

Title:

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Baghdād's Topography and Social Composition: A Historical Sketch

Jens Scheiner/Isabel Toral

Baghdād in Late Antiquity

Baghdād is the name given to a centuries-old urban complex¹⁶ that has undergone constant changes with regard to its topography, social composition, political order, culture and economy. Hence, as with every city, it is necessary to conceptualize Baghdād from its very beginnings as a process rather than a static unit. Further, this urban complex cannot be separated from its natural setting at the middle course of the Tigris River, connected to the Euphrates through various canals, nor from its productive agrarian hinterland used for agriculture and pasture. In addition, on a macro level this urban complex is part of the Mesopotamian cityscape which includes important cities such as Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Babylon.¹⁷ Boundaries between this more densely constructed urban complex, its tilled hinterland and smaller structures of human habitation (hamlets or villages) were fluid in the period of consideration here, i.e. from Late Antiquity to the Islamic Middle period (1000-1500). Based on this procedural view of urbanity, Baghdād can also be described as a “foundation city” that incorporates older settlement structures.

One of the oldest dwellings in the area of the urban complex of Baghdād was “Baga'dāta's estates”, Baga'dāta being an old Persian name that means “given or created by God”, according to Wilhelm Eilers.¹⁸ It is from this that the later metropolis¹⁹ ultimately took its name. In Sasanian times, a conglomerate of loosely connected settlement structures, such as villages, rural villas, monasteries and agricultural domains were located in the area of the later urban complex east and west of the middle Tigris. This area's cultivated landscape and infrastructure were under continuous development. For instance, Sasanian officials ordered

¹⁶ This volume distinguishes conceptually between Baghdād as an urban complex or conurbation and al-Manṣūr's palatial city Madīnat al-Salām as a part of it. For a similar portrayal of Baghdād as “a city of cities” or a “greater urban center”, see Lassner, *Topography*, 178-183. Other works that incorrectly equate Baghdād with Madīnat al-Salām include von Kremer, *Stadt*, 47; Levy, *Baghdad Chronicle*, XI and more recently El Hibri, *Empire*, 272. Le Strange's position is ambiguous: at one point he treats places as equal (Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 10), whereas elsewhere he distinguishes them, calling Madīnat al-Salām a burgh or a citadel (ibid., 15, 42). This might be borrowed from von Kremer who calls it a *Zwingburg* (stronghold) or a *Königsburg* (von Kremer, *Stadt*, 48, 78).

¹⁷ For a description of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as an urban precursor of Baghdād, see the contribution by Parvaneh Pourshariati.

¹⁸ Eilers, *Namensgebung*, 13-14.

¹⁹ For previous characterizations of Baghdād as a metropolis, see Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 1; Nagel, *Kalifat*, 137; Scheiner/Janos, *Baghdād*, 1.

the digging of several canals, some connecting the Euphrates with the Tigris on its western shore, while others, like the Nahrawān Canal built by King Khosraw I (r. 531-579), branched off the Tigris to the East and watered its eastern lands. Sasanian representatives also built roads as well as stone and boat bridges traversing some canals and the Tigris. Regarding human settlements, we know of a Sasanian palace and several native Aramean and Sasanian villages, one of which is called Baghdād or Baghdādh (with *dhāl*) in the Arabic sources²⁰ and was located on the western bank of the Tigris, as well as a Zoroastrian graveyard and two marketplaces, one on the western side called The Market of Baghdād and one on the eastern bank of the Tigris, The Tuesday Market. Moreover, it is probably that some Muslims owned estates there that they obtained after the early Muslim conquest of the area. Apart from the city of al-Karkh founded by the Sasanian King Shāpūr II (r. 309-379) several Christian monasteries were located in the area, as well. Hence, in Sasanian and early Islamic times the later urban complex of Baghdād represented a widespread cluster of settlements on both sides of the Tigris that had attracted some political attention and developed some economic importance, thus attracting people to settle, work and live there.²¹ During these centuries, Baghdād was a village, not a city proper (that being al-Karkh), and was part of this cluster.²²

Baghdād in Early ‘Abbāsīd Times

This cluster of settlements developed into a conurbation when the second ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775) decided to build a new palatial city²³ in the area on “a common field known as al-Mubārakah [...] that was shared by sixty citizens of Baghdād”.²⁴ He had

²⁰ Both variants are attested for the Sasanian village (as well as for the later urban complex) in our oldest historical sources, for instance in Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr’s *Kitāb Baghdād* (The Book of Baghdād). According to Le Strange, Baghdādh seems to have been the late antique and pre-Islamic name of the village, whereas Muslims would have called the village Baghdād (Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 10). The difference is of course the final-obstruent devoicing of the letter *dhāl*, which became meaningful when later Muslim scholars wanted to establish a meaning for the name Baghdād. Accordingly, in Middle Persian only Baghdād would be meaningful: *bagh* (God) and *dādan*, with two hard *dāls*, (to give), resulting in the village (or the later metropolis) was “given by God”. This (pseudo-)etymology is alternatively explained by Eilers as referring to a personal name Baga’ dāta, who was “given by God” to his parents (see above).

²¹ For some reflections on the relationship between the economies of Baghdād and its hinterland in Sasanian and Islamic times, see the contribution by Richard Bulliet.

²² For more on late antique Baghdād, see Scheiner/Janos, *Baghdād*, 2-4.

²³ Lassner also called Madīnat al-Salām a “palace precinct” that was only “a small part of the total area comprised by greater Baghdād” (Lassner, *Notes*, 458); similarly: “The original Round City of al-Manṣūr [...] was rather an enormous palace-complex [...]” (Lassner, *Topography*, 169). In his latest description of Baghdād in *El.Three* he falsely claims that “at the heart of Madīnat al-Salām was the Round City (Madīnat al-Manṣūr)” (*El*³, s.v. Baghdād until 1100 [J. Lassner]).

²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh. Tr. McAuliffe Vol. 28*, 247; *Ed. de Goeje*, III, 278.

conceptualized it as a round structure,²⁵ had asked astrologers for an auspicious time for its construction²⁶ and had called it Madīnat al-Salām (The City of Peace)²⁷ (not Baghdād), thus alluding first and foremost to paradisiacal concepts as mentioned for instance in the Qur’ān (Q. 10:25-26).²⁸ The existing infrastructure allowing for levying taxes, fostering commerce and securing water supply must have convinced him that this was a good spot to take up imperial residence.²⁹ Thus, out of millions of sun-dried and baked mud bricks, *spolia* from Seleucia-Ctesiphon and possibly pisé, al-Manṣūr built a walled non-rectangular city on the western shore of the Tigris, north of (yet unwalled) al-Karkh. This palatial city offered housing and estates for military forces, civil servants, merchants and caliphal clients. Governmental institutions, such as the mint, the arsenal or a prison, as well as a great Friday mosque (*jāmi’*), the Manṣūr Mosque, and the caliph’s Golden Gate Palace were also located within the city walls. The latter two buildings stood in the center of Madīnat al-Salām and were surrounded by a vast undeveloped courtyard that stressed the distance between ruler and ruled.³⁰ According to Alastair Northedge, in building such a fortified city (*miṣr*) al-Manṣūr followed established (Umayyad) practices, which are also evident in al-Manṣūr’s assignment of estates to his family, clients, followers and soldiers and his construction of a separate establishment for his son (and successor) Muḥammad (al-Mahdī, r. 775-785) on the eastern side of the Tigris.³¹ This newly established second military camp (*‘askar*), which included another palace, a second Friday mosque, barracks and a market ultimately came to be known as al-Ruṣāfa, from Hārūn al-Rashīd’s (r. 786-809) time onward. Moreover, al-Manṣūr initiated

²⁵ Al-A’zamī, *‘Imārāt Baghdād*, 22. For a discussion whether al-Manṣūr’s palatial city was roundish, circular or oval, see More-to-know box II by Jens Scheiner.

²⁶ For an analysis and assessment of this horoscope, see More-to-know box I by Johannes Thomann. For the policy of the early ‘Abbāsīd caliphs in patronizing astrologers and astronomers, see Borrut, *Court Astrologers and Janos, Al-Ma’mūn’s Patronage*, 391-398.

²⁷ Kevin van Bladel—who in a paper discusses al-Manṣūr’s contacts to the Tang emperor and argues that the former imported Indian astronomy from there—makes the point of similarity in the names of the two empires’ capitals. While the Tang capital Chang’an (长安) means eternal peace, al-Manṣūr called his palatial city the City of Peace (van Bladel, *Two Cities*, 274). This parallel calls for further transcultural investigation of peace as a positive symbol in the rulers’ representation. We thank Johannes Thomann for pointing this article out to us.

²⁸ The respective passages of Q. 10:25-26 read: “And God summons to the Abode of Peace (dār al-salām) [...]” (25) “the good-doers [...] Those are the inhabitants of Paradise, therein dwelling forever” (26) (translation by Arberry).

²⁹ For al-Manṣūr’s reasoning for choosing that particular location, including some regional legends in conjunction with his decision, see the contribution by Isabel Toral.

³⁰ For a more detailed description of Madīnat al-Salām, see Bernard O’Kane’s contribution in this volume and Lassner, *Topography*, 138-149, as well as al-Huyutī, *Takḥīṭ madīnat Baghdād*, 9-14. For more on the wall of the palatial city, see al-Sūdānī, *Aswār Baghdād*, 43-47.

³¹ Northedge, *Urbanism*, 162-163.

infrastructural projects, such as new streets, bridges over the Tigris and various canals,³² as well as the construction of market stands and a cemetery. After al-Manṣūr, many more ‘Abbāsīd caliphs and other Muslim rulers left their footprints on Baghdād’s cityscape.³³ In addition, the social elite of the city initiated building projects that tried to compete with the rulers’ premises and that were usually constructed close to the caliphs’ palaces. First and foremost, powerful viziers, governors and commanders in chief (*amīrs*), such as Hārūn’s vizier Yaḥyā I-Barmakī (d. 806), the eunuch and commander Mu’nis al-Muḏaffar (d. 933) and the Saljūq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092), owned palaces in eastern Baghdād, sometimes even at the riverbank, and further initiated building projects of their own.

These investments, partly financed by rents and partly by land taxes, as well as the demand for manpower and many kinds of goods, caused an influx of thousands of people seeking political, economic and cultural opportunities at the caliphal court, thus creating a vibrant and growing urban complex. When this urban complex adopted the name of the already existing village of Baghdād is not clear. Although our oldest sources mention this designation for the metropolis for the first time only in the late 9th century, it is very likely that soon after al-Manṣūr’s building activities were completed the name Baghdād was applied as an umbrella term to the whole urban complex into which the older and newly built settlement structures were incorporated. Nevertheless, some parts of this emerging metropolis kept their distinct names. Thus, the City of Peace refers only to al-Manṣūr’s palatial city, while al-Ruṣāfa or al-Karkh became the names of two neighborhoods within this urban complex.

