

Mecca, Basra and Baghdad: Economic Situation During the Classical Period of Islam

Mekke, Basra ve Bağdat: Klasik İslâmi Dönemde Ekonomik Durum

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Abstract

This study examines in general terms three cities that were prominent trade centers from the Ignorance period to the first centuries of Islam. Because Mecca, Basra and Baghdad are the most notable cities throughout Islamic History. Mecca, which is the mother of cities as mentioned in the Holy Quran, was also an important trade centre in the pre-Islamic period. Thanks to the fairs held during the pilgrimage season and especially the 'Ukâz Fair, Mecca has witnessed a very active cultural and economic activity. In addition to its geographical location, for example with Ilâf has also gained the status of an international trade centre. Basra, which was founded as the headquarters city during the caliphate of Umar, developed over time and became one of the schools of religious sciences, while on the other hand, it became one of the main trade centres of the region with its markets, especially Mirbađ. It has become a trading city connecting the Arabian Peninsula with Egypt, the coast of Southern Iran, India, Indonesia and China via the Red Sea. On the other hand, Baghdad, which is among the largest metropolises not only of the Islamic world but also of the whole world, has maintained this feature for centuries as a center that directs economic life. Founded during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Mansur, Baghdad attracts attention with its city model having many different bazaars, as well as being the center of the caliphate of the Islamic world. At the same time, it is primarily in contact with the entire Islamic world through its wide network of land routes and maritime trade. It is the main centre of trade relations with separate regions of Transoxania, China and India. All three cities were affected positively and negatively by political developments throughout Classical Period of Islamic History. In parallel with these influences, their roles in economic and commercial life have differed. However, the traces they left throughout history still maintain their importance even today.

Keywords: Mecca, Basra, Baghdad, Classical Period of Islam, Economic and Commercial Situation.

Mekke, Basra ve Bağdat: Klasik İslâmi Dönemde Ekonomik Durum

Öz

Bu çalışma Cahiliye döneminden İslâm'ın ilk asırlarında öne çıkan ticaret merkezlerinden üç şehri genel hatlarıyla el almaktadır. Zira Mekke, Basra ve Bağdat İslâm Tarihi boyunca şehirler arasında en çok dikkat çekenleridir. Kur'ân-ı Kerîm'in ifadesiyle şehirlerin anası olan Mekke, aynı zamanda İslâm öncesi dönemde önemli bir ticaret merkezi konumuna sahip olmuştur. Hac mevsiminde kurulan panayırlar ve özellikle Ukâz Panayırı sayesinde Mekke çok hareketli bir kültürel ve ekonomik faaliyete ev sahipliği yapmıştır. Coğrafi konumu yanında örneğin İlâf sebebiyle de uluslararası bir ticaret merkezi vasfını elde etmiştir. Hz.Ömer'in halifeliği döneminde ordugah şehir olarak kurulan Basra, zamanla gelişerek dini ilimlerde ekoller arasında yer alırken diğer taraftan başta Mirbed olmak üzere pazarları ile bölgenin başlıca ticaret merkezleri arasına girmiştir. Arap Yarımadası'nı Kızıl Deniz yoluyla Mısır, Güney İnan kıyıları, Hindistan, Endonezya ve Çin ile bağlayan bir ticaret şehri haline gelmiştir. Diğer taraftan sadece İslâm dünyasının değil aynı zamanda dünyanın en büyük metropollerini arasında ye alan Bağdat, iktisadi hayata yön veren bir merkez olarak asırlar boyunca bu özelliğini korumuştur. Abbasi Halifesi Mansur döneminde kurulan Bağdat, İslâm dünyasının hilafet merkezi olması yanında çok sayıda farklı çarşıların yer aldığı şehir modeliyle dikkat çekmektedir. Aynı zamanda geniş kara yolları ağı ve deniz ticaretiyle öncelikle bütün İslâm dünyası ile irtibat halindedir. Ayrıca Mâverâünnehir, Çin ve Hindistan'ın ayrı bölgeleriyle ticari ilişkilerin ana merkezi durumundadır. Her üç şehir de Klasik İslâm Tarihi boyunca özellikle siyasi gelişmelerden olumlu ve olumsuz açıdan etkilenmiştir. Bu etkilenmelere paralel olarak iktisadi ve ticari hayattaki rolleri farklılık göstermiştir. Ancak tarih boyunca bıraktıkları izler günümüzde bile hala önemini korumaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mekke, Basra, Bağdat, Klasik İslâmi Dönem, Ekonomik ve Ticari Durum.

