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BAGHDAD I. THE IRANIAN CONNECTION: BEFORE THE MONGOL INVASION

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Baghdad, whose official name was originally Madīnat-al-Salām, the City of Peace, was founded in 145/762 by the second ʿAbbasid caliph, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr as his official capital. From this time until the sack of the city in 656/1258 by the Mongols, apart from a brief period in the third/ninth century, Baghdad was the home of the ʿAbbasid caliphs. Until the end of the fourth/tenth century it was the most important center of Arabic culture and letters and was almost certainly the biggest city in the Muslim world. It remained throughout an Arabic-speaking city but partly because of its metropolitan status, and partly because of its geographical position, there were considerable Persian elements in its population and urban environment.

Although it was founded near the ancient Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon, known to the Arabs as Madāʾen, in an area which had been under Persian rule at least since the fourth century, there does not seem to have been extensive Persian settlement in the little village of Baghdad or any of the small neighboring communities which were later swallowed up by the great city.

(For the distribution of the Persian population in Sasanian Iraq, see Morony, pp. 181-213.) While the name of the city may have been derived from two Old Persian words, *bag* "god" (see baga iii) and *dād* "given," the probability is that most of the inhabitants were Aramaic-speaking Nabateans. Persian elements came after the foundation of the city and took four main forms: architectural influence on the original design, Persian military settlement in the early years of the city, later rule by dynasts of Persian origin, notably the Buyids, and the continuing settlement of Persian scholars and intellectuals.

The most important feature of the architecture of early Baghdad was the celebrated round city, whose walls encircled the caliph's official residence and the first great mosque. While it is impossible to cite any direct influence, there were a number of examples of round cities from pre-islamic Persia which may have provided inspiration. Ctesiphon was surrounded by oval ramparts, although this may have reflected the natural growth of the city rather than deliberate planning. Clearer parallels can be found in the Sasanian round cities at Dārābgerd and Fīrūzābād, which like Baghdad had four main gates, in Fārs, and at the very striking Parthian and Sasanian ritual center at Taḵt-e Solaymān in Media.

Persian influence also seems to have been evident in the building techniques, although we are dependent on literary sources for our information as none of the original structures survive. The great mosque was built with brick walls and a hypostyle prayer-hall with wooden columns supporting a flat roof, making it the inheritor of an Iranian architectural tradition which stretched back to the great Achaemenid *apadāna* at Persepolis. The caliph's palace boasted a typically Persian *ayvān* with a dome-chamber immediately behind it; the *ayvān* can be traced to the nearby Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon, while the palaces at Fīrūzābād and Sarvestān, also of Sasanian date, had the combination of *ayvān* and dome-chamber. Building materials, on the other hand (brick sometimes strengthened by reeds) naturally owed more to the Mesopotamian tradition and resources than to the Iranian pattern of building in rubble masonry.

The peopling of the new city was a reflection of the reasons for its foundation. The inhabitants can be divided into two groups, the military settled by the caliph and those who flocked to the new city to take advantage of the economic opportunities offered. Although many of the leaders of the ʿAbbasid army were, or at least claimed to be, of Arab descent, it is clear that most of the rank and file were of Persian origin. There were also a number of families of

Iranian notables, the Barmakids of Balḵ for example, and the Sulid family, descendents of the native princes of Gorgān. These military groups were settled in certain defined areas of the city, mostly in the district to the northwest of the round city which came to be known as the Ḥarbīya and the names of the different groups give us a clear idea of their geographical origins. As might be expected, the vast majority of them came from Khorasan and Transoxania, where the ʿAbbasid armies had been recruited, rather than from western Iran or Azarbaijan. We find numerous individuals of Persian origin who were assigned plots of land for themselves and their followers but also areas given to people from different districts; the Marvrūdīya (from Marvrūd) in the round city itself, a suburb (*rabaż*) of the Persians (Fors, which may imply people of Fārs, rather than Persians in general), a suburb of the Khwarezmians, and a mosque of the people of Bukhara, all in the Ḥarbīya. A second wave of Persian military settlers came in 151/768 when the future caliph al-Mahdī, then heir apparent, came from Ray, where he had been based for ten years as governor of Khorasan and established a new city on the east bank of the Tigris. It was in these eastern quarters that the Barmakids acquired their main properties.

