



The City of Baghdad

Baghdad, now the capital city of Iraq, was chosen by the Abbasid ruler, Caliph al-Mansur, to be the center of his empire in the eighth century. Baghdad was an ideal choice because it lay between two rivers and was at the crossroads of great trade routes. The city was built in concentric circles (each inside the other), with a deep moat surrounding three circular walls. The citizens of Baghdad lived in houses outside the walls. The space between the outer and middle walls was left clear for defense. Between the middle and inner walls were the houses of army officers. Behind the innermost wall were the residences of the Caliph's family and the highest officials. At the very hub of the city was the Caliph's palace of marble and stone. The Caliph chose this spot because he wanted to live at the very center of his empire.

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Polo

The game of polo was introduced to the Muslim world by the Persians. Polo is a ball and goal game played on horseback by two teams of four on a grass field with goal posts at either end. Players use a wooden mallet to strike the ball into the goal. The game became a great favorite among the wealthy classes because of its use of horses. The Abbasid rulers loved the game and valued raising fast-moving, champion Arabian horses to improve polo. The Muslims adapted and improved the game, which was then introduced to Europeans. Today it is played all over the world.

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