The Buildings of Medieval Baghdad and the Impact of the Mongol Conquest in 1258

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While the historical accounts of the immediate aftermath of the sacking of Baghdad in 1258 CE indicate that some buildings survived or were restored, the overwhelming impression is of a city in ruins. Recently, however, the cataclysmic interpretation of the Mongol conquest has been questioned both in terms of the physical destruction and its effects on cultural life. This prompts questions of how the urban infrastructure was restored and to what extent the city was remodelled to reflect the new political and religious reality. Although the exact extent of the destruction is not clear, modern authors agree that the sacking of Baghdad reduced its status from that of a metropolitan capital to a provincial city. There is, however, some evidence that the city continued to be of considerable cultural importance; for example, many of the library collections survived the conquest. However, within the new political structure, the city was separated from its Arabic cultural network and instead incorporated within a predominantly Persian environment. This paper will assess if and how this transition is reflected in the built environment. In the absence of direct archaeological evidence, this paper uses alternative sources such as historical records and surviving medieval buildings to reconstruct evidence for the destruction but also the preservation of architectural structures, such as the caliph's palace.

Keywords: sacking of Baghdad 1258 CE, archaeology, architectural evidence, urban infrastructure

Introduction

The sacking of Baghdad by the Mongols is one of the defining events of the medieval world and marked an end to the reign of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad.

The capture of the city is described by several authors who give varying accounts of the numbers of people killed. For example the author of *al-Ḥawādith al-jāmiʿa*, a local chronicle written in Arabic, states that 800,000 people were killed after the Mongols had taken the city.[1] The slaughter is described in some detail: "The dead lay in mounds in the streets and

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1 Gilli-Elewy, Contemporary account, 368.

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the markets. Rain fell on them, horses trampled down upon them, their faces were disfigured, and they became an example to anyone who saw them."[2]

A more conservative account of the conquest is given by the Chinese author Ch'ang Te writing in 1259 CE, whose account was probably based on Mongol witnesses or participants in the siege. He wrote that after the battle several tens of thousands were killed.[3]

In addition to a depiction of the fighting, this Chinese account also contains a brief description of Baghdad, which concurs with other descriptions of the city prior to the conquest. The city comprised two parts, an eastern part and a western part, separated by the Tigris. The western half of the city was un-walled, whilst the eastern part of the city was contained within magnificent walls made of large bricks. It seems that the inhabitants left the western portion of the city prior to the Mongol attack, so that the siege and subsequent killing of civilians was restricted to the walled city on the east bank of the Tigris.[4] While it is not possible to know the true numbers of people killed, it is clear that a significant proportion of the city's inhabitants lost their lives and that many of the buildings were burnt to the ground or otherwise destroyed. However, there is some historical evidence that important buildings were preserved; for example, the caliph's palace seems to have survived, as the keys were handed over to the new governor.[5] A number of authors including Ibn al-Fuwaṭī and Ibn al-Ibrī also concur that the new rulers ordered the immediate renovation and restoration of important buildings in the city.[6] For example, the supervisor of religious endowments (*awqāf*) ordered the rebuilding of the Mosque of the Caliphs (Jāmiʿ al-Khulafāʾ) which had burnt down during the conflict.[7] Also, several of the madrasas and ribats were restored by the supervisor of religious endowments.

At this point it is worth pointing out that the city was in a state of decline even before the Mongol invasion. There are, for example, records of serious floods which destroyed houses during the years 1253, 1255 and 1256. The 1256 flood was particularly devastating as it submerged most of the city on both the western and eastern sides of the Tigris.[8] The anonymous author of a local chronicle of events notes that in the years preceding the Mongol invasion, the annual hajj to Mecca was cancelled, possibly indicating the weakness of the caliph and perhaps deteriorating economic circumstances.[9]

While the historical accounts of the immediate aftermath of the conflict indicate that some buildings in Baghdad survived or were restored, the overwhelming impression is of a city in ruins.[10] Recently, however, the cataclysmic interpretation of the Mongol conquest has

2 Gilli-Elewy, Contemporary account, 367.
3 Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, 138-139.
4 Gilli-Elewy, Contemporary account , 364.
5 Gilli-Elewy, Contemporary account, 369.
6 Duri, Baghdād, 17.
7 Gilli-Elewy, Contemporary account, 369.
8 Duri, Baghdād, 17.
9 Gilli-Elewy, Contemporary account, 359.
10 Duri, Baghdād, 18; Biran, Mongol rule, 285.

been questioned, in terms of both the physical destruction and its effects on cultural life.[11] This prompts questions of how the urban infrastructure was restored and to what extent the city was remodelled to reflect the new political and religious reality. Although the exact extent of the destruction is not clear, modern authors agree that the sacking of Baghdad reduced its status from that of a metropolitan capital to a provincial city. There is, however, some evidence that the city continued to be of considerable cultural importance; for example, many of the library collections survived the conquest.[12] However, within the new political structure, the city was separated from its Arabic cultural network and instead incorporated within a predominantly Persian environment.[13] This paper will assess if and how this transition is reflected in the built environment.

Sources for Reconstructing Medieval Baghdad

In order to assess the changes to the city after the Mongol conquest it is necessary to understand the architecture and urban plan of the city in the late Abbasid period. Three forms of evidence will be used: the surviving monuments, medieval Islamic and early Ottoman manuscript illustrations, and later Ottoman and European maps and plans. These forms of evidence have been used in preference to textual sources because they provide the visual and spatial material which is not present in the texts, especially detailed evidence about the appearance of the city or particular buildings.

