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REVISTA DE LA FACULTAD DE GEOGRAFÍA E HISTORIA





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## **DOSSIER**

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Edited by Avinoam Shalem

### **TESOROS DEL MAR: ¿EL ARTE ANTES DE LA DESTREZA?**

Editado por Avinoam Shalem



MOTHER-OF-PEARL INCISED WITH VERSES 51 AND 52 OF SURAT AL-QALAM ('THE PEN') AND WITH MAGICAL NUMBERS. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN, BAKU. Photo: Avinoam Shalem.

# REFLECTIONS ON A BRIDGE AND ITS WATERS: FLEETING ACCESS AT JAZIRAT B. ‘UMAR / CIZRE / ‘AIN DIWAR<sup>1</sup>

## REFLEJOS SOBRE UN PUENTE Y SUS AGUAS: UN ACCESO RÁPIDO A JACIRAT B. ‘UMAR / CIZRE / ‘AIN DIWAR

Persis Berlekamp<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

Whether for medieval or modern audiences, the Zangid bridge at Jazirat b. ‘Umar / Cizre / ‘Ain Diwar has been integrally linked to its waters. Historically, reflections of its dome-like arch, astrological reliefs, and Kufic calligraphy shimmered on them in shifting combinations. The bridge and its waters thereby together expressed the widespread poetic trope of the earth as the mirror of the heavens, the causal link medieval audiences believed existed between terrestrial and celestial realms, and the highly elusive nature of earthly access to heavenly influences. In the modern world, the same waters define the troubled state border between Syria and Turkey. As a result, scholarly access to the bridge has also been highly elusive, making it particularly vulnerable to theft, and endangering our access to the past. The bridge and its waters showcase the sophistication of medieval relationships between art and nature, while illustrating the intractability of modern challenges to historical inquiry.

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**Keywords**

Islamic architecture; astrology; mirror writing; war; art market.

**Resumen**

Tanto para la sociedad medieval como para la moderna, el puente Zangid en Jadirat b. 'Umar / Cizre / 'Ain Diwar ha estado siempre íntimamente ligado a sus aguas. Históricamente, los reflejos de su arco de bóveda, los relieves astrológicos y la caligrafía cífica brillaron sobre ellos en una variedad de combinaciones. El conjunto del puente y sus aguas expresaban el amplio símil poético de la tierra como espejo del cielo, el vínculo casual que la sociedad medieval pensaba que existía entre los ámbitos terrestre y celestial, así como la naturaleza altamente intangible del acceso terrenal a las esferas celestiales. En el mundo actual, esas mismas aguas delimitan la conflictiva línea fronteriza entre los estados de Siria y Turquía. Como resultado, el acceso de los expertos al puente también ha sido muy restringido, convertida en una zona peligrosa por los robos y que dificulta nuestro acceso al pasado. Por todo ello, el puente y sus aguas ejemplarizan la sofisticada relación medieval entre arte y naturaleza, a la vez que ilustran los inextricables desafíos actuales en la investigación histórica.

**Palabras clave**

Arquitectura islámica; astrología; escritura espectral; guerra; mercado de arte.

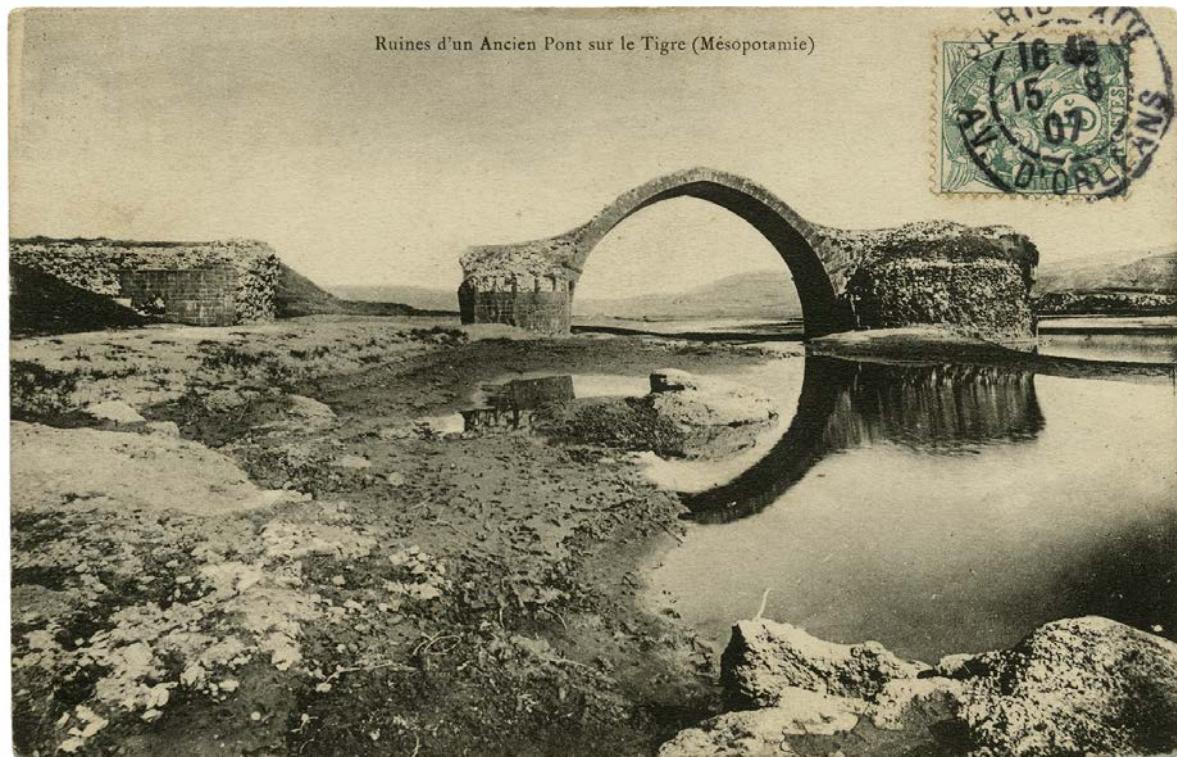


FIGURE 1. A POSTCARD OF THE SURVIVING SPAN OF THE BRIDGE AT JAZIRAT B. 'UMAR, POSTMARKED 1907.

«When the Real [God] had brought into being  
the universe ...  
it was like an unpolished mirror ...  
what was required  
was the polishing of the mirror  
that is the world».<sup>3</sup>

*-Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240)*

Water. Liquid water that rises, falls, and moves with the tides, the seasons, and geological time. It is an elusive material our human hands can never quite grasp, and yet for millennia we have contrived not only to work around it but also to work with it. Under some conditions, its placid surface reflects its surroundings with exquisite clarity (Figure 1); under others, its turbulent waves threaten destruction and occlude its depths. Seas, lakes, and rivers nourish precious materials such as pearls and coral, and they hide lost treasure and refuse. Yet regardless of what they else hold, water –liquid water that comes and goes– is ultimately their defining material.

3. SELLS, Michael: «Ibn 'Arabi's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event», *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988), 126.

Accordingly, medieval Islamic cosmographies conventionally grouped discussions of seas, lakes, and rivers together, as different types of watery features in the earthly realm. Maps of rivers emphasized this fluid connection. For example, a map of the Tigris in a manuscript now in Oxford does not attempt to pin down the exact shape of the Tigris' course from a bird's eye view; rather it arranges the river's main tributaries, as well as the larger cities nearby, around and along a deep blue route that winds across and down the page until it feeds into the Persian Gulf (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup> The map is oriented with north rather than south on top, a departure from prevailing conventions of pre-modern Islamic cartography in which south more often appeared at the top. For a modern audience, this north at top orientation makes the map easier to read, but for a medieval map maker, it allows the Persian Gulf to occupy the lower left of the page, the expected «end» in the reading direction of an Arabic text. It thus positions that sea as the Tigris' conclusion.

Until different sections of it were separated by modern state borders, the Tigris was a major thoroughfare for the transport of people and goods, though access to its upper reaches could easily be cut off by a series of choke points.<sup>5</sup> The furthest upstream that cargo boats could predictably reach was a town known in the medieval period as Jazirat b. 'Umar.<sup>6</sup> East-west land routes also crossed the Tigris there,<sup>7</sup> and it was thus a town of considerable importance. The region to which it belonged, in the upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was called the Jazira (Figure 3, inset).<sup>8</sup> Among Jazirat b. 'Umar's monuments was the bridge whose surviving span is shown in the postcard that introduces this essay. As will be discussed in more detail below, scholarly opinion has been divided on whether to classify it as ancient or medieval, but it is best known to scholars for its remarkable astrological relief program, the medieval provenance of which is beyond serious dispute.

In both structure and decoration, the bridge is closely related to two bridges in Eastern Turkey: the Dicle (or Tigris) Bridge at Hasankeyf; and the Malabadi Bridge over the Batman River near Silvan, the medieval aspects of which constituted a reconstruction of an earlier bridge.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the chronicler Ibn al-Athir (d. 1223) identifies the Zangids' vizier Jamal al-Din al-Isfahani (d. 1163-4) as the patron of

4. SAVAGE-SMITH, Emilie and RAPOPORT, Yossef (eds.): *The Book of Curiosities: A critical edition*. World-Wide-Web publication. ([www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities](http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities)) (March 2007).

5. ALGAZE, Guillermo; HAMMER, Emily and PARKER, Bradley: «The Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project. Final Report of the Cizre Dam and Cizre-Silopi Plan Survey Areas», *Anatolica* 38 (2012), 4.

6. NICOLLE, David: «The Zangid bridge of Ǧazirat ibn 'Umar ('Ayn Dīwār/Cizre): a New Look at the Carved Panel of an Armoured Horseman», *Bulletin d'études Orientales* 64 (2015), 227.

7. ALGAZE, Guillermo, et al. *Op. cit.*, 4-5.

8. Local map by Isaac Tannenbaum, based in part ALGAZE, Guillermo: «A New Frontier: First Results of the Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project, 1988», *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 48 (1989), fig.5, inset detail.

9. The structural comparison is well laid out by MEINECKE, Michael: *Patterns of Stylistic Change in Islamic Architecture: Local Traditions versus Migrating Artists*. New York, New York University Press, 1996, 58-60. For further discussion with more analysis of the figural reliefs on the other two bridges, and for their bibliography, see WHELAN, Estelle: *The Public Figure: Political Iconography in Medieval Mesopotamia*. London, Melisende, 2006, 394-400, 406-411. For her discussion of the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge, see 422-429. Another related Artuqid bridge crosses the Deveğeçidi in Syria, but it does not have reliefs. GALLIAZZO, Vittorio: «Ponte», in ROMANINI, Angiola Maria et al. (eds.): *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*. Rome, Instituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1998, vol. 9, 639.



