IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: THE AESTHETIC (IN)SIGNIFICANCE OF ARCHITECTURE IN ARABIC GEOGRAPHY, AH 250-400

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During the past fifty years, geographical literature in 'classical' Arabic has been repeatedly investigated and deeply probed from diverse points of view, not least from those of cultural studies and the study of *mentalités*[1]. However, to the best of my knowledge, the examined authors' narrative representation of architecture, or differently put, their appropriation of the built environment, has not been a focus of scholarly attention; only in passing has al-Muqaddasī's family background been cited as having imbued him with architectural sensibility (A. Miquel, "al-Mukaddasī", *EI*[2] VII, 492b-493b). In particular, the question of whether or not geographers of the caliphal and medieval periods shared a culturally mediated common vision of architecture *qua* architecture still awaits discussion. This paper, intended as a brief first introduction to the subject, will concentrate on Arabic authors from the third and fourth centuries A.H. who were, whether as travellers or on the basis of textual information only, concerned with 'human geography' in a broad sense[2]. Their testimony on architecture – pre-Islamic as well as Islamic – will be measured against the following scales: credulity vs. realism; dependence on literary tradition and authorities vs. autopsy; 'poetic' evocation vs. detailed description; committed value judgment vs. disinterested observation. Perhaps not surprisingly, it will emerge that the examined writers' appreciation of architecture was primarily informed by concern for symbolic values, rather than for artistic merit.

As may not be out of place to repeat, the focus of the present study is on representations of architecture in geographical writing of a limited period; other contemporaneous sources on attitudes to architecture, such as ecphrastic poetry, will not be considered. While realizing that the impact of literary conventions was not limited

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[1] See, e.g., the following: S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Djughrāfiyā," *EI*[2] II, 575b-587b (cf. *q.v.* in *EI*[1] *Suppl.* [1936], 62a-75a [J.H. Kramers]); Khalidi 1975; Miquel 1967-88; Shboul 1979; no special reference will here be made to the respective entries in *EI* and *EIr*.

[2] Since the scope of the present paper is restricted to the two mentioned centuries, later sources, such as Yāqūt, will, save for a few exceptions, not be quoted. It is hoped that pertinent sources of the fifth and later centuries will be treated separately in future.

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to poetic genres, but extended to prose as well, I submit that a distinction between poetic evocation and expository prose, especially prose as a vehicle of the physical reality of 'geography', does have a certain heuristic value. Thus it would appear feasible to concentrate (initially) on a selection of texts which in a first approximation can be classed as geographical, without, by ignoring their diversity, identifying them as a coherent genre. Moreover, it will instantly become clear that the literary tradition in (for short) 'geography' was not substantially shaped by poetry's stock images of architecture.

Not to be ignored as a formative influence on collective mentality is the ascetic trend in early Islam as expressed, *à propos* of architecture, in the form of *hadīṯ*: "The most unprofitable thing that eateth up the wealth of a believer is building" (Ibn Saʿd, *Tabaqāt* I_2 181_{7f} / = VIII 120_l), or even more reprovingly: "A man does not incur expenses unless he is reimbursed for them with a surety with God, except for what is spent on building and impiety"[3]. The Koranic censure of the ʿĀd's frivolous building spree was adduced in support (XXVI [*aš-Šuʿarāʾ*] 128f), and the Muslims' decreasing frugality in the construction of mosques was equated with moral decline. An entire *adab* tradition elaborated on the foolishness of vainglorious building when life's transitoriness was the only permanence on earth[4]. It stands to reason that such an attitude easily fed into anti-Umayyad opposition – or at least could later be construed in this way – and did not necessarily disappear with the Abbasid seizure of power. However, the exigencies of sedentary civilization proved stronger; as will be seen below, the cultural and literary traditions of the pre-Islamic past, a – real or perceived – situation of architectural competition with Christianity in Bilād aš-Šām, and simply a certain naïve pride in "one's own" architectural achievements all in time contributed to the emergence of more complex attitudes. Possibly, though, an underlying pious rejection of sumptuous building delayed the 'Islamization', by including Islamic monuments, of the notion of 'wonders of architecture' so prominent in the authors to be examined; conversely, the very same notion highlights, once again, the multifariousness of the warp and weft of Abbasid civilization.

Ibn al-Faqīh, who obviously is one of the essential sources of this study anyway, also highlights, perhaps in a Ǧāḥizian vein, Abbasid *adab* as such[5]. Between the sections on the Rūm and al-ʿIrāq he inserts, by way of digression, two dialectically

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[3] Here quoted from Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 156_{11} (cf. Wensinck, 1936-88: II [1943], 69b, s.v. *ḫalaf* [al-Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, "*kitāb az-zakāt*" 27 / ed. Krehl, I 364).

[4] See Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 156-161.

[5] See H. Massé, *EI*² III, 760b-761b , *s.v.* Ibn al-Fakīh; Anas B. Khalidov, *EIr* VIII, 23b-25b, *s.v.* Ebn al-Faqīh.

opposed sections on 'praise' and 'blame' of building, resp.[6]. Even though the very order of the pleas and the weight of the quoted evidence appear to stack the argument against ambitious building, Ibn al-Faqīh in numerous passages throughout his book evinces such a positive attitude to monuments that he may have intended the debate on the merits and demerits of building as a concession to pious scruples, apart from its expressing pleasure in verbal sparring.

If in the examined sources the mere use of the term *ʿaǧāʾib* in *ʿaǧāʾib al-bunyān* suggests the notional locus of attention to architectural sights, hyperbolic utterances of bedazzlement are almost from the beginning supplemented by attempts at reducing, in soberly descriptive terms, those miraculous phenomena to intelligible reality. In the present paper I will focus on such, in a modern sense, more 'realistic' descriptions and in a further narrowing down of the subject, on the representation of one particular, identifiable set of monuments.

One of the earliest witnesses, if not the very first, to be called upon here is Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih who completed a revised edition of his *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik* in 272/885; however, although he may, along with the title of his geographical handbook, also have pioneered the scope of its contents, he cannot have been the first writer to comment on notable monuments. In fact, Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's presentation of 'wonders of architecture' (*ʿaǧāʾib al-bunyān*) as a topic unmistakably reflects commonplace notions[7], above all, the fundamental notion of *mirabilia*, which has a much wider compass than just buildings[8]. As for Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's more specific literary background, his follower Ibn Rusta expressly attributes the passage here to be discussed to Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Ḫuwārizmī[9], even though it can unfortunately not be traced to one of al-Ḫuwārizmī's extant writings.

Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's section on architectural marvels is a collection of all manner of more or less imaginary information on a variety of – actually existing – pre-Islamic

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[6] Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 151-155 and 156-161, resp.; it bears mention that Ibn al-Faqīh quotes criticism of building from the Abbasid as well as from the Umayyad period.

[7] Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, *Masālik* 159_{1}-161_{11}, and here esp. 161_{12} – 162_{12}; Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih was freely excerpted by later authors, such as Ibn al-Faqīh, Ibn Rusta, etc., which will not normally be noted here; however, cf. *ad locum* Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 176_{4-8}, 134_{1-4}; Ibn Rusta, *Aʿlāq* 80_{2-13}, 83_{6-13}.

[8] Cf., e.g., a set of four 'wonders of the world' on authority of ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀs, Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, *Masālik* 115_{17}-116_{11}, and immediately preceding it, 113_{16} - 115_{16}, the fantastic account of 'Rome' (rather Constantinople as New Rome); also, quite instructively, Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 50_{20}-51_{5}, 255_{8-16}. For general reference see Meisami & Starkey 1998, I 65b-66b, *s.v.* ʿaǧāʾib *literature* [L. Richter-Bernburg].

