



**Name of Object:**

Fresco panel: 'The Family of Kings'

**Location:**

Amman, Jordan

**Holding Museum:**

In situ at Qusayr 'Amra

**Date of Object:**

Hegira first third of the 2nd century / AD second half of the 8th century

**Material(s) / Technique(s):**

Fresco

**Dimensions:**

n/a

**Period / Dynasty:**

Umayyad

**Provenance:**

Qusayr 'Amra, Jordan.

**Description:**

A fresco situated at the southern end of the audience hall on the lower register of the western wall at Qusayr Amra. Much discussed and extremely damaged, the fresco is known as The Family of Kings. In its original state, the fresco panel depicted six kings arranged in two rows: the most important rulers are in the front row, and the less important ones are at the back. Their names, written above their heads in Arabic and Greek, identify them as: Caesar, the Byzantine emperor; Kisra, the Sassanid emperor; Negus, the king of Abbyssinia (Ethiopia); and Roderick, the Visigothic king of Spain. Historical inference has established the identities of the other two as the emperor of China and the ruling prince khaqan of the Turks. Fortunately parts of the scene including the Sassanid king and certain sections of the Byzantine emperor are still preserved. The fresco shows figures extending their hands as if paying homage. The figure to the left-south (the Byzantine emperor), whose head is destroyed, is dressed in an imperial robe decorated with an all-over pattern of small circles; the central figure (the Sassanid king) shows a beardless youth wearing a long robe (chiton) with a golden hem and a mantle (chlamys) fastened on his right shoulder by a fibula. The Sassanid king's crown is not typical and shows a stand topped by two superimposed knobs with a crescent. As it has already been pointed out by Oleg Grabar (1954), the scene does not stress defeat in the usual Sassanid or Byzantine manner, and therefore might be interpreted as a harmonious representation of a Family of Kings. This scene was also thought to supply the date of the building, since Roderick ruled for only one year before he was killed by the Umayyad armies in AH 92 AD 711. It has been assumed that the Qusayr Amra complex was built by al-Walid I (r. AH 986–96 AD 705–15). This date AH 92 AD 711, however, provides a terminus post quem for the construction of the monument and it is more likely that it was



built by Al-Walids nephew and synonym, Al-Walid II, who is known to have lived in the Azraq area.

**View Short Description**

This fresco panel is situated in the audience hall of Qusayr 'Amra. Its original state depicted the six rulers of Byzantium, Persia, Abyssinia, Spain, China and the Turks, whose names were written in Arabic and Greek. Roderick of Spain ruled only in AH 92 / AD 711 providing a terminus post quem for construction.

**Original Owner:**

Possibly al-Walid II (AH 125–6 / AD 743–4)

**How date and origin were established:**

Qusayr 'Amra and its frescos date to the Umayyad period, an accurate dating achieved primarily through analysis of some of the paintings in situ, the most important being this fresco panel depicting six rulers; 'The Family of Kings'. Since Roderick ruled for only one year before he was killed in AH 92 / AD 711, this date provides a terminus post quem for construction of the monument.

**How Object was obtained:**

The fresco is in situ at Qusayr 'Amra.

**How provenance was established:**

The fresco panel is located in the audience hall at Qusayr 'Amra, Jordan.

**Selected bibliography:**

Almagro, M., et al, Qusayr 'Amra: Residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de Jordania, Madrid, 1975, plates XXII a-b. Creswell, K. A. C., A short Account of Early Muslim Architecture, Revised by J. W. Allen, Cairo, 1989, pp.112–13, plate 69. Fowden, G., Qusayr Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria, Los Angeles, 2004, pp.197–226. Grabar, O, 'The Painting of the Six Kings at Qusayr Amra', Ars Orientalis, 1, 1954, pp.185–7.

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