FIGURE 2. THE RIVER TIGRIS. THE BOOK OF CURIOSITIES OF THE SCIENCES AND MARVELS FOR THE EYES (KITĀB GHARĀ'IB AL-FUNŪN WA-MULĀH AL-'UYŪN). EGYPT OR SYRIA, TWELFTH OR THIRTEENTH CENTURY. 32.4 X 24.5 CM. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Arab C 90, fol. 43a.

the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge,<sup>10</sup> another chronicler, Ibn al-Azraq, mentions Artuqid rulers among the patrons of the latter two: Fakhr al-Din Qara Arslan of Amid and Hasankeyf (r. 1144-67) for the Hasankeyf bridge, and Najm al-Din Alpi of Mardin (r. 1152-76) for the Malabadi Bridge.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of the age of their foundations, all three bear figural reliefs dated to the twelfth century. These, rather than other aspects of the bridges' decorative programs, such as the contrasting bands of stone on the upstream side of the pier at Jazirat b. 'Umar (Figure 4, center bottom), have attracted considerable attention. Some scholars such as Gönül Öney have approached the reliefs at all three bridges as sources of astrological motifs; while others such as Joachim Gierlichs have paid particularly close attention to the astrological themes expressed at Jazirat

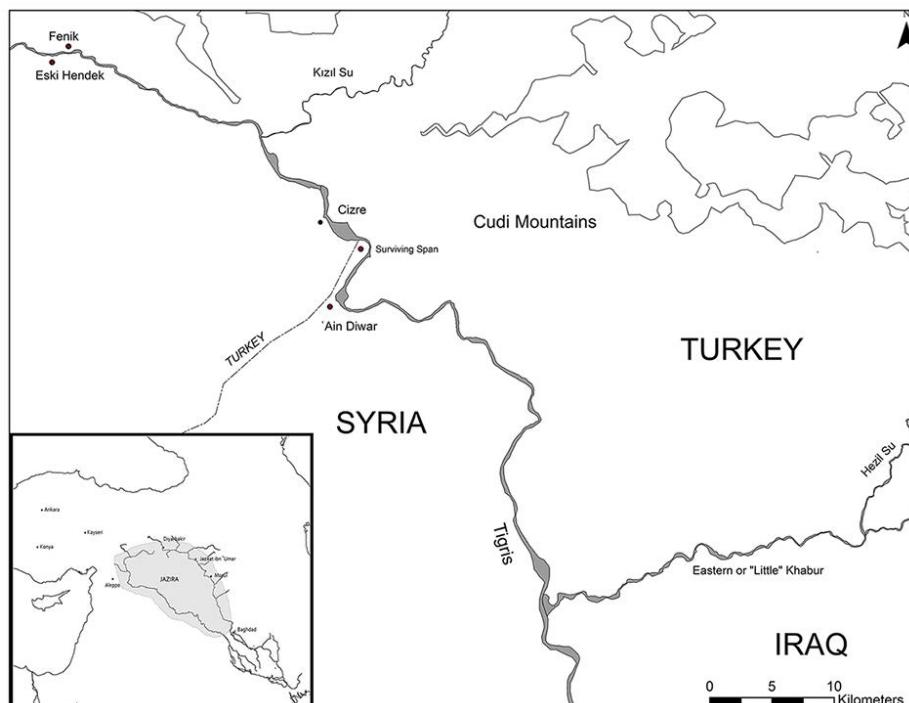


FIGURE 3. JAZIRAT B. 'UMAR / CIZRE / 'AIN DIWAR AND THE BRIDGE IN LOCAL MODERN GEOGRAPHY (LARGE MAP) AND IN REGIONAL MEDIEVAL GEOGRAPHY (INSET). Both maps produced at the Center for Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes, the Oriental Institute of University of Chicago. Local map by Isaac Tannenbaum; regional inset map by author with the kind assistance of Robert Tate.

10. IBN AL-ATHIR, Abu al-Hasan'Ali: *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, Beirut: Dâr Şâdir, 67-1965; Vol. 308, II; RICHARDS, Donald S. (trans.): *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kâmil fi'l-tâ'rikh, Part 2*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2007, 152.

11. WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 406, n. 89 and 394, n. 4, citing Ibn al-Azraq, *Tarikh mayyafarqin*, British Library Or. 5803, 6309, fol. 180a. There was also an inscription on the latter bridge, now damaged. Jean Sauvaget read it as crediting the bridge to Najm al-Din's father and predecessor, Timurtaş of Mardin (r. 1122-1152). GABRIEL, Albert: *Voyages archéologiques dans la Turquie orientale*. Paris, E. de Boccard, 1940, vol. 1, p. 345, no. 128; COMBE, Etienne, SAUVAGET, Jean and WIET, Gaston: *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*. Cairo, Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1931-1991, vol. 8, 244-245, no. 3134.

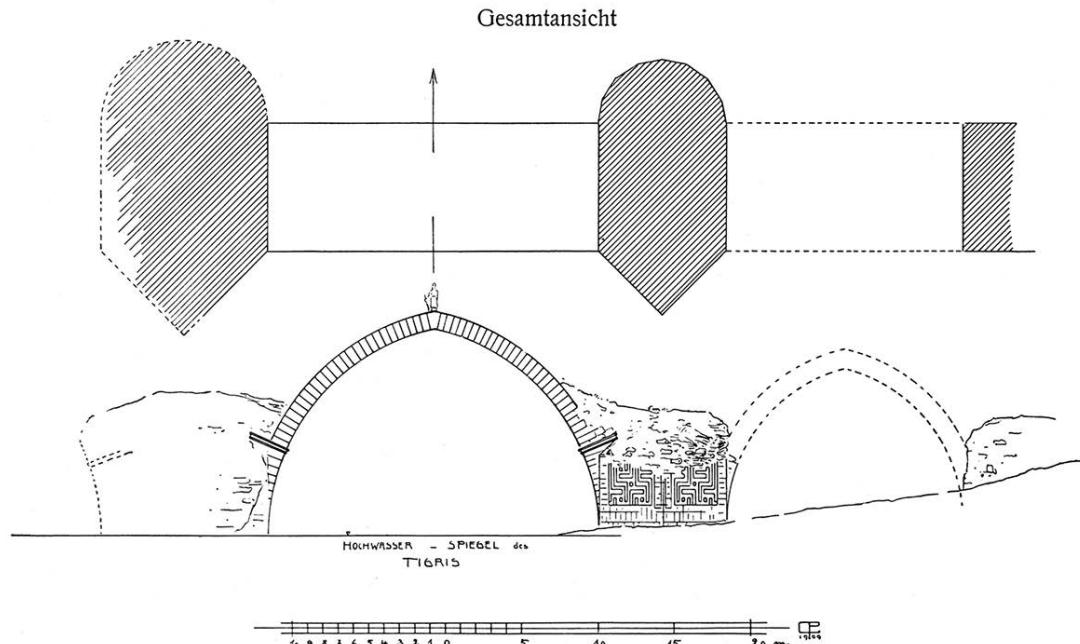


FIGURE 4. CONRAD PREUSSER'S LINE DRAWING SHOWING GROUND PLAN AND ELEVATION FROM THE UPSTREAM SIDE. AFTER PREUSSER, *NORDMESOPOTAMISCHE BAUDENKMÄLER ALTCHRISTLICHER UND ISLAMISCHER ZEIT*, (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1911), plate 38, middle image.

b. 'Umar.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, Estelle Whelan has interpreted the reliefs on the Artuqid bridges in Turkey as expressions of Artuqid sovereignty, but remarks that the program at Jazirat b. 'Umar is «more puzzling». Given that she recognizes that its reliefs are astrological, this comment seems to suggest that she finds a primarily astrological interpretation inherently unsatisfying; perhaps, despite acknowledging the importance of astrology in ancient and medieval intellectual circles, and despite the well-established courtly resonances of astrological iconography in Islamic art, she nonetheless perceives astrology as disconnected from the broader social context.<sup>13</sup>

The postcard calls any such assumed disconnect into question because it shows that the bridge's decorative program, including its astrological reliefs, were tantalizingly perceptible from afar, and thus directed at least in part towards a broad audience. With specific reference to the walls of Konya, which were adorned with a variety of sculptures and inscriptions, Scott Redford has pointed out that city walls in this period «constituted the backdrop for ceremonies of official welcome – *istiqbal* – in which guests were met before the walls and then conducted into town».<sup>14</sup>

12. ÖNEY, Gönül: «Sun and moon rosettes in the shape of human heads in Anatolian Seljuk architecture», *Anatolica*, 3 (1969-70), 195-203, plates XXI-XXVI; GIERLICH, Joachim: *Mittelalterliche Tierreliefs in Anatolian und Mesopotamien*. Tübingen, Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 1996, 125-6.

13. WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 38, 24; BAER, Eva: «The Ruler in Cosmic Setting: A Note on Medieval Islamic Iconography», in DANESHVARI, Abbas (ed.): *Essays in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Katharina Otto-Dorn*. Malibu, CA, Undena Publications, 1981, pp. 13-19.

14. REDFORD, Scott: «The Seljuqs of Rum and the Antique», *Mugarnas* 10 (1993): 148-156.

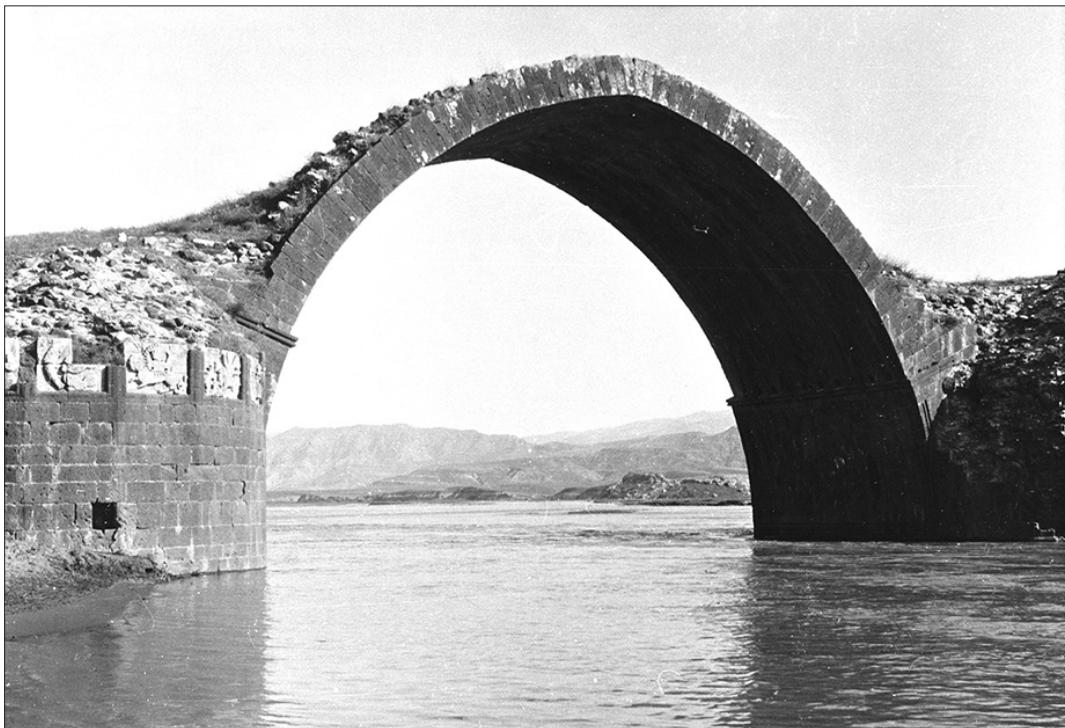


FIGURE 5. THE SURVIVING SPAN OF THE BRIDGE, AS PHOTOGRAPHED BY GERTRUDE BELL IN MAY 1909. The Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University, M\_089.

The Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge was not part of a city wall, but it would certainly have served the purpose of impressing not only the town's inhabitants, but also its visitors, many of whom would have arrived by boat when the Tigris was navigable.

The postcard demands that we consider how the bridge would have been perceived from afar by calling attention to another remarkable feature of the monument: the dynamic visual interplay between the bridge and its water (Figure 1). Most dramatically, the arch and its reflection together suggest an almost complete circle, interrupted in the lower left quadrant by a protrusion of muddy shoreline into the river. Less obvious, but equally important, just below the left pier on the surface of the water where the shoreline recedes slightly, we can also glimpse a partial reflection of the bridge's astrological reliefs. While the reliefs certainly merit further close examination, the postcard urges us to also step back, consider the larger setting in which they belong, and the multiple ways in which they could be viewed. The photograph taken by Gertrude Bell (Figure 5), shot from closer range and when the waters of the Tigris were higher, hints at the same phenomenon. Her black and white print emphasizes the contrast between the twelfth-century zodiacal limestone reliefs at the base of the arch, and the darker basalt masonry into which they are set.<sup>15</sup> It also emphasizes the effects of both light and shadow on

15. GODFREY, Jonathan: *Gertrude Bell, Photographer. A Preliminary Report into Her Cameras and Methods*, (Unpublished Paper), Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1998, 2.

the water's shimmering surface. From both the postcard and Bell's photograph, we can understand that under certain conditions, the bridge and the river worked in visual symbiosis. Together, they expressed the widespread medieval poetic trope of the earth as the mirror of the heavens.

As both the postcard and the print have aged, scratches and flecks have appeared across their watery areas, reminding us that the shimmer in both, like the shimmer on the water, is ephemeral. The processing stamp on the postcard literally dates it. Both images thereby offer twenty-first century viewers a quick visual suggestion of how this historic bridge put the idea of the earth as the mirror of the heavens into visual form, even as they remind us of their own age and material vulnerability.

In the medieval world, as the sometimes calm, sometimes turbulent Tigris rose and fell, the river and the bridge together offered only evanescent glimpses of the earth as the mirror of the heavens. In the modern world, the Tigris and geopolitics together have offered scholars only fleeting opportunities to visit, document, and study the bridge. In this essay, I reflect on the relationship between the bridge and the water that is its *sine qua non*. Through this analysis, the bridge emerges as a particularly rich example of how sophisticated the relationship between art and nature could be in the medieval period. But in this case, to reflect on the bridge and its waters is also to reflect on how we study them. It requires us to reflect on the inextricable links between the tangible and intangible things that we make as humans – from art, architecture, and infrastructure to political borders, identities, and ideologies. In combination, these inevitably frame, complicate, and sometimes impede our access to the past.

## THE DOCUMENTED BRIDGE AND THE WATERS BETWEEN

The photograph in the postcard has never previously been considered by the monument's scholars (who include archaeologists, historians of art and architecture, iconographers, and historians of arms and armor). Instead, as David Nicolle has recently discussed in conjunction with the welcome publication of his own photographs,<sup>16</sup> many of them such as Whelan have continued to rely on the better known photographs and line drawings by Conrad Preusser, a member of the German Babylon Expedition, who visited it in April 1909 (eg., Figure 4).<sup>17</sup> Gertrude Bell, the British archaeologist and spy, visited it a month later in May 1909, and following the digitization of her archive by Newcastle University Library, her photographs, which expand the small corpus of available views, are also now available to scholars (eg., Figure 5).<sup>18</sup>

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16. NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.*

17. PREUSSER, Conrad: *Nordmesopotamische Baudenkmäler altchristlicher und islamischer Zeit*. Leipzig, J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1911, 23-29, and plates 38-40.

18. BELL, Gertrude: «The Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library». In <<http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/>> (September 8, 2016).

When the Ottoman Empire was carved up into the initial nation states of the modern Middle East in the 1920's (a process in which Bell played no small part),<sup>19</sup> about 30 km of the Tigris were designated to define a section of the political border between modern Syria and modern Turkey (Figure 3). These 30 km, near the point where Turkey, Syria, and Iraq meet, include the part of the Tigris once traversed by the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge. However, just upstream, the border cuts away from the Tigris, and becomes the land border between Syria and medieval Jazirat b. 'Umar's modern counterpart: Cizre, Turkey. This is the location of Jazirat b. 'Umar's twelfth-century mosque, and the bridge's surviving span is less than 5 km away as the crow flies. But the span is on the Syrian side of the border, 3.5 km northeast of the town of 'Ain Diwar. As for the bridge's other surviving piers, they have fallen into the no man's land between.<sup>20</sup>

David Nicolle has rightly pointed out that the bridge's precise location in relation to the Syrian-Turkish border has greatly complicated access to it ever since, and that this difficulty has significantly hampered its historiography. However, he was incorrect in his suggestion that his own visit on June 25, 2000 was the first scholarly visit to the bridge since the border had been established.<sup>21</sup> All the scholars he mentions whose requests to visit it were denied, tried to get there from the Turkish side. In the second half of the twentieth century, getting there from within Syria, though difficult, was not impossible. In his handbook to Syrian sites, Ross Burns explained that access required a four-wheel drive vehicle, a police escort by special arrangement, and the low water levels of late summer.<sup>22</sup> Both Gierlichs and Michael Meinecke succeeded in visiting it from Syria.<sup>23</sup>

Nicolle thought that the reason he was granted permission to visit the span from Cizre in June 2000 was that he happened to ask only four days after the death of the Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad.<sup>24</sup> But following announcements made by the Turkish government in 2002 and 2003, this seems unlikely. Rather, it is now clear that the most pernicious reason one could not visit the surviving span from Turkey was that the border had been mined in the 1950's; a comprehensive campaign for

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19. For a popular account of Bell's role, see HOWELL, Georgina: *Gertrude Bell: Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

20. The two most closely related Artuqid bridges, by contrast, fall within Turkish territory, and have been comparatively accessible. Unfortunately the Ilisu Dam puts all of Hasankeyf including its bridge under threat; because this was recognized years ago, teams from both Ankara University and Middle East Technical University led by M. Oluş Arik have done considerable archaeological and surveying work, and have published extensive color photography, about Hasankeyf. ARIK, M. Oluş: *Hasankeyf: Üç Dünyanın Buluştuğu Kent*. İstanbul, Aralk, 2003.

21. NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.* 231.

22. BURNS, Ross: *The Monuments of Syria: A Guide*. New York, New York University Press, 1992, 27-28.

23. Joachim Gierlichs, in a generous response to my e-mail query, informed me that he visited it from Syria in spring 1993, and took several photographs, including then one that he has graciously granted me permission to publish in the present article as Figure 8, previously published in color in HATTSTEIN, Markus and DELIUS, Peter (eds.): *Islam, Kunst und Architektur*. Munich, Könemann, 2000, 381. Gierlichs' photographs of the other reliefs appear in GIERLICHES, Joachim. *Op. Cit.* plates 45-47. Meinecke's posthumously published book states that he visited it from Raqqa, Syria, in May 1989; it also includes photographs credited to him and catalogued as if they were taken in 1984. MEINECKE, Michael. *Op. Cit.* 57; Plates 17, b and c; 20, b.

24. NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.* 231.

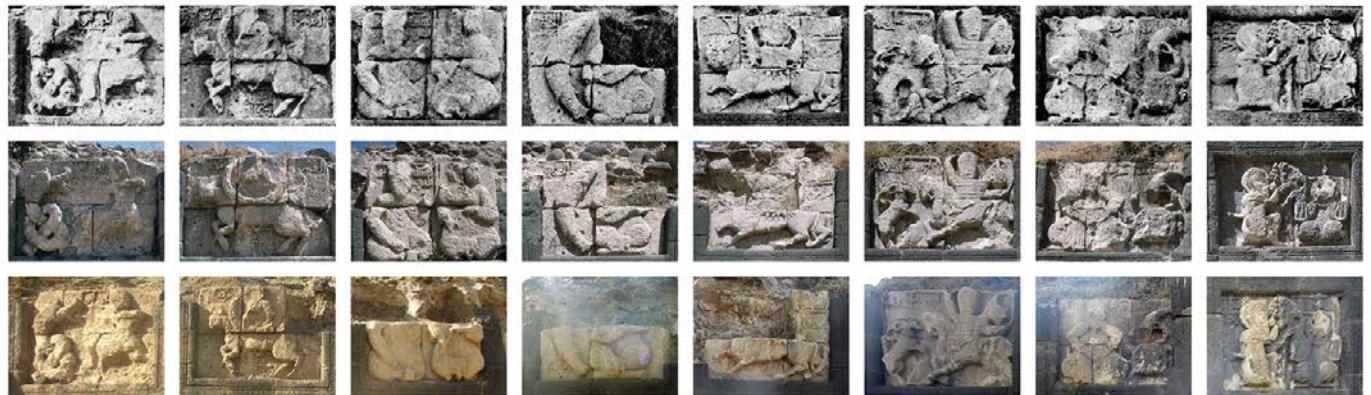


FIGURE 6. DIGITALLY SQUARED VIEWS OF THE ASTROLOGICAL RELIEF PANELS, BASED ON PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN IN 1909 BY CONRAD PREUSSER (TOP); IN 2001 BY DAVID NICOLLE (MIDDLE), AND IN 2003 BY GEORGE STIFO (BOTTOM). FROM RIGHT TO LEFT IN THE READING DIRECTION OF BOTH ARABIC AND PERSIAN: SATURN, JUPITER, MARS, THE SUN, VENUS, MERCURY, THE MOON, AND THE ECLIPSE DRAGON. Montage by Whitney Gaylord and the Visual Resources Center, the University of Chicago.

clearing the mines began in 1998.<sup>25</sup> In hindsight, it seems the Turkish authorities most likely granted Nicolle permission because of their confidence in this campaign. Unfortunately, in the past decade and a half, the Turkish-Syrian border has again become extremely dangerous for multiple reasons. For the great majority of scholars, access to the bridge seems impossible for the foreseeable future.

Despite the scholarly publication of not only Nicolle's photographs, but also those of Gierlichs and Meinecke, and despite the internet posting of photographs taken by various individuals on the Syrian side of the border in the early twenty-first century, Preusser's and Bell's photographs still occupy a central place in the bridge's fascinating if spotty historiography. Tragically, recent damage to the bridge, likely caused by theft, cements their importance (Figure 6). That historiography has important implications for local resurgence of interest in the bridge as an ancient monument today, while also helping to explain the lack of popular engagement with the bridge's compelling medieval history.

