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The Question of the Islamic City

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the creation and development of the concept of the Islamic city in the discourse of twentieth century Orientalism and Islamic studies. Based largely upon the urban theories of Max Weber, French Orientalists working in the first half of the twentieth century developed a standardized and ideal model of the Islamic city. This model remained unchallenged until the late 1950s when Eliyahu Ashtor-Strauss and Claude Cahen began to question some of its fundamental assumptions. The revisionist trend continued into the 1960s and 1970s with the innovative work of Samuel Stern and Ira Lapidus. Contributions from fields outside traditional Oriental studies such as anthropology, sociology, and geography also helped to paint a more complex and diverse picture of the city in Islam. By the 1980s, thanks in part to the influence of Edward Said's book Orientalism, the old French model of the Islamic city was thoroughly discredited. In its place emerged a new understanding of the Islamic city in which scholar increasingly saw Islam as just one of many forces which have helped to shape the urban form. Moreover, cities are increasingly regarded as dynamic and constantly evolving entities, and therefore they can longer be simply represented in idealist and essentialist terms.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine de manière critique la création et le developpement du concept de ville islamique dans le discours orientaliste et les études islamiques du XX ° siècle. Largement influencés par les idées urbaines de Max Weber, les orientalistes français appartenant à la première moitié du XX ° siècle ont développé un modèle standard et idéal de ville islamique. Ce modèle est resté incontesté jusqu'a la fin des années 1950 où Eliyahu Ashtor-Strauss et Claude Cahen ont commencé à mettre en doute ses fondements. La vague revisioniste a continué durant les années 1960 et 1970 avec le travail innovatif de Samuel Stern et Ira Lapidus. Outre les études orientales traditionnelles, les contributions de domaines, tels que l'anthropologie, la sociologie et la géographie ont aussi aidé à paindre une fresque plus riche et complexe de la ville islamique. Pendant les années 1980, l'authorité du livre d' Edward Said intitulé Orientalism, le vieux modèle français de la ville islamique a été fortement discrédité. A sa place a émergé un nouveau concept de ville islamique où les savants ont vu l'islam comme une des nombreuses forces qui ont contribué à donner la forme urbainé en question. De plus, les villes sont de plus en plus considérées comme étant des entitées dynamique et en constant mouvement, de ce fait elles ne peuvent plus être décrites dans un language essentialiste.

Acknowledgments

The research and writing of this thesis can best be described as a journey from naïve assumptions to recognized complexities. What at first seemed to be a simple and straightforward topic quickly evolved into something much more elaborate, multilayered and even contradictory. I soon realized that in order to complete this thesis I would need the help and knowledge of many different people.

I would first like to acknowledge my departmental advisor, Professor Donald Little. His comments, criticisms, and corrections greatly facilitated the completion of this study. Professors Eric Ormsby and Üner Turgay also provided me with many useful comments and suggestions. Many thanks are in order for Selwa Ferahian, Steve "Backroom Guy" Millier, and Wayne "Cruise Director" St. Thomas of the Islamic Studies Library. Their constant encouragement, humor, and generosity not only helped me with this thesis, but also made my stay at McGill that much more memorable. Furthermore, I am grateful to all my friends at the Institute of Islamic Studies, especially, Sami "yā" Massoud for all the help with French and for being such a cool dude; Susy Ricciardelli for all the support and cheering up; Shahina Mapara for the last minute editing, and last but not least, Mike Wood for the summer of '98. I also owe a special thank you to Yasmina Borki for all her help, encouragement and patience.

Above all, I wish to acknowledge the unwavering love and support of my parents, without which I would not have been able to complete this thesis. Their continual encouragement in both good times and bad helped me more than anything or anyone else. Finally, I would like to thank my grandfather, Professor Doctor Wolfgang Tischler, for his constant interest in my work and for his generous financial support.

To My Parents

Introduction

The concept of the Islamic city has long been a disputed issue in the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies. Since the first serious discussion on cities in the Islamic world began around the turn of the century, debates have ranged (and still do) from the basic determining of the "true" nature of an Islamic city to whether or not an Islamic city - past or present- even exists. Until the 1960s, the Islamic city was primarily discussed amongst Orientalists and historians, but since then the topic has been taken up in many other academic fields. As a result, we now have a large body of literature concerning the Islamic city and Islamic urbanism diffused across a diverse number of fields ranging from architecture and history to socio logy and cultural studies.

The following study is an attempt to review and critically analyze the development of Islamic urban studies and the conceptualization of the Islamic city. Because this field is so large and covers so many cultures, countries and regions ranging between the seventh century C.E. and the present day, it was necessary to limit the scope of this inquiry into a manageable format. I have therefore confined myself to an examination of the literature and research dealing primarily with North Africa and the Arab Middle East from the 7th century C.E. to about 15th century C.E. As will be shown, it is in this region and time frame that the vast majority of significant research has been done on the Islamic city. Finally, literally thousands of works -books, articles,

papers, monographs, etc.- have been written on the subject of the Islamic or Muslim city, especially over the last thirty years. [1] I have attempted to choose and analyze only those works which are generally considered important landmarks in the field of both Islamic history and urbanism. [2] In the end, however, I will have inevitably left a few out whom some may have considered as equally important or relevant. I only remind the reader that this is a limited study and as such cannot include everyone.

Chapter one begins with an analysis of Max Weber who laid down much of the theoretical ground work for the study of the Islamic city. This is followed by a chronological account and analysis of how mostly French Orientalists working primarily in North Africa and Syria developed a uniform model of the Islamic city. This chapter closely follows the *isnād* or "chain" theory presented by Janet Abu-Lughod in her recent article on the Islamic city. [3] The following two chapters, however, will adopt a more standard analytical-historical approach. Moving on, chapter two begins in the late 1950s with the first

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[1] See M.E. Bonine, Eckart Ehlers, Thomas Kraft and Georg Stöber, eds., *The Middle Eastern City and Islamic Urbanism: An Annotated Bibliography of Western Literature*, (Bonn, 1994) which lists over seven thousand works on or related to the Islamic city.

[2] I have largely referred to the works mentioned in, Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City -Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19 (1987), pp. 45-94; R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, 1991); and, Eugen Wirth, "Die orientalische Stadt: Ein Überblick aufgrund jüngerer Forschungen zur materiellen Kultur." *Saeculum* 26 (1975), pp. 45-94. Moreover, most of the books and articles examined in this thesis repeatedly cite or mention each other, thus reinforcing their general importance.

[3] According to Abu-Lughod, "the idea of the Islamic city was constructed by a series of Western authorities who drew upon a small and eccentric sample of pre-modern Arab cities on the eve of Westernization (domination), but more than that, drew upon one another in an isnad of authority. . ." Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City -Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19 (1987), pp. 155.

criticisms of and revisions to the French model, and continues to follow
the revisionist trend into the mid 1970s. This chapter assess in-depth
the works of such well known scholars as Claude Cahen, Samuel Stern,
Ira Lapidus and Eugen Wirth. Finally, chapter three and the conclusion
take a critical look at the recent scholarship in the field since the
beginning of the 1980s. Here we will not only examine the impact of
new approaches, but we will also discuss the relevance and accuracy of
the term Islamic city and what the future may hold for the study of
cities in the Islamic World.

Chapter I

I. Max Weber

Any thorough discussion of modern Western scholarship of the Islamic city must begin with the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). Although he was not the first Western scholar to examine Asian and Middle Eastern cities, he did set up a framework for analyzing and categorizing the Islamic cities which would be largely followed by Orientalists for the next half century. Weber's concept of cities and urban evolution is very much tied to his understanding and formulating of Eastern/Asian and Western/European socio-economic and political history. As a pioneering sociologist, Weber was primarily concerned with understanding why Western (and Eastern) societies were the way they were. Why was Europe a great power and Asia, including the Middle East in decline? What forces and influences had been and were still at work? Although these questions and observations seem harmless enough, their mere asking made Weber part of the prevailing practice of dichotomizing the East and the West, Europe and Asia -a practice that has dominated Western scholarly discourse on Asia and the Middle East to the present. This was not an impartial or neutral comparing or contrasting; rather, it was a way of defining and reinforcing the progressive European identity by demonstrating the faults, flaws, and errors inherent in non-Western societies. To put it simply, the West was enlightened and dynamic and the East was

misguided and backward. Of course, Weber was far from the first to express this negative and derogatory view of the East -such views of the Arabs and Turks can be traced back to the Crusades; however, he was, along with other great 19th century scholars such as Marx and Durkheim one of the first to produce a coherent methodological model to articulate this ideology. [1]

Weber saw - as did Marx et al.- that what made European society so unique and successful was its capitalist economy, an economic system that never had existed outside the Western world. But why? Weber's response was, as put forth in his famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that the adoption of Protestantism and the Protestant ethic directly led Europe into a capitalist economy. [2] But this begs the question then of what led to the rise of Protestantism. It is in attempting to answer this larger question that Weber first comes to the subject of cities and urban communities.

Weber came to the conclusion that the emergence of Protestan tism and capitalism was contingent upon the existence of two pheno mena: 1. independent, urban communities, or free cities; and 2. Christ ianity. [3] The latter is obvious: how can Protestantism evolve without pre-existing Christianity? The former is important for it is only in an autonomous urban setting that free thought and action can take place. The key element, however, is Christianity; for it was the

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[1] Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York, 1979), pp. 259-260. For an excellent summary of Weber's view of Islam see Manal Talje, "Weber's Sociology of Islam," in McGill Journal of Middle East Studies, 5 (1997), pp. 61-80.

[2] Bryan S. Turner, *Weber and Islam: A critical study,* (London, 1974), p. 2

[3] id., *Max Weber: From history to modernity,* (London, 1992), pp. 75, 157; and *Weber and Islam,* p. 97.

adoption of Christianity that allowed the Occidental city to break free from those cultural features -tribalism, religious taboos, and patrimonalism- that kept it from evolving into a community:

> Christianity deprived the clan of its last ritualistic importance, for by its very nature the Christian community was a confessional association of believing individuals rather than a ritualistic association of clans. [4]

The inreasing conversion of the Middel Eastern population from Christianity to Islam since the Arab conquest in the seventh century terminated whatever progress there was towards urban autonomy. As will be explained shortly, Weber believed that Islam as social structure did not allow for the development of individual or group automony. Cities remained collections of distinct and separate clan and tribal groups which did not form associational co mmunities. Instead of creating a unified society, the adherence to reli gious taboos and tribal loyalties simply reinforced the social and ec onomic divisions within the Oriental city. [5]

Thus, according to Weber, the epitome of urban development was to be found only in the free, communal cities of Christian Europe. [6] In order for a city to qualify as a true urban community, it had to possess the following five features:

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[4] Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, trans. G. Roth and C, Wittich, vol. 2, (Berkeley, 1978), p. 1247.

[4] Turner, *Weber and Islam*, p. 97

[5] Ibid.

1. fortifications; 2. a market; 3. a court of its own and at least partially autonomous law; 4. a related form of association; and 5. at least partial autonomy and autocephaly. [7]

Even Weber admits that up to the eighteenth century only a minority of European cities fulfilled all the above requirements. Nevertheless, the cities of the European Middle Ages still possessed more of the above features than Asian or Middle Eastern cities ever did. According to Weber, "the cities of Asia were not urban communities at all even though they all had markets and were fortresses. [8] What the Orient lacked the most was the idea of citizenship that was brought about not only by the city dwellers' possession "of a special substantive or trial law or of courts autonomously nominated by them, but also by the existence of an autonomous administration. [9]

Although Weber tends to group all Asian cities together with little regard to time or place, he does give a more detailed description of Mecca, using Snouck Hurgronje's two volume work on the city as his main source. [10] As will be seen later, much of what Weber says about Mecca (and Islamic cities) will reappear in subsequent Orientalist literature on the Islamic city. Weber begins by stating that "Arab cities. . . [like] Mecca were clan towns all through Middle Ages and almost up to the present." [11] Here Weber conveys the then dominant European belief that the Islamic World, in this case the Arab-Islamic city, was in stagnation and decline due to some flaw in its essence, a

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[7] Weber., p. 1227.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 2 vols. (Den Haag, 1888).

view that would dominate the field of Islamic urban studies until 1960s. Weber continues with a description of the kinship ties within the clans and how that laid the basis for the socio-political and economic structure of Mecca. His argument, taken from Hurgronje, (and somewhat confusing,) describes Mecca as being surrounded by the "lordly property" of a family or clan that was directly desce ndent from 'Alī, and who had at least one ancestor who had once been a sharīf. [12] The lordly property itself was intermixed, and consisted of peasants, clients, and protected Bedouin. Although the sharīf was supposed to be appointed by the governor of the caliph, in practice he was elected by the elders of the *dewis* or landowning aristocrarcy who resided in the city. Because the elders/leaders of the *dewis* dwelled in Mecca, so too did the *emirs* of other non-*dewis* families: not only did these families want to associate themselves with the powerful *dewis*, but also, living in the city allowed for the chance of exploiting the pilgrims. Often, families and clans, both *dewis* and non-*dewi* would make alliances with each other to regulate the competition, keep the peace, and increase the overall chances of economic and political gain. Just as frequently, however, these alliance would fall apart, resulting in feuding and fight both in and outside of the city. The defeated family or clan would normally be exiled from the city.

It must be reiterated that while Weber only describes the city of Mecca, he clearly sees this as typical of all Islamic and Arabian cities from the time of Muhammad to the present. [13] Also evident in the above

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[11] Weber, pp. 1231-32.
[12] Ibid., p. 1232.
[13] Ibid.

description of Mecca is the dominant patriarchal feature of the city's socio-political structure. This is important because patriarchalism and patrimonialism play a defining role in Weber's historical sociology and more specifically, in his theory of cities. Weber contended that patriarchalism is the most primitive form of traditional authority and resembles the domination of a lord over his own household. When the administrative staff, normally made up from members of the extended family of the patriarch, no longer has the resources to administer the ever growing patriarchy, the patriarchy transforms into a patrimony. "The members of the extended family are thus converted into dependent subjects" and an external staff would be brought in which usually consisted of slaves, conscripted subjects, and mercenary bodyguards and armies. [14] Each patrimonial society tended to develop along its own particular path. The Islamic world (from the Middle Ages to the end of Ottoman Empire), for example, developed its own unique form of patrimonialism called Sultanism where the ruler exercises complete authority and control over his subjects [15] According to Weber, Sultanism is more "extreme" than normal patrimonial authority because it "operates primarily on the basis of discretion." In contrast, simple patrimonial domination is based primarily on tradition. Furthermore, Sultanism has the tendency to enforce its authority by use of mercenary and/or slave (mamluk) armies. This use of outside armies while at first highly successful, will, however, lead to the ruler's eventual downfall: for the more the ruler has to rely on his mercenaries

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[14] Turner, *Weber and Islam*, pp. 80-81. see also, Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1 p. 232. and idem, vol. 2. chap. 7.
[15] Weber, vol 1, pp. 231-32.

or slave army, the more powerful they become. The army is increasingly able to demand a larger share in the kingdom's wealth and leadership. Eventually, after having completely pauperized the peasantry, the ruler becomes nothing more than a puppet in the hands of the military. Weber terms this process "the contradiction of Sultanism." [16]

Another important feature of Sultanism is that it precluded the rise of autonomous cities. [17] In fact, according to Weber, "patrimonial societies [in which Sultanism is a sub-group] depended on the [complete] absence of autonomous associations." [18] To allow any kind of freedom or autonomy in the city would immediately compromise the absolute domination of the patrimonial ruler.

Weber continues his discussion of Mecca with a description of official authorities "in more recent times" He lists them as follows:

> 1. . . . [T]he collegiate administrative council (*mejlis)* installed by the Turks; 2. . . . [T]he Turkish governor; 3. The four *kadis* of the orthodox rites, of whom the most eminent . . . [was] the *Shafi'i* one. . . ; 4. The Sherif, [who was also] the head of the. . . urban nobility; 5. The craft guilds, foremost of which was the "craft" of the pilgrim guides, followed by the butchers, grain merchants, and others; 6. The city wards with their elders. [19]

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[16] Ibid., and Turner, *Weber and Islam,* pp. 80-81.

[17] Weber, vol. 2., p. 1325. For an recent analysis of Weber's theory of Sultanism in regard to the Ottoman empire see Halil Inalcik. "Comments on 'Sultanism': Max Weber's Typification of the Ottoman Polity," *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1992), pp. 49-72.

[18] Turner, p. 98.

[19] Weber, vol. 2., p. 1232.

Although this list of officials may appear to be a hierarchy, Weber argues that "[t]hese authorities competed with each other in many ways without firmly established jurisdictions." Without counting the Sultan in Istanbul, authority in Mecca seemed to be very fluid and relative. Weber gives the example that "[a] plaintiff in a legal suit would select that authority which appeared most favorably inclined to him or which seemed to be able to bring most power to bear upon the accused." [20] All the above mentioned officials had there realm of authority and influence -a realm that was constantly changing.

This complex and interactive picture th at Weber paints of Mecca would greatly influence subsequent scholarship on both Islamic urbanism and society. Ideas such as a hierarchy of guilds and the importance of self-contained city quarters and districts would be developed further and fleshed out, most immediately by French scholars working in and on North Africa, such as the Marçais brothers and Louis Massingnon. Moreover, Weber's conception of Islamic society, which includes city structure, contributed to the emerging notion of the mosaic nature of the Middle East. The idea that the Islamic social structure is and was a mosaic or patchwork of tribes, religious groups and social organizations plays right into Weber's concept of patrimonial domination and Sulta nism. Because of such complex and extreme diversity, people and groups could not organize themselves into a coherent opposition against the patrimonial ruler. Thus, the existence of a mosaic society was nece ssary for authoritarian rule. [21]

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Bryan Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism*, (Georges Allen and Unwin: London, 1978), pp. 39-40.

II. The Traditional Islamic City

Whereas Max Weber laid much of the methodological and theoretical ground work for study of Islamic cities and societies, it was the French Orientalists, however, who really developed and refined the concept of the Islamic city. The Marçais brothers, William and Georges, were at the forefront in establishing and expanding the study of cities in the Islamic world, but in particular -and understandably- North Africa. Together their work influenced not only their contemporaries, but also their successors, so that even today, many of the basic (mis)conceptions of the Islamic city can be traced back to them.

Before delving, however, into an analysis of the contribution of French scholarship to Islamic urbanism, a brief word should be said about the methodology adopted in this section. I will follow the approach formulated and used by Janet Abu-Lughod in part one of her article "The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance." [22] Abu-Lughod sees the Islamic city as a largely Western construct in which the "creators," i.e. Western scholars, relied more on previous European scholarship than on "hands-on" and original research. Furthermore, these scholars based their concept of the Islamic city on a very limited sample of cities in both

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[22] Janet Abu Lughod, "The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 19 (1987), pp. 155-176; part one: pp. 155-162.

time and place: the dominant location was North Africa, and to a lesser extent, Egypt and Syria; the time period was confined to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or as Abu-Lughod puts it: "pre-modern Arab cities on the eve of Westernization (domination)." [23] This methodology works well in deconstructing French scholarship on the Islamic city mainly because the French were so successful in producing such a uniform and cohesive concept/picture of the city in the Islamic world. Dissenting voices did not appear until the 1960s.

The first commonly acknowledged work solely devoted to the form, structure, and role of the city in the Muslim world is William Marçais's 1928 article "L'Islamisme et la vie urbaine." [24] Whereas Max Weber may be regarded as laying the theoretical groundwork for analyzing the Islamic city, the French Orientalist William Marçais was the first to apply it systematically to the analysis of certain Islamic cities. He introduces many of the recurrent themes that appear in subsequent works on the Islamic city and thus can be considered as one of founding fathers of the physical model of the Islamic city, and of Islamic urban studies. The first of these is the idea that Islam is intrinsically linked to city life, and that it is therefore an essentially urban religion:

> Islam . . . has asserted itself from the time of its appearance as an essentially urban religion. Its founder and a small number of his first followers belonged to the bourgeoisie of the cities of the Ḥijāz. It is for such a society that the Qurʾān legislated; it is

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[23] Ibid., p. 155.
[24] William Marçais, "L'Islamisme et la vie urbaine," *L'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lêttres, Comptes Rendus,* (Paris, 1928), pp. 86-100.

within such a milieu that it [the Qur'ān] organized the primitive community of believers. The elementary principles of civil law decreed by the Holy Book only applied in principle to settled merchants. [25]

As can be seen, Marçais argues that Islam was not only a religion that originated from settled Arabs, but also a religion that specifically favored and supported them. In other words, Islam was a religion by and for Arab urbanites. Since, according to Marçais, those Arabs that chose to settle themselves were primarily traders and merchants, like the prophet Muhammad, it is only logical that the new belief would "legally" support such a lifestyle. To help prove his claim that the Qur'ān justified and supported the urban, mercantile class in Western Arabia, Marçais details some of the "pro-urban laws" that the Qur'ān mentions. These include restrictions on such practices as specul ation and usury, which, Marçais argues, implies the existence of certain urban institutions such as warehouses (for merchandise), a banking system, and the practice of written contracts. [26]

In conjunction with this, Marçais introduces the notion that Muhammad had a particular dislike and hostility towards the Bedouin and their customs and values. Not only were they a constant danger to the safety of the caravans on which the cities relied, but they were also contemptuous of and hostile to sedentary life. All in all, they were deemed a perpetual threat to the well-being of settled people. Marçais supports this claim by citing both Qur'ānic verses and certain Ḥadīth

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[25] W. Marçais, p. 89. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes in this chapter from French sources are my translations.
[26] Ibid.

that criticized and/or condemned the Bedouin. [27] Nevertheless, Marçais seems to have forgotten the crucial role the Bedouin tribes played in the spread of Islam.