[9] His renown as a mathematical scientist notwithstanding, it might come as a surprise to find him called upon as a reference in the present context; cf. *EI*[2] IV, 1070a-b, *s.v.* al-Ḫwārazmī, Muḥammad b. Mūsā [J. Vernet].

monuments of Egypt, Syria, Byzantium, Iran[10] and leads up to the much-discussed report by one interpreter Sallām ('Sallām at-Tarǧumān') of his expedition, on al-Wāṯiq's order, to the Dam of Ya'ǧūǧ and Ma'ǧūǧ in the further reaches of northern Eurasia[11]. Following upon the opening, much embroidered-upon, list of 'wonders' and preceding the lengthy (complete?) quotation of Sallām's report, Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, as it were, changes registers with the following quotation, from al-Ḫuwārizmī, of an alternative, and much more down-to-earth, set of splendid monuments, remarkably again in tetradic form:

The Rūm say: "Nothing built with stone is more magnificent than the church of ar-Ruhā; nothing built with wood is more magnificent than the church of Manbiǧ since it has arches of jujube wood; nothing built with marble is more magnificent than the Qusyān of Anṭākya, and nothing built with arches of stone is more magnificent than the church of Ḥims"[12].

In form, that of a finite enumeration, this alleged quotation would seem to echo older traditions such as that of the seven wonders of the world, but given the popular character of such notions and the lack of any *material* continuity with the classical heptad, this remains mere speculation. Actually, the identity of works chosen points to a Levantine Christian origin – more on that instantly – and moreover to a somewhat forced attempt to fit them into a preestablished tetradic mould, considering their inconsistent categorization either by material or by structural features. Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, or rather his source, is quick to challenge the "Rūm's" list with his own, rival, choice of just as manifestly, albeit implicitly, pro-Sasanian slant, emphasizing material over form or function:

I say, nothing built with gypsum and baked brick is more magnificent than the Aywān Kisrā in al-Madā'in – al-Buḥturī says [3 vv.] – and the Ḫawarnaq of Bahrām Ǧūr in al-Kūfa – the poet says [2 vv]; nothing built with stone is more accomplished and more magnificent than the Šāḏurwān of Tustar since it is in rock, iron columns and joints of molten lead; the grotto of Šibdāz, graven in the mountain; and the barrage of Ya'ǧūǧ and Ma'ǧūǧ.

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[10] To wit (and here with minimal comment): the two great pyramids 'in Egypt'; the city of 'Rome' [Constantinople]; the city of Alexandria and its lighthouse; Memphis; the theatre of Apamea; Tadmur [Palmyra]; Baalbek; Lydda; Bāb Ǧayrūn [the East propylaea of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus]; the two 'columns' of 'Ayn Šams [Heliopolis], 'built by Hūšang'; the citadels of Sūsa and of as-Sūs al-Aqṣā [in Southern Morocco, here of uncertain referent], both also 'built by Hūšang'.

[11] Koran XVIII (*al-Kahf*): 94, XXI (*al-Anbiyā'*): 96; on Sallām's 'eye-witness report' see Minorsky, *Ḥudūd* 225.

[12] *Ṭāqāt*, occurring twice in the foregoing sentence, has been translated as 'arches' although conceivably it was intended to refer to arched, or vaulted, ceilings, not merely to 'arches' springing from columns or piers (cf. *ṭāq Kisrā* and *čahār ṭāq* for two apparently different uses of the term); jujube wood renders *'unnāb*.

The wording suggests, though, that no pre-existent fixed set is rehearsed here, but that from a ready stock of remarkable monuments a certain number, of more or less 'wondrous' quality, are cited in casual sequence; not altogether surprisingly, its present form owes something to *adab* and religious education, as witness the verse quotations on the first two sights and the Koranic associations of the last in his enumeration[13]. The group comprises two quasi-proverbial palatial constructions of baked brick and mortar, the great *ēvān* of Ctesiphon[14] and another one in al-Kūfa, which was attributed to Bahrām Ǧūr; the Šādurwān of Tustar, a famed hydraulic construction[15]; the relief-decorated *ēvān* of Ṭāq-e Būstān, for being cut out of live rock[16]; finally, the immensely strong wall which Alexander the Great reputedly had had erected against the hordes of Ya'ǧūǧ and Ma'ǧūǧ[17].

By Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's time, this barrage had receded immeasurably[18] from its

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[13] Provided Ibn Rusta can be relied upon, it was Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih who added the verses to the quotation from al-Ḫuwārizmī.

[14] See *EIr* III, 153a-155b, *s.v.* Ayvān [O. Grabar; cf. *id.*, "Īwān," *EI²* IV, 287a-289a], *ibid.*, 155b-159a, *s.v.* Ayvān-e Kesrā [E.J. Keall; ill.!]; *ibid.* VI 446a-448b, *s.v.* Ctesiphon [J. Krōger].

[15] Cf. al-Muqaddasī, *Taqāsīm* $411_{14\text{-}18}$ ('relocating' it from Tustar to al-Ahwāz, cf. 409!) and *EI²* IX, 512a-b, *s.v.* Shushtar [J.H. Kramers (C.E. Bosworth)], *EIr* III, 679a-680b (esp. 679b-680a), s.v. *Band* [X. de Planhol]. The Arabic authors cited here do not attribute the dam to the Roman emperor Valerian who was at times said to have laboured there as Šāpūr's prisoner after his notorious defeat (cf. at-Tabarī I, 827; refs. in *EI*, *ibid.*, and Le Strange 1905:235f); rather, they credit Šāpūr II (309-379) with it.

The term *šādurwān* denotes the entire reservoir and particularly its stone facing, not the dam alone (*cf. MacKenzie 1971:78, s.v. šādurwān*; al-Ḫuwārizmī, *Mafātīḥ* 70; *Lugatnāma-yi Dihḫudā* LXXII 55c-56c, s.v. *šadurvān*, and *ibid.* 56c-57b, s.v. *Šadurvān-i Šāpūr*). Regrettably, Nasser Rabbat (*s.v.* Shadirwān, *EI²* IX, 175a-176a) completely neglects this earlier usage of *šādurwān* in Arabic in favour of later secondary meanings which all relate to a type of indoor fountain; it typically includes a wall spout, from which water ripples across the carved surface of an inclined marble slab into a channel in the floor and then flows into a larger basin.

[16] Cf. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 214_{14}-216_{20}; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūǧ* I, 314, no. 635, and Abū Dulaf Misʿar b. Muhalhil (as well as Ibn al-Faqīh) *apud* Yāqūt, *Buldān* III, 250_{12}-253_{20} *s.v.* Šibdāz. Here the scholarly discussion of the original date(s) of the reliefs and structures on site cannot be engaged; for a fairly recent survey, which again dates the *ēvān* and its decoration to Ḫosrow II, see Vanden Berghe & Overlaet 1993: esp. 78 (with fig. 63), 87 (with figs. 73-74), 91-94 (with figs. 78, 80), 114f (with figs. 99-101).

