

A MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC CITY: CASE OF CORDOBA*

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ABSTRACT

From Turkestan to Andalusia Spain, Medieval Islamic cities geographically occupied a wide area, and thus they had left their mark on the medieval era. Being one of these Islamic cities, Cordoba was seized by the Arabs in 711 and the first urbanization activities began upon moving the government centre from Seville to Cordoba. Later on, as the capital city of Andalusia Umayyad Dynasty, Cordoba became one of the most crucial cities of Spain in terms of science, art and trade. In this study, stating the features of medieval Western and Islamic cities, initially, the geographic, politic, economic and philosophic bases that took part in the establishment of the cities will be discussed and a specific focus will be made upon Cordoba city. Afterwards, information about the history, city layout and structure, city administration, socio-economic structure and cultural formation of Cordoba will be presented. This study reveals that Renaissance which is the main output of the European urbanization in medieval era cannot be considered apart from the administrative, socio-economic, cultural and architectural features of the Islamic cities within the context of Ibn Haldun's thoughts.

Keywords: Medieval Islamic City, Medieval Western City, Cordoba, Ibn Haldun

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history, human communities that live together have emerged as villages, towns and cities. The most significant differences between the cities and the rural residential areas are the social structure which is completely organized according to division of labour, economic structure depending on production surplus and the trade, dense population in the residential areas (Öztürk, 2009: 628-629). In the emergence of the cities; trade was highly crucial since it provided opportunities for the formation of the market and interaction with the other civilizations and the diversification and the increment of the products and services (Karatepe, 2005: 269). According to Pirenne, the urban life cannot be developed independently from trade and industry in any civilization (Pirenne, 1990: 98). With the development of commercial life, the changes in the socio-economic structure generated different behaviour, thinking and lifestyle. This common heritage which has been cultivated and transferred from generation to generation influenced the physical structure of the city such as squares, public and civil buildings, residential and commercial areas which was the basis of urban culture (Karatepe, 2005: 270-271).

Ibn Haldun's, who is regarded as one of the pioneering political geographers and philosophers of the middle age, assessments are overwhelmingly functional to understand the concept of city, urbanization and civilization. Living in the middle age, Ibn Haldun's trips and observations in the great Islamic cities on the Mediterranean basin such as Fez and Cordoba, which had the most advanced civilization of that period played fundamental role in the accuracy of his perspective and the evaluations. According to Ibn Haldun, diversity of human communities is formed according to their source of income. Similarly, the mode of production of human communities forms a criterion in order to comprehend the residential style and the civilizations of the communities (Ibn Haldun, 1990: 302).

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIEVAL CITY

Medieval cities are usually raised above the existing structure of the ancient cities. In these cities, security and order provided by military and civil bureaucracy, in addition to developed commercial activities, led to the emergence of various crafts, production and markets which the goods were exported to other cities. Therefore, these cities have become a significant centre for economic activity. In the origin of this change, the capture of the all Mediterranean areas by Muslims and then their commercial relations with Western Europe and the socioeconomic and cultural interaction were created by the relationship. The rising commercial activities with the Islamic cities led to the abolition of Church's supremacy over Italian port cities and this event made a great contribution to the revival of European cities again (Karatepe, 2005: 272). On the management of the new merchant class, depending on increasing trade and cultural interaction, the socio-political pyramid containing an absolute hierarchy of the agricultural community on the commercial cities of Medieval Europe started to break and a new social structure based on market economy and a relatively laic order began to emerge.

