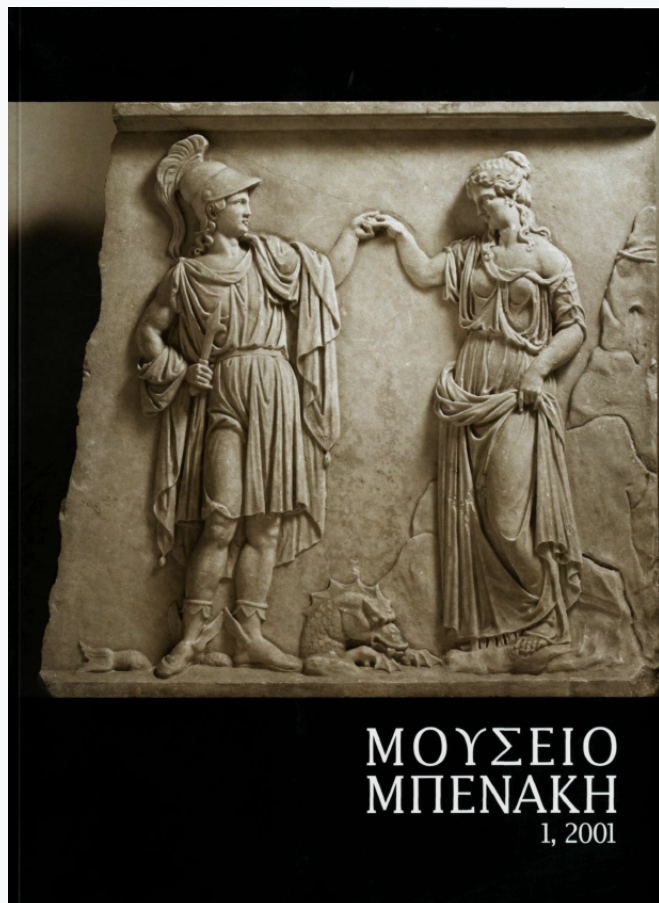


## Μουσείο Μπενάκη

Τόμ. 1 (2001)



### Διακοσμητικά θέματα της εποχής των Ουμαγιάδων σε πρώιμα ξυλόγλυπτα

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## Umayyad ornament on early Islamic woodwork: a pair of doors in the Benaki Museum

THE BENAKI MUSEUM contains a pair of doors (fig. 1), part of the collection of Islamic art acquired by Antonis Benakis himself and one of the most impressive and important pieces on display when the Museum first opened in 1930. It was initially published a year later by Edmond Pauty<sup>1</sup> who states that it was found by M. Ispenian in a tomb in the immediate vicinity of Baghdad together with another fragment of a door in the same collection (fig. 2). These doors had been dismantled and used to make the coffin.

The pair of doors is impressive in size (height 2.55 m., width 1.23 m.). Each leaf is constructed from four planks (their width ranging from 13 to 20 cm. approximately) joined vertically by tenon and mortise. The planks run the whole height of the doors except for two small panels which are placed horizontally at the two extremities. The entire surface is carved in high relief and makes an elegant and impressive effect with the decoration standing out against a dark background. The quality of the carving is high and the dense layout is carefully planned and well balanced. The overall condition is fair except on the upper part where some of the decoration is damaged.<sup>2</sup>

The main decorative theme of the doors is a "tree motif" under a lobed pointed arch resting on imbricate columns. It is repeated four times on two different scales, with two elongated versions on the upper part and two square ones below. The poor state of preservation on the upper section of the doors makes it easier to distinguish the iconography on the lower part.

This "tree-motif" is composed of a tall trunk rising

towards a pointed eleven-lobed arch which is delineated by two rows of pearls. On the top of the imbricate trunk there is a fleuron composed of two half palmettes supporting a three-lobed leaf and springing out of another small leaf on two volutes. On the outer side of the half palmettes are slender leaves with curled tops. Under each lobe of the arch this same fleuron motif alternates with pine cones flanked by two half palmettes and resting on two volutes. The tree depicted could be a thuya, which is coniferous and has imbricate, flexible branches;<sup>3</sup> it represents the Tree of Life, which was frequently depicted in pre-Islamic Persian art.<sup>4</sup> The stems terminating in the pine cones and fleurons spring from near the base of the trunk and cross over it twice, at its lower and upper part. Filling the rest of the space is dense naturalistic foliage with small pine cones and heart-shaped leaves delineated by fine incisions, which starts at the base of the tree trunk and extends organically upwards in a naturalistic manner. In the area outside the arches are vine leaves set in circles made of twisting bifurcated stems, bunches of grapes and three-lobed leaves. The execution of these vine scroll motifs is different from that of the foliage since the circles are arranged roughly in rows, resulting in a distinct and more stylised form of decoration.

Over each arch on the lower part of both leaves there is a row of architectural ornamentation, a continuous series of small arches on double columns decorated with pearls and on top another row, with stepped motifs enclosing of an arrow-shaped openings, placed between two bands of pearl motifs.









Fig. 1. Pair of carved doors, wood, found in the vicinity of Baghdad, middle of the 8th c. (2.55 x 1.23 m.). Athens, Benaki Museum 9121 (photo: M. Skiadaresis).

Fig. 2. Carved door fragment, wood, found in the vicinity of Baghdad, second half of the 8th c. (1.46 x 0.39 m.). Athens, Benaki Museum 9122 (photo: St. Samios).

The central section of each leaf contains a geometrical composition combined with vine scrolls. An imbricate circle encloses two intersecting squares which form an eight-pointed star decorated with a pearl motif. The background is filled with tight three-lobed and five-lobed vine leaves encircled by their stems and surrounded by bunches of grapes with fine incisions to define the details. The design of the vine scroll is the same as that which surrounds the lobed arches over the "tree motif" on the lower and upper panels.

On the top and the bottom of each door are small rectangular panels with an interlace design of three large imbricate medallions linked by two smaller ones enclosing a rosette. These panels are badly worn and the decoration is only clear on one; this appears to show a bird placed among leaves and it is flanked by two other medallions with four five-lobed vine leaves encircled by bifurcated stems, bunches of grapes and three-lobed leaves. Vine scrolls also occupy the space surrounding the medallions. The other three small panels apparently had similar decoration with or without the figure of the bird.