Introduction

In addition to the historical studies of any period or region in terms of social and political structure, it seems necessary to make a research economically concerning the same time or place in order to get a proper idea in regard to the topic. In other words, when one can collect much historical data from every respect, i.e. socially, politically and economically, and then analyze this information to get to conclusion, it will be easier to reach more adequate evaluation concerning the subject in question.

When one wants to get an idea about the economic situation of any caliphate or century, it would be better to study the famous cities just because of the fact that social and economic activities were concentrated mainly in some cities. For instance, during the Classical Period of Islam, some cities such as Mecca, Basra and Baghdad, had much more importance than the others in terms of economic activities as capitals or main trade centres because they were located on the trade routes and also every kinds of social activities in addition to the economical ones were taking place extensively in such centres.

As a matter of fact, different kind of people having various cultural values were carrying merchandise from one city or region to another and from time to time they were gathering at fairs being held in some of the regions during specific time of the year. These trade activities and fairs were very good opportunities for people to interchange their ideas between themselves and become acquainted with other religious and social ideas, political movements as well as economic facts.

Among the Muslim cities, Mecca, Basra and Baghdad should be mentioned first as commercial centres. Therefore, purpose of this paper is to give a general outline of the economic situation in Mecca, Basra and Baghdad in the course of Classical period that is to say during the first four centuries of Islam, including the pre-Islamic time.

1. Mecca

Before dealing with the economic situation of Mecca, it should be indicated first that Mecca was also a commercial centre in Arabia during the pre-Islamic period; and secondly it was a main trade place until the Prophet's migration to Medina. Therefore, we have a lot of information in regard to these periods.

1.1. Pre-Islamic Mecca

During the period of Ignorance (Jahiliyya), Mecca was the most important city which had the most extensive economic activities in Arabia as a religious and commercial centre. As to the reasons why it was a commercial centre, it should be mentioned that there were the sanctuary of the Ka'ba and well of Zamzam in Mecca, it was placed at the cross-roads of trade routes leading from Babylonia and Syr-

ia to the plateaus of the Yemen, and to the shores of Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.¹ Also the institutions of sacred months², the old fairs and markets such as Suq 'Ukâz, which were held near Mecca³ and ilaf, an agreement between the Quraish and the tribes along the trade routes to provide Meccan caravans with safe passage and protection, khafara⁴ were other main factors making Mecca an important commercial centre. Then, it goes without saying that because of all these factors Mecca was very active in trade and commerce.

Incidentally, during the period of Ignorance (Jahiliyya), markets and fairs of the Arabia (Aswaq al-Arab), which were organized in certain time during the year, were significant means of the economic and social activities. Among these markets Suq 'Ukâz which were held in second part of the month of Dhilga'dah, got the first stage in importance. The tribe of Quraysh was going to this market with other Arab tribes such as Hawazin, Ghatafan and Aslam. In this market, in addition to the economic activities some kind of social and cultural activities, such as the competition of poetries, were done. According to Kister⁵, some Tamimis, who frequented Mecca for trade, co-operated with Meccans in the market of 'Ukâz in order to make Quraysh superior and having influence in the other bazaars and fairs.⁶ During the period of this market, there were massive increases in economic activities in Mecca.

The Byzantine and Persian Empires were interested in Mecca for the trade reasons. The former wanted all luxury articles coming from the East, and the latter made the Byzantines pay yearly for their silks and spices by sitting astride nearly all the trade routes, China and India overland routes, and India and Ceylon sea routes.⁷

At the end of the sixth century A.D., the Meccans were able to control mostly the trade of Yemen-Syria. During that time, this trade route was very important by which Indian and South Arabian luxury goods were brought to the West. At the same time, Taif another city in the Hîjâz region, was a rival of Mecca in the matters of commerce, but Mecca gained stronger position after the War of Dhu-Qar between the Byzantines and Persians.⁸

¹ H.Lammens, ""Mecca", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1913) , 3:1/ 437; W.Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1965), 3.

² W.Montgomery Watt, "Makka", (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*) (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1987), 6/145.

³ Ahmed Umar al-Zaylai, *Makka Alâkatuha al-Khariciyya (301-487 A.H.)*, (Riyad: 1981), 155.

⁴ Mahmood Ibrahim, "Social and Economic Conditions in Pre-Islamic Mecca", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14 (1982), 344.