[17] See *EIr* VII 13a-19b, *s.v.* Darband [E. Kettenhofen], esp. 15b-16b, and cf. *EI²* IV, 127a, *s.v.* al-Iskandar [W. Montgomery Watt] and *ibid.* 341b-349b, *s.v.* al-Ḳabḳ [C.E. Bosworth], esp. 342a. See also *EI²* XI, 231a-234a, *s.v.* Yādjūdj wa-Mādjūdj [E. van Donzel and C. Ott], and *EI²* IV, 1236a-1237a, *q.v.* [A. J. Wensinck].

[18] See also al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh* $26_{3,7}$, and esp. Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ard²* 14_{20}-15_4, who localizes them concretely 'in the north, when you have crossed what is between Kīmāk and Saqāliba', with additional first-hand reports on transport and (Ḫwārezmian) trade in their difficult mountain terrain by Ibrāhīm b. Albtegīn (see *EIr* I, 272b-273a, *s.v.* Abū Eshāq Ebrāhīm [C.E. Bosworth]); cf. Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ard²* 392_{15f}, $482_{2,7}$, on their trade with Rūs and Ḫwārezm, their lack of facial hair, etc. (cf. further *EI²* IV, 1236a-1237a, *s.v.*

earlier localization in the Caucasus, where it had been identified as the Sasanian fortification – often in turn attributed to Ḫosrow Anūšīrvān – of the Caspian Gates at Darband (and possibly of the Alan Gates too) against incursions from the northern steppe[19].

Considering that the ideal common denominator of the monuments on al-Ḫuwārizmī's list is artisanal accomplishment on the one hand and their patrons' power and wealth on the other, the underlying notion of aesthetic value appears limited – namely to technical command of the given materials – and vague enough to encompass such highly diverse works. Indeed it would appear that often the qualification of the mentioned structures as *ʿaǧāʾib* was suggestive enough for the author to dispense with descriptive detail. It will emerge that factual description, beyond merely declarative utterances developed considerably during the fourth – and subsequent – centuries.

As regards the age of Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's favoured monuments, it is worth noting that however loyally he served the Abbasid dynasty he limited himself to the pre-Islamic period, but then again, not in any politically ambiguous manner. To the extent of his quotation from al-Buḥturī, the palace of Ctesiphon is extolled as a quasi-mythical accomplishment without any reference to its Sasanian builders[20]:

And as though the Aywān were, by wondrous work-
manship, an open hollow in the side of a tall, hard mountain
Proud, surmounted by merlons
which were raised on the tops of Raḍwā and Quds
It is not known whether it is the work of men for *ǧinn*,
who inhabited it, or the work of *ǧinn* for men.

Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih does not elaborate either on sentiments of kindred spirit between pre-Islamic Iranians and self-styled South Arabs as expressed in his anonymous verse quotation *à propos* of Bahrām Ǧūr's palace in al-Kūfa:

Yāḏjūḏj wa-Māḏjūḏj [A.J. Wensinck]). Whichever tribes were identified as Yaʾǧūǧ wa-Maʾǧūǧ and wherever their barrier was localized, it is clear that during the third and fourth centuries these Koranic names were given referents in physical reality; their omission from *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* raises the tempting question of whether increased knowledge about the inhabitants of northern central Asia had made them redundant.

[19] See *EIr*, as in n. 18 above, and cf. *EI*² I, 835b, *s.v.* Bāb al-Abwāb [J.M. Dunlop]; al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh* 64_{7-6}, only knows of an impressive arched bridge across a river there (his comparison of this structure with the bridge of Sanǧa [v. infra] confirms the translation of *qanṭara* as 'bridge').

[20] *Dīwān* II, 1152-62, no. 470, esp. 1159f, vv. 35, 41, 43 (*matlaʿ*: *ṣuntu nafsī ʿammā yudannisu nafsī* * ... *ǧibsī /*); Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 212_{19}-213_{14}, is much less reticent about the Sasanian origin of the Ctesiphon palace; first he anonymously quotes Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih (i.e., al-Ḫuwārizmī) on its glorious construction of burnt brick and mortar ('gypsum'), then the same three verses by al-Buḥturī, and finally 13 vv. of a frank eulogy which he heard directly from its author, Ibn al-Ḥāǧib.

The tribes of Qaḥtān built its glory,
and their loyalty is to Bahrām Ǧūr,
And by his Aywān al-Ḫawarnaq among them they learnt
the way of their kingship, and by as-Sadīr[21].

In geographical authors following upon Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, a quartet of notable buildings as he cited it from the Rūm's usage continues to be mentioned, even if in fluctuating identity. However, none of the Sasanian structures which he was not alone in promoting ever came, notwithstanding their wide renown and quality of *'aǧā'ib*, to be included in that or an alternative list of 'classics', nor was, for that matter, any other Sasanian or even Abbasid monument. 'Ḫusraw's palace' at Ctesiphon was mentioned, in some quarters lauded, as the ancient Persians' supreme architectural achievement[22]. The Šāḏurwān of Tustar attracted only inconsequential, if general, admiration, which is all the more remarkable in view of its eminently practical usefulness[23]. Finally, the rock reliefs of Tāq-e Būstān may have been classed as one of the wonders of the world by some authors and even given rise to discussions of theological import about their authorship, but again, did not achieve 'canonical' status.

Admittedly, the term 'canonical' would seem inappropriate in a discussion of the period here under review, the late third and early fourth Hijra centuries. The examined texts, especially Ibn al-Faqīh, demonstrate that there simply was no canon, whether for reasons of authorial indifference[24] or the given groups' and writers' variant regional and other partisan allegiances, but that there existed diverse sets or simply loose enumerations of monuments. al-Ḫuwārizmī's and Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's 'Rūm' and the two authors' rejoinder exemplify this as do the contexts in which these and other lists of notable monuments are quoted.

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[21] Cf. verses by 'Īsāba al-Ǧarǧarā'ī (*apud* Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 315_{11}-316_4; *apud* al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūǧ* I, 190, no. 397), where a similar analogy of South Arab and Sasanian glory is expressed by pairing the two palaces of al-Aywān and al-Ġumdān and the two 'kingships' of Qaḥtān and Sāsān. Remarkably, this memory of the pre-Islamic relations between South Arabians – either in the Yemen itself or in al-Ḥīra – and Sasanian Iran failed to have an impact on the tradition of architectural wonders in geographical writing. Here is not the place to trace the origin and dissemination of this piece of Mesopotamian Arab lore, nor its propagandistic uses, whether pro-Abbasid, Arab-regionalist (Hišām b. al-Kalbī) or *šu'ūbī* (cf. *EI²* II, 1096a, *s.v.* al-Ġhumdān [O. Löfgren], and IV, 287a-288a, *s.v.* Īwān [O. Grabar]).

[22] Ibn Rusta, *A'lāq* 86_9; al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān* 321_{5ff}; al-Istaḫrī, *Masālik* 86_{7-10}; Ibn Ḥawqal *Arḍ²* 244_{15ff}; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūǧ* I, 118, no. 231; 190, no. 397; 301, nos. 609-610; 306, no. 620; al-Muqaddasī, *Taqāsīm* 122_{9f} (there without any qualifiers listed by name only).

[23] Strangely enough, Ibn al-Faqīh does not include it in his list of marvels.

[24] See above, n. 8, on Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, and Ibn Rusta, *A'lāq* 80-83.

