

Architectural Site and Imagined Landscape: The Foundation Lore and Perpetuated Mythology of the Round City of Baghdad

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The eighth-century Abbasid capital, the Round City of Baghdad, existed in its perfect, circular form for a short period of time. However, even after its ruin, its physical shape and the reasons for its establishment were vehemently remembered in a manner unrivaled in the dense history of Islamic cities; this round city became storied. While the intertwined legends of the city's site, foundation, and founding caliph established (and perhaps exaggerated) through historical descriptions and stories enable architectural reconstructions, this foundation lore opened a realm of continued glorifications, reflections, and lamentations of the early Abbasid capital in literature succeeding its construction and ruin. Research and writing by scholars across disciplines including history, literature, and art and architecture history delve into the city's foundation and its mythology as separate entities. Diverging from this dichotomy, this research draws a connection between the legends of its foundation and its continued mythology to suggest that the Round City of Baghdad must be studied simultaneously as an architectural site and an imagined landscape.

The Round City of Baghdad, the Abbasid capital completed by Caliph al-Mansur in 766, witnessed a short phase of inhabiting its perfect, circular construction before its eventual expansion that humbled the structure to a single part of the larger urban complex. However, as Oleg Graber eloquently states, even after its ruin, "the memory of its original shape and of the ideas behind it lasted for centuries in a way that has no parallel in the history of Islamic cities, even though dozens of new urban centers were founded by the new faith" (69). Baghdad, what Michael Cooperson calls "the mother of the world, the mistress of nations, Heaven on Earth, the city of Peace, and the dome of Islam," became storied (111). While there are no physical remains of the Round City, the intertwined legends of the city's site, foundation, and founding caliph established (and perhaps exaggerated) through historical descriptions and stories enable architectural reconstructions of the eighth century marvel. This foundation lore has "passed, almost in a twinkling, into the realm of memory and myth" (Goodwin 28). This realm has elicited continued glorifications, reflections, and lamentations of the early Abbasid capital in literature after its construction and ruin. This literature perpetuates the city's mythology in its reference to the city's initial legends and its incorporation of new stories. Such a connection between the legends of its

foundation and its continued mythology suggests that the Round City of Baghdad must be studied simultaneously as an architectural site and an imagined landscape.

A Brief Outline of Baghdad's History from Foundation to Siege

While evidence reveals the presence of various settled civilizations occupying the site of Baghdad throughout ancient times, the origins of the present-day metropolis follow the Arab conquest of Mesopotamia in 637 (Davidson and Lusk Brooke 64). Caliph al-Mansur, the second caliph of the Abbasid dynasty who ruled from 754 to 775, moved his capital to a new site "where the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, are closest to each other" (Al-Attar 8). The market village of suq Baghdad thrived on the Tigris' eastern bank until al-Mansur founded his circular city on the western bank and officially titled it *Madinat al-Salam* (City of Peace) (Snir 5; Al-Attar 8). Shortly after its construction, and in the lifetime of its founder, the Round City expanded beyond its constrictive circular walls, growing into the urban settlement of *al-karkh* (*The Topography of Baghdad* 27; Al-Attar 10). Eventually, the Abbasids crossed the Tigris and repurposed the old settlement of suq Baghdad to establish a second settlement called *al-rusafa* (Al-Attar 11). The sites of Madinat

al-Salam, Karkh, and Rusafa along the Tigris are designated in Figure 1.

The growth of this second settlement in *al-rusafa* eclipsed the rule of al-Mansur and launched the city into the “golden age” of the Abbasids (785-847), for with its centrality to eastern trade routes and abundant markets, *al-rusafa* evolved into the ever-present commercial core of Baghdad (Al-Attar 11). This settlement beyond the Round City established Baghdad as “an entrepôt for the world’s goods... [and] a clearing-house for the higher sciences of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, law, and astrology” (Goodwin 27). This period is glorified, admired, mourned, and eternalized in literature. The city grew most quickly under the rule of Harun al-Rashid, the storied caliph of *The One Thousand and One Nights* (also known as *The Arabian Nights*) who reigned from 786 to 809 (Davidson and Lusk Brooke 64).

