

# The Stylites of Syria

Brandie Ratliff

In 459 seven bishops and six hundred soldiers arrived at the column of Saint Symeon Stylites (ca. 389–459) outside of Telneshe (Telanissos, now Deir Sem'an), in northwestern Syria, where the holy man had subjected his body to extreme feats of asceticism for forty-seven years. The retinue had come to remove Symeon's body from his column and accompany it on a five-day procession to the city of Antioch, where it was to be interred.<sup>1</sup> Symeon, whose epithet "Stylites" (Greek *stylós*, pillar) refers to his life spent atop the column, drew visitors from as far away as Persia and Britain to the prosperous Syriac-speaking region known as the Limestone Massif.<sup>2</sup>

Three vitae attest to Symeon's life as a charismatic holy man.<sup>3</sup> They chronicle a flow of pilgrims of all Christian affiliations, as well as non-Christian Arabs, who sought the saint's worldly and spiritual advice and his healing touch, often mediated through oil, water, and dust from around his column or by *hnana*, a combination of the three.<sup>4</sup> While the lives do not extend to the posthumous cult centered on his column, the vast pilgrimage complex of Qal'at Sem'an (fig. 39), built through imperial donation sometime after 470, and the associated structures in Deir Sem'an attest to its longevity.<sup>5</sup>

Symeon's column, surrounded by an octagon radiating into a cruciform basilica, was the focal point of the magnificent complex. Housed outside, in the surrounding enclosure, were a monastery and pilgrimage facilities, including a cistern, hostel, and baptistery. Pilgrims approached the enclosure from the town of Deir Sem'an, passing through a triumphal arch that gave way to a via sacra lined with buildings for registering the visitors, shops, and baths. By 479 the town had a hostel and three monasteries.<sup>6</sup> Pilgrimage to Qal'at Sem'an continued until the Arab conquest in 638; there is limited evidence of activity at the site between that date and the Byzantine recapture of the region in 969.<sup>7</sup>

Symeon's posthumous appeal extended well beyond pilgrimage. The saint regularly appeared in homiletic literature and is included in the calendars of most Christian churches in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the greatest evidence of Symeon's charisma is his role as the "protostylite," founder of an ascetic movement that had adherents into the nineteenth century, from Mosul in today's northern Iraq to Gaul in France.<sup>9</sup> Though stylitism was spread over a vast area, it was in large part a spiritually and geographically Syrian phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

Symeon was an exemplar of the asceticism for which early Syriac Christianity was known. Ascetics existed in symbiosis with the monasteries and churches of the Syrian countryside. These communities provided the supplies and assistance necessary for spiritual athleticism, while the visitors drawn to the ascetics offered a boost to the local economy. Symeon's relationship with local ecclesiastical structures is made clear through the linking of his physical deprivations to the liturgical calendar.<sup>11</sup>

Although few stylites are as well documented as Symeon, there are vitae, religious narratives, church histories, and archaeological remains that do preserve their memory.<sup>12</sup> Sites identified with stylites share a common structure: a column surrounded by an enclosure and closely associated communal buildings, presumably used by the monastic communities that served the stylite.<sup>13</sup>

Among the better-documented stylites, Saint Symeon Stylites the Younger (521–562) stands out. His column and monastic complex, known as the Wondrous Mountain (modern Sem'an Dağı), is located eleven miles (18 km) west of Antioch.<sup>14</sup> Symeon's vita chronicles his origins in Edessa, his early calling to the pillar at the age of seven, and his ascetic exercises and miracles, which drew pilgrims from Antioch and its environs, as well as from farther afield in Syria, Cilicia, Armenia, Asia Minor, and the Persian frontier.<sup>15</sup> Symeon the Younger was an ordained Chalcedonian priest.<sup>16</sup>

The complex at the Wondrous Mountain, unlike its model, Qal'at Sem'an, was not built through imperial donation but constructed by visitors as an expression of their gratitude for the holy man's aid.<sup>17</sup> The focal point of the site was the column, around which was built an octagon with two-tiered benches to accommodate pilgrims. Other buildings included three churches, various monastic structures, a baptistery, hospices, storage rooms, and a kitchen.<sup>18</sup> Much of the structure was completed between 541 and 551, the rest later in the sixth century.<sup>19</sup> Occupation of the site is similar to the pattern seen at Qal'at Sem'an: it functioned until the Arab conquest, after which little



Fig. 39. View of the column of Saint Symeon Stylites, Qal'at Sem'an, Syria. The pilgrimage shrine was constructed after 470.

evidence of activity exists until the Byzantine reconquest.<sup>20</sup> A revival in pilgrimage activity is attested by lead medallions, generally dated to the tenth or eleventh century (cat. no. 65).

