разные, часто более древние, предшествующие культурные пласты.

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Pre-Islamic Motives in the Interior of Umayyad Palaces Quseir Amra and Mshatta (661-750 A.D.)

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Abstract. The article analyses interior decorative elements in Quseir Amra and Mshatta Palaces in Jordan in the aspect of interaction of regional historical and cultural traditions. The authors reveal the specificity of palace interior space in the context of ideological and artistic programs of a multicultural and multi-confessional region, and herein lies the scientific originality of the study. The findings allow concluding that religious and cultural syncretism played a key role at the early stage of Muslim community development, which determined the uniqueness of Umayyad architecture. Multiculturalism and multi-confessionalism promoted artistic solutions based on a synthesis of recent and ancient artistic traditions.

Introduction

The art and culture of the Arab world is conventionally divided into three main historical periods: Mecca-Medina (pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia of the 6th-7th centuries); Damascus or Syrian (associated with the reign of the Umayyad dynasty in 661-750 A.D.); and the Baghdad (Iranian-Mesopotamian) period of the Abbasid dynasty (750-1055 A.D.), which ended with the conquest of the Arab caliphate by the Seljuk Turks (Саваренская, 1984, с. 182). In the pre-Islamic period, the Arabian Peninsula was inhabited by the numerous Arab tribes, who led both nomadic and semi-sedentary lifestyles in a narrow foreland along the Red Sea (in areas where agriculture was possible). The trading cities of Yathrib (Medina), Mecca, Marib, Sana and others quickly developed along the ancient caravan routes that traditionally connected India with the countries of the Mediterranean. The religious and social movement of the “Hanifs”, people who believed in the one God-Allah (al or el is a common Semitic root of the “God” notion), which arose in the 6th century, marked the beginning of the further monotheism formation among the Arab tribes. Accurate information about the Hanifs has not been preserved (the features of their preaching activity are not entirely clear), but it is known that the god they preached differed from both the Jewish Yahweh and the Christian Trinity. This movement became especially widespread in Hejaz, in the west of Arabia, among the impoverished Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe, to which the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad (570-632 A.D.) belonged. The further spread of Islam in the 30s of the 7th century served as a powerful impetus for the coalition of the disparate Arab clans and tribes into a single socio-religious community (ummah), in which Muhammad’s hometown – Mecca – became the religious centre of the Islamic world, and Medina – the place of the first Arab caliphs’ residence (Васильев, 1988, с. 113).

Current difficulties in studying the secular art of the palace architecture of the Umayyad period lie mainly in the insufficiently complete analysis of secular interiors and new architectural and decorative techniques, since quite a number of researchers pay little attention (or ignore) the traditions of ancient pre-Islamic art (which has an archaic character). Although it is the ideological and artistic programs reflected in the object-spatial world of Jordanian palace interiors that quite convincingly testify to the stability of the development of archaic forms and late antique trends that actively penetrated the cultural field of the early Islamic society (Тарханова, 2016). This unique example of a rather active coexistence of early Islamic architectural objects with different style and stylistic characteristics in the same geographical area allows us to trace the complex process of the formation of a certain general ideological and artistic program of architectural and decorative solutions in the art of the Umayyad period. It, in turn, gives us the opportunity to get an objective idea of the specifics of their formation and development in this region (Альшурман, 2019, с. 11).

