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New perspectives

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# A SYMBOLIC *KHASSAKIYYA*: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PALACE GUARD IN MURALS AND STUCCO SCULPTURE

Melanie Gibson

During the course of the ninth century the formation of the Islamic army changed. From the time of caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 189–218 H/813–833 CE) and his brother al-Mu'tasim (r. 218–227/833–842), the caliphal army was no longer composed of Arab soldiers as had been the case during the initial stages of conquest; the core was instead formed from a praetorian guard of Turkish slave soldiers (*ghulam*; pl. *ghilman*). The military prowess of these soldiers was legendary; their loyalty remained exclusive to the ruler rather than to the state and they could be counted on to give their lives in his defence.<sup>1</sup> They were paid directly from the ruler's personal treasury, lived within the palace complex and were issued with ceremonial uniforms, arms, equipment and horses.<sup>2</sup> They were trained primarily in the martial arts but also in the manners of the court, and during occasions of court ceremonial flanked the ruler wearing special dress and armour. One of the earliest references, from the tenth-century historian al-Mas'udi, describes the ruler's personal retinue as *ghilman min khawassa*, that is, soldiers of the special corps, from the Arabic root *khassa* (خص) which means to be special or singled out.<sup>3</sup> By the Mamluk period this elite corps was given official status and termed *al-khassakiyya*; its officers were admitted into the sultan's presence at all times and were distinguished by their coats with brocaded bands and permission to bear a sword.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Mas'udi recounts that Ya'qub ibn al-Layth (r. 247–265/861–879), founder of the Saffarid dynasty, had a personal guard of two thousand soldiers who paraded beside the throne on ceremonial occasions, richly clothed and armed with gold and silver shields, swords and maces. Selected members of this personal retinue played a more intimate role and slept in a tent pitched behind his own, close enough for him to be able to call them to attend to

him.<sup>5</sup> Hilal ibn al-Muhassin ibn Ibrahim al-Sabi, a chancery secretary in tenth-century Baghdad, wrote that the caliph al-Ta'i (r. 363–381/974–991) sat on a throne in front of a curtain in the ceremonial courtyard surrounded by a hundred of his guards, who were dressed in 'coloured garments, belts, and swords with trappings studded with jewellery. In their hands they carried clubs and battle-axes'.<sup>6</sup>

The historian Bayhaqi gives a detailed description of a court ceremony that took place in 429/1038 when Mahmud of Ghazni inaugurated his new palace with its elaborate golden throne, which had taken three years to construct:

All around the hall, standing against the panels, were the household *ghulams* (*ghulamman-i khassagi*) with robes of Saqlatun, Baghdadi and Isfahani cloth, two-pointed caps, gold-mounted waist sashes, pendants and golden maces in their hands. On the dais itself, to both left and right of the throne, were ten *ghulams*, with four-sectioned caps on their heads, heavy, bejewelled waist sashes and bejewelled sword belts. In the middle of the hall were two lines of *ghulams*; one line was standing against the wall, wearing four-sectioned caps. In their hands they held arrows and swords, and they had quivers and bow-cases. There was another line, positioned down the centre of the hall, with two-pointed caps, heavy, silver-mounted waist sashes, pendants and silver maces in their in their hands.<sup>7</sup>

To reinforce the authority of the sovereign, and to symbolise his presence even in his physical absence, a tradition developed of displaying a second, inanimate guard along the walls of the throne room, rendered in paint, stone or stucco. The earliest examples of this type of symbolic display are found within Achaemenid palaces: at Susa and Persepolis ranks of life-size archers and guards were depicted in stone and glazed brick along the walls of the *apadana* (audience hall), and it has been suggested

<sup>1</sup> David Ayalon has collected a list of twelve statements dating from the ninth to eleventh centuries that attest to the military prowess of the *ghilman*. See David Ayalon, 'The Mamluks of the Seljuks: Islam's Military Might at the Crossroads', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 6/3 (1996), pp. 311–315.

<sup>2</sup> Clifford Edmund Bosworth, 'Recruitment, Muster and Review in Medieval Islamic Armies', in Vernon John Parry and Malcolm E. Yapp (eds), *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 62–63.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*, trans. and ed. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1861–1877), vol. 8, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> David Ayalon, 'Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 15 (1953), pp. 213–216.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, p. 53. See also Clifford Edmund Bosworth, 'The Armies of the Saffarids', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 31/3 (1968), pp. 544–546.

