Originalveröffentlichung in: Baker, Heather D. ; Kaniuth, Kai ; Otto, Adelheid (Hg.), Stories of long ago. Festschrift für Michael D. Roaf (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 397) , Münster 2012, S. 385-404; Online-Veröffentlichung auf Propylaeum-DOK (2022), DOI: https://doi.org/10.11588/propylaeumdok.00005565

The Change of Caliphate Ideology in the Light of Early Islamic City Planning

Mirko Novák

Preface

Early Islamic material culture was strongly influenced by the art and architecture of the Ancient civilisations; many elements were adapted, as is visible in iconography, style and typology. Modern scholars often focus on the role of Byzantine and Sāsānian traditions (Ettinghausen 1972; Grabar 1977, 277–279 *passim*; Sourdel-Thomine / Spuler 1990, 84–88; Schippmann 1993: 131–132; Bier 1993). It is also well known that these Late Antique civilisations emerged from a long process of adaptation and transformation of the preceding cultures of Ancient Mesopotamia and Iran on the one hand as well as those of Greece and the Roman Empire on the other (Knauth / Nadjmabadi 1975; Fauth 1979; Frye 1983; Ahn 1992; Rashad 1996). Considering these influences, it is surprising that relatively few studies have tried to analyse the Ancient Mesopotamian and Iranian influences in Early Islamic art and architecture.[1]

Since even the material basis of Islamic culture in Ancient Mesopotamian civilisation is often neglected it is no surprise that also its intellectual, ideological and political roots in pre-Hellenistic societies have been nearly completely ignored. Almost no connection is sought between political concepts of Ancient Near Eastern and Islamic states, and no attempt has been undertaken to compare the similar ways in which ideological messages were presented in art and architecture.

To cite two examples: The themes of the "royal hunt" and the "garden scene" in art and literature are well attested as far back as the Early Sumerian Period (2nd half of the 4th Millennium BC). They expressed two of the main duties of the king by stressing the pastoral and the agricultural roots of this civilisation. The creation of huge gardens with botanical sections, landscape parks and hunting areas, the "artificial paradise", by Mesopotamian rulers stood in a close relation to these ideological concepts

1 The lack of comparative studies in the transmission of elements of material culture may be mainly a result of the strict distinction between (ancient) Near Eastern and Islamic Archaeology in modern universities. Another reason is surely the Islamic claim that the Muslim community has created a completely new society and civilisation without influence from older cultures – a claim, which has been accepted by many modern scholars.

(Novák 2002). The hunting and garden scenes as topics in visual art as well as the architecture of the paradise gardens were both adapted by nearly all Near Eastern civilisations until modern times; nevertheless, their semiotic messages throughout the periods were never considered to be coherent features in a continuing tradition (Elsen-Novák / Novák 2005).

The second example is the physical layout of the Madīnat as-Salām in Baġdād. It has been often stressed that it was a copy of many Sāsānian cities like Veh-Ardaḫšīr or Ardaḫšīr-Ḫurre (Creswell 1989; Meinecke 1996b, 144f.; Wirth 1997). The ideological concept of the "circular city" as a symbol of Islamic power and the *axis mundi* is generally accepted (Grabar 1977, 75). It should be reasonable to discuss if not only the idea of a circular city but also its ideological background, and the concept of city planning as expression of ideology, go back to Ancient Near Eastern times. Programmatic city planning was, after all, well developed by the time of the Assyrian Empire.

In the following paper, which is dedicated to Michael Roaf, a scholar of impressively broad interests and competences, I will focus on Early Islamic city planning which helps to demonstrate how the political concepts changed in the first two Islamic centuries and how this change was expressed in the material culture. Since many of the ideas and elements were the result of a long development beginning with the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires, I will start with a brief overview of the Mesopotamian and the later Persian kingship ideologies and city planning principles. Following that, the change of the Caliphate ideology as reflected in some special architectonic features will be sketched.

Prelude: Ideological city planning in ancient Mesopotamia

Kingship ideologies in the ancient Near East

The predominant principle of Babylonian kingship ideology from the end of the 3rd millennium BC onwards was the "able ruler" (Edzard 1972–75, Lambert 1974, Röllig 1981, Maul 1995, Maul 1999, Cancik-Kirschbaum 1995, Franke 1995, Selz 1998 and Pongratz-Leisten 1994). This signifies that the king, in theory, was qualified primarily by his particular capabilities, his personal *charisma*, more than by genealogy, to fulfil his God-given mandate to rule. Of course, ideology and reality were generally distinctive. Babylonian kingship was never based on a real "meritocracy".

The king's two pre-eminent duties were, first, to ensure a successful harvest – mostly by taking care of the important irrigation channels – and, second, to protect the herds of domesticated animals against wild beasts and enemies. As a result, the archetype of the "royal gardener and hunter" was developed in literature and art (Fauth 1979; Galter 1989). Furthermore, the king was responsible for building activities, especially of "public" buildings such as temples, palaces and defensive walls as well as the renovation of cities themselves (Lackenbacher 1982). He had to guarantee the social order as well as the security of the community against foreign enemies.

Most of the duties of the Assyrian king were comparable to those of his Babylonian counterpart. The traditional archetype of the "royal gardener and hunter", for example, was adapted in literature and art. Based on his role as *iššiakkum* "governor" and *sangu* "high priest" of the god Aššur, the ruler of Assyria became a kind of "priest-king" of an extended empire. He supervised the property of the national god, who was considered the "true king" of the city and the nation. Furthermore, he was the interlocutor between humans and gods. In contrast to the Babylonian ruler, he unified the spiritual and secular power. In addition, the god Aššur obliged him to wage war against all enemies of the god, city and state of Aššur, causing war to become an instrument of legitimation.

The Iranian concept of kingship as held by the Achaemenids, Parthians and Sāsānians show some striking similarities to the Assyrian one (Knauth / Nadjmabadi 1975; Fauth 1979; Ahn 1992; Wiesehöfer 1993). It was focused on the figure of the "charismatic king" as the earthly representative of the main god Ahuramazdā / Ohrmuzd, and the archetype of the "royal gardener and hunter" was adapted in visual art and literature.

In spite of the many differences in the various kingship ideologies of Mesopotamia, some striking similarities can be seen. A few aspects may have passed from dynasty to dynasty as a symbolic act of tradition and continuity; others were taken over unconsciously, and prove thereby their vivid and fundamental reality in Mesopotamian or Near Eastern consciousness. The idea of the "royal gardener and hunter", for example, ultimately refers to the agricultural and pastoral origins of Mesopotamian society. Even if its adaptation by Iranian and – later – by Islamic leaders was a conscious procedure as part of their ideological programmes, the mythological and historical background was surely no longer understood. The "charisma" of the ruler, emphasising his special relationship to the god, is one of the most persistent features of Near Eastern kingship ideologies up until modern times.

The semiotic programme of royal cities in the ancient Near East

One of the means of expressing the legitimacy of the king was the renovation and re-creation of the major cities of his kingdom or parts of them. In special periods the foundation of new capitals or residential cities was used as an act of demonstration of power.

