



Conceptual Framework of an Ideal Muslim Capital: Comparison between Early Muslim Capital of Baghdad and Islamabad

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Abstract

According to Islamic teaching the Muslim capital city should incorporate fundamental elements of socio- economic enrichment and also a hospitable glance for its visitors. Various cities in the history of Islamic world performed as administrative capitals such as Medina, Damascus, Kufa, Baghdad, Isfahan, Mash'had etc. Among these Baghdad was the first major purpose built capital city founded at the bank of river Tigris by the Muslims. It had a radial plan with social interactive spaces at its centre. In the modern times, we have the example of Islamabad which was also planned as the capital of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The current research compares these two capital cities in order to discover the features which an Islamic world capital city should incorporate and depict. Furthermore, it will generate some general rules for planning capital city for the governing bodies of Islamic republics which would be helpful in futuristic facets.

Keywords: Islamic, capital, Baghdad, Islamabad, urban, planning, design

Introduction

There is a special relationship between Islam and urban life, and popularization of Islam has been intertwined with the development and promotion of urban life. Islamic city is a reflection of high thoughts of true religion of Islam in all aspect. In fact, a general view of an Islamic city is the interpretation of the religious beliefs and social life of the people residing in, which is considered to be developed through collective life and cooperation with each other, contributing towards the preservation and survival of the society.

The Holy Qur'ān is among the original and fundamental sources which describes the attitude of Islam towards characteristics of a desirable city. In a general opinion, it is a city with numerous domes and minarets, abundant religious places. Yet, no complete definition has been provided for an Islamic city and its characteristics. In the Qur'ān, the word '*al medina*' has been cited 14 times, the word '*Balad*' in three forms and in total for 14 times, and "*al Balad*" for 5 times. In some verses, the concern has been a special city; in others, the main subject and message of the verse is not related to any characteristic of a city; and other verses are directly



related to the characteristic of a city. Regarding respect and security of the city, as expressed in the Quran, the city may be respected and God, the Almighty, swears on this city two times: “I was ordered to worship Creator of this city. A city, whose lordship and everything belongs to Him, I shall respect it and I am to be from Muslims.”¹ And second time in these words, “swear on this city and you who settled there in.”²

“Islamic cities” convey a special concept of city, in which Islamic values and attitudes are manifested. Such values and attitudes are evident in construction of urban elements. Construction of urban texture and buildings such as Mosques, Market (*Bazaar*), and *Madrassas* (Schools) represents value, symbol and epitome of concepts and values and manifestation of many Islamic concepts. Islamic ideology highly influenced not only the emergence of the cities but also their physical structure. This structure witnessed various changes and evolutions during various periods. The results indicate that the formation of design principles of an Islamic city mainly depend on Islamic values and cultural beliefs, which also affect various aspects of the lives of Muslims. Among the most important factors forming the map and shape of Islamic city are the influence of local topography, former morphologies of the city and in fact a reflection of economic, political, social and cultural structures. Cities and habitations are among the most prominent and tangible effects of human culture, which express many mental and subjective components affected by and resulting from it, by providing objective and perceivable spaces.

This paper is an endeavour to figure out the development of an urban framework for an Islamic City. It is based on the relationship between urban forms and Islamic principles. The paper explores the morphology and its effect on sociology of Islamic cities. This paper will try to recognize the factors in shaping the environment and buildings in two model cities in the Islamic world. It will inquire how Muslims transmuted Islam in their cities both physically and socially. For this paper, two Islamic capital cities have been selected; Baghdad from the past and Islamabad from the present. Comparison has been made between these two to show how Islamic principles are reflected in their physical form.

2. History of Baghdad and Islamabad

At the advent of Islam, Medina acted as the capital of Muslim caliphate from the death of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) till the time of the *Khulafa-e-Rashdun*. Afterwards, Damascus became the capital of Muslim caliphate. In 762, Abbasid Caliph, Al Mansur started the construction of new Muslim Capital at the bank of

¹al- Qur’ān, an-Naml: 27: 91.

²al- Balad: 90:1, 2.



River Tigris named Baghdad.³ (Figure 1)

