

Seville- the Pearl of Andalusia - Under the Arab-Islamic Rule

Sahar A.M. Al-Majali, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Social & Applied Science, Princess Alia University College,
Al-Balqa Applied University, P.O. Box: (144211) Amman (11814) Jordan

Abstract

Remarkable development was recorded by Seville under the spell of Islamic rule, first under the Umayyad dynasty, then under the Almoravids and thereafter under the Almohad rulers. The Umayyad rulers transformed the city from the Roman-Gothic vestiges into a thriving city pulsating with economic, commercial and cultural activities. Special attention was paid by the Umayyad rulers maintain defence of the city and ensure all-round progress its people. Under the Almoravid rule, Seville seldom witnessed any noticeable development activity. However, the Almohad rulers revived the development dynamics by constructing buildings, improving public infrastructure and facilities for the people. Multifaceted development attained by Seville, especially under the Umayyad rule, earned it the appellation of “Pearl of Andalusia”.

Keywords: Seville, Andalusia, Umayyad’s, Almoravids, Almohads

1. Introduction

I. Subject of the Study: Seville – the Pearl of Andalusia - Under the Arab- Islamic Rule

II. Problem of the Study: To analyze the role and contribution of Medieval Arab Islamic rule in influencing various aspects of development of Seville

III. Limitations of the Study: This analysis is limited to developments in various fields of Seville under the Medieval Arab Islamic rule, especially under the Umayyad dynasty, Almoravid rulers and the Almohad rules of Seville.

IV. Theoretical Framework of the Study: It is a historical topic and no theoretical framework has been developed.

V. Methodology: Major tools of research – historical, analytical, comparative and descriptive – have been applied. More emphasis is on historical technique. Relevant material available in English, and Arabic languages has been used and Arabic sources are used in translated (into English) form.

VI. Previous Researches etc.: Undoubtedly, some work in the form of academic research has been undertaken in the realms of Islamic history of Seville; nonetheless, the research studies available pertain to diverse interpretations and there is dearth of a comparative perspective in respect of the contribution of medieval Arab Islamic rulers of Seville that made it the pearl of Andalusia.

VII. Results and Conclusion: The trends emerging from this study show that Medieval Arab Islamic rulers, especially the Umayyad rulers and Almohad rulers played remarkable role in influencing different aspects of development of Seville, especially in terms of building religious, educational and residential premises for the people compassion, encouraging socio-economic and cultural activities and providing peaceful, secure and tranquil ambience which is a sine qua non for progress of the society and its people.

VIII. Bibliography: The books and other materials used in the study are shown in the references. Only English sources have been used.

IX. Outline of the Study:

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1. Introduction

Seville is a city situated on the banks of Guadalquivir river in modern Spain. Seville, known as *Ishbilya* in Arabic, was second to Cordova in size and influence throughout most of the Islamic period. Of the famous cities of medieval Islamic Andalusia – Cordova, Granada, Toledo and Seville – only Seville has been described as ‘the pearl of Andalusia’ for its lush greenery and “spreading palms overshadowing the public square and walks, and the banks of the brown Guadalquivir are densely clothed with an Oriental verdure” (Calvert, 1908: 1; Azzouhri, 1958: 88; Ibin El-Kardabous, 1971:138-9; Al-Hamawi, 1977:195).

According to Gallichan, Cordova is dead and Granada broods over its past because both are cemeteries of a vanished civilization, but Seville lives because alone ‘among the ancient seats of Moorish dominion only Seville has maintained her prosperity’ (Gallichan, 1903: 1; Azzouhri, 1958: 88).

Ubiquitous Arab impact is discernible in Seville's modern public buildings, churches and dwelling-units, "in the tortuous, narrow streets, in the features, language, music and garb of the people, and in many of the customs" (Calvert, 1907: 5; Al-Maqari, 1968: 127-8). Arab and Islamic influence in different spheres of Seville gained prominence under the Umayyad rulers and under the Almoravids and Almohad rulers.

2. Seville under the Umayyad Rule

In the aftermath of military forays of Mūsā bin Nusair in Andalusia, soon after Tarik's military expeditions, in the early part of the second decade of the eighth century, Seville became the part of territories conquered by Musa and these territories, including Seville, was looked after by 'Abd al-'Aziz. Seville became the capital of Islamic Andalusia, the first Arab Islamic capital in Spain, between 713 and 716. This period witnessed settlement of people coming from Syria in and around Seville in large numbers. The vast majority of native population in Seville and its countryside was Christian and with the passage of time many of these people got converted to Islam and they were called 'Muwalladun' and those who remained Christian were called 'Musta'ribun', also called Mozarabs (Lunde, 1993; Al-Maqari, 1968:269 & 277; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2:14; Al-Hamawi, 1977: 95).

