

Two wall mosaic inscriptions from the Umayyad market place in Bet Shean/Baysān

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Two wall mosaics with Arabic inscriptions were recently discovered in Bet Shean (Roman-Byzantine, Scythopolis; Arabic, Baysān) in the course of the excavations conducted by the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.¹ These mosaics were uncovered under the ruins of the entrance gate to the Umayyad market in the south-eastern part of the city centre,² which collapsed during the earthquake of the year 749 C.E.³ During the Roman period this area was a street paved in basalt with a colonnade along the north-eastern side, consisting of seventeen columns each seven metres in height, in front of which was a shallow pool extending towards the street. A thick basalt wall, less than two metres in width, separated the pool from the street, and it contained a row of small booths with arched entrances. On the other side of the colonnade there was an unusually large bath house (fig. 1).

¹ The inscriptions were first presented at a lecture given during the 1997 Israel Archaeological Conference. An abstract appears in *The Twenty-Third Archaeological Conference in Israel*, Jerusalem, 1997, p. 7. A Hebrew version of this article appeared in *Cathedra* 85 (Jerusalem, October 1997), 45–64. See also: M. Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae (CIAP)*, II, Brill, 1999, 207–14, which depends on the Hebrew version, but unfortunately the precise title of my article is not included in Sharon's bibliographical list.

The excavations at Bet Shean are being carried out under the direction of Professor Yoram Tsafrir and Professor Gideon Foerster, to whom, as to all my fellow-members of the expedition, I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation for their generous help and encouragement in writing this article. The work on this site area was carried out for several seasons by Shoshana Agadi, Danny Abuhazeira, Oded Ron, Shulamit Hadad and Shira Nahari. Plans and stratigraphic analysis are by Bennie Arubas. Computer drawings are by Bennie Arubas, and Ronnie Shraer of the preservation section of the Antiquities Authority at Bet Shean, which extracted the mosaics from the site and worked on their preservation and restoration. Photographs are by Gabi Laron. My thanks are due to Professor Amikam Elad, who generously gave of his time, read the article, made valuable comments and referred me to additional sources. I also wish to thank Professor Rubin Amitai for his valuable comments and Professor Moshe Sharon, who accepted my reading of the inscriptions. It is hardly necessary to add that the responsibility for reading and translating the texts is entirely mine.

² The sources do not provide any information about Umayyad Bet Shean. The Arab historiographers seldom mention the place at all, perhaps because it was totally destroyed in the earthquake of 749 and was not rebuilt as a trading centre, causing a sharp diminution of its status. It is thus possible that the historiographers did not know of the city's importance in the Umayyad period. In any event, they took no interest in the place in later times. Nevertheless, from the little that is known about Bet Shean under the 'Abbasids, it seems that it became mainly an agricultural settlement. We gather that it produced dates of good quality, and like other towns and villages in the Jordan Valley it produced sugar and indigo dye (*al-nīl*), and supplied the whole of *jund al-Urdunn* and *jund Filastīn* with rice, see: Muhammad b. Aḥmad al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm*, Leiden, 1906, 162, 180, and a note on p. 162 saying that a stream crossed the town and the mosque was built within the market. He reckons *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem) to be the second city in *jund Filastīn* after Ramla, and Baysān as the second city after Tiberias in *jund al-Urdunn* (p. 54). Yāqūt al-Hamawī says that people talk of a great number of palm trees, but he himself saw only two; he adds that wine was produced there, see: Shihāb al-Dīn Abū 'Abdallāh Yāqūt al-Rūmī al-Hamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, Leipzig, 1868, I, 788. Ibn al-Faqīh tells a story according to which one of Hishām's people praised, in his presence, the dates of Bet Shean, see: Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Hamadhānī Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, Beirut, 1996, 70 (edition with new material not included in the Leiden 1885 publication). For further discussion of the economic situation of Bet Shean in the early Muslim period, see: A. Elad, 'The Caliph Abū 'l-'Abbās al-Saffāh, the First 'Abbāsīd Mahdī: implications of an unknown inscription from Bet Shean (Baysān)', in E. Fleischer, M. A. Friedman and J. A. Kraemer (ed.), *Mas'at Moshe, Studies in Jewish and Islamic Culture Presented to Moshe Gil*, Jerusalem, 1998, 25–32 (Hebrew).

³ On the dating of the earthquake to 749, in light of the written sources and the numismatic evidence, see: Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, 'The dating of the "Earthquake of the sabbatical year" of 749 C.E. in Palestine', *BSOAS*, 55, 1992, 231–5.

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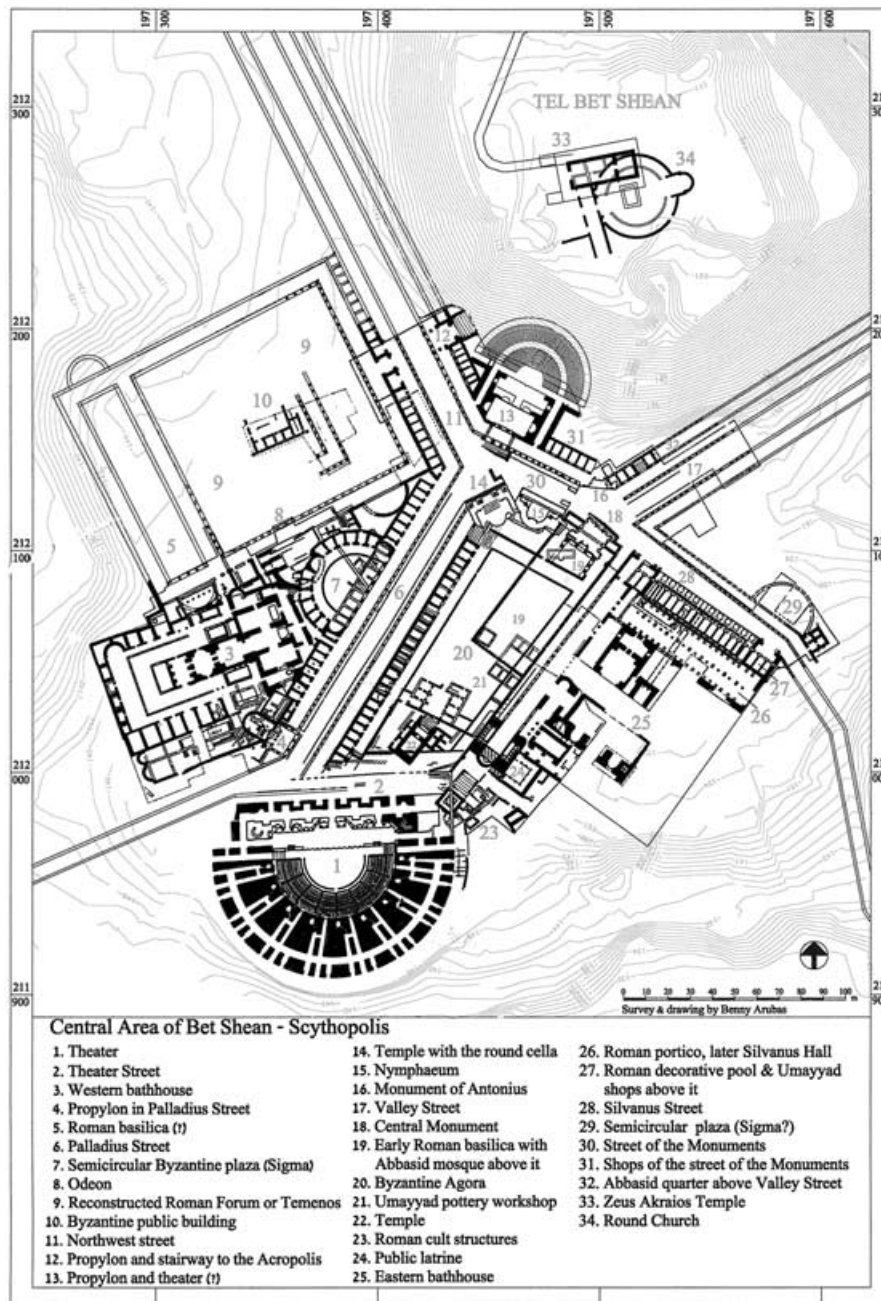


FIG. 1 Map of the central area of Scythopolis—Bet Shean.