⁵ M.J. Kister, "Mecca and Tamim (Aspects of Their Relations)", *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 8 (1965), 147.

⁶ On Suq 'Ukâz see, Ibn Habib, *Kitab al-Muhabbar*, (Haydarabad: 1361), 266-267; Abu Ali al-Marzuqi, *Kitab al-Azminah wa al-Amkinah*, (Haydarabad: 1332), I/165; and Ali Hafiz, *Suq 'Ukâz*, (Riyad: 1977). Also according to Ali Jawad, this market was still active during the Islamic time. (Jawad Ali, *Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Islam*, (Beirut: 1980), 3/385.

⁷ Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 11-12.

⁸ Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 3.

In the following years of the Abyssinians' conquest of Yemen, the Meccans developed their trade by sending their own caravans in all directions; Abyssinia, Syria, Yemen and Iraq.⁹ Also some years after the war of the Fijar, Uthman b. al-Huwayris entered into negotiations with the Byzantines.¹⁰

All these events helped Mecca to remain powerful enough economically and Mecca became the leading religious center in Arabia as well.¹¹

To sum up, Mecca was the most important commercial, social and religious centre in Arabia during the pre-Islamic time. As far as the religious life is concerned, Ka'bah was sacred for the Meccans and Hijāz region, and idolatry was the belief of Meccan people.

1.2. Mecca During the Islamic Period

Although there is not enough knowledge about the economic activities of Mecca with its neighbours in the first years of Islam, it can be assumed that commercial relations continued between Mecca and other parts of Arabia. For instance, even the Prophet Muhammad himself accompanied his uncle Abu Talib on trading journeys to Syria and with the capital of the woman merchant Khadija, his later wife, the Prophet continued to trade. Thus, he attended trade caravan to Busra with his uncle Abu Talib¹², and attended the Curash fair in the Yemen region and the Hubasha fair on the Hijāz -Yemen road with the capital of Khadijah.¹³

After the migration to Medina, Mecca's commercial activities appear to have declined because the wars between Medina and Mecca affected the social and economic order, and also many of the leading men moved to Medina.¹⁴

When the Prophet settled in Medina and cut the communications of Meccan people with Syria, their leaders traded through al-Najd. However, the Ridda wars were fatal to its economic prosperity. And when the fourth Caliph of Islam, Ali, definitely left Arabia to settle in Kūfa, the leading Quraish lost interest in commerce. No more is heard about caravans or fairs in Hijāz. It was only at the period of the annual Hajj ceremony that Mecca became alive again in terms of social and economic activities. The most effective factor to decrease these kinds of activities was the conquest of Iraq. It dealt the last blow to the economic decline of Western Arabia. The Indian trade resumed its old route by the Persian Gulf and the valley of the Euphrates. Direct communications were established by the land with the markets of the Middle East.

As far as the sea trade of Mecca is concerned, it had neither ships nor a port

⁹ Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 13.

¹⁰ Watt, "Makka", 6/146.

¹¹ Ibrahim, "Social and Economic Conditions in Pre-Islamic Mecca", 350. As a religious capital, for detailed information also see, Philip K. Hitti, *Capital Cities of Islam*, (Minneapolis: 1973), 3-32.

¹² Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Beirut, 1/121.

¹³ Yaqut el-Hamevi, *al-Mu'jam al-Buldan*, ed. Ferid Abdulaziz al-Jundi, (Beirut: 1990), 2/243.

¹⁴ Watt, "Makka", 6/146-147.

before the Hijra. Foreign ships cast anchor only in the little bay of Shuabia off a desert shore. From the time of Caliph Uthman, Jidda took the place of Shuaiba and became the port of the Quraish metropolis.

At the time of the Umayyad Caliphate, the situation improved in terms of social life. Especially under the Marwanids, Mecca became a city of pleasure, many poets and musicians gathered there.¹⁵

For a brief period after the death of Muawiya, Mecca gained some political importance as the seat of the rival caliph Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr. But for most of the Umayyad period, it attracted wealthy people who did not want to get involved in politics.¹⁶ In other words, Mecca lost its previous economic and commercial importance.