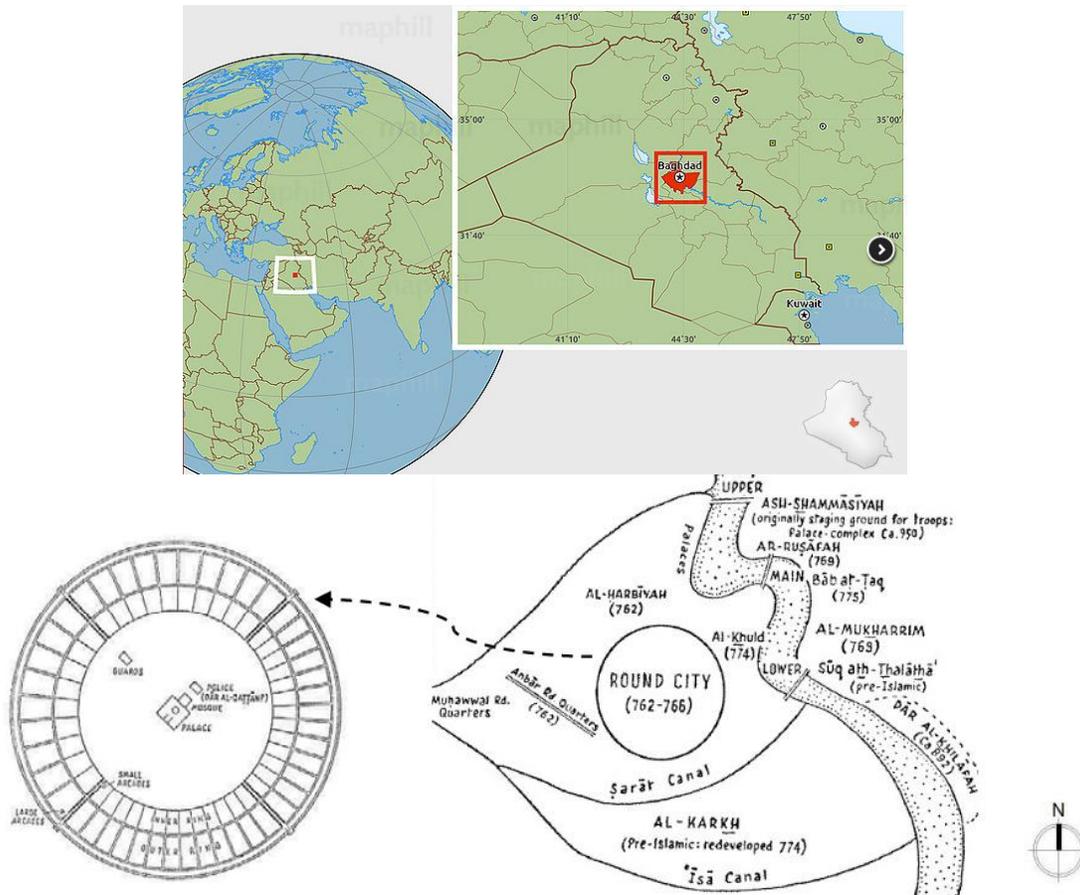


Figure 1: Location of Baghdad along River Tigris⁴

It was a round city with a concept of heaven on earth. It was a walled city with four gates as shown in Figure 2, named Damascus gate, Kurasan gate, Kufa gate and Basra gate. These gates were erected in the direction of the cities from which they borrowed their names. According to Caliph al Mansur, the capital city of Baghdad would be a mark in the history, he said, “This is indeed the city that I am to found, where I am to live, and where my descendants will reign afterward.”⁵

³Dawn Kotapish, and Ray Webb, *Daily Life in Ancient and Modern Baghdad* (Minneapolis: Runestone Press. 2000)

⁴Samuel Miklos Stern, C Cahen, and Albert Habib Hourani, *The Islamic City: a Colloquium* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1970).

⁵*Iraq Country Study Guide*. (USA: Intl Business Publications, 2009)

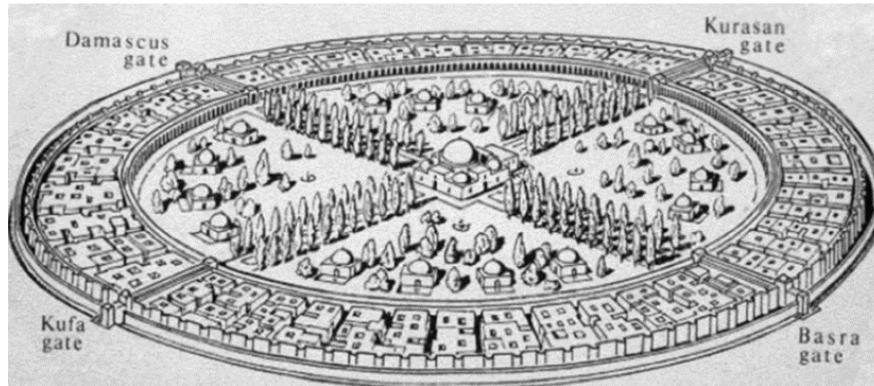


Figure 2: The earlier plan of Baghdad with four gates

Similarly, Islamabad is an example of a modern capital in the twentieth century. After partition, Karachi served as the capital. Karachi was a highly dense and populated city and was unable to incorporate the permanent seat of government. So there was a need of a new capital that could serve the new state of Pakistan without any discrimination between ethnic groups and reflected a common faith. Islamabad means ‘City of Islam’ was designed and planned by C. A. Dioxides from 1959 to 1963 and its implementation started in 1961. The location was selected along the city of Rawalpindi which provided initial services and facilities required on an immediate basis. Figure 3 (Islamabad the creation of new capital). The conceptual master plan encompassed the strategic planning of the neighboring city of Rawalpindi and its urban areas.⁶

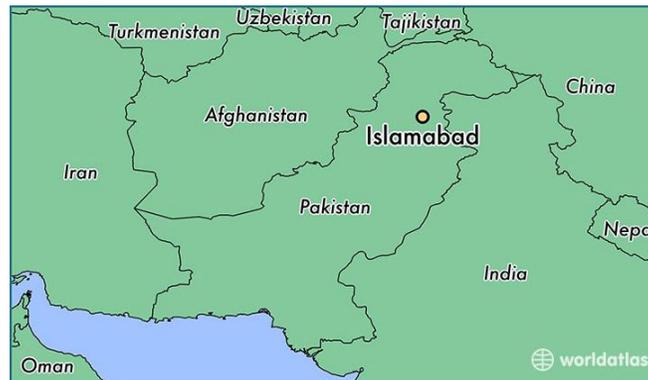


Figure 3: Location of Islamabad

⁶Botka, and Dusan, “Islamabad after 33 Years,” *Ekistics* (1995): 209-235.



