

## INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF IMPERMANENCE

This book examines a notable aspect of palace building under the Abbasid dynasty of Iraq at the height of its power, from around 750 to 900. The early Abbasid caliphs conceived their palaces as statements of power, building on a grand scale and marshaling significant resources to construct them, and yet they arguably also thought of these complexes as impermanent structures. Early Abbasid palaces were large but built quickly, and not always with durable materials. After a few decades of use, the court might well renovate its main imperial palace extensively, or even abandon it for a new foundation. In some extreme cases, work began but stopped before the complex was ever finished. During this period, it was never more than a few decades before the court shifted its center of operations from one structure to another. Thus, even if one palace remained standing and in use long after its construction, as was sometimes the case, it did not endure as the primary theater for the performance of imperial power. Nowhere has this aspect of palace building under the Abbasids been more evident to scholars than at Samarra, a sprawling palatine city with numerous caliphal residences located some hundred kilometers north of Baghdad. Founded as a new imperial capital on the scale of a large city in 836 by the eighth Abbasid caliph, al-Mu'tasim bi'llāh (r. 833–42), Samarra served as the headquarters of the caliphate for just fifty-six years before the court abandoned it and its palaces for Baghdad.

Though no work of architecture is truly permanent, many great buildings do convey their patrons' intention to create a lasting presence, especially those commissioned by imperial rulers like the Abbasids. The desire to stave off the effects of time is discernible in strategic choices made during the design process, such as selecting a site with long-lasting significance in the local culture, using durable construction materials, or choosing architectural forms and ornaments that have a timeless or well-established quality.<sup>1</sup> Such strategies are indicative of what Alois Riegl called "intentional monuments."<sup>2</sup> Some building traditions engaged generations of

builders and planners to achieve a completed form that was both aesthetically harmonious and architecturally durable.<sup>3</sup>

The palaces of Samarra and other early Abbasid palaces employed few of these strategies. Built in the span of a few years, often as foundations on sites without particular historical significance, they incorporated mud brick and stucco (cheap and easily degraded materials) in addition to the expected use of higher quality, more durable media like fired brick and wooden or marble décor, and feature strange and experimental forms of ornament, often repetitive and at times unevenly applied. Hence the observation made by other scholars that these palaces are monumental in scale, conveying the idea that their patrons intended to make a grand architectural statement, yet were also apparently designed with little consideration for permanence.<sup>4</sup> Abbasid palaces are particularly noteworthy for their sense of impermanence, though the phenomenon is not limited to that group. More precisely, one could say that palaces were relatively impermanent compared to other forms of architecture in the early Islamic era.<sup>5</sup> This is especially true over the longue durée and the change of political regimes. Indeed, the absence of early Islamic palaces in the landscape of extant monuments compared to other types has made their analysis and incorporation into general histories of Islamic architecture more difficult, requiring careful archaeological excavation and painstaking reconstruction before scholarly synthesis is possible.<sup>6</sup>

Although the relative impermanence of palace architecture in the early Islamic period is widely acknowledged, as

1 For examples of monuments that resist the effects of time through their choice of materials, see Shalem 2018.

2 Riegl defines an intentional monument as a structure built with the intention of commemoration, thus implying permanence. Riegl contrasted intentional monuments with "unintentional monuments" (works of art or architecture not created to commemorate but still seen as worthy of preservation today), as well as "ancient monuments" or "age-value" monuments, works classified as monuments today by virtue of their sheer antiquity and accumulated aura. All three classes of monuments merge in the

present to form a canon of works deemed worthy of preservation. For these definitions, see Riegl 1903 and the translation of his essay by Forster and Ghirardo in Riegl 1998. On Riegl's taxonomy of monuments and its implications for our understanding of the history of scientific archaeology, see also Naginski 2001.

3 This mode is epitomized by the building of monumental architecture in pre-modern Italy, for example. See Trachtenberg 2010, 103–284, which contrasts it to other approaches that developed later.

4 For these and other observations on choices made in Abbasid palace design, see Milwright 2001. For scale in Abbasid architecture, see Rogers 1970, 142–43; Bloom 1993; and Ruggles 2000, 90–92.

5 Irwin 1997, 103; Hillenbrand 1994, 377–78.

6 An issue discussed in Necipoğlu 1993b, and Anderson 2013, 8, both careful studies of palaces. In the last two decades, the fruits of sustained archaeological research on palaces in the Islamic west (especially in Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, and Sicily) have allowed for such synthesis to occur, and a comprehensive survey of Islamic palaces in this region is now available in Arnold 2017.

is the particular impermanence of Abbasid palace architecture within this tradition, this phenomenon merits a deeper investigation than it has received, as it raises questions of significant interest to the study of art history. What did it mean to construct palaces that required a substantial outlay of labor and resources, and yet do not appear to have been built to last? Can such structures be understood as “intentional monuments,” in Riegl’s sense of buildings erected to make a lasting impression? Should Abbasid palaces, though certainly monumental in terms of scale, be considered monuments at all? These questions have yet to be answered sufficiently, and they deserve our attention. For the field of early Islamic architecture, engaging such questions requires us to more closely interrogate the practices of construction, reconfiguration, repurposing, and abandonment of monumental palace architecture evident in the archaeological record. Doing so opens the broader possibility of understanding to what extent the conception of these monumental palaces resonates or contrasts with modern definitions of monumentality, which have traditionally valued durability and solidity, if not permanence.<sup>7</sup>

While other concerns have justifiably occupied historians of early Islamic architecture and partly obscured the questions I raise here, the state of research on Abbasid palaces has reached a point where such questions can now be asked. Before returning to them, a review of some literature on Abbasid palaces will serve to situate my intended focus within the broader scholarly landscape.

### Early Abbasid palaces and the Dār al-Khilāfa of Samarra as a case study

The Abbasids were the second family to rule the Muslim world, following the Umayyads, who established the first hereditary dynasty of Islam in the year 661 and ruled from the ancient Levantine cities of Damascus and Jerusalem. At a secure distance from Syria, the Abbasids fomented an anti-Umayyad political movement that grew in power, spread,

and became militarized.<sup>8</sup> In 750, the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II (r. 744–50), capitulated to an army organized by the dissenters, and the surviving members of the Umayyad family fled to Spain. The first Abbasid caliph, Abū al-‘Abbās ‘Abd-Allāh ibn Muḥammad, who took the regnal title al-Saffāḥ (r. 749–54), thus ascended to the throne. The Abbasids absorbed the lands of the Umayyad Empire, with the exception of western North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain, the scions of the Umayyad caliphate ruled independently, but did not claim the title of caliph until the tenth century. Thus, at the height of their power in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the Abbasids ruled the Muslim world as the sole caliphs and their territories stretched from today’s Tunisia to Pakistan, encompassing the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, the Nile and Indus Valleys, and Transoxiana (figs. 1 and 2).