This unique pair of doors displays a variety of decorative features which unite to give a rich and sumptuous impression. The combination of these elements is carefully chosen and they are treated with varying degrees of naturalism, juxtaposed and presented in an well-balanced manner. In this article these different elements will be discussed and analysed in the context of Umayyad art (661-750), while at the same time being compared to works from the early 'Abbāsid period (749-1258).

Certain aspects of the decoration on the doors show a striking resemblance to that at Qaṣr at-Tūba, a large palatial structure in the Wādī Ghadaf in Jordan, attributed to the reign of Caliph Walīd II (743-44).<sup>5</sup> Only a small amount of the decoration survives from this palace, restricted to door posts and lintels. The lintel depicted in fig. 3 is carved in stone and decorated with fleurons compartmentalised into panels. An examination of this and the "tree-motif" on the Benaki doors indicates that in both cases the combination of imbricate bands and pearl motifs is used to create geometrical compositions or frames to enclose other designs. But the main affinity is revealed by a comparison of the two fleurons (figs 4 and 5). Apart from the fact that on



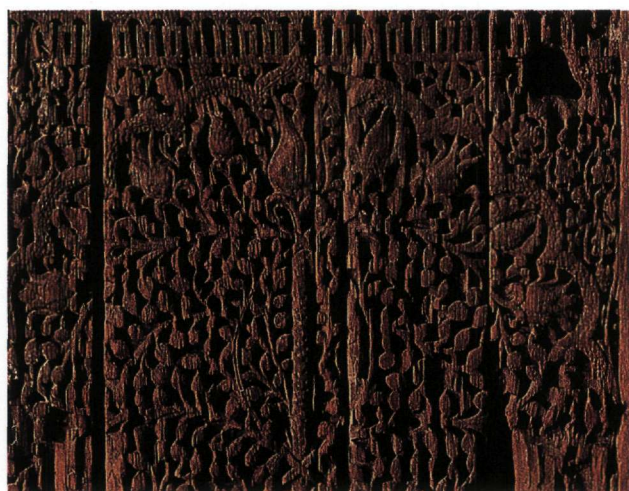


Fig. 3. Lintel from Qaṣr at-Tūba, stone, second quarter of the 8th c. (photo: Oxford, The Creswell Archive-Ashmolean Museum, print number 209).

Fig. 4. Detail of fig. 1.

Fig. 5. Detail from a lintel from Qaṣr at-Tūba, stone, second quarter of the 8th c. (photo: Oxford, The Creswell Archive-Ashmolean Museum, print number 708).

the doors the motif is narrower and less sophisticated in detail,<sup>6</sup> the way the different elements are superimposed to create this complicated floral motif is identical. The fleuron on the lintel has the same design of two half palmettes supporting a lobed leaf and resting on a heart-shaped leaf on two volutes connected to a bifurcated stem. The way the half palmettes curl on top, the bifurcated stems and the leaves on the outer side of the half palmettes all go to strengthen the resemblance. In addition, the combination of alternating fleurons and pine cones is also found in the central medallion of the lintel (fig. 3).

Another contemporary palace associated with the reign of Caliph Walīd II is the palace of Mshattā situated south of ‘Ammān in Jordan. This is another great Umayyad palace whose most famous feature is the decoration on its façade which has been housed in the Islamic Museum of the State Museums in Berlin since 1904, when it was presented as a gift by the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd-al-Hamīd II to Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>7</sup> This lavishly decorated façade is divided into large stone triangles, each carved with a vitality which fills the whole area with ornament, a characteristic of the Umayyad period which would develop into one of the fundamental elements of Islamic art throughout the centuries.

The decoration on these triangles displays great variety in both subject matter and design.<sup>8</sup> The group most directly relevant to this discussion is characterised by non-figurative decoration and by a strong pre-Islamic Persian influence. More specifically, the so-called triangle O (fig. 6) is decorated with a central "tree motif", with the same concept of a tall imbricate trunk carrying a fleuron on top and delineated by two volutes with a pearl motif supporting a small pine cone, two half palmettes and another larger pine cone-shaped motif on top. This design stands independently within the triangle and does not alternate with pine cones, but cones are not absent from this composition as they appear in the lobed medallion above the triangle. Furthermore, within the vine scroll, on the right side of the tree trunk is a fleuron motif, similar to that at Qaṣr at-Tūba, and on the left side a single pine cone. The vine scroll extends and expands in a more or less symmetrical manner on either side of the "tree motif" and although it is compact and sinuous it does not develop in the same organic manner as on the doors.



