sion, he observes that "over the heads of the living creatures there was something like a dome, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads" (Ezek 1:22 [NRSV]). Crystal describes the dome's brightness. The author highlights the visual characteristics of crystal in the vision narrative. This emphasizes how Ezekiel experiences his vision. Other authors use crystal as a comparative measure of value. In Job 28:18, wisdom is more precious than crystal.

Hye Kyung Park

Ctesiphon

The capital of the Sassanian Empire, located on the east bank of the Tigris, approximately 25 km south of Baghdad. *Al-Madāʾin* is more or less the equivalent in Arab-Islamic sources, although technically al-Madāʾin (lit. "the cities," a borrowing from the Aramaic *mĕdināthā* or *māḥōzē*) was comprised of several adjoining urban centers located on either side of the Tigris; Ctesiphon proper seems to have been only one of these. The fact that the Arab forces that conquered Iraq from the Persians were not garrisoned permanently at al-Madāʾin but were soon relocated to the new city of Kūfa in the south (closer to the Lakhmid capital of al-Ḥīra) meant that the former was rapidly relegated to secondary status, with the latter playing a much greater role in subsequent Islamic history.

1. Ctesiphon During the Arab Conquests and Early Islamic Period. Al-Madāʾin was taken by the Arabs in 637 BCE, in between the two major battles that secured the Sassanian domains for Islam – Qādisiyya, which opened Iraq up to Arab settlement, and Nehāvand, which marked the beginning of the slow conquest of Iran. In comparison to these great battles, the taking of Ctesiphon was a rather less spectacular victory: following a protracted siege, after Arab forces managed to make their way across the Tigris, Shah Yazdagerd III simply abandoned the capital and fled eastward. According to the sources, Salmān al-Fārisī, a Companion of the prophet sometimes reputed to have been the first Persian convert to Islam, became the governor of al-Madāʾin, his modest and pious presence at Ctesiphon standing in sharp contrast to the opulence of the Sassanians.

The Arab commander Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ reportedly found the atmosphere of al-Madāʾin uncongenial, however, and a little over a year after the conquest of the city, he relocated further south and founded Kūfa as the main army garrison (*miṣr*) assigned to upper Mesopotamia. The small community of Muslims who remained in al-Madāʾin at this time mostly resided in Ctesiphon, which they called *al-madīna al-ʿatīqa*. Al-Madāʾin remained in Kūfa's political orbit, and the city increasingly took on a Shīʿī complexion after the first civil war. After the founding of the ʿAbbāsid capital of Baghdad in 762 CE, deliberately sited near al-Madāʾin in order to appropriate Sassanian prestige for the new regime, the city was even further eclipsed by the emergence of this new metropolis.

2. Ctesiphon's Importance in the Development of Islamic Culture in Iraq. There is some debate over the role played by the palace of Ctesiphon, particularly the "Audience Hall of Khusraw" (*ayvān-e kisrā* or *īwān kisrā*, actually located in the royal complex at Asbānbar and not Ctesiphon proper), in the evolution of classical Islamic art and architecture. Persian decorative motifs were communicated to the artisans who produced luxury goods and worked on the building projects of both the Umayyads and ʿAbbāsids mainly through portable items. However, the surviving decorative programme of the palace of Ctesiphon, which took centuries to fall into its current state of desuetude, seems to have also exerted some influence in this regard as well. Scholars in the early part of the 20th century often asserted that Sassanian royal architecture had a direct and profound impact on Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid building projects, though their confidence in doing so has been criticized in more recent times. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the basilical spaces sometimes found in early Islamic architecture were intended to evoke the imperial grandeur of the massive elevated halls found at Ctesiphon and other important Sassanian sites.

Ctesiphon is also of possible interest for the development of early Islamic culture in another, less concrete, way, inasmuch as it is now increasingly recognized that the Sassanian capital was frequently a center for fruitful exchanges and interactions between the various communities that inhabited its diverse neighborhoods and districts. Maḥozā, one part of the larger urban complex of Ctesiphon/al-Madāʾin, was both the seat of the Nestorian Catholicos in pre-Islamic times and a bustling center of Jewish life. Recently, some scholars have taken interest in the impact of intercommunal contacts on rabbinic discourse in particular, for much of the surviving evidence suggests that the rabbis whose teachings shaped what became the Babylonian Talmud were often on quite familiar terms with their aristocratic Persian counterparts.

The city may very well have played a similar role in facilitating contacts between learned Jews and Christians of the Sassanian Empire and their Muslim successors, especially insofar as the formation of such disciplines as law and grammar in early Muslim Iraq was undoubtedly impacted by the wider intellectual milieu. Given the dense concentration of a number of different religious communities in the vicinity of the metropolis, it is likely that its cosmopolitan atmosphere could have exerted a more diffuse influence on the doctrinal development of some groups within Islam as well, as dem-

onstrated in particular by the emergence of factions of so-called *ghulāt*, radical Shīʿī sects espousing gnostic ideas, in northern Iraq in the later 7th century CE.

