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A Reconstructive Hypothesis of the Palace-Mosque Complex in the Round City of al-Manṣūr in Baghdād

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Abstract

The plan of the palace-mosque complex built by al-Manṣūr at the centre of his Round City in Baghdād is one of the most fascinating problems in the history of early Islamic architecture. Its importance is due to its chronological and cultural setting – the beginning of the ‘Abbasid rule and the Iranian area – which marked a radical change from the Syrian-centred Umayyad culture. The main issue concerns the relationship between this complex and the previous and following architectural and urban traditions, which appear to be the outcome of different conceptions of power and space. Regrettably, the information mainly comes from literary sources. Their different readings have resulted in the complex being contextualized within the previous or following traditions. By analysing these sources, this essay will propose an alternative view of the morphology of the palace and mosque and their relationship, and interpret them as a unique moment of transition from the Umayyad to the ‘Abbasid conception of power and space.

Keywords: Baghdād, Round City of al-Manṣūr, palace-mosque complex, Umayyad architecture, ‘Abbasid Architecture.

The night between 7 and 8 Jumādā II 329 (10 March 941) “the crown of Baghdād, the banner of the realm, the major monument of the ‘Abbasids” collapsed (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 11). This was the dome that stood over the audience chamber in al-Manṣūr’s palace, which was built in the centre of the Round City in Baghdād, founded by al-Manṣūr on the

left bank of the Tigris in 145 H (762). In truth, in 329 (941) the audience chamber was all that remained of the palace, the precincts of which had been partly incorporated by the enlargement of the mosque commissioned by al-Mu‘taḍid billāh a few years before 280 H (893/894) – the mosque had already been enlarged by Hārūn al-Rashīd in 192-193 H (808-809) – and partly by the enlargement of the Badriyya neighbourhood by Badr, the Caliph’s *mawlā* (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 59-61). In 374 (985) the whole Round City was in ruins and deserted, and only the mosque was still frequented on Fridays (al-Muqaddasī 1906: 120). It possibly survived the Mongols’ sacking in 1256 and was destroyed in 1623 by the Safavid army (Le Strange 1900: 36-37; Creswell 1979b: 34-35). Later on the Round City was completely obliterated by modern buildings making archaeological investigation quite impossible.

The reconstruction of the plans of the palace and the mosque of the Round City of al-Manṣūr are essential to establish the relationships between the two buildings in the transitional phase between the Umayyad and the ‘Abbasid concept of the palace-mosque complex. Indeed, the case of the Round City is chronologically set between the construction of the palace-mosque complex of Marw in 748-755 (Creswell 1979b: 3), the incipient disruption of this scheme in al-Rāfiqa in 772 (Heidemann 2003; 2006) and its complete obliteration in Sāmarrā’ in 836 (Northedge 2007). The task is difficult since, in the absence of archaeological data, the reconstruction must rely on written sources subject to different interpretations. The following is an attempt to clarify some issues and contribute to the discussion, without any pretence of providing the final solution to the problem.

The sources

Among the numerous texts dealing with the Round City (Creswell 1979b: 29-30), three in particular pay specific attention to the palace and the mosque: the 10th-century Geography by al-Ya‘qūbī, the Universal History by al-Ṭabarī, and the 11th-century History of Baghdād by al-Khatīb. The former two provide few but useful details, while the latter gives a comprehensive account. Since these sources are fundamental to the following discourse, it seemed appropriate to quote them:

al-Ya‘qūbī (al-Ya‘qūbī 1892: 240-241): “In the middle of the courtyard [*raḥaba*] was the palace –its gate was named the Golden Gate – and next to the palace [*ilā janīb al-qaṣr*] was the congregational mosque. There were no other buildings or houses nor residences around the palace, except a structure on the side [*min nāḥiya*] – of Bāb al-Shām for the bodyguard [*ḥaras*] – and a large gallery [*saqīfa*] on columns constructed of backed brick and gypsum; the chief of the security forces used to be stationed in one and the head of the bodyguard in the other – today it is used for performing the prayer. Arranged around the perimeter of the courtyard were the residences of al-Manṣūr’s young children and the household slaves in attendance, the treasury, the armory, the chancery, the finance ministry, the ministry of the privy seal, the ministry of the army, the ministry of supplies, the ministry of court servants, the public kitchen, and the ministry of stipends (*nafaqāt*). From one arcade to another there were streets and lanes [...]. None of these streets connected with the wall of the courtyard where the caliphal palace was located; the wall was around the courtyard and the streets were concentric to it” (al-Ya‘qūbī 2018: 74-75).

al-Ṭabarī (al-Ṭabarī 1883-1885: 321-322; 324-326): “He [al-Manṣūr] built his palace in the middle of it [his city] and the congregational mosque next to it (*hawla*) the palace. It is said that al-Ḥajjāj b. ‘Arṭāt was the man who laid out the plan of the congregational mosque on the orders of Abū Ja‘far and laid its foundations. It is said that its *qibla* was not in the right direction and that anyone praying in it had to turn a little toward the Baṣra Gate and that the *qibla* of the mosque of al-Ruṣāfa was more correct than the *qibla* of the mosque of the city because the mosque of the city was built onto [‘*alā*] the palace, while the mosque of al-Ruṣāfa was built before the palace and the palace was built onto it [‘*alayhi*] and it happened because of that [...]. The doors of the chambers of the mass of the military commanders and secretaries of Abū Ja‘far opened into the courtyard of the mosque [*raḥaba al-masjid*]. [...] According to ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Faḍl b. al-Rabī‘: When al-Manṣūr had finished building his palace in the city, he entered it and toured it and approved of it and examined it and admired what he saw in it, except that he thought he had spent too much money in it. He looked at one part of it [*mawḍu‘ fihī*] and thought it excellent, and he said to me: ‘Go out to al-Rabī‘ and tell him to go out to al-Musayyab and tell him to bring me a competent builder immediately’. I went out to al-Musayyab and told him, and he sent for the chief of the builders and summoned him and sent him to Abū Ja‘far [...]. He took his hand and said, ‘Come may God not teach you the right thing!’ He took him in the room [*ḥujra*] he admired and showed him a *majlis* that was in it and said, ‘Look at this *majlis* and build an arch [*tāq*] next to it so that it will be similar to the house

[*bayt*], and do not use any wood in it'. The builder said, 'Yes, O Commander of the Faithful,' and the builder and all those who were with him began to marvel at his understanding of building and engineering. The builder said to him, 'I am not expert enough to construct it in this way and cannot do it a want,' and he said, 'I will help you.' He ordered baked bricks [*ājur*] and plaster [*jīṣṣ*], and these were brought, and then he began to calculate the amount of bricks and plaster involved in the construction of the arch [...]. Then he took the measurements of the arch of the room [*min al-hujra hattā gburafihī*] so that he understood him [...]" (al-Ṭabarī 1990: 6; 7; 10-11).

al-Khaṭīb (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 10; 59-61): "Al-Manṣūr built the palace and the mosque. In front (*fi ṣadr*) of the palace was an *īwān*, 30 cubits long and 20 cubits wide. In front of the *īwān* was a reception/throne room [*majlis*], 20 cubits long and 20 cubits wide, 20 cubits high. Over it was a dome, and above it another reception/throne room [*majlis*] covered by a green dome. The total height of the room was 80 cubits. On top of the dome was a horse mounted by a horseman. The green dome was visible from all the sides of Baghdād". As for the mosque, al-Khaṭīb reports: "Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr had established the principal mosque of the city of al-Manṣūr in contact with (*mulāṣiq*) his palace called *Qaṣr al-dhabab* – it is (what is known as) the Old Court (*aṣ-ṣaḥn al-'atīq*) – he built it with sun dried bricks and clay; its dimensions, according to Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Warrāq and Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Muḥtasib, were as follows: Muḥammad ibn Khalaf says: The dimensions of the palace of al-Manṣūr were 400 cubits by 400 cubits and those of the first mosque