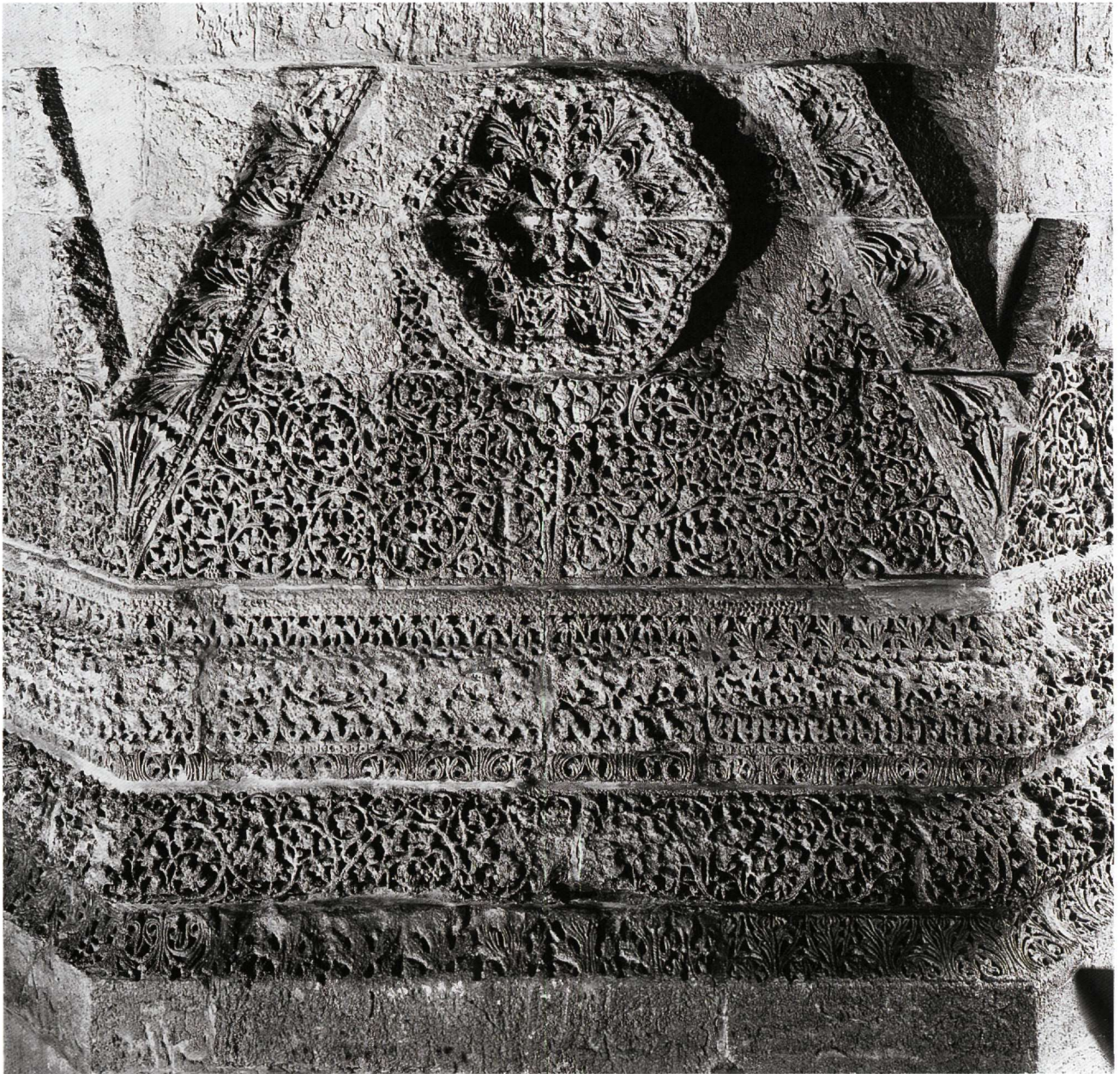


Fig. 6. Triangle O from the facade of the palace of the Mshattā, stucco, second quarter of the 8th c. (photo: Oxford, The Creswell Archive-Ashmolean Museum, print number 2385, detail).

Rows of architectural ornamentation are a recurring theme in Umayyad art, whose decorative repertoire incorporates architectural friezes and arches. This is not a new concept in the pre-Islamic era in the eastern Mediterranean world,<sup>9</sup> but during the Umayyad period it takes on an abstract quality and its role is reduced to a mere framing device or to incorporation as just another

element in the decoration, without any structural role or reference to a particular edifice.<sup>10</sup>

The particular combination of an arch enclosing a "tree motif" and surmounted by stepped ornamentation on arches supported by double columns is found in Qaṣr al-Hayr Gharbī. This is an earlier Umayyad palace, situated south west of Palmyra, which bears a



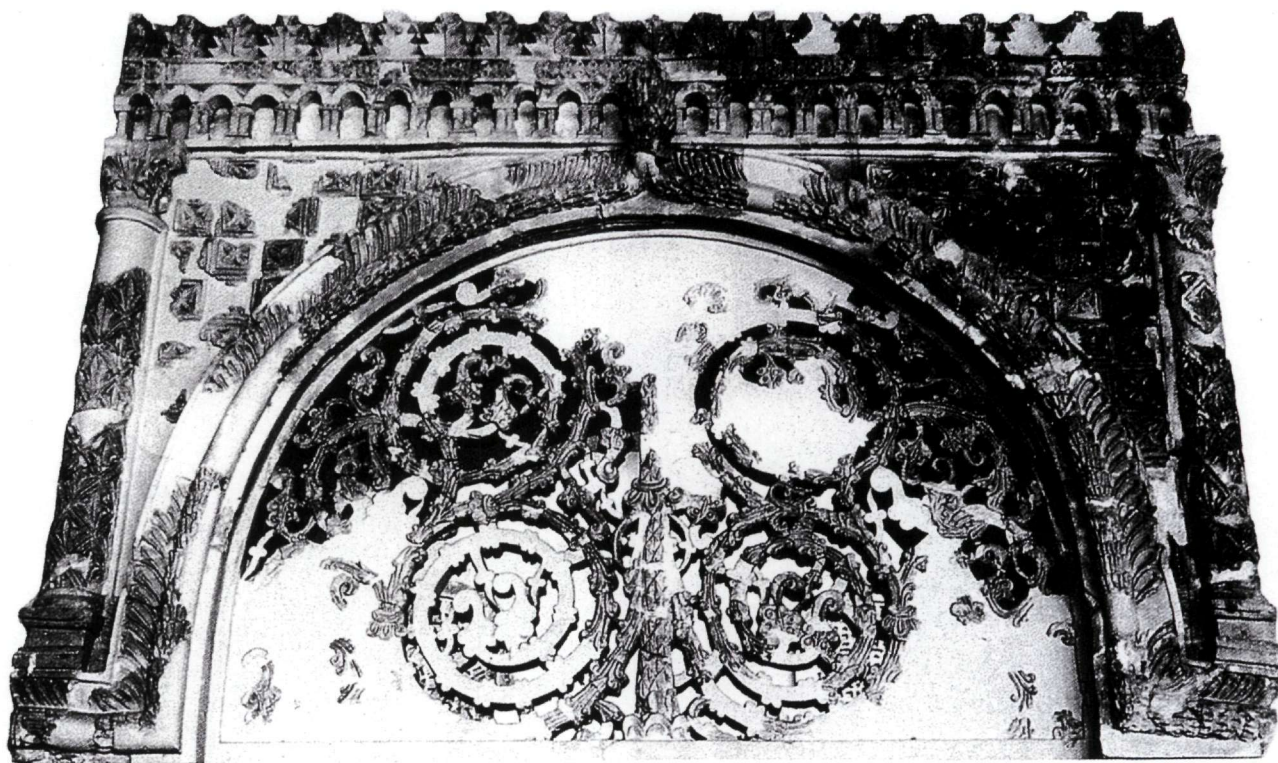


Fig. 7. Window from Qasr al-Hayr Gharbī, room VI, second quarter of the 8th c. (after Schlumberger).

