

# Mecca and Medina Arab City-States or Arab Caravan-Cities?

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A number of cities in different parts of the modern Arab world have been involved in international trade from very early in human history. Saba' in Yemen and Taymâ' in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula are known as trading cities already in the second millennium B.C.<sup>1</sup> while many others are attested in later centuries. The sources available for an analysis of these cities are unfortunately few in number and we are unable to follow their history in any detail.

In the first centuries of the first millennium A.D. a number of caravan-cities were existing in different parts of the Middle East. Among these were Dura Europos and Palmyra in the Syrian desert (Browning [1979]; Starky & Gawlikowski [1985]); Petra in the Jordanian desert (Bourbon [1999]); Taymâ', Dûmat al-Djandal, Wâdî al-Qurâ, Tâ'if, 'Ukâz and Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula<sup>2</sup> as well as al-Hîra close to the Persian Gulf (*Encyclopaedia of Islam* [1971] III: 462f [Irfan Shahid]). Dura Europos lost its significance due to changed political relations between the two dominant empires of the Middle East, Petra and Palmyra were both conquered by the Roman Empire and al-Hîra became a kind of autonomous city in the Sasanid Empire.

Events in Mecca ended up the other way around. Mecca was out-manoeuvred by traders from the town itself who at a certain point were forced to settle in another city. As a result of this they transformed Medina into a competing caravan-city that finally was to replace it completely. Almost all the evidence we have pertaining to the history of the cities on the Arabian Peninsula concerns Mecca and Medina, but they were just two out of a whole string of caravan-cities.

Analysis of the sources relating to the conflict between Mecca and Medina in the beginning of the 7th century is faced with a serious problem. Modern scientific research has accepted and even interpolated the dichotomy of the later Arab-Muslim historical tradition dividing history into an age of *jâhilîya*, i.e. an

age of unbelief, on the one side and *al-'asr al-islâmî*, the age of Islam on the other.

We find the same dichotomy between pre and post in other historical settings as well, but the idea of dividing the history of the Arabian Peninsula into a pre-Islamic period to be followed by an Islamic one seriously violates our understanding of the social dynamics shaping both pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Arab history as far as the two cities are concerned. It would be futile to neglect Islam's immense importance for the history of mankind, but in our effort to understand specific shorter periods of history it is of great importance not to analyse history backwards by interpolating chronologically later phenomena into a context where they do not belong.

Mecca is defined in the Qur'ân as the religious centre for all Muslims.<sup>3</sup> Prior to the revelation of Sura 2.142-4 Muslims in Mecca faced the direction of Jerusalem when they conducted their daily prayers. We can analyse the content of the revelations in the Qur'ân as well as the interpretation worked out in the later Muslim tradition in our effort to explain why Mecca became the centre of Islam, but such an analysis will not explain why Mecca as a city with its own peculiar polity was developed in the first place.

This article is based on the view that a proper understanding of the historical dynamics in the Arabian Peninsula is precluded by an uncritical acceptance of the dichotomy of the Arab-Muslim historical tradition as the principal force behind events in the first part of the 7th century. Historians have to maintain that history is created by man and they have to abandon the idea that historical events are orchestrated by God.

## Trade and Caravan Cities

Mecca's early history is hazy and the information collected in the later Muslim tradition is difficult to analyse in so far as it is narrated and composed to fit



Fig. 1. Map of Arabia in Late Antiquity.

later Muslim needs. What made the town important can, however, be deduced from the Qur'ân: international and local trade (Cf. Sura 106.2). Mecca is not situated in a fertile area. It is located in a barren valey surrounded by mountains with only limited access to land suitable for agriculture. As a result the city depended on importing food from other more fertile areas in the region. This was possible<sup>4</sup> because the city from late in the 5th and all through the 6th century successfully secured itself an important position in the caravan trade in the western part of the peninsula.

The reasons for this development were manifold. First of all there was a demand and a market for the commodities procured by the traders of Mecca. It lay to the North, where first the Roman Empire and later the Byzantine continuously demanded commodities from Yemen, India and East Africa to be supplied by international trade. From the late 5th century the

centre for this trade was Mecca, geopolitically placed on the periphery and outside the reach of the Roman/Byzantine as well as the Sasanid empires.