200 by 200; and the columns of wood of the mosque consisted of two pieces bound together with sinews, glue, and iron clamps, except five or six columns near the minaret. On each column were round composite capitals, of wood like the shaft. Ibn 'Arābī says: the *qibla* needed turning slightly towards the Baṣra Gate, certainly the *qibla* of (the mosque of) Ruṣāfa [...] is more accurate than it is. (The architect was al-Ḥajjāj ibn 'Artāt). The Great Mosque of the city (of al-Manṣūr) remained in the same state until the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Hārūn ordered its demolition and reconstruction with kiln-baked bricks and gypsum. This was done and they inscribed the name of Hārūn ar-Rashīd on it, mentioning the order which he had given concerning its construction, the name of the architect, of the carpenter, and the date; this inscription is to be seen to this day, on the outside wall of the mosque on the side next (*yali*) the Khurāsān Gate. Ibrāhīm bin Makhlad has handed down to us from Ismā'il al-Khuṭbī: the mosque of Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr was demolished, enlarged, and solidly rebuilt; the work, commenced in (1)92, was finished in (1)93 (=808-809). The Friday prayer was celebrated in the *Ṣaḥn al-'atīq*, which had been the mosque before it was enlarged by taking in the *Dār al-Qaṭṭān*, which had been a *Dīwān* (Government Office) of al-Manṣūr, built at the order of Muffīḥ the Turk, by his companion al-Qaṭṭān, and named after him. This became a praying place for the people and that in the year 260 (873/4) or 261 (874/875). Al-Mu'taḍid billāh afterwards added the first court, which was (part of) the Palace of al-Manṣūr; he joined to it the mosque by opening 17 arches in the partition wall between the palace and the Old Mosque (*al-jāmi' al-'atīq*), of which

13 opened into the *ṣahn* and 4 into the side arcades (*riwāqs*). He transported the pulpit, the *mihrāb* and the *maqṣūra* into the new mosque. Ibrāhīm ibn Makhlad states on the authority of Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Alī: the Commander of the Faithful al-Mu‘taḍid billāh was informed that there was not sufficient room in the Congregational Mosque on the west side of Madīnat al-Salām (= Baghdād in general) in the City of al-Manṣūr (the Round City), and that this want of room compelled the people to pray in places (*i.e.* the *Dār al-Qaṭṭān*) where prayer was not permissible (*tajūz*). He then ordered its enlargement at the expense of the palace of the Commander of the Faithful. A mosque was built there after the pattern of the first one, of the same size or nearly so. Then the *ṣadr* of the old mosque was opened and joined to it, and the people found ample room there. The completion of the building and the first service took place in 280 (893/894)” (Creswell 1979b: 30; 31-32; see also Lassner 1970: 52; 95-96).

Previous interpretations

Le Strange devoted a whole monograph to the topography of Baghdād during the ‘Abbasid period accompanied by maps (Le Strange 1900). His hypothesis on the Round City of al-Manṣūr was based on al-Ya‘qūbī’s and al-Khaṭīb’s descriptions. In regard to the central area where the palace and the mosque were located, Le Strange (1900: 30-37) argued that the two buildings were placed side by side and that the palace’s sides were aligned with the gates of the city wall, which he located as follows: al-Shām Gate to the north-west (315°), al-Khurāsān Gate to the north-east (45°), al-Baṣra Gate to the south-east (135°), and al-Kūfa Gate to the south-

west (225°). He inferred that the House of the Guard and the porticoes – as he intended *saqīfa* – were adjacent to the side of the palace oriented towards al-Shām Gate, namely towards the north-west, and, considering that the right *qibla* was towards the south-south-west (202.5°), he located the mosque on the side of the palace opposite the House of the Guard and the porticoes, its *qiblī* wall aligned with al-Kūfa Gate and its front with al-Khurāsān Gate. He also randomly distributed in the area the residences of Manṣūr's children and the other buildings relating to court offices. Le Strange described the palace as a square with each side measuring 200 yards [= 182.88 m], at the centre of which was the double audience chamber 30 feet square [9.144 m], surmounted by a 120 feet [36.576 m] high dome and preceded by an *īwān* 30 feet [9.144 m] wide and 45 feet [13.716 m] high. He added that although a large part of the palace had been pulled down when the mosque was enlarged at its own expense, the dome only fell in 329. As for the mosque, he interpreted al-Khaṭīb's text as follows: al-Manṣūr's mosque was a square measuring 200 ells or 100 yards on each side, thus its dimensions were one-quarter of the palace. This structure made of perishable material was replaced by Hārūn al-Rashīd, who placed a foundation inscription on the outer wall facing al-Khurāsān Gate [thus in the front of the mosque]. This was the mosque later known as the Old Court and it was abandoned since the people used the house of Qaṭṭān as an additional place for prayer. Then al-Mu'taḍid ordered the restoration and enlargement of the old mosque by adding part of the palace and opening 17 arches in the partition wall between the mosque and the palace: 13 towards the court and 4 in the

aisles or porticoes. The works were carried out under the direction of Badr and the new part of the mosque was named al-Badriyya in his honour. In his plan of the Round City Le Strange consequently locates the palace and the mosque in the centre of a circle delimited by streets leading to the four doors of the city wall (fig. 1). The intersection of the streets is found between the palace and the mosque, which are not adjacent but next to each other. Their axes are oriented towards north-west-south-east and north-east-south-west, but only two sides of the palace are aligned with the gates: the north-west side with al-Shām Gate and the south-east side with al-Başra Gate. The palace is represented as a square featuring a wide central court and two annexes on the north-west side – clearly the House of the Guard and the porticoes. The mosque is also a square, one-quarter of the palace in dimension, featuring a wide protruding *mīhrāb* on the *qiblī* wall oriented towards the south-west, a covered part occupying half of the area of the building, and a front wall in line with the north-east wall of the palace.

Some problems arise from this reconstruction. First of all both al-Ya‘qūbī and al-Khaṭīb specify that the palace and the mosque were adjacent: the former uses the locution *ilā jānib al-qaṣr al-masjid al-jāmi‘*, literally: “towards the side of the palace [was] the congregational mosque”, which recalls a similar expression used by Ibn Rusta (1892: 187) to describe the location of Ḥajjāj’s palace at Wāsiṭ, *bi-janibihi* [i.e. *bi-janib al-masjid*], literally “on its side [i.e. on the side of the mosque]”. As proved by the excavations, Ḥajjāj’s palace was adjacent to the mosque (Safar 1945). Moreover, the mosque and the palace at Wāsiṭ, like those at Kūfa (Mustafa 1963;

Creswell 1979a: 48), had the same 1:4 proportions and the same dimensions: 200 cubits square the mosque, 400 cubits square the palace (Yāqūt 1869: 885; Creswell 1979a: 132-133). In both cases the side of the mosque adjacent to the palace was the *qibli* wall, but at Wāsiṭ the mosque occupied the central part of the wall of the palace and, consequently, the gate of the latter was in a lateral position (Safar 1945: 20-23), while at Kūfa the mosque had three-quarters of the *qibli* wall adjacent to the palace, which left room for a central gate aligned with the audience chamber on the opposite side (Mustafa 1963). al-Khaṭīb is even more specific, since he uses the term *mulāsiq*, which has the specific meaning of adjacent. As Ṭabarī informs us, this very contiguity between the palace and the mosque caused the *qibla* of the latter to be off by some degrees. Indeed, if the palace and the mosque were not adjacent there could have been room for a deviation from the axis of the palace. The *qibla* of al-Manṣūr's mosque, and the related orientation of the palace, is also problematic in regard to the position of the gates on the city wall. Le Strange considered the correct *qibla* to be SSW, namely 202.5°, which approximates 200°, the value of the *qibla* calculated with the mathematical formula and considering modern geographical coordinates. By considering instead the Ptolemaic coordinates, the astronomers working at the 'Abbasid court calculated that the *qibla* at Baghdād was approximately 13° W of S (= 193°; King 2000: 228)¹. In

1. 13;24° according to Aḥmad ibn 'Abdallāh Ḥabash (d. 896), who served al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim; 13;38° according to Yaḥyā ibn Akhtam (d. 857), *qāḍī al-quḍāt* for al-Ma'mūn and al-Mutawakkil; 13;13° reported in a 'Abbasid *qibla* table: see King 2000: esp. 228. These *qibla* values

both cases, the *qibla* of Maṣṣūr's mosque would have been too far west, since the Baṣra Gate is mentioned by Ṭabarī and al-Khaṭīb as the direction towards which prayer should be directed. Since Baṣra is south of Baghdād, as is Kūfa, Le Strange located the gates named after them in the southern half of the round wall, al-Kūfa Gate to the SW and al-Baṣra Gate to the SE (fig. 1).