In the aftermath of the assassination of Musa's son Abd al-Aziz, the seat of power was transferred from Seville to Cordova and the subsequent period witnessed Seville sinking to a lower rank for a time. Until the mid-eighth century, Seville was administered by Umayyad officials appointed by the governor of North Africa. This period was characterized by increased Arab settlers and the increasing social interaction culminated in narrowing down differences between the pure-blooded Arabs and the Muwalladuns. Calvert opines that the fusion of the Hispano-Gothic and Arab cultures proved instrumental in producing a "commingling of spirit, and ultimately to give birth to an art and a culture racy of the soil. The root was originally in Arabia, but it was happily transplanted to Spain, where blossomed that beautiful flower which diffuses its perfume after a lapse of seven centuries" (Calvert, 1908: 7; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt1: 25; Ibn el-Quteiyah, 1958:11-12; Al-Bakri, 1968:112; Ibn A'athari, 1983, P2: 126).

As a sequel to the advent of the regime of the Umayyad prince 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Mu'awiyah Ibn Hisham, popularly known as Abd al-Rahman I, he proclaimed himself as Caliph in 755 and made Cordova as the capital of his kingdom and founded the rule of Umayyad dynasty. Initial attempts by Abd al-Rahman I to subjugate Seville were met with resistance from the Berbers and others. In the wake of joint Berber and Yemeni insurrections in 771, Abd al-Rahman led a military expedition against the insurrection and quelled it effectively and annexed Seville into his kingdom. Officials to govern Seville were appointed by the court at Cordova and "for almost a hundred years Seville enjoyed relative peace" (Lunde, 1993; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2: 130; Ibn Khaldun, 1958:200-4).

With the construction of congregational mosque in Seville in 829, there began the process of transformation of the city from a Roman to an Islamic city. This was the mosque of 'Umar Ibn 'Adabbas, whose foundation inscription is the oldest surviving Arabic inscription from Andalusia. According to Lunde (1993), the cloister of this mosque itself is bounded on one side by columns and arches from the ninth-century mosque, so deeply imbedded in the ground that only the tops of the columns are now visible (Honkah, 1993:477-8).

In the wake of invasion by the Vikings in 844 on Seville, which caused immense loss of human life and property, Abd al-Rahman sent his forces which engaged the Vikings in a number of many inconclusive battles and finally forcing the latter to retreat. Some of the Viking contingents which had scattered through the countryside of Seville had indulged in looting and arson and in the wake of stiff resistance by Umayyad forces; they retreated while ravaging both banks of the Quadiliver River as they retreated.

Vulnerability of Seville was exposed in the wake of the Viking attack, which spurred Abd al-Rahman to fortify the city by repairing the old Roman crumbling walls and constructing new ones as well. Thus, "Abd al-Rahman built the first Islamic defenses" (Lunde, 1993; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2: 87-8; Al-Bakri, 1968:112).

Fertile land, rich agricultural production along with foreign and domestic trade were at the roots of Seville's prosperity which often lured many ambitious warlords of contemporary Andalusia to wrest control of Seville from the Umayyad's. The two Yemeni clans – the Banu Hajjaj and the Banu Khaldun – were powerful clans that nursed the ambition of controlling the Seville. The Banu Hajjaj owned much of the richest land in the province of Seville, while the Banu Khaldun had a well-fortified castle in the Aljarafe.

In the late ninth century, the chief of the Banu Khaldun clan, Kurayb, revolted against the Umayyad's and took control of Seville. However, the rebellion could be quelled with difficulty. The numerical superiority and prowess of these two clans left no option with Cordova but to give them *de facto* authority over Seville or let them decide between themselves as to who would control the city. The Banu Hajjaj prevailed, and for a while ruled Seville independently of the Umayyads (Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2: 125, 131; Al-Bakri, 1968:112; Ibn Khaldun, 1958:174).