Even if Ibn al-Faqīh himself clearly holds to the notion of a, however loosely defined, standard set of man-made as well as natural 'wonders'[25], he adduces diverse particular lists which reflect regional or tribal allegiances; al-Ḫuwārizmī–Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's Rhomaic quartet figures in the section on al-Ǧazīra (notwithstanding the fact that three of the four structures are in aš-Šām) (*Buldān* 134_{1-4}); in the section on Syria, however, he cites a tetrad, of two natural (Lake Tiberias and the Dead Sea) and two architectural sights ('the stones of Baalbek' and the lighthouse of Alexandria), one of which certainly does not belong (even if Alexandria may, following classical tradition, not have been considered part of Egypt proper). Similarly, Yemenite regional pride expresses itself in a quote from Hišām b. al-Kalbī (34_{12-16}); dismissing the architectural rivalry of Rūm and Fārs, he extols the famed constructions of Yemen, Ġumdān, Ma'rib, Ḥaḍramawt, etc. *À propos* of al-Kūfa, in introducing the famed palace al-Ḫawarnaq, Ibn al-Faqīh is again reminded of noteworthy architecture in general and cites a corresponding list, which is at least partially derived from Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih (176_{4-8}). In the context of Qarmīsīn, and before getting to Šabdīz, he recalls (without attribution) the same writer's praise of Ḫosrow's palace in Ctesiphon (as above) (Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān* 212_{19f}).

Thus it is in the context of the account of Damascus, or more precisely upon introducing its great mosque, that Ibn al-Faqīh first presents, by way of anonymous quotation ('they say'), a tetrad of 'wonders of the world' which subsequently came to overshadow alternative or rival sets – to wit: the bridge of Sanǧa, the lighthouse of Alexandria, the church of ar-Ruhā, and the mosque of Damascus (*Buldān* 106_{3f}). A Levantine outlook is still very much in evidence here although the North Syrian-Mesopotamian ecclesiastical bias of the 'Rhomaic' list has receded; actually, at this point the question of a link between the two sets will have to be left unanswered. In any case, though, and as observed above, neither Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih's Sasanian 'standards' nor his follower Ibn al-Faqīh's plethora of monuments achieved literary recognition on a par with the Levantine-Egyptian quartet as first introduced by the latter. It solidified into a set tradition, passed on by al-Masʿūdī in *Tanbīh* (144_{9}) and again by al-Muqaddasī (*Taqāsīm* 147_{2-7}).

[25] See above, n. 8; on p. $50_{3etc.}$ he praises curiosity and inquisitiveness for having provided otherwise inaccessible information on the existence of such unique wonders in the Maġrib and in Egypt as the lighthouse of Alexandria, the 'column' of ʿAyn Šams, the two pyramids, the bridge of Sanǧa, the church of ar-Ruhā, the walls of Anṭākiya, al-Ablaq al-Fard, the Barhūt and Hārūt and 'the horse which is in the farthest west'; this passage illustrates the heterogeneity of the author's sources and calls for comment which will here be restricted to the monuments of the quartet below.

In al-Muqaddasī it is the regional – upper Mesopotamian – context[26], as it was for the above-mentioned writers, which triggers the mention of a set of wonders, whereas in al-Masʿūdī's *Tanbīh*, which is not geographically, but chronologically organized, it is the dominant and somewhat mythicized figure of Constantine's mother Helena which lead the author on to attribute 'the church of Hims' and 'the church of ar-Ruhā' to her[27]. Moreover, it has to be admitted that at times, the quartet is abridged to a triad or even dyad; al-Muqaddasī or his source cannot have brooked the continued inclusion in the set of the 'church of ar-Ruhā' as a Christian building, claiming that it was replaced by al-Aqsā mosque upon its construction and after its ruin by earthquake, by the mosque of Damascus – this in spite of the same al-Muqaddasī qualifying it as one of the wonders of the world elsewhere[28]. Regional pride, on the other hand, may have reduced the tetrad to a dyad in the quote by Ibn Ḥawqal *à propos* of the bridge of Sanǧa that "the wonders of the world are the church of ar-Ruhā and the bridge of Sanǧa"[29].

As for the churches of Antioch[30], Hims[31], and Manbiǧ as recorded by Ibn Ḥur-

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[26] al-Muqaddasī here confuses the bridge of Sanǧa with another outstanding bridge which spanned the river Ḥābūr al-Hasaniyya (see note *in locum*).

[27] Interestingly enough, in *Murūǧ*, he still (correctly) identifies Justinian, the builder of many churches, as the patron at Edessa (II, 51, no. 753), whereas in *Tanbīh* Helena of Holy Sepulchre fame outshines everybody else (144_{4-7}); since in either place, Helena is credited with founding the church of Emesa, the question remains open of whether al-Masʿūdī's *Edessene* attribution to her is simply an oversight or the reflection of a local tradition and which may also be echoed in Ibn al-Faqīh's report about a miraculously beautiful statue of Helena there (*Buldān* 134_{4-3}); cf. Segal 1970:41, 51, 68; Drijvers 1992: Index, 214b, *s.v.* Edessa; van Esbroeck 1999.

[28] al-Muqaddasī, *Taqāsīm* $141_{17f.}$, in a passage listing the cities of Diyār Mudar.

[29] *Ard*[2] 181_{5-7}; cf. Ibn Ḥawqal's *Vorlage* al-Istaḫrī, *Masālik* $62_{11f.}$, who does not have the quotation of the proverbial saying, and the following authors: al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh* 144_{9}; al-Muqaddasī, *Taqāsīm* $147_{2m.}$.

[30] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūǧ* II, 339, no. 1292, praises the church of St. Mary, a circular structure, as one of the wonders of the world for its construction and elevation and specifically mentions its marble columns, but omits its ancient name; in particular it is uncertain, or rather, implausible that it was identical with the afore-mentioned "Qusyān" (unless a tradition originally adhering to a separate location had been transferred to a different, similarly holy place after the loss of its original locale, e.g., to destruction of the building in question). Under the form *Qusyān*, ultimately derived from the Roman name *Cassianus*, the Syriac-Arabic tradition referred to an Antiochene citizen of that name whose son had, according to legend, been resuscitated by St. Peter and in whose residence St. Peter had built the first church of the city (cf. Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* II, col. 3678, s.v. *qsyn'*).

At an unknown date in the decade of 440/1048 Ibn Buṭlān visited Antioch and described the city to his friend Hilāl b. al-Muḥassin aṣ-Ṣābī, including the church of Qusyān in the city center; in Ibn Buṭlān's telling, Qusyān had been a king whose house was turned into a sanctuary (*haykal*) of 100 by 80 paces. In it was a hypostyle church; the porticoes which surrounded it accommodated judges sitting in court as well as study groups in grammar and vocabulary. At one of its gates was a water clock which indicated, without interruption, the twelve diurnal and twelve nocturnal hours, resp.; it is this clepsydra (*finǧān li-s-sāʿāt*)

radādbih, their subsequent destiny in the sources underlines the fact of the fluidity of sets of architectural monuments; the former two structures continued to be mentioned as 'wonders' although no longer included in the tetrad, whereas 'the church of Manbiǧ' either was passed in silence or may have been subsumed under unnamed 'impressive' monuments of the Rūm in that city[32]. As regards all these Christian buildings, the question of textual tradition vs. authorial autopsy is particulary apposite; even al-Masʿūdī, who appears to write about Antioch from experience – as does Ibn Ḥawqal about Manbiǧ –, draws on extant texts for his summary reference to Edessa[33]. Yet as seen above, it was the 'church of ar-Ruhā' which alone survived as part of the modified quartet of architectural wonders – possibly more in tribute to its enraptured ecphrasis in the Syriac tradition than to actual experiences of its beauty[34]. Towards the last quarter of the fourth/tenth century, though, al-Muqaddasī may again have visited the place, provided his concrete reference to mosaic-encrusted arches permits of such a conclusion[35].