The geographic range of Abbasid political power began to shrink during the ninth century when local rulers, known as amirs, began to assert autonomy in regions such as Ifriqiyya (roughly modern-day coastal Tunisia), Khurāsān (northeastern Iran and parts of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan), and Mā Warā’ al-Nahr (Transoxiana or modern-day Uzbekistan, and parts of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic). These amirs nominally acknowledged the Abbasids as caliphs but governed their territories without much interference from Iraq in practice, and even appointed their own successors.<sup>9</sup> In the first half of the tenth century, much of the eastern half of the empire lay under the control of such autonomous amirates and, in the west, the Abbasids witnessed the formation of two rival caliphates: the Fatimid caliphate, centered in Ifriqiyya and later Egypt, and a revived Umayyad caliphate in Spain. By the year 950, three rulers from different families claimed the title of caliph in the Dār al-Islām. Even in the Abbasid heartland of Mesopotamia, the Shia Buyid amirs had taken political control, leaving the reigning Abbasids, who remained caliphs until 1258, as ideologically powerful but otherwise politically diminished figureheads.

Before the late ninth century, however, the Abbasid caliphate represented a peak in the imperial unification of the cultural zone that Marshall Hodgson described as the “Nile to Oxus” region.<sup>10</sup> While this unified zone reached its territorial height during the last years of Umayyad rule, the Abbasid period saw the fully realized ideological blossoming of what Garth Fowden has called a “politico-cultural world empire,” a feat commemorated architecturally in the foundation of Baghdad by the second Abbasid caliph, al-Manṣūr

7 For an introductory discussion of the idea of monumentality in modern and post-modern philosophical and architectural discourse, see Sturken and Young 1998, which includes examples of scholarship criticizing the idea of the monument as a durable, persistent structure. The ritual burial or even destruction of objects, precisely in order to ensure their continued remembrance, is a phenomenon described in a number of cultures, historical and contemporary. For example, see Rowlands 1993, which draws on the work of Susanne Küchler concerning sculptures used in mortuary ceremonies on the island of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea. Using images and patterns recalled from memory, designated persons laboriously create these sculptures to commemorate the deceased, only to destroy them (Küchler 1987). See Lucas 2014 for a discussion of Rowlands’ and Küchler’s research, along with other examples of archaeological studies investigating notions of memory and its relationship to material culture.

8 For the social conditions in the eastern provinces of the Umayyad Empire during the period of the Abbasids’ ascendancy, see Sharon 1983, 51–71.

9 An overview of these events is offered in Lewis, “Abbāsids,” *ET2*.

10 For the term “Nile to Oxus,” see Hodgson 1974, 1:60–62. On this region as a distinct cultural zone within the broader array of cultural areas in Afro-Eurasia, united by certain shared linguistic and intellectual traditions, as well as economic and geographical conditions, see Hodgson 1974, 1:111–17 and 121–24.

(r. 754–75).<sup>11</sup> In this study, I am concerned with this period, from the reign of Maṣṣūr to the end of the ninth century, and refer to it throughout as “early Abbasid.”

As the central stage for the administration and performance of early Muslim imperial power at its height, the Abbasid palace has received substantial attention, although the road toward scholarly synthesis has been long and difficult, and an overarching image of the architecture and its coeval significance is still evolving. The difficulty is due in no small part to the impermanent quality of these palaces. Today, the urban fabric of early Abbasid Baghdad is covered by modern development, and no Abbasid palaces survive there. Thus, any reconstruction of these complexes must rely on verbal descriptions.<sup>12</sup> The earliest archaeological evidence we have for Abbasid palace building in Iraq is the remains of the fortified palace at Ukhayḍir, dated to the late eighth century and attributed to either ʿĪsā ibn ʿAlī, the uncle of Saffāḥ and Maṣṣūr, or to ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā, the nephew of the same caliphs.<sup>13</sup> Ukhayḍir is, however, distinct from the central palaces that form the main theme of this study: built as a rural residence, it never was meant to be a seat for the imperial administration. The other two major sources of information are the palaces outside Raqqā, commissioned by the fifth Abbasid caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) and his court, and the palaces of Samarra, both of which lie in ruins. Both Raqqā and Samarra were partly excavated, and these archaeological excavations have recently been revisited, providing a wealth of new evidence.<sup>14</sup>

Between the two, Samarra offers the more compelling material for a broader and more speculative study on early Abbasid palace architecture and the question of impermanence, as it is substantially larger than Raqqā, preserving the building activity that took place during the reigns of eight Abbasid caliphs. It represents the best-documented example of the Abbasid approach to palace building I described above, its palaces remarkable both for their vastness and their relatively short lives as stages for the performance of imperial power. While this study makes a claim about early Abbasid palaces in general, Samarra and its primary imperial palace, the Dār al-Khilāfa, constitute the main focus.

## Research on Samarra’s palaces since the first recorded excavations

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Samarra had already attracted the attention of archaeologists.<sup>15</sup> Henry Viollet made soundings in the Dār al-Khilāfa between 1907 and 1910, and published his findings.<sup>16</sup> Ernst Herzfeld, an architect and historian of the Ancient Near East, then undertook larger, more systematic excavations at Samarra in two campaigns from 1911 to 1913.<sup>17</sup> During the first campaign, Herzfeld and his team excavated parts of two congregational mosques, four palaces, and sixteen private houses, and made plans of several other structures at the site.<sup>18</sup> During the second campaign, he unearthed approximately 18,000 square meters of the Dār al-Khilāfa and conducted a topographical survey.<sup>19</sup> Herzfeld’s research on site led to the first detailed plans of several important monuments and the layout of the city.<sup>20</sup> He supplemented these preliminary studies with a series of book-length monographs dedicated to the site. The first five volumes of the series, titled *Die Ausgrabungen von Samarra*, were dedicated to excavated artifacts, establishing the stylistic typologies through which later generations

11 Fowden 1993, 6. On the realization of this idea in the founding of Baghdad, see Fowden 1993, 149–51.

12 Relevant sources and studies are given in Lassner, “Baghdad until 1100,” *EI3*. Some important syntheses are Le Strange 1900, the work of Jacob Lassner (particularly Lassner 1970), and ʿAlī 1985.