3. Land Use Distribution

The basic structure of the ancient round city (Figure 4) of Baghdad consisted of two semicircles; each had a diameter of about 19 km. In terms of the history of urban planning, it was a Persian-Sasanian city. The surrounding wall was 12 meters thick from the top and 44 meters at the base. The total height of the wall was 30 meters. Another wall of 50 meters surrounded the first wall and beyond this was a moat filled with water.⁷ The center of the round city consisted of a mosque and palace. The residences of officers were placed nearer to the palace. The general public residential units were placed with the inner periphery of the wall. There was a building incorporating commander of guards and residence of the governor near the Syrian gate. The city had cylinder towers, circular-residential sectors, streets, and bazaars. The construction materials used were brick and marble.⁸ The complete construction took almost for years. The outer periphery of the wall was surmounted by a ditch. (Figure 5)⁹

⁷*Iraq Country Study Guide* (USA: Intl Business Publications, 2009)

⁸Dhirgham Alobaydi, and Mahbub Rashid, "Evolving Syntactic Structures of Baghdad: Introducing 'Transect' as a Way to Study Morphological Evolution," In *10th International Space Syntax Symposium*, (2017) http://www.sss10.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/SSS10_Proceedings_040.pdf

⁹"History Cheat Sheets: Starting Point for KS2 Statutory and Optional Units," 2014. Accessed June 06, 2017. <https://michaelt1979.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/history-cheat-sheets-book.pdf>.

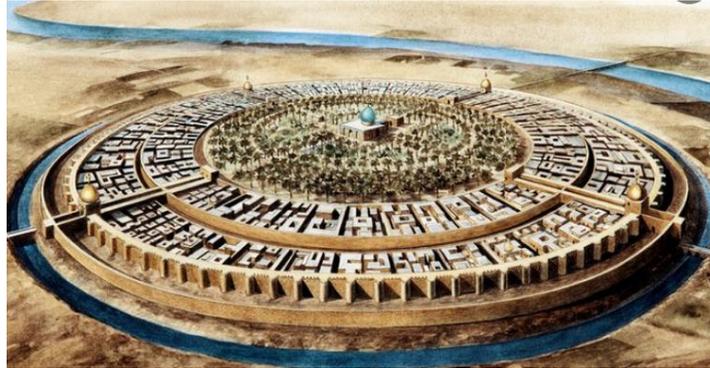


Figure 4: City of Baghdad in 10th century

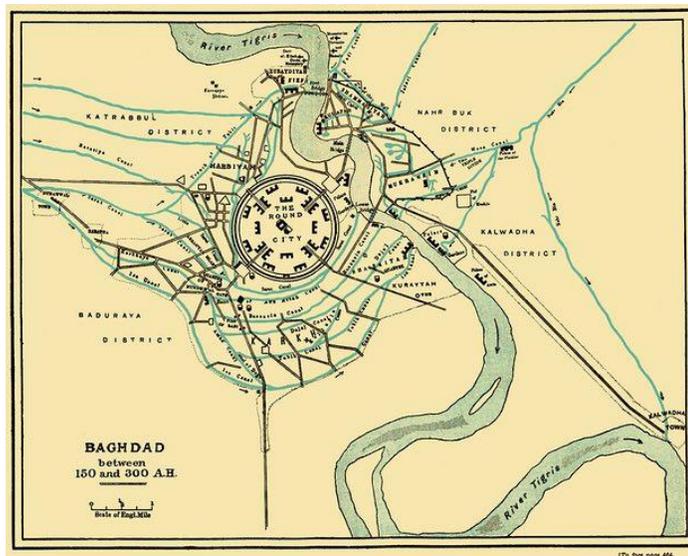


Figure 5: Round city of Baghdad¹⁰

The capital city of a country should be cosmopolitan and must have the capacity of expansion. However, in Baghdad, the space within the circular boundaries was limited to adapt more facilities and expansion. The later expansion of the city was thus in organic form.¹¹

¹⁰Justin Morazzi, "Story of Cities no.3: The Birth of Baghdad was a Landmark for World Civilisation," *The Guardian* 16 March 2016, Accessed June 5, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/mar/16/story-cities-day-3-baghdad-iraq-world-civilisation>.