During the Abbasid period Baghdad was the political centre of the Caliphate, and Mecca and Medina, sometimes Mecca and Taif were under one ruler. In other words, Mecca lost its political power, and this situation effected economic life. Especially with the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate after the death of Mamun, a period of anarchy began in Mecca. The appearance of the Qarmatians worsened all the conditions. For instance, from 950 A.D. onwards, Mecca was relieved of serious danger from the Qarmatians.¹⁷

al-Zaylai who examined Mecca between 301-487A.H. presented some account in regard to the economic activities in the years in question. According to him the market of Mecca in which the coins of the Abbasids and Fatimids were minted was similar to the wall street of our time,¹⁸ and during the seasons of Hajj and Umra was very crowded and full of every kind of activities.¹⁹

In terms of sea-trade, Jidda was the port of Mecca as it has been indicated before. As to its importance, it was located near to Adan and Hind as well as Mecca, so it had commercial connections with Hind and Sin (China). All the goods imported from various European ports were brought into al-Iskandariyah and then al-Faramah and H̱ijāz through Jidda and al-Jar. From Jidda they were delivered to all H̱ijāz, especially to Mecca.²⁰ Jidda, in a sense, was the connection point between Mecca and the Far-East

As far as the caravan trade is concerned, through the caravans, the products of India and silks of China were brought into Mecca. From Africa, slaves and ivory were imported. In Egypt and in Syria, the tribe of Quraish traders bought luxury articles, products of the industry of the Mediterranean, mainly cotton, linen or silk

¹⁵ Lammens, "Mecca", 3:1/441.

¹⁶ Watt, "Makka", 6/147.

¹⁷ Lammens, "Mecca", 3:1/442-443.

¹⁸ al-Zaylai, *Makka Alâkatuha al-Khariciyya (301-487 A.H.)*, 161.

¹⁹ al-Zaylai, *Makka Alâkatuha al-Khariciyya (301-487 A.H.)*, 164.

²⁰ al-Zaylai, *Makka Alâkatuha al-Khariciyya (301-487 A.H.)*, 177.

stuffs. In addition, from Busra and the Sharat came arms, cereals and oil.²¹

On that point, Crone accepted that Meccan trade, first, was not a transit trade and secondly it was not a trade attracting the attention of the Egyptian and the Fertile Crescent's merchants.²² On the contrary, the nature of Meccan trade was local and generated by Arab rather than by foreign needs.²³

When we look at the relations between the three cities discussed here, it can be seen that they are connected to each other by the Pilgrimage Road starting from **Basra**.²⁴ Also, the South-West road starting from Baghdad reached the Hījāz region via Mecca and Medina. For this reason, it was even known as the Pilgrimage Road.²⁵

As a conclusion, from the period of Jahiliyya onwards, Mecca was considered as the most significant commercial centres of Arabia especially in the pre-Islamic period. Despite the fact that economic activities worsened at some periods of the history, Mecca remained as an active place in of social, religious and economic affairs at least during the period of Hajj.

2. Basra

At the beginning it would be better to note that besides Baghdad, Basra was also one of the major trade centres in the region of Iraq, since it played a significant role for the economic activities after the former, so considered to be the gate of Iraq and main market place for the eastern trade as well as the meeting city of the caravans coming from the desert. Through the ages Basra gained so much importance in economic life that it was described as the dome of Islam (Qubbat al-Islam).²⁶

2.1. Foundation of Basra and Its Historical Background

As far as the foundation of Basra is concerned, first, it should be indicated that at the Caliph Umar's time new period of Islamic conquest began, and during the conquest of Iraq the muslim army camped on the ruins of the old Persian post called al-Khubayra in 635 in order to approach to Iraq from the sea. However, it deserted again, so in 638 A.D., Utba b. Ghazwan, the actual founder of the city, chose this location to establish the military camp by the order of the caliph Umar.²⁷

²¹ Lammens, "Mecca", 3:1/440.

²² Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: 1987), 133. However, according to Kister, in the lower part of Mecca there was the Court of Egypt (Dar Misr) which belonged to Safwan b. Umayya, and he used to store the wares arriving from Egypt in this court. (M.J.Kister, "Some Reports Concerning Mecca from Jahiliyya to Islam", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 15 (1972) 77.

²³ Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, 149.

²⁴ al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-Ta'asim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim* (Leiden: 1967), 251.

²⁵ G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia and Central Asia from the Muslim Conquest to the Time of Timur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 11.

²⁶ A. A. Duri, *Tarikh al-Iraq al-Iktisadi fi al-Qarn al-Rabi al-Hijri* (Beirut: 1974), 135.

