

on an old tower restored from the ancient wall surrounding Baghdad. Inside the tower, the walls are decorated with Islamic designs and a relief sculpture depicting of al - Mansur with his aides and engineers selecting the site of Baghdad.

The Muslim Arab traders ventured from Basra to as far as China in the east bringing silk and paper to Islam. While their coins reached Scandinavia, there is some evidence that Arab traders also reached the English Channel since fine glassware of this era from eastern Syria, has been unearthed in London(1).

In August 775, Mansur set out with a large convoy to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. He had suffered for some years from digestive troubles and had consulted many doctors without result. After leaving Kufa his pains became more acute, but he struggled until he had reached within a days march from Mecca. He died at dawn in his tent, on the day on which he had hoped to reach the holy city. He was sixty-four years of age and had reigned for twenty-two years(2).

Although al-Mansur died, the flower that he planted in Baghdad kept growing for many generations, becoming an unremovable part of the culture, religion and heritage of the Muslim and Arab people. Al-Mansur was receptive and open his doors to all breezes and to all songs. From the Greek culture to the Indian culture, the winds of the west and the east melted in the cultural pot of Islam. Inheriting all the ancient civilizations the Mediterranean, Islam opened her heart to the people and cultures of her far-flung empire.

Al-Mansur was a brilliant planner and he built a capital for the empire. Baghdad became the centre of culture and the established base of learning in the Arabic Muslim State.

Mansur in Baghdad Today

Mansur, the builder of Baghdad and the founder of the Arab Islamic science is still remembered in the Baghdad of today. A carving of his head, executed by al-Rahal, a Baghdad sculpture, stands three and a half meters above it's base, a monument of twice that height. This monument is set

1. *London Museum.*

2. *E. A., p. 257.*

looking the river. It was named the palace of "Khuld, or immortality", the suggestion being that the gardens which surrounded it resembled the gardens of paradise. Further north, a third palace called "al-Rusafa, or causeway", was erected, intended for the crown prince, the caliph's son al-Mahdi(1). During this time of massive building and construction the cities of Kufa and Basra were each surrounded by walls and a moat(2). Mansur also had the Dome of the Rock Mosque rebuilt after an earthquake had hit Jerusalem.

As if called into existence by magician's wand the city of al-Mansur fell heir to the power and prestige of Ctesiphon, Babylon, Nineveh, Ur and other capitals of the ancient orient(3). The early city of Baghdad, constructed entirely with need of political administration in mind, had within thirty years become one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean world. It was the seat of learning and art for scholars from all over the Middle East. Intermingling Greek, Indian, Islamic, Arab and Judaic thought and talent, Baghdad became the social and cultural centre of the East.

A Centre of Trade:

The city was located at a point where the Euphrates and the Tigris approached within twenty miles of one another. It was in the eighth century that the navigable Isa canal was built joining the Euphrates with the Tigris at the gates of Baghdad(4) Thus the products of Syria could reach the capital by water down the Euphrates, in the same manner that the trade with India and the Arabian Gulf came up the Tigris. The main land route from the east to the rest of the caliphate passed through the location of Baghdad, which had been a centre of trade since early Iraqi history.

1. *H. A. p. 293.*

2. *E. A. p. 257.*

3. *H. A. p. 293.*

4. *E. A. p. 244.*

historians say it was an area of Akkad in the early ages while others say it was near Opis, a Greek city in Iraq. After lengthy consultation with his advisers and later with peasants living in the locality, he eventually chose a site(1). The city was at first known as "Madinat al-Salam, or the city of peace", but gradually the name "Baghdad, or splendor" replaced the former title. When the plans had been drawn and the map of the new capital laid before him, al-Mansur spoke as follows: "In the name of the most merciful God, praise belongeth unto him, and the earth is his, he causeth such of his servants as he pleaseth to inherit the same, success attend the pious, now with the blessing of God, build on"(2).

Mansur devoted himself passionately to the supervision of the building and work, even himself measuring up the quantities of bricks and lime. He also checked the accounts, verifying the costs and the wages of the workers(3). One hundred thousand architects, craftsmen and labourers were employed from all over the caliphate. The city was made completely round and inside the double circle of walls were four gates called respectively, Khurasan, Basra, Kufa and Syria, In the centre of the inner city was built the palace of the caliph, who would be symbolically at the very heart and center of the Islamic Arab State. Upon the dome of the palace stood a figure of a horseman which might have served as a weathercock(4). Other space within the inner walls of the new city was devoted to a mosque and offices of various government departments, while the space between the two rings of walls was allotted to residential houses for officers and officials.

It took four years to build the round city of Mansur, and a few years after its completion, the suburbs had already spread up and down the west bank of the Tigris(5). Mansur then built a new palace immediately over-

1. *T. R.*, p. 157.

2. *T. R.*, p. 158.

3. *E. A.*, p. 246.

4. *H. A.*, p. 419.