13 For descriptions of the palace of Ukhayḍir, see Bell 1914 and Creswell 1932–40, 2:50–91. For a discussion of the various dates and attributions suggested for the building, see Northedge, “al-Ukhayḍir,” *EI2*.

14 For Raqqā, see particularly Heidemann and Becker, eds. 2003; Daiber and Becker, eds. 2004; and Siegel 2017. A bibliography of archaeological research at Raqqā since 1944 is given in Siegel 2017, 10–22. For archaeological research on Samarra, see references below.

15 For the history of modern archaeological interest in Samarra, see Leisten 2003, 20–24.

16 Viollet 1913a; Viollet 1913b. On Viollet’s archive and his findings at Samarra, see Rose 2017. Note that Viollet 1913a and 1913b, which appeared together in vol. 12, pt. 2 of *Mémoires présentés par divers savants à l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres de l’Institut de France*, were also published separately as extracts in 1909 and 1911, respectively. The 1909 and 1911 extracts, which have the same contents as the versions printed in 1913, are often cited in scholarship. In this book, I cite the 1913 versions because the volume in which they appear is widely available online, for example through Persée: [https://www.persee.fr/issue/mesav\\_0398-3587\\_1913\\_num\\_12\\_2](https://www.persee.fr/issue/mesav_0398-3587_1913_num_12_2).

17 For preliminary reports, see Herzfeld 1912; Herzfeld 1914. It is important to note that Herzfeld did not work alone, but at times employed anywhere between 50 and 300 men who worked in groups at various sites. The personell involved with Herzfeld’s excavation of Samarra, including individuals who were pivotal to the operations such as Shāʿūl ibn Salmān, are discussed in greater detail in Kröger 2014, 262–65.

18 For the history of the first campaign, see Leisten 2003, 10–19. For an exhaustive chronicle of the events in both campaigns, see Kröger 2014.

19 The figure of 18,000 square meters is cited in Northedge 2005, 133.

20 Herzfeld published plans of the site were based on an initial survey and a descriptive text by the medieval geographer al-Yaʿqūbī. See Herzfeld 1907, pls. 7 and 8, and discussion of textual sources on pp. 49–80. Herzfeld published an extensive essay on the city plan and primary sources after having returned to the site with his colleague Friedrich Sarre as part of a larger survey of Mesopotamian Islamic architecture the two scholars undertook between 1907 and 1908. See Sarre and Herzfeld 1911–1920, 1:52–109. Herzfeld’s plan of the Balkuwārā is published in Herzfeld 1912, pl. 10. A plan of the Dār al-Khilāfa was published in Herzfeld 1914, 203.

would view the city's architectural ornament, ceramics, glass, and wall paintings.<sup>21</sup>

Herzfeld's excavations produced a remarkable volume of information and generated significant interest in the site.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the scale of his campaigns also meant that he could only give superficial attention to problems of stratigraphy and chronology, which require close attention and time.<sup>23</sup> In addition, though he intended to publish a final report on the architecture of Samarra, Herzfeld never managed to do so, resulting in the publication of the finds without much information on their archaeological context.<sup>24</sup> Thomas Leisten has published the results of the first campaign, partly rectifying this gap.<sup>25</sup> Research on the areas Herzfeld excavated must use the data he obtained to the extent possible while acknowledging its limitations, and it is often necessary to turn to archival sources to gain a full understanding of his work. It is fortunate that these archival resources have become increasingly accessible in the last two decades. Many of Herzfeld's papers pertaining to the Samarra excavations are now available online and fully catalogued: the most extensive group is housed in the FSA;<sup>26</sup> smaller groups are housed in the library of the Islamic Department of the MMA,<sup>27</sup> and in the archives of the MIK.<sup>28</sup>

Since Herzfeld's excavations, the Iraq DGA has undertaken important work at the site. A series of excavations in the 1930s produced a large number of finds, supplementing Herzfeld's material and shedding light on a partial plan of

the palace at al-Ḥuwayṣilāt.<sup>29</sup> Several careful and targeted excavations undertaken in the Dār al-Khilāfa during the 1970s and 1980s provided detailed information regarding several parts of the palace,<sup>30</sup> and further revealed the extent to which certain areas in Samarra's Dār al-Khilāfa had changed over time.<sup>31</sup>

The palaces and people of Samarra also loom large in the literary record, from anecdotes about the political intrigues of the Abbasid court to an array of impressive poetry recited to the caliphs and their entourages.<sup>32</sup> Several modern studies devoted specifically to Samarra have brought together the most important sources, painting a vivid picture of life in the Abbasid palace city. The first of these was Ernst Herzfeld's *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra*, the sixth and final volume of the *Ausgrabungen von Samarra* series.<sup>33</sup> This compendium contains a section on Samarra's pre-Islamic past, followed by a discussion of the site's topography as described in Arabic sources, a section on the lives of the rulers of Samarra, and a presentation of epigraphic finds made at the site. The sections on Samarra's topography and rulers are the weightiest, consisting almost entirely of translated quotations from Arabic sources.

The next significant work on Samarra's representation in primary Arabic sources was Yūnus Aḥmad al-Sāmarrāī's *Sāmarrāī fī adab al-qarn al-thālith al-hijrī*.<sup>34</sup> Like Herzfeld, Sāmarrāī sought to bring together the most important early Islamic literature connected to the city, mostly limited to the ninth century. Sāmarrāī includes a number of sources that Herzfeld did not, particularly from the corpus of classical Arabic poetry, in part because the author was a literary historian and more texts had been edited and published by the 1960s, when his work appeared. Like Herzfeld, Sāmarrāī mostly quotes directly from the sources, putting them together to give the reader a sense of the importance of the city in the cultural life of the high Abbasid period.

Combining archaeology and literary studies, Aḥmad Sūsa's work on the history of irrigation at Samarra during the Abbasid period is another landmark study of the site. Sūsa drew attention to the many canals and waterworks that the Abbasids created, which were arguably as impressive and important as their palaces and mosques. The terminology and history of this ancient art perfected in Iraq had been neglected by the first modern (mostly European) scholars to work on the site.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Sūsa's work points to the importance in general of water sources—both manmade and natural, such as the River Tigris itself—to the design of Abbasid

21 Herzfeld 1923; Sarre 1925; Herzfeld 1927; Lamm 1928; and Herzfeld 1930. On these volumes, see also Kröger 2014, 311–24.