In the Byzantine period, probably at the beginning of the sixth century, major changes were introduced in this area. The shallow pool was filled in and disappeared under a large basilical building paved with mosaics, slabs of marble and bitumen. The tiled roof exploited the Roman colonnade as a support. Two Greek inscriptions were found in the rubble in this area,

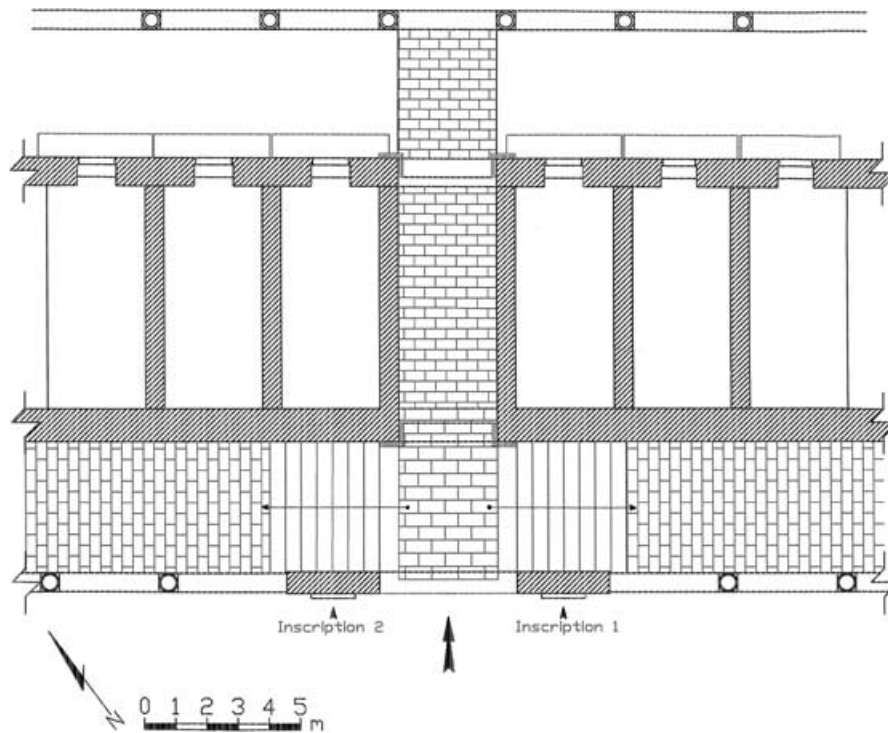


FIG. 2 The Umayyad market entrance gate, the location of the inscriptions and the passageway.

commemorating Silvanus, a citizen of Scythopolis, as the builder. (The archaeological expedition named the street in this area, which covered its Roman predecessor, 'Silvanus Street' in his honour.) In the next phase, some time after the basilica was destroyed, a long row of shops was built on the site, with an arched marble colonnade in front, and adjacent to it a street that has been dated in previous publications to the Byzantine period. The Roman colonnade was blocked in and provided a back wall for these shops. Some time later a passage was installed across the middle of the line of shops, lying north-west–south-east, with two entrances (fig. 2). The south-eastern entrance had a portal constructed of two stone piers. Fronting each of these there was a rectangular decorated stone frame containing a mosaic with Arabic inscriptions, found almost intact (fig. 3). The uncovering of these inscriptions confirmed the dating of the shops to the Umayyad period.⁴ The first inscription, attached to the right pier of the portal, was exposed in 1995. At its greatest extent it is 84 cm. in length and

⁴ On the most recent findings concerning this site and the dating of the shops to the Umayyad period, see: Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster, 'Urbanism at Scythopolis—Bet Shean in the fourth to seventh centuries', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51, 1997, 138–40; on the Bet Shean excavations on the site of the shops, see: G. Foerster and Y. Tsafir, 'The Bet Shean project: B. Center of Bet Shean—north: The amphitheater and its surroundings', *Excavations and Surveys in Israel (ESI)* 6, 1987–88, 25–43; G. Foerster and Y. Tsafir, 'The Bet Shean project—1988: Hebrew University Expedition', *ESI* 7–8, 1988–89, 15–22; Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster, 'Bet Shean excavation project—1988/89', *ESI* 9, 1989–90, 120–8; G. Foerster and Y. Tsafir, 'The Bet Shean excavation project (1989–1991): city center (north). Excavations of the Hebrew University expedition', *ESI* 11, 1992, 3–32; Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster, 'The Hebrew University excavations at Bet Shean, 1980–1994', *Qadmoniot* 27 nos. 3–4, 1994, 99–112 (Hebrew); Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster, 'From Byzantine Scythopolis to Arab Baysān—changing urban concepts', *Cathedra* 64, July 1992, 3–30 (Hebrew); Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster, 'Land use and settlement patterns in northern and central Transjordan, ca 550–ca 750', in: G. R. D. King and A. Cameron (ed.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East II, land use and settlement patterns*, Princeton, N.J., Darwin Press, 1994, 95–115.

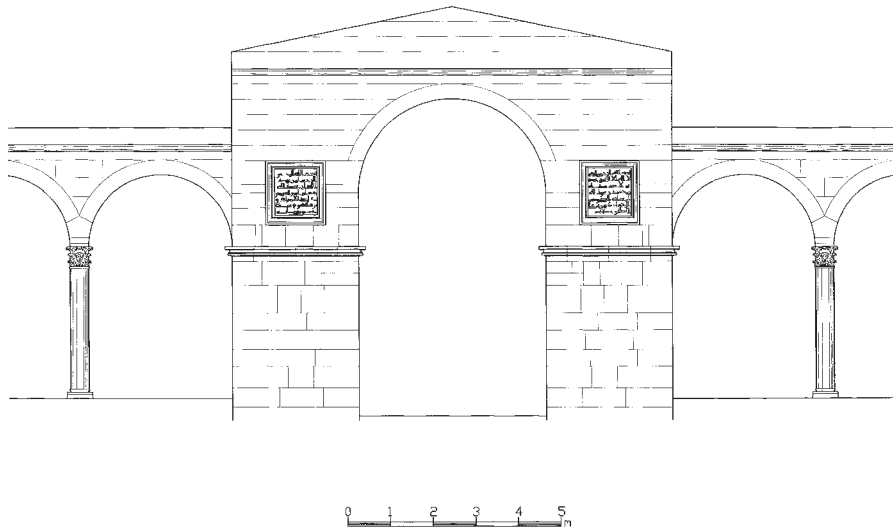


FIG. 3 Reconstruction of the south-eastern facade gate and the arcade.



FIG. 4 Computerized reconstruction of the right-hand mosaic inscription.

116 cm. in width; the space between the lines is 15 cm., the maximal length of the letters 13 cm. and their average thickness 1.5 cm. The inscription contains four lines in the squared Kufic script. The first line carries the *Basmalah* and the other three the formula of *al-Shahāda* (fig. 4):

In the name of Allāh, the Compassionate, **بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ**
the Merciful,
there is no God but Allāh, One, **لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ**
without associate. **لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ**
Muḥammad is the envoy of Allāh. **مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ**

The second inscription, attached to the left pier, was uncovered in 1996. It is 135 cm. in length and about 120 cm. wide; the space between the lines and the average thickness of the letters are as those in the first inscription. This inscription contains seven lines of Kufic script. It starts once again with the *Basmalah* formula and is followed by a commemoration of the erection of the building. The seventh and last line, which included the date of construction, was largely destroyed, but some remains of the final word can be made out (fig. 5):

In the name of Allāh, the Compassionate **بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ**
the Merciful. Ordered this **الرَّحِيمِ أَمْرًا بِهَذَا**
building the servant of Allāh (*‘Abd Allāh*) **الْبَنِيَانِ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ**
Hishām, Commander of the Faithful, **هَشَامَ أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ**
[to be built] by the governor Ishāq **عَلَى يَدَيِ الْأَمِيرِ إِسْحَاقَ**
bin Qabīṣa (completed in ?) the year **بَنَى قَبِيصَةَ فِي/ي؟ سَنَةِ**
[] and one hundred **وَمِئَةٍ []**

General description

The mosaics are composed of small glass tesserae at a density of 130 per square decimetre. The letters are inscribed in a tightly-packed double row of gold tesserae, consisting of transparent pale greenish cubes of glass each covered by a very thin sheet of gold and over this another thin layer of glass. The background is in shades of light to deep blue. The inscription areas, including the background, are framed by a double row of very dark tesserae, giving an effect of black lines. The space between the two lines of the frame is decorated with a coloured herring-bone pattern, five tesserae in width. Each line of the pattern is made up of tesserae mainly of the same colour, arranged in pairs, to compose three double pyramid-like steps. The pattern includes the following colours: gold, yellow, green, turquoise, light blue and deep blue, used in such a manner that they form patterns repeated always in the same order. The chevrons develop from the centre of the lower part, where they form a rhombus, and from there they flow in opposite directions, turning upwards at the corners and continuing to the top. At the upper two corners the pattern turns again towards the centre, this time to form an ‘X’. This arrangement, and the gradual transition between the colours, gives an effect of light and shade and