5. *E. A.*, p. 257.

During al-Mansur's reign the first historians of Islam began to write. The Basra schools became famous for their grammarians of the Arabic language and the interest in book-learning was on the increase(1). It was in this time that the Jundi - shapur hospital, which had been founded in 555 by the great Anusharwan, was noted for its academy of medicine and philosophy. The dean of Jundi-shapur, Jurjis (ibn Bakhtishu), won the confidence of the caliph and became the court physician. He founded a brilliant family which for six or seven generations, covering a period of two and a half centuries, ruled over the court medical practice in Baghdad(2). Al-Mansur set the corner-stone for the period of the Abbasid caliphate which is best remembered and most appreciated of all Iraqi history. It has left an immense volume of tradition, many famous names and a record of great achievements(3).

Al-Mansur(4) was opposed to drinking "khamr, or wine"(5) and would not allow music, frowning upon every kind of frivolity. Once his authority was undisputed, he was careful in the enforcement of justice and would not permit provincial governors to carry the death sentence without conferring with him. He was undoubtedly a capable ruler and a painstaking administrator(6)

The Building of Baghdad:

In the spring of the year 762, the caliph undertook long personal reconnaissances extending as far north as Mousel, to find the ideal site for a new capital. He selected a position on the west bank of the Tigris, at the nearby ruins of Ctesiphon, a summer place of a Persian king. Some

1. *E. A. p. 258.*

2. *H. A. p. 309.*

3. *Iraq. Stephen. p. 61.*

4. *H. A. p. 291.*

5. *H. A. p. 337.*

6. *E. A. p. 258*

rampantly in the proceeding years, its perfume still lingering in the Arabic and Islamic societies today.

A Stream of Cultures.

The Arab scholars of Mansur's time, assimilated what had taken the Greeks centuries to develop. Linking southern Europe with the near east, the culture was fed by a single stream, a stream with sources in ancient Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, Phoenecia and Judea, flowing to Greece and then returning to the east in the form of Hellenism, the culture, ideals and pattern of life of Greece as represented in Athens at that time. This same stream was later rediverted into Europe by the Arabs through Spain and Sicily, whence it helped create the renaissance of Europe (1).

Greek Inheritance:

The Greeks had become an indigeous part of the Arab society since many had been living in the east from the time of Alexander. Others, fleeing Byzantine intellectual oppression, found freedom to continue their work in the Islamic world.

The caliph, in his thirst for knowledge, obtained from the Byzantine emperor important Greek scientific and philosophical books which he subsequently ordered to be translated(2). He depended at first upon translations made by his subjects. One of the pioneer translators from Greek was Abu Yahya (ibn-al-Batriq) who is credited with having translated for al-Mansur, the major works of the Greek physicians Galen and Hippocrates. He also translated, for another patron, most of the work of Ptolemy, the famous Greco-Egyptian astronomer(3). Not only did the Arabs accumulate the knowledge of Greece, they researched from sources throughout the ancient world, translating the Indian works on astronomy and mathematics. Much of this work laid the foundation on which the Arabs were to build and achieve their greatest advancements in science and medicine.

1. *H. A.* p. 307.

2. *Islam and the Arab World.*

3. *H. A.* p. 311.

A STORY OF AN ARAB CALIPH

AL-MANSUR

Joseph Almaleh and Jacqui Underwood

Caliph Abu-al-Abbas nominated his brother Jafar (ibn Muhammad ibn Ali) for the caliphate before he died, ⁽¹⁾Jafar, who took the name "al-Mansur-billah or, supported by God with victory" was one of the greatest of the Abbasides, and the thirty-five caliphs who came after him were all his lined descendents.⁽²⁾ In his time the Islamic Arab caliphate was reaching maturity and moving towards culture, literature and the arts.⁽³⁾

Mansur, the grim, efficient and imaginative builder of Baghdad ⁽⁴⁾ was a slender, tall man of dark complexion and thin bearded, according to the Arab historian al-Tabari. He had a real talent for statesmanship and organization, and an intelligent appreciation of revisions now essential in Islamic policy. He made it his business to eliminate, as much as possible, the privilege which had been associated with the Arabs during the Umayyad Caliphate, and gave equal rights to the gentile and neo-Muslims of the empire.⁽⁵⁾ He made some constitutional reforms, and developed the institution of "wazir or, minister of state". The wazir's duty was the interpretation of the caliph's wishes to the people and as a consequence very heavy responsibilities devolved upon him. The first wazir was Khalid ibn Barmecide, who had been a close friend to the previous caliph.

Al Mansur was well read and interested in literature.⁽⁶⁾ It was his interest that planted the flower of literature in Baghdad which grew

1. *H. A.* p. 317.

2. *T. W.* p. 155.

3. *E. A.* p. 259.

4. *Iraq. Stephen.* p. 61.

5. *T. R.* p. 155.

6. *E. A.* p. 258.