That the bridge's medieval history has not attracted more popular attention is otherwise somewhat surprising, because the aspect of the bridge that has most interested scholars is its program of astrological reliefs, and scholars agree on their twelfth-century provenance. Each appeared as a large rectangular panel (about 1.2 x 1 m), itself composed of a grid of light limestone slabs, set against a dark basalt ground.<sup>26</sup> One of the slabs from the Sun panel disappeared between 1911 and 2000, but otherwise, Nicolle's and Gierlich's higher resolution color photographs of the reliefs supersede Preusser's and Bell's. They had inscriptions, but their legibility has been compromised.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the sequence, which has been elucidated

25. INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO BAN LANDMINES: *Landmine Monitor Report 2003: Toward a Mine-free World*. New York, Human Rights Watch, 2003, 699-700.

26. WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 423; ÖNEY, Gönül. *Op. Cit.* 199.

27. HERZFELD, Ernst: «Der Thron des Khosrō. Quellenkritische und ikonographische Studien über Grenzgebiete der Kunstgeschichte des Morgen- und Abendlandes (Fortsetzung)», *Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen*,

in detail, is iconographically clear. While the inscriptions can enrich close readings of each of these reliefs, such readings are beyond the scope of this essay. It is the sequence that matters to the present analysis of the bridge as viewed from afar, and that sequence is visually obvious. Reading from right to left, there were high relief personifications of the seven standard medieval planets –Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon– as well as an additional entity, the Eclipse Dragon, which came to be treated as an eighth planet in the astrology of the time. Each appeared with the zodiacal sign of its exaltation.<sup>28</sup>

The relief program is thus unequivocally astrological. By contrast, the character of the relief programs at the two directly comparable Artuqid bridges is more ambiguous. Albert Gabriel saw them, too, as astrological, but this has been disputed. Whelan, for example, acknowledges a lunar crescent on the Malabadi bridge as discussed by Öney, but whereas Öney understood it in astrological terms, Whelan understands the same motif as fully subsumed into a courtly program. As for the bridge at Hasankeyf, where Gabriel saw personified signs of the zodiac, Whelan sees courtly attendants.<sup>29</sup> My point is not to suggest that these interpretations are mutually exclusive –on the contrary, the possible courtly resonance of astrological themes is well established in the history of medieval Islamic art.<sup>30</sup> Rather, it is to point out of the three bridges, the one at Jazirat b. 'Umar stands out as the one whose engagement with astrology most demands our consideration.

Figure 6 is designed to lay out the full astrological program of the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge, and its recent history, with schematic clarity. But it is important to keep in mind that because of the unusual ground plan of the pier, the eight reliefs could never have been seen simultaneously on the actual bridge. The upstream side is formed of two vertical planes meeting at an angle, and the downstream side where the reliefs are placed spans the rough outline of a hemisphere with eight distinct planes (Figure 4, center top). Each of these planes is adorned with one panel. Therefore, depending on the angle of viewing, one might see three or four panels on the base of the arch, as in figures 1 and 5. When the skies were bright and the water was placid, one might have seen more reliefs simultaneously mirrored on the water than on the pier itself: the earth as the mirror of the heavens.

Architectural expression of the idea that the earth was a reflection of the heavens was certainly not unprecedented. Indeed, it is a recurring leitmotif in the significant art historical bibliography on «the dome of heaven». That bibliography builds on Karl Lehmann's 1945 argument that from the classical to the Baroque, architectural domes represented cosmological ones.<sup>31</sup> Scholars have rightly debated the scope of

41 (1920), 137-9; NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.* 237.

28. WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 422-6. On the eclipse dragon see HARTNER, Willy: «The Pseudoplanetary Nodes of the Moon's Orbit in Hindu and Islamic Iconographies», *Ars Islamica*, 5 (1938): 112-154; GIERLICH, Joachim: «Das Mosul-Tor von Amādiya im Nordirak. Ein unbekanntes islamisches Figurenrelief und seine Bedeutung», *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, 26 (1995): 195-206.

29. GABRIEL, Albert: *Monuments turcs d'Anatolie*. Paris, E. de Boccard, 1931-34, Vol I, 235, 75-76; WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 397, 399, 406-408, 410; Gönül. *Op. Cit.*

30. BAER, Eva. *Op. Cit.*

31. LEHMANN, Karl: «The Dome of Heaven», *The Art Bulletin*, 27 (1945): 1-27.

Lehmann's argument –some objecting that it was too sweeping, and others that it did not go far enough. However, it has proved fruitful as either inspiration or foil for scholars from many fields, as has the attention Lehmann paid to floors which mirror the domes above them.<sup>32</sup>

What sets the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge apart is that it is an exterior structure above an essentially natural surface, rather than a ceiling above an architectural floor or landscape. Floors below interior domes are constructed, even in examples such as Qusayr 'Amra which include reflective pools.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, the «floor» below an exterior bridge typically *is* the surface of the earth. In this sense, the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge is more like its Artuqid cousins than like the domes that attracted Lehmann's attention. Each of the three bridges' medieval elevations culminated in an apex surmounting a grand central arch; this could reflect in the water such that the arch and its reflection together suggested an orb. Especially when shown by the reflection to constitute the upper half of a full circle, the arch structure of any of these bridges' supporting spans could also appear as the cross section of a dome. Although the reflective waters under any of these bridge's spans could thereby be seen to reflect the «dome of the heavens», the formal expression of the metaphor is particularly compelling at Jazirat b. 'Umar because its relief program makes the most unequivocal foray into astrology. When the Tigris runs beneath it, and the lighting conditions are right, the earth's surface becomes a mirror of depicted heavenly bodies in a very literal sense.

Despite its special relationship with the two Artuqid bridges, the corpus of examples within which the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge holds this distinction remains grounded in Lehmann's foundational article, and despite the sweeping scope of his argument, his article in turn was grounded in the classical period. Given the depth and vitality of the dialogue between the medieval and classical architectural traditions, it should not be surprising that the bridge should engage a classical architectural metaphor through a medieval poetic trope.

### THE (ROMAN?) BRIDGE, ITS (TIMELESS?) WATERS, AND ACCESS TO ANTIQUITY

The close relationship between medieval and classical architectural traditions also lies behind the sharp divergence in scholarly opinions on when the bridge was first built. Before going on to consider what matters about the bridge's medieval history, it is important to sort this out. While the medieval provenance of the

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32. SOPER, Alexander: «The 'Dome of Heaven' in Asia», *The Art Bulletin*: 1947: 225-248; MATTHEWS, Thomas: «Cracks in Lehmann's 'Dome of Heaven'», *Notes in the History of Art*, 1 (1982), 12-16; GRABAR, Oleg: «From Dome of Heaven to Pleasure Dome», *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 49 (1990), 15-21; BLOOM, Jonathan: «The 'Qubbat al-Khaḍrā' and the Iconography of Height in Early Islamic Architecture», *Ars Orientalis*, 23 (1993), 135-41; PENTCHEVA, Bissara: «The Power of Glittering Materiality: Mirror Reflections Between Poetry and Architecture in Greek and Arabic Medieval Culture», *Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Supplements*, 47 (2014), 223-68.

33. I am grateful to Avinoam Shalem for his suggestion that the reflective pool below this dome might help explain why its constellations are depicted as on a globe rather than as in the sky.

reliefs might seem to suggest that the bridge itself is medieval, this does not entirely settle the question, because many ancient bridges were heavily refurbished in the medieval period. Indeed, Ibn al-Azraq specifies that the Artuqid period patronage of the Malabadi bridge began as a reconstruction project.<sup>34</sup>

Whereas classicists have long thought the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge was initially built as part of the long-lost Roman city of Bezabde (Phaenicia), medievalists have long identified it with the bridge credited to the Zangid's vizier Jamal al-Din al-Isfahani (d. 1163-4 (559 AH) by the chronicler Ibn al-Athir (1160-1223). The classicists have therefore considered the bridge ancient while the medievalists have considered it medieval. Both positions have generally been articulated on the basis of assumed correspondences between existing architectural remains and references in textual sources; as the bridge's structural materials were used in the region from antiquity through the early modern period, both positions initially seem plausible. Surprisingly, as each camp has been content with its own conclusion, there has been scant acknowledgement of this basic divergence from either side, even less effort to understand the reasoning behind the alternate view, and no effort at all to grapple with the question's broader implications.<sup>35</sup>

In the medieval map (Figure 2), a red circle indicating a city labelled as «Bārzadā» (one of many alternate medieval spellings of Bezabde) appears quite near to where one would expect to find Jazirat b. 'Umar, were it on the map. The circle appears near the large red triangular cluster of rocky forms in the middle of the page, with a label that has been translated by Savage-Smith and Rapoport: «this mountain connects with the mountains of Armenia». In geographical fact (Figure 3), Jazirat b. 'Umar / Cizre / 'Ain Diwar is on a plain nestled amongst mountains (the Ayadh mountains in modern Iraq; and the Cudi mountains in modern Turkey). The circle on the medieval map is also across the Tigris from a tributary identified as the «River Khābūr», shown as a straight line parallel to the top and bottom of the page that incorrectly meets the Tigris from the west. Savage-Smith and Rapoport suggest that it may have been confused with the (western) Khabur, which actually flows into the Euphrates rather than the Tigris. It is also possible that it was confused with the (Eastern, or «Little») Khabur river, which together with its tributary Hezil, flows into the Tigris from the east, south of Jazirat b. 'Umar. For the few kilometers that these two rivers flow together before meeting the Tigris, they form a short stretch of the modern Turkish-Iraqi border.<sup>36</sup>

As the medieval Tigris map suggests, it has long been accepted that Roman Bezabde should be found very near Jazirat b. 'Umar. Bell considered the bibliography of her day in relation to her own observations of the area. Although she did note some evidence that Bezabde might instead have been located at nearby Fenik, she ultimately concurred with the prevailing modern opinion that Roman Bezabde

34. WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* citing British Library Or. 5803, 6309, fol. 171b.

35. Nicolle identifies the problem of how to date the bridge as a confusion that needs to be resolved. However, his citation of the relevant passage from Ibn al-Athir does not address the reasons behind the classicists' assumption that the bridge is classical. NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.* 228.

36. SAVAGE-SMITH, Emilie and RAPORT, Yossef (eds.). *Op. Cit.*; ALGAZE, Guillermo. «The Tigris-Euphrates ...» 4.

was located at Jazirat b. 'Umar.<sup>37</sup> She may have been a spy, but on this matter, her opinion serves as a telling barometer of what intelligent, careful observers who cared about Bezabde's location thought. Bell was brilliant –she was the first woman ever to receive a degree from Oxford University–, and precisely because she was working at the highest levels of international intelligence, she was deeply invested in understanding the historical geography of the region.

If Roman Bezabde really were at Jazirat b. 'Umar, it would make sense to assume that the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge represented one of many cases in which an ancient structure was reused, and perhaps refurbished or renovated, in the medieval period. Recent archaeological surveys prompted by the Turkish government's planned dams, however, shed new light on the question. For the current discussion, the most salient results of these surveys are, first, that neither Roman nor Sasanian remains have been found at modern Cizre. And second, that instead, the remains of a Late Roman fortress city have been found on both sides of the river just 13 km north of Cizre at the site of Eski Hendek/Fenik.<sup>38</sup> With these discoveries, the argument that the site of ancient Bezabde lies under and around modern Eski Hendek/Fenik, is clearly stronger than the assumption that it should lie under modern Cizre. Thus, even though the archaeologists who did these surveys have not called direct attention to the specific implications of their work for dating the bridge, they have undone the most substantive logic behind the idea that the bridge is of antique origin.

