



State Board of Antiquities and Heritage

Iraq Museum

2008



Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali
Ministero degli Affari Esteri
Fondazione Banca Nazionale delle Comunicazioni
Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino

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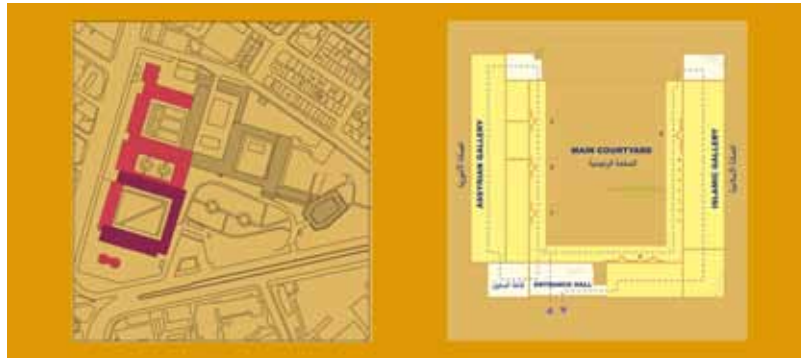
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Iraq Museum State Board of Antiquities

After the early phases of the establishment of the modern Iraqi State, the Iraq Museum was founded and housed in a small room in the Al-Serai building (the old Ottoman-period barracks), which lies on the eastern side of Tigris. This museum was managed and directed by the British pioneer archaeologist Gertrude Bell (1888–1962). Meanwhile, the first law to protect the nation's antiquities was enacted in 1924. As foreign excavations became more frequent and discovered ever more objects, the law still permitted the sharing of finds between the museum and the excavators, as well as the export of duplicate pieces.

The collection of antiquities was expanding, and the need to find a new building was urgent. This was a separate building in Al-Mamoun street in which the museum was hosted just to construct the new one. The attempts to establish it go back to 1932, when the German architect Prof. Werner March laid the designs, yet the project was postponed until 1957 and the construction works were completed in 1963, at a total cost of ID 1,250,000. That year the Directorate General of Antiquities and the Museum moved to the present premises.

The museum was inaugurated and opened to public in 1966.

The period between 1966 and 1987 witnessed some important events, such as the globe-wanderer museum in 1970 and the foundation of the provincial museums.

The Gulf war in 1990 led depredation of the provincial museums, but the national museum was left intact. The catastrophe took place when Baghdad succumbed in April 2003, when the national museum was violated, looted, and vandalized.

The Geneva convention unequivocally mandates that occupation troops must protect the cultural heritage of the occupied country. In fact, multi-national troops have been retained to show a decisive attitude against the mob, but the museum has been vandalized under their guardianship. We are in debt to such organizations as Unesco, Acor, Getty, Jaica, and others, which are playing an invaluable role in implementing our project of reinstitution, restoration, re-qualification, and site protection.

Here we would like to emphasize in particular Italy's contributions to the many efforts and accomplishments in the rehabilitation of the Iraq Museum's halls, in addition to the rehabilitation works of the laboratory and to the training of much of the Museum's staff. Finally, we would like to quote a phrase full of meaning; it is the title of a book by the an eminent archaeologist, Samuel Noah Kramer: "History begins at Sumer". Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilization, and its museum is a vast colourful window displaying the authentic and priceless objects created by an immortal people.

Dr. Amira Edan
Iraq Museum

If we look at *Genesis*, the Museum of Iraq is the place that held Paradise Dust. In the Museum, located in the centre of the Biblical Garden of Eden, one could read, as if browsing through the pages of a single book, a whole range of documents belonging to the material culture of men who were born when divine spirit first breathed life into Mesopotamian clay. These were the same men who had learned to plough the land, more than six thousand years before, in the southern ranges of the plain of the river delta; they had built the first “modern” cities, founding organized town communities; they had invented writing; they had invented the wheel and drawn up the first code of law; they had understood the solar system, centre around the sun; they had learnt to measure astronomical time; they had planted in the land of Sumer the very seed from which Western culture would stem.

Through the halls of this museum, one could truly chart the evolution of early History according to a continuous, uninterrupted sequence, in a much more effective manner than in the Louvre in Paris, or in the British Museum in London, in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin, or in the Oriental Institute in Chicago. In these institutions, exhibits are all organized according to the criteria of 19th century antiquarian taste, in which single pieces are shown deprived of their context and, in any case, as items “collected” and placed in a context which highlights excavation campaigns of the central and northern regions of the Land of the Two Rivers, the land reaching from Babylon to Nineveh of the Assyrians.

This was the region still inhabited by the spirit of the sovereigns of many royal dynasties. These ranged from the ancient, semi-divine ones inaugurated by A-lu-lin, who had first reigned in Eridu for 28,800 years before the Flood, to the mythical kings who reigned over Uruk, the land of Gilgamesh. They also included the historical rulers of the city of Ur, such as Mes-Kalam-dug and Sargon the Great, whose reigns are known through excavated documents scrupulously detailed by scribes in the Royal Lists dating from the end of the third millennium, found at Nippur and at Larsa.

The Museum also held a few of the scarce attestations of the Capital of the Caliphs, the city of Baghdad, chosen as capital by the Abbasids, who conceived it as the centre of the Islamic world, and in whose time the city was unrivalled as to its splendour, wisdom, tolerance, and cosmopolitan culture. Proof of this lies in the fact that its flourishing wealth and culture, immortalized by Harun ar-Rashid’s “The Thousand and One Nights”, became a byword for magnificent, legendary splendour.

After the heavy damage suffered by the museum in April 2003, the Iraqi authorities, in constant cooperation with the Italian Government, have striven to return to the museum its function, namely, the conservation of the country’s historical heritage. This was done starting with the restoration of the great Assyrian Gallery and of the Islamic Halls. Among other things, they promoted a new layout which enhances the colossal alabaster reliefs showing the neo-Assyrian kings and proposes an important representation of the gateway leading to the royal citadel of Khorsabad.

We hope this is only the first step, and that the Museum will soon be opened to the citizens of Iraq and to the rest of the world.

Dr. Giuseppe Proietti
Secretary General, Italian Ministry of Culture

The reopening of the Iraq Museum should not be considered a mere mirage, though I presume the first beneficiaries will be an unspecified number of brave Baghdadi citizens. The project of reopening a part of the museum galleries, where unmovable objects are still exhibited, has been envisaged, with the favour of the museum authorities and the support of the Italian government, since autumn 2003, when the end of the tunnel was glimpsed; it is finally completed. After long logistic interruptions for security reasons, the work for the new Assyrian and Islamic galleries, planned by this writer for the Centro Scavi di Torino and entrusted to a local contractor, is complete. In the Assyrian gallery, where samples of monumental sculpture from Khorsabad and Nimrud are exhibited, a new lighting system and a new architectural contextualization have been installed. In the Islamic gallery new partition walls have been planned to better organize the chronology and geography of the architectural pieces exhibited. Samples of the statuary from Hatra and educational aids for the explanation of the entire archaeological panorama of Mesopotamian Iraq will be exhibited in the museum's main courtyard.

Arch. Roberto Parapetti

Director of the Iraqi-Italian Centre for Restoration of Monuments



1. The Iraq Museum

Roberto Parapetti

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1. The Iraq Museum

The Iraq Museum was founded by King Feisal I in 1923, soon after the monarchy in Iraq was created (1921) following World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. One of its promoters was the British scholar Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), technical adviser to the British protectorate and friend and confidante of the king.

In 1927 the museum got its first stable headquarters in Baghdad, in Ma'moun Street, where it housed the collections formerly in the Serraglio. Archaeological research in Mesopotamia was intensifying, not least because the 1924 antiquities law (based on similar Ottoman legislation of 1881) permitted the partition and exportation of “duplicate or similar” material found in new excavations. The law remained on the books until 1967, and the inalienability of antiquities was legally sanctioned in 1974. But throughout the 1930s archaeology was booming. International institutions undertook or resumed excavations (Nineveh, Ur, Tell Ubaid, Kish, Jemdet Nasr, Khorsabad, Tepe Gawra, Nuzi, Uruk, Tello, Seleucia, Ctesiphon, Kakzu) whereby they both laid the foundations of our knowledge of the Mesopotamian civilizations and filled the collections of western museums.

The Iraq Museum grew richer too, of course, and by 1932 expansion was already needed. In 1940 the cornerstone of the present building in the Salhiya quarter was laid. The winning plan was by the German Werner March (in 1957 even Frank Lloyd Wright submitted a plan, later discarded as too costly).

Meanwhile, in 1937 the Museum of Arab Antiquities was founded in a historic Baghdad building, the Khan Mirjan, and in 1951 a new museum in Mosul was opened to exhibit the finds from the new Iraqi excavations in Hatra and the Assyrian capitals. The Iraq Museum was eventually inaugurated and opened in 1966, incorporating the Arab Antiquities. The Directorate General of Antiquities' offices, restoration laboratories, large stores and a library were moved to the new museum.

Between 1964 and 1966, the treasures of the Iraq Museum crossed national boundaries for the first time with an exhibition that travelled to Cologne, Hamburg, Berlin, Turin, Lisbon, Paris, and Tokyo. Starting in the 1970s, 14 provincial museums were founded or expanded with educational functions representative of the entire panorama of Mesopotamian cultures. The addition of new spaces in the Iraq Museum could no longer be postponed and, in 1987, two new galleries were created.

The Gulf War (1990) brought with it the looting of many of the provincial museums though the Iraq Museum remained unharmed. The consequent embargo, lasting more than a decade, caused significant gaps in the management of the country's archaeological heritage, irreparably loosening the fabric of control of the territory. Most recently, with the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the world watched aghast the irreparable looting and vandalism to the Iraqi cultural heritage.





2. Discoverers and Discovery of Mesopotamia

From the early explorers to World War II

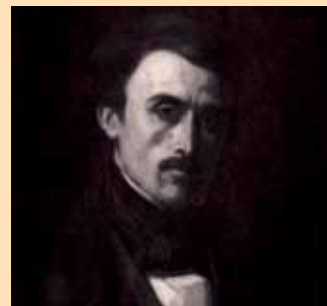
If Mesopotamian archaeology has a birth year, it is 1616. It was a Roman, Pietro della Valle, who, that year, became the first European to publish a cuneiform text. He had copied the hitherto unknown form of writing from bricks found on the site of the ancient city of Ur.

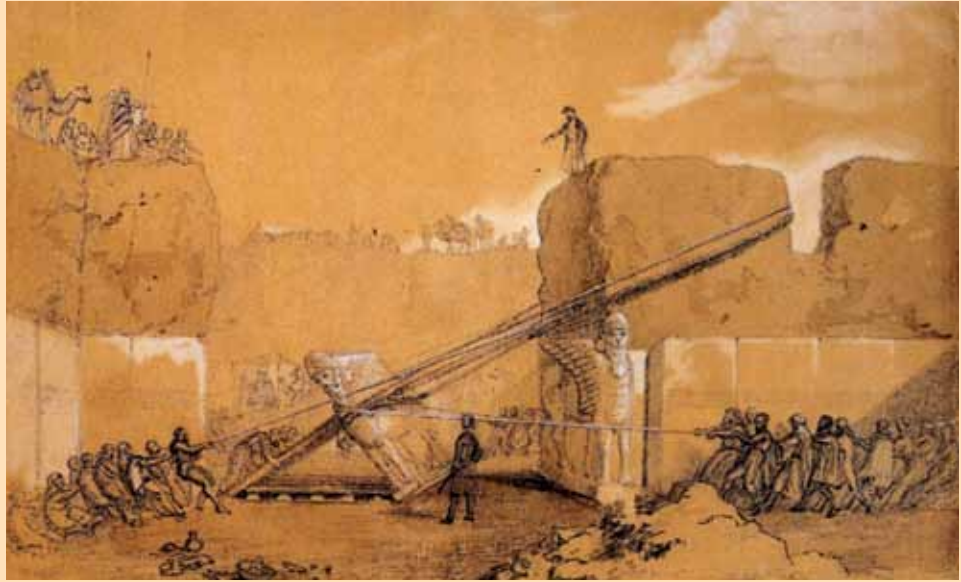
But archaeology had to wait until the 18th and 19th centuries to develop as a scholarly discipline, the search for and documentation of the material evidence of past civilizations, not for profit but for knowledge, to reconstruct their history. As they had for Greece and Rome, men of culture dashed boldly off in search of the remains of ancient Mesopotamia. Between 1807 and 1821 Claudius James Rich, consul general of the British Empire in Baghdad, recognized the hills of Babil, al-Qasr, and Amran ibn-Ali as the urban area of Babylon; his excavations were later celebrated by the poet Byron.

The middle of the 1800s brought the first astonishing results: evidence that a civilization known only from written sources—the Bible, but also Greek, Roman, and Arabic texts—had actually existed. In 1843 Paul-Emile Botta, a French diplomat of Italian descent, began to excavate at Khorsabad, the ancient Dur Sharrukin, not far from Mosul. He mistakenly believed it to be the Nineveh of the literature, but his excavation nevertheless yielded exceptional results. Rooms entirely decorated with magnificent marble bas-reliefs emerged. In 1847 some of the reliefs made the long journey by river and sea to Paris. The following year Longperrier first recognized the name of Sargon (*Sar-gin*), founder of the citadel, incised on those slabs.

The excitement that Botta's discoveries caused in Europe spurred the Englishman Austen Henry Layard to venture in search of new treasures. Between 1845 and 1847 he brought to light the royal palaces of Nimrud, the ancient Kalkhu, and Nineveh, these, too, rich in marble bas-relief decorations.

Between 1849 and 1851 Layard recovered ivory artifacts in the residential sector of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud and at Nineveh brought to light part of a “library” of clay tablets. The Frenchman Victor Place undertook a second campaign at Khorsabad





(1852–53) and discovered important new sculptures. This first phase of explorations concluded in 1855 with the tragic loss in the Shat el Arab of a second shipment of sculptures dismantled from Khorsabad to join others already installed in Paris.

In 1857, some cuneiform inscriptions were successfully translated, and the way was opened to a new branch of philology, Assyriology.

Extended investigations soon began in southern Mesopotamia as well. William Kenneth Loftus and J. E. Taylor completed explorations on the sites of Larsa (Tell Senkereh), Ur, Eridu (Tell Abu Shahrain), Uruk (Warka), Nippur (Nuffar). Taylor conducted full-scale excavations in the sector of the ziggurat of Ur (1853–54), where he recovered an inscribed cylinder that celebrates Nabonedo's late reconstruction. At Uruk, Loftus investigated a necropolis and Parthian levels. In 1854 Henry Creswicke Rawlins superintended the excavations at Birs Nimrud (Borsippa).

Meanwhile in the north, work continued in the large Assyrian centres. A stunning case is that of the Englishman George Smith, who deciphered a fragment of the story of the biblical flood in the Epic of Gilgamesh on a tablet from Nineveh. Assyria continued to yield up such treasures as the bronze doors (British Museum/Mosul Museum), of Imgur Enlil (Balawat) from excavations conducted by Hormuzd Rassam, a native of Mosul. Rassam later opened trenches in the south too, at Babylon (South Palace), Borsippa, Larsa, Girsu (Tello), and Sippar (Temple of Shamash). In all some 50,000 cuneiform tablets were recovered.



The archaeological discoveries in southern Mesopotamia, with the French excavations of Ernest de Sarzec at Tello (1877–1900) and subsequently of Leon Heuzey, Gaston Cros, and F. Thureau-Dangin between 1903 and 1909, also yielded thousands of cuneiform tablets, reliefs, and sculptures. These revealed to the world the great and even older Sumerian civilization, which dated to before the 3rd millennium BC. Not even the Bible preserved its memory.

The discoveries led to a new international rivalry that now included Germany and America. The principal theatre of the operations was Lower Mesopotamia. In 1881 Rassam was at Sippar for the British Museum; Vincent Scheil succeeded him in 1894. In 1886 Robert Koldewey worked at Surghul and el-Hibbah, two sites in the ancient kingdom of Lagash.

Starting in 1888 the University of Pennsylvania expedition conducted four campaigns at Nippur that yielded some 30,000 fragments of administrative, religious, and literary texts.

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th marked a turnaround in Oriental archaeology. Robert Koldewey's systematic German excavations at Babylon and Walter Andrae's at Assur laid the groundwork of a scientific, rigorous, and innovative kind of archaeology. The two sites had been donated by the sultan Abdülhamid II to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, a passionate scholar of antiquity. The pioneering archaeology of the 19th century was followed by a scientific archaeology of historical bent that tended to define chronologically the development of the Mesopotamian cultures. The German archaeologists were at Babylon from 1898 to 1917, at Assur from 1903, at Shuruppak (Tell Abu Hatab) and at Fara in 1902–3. At Uruk, in 1912–13, the first German expedition was directed by J. Jordan.

Proceeding by horizontal cuts, Koldewey excavated the levels of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, and brought to light the South Palace, the Street of the Processions and the Ishtar Gate, the so-called Hanging Gardens, and the remains of the ziggurat.



Andrae's systematic excavations at Assur brought more profound knowledge of the architecture of the ancient Assyrian capital and of its cultural and commercial contacts. Andrae's team surveyed and photographed Hatra.

Along with the excavations, E. Herzfeld





and F. Sarre's survey of the monuments along the valley between the Euphrates and Tigris (1907–8) should be remembered. At the same time, C. Preusser, a member of the Babylon expedition, surveyed and photographed Islamic and Christian religious buildings in the north, while Oscar Reuther inspected the ruins of Ukhaidir. In the first decades of the 20th century Gertrude Bell and A. Musil made exploratory trips that led to a first topographic study of the Middle Euphrates.

The French worked at Kish (1912–14), later the base of a joint Anglo-American expedition directed by S. Langdon (1923–33). In summer of 1910 the French architect H. Viollet opened the first trenches at Samarra, in the palace of Dar al-Khilafa. Between 1911 and 1914 the German expedition at Samarra, led by Herzfeld, was the most important excavation of an Islamic site in Iraq up to that time.

In 1927 the Baghdad Archaeological Museum was inaugurated.

In northern Mesopotamia, the British Museum resumed the investigations at Nineveh (1928–32). Max Mallowan dug a deep test trench that made it possible to identify and describe the pottery type known as Nineveh 5, which dated to the first centuries of the 3rd millennium BC. At Nineveh were also recovered the celebrated bronze head of an Akkadian sovereign, the so-called Sargon, today a symbol of the Iraq Museum.