22 Kröger 2014, 324–27.

23 Northedge 1991, 87; Northedge 1996.

24 Kröger 2014, 322–23.

25 Leisten 2003. See his discussion of the idea behind the publication of Herzfeld's results on pp. ix–x.

26 Ernst Herzfeld Papers, FSA A.06, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. Gift of Ernst Herzfeld, 1946 (henceforth Ernst Herzfeld Papers, FSA). For a catalogue of this collection, see Upton 1974[?]. Digitized records can be accessed through the finding aid available at <https://sova.si.edu/record/FSA.A.06>, or through the Herzfeld Resource Gateway at <https://asia.si.edu/research/archives/herzfeld/>. Descriptions of items online are provided by Xavier Courouble on the basis of relevant publications, captions on documents, departmental notes, and Joseph Upton's catalogue. For more information on this collection, see also Nagel and Woody 2014.

27 Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Department of Islamic Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1943 (henceforth Ernst Herzfeld Papers, MMA). A separate group of Herzfeld's papers at the MMA is housed in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art. For a history of the acquisition of the papers at the MMA, see Root 1976. Digitized material from this collection—primarily from the group in the Islamic department but also containing some material in the Ancient Near Eastern department—is available online at <http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16028coll11>.

28 Ernst Herzfeld Papers, Archives of Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (henceforth Ernst Herzfeld Papers, MIK). The papers housed at the MIK are not available online at the time of writing but can be accessed in person.

29 Iraq DGA, 1940.

30 Ḥammūdī 1982; Ḥayānī, 1985–86; Ḥayānī 1996; Ḥayānī 2001–02.

31 Ḥammūdī 1982, 175–176.

32 Bray 2001.

33 Herzfeld 1948. For a review of the contents, see also Kröger 2014, 320–22.

34 Sāmarrāī 1968.

35 Sūsa 1948–49, 1:11–17.

palace architecture: water and its manipulation through engineering touched everything at Samarra, and its currents run through the city's rich material and literary culture.

More recently, research conducted by Alastair Northedge and the Samarra Archaeological Survey on the city's architecture and urban development offers a synthesis of the excavations and literary studies mentioned above that is broader in scope than Sūsa's, benefiting as it does from much additional archaeological information.<sup>36</sup> Using site surveys, aerial photographs, archaeological data, and primary sources, Northedge offers interpretations of the plans of several of the site's major monuments, including the Dār al-Khilāfa.<sup>37</sup> A comprehensive study of the site's historical topography connects extant ruins *in situ* to place names mentioned in sources.<sup>38</sup> An atlas with comprehensive documentation of every structure identified at the site supplements the topographical study.<sup>39</sup> In addition to providing indispensable references that ground the previous work of literary identification in the city's surface remains, Northedge's work places Samarra's architecture and city plan in the context of broader regional developments, calling attention to continuities between the Abbasid city and earlier Islamic foundations.<sup>40</sup>

At the time of writing, an in-depth publication on the archaeology of the Dār al-Khilāfa, edited by Alastair Northedge, is underway. My aim here is thus not a comprehensive presentation of Herzfeld's and other extant documentation on this or any other Abbasid palace. Rather, by focussing on several discrete examples of phenomena in design and decoration evident in the archaeological record that speak to broader ideas evident in the literature of the Abbasid period and modern scholarship on the site, I hope in this book to complement forthcoming archaeological publications and provide a broader interpretation of some of the evidence, putting it into conversation with evidence from other Abbasid palace sites.

While relying heavily on published work, a fresh analysis of the architectural ornament excavated in the Audience Hall Complex of the Dār al-Khilāfa was still necessary. I thus include an assessment of some unpublished archaeological data and a survey of some fragments of architectural ornament found in the Dār al-Khilāfa during Viollet's and Herzfeld's campaigns. In this aspect, the present study joins several other ongoing efforts to advance our understanding of targeted portions of the material remains of Samarra

through re-examination, archival research, and improved documentation.<sup>41</sup>

During the period that I researched this book, the political situation in Iraq meant that visiting the site was not advisable, let alone conducting new archaeological work there. Despite this fact, it seemed particularly important to me to make the most of what was already available in museum collections and archives in Europe and North America. While additional work on site will surely cast new light on the arguments presented here, the material already excavated, however incomplete, deserves attention.<sup>42</sup>

## Architecture and audience

This study seeks to outline an approach to palace building evident in the archaeological and textual records, and thus to add to the ongoing work of connecting palaces, people, and ideas. Before discussing my approach and argument, however, a few words about several important contributions in this area serve to further frame the present investigation.

Despite its canonical status in the history of Islamic art, contemporary scholarship has not fully examined the relationship between Abbasid architecture and the culture that built it, although important progress toward this goal has been made. Recent studies have pushed back on the early scholarly consensus that the art and architecture of the Abbasid court reflected the passive reception of an Iranian or more ambiguously "Eastern" tradition as residents of what was once the Sasanian heartland.<sup>43</sup> Studies by political and intellectual historians of the relationship between the Abbasids and their late antique predecessors in Iran have rather demonstrated that the Abbasids actively appropriated

36 For the initial surveys, see Northedge 1985, as well as Northedge and Falkner 1987.

37 Northedge 1990; Northedge 1992; Northedge 1993; Northedge 1999.

38 Northedge 2005. For the approach to sources taken in this work, see 27–33.

39 Northedge and Kennet 2015.

40 For Samarra in relation to other early Islamic cities, see Northedge 2000, and Northedge 2005, 247–59. I thank the author for making the former work, an unpublished habilitation manuscript, available to me.

41 At the time of writing, Vanessa Rose is completing a doctoral dissertation on architectural ceramics of Samarra. Fatma Dahmani has completed a doctoral dissertation on Samarra's wall paintings (Dahmani 2014b), and a summary of some of the findings regarding the Dār al-Khilāfa is presented in Dahmani 2014a and Dahmani 2020. Simone Struth is completing a doctoral dissertation on the stuccoes of Samarra, and some preliminary remarks on a reassessment of Herzfeld's findings appear in Struth 2020. For an overview of various projects on Samarra in museums and archives undertaken in the last two decades, see also Gonnella 2014.

