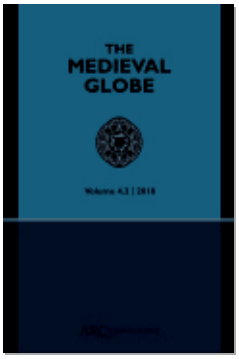
Fit for an Umayyad Prince: An Eighth-Century Map or the Earliest Mimetic Painting of the Moon?



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FIT FOR AN UMAYYAD PRINCE: AN EIGHTH-CENTURY MAP OR THE EARLIEST MIMETIC PAINTING OF THE MOON?

KAREN PINTO

THE UNESCO WORLD Heritage site of Qusayr ʻAmra is one of the most famous places for early Islamic art (Figure 2.1). This lavishly illustrated bathhouse, dated firmly to the period of 723–743,[1] contains a treasure trove of mural images that have been described as capturing "a men's locker-room view of the world."[2] With the possible exception of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, another Umayyad construction, more has been written on Qusayr ʻAmra than on any other early Islamic art historical site. But unlike its flashy rival in Jerusalem, Qusayr ʻAmra emerges out of the sands of the Syro-Arabian desert (Badiyat ash-Sham) like a hidden set of burnished pearls.[3] Tucked away in the depression of Jordan's Wadi Butum, the valley of the Terebinth Pistachio trees that extends to the oasis of Azraq, it lies about 100 km east of Amman in an area known for its Umayyad desert castles (Plate 2.1).[4]

I am grateful to my former students Kassem Jouni, John Najarian, Charbel Abou Haidar, Olivia Yongwan Price, Julian Weiss, and Gregory Williams for their input and assistance with my research on this project; and to my daughter, Safiye, for her enthusiastic support during our visits to the site. The author also owes thanks to Richard Bulliet of Columbia University and Kathleen Baker of Western Michigan University for their assistance with interpretations of the Qusayr ʻAmra map fresco. Versions of this paper were presented at the annual Symposium of the International Society for the History of the Map, June 21–23, 2018, at the Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine and the 52nd Middle East Studies Association conference in San Antonio, November 15–18, 2018. The author thanks Matthew Edney, and James Akerman Victoria Morse, Tom Conley, Jeremy Brown, Tarek Abu Hussein, Patricia Blessing, Marina Tolmacheva, Ali Yaycioğlu, and the other scholars in the audience for their feedback and suggestions.

1 Following a thorough cleaning and decipherment of a key inscription on the site, it has been confirmed that the bathhouse was commissioned by the Umayyad prince al-Walid ibn Yazid, prior to his becoming the eleventh Umayyad Caliph al-Walid II (r. 743–744). See below.

2 Grabar, "Umayyad Palaces Reconsidered," 96–97.

3 Some refer to it as a mirage: Zayadine, "Umayyad Frescoes," 21.

4 One of the ironies of Qusayr ʻAmra is that local Jordanians have rarely heard of it; whereas tourists and scholars flock to it in droves.

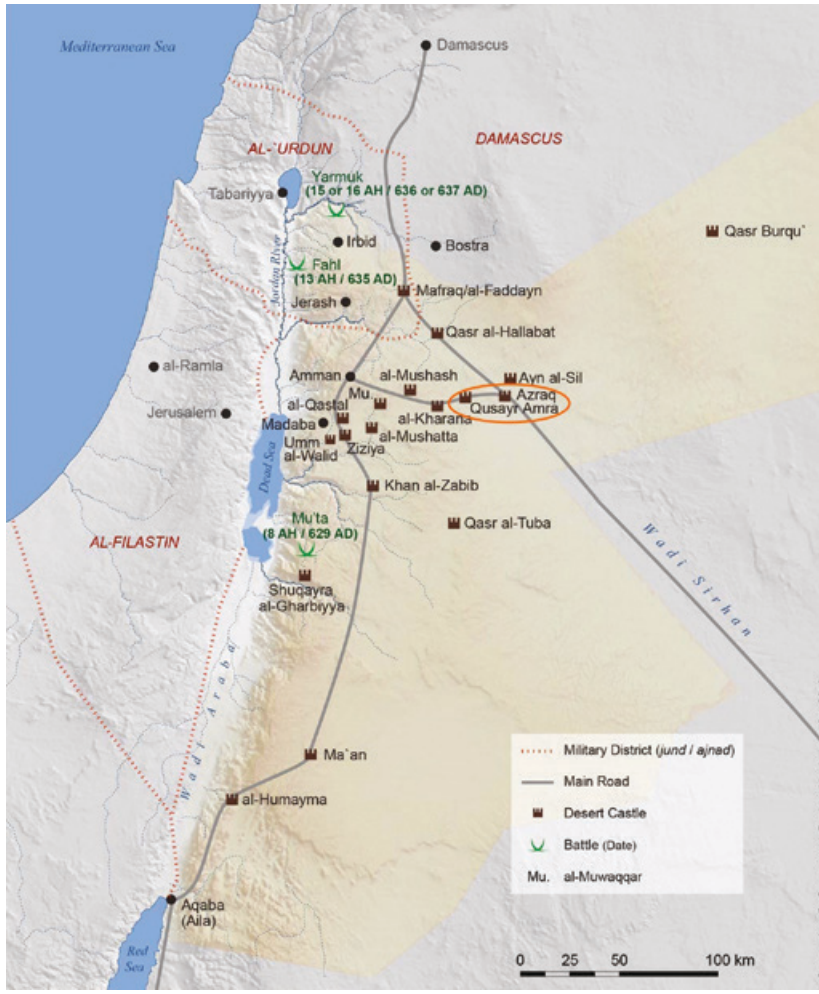

Plate 2.1. Map showing the location of Qusayr ʿAmra amid the other desert castles of Jordan's Wadi Butum. (Prepared by M. Ababsa and D. Genequand; reproduced by permission.)

Figure 2.1. Qusayr ʻAmra, Jordan. (Author's photograph.)

Since Alois Musil first discovered the site in 1898,[5] virtually every inch of Qusayr ʻAmra has been carefully analyzed.[6] Scholars have competed to determine who commissioned the building and for what purpose. Some have asked whether the orgies depicted on the walls are a confirmation of the debauchery ascribed to al-Walid b. Yazid (706–744), the Umayyad prince and eventual caliph Walid II (r. 125/743–126/744) who commissioned and actively patronized this his favourite bathhouse, where he escaped the world and fantasized about becoming caliph for twenty-odd years. Other scholars have explored the site for Umayyad patronage and the variety of influences on early Islamic art: Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine,

5 The Viennese Orientalist and his adopted Bedouin tribe were being chased by another tribe when they accidentally stumbled upon Qusayr ʻAmra. Interested readers can access Musil's adventures and findings in *Ḳuṣejr ʻAmra, Arabia petraea*, *Ara deserta,* and *In the Arabian Desert*. See also Fowden, *Qusayr ʻAmra*, 1–30.

6 Claude Vibert-Guigue has been conducting extensive on-site work. See, in particular, Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Les peintures de Qusayr ʻAmra*; and Vibert-Guigue, "Le project franco-jordanian," and "Qusayr ʻAmra."

Sassanid, Armenian, Coptic, generally Mediterranean or specifically "Nilotic."[7] The murals have been examined in great detail, particularly those featuring male and female nudes, portraits of princes and kings, and an astronomical fresco.[8] With its repertoire of scenes with musical instruments, dancing girls, animals, and craftsmen, the paintings of Qusayr ʿAmra also afford glimpses of daily life at the Umayyad court.[9] Some scholars have marvelled at the use of Greek names below the depiction of the muses of *Historia*, *Sképsis*, and *Poiésis* (History, Philosophy, and Poetry).[10] There is even a detailed study on the modern graffiti that mars some of the murals.[11]

To date, no one has adequately explained the significance of the mottled circular object, which a cherub is handing to a figure reclining on the spandrel above and to the right of the site's entrance (Plate 2.2).[12] Thus far, scholars have argued that it depicts a crown or a wreath. But in this article, I will demonstrate that this circular disk should be read as a map, either of the earth or of the moon. If I am correct, this would make it either the earliest known terrestrial depiction produced in an Islamic context or the earliest known mimetic representation of the moon.[13]

To prove this thesis, I first survey contemporary representations of crowns and garlands in order to prove that this globular image is *not* a depiction of such an object. Next, I briefly discuss known ancient and late antique mapping conventions in the region of the Qusayr ʿAmra frescoes. Then, using satellite imagery and georeferencing, the body of this article focuses on examining the

7 In addition to works cited above, see Sauvaget, "Chateaux umayyades de Syrie"; Strika, "Alcune question su Qusayr ʿAmrah"; Grabar, "Notes sur les cérémonies umayyades," and "La place du Qusayr Amrah"; Hillenbrand, "*La dolce vita* in Early Islamic Syria"; Bacharach, "Marwanid Umayyad Building Activities"; Rosen-Ayalon, "Return to Qusayr' Amra."