<sup>6</sup> Hilal al-Sabi, *Rusum dar al-khilafah* (*The rules and regulations of the 'Abbasid court*), trans. Elie A. Salem (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1977), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Abu'l Fazl Bayhaqi, *Ta'rikh-i Mas'udi*, quoted in Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 994–1040* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), p. 136.

that these were images of the imperial guard of Darius I, described as ‘the Immortals’ by Herodotus.<sup>8</sup> When Ernst Herzfeld discovered the Jawsaq al-Khaqani’ palace in Samarra he observed several fragmentary frescoes in the main audience chamber showing standing figures dressed in patterned coats with elaborate belts and bearing swords: these can almost certainly be identified as images of the ruler’s bodyguard.<sup>9</sup>

From the Ghaznavid period, visually corroborating Bayhaqi’s textual description of the *ghulaman-i khassagi*, are displays of military figures painted along the inner walls of the most monumental and highly decorated of the chambers – probably the audience hall – in the southern palace of Lashkari Bazar (initiated by Mahmud, r. 388–421/998–1030, and completed by his successor Mas’ud I in 428/1036). Forty-four painted guards survive but the original scheme probably numbered sixty or more (fig. 1).<sup>10</sup> The guards seem to be in a rural setting with foliage and birds in the background; they are shown frontally with their beardless faces in three-quarter profile, their heads encircled by haloes, and looking towards the point where the ruler would have been seated. The upper sections of the heads are damaged and the exact form of the headdress cannot be construed. They wear long, brightly-coloured *qabas* (double-breasted coats) in fabrics of varied patterns embroidered with *tiraz* bands, over boots; the coats are fixed on the left side and belted at the waist with a variety of straps, while the pendants referred to by Bayhaqi are attached to the belts. Each rests the shaft of a weapon on his right shoulder; the upper parts are partially damaged but are recognisable as maces.

From the time of the Seljuqs and their successor states, the nature of this type of representation was subtly altered: instead of massed ranks of attendants, each one more or less identical to the next in terms of costume and regalia, the depictions were of individual officers as defined by their specific attributes. It seems that in this period the institution of the *khassakiyya* was formalised and demarcations of rank came to be indicated by a personal emblem.

Mamluk historians use the word *rank* to describe the blazon and we have a profusion of material evidence of such insignia in the Mamluk period, but almost no textual evidence; L.A. Mayer, whose work *Saracenic Heraldry* was one of the first to identify and classify Mamluk heraldic blazons, based his understanding on a text describing the custom of the Khwarazmshah ruler Muhammad ibn Tekesh (r. 596–617/1200–1220) who rewarded officers in his retinue with these emblems:

[T]he emblem of the secretary (*dawadar*) is the pen-box, and of the armour-bearer (*silahdar*) the

bow, and of the superintendent of stores (*tishtdar*) the ewer, and of the master of the robes (*jamdar*) the napkin, and the emblem of the marshal (*amir akhur*) is the horseshoe, and the emblem of the *jawish* is a golden *qubbah*.<sup>11</sup>

The *Kutadgu Bilig* (‘Wisdom of royal glory’) is a long didactic poem written in Turkish and presented to Tavghach Bughra Khan, the Karakhanid ruler of Kashgar, in 462/1069–70.<sup>12</sup> Its author was awarded the title *khass hajib*, meaning that he was made special or privy chamberlain, one of the ranks within the *khassakiyya*. The text counselled the sovereign on how to rule with wisdom and justice, together with more pragmatic aspects of court etiquette. There are ten sections outlining the qualifications of the prince, the vizier and various members of his select retinue; for example, the cup-bearers were required to be:

beardless boys with faces like full moons and bodies like saplings, thin-waisted and broad-shouldered, with black hair and white complexions and red cheeks – in short like statues! Then they should be outfitted with garments of green and blue and red and yellow silk so they will have a suitable appearance as they offer the trays.<sup>13</sup>