²⁷ Ch. Pellat, "al-Basra", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New edn. (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1960), 1/1085. Also see on the foundation of Basra Muhammad Camal Cavda, *al-Arab wa al-Ard fi al-Iraq fi Sadr al-Islam* (Jordan: →

The town, which received the name of Basra from nature of the region where it was founded²⁸, was situated to afford a control over the route from the Persian Gulf, and also to constitute a starting point for the subsequent expeditions to the east of the Euphrates and the Tigris.²⁹

Not only strategically but also from the point of social, political and military aspects of the caliphate, Basra played an eminent role. For instance, it provided contingents for the Arab armies of conquest, and the men of Basra participated in the battle of Nihawand as well as in the Camel and Siffin battles at the time of Muawiya, the authority of the Umayyads over the town was reasserted³⁰ so that Khurasan was governed from here.³¹

2.2. Economic Situation in Basra During the Classical Period

Basra, though it reached its zenith, in economic and social activities during in the 8th and the 9th centuries, it came to be a commercial centre, even in the previous years.

During the governorship of Abd Allah b. Amir between the years 646 and 657 A.D., Basra first turned into the permanent urbanized settlement, and after became a commercial center in Iraq.³²

In the same way, Ziyad b. Abihi, one of the governors during the Umayyad Caliphate, between the years 664-673 A.D., gave much more credit to the urbanization of the city, and enlarged the market, even established new ones.³³

Markets had significant role in the economic activities of Basra as well. When we look at the sources we realize that there were four huge commercial market places; Suq al-Mirbaḍ, Suq al-Kalla, Suq of Bab al-Jami and Suq al-Kabir, in Basra during the first and second centuries of the Hijra. Among them Suq al-Mirbaḍ was the most outstanding one. It was not only a great commercial but cultural center as well. At this Suq the poets and other intellectuals used to meet together with the Beduins and recite their poems.³⁴ Through these markets and especially of Suq al-Mirbaḍ, Basra actively got involved in the social and economic activities.³⁵

As it has been presented above, Basra was the second significant city in the

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1977), 157-165.

²⁸ R. Hartman, "al-Basra", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1913), 1:2/673.

²⁹ Pellat, "al-Basra", 1/1085.

³⁰ Pellat, "al-Basra", 1/1085.

³¹ Hartman, "al-Basra", 1:2/673.

³² A.J.Naji and Y.N.Ali, "The Suqs of Basra: Commercial Organization and Activity in a Medieval Islamic City", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 24: 3 (1981), 298.

³³ Naji and Ali, "The Suqs of Basra: Commercial Organization and Activity in a Medieval Islamic City" 24:3/300.

³⁴ Naji and Ali, "The Suqs of Basra: Commercial Organization and Activity in a Medieval Islamic City", 24:3/302-303. Also for detailed information on Suq al- Mirbaḍ see, Said al-Afghani, *Aswaq al-Arab fi Jahiliyya wa al-Islam* (Dimashq: 1937), 356-371.

³⁵ Refer to Ahmad Emin, *Duha'l-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1933-1936), 2/81-82.

economic activities in Iraq. The sea-routes which were going to Hind (India) and Sin (China), and to the shores of the Arabian Peninsula began from Basra.³⁶ In other words, as it has been expressed by Spuler³⁷ Basrawas the famous port of Mesopotamia, that connected it with the Arabian Peninsula and, via the Red Sea, with Egypt, as well as with the southern shore of Iran, India and then with Indonesia and China.

In regard to trade with Hind, it can be said that Basra was the trade centre for the Indian trade, and Ubullu was the port of Basra and its centre for sea-trade with the other countries, especially with India.³⁸ For instance, merchants from Samraqand were coming to Basra and then through the sea were going to Sin.

As far as the caravan trade is concerned, Basra was connected with Hind as well. During the 3rd century A.D., the Jewish traders called Rahdanites were going to al-Ahwaz setting out from Basra and then to Kirman, Sind and Hind.³⁹

As we mentioned above, by the 9th century Basra reached its high level in commercial importance. In the mid-10th century, it was very important in the field of commerce. At that time, Basra was called as Umm al-Iraq and Qubbat al-Islam.⁴⁰ Even during the time of Caliph al-Mansur, it was the import and export centre of Iraq due to the fact that no merchandise were imported or exported but through Basra.⁴¹