Al-Rashid’s death witnessed the gradual decline of the Abbasids due to internal strife, including a civil war induced by a succession dispute between his sons al-Amin and al-Ma’mun which consequently reduced much of the original Round City to ruins (Kennedy 149; El-Hibri 463). The empire temporarily abandoned Baghdad for Samarra, and upon their return in 1187, the Abbasids rebuilt their capital from the ruins left by the Persian Buyids and Turkish Seljuks who had occupied Baghdad during their absence (Al-Attar 15; Davidson and Lusk Brooke 65). 1258 marked the siege of Baghdad by the Mongols which effectively ended the Abbasids’ control of the city (Al-Attar 15-17). Through his analysis of the poetry of the siege of Baghdad, Hugh Kennedy captures the destruction and life changes that befell the inhabitants of Baghdad by stating that “it is the ordinary people, the civilians rich and poor, who are having their lives torn apart by those for whom the achievement of a transitory military success or political power outweighs any moral considerations or the most basic kinds of human decency” (164).

The Architecture of the Round City

The Palatial Architectural Plan

The construction of Madinat al-Salam began in 762 and was completed in 766. While records of its exact dimensions are inconsistent across various sources, the approximate diameter of the Round City was 2300 meters or 1000 cubits (Grabar 68, Goodwin 25). As the recorded measurements of

the city’s layout and architectural components vary, architecture scholars Saba Sami Al-Ali and Nawar Sami Al-Ali facilitated an analysis and synthesis of the hypotheses of numerous historical accounts and later architectural drawings (al-Ali and al-Ali 137). Their study suggests a revised reconstruction and interpretation of the City of Peace including a general plan of the Round City (Fig. 2), a plan and section of the entrance *rahba* and gate (Fig. 3), a plan and section of the domed gates (Fig. 4), and an architectural plan of the central complex’s palace, Great Mosque, and mosque extension (Fig. 5). These architectural drawings, amalgamated from various accounts and attempts at delineating the dimensions of the Round City, may not represent the city’s precise measurements, but the study from which they resulted emphasizes the discrepancies present when envisioning early Baghdad. In highlighting how much is unknown about the city, the study therefore contributes to the enigma of the Round City.

The circular form of the city was contained by double walls with four double gates oriented to points midway between the cardinal directions (Wendell 116). Over their main doorways, each gate supported a second story reception hall that was accessed via a *mas’ad* (gangway/ramp) and whose primary feature was a gilded cupola (small dome) adorned with sculpture (al-Ali and al-Ali 146; Grabar 68). Entering through the *dihliz* (passage) of the outer gates into the *rahba* (the first open space that is encountered), one infiltrated the *first fasil* (the area between the double walls of the city) which was devoid of buildings, for according to al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, al-Mansur declared that “no one should dwell beside the inner higher wall, nor should build a house” (qtd. in al-Ali and al-Ali 139). Traversing into the center of the walled city, the open space contained market complexes in the arcades near each gate, neighborhoods and residential quarters populated the space between the gates, and administrative buildings clung close to the walls (Grabar 68; Al-Attar 8).

While the circular plan of the city was indeed celebrated, Madinat al-Salam was a palatial city. Therefore, the focal point of the city was dar al-Khilafah, the imperial complex of the caliph’s palace and the Great Mosque. Grabar articulates that “the important point about Baghdad is that all parts of the city were both compositionally and functionally

united, as though they were but parts of a single palace entity” (70). Al-Mansur’s opulent residence and mosque were centrally situated in the Round City and enclosed within an inner courtyard by a third inner wall (*The Topography of Baghdad* 142; al-Ali and al-Ali 138). The rationale for the circular plan and subsequent centrality of the palace, including its visual support of the caliph’s power and its potential cosmological significance, is later described.

The palace housed a large reception hall with an irregular iwan which led to two domed rooms, one above the other (Ettinghausen et al. 52). Visible from the outskirts of the city and topped with a statue of a rider mounted on his horse with a lance (Fig. 6), the Green (or Heavenly) Dome was viewed as the crown jewel of dar al-Khilafah and the Round City in general (“Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities” 168). Grabar includes that “according to tradition [the rider’s] lance would always point in the direction of the enemies of the Muslim empire” (69). The traditional hypostyle mosque was erected as the congregational mosque for the city and its qibla wall is believed to be oriented slightly incorrectly due to miscalculations of its juncture with the palace (“Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities” 167-68). The mosque later extended under the reigns of caliph Harun al-Rashid and Al-Mu’tadid; though it penetrated the walls of the palace, its borders never reached al-Mansur’s famed Green Dome (al-Ali and al-Ali 152).

