



## MADĀ'EN

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**MADĀ'EN** (lit. *the cities*; Ar. sing. Madina, cf. Aram. pl. Māḥozē or Medinātā), the Sasanian metropolitan area of several contiguous cities, on both sides of the Tigris and connected by floating bridges, about 35 km southeast of Abbasid Baghdad. At the end of the Sasanian period, this metropolis served as the administrative capital, the winter home of the monarch, the residence of the [Jewish Exilarch](#), and the seat of the Catholikos of the Christian Church of the East. About 130,000 people, or over 30,000 families were estimated to be living in the environs of Madā'en when it fell to the Muslims in 637 (Ṭabari, I, p. 2467). The population of Arameans, Persians, Greeks, and Syrians mostly comprised Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. The residential, industrial, and commercial zones of the metropolis were interspersed with palaces, villas, parks, gardens, ceremonial buildings, monuments, and large open areas. The place name Madā'en has remained alive in modern Persian because of the famous 12th century elegy about the ruins of Ṭāq-e Kesrā by Kāqāni Šervāni (b. 1127?, d. between 1186 and 1199?).

*The Pre-Islamic Period.* Tradition claimed that Madā'en had been built by Ṭahmurāt Zibāwand or [Hōšang](#), who called it Kardbandād, and was then rebuilt by King Zāb, Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), and Shapur II (r. 309-379 CE; cf. al-'Ali, tr., pp. 422-23; Ḥamza, p. 31; Maqdesi, IV, pp. 98-99). Tradition also preserved the names of five or seven cities (with variants) that made up Madā'en: Asfābur, Weh Ardašir, Hanbu Šābur, Darzanidān, Weh Jondiu-Kosrow, Nawinābād and Kardakād (al-'Ali, tr., p. 422; Ḥamza, p. 31; Malāyeri, VI, pp. 40-51; Qazvini, II, p. 303; Streck, II, pp. 246-79; Yāqut, IV, pp.



446-47).

In the late Sasanian period there were four or five main population centers (al-'Ali, tr., p. 423; Fiey, "Mahozé", pp. 397-401). The oldest was the walled city of **Ctesiphon** on the east bank, which the Arabs called the Old City (*al-madina al-'atiqa*) and where the royal residence, known in Arabic as the White Palace (*al-qasr al-abyaḥ*), was located. (al-'Ali, pp. 53, 55; Ṭabari, II, p. 982). To the south of Ctesiphon lay the sprawling, unwalled residential district of Aspānbar with the great audience hall, palace, bath, treasury, game preserve, and stables (cf. Fiey, 1967a, pp. 401, 417; 1967b, p. 28; Kühnel and Wachtsmuth, pp. 12-14). About 5 km south of Aspānbur was Weh-Antioḳ-e Ḳosrow where Ḳosrow I Anōšīrvān (r. 531-79) resettled the captives of Antioch in 540, and which the Arabs called al-Rumiya (Dinawari, pp. 70-71; Ḥamza, p. 51; Ṭabari, I, pp. 898, 959-60; Ta'ālebi, pp. 612-13). Opposite Ctesiphon on the west bank was the round, walled city of Weh-Ardašīr, called Māḥozā (lit. *the city*) by Jews, Kōḳē by Christians, and Behrasir by Arabs (al-'Ali, tr., pp. 433-34; Fiey, "Mahozé", pp. 399-400; Streck, 1917, p. 27). Wealthy Jews populated this commercial and industrial city, which was also the seat of the cathedral church of the Catholikos (Scher, p. 148; Streck, 1917, p. 63). Sābāṭ, about 5 km south of Weh-Ardašīr where the Nahr al-Malek emptied into the Tigris, is sometimes included in the metropolitan area (al-'Ali, tr., p. 435 Ḥamza, p. 50; Mas'udi, II, 405).

*The Muslim Conquest.* After the battle of Qādesiya, in October or November 634 different parts of Madā'en fell separately to the Muslim Arab forces. The Muslim vanguard under Ḳāled b. 'Urfoṭa took Sābāṭ and made peace with the people of al-Rumiya and Behrasir. According to the terms of surrender, on which the people of al-Rumiya agreed with Ḳāled, they were free to leave, but if they chose to stay they were to submit politically, offer advice, pay tribute (*jezya*, *karāj*) and act as reliable guides (Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, p. 263). When Sa'd b. Abi Waqqāṣ (d. between 670-78) arrived in March 637 he found Madā'en deserted: the Sasanian royal family, nobles, and army had fled (Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, p. 262-63; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2357-58; 2439, 2441-42; Ta'ālebi, p. 739; Ya'qubi, *Ta'riḳ*, II, p. 165). Some soldiers were captured, and huge amounts of booty were taken from the royal treasury and distributed to the Muslim soldiers. The people in the White Palace made peace with Sa'd in return for paying tribute (Ṭabari, I, p. 2440). After taking Aspānbar and Kardbandād Sa'd himself occupied the White Palace and divided the houses of Madā'en among the Muslims who settled in them with their dependents until they left on

