

A Visit to Al-Andalus

The year 711 AH saw the arrival of a young man named Tariq bin Ziyad on the shores of Iberia and what started the expansion of Islam into Europe. 7 years was all it took for the Muslims to take over Iberia, or al-Andalus as it was now called. The people of this land embraced Islam in the thousands, and the establishment of Islam created a society which was envied by the rest of Europe. Contained within it was a harmonious society where Christians, Jews and Muslims lived alongside each other and where minorities were free to practice their faith. The citizens of al-Andalus enjoyed street lighting, well built roads, public baths and running water. It gave rise to famous intellectuals including Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina, whose works were later used as fuel for the European renaissance. Al-Andalus was centuries ahead of its European neighbours as it created a society where the needs of all its citizens were met, something Europe could only dream of.

My recent visit took me to the old capital, Cordoba, a magnificent city which contained approximately 700 mosques, 60,000 palaces and 70 libraries. In comparison to the largest library in Christian Europe which had 400 manuscripts, the largest Andalusian library had approximately 600,000 books on various topics. Laying my eyes on the Grand Mosque of Cordoba was mind blowing, as the gardens and the numerous arches made clear the brilliance of Muslim architecture. However, the loss of Cordoba soon occupied my mind, as the conversion of the mosque into a church became obvious. All that remained of the mosque, and much of Cordoba was the Islamic inscriptions in some places and the arches. It was clear that the Christians tried their best to wipe out all signs of Islam after the Reconquista.



The Grand Mosque of Cordoba

Muslims were forced to either convert to Christianity or be killed. The fall of Cordoba signified the beginning of the end for the Muslims in Spain. The loss of a legitimate authority made Muslims and Jews fair game as they were harassed, abused and thrown out of their own homes. This is a similar reality to today where our brothers and sisters around the world have no one to represent their affairs. The shedding of Muslim blood, the slandering of RasoolAllah (saw) and the attacks on our values have been dubbed "freedom of expression" while the expression of our views denote "extremism, fundamentalism and intolerance". **Whilst the attacks were physical then, the attacks are intellectual now and are in fact worse as doubts about the very idea of Islam are being sewn in the minds of the Muslims in the West.**

The second part of my journey took me to Granada which was the last province to remain until the eventual eradication of Islam from Spain. Walking on the old, rocky roads of Albayzin which were originally built by the Muslims in Granada was surreal. On the north-eastern corner of the city of Granada I came across a huge fort which was strategically positioned on top of a mountain which made it overlook the whole of Granada. This was Al-Hambra, a fortress that was reconstructed and expanded under the emir of Granada, Mohammed bin Al Ahmar. It served as the palace of subsequent emirs and contains within it beautiful gardens, exquisite architecture and public baths. Engravings of ayaat of the Quran were ever present, including the "motto" of the province of Granada – "There is no victor except Allah".

The fall of Granada occurred approximately 250 years after the first parts of North Spain fell. The history books explain how the Christians broke their promise of peace with the Muslims of Granada and launched a bloody offensive on the Muslims. The Muslims were killed, had their property looted and were continuously spied on. The Christians would spy on the Muslims on Friday mornings to see if any were having a bath in order to confirm their religion and essentially provide them with a license to kill. It can be seen that this habit of spying has been inherited well by their European successors.



Al Hambra

The fall of Granada and before it, the rest of Andalus occurred due to a number of reasons. The end of Andalus saw the formation of Taifa's, similar to nation states where each emir demarcated and separated itself from the rest and aimed to control or take over other Taifa's. This saw emirs going to the extent where they sought help from the Christians to defeat their Muslim accomplices in other areas in order to expand their influence. This all occurred despite the presence of a wali and the various emir's sharing the same Deen. This eventually resulted in al-Andalus disintegrating from within, as a result of this pseudo-nationalism taking root within the hearts and minds of the Muslims. The importance of Islam was put on the backseat and the obtaining of power became the aim of the emirs. Islamic unity became a fanciful concept and the separation of lands based on location became the perceived solution. Is this any different from the current thinking of the Muslims today who claim to be united based on Islam but make the interests of their homeland the prime focus of their thinking? The state of al-Andalus at that time was much different to the rest of the Khilafah which once again realised the importance of unity under the Ottomans who were on the rise.

My journey made me witness firsthand the success of al-Andalus as a model region for the rest of the world. It was clear however, that the success of this land was purely down to Islam, from which the Shari'ah rules were derived to conduct society's affairs. The various advancements of this land, which far surpassed those of Europe were down to the Islamic culture becoming embedded into the Muslims. The society itself was spiritual, as everyone conducted their affairs according to Islamic law and the state of God-consciousness created by the implementation of Islam produced personalities far greater than those we have today. What is sad is that this source, al-Islam which produced the Khilafah state has been sidelined in the minds of Muslims and concepts such as nationalism and secularism have taken their place. Instead of referring to Islam as their solution, and working to re-establish the Khilafah upon the Prophetic methodology, Muslims look to the enemies of Islam for help, with the hope that the good old days will return.

Al-Andalus is only one example of the many lands which were once showered with the mercy of Allah (swt). Lands such as Western China, Greece, Southern Italy, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Malta, Cyprus, Ukraine, the Canary Islands, parts of Iceland, the largest island of the Bristol waters in England – Lundy, Croatia, the Island of Rhodes, Southern Russia as well as Portugal have all been forgotten. Perhaps the generations after us will also forget Chechnya and Kashmir like we have forgotten other lands.

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