Elements Borrowed from Iranian Traditions

As only ruins of the Round City remain, it is difficult to determine its exact architectural innovations and influences; however, whether for political, cosmological, practical reasons, or a combination of the three, the Round City borrowed various methods and techniques from predecessors of the area. The doors of the gateway entrances were taken from older cities (one from Wasit and one from Syria) and their use exemplifies the “repossessing of ancient traditions of the area” (Ettinghausen et al. 52). The palace plan was taken from Sassanian tradition and previously employed in the Umayyad structures of present-day Syria and Iraq (ibid 52). Baghdad shares architectural elements (i.e., heavy pillars, long vaulted halls, blind arch decorations, two storied domed reception halls, etc.) with two other early Abbasid monuments, Raqqa and Ukhaydir (ibid 54). Baghdad exhibits palatial architecture in plan and

Sassanian methods in technique which is consistent with the early Abbasid architectural canon (ibid 54). It is through this evidence that with its enduring Iranian elements, the Abbasid capital “was intended to be a visible sign of the ‘Abbâsid inheritance of Persian royal tradition” (Beckwith 150). Baghdad eclipses merely inhabiting its land and instead leans into the appropriation of previous cultures, exemplifying early Islam’s “conscious attempt to relate meaningfully to the conquered world, by islamizing forms and ideas of the old” (Grabar 72). By integrating visual aspects of previous cultures, Baghdad employed a visual language understood by and appealing to native populations in order to frame al-Mansur as “the successor to the great emperors of the past” (“Some Speculative Thoughts” 210; Wendell 119).

The Interwoven Legends the Round City’s Site, Foundation, and Founding Caliph

The Abbasid caliphate demonstrated a penchant for constantly moving their capital; the term al-Hashimiyah refers not to a single place, but to wherever the caliph established his residence as the capital (*The Topography of Baghdad* 123). While unexplained, this phenomenon suggests that the establishment of a permanent capital must satisfy an abundance of requirements. In this way, multiple factors contributed to al-Mansur’s decision to move the Abbasid government to Baghdad. Logical reasons include the climatic conditions of Baghdad which permitted year-round residence and strategic considerations of the site’s location on the Tigris and its connection to the Euphrates via the Sarat Canal (ibid 126). Ninth-century geographer Ya’qubi credits the statement “this island between the Tigris in the East and the Euphrates in the West is the harbor of the world” to al-Mansur (qtd. In ibid 127). A secondary systematic advantage of establishing the Abbasid capital in Baghdad is its potential to politically unify the Islamic world and function globally. Edward Zychowicz-Coghill explains that the location of Baghdad is “presented as the natural centre of the world, able to gather in all the products of the earth from the caliphate and beyond, including the medieval Roman empire, India and China” (130). In addition to these rational justifications, legends offering more mythic explanations of the site and construction of Madinat al-Salam have manifested.

The Prophecy of Miqlas

During al-Mansur's travels to locate a site for his new capital, a Christian doctor treating one of the caliph's entourage informed al-Mansur of an old legend known among Christian monks that a king by the name of Miqlas would someday erect a magnificent new city named al-Zawra' ("the askew" or "the crooked") between the Tigris and the Sarat Canal (*The Topography of Baghdad* 124-25). The version of this legend written in the ninth-century reports of al-Tabari detail that after laying the city's foundation and constructing a portion of the enclosure wall, the site would be breached by the Hijaz and then al-Basrah, eliciting a "greater deal of damage than before. But it will not be long before he [Miqlas] repairs the breaches and returns to building the city; then he will complete it..." (qtd. in *ibid* 125).

This story was only related to the caliph upon the doctor's discovery of al-Mansur's endeavor to build a city and Jacob Lassner suggests that "the literary play is to indicate that al-Mansur would be wasting his time there, unless, of course, his name was really Miqlas" ("Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities" 165). The caliph was not deterred by the legend, for he divulged that his nickname was Miqlas as a child and designated the site specified by the doctor as the destined location for his new capital (*The Topography of Baghdad* 125).