To further demonstrate the connection between Islam and urbanism, Marçais touches upon the role of women in the religion. He states that "the semi-confinement of women as prescribed by the Qurʾān. . . can only be conceived of in an urban society." [28] It is simply impossible to confine women in a nomad society. Marçais uses the example of the veil to advance this argument even more: "The wearing of the veil which comes under the same concept [as confinement] remains to our day incompatible with the harsh, outside duties imposed upon women by a nomadic life." [29] Thus, the treatment/practices of women in the Islamic world is really a reflection of living in an urban setting; Islam merely reinforces and legitimizes these norms.

Marçais' final and most influential argument for the inherent link between Islam and urban life is his insistence that it is only in a city that a Muslim can properly fulfill all his or her duties:

> . . . [T]he essential rite and the rite of highest significance in the Muslim cult [is] the communal prayer on Fridays. Since ancient times, this rite appears as the exclusive privilege of sedentary groups. The importance of where this solemn ceremony should and ought to be celebrated is [and was] discussed within the different [law] schools. Some limit this obligation to cities, while others extended it to towns (bourgs) and large villages (gros villages). But all agree that the buildings and houses (habitations)

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[27] Ibid., pp. 95-96 q.v. Qurʾān 9:98 and 48:11. Specific Ḥadīth references are not given, only generic quotes.

[28] Ibid., p. 89.

[29] Ibid. p. 90.

be non-mobile agglomerations, and that the population be permanent. A corollary doc trine adds that the mosque must be a complete building [i.e., a permanent structure]. [30]

This theme that "Islam is a religion of cities" will appear repeatedly in the literature on Islamic cities for decades to come, often without any reference to William Marçais. It became an almost common assumption.

Although it is his brother Georges who really develops the morphology of the Islamic city, it is William Marçais once again who lays the ground work. Citing the Andalusian geographer Abū ʿUbayd al-Bakrī (d. 1094 C.E.) and the Imām Shāfiʿī (d. 820. C.E.), he concludes that a settlement must possess a congregational Friday mosque (jāmiʿ), a nearby permanent market (sūq), and a public bath (hammām) to be termed a city[31] The congregational mosque is important not only because it allows for the necessary Friday prayer, but also because it can serve as a court of law, a prison, a school, and a hostel. It is really a "house of the people" to quote Marçais and is used as a gathering place during both times of crisis and celebration. Marçais has little to say about the market, other than mentioning the obvious fact that it is necessary in providing for the economic and social structure and well-being of the city. Finally, the public baths, an inheritance from the Greek and Roman empires, are important in that they allow for the required ablutions before prayer. Despite some interesting points and observations, in particular the multi-purpose role of the congregational

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[30] Ibid., pp. 90-91.
[31] Ibid., pp. 97-99.

mosque, William Marçais has gives us only a rudimentary picture of the Islamic city. The major part of his article "L'Islamisme et la vie urbaine" is concerned with explaining the intimate, reciprocal bond between urbanism and the religion of Islam, an argument that seems to forget about the Islam that was embraced and practiced by the rural and nomadic populations living well outside the cities. An even greater flaw, one also mentioned by Abu-Lughod, is how can Islam be deemed an essentially urban religion when it was a religion carried by nomads? [32] Despite these weaknesses, William Marçais' conception of the Islamic city -as will be seen- will dominate the field of Islamic urban studies for some time to come.

Georges Marçais closely followed his brother's work on the Islamic city: he not only embraced his older brother's ideas and concepts but also expanded upon them to form a much more coherent picture of the Muslim city. Georges set forth his view of the city in two important articles: "L'urbanism musulman" and "La conception des villes dans l'Islam" [33] Although the two articles are similar, the former is more a detailed description of the Islamic city, while the latter is more of a theoretical work.

Like William Marçais, Georges sees Islam as an urban religion: "in order for it to realize fully its social and religious ideals, Islam could

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[32] Abū-Lughod, p. 156.

[33] Georges Marçais, "La conception des villes dans l'Islam," *Revue d'Alger*, 2 (1945), pp. 517-33; and id. "L'urbanisme musulman" *5e Congrès de la Féderation des Société Savantes de l'Afrique du Nord*, (1940) and which was reprinted in *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archaeologie de l'occident musulman*, tome 1, *Articles et conférences de George Marçais* (Alger, 1957), pp. 219-31.

not manage without an urban lifestyle." [34] Continuing along the same
lines, he states that the religious role of the cities was fundamental in
establishing an Islamic world. [35] He openly admits the paradox of
nomads spreading a religion of settled people and of establishing cities,
a fact which he attempts to explain as a necessity of military expansion:
the first Muslim cities were garrisons which were established not only
to help supply and support further conquests, but also to keep the
conquered population from revolting. It is from these garrisons that
numerous cities evolved, e.g. Fusṭāṭ, Qayrawān, Baṣra, and Kūfa. [36] He
also proposes the idea that the leaders of the Arab armies "had nothing
more pressing than to mark out the stages of their victorious march by
the creation of cities." [37] While all this may explain why the Arab armies
established cities, it doesn't at all clarify why the Bedouin took up and
championed an urban religion.

Before delving into Georges' description of the Islamic city, a
brief word should be said about his conception of Islamic urbanism, a
conception that has definite links to Weber. Marçais begins with a
brief exposé on the western Roman *civitas* or city/city-state. He asserts
that the Roman city comprises both the built town (*agglomeration bâtie*)
and all the territory of which the former is the center. [38] Furthermore,
every free man is registered in a tribe of the city and is made part of a
municipality. Those that live outside of the city walls, although

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[34] Georges Marçais, "L'urbanisme musulman," p. 219.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. 220; and "La conception des villes dans l'Islam," p. 518.
[37] "La conception. . .," p. 518.
[38] Ibid., p. 521. Civitas in Latin can mean not only city but also state, city state, and citizenship.

distinguished as rural, are not excluded from the city and enjoy the same political rights as their urban counterpoints.

The western medieval city which was heir to the Roman *civitas* was, of course, very different. Because of barbarian invasions or the constant threat of them, the city became a place of security and refuge. Within the city, the inhabitants, particularly the wealthier bourgeoisie, settled themselves around the fortress of either a religious or secular lord, a right from which rural dwellers were excluded. The urbanites came to despise the peasant farmers and did not recognize any shared community with them.

Despite the great changes from Roman to medieval times, there remained one constant: a feeling of solidarity. Georges Marçais argues that throughout the centuries the inhabitants of these cities maintained an attachment to their city; they kept a kind of municipal pride which reflected in the personal and collective foundations of the city: the cathedral, the market, the public library, etc. [39] The inhabitants of the city were not just city dwellers, they were citizens that participated in the political, social, and economic life of the city.

According to Georges Marçais, nothing even close to this (kind of citizenship) ever appeared in the Islamic world:

> [The Muslim city] does not know of a political life comparable to
> the one found in the Roman city and its center; it does not confer
> on its inhabitants, like our medieval city, a privileged status which
> distinguishes them (the city dwellers) from the surrounding

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[39] Ibid.

people. Muslim law. . . detests privileges of exception; it only knows the *Umma*, the community of believers. [40]

Marçais goes on to say that while under the Umayyads previously existing cities such as Damascus still maintained some of the Roman and Byzantine social traditions, this all ended with the coming of the Abbasids who introduced specifically Islamic principles of organization. [41] The greatest change was that inhabitants were no longer able to participate, let alone intervene, in matters of the city; they were now simply subjects of the Caliph or his representatives, e.g., an emir or governor, The main duty of the subject, both in the city and in the country was to pay the levied taxes imposed upon them in concordance with Islamic law. Georges Marçais thus concludes that the Islamic city did and still does not have any autonomy or municipal organizations. [42]

Many of the above characterizations of the city can be traced to the ideas of Max Weber. The idealizing of the classical Roman city-state to which the Europeans of the time, especially the French, saw themselves as heirs is typical of Weber. [43] The romantization of the Medieval Europe "commune" and its similarity to classical Greek and Roman settlements is also a major theme in Weber's writing. [44] Most of

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[40] Ibid., pp 521-22.
[41] Ibid., p. 522.
[42] Ibid.
[43] According to André Raymond, French colonization willingly represented itself as re-establishing the Roman "imperium" in North Africa and Syria. André Raymond, "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myth and Recent Views," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1994), p. 4.
[44] In particular see chapter 16, part 3 "The Patrician City in the Middle Ages and in Antiquity," in Max Weber, *Economy and Society,* vol. 2. pp 1266-1300.

all, however, the entire comparative dichotomy that Marçais sets up between the Muslim and Western Christian city can be traced right back to Weber.[45] This comparison, to reiterate, posits the West against the (Islamic) East, with the West as progressive and East as backward. For instance, Georges Marçais implies the idea that the West was in a sense better because it had a tradition, supposedly inherited from the classical age, of autonomy and citizenship that never existed in the Islamic world.[46] Not unlike Weber's concept of Sultanism, Marçais depicts the individual in Islamic society as nothing more than a subject with no autonomous privileges. Since the Caliph has absolute power, Islamic cities have no municipal institutions, the mere existence of which would compromise the Caliph's authority.

Georges Marçais devotes the second half of his article, "L'Urbanisme musulman," to a morphological examination of the Islamic city. His first task is to explain not only the location of those cities founded by the Arabs, but also why certain of these settlements prospered and other declined or even disappeared. The two primary reasons/conditions that, according to Marçais, determined these developments were security and access to water. It doesn't take much thought to acknowledge the validity of these reasons/conditions as some of the main causes for the establishment and evolution of settlement. Nevertheless, Marçais' example of how security influenced the demography, economy, and morphology of North African cities in the Middle Ages merits further examination. Up until and during most

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[45] See this chapter (1) pp. 4-7.
[46] See Weber's description of European feudalism in which patrimonial authority is always limited by its administrative staff: Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, pp. 232-35

of the eleventh century those cities in the interior of North Africa (mostly modern day Tunisia and Algeria) enjoyed considerable prosperity, but by the century's end, they were in decline, while the cities on the Mediterranean coast became increasingly vibrant. Marçais explains this shift as a reaction to what he calls "la seconde invasion arabe" most likely referring to the migration of Banū Hilāl in 1052 C.E. These nomads, in their quest for better grazing lands, threatened the well-being of agriculturally and mercantile based cities and towns of the North African interior. Therefore, life in the coastal regions provided the only refuge from these invaders, who were not interested in the less fertile maritime lands. [47] Marçais goes on to describe how these coastal cities changed and evolved under the new circumstances. For example, these cities too were not without danger. Here the threat was pirates -though apparently not as big a threat as the migrating nomads. In order to protect themselves, the existing ramparts that encircled both the port and the city and the defensive gates at the entrance of the port were reinforced. Clearly these bolstered defenses greatly changed the morphology of the city [48] Marçais' argument is compelling and it is unfortunate that subsequent scholars have not, to my knowledge, pursued this theory -that security concerns influenced the morphology of the Islamic city- further.

George Marçais's greatest and most influential contribution to the field of Islamic urbanism is his detailed morphological portrayal of a "typical" Muslim city. [49] He starts by stating that an Islamic city is

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[47] Marcais, "L'Urbanisme musulman," p. 223.
[48] Ibid., p. 224.
[49] Ibid., pp. 228-231.

usually rectangular in overall shape -a shape determined by the city walls. Next, the city normally boasts two main roads which stretch from the city walls and intersect at right angles in the center of the city; it is here, at the intersection, where one finds the main congregational mosque. Often adjacent to the main mosque is the *qasba* or the citadel and palace of the prince or ruler. It is also along these principal roads that the main markets (*aswāq*) are located. It should be noted that Marçais uses predominately North African cities for his examples.

Having given us a general overview of the "normal Muslim town," Marçais now discusses city quarters. He sees the quarters, after Islam, as the fundamental building block of the Muslim city. These quarters are distinguished by the ethno-religious origins of its inhabitants and by their occupations. Many of the ethnic divisions of the quarters can be traced back to the Arab conquests when each tribe that constituted the victorious army settled in a different part of the city. Moreover, each tribe jealously maintained its own traditions and customs, with the result that the quarters they inhabited became increasingly separate and closed, with their own gates and walls. Over time new quarters arose. This usually happened when the city was conquered or acquired by a new dynasty and the ruler needed to settle and house his army and supporters. The sudden arrival of new groups and quarters often led to hostilities between the different quarters -hostilities that would last for generations if not longer. All this resulted in keeping the Islamic city from ever really integrating or uniting, a condition that helped maintain the absolute authority of the ruler.

Despite the closed nature of the ethnic qu arter, there also exists the commercial quarter where one group will band together with others of the same occupation. The reasons for this are almost the same as for the establishment of ethnic quarter: people wanted to enjoy the mutual advantages of peace and security that only came in a group of common interests, not to mention improved economic power. Finally, Marçais locates the these commercial quarters in and around the center of the city and close to the congregational mosque. Here is one of the few times our author mentions non-Maghribī cities: Damascus, Aleppo, and Cairo.

"L'urbanisme musulman" culminates in a now famous description of how the markets were organized in a typical Muslim city. As will be seen, this description appears repeatedly in subsequent studies on the Islamic city:

> . . . the center [of the city] is occupied by the Great Mosque, the old political center, as well as the religious and intellectual center of the city. . . Near the mosque, the religious center, we find the furnishers of sacred items, the *sūq* of the candle-sellers, the merchants of incense and other perfumes. Near the mosque, the intellectual center, we find also the booksellers, the bookbinders and, near the latter, the sūq of the leather merchants and the slipper (*babouche*) makers which also use leather. [Next comes]. . the clothing industries and the commerce in cloth, which occupy so large a place in the life of Islamic cities. The essential component is a great market [composed of] a group of markets that carry the mysterious name, Qaiçariya. The Qaiçariya. . . [is] a secure place encircled by wall. . . The Qaiçariya, placed not far from the Great Mosque, as in Fez or Marrakech, for example, is a vital center of economic activity in the city. Beyond the commerce of textiles, of the jewelers, and the makers of hats (*chechias*), we find the makers of furniture and of kitchen utensils. . . Farther out are the blacksmiths. Approaching the

gates one finds places for caravans. . . then t he sellers of provisions brought in from the countryside. . . In the quarters of the periphery are the dyers, the tanners, and, almost outside the city, the potters. [50]

Although Marçais claims that this depiction represents the "Islamic city," in reality, it portrays more the features of North African city. Terms such as the Qaiçariya (main market/cloth market), babouche (slippers), and chechias (tarbouches) are all typical of the Maghrib and are generally not found in other regions. Even the hierarchy of the markets themselves has been noted as being characteristically North African. [51] Another important point to note is that while much emphasis is placed on the physical characteristics of the "Islamic city," hardly any mention is made of the city's social organizations or structures. This is noticeable in the works of both William and Georges Marçais: they interpret the Islamic city mainly through its physical structures and components. As Nezar AlSayyad insightfully points out, the Marçais brothers never addressed the issue of what constitutes "the essence of Islamic urban experience" and instead, only concerned themselves with documenting the physical manifestations of that existence. [52]

Before proceeding to Gustave von Grunebaum and the culmination of the French stereotype of the Islamic city, it is necessary to discuss briefly some of the other trends in the field of Oriental studies that influenced the study of cities in the Muslim world.

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[50] Ibid., pp. 230-231. The quote is taken from Abu-Lughod's translation in her article, "The Islamic City," pp. 156-7.
[51] Abu Lughod, p. 157.

The first of these is the theory of Islamic guilds propo sed by the great French Orientalist Louis Massignon. Although there had been some previous studies on the existence and functioning of guilds in Islamic cities -once again mostly in North Africa-, it was not until Massignon's 1920 article, "Les corps de métiers et la cité islamique" that the topic became a major point of discussion. [53] Massignon argued for the central role of the market and its guilds in the social and formation of the Islamic city. He states that "[t]he Muslim town (*ville*) is essentially built on the idea of the market and [that] the formation of the Muslim city (*cité*) is a result of. . . [its] craft guilds."[54] This theory doubtless influenced the Marçais brothers' decision to include the *sūq* as one of (the three) defining features of the Islamic city. The other major idea that Massignon presented in this article is that the guilds allowed its members to enjoy a kind of autonomous life very much like that of the inhabitants in the European "commune" of the Middle Ages.[55] In fact, Massignon goes on to suggest that the "tradition' of urban autonomy in Europe might have even come from the Islamic world.[56] The idea that guilds provided the Islamic city with at least limited autonomy would be influential up until the 1960s when such scholars as Claude Cahen and Samuel Stern vehemently attacked it.

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[52] Nezar AlSayyad, *Cities and Caliphs*, (Westport: Greenwood, 1991), p. 17.
[53] Louis Massignon, "Les corps de métiers et la cité islamique," *Revue Internationale de Sociologie* 28 (1920), pp. 473-89. Examples of previous work on Islamic guilds see: Ch. Lallemand, *Tunis et ses environs*, (Paris, 1890); and A, Atger, *Les Corporations artisanales en Tunisie*, (Paris and Roussea, 1909).
[54] Massignon, p. 475.
[55] Ibid., p. 487.
[56] Ibid., pp. 487-489.

Just as Massignon claimed that the *sūq* and its guilds are the essential defining elements of the Islam city, so too did the French archaeologist and urban historian, Jean Sauvaget, argues that the quarter is the fundamental unit of the city. Just as the Marçais brothers focused on North Africa, Sauvaget concentrated his research on the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo. Still, he believed, like them, that the purpose of urban history is to explain how and why a city appeared the way it did. He seems at first to have broken with the Marçais brothers' tendency of regarding Islam as the main determining force behind the morphology of the city by asserting religion as only one of many causes that affected urban development. Furthermore, he held that a city's physical structures, topography, and settlement patterns were a direct and clear reflection of its social and political history; and that these "material witnesses" had to be examined just as closely as textural sources. [57] Despite these progressive views, Sauvaget nevertheless fell back on Islam as a the main force which determined urban form. And like his contemporaries, he openly worked within the larger Weberian framework of comparing the Islamic city with the Hellenistic-Roman city. Still, Sauvaget's research and methodology was the most rigorous and comprehensive to date, and he set a new standard in studying the Islamic city.

Sauvaget's first significant contribution to the study and history of Middle Eastern urbanism was a 1934 article on Damascus. This article, "Esquisse d'une histoire de la ville de Damas," introduced many

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[57] R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: a framework for inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 235.

of the theories and interpretations of urban development that Sauvaget
would later use in his more complete study of Aleppo that appeared
shortly after in 1941. [58] In both studies Sauvaget examined the entire
history of each respective city from the speculated time of its first
habitation, through the Hellenistic-Roman and Byzantine periods, and
finally to the Islamic era. He adopted a very pro-European/Weberian
notion of the city in which the urban ideal of both Damascus and Aleppo
was found in the Greco-Roman period (333. B.C.E. to 286 C.E.). Since
then, the history of each city is one of stagnation and decline
culminating under the domination of the "Islamic dynasties." Sauvaget
defined this ideal urbanism as "express[ing] itself not merely in the
drawing of a plan, but rather through systematic and coherent
administrative regulation elaborated after due reflection for a defined
purpose and then firmly applied." [59] The ideal city as embodied in the
Greco-Roman city state, is thus a creation of public law applied to every
aspect of its life, an interpretation that Stephen Humphreys argues
makes the city become an "organic unity" and a "moral person:"

> He (Sauvaget) regards the history of Aleppo [and Damascus] as a
> morally significant process, one which exemplifies the city's
> ultimate failure to sustain the urban ideal which it had embodied
> at one moment in its history. [60]

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[58] Jean Sauvaget, "Esquisse d'une histoire de la ville de Damas" *Revue des Études
Islamiques*, 8 (1934), pp. 421-480; and, *Alep: essai sur le dévloppement d'une grande ville
syrienne des origines au milieu du xix° siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: P. Geunther, 1941).
[59] Ibid., *Alep*, p. 52.
[60] Humpherys, pp. 236-237.

Actually, Humphreys' observation that Sauvaget regarded urban history as a "morally significant process" can easily be applied to almost all of the scholarship devoted to Islamic cities done in the first half of the twentieth century. The Marçais brothers as well as Massignon also held the classical city state of Greece and Rome as the epitome of urban development and that this ideal "form" was corrupted and fell into decay under Muslim rule. While this is a theme in earlier works, it is much clearer with Sauvaget.