foundation date of 727 (AH106 month of Rajab) during the reign of Caliph Hishām (724-743).<sup>11</sup> The decoration of this palace, especially on the window grilles, contains many examples of this design. Fig. 7 especially shows a composition very similar to that on the lower part of the doors, with a "tree-motif" under an arch flanked by floral scrolls filling the entire area. Above this arch is a frieze of small arches surmounted by a series of stepped ornaments. Fig. 8 also displays a similar arrangement although the treatment of the design and degree of stylisation is very different to that on the doors.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that architectural ornamentation inspired artists and craftsmen is also apparent in early Qur'ān illuminations, for example the collection of parchment Qur'ān pages (c. 725) from the mosque of 'Amr, now kept in the Khedivial Library in Cairo.<sup>13</sup> Each page is decorated with a band to separate the *sūras* (the chapters in the Qur'ān) and does not contain any titles or other inscriptions. The decorative repertoire includes

motifs inspired by architecture and textiles and floral motifs of simple leaves, stylised flowers and elaborate Sasanian influenced palmettes<sup>14</sup> with rows of arches surmounted by stepped ornamentation (fig. 9).<sup>15</sup>

A particular characteristic of the decoration on the doors is the use of two levels of stylisation for the vegetal ornamentation. The foliage under the arches is represented in a naturalistic manner and is reminiscent of a number of other examples such as the mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus,<sup>16</sup> one of the paintings at Qasr al-Hayr Gharbī<sup>17</sup> and especially the floor mosaic at Khibart al-Mafjar.

Khibart al-Mafjar is an unfinished palatial complex north of Jericho dating from the period of Caliph Hishām (724-743) and built by Walīd ibn Yazīd, who became Caliph in 743.<sup>18</sup> It comprises three separate buildings: a palace, a mosque and a bath attached to a hall. It is lavishly decorated with paintings, mosaics, plaster and sculpture. Several of the features discussed above, such as the architectural ornamentation, the "tree-motif"



under an arch as well as the geometrical composition are also found in the decoration of this palace.<sup>19</sup>

The mosaic under discussion is in the audience room and is the only full pictorial mosaic in the palace complex (fig. 14). It is in the form of an apse and is of exquisite technical quality and design, depicting a large fruit-bearing tree, two relaxing gazelles and a lion ferociously attacking a third gazelle. The tree shows gradations of colour on the trunk and the leaves can be compared in terms of style and quality of design to the wall mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus. In making a comparison with the doors, especially the upper part, three points should be stressed, even while taking into account that the nature of mosaic design brings it close to painting, something that is not possible to achieve in woodcarving. Firstly in both cases the branches extend in an organic way, twisting and intertwining naturalistically while retaining order and a subtle form of symmetry; secondly, there is no stylisation in the depiction of the leaves and the fruit; and thirdly the density of the foliage gives a sense of abundance and prosperity in both cases.

The remainder of the vegetal decoration on the doors, especially in the area surrounding the lobed arches and in and around the geometric composition, presents a very different treatment of the vine scrolls. The vine scroll was a popular late antique and early Christian form of ornamentation which underwent a stylistic change once it was incorporated into the repertoire of Islamic art.<sup>20</sup> A fine example of this is the vine scroll which decorates the fragment of a bone plaque in the Benaki Museum. The plaque formed part of a larger plaque intended to adorn furniture (fig. 15). It is carved in high relief and decorated with vine stalks curling symmetrical around leaves, two birds and a hare. It is datable to the Umayyad period of the 8th century,<sup>21</sup> as certain details, such as the undulating vine stem used to create symmetrical circles, the rosette which links the circles and the three little grapes at the centre of the five-lobed leaf indicate a relationship with the facade of the palace of Mshattā. The first of these features is also seen in the ornamentation of the doors, and although the quality of the carving on the bone plaque is superb and much more refined in detail, both examples display similar treatment of the decoration.

The group of wooden panels which decorated the

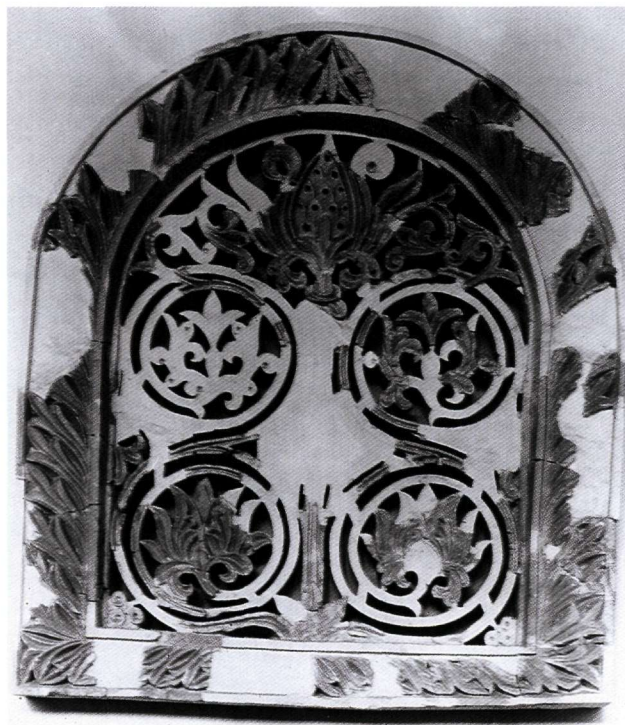


Fig. 8. Window from Qaṣr al-Hayr Gharbī, second quarter of the 8th c. (photo: Oxford, The Creswell Archive-Ashmolean Museum, print number 694).

interior of the al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem, one of the few examples of extant Umayyad woodwork, presents a rich and sumptuous corpus of work dating from the 8th century.<sup>22</sup> Fig. 13 depicts one of the panels with an interlace design of two circles and one rhomboid. Each circle is decorated with pine cones alternating with pomegranates.<sup>23</sup> The interlace composition, which has affinities with the small panels situated on the top and at the base of the doors, was commonly used in the pre-Islamic period in late antique and Persian art and continued into the Islamic period.<sup>24</sup> The geometrical composition of a circle enclosing a star which is found on the central part of the doors is another pre-Islamic decorative motif which continues to be used in Umayyad art.<sup>25</sup> For example, the dedicatory page of a copy of Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* made for Juliana Anicia, c. 512<sup>26</sup> and also a panel from the Coptic period in the Louvre are both decorated with this design.<sup>27</sup>