Only a few years later the vizier Nizam al-Mulk was requested by his Seljuq sovereign Malikshah to compile a handbook on the rules and conduct of government, which he named *Siyar al-muluk* (‘Manners of the kings’).<sup>14</sup> Like the *Kutadgu Bilig*, the text deals with many practical aspects of ruling and includes a passage on the system of training in the *khassakiyya* that explains how its members earned their insignia by gradual advancement within the ranks:

Pages were given gradual advancement in rank according to their length of service and general merit ... After serving for a year with a horse and whip, in his third year he was given a belt to gird on his waist. In the fourth year they gave him a quiver and bow-case which he fastened on when he mounted. In his fifth year he got a better saddle and a bridle with stars on it, together with a cloak and a club which he hung on the club-ring. In the sixth year he was made a cup-bearer or water-bearer and he hung a goblet from his waist. In the seventh year he was a robe-bearer. In the eighth year they gave him a single-apex, sixteen-peg tent and put three

<sup>8</sup> John Curtis and Nigel Tallis (eds), *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (London: British Museum, 2005), figs 27–33, 51–52.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1927), plates LXVII–LXXII.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Schlumberger, ‘Le Palais Ghaznévide de Lashkari Bazar’, *Syria*, 29 (1952), plate XXXI, figs 1–3.

<sup>11</sup> L.A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 4. See also Scott Redford, ‘A Grammar of Rum Seljuk Ornament’, *Mésogeios-Méditerranée: histoire, peuples, langues, cultures*, 25–26 (2005), pp. 286–289.

<sup>12</sup> Yusuf Khass Hajib, *Wisdom of Royal Glory (Kutadgu Bilig): A Turko-Islamic Mirror for Princes*, trans. Robert Dankoff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Hajib, *Wisdom of Royal Glory*, p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Since Charles Schefer translated the Persian text in 1891 this book has been known as the *Siyasat-nama* (‘Book of Government’), however its title is quoted in Persian literature as *Siyar al-muluk*. Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyar al-muluk or Siyasat Nama*, trans. Hubert Darke (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), p. xii.



Figure 1. Wall painting from the audience hall of the palace of Lashkari Bazar. After Daniel Schlumberger, *Lashkari Bazar: une Résidence Royale Ghaznévide et Ghoride, Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique Française, XVIII* (Paris: Boccard, 1978) vol. 1, plate 123.

newly bought pages in his troop; they gave him the title of tent-leader and dressed him in a black felt hat decorated with silver wire and a cloak made at Ganja. Every year they improved his uniform and embellishments and increased his rank and responsibility until he became a troop-leader, and so on until he became a chamberlain.<sup>15</sup>

Just as in earlier periods, these textual descriptions of the *khassakiyya* were reinforced by artistic representations. Two Seljuq-period constructions contain stone reliefs depicting soldiers identifiable by the emblems they display as members of the ruler's elite corps. A bridge spanning the Tigris at Hasankeyf, built in 510/1116–7 by Qara Arslan, has mostly collapsed but on the four upstream walls of the two main piers are five reliefs of single human figures carved on vertical blocks and set into the middle course.<sup>16</sup> Estelle Whelan concluded that each of the four walls originally contained two reliefs and thus eight figures altogether. On the western pier is a standing human figure wearing a caftan, boots and *sharbush*; his arms are bent and rest on a straight object, possibly an arrow or mace. On the inner wall the figure rests on a bow, and another holds a bird.<sup>17</sup>

A very distinctive and unusual arched niche excavated in 1938 at Sinjar in the Jazira is all that remains of what was probably a ruler's pavilion or palace.<sup>18</sup> The site, known as Gu' Kummēt, contained a recess with a semi-dome covered with *muqarnas*. Framing the arch was a continuous frieze of small lobed alcoves with very distinctive detailing; a ribbon of carved stone delineates each opening, forming a loop at the apex before outlining the horizontal base of the arch above. The interiors of the niches were carved with stylised foliate scrolls alternating with eight royal attendants, carved in deep relief and projecting from the background (fig. 2).<sup>19</sup> Although the figures are small, the details of costume and headdress are identifiable: they are shown wearing a knee-length *qaba* with a belt from which various pouches or tassels are suspended, and each one carries a different attribute and wears a different form of headdress. Along the vertical sides one figure holds a straight pole with a pointed terminal directly in front of his body (fig. 2a), a second holds a polo stick diagonally, a third rests a mace on his shoulder and a fourth holds a curved sword. The figures in the outer corners each hold a beaker and a napkin (fig. 2b) and the two placed closest to the apex face one another and each holds a bow diagonally across the body, forming an arch (fig. 2c). The small alcove

