Life in the Cities of Medieval Islam

HSTAFM 162
Week 5.1 (2/2)
What did a dīnār buy in Fāṭimid Egypt?

• In 1005 CE, 1 dīnār would buy 110 kilograms of grain. In famine years though, its purchasing power could go as low as 11 kg.

• Silk prices, which more stable than grain: 20 dīnārs / 6 kg of silk.
I. Andalusia

The civilization engendered in the Iberian Peninsula by the Muslims was unique to the region, with its own distinctive culture and achievements. Islamic Spain, also known as al-Andalus, was a region where Islam was strongly established and had a significant impact on the local population.

By the end of the 8th century, Muslim rule and influence for nearly 800 years had established a cultural and political landscape in the Iberian Peninsula that came under Muslim rule and was distinct and linked to the broader developments in the Middle East and North Africa. Among this tradition, which would exercise a great influence on the West, were reflected in the philosophical, theological, and literary heritage.

After the 1492 defeat of Granada, most of the Iberian Peninsula, including most of the Islamic territories, became Christian. However, the influence of Islam is evident in the architecture, art, and literature of the region.

The map illustrates the regions of Islamic Spain, the most outstanding cities, and the extent of the Muslim rule and control. The map also shows the Christian states and the Islamic kingdoms after 1031, highlighting the areas of historical importance and cultural significance.

The map includes key cities such as Granada, Seville, and Toledo, which were important centers of Muslim culture. It also shows the Christian states and the areas under Muslim control, providing a visual representation of the complex political landscape of Islamic Spain.
Chronology of Muslim Spain

- Muslim Conquest of Spain: 711 CE
- The Umayyad dynasty of Spain: 756–1032
- Reconquista part 1: 11th century
- Local Berber dynasties push back: 11–13th centuries
- Reconquista part 2: 13th century
- The fall of Granada: 1492
Spanish words derived from Arabic

- *aceite* “oil” from *az-zayt*
- *adobe* “clay brick” from *aṭ-ṭūba*
- *aduana* “customs” from *ad-dīwān*
- *álgebra* “algebra” from *al-jabr* “subtraction”
- *algodón* “cotton” from *al-quṭūn*
- *algoritmo* “algorithm” from al-Khwārizmī …

- (Wikipedia counts more than 600 words borrowed into Spanish from Arabic beginning with the letter *a*- alone).
“They delight in reading Arabic poems and stories; they study the doctrines of the Muslim theologians and philosophers not to refute them but rather to acquire an elegant and correct style. Where today can you find a layman who reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scripture?”

—Álvaro of Córdoba, mid-9th century
Ethnic Groups in al-Andalūs

- Mozárabe (*muta‘arrab*): Arabized Christians
- Sefardic Jews
- Muladí (*muwallad*, “born [here]”): Iberian converts to Islam
- Arabs: Syrians, etc.
- Berbers
- Mudéjar (*mudajjan*, “tamed”): Muslims under Christian rule
The Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba
Salon Rico, from Medina Azahara
Upper Hall, from Medina Azahara
II. Baghdad in the “Iranian Intermezzo”
The Buwayhids

- Buwayhid Dynasty founded by Iranian Zaydīs in 934 CE.
- In 945, Aḥmad ibn Būwayh conquers Iraq and establishes Baghdad as his capital.
- Caliphate maintained, while Buwayhid princes receive honorific titles from the Caliph.
- Eventually, Buwayhids claim the old Iranian title *Shāhanshāh* “king of kings.”
The Arts Under the Buwayhids

- Buwayhid vizier al-Ṣaḥib ibn ‘Abbād (938–995) serves as minister to Buwayhid prince Mu‘ayyad al-Dawla; cultivates a wide circle of 200+ scholars around him. Authors one of the most important early Arabic dictionaries (al-Muḥīṭ)
Poetry under the Buwayhids

- al-Mutannabī (915–965 CE), “he who would be prophet”—the leading panegyrist of his age.
- Highly sought after by the local rulers of his day, al-Mutannabī was employed in Syria, in Egypt, and ultimately in Buwayhid Baghdad.
Turks in the Military

• Already in the late ‘Abbasid period, caliphs had begun increasingly to rely upon enslaved soldiers (mamlūks) for military support.

• As the Buwayhid territories began to increase, great numbers of Turks were brought into the cavalry.

• Meanwhile, Persians too began to exert a kind of ethnic reaction against Arab hegemony, ultimately promoting literary production in Persian rather than Arabic (the so-called shu ‘ūbiya, roughly, “the people’s movement”).
The Later History of the Ismāʿīlīs
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The Siege of Alamūt 1213–4, Jāmiʿ al-Tavārīkh (14th c.)
III. Ghazna under Sultān Maḥmūd
Sulțān Maḥmūd

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Bilingual dirham/tanka struck in the name of Mahmud of Ghazni in Mahmudpur (Lahore) 419/1028 (private collection).
The homes that are the dwellings of today
Will sink beneath shower and sunshine
to decay
But storm and rain shall never mar
What I have built – the palace of my poetry.

— Firdawsī