In 1933 Mallowan moved to Tell Arpachiyah to learn more about the prehistory of northern Mesopotamia. The site, chosen for the conspicuous presence of Halaf pottery,



provided essential data on this prehistoric culture that developed an original architecture.

The campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s changed the face of Near Eastern archaeology. Not only were new cultures and civilizations discovered, but precise chronological and methodological bases were laid down and defined. The new stage of archaeological research in Mesopotamia that began in those years lasted until after World War II.

In the south of the country, collaboration between the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania led to one of the most sensational discoveries in the history of archaeology. The monumental excavations of Tell el-Muqayyar, identified in 1850 as Ur of the Chaldees, are inextricably linked to the name of the British archaeologist Sir C. Leonard Woolley. He concentrated his forces in the sector around the sacred precinct of the ziggurat and found a cemetery containing some 2000 burials datable to the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. Some of them, which Woolley designated "royal", contained a wealth of valuable grave goods. Another important name at Ur was that of H. R. Hall, director of the work on the nearby small site of el Ubaid (1923–24), which revealed a hitherto unknown prehistoric phase.

After a preliminary campaign in 1927, the University of Pennsylvania Museum, excavated the prehistoric site of Tepe Gawra (1931–38). In the north, at Yorghana Tepe (Nuzi), Edward Chiera brought to light the remains of the capital of a small regional kingdom.



Between 1929 and 1937, Leroy Waterman and Clark Hopkins directed the six University of Michigan campaigns at Seleucia on the Tigris, a Hellenistic city not far from Baghdad.

Oxford University and the Field Museum of Chicago worked under the Assyriologist S. Langdon on two key sites in southern Iraq. The first was Jemdet Nasr (1926 and 1928), which gave its name to the entire phase in which the social and administrative conquests of the proto-urban period were consolidated. The second





was Kish (1923–33), with the two tells of Uhairra and Ingharra and an unbroken series of cultures from protohistory to the Parthian–Sasanid period.

The German Institute returned in 1928 to undertake large-scale archaeological excavations in Iraq. N. Nöldeke and J. Jordan resumed the excavation of Uruk concentrating their efforts around the largest sacred precinct in the city, the Eanna. Their deep trench (20 m), with 18 archaic occupation levels, constitutes one of the most complete stratigraphies of any site in ancient Mesopotamia And yielded the masterpieces of proto-urban sculpture today in the Iraq Museum.

Under the aegis of the Chicago Oriental Institute, Chiera obtained permission to dig at Khorsabad (1928–35). Those excavations revealed the colossal head of a winged bull with human face at the entrance to the throne room of Sargon. The same institution undertook a series of wide-ranging investigations in the basin of the Diyala, an affluent of the Tigris northeast of Baghdad (1930–38). Even though the spectacular discoveries of the 1920s had put Iraq on the archaeological map of the world, systematic approaches to excavation and especially to stratigraphy were still lacking. The establishment of the chronology of the principal ancient phases of Mesopotamia (especially for the proto-dynastic period) received an important contribution from Henri Frankfort, Seton Lloyd, Thorkild Jacobsen, and Pinhas Delougaz in the great regional centres of Tutub (Khafaja), Eshnunna (Tell Asmar), Tell Agrab, and Neribtum (Ischali). Thanks to their



work, a cross-section of the life of the urban centres in the region between 3200 and 1800 BC could be outlined.

The French expedition to Tello—in 1929–31 under H. de Genouillac and 1931–33 with A. Parrot—was important too. The Italian presence was more modest—a brief campaign on the Assyrian site of Qasr Shemamok (ancient Kilizi near Erbil, 1933) directed by Giuseppe Furlani and Doro Levi and sponsored by the Archaeological Museum of Florence.

After 1932, the Iraqi Department of Antiquities became more involved in the field. Until then Islamic archaeology had been in the background, but now the excavation and conservation of Islamic sites began to receive particular attention, and a museum of Islamic art was created. Digging began at Wasit and Kufah. By the end of the 1930s two Iraqi government expeditions were already under way. At Samarra private dwellings were excavated and large quantities of stucco decoration were recovered. At Wasit, Fuad Safar, a University of Chicago graduate, brought to light the mosque with the adjacent Dar al-Imara. In 1938 Kufah was declared a major archaeological site.

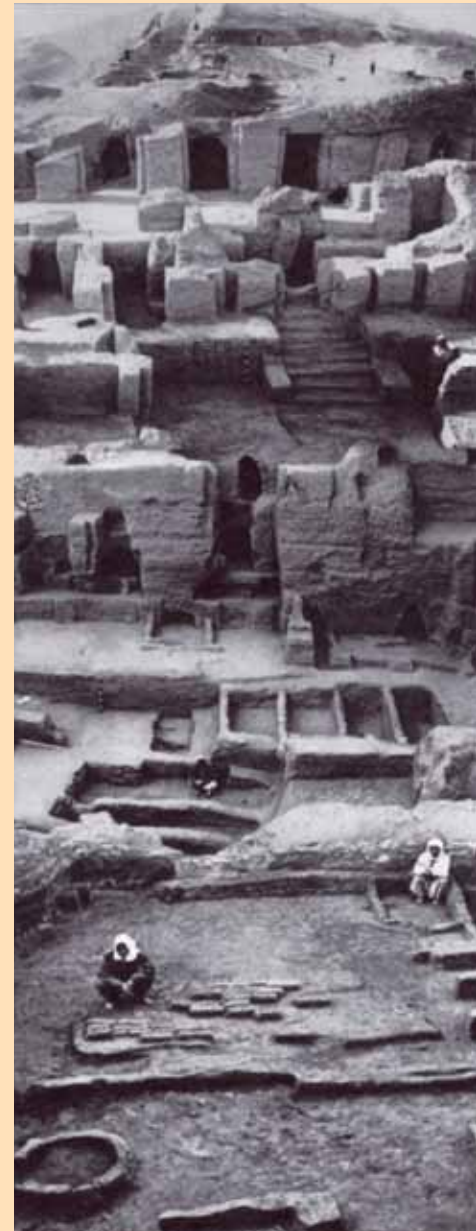
During World War II Seton Lloyd, technical consultant and, briefly, Director General of Antiquities, reorganized the now vast collections of the Iraq Museum by chronological criteria. At the end of the war the Iraqi scholarly journal of archaeology *Sumer* was founded. In the 1940s the General Direction entrusted to young Iraqi archaeologists trained in European universities excavations at Deer (Tell 'Uqair), a pre- and protohistoric settlement just south of Baghdad famous for a terraced temple with mural paintings, and at Hassuna in the north. Among Lloyd's closest collaborators were Taha Baqir and Fuad Safar, who held the highest posts in the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and whose names are part of the history of the excavations in that period. Taha Baqir (1912–84) was director of the mission at Quf (Dur Kurigalzu) and of the rescue excavation at Tell Harmal (Shaduppum; 1945), near Baghdad. He held the post of curator of the Iraq Museum (1941–53) and of Director General of Antiquities (1959–63).

The excavations of Eridu under Fuad Safar (1913–78), which began in 1946, brought to light the stratigraphy of building levels from the Ubaid period, through the proto-urban and protodynastic periods, up to the neo-Sumerian ziggurat.

In 1949 at Mosul one of the first provincial museums of Iraq was being readied to collect the materials from the new excavations in northern Iraq, in particular that of Hatra directed by Safar and Mohammed Ali.

The period after World War II marked the resumption of international collaboration. In 1948 Richard C. Haines and Donald E. McCown, representing the Chicago Oriental Institute and the University of Pennsylvania, dug at Nippur. In the temple quarter the so-called Northern Temple and that of Inanna came to light.

Between 1948 and 1955 the prehistorian Robert J. Braidwood directed an interdisciplinary project at Jarmo and other sites in Iraqi Kurdistan, coordinating the work of archaeologists, geologists, climatologists, zoologists, and botanists.



The Germans resumed research at Uruk under H. Lenzen (1947). They continued to investigate the ancient levels of the Eanna and opened trenches in other sectors of the city to reveal the Kassite (temple of Karaindash), Hellenistic-Parthian (temple of Gareus, Bit Resh, Irigal), and Sasanian phases.

Meanwhile Mallowan launched a long series of campaigns at Nimrud, resuming Layard's excavations of the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II and then expanding to the sectors of the ziggurat and the Ezida.

The 1950s and 1960s

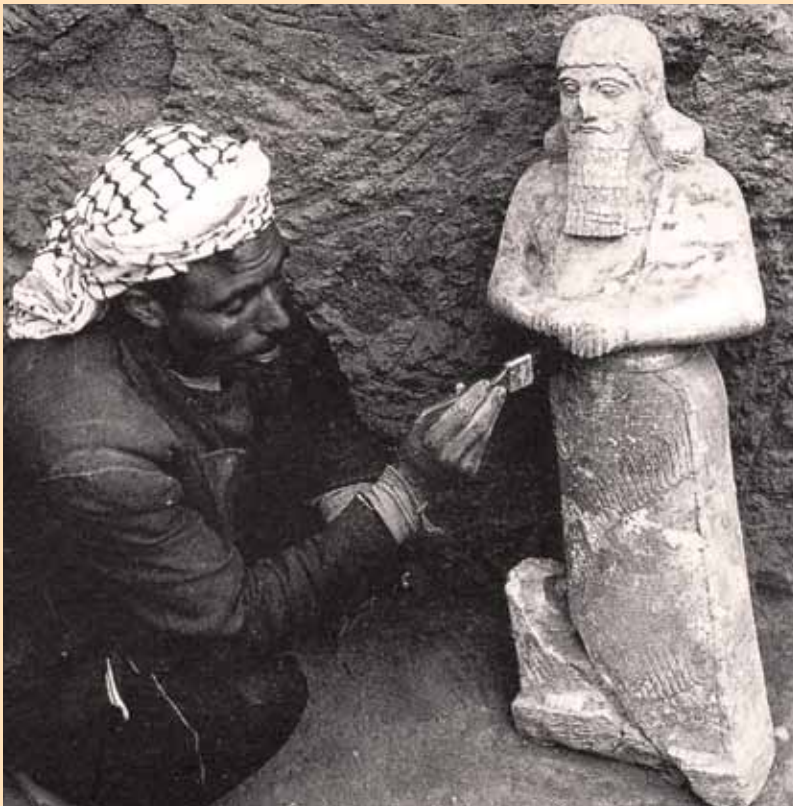
Archaeological work continued at Nimrud, the Assyrian capital, throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Mallowan's British expedition had begun in 1949 and centred on the excavation of the ziggurat, the temples of Ishtar and Ninurta, and the palace of Ashurnasirpal II, the

so-called Northwest Palace. An Iraqi mission was launched in 1956 under Behnam Abu as-Suf, who concentrated on restoring the throne room of that same palace.

The Chicago Oriental Institute also continued its research in the temple area at Nippur, under the direction of Donald E. McCown and, after 1972, of McGuire Gibson. There, the temples of Enlil and Inanna were identified as a scribes' quarter containing thousands of cuneiform tablets bearing literary and religious texts. The 1957–58 joint Iraqi–American project known as the Diyala Project, under Robert McAdams and Fuad Safar, enjoyed a high profile. Their work produced a vast surface survey of the lower Diyala basin for studying the material history of the settlements, and the use of aerial photography in archaeological research was put to the test.

Excavations continued. A Danish expedition, directed by Jørgen Laessøe, found an early Babylonian archive in the Dokan basin, at Tell Shemshara.

In 1957 the cornerstone of the new Iraq Museum building was laid. Construction was



completed in 1963 and the museum inaugurated in 1966. The objects were transferred from the old headquarters created by Gertrude Bell. The new structures also provided new headquarters for the Directorate General of Antiquities and a library, all of which made it one of the greatest archaeological museums in the world.

The foreign archaeological expeditions became gradually more numerous. In 1951 an excavation in eastern Kurdistan directed by Ralph S. Solecki identified the Shanidar Cave, dating to the 10th millennium BC, in which were discovered remains of the so-called Neanderthal man.

In 1965, David Oates led a new British expedition at Tell al Rimah near Nineveh. He identified the large settlement as the ancient city of Karana, datable to the reign of Hammurapi, and brought to light a palace and a temple that attested the use of mud-brick arches. The continuity of life in the settlement was further documented by a neo-Assyrian temple within which was found the famous stela of Adad-nirari III.



In this climate of intense activity, the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino, founded by Giorgio Gullini in 1963, launched its research in the area of al-Mada'in, on the sites of Coche (the ancient Veh Ardashir) and Seleucia on the Tigris, the Hellenistic city that best exemplifies the meeting of the Mesopotamian and Greek traditions. The group, directed by Antonio Invernizzi, began work at Tell 'Omar in 1964 and, in 1967–72, brought to light an enormous public archive with thousands of clay seals.

The 1970s and 1980s

The international presence increased further in the 1970s and 1980s.

The German excavations at Isin, directed by Barthel Hrouda, started in 1973. The French began exploration at the site of Larsa in 1968 under Jean-Louis Huot, while the



Belgians, under Hermann Gasche, worked at Tell ed-Der. In 1975 British archaeologists, under J. N. Postgate, started work on the protodynastic site of Abu Salabikh. Polish scholars resumed the excavations of the Palace of Tiglat-pileser III at Nimrud, and, under J. Meuszynsky and R. Sobolewski, brought to light new monumental bas-reliefs.

In 1975 on the same site, Iraqi archaeologists directed by M. S. al-Iraqi found numerous valuable ivories, while the conclusion of B. Abu as-Suf's excavations at Tell es-Sawwan, in progress since 1964, completed the picture of the very ancient Samarra culture, which had been superimposed on the Hassuna culture in the 6th millennium BC.

In 1978, a University of Baghdad expedition, directed by W. Al-Jadir, began work in the sanctuary of Sippar, the so-called E-babbar. The excavations continued for years, until the discovery, in 1986, of a neo-Babylonian library on shelves of unbaked brick built into the masonry of one of the temple rooms.

At the end of the 1970s, vast programs of hydrologic restructuring in Iraq foresaw the construction of dikes for the creation of artificial basins that would submerge a large number of archaeological sites. International invitations were extended for rescue excavations of the areas at risk, and enormous excavation sites were opened and engaged the international scientific community in Iraq for about a decade.

The first two large-scale rescue projects were the one in the region of the Jebel Hamrin, on the river Diyala, and that in the area of Haditha, on the Euphrates.

Begun in 1977, the Hamrin project, was perhaps the most extensive rescue intervention in the Near East, and permitted identification and investigation of some 70 sites. One of these was the protodynastic site of Tell Gubba, where a Japanese expedition, led by H. Fuji, brought to light a building with circular concentric walls. Another was Tell Yelkhi, investigated by Italian archaeologists, which was important for its long stratigraphic sequence. And at Tell Madhur an Anglo-Canadian expedition identified an inhabited centre of the Ubaid period with an interesting a cruciform building.

Some years later, in 1980–81, rescue work around Haditha began. The French archaeologists excavating at Khirbet ed-Diniyeh identified a mercantile outpost with a wealth of palaeo-Babylonian tablets. On the island of 'Anah, a joint Iraqi and British excavation brought to light an important neo-Assyrian settlement, perhaps headquarters of a local governor. At Kifrin, the Italian expedition brought to light a Roman imperial fortress, with residential buildings and baths, placed there to guard the Syrian *limes*, or frontier.

The third and last rescue project took place on the Upper Tigris, near Eski Mosul, between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. Of particular importance were the finds from excavations in that area that shed light on the protodynastic cultural phase known as Nineveh 5, found throughout in northern Mesopotamia and attested at many sites, including Tell Marrana (Iraqi and Italian-German excavations). Tell Fisna and Tell Jessary (a Japanese dig under Ken Matsumoto), Tell Kutani (French, directed by J. D. Forest), and



Tell Mohammed Arab (British, directed by Michael Roaf). In addition, Italian excavations at Kirbet Hatara revealed an uninterrupted stratigraphic sequence from the Halaf phase to Nineveh 5.

Iraqi archaeologists continued their research at Eridu; the University of Turin, under R. Ricciardi Venco, conducted excavations at Hatra in a residential quarter; the Iraqi-Italian Institute of Archaeology resumed work inside Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud under P. Fiorina and excavated test trenches at Babylon under G. Bergamini between 1987 and 1989.

The 1990s

The most extraordinary archaeological discovery of the last fifty years was made at Nimrud at the beginning of the 1990s, during excavation and restoration by the State Board of Antiquities that had begun in 1988 under M. S. Damerji.

The restoration plan included the cleaning of some rooms in the residential quarters of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II (the Northwest Palace). When Mallowan had worked there, his foreman, S. M. Mahmud Hussein, noted how some of the tiles belonging to the pavement of room MM looked irregular, almost as though they had been put there later to replace the original tiles, and had them removed to verify whether his hypothesis was correct.

A vaulted hypogaeon chamber was revealed underneath the pavement. Access to it was through an antechamber with steep staircase and contained two sarcophagi that held female

remains and a variety of precious grave goods, including gold *fibulae* and anklets (hypogaeum I).