¹¹Mohammed K. Al-Hasani, "Urban Space Transformation in Old City of Baghdad – Integration and Management," *CAUMME 2012 International Symposium*. Istanbul, 2012 <http://www.journalagent.com/megaron/pdfs/MEGARON-14633-ARTICLE-AL-HASANI.pdf>



Islamabad was designed on the concept of “Dynapolis” shown in Figure 6, in which the expansion is in one direction and allows the center to expand without difficulty. The whole city was planned on the grid iron pattern that adjusted unseen issues as it allows alternate routes to traffic. It also gives ample right of way to the plots which other cities generally lack in their planning aspect.¹² The idea of the construction of a new capital at that time was to achieve a sustainable form that could achieve a higher level of living for the residents.¹³

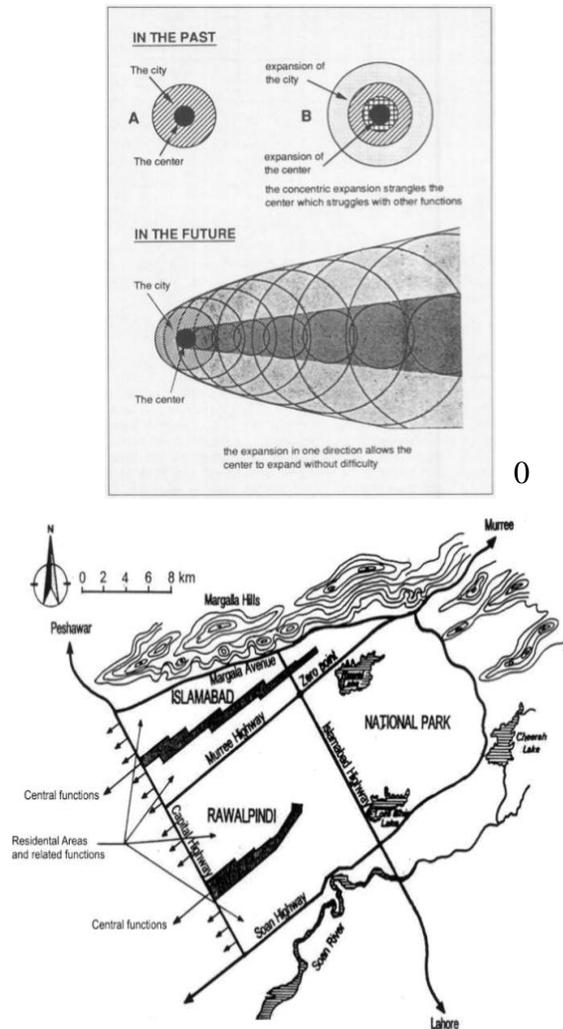


Figure 6: Expansion of city with the concept of “Dynapolis or Dynametropolis”

¹²Botka, and Dusan, “Islamabad after 33 Years,” *Ekistics* (1996): 209-235.

¹³Glenn V. Stephenson, “Two Newly- Created Capitals: Islamabad and Brasilia,” *Town Planning Review*, vol.41, 4, (2004): 317-332.



The city of Islamabad was planned on grid iron pattern in which the streets cross each other at right angles. There is a clear hierarchy of residential communities in relation to their functions. The road networks discriminate between high and low speed vehicles, pedestrians, public transport and bicycles.¹⁵(Figure 8) A hierarchy of communities and functions in which each neighborhood's inhabitants had proper functions like schools, market, office buildings, green areas recreation, etc.¹⁶