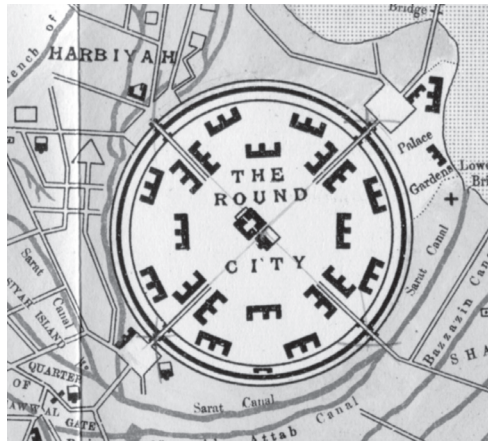


Fig. 1. Plan of the Round City proposed by Le Strange (after Le Strange 1900).

were obtained by King through the latitudes and longitudes of Mecca and Baghdād provided by the sources.

However, if the *qibla* of Manṣūr's mosque was too far west, prayer should have been directed more to the south rather than the south-east. As we shall see, it is also possible that al-Baṣra Gate was located to the south, al-Kūfa Gate to the west, and so on. A second problem in Le Strange's reconstruction is that he overlooked the phrasing al-Khaṭīb used to describe the position of the domed chamber: the writer does not state that the chamber was in the middle of the palace, but rather: *kāna fī ṣadr qaṣr al-Manṣūr īwān ṭūluḥu thalāthūn dhirā'an and 'arḍuhu 'isrūn dhirā'an wa-fī ṣadr al-īwān majlis 'isrūn dhirā'an fī 'isrūn dhirā'an* [...], literally: "in front of the palace of al-Manṣūr was an *īwān* 30 cubits long and 20 cubits wide and in front of the *īwān* an audience chamber 20 cubits by 20 cubits [...]". Whether we consider this *ṣadr* to be the front or the back of the palace, as we shall see in a while, it is definitely not the *wasat*, namely the centre. This detail is important, since if the domed chamber had been in the middle of the palace it would have been damaged when the size of the mosque was doubled at the expense of the palace by al-Mu'taḍid, according to the *khabar* by Ismā'īl ibn 'Alī reported by al-Khaṭīb and neglected by Le Strange. Yet, according to the *khabar* by Ismā'īl al-Khuṭbī, also reported by al-Khaṭīb, which Le Strange follows in regard to the opening of the partition wall between the palace and the mosque, the latter was not only rebuilt but also enlarged by Hārūn al-Rashīd. On the contrary, if the domed chamber was decentred, it could have remained untouched by the incorporation of the palace into the new mosque. Another problem re-

lates to the Badriyya, which according to the text of al-Khaṭīb were the quarters enlarged by Badr at the expense of the palace (*wa-zāda Badr mawlā al-Mu'taḍid min qaṣr al-Maṣṣūr al-muṣqaṭāt al-ma'rūfa bi-l-Badriyya fī dhālika al-waqt*) and not the new part added to the mosque. Another inconsistency, also noted by Lassner (1968: 29; 1970: 143-144; 1980: 188), is the location of the House of the Guard and the portico on one side of the palace: here again, the text by al-Ya'qūbī describes them as being *min nāhiya bāb al-Shām*, literally on the side of al-Shām Gate with no reference to their being contiguous to the palace.

Herzfeld (1920: 134-139) based his interpretation on al-Khaṭīb's text. He corrected the conversion made by Le Strange from cubits to meters and established that each side of the palace measured 207.12 m, the *iwān* was 14.53 m deep and 10.38 m wide, the audience chamber 10.38 m by 10.38 m, and the dome 41.42 m high. He interpreted *fī ṣadr al-qaṣr*, referred to the *iwān*, as in front of the palace, but *fī ṣadr al-īwān*, referred to the domed chamber, as at the back of the *iwān*. He observed that an *iwān* usually opened onto a court and therefore a court should have preceded the *iwān* and the domed chamber. He argued that since the dome was to be considered the centre of the palace, and that the palace had to have four gates aligned with the four gates of the city wall, for the sake of symmetry, there should have been four *iwān* preceded by four courts as in the palace of Hiraqla, which was also a round city. He also recalled that, according to al-Iṣṭakhrī,

the *dār al-imāra* built by Abū Muslim at Marw adjacent to the mosque had a central room surmounted by a dome 55 cubits wide with four doors each opening onto an *iwān* which led to a court (al-Iṣṭakhrī 1927: 259); according to Qazwīnī the dome was 50 cubits high, the *iwān* 30 cubits high and 60 wide, which Herzfeld found consistent with al-Khaṭīb's description of the palace of al-Manṣūr (Mustawfī Qazwīnī 1916: 156). Herzfeld also noticed that cruciform plans also occur in the audience chamber ensemble of the Bulkhuwāra and the Jawsaq al-Khāqānī at Sāmarrā', and also at Mshattā, where we find three apses and a basilical hall instead of four *iwāns*. Therefore, he inferred that the palace of al-Manṣūr was the prototype for the Samarran audience chamber ensemble. He also compared the arrangement of the *iwān* preceded by a court and followed by a domed room to that found at Ukhayḍir and recalled that 400 cubits by 400 cubits were the dimensions of Ḥajjāj's palace at Wāsiṭ. As for the mosque, Herzfeld located it in the centre of the side of the palace aligned with al-Kūfa Gate, and suggested that its front part was adjacent with the palace, the *mihrab* was exactly in axis with al-Kūfa Gate, and that the palace and mosque shared an entrance. According to Herzfeld, the right *qibla* had to be identified towards the East, since it was aligned with the Baṣra Gate. Indeed, he positioned the gates of the city wall as follows: al-Shām Gate just south of north-west (317°), the Khurāsān gate just south of north-east (47°), al-Baṣra Gate just north of south-east (137°), and al-Kūfa Gate just north of south-west (227°) (fig. 2).

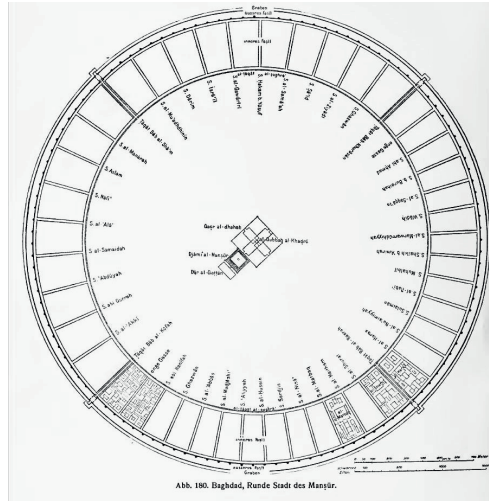


Fig. 2. Plan of the Round City proposed by Herzfeld (after Herzfeld 1920).

Herzfeld identified three structural phases of the mosque: the original mosque built by al-Manşūr in 762, which was 200 cubits by 200 cubits square; the mosque rebuilt by Hārūn al-Rashīd in 808, which had the same dimensions and plan as the previous building but was made of more exquisite material; the mosque commissioned by al-Mu‘taḍid and built by Badr in 893, which was characterized by two courts separated by a portico [*saqīfā*], as stated by al-Muqaddasī in his description of the mosque at Fasā (Muqaddasī 1906: 431). According to Herzfeld,

the court added by al-Mu‘taḍid, *al-ṣaḥn al-awwal* was obtained by building a court of the same dimensions as the first, *al-ṣaḥn al-‘atīq*, in the precincts of the palace: by opening 17 arcades in the partition wall of the two buildings – the front of the mosque and the side of the palace – 4 arcades opened onto the side porticoes of the court, two at each extremity, and 13 onto the court, thus forming a gallery between the two courts. The prayer hall was enlarged in the opposite direction by incorporating the House of Qaṭṭān, which became known as al-Badriyya (fig. 3a).