3. Ctesiphon as Symbol: The *īwān kisrā* and the *ubi sunt* Motif in Classical Poetics. According to al-Ṭabarī, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ recited S 44 : 25–27 upon entering the Audience Hall of Khusraw after the capitulation of the city, a passage that epitomizes the qurʾānic *topos* of *ubi sunt*: "How many gardens and springs have they left behind, how many a field and noble structure, and things in which they delighted; thus have We given them to others to inherit." This sentiment is repeated in a number of famous laments in Arabic and Persian by poets such as al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 1044), Khāqānī Sharvānī (d. 1199), and, most celebrated of all, al-Buḥturī (d. 987 CE). In al-Buḥturī's famous *qaṣīda*, the poet gazes upon a fresco in the *īwān* depicting a Persian victory over the Byzantines and imagines that he is in the company of the Shah Khusraw himself, the splendid court that once thrived there restored to its former glory. "Madāʾin odes" like al-Buḥturī's often feature such transformative moments of recognition, in which the poet's melancholy meditations upon the royal ruins occasion insights into the transience of life. Sperl has recently noted that al-Buḥturī's epiphanic realization of affinity with the Persians, a kind of spiritual defection or "boundary crossing" over to the enemy's side, reflects a pessimism characteristic of later ʿAbbāsid times, which may be profitably compared with the attitude of other poets of empire such as Virgil.

The anomie expressed by this ʿAbbāsid-era poet stands in stark contrast with the confident triumphalism reflected in another use of the image of ruined Ctesiphon in Muslim sources, namely in descriptions of the omens of the destruction of the Persian Empire that occurred at the time of the birth of the prophet Muḥammad. Al-Ṭabarī vividly describes the frightening portents of the fall of the Sassanians that were observed at that time, including the collapse of the roof of the *īwān*; one such report records Khusraw's sorrowful words at the disaster as *shāh beshikast*, "the king is ruined." The image famously recurs in a line from the wildly popular "Mantle Ode" of al-Būṣīrī, which translates roughly as: "Like the host of Khusraw forever scattered / was the *īwān* of Khusraw on that day cleaved; / the sacred fire ruefully expires / as the Tigris forgets its path, bereaved." In some ways, these triumphalist notes are reminiscent of eschatological portents found in the Bible, such as the various prophetic celebrations of the future overthrow of Israel's imperial persecutors, or the book of Revelation's apocalyptic vision of the fall of Babylon (i.e., Rome).

In the final analysis, Ctesiphon's main significance to Islamic tradition is primarily a symbolic one. The appurtenances of royal grandeur there – Khusraw's impossibly splendid crown suspended over his throne by a chain, with subordinate thrones in the *īwān* prepared in anticipation of the submission of the Turkish khān and the Chinese emperor – provided Muslim dynasties, particularly the ʿAbbāsids, with a ready-made iconography of imperial triumph. But it is perhaps Ctesiphon's significance as a symbol of oblivion that has, ironically enough, proved most enduring.

Bibliography. ***Primary:*** ■ al-Buḥturī, "Qaṣīda," in *Arabic Poetry* (ed. A. J. Arberry; Cambridge 1965) 72–81. ■ al-Būṣīrī, *Al-Būṣīrī: Shāʿir al-burda* (ed. M. Gharīb; Cairo 2002). [Esp. 70–71] ■ Khāqānī, "Qaṣīda," in *Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance*, vol. 2 of *Qaṣīda Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa* (eds. S. Sperl/C. Shackle; Leiden 1996) 162–69. ■ al-Ṭabarī, *The Conquest of Iraq, Southwestern Persia, and Egypt*, vol. 13 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (Albany, N.Y. 1985). [Esp. 8–23, 61–76] ■ al-Ṭabarī, *The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, vol. 5 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (Albany, N.Y. 1999). [Esp. 285–86, 331–35]

Secondary: ■ Bier, L., "The Sasanian Palaces and Their Influence in Early Islam," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993) 58–66. ■ Donner, F., *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, N.J. 1981). [Esp. 202–20, 226–30] ■ Hillenbrand, R., "Islamic Art at the Crossroads: East Versus West at Mshatta," in *Essays in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of K. Otto-Dorn* (ed. A. Daneshvari; Malibu, Calif. 1981) 63–86. ■ Meisami, J. S., "Places in the Past: The Poetics/Politics of Nostalgia," *Edebiyât* 8 (1998) 63–106. ■ Morony, M. G., *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Piscataway, N.J. 2005 [= Princeton ¹1983]). ■ Sperl, S., "Crossing Enemy Boundaries: Al-Buḥturī's Ode on the Ruins of Ctesiphon Re-read in the Light of Virgil and Wilfred Owen," *BSOAS* 69 (2006) 365–79. ■ Zarrīnkūb, ʿA., "The Arab Conquest of Iran and Its Aftermath," in *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Iran* (ed. R. N. Frye; Cambridge 1975) 1–56.

Michael E. Pregill

Cub

→Libya, Libyans

Cubit

→Weights and Measures

Cucumber

A fruit growing from trailing vines. "Cucumber" (Heb. *qiššuʾâ*; Num 11 : 5) may refer *to Cucumis sativus L.* or *Cucumis chate L.*, which are both similar to modern garden cucumber varieties. The term may also refer to a muskmelon (*Cucumis melo L.*), a green melon-like fruit. In the wilderness where they eat manna daily, the Israelites complain that they miss the cucumbers, along with other foods, that they ate when they were slaves in Egypt (Num 11 : 5). To emphasize the city's vulnerability in the face of God's anger, Isaiah likens Jerusalem to a flimsy, temporary structure in a cucumber patch (*miqšâ*; Isa