When considering the developments and changes in urbanization and the emergence of the medieval cities, it has been suggested that these developments and changes have different features in Europe and the Islamic world. Even Henri Pirenne reveals that the urban life was not developed regardless of the trade and technology; on the other hand, he claims that commercial and economic changes in the medieval cities created a conflict that have not seen any period in the history between rural areas and the cities (Pirenne, 1990: 103-104). The independence from the authority of church and feudal domination of the urban bourgeoisie that are the most fundamental elements stand out in Pirenne's assessment of the medieval city

excludes the Islamic cities and the Islamic civilization that was the highest point of civilization in that period. With these statements, Pirenne tried to put forward that Western world created a new urbanization process independently from the East that bred Renaissance. In the same manner, Weber, comparing to the urbanization process of the Eastern and Western world, claims that medieval Western cities had been developed as independent entities from central authority under the leadership of the bourgeois. But independent city phenomenon could not be seen in medieval Islamic cities (Weber, 1968: 83).

According to Öztürk; civilization that arises from the nature of humanity's basic needs cannot be arrogated to any race or religion. At this point, people who live in similar natural and physical conditions show similar behaviour and establish similar institutions. In this context, it is irrelevant to see the grooming institution as Byzantine, Christian and Turkish creation in the classical period in which there was no development of monetary economy (Öztürk, 2009: 632).

Ortaylı claims that discrimination between the medieval western city and the Islamic city is an unnecessary effort as long as a different situation cannot be seen from any medieval city when regarding the city structure of the Islamic Era, the administrative institutions, economic activities and socio-economic organizations. Like all communities in the settled life, Islamic city can be seen as an economic centre depending on production surplus. By this way, city administration controls the surroundings for the security of the common market by collecting military, religious and administrative functions. Ortaylı argues that there is no difference in the context of economic and administrative institutions and the colour of Islam in the context of cultural and its social structure should not be ignored (Ortaylı, 2007: 70-71).

3. FEATURES OF THE MEDIEVAL CITY

Medieval city has its own socio-economic structure which was strengthened with the development of commercial life and enabled by traders called bourgeois. At this point, especially in the Western cities, bourgeois became a dominant figure in the administrative field while they were organizing the economy in terms of its own profits (Bakır ve Ülgen, 2009: 132). The urban bourgeoisie began to establish a new political and administrative order that would be the basis of consumption society and based on competition by breaking down socio-economic, political and administrative structures and institutions of the traditional agricultural society. The trade was the form of the city's lifeblood and naturally as a result of that it was supposed to protect the merchants and their property. With this purpose, the castle walls surrounding the city were built which was one of most the important aspects of the medieval cities, even the walls precisely separated the urban and rural areas from each other (Bakır ve Ülgen: 2009: 132-136).

Another feature of the Medieval city was their location on the trade routes. Considering that the trade was the most significant factor in the revival of the medieval cities; the cities were emerged as natural trade routes, the rivers and the harbour cities (Bakır ve Ülgen, 2009: 133). The other feature of the Medieval city was that they were taking on the role of the cultural centre of the era. In this period, with the active use of the sea as well as inter-city trade opened the way of the cultural interaction with the transfer of technologies and it contributed to the occurrence of the high qualified and entrepreneur intellectual class in the cities (Goff, 2006: 24). One of the common features of the Medieval city was that the cities needed to be established and developed on the productive land around in order to feed the population. While increasing the agricultural production, the migrations from rural to urban has begun, therefore, the city has been transformed into a new society within a different social structure in the city (Bakır ve Ülgen: 2009: 136). Lastly, medieval city shaped a dense

settlement and structuring around the religious, administrative and commercial centres due to its protected and privileged position. Taking place in a limited area of the city has conducted to the emergence of the art of Gothic architecture which initiates the building of high-rise buildings and aesthetic especially in the West (Bakır ve Ülgen, 2009: 130-139). In parallel to West, religious temples and administrative buildings located in the cities in the Islamic world showed a certain aesthetic. The city of Cordoba and Al-Hamra Palace Complex can be shown as a best example of aesthetic mentality and durability and the using of the quality materials on the buildings of the city.