Despite the impressive architectural remains of Qal'at Sem'an and the Wondrous Mountain, the material record of the stylites consists largely of portable objects, stone reliefs (cat. no. 63), and graffiti.<sup>21</sup> Such small-scale objects bearing stylite iconography include tokens (cat. no. 64), lead medallions (cat. no. 65), bottles (cat. no. 62), glass pendants,<sup>22</sup> and a stunning silver relief in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.<sup>23</sup> The objects, reliefs, and graffiti share a common, sometimes highly stylized iconography: a bust-length image of a stylite, generally wearing a monastic hood (*koukoullion*), atop his column. More complex compositions might feature censers, ladders, angels, supplicants, birds, crosses, stars, vines, or narrative scenes. Censers are particularly prominent in stylite imagery (cat. nos. 62, 63, 64). The earliest references to the use of incense in Christian ritual—among them the lives of the Symeons—are of Syrian origin. Like the ascetic and his symbiotic relationship with the local church, the incorporation of incense into church ritual and language is a hallmark of Late Antique Syriac Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Incense was an intercessory medium for private prayer, and its part in effecting miracles is vividly described in the vita of Symeon the Younger.<sup>25</sup>

The shared iconography poses difficulties in assigning objects to a specific site unless there is an identifying inscription. Given the sizable corpus of objects and the large number of stylite sites, it is possible that the images should be assigned more broadly, that some of the now-anonymous stylites attracted their own pilgrims (perhaps not internationally but locally), and that the tokens with generalized stylite iconography could have been distributed at these sites.

## 62A–C. Stylite Vessels

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Syria (?), mid-5th to 7th century

### A. Hexagonal Bottle with Stylite

Glass, mold-blown, greenish tint

21.7 × 6.4 × 6.5 cm (8 5/16 × 2 1/2 × 2 5/16 in.)

Provenance: Paul Dougherty (from at least 1931); Lisa Dougherty Coon (Mrs. Carleton S. Coon) (by descent until 1961).

Condition: The bottle is intact with no significant chips or losses; the glass is in good condition with signs of corrosion, including pitting and iridescence on two of the panels and the corresponding parts of the neck and mouth. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. Carleton S. Coon, 1961 (61.247)

### B. Hexagonal Bottle with Stylite

Glass, mold-blown, dull green

25.5 × 6.5 cm (10 1/16 × 2 1/16 in.)

Provenance: Said to have been found at Aleppo, Syria; purchased by the British Museum from Artin Sarkissian, Paris, in 1911.

Condition: The bottle is intact with no significant chips or losses; a small hole and short crack on the base have been consolidated. The glass is in good condition with some iridescence.

The British Museum, London (1911,0513.1)

### C. Jug with Stylite

Glass, mold-blown, light green with dark green handle and thread decoration; trailed-on handle and neck ring H. 14.2 cm (5 5/16 in.)

Provenance: Collection of Mrs. William H. (Ada Small) Moore (1858–1955).

Condition: The mouth is restored above the neck ring; there are strain cracks in the lower body and light brown weathering.

Yale University Art Gallery, The Hobart and Edward Small Moore Memorial Collection (1955.6.149)

These vessels reflect two mold types used in the production of a large group of mold-blown glass objects with stylite iconography.<sup>1</sup> A and B are from the same or very similar molds.<sup>2</sup> Their six sides show, in low relief, a stylite, a cross on a column, a lattice pattern (on two sides), and a palm frond (on two sides). In very legible high relief, the four sides of C depict, respectively, a stylite atop a column, a ladder, a censer, and five dots; a lattice pattern; a bird; and a cross flanked by rows of four dots.<sup>3</sup> All three vessels share a visual vocabulary with stylite



A

B

C

imagery in other media. The stylized rendering of the figure and the cross surmounting a column on A and B find close parallels in graffiti, such as those found on Jabal Barisha in Syria's Limestone Massif.<sup>4</sup> C finds its closest parallels in bas-reliefs (cat. no. 63).