42 Tilley 1989 offers an argument for making the most of previously excavated material rather than initiating new excavations that simply result in the accumulation of more unprocessed (and therefore often inaccessible) material.

43 An idea articulated in Herzfeld 1907, 6–11, and reiterated in Creswell 1932–40, 2:370. For a criticism of the idea of "Eastern influence" in Abbasid art and architecture, see Hoffman 2008. To what extent Abbasid palace architecture was inspired by that of the Sasanians is still under investigation. The idea that early Islamic palaces were derived from Sasanian models (articulated by Herzfeld and others) is criticized in Bier 1993, but more recent analyses by Ignacio Arce have cautioned against dismissing the theory outright. See Arce 2008b, 198.

certain concepts of Sasanian culture relevant to their own interests and modified them accordingly.<sup>44</sup> More broadly, it is evident that an ideology of absolutism particular to the Abbasid court played an important role in generating an increasingly rigid and spectacular court ceremonial and expansive, hierarchical architecture: two related manifestations of a broader concept.<sup>45</sup> These conclusions regarding the ideological function of Abbasid architecture point to the importance of utilizing ninth-century sources to understand the development of Abbasid architecture, although links to practices at the Umayyad court are also evident, and have challenged the tendency to contrast the Abbasid and Umayyad traditions in academic literature.<sup>46</sup>

Political ideology was clearly important to the development of Abbasid imperial architecture, but other elements of Abbasid culture, ranging from aesthetics and theories of vision to theology and popular spirituality should also be considered. In the last three decades, scholars have begun to look more closely at poetry, philosophical works, and even scientific literature to better define the social, intellectual, and aesthetic preoccupations peculiar to Abbasid Iraq that may have informed the development of courtly art and architecture there.<sup>47</sup> Mohammed Hamdouni Alami's study of writing on early Islamic architecture in particular has been beneficial to the present work, and is noteworthy for probing an array of medieval texts, some rarely used in the study of art history, including the writings of al-Jāhiz (d. 868 or 869), a figure of staggering importance to the intellectual landscape of ninth-century Iraq.<sup>48</sup> Contrary to what has sometimes been assumed for the early periods, there is no shortage of literature relevant to the study of architecture. The challenge has rather been to make a meaningful connection between the complex and nuanced archaeological reality and the ideas conveyed in literary sources, which require their own special contextualization.<sup>49</sup>

The published proceedings of a 1996 conference on Samarra held at Oxford demonstrate the potential of such an

interdisciplinary approach in bringing the site and its monuments to life. From analyses of poetry describing Samarra's palaces, to a survey of Samarran palace architecture, to an overview of the history of the Abbasid military at Samarra, the volume was "intended to remind scholars of the pre-Modern Near East that the objects of their study—be they texts, persons or artifacts—came to exist, function and bear meaning within an historical context."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, when read together, the studies in this important volume begin to paint a vivid picture of Samarra as a spectacle of imperial and military might, where the erection and ornamentation of vast palaces, monumental avenues, and mosques served as a stage for Abbasid imperial self-representation.<sup>51</sup> The present study is indebted to and seeks to expand upon these interdisciplinary efforts.

## Approach and outline

Samarra, in its vastness, has attracted writers with comparably vast scholarly capabilities, as the abstracts above show. Thanks to their work, it is feasible now to consider the nature of the Abbasid palace in a more nuanced fashion than has been possible before, and to ask new questions.

I now return to the phenomenon of impermanence in Abbasid architecture, not just over the long term but even during the first century of the Abbasid period itself, at the very height of the empire's power. My approach differs from previous studies on Abbasid architecture in its focus on this single but important phenomenon. While none of the monuments and few of the textual sources I draw upon are new to the historiography of Islamic architecture, no other study has considered in depth the implications of the sense of impermanence that permeates these palaces, despite its ubiquitous presence as both an archaeological phenomenon and a theme in Arabic texts.

Questions of the relationship between monumental architecture and the passage of time have been more fully examined outside the field of early Islamic architecture. The work of Marvin Trachtenberg in particular has been a source of inspiration for the questions I ask of these buildings.<sup>52</sup> Trachtenberg brings the question of time to bear on the study of pre-modern European monuments, not only from our perspective today, looking back across time, but also from the perspective of medieval concepts of time and how they factored into architectural planning. His work offers a new lens through which to interpret certain peculiarities of medieval architecture and the sweeping changes in the conception of monumental buildings that occurred during the

44 Morony 1984, Gutas 1998.

45 For ceremonial as an expression of absolutism, see Azmeh 2001, 115–53. For its translation into architecture during the Abbasid period, see Necipoğlu 1993b, 6–7. For a model study of the relationship between ceremonial and architecture in the Ottoman period, see Necipoğlu 1991.

46 Arce 2008b.

47 For examples of studies that utilize such works pertinent to the Abbasid period, see Necipoğlu 1995, esp. 185–96; Leisten 2007; Hamdouni Alami 2011, 63–128; Saba 2012; and Pentcheva 2015. For the broader question of aesthetic theory in Arabic literature, see Puerta Vilchez 1997, and Gonzalez 2001, esp. 5–41. Two recent studies that seek to outline aesthetic principles inherent to contexts of reception in the Islamic world are Graves 2018 and Shaw 2019.

48 Hamdouni Alami 2011.

49 The limited use of literary sources in the study of Islamic art is identified as a historical peculiarity of the field in Flood and Necipoğlu 2017, 1:21–22. For an example of an architectural study that carefully draws on coeval literature, poetry, and literary criticism, see Robinson 2002.

50 Robinson ed., 2001, 10.

51 Robinson ed., 2001, 16–20.

52 I thank Richard Neer for first bringing this work to my attention.

Renaissance.<sup>53</sup> In exploring the theme of architectural impermanence in early Islamic architecture, I hope to contribute another perspective to the larger conversation surrounding questions of temporality in pre-modern architecture.

A variety of conditions specific to eighth- and ninth-century Iraq conspired against the preservation of monumental architecture, particularly buildings such as palaces that, unlike mosques, shrines, or madrasas, had no obvious public ritual or service function. Given these conditions, the Abbasids themselves must not have expected their palaces to last as built structures without change to their physical configurations or symbolic significance. I do not propose, however, that the Abbasid caliphs, ever mindful of their place in a lineage of world emperors, would have simply accepted that their palaces would lie in obscurity for generations to come. Rather, evidence suggests that these imperial patrons expected their palatine creations to leave a lasting legacy as permanent fixtures in the collective consciousness of Arabic-Islamic civilization. It was the literary tradition in both oral and written forms that would ensure the continued remembrance of Abbasid palace architecture. For the Abbasids, *monument* and *impermanent* were not mutually exclusive terms: Abbasid palaces were built as impermanent monuments meant to be part of an enduring architectural legacy even as they were perceived as mutable structures.