3.1. Features of the Medieval Islamic City

In terms of general structural features and the emergence of cities in the middle age, no difference can be seen between Western and Islamic cities. Revealing the systematic method and relating to the modes of production for urbanization by Ibn Haldun obviously put forth that there is no structural differences between the cities. Ibn Haldun implies that the most significant elements in the establishment of a city should be defence and security (Ibn Haldun, 1990: 234). Secondly, Ibn Haldun says that a city needs to have a good transport network. At this point, cities should be established on trade routes and seaside or the edges of large rivers which the goods can be transported more easily (Ibn Haldun, 1990: 238). According to Ibn Haldun, the cities should be established near fertile lands in order to provide agricultural products, because the inhabitants of the city are not laboured in agricultural production. Ibn Haldun makes reference to the economic division of labour and specialization in the city in his assessment of the economic production. According to Ibn Haldun's thought about social classification, there are variety of social classes such as merchants, craftsmen, scientists and military (Ibn Haldun, 1990: 368).

The city of life prepares the suitable condition for human intellectual improvement. The development of civilized life dispatches the people engaging with mental and intellectual knowledge. Thus, learning and spreading of medical knowledge should be supported in addition to books reproduction, bookbinding, writing and stationery (Ibn Haldun, 1990: 370). Ibn Haldun indicates that the structure of the city should have a certain aesthetic value. According to him, the buildings in the cities are made as the product of a particular architectural aesthetics with the high, sturdy and high quality materials (Ibn Haldun, 1990: 373). As stated by Ibn Haldun, another important factor in the emergence of the city is an administrative authority responsible for the layout, reconstruction and the order of the city. In order to have a socio-economic stability in the cities, judicial and administrative authority is indispensable (Ibn Haldun, 1990: 117).

Despite the decline of European cities in case of their significance on the 9th, 10th and 11th century, the population of Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus and Cordoba increased dramatically. Therefore, this period has been called the "Islamic period in Urbanization" (Karatepe, 2005: 274). By ignoring the contribution to the urbanization of Islam, it would be wrong that the urbanization movement which became a centre of production and trade in middle age and constituted the infrastructure of the industrial era connecting solely to Western culture. Although there are no fundamental structural differences between the Islamic cities and the medieval western cities, there are certain differences as a reflection of social, religious and administrative fields.

One of the most important differences is that the local government in the Islamic cities is a part of the central political power. As in the West, the privileges of administrative, legal and autonomy are not granted to the cities. As a part of the overall administrative system, Islamic cities did not make any contribution to democratization in general (Karatepe, 2005:

274). However, it is difficult to claim that the merchant class in the city is totally disconnected from administration. Indeed, it has always been a conflict between public (except from military class and crafts) and the administrators with absolute power in social and economic fields (İnalçık, 2005: 182).

In the administration of the Islamic cities as a part of the central political power, the Kadi was the most important administrator of the city who was responsible for implementing the Islam and Sharia. Kadi, had an autonomous position as the representative of the city's community, although he was appointed by the central government. The Kadi was autonomous and independent in controlling social life as a representative of the Islam community and he was responsible for the rights of Islam community (İnalçık, 2005: 178-179). Under the rule of Kadi, the Muhtasib, executed the order of commercial and social life in the city, was also one of the main features of the city of Islam (Akyüz, 2005: 244).

The formation and the structure of the Islamic cities depend on the interaction of the individuals, family and the community. In many city plans with the Islamic models, a closed geometric model is applied. City structure which had a central space was surrounded by smaller centre sites in different geometric shapes or as a tetragonal or hexagonal and that these small centres are comprised of smaller individual cells although some parts seem irregular (Goş, 2005: 324). The city plans and the structures which reflected the manifestation of Islamic faith can be likened to the honeycombs. In the form of Islamic architectural and Islamic city structure, the central hierarchy with the specific site hierarchy was seen. In the context of the site hierarchy, the dwellings which had walls and courtyard around constituted the special places closed to the outside within the framework of family privacy. The semi-private space was the street opening to the house in front of the gates and the yards. The public space was the square next to the mosque and the market. The streets between the houses which became later blind alley were often closed. The concept of the Islamic family privacy brought with the separation of the residential and commercial space as the doors, arches, roads, dead-end streets or public places. The hierarchy of centres refers to the presence of a main centre which contained all the most important or the most intense or the most specialized activities (Goş, 2005: 329-330). In the light of these data, another significant difference of the Islamic city was that the central was fictionalized as the mosque in the sense of physical and spiritual. At this point, the mosque did not only cover the spiritual area as in Christianity, but also the mosque was regarded as a natural part and the heart of the city in the point of financial and moral section of the Islamic city (Yıldız, 2011: 201). The mosque was undertaken at various social functions with the schools, libraries and the public meeting place in addition to its religious functions.