Seen from semiotic methodology, "culture" is a kind of communication, and each phenomenon of it – including art and architecture – is a "system of signs" which is intended to transmit a message. This means that ideology – as a political message – could also have been expressed throughout the shape and the structure of a new founded city. The sender of the message is the ruling political system and the architect is the medium that creates the "language". The receivers of the message are, on the one hand, the gods (or the one God in the case of Christianity or Islam), before whom the king had to justify himself, and, on the other hand, the human dependants who would thereby recognise the legitimate reign of the king. A psychological means of transmission is to be seen here: through the common perception of the urban milieu in

daily life, the inhabitants or visitors of a city reflect the design of its structure. Special axes, presented by the alignment of the streets, and important buildings symbolise the cosmological order. Significant urban elements are either emphasised or hidden, due to the underlying concept and ideological programme.

In the Ancient Near East several layouts of cities were created based on special ideological concepts. In addition to those with irregular shapes, settlements with rectangular or circular forms were constructed. The literary sources suggest that appropriate city forms were chosen according to pre-existing images concerning the spatial structure of the universe. This was the case in all societies that defined their capitals as an *axis mundi*. In pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamia rectangular shapes were preferred, in Iran at least in some cases circular ones. The model of rectangular city-layouts was the image of the *kibrāt erbettim* "four corners of the world" (Maul 1997, 124) whereas the ones of the circular cities were the "Kašvar-circle" (Brentjes 1981) and the Mandala.

The Assyrian kings in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods were very active in shifting the political centre – the "horizontal axis" (Maul 1997) of the empire into newly founded capitals. Meanwhile, the city of Aššur, the old core of the empire, with the main temple of the national god Aššur remained the cultic centre – the "vertical axis".

The Assyrian residential city, the *āl šarrūti* "city of kingship", had a rectangular shape and was surrounded by huge artificial "paradise-gardens" with the idea of representing all the zoological and botanical species in the universe. A citadel at its periphery, where the royal palaces as well as the main temples were situated, dominated the city. The distance between the dwelling quarters of the common people in the lower town and the public buildings above stressed the nearly supernatural position of the king. He, as the main priest and representative of the god Aššur and the *šar kibrāt erbettim* "king of the four quarters (of the world)", lived in his *ekallu* "palace" high above the city itself, close to the *bītū*, "houses" of the gods. The palace was the *šubat šarrūti* "seat of kingship" built *ana tabrāt kiššat nišī* "for the astonishment of all peoples" (Winter 1993). The public buildings were visible from outside as well as inside the city, so that everybody could appreciate the political and ideological message: the palace dominated the city on one side, representing the king's power over the citizens; on the other side it overlooked the "paradise" gardens, reflecting the king's right to the entire universe. The city was a symbol of the charismatic king, the creator of the city and of the artificial paradise gardens. It was the horizontal axis and the seat of terrestrial political power.

In Babylonia the concept of founding a residential city was not a predominant preoccupation of the king – with the exception of Agade built in the late 3rd Millennium and Dūr-Kurigalzu built in the middle of the 2nd. Instead, Babylon as the "vertical and horizontal axis" (Maul 1997) of the world, the "bond of lands" (George 1997), was inherited by the Late Babylonian kings as a way to represent the God-given world order (Novák 1999, 388–391).

Babylon in its Late Babylonian structure (6th century BC) demonstrated a synthesis between traditional Babylonian and adopted Assyrian building principles. In accordance with the Babylonian concept of the "temple city", the main temple of the city-god Marduk lay at the centre of the capital. The main axis of the street system connected the gates with the central temple, which was thus located at the main junction. The shape of the city was rectangular, and, as the *axis mundi*, symbolised the world with its "four corners". The "navel of the world" on its vertical and horizontal axis – the temple of the city and national god Marduk – dominated the city and therefore the whole universe. Each inhabitant or visitor to Babylon could see this architectural agenda from either the outside or the inside. The temple Esangil and the *ziggurrat* Etemenanki were visible from all main streets of the city and served in daily life as the most important points of orientation within the city. The Assyrian influence led to the creation of a "paradise garden" – the so-called "Hanging Gardens" (Bichler / Rollinger 2002) – and to an artificial citadel on the periphery, where the palaces were situated. This citadel gave the city for the first time in Babylonia a bipolar structure with two prominent landmarks. This symbolised the Babylonian ideology of twin powers: god and king.

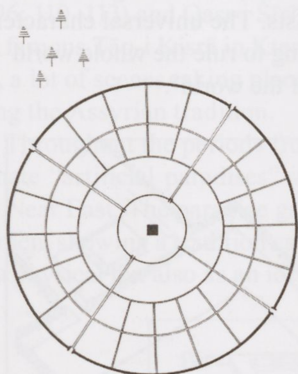

Fig. 1: The Sāsānian residential city of Ardaḫšīr-Ḫurre, built by king Ardaḫšīr I. (211–240 AD) in the Fars region (drawing by Gabi Elsen-Novák)

During the Parthian period the principle of the "circular city" with a central palace or temple was created and spread over Iran and Mesopotamia. The Sāsānians adopted it and surrounded their cities with huge extramural "paradise gardens" in the Assyrian and Achaemenid tradition (Fig. 1). Four streets connecting four gates, with the public buildings in the centre, created four equal segments, the four quarters of the world. The palace at the centre emphasised the position of the charismatic king.

The Iranian dynasties, then, stood in the tradition of Mesopotamian empires with the "charismatic ruler" in the kingship ideology and also in the programmatic creation of new cities in order to express a political concept.

The artificial Paradise

An urban and architectural element of visualisation of kingship ideology was the royal garden, the "artificial paradise" (Novák 2002). The Assyrian kings were the first to create huge "universal gardens" that consisted of botanical areas, landscape parks and "zoos" (Wisemann 1983). Those tripartite gardens lay outside the cities close

to the palaces so that visual contact was possible (Novák 1997: 186–188). Plants and animals from all known countries were kept inside to illustrate the world dominance of the Assyrian king and the fertility of the lands he ruled. This was a reflection of the cities themselves, which were populated by people of all conquered countries. The "paradise gardens" formed the scenery of the ceremonial royal hunt of wild animals. Inside the gardens small palaces, the so-called *bītānu*, were erected "for the leisure of the majesty". Open-columned halls in the tradition of the Syrian *ḫilāni* formed their entrances. As the inscriptions reveal, wall paintings or orthostat reliefs decorated them inside. The gardens served to symbolise aspects of the "royal gardener and hunter": the botanical section stressed the function as gardener, the hunting areas the one of the protector of the herds and killer of the wild beasts. The universal character of the paradises emphasised the claim of the Assyrian king to rule the whole world – to be the *šar kibrāt erbettim* "king of the four quarters of the world".