Whether al-Mansur's claim of his being called Miqlas in his youth is truthful or apocryphal, it is quite evident that the prophecy of Miqlas is tethered to the building program of the caliph. The legend's language is purposefully ambiguous and prophetic, but the breaches mentioned in the story are plainly understood to have transpired as the sequential rebellions of 'Alid leaders, Abdallah and Ibrahim, in 762 ("Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities" 165). Such halts on construction due to the caliph's military campaign amid the revolts postponed the completion of Madinat al-Salam until 766 (Wendell 112). These events align perfectly with the legend, leading some scholars to suggest that this is a contemporary story created to enhance the image of Baghdad. Lassner asserts that "if this is insufficient it can be shown that the name al-Zawra, given to the city in this purportedly ancient manuscript is also an indication that the doctor's sacred vision is actually based on contemporary events" as al-Zawra, one popular name for the Round City, translates as "the crooked" and references the slightly askew

orientation of the mosque ("Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities" 165). Further, Lassner states that "this motif may have become a cliché which Muslim authors used to glorify the building programs of the Caliph" following his note that the story of Miqlas is also reported in the construction of ar-Rafiquah which was founded by al-Mansur in 772 (*The Topography of Baghdad* 125). The story of Miqlas is permeated with suspicion, but even without confirmation of the legend's veracity (or fallacy), its prevalence within numerous historical accounts and its continued presence in contemporary studies suggest an existent mythologized Baghdad prior to the placement of the first brick.

Al-Mansur: Domineering Caliph or Qualified Architect?

Conveyed in historical accounts and reviewed in scholarly studies, it seems that the overall plan of the Round City of Baghdad was crafted according to the personal preference of al-Mansur. The foundation lore of the city conveys al-Mansur as the initiator and facilitator of Madinat al-Salam. However, his involvement in the technical architectural drawings and physical construction of Madinat al-Salam as well as his conscious consideration of the city's political symbolism and aesthetics are continually debated. Al-Tabari reports that "when al-Mansur decided to build it he wanted to behold it with his own eyes, so he ordered that it be delineated with ashes... and he commanded that the foundation thereof be excavated according to the design" (qtd. in Beckwith 144). The caliph opted for a circular construction due to its advantages over a square design; eighth century jurist Waki' ibn al-Jarrah recounted that "if the monarch were to be in the center of a square, some parts would be closer to him than others; however, regardless of the divisions, the sections of the Round City are equidistant from him when he is positioned at the center" (qtd. in "Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities" 171). Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, in his account of the building of the Round City, explains that al-Mansur summoned masters of engineering, architecture, surveying, carpentry, and blacksmithing, and he did not begin construction "until the number of craftsman and skilled laborers in his presence reached many thousands" (qtd. in *The Topography of Baghdad* 46). Such a large aggregation of skilled personnel for the construction of the Round City illuminates what Lassner designates as

the “relationship between al-Mansur’s city and the legitimization of his political authority” (“Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities” 164).

These passages are often interpreted to mean that the caliph himself designed the city, but Christopher Beckwith contends that the historical accounts “cannot be interpreted as literally meaning that the ruler personally delineated the city, and al-Khatib does not in fact say that al-Mansur delineated his city, he says *ikhtattahâ*, ‘he laid it out [or “founded it”]’” (145). While the attribution of the Round City’s construction to al-Mansur contributes to his image as a powerful figure of Abbasid authority, perhaps such an attribution is an exaggeration of the caliph’s contribution. Beckwith asserts that “one must reject the idea that an untrained layman like al-Mansûr, who had no known experience in architectural design (or with round structures) could have personally created ex nihilo such a sophisticated and unusual design” and instead acknowledge that the Iranian Buddhist priest Khâlid ibn Barmak, who had experience in architecture and specifically in circular structures of royal Iranian origin, is the most likely candidate for architect of the Round City (145). Regardless of the extent of his involvement, “there can be no question that, in both design and function, the Round City was a most dramatic expression of centralized rule and was thus well suited to al-Mansu’s particular needs” (“Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities” 171). Whether al-Mansur actually delineated the city or simply domineered over its construction, his central presence in its foundational lore serves to bolster this image of the Round City as a symbol of the prestige and authority of the Abbasid caliphate.

The (Possible) Role of Cosmology

Various instances of potential cosmological significance have been extracted from tellings of the Round City’s foundation, and in conversation with the legend of Miqlas and the city’s storied construction, it is evinced that “the foundation lore, by its very nature, obscures the subtle line between fact and fiction” (“Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities” 164).