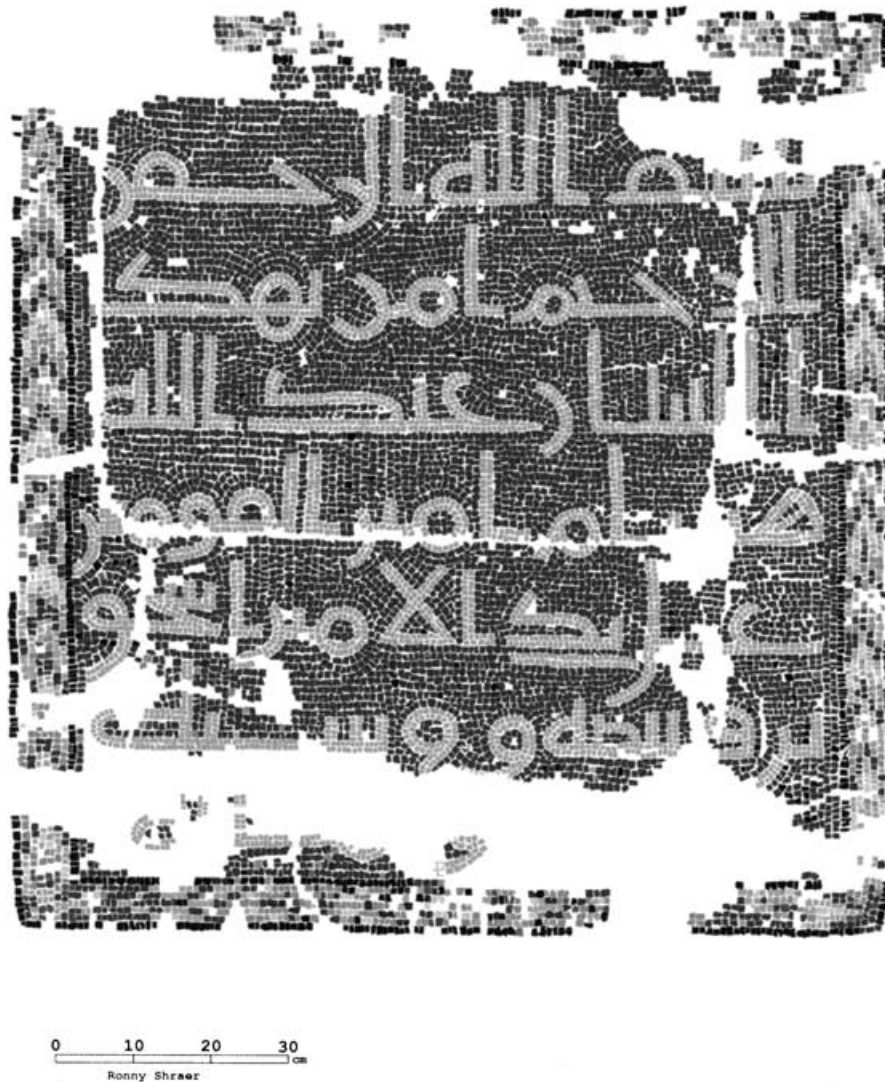


FIG. 5 Computerized reconstruction of the left-hand mosaic inscription.

an illusion of movement and flow from the lower towards the upper side of the frame.⁵

The technique

The mosaics were found beneath the fallen stones of the two piers, and detached from them, so that they were face-down on the ground (fig. 6). Finding them in this manner gave us the opportunity to study the detail of the construction

⁵ The ornamental pattern on the Bet Shean wall mosaic is not widespread. A similar frame exists on the soffit over the entrance to the west hall of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, see: K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Moslem architecture*, Oxford, 1969, I, part 1, pl. 50, a and c. It is possible that this frame was a source of inspiration to the Bet Shean mosaicist. A similar frame may be recognized in a now vanished mosaic in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, preserved in a Syrian sixth-century manuscript illumination, see: C. Cecchelli, J. Furlani and M. Salmi, *The Rabbula Gospels*, Olten and Lausanne, 1959, fol. 13a.

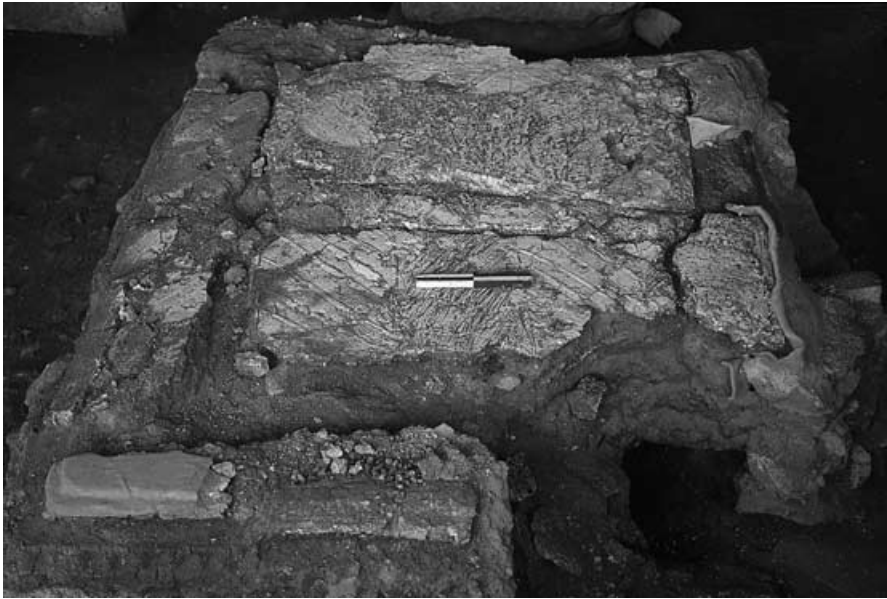


FIG. 6 The back of the left-hand mosaic inscription after its collapse in the earthquake.

of the mosaic and the matrix into which they were fixed. The mosaics are fixed in a matrix composed of two layers of white plaster. The first layer covered the stones of the piers and this was intended to align the wall surface and seal the grooves between the stones, to facilitate a more delicate plaster surface at the next stage. On the plaster surface, while still wet, typical herring-bone shaped grooves were engraved. The purpose of these was to strengthen the grip of the second layer of plaster on the first one, which had already dried. The traces of the grooves can still be seen in negative on the back of the second layer of plaster, which was used as a base for placing the tesserae. On this second layer, while still wet, preparatory drawings were marked in a red-earth pigment (*sinopia*), and perhaps also by incising. These drawings were intended to guide the artist in his work of laying the tesserae. In some of the small hollows left by fallen cubes it was possible to distinguish the traces of the preparatory red-earth colour (fig. 7).

In the final treatment the tesserae were laid on the second layer following the guiding lines. The tesserae cubes were fixed by a white mixture, based on lime, which was used as an adhesive. Analysis of the mosaic surface shows that the gold cubes with which the letters were composed were the first to be set in place, followed by the rest of the cubes for the background. This can be determined from the way these tesserae are arranged around and follow the contours created by the gold tesserae letters (fig. 8). We do not know whether the artist who made the mosaics was the same individual who prepared the drawings. However, it is quite likely that full-size drawings were prepared before the mosaics were laid and the gate built. The decorated stone frames, which are an integral part of the construction of the piers, fit the two mosaic inscriptions exactly (fig. 9). It is presumed that the drawings which we assumed to have been prepared were followed by the builders and stone-masons. In other words, a complete and detailed template would have been given to the builders before they started the construction of the gate.