So far the decoration on the doors has been described



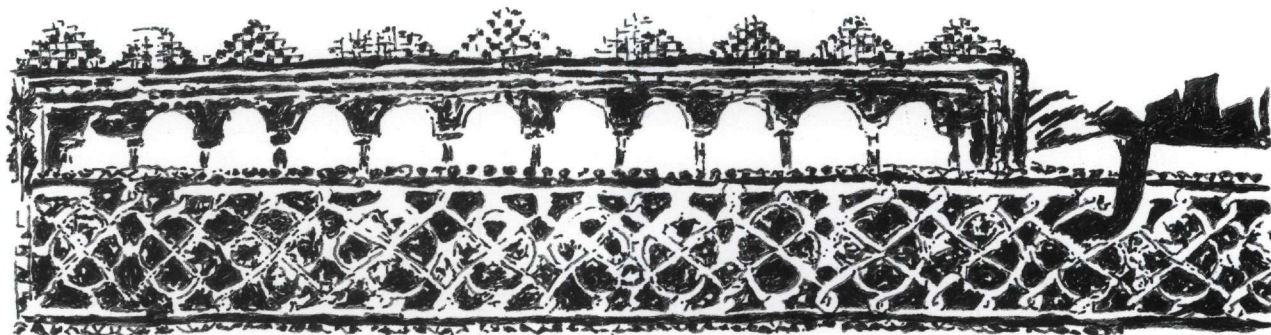


Fig. 9. Sketch of the decorative band from a parchment Qur'ān, 8th c. Cairo, Khedivial Library (no 11, after Moritz; drawing: K. Moraitou).



Fig. 10. Sketch of a panel found at Takrīt, wood, second half of the 8th c. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art MMA 31.41.14 (after Dimand; drawing: K. Moraitou).

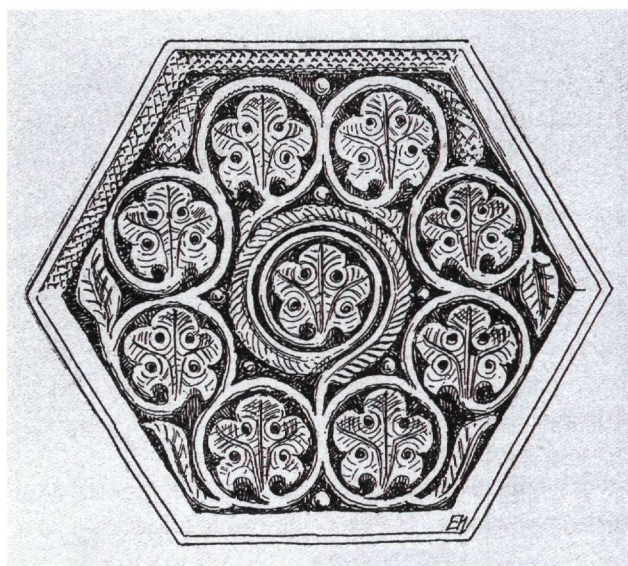


Fig. 11. Sketch of stucco decoration from Sāmarrā', ornament 272 (after Herzfeld).

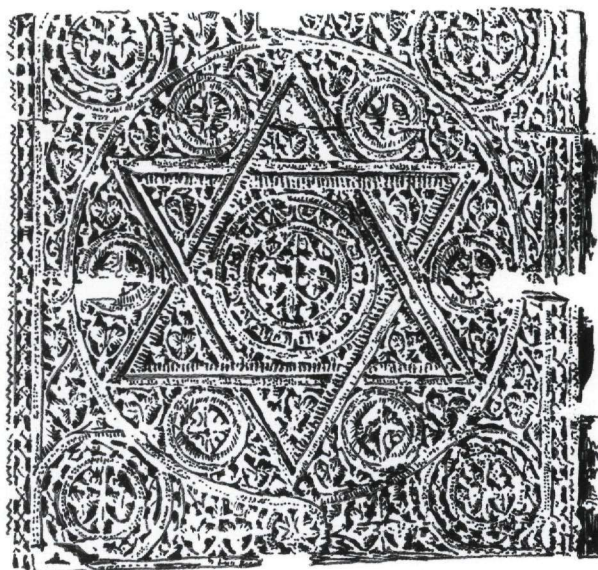


Fig. 12. Sketch of a panel found at Takrīt, wood, second half of the 8th c. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art MMA 31.41.1a-e (after Dimand; drawing: K. Moraitou).





Fig. 13. Panel from the al-Aqṣā mosque, Jerusalem, wood, 8th c. (photo: Oxford, The Creswell Archive-Ashmolean Museum, print number 5036, detail).



Fig. 14. Floor mosaic from Khirbat al-Maṣjar, Jordan, second quarter of the 8th c. (after Ettinghausen).

and analysed in relation to the vocabulary of ornament of the Umayyad period. However, most of these elements continued to be used in the decorative repertoire of the early ʿAbbāsīd period, as Umayyad ornamentation did not end with the dynasty when it was overthrown by the ʿAbbāsīds in 750. Early ʿAbbāsīd ornament continued related motifs for roughly another century until the appearance of a different approach to design in the city of Sāmarrāʾ, the capital of the Caliphate during the period AH 221-279 (AD 836-892), when Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (833-842) left Baghdad and made it his temporary capital and one of the largest cities of his time.

An examination of some of these early ʿAbbāsīd works of art shows this continuity of ornamentation. The door fragment in the Benaki Museum (fig. 2) is composed of three panels, two rectangles and a square set in a frame. These decorative panels are carved with a dense vine scroll composed of vine leaves and bunches of grapes. The vine leaves are five-lobed and three-lobed, their veins are delicately incised and they form a volute on their lower part. Most of them are set in circles created by stems accompanied by a bunch of grapes. Two bands border each panel, one with pearls and the other with a simple palmette scroll. The frame is also decorated with a vine scroll in a similar manner but it is carved in lower relief and the design is more





Fig. 15. Decorative plaque, bone, Syria or Egypt, 8th c. (0.15 x 0.07 m.). Athens, Benaki Museum 10411 (photo: Sp. Panagiotopoulos).

simplified. Surrounding the frame are bands with a pearl motif and repetitive cross motifs. At the juncture between the vertical and horizontal bands there are medallions with rosettes. A similar, but better preserved door was found in Takrīt and is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>28</sup> This ‘Abbāsīd work, from the second half of the 8th century, displays a continuation of the same motifs, with the vine scroll as the main decorative theme on the door, executed with different degrees of stylisation on the panels and on the frame. The latter has many similarities with the execution of the more stylised vine scroll of the Benaki pair of doors.