This exceptional discovery spurred the Iraqi archaeologists to seek further anomalies in the pavements of the palace complex, which led them to remove the pavement of room 49. There they found another hypogaeon tomb. It consisted of a chamber and vaulted antechamber and was accessible by means of a staircase on axis with the main room (hypogaeum II). Conspicuous within it was a sarcophagus

containing the remains of at least two females and a stone slab bearing an inscription that identified the burial as that of Queen Yabaya, consort of King Tiglat-peleser III (745–727





BC). The sarcophagus was surrounded by one of the richest sets of grave goods ever seen, with crowns, diadems, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and rings of gold and precious stones. More than 150 precious objects were inventoried: in addition to vessels made of rock crystal, there were traces of the deceased women's linen clothing embroidered with gold as well as objects bearing inscriptions of other

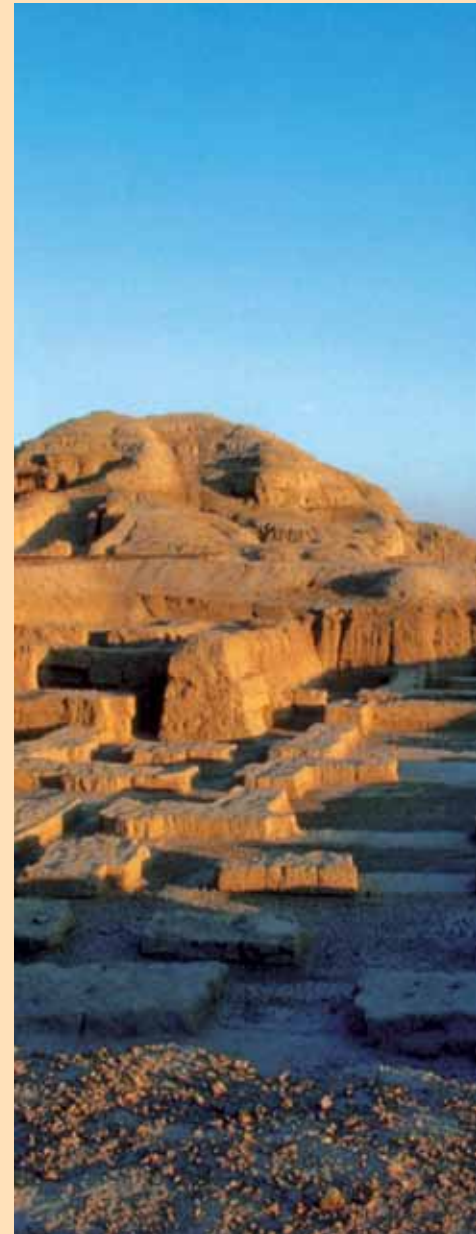
Assyrian queens, such as Banitu, consort of Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC), and Atalya, wife of Sargon II (722–705 BC).

Next, beneath the adjacent room (57) was discovered another antechamber tomb (hypogaeum III), containing the sarcophagus of Queen Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua, wife of Ashurnasirpal II (884–858 BC), the sovereign who had refounded the city. Here another treasure lay inside a bronze chest—vessels, crowns, cylinder seals, and finely embroidered clothes—for a total of more than 400 gold and silver objects, weighing some 23 kg (50.6 lb).

The last tomb (hypogaeum IV) was found in 1990, but had already been looted in antiquity. Still, this partial disappointment in no way diminished the importance of an excavation that in only two years had led the Iraqi archaeologists to a sensational discovery, which some scholars consider comparable only to that of the tomb of Tutankhamen. The extraordinary finds were displayed briefly at the beginning of the 1990s, and for a few hours in 2004, then removed to permanent safe keeping.

Archaeological activity in the 1990s was dominated by Iraqi expeditions, though some foreign groups overcame the difficulties of the embargo to continue their work. Austrian archaeologists, under H. Trenkwalder of Innsbruck University, investigated the ziggurat of Borsippa and the adjacent temple of Nabu, which documented a continuity of use up to the Parthian period. German archaeologists, directed by R. M. Boehmer, continued to work at Uruk, and the University of Turin continued the excavations begun at the end of the 1980s at Hatra. The Italians ascertained that under of the temple precinct of the city, whose monumental remains are datable to the 2nd century AD, lay the remains of architectural phases dating to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.

Finally, beginning in 1999 a joint Iraqi-German mission, under the direction of M. Hussein and Peter Miglus, undertook the surface excavation of a residential quarter of Assur and reopened Taha Baqir's old dig at Tell Harmal, to reach the site's early Babylonian levels. In the same period, exclusively Iraqi missions investigated the sites of Umma, Marad, and, under the direction of D. George Youkhanna, the site of Umm al-Agraiab, with its splendid examples of perfectly preserved Ubaid tripartite buildings.





3. History and Art of Mesopotamia

From prehistory to the 4th millennium

Our knowledge of the prehistory of Mesopotamia derives prevalently from sites in the north: small groups of hunter-gatherers lived in caves or semi-protected shelters, but also in open-air camps, supplementing the food they procured by hunting and fishing with berries, roots, and spontaneous vegetables.

The first stable villages appeared around 10,000 BC, and the dwellings changed from simple huts to articulated units of pressed clay. The first great conquests in the history of man were taking place: the terrain was fertile and precipitation sufficient for cultivating the land and growing grains and legumes. The sheep, the goat, and the dog were domesticated, followed by pigs and cattle and only later the donkey, horse, and camel.

The figurative art is rich in animal representations most commonly depicted in scenes of hunting. At Umm Dabaghiya, around 6000 BC, large warehouses were used for the working of dried meat and skins. At Jarmo, Tepe Gawra, and Tell Sotto artefacts of stone, bone, and clay, as well as the design of the houses, reflect more articulated forms of production and conservation.

The technique of pottery production developed. The Hassuna culture (6th millennium), which made the first technological advance in the firing and production processes, was followed by the Samarra culture, with its finer and more variegated pottery. In architecture (Tell es-Sawwan, Tell Songor) regular and complex building plans were introduced. The figurines from Tell es-Sawwan introduced gestures that return in the later Sumerian worshippers. The Halaf culture, which overlapped with the Hassuna and outlasted it, had some of the most refined pottery in the ancient world. The female clay figurines show clear attributes of maternity.

In the south, the soil of the alluvial plain was very fertile but only if properly irrigated, and so irrigation systems were developed. The first villages there belonged to the Ubaid culture (5th millennium), which spread as far as Syria and Iran. There was both painted pottery and a mass production made on the slow wheel. Some sites reveal the significant transformation of the society. New building plans stand out for their monumentality and workmanship. In the south (Eridu, Uruk) as in the north (Tepe Gawra) the typical features of Mesopotamian architecture were set: compact volume, tripartite interior division,



3. History and Art of Mesopotamia



articulation of the external walls with pilasters and niches.

The most significant outcome of these transformations occurred in the proto-urban period (4th millennium). The perfection of agricultural practices, development of technologies, increase in productivity, specialized organization of work, and hierarchical articulation of the community are reflected in the growth of the city, central organism of a complex and articulated social structure. Uruk is the metropolis of a densely populated plain where a complex administration elaborated new systems of registration and control of the goods of the community, the first step towards the introduction of a real system of writing.

At Uruk (Warka), the Eanna precinct and the high terrace of Anu attest the existence of a monumental architecture. At the head of the community was the personage depicted on the Lion Hunt stela. The artistic and technical skill of the specialist carvers can be seen in the female face from Uruk, whose expressive force is not diminished by the loss of materials originally used for finishing touches, and in the ritual vase from Uruk, synthetic images of urban society. Other stone cult vessels evoke the agro-pastoral world also seen on the cylinder seals. The Uruk culture spread beyond the borders of Sumer, thanks to commercial emporia along the main trade routes to Syria, Turkey, and Iran.



From the city-state to the Akkadian Empire

The 3rd millennium BC was a time of heated rivalry between cities, each ruled by its own sovereign. In addition to Uruk and Kish, there emerged Ur, Nippur, Umma, and Lagash. The economic prosperity of the ancient cities seems gradually to have attracted nomad populations; the nomenclature attests the presence of Semitic peoples in Mesopotamia alongside the ancient Sumerian inhabitants.

In this period, designated “early dynastic”, a clear division between civil and religious power existed. Visible evidence of this are the new constructions built next to the great urban sanctuaries. The holders of power were distinguished by honorific titles and can no longer be identified with the priest-kings of the Uruk period. A document of enormous historic importance in this regard is the so-called Sumerian King List, which lists the sequence of cities’ sovereigns (Gilgamesh, the mythical king of Uruk, among them). These rulers formed true dynasties, like those of Uruk and Kish, or like the first dynasty of Ur, whose predecessors, grand lords of the city, had themselves buried together with their servants in sumptuous tombs.

Despite the tensions between cities, Mesopotamia was already unified by a single culture that expressed itself through a common language and also through art. A typical product of the period is the statuettes of worshippers dedicated in the temples. The typical figure



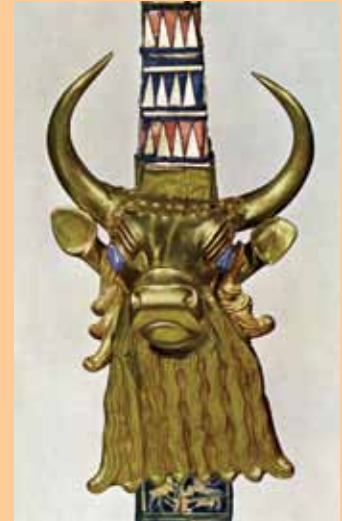
has its hands joined at the breast in an attitude of devotion and the eyes wide open, possibly expressing a transcendent colloquy with the divinity.

The precious grave goods that accompanied some personages of high rank into the afterlife attest

a refinement never seen before and rarely equalled. Meanwhile the victorious sovereign was celebrated on stone reliefs and stelae.

In the last centuries of the 3rd millennium, at the peak of its development, Mesopotamian society was transformed from the fragmented collection of city-states of the early dynastic period into a true empire able to impose its control even outside Sumer. Creator of this power was a Semitic king, Sargon (2335–2279 BC), who unified the country and whose new capital city, Akkad, has unfortunately never been identified by excavations.

The figurative art became increasingly naturalistic, in part thanks to greater sophistication in carving stone and technical progress in metal fusion, which made bronze statuary possible. The political ideology too seems to have evolved significantly, since



3. History and Art of Mesopotamia



at least one of the Akkadian kings, Naram Sin, was deified and depicted with the horned tiara, the most typical attribute of divinity.

And yet the empire had a relatively brief duration, crumbling because of the repeated incursions by the Guti, a people from the Zagros mountains. In this chaotic time, the city of Lagash managed for a while to achieve pre-eminence over the others, but it was only with Ur-Nammu (2112–2095 BC), king of the third dynasty of Ur, that the country again found its unity. The statuary of this period of neo-Sumerian renaissance develops and broadens the Akkadian interest in naturalism, and it was then that what may be the most famous Mesopotamian monument type, the ziggurat, achieved its definitive form, a ponderous terraced structure whose function was to support a temple and that evolved directly from the high terrace of the Uruk period.



Mesopotamia in the 2nd millennium BC

The political scene of first centuries of the 2nd millennium BC was marked by the presence of a number of Amorite dynasties in the larger cities of the Mesopotamian plain—Isin and Larsa in the south; Eshnunna and Babylon in the centre; Assur in the north of the country.

After years of struggles in which supremacy was tossed from one competing kingdom to another, the great Hammurapi, sixth Amorite king of Babylonia, able statesman and general, best known to posterity for his famous Code of Laws, finally conquered and unified the entire country.

At the beginning of the 16th century BC Babylonia fell under the rule of the Kassites, one of the many peoples that, since the middle of the 3rd millennium, had swept in from the east over the Zagros mountains towards the Mesopotamian plain. When they assumed the government of the country, they also adopted the writing system and language they found there. The foundation of their new capital, Dur Kurigalzu (present-day 'Aqar Quf), legitimized the kingship within a broader political program that intended to preserve Babylonia's ancient cultural status and bring the country back to the centre of international diplomatic relations, a milieu that included the pharaoh of Egypt as well as the rulers of Khatti, Mitanni, and Assyria. It was no accident that the ziggurat, more than 45 m high, was dedicated to the Mesopotamian god Enlil, who more than any other legitimized the royal power.

In 1225 BC, the capture of Babylonia by Tukulti-Ninurta I, the most important royal and military personality of the Middle Assyrian Kingdom, brought the destruction of Babylon and the exile of the statue of the god Marduk to Assur. The Kassites, who by the first half of the 12th century BC had been gravely weakened, were ravaged by the Elamite army. Works of art were looted—including the stela of Naram Sin of Akkad and even Hammurapi's code—still venerated for their profound cultural and political significance.

Only in the last century of the 2nd millennium, with the second Isin dynasty and Nebuchadnezzar I, who brought the statue of Marduk back from Susa, would Babylonia again experience a true religious and political rebirth.

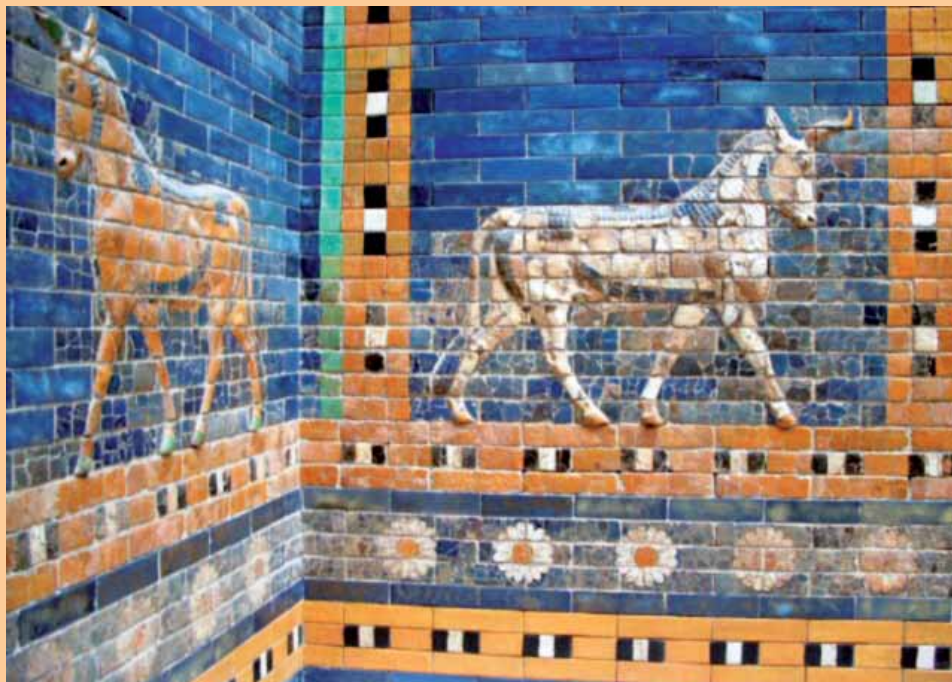


The Assyrian Empire and the Babylonian Renaissance

At the beginning of the 1st millennium BC, the Assyrian empire became the leading eastern power. The first real architect of this achievement was Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC), who used military conquest gradually to extend Assyrian dominion from Cilicia to the Zagros mountains. In so doing he thus fulfilled the ancient dream of Mesopotamian sovereigns to reach the “Upper Sea”, the Mediterranean. Some of his successors, such as Shalmaneser III and Tiglath-peleser III, continued this expansion, which reached its maximum extent, Egypt, with the conquests of Ashurbanipal (668–631 BC).

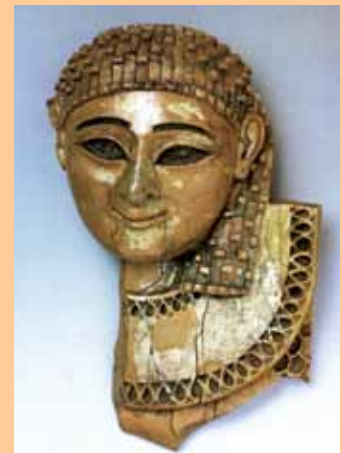
The art of this period centred on the celebration of the sovereigns and their victories and expressed itself primarily through the monumental stone reliefs of the royal palaces of Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh. There cuneiform inscriptions recounted great battles, the ruler was depicted in ceremonial acts of valour. Colossal statues of winged figures, with animal body and human head—called *lamassu*—stood guard at the gates. Ivory and gold furnishings and ornaments attested the sumptuous life at court.

Babylonia and southern Mesopotamia, which remained culturally autonomous, attained their greatest splendour under the Chaldean king Nebuchadrezzar (604–562), who reconstructed the city, the sanctuary of the god Marduk—where the great ziggurat



Etemenanki was built—and the monumental gate dedicated to Ishtar, decorated with enamelled bricks depicting processions of bulls and dragon-serpents, called *mushkhush*, while striding lions were depicted on the so-called Procession Street. The excavations brought to light the remains of the city of Nebuchadnezzar.

The political and cultural importance that Babylon achieved in this period long outlived the Chaldean dynasty. The arrival of the Achaemenids never erased the established local traditions.





Seleucids, Parthians, and Sasanians

The conquests of the Macedonian Alexander the Great, whose empire extended from Greece to the Indus, represented the first penetration of the east by a western power. Mesopotamia fell under his sway in 331 and after his death, in 323, was ruled by his successors, the Seleucid kings. In the art of the Seleucid period, the Babylonian tradition could still be seen alongside the Greek.

In 141 BC Mesopotamia was conquered by Mithridates I (171–138 BC), whose empire extended east and west from Parthia, in Central Asia. In this period, the commercial relationships with the Far East and the Roman West, which had begun during the Seleucid period, were consolidated, and Mesopotamia became one of the main commercial crossroads between the Mediterranean and China. This development meant that such centres of ancient tradition as Uruk, Nippur, and Assur continued to prosper, but also made room for new cities, such as Hatra, which became the principal caravan centre of the Jazirah, and Ctesiphon (still not identified), which became the capital of the empire in the heart of Babylonia. In these cities, the figurative art revived themes introduced during the Seleucid period, but re-elaborated them according to a typically eastern taste.

Weakened by internal conflicts and continuous border fighting with the Romans, the Parthians finally lost control of their immense kingdom to the Iranian Sasanians in the 3rd century AD. The new dynasty, which governed the empire with strong centralization and an efficient bureaucracy, chose new trade routes to the detriment of some ancient centres and the benefit of others.

Mesopotamia, however, remained the economic and political heart of the new empire. Intensive agriculture was made possible by a more efficient network of irrigation canals. Alongside a new royal city, Veh Ardashir (Coche), the area in which the Seleucids and Parthians had built their capitals was strengthened further. Not by chance, it is in that same zone, called al-Mada'in in Arabic, that the remains are still visible today of the greatest Sasanian monument in Mesopotamia, the Taq-i-Kisra, the only surviving remains of the larger palace complex of Khosrow I (531–579 AD).



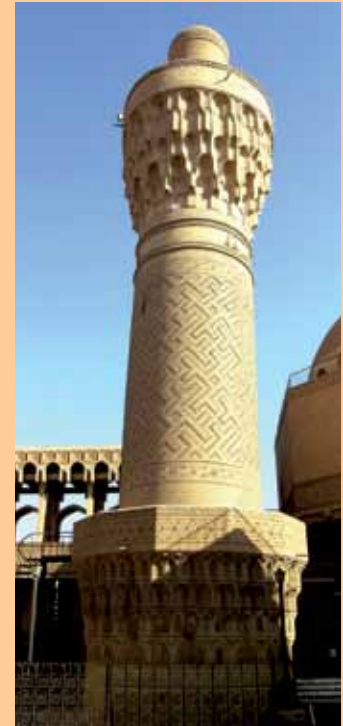
Islamic Iraq

Between the Arab conquest in the 7th century and the 1910s, the name Iraq denoted the flatlands between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf, an area that anyone travelling between Central Asia and the Mediterranean had to pass through.