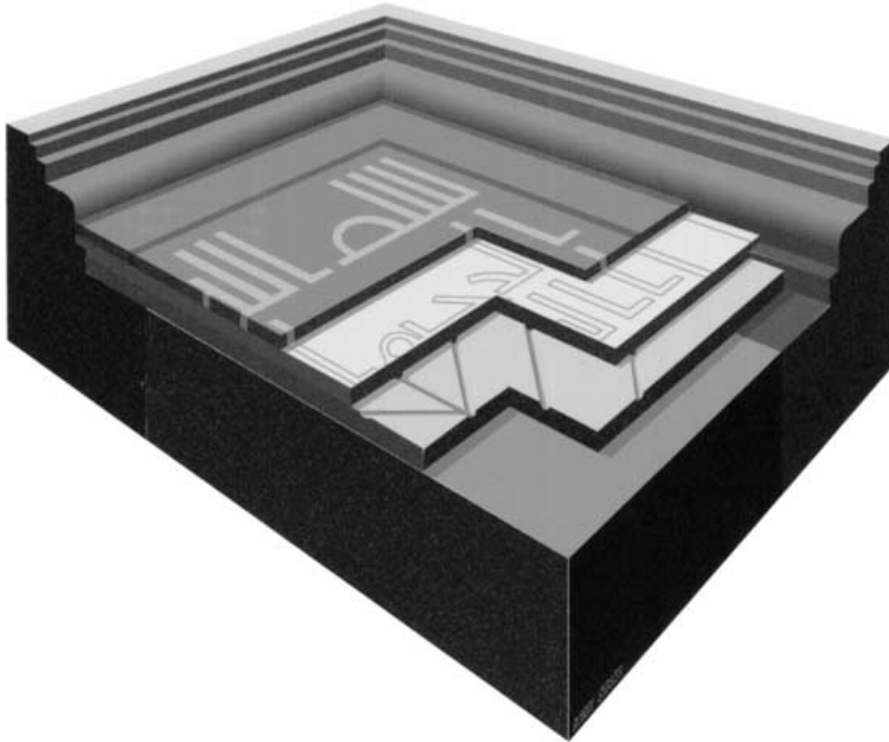


FIG. 7 Computerized section of the mosaic within the stone frame.



FIG. 8 The left-hand mosaic inscription under reconstruction.



FIG. 9 The stone frame of the left-hand mosaic inscription.

The inscriptions

The manner of arranging the inscriptions on both sides of the entrance gate makes them the only known dedication inscription from the Umayyad period to have been written in two parts. All other Arabic Umayyad dedication inscriptions are written in one sequence, whether in a few lines on one *tabula* (or plate) or in one continuous line. Although our inscription was made in two parts, the typical Caliphal formula was preserved, that is, first the *Basmalah* and then the dedication. The arrangement on either side of the gate enabled whoever faced the inscriptions to start on the right and to continue with the rest of the inscription on the left. Anyone who missed the prayer on the right could still start with the brief *Basmalah* prayer on the left.

The right-hand inscription, then, started with the *Basmalah* and was followed by *al-Shahādah*, which is composed of two parts: *al-Tawhīd* to attest the existence of one God, Allah who has no associate, and the *al-Risālah* of the Prophet Muḥammad. The mosaic is incomplete, and the lower part, including the bottom frame, was not found. The second inscription has seven lines and may be supposed to have been symmetrical to the first, and it may be assumed also to have had seven lines. Other Umayyad inscriptions perhaps provide the continuation. The most accepted formula is that which began to appear on the reformed coins of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (65–86 A.H./685–705 C.E.), which is the same as that mentioned twice in the Quran (IX, 33 or LXI, 9). This verse may supply the three missing lines of the first inscription from Bet Shean.⁶

⁶ This passage contains three further words *ولو كره المشركون*, ‘even though the polytheists hate it’, but the full version is too long to fit neatly and becomingly into three lines. For inscriptions of the Umayyad period containing the full text of the verse, see: Max Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum, Jérusalem (CIA): ‘Haram’ II*, Cairo, 1927, 250, no. 217; E. Combe, J. Sauvaget and G. Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie Arabe (RCEA)*, I, Cairo, 1931, 22, no. 25. The same inscription appears on Umayyad gold dinars, but without the last three words (which do, however, appear on *dirhams* of the same period).

[Has sent his Apostle with the Guidance and a Religion] [ارسله بالهدى ودين]

[of the truth that He may make it victorious] [الحق ليظهره]

[over every other religion] [على الدين كله]

‘Abd al-Malik often used this formula, making it into an emblem during the process of demarcation and Islamic identification *vis-à-vis* the Christians,⁷ and it continued in use under the other caliphs of his dynasty.

The inscription on the left again opens with the *Basmalah* formula and could thus stand independently of the inscription on the right. Immediately after the *Basmalah* comes the commissioning of the building, without any information as to its function. The term ‘to build’ in Arabic is used in Umayyad inscriptions to designate the construction of a new building.⁸ The order was given by ‘Abdallāh Hishām [b. ‘Abd al-Malik], commander of the faithful (the Caliph). The title ‘Abdallāh, which comes before the caliph’s personal name, appears in almost every inscription mentioning a caliph of the Umayyad dynasty from the days of Mu‘āwiya, the founder of the dynasty, and it demonstrates humility before God.⁹ The designation *amīr al-mu‘minīn*, ‘commander of the faithful’, was adopted by all the caliphs, beginning with ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb.¹⁰ The command to erect the building was carried out by the *Amīr* Ishāq b. Qabīsa, who was the governor of *jund al-Urdunn* during the reign of Hishām.¹¹ After the name of the governor comes the date of the

⁷ For the meaning of these inscriptions of the ‘Abd al-Malik period, see: O. Grabar, ‘The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem’, *Ars Orientalis* 3, 1959, 52–60; O. Grabar, *The shape of the Holy: early Islamic Jerusalem*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 65–71; A. Welch, ‘Epigraphs as icons: the role of the written word in Islamic art’, in J. Gutman (ed.), *The image of the word*, Missoula, Montana, 1977, 66–7; C. Kessler, ‘‘Abd al-Malik’s inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock: a reconsideration’, *JRAS* 1, 1970, 2–14.

⁸ An inscription containing the verb *banā*, usually referring to the commissioning of a new building, appears on several structures, as for instance in the dedicatory part of the inscription in the Dome of the Rock: ‘...built this dome ‘Abdallāh...’. For publication and discussion of this inscription, especially of the significance of the verb ‘to build’ (*banā*), see: *CIA*, ‘*Harām*’, 229–41, no. 215, fig. 35; III, pl. XIII. The inscription also appears in *RCEA* I, 8–9, no. 9; see there also two inscriptions of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, 12, no. 12, and 16–17, no. 18, the latter being the dedicatory inscription of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus: ‘...ordered the building of this mosque and demolition of the church that was within it ‘Abdallāh al-Walīd...’. On the dedicatory inscription from al-Muwaqqar: ‘...ordered the building of this pool ‘Abdallāh Yazīd...’, see: L. A. Mayer, ‘Note on the Inscription from al Muwaqqar’, *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine (QDAP)* 12, 1946, 73–4, pl. XXIII, 1.

⁹ The first to use the appellation ‘*Abdallāh*’ was Muḥammad himself, to be followed by the caliphs. The first inscription to mention the name of a caliph is a Greek inscription of Mu‘āwiya, A.H. 42, at Hammat Gader; the caliph’s name is preceded by the term ‘*Abdallāh*’, see: J. Green and Y. Tsafirir, ‘Greek inscriptions from Hammat Gader: a poem by the Empress Eudocia and two building inscriptions’, *Israel Exploration Journal (IEJ)* 32, 1982, 94–6, pl. II, A (Inscription No. 3); I. Hasson, ‘Remarques sur l’inscription de l’époque de Mu‘āwiya à Hammat Gader’, *ibid.*, 100. This inscription was published recently with new interpretations by L. Di Segni, ‘The Greek inscriptions of Hammat Gader’, in Y. Hirschfeld (ed.), *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader*, Jerusalem, 1997, 237–40, fig. 50. Also in another Mu‘āwiya inscription, dated A.H. 58, in Arabic on a dam at al-Ta‘if in the Hijāz, the term ‘*Abdallāh*’ appears before the caliph’s name, see: G. C. Miles, ‘Early Islamic inscription near Taif in the Hijaz’, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7, 1948, 237, pl. XVIII, A.

¹⁰ See: M. A. Shaban, *Islamic history, A.D. 600–750 (A.H. 132), a new interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, 56–7. On several aspects of the evolution and meaning of this term see a review by M. J. Kister of Shaban’s book in *Hamizrah Hahadash* 24, 1974, 100–01 (Hebrew); cf. also M. Sharon, ‘The birth of Islam in the Holy Land’, in *idem* (ed.), *Pillars of smoke and fire*, Johannesburg, 1986, 226–30.

