

The Valor of

M E R C Y

Summoning the Strength of Compassion



Topic I
Cities of Light



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CORDOBA

Background

Córdoba is a city in a province of the same name, located in a southern region of Spain known as Andalusia. It was a significant Roman settlement before it was conquered by Umayyad Muslim forces in the year 711. This initiated 500 years of Muslim rule over the city, during which it became one of the world's leading centres of learning and culture. It was reconquered by Christian forces in 1236. Today, Córdoba continues to celebrate its rich heritage and has a thriving tourism industry; the region of Andalusia overall received an estimated 10.6 million international tourists in 2016. The city's historic centre is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

History

Córdoba emerged as a centre of trade after the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE). The Romans colonized it starting in 152 BCE and made it the capital of Hispania Ulterior (the same region that later became known as Andalusia). Over time the Romans lost control of Córdoba and by 600 CE it was controlled by the Visigoths, a group of nomadic Germanic tribes. The city was conquered by Umayyad (Muslim) forces in late 711; this took place under the overall leadership of the famous general Tariq ibn Ziyad. The earliest Muslim officials in the city left the existing infrastructure and culture as it was, making only small improvements where they could (e.g. restoring the old Roman bridge over the Guadalquivir River). It wasn't until 750 that the first major mosque in the city was established.

In that same year, the Abbasid Revolution occurred in Syria, in which the Umayyad dynasty was overthrown. One member of the Umayyad family, Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya, fled all the way to Córdoba to escape persecution. After overcoming many challenges, he was able to have himself recognized as a legitimate ruler. He became the first Emir of Córdoba and ruled from 756 to 788. His descendants ruled Andalusia with Córdoba as their capital until 1031. Under Umayyad rule the city reached the height of its prosperity and became a centre of learning, culture, and trade. Estimates of its population in this era range from 90,000 to 500,000 and even up to a million, making it the largest city in Europe after Constantinople. However, by the early 1100s Córdoba's was clearly in decline, mostly due to political instability. In 1236, it was conquered by the Christian forces of Ferdinand III of Castile. The city went into a prolonged period of decline after this (e.g. it had a population of only 40,000 in 1800) from which it only emerged from it in modern times.

Culture

Hrotsvitha, a famous German nun and poetess who lived in the 900s, described Córdoba at the time as *decus orbis*, "the jewel of the world". The Umayyad rulers of Córdoba understood the importance of being patrons of culture as a way to legitimize their rule. Emir Abd al-Rahman I bought half of the church dedicated to St. Vincent in 784 and established a mosque, which eventually became the famous Great Mosque of Córdoba. He also built the garden of al-Rusafa in the city, for which non-native species of plants from Syria (e.g. palm trees) were imported. Later on (in 936), Abd al-Rahman III established an even more elaborate project: an entire palace-city with its own spectacular garden, known as Madinat al-Zahra, built from scratch a few kilometres outside of Córdoba.

Córdoba was also known for its paved roads, fountains, pools, and even a zoo. Some of the popular sports were polo, archery, swimming, rowing, hunting, and falconry. Composing poetry and playing chess were two very popular hobbies. Córdoba was also famous as a centre of learning, known for its university and a library that held an estimated 400,000 volumes. Some of the scholars that lived and

or worked in the city include Ibn Hazm (poet, historian, and Islamic scholar), al-Qurtubi (scholar of hadith, tafsir, fiqh), Ibn Mada (pioneering linguist), Lubna al-Qurtubiyya (poetess and grammarian), Ibn Tufayl (arguably the first novelist in history), and Maimonides (a very influential Jewish scholar/philosopher). Scholars, poets, artists, cultural trendsetters, and many others were often drawn to Córdoba by the presence of others in their field of work and/or in hopes of gaining the patronage of the city's Umayyad rulers.