Baghdād’s Neighborhoods

During the 8th and early 9th centuries, the older and newly built urban structures grew into an organic city, and habitation in Baghdād spread over a vast area east and west of the Tigris. The historical tradition knows of the following major neighborhoods in the metropolis, which changed their scope, their importance and sometimes even their names over time (see fig. 1.1).³⁴

³² Ahola and Osti, who reconstructed the topography of Baghdād in the early 10th century, remind us that not only did this network of canals increase, but also that some of the canals reverted to agricultural land over the centuries (Ahola/Osti, *Baghdad*, 221; maps 1-3).

³³ Their respective building activities are addressed in the contributions that offer a historical overview of the city (to be found in section 2 of the volume).

³⁴ The description that follows is based on Le Strange, *Baghdad*. For another account of Baghdād’s topography that is also based on Le Strange’s study, see the analysis presented by Georges Salmon in al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād. Partly Ed./tr. Salmon*, 32-72.

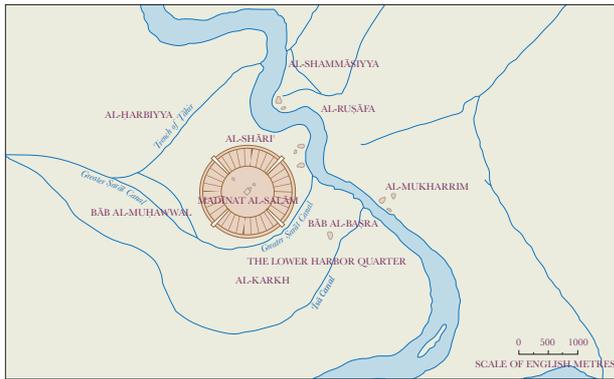


Fig. 1.1: The Neighborhoods of Baghdād (8th-9th Cent.)

On the western side there was al-Manṣūr’s palatial city Madīnat al-Salām, mentioned above, and the Shāri’ neighborhood to its north and northeast. This neighborhood was dominated by the Trench of Ṭāhir, which according to one Arabic source was a wide canal supplied by the Tigris.³⁵ Northwest of Madīnat al-Salām was the Ḥarbiyya neighborhood, in which al-Manṣūr had settled his troops and had established, among other buildings, the Quraysh Cemetery. In this cemetery the Shī’ī *Imāms* Mūsā I-Kāẓim (d. 799) and his grandson Muḥammad al-Taqī (d. 835) were buried, and at some point the Kāẓimayn Shrines, still extant today, were erected over their tombs. In addition, the tomb of the traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), which existed (at least) until the 1300s, stood there as well.

West of Madīnat al-Salām was the Muḥawwal Gate (Bāb al-Muḥawwal) neighborhood, which from al-Manṣūr’s time until the 13th century was an active market area in the urban complex of Baghdād. Turning to the south of Madīnat al-Salām, there were al-Karkh and the quarter of the Lower Harbor. Al-Karkh was famous for being the main commercial center of Baghdād (especially after the removal of the markets from the City of Peace in 774), with its links to the city’s southern harbor, which brought barges from Iraqī cities and ships from the Persian Gulf and China.³⁶

³⁵ For an argument that regards the Trench of Ṭāhir in al-Muqtadir’s time as a defensive ditch only “occasionally filled with water”, see Ahola/Osti, *Baghdad*, 224-225.

³⁶ Based on the analysis of some poetry, Neggaz argues that al-Karkh was also Baghdād’s “red-light district” (Neggaz, *al-Karkh*, 278).



Fig. 1.2: Some Porters in Front of Sailing Boats, Rowing Boats and Motorboats on the Tigris, 1925

Moreover, it was a neighborhood that was mostly inhabited by Shī'īs throughout the centuries under discussion here. The Başra Gate (Bāb al-Başra) neighborhood, to the southeast and east of the City of Peace, was well-known for the mausoleum of the ascetic Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 816) that stood (at least) until the early 20th century.

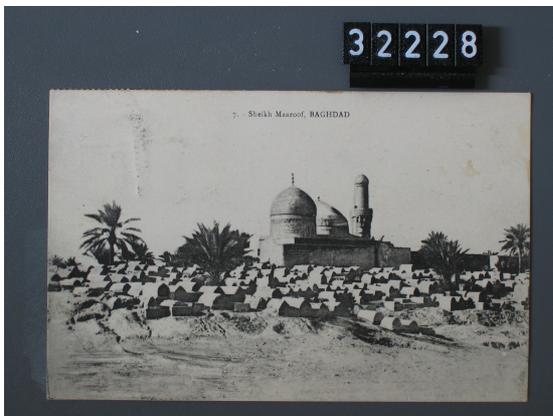


Fig. 1.3: Mausoleum of Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, 1924

In addition, from ca. 985 onward the 'Aḍudī Hospital, named after the Būyid Chief Emir 'Aḍud al-Dawla (r. 978-983), was located there. This hospital was in use up to 1233, when Caliph al-Mustanşir (r. 1226-1242) built a new one in eastern Baghdād as part of the Mustanşiriyya Madrasa.

Eastern Baghdād consisted of three major neighborhoods, al-Shammāsiyya, al-Ruṣāfa and al-Mukharrim, which were sometimes together called Bāb al-Ṭāq (The Gate of the Arch) because of a gate through which a visitor crossing the Tigris from western Baghdād via the

main bridge entered eastern Baghdād. The most northern neighborhood was al-Shammāsiyya, which included the major Christian quarter of Baghdād (at least until 1300); this was also where the Būyid rulers had their palaces. The Ruṣāfa neighborhood was opposite Madīnat al-Salām and represented the center of Muslim life in eastern Baghdād during the Early ‘Abbāsīd period, since it had a publicly accessible Friday mosque from al-Manṣūr’s time onward. Near this mosque was established the Khayzurān Cemetery, in which most of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs from the middle of the 10th century onward were buried.³⁷ Their tombs were still visible in the 14th century. In this neighborhood the mausoleum (and madrasa) of the legal scholar Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) was erected and survived until the 19th century when Carsten Niebuhr (d. 1815) still saw it.³⁸ Finally, the Mukharrim neighborhood, in the south of eastern Baghdād, was dominated from the late 9th century onward by the new palatial city of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs. In particular in late ‘Abbāsīd times this neighborhood became the new central area of Baghdād.

All these neighborhoods, which were usually subdivided into smaller quarters and residential areas, fulfilled several important social functions in daily life. First, they divided the city space into political, commercial and residential quarters, which were characterized by various inhabitants from the upper, middle and lower classes. Second, in the event of a lack or weakening of the central authority that ensured peace in the whole city, neighborhoods and local groups with their chiefs offered the inhabitants protection against attacks or urban strife. Third, neighborhoods were the places where religious and/or social control could be exerted over their inhabitants. Moreover, when neighborhoods were inhabited by a single religious denomination, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, legally or religiously established distinctions between these denominations were translated into spatial segregation. For instance, as mentioned above, Shī‘ī Muslims lived mainly in al-Karkh, while Sunnī Muslims populated the Bāb al-Baṣra or al-Mukharrim neighborhoods. In addition, Christian prisoners of war were settled by Hārūn al-Rashīd in al-Shammāsiyya.³⁹ Nevertheless, this kind of spatial segregation never led to the establishment of ghettos for Shī‘ī Muslims, Christians or Jews in Baghdād. Rather, although from early on people from one region, one tribe or one family tended to settle together in the same quarter of Baghdād, like in the Anbārī Mosque Quarter

³⁷ The first caliph to be buried there was al-Rāḍī (r. 934-940).

³⁸ Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 190.

³⁹ For Hārūn’s relations to the Christian Frankish kings and mutual European-Middle Eastern perceptions, see the contribution by Kirill Dmitriev and Klaus Oschema.

where, according to the historian al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 1071),⁴⁰ a “vast number” of people from Anbār (west of Baghdād) lived,⁴¹ many neighborhoods, like al-Karkh, remained diverse and cosmopolitan areas.

All this shows the centrality of neighborhoods for urban life in Baghdād. However, neighborhoods were also no static blocs; the density of their population and their architectural structure, including open, undeveloped spaces, changed over time. Hence, any historical assessment has to allow for decreasing numbers of inhabitants in some places and increasing habitation in others, and vice versa. The reasons behind such population shifts have been investigated only in broad lines. For instance, the City of Peace functioned as a residence for the ‘Abbāsīd family and their supporters for less than 60 years. And even throughout this period some caliphs decided to reside in palaces outside it, for instance in the Khuld Palace at its northeastern gate, or left Baghdād completely, like Hārūn al-Rashīd, who stayed in his palatial city al-Rāfiqa (near al-Raqqā) for several years.⁴² Later, the City of Peace was severely damaged by al-Ma’mūn’s (r. 813-833) general Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 822) during the Civil War with al-Ma’mūn’s brother al-Amīn (r. 809-813). Thereafter, it was never restored completely and fell into disuse over time, until it was abandoned sometime around the 940s. Instead, at the beginning of the 9th century, more precisely when al-Ma’mūn came to Baghdād in 819 after his victory, the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs’ residence was moved to a newly built palatial complex in the Mukharrim neighborhood in eastern Baghdād. With the exception of 56 years (from 836 to 892) during which the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs resided in the newly founded palatial city of Sāmarrā’ (ca. 100km north of Baghdād as the crow flies), all ‘Abbāsīd caliphs ruling from the late 9th to the 13th centuries lived in the palatial complex known as Dār al-Khilāfa (The Abode of the Caliphate) in eastern Baghdād. Thus, the political center of the city shifted from Madīnat al-Salām to the Dār al-Khilāfa, i.e. from western Baghdād (via Sāmarrā’) to eastern Baghdād. In times of lengthy absences of a caliph, in particular when he resided in another city, such as in al-Raqqā, Marw or Sāmarrā’, Baghdād was usually governed by a deputy and was not strictly speaking a *Residenzstadt* (i.e. not the official residence of the caliph and the seat of government). Furthermore, later rulers from the Būyid, Saljūq and Ilkhanid dynasties set up their residences in eastern Baghdād and continued to develop this part of the city, neglecting

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of the most important original sources featuring Baghdād, see Appendix I.

⁴¹ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād. Partly tr. Lassner*, 73.

⁴² Al-Rāfiqa was initially built by al-Manṣūr in 772 as a military settlement “according to the plan of his city at Baghdād”, as al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 892) narrates. Hārūn used it regularly, but had his palatial city, al-Mubārak (The Blessed), built south of Sāmarrā’ (Northedge, *Urbanism*, 166-167).

its western neighborhoods to a large extent. In particular, a number of palatial cities were built on the eastern side that included palaces for the various Muslim rulers and their families, a central mosque, barracks for soldiers, houses for servants, stables, kitchens, roads and water courses or channels.