Nonetheless, since the evidence of these surveys has not previously been articulated in a manner that explicitly addresses the bridge itself, the popular perception that the bridge is ancient persists. The bridge's Wikimapia site identifies it as the «Ain Diwar Roman Bridge» [emphasis mine]. In the early twenty-first century, when so many people have been tragically displaced from the region, perceiving the bridge as ancient resonates with a genuine sense of nostalgia. Nonetheless, it clearly has Orientalist roots. The French caption on the postcard from the late Ottoman period hints at these (Figure 1). It labels the scene as the ruins of an ancient bridge over the implicitly timeless Tigris, vaguely located in Mesopotamia.

The idea that the bridge is ancient goes hand in hand with its aestheticization as a ruin. Consider how Paul Müller-Simonis, who records that he visited Jazirat b. 'Umar in December 1888, presents the city and its bridge (Figure 7). He starts by saying that the whole town may be called a ruin, and although he acknowledges that its name implies origins in the Islamic period, he dismisses this by simply stating that one can assume it was actually founded long before. He describes the bridge as being in deplorable condition, with entirely lost vaults and damaged pillars.<sup>39</sup>

The accompanying print depicts the bridge in a ruinous state. The single surviving vault is shown at a slight tilt, dwarfed by the width of the missing central span. Raging waters embattle the structure. A small boat threatens to crash into one of

37. BELL, Gertrude: *Amurath to Amurath*. Second edition. London, MacMillan, 1924, 296 n. 1.

38. ALGAZE, Guillermo. «A New Frontier...» 249-252; ALGAZE, Guillermo. «The Tigris-Euphrates ...» 42-44. I am grateful to Ross Burns for bringing these studies to my attention.

39. MÜLLER-SIMONIS, Paul: *Vom Kaukasus zum persischen meerbusen, Durch Armenien, Kurdistan und Mesopotamien*. Mainz, Kirchheim, 1897, 251-264.



FIGURE 7. THE BRIDGE AS A RUIN, ILLUSTRATING PAUL MÜLLER-SIMONIS' ACCOUNT OF HIS VISIT IN DECEMBER 1888. AFTER MÜLLER-SIMONIS, *VOM KAUKASUS ZUM PERSISCHEN MEERBUSEN, DURCH ARMENIEN, KURDISTAN UND MESOPOTAMIEN*, MAINZ, 1897. Image between pages 256 and 257.

the piers, or else to barely escape such a fate, heightening the sense of danger. The majestic snow-capped Cudi mountains form a dramatic backdrop, removed from the central image by an almost panoramic band of cliff face, and a hazy mist. Whether or not the artist intended to invoke the moment when Noah's ark finally reached dry ground, said in the Qur'an (11.44) to have occurred in those mountains, their stable, inaccessible strength contrasts strongly with the precarious scene in the immediate foreground. The bridge is thereby visually presented as an ancient ruin lost in a timeless landscape, evoking dramatic nostalgia for the pre-Islamic past.

Müller-Simonis' assumption of Jazirat b. 'Umar's antiquity may have been presented without any evidence, but it was also widespread. The idea that Jazirat b. 'Umar must have had ancient origins cohered with the scholarly opinion that it likely covered ancient Bezabde (Phaenicia). Particularly now that there is clear archaeological evidence to the contrary, it needs to be recognized that the identification of the two sites with each other neatly served Orientalist agendas by collapsing distinctions of historical time.

Medievalists have long accepted not just that the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge is a medieval structure,<sup>40</sup> but more specifically that it is the bridge that Ibn al-Athir reported built by Zangids' vizier Jamal al-Din al-Isfahani. Ibn al-Athir relates that the vizier died in 1163-4 (559 AH) before the bridge was completed, and medievalists

40. NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.* 228-229; WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 422-43; HARTNER, Willy. *Op. Cit.* 114. Ernst Herzfeld dated the bridge to the second half of the twelfth century on stylistic grounds and mentioned Ibn al-Athir's statement in a footnote. HERZFELD, Ernst. *Op. Cit.* 19 n. 2.

generally date the bridge to 1163-4 accordingly. Some also take Ibn al-Athir's account as evidence that it was never completed,<sup>41</sup> which would provide an explanation for the missing vaults. However, we should be wary of assuming that either ambitions or funding for the bridge necessarily died with its initial patron.

Likewise, we cannot necessarily assume that when a medieval chronicler credits a patron, he is crediting him with an entirely new construction rather than a refurbishment. This is why the written sources, though invaluable, are in and of themselves only of limited value for the controversy over whether the bridge should be classified as medieval or antique. What is more fruitful, is to read the same sources in conjunction with an inventory of the remarkable structural relationships between the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge, the Malabadi bridge, and the Hasankeyf bridge. These have been noted in detail, but their implications for dating the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge have not been drawn out. They therefore bear reviewing here. The three bridges are related not only by their striking similarities, but also by the compelling logic of their differences.

Meinecke has clearly laid out their structural similarities.<sup>42</sup> All three had triangular elevations over central arches. At the Malabadi bridge, the only one Ibn al-Azraq specifically identified as a reconstruction project, that central arch had a span of 39 m. This was flanked with walls pierced by passageways; the whole bridge was about 150 m long. Also according to Ibn al-Azraq, it was the model for the Hasankeyf bridge. In addition to sharing the Malabadi bridge's triangular elevation, the bridge at Hasankeyf featured a central arch whose span was so close in size (40 m) as to constitute something like an architectural quotation. However, the Hasankeyf bridge was nonetheless clearly the grander of the two: at about 200 m it was longer, and its elevation opened with a sequence of five expansive arches, rather than just one large arch flanked at the ends of the bridge by passageways so much smaller that they almost appear as doorways in comparison. The grander bridge was visible from the Hasankeyf citadel, and these differences seem suitable for the higher status of its site. As for the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge, at over 140 m long, it combined a length that echoed that of the Malabadi bridge, with the five arch elevation of the Hasankeyf bridge. At the same time, its central arch span of 28 m made it significantly shorter and so less imposing than either of its Artuqid cousins.

A comparison of the ground plans of the piers from all three bridges points to a similar pattern. The ground plans of the piers at both Artuqid bridges consist of two intersecting planes on one side and hemispheres on the other;<sup>43</sup> in comparison the prismatic side of the Jazirat b. 'Umar piers (similarly opposite a side with two intersecting planes), appears as an angular, and therefore perhaps slightly less «perfect», variation on the hemispheres. Along with the significantly shorter elevation of the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge, the difference in the piers seems appropriate to the fact that its patron was not a ruler, but a vizier, albeit of a different court.

41. WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 423.

42. MEINECKE, Michael. *Op. Cit.* 58-60, particularly figure 15 on p 59, which juxtaposes GABRIEL, Albert. *Voyages...* figs. 57 and 175 with PREUSSER, Conrad. *Op. Cit.* plate 39.

43. GABRIEL, Albert. *Voyages...* figs. 57 and 175.

The precise similarities and sensitive differences between the three bridges call to mind the codes of architectural decorum that later characterized classical Ottoman architecture.<sup>44</sup> Together, they suggest that a similar, if perhaps less rigorously detailed system, may already have been functioning in the region in the twelfth century. A key difference would have been that as in the case of sensibilities regarding coinage at the time, the twelfth-century sense of architectural decorum seems to have signified across a cultural orbit that spanned competing dynasties.<sup>45</sup> For present purposes, though, the central point is that the three bridges refer to each other in ways that are difficult to explain, unless their structural design features were realized at roughly the same time, precisely as the written sources pertaining to the twelfth century also suggest.

## THE MEDIEVAL BRIDGE, ITS MIRRORING WATERS, AND ACCESS TO ASTROLOGY

There were of course practical reasons for building bridges in the twelfth century, as both the population and the number of competing principalities in the region expanded. In general, bridges facilitated the transport of people and goods. At Jazirat b. 'Umar, transport possibilities related directly to the seasonally changing water levels of the Tigris. During the several months of the year when it was low, it could be forded without a bridge. Presumably this was one of the reasons that the east-west land routes crossing the Tigris there had become important. But in the late spring when the river was in flood, those same east-west land routes were severed. A bridge would address this problem, and could potentially also offer a revenue source in the form of toll collection.<sup>46</sup> But there were less immediately practical reasons as well.

Most obviously, monumental civic structures such as bridges were highly visible, and as such afforded opportunities to make strong public statements. These could of course be primarily political in character, as in Whelan's interpretation of both the Hasankeyf bridge and the Malabadi bridges as public statements of Artuqid sovereignty. Then as now, politics inevitably inflected how thoughtful viewers saw their world. But it has never been the only such prism.

As citizens of the modern world, we perceive a lyric beauty in the postcard. There is no doubt that we respond as we do partly because the image's clear geometry and monochrome palette accord well with the formal values of modernism. But if, being aware of this, we can nonetheless try to use the postcard as a window that helps us imagine how medieval audiences saw the bridge at Jazirat b. 'Umar, we

44. NECİPOĞLU, Gülrü: *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005.

45. CANBY, Sheila *et alii.*: *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016, 66-71; LEISER, Gary: «Observations on the 'Lion and Sun' Coinage of Ghiyath al-Din Kai-Khusraw II» *Mésogeios*, 2 (1998): 96-114; YALMAN, Suzan: «'Ala al-Din Kaykubad Illuminated: A Rum Seljuk Sultan as Cosmic Ruler», *Mugarnas* 29 (2012): 151-186.

46. NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.* 229-30.

should consider that the aesthetic effect of the Tigris' reflective surface would have been even stronger in the medieval period than it is today, for two reasons. First, before the invention of modern mirrors and photography, the images that sometimes appeared on reflective bodies of water, and then disappeared, then appeared and disappeared again, were unparalleled and rare. Second, the cultural resonances attached to such reflections were both specific and multi-layered.

The most splendid city on the medieval Tigris was without question Baghdad, seat of the Abbasid caliphate. Though the caliph was far less powerful in the twelfth century than in the tenth, the idea of Baghdad still stood for the glory of medieval Islamic civilization as a whole. In his eulogistic description of this city, Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217) specifically invoked the Tigris, using two well-established metaphors of both Arabic and Persian poetic tradition: the mirror and the necklace. The Tigris he says, «runs between its eastern and western parts like a mirror shining between two frames, or like a string of pearls between two breasts. The city drinks from it and does not thirst, and looks into a polished mirror that does not tarnish».<sup>47</sup>

It was evident that Jazirat b. 'Umar could not outshine Baghdad's storied stature. Nonetheless, a bridge at Jazirat b. 'Umar, showcasing that city's own relationship with the same reflective, mirror-like Tigris, visually celebrated Jazirat b. 'Umar even as it invoked familiar poetic tropes for exalting cities. One wonders whether, from afar, the sequence of light limestone reliefs, when reflected on the water, might have appeared to an audience whose descriptive lexicon in a formal register included the stock phrase, «a string of pearls», as an example of that metaphor. Regardless, any circle suggested by a reflected arch, such as the one so clearly shown in the postcard, did correspond to the most common shape for the actual round bronze mirrors that circulated widely in this period, and that often had talismanic as well as more mundane purposes.<sup>48</sup>

The fundamental connection between astrology, mirrors, and the world, is well attested in Islamic culture from early medieval Arabic sources to early modern Persian ones and beyond. According to one influential myth, Adam first used to know things about the world by consulting the stars. But then «that became too difficult for him», and so he was sent a mirror from heaven that he could consult instead.<sup>49</sup> As a mirror inevitably receives the images it reflects, so the earth was believed inevitably susceptible to divine influences that it received from the heavens above.