With the rise of Abd al-Rahman III as the powerful Umayyad ruler, the independence of Seville came to an end. In December 911, the Umayyad official Badr entered the city cleverly managed to elicit the assistance of

the supporters of the Banu Hajjaj in favour of the Umayyad ruler. Appointment of high officials for Seville was personally facilitated by Abd al-Rahman III, under whose rule Seville once again enjoyed a period of peace and tranquility (Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2: 130).

Just prior to the final collapse of the Umayyads and the beginning of the period of *muluk al-tawa'if* - the faction kings, by the closing part of the second decade of eleventh century, Abu al-Qasim hailing from the Banu Abdad family, unrelated to Banu Hajjaj or the Banu Khaldun clans, emerged as the supreme authority in Seville in 1023. As a sequel to the official abolition of the Umayyad Caliphate in 1031, Abu al-Qasim ruled Seville as an absolute monarch till his death in 1042. He was succeeded by his son Abdad, who assumed the throne name of al-Mu'tadid and expanded his territories by absorbing Granada, Badajoz and some smaller kingdoms of western Andalusia.

Following al-Mu'tadid's death in 1069, he was succeeded by his son Abu al-Qasim Muhammad, who took the throne name al-Mu'tamid, who was as concerned the kingdom of Seville as his father had been. In the meanwhile, the Christian ruler of Castile, Alfonso VI laid the siege of Seville for three days and raided throughout al-Mu'tamid's territory. Realizing that the rulers of faction kingdoms would never bury their differences and agree to put up a united front against the invader, al-Mu'tamid along with the rulers of Badajoz and Granada decided to elicit the help of the powerful Almoravid leader Yusuf ibn Tashufin as the only way to prevent the Christian takeover of Andalusia. This paved way for Almoravid rule over Andalusia, including Seville (Ibn Khaldun, 1958:200-4; Al-Maqari, 1968: 204).

The spells of Umayyad rule in Seville proved instrumental in envisaging relative peace and tranquility which in turn paved way for facilitating socio-economic and cultural prosperity of the city. During the spell of Abd al-Rahman I's rule, Seville witnessed laying down the foundation of the city's prosperity, especially in terms of construction of residences, laying out the gardens, and transplantation of various kinds of trees. Apart from being a bold and generous ruler possessing a fine sense of justice, he also encouraged leaning and was a benefactor of educational institutions (Gallichan, 1903: 20; Al-Himiari, 1988: 21 & 101).

During the regime of Abd al-Rahman III, Guadalquivir River was narrowed and deepened to render it navigable. Besides, he also introduced the palm tree from Africa, planted gardens, and adorned the city with splendid edifices. "Much of the splendor of the Court of Cordova was reflected on Seville, which certainly rivaled the capital as a seat of learning" (Calvert, 1908: 8; Al-Himiari, 1988: 72; Azzouhri, 1958: 88).

3. Seville under the Almoravids

Dreaded by the rising power of the Christian king of Castile Alfonso VI, the Taifa rulers summoned help from Yusuf Ibn Tashufin, who had founded the Almoravid empire with its capital at Marrakesh in Morocco between 1058 and 1060. Taifa rulers with the help from Ibn Tashufin served a crushing defeat upon Alfonso VI in 1086 in the Battle of Zallaka, in which the king was wounded as well as vanquished, subsequently resulting in loss of all the territory conquered by him, with the exception of Toledo (Perez, 1990: 70; Al-Maqari, 1968: 349; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2: 115). In 1090, Ibn Tashufin occupied Seville and armed with fatwas, declared the remaining Taifa rulers outside religious teaching, and occupied other kingdoms, between 1090 and 1094.

Under the Almoravids, Seville continued to be the capital of western Andalusia. Having taken over Seville in 1091, the Almoravids had managed to extend their rule all over Andalusia by 1094 and their rule lasted till 1147. Seville was governed during these years by relations of Yusuf ibn Tashufin (Lunde, 1993; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt1: 142). Before his death in 1106, Ibn Tashufin had named son, Ali Ibn Yusuf his successor and governor of Andalusia, with a seat at Cordoba. Having been perpetually engaged in warfare, among themselves or with the Christians, the Almoravids left no deep imprint on the character of Seville or of Andalusia in general. Calvert has opined that the Almoravids "burst like a tornado over the land, destroying much, creating nothing" (Calvert, 1908: 16; Ibn A'athari, 1983, P2:48; Ibn el-Kardabous, 1971: 113). In the wake of declining power of the Almoravids in Andalusia, there erupted an uprising in the territory in 1143-1144 and the subsequent three decades were marked by a succession of factions and scramble for independence during which cities were passed from hand to hand (Perez, 1990: 71; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2:48; Ibn el-Kardabous, 1971: 113). The rising power of Al-Muwahedun or Almohads in the wake of declining power of the Almoravids, prompted the former to wrest all territories from the latter and in 1146 the Almohads annexed Seville to their empire.