8 Grabar, "Paintings of the Six Kings"; Blázquez, "La pintura helenística."

9 Winkler-Horacek, "Dionysos in Qusayr ʿAmra"; Lohuizen-Mulder, "Frescoes."

10 Grabar, "Note sur une inscription grecque."

11 Betts, "Grafitti from Qusayr ʿAmra."

12 The earliest published photograph of this map dates from 1981: see Blázquez, "Las pintura helenistica." Unfortunately, the earliest photographic record of the site does not contain a photograph of this image: Jaussen and Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie*, vol. 3; nor does Creswell's 1932 edition of *Early Muslim Architecture*. Musil's information on the frescoes is unreliable. During his first trip to the site, he did not have the time to take many pictures (see note 5); on his second trip, he took the artist Alphons Leopold Meilich with him, who created artistic recreations of the frescoes for Musil's *Ḳuṣejr ʿAmra*, vol. 2; however, these were made months later in Meilich's studio, and not on site. See Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 259; Fowden, *Qusayr ʿAmra*, 10–14.

13 Hitherto, the earliest known "territorial" maps created in an Islamic context date to the early eleventh century: see Pinto, *Medieval Islamic Maps.*

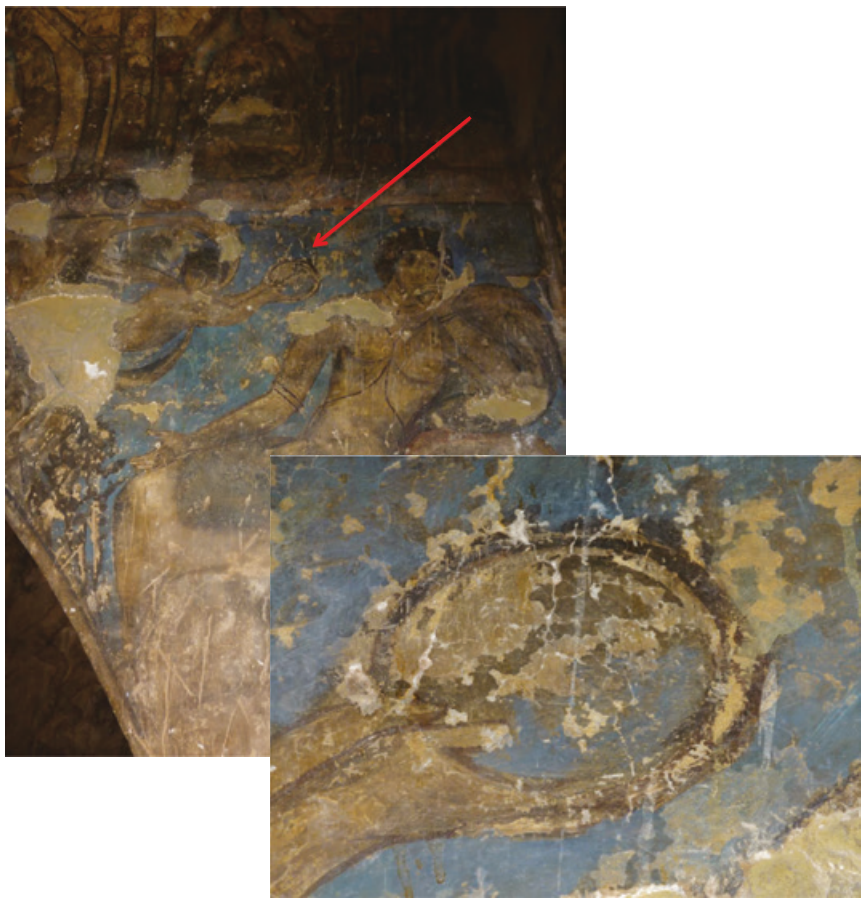

Plate 2.2. Fresco of an angel or cherub bringing a globe (see detail)—to a reclining figure deep in thought: northwestern spandrel next to entrance of Qusayr ʻAmra. (Author's photograph.)

possible terrestrial and lunar landscapes captured by this globular fresco. As part of this study, I also consider the early science of selenography, Greco-Roman verbal and pictorial representations of the moon as mirror of the earth, and both written and painted depictions of the moon in classical Islamic texts. In the final section, I return to the historical context of this fresco, juxtaposing it with other map-like images at the site, and to its place within the unrealized political ambitions of al-Walid II, Qusayr ʻAmra's patron, and the hyper-jihadist ideology of the later Umayyad caliphate.

Wreath, Crown, or Map?

As noted above, the image that is the focus of this article was previously identified as either a crown or wreath carried either by a wingless Nikē (Victory) or a figure of Eros.[14] My examination of comparable visual sources reveals no contemporary depictions of crowns or wreaths that match this one. The high calibre of fresco painting at Qusayr ʿAmra suggests that, if the artists had intended to depict a wreath or a crown in this image, it would have been clearly identifiable as such. As the numerous analyses of Qusayr ʿAmra reveal, Umayyad artists were well aware of the Greco-Roman artworks, mosaics, and paintings in the neighbourhood and employed some of these motifs in their frescoes.[15] Judging by the many examples of wreaths in close proximity, the Qusayr ʿAmra artists must therefore have been familiar with these local depictions.[16] Other Umayyad royal residences nearby, such as Qasr Hallabat (see Plate 2.1), feature additional examples of wreaths. At the eighth-century Church of St. Stephen in Umm al-Rasas, approximately 8 km southwest across the desert, the frescos parallel those of Qusayr ʿAmra so closely that the same artists were arguably employed at both locations (see further discussion below). Madaba, site of a famous map mosaic dated to the late sixth to early seventh century; and Mount Nebo, located about 100 km west of Qusayr ʿAmra, are also rich in mosaics. Khirbat al-Mafjar, located near Jericho and 100 km due west—identified as al-Walid II's official caliphal palace following his ascension to power in 743—demonstrates further the capacity of his artists to depict a wreath or garland should they have intended to do so. But none of the wreath motifs at Khirbat al-Mafjar resemble Qusayr ʿAmra's globular fresco, further reinforcing the argument that the depiction of a wreath was not the intention of the artists.[17]

Nor is the standing hypothesis, that this globular fresco represents a crown (*taj*), tenable. Crowns were not worn by the Umayyad caliphs, nor were they used at any other medieval Muslim court. According to contemporary chronicles,

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14 Lohuizen-Mulder refers to this image as 'Victory bringing a garland,' "Frescoes," 144. Her interpretation has been reiterated by Zayadine, "Umayyad Frescoes," 23. Almagro et al. also contend that this is Victory, presenting a crown: *ʿAmra*, 52; a view echoed by Blázquez, "La herencia clásica." Fowden (*Qusayr ʿAmra*, 74) refers to it as a crown offered by a "wingless figure, more likely to be an inept Eros than an apteral Victory."

15 Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, provides a rich and abundant array of possibilities.

16 See, for instance, the mosaic fragment of a bust of Erato partially encircled by a typical garland design from late antique Jerash, in Jordan: www.computer-render.com/Pages/Gerasa_1.html (accessed June 17, 2018).

17 Rosen-Ayalon, "Return to Qusayr ʿAmra," 458. See also Bisheh, "From Castellum and Palatium."

Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs alternated between the Islamic equivalent of the turban (*'imāma*) and the bonnet with tassels (*qalansuwa*). The Persian origin of the word *taj* suggests that the crown remained a foreign object among Arab rulers. Instead, the chair (*kursi*) or dais (*sarir*) was the preferred symbol of Muslim rule.[18] It is only in the early modern period that we find examples of elaborately decorated turban-like crowns studded with gems, commissioned by Ottoman Sultans from Italian goldsmiths.[19] This is not to say that the Muslim caliphs were unaware of the significance attached to crowns among their Christian contemporaries. The mosaics decorating the arches inside the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, built by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), include elaborate crowns atop spandrels of grapevines but neither do these resemble the forms on the globular fresco.[20]

The walls of Qusayr 'Amra provide further proof to the contrary. Other frescoes reflect an iconographic vocabulary of the crown as a foreign symbol of power. Such is the case of the fresco panel referred to as the "Six Kings" (Figure 2.2).[21] Here, the most intact figure, identified as the last great Sassanid king, Khosrow II (590–618), wears a crown of Sassanid fashion with a crescent at the top.[22] Two of the other kings appear to be wearing headgear and, even though the images are damaged, it is clear from what remains of them that their headgear does not resemble the globular fresco.[23] We can also look to a corollary fresco on the west wall, known as the "Enthroned Prince." This has been identified as a portrait of al-Walid II (see below, Figure 2.13) and it does not feature a crown, either.[24] Meanwhile, at another nearby Umayyad desert palace, Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, the excavator Donald Schlumberger has identified what may be a bust of the caliph Hisham, wearing a form of headgear that resembles the bonnet-like *qalansuwa* that the Umayyads

18 For discussions on the crown versus the turban and the *qalansuwa*, see Kadoi, "Crown"; Björkman, "Tādj"; Grabar, "Ceremonial and Art," 58–64, and 30–35.