The Later Palatial Cities of Baghdād

The process of moving the city's gravitation point from the Tigris's western to the eastern bank started with al-Ma'mūn's construction of a palatial district in 819, the core of which was the former palace of his father's vizier Ja'far al-Barmakī (d. 806). Caliph al-Mu'taḍid (r. 892-902) expanded this area by adding several buildings, among them a prison and a racecourse, and by enclosing it with a wall with nine gates, one being the Bāb al-'Āmma through which the general public was allowed to enter the palatial city.⁴³ Whether he adopted the style of decoration previously used in Sāmarrā' is likely, but cannot be proven.⁴⁴ His successor, al-Muktafī (r. 902-908), finished the famous Tāj Palace and added a central mosque, called the Palace Friday Mosque (*Jāmi' al-Qaṣr*).⁴⁵ Thus, the palatial district, which eventually came to hold 23 palaces, the detailed configuration of which is unknown, became a palatial city, which was expanded by various later caliphs and was called Dār al-Khilāfa (The Abode of the Caliphate) or Ḥarīm (The Protected [Precinct]). After Madīnat al-Salām this was the second palatial city the 'Abbāsids built in Baghdād. According to Yasser Tabbaa, a two-story great hall (*īwān*), situated at the Tigris and erected either by Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (r. 1180-1225) or Caliph al-Mustaṣfir (r. 1226-1242), and still extant today, was part of this palatial city.⁴⁶

A third palatial city was built by Aḥmad b. Būya/Mu'izz al-Dawla (r. 945-967) north of the Dār al-Khilāfa in the Shammāsiyya neighborhood, after he had taken over Baghdād.⁴⁷ He protected the palatial city, into which he incorporated the iron gates from Madīnat al-Salām, from the Tigris with a dike. Later, 'Aḍud al-Dawla built his own palatial residence with a garden in the Mukharrim neighborhood, closer to the 'Abbāsids' palaces.⁴⁸ However, no further

⁴³ For a description of the other gates, see al-Sūdānī, *Aswār Baghdād*, 51-52.

⁴⁴ For the analysis of textual and archaeological decoration in 'Abbāsīd Sāmarrā', see most recently Milwright, *Abbasid Ornament*.

⁴⁵ For a historical overview of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs and their various palatial cities, see the contribution by Jens Scheiner.

⁴⁶ Tabbaa, *Resurgence*, 316-319; see also al-A'zamī, *Imārāt Baghdād*, 24.

⁴⁷ For a historical overview of the Būyid chief emirs and their contributions to Baghdād's topography and urban culture, see the chapter by Nuha Alshaar.

⁴⁸ Lassner, *Topography*, 271, n. 1.

detailed description of either palatial city is preserved. The Būyid rulers and governors resided first in Mu‘izz al-Dawla’s palatial city and then moved to ‘Aḍud al-Dawla’s place.⁴⁹ Their residence was called Dār al-Mamlaka (The Abode of the Empire) or Dār al-Imāra (The Abode of the Command), thus reflecting the Būyid *amīrs*’ power and ideology as rulers.

When Ṭughril Beg (r. 1055-1063) and the Saljūqs conquered Baghdād in the 1050s, he built yet another (walled) palatial city in eastern Baghdād at the riverside, partly incorporating the Būyid’s (second) palatial city in the Mukharrim neighborhood.⁵⁰ This fourth palatial complex was sometimes called Madīnat Ṭughril (Ṭughril’s City) and in other sources Dār al-Mamlaka (The Abode of the Empire) or Dār al-Salṭana (The Abode of the Sultanate). The latter name is the one used in this volume, because it is reminiscent of the title *sulṭān* (might) which Ṭughril Beg’s was soon awarded by the ‘Abbāsīd caliph and helps to distinguish this palatial city from the others.⁵¹ Later in 1092, Sultan Mālikshāh (r. 1072-1092), the contemporary of Caliph al-Muqtadī (r. 1075-1094), built new palaces and began the erection within them of a new central mosque known as the Sultan’s Friday Mosque (*Jāmi’ al-Sulṭān*). Although this palatial city was demolished in late ‘Abbāsīd times by Caliph al-Nāṣir in 1219,⁵² the Sultan’s Friday Mosque continued to be in use until at least the 14th century. Immediately after their sack of Baghdād, the Mongols also took up residence in the city.⁵³ Hülegü appointed ‘Alī Bahādūr (d. 1264) as governor of Baghdād, but we do not know where the latter resided. However, starting with Abaqa (r. 1265-1282), the Ilkhans resided with their mobile courts and tents in the Muḥawwal Gate neighborhood in western Baghdād, which at that time was called Muḥawwal neighborhood. The Mongols thus never built a palatial complex in the city.

Friday Mosques in Baghdād

It has become clear that each of the palatial cities contained a Friday mosque (*jāmi’*); this shows that the respective caliph or Muslim ruler wanted to have control over at least one of Baghdād’s Friday mosques and its preachers in order to ensure that his name was mentioned

⁴⁹ Yāqūt (d. 1229) refers only to the palace in the Mukharrim neighborhood as the Būyids’ residence (Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, V, 71).

⁵⁰ Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, V, 71.

⁵¹ For a historical overview of the Saljūq sultans and their contributions to Baghdād’s topography and urban culture, see the chapter by Vanessa van Renterghem.

⁵² For a historical overview of the late ‘Abbāsīd caliphs and in particular al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh, see Hend Gilli-Elewy’s contribution.

⁵³ For a historical overview of Mongol rule in Baghdād, see the contribution by Michal Biran.

after the sermon (*khuṭba*) on Fridays.⁵⁴ The most important of these will now be presented in a summary fashion.⁵⁵

The Manṣūr Mosque in the center of Madīnat al-Salām was built by the said caliph and was restored and enlarged several times over the following centuries.⁵⁶ In 915 it burnt down, but was rebuilt. At one point a minaret was added to it. It was continuously used as the Friday mosque of western Baghdād from the 8th to the 14th centuries. The second oldest of Baghdād's Friday mosques was the Ruṣāfa Mosque in eastern Baghdād, which was built for Muḥammad al-Mahdī before he became caliph and which was also in use from the 8th to the 14th centuries. Shī'ī Muslims seem to have used the normal Barāthā Mosque (*masjid*, not *jāmi'*) in the Muḥawwal Gate neighborhood in western Baghdād until the early 10th century, when it was torn down by order of Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908-932). It was rebuilt soon after (in 940) but turned into a mosque for Sunnī Muslims. However, the mosque was used only for a century or two, because in the 13th century at the latest it fell into ruins.

After their move to eastern Baghdād and the erection of the Palace Friday Mosque during al-Muqtafī's rule, the 'Abbāsīd caliphs used that mosque as their central place of worship until the 13th century. After at least the minaret has been restored in the Ilkhanid period, it seems to have been continuously in use until Ottoman times, because its remains were still standing in the 19th century in the Sūq al-Ghazl.⁵⁷ Today, its Ilkhanid minaret is part of the so-called Masjid al-Khulafā' (The Caliphs' Mosque) constructed in 1960.

⁵⁴ For an example of such a mention of an 'Abbāsīd caliph, see al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm. Ed. 'Awwād*, 133-134; tr. Salem, 111-112.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the Friday (and regular) mosques in Baghdād still visible at the beginning of the 20th century, see al-Alūsī, *Ta'rikh masājīd Baghdād*. Al-Alūsī mentions among many others the Ruṣāfa Friday Mosque and the *masjids* of Barāthā, Kāzimayn and Ma'rūf al-Karkhī.

⁵⁶ For an analysis of the architectural history of this mosque, see Lassner, *Topography*, 189-193; 214-218 (figures).

⁵⁷ Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 253, 278. Today, what has remained of late 'Abbāsīd mosques are two minarets belonging to the al-Khaffāfīn and Qumriyya Mosques (Tabbaa, *Resurgence*, 312).



Fig. 1.4: Masjid al-Khulafā' (The Caliphs' Mosque) with the Ilkhanid Minaret, 2014

The Sultan's Friday Mosque in the Saljūq's palatial city was also extant and in use until the Mongol period, i.e. until the 14th century. Two further mosques, the Umm Ja'far and the Ḥarbiyya Mosques, which had previously served as local places of prayer, were raised to Friday mosques at the end of the 10th century by Caliph al-Qādir (r. 991-1031).⁵⁸

The Walls of Baghdād

Turning from the central mosques of Baghdād to its walls, another typical feature of the mentioned palatial districts becomes apparent: they were all walled.⁵⁹ These walls were intended to protect the people (and buildings) inside the palatial districts from local rioters and foreign enemies, and at the same time to demarcate the inner space as distinct from the outer. Social life within the walled districts was different from that outside. Hence, the palatial districts functioned as small "cities" within the urban complex of Baghdād and are thus called palatial cities throughout this volume.

However, Baghdād at times also had a wall that encircled the city as a whole. Here again, the city wall served as protection against conquering armies or raiding Bedouins and at the same time established a border between the urban space and the territory beyond. Needless to say, this wall neither always protected its inhabitants, nor constituted a hard border between the two spaces. Some of the above-mentioned neighborhoods and buildings

⁵⁸ For these two mosques located in western Baghdād, see Micheau, *Baghdad*, 231. The mosques were named after the 'Abbāsīd princess Zubayda, the wife of Hārūn al-Rashīd and mother of his son Muḥammad (the later Caliph al-Amīn), and after the Ḥarbiyya neighborhood in which Caliph al-Manṣūr had settled his troops from Khurāsān.

⁵⁹ Private compounds and important buildings, like the Niẓāmiyya Madrasa, were also enclosed by walls.

transgressed this border, thus extending the de facto city space beyond the wall. Nevertheless, the city wall is one of the strongest characteristics that define Baghdād as a large city or metropolis. The emerging urban complex of Baghdād in the 8th century was not walled; only the palatial city Madīnat al-Salām was. The only protecting device aimed at halting attacks from the North at that time was the Trench of Ṭāhir. Only with Caliph al-Mustaʿīn's (r. 862-866) flight from Sāmarrā' to Baghdād did the city receive its first wall. According to the historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Mustaʿīn, who was supported by the Ṭāhirid governor of Baghdād Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh (d. 867), ordered the governor in 865 to build a wall around the major neighborhoods of western and eastern Baghdād.⁶⁰ Al-Mustaʿīn's rival and successor Caliph al-Muʿtazz (r. 866-869) laid siege to the walled city, conquered it and in the end forced al-Mustaʿīn to abdicate. Hence, the city walls protected the caliph only temporarily. How long al-Mustaʿīn's wall was in use is not clear, but it seems that Baghdād had no complete wall for the next centuries, when it lost the status of a metropolis and became a regional center of power alongside Rayy, Iṣfahān, Cairo and Damascus, because no geographer or traveler during this period mentions one. In these times, the walls of the palatial cities of the Būyids, Saljūqs and ʿAbbāsids were of particular importance in terms of protection. It is only in late ʿAbbāsīd times, when the Mukharrim neighborhood in eastern Baghdād became the new center of the city, that a new wall was erected in 1095 by Caliph al-Mustaẓhir (r. 1094-1118) around this area. This wall did not encompass all neighborhoods of eastern Baghdād and was wider than the wall around the Dār al-Khilāfa. Thus, it might be described as a city wall within the city, delineating a particular area of Baghdād that was in need of special protection. In the following decades, al-Mustaẓhir's wall which was maintained. For instance, al-Mustarshid (r. 1118-1135) rebuilt it, al-Mustaḍīr (r. 1170-1180) repaired it and al-Nāṣir restored its gates, leaving an inscription on the Ḥalba (or Talismān) Gate.⁶¹ The whole wall around parts of eastern Baghdād was extant (at least) until the 14th century, while the Ḥalba (or Talismān) Gate, facing east, was still standing in the early 20th century, when Ernst Herzfeld (d. 1948) still saw it.⁶²

⁶⁰ The course of this wall is difficult to reconstruct. For a first attempt, see Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 172; see also al-Sūdānī, *Aswār Baghdād*, 48-49.