Aggiornamento of al-Ḫuwārizmī-Ibn Ḫurradādbih's Rhomaic quartet had a structure of practical utility included, as Ibn Ḫurradādbih had done in his 'Sasanian set', and in addition a prominent Muslim building. Yet, the persisting regional focus on the south-eastern Mediterranean, excluding even the holy cities of the Ḥiǧāz, not to mention the heartland of the Abbasid caliphate or formerly Sasanian provinces further East, highlights the *literary* superiority of a commonplace to information not thus established but instead based on first-hand experience either by widely travelled informants or the authors themselves.

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which Ibn Buṭlān qualifies as a wonder of the world (Yāqūt, *Buldān* I, $267_{16etc.}$).

Unless al-Masʿūdī's church of St. Mary had fallen into ruin by the time of Ibn Buṭlān's visit – provided al-Masʿūdī can claim credence here at all – it would appear difficult to explain Ibn Buṭlān's silence on such a prominent structure; the question will have to remain open for now (cf. Downey 1961: 481, 531 on the church of Cassianus [based on John Malalas], and Index, 742a, on the Justinianic church of St. Mary, which would seem to be intended by al-Masʿūdī's comments here; cf. Whitby 2000:283f, n. 76).

[31] al-Istaḫrī, *Masālik* 61_{7ff}; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ard*^{2} 176_{15f}; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūǧ* II, 41, no. 735; id., *Tanbih* 144_{4ff} (noting its 'four pillars').

[32] al-Istaḫrī, *Masālik* 62_{1ff}, barely mentions Manbiǧ by name, whereas Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ard*^{2} $180_{21etc.}$, writing from autopsy, appears largely uninterested in its non-Islamic monuments. It would seem tempting to infer from the prominence given to Manbiǧ in Ibn Ḫurradādbih's 'Rhomaic quartet' its provenance, i.e., to attribute it to an author with local ties. Sources on its ecclesiastical buildings are scant and extremely vague (see *RAC*, *s.v.* Hierapolis [H.J.W. Drijvers]).

[33] al-Istaḫrī's wording suggests textual dependence, while Ibn Ḥawqal's addition of another qualifier, 'of wonderful craftsmanship', to his *Vorlage*'s 'impressive' may simply derive from one-upmanship.

[34] Segal 1970:189, and *RAC* IV, *s.v.* Edessa, esp. cols. 578-80 (refs.!) [Kirsten].

[35] Leaving open the question of whether *āzāǧ* means 'arches' as here translated or 'vaulting'.

Before, however, passing on to descriptions, or representations, of architecture outside the received quartet, a few remarks on the four component structures would not seem out of place. As noted above with respect to Ibn Ḥurradāḏbih's version of al-Ḫuwārizmī's list, they were prized, rather than for their aesthetic quality in imparting form to solid and spatial volumes, for the tangible, material beauty of superior craftsmanship and for the power and wealth of their patrons.

The bridge of Sanǧa (Gk. Σίγγας), spanning a western tributary of the upper Euphrates (between Sumaysāṭ and Qalʿat ar-Rūm) and thus called for the river as well as for a nearby town[36], must have become known during the Muslim-Byzantine frontier wars of the third and fourth/ninth and tenth centuries[37]. Its single arch of dressed stone, of a span of (c.) 31 m, acquired, as seen above, proverbial fame in the Arabic tradition. The position of the 'church of ar-Ruhā' on the set, commented on before, became ever more tenuous and 'nominal', although its fame had originally also derived from a recorded technical feature, namely its lapidary work. As noted above, with the exception of al-Muqaddasī neither al-Masʿūdī nor any other author after Ibn Ḥurradāḏbih provide descriptive details; the conclusion is hard to resist that their information had long since become divorced from a physical referent[38].

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[36] In Greek, the hydronym Σίγγας was derived from the toponym Σίγγα (Tischler 1977:136, *q.v.*).

[37] *EI*² I, 761b [1957], s.v. '*awāṣim* [M. Canard]; ibid. IX, 11b, *s.v.* Sanǧa [C. E. Bosworth]; Yāqūt's witness (by no means the earliest, cf., besides Ibn al-Faqīh, al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh* 64_{7-6}, al-Istaḫrī, *Masālik* 62_{11}, and Ibn Ḥawqal, *Arḍ*² 181_{5}) apparently dates from the border warfare between Byzantines and Ḥamdānids during the fourth/tenth century since it relates to the mention of Sanǧa and Dulūk *à propos* of a campaign (in 342/953) by Sayf ad-Dawla in a verse (no. 19) by al-Mutanabbī (*maṭlaʿ*: *layālīya ḥaʿda z-zā-ʿinīna šukūlū* * ... *ṭawīlū* /). The modern name of the river, Gök Su, plausibly is reflected by *an-nahr al-azraq* in Abū l-Fidā' (here quoted after Reinaud's trl., 1848, I, xvi). The identification of this from among several Euphratian tributaries in the area with the classical Singas is based on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (XI, 3; cf. Wagner 1984: B S 1,2) and the localization of the famed single-arch bridge in Yāqūt's source al-Adībī between Kaysūm and Ḥiṣn Manṣūr (here, the question presents itself of the precise textual relationship between the Arabic tradition of the bridge of Sanǧa and the attribution of a magnificent single-arch (*μονοκέρατον*) bridge to the Byzantine frontier hero Digenes Akrites in his epic (see Grégoire 1931: esp. 504f; Trapp 1971:66f, 326, vv. E 1660, 1649; 390a); for a modern map including the Roman road system see Wagner 2000:12, fig. 14, and for illustrations of the bridge see Wagner 1985:31, fig. 50, and 54ff, also Dörner & Naumann 1939:74f, pls. 7, 21-22 (cf. Honigmann, *RE* III A,1 [1927], 231-234, *s.vv.* Σίγγα and Σίγγας, resp.; Sinclair 1990:172ff, 176f). Le Strange 1905:123f [n.!] wrongly identified the Severan bridge over the Chabinas (Cendere/Bölam Suyu) as 'the bridge of Sanǧa' (cf. Grégoire, as above); on this bridge see Kissel & Stoll 2000: esp. 116f, 124f (refs.), 118 (fig. 13); Sinclair 1990:58f, 61, pl. 28.

[38] The contested position of ar-Ruhā between a newly expansionist (or 'revisionist') Byzantine empire and the increasingly fragmented caliphate during the fourth/tenth century has to be kept in mind here too (*EI*² VIII, 589a-591a, s.v. al-Ruhā [E. Honigmann (C.E. Bosworth)].

The third pre-Islamic monument on the quadruple set is the lighthouse of Alexandria, incidently the only one of the classical wonders of the world to be included[39]; not even the pyramids of Gizah, for all their overpowering presence on the ground and in collective memory, were given the same recognition. Both sites attracted, as befitted their status as 'wonders' (*'aǧā'ib*), all manner of legendary reports on their origin and purpose[40]. On the other hand, the progression of authors from Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih to al-Muqaddasī shows a substantial, although by no means linear, increase in factual information on the Alexandrian Pharos (*manāra*) as well; remarkably, though, most of it was still not based on autopsy.

According to legends first represented in the Arabic geographical tradition by Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, the foundation of the lighthouse rested on a glass crab under water[41] – variants name a crab of marble or four glass crabs[42] – and the top had carried a magical mirror which permitted of a view clear across the sea to Constantinople and thus provided security against any seaborne attack[43].