Although much of the historic core of the city has been destroyed today, there are still a number of buildings which can be identified and help to reconstruct the layout of the medieval city. Important surviving pre-Mongol structures within the city include parts of the city wall (Bāb al-Wasṭānī); mosques such as Jāmiʿ al-Qumriyya, built in 1228; at least two madrasas (Qaṣr al-Abbāsī and the Mustanṣiriyya); and the *muqarnas*-domed tombs of ʿUmar Suhrawardī (d. 1231 or 1234) and Zumurrud Khātūn (d. 1203). The earliest surviving post-conquest structure in Baghdad is the Suq al-Ghazl minaret (rebuilt in 1270), although the most important Mongol-era building is Khān Marjān (1358) and the associated Marjāniyya madrasa (1357). In addition to the buildings which are still standing, there are also fifteen medieval buildings that survived into the early 20th century before being destroyed for a variety of reasons, including urban renewal and lack of maintenance. Nine of the demolished buildings belong to the period before the Mongol conquest, while six post-dated that event.[14]

A number of contemporary manuscript illustrations depict the architecture of Baghdad, including most famously the paintings of al-Harīrī's (d. 1182) *Maqāmāt*, which depicts khans, houses, mosques and tombs. The most famous version of the text is by Yaḥya ibn Maḥmūd al-Wāsiṭī (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS arabe 5847), who completed the work in 1237, two decades before the Mongol siege of Baghdad. Although little is known about al-Wāsiṭī's life, he seems to have lived in Baghdad during the early 13th century and his

11 See, for example, Biran, Mongol rule; De Nicola, Cultural activity.

12 Biran, Libraries, books, and transmission of knowledge, 471.

13 Biran, Mongol rule, 285; Zaryāb, Baghdad.

14 Fethi, *Urban Conservation*, 125-183.

paintings are a rare depiction of domestic architecture before the Mongol conquest.[15] A number of Ilkhanid and Jalayirid manuscripts also contain illustrations which depict the architecture of Baghdad, as do some early Ottoman illustrations. The first post-1258 illustration of Baghdad is a double-page painting in a manuscript copy of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* (painted in Tabriz, ca. 1305).[16] The miniature depicts the Mongol conquest of Baghdad from the right (west) bank of the Tigris, and although highly stylised, it clearly depicts elements of the architecture of Baghdad, including arch forms, brickwork and wooden balconies.

In addition to miniature illustrations and monuments, there are a number of maps and plans from the Ottoman period and later, which give information about vanished buildings, streets and districts. In some cases, there is an overlap between maps and miniature illustrations. For example, an early 17th-century miniature from 1638 in a manuscript written by Kara Çelalbizade Efendi (1581-1657) provides a bird's-eye view of Baghdad from the southwest, and this supplies topographic information about the city (fig. 1). For example, the entire circuit of the walls is shown, as well as the location of the citadel and the position of the main gate next to the bridge of boats. However, the details of the buildings show a resemblance to the architecture of Ottoman Constantinople (Istanbul), with what appear to be stone walls with lead-covered roofs. It seems likely that the miniature is based on sketches or maps made in Baghdad which were then painted by a miniaturist in the Ottoman capital.



Fig. 1: 17th-century depiction of Baghdad (1638) miniature in a manuscript written by Kara Çelalbizade Efendi (1581-1657).

15 For a discussion, see al-Ani, *Représentation architecturale*.

16 Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Diez A, fol. 70, pp. 4 (right) and 7 (left); also reproduced in al-Awadi *et al.*, *Baghdad Eye's Delight*, 82.

A 17th-century Ottoman map of similar date also contains a bird's-eye depiction of Baghdad, this time from the east. Whilst the depiction of the buildings of the city are similar to the miniature painting, it is more sketchy. It is perhaps significant that a central part of the city is shown with very few buildings, whilst the citadel and the southeast corner of the city are heavily developed. Although the relationship with rivers, roads and other topographic features appears to be more accurate it is interesting that a large mosque to the north of the citadel, accessed by an arched bridge, is not shown in the 17th-century map.

The first detailed topographic map of the city which has survived was made by Carsten Niebuhr in 1765 and published in 1778 (fig. 2). In addition to producing maps of the region, Niebuhr also made 28 plans of cities, which are valuable both because of their accuracy and because in many cases they are the earliest detailed depictions.[17] The map of Baghdad shows the first detailed plan of the city streets and building blocks, as well as the location of a few key monuments. It also shows the street pattern within the un-walled portion of the city on the right (west) bank.

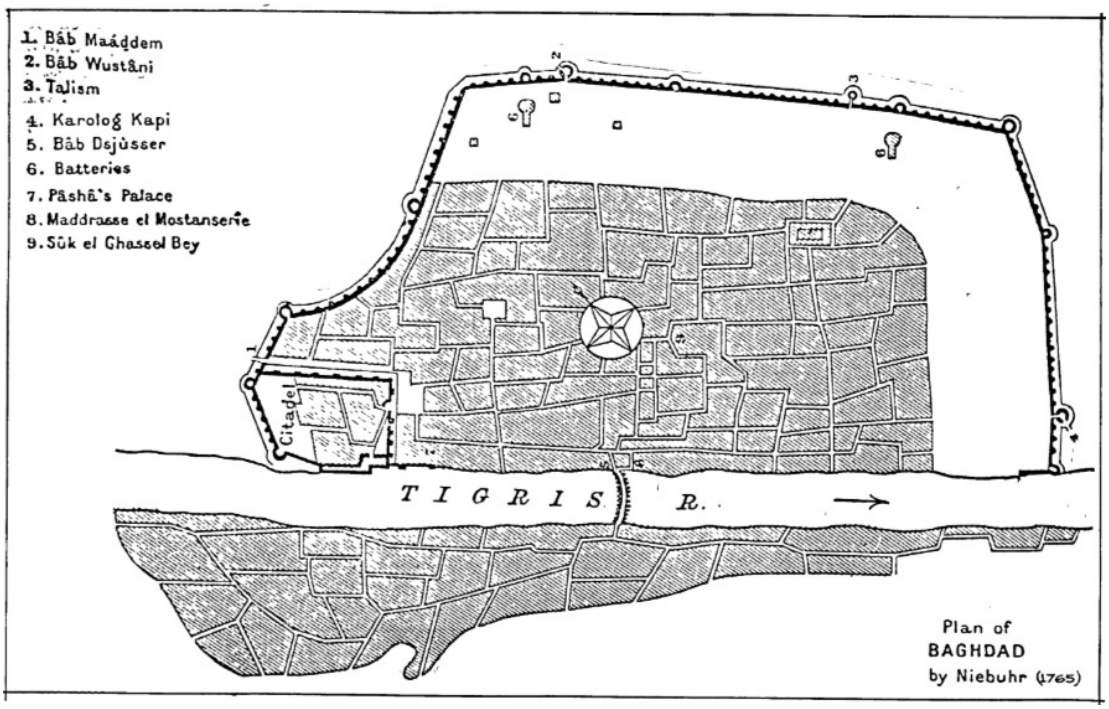

Fig. 2: Map of Baghdad by Carsten Niebuhr, Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern.