The primary cosmological reading of the Round City is that the Abbasid capital was created in the image of the world and al-Mansur’s purview over this metropolis center indicated his jurisdiction over the Islamic world. Visually translating the *imago mundi*,

the sacral image of the world upheld by Buddhists, Hindus, and Zoroastrians, into its architectural plan, the city enlisted Iranian cosmology, conforming to a recognized type of city arrangement employed by its geographic predecessors and centering its “‘celestially’ domed palace [that] lay precisely at the ‘cross-roads of the world’” (Wendell 120). Further, cosmological elements of its mandala plan, the symbolic orientation of its gates, and its Jupiter horoscope which “foretold long life, fame, grandeur, and the ‘special quality’ that no Caliph would ever die in it,” suggest that these features were purposefully included to further the concept of Baghdad as an *imago mundi*, or a microcosm of the world, where the caliph’s dominion over his cosmological city symbolized his authority over the entire earth (ibid 122).

However, despite these cosmological claims and speculations, there is no explicit evidence in accounts that al-Mansur thought or acted cosmologically (Beckwith 143). When it is dismissed that al-Mansur purposefully entertained and enacted the proposed cosmic symbols of the Round City, and it is accepted that he himself either designed the city or domineered over its construction, it may be that “the proposed cosmic origins of the Round City seem at best a rationalization after the fact” (“Baghdad: Legendary Origins and Historic Realities” 173). In regarding the cosmology as a mere retroactive consideration, Lassner notes, “the suggestion has been put forth that al-Mansur wished to present himself as the ‘successor to the great emperors of the past,’ but, among the subjects whose loyalty he coveted, who was likely to be impressed by representations derived from Iranian cosmology?” (ibid 179).

Literature that Perpetuates the Round City’s Mythology

With the abundance of lore shrouding the foundation of Madinat al-Salam, it is quite certain that “no literate resident of or visitor to Baghdad could experience the material reality of the city without confronting the tropes that had gathered around Baghdad” (Cooperson 111). Much of the literature – poetry, prose, and travel journals – that followed the construction (and ruin) of Madinat al-Salam glorifies the Round City through themes of nostalgia, desire, mourning, and elegy.

The most basic of iterations that simply glorifies the Round City pertains to its various names and

their interpretations. The Abbasid capital is referred to as Madinat al-Mansur (City of al-Mansur), Madinat al-Salam (City of Peace), al-Zawra' (the bent, or the crooked), and al-Madina al-Mudawwara (Round City). The most prolifically used, Madinat al-Salam, and its shortened version, Dar al-Salam, reference "the Koranic paradise, the heavenly City of God, known as the Abode of Peace," propelling the analogy of Baghdad as the center of the Islamic universe to an extreme (Beckwith 144). Ana Negroiță explores the reflection of paradise in the caliphal city, explaining "one manner to accomplish the religious and ideal goal of peace on earth is to establish a favorable 'functional,' yet deeply symbolic form for its existence – a city" (168).

The operation of this interpretation of Baghdad as paradise presents itself in a wide array of different forms in writing. An example of this glorification manifests in an anecdote where, in a dream, the deceased linguist Abu 'Amr ibn al-'Alā' al-Basri proclaims that "whoever lives in Baghdad and dies a Sunni moves from one Paradise to another" (qtd. in Cooperson 101). Further, within the century following the Round City's construction, classical Arab author Abu 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz expressed, "I have seen the greatest of cities that are known for their perfection and refinement, in the lands of Syria and the Greeks and other countries, but I have never seen a city like Baghdad whose roofs are so high, a city which is so round or more noble, the gates of which are wider and the walls better. It is as if the city were cast into a mould and poured out" (qtd. in Snir 6). Al-'Uzari's poem engages a more complex form of glorification:

If you mention beautiful places in the area
Do not forget the crescents of al-zawra'
This land overflows with beauty from its sides
The beauty pours like rain that pours from the
sky
I wonder if this is only a city or is it heaven on
earth!
Or is it a rosy cheek of a beautiful girl!
I ask you my friends; will the good times ever
come back?
And would the calm shade be delivered again by
the grand green tree!
I salute those wonderful nights from the past
They were bright and full of dignity and eminence
(qtd. in Al-Attar 55).