Results and Discussion

A thorough study of the surviving secular interiors of palace buildings in Jordan shows us various facets of a complex system of ideological and artistic interfaith interactions, since for thousands of years this region has been a crossroads of various cultural and religious traditions of more ancient and more advanced civilizations. At the same time, it is worth noting the fact that a rather free reading and relatively free interpretation of the dominant cult dogmas was one of the important features of the architecture, arts and crafts of Jordan, especially in relation to the period under study. Such a “free” reading undoubtedly introduced local originality into the process of the early Muslim culture formation in the Umayyad period. However, this originality was largely lost later both here and in a number of other regions as the system of religious control developed in the Muslim community – the “ummah” on the part of the activating Islamic clergy. Moreover, it was the special isolation of Jordan that contributed to the search for artistic solutions based on the most diverse, often more ancient, preceding cultural layers. This combination of isolation and recession from dogmas at the initial stage of the Muslim culture development predetermined the unique character of the architecture of the secular palace complexes (castles) of the Umayyad period. However, despite the individuality of the Islamic architecture of the Umayyad period in Jordan, there were also more general cultural and historical trends that involved the synthesis of various ancient traditions and their further interpretation both in line with new religious and social ideas and in line with new style and stylistic trends of the rich Islamic culture. Thus, for research both in the field of art criticism and in the field of architectural and artistic design, the ideological and artistic patterns of the palace architecture formation in Jordan during the Umayyad period are of apparent interest (Альшурман, 2019, с. 14).

Currently, the ruins of several castles from the era of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 A.D.) have been well preserved in the sultry deserts of Jordan, some of them have gained quite wide world fame. So, for example, the remains of a small hunting castle Quseir Amra locate 65 kilometers east from Amman. Among the complex of buildings made of reddish limestone, one can distinguish, first of all, the so-called “audience hall” with an area of 8.5×7.5 m and an “alcove” flanked by two apse-shaped rooms that are connected to the bath hall. The whole complex of buildings (halls, passages, alcoves and baths), covered with vaulted ceilings, is quite well preserved. As of today, it has been established that the entire palace-castle was built by Caliph Walid in the period from 711 to 715 A.D. As L. D. Petrova rightly notes in her article “The frescoes of the baths of the Quseir Amra Castle”, the creation of an integral panorama of interior murals was most likely predetermined by the customer (Петрова, 2012, с. 53-59). In general, the importance of discovering the frescoes of Quseir Amra lies in the following fact: despite a number of similar buildings that have survived to our time, only this small palace-castle has the most complete and superbly preserved picturesque series of frescoes, the scenes of which can give us the key to understanding tastes and preferences of the Umayyad elite (Петрова, 2012, с. 53-59). The artistic paintings of the vaults and ceilings of Quseir Amra initially formed the integral architectural and pictorial space, which depicts various scenes of court life, as well as everyday sketches from the life of artisans and builders of Jordan of this period (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Scenes of paintings on the vaults and walls of the Quseir Amra castle, 711-715 A.D.

It is also appropriate to assume that the entire cycle of painting the walls and ceilings of the castle was not completed simultaneously, but most likely in two stages – moreover, by two different groups of craftsmen. Most likely, the painting of the main hall was made for the first; it shows a strong influence of the artistic tradition of Persian (Iranian) and Roman-Byzantine painting, and, perhaps, some influence of Coptic (pre-Chalcedonian) Christian art.

At a later point of time, during the second stage of artistic and decorative work, the paintings of the palace baths were made with their clear orientation to the late Hellenistic tradition in its Middle Eastern (Byzantine) version. The basis of the overall compositional structure in the paintings cycle is an ornamental net, as if woven from plant branches, and in its nodes (links) there are zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures (images of animals and dancers) playing various musical instruments. It can be assumed that if the netlike pattern is an element borrowed from other pre-Islamic traditions (as one of the variants of the grape-vine), then the images of people and animals playing musical instruments are a very common motif of Middle Eastern art, known since the ancient (Hellenistic and Christian) times (Альшурман, 2019, с. 22).