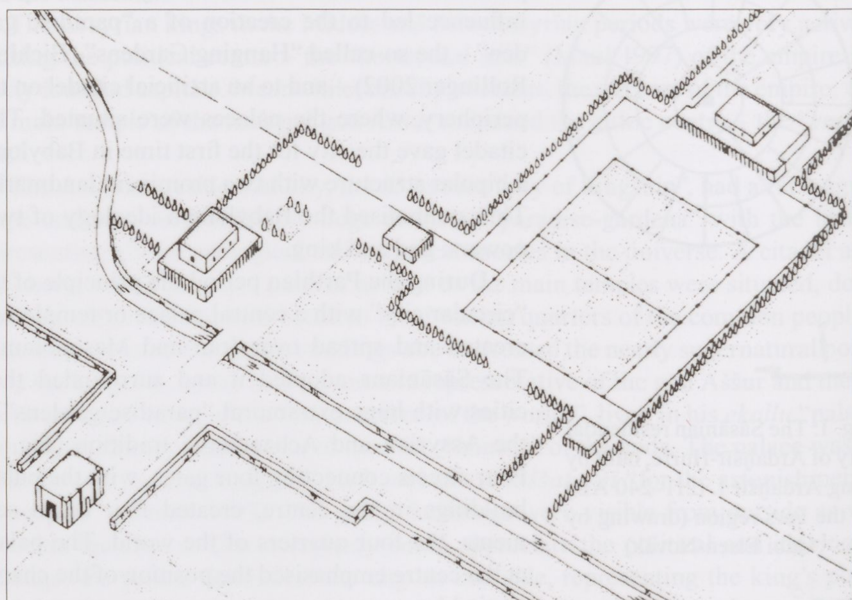

Fig. 2: The paradise garden and the apadana palaces in Pasargadae, the residential city of the Achaemenid king Cyros II. (559–530 BC); (from Kawami 1992, 89, Fig. 31)

The kings of the Achaemenid dynasty followed the Assyrian example. Huge paradises, now named with that Persian-Avestic term *paeridaēza* "enclosure", surrounded the palaces in Pasargadae (Fig. 2), the first capital (Stronach 1990; Kawami 1992; Tuplin 1996: 88 *passim*). As known from literary sources, both botanical gardens and landscape parks with wild animals were part of it (Fauth 1979: 3; Tuplin 1996: 92).

The botanical section was formed as the symmetrical *čahar bagh* "four gardens", divided into four equal quarters. The developed system of the covered *qanawāt* supplied the gardens with water.

With the "artificial paradise" also the ideological concept of the "royal gardener and hunter" was adapted by the Achaemenid rulers (Fauth 1979). This concept of ideal kingship fitted very well with the Iranian one (Ahn 1992; Knauth / Nadjmabadi 1975).

The principle of the *čahar bagh*, which symbolised the four quarters of the world, was taken over by the Parthians and Sāsānians and, finally, by the ʿAbbāsids. Well known examples of Sāsānian paradise gardens are Tāq-i Bustān, Bisotūn (Kleiss 1996: 110–113) and Qaṣr-i Šīrīn (Fig. 3; Stronach 1990: 177; Novák 1996: 359). Even the famous Tāq-i Kisrā in Ktesiphon was located inside a huge garden area. In visual art, a lot of scenes taking place in the royal gardens were produced, all of them showing the Assyrian tradition.

Throughout the periods from the Assyrian kingdom until the early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate "artificial paradises" were part of programmatic city building activities in the Near East. The paradise gardens are one of the best examples of an architectonic element showing a tradition carried from Ancient Near East to Islamic times not only as a physical but also as an ideological feature.

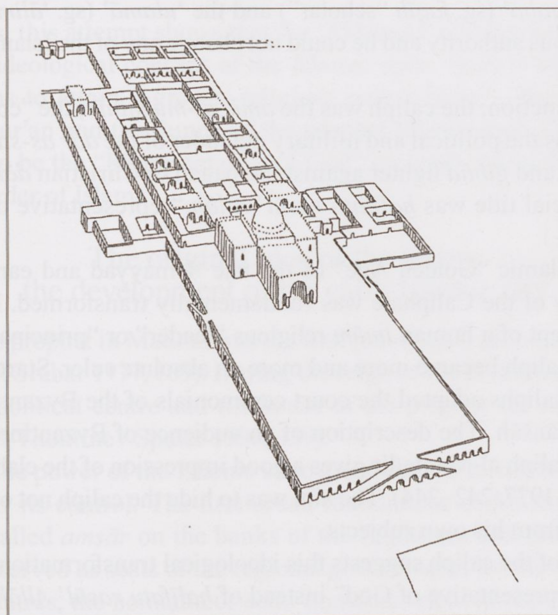

Fig. 3: The Sāsānian garden palace Imaret-i Ḫosrau near Qaṣr-i Šīrīn, built by king Ḫosrau II (590–628 AD) in the centre of a "paradise garden" (from Kleiss 1989, Fig. 31b)

The Development of Caliphate Ideology

In the time of the immediate followers (*Ḫalīfatu* "Caliph") of the prophet Muhammad, the idea of the "caliphate" was developed (Hartmann 1987, 100–104 *passim*). It was based on the concept that the best Muslim of the *umma* "community" should be its *imām* (religious) "leader". A true "kingship" on the dynastic principle should be avoided. The caliph should be a male and healthy member of the tribe of the Quraiš. The choice of a new caliph should follow the examples of procedure at the declaration of the first three caliphs: Abū Bakr was proclaimed spontaneously by the leading members of the community, 'Umar was appointed by his dying predecessor and 'Uṯmān was elected by a council, the so-called *šūra*. Nevertheless already the fourth Caliph 'Alī declared himself the *imām* in a kind of usurpation.

The fifth Caliph Mu'awiya, from the house of the 'Umayyads, founded the first Islamic dynasty, which started to take over several traditional aspects of ancient Near Eastern kingship. After some time, the dynastic principle became dominant in the ruling system of the families of the 'Umayyads and 'Abbāsids as well as in the most important Islamic opposition, the family of the 'Alīds that was supported by the Šī'a (Halm 1988).

During the reign of the first caliphs, the *imām*, the leader of the Islamic community, was a *muǧtahid* and responsible for the correct interpretation of the religious orders. After the "gate of the *iǧtihād*" was closed, he was subordinated to the *iǧmā'*, the "consensus" of the *fuqahā'* (sg. *faqīh* "scholar") and the *'ulamā'* (sg. *'ālim* "scientist"). He had no real religious authority and he could not change any of the Islamic rules (Hourani 1992, 91).

Beside this function, the caliph was the *amīr al-mu'minīn*, the "commander of the believers". He was the political and military defender of the *dār as-salām*, the Islamic "world of peace" and *ǧihād* fighter against the pagan or Christian *dār al-ḥarb* "world of war". His official title was *ḫalīfatu rasūl' Allāh* "representative of the prophet of God".

During the Islamic "Golden Age" of the late 'Umayyad and early 'Abbāsid empire, the ideology of the Caliphate was fundamentally transformed. Moving towards the original concept of a human *imām* religious "leader" or "principal" of the Islamic community, the caliph became more and more an absolute ruler. Starting with the late 'Umayyads, the caliphs adapted the court ceremonials of the Byzantine emperor and the Sāsānian Šāhānšāh. The description of an audience of Byzantine ambassadors at the court of the Caliph al-Muqtadir gives a good impression of the elaborated court ceremonial (Grabar 1977, 242–244). The aim was to hide the caliph not only from foreign visitors but even from his own subjects.

Even the title of the caliph suggests this ideological transformation by its new form *ḫalīfatu Allāh* "representative of God" instead of *ḫalīfatu rasūl' Allāh* "representative of the prophet of God". Though just one word of the original title was left out, a fundamental change was expressed: Like the charismatic king of the Ancient Near East the Caliph now was the representative of God on earth and the intercessor between humans and God.