Sauvaget viewed the Islamic city as the antithesis of the principles of urbanism as embodied in classical antiquity. Sauvaget's ideal urbanism needs a strong and centralized government to function. When, however, that centralized authority begins to wane, as under Muslim rule, the city starts to decentralize; the inhabitants can no longer rely on the government to protect them and so they retreat into the collective security of exclusive groups based on shared ethnicities or professions. The result, as in Damascus and Aleppo, was the dividing up of the city into "an aggregate of quarters" each of which over time became an almost self-sufficient and self-contained entity with its own markets, mosques, and administration. [61]

While this process of urban decentralization began during the Byzantine period, it reached its peak in the three centuries following the overthrow of the Umayyads. Sauvaget saw this period as one of anarchy and war, which drastically changed the topography of the city:

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[61] Sauvaget, *Alep*, pp. 102-3. also, "Esquisse. . ." pp. 450-453.

The quarter radically distinguishes itself from the Greco-Roman island [*insula*]. In the ancient city, traffic and access to dwellings was provided by the same streets. Since then, there only exists a certain number of streets where traffic is free, and it isn't by them that private houses are served; [instead] from these essential arteries begin the alleyways, where a gate prohibits access at sunset, or during times of trouble. These alleyways in turn branch out in dead ends [alleys] which also have closed gates and on which the entrances of private houses look out . . [T]hanks to these series of obstacles and to the solidarity which is displayed between the people of the same quarter, we find them to have [developed a degree of] relative sec urity[62]

While Sauvaget acknowledges three structures that helped unify the city –the fortified city walls, the congregational mosque, and the central market–, he nevertheless concludes that the Islamic city was fundamentally a mosaic of quarters without any municipal institutions. "The urban center was not at all, as it was in Europe at the same time, hereditarily enfeoffed (*inféodée*), or established in a privileged body." [63] Sauvaget has already given us political reasons for the development of the Islamic city; he now provides us with a socio-religious one. He states that "as an integral and joint part of the great Muslim community, people were no longer entitled to guide their destinies. . ." [64] By adopting Islam, people gave up any sense of personal freedom and so precluded the possibility of them forming autonomous organizations. This theory, of course, calls to mind similar ideas put forth by the Marçais brothers.

Although Sauvaget was one of the first French urban scholars to work in Syria, much of his research still reflects the assumptions and

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[62] Ibid., "Esquisse." p. 453.
[63] Ibid., p. 455.
[64] Ibid.

approaches taken by his colleagues in North Africa. His value-conscious methodology of contrasting the Hellenistic-Roman and European worlds with the Islamic world recalls not only Massignon and the Marçais brothers but also ultimately Weber. Nevertheless, Sauvaget contributed an enormous amount to the study of Islam in general and the Islamic city in particular. He was the first to really articulate, albeit primitively, change over time in the pre-Islamic and Islamic city. Also, his strict and rigorous methods and his willingness to go beyond textual sources and incorporate material (archeological) evidence opened up new possibilities and avenues for investigating Islamic urban history.

Another aspect of the Islamic city that was initially investigated by the French was how Islamic law influenced the shape of the city. Since classical and medieval Islamic cities were not recognized as legal entities, scholars generally assumed that Islamic law had nothing to say about urban life[65] Despite this assumption, Robert Brunschvig attempted to show that there were indeed connections between the *shari'a* and urban development. In his 1947 article, "Urbanisme médiéval et droit musulman," Brunschvig examined the legal texts of two Tunisian *qāḍīs*, Ibn al-Imām (d. 996 C.E.) and Ibn al-Rāmī, a former master stonemason and later *qāḍī* (d. 1333 C.E.), in order to determine how Islamic law was applied to such aspects as public and private roads, shared walls, water supply, and questions arising form the rebuilding and modification of private structures. [66] Other categories that

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[65] Humphreys, p. 231.
[66] Robert Brunschvig, "Urbanisme médieval et droit musulman," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 15 (1947), pp. 127-155

Brunschvig investigated include the relations between neighbors and the location of "undesirable" businesses such as tanneries, stables, and forges. Most often quoted, however, is Brunschvig's distinction between public and private roads:

> In the cities, Muslim law distinguishes a real road, [meaning a road] open at both ends (*shāri^c*, *ṭarīq nāfiḍ*), as a public path where everyone has the right to pa ss. A dead-end road (*sikka ghayr nāfiḍ; sikka* is often replaced by *zuqāq* or *zanqa*) is considered by most authors [i.e., *qāḍīs*] as a private way belonging in joint ownership to the residents. [67]

Thus, according to Brunschvig, Islamic law made a clear and strict distinction between public and private roads. In addition to the definitions given above, Brunschvig demonstrates how public roads had certain restrictions and regulations on obstructions, street width, and projections/overhangs that usually did not apply to private (dead-end) roads. For example, Ibn Imām, in a now often quoted ruling, states that "the width [of a public road] should be so maintained that the largest beings and objects, such as camels carrying the greatest possible loads, and carts or carriages can pass without incident." [68]

For dead-end streets which were by definition private ways, the above regulations did not generally apply. Since the road was property held in joint ownership by those who lived on it, the inhabitants were free to do more or less as they pleased as long as it did not threaten or harm fellow neighbors. An example of this would be the proper

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[67] Ibid., p. 131
[68] Ibid., p. 132.

placement of a house door. Brunschvig claims that: "the Mālikīs. . . , all faithful to the fundamental principal of 'no harm' (*lā ḍarar*), would allow the free installation or relocation of a house door on a dead-end road so long as it would not harm or bother (*gêne*) the neighbors. . ."[69] Here harm is interpreted as the jeopardizing of privacy: a door could not be placed across or near the doors of other residences. [70]

This summary of Brunschvig's analysis of the city roads (*voirie*) introduces some of the main themes that run through the other structures and features of the Islamic city that he examined and which figure into his conclusion. For Islamic law proper as it relates to the city, Brunschvig simply states that it only concerns itself with the question of "harm or damage." This is because "it [Islamic law] incurs certain weakness, which are not without relation to the structures of the states (*états*) when they flourished."[71] Brunschvig never elaborates upon this. Since this idea of damage is so vague, he adds that local customs together with the Muslim concept of the family dominate and fill in many of the details when it comes to urban issues. The underlying theme in Brunschvig's article is the notion of family. This is important for it sets up a basic legal framework of dividing everything into mutually exclusive realms of public and private. It is only when one of these realms infringes upon the other that damage or harm occurs. This is the essence of Brunschvig's argument.

The morphology of the city was thus influenced by the drive to keep public and private area separate -a notion that Brunschvig

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[69] Ibid., p. 134.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., p. 153.

attributes to Islam. [72] The "state" had little had or no interest in "urban planning" and so it was left up to the city inhabitants. Unlike the Roman cities, Brunschvig argues, there was no conception of an "urban aesthetic" in the Islamic city. Instead, people tended to group together with their neighbors and only concerned themselves with their immediate surroundings. Nevertheless, the adoption of Islamic law as an expression of Islamic civilization -public/private- unconsciously transcended this localization and despite its vagueness gave the city a kind of rudimentary form.

Brunschvig's research and arguments are compelling and at the basic level quite believable. While most of this article falls into the same trappings as most previous French scholarship on the Islamic city: exclusiveness to North Africa and to a lesser extent Syria (and in this case the almost sole reliance on Mālikī law), the idea that Islamic civilization has not changed since medieval times, and the constant comparison with classical antiquity and Christian Europe; it nevertheless introduces some influential ideas that will only be picked up much later when other social sciences join in on the research of the Islamic city. The idea of public and private space and its legal defense, though only indirectly mentioned, will become a major theme of anthropologists and sociologists starting in the 1970s (up until the present). Furthermore, this is the first time, as Janet Abu-Lughod points out, that any attempt was made to explore not only the social

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[72] Ibid.

organization of the city, but also "the underlying causes of the particular patterns found in Islamic cities." [73]

Although not a Frenchman, it was Gustave von Grunebaum who, in a 1955 essay, presented a depiction of the city that is generally considered to be the epitome of the traditional or "classic"(French) stereotype of the Islamic city. [74] What von Grunebaum basically did was to collect nearly all the previous Western scholarship on the Islamic city -including all those already mentioned in this paper-, and synthesize them into a single model. Indeed, the first half of the article is more or less a paraphrasing of the main points and ideas of William and George Marçais. Arguments that "Islam [is]. . . a religion of the townspeople. . . in that it tends to favor the settler over the nomad," and that "a town was a settlement in which [a Muslim's] religious duties and. . . social ideals could be completely fulfilled" are taken directly from William Marçais even though von Grunebaum fails to cite him. [75] As for the actual topography of the city, von Grunebaum gives the following description:

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[73] Abu-Lughod, p. 157.

[74] Gustave von Grunebaum, "The Structure of the Muslim Town," *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 141-158. Among the strongest proponents for von Grunebaum as presenting the best picture of the classic Islamic city stereotype are Abu-Lughod, op.cit. pp. 155-162, as will as her conference paper: "What is Islamic about a City? Some Comparative Reflections," *Urbanism in Islam: The Proceedings of the International Conference on Urbanism in Islam held in Tokyo: 22-28 October 1989*, ed. Y. Takeshi, vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1989), pp. 193-217; Nezar AlSayyad, op. cit; M. Haneda and T. Miura eds., *Islamic Urban Studies: historical review and perspectives*, (New York: Kegan Paul, 1994), especially chapters 1 and 2.

[75] Von Grunebaum, p. 142, cf. William Marçais, op. cit. pp. 89-91 for his discussion of Islam as an essentially urban religion, and pp. 95-96 for his theory that Islam was anti-Bedouin.

The full-fledged Muslim town. . . has two focal points–the
Friday mosque and the market. The *jâmi^c*, as the spiritual center,
is in general appropriately placed alon g the main thoroughfare or,
where the plan of the town permits, at the rectangular crossing of
the two main thoroughfares which is market by a spread-out
square. . . Next to the *jâmi^c* we find the principal government
building, be it the palace of the ruler or the official residence of
his deputy. The *jâmi^c* is [also] the political as well as. . .the
intellectual center of the town. [76]

While this is more or less a paraphrasing of part of George Marçais'
article 'L'urbanisme musulman, the description now continues with
nothing less than a direct quotation/translation: [77]

Near the mosque as a religious center we will find the suppliers of
the sanctuary, the *sûq* of the candle merchants, the dealers in
incense and other perfumes. Near the mosque as an intellectual
center we will find also the *sûq* of the booksellers, the *sûq* of the
bookbinders, and, as its neighbor, the *sûq* of the leather
merchants and the makers of slippers. . . Adjoining this group of
markets we enter the halls of the dealers of text iles, the
qaiṣariyya, the only section of the *sûqs* which is regularly roofed
and which can be locked.

Next to the textile trade the carpenters, locksmiths, and the
producers of copper utensils will be located; and somewhat
farther from the center, the smiths. Approaching to the gates [of
the town] one will find, apart form the caravanserais. . . the
makers of saddles. . . Then the vendors of victuals brought in from
the country. . . On the periphery of the town will be situated such
industries a s require space and whose vicinity might be
considered undesirable; the dryers, the tanners, and almost
outside the city limits, the potters. [78]

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[76] Von Grunebaum, pp. 145-46.
[77] See Georges Marcais, L'urbanisme musulman, pp. 228-29.
[78] Von Grunebaum, pp. 146-47.

What is most remarkable about this excerpt is that von Grunebaum presents it without any critical commentary, analysis, or additions; he seems to accept completely and without question William Marçais' 1940 depiction of the Islamic city: one based on the general characteristics of Fez, Algers, Tunis and other Maghribī cities. [79]

In fact, most of von Grunebaum's ar ticle is an uncritical collection of the observations, theories, and conclusions made by previous scholars of the Islamic city. For example, he accepts Sauvaget's theory that the Islamic city represented the epitome of decentralization and stagnation that began during the Byzantine period as well as his theory that the quarter is the basic unit of the city. [80] More importantly though, he thoroughly embraces Sauvaget's conclusion that that cities under Islam possessed no municipal institutions. [81] Besides incorporating Sauvaget in to his essay, von Grunebaum unequivocally accepts Massignon's guild theory [82] and Brunschvig's legal interpretation of the Islamic city. [83] Of course, the greatest problem with accepting all these views so uncritically is that one obtains a very confusing view of the Islamic city. What really are the essential elements of the city? Is it religious (Marçais), is it socio-political (Sauvaget), is it economic (Massignon), or is legal

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[79] Compare Grunebaum's description with G. Marçais' quoted earlier in this chapter (p. 29) and following analysis.

[80] q.v. the discussion on Sauvaget: pp.

[81] von Grunebaum, p. 149.

[82] Ibid., p. 150.

[83] Ibid., pp. 152-53.

(Brunschvig)? Indeed, it may be all of these, but von Grunebaum makes that conclusion.

Finally, it should be noted that the influence of Max Weber in the this article is quite strong.   Von Grunebaum begins his essay by setting up a comparison between the classical Greco-Roman city and the Islamic city –a comparison that continues in differing degree throughout the paper. Like Weber, von Grunebaum upholds the ideal of the Greek and Roman city and uses it as a foil to the Islamic city. For example, he states that "it [the Islamic city] is not (what the *polis* was) an autonomous association of citizens. . . [rather, it was] merely a functionally unified, administrative entity with a more or less stable complement of settlers or inhabitants." [84] On almost every page one can find references to Greek, Roman, or "Hellenic" cities. Even the concluding paragraph begins with the following sentence: "The Islamic town did not represent a uniform type of civilized life as had the Greek or Roman town." [85] This tone, one of praise for classical civilization and almost contempt for Islamic society, is dominant through the article. Despite these flaws, von Grunebaum did the study of Islamic urbanism an invaluable service: he summarized, with great efficiency and clarity, the main points and arguments -already a large and disparate collection of works- that had been made on the Islamic city since the early part of the 20th century. Thanks to him, not only was the concept of the Islamic city made more accessible to other scholars outside the field of

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[84] Ibid., p. 142.
[85] Ibid., p. 154.

Orientalism but also, (as we will see) research on the Islamic city could now proceed more rapidly than ever.

Chapter II

It was not long after Gustave von Grunebaum published his well known essay, "The Structure of the Muslim Town," in 1955 that the first criticisms of his model of the Islamic city appeared. The historians E. Ashtor-Strauss and Claude Cahen challenged the notion that, unlike their European counterparts, Islamic cities had no autonomous organizations. These initial critiques and observations were soon followed by more forceful rejections of Massignon's guild theory; this time Cahen was enthusiastically joined by Samuel Stern. Perhaps the most famous challenge to the accepted picture of the Islamic city was Ira Lapidus's book, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, published in 1967, in which he rejected the accepted methodology of comparing Islamic cities against ideal European models, and offered a new model based on social relations and functions.

By the early 1970s, the critique and revision of the traditional model of the Islamic city were fully underway. What really added momentum to this process was the participation of scholars from fields outside traditional oriental studies. Some of the most prominent included urban geographer Eugen Wirth, art historian, Oleg Grabar, and anthropologist, Dale Eickelman. Not only did they rigorously critique and question the accepted model of the Islamic city, but they also proposed and presented new approaches and methodologies for looking at and representing cities in the Islamic world. The results of

these numerous and diverse investigations and interpretations were a mixed blessing: while they buried the simplistic notion of the Islamic city as epitomized by von Grunebaum, they failed to offer any kind of new and more applicable model which could be agreed upon by a majority of scholars. Instead, what emerged by the 1980s was highly complex and often contradictory image of the city in the Islamic world, a city with as many faces as interpretations. This chapter will present and examine the major contributors to this process of questioning, re-interpreting, and diversifying the notion of the Islamic city.

The claim that Islamic cities had never enjoyed any kind of civic autonomy -one of Weber's five requirements for "city status" was the the first characteristic of the traditional Islamic city to be challenged. Although most scholars agreed that cities in the Islamic world never achieved the level of autonomy that medieval European cities had, some now attempted to show that there had been times when certain cities had experienced forms of urban autonomy. Of course, Massignon had previously argued that Islamic cities in the Middle East had possessed limited autonomy in the form of European style guilds, but his conclusions though still influential were (as we shall see) soon to be completely discredited. Going beyond Massignon's autonomous guilds, scholars increasingly began to look toward other aspects of Islamic cities, especially toward their social structure. The pioneer in this field of Islamic social history was E. Ashtor-Strauss. In 1956 he published an article titled "L'administration urbaine en Syrie médiévale" in which he illustrates how Syrian cities between the 10th and 12th centuries

attained certain forms of autonomy. [1] While still adhering to the framework of comparing and contrasting European and Oriental cities, Ashtor-Strauss contends that through a combination of weakened government and a dormant tradition of municipal autonomy, the populations (especially the bourgeoisie) of certain Syrian cities, as well as some those in Mesopotamia were able to assert significant control and influence over their own lives and over their rulers. Apart from the guilds, the main players in this gaining of semi-freedom included the *muhtasib* (market and moral supervisor) , the *fuqahā'* (jurists), and the *ra'īs* (chief) backed by the *ahdāth*, or city militia.

Ashtor-Strauss argues that the *muhtasib* carried out many of the duties that were typical of a municipality: "we can say that the political theory of Islam did not recognized the municipality as an autonomous body of urban life, but it did impose on the *muhtasib* many municipal functions." [2] For example, the *muhtasib* not only made sure that the markets were in order and that certain standards of commerce were met, but he also had control over the construction of buildings. Moreover, he was also a kind of religious and moral policeman and made certain that the public followed the prescribed religious laws such as not drinking alcohol or fasting during Ramadan.

Whereas the *muhtasib* was a direct representative of the government, the *fuqahā'* and their leaders played a more autonomous role in city life. True, many were recruited into government positions, but according to Ashtor-Strauss, the leaders (shaykhs) were not named

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[1] E. Ashtor-Strauss, "L'administration urbaine en Syrie médiévale," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 31 (1956), pp. 73-128.
[2] Ibid., p. 82.

or elected by the authorities, rather, they were chosen by members within their own group, i.e., law school, city quarter, etc. [3] To prove their autonomous nature further, Ashtor-Strauss gives the example of how two shaykhs were imprisoned by the Ayyubid ruler of Damascus, al-Malik aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl, because they publicly disapproved of his conduct -a sentiment held by the majority of the populace. [4]

The next half of this article is almost completely dedicated to the raʾīs, or chief of the city. For Ashtor-Strauss, this city headman embodied, more than any other person or group, the apogee of urban autonomy in Syria during the 11th and 12th centuries. Although there is no single definition of the city raʾīs, he has been regarded at different times as the chief of police, the head of the municipality, and even the equivalent of a mayor. Officially his position was somewhat under that of the muhtasib, but the above leaders of the quarters. Like the muhtasib, the raʾīs was appointed by the ruler of the city and usually came from a well respected family. From the examples that Ashtor-Strauss gives, the raʿīs had significant political power and seemed to enjoy popular support -a combination that often led to conflicts with the ruler. For example, during the early decades of the 12th century, the raʾīs Ṣāʿid b. Badīʿ basically ran the city of Aleppo with the consent of the Seljuk Alparslān. He defended the city against both Crusader and Ismāʿīlī incursions, but shortly thereafter he was deemed too powerful by the Seljuk prince and was imprisoned. [5] While a raʾīs normally had the support of the other city notables his real muscle came from being

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[3] Ibid., p. 90.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 97. For further examples see pp. 92-100.

the head of the city *aḥdāth*, or militia. According to Ashtor-Strauss, "it was the *aḥdāth* who permitted the *raʾīs* to play such an active a role in urban and interurban politics." [6] These city militias not only defended the city against attack but also often took part in many of the battles between the Seljuk, Zangid, and Ayyubid princes. Thus they played an important political role in Syria during the 11th and 12th centuries, and their support or non-support could determine who would control an major city or region. During times of peace these militia became socially more active and ascribed to the ideals of the *futuwwa*. Others became champions of orthodox Islam and actively persecuted Shiʿites and Ismāʿīlīs. [7]

This article provides numerous examples of how the aforementioned institutions, usually through revolt or open defiance, succeeded in acquiring limited autonomy and power. Nevertheless, unlike their European counterparts, their successes were short lived as a strongly centralized military authority re-emerged to take control. It was only during the 10th to 12th centuries, when centralized authority was weak and in decline, that Syria offered fertile ground for the rise of urban autonomy. But before they could completely gain their freedom, these cities and towns were re-conquered and re-incorporated into the new centralized regime of Nūr ad-Dīn, followed by the even stronger rule of Saladin. Any emerging voices of urban autonomy were now effectively silenced. [8]

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[6] Ibid., p. 118.
[7] Ibid., p. 120.
[8] Ibid., pp. 127-28.

The main flaw of this article is that it still falls back upon the Weberian dichotomy between East and West. For example, Ashtor-Strauss states that "there had not been in this country [Syria] any civic sentiments that could be compared to the civic nature [civisme] found in the Hellenic world, ancient India, or medieval Europe." Ashtor-Strauss provides no evidence to reinforce this claim and it comes across as pure conjecture. Furthermore, it seems to go against his seeming desire to show that there indeed were some similar trends between the cities of the Islamic and European Christian worlds. More importantly, however, the above assertion clearly demonstrates the still strong impetus to compare and contrast Islamic cities with Greco-Roman and European ones, the latter being the archetypal models. Of course, the entire emerging debate about the autonomy of Islamic cities itself identifies this eurocentric framework.