campaign to Jalulā, Tekrit, and Mosul (Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, p. 274; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2440, 2451). The *Ayvān-e Kesrā* was used as a mosque despite the presence of plaster statues (Ṭabari, I, p. 2441). Madā'en's fleeing inhabitants, though not the members of the Sasanian royal family and their entourage, were allowed to return on terms similar to those granted to the people in the White Palace (Ṭabari, I, p. 2440). There is some evidence for the survival of a Persian population since in 657, before the Battle of Şeffin, Madā'en's Persian notables offered 'Ali (d. 661) gifts which he refused to accept (Ya'qubi, *Tarīk*, II, p. 218).

Finding the swampy conditions at Madā'en to be malarial, the Muslim army resettled at Kufa, taking the doors from their houses at Madā'en with them (Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, p. 277; al-'Ali, tr., p. 419; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2424, 2481, 2497). Members of various clans, mostly of the Banu 'Abs, chose to stay at Madā'en as the garrison (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2486-87). The Friday mosque was in al-Madina al-'Atiqa (al-'Ali, p. 54).

In early Islamic times, the inhabitants of Madā'en (Ṭabari, II, p. 980) comprised Kufan tribal leaders (*aşrāf*), including the chiefs of the Banu Azd, and members of leading Muslim families (*boyutāt al-nās*), who were not considered *aşrāf*. Ḥoḍayfa b. al-Yamān (d. 656-57) is a good example of a Kufan Muslim who married a local Jewish or Christian woman at Madā'en where he was buried and where his descendents continued to live. The caliph 'Omar (r. 634-44) ordered him to divorce her because the number of eligible Muslim women had increased there (Ṭabari, I, pp. 2374-75; II, pp. 504, 561).

Madā'en is said to have lost its population first to Basra and Kufa, and then to Wāseṭ and Baghdad (Eşṭakri, p. 86; Qazvini, II, p. 303; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2380-81; Yaqut, IV, p. 447). But people also moved to Madā'en from Kufa, Basra, and elsewhere. The garrison of Madā'en in 683-84 was from Kufa (Ṭabari, II, p. 504). Helāl b. Ḳabāb moved from Basra to Madā'en in 761-62, and Naşr b. Ḥājeb al-Qoraşi (d. 762) moved from Khorasan to Madā'en (Ebn Sa'd, VII, p. 66). Although Madā'en was no longer an imperial capital, it was of strategic importance because it controlled the main road to the east (Ṭabari, II, pp. 929, 982) and was the administrative center for the Diāla (see [ARVAND-RUD](#)) region (*arż Juḳā*) under the governor of Kufa (Balāḍori, *Ansāb*, V, p. 45; Dinawari, p. 163; Ṭabari, II, p. 635). Madā'en's garrison was fairly small (300 horsemen in 663, and 1,000 in 695; cf. Ṭabari, II, pp. 46, 899), and could guard either *arż Juḳā* or *arż Anbār*, between which the city was situated on the Tigris. Early governors often combined the responsibilities for war, worship, and finance, and resided in the White Palace.



In 637 Sa'd left Qa'qā' b. 'Amr al-Tamimi (fl. 632-42) in charge of Madā'en when he resettled the army at Kufa (Ṭabari, I, p. 2463). Sa'd is also said to have appointed Šoraḥbil b. al-Simṭ as Madā'en's governor (Ṭabari, I, p. 2360-61). The aforementioned Ḥoḍayfa b. al-Yamān, whom 'Omar appointed as the first fiscal agent of Madā'en in 642, established the tax rates for *arż Jukā* (Ebn Sa'd, VII, 2, p. 64; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2374, 2645). Salmān al-Fāresi (Salmān Pāk) (d. 656-57) is considered one of the first *amirs* of Madā'en, where he was buried during the caliphate of 'Otmān (r. 644-56) (Ebn Sa'd, VII, 2, pl. 65). Mālek al-Aštar put 'Orwa b. Zayd al-Ḳayl in charge of Madā'en when he rebelled against against 'Otmān (Balāḍori, *Ansāb*, V, p. 45). In 656 Mālek al-Aštar appointed Yazid b. Ḥoyjaba al-Taymi over Madā'en and *arż Jukā* (Balāḍori, *Ansāb*, V, p. 45). When 'Ali was at Kufa he appointed Yazid b. Qays al-Arḥabi, 'āmel of Madā'en and all of Jukā (Dinawari, p. 163). But in 656-57, before the Battle of Šeffin, 'Ali appointed Sa'd b. Mas'ud al-Ṭaqafi the 'amel of Madā'en (Dinawari, p. 218; Ṭabari, I, 3259). In 657-58 Sa'd b. Mas'ud seized the gates of Madā'en against the Kharijites and put his nephew, Moḳtār b. Abi 'Obayd in charge of the gates when he pursued the Kharijites (Dinawari, p. 218; Ṭabari, I, p. 3366). Ḥasan b. 'Ali (d. 670) also appointed Sa'd b. Mas'ud his 'amel at Madā'en in 661, and when Ḥasan was stabbed in Sābāṭ he was carried to the White Palace (Ṭabari, II, p. 2).