Nearly a hundred years later, between 1853 and 1854, Captain Felix Jones of the British Royal Navy made the first scaled map with the exact position of buildings and the correct alignments of streets, alleyways and walls (fig. 3).

17 For a discussion of the cartography of Carsten Niebuhr, see Hopkins, Maps of Carsten Niebuhr.

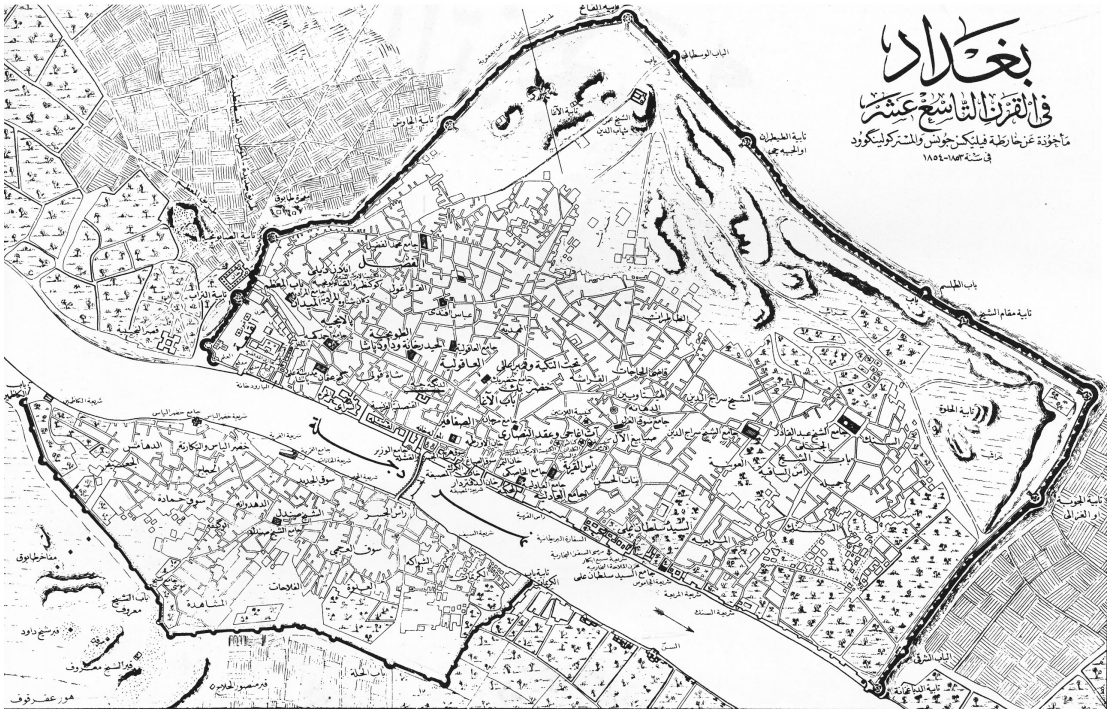

Fig. 3: Map of Baghdad by Captain Felix Jones, from 1854.

In more recent times, during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, there have been a number of studies of the historic architecture and urban fabric of Baghdad.[18] These studies are based on archive sources together with observation and mapping and provide an invaluable insight into the remains of the historic city. However, the focus in these studies is on conservation of the historic environment, and they include all historic buildings up to the end of the Ottoman period. For the first time this study will focus on the medieval period, and will distinguish between the pre- and post-Mongol building of the city.

Using these different forms of evidence, it is possible to gain some insight into the layout and appearance of the medieval city. The discussion here will focus on the walled city on the left (east) bank of the Tigris, although throughout the medieval period there continued parts of the city on the right (west) bank continued to be inhabited.

Buildings from before the Mongol Conquest

City Walls

The most notable feature in early depictions of Baghdad are the city walls, which not only determine the shape of the medieval city but are also one of the few features which we can trace back before the Mongol conquest of 1258. The construction of the wall began in 1095 during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mustaẓhir (r. 1094-1118) and was completed during the

18 See, for example, al-Ashab, *Urban Geography*; Fethi, *Urban Conservation*; al-Saffar, Urban heritage.

reign of his successor, al-Mustarshed (1118-1135). Unfortunately, the walls were destroyed in 1872 on the orders of Midhat Pasha, who wanted room to expand the area of the city and also to re-use the bricks in new construction activities. However, there are a number of medieval descriptions of the wall; the most useful of these is that by Ibn Jubayr, a Muslim traveller from al-Andalus, who visited the city in 1185.[19]

The construction was a communal enterprise which at least in part was funded by the citizens of Baghdad, who both collected money and participated in its construction. The walls described a semicircle around the city with a length of 6.2 kilometres; there were four main gates, and according to some accounts, 163 towers. The main gates were Bāb al-Muaẓam (built 1094-1118, destroyed 1925), Bāb al-Wasṭānī (built 1180-1235), Bāb Ṭalsim (built 1221; destroyed 1917) and Bāb al-Sharqi (built 1221 destroyed 1937); in addition, there were two small gates.[20] Today the only remaining city gate is the Bāb al-Wasṭānī (Middle Gate), which has been preserved as a monument (fig. 4). As mentioned, the walls themselves were dismantled in 1872 during the time of Midhat Pasha to allow the city to grow outside its medieval core and also to make use of the bricks for new developments (fig. 5). However, archaeological excavations during the 1970s revealed a section of the original wall on the riverfront adjacent to the Mustanṣiriyya madrasa.[21] Until the 1970s there was also a small portion of the city walls (6 metres long and 4.5 metres high), with crenellations and loopholes, which had survived within the area of the citadel.[22]