Nevertheless, Ashtor-Strauss's achievements greatly outweigh his shortcomings. His work on the social institutions and structure of Syrian cities added tremendously to the understanding of city life in medieval Syria and influenced a new trend in Islamic urban studies. Furthermore, his thorough use of primary sources heightened the standards of research not only in the specific field of Islamic cities, but also in Islamic history in general.

A final point about this article is that Ashtor-Strauss makes a real effort to demonstrate the uniqueness of Syrian cities under Islamic rule, even more so than Sauvaget had. He seems to be aware of the dominance of the North African model and shows how cities in Syria were different. After noting that the conquering Arabs had not founded any new cities in Syria as they had in North Africa and Iraq, he points

out that unlike in North Africa, the rulers and princes in Syria did not set up their courts outside the main cities in the suburbs. Instead, they took up residence within the walls of the city. In addition, the suburbs never supplanted the principal city as had so often occurred in the Maghrib. [9] This was an important step in realizing the complexity and diversity of urban centers in the Islamic world. Furthermore, it suggested a new approach in comparing cities -an approach of getting away from block comparisons between European and Islamic cities, and moving more towards an "internal comparison" between cities from different regions of the Islamic world.

Ashtor-Strauss's work on urban autonomy and social structure in the Islamic world was enthusiastically continued by Claude Cahen in two important articles that appeared in 1958. The first article, "Zur Geschichte der städtischen Gesellschaft im islamischen Orient des Mittelalters," is a more general study of the social development of cities under Islam up to the 12th century C.E., while the second paper, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulman" is a more in-depth study of how certain groups gained limited autonomy between the 10th and 12th centuries in Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and how that affected the social structure of the cities in those regions. Despite often complex interpretations and some repetition between the two articles, Cahen presented a picture of the city in the Islamic Middle East that not only challenged the traditional model of the Islamic city,

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[9] Ibid., p. 75.

but also established a new methodology for understanding cities, especially during the first six hundred years of Islam

In both articles, Claude Cahen maintains that the cities which the Arabs had captured in the 7th century did not drastically change under Arab rule; rather, they continued to develop along the same path as most of the neighboring European cities which had not been conquered. It was not until the 11th century that Middle Eastern (and North African) and European cities began to diverge, and it is only then that one can accurately speak of an Islamic city. [10] (This break was due to the economic rise of Europe on the one hand, and the socio-economic solidification and partial decline of the Islamic world on the other hand.)

What brought Cahen to this topic was his great interest in the social history of Islam. He believed that social history had be to used for more than just learning about the Arab conquerors themselves, and instead, should also be used for looking at the societies and cultures of the people that they had subjugated: "one needs to place oneself at the base of the cultures which the Arabs had conquered and ask in what respect did the Arab conquests and Islam change their social organization. . ."[11] As for the study of those cities which had fallen under Arab rule, Cahen contends that too much emphasis had been

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[10] C. Cahen, "Zur Geschichte der städischen Gesellschaft im Orient des Mittelalters," *Saeculum*, 9 (1958), 75-76

[11] Ibid., p. 59.

placed on topography and morphology, and not enough on their history and social structure. [12]

In order to pursue this new approach to Islamic history in general and Islamic cities in particular, Cahen needed to develop a practical methodology. He began by looking at previous studies of the Islamic city and soon discovered that they were almost all structured around a comparison between the Islamic city and either the Greco-Roman city-state or the European commune. Apparently the first to have realized this dominant trend, he immediately set about questioning and re-evaluating it. Needless to say, he found it quite lacking and biased. More specifically, he concluded that one cannot compare cities out of context and that it is necessary to consider the broader geo-political setting in which they existed. He also noted that previous studies only compared static models that had little or no connection with each other. For example, the classical city-state no longer existed by the time the Arabs arrived at the Mediterranean, so why compare an Islamic city with a city that ceased to exist centuries before? It was out of these criticism that Cahen developed his methodology. He proposed a much more fluid method that looked at what cities were like immediately before they were conquered by the Arabs and then after they were subjugated, and also how they compared to those neighboring cities that had not been conquered. Combining this approach with his strong interest in social history, Cahen was able to emphasize the continuity between the pre-Islamic and Islamic worlds rather than the change.

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[12] Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen Age," part 1, *Arabica*, 5 (1958), 225.

Like Ashtor-Strauss, Cahen focuses his attention on the cities of the Syrian-Mesopotamian region. This region fit very well with Cahen's study of continuity not only because it became the "heartland" of the great Arab and Turkish empires, but also because it had been one of most populated pre-Islamic territories that the Arabs conquered. The first question that Cahen asked was what kind of cities did the Arabs first find when they reached the Mediterranean. His immediate answer was that they *did not* encounter the autonomous city-state of Antiquity; rather, they found cities that had not only expanded and evolved beyond their classical foundations, but had also lost most of their former autonomy. [13] While the physical and administrative layout of Eastern Mediterranean cities was already beginning to change in the 2nd century C.E., it was really under Byzantine rule during the 6th and 7th centuries that cities drastically changed. Instability and almost constant warfare caused not only the Byzantine Empire to move towards increasing centralization at the expense of municipal autonomy, but also urban centers to decline economically, culturally, and, needless to say, demographically. [14] In addition, towns and cities such as Aleppo and Damascus were physically evolving and changing: defensive walls were erected around them, and new roads, quarters and

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[13] Cahen, "Zur Geschichte. . . ," p. 64.

[14] Ibid., To support his claim that Eastern Mediterranean cities were already in decline during late Roman times Cahen cites A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1937) and J. Sauvaget, *Alep* (Paris, 1941). With such compelling evidence, it is remarkable that no one until Cahen -almost 20 years later- picked up on the idea that the cities which the Arabs took over were no longer classical city-states.

suburbs emerged. [15] On the whole, cities in the Eastern Mediterranean were becoming increasingly closed and compact.

Having established that Arab armies did not find any true classical city-state, Cahen now raises the question of whether or not the conquests halted, changed, or accelerated the path of development of these cities. In order to answer this question, he employs his new methodology and compares the development of Mediterranean cities not under Arab rule with those that were. He finds that for the most part Islamic cities and neighboring Byzantine and Italian cities followed the same path of development up to about the 11th century C.E.[16] To prove this phenomenon of parallel development, Cahen looks at the evolution of autonomous movements in Byzantine, Italian, Syrian, and Iraqi cities. [17]

Since much more was known about autonomy in European cities, Cahen devotes most of his time to the manifestations of autonomy in Islamic cities, particularly those in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, as the title implies, Cahen's article, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen Age" is almost completely dedicated to the topic. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into a detailed review and analysis of Cahen's work on popular movements, we will nevertheless look at his conclusions and how they relate to the idea of the Islamic city. Like Ashtor-Strauss, he argues

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[15] Ibid.

[16] id., Mouvements populaires. . . ," part 3, *Arabica*, 6 (1959), p. 258.

[17] For examples of corresponding developments other than autonomy see: Ibid., pp. 64-66, 74-76; also, Cahen, "Mouvements populaires. . . ," part 3, *Arabica*, 6 (1959) pp. 255-260.

that the *aḥdāth* represent the most convincing example for the development of municipal autonomy:

> They were exclusively recruited from the population of the city and represented an element of local opposition against the arbitrariness [*Willkür*] of the more or less foreign overlords. For two hundred years [10th-12th centuries C.E.], they were the ruling political power within the city limits and the [foreign] princes, whether present or not, could do nothing wit hout their consent [18]

It was only by garrisoning armed troops in every city quarter that the Turkish rulers were able to crush the *aḥdāth* and their *raʾīs*. By the beginning of the 12th century all independence and authority of the *aḥdāth* in the major cities of Syria and Northern Iraq had been eliminated [19]

Having provided a detailed picture of the *aḥdāth*, Cahen now shows how the autonomous role they played in Syria could be connected to the role of both the *ʿayyārūn* and *fityān* in Iraq, and the *milites* in medieval Italy. The term *fityān* (plural of *fatā*, young man) was used to designate the members of a group (or gang) devoted to the ideals of the *futuwwa* -mutual loyalty, bravery, solidarity etc. [20] On the other hand, the term *ʿayyārūn* (vagabonds) was originally used to describe common

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[18] Cahen, "Zur Geschichte. . . ," p. 68. Although Cahen's three part article in *Arabica* goes into great detail about the organization and role of the *aḥdāth* the *ʿayyārūn* and the *fityān*, the shorter article in *Saeculum* is more concise and summarizes better the main arguments, ideas, and conclusions that are worked out in the former.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Cahen, "Mouvements populaires," part 2, pp. 31-32. Cahen also details on these pages some textual inconsistencies between the terms *fatā, fityān, and futuwwa*. For further information on the ideology and social significance on the *futuwwa* movement see, M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, (Chicago, 1974), pp. 126-30.

criminals and those who were at the lowest segment of society. Often homeless and unemployed, they tended to live outside the law and frequently banded together into organized street gangs. [21] Although the two groups seem almost diametrically opposed, Cahen argues that the terms are more often than not used interchangeably in the treatises and chronicles of the time. [22] Thus, Cahen coins the term *fityān-ᶜayyārūn* to refer the "youth gangs" of Iraq and Iran. Despite their seeming differences from the *ahdāth* of Syria and northern Iraq -they often came from a lower social standing and were usually less formally organized-, the *fityān-ᶜayyārūn* played a similar role in the socio-political life of the towns and cities. They were frequently the only power to challenge foreign rule and during times of trouble and instability they often joined with local notables to administer and police the city. [23]

Although the drive toward municipal autonomy in Europe was better known, Cahen attempts to show that this process in non-Muslim Mediterranean cities was very much akin to the one in the cities of Syria, Iraq and Iran. Due to the lack of sources and information on eastern Byzantine cities, He takes the example of the cities and towns of southern Italy, most of which were socially quite similar to other Byzantine cities of the time. As was the case in Syria and Iraq, the militias in these cities formed a kind of autonomous body against the ruling forces:

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[21] Cahen, "Mouvements populaires," vol. 2, pp. 34-35; id, "Zur Geschichte," pp. 71-72.

[22] Cahen, "Mouvements populaires," part 2, pp. 34-35.

[23] Ibid., p. 51. For numerous examples of *fityān-ᶜayyārūn* power and authority in Iraq and Iran, see pp. 35-48.

> The *milites* continued to play an essential role until the 11th century C.E. They were [composed of] the lower urban aristocracy. . . and were opposed to the great landed aristocracy who were not only rurally based, but also on the road towards feudalization. . . [It] was this setting, begin ning in the 9th and 10th centuries, that led to the revolts of civic autonomy against the princes, bishops, and feudal lords -revolts that would eventually lead to communal emancipation. [24]

Cahen goes on to explain that contrary to what was hitherto believed, professional guilds did not help bring about this movement toward urban autonomy. Indeed, at this time, guilds in the classic European sense of professional corporations did not yet exist; this is true for both the Islamic and Christian worlds. What did exist were loose fraternities, half social and half religious that often identified themselves with certain city quarters or districts. In larger cities such as Rome and Venice, the opposition and competition between quarters, city and suburb, feudal estates and episcopal estates were quite frequent and opposing fraternities along with militias often took sides in these battles. As imperial (Byzantine) authority began to erode, the militias and fraternities, like their counterparts in Syria and Iraq, were often used by influential families and bishops to gain power and leadership over a town or city. [25]

These parallel socio-historical developments between neighboring Muslim and European cities seem to end in the 11th century. Cahen offers two explanations for this: 1) the Islamic world experienced a certain social decline and ossification, and 2) the socio-

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[24] id, part 3, pp. 256-57.
[25] Ibid., p. 257, and id., "Zur Geschichte," pp. 74-5.

economic rise of Europe. [26] While Europeans were beginning to free themselves from their feudal overlords, the inhabitants of the Islamic world were subjugated under an emerging military aristocracy which chose to live in the cities. And as the economy of the cities began to decline in the face of European growth, the military aristocracy was able to suppress the urban populations even more. In addition, the Islamic world had, by the 11th century, developed its own distinctive legal and social structures, as had Europe. Cahen argues that it is only after these fundamental changes in the 11th century that one can begin to talk about distinctive differences between European and Islamic societies, and thus between Islamic and Christian cities. [27] To use the adjective Islamic to qualify any city before the 11th century would be misleading and inappropriate; it is only after this time that one can use that term. Moreover, Cahen points out that even when this term is used, one must remember that Islam as a religion was not the primary cause of the Islamic city; rather, the essential characteristics of "Islamic" cities grew out of the general social factors which, for the most part, did not originate in Islam. Instead, these social factors came from the pre-Islamic civilizations that the Arabs inherited. [28]

It is now generally accepted that Claude Cahen was the first to question and criticize the accepted model of the Islamic city. [29] Although

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[26] Cahen, "Zur Geschichte," pp. 74.

[27] Ibid., 75.

[28] Cahen, "Mouvements populaires," pp. 258-59.

[29] R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 229-30; Toru Miura, "Mashriq," in *Islamic Urban Studies: Historical Review and Perspectives*, eds. M. Haneda and T. Miura (New York, 1994), p. 89. As early as 1975 Eugen Wirth acknowledge Cahen's contribution on the second page of his article "Die

he did not concentrate on topography and his ambitious plan to compare all the cities of the Middle East, his analysis of urban social structures and their role in municipal autonomy challenged the idea that cities under Arab and Islamic rule were static and did not share anything in common with their European, Christian counterparts. His emphasis on social history and on a methodology that seeks to examine the social continuity of parallel cultures and societies ushered in a new direction in understanding the physical and social structure of the Islamic world. He broke down a sort of psychological barrier that had hitherto guided research on the eastern and western worlds; where previous scholars sought to accentuate the differences between Europe and the East, Cahen chose to stress the similarities. Although his own plans to compare and analyze the parallel developments between the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic Middle East (including Iran) often falls a little short -it was a very ambitious undertaking-, his work encouraged a new wave of scholars not only to review critically the theories and conclusions of earlier researchers, but also to regard the Islamic world inclusively rather than exclusively. Thanks to Cahen's work, the specter of Weber was finally being challenged.

The concept of the Islamic city had now become somewhat of a hot topic and in the summer of 1965 Albert Hourani and Samuel Stern organized a colloquium on the subject at Oxford University in England. This colloquium brought together a number of eminent and emerging

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orientalische Stadt: Ein Überblick aufgrund jüngerer Forschung zur materiellen Kultur," in *Saeculum*, 26 (1975), pp., 45-94.

scholars in the field such as Claude Cahen, Samuel Stern, Jean Aubin, Ira Lapidus, and Oleg Grabar. The proceedings themselves were not published until 1970.[30] Despite Hourani's disappointing introduction, "The Islamic City in Light of Recent Research," in which he "safely" deferred to both Weber's categories and the standard model of the Islamic city, the colloquium produced some important papers which are still frequently cited today, namely, Stern's "The Constitution of the Islamic City, and Cahen's Y a-t-il eu des corporations professionelles dans le monde musulman classique?"[31] Other noteworthy papers were presented by George Scanlon, Jean Aubin, and J. Lassner.

Of all the papers presented at this colloquium, Stern's provides the most compelling observations and arguments on the actual nature of the Islamic city. Not only does he examine the social structures of the Islamic city, but he also critically reviews Massignon's guild theory. (He incidentally comes to the same conclusions about guilds as Cahen does in his paper.)[32]

Stern begins his inquiry with the simple question of what constitutes an Islamic city; more specifically he wants know what distinguishes it from cities in other civilizations. Like Cahen, Stern steers away from topographical and material aspects, and instead looks at the inner structures of the city. He begins his examination with

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[30] A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern, eds., *The Islamic City* (Oxford, 1970).

[31] For a harsh yet accurate review of Hourani's introduction see Nezar AlSayyad, *Cities and Caliphs* (Westport, 1991) pp. 26-27. Alsayyad points out how Hourani literally reproduced the standard Marçais-Grunebaum model of the Islamic city.

[32] Since a significant part of this chapter has already been devoted to Claude Cahen's work on the Islamic city, and since he also comes to the same conclusions as Samuel Stern, an analysis and review of his paper "Y a-t-il eu des corporations professionelles dans le monde musulman classique?" would be somewhat excessive.

Byzantine cities because it was these cities with which the Arabs first came into contact. Since they had almost no urban traditions of their own, the conquering Arabs adopted whatever administrative systems were in place when they arrived; in this case, the cities had mostly been under Byzantine control. Based upon his reading of Jones's 1940 classic *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian*, Stern, like Cahen before him concludes that the city that the Arabs encountered in the Near East was not the city-states of classical antiquity. [33] Cities under Byzantine rule had gradually lost their municipal autonomy due to the increasing centralization and militarization of the empire. By the time the Arabs came on the scene in the 7th century, there were hardly any traces left of the autonomy which these cities had once enjoyed. The Arabs were able to "take over and develop what existed at the moment of the transition, but since municipal institutions had ceased to exist Islam could not borrow them from Antiquity." [34]

While Stern and Cahen agree that the conquering Arabs did not inherit autonomous institutions from classical antiquity, Stern is much less enthusiastic than Cahen about the subsequent development of autonomy in the Islamic world. He flatly states that Islamic society never developed municipal institutions. This was due to two reasons. [35] The first was that the first centuries of Islamic rule were characterized by strong and stable governments, a situation that was less than

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[33] S. M. Stern, "The Constitution of the Islamic City," in *The Islamic City*, eds. A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern (Oxford, 1970), pp. 29-30. Stern cites A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford, 1940), pp. 85-94. For more information on the cities of late antquity see his, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford, 1971).

[34] Stern, "The Constitution," p. 30.

propitious for the rise of autonomy. The second and related reason was that Islamic civilization more or less directly continued the centralized bureaucratic administration of the Byzantine empire. [36] Under such conditions, no kind of civic autonomy could arise. Although Cahen acknowledges that there were attempts towards independence in certain cities, these all ended in failure because unlike in Europe, they never assumed institutional forms and thus "remained abortive." Finally, Cahen makes an observation that could partially explain why scholars had been so "obsessed" with proving the existence of civic autonomy in the Islamic world: he observes that it is a seeming paradox that despite an incomparably more advanced urban life than in Western Europe, Islamic civilization did not develop any kind of civic institutions. [37] Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that this conclusion still reflects a eurocentric, Weberian ideal of the city for it suggests that autonomous associations are part and parcel of "advanced urban life."

The issue that Stern deals with next is the existence of professional European-style craft guilds as characterized by Louis Massignon and his student Bernard Lewis. [38] Stern completely rejects Massignon's guild theory and sees it as "based on the theories -or let us

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[35] Ibid., pp. 31-32.
[36] Stern also points out on p. 32 of "The Constitution" that such "continuity of social life did not obtain in the Latin-Germanic West, where different circumstances brought about the rise of feudalism instead of the centralized state, and the disappearance of towns, instead of a thriving urban life."
[37] Ibid., pp. 32-33.
[38] For more information on Massignon's guild theory see chapter 1, pp. 24-25; for Lewis's (dupicate) version see: B. Lewis, "The Islamic Guilds," *Economic History Review*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1937), pp. 20-37.

rather say the fancies -of L. Massignon." [39] He argues that there is no known evidence for the existence of such independent, professional guilds in classical and medieval Islam; and furthermore, he demonstrates that even if there were such associations there is no proof for Massignon's assertion that the Qarmatians or Ismāʿīlīs created autonomous guilds in order to help them overthrow the Abbasids. [40] Nevertheless, Stern shows that according to certain 12th century *ḥisba* texts some crafts were indeed organized. [41] But unlike the independent and highly organized corporations of Medieval Europe, the "guilds" of the Medieval Islamic world were rather loosely set up and tended to be controlled and supervised by the state. The craftsmen chose leaders (ʿ*arīf, amīn, muqaddam*) who would answer directly to the *muḥtasib* and would carry out his orders. Thus, instead of being an autonomous association, the guild, through the *muḥtasib* and his subordinates, was used as an organ of state control. Moreover, Stern points out that such government-regulated guilds date back to Roman times and that it is reasonable to assume that the tradition survived the transition to Muslim rule. And although the organization of crafts did become more "articulated" during the later Middle Ages, with some associations even adopting the ideology of the *futuwwa*, they, like other forms of emerging civic autonomy never fully developed to the level of their European counterparts. [42]

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[39] Stern, "The Constitution," p. 37.
[40] For Stern's complete and detailed refutation of Massignon's guild theory see ibid., pp. 38-43; see also Cahen's article from the same colloquium, (op. cit. footnote 21), especially, pp. 52-56.
[41] Ibid., pp. 43-44.
[42] Ibid., pp. 45-47.