Stylite glass can be classed among *eulogia* vessels that were presumably used to collect sanctified substances (see Ratliff, p. 86, and cat. nos. 60, 72, 186). Lacking an inscription, these objects are generally identified with Symeon the Elder.<sup>5</sup> His Syriac life describes the use of oil, water, dust, and *hnana*, a combination of the three, in his miracles;<sup>6</sup> any of these substances could have been collected by visitors to his column. Bottles could also have been used to store oil taken from lamps at Symeon's tomb in Antioch as well as oil or water poured into his sarcophagus and allowed to flow over his relics.<sup>7</sup> At the Wondrous Mountain, dust, used to make tokens, is linked to miracles and could have been gathered in glass vessels.<sup>8</sup> The discovery of sarcophagi near stylite pillars raises the possibility that these holy men were buried near their columns; oil or water sanctified through contact with their relics could have also been collected in bottles.<sup>9</sup>

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- 7 On these practices, see Ratliff, p. 86. Sodini 1989, p. 32, suggests a connection with Symeon's tomb in Antioch. For a discussion of Symeon's corporeal relics, see Eastmond 1999.
- 8 Vikan 2010, p. 15.
- 9 See Schachner 2010, pp. 358–59, for a list of sites where sarcophagi have been identified.

*References:* (A) Unpublished; (B) Harden 1968, p. 63, cat. no. 80; Buckton 1994, p. 116, cat. no. 131b; (C) Eisen 1927, vol. 2, pp. 483–84, fig. 200, pls. 121–122; Matheson 1980, pp. 132–33, no. 353; R. Grossmann 2002, p. 37, fig. 38.

### 63. Relief of a Stylite Saint

Syria, 5th–6th century

Basalt

84.5 × 76 × 18.5 cm (33 1/4 × 29 7/8 × 7 1/4 in.)

*Provenance:* Relief seen by Jean Lassus before 1932 in secondary use in a stone enclosure in Qasr Abu Samira, Syria.<sup>1</sup>

Slab acquired for the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst on the antiquities market in 1963.

*Condition:* The slab retains its original edges on the top, bottom, and lower right side. The left side is broken. The bottom shows minor damages along the lower edge.

Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin (9/63)

This shallow relief depicts a stylite saint sculpted in a naive but expressive style. Shown as a bearded monk with a monk's hood, he stands on a column with a two-stepped base. The lower part of his body is hidden behind a plain parapet, the outline of which is indicated by thin lines. A dove as a messenger from God carries a wreath in its beak and holds it over the tip of his hood. A monk approaches the stylite on a ladder, swinging a censer in his hand. The incense was meant to evoke the help of the saint.<sup>2</sup>

The stylite is either Symeon the Elder (d. 459) or Symeon the Younger (d. 592), who were represented using very similar iconographic schemes (see cat. no. 65). In this case, a positive identification seems impossible, as ladder, monk, censer, and dove are not exclusive to either saint.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the figure lacks individualized features, and there is no inscription. The relative vicinity of the findspot, Qasr Abu Samira, to the pilgrimage center at Qal'at Sem'an, however, suggests an interpretation as Symeon the Elder.

As can be deduced from the different widths of the plain framing bands, the frag-



1 For examples of other molds, see Matheson 1980, pp. 133–34, nos. 354–356; E. Stern 1995, pp. 266–67, no. 190; Israeli 2003, p. 279, no. 374.

2 This mold seems to have been quite common. See, for example, handled juglets/pitchers in the Toledo (Ohio) Museum of Art (1923.1352; E. Stern 1995, p. 265, no. 189); the Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, N.Y. (66.1.230; Whitehouse 2001, pp. 98–99, no. 591); the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (1955.6.147; Matheson 1980, pp. 134–35, no. 357); and the Musée du Louvre, Paris (OA 6418; Arveiller-Dulong and Nenna 2005, p. 481, no. 1313).