As an argumentative instrument for the ideological increase of the position of the Caliph the doctrine of the *mu'tazila* was officially supported (Hartmann 1987: 39). The Sunnite *mu'tazila* was founded in Baṣra by the two *mutakallimūn* Abū'l-Hudail al-'Allaf and al-Nazzām under the influence of the atavistic religions of Mani and Mazdak. With the help of logic and dialectic the scholars tried to elaborate the dogmatic discussion (*kalām*). One of the principles was the Qadarīya, the freedom of human to decide between good and evil without divine predestination. Furthermore, the *imām* as a real religious authority should be prior to the *iğmā'* of the scholars.

This last point was the reason why the *mu'tazila* became so popular with some of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs: With the help of this doctrine their position as *imām* was increased as the highest religious authority, almost reaching that of a prophet. The main supporter of the *mu'tazila* was al-Ma'mūn. He founded the Dār al-Ḥikma in Baġdād and ordered the translation of philosophical treatises from Greek and Latin. His successor al-Mu'taṣim, who shifted his political capital into the new residential city of Sāmarrā' (Novák 1995), and after him al-Wāṯiq continued supporting the *mu'tazila* as official doctrine of the Islamic state. The famous *qāḍī al-quḍāt* Ibn Abū Dā'ūd was one of the main representatives of the *miḥna*, a kind of inquisition of the *mu'tazila*.

At last, the pressure of orthodox Muslims led by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal forced the Caliph al-Mutawakkil to return to traditional Sunnite doctrine and to abolish the *mu'tazila*.

Nevertheless, this attempt shows that the 'Abbāsid Caliphs tried to increase their position in the ideological concept of the Islamic state. Even if the attempts of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs to attain a greater religious power failed – the main authorities remained the Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad – the Caliph continued claiming to be the "Representative of God" on earth. As such, his duty was to guarantee the order of Islam.

The original idea of the imam: the development of the early Islamic city

The house of the prophet in Madīna was the first (unofficial) centre of the newly founded community (Grabar 1977, 109). During the reign of the first three Caliphs Madīna remained both political centre and the house of the prophet the main congregation mosque (Sourdel-Thomine / Spuler 1990, 139).

Meanwhile the power of the Islamic state grew and the fertile regions of the Near East came under its control. The first urban foundations of Muslims were military camps, the so-called *amṣār* on the banks of the Euphrates and the Nile (Al-Sayyad 1991, 43). They served as seats of the regional governments for the invaded areas. By building new centres, the nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes of the Arabs avoided the existing capitals like Ktesiphon (called *al-Madā'in* "the cities" by the Arabs), Damascus or Alexandria. The most prominent examples of military camps were al-Kūfa (Djait 1986) near the ancient city of Babylon, Baṣra at the shore of the Persian Gulf and Fuṣṭāt, the core of later Cairo in Egypt.

The inner structure of al-Kūfa, as a representative model of these camps, was dominated by a strict segregation between the various Arab tribes that settled inside the camp (Fig. 4; Al-Sayyad 1991, 55). Each tribe inhabited one of the *hiǧāǧ* "quarters", separated by 15 *manāhiǧ* "alleys" and a number of *zuqāq* "lanes". A large square in the centre of the town, named *as-Sahah or ar-Raḥba*, was used as congregation area and market. It enclosed the great mosque and the adjacent governor's palace, the *Dār al-'Imāra* "House of Rule" (Creswell 1989, 9; al-Jannabi 1983, 220). The founder and first governor of al-Kūfa, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, built the *Bait al-Māl*, in which the treasury of the community was deposed, inside the mosque so that it could easily be guarded by all Muslims of the town.

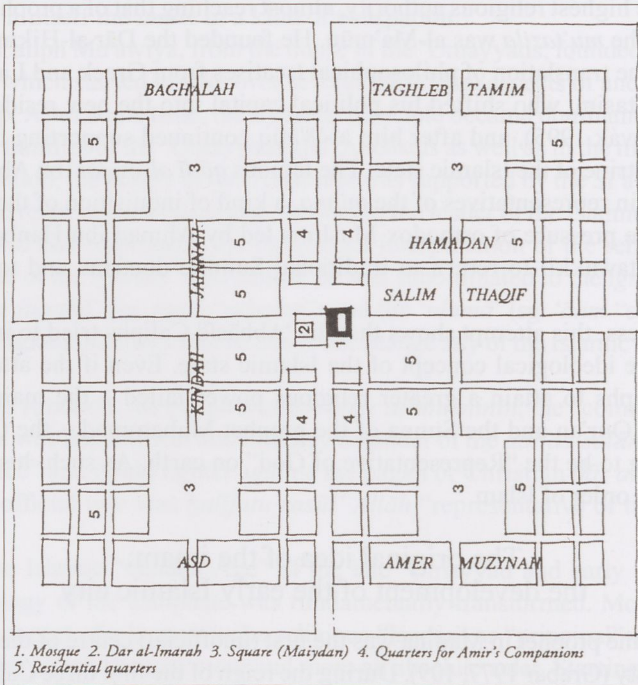

Fig. 4: The Early Islamic military camp of al-Kūfa (from Al-Sayyad 1991, 61, Fig. 3.7)

Irrespective of the religion, all sacral buildings, such as temples, churches or mosques, were gathering points of the communities. Ceremonies and processions supported their unity. Sacral buildings normally lay in the centre of the cities and were visible and accessible to all the inhabitants. Also the mosque of Kūfa was the most extended and most prominent building of the town while the palace was the second in size and importance; the two buildings shared a common wall. After a short period Kūfa was transformed into a real city, like the other military camps. It became the residence of the fourth Caliph 'Alī (Djait 1986, 346f.).

The newly established empire of the ʻUmayyads shifted its political centre to the old and traditional city of Damascus. The structure of this city was formed during the previous periods and only slightly changed by the new power. Nevertheless some of the predominant planning principles of the *'amsar* were repeated: Close to the dominating main congregation mosque, which was built at the place of the former cathedral, the palace of the Caliph was erected (Sack 1989; Al-Sayyad 1991, 86). The spatial organisation between the two buildings was equal to that at al-Kūfa. The markets surrounded this ensemble. The *Bait al-Māl* was still placed in the courtyard of the mosque. As a new visual symbol of caliphate power a *Qubbat al-Ḫaḍrā'* "Green Dome" or "Dome of Heaven" (Bloom 1993) was built above the main hall of the palace. It became the main feature of the Caliphs' palaces for nearly two centuries. A similar dome crowned the palace of Ḥaǧǧāǧ ibn Yūsuf at al-Wāṣit, the ʻUmayyad administration centre of Irāq (Creswell 1989, 40).

The most striking feature both of the early Islamic foundations and of the first real capital, Damascus, was the close spatial connection between the main congregation mosque and the palace, for the palace appeared as an adjunct building to the mosque. Together they formed an ensemble in the centre of the town, easily reachable for all inhabitants. This visually demonstrated that the caliph, like the *amīr* "governor" in the military camps, was in the first degree the *imām* of the town who was responsible for the *ḫuṭba*, the Friday prayer. The distance between ruler and subjects was relatively short since the believers had free access to the nearby mosque. The fact that the *Bait al-Māl* with the treasury of the community was deposed in the mosque and not in the palace stressed that the *umma* was economically superior to the *imām*.