4. Seville under the Almohads

The Almohads made Seville the capital of their empire, which remained so till the fall of Almohad empire in Andalusia. The process of consolidation of power in Andalusia began under Abu Yakub Yusuf (1139-1184) who came to throne in 1163. Following the death of Abu Yakub Yusuf, his son Abu Yusuf Yakub was proclaimed caliph of Seville in 1184. The Almohad rulers were active builders of religious, civilian and military structures in Andalusia. Undoubtedly, under the Almohad rule Cordova maintained its reputation as the city of learning; nevertheless, Seville became the centre of power, particularly during the regime of Abu Yakub Yusuf (Perez, 1990: 79; Al-Maqari, 1968: 282-4; Ibn Khaldun, 1958: 293-3).

In 1171, Abu Ya'qub Yusuf built a bridge of boats across the Guadalquivir River, linking *Ishbiliyah* to *Triana* and the *Aljarafe*. In order to tide over the recurring flooding of the river, stone bridges were thrown across and a stone retaining was built along the left bank. Apart from improving the water supply by building an aqueduct, Abu Yakub Yusuf also introduced many other improvements to the infrastructure of Seville, (Lunde, 1990; Honkah, 1993: 477-9).

The construction of the Great Mosque and its minaret – called the Giralda - was the major work undertaken by Abu Ya'qub Yusuf. He wanted to build a mosque large enough for all the faithful, and an unforgettable symbol of Almohad power. Construction work for the mosque commenced in 1171 and the first khutbah was pronounced in April 1182 (Lunde, 1990; Honkah, 1993: 477-9). The most precious materials like marble, sandalwood, ebony, gold and silver etc. were used in the construction of the mosque, which had 17 naves and five cupolas. “A prayer hall featuring seventeen naves opened onto the court through thirteen doors; the two outermost naves on each side continued to the transverse, which closed the door to the north. To the south, in front of the qibla wall, was another transverse nave, with a cupola at each end that terminated the aisles of the naves of the hall” (Perez, 1990: 78; Salem, 1958: 35-6).

The work on the minaret, presently known as La Giralda, was begun after the completion of the Great Mosque. The minaret located in the east delineating the division between court and prayer hall, was once topped by four famous gilded spheres. According to Perez, it one of the glories of Islamic art owing to its elegance of proportion and variety within apparently uniform decoration (Perez, 1990: 78; Salem, 1958: 37-8). It consists of two rectangular units, one upon the other. “Within this structure is a nucleus of similar proportions containing seven rooms, one above the other, with groined vaults. The access to the tower, a ramp with intermittent horizontal sections, rises between this nucleus and the outer wall. Initially, the minaret was crowned with crenellations that were lost in later alterations” (Perez, 1990: 78; Salem, 1958: 40-2).

Another major work undertaken by the Almohad rulers in Seville was the Burj al-Dhahab, known as the Torre del Oro, or Golden Tower – construction for which was begun in 1220, toward the end of Almohad rule. The underlying objective of building this tower was to protect the bridge of boats built by Abu Ya'qub Yusuf over Guadalquivir River. A heavy chain was stretched across the river from the base of the tower to prevent enemy ships coming upriver (Lunde, 1993; Salem, 1958: 43-5).

Perez enumerates many other constructions in Seville ordered by Abu Yakub Yusuf, which *inter alia* included low-lying suburban palace of the Buhayra, so called to allude to its large well-irrigated garden. For the garden called Huerta del Rey (King's Orchard) Abu Yakub Yusuf converted a preexisting Roman aqueduct into water what is known today as Los Canos de Carmona (Carmona Water Pipes). Details of water pipes, a large reservoir and indications of the palace that stood there have also been revealed in recent excavations (Perez, 1990: 79-80; Salem, 1958: 43-5).