In general, in the decorative components of the Jordanian castle interiors of Quseir Amra, there is a fairly wide range of ornamental compositions, which system of artistic images dates back to the Neolithic period, where its initial formation took place under the influence of various tribal magical ideas. It is quite obvious that during the period of domination of first Greek and then Roman conquerors, local pre-Islamic art actively absorbed Greco-Roman (Hellenistic) traditions. In addition to traditional geometric and floral (vegetative) ornaments, images of animals, often fantastic ones, were applied to the decorated surface – for example, creatures with the body of a bird and the head of a woman (Figure 2). These zoomorphic compositions also contained the echoes of local archaic-mystical traditions. Anthropomorphic images of a person in everyday scenes (hunting, holidays, etc.) were also often present in the frescoes scenes of this period. The state-political association of the Arab tribes at the beginning of the 7th century A.D. took place under the dominant influence of the Islamic religion. The final approval of this religion dogma further contributed to the development of strict religious canons in the Jordanian ornamental and decorative art, which have been preserved up to the present day. Islamic dogmas imposed a strict ban on the direct copying of natural objects, on the depiction of animals and humans. Hence, in painting there is a tendency for abstractness, schematic simplification, and stylization. The further movement of the artistic image began to develop in the direction of a symbolic, emblematic (semantic) expression (Абы Pac, 2008).



Figure 2. *Fragments of frescoes of the interiors of the Quseir Amra castle, 711-715 A.D.*

The palace-castle of Mshatta is as much grandiose as the palace-castle of Quseir Amra is miniature. The former is traditionally associated with the monuments of the original sculpture of the Umayyad Caliphate. This sculptural plasticity had an exclusively secular scope and then almost completely disappeared by the end of the Umayyad period. The ruins of the Mshatta Castle were discovered in 1840, about 30 km south of the capital of the kingdom, Amman. Today some fragments of the carved frieze of Mshatta (together with the “Room from Aleppo”) are the most famous exhibits of the State “Pergamon Museum” in Berlin (Пиотровский, 2001, с. 83). The Mshatta palace-castle itself appeared to have been used as the winter residence of the Umayyad princes. The construction of the castle was supposedly begun during the reign of Caliph Al-Walid II, approximately between 743 and 744 A.D. After the treacherous assassination of Caliph Al-Walid II, the construction of the palace was almost immediately stopped. Over time, the unfinished palace-castle of Mshatta was thoroughly destroyed by an earthquake and subsequently almost completely covered with sand. The modern name of the castle “Mshatta” was given by the Bedouin nomads, since the original historical name of the palace-castle, unfortunately, has not been preserved. Numerous halls, rooms and courtyards fill a square perimeter measuring 150×150 m, fenced with stone walls, with amazing internal logic and strict symmetry. In the system of the castle general planning, the features of the influence of the Roman-Byzantine palace architecture traditions, related to the typology of the “military camp”, are visibly traced. The walls of the castle, built of wild stone, are fortified with semicircular towers flanking the central entrance portal, since in those days palaces-castles continued to serve as fortified outposts. Two parallel walls noticeably accentuate the middle “official” part of the palace with an architectural complex consisting of a vestibule in front and an audience hall in the depths of the castle space. The group of rooms is clearly separated by a square courtyard, the corners of which lie on the diagonals of the outer square of the walls. The large reception hall in the official part of the Roman “basilica” type castle ends with a triple domed hemispherical conch. The connection of a three-aisled vaulted space with a domed hall is quite a typical phenomenon both for the Sasanian palaces and for the architectural forms of Late Antique Rome and Christian Byzantium. With its original architectural and artistic morphology, the reception hall of Mshatta shows us an example of the synthetic unity of various cultural and artistic traditions, which have found expression not only in the plan, but also in the artistic and ornamental decoration of the castle interiors (Гордлевский, 1941, с. 82).