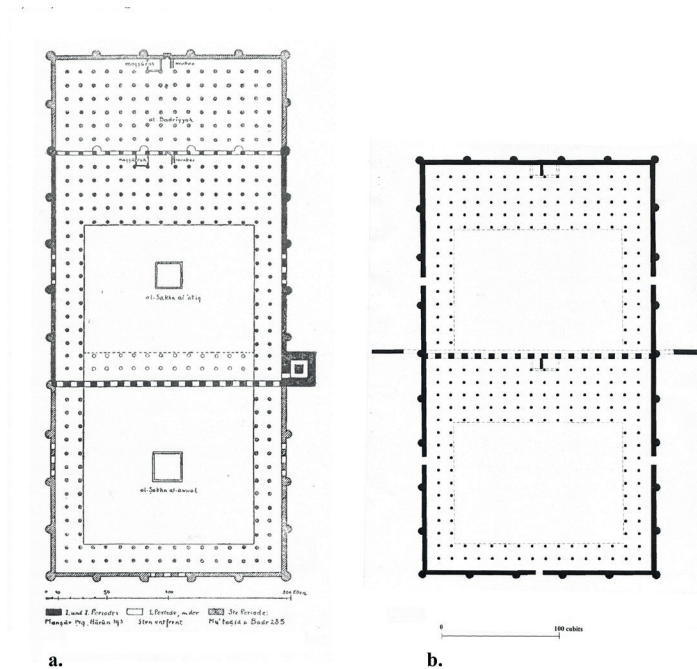


Fig. 3. a. Plan of al-Mu‘taḍid’s mosque proposed by Herzfeld (after Herzfeld 1920); b. Plan of al-Mu‘taḍid’s mosque proposed by Creswell (after Creswell-Allan 1989).

Herzfeld also calculated that the prayer hall possibly had 5 rows of 16 columns while the porticoes on the sides of the court consisted of a double row of 13 columns. The proportion of 5:17 was similar to the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn.

Herzfeld's reconstruction of the palace plan is doubtfully brilliant. It would attest the initial phase of a new concept of the caliphal palatial complex – or, better, of the ceremonial area – which was to be fully developed at Sāmarrā'. However, the archetype of this plan would remain Abū Muslim's *dār al-imāra* at Marw: though it was the gubernatorial palace of the capital of Khurāsān province, the base of the 'Abbasid revolution, it is odd to imagine that al-Manṣūr chose the mansion of a provincial governor as the model for the most representative building of his imperial capital. Most importantly, as already noted by Grabar (1958: 101), the description of Manṣūr's palace by al-Khaṭīb does not correspond to that of Abū Muslim's palace by al-Iṣṭakhri. The latter clearly mentions four *iwāns* and describes them as each leading to the domed chamber at the centre of the building and preceded by a court directed outwards. The central position of the domed chamber and its connection to four *iwāns* is missing in al-Khaṭīb's description. There, only one *iwān* is mentioned, and it is located *fī ṣadr al-qaṣr*, while the domed chamber is located *fī ṣadr al-iwān*. We cannot translate *fī ṣadr* in two different ways, "in front" and "at the back" respectively, as Herzfeld proposes, but also if we translate both occurrences as "in the front" – more correctly than "in front" – or "at the back" – we cannot locate

the domed chamber at the centre of the building. Both instances, the *iwān* (preceded by a court) in the front of the palace and the chamber in the front of the *iwān*, and the *iwān* (preceded by a court) at the back of the palace and the chamber at the back of the *iwān*, lead to the conclusion that the chamber was in the proximity of the perimetral wall of the palace, be it the front or back wall. As for the mosque, Herzfeld inferred that it was built against the south-western wall of palace, in the centre of it, like at Wāṣit. However, unlike there, the front side of the mosque, namely that opposite to the *qiblī* wall, abutted onto the palace. The south-western entrance to the palace should be located in the centre of this side, thus it would mark the first inconsistency with Herzfeld's plan of the mosque, which does not consider a pre-existent opening on the wall of the palace besides the seventeen created in the third phase. The second inconsistency was later noticed by Creswell (1979b: 33) and consists of the incorporation of the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* on the *qiblī* side. Creswell pointed out that the latter was not deemed an appropriate place for prayer; moreover, in order to add it to the *qiblī* wall of the mosque another seventeen arches should have been created and al-Khaṭīb does not state anything of the sort. We can add that, as clearly stated by al-Ya'qūbī and demonstrated by Lassner (1969: 29-33; 1970: 141-146; 1990: 184-197), *pace* Le Strange, the central area of the city did not include other buildings except the palace and the mosque; therefore the location of the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* behind the mosque is completely arbitrary. Another inconsistency is that the enlargement of mosques usually

regarded the covered parts, namely the *mughattā*, as for example in the Great Mosque of Cordoba – second phase (Creswell 1979b: 140, 145-157) – or the side porticoes, as for example in the mosque of ‘Amr at Fustāt - Ṭahirid and Faṭimid phases (Creswell 1979b: 171-194). Moreover, it is clear that the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* was used by people as a *muṣallā* because it was a covered building, otherwise the large central *raḥaba* would have provided plenty of space. Thus, the addition of a second court appears unjustified. Another issue concerns the omission of the second phase in the plan and its discussion. As noted by Lassner (1970: 189), this phase ascribed to Hārūn al-Rashīd, according to the second *khabar* reported by al-Khaṭīb, not only consisted of the re-building of the previous structure, but also the enlargement of the area of the mosque. We must consider then that it was this mosque that doubled in size, not the one by al-Manṣūr. The last problem is the orientation of the mosque and palace in relation to the position of the gates of the city wall. In this regard, the objections already raised to Le Strange’s reconstruction can be re-proposed.

Creswell (1979b: 4-18; and his fig. 1) accepted Herzfeld’s plan of the Round City, also locating the House of the Guard and the porch of the Police in the central area, but not specifying their position in regard to the palace. He stated that he relied on al-Khaṭīb’s description of the palace, but concluded that the *iwān* was in its middle (*fī ṣadr*), and the domed chamber was at its back (*fī ṣadr*), the height of which he calculated as 80 cubits (41.42 m; Creswell 1979b: 30). As for the mosque, Creswell (1979b: 31-35) criticised Herzfeld’s reconstruction, since he was not

entirely convinced that the front side of the mosque was adjacent to the palace instead of the *qiblī* side, as previously attested, for example, at Kūfa and Damascus, in order to allow the Caliph to enter the *maqṣūra* directly. As a more decisive argument, as we have already mentioned, he found the incorporation of the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* improbable as it was not suited to prayer; it would have required the opening of seventeen additional arcades, not mentioned in the sources; the *miḥrāb*, *minbar* and *maqṣūra* would not have been moved to a new mosque, as stated by al-Khaṭīb. Rejecting Le Strange's location of the mosque on the south-western side of the palace, he argued that the mosque should be positioned so that the *qiblī* wall was adjacent to the north-western side of the palace, in the middle of it (Creswell 1979b: 34 fig. 25 = here fig. 3b). Indeed, Creswell interpreted *ṣadr*, which occurs in the second *khābar* reported by al-Khaṭīb, as the part opened to join the two buildings, as "the part opposite to the entrance", namely the back of the *mughattā*. He imagined a duplication of the plan of Maṣṣūr's mosque as drawn by Herzfeld, minus its north-eastern portico; in so doing, he turned the *mughattā* of the old mosque into a portico between the two courts, thus suiting the description of the mosque at Fasā. Effectively, this created thirteen arches that opened onto the old court, four of which were in the side porticoes, as reported in the first *khābar* quoted by al-Khaṭīb. Therefore, Creswell justifies the need to move the *miḥrāb*, *minbar* and *maqṣūra* in the new *mughattā* (fig. 3b). Here again we find four main problems: 1. the enlargement by Hārūn al-Rashīd is not taken into account, as later ob-

served by Lassner (1970: 189-190); 2. the *mughattā* has the same dimensions as before, thus not solving the problem of the need for a larger covered space; 3. the relationship between the mosque and the *iwān* and the domed chamber, which Creswell locates at the centre of the palace, is not explained; 4. the denomination of the new court as the First Court (*al-ṣaḥn al-awwal*), which implies that it should have been accessed before entering the Old Court (*al-ṣaḥn al-‘atīq*), is inconsistent. Moreover, the orientation of the mosque and the palace with respect to the gates of the city wall remain the same as proposed by Herzfeld.