directly over the apex of the arch mirrors the larger alcove below and has *muqarnas* in the miniature semi-dome. When the site was further excavated in the 1960s it was found that the niche was installed in the back wall of a two-room annexe and fragments of marble and tile decoration were found in the first room, which could thus be construed as an ante-room leading into the throne room.<sup>20</sup> The arched recess framed by its symbolic *khassakiyya* was probably the alcove into which the throne was placed. Whelan suggested it was constructed for one of the Zangid rulers of Sinjar, thus dating the niche to c. 566–617/1170–1220, or their Ayyubid successor al-Malik al-Ashraf who maintained a residence there until 626/1229.<sup>21</sup>

A similar arch framed with alcoves containing human figures forms the façade of a chapel within the monastery of Mar Behnam, sited about thirty-two kilometres southwest of Mosul and datable to c. 560/1164. The niches have the same raised and lobed outlines which loop over at the apex to form the base of the next niche, but the figurines within wear cowls over their heads and hold crucifixes identifying them as priests or monks (fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> The geographical proximity of these buildings would seem to indicate that this style of arch was characteristic of the architecture of the Jazira region and this is borne out by two more examples. The first is the mihrab of a mosque in Mosul with an inscription dating it to Jumada al-Awwal 543/September–October 1148. There is some confusion over the precise identity of the builder of this mosque. He is named as Nur al-Din Mahmud Zangi (r. 541–569/1147–1174) by Gerald Reitlinger, and as his brother Sayf al-Din Ghazi (r. 541–544/1146–1149) by Herzfeld and Friedrich Sarre.<sup>23</sup> The latest known example decorates the entrance to a tomb built by Badr al-Din Lu'lu' in 645/1248.<sup>24</sup>

In the Iranian world stucco (*gach*) was used as architectural decoration from as early as the Achaemenid period; cheap to make and quick to apply, it was used to transform large areas of brick construction into highly decorated surfaces. The technique of stucco revetment and particularly of three-dimensional stucco sculpture was used to great effect in several Umayyad royal residences, notably the bath hall of Khirbat al-Mafjar which displayed a ruler figure in Persian dress as well as many female attendants.<sup>25</sup> The technique was revived in the Seljuq period and a number of almost life-size stucco sculptures, together with other architectural

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

<sup>16</sup> The projected Ilisu dam across the Tigris river will flood the town and bridge of Hasankeyf. Silke Jelkic, 'Tigris Dam will Flood Historical Sites', *The Epoch Times* [accessed 18 May 2011], <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/world/tigris-river-dam-cultural-site-6082.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Estelle Whelan, 'Representations of the Khassakiyah and the Origins of Mamluk Emblems', in Priscilla Soucek (ed.), *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), pp. 219–222, figs 9–12.

<sup>18</sup> In 1960 the niche was removed and installed in the National Museum in Baghdad, where it hopefully still remains.

<sup>19</sup> Whelan, 'Representations of the Khassakiyah', pp. 219–222, figs 1–8.

<sup>20</sup> Estelle Whelan, *The Public Figure: Political Iconography in Medieval Mesopotamia* (London: Melisende, 2006), pp. 410–411.

<sup>21</sup> Whelan, 'Representations of the Khassakiyah', p. 222.

<sup>22</sup> *Gertrude Bell Archive* [online], photograph M\_020. University of Newcastle [accessed 18 May 2011], <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk>. See also Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture: 650–1250* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2001), fig. 479.

<sup>23</sup> Gerald Reitlinger, 'Medieval Antiquities West of Mosul', *Iraq*, 5, (1938), p. 153. Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat-und Tigris-Gebiet* (Berlin 1911–1920) vol. 2, pp. 221–222, plate 5.