¹¹ ‘Alī b. al-Hasan ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta‘rikh madīnat dimashq*, Amman, 1989 (a photocopy of the manuscript in al-Zāhiryya library in Damascus), vii, 308–9. On Ishāq b. Qabīsa’s title of *Amīr*, see: Jamāl al-Dīn Abū ‘l-Hijāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā‘ al-rijāl*, Beirut, 1988, II, 469. Al-Mizzī says that Ishāq b. Qabīsa’s name is mentioned by Abū al-Hasan al-Rāzī in his work on the names of the *amīrs* of Damascus, which has not survived (see also n12).

building;¹² unfortunately the main part of this line was destroyed, but from the remaining fragments it is possible to reconstruct only the last word of the date: and one hundred.

Ishāq b. Qabīṣa in the service of the Umayyad caliphs

The historical sources do not say when Hishām appointed Ishāq b. Qabīṣa as governor of *jund al-Urdunn*, but they list the various functions that he performed prior to that. Being related to the caliphs of the ‘Abd al-Malik branch of the Umayyad family (his father, Qabīṣa b. Dhu’ayb al-Khuzā‘ī, was a brother-in-law and secretary of ‘Abd al-Malik himself)¹³ he had a successful career. To begin with, Ishāq b. Qabīṣa was responsible for affairs of health (*Dīwān al-Zamnā*) under the caliphate of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik. With the accession of Hishām, he was appointed to the office dealing with charitable matters (*Dīwān al-Ṣadaqāt*), and afterwards, it seems, to the governorship of *jund al-Urdunn*.¹⁴

At this time, the tribes of the region were led by a certain ‘Ubāda b. Nussay al-Kindī, a well-known personage appointed by ‘Abd al-Malik as *qādī* of *jund al-Urdunn*. He established his seat at Tiberias, the capital of the *jund*.¹⁵ During the reign of the Caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (99–101 A.H./717–720 C.E.), ‘Ubāda was appointed governor of the *jund*,¹⁶ and it is reasonable to suppose that he remained in his post on the accession of Hishām.¹⁷ Hishām did not, apparently, replace him since there was no good reason for doing so, and also

¹² Between the name Ishāq b. Qabīṣa and the word *sana* there is a word lacking its lower part, which could perhaps be read as *wafā*. The connective *fī* usually appears before the date in such inscriptions, and in that case the addition of the letter *wa* before *fī* does not seem suitable. It is possible that these three letters were part of the verb *wafā*, which means ‘finished’, ‘came to an end’. Although this verb is not characteristic of this type of inscription, the interpretation cannot be entirely rejected.

¹³ Muḥammad b. Sa’d, *Al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Beirut, 1958, v, 176, 224, 233–4; Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, Leiden, 1964, ii, 787, 837; Muḥammad b. ‘Abdūs al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-Kutūb wa-l-Wuzarā’*, Cairo, 1938, 34; Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, Haydarabad, 1908, viii, 346; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, xiv, 392–4; ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī l-Ta’rīkh*, Beirut, 1987, iv, 234, 242.

¹⁴ The *Dīwān al-Zamnā* is known only from the period of al-Walīd; apparently it did not exist before him and was perhaps abrogated after his reign. Al-Walīd was known for his concern for the sick and crippled, and it is said that he appointed a guide for every blind person and a helper for every cripple, and that he was the first to establish hospitals (*bīmāristān*). See: *Al-Uyūn wa-l-Hadā’iq* [anonymous], Leiden, 1871, iii, 4, 11–12; Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, 157; Abū ‘l-‘Abbās Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A’shā fī Ṣinā’at al-Inshā*, Beirut, 1987, i, 491. After al-Walīd the *Dīwān al-Zamnā* seems to have been amalgamated with the *Dīwān al-Ṣadaqāt*, which dealt, as it had done before, with matters of disease and poverty, see: Shaban, *Islamic history*, 118–9. Ishāq b. Qabīṣa was thus appointed to the *Dīwān al-Ṣadaqāt* under Hishām. On his various posts, see: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, ii, 779. Ibn ‘Asākir adds that Al-Walīd said that ‘I will bring it about that the sick will be more beloved in his family than the healthy’. See also: Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, i, 247; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Mashāhīr wa-l-‘Alām*, Beirut, 1990, vii, 26–7; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, ii, 469; al-Jahshiyārī, *al-Kutūb wa-l-Wuzarā’*, 60, where we find the interesting information that ‘he was appointed over the estates of Hishām in al-Urdunn’, i.e. not as governor of al-Urdunn.

¹⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, v, 113; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, viii, 783; al-Dhahabī, *Ta’rīkh*, vii, 390–1; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, xiv, 194, 197.

¹⁶ The Caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz wanted to combine the function of judge with that of governor of the various *junds*, see: ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Abdallāh al-Dimashqī Abū Zur’a, *Ta’rīkh*, Baghdad, 1973, 202. On the appointment of ‘Ubāda b. Nussay al-Kindī as governor of *jund al-Urdunn* under ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, see: Khalifa b. Khayyāt al-‘Uṣfurī, *Ta’rīkh Khalifa b. Khayyāt*, 1967, 330; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, viii, 873; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, xiv, 197.

¹⁷ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Al-Ta’rīkh al-Kabīr*, Beirut, 1986, iii/2, 95, mentions that ‘Ubāda b. Nussay al-Shāmī al-Kindī al-Urdunī is at their head [of the tribes of al-Urdunn]. See also: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, viii, 873, who tells a story of Caliph Hishām asking ‘Who stands at the head of the tribes of al-Urdunn?’ and is answered ‘Ubāda b. Nussay’.

out of consideration for his high standing in the region.¹⁸ It is not clear how long 'Ubāda remained in his post, but he is known to have died in 118 A.H./736 C.E.¹⁹ It would appear, therefore, that Ishāq b. Qabīsa was appointed in that year, and that his period as governor was no longer than seven years, from 'Ubāda's death in A.H. 118 to Hishām's death in A.H. 125. During these years Ishāq b. Qabīsa must have completed the construction of the market and the erection of the inscriptions in Bet Shean.

Date of the inscriptions

The word 'and one hundred' preserved at the end of the dedicatory inscription begins in the middle of the last line and stretches to the end of it, so that there is room for only one word before it. In view of the fact that the inscription was well planned in advance, down to the last detail of the proportions and the spacing between the letters and the words, it is difficult to imagine that two words were inserted before the surviving 'and one hundred'. Taking the years 118–125, the only plausible solution is twenty, making the date A.H. 120 (December 737–December 738).²⁰ If so, it would appear that construction of the new Umayyad market was completed in this year, with the erection of the *stoa* along the south-facing front, containing the portal with the inscriptions. We do not know precisely when the construction of the market began, but in the light of the excavations, it seems that it must have been under Hishām. Eleven years later the market collapsed in the earthquake of 749 that devastated Bet Shean and large parts of Palestine.

Umayyad mosaic inscriptions

The name of Ishāq b. Qabīsa also appeared in a mosaic inscription from the estate palace at Acre, quoted in part in al-Jahshiyārī '...of what was made by Ishāq b. Qabīsa'.²¹ Neither inscription nor structure have survived, but it can be speculated that this inscription was similar in both content and form to the Bet Shean example. From the sources we know of Hishām's rebuilding of Acre after it had been reduced to ruins by repeated Byzantine assaults. The Acre inscription shows that this reconstruction was carried out, at least in part, by the same Ishāq b. Qabīsa who was responsible, under Hishām, for building the Bet Shean market. Acre was a port city for *jund al-Urdunn*, and very probably entertained close commercial relations with Bet Shean, for the import and export of goods.²²

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem has the only surviving example of a major Umayyad wall mosaic inscription. It consists of one continuous line,

¹⁸ See: M. Gil, *A history of Palestine, 634–1099*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 115–6. Gil writes that, of the people appointed to govern in Palestine, the foremost were men of the caliph's family, or heads of the tribes who participated in the conquest or were settled in Palestine. On the method of appointing and deposing governors in the Umayyad period in general and under Hishām in particular, see: K. 'Athamina, *Ansāb al-Ashraf, al-Balādhurī, IVb, The Umayyad Caliph Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik*, part 1, vol. 1 (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1982, 200–03.

¹⁹ Khalifa b. Khayyāt al-'Uṣfurī, *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt*, Baghdad, 1967, 310; *ibid.*, *Ta'rikh*, 363–4; Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Tabaqāt*, vii, 456; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, v, 114; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, viii, 876; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, xiv, 198; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, vii, 391.