3 Another example from this mold is in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (OA 6417; Arveiller-Dulong and Nenna 2005, p. 481, no. 1312).

4 Schachner 2010, p. 372, figs. 13a–c. Eisen 1927, vol. 2, p. 474, pl. 119, published the Yale (then Moore Collection) example as bearing images of the Holy Cross with the beaker of Joseph of Arimathea; the Tree of Life (on two sides); cross-hatching with lozenge-shaped fields representing paradise (on two sides); and the Vision of Constantine. More recently, it has been argued that the figure on this mold should be understood as a monk at an altar; see D. Woods 2004b, pp. 45–49. Without an inscription, the identity of the figure is uncertain, but one of Woods's main objections to the identification is that similar representations are not preserved. This argument seems to ignore stylite graffiti, which are very often highly schematic but identified by inscriptions (see, in particular, Peña et al. 1975, pl. 41.1), along with related imagery in glass: an example in the Toledo (Ohio) Museum of Art (1948.13; E. Stern 1995, pp. 266–67, no. 190) clearly shows a stylite on a column, and the rounded torso is inscribed with a cross.

5 Sodini 1989, p. 32.

6 For instances of these substances in the Syriac Life, see Ratliff, p. 94, n. 4.

ment is probably only the right-hand side of a slab originally containing two image fields. With a once-horizontal format, it might have served as part of a chancel screen, a parapet separating the altar area from the nave of a church. However, reliefs of stylite saints are also known as decorations of the outer walls of Syrian churches.<sup>4</sup>

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or the Wondrous Mountain, there is no consensus on the stylite depicted on the tokens.<sup>4</sup> Most of these objects with known find sites come from Qal'at Sem'an or Deir Sem'an.<sup>5</sup> Recent analysis of the clay used in the production of a small test group, including tokens without stylite imagery (cat. no. 58), points to the area around Qal'at Sem'an as a possible center of production.<sup>6</sup>

Token A is very legible.<sup>7</sup> Flying angels holding crowns approach a hooded stylite on a column. The pattern on the shaft and base of the column recalls the palm-frond pattern on glass bottles (cat. no. 62A, B) and on the engaged columns decorating the facades of churches in the Limestone Massif.<sup>8</sup> The beaded lines running parallel to the columns may represent ropes used to carry supplies to the stylite.<sup>9</sup> At the base of the column is a scene of the Baptism of Christ (left) and an enthroned Virgin and Child (right), generally identified as the Adoration of the Magi.<sup>10</sup> It is inscribed "Holy, Holy."<sup>11</sup> The iconography of B is less clear. Again, a hooded stylite perched on a column is approached by angels, at least one of whom holds a crown. The column has diagonal fluting, and the stylite's platform is clearly indicated. The poles flanking the column likely represent the ladder common in stylite imagery. Although the lower left and right are very difficult to read, they may show the same narratives as on A. Tokens such as these were more than souvenirs. Presumably made from the earth around stylite columns, they linked imagery and substance in order to evoke the healing power of the holy man, so vividly described in the lives of the two Symeons.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vikan 2010, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> For examples with incense imagery, see Sodini 1993, p. 27, no. 6, pl. I, fig. 6; for supplicants, see Vikan 2010, p. 31, fig. 11; for narrative vignettes, p. 33, figs. 17 and 18; for inscriptions, p. 31, figs. 11 and 12, p. 33, figs. 17 and 18.

<sup>3</sup> Sodini 1989, pp. 43–44, fig. 15; Sodini 1993, p. 26, pl. I, fig. 1; Vikan 2010, p. 31, fig. 11.

<sup>4</sup> See Vikan 2010, p. 33 (fig. 19 shows an example) and p. 51, for a discussion of Symeon the Younger tokens; also Sodini 1989, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> For tokens found at Qal'at Sem'an, see Sodini 1989, pp. 38–41.

<sup>6</sup> Gerard et al. 1997.

<sup>7</sup> There are several examples of tokens with the same iconography; see Sodini 1993, pp. 31–32.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, the west facade of Qal'at Loze; Peña et al. 1975, pp. 190, 191, fig. 42, pl. 39.2.