Nevertheless, with the creation of the "Green Dome" as an outer symbol of caliphal power, the importance of the Caliph was increased in the physical layout of the city during the ʻUmayyad rule.

The ambivalent caliphate ideology: Madīnat as-Salām

The first climax of the Islamic "residential city" was early ʻAbbāsid Baġdād, built on virgin soil shortly after the ʻAbbāsid Revolution (Fig. 5). Even the act of the foundation of the new political centre was reminiscent of the building programmes of the Assyrians, Achaemenids and Sāsānians. The inclusion of the toponym into the programme of the capital was maintained by the name *Madīnat as-Salām*, the "City of Peace". It was modelled on the Qur'an image of the *Dār as-Salām*, the "House of Peace" (Sura VI, 127), i.e., the part of the world ruled by Islam. Programmatic toponyms of new founded cities were already known to the Assyrians and the Sāsānians (Novák 1999, 383–384).

The outer shape and inner structure of the vanished circular city can be reconstructed on the base of literary descriptions and the comparison with other similar cities (Lassner 1970; Duri 1986, 894; Creswell 1989, 229–231; Lombard 1991, 136; Novák 1999, 242–249, Fig. 43.). Sāsānian principles were combined with Early Islamic ones: The circular layout of the new capital followed the example of Sāsānian

cities like Ardaḫšīr-Ḫurre in the Fars region and Vēh-Ardaḫšīr near Ktesiphon (Fig. 1; Novák 1997, 192–193 and 1999, 224–225). The city's four gates, one facing each wind direction, and four streets represented the four quarters of the world. Like their Persian forerunners they symbolised the *axis mundi*, the civilised and – in this case – Islamised universe (Grabar 1977, 75; Al-Sayyad 1991, 117; Meinecke 1996a, 168 and 1996b, 144.).

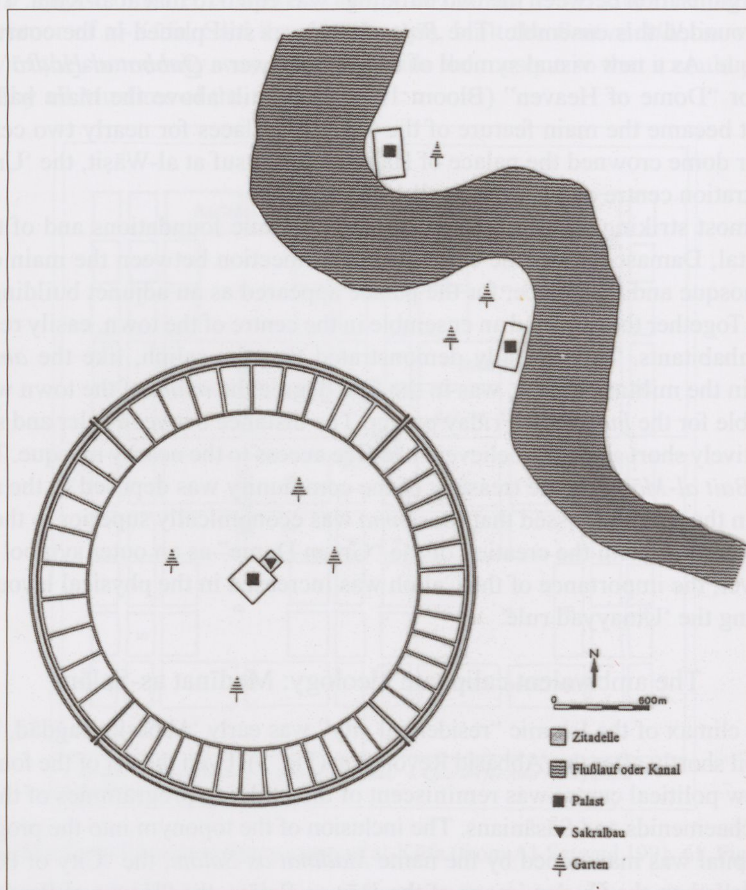

Fig. 5: Madīnat as-Salām, the ʿAbbāsid residential city of Bagdād, built by the Caliph al-Manṣūr (754–775 AD); (drawing by Gabi Elsen-Novák)

In the centre was the palace with the "Green Dome", the symbol of power, emphasising the position of the Caliph. The *Dār al-Ḫilāfa*, the "House of the Caliphate" carried on the function of the former *Dār al-'Imāra* in the first Islamic foundations. Close to it lay the main congregational mosque. While in al-Kūfa the mosque was the dominating building, the palace of Madīnat as-Salām exceeded the mosque in size

by far. It seems as if the culminating point of the central arrangement has shifted. Still, the close connection of palace and main mosque emphasised the function of the caliph as *imām* of the *umma*, the community of Islam.

A vast empty area, the so-called *ar-Raḥba*, surrounded the mosque and the palace. In this, the patterns both of the Islamic foundation al-Kūfa and of the Sāsānian residential cities were visible. Probably the *ar-Raḥba* was used as a garden area (Stierlin 1996, 118). The residential quarters were divided into equal sectors. The inhabitants of the city were drawn from all people living in the *Dār as-Salām*. In this way, the city was a microcosm of the Islamic world, just like the quarters of the Arab tribes in Kūfa were, in a more limited way. While the Islamic community was an Arabic feature during the first years of the expansion, it now had become a universal religion connecting many peoples all over the world.

An adapted principle was the extramural paradise close to the river. As descriptions show, botanical gardens lay besides hunting parks. Palaces were built inside these vast areas. As mentioned before, such gardens show a tradition, which goes back to the Assyrian empire. There and in the following Iranian kingdoms, they symbolised the royal claim of world rule.

The ʿAbbāsid caliphs tried more and more to protect themselves against the frightening power of the nearly uncontrollable inhabitants of the growing city. The originally planned intramural markets were settled outside already during the construction of the city. Later, the inner circle with the palace was fortified (on the change of the inner structure by transformation of the central space into a "Caliphal Private Domain" cf. Al-Sayyad 1991, 129, Fig. 5.8.). After a short period the residences of the caliphs and their families were shifted into the garden palaces. The most prominent one was the *Qaṣr al-Ḫuld*, the "Palace of Eternity". At that point, the *Madīnat as-Salām* with the extramural garden palaces became a pure copy of Sāsānian residential cities.

The *Madīnat as-Salām* consisted of elements of two planning principles which became discernible in the architectural combination in the physical layout of the city: The Islamic one already known from the early military camps, and the Ancient Near Eastern one adapted from the Sāsānians. The connection of congregation mosque and palace, the "Green Dome" and the ethno-religious segregation of the inhabitants stood in the tradition of the early Islamic foundations while the circular layout, the centralisation of the palace and the vast extramural garden areas with huge garden palaces show Ancient Near Eastern influences.

