

# Baratha

## from monastery to mosque

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Iraq is a country of Islamic monuments : mausoleums, shrines of saints which are visited by pilgrims, monasteries and famous mosques. This is to be expected in a country which was the crucible of human civilizations, the land of the prophets and the center of the Islamic Khalifat; Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasside dynasty and the beacon of Islamic cultural radiation.

المقبرة القديمة.  
The old graveyard.

The area of Baratha is regarded as one of the older sites in the Islamic history of Baghdad. Historical tales indicate it was built 108 years before Baghdad (House of Peace). Before that it was a Christian monastery. This area is between the center of Baghdad and the town of Kadimiya - a distance of about 10 km. Baratha, is the name of the founder of the monastery. In the Assyrian language it means "the son of the wonders" and in Arabic "soft and red ground". Several prophets reportedly honored the place by praying there ; among them were Abraham and Daniel "of Kafal" whose tomb is in Kafal, an Iraqi city south of Babel and 160 km south of Baghdad.

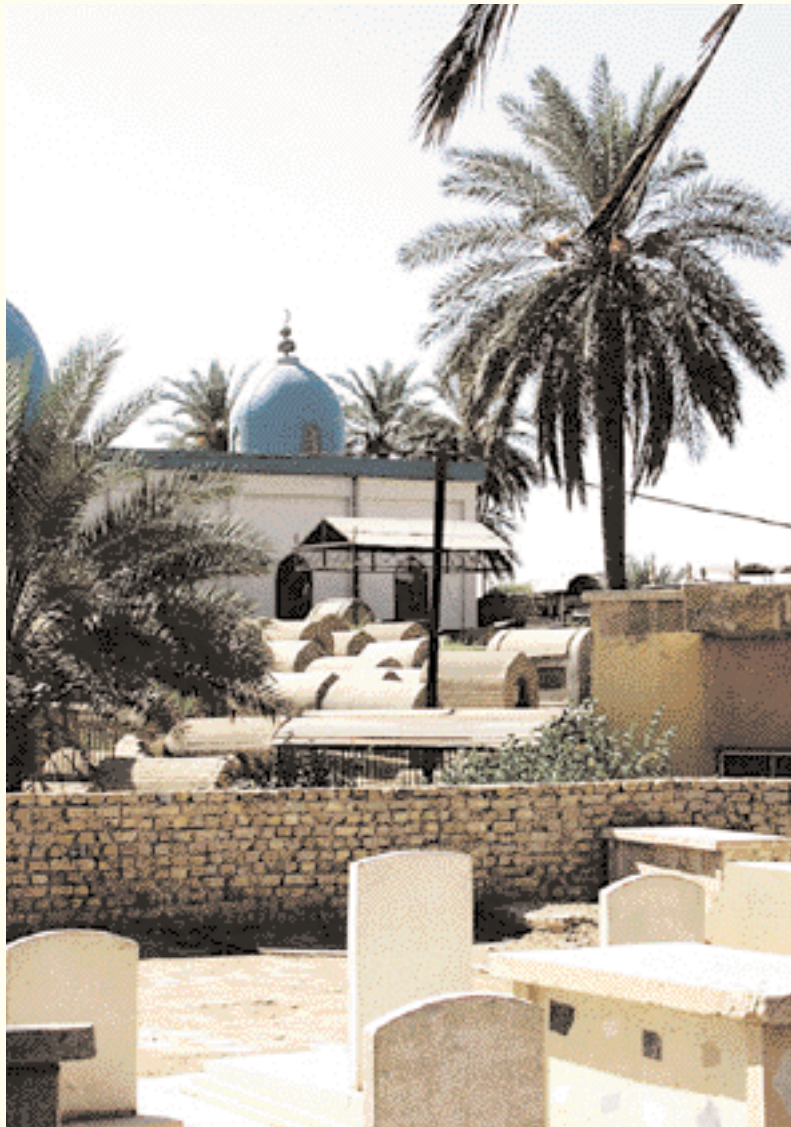
### Baratha during the Islamic period

During the Islamic period, the Khalife Al Imam Ali (God Blesses Him) prayed at Baratha. Religious sources tell

us that on his return from the Battle of the River against the Kharijites, Imam Ali passed through Baghdad and stayed at a certain place. When

he asked about it he was told that it is ground of the sea.. His reply was: "It is a waste land, turn to the south and veer to the right".

