

the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, so often presenting the Assyrian rulers in the image of the mythical king of Uruk. Both texts also make direct allusions to a range of well-known mytho-epic texts, and Bach shows that Esarhaddon's succession narrative is a part of a wider field of texts including proverbs, the ritual text *Maqlû*, and the *Series of the Fox*. In this way, Bach establishes not only the high literary nature of these texts, but the exact methods the Assyrian scribes employed. One is left with a picture of a highly sophisticated scribal culture at the Assyrian courts.

Bach concludes his book with the words "Es bleibt noch viel zu tun. Hier fängt die Geschichte an". One hopes that this is just the beginning of a new era of a literary-critical understanding of the nature of the Assyrian royal narratives. Further studies of this nature will continue to reap handsome rewards.

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GIUSEPPE LABISI:

Dwelling Models of Umayyad Madā'in and Quṣūr in Greater Syria.

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Where and how people tailored their lives in a rapidly changing seventh- to eighth-century Bilād al-Shām is a huge, yet barely considered, question. In his book, a reworked and translated version of his doctoral thesis, Giuseppe Labisi sets out to address that very question. Setting the clear goal of identifying architectural and cultural patterns as represented in the living quarters found in Umayyad architecture, an objective largely achieved, Labisi systematically brings together a wide, if uneven, range of published material acquired over the last century, and uses it to analyse and categorize different dwelling types while detailing the living spaces within them.

An introductory account of settlement models and dwelling types in their historical context forms Part 1 of the book (pp. 5–16). The possible pre-Islamic origins in late antiquity are considered for *madā'in* (town/city) and *quṣūr* (castle/palace), the focus of this study, before progressing to components within these, specifically "living units" (pp. 9–16). Two primary types are diagnosed: the "five room unit" (a large central room lined on either side by a pair of rooms) and *banā' al-Ḥūrī* (a central *iwān* with an adjoining room either side, all prefaced with a courtyard portico). These two distinctive components, with their subsidiaries, form a common theme that underlies the whole study.

In Part 2 (pp. 19–59), the descriptive core of the book, Labisi divides the architectural sources into two categories based on the dwelling types of *madā'in* and *quṣūr*. The different purpose and function of each type is a key factor in separating the overall layout of these new foundations, even when associated with an existing urban centre such as 'Ammān, which brings greater clarity to comprehending the positioning of living units within the larger plan and, in some cases, the intended purpose of individual rooms. In dealing with *madā'in* (chapter 2), Labisi considers the three primary sites of 'Anjar, Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī, and 'Ammān. The focus in

this section is on 'Anjar in Lebanon, the subject of important new survey and archaeological work by German and French teams (regrettably, H.K. Chéhab's much-awaited doctoral thesis, *Les ruines d'Anjar* (Beirut, 2017–18), apparently appeared after completion of Labisi's book). Taking B. Finster's much-improved plan of the site, Labisi gives an overview before dissecting in detail the unit/room arrangements of the palaces and "extra-palatial" courtyard dwellings, the latter classifiable into four models based on their internal layout. A similarly tight study is offered on the 'Ammān Citadel complex, drawing on the incompatible work of A. Northedge, A. Almagro, and I. Arce. Labisi distinguishes between the formal areas of the palace proper (the public and private reception halls, linked through a court and a colonnaded street) and the extensive areas of living quarters flanking them. Each of the living units had an internal courtyard with rooms on all sides, the arrangement of which generally conformed to the rather unfortunately termed "pseudo *banā' al-Ḥīrī*" style (lacking a portico). Extra-palatial dwellings around the citadel mosque are also evaluated but restricted by incomplete excavation. Chapter 3 (pp. 51–9) focusses on the Umayyad *quṣūr*, of which those with "five room units" predominate in the analysis. Eleven key sites are offered, although the descriptions of these are basic. While a short chapter, some unexpected results are achieved. Using sites of known dates, a chronological sequence based on the total surface area of each "five room unit" and the surface area of the larger central room reveal an increase in size between the first *qaṣr* (al-Kharānah) and the last (Mushattā and Qaṣr al-Ṭūba). Labisi identifies in this sequence a three-stage chronological "evolution" (p. 56) between 705 and 743/4 CE. Only Qaṣr al-Minya on Lake Tiberias fails to conform to this chain. Within this sequence, Labisi finds a chronological slot for the *quṣūr* of Bālis, al-Fudayn, and al-Qaṣṭal, the dates for which were previously ambiguous; including the overlooked *madīnah* of Baysān might have added to this list.