As a result, the city symbolised two concurring ideological principles: First, the Islamic idea of the human *imām* of the community who was responsible for the *ḫutba* and who was accessible to the believers, his subjects. Second, the Ancient Near Eastern concept of the "charismatic king", the "representative of God on earth". Even the foundation of a new capital with a geometrical shape as the *axis mundi* stressed his claim of absolute world rule. In the programme of the extramural paradise gardens the idea of the "royal hunter and gardener" was still vivid. The name of the

capital with its religious connotation was part of the legitimisation. Following that, the *Madīnat as-Salām* represented an ambivalent Caliphate ideology: on the one side the human *imām*, on the other the "charismatic king".

The "charismatic king": Surra-man-ra'ā

Many social and political reasons caused the caliphs to shift their residence several times, e.g. to ar-Raqqa or to Sāmarrā'.[2] The well-known layout of the huge military camp, the *'askar* Surra-man-ra'ā (Northedge 1990) and the architecture of its palaces show the further development of the caliphate ideology (Fig. 6).

Since the city had no geometrical shape – indeed it had no town wall at all – it should not be considered to symbolise an *axis mundi*. Nevertheless the dimensions of the buildings and the city emphasised the power of the political system with the Caliph at its head.

The Caliph's palace was situated in the centre of the city, at the edge of the natural plateau facing the alluvium of the river (Northedge 1993). The main street ran alongside this edge. South of the palace it sloped into the valley and crossed the botanical gardens stretching west of the palace. North of the building the street climbed up the plateau again and continued its original alignment along the edge of the plateau.

A visitor to the palace had to walk first downward into the gardens and cross them. There he had to turn at a right angle. Behind a large water-filled basin a broad staircase led to the gate of the palace. Here, in or behind the middle *līwān*, the Caliph used to give his public audiences sitting high above the ordinary people and facing the gardens. This stressed the distinct distance of the Caliph and his subjects, which was also enhanced by the complex court ceremonies.

The architecture of the entire palace clearly showed a strong Sāsānian influence with open *līwāns* giving access to the rectangular audience hall covered by a cupola (Bier 1993, 57; Novák 1996, 362–363). This principle was predominant in nearly all of the known Sāsānian palaces, such as Qaṣr-i Šīrīn (see Fig. 3; Kleiss 1989).

The gardens inside the building were designed as a double *čahar bagh*. Although this was a Persian type of garden it was reminiscent of a Qur'ān description of the supernatural *paradise* as a double garden (Sura LV, 62).[3] Neighbouring the palace was a vast area with hunting parks and racecourses. Inside the parks lay palaces like the one called al-Mušarraḥāt (Northedge 1990, 22f.). The combination of botanical gardens with geometric shape and landscape parks for the "royal hunt« with including open garden palaces clearly showed the tradition of Ancient Near Eastern programmatic *paradise* gardens.

---

2 On the reasons cf. Novák 1995. On the history of Sāmarrā' cf. Herzfeld 1948.

3 In the *hadīṯ* the paradise is described as having consisted of seven or eight parts (Khoury – Hagemann – Heine 1991, 610f.).

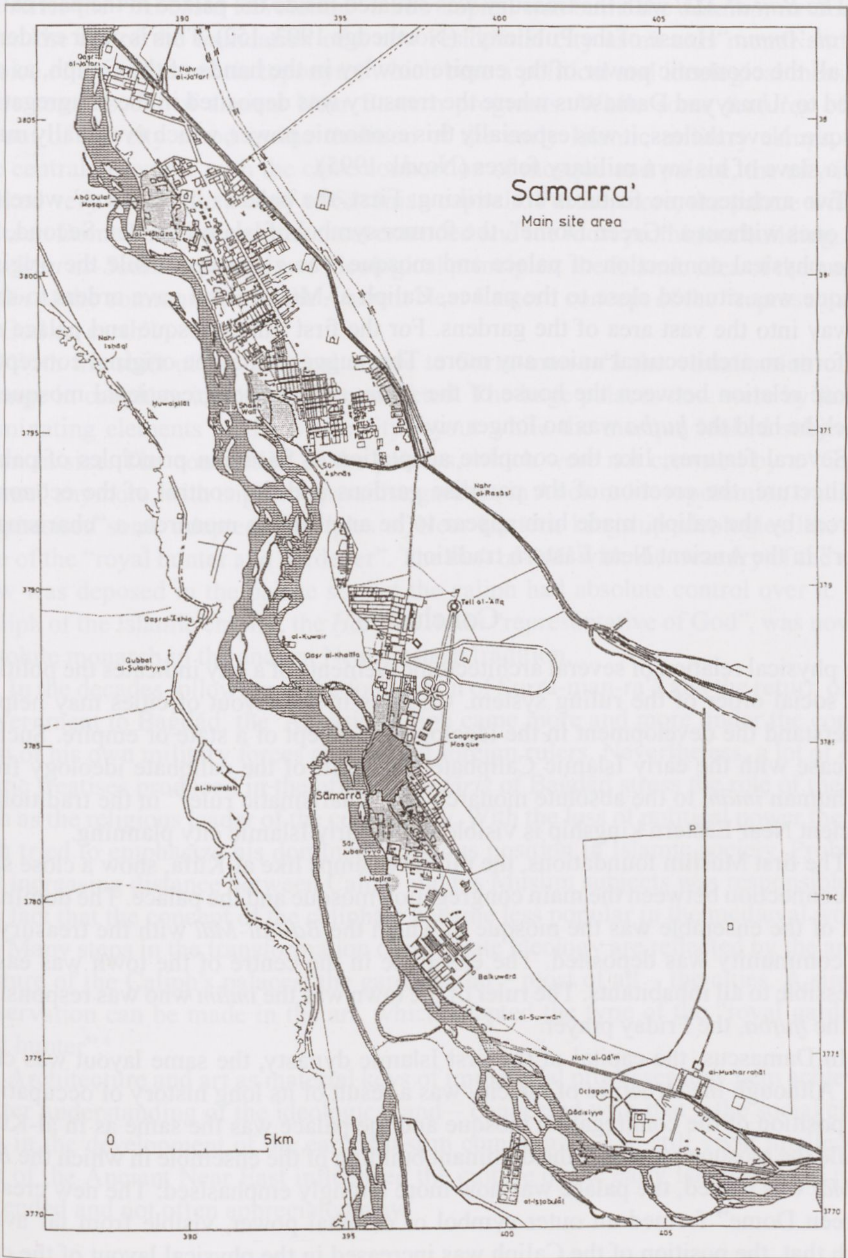

Fig. 6: The 'Abbāsid residential city of Surra man ra'ā (from Northedge 1990, 4, Fig. 3)

The *Bait al-Māl* with the treasury was situated inside the palace in the part called *Dār al-ʿAmma* "House of the Publicity" (Northedge 1993, 152). This is clear evidence that all the economic power of the empire now lay in the hands of the Caliph, as opposed to 'Umayyad Damascus where the treasury was deposited in the congregation mosque. Nevertheless, it was especially this economic power, which eventually made him a slave of his own military forces (Novák 1995).

Two architectonic features are striking: First, the palaces in Sāmarrā' were the first ones without a "Green Dome", the former symbol of Islamic power. Second, the close physical connection of palace and mosque was given up. While the original mosque was situated close to the palace, Caliph al-Mutawakkil gave orders to shift it away into the vast area of the gardens. For the first time, mosque and palace did not form an architectural union any more. This suggests that the original concept of a close relation between the house of the *imām* and the congregational mosque in which he held the *ḫuṭba* was no longer vivid.