While the imaginary mirror may, so to speak, dimly reflect the actual lighting devices originally installed atop the Pharos, the assertion of its foundations resting on one or several glass crabs appears quite fantastic at first sight. However, it may have been a contamination, imaginary indeed, of vague and possibly misunderstood evocations of the structure's deep-reaching foundations (down to below sea level), its figurative comparison to a 'column', and the factual observation that some of Alexandria's obelisks rested on copper 'crabs'[44]. Yāqūt, following his predecessor Ibn Haw-

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[39] For recent accounts of the pharos see Grimm 1998:43-46, figs. 43-44, 163, n. 36 [refs.], Pfrommer 1999:11-13, figs. 1_{8-11}; cf. Bernand 1997 [including an implicit critique of Empereur & Grimals 1997]; Ekschmitt 1991:188-97, figs. 52-55 and pls. 46-49, and p. 275 (refs.); Daumas & Mathieu 1987. Still to be consulted: Thiersch 1909.

[40] See here and for the following Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih, *Masālik* 159f (on the pyramids), $114_{13\text{ff}c.}$, $115_{19\text{f}}$, $160_{19\text{f}}$ (on the lighthouse) and Ibn Rusta, *A'laq* 80_{6-9}, who quotes Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih selectively on the lighthouse only (cf. *ibid.*, 118_{7-11}).

[41] 'Crab' here made to represent *saraṭān*; for a detailed discussion of these 'crabs' on the basis of archeological as well as late classical and medieval Latin textual evidence (beginning with Gregory of Tours) see Thiersch 1909, esp. 35, 54 [ill's.!], 65/68 and 247.

[42] In addition to Ibn Ḫurradāḏbih and Ibn Rusta, as in note 41, see al-Masʿūdī, *Murūǧ* II, 104-8, nos. 836-41; in contrast, neither does al-Yaʿqūbī mention a crab (*al-Buldān* $338_{16\text{ff}}$), nor do al-Masʿūdī in *Tanbīh* 47_{6}-48, Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ard* $^{2}151_{10-21}$, and al-Muqaddasī, *Taqāsīm* 211_{7-17}.

[43] Other stories, which need not concern us here, narrate various ruses employed by the evil Rūm against the defensive appliances of the lighthouse; see al-Masʿūdī, *Murūǧ* II, 105f, no. 838; al-Muqaddasī (as in preceding note), Yāqūt, *Buldān* I, $261_{13\text{ff}c.}$

[44] Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ard*^{2} $151_{8\text{f}}$ (cf. Wiet's trl., 1965:150f); implausibly, Thiersch attempted a rebuttal of Butler's (1902:376-78) similar hypothesis on the origin of the account of the Pharos's 'crabs', siding with

qal in criticizing the tall stories in circulation about Alexandria and the lighthouse, mentions a – *post factum* – rationalization of the glass foundation: supposedly glass had been the only material to have passed a year-long test of resistance to the corrosive effect of saltwater (*Buldān* I, 261_5-264_{10}).

A feature which attracted attention and fired the imagination was the interior ramp which could be ascended on horseback, even two abreast; to Ibn Ḥurradādbih's two informants, this recalled the 'minaret of Sāmarrā'. Plausibly the same feature led to the assertion of the existence of 366 (Ibn Ḥurradādbih) or 300 rooms (al-Muqaddasī) in it. Ibn Rusta, while deriving the 'crab' from Ibn Ḥurradādbih, also offers possibly realistic details. Even in relating the suspiciously round figure of 300 to the number of 'steps', each with a window to look out over the sea, he may have hinted at a spirally ascending row of windows, unlike the horizontally arranged windows of the lighthouse of La Coruña[45] or those, admittedly a formulaic abbreviation, on the vase of Begram (Bernand 1966:pl. XXX). Ibn Rusta in turn undermines the credibility of his own account by repeating the figure of 300 cubits for the height of the building, royal cubits at that, which he adds, equals 450 handy cubits[46]. Ibn Ḥawqal, while assessing the original elevation at more than 300 – unspecified – cubits, mentions the collapse of a large canopy (*qubba ʿaẓīma*) from its top, thus somewhat relativizing the quoted figure. al-Yaʿqūbī had earlier, and as the first author to do so, proffered the figure of 175 – unspecified – cubits; in either of the two most probable cases, the 'handy' or the 'royal' cubit, the figure is not inherently impossible (*Buldān* 338_{16}).

al-Masʿūdī's two works, separated by roughly a dozen years (332/944 – 344/956), mark an interesting transition from a collection of legends to a largely realistic account. In *Murūǧ*, he follows the tradition which had Alexander erect the pharos as an enormous watchtower of an original elevation of 1000 cubits; it bore three likenesses of copper, one turning with the sun to indicate its position, the second sounding alarm against naval invaders, and the third striking the hours[47]. He also retails that in order to incapacitate the alarm system of the pharos, the Byzantine emperor had garnered al-Walīd's permission to have the structure demolished in search of a gold

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the tradition instead and relating it to actual structural features of the lighthouse (see above, n. 42).

[45] Ekschmitt 1991:pl. 48; here and *infra* see Thiersch 1902: esp. 52-56, 65-67, for a more 'optimistic' analysis of the sources' diverse figures and measurements.

[46] The proportion here indicated does not agree with what W. Hinz derived from his sources, viz. 3:4 instead of Ibn Rusta's 2:3; Hinz bases the royal cubit, of around 66.5cm, on the handy cubit which he identifies as the legal cubit of 49.8cm, while recognizing, at the same time, the fundamental importance of the 'black cubit' of 54.4cm as determined by the Nilometer (*EI²* II, 231b-232b, s.v. *dhirāʿ*).

[47] Cf. Thiersch 1902: esp. 55, and 70, no. 12.

treasure supposedly hidden in its foundations; it was only the Alexandrians' protest which stopped the destruction at half the original height.

In *Tanbīh*, al-Masʿūdī omits much of the fantastic material from his earlier book while still rehearsing the story of the magical mirror and fixing the original elevation at the symbolic figure of 400 cubits; even his measure of 230 cubits for the extant portion may not be above suspicion, considering that al-Yaʿqūbī, whose account is otherwise filled with legendary detail, has the more modest figure of 175 cubits[48]. Other than that, al-Masʿūdī's account in *Tanbīh* provides substantive realistic detail, beginning with the attribution of the pharos' construction to one of the Ptolemies. His observation on the structural divisions of the pharos is of concrete value; the bottom, square, section, of white stone, is said to amount to between one third and one half of the entire elevation, around 110 cubits, whereas the following, octagonal, section is described as consisting of baked brick and gypsum and measuring about sixty cubits up; the open terrace surrounding it attracts al-Masʿūdī's, or his source's, attention[49]. The third, cylindrical, section was crowned by a domed canopy of wood which al-Masʿūdī reports, Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn had, together with the upper part of this section, erected in repair of previous damage. Ascent to the lighthouse was by way of an internal stairless ramp; in all likelihood it could be mounted on horseback, as witness the above-mentioned Roman lighthouse of La Coruña and the minaret of the Almohad mosque of Seville, the so-called Giralda, whose internal ascent is also by an inclined ramp[50].

al-Masʿūdī further records, on the East front of the structure, a Greek inscription, inlaid with lead and the letters of which measured – height by width – one cubit by one span. At ground level, the structure measured roughly 100 cubits along one side; earthquake damage at the western corner had been repaired on the order of Ḫumārawayh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn. Writing in al-Fusṭāṭ, al-Masʿūdī concludes his account of the pharos with the report of an earthquake on Saturday, 18 Ramaḍān 344 / 5 January 956, which caused the collapse of thirty cubits from the top.

al-Masʿūdī's description of the Alexandrian lighthouse in *Tanbīh* deserves close examination for a variety of reasons. As indicated above, it represents a marked increase in realism and factual detail as compared with his earlier evocation of this wondrous structure. His wording, though, does not irrefutably imply autopsy on his part.