The treatment of the design on the door fragment (fig. 2) has similarities with two other contemporary panels in the Metropolitan Museum. The first (fig. 12) is decorated with a circle and a star and medallions which fill the

rest of the surface, set on a background filled with a vine scroll. There are some similarities between this and the door fragment in the vine scroll, the rosettes in the medallions and the bands with cross motifs. The second panel from the same museum (fig. 10) is decorated with a complex crescent shaped motif flanked by two lobed arches resting on coupled columns, the whole surmounted by a series of stepped ornaments. The treatment of design and the mode of stylisation are comparable to the panel previously discussed.

These examples of ‘Abbāsīd woodwork have many similarities with the pair of doors in terms of subject matter, such as the use of architectural ornamentation in the form of arches filled with vegetal motifs and placed under a stepped ornament, the star within a circle and the vine leaf encircled by its stems, placed frontally among bunches of grapes. However in spite of the closeness of their design to the doors these panels do not display naturalism but rather a lack of realism which is increasingly evident as design evolves during the ‘Abbāsīd period.

It is during the 9th century that ornamentation, characterised by stylisation and formality, acquires a new spirit which will lead to the decoration at Sāmarrā.<sup>29</sup> Fig. 11 depicts an example of stucco decoration with five-lobed vine leaves encircled by their stems, pine cones and simple leaves, the whole enclosed in an imbricate hexagon. Although this composition has affinities with the decoration of the Benaki pair of doors, the handling of the design is much more stylised and formal.

A fine example of Islamic woodwork is the *minbar*<sup>30</sup> in the Great Mosque of Qairawān in Tunisia. According to literary sources it was brought from Baghdad by the Aghlabid amir Abū Ibrāhīm Aḥmad (856-863), as were the tiles which decorate the adjacent *miḥrāb*.<sup>31</sup> It is the earliest surviving *minbar* and therefore an important example of woodwork from the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd periods, displaying rich openwork decoration and diverse ornamentation<sup>32</sup> consisting of numerous panels with vegetal and geometrical motifs, set in a framework decorated with a vine scroll. This is the familiar composition of vine stalks curling symmetrically around the leaves and creating loops each of which enclose a three lobed leaf and a bunch of grapes, similar to that on the Benaki door fragment (fig. 2).



The decoration on several panels from the *minbar* is similar to that discussed above, for example the "tree motif", the lobed pointed arch and the stepped motif above an arch.<sup>33</sup> Fig. 16 shows one of these panels with a tree motif composed of a tall trunk with two volutes out of which springs a pine cone, two elaborate leaves and a stylised pomegranate. This represents the same principle of design as on the Mshattā triangle O (fig. 6) and the Benaki doors and indicates how Umayyad ornament survived during the ʿAbbāsīd period, retaining vivacity, balance, symmetry, formality and frontality but losing the sense of naturalism and spontaneity.

The origin of the pair of doors raises certain questions. Although they were found in Baghdad, the decoration has affinities with the Umayyad palaces of Syria and Jordan as described above. In the past they have been published as coming from Takrīt,<sup>34</sup> a city situated on the Tigris to the north of Sāmarrā' 100 miles from Baghdad.<sup>35</sup> However the records of the Benaki Museum contain no indication to associate them with this city, even though other works of the ʿAbbāsīd period in the museum are recorded as originating there.<sup>36</sup> As discussed above, the combination of the different motifs was widespread in the decoration of the palaces in Syria and Jordan, but the fact that the motifs survive in an archaic form on the *minbar* of Qairawān may suggest that this feature was also popular in Iraq prior to the changes which would take place during the ʿAbbāsīd period.

To conclude, this pair of doors contains a collection of decorative motifs found in Umayyad art, especially in its later period. The various motifs, inherited and continued from the late antique and Persian traditions, are juxtaposed and blended together in an attempt to create a new vocabulary suited to the newly established Islamic state. Not only different motifs but also different styles of representation are combined together, as can best be seen in the varied treatment of the foliage and the vine motif.

According to Pauty this pair of doors dates from the end of the 8th or the beginning of the 9th century, the period of the fifth ʿAbbāsīd Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd (786-809), an age when Baghdad, the capital of the ʿAbbāsīd dynasty, was overwhelmed by splendour and luxury.<sup>37</sup> However this discussion, with its examination of the decoration in connection with monuments of

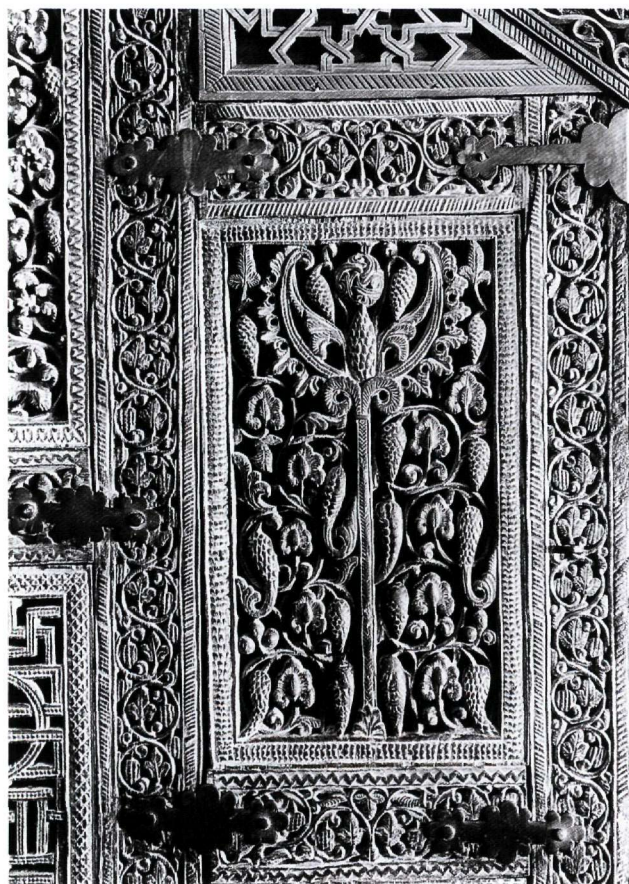


Fig. 16. Panel from the minbar at Qairawān, wood, c. 862 (photo: Oxford, The Creswell Archive-Ashmolean Museum, print number 6819).