Stern concludes his examination by asserting that corporate institutions did not exist in classical and medieval Islam. They did not exist because unlike Western Europe, the Arab world did not inherit a tradition of corporate life for its institutions to imitate and develop. [43] Furthermore, Stern points out that Islamic law hindered any idea of corporate organization because it recognized "neither the juridical personality of municipalities, nor that of collectives of persons such as guilds."[44] This absence of corporate institutions and (thus) municipal autonomy caused the cities and towns of the Islamic world to possess instead a kind of "looseness of structure." Stern fails to explain what he means by this descriptive, but it seems to imply by it the lack of corporate and autonomous institutions which were found in Medieval Europe. Therefore Stern simply concludes that the essential characteristic of the Islamic city was its general absence of corporate institutions, or put more positively, its looseness of structure.

The clarity and directness of Stern's paper is refreshing and it is easy to be won over by his forceful arguments. But behind this masterful presentation, Stern fails to fulfill his goal of "examin[ing] the constitution of the Islamic city which distinguishes it from the cities of other civilizations." [45] As we have seen, he simply concludes his investigation by stating that the main characteristic of the Islamic city is its lack of corporate structures which, of course, precludes any form

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[43] Ibid., pp. 47-48. Stern argues that religious orders with their highly developed structures and the idea of legal associates and juridical persons inherited from Roman law had much to do with the rise of corporations in Europe.

[44] Ibid., pp. 48-49. Stern basis this arguement solely on D. Santillana, *Insituzioni di dritto musulmano malichita*, vol. 1. (Roma, 1925-38), pp. 170-1.

[45] Ibid., p. 25.

of municipal autonomy. A definite disappointment for a paper grandiosely entitled "The Constitution of the Islamic City." He is undoubtedly successful in proving that Islamic cities did not possess corporations and this is important, but as a distinguishing element from cities of other cultures Stern himself undermines it in his concluding remarks: [46]

> It seems that this proliferation of corporations is a particular characteristic of medieval western civilization, so that the lack of it cannot be used as a specific characterization of Islamic civilization, since this lack it shares with most other civilizations.

So, while Stern has demonstrated that the Islamic world did not organize itself into corporate bodies, he cannot prove that this is a unique characteristic of Islam; at most it only helps to distinguish it from western Europe -an unwitting retreat to Weber.

Where Stern truly excels is in his critique and dismantling of the Massignon-Lewis guild theory, and of the idea that limited forms of urban autonomy had existed in the Islamic world. This fatal blow to the notion of Islamic guilds annulled one of the last great fundamental elements of the tradition Islamic city and in so doing helped shift the study of Islamic urbanism away from religious and economic determinism to a methodology based on social and cultural structures. Whereas Ashtor-Strauss and Cahen directly promoted ideas of social history in the study of the Islamic city, Stern indirectly did the same by destroying one of the last vestiges of the traditional Islamic city model.

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[46] Ibid., p. 49.

His partial cleaning of the slate helped usher in a new generation of diverse scholars who, as we will see, approached the Islamic city from a variety of fields.

One of the most well known names in the field of Islamic urban studies is doubtless Ira Lapidus. His 1967 book, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* is still considered a standard if not a classic work in Islamic social (and urban) history. [47] What makes Lapidus's work so important is that it was the first to present a comprehensive new model of the Islamic city taking into account the critiques, revisions, and ideas of Ashtor-Strauss, Cahen, and Stern. Not Since Gustave von Grunebaum's article "The Structure of the Muslim Town," had anyone attempted to formulate a comprehensive model of the Islamic city. While Ashtor-Strauss, Cahen and Stern had all made crucial contributions to the study of cities and towns in the Islamic world, none had gone on to describe in full the form and structure of those cities; rather, they tended to focus mainly on explaining and analyzing certain socio-economic aspects of the medieval Islamic city.

While Lapidus's principal work remains his *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, most of the ideas and theories introduced in that work were further refined and expanded upon in a series of notable yet somewhat repetitive follow-up papers and articles. [48] Thus, the following

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[47] I. M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univeristy Press, 1967)
[48] These include: I. M. Lapidus, "Evolution of Early Muslim Urban Society," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 15 (1973), pp. 21-50; id., "Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies," *Middle Eastern Cities*, ed. Lapidus, (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 47-79; id., "Muslim Urban Society in Mamlūk Syria," *The Islamic City*, eds. A. H. Hourani and

examination of Lapidus's understanding of the Islamic city will draw on all these works.

Ira Lapidus is in many ways a social historian *par excellence.* For him, social structures and institutions cause history to have taken the shape it has. Politics, economics, art, and even religion have all been shaped by the workings of a civilization's changing social structures and systems. Therefore, it should come as no surprise when Lapidus argues that the morphology of cities and towns in the Islamic world is in essence the physical manifestation and representation of the prevailing social structures, relationships, and institutions. [49] Furthermore, it should be noted that unlike many of the previous scholars reviewed in this paper, Lapidus's ultimate goal is not to define the Islamic city *per se*; rather, it is to examine the social structures of certain medieval Muslim cities in order to better understand the Islamic society of which they were an intrinsic part.

Lapidus, like Cahen and Stern, supports the theory that the Arab conquests, far from altering or destroying the cities of late antiquity, supported and continued the pre-existing path of urban development taking placed in almost all the newly acquired regions and territories. More importantly however, the Arab conquests directly caused a kind of urban revival: not only were many exiting cities expanded upon, but a good number of new towns and cities were also established. According to Lapidus these new settlements were of two types: mass encampments

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S. M. Stern (Oxford, 1970), pp. 195-205; id., "Traditional Muslim Cities: Structure and Change." *From Madina to Metropolis*, ed. L. Carl Brown, (Princeton, 1973), pp. 51-69.
[49] I.M. Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, (Cambridge MA, 1967), p. 114; id., "Traditional Muslim Cities: Structure and Change," p. 63.

or garrison towns (*amṣār*) and administrative centers or bases.
Garrison towns such as Basra, Kufa, and Fusṭāṭ were, as the name
implies, created in order to station the migrating bedouin tribes and
armies. This was necessary both to organize them for future campaigns
and to segregate them from the conquered peoples. These
encampments also prevented the bedouin tribes from raiding, seizing,
and destroying the newly acquired lands and properties. [50] Even later in
the 8th and 9th centuries, administrative bases were created in order to
meet the Caliphs' demands to isolate loyal troops and administrators
from the mass population and thus ensuring the Caliph's sovereignty
over his subjects. Madīnat al-Salām (Baghdad) and later Samarra are
prefect examples of this. Similar administrative and military
headquarters -predominately in Iran- were constructed by Arab
governors as new suburbs of existing cities. Examples here include
Wāsiṭ, Qazvin, Rayy, and Nishapur. [51] In addition to settlement into new
towns and suburbs, many Arabs also moved into the quarters and
suburbs of already existing cities. [52] Finally, -and Lapidus goes into some
detail on this- many migrating Arabs chose not settle into towns and
cities at all preferring instead to move into smaller villages or even to
remain as nomads. His emphasis on this latter point was to try to dispel
the popular notion that "the Arabs had a religious preference for urban
over rural habitation," i.e., that cities were somehow necessary to Islam
and that it was only in an urban setting that a Muslim could completely

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[50] Lapidus, "The Evolution of Muslim Urban Society," pp. 24-25.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., p. 26; Lapidus, "Traditional Muslim Cities," pp. 53,59.

fulfill his or her religious duties. [53] Of course, cities quickly became important centers for Islamic learning and practice, but that did not in any way automatically make them exclusive places for living a proper Muslim life.

According to Lapidus, the most important effect that these new cities and suburbs had on Middle Eastern urbanism was the creation of a "double city tradition." [54] The ancient cities and towns of the Middle East in which the majority of the native populations lived were now juxtaposed to new and extensive Arab settlements Unlike the preexisting cities, these new towns and settlements were quite differently structured and organized. Arab cities were arranged predominately on a clan or tribal basis, and since early Arab society was primarily devoted to war and collecting booty, there existed very little class or occupational differentiation; distinctions among tribal, religious, and political elites were also somewhat blurry. [55] The Caliph was the political and religious leader of the Muslim Arabs and it was he who would directly appoint governors and generals from elite clans and tribes; as appointed leaders they also became the Caliph's delegates for both administration and prayer. [56]

Gradually, however, the traditional Middle Eastern cities merged with the Arab founded cities into a new urban phenomenon. Arab and non-Arab populations began to mix, with each society adopting aspects of the other. Arab society and settlements previously arranged around

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[53] Lapidus, "The Evolution of Muslim Urban Society," p. 27.
[54] id., "Traditional Muslim Cities," p. 53.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

kinship and clan ties were now organizing themselves based on economic and social interests; class distinctions were emerging within Arab society and that, as we shall see, directly affected the layout of the urban setting. [57] While the Arabs settled into city life and took up typically urban occupations, increasing numbers of non-Muslims learned Arabic and converted to Islam.

By the 9th century C.E. the cities and towns of the Middle East had become quite heterogeneous and diverse. Not only had native and Arab populations mixed, but also peoples from many different regions and countries, both near and far had migrated to the great urban centers of the Abbasid Empire, such as Baghdad, Basra, and Kufa. Here we see the first hints of Lapidus's concept of Islamic urbanism and urban social structure. As all these different people moved into the cities, they settled themselves into distinctive neighborhoods and quarters defined by certain shared ethnic, religious, economic, and regional identities. These quarters and suburbs soon developed into quite self-sufficient and defined communities with their own social, political, and economic structures. So distinct and entrenched were city quarters by the 10th and 11th centuries that Lapidus refers to them as "the basic units of society." [58] At once social solidarities and geographical entities, quarters were village like communities within the urban whole. [59]

The development of the city quarter was part and parcel of the development of a completely new and uniquely Muslim urban society

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[57] Ibid., 54; Lapidus, "Evolution," pp. 28-9.
[58] Lapidus., "Muslim Cities", p. 49.
[59] Ibid.

which reached fruition during the 11th and 12th centuries C.E., after

the breakup of the Abbasid empire and during the rule of the Seljuk and

Mamlūk regimes. This new society was based on three broad types of

social organization: parochial groups (families, clans, quarters, and

gangs), religious associations (schools of law, Sufi brotherhoods, and

other religious sects), and imperial regimes (Mamlūks, Seljuk amirs). [60]

What united all the different people and groups of this three-tiered

system into a cohesive society was the relationships and networks that

existed between them. And while it seems that everyone professed

some degree of personal or professional ties, it was the ulema, the

religious elite, who were the main architects and sustainers of these

ties and networks. Their central role in the medieval Islamic city is

best described by Lapidus himself:

> Muslim urban society was divided into numerous small
> communities, and what held them together were the ulama and
> their ties across divisive and community lines. Their
> competencies , their judicial, managerial, legal, educational,
> secretarial, financial, commercial, and familial authority
> grounded in the multiple dimensions of Muslim law br ought them
> into contact with every concern of the city. [61]

Under the Abbasids, the ulema were predominately a religious elite, but

by the 11th century C.E. they had emerged as social and political

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[60] Lapidus, "Evolution," p. 21. In his initial work on Mamlūk cities (q.v. *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* and "Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies") Lapidus actually delineated four basic levels of society: the ruling elite, the notables, the common people, and the lumpenproletariat. By consolidating these four levels into three, Lapidus has attempted to apply his model beyond Mamlūk Syria and Egypt to accomodate the entire Middle East.

[61] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 113-114.

leaders as well.[62] According to Lapidus, the ulema was the one institution that survived the demise of the Abbasid empire and as a result it assumed many of the functions of the old military, administrative, and landowning class. In addition to the control of offices and landed incomes the ulema received a lot of power from its popular religious followings. The most visible representation of the ulema was its schools of law. Lapidus argues that since most Muslims looked to the ulema for religious and juridical guidance as well as for leadership in times of trouble they were all *de facto* members of one or another law school. [63] This close connection of the populace to the ulema bound people to the schools of law and thus created communities which transcended the parochial quarter. They were "[c]ommunities which shared a common law, common norms in family, commercial, and religious life, a common judicial authority, and common facilities such as mosques, schools, and charities." [64]

One of the main criticisms of previous scholars was that the city under Islam was not a true or real city because it lacked any kind of autonomous associations. Unlike Ashtor-Strauss and Cahen, Lapidus did not take up the challenging of trying to prove that Islamic cities experience some form of limited autonomy, and instead rejected the Weberian criteria by attempting to show that an urban society could still function without autonomous organizations. In the medieval Islamic city, it was the ulema who assumed the functions that an

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[62] For an indepth discussion on the rise of the ulema and the development of the schools of law q.v. Lapidus, "The Evolution of Muslim Urban Society," pp. 30-36; 39-46.

[63] Lapidus, "Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies," p. 50.

[64] Ibid.

independent administration or government would provide an European
city:

> There were no municipalities and . . . no regular bureaucracy to
> deal with city-wide concerns. For these reasons the ulama had a
> unique role to play. As an undifferentiated elite their roles, their
> ramified ties, and the pattern o f their social interaction held
> Muslim cities together without recourse to more formal
> institutions of representation or control. [65]

An Islamic city could no longer be seen as mere agglomeration of
isolated communities oppressed by some despotic overlord; rather it was
a complex and dynamic society held together by the social, political, and
religious abilities of the ulema.

Because of the ulema's central role within the society, the ruling
Mamlūk amirs endorsed and supported them. The ruling elite needed
the ulema not just to represent them, but also to help control and
administer the city. Likewise, the ulema relied on their Turkish rulers
to defend the city and suppress internal violence. [66] The Mamlūks also
controlled and manipulated fiscal administration and the economy. The
Mamlūk's vast rural and urban holdings, which included grain and raw
materials, as well as the purchasing power of their great wealth
naturally tied them to merchants of the city. [67] Cities and towns
depended heavily on the surrounding countryside for both food and raw
materials and so it was in the best interest for the ulema and the

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[65] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 114.
[66] Ibid., pp. 141-142
[67] Ibid., pp. 119-20.

influential merchants to cooperate with the state. [68] Thus, rather than regard the military overlords of the 11th to 15th centuries as stereotypical oriental despots, Lapidus sees them as a ruling military elite who were inextricably tied to the urban society.

The physical appearance and form of a city or town was in many ways a manifestation of this interconnected and fluid social structure. While Lapidus agrees with other scholars that the residential city quarter lacked a distinct physical form due to the necessity for privacy and security, the apparent formlessness of the more public market areas was more the result of the constant interchanging and mixing of facilities and institutions: "all institutions, shops, mosques, and administrative offices were thoroughly intermingled to accommodate the demand for easy access and constant change of activities, from trade to prayer, to teaching and so on." [69] In other words, the public areas of an Islamic city were not formless; rather, they reflected the pattern of a society in which its members, especially the learned elite, carried out and undertook numerous different roles and responsibilities.

One of the most interesting ideas that Lapidus proposes is how urban centers were both socially and physically tied to the surrounding rural towns and villages. By demonstrating such a connection, Lapidus attempted to disprove the accepted notion that Islamic cities were self-contained entities which were isolated from and opposed to the countryside. On the social level, it was the law schools and other religious organizations which transcended the urban boundaries of the

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[68] Ibid., p. 115.
[69] Ibid., and Lapidus, "Traditional Muslim Cities," p. 63.

city and incorporated not just the surrounding towns and their hinterlands but often reached out to include larger regions and territories. [70] The different competing law schools frequently sought support from the populations outside the city limits which in turn brought both rural and urban dwellers closer together. [71] While it may be obvious that cites were religious, economic, and political centers and as such would always attract the population of their regions, many urbanites also had ties to the countryside and its people. For example, many city merchants had rural landowning interests and would often reside in villages and small towns. [72] Thus the relationships between city and village were frequently reciprocal in nature and as a result Lapidus concludes that "Muslim communities were often regional rather than urban bodies." [73]

Physically and geographically speaking the differences between city and village were equally indistinct and ambiguous. Lapidus argues that throughout the Middle East many if not most "cities" had "rural" components and "villages" had "urban" elements. For example, gardens and agriculture were often found within the city walls, while villages frequently had such urban features as a Friday mosque, a permanent market, baths, caravansaries, and walled quarters; some outlying villages were even fortified with defensive walls. [74] As can be seen, the traditional markers that distinguish urban and rural are no

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[70] Lapidus, "Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies," p. 54; and id, "The Evolution of Muslim Urban Society," pp. 45-46.
[71] Lapidus, "Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies," p. 54.
[72] Ibid., p. 56.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., pp. 64-66.

longer so decisive and absolute. Even such basic determining factors as population and size could not always differentiate a village from a city as some so-called villages were just a large and complex in facilities as nearby *madīnas*.[75] Because of this inability to define a difference between cities and villages Lapidus concludes that "we should eschew the urban-rural dichotomy and avoid using 'city' and 'village' as absolute categories." [76] Instead, he proposes a new approach which places both urban and rural settlements into a larger regional context - something he calls "regional settlement composites." To illustrate this concept Lapidus applies it to certain Iranian oasis cities:

> In the oases of Bukhara, Balkh, Bayhaq, and Shash the population was settled in one dense city core, usually surrounded by suburbs, and in many small towns, villages, and hamlets scattered throughout the oasis. What made an entire oasis a single unit was the fact that not only the biggest settlements and their suburbs, but the entire region was surrounded by walls to protect against nomads. Because urban functions were not concentrated within the walls of the largest settlement, but were often distributed throughout the oasis, the outside walls, not the inside walls, may be conceived as the effective boundaries of the region. [77]

He goes on to state that "city" names such as Bukhara applied not just to the actual city but also to the entire oasis region and thus it is better to regard such oases as "extended boundary, multiple settlement composites." [78]

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[75] Ibid., p. 67.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., p. 68.
[78] Ibid.

Furthermore, this regional approach can be applied to settlements throughout the Middle East, and not just to walled oases but also to natural geographical districts as well as to large cities surrounded by densely populated suburbs and villages. Lapidus concludes that it is only by thinking in terms of regions and districts that all the realities of geographical settlement can be understood; the urban-rural or city-country paradigm so prevalent in previous works on Islamic urbanism and society is far too limiting in comprehending all the geographical and social aspects of medieval Islamic civilization. [79]

Lapidus's work on the Islamic city was ground-breaking on many levels. Not only did he dispute the generally accepted model of the Islamic city but he also challenged the way in which both Islamic and other non-western cities had been conceptualized. Most research on the Islamic city had been dominated by the Eurocentric idea that a settlement could only qualify as a true city if it possessed the physical features and social institutions that characterized either the medieval European commune or the Greco-Roman polis. As described in chapter one, it was the German sociologist Max Weber who categorized these ideas into a workable methodology which most Islamic urban historians readily followed. Lapidus, however, seems to have completely rejected the Weberian framework and instead attempted to look more directly at Islamic cities by relying more on historical accounts and by employing newer sociological approaches. For example, functionalism plays a strong role throughout Lapidus's work. [80] The emphasis on social

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[79] Ibid.
[80] According to Dale Eickelman "functionalism emphasizes the explanation of social phenomena on the basis of their interration with coexisting events or social forms,

organizations and relationships and how they influenced the physical structure of cities is typical of functionalist theory. While this methodology may serve well for describing in detail the workings of a society during a certain period, it has difficulties in explaining change and development over time, a problem that Stephen Humphreys has also recently pointed out. [81] Despite some methodological limitations, Lapidus, more than any other scholar, encouraged a new way of examining and understanding Islamic urban society. Since his work combined sociological approaches with traditional Islamic history he helped bridge the gap between classically minded orientalists and the newer social scientists.

One area of Islamic social histor y that Lapidus influenced was the role of the urban elite, i.e., the ulema and the wealthy merchants. As will be recalled, it was the ulema who maintained and kept the cities and towns functioning as a cohesive society. Since *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* was published (in 1967) numerous works on the role of urban elite have been published. Some of the most important include Richard Bulliet's *The Patricians of Nishapur* (Cambridge MA, 1972) and Carl Petry's *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1981). Both works confirm many of the observations and conclusions first made by Lapidus.

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rather then in terns of how any of these came to be." Dale Eickelman, *The Middle East: an anthropological approach*, (New Jersey, 1989), p. 48.
[81] R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: a framework for inquiry*, (Princeton, 1991), p. 246. Humphreys notes that "in his [Lapidus's] presentation, patterns of political action appear to remain much the same throughout a 250-year period which was riddled with major crises (e.g. the Black Death, the invasion of Timur) as well as constant turmoil within the political elite."

While the above pages have hopefully illustrated how Lapidus viewed the social and physical structure of the medieval Islamic city, a brief word should be said about how he understood the actual term "Islamic city." First, it should be noted that Lapidus never uses the modifier "Islamic" when referring to a city, town, or any other settlement in the Islamic world; instead, he prefers the adjective, "Muslim." Although he has never, as far as I know, explained why he favors "Muslim" over "Islamic," he does at least partially clarify why Muslim cities are "Muslim: "they [Muslim cities] are Muslim by virtue of the predominance of subcommunities which embodied Muslim beliefs and a Muslim way of life."[82] In other words, Muslim cities are Muslim because the majority of the population were Muslim and identified with shared Islamic values.

