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HST100
Primary Source Assignment #7: Baghdad and Venice

Baghdad is described late in the 9th century, and Venice in 1496. This is a time difference of about 500 years. However, the cities did both exist at the same time before the expansion of the Mongol empire.

Both cities were trade cities that traded goods from all over the known world. Both cities had complex social structures with elites, scholars, artisans, and religious teachers. The societies of Venice and Baghdad where both tolerant of other religions and foreigners.

Baghdad was on the Euphrates and the Tigris, putting it on the crossing point of trade routes between east and west. The trade between Europe and the middle east with China and India

Venice positioned itself to control the sea trade from the middle east and ultimately as far as China and India. It set itself with colonies and trading posts to access both the land routes like the silk road and the sea routes coming through the Persian Gulf. The Gulf route proved very important at later stages when the Mongol empire collapsed, and trading posts in China and Persia were lost.

Both Venice and Baghdad, where new cities at the time. Baghdad said to have been designed by the divine inspiration of the Caliph. Baghdad was a city of spectacular planning and engineering. A round city with four districts. Each with markets. Venice came to be ingenuous more out of necessity. It came to be where it was because the islands in the lagoon presented safety to outcasts during the unstable period after the fall of Rome. Yet it came to be a beautiful and functional city of canals. We are fortunate that the beauty of Venice survives to this day, unlike Baghdad.

Baghdad had walls and four grand gates that controlled entry to the city. Venice was protected by the sea. When not many forces maintained a seagoing fleet, this was a great advantage to Venice. The Venetian fleet of galleys excelled at sea battle, and this ensured the safety of the city.

Venice was in a predominantly Christian territory with significant exposure to the pilgrims and crusades. Yet it did support smaller and vibrant Jewish and Muslim communities—many foreigners in general. Baghdad had become the center of the Islamic world and Islamic scholars

and the seat of the caliphate. The calif being considered the successor of Mohamed. Baghdad was tolerant of foreigners and their religions too.

Baghdad was surrounded by farms and produced plentiful agricultural goods. Venice was wholly dependent on imports for such as it was built on islands in a lagoon. Venice created a vibrant economy based on trade and craftsmanship without holding significant land or agricultural production.

In Venice, we find that there was a lack of a peasant class and not much of a distinction between nobility and the craftsman and mercantile class. Not to say there was no class separation as the ruling noble families indeed controlled the city. Baghdad shows many levels of class, the highest being the large central palace of the Caliph.

I would choose if it were possible to travel through time to visit 9th century Baghdad. Simply because Venice's grandeur and traditions have survived, and I am free to see it at any time. Unfortunately, the majesty of Bagdad is lost to history. Not only ravaged by the Mongols but subjected to many modern wars.

Finally, I would like to ask about the exact origin of the text "In *Praise of the City of Venice"* and its author Marin Samuda. It seems like he is somewhat biased in the origins of the city and the type of liberty people enjoyed. Although being a republic, Venice is a far shot from the roman republics or our modern Republics. How free where Venetians really and how much of it depended on a good birth.