The poet describes the Round City as an idyllic paradise, indicating its natural beauty as "heaven on earth." Asking "will the good times ever come back?" the poem enters into a nostalgic glorification of the Round City. And, in its melancholic expression related to losing a loved one, the poet mourns Baghdad like the beautiful girl the city is likened to. While this nostalgia manifests in al-'Uzari's poem temporally, in al-Baghdadi's poem, the nostalgic idealization of Baghdad materializes through distance and spatiality:

I left Baghdad and its people, aiming to find a
comparable place
But I realised that I decided on something that
leads to hopelessness
It is impossible to find a better place!
For me Baghdad is 'the entire world'
And the residents of Baghdad are 'all of
humankind' (qtd. in Al-Attar 40).

In his view of Baghdad as "the entire world," it seems that al-Mansur's intention to legitimize the Abbasid caliphate's authority through the construction and perpetuated image of the Round City was successfully realized, remembered, and revered nostalgically. Replicated in poetry over time, this nostalgic glorification evinces a perpetuated fervent attachment to Baghdad by Arab poets. This affection and nostalgia presented itself in more romantic ways as well, casting Baghdad as an object of desire and longing. This untitled poem by Abu al-Mutahhar al-Azdi's Abu al-Qasim explicitly exposes Baghdad as an object of desire, admired because of an inherent inaccessibility, much like that of the poet's lover:

I greet Baghdad from far away,
But you think of me no more
You take your ease with song and wine
By distant Tigris' shore.
You greet my love from close at hand
I long for him, and weep:
A face like moonlight, and a scent
Like blossoms, in my sleep (qtd. in Cooperson 102).

This almost lustful yearning elevates the image Baghdad to the precipice of illusory immortalization, thrusting what was once represented by a physical construction into an oxymoronic and elusive space

of simultaneous glorified omnipresence (of its memory) and mourned absence (of the city itself).

A more subdued example of the legacy of Baghdad as an entity to which one may compare another—lover, city, or otherwise—is the description of Baghdad by medieval explorer Ibn Battuta. In his remarks written in his travel book *Rihlah* (Travels), Battuta mentions that the western part of the city (the site for the Round City) lays in ruins, but what remains elicits his statement that “in no town other than Baghdad have I seen all this elaborate arrangement, though some other towns approach it in this respect” (Battuta). The traveler’s description of the western part of Baghdad and his naming of the city as the “Abode of Peace” suggest that the legacy—physical and literary—of Baghdad continued as the ruins of the original Round City were regarded highly and still integrated into the city’s function. Later in his travels notes, Battuta visits and describes the city of Marrakesh, only to compare it to Baghdad and proclaim that the latter is finer (Battuta).

These examples and others display that much of the literature celebrating Baghdad surpasses simple glorification and either teeters on the boundary or completely enters a realm of immortalization. The idealization of Baghdad is underlaid with nostalgia, reflective elegy, and fervent desire. These provided glorified imaginations of the Round City in literature suggest that “its magical image was perpetuated in peoples’ [sic] minds, reminding them of a great history” (Al-Attar 55). Further, such reflections allowed for a fixation on a historical past of Baghdad that can be celebrated, mourned, and “free of the miseries and afflictions of the writer’s present;” in other words, “the remembrance of the round city was a stimulus to be positive about the future, since it keeps reminding them of a great history” (Cooperson 103; Al-Attar 11).

While it was determined to focus on the perpetual glorification of the Round City in correlation with its foundation lore, further study may be undertaken to investigate how these celebratory mythologies are complicated when the glorified image of Baghdad elicits opposition. Many negative aspects accompanied Baghdad’s foundation and a breadth of literature illuminates the “contrasting notions of privilege and adversity;” such literature portrays Baghdad as a cause of disappointment rather than

solely celebrating, immortalizing, and longing for the material and metaphorical splendor of the Round City (Al-Attar 37).