19 Necipoğlu, "Suleyman the Magnificent."

20 For examples see: http://i2ud.org/j/html3/monuments/sites/t044_qub_al/index.html (accessed July 11, 2018).

21 Bisheh, "Fresco Panel."

22 Palumbo, "A Photographic Report of New Discoveries."

23 Claude Vibert-Guigue's artistic reconstruction of the entire fresco can be found at: http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/docannexe/image/4909/img–8.jpg (accessed June 18, 2018).

24 Some scholars have identified the strange "drop-shaped" keystone that hung from the apse of a semi-dome in the Umayyad palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar as an attempt to mirror the "hanging crown" of Sassanian usage. See Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*, 90 and Plate XII.6.

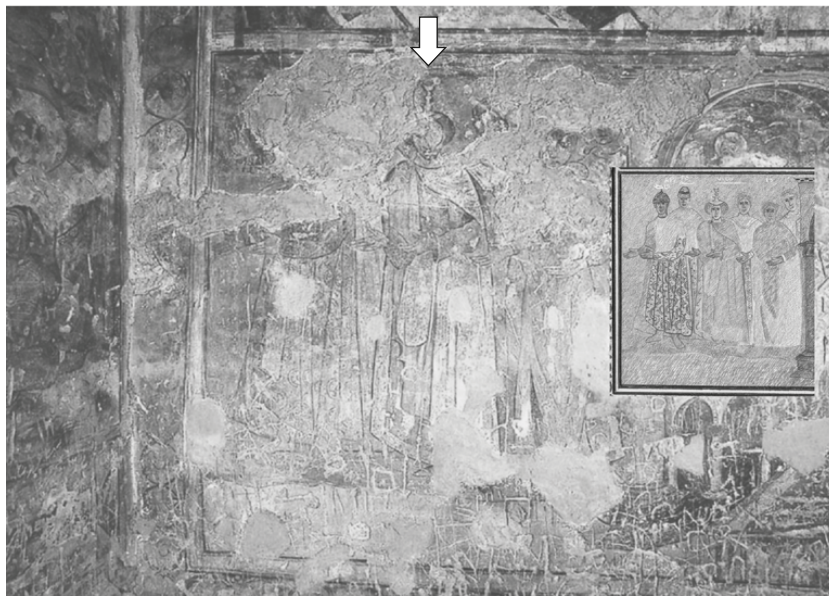

Figure 2.2. The "Six Kings" fresco panel, situated at the southern end of the audience hall on the lower register of the western wall at Qusayr 'Amra, behind the wall featuring the fresco of the globe (Plate 2.2). The names of the kings are written above their heads in Arabic and Greek. The most intact figure, identified as the last great Sassanid king, Khosrow II (590–618), wears a crown in the Sassanid fashion with a crescent at the top (indicated by the white arrow). The inset shows Claude Vibert-Guigue's reconstruction of the entire fresco. (Reproduced by permission.)

are known to have used (Figure 2.3).[25] It, too, does not resemble a crown. It is therefore safe to assert that the cherub is not bringing a wreath or a crown to the reclining figure. The double-ringed globular sphere with brown, cream, and blue markings located above the entrance of Qusayr 'Amra must be something else.

Ancient, Late Antique, and Medieval Cartographic Connections

Stripped of its internal details, the globular fresco could be linked to ancient and late antique cosmographic maps. Although there are no known extant maps

25 Schlumberger, "Les fouilles de Qasr el-Heir el-Gharbi."

Figure 2.3. Bust of the Umayyad Caliph Hisham, showing typical Qalansuwa headgear (as indicated by white arrow). (Photo courtesy of Donald Whitcomb, Associate Research Professor of Islamic Archaeology at the University of Chicago; after Schlumberger, "Les fouilles," Plate XLVI, no. 1. Reproduced by permission.)

from the Sassanian era (224–642), the double-ringed circle was a favourite meta-symbol for the *imago mundi* in Byzantine and medieval European traditions.[26] This ring of terrestrial power lies at the heart of the Achaemenid and Sassanid symbols for the god Ahura Mazda.[27] A large number of finely-crafted silver Sassanian plates

26 For a detailed discussion of the encircling ocean as a metaform symbolizing the *imago mundi*, including the Iranian Ahura Mazda motif and the use of the orb in Byzantine medieval European traditions, see "Iconography of the Encircling Ocean" in Pinto, *Ways of Seeing Islamic Maps*, Chapter 5.

27 See, e.g., the Achaemenid inscription of Darius at Behistun, where Ahura Mazda symbol hovers above figures of enslaved people: http://commondatastorage.googleapis.com/static.panoramio.com/photos/original/75959692.jpg (accessed June 18, 2018).

display figures and scenes involving a Sassanian king surrounded by a double-edged circle.[28] And, a number of scholars have linked parts of the Qusayr 'Amra fresco cycle to Sassanid iconography.[29]

Similarly, although there are no known extant Greek maps from the ancient or Hellenistic periods, we can point to textual sources referring to the use of circular forms to express the world and the cosmos: the Homeric description of Achilles's round shield, for example, upon which Hephaestus created a schematic depiction of the earth and the universe.[30] Through the historian Herodotus (c. 484–425 BCE), who mocks of the *periata gaies* or "Ring-Around Maps," we receive the impression that these were commonly made.

> I cannot but laugh when I see numbers of persons drawing maps of the world without having any reason to guide them; making, as they do, the ocean-stream to run all round the earth, and the earth itself to be an exact circle, as if described by a pair of compasses, with Europe and Asia just of the same size.[31]

During the reign of Emperor Augustus, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa (63–12 BCE) is said to have made a world map which does not survive.[32] The Roman surveying manual known as the *Corpus Agrimensorum Romansorum* (fifth or sixth century CE) includes an image of a circular world divided into four parts and is probably based on an older exemplar.[33]

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28 See, e.g., Freer's online exhibition link to the Shahpur Plate: http://archive.asia.si.edu/explore/ancient-world/shapur-plate/default.asp (accessed June 18, 2018).

29 Grabar, "Ceremonial and Art." The ongoing restoration work of an Italian team, working with specialists at the University of Oxford, emphasizes the late antique roots of these frescoes: see Palumbo and Atzori, "Qusayr 'Amra Site Management Plan" at www.firenzepatrimoniomondiale.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/4-Management-Plan-Qusayr-Amra–2014.pdf (accessed June 18, 2018); and Palumbo, "A Photographic Report of New Discoveries at Qusayr 'Amra," February 2014 (unpublished).

30 Willcock has created a schematic illustration in *A Companion to the Iliad*, 210.

31 Herodotus, *History*, 4.36; trans. Rawlinson, vol. 1, 301.

32 Dilke, "Maps in the Service of the State," 207–8; Berthon and Robinson, *The Shape of the World*, 27. See also Talbert, "Greek and Roman Mapping," 13–14, and *Rome's World*, 136–37. For a different approach, see Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 95–114 and 167–221.

33 The only extant copy is Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Codex Guelf. Aug 2°, fol. 43r. The miniature can be seen at: https://culturedecanted.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/the-templum-in-the-sky.jpg?w=650 (accessed June 18, 2018). For stimulating discussion and analysis of the dating and provenance, see Carder, *Art Historical Problems*, 1–35. See also Campbell, *Writings of the Roman Land Surveyors*.

Other extant late antique examples, such as the Peutinger Table, are route-based travellers' maps laid out as rectangular strips to show major roadways, with circles used to highlight the cosmic significance of key places such as Rome.[34] From the ninth century onward, medieval European copies of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (early seventh century) begin to include T-O (*terrarum orbis*) world maps. These maps, which become ubiquitous from the eleventh century onward, feature a circle encasing a schematic image of the known world (*Oecumene*) of Asia, Africa, and Europe.[35] In Byzantine, eastern Orthodox, and medieval European traditions, T-O orbs and symbols are often depicted in the hands of archangels and rulers to signify world dominion.[36]

Whether the dark band surrounding the globular fresco is Sassanid, Greco-Roman, or Byzantine in inspiration, or linked to the medieval European T-O map structure, the internal markings within this encircling band call for in-depth examination.