As far as the commercial exported-imported products are concerned, as it has been narrated by al-Maqdisi, the Khazz (silken stuff), Bazz (cotton stuff) and rare remarkable wares;⁴² the dates and water of rose (ma al-ward)⁴³ were exported as products of Basra. Regarding the imports of Basra, it can be said that as a result of its extensive connections with the other countries, every kind of commercial stuffs of the time were being brought into Basra. Owing to the huge merchandise, the prices were too low. For instance, al-Jahiz describes Basra as a city of the lowest price in his time.⁴⁴

Finally, in economic activities, Basra also suffered from some troubles and declines. The gradual decline of the central authority put an end to the prosperity of Basra. The Zanj rebel in the 9th century A.D., and later the Qarmatians were a

³⁶ Duri, *Tarikh al-Iraq al-Iktisadi fi al-Qarn al-Rabi al-Hijri*, 146.

³⁷ Bertold Spuler, "Trade in the Eastern Islamic Countries", *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, ed. A.S.Richards (Oxford: 1970), 14.

³⁸ Salih Ahmad Ali, *al-Tanzimat al-Ijtima'iyya wa al-Iktisadiyya fi al-Basra fi al-Qarn al-Awwal al-Hijri* (Beirut: 1953), 259.

³⁹ Duri, *Tarikh al-Iraq al-Iktisadi fi al-Qarn al-Rabi al-Hijri*, 152, 153.

⁴⁰ Najj and Ali, "The Suqs of Basra: Commercial Organization and Activity in a Medieval Islamic City", 24:3/301.

⁴¹ Camal Efendi, "al-Basra fi Khilafat al-Mansur", *al-Muqtataf*, 5:7 (1880), 178.

⁴² al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-Taqaqim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim*, 128, 145; Najj and Ali, "The Suqs of Basra: Commercial Organization and Activity in a Medieval Islamic City", 24:3/300.

⁴³ Duri, *Tarikh al-Iraq al-Iktisadi fi al-Qarn al-Rabi al-Hijri*, 138.

⁴⁴ Ahmad Matlub, "al-Basra fi Turath al-Jahiz", *al-Mawrid* (1902), 11/28.

constant danger to Iraq; Basra was plundered by them.⁴⁵ Naturally, these troubles caused declines in the economic and social activities in Basra.

As a conclusion, from the 8th century onwards, Basra was considered as one of the most significant trade centres of the Iraq region, especially in the sea-trade with India. Like Baghdad, it lost its importance beginning at the second half of the 10th century.

3. Baghdad

First of all it should be mentioned that through the Classical Period of Islam, one of the capital cities of the Islamic Caliphate was Baghdad and in addition to the fact that it was centre of political power and the intellectual capital of the Abbasids as it has been indicated by also Philip K. Hitti⁴⁶, Baghdad was the most important trade centre as well. Secondly, the site of Baghdad was inhabited before the Islamic period. The name of the town probably derives from an Iranian form 'Bagh-dade', 'gift of God', and the name of its commercial quarter, al-Karkh, from the Armenian kerka, 'market'⁴⁷, and we do not have any information showing that it obtained significant commercial and political importance before the Abbasids came to power.⁴⁸

3.1. Foundation of Baghdad and Its Historical Background Until the Time of Saljuqs

Until the reign of Caliph al-Mansur, Anbar was chosen as a new capital of the caliphate by the first Abbasid caliph, al-Saffah, to symbolise the new revolution (da'wah). When al-Mansur came to power, first, he moved to Hashimiyya near Kūfa; but he realised that pro-Alid Kūfa was a bad influence on his army, so he looked for a strategic site. As a result, he laid the foundation-stone of his new capital in the year 762 A.D. and in the course of four years it was completed.⁴⁹

Duri gives these reasons why Baghdad was chosen as new capital:

"After careful exploration, he chose the site of Baghdad for military, economic and climate considerations...It was on the Khurasan road and was a meeting place of caravan routes, and monthly fairs were held there, and thus provisions could be plentiful for army and people...To ensure control of the city and to facilitate communications internally and with caravan routes externally, the city was divided into four equal parts divided by two roads running from its equidistant gates. The Khurasan gate was to the N.E., the Basra gate to the S. W., the Syria gate

⁴⁵ Hartman, "al-Basra", 1:2/673.

⁴⁶ Hitti, *Capital Cities of Islam*, 85-110.

⁴⁷ Maurice Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, trans. Joan Spencer (Amsterdam: 1975), 124.

⁴⁸ Jacob Lassner, "Massignon and Baghdad: The Complexities of Growth in an Imperial City", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 9 (1966) 15.