From the periphery the traders of the cities of the peninsula carefully followed the political developments and the tensions between the two northern empires, as is witnessed in the Qur'ân. Sura 30, entitled Surat al-Rûm (the Chapter of the Romans), hints at the conflict between the Byzantines and the Persians starting in the early 7th century and ending in 629. The passage provides us with a clear indication of the interest shown by the traders in Mecca and the importance of their being up-to-date with the political relations between the two great empires.<sup>5</sup>

But other pre-conditions had to be fulfilled as well. The geographical position of Mecca made it secure *vis à vis* the two big empires. The logistical problem of how to connect the markets and bring the desired commodities from one place to the other could not be

solved until the camel was domesticated. That happened in Eastern Africa late in the second millennium B.C. and from there the knowledge of domestication of this incredible animal was passed on to the Arabs (Bulliet [1975]).

The domestication of the camel made it possible for cities in Arabia to play an active role in international trade – and thus for families in Mecca to secure for themselves a position in the trade bringing the coveted commodities from distant places to the cities along the Mediterranean Sea. India and East Africa traded with Yemen and Meccan traders carried commodities by caravans from there to the markets in Syria and Egypt.<sup>6</sup> We are unable to follow the development of this trade in detail, but by the end of the 6th century the leading tribe in Mecca, Quraysh, had secured for itself an important role in this respect.

Scholars disagree on the importance of Meccan trade<sup>7</sup> and we do not have reliable sources at hand to measure its exact size and extent. We do not lack sources, however, to judge its importance for the traders of Mecca. The economic consequences for Mecca's position as an important centre for the caravan trade was evident to the leading trading families from the very beginning when Muhammad began to preach his new religion.

### Ilâf and Hums

In all pre-modern societies it is impossible to separate religion from culture and politics, and this was also the case in Mecca. The Meccans worshipped a number of different gods, and as Quraysh from the end of the 5th century slowly began to monopolise the trade, a parallel unification of religion developed as well. Mecca never became the sole religious centre of the pre-Islamic Arab world,<sup>8</sup> but its importance seems to have increased during the 6th century, and the religious rites conducted during the sacred months at the Ka'ba in Mecca offer only one of several examples of a growing sense of common origin and identity in the pre-Islamic Arab society. Pre-Islamic poetry presented at the religious festivals indicate a growing tendency to use the same poetic norms and rules as well as the same language (Bamyeh [1999] and Borg [1997]).

The trade monopoly was a result of the social and political organisation initiated by Qusayy, the organiser and leader of Quraysh, who in the late 5th century succeeded in organising the polity of Mecca in the way in which it existed at the beginning of the 7th century when Muhammad appeared on the scene.<sup>9</sup> Qusayy drew up a number of agreements called *ilâf*

with tribes and cities in the western part of the peninsula as a means of securing safe passage for the Meccan caravans.<sup>10</sup>

Such agreements were a *sine qua non* for the trade because there was no major political entity in the region. Power was vested with different families in the various areas and they had yet to be integrated into a system from which all could benefit. Qusayy and after him other leaders of Quraysh were able to negotiate a number of such agreements which were a precondition for a secure caravan trade. During the 6th century these *ilâfs* were extended to include religious agreements defined in the so-called *hums* (Simon [1970]).

Qusayy also introduced a new political institution in Mecca, the assembly, set up in a building, *dâr al-nadwa*, erected north of the Ka'ba to be the place where leaders of the various families in Mecca could meet and decide on matters of mutual interest. Tradition has it that no decision in Mecca was taken without first being discussed in the *dâr al-nadwa* (Ibn Ishâq [1978] I.124). Several other offices were established, among these the office of *saqîya* (Ibn Ishâq [1978] I.118). The person in charge of this office had to supply drinking water for the pilgrims participating in the religious ceremonies.

Lammens (1928) and later Hamidullah (1938) have both interpreted this as proof of the existence of some kind of city council in Mecca, like the councils to be found in Italian cities during the later Middle Ages. But this seems not to be a proper analogy, as is apparent when we take a closer look at how the ruling elite reacted when Muhammad began to preach in public.

The Muslim sources have two different traditions concerning which revelation was the first to be passed on to Muhammad. One tradition mentions Sura 96.1-8 to be the first, another Sura 74 (Watt [1970]). Modern research, be it Muslim, or non-Muslim has not been able to solve the question. Be that as it may, the experience Muhammad had in a cave called *al-Hira* in the mountains surrounding his native town Mecca in 610 was to polarise further a power struggle that had already begun years before.