Grabar (1958) questioned Herzfeld’s and Creswell’s ‘central plan’ of the palace, arguing for an arrangement of the quarters along a longitudinal axis. He translated the first *ṣadr* occurring in the related passage of al-Khaṭīb as “in the centre and on the axis of” Mansūr’s palace, and the second as “right in the back” (Grabar 1958: 101). He also outlined the importance of the Golden Gate, which gave its name to the palace, and imagined it as the most striking area of the building along with the throne room complex. Thus, he reconstructed the plan as consisting of an elaborate gateway block in axis with a court onto which opened the *iwān* leading to the throne room ensemble. According to Grabar, this axial longitudinal arrangement was reminiscent of that of Mshattā and the relationships between the latter and Mansūr’s palace could be explained through the Umayyad architectural experiences had in ‘Irāq, specifically at Kūfa and Wāsiṭ. In the palace of Kūfa Grabar recognized “a close parallel in the organization of ceremonial rooms to both al-Mushatta and Baghdād and that this organization – regardless of the specif-

ic means used to carry it out – is not of western origin” (Grabar 1958: 104). After posing the question of whether Kūfa was the model for the two later buildings, he was inclined to identify it as the palace of Wāsīt. Though the excavations have only unearthed a portion extending along the *qiblī* wall of the mosque, consisting of an odd number of colonnades and a lateral gate, and the sources only provide its dimensions and describe its dome, Grabar inferred that there was an ideological connection between the two palaces. Indeed, he recalled a *khobar* reported by al-Khaṭīb in which it is stated that al-Manṣūr moved to Baghdād the doors al-Ḥajjāj had in turn transferred to Wāsīt from a Solomonic city (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 13) and that both Manṣūr’s and Ḥajjāj’s palaces had a green high dome (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 10; Ibn Rusta 1891: 187)². He concluded that “Baghdād was a royal city and as a capital, in a sort of apotropaic succes-

2. In truth, the *qubbat al-khadrā*’ was also found in Mu‘āwiya’s palace at Damascus; moreover, the locution is an *idāfa* and consequently, if we maintain “green” as the meaning of *khadrā*’, we should translate it as “the dome of the green”. A possible explanation for this construction and its meaning has been provided by Bloom 1993. However, as the sources state, in the case of Damascus, Wāsīt, and Baghdād, *qubbat al-khadrā*’ not only indicated the dome crowning the caliphal or gubernatorial palaces, but indeed the whole building. Since *qubba* originally indicated a tent and, according to the lexicographers al-Jawharī and al-Fayrūzābādī, *khadrā*’ meant “The congregated or collective body, and mass, or bulk, of a people” (Lane 1968: 756), we could also infer that the meaning of *qubbat al-khadrā*’ was “the tent of the assembly”, thus a synonym of *dār al-nadwa*, the place where, according to tradition, the Quraysh met to take collegial decisions in pre-Islamic Mecca and was later bought by Mu‘āwiya (Paret 1991). This raises some intriguing questions about the original form and function of the *dār al-nadwa* and its relationships with the later *qubbat*

sion to Wāsiṭ, the flourishing capital of Umayyad al-‘Irāq” (Grabar 1958: 105). Indeed, according to him, when the ‘Abbasids prevailed, Wāsiṭ was the only city that could stand as a symbol of Umayyad power, “the capital of the most important province of the empire and of the region which was becoming the central one in the empire [...] and the only major urban testimony to the dynasty’s power” (Grabar 1958: 106).

Lassner (1969; 1970: 138-146; 1990: 184-197) convincingly pointed out that the central area of Manṣūr’s city consisted of a large courtyard with the palace and mosque at its centre and the residences of the princes and the administrative and military buildings arranged all around the circumference and encompassed in a fourth *intervallum*. Indeed, he interpreted the smaller arcades (*al-ṭaqāt al-ṣughrā*) mentioned in the sources as a continuation of the larger arcades which lead from the gates on the city wall to the central area. He interpreted the passage by Ṭabarī on the doors of the chambers of Manṣūr’s generals and scribes opening onto the court (*raḥaba*) of the mosque as referring to the central courtyard (*raḥaba*) of the city instead. He located the House of the Guard next to the Shām Gate and the portico of the police elsewhere. He brilliantly inferred that the whole central area was conceived as a Caliphal palace precinct, of which the palace-mosque complex was the major element, and the gates on the city wall, where the Caliph received the envoys, as an extension of the palace. Thus the Round City appeared as a sort of “palatial city”, consequently justifying its specific fea-

al-khaḍrā’ both as an audience room (*majlis*) and as a building.

tures which were so different from previous Islamic urbanistic experiences. As for the palace and the mosque, Lassner (1990: 181-182) followed Grabar in identifying the complex of Wāsiṭ as the model for that of al-Manṣūr. He translated the passage referring to the *iwān* and the dome as “In back [sic] of al-Manṣūr’s palace was a reception hall [*iwān*] thirty by twenty cubits and in back of this hall [sic] was an audience room twenty by twenty cubits, whose ceiling ended in a dome” (Lassner 1970: 52). He recalled Herzfeld’s and Creswell’s reconstruction of the palace as having a central domed

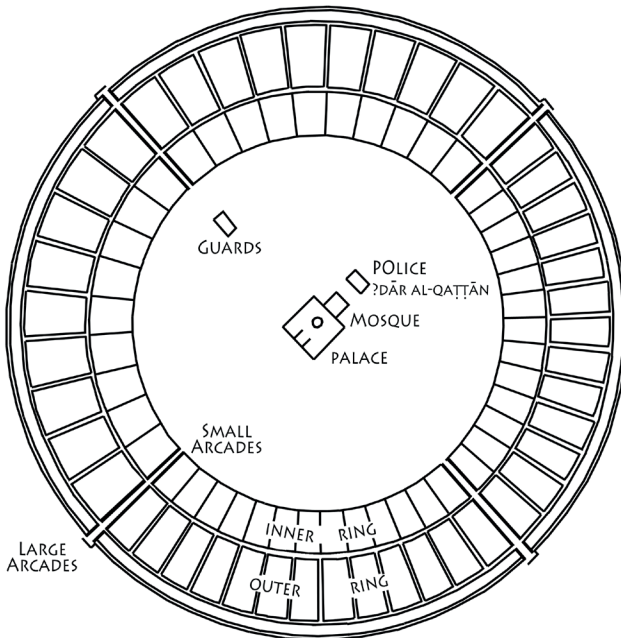


Fig. 4. Plan of the Round City proposed by Lassner (after Lassner 1970 and 1990).

chamber and four *iwāns* opening onto four courts, and Grabar's alternative view of an arrangement on a longitudinal axis (Lassner 1970: 239, n. 21). In this schematic rendering of the plan of the city he drew a round circle representing the dome at the centre of the north-eastern half of the palace, and two parallel lines perpendicular to its south-western side representing the *iwān* (Lassner 1970: 207 fig. 2; 1990: 190 fig. 2; here fig. 4). Moreover, he superimposed his plan of the palace on Herzfeld's plan of the city (fig. 4) and maintained the location of the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* in front of the north-east side of the mosque. He identified it as the portico of the Chief of Police (Lassner 1970: 193-195).

Lassner (1970: 189-193) observed that Creswell's reconstruction of the history of the mosque neglected the second phase, namely the enlargement by Hārūn al-Rashīd. He considered that this could have been achieved in three ways: by extending the length of the original building, the width, or both (Lassner 1970: 216 fig. 12, 217 fig. 13, 218 fig. 14; here fig. 5).

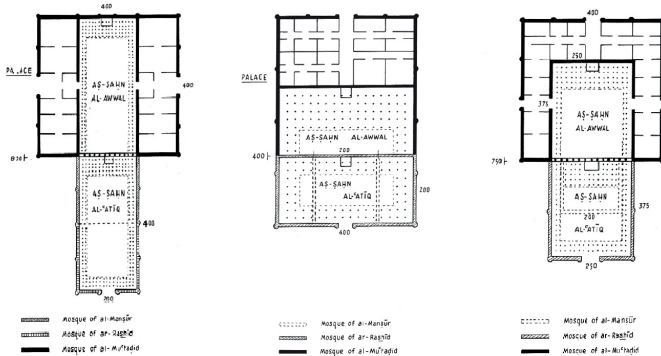


Fig. 5. Alternative plans of al-Mu'tadid's mosque proposed by Lassner (after Lassner 1970).