In Part 3 (pp. 63–84), the architectural components that formed the separate parts of the living units are compared between the *madā'in* and *quṣūr* types, and their origins discussed (chapter 4). Four components are considered: vestibules, courtyards, "five room units" and *banā' al-Ḥīrī* including the "pseudo" variant (p. 67; here the language is somewhat confused), and audience halls. Although both dwelling types appear to present a common, almost monotonous, plan, variations between sites are frequent, although not easily explained. Chapter 5 begins by expanding the study with selective comparisons to other *quṣūr* in Bilād al-Shām, for which dates are tentatively proposed based on room size calculations, as well architectural parallels with two sites in Iraq. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the housing units found in Umayyad *madā'in* and *quṣūr* as architectural elements compatible with the tenets of privacy, modesty, and hospitality in Islamic housing, commencing with an appraisal of new views on the Prophet's house and mosque in Madinah and elements from pre-existing Sasanian and late Roman traditions. As Labisi notes, identifying room usage from archaeological material is hindered by its absence, making it impossible to "adopt a sociological approach" (p. 79, n. 526). However, other techniques with which to recognize relationships between social norms and buildings are readily available, notably space syntax. A conclusion closes out the text section (pp. 85–7).

The rest of the book contains six appendices over 232 pages (pp. 89–321). These consist of detailed data tables (appendices 1–2) and numerous descriptive plans of dwellings found in the *madā'in*, *quṣūr*, and other sites discussed in the book, redrawn by the author (appendices 3–6). Unfortunately, the illustrations are not always directly referenced in the text.

Language inconsistencies, some poor expression, and cases of muddled terminology mar the text in places, but not fatally. Overall, Labisi's book brings a solid, evidence-based approach to describing and understanding the role and significance of "living units" within much larger architectural constructions. It sets authoritative guidelines and techniques with which effectively to assess the major role of residential quarters in the Umayyad architectural tradition.

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THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

LAURA HASSAN:

Ash'arism Encounters Avicennism: Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī on Creation.

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In his *Kashf*, the philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) reaches a crushing verdict about the centuries-old theological tradition: the practitioners of *kalām* might have been right in their insistence that Islam's fundamental religious dogmas have to be subjected to rational investigation and reason-based proof. Yet, their enterprise failed. For instance, the method employed by the *mutakallimūn* to prove that the world is God's creation is, in Ibn Rushd's estimation, "an obscure method . . . that is not a proof, nor effective, nor certain" (Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf 'an manāḥij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla*, ed. Maḥmūd 'Abid al-Jābirī, Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-'Arabiyya, 1998, p. 103). All that the *mutakallimūn* achieved was creating confusion among themselves and the rest of society.

Ibn Rushd, the philosopher, might be accused of a certain bias against the rival *kalām* tradition; however, classical *kalām* works bear witness that their authors were far from unanimous agreement on which methods and proofs were valid, and which concepts and tenets should be upheld. Laura Hassan's *Ash'arism Encounters Avicennism: Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī on Creation* highlights just how fiercely debated these questions were. Based on her PhD thesis at SOAS University of London, Hassan's book seeks to contextualize the thought of a post-Avicennan luminary, al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), who appears as a "puzzle" (p. 1) since he authored works of both Ash'arī *kalām* and Avicennan *falsafa*. The "major theological issue of the creation of the world" (p. 4), traditionally the site of a clash between these two very different paradigms, provides her with the opportunity to investigate "the nature and extent of the philosophical influence on al-Āmidī's thought . . . [and] the extent to which al-Āmidī endorses the methods and doctrines of classical Ash'arism" (pp. 3–4).

Hassan's study is insightful in several respects: it traces significant developments in the doctrines, concepts, and methods championed by al-Āmidī, who started his intellectual career as an ardent defender of Avicennism, in order then to become a staunch adherent of Ash'arism. Yet, this shift of allegiance meant neither that al-Āmidī came to reject all aspects of Avicennism, nor that he simply accepted all aspects of the Ash'arī tradition which he inherited from his predecessors. Al-Āmidī's works bear witness to a constant process of negotiation and deliberation.