Bridges

There were no fixed bridges in Baghdad until the mid-20th century, with river crossings either by ferry or on pontoon bridges. The number of bridges joining the right (west) and left (east) banks of the Tigris in Baghdad fluctuated over time. At the time of the Mongol conquest, there was only one bridge connecting the western suburb with the main city on the eastern bank. However, according to historical accounts, the Mongols constructed a second bridge as part of their conquest of the city. Certainly, the image of the city presented in the early 14th-century painting in the Rashīd al-Dīn manuscript shows the city connected by two pontoon bridges.[23]

Houses

Unfortunately, there are no surviving examples of medieval houses from Baghdad, neither from the period before 1258 nor from afterwards.[24] The subject has been discussed in some detail by Ihsan Fethi, who stated that "[f]requent floods, fires, wars and other disasters, have resulted in the total destruction of all medieval houses in Baghdad".[25] He argues this was because private houses were less likely to have been maintained to the same standards as

19 Ibn Jubayr, *Travels*, trans. Broadhurst, 229.

20 Al-Janabi, *Medieval Architecture*, 13-14.

21 Fethi, *Urban Conservation*, vol. 2, 141.

22 Al-Ashab, *Urban Geography*, 157-158, Fig. 5.10e.

23 Petersen, Ancient and medieval bridges.

24 Warren and Fethi, *Traditional Houses*, 26-38

25 Fethi, *Urban Conservation*, 357.



Fig. 4: Bāb al-Wasṭānī (photo A. Petersen, 1988).

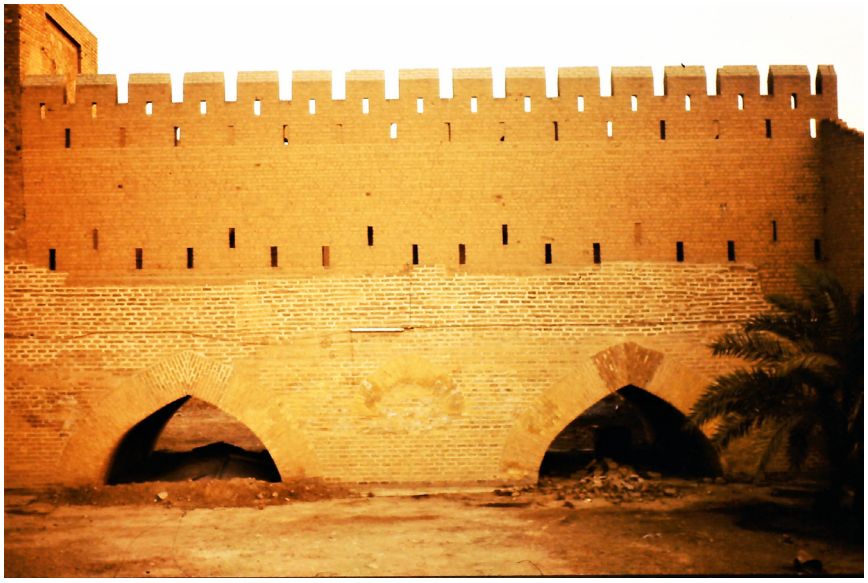

Fig. 5: Reconstructed stretch of city wall adjacent to Bāb al-Wasṭānī (photo A. Petersen, 1988).

public buildings like mosques and madrasas. He also points out that private houses were more likely to have been built of mud brick and wood, which meant that they were more vulnerable to floods and fires. Additionally, it has been pointed out that wood-eating termites were a constant presence in pre-modern Iraq, destroying wooden components of buildings.[26] The illustrations of al-Harīrī's *Maqāmāt* by al-Wāsiṭī provide some idea of medieval houses in Baghdad including the internal courtyards, the roof ventilation and internal balconies. Although no medieval houses have been archaeologically investigated in Baghdad, excavations in the town of Harba near Samarra have revealed plans of 12th- and 11th-century domestic architecture. The houses at Harba ranged from simple buildings with three rooms to complex structures with nine rooms incorporating shops opening onto the street. In all cases the houses had internal courtyards, and in many cases the entrance was via a short corridor.[27] However, the houses in Harba seem to have had only one floor whereas the houses in Baghdad probably had at least two storeys, based on the al-Wāsiṭī paintings.

Mosques

Within the medieval walled city the most important mosque was the Jāmiʿ al-Khulafāʾ built in the 10th century by the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtafi (902-908 CE). Although there is still a mosque of this name on the site, the original building from the 10th century was destroyed in a fire during the Mongol conquest in 1257-1258. When Carsten Niebuhr saw the building in March 1766, he observed the minaret and the front wall of the mosque with two entrance portals, one of which was used as a coffee shop.[28] Above one of the entrances there was an inscription recording its construction by al-Muntasir in 1235 CE (633 AH). The remains as seen by Niebuhr were destroyed soon after, when a new mosque was built by Sulayman Pasha between 1780 and 1802. The Ottoman mosque was in turn destroyed in 1957 and replaced by the present structure in the 1960s. The only medieval part of the building to have survived is the minaret, which was built in 1272 by ʿAṭā Malik al-Juwaynī, the Mongol ruler of Baghdad (see below, Architecture of the Mongol Period in Baghdad).

The first Seljuk mosque to be constructed in the city was the Jāmiʿ al-Sultān, built on the site of the old Mukharrim mosque between 1091 and 1129. The mosque was located north of the city wall next to the sultan's palace.[29] Although the mosque has not survived to the present day, it may be the building depicted on the left-hand side of the citadel just outside the city walls in the 1638 illustration of Baghdad by Kara Çelalbizade Efendi (fig. 1).

Several other medieval mosques survive in Rusafa within the environs of medieval Baghdad, and we also have information on a number of other mosques which survived into the early 20th century. For example, the Uthman Askari funerary mosque, which was built in the 9th or 11th century, has been preserved to the present day, although little of the original structure seems to have survived.[30] One of the more famous surviving mosques is the

26 Warren and Fethi, *Traditional Houses*, 21 and 31.

27 Al-Ani, *Représentation architecturale*, 218-225.

28 Sarre and Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise*, vol. 2, 156-160.

29 Duri, Baghdād, 14.

30 Fethi, *Urban Conservation*, vol. 2, 55.

Khafafin masjid, which dates to the early 13th century, and although the prayer hall has been restored several times, the minaret is generally accepted as the oldest that survives in Baghdad.[31] Several mosques built before 1258 were destroyed in the 20th century, including the Abariqi mosque, built in the 12th century (destroyed in 1962).