Not all tribes in Mecca benefited to the same extent from the local and international trade, and a number of the less fortunate families organised themselves in a confederation in order to help each other against the leading families in Mecca. Their confederation is called *hilf al-fudûl* in the sources and comprised those families inside Quraysh who did not belong to the inner circle.<sup>11</sup> The reason for the establishment of the

confederation was a debt by a member of the inner circle of Quraysh to a tradesman belonging to the families who organised the *hilm al-fudûl*. The member of the richer family refused to pay because the person entitled to the payment had died.

We are unable to follow the internal discussion between the inner power-circle and those who felt they were kept at a distance. We can only conclude that differences existed. And these differences mattered a lot when the leading families in Quraysh had to decide how to react when Muhammad began to preach Islam in public.

### Religion and Politics

After serious hesitation Muhammad finally interpreted the experience he had had in the cave as a sign from God (Ibn Ishâq [1978] I.221). He was convinced that God had decided to call him to be a prophet to bring to the Arabs knowledge of His will and His plan with the creation. In the following years this idea was further elaborated, and Muhammad was defined as “the seal of the prophets”, i.e. the last one to receive revelation from God ending the long series of prophets and messengers He had sent to mankind throughout history (Sura 33.40 and Sura 3.84).

From the beginning Muhammad was aware of the significance for the history of Mecca of his claim to be God’s messenger. When he began to preach Islam in public a few years later two principal ideas can be found in all of his early revelations (Watt [1970] 15ff). One is a call to believe in the One and only God, the Creator of man, and the other one is a strong critique of the social rules and norms in his native city. Those in power ought to thank the One and only God for their success in life, but they did not. Instead of thanking God for their material gains and pleasant life, they behaved as if they themselves were the reason for their happy fortune. At the same time they neglected to pay attention to society in general and refused to fulfil the traditional social responsibility *vis à vis* the poor, the old, the widows and other marginalised groups of society.<sup>12</sup>

Muhammad’s early revelations are embedded in a strong critique of religious and social conditions in Mecca. Those in power were quick to react and tried to persuade his family to stop his proselyting. Muhammad, however, carried on and remained true to his call and in all revelations dating to his life in Mecca the two themes remain central. Both malaises could be cured if only Muhammad’s call was accepted. As was the case in all other pre-modern

societies religion and politics were intertwined and therefore Muhammad’s critique was both religious and political.

This intertwining had important consequences as the conflict gradually developed. Muhammad met with strong criticism and his native townsmen accused him of borrowing ideas from Christians and Jews or for telling tales he had heard from strangers.<sup>13</sup> This forced Muhammad to elaborate on Islam and gave way to an interpretation of the relationship between Islam and other religions where Islam was defined not as a *new* religion, but as the religion of Abraham as explicitly stated in Sura 3.67. As such Islam had a double rôle to fulfil. On the one hand it was to replace the polythism of the people living in Mecca, and on the other hand it was a necessary correction of the two earlier monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism. Both religions were widespread on the Arabian peninsula before the revelation of Islam.

In the Qur’ân we are able to follow the debate Muhammad had with both followers of the local traditional religion and followers of the two monotheistic religions.<sup>14</sup> In what became the classical Muslim tradition the conflict was interpreted as one between the final revelation from God (Islam) and polytheism/false monotheism, a conflict finally won by Islam when Mecca was conquered in 630.

### From Internal Conflict to External Confrontation

When Muhammad began his revelation in public he encountered with strong scepticism from people in his native town. Leading members of Quraysh tried to mobilise the public against his preaching and to a certain extent succeeded. They were able to organise an economic boycott of *Banû Hâshim*, i.e. the family to which Muhammad belonged, a fact which shows that decisions taken in the *dâr al-nadwa* were connected with an executive political power of some sort. But it certainly had its limits.

As long as Muhammad was supported by his family, his opponents were unable to isolate him or for that matter ask any office or official institution to intervene. His family could be excluded from trade arrangements as a result of decisions taken in the *dâr al-nadwa*, but neither he nor his family could be socially excluded from Meccan society. This is evident from the description in the sources of the economic boycott to which Muhammad and his family were exposed for several years. His family remained part of the Meccan society. As a result he was able to

continue his mission introducing the Qur'ân to his native city even though those in power did not like it.