Notable Figures

Ziryab (790-852) was the ultimate cultural trendsetter. As a young and talented musician living in Baghdad, he became a favourite of the Abbasid ruler Harun al-Rashid; this earned him the jealousy of more senior entertainers, causing him to flee to Córdoba in 822 to seek other opportunities. Ziryab melded Persian and Hindu musical elements with local Andalusian ones; he also modified his 'ūd into a precursor of the Spanish guitar, opened a music school, and established the set of basic elements to be used in composing a nashīd. He also invented early forms of toothpaste and deodorant, as well as new hairstyles for men and possibly even a cosmetology school for women. He is also credited with the idea of a three-course meal (soup, main course and dessert) and serving drinks in crystal (i.e. glass), rather than metal, containers.

Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) was a philosopher, judge, physician and astronomer who was native to Córdoba. He is one of the most influential thinkers in both Islamic and Western history; in the West he is known as Averroes, and has been called the “grandfather” of Europe’s Renaissance because of the influence of his own philosophy and his famous commentaries on the works of Aristotle and Plato. His grandfather was the imam of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, and both his grandfather and father were judges in the city. He served as a judge of the Maliki school of law in Córdoba, and as a court physician. He believed strongly in the harmony of revelation and reason. His work as a philosopher influenced the leading Jewish (Maimonides) and Western (Thomas Aquinas) thinkers of the time, and “Averroism” became an entire subject that was taught in early European universities.



MALACCA

Background

Malacca (officially known as Malacca City) is a city in Malaysia. It was once a humble fishing village and is today a relatively quiet city about 150 km southeast of Kuala Lumpur. It is known today for its unique combination of Chinese-Malay, Portuguese, and Dutch architecture, but is most famous for being the capital of the most powerful Malay kingdom in history, the Malacca Sultanate (c. 1403-1511). It was at this time that the city flourished as a major centre of trade; a prominent theory about the origins of the name “Malacca” is that it comes from the Arabic *mal’aqat*, or “possession”, the implication being that this was a place to which everyone brought their goods to trade. The city’s prosperity in this period was also key to further the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.

History

Very little is known about Malacca before the 1400s except that it was a fishing village and a temporary stop for seafaring merchants traveling through the Indian Ocean. Malacca as a city was founded by Parameswara, a Hindu king of Singapura (modern-day Singapore) in the year 1403; this was the beginning of the Malacca Sultanate, although only about 100 people lived in the city at the time. Parameswara’s son and successor, Iskandar Shah (r. 1414-23), was very hospitable to Muslim merchants, and eventually married a Muslim princess and converted to Islam himself. Under the leadership of Iskandar Shah and his successors, Malacca became the most important port in the region and, according to the Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires who came to Malacca in 1507, the world. This was supported by the rise of the spice trade, which flowed through Malacca and other Muslim-controlled ports toward Europe. By the year 1500, over 100 tons of spices passed through Malacca on their way to Venice every year, and the population of Malacca had increased from 100 to an estimated 100,000 in just a century.

However, the same spice trade also became the cause of Malacca’s downfall. Tomé Pires wrote that whoever was in control of Malacca “shall have his hands on the throat of Venice”, using a metaphor to describe this Muslim port’s monopoly on the trade of spices that were in high demand in Europe. Many of the emerging European powers began to try to find their own, direct routes to the islands of Southeast Asia, where these spices came from. The Portuguese sailed around the southern tip of Africa for the first time in the 1480s, and soon enough they had crossed the Indian Ocean and reached Malacca for trade. Soon the superior Portuguese naval forces overwhelmed many of the Muslim ports in East Africa, Arabia, and South Asia. In 1511, the Portuguese leader Afonso de Albuquerque captured Malacca as well, ending the Malacca Sultanate. Although the city continued to serve as a port, it never reached the same prosperity that it enjoyed throughout the 15th century.

Culture

Malacca had a very vibrant culture in its golden age (c. 1403-1511). Being a centre of trade meant people of many different backgrounds travelled through it. It is recorded that a person in the city could hear up to 84 different languages being spoken. Most of the merchants were South Asians (especially Gujarati Muslims), Southeast Asians or Chinese, but others, such as the Portuguese, came from farther away. Some traders established small, permanent communities in Malacca, adding to the city’s diversity; this was the reason why many Hindu temples were built. This cosmopolitanism was the key to Malacca’s outstanding success as a centre of trade. The city itself was designed and administered with trade in mind; there were large underground warehouses built to safely store goods, shahbandars or the

bour masters” were assigned to oversee groups of trading nations as they arrived and did business, and the legal code focused on trade-related offences such as bribery.