Madrasas

According to Ibn Jubayr, who visited in 1185, there were over thirty madrasas in Baghdad and more were built after his visit. The most famous madrasa was the Niẓāmiyya, which was founded in 1065 and rebuilt in 1110. Although the madrasa was damaged during the Mongol conquest, it was rebuilt soon afterwards, and by the early 14th century there were at least five functioning madrasas in the city. However, only two of the pre-Mongol medieval madrasas have survived: the Madrasa al-Sharabiyya, also known as the Abbasid palace, built in 1226; and the Mustanṣiriyya madrasa, completed in 1234 (fig. 6).

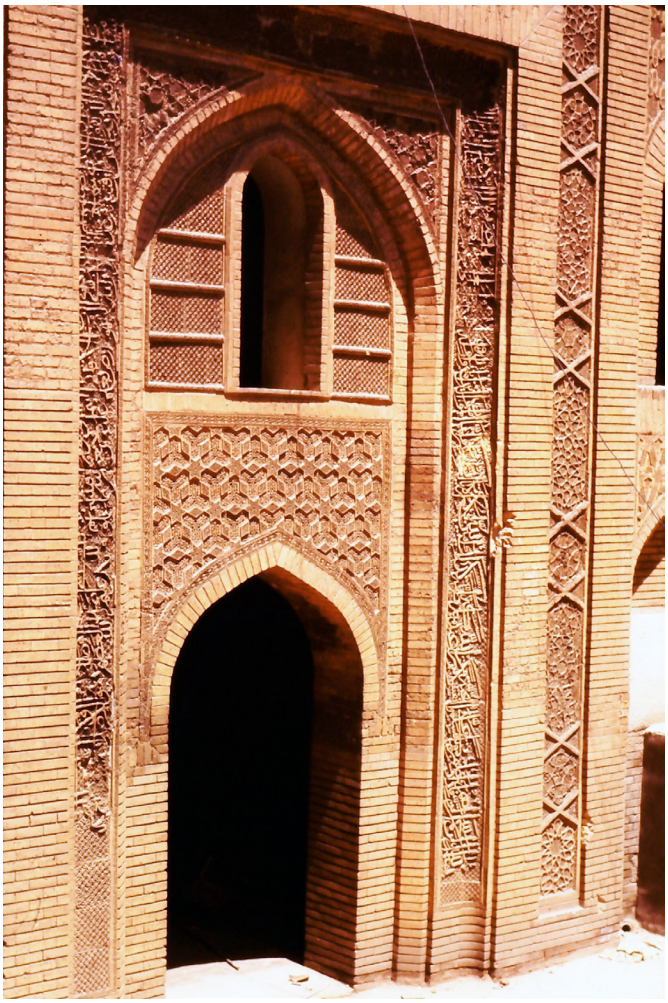

Fig. 6: Mustanṣiriyya madrasa (photo A. Petersen, 1988).

31 Fethi, *Urban Conservation*, vol. 2, 88.

Tombs

Shaykhs' tombs are one of the most notable features of the medieval urban landscape in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.[32] In many cases tombs were incorporated into mosques, and in other cases prayer halls were attached to tombs, so they are sometimes difficult to categorise. One of the most distinctive forms is the *muqarnas*-domed tomb, the earliest example of which is Imam Dur located to the north of Samarra, which is dated to the late 11th century. Within Baghdad, the most famous example is the Zumurrud Khātūn tomb (also known as Sitt Zubeida), located in a large cemetery in west Baghdad (figs. 7 and 8). This structure, which was built between 1189 and 1202, has an octagonal base and nine tiers of *muqarnas* vaults culminating in a small dome.[33] This is one of the few medieval monuments to have survived in west Baghdad, which was frequently subjected to devastating floods. In eastern Baghdad near Bāb al-Wasṭānī there is a second *muqarnas*-domed tomb over the grave of Shaykh ʿUmar Suhrawardī, who died in 1234. Although only two of these buildings are still standing, 16th-century Ottoman miniatures indicate that there were originally many more *muqarnas*-domed tombs in Baghdad.[34]



Fig. 7: Zumurrud Khātūn tomb, west Baghdad (photo A. Petersen, 1988).

32 Petersen, *Bones of Contention*, 7-9.

33 Tabbaa, Muqarnas dome, 66.

34 Tabbaa, Muqarnas dome, 65, plates 4 and 5.



Fig. 8: Detail of dome, Zumurrud Khātūn tomb, west Baghdad (photo A. Petersen, 1988).

Khans

Although there are many khans and markets within the area of historic Baghdad, the majority of these were built or rebuilt during the 19th century. There are, however, a few older commercial structures; for example, part of the medieval Suq al-Ghazl has survived adjacent to the Suq al-Ghazl minaret and Khān Marjān, which will be discussed below.

Effects of the Mongol Conquest on the Urban Structure of Baghdad

From the above review of the buildings of medieval Baghdad it can be seen that the city was already severely damaged by political strife, social unrest and economic hardship before the Mongol conquest. As early as 1241, the Abbasid caliphs had started to send an annual tribute to the Mongol ruler and had already lost much of their former territory to the invaders.[35]

35 Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia*, 2.

Social unrest took the form of fighting between different quarters of the city, especially in 1242, when conflict around the Niẓāmiyya madrasa resulted in the looting of shops and many deaths.[36] There are many accounts of a declining currency, high food prices and an inability to pay soldiers. An indication of the dire economic situation immediately before the conquest in 1248 is the fact that there was only one bridge connecting east and west Baghdad. In earlier times, between the 8th and 11th centuries, the number of bridges fluctuated between five and three. Soon after the conquest the number of bridges was increased to two, which remained the case into the 14th century.