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[48] On the other hand, considering that ʿAbdallaṭīf al-Bagdādī quotes a figure of 233 cubits (*Ifāda* fol. 33r-l /pp. 133, 135), the question may bear further examination, especially allowing for the possibility of a difference of unit between 175 *royal* and 230 *handy* cubits and the collapse of the top as recorded in *Tanbīh*.

[49] (*wa-*)*ḥawālīhi faḍāʾun yaḍuru fīhi l-insān* (p. 48$_1$): it is surrounded by open space on which one can walk around (the tower?).

[50] See Thiersch 1902: esp. 54b and 259c (ind.), *s.v.* Sevilla, Giralda.

Apart from the conventional qualification of the structure as a wonder, or as one of the four known wonders of the world, he does not overtly express admiration or fascination; his positive attitude can only be inferred from the circumstantiality of his description[51].

Concerning the Umayyad mosque of Damascus[52], a modern reader's expectation of particular interest in it *qua* Muslim architecture among geographical authors might be disappointed at first sight, given the wide variation in coverage. However, such expectations would miss an essential point, touched on above, namely the symbolic complexity of Muslim architecture, religious and secular, in the eyes of a Muslim beholder; his perceptions of it were limited by various constraints, not least among them his religio-political attitude towards the original patrons. The Umayyad mosque of Damascus is an obvious case in point; its status as one of the recognized wonders of the world did not automatically earn it detailed descriptions, as witness, once again, al-Masʿūdī. In *Murūǧ* (II 406f, no. 1417, and III 365f, nos. 2115-16), he mostly reproduces some legendary traditions about the site's pre-Islamic history, including the discovery of a Greek foundation inscription of, fittingly, Solomonic origin[53], although he does credit al-Walīd with skilful work[54] and records that his inscription in gold on lapis lazuli was still extant at the time of writing in 332/943; he also mentions the four corner towers (*sawāmiʿ*) of the Roman temenos as being left unchanged by al-Walīd and continuing to serve as the mosque's minarets to his own day. In spite of his overall appreciation of the building, it does not seem to have fired his imagination in the same way as some other monuments did[55].

In Ibn al-Faqīh's treatment of the Damascus mosque, the tradition of pious scruples against sumptuous building, combined with a certain anti-Umayyad trend, is reflected along with his fascination with its quality as a 'wonder' (*Buldān* 106_5-108_{23}); according to a saying he quotes, one of its marvels is that for an entire year, a visitor would every day discover something new to admire. After paying tribute also to its patron al-Walīd as a great builder and enlarger of mosques – not neglecting the massive sums involved – he extensively quotes Kaʿb al-Aḥbār on the, more or less legendary, history of the building. In a similar vein, he next dwells on an anecdote which features Abbasid society's favourite 'anti-Umayyad' Umayyad, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd-

[51] For a collection, with translation, of Arabic evocations and descriptions of the pharos see Asín Palacios 1933.

[52] For a recent monographic treatment of the much-discussed monument see Flood 2000.

[53] On Solomon in Islamic lore see *EI²* IX, 822b-824b, *s.v.* Sulaymān b. Dāwūd [J. Walker (P. Fenton)].

[54] *aḥkama bināʾahu* (II 406_{11} - 407_1).

[55] To be discussed in a continuation of the present study.

al'azīz. Predictably he is represented as opposed to the mosque's lavish decoration of marble and mosaic and appointments, such as candelabra chains, and set on stripping them and selling them off to the treasury's profit. What finally sways him, is not so much the Damascenes' opposition as the awe of Muslim power it strikes in the hearts of visiting Byzantine envoys. Regardless of the historical authenticity of this report in the strict sense, it does reflect an apparently widespread perception of architecture as an effective means of propaganda, temporal and spiritual; al-Muqaddasī will be seen to share this view.

It is only in the concluding few lines of his long account of the mosque that Ibn al-Faqīh returns to artistic features; he summarily mentions marble and mosaic, teakwood roofing, lapis lazuli and gold, and the incrustation of the *miḥrāb* with gemstones and other precious lapidary work. Thus it is surface values which attract his attention, not the disposition of solids and voids, volumes and spaces, i.e., architecture as such.

Other writers, such as al-Ya'qūbī and Ibn Ḥawqal, give the Damascus mosque notes of approval, both lauding its unsurpassed beauty in Muslim architecture (al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān* 326_{2-4}; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ard*^{2} 174_{18}-175_{11}). However, the former does not add any concrete description, and the latter attributes its walls and dome to pre-Islamic pagans whose temple it had been. It would appear possible to read this – partially erroneous – observation as a compliment of sorts as it implies a favourable comparison of the dome with the outer, Roman, walls. What Ibn Ḥawqal credits al-Walīd with and what catches his fancy is the visual attraction of its rich and colourful decoration; in particular he names the variegated marble of its wall revetment, the particoloured marble of its columns, its marble pavement, the gilt and jewel-incrusted *miḥrāb* and the gilt inscription running around the four sides of the prayer hall. Clearly, and by now, not surprisingly, Ibn Ḥawqal's attention is primarily drawn to the surface properties of the edifice rather than to its spatial qualities. al-Muqaddasī's description of the Umayyad mosque, which will be examined instantly, also emphasizes decorative features, thus giving rise to the question of the existence of an a-tectonic perception of architecture at the time.

At this point, however, it may not be useless to trace the interplay of religious and aesthetic considerations as it affected representations of sacred architecture as such in geographical literature. Ibn Rusta's account of the *ḥaramayn* in the Ḥiǧāz by its very detail attests his veneration of them, although on the one hand, he heavily relies on al-Azraqī, whose text he must have considered more authoritative than what he himself could have produced, and on the other, the tone of his description is notably sober (29_{16}-53_{13} and 64_{14}-78_{6}, resp.). Emphasis derives from content, from the sacredness of the locations and from Ibn Rusta's as the eyewitness and final redactor's meticulous recording of detail; he duly notes the successive stages of a given building's construction, its layout, measurements, elevation, structural components, and materi-

als. Especially the latter, which, of course, decisively affect the visual and tactile impression of architecture, capture his imagination; teakwood, multicoloured marble, gilding, the Ka'ba's windows of translucent Yemenī marble, etc., are all duly mentioned in their proper place, i.e., in the context of the spatial and solid elements they constitute and decorate, respectively. Nor does Ibn Rusta neglect the inscriptions which evidently impart particular meaning to the structures thus distinguished. In sum, he takes his reader on a virtual tour of the two sanctuaries, as it were, into a verbal motion picture.