One of the other features of the Islamic city was the separation of residential and commercial areas in city planning. Residential and commercial areas were separated by dead-end roads, streets, roads, arches and doors. Thus, within the framework of the concept of family privacy, the tripartite structure emerged on the establishment of the Islamic city which consisted of public, semi-public and private spaces (Goş, 2005: 335). On the semi-public area of trade zone, religious identity did not interfere with daily life, Muslims and non-Muslims were mixed together (İnalçık, 2005: 175).

The Islamic architecture in the cities can be considered as three major types; religious, military and civil architecture. Religious architecture emerged with the domes, minarets, columns and arches. The important feature of the gothic architecture style which dominated on the medieval Christian cities was acuteness. In Gothic architecture, while striped domes were used instead of the large and widespread domes which were seen in Islamic architecture widely, intersecting pointed arches were preferred instead of the round arches. Such as the

building of Islamic minarets, the issue about the Christian religious buildings was the high structures and the presence of towers on the roof in order to evoke the feeling of greatness and glory. Military architecture emerged with the surrounding the cities by strong walls and opening outwards by specific doors. Umayyad ribats and Ottoman derbents were foremost samples of this architecture. Ribats were strong buildings consisting of rooms, warehouses, stables, watch and observation towers, mosques, baths and the other necessary organizations and surrounded by a defensive wall (Baltacı, 2005: 87). The residence of civil architecture was constructed as garden buildings in which had water wells with the one or two-storey courtyard (Baltacı, 2005: 87). The houses were inward-oriented and there were overhangs on the windows covered wooden crates while generally clustered according to family structure (Goş, 2005: 336).

4. MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC CITY: CORDOBA

4.1. History of Cordoba

In pre-Islamic period, Cordoba was an important political centre because of its geostrategic condition opened a new page in its history with being captured by Umayyad Arabic in 711. Abd al-Rahman El-Takati who was the fifth governor of the Umayyad Dynasty in Damascus carried government centre from Seville (İşbiliyye) to Cordoba in 716. Thus, Cordoba became one of four centres during the management of the early Andalusia Umayyad (Hillenbrand, 1994: 112-113). With the moving of the central government, the first urban studies were started in Cordoba. In addition to city public works, the population of the city increased and the southern districts of the city were established as the new settlements (Akyüz, 2005: 238-239). Cordoba's spectacular rising started with Abd al-Rahman I Ed-Dahli who established the Andalusia Umayyad Empire by making Cordoba as a capital city in 756 (Hillenbrand, 1994: 112-113). Starting from this date, Cordoba became one of the most important culture, art, science and commerce centres of Europe in the period up to 10th century.

4.2. City Layout and Structure

Although the ancient Cordoba had a vast area, having Kuadalkivir River was a great chance for Cordoba city for defence. At the same time, river accessing to the city centre was the main factor that led to the development of commercial life because of arranging the ship's transportation. On the other hand, fertile land and mineral deposits that were around riverside and the city were factors which increased the city's geostrategic importance (Hildenbrand, 1994: 113-115). Urbanism requirements of the period played a vital role in being chosen Cordoba city as capital during the period of the Andalusia Umayyad Empire. Cordoba, showed suitability to both Medieval urban structure in Europe and Ibn Haldun's suggestions for city planning, was established near the riverside which facilitated the trade and the security of the city.

