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The rich harvest of Near Eastern mosaics

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JANINE BALTY, *MOSAÏQUES ANTIQUES DU PROCHE-ORIENT* (Centre de Recherches d'Histoire Ancienne, vol. 140; Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 551; Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1995), Pp. 395, 52 plates. ISBN 2-251-60551-7.
MICHELE PICCIRILLO, EUGENIO ALLIATA, *et al.*, *UMM AL-RASAS, MAYFA'AH I: GLI SCAVI DEL COMPLESSO DI SANTO STEFANO* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Maior 28; Jerusalem, 1994). Pp. 376, ills. (black-and-white, color), drawings throughout text, 23 color plates, summary in Arabic (8 pp.).

The sensational discoveries of important mosaics from the Near East across a broad chronological expanse reaching from the 3rd to the 8th c. constitute perhaps the richest source of new insight into the society and culture of the E Mediterranean in late antiquity. At this relatively early stage it is impossible to achieve a complete and balanced assessment of what we have gained, but the two volumes under review together provide an indispensable introduction to the material and its problems. Janine Balty has long been a pioneer in the presentation and interpretation of Near Eastern mosaics. She and Jean-Charles Balty have led the Belgian excavations at Syrian Apamea (a site fertile in mosaics), and they have both contributed to our appreciation of that city as a center of Neoplatonic philosophy. M. Piccirillo, of the Franciscan school in Jerusalem, has excavated at Umm al-Raṣāṣ in central Jordan. Inscriptions on mosaics that he has unearthed have demonstrated that this is the site of ancient Mayfa^{c}a (Mefaa), known from Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, and the 11th-c. Spanish-Arab geographer al-Bakri. The mosaics in the Church of Saint Stephen at Umm al-Raṣāṣ are the crown jewels in Piccirillo's treasure. They are stunning, eloquent, and astonishingly late — dating well after the Muslim conquest. They include images of many of the major cities on both sides of the Jordan Valley and afford an extraordinary glimpse into the settlements and culture of early Islamic Palestine.

One hardly knows where to start, and it is clear that there is still more to come. Reading through Janine Balty's book we learn (on 33 and 40) about the chance discovery, some 8 years ago, of a group of mosaics from Ḥoms (Emesa) with a depiction of the Heracles myth, including Zeus's appearance to Alcmene as Amphitryon and a personification of ῎Αγνοια. These amazing pieces now repose in the museum at Ma^{c}arat an-Numān in Syria, along with other unstudied mosaics that are summarily described in *Syria* 64 (1987) 323-29. Balty's book is an excellent propaideutic for confronting all this visual documentation. With the exception of a gentle polemic with M.-H. Quet that concludes the volume, the chapters are republished texts from a range of publications, many of which are not readily accessible. The book has a structural unity that reflects Balty's principal interest, the interpretation or "reading" of mosaics from the perspectives of iconography and symbolism. Her opening papers on chronology and the actual production of mosaics are largely informed by her desire to extrapolate interpretations of their images. Her work is therefore of the greatest relevance to historians of late antiquity. If she has little to say about the technical aspects of mosaic production, this is no great loss until we are forced, as we are at Umm al-Raṣāṣ, to address the problems of iconoclastic damage and repair.

Both Baltys have worked extensively on possible interpretations of the mosaics discovered beneath the cathedral at Apamea. Three papers on this subject, all arranged under the general heading of 'Interprétation', as well as the supplement in answer to Quet, comprise the final part of Janine Balty's book, and they constitute an instructive lesson in the symbolic meanings of traditional myth and legend. The mosaics depict Ulysses' reunion with Penelope, Socrates sitting amid the sages, and personifications of Beauty (Κάλλος) and Grace ([Χάρ]ις). The reunion with Penelope is a wholly imagined scene that corresponds with no recognizable

moment in Homer. The central and right parts of the panel are given over to the exuberant motions of Penelope's servants, identified as θεραπενίδες (*sic*). Balty has explained Ulysses' embrace with his wife in terms of the Neoplatonic allegory of the return of the soul to philosophy, and she has accepted Quet's interpretation of the maidservants as representations of the ἐγκύλκιος παιδεία. The case for this reading of the scene is exceptionally well grounded in literary texts, as Quet argued independently (but with too much pointless posturing against Balty) in *Cahiers du Centre Glotz* 4 (1993) 129-87. W. E. Helleman has recently given a valuable supplement to this discussion, though in ignorance of the visual evidence, in her article "Penelope as Lady Philosophy" (with an appendix on the ἐγκύλκιος παιδεία as a preparatory curriculum for the study of philosophy): *Phoenix* 49 (1995) 283-302.