Possible Islamic Cartographic Connections

There are two images in particular that lend credence to the interpretation of the Qusayr 'Amra globular fresco as a map. One is a map of the Nile that is among the earliest known Arabic maps, featured in a copy of the *Kitab surat al-'ard* (Picture of the Earth) by al-Khwarazmi (d. ca. 332/847) (Figure 2.4).[37] Filled with a series of *zij* tables (i.e. tables containing longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates), the manuscript also contains four maps, including this one, which bears a striking resemblance to the dark brown riverine form which runs through the heart of the Qusayr 'Amra globular fresco (compare with Plate 2.2).[38] The second related map image comes from a miniature in a mid-fourteenth-century Persian manuscript (Figure 2.5). It shows an angel (possibly Gabriel) carrying a model of a city to a seated image of the Prophet Muhammad. The city has yet to be identified, but the model could suggest the existence of an Islamic artistic repertoire of angels/cherubs bearing maps that may have started with the Qusayr 'Amra fresco or with earlier precursors that are no longer extant (compare Figure 2.5 with Plate 2.2). It, too, employs a river running through the heart of a roundish shape, to signify its cartographic intent.

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34 Pinto, *Medieval Islamic Maps*, 113–22.

35 Edson, "Maps in Context"; Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, 18–35.

36 See Pinto, *Medieval Islamic Maps*, 121–32. Compare the sixth-century Ravenna mosaic with angels bringing a T-O (https://goo.gl/images/A4kES5) and the Hagia Sophia mosaic fresco showing an archangel holding a blue orb (https://goo.gl/images/A4kES5).

37 Von Mžik, ed., *Das Kitāb ṣūrat al-'arḍ* (facsimile).

38 Tibbetts, "Beginnings," 105–6.

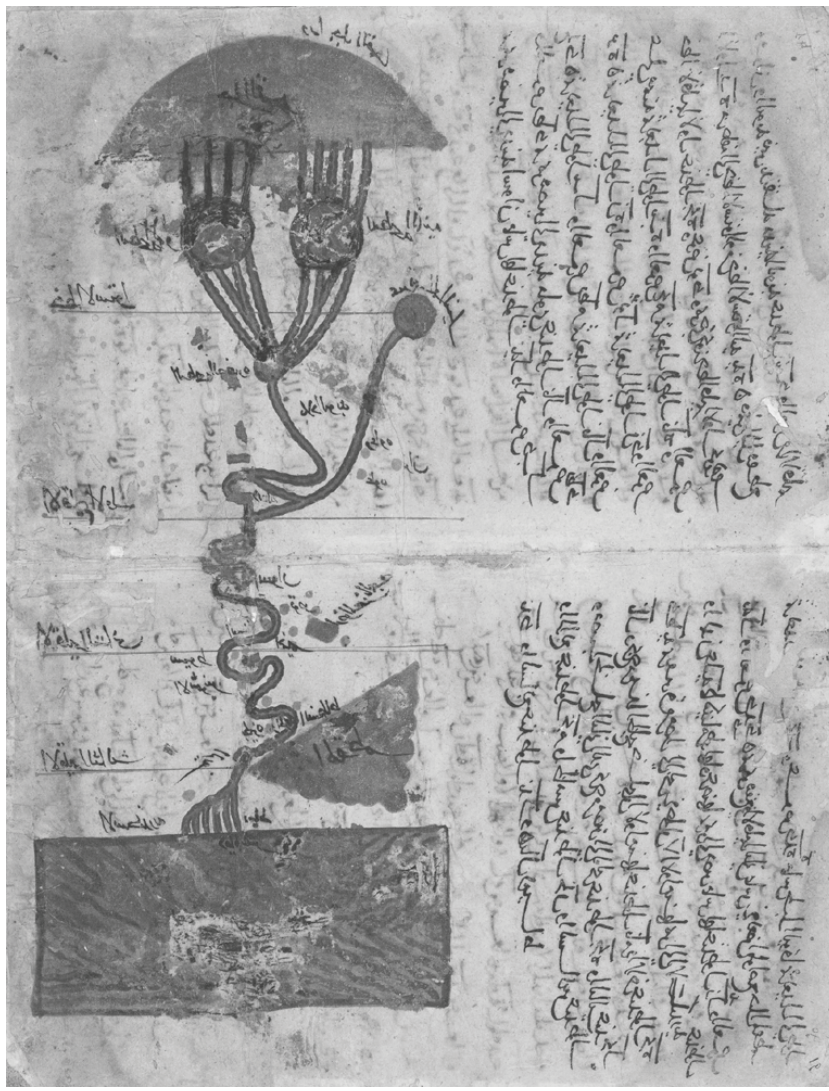

Figure 2.4. Earliest extant map of the Nile in al-Khwarazmi's *Kitab surat al-'ard*. dated to 428/1037. Blue, green, and brown gouache with red and black ink on paper: 33.5 × 41 cm. Image courtesy of Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS 4247, fols. 30b–31a.

Figure 2.5. Model of a city being presented to the Prophet Muhammad by an angel, from a Timurid *Mirajnama* made in Tabriz in the mid-fourteenth century (35 × 25 cm). (Istanbul, Topkapı Saray Kütüphanesi, Hazine 2154, fol. 107a. Reproduced by permission.)

A century later, the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 197–218/813–833) is said to have asked a group of scholars to prepare a silver globe depicting the world with its spheres (*aflāk*), stars, land, and seas, the inhabited and uninhabited regions, settlements of peoples, cities, and other varia.[39] Although this globe is no longer extant, the historian al-Mas'udi (d. 345/956) claims to have seen a rendition of it in a book called the *Surat al-ma'muniyya*. Eventually, out of this caliphal context, emerges the earliest known atlas tradition, that of the *Kitab al-masalik wa-al-mamalik* (Book of Routes and Realms). Meeting the administrative needs arising from the monitoring of a far-flung Islamic empire that had spread rapidly from Iberia to Central Asia, the *Routes and Realms* tradition mapped out the world and, within it, the twenty-one regions comprising the empire. It had a popular following, as confirmed by the numerous extant copies that stretch from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries.[40]

Can the Qusayr 'Amra globular fresco be the starting point of the Islamic mapping impulse, within a caliphal context? There is no question that this very site also houses the earliest extant star chart of the medieval Middle East (see discussion below around Figure 2.12). Taken together, these frescoes imply that the mapping tradition in the Islamic world may well have begun under Umayyad auspices in a raunchy bathhouse in the Jordanian desert.

What Does the Qusayr 'Amra Map Fresco Depict? Three Possible Scenarios

On-site examination confirms that the light brown and cream-coloured patches of this fresco match the pigment used to paint the body parts of surrounding images, such as the hand of the cherub holding the globular object (Plate 2.2: detail). Close-up examination of this image on site has also confirmed that these cream patches do not include any scraped paint. Nor is the dark streak running through the centre of the image an accidental discolouration: it is a deliberately painted band, broad at the top, tapering in the middle, broadening out again as it reaches the edge held by the fingers of the cherub. Close examination also reveals that the lower half of this image is painted on the same background of ultramarine blue that covers the walls behind all the mural paintings at Qusayr 'Amra.[41] There are a few isolated gouges, such as the one in the blue-painted half of the image and

39 Mas'udi, *Kitab al-tanbih wa-al-ishraf*, 33, 38.

40 Pinto, "KMMS World Maps Primer," *Medieval Islamic Maps*, Chapter 4.

41 Creswell identifies the pigments as follows: Light Brown = ochreous composition containing iron; Dull Yellow = Light Brown mixed with chalk; Deep Brown = a red produced

the one at the edge of the cherub's right thumb, both of which reveal the colour of the bare wall. Fortunately, the gouges and paint chips are minor and there are no major missing patches of paint. There are some dabs of cream paint from a reconstruction by a Spanish team from 1971 to 1974, but these lie outside of the central image, along the periphery opposite the cherub's hand, and do not affect the original image.[42]

In keeping with the Harleian dictum—that "What constitutes a text is not the presence of linguistic elements but the act of construction, so that maps, as constructions employing a conventional sign system, become texts"[43]—we need to deconstruct the sign system of this image in order to understand what it depicts. On-site examination enables us to compare this image with available cartographic exempla in order to determine what part of the world or the sky the painter intended to depict.

Blue for water, cream for land, and dark brown for mountains: if we interpret the symbolic use of colours accordingly, what body of water would this image intend to represent? Given the site's location in the Syro-Arabian desert, the closest bodies of water are the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Dead Sea, or the stream that fed the Wadi al-Butum,[44] in which the site is located. The Red Sea does not match the layout of this image, but the Mediterranean littoral of the Levant does—especially if we rotate the image 180 degrees clockwise to match our modern perspective, with the thumb of the cherub to the right of the image and the blue section of the image facing upward (Plate 2.3). In this scenario, the thin patch of cream-coloured pigment can be read as a representative of the coastal littoral of present-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. The dark patch would then indicate the band of mountains that separate the interior of Jordan, Syria, and the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon from the coast and which encase the deep Jordan Rift Valley (including mountains such as Jibal ash-Sharah in the south and the mountain range of the Golan Heights and the Bekaa in the North). One can well imagine the impression that the Dead Sea in the Jordan River Valley must have made on inhabitants of the area, plunging as it does to staggering depths of more than 300 metres below sea

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from oxide of iron overlaid with a thin coat of ultramarine; Bright Blue = Natural Ultramarine. Creswell, *A Short Account*, 88.