The cultural anthropologist Dale Eickelman was one of the first social scientists to contribute to the debate on the Islamic city. His 1974 article "Is there an Islamic City? The Making of a Quarter in a Moroccan Town" further explores the informal ties and relationships discussed by Lapidus by examining how they help to define residential quarters in an Islamic, in this case, Moroccan town. The article begins with a brief yet insightful analysis and critique of the theoretical underpinnings on which the study of the Islamic city had been -and for the most part still is- based. He questions the validity of Weber's ideal city as a unit of cross-cultural comparison since according to the model it is only in western Europe where true cities exist; the Islamic world

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[82] Lapidus, "The Evolution of Muslim Urban Society," p. 48.

has no cities. But, if one is to reject Weber, then some kind of new comparative model must be found. According to Eickelman, there are only two real alternatives to Weber's ideal city. The first is to redefine the ideal concept of the city so that it encompasses and is relevant to both European and Islamic cities:

> [A] more satisfactory ideal type [of city] must be formulated which (1) defines the city as a specific form of association distinct from other forms of association in the context of each cultural tradition and which (2) is amenable to comparison with the category of 'city' in the other cultural traditions." [83]

The second option, however, is to completely reject the city in any conceptual form as a unit of cross-cultural comparison." [84] The idea here is that cities are too specific and too closely tied into the culture they represent to be expressed in terms of an ideal type. Other broader socio-political concepts such as hierarchy and authority may be more helpful in the comparative study of cultures. Of course, to adopt such a radical position would automatically challenge if not invalidate the entire field of comparative urban studies.

Since Ira Lapidus was the only scholar at the time to openly dispute Weber, Eickelman appropriately includes him in his essay. While he credits Lapidus with introducing a meaningful new approach to understanding the Islamic city and society based on informal ties of

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[83] Eickelman, "Is There an Islamic City? The Making of a Quarter in a Moroccan Town," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, (1974), p. 275.
[84] Ibid.

obligation, he nevertheless sharply criticizes Lapidus for not really comparing cities but analyzing and comparing the larger social structures that comprise European and Islamic civilization. [85] Furthermore, Eickelman insightfully argues that "to analyze the nature of the ties of obligation in a city does not necessarily say anything about the nature of the city." [86]

In light of this supposed failure to define the Islamic city, Eickelman proposes a new approach. He argues that the only way to understand cities and towns in the Islamic world is to find some feature(s) or characteristic(s) that will not just set cities apart from other elements in Muslim society but will also be comparable to European towns and cities. [87] This feature has to be a form of association distinct to urban life in Muslim society, and so Eickelman decides to re-examine the social bonds and organization of the city quarter (darb). More specifically, he is looking for evidence of a collective conscience distinct to quarters which if it exists would not only be a unique feature of Islamic cities but would also be applicable to western cities.

Based on a three year ethnographic study of certain quarters in a the small Moroccan town of Boujad between 1967-70, Eickelman comes to the conclusion that the people and households of a quarter are bound together by a mutual sense of (qrāba) or "closeness." Qrāba symbolizes not only family and kinship ties but also patron-client relationships and neighborhood and factional alliances. Eickelman contends that a

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[85] Ibid., p. 277
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

quarter or *darb* can be defined "as the extension of *qrāba* in a contingous physical space." [88] But since social relations are never static, quarters in both the physical and social sense are also never fixed; the quarter is a fluid entity that can expand, decline and at times even completely disappear. This reality along with the fact that the concept of *qrāba* applies not just to quarters, but also to other social ties, both urban and rural, proves that the quarter is not "a form of association distinct to urban life." [89]

Eickelman's article is noteworthy for number of reasons. It not only summarizes the major assumptions and methodological bases on which work on the Islamic city had been based, but it also proposes new directions for further research. Moreover, Eickelman's examination of the quarter, while admittedly not helping to differentiate the Islamic city from the rest of Muslim society and from European cities, has, nevertheless, provided a valuable insight into the social workings of the Moroccan quarter. If similar work is done in other regions of the Middle East and North Africa, then Eickelman's conclusions may yet be applicable to large regions of the Islamic world. Still, Eickelman's monograph is on the modern town and city and employs modern ethnographic methods. Much more work and research still has to be done to determine if his findings can correspond to more historical accounts and to pre-modern Islamic cities. Nevertheless, a good starting point would be to use his approach of viewing the quarter not

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[88] Ibid., p. 283.
[89] Ibid., p. 293.

just as a permanent physical entities but as being composed of numerous, interconnected personal and imagined relationships.

The German geographer Eugen Wirth is another prominent social science contributor to the debate on the nature of the Islamic city. As a geographer, he was much more concerned with the physical form and material culture of Islamic cities than with their social, political, and religious organizations and institutions. Thus, he bases his research and conclusions on the architectural and archaeological record of the cities he examines -a methodology that closely follows the approach taken by Jean Sauvaget. [90]

Wirth's main ideas are summed up in a short yet precise paper given at an international conference in Tunisia in 1979. The paper, entitled "Villes islamiques, villes arabes, villes orientales? une problematique face au changement" is the summary of a longer German article published in 1975 under the title "Die Orientalische Stadt: ein Überblick aufgrund jüngerer Forschungen zur materiellen Kultur" (*Saeculum*, vol. 26). As the title of the conference paper implies, Wirth is concerned with the terminology used to describe cities in the Islamic word. He admits that there are indeed numerous physical similarities among the cities and towns of the Middle East and North Africa, but he questions whether those similarities are the result of Islam. To point this out he claims that if one is to replace the mosque of a traditional Islamic city as represented by von Grunebaum with a church or cathedral it would look very much like a typical medieval city in

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[90] For more on Sauveget q.v. chapter 1, pp. 23-28.

western Europe. [91] According to Wirth, the only way to determine if there indeed is an Islamic city, i.e., a city physically shaped by Islam, is to identify common characteristics of cities in North Africa and the Middle East during the Islamic period that do not appear in Europe. He comes up with five such characteristics: 1) the degeneration of a planned city -those cities founded under Islam were systematically planned with their labyrinth-like form only evolving later on; 2) the conscious planning of blind alleys and cul-de-sacs in the residential quarters -they did not evolved haphazardly; 3) houses centered around an inner courtyard; 4) separate and distinct quarters; 5) the central market (sūq/bāzār). [92] Of these five features only the market appeared during the Islamic period; the other four characteristics all existed in one form or another before the coming of Islam. Nevertheless, the market has the weakest connection to Islam, and therefore Wirth argues that it is better to use term "Oriental city" to describe Middle Eastern and North African cities during the Islamic era than "Islamic city." [93] He equally rejects the designation "Arab city" since the five features can also be found in Iranian and Turkish cities. [94]

Wirth's approach and ideas are a refreshing break from the dominant trend of analyzing Islamic cities according to their social organization. By emphasizing form and morphology, he has brought back a crucial element in the study of the Islamic city -that cities are

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[91] E. Wirth, "Villes islamiques, villes arabes, villes orientales? une problèmatique face au changement," *La ville arabe dans l'Islam*, eds. A. Bouhdiba and D. Chevallier, (Tunis and Paris, 1982), p. 194.

[92] Ibid., pp. 194-98. For a more detailed discussion of these five elements see Wirth, "Die Orientalische Stadt," *Saeculum*, vol. 27, (1975), pp. 61-85.

[93] Wirth, "Villes Islamiques," p. 198.

also physical entities and are made up of houses, roads, markets, and other tangible structures. Moreover, regardless if one agrees or disagrees with his conclusions, Wirth has reintroduced one of the fundamental issues surrounding the Islamic city: what is "Islamic" about a city? What makes a city Islamic? And although he doesn't explicitly state it, there is an implied question as to what Islam means when it is applied to objects or concepts such as a city or town. Does Islamic solely convey the idea of a religion or faith as Wirth understands it; or does it embody something larger such as a culture? Such debates will haunt not just the study of the Islamic city but also the study of many other subjects and fields under the auspices of Islamic studies.

Finally, a brief word should be said about a much neglected field in the study of the Islamic city: art history. The sole champion here is the well-known Islamic art historian, Oleg Grabar. Whereas most art historians of Islam concentrated on specific objects or buildings, or on trends in the decorative or architectural arts, Grabar was quite unique at the time in attempting to connect social trends with artistic and architectural ones..

Grabar's vision of the Islamic city is best depicted in his often quoted city essay "Cities and Citizens." [95] Before the 12th century the city was largely focused on one or two congregational mosques, the *masjid al-jāmi*. From the 12th century on, however, the city became

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Oleg Grabar, "Cities and Citizens." *The World of Islam*, ed. B. Lewis, (London, 1976). pp. 94-100; and id. "The Architecture of the Middle Eastern City from Past to Present:

infiltrated by increasing numbers of other religious monuments and institutions, most notably, the *madrasa* and the *mashhad* or religious shrine. Grabar attributes this obvious change in the physical make up of the city to not only a shift in politics but, more importantly, to a change in the social and economic character of the city. Simply put, before the 12th century the Islamic world was mostly dominated by fairly strong central governments, i.e. the 'Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Seljuks. This strong centralized power was reflected and symbolized in the great congregational mosque of each city -at the time it was the largest monument in the city. But as the cities grew in size and as the central authority began to weaken, the *masjid al-jāmi^c* could no longer serve its original purpose as a political, social and religious center. On the popular level, the inhabitants found it too inconvenient to have to travel such long distances to the mosque, not to mention the fact that it could no longer accommodate everyone. On the economic and political stage, the breakdown of centralized authority led to the rise of the bourgeoisie who, while still concerned about overall stability, were also interested in local well-being. Both the middle and lower classes, therefore, were moving away from the idea of a unified community centered around an official mosque to a more heterogeneous body attached to localized religious foundations. The bourgeoisie provide the financial support for the building of new mosques, *madrasas* and shrines and in return they received the support of the public. Even though this process seems to be one of fragmentation, Grabar argues it is not. Like

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the Case of the Mosque." *Middle Eastern Cities*, ed. I. Lapidus, (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 38-42.

Lapidus, he maintains that these many religious institutions brought the population together not so much in the sense of an isolated city but as members of a greater Islamic society.

As can be seen, Grabar is very much interested in showing the relationship between monuments and people and unlike Lapidus, he is more concerned with change over time. As a result, there appears in Grabar's work a dimension of individuality and culture that is largely lacking in Lapidus's writings. Although Grabar's depiction of the Islamic city is not groundbreaking, its value is in how it attempts to reconcile the physical evidence with the prevailing trends in textually based social history, e.g., the rising importance of the ulema and the schools of law as demonstrated by Lapidus. [96] Grabar's work is a kind of middle ground between the stark morphological research of Eugen Wirth, and the very sociological orientated works of Claude Cahen and Ira Lapidus.

The three decades between the publication of Ashtor-Strauss's article on medieval Syria (1956) and the appearance of Oleg Grabar's essay "Cities and Citizens" (1976) were marked by a burst of critical and creative research and writing on the Islamic city. It began with the introduction of social historical methods which provided the tools for the first serious criticisms and challenges to the Weberian categories on which the traditional model of the Islamic city had been based. While Ashtor-Strauss and Claude Cahen demonstrated that there had indeed been periods when certain cities in the Islamic world had

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[96] q.v. pp. 62-66

enjoyed at least partial autonomy, Lapidus went on to challenge all the previous assumptions of the Islamic city model and proposed a new one based on social structures and informal personal ties and relationships. The adoption of sociological methodologies into the field of Islamic urban studies and history also opened up the way for other social scientists to contribute to the study and debate over the nature of the Islamic city. But rather than constructing a more realistic and dynamic model of the city, what emerged in the 1970s was an "Islamic" city that was as complex as it was contradictory. On one side were specialists such as Eugen Wirth who denied the tenability of the term "Islamic" or "Muslim" in defining cities, while one the other side were social historians like Ira Lapidus who argued for its use based upon the idea that Islam was a cultural as well as religious phenomenon. The only area upon which most scholars seemed to agree was that the traditional model of the Islamic city as defined by Gustave von Grunebaum and his French predecessors was methodologically shaky and too simplistic and that a new definition was needed. In the search for this new model of the Islamic city almost every researcher came up with a different definition or interpretation, and while many borrowed from each other, none could agree on a single "true" nature of the Islamic city, if indeed such a thing had ever existed.

Chapter III

The publication of Edward Said's controversial book *Orientalism* profoundly impacted the study of the Islamic city, as it had the rest of Middle Eastern and Asian studies.[1] Although, as we have seen, there had already been a growing trend away from the simplistic Islamic city stereotype, the appearance of *Orientalism* instigated a great number of younger Middle East specialists to break even more severely with the ideas, theories, and research of previous (western) scholars. It became almost obligatory for every paper, article, or book on urbanism in the Islamic world to demonstrate not only the "bias" of the traditional Islamic City model, as for example, characterized by Gustave von Grunebaum, but also the methods, assumptions, and conclusions of more recent scholars such as Ira Lapidus and Eugen Wirth. Almost every major work on the Islamic city since the beginning of the 1980s including those that will be analyzed in this chapter, contains a critical review of previous "Orientalist" scholarship on the subject, a phenomenon that has just about become a prerequisite for writing about cities in the Islamic world. While such critical and careful evaluations can be helpful, more often than not they seem to turn into the main purpose of the paper.

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[1] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York, 1979).

The Orientalist critique has not only made scholars more suspicious of using and accepting fixed categories and generalizations but it has also made them much more aware and self-conscious of how they (should) approach objects of study such as cities and urbanism. No ground was sacred and all assumptions could be questioned. Even the fundamental framework of cross-cultural comparisons was condemned as too often marginalizing the "other" non-western culture. These methods and ideas are some of the underlying "principles" of the ambiguous world of the poststructuralist and postmodernist discourse, and I would argue that it was Said's book which helped introduce them into the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. [2]

The 1980s also saw increased contributions from Arab scholars to the field of Islamic urban studies. Interestingly, two of the most prominent of these researchers, Nezar AlSayyad and Hichem Djaït re-examined the earliest cities of the Arab Muslims and offered them as better models for understanding the form and function of cities in the Arab-Muslim world. Renewed investigations by both Arab and Western scholars occurred in other areas as well: examples include the influence of Islamic and customary law on urban topography (B. S. Hakim and Baber Johansen), the role of autonomy (Michael Brett), and how cities changed during the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule

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[2] Some noteworthy works on postmodernism and Islam include: Akbar Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, (London, 1992); Mohammad Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Bryan Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, (London, 1994); and Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, (London, 1992). For an excellent introduction to postmodernist approaches to history see Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, (London, 1991).

(H. Kennedy). As we have seen, these topics had already been examined by previous scholars.

Finally, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the impressive arrival of Japanese scholarship to the field. The week long International Conference on Urbanism in Islam (ICUIT) held in Tokyo in the Fall of 1989 was the largest conference on the subject to date, and its papers and proceedings were published in an impressive five volumes -the fifth being a later supplemental edition. Shortly thereafter, the same research group/project (Urbanism in Islam: A Comparative Study) that had sponsored the conference published the first comprehensive and critical survey of all the significant literature on the Islamic city from the Maghreb to Central Asia. [3] The book, entitled *Islamic Urban Studies: Historical Review and Perspectives*, first appeared in 1991 in Japanese, the first English addition was published in 1994. [4] The same year (1994) also saw the publication of a meticulous bibliography on the Islamic city, *The Middle Eastern City and Islamic Urbanism: an annotated bibliography of western literature*, containing over 7000 entries! [5] What all these recent works have shown is that Islamic urban studies is now a recognized and distinctive area of study; and instead of being subordinated to other larger fields such as history, anthropology or geography, it has now become its own legitimate field developing its own unique approaches and methodologies.

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[3] Yukawa Takeshi ed., *Urbanism in Islam: The Proceedings of the International Conference on Urbanism in Islam (ICUIT), Oct. 22-28, 1989*, 4 vols., (Tokyo, 1989).
[4] M. Haneda and T. Miura, *Islamic Urban Studies: Historical Review and Perspectives*, (New York, 1994).

In 1985 Hugh Kennedy published an insightful and informative article entitled *From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria* in which he re-examined the question of continuity and change of Syrian cities from the late Byzantine to the early Islamic period. Following in the tradition of Sauvaget (and to a lesser extent Eugen Wirth), Kennedy looks at the topography and physical characteristics of selected cities using the latest archeological discoveries and conclusions. He finds that while there were major changes that took place in the towns and cities of Syria, they were for the most part not the result of Islamic hegemony, rather, they were changes that were already in process long before the advent of Islam:

> [U]rban change in the Middle East took place over a number of centuries and. . . the development from the *polis* of antiquity to the Islamic *madina* was a long drawn out process of evolution. Many of the features which are often associated with the coming of Islam, the decay of the monumental buildings and the changes in the classical street plan, are in evidence long before the Muslim conquests. . . [T]he evolution of the traditional Islamic town was not complete until much later. . . [in] the eleventh and twelfth centuries. [6]

Kennedy confirms the claims of Claude Cahen and Samuel Stern that the Greco-Roman city state (*polis*) no longer existed by the time of the Arab invasions. Although Cahen and Stern were more concerned with

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[5] M.E. Bonine, Eckart Ehlers, Thomas Kraft and Georg Stöber, eds., *The Middle Eastern City and Islamic Urbanism: An Annotated Bibliography of Western Literature*, (Bonn, 1994)

[6] Hugh Kennedy, "From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria," *Past and Present*, no. 106 (1985), p. 17.

socio-political developments such as explaining why civic autonomy was absent from Islamic cities, Kennedy has rendered an invaluable service by supporting and correlating their arguments with the physical and archaeological record. Moreover, his investigations have also modified Sauvaget's thesis by demonstrating that the change from the classical city plan to the traditional Islamic city model did not take place during the "chaos" of the tenth century, but rather that this metamorphosis was already under way during the sixth and seventh centuries, and wasn't complete until the eleventh or twelfth centuries.

Nevertheless, Kennedy lists a number of factors both before and after the Arab conquests which he contends helped transform the cities and towns of the Near East from Greco-Roman *poleis* to "Islamic" *madinas*. The factor which Kennedy mentions first is demographic declines due to plague and invasion. [7] The bubonic plague of 541 C.E. and its successors coincided with a series of destructive invasions by the Sassanian which culminated in taking of Syria and Egypt in 614 C.E. Although the Byzantine emperor Heraclius was eventually able to defeat the Persians and retake the provinces, the sum effect of warfare and reoccurring plague devastated the urban population of the eastern Mediterranean. Many towns and cities did not survive to become madinas, and those that did, had in the chaos lost much of their classical layout and already began to take on aspects of a typical Islamic town.

Another development that was already in motion before Islam and which continued to play an important role was the change from

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[7] Ibid., p. 18. An excellent discussion of the social and political situation of sixth and seventh century Byzantine and Sassanian empires can be found in chapter one of H. Kennedy's *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, (London, 1986).

carrying goods by means of wheeled transport, i.e., carts and wagons, to carrying goods by pack animals. [8] The disappearance of wheeled transport began already around the fourth century C.E. due to improved camel domestication. The "new and improved" camel, it seems, quickly became a much more efficient and cost effective means of shipping goods across extensive regions of land; as a result the wheel was increasingly abandoned and this had a lasting effect on urban planning. The wide, unobstructed streets of the Greek and Roman cities were necessary for wheeled traffic, but pack animals required no such space; a simple winding road or path between shops and houses was sufficient (and as Kennedy points out, most $q\bar{a}\d{d}\bar{\imath}s$ only required that public streets be wide enough for two loaded pack animals to be able to pass each other with ease). Because of this increasing use of animal transport, the wide, colonnaded streets of the *polis* were no longer needed, for they "ceased to fulfill an essential function in the urban environment." [9] Thus it was not long before the extra space was given up to shops, markets, and other buildings both public and private.

As Cahen and Stern already pointed out, fifth and sixth century Byzantium had become an increasingly centralized state at the expense of urban autonomy. [10] One effect of this shift was that patronage for public buildings passed onto the emperor and his local representatives. [11] Needless to say, imperial patronage fell far short of former local patronage and by the mid-sixth century the finance for constructing

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[8] Kennedy, From Polis to Madina," p. 26. Kennedy cites R. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel*, (Cambridge, MA, 1975) as his primary source for this argument.
[9] Kennedy, From Polis to Madina," p. 26.
[10] See Chapter 2, pp. 43-45; 53-54.

and maintenance of public buildings had practically vanished. What little imperial funding remained was directed away from secular monuments in favor of religious buildings. This trend continued in the early Islamic period. According to Kennedy, the early Islamic state as epitomized by the Umayyads, was very much a minimalist state and as such tended not to interfere in the lives and activities of its subjects. While it did provide Muslims physical protection, mosques for them to worship in, and a supply of running water, the government generally did not allocate funding for non-religious urban building. Thus, the patronage of secular monumental building, already in decline under the Byzantines, had altogether ceased during the early Islamic period.