Lassner considered the first possibility as inconvenient since the symmetry altered the proportions (800 by 200 cubits, 4:1) and did not solve the problem of enlarging the covered area. The second possibility, namely a second mosque 200 by 400 cubits and a third 400 by 400 cubits, also appeared as unsatisfactory to him since instances of mosques characterized by their width exceeding their length are unknown in the 'Abbasid period; moreover, applying the proportion widespread in 'Irāq to the square mosque, namely 5:17, would make the courts very narrow. Lassner favoured the third possibility, thus calculating that Hārūn's mosque could have been a rectangle measuring 375 by 250 cubits, thus giving a ratio of 3:2, and that Mu'ṭaḍid's mosque should measure 750 by 250 cubits, thus giving a ratio of 3:1. However, he also suggested a square plan for Hārūn's mosque, which would have measured 300 by 300 cubits, thus, as Allan (in Creswell-Allan 1989: 242 and Allan 1991: 20) has observed, Mu'ṭaḍid's mosque, being a rectangle of 300 by 600 cubits, would have had a more acceptable ratio of 2:1. As for the orientation of the palace-mosque complex, Lassner (1970: 207 fig. 2; 1990: 190 fig. 2; here fig. 5) positioned Manṣūr's mosque in the middle of the north-western side of the palace, with its *qibli* wall aligned with the Kūfa Gate. The principal objection to Lassner's proposal regarding the history of the mosque is that, as we have seen before, he positioned the domed chamber at centre of the north-eastern half of the palace, thus exposing it to the damage caused by any enlargement of the mosque towards the south-west.

Hillenbrand (1981: 17) rejected Grabar's identification of the palace at Wāsiṭ as the model for Manṣūr's palace due to an evident lack of archaeological and textual evidence as well as the

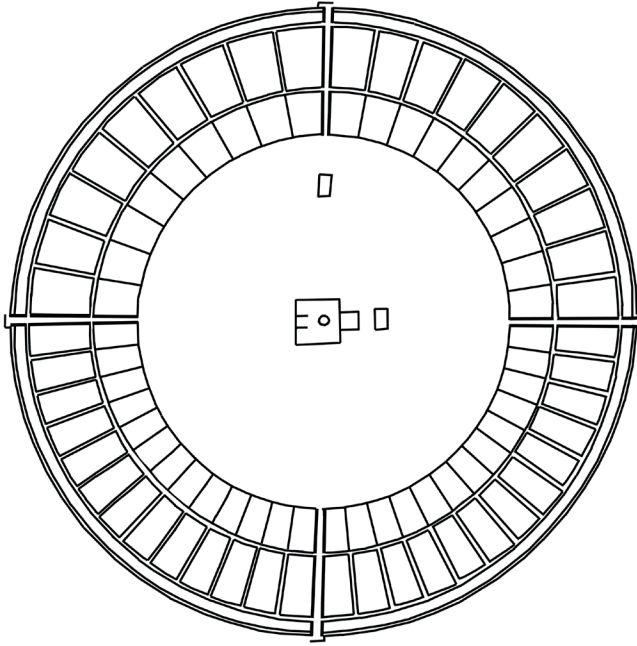


Fig. 6. Plan of the Round City proposed by Hillenbrand (after Hillenbrand 1999).

parallels with Kūfa and Mshattā. He followed Herzfeld's reconstruction of the plan of the palace (Hillenbrand 1994: 392-395), though he accepted Lassner's scheme (Hillenbrand 1999: 40 fig. 23; here fig. 6) where, however, he shifted the orientation of the palace-mosque complex and of the gates on the city wall: the main axes of the former and the latter are positioned in correspondence to the four cardinal points. Though the names of the gates are not specified, the diagram indicating the House of the Guard in the proximity of al-Shām Gate leads us to identify the latter as the northern gate. This hypothesis on the orientation of the gates will be useful for the following discussion.

A further hypothesis

As is evident from the objections raised to Herzfeld's and Creswell's reconstruction of the plan of the palace, the key to understanding it should be identified in the term *al-Khaṭīb* used to outline the relationships between the domed chamber and the *īwān*, namely *ṣadr*. As we have already anticipated, if we translate both occurrences as “in the front” or “at the back” of the palace, we cannot locate the domed chamber at the centre of the building. Rather, both instances, the *īwān* (preceded by a court) in the front of the palace and the chamber in the front of the *īwān*, and the *īwān* (preceded by a court) at the back of the palace and the chamber at the back of the *īwān*, lead to the conclusion that the chamber was in the proximity of the perimetral wall of the palace, be it the front wall or the back wall. In truth, the lexicographers, as also pointed out by Creswell (1979b: 34 n. 1), define *ṣadr* as “Anything that fronts, or faces, one [...] breast or bosom [...]. The upper, or uppermost, part of the front of anything [...]. And *ṣadr al-majlis*: The upper, or highest, part (or end) of the sitting room, or sitting place [...]. The first, first part, or commencement, of anything [...].” (Lane 1968: 1661). Thus, it is evident that the meaning of *ṣadr* depends on the perspective of the beholder. Indeed, if we imagine the palace in front of us, we will find the *īwān* in front of us, then the domed chamber in front of us as well, along with the axis of the main entrance. As also suggested by Grabar, this main entrance should be identified as the Golden Door which gave the palace its name and is the only gate of the building mentioned in the sources. This excludes the possibility that the *īwān* opened directly onto the central courtyard of the city, since the *īwān* is precisely char-

acterized by having the outward side open. Moreover, in the extant Umayyad and ‘Abbasid urban palaces – as for instance at ‘Ammān, Kūfa, Sāmarrā’ – the audience chamber, along with the Caliph’s apartments, is reached after passing through long vestibules and courts, being located on the opposite side of the entrance. Moreover, the possibility that the court onto which the *iwān* opened abutted or was very close to the perimetral wall – a possibility which would mean the domed chamber could be located at the centre of the palace – is unlikely, since comparable cases are unknown and the Caliph’s apartments would not have been secluded from the rooms used for other functions and dwellers. These considerations are supported by the *khbar* by ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Faḍl b. al-Rabī‘ reported by Ṭabarī, which describes the construction of the *ṭāq* preceding the *majlis*. Since *ṭāqāt* is used in the descriptions of the Round City to indicate a vaulted gallery rather than side arcades (Herzfeld 1920: 128-129 and figs. 181-182; Creswell 1979b: 16-17 and figs. 3-4), we can infer that the term here means *iwān*. This translation is also confirmed by the fact that al-Manṣūr commissioned a *ṭāq* of the same dimensions as the room (*bayt*) near the *majlis* and then looked at its measurements from the [perimetral walls of the] room up to its crown (*wa-naẓara miqdār al-ṭāq min al-hujra ḥattā gharfihī*). This *ṭāq* takes the place of a room (*hujra, bayt*) near the *majlis*, the audience chamber which we should identify as the domed chamber, which was located in the area of the palace (*mawḍu‘*) the Caliph liked the most. From this detail we can infer that this *mawḍu‘* was a part of the palace distinguished by other quarters, it was the Caliph’s quarter and was not originally conceived as including an *iwān*. The latter was

an innovation suggested by the Caliph himself. Therefore, on account of both the square plan and its dimensions (400 by 400 cubits), as already suggested by Grabar on other bases, we should consider for the palace an Umayyad model, such as Mshattā – a square plan – the palaces at Kūfa and Wāsiṭ – 400 by 400 cubits squares – but also contemplating the innovations – such as the *iwān* leading to a square domed chamber – appearing at Ukhayḍir. Regretfully, we cannot take Wāsiṭ into consideration, since the excavations did not unearth the whole area of the palace. The *dār al-imāra* at Kūfa has a double enclosure, the outer measuring 168.20 by 169.68 m, corresponding to approximately 324.72 by 327.56 cubits, the inner one measuring 114 by 114 m, corresponding to approximately 220 by 220 cubits. The relationships between the two enclosures are still unclear, as is the chronology of the three phases observed by Mustafa 1963 (Santi 2018). However, as observed by Creswell (1979a: 49), “the division of the inner enclosure in three parts running from north to south, [is] exactly as at ‘Anjar and Mshattā”, but also at Ukhayḍir, as noted by Grabar (1958: 107-108). At Kūfa, Mshatta and Ukhayḍir we also find an axial arrangement of the central

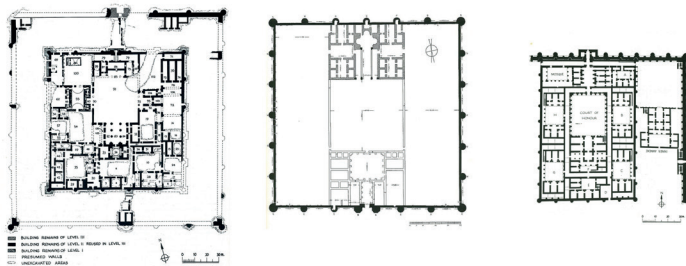


Fig. 7. Plans of the palaces of Kūfa, Mshattā, and Ukhayḍir (after Creswell 1979a; Creswell-Allan 1989; Creswell 1979b).

part, where the main entrance is aligned with a vestibular area, a court, and the audience chamber (fig. 7).