However, as indicated above, most accounts of the siege and final capitulation of the city give an impression of a massacre on a massive scale exacerbated by the concentration of citizens from other parts of Iraq also fleeing the Mongols. Whilst the loss of life was undoubtedly unprecedented, the destruction of buildings and infrastructure is more difficult to assess. This is partly because the burning or demolition of particular buildings is only mentioned in a few cases. Even if a particular building survived the Mongol conquest, it may have been destroyed later during one of the man-made or natural crises which engulfed the city. A recent assessment of the effects of the Mongol invasions on cities in Central Asia suggests that the deterioration of buildings was caused by depopulation rather than demolition by the Mongol conquerors.[37] A review of archaeological work in eastern Turkey and the Southern Caucasus also observed that there was "great potential for dismantling the presumption [....] that social life in rural areas contracted or stagnated during the Ilkhanid period".[38] The historical evidence from Baghdad indicates that some of the buildings were deliberately destroyed whilst other parts of the city were consumed by fires. However, it is noticeable that the Mongols took care to repair some of the more important buildings, and it is also evident that some major buildings survived the conquest, such as the Mustanṣiriyya and the Abbasid palace also known as the Madrasa al-Sharabiyya. Perhaps more significant is the fact that the walls retained their pre-conquest form and survived until the 19th century. The one possible indicator of the devastation of the conquest is the large empty area within the walls on the land (eastern) side that can be seen both in the 17th-century depiction of Baghdad by Kara Çelalbizade Efendi (fig. 1) and the Carsten Niebuhr map made in 1765 (fig. 2). In the map produced by Felix Jones in the mid-19th century, a number of mounds are located inside the eastern walls of the city, and significantly they are marked as ruins (fig. 3). The area was redeveloped during the 20th century, although it seems likely that archaeological excavations in the vicinity would produce evidence of the Mongol siege and conquest.

36 Duri, Baghdād, 17.

37 Campbell, Mongol conquests, 13-14.

38 Franklin *et al.*, Medieval village, 124.

Architecture of the Mongol Period in Baghdad (Ilkhanid and Jalayirid Periods)

The architecture of the Mongol period in Baghdad was a direct continuation of the building style prevalent in the previous Seljuk and later Abbasid periods. Fired brick was the preferred material for the construction of religious monuments and public buildings, although it is probable that houses and less important commercial buildings may have been built from a combination of fired brick, mud brick and wood. The fired bricks were generally square, with dimensions varying from 15 to 26 cm per side and a thickness from 5 to 7.5 cm. An analysis of the brick sizes used in Iraq from the 11th to 14th centuries indicates that there is no correlation between brick size and the date of construction of monuments, and that the variation in brick dimensions was due to the requirements of a particular building.[39] However, it is noticeable that a greater variety of brick sizes and shapes were used later, including moulded bricks made specifically for decorative facades.

City Walls

Although it is probable that the city walls were breached during the Mongol conquest in 1258, later depictions of the city indicate that the entire circuit of walls was in place during the later medieval Ottoman periods. Al-Ashab suggests that in addition to their function of deterring attacks from enemy forces, the walls in combination with the moat were designed to protect the city from flooding.[40]

Mosques

As mentioned above, it is clear that the Mongols began to restore Baghdad immediately after the conquest.[41] Although at this time the Mongol rulers did not follow Islam, they still took care to restore damaged mosques; thus in 1279, for example, the still extant Suq al-Ghazl minaret (also known as the minaret of the Caliphs' Mosque) was built to replace the structure destroyed during the conquest (figs. 9 and 10). We also know of several mosques built after 1258 which have since disappeared: for example, the Numani mosque, built between 1329 and 1381, which was destroyed in 1936; and the Sayyid Sultan Ali mosque, built in 1383 and demolished in 1934.

Madrasas

Soon after taking over the city, the Ilkhanids built a number of major madrasas in the city including Madrasat al-Ismatiyya (built in 1279), Madrasa Bāb al-Azzj (built in 1289), Madrasat al-ʿAlāʾiyya (completed in 1293), Madrasa Ghāzāniyya and Madrasat al-Imāmiyya al-Bakriyya.[42] The most well-known Mongol-era madrasa, the Marjāniyya, survived until the middle of the 20th century (fig. 11). It was built in 1357 by the Jalayirid governor of Baghdad, Amīn al-Dīn Mirjān, and comprised a school with accommodation for thirty students, a mosque and the tomb of the founder. According to the *waqf* (endowment) document, the madrasa and a now-vanished hospital were to be supported by the income of seven khans also built

39 Al-Janabi, *Medieval Architecture*, 364-365.

40 Al-Ashab, *Urban Geography*, 157.

41 Biran, Mongol rule, 290.

42 Al-Janabi, *Medieval Architecture*, 37-38.



Fig. 9: Jāmiʿ al-Khulafāʾ and the Suq al-Ghazl minaret (photo A. Petersen, 1988).



Fig. 10: Detail of Suq al-Ghazl minaret, Jāmiʿ al-Khulafāʾ (photo A. Petersen, 1988).

by the founder.[43] Unfortunately, much of the madrasa was demolished in 1945 as part of a street-widening programme. However, the portal and the adjacent mosque have survived to the present day, whilst part of the madrasa has recently been reconstructed in a specially built pavilion in the Iraq Museum.[44] The madrasa is a good example of the innovative design and decorative style that was characteristic of later Mongol (Jalayirid) architecture. In terms of shape, the nearly square building was adapted to the constrictions of the site by a chamfered external corner at the north which nevertheless left the interior courtyard as a perfect quadrangle (21 × 20 metres). In terms of decoration, one of the innovations of this building was the use of spiral mouldings (barley cone), as seen on the facade of both the mosque and the entrance to the madrasa. The use of vertical fluting on the exterior drum of the mausoleum of the founder is also a characteristic feature of architecture from this period.



Fig. 11: Entrance to Marjāniyya madrasa (photo A. Petersen, 1988).