Another striking reflection of the symbolic importance of the Ulysses myth at Apamea comes in a two-line metrical inscription of the bishop Paul: Τὴν ποικίλην ψηφῖδα Παῦλος εἰσάγει / ὁ ποικιλόφρων τῶν ἄνωθεν δογμάτων (J.-Ch. Balty, "L'évêque Paul et le programme architectural et décoratif de la cathédrale d'Apamee," *Mélanges d'histoire ancienne et d'archéologie offerts à Paul Collart* [Lausanne 1976] 31-46). In a fascinating paper on the meaning of the rare word ποικιλόφρων (*ZPE* 116 [1997] 31-38) G. Agosti has elaborated the allusion to Ulysses, which Balty had already seen as implicit, through an examination of Neoplatonist and Christian interpretations of πολυτροπία. Bishop Paul was doing much more in his verses than punning on the ποικιλία of his mosaic. Agosti acutely observes the popularity of this concept in protobyzantine patristic writing, and consequently he rejects the notion, repeated by Janine Balty in the book under review (130), that Paul must be making an allusion to Euripides' *Hecuba* 1.131, which is the sole appearance of the word ποικιλόφρων in extant Greek literature apart from a scrap of Alcaeus. It is easy to misjudge the rarity of rare words.

The assured symbolic reading of the Ulysses mosaic under the Apamea cathedral gives new weight to the interpretation advanced earlier by both Baltys for the Socrates panel (*DHA* 1 [1974] 267-68), according to which Socrates evokes the apostate Julian and the polytheist revival. We are, after all, in a Neoplatonist center most closely associated with Iamblichus, and the juxtaposition of these mosaic panels, separated only by geometric designs, seems clearly to reflect the philosophical character of the city. Balty (272) goes further still in advancing a tempting hypothesis for the meaning of a pavement discovered in 1971 from the same group of mosaics. Here a small wreath surrounds the words εὖ χρῶ ("Use well") and is itself surrounded by a larger wreath. Balty argues that this is a play upon the Christian emblem A X/P Ω, which the profane could have read as simply αχρω. The wreath, therefore, stands as the imperial one borne by a philosophic emperor. It would celebrate philosophy on the throne. It must be said, however, that χρῶ inscriptions are not uncommon: see the substantial collection of references assembled by J. and L. Robert "sur ce type de souhait" in *Bull. Épig.* 1972.264. Balty's interpretation must therefore be judged a bold, if ultimately unprovable, hypothesis. But it is not all that remote from the entirely provable interpretation of Ulysses and Penelope, to say nothing of the highly plausible interpretation of Socrates and the sages as a Neoplatonist Christ with his disciples.

The brilliant re-assessment of the myth of the judgment of the Nereids that was advanced by Janine Balty in work republished in her book was also elaborated, in very substantial detail, by her husband in "Une version orientale méconnue du mythe de Cassiopée," *Mythologie gréco-romaine, mythologie périphérique* (Colloques internationaux du CNRS no. 593, Paris 1981] 95-106). With full attention to comparable scenes in mosaics from Palmyra and New Paphos, Balty is able to establish a local Near Eastern tradition in which Cassiopeia emerges as victor from the competition of the Nereids. Here she belongs to the Syrian countryside with Mons Cassius supplying an etymology for her name in this context. This transformation of myth under the influence of regional tradition encourages a more local reading of other problematic images from the ever growing corpus of Near Eastern mosaics.