Conclusion

Despite the short-lived existence of the Round City in its initial perfect circular design, it truly established Baghdad as the core of the Abbasid empire. Its mythology and “the memory of its original shape and the ideas behind it[,] lasted for centuries in a way that has no equivalent in the history of other cities in the region” (Al-Attar 11). Madinat al-Salam is understood and memorialized as an architectural site due to the historic accounts of its construction. While these accounts describe the Round City’s design, borrowed cultural traditions, political motivations, and intention to legitimize the caliph as a veritable authority, they are laced with lore. Detailing its architectural presence, narrating its storied materialization, and planting seeds of speculation, the early legends of the Round City’s site, foundation, and founding caliph function as the genesis of the Round City’s dense mythology. The preventive mythologizing of Baghdad established that the architectural site of Madinat al-Salam is inextricably linked with its imagined, mythologized landscape. In crystallizing this connection before the first brick was laid, the opportunity for additional literature perpetuating this glorified image of the Round City of Baghdad as the center of the Islamic world was granted. From the city’s founding, inhabitants of and visitors to Baghdad, including poets and writers, have become engrossed in the storied city in a way that allowed the mythic glorified iteration of the early Abbasid capital to transcend its physical presence and continually expand within literature.

Appendix

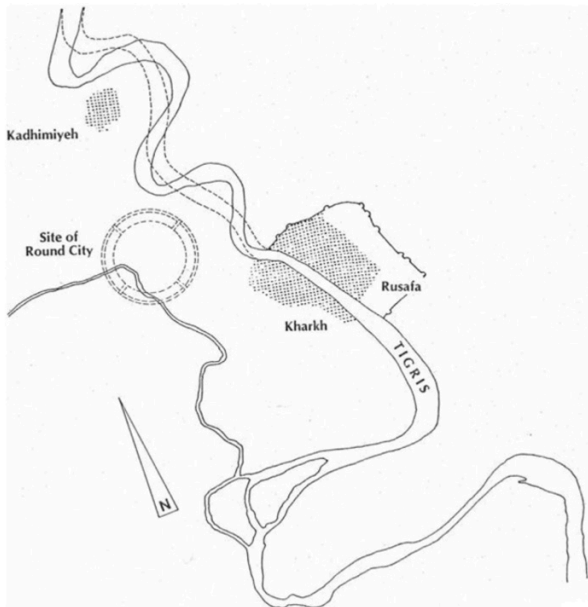


Fig. 1. “The round city on the western side of the Tigris and the second settlement on the eastern side,” from Warren and Fethi (1982) reproduced in Al-Attar, *Baghdad: An Urban History through the Lens of Literature*, 2018.

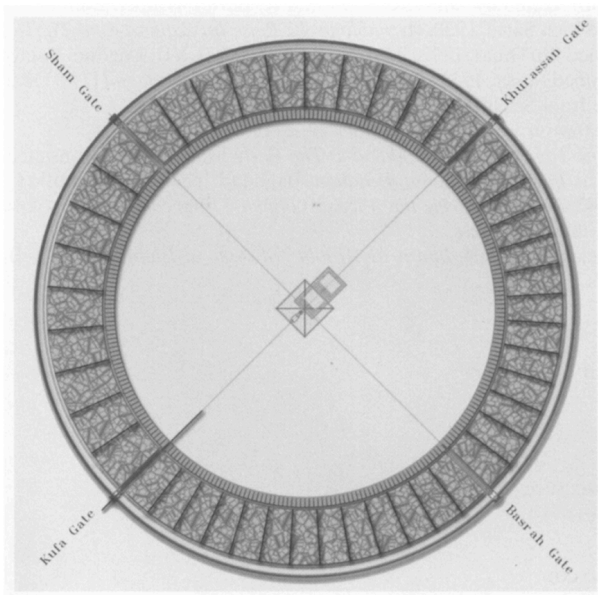


Fig. 2. “General plan of Round Baghdad,” from Saba Sami al-Ali and Nawar Sami al-Ali, “Images of Round Baghdad: An Analysis of Reconstruction by Architectural Historians,” 2016.

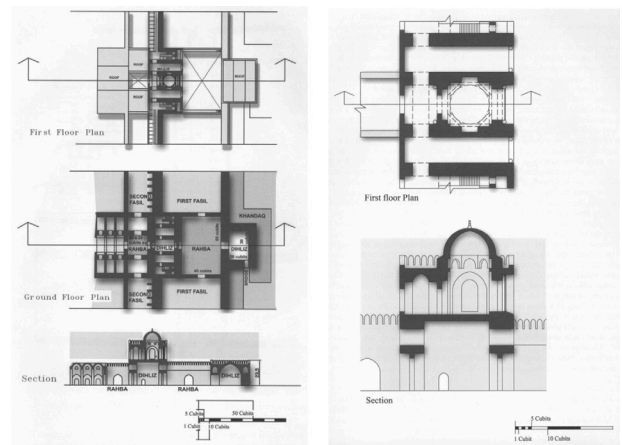


Fig. 3 (left). “Plans of the ground and first floors and section of the entrance rahba and gate,” from Saba Sami al-Ali and Nawar Sami al-Ali, “Images of Round Baghdad: An Analysis of Reconstruction by Architectural Historians,” 2016.