Malacca also became the launchpad for the spread of the Malay language and of Islam in Southeast Asia. Some of Malacca’s sultans were very devout Muslims, especially Sultan Mansur Shah (r. 1459-77; see Notable Figures). The southern Philippines, Borneo (Brunei), and Java (Indonesia) are some of the places to which Islam arrived by way of Malacca; part of its legacy, therefore, are the more than 257,000,000+ Muslims that live in this region as of 2010.

Notable Figures

Zheng He

Zheng He (c. 1371-1435) was a Chinese navy admiral who was a very frequent visitor to Malacca. Incidentally, he was also one of the most famous Chinese Muslims in history. He visited Malacca on at least five separate voyages between 1405 and 1433. As someone who was both Chinese and Muslim, Zheng He was the perfect go-between for the sultans of Malacca and the powerful Ming emperor in China. His skills as a diplomat also helped to eliminate the threat that Malacca faced from Thai kingdoms in its early years. Today, he is known in Malacca as Cheng Ho, and has two guesthouses in the city named after him. Malacca is even home to the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum, which is dedicated entirely to him and was opened in 2005, on the 600th anniversary of the start of his first voyage.

Mansur Shah

Mansur Shah (r. 1459-77) was the sixth sultan of Malacca. The prosperity of the city arguably reached its peak during his reign. He significantly reduced taxes on trade, drawing more merchants to Malacca by doing so. He was a very devout Muslim, and spread Islam in Southeast Asia through a variety of means. These included his many interracial and interfaith marriages into Chinese and Southeast Asian royal families (the most famous of these was to the Chinese princess Hang Li Po of the Ming dynasty; Mansur encouraged his subjects to marry among non-Muslims as well); his military expansion of Malacca Sultanate to include, for example, Sumatra and Singapore; and the missions of Islamic scholars that he regularly sent out to Pisai, a nearby city-state, and possibly to other parts of the region. He also appointed the first qadi (Islamic chief judge) of Malacca, built the city’s first grand mosque, and made the five daily prayers obligatory for Muslims. Although not much is known about him, his rule was key to the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.



KASHGAR

Background

Kashgar is an ancient oasis city in somewhat of an intercultural zone between Central Asian and Chinese civilizations. It is currently the capital of Xinjiang, the largest province of China (though officially it is an “autonomous region”). For centuries this city was a major stop on the famous Silk Road that ran through Central Asia. Merchants from across Asia came here to trade, and even today the city’s Sunday Market is the largest in Asia (if not in the entire world), with an estimated daily attendance of 100,000 people. This serves as a testament to the city’s rich heritage, much of which has been cultivated by Muslims for more than a thousand years.

History

The recorded history of Kashgar dates back approximately 2,000 years. It was an important trading centre from the get-go, and the population was mostly Central Asian in terms of origin and ethnicity, Zoroastrian or Buddhist in faith, and ruled for much of this period by Chinese dynasties. By the 900s, Kashgar was ruled by the Karakhanids, a Turkic dynasty. One of the dynasty’s leaders, Satuq Bughra Khan (d. 955), embraced Islam in 934—he was one of the first Turkic leaders to do so—and became first known Muslim in Kashgar, which was his capital. It is recorded that many of the Turks (more precisely, “200,000 tents” of them) in Kashgar accepted Islam en masse in the year 960, though the reason for this is uncertain. However, other religions continued to flourish in Kashgar as well, and there were prolonged periods of ethnic and/or religious tensions; these tensions sometimes flared up, as they did just before the Mongol occupation of the city (in the 12th-14th centuries).

Kashgar flourished under the Mongol Empire because of the Pax Mongolica (“Mongol Peace”) which encouraged the trade and culture between previously disconnected parts of Asia through the Silk Road. One of the travelers who took advantage of this opportunity and visited Kashgar in about 1273 was Marco Polo. Islam also flourished during this time, especially after one of the Mongol rulers, Tuqhuq Timur Khan (d. 1363), embraced the faith. The establishment of the Id Gah Mosque in 1444 can be seen as the peak of this period of cultural revival; the mosque still stands today and is considered the largest mosque in China. Soon enough, Kashgar slipped into a long period of decline, especially as it became part of the “Great Game” for control of Asia played by the European powers (especially the British and Russians). However, this decline was relative; as the local culture of Kashgar (e.g. the Sunday Market) continued to go on as it always had. In 1949, Kashgar and the rest of East Turkestan were annexed by Chinese forces.

