Islam in Mesopotamia

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Let us go on adventure... to Baghdad more than 1000 years ago.
➢ Why Visit Baghdad?

➢ For those in the post classical:
  ○ Silk roads/other trade routes
  ○ Capital of caliphate
  ○ Center for banking, commerce, crafts, industrial production, a metropolis
  ○ Connection to Islam

➢ For us (modern):
  ○ History
  ○ Very cheap prices
**Historical Meaning of Destination**

- Capital of Abbasid Caliph
  - Succeeding the Umayyad Caliph
  - Golden Age of Islam—science, economies, culture flourished

- Most of the population was Arabic
- No expanding, more converting, and spread of culture
- Non-Arabs now had a more prominent role
Location, Location, Location

- Located on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (trade)
  - Built reservoirs along rivers
- Designed to be a center of Islamic world
- Built close to an old Persian capital
  - Accessibility to partners
- Rich in agriculture (Fertile Crescent)
- Limited in other necessary resources
  - Resulted in trade in both Mesopotamia and Abbasid
1st stop - House of Wisdom

- Center for studies of humanities/scholars
- Largest collection of books
- Paper making technologies - to write and translate
- Majority of texts were based on medicine
  - Scholars acted as medics
2nd stop - The Great Mosque

➢ Built out of baked brick and marble columns

➢ The spiral minaret (Malwiyya) most likely was influenced by earlier Mesopotamians

80,000 Muslims
Religion in Baghdad

➢ The Abbasid caliph tolerant of other religions
  ○ Required the Jizya

➢ Many converted to Islam without force
  ○ polytheistic peoples—need for political and economic integration and involvement in state
  ○ Monotheistic peoples—Islam close enough to substitute, no more tax
  ○ Rise of Islam weakened other churches
DAY 3 - MARKET!
Why Trade?

➢ Unrivaled culture of trade, science, learning
➢ Located on silk roads and acted as a crossroads for many trade routes
➢ Need for resources
➢ Over land and sea, spreading ideas and culture
➢ Paper-making was a large part of the industry
➢ Made trade freer, safer, and more extensive
➢ Trade made easy:
  ○ Unity under Islamic rule
  ○ Tied by common Arabic language
  ○ Same Abbasid coin as currency
Day 3: Market (Art-focused Day)

- Common styles unique to this period:
  - Beveled style
  - Repetitions of geometric or pseudo-vegetal forms (arabesques)
    - Used for decorating walls, wood, metalwork, pottery
  - Pottery had extensive use of color
  - Common products: ceramics, metal works, textiles, manuscripts, woodwork, calligraphy

- Art products used in trade
Day 4 - Ukhaidir Palace

➢ Several architectural concepts derived from Persians and early Mesopotamians
  ○ Persians were needed to overthrow the Umayyad caliph
  ○ Instituted a Persian bureaucracy
  ○ Persian influence seen throughout the Abbasid caliph

➢ Built for protection with defensive arrangements
  ○ Slits to fire arrows, vaults for dropping missiles

➢ Throne rooms, great hall, court of honor, audience halls, a mosque
Government

- Centralized power, Persian bureaucracy (replaced Arab aristocracy)
  - Government centered in Baghdad
- Large territory that was hard to control
  - Struggled with limited communication throughout empire
  - Led to downfall, couldn’t communicate with troops
- Made political positions hereditary
- Encouraged intellectual, cultural, & scientific developments
SUNNI/SHIA IN GOVERNMENT:

➢ Abbasids descended from Muhammad’s uncle

➢ Shias supported Abbasids overthrow of Umayyads
  ○ Supported hereditary connections to Muhammad

➢ Once in power Abbasids ruled a more Sunni government
  ○ Opposed Shia, lost support of Shia
Other observations

In our travels, we observed many Social Organizations that had both similarities and differences between Pre-Islam Mesopotamia and Post-Islam Mesopotamia.
What We Observed about Gender roles:

Pre-Islam
- Most was male dominated
- Status of women determined by husband
- Women were able to obtain property, have certain jobs, and even have elite status

Post-Islam
- Women treated almost as slaves
- Did not have any rights
- Female infanticide reemerged
- Women seen as commodities
Hierarchies and their roles in the Abbasid Empire

The Caliph and his family

Professionals

Dhimmis

Slaves

Women
Islamization Scale: 7 → 9

- (6) Persian influence and government
- (7) Tolerant to many religions
  - Slowly people converted due to a culture spread (no force)
- (8) Controlled a lot of the trade
  - Brought unity under Islam
- (8) Golden Age of Islam
  - High focus on intellect of region
- (10) Center/Capital of Islamic Caliphate
Thanks for adventuring with us!

We hope you enjoyed traveling with us to Baghdad more than 1000 years ago.