When Muhammad's uncle Abû Tâlib<sup>15</sup> died in 619 the situation changed for the worse. Until his death, Abû Tâlib had been the undisputed leader of *Banû Hâshim* and although he himself never became a Muslim, he defended his nephew abiding by the social rules of his time. Any individual was totally dependent on the support of his or her family, and Abû Tâlib never accepted the accusations raised by the other families in Quraysh, nor did he share the scruples aired in the *dâr al-nadwa* as to the possible negative consequences for Mecca's trade if Muhammad continued his mission.

After Abû Tâlib's death a sworn enemy of Muhammad called Abû Lahâb<sup>16</sup> was elected<sup>17</sup> new leader of *Banû Hâshim*. Muhammad was aware of the negative not to say threatening consequences of Abû Lahâb's election and immediately tried to establish relations with people outside Mecca as a means securing his and his supporters security, but in vain (Ibn Ishâq [1978] II.71ff). No one dared to challenge the political system dominated by Quraysh.

During the religious ceremonies in 620 Muhammad had negotiations with a group of people from Yathrib (Medina), an oasis north of Mecca (Ibn Ishâq [1978] II.67f). The following year new negotiations were conducted, and during the summer of 622 most of the Muslims in Mecca – around 200 in number – left for Medina. The last to leave were Muhammad and Abû Bakr, who arrived in Medina after a dramatic and dangerous trip (Ibn Ishâq [1978] 00.000).

The negotiations between the delegation from Medina and Muhammad transformed the year-long conflict from a local one between members of the same community to one between different cities (Bæk Simonsen [1988] 24). And as Muhammad and his supporters were all traders, it was no surprise that the *muhâdjirûn*<sup>18</sup> from their arrival in Medina tried to make Medina a new caravan city in the region.

## Dhimma and Security

Later Muslim tradition depicts Muhammad's efforts in both Mecca and Medina as a religious struggle for the One and only God. But part and parcel of this conflict was another fight: a fight over who was to benefit from the caravan trade. Until the *hidjra* Quraysh were in charge and they were centred in Mecca. When Muhammad and his supporters in 622 settled in Medina, the original conflict was changed from an internal Meccan conflict to an open fight between two

sections of Meccan society where the group in opposition to those in power for a time yielded in order to seek support from outside the city.

From the very beginning Muhammad and his supporters tried to establish alliances with other groups in the region who were ready to challenge the power wielded by Quraysh in Mecca. Of course, that was not easy, but the many attacks on Mecca's caravans initiated from the moment when Muhammad arrived in Medina soon resulted in a confrontation between the *muhâdjirûn* and Quraysh. In March 624 at Badr the two groups met in battle and the *muhâdjirûn* were victorious.

Later Muslim tradition has presented the battle at Badr as a battle between Muslims and polytheists. It certainly was a battle between one group consisting of Muslims who had accepted Islam and belief in the One God and another group refusing to accept Muhammad's revelation. The crucial point, however, is that both groups originated in Mecca and represented two different positions: on the one hand a group challenging the power of Quraysh consisting of Muhammad and his *muhâdjirûn*, and on the other hand a group eager to maintain economic and cultural conditions as they were.

From 622 onwards Muhammad invited tribes and people settled in the area to become allies by offering them *dhimma*<sup>19</sup> i.e. an alliance of mutual support and assistance. *Dhimma* was in other words a concept completely analogous to Mecca's *ilâf*. We need not go into details here, but it is interesting to note how later Muslim sources contain traditions underlining the fact that the first attacks on the Meccan caravans after the *hidjra* were conducted only by the *muhâdjirûn* and not by Muslims living in Mecca.<sup>20</sup> Muhammad's faction won general support concurrently with the belief that the struggle with Quraysh might end up with a victory for Muhammad. Even in the late 620s many Muslims in Medina hesitated to support his fight, as is evident from the many critical utterances in the Qur'ân referring to the hypocrites, the *munâfiqûn* (Watt [1970] 120).

To fully understand this we have to look at the agreement negotiated between Muhammad and his supporters on the one hand, and the groups living in Medina on the other. This agreement stipulated the social position of Muhammad and his *muhâdjirûn* in the city, and one of its clauses guaranteed their security – *dhimma* (Ibn Ishâq [1978] II.148f) – but without any implicit religious consequences at all.<sup>21</sup>

We know very little about the polity of Medina at the time when Muhammad and his supporters arrived.