The Arab caliphs, the successors of the Prophet Muhammad, with the strength of their faith and their army, created an empire that extended from North Africa to the Indus River.

The history of Islamic Iraq has been dominated by the rivalry among the principal ethnic groups in the Muslim world, the Arabs, the Iranians, and the Turks. Iraq was also a great centre of Islamic culture as well as the birthplace of several sects that divided Islam. From the beginning Islamic culture brought achievements of great originality in the visual arts, architecture, and literature. In less than 50 years, the first Abbasid caliphate in Iraq, mainly under Harun ar-Rashid and al-Ma'mun (170–218 AH/786–833 AD), brought Arabo-Islamic culture to peaks of civilization without equal in the contemporary world. The centre of learning in Baghdad known as the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) played an essential role in the harmonious blending of Greek, Persian, and Indian elements that made this flowering possible. Iraq came to regard itself as a kind of privileged heir of all former civilizations and felt obliged to accept and develop their legacies.

The political history of the region may be summarized as follows. After being the metropolitan province of the Arabo-Islamic empire under the caliphs' more or less effective authority, Iraq fell under the control of the Buyid dynasty of Iran and then the Seljuk Turks. Then, after the Mongol invasion, which hastened its decline, it became a dominion of Mongol and later Turkmen and Persian dynasties established in Iran and remained for almost four centuries under Ottoman rule, to emerge again as an independent state as result of World War I.





4. Hatra, City of the Sun

The city of Hatra stands in the flat region of southern Jazirah, between the middle Tigris and Euphrates, not far from the wadi Tharthar. The shallow water table made it easy to dig wells and thus the place was attractive to nomad Arab tribes early on. The city very likely evolved from an earlier temporary encampment.

Strategically located at the centre of a small independent state in the Parthian orbit, Hatra was caught between the rival powers of Rome and Parthia from the beginning of the 1st century AD, when they divided the legacy of the Seleucid kings, successors of Alexander the Great, through the 3rd century.

The Roman emperor Trajan besieged Hatra in vain after his conquest of Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital, in 116 AD. During the 2nd century it enjoyed a period of prosperity, to judge from the construction of a new city wall between 120 and 140, accompanied by a grandiose program of stone public buildings. The city resisted another siege by a Roman emperor, Septimius Severus, at the end of the 2nd century, only to be taken and sacked by the Sasanians in 240/241 AD. After that event, Hatra was no longer systematically inhabited.





In the absence of stratigraphic evidence, the chronology of Hatra's buildings is largely based on the dated inscriptions in Aramaic. The oldest found so far dates to 98 AD; the latest from the years 235–238, just before the city fell. Little is known of its political and social organization. The inscriptions indicate that Hatra must originally have been ruled by a personage known as “Lord”; in the second half of the 2nd century, the title of “Lord” was replaced by that of “King” and sometimes “King of the Arabs”.

Arab stories and legends have preserved the memory of Hatra's rise and fall. At the end of the 12th century, the ruins at the centre of the city were briefly reused by the Atabeg of Mosul, probably as military outpost and caravanserai.

Even if the conquest of the East by Alexander the Great imposed Greek as official language in many parts of the Near East, Aramaic remained the lingua franca. The Aramaic of Hatra, its official language, is mixed with elements of pre-Islamic Arabic with Iranian influence. These multiethnic elements are particularly evident in the nomenclature. Unlike the inscriptions from Palmyra in the same period, for example, the Hatrene texts provide



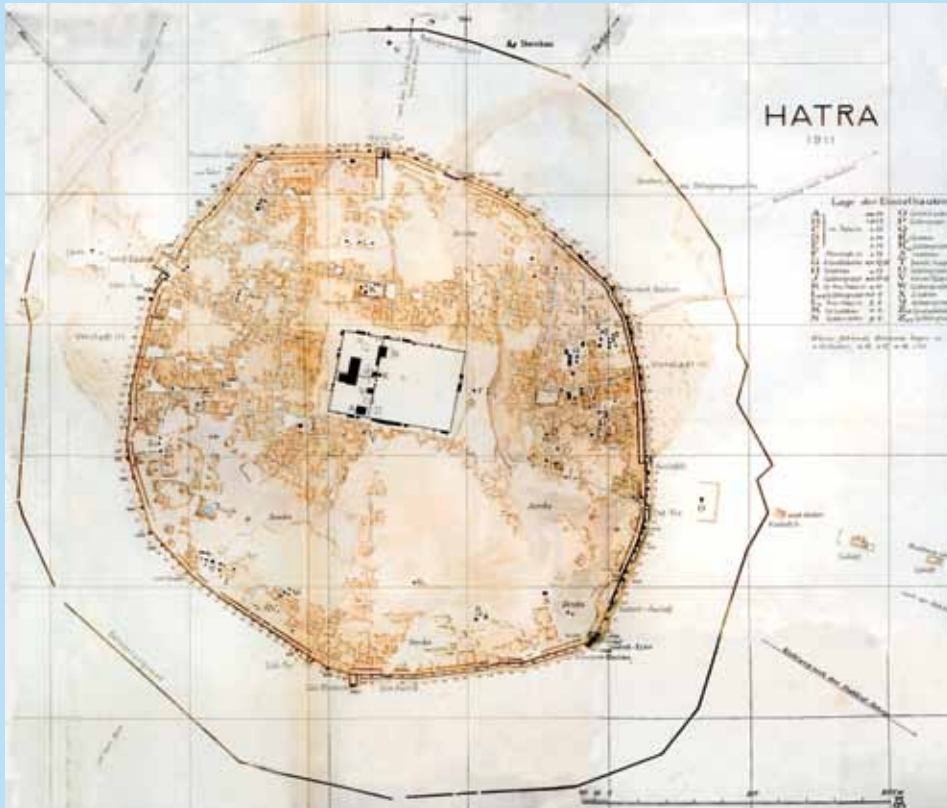
4. Hatra, city of the Sun

a sharp picture of the society's political and religious life. For example, some of the rulers bore both a political and a religious title. Most interesting are the juridical texts, two of them dated to 151/152 AD, that mention different penalties for crimes committed by citizens and by foreigners. Some Latin inscriptions on altars to the Sun god attest the presence of a Roman garrison at Hatra between 235 and 238 AD.

The discovery

The imposing ruins of the city impressed European travellers and archaeologists as early as the 19th century (J. Ross, W. Ainsworth, A. H. Layard). But it was only between 1903 and 1911 that W. Andrae, the German archaeologist working nearby at Assur, undertook the first systematic exploration of the site.

The Iraq Directorate of Antiquities began archaeological investigations of Hatra in 1951 under Fuad Safar and Mohammed Ali Mustafa. The excavations concentrated on the





temple buildings. Large-scale restoration began in 1960, especially of the buildings of the central sanctuary.

Massive reconstruction and restoration works were resumed in 1989. In 1990 a brief excavation campaign by a Polish team under Michel Gawlikowski brought to light the earliest city wall. The Italian Archaeological Mission, directed by Roberta Ricciardi Venco, has been active on the site since 1987, with the excavation of a residential quarter and, since 1996, with stratigraphic soundings within the main sanctuary.

The city plan

Hatra has a more or less circular layout with the large metropolitan sanctuary of the Sun god in the centre.

The street system is irregular with blocks of various sizes and orientations. The main streets, never wider than 6 m, are rarely perfectly straight, and, though many of them originate at the perimeter of the great sanctuary, are not radial to it.

The defence system, which gives the city its shape, consists of two lines of concentric fortifications.

The outermost line, which today appears as a modest elevation of the terrain, was originally constructed with compacted earth or mud brick with stone foundations. It does not seem to have a single plan and may have been built by the Sasanians during the siege of 240.

The internal circuit, 6 km in circumference, encloses an area of more than 300 ha. It consists of a curtain of mud bricks on a high plinth of limestone ashlars. Its more than 160 square towers, with slits, are surrounded by a broad, deep moat. Short bridges crossed the moat at the four city gates, located approximately at the cardinal points. Only the northern and eastern gate have been brought completely to light; they are flanked by towers and, in the last phase, had the characteristic bayonet shape.

The main wall was constructed prior to 151/152 AD, a date provided by inscriptions found at the two gates.

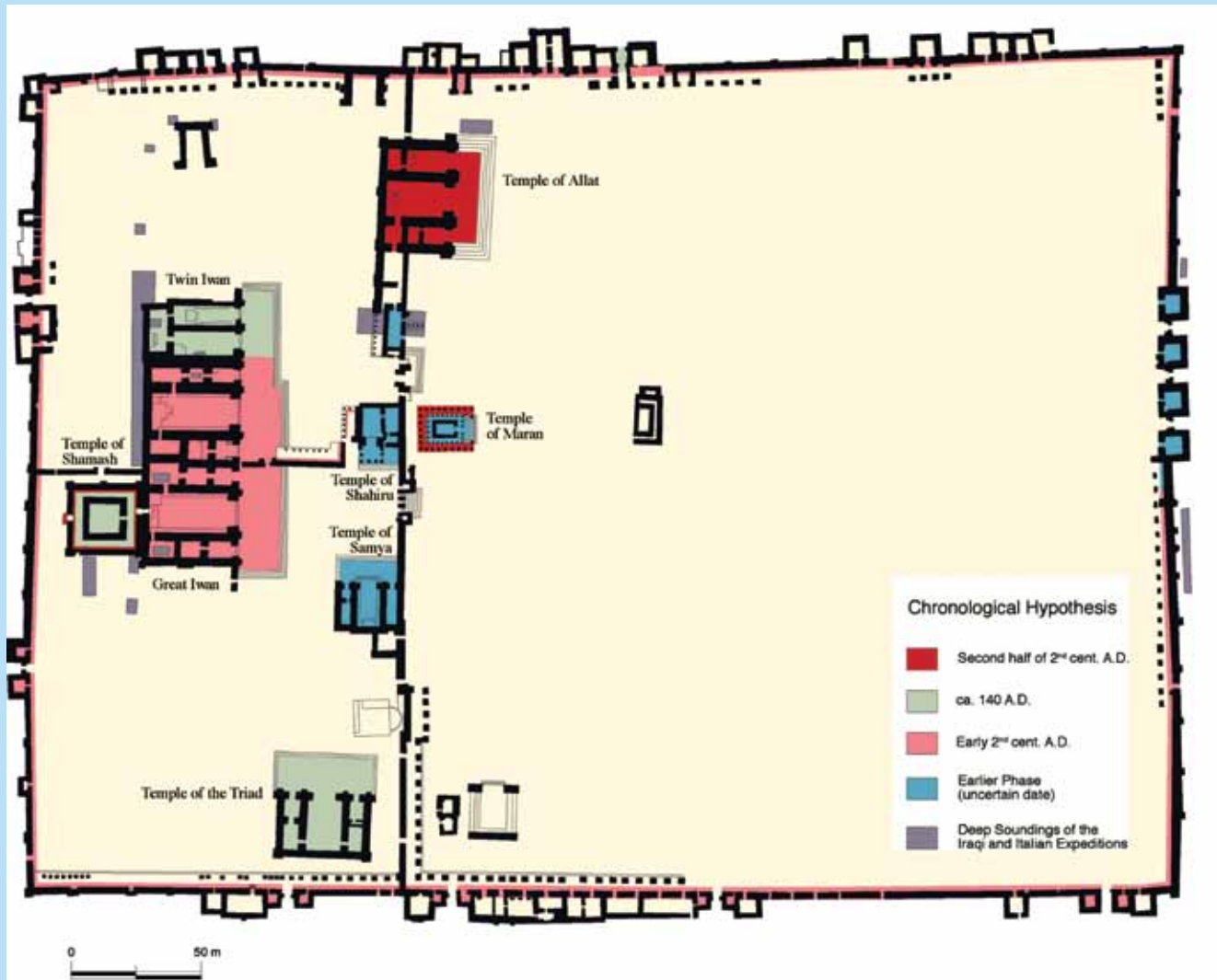
It was probably after the sieges that the walls were reinforced with bastions and massive stone towers. Within the city, mud-brick ramps permitted the war machines—like the catapult found at the northern gate—to reach the tops of the towers. Inside, the defensive system was later reinforced further by a continuous stone and mud-brick wall parallel to the principal circuit. The circular defensive wall replaces an earlier straight-sided wall that enclosed a much smaller city. This too was made of stone and mud brick, with towers and square corner bastions. To judge from the southeast corner, the only one so far brought to light, this wall must have existed at the beginning of the 2nd century, that is, at the time of the siege of Trajan. The boundaries of the earliest city have not been clearly recognized, but the urban area must have extended irregularly around the great central sacred precinct.



4. Hatra, city of the Sun

Most of the funerary buildings of Hatra are found between the earliest fortification and the main wall, into which some of them are incorporated. They are built of stone on a square plan, sometimes with an upper storey. The interior space is occupied by one or more rooms, flat-ceilinged or vaulted.

The multiple burials within the tombs, belonging to family or tribal groups according to the inscriptions, were mostly sacked in antiquity. Most are inhumation burials, with only



4. Hatra, city of the Sun



very rare cases of cremation. The receptacles for the dead were opened in the walls or in the floor, or constructed with stone slabs attached to the walls. The tombs incorporated into the walls are certainly earlier than 140 AD.

The Main Sanctuary

Coin legends give the city's name as Hatra of Shamash (the Precinct of the Sun), and indeed the great precinct (ca 435 x 320 m) of the sanctuary to the Sun god, in the centre of the city, represents not only the city's full name but the reason for its very existence. The sanctuary, interregional in character, also housed the cult of other deities and was a place of pilgrimage for Arab populations. Three large gates facing east

constituted the principal access and gave onto an enormous open space, practically without buildings. The precinct wall is articulated with various rooms and porticoes.

The open space is delimited by a wall that cuts across the width of the precinct. Behind the wall, at the western end of the precinct, two monumental gateways lead to the most sacred area, that containing temples of Shahiru, Samya, the Triad, and the complex that includes the Great Iwans, with the temple of Shamash behind it, and the Twin Iwans. In front of this wall, facing east between the two gateways stands the temple to the god Maran, of Graeco-Roman design, probably the earliest building in the precinct. At the northern end of the wall is inserted the temple of Allat, also facing east.

Behind the wall, the Great Iwans complex is more monumental and better preserved than the others. It is 115 m long and is characterized by the arched openings of eight iwans facing east. The iwan, a typical space in Parthian architecture that was later widely used in Sasanian and Islamic architecture, is a rectangular vaulted room with one short side almost completely open.

Most of the temples of the sanctuary have a tripartite plan, with a large central iwan and smaller two-storey lateral iwans. Exceptions are the Temple of Shahiru, the Square Temple of Shamash, and the Temple of Maran.

The present complex of sanctuary buildings is the result of various building projects carried out over little more than a hundred years, mostly within the 2nd century AD. Test trenches at different points in the sanctuary have revealed the existence of earlier building phases. For example, behind the Great Iwans was found evidence of two stretches of wall, more or less parallel, one of stone with semicircular towers and one even earlier, of mud brick with a rectangular tower.

The decoration of the main temples is extraordinarily exuberant, almost "baroque", with Hellenistic and Roman elements, but used more as ornament than for their meaning.



As in all Parthian art and architecture, apotropaic and magic motifs like griffins, scorpions, evil eyes, Medusa heads, and fantastic serpent-shaped creatures are found. Such decorative overabundance is particularly characteristic of the 2nd century AD; the temples of Shahiru and of Samya, probably earlier, do not have it.

The voussoirs composing the archivolts of all the iwans are decorated in high relief (figures, busts of deities and rulers, religious symbols). The capitals are very varied; some of those dating from the second half of the century are carved with small human heads with a variety of facial expressions.

The temple façades were further embellished with numerous statues on stone consoles.



The other temples

So far 14 temple buildings have been found in addition to those in the main sanctuary. Their plans reveal a confluence of elements from the Babylonian and Assyrian traditions. A large, wide antecella precedes a cella, usually deep, which contains the altar and the sacred effigy. In these smaller temples are worshipped, alongside the triad of Maran, Martan, and Bar Marayn, deities of the Mesopotamian tradition (such as Nabu and Nergal) not found in the main sanctuary.

Also unlike the main temples, these temples have yielded inscriptions that attest the presence in Hatra of Arab tribes, both nomad and settled.

They present the rich architectural decoration typical of the main temples only sporadically. But within them were found an extraordinary number of statues, reliefs, and objects that indicate a close connection of the owner with the regal power and with the main sanctuary. Numerous reliefs depict Arab deities worshipped in the sanctuary as well as statues of the sovereigns who, for their part, boasted the title of “King of the Arabs”.

Furthermore, only in these temples has been found evidence of the presence in Hatra of foreign communities that dedicated statues and stelae, in Latin or Palmyrene, to the deities of the local pantheon. In addition, the lesser temples have yielded a variety of ritual objects not attested in the main temples, such as boxes for offerings, miniature temples, and small altars.

Houses

What is known of Hatra's domestic architecture comes from the excavation of 15 houses. The private houses are built of mud brick on a stone base; the roofs are vaulted in rubble with gypsum mortar.

Though the houses range in size from 220 to 2700 m², the ground plan is the same: the house is articulated, according to Mesopotamian tradition, around a central courtyard with the main reception room, here an iwan, usually on the south side. The entrance was usually located in a corner of the courtyard, through an L-shaped route that impeded a direct view of the interior from the street. In the courtyard, occasionally with a portico on one side, a staircase leads to the rooftop terrace.

The largest house brought to light so far is that of Ma'nu, situated to the south of the main sanctuary, adjacent to temple I. It is articulated in diverse units; the main one is reached by a long entrance corridor and surrounds a courtyard, with two facing iwans to north and south and a portico along the west side; three smaller units, independent suites with courtyard, complete the house to the east, while another courtyard with rooms, west of the central unit, may have been used for productive activities.

Along the North Street is another large house, Building A, brought to light by the



Italian Mission. The inscriptions found indicate that it belonged to the chief priest of the temple of Shahiru. Enlarged several times, by 200 AD it occupied a surface of about 1850 m² and was articulated in more units with specific functions. The most important were around the central courtyard, which had a reception iwan on the east and an altar. The other two units of the house are articulated around two secondary courtyards, the southern with a curiously apsidal iwan, the northern probably for living quarters. A rectangular room, whose walls were decorated with hunting scenes, links the central courtyard with the southern unit of the house.