⁶¹ For a description of the wall and its gates in al-Nāṣir's time, see al-Sūdānī, *Aswār Baghdād*, 53-54.

⁶² Micheau notes that the wall was destroyed in 1870 (Micheau, *Baghdad*, 222).

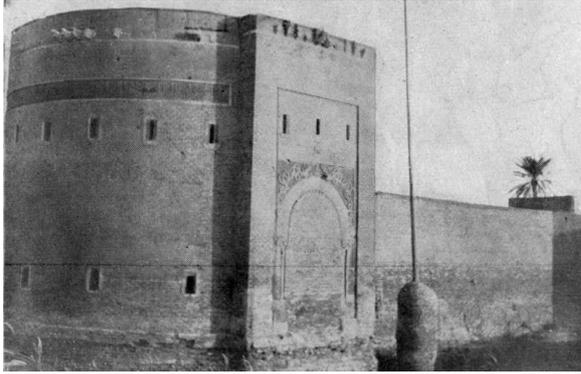


Fig. 1.5: The Bricked Talismān Gate with Caliph al-Nāṣir's Inscription Running around the Upper Part of the Tower, 1918

The Waṣṭānī (or Dha'fariyya) Gate, also facing east and located north of the Talismān Gate, is still extant today, including a partially visible inscription from 1221.⁶³ The remaining two gates are the Mu'azzam Gate (facing north) and the Baṣaliyya Gate (facing south).



Fig. 1.6: The Waṣṭānī Gate (Viewed from Outside), 2016

Other important neighborhoods, such as al-Karkh on the western bank in 1026, also built their own walls. Hence, by the 12th century the urban complex of Baghdād was characterized by relatively distinct walled or unwalled neighborhoods, separated by wasteland or agriculturally used gardens.

Markets, Baths and Gardens in Baghdād

Further continuities in Baghdād's urban history are the various markets that were subdivided according to craft or trade products. For instance, in al-Karkh there was a fruit and cloth

⁶³ For a description of this gate, see Tabbaa, *Resurgence*, 310.

market, where money changers and paper and book producers were also active.⁶⁴ In eastern Baghdad the Sūq al-Ṭīb comprised a flower market in the 9th century, which is not mentioned in previous or later times. From the 12th-13th centuries onward urban “hotels with storage-rooms” (*khāns*) became part of Baghdad’s cityscape, a very famous one being the Khan al-Mirjān erected in 1358 as source of income (*waqf*) for the madrasa of the same name (see fig. 1.7).⁶⁵



Fig. 1.7: Khan al-Mirjān in the 20th century (center)

These markets and khans were stocked with locally produced goods and fruits, agricultural products from Baghdad’s hinterland as well as long-distance trade goods from Khurāsān, Transoxania and China.⁶⁶

Moreover, the sources continuously mention a vast number of mosques,⁶⁷ mausolea,⁶⁸ public baths (*ḥammāms*)⁶⁹ and wonderful gardens embedded in the cityscape. Some of the gardens, for instance the famous al-Zāhir Garden located in eastern Baghdad (at least) during the 10th century, included palm and other trees and belonged to the various palaces or palatial

⁶⁴ *El²*, s.v. Baghdad (al-Dūrī). For more on the *sūqs* of Baghdad during al-Muqtadir’s time, see Ahola/Osti, *Baghdad*, 233-235.

⁶⁵ For a list of the khans remembered and preserved in Baghdad (mostly from the Ottoman period), see al-Miyāḥ, *Khānāt*, 32-36.

⁶⁶ For a brief discussion of ‘Abbāsīd-Chinese trade (and political) relationships, see More-to-know box III by Angela Schottenhammer.

⁶⁷ Ahola and Osti counted 15 regular mosques in the cityscape in the early 10th century (Ahola/Osti, *Baghdad*, 231-233).

⁶⁸ Two mausolea with conical domes from late ‘Abbāsīd times are still extant today: that of Zumurrud Khātūn (d. 1202; see fig. 1.8), the mother of Caliph al-Nāṣir, and the shrine of the Ṣūfī ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234) (for these buildings, see al-A‘zamī, *‘Imārāt Baghdad*, 23-24; Tabbaa, *Resurgence*, 312).

⁶⁹ From Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) we learn that the insides of these baths were plastered with bitumen, which in addition to its hydrophobic effect created an optic of black marble slabs (for a quotation of the respective passage, see Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 877).

cities of Baghdād. Others might have been plantations, orchards or kitchen gardens in which fruits and vegetables were cultivated for daily use.



Fig. 1.8: Mausoleum of Zumurrud Khātūn with Palm Trees, 1924

Academic Institutions in Baghdād

Another group of buildings that had a continuous impact on the cityscape were institutions of education and academic exchange. Apart from elementary schools (*kuttāb*),⁷⁰ mosques, hospitals and monasteries, where basic teaching took place, the Bayt al-Ḥikma (The House of Wisdom or The House of Philosophy, 9th century),⁷¹ the Dār al-ʿIlm (The House of Knowledge, 10th century), the Abū Ḥanīfa and Niẓāmiyya Madrasas⁷² (11th century) and the Mustanṣiriyya and Bashīriyya Madrasas (13th century) are the most famous academic institutions in Baghdād. From the 11th century onward, several madrasas as well as Ṣūfī hospices (*ribāṭs*) could be added to this list, some of which, like the Mirjāniyya Madrasa from 1357, were built during the Mongol (Jalayirid) period (see fig. 1.9). The Mustanṣiriyya Madrasa, which also had rooms for a hospital, continued to function until the 17th century and is still extant today.⁷³

⁷⁰ For elementary schools, madrasas and other institutions for teaching the Islamic sciences, see the contribution by Sebastian Günther.

⁷¹ For the hospitals, the Bayt al-Ḥikma and other institutions of philosophical and scientific learning, see Damien Janos's contribution.

⁷² For a discussion of the madrasas in Baghdād still visible at the beginning of the 20th century, see al-Alūsī, *Ta'rikh masājid Baghdād*. Al-Alūsī mentions among many others the Abū Ḥanīfa, Niẓāmiyya and Mustanṣiriyya Madrasas.

⁷³ Al-A'zamī, *ʿImārāt Baghdād*, 24; Tabbaa, *Resurgence*, 314-316.



Fig. 1.9: Mirjāniyya Madrasa and Mosque

Baghdād's thriving success and architectural developments, however, owed much to the continuous supply of rents and tax-surplus coming mostly from the city's hinterland and the provinces, and thus to its position as an imperial center. When this flow decreased or started to dry up due to governmental crises, administrative failures and the gradual emancipation of the provinces (i.e. from the early 10th century onwards), building projects were reduced and scaled down, and the population and labor force of Baghdād began to shrink, gradually diminishing the demographic density. These processes resulted in a dramatic change in urban topography, which was alluded to above in connection with the city walls. Previously connected neighborhoods devolved into local clusters of settlements attached to markets and a central mosque, separated from each other by large empty, ruined spaces that were sometimes repurposed as fields or gardens. Such was the topographical situation of Baghdād from the Late 'Abbāsīd and Ilkhanīd periods well into the Ottoman period. The memory of Baghdād as a booming and splendid metropolis, comparable only to Constantinople,⁷⁴ frequently led visitors of these periods to disappointment and evoked a feeling of nostalgia when they found that the idealized image preserved in Arabic literature contrasted starkly with the reality.⁷⁵

Baghdād and Nature

⁷⁴ For more information on Byzantine-'Abbāsīd rivalry (and relations), see the contribution by Olof Heilo.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the idealized image of a golden age in Baghdād, see More-to-know box IV by Isabel Toral.

Baghdād was not only a manmade space based on the influx of persons and capital, but was throughout its history dependent on its natural setting. First, shifts in the course of the Tigris, which, according to Le Strange, was once more than 200m wide,⁷⁶ had a direct impact on the occasionally mentioned islands in Baghdād⁷⁷ and on the life of the neighborhoods located along the river's banks. Any historical reconstruction of the cityscape with its buildings and natural areas needs to take this into account. The severest impact of the Tigris on city life took place when it flooded parts of the city, which occurred on average twice a century. Historical sources record floods, often in spring, (and damage by water) in the years 883, 904, 929, 983, 1070, 1073, 1159, 1243, 1248, 1253, 1255 and 1256.⁷⁸ The more frequent floods in eastern Baghdād that occurred in the 1240s and 1250s, probably due to caliphal neglect of the canals and dikes, left the city in a weak position when the Mongols approached.

Moreover, fires broke out regularly in the city, destroying buildings, trees and plants and sometimes even claiming lives. Fires are recorded particularly during the 10th and 12th centuries, but occurred also in other years: 920, 921, 959, 971, 973, 991, 1016, 1057, 1059, 1121, 1156, 1164, 1173, 1187, 1256 and 1258.⁷⁹ Besides fires, historical sources also mention periods of frost and ice, at times having an impact on the harvest and at others on the Tigris River itself.⁸⁰

On occasion, the sources also report earthquakes or outbreaks of the plague in Baghdād. While the 10th and 12th centuries were particularly remembered for their frequent earthquakes,⁸¹ the plague occurred once or twice a century, i.e. in 783-784, 871-872, 913-914, 942-943, 1047-1048, 1085-1086 and probably in 1151-1152.⁸² On the flip side, this lends

⁷⁶ Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 177.

⁷⁷ For instance, the 'Abbāsiyya Island was part of Baghdād's cityscape up to the 10th century (for this island, see Le Strange, *Baghdad*, 142; Ahola/Osti, *Baghdad*, 227).

⁷⁸ For these figures, see *El²*, s.v. Baghdād (al-Dūrī). Most likely al-Dūrī did not record all floods that happened throughout the period. For a vivid description of the 1073 flood and the damage it caused (based on Ibn al-Jawzī's *al-Muntaẓam*), see Makdisi, *Topography*, 287-290.

⁷⁹ For these figures, see *El²*, s.v. Baghdād (al-Dūrī). Most likely al-Dūrī did not record all fires that happened throughout the period.

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī regularly mentions in *al-Muntaẓam* the occurrence of cold spells, which were analyzed by Richard Bulliet (see Bulliet, *Cotton*, esp. 69-95). For 926, Ibn al-Jawzī even mentions a *ḥadīth* class taking place on the frozen Tigris (*ibid.*, 70).