<sup>24</sup> The tomb was built for Imam ibn Hassan Awn al-Din. For images see Imam Awn al-Din Mashhad, *Archnet Digital Library* [accessed 2 June 2011], [http://archnet.org/library/sites/one-site.jsp?site\\_id=7740](http://archnet.org/library/sites/one-site.jsp?site_id=7740).

<sup>25</sup> Robert William Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), plates LV–LVII.

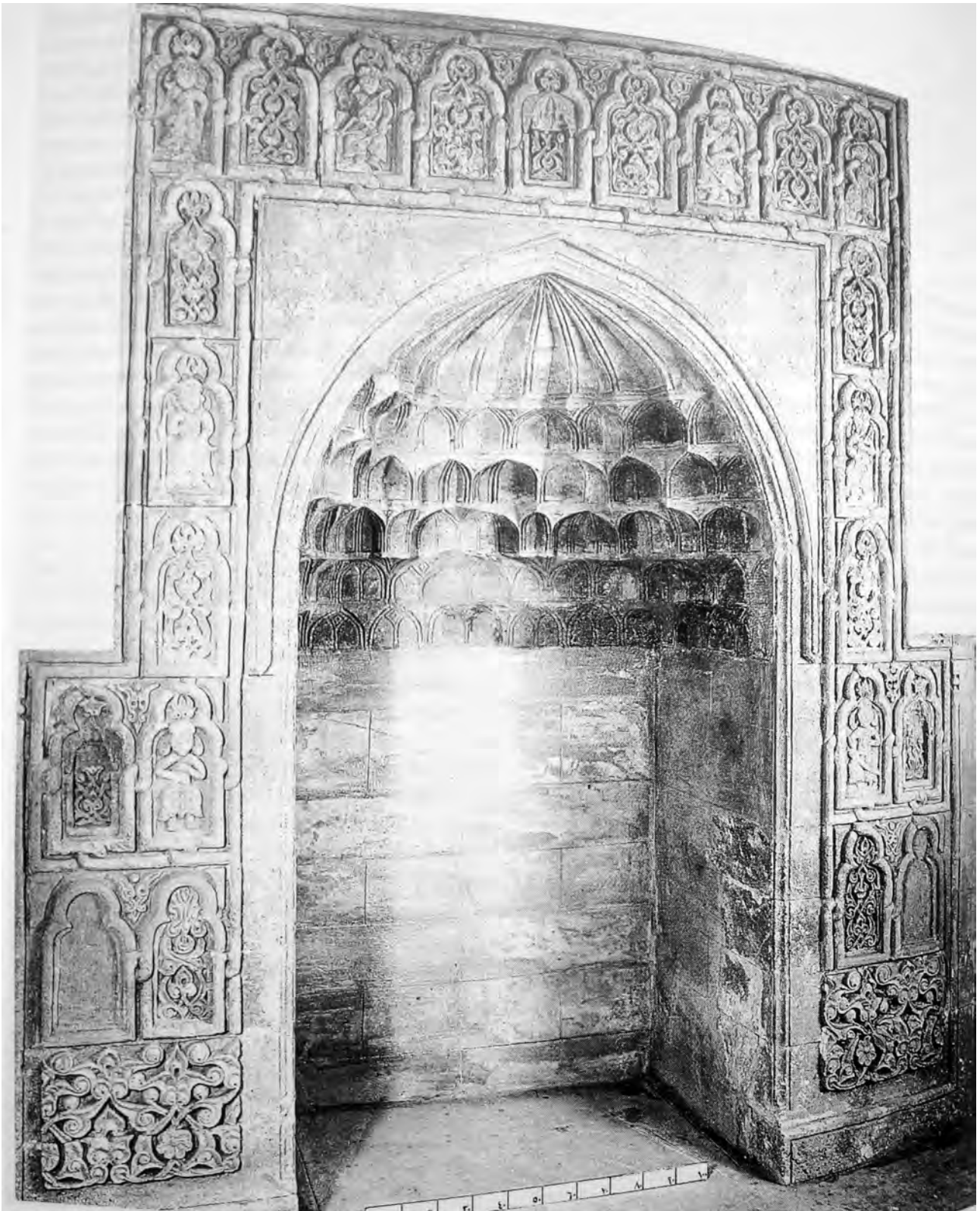


Figure 2. Carved stone niche from Gu' Kummet, Sinjar. Iraq Museum, Baghdad. After Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, Meaning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), fig. 287, p. 420.