Art

The visual art of Hatra, especially sculpture, the richest corpus of Parthian statuary known, constitutes an extraordinary body of evidence. Found mostly in the temples, the statues represent deities, sovereigns, priests, and city notables shown with one hand raised in the act of devotion.

In the Parthian fashion, the male figures wear long trousers and knee-length tunic. The female clothing consists of two or three layered garments, a high headdress with veil, and, especially for princesses, a great deal of jewellery.

The sovereign is represented standing, in majestic frontality, dressed in a long, sumptuously embroidered tunic, from beneath which protrude baggy trousers. The thick hair is rendered in tight round curls; the tall regal tiara is decorated with the eagle, wings outspread, religious symbol of the city.

The minute, precise detailing of the clothing and jewels evidence not only the same taste for decorative overabundance as the architecture; it also emphasizes the identity of the person depicted.

In the representation of divinity, the fixed gaze and the static frontality are more accentuated.





Traces of colour indicate that the limestone or alabaster statues must have been partially painted. The Hatrene sculpture also reveals scant interest in anatomy, attention to detail, and a propensity for working in series, all of which, in the absence of inscriptions, make the statues difficult to date.

Highly unusual is the find in Building A of statues of religious subject, the only evidence so far at Hatra of a domestic cult. The alabaster statue, 1.20 m tall, depicts a young god, probably Bar-Marayn. Its polished surface shows a sensitive treatment of the facial features. Under a frontal band protrude two small horns, symbolizing his divine nature. On the standard next to the youth is depicted a series of eagles grasping agricultural tools. The statue bears the date of 200 AD, and the long inscription on the base mentions the king Ab Samya.

Building A contains a large-scale mural painting of a scene of boar and gazelle hunting on horseback, executed only in red outline. Riding at a flying gallop, a horseman strikes a boar with a long lance; beneath the wounded animal is depicted

probably the same animal, now dead, in a symbolic-narrative sequence that follows a convention that became common in the Sasanian period.

If the paintings attest a rather elevated painterly skill, the many graffiti that cover the walls of the houses are more varied, ranging from the more professional, possibly preparation for real paintings, to, more frequently, of popular character.

Religion

It is evident from the many inscriptions found that the religious world of Hatra was populated by many gods and goddesses, the result of the confluence of Mesopotamian, Syrian, Arab, and Graeco-Roman elements.

In the sacred precinct a unique inscription records that the large temple called Esagil (the name of the famous sanctuary of Marduk at Babylon) was built for Shamash.



Heracles found near the north and east city gates, reveal an interesting syncretism: Heracles is identified as Nergal with the function of guardian and protector of the city gates.



The principal cult was that of the Triad formed by Maran (Our Lord), Martan (Our Lady), and Bar Marayn (son of Our Lord and Our Lady). Although Maran can be assimilated into the Sun god (Shamash), the identification of Martan and Bar Marayn remains in doubt. Nevertheless, it is likely that one of the two is associated with the moon.

The temple, more imposing and richly decorated than the sanctuary, was dedicated to the Arab goddess Allat, whose symbol was the camel; many elements suggest that devotion to the goddess was strongly supported by the ruling house.

Cults of other deities of Syrian origin (Baal-Shamin, Atargatis) or Mesopotamian (Nergal, Nabu, Nannai) were practised only in the lesser temples. The statues of



5. Assyria in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC

Little is known of the first centuries of Assyria in the early 2nd millennium, BC, but by the reign of the Amorite Shamshi Adad I, at the end of the 19th century BC, the kingdom of Assyria was one of the major powers of its day. Assyria's most influential cities, located in the triangle between the Tigris and upper Zab, were Assur, on the right bank of the Tigris in a strategic position for the trade routes to Syria and Anatolia, and Nineveh, ancient religious centre of primary importance.

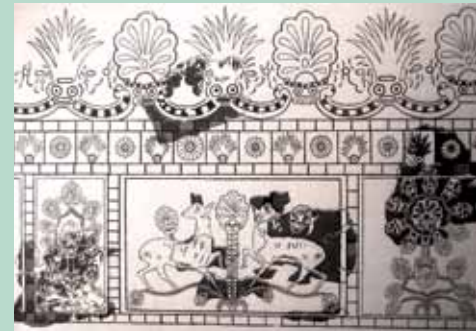
Under Shamshi Adad, through military conquests and diplomatic alliances, Assyria began to expand its borders beyond northern Mesopotamia. It reached the Euphrates, then conquered Mari, while to the south it controlled the state of Eshnunna. But Hammurapi's military reaction forced Assyria back inside its own borders, where it gave up any attempt at conquest for centuries to come.

It was only between the 14th and 13th centuries BC that, under capable and determined kings, Assyria resumed a decidedly expansionist military policy. The systematic military campaigns of Tukulti-Ninurta I pushed the western and northern frontiers as far as the Euphrates and to the area between lakes Van and Urmia, and on the south to conquer the whole of Babylonia. The foundation of a new capital, Kar Tukulti-Ninurta, was the culminating act of the assertion of the ideology of the royal power. But when the king fell to a palace conspiracy, the state passed to weak successors barely able to maintain its independence.

The end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st millennium BC brought a resumed expansionist—even imperialist—policy. Between the 9th and 7th centuries the Assyrian kings focused their military campaigns on three fronts: Syria and Palestine to the west (Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal were to occupy, albeit for brief periods, the capitals of pharaonic Egypt, Memphis and Thebes), the Urartu and the zone of the Lake of Urmia to the north, and Babylonia to the south.

Legitimacy for military intervention and the harsh imposition of the Assyrian system of government was provided by the notion of the divinity of royal power and the conviction that the Assyrian power was superior to all others. The king was considered the highest priest and representative on earth of the god Assur, tutelary divinity of the country, to whom all peoples must submit. In addition to exorbitant tribute and tragic deportations, provincial governors were sent to replace local dynasties.

The kings' self-affirmation is evident in the foundation of new capitals—first Nimrud,



then Khorsabad—and in the building of amazing new “unrivalled” palaces within the ancient centres of power, especially Nineveh. Ashurnasirpal II transformed the town of Kalkhu (Nimrud), on the left bank of the Tigris north of Assur, from village to grandiose imperial capital by moving his court there. His royal abode became an example for all the royal palaces to follow. The grandiose entrance area (*babanu*) on which the throne room opened and the residential quarter (*bitanu*), which also served as a reception area, were clearly separated. The walls of many rooms bore magnificent decorations with alabaster bas-reliefs with religious and mythological themes as well as narrative and historical, celebrating of the political and military power of the sovereign, the army, and the Assyrian state.

The fall of the Assyrian state, hastened by the internal crisis that followed the death of Assurbanipal, the intrinsic fragility of the empire, and the continuous attempts by Babylonia to win back its total autonomy were brought to completion some years after the great king's death by the Chaldean Nabopolassar. The taking of Assur in 614 BC by the army of Cyaxares of Media, with whom the Babylonian king had formed an alliance, was the first sign of the political and military crisis that was to beset the empire. Within a few years, the joint armies of Babylonians and Medes would—with the sack of Nineveh and Nimrud, in 612 BC, and, in 610 BC, the fall of Kharran, where the last Assyrian king, Assur-uballit II, had found refuge with what remained of his court—put an end to the Assyrian kingdom.

Khorsabad (Dur Sharrukin)

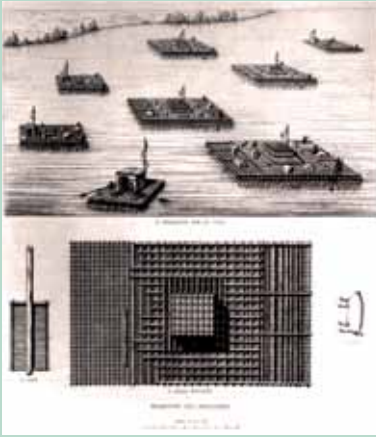
The discovery



In 1842, thanks to his experience in the Arab world and his knowledge of the Arabic language, Paul-Emile Botta was named French consul at Mosul. After starting, and soon abandoning, excavations on the hill of Kuyunjik (Niniveh), in 1843 he turned to the site of Khorsabad after some inhabitants of the village had shown him some inscribed bricks and fragments of figured reliefs. He began digging north of the Dur Sharrukin palace of Sargon II, and within only a few days had brought to light inscriptions and reliefs.

In 1844 the draughtsman Eugène Napoléon Flandin joined Botta. Flandin, who became an invaluable collaborator, drew the relief-covered slabs that were coming gradually to light, showing their position in the rooms and their state of preservation. Botta had the additional duty of choosing some sculptures to ship, via

5. Assyria in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC



Baghdad and Bassora, to France, where they were received with excited interest in 1847. That same year, lavish celebrations accompanied the opening of the Louvre's Assyrian Museum. The newspapers of the day wrote: "The Assyrian king has moored on the bank of the Seine. A new home has been designated for him ... the palace of our king, the Louvre, has thrown open its doors to him"

In 1852 the new French consul, Victor Place, was charged with continuing Botta's work. Under him, between 1852 and 1854 the excavation area was greatly extended, the plan of the buildings was clarified as almost the entire great palace complex was brought to light. For the first time the

excavations were immortalized in photographs that recorded the extraordinary discoveries with great immediacy. But in May 1855, shortly before Place was called home from Mosul, came the unhappy end of the story: the ships carrying 200 cases of sculptures from Dur Sharrukin, Nineveh, Nimrud, and other sites, from Baghdad to the Louvre, were attacked by a group of Bedouins. Almost all of them, as well as some of Place's excavation notebooks, sank in the waters of the Shat el-Arab and were lost forever.

After a hiatus of more than 70 years, excavations were resumed between 1927 and 1935 by the Chicago Oriental Institute, directed first by the philologist Edward Chiera and later by Gordon Loud. The Americans returned to areas already explored in the 19th century and also brought to light the vast residences of the chief court dignitaries and the great temple of Nabu, built at the foot of the terrace on which stood the palace structures and the retaining wall around the whole area.

In the 1930s the Iraq Department of Antiquities decided on the removal, for their protection, of the relief slabs still *in situ* in rooms 6 and 11, of the great *lamassu* and fantastic winged figures that protected Gate A of the retaining wall of the citadel. They were removed to the Iraq Museum.

The city plan

Sargon II's foundation of the new capital of the empire was the culminating act of his program to affirm his power, as commemorated in many inscriptions, according to his wishes and inspired by the Assyrian gods.

The place chosen for his grandiose architectural and city-planning project lay "on the slopes of Mount Musri, near Nineveh", where in little more than ten years, 717–706 BC, the new capital, Dur Sharrukin (Fortress of Sargon), today Khorsabad, would be built.





Covering an area of some 350 hectares, it was one of the largest cities in the ancient world. The inscriptions written by the royal chancellery emphasize how the work force for the complex enterprise was composed of prisoners and deportees from conquered countries, in addition to Assyrian soldiers and citizens of other cities, under the direction of officials chosen by the king.

In his fifth year of reign, 717 BC, the works began with the laying of the foundation platform and a channel that must have carried the water both for the city's construction and for its life. In the years to follow, the temple buildings were built, followed by "a palace of ivory, of ebony, of mulberry, of cypress, of juniper, of cedar and of pistachio". The king had planted along the walls of Dur Sharrukin a park "like the Amanus mountains", rich in every type of fruit tree, cypresses and cedars, brought, thanks to a complex and efficient organization, from the north-western provinces of the empire. The official documents and correspondence show how Sargon II personally followed the progress of the operations and was kept informed of the smallest details—from the procurement of straw for making the bricks to the construction of the barges used for transport along the Tigris of the gigantic blocks for making the winged bulls to protect the entrances of the palace and the city. But the king also intervened directly in the supervision of the works, whose responsibility was entrusted to officials of high rank coordinated by the State Treasurer Tab-shar-Assur.

In his sixteenth year of reign, 706 BC, Sargon II finally occupied his new royal palace and celebrated the inauguration of the city with a great feast. The nobles of the court, the great Assyrian dignitaries, the foreign vassal princes came bearing gifts. But Sargon's wish for himself and his city—"May the great gods that inhabit heaven and earth and this city grant me for eternity the privilege of having built it and of living here for a long time"—was not granted. The king soon died in battle, and his body was never found. Sennacherib, his son, abandoned the city and built his own palace in Niniveh.

The citadel buildings

The royal palace, the great residences, and the Nabu temple are built inside a fortified citadel, athwart the city walls, interrupting it along its northwest side. The palace stood on a platform, about 12 m high, reached by a wide ramp. The residences of the high court dignitaries, including the king's brother, were at ground level, while the temple of Nabu was also on a terrace, directly linked to that of the palace by a bridge supported by an arch.

The palace was made up of various sectors with specific functions. The main shrine to the principal Mesopotamian deities was located west of the entrance Court XV. The eastern sector contained offices, storerooms, and the stables, where the rings used to tie up the horses are still embedded in the pavement. Access to the royal apartments, through the great rectangular Court VIII, was opposite the entrance, next to the northeast corner. The throne room was reached through a sequence of three great portals flanked by tutelary

figures, gigantic *lamassu*, associated with Lord of the Animals. The stone slabs of the courtyard walls were decorated with court scenes: processions of dignitaries and parades of bearers of gifts or tribute, introduced by courtiers or soldiers, are received by the sovereign.

A series of smaller rooms connected the *babanu* (entrance quarter) with the smaller Court VI of the *bitanu* (residential quarter). The north-western wing, reached through two courtyards (VI and VIII), projected from the palace block, according to a model already used at Nimrud in Fort Shalmaneser, and was completely decorated with allegorical reliefs celebrating the victorious regality.



The complex of sacred buildings in the southwest part of the terrace on which the royal palace also stands consists of three main temples, dedicated to Sin, Shamash, and Ningal, around two courtyards with a shared entrance court. The three temples, as can be deduced from the royal texts, built before the palace, were inaugurated with festivals and sacrifices in the fifteenth year of the reign of Sargon II, in 707 BC. They have the same typically Assyrian layout: a long cella terminating in an elevated alcove preceded by a transverse antecella.

Three smaller shrines, dedicated to the gods Adad, Ea and Ninurta, open onto Courtyard XXVII and have no antecella.

The courtyard façades of the main temples have portals with side towers at the base of which are depicted animals and symbolic figures in enamelled brick. On either side of the gateways, which the sources tell us were covered with sheets of silver and bronze, were placed, as at the temple of Sin, tall cedar-wood shafts faced with bronze sheet, in imitation of palm trees. In front of them were stone statues of deities holding vases from which spouted water, symbol of life and fertility.

The religious complex also included an Assyrian-type ziggurat (without the triple staircase of Babylonian ziggurats). Victor Place reconstructed the Khorsabad ziggurat, 40 x 40 m square, with a single winding staircase around the central core.

The great sanctuary of the Babylonian god of wisdom, Nabu, also worshipped extensively in Assyria, stands isolated on its own terrace, linked by a bridge to that of the palace. Although the plan of cella and wide antecella is like that of the palace temples, the general layout of the sanctuary is articulated around three courtyards, of which the rooms composing them must have had not only official but probably ceremonial and residential functions.

The relief decoration

The decoration of the great royal residence of Sargon II in Dur Sharrukin, according to the prototype of Assurnazirpal II's sculptural decoration for the Northwest Palace of Nimrud, consisted of slabs of alabaster (the so-called Mosul marble) carved in relief used as facing for the mud-brick walls. The relative paucity of decorative slabs found during the French excavations supports the hypothesis that Sargon's sudden death, in 705 BC, brought an end to his decorative program.

The symbolic and religious subjects that were so important at Nimrud in the residence of Ashurnasirpal II, were used at Dur Sharrukin mainly for decoration of the gateways: winged figures, *lamassu*, "lord of the animals", keep their strong protective significance, while the sacred tree appears rarely in the corner of some rooms.

Ceremonial subjects and allegorical celebration of the victorious kingship are particularly common, exemplified in parades of dignitaries and tribute bearers before the



king, processions of prisoners, sometimes with scenes of execution of rebels. These were in relief in full figure on the slabs, 2.70–3 m high, that give powerful visual impact to the façades. The ceremonial themes and court scenes with depictions in full figure recur frequently in the figurative program of the interior decoration of the principal rooms. The theme of the procession of tributaries is particularly effective in Corridor 10: cortèges of Assyrian officials and foreign tributaries who bear gifts and lead horses and dromedaries are depicted in two registers, running in opposite directions and separated by an inscribed band.

The reliefs on two registers, according to the criteria already codified in the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, separated by the synthetic inscription describing the sovereign's military campaigns year by year, are of particular historic and compositional interest. Each register, about 1.25 m high, contains scenes depicting the victorious campaigns of Sargon II. There are sieges, conquests of burning fortified cities, sacking, battles with chariots, execution of prisoners—all illustrated with an abundance of detail and careful observation of the action. One innovation is the particular clarity of narrative and composition thanks to which each room maintains a precise standard of spatial-temporal unity. The campaigns against the kingdom of Urartu, for example, are carved on the slabs that decorate Rooms 13 and 14; Room 5 is dedicated to the Syrian campaigns; the eastern campaigns are represented in Room 2, and probably those in southern Mesopotamia are represented in Room 3.

The scenes of hunt in the forest represent new narrative themes, serene natural ambience described with plenty of detail. An iconography unique among the depictions of hunts in the Assyrian reliefs is the representation of the aristocracy, on foot or on horseback, while the sovereign watches from his chariot. The scenes of banquets, attended by the great court dignitaries, probably take place after the hunt or victorious military exploits.

The fantastic figures with body of winged bull and human head, always placed symmetrically side-by-side or back-to-back, at the main entrances and gates of the citadel buildings, had a dual purpose. They supported the gates' vaults and protected the whole palace and the city. Usually known as *lamassu* or *šedu lamassu*, these protective deities are sculpted in high relief on blocks of alabaster, about 1.30 m thick and 3.50–5.80 m high.

On the short sides of the block are carved the anterior and posterior parts of the human-headed bull, its hooves together at rest; along the passage the figure is shown in profile, walking. The combination of these different positions means that five hooves are represented. The musculature and the coat, the features of the human face, the thick beard and long hair, both rendered with dense curls, are carved with particular care, and for the first time the mythical beings wear a cylindrical tiara bearing two or three pairs of horns—an essential attribute of the divine figure—decorated with series of rosettes and topped with feathers.