The agreement reflects a political structure similar to the one we know from Mecca. There were no collective decision-making institutions, nor was there any central executive power in Medina, and the various families seem to have been autonomous and responsible for law and order inside their own ranks. There is, however, an indirect reference to Muhammad in the agreement stating that in case two opposing groups in the city were unable to solve a conflict, they had to present the case to Muhammad for arbitration (Ibn Ishâq [1978] II.149). It is important to stress that this was *not* legitimised by reference to Muhammad's perception of himself as God's messenger. In other words, when the various groups in Medina decided to allow Muhammad and his supporters to settle in the city, it was due to their need for a person to function as arbitrator in the many conflicts among the different groups living in the oasis.

The same lack of reference to any demand to accept Islam is visible in the first agreements Muhammad negotiated with others (Bæk Simonsen [1988] 71ff). As time went on and the efforts to weaken Mecca took shape, the demands formulated by Medina with regard to Islam increased. But even in 630, when Muhammad and his supporters conquered Mecca and made it clear to everyone that the struggle had ended with total victory for Muhammad, he still abided by the traditional rules and permitted a period of time to pass before agreements made prior to the conquest would lapse (Sura 9.1-6).

### Pax Medina

As mentioned above, we know very little about the polity of Medina. As time went on and Muhammad and his supporters were able to expand Medina's claim to be an important new caravan-city, his rôle as the new undisputed leader of Medina became evident. The position as arbitrator in the agreement of 622 was skilfully used to expand his power. The Qur'ân stresses the need for the believers to consult each other in matters of mutual importance, and the later Muslim tradition has numerous examples of how Muhammad was used to consulting his companions (Sura 42.36, Ibn Ishâq III.174). But the very same Qur'ân also has a number of revelations stressing the need for the believers to obey those in power in general and God's prophet in particular (Sura 59.64). Sura 8.1ff, discussing the principles of how to divide the spoils of war, offers one example of how Muhammad personally decided upon the principle to

be followed, and references in Sura 9.60 to those whose hearts shall be reconciled offer another.

References in the Qur'ân indicate an ongoing debate between the group who settled with Muhammad in Medina in 622 (the *muhâdjirîn*) and Muslims from Medina (the *ansâr*). As we have seen above, only Muhammad's Meccan supporters took part in the first attacks on the Meccan caravans. Immediately after the conquest of Mecca in 630 the *ansâr* from Medina feared that Muhammad would move back to his native city; but that did not happen. Muhammad returned to Medina after the conquest, making it clear to all that this city was to be the new trading centre of the peninsula and the regional caravan-city *par excellence*. Mecca, on the other hand, became the sole religious centre for the new polity, now based exclusively on Islamic credentials.

It was therefore to Medina that tribes and cities of the peninsula not yet part of the new polity sent their representatives in the "year of delegations".<sup>22</sup> A closer look at the content of the different agreements signed is in line with the *dhimma*-agreements signed during the previous years. In all agreements the recognition of Medina as the new centre of the caravan trade is paramount. It is nevertheless important to notice the complete lack of political control *vis à vis* the tribes and cities on the peninsula on the part of Medina. In this way Medina continued the policy of its predecessor Mecca.

The same policy was followed when Medina organised the conquests after Muhammad's death in 632. The expansion was successful, but the administrative system established in the conquered areas was founded solely on the experience of the caravan-city. Medina never tried to control the conquered areas directly. In Syria, Iraq and Egypt the administration was left to the local upper class, and their autonomy was extensive. In the early caliphate the central administration never interfered with local administration. If the tax-demands were met, the caliphate left matters entirely to the local administration (Bæk Simonsen [1988] 127ff).

The trading system existing before Islam, however, was totally destroyed as a result of the great conquests. International trade no longer depended on what the caravan-cities could procure. Geographically the area became part of a much larger network, and therefore Medina's position as caravan-city was no longer needed. As a result, the leading traders decided in 661 to move the political and economic centre from Medina to Damascus. The age of caravan-cities on the peninsula had finally come to an end. The two cities

remained important cities for the Islamic world: Mecca as center for the pilgrimage and Medina as the city of the prophet Muhammad.