43 Al-Janabi, *Medieval Architecture*, 230-246.

44 Parapetti, The lost Mirjaniyah madrasa.

Tombs

Although many of the religious buildings constructed in Baghdad during the period of Mongol rule incorporated the tombs of their founder, very few of these have survived in their original form. A rare example of an ironwork grill for an unknown tomb from Mongol-era Baghdad is currently part of the collection of the Museum for Islamic Art in Doha (fig. 12). An inscription in the tomb of Shaykh ʿUmar Suhrawardī built around 1234 (see above) provides rare epigraphic evidence for the reconstruction of a building following the Mongol conquest. The inscription, dated 1334, states that the building was renewed – presumably because it had either fallen into ruin or had been damaged.[45]

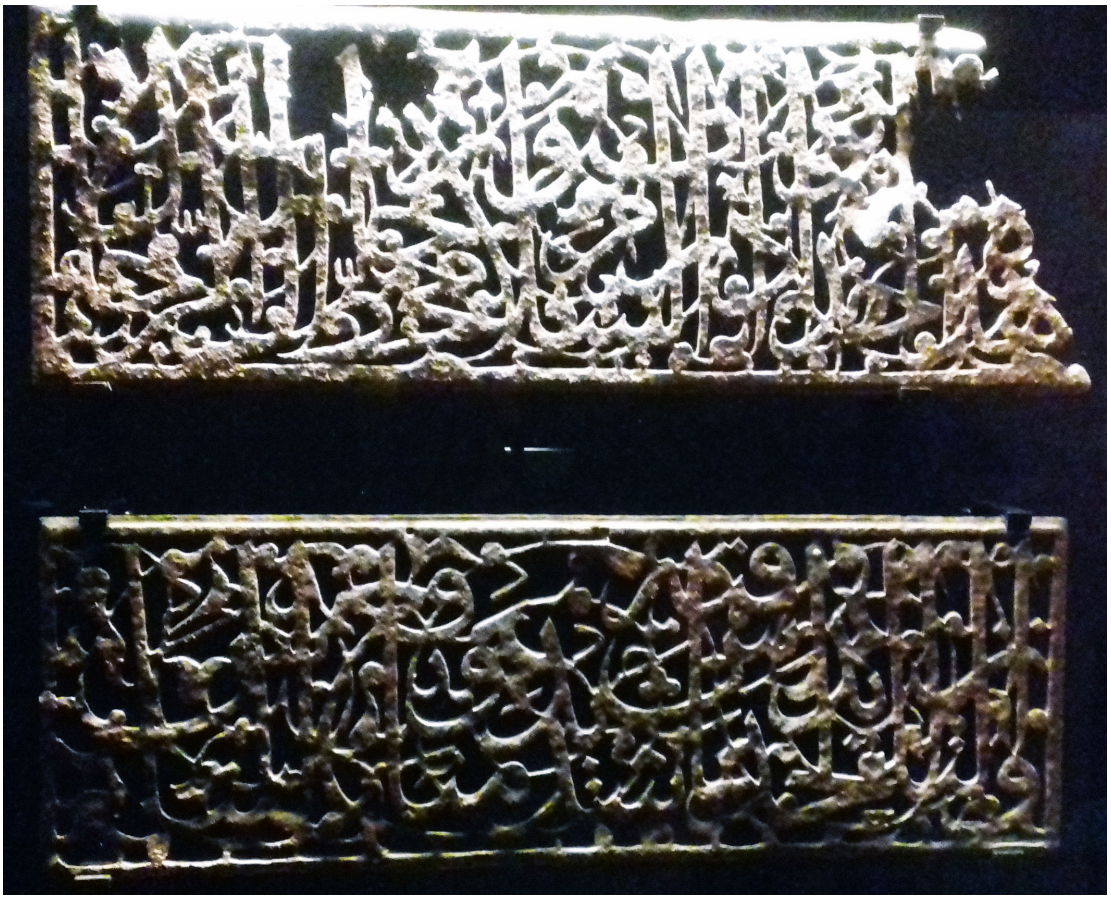

Fig. 12: Ironwork from a Mongol-era tomb in Baghdad (photo A. Petersen, 2022).

45 Al-Janabi, *Medieval Architecture*, 107-109.

Khans

Although very few secular buildings have been preserved from this period, Khān Marjān, one of the seven caravanserais built to support the Marjāniyya madrasa, has survived into the 21st century. This is probably the most famous surviving building from Mongol-era Baghdad (figs. 13 and 14). The identity of the building is confirmed by an inscription above the now-blocked main entrance. This text is made up of nine lines and states that this is one of several buildings built to support the Marjāniyya mosque and the hospital known as the Dār al-Shifāʿ (fig. 15).[46] It is perhaps relevant that, in addition to the khans, a paper shop provided income to the Marjāniyya *waqf*. The building is unique in Islamic architecture. It has two floors, with galleries opening onto a central courtyard covered by a magnificent vaulted roof, which reaches a height of 14 metres. The vaulting system comprises a series of arched ribs bridged by two tiers of vaults, with windows to provide ventilation and light. The exact function of the building is a matter of debate, although it seems likely that it provided accommodation and storage spaces for merchants with expensive goods, possibly silks and other precious fabrics (similar to the Turkish *bedestan*).



Fig. 13: Khān Marjān, southeast (rear) facade, now the main entrance (photo A. Petersen, 2021).