Culture

Because it was a crossroads of trade and culture for so long, one can expect Kashgar to have a very rich culture. Before the coming of Islam (and for a long time afterward, too), it was a strong centre of Buddhist culture and learning. Many leading Muslim scholars emerged from and worked in Kashgar or its immediate surrounding areas, including Yusuf Khass Hajib (d. 1085), a poet, statesman, and philosopher; Mahmud al-Kashgari (d. 1102), a famous lexicographer of the Turkic languages; and Fatimah bint Sa’d al-Khayr (d. 1204), one of the leading hadith scholars of her time. Many Sufi movements were also based in Kashgar, such as the Aq Taghliqs (“White Mountaineers”) and Qara Taghliqs (“Black Mountaineers”); the Naqshbandi Sufi tariqah also found a significant following in the city, particularly during and after the Mongol period.

Kashgar is associated with the Uyghur people, who were originally dedicated Buddhists but gradually embraced Islam to the point that, in the present day, they are the second-largest Muslim ethnic group in China (after the Hui Muslims). The Uyghur Muslims have a very distinctive culture that blends elements from both Central Asia and China; two of the main dishes in their cuisine, for example, are polu (steamed rice and vegetables), which comes from the Central Asian pilaf or pulao, and leghmen (noodles and stir-fry), which comes from the Chinese lamian. The layout of the modern city was set by a Muslim ruler named Abu Bakr, who ruled in the late 15th century. In the 16th century the literary and musical culture of Kashgar flourished, and the Uyghurs' mukharum epics are still sometimes read aloud to the tune of music today. The culture has been so well-preserved that historian George Michell has called Kashgar's Old City "the best-preserved example of a traditional Islamic city to be found anywhere in Central Asia".

Notable Figures

Afaq Khoja (1626-1694) was one of the most influential political and religious leaders in Kashgar's history. He was born in a Kumul, though his mother was from Kashgar and he moved there with his family at the age of 12. He was considered a descendant of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and came from a long line of Naqshbandi Sufi leaders. He became involved in a political-religious conflict against the Mongol rulers at the time, who were Muslim but implemented Mongol yasa law instead of the Islamic shari'ah. Khoja challenged this, for which he was expelled. He fled to Kashmir and later to Tibet. However, he found considerable support for his cause, even among non-Muslims; in 1680, he even got the Dalai Lama to order one of his followers to lead an army of 120,000 soldiers to help Afaq Khoja and his supporters, known as the White Mountaineers, against their adversaries. Despite some temporary victories, in the long run Afaq Khoja was unsuccessful and he died a violent death. However, his spiritual teachings captured many devoted followers, who built a decorated mausoleum in Kashgar in which he is buried. The mausoleum is still visited today, and Afaq Khoja continues to be celebrated not only for his efforts in Kashgar but also for spreading the message of Islam and Sufism deeper in the Chinese heartland.



SARAJEVO

Background

Sarajevo, the capital and largest city of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is sometimes referred to as the “Jerusalem of the Balkans” given its rich and diverse heritage. This is in spite of it being one of the youngest of our “cities of light”, as it was founded by the Ottomans only about 550 years ago. Nevertheless, Sarajevo has been the centre of attention in many historic events, most famously as the site of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary in 1914, which triggered the First World War. This and other unfortunate events have not outdone the resilience of the city, and it continues to be a thriving centre of a unique European Muslim culture.