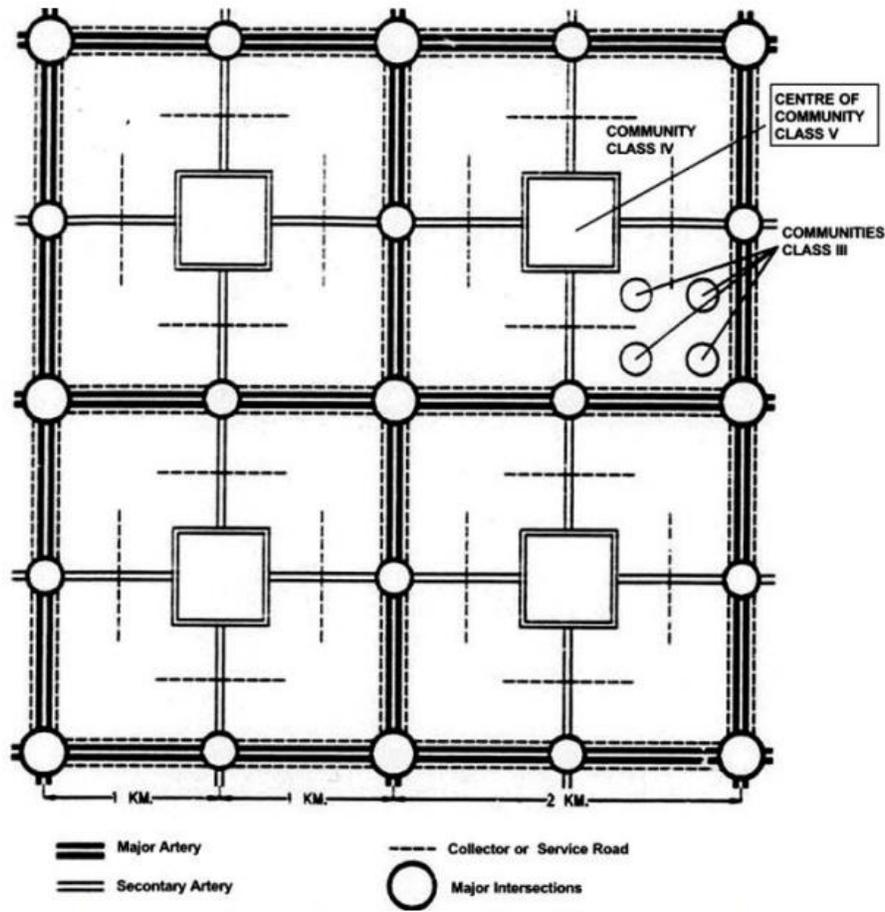


Figure 8: Street Systems hierarchy of Islamabad¹⁷

¹⁵J. M. Frantzeskakis, "Islamabad, a Town Planning Example for a Sustainable City," *Sustainable Development and Planning IV*, 2009.

¹⁶Derak Lovejoy, "The Design of Islamabad-New Capital City of Pakistan," in *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 114, no. 5123 (1966): 923 - 941.

¹⁷J. M. Frantzeskakis, "Islamabad, a Town Planning Example for a Sustainable City," *Sustainable Development and Planning IV*, 2009.



5. Central Focus

The center of the Baghdad city consists of a palace known as Golden Gate Palace and Mosque (Figure 9) which was the residence of the caliph.¹⁸ It had a 39 meter high green dome as a distinctive feature. The palace was surrounded by an enormous open space and was just in the use of caliph. The open area consisted of a water body and some other landscape features.¹⁹

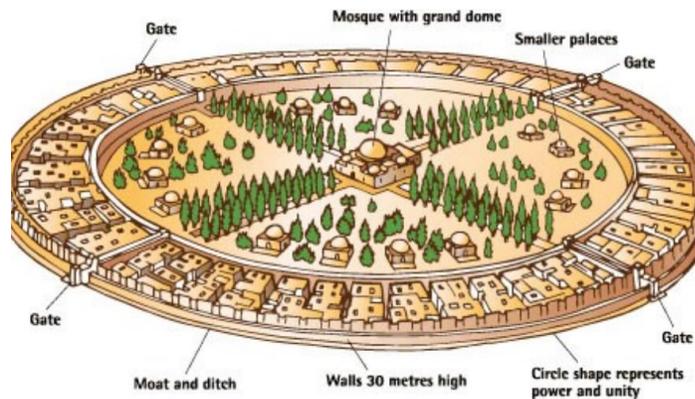


Figure 9: The Painted view of Golden Gate Palace²⁰

The main mosque named Faisal Mosque is the point that is visible from almost all areas of Islamabad and it depicts the importance of the symbol of Islam in an Islamic capital city. Beside this, the Blue Area was reserved to satisfy the

¹⁸Mariabruna Fabrizi, "The Round City of Baghdad," *SOCKS*, October 06, 2015, <http://socks-studio.com/2015/10/06/the-round-city-of-baghdad/>.

¹⁹<http://www.bookofdaystales.com/baghdad>

²⁰Mariabruna Fabrizi, "The Round City of Baghdad," <http://socks-studio.com/2015/10/06/the-round-city-of-baghdad/>.



commercial requirement of the residents of Islamabad. The Blue Area was developed in such a way that it runs throughout the length of Islamabad as the vital point of the city and has the ability to cater the city's dynamic growth.²¹

6. Building Block Form

The form of the round city of Baghdad was associated with the look of paradise. The historians associate it with the religious concepts of that time. Furthermore, it was associated with the Mesopotamian town planning before the construction of the city. The centrally located mosque reflected the Islamic influx of the city as it was a previous experience in the development of Medina around the main Mosque of Prophet (SAW). This could also be a reflection of the importance of *Shari'ah* norms within the Islamic city. The building blocks were almost squares and rectangular in shape.

Islamabad was named as the city of Islam and the placement of the main mosque named as Faisal Mosque was placed at the focal point and can be viewed from the major areas of the city. This also reflected the importance of Islamic customs of the capital of an Islamic state. The concept of hierarchy in the building blocks provided a variety of architectural designs regarding their form and design elements. The government level buildings had a variety of space and open land to incorporate different form.²²

7. Plots Aggregation into Street-Blocks

The whole circular city of Baghdad was divided into four radial streets leading to the main entrance gates. The plots had their openings in the secondary streets which also served as the interactive space for the residents. This city had no recreational spaces for the general public like gardens etc.²³ Figure 10 shows the view of Main Street of the city of Baghdad.



Figure 10: Assumed 3D of the main street of Baghdad

²¹Dr Muhammad Qasim, "Islamabad Master Plan: Know thy city — I," *The Express Tribune*, Islamabad, January 13, 2014, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/658293/islamabad-master-plan-know-thy-city-i/>

²²Herrman Kreutzmann, "Islamabad- Living with the Plan," *South Asia Chronicle*, 3(2013): 135-160.