Let us consider Χάρις, for example. In a mosaic from Shahba-Philippopolis the story of Ares and Aphrodite seems to be given a new twist. A personification of Grace is in the process of placing a wreath on the head of the goddess, while the imposing body of the god of war is benevolently flanked by a personification of Comeliness (Εὐπρέπεια). Two Erotes hover in the air, and a matron on a couch, identified as a personification of Watching (Σκοπή), looks down from above upon the whole scene. Balty (40-41) sees Χάρις and the other personifications of abstract concepts as commentaries on the myth, providing in this instance a moralizing or sanitizing interpretation of what some ancient critics had considered a scandalous liaison. She offers this reading *à titre d'hypothèse*, because the presence of the personifications guarantees that this is no straightforward mythological image. The personifications do serve as commentary: Aphrodite is graceful, Ares is handsome, and the two are being observed. Balty is obviously right about all that, but if these figural commentaries serve to remove the scandal (and the joke) of the Ares and Aphrodite episode we need an explanation as to why they were thought necessary. Fortunately one is readily available from the local pantheon of southern Syria. In that region the old Homeric gods Ares and Aphrodite embodied two unimpeachable divinities, the warrior god Arṣū and the goddess al-ᶜUzzā, for whom the Homeric scandal would be most inappropriate. Arṣū (Ares) is well documented from Palmyra to Areopolis (which was briefly called Arsapolis under Elagabalus). For the Arabian Aphrodite, see F. Zayadine, "L'iconographie d'al-'Uzza–Aphrodite," in *Mythologie gréco-romaine, mythologie périphérique* 113-18.

The presence of Χάρις and Σκοπή in the Shahba mosaic should remind us of some puzzling inscriptions on the brilliant Umayyad frescoes at Quṣair al-ᶜAmra. Among the personified figures is Σκψη (*sic*), who has been understood as Thought or Thinking. The name for another of the figures, which is a pendant to Νίκη, has been impossible to determine with certainty since the site was first recorded by Musil. But a recently completed doctoral thesis by C. Vibert-Guigue has established through meticulous drawings and photographs of all the surviving images and texts that the name opposite Victory ended in ΡΙΣ. This means that we are no longer in any doubt. The figure has to be [Χά]ρις. And if that is the case, we should reconsider the sense of Σκψη, for the grammarian Herodian records the lection σκέψ as an equivalent of σκοπός (1. 404 Lentz). This may well be the same personification, therefore, as Σκοπή at Shahba — a female overseer who looks down upon a scene from on high, a kind of celestial chaperon. One should scarcely be surprised to find the visual language of Syria surfacing in the Jordanian desert under the Umayyads. As we shall see again in Piccirillo's mosaics, Greek language and artistry persisted well after the Muslim conquest.

A similar kind of regional interpretation might help with the problematic mosaic at Madaba depicting Achilles and Patroclus. Achilles stands in the center with with his lyre, while Patroclus stands to his right side. Both men are shown in highly explicit frontal nudity. On Achilles' left (to the viewer's right) there is a clothed, apparently female figure, who is dancing and about to receive a wreath from two winged Erotes fluttering over her head. As with the Apamea Ulysses panel, we have here a scene that occurs nowhere in Homer. This is certainly not the scene in which Ulysses and Ajax find Achilles playing his lyre by the sea while Patroclus sits in silence opposite him (*Iliad* 9, 185-91), although it seems to recall that moment. The name of Achilles appears over his head but oddly in the accusative case. The dancer is identified by the letters ΕΥΒΡΕ, which still remain to be interpreted. Whatever is going on here, we have a striking reflection of the late-antique interest in Achilles as lyre-player. (Cf. C. Delvoye, "La légende d'Achille au Bas-Empire," *AntClass* 53 [1984] 184-99.) The startling nudity is unparalleled in the iconography of Achilles. Could this scene reflect the ever popular mime performances in the Near East that persisted century after century despite the censure of pagan and Christian intellectuals? A piece of the upper right part of this mosaic, photographed at its discovery and subsequently lost, showed the lower part of a Pan or satyr with his pipes (M. Piccirillo, *Madaba, le chiese e i mosaici* [Torino 1989] 136). This

reinforces the impression that we are not looking at a representation of a scene from Homer. On the face of it the unidentified dancing figure would appear to be responding to the music from Achilles' lyre, and once again we ought to consider the possibility that this figure provides a kind of authoritative commentary on the scene (not least because it is about to be crowned with a wreath).