⁴⁹ M. Streck and R. Hartmann, "Baghdad", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1913),1/565. See for detailed information G.Le Strange, *Baghdad During The Abbasid Caliphate* (Oxford: 1900), 1-14.

to the N.W. and the Kūfa gate to the S.E.”⁵⁰

As it has been understood from the passage, economic reasons played important role in choosing the proper place for Baghdad.

Among the sections of the city, markets play a prominent part in the plan. In 774 A.D. al-Mansur ordered moving the markets, which were inside the city, to Karkh in order to keep the turbulent populace away from the city and to make sure that gates of the quarters are not left open at night for the markets upon the suggestion of Byzantine delegation.⁵¹ In Karkh, each trade had its separate market. Among the markets, were the fruit market, the cloth market, the money-changers' market and so on. With the growth of the city merchants from Khurasan and Transoxania, Marw, Balkh, Bukhara and Khwarizm began to come to Baghdad. They had their own markets at Harbiyya quarter.⁵²

In terms of the social order, Baghdad suffered from a severe blow during the conflict between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun. However, during the time of al-Mu'tasim, when he decided to move to Samarra, Baghdad missed the immediate attention of the caliph but it remained the great centre of commerce and cultural activities. Although Baghdad developed during the reigns of the Caliphs al-Mu'tamid and al-Muktafi, it reached its height during the time of Caliph al-Muktadir in the years between 908 and 932 A.D.⁵³

Baghdad, however, declined during the time of Buwayhids, markets were renewed by Adud al-Dawlah, and Karkh, where the merchants had their places of business, was the most flourishing section of West Baghdad.⁵⁴ Finally, although the glory of Baghdad was in its first several centuries, it remained the capital of the Abbasids until it was partially destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century.⁵⁵

3.2. Economic Situation in Baghdad During the Classical Period

After having been founded as a new capital of the Caliphate, Baghdad played an outstanding role in the social, cultural, and economic life of the Abbasids, and among the emporia of the Caliphate at its zenith (the 9th and 10th centuries) Baghdad, as it has been indicated also by Bertold Spuler⁵⁶, was doubtlessly the most important one.

As the years passed, with the massive populations of different nations Baghdad had turned into the city where the migrants and merchants came intensively from every parts of the Muslim world, and depended on international

⁵⁰ A.A. Duri, "Baghdad", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New edn (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1960), 1/895.

⁵¹ Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: 1970), 61.

⁵² Duri, "Baghdad", 1/896.

⁵³ Duri, "Baghdad", 1/897-898.

⁵⁴ Duri, "Baghdad", 1/900.

⁵⁵ D. Brunn Stanley and Jack F. Williams, *Cities of the World Regional Urban Development* (New York, 1983), 299.

⁵⁶ Bertold Spuler, "Trade in the Eastern Islamic Countries", *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, 12.

trade.⁵⁷

Markets were the main places for the economic activities as previously mentioned.. In other words, markets became an essential feature of the life in Rusafa and especially in Karkh, which was the greatest market in Baghdad. In Karkh, each branch of trade had own market, and each market or craft had a chief appointed by the government. Since the time of al-Mansur a Muhtasib was appointed to watch over the all markets in order to prevent cheating and to check on measure s and weights.⁵⁸

Not only the local merchants were coming to these markets, but also foreign traders were joining them. Harbiyya quarter was the centre of foreign merchants. Market of the Gate of Damascus (Suq Bab al-Sham) was one of these kinds of markets, where merchants from Balkh, Marw, Bukhara, and Khawarizm came for business.⁵⁹

In economic activities, Baghdad, as a central point where five of the main highways going in other directions got together, was also important. These roads were:

- 1-The Eastern road to Hulwan and then to Iran and Central Asia,
- 2-The Northern road to Mawsil and Jazira,
- 3-The Southern road to Wasit and Basra,
- 4-The South-Western road to Kūfa, from there to the Arabian Peninsula until Hijāz,
- 5- The Western road to Raqqa, from there to Syria and Egypt.⁶⁰

In other words, the road system under the Abbasids has centered in Baghdad. Therefore, Baghdad was connected with the other parts of the Caliphate by means of the highway network. This situation gave rise to more economic activities. The development of the banking system in Baghdad was the consequence of the great commercial business.⁶¹

As to the commercial products which were exported and imported, first, it should be mentioned here that the commercial interchange between Baghdad and the east was not restricted to local products. It was but one sector of the overall commercial activity of the Caliphate, or rather of the whole Islamic World.⁶²

Among the exports of Baghdad were cotton stuffs, silk textiles, crystals

⁵⁷ Ira M. Lapidus, "Arab Settlement and Economic Development of Iraq and Iran in the Age of the Umayyad and Early Abbasid Caliphs", *The Islamic Middle East, 700-900*, ed. A.L. Udowitch (Princeton: 1981), 181.