²⁰ Y. Grumel, *La Chronologie*, Paris, 1958, 282.

²¹ According to al-Jahshiyārī, Ishāq b. Qabīsa's name appeared on the palace 'al-Ṣabāh', a word of uncertain meaning in this context. The editor suggests reading 'al-ḍiyā', that is, 'estates', see: al-Jahshiyārī, *al-Kutūb wa-'l-Wuzarā'*, 60. On this inscription see also: *RCEA*, i, 26, n32.

²² C. Cahen, *L'Islam, des origines au début de l'empire ottoman*, Paris, 1970, 130. Cahen considers Acre to have been one of the principal ports of *al-Shām* (Greater Syria) in the Umayyad period. After the Muslim conquest Acre was joined to *jund al-Urdunn* and controlled the trade of the Jezreel Valley (*Marj bin 'Amir*) and the Jordan Valley (*Ghawr al-Urdunn*) including Bet Shean.

240 metres in length, that runs around the interior ambulatory. It is made of gilded tesserae, the letters being four tesserae thick, on a turquoise background. The mosaics were made under 'Abd al-Malik and are dated to 72 A.H./691 C.E.²³

Gold mosaic inscriptions on a blue background are known to have existed in three mosques built by al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik—the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, al-Aqṣā Mosque²⁴ in Jerusalem and the Mosque of the Prophet in al-Madīna. None of these inscriptions has survived, but the sources tell of al-Walīd's dedicatory inscriptions in the Damascus and al-Madīna mosques. The first to quote the inscription in Damascus was al-Mas'ūdī. He noted that the inscription was in golden letters on a blue background, and contained the date 87 A.H./707 C.E.²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī mentions the dedicatory inscription on the wall mosaic of the mosque in al-Madīna, where the name of al-Walīd appears, and he adds that in the course of time this name was changed to that of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī.²⁶ A description of the Madīna mosque is found in Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, who notes five continuous lines of inscription in gold on a blue background, each letter as thick as a finger. These inscriptions contain the short Makkan *sūras* from the end of the Quran.²⁷ The al-Madīna inscriptions were written by ibn Abī al-Hayyāj, one of the celebrated calligraphers of his time, who was appointed by al-Walīd to write Qurans for him and who was also asked to prepare the inscriptions for the mosque.²⁸ It can reasonably be suggested that it was he who wrote the inscriptions in the other mosques built by al-Walīd. As for al-Aqṣā, we know nothing of the inscriptions there, but we do know that the mosque was decorated with mosaics, like those in Damascus and al-Madīna.²⁹

The script

With the consolidation of the text of the Quran by the third Caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, and the first construction of splendid Islamic religious buildings in the Umayyad period, verses from the holy text were chosen to decorate the walls of the new edifices. For the writing of the verses the noble colour of

²³ Margaret Van Berchem, 'The mosaics on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque in Damascus', in Creswell, *EMA*, i, 1, 213–372, especially p. 220. Van Berchem observed that the mosaics were light green in colour after cleaning. In contrast, at the beginning of the century Max Van Berchem saw them as dark blue, see: *CIA*, 'Haram', 228.

²⁴ The argument about the date of the construction of al-Aqṣā mosque has recently been revived in the work of A. Elad, who ascribes the building to 'Abd al-Malik, but does not rule out the possibility that al-Walīd was responsible for the mosaic decoration, see: A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship*, Leiden, 1995, 35–9.

²⁵ Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'l-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa-Ma'ādīn al-Jawhar*, Beirut, 1970, vol. iii, 366. On this inscription, see: *RCEA*, i, n18, 16–17.

²⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, iii, 535. The substitution of al-Mahdī for al-Walīd recalls the replacement of 'Abd al-Malik's name by that of al-Ma'mūn in the mosaic inscription in the Dome of the Rock.

²⁷ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *al-Iqd al-Farīd*, Cairo, 1940, iv, 296. On the restoration of the decorations and the place of the quranic verses within them, as well as on the dedicatory inscription of al-Walīd in al-Madīna, see: J. Sauvaget, *La Mosquée Omeyyade de Médin*, Paris, 1947, 66, 80, fig. 3.

²⁸ On the decoration with quranic inscriptions of the mosque in al-Madīna, and what is known of al-Walīd's calligrapher, see: Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, Leipzig, 1871, 6. The author also tells a story according to which 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (governor of al-Madīna under al-Walīd, and responsible for the building of the mosque) asked this calligrapher to write a Quran for him in a style similar to the mosque inscriptions. When the work was completed, 'Umar was enthusiastic but had to return it to the artist because of its high price, see: Nabia Abbott, *The rise of the North Arabic script and its Kur'anic development, with a full description of the Kur'anic manuscripts in the Oriental Institute*, Chicago, 1939, 54.

²⁹ For the mosaics in al-Walīd's mosques in Damascus and al-Madīna, see: B. Finster, 'Die Mosaiken der Umayyadenmoschee von Damaskus', *Kunst des Orients*, vii (1970,–71), *Heft 2*, 83–141. For the mosaics that decorated al-Aqṣā, see: Creswell, *EMA*, i, 2, 374. In another inscription from the Umayyad period, this time a pavement mosaic depicting a *mihrāb* excavated in a house in Ramla, the script is square and amateurish, appearing in three lines, see: M. Rosen-Ayalon, 'The first mosaic discovered in Ramla', *IEJ* 26, 1976, 104–19, pl. 23, c.

gold was chosen, symbolizing light, authority and kingship. For the background, blue was used, representing the mystery, the infinity and, more notably, the colour of the heavens. The significance of these colours in Umayyad iconography derived directly from the Byzantine tradition.

The development of Arabic script during the seventh century was rapid and was probably greatly stimulated by the project of collecting and copying the definitive quranic text initiated by the Caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. The script continued to develop during the Umayyad period, but more slowly.³⁰ 'Abd al-Malik often used quranic verses in the Kufic script. Under his rule they appeared on mosaics, as well as on the repoussé bronze plaques, inscribed in gold on a blue background, which were placed over two of the four entrances to the Dome of the Rock.³¹ 'Abd al-Malik made still more widespread use of quranic texts during his administrative reform, in the course of which he made Arabic the language of administration and coinage. From the year 77 A.H./696 C.E., Islamic coins carry quranic verses in a script similar to that of the mosaic inscription and the bronze plaques of the Dome of the Rock. The similarity is evident in the proportions of the words as well as in the design of the elongated and shortened letters, and it would appear that all these inscriptions, whether architectural or on coins, derived from one source: quranic manuscripts of the Umayyad period.³²

Support for this assumed relationship between the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock and quranic script may be found in the shape of the lettering in the Dome, which looks like an imitation of writing with the pen (*al-qalam*) made from a reed with a wide tip, which was used to write the Quran.³³ The writing technique is expressed in the shape of the letters, which are thick or thin according to whether the pen is held on its thick or thin side.³⁴ The way of writing the diacritical signs (by strokes) in the mosaic inscription of the Dome of the Rock³⁵ also exemplifies the link between it and the Quran—the strokes were indicated by means of a thin horizontal line imitating the shape of the pen tip, and they were placed over the letters in an archaic manner, as in the earliest Qurans that we know.³⁶

At first glance the resemblance between the Bet Shean mosaic inscription and that of the Dome of the Rock is striking, but on closer examination the differences become apparent—differences explicable by the development of the

³⁰ Abbott, *Arabic script*, 17–30; Y. H. Safadi, *Islamic calligraphy*, London, 1978, 10–17.

³¹ CIA, 'Haram', 246–55, nos. 216–7. Also in RCEA, I, 10–11, nos. 10–11. One of the plaques was set above the north entrance and the other above the east. They were removed in 1973 and taken to the Waqf offices on the Haram al-Sharīf.

³² Abbott, *Arabic script*, 55; G.-R. Puin, 'Methods of research on qur'anic manuscripts—a few ideas', in: *Masāhif San'ā* (Catalogue of the exhibition held in Kuwait National Museum 19 March–19 May 1985), 9–17, 32–61.

³³ On making a quill out of a reed, writing with it, and the origin of the name *qalam*, see: al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā*, III, 54–64; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 7–8, 20–21; Pederson, *The Arabic book*, Princeton, 1984, 69.

³⁴ The Dome of the Rock mosaics, including the inscription, were recently published in state-of-the-art photographic reproductions in Grabar, *The holy*, ill. 38–49.