*The Omayyad Period.* Semāk b. 'Obayd al-'Absi was Madā'en's 'āmel for Moḡira b. Šo'ba (d. bet. 668-71) in 663-64 (Ṭabari, II, p. 39). Moḳtār put Ešḥaq b. Mas'ud in charge of Madā'en and *arż Jukā* in 685-86 (Ṭabari, II, p. 635). Kardam b. Martad b. Najaba was in charge for Moš'ab b. al-Zobayr when Madā'en was attacked by the Azāreqa in 687-88 (Ṭabari, II, p. 755), and Yazid b. Ḥāret al-Šaybāni was in charge there for Moš'ab later in the same year (Ṭabari, II, pp. 775-76). Moš'ab was advised to imprison in the White Palace members of his army suspected of crimes (Balāḍori, *Ansāb*, V, pp. 337, 341). In 695-96 'Abd-Allāh b. Abi 'Ošayfer was *amir* of Madā'en with 1,000 horsemen and financial authority, when Šabib the Ḳāreji (d. 697) entered the city and killed the army mounts (Ṭabari, II, p. 899). The same year Ḥajjāj (d. 714) removed 'Abd-Allāh and appointed 'Otmān b. Qoṭn to give the sermon, lead worship, and to be in charge of the relief of all of Jukā and the *karāj* of the district (*ostān*) (Ṭabari, II, p. 929). In 696-97 Moṭarref b. al-Moḡira was in charge of Madā'en for Ḥajjāj, and in 701 the responsibility was divided between Ḥanzāla b. al-Warrād and Ebn 'Attāb b. Warqā' (Ṭabari, II, pp. 942, 979, 1069). There do not seem to have been any later governors at Madā'en. Al-Madina al-'Atiqa was also a mint for post-reform Omayyad dirhams. S. A. al-'Ali (pp. 64-65) lists 21 qadis either at or

from Madā'en down to the early 13th century. Early qadis include Salmān b. Rabi'a al-Bāheli, in the time of 'Omar II (r. 717-20), and Sa'd b. Ḥoḍayfa b. al-Yamān.

*Muslims and Manicheans.* Madā'en's Muslims tended to be pro-Shi'ite and anti-Kharijite, possibly because of their connections to Kufa. In 663-64 the Kharijites led by Mostawrad occupied Behrasir, but Semāk b. 'Obayd cut the pontoon bridge and prevented them from crossing over to al-Madina al-'Atiqa (Ṭabari, II, p. 39). In 684 (Ṭabari, II, p. 561), Sa'd b. Ḥoḍayfa and 170 Shi'ites who had moved to Madā'en from Kufa joined Solaymān b. Ṣorad (d. 685). The Shi'ites of Madā'en suffered for their partisanship later when the Kharijite Azāreqa sacked the city and massacred its Muslim population in 687-88 (Ṭabari, II, p. 755). Madā'en was also taken by Ṣabib the Ḳareji in 696 (Ṭabari, II, pp. 886-87, 892, 949). By the 8th century Madā'en's Shi'ites were extremists (*gālis*; cf. Massignon, p. 23). 'Abd-Allāh b. Ḥāret had been a supporter of 'Abd-Allāh b. Mo'āwiya (d. 746-47). His followers, called the Ḥāretiya, believed in the cyclic historical recurrence of types of people mentioned in scripture (i.e. those who accept or reject the imam), spread the idea of reincarnation, believed that those who knew the imam could do whatever they liked, and supported the 'Alawi uprising of 744 (al-'Ali, tr., p. 420; Massignon, p. 34; Nawbakhti, pp. 22, 29, 34). The extremist sect of the Eshāqiya, named after Eshāq b. Moḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abān al-Naḳa'i was active in Madā'en in the 10th century (al-'Ali, tr., p. 421; Ebn al-Jawzi, VI, p. 20; Ḳaṭib, VI, pp. 387-81).