Chapter 1 places the construction and abandonment of Samarra in the context of early Abbasid attitudes toward monumental architecture, expressed through building practices and commentary in the literature of the day. While Samarra is known poignantly as a city that enjoyed notoriety as a courtly residence for only a short time, it was, in many respects, not an anomaly. In the first century and a half of Abbasid rule, other palatine foundations of a comparative scale to Mu'tasim's original project were erected only to be used as primary centers of imperial representation for a short time. The Abbasids themselves must have been aware of the unlikelihood that their monumental palaces would stand the test of time: we find many ruminations on ruined architecture preserved in the textual record, which echo the actual practices outlined above and point to a general understanding of monumental architecture, especially palace architecture, as impermanent. Broader cultural currents in eighth- and ninth-century Iraq further suggest that the question of a lasting heritage for an increasingly self-conscious civilization was a widespread intellectual preoccupation of imperial patrons such as the Abbasid caliphs, for whom the desire to make a lasting impression and the concurrent acknowledgement of palatine architecture's impermanence would have posed a genuine problem.

With these building practices and societal preoccupations in mind, various features of the Abbasid palaces that have been preserved either archaeologically or in verbal descriptions come further into focus. Chapters 2–4 explore

several of these features in detail. In Chapter 2, I examine the monumental exterior spaces that surrounded Abbasid palaces, exemplified by the large open landscapes, squares, and avenues adjoining the Dār al-Khilāfa of Samarra. The inconvenient situation of this palace and its entrance are representative of the increased separation between city and palace complex that scholars have noted beginning under the late Umayyads and which became more pronounced under the Abbasids. At the same time, it is also clear that these spaces were stages for public ceremonial performances, suggesting that the increased distance between palace and city and the addition of open space to the palace grounds was not intended to merely isolate the caliph from his subjects. Building on recent phenomenological interpretations of early Islamic palace architecture, I argue that the elaboration of a zone of open spaces between palace and city served to dramatize the act of entering the grounds and amplified the invisible “presence” of the caliph, an idea discussed in texts on administration either written or translated from ancient sources at the Abbasid court. Without relying solely on fixed, built structures, these exterior zones created an atmosphere of monumentality, establishing the palace as a place set apart from mundane experience. As a medium of architectural expression in these exterior zones, empty, open space was just as important as an elaborate façade, an imposing wall, or a gatehouse, if not more so. This strategy of building with open space distinguishes Abbasid palaces from other early Islamic counterparts, suggesting that the Abbasids harnessed the opportunities presented by the Mesopotamian landscape to create a lasting impression without relying solely on permanently fixed, monumental buildings.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I turn to palace interiors, beginning again with the Dār al-Khilāfa in Samarra and analyzing the architectural decorations of a formally arranged area believed to be the public audience halls of the palace. As Herzfeld's documentation reveals, the decorative scheme in this complex is characterized by variation in style across different architectural units, but stylistic and morphological consistency within each unit. This quality of internal consistency is amplified in the most important section of the complex: the set of four pillared halls forming a cross at the eastern end and the rooms adjoining them. Findspots for elements like wood, glass, and marble ornaments suggest a series of sparsely decorated spaces punctuated by more opulently decorated ones that, again, correspond to the most important spaces in the complex. These specific findings resonate with more general observations that have been made about Abbasid ornament at Samarra being economically designed—unevenly applied and repetitive in nature—possibly as a way to cut costs and cover large expanses quickly. Turning to the probable use of these spaces as stages for ceremonial receptions or audiences, I suggest that these decorative strategies were also ideologically efficient, having a

closer connection to ceremonial than may have been apparent before. Specifically, I argue that these features helped construct the ceremonial atmosphere required for organized audiences with the caliph, where the principle of restricting visibility was just as important at times as the desire to produce a visually striking scene, and the principle of orderliness, expressed through the patterned arrangement of not only people and furnishings, but also fixed wall ornament, may have served an ideological function. The implication of this conclusion is that the arrangement of the palace's architectural decorations gave visual form to specific ideological concepts central to the spectacular temporary events through which the Abbasids' palaces were primarily remembered.

Continuing with the theme of architectural decoration, Chapter 4 examines the diversity of innovative styles of vegetal ornament used in the surviving Abbasid palaces, along with evidence for the repurposing of decorative pieces. In addition to the economics of large building projects and a taste for visual complexity at the Abbasid court, both proffered in the scholarship as explanations, I argue that the concept of the palace as an impermanent monument was a critical element in fueling the stylistic diversity and artistic creativity associated with the ornament of this period. Freed from the expectation of permanence, the Abbasid palace became a laboratory for artistic experimentation and spurred numerous developments that had a broader impact on the evolution of ornament in the Islamic world.

The features of Abbasid palaces highlighted in Chapters 1–4 suggest strategies to make a lasting impression that did not depend on the permanence of the built structure. In Chapter 5, I argue that some Abbasid caliphs went further to ensure that future generations would celebrate their works, by promoting the production of poetry describing their palaces. This desire for commemoration, I suggest, partly explains the efflorescence of the *qaṣīda* (ode) for describing palace architecture at Samarra, a theme with some precedents in the Arabic tradition that was, however, underutilized by early Islamic poets. These poems are mostly associated with works commissioned by al-Mutawakkil 'Alī Allāh (r. 847–61), the caliphate's most enthusiastic builder. In revisiting the texts and contexts of these celebrated poems, I argue that, with their patron's encouragement, court poets such as al-Buḥturī, 'Alī ibn al-Jahm, and Ibn al-Mu'tazz manipulated style and imagery to create verbal images of palaces that would enshrine these works in the literary culture of their day. Although the style of the poems was self-consciously fresh, the images evoked were part of a long tradition and served to link the Abbasids' works to an enduring canon of Arab monuments. Exploring the imagery of the Samarra palace poems in turn casts further light on the palaces themselves. The visions of glass-clad halls, stupendous waterworks, and wide-open courts all have a basis in the reality conveyed by the archaeological record. As much as the odes describing the palaces were monumental poems, the palaces described were poetic monuments. In the long term, these

poems successfully canonized the Abbasid palaces within the tradition of Arabic literature and commemorated the Samarra caliphs as patrons of fabulous architecture, despite the brief period the city was in use, and the nearly complete ruin of its palaces, a process that was already beginning during the reign of Mutawakkil.

