APPENDIX:

BAGHDAD AT THE TIME OF AL-MUQTADIR¹

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Apart from a few landmark structures, the medieval city of Baghdad has disappeared. The network of canals which once covered the city and its suburbs has been erased, and the course of the Tigris along which the city was built has changed. The modern city of Baghdad now occupies much of the same land as its medieval foundation, and although limited archaeological investigations were made during the twentieth century, the prospects for further excavations are poor.

The fortified citadel or Round City of Baghdad was situated on the West Bank of the Tigris and, throughout the medieval period, was surrounded by a network of canals, residential quarters, gardens and markets. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contemporary maps show this same area as having reverted to agricultural land. During the First World War, Iraq was the subject of extensive aerial reconnaissance photography. The photographs were used by specialist units of the Indian and British armies of the time to create detailed maps.² These and the earlier maps, together with a number of published works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cataloguing archaeological remains in the area of Baghdad,³ were consulted in the hope of discovering evidence of the major canals that linked the Euphrates to the Tigris at Baghdad and of the secondary canals that crossed the city. Map 1 shows the results of this survey and illustrates the extent to which the evidence of canals near the city has been entirely effaced by flood water.

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³ Le Strange, Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate; Muṣṭafā Jawād and Aḥmad Sūsah, Dalīl kharīṭat Baghdād al-mufaṣṣal fi khīṭat Baghdād qadīman wa-ḥadīthan (Baghdād: al-Majma’ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī, 1958).
Map 2 shows the canal evidence in the context of the medieval remains. The position of the Round City is that which Herzfeld first proposed, and which has been followed by both Le Strange and Jawād and Sūsa. Tel Mantiqa is located in an area where Herzfeld reported the presence of ‘ruin hills’. Fixed landmarks are the Kāẓimayn region, where a shrine was built in the fourth/tenth century over the tombs of Muḥammad b. Kāẓim and his grandson; the shrine erected over the tomb of Abū Ḥanīfa; and the tomb of Maʿrūf al-Karkhī. The illustration demonstrates the importance of the literary evidence for establishing the topography of the city between the site of al-Muḥawwal and the Tigris.

In addition to the landmarks mentioned above, there are also the remains of a small part of the Dār al-Khilāfa. There is another tomb, that of Shaykh Junayd, which is said to be original, but its precise location cannot be established with certainty.

Our knowledge of the early topography of Baghdad relies heavily on descriptions of the city by authors of the third/ninth to seventh/thirteenth centuries. The early writers summarize the topography of the city as it was laid out by the caliph al-Manṣūr at its foundation and include some incidental contemporary information. The later writers recapitulate these early works, again with some contemporary references.

These careful descriptions of Baghdad focus on the built environment, and suggest that it was a densely populated, thoroughly urbanized area, tightly clustered around al-Manṣūr’s citadel on the West Bank, clinging to the Tigris shore on the East. Both Le Strange and Aḥmad Sūsa have created maps using these descriptive sources. However, by combining different historical periods within a single illustration they make it difficult to visualize the dramatic and sometimes devastating changes to the topography and the toponymy of the city. Sūsa, a resident of Baghdad, had the advantage of a close inspection of the ground, as well as access to

4 Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-Gebiet, 4 vols. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1911).
7 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Taʾrīkh Baghdād; Yaqūt, Muʿjam al-buldān.