⁸¹ Ṭāhir, *Nuṣūṣ*, 17-140 lists the following years for earthquakes in Baghdād and Iraq: 757, 848, 859, 881, 901, 957, 958, 977, 978 (Iraq), 1058, 1086 (Iraq), 1094, 1117, 1129, 1134, 1137 (Iraq), 1156, 1177, 1193 (Iraq), 1225 (Iraq), 1252. We thank the anonymous reviewer for indicating this work to us.

⁸² For a preliminary list of incidences of the plague in Baghdād, see Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, VIII, 288 (in 783-784); XIII, 144 (in 913 or 914); XIV, 27 (in 942 or 943); XV, 308 (in 1047 or 1048); and XVI, 240 (in 1085 or 1086). Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233) to my knowledge repeats the outbreak of the plague in 783 or 784 and adds the years 871 or 872 and probably 1151 or 1152 (Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*. Ed. Tornberg, VI, 51 (sub anno 167); VII, 177 (sub anno 258); XI, 100 (sub anno 545), *Tr. Richards*, II, 38).

credence to the sources praising Baghdād's good climate as yet another factor explaining why the city was continuously inhabited.

Definition of Baghdād as a City

In light of the foregoing comments, the urbanity of Baghdād is defined by a number of abstract criteria: the existence of a number of (residential) neighborhoods, at least one walled palatial subcity in which a supreme political authority resided, the continuous presence of no less than two Friday mosques as well as numerous other mosques spread across the city as a whole, commercial neighborhoods including markets, handicraft workshops and gardens, institutions of basic and higher education, public baths and, at times, a city wall or walled neighborhoods. Whether the neighborhoods were composed of convoluted streets is not to our knowledge recorded for Baghdād,⁸³ but seems likely.

Municipal authority in Baghdād was not exercised by an independent, self-governing city council, nor was the city legally constituted as an independent entity. Instead, municipal authority was enforced by the military and police forces as well as by the judiciary installed by the ruler at that time, whether the caliph or the de facto Būyid, Saljūq or Ilkhanid ruler.⁸⁴ If the ruler was absent from the city, either because he had organized a military campaign or resided somewhere else, a city governor, local judges and market inspectors (*muḥtasibs*) executed municipal authority with the primary aim of protecting the inhabitants of Baghdād and enforcing legal issues in the public space. Hence, municipal authority was likely to be felt more in commercial neighborhoods than in residential ones. In times of weak governors and judges or when the means of exercising this municipal authority were lacking, it passed over to multiple local power holders in each quarter, who resolved conflicts on a smaller level through negotiations or with the help of more or less militant supporters. One of these local power holders, al-Burjumī, who led a gang of young men, “practically ruled Baghdād for four years” in the first half of the 11th century;⁸⁵ another one was Ṣafī l-Dīn Urmawī (d. 1294 in Baghdād), who negotiated the handing over of his neighborhood to the Mongol commander Bānū Noyan.⁸⁶

⁸³ See Le Strange, *Baghdad*, index.

⁸⁴ A good example of the functioning of Caliph al-Muqtadir's police force is when al-Ṭabarī's house was attacked by some Ḥanbalī rioters in the 910s or 920s. This riot was effectively put down by the Baghdād *shurṭa* (*EP*², s.v. al-Ṭabarī [C. Bosworth]).

⁸⁵ *EP*², s.v. Baghdād (al-Dūrī).

⁸⁶ For a discussion of this episode, see Biran, *Violence*, 17-19.

The criteria just mentioned do not render Baghdād an Islamic city in the sense that Islam per se was the determining factor of Baghdād's architecture or city life. Even if we think of building heights or the position of windows in residential buildings that *might* have been influenced by social norms of visual privacy, there is no textual evidence for this assumption in the case of Baghdād. It is also not clear that wooden lattices in front of windows (*mashrabiyyas*) existed in Baghdād in the period under investigation here (for evidence of modern window building, see fig. 1.10).



Fig. 1.10: Street Scene in Modern Baghdād (with Oriels)

Moreover, the variations and different interpretations of what Islam was or what it meant to the residents of Baghdād were so numerous and diverse, always supported by a particular social group, that it would be difficult to pinpoint Islamic influence in any case. Some of the aforementioned tombs and shrines and perhaps the palatial buildings might have used an architectural language—for instance the stalactite (*muqarnas*) vaults, domes, tiles or cursive epigraphy—that is also found in other cities of the Middle East (and is thus a cultural expression of Islamicate societies). In addition, most architectural forms were conditioned by the building materials (burnt or sun-dried bricks and wood) and by centuries-old building practices in Mesopotamia. Turning from architectural to city life, one can imagine that religiously based social patterns of gender segregation existed in Baghdād's public and private spaces. At least in the 1180s, heavily veiled women were observed by the Jewish traveler

Petachiah of Regensburg.⁸⁷ Also, social patterns of prescribed food production and food culture may have been found in the marketplaces, private homes or the elite's palaces.⁸⁸ Moreover, there is some evidence of public city space having been defined religiously, for instance through Twelver Shī'ī processions starting from 963 or public Muslim exhortatory prayers in late 'Abbāsīd times. All these are Islamic elements in Baghdād's city life. However, as Abu-Lughod emphasizes, the terrain of the city, its climate, the technology of building and its (public) transportation are non-religious aspects of city building, and hence do not comprise the Islamic character of Baghdād.⁸⁹ Moreover, Christian religious festivals that also took place in the monasteries and streets of Baghdād put Muslim social practices into perspective. Hence, non-Islamic social practices also existed in Baghdād. Given that neither central topographic constituents, nor the architectural language, nor social practices made Baghdād an Islamic city per se, Baghdād may not be labelled as such for it fulfilled the typical functions of any city.

First, it brought together the 'Abbāsīd Empire's elite, which resided at least for a limited period of time in the city and based their living on non-agrarian means of income or on rents from landholding. Second, Baghdād served as the (or at times as one) center of political administration of an empire or a city-state. Third, it was a hub of diverse regional and international commerce, the production of various goods and financial investment. Fourth, due to the presence of a number of judges in western and eastern Baghdād, sometimes presided over by a chief judge (*qāḍī l-quḍāt*), it also had a judicial function as a place where Islamic law was developed and applied.⁹⁰ Fifth, the Friday mosques, churches, monasteries and synagogues in Baghdād offered believing Muslims, Christians and Jews means of worship (through sermons or religious practices) that these groups did not have in most rural areas. At the same time, Friday mosques allowed the present caliph and/or ruler to exert influence over his Muslim subjects. Sixth, because of the patronage exercised at the caliph or Muslim ruler's court and in the higher echelons of Baghdād's society, in particular periods the city became also a cultural center that spread its influence to competing urban societies, such as Cordoba, Cairo and Samarkand. Seventh, Baghdād as a whole, but also its various neighborhoods,

⁸⁷ For veiled women, see also fig. 1.10 above.

⁸⁸ Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq's (fl. 10th cent.) cookbook *Kitāb al-ṭabīkh* (The Book of Cooked Food), composed for the caliphal court in Baghdād, however does not reflect typical religiously-based social rules. Instead, it advocates for instance the consumption of wine. For more on this oldest ('Abbāsīd) cookbook, see Scheiner, *Cooking*.

⁸⁹ Abu-Lughod, *Islamic City*, 162.

⁹⁰ On an intra-communal level the same holds true for Christian canon law and Jewish rabbinic law.

functioned as spatial means of social identification. All *Baghdādīs* (People from Baghdād) carried the city's name with pride, while the *Karkhīs* (People from al-Karkh) evidenced communal bonds to their neighborhood in their names.⁹¹ All these elements constitute the urban complex of Baghdād, which, one has to repeat it again, was not a monolithic bloc. At times it grew into a metropolis, while at others it only had the size of a grand city or was an assembly of loosely connected and independent neighborhoods. Thus, Baghdād was a “typical” city that neither stands out, nor differs conceptually from other cities in the world.

Social Groups in Baghdād

Turning from the topographical description of the urban complex of Baghdād to its social composition, it is important to emphasize that Baghdād from its very beginnings was a multi-ethnic, multilingual and religiously diverse city. The blossoming of the new metropolis from the 8th century onwards as an economic and cultural hub attracted many non-indigenous people from the Middle East and Central Asia who settled permanently in the city. In particular the cities of Medina, al-Kūfa and al-Baṣra were suppliers of immigrants in the first decades.⁹² Even from the mid-11th century onward, when the influx of people decreased considerably⁹³ and Baghdād had become a provincial city, we must assume a substantial proportion of non-local and non-Arab residents (i.e. Greeks, Iranians, Turks, Kurds and others) in the city, because of its central geographic position in the Middle East. Moreover, throughout the city's history the presence of Jewish and Christian communities (until recently) as well as that of Twelver (and other) Shī'īs and Sunnīs up to today, has always been a characteristic social feature. Despite this diversity, which regularly struck observers from abroad, Baghdād did not become a veritable “melting pot” that produced a homogeneous ethnic culture. Probably the metaphor of a kaleidoscope or “salad bowl” is more fitting, since we can observe that, though these different cultures and groups mixed and despite a common Baghdādī identity that had

⁹¹ For an argument about the social identification of the *Karkhīs*, see Neggaz, *al-Karkh*, 298-305, esp. 304. Neggaz also calls attention to the fact that some persons bearing the *nisba* al-Karkhī may have lived in al-Karkh in Sāmarrā' (ibid., 280, n. 71). The precaution may be extended to other cities with such a neighborhood, such as Juddān.

⁹² For an overview of how Medinan scholars enriched Baghdād's academic scene, see Mehmetcan Akpınar's contribution.

⁹³ We refrain from evaluating all figures and calculations regarding Baghdād's population that are mentioned in the Arabic sources and in secondary literature and that vary from several thousand up to 1.5 million persons at the time of the metropolis's greatest expansion. For a good overview of these figures, see Micheau, *Baghdad*, 234-235; for one of the latest arguments of population decrease in the mid-11th century, see Ahola/Osti, *Baghdad*, 236-237.

emerged, these groups remained distinct in many aspects, and conflicts among them abounded. This segregation is also reflected in the topography of the urban complex of Baghdād, as has been outlined above. Even though there were no sharply divided ghettos, the widely spread neighborhoods usually assembled people of common religious and/or tribal or ethnic backgrounds (categories that sometimes overlap, and in other cases intersect).