### Conclusion – Arab City-States?

For centuries a number of cities on the Arabian Peninsula were important for local and international trade. The sources are too few and too scattered to indicate the extent of the trade, but from the stories contained in the Bible referring to the Queen of Sheba bringing precious commodities to the kings of Israel (I Kings 10.1ff and II Chronicles 9.1ff), from various Mesopotamian cuneiform inscriptions<sup>23</sup> as well as from references in classical Greek literature<sup>24</sup> we can infer that these cities were important and although they were remote and situated in the periphery they were well known.

Time passed, and some caravan-cities were conquered by the very same empires which had been their economic *raison d'être* as markets. This was the case with Palmyra, Petra and to a certain extent al-Hîra. Others remained and new ones developed. Some gained importance at certain points of history, only to be less important in later times. Taymâ' is referred to as an important caravan-city in cuneiform inscriptions in the second millennium, but is less important in the 6th and 7th century A.D. albeit still in existence.

Each and every caravan-city was involved in an ongoing struggle for survival. The sources are too few and too scattered to enable us to depict the history of the caravan-cities on the peninsula in detail, but the conflict between one established caravan-city (Mecca) and a newly emerging one (Medina) in the early 7th century allows us to perceive the dynamics of the struggle affecting all the cities.

The caravan-cities were urban centres. The size of the population remains unknown, but in the 7th century Mecca and Medina must have had four-digit populations and people were living close together. They practised a considerable division of labour and both local and long-distance trade was essential. But were the caravan-cities city-states?

On the one hand, we know that each caravan-city was able to enter into political agreements with others. They were able to negotiate trade agreements with third parties and they were able to engage in violent political and military struggles with competing cities. They also had some sort of centralised executive political power. In these respects they can reasonably be classified as city-states. But their social struc-

ture was at the same time peculiar and far less centralised compared with city-states or states in general. The central executive political power was limited, as is indicated by the struggle between Muhammad and his opponents during his time in Mecca. As long as he was defended by his family those in power were unable to contain him. The caravan-cities seem to have left it to the individual families to maintain law and order. Thus, the caravan-cities did not possess a centralised and institutionalised government empowered to enforce the legal order, and in this regard they seem not have been states in the sense of the term described *supra* 12-13. Admittedly, they have often been classified as city-states, e.g., by Hamidullah (1938); but his analysis is based on an overinterpretation of the powers exercised by Quraysh. In this volume they are included among the city-state cultures, but only hesitatingly. They were undoubtedly independent cities, but they were only on the way to becoming states and never really got there.

When conflicts emerged involving more families a solution was difficult to find as no centralised judicial institution existed. In such cases an arbitrator was needed. This was the reason why Muhammad was accepted in Medina. When the political struggle inside Medina developed during the 620s as a result of Muhammad's growing importance, we have several examples where single families fortified themselves in their own defensive structures.<sup>25</sup>

The power élite who in 632 inherited the polity established by Muhammad and his supporters during the previous decade decided not only to uphold the centralised executive power gradually developed by Muhammad from 622 but to expand it. When different tribes and cities on the peninsula tried to get rid of Medina, referring to traditional rules stipulating that an agreement should end upon the death of the person with whom it was agreed, they were forced to adjust to a new and different reality.

Medina realised the dire need for changes to traditional norms and rules, and introduced a more centralised urban political structure compared to the one existing in Mecca from late in the 5th century and compared to the polity we know only vaguely from Dûmat al-Djandal, Taymâ', Tâ'if and al-Hîra.

The conquests made by the new caravan-city resulted in the quashing of all opposition to its position as the new centre for local and international trade; but the new situation had its own dynamic and created new challenges. Although Medina had no intention of controlling the occupied territories directly, the geographical extension of the territory conquered forced

it to resort to political means never used before by the caravan-cities on the peninsula.

Medina had to place military detachments in the conquered provinces in order to secure their future links to the caliphate. The city did not extend its control to territorial domination, but the efforts of the Byzantine emperor to regain control of the provinces in Syria and Egypt forced Medina to innovate and to adopt a new policy.

The agreements concluded earlier were linked to the mutual benefits to be gained by cooperation, and never involved direct political control. The outcome of the conflict between Mecca and Medina was an empire based on Islam, and the gradual development of an Islamic civilisation from its birth depended on cities. But all cities were now part of an empire with centralised political power and centralised executive legal and political institutions, i.e. with a form of domination which was incompatible with the existence of city-states.