42 This reconstruction is discussed in detail by Almagro et al., *Qusayr ʿAmra.*

43 Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," 238.

44 The Wadi al-Butum no longer has a major water source because the Jordanian government redirected the water for crop production elsewhere. The lush vegetation that once surrounded Qusayr ʿAmra can be seen in Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Les peintures de Qusayr ʿAmra*, plate 89.

Plate 2.3. NASA Spectroradiometer image (from the *Terra* satellite) of the Levant, showing the eastern Mediterranean coastline, the Jordan Rift Valley, and the Syro-Arabian desert. Insets: relief map of the Jordan Rift Valley and the Qusayr 'Amra map fresco. (Image credit: Jacques Descloitres, MODIS Rapid Response Team, NASA/GSFC: http://visibleearth.nasa.gov/view.php?id=65114.)

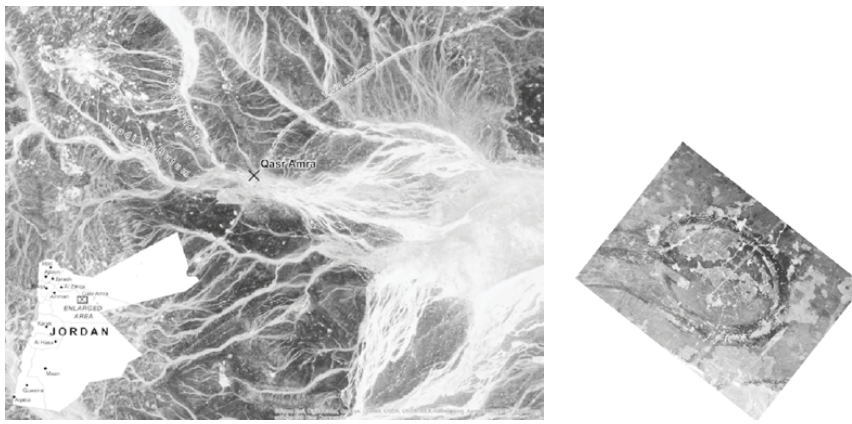

Figure 2.6. Relief map of the Wadi Buṭum surrounding Qusayr ʻAmra, with the map fresco for comparison. (Relief map prepared by Julian Weiss.)

level.[45] A NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Association) satellite image of the area, along with the inset topographic sectional chart, illustrate the stark division between mountains, landmasses, and sea astride the Levantine littoral, all of which could well be represented on the face of the globe fresco. In this context, the larger patch of cream-coloured pigment that makes up the other half of the fresco can be read as the vast Syro-Arabian desert within which Qusayr ʻAmra is located (Plate 2.3).

It seems logical to presume that, if Umayyad artists were commissioned to produce a map of the area, this rift valley and its surrounding mountain ranges would have figured prominently in their image of the world. Bilad al-Sham (Land of Damascus, *i.e.* Greater Syria)—as this region was known—encompassed this area during the period of the Umayyad caliphate (660/661–747/750). Indeed, the Umayyads had moved their capital from Medina to Damascus because this was where they could count on support in their bid for the caliphate.[46] The world depicted in premodern maps is necessarily limited to the area of the mapmaker's knowledge, concerns, skill-set, and available technologies. Its boundaries are limited to the specificities of that specific world and should not be compared to the dimensions of what we know today, based on satellite images and vastly

45 Anyone who has been in the area knows how steep is the plunge from the mountains of the Bekaa to the Mediterranean.

46 Prior to becoming the first Umayyad caliph, Mu'awiyya was governor of Damascus. For an introduction to this tumultuous period, see Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 31–56.

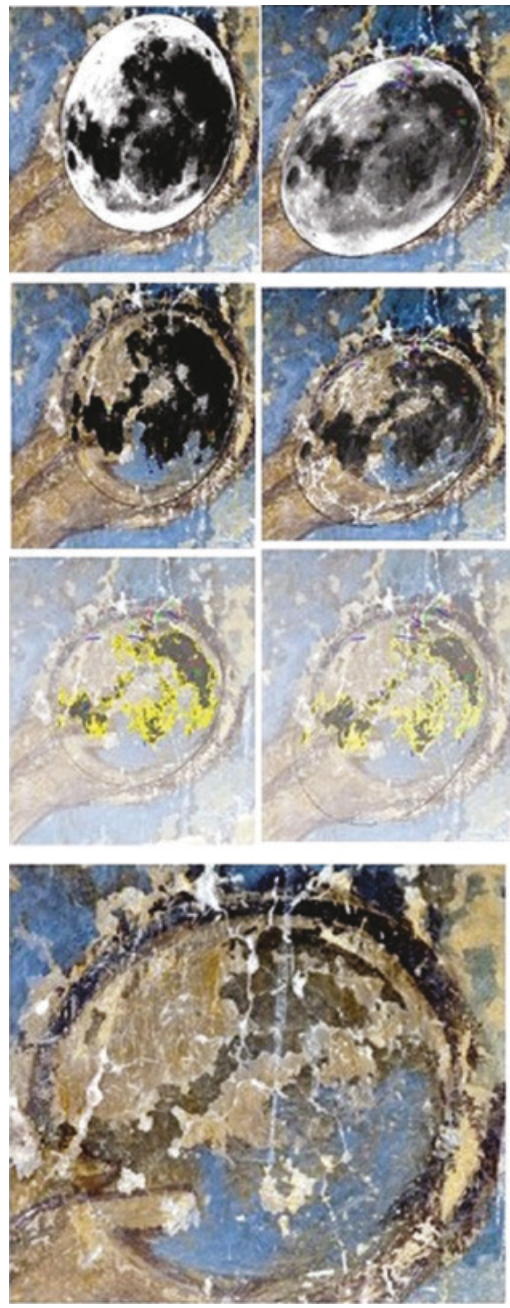

Plate 2.4. Simple georeferencing of a standard image of the moon (cf. Figure 2.7) superimposed upon an image of the Qusayr ʻAmra map fresco. (Prepared by Dr. Kathleen Baker, Western Michigan University.)

superior technology.[47] The Madaba mosaic, dated to the late sixth or seventh centuries, located 100 km due west of Qusayr 'Amra, is another contemporary example, depicting biblical lands from Egypt to Lebanon, including the Sinai, Israel, Palestine, and Transjordan.[48] Both are distinct: one is a navigable map on the floor of a Byzantine church, the other a painting on the walls of a Muslim pleasure house. Together, they hint at the richness and diversity of efforts in the early days of the Caliphate to understand their world geographically.

Bearing this in mind, another way to interpret the landscape depicted in the Qusayr 'Amra fresco might be through a still more local lens. The area immediately surrounding Qusayr 'Amra resembles the colourations on the fresco, too. In this scenario, the dark brown patch would represent the *wādī* (valley) of Butum within which Qusayr 'Amra is located (Figure 2.6). But how would residents of the area in the early eighth century have understood the terrain that surrounded them at the macro (god's eye) level of a satellite?

A third possibility, while a great deal farther away, is ironically the most plausible: the moon (Figure 2.7).[49] Anyone who has spent the night of a full moon in the Syrian desert, or Wadi Rum, will know that the face of the moon looms large and clear in the dry desert air devoid of light pollution: an awe-inspiring sight (Figure 2.8). It also hangs low on the horizon and would therefore have been an easy and tempting object for an artist to paint.

In order to establish a correlation between the Qusayr 'Amra fresco and the face of the moon, Professor Kathleen Baker, a leading specialist on the application of the ArcGIS mapping tool to medieval Islamic mapping, conducted a simple georeferencing of a standard image of the moon superimposed upon the fresco image (Plate 2.4).[50] Baker then progressively lightened the image of the moon so that 30 per cent of the darkest portion is the only part visible, in order to see how it matches up to the pattern of the brown streak in the fresco. The close parallel between the two is striking, reinforcing this reading of the Qusayr 'Amra fresco as the earliest known mimetic representation of the moon.

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47 See Delano-Smith, "Prehistoric Maps and the History of Cartography."

48 An interactive version of the Madaba map, with essay-length articles, is available at www.bibleplaces.com/madabamap (accessed July 11, 2018).

49 I am grateful to my advisor, Richard W. Bulliet, for suggesting this interpretation when I first brought the Qusayr 'Amra fresco to his attention.

50 I am most grateful to Professor Kathleen Baker of Western Michigan University's Geography Department and Director of the W. E. Upjohn Center for her assistance with the georeferencing of this image. She concurred with the author's reading of the close parallels between the Qusayr 'Amra fresco and the image of the moon.