Figures 2a, b, c. Left to right: lance-bearer, cup-bearer and archer from Gu' Kummel, Sinjar. All drawings by the author.

elements made of moulded plaster, were found at Rayy, an important mercantile city made capital by Tughril Beg in 434/1042–3. The sculptures were large (the most complete example surviving measures 144.8 centimetres in height) but were not designed for display in the round; they were made with flat undecorated back surfaces and would have been secured to the walls. They were not carved but moulded out of plaster, which is an excellent material for casting; plaster expands while drying and then contracts slightly just before hardening completely, which facilitates its extraction from the mould. When dry the surface was painted, and there are remains of black, blue and red pigments, together with traces of gilding, on all of the surviving sculptures.<sup>26</sup>

Nine surviving stucco figures represent young male retainers from the *khassakiyya*, or possibly members of the ruling family. Two are in the Metropolitan Museum (figs 4 and 5); three are in the Victoria and Albert Museum (figs 6, 7 and 8);<sup>27</sup> one is in the Detroit Institute of Arts;<sup>28</sup>



Figure 3. Hooded figure with crucifix within the surround of the façade of the chapel at the Mar Benham monastery. After Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat und Tigris* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1911) vol. 4, fig. 247.

<sup>26</sup> Raman analysis on a stucco mask that formed part of the Marling bequest of stucco sculptures to the Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. A.23-1928, found the red to be vermilion and the black carbon.

<sup>27</sup> These sculptures, together with two fragmentary stucco pieces of a harpy and a face, form part of the Marling bequest at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Donated to the museum in 1928 by Sir Charles Marling, British envoy to Tehran from 1908 to 1918, there is unfortunately no record of the provenance of the objects, although the similarity in the modelling and appearance of the figures suggests they were intended for the same site.

<sup>28</sup> Detroit Institute of Arts, inv. no. 25.64: see Rudolf M. Riefstahl, 'Persian Islamic Stucco Sculptures', *The Art Bulletin*, 13/4 (1931), fig. 5. This standing figure wears a long cobalt-coloured *qaba* with a multi-stranded necklace, earrings and a jewelled headband. The left arm is held out towards the viewer but is broken off at the elbow.



Figure 4. Royal guard with sword. Stucco with traces of red, orange, blue, white and black paint. Iran, possibly Rayy, twelfth century. 144.8 x 49.5 x 24.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum, 57.51.18: Cora Timken Burnett Collection of Persian Miniatures and Other Persian Art Objects, Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956. Image © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 5. Royal guard with sword. Stucco with traces of red, orange and blue, white and black paint. Iran, possibly Rayy, twelfth century. Height 119.4 cm. Metropolitan Museum 67.119: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lester Wolfe, 1967. Image © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 6. Royal guard with 'sceptre' in right hand and mandil in left. Stucco with traces of red, blue and black paint, Iran, possibly Rayy, twelfth century. 47 x 22.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum A.22.1928. Image © Melanie Gibson, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

one is in the Worcester Art Museum;<sup>29</sup> another is in the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait;<sup>30</sup> and the ninth is in the Khalili Collection, London.<sup>31</sup> The sculptures were made to be seen frontally and they stare out challengingly at the observer; the description of the cup-bearer in the *Kutadgu Bilig* comparing the young attendants to statues seems

<sup>29</sup> Worcester Art Museum, inv. no. 1932.24. This standing figure wears a *qaba* with a necklace, earrings and headdress.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, inv. no. LNS 2 ST. The surface of this statue is damaged around the head and neck but the cobalt colour of the coat is visible.

<sup>31</sup> Khalili Collection, London inv. no. MXD 302. This figure wears a short coat with *tiraz* bands on both sleeves and a three-line text panel on the left breast. The headdress appears to be a *sharbus* with a triangular front plaque. The arms and legs are splayed in a running posture.