What follows is an outline of the main social groups in Baghdād identifiable in the sources, classified along diverse, non-exclusive categories (i.e. socio-economic, professional and religious). Linguistic and ethnic categories are less useful since many of the people were multilingual and ethnic identities are difficult to assess, because emic ethnic labels are often misleading: not all Turks (*Atrāk*) were Turkish, and not all Khurāsānians (*ahl Khurāsān*) were Iranian. Instead, these terms encompass various ethnicities, tribes or social groups that were associated with a particular group or region by the sources' authors. However, all members of these groups used Arabic as a common language (*koine*), sometimes in addition to their native languages. It must also be said that our sources tend to focus on certain groups, such as the Turks, and tend to ignore others whose presence must be inferred from the historical context. In addition, caliphs, viziers, courtiers and diverse cultural actors (such as poets, litterateurs, scholars, etc.) overwhelmingly populate our texts and normally carry a meaningful name (so that we can reconstruct their biographies, trajectories and networks). Other people are mentioned only as rather opaque groups (e.g. the Khurāsānians, the merchants, the gangs of young men [*'ayyārūn*], etc.), while still others are almost non-existent in the sources, such as peasants, unskilled workers and the lower classes in general. With a few exceptions this also holds true for slaves, eunuchs, women and children. In short, our information on the diverse social groups is very uneven.

The 'Abbāsīd Family and their Entourage

The 'Abbāsīd caliphs must be mentioned first, because they form the central focus of many sources and their connection to Baghdād determined the high status of the city. In this sense, Baghdād was overwhelmingly perceived as the city of the 'Abbāsīds. Curiously, the powerful caliphs who ruled their empire between 762 and the late 9th century seem to have had a rather ambivalent relationship to their city. While al-Mahdī was often absent on military campaigns or leisure retreats, the early abandonment of Madīnat al-Salām by its very founder al-Manṣūr for the Khuld Palace, which he commissioned four years before his death in 771, suggests a

surprisingly rapid onset of dissatisfaction with the original planning. Hārūn al-Rashīd spent most of his time in al-Rāfiqa (near al-Raqqā), so that many anecdotes commonly associated with him being in Baghdād in fact must have taken place elsewhere. The only early ‘Abbāsīd caliphs who were based in Baghdād throughout their entire (but brief) reigns were al-Hādī (r. 785-786) and al-Amīn (r. 809-813). This is perhaps the reason why the latter was supported by the inhabitants of Baghdād, who became his auxiliary corps in the Civil War (811-813) with his brother al-Ma’mūn (r. 813-833). Al-Ma’mūn was initially stationed for many years in Khurāsān and only moved from Marw to (eastern) Baghdād in 819, where he spent the rest of his caliphate. His successors relocated to Sāmarrā’ between 836 and 892. All this means that it is only from the late 9th century onwards that, with the exceptions of al-Manṣūr, al-Hādī and al-Amīn, the caliphs took up permanent residence in Baghdād, where they remained until the deposition of al-Musta‘īm (r. 1242-1258) after the Mongol siege of the city. Moreover, none of the post-10th century caliphs resided in the original palatial complex, i.e. Madīnat al-Salām in the western part, but retreated to the Dār al-Khilāfa, a difficult to access, walled palatial enclosure that occupied about one quarter of eastern Baghdād.

The residences of the caliphs were also the sites of the caliphal court, and accordingly, many members of their entourages accompanied the caliphs in these relocations within Baghdād, from Baghdād to other (caliphal) cities and from there back to Baghdād. This applies to the functionaries of the central administration (such as viziers, chamberlains [*ḥājibs*], secretaries [*kuttāb*] and postal workers) and the caliphs’ bodyguards, but also in part to the caliphs’ wives and concubines, their designated heirs and all the anonymous persons that kept the court functioning, such as cooks, grooms, domestic slaves, harem eunuchs, female singers, etc.⁹⁴ Courtiers and boon companions (*nadīms*), poets and litterateurs (*udabā’*) were also frequently present, but they probably often commuted from their personal residences to the caliphs’ palaces when they wanted to join them in a courtly session (*majlis*). Some courtiers, however, seem not to have been accompanied by their families, who stayed in Baghdād. Sometimes also wives of dignitaries stayed alone in Baghdād during their husbands’ absence.

Later, when the caliphal court lost its significance as a transregional political, administrative and cultural center, and as a source of wealth and patronage, the number of people surrounding the caliphs or foreign rulers diminished substantially. However, the

⁹⁴ For a detailed depiction of the early ‘Abbāsīd caliphs’ courts and their court culture, see the contribution by Letizia Osti.

caliphal household still sustained a discernible portion of Baghdād's population, directly and indirectly, until 1258.

Generally speaking, throughout the whole period under investigation here dignitaries and the urban elite (including the numerous 'Abbāsīd princes and princesses, as well as other important Arab, Iranian and Turkish families) sought to be part of the caliphal entourage and saw it as a privilege to live near its residence. Accordingly, the residential areas of the wealthy were initially situated within Madīnat al-Salām or nearby in western Baghdād and were then gradually moved towards the eastern part and eventually concentrated near the Dār al-Khilāfa. Moreover, in parallel with the caliphs' decline in power, the number and scope of exclusive residential areas seem to have decreased from the 10th century onwards as well.

The Military and Urban Militias

Military commanders and their soldiers were a constant feature of the population of Baghdād (and Sāmarrā'). Though they usually lived in barracks and were thus separated from the urban population, they constituted an essential part of city life, first as a source of spending and second as a frequent factor of unrest, animosity and violence. The military's ethnic composition and mode of recruitment, as well as the location of their barracks, changed over time, but almost all of them were professional soldiers of non-Iraqī origin, which might explain their tensions with the local urban population.

In the first decades of 'Abbāsīd rule, the military mainstay of the dynasty was composed of the so-called Sons of the Dynasty (or Revolution) (*abnā' al-dawla*), who originated mostly from Khurāsān and were thus also called in the sources Khurāsānians. These troops formed the revolutionary army that had supported the 'Abbāsīd family and their (Shī'ī) supporters when they seized power in 749 and 750. They were ethnically mixed, some being unruly Arab Iraqī tribesmen sent by the Umayyads to Khurāsān, others being local Muslim converts (*mawālī*). Al-Manṣūr settled the troops in Madīnat al-Salām and the Ḥarbiyya neighborhood in western Baghdād in order to transform them into a professional army. Having overwhelmingly supported al-Amīn in the Civil War, the Sons of the Dynasty lost their dominant military position under al-Ma'mūn, although they remained an identifiable group until the end of the 9th century, as is attested by the famous litterateur al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 869) treatise *al-Bukhālā'* (The Book of Misers), which devotes an entire chapter to them.

Al-Ma'mūn in contrast relied mainly on his Iranian followers from Marw, while Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-842) (and his successors) imported Turkish slave soldiers (*Atrāk*, *mamlūks*) to Iraq. Originally, these soldiers were non-Muslim slaves of diverse ethnic origin (many of them were Turks from Central Asia, others came from the Ferghana region), led by converted freemen commanders (*amīrs*) from within their own ranks. These Turks were highly professionalized and became pillars of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate in the 9th and early 10th centuries in Baghdād but also dominated the 'Abbāsīd caliphs of Sāmarrā'. At times, they were a source of unrest in both cities. In fact, a major reason for the transfer of the caliphal court to Sāmarrā' was to remove from Baghdād the Turkish soldiers, who by then had often ravaged the city. They were highly unpopular among the inhabitants of Baghdād and perceived as a foreign element in the city. After Caliph al-Mu'taḍid (r. 892-902) defeated the revolting Zanj slaves in southern Iraq with his personal Turkish army and decided to move back to Baghdād, the succeeding caliphs, in particular al-Muqtadir (r. 908-932), were no longer able to pay their own army. This resulted in various warlords (*amīrs*) with their Turkish, Iranian or Daylamī soldiers entering Baghdād and posing a constant threat of conflict in the city. The Shī'ī Būyids, who were mercenary soldiers from Daylam in northern Iran, likewise brought slave soldiers with them to Baghdād. The central problem for the 'Abbāsīd caliphs in the 10th century was the steady demand for money by the troops, at a time when the caliphal income from land taxes and rents was shrinking. The solution found, i.e. to introduce tax farming on parcels of land (*iqṭā'*), led to new problems, because it further diminished the income of the caliph's administration. The various slave soldiers (and their commanders) gradually disappeared from the urban landscape, in particular when the Saljūqs tightened their grip on Baghdād and Iraq from the 1050s onwards. The Saljūqs themselves were newly converted Sunnī Oghuz Turks, and they relied mainly on tribal warriors from their own ranks. With the loss of authority of the last Saljūq sultans, the late 'Abbāsīd caliphs, from al-Muqtafī (r. 1136-1160) onwards, managed to establish a small army of their own, consisting of soldiers from Baghdād and its hinterland. In particular, Caliph al-Nāṣir built a new military group recruited from the local militias and *futuwwa* (or chivalric) groups and organized them into a formal army that was allied with the caliph. During Ilkhanid rule from the mid-13th century onwards, the dominant military group in Baghdād was the multi-ethnic Mongols, who were at the disposal of the local governors or visiting Mongol rulers, while the inhabitants of Baghdād remained exempt from military service.

Urban militias or gangs of young men of local origin (*'ayyārūn*, *fityān*) were also a constant social force in the urban landscape of Baghdād and were particularly dominant in periods when central power was weak, as in the later Būyid and Saljūq periods. Their appearance in the sources provides a rare glimpse into the (lower) urban classes, which are otherwise almost invisible. Urban militias are first recorded during the above-mentioned Civil War between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. Later, they were important protagonists in the fight between Caliphs al-Mu'tazz and al-Musta'in, who had fled to Baghdād, where he was supported by the local governor of the city and its inhabitants. Some militias seem to have arisen from the lower classes, others were accomplices of thieves and hence can be compared to the mafia, while still others tried to enforce order and correct religious practices, for instance by adhering to an internal judge (*qāḍī*), as al-Jāhīz narrates. Moreover, gangs of young men were the instigators of various civil and religious conflicts in Baghdād during the Būyid and Saljūq periods. In the Late 'Abbāsīd period, these gangs associated with Ṣūfī circles and became increasingly powerful groups. As mentioned above, Caliph al-Nāṣir managed to successfully tap into this source by aligning the *futuwwa* groups with the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, thereby transforming them into a more formal caliphal army.

Cultural Agents

A central element of Baghdād's population were diverse types of cultural agents, such as poets,⁹⁵ prose litterateurs,⁹⁶ scholars in all branches of the Islamic sciences (e.g. Qur'ān and Qur'ānic exegesis, the Prophetic tradition [*ḥadīth*], Sunnī and Shī'ī laws, theology, etc.), natural scientists, physicians, philosophers, historians, translators and many other intellectual professions. However, this massive presence of scholars and other cultural agents must be interpreted with caution: since most of them were also producers of texts, it comes as no surprise that they are remarkably present in our sources. Another issue is that of delimitation. Since the biographical sources tend to add the name of affiliation (*nisba*) Baghdādī (the one from Baghdād) to a huge number of people, they create a biased perspective on the relative significance of the city's intellectual luminaries. Thus, one might get the impression that almost everyone at a given time hailed from Baghdād, was living in the city or died there. In fact, if we study these biographies in detail, many scholars were not Baghdādīs by birth, but

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the many poets that were present in Baghdād, see the contribution by Beatrice Gruendler.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the many litterateurs of Baghdād, see the contribution by Isabel Toral.

had moved to Baghdād as adults attracted by career options and had spent their formative (or later) years elsewhere. Others only went once to the city (for a particular period of time) or commuted regularly between Baghdād and other Iraqī cities, like the already mentioned litterateur al-Jāhīz or the historian Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233). Still other scholars only passed through the city, staying there for a short period of time, for instance when making the pilgrimage to Mecca, since Baghdād was a station on the pilgrimage route from Iran and northern Iraq to the Ḥijāz. One also has to take into account that from the late 10th century onwards many Baghdādī scholars and intellectuals left the city, because of better career opportunities in other political centers and their high degree of mobility. In short, the decision of whom to include in this group is often difficult to make.