In the wake of Almohads' defeat in the battle of Navasde Tolosa in 1212, the Almohad power started registering constant decline. The continuous pressure from Castile, growing dissatisfaction among the people, the anti-Almohad rebellion of Ibn Hud and the siege of Seville by the Fernando III, the king of Castile were the factors that culminated in the end of the rule of Almohad dynasty in Seville and Andalusia and it also marked the end of Islamic rule in Seville as well as in Andalusia (Ibn Khaldun, 1958: 393).

5. Conclusion

The prolonged spell of Islamic rule proved instrumental in providing Seville a transformed outlook that entailed new formations in socio-cultural and economic realms which provided new identity to the city. As Lunde (1993) has observed: “Five hundred years before, when Musa ibn Nusayr entered Hispalis, he had found himself in a Roman city with some Christian Visigothic additions... When Fernando III entered Ishbiliyah (Seville) in 1248, it had been transformed. Hardly a trace remained of Roman times: He found himself in an enchanted world of palaces, gardens, fountains and mosques, the Torre del Oro still clad in the gold-luster tiles that gave it its name. The Christians, even as they transformed the city in future centuries, would live under its spell. They still do today.”

Seville, under the Islamic rule, as pointed by Calvert (1908: 22) , had emerged as one of the fairest cities on earth where beautiful palaces were built upon the sites of the Roman halls, gardens were shady with palms, and odorous with the blossom of orange trees, and there were hundreds of public baths. The streets were paved and lighted. In winter the houses were warmed, and in summer cooled by scented air brought by pipes from beds of flowers (Ibn A'athari, 1983, P1: 25; Ibn el-Quteiyah, 1958: 11-2; Al-Bakri; 1968: 112; Ibn A'athari, 1983, Pt2: 126).

According to Gallichan (1903: 25), the Muslims in Seville were not only a cultured and devout community, they were commercial and manufacturing, weavers of cotton, silk and wool, makers of leather and paper, and growers of grain. In their hours of recreation, they played chess, sang and danced. Their dances have survived to this day in the south of Spain, and may be witnessed in the of Seville and Malaga (Al-Himiari, 1988: 21; Al-Bakri; 1968: 107).

Under the spell of Islamic rule, Seville witnessed flourishing of literature, art, philosophy and science along with progress in economy and trade. Among the learned Moors of Seville, the most eminent was Abu Omar Ahmed Ben Abdullah, known as El Begi, was among the learned Islamic scholars of Seville. There was no person who could surpass him in knowledge of arts and sciences. Even in his earliest youth, the Qadi of that city, very frequently consulted him in affairs of the highest importance.

There was on discrimination on grounds of sex in imparting education to men and women, “The graceful courtesy and deference to the sex, which were the indispensable attributes of every gallant cavalier, in short, the very genius of chivalry, originated among the Spanish Mohammedans. The women of Christian Europe – except in countries influenced by Muslim culture – from the tenth to the fifteenth century received no such social consideration and enjoyed no such educational advantages as did their infidel sisters of the Peninsula (Scott, 1904: 452; Al-Maqari, 1968: 127; Ibnel Khateeb, 1974: 138-9).

Many scholarly women of Seville shot into prominence for their pioneering works. Valada, an Almohad princess, was renowned for poetry and rhetoric and her conversation was remarkable for its depth and brilliancy (Scott, 1904: 447; Al-Maqari, 1968: 127; Ibnel Khateeb, 1974: 138-9). Algasama and Sofia, both from Seville, were known for their poetical and oratorical skills and the literary achievements of Miriam were famous throughout the Peninsula, entailing a tinge of caustic wit and satire (Scott, 1904: 447).

Seville served as the meeting ground for many Muslim scientists from Toledo and Granada where they exchanged notes on their expertise. Ibn Bassal, Ali Ibn al-Lukuh and Mohammed B. Hadjadj Al-Ishbilli were such scholars who enriched the science of botany (Colin, 1986: 901; Ibnel Khateeb, 1974: 138-9; Al-Himiari, 1988: 21 & 101).

The mysteries of nature were subjected to questions in the laboratories by the chemists in Seville by means of careful experiments. Gallachin (1903: 24) opines: “There was no censorship, no meddling with the works of genius. Men of science were encouraged to investigate every problem of human existence. Abu Abdullah wrote an encyclopedia of the sciences. The theory of the evolution of species was part of the Arab education. Moorish thought was destined to influence Spain for ages.” It is in the backdrop of these factors that Seville is described as the ‘pearl of Islamic Andalusia,’ (Al-Maqari, 1968: 374).

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