Figure 7. Seated attendant with 'sceptre' in both hands. Stucco with traces of red and blue paint. Iran, possibly Rayy, twelfth century. 40 x 22.3 cms. Victoria and Albert Museum A.20.1928. Image © Melanie Gibson, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 8: Standing falconer with broken arms. Stucco with traces of red, blue and black paint. Iran, possibly Rayy, twelfth century. 51.5 x 24.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum A.21.1928. Image © Melanie Gibson, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

particularly apt.<sup>32</sup> Their costumes and headdress, jewellery and armour were moulded in detail and coloured: details of physiognomy and hair were painted in black while the costumes were coloured blue and red, and details such as the *tiraz* bands were gilded. They wear coats of patterned fabric with elaborate borders which are shown open at the front to reveal the flaring ends of the sash knotted at the waist; the sleeves are decorated with *tiraz* bands and on two the words *al-mulk* ('sovereignty') can be read. The headdresses are particularly large and striking: a three-winged tiara, a crenellated crown and headbands with large central diadems. Only one of the figures appears to be wearing the *sharbush*, the distinctive stiff cap with a tall triangular front worn by the Turkish military elite, but the tiaras must represent ceremonial rather than everyday headgear. The jewellery includes strings of pearls, chains with hanging pendants, often in the shape of a cross, and earrings with elaborate tasselled elements.

Each of the figures holds an object: in only two instances is this a weapon, and in most cases it is difficult to identify. Two grip the hilt of a sword which extends diagonally to the side of the body (figs 4 and 5); two others hold sceptre-like objects, one with a simple rounded end and another with a swirling finial (figs 6 and 7). The Worcester Art Museum figure also holds an object with a large rounded end in his right hand and tightens his left hand around something partly damaged; the Detroit figure holds the curved handle of an object that is broken off; the Kuwait figure holds a flared beaker in front of his chest in his right hand and a rosette-like object hangs from his left; and the Khalili figure holds his arms outstretched with an object, now broken off, grasped in each hand. The sculpture in figure 8 stands with arms outstretched and now broken; from his sash hangs a square pouch with scalloped edges and a black glove which indicates that this was a falconer who no doubt once supported a bird of prey on his raised arm.

Not all of the sculptures of this type represent male figures. One androgynous creature in a flowing cobalt-coloured robe is shown in three-quarter view with the right hand extended.<sup>33</sup> The curved posture and extended arm of this figure relate it to the flying genii holding up a canopy over the ruler's head in the frontispieces of the *Kitab al-aghani* ('Book of songs') created for Badr al-Din Lu'lu' c. 1218–1219.<sup>34</sup> Another shows a seated woman with her arms planted firmly on her knees and a naked child resting within the curve of her right arm;<sup>35</sup> this maternal image, infrequent in Islamic art, finds an echo in a group of contemporary

<sup>32</sup> 'Beardless boys with faces like full moons and bodies like saplings, thin-waisted and broad-shouldered with black hair and white complexions and red cheeks.' (Hajib, *Wisdom of Royal Glory*, p. 136.)

<sup>33</sup> Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, I.2658. See Volkmar Enderlein et al., *Museum of Islamic Art: State Museums of Berlin Prussian Cultural Property* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Phillip von Zabern, 2003), p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> All six surviving paintings show flying creatures holding a canopy over the head of the ruler, Badr al Din Lu'lu', whether he is seated on a cushion, on a throne or on horseback; see illustration in Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Sold at Christie's, *Arts of the Islamic and Indian Worlds*, 31 March 2009, lot 181.

ceramic figurines representing a woman suckling a naked child, and must have held a particular significance at this time.<sup>36</sup>

Since none of the stucco sculptures has survived in situ it is not clear exactly how they were arranged within their architectural setting, but the curved stance of the Berlin figure suggests that it formed part of a larger composition framing the ruler, surrounded by members of the *khassakiyya* and possibly also accompanied by some female members of the court. One analogy is the image depicted on the frontispiece of a manuscript of the *Kitab al-diryaq* ('Book of antidotes'): this painting, probably made in Mosul c. 596–622/1200–1225, is divided into three registers with the ruler occupying the central field.<sup>37</sup> He is surrounded by ten male figures holding different attributes: three carry swords with the hilt held upwards (a ceremonial rather than a practical posture), two carry polo sticks, one a spear, one a hawk, one a goose and one a beaker. Nine of the figures are fresh-faced beardless young men who wear a variety of caps; the ruler that they surround wears the more traditional *sharbus*, with a cone-shaped plaque on the front. The tenth figure is bearded and does not hold an object, and probably represents a senior member of the entourage. The bottom register shows a group of women riding on camels who probably represent the ruler's immediate family; one woman rides on a litter with a child beside her.