At Khorsabad the great human-headed bulls are sometimes accompanied by winged genii who guard the entrances to the palace and the city itself. They have frontal torso and face and wear a characteristic tiara with two or three pairs of horns. They hold a pine cone in the raised right hand and a bucket in the left in the ritual gesture of pollinating





the sacred palm tree. On the façade of the throne room, the gigantic winged bulls are associated, for the first time in Assyrian court art, with the image of a “lord of the animals”, with frontal torso and face. He grips a short curved sword in his right hand; with his left, he holds a small roaring lion against his chest. The group is often considered the true royal emblem, expressly created for the new residence of Dur Sharrukin, to proclaim the power and the legitimacy of the kingdom and of Sargon’s line.

Nimrud (Kalkhu)

The city and the palaces

Ashurnasirpal II, king of Assyria between 883 and 859 BC, decided to transform Kalkhu, then on the left bank of the Tigris north of Assur, from village to grandiose royal residence and then imperial capital.

The city first became the object of systematic archaeological investigations by the British in the 19th century. It is a large, roughly square area surrounded by walls. Because of changes in the course of the Tigris, the southwest corner is today lost. In the centre of the west side stands the so-called acropolis, a sort of elevated citadel enclosed in its own walls, containing palaces, sanctuaries, and administrative quarters. Near the southwest corner is a second citadel, the so-called Fort Shalmaneser.

A surface survey by Italian archaeologists suggested the organization of the lower city. Although a true street layout has never been clearly identified, the city plan may well have been organized in a series of large open spaces or gardens connected by broad avenues. One of these, at the foot of the acropolis, must have been for military parades.

According to the contemporary written sources, Ashurnasirpal wanted to endow his city with a “zoo” and a “botanical garden” outside the walls. One of these was probably located outside the lower city halfway around the southern side, to judge from the extreme scarcity of potsherds found in that area.

The surface finds of pottery confirm that life on the site began in the 5th millennium BC (Halaf period) and continued on and off until the late Sasanian–Early Islamic period. Traces of occupation in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC have been identified In the acropolis area, in particular, under the terracing built by Ashurnasirpal.

The Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, the so-called Northwest





Palace, is the most important of the buildings on the large artificial terracing. Its innovative architectural design and sculptural decoration were imitated in all the imperial residences of the neo-Assyrian period. The layout of the palace is divided into two large sectors, an official zone, called *babanu*, and a private one, the *bitanu*, each centred around large courtyards.

Fort Shalmaneser (858–824 BC) also stands on an artificial

hill, in the southeast corner of the city. This is a roughly rectangular complex, with main accesses on the north and west sides. The internal division of the space is regular and articulated around large courtyards. The throne room, with painted walls and a high stone skirting board decorated in bas-relief, opens on the internal front of the southeast courtyard. The residential quarter, located in the most isolated part of the complex, contains baths and banquet halls around four smaller courtyards.

With Esaraddon (680–669 BC), the complex became a military arsenal.

The statuary and the royal tombs

The old Mesopotamian practice of dedicating statues of worshippers to the deities fell out of use in the neo-Assyrian period. Royal personages and divine beings wearing horned tiara, however, continued to be represented and sometimes had a structural function.

The statues of rulers are typical of the 9th century BC: Ashurnasirpal II and III are represented standing rigidly and bearing the insignia of command, the mace-shaped sceptre and curved spear. Shalmaneser sometimes has his hands clasped, one inside the other, in front of his chest. Another typical gesture for female figures and genii is the hands closed around a small vase.

Although rarely monumental (exceptions are the over-life-size statues of Shalmaneser from Assur), the statues of kings are intended to express the sovereign's absolute power, as in the known examples of Ashurnasirpal II from the acropolis (106 cm) and of Shalmaneser III from Fort Shalmaneser.

The royal tombs in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, discovered in 1988–90 by the Directorate General of Antiquities of Iraq, are extraordinary not merely for the abundance of precious grave goods but also for their very presence at Nimrud instead of



at Assur, as would be usual. Assur was the first capital of the empire, and an important religious centre, where the royal families were buried. One of the Nimrud tombs, that of queen Yabaya, consort of king Tiglat-pileser III (745–727 BC), yielded such valuable objects as: a gold crown with vine tendrils and bunches of amethyst grapes; numerous necklaces with gold beads alternating with turquoise, lapis lazuli, and carnelian; bracelets of gold and amethyst; gold rings with semiprecious stones, some of which were incised with motifs also seen on neo-Assyrian seals; seals of semiprecious stones set in gold; earrings in the form of lotus blossoms; flabella of gold chains, and more.

Other pieces found included rock crystal and glass vases, gold drinking-cups, and gold inlays that must have been woven into cloaks and other garments.



The ivories

The British excavations in the Northwest palace of Ashurnasirpal II and Fort Shalmaneser turned up significant quantities of precious objects made of ivory, notably components of furniture (chairs, beds, etc.), boxes, and utensils.

The ivory, usually applied over a wooden support, was worked in small tiles or blocks decorated with incision or intaglio. According to the style and subject represented, the ivories have been classified in three main groups—Assyrian, Phoenician, and Syrian.

The Assyrian style

The Assyrian-style group, so designated from the subjects and composition, differs from the rest also in its technique. It uses mostly small tiles with incised figures of kings, winged genii, tribute bearers—the same subjects as the stone bas-reliefs, albeit of inferior workmanship. Nevertheless, the figures, especially the clothing, are represented with greater detail. Rarer are the depictions in high relief, which, however, can be miniature masterpieces thanks to the wealth of detail and refinement of composition.

The Syrian style

The Syrian-style group is the most varied in subjects and style. Different workshops in various Syrian cities can be recognized. Their products probably reached Assyria as war



booty, though the inscription “Haza-el of Damascus” on a carved jewel box suggests that in at least one case the object was a gift.

These ivories were both furniture ornaments and utilitarian objects. The former include panels for chair backs and bed heads with winged figures or deities holding lotus blossoms, standing or seated beneath winged solar disks, reminiscent of northern Syria figurative repertoire. Blocks of solid ivory for chair legs are worked in the round as nude caryatids, the arms stretched along the sides, supporting a capital made of vegetal elements.

Among the most common vessels are boxes richly decorated with lids on which are often mounted handles in the form of reclining cattle. An exceptional piece is a cosmetics jar carved from a single tusk with sphinxes, winged lions, and griffins alongside eagles, rams, and gazelles.

This group displays the greatest variety of techniques, ranging from low or high relief to sculpture in the round with incised details. More or less extensive sections of the ivory were often covered with gold foil, and sometimes there are appliqués of dark brown resinous paste.

The Phoenician style

The Phoenician-style ivories are more homogeneous in both iconography and technique. The style is characterized by soft and luminous rendering of the surfaces accompanied by thin, deep incisions and by inlays of blue, red, and green glass paste. The workshops seem to be contemporary with the Syrian ones and continue until the 7th century BC.

The Phoenician repertoire is characterized by Egyptian themes and motifs, most typically winged sphinxes with kilt, large pectoral, and crown, the ‘woman at the window’, different types of winged genii with Egyptianizing hairstyles and clothing, and Egyptian gods. The themes of a lioness sinking her teeth into an Ethiopian in a lotus thicket and the theme of bearers of exotic animals (monkeys, gazelles, ostriches) occur but are rare.

The Phoenician workshops specialized in the manufacture of furniture, especially beds and thrones; examples have been found in the necropolises of Salamis and Cyprus.





6. Arabs and Islam

In pre-Islamic times the Arabs had established kingdoms and petty states not only on the Arabian Peninsula but in Syria and Mesopotamia as well. They founded urban settlements as staging posts and garrisons for caravans that used the desert routes for trade. Their strategic importance grew during the long conflicts between Romans and Parthians and between Byzantines and Sasanians. The predominantly Arab inhabitants of these cities developed their own culture, which adapted elements from their native civilizations as well as Persian, Hellenistic, and Byzantine. In southern Mesopotamia in particular, the Lakhaniids, a small dynasty of South Arabian origin, settled on the fringes of the desert. Their main centre was al-Hira, on the Euphrates, where they ruled as vassals of the Sasanians, who relied on them to keep the Bedouins in check and hold the borders of Iran against the Byzantines.

In 622 AD the Prophet Muhammad bin Abdullah (born in Mecca in 571) travelled to Medina for the first time (the Islamic era dates from this event, known as the Hijra). Before his death, in 632, he succeeded, through the strength of faith and his army, in unifying the Arabian tribes under Islam, thus creating a Muslim state. Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's oldest companions, was acclaimed his successor, the first *khalifat rasul Allah* (11–14 AH).

The city of the Arab poets

The earliest references to the idea of city and architecture appear in Arab literature before the first Islamic cities were built. In their imagination, nomads transformed the ruined palaces, temples, and cities of South Arabia they saw into fantastic, mythical places, and these in turn evolved, between the 4th and 6th centuries AD, into literary archetypes of Arab prose and poetry.

There developed a concept of utopian and imaginary city, described by poets and geographers, in which dream of the nomad, the warrior, and the



farmer was manifested. From it derived a vision of architecture that was more aesthetic than technical, more emotional than practical, made of materials as precious as they were unreal. A city that identified itself with the desire of itself, as destination and place of rest whose features—pavilions, gardens, flowing waters—were not needed to satisfy actual need, but were presented as pure object of pleasure for the senses and for the spirit.

Evocative descriptions of the palace of Khawarnaq at al-Hira and of the golden dome of the iwan of Khosrow at Ctesiphon, for example, recur often in pre-Islamic Arab literature.

Rashidun (Orthodox) Caliphs (11–40 AH/632–661 AD)

Aiming at the conquest of the fertile lower Mesopotamian lands, the Islamic armies seized al-Hira in 12/633. Damascus was conquered in the reign of the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, in 14/635, and with the battle on the Yarmuk River, the whole of Syria fell; Jerusalem fell in 17/638. In Iraq, the victory over the Sasanians at al-Qadisiyah, southeast of al-Hira, followed by the capture of Ctesiphon (al-Madain), the Sasanian capital in Iraq (16/637) was the beginning of the collapse of the Iranian empire. In 19/640 Nineveh fell to the Arabs, and Egypt was conquered in the same year. One year later the battle of Nihavend, in Persia, brought the Sasanian domination of Iraq to a definitive end. 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, the third caliph, fought his first naval battle and conquered Cyprus, Rhodes, and the southwest Anatolian coast.

Under the Rashidun caliphs, the pillars of Islam were firmly established. In Iraq the Arabs founded Basra, on the right bank of the Shat el-Arab (14/637), and Kufah, on the Euphrates near al-Hira (17/638). The whole history of Islam has to some extent been conditioned by events that occurred at Basra and Kufah or were connected with one or the other of those cities. The last of the Orthodox caliphs, Ali ibn Abi Talib (36/657), was murdered at Kufah in 40/661. His elder son Hassan renounced the succession in favour of Mu'awiya, who founded the Umayyad dynasty.

The Umayyad caliphate (41–132 AH/661–750 AD)

Iraq now fell under the control of the Umayyad caliphate, whose seat was moved to Damascus. Under the Umayyads the Islamic conquests spread both eastwards and to the west, as far as North Africa and Spain (Abd Rahman fled to Spain and established the Umayyads at Cordoba in 137/755); Iraq underwent a period of intellectual ferment and development, especially in Kufah and Basra, despite internecine warfare between the new establishment and the Shi'a followers of 'Ali. The viceroy in Iraq of the Umayyad caliph Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, al-Hajjaj ibn Yusiuf ath-Thaqafi, eager to achieve balance between the two cities, founded a new city on the Tigris in 83/703 and called it al-Wasit (the Intermediary). In 99/718, the family of 'Abbas, of the Prophet clan, the Abbasids, worked

to gain control of the empire, and, with the support of Shi'a Arabs of Kufah and Iranians from Khorasan, overthrew the Umayyad caliph Marwan II at the battle of the Great Zab River in 750.

The foundation of the first cities

Throughout the period of the first caliphs, the foundation of a city was limited to the designation of areas around the tent of the commandant that were suitable for building, according to the ancient, typically Bedouin system of appropriation of lands. There soon developed a new building type, inspired by Muhammad's house at Medina: the mosque, place of gathering and prayer of the faithful to Islam.

The first mosque was built in 17/639. It had a square plan with internal courtyard, each side as long as an arrow's shot. On the south side, parallel to the *qibla* wall (direction of prayer), were five naves supported by stone columns, 30 cubits tall, reused from Sasanian buildings; on the other three sides of the courtyard were double porticoes. Adjacent to the south side was the governor's palace, built, under the direction of the architect Rurbih, with bricks taken from Hira.

The first Islamic city in Mesopotamia, **Kufah**, was founded as a military camp in 16/638 near al-Hira by Sa'd ibn Abu Wassaq, general of the caliph Umar, and became capital of the empire with the caliph 'Ali in 36/657. This confirmed the public nature of the original nucleus with the great mosque, the palace of the governor, al-Qasr al-'Imara, and the maydan, a vast central area destined for commercial operations, where 15 residential avenues converged. The city developed without walls until 140/785, when it was surrounded by a navigable moat linked to the Euphrates. It soon became multiethnic (there was even a Christian community with two bishops), acquiring the function of primary cultural centre (Kufah school).

Basra was also founded in 16/638, by the companion of the Prophet 'Utba ibn Gazwan, on the right bank of the Shat el-Arab, 15 km from the sea. The city was organized in five tribal districts around a central nucleus. Its privileged position as river port and terminus for maritime traffic with the east gave rise to an industrial pole that functioned as a maritime arsenal.

A few years later, in 641, al-Mawsil (**Mosul**), another military camp, was built near the Sasanian village of Now Ardeshir, opposite ancient Nineveh. It would take on the features of a trading city.

Wasit was the most important Umayyad military and commercial settlement on the banks of the Tigris midway between Kufah and Basra. Its foundation had been decided by Hajjaj, the governor of Iraq, under the caliph Wasit Abd al-Malik, mainly to preserve the Syrian leadership threatened by the Iraqi garrison in the two principal Mesopotamian centres. The construction of the seat of the governor, al-Qubbah al-Khadra', the Green



Dome, and the Friday Mosque and the opening of irrigation canals for agriculture are known from the literature. At the death of Hajjaj, the city lost its homogeneous Syrian character and became multiethnic and multicultural. Wasit maintained an important strategic position even after the transfer of the capital of the empire from Damascus to Baghdad and declined only in the 15th century when the Tigris changed its course.

The Abbasid caliphate (132–656 AH/750–1258 AD)

Abu al-Abbas as-Saffah (132–136/750–754), back in Iraq, felt unsafe in Kufah and so built himself a courtly residence near al-Anbar. The Abbasid caliphate lasted, with 36 caliphs after him, for 502 years, a period which is divided for convenience into five phases, according to the relationship of the caliph to the foreign powers that held secular authority.

Abu Ja'far al-Mansur (136–158 AH/754–775 AD)

The second Abbasid caliph was Abu Ja'far al-Mansur, the brother of as-Saffah. With his firm rule and energetic administration, he laid the foundations of the caliphate's subsequent success. He overcame initial opposition from a strong opponent, Abu Muslim al-Khorasani, and is best remembered for founding the city of Baghdad in 145/762.

Al-Mahdi ibn al-Mansur (158–169 AH/775–785 AD)

Harun ar-Rashid ibn al-Mahdi (170–193 AH/786–809 A.D).

Harun ar-Rashid ibn al-Mahdi was the ablest and the most illustrious of all the Abbasid caliphs. His name became synonymous with the golden age of Islam and a source of legend and story in East and West. A great patron of arts and sciences, he gave freely and generously to poets, artists, and scientists. Court life in his reign was of unparalleled brilliance, and the Palaces of Baghdad and other cities were extremely luxurious. In his reign the spectacular story of the rise and fall of the Barmakid ministers was played out. Aside from easily put down uprisings in distant territories, the only military event of his reign was his conflict with the Byzantines, in which he took the field in person. The story of his relations with Charlemagne, Emperor of France, has been told often by Western authors, who describe the exchange of gifts and embassies between the two great rulers. At Harun ar-Rashid's death, his son Al-Amin succeeded to the caliphate on the understanding that he would be followed by the second son, Al-Ma'mun. But the brothers soon had a falling out, which ended with the killing of Al-Amin and Al-Ma'mun's assumption of power.

Al-Ma'mun ibn ar-Rashid (198–218 AH/813–833 AD)

Al-Ma'mun ibn ar-Rashid was one of the greatest of the Abbasid caliphs, and a great patron of the arts. Part of his reign was spent in Marw, his capital in Khorasan, and his rule was characterized by Persian influence. He quelled a number of disturbances and uprisings in the vast Abbasid Empire, and in 204/819 he was compelled to march in person with an army to Baghdad. He also came into conflict with the Byzantines.

Al-Mu'tasim-billah ibn ar-Rashid (218–227 AH/833–842 AD)

Al-Mu'tasim-billah ibn ar-Rashid was a strong and energetic ruler and a good soldier. He broke the strength of the followers of Babak, in Azerbaijan, and put down several other mutinies. He also took the field several times against the Byzantines. Al-Mu'tasim is credited with the introduction of Turkish mercenaries into the army, but their unruly behaviour in Baghdad, as well as the power held by the Turkish generals, forced him to seek a new capital. This he founded at the site of Samarra, on the Tigris, about 120 km north of Baghdad (221/836). The best craftsmen, builders, and architects were assembled, and the city became the most splendid in the world. Indeed, the remains of numerous palaces and mosques, in particular the Great Mosque, with its spiral minaret, the Malwiyah, the mosque of Abu Dulaf, and the Caliph's Palace stand today as reminders of Samarra's past glories.