²³Mohammed K. Al-Hasani, "Urban Space Transformation in Old City of Baghdad – Integration and Management," *CAUMME 2012 International Symposium*. Istanbul, 2012



Islamabad planning conceptualized in its steady growth patterns that allowed the futuristic growth to be accommodated. The overall planning of Islamabad had wide roads having proper right of way which provides the residential and commercial spaces wide open entrances and free movement. These open spaces also served as interactive spaces.¹⁸

Islamabad was planned according to a hierarchical system of plot size, having neighborhood planning concept on grid iron pattern. The class diffidence was to compromise on the size of the plot but not on the facilities.²⁴

8. Social Systems

The social aspect for the capital city is one of the major elements to be considered while planning.²⁵ Baghdad's palace area comprised one third of the whole round city and its life was different than that of the general public living. They spend as much money as they could on their occasions such as marriages and installations of caliphs and reception of foreign envoys. They displayed their wealth that could be found in the historic literature. The specialties among goods from all over the world like fur, honey and wax from Russia, Chinese diverse wares, linen, rice, grains from Egypt, metal wares and fruits from Syria, all were brought here and displayed to sale out. This diverse meet up of merchants from different parts of the world allowed them to discuss and debate about knowledge and sharing which ended up as advancements in literature and sciences. Indian merchants brought the knowledge of astronomy to the city of Baghdad.²⁶

The capital should give equality to all political, economic and ethnic groups without any discrimination. The planning of Baghdad showed the strong disparity among the social groups. However, twentieth century capital of Islamabad, cater all types of groups at an equal level in terms of its neighborhood planning (Figure11). Since each neighborhood incorporated the same type of facilities as markets, communal activity places, parks and mosques etc.

²⁴J. M. Frantzeskakis, "Islamabad, a Town Planning Example for a Sustainable City," <https://www.witpress.com/Secure/elibrary/papers/SDP09/SDP09008FU1.pdf>

²⁵Dawn Kotapish, and Ray Webb, *Daily Life in Ancient and Modern Baghdad* (Runestone Press, 2000).

²⁶Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

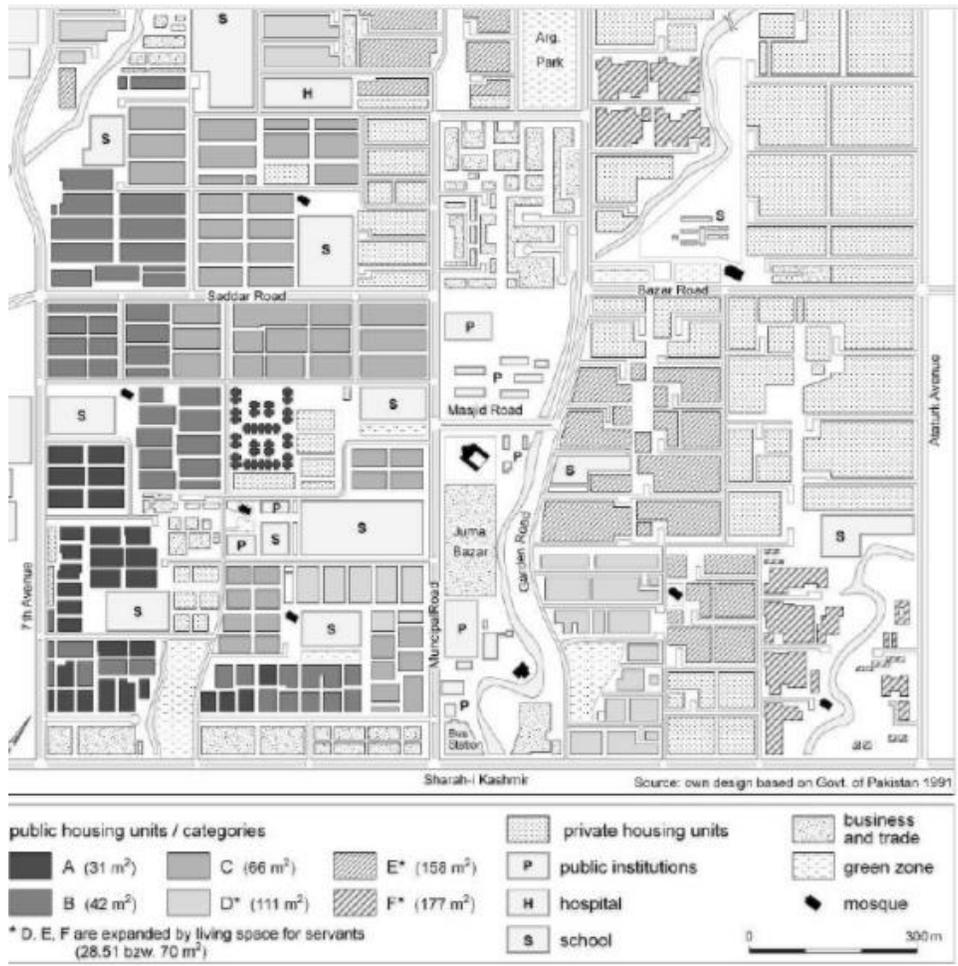


Figure 11: Social hierarchy in Islamabad (Kreutzmann 2013)

9. Economic Linkage

Building a new capital was a very wise decision in terms of its strategic location and was greatly influenced by the economic factor as an important element.²⁷ The major consideration of the selection of the location of a capital city is that it should be a center of gravity for the periphery. It should not act as an isolated piece of land. The location of Islamabad and Baghdad were on the important historical routes (Figure 12 and Figure 13).