## Notes

1. Cf. *Enzyklopaedie des Islam* (1934) IV: 3ff s.v. Saba'; *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1960) I: 180ff s.v. Aden (O. Lófgren); (1999) X: 401 s.v. Taymâ' (F. Buhl & C.E. Bosworth).
2. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1965) II: 624ff s.v. Dûmat al-Djandal (L. Veccia Vagliere); (1999) X: 115f s.v. Tâ'f (M. Lecker); (1999) X: 401f s.v. Taymâ' (Fr. Buhl & C.E. Bosworth), and *Enzyklopaedie des Islam* (1934) IV: 1166f s.v. Wâdî al-Qurâ (Adolf Grohmann).
3. This is based on Sura 2.142-44. Mecca is referred to also in Sura 2.125-27 and explicitly mentioned in Sura 48.24 and in Sura 3.96 by the alternative name Bakka. The city was known by Ptolemy as Macoraba.
4. Cf. Muhammad ibn Sa'd (1904-40) I: 258.
5. According to Muslim tradition Sura 30 was revealed in the early 620s before the *hidjra*, cf. al-Tabarî (1987), 10: 21-20.
6. Muhammad's effort to send some of his supporters to Ethiopia for a while shows there was direct trade between Mecca and East Africa by way of Jidda cf. Watt (1953).
7. Cf. Millar (1969); Crone (1987); Feldbauer (1995).
8. After the Muslim conquest of Mecca in 630 small detachments of Muslims were sent to various places in Hidjâz to destroy local sanctuaries, a clear sign of the existence of other important pre-Islamic holy places, cf. Wellhausen (1887).
9. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1986) V: 519ff (G. Levy Della Vida).
10. Cf. Hamidullah (1957). The agreements are referred to in the Qur'ân Sura 106.1-2.
11. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1971) III: 389 s.v. *hilf al-fudûl* (Ch. Pellat).
12. Sura 90.13ff; Sura 107.2f; Sura 81.8; Sura 6.152 and the very early revelation in Sura 70.23.
13. Cf. Sura 20.113-35; Sura 26.192-227 and Sura 53.1-29.
14. For a presentation of the chronological sequence of the revelation, see Newman (1996).
15. Abû Tâlib was Muhammad's paternal uncle and father to Ali ibn Abi Tâlib who was one of the very first, maybe the very first to accept Islam after Muhammad in 610 was called to be the messenger of God.
16. He is mentioned in the Qur'ân in Sura 111.
17. We do not know why Abû Lâhab was elected leader of *Banû Hâshim* after the death of Abû Tâlib. The later Muslim historical tradition offers no explanation. Sura 111 was revealed in Mecca before the *hidjra* in 622 and thus clearly indicates that Muhammad must have been aware of the possible consequences of the election or nomination of Abû Lâhab as chief of his family.
18. The technical term used in the Arab-Muslim tradition for the group of Muslims who did the *hidjra* with Muhammad in 622. The group is mentioned several times in the Qur'ân.
19. The word means security and later became the technical term for the security the Islamic polity granted followers of the religions recognized by Islam (Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism) if they payed poll-tax to the Muslim community. This *dhimma* of the Qur'ân was a security to be given to anyone who wanted to cooperate with Muhammad, also his religious opponents, cf. Bæk Simonsen (1988) 47ff.
20. The group of Muslims who had accepted Islam before 622 are called *al-ansâr* in the sources, i.e. the helpers.
21. The agreement is referred to in the literature as the Constitution of Medina. It has, however, nothing to do with a constitution in the modern sense of the word. It is an agreement socially integrating the group from Mecca as *one* group legally and economically responsible *vis à vis* other groups in Medina. Note the absence of any religious claims on behalf of Muhammad in the agreement!
22. Ibn Sa'd (1904-40) III.124ff.
23. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1999) X: 401 s.v. Taymâ (Fr. Buhl & C.E. Bosworth).
24. Ptolemy in *Geographia* refers to Mecca as Macoraba cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1986) VI: 144 s.v. Makka (W. Montgomery Watt).
25. Cf. al-Wâqidî (1966) I: 363f; II: 496f.

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