Finally, two appendices provide data from Herzfeld's excavations that support some specific claims I make about Samarra's Dār al-Khilāfa. Appendix I is a transcription of several passages from Herzfeld's field notebook containing an account of the second Samarra campaign, housed in the Ernst Herzfeld Papers, FSA, which includes a number of observations important to understanding the dating and decoration of the Dār al-Khilāfa of Samarra;<sup>54</sup> Appendix II is a partial inventory of fragments of architectural ornament and portable wooden furnishings excavated or attributable to the same palace, which includes references to their findspots, current locations, and publication.

If this study is successful, it will illuminate an approach to palace building that evolved during the early Abbasid period in response to challenges and opportunities specific to that era. For the field of Islamic architecture in general, I hope that this attempt to engage with the question of architectural impermanence opens new lines of inquiry that others might pursue for different groups of monuments. For readers whose primary interests lie in other times and places, I hope that this study provides a sense of possibility for the art historian who faces down the vagaries, losses, and lacunae inherent to the archaeological record. Michael Ann Holly has argued that art history is a melancholic discipline. Mourning the distance between the world of the objects we study and our own, she argues, we attempt to make them familiar through various forms of scholarly research and writing. Yet bridging the gap between now and then with words is a task always haunted by the specter of loss.<sup>55</sup> This statement rings especially true for those who study the palace architecture of the Abbasids. Here, the art historian confronts two difficult scenarios. On the one hand, there is the dizzying complexity of sites like Samarra, whose remains are copious but fragmented and in need of a tedious piecing back together. On the other, there is the complete erasure of Abbasid Baghdad, where literature tempts us with vivid descriptions, yet not a single palace plan can be seen on the ground. It is an invisible point at the center of an archaeological galaxy that we detect only from scattered remnants in its orbit. Abbasid palaces may be the art historian's ultimate melancholic object. The argument undertaken here, however, suggests that instead of a frustrating scholarly problem, the mass of incomplete remnants of the Abbasid palace tradition can be seen as the deposit of an alternate way of thinking, one that has the potential to expand our own vision of what a monument can be.

54 Ernst Herzfeld Papers, FSA, FSA A.6 07.09.

55 Holly 2013, 3–7.

# 1 GRANDEUR AND IMPERMANENCE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SAMARRA AND OTHER PALACE COMPLEXES IN THE EARLY ABBASID PERIOD

I write to you from a city whose inhabitants time has caused to rise in exodus and whose walls time has caused to fall in ruin. Here, the witness to misfortune speaks and the thread of hope is severed. Its prosperity has been swallowed while its ruination spreads wide. Its environs have been leased to abandonment, and that which was lasting was urged toward that which was transient [...].

This, after it was only recently the garden of the earth and the dwelling of kingship, its quarters abundant with soldiers clad with swords and gowns of iron. Their spears were like the horns of mountain goats and [the sheen of] their armor was like the froth of rushing water.<sup>56</sup>

The contrasting images of glory and impermanence that structure the opening paragraphs of the epistle quoted above exemplify the vivid legacy that the Abbasid palace city of Samarra left in Arabic literary culture. The epistle appears in a dictionary of place names compiled in the thirteenth century by the geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1229), who quotes it and other passages as an evocative end to his description of the city. Yāqūt attributes the epistle to the Abbasid prince, poet, literary critic, and caliph for one day, Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 908), who was born in Samarra in 861 and witnessed the court's abandonment of the vast palaces constructed there when he was in his thirties.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz's depictions are not merely literary devices. They also convey a truth about Samarra that would have immediately resonated with scholars like Yāqūt, who never experienced Samarra as "the garden of the earth and the dwelling of kingship," since its palaces and their associated gardens had long stood in ruins by the time he wrote. Yet, despite Samarra's nearly complete ruination, the geographer was clearly impressed by the legacy of the site. Had he traveled to Samarra, a short journey from Baghdad, he would have seen a vast field of crumbling walls engulfing the much smaller medieval city that was still there, perhaps not unlike the ghostly terrain of monumental ruins that dominate the landscape surrounding the surviving town today (fig. 3a–b). Ibn al-Muʿtazz's epistle was just one of many poetic descriptions of this palace city in its prime with which Yāqūt would have been familiar. Chronicles, anthologies, geographies, and poetry delineated a glorious vision of Abbasid palace architecture etched into the consciousness of medieval Arab scholars.

The story of Samarra's construction, abandonment, and ruination captivated Yāqūt and others who contemplated its

physical remains and the descriptions of them found in literary sources. That story begins with Samarra's foundation but does not end there, extending outward to encompass other early Abbasid palaces and pointing to broader observations about the simultaneous grandeur and impermanence of these complexes, and the Abbasid caliphs' desire that these substantial building projects be remembered as part of a lasting legacy of Abbasid imperial power.

## Samarra's rise and fall as the Abbasid imperial residence

When Muʿtaṣim built Samarra in 836, the Abbasid caliphate needed a powerful and lasting statement of continued vitality. Samarra was founded following a political crisis that had taken place two decades earlier but left unresolved problems in its wake. After the death of the caliph Rashīd in 809, a succession battle between his sons al-Amīn (r. 809–13) and al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–33) led to four years of civil war that ended with the execution of Amīn in 813. Maʾmūn successfully reigned for the following twenty years, and the Abbasid Empire still possessed unrivaled political power and wealth within the Islamic world, but his accession to the throne at the price of fratricide had undermined the internal stability of Abbasid rule and additional security became necessary. Maʾmūn's younger brother, the future caliph Muʿtaṣim, helped restructure the imperial army, building it into a substantial force that included an expanded guard of Turkish soldiers. Samarra served as a base for Muʿtaṣim's expanded military, on which he and his successors increasingly relied for protection.<sup>57</sup> Thus, Samarra represented an opportunity for the caliphs to consolidate power at a safe remove from Baghdad's troubled urban population.<sup>58</sup>

57 Gordon 2001, 29–42. Estimating the size of the Turkish guard at Samarra has been difficult. Using figures given in historical sources, which differ substantially from author to author, Helmut Töllner suggested that the guard reached a size of 20,000: Töllner 1971, 47. Based on an analysis of the archaeological remains, which include military cantonments, Derek Kennet has estimated that the army had approximately 100,000 soldiers when the city was first founded and increased by fifty to sixty percent during the reign of Mutawakkil: Kennet 2001. Both Töllner and Kennet's methodologies are questioned in Gordon 2001, 72–73.