46 Al-Janabi, *Medieval Architecture*, 233-236.

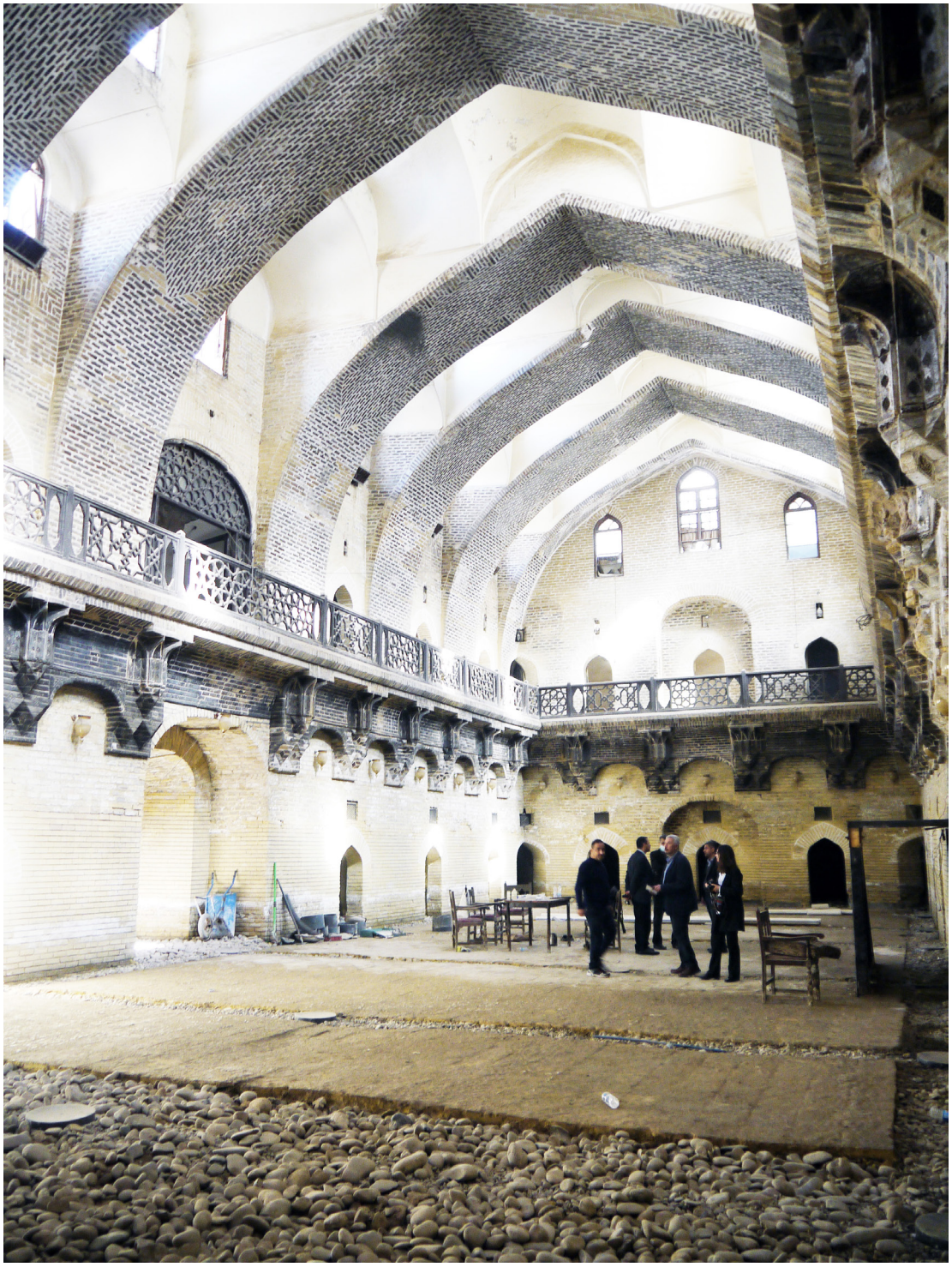

Fig. 14: Khān Marjān, exterior, in 2021 (photo A. Petersen, 2021).



Fig. 15: Khān Marjān, northeast side, inscription above main entrance (photo A. Petersen, 2021).

Bookshops and Paper Production

Given our limited knowledge of the topography of medieval Baghdad, it is difficult to locate where book production and libraries were located. However, we do have a few clues. For example, the famous al-Mutanabbī street seems to have existed in the same location from the 13th century.[47] Its location near the river is probably significant, as water was needed both to power the mills and also as an essential ingredient for making paper pulp. We know that paper was being made in Baghdad from the 8th century, possibly using floating water powered mills moored in the Tigris river.[48] Floating mills had the advantage that they could adapt to the extreme seasonal variations in water level in the Tigris and could also be moored in locations where the water flow was at its strongest. Once the pulp had been produced it was made into sheets in factories which were probably located close by the river, as was the case in Fustat.[49] Bookshops were also probably located close to the factories and the mills moored in the river.

Conclusion

In the absence of direct archaeological evidence for the siege of 1258, it is difficult to assess the direct impact of the Mongol conquest on the physical infrastructure of Baghdad. The most compelling evidence for the destruction is the continued absence of structures adjacent to the landward walls up until the 19th centuries. However, elsewhere in the city there appears to have been considerable continuity. Both the historical sources and the survival of many medieval buildings in the old city up until the mid-20th century suggests that the city recovered fairly rapidly after the conquest. The quality of the surviving architecture seen in buildings such as the Mustanṣiriyya, the so-called Abbasid palace and Khān Marjān also indicates a city of considerable economic and cultural significance.

47 Sekulova, al-Mutanabbi Street, 178.

48 Bloom, *Paper before Print*, 27.

49 Shatzmiller, Adoption of paper, 483.

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List of Figures

Fig. 1: 17th-century depiction of Baghdad, miniature in a manuscript from 1638 written by Kara Çelalbizade Efendi (1581-1657) (photo A. Petersen, 2022).
Fig. 2: Map of Baghdad by Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern*, vol. 2 (Hamburg, 1778).
Fig. 3: Map of Baghdad by Captain Felix Jones, from 1854, in: James Felix Jones, *Memoirs*, comp. and ed. by R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay, 1857).
Fig. 4: Bāb al-Wasṭānī (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 5: Reconstructed stretch of city wall adjacent to Bāb al-Wasṭānī (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 6: Mustanṣiriyya madrasa (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 7: Zumurrud Khātūn tomb, west Baghdad (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 8: Detail of the dome of Zumurrud Khātūn tomb, west Baghdad (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 9: Jāmiʿ al-Khulafāʾ and Suq al-Ghazl minaret (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 10: Detail of Suq al-Ghazl minaret, Jāmiʿ al-Khulafāʾ (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 11: Entrance to Marjāniyya madrasa (photo A. Petersen, 1988).
Fig. 12: Ironwork from a Mongol-era tomb in Baghdad (photo A. Petersen, 2022).
Fig. 13: Khān Marjān, southeast (rear) facade, now the main entrance (photo A. Petersen, 2021).
Fig. 14: Khān Marjān, exterior, in 2021 (photo A. Petersen, 2021).
Fig. 15: Khān Marjān, northeast side, inscription above main entrance (photo A. Petersen, 2021).