

Notes

- 1 We have tried to introduce the smallest possible number of Arab terms, although in some cases their inclusion was unavoidable. These cases are always written in *Italics*. In cases of proper names we have opted to transcribe them in the most simple and accessible way for the Spanish phonetic system. (Note: the same has been done for the English translation)

DRIVING THROUGH BAGHDAD IN AN ARMORED VEHICLE

Tomás Alcoverro

Every time I am able to explore the city (which I visited for the first time in the summer of 1972, when it still was a provincial capital with only one large hotel –*The Baghdad Hotel*– on the banks of the Tigris), with bodyguards of course, I try to absorb its life and to keep its landscapes in mind. Baghdad is a very dangerous city for its inhabitants, especially in certain places such as centrally situated streets, market places or crowded mosques where attacks are committed often: in spite of these never-ending massacres, the people come back over and over again because there is no other chance; they must resume their tasks, go from their houses to the workplaces in order to live, day after day.

Since a couple of years ago, spectacularly, the river Tigris with its meanders and bridges has become a sort of borderline between two zones where the Sunni and the Shiite populations gather together, each of them at one side of the river. Before these sordid threats of ethnic cleansing began, Baghdad was a metropolis of more than six million people, mostly Sunnis, where all the Iraqi communities were mixed up, or at least they could live together with each other in many mixed sectors: Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrian and also the numerous Shiite community.

The new Baghdad, emerging under threat from violence and segregation, has its mostly Sunni neighborhoods at the west of the river, in Karaj, and those dominated by the Shiites at the east, in Rusafa. Between Karaj and Al Mansur (Yarmouk), we find the Green Zone, and the most residential and modern areas from the city, where there were many buildings from the former regime. The old Abbasid palaces are in Rusafa: here is the popular heart of the capital. There is also the large and crowded periphery of Sadr City, a stronghold of the militias of Muqtada al Sadr.

But even in these increasingly homogeneous areas, the exceptions persist: neighborhoods like Karrada or Adamia (Sunnis and Christians in the Shiite bank) or Kadimiya (Shiites in the Sunni side). I used to live in Karrada before the American-British invasion, with its Christian minorities and its churches, its long Arasat el Hindie Street, with restaurants and bars where alcoholic drinks were allowed.

The borders of these enclaves are more and more precise, and here the extremist fighters from both sides encourage a long-term war, which settles, in fact, these bloodcurdling religious limits. With suicide attacks, kidnapping, mortar shots and machine gun bursts, they scare away their neighbors like in Beirut during the seventies and eighties, when the city split into the so-called Eastern and Western areas, Christians and Muslims. More than one hundred and sixty thousand people have been forced to leave their neighborhoods and settle in others under the shelter of their respective religious communities. Some caricaturists even draw their cartoons about “wars and peaces” in this “league of republics of Baghdad”.

This neighborhood-cutting causes the erection of walls, brick barriers of concrete, and surveillance by armed guards day and night. The urban geography of Baghdad is breaking into pieces, it is becoming more and more “medieval”. The people reduce their living space into minimums, and every time they have to move they feel the danger of not knowing who is the uniformed policeman, who is the mercenary, who the criminal: they do not know who is friend nor enemy. There is no need of a curfew because everybody locks themselves in their homes at dawn, although they are not sure of having electricity or any drinking water. There are building workers who would rather stay at night in the workplace better than return back home.

I have entered the “green zone” inside an armored vehicle, with a bulletproof vest and accompanied by the police guard from the embassy of Spain. This is the privileged area of Baghdad where the great diplomatic representation of the USA has its seat and the offices of its administration. It is also where the most important rulers of Iraq have their residences. In the “green zone” or international zone (as the Americans like to call it in order to avoid such an exclusive shade of meaning in this enclave), thousands of people live and work, especially Americans and foreigners.