The carved decorative frieze, stretching along the pediment of the castle facade (with a total length of 33 m and a height of 5 m) and located between two gate towers, clearly tends towards the Late Antique tradition in its iconographic

and compositional scheme, although it is a vivid example of early Islamic plastic art of the Umayyad era (Гордлевский, 1941, с. 84). Acanthus leaves carved in soft limestone form a compositional structure of triangular frames accentuated by a circle with an elegant rosette located in the geometric centre. The filling of the entire field of the ornamental composition, made in low relief, consists of heraldic figures of griffins, lions and leopards, symmetrically placed by the author on the sides of a symbolic cup against the general background of vines and large bunches of grapes. The general artistic image created by the masters was definitely inspired by the Christian tradition (Гордлевский, 1941, с. 84). As Figure 3 shows, fruits and plants gracefully entwine zoomorphic figures and thus form bizarre tracery carved surface, very decorative in its pictorial principles (Гордлевский, 1941, с. 84). Medallions and mouldings are completely filled with a solid floral ornament. Thus, the carved frieze from Mshatta, with all its closeness to late antique and Christian prototypes, already clearly indicates a different understanding of compositional and artistic tasks and new artistic principles of decoration (Figure 3). In this amazing example of carved decor, the authors, as it were, deliberately threw a kind of a cultural bridge from the Christian canons of the Roman-Byzantine “ecumene” to the new ideals of the medieval “ummah” of the Islamized East.



Figure 3. *Floral and zoomorphic fragments of the carved frieze of Mshatta castle, 743-744 A.D.*

Under the influence of first Greek and then Roman architectural and artistic programs, local art voluntarily or involuntarily enriched itself with Greco-Roman traditions (Альшурман, 2019, с. 22). Moreover, the religious and ideological component of early Islamic art was inevitably directly dependent on the formation of the Muslim community's socio-economic status, especially during the reign of the Umayyad dynasty. In an era when a relatively small and poor community of devout Muslims suddenly turned into a huge empire (caliphate), historical necessity demanded cardinal changes in the development of all areas of religion, ideology and culture from the rulers and clergy of the caliphate. The general prosperity of the natural sciences and the humanities in the era of the Umayyads, whose conceptual regulations were not directly related to Islam, could not but have a very beneficial effect on the development of artistic culture (which was still under the spell of the Late Antique and Roman-Byzantine heritage). In addition to these factors, it is worth noting that it was during the reign of the Umayyad dynasty that the attitude of Muslims to the use of luxury items (gold jewellery, products, silk and brocade fabrics, precious utensils and interior items) changed. The rules of early Islam strictly forbade such “excesses” to the faithful, but for the caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty, members of the palace nobility, this luxury was an absolutely necessary attribute of their new social status, due to the “customs of kings and emperors” of the former states conquered by the Arabs. The court and private life of the Byzantine “Caesars” and Persian “Khosroes”, their military and civilian environment could not but serve as a kind of standard for the social and political elite of the Umayyad Caliphate, which occupied the former territories of Sasanian Iran and Christian Byzantium. Although, the caliph, as the supreme “imam”, remained in modest Bedouin clothes against the “faithful” at the obligatory common “Friday” prayer as before.

This obvious dualism in relation to early Islamic art to the depiction of living beings and natural motifs visibly appears in the iconography and compositional solutions of the carved frieze from Mshatta. Despite the fact that there were no direct prohibitions in the Koran on the depiction of natural phenomena, clearly formulated as a religious law, nevertheless, by the beginning of the 9th century, the idea of the “sinfulness” of living beings depiction was affirmed in the Sunni tradition. A Muslim could not worship idols and create objects of worship, because, according to the Koran, only Allah could be worshiped, and he was not conceived in anthropomorphic forms. Among orthodox theologians, for various reasons, prohibitions on the depiction of any natural and anthropomorphic forms were very popular. These prohibitions were later reflected in the so-called “Hadith” – records about the life, sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, told by his companions and his widows (Бренд, 2008, с. 81). In the Hadith, threats to artists about their fate in the afterlife were already clearly heard because they “imitated” Allah in the “creation” of certain “essences” (artistic images). From now on, only Allah was given the right to creativity among the “faithful”, only he could animate the form (engage in morphology). Such a conception of God categorically ruled out the use in religious art of such themes as God, his life, miracles, suffering, and thus completely deprived artists of the opportunity, even in secular art, to address to the general population of the “Ummah” (Гордлевский, 1941, с. 81). For this reason, scene painting in Muslim society, almost at the first stage of the cultural code formation, began to close in the court sphere, spreading only among the political, administrative, intellectual and financial elite of the caliphate. For the elite, the Hadith gave expansive and convenient interpretations, in the form of “deviations” from strict Muslim rules, even allowing the images of various “trampled” (but not revered) creatures on utilitarian objects. Figurative scenes of people or animals are often found in palaces, intimate chambers, baths, furniture, carpets,