Figure 2.7. Photograph of the only side of the moon visible from earth, due to the gravitational phenomenon of tidal locking, with an inset of the Qusayr ʻAmra map. (Photograph courtesy of Gregory Revera, 2010.)

A Brief Overview of Medieval Selenography and Imagery

Although selenography is an ancient field of study, naturalistic representations of the lunar face are unknown prior to the fifteenth century. Credit for the earliest has been ascribed to Jan van Eyck, for his depiction of a gibbous moon near the upper right-hand edge of his painting of the Crucifixion (ca. 1435–1440) (Figure 2.9). The moon is shown below the arm of the third cross in the left-hand panel of the image.[51] Leonardo da Vinci also produced early sketches of the moon, between 1505 and 1508. One caricatures the age-old concept of the "Man in the Moon" while two others show the full moon and the eastern half of the moon.[52] Less than a century later, William Gilbert prepared the first labelled map of the

51 Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, 83–95.

52 Reaves and Pedretti, "Leonardo Da-Vinci Drawings."

Figure 2.8. The rising full moon over Wadi Rum: to be compared to the Qusayr 'Amra globular fresco. (Author's photograph.)

moon, sometime in the late 1590s, although it was not published until 1651. In keeping with the classical idea (dating back to Plutarch and the first century CE) that the moon reflects the earth, Gilbert's map introduced the earliest nomenclature for the main features of the moon based on terrestrial place-names.[53] In the seventeenth century, mapping was facilitated by the advent of the telescope: in 1609, Thomas Harriot produced the first known telescopic drawing of the lunar surface, followed by a detailed and intricately labelled full moon mapping in 1611.[54] Contemporaneously, between November 30, 1609 and January 9, 1610, Galileo Galilei undertook his telescopic examination of the lunar surface and made detailed drawings of the moon, published in his *Sidereus nuncius* (1610).[55] Armed with the influence of Plutarch's *De facie in orbis lunae* (Of the Face in the Orb of the Moon), Galileo created a stir with his discovery of the changing shapes of spots on the lunar surface.

53 Brunner, *Moon: A Brief History*, 47–48; Whitaker, *Mapping and Naming the Moon*, 13–15; Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, 98–104.

54 Brunner, *Moon: A Brief History*, 48–49; Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, 106–13; Whitaker, *Mapping and Naming the Moon*, 17–20.

55 Whitaker, *Mapping and Naming the Moon*, 20–25; Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, 114–34.

Figure 2.9. Jan van Eyck, *The Crucifixion; The Last Judgment*, ca. 1435–1440: oil on canvas transferred from wood; each panel measures 56.5 x 19.7 cm. The moon is just below the arm of the third cross, in the upper right-hand corner of the left panel (designated by the arrow). (Image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 33.92ab.)

Before these late medieval and early modern mappings, the earliest known depictions of the moon are by artists working within cosmographic contexts. A Babylonian clay tablet from Uruk, dated to before 8000 BCE, depicts the seven stars of the Pleiades and a warrior god riding a stylized crescent moon.[56] Philip

56 Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, 12.

Stooke argues that a series of Neolithic rock carvings from Knowth and Baltinglass (Ireland) can be interpreted as the oldest depictions of lunar markings.[57] Closer to Qusayr 'Amra, the third-century CE synagogue at Dura-Europos, along the eastern-most border of Syria with Iraq, contains a wall painting of stylized representations of the sun and a crescent moon on either side of the head of a man tentatively identified as Moses.[58] Although Greek thinkers from Homer to Plato, Aristotle, and Ptolemy discussed the moon at length, there are few extant images from the classical period. Those that exist, such as a fragmentary papyrus portion of a Hellenistic astronomical manuscript, maintain the form of a stylized crescent moon without any landscape details.[59] The same is true for medieval European portrayals of the moon. Hundreds of stylized depictions of the moon are to be found above the head of Christ in illustrations of the crucifixion in manuscripts, on ivory carvings, reliquaries, bishops' robes, frescoes, as well as in astronomical illustrations of the *computus*. In all cases, these medieval European depictions are symbolic markers for the moon as a crescent or full circle, devoid of any mimetic intent.[60]

Even in the classical Islamic context, the moon is shown in symbolic forms without any details. This is in spite of the fact that the moon holds a special place in Islam and Islamic history.[61] The *hijra* calendar that guides Muslim life is lunar-based. Within the calculations of Islamic science and astronomy, the moon holds pride of place. The famous scholar of optics, Ibn al-Haytham, devoted a number of treatises to the study of the moon: *Harakat al-qamar* (On the Motion of the Moon) and *Daw' al-qamar* (On the Light of the Moon) and *al-Athar alladhi [Yura] fi [wajh] al-qamar* (On the Nature of the Marks [Seen] on the [Face of the] Moon). And the *hilāl* (crescent) moon has come to symbolize Islam and the Islamic world in our own global imaginary.[62] Images of the crescent moon on coins, on flags, silk, and pottery are ubiquitous in medieval contexts, too. Line-sketches of the moon appear frequently in astronomical manuscripts (Figure 2.10). *Taqāwīm* (lunar calendars) often employ small moon symbols to represent the time of the month (new moon, gibbous moon, full moon) but these are not mimetic renderings of the lunar face of the moon, in the way that Jan van Eyck's rendition is—and the Qusayr 'Amra globe fresco could be.

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57 Stooke, "Neolithic Lunar Maps."

58 See a discussion with relevant images at https://lethargic-man.dreamwidth.org/292134.html (accessed June 18, 2018).

59 Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, 25.

60 Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, 50–62.

61 Rodinson, "La lune chez les arabes."

62 Kadoi, "Crescent (Symbol of Islam)."

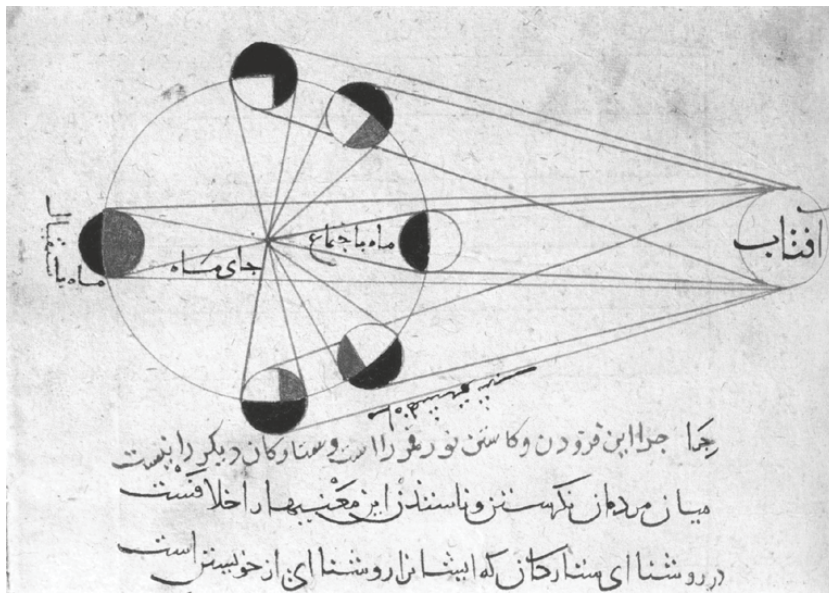

Figure 2.10. Stages of the lunar eclipse, illustrated in a fourteenth-century Persian translation of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's *Kitab al-tafhim li-awa'il sina'at al-tanjim* (The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology). (Image courtesy of Tehran, Majles Library, MS no. 6565.)

The Moon as Mirror and Map of the Earth

Classical notions of the moon as a mirror reflecting the earth do, however, influence efforts to map both the earth and the moon throughout the Middle Ages, in both Europe and the Middle East. In an innovative article, Philip J. Stooke argues that the shape of the landforms visible on the face of the moon may have influenced the layout of landforms on medieval European T-O maps and maybe even some medieval Islamic maps: an idea explored at the theoretical level by Christian Jacob in a provocative article which argues that the moon was seen, in antiquity, as a mirror of the earth.[63] The moon thereby performs the same mediating function as a map, allowing viewers to conceptualize what we cannot apprehend directly. As another earth, it invites the cartographers to conquer it.[64]

If the Qusayr 'Amra globe fresco can be identified as a painting of the moon—and perhaps as an effort to understand the layout of the earth, too—it would mean

63 Stooke, "Mappaemundi and the Mirror"; Jacob, "De la Terre à la Lune."

64 Jacob, "De la Terre à la Lune," 9.

that the earliest naturalistic representation of the moon predates the work of Jan van Eyck by seven centuries. It would also fit within the context of the larger pictorial program of Qusayr ʻAmra, which houses one of the earliest extant Islamic star charts and a number of other cartographically-inclined images.