the late Umayyad period such as the palaces of Mshattā, Qaṣr at-Tūba and Khibart al-Maṣjar, suggests an attribution to the middle of the 8th century. This places the pair of doors earlier than the door fragment (fig. 2) and the Takrīt panels in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (figs 10, 12), during a period when the Sasanian influence is apparent in the sense of formality but late antique elements still linger on, arranged in an experimental fashion which is indicative of the search for a new identity exclusive to the newly founded dynasty.

To sum up the character of the Umayyad period in the words of by R. Ettinghausen and O. Grabar: "It is the opposition between intensely naturalistic and completely stylised features, the tendency to take over the whole surface of the wall, and the presence of so many



different elements alongside each other that define Umayyad ornament. It does not yet have the sophistication and cleverness which were later to characterise it, but in feeling it has separated itself from the traditions both of the Mediterranean and of Iran, although individual units and motifs and the general conception not

fully related to architecture derive directly from one or the other."

Mina Moraitou  
Curator, Islamic Collection  
Benaki Museum

# NOTES

1. E. Pauty, Sur une porte en bois sculpté provenant de Bagdad, *BIFAO* 30 (1931) 77-81.

2. According to the Benaki Museum records the type of wood is palm although further information as to the specific kind of palm is not available. Palm is a difficult wood to work with and although it is not strong, carpenters occasionally used larger trunks for building work *ET*<sup>2</sup> VII 923 Nakhil (F. Vire).

3. Pauty (n. 1) 78.

4. G. Lechler, The Tree of Life in Indo-European and Islamic Cultures, *Ars Islamica* IV (1937) 369-416.

5. K. A. C. Creswell, *A short account of Early Muslim Architecture* (revised and supplemented by J. W. Allan, Aldershot 1989) 211-12.

6. This could be because wood deteriorates more easily over the course of time than stone.

7. A. Hagedorn, The Development of Islamic Art History in Germany in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, in: S. Vernoit (ed.), *Discovering Islamic Art* (New York 2000) 123.

8. K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford 1969) I part II 619-22.

9. See O. Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Washington 1992) 155-93.

10. For an early example of the use of architectural ornamentation see the decoration of the interior of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem (691-692) Creswell (n. 8) I part I fig. 31b.

11. D. Schlumberger, *Qasr el-Heir el Gharbi* (Paris 1986).

12. These are not the only examples in the palace. There are further instances of arches above a stylised palmette tree and surrounded by scrolls, and of stepped ornamentation on top of arches resting on double columns, Schlumberger (n. 11) pls 73, 80.

13. B. Moritz, *Arabic Palaeography* (Cairo 1905) nos 2, 5, 11.

14. See P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the*

*Sasanian Empire* (New York 1978) 64-65.

15. The idea of architecture as ornament is also seen in objects, e. g. the so-called Marwān II ewer datable to the middle of the 8th century. The ewer contains a series of blind arches which serve as a framing device for the decoration. G. R. D. King, The Architectural Motif as Ornament is Islamic Art: The "Marwan II" Ewer and Three Wooden Panels in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, *Islamic Archaeological Studies* 2 (1982) 24-29.

16. Creswell (n. 8) I part I, figs 55b-c.

17. R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva 1977) 35.

18. For a discussion of the date, see Creswell (n. 5) 200; E. Baer, Khibat al-Majar, in *ET*<sup>2</sup> V 10.

19. The main publication of this palace is R. W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Maffjar, An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford 1959).

20. M. S. Dimand, Studies in Islamic Ornament, I: Some aspects of Omayyad and Early Abbasid Ornament, *Ars Islamica* IV (1937) 294.

21. The date and attribution of this plaque has been a subject of disagreement in the past: E. Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VII-XIII. Jh* (Berlin 1971) 26; Creswell (n. 8) part II 620-22; H. Stern, Quelques oeuvres sculptées en bois, os et ivoire de style omeyyade, *Ars Orientalis* I (1954) 130-31; *El esplendor de los omeyas Cordobeses* (exhibition catalogue, Cordova 2001) 76-77 (M. Moraitou).

22. Published by a number of scholars, most recently by R. Hillenbrand, Umayyad Woodwork in the Aqsā Mosque, in: J. Jones (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis – Jerusalem and Early Islam* (Oxford 1999) 271-310.

23. The pomegranate is a popular pre-Islamic oriental motif, see Dimand (n. 20) 294, 301.

24. See M. H. Rutschowskaya, *Catalogue des bois de l'Égypte copte* (Paris 1986) figs 419, 446, 447; Schlumberger (n. 11) pl. 68b; M. Jenkins, A Vocabulary of Umayyad Ornament, in: *Masāhif Sarfā, Catalogue of an exhibition in Kuwait National Museum* (Kuwait 1985) 21; Creswell (n. 8) I part I, fig. 26a.



25. In Qaṣr al-Hayr Gharbī, for example, this composition is included in the decoration of the gateway of the palace although without the vine scroll, Schlumberger (n. 11) pl. 61c.

26. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (med. gr. 1 fol. 6<sup>v</sup>), see G. Galavaris, *Ελληνική Τέχνη, Ζωγραφική Βυζαντινών Χειρογράφων* (Athens 1995) no 1.

27. Rutschowskaya (n. 24) fig. 464.

28. Dimand (n. 20) 293-337 figs 1-3.

29. E. Herzfeld, *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra* (Berlin 1923); Creswell (n. 8) II 286-88.

30. The *minbar* is the pulpit in a mosque used for sermons and announcements to the Muslim community.

31. Creswell (n. 5) 326. The *mihrab* is the niche which indicates the direction of Mecca (*qibla*).

32. There have been several restorations to the *minbar*

which have altered its composition. For a summary of the history of the *minbar* and further bibliography, see *EI*<sup>2</sup> II 73 Minbar (J. Golmohammadi).