A comparison of Ibn Rusta's reverent and detail-conscious account of the Hiğāzī *ḥaramayn* – even if he substantially lifted it from al-Azraqī and possibly Ibn Zabāla – with the summary and superficial remarks he has to spare for other prominent sights such as Baghdad or his own home town, Isfahan, demonstrates that the primary focus of his interest was not architecture as such, but its symbolic, preferably religious significance. His presentation of Isfahan (pp. 160-163), albeit informed by a native inhabitant's pride, is short on concrete architectural data and includes, of individual structures, merely the city walls and a semi-mythical stronghold of antediluvial age by the name of as-Sārūq; he does not even deem the Friday mosque worthy of mention. What elicits his interest are the glories and wonders – *'aǧā'ib* – of Isfahan's past and of architecture, measurements and figures, such as the extent of the city's walled area, the length of its walls and the zodiacal alignment of its gates. Evidently, such data reflected a city's importance and defensive strength, not least from the point of view of astrology. As for Baghdad, Ibn Rusta, while giving the city as such short shrift, acknowledges the existence of a Friday mosque[56]. His comments focus on materials – burnt brick and gypsum, with teakwood columns and roofing – and on a costly feature of decoration, lapis lazuli paint, rather than on specifically architectural features, such as layout and dimensions, which are passed in silence. Ibn Rusta's point of view appears basically to agree with the, so-to-speak two-dimensional, perception of architecture commented on above.

al-Muqaddasī's account of the Umayyad mosque of Damascus challenges the conclusions intimated above; even though he predictably evinces enthusiasm for decorative detail, he by no means neglects structural features (157_8-159_{10}). He readily admires the mosque's sumptuous beauty, which in his view surpasses all other Muslim architecture, but records that as a young man, he had reservations about al-Walīd's enormous expenditure on this ostentatious building; in his opinion, he should rather have spent those revenues on utilitarian constructions such as roads, water reservoirs and fortifications. It was his paternal uncle who enlightened him on the propaganda effect of magnificent religious architecture, pointing out the potentially seductive effect on

[56] *A'lāq* 108_7-109_4, the last three lines referring to the Friday mosque.

Muslims of such Christian monuments as the Holy Sepulchre and the churches of Ludd and ar-Ruhā (*sic*, actually in al-Ǧazīra!)[57].

al-Muqaddasī's outline of the ground plan and elevation of the mosque indicates its overall disposition, but without measurements or anything approaching the rich detail and methodical progression in Ibn Rusta's account of the *Haramayn*; an ashlared enclosure wall with four gateways in specified locations surrounds a porticoed courtyard and a prayer hall in three wide aisles. The prayerhall is surmounted by a dome in front of the *miḥrāb* and supported by colonnades; colonnades, which are surmounted by 'windows', support the porticoes of the courtyard and of the two major gateways; a recent minaret adjoins the north gate. In spite of the attention al-Muqaddasī pays to the two major gateways, noting, e.g., the arrangement of their colonnades in, respectively, longitudinal and transversal axes, he is much more taken with valuable and polychrome materials and correspondingly lavish decoration, such as smooth black columns in the prayer hall, white marble columns in the courtyard, marble pavement, marble revetment, gold mosaic, gilt capitals, cornelian and turquoise incrustations of the major *miḥrāb*, the precious metal sheathing of door leaves and the lead sheets on the roofs. However, he waxes positively enthusiastic about the intricacy and well-nigh inexhaustible variety of patterns produced by an artful display of veined marble in the wall revetment. Clearly, such play of geometry fascinates him even more than the depiction of diverse species of trees and, in his words, 'metropolitan cities', in the mosaics of coloured glass, including gold, although their subtleness and fine craftsmanship do elicit his praise. On the other hand, his utilitarian sense, as noted above in his criticism of al-Walīd, also expresses itself in the approving comments he makes on the ample water supply and the marble appointments of the mosque lavatories.

As alluded to above, al-Muqaddasī's descent from a family of master builders has been identified as the initial impulse for him to develop the remarkable architectural sensibility evinced in his work. However, textual evidence would seem to caution against sweeping generalizations. His interest in architecture *qua* architecture, as giving shape and proportion to spaces and volumes, definitely cedes it to a focus on craftsmanship and technique, such as lapidary work or the heating systems of baths; on materials, from mudbrick to marble; and on the visual and tactile qualities of surfaces (e.g., 162_{11}-163_{13}, $165_{4\text{-}11}$, 356_{9ff}, $440_{3\text{-}13,\ 13\text{-}18}$, 444_{11f}). Measurements are treated in

[57] In his brief mention of Ludd (*Taqāsīm* 176_{19f}, at the appropriate place in the section on Palestine), he simply qualifies the church as 'wondrous', but *à propos* of the Friday mosque at ar-Ramla, he specifically refers to the columns of the church of Ludd as desirable for the new mosque ($165_{7\text{-}11}$; for al-Muqaddasī's comments on ar-Ruhā see above). In the present context, the historical correctness of the interpretation here attributed by al-Muqaddasī to his uncles is not at issue, in particular his view of the competition between the Holy Sepulchre and the Dome of the Rock.

a cavalier fashion, as witness those of the Jerusalem mosque esplanade, later known as *ḥaram*. Moreover, the number of outstanding structures he deems worthy of closer examination is quite limited. The lighthouse of Alexandria is fixed in its literarily mediated status as a 'wonder' and thus exempt from inspection; the ruins of Persepolis, albeit by their very name, 'Solomon's playing field' ($444_{6\text{-}11}$), also classed as a 'wonder', are more concretely anchored in experience. The author positively, if summarily, takes note of their stairways, sculptures and halls and compares them to the ruins of Syria; of more import, though, are a miraculous spring, which is said to cure the aftereffects of wine, and the panoramic view from the palace terrace, of nothing within eyeshot but farms and fields.

The emergence of a quartet of architectural wonders of the world in fourth/tenth century Arabic geographical writing illustrates the mutual integration of the pre-Islamic and Islamic civilizations of the Levant in the cultural self-image of a certain class of *literati* and their audiences; the wide variation in function, period, style of the privileged structures – whether comprising the tetrad or elsewhere mentioned – documents a correspondingly broad and vague perception of aesthetic values in architecture. As far as the texts here examined evince a descriptive interest in ambitious building at all – lingering pious reservations as well as hazy wonderment have to be accounted for – it tends to be directed to feats of engineering, value of materials, and the properties of decorated surfaces. al-Muqaddasī's accounts of the Umayyad mosque of Damascus as well as of the Friday mosque at Jerusalem (i.e., the *Haram*) (168_{5}-171_{7}) do provide more detail than, e.g., al-Masʿūdī does; it would appear that they occupy an intermediate position between his predecessors on the one hand[58] and on the other, later authors, beginning with Nāṣer-e Ḫosrow and, e.g., his description of the Jerusalem 'mosque', the *Haram* (*Safarnāmeh* 25_{16}-40_{17}). Writers of the sixth/twelfth century and as diverse as al-Balawī[59], Ibn Ǧubayr[60] and ʿAbdallaṭīf al-Baġdādī[61] betray a substantially different interest in and heightened sense of, architectural monuments than the earlier authors here introduced. It is hoped to discuss the last-named writers in a future continuation of the present study, along with some fourth/tenth century representations, omitted here, of buildings outside the quartet of wonders.

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[58] With the notable exception of Ibn Rusta's near-filmic survey of the *Haramayn* (see above).

[59] *Alif-bā* II, 537f: description of Pharos (cf. Asín Palacios 1933).

[60] *Riḥla*, see esp. 261_{9}-271_{15}, on Damascus mosque.

[61] *Iʿāda*, esp. fols. 26*l*-40*r*/pp. 107-59, on monuments in Egypt.

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