The Cupola Star Fresco

This star chart (Figure 2.11) is located in the dome of the caldarium (hot bath) in which the future caliph al-Walid II regularly dipped. Well-known among historians of science, it was first studied in 1932 and is comparable in importance to the Farnese Atlas.[65] Recently, this fresco has even been referenced as the earliest extant Islamic map.[66] Detailed work has determined how the constellations depicted in it match up with other star charts of the ancient and medieval periods. As a result, it has been revealed that the artist made (intentional?) mistakes in the positioning of the constellations because he was trying to accommodate the sky-lights of the bathhouse.[67] As Arthur Beer observes, "The painter of Qusayr ʻAmra had a unique opportunity to achieve a correct reproduction, working as he was on the inner surface of a sphere; nevertheless he preferred to accept the old model used for flat surfaces."[68]

A similar error of inversion can be seen in the rendition of the image of the moon in the globular fresco, which may have been painted by the same artist who completed the Star Chart. As I showed in Figure 2.7 above, the fresco has to be rotated 180 degrees in order to mirror the way the moon's face is visible from earth. This suggests that the artist may have based the fresco on a sketch of the moon that was inverted during the process of transference to Qusayr ʻAmra's wall.

The cupola's chart of the heavens confirms that there was an active interest in celestial mapping during this period of the Umayyad caliphate and that the artists of Qusayr ʻAmra must have had access to exemplars they could copy. The analysis of this star chart suggests Greek and possibly Ptolemaic influence, which means that the Qusayr ʻAmra artists may also have had access to Ptolemy's instructions

65 The two earliest studies are Saxl, "The Zodiac of Qusayr ʻAmra," and Beer, "Astronomical Significance." See also Beer, "Astronomical Dating," and the response by Hartner, "Qusayr ʻAmra." Savage-Smith, *Islamicate Celestial Globes,* 16–17, and "Celestial Mapping" also discusses this star chart, but incorrectly date Qusayr ʻAmra to the reign of al-Walid I (705–715).

66 Fuat Sezgin has designated the Star Chart of Qusayr ʻAmra as the earliest Islamic map: *Islam Uygarliginda Astronomi Cografya ve Denizcili*, 14. However, like Savage-Smith and others, Sezgin has misdated it (in this case to 711–715).

67 The best and most up-to-date study is that of Brunet, Nadal, and Vibert-Guigue, "The Fresco of the Cupola."

68 Beer, "Astronomical Dating," 181.

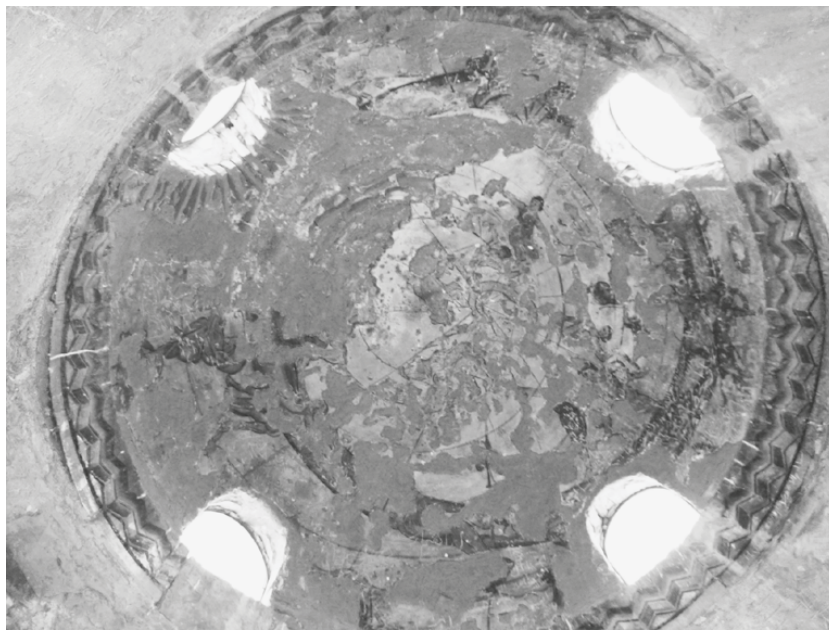

Figure 2.11. The Star Chart fresco in the cupola of Qus'Amra. (Author's photograph.)

for depicting the earth, which could have influenced the creation of a second map in the form of a globe.[69] It further suggests that the patron of the bathhouse was interested in models of the stars, and, by extension, could very well have asked his artists to include a smaller globe depicting the moon or the area of his Umayyad ruling family's powerbase in the area of Syria and Jordan.

The Enthroned Figure as Cosmokrator

Further confirmation of Qusayr 'Amra's patron's interest in depicting the earth and the cosmos can be found in the alcove directly opposite the entrance, identified by scholars as the "throne apse" because it contains the image of a seated figure (Figure 2.12). The inscription above it designates this figure as an *amīr* (prince) and is one of the reasons why the patron of this structure has been identified as al-Walid II. Although seriously damaged in places, the image is still clear enough

69 Savage-Smith (*Islamicate Celestial Globes*, 17) points out that, six or seven decades prior to the building of Qusayr 'Amra, the Syriac scholar Severos Sebokht penned an astronomical text based on Greek sources and a treatise on the astrolabe.

Figure 2.12. Qusayr 'Amra's fresco of the Enthroned Prince, as reconstructed by Claude Vibert-Guigue in "La question," 562. (Reproduced by permission of Claude Vibert-Guigue.)

to show that the enthroned figure is being fanned by two servants holding fly-whisks (*flabella*) and that there are birds ringing the arch above and fish in the sea below.[70] This lower portion of the fresco—which once included a boat, in addition to water and fish (removed by Alois Musil and Alphons Leopold Meilich in 1902 and now on display at the Berlin Museum)—has been identified as a "Nilotic" scene reflective of Coptic Egyptian influence.[71] Richard Ettinghausen suggests that the seated figure could thus be interpreted as a Cosmokrator (universal ruler), possibly inspired by Sassanian or Byzantine motifs: "The central and most important painting [might] have expressed the idea that the caliph was ruling the

70 Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Les peintures de Qusayr 'Amra*, plate 15.

71 Lohuizen-Mulder, "Frescoes in the Muslim Residence," 133.

earth, which was thought to be bounded by the ocean, designated by sea monsters, and beneath the all-covering sky, symbolized by birds."[72] Some scholars have taken Ettinghausen's suggestion one step further, to suggest that al-Walid II was trying to express his Solomonic-sized pretensions while languishing as heir in the desert for twenty years, waiting for his nemesis and uncle, the Caliph Hisham, to die.[73]

Gaea—Goddess of Earth

One final element bolstering this reading of the globular fresco as a map are the depictions opposite, of female figures carrying fruit, which are read as representations of Gaea, the Earth Goddess of the ancient world. A common trope of medieval Coptic artwork, Gaea has been identified in the iconographic programs of a number of royal Umayyad structures. In Qusayr 'Amra, two female figures in the soffits of the arches of the main entrance halls (as seen partially in Figure 2.13) hold up a cloth filled with fruits, just opposite the image of the cherub handing the globular fresco to the reclining figure (Plate 2.2).[74]

A single space housing a gigantic star chart of the heavens, an enthroned universal ruler, and iconographic references to Gaea might well contain an image of the earth or its moon (Figure 2.14). What kind of patron would sponsor such a collection of images? Why would a globe depicting the earth and/or the moon be offered to a reclining melancholic figure who seems singularly uninterested in accepting it? These are the questions that remain to be answered in order to further our understanding of Qusayr 'Amra's globular fresco and its significance.

The Meaning of the Site's Iconography

The answers come together in the unusual person of Qusayr 'Amra's patron: the iconoclast of the Umayyad family, al-Walid II. Credited as one of the best Arabic poets of the early seventh century, he went into virtual exile while the reigning

72 Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 32. For a Byzantine example, see http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=54414.

73 Soucek, "Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath"; Lohuizen-Mulder, "Frescoes," 132–33. Patricia Crone reinforces this view through her reading of "Caliphal law" under the Umayyads: *God's Caliph*, 44–45. Of late, Nadia Ali and Mattia Guidetti have argued for a strictly late antique interpretation based upon their identification of an agricultural calendar on the ceiling of the central span of Qusayr 'Amra. This reading ignores the representations of al-Walid II. See Ali and Guidetti, "Umayyad Palace Iconography," 234.

74 Lohuizen-Mulder, "Frescoes," 126; Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 71–72. The palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar, attributed to the patronage of al-Walid II after he became caliph, also contains a Gaea-type stucco figure.

Figure 2.13. Full-breasted Gaea figure in the soffit of the entrance hall arch, with the fresco of the globe being offered to a melancholic figure (designated by the arrow) in the context of surrounding imagery. (Author's photograph.)