A Manichean secretary of Ḥajjāj built an inn and oratory at Madā'en for Zād Hormozd, who claimed to be the leader of the Manichaeans (Ebn al-Nadim, I, p. 334). The father of 'Abd-Allāh b. al-Ḥāret was accused of being a Manichean (*zendiq*) from Madā'en (Nawbakhti, p. 34).

*The Abbasid Period.* Although Maṣṣūr (r. 754-75) stayed briefly in 754 at al-Rumiya, where Abu Moslem (d. 755) was killed (Dinawari, p. 376; Yāqut, II, p. 867), Madā'en declined politically and commercially after the founding of Baghdad in 762 (Mas'udi, II, p. 200). The population moved to Baghdad, where the Catholikos and the Exilarch relocated, although the Catholikos, Timothy (780-823), completed the building of a hospital (*bimāristān*) at Madā'en in 790 (Dols, pp. 113-14). Maṣṣūr began to demolish the White Palace to build Baghdad, and although he ordered it to be rebuilt in 775, it remained in ruins (Ṭabari, III, pp. 320, 385). Mu'taded (r. 892-902) used its brick, as well as brick from a palace called al-Kāmel, to begin the foundations of the Tāj palace in Baghdad (al-'Ali, tr., pp. 428-29; Yāqut, I, p. 109). Moqtafi (r. 902-908) completed



the demolition of the White Palace in ca. 903 by using the brick of its balconies to complete the foundations of the Tāj palace and the bricks of its foundations for the balconies, a symbolic overturning of the building that need not be taken literally (al-'Ali, p. 57; Yāqut, I, p. 109). By the 9th century Madā'en was mainly an agricultural center, and the position of qadi tended to be combined with that of Baghdad and other places (al-'Ali, pp. 64-65; cf. tr., p. 425). Tombs had been built for Salmān al-Fāresi near the Ayvān, and for Ḥoḍayfa near the river at Aspānbar.

By the 10th century Madā'en was a flourishing suburb of Baghdad on the east bank of the Tigris, about the same size as Wāset but smaller than many villages in Khorasan, with brick buildings, markets, two Friday mosques, and the Sasanian palace with its ayvān (al-'Ali, p. 51; Ebn Rosta, p. 186, Moqaddasi, p. 122). Al-Rumiya was deserted, but its earthen walls, half-ruined, still stood (Mas'udi, I, p. 233). On the west bank was a large fire temple the expenses of which were twice the land tax of the province of Fārs (Ebn Rosta, p. 186). A gnostic sect, called the People of the Fear of Heaven (*ahl kifāh al-samā'*), was also still active at Madā'en (Ebn al-Nadim, I, p. 341).

In 1199 Jews at Madā'en protested against the Muslim call to worship (*aḍān*) from a mosque that was near their synagogue. They attacked the muezzin, and defeated his fellow Muslim supporters. A Muslim delegation went to the caliph's secretary (*ṣāhib al-makẓan*) asking for support against the Jews, and Nāser (r. 1180-1225) ordered the demolition of the synagogue (al-'Ali, p. 50, cf. tr., p. 421, Ebn al-Jawzi, X, p. 275).

*The Post-Abbasid Period.* By the 13th century Madā'en was a small town inhabited by Imami Shi'ite farmers (al-'Ali, tr., p. 422; Yāqut, IV, p. 447). The tomb of Salmān al-Fāresi was visited annually by Sunni barbers, pedicures, phlebotomists, and surgeons of Baghdad, while Shi'ites from Najaf and Karbalā' came on variable dates (Massignon, p. 22). The office of qadi was held by local people. In the 14th century there was on the west bank a village of Imami Shi'ite farmers, whose women never went outside during the day (Qazvini, II, p. 303). Coin finds from Tell Baroda confirm a settlement at Behrasir in the 13th century, and Behrasir remained a small Shi'ite town in the 14th and 15th centuries (Ricciardi, p. 20; Reuther, p. 48). The tomb of Salmān al-Fāresi was rebuilt by the Ottoman Sultan Morād IV (r. 1623-40) and restored in 1904-1905 (Sarre and Herzfeld, II, p. 262). The village of Salmān Pāk has grown up around the tomb since the 19th century with inns for Shi'ite pilgrims.



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