This was the Abbasid golden age, but towards the end of Al-Mu'tasim's reign political weakness and internal decay sapped the strength of the Abbasid empire. The last of the Abbasid caliphs of this golden age was the ninth, Al-Wathiq-billah (227/842). After him six more caliphs resided in Samarra; from their reigns date some of the city's magnificent buildings—mosques, palaces, schools, and scientific institutions. In about 276/889 the caliph Al-Mu'tamid-ala-Allah moved the capital from Samarra back to Baghdad; by this time the so-called Second Abbasid Era was well under way. It had begun with the reign of Al-Mutawakkil-ala-Allah (232/847) and saw Abbasid glory eventually fade. The twelve caliphs of this period no longer had much clout, and the empire disintegrated into semi-independent provinces, in which the real power was in the hands of Turks, Persians, and Mongol princes. In Egypt the Tulunid Dynasty took control. In Iraq the title of caliph still commanded respect, but the caliphs themselves were largely subject to the influence of the Turkish generals who controlled the armies. (FB)

Baghdad, the Round City

On 1 August 145 AH/762 AD, al-Mansur, brother of as-Saffah and second caliph of the Abbasid dynasty (754–775), launched the construction of a new city, to be called Medinat as-Salam (City of Peace), new seat of government of the Islamic empire. Tradition has it

that the site was selected near Suq Baghdad, a market village on the western shore of the Tigris, where river and land routes met (between Basra and northern Mesopotamia and between east and west), where the distance between the Tigris and Euphrates was shortest. The capitals of ancient Mesopotamia—Akkadian Opis, Assyrian Babylon, Hellenistic Seleucia, and Parthian Ctesiphon—had already been situated there for the same reason.

To define the perimeter, the soil was strewn with burnt cotton. The works lasted about five years, and in 150/767 the government was able to function effectively in the new city. Four superintendents—in addition to architects and engineers from Syria, Persia, and Iran—presided over the work of 10,000 men.

The city plan encompassed a perfectly circular double outer wall, with towers and a moat in the middle, 2000 m in diameter, and a third inner circuit, concentric with the first. Four gates—facing northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest—took their names from as many regions of the empire: Basra, Kufah, As-Sham (Damascus), and Khorasan. The latter, though distant, paid homage to the crucial contribution given by the Shi'i of the oasis of Marw to the dynasty's ascent to power. In the middle of the city was the palace (al-Qasr al-Dahab). The throne was beneath a green dome (al-Qubba al-Kadra) surmounted by the equestrian statue of the caliph. The northeast side of the palace coincided with the *qibla*, the wall of the great mosque that indicated the direction of prayer towards Mecca, to the southwest.

From the description handed down, clearly the intention was to celebrate the authority of the Muslim prince. The cosmological significance of the plan corresponded to the image of umbilical city of the world on an urban scale. Thus the Abbasid caliph defined himself through the city as unifying pole of the regions of his empire. Also, the cosmological model was not unknown to the pre-Islamic world to which the Abbasids intentionally turned. The prototypes can be seen in some Assyrian, Parthian, and Sasanian examples. The circular plan was perfect, but allowed no extension, which soon forced al-Mansur himself had to find a solution to the need to expand. A residence outside the city, on the banks of the Tigris, this time according to the models of the Paradise garden, represented the first act of what would become a metropolis that grew in clusters.

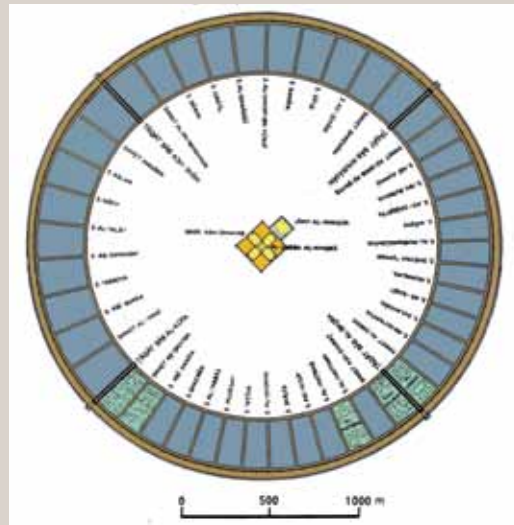
The Round City (al-Medina Mudawwarah), a sort of 'forbidden city', was reserved for administrative and ceremonial functions in addition to the settlement of the troops chosen from the most loyal to the caliph. A few years later "turbulent" activities (markets, caravanserais, relatively safe encampments of troops) took place in the open air in what became a prevalently commercial area, in the suburb of al-Karkh, south of the Round City, right on the nucleus of the old Suq Baghdad. A new nucleus formed on the eastern bank of the Tigris around the palace built by al-Mahdi, son of al-Mansur. This was ar-Rusafa and was linked to the first by a bridge of boats. The names are still used today for the quarters of Baghdad on the two opposite banks of the Tigris.

Another son of al-Mansur, **Harun**, known as **ar-Rashid**, succeeded to the leadership of Islam. With his reign (170–193/786–809) the Abbasid dynasty reached its apogee, despite



the political and religious conflicts in many parts of the empire.

It was, however, his son al-Ma'nun (198–218/813–833) who brought Islamic civilization to its peak. Endowed with great intellectual intuition, he attempted, albeit without lasting success, to mend the political-ideological schism between Shi'i and Sunni. In Baghdad he built a hippodrome, a zoo, a university with astronomical observatory, and a library, the famous House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah), where the works of the greatest sages of antiquity were translated from Greek and Persian into Arabic.



His successor, al-Mu'tasim (218–227/838–842), another son of ar-Rashid, introduced Turkish, Berber, and Slavic mercenaries into the palace troops. So unpopular was this decision that he was obliged to transfer his administrative capital from Baghdad to Samarra (221/836), 120 km to the north, where it remained for more than 50 years.

The centre of power returned to Baghdad only in 278/892. The administrative void did not, however, prevent Baghdad from enjoying an economic and cultural supremacy without equal even outside the caliphate. The geographic position that made it a primary commercial centre, sustained by banks largely managed by Christians and Jews, favoured urban expansion. The cosmopolitan character of the caliphs' capital attracted personalities that would make the most varied cultural and scientific contributions. There was a hospital with attached school of medicine, as well as groups of scholars of theology, jurisprudence, and literature. In the Baghdad of that day Arab, Persian, and Greek elements mingled in perfect harmony. A court intelligentsia grew up alongside an urban bureaucracy that favoured the diffusion and patronage of the arts, in particular music and literature.

While magnificent new palaces were going up in the quarters to the east of the Tigris, the Round City gradually declined, and the flood of 330/941 definitively destroyed the Qasr al-Dahab.

The desert castles

Like the Umayyads, whose castles in the Syrian desert and Transjordan are known, the Abbasids built imposing residences outside the city. The best-known extra-urban palace is





that of Ukhaidir, in the north-western steppe of the territory of Kufah. This large building (175 x 169 m) was defended by a high outer wall with circular towers at the corners and semicircular towers at regular intervals along the sides. On each side was a gate. The northern one, flanked by square towers, gave direct access to the palace proper. The entry room, covered by a great barrel vault, led, on the right, to a mosque and opened onto a central porticoed court. To the south opened a large iwan that gave access to the reception rooms. To east and west were residential units facing smaller courtyards. A bath was located at the southern extremity of the palace. The building is built entirely of rubble, with the exception of the bath, which is of brick, with gypsum mortar and faced with stucco plaster. Scholars attribute the building to an important figure in the family of the caliph al-Mansur.

The smaller contemporary extra-urban palaces of Atshan and Uskaf Beni Junaid have been studied only partially.

Samarra

The second great human settlement created by the Abbasids was Samarra, founded in 220 AH/836 AD on the right bank of the Tigris about 100 km north of Baghdad, by the caliph al-Mu'tasim, forced to abandon Baghdad because his Turkish troops were by now uncontrollable.

Samarra was conceived less as a city than as a magnificent complex of residences and services for the exclusive use of the sovereign and his court; it was erected without an apparent unified design, as the juxtaposition of a series of palace cities, each with palaces of sovereigns, emirs, generals, and ministers with gardens, mosques, and residential quarters, built gradually by the seven caliphs who lived there until 278/892. Each of them, as if from a superstitious repugnance to living where someone else had, built his abode from scratch, sometimes taking the trouble to destroy that of his predecessor, as in the case of the al-Ja'fariyya, built by Mutawakkil and stripped of all usable material by his successor al-Mu'tasim.

Thus in less than 60 years was created one of the largest cities in area in the ancient world, some 35 km long with an average width of 5 m. It stood almost entirely on the left bank of the Tigris, though some palaces and pavilions were located on the right bank.

The rigidly circular town-planning of Baghdad was rejected; this "city" developed in part along a broad rectilinear road axis 11 km long. The city of al-Ja'fariyya stood at the extreme north with the mosque of Abu Dulaf, then formed a sort of central agglomeration around the palace of al-Mu'tasim, known as Jwsaq al-Khaqani, which had a polo field and a cloverleaf hippodrome, and the Great Mosque. Finally, to the south, it took in the great complex of Bulkuwara and the site of al-Qadisiyya.

Samarra's design bespeaks Roman, Hellenistic, Byzantine, Sasanian, and Umayyad inspiration, the most culturally diverse models available, not easily seen in true cities.

In addition to royal residences, destined only for ceremonies and show, there were buildings for amusement, spectacle, sport, and the hunt, as attested by kiosks, belvederes, loggias, observation points, and tribunals from which to watch races. The two tall helical minarets—al-Mu'tawakki, known as al-Malwiyya, and Abu Dulaf—are ascribable more to intellectual creations, alluding to the tower of Babel, than to religious needs. The kings required high places from which to look up at the starry heavens and down over their earthly domains.

Samarra was actually a completely different city, not only because of the lack of business and cohesion among the social components, but also for the difficulties of water supply and communications. Such were the causes and the effect of the return to Baghdad of the seat of the caliphate in 892.

On the other hand, Samarra was built quickly. The mud-brick construction gave speed and acquired solidity and architectural dignity from decorative stucco facing. Though such construction is easy and cheap, but without periodic maintenance, it is at risk of rapid decay and destruction, which is why—abandoned early on for lack of water for drinking and irrigation—the city today looks like an immense field of ruins.

The relationship between Baghdad and Samarra must have been something like that of Versailles and Paris in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Jawsaq al-Khaqani, for example, was an immense building complex, which covered circa 175 ha, about half of which with gardens. It was entirely surrounded by high walls and had a single main entrance and was subdivided into several units. The public area was located at the end of a succession of open spaces separated by monumental doors. This was centred on a central domed room that looked on iwan and courtyards. Adjacent were baths, a mosque, and residential quarters. The Fatimid-period palaces of Cairo, Madinah al-Zahra, and the Granada Alhambra were inspired by building models of Baghdad and Samarra dating to the end of the 8th and the 9th centuries.

Though the archaeological record for Baghdad and Samarra is insufficient, the literary sources suggest a model of public life in Islam's early centuries centred around the palace.

As in the Umayyad extra-urban complexes, recreation was an aspect of particular significance. The appetite for pleasure gave rise to an apparently new building form, the kiosk pavilion, a small and separate domed construction in an artificial natural setting, usually with fountains and running water. Such pavilions are clearly to be read as paradisiacal, and it was from the sense of pleasure that the development of an architecture of water derived. Its first examples were at Khirbat al-Mafjar in Umayyad Palestine. In Fatimid-period Cairo they were found all over the city, and some of the earliest surviving examples of this type of pavilion with water can be seen in Sicilian architecture of Fatimid inspiration.





The art of the Abbasids

The visual arts of the Abbasid period are nearly all lost. Only very rare examples from Samarra survive. However, the decorative arts and crafts, of great artistic merit and high technical quality, are better known.

Rulers of the largest empire in history, the Abbasid caliphs promoted a wide variety of decorative arts characterized by a rich use of colour, scant interest in the representation of the human figure, composition of the decorative fields without empty spaces, the arabesque, and decorative calligraphy.

Stucco

Most, if not all, Samarra's buildings were built of mud brick decorated with, and protected by, painted or carved plaster, and only rarely were the bricks faced with wood or marble. To enliven the large stucco walls, the artisans of Samarra developed three different decorative styles over a brief time. The first style uses a deep intaglio technique on damp stucco to form vegetal and geometric motifs, still of Umayyad type. Ornamental bands create panels of varied forms filled with grapeless vines. The leaves have five lobes separated by an 'eye'. In the second style, whose technique and motifs were very similar to the first, simplified leaves, without the characteristic eye, are attached to a continuous vine. The third style is clearly distinguished from the first two by its rapid technique involving a backless bevelled mould from which the stucco could be easily detached. The motifs, still vegetal, are extremely stylized or abstract.



Pottery

Pottery was the most common genre of decorative and utilitarian art in the Islamic period. In the last quarter of the 8th century, Iraq began to produce new glazed ceramics with enormously varied shapes and decorative motifs. These were mainly vegetal and floral, but birds and humans are found, as are proverbs and sentiments. Geometric and abstract motifs such as simple splashes of colour with or without motifs incised beneath the glaze are found as well.

Trade with central Asia brought Mesopotamian artisans into contact with Asiatic, especially Chinese, work. The elegant lustre ware found at Samarra, made with a special technique that gave a metallic look, is probably the result of such contacts.

Textiles

Textile production was an essential part of the artistic artisanship of the age. The description of Harun ar-Rashid's legacy gives an idea of its importance. Besides thousands of garments, there were countless textile furnishings: 1000 Armenian rugs, 4000 tapestries,

5000 cushions, 1500 silk rugs, 100 silk blankets, 1000 silk cushions, 300 Maysan rugs, 1000 Darabgird rugs, 1000 brocade cushions, 1000 striped silk cushions, 1000 pure silk tapestries, 300 brocades tapestries, 500 rugs, and 1000 Tabaristan cushions.

Glass

Glassware was equally innovative. Naturalistic or abstract motifs, with new chromatic effects, were created by means of a cameo-like technique: two layers of different-coloured glass were used, and the surface layer was incised to produce the design.

Metals

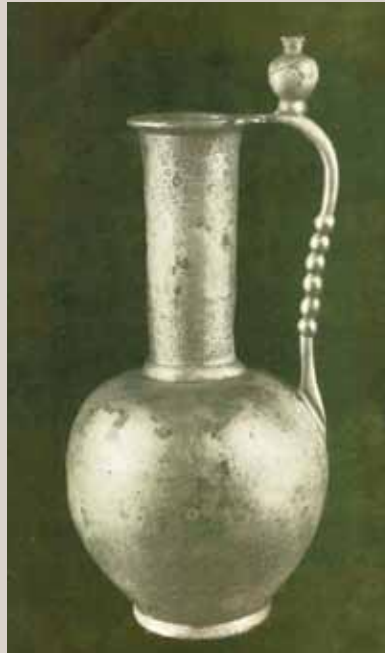
Metal tableware was also important. The use of gold, silver, bronze, and brass, albeit little known, was particularly developed. The formal inspiration came largely from Sasanian work.

The Abbasid caliphate under the Buyids and Seljuks

During the caliphate of Al-Mustakfi-billah, a dynasty known as the Buyids, or Buwayhids, descendants of the Sasanian Persians, came to power and ruled the empire in the name of the Abbasid caliphs, who resided in Baghdad. Their founder, Ahmad ibn Buwayh, assumed the title Mu'iz-ad-Dawlah, and exercised full authority (334 AH/946 AD). This period, known as the Third Abbasid Era, comprised the reigns of five caliphs and ended when the last of them, Al-Qa'im-bi-amrillah, appealed for political support to Tughril Beg, the Seljuk ruler of Iran, who marched to Baghdad and established Seljuk rule in Iraq.

The Abbasid caliphate under the Seljuks (447–590 AH/1055–1194 AD)

Iraq enjoyed a new prosperity during the Seljuk dynasty, whose period of power is known as the Fourth Abbasid Era. The most prominent members of this dynasty were Tughril Beg, Alp



Arslan, and Malik Shah. Under their rule the arts and sciences flourished; new mosques were built, and new irrigation canals were dug. But the Seljuks also had to contend with both the attempts by the Fatimids to extend their control from Egypt to Iraq and the first crusades from Europe.

The Seljuk sultans were of Turkish stock, originally from the Ghuzz tribe, which inhabited the steppes of Central Asia, and quickly made themselves masters of Iran and Iraq. In their hands, the caliphs were puppets, to be deposed, killed, or replaced at will.

The constant strife and bloodshed in Mosul forced the Seljuk Sultan Mahmud, during the caliphate of Al-Mustarshid-billah, to appoint a viceroy over that province and its adjacent territories. This was Imad-ud-Din Zangi (Atabeg), who managed to restore peace and order throughout the north of Iraq. He founded the Atabeg Dynasty, which ruled from Mosul under the nominal suzerainty of the Abbasid caliphate and under the control of the Seljuks.

Buildings attributed to the first Seljuk sultans

Tomb of the Imam Al-Dur

The walls of east Baghdad

Minaret of the mosque of the island of Anah (anah)

Baghdad buildings attributed to Caliph An-Nasir (575–622 AH/1180–1225 AD)

In the late Abbasid period, beginning in the 6th century AH/12th AD, a new way of finishing the wall surfaces, of Central Asian and Iranian inspiration, was introduced and spread. In this technique, known as *hazarbaf* (a Persian term that alludes to weaving), the plaster coating is replaced by an outer curtain of decorative brickwork. In Baghdad today, master brick workers call the technique *hasiri*, after the weave of palm mats. From simple bands and panels of bricks arranged to form chevrons or lozenges, the technique developed, in the hand of Seljuk and Mongol craftsmen, to use intaglio of the bricks to make geometric and vegetal motifs and add thin bands of turquoise, green, and blue enamelled brick to make theatrical plays of light.

In the same period an original architectural type, which would become widely used with infinite variations, was introduced. This was the *muqarnas*, a dome formed of tiers of superimposed and staggered niches on circular or polygonal impost that made it possible to enclose a conical space.

The minaret of Jami' Al-Khaffafin (Al-Karkh)

The minaret of the shrine of Shaikh Ma'Ruf Al-Karkhi (Al-Karkh)

Turba of Zumurud Khatun (al-Karkh)

Baghdad buildings attributed to the Caliph Al-Mustansir (623/640 1226/1242)

Madrasa ash-Sharabiya (Rusafa)

The Al-Mustansiriya madrasa (Rusafa)

The minaret of Jami' Qumriya (al-Karkh)

Monumental entrance of the madrasa Ash-Sharabiya (Wasit)

Harba Bridge (Samarra)

The miniaturist Yahya Ibn Mahmud Al-Wasiti

The Islamic miniaturist painter Yahya ibn Mahmud, active at Wasit in the first half of the 13th century, stands out for excellence and originality. His style significantly influenced the Persian miniature painting of the next century. His works, which show an effective synthesis of realism and stylization within elaborate compositions—a combination of Chinese, eastern Christian, Persian features that is known as the Baghdad School. One of his most important works is the 1237 AD illustration of the *Maqamat* (“Assemblies”) of al-Hariri. This book, which recounts the peregrinations of a 12th-century Arab in a series of anecdotes, was very popular in its day. The 96 illustrations are of extraordinary quality for composition, expressiveness, and the lively use of colour. The artist also illustrated Ferdowsi’s Persian epic poem *Shah-nameh* (“The Book of Kings”) in 99 plates.