³⁵ Kessler, 'Abd al-Malik's inscriptions', 2–14, pls. 1–3. On the reason why the diacritical marks appear in some places and not in the whole inscription, see: Grabar, *The holy*, 62; Abbott, *Arabic script*, 39. Diacritical signs began to be used in Arabic in the last quarter of the seventh century, in the period of Mu'āwiya or of 'Abd al-Malik, but only in Qurans written in the Kufic script: see: 'Calligraphy and epigraphy', in A. U. Pope and P. Ackerman (ed.), *A survey of Persian Art*, II, Oxford, 1939, 1711; Ibn al-Nadīm remarks that the first to insert diacritical signs into Arabic script was Abū 'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī, in the time of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, see: Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 39–40.

³⁶ S. Blair, 'What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?', in J. Raby and J. Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, part one (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, 9), Oxford, 1992, 74; Abbott, *Arabic script*, 38–9, 55. For the earliest Qurans and the structure of their script, see: F. Déroche, *The Abbasid tradition. Qur'āns of the 8th to the 10th centuries AD*, Oxford, 1992; G.-R. Puin, *Qur'anic manuscripts*, 9–17, 32–61.

script over half a century. The Bet Shean inscriptions have no strokes and the influence of the *qalam* writing implement is not noticeable, apart from isolated letters (such as the letter ‘*ayn*’ in the left inscription) which still have pointed tips. The difference between these inscriptions, those of the Dome of the Rock and others of the Umayyad period is evident in the style of the graded writing of some letters, a phenomenon known to us from later Kufic, as in the Allāh in the first Bet Shean inscription. Something similar occurs in the letter *sīn* in the word *rasūl*. Another phenomenon unique to the Bet Shean inscription is the letter *mīm*, sometimes written as a semi-circle in the middle or at the end of a word. When the final *mīm* is fully circular it finishes in a very short hook turned downwards, in contrast to the ending appearing as a straight line in other Umayyad inscriptions. The letter *yā* in the word *al-rahīm* is slightly rounded following the curve of the circular *mīm*. The final *yā* in *yadaī* does not curl back under the preceding letter, as is usually the case in Umayyad inscriptions. Also noteworthy is the design of the letters *sīn* and *hā* in the name Ishāq—the first written over the second instead of in a straight line. (In the word *al-m’umīnīn* a problem seems to have occurred, probably because of lack of space, so that the letters *nūn* and *yā* are squashed together into a four-cube space, without the necessary separation.)

In the various inscriptions of ‘Abd al-Malik’s period, especially those in the Dome of the Rock, the influence of contemporary quranic script can be discerned, as we have suggested above. Al-Walīd, as al-Jahshiyārī tells us, wanted to introduce changes into the official style of writing in order to embellish it and make it more impressive.³⁷ It is possible that this ambition was also reflected in the script used for mosaic inscriptions in this period, leading to some modification in the letters. The Bet Shean inscriptions reflect a further stage in the development of mosaic inscriptions towards the end of the Umayyad period, and suggest the adoption of the special style used for religious purposes in the field of secular construction. The inscriptions at Bet Shean and probably also at Acre in the time of Ishāq b. Qabīṣa (and perhaps also elsewhere) were employed to embellish a secular construction, certainly, but also to commemorate the name of the builder in gold and to emphasize the Islamic presence through the elaborated Arabic script.

The Umayyad market in Bet Shean at the time of Hishām

The construction of the new market in Bet Shean in the latter part of the Umayyad period is evidence of an attempt to encourage the renewal of commercial activities in the town, which was in a state of decline. Parts of Byzantine Scythopolis had already been abandoned. ‘Palladius Street’ as well as the ‘Sigma’ and the Byzantine *agora* had become terrace-like structures, containing a cemetery and an industrial area, especially of pottery kilns.³⁸

Why, then, was there a need to encourage commerce and resettlement under the Umayyads? To answer this question we must try to examine the external factors, the historical background and the economic conditions that led to this renewal, as well as the steps taken by the Umayyad rulers to influence the development of the region, and especially the Caliph Hishām’s attitude to these matters.

The construction of the market in Bet Shean is one of several building

³⁷ Al-Jahshiyārī says that al-Walīd wanted his calligraphers to write on *tūmār* (large papyrus) and in large script called *jalīl* which was written with a thick *qalam* and used for official missives from the caliph to rulers and kings, see: al-Jahshiyārī, *al-Kuttāb wa-’l-Wuzarā’*, 47. On this writing style, see: Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 8–9.

³⁸ Tsafirir and Foerster, *Urbanism*, 136–8.

projects undertaken by the Umayyads in Greater Syria (al-Shām) generally and in Palestine in particular. These enterprises include, as we know, the magnificent Jerusalem edifices of the Dome of the Rock, al-Aqṣā mosque and the associated palaces.³⁹ The town of Ramla was built by Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik as the economic centre of *jund Filastīn*.⁴⁰ Other towns were rehabilitated at the same time, especially those near the coast.⁴¹ Further constructions were built around the Sea of Galilee, including the palace, apparently a country estate, of Khirbat al-Minyā and the renovation of the adjacent bath house,⁴² al-Sinnabra,⁴³ and the baths of al-Ḥamma (Hammat-Gader).⁴⁴ In the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, the road going up to Jerusalem was paved. As it approached Jerusalem this road passed through Bāb al-Wādī (Sha‘ar Hagai) and Abū Ghūsh, and from Jerusalem it went on to Wādī ‘l-Qīl.⁴⁵ It probably continued via the Jordan Valley (*Ghūr al-Urdunn*), passing through Bet Shean. From the south of the Sea of Galilee the road went on to Damascus.⁴⁶ Farms were established along the Jordan Valley and irrigated by means of canals and connected wells, for instance that at Fatzael.⁴⁷ Likewise, a beginning is known to have been made on the excavation of a large canal in the Jordan Valley during the reign of al-Walīd (II) b. Yazīd (125–126 A.H./743–744 C.E.).⁴⁸ The best-known of the Jordan Valley constructions is Hishām’s palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar, in the middle of a flourishing agricultural region.⁴⁹

Apart from construction activities and economic development, the Umayyad rulers took further steps to establish their rule and standing in Palestine, endowing various towns with sanctity by propagating *ḥadīths* (traditions) connected with these places.⁵⁰ The first among these was, of course, Jerusalem. Although a less sanctified place, Bet Shean/Baysān is mentioned in a *ḥadīth* conveyed in the name of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, saying that those wishing to earn their livelihood and be well-off and God-fearing should settle in Baysān.⁵¹ This *ḥadīth* may have been propagated in order to encourage settlement there towards the end of the Umayyad period. Other *ḥadīths* connected with Baysān were intended to elevate the standing of the place in the eyes of the faithful.⁵²

Of the caliphs, Hishām played a leading role in encouraging development

³⁹ M. Ben-Dov, *The dig at the Temple Mount*, Jerusalem, 1982, 293–322.

⁴⁰ N. Luz, ‘The construction of an Islamic city in Palestine. The case of Umayyad al-Ramle’, *JRAS* (third series) 7, 1997, 36–45.

⁴¹ Gil, *Palestine*, 107–9; A. Elad, ‘The coastal cities of Palestine during the Early Middle Ages’, *The Jerusalem Cathedral*, 2, 1982, 146–67. On Ramla, see: M. Rosen-Ayalon, ‘The first century of Ramla’, *Arabica* 43, 1996, 250–63.

⁴² O. Grabar, J. Perrot, B. Ravani and M. Rosen, ‘Sondages à Khirbet el-Minyeh’, *EIJ* 10, 1960, 226–43.

⁴³ Al-Sinnabra is opposite ‘Aqabat Afīq; there was a place on the site visited by Mu‘āwiya, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, and others, see: Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, iii, 419; L. A. Mayer, ‘Aṣ-Sinnabra’, *Eretz-Israel* 1, 1951, 169–70 (Hebrew).

⁴⁴ Y. Hirschfeld, *The Roman baths of Hammat Gader*, Jerusalem, 1997.

⁴⁵ *CIA, Jerusalem: ‘Ville’*, Cairo, 1922, 17–21, figs 1–4.

⁴⁶ M. Sharon, ‘An Arabic inscription from the time of the caliph Abd al-Malik’, *BSOAS* 19, 1966, 367–72, pl. I; A. Elad, ‘The Southern Golan in the early Muslim period, the significance of two newly discovered milestones of ‘Abd al-Malik’, *Der Islam* 76, 1999, 33–88.