One of the most important characteristics of the medieval towns was the surrounding of city by ramparts so as to maintain the safety of bazaars and centre of the city. As in the case of Cordoba, the old Roman wall was expanded and strengthened to ensure the city's security. After the reconstruction, the old Roman Bridge that linked to the castle was extended and became an entrance to city centre Kantaratül-valley (Karlığa, 2005: 254). Hence, Cordoba became a cultural, commercial and industrial centre. Abd al-Rahman I further developed the architecture Cordoba "Supreme Mosque" which was the heart of the growing city with taking model of Emeviye Mosque in Damascus. Mosques that were the nature of the heart of Islam were not only places of worship, but also courts were operating in a part of mosque like

Cordoba Supreme Mosque. All education operations were carried out from primary school in complex of buildings adjacent to mosques.

Around the mosques, inns including shops located on highways or streets where were each occupational group partitioned separately. While commercial inns were two storeys in Cordoba, the lower floors were as shop, the upper floors were allocated for the accommodation of traders (Bal, 2008: 61-62). Neighbourhoods were located around the centre of the walled city. Especially, there were walls around neighbourhoods inhabited by Arabs in Cordoba (Akyüz, 2005: 239). Houses in Cordoba had exactly the features of houses in Islamic city. The facades of the houses were not pompous and the windows existing in limited numbers had cage to watch family members outside and to protect the privacy (Bal, 2008: 66).

The administrative and management centre of the city was transferred by Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) to Medinetüz-Zahra where was completed in 945, had a safer location, as a result of increasing of the city's population rapidly and the revolt of the Spanish Muslims. The famous Islamic traveler Al-Idrisi said that Medinetüz-Zahra was composed of three parts extending to the top and suggests that the bottom of upward city falls on the roofs of the middle city and also this fell on the roofs of the bottom city (Sinemoğlu, 1987: 554-555). Cordoba, which transformed into a commercial and cultural centre in the 10th century had an advanced civilization when it is compared with European cities of the period. While Paris had the mud on the streets and alleys, Cordoba had stone paths stretching for miles. Likewise, while there was not any street lighting in any city in Europe, the street lighting lamps were used at every home's outside door in Cordoba (Hitti, 1980: 832).

4.3. City Administration

Unlike Western cities, urban administration was composed of judges and supervisors who were appointed by the central government. At the same time, issues related to the development and public works of the city were different from Western cities. In line with Islamic features, earnings that were gained by the central administration spent largely to the development of the country and for socio-economic charities again by the central administration in the Andalusia Umayyad Empire (Akyüz, 2005: 242-243). On the occasion of the capital of Cordoba, the judge of the judges as Kadiyyül-Kudat was appointed by the Sultan himself and responsible for Cordoba's legal and administrative affairs. Another special judge was called Sahibül-Mezalim had power to investigate and made a decision about the complaints of the public servants (Hitti, 1980: 833-834).

4.4. Commerce and Industry in Cordoba

Cordoba was one of Europe's most important industrial centres in the 10th and 11th centuries especially on textile fabrics, leather industry and iron working crafts with iron ores. There were about 13,000 workers working in wool and silk fabric textile industry. The most important industry in Cordoba was tanning (Yıldız, 1987: 537). The products produced in cities, were sold as in city markets and exported from Seville harbour being formed by the Andalusia Umayyad State with trade chain reaching to Egypt, Istanbul, India and Central Asia countries. One of the most important income sources of the state was taxations in import and export (Yıldız, 1987: 538-539).

Another reason of developing trade in Cordoba and the Andalusia was development of regular and reliable postal service between the cities and being operated. Likewise, the monetary system consisting the dinar in Andalusia (gold coins), the dirhem (silver money) and fals (copper coins) was created and this monetary system was accepted and applied in the

Christian kingdoms in the north of Spain during four centuries (Hitti, 1980: 838). Because of the reasons such as the monetary system, quality and production for export, links to commercial centres, there were around 80,000 shops in this period of Cordoba (Yıldız, 1987: 548).