There was a time when Baghdad, got its recognition in terms of advancements in mathematics and science. Geographically, it was a strategic place because it was

²⁷Dusan Botka, "Islamabad after 33 Years," *Ekistics*, v.62, no. 373-374-375, July/August - September/October - November/December (1995): 209-235.



located on the Silk Road (Figure 12) which was the ancient trade route. In addition, this was the area where trade caravans switched from one mode of transport to another, that is from land to water or vice versa. This is the reason that the traders had their attractions regarding selling their goods and perhaps their stopovers at this place. There were markets around the mosque where foreigners used to sell their merchandises. Also, the great knowledge given by Aristotle and Plato was translated and there were open discussions about their philosophies and ideas. The city had a rapid growth and expanded along the River Tigris and Euphrates.²⁸ Another reason found in the growth of Baghdad was the demand generated by the caliphate for the construction in terms of man power, services and material.

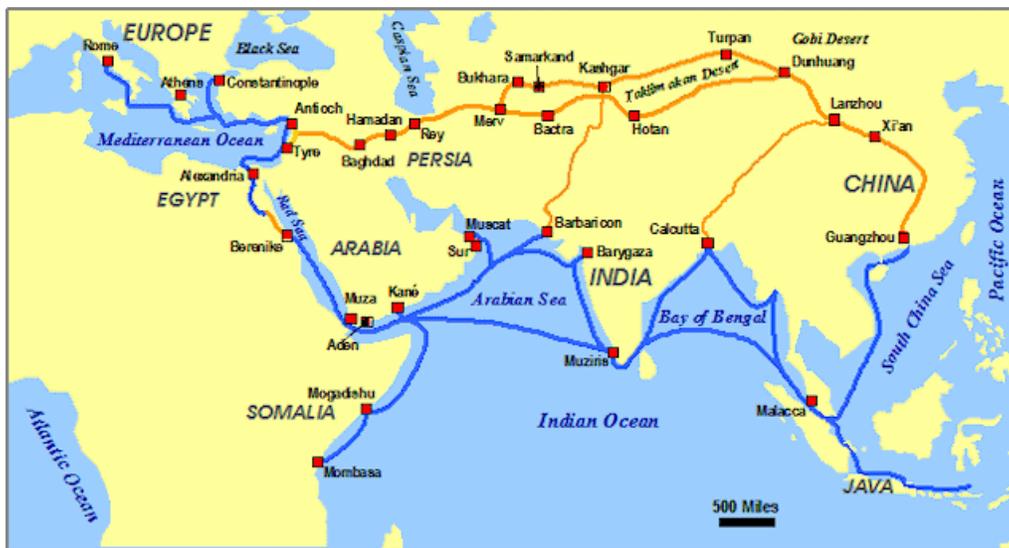


Figure 12: Location of Baghdad on Silk Road

Islamabad, Figure 13, shows that the site selected to build Islamabad as a new city was also located on Tran-Asian Highway. This route had many other important capitals like Calcutta, Delhi, Lahore, Kabul and Tehran. The factor of the existing joined city of Rawalpindi gave it a benefit as it had large scale facilities like Airport and transportation terminals. Considering the planning of Islamabad, the distribution of the market place was evenly done by the provision of commercial zone in each sector and an overall central area known as the Blue Area as a combined source. The experts at the time of planning of Islamabad also focused on the area to be of

²⁸Dr. Muhammad Qasim, “Islamabad Master Plan: Know Thy city — I.” *The Express Tribune*, Islamabad, January 13, 2014.



economically, socially and environmentally beneficial. The area was also in the locality of Potohar plateau and the weather conditions were feasible.²⁹

