

IMPACT OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC CONQUESTS ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MEDINA

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The rise of Islam in the seventh century led to fundamental changes in the Arabian Peninsula in general and in Medina in particular, since in Medina both a community and a state were created. Although the *Riddah* (apostasy or renunciation from the authority of Medina) uprisings threatened both the new faith and the changes produced by it, the transformation of the Arab tribes under a single central government and Islam was nevertheless achieved throughout almost all the Arabian Peninsula within a year of the death of the Prophet. This step paved the way for the early Islamic Conquests, during which the Muslim armies extended the new faith to the former Persian and Byzantine territories. Consequently, new areas with different peoples of different cultural background and heritage were brought under the Islamic state. This in its turn brought in another set of influences.

The conquests paved the way for Medinans to gain closer contact with relatively "civilized" societies, "civilized" compared with traditional Arabian society. This occurred both through their participation in the conquests themselves (as fighters, army leaders, administrators) and their migration to the garrison towns (*amsār*) of the occupied lands, but also through their intermixing with the foreigners who entered Medina as a result of the Conquests, such as *mawālī* (clients),¹ slaves, prisoners of war, and voluntary immigrants. As a result, the Medinan community became a composite of various ethnic groups.

¹ A client, in Arabic *mawlā*, is a person linked to another in a number of legal ways called *walā*: see Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, XV, 507-418; Crone, "Mawlā", EI2, VI, 874-82.

According to the circumstances of the conquests, the financial and economic institutions of the state were developed along with the resources of the Treasury. This in its turn led to the establishment of a payment system by the state which came to be known by the name of 'atā' (stipend). Trade and agriculture developed following these changes. In addition, a small minority of Medinans gradually became possessed of immense riches because of their commercial and agricultural enterprise.

The Conquests led to a change in the status of Medina as it became the centre of the Islamic state, the assembling place of the fighters, and the distribution centre of the 'atā'. Prisoners of war who belonged to different social classes in their homeland were sent to the caliph in Medina to be divided up. The distinct position of Medina at that time as a capital, base of the expansion, and centre for the distribution of 'atā' encouraged some people to migrate to it.

It is natural that these changes should have left their mark on the social structure of the city. Very few studies have tried to examine this topic, most such attempts are of a general nature or concentrate on the causes of the Conquests while a few focus on garrison towns. No comprehensive study has been attempted along these lines. The major concern of this paper is to examine and evaluate the impact of those changes on the social structure of Medina during the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs.

It is clear from historical sources that there was a steady increase in the size of the population from the time of 'Umar. It is common to read in the sources that the army commander sent the news of the victory and the spoils to Medina, or that someone brought the news of the conquest of a certain town, the amount of spoils, the number of the captives, and how they had been divided up.² This is evident in many reports, a few examples of which may be sufficient to illustrate this situation. Al-Balādhurī, for example, mentions that when Mu'twiyah sent to 'Umar 4,000 from the captives of Qaysariyyah, the latter gave orders that they be settled in al-Jurf. They then distributed them among the orphans of the *Anṣār*.³ The result of this

² Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 577; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, II, 395; Balādhurī, *Futūh*, 111.

³ Balādhurī, *Futūh*, 147.