by the Abbasids, in particular during the reign of the Commander of Princes in Baghdad "Bejcom El Makani" who ➤



As he traveled in this direction , he saw a priest, Habab, in his monastery and said to him: "O Priest, can I land here? ". The priest answered: "You do not land with your army". "Why? ", he asked? The priest said: "Only a prophet or his envoy, can land here with his army to fight in the name of God".

A discussion between the two men followed. The priest became acquainted with the person of the Khalife Ali and said : "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet, and I swear that I found in the Bible your description". The Khalife then asked him to transform this monastery into a mosque. This priest built the mosque and joined Imam Ali in Kufa where he remained until the martyrdom of Imam Ali in 40 A.H. (660 A.D. approximately).

After that Habab, the former priest, returned to the mosque of Baratha which was renovated several times



The white stone of Baratha.

حجارة براكا البيضاء.



**The white stone has beautiful engravings dating back to pre-Islamic times and recounting the history of the mosque. The names of the Prophet Mohammed, his daughter Fatema, and the 12 Imams of the Shii are engraved on this old, invaluable stone.**

ordered the rebuilding and extension of the mosque, put a wall around it and decorated it with the name of Khalife Ar-Radi Billah.

Today there is a large mosque with two minarets built in 1375 A. H., in Baratha. It has an old library, a room reserved for prayer and a large esplanade. Development plans include further construction and renovations at a cost of \$1,139,550.

A tour of the mosque is a journey into the past where the white stone, the well and the black stone tell their own stories:

### The white stone or the stone of Baratha

The white stone has beautiful engravings dating back to pre-Islamic times and recounting the history of the mosque. The names of the Prophet Mohammed, his daughter Fatema, and the 12 Imams of the Shii are engraved on this old, invaluable stone.

### The Well of Ali Ibn Abi Taleb

Historical accounts indicate that Imam Ali

(God Bless Him) asked the priest Habab in Baratha: "Where do you drink from?". He answered: "Commander of the Believers, one finds only non-drinkable water in each well which we dig". The Imam told him: "Dig a well here!". He dug there but was confronted with a solid rock no one could remove, so the Commander of Believers removed it and unearth a spring. Then, he told his followers: "Dig 17 arms lengths (the arm length is 79,5 cm)". After digging, they found a white rock. The Commander of Believers took this stone, made his prayer on it and remained in the place for four days. Today the well is surrounded by a glass dome to preserve it. The water is transported by a pipe for visitors to drink or make their ablutions.

### The stone with power to make the dumb speak

A black stone, known as the stone which makes the dumb speak, is located in front of the well around which visitors often assemble. It carries the trace of the stones of the old area where the mosque of

Baratha is located. Throughout the centuries people have believed in the curative powers of this stone; they pour water into its cracks and give it to dumb children to drink so their speech can be restored. One often hears the women asking their children to say: "You that make people speak make me speak!"; and they repeat that several times.

In addition to its famous mosque, the area of Baratha includes a tomb of the prophet Jushau, a follower of Moses, as stated in the Quran. There is also a cemetery where Baghdadis bury their children. The cemetery has expanded in a chaotic way and will be included in current development plans.

Baratha has finally been accorded the importance it deserves. Friday prayers are held regularly at the mosque which is visited by the locals and foreigners. It will preserve its holiness for the Moslems and the followers of other divine religions. The monastery which became a mosque provides one of the best examples of the convergence of civilizations which will overcome the conflicts of faiths. ■