Although Balty naturally could not discuss the Emesene Heracles group because it is not yet published, she does make observations (40) that are pertinent to her overall interpretation of the mythological mosaics. The panels include two unusual personifications. (I am grateful to N. Rabbat who has shown me excellent photographs of these pieces.) In addition to the female figure of Ignorance (''Αγνοια) attending the guileful appearance of Zeus to Heracles' mother, we have another female who is present at the apotheosis of Heracles and identified as Immortality ('Αθανασία). These can only be a kind of visual commentary on what is happening. Although Balty believes that the Heracles mosaics are comparable to the 3rd-c. Shahba mosaics in style, it is worth reflecting on the extreme popularity of Heracles in late antiquity: he and Dionysus were the dominant divinities in polytheist culture. Julian's praise of the two in his address to the Cynic Heracleius could serve as a gloss on the Emesene panels (Jul., *Orat.* 7. 219-20). The images include, just as Julian does, the episode of the baby Heracles' struggle with the serpent, and Julian asserts, in a startling parody of the story of Jesus, that Heracles walked on the sea as if it were dry land. The Emesene mosaics include some kind of water god, who might well be Poseidon.

Another extraordinary mosaic currently housed in the museum at Ma^carat an-Numān is mentioned only in passing by Balty (132, n.192), but it merits further thought. It is nothing less than a representation of Romulus and Remus in the traditional scene with the she-wolf suckling them. The inscription on the mosaic furnishes a date of 20 December 511, and the whole text of the inscription can easily be read from a photograph published in *Syria* 64 (1987) 327. D. Feissel must have read the text to prepare his entry for the *Bull. Épig.* 1989. 971, but his accurate summary seems not to have aroused the interest the text deserves. For the record it might be useful to have a transcription here:

> Φιρμίνου μὲν ὁ δόμος, τοῦ δὲ ἀριστῶς διαπρέψαντος, καὶ 'Ιωάννου τοῦ φιλοχ{ρίστο}υ ὂν εἰς θεραπίαν ἐξέδοντο 'Αντωνίνῳ τῷ τῆς θεοφίλ{ου} μνήμης τῷ γηνομένῳ ἀρχιμα{νδρίτῃ} εἰς ἐπιμελίαν ἀρρώστων, Εὐσεβίου δὲ τοῦ τῆς πανευφίμου μνήμης ἡ ἐπιχορήγισις, τὸ δὲ ἔργον, καὶ ἡ ἀνόρθωσις Παύλου τοῦ θεοφίλ{ου} καὶ φιλοχ{ρίστο}υ πρεσβ{υτέρου} καὶ ἀρχιμα{νδρίτου}. Μη{νὸς} 'Απ⟨ρ⟩ιλλεω Κ 'Ινδ{ικτιῶνος} Ε τοῦ ΓΚΩ ἔτους Μακεδονί{ου}.

Beneath the figures of the twins are their names. The name of Romulus is unmistakable ('Ρώμυλλος), but Remus seems to be called 'Ρώας, with the last two letters in ligature.

Of this mosaic Balty writes, "Mais l'idée de la romanité a dû survivre dans l'imaginaire collectif, même en Orient, bien au-delà du déclin historique de Rome elle-même, ainsi qu'en témoigne une représentation de la louve allaitant les jumeaux sur un pavement du couvent de Frikya en 511." But the inscription proves that the mosaic commemorates a hospital, and therefore that the image was chosen to illustrate succouring the needy. Rome would appear to be utterly irrelevant here, and the most plausible interpretation of the mosaic would be that the person who designed it had not the remotest notion of who Romulus and Remus actually were. The strange deformation of Remus' name, which presumably had the correct alternate form of Romus in the model that was used to create the image, not only supports this interpretation but implies that the image was probably discovered in a manuscript. In 511 the idea of Rome seems to have been quite forgotten.

The oblivion into which the eponyms of old Rome would appear to have fallen should counsel caution in the interpretation of a much discussed mosaic from Madaba. In the border of a depiction of the Hippolytus and Phaedra story there are three personifications of cities, identified as Rome, Gregoria, and Madaba. Local pride has placed Madaba on the level of two transparently important places. But scholars have long been embarrassed by the fact that no

city by the name of Gregoria is known at all, although many have tried to explain it as another name for Constantinople. That interpretation would compel us to see Rome as old Rome. But the mosaic of 511 now makes this a much more problematic assumption. Why not the new Rome? In that case we can gratefully accept the excellent suggestion of P.-L. Gatier that Gregoria, evoking the city's 6th-c. patriarch, could be Antioch (*IGLS* 21, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Jordanie* 2 [Paris 1986] 126).