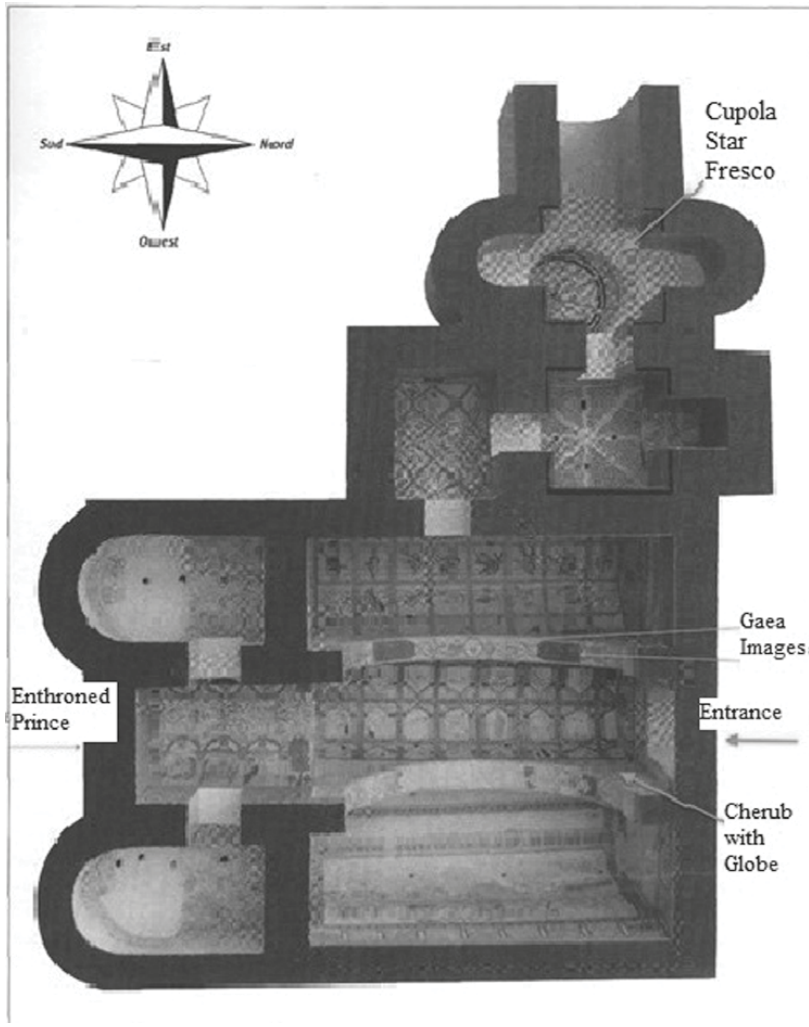

Figure 2.14. Three-dimensional layout of Qusayr ʿAmra, indicating the location of key frescos. (Adapted by permission of Claude Vibert-Guigue.)

Umayyad caliph, his uncle Hisham, upended the succession arrangement of his father, Yazid II (r. 720–724). In his two decades' long wait to succeed, al-Walid II lived around the oasis of Azraq in the Jardano-Arabian desert, 15 km down the road from Qusayr 'Amra. This was his exclusive hideaway where, shut away from the world, al-Walid II could enact his wildest fantasies, as confirmed by Qusayr 'Amra's idiosyncratic image program and his own poetry.[75]

> Walid am I, Abu'l-'Abbas; the great ones of Ma'add
> Have known the depth and daring of my charge.
> By male and female ancestry proclaimed
> My lineage tops the highest peak of all.
> My fame's a beacon tower, a landmark bright,
> Built by a builder not incapable.
> My line is from the purest stocks distilled,
> Whose haughty eminence the whole world knows:
> A mountain top, high, unattainable,
> In pride to rival with the Pleiades.[76]

Vainglorioously filled with self-portraits of himself, his dancing women, and servants, al-Walid II's Qusayr 'Amra was a world unto itself: the canvas on which he inscribed his claim to caliphate. Here he was not the renegade nephew, waiting in vain, but the ruler of the universe—presiding over land and sea while contemplating control of the moon and stars.

Not only was the world—or its moon—his oyster, it was also his to give away. The reclining figure at the door, hitherto unidentified, might be read as Salma, his wife's sister and the unrequited love of his life.[77] In this scenario, the wingless figure could be Eros attempting to win over the recalcitrant Salma by offering her the world or (better still) the full moon (*badr*), which the Bedouin construe as the ultimate essence of beauty. If, however, the reclining figure is read as another portrait of the vainglorious prince himself—the same figure who shows off his diving prowess in the scene on the western wall—then we see an angel of Victory bringing a globe to

75 Given his brief tenure as caliph and relative insignificance within Islamic political history, there are a surprising number of full-length biographies dedicated to al-Walid II, focusing on his contributions to Arabic poetry and artistic patronage: Hamilton, *Walid and His Friends*; Derenk, *Leben und Dichtung*; Gabrieli, "Al-Walid ibn Yazid."

76 al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Aghani*, VI: 103; translated Hamilton, *Walid and His Friends*, 97.

77 Although he subsequently divorced his wife, Sa'dah, in order to marry her sister, his father-in-law *cum* uncle (the caliph) refused his request. Al-Walid's desire for Salma was not requited until he himself became caliph.

the melancholic prince, a symbol and promise of his future caliphate. Al-Walid II's own words reinforce this reading, as Patricia Crone shows in her analysis of a letter in which he invokes the moon as

> "a light which has illuminated the land for us," "the moon by which we are guided." He sets up a "beacon of guidance" (*manār li'l-hudā)* wherever he goes. His kinsmen and governors are similarly "lights of guidance," full moons, stars and the like. He disperses darkness and makes the blind see. He revives both land and souls.[78]

Al-Walid II may have marched to the tune of his own iconoclastic ways, but at the root of all his flamboyant hyperbole are the anxieties of legitimacy and frustrated rule that were typical of previous Umayyad rulers of the Marwanid branch. Regardless of which interpretation the reader prefers—earthly or lunar—the globular fresco at the entrance of al-Walid II's beloved bathhouse reinforces Marwanid desire for caliphal power. As Aziz al-Azmeh aptly puts it, "relatively new to the world of œcumenism and empire, Umayyad caliphs sought to inscribe themselves into a universal history of world-empire." This aspiration, al-Azmeh further notes, was captured in Qusayr 'Amra's fresco of "the six kings of the world (including those of Byzantium, Abyssinia, and Persia) paying homage to the new Arab master of the world."[79] And, Crone reinforces, "the Umayyads took the title [of Khalīfat Allāh (Caliph of God)] very seriously. They saw themselves as representatives of God on earth in the most literal sense."[80]

Cast as usurpers of the caliphate rightly bestowed originally on the *Rāshidūn* (the Rightly-Guided companions of the Prophet), the Umayyads were struggling to hold onto their caliphate by the mid-seventh century. In a bid for survival, al-Walid II's father, Yazid II, and his father's brother, Hisham, put into motion a reinvigorated and aggressive jihadist ideology to spur on conquests and the acquisition of booty aimed at prolonging the survival of their dynasty. The later Umayyad caliphate constituted the jihadi state par excellence.[81] We can read this hyper-jihadist ideology as another ingredient in the worldly and otherworldly representations of empire as manifested on the walls of Qusayr 'Amra.

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78 Crone, *God's Caliph*, 21 and Appendix 2. See also Hillenbrand, ed. and trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 87–180.

79 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 67.

80 Crone, *God's Caliph*, 21. Sections of the letter are cited above in connection with footnote 79.

81 Blankinship, *End of the Jihad State*, 232.

Figure 2.15. The author and her team of former students from the American University of Beirut. Thanks to the team of my former students at the American University of Beirut—Kassem Jouni and Charbel Abou Haidar, with Safiye Pinto-Richards—for assisting with on-site research and photography at Qusayr ʻAmra. (Author's photograph.)

After two decades of waiting in the desert to be caliph, the hapless al-Walid II became caliph for little more than a year. In the end, he was unceremoniously slaughtered on the ramparts of his castle. Three years later, the Umayyad caliphate was overthrown by a revolution that unfolded westward from Merv (in Khurasan) in 747. By the year 750, following the rout of the Umayyad forces by the Abbasid rebels at the battle of the River Zab, just one Umayyad prince survived to continue the family legacy in the farthest westernmost reaches of the Islamic empire of al-Andalus. Only the decorated palaces and bathhouses of Jordan remain to tell a fragmentary tale of the way in which the Umayyads visually expressed their ideological goals. It is to this tale of universal imperial history that the globular fresco of Qusayr ʻAmra adds another layer of intrigue while, at the same time, revealing what is possibly the earliest extant depiction of the moon as mirror of the earth. In the end, Qusayr ʻAmra never fully reveals its secrets and therein lies its enduring allure. Like al-Walid II, generations of scholars are drawn to this site, never to be fully satiated (Figure 2.15).

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