It is an urban space where we can find the ostentatious palaces of the overthrown President Saddam Hussein, like the Palace of the Republic. The busts of the hanged statesman were decapitated in its towers. Very near, a singular building of gracious Mediterranean style is still standing. It is the work of

the Catalan architect Sert, who was an exile in Harvard. He constructed it for the American embassy in the sixties, and it was abandoned when both countries broke their diplomatic relationships.

The concrete walls, barricades, bunkers and reinforced cement walls which have deformed and destroyed the landscape of Baghdad, proliferate in the "green zone" as well. This is a city completely divorced from the outer world which tries to act as the capital city of the former Mesopotamia and dominate the "red zone", as all other neighborhoods in Baghdad are called.

I would like to see Sert's building because it is one of the few architectural works (from those constructed in the middle of the twentieth century to embellish the city), which have suffered no damage and can still be visited, at least from a distance. First it was King Faisal II and later Saddam Hussein: they encouraged ambitious projects to modernize Baghdad, after the end of the British colonial control and after the Baath Party's coup d'état, respectively. Great international architects were asked for important works: Le Corbusier for a stadium, Walter Gropius for a university campus, Gio Ponti for a ministry, Constantinos Doxiadis for a residential neighborhood, Ricardo Bofill for a large mosque. Le Corbusier's stadium is still open but the Planning Ministry is in ruins and the ideal city designed by Doxiadis became Sadr City, where the poor are packed into their living places. The project of Bofill for a grand mosque was never constructed. That time of Baghdad, city of mirages, city of modern architectural works, was the time when literature and the arts flourished, the time when Iraqi painters were highly valued and excellent magazines of avant-garde poetry were published.

It's been a long time since the restaurants of the Abu Nauas Street were closed. That was the most pleasant street in the city, with its restaurants in the banks of the Tigris river, where the typical fish was served (the river carp or *masguf*, which the clients chose from the jets to fry in the wooden fire), and the old cafes between the eucalyptus trees where people used to play *trictrac* or backgammon. I remember the joy of that street in my first voyage to Baghdad... the end.

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URBANISM IN BAGHDAD BEFORE THE PLANNING: A CODIFICATION BETWEEN THE FATES OF THE ARBITRARY AND URGENT NEEDS (1920 – 1950)

Caecilia Pieri

This text seeks to recall the milestone stages which led to the structuring of Baghdad's urban fabric between those two inflection points that were the beginning of the British mandate, in 1920, and the creation of the Development Board (*Majlis al a'mar*) in 1950 : the first one because it opens, out of all regulatory frame, a kind of expansion and urban layout new to Baghdad, that adapts itself to the profile and needs of a colonial strategy; the second one because it matched the firsts overall 'modern' planning attempts which led to an international consultation. Thanks to those two events, an arbitrary regulation has given Baghdad that look of a low and regular Garden city it still offers in the city centre. Green, spotted with eucalyptus and palm trees, this monochromatic urban entity, where the brick dominates the scene, is not well-known, because it has been built mainly by unknown builders, and, paradoxically, it has been preserved quite well up until now from the mass destruction known by most large Arab capitals over the last thirty years².

We will also show some elements of a contextualization necessary in order to appreciate what was taking shape just before 1950, the date chosen for this exhibition –such events, which were quite complex due to the myriad breaking-offs that reoriented the path to modernity, had made urban politics and the history of politics intimately coincide in a region of crucial geopolitical coordinates, for Iraq as well as for the covetousness that it raises-

BEFORE 1917: BETWEEN SOCIOCLIMATIC DATA AND SPATIAL-FUNCTIONAL COERCIVE FACTS, A TRADITIONAL URBAN LANDSCAPE.

At a nodal cross between the Tigris and the Euphrates, Baghdad is located over a potential partial floodplain. The supremacy of this river which divides it, like a heart, in two unequal parts, represents a constant concern because devastating floods regularly swept a native habitat of adobe along its way. 'Ville menacée'³ (Vaumas 1962), Baghdad has therefore protected itself by partially spreading along the right bank, sticking out slightly into the river (Al Karkh neighbourhood)