A monumental stucco panel in the Philadelphia Museum of Art shares its material – as well as similar proportions – with the independent stucco sculptures and probably gives the best indication of how they were once arranged.<sup>38</sup> In the past there has been some dispute over the authenticity of this panel but recent research appears to validate it.<sup>39</sup> The relief, apparently found at Rayy, is inscribed with the titles of Tughril II who died 591/1195; the panel depicts the ruler seated on a throne flanked by attendants, and with members of his *khassakiyya*, each one distinguished by a different attribute, ranged in a line below him. The inscription, which runs along the top of the panel, is raised in relief against a scrolling vegetal ground with traces of cobalt pigment. It reads *al-sultan, al-malik al-a'zam, al-malik Tughril, al-'alim, al-'adil, al-qadir* ('the sultan, the

exalted king, the ruler Tughril, the learned, the just, the powerful'). The figure of Tughril is seated cross-legged on a throne with two vertical pillars that rest on lion masks, and an inscription running in a semi-circular band between the pillars reads: *al-malik al-muzaffar, al-ghazi*, ('the victorious king, the warrior'). He is dressed in a coat with a scrolling pattern embossed in relief and *tiraz* bands on the sleeves, worn over a belted tunic and trousers. He has two necklaces hanging around his neck, earrings hanging from his ears and a crenellated crown worn over a round cap. He holds a flaring beaker in his right hand and rests his left hand on his knee. In terms of costume and accessories the image of the ruler compares closely to the two standing stucco figures in the Metropolitan Museum (figs 4 and 5). Flanking Tughril are two proportionally smaller attendants; the one on his right holds a beaker and the one on his left a napkin and a spherical object. Ranged below the ruler is a row of eight attendants: six are dressed in the traditional belted caftan with boots and wear headdresses of the *sharbus* type. The figures on the extreme left and right wear short trousers and different headdresses that probably denote their lesser status; one holds a spear and the other an unidentifiable object.

The recess or dais on which the royal throne was placed symbolised the ruler even during times of his physical absence, and images of the *khassakiyya* must have evinced the same symbolic reference. The depiction of members of the ruler's personal retinue around the walls of the royal *diwan*, close to the throne, would have vigorously reinforced his universal presence in the same way that in the Umayyad period the stone *qalansuwa* suspended above the throne apse at Khirbat al-Mafjar declared the presence of the caliph whether he was physically present or not.<sup>40</sup> When the ruler was physically present, a display of inanimate guards standing as a backdrop to his flesh-and-blood corps would only emphasise his prestige and omnipotence. It seems no coincidence therefore that in the Qur'an the archetypal ruler Solomon is said to have commanded the *jinn* to make statues for him: 'The *jinn* made for Solomon whatever he pleased: shrines and statues (*tamathil*), basins as large as watering-troughs and built-in cauldrons'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> To date seventeen examples are known, with wide variations in size and quality. All the figurines are hollow, glazed on the interior and have a wide opening with a lip at the top which suggests they were used as vessels. The finest example is in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, inv. no. I.2622. See Melanie Gibson 'The Enigmatic Figure: Ceramic Sculpture from Iran and Syria c. 1150-1250', *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, 73 (2008–9), p. 41, fig. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, A.F.10, folio 1 recto. See Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 91.

<sup>38</sup> The panel measures 213.5 centimetres in height and 671 centimetres in length. See Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art: from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Ashiya: SOPA, 1981), vol. 8, pl. 517. A second, somewhat smaller panel, measuring 152 by 344 centimetres, was recently sold at Christies (5 October 2010, lot 99), and was bought by the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar.

<sup>39</sup> Professor Renata Holod and Leslee Michelsen minutely examined this stucco panel, which is in the store of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and concluded that although it has been altered and restored, probably in the early twentieth century, it is fundamentally sound and dates from the medieval period.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: three modes of artistic influence* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 24–29.

<sup>41</sup> Qur'an 34:14.