Several features, like the complete adaptation of Sāsānian principles of palace architecture, the erection of the paradise gardens and the control of the economic sources by the caliph, made him appear to be an absolute monarch, a "charismatic ruler" in the Ancient Near Eastern tradition.

Conclusion

The physical relation of several architectonic elements of a city indicates the political and social order of the ruling system. Changes in the layout of cities may help to understand the development in the ideological concept of a state or empire. Such is the case with the early Islamic Caliphate. The shift of the caliphate ideology from the human *imām* to the absolute monarch and "charismatic ruler" in the tradition of Ancient Near Eastern kingship is visible in the early Islamic city planning.

The first Muslim foundations, the military camps like al-Kūfa, show a close spatial connection between the main congregation mosque and the palace. The dominant part of the ensemble was the mosque in which the *Bait al-Māl* with the treasury of the community was deposited. The ensemble in the centre of the town was easily accessible to all inhabitants. The ruler of the town was the *imām* who was responsible for the *ḫuṭba*, the Friday prayer.

In Damascus, the capital of the first Islamic dynasty, the same layout was chosen. Although the structure of the city was a result of its long history of occupation, the position of the congregation mosque and the palace was the same as in al-Kūfa. While the mosque remained the dominant building of the ensemble in which the *Bait al-Māl* was placed, the palace was now more strongly emphasised: The new created "Green Dome" formed an outer symbol of caliphal power, visible from far away. With that, the position of the Caliph was increased in the physical layout of the city. The change of the *Ḫalīfatu Rasūl' Allāh* "representative of the prophet of God" to the *Ḫalīfatu Rasūl' Allāh* "representative of God" had already begun.

After the "'Abbāsid Revolution" a new capital was built: the *Madīnat as-Salām*. Even the act of the foundation of a new residential city as an axis mundi and the choice of a programmatic toponym, which bore a political and ideological message, were reminiscent of ancient Near Eastern programs. While some features of the layout of the city stood in the tradition of the early Islamic military camps, like the central ensemble with the close connection of mosque and palace, the city itself looked very much like a copy of Sāsānian capitals. Furthermore, the palace with its "Green Dome" had become the most extended and the most prominent building. The *Madīnat as-Salām* reflected two ideological principles: the Islamic idea of the human *imām* of the community and the Ancient Near Eastern concept of the "representative of God on earth".

With the shift of the political centre to Surra-man-ra'ā the visualisation of the change in caliphate ideology was completed. The huge palaces now were by far the dominating elements of the whole city layout while the mosque looked subject to them in size. The connection of the palaces, which were not crowned by a "Green Dome" anymore, with tripartite paradise gardens in Ancient Mesopotamian tradition emphasised some adapted principles of Near Eastern kingship ideologies like that one of the "royal hunter and gardener". The *Bait al-Māl* with the treasury of the state now was deposed in the palace so that the caliph had absolute control over it. The Caliph of the Islamic empire, the *Ḫalīfatu Allāh* "representative of God", was now an absolute monarch in the ancient Near Eastern tradition.

In the decades following to the foundation of Surra-man-ra'ā and the return of the government to Baġdād, the 'Abbāsid Caliph came more and more under the control first of his own military forces and then of foreign rulers. Nevertheless, a lot of dogmatic treatises produced in the official *Madāris* of Baġdād stress the role of the Caliph as the religious leader of the community. With the loss of political power the Caliph tried to emphasize his dominant religious position in Islamic society. Probably the increasing distance between Caliph and his Muslim subjects was responsible for the fact that the concept of the caliphate became less popular in the medieval world.

Many steps in the transformation of caliphate ideology are reflected by the architecture of the Caliph's palaces, the gardens and – most of all – the cities. A similar observation can be made in the art, which adapted the type of the "royal gardener and hunter".[4]

Architecture and art as material keys of immaterial processes may help achieve a better understanding of the ideological and – connected with that – the social changes in the development of the early Muslim community. The still vivid intellectual life of the Ancient Near East influenced the culture of the early Islamic world in an extended and not often appreciated way.

4 See for example the Umayyad hunting scene from Qaṣr al- Ḥair al-ġarbī (8th Century AD), reminiscent on Assyrian and Sāsānian motives of the "Royal Hunter" (Sourdel-Thomine / Spuler 1990, Fig. XIII).

Bibliography

Ahn, G. 1992: *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran. Acta Iranica* 31. Leiden / Leuven.

Bichler, R. / Rollinger, R. 2005: Die Hängenden Gärten zu Ninive – Die Lösung eines Rätsels? In: R. Rollinger (ed.), *Von Sumer bis Homer, Festschrift für Manfred Schretter zum 60. Geburtstag am 25. Februar 2004. AOAT* 325 (Münster), 153–218.

Bier, L. 1993: The Sasanian Palaces and their Influence in early Islam. *Ars Orientalis* 23, 57–66.

Bloom, J. M. 1993: The Qubbat al- Ḫaḍrā' and the Iconography of Height in Early Islamic Architecture. *Ars Orientalis* 3, 135–141.

Brentjes, B. 1981: *Die Stadt des Yima*. Leipzig.

Cancik-Kirschbaum, E. 1995: Konzeption und Legitimation von Herrschaft in neuassyrischer Zeit. *Welt des Orients* 26, 5–20.

Creswell, K. A. C. 1989: *A short Account of early Muslim Architecture*. Newly edited by J. W. Allan. Aldershot.

Djait, H. 1986: Al-Kūfa, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition* 5 (Leiden), 345–351.

Duri, A. A. 1986: Baghdād, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition* 1 (Leiden), 894–909.

Edzard, D. O. 1972–75: Herrscher A. Philologisch. *RlA* 4, 335–342.

Elsen-Novák, G. / Novák, M. 2005: „Ich bin der wahre Weinstock und mein Vater ist der Weingärtner" – Zur Semiotik des Weinstocks in Joh 15, 1–8 aus Sicht der Altorientalistik. In: A. Weissenrieder / F. Wendt / P. von Gemünden (ed.), *Picturing the New Testament. Studies in Ancient Visual Images. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2. Reihe 193 (Tübingen), 183–206.

Ettinghausen, R. 1972: *From Byzantium to Sassanian Iran and the Islamic World. Three Modes of Artistic Influence*. Leiden.

Fauth, W. 1979: Der königliche Garten und Jäger im Paradeisos. *Persica* 8, 1–53.

Franke, S. 1995: *Königsinschriften und Königsideologie*. Münster / Hamburg.

Frye, R. N. 1983: Achaemenid Echoes in Sasanian Times. In: H. Koch / D. N. MacKenzie (ed.), *Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte der Achämenidenzeit und ihr Fortleben. Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran Ergänzungsband* 10 (Berlin), 247–252.

Galter, H. D. 1989: Paradies und Palmentod – Ökologische Aspekte im Weltbild der assyrischen Könige. *Grazer Morgenländische Studien* 2: *Der orientalische Mensch und seine Beziehung zur Umwelt* (Graz), 235–253.

George, A. 1997: Bond of the Lands: Babylon, the cosmic Capital. In: G. Wilhelm (ed.), *Die orientalische Stadt: Kontinuität, Wandel, Bruch. CDOG* 1 (Saarbrücken), 125–146.