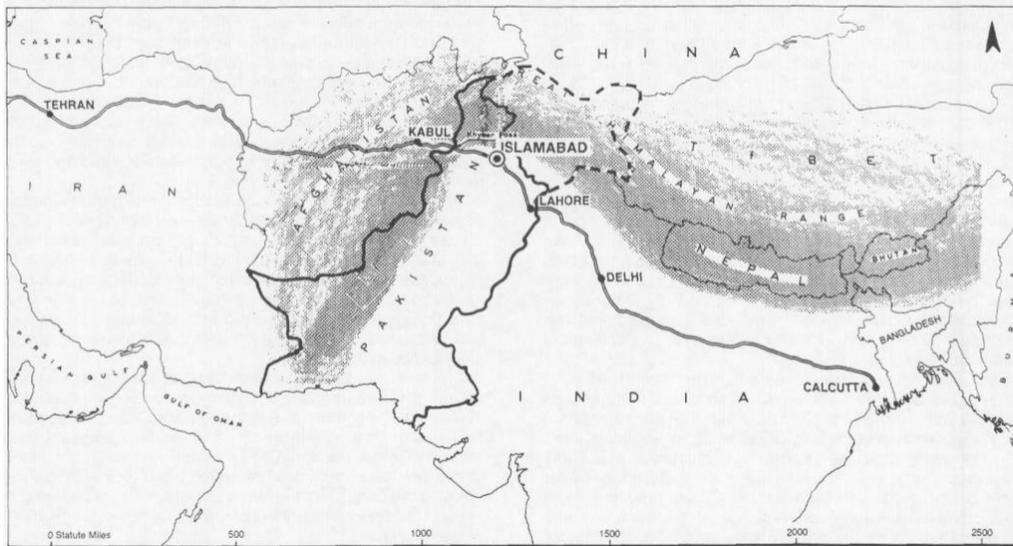


Figure 13: Location of Islamabad on Tran-Asian Highway²⁰

10. Security Preferences

The round city of Baghdad was basically surmounted by three walls. Two were at the outer boundary and other one divided the public areas from the royal buildings, including officials' residences and golden gate palace and the mosque. The most secured area was hence the central Golden Gate palace which was surrounded by the administrative blocks and residences of the officials. The main security headquarter building was with the boundary of Syrian gate incorporating the accommodation and administrative areas of guards and officials.³⁰ Also the caravans and their ships required a secure and relaxing place for their voyages so Baghdad served the purpose.

Islamabad is a self-contained and a purpose built capital and each sector fulfills its basic requirements within itself in a short radius. That is why the grid boundaries of each neighborhood line meet up with the security demands.³¹ The government and presidential and secured areas are all at one side known as the Red Zone which is considered to be the most secure area of the city.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰*Iraq Country Study Guide* (USA Intl Business Publications, 2009)

³¹Dr. Muhammad Qasim, "Islamabad Master Plan: Know Thy city — I." *The Express Tribune*, Islamabad, January 13, 2014.



11. Peripheral Interaction

Baghdad became the center of learning and commerce from 8th to 13th century. The house of wisdom was the center where Persian, Greek and Syriac work were translated into Arabic. This gave strength to the Islamic world of that time. This is one of the reasons that there was a rapid growth in the morphological figures of Baghdad and people preferred to become its permanent residence. Figure 14 highlights the surrounding significant ancient cities around Baghdad.

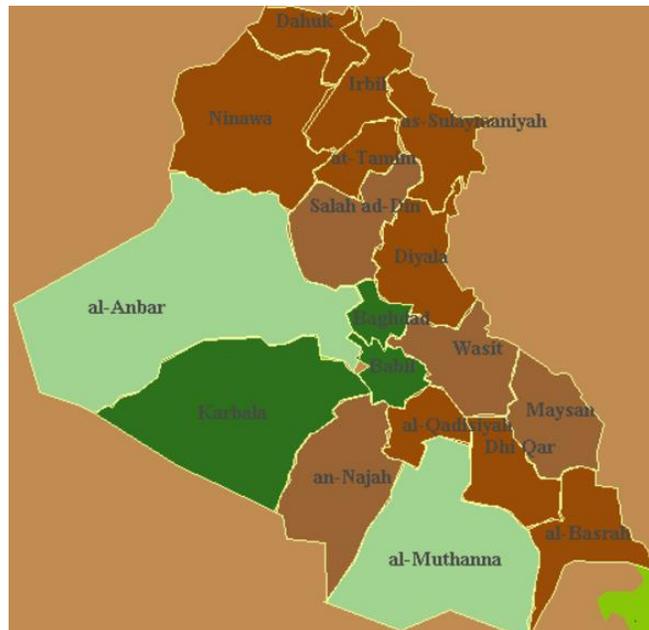


Figure 14: Important ancient cities around Baghdad

The sustainable planning of a new capital city of Islamabad had parallel considerations to the value of its peripheral attractions. Its land use and provision of proper infrastructure, transportation, educational institutions, and international universities was latest for both, the city and its peripheral cities. Currently, it contains many internationally renowned universities such as Quaid-e-Azam University and National University of Sciences and Technology.³² In addition, all the government departments head offices and foreign embassies are located in Islamabad.

³²Spiro N. Pollalis, Angela Kouveli, Yannis Orfanos, and Olga Tzioti, "Planning a Sustainable New City," *Journal of Building Construction and Planning Research II*, (2014): 50-58
https://file.scirp.org/pdf/JBCPR_2014032713375783.pdf



12. Conclusion

The most important lessons learned by comparing the planning of these two cities are summarized below:

- The city plans must be simple but adequate which means it should have clear land uses.
- There should be legibility in cities. A clear transition between residential and industrial area enables environmental stability.
- There should be a good mixture of all building styles in a city to facilitate all types of citizens, including families, students, and older people and so on.
- The infrastructure should be incorporated for all transportation modes. People should be able to walk to closest (local) commercial district and primary schools.
- The city must have all sorts of land uses to attract different occupations and work conditions.
- An area dedicated to parks, greenery and housing, should be incorporated in city core.
- The city has to be planned for tomorrow, not yesterday or today. The city must be dynamic. It should provide adequate framework for future growth.
- The city plan must have flexibility. It should not be over ambitious. It should rely on existing resources.
- A successful implementation of a city plan is in the organizational and political structure necessary to really make the plan a reality.
- Cities should be able to absorb unavoidable circumstances like floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

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