58 Herzfeld 1948, 89; Kennedy 2004, 156–64. See also Gordon 2001, 50–55.

56 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 3:20–21.

Indeed, one may discern a statement of renewed imperial power at Samarra, even though much of it today lies in ruins. The remains of Mu'taṣim's city, along with the additions made by his successors, form one of the largest archaeological sites in the world, stretching for nearly forty kilometers along the banks of the Tigris (fig. 4).<sup>59</sup> In aerial photographs taken during the twentieth century, the ruins engulf the modern city of Samarra, and traces of Mu'taṣim's grand arterial avenues are clearly visible extending for miles into the surrounding field of ruins (fig. 5). The Dār al-Khilāfa—Samarra's main imperial palace—was itself many times larger than extant examples of Islamic imperial palaces from previous centuries. A sprawling complex of buildings and gardens occupying approximately 125 hectares, it is situated north of the original city laid out under Mu'taṣim, on an escarpment overlooking the Tigris floodplain (boxed in fig. 4 and shown in greater detail in fig. 6).<sup>60</sup> The plan of the Dār al-Khilāfa extends along a well-defined axis from the floodplain in the west to a recreational ground in the east.

The core of the complex comprises a large, formal exterior space (fig. 7, A, henceforth the Western Garden), a block of formally arranged courtyards and halls occupying approximately 36,000 square meters (fig. 7, B, henceforth the Audience Hall Complex), and a vast courtyard of approximately 64,000 square meters (fig. 7, C, henceforth the Great Central Courtyard). East of this is a complex surrounding a *sardāb* (a sunken pool used for cooling in the hot Mesopotamian summers), along with stables and pavilions occupying an area of approximately 35,000 square meters (fig. 7, D). Further east still is a polo ground and racecourse. To the south of this axially arranged complex lies a large unexcavated zone surrounded by walls and connecting to a monumental avenue that leads to the city center (fig. 7, F). To the north is a walled compound with a circular pool at its center, similar in scale to area B (fig. 7, E, henceforth the Large Circular Pool Complex). Still further north was a large rectangular enclosure of approximately 152,000 square meters (fig. 7, G).<sup>61</sup>

The earliest photographs taken by Ernst Herzfeld of the palace's Great Central Courtyard mentioned above perhaps offer a better sense of the size of the complex (fig. 8). Because a single shot could not capture the space as a whole, Herzfeld had to take two pictures and piece them together as a panorama. He further noted that he had driven a car across the courtyard in 1930, likening his use of a vehicle to the caliphal practice of traversing the palace complexes on donkeys or horses attested in the sources.<sup>62</sup> Equally as stunning in terms of scale are the remains of architectural decoration found clinging to the walls of this and other structures at the

site. Most plentiful today are the stucco dadoes carved in repetitive, abstract vegetal patterns that wrap around many of the palace's rooms (fig. 9). Comprising endless lengths of decorated surface, these remnants of interior decoration represent but a fraction of what once was there.

Early descriptions of the site capture Mu'taṣim's lofty aims for the city. The most thorough account of the construction of Samarra is preserved in the *Kitāb al-Buldān* (Book of Countries), a geography of the Muslim world written by al-Ya'qūbī (d. after 905) in 891.<sup>63</sup> Ya'qūbī's account is particularly valuable because he was alive during the period Samarra served as the imperial capital, and he had resided in Baghdad. His description of the caliphal city, which fills several pages of the geographic treatise, comes directly after the entry on Baghdad. According to Ya'qūbī, Mu'taṣim spent months searching for a suitable location, first outside Baghdad, and then in several locations up the Tigris. None of these proved suitable, either because they were not irrigable or because, in the case of Qāṭūl on the Tigris, "the land lacked spaciousness (*laysa li-arḍihā sī'a*),"<sup>64</sup> pointing to the importance of open space to these imperial projects. Finally, he found the site on which he would build Samarra. Although there is evidence of pre-Islamic settlement at Samarra, Ya'qūbī's description emphasizes the vastness of the site and its barrenness at the time of Mu'taṣim's survey. The caliph was destined to change this situation:

He stopped at the monastery and spoke to the monks in it, and said, 'what is the name of this place?'. One of the monks said to him 'we find in our ancient books that this place is named Surra Man Rā'a, and that it was the city of Sām b. Nūh, and that after [many] ages it will be rebuilt by a noble, victorious and powerful king with companions whose faces are like the faces of the birds of the open country; he will settle it, and his children will settle it.' [Al-Mu'taṣim] said, 'I, by God, will build it, and settle it, and my children will settle here.'<sup>65</sup>

Samarra served as the imperial capital for only fifty-six years, however, and even within this span of time, other palaces were created and abandoned. Mu'taṣim's successor, al-Wāthiq bi'llāh (r. 842–47), built an ornate palace known as al-Hārūnī along the Tigris, not far from the Dār al-Khilāfa.<sup>66</sup> Wāthiq's successor, Mutawakkil, took up residence there for a decade, during which time he expanded Mu'taṣim's city and rebuilt its congregational mosque.<sup>67</sup> Then, in 859,

59 For a more precise definition of the Abbasid site founded by Mu'taṣim and its subsequent development, see Northedge 2005, especially 121–30.

60 Herzfeld 1914; Northedge 1993; Northedge 2005, 133–35.

61 Approximations of area for these units follow the figures given in Northedge and Kennet 2015, 81.

62 Herzfeld 1948, 140.

63 Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, 255–318. Ya'qūbī's entry on Samarra has been fully translated by Northedge in Northedge 2005, 267–73. For this and other Arabic sources on the founding of Samarra, see also Herzfeld 1948, 88–101.

64 Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, 257.

65 This translation is Northedge's. See Northedge 2005, 267. For the original Arabic, see Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, 257. For evidence of pre-Islamic settlements in the vicinity of Samarra, see Northedge 2005, 43–79.

66 On al-Hārūnī, see Sāmarrā'ī 1968, 228–34 (appearance in texts), and Northedge 2005, 225 and 300–302.

67 Northedge 2005, 271. For original Arabic, see Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, 265.