The children of these Persian settlers' families took the name of *abnāʾ*, said to have been short for *abnāʾ al-dawla* (sons of the state) but also an echo of the title *abnāʾ* taken by those Persians in the Yemen who had acknowledged Moḥammad's authority in the early days of Islam. In this way they proclaimed both their loyalty to the dynasty and their Persian identity, and at least until the civil war which followed the death of Hārūn al-Rašīd in 193/809, they retained close links with their homeland.

These Persian settlers were probably greatly outnumbered by settlers of the second group, the Arabs and local Nabateans from the Sawād of Kūfa. Thus despite the strong Persian element in the population, Arabic was the vernacular language of the city and it seems that by the early 3rd/9th century, fifty years after its foundation, these Persians had become completely acculturated and lost any connection with their country of origin.

The year 204/819 saw the entry of al-Maʾmūn, and his Khorasani supporters into Baghdad and once again there was an influx of Persian soldiers and administrators into Baghdad, but its effect on the city was short-lived. Al-Maʾmūn's chief adviser had been Fażl b. Sahl, a Persian of Iraqi origin whose openly expressed aim it had been to restore the influence of the Persian land-owners (*dehqān*s) and make the ʿAbbasid caliphs the true heirs of the Sasanian

tradition; but he was assassinated in 202/818, and when al-Maʾmūn did reach Baghdad, he was obliged to make compromises with the local people which left the Arab nature of the city virtually intact.

The essentially Arab character of Baghdad was preserved in part because of the move of the caliphal court to Samarrāʾ in the reign of the caliph al-Moʿtaṣem (218-227/833-842), since the new administrative and military establishments, in which Persian elements were pronounced, were based in the new city. Baghdad was effectively ruled by a branch of the Taherid family, but they do not seem to have promoted Persian influence in the city.

There was, however, another development at this time which led to a new wave of Persian settlers of a very different sort. The study of Muslim tradition (*ḥadīṯ*), was established in Baghdad in early ʿAbbasid times but it was given renewed impetus by the opposition of many Baghdadis to the government of al-Maʾmūn and al-Moʿtaṣem and the Muʿtazilite doctrine they espoused. They expressed their opposition by a firm commitment to the traditions of the Prophet whose study became the most important of the religious sciences: This meant that scholars from Persia who wished to acquire expertise in this field flocked to Baghdad. This trend was reinforced by the fact that Baghdad lay on the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage) route from Iran to Mecca and Medina. In this way numerous religious figures passed through the city and many stayed on to become permanent residents. For this reason, Persians came to form a much larger element among the clergy (*ʿolamāʾ*) of Baghdad than Syrians, Egyptians, or North Africans. An interesting example of how this worked in practice can be seen in the career of the historian and traditionist Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Originally, as his name suggests, from Ṭabarestān in northern Iran, he came to Baghdad in search of traditions and in the end took up permanent residence there. He continued to be supported by revenues from his family estates in Ṭabarestān which were brought to him by pilgrims from his native province passing through the city. In this way he, and numerous other Persians, contributed not just to the intellectual life of the city, but to its economic survival as well. They did not, however, import Persian culture to Baghdad: they had come to immerse themselves in Islamic learning whose language was Arabic, and they seem to have taken on the language and customs of their adopted home.