pillows, washbasins or dishes (Гордлевский, 1941, с. 81). After the final formation of Sunni dogma in the 9th century, the tradition of "Sunnah" in Islam began to preach religious truths only in words, completely abandoning the images on the walls of mosques, palaces and on the pages of the Koran. Such religious strictness could not but affect the difference in the ways of further development of Eastern (Islamic) and Western (Christian) secular art.

Over time, only the ornamental decor in Islamic art became dominant, pushing into the background other genres of artistic creativity, where there were emotionally figurative and imaginative elements. Decoration through geometric and floral ornaments continued to be constantly improved and finally took root in almost all genres of applied art. If in the ornamental and decorative art of other peoples the ornament was used mainly as a background for filling voids or as a frame for genre scenes, then for Islamic Arab artists it represented a holistic symbolic composition, a kind of symphony of meanings, texts, colours and forms (Абу Рас, 2008).

Conclusion

Since the Umayyad palaces of Jordan are primarily secular buildings, they inevitably experienced the ideological and artistic influence of older and more developed civilizations that once dominated the region. First of all, these are the great cultures of Ancient Mesopotamia (Sumer, Assyria, Babylon, Elam, etc.), the civilizations of Ancient Egypt, Ancient Persia, as well as the Hellenistic states that were once part of the empire of Alexander the Great (Альшурман, 2019, с. 33). For several centuries, the territory of Jordan was part of the Ancient Roman Empire, and then, after its division, it was part of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) (Бренд, 2008). Invading the world of pre-Islamic temple and palace traditions, early Islam could not but demand the artistic and graphic language of expressing religious formulas and organizing sacred spaces that had developed here. Therefore, the first stage in the development of Islamic architecture in Jordan in the 7th-8th centuries, which occurred during the reign of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 A.D.), focused primarily on the Hellenistic and Roman-Byzantine heritage of the conquered territories, since most of the nomadic Arab tribes did not have a developed architectural tradition. The architectural ensembles of this period today are located mainly within the borders of Jordan and the Levant, where new types of Muslim buildings were erected on the basis of the ancient order language. It is namely due to its unique historical, temporal and geographical location that the studied architecture and factors of the general functional significance of all palaces located outside the city, as waypoints on pilgrimage routes or the movement of trade caravans, have a special artistic and aesthetic originality (Роузентал, 1978).

The architecture of the Umayyad palaces in Jordan at the initial stage of the Islamic artistic culture formation was formed due to a complex intercultural balance of external and internal influx of artistic ideas. In the process of development, it was able to achieve a unique variety of architectural types, which turned out to be concentrated in a relatively small area. Sanctuaries of the Middle Eastern and ancient type coexisted here with Greco-Roman and Byzantine buildings. The variety of architecture of the Umayyad palace buildings in Jordan, comparable with such variability, reached certain heights by the 8th century. The aesthetic canons that developed during this period served as a model followed by all subsequent generations of Islamic artists in the Middle East. The main factor that ensured the long-term impact of these artistic norms on the secular art of Islam was a special aesthetic program, called the "art of a beautiful life" (Наджм ад-Дин Дайа ар-Рази, 2008).

The cross-link of Islamic pictorial traditions and the local features of the architectural ornamentation of Jordan allows us to talk about the origin and formation of a special medieval "Umayyad" architectural and artistic tradition, which, however, later, already during the period of Turkish domination, experienced a serious influence of the so-called "Ottoman style".

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