47. BROADHURST, Ronald J.C. (trans.): *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1952., 226. Ibn Battuta also later included these comparisons in his description of the Tigris in Baghdad. See GIBB, Hamilton A.R. (trans.): *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325-1354*. London, Hakluyt Society, 1958, Vol. 2, 327.

48. CARBONI, Stefano: «Narcissism or Catoptromancy? Mirrors from the Medieval Eastern Islamic World», in Patricia BAKER, Patricia and BRENDA, Barbara (eds.): *Sifting Sands, Reading Signs: Studies in Honour of Professor Géza Fehérvári*. London, Furnace Publishing, 2006, 161-70; KADOI, Yuka: «Translating from *jīng* to *mir'āt* / *ā'īna*: Medieval Islamic Mirrors Revisited», *Art in Translation*, 5 (2013): 251-272.

49. The myth, which has been quoted and analyzed by other scholars, may be found in AL-QADDUMI, Ghada al-Hijjawi, trans.: *Book of Gifts and Rarities = Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, 175 no. 203. ROXBURGH, David: *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran*. Boston, Brill, 2001, 182; SHALEM, Avinoam: «Objects as carriers of real or contrived memories in a cross-cultural context», *Mitteilungen zur Spätantiken Archäologie und Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 4 (2005): 110.

Astrology was expected to work within a medieval cosmology that modeled the «dome of the heaven» as a physical entity, or series of entities, surrounding the earth. The cosmos was understood as a series of transparent concentric spheres, sometimes described as the seven heavens, with the earth at the center. The earth was understood as nested within all these, so that to look up towards the heavens was to look up towards the inner surfaces of the orbs upon which the stars and planets were arranged. Thus, the phrase, «the dome of heaven», described the upper part of the celestial globe understood to surround the earth.<sup>50</sup>

The comparison between the earth and a mirror, expressed in the poem by Ibn 'Arabi that opens this essay, was thus descriptive as well as metaphorical. Ibn 'Arabi, who did some of his writing in Mosul where the Zangid court was based, likens the earth to a mirror that must be polished to receive emanations from God. His verses should be understood in terms of the medieval Islamic Neoplatonic model of creation by emanation, which, though controversial, nonetheless had implications that were widely accepted.<sup>51</sup> According to this doctrine, all of creation had emanated from God in hierarchical order. Those things that had emanated earlier, such as the angels, the planets and the stars, remained in the heavens closer to God; they retained a comparatively greater degree of the powerful universal soul that ultimately came from God and that connected all creation. Those things that had emanated later had emanated diffusely through earlier emanations. Those that ended up in the terrestrial realm were comparatively lower and further –in both location and stature– and the degree to which they still partook of the universal soul was weaker. By virtue of shared universal soul, weaker terrestrial things remained susceptible to the influences of the stronger celestial things through which they had emanated.<sup>52</sup> The terrestrial world received celestial influences as a mirror receives reflections.

In a post-industrial, digital society, it is difficult to appreciate how widely accepted this basic idea –that the earth was affected by the planets– was. We must consider that in an agricultural society whose basic economy depended directly on seasons and weather, the idea that terrestrial fate was bound to the turning of celestial orbs made intuitive sense.

Further, whereas we distinguish between the science of astronomy and superstition of astrology on epistemological grounds, we should not assume the same binary seemed equally self-evident in the medieval Islamic world. While there was indeed considerable controversy about astrology, it rested on ethical grounds instead. What was controversial was the question of whether it was religiously permissible for humans to use their understanding of how planets related to the terrestrial realm to try to predict or influence the future. The argument against, was that in so doing, astrologers were appealing to powers other than God, and thus committing a

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50. EDSON, Evelyn and SAVAGE-SMITH, Emilie: *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, 2004, 9-21.

51. Ibn Sina was a major proponent of this doctrine. On the unexpectedly wide circulation of his emanationist views in later madrasa curricula, see BERLEKAMP, Persis: *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. London, Yale University Press, 16, 46-50, 177.

52. FAKHRY, Majid: *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1972, 21-7.



FIGURE 8. THE ECLIPSE DRAGON PANEL. PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOACHIM GIERLICH IN SPRING 1993.  
Image Archive Das Bild des Orients, Berlin / Joachim Gierlichs.

form of idolatry; the argument in favor, was that as the planets' power came from God, appealing to them ultimately was an appeal to the divine. The idea that the planets influenced the earth, on the other hand, was hardly controversial. This explains why even though Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328; a medieval jurist remembered as quite strict in his orthodoxy and very much associated with the modern resurgence of Hanbali Islam) ruled against the practice of astrology, he also said that Jupiter (a munificent planet associated with wisdom) rather than Venus (associated with frivolity) was clearly the titular planet of Islam.<sup>53</sup> This is the context in which medieval Islamic courts vied for the leading astrologers of the day, and in which the astrological reliefs were placed on the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge.

The program for those reliefs was unprecedented. As mentioned earlier, in addition to the seven standard planets, the bridge also includes a depiction of *al-jawzhar*, the eclipse dragon (Figure 8). Although this entity was already well established in medieval Islamic astrological theory, in Islamic art, it had not been depicted alongside the seven standard planets until it was included in the relief program at the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge.<sup>54</sup> The fact that the particular program of reliefs was not standard at the time matters. It suggests that whoever chose it either consulted with leading astrologers, or engaged directly with important works of astrology.

53. MICHOT, Yahya: «Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology. Annotated Translation of Three Fatwas», *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 11 (2000), 181.

54. HARTNER, Willy. *Op. Cit.* 120, 131. For a slightly later example that has been linked to the partial solar eclipse of 1199, see AZARPAY, Guitty: «The Eclipse Dragon on an Arabic Frontispiece-Miniature», *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 98 (1978), 363-74.

It also means, in Willy Hartner's apt phrase, that within the context of Islamic art, the bridge marks *al-jawzhar*'s «promotion to planetary rank».<sup>55</sup>

How could this particular entity get elevated to planetary status? And what did that imply for astrology of the time? To answer these questions, we must start by considering that the eclipse dragon form is analogous to a constellation in the sense that both are visual forms that organize knowledge of the sky, except that whereas constellations refer to stars that may actually be seen in the sky, the eclipse dragon references invisible entities of medieval astrological theory. Medieval Islamic astronomers understood that eclipses were caused by the alignment of the earth with the sun and the moon, and they reconciled this with the ancient Near Eastern myth that eclipses happened when celestial dragons swallowed the sun or moon, as follows. They posited that the celestial nodes through which the sun and moon moved when they intersected during eclipses could be identified with the head and tail of a great if invisible celestial eclipse dragon.<sup>56</sup> Since the celestial locations of these nodes were not stable but rather moved, the invisible head and tail of eclipse dragon were understood to move accordingly. So the dragon came to be classified with the so-called «moving stars» (a phrase used for planets), as opposed to the «fixed stars» (a phrase used for what we call stars), and thus it came to be considered as an eight planet, conventionally represented as a dragon with a knotted body. This makes sense, because the Arabic astronomical term used for a node was '*aqd*', or knot, as if intersecting planetary courses of the sun and moon during an eclipse resulted in a kind of knotty celestial traffic jam.<sup>57</sup>

At the Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge, the well-defined pretzel shaped knot is no small detail added to the dragon's body, rather, in its considerable bulk it comprises most of the body; indeed, it occupies a considerable portion of the whole relief. Its curved volume makes the dragon appear almost portly; and the whole figure is almost as tall as the adjacent horse-bodied archer that represents Sagittarius. Full visual advantage is thereby taken of the pun on '*aqd*'. That pun evokes a long tradition of using knots to thwart one's opponent, according to the idea that knots might make things tangled, obstructed, and difficult for them rather than unfettered, open, clear, and easy.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the elevation of the eclipse dragon to planetary status, along with the iconographic convention of the twist in the eclipse dragon's body, subsumed binding spells, which had not initially been astrological, into an astrological framework.

For medieval viewers, the astrological framework of the relief program on the bridge was cumulatively discernible even without close readings of any of the individual reliefs. Those viewers particularly knowledgeable about astrology would also have recognized a new visual expression of astrological theory in the relief program. But even a less specialized audience would have noticed that under changing lighting conditions of days and seasons, and in accordance with the changing position

55. HARTNER, Willy. *Op. Cit.* 132.

56. *Idem.* 131-132.

57. *Idem.* 120, 134.

58. KUEHN, Sara: *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art*. Leiden, Brill, 2011, 159-68.

of any given viewer approaching or crossing the bridge, reflections of different combinations of reliefs would have shimmered on the water's surface with greater or lesser clarity. The more or less obvious presence of particular planetary and zodiacal signs on the river's surface gave visual expression to the presence of shifting combinations of astral influences in the terrestrial realm. It therefore called attention to the difficulty of pinning down these influences in desirable combinations, and to the fleeting precariousness of human access to astrological power.

### THE BRIDGE'S UPSTREAM SIDE, ITS MIRRORING KUFIC, AND ACCESS TO THE DIVINE

While the astrological reliefs on the downstream side of the western pier of the bridge's surviving span have intrigued modern scholars, almost nothing has been written about the geometric bands of dark and light stone that adorn the two planes defining the angled plan of the upstream side of the same pier (Figure 9). Best photographed by Bell, they are faced with what she described as «a key pattern» of light limestone and black basalt. Whelan drew attention to the slight recess of the limestone from the basalt, which plays up the dynamism of the contrast.<sup>59</sup> But the suggestion that their geometries might include Kufic calligraphy has not previously been advanced.<sup>60</sup>

The highly geometric type of Kufic in question is notoriously difficult to read. Further, the surfaces of both planes were already damaged when they were first photographed, and to my knowledge there are no photographs shot from an angle that clearly frames either plane in full. In the existing visual documentation, the clearest rendering is Preusser's line drawing of the right plane (Figure 10, a).

Puzzled that no one had considered whether the geometric pattern might include Kufic writing, yet thinking of the Tigris as a mirror for the bridge, I digitally flipped Preusser's line drawing of the pattern vertically, in order to see how it would have appeared if reflected on the Tigris (Figure 10, c). Curiously, the vertically flipped image corresponds in almost every particular to the way the pattern appears on the left plane, shown in Bell's photograph (Figure 9). This made me see that in the sections that remained when they were photographed, the patterns on the two



FIGURE 9. THE GEOMETRIC LIMESTONE AND BASALT FACING UP THE UPSTREAM SIDE OF THE SOUTHWESTERN PIER OF THE SURVIVING SPAN, AS PHOTOGRAPHED BY GERTRUDE BELL IN MAY 1909.

The Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University, M\_090.

59. BELL, Gertrude: *Amurath...* 297; WHELAN, Estelle. *Op. Cit.* 423.

60. For the intricate relationship between geometric ornament and writing, particularly this particular form of Kufic, see both GRABAR, Oleg: *The Mediation of Ornament*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, and NECİPOĞLU, Gülrü: *The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture*. Santa Monica, The Getty Center, 1995.

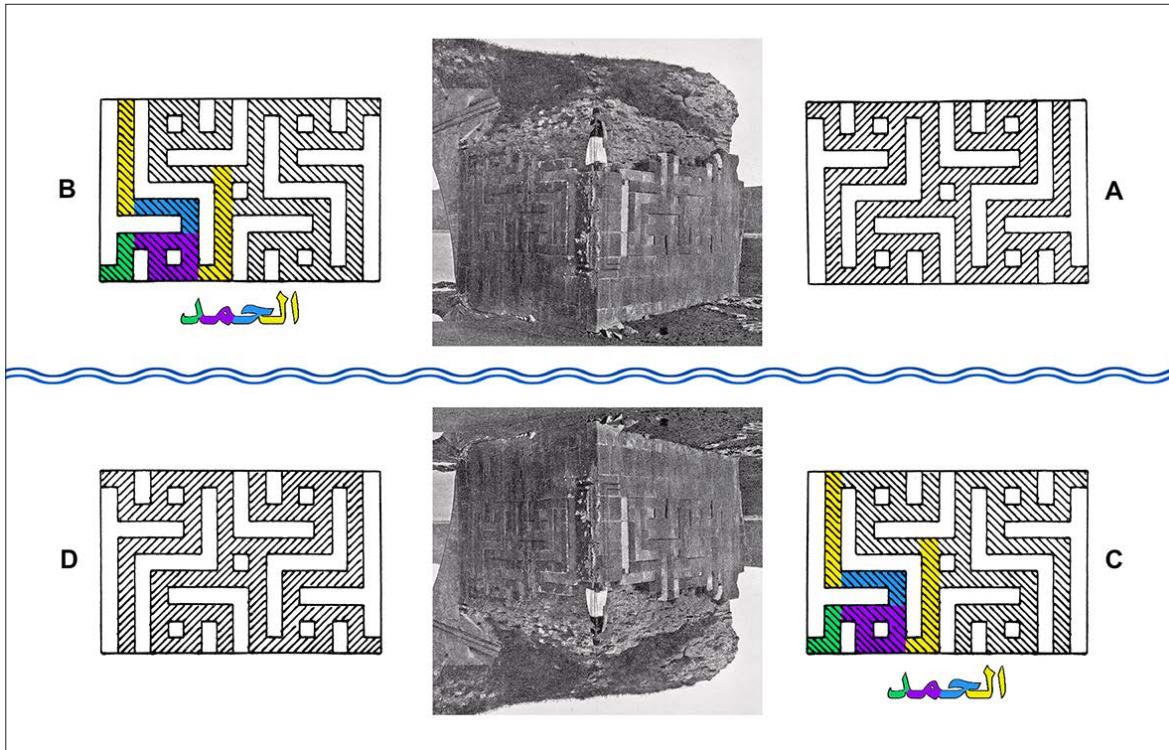


FIGURE 10. KUFIC MIRROR WRITING IN THE GEOMETRIC LIMESTONE AND BASALT FACING. Montage by Whitney Gaylord and the Visual Resources Center, the University of Chicago.

Preusser's photograph of the upstream side of the pier (from *Nordmesopotamische Baudenkmäler*, Plate 39) appears in the center of the upper register; to the right (a) is Preusser's schematic drawing of the right plane. Notice that the upper right corner of his line drawing (and particularly the extension of the second light band from the right all the way to the top) is conjectural, because the photograph shows that part of the facing as missing.

The geometric facing that remained on both planes when the photograph was taken mirror each other; thus a horizontal digital reversal (b) of Preusser's drawing, functions as a schematic of the left plane. Had Preusser drawn this plane instead, he might have recognized it as a Kufic inscription. The color coding traces how it spells «*al-hamd*», as read by Wheeler Thackston. The same reading is also possible in the vertical reflection on the water below, as suggested in (c).

The minor differences between (b) and (c) are attributable to Preusser's surmise about how the upper right corner of the right plane of the pier might have appeared. If in fact the second light band from the right on that pier did not extend all the way to the top, but rather appeared as it does in the lower right of this figure (d) – or in the lower right corner of the design itself (a) –, then these differences would disappear. The horizontal mirror image (b) and the vertical mirror image (c) would be precisely the same; the original design would have been characterized by 180 degree rotational symmetry.

planes defining the angle of the upstream side of the pier mirror each other horizontally; although Preusser's drawing may include a minor incorrect inference that does not perfectly express this, the original design probably had 180-degree rotational symmetry. In this case, the horizontally mirrored design (Figure 10, b) and the vertically mirrored design (Figure 10, c) would have been precisely the same.<sup>61</sup>

61. Preusser's line drawing, shown in its original orientation in Figure 10 (a), includes a detail that does not conform to this description. Starting at the right side of the upper edge of that drawing, a light band, then a dark band, then another light band reach the top edge; this is not rotationally symmetrical what happens at left side of the bottom edge of the same drawing, where the second light band does not reach the edge. However, it is clear from Preusser's photograph at the center of Figure 10, that the section of the right panel on the upstream side (the panel Preusser was drawing), was damaged in the top right corner, so he may have reconstructed this detail incorrectly. Unfortunately, Bell's photograph in Figure 9 shows that the corresponding section (upper left) of the (horizontally

In deference to his experience in reading this type of Kufic, I sent images of both Preusser's original line drawing and its vertical mirror image to Wheeler Thackston. He replied that it was the mirrored image, the one indicating how the contrasting bands of stone would have appeared as reflected on the surface of the Tigris below the right plane, that was meant to be read: «*al-ḥamد*» («praise») (Figure 10, c). Whether or not Preusser made a slight mistake in his assumed reconstruction of the damaged corner of the plane he sketched, the same word would also have appeared in the same way on the left plane of the pier itself (Figure 10, b). Further, Thackston postulated quite logically that «there may well have been an accompanying «*lillāh*» (to God) companion piece that hasn't survived».⁶²

The obvious place for this would have been the upstream side of the eastern pier of the surviving span. Preusser's photographs indicate that the facing had already come off both sides of that pier in 1909. If such a companion piece had originally been located there, it would have resulted in a reading of the two words of the widely used Qur'anic phrase «*al-ḥamdu lillāh*». This could have been read in the correct right to left order as one approached the bridge from the upstream side, either on the piers themselves, or as reflected on the Tigris. The patterns on the two planes, along with their mirror images in the water, would have formed a quadrant of four squares, visually echoing the right angles of the composition. Within this quadrant, on both the pier and the river, the readable term «*al-ḥamد*» would have been both horizontally and vertically paired with its mirror image. Although the phrase «*al-ḥamdu lillāh*» is often translated simply as «Praise to God», more literal translations emphasize its expression of the idea that all praise is due to God alone. This is precisely the point that those who defended the licitness of astrology would have insisted that they did indeed recognize.

The astrological reliefs on the downstream side also had inscriptions, oriented to be read directly from the pier. They are badly damaged, making it difficult to even know which parts of them may have served the function of Arabic labels, or might have included fragments of Persian poetry.<sup>⁶³</sup> What is clear is that they are naskh inscriptions carved into the same limestones as the reliefs of which they form a part. Nicolle notes that the timing of his own visit, when the Tigris was low, allowed him to get close to them and therefore to get much better photographs of them than had Preusser. This clearly indicates that they were not designed as graphics to be perceived from afar. By contrast, the Kufic on the upstream side constitutes a bold visual image in and of itself. In the case of the downstream side, the iconographic representations of the planets would have been legible from afar in a way that the inscriptions on the same panels would not have been; therefore, it would

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reflected) panel on the left plane of the upstream side of the pier was also damaged. In the sections of the facing that remained on both planes when they were photographed, the two planes mirror each other horizontally. If, as seems likely, this horizontal mirroring also characterized the missing sections, and if the second light band from the outer edge did not extend all the way to the top on either plane, then Preusser made an incorrect surmise about the upper right corner of the damaged panel he sketched. In that case the original design would have been characterized by 180 degree rotational symmetry.

62. Wheeler Thackston, personal communication by e-mail 10/25/2016.

63. HERZFELD, Ernst. *Op. Cit.* NICOLLE, David. *Op. Cit.*

have been the iconographic representations that were intended to be perceived as reflections on the water. But in the case of the upstream side, the salient graphic meant to be perceived from afar, and also meant to be reflected, is the geometric form that can become word.

The pairing of astrological reliefs with religious inscriptions on two different sides of the same pier would not have been as strange in the bridge's medieval milieu as it might appear now. In the twentieth century, when histories of art were very often framed through nationalist prisms, one can easily imagine the following overly simplistic characterization: that the geometric, calligraphic side might have been perceived as more religious and thus more Arab or «Syrian»; while the astrological, figural side would have been perceived as religiously looser, or perhaps even pagan, and thus more «Turkish». <sup>64</sup> While such a statement would tell us far more about twentieth century national identities than about the twelfth century bridge, it is certainly the case that in the medieval period there was nothing about the geometric calligraphic side that would have raised questions about the orthodoxy of the communities with which it was linked. At the same time, we should recognize that within the twelfth and early thirteenth-century courts of the Jazira region, appealing to God and appealing to the planets were what we might call two sides of the same coin. Indeed, one finds the very same combination on the actual coinage of the period. Made with base metals rather than precious ones, that coinage, like the bridge, would have been seen by a broad cross section of society. <sup>65</sup> The earth, as mirror of the heavens, was simultaneously understood as susceptible to planetary influences established during the process of divine creation; and as directly governed by God in the heavens above. The pairing of the reflected Kufic inscription with the reflected astrological panels would thus have positioned the earth as a mirror of not just the heavens, but more specifically of the divinely created heavens, and all they contain.

Thus, even if its central spans were never completed, the medieval bridge's role went beyond the provision of practical access across the formidable waters of the Tigris; and it went beyond the proclamation Jazirat b. 'Umar's splendor. Through a sophisticated interplay between art and nature, it appeared as a dynamic visual expression of the causal link medieval audiences believed existed between terrestrial and celestial realms. As such, it served as a tangible, monumental reminder of the extremely important, yet highly elusive, problem of access to heavenly influences. What would have made passing chances to see heavenly influences literally reflected on the earth's watery surface all the more compelling, was the awareness that with nothing but a passing cloud, they could be gone in a flash.

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64. NECİPOĞLU, Gülrü and Bozdoğan, Sibel (eds.): *Historiography and Ideology: Architectural Heritage in the «Lands of Rum»*, *Muqarnas* (Special Issue). Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2007.

65. As an example consider a coin minted at Mosul in 1229-30 in the name of Nasr al-Din Mahmud minted at Mosul 1229-30. CANBY, Sheila et al.: *Op. Cit.* 70.

## THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRIDGE, ITS VOLATILE WATERS, AND ACCESS TO HISTORY

In our own age, the relative ease of scholarly access to the Jazirat b.‘Umar bridge that existed briefly, after the mines were cleared, and before more recent violence, also seems to have gone in a flash.

For much of the twentieth century, the rigid boundaries of nation states made it very difficult to reach the bridge. Precisely for this reason, it has never been as well-known, nor has its fate attracted as much attention, as the Artuqid bridges in Turkey. Sadly, Hasankeyf, including its bridge, is now threatened by the Ilisu Dam. While no quantity of prior study can replace actual archaeological remains once they are gone, it matters that awareness of the dam’s likely archaeological impact has been a significant impetus for archaeological and surveying work.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, the threats to the Jazirat b.‘Umar bridge might be less immanently totalizing... but they also might not be –the bridge is so inaccessible that the basic question of how much it is endangered, is not easily addressed. What is clear is that in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the conflicts that come from direct challenges to the nation state system are not only preventing visits to the bridge, but also resulting in permanent damage to the monument. As long as the bridge is not available for visiting, studying, documenting, or even just observing, it lacks the most basic protections of social, let alone legal, control. In this situation, access to the past is not just being blocked, but undone, in ways that may be irreversible.

The war between the Turkish military and the Turkey-based Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) has escalated as Syria has descended into civil war. Starting in December 2015 this brought a particularly painful curfew to the town of Cizre. Along the border itself, tensions boiled over in the summer of 2016, marked by direct hostilities between the Turkish military and the People’s Protection Units (YPG) controlling the Syrian side of the border at ‘Ain Diwar.<sup>67</sup> As a visual banner introducing its report on those hostilities in August 2016, Vedeng News, an internet based, Arabic language news organization with strong Kurdish sympathies, published an image of the bridge in a damaged state (Figure 11).<sup>68</sup>

Though the image is in low resolution and the astrological reliefs are covered with protective grills, it appears that the slabs originally comprising the top halves of the Mercury, Venus, and Sun panels are missing. Even though the top right quadrant of the Venus relief was already missing when Preusser photographed it in 1909, and even though a large section from the top of the Sun relief was already missing when Nicolle visited in June 2000, the Vedeng image still suggests significant loss. Both the top of the bridge itself and the top of the western pier seem to have

66. ARIK, M. Oluş. *Op. Cit.*

67. AL-ABED, Tareq, translated by MENASSA, Pascale (2014): «Who Controls Syrian Border Crossings». In <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/07/who-controls-syrian-border-crossings.html>> October 14 2016. This group has received more attention in the American media for its role in taking Kobani from ISIS.

68. KOCHAR, Asrin (2016): «2016-8-27. تقرير كامل عن الحالة الأمنية في قرية عين ديوار» In <<http://www.vedeng.co/12473-2/2016-8-27>> (October 15 2016).



FIGURE 11. A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE BRIDGE WITH PROTECTIVE GRILLS OVER ITS DAMAGED ASTROLOGICAL PANELS, POSTED ON THE VEDENG NEWS WEBSITE ON AUGUST 27 2016.

been resurfaced, and it is clear that the ground below has been leveled. Recent tire treads mark the mud.

The Vedeng report foregoes any explicit mention of the bridge, but the image raises a pointed question: what happened at the bridge between Nicolle's visit in June 2000 and Vedeng's publication of the image in August 2016? Figuring this out also involves addressing the question of how, in the twenty-first century specifically, the bridge's place in history has been affected by its location on the border defined by the Tigris.

The brief moment in the earliest years of the twenty first century when the bridge was relatively accessible fell in the age of widespread internet image posts, and from these we can get a loose sense of who, beyond the scholarly community, was able to visit the bridge's western pier near 'Ain Diwar in that period. The Turkish search term «Cizre» does not locate images of the bridge, but the Arabic search term «'Ain Diwar» (either Romanized as «Ain Diwar» or in Arabic script) does, as does the Kurdish term «Pire Bafel» (also Romanized as «Pira»).<sup>69</sup> Particularly given the established strength of Kurdish groups on the Syrian side of the border, this suggests that the bridge was still mainly visited from the Syrian side. The matter is complicated by the fact that although the bridge has been accessed from the Syrian side, internet access from within Syria has been controlled, restricted, and blocked in a variety of ways;<sup>70</sup> as a result, images taken within Syria but post-

69. ANONYMOUS on Panoramio.com (no date): [Numbered but untitled photos] 17022624, 17307372, 22270746, 54042315, 2686429, 17307372. In <<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/17022624>>; <<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/22270746>>; <<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/54042315>>; <[http://www.panoramio.com/photo\\_explorer#view=photo&position=26&with\\_photo\\_id=26864291&order=date\\_desc&user=2915261](http://www.panoramio.com/photo_explorer#view=photo&position=26&with_photo_id=26864291&order=date_desc&user=2915261)> (September 12 2016).

70. Among the numerous reports testifying to this, Freedom House commented following Hafiz al-Asad's death in 2001 that «Internet access in Syria remains inchoate and highly restricted;» CBS reported in 2013 that online activity was being tracked to hunt down protesters; and the Financial Times and other news organizations reported in 2015 on ISIS/ISIL shutdowns of private internet access in parts of Syria. FREEDOM HOUSE (2001): «Syria.

ed from other countries after the photographers left probably disproportionately suggest a foreign visitorship.

Similarly, it is not possible to pinpoint precisely when the images were taken, since the dates of the image files themselves are rarely accessible and there is no reliable interval between the date a photograph is taken and the date it is posted. Further, one must keep in mind the possibility of digital manipulation. Nonetheless, the images that have been posted indicate significant damage to the reliefs between Nicolle's 2001 visit and the summer of 2003. One group of photographs reportedly taken in July-August 2003, and posted on a website for the Assyrian community in exile, Beth Suryoyo Assyrian, does show the downstream side.<sup>71</sup> Digitally enhanced details from them form the bottom row of Figure 6 in this essay. Taken before the panels were covered with grilles and before the ground at the base of the pier was levelled, they show clearly that the slabs that comprised the top halves of the Sun, Venus, and Mercury, as well as a slab from the top right corner of the Moon panel, were already missing.<sup>72</sup> The panels for Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and the Eclipse Dragon appear to be intact.<sup>73</sup>

The damage to the astrological panels on the downstream side seems almost surgically precise. Despite what the Vedeng News website insinuates by using an image of the damaged bridge as a banner to a story about the Turkish army firing on YPG positions, this is clearly not a case in which a monument has been bombed or hit. Rather, panels have been removed, probably for sale. While it might be hoped that this is not one of the many current cases in which looted antiquities are funding war and terrorism,<sup>74</sup> it must be noted that the bridge is particularly vulnerable to this because the lack of scholarly access to it for most of the twentieth century means that it is little known, even amongst specialists; were it better known, it would be far more difficult to pass pieces of it into the art market without getting caught. Regardless of who is responsible for these thefts, they constitute a material, physical erasure of the bridge's medieval history.

This is happening at precisely the same time that particular communities, such as Kurdish and Assyrian communities, are claiming the bridge as part of their cultural inheritances. These are both communities for whom cultural inheritance dating from before the Islamic period constitutes an important part of identity heritage. Over a century ago, Orientalist approaches framed the bridge as a ruin, gradually decayed under Muslim rule, yet still anchored in the timeless landscape of the

Freedom in the World 2001». In: <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2001/syria>> (November 15 2016); WHITTAKER, Zach (2013): «Surveillance and censorship: Inside Syria's Internet». In <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/surveillance-and-censorship-inside-syrias-internet/>> (November 10 2016); SOLOMON, Erika (2015): «Isis to cut private internet access in parts of Syria». In <<https://www.ft.com/content/3beoba48-2edf-11e5-8873-775ba7c2ea3d?mhqsj=e1>> (January 4 2017).

71. Personal communication by e-mail from George Stifo, webmaster of Beth Suryoyo Assyrian, November 2016. STIFO, George: «Homeland Photos, Syria, Ain Diwar». See Ain Diwar 16 and Ain Diwar 14. In: <<http://www.bethsuryoyo.com/HomelandPhotos/Syria/AinDiwar>> (November 8 2016).

72. *Ibidem*.

73. STIFO, George. *Op. Cit.* See Ain Diwar 15 and Ain Diwar 14.

74. BAHRANI, Zainab (2014): «Illicit Trade Funds Terrorists», In: <<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/10/08/protecting-syrias-heritage/illicit-trade-funds-terrorists>> (August 12 2015).

cradle of civilization, and thus evocative of nostalgia for the pre-Islamic past. It is important to recognize how easily either Kurdish or Assyrian prisms for viewing the bridge could, but need not, coopt the Orientalist tradition that assumes that the bridge is of ancient origins. To be absolutely clear: in pointing this out, I am neither denying that the bridge is part of these communities' inheritances, nor accusing either group of looting the bridge's reliefs. But I am pointing out how easily current interest in the bridge can ignore its medieval history, so that the medieval history of the bridge is in danger of getting lost, in more ways than one.

Why would this matter? The medieval Jazira region to which medieval Jazirat b. 'Umar belonged was remarkably diverse –religiously, linguistically, and ethnically.<sup>75</sup> As a result, there are numerous modern communities, many of them suffering, who can take pride in recognizing that the bridge's medieval history is part of their own cultural past. The bridge's medieval history demands that they recognize the shared legitimacy of the claim.

But more broadly, if we consider history deeply, we will also find it goes beyond questions of culturally specific inheritance to expand our collective awareness of who we have been as human beings. Indeed, those very parts of history that seem the most disconnected from our own experience are ironically some of the most important for telling us what being a human might imply, beyond what we already know. They show us pointedly that, had we been born under different circumstances (and history shows us that these might be chronological circumstances as much as anything else), we might think and see quite differently. They show us that the range of possible ways of being human has historically been even wider, much wider, than what we can see in the world around us at our own moment, a moment when both globalization and direct challenges to globalization make us quite aware of human cultural diversity.

The Jazirat b. 'Umar bridge invites us to delve into this kind of history in general, and into this kind of art history in particular. The postcard helps us imagine, in a historically informed way, how the bridge sometimes offered a medieval audience the passing chance to catch a glimpse of the earth as a mirror of the heavens. We can imagine that medieval viewers could sometimes suddenly see the heavenly bodies of astrology, and from other angles the words that asserted the ultimate supremacy of divine celestial power, clearly displayed on the water's surface. And then, that with the passing of a cloud or even with their own movements, particular combinations of astrological entities would have disappeared from sight. In trying to see the bridge through their eyes, we ourselves can catch a glimpse of a specific context of human experience in which the idea that the heavens directly affected the earth was extremely widespread.

How fleeting access to celestial power must have seemed to a medieval audience; how fleeting our own access to the history of their experience seems to us.

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75. BERLEKAMP, Persis: «Symmetry, Sympathy, and Sensation: Talismanic Efficacy and Slippery Iconographies in Early 13<sup>th</sup> C Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia», *Representations*, 133 (2016), 90-91.

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