Madaba is not all that far away from Umm al-Raṣāṣ, now revealed as the site of Mefaᶜa (or, as the name appears on the mosaics, Kastron Mefaa). The great mosaic floor of the Church of St. Stephen actually includes Madaba among the cities registered in the side borders of the Nilotic scenes that themselves encompass a central vegetal decoration. The representational scenes show clear evidence of iconoclastic damage and subsequent repairs in an anodyne form. This mosaic, marvelous on its own terms, is all the more so in view of its date. A Greek inscription at its head proclaims the year 785, well into the rule of the Abbasids and phenomenally late for Greek language and styles. The date is amazingly given as a year of the Province of Arabia, founded by Trajan in 106. But the indiction provided cannot be fitted into the year 785, and the tesserae give every sign of having been rearranged. Accordingly, we would be well advised to follow the meticulous argument of R. Schick in support of an original date of 718, with repairs and restorations made later, presumably after the deliberate gouging out of images of living things, to which the mosaic in its present state bears eloquent witness ("Christianity in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Early Abbasid period, 132-198/750-813," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the history of Bilād al-Shām* [Amman 1991] 63-80, esp. 75-77 and 80). On p.246 of his book Piccirillo notes Schick's correction as the most probable date. The inscription on another mosaic in the church shows that repairs were most certainly made in 756, clearly after iconoclastic damage.

The year 718 is in itself quite remarkable enough, dating the great mosaic to the latter half of Umayyad rule and making it among the latest known mosaics to depict living figures before the outbreak of iconoclasm in the middle of the following decade. The vexing question as to who the agents of iconoclasm were in the Near East — Christians or Muslims — has recently received a luminous analysis by Schick in his book, *The Christian communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 2; Princeton 1995) chapt. 9 ('Iconoclasm') 180-219. Schick's comprehensive list of datable mosaics, damaged and undamaged, furnishes the most secure basis so far for assessing the character of Near Eastern iconoclasm. His conclusion is that the damage was the direct result of a Muslim order to eliminate all representations of living things — organisms which possessed breath, in Arab terms. This was evidently a much more drastic measure than the Christian ban on holy images or icons. (It is worth observing that the widespread use of the term "iconoclasm" in scholarly writing to denote both Christian and Muslim policies as well as the actual act of damaging an object can sometimes lead to confusion.) The Muslim order, which is documented from the 720s archaeologically as well as in the literary texts, must, in Schick's analysis, have been the so-called Edict of Yazid or something very much like it. But he believes that it was the Christians who actually carried out the destruction and made the cosmetic repairs. He argues that the work was too meticulously done to be ascribed to non-Christian vandalism, and his argument deserves to be taken seriou. y.

Probably the single most striking feature of the great mosaic is the border on two sides with architectural representations of cities in the region. It serves to place Mefaa in the context of the whole region. On the left border (at the north side) we can see, one below the other, the major cities west of the Jordan: Jerusalem, Neapolis, Samaria-Sebaste, Caesarea, Diospolis, Eleutheropolis, Askalon, and Gaza. On the right border (at the south side) appear cities to the east of the Jordan: Mefaa itself, Philadelphia, Madaba, Esbus, Belemounta (Maᶜin), Areopolis (Rabbathmoba), Characmoba (Kerak). It can readily be appreciated that, just as Madaba took

pride in equating itself with important cities, Mefaa here places itself at the top right, in a parallel location to Jerusalem on the left. The architectural images for the various cities are all different one from another, and they are stunning in their detail. Piccirillo's volume has a series of individual full-page color plates for all these images. They are breathtaking (perhaps, it must be admitted, more than they would have been if viewed under foot). N. Duval has contributed an extensive chapter on "Le rappresentazioni architettoniche", which must henceforth be the point of departure for any study of these city images. The fundamental issue, addressed repeatedly and thoughtfully by Duval, is whether these images picture in any way, however schematically, the topography and monuments of the actual cities. His conclusion is resolutely minimalist.