⁵⁸ Duri, "Baghdad", 1/898.

⁵⁹ A. A. Duri, *Tarikh al-Iraq al-Iktisadi fi al-Qarn al-Rabi al-Hijri*, 134.

⁶⁰ Duri, *Tarikh al-Iraq al-Iktisadi fi al-Qarn al-Rabi al-Hijri*, 143. Also see Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, 10-11.

⁶¹ Duri, "Baghdad", 1/898.

⁶² Şpuler, "Trade in the Eastern Islamic Countries", 11.

turned on lathes, glazed-ware, and various oils, potions and electuaries. In addition, shirts of different colours, turbans of thin texture and celebrated towels were manufactured in Baghdad. It was famous for its leather and paper manufactures.⁶³

Slaves, who were imported from Transoxiana through Samarqand and Khawarizm, were one of the trading commodities.⁶⁴ Slaves from Bulgars and Khazars were dispatched either along the land route leading Derbent and Armenia, or the Caspian route leading to Tabaristan, Rayy and Baghdad.⁶⁵

As far as the trading connections of Baghdad are concerned, it had good connections with the whole lands of the Caliphate. In addition, Baghdad was in good commercial relations with Transoxiana, Central Asia, China and India through Persian Gulf⁶⁶, and most of the products imported were Indian merchandise.⁶⁷

Finally, in terms of economic activities, Baghdad suffered from some troubles. At the time of the political disorder happening in the reign of al-Mustain in the year 865 A.D. between him and his cousin al-Mu'tazz, Baghdad was captured and especially its western quarter was destroyed.⁶⁸ In the same year, the supporters of the caliph al-Mu'tazz intercepted the passage of foodstuffs from Raqqa to Baghdad, and this increased the prices, so hunger was experienced in the city that year.⁶⁹

In the same way, Baghdad suffered much from the turbulence of the amma, from sectarian differences encouraged by the Buwayhids, and from the ayyarun, whose rise was against the wealthy and the rulers because of their hard living conditions and of political chaos. They kept people in terror for life and property by levying tolls on markets and roads and burning many quarters and markets, as well.⁷⁰

In addition, conflicts which started between the Shi'is and the Sunnis during the second period of the 10th century raised many troubles. For instance, in 971 A.D., troubles in Karkh led to its burning and 17,000 people perished, 300 shops and many houses were burnt down.⁷¹

To sum up, all these social and political conflicts and disorders affected, to some extent, the economic activities in Baghdad, mostly in the course of second part of the 4th/10th century.

As a conclusion, economic activities are among the main parts of life. These

⁶³ Duri, "Baghdad", 1/898.

⁶⁴ Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, 199.

⁶⁵ Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, 197.

⁶⁶ Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, 218.

⁶⁷ Davud Efendi, "Baghdad", al-Muqtataf, 5/6 (1880), 149.

⁶⁸ D. Wainess, "The Third Century Internatinal Crises of Abbasids", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 20 (1977), 299.

⁶⁹ Wainess, "The Third Century Internatinal Crises of Abbasids", 20/299.

⁷⁰ Wainess, "The Third Century Internatinal Crises of Abbasids", 20/300.

⁷¹ Duri, "Baghdad", 1/900.

activities were carried out in bazaars, markets and fairs. At this point, throughout the Islamic history, some cities have priour position in comparison with others. On this point, Mecca, Basra, and Baghdad had the most active economic life, with their geographical locations, fairs, bazaars and markets held throughout the year. Although the economic activities during the first four centuries varied in terms of intensity in these three cities, they maintained their distinction as the most influential centres of the Muslim world in every aspects of life. Throughout history, Baghdad, as the center of the caliphate, developed not only in the Islamic world but also as an important metropolis throughout the world. In this respect, it has become the leading center of trade and economic life. Mecca, on the other hand, maintained its importance especially due to the pilgrimage season and as the holy city of the entire Islamic world. Basra, continued to be influential in economic life with Mirbađ and other bazaars, which are considered as the continuation of 'Ukâz.

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