⁴⁷ ‘Fatzael’, *HA* 46, 1973, 9–13 (Hebrew). Connected wells (foggaras) constitute a sophisticated system of drawing on the aquifer by means of gravitation, without pumping. The method originated in Iran and was introduced into Palestine by the Umayyads, see: Y. Porath, ‘Connected wells (foggaras) in the Jordan Valley’, *Teva Vaaretz* 12, April–May 1970, 128–32 (Hebrew).

⁴⁸ Gil, *Palestine*, 108–9.

⁴⁹ H. W. Hamilton, *Khirbit al-Mafjar*, Oxford, 1959.

⁵⁰ On the attribution of sanctity to cities in Palestine in the Umayyad period, see: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, i, 339–43; Gil, *Palestine*, 100–1.

⁵¹ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, i, 343.

⁵² These *ḥadīths* called Bet Shean *lisān al-ard* ‘the tongue of the Earth’, and said that its well (*Ayn al-Fulūs*) brought water from Paradise and is mentioned in the Quran, and also that two or four just men (*abdāl*) live there, out of forty ever-renewed just men in the entire world, see: Gil, *Palestine*, 101. For a detailed discussion of the traditions linked to Bet Shean, see: Elad, *al-Safāh*, 38–49.

projects in al-Shām.⁵³ The caliphs or their governors invested a great deal in building roads and towns and establishing markets, *khāns* and watering facilities along the ways that led to and from al-Shām.⁵⁴ The name of Hishām is associated with many such sites in Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Syria.⁵⁵

One of Hishām's main concerns was the treasury.⁵⁶ To augment state income he increased taxes, initiated economic projects and expanded the areas given to agriculture by cultivating waste lands, and improving farming, draining marshes and digging irrigation canals.⁵⁷ Hishām also knew how to exploit market conditions, and from time to time he would raise the prices of the produce cultivated on his private estates.⁵⁸ In order to control trading ventures he built or improved marketplaces in the main towns on the empire's trading routes. Thus, for instance, he renovated the great market of Qayrawān and divided it according to types of goods and artisanship.⁵⁹ In Fustāt, too Hishām set up an extensive system of markets, called *Qaysāriyat Hishām*. It specialized in the silk (*al-baz*) trade, which became a monopoly of Hishām.⁶⁰ The market established by Hishām in al-Madīna, through his uncle, Ibrāhīm b. Hishām b. Ismā'īl, then governor of the town, was built in two storeys, the first rented out to traders, and the second residential. This market blocked other markets and houses in its vicinity and was constructed against the opposition of the citizens and merchants of al-Madīna, who immediately destroyed it when they heard of Hishām's death.⁶¹ Other markets were established in Hishām's time by his governors in Iraq, such as *sūq* Hishām in al-Raqqā,⁶² *sūq* 'Umar in al-Hīra⁶³ and the shops built by Khālīd b. 'Abdallāh al-Qasrī.⁶⁴ Even Hishām's wife built a market, known by her name (*sūq* Umm Ḥakīm) in Damascus.⁶⁵

In view of Hishām's great interest in business affairs, and his energetic acquisitions of land,⁶⁶ his building of markets and seeking economic resources in Palestine, and the corresponding need for encouraging trade and selling the

⁵³ Hishām had wells dug from Mecca to *al-Shām*; he was very interested in digging canals and building palaces and warehouses. He also greatly contributed to the regularity and safety of the caravan trade, see: Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, 157; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, iv, 41.

⁵⁴ Athamina, *Hishām*, i, 2, 138–40.

⁵⁵ On Hishām's building undertakings, see: *EMA*, i, 2, 498–577; F. Gabrieli, s.v. 'Hishām', *EI*².

⁵⁶ G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam, the Umayyad Caliphate A.D. 661–750*, Carbondale, 1987, 81. Hishām claimed that the Caliphate was as much in need of money as a sick man is in need of medicine, see: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, Jerusalem, 1993, vib, 52.

⁵⁷ al-Tabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ii, 1655; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, iv, 408, 889, 994; Ahmad b. Yahyā al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, Beirut, 1957, 408; Shaban, *Islamic history*, 160–6; Athamina, *Hishām*, i, 2, 167–9.

⁵⁸ On Hishām's exploitation of market conditions in order to fix prices, see: J. Wellhausen, *The Arab kingdom and its fall*, London, 1973, 349; Wellhausen recounts that Hishām was envious of his governor in Iraq, Khālīd b. 'Abdallāh al-Qasrī, and prevented him from selling his crops before Hishām himself, for such a sale might have lowered prices. For the same story, see: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vib, 218; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, iv, 437; al-Tabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ii, 1658; Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, 81–3.

⁵⁹ Abū 'Ubaydallāh 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-Maghrib fī Dhikr Ifrīqiyā wa-l-Maghrib*, Paris, 1965, 25–6. According to al-Bakrī the markets of Qayrawān stretched from the Great Mosque to the town gates. They were two-and-a-third miles in length, and one enormous roof covered the entire market. For the division by crafts, see: al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm*, 216.

⁶⁰ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn 'Abdallāh 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-Akḥbāruhā*, New Haven, 1922, 132; Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kindī, *Wulāt Miṣr*, Beirut [n. d.], 95; Athamina, *Hishām*, i, 2, 171.

⁶¹ 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-Wafā bi-Akḥbār Dār al-Muṣṭafā*, Beirut, 1984, ii, 749–53.

⁶² al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 247.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 395.

⁶⁴ al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vib, 165; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 402.

⁶⁵ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, iv, 108.

⁶⁶ One of the stories about Hishām's limitless greed for landed property tells that when he visited a fruit orchard belonging to a monastery, and the orchard found favour in his eyes, he proposed to the monk to buy it from him, with much insistence. The monk was astonished and said to him: 'I hope that all people will die except you alone, so that you will fulfil your desire to possess the whole world'. See: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vib, 70; Ibn 'Abd Rabbīhī, *al-'Iqd al-Farīd*, v, 210; Athamina, *Hishām*, i, 2, 232, n305.



FIG. 10 General view, looking south-east, of the Umayyad market place.

produce of his private estate,⁶⁷ it is quite possible that he found an abandoned terrain near the commercial centre of Umayyad Baysān, bought it, and constructed a market (fig. 10). It may be supposed that local builders were employed, who had acquired much experience in working on mosques, palaces and even urban projects. With much skill, these builders constructed Hishām's market and gave it an Islamic character, to distinguish it from the other streets and shops of Bet Shean, which dated back to Roman and Byzantine times. The Islamic aspect of this market was expressed by the Arabic inscriptions on the market portals containing quranic verses, done in the technique of the mosaic inscriptions that also decorate Islamic sacred buildings. It seems that the shop façades were also decorated in stucco, showing *mihrāb*-like niches facing south. Three of these niches have survived over the shop-openings.

Thus to summarize, Bet Shean was situated at a trade crossroads in the Greater Syrian region. The Umayyad caliphs greatly contributed to the development of this trade, which saw a lively and extensive efflorescence under their rule. For this reason Hishām decided to build a market in Bet Shean. As was his habit, he financed the building of the market so that it remained his property. He levied taxes and derived an income from the enterprise, regarding it as a favourable investment.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ One of the interesting finds in the shops area of Bet Shean is a lead seal for a honey jar, carrying the name of the Caliph Hishām. The jar was very probably sent from his private estates (this seal is to be published by the author). Hishām kept stocks of honey in warehouses in al-Hanī and al-Marī, and when he once sent for honey he was told that the poor and sick had licked at it. He ordered that these people should be kept at a distance, and that the honey should be collected and locked up in the warehouses, see: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, v, 16. Al-Hanī and al-Marī were two estates belonging to Hishām on the Euphrates, see: al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*, p. 247. Hishām of course possessed many other estates; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, v, 29–30 (an estate that sometimes doubled its production); p. 50 (fruit orchards); pp. 71, 75 (olive groves). On his estates on the Rumān River in Iraq, see: Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, iv, 436. Hishām and his sons had more estates in Syria, Lebanon (in the Baalbek district) and in Jordan. In the Ḥijāz, he owned orchards in al-Tā'if and al-Madīna, see: 'Athamina, *Hishām*, i, 2, 170–1.

⁶⁸ The construction of the *sūq*, as an enclosure with gates and permanent shops, and as a place for the levying of taxes, evolved in Hishām's period and under his order; see: P. Guichard, s.v. 'sūk', *El²*.