Duval is, however, aware that in those cases that can be controlled from archaeological evidence the vignettes of the cities represented in the mosaic show real places. The most impressive instance of topographical precision is Mefa^{c}a itself, for which we have not only the mosaic of 718 but another mosaic of two centuries earlier. Both can be controlled by the topography of the site on the ground. Not only the outline of the *castrum* and outer city match precisely the extant remains: even the two churches that lie within the *castrum* and nestle up against its wall in the mosaics appear to be the very buildings excavated in the same place at Umm al-Raṣāṣ. Between the two parts of the city stands a column on three steps. In the 6th-c. image this column is surmounted with a cross, but in the 8th-c. image, with essentially the same urban plan, the column appears without the cross on top. Clearly someone was being attentive to the reality of the site.

A similar representation of reality may be inferred for the image of the holy city, for which the Madaba Map had earlier given clear indications of the urban design. In the St. Stephen mosaic the Church of the Anastasis (the Holy Sepulchre) cannot be mistaken for anything else, even though there is nothing like the quantity of topographical detail in the huge Madaba vignette. More impressive still at Umm al-Raṣāṣ is the representation of Neapolis (Nablus) through a magnificent columnar facade that looks more like a temple than a church. We know that upon one of the peaks of Mt. Gerizim stood a famous old temple of Zeus Hypsistos, accessible by a long flight of steps. It was, with its columns, the most conspicuous of several shrines on the mountain. It was a symbol of the city, as its coins from the Roman period show, and it would seem the obvious identification for the Umm al-Raṣāṣ image. We have here a precise topographic reference, not a stylized or conventional representation.

In his chapter for Piccirillo's book Duval has insisted that, apart from Mefa^{c}a, Jerusalem, and Neapolis, the other cities on the St. Stephen's mosaic are represented by purely symbolic vignettes. They have, in his opinion, no relation to reality, and the proof of this he believes to be the absence of common elements when the same cities are represented in Madaba or Ma^{c}in (or both): "Quando si confrontano le città rappresentate sia a Madaba, sia a Ma^{c}in, sia a Umm al-Raṣāṣ, non si osserva praticamente niente in comune" (205). But this proof presupposes that reality can be conveyed only by identical vignettes. The Jerusalem images at Madaba and Umm al-Raṣāṣ demonstrate beyond any doubt that real monuments can be represented in quite different ways. If that is the case, then there is no reason to assume that real monuments are not represented in the vignettes for those cities about which we know little or nothing architecturally. The important conclusion to be drawn from Duval's meticulous account of the panels is not that most are unrealistic, but rather that there was no standard iconography for the cities. This was a point that had already seemed clear from the Madaba, Jerash, and Ma^{c}in mosaics, but it is resoundingly confirmed by the new material at Umm al-Raṣāṣ.

The images created for the church of St. Stephen, like those created earlier at Jerash or Ma^{c}in, belonged to a time of change and transition. Although rooted in the Greek art of the East, they passed easily into Umayyad culture before iconoclasm. Therefore it is hardly surprising that images of this kind turned up in a strictly Muslim monument of the same period

as the church at Umm al-Raṣāṣ. This is the Great Mosque at Damascus. According to the geographers al-Muqaddasi (*Aḥsan al-taqāsim*, ed. de Goeje, p. 157) and Yakut (*Muᶜjam al-buldān* [Beirut 1964] 8.465) the walls of the porticoes of the mosque were decorated with mosaics representing cities and villages of the whole world. We obviously have here a kind of map covering a region familiar to those who entered this sacred space — something similar to the Madaba Map and the geographical borders in the church of St. Stephen. The cities were individuated visually so that visitors could distinguish one from another. The vignettes naturally lacked complete verisimilitude, but they provided representations in a visual language that evoked each city and were evidently easy to read. Furthermore, it is worth recalling that representations of this kind never wholly disappeared from Islamic art in the subsequent centuries. As N. Rabbat has well demonstrated in his book, *The Citadel of Cairo: a new interpretation of royal Mamluk architecture* (Leiden 1995) 161-69, the mosaics with city vignettes that were made in Damascus and Cairo as late as the end of the 13th c. were entirely comparable with those of the Umayyad age.

The mosaics of the late-antique Near East, in their richness, variety, and regional character, afford a unique perspective on that teeming world. They carried forward into both the Christian and Muslim empires the still living traditions of the classical pagan past, and they incorporated them into an urban environment that was full of self-consciously distinctive cities. These cities remained consistently true to themselves, whether they were subjects of Rome, Constantinople, Damascus, or Baghdad.

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