
Mercaderes, artesanos y ulemas. Las ciudades de las Coras de Ilbīra y Pechina en época Omeya, by Eneko López Martínez de Marigorta. Colección Arqueologías, Serie Medieval, 2020. 432pp., 23 maps, 32/39 figures. Pb. €50.00; eBook €17.00. ISBN-13: 9788491593560.

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This book considers the change from Visigoth Christian rural society to Arab-Islamic urban through the analysis of the administrative territory of al-Andalus, called the “cora” (*kūrā*) of Ilbīra (from an undetermined date in the 10th century divided into two “coras”: Ilbīra and Pechina, or Bajjāna), located in the southeast of al-Andalus, and the foundation of four Islamic urban centres. The author points out the singular evolution that took place in the current Granada and Almería provinces, from the 8th to the 11th centuries CE, which was very different to contemporary events in Europe. Although the cities of Pechina, Almería, Ilbīra and Garnāṭa have been extensively discussed in the literature, this is the first time they have been studied together and analysed diachronically. The author has brought together material sources, such as numismatic and epigraphic, and Latin and Arabic textual sources, the latter with the novelty of using the biographical dictionaries of *ulāmas*, the Muslim religious elite. Also, the archaeological information is updated (especially for Pechina) using unpublished archaeological reports.

The monograph is well organised and divided into seven chapters. The first three refer to the Emirate period (8th–early 10th centuries) and the last four to the Caliphate period (10th–early 11th centuries). A clear introduction opens the book, explaining its chronological, geographical, and methodological boundaries. Following the conclusions, it also includes a list of the written sources consulted, a comprehensive bibliography, and several useful onomastic and toponymic indexes, figures, maps, and tables.

Chapter 1 focuses on how the Visigoth territory of the Eliberri hinterland in the Vega of Granada (the “cora” of Ilbīra after the Muslim division) was articulated during the 7th–early 9th centuries. It explores the topics of the decadence of the Eliberri city (located in the Albayacín Hill, in the current town of Granada), the continuity of rural exploitation of the countryside by the Christian elites after the arrival of the Muslims, the role of the *jund* of Damascus in the transformation of the taxation model from rent to tribute, in addition to the change of identity and owners of rural properties, from *ḍiyāa* (villages) to *qurā* (farms). The author goes on to explain in chapter 2 how the region changed from the mid-9th century with the foundation of the administrative city of Ilbīra and the construction of the citadel in the Cerro del Sombrerete, which attracted the Arab population, as well as with the more effective fiscal control of the Umayyad dynasty. The new hierarchy and the growth of the city influenced the development of a dynamic local urban society, not only in the new city, but also in the rural hinterland. This is well documented in biographies, new Muslim cultural features and consumption patterns. Finally, the influence of the socio-political instability generated by the first

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fitna (civil war), during the late Emirate period, and the build-up of fortifications are analysed in the Ilbīra hinterland.

Chapter 3 moves the setting to the eastern district of Urš al-Yamān (then within the “cora” of Ilbīra) and the city of Pechina, which was founded there in the mid-9th century. The role of the *bahriyyun* (indigenous sailors) in the splendour and Islamisation of the city as well as the articulation of the Mediterranean trade axis are well explained, since they connected al-Andalus to North Africa and the East through the trade of luxury goods (i.e. slaves, silk fabrics, perfumes) and passenger transport. Their growing power, which culminated in the temporary independence of Pechina from both Ilbīra and the Umayyad emirate, is traced by the author from the preserved information. Chapter 4 considers the occupations related these new production activities and the mercantile craftsmanship of both Ilbīra and Pechina, and the relationship between them. This chapter also covers the natural resources of the region, especially from the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Chapter 5 explains how the city of Almeria—very close to Pechina—was founded by the Umayyads, converted into the seat of the Caliphal navy, and finally into the new capital of the district. This accelerated Almeria’s urban development, with a new citadel, walls, suburbs, artisan areas, and commercial buildings being built. The second *fitna* allowed the *fityan* (Caliphs’ domestic servants) family’s rise to power in the city and the definitive decline of Pechina. Chapter 6 is devoted to a similar story, but for the inland region, since it emphasizes the prevalence and the urban evolution of Ilbīra during the Caliphate and the loss of the capital in favour of Garnāṭa (Granada) with the arrival of the Zīrid dynasty during the Taifa period in the 11th century.

The last chapter provides the reasons for the productive and commercial emergence of the four cities during the 10th century, especially through the development of luxury craft activities, such as glazed pottery, silk and linen fabrics, perfumes, copper work, marble masonry, among others, and the routes and dynamism of exchanges in manufactured goods, slaves and food commodities.

Overall, López Martínez de Marigorta analyses three main processes: the shift of the taxation surplus, the Umayyad centralisation (materialised mainly in a new urban model), and the increased relations between the southeast of al-Andalus and the Dār al-Islam (particularly North Africa and the Middle East). However, the interaction of the area under study with the more closely related territories, such as other surrounding “coras,” is somewhat left aside. The contribution of this book (the outcome of the author’s thesis) advances the well-known idea that there was no immediate religious conversion to Islam after the conquest of Iberia. Rather, it was a centuries-long process, a solid trend based on a the development of a common cultural framework that accounts for a social Islamisation. The tracing that López Martínez de Marigorta does of the people who lived in the territory during those centuries is commendable: he explains who they were, what their occupations were, their religion, tribal group and identity, where they lived and where they travelled. Much of the existing information was extracted particularly from the biographies of *ulāmas*. The clarification of the historical sequence, especially for the case of Pechina, is worth noting as well. The author’s effort to consider archaeological sources should also be highlighted, as it is of noble quality, despite the author not having archaeological training. López Martínez de Marigorta accounted for not only the published archaeological data, but also unpublished information from archaeological reports and

personal conversations with archaeologists. The lack of a more in-depth analysis of the territory from an archaeological point of view is manifest, but it must be noted that this was not the aim of the study.

In sum, the rich information and analyses provided in this work are essential to understanding the urban development and processes of Islamization and Arabisation in the Iberian Peninsula during the early Islamic period.