Indeed, Baghdād offered fabulous opportunities for income and benefits for these people. For poets, philologists and litterateurs, the caliphal court, with its numerous princes and princesses, as well as wealthy patrons, made Baghdād the “place to go”.⁹⁷ Patronage was a key factor in the intellectual history in the Islamicate World, since rulers and viziers surrounded themselves with experts in assorted fields of knowledge, to enjoy their intellectual capacities and services and gain prestige by interacting with and sponsoring them. Many of the cultural actors also earned their living in Baghdād by working as tutors for the children of the rich and powerful, which gave them the opportunity to shape the minds of future rulers and members of the elite and promote their own intellectual production with their future sponsors. Others found a paid position in the caliphal administration serving as secretaries or judges. However, not everyone was so lucky to find a patron: The native and *qāḍī* of Baghdād ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Mālikī (d. 1031) in a poem blamed the city, meaning its elite, of having repulsed him:

Of all the abodes on earth, let Baghdad receive my salutation [...] I left it, not through hatred [...] But large as it was, I could find no ease within it, and even the means of subsistence were refused to me. That city is like a friend whose company is anxiously desired, but whose character removes him [...] and counteracts his good qualities.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ For the coining of this term, see Scheiner/Janos, *Baghdād*.

⁹⁸ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-‘ayān*. Tr. de Slane, II, 166.

Moreover, the introduction of paper and the emergence of thriving book markets in Baghdād (almost 100 bookshops are said to have existed at the end of the 9th century in al-Karkh)⁹⁹ created new professional opportunities for intellectuals, freeing them from the need to seek patronage. They could now make a living as copyists, authors, booksellers (*warrāqs*), librarians, editors and publishers or a combination of any of these. The self-supporting author and book-entrepreneur, who chose his own topics of discussion and was free of a patron, is an early phenomenon and important factor of Arabic book culture, particularly in Baghdād. Moreover, the book economy led to the growth of a wider group of readers that sought additional education and information. Of course, patronage did not cease and in particular in Būyid times, together with literary salons led by dignitaries and viziers, it was still an important factor of urban life, enabling the cultural blossoming of that time.

Some scholars working in religious disciplines often took an attitude of detachment towards the political establishment, refusing to accept patronage or governmental employment of any sort. Rather, they tried to earn a living as independent preachers and teachers or from personal income, such as workshops, rents or donations. Baghdād was also a very attractive center for these individuals, because one could meet many other scholars in search of knowledge there, for instance luminaries of *ḥadīth* transmission, in Qur'ānic studies and other branches of the religious sciences, attend their teaching sessions in the public mosques or madrasas, and get a license of transmission (*ijāza*) for new books.¹⁰⁰ With the establishment of madrasas in late eleventh-century Baghdād, religious scholars could also assume positions as law teachers in the many institutions of that sort in the city, or profit from the teachings of famous scholars, like the Shāfi'ī theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) or the Ḥanbalī preacher Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201). Baghdād deteriorated to a provincial center from the 10th century onwards, but maintained its supra-regional position in the higher education of the Islamic sciences (at least) up to the 14th century thanks to its celebrated madrasas, Ṣūfī hospices and other institutions of learning.

Craftsmen, Workers and Merchants

The construction of Madīnat al-Salām by al-Manṣūr immediately transformed Baghdād into a booming city. Craftsmen, artisans, technical experts and skilled and unskilled workers of all

⁹⁹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*. Ed. de Goeje, 245; tr. Daniel/Cobb, 78.

¹⁰⁰ For the attraction Baghdād offered to scholars, in particular Mālikī jurists, from al-Andalus from the mid-ninth to the mid-twelfth century, see Fierro, *Bagdad y Córdoba*.

kinds moved to Baghdād, attracted by the many possibilities for work and good salaries. Some of them were systematically recruited by al-Manṣūr, such as the engineer and legal expert Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767). The historian al-Ya‘qūbī (d. after 908) mentions 100,000 craftsmen, engineers and architects, whom al-Manṣūr gathered to build his palatial city, as well as a huge security force to control them.¹⁰¹ Most of these people settled permanently in Baghdād after the completion of al-Manṣūr’s building projects, in particular because the building activities during the next decades did not cease, but even gained momentum and continued to offer good sources of income. Starting with al-Mahdī, subsequent caliphs commissioned further construction projects for themselves and for their offspring, as did local dignitaries. The massive immigration of workers (and their families) caused new markets (and neighborhoods) to mushroom in order to fulfill the increased demand for various consumer goods and building materials. Boys selling water, cooks, bakers, barbers, grocers, butchers, tailors, shoemakers, tanners, load carriers, harbor workers and members of many more professions thus settled in Baghdād and made up a great portion of the non-elite segment of its society.



Fig. 1.11: Cooking Scene with a Butcher, Two Cooks and a Female Servant, Maqāma 44, *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, painted by Yaḥyā I-Wāsiṭī in 1237

This is not to forget those workers who were employed in the official *ṭirāz* workshops, i.e. in places where expensive textiles were produced for the caliphal court. As already indicated previously, the introduction of rag paper¹⁰² in the late 8th century led to the flourishing of book

¹⁰¹ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*. Ed. de Goeje, 238; tr. Daniel/Cobb, 71. The figure may be inflated, though.

¹⁰² For this kind of paper made of textile fiber, see Bloom, *Paper*, 44-45.

markets and to the establishment of professions connected with book production, such as paper makers, copyists, calligraphers, etc. Spaces that were left open between the newly built neighborhoods were filled by garden plots and orchards where farmers engaged in intensive small-scale food production.

While regional producers and merchants took care of the local supply, other tradespeople engaged in international trade with luxury items for the wealthy, taking advantage of the optimal position of Baghdād between the water routes on the Tigris and the Euphrates and the land routes that connected it to the rest of Iraq, Iran, the Hījāz and Syria. Goldsmiths, carpet and spice dealers, silk traders and perfume manufacturers offered their products to the rich urbanities in the many *sūqs* of Baghdād. Money changers and lenders, in addition to bankers, organized the financial supply for these endeavors. The above-mentioned market inspectors (*muḥtasibs*) ensured that trade was conducted in accordance with Islamic law, while policing guards (*shurṭa*) were employed to regulate security in the streets.

Women

The female members of Baghdād's population are conspicuously absent from the sources, although it should be said that this invisibility is not exceptional at all when studying the Arabic textual tradition.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, there is relatively more information about elite women, such as princesses, spouses, sisters and mothers of the caliphs and Muslim rulers, as well as celebrated concubines of the powerful, than about "ordinary" women. It is almost only in these cases that the sources provide their full names and biographical details. For instance, the 'Abbāsīd princesses Zubayda bt. Ja'far b. al-Manṣūr (d. 831), wife and cousin of Hārūn al-Rashīd and mother of al-Amīn, the poetess 'Ulayya bt. al-Mahdī (d. 825), and Hārūn's mother, the former slave al-Khayzurān bt. 'Aṭā' al-Jurashiyya (d. 789), are well-known personalities of the 8th and 9th centuries, who are also renowned for their philanthropic works. In other cases, they appear as controversial political actors and informal power-holders in events and intrigues at the caliphal court or as sponsors of pious foundations (*waqfs*) who donated money for building projects, such as Banafshā (d. 1201), the former Greek concubine of Caliph al-Mustaḍīr (r. 1170-1180), who built a Ṣūfī lodge for ascetic women. In addition, our sources are populated with mentions of beautiful and gifted concubines, luxury slave singers and dancers, since these females constituted the preferred object of male erotic interest and adorned the

¹⁰³ For the "invisibility" of women in Arabic documentary sources, see Deguilhem/Marín, *Writing the Feminine*.

leisure venues of the elite. Many of the anecdotes (of uncertain historicity) featuring these women are set in Baghdād and Sāmarrā'. Only occasionally, these women are known by name, such as 'Arīb al-Ma'mūniyya (d. ca. 880 in Baghdād), who served the caliphs from the reign of al-Ma'mūn to that of al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861) as a singer (*qayna*) and poet. However, also these women are mostly referred to collectively as female slaves (*jāriyas*). Harem servants and nurses (wet nursing was the rule among the wealthy) are also mentioned now and then, whereas a huge diversity of female domestic slaves must be assumed to have also been members of the caliphal court. The dignitaries' households usually mirrored the caliphal court in this regard, though at a more modest level. Regarding other non-elite women, our sources provide occasional glimpses of them, for instance when legal cases are discussed or, in passing, in biographies of celebrated scholars such as the traditionalist and preacher Ibn al-Jawzī.¹⁰⁴ Sometimes, women appear as poets and ascetics or as members of the scholarly class, erudite women and *ḥadīth* transmitters. For instance, the famous Baghdādī legal scholar and historian al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, who also dedicated a section of his biographical dictionary to women, tells of his female teacher and transmitter of Prophetical traditions (*ḥadīth*) Khadīja bt. Muḥammad that she was a preacher (*wā'iza*), that she was pious and honest and that she lived in the Rabī' quarter of Baghdād.¹⁰⁵ Also Shuhda l-Kātiba (d. 1178) was a renowned *ḥadīth* transmitter and calligrapher, who was born and educated in Baghdād and taught Prophetical traditions (mostly) towards the end of her life there.¹⁰⁶

Religious Communities

Shī'ī Groups

From its beginnings, Baghdād housed a substantial Imāmī (later Twelver) Shī'ī population,¹⁰⁷ which was attracted to the city by the proximity to their *imāms*, who from the late 8th century were forced to live under the tutelage of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs in Baghdād and later in Sāmarrā'.¹⁰⁸ In general, the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs had an ambivalent and difficult relationship with Shī'ī Muslims. This is due to their common ancestry as Hāshimites, i.e. as members of the Banū Hāshim clan of Quraysh, and their common political interest in overturning Umayyad

¹⁰⁴ See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, XIV, 334 (no. 7831).

¹⁰⁶ Sayeed, *Women*, 148-159.

¹⁰⁷ For a thorough analysis of Imāmī presence in early 'Abbāsīd al-Karkh, see Neggaz, *al-Karkh*, 279-292.