Recalling the examples and conclusions of Robert Brunschvig's *Urbanisme médiéval et droit musulman*, Kennedy next shows how Islamic law helped shape urban development. [12] Roman law made a clear distinction between public and private property and it was the duty of the government to uphold the law. Private building on public land was plainly illegal and thus the issue of whether or not it caused problems never came up. In addition, Roman law concerned itself with the aesthetic character of the city and was enjoined to forbid any building of structures which would degrade its appearance. Of course, both these laws could only be upheld if the desire and resources were there to enforce them; as can be imagined there were numerous lapses in such legal statutes during the upheavals of the last century of Byzantine rule. Thus it is safe to assume that a fair number of Syrian towns were

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[11] Kennedy, pp. 18-21.
[12] Ibid., pp. 21-22. For more on Brunschvig see Chapter 1, pp. 28-31.

already experiencing private and uncontrolled expansion onto public space. Islamic law's emphasis on private property only encouraged this trend by stipulating that one could for the most part do whatever one wanted as long as it did not harm one's neighbors. This allowed residents the freedom to build overhangs, balconies and other additions to their houses that would often extend over or into the street. If a neighbor felt that such a building was infringing upon his family's freedom or privacy it was his responsibility to take any grievances to the local *qāḍī*, who would made a ruling. Unlike Roman law, property owners did not need governmental permission to add onto their houses and as a result there was more temptation to enlarge private houses and other structures at the expense of public streets and space. Kennedy also points out that a proprietor who owned structures on both sides of the street had the right to connected the opposing buildings with an arch, and thus transform the street into a tunnel. Finally, if all property owners of a cul-de-sac agreed, they could legally place a gate at its entrance and convert the once public street into a private road. While Kennedy acknowledges the effect that the Muslim legal system had on urban development, he nevertheless warns us not to place too much importance upon it. He re-emphasizes the fact that the archaeological evidence shows that even the strict Roman legal system could not completely preserve the classical urban layout. More importantly however, Kennedy argues that for the emerging Islamic society, the *polis* form was no longer needed: "[i]f the Muslim community had perceived that wide colonnaded streets and spacious *agoras* were vital to

their well-being, then they could have proceeded to [make] a law to protect them." [13]

The changing social structure of the cities is Kennedy's last factor to contribute to the transformation of the urban pattern. [14] Basically, he argues that the central role of commerce in Arab-Muslim society physically reflected itself in the urban environment. Classical and Byzantine cities were not for the most part centers of industrial or commercial activity; instead, cities relied on the neighboring landed aristocracy who took part in the social and political life of the city. Kennedy points out that much of their wealth came from their role as administrators and tax collectors for the surrounding regions, and when taxes ceased to be collected such as during political upheaval or warfare, the cities suffered greatly. Generally speaking, this bureaucratic and landed elite did not concern itself with commerce, and merchants held a low social status. In addition, both the local and imperial governments did not patronize urban markets and instead obtained what they needed through payments in kind and requisition.

Muslim society, however, was based upon much different ideals and values. Merchants and mercantile activities were highly regarded and it should not be forgotten that Muhammad and many other early Muslim leaders had engaged in trade and commerce. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this reverence had a direct impact on the urban landscape. Kennedy explains that

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[13] Ibid., p. 22.
[14] Ibid., pp. 22-26.

> [The] Muslim city allowed the commercial considerations to outweigh the dictates of formal planning. This is the most obvious in the case of the market areas. The main consequences of the change from the open colonnaded street to the crowded *suq* was to increase the number of retail shops in the city cente r as the old shops were subdivided and new structures were erected in the old roadway. [15]

Here we can see how commercial pressures and considerations greatly influenced the shape and design of cities and towns. Never was there any action taken against market expansion either because it infringed on public space or because such developments were aesthetically unpleasant.

Kennedy provides a very methodical and comprehensive account of the development of the typical features attributed to the Islamic city. His analysis shows that the shape of the Islamic city was due just as much to pre-Islamic developments as it was to the changing needs and values of the new Arab-Muslim society and culture. Kennedy's is a very lucid and practical picture of the early Islamic city, and while he shies away from the methodological debate of whether or not there is an Islamic city, he does find ridiculous "the idea that there is something in the spirit of Islam which leads to the enclosed, private, and secret world of the Islamic city. . ."[16] He also warns us that we should not make "inappropriate value judgments" when regarding cities in the Islamic world.[17] One example is the popular view that the development of the Islamic city was essentially a process of decay and deliberate abandonment of classical ideals of urban planning. Kennedy, however,

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[15] Ibid., p. 25.
[16] Ibid., p. 16.

sees the transformation of the classical city into the madina as representing increased urban and commercial vitality. [18] Of all the works on the Islamic city since the 1980s, Kennedy's is one of the most concrete. By tying archaeological evidence to social, cultural, and economic aspects of both the late Byzantine and early Islamic civilizations, he has provided us with a very workable and believable model of the early Islamic city. Furthermore, his work represents a new post-Orientalist trend of looking at Middle Eastern urbanism not in a comparative European framework, but in and of itself. In other words, Kennedy tries to define urban development as a phenomenon uniquely tied to its region and society, and not according to its similarities or differences to the evolution of European cities.

Whereas Kennedy revisits the theme of urban continuity and change in the early Islamic period, the medieval historian Michael Brett re-examines the theme of autonomy in the medieval Islamic city. Returning to the arguments and ideas of Ashtor-Strauss and Claude Cahen, he reconsiders the question of why the movement towards self-government in Syria ultimately failed. Ashtor-Strauss thought that a comparative investigation of Muslim cities of the western Mediterranean with those of Syrian would shed more light on this dilemma. Brett answers the call and seeks in his 1986 article, "The City-state in Mediaeval Ifriqiya: the Case of Tripoli," to better understand the phenomenon of urban autonomy in medieval Islam.

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[17] Ibid., p. 17.
[18] Ibid.

The Ifrīqiyan city of Tripoli enjoyed considerable freedom between 1000 C.E. and 1400 C.E.[19] And despite some gaps in the historical record, Brett finds that there is still enough information on the city so that it can be categorically compared to other cities of Syria and North Africa. Brett begins by giving a detailed account of the political history of Tripoli in which he pays particular attention to the shifting forms of authority that ruled the city. Generally speaking, for Brett's description is quite complex, the city of Tripoli undergoes three phases of self government after gaining its independence from the Zirids in the first quarter of the eleventh century C.E. until its submission by the Hafsids in 1401 C.E. The three phases are a progression from a fairly loose government run by a council of elders (*shūrā*), to a *riyāsa*, which eventually turns into a *mulk* or monarchy. Under all these forms of government Brett asserts that "the citizens were managing their own affairs." For example under the *ra'īs* Ibn Maṭrūḥ (1120-1180 C.E.) Brett concludes that:

> The picture of Tripoli that emerges. . . is of city ruled by a *ra'īs* or *muqaddam* of local origin, who remains in charge of its affairs whether it is independent (before 1146), garrisoned by Christian conquerors, or part of a Muslim empire (after 1160) [20]

Even later on when the *riyāsa* became hereditary and took on the trappings of royalty it relied very much on the support of the people. This is clearly evident when the city was finally captured by the Hafsids in 1401 C.E. While superficially the fall of Tripoli might be seen as a

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[19] Michael Brett, "The City-state in Mediaeval Ifriqiya: The Case of Tripoli," *Cahiers de Tunisie*, vol. 34, no. 137-38 (1986), pp. 69-94.
[20] Ibid., p. 84.

defeat in face of a superior military, Brett argues that it also had much to due to the will of the people. According to report of the surrender, "the city capitulated at the wish of its people, at the hand of its worthies." [21] The people of Tripoli had rejected their local government in favor of living under the military governor of a foreign sultan. For Brett, this repudiation of the local state showed that at least for the bourgeoisie (the worthies), municipal autonomy was no longer essential, and that they were better served by a more powerful yet distant Sultan. But why? The answer lies on economic profit. Brett explains that the merchant elite were the predominant social and political force during the Islamic middle ages, and as such developed a system of municipal self-government because it was economically advantageous. By the fifteenth century, however, the wealthy merchants could no longer compete with the rising economic power of Europe, especially that of Italy, and the only way in which they could survive was by incorporating themselves into a large, more powerful state.

Confident in his analysis and understanding of urban autonomy in Tripoli, Brett extends it to explaining the phenomenon of self-government in other Muslim city-states, particularly in the cities of medieval Syria. Thus he concludes that "the origin of urban autonomy in mediaeval Islam lay in the development of an urban society and a commercial economy out of the Arab conquests and the Arab empire." [22] Neither the remains of pre-Islamic institutions nor contemporary European developments influenced the evolution of this autonomy.

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[21] Ibid., p. 91.
[22] Ibid., p. 93.

Brett's conclusions challenge not only Stern's view that urban autonomy in the Islamic world was merely "abortive" and "inchoate," but also Lapidus's assertion that autonomous organizations did not apply to medieval Muslim society and therefore never existed. Based on this distinctiveness of the Islamic city, Brett ends his essay by calling, like so many others, for the abandonment of the "constitutional, republican model of the medieaval western European city" as a measure for comparing and understanding Islamic cities. [23]

This somewhat elusive and complicated article provides us with a rather new and more nuanced understanding of autonomy in the Islamic city, especially in the cities of medieval North Africa. Like Kennedy, Brett sees autonomy as serving a function for the given society, and when it no longer did, it was discarded. Moreover, Brett demonstrates that autonomy should no longer be solely understood in its classical/European sense, rather it should be viewed, value free, as an unique characteristic in the urban development of the Islamic city. Self-government as it appeared in European cities was very different from its form in Islamic cities, a result of the completely different social, economic, and cultural forces at work in the respective civilization. Urban autonomy in the Islamic Middle East/North Africa, and Christian Europe should thus not be seen in the same light. Brett has provided us with a potentially better way to understand the components of the Islamic city (and society): Phenomena should and can be studied, but only in the context of their society and culture. Instead of immediately and automatically comparing aspects of the

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[23] Ibid., p. 94.

Islamic world with their so-called counterparts in the West, it might be more productive first to compare and contrast within the context of the original society.

Baber Johansen (1981) and Besim Hakim (1986) undertook the first exclusive study of Islamic law as it pertains to the city since Robert Brunschvig's landmark article of 1947. While Johansen looks more at how Islamic law defined the city, Hakim is more concerned with how the law determined urban morphology. By concentrating on law both scholars have also been able to discard the comparative methodology so dominant in previous attempts to grasp the essence of the Islamic city. Islamic society as represented by its legal system, and not European models, could now be use as a framework for better understanding the nature and development of the city and town.

The importance of Baber Joha nsen's 1981 article, "The All-Embracing Town and Its Mosques" lies in its forceful challenge to the widely accepted notion that Islamic law made no distinction between town and country, a position bested summed up by Gustave von Grunebaum when he stated "that Muslim law 'in its horror of exemptive privileges,' does not concede a special status to the town. The Law only knows the *umma*, the community of the faithful, which by definition is one and indivisible." [24] By analyzing a large body of Ḥanifī legal texts, Johansen concludes there indeed existed a legal distinction between

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[24] Gustave von Grunebaum, "The Structure of the Muslim Town," *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*, (London, 1955), p. 152.

urban and rural in the categories of taxation, penal law, and Friday prayer.

As the title of his paper implies, Johansen focuses on how the regulations concerning the Friday prayer initiated a legal discourse on what differentiated a town or city from its precincts, suburbs, and surrounding countryside. [25] This discourse was facilitated by the development of a set terms primarily authored by Ḥanifī jurists. A predominate term, appearing as early as the late eighth century, is *al miṣr al-jāmiᶜ*, which Johansen translates as "the all-embracing town." Although there are numerous different definitions of this term, almost all of them emphasize "the idea that a town should be a comprehensive social and political entity embracing various groups, rallying different factions into one community and uniting them under one leadership." [26] More specifically, Johansen settles upon two definitions of *al-miṣr al-jāmiᶜ* whose contents became the dominant view. The first is a judicial-political definition which understands *al-miṣr al-jāmiᶜ* as the place where "the *ḥudūd* penalties are executed and the legal ordinances are applied." [27] The second definition is one in which *al-miṣr al-jāmiᶜ* is identified as a place where the population is large enough to necessitate the building of a Friday mosque. While these definitions worked for identifying a city or town during the first century or so after the Arab conquests when cities and towns were the only places where a Friday mosque could be found, the subsequent centuries, however, witnessed a

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[25] Baber Johansen, "The All-Embracing Town and its Mosques: al-Miṣr al-Ǧāmiᶜ," *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, vol. 32 (1981-82), pp. 139-162.
[26] Ibid., p. 141.
[27] Ibid.

great expansion of urbanism and with it the building of Friday mosques in smaller towns and villages. The above definitions could no longer distinguish villages from fully developed cities towns, and so the differences between city and countryside became somewhat blurred. Despite this problem with the concept of *al-miṣr al-jāmiᶜ*, Johansen uncovers two elements in the Ḥanifī legal texts that clearly provide a distinction between the urban and the rural. The first element was the appearance during the ninth and tenth centuries of a hierarchy of religious buildings in addition to a proliferation of Friday mosques. In this way a lawyer was able to identify a city by a number of Friday mosques and by a complex hierarchy of places to worship from the *masjid* of a neighborhood or quarter, to the local *musalla*, and even to the *maṣṭaba* in the *sūq*. The other means of differentiating the city from the countryside was by the presence of a *fināᶜ al-miṣr* and one or more *tawābiᶜ* (suburbs): [26]

> The *fināᶜ al-miṣr* is an open space serving the common interests of all town residents and becomes the spatial embodiment of the town dwellers as a collective unity. It serves as a bridge between the built up area of the town and its agricultural surroundings on the one hand, and the open country-side, the *mafāza*, on the other hand. The size of the *fināᶜ al-miṣr* and number of *tawābiᶜ* constitute the decisive criterion by which the difference bet ween cities, towns, and villages is defined in the Hanafite school of law.

Johansen's representation of the Islamic city is one in which the city is understood as a center for the religious and political functioning of Islamic society. This does not at all imply the Marçais brothers'

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[26] Ibid., p. 153.

assertion that Islam is an urban religion and that it is only in a city where a Muslim can practice his faith completely; rather, it shows us how cities were pivotal in sustaining the religious customs and political authority upon which Muslim society was based. By legally defining the cities and towns, jurists and political leaders were better able to organize and maintain the social, religious and political structures of their society. Furthermore, by acknowledging a hierarchy of places to worship, Muslim jurists accepted the fact that a city was made up of many co-existing congregations; because of urban expansion, towns people could no longer meet as one community in a single Friday mosque. So much for the assumption that Islamic law could not conceive of entities other than the all-inclusive *umma*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Johansen's convincing argument that at least legally city and countryside could be differentiated, flies in the face of Lapidus's theory that there was no real distinction between the two. Although legal opinions by definition tend to present somewhat ideal visions of reality, this article re-asserts the potential of Islamic legal sources in helping to understand and define Islamic urbanism. Johansen has of course only examined Ḥanifī texts in this paper and therefore it will only be after similar research is done on the other three Sunnī law schools that we can determine if his conclusions hold up.

The architectural historian, Besim Hakim, in his frequently cited book, *The Arab-Islamic City: Building and Planning Principles*, approaches Islamic law and the city quite differently than Baber Johansen and attempts to show how Islamic legal principles shaped the

topography and architecture of the Islamic city. If this connection can

be validated, then it implies, as Richard van Leeuven insightfully points

out, that Islam understood some sort of concept or notion of the city; for

how can one make rules and regulations for urban planning without

having some idea of what a city should look like and how it should

function? [29] But beyond this, Hakim's other perhaps greater goal is to

prove that Islam, as a dynamic and all-encompassing religion, was the

dominant force behind the making of the Islamic city. For example, he

states in the opening paragraph of his first chapter that "[t]he basic

principles and guidelines of the building process and its framework

derived from the essence and spirit of Islam" -a statement in direct

opposition to Kennedy (q.v. page 88). [30]

Hakim's book primarily revolves around an in-depth case study of

the Tunisian capital of Tunis with the ultimate aim -as alluded to above-

of developing a new, more meaningful model of the Islamic city,

especially in the Arab world. But after an exhaustive, systematic, and

detailed examination, his conclusions, while much more elaborate,

largely echo those of Brunschvig -that Islamic property regulations

based on the primacy of the family and the right to privacy were the

dominant movers and shapers of the Islamic city. [31] The one area where

Hakim does offer some new insights, however, is in the role of

customary law or *'urf*. While he only briefly mentions the practice of

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[29] Richard van Leeuwen, "The Quest for the 'Islamic City,'" *Changing Stories: Postmodernism in the Arab-Islamic World*, eds. Inge Boer, A. Moors, and T. van Teeffelen, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), p. 156.
[30] B. S. Hakim, *Arab-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles*, (London, 1986), p. 15.
[31] cf. chapter 1, pp. 28-31.

ᶜurf in his book, he does devote at least two subsequent papers to it,
appearing in 1989 and 1993 respectively. [32] Here ᶜurf is used to explain
"[t]he phenomenon of diversity within unity so apparent in traditional
Islamic cities. . ."[33] In other words, he argues that the adoption of ᶜurf in
urban planning helps to explain why Islamic cities vary so much from
region to region.

Hakim presents an seemingly comprehensive legal-based
understanding of the Islamic city, a model that builds on Brunschvig's
conclusions by incorporating the element of ᶜurf. But no matter how
convincing this concept is, it is hard to imagine that legal regulations
and traditional building practices are the sole cause of a city's
appearance. As Abu-Lughod comments: "I see Islamic law as an
adaptive mechanism for helping the society to achieve its goals, rather
than as a *deus ex machina* determining them." [34] Furthermore, Hakim's
representation of his so-called Arabic-Islamic city is very reminiscent
of the static model set forth by the "old school orientalists" such as the
Marçais brothers and von Grunebaum. His decription of the topography
and morphology of Tunis, while one most detailed and complete of any
Islamic city to date, is nevertheless compiled from a combination of
medieval and modern sources which results in a tendency to disregard
change over time; he has in effect lumped five hundred years of urban

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[32] B. S. Hakim, "The Role of ᶜUrf in Shaping the Traditional Islamic City," *Urbanism in Islam: The Proceedings of the International Conference on Urbanism in Islam (ICUIT)*, *Oct. 22-28, 1989*, vol. 2., ed. Y. Takeshi, (Tokyo, 1989), pp. 113-138; and id., "The Role of ᶜUrf in Shaping the Traditional Islamic City," *Islam and Public Law: Classical and Contemporary Studies*, ed. Chibli Mallat (London, 1993), pp. 141-155.
[33] Hakim, *Islam and Public Law*, p. 149.

history into one changeless model. Therefore, in his seemingly post-Orientalist desire to assert the dynamic role of Islam in shaping the city, he has ironically fallen back upon the very stereotype he sought to disprove. Finally, and this is perhaps the major criticism of Hakim's research, he bases all his ideas and conclusions on the examination of one city, Tunis, and then on basically one fourteenth century Mālikī text by the Tunisian master stonemason cum *qādī*, Ibn Ramī, incidentally the same source used by Brunschvig. Therefore, in all fairness, it only seems appropriate to wait in passing complete judgment on the validity or applicability of Hakim's arguments and conclusions until more similar research is done with legal sources representing both other law schools and other cities. Nevertheless, Hakim's work, like Johansen's before him, has shown the possible importance of law and legal issues in understanding the form and function of the city in Islam. And, as stated early, his approach of analyzing Islamic urban development in and of itself through indiginous legal principles is an attempt at escaping from the prevalent Weberian methodology of value-laden cross-cultural comparasions, and as such should be seen as a model for future research.

Another recent and potentially rewarding trend in the research of Islamic urbanism has been on the early Arab-Islamic cities as described in the contemporary Arab writings and chronicles. The two main works in this area, Hichem Djaït's *Al-Kūfa: Naissance de le ville*

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[34] Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City -Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 19 (1987), p. 164.

islamique (1986), and Nezar AlSayyad's, *Cities and Caliphs* (1991) move away from the static medieval Islamic city model and argue that Islam as a culture, along with other social, climatic, and political factors produced original and planned cities. In other words, early Islamic cities physically reflected the Arab-Islamic culture and society at the time, and as the society changed so did the cities.

Hichem Djaït's brilliant and insightful examination of the founding and early development of Kūfa directly challenges the generally accepted theory that the city was merely an *ad hoc* military encampment which only slowly and somewhat haphazardly evolved into a town. Instead, based primarily on the descriptions provided by Balādhurī and Sayf ibn ʿUmar and to a lesser extent on archaeological and architectural evidence, Djaït contends that Kūfa developed relatively quickly into a fixed, built, and urbanized settlement which he sees as proof that the early inhabitants of Kūfa as well as the Caliph ʿUmar "had inscribed on the ground the plan of a future city cable of supporting a community existence that would be Islamic, permanent, civil, and urban."[35] Moreover, he understands the Arabic word *maṣṣara* (to build, found, settle, civilize -from which *miṣr/amṣār* (city) is derived) as representing this early drive to build an urbanized, Islamic civilization and empire.[36] Simply put, there was almost immediate intention or will on the part of the Arab Muslims to organize themselves

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[35] Hichem Djaït, *Al-Kūfa: Naissance de la ville islamique*, (Paris, 1986), p. 89.
[36] Ibid. pp. 75; 89.

into permanent cities and town which Djaït sees as being largely
influenced by Islam.