At Mshattā and Ukhayḍir the central part is also tripartite from north to south, the former having three squared areas, according to the square plan of the palace, and the latter three rectangular areas, according to the rectangular plan of the palace. Due to these similarities in the planimetric conception and the dates of the two buildings – Mshattā, along with Tūba, is the latest extant example of Umayyad palatial architecture, probably commissioned by al-Walīd II, left unfinished because of his sudden death (Creswell 1979a: 607, 638-639); Ukhayḍir can be possibly ascribed to ‘Īsā b. Mūsā, a nephew of al-Ṣaffāḥ and al-Manṣūr who retired from court in 778 in the vicinity of Kūfa, but in any case after 750 and before 836 (Creswell 1979b: 94-98) – we can consider these two plans as the points of departure and arrival of the experience that occurred in Baghdād in 762.

Thus, we can imagine Manṣūr’s palace as having a square plan featuring a double tripartition; in both latitudinal and longitudinal directions, the central part of the latter had an axial arrangement from the entrance to the vestibular area to the central courtyard, to the *iwān* and the domed chamber, which was included in the rear quarter, namely the *ṣadr* of the palace for a beholder entering the building. We can also suppose that the courtyard was 152 by 152 cubits square, each side approximately 7.6 times the opening of the *iwān* (20 cubits), almost the same proportion as between the opening of the central part in Mshattā’s basilical hall and the courtyard (7, 71; fig. 8).

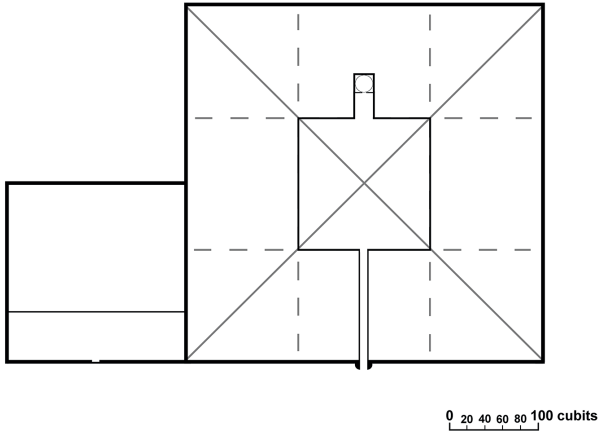


Fig. 8. Schematic Plan of Manṣūr's palace-mosque complex proposed by the author (graphics layout by L. Ebanista).

If an Umayyad model can be identified in the planimetric conception of this palace, the *khavar* about al-Manṣūr asking to modify the room preceding the *majlis* into an *iwān* suggests a *imitatio-aemulatio* reaction. The temptation to ascribe this choice to the growth of 'Persian influence', a *vexata quaestio* (Bier 1993: 57-76), is avoided by recalling that a similar preference for the *iwān*-domed chamber arrangement over the basilical hall-domed chamber had already been employed at 'Ammān in the northern building of the Umayyad palace where the axial tripartition observed at Mshattā and Ukhayḍir occurs (Northedge 1980). Having established the possible planimetric features of the palace, we can note that the introduction of a second *ṣahn* in Mu'ṭaḍid's mosque (The First Court) may have been the result of the enlargement of the palace's courtyard, which should match the

measurements of Hārūn al-Rashīd’s mosque when doubled. If we turn to the *khbar* by Ismā‘īl al-Khuṭbī reported by al-Khaṭīb we read that in order to solve the need for space for which the people prayed in the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* the Caliph “enlarged the First Court, which is the palace of al-Manṣūr, and joined it to the congregational mosque” (*zāda al-Mu‘taḍid billāh al-ṣaḥn al-awwal wa-huwa qaṣr al-Manṣūr wa-waṣalahu bi-l-jāmi‘*). In fact, Creswell and Lassner’s translation, “al-Mu‘taḍid billāh added the First Court [to the mosque]”, does not adhere to the text, since *zāda* means “to increase, to augment, to enlarge” (Lane 1968: 1275) as in other passages from al-Khaṭīb where it is stated that “the mosque of Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr was demolished and its sides increased” (*wa-hudima masjid Abī Ja‘far al-Manṣūr wa-zāda fī-nawāḥihī*) and that “the prayer was held in the Old Court, which is the congregational mosque, until it was augmented with the house known as al-Qaṭṭān” (*wa-kānat al-ṣalāt fī l-ṣaḥn al-‘atīq alladhī huwa al-jāmi‘ ḥattā zāda fīhi al-dār al-ma‘rūfa bi-l-qaṭṭān*). From the latter sentence we also learn that the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* was added to Hārūn’s mosque. Therefore, since the central area of the city (*raḥaba*) was occupied only by the palace and the mosque, we have to infer that this old *dīwān* of al-Manṣūr was located in the premises of the palace, and they were probably the rooms used by the Caliph’s military commanders and secretaries which opened onto the courtyard of the mosque, according to Ṭabarī. Indeed, *raḥaba* here is not used absolutely but as *mudāf* of *masjid*, and the court of a mosque cannot be a square outside it. Moreover *fa-*, which introduces the story of the building of the *dār al-Qaṭṭān* can denote a sequence of events (Lane 1968: 2321), thus

suggesting that the old *dīwān* had been transformed into the *dār* of Qaṭṭān, and not that the old *dīwān* was originally a *dār* built by al-Qaṭṭān. The *dīwān* should be located along a side of the palace, in one of the lateral latitudinal partitions, in order to be contiguous to the mosque. Considering that the third phase of the latter did not involve the destruction of the domed chamber and included an enlargement of the courtyard, we have to locate Maṣṣūr's mosque so that its *mughattā* is positioned in line with the side of the palace opposite to the domed chamber. This reconstruction is supported by the central position of the Golden Gate in axis with the domed chamber: this plan and its transformation exclude the possibility that the mosque was contiguous to the front or the rear of the palace. A lateral position of the mosque would be reminiscent of analogous solutions found in some Umayyad palaces – as for instance Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī and Mshattā – and at Ukhayḍīr, though in these cases the mosque is located inside the palace. Also in the case of Mshattā we find that the *qiblī* wall is oriented in the opposite direction of the side including the audience chamber. As for the exact position of Maṣṣūr's mosque, al-Khaṭīb informs us that when it was enlarged by Hārūn al-Rashīd, the Caliph had a foundation inscription placed on the side towards (*yalī*) the Khurāsān Gate. If we accept Le Strange's or Herzfeld's location of the gates in the city wall, we should locate the mosque on the north-west side of the palace. This also holds true if we locate the Baṣra Gate to the south, the Kūfa Gate to the west, the Shām Gate to the north, and the Khurāsān Gate to the east, as Hillenbrand's plan seems to suggest and as emerges from the considerations previously made on the *qibla*. Indeed, the

qibla at Baghdād was calculated by ‘Abbasid court astronomers as 193° (King 2000: 228) and the *qibla* of Manṣūr’s mosque would have been too far west, since people praying should turn slightly towards the Baṣra Gate. However, if we locate the Baṣra Gate to south-east we would still have an aberrant *qibla*. Moreover, al-Khaṭīb’s text does not state that the gates were aligned with the sides of the palace, but simply that they faced the palace (*kull bāb muqābilan li-l-qaṣr*) (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 9), that they were located to the east, west, south, and north (*sharqī wa-gharbī wa-qiblī*