Fig. 4 (right). “Plan of first floor and section of the domed gate,” from Saba Sami al-Ali and Nawar Sami al-Ali, “Images of Round Baghdad: An Analysis of Reconstruction by Architectural Historians,” 2016.

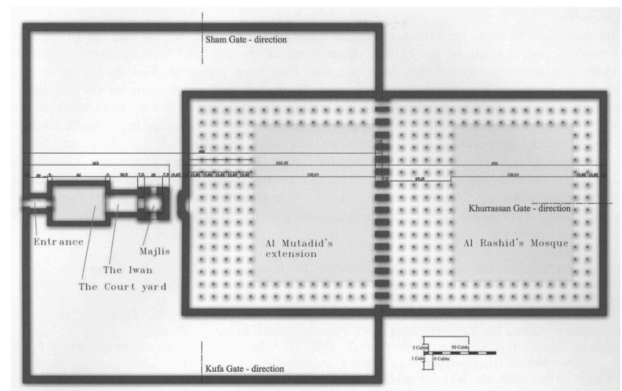


Fig. 5. “Plan of the central complex of the Round City with the caliph's palace and Great Mosque with extension,” from Saba Sami al-Ali and Nawar Sami al-Ali, “Images of Round Baghdad: An Analysis of Reconstruction by Architectural Historians,” 2016.

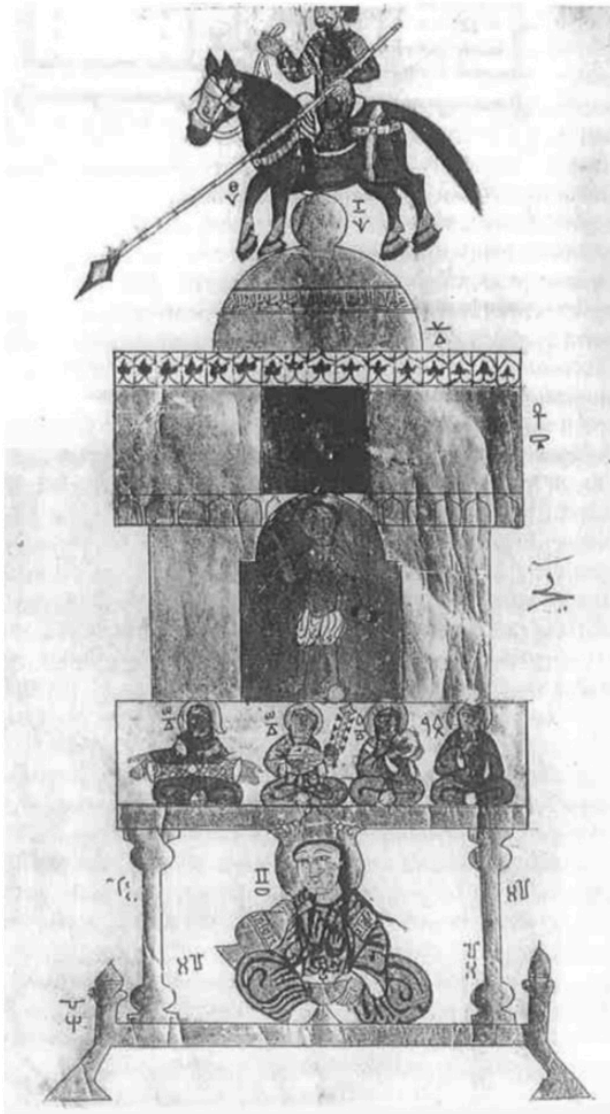


Fig. 6. "Drawing of an automaton rider with lance on the Green Dome, Baghdad, founded 762," from Ettinghausen et al., "Central Islamic Lands," *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650-1250*, 2001.

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