History

Sarajevo was established in 1460 with a governor’s palace, a mosque, a bridge over the Miljacka River, public baths, a caravanserai, some residential houses, and shops. Only 20 years later, the settlement was attacked and much of it was burnt to the ground by Hungarian and Serbian forces. However, the Ottomans held onto the site, which was an ideal location from which to administer the parts of the Balkans that they had recently conquered. The first known use of the name “Sarajevo” is in a letter written in 1507. It coincides with the start of a 200-year period in which Sarajevo would become established as a city. Sarajevo became increasingly important because of the Ottomans’ need to launch campaigns and control the region from it. Many of the governors put effort into building the infrastructure of the city, such as the clock tower, built in the late 16th/early 17th century, which is still operational, is known to locals as “Little Ben”, and is thought to be the only public clock in the world that keeps lunar time. Another example is that of the complex built by Gazi Husrev Beg (see Notable Figures). The development of the city regularly slowed down due to many causes including wars, outbreaks of plague (1526-7) and cholera (1691), major fires (1644 and 1656), famines and earthquakes.

The real cause of difficulty for Sarajevo was the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire itself. As the Ottomans slowly lost their grip on the Balkans in the 18th-19th centuries, Sarajevo was left to deal with more natural disasters, poor economic conditions, rising religious and ethnic tensions, and by the time of the Congress of Berlin (1878), foreign occupation by Austria-Hungary. By the early 1900s, Sarajevo had already become the “Jerusalem of the Balkans” in the cultural sense, but politically it was in decline. It was in this context that events such as the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the uneasy creation of Yugoslavia in 1918, the Nazi occupation of the city in 1941-45, and the Bosnian War in 1992-95 kept Sarajevo in a continuously jarred state. However, even in the midst of these events Sarajevo was able to stand out as the only historically-Muslim city to host the Olympic Games, which it did in 1984.

Culture

When the Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi (who had a slight tendency to exaggerate) visited Sarajevo in 1660, he recorded that the city comprised 400 neighbourhoods, including 10 Christian and two Jewish, 17,000 houses, 77 mosques, numerous schools, 47 Sufi lodges, 110 public fountains, 700 wells, five public baths, 1,080 shops, an Orthodox church, a Catholic church, a synagogue—and that 6,000 loaves of bread are consumed daily. The numbers are not important on their own, but they indicate that Sarajevo at the time was a thriving cosmopolitan city. The literary culture of Sarajevo was also flourishing in the works of writers such as Mehmed Nergisi (d. 1635) and Hasan Qa’imi (d. 1690).

The most striking aspect of the culture of Sarajevo is its acceptance of religious diversity. It is considered

to be the only major European city to have a mosque, a Catholic church, an Orthodox church, and a synagogue in the same neighbourhood. Despite being founded and controlled by Muslims, in 1477 there were 103 Christian households in the city compared to only 42 Muslim households. Many of the Jews who were expelled from Spain in the Inquisition were resettled in Sarajevo's Cifuthana quarter, where they came to form a thriving community. Despite tensions flaring at times, the general attitude of inter-communal acceptance and support lasted even into the Second World War, for example, during which Muslims safeguarded the Jews' invaluable Sarajevo Haggadah and over 100 Bosniaks signed the Resolution of Sarajevo Muslims (1941), condemning the persecution of Serbs by the Nazis' local allies, the Ustaše.

Notable Figures

Gazi Huzrev Beg (1480-1541) was the governor of Ottoman-ruled Bosnia from 1521 until his death in 1541 (with a few short interruptions). Through his mother he was the grandson of Sultan Bayezid II; he was awarded his position by Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent due to his role in the sultan's campaign against Belgrade in 1521. Through his father he was an ethnic Bosnian. After becoming governor, he worked diligently to spread Islamic culture in Sarajevo and the surrounding region (especially in modern-day Croatia). The city developed into an important centre of culture and trade under his leadership. He is best remembered for establishing a complex which included a mosque, a seminary (medrese), and public charitable kitchen, an extensive library, a public bath, a marketplace, and a mausoleum which later served as his own tomb. Remarkably, the funding for this entire complex was set through a waqf (endowment) to ensure that it would be maintained long after the founder, and this waqf was active until the 20th century. The library in the complex has served as a very useful resource for historians due to the many archival documents it holds.

The following video is to be studied for the National tournament. The content in the video (in addition to the content in the packet) is exclusively for the National tournament.

[BBC: The Lost Libraries of Timbuktu](#)