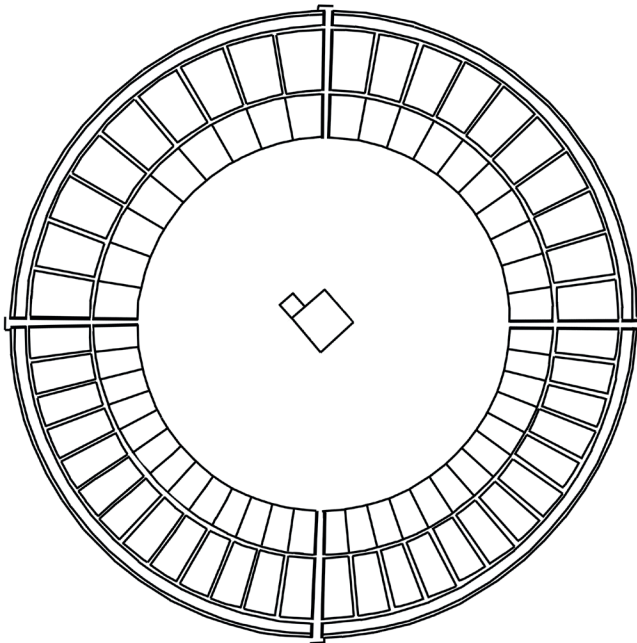


Fig. 9. Orientation of the palace-mosque complex proposed by the author (after Hillenbrand 1999, modified).

wa-shamalī) (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 12), and that al-Manṣūr went to the domed chamber above the Khurāsān Gate to look towards the water, and those who came from the regions of al-Khurāsān went to the domed chamber above the Shām Gate to look toward the suburbs and their surroundings, to the domed chamber above the Baṣra Gate to look towards al-Karkh and those coming from that side, and the domed chamber above the Kūfa Gate to look toward the gardens and orchards (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1904: 13). Thus a location of the Baṣra Gate to the south is more convincing (fig. 9).

We can also suppose that the *qibla* of al-Manṣūr's mosque was some degrees off since the building was originally astronomically oriented, thus aligned with the winter sunset, like the mosque of Wāṣit. The astronomical orientation is testified in several cases along with the *qibla* of the Prophet (i.e.

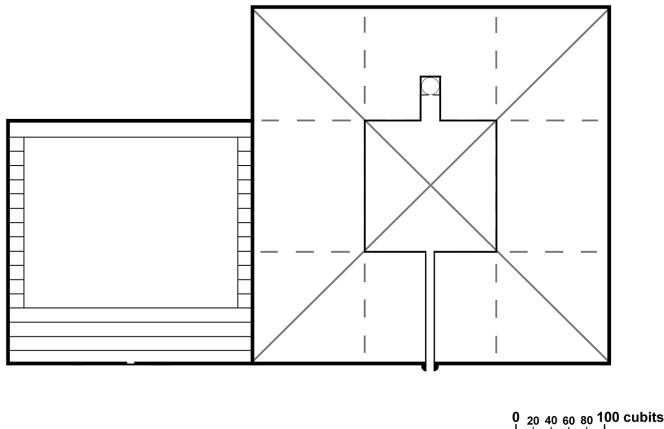


Fig. 10. Schematic Plan of Hārūn al-Rashīd's mosque proposed by the author (graphic layout by L. Ebanista).

due south; King 1985; 1995; Di Cesare 2017), at least until the construction of Mutawakkil's mosque at Sāmarrā', the *qibla* of which is calculated according to the mathematical formula developed at the 'Abbasid court (King 2000: 229). Manṣūr's mosque, then, was enlarged on the north-west and north-east sides, Hārūn's inscription was located on the latter wall, approximately in the direction of al-Khurāsān Gate. Following the hypothesis that the second courtyard (the First Court) that was added by al-Mu' taḍīd was the enlarged courtyard of the palace, and considering the dimensions and position of Manṣūr's mosque, we can argue that Hārūn al-Rashīd's mosque was also a square with each side measuring 272 cubits. Thus the dimensions of the court, including the porticoes, would be 208 by 208 cubits and that of the *mughattā* 64 by 208 cubits. These measures are obtained by supposing that the courtyard of the mosque was enlarged towards the north-west, where the mosque was located, thus becoming 272 cubits wide (fig. 10). Its length depended on that of the *mughattā*. The relationship of the latter to the court is described in the *khobar* by Ismā'īl al-Khuṭbī reported by al-Khaṭīb: when Hārūn al-Rashīd's mosque was doubled, it was connected to the new part by creating seventeen – thick – arches (*tāq*) in the partition wall between the palace and the mosque. The transmitter specifies that 13 were opened onto the court and 4 onto the *arwiqa*. The latter term can be referred to the side porticoes of a court, as Herzfeld and Creswell thought, but also to arcades delimiting the aisles of the covered portion of a mosque, as is the case, for example, in Muqaddasī's description of

the ‘Abbasid rebuilding of al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem (al-Muqaddasī 1906: 168) and al-Muḥallabī’s description of the same building (Munajjid 1958: 40-41). I deem the latter meaning more appropriate in this case, since the distinction specifically made in the *khābar* suggests that it had to be meaningful, such as it would be in the case of the aisles of the *mughattā*. Thus if we divide 272 cubits by 17, we obtain 16 cubits which should include the thickness of the parts of the wall supporting the new arches, 16 cubits \times 13 gives 208 cubits, 16 cubits \times 4 gives 64 cubits. When Ismā‘il b. ‘Alī states that al-Mu‘taḍid opened the *ṣadr* of the mosque, we have to infer that, as in the case of the location of the *īwān* and the domed chamber, *ṣadr* reflects the perspective of the beholder, who looked towards the side of the mosque which opened onto the palace (fig. 11).

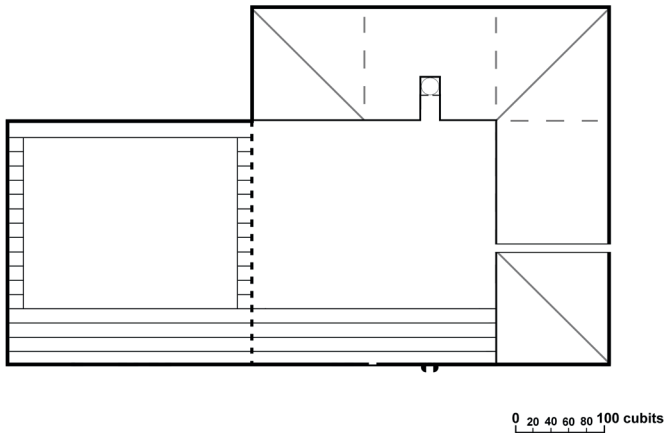


Fig. 11. Schematic Plan of Mu‘taḍid’s mosque proposed by the author (graphic layout by L. Ebanista).

This reconstruction presents the advantage of hypothesizing that the *miḥrāb* was moved into the new building added to Hārūn's mosque in order to correct the *qibla* (fig. 9). Indeed, by locating it in the middle of the added part of the *qibli* wall, the axis shifts by some degrees to the south – and this would be another case of *tayāsūr* (for which see Cook 2013). Moreover, from the name of the new building, the First Court (*al-ṣaḥn al-awwal*), we can infer that this was the first and most significant court that people crossed in order to reach the *mughattā*: an entrance was possibly opened onto the south-eastern side of the palace and the importance of the First Court was due to the fact that onto it opened the *iwān* leading to the domed chamber, 'the crown of Baghdad'. The lateral position of the mosque, reminiscent of that of palatine mosques, would also suit the conception of the Round City as a palatine city put forward by Lassner and implicitly suggested by the comparison between Manṣūr's city and Ukhayḍir made by Herzfeld (1920: 129-131) and followed by Creswell (1979b: 86-87). Consequently, the palace-mosque complex of the Round City, though attesting to a moment of transition between the Umayyad and the 'Abbasid conception of the plan of the palace and that of the mosque, would remain a unique achievement conceived by al-Manṣūr for the capital of his empire.

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