<sup>9</sup> Sodini 1989, p. 42. Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne makes this proposal; Sodini suggests they could also be read as candles.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of these scenes within the context of pilgrimage tokens, see Vikan 2010, pp. 53–56 for the Baptism, and pp. 59–61 for the Adoration.



A



B

<sup>11</sup> For an extended discussion of tokens with this inscription and liturgical overtones, see Pentcheva 2010, pp. 40–42.

<sup>12</sup> Vikan 2010, pp. 52–53. Pentcheva 2010, p. 38, cites examples of tokens with filed sides and sees these as evidence that they were used medicinally.

References: (A) Campbell 1985, p. 80, no. 106; (B) Zapheiropoulou 2002, p. 38, cat. no. 50.

## 64A, B. Stylite Tokens

Syria(?), 6th to 7th century  
Terracotta

### A. Token with Stylite, Baptism of Christ, and Adoration of the Magi

Diam. 2.5 cm (1 in.); thickness 0.7 cm (5/16 in.)

Inscribed: In Greek, left, ΑΓΙΟΣ; right, ΑΓΙΟΣ (Holy Holy)

Provenance: Purchased Blumka Gallery, New York; collection of Dr. Lillian Malcove (1902–1981), New York, until 1981; bequeathed to the University of Toronto, 1982.

Condition: The object is stable with soiling and accretions. There is a small loss along the edge of the obverse; a deep gouge and three radiating cracks appear on the reverse. Malcove Collection, University of Toronto Art Centre, Toronto (M82.242)

### B. Token with Stylite

2.7 × 2.4 cm (1 5/16 × 1 5/16 in.)

Provenance: Collection of Gheorghios Tsolozidis (1928–2002) before 1962.

Condition: The object is stable with some pitting and accretions.

Tsolozidis Collection, Thessaloniki (ΣΤ169)

Some two hundred fifty small, stamped clay tokens with stylite imagery survive.<sup>1</sup> Generally depicting a column with a stylite being crowned by angels, these may include incense imagery (see Ratliff, p. 94), supplicants, narrative vignettes, or inscriptions in Greek or Syriac.<sup>2</sup> A small number of examples of portraits exist.<sup>3</sup> Except for a few larger, mold-made terracotta examples with inscriptions referring to Symeon the Younger

## 65A, B. Pilgrim Tokens with Images of Saint Symeon Stylites the Younger

### A. Pilgrim Token

Syria, 10th–11th century

Lead

H. 5.9 cm (2 5/16 in.); Diam. 5.5 cm (2 1/8 in.)

Inscribed: In Greek around the edge, + ΕΥΛΟΓΙΑ [Τ]ΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΣΥΜΕΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΘΑΥΜΑΤΟΥΡΓΟΥ ΑΜΗΝ (+ Eulogia [blessing] of Saint Symeon Thaumatourgos [miracle worker] Amen)

Provenance: Acquired by the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in 1973.

Condition: The entire surface is corroded, and parts of the border are missing in two places.

Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin (32/73)

### B. Pilgrim Token

Syria, 10th–11th century

Lead

Diam. 5.5 cm (2 1/8 in.)

Inscribed: In Greek, around the edge, + ΕΥΛΟΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΣΥΜΕΩΝΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΘΑΥΜΑΤΟΥΡΓΟΥ ΑΜΗΝ (+ Eulogia [blessing] of Saint Symeon Thaumatourgos [miracle worker] Amen)

Condition: The entire surface is heavily corroded and worn. The border shows minor dents and signs of deformation.

Tsolozidis Collection, Thessaloniki, Greece (ΣΤ 7)

These two lead medallions belong to a closely related group of pilgrim tokens or blessings characterized by similar iconography,

a circular inscription on the obverse giving the name of Symeon the Younger around his depiction and with a cross on the reverse.<sup>1</sup> The tokens in Berlin and from the Tsolozidis Collection both show the bust of Symeon in monk's habit on top of a stout column, holding a book and accompanied by angels. Comparison with inscribed examples shows that the two figures flanking the column can be identified as Symeon's mother, Martha, and his disciple Konon.<sup>2</sup> A stylized ladder leads to the saint.

