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Baghdad until 1100

Baghdad was the capital of the 'Abbāsid caliphate from the founding of the city in 145/762 until the fall of the dynasty in 656/1258, except for a 59-year interlude (218–79/833–92) when the seat of 'Abbāsid rule was transferred to Sāmarrā', a site along the Tigris River some 125 kilometres north of Baghdad. In choosing the site for the city, the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75) was moved by economic and strategic factors. The caliph's palace complex, the adjacent military cantonments, and the market areas nearby were all situated at the confluence of two major river systems: the Tigris and the Euphrates, which flowed into the Tigris via a man-made canal that accommodated large boats. The specific location of the city thus allowed for the transport of all means of goods and food-stuffs from different regions. Baghdad also straddled the major overland trade routes, thus enhancing the city's economic importance as a hub of international trade. The government centre of Baghdad, called Madīnat al-Salām (the City of Peace), was situated in the northwest segment of

Baghdad. It consisted of a circular palace complex appropriately called the Round City or Madīnat al-Manṣūr, which contained the caliph's residence, the principal mosque, various government bureaus, and residential quarters. Also part of Madīnat al-Salām were palaces and military cantonments beyond the walls of the Round City in the area called al-Ḥarbiyya. Surrounded by the Tigris and various canals, the government centre was well defended against a land assault [Illustration 1].

Sparsely populated, pre-'Abbāsid Baghdad was serviced by a weekly market held on Tuesdays. The immense scope of al-Manṣūr's construction necessitated importing tens of thousands of skilled and unskilled labourers from Iraq and nearby provinces of the realm. Their presence required a vast number of merchants to supply the work force and the military contingents assigned to keep order. As a result, a massive suburban area, known as al-Karkh, was established south of Madīnat al-Salām, below the Karkhāyā (Ṣarāt) canal. The southwest suburb featured an expanded series of markets that catered to the needs of the inhabitants and sites for producing building materials.

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Baer, Eva (b Berlin, 20 Feb. 1920). Israeli historian of Islamic art. Forced to emigrate from Nazi Germany in 1938, Baer spent the years of World War II in Palestine. She received her B.A. from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and met and married Gabriel Baer (1919–82), an historian of modern Egypt. She earned her Ph.D. in 1965 from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. She then returned to Jerusalem, where she served as Curator of the L. A. Mayer Museum for Islamic Art. In 1970 she began teaching at Tel Aviv University, from which she retired as professor in 1987. Baer lectured and taught at museums and universities throughout Europe and the USA. Her major publications focused on the history of Islamic metalwork and the iconography of Islamic art.

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Baghdad [Baghdād]. Capital city of Iraq. Located on both banks of the Tigris River in central Iraq, the city was founded in 762 near several earlier settlements dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE. The site marks the closest approach (c. 60 km) of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers before their eventual confluence in southern Iraq. In 750 the ABBASID caliphs (r. 749–1258) abandoned the Umayyad capital at Damascus for Mesopotamia but made several false starts in finding an acceptable site for a new capital: the first choice, named al-Hashimiyya, was located between Kufa and Baghdad, a second was located at al-Anbar on the left bank of the Euphrates and a third was near Kufa. The caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–75) selected another site on the west bank of the Tigris not far from the ancient Seleucid and Sasanian capitals of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and Ctesiphon. He named his new capital

Madīnat al-Salām (Arab.: "City of peace"), although it continued to be known as Baghdad in popular usage. Al-Mansur and his court occupied the city in 766–7 and, with some exceptions prior to 900, it remained the Abbasid capital until the Mongols sacked it and ended the caliphate in 1258.

The city of al-Mansur, known as the Round City (see ARCHITECTURE, fig. 3), was built of mud-brick, with baked brick where required. Its wall formed an enormous circle, like such other imperial cities in the Near East as Hatra, the Parthian capital near Mosul, and Firuzabad, the Sasanian city in southern Iran. The city wall had a moat and four gates set so that they opened towards Damascus in Syria, Kufa and Basra in Iraq, and the province of Khurasan in Iran. Four major roads lined with arcades and buildings led from the gates into the interior of the city. A ring of houses built inside the wall served as the residence of the caliph's family, its staff and servants, and an inner ring housed the arsenal, treasury and government offices. The center of the city was open except for the police station, the hypostyle congregational mosque and the adjacent palace, which had a throne-room surmounted by a green dome supporting a large figure of a horseman holding a lance, visible from afar. The Round City was built to separate the caliph from his subjects, but it soon failed to achieve this purpose, and the population settled thickly around it. The caliph moved to a suburban estate on the east bank long before the green dome of al-Mansur's palace collapsed in 941, and the Round City was swallowed up by the new metropolis developing on the west bank of the Tigris. Sections of the wall remained visible for centuries, but no trace of the Round City has been found in modern times.

Baghdad quickly spread to the east bank of the Tigris, called al-Rusafa, site of a notable cemetery, the palaces and gardens of the caliph and his principal followers, parade grounds, mighty walls and barracks. Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809) disliked Baghdad and halfway through his reign moved to Raqqā. His successor returned to Baghdad, but between 836 and 883 the government was moved 80 km north to Samarra. After the caliphs returned to Baghdad, they expanded the palatial district on the east bank, and a Byzantine embassy to the caliph in 917 was astonished even by the least of these palaces. The east bank was further developed and redeveloped by the rulers of the Buyid (r. 932–1062) and Saljuq (r. 1038–1194) dynasties, who maintained residences in Baghdad. Other districts of the city grew, prospered and fell into ruins in an unplanned patchwork. As the Abbasid dynasty lost power, Baghdad diminished in importance, despite a brief revival under the caliph al-Nasir (r. 1180–1225).

Several buildings survive from the later Abbasid period. The so-called Abbasid Palace (early 13th century) in the citadel was probably a madrasa. Its fine decoration in cut brick and stucco is among the richest and most elaborate of its kind before the 14th century. It has been made into a museum illustrating different features of Islamic architecture. The