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EDITED BY MARTIN CARVER AND JAN KLÁPŠTĚ
TWELFTH TO SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

The Archaeology of Medieval Europe

Edited by Martin Carver and Jan Klápště

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The Weberian legacy is present in some of the issues that have dominated the historiography of the Islamic city during most of the twentieth century. William and then Georges Marçais examined the cities of the Maghreb that were under French colonial rule (Marçais W. 1928, Marçais G 1945). Their studies, along with input from Brunschvig (1947), incorporating information from Muslim law, that of Sauvaget (1934 and 1941) on Syria and the synthesis of Von Grunebaum (1955), defined what has been called the “traditional concept” of the Muslim city, featuring a long-term continuity of use and character (see Fig 1 for a model). These inquiries, which mainly involved detailed descriptions of the madina (the trading and residential part of the town), must be placed in the context of colonialism. Attitudes changed as decolonisation took hold between 1945 and 1962, since from then on European scholars could hardly maintain a belief in the superiority of their own social, political and cultural system (Raymond 1995, 318).

From the middle of the twentieth century and up to end of the seventies, urban studies continued to develop a more critical, socioeconomic interpretation of the role of the medina and its changing history, and since the early eighties most of the literature has been permeated by the thinking of Edward Said, whose book Orientalism (1978) postulated that western interpretation was based on a number of insecure ethnocentric assumptions that had acquired scientific value by virtue of their repetition in print. The influence of Said is explicit in most of the voices of the new critical current such as Brown K (1976), Ilbert (1982), Djait (1986), Abu-
Lughod (1987), AlSayyad (1991) and the Japanese school (Haneda & Mihura 1995). The main thrust of the new critique is directed against the alleged immutability of the medina, exposing the city described in the colonial literature as one that was actually itself created in colonial times.

In Spain, modern investigation begins (as in so many historical fields) with the work of Leopoldo Torres Balbás (1968, 1971). He considered that the cities of al-Andalus were profoundly different from those of contemporary Christian Spain. They manifested a “uniform urban Islamic mould” that was “a consequence of a way of life” and they were “totally different to the Christian areas” (Torres 1968, 68, 92-93). Emphasis on the socio-economic and administrative aspects of the city was taken up in the work of Lévy-Provençal (1950) and Pedro Chalmeta (1973). In 1992 Basilio Pavón published a monograph with the same title as that of Torres Balbás and a content indebted to it, especially with regard to the overall themes treated.

But Pavón included a descriptive catalogue of 59 Hispano-Arabic cities plus 5 Luso-Arabic examples (Islamic-Portuguese), adding 35 more in his monumental 1999 treatise. In 1996 Ch. Mazzoli-Guintard published *Villes d’Al-Andalus*, a work based largely on Arabic sources but which also included some archaeological data, especially from the excavations of the abandoned towns such as Madinat al-Zahra’, Saltés, Siyāsà and Vascos.

Traditional studies of urbanism in al-Andalus drew principally on written sources and the surviving urban fabric in cities like Granada, Toledo and Córdoba. Early medieval archaeologists carried out some investigations at abandoned sites such as Madinat al-Zahra’, Medina Elvira or Bobastro during the first decades of the twentieth century, but their objectives were mainly artistic or historical and the results obtained were very modest. It is from the seventies that interest in medieval archaeology in general, and al-Andalus in particular begins, accelerating in the following decade thanks to the pace of rescue archaeology in modern cities with an Andalusian past, such as Córdoba, Seville, Granada, Toledo, Málaga, Almería, Murcia, Valencia, Zaragoza, Calatayud and Albarracín. Although some madinas and villages were depopulated or abandoned after the Castillian conquest, most settlements have survived as archaeological deposits captured in and under the Christian towns that succeeded them.

The urban planning of the Caliphate period is represented in the splendid courtly city of Madinat al-Zahra’, the abandoned town of Pechina which corresponds to the former Bayyana (Almería) and, of course, Córdoba. The eleventh and early twelfth centuries see the final phase of Vascos (Toledo) and
the recently unearthed urban complexes in Zaragoza (Fig 2). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries archaeological sequences have come to light in rescue excavations at Murcia, Valencia, Xativa, Denia, Orihuela, Elche, and Lorca, and area excavations have revealed parts of abandoned sites at Bofilla, l’Almisserá, Yecla, Calasparra and especially Siyása (Cieza) (Fig 3; and see Fig. 4.12).

The complexity of the topic and the great quantity of ongoing information coming from different disciplines, especially from archaeology and Arabic studies, mean that it is still difficult to construct an overall synthesis. This is why the work of the last few years has been mainly reported in the proceedings of scientific meetings. Some of these have dealt with the topic in a general way (AAVV 1991; 2001), whereas others have addressed specific topics, such as the origins of the Andalusian cities (AAVV. 1998), or the information inherent in legal sources (AAVV. 2000b). There is also a large number of articles and monographs dedicated to different localities, cities and villages of Andalusian origin. Some of these study the complete medieval landscape of the town and others a certain urban element (wall, baths, fort, etc.). Some works are based exclusively on written sources, others are fully archaeological, and some combine both types of sources. Further guidance to the bibliography will be found in our monographs on the urbanism of al-Andalus (Navarro and Jiménez 2007a, 30) and on the site of Siyása (Navarro and Jiménez 2007b, 194-199).

At present almost all experts accept that the medina was not an unchanging entity (see above), rejecting simultaneously the idea that the traditional examples that survived into the beginning of the twentieth century need resemble their medieval antecedents. However, we have as yet seen very little tangible evidence for the origin and development of the earliest cities and how they were transformed into what survives. A recent thesis proposed the elements, relationships and basic operational rules of urban morphogenesis and then applied them to the Islamic city (García-Bellido 1999). In 2003 we published a study on the Islamic city and its evolution, which took as its basis the idea that all Islamic cities are constantly changing, and tried to define the guidelines governing the formation of the urban fabric. In effect we proceeded in the opposite way from García-Bellido, beginning with the archaeological results and ar-
Fig 4

Archaeological plan of the city of Murcia in the 13th century, showing the town wall and the sites of excavations.

...guing for the general principles that should apply. The sources used were basically three: archaeological, ethnoarchaeological and textual, especially Islamic, and we focussed on two exceptional sites: the abandoned town of Siyása and the present city of Murcia (Fig 4) (Navarro and Jimenez 2007a).

The results of these studies show that urban agglomerations were initially much less dense within the city walls than they became in the later Andalusian era (Navarro & Jiménez 2007c). As the urban population grew, green areas disappeared, property was divided, houses acquired multiple storeys, encroached on streets and acquired jetties, and there was a proliferation of alleys and cul-de-sacs to gain access to properties behind. Religious forces were also at work. It was an obligation on all citizens to attend service on a Friday at the same congregational mosque, which meant that there was a regular meeting of all the believers living inside the walls and in the hinterland. This had a number of consequences for urban development. First, it attracted a concentration of commercial establishments around the mosque; second, it developed a network of streets joining the mosque with the gates through the town wall and with other principal routes; and, third, it encouraged the linear development of souks on both sides of the arteries so generated (see also Ch 11, pt4). These changes gave us the town that became characterized as ‘Islamic’, but the true nature of the earlier, less densely occupied, Islamic cities of the Middle Ages still remains obscure.

by Julio Navarro Palazón and Pedro Jiménez Castillo