Furthermore, and equally interesting, Djaït proposes Kūfa as a
kind of prototype Islamic city which directly influenced the building of
other cities such as Baṣra, Wasīṭ, and Baghdad. He does this by showing
how the central plan of Kūfa closely resembled that of these other
cities. According to Djaït, Kūfa's principle plan during its first one
hundred years is as follows:

> Three elements composed the space of the first Kūfa: a large
> central, religious, and political area encompassing the *masjid* and
> the *qaṣr*, a gathering place for the community and for
> commanding [the troops]; beyond that were the lots of land given
> to the different tribes on which to live (*khiṭāṭ*), radiating from the
> core, deliberately defined, contained, and planned . . . ; in the third
> place was an element at once of separation and of circulation
> (*manāhij*) [street network], which allowed for the
> individualization of the tribal lots and for the quick gathering of
> the warriors into the large central space. [37]

Most importantly the layout of the city was generous and geometrically
planned; there is no sense, not to mention any evidence of the
"disorder" and compactness so evident in later medieval cities. One
element not mentioned above, is the sūq, the location of which was also
knowingly planned. [38] Altogether. Djaït attempts to demonstrate how
these essential elements of Kūfa were adopted in the establishment and
development of Baṣra, Wasīṭ, and eventually, Baghdad. For example,
even though Baṣra was established earlier than Kūfa, it was slower to

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[37] Ibid., 91. For a complete detailed descirption see all of chapter VII: Structure de
l'espace intérieur: l'aire centrale.
[38] Ibid., pp. 108-110.

development into a permanent city. When it did begin to set up

permanent structures, Djaït reveals through historical and

archaeological sources how the plans and layout were very much copied

from Kūfa.[39] Similarly, and perhaps more controversially, Djaït

challenges the conventional view that the round city of the Caliph al-

Manṣūr, Madīnat as-Salām/Baghdad was primarily influenced and

shaped by Persian traditions; instead he argues that

> "Like Kūfa and like Wasīṭ, the center [of the original Baghdad]
> was defined by a public area where we find the palace, the great
> mosque, the one next to the other, and always a pl ace larger than
> the mosque. We also find there the headquarters of the police and
> other administrative buildings. Like Kūfa, a residential belt
> surrounded the public area, cut up by *sikak* (side-streets) which
> were geometrically planned. The articulation of the Round City
> into two spatial zones -public and residential- demonstrates
> remarkable continuity since Kūfa, for it is in Kūfa. . . that this
> scheme first appeared. [40]

Of course, there were also many differences between the two cities, not

the least which was sheer size, but these supposed similarities remain

striking. One reason that Djaït gives for these common features is that

until 766 C.E. Kūfa was the administrative capital for the Abbasids and

that this might have influenced al-Manṣūr's conception of what the

capital of an Islamic empire should look like. [41]

Another area that Djaït examines is the more theoretical issue of

the Islamic city. Although he brings up many of the usual points of the

"Orientalist critique," he does offer some interesting remarks and

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[39] Ibid., pp. 311-315.
[40] Ibid., p. 322.
[41] Ibid., pp. 321-22.

insights. His first comment, of course, deals with the *amṣār* and how scholars have interpreted and dealt with the transition from a spacious and planned city to the disordered city of the so-called medieval Islam. Most, such as Xavier de Planhol and Robert Brunschvig, have simply written off this change as a simple effect of evolution. As an example, Djaït cites Planhol as stating that "the irregular plan of Islamic cities is in most cases an acquired feature, not something 'congenital.'" [42] Never, interjects Djaït, has anyone explained this development as resulting from something in the structure of the original plan. Thus, he proposes that this gradual change from order to disorder is more the result of complex mixture of demographic pressures, the reemergence of cultural tendencies (bedouin, oriental, etc.), and the organization of Islamic civilization itself in an urban framework. Finally, he questions if this so-called disorder really is disorder, that in fact there may be a certain order in the seemly chaotic pattern of the Islamic city. [43]

In a brief chapter entitled "Une ville sans visage," Djaït takes some Edward Said inspired stabs at Eugen Wirth's contention that there is no such thing as an "Islamic" city. [44] Not only does Wirth's conclusions de-Islamize the Islamic city by proposing the alternate term, oriental city, but his methodology also "mixes oriental prejudices with Weberian presuppositions" first by trying to determine essential, unchanging characteristics of urbanism in Islam and second by regarding Islam as purely a religious phenomenon. [45] Finally, Djaït

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[42] Ibid., p. 140.
[43] Ibid., pp. 140-141.
[44] Ibid., pp. 143-145. For more on Eugen Wirth see chapter 2, pp. 74-77.
[45] Ibid., p. 144

points out that Wirth shoots himself in the foot by concluding that "if
one refers to the material remains and to the architectural
documentation, it seems reasonable to give up the term 'oriental
village.'" [46] Thus, exhausting all possible designations to replace the
seemingly inappropriate "Islamic city," we have come to "a city without
a name, and without a connection to any civilization." [47] Like Said, Djaït
sees all this as a larger problem in which orientalists have refused to
accept the possibility that Islam possessed any new or original ideas. [48]
By constantly trying to prove connections to pre-Islamic civilizations or
to medieval Europe, scholars have (un)consciously denied the city in
Islam any kind of identity. Djaït has, of course, tried to present a
different picture of urban development in the Arab-Islamic world by
showing how Islam as a creative and dynamic socio-cultural force has
helped to establish and shape cities and towns in the Middle East from
the time of the Arab conquest to well into the Abbasid empire, and
possibly beyond.

The obvious strength of Djaït's work is in its rigorous analysis and
comprehensive descriptions of the construction plans of early Islamic
amṣār, particularly (of course) Kūfa. The hypothesis that Kūfa was a
prototype/model for other amṣār is quite original and convincing but
not completely; more research needs to be done on the other garrison
cities and other "created" cities such as Baghdad and Samarra before
such a definitive connection can be made. Unfortunately, Djaït does not
address the situation of the existing cities which the early Arabs took

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] See chapter 3.4 in Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York, 1979), pp. 284-328

over. How did this "creative Islam" deal with intact non-Arab, non-Muslim cities? Does the Kūfa model apply to or have influence over the development of these cities as well? Although he does not provide any answers to these questions his approach of looking into the earliest manifestations of Arab-Islamic urbanism in order to understand better how Islamic cities evolved is both innovative and useful.

AlSayyad attempts a much broader examination of early Arab-Islamic urbanism than Djaït, but it is also markedly less in-depth, articulate, and rigorous. In fact, his book has been widely criticized for its misreading of textual and archaeological sources, as well as for its generalizations, topographical reconstructions, and derivative nature (i.e., that his main theses are derived from other scholars) [49] Despite his problematic and faulty research, he does, however, present some interesting approaches to and interpretations of early Islamic urbanism that can be a guide for further, more accurate and fruitful research. Generally speaking, AlSayyad seeks to understand the building and development of cities in the Arab-Islamic world by analyzing the role that the Caliphs and their deputies played in shaping them. Through this study, he hopes, in typical post-Said fashion, "to demonstrate that the stereotypical model [of the Islamic city] is inadequate because it

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[49] For example see the following two scathing reviews: Zeynep Çelok, review of *Cities and Caliphs: On the Genesis of Arab Muslim Urbanism*, by Nezar AlSayyad, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 113 (1993), pp. 124-25; and Yasser Tabbaa's review in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26 (1992), pp. 524-526.

divorces form from function and because as a theoretical construct it is too simplistic to be of any substantial use." [50]

Like Djaït, he relies almost exclusively on the works of Arab historiography, namely al-Balādhurī, aṭ-Ṭabarī, al-Ya'qūbī, and al-Maqrīzī. And since AlSayyad is an architect and urban historian his proposed methodology attempts to combine elements from both disciplines: he explains that "[t]his study attempts to marry. . . the practice of urban history and the analytical techniques of urban form and design." [51] The added benefit of using these urban studies approaches is that it virtually requires the use of topographic maps and diagrams, an addition that is very helpful in visualizing the urban change and development that AlSayyad describes.

This book doesn't really start until the third chapter -the first chapter deals mostly with methodological issues while the second chapter gives a Said based anti-Orientalist historiography of the Islamic city concept- in which AlSayyad examines the founding new towns by the Arabs, in this case, the amṣār or garrison towns of Basra and Kūfa. Surprisingly, AlSayyad makes no use of or reference to Djaït's book in his analysis of Kūfa. Nevertheless, he comes to the similar conclusion that both cities, Kūfa and Basra, were in essence prototypical urban settlements:

> Basrah and Kufa were the first prototypes of planned Muslim cities. They possessed similar features and to some extent conformed to the stereotypical ima ge of the Muslim city. . . [I]t is

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[50] Nezar AlSayyad, *Cities and Caliphs: On the Genesis of Arab Muslim Urbanism,* (Westport, Conn, 1991), p 7.
[51] Ibid., p. 6.

obvious that the form of the two cities was a product of commonsense planning that represented Arab bedouin or nomadic tribal identity. This does not deny Basrah and Kufa, in their early days, their Islamic identity. [52]

AlSayyad goes on to explain that at least until the death of the Caliph ᶜUmar in 644 C.E., Baṣra and Kūfa "were planned, run, and administered according to some Islamic ideals such as modesty and simplicity." [53] He also mentions that the physical layout of these early garrison towns were often the result of negotiations between the inhabitants, the governor in charge, and sometimes even the Caliph. Over time, however, the tight hold over the amṣār by the powers in Madina and Damascus weakened resulting in their increased freedom to grow, develop, and acquire their own unique character. [54]

Following this discussion on the garrison towns, AlSayyad launches into an examination of three existing cities which were taken over and incorporated by the Arab-Muslims: Damascus, Aleppo, and Cordoba. Within these three towns there seems to have been a consistent pattern of change and development which AlSayyad attributes to a conscious program by the Caliphs to Islamize the city. Generally speaking he argues that in all these cities there appeared a trend to appropriate "some open space close to an existing building like a church," which would be used for public prayers. [55] Eventually, as more towns people converted to Islam, a mosque was built on this area.

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[52] Ibid., p. 72.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., p. 76.
[55] Ibid., p. 110.

This would then inevitably lead either to the destruction of the church or its incorporation into the adjacent mosque. [56]

A similar development occurred in conjunction with the Caliph or amir's residence. At first he occupied an existing building within the city usually near or next to the main mosque. Eventually, however, the ruler moved to the edge or even outside the city where he would have a completely new, larger and more opulent palace built. [57]

AlSayyad argues that these developments do not represent some kind of "Islamic planning ideology;" rather they reflected both the challenges the Caliphs and amirs faced in trying to consolidate their authority and rule. and the changing mentality of Arab society. [58]

The last type of city that AlSayyad analyzes is the so-called planned capital cities. In this chapter, he compares Cairo and Baghdad. After a comprehensive review of the physical form and topography of each city, AlSayyad concludes that while both shared similarities in terms of compositional elements, location of activities, process of building, and general symbolism, their physical form did not represent any Islamic building or planning ideals. Rather, these cities were the creations of their founders, the Caliphs, and as AlSayyad warns, "Cities planned by Caliphs for themselves instead of for their people should not be considered a proper representation of Islam as a religious or cultural system." [59] Cairo and Baghdad were built as capitals of a political-

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., p. 111.
[59] Ibid., p. 151.

religious empire and as such were physical expressions of symbolic power.

Interestingly, like Djaït, AlSayyad notes the physical and symbolic similarities between these planned capitals and the garrison towns of Baṣra and Kūfa. He goes on to suggest that they also may have been, to a certain extent, models for the imperial cities of Cairo and Baghdad. Nevertheless, these conclusions are conjecture, and unlike Djaït, he offers no convincing evidence.

As a theoretical framework for the study of early Islamic urbanism, *Cities and Caliphs* is both workable and potentially rewarding; nevertheless, it also requires an ambitious and formidable investigation of a great number of cities over a significant period of time. This, not to mention sloppy research, is most likely why AlSayyad's work ultimately fails: he bit off more than he could chew. His study would have answered many of the persistent questions surrounding the Islamic urbanism, but until more research is done on specific cities, such a grandiose and comparative study will not be able to lead to any decisive results or lasting conclusions.

The examples of recent research covered in this chapter display some interesting new trends in and approaches to the study of Islamic urbanism. Although the static Islamic city model proposed by the French orientalists in the first half of the twentieth century was already being questioned and revised by the late 1950s, it was not until the 1980s that we see a more secure and confident break from it. This may in part be due to Edward's Said's book *Orientalism* in which he provided many new scholars with a powerful arguement against earlier

research on the Middle East and the Islamic world. The result, at least in the field of Islamic urban studies, was an attempt to look at Middle Eastern cities in their own context, and to regard Islam not a monolithic and changless entity, but as a dynamic and adaptable force. Another reason may lie in the increasing body of research on cities and towns in the Islamic Middle East and North Africa which have invariably painted a much more complex picture of urban structure and development. Most likely it is a combination of both.

The new direction of research since the beginning of the 1980s can be characterized as a kind of "post-Orientalist" break against overarching, ahistorical and general models of the Islamic city in favor of more time-specific descriptions and analyses of either particular cities (Hakim, Brett, Djaït) or cities contextualized in distinct regions (Kennedy). In this regard, Lapidus's concept of the Islamic city is criticized for its over-generalizations (Johansen, Brett) in almost the same way as he criticized the then predominant model of the Islamic city represented by von Grunebaum et. al. Furthermore, ideas such as "change-over-time" (Kennedy, Djaït) and regarding Islam as a cultural entity rather than simply as a religion (common aspect of all aforementioned scholars) have become increasingly dominant. A good example of the latter development is how Islamic law has helped shape and define the city. Yet despite this seeming rejection of the old French archetypal model of the Islamic city, there is, almost ironically, a certain, limited and modified acceptance of it inherent in most of the works cited in this chapter. The model developed by the French was though not entirely accurate, also not entirely fictitious: taking away such value judgments as "stagnant" and "backward," most cities in the

Middle East and North Africa did display during different periods such
common characteristics as winding, narrow streets, defined quarters,
and central markets (*sūqs*). What recent research has attempted to
drive home is the point that such a depiction of the city does not apply to
every Islamic city in every point in time from the Arab conquests to the
present day. In other words, this model should not be taken as a general
picture of the city in Islam, only perhaps as a representation of certain
cities at a certain point in time. If there should (or can) be a model of
the Islamic city, it needs to be a dynamic one which can account for
change and development over time.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to elucidate the evolution of the concept of the Islamic city within the discourse of Oriental, Islamic, and Middle Eastern studies. Based on the methodology and theories of Max Weber, French Orientalists such as William and Georges Marçais, Louis Massignon and Jean Sauvaget constructed a timeless and ideal model of the city in the Islamic world. But by the late 1950s and early 1960s this view of the Islamic city began to be questioned as new, alternative models were proposed. This process of revision was considerably influenced and bolstered by the arrival of the new social sciences into the field: sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers joined the more traditional historians and religious scholars to paint a much more complex and often contradictory picture of the Islamic city. Although not able to agree upon a single, revised model, most scholars were united in dismissing the previous model of the French Orientalists as too general, Eurocentric (i.e. Weberian) and inadequate. Research since the early 1980s has seen a continuation of the previous revisionist trends, but now tempered with the ideas of Edward Said. Breaking with the traditional methodology of comparing and contrasting "ideal models" of Islamic cities with classical and European ones, recent scholars have largely preferred to examine cities and towns within the context of their own society and culture; they have attempted to understand the Islamic city as an entity shaped not just by

Islam as a religion, but by a variety of constantly changing socio-cultural factors of which religion is just one. This not to say that Orientalists such as the Marçais brothers and Sauvaget did not consider other non-religious factors in their conceptualizing of the Islamic city, for they did, but rather, they place a disproportionate emphasis on Islam as an all-determining power. Today, economic, political, ecological, and demographic elements are also seens as influencing the form and function of the Islamic city. The simplistic and changeless Orientalist model of the Islamic city has, through a long process, given away to a much more fluid, complex and diverse understanding of the city in Islam. A single model encompassing all cities in the Arab-Islamic world is now both naive and impossible.

The question now presents itself of where we should go from here? Our understanding of the city in Islam is far from complete and as this paper has hopefully shown, it will yet take many more years before we can be certain if there are indeed common roots, trends, and developments among the cities and towns of the Islam world. In the meantime, a few scholars have recently proposed some insightful and innovative ideas and approaches for both the understanding of and research on so-called Islamic cities. Kenneth Brown, in his essay "The Uses of a Concept: 'the Muslim City'" has suggested a re-emphasis on religion as interpreted and used by Michael Gilsenan in his 1983 book *Recognizing Islam*. Accordingly, Brown argues that "[r]eligious identities and ideologies in the cities of the Muslim world have dimensions in space and languages that can with great care be described -seen and

read."[1] Janet Abu-Lughod, in probably the most "famous" of recent

articles on the concept and study of the Islamic urbanism, "The Islamic

City -Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance,"

has also offered up some interesting ideas, interpretations, and

observations. Although contending that Islamic cities share a number

of comment elements, she was the first, as far as I know, to propose that

Islam was just one of many forces which created the traditional Islamic

city. Just as important were terrain and climate; means of production,

distribution, and transportation; a system of social organization; and a

legal and political system. [2] As for the role of Islam in particular, Abu-

Lughod states the following:

> Cities are processes not products. The three Islamic
> elements that set in motion the processes that gave rise to
> Islamic cities were: a distinction between the members of the
> Umma and outsiders, which led to juridical and spatial distinction
> by neighborhoods; the segregation of the sexes which gave rise to
> a particular solution to the questions of spatial organization; and a
> legal system which, rather than imposing general regulations
> over land uses of various types in various places, left to the
> litigation of neighbors the detailed adjudication of mutual rights
> over space and use. [3]

Besides regarding cities as processes of many divers forces and factors,

the specific impact of Islam as a cultural and social force on the spatial

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[1] Kenneth Brown, "The Uses of a Concept: the Muslim City," in *Middle Eastern Cities in Comparative Perspective*, eds. K. Brown, M. Jolé, et. al., (London: Ithaca Press, 1986), p. 80.
[2] Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City -Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19 (1987), p. 162.
[3] Ibid., p. 172.

organization of the urban matrix is quite interesting and holds a lot of potential in future research.

A final way of possibly furthering ou r understanding of Islamic urbanism is in the somewhat radical proposal of re-defining our general notion of what constitutes as city. A perfect example of this can be found in Richard van Leeuwen's recent article, "The Quest for the Islamic City," in which he takes an openly poststructuralist approach to the city in general and applies it to the Islamic city in particular. He rejects the standard Weberian assumption that there are specific laws which apply to all cities and that there are common criteria which allow us to define what a city is anywhere in the world; instead he argues that while cities do share enough characteristics to be converted into an abstract model, each city is nevertheless different and can only be defined in a broad framework of socio-economic and political relations: "cities can not be studied as conceptual entities, but only in relation to these broader frameworks." [4] With this in mind van Leeuwen proposes a new concept of the city as a center where various political, social, economic and cultural networks meet and interact. [5] This centralizing role also makes cities the centers of power which helps distinguish them from the surrounding villages and countryside. By applying this concept to Islamic cities van Leeuwen argues that "the *a priori* distinctions between Islamic and European cities disappear." [6] By combining this "universal Foucaultian power-structure" approach with

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[4] Richard van Leeuwen, "The Quest for the 'Islamic City,'" in *Changing Stories: Postmodernism in the Arab-Islamic World*, eds. I. Beor, A. Moors, and T. van Teeffelen, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), p. 152.
[5] Ibid., p. 158.
[6] Ibid.

general investigations on urban spatial organization, and with the
rigorous examination of primary written sources, it may be possible,
Leeuwen contends, to formulate a set of criteria which will determine
the Islamic character of cities, or at least to find certain common
features between cities in the Islamic world. [7]

In the light of recent research, we can safely conclude that the
term "Islamic city" is no longer a completely accurate term for
describing cities in the Islamic world. Not only does it presuppose an
unjustifiably predominant and defining role of Islam in determining
urban form, but it also presumes a timeless, Eurocentric and idealistic
model. But until more research is done on cities through the Islamic
world, and until we have more information at our disposal from which to
draw some decisive conclusions, it is probably best to adopt André
Raymond's reasonable and realistic compromise:

> For the time being, it is wise to resort to the notion of a
> traditional city marked by regional aspects (Arab in the
> Mediterranean domain, Irano-Afghan and Turkish), but naturally
> fashioned in depth by th e Muslim population that organized it and
> lived in it (with its beliefs, institutions, and customs, all
> profoundly impregnated with Islam): it is the most prudent
> approach we can suggest, one which best takes into account the
> elements we have now at our disposal. [8]

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[7] Ibid., p. 159.
[8] André Raymond, "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Reviews,"
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