4.5. Education, Culture, Science and Art Centre

At the time of the Umayyad, Andalusia state provided political and administrative unity, Cordoba was the most important science, culture and art centre of Europe. Real splendour of this era could be seen in the developments being achieved in the science, culture and art fields rather than political space. Cordoba University, which was founded by Abd al-Rahman III, was the biggest university of the medieval period, attracted students from both the Christian world and the Muslim world to itself. In this period, even there were a complete ignorance within Western Europe; the rate of literacy was very high in Cordoba and Andalusia cities (Bal, 2008: 68). Cordoba palace library that was founded at the time of Abd al-Rahman II, was one of the richest libraries of the Middle Age. Libraries that were established by each sultan were combined at the time of Hakem II and emerged a giant 600,000-volumes library (Yıldız, 1987: 483). In this era when there was a complete ignorance in Europe, Andalusia and its capital Cordoba were at the highest level in many fields such as religious as well as history, geography, philosophy, law, mathematics and medicine. Cordoba and the Andalusia's knowledge and civilization created a principle for Europe's awakening and Renaissance thanks to transferring to Europe through both the Christian kingdoms of Spain and commerce.

5. CONCLUSION

A society structure that had never seen before in any community occurred in Andalusia. In society; Arabs, Berbers, Spaniards who lived together brought an unexampled superiority and wealth to Islamic culture in Spain. This multicultural structure led to a great improvement in all areas of architecture, scientific, philosophical and the art in a short period. These cultural wealth and scientific improvements reached to the Western European cities through Muslim merchant expeditions to Western European cities and relationships that were established by them. Philosophic works in the Islamic world, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, geography, history and music studies were transferred to their cities by European traders. Additionally, crafts such as advanced agricultural techniques being applied in Cordoba, textile weaving and silkworm rising, leather processing, iron and copper processing art, paper production from linen and cotton and bookbinding were moved to Western European cities through traders.

Being excluded Muslim culture and its contributions by Europe and the matter of occurring Renaissance entirely by European's own dynamics; it is still advocated as an opinion which is still valid today. Scholars such as Pirenne and Weber claim that there are serious differences in freedom, the city planning and economic structure between medieval Islamic cities and medieval Western European cities. In this context, it is expressed that Islamic cities are not independent from the central management and also there are no specific plans of Islamic cities. It is clear that the development of cities depended on the circumstances of the period and cities and cultures were affected by each other through trade. Thus, in accordance with needs of middle age, they were similar to each other by their main structural characteristics of the basic structural characteristics, planning and economic structure in both Islamic world and Europe.

The differences resulted from the religion and cultures were seen among medieval European and Islamic cities. To seize the bourgeois, the city government formed the basis of

the Renaissance in Western Europe. At this point, this autonomy that did not exist in Islamic cities and lacking citizen rights as well as continuing the understanding the servitude in the medieval age was criticized. In this regard, İnalçık verifies the management in Islamic cities are not independent from central government, but he claims that there was no despotic tyranny structure for people of the city. İnalçık, says that Kadi and other judges played a public representative role and they had independence from the central government as a person who had a duty to protect the public.

The allegations related to being unplanned of Islamic cities, were caused by the inability of gripping of Islam's privacy understanding by Western scholars. In medieval Islamic cities, there was a clear distinction between commercial and residential areas, as well as the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims through districts because of family privacy. Commercial and administrative areas, districts and the city centre were separated by gardens and green spaces. Indeed, metropolis was occurred with this city plan such as Baghdad, where the population reached to 2,000,000 and Cordoba that the population reached to 400.000 in the Middle Age. Particularly, while there were darkness and knee dip mud on the streets of Paris which was one of Western Europe's important cities in 10th and 11th centuries, Cordoba which was one of Islamic world's important centres was the most modern city of medieval Europe with the stone paths stretching for miles, green spaces and gardens, architectural, libraries (Hitti, 1980: 632).

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