

CHAPTER 1

Baghdad

With the foundation of Baghdad Islamic intellectual history reached a decisive turning point. This statement will sound banal to anyone looking at the development retrospectively; for the contemporaries, however, what was taking place was too complex to be perceived consciously and described in these terms. They recorded how carefully Manşūr planned the external appearance of the city, how, maybe with reference to east Iranian models, he had it built perfectly circular, and how he parcelled it within the walls according to clear geometric principles, but also with a view to strict security. They also noted that he, being superstitious like most rulers, had his court astrologer Nawbakht calculate the precise moment for laying the foundation stone. But they did not notice, or if they did, they did not transmit it, the revolutionary consequences this would have for social structures and how they would influence intellectual life and alter consciousness.

After all, the depth of the historic caesura had by no means been evident from the very first. The Abbasids had moved their residence several times already. After Saffāh had proclaimed himself caliph in Kufa, he had first lived near Qaṣr Ibn Hubayra halfway between Kufa and the future Baghdad, and then moved into a newly established palace complex near Anbār. Manşūr had settled near Kufa, presumably in a town which, like Qaṣr Ibn Hubayra, had been built by the last Umayyad governor. As we know, the caliphs did not stay in Baghdad very long either; a century later they moved to Samarra, a good 125 km (75 miles) away. Baghdad, however, was not abandoned by its inhabitants and left to be washed away by the rains like the earlier centres, which historians list as 'Hāshimī dwellings' (Hāshimiyya). On the contrary, the city grew quickly to become a metropolis, surviving the temporary absence of the court and civil servants.

Texts by native geographers are collected in O. V. Tsikitišvili, *K istorii Bagdada* (Tbilisi 1968); cf. e.g. Ya'qūbī, *Buldān* 238, 20ff., or Ibn al-Faqīh, *Akhbār al-buldān*, Facsimile of MS Mashhad 5229 (*Collection of Geographical Works*, Frankfurt/Main 1987), p. 55ff. = Tsikitišvili, Ar. Part 3 ff. = ed. by Ṣ. A. al-'Alī entitled *Baghdād madīnat al-salām* (Paris/ Baghdad 1977). The foundation of the city was described in detail by Ṣ. A. al-'Alī in the extensive work of the same title *Baghdād madīnat al-salām*, vol. 1: *al-Jānib al-gharbī* (Baghdad 1985). Cf. R. Hodges and D. Whitehouse,