33. For an overall view of the *minbar*, see Creswell (n. 8) II pl. 89a.

34. H. Philon, *Islamic Art* (Athens 1980) 21 fig. 54; *The Arts of Islam* (exhibition catalogue, London 1976) 391 fig. 660.

35. For a discussion on the city of Takrīt *EI*<sup>2</sup> II 140 Takrit (J. H. Kramers [C. E. Bosworth]).

36. Three doors with ‘Abbāsid bevelled ornament, nos 9128, 9129, 9130.

37. Pauty (n. 1) 81.

38. R. Ettinghausen, O. Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650-1250* (London 1987) 71.

## ΜΙΝΑ ΜΩΡΑΪΤΟΥ

Διακοσμητικά θέματα της εποχής των Ουμαγιάδων σε πρώιμα ξυλόγλυπτα

Η δίφυλλη ξυλόγλυπτη θύρα του Μουσείου Μπενάκη (εικ. 1) είναι μέρος της αρχικής συλλογής του Αντώνη Μπενάκη, και αποτέλεσε ένα από τα πιο εντυπωσιακά αντικείμενα όταν το μουσείο ιδρύθηκε το 1930. Η θύρα βρέθηκε με μία άλλη μικρότερη (εικ. 2) μέσα σε ένα τάφο κοντά στην Βαγδάτη, όπως αναφέρει ο Edmond Pauty, ο οποίος τη δημοσίευσε.

Το κύριο θέμα της διακόσμησης επαναλαμβάνεται τέσσερις φορές: είναι το δέντρο της ζωής που πλαισιώνεται από πυκνό φύλλωμα κάτω από λοβωτές ασφίδες. Το “δέντρο” έχει ευλύγιστα κλαδιά με σύνθετα άνθη και κουκουνάρια. Η κεντρική περιοχή κάθε θυρόφυλλου διακοσμείται από ένα αστέρι εγγεγραμμένο σε κύκλο, μέσα σε φόντο από σπειροειδείς κληματίδες, και από σειρές μικρών ασφίδων με τριγωνικά βαθμιδωτά στοιχεία. Τα θυρόφυλλα ορίζουν στο πάνω και στο κάτω μέρος πλακίδια με κυκλικά διάχωρα τα οποία περικλείουν ρόδακες, κληματίδες και πιθανόν ένα πτηνό.

Η διάταξη των διακοσμητικών στοιχείων όπως παρουσιάζονται στη θύρα παραπέμπει σε μνημεία της όψιμης εποχής της δυναστείας των Ουμαγιάδων (661-

750) και ιδιαίτερα στο διάκοσμο των παλατιών Qaṣr at-Tūba (Κασρ ατ-Τούμπα) και Mshattā (Μουσαττά) στην Ιορδανία, τα οποία χρονολογούνται στο β' τέταρτο του 8ου αιώνα. Ιδιαίτερη ομοιότητα παρουσιάζει ο τρόπος με τον οποίο αποδίδονται τα σύνθετα άνθη σε συνδυασμό με τα κουκουνάρια (εικ. 4-6). Η χρήση αρχιτεκτονικών στοιχείων στη διακόσμηση παραπέμπει επίσης στην ίδια εποχή, όπως φαίνεται στο παλάτι Qaṣr al-Hayr Gharbī (Κασρ αλ-Χειρ αρ-Γάρμπι) (εικ. 7-8) στη Συρία καθώς και στις διακοσμητικές ταινίες των πρώιμων Κορανίων του 8ου αιώνα (εικ. 9).

Ένα ιδιαίτερο στοιχείο στη διακόσμηση της θύρας είναι η διαφορετική απεικόνιση της φυτικής διακόσμησης. Το πυκνό φύλλωμα κάτω από τις ασφίδες αποδίδεται με φυσιοκρατικό τρόπο, που θυμίζει τα ψηφιδωτά του τεμένους της Δαμασκού και ψηφιδωτά όπως αυτό στο Khibart al-Mafjar (Χίμπαρτ αλ-Μάφτζαρ) στην Ιορδανία (εικ. 10), ενώ η υπόλοιπη φυτική διακόσμηση παρουσιάζει σχηματοποιημένες κληματίδες με φύλλα και σταφύλια συμμετρικά διατεταγμένα.

Πολλά από τα διακοσμητικά στοιχεία της πόρτας εμφανίζονται και σε ξυλόγλυπτα της Αββασιδικής ε-



ποχής (749-1258), ειδικότερα της πρώιμης περιόδου. Η μικρότερη θύρα (εικ. 2) με τρία ένθετα πλακίδια και σκαλιστή συμμετρική διακόσμηση από έλικες κληματίδας, χρονολογείται στο β' μισό του 8ου αιώνα και είναι χαρακτηριστική της μεταβατικής εποχής από τον ουμαγιαδικό στον αββασιδικό διάκοσμο. Άλλα διακοσμητικά στοιχεία εμφανίζονται σε διάφορα ξυλόγλυπτα του Μητροπολιτικού Μουσείου της Νέας Υόρκης (εικ. 10, 12) καθώς και στον άμβωνα του τεμένους του Qairawān (Καϊραουάν) στην Τυνησία (856-63) (εικ. 16).

Η δίφυλλη θύρα αποτελεί ένα σύνολο διακοσμητι-

κών στοιχείων της εποχής των Ουμαγιαδών και ειδικότερα της ύστερης περιόδου τους (α' μισό 8ου αιώνα). Τα διαφορετικά στοιχεία προέρχονται από τον πολιτισμό των κατακτημένων περιοχών, από την ελληνορωμαϊκή και τη σασανιδική παράδοση. Ο συνδυασμός αυτός καταδεικνύει την αναζήτηση μιας νέας τεχνοτροπίας που οριοθετεί και χαρακτηρίζει την καινούρια ηγεμονία, χωρίς να περιορίζεται μόνο στην επιλογή των διαφορετικών στοιχείων, αλλά υιοθετεί και τον τρόπο που αποδίδονται αυτά, όπως για παράδειγμα η διαφοροποιημένη απόδοση της φυτικής διακόσμησης.