¹⁰⁸ It was in Sāmarrā' that the twelfth *imām*, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, is said to have gone into seclusion in 874.

rule, but the later “betrayal” of the ‘Abbāsīd family who took over the caliphate and pushed their former supporters aside. From ca. 900 onwards, Baghdād replaced al-Kūfa as the center of Shī‘ī presence and learning, attracting famous Imāmī and Twelver scholars (with their students) such as Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 795 or 796) and al-Kulaynī (d. 940 or 941), who completed his famous *al-Kāfī* (The Sufficient [Work]) in al-Karkh, where most of the Shī‘īs were concentrated. Nassima Neggaz even argues that “the roots of the later Imāmī *ḥawza* of Najaf” are found in Baghdād.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, there were influential Imāmī and Twelver Shī‘ī families (or families with Shī‘ī sympathies) in Baghdād, for instance the Nawbakht family, who were descendants of the chief astrologer of al-Manṣūr, or the Asadī family, who included two of the *safīrs* (ambassadors) during the minor occultation of the 12th *imām* (*ghayba*). Under the rule of the Būyids, themselves a Shī‘ī dynasty, the Imāmī Shī‘īs received official protection, developed their distinct theology in *majlises* and libraries and could practice their religious rites in public. Thus, Shī‘ī communal celebrations, such as the Ghadīr Khumm ceremonies and the ‘*āshūrā*’ processions, were allowed to take place, and the Būyids ordered the construction of a mausoleum over the graves of the seventh and ninth *imāms*. These Kāzīmāyn Shrines were located in the former Quraysh cemetery in western Baghdād. Baghdād thus became the main intellectual center for the Twelver Shī‘ī Muslims and the site of the famous Shī‘ī theological school of Baghdād, featuring such luminaries as Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022) and his disciples the *sharīfs* al-Rāḍī (d. 1016) and al-Murtaḍā (d. 1045 in al-Karkh). The many descendants of ‘Alī (d. 661) and Fāṭima (d. 632), the *sayyids* and *sharīfs*, also received numerous privileges. For instance, they were granted pensions, the distribution of which was the responsibility of their official representative, the *naqīb* (syndic), who also supervised the genealogical books of the ‘Alid families. The public celebration of Shī‘ī ceremonies in Baghdād, which were often accompanied by the cursing of certain companions of the Prophet Muḥammad who were favored by Sunnī Muslims, regularly provoked violent protests by the latter and could lead to riots, as in 973, which resulted in numerous Shī‘ī deaths in al-Karkh. Sunnī-Shī‘ī street fights, with the participation of gangs, became a constant menace in Baghdād city life. The religious policy of the Sunnī Saljūqs remained remarkably tolerant towards the moderate Twelver Shī‘a, in contrast to their rigorous actions towards the Ismā‘īlī branch of Shī‘ism. Nevertheless, with the reestablishment of Sunnī forms of Islam in the

¹⁰⁹ Neggaz, *al-Karkh*, 293.

cityscape and the fleeing of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī from al-Karkh to Najaf, Baghdād lost its role as leading center of Twelver Shī'ism.

It is important to state that the Zaydī Shī'īs and Fāṭimid Ismā'īlīs never took root in Baghdād. The speech by the Zaydī *Imām* Aḥmad b. 'Īsā to the people of al-Karkh upon his imprisonment by Hārūn al-Rashīd's servant in 804, *pace* Neggaz, does not prove the presence of Zaydī Shī'īs there.¹¹⁰ What is more, the short interlude under the Turkish commander al-Basāsīrī (d. 1059), who conquered Baghdād in the name of the Fāṭimid *Imām*-Caliph al-Mustanşir bi-llāh (r. 1036-1094), did not have any palpable consequences. In contrast, the Qarmaṭians under their alleged leader al-Ka'kī seem to have attracted some followers in Baghdād in the early 10th century,¹¹¹ although they posed a far greater threat to the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs in southern Iraq. In addition, some Shī'ī *ghulāt* (extremist) groups are known to have existed in al-Karkh. For instance, 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Khāşībī (d. 957) assembled a few Nuşayrī Shī'īs in the city before moving to Aleppo, and the Mukhammisa group, which believed in only five persons belonging to the *ahl al-bayt* and which consisted of some important Baghdādī families, is attested there as well. Moreover, the extreme Shī'ī (*ghālī*) Ibn Abī l-'Azāqir (d. 934) taught in Baghdād that God was inherent in the *imāms*, that he himself was the present 12th *imām* and that religious law (*sharī'a*) should be abandoned, for which he was flogged, beheaded and crucified on the order of Caliph al-Rāḍī (r. 934-940).¹¹² In sum however, Imāmī (and Twelver) Shī'īs formed the majority of Shī'īs in the city.

Under the Saljūqs, Shī'ī ceremonies and processions still took place in Baghdād and were partly followed by some Sunnīs with sympathy, partly vehemently opposed by others, and remained a cause of violent riots between urban militias. The reforms of Caliph al-Nāşir promoted an ecumenical version of Sunnī and Shī'ī Islam that was probably directed at resolving this continuous animosity between the two groups. After 1258, the Mongols continued a tolerant policy towards Twelver Shī'īs, but persecuted the Niżārī Ismā'īlīs in northern Iran. By way of example, the Ilkhanid governor of Iraq, 'Alā' al-Dīn Juwaynī (d. 1283), reconstructed the Kāżimayn Shrines of Baghdād, which has remained a mixed Shī'ī and Sunnī city until today.

The Sunnīs

¹¹⁰ Neggaz, *al-Karkh*, 281.

¹¹¹ Neggaz, *al-Karkh*, 285.

¹¹² For the Mukhammisa, see Massignon, *Shī'ites extremists*; for Ibn Abī l-'Azāqir, see Fück, *Kampf*.

The Sunnīs are less easily identifiable as a distinct group than the Shī'īs in the Early 'Abbāsīd period, although they presumably formed the majority of people in Baghdād. In the 8th and 9th centuries, Ḥanafites constituted the dominant Sunnī legal school (*madhhab*) in the city, because Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767), the eponym founder of this school, spent his last years in Baghdād, where he is also buried, while his main disciple, Abū Yūsuf (d. 798), became a very influential chief judge of the city under Hārūn al-Rashīd. The historian, exegete and legal scholar al-Ṭabarī also established his own school of law in the city, called the Jarīriyya School of Law, which is no longer extant. In the 10th century, the Ḥanbalites, who were followers of the charismatic Baghdādī traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), formed their own legal school and became increasingly important in local religious politics. In contrast to the rational theological approach sponsored by the Mu'tazilī thinkers in Baghdād,¹¹³ the Ḥanbalites developed a traditionalistic approach to law and theology that over time has become a typical characteristic of Sunnī Islam.¹¹⁴ In the Būyid period, Caliph al-Qādir (r. 991-1031), who was supported by these and other proto-Sunnī groups, denounced Mu'tazilī and Shī'ī ideas and declared Sunnī religious views to be the sole correct religious belief.

Moreover, from the early 9th century onward, we also have evidence for the presence of a local school of mystics (Ṣūfis) and the Shāfi'ī school of law in Baghdād.¹¹⁵ During the Late 'Abbāsīd period, members of these legal schools, in addition to various Ṣūfī groups and Ash'arite theologians, who traced their teachings back to the anti-Mu'tazilī theologian al-Ash'arī (d. 936), recognized each other as equal participants in the wider Muslim community and as adherents to the Prophet Muḥammad's practices (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a*), and thus, in short, became the Sunnīs. The Sunnī quarters of Baghdād were mainly situated in the eastern part, with the exception of the famous Sunnī Bāb al-Baṣra neighborhood in western Baghdād. The proximity of this neighborhood to al-Karkh was a frequent cause of Sunnī-Shī'ī interaction and conflict, as described above.

Jews, Christians and others

Baghdād inherited the religious multiplicity of the Sasanian urban landscape in Mesopotamia. Hence, there were also Jews, East and West Syrian Christians, Zoroastrians and diverse Gnostic as well as semi-pagan groups, such as the Sabeans, present in Baghdād and its hinterland.

¹¹³ These thinkers and their main ideas are described in More-to-know box V by David Bennett.

¹¹⁴ For a more detailed description of this process, see Christopher Melchert's contribution.

¹¹⁵ For the development of Sufism in Baghdād, see the contribution by Pavel Basharin.

The main Jewish neighborhood was in the 'Atīqa Market quarter located in the Karkh neighborhood.¹¹⁶ This was also the seat of the Exilarch, the Jewish “political” representative to the government, who had moved to Baghdād from early on. At the end of the 9th century, the Jewish academy (*yeshiva*) of Pumbedita was transferred to Baghdād, too, later followed by the Sura academy, so that Baghdād became the center of Rabbinic Judaism. This led to the flourishing of the Baghdādī Jewish community, which produced leading intellectuals who also interacted with their Muslim (and Christian) counterparts. According to historical sources, members of this community (both Rabbinic and Karaite Jews) engaged in international commercial activities and worked as money changers as well as physicians and craftsmen. They remained a continuous element of Baghdād’s social urban landscape until the 20th century.

Al-Shammāsiyya in eastern Baghdād was the main Christian quarter and the site of the see of the East Syrian patriarch or catholicos.¹¹⁷ The metropolitan cathedral was also located there, and numerous monasteries and churches were spread throughout the city. Some West Syrian communities are also attested in Baghdād, although their deputy patriarch mostly resided in Takrīt, whereas Melkite or Chalcedonian Christians were exceedingly rare and normally entered Baghdād only as foreigners on travels or as prisoners of war. Like the Jews, educated members of the Christian communities took an active part in the intellectual life of Baghdād, appearing regularly in debates and literary salons, and figured as translators of Greek and Syriac texts for more than two centuries.

Zoroastrians and Gnostics are scarcely attested in Baghdād, which is hardly surprising, since after the early Muslim conquest of Iraq these communities retreated to the land and continued to operate on a rural basis.¹¹⁸ However, the sources suggest a gradual shift towards a slight presence of Zoroastrians in Baghdād from the 9th century onwards. Manichaeans, in contrast, had a more palpable presence in the city, given their close relationship to Babylonia as a center of Manichaeism since Late Antiquity and their affinity to urban elites and environments. However, we lack information about religious sites, buildings, neighborhoods and ceremonies regarding these groups. In addition, there are indications for the existence of a late pagan, or Sabeian (*Ṣābi'a*), group in the 10th century in the countryside around Baghdād

¹¹⁶ For a detailed description of Jewish life in Baghdād, see the contribution by Y. Zvi Stampfer.

¹¹⁷ For a detailed description of Christian life in Baghdād and its hinterland, see the contribution by Michael Morony.

¹¹⁸ For a presentation of Zoroastrians, Manichaeans and Gnostics in Baghdād and its hinterland, see the contribution by Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst.

(*sawād*).¹¹⁹ This was an obscure group of partly late Babylonian creed, astral deities and magical practices. The secretary Hilāl b. al-Muḥassin al-Ṣābi' (d. 1056), who was born in Baghdād, was probably the most well-known adherent of this group before he converted to Islam.



Fig. 1.12: A Sabeen Silversmith at Work in His Jewelry Story, 1932

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¹¹⁹ For more information on them, see Hämeen-Anttila, *Last Pagans*.

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