Grabar, O. 1977: *Die Entstehung der islamischen Kunst*. Köln.

Grabar, O. 1993: Umayyad Palaces reconsidered. *Ars Orientalis* 23, 93–108.

Halm, H. 1988: *Die Schia*. Darmstadt.

Hartmann, R. 1987: *Die Religion des Islam*. Darmstadt (Reprint, first Edition in 1944).

Herzfeld, E. 1948: *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra. Ausgrabungen von Samarra VI*. Berlin.

Hourani, A. 1992: *Die Geschichte der arabischen Völker*. Frankfurt a. M.

Hrouda, B. (ed.) 1991: *Der Alte Orient*. München.

Al-Jannabi, T. J. 1983: Dār al-'Imāra fī'l-Kūfa. *Sumer* 39 (Arabic section), 220–232.

Kawami, T. S. 1992: Antike persische Gärten. In: M. Carroll-Spillecke (ed.), *Der Garten von der Antike bis zum Mittelalter* (Mainz), 81–100.

Khoury, A. T. / Hagemann, L. / Heine, P. 1991: *Islam-Lexikon*. Freiburg.

Kleiss, W. 1989: *Die Entwicklung von Palästen und palastartigen Wohnbauten in Iran*. Wien.

Kleiss, W. 1996: Die sasanidische Brücke und das Paradeisos. In: W. Kleiss / P. Calmeyer (ed.), *Bisutun. Teheraner Forschungen* 7 (Berlin), 99–113.

Knauth, W. / Nadjmabadi, S, 1975: *Das altiranische Fürstenideal von Xenophon bis Ferdousi*. Wiesbaden.

Lackenbacher, S. 1982: *Le Roi Bâtisseur. Études Assyriologiques* 11. Paris.

Lambert, W. G. 1974: The Seed of Kingship. In: P. Garelli (ed.), *Le Palais et la Royauté. Actes de la XIXe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris), 427–440.

Lassner, J. 1970: *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages*. Detroit.

Lombard, M. 1991: *Die Blütezeit des Islam*. Frankfurt.

Maul, S. M. 1995: Das „dreifache Königtum" – Überlegungen zu einer Sonderform des neuassyrischen Königssiegels. In: U. Finkbeiner / R. Dittmann / H. Hauptmann (ed.), *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Vorderasiens, Festschrift für Rainer Michael Boehmer* (Mainz), 395–402.

Maul, S. M. 1997: Die altorientalische Hauptstadt: Nabel und Abbild der Welt. In: G. Wilhelm (ed.), *Die orientalische Stadt: Kontinuität, Wandel, Bruch. CDOG* 1 (Saarbrücken), 109–124.

Maul, S. M. 1999: Der assyrische König – Hüter der Weltordnung. In: K. Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East* (Heidelberg), 201–214.

Meinecke, M. 1996a: Ar-Raqqa am Euphrat: Imperiale und religiöse Strukturen der islamischen Stadt. *MDOG* 128, 157–172.

Meinecke, M. 1996b: Die frühislamischen Kalifenresidenzen: Tradition oder Rezeption? In: K. Bartl / S. Hauser (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Northern Mesopotamia from the Hellenistic to the Early Islamic Period* (Berlin), 139–164.

Northedge, A. 1990: *Sāmarrā'*. Tübingen.

Northedge, A. 1993: An Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph at Sāmarrā'. *Ars Orientalis* 23, 143–170.

Novák, M. 1995: Die „Sāmarrā'-Zeit" als Wendepunkt der islamischen Geschichte. *Das Altertum* 41, 123–140.

Novák, M. 1996: Der Landschaftsbezug in der orientalischen Palastarchitektur. *AoF* 23, 335–378.

Novák, M. 1997: Die orientalische Residenzstadt. In: G. Wilhelm (ed.), *Die orientalische Stadt: Kontinuität, Wandel, Bruch. CDOG* 1 (Saarbrücken), 169–198.

Novák, M. 1999: *Herrschaftsform und Stadtbaukunst – Programmatik im mesopotamischen Residenzstadtbau von Agade bis Surra man ra'ā. Schriften zur Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 7. Saarbrücken.

Novák, M. 2002: The Artificial Paradise – Programme and Ideology of Royal Gardens. In: S. Parpola / R. M. Whiting (ed.), *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East. CRRAI* 47 (Winona Lake), 443–460.

Orthmann, W. (ed.) 1975: *Der Alte Orient. Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* 14. Berlin.

Pongratz-Leisten, B. 1994: *Ina šulmi īrub. Die kulttopografische und ideologische Programmatik der akītu-Prozessionen in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr. BaF* 16. Mainz.

Rashad, M. 1996: Die Bedeutung der Jagd für die Herrschaftsdarstellungen bei den Achämeniden, Parthern und Sasaniden. In: U. Magen / M. Rashad (ed.) *Vom Halys zum Euphrat. Festschrift für Thomas Beran. Altertumskunde des Vorderen Orients* 7 (Münster), 241–255.

Röllig, W. 1981: Zum „Sakralen Königtum" im Alten Orient. In: B. Gladigow (ed.), *Staat und Religion*. Düsseldorf.

Sack, D. 1989: *Damaskus. Entwicklung und Struktur einer orientalisch-islamischen Stadt. DaF* 1. Mainz.

Al-Sayyad, N. 1991: *Cities and caliphs*. New York / London.

Schippmann, K. 1993: L'influence de la culture sassanide. In: Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire (ed.), *Splendeur des Sassanides – L'empire perse entre Rome et la Chine* (Brussels), 131–141.

Selz, G. 1998: Über Mesopotamische Herrschaftskonzepte. In: M. Dietrich / O. Loretz (ed.), *dubsar anta-me. Festschrift für Willem H. Ph. Römer. AOAT* 253 (Münster), 281–344.

Sourdel-Thomine, J. / Spuler, B. (ed.) 1990: *Die Kunst des Islam. Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* 4. *New Edition*. Frankfurt / Berlin.

Stierlin, H. 1996: *Frühe Bauwerke von Bagdad bis Córdoba. Taschens Weltarchitektur: Islam* 1. Köln.

Stronach, D. 1990: The Garden as a political Statement: Some Case-Studies from the Near East in the first Millennium BC. *Bulletin of the Asia Institute. New Series 4. Studies in Honour of Richard Nelson Frye: Aspects of Iranian Culture*, 171–180.

Tuplin, C. 1996: *Achaemenid Studies*. Stuttgart.

Wiesehöfer, J. 1993: *Das antike Persien*. München / Zürich.

Winter, I. J. 1993: The Palace as Construct in the Ancient Near East. *Ars Orientalis* 23, 27–55.

Wirth, E. 1997: Kontinuität und Wandel der orientalischen Stadt. Zur Prägung von städtischen Institutionen durch jahrtausendealte kulturraumspezifische Handlungsgrammatiken. In: G. Wilhelm (ed.), *Die orientalische Stadt: Kontinuität, Wandel, Bruch. CDOG* 1 (Saarbrücken), 1–44.

Wiseman, D. J. 1983: Mesopotamian Gardens. *Anatolian Studies* 33, 135–144.