The return of the caliphate to Baghdad in 278/892 led to a renewed building campaign, this time largely confined to the east bank of the Tigris, where the palaces of caliphs and military leaders in the Moḵarram quarter, came to form

the core of modern Baghdad. It seems likely that the ʿAbbasid court of this period was strongly influenced by Persian ideas of royal splendor, and from this period we have tales of elaborate court ceremonial, of vast and opulent palaces and golden birds singing in silver trees which were alien to early Islamic styles of monarchy. That Persian influence played its part is suggested by the fact that the caliph al-Moʿtażed (279-89/892-902) gave two of his new palaces the typically Persian names of Ferdows (paradise) and Tāj (crown) but we have neither detailed enough descriptions of the architecture nor archeological evidence to show how far this Persian influence extended.

Persian influence was greatly increased under the rule of the Buyids. They were themselves of Persian origin, from Deylam on the southwestern shores of the Caspian Sea. They adopted many of the styles of Sasanian monarchy, including the use of the title *šāhanšāh* along with their Muslim titulature. They were also Shiʿites and some of them certainly patronized Shiʿite shrines in the city; but the great movements of Persian pilgrims to the Shiʿite shrines of Iraq, which led to so much Persian influence in the area, did not begin until much later. This was partly because Shiʿism did not become the established faith of Persia until Safavid times, but partly too because the main Shiʿite shrine of Baghdad, at Kāẓemayn, the old cemetery of the Qorayš, was venerated as much by Sunnis as by Shiʿites in this period.

The first Buyid sovereign of Baghdad, Moʿezz-al-Dawla Aḥmad (334-56/945-67), relied on Turkish soldiers and locally recruited bureaucrats, although he did employ workers from Ahvāz and Isfahan on his new palace. The chaos which ensued under the rule of his son ʿEzz-al-Dīn Baḵtīār, led to the conquest of Iraq by the greatest of the Buyids, Ażod-al-Dawla in 367/978. Ażod-al-Dawla's political power was based in Fārs, the old Sasanian homeland, and he brought with him bureaucrats from there, some with ancient Iranian names like Sābūr (Šāpūr) b. Ardašīr, who founded an important educational establishment in the city; he even imported plants from Fārs to revive the ruined gardens of Baghdad. He spent lavishly on building, mostly on palaces but also on his celebrated hospital (*bīmārestān*, the Persian word is used), the ʿAżodīya. This set a pattern for the Persian patronage of charitable institutions which was continued under the Saljuqs. Ażod-al-Dawla's activities were brought to a premature end by his death in 372/983, and his Buyid successors lacked the resources to continue them. While the Buyids did bring Persian elements to Baghdad, in personnel, resources and royal styles, they did not make Baghdad a Persian capital and the language of court and administration remained

Arabic.

The same seems to have remained true for Saljuq Baghdad after 447/1055, a period which saw the foundation of the greatest of the Baghdad schools, the Neẓāmīya, founded by the Persian vizier Ḵᵛāja Neẓām-al-Molk in 457/1065. Indeed the movement which saw the foundation of numerous *madrasa*s in Baghdad in this period was largely of Persian inspiration. After 552/1157 the Saljuq hold on Baghdad effectively disappeared, and the last century before the Mongol conquest saw the city under the rule of ʿAbbasid caliphs and the political links with Persia broken.

There were other ways in which Baghdadi lifestyles were influenced by Persian elements. In dress the high *qalansowa* (a tall conical hat) which became fashionable in the 3rd/9th century was an example. Persian festivals were celebrated by the caliphs, especially Now Rūz, which became a major event in the city from the time of the caliph al-Motawwakel (232-47/847-61). Many common dishes in Baghdad cuisine, *bezmaverd* and *sīkbāj* for example, had Persian names, and from the time of Hārūn al-Rašīd (170-93/786-809), the typically Persian game of polo became a favorite pastime at court. If we add to this, the vast influx of Persian material goods, textiles, ceramics, and metalwork, attracted by the high-spending court, a picture emerges of an upper-class culture strongly influenced by Persian practice. All this, however, did not make Baghdad a Persian city and the Persian elements were pervasive but never overwhelming; only in the Jalayerid period, after the departure of the ʿAbbasids, did Baghdad come near to being a Persian capital.

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