The Abbasid caliphate under the Atabegs (521–660 AH/1127–1261 AD)

The term “Ata-beg”, which means “father of the prince”, referred originally to the guardian or tutor of a young Seljuk prince. The dynasty’s founder in Mosul, Imad-ud-Din Zangi, was the son of Qasim ad-Dawlah, son of Aqsunqur, a tutor of Turkish descent (521–541/1127–1146) and a patron of many reforms. He was succeeded by his son Sayf-ud-Din, who took particular care to build up the army. Though some of the subsequent Atabegi monarchs were weak and self-indulgent, others, more energetic, achieved political reforms and left architectural monuments. This was when Salah-ud-Din (feared by the crusaders as Saladin), born in Tikrit, in the centre of Iraq, appeared on the scene, during the caliphate of Al-Mustadhi-bi-amrillah (571/1175). In a ferocious battle at Hattin in 583/1187, Salah-ud-Din completely routed the crusader forces and later captured Jerusalem itself.





During the reign (607/1210–615/1218) of the seventh Atabeg ruler, Al-Qahir Izz-ud-Din, the Mamluk Badr-ud-Din Lulu acted as a minister of state and served as tutor and guardian to the ruler's four sons. After the king's death, Badr-ud-Din Lulu began to maltreat his wards and other members of the late king's family, until he succeeded in gradually ousting them. He took the kingship for himself and, by virtue of his good relations with the Seljuk overlords and the caliph Al-Mustansir-billah, was awarded the title of King of Mosul and the heraldic emblems to go with it (631/1234). He was a great patron of new architecture and oversaw the building of numerous Atabeg works in brick and in the local marble and limestone. These buildings, with their decorative brickwork, commemorative inscriptions, and delicate wood carvings, marked a new high point in Islamic architecture. Lulu's long reign lasted until the savage onslaught of the Mongol Hulaku, in 656/1258. The succession of Lulu's son, Rukn-ud-Din Ismail (657–660/1258–1261), marked the effective end of Atabeg power.

Meanwhile, in Baghdad, the Abbasid caliphs had become rulers only in name, ever oppressed by their Seljuk overlords. During this Fifth Abbasid Era, four caliphs held office, including Al-Mustansir-billah, who built the Mustansiriyah College in Baghdad. However, on the fateful day of 4 Safar 656/20 February 1258 AD, soldiers of the Mongol armies, led by Hulaku, breached the walls of Baghdad. The caliph Al-Musta'sim was put to death with his officials, tens of thousands of people were massacred, and the city was looted and burned. Thus ended the Abbasid caliphate and the era of the Ilkhanids began.



Despite its tragic conclusion, the Abbasid caliphate, even under foreign domination, made Iraq a home of sciences, arts, and literature. Even after the death of the last caliph, Baghdad remained a centre of civilization, attracting scholars and art lovers. But the Mongol domination was disastrous for Iraq in general, and the ensuing disruption of life and continuing insecurity wrought great social, economic, and, especially, agricultural damage, which would endure through the Ilkhanid period into later dynasties.

Atabeg buildings in the north of Iraq

Qara Seray (Mosul)

Nuri Al-Din Mosque (Mosul)

Minarets of Arbil and Sinjar

Mashhad Al-Imam Yabya (Mosul)

Mar Bahnam



The art of the Atabegs

An important workshop for the production of metal objects developed at Mosul in the 7th century AH/13th AD under the patronage of the Atabeg/Zangid dynasty, together with a school of miniaturists who adopted a Seljuk style. In the centuries to follow its influence would be felt from North Africa to eastern Iran. The so-called Mosul School elaborated an extraordinary intarsio technique that used different metals, especially silver or gold on bronze or brass, to create extremely effective figured scenes. Da'ud ibn Salamah stands out as one of the most skilful masters of the technique.

The Ilkhanid state (656–738 AH/1258–1338 AD)

The Mongol Ilkhanid state in Iraq began with the invasion of the country and sack of Baghdad, in 656/1258, by Hulaku, known as Il-Khan, son of Tuluy Khan and grandson of Genghis Khan. Appointing a vassal ruler in Baghdad, Hulaku himself pressed westwards. After his death, his son and successor Abaqa Khan made a reputation as a builder and reformer. He was responsible for the rebuilding of the Caliphs' Mosque and the Suq-al-Ghazal minaret, among other projects (678/1279). Under him Ala-ad-Din Juwaini was governor of Baghdad. The Tartars were converted to Islam in his reign, and among the first converts was another son of Hulaku, Tukudar Khan, who took the name of Ahmed Khan and the title Sultan (681–683/1282–1284). Intrigues between the governors and princes kept conditions in Iraq unstable, and in 683/1284 AD, Abaqa's son Arghun revolted and lost his life in the effort. A number of more or less weak and irresponsible kings followed in quick succession. Thus it was that after 80 years, the Ilkhanid Dynasty in Iraq fell to the rising ambitions of the founder of the Jalayrid Dynasty.

Jalayrid state (739–814 AH/1338–1411 AD)

The Jalayrid state was founded by Shaikh Hasan al-Jalayri, a Mongol originally from Persia and Anatolia. He seized the opportunity afforded him by the internal dissensions of the Ilkhanid rulers, and in 738/1338 occupied Baghdad and declared himself an independent sovereign with Baghdad as his capital. He was succeeded by his son, As-Sultan Shaikh Muizz-ed-Din Uwais. He expanded the state's frontiers and appointed as governor of Baghdad his Mamluk Amin-ed-Din Mirjan, who built the Khan Mirjan as part of the nearby Mosque and College.

During the reign of his successor, his son Sultan Ahmad ibn Muizz-ed-Din Uwais, Timurlang (known as Tamerlane) descended from Turkestan and invaded Iraq (795/1392). Ahmad's resistance to the invasion was swept aside, and Baghdad once again suffered sack and ruin. The Sultan took refuge in Egypt, where he was given a friendly reception by king





Dhahir Barquq. During his exile he put together a strong army with which he marched on Baghdad and recaptured the city. He was, however, soon ousted again by Timurlang, only to return two years later, and with the help of the Turkoman ruler Qara Yusuf, regained the city. Timurlang descended on Baghdad for a third time, and this time completely destroyed its public buildings and massacred its inhabitants. Ahmad himself escaped to Aleppo. Although he returned once more to Baghdad, he found himself on bad terms with his former ally Qara Yusuf and retired to Egypt. Later, in the face of another Timurid advance on Baghdad, Qara Yusuf himself followed Ahmad's example and went to Egypt.

During the Jalayrid period Baghdad was devastated several times by floods and plagues that greatly reduced the population. After the death of Timurlang (807/1404), Ahmad and the Turkoman Qara Yusuf continued their struggle in Azerbaijan, until eventually Qara Yusuf succeeded in taking Tabriz and Ahmad was dethroned and put to death.

The minaret of Jami' Al-Khulafa' (Suq Al-Ghazl)

The mausoleum of Muhammad As-Sakran

The minaret, masjid, and tomb of Dhu'l-Kifl

The tomb of Shaikh 'Umar As-Subrawardi

Al-Madrasa Al-Mirjaniya

Khan Mirjan

Al-Sifina (the ship) in the courtyard of Al-Kufah mosque



The Black Sheep and White Sheep states (813–914 AH/1410–1508 AD)

The Turkoman Black Sheep state was founded by Qara Yusuf on the death of Ahmad ibn Muizz-ed-Din in Tabriz (813/1410). The remainder of his dynasty, which included Jihan Shah, ruled in a period of great strife and internal struggles from which Iraq suffered mightily. In 874/1470 power passed to the White Sheep Dynasty, when Sultan Hasan at-Tawil al-Turkmani descended from Diyar Bakjr and defeated the Black Sheep Dynasty. He and his successors maintained a precarious hold on the country for forty years. They were ultimately defeated by the Persian ruler Shah Ismail as-Safawi, who gained control of the whole northern area and then captured Baghdad in 914 AH/1508, founding the great Safawid Dynasty in Iran.

Safawid state in Iraq (914–941 AH/1508–1534AD)

The renowned founder of this dynasty was Shah Ismail ibn Junaid ibn ash-Shaikh Safa-ed-Din al Ardabili, who was held in great esteem as a leading exponent of Sufic doctrines. After his death, in 930/1523, he was succeeded by his son Tahmasp, whose long reign was marked by constant warfare and dissension. Tahmasp put down a mutiny by Prince Dhulfiqar with the assistance of Sulaiman al-Qanuni, the Turkish sultan, and had Dhulfiqar himself put

to death. This greatly angered Sulaiman, who dispatched his general Ibrahim Pasha at the head of a large army against Baghdad, which he occupied in 941/1534. Thereafter Sulaiman al-Qanuni visited Baghdad and other parts of Iraq and ordered the initiation of reform measures. However, the Turkish governors of Iraq engaged in hostilities and intrigues and neglected their duties, bringing great hardship on the country. The police chief, As-Subashi Bakir, appealed to the Safawid Shah Abbas for assistance. Abbas answered his appeal with a well-equipped army and recaptured Baghdad (1033/1623).

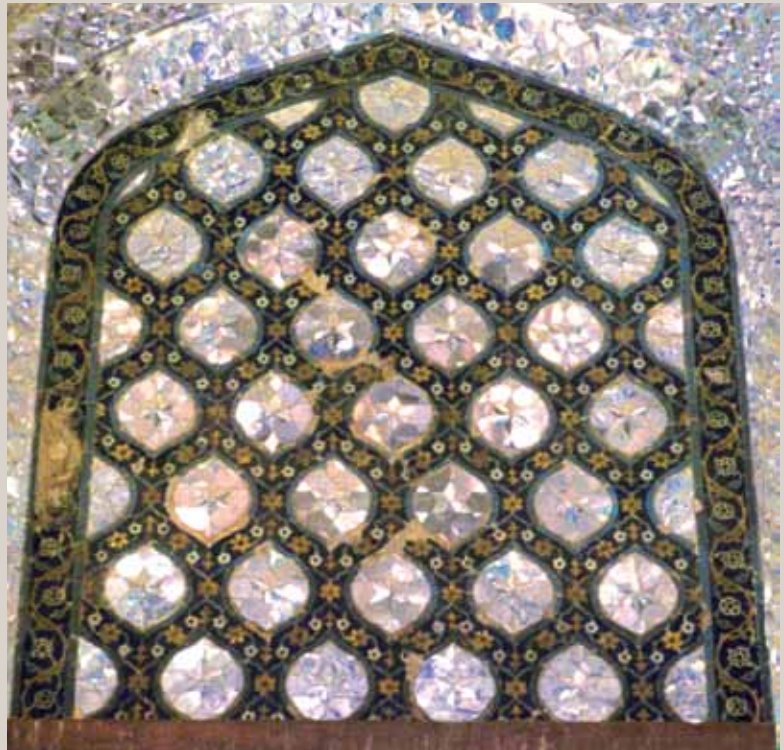
There followed several more Safawid rulers, while the Turks prepared for the final showdown. In 1047/1637 the Turkish Sultan Murad IV invaded Iraq, and after taking Mosul, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Sulaimaniyah, entered Baghdad in 1049/1639. Thus began the Ottoman era in Iraq. The huge cannon, called Toab Abu Khizzama, with which Murad took Baghdad is still in an excellent state of preservation and was displayed in the centre of Maidan Square near the Ministry of Defence, Baghdad.

Under Safawid rule most of the Shi'a holy places were renovated. One of them, al Kadhimain shrine, founded in the early Abbasid period, was rebuilt and restored several times; it is known above for all its beautiful faience mosaic decorations.

Safawid art

Safawid influence on art and architecture can be seen in Iraq especially in the cult buildings of the numerous Shi'a communities and was to last through much of the Ottoman domination. The sanctuaries of Kerbala, Najaf, Samarra, and especially Kadhimiyyah are good examples. Some specimens survive in Iraq of 16th-century inlaid majolica decoration and some recurring architectural features, such as the bulb ("onion") dome faced with majolica tiles, *kashi*, originally produced at Isfahan and later at Kerbala.

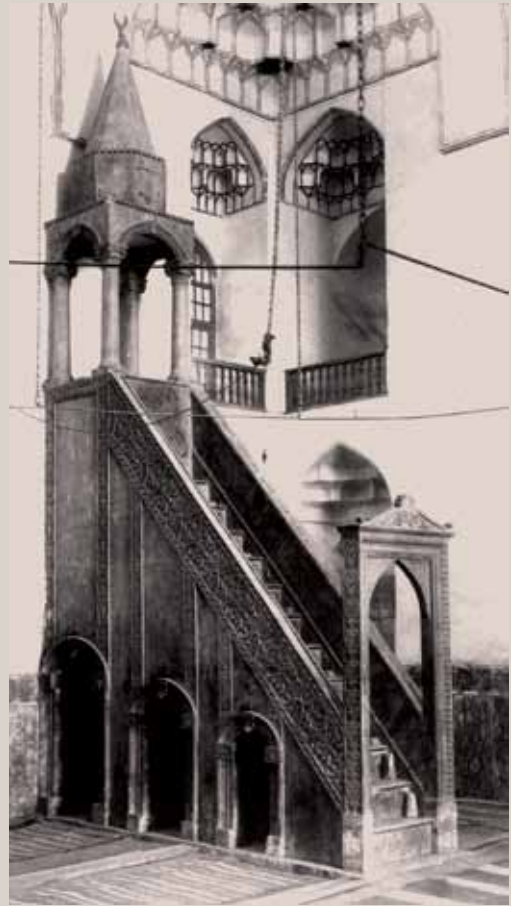
The Iranian influence in Baghdad's building practice persisted until the dawn of the 20th century in interventions on Shi'a shrines and more in general in domestic construction. Typical of the Qajar dynasty (18th–19th century) are the wood-panel revetments with close geometric motifs with small mirrors inserted and stucco decoration with motifs inspired by European rococo.



Ottoman rule in Iraq (1049–1335 AH/1639–1917 AD)

The Ottoman Empire was founded in Anatolia in 699/1299 by Ghazi ibn Ertoghul. The Ottomans were in origin Turkoman tribes subject to the rule of the Turkish Seljuks; their dynasty numbered 37 sultans. The early Ottoman sultans succeeded in enlarging the empire's territory to cover the western parts of Asia Minor, but came into conflict with the Byzantines. In 838/1435 the Sultan Muhammad II (The Conqueror) took Constantinople and made it the capital of the empire. The Ottomans subsequently added the Balkan states and North Africa to their conquests, as well as the Near Eastern countries to the south and east, including Iraq.

Some mention has already been made of the struggle between the Ottomans and the Safawid Dynasty. In the north of Iraq Safawid rule was terminated by Sultan Selim I, who also conquered the Mamluk dynasties of Syria and Egypt. In 941/1534 his son, Sulaiman al-Qanuni, took Baghdad, thus starting Iraq's First Ottoman Era. The subsequent reassertion of Safawid authority under Shah Abbas, and the retaking of Baghdad by Sultan Murad IV, have already been recounted. After the establishment of the Second Ottoman Era in 1049/1639 Murad IV appointed the first Governor (*wali*) of Iraq, and thereafter Iraq's status as a province of the Ottoman Empire remained constant until Baghdad fell to the British in 1917. During this period the country suffered from shameful neglect and weak administration. The central authority was in permanent conflict with disaffected elements, and unable to cope with the effects of natural catastrophes. A constant threat was posed by the Persian Empire to the East, but in 1165/1751 power in Iraq was assumed by the Mamluk dynasty, which ruled in the name of the Ottoman Sultans. The last of the Mamluk governors, who included Sulaiman Pasha, was the celebrated and powerful Daud Pasha. His strong



personality and independent policies were a source of concern to the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II, who decided to send a strong army against Iraq to depose the Pasha. He was aided meanwhile by high floods and devastating plagues which afflicted Baghdad, and in 1247/1831 Daud Pasha was forced to surrender, ending the Mamluk rule in Iraq.

From now on direct Ottoman rule was restored in Iraq, and governors were appointed from Constantinople, with allegiance to the sultan in person. Within Iraq itself dissension and intrigues continued, particularly between the governor, the governor of Mosul (Injeishare Aga), and the Arab tribes. Owing to the difficulty and delay in communication with Constantinople, the governor was not in a position to control the situation with the decisive and energetic policies it demanded. During the same time the Ottoman Empire began to feel the interference of foreign powers in commercial and other spheres.

In 1869 the governorship passed to Midhat Pasha, who undertook many significant reform and modernization measures during his brief administration. He inaugurated schools, established factories, and drew up plans for the pacification and settlement of the tribes. Later, after the accession of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the governor Nadhim Pasha was appointed to Baghdad (1317/1910). He also initiated works of reform and reconstruction, especially in Baghdad.

During World War I, Iraq was the scene of fierce fighting between the Turkish and British armies; the British entered Baghdad in 1917, and in 1918 took Mosul. The revolution that led to the liberation of Iraq broke out on 13 Shawwal 1338/30 June 1920 AD, and the country won its independence with the formation, on 18 Dhil-Hijja 1339/23 August 1921, of the first Iraqi national government.

Ottoman architecture

Most of the Ottoman-period monuments are in Baghdad. Some are restorations or refacings of pre-existing buildings, but among the best-known new constructions are the al-Ahmadiya (1211/1796) and al-Haydar Khaneh mosques (1242/1826). Both have square prayer rooms flanked by two naves, preceded by a porticoed gallery. The central domes of both mosques are bulb-shaped, faced in maiolica, outside, hemispherical inside. The Haydar Khaneh's *mimbar*, made of Mosul marble and finely carved with vegetal motifs of neoclassical inspiration, is particularly admirable.

Of the Ottoman citadel the structure originally intended as a barracks, only the Qushla (1276–1286/1860–70) survives. On the right bank of the Tigris, a long (about 180 m) L-shaped two-storey building, with central body slightly taller than the rest, defines a broad open space in the centre of which is a clock tower. Crenellated square towers punctuate the outer façade, semicircular towers the inner façade towards the river. The stylistic model of the building reveals, in particular in the pedimented windows of the central body, inspired by European neoclassicism.





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