The overall iconographic scheme, including the ladder and the inscription, is already present on a stamped token in Bobbio made of sawdust and resin, which can be dated to the sixth to seventh century because of its close association with lead ampullae from the Holy Land of this date.<sup>3</sup> The arabesque-like, leafless scrolls ornamenting the crosses on the lead tokens in Columbia (Missouri), The Hague, and Princeton point to medieval, possibly Islamic, models and thus to a later date for the whole group.<sup>4</sup> This is supported by the design of the cross on the token in Berlin, whose pointed elements between the arms of the cross find equivalents in Middle Byzantine compositions.<sup>5</sup> After a long period of Muslim-Arab dominion, the region of Antioch came under Byzantine rule again between 969 and 1074. This seems to be a likely moment for the revival of Christian pilgrimage on a larger scale and thus for a market for pilgrim tokens, which, however, were modeled on an earlier iconographic scheme.

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<sup>1</sup> Verdier 1980 (with bibl. in notes); Vikan 2010, pp. 33, 84–85.

<sup>2</sup> Cleveland Museum of Art, Norman O. Stone and Ella A. Stone Memorial Fund (CMA72.52); former Stoclet Collection, Brussels; Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (55.78); Verdier 1980, pp. 17–21, fig. 1, p. 19, fig. 6, p. 21, fig. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Elbern 1965, pp. 289–90, fig. 7; Verdier 1980, p. 23, fig. 18. For the lead ampullae, see A. Grabar 1958. The iconography of Symeon the Younger is based on that of Symeon the Elder; see Vikan 2010, pp. 31–33, figs. 11, 17, 18.

<sup>4</sup> First pointed out by Lafontaine-Dosogne 1967, pp. 146–47; Verdier 1980, p. 25. For examples from the Middle Byzantine period, see Evans and Wixom 1997, p. 221, fig. at the top; p. 187, fig. lower right, above the bust of the emperor; p. 208, cat. no. 143, suppedaneum; p. 212, fig. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Goldschmidt and Weitzmann 1930–34, vol. 2, pl. V, no. 21b, pl. LXIII, no. 193.

References: (A) Wamser 2004, p. 211; Effenberger 2008, p. 65; (B) Zapheiropoulou 2002, cat. no. 51.



A, obverse



A, reverse



B, obverse

## Mosaics during the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods

Robert Schick

The use of colored stone cubes to produce artistic patterns on floors was an art form employed in the Mediterranean world since the Hellenistic period. In central Jordan, the focus of this short essay, the use of the mosaic arts to decorate both religious and secular buildings flourished between the fifth and eighth centuries, spanning the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods.<sup>1</sup> Almost every church building in the region had a mosaic floor, but plenty of secular buildings, as well as Muslim buildings in the later seventh and eighth centuries, also had mosaic floors. Some churches would have had mosaics of glass tesserae on the walls and semidomes of the apses, but only meager traces of these have survived. The larger mosaic floors are composed of hundreds of thousands of mosaic cubes and would have taken months to install.

Some mosaic floors were confined to geometric patterns of lesser or greater complexity, but many others included depictions of people and animals, often within an overall pattern of vine scrolls forming individualized vignettes. Scenes of daily life, pastoralism, agriculture, and hunting abound, including depictions of exotic people or animals that were not found in Jordan, such as in the mosaic in the diakonikon/baptistery at Mount Nebo, dating to 530 (fig. 41), along with renderings of buildings, personifications of such concepts as the seasons or the earth, and portraits of benefactors.

At times, mosaics provide clues to the social characteristics of the locals. For example, the mosaics in the church of Kayanus at ‘Uyun Musa, north of Mount Nebo, Jordan (cat. no. 66), depicted a horseman with a spear and a camel driver, dressed in a loin-cloth and carrying a bow and a large sword, who can be identified as an Arab Christian soldier serving in the Byzantine military along the desert frontier.<sup>2</sup>

Many mosaic floors included dedicatory inscriptions that reveal what languages were in use. Although the bulk of the population were native speakers of Aramaic or Arabic—increasingly so after the Muslim conquest

# BYZANTIUM AND ISLAM

AGE OF TRANSITION  
7th–9th Century

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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