

The Function of Bazaar in the Modern World

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Abstract

One of the topics in Islam which has not been studied deeply and which has started to attract attention lately is bazaars. Therefore, in this research following a short information on the development of bazaars in Muslim world, moving from the solidarity and cooperation roles of the sellers in bazaars in Baghdad, the capital city of Abbasids and the cooperation of the sellers in bazaars during the Iran Islam revolution, inferences were made on what kind of roles bazaars could play in the modern world.

This research intends to depict the importance of the bazaar on the social integrity and professional solidarity among tradesmen during early Islamic times.

Key words: Bazaar, Abbasids, Baghdad, Iran revolution, tradesmen, Professional solidarity

Introduction

One of the topics in Islam which has not been studied a lot and which has started to attract attention lately is bazaars. That the person who proselythesized Islam to Arabs and the rest of humanity was a tradesman from Mecca is not something that is always remembered. Similarly, most of us do not remember that Muslim tradesmen were the main actors in spreading Islam both in Indian continent, Far East and in Africa. We know that when Muslims were taken out of Mecca and migrated to Medina, most of the Muslims in Medina were mainly engaged in agriculture and the trade was under the control of Jewish people. However, it is recorded that in a short period of time, Muslims, particularly the migrants from Mecca had significant earnings as a result of their activities in Medina market founded by the Prophet Muhammad. We should also remember that the markets of new founded cities by Muslims such as Kûfe, Basra and Baghdad had their significant place in the economy of the country in a very short period of time. That Iraq was a geographical center, that it was located at the crossroads of land routes and sea routes, that Abbasids encouraged trade, that they were just in tax regulations and social developments led to an increase in interest towards trade and to the expansion of trade activities. Trade activities extended over to far west to Andalusia and Eastern Africa, to Baltic basin and Russia, and to India, China and Korea. The improvement of el-Hirah and Basra people in this issue has been a proverb. The dominance of Muslim tradesmen on roads to India and Far East continued until they were overwhelmed by Portugal. It would be convenient to remind that such commercial paper transactions as money order, cheque and credit letters and the law of commercial papers were developed by Muslims (For more information on the foundation of Baghdad city during the Abbasids, the development and structuring of market, the importance of Baghdad markets in world's and country's trade, please see Mustafa Hizmetli, *Tarihte Şehir ve Pazar*, Ankara 2012).

In this study, we will focus on the roles of markets in the development and growth of Muslim societies, in general and on their roles in the city lives, in private.

When we consider main economic activities as production and distribution, we can classify tradesmen, the actors of commercial activities, as follows:

1. Tradesman as a trader whose job is to buy to resell
2. Tradesman who acts in the name of producer and thus, reminds of broker in this sense.
3. People who generally work in the modest sections of market (sûka-small bazaar)

Here, it is possible to talk about three main commercial relationships in medieval Muslim world:

1. Weekly rural area bazaars are bazaars which are set up in places with relatively rare population and where the buyers and sellers come from a half-day distance. They are called after the day they were set up or to the place they were set up: such as Tuesday bazaar or Friday bazaar.
2. Seasonal fairs: the best example of this is Esvaku'l-Arabı (Arab bazaars) in pre-Islam Arabia. Later, they lost their importance.
3. City bazaars: these bazaars, which are the subjects of our study, are the most important ones among all.

Socio-economically, city bazaars are supposed to cover export and import trade, food stuff and raw material sources, sales from the city to the rural area, meeting domestic needs and

domestic redistribution (Pedro Chalmeta, “Bazaars”, *In The Islamic City*, Ed. R. B. Serjeant İstanbul 1991)

When we look into the areas where city bazaars were founded, we see that there were different practices. The area where Prophet bazaar was founded in Medina was such an empty area that a man on a horse could see the saddle of the horse from everywhere in the bazaar, when he put it just to the middle of the bazaar (Semhudi, *Vefai'l-Vefa*, I, 540, Cairo 1326). This was not an empty place only during that time. People tried to keep it the same in the following periods as well. A man, who first put his water bottle to the bazaar first and then made shade over it, was made to bring it down by Caliph Omer and this is the most obvious example (Semhudi, I, 541). All of the abovementioned and the strict orders of the Prophet to not divide or make this area smaller shows that because this bazaar cannot be limited in any way, it was accepted as a public area open for everyone (İbnu'l-Ferra, *Ahkamu's-Sultaniyye*, 224). Construction of a building that could incorporate all sük (small bazaars) was during the time of Omayyad caliph Hişam b. Abdülmelik and after his death, it was ruined by the people (Semhudi, I, 540-44). Basra, Kûfe and Aleppo bazaars belong to the same period. As a result, it is possible to say that there was a transformation of empty space bazaars to set up bazaars during Hişam b. Abdülmelik period between 724-43, that fixed and permanent bazaars were set up and taxes were collected. When Abbasids founded Baghdad, they followed the same method and did not collect taxes until tradesmen were used to the bazaar. However, they started collecting taxes during el-Mehdi period.

The best example while discussing how Islam cities gained their main characteristics is Baghdad. Baghdad bazaars which were first active in the arches of the circular city founded by Mansur had become individual cities in the city of el-Kerh in such a short period of time less than one century. People from various colors and origins located by their occupation and profession in the market were forming a mosaic here. The development of jobs and occupations resulted in the accumulation of each occupation in different bazaars and thus, enlargement of these areas and tradesmen and craftsmen to become organizations that support cooperation and association. These people called tradesmen, craftsmen or job holders were proud of their jobs and strongly advocating their jobs against other social groups and occupations. People started to be considered to belong to a certain occupation such as cotton fluffer, tailor or bookseller-stationer as they were considered to belong to a certain tribe and city. At this point, we need to remember that craftsmen were at lower class in the social structure and were considered as ordinary people and that the saying: “craftsmanship neither improves you nor kills.” was a frequently used saying. However, we witness that the importance of these people started to increase as of the III. Year of hegira and their roles in public life become more prominent. These are called the swag man and ragtag of the city called *Ayyar* (vagabond) and *Şuttar* (Abdülaziz Duri, *Introduction to Economic History of Islam*, 94-95). The first activity of ayyar people who had a stance against authority, wealth holders and particularly against big tradesmen occurred when Baghdad was sieged by el-Me'mun army. The second was when 50.000 people fought to defend the city when the Turkish army coming from Samerra sieged Baghdad during the civil war between el-Müstain and el-Mu'tez. Sometimes due to such actions as pillage and plundering and shakedown of Baghdad for a certain period, their actions caused to misunderstandings and caused them to be named as ragtag, hobo and swag man. However, we see that in fact they also represent such a revolutionary social movement resulting from the deteriorating conditions of the people and growing economic gap among the public. Among these people were craftsman, street hawkers

and shopkeepers. Their action was a rebellion against the emperor representing the authority and those holders of wealth. And their actions were, in fact, against those people. It is seen that those *ayyar* people, who were fighting with para-military tactics, had a leader in each street. Information on those people focuses on their bravery, courage, and their friendly attitudes towards the poor and the weak as well as such ethical principles as protecting women. This information necessitates making a distinction between these people and ordinary plunderers. They used to call their way as bravery and were glorifying courage and generosity. One point strengthening the social side of the movement was that the movement enlarged when some groups which were in fact not from the common people participated to their movement during the period of Buyid. We even see some people from Abbasids and alevis. The reason of that is the reaction against Buyid reign for bringing all of the people of the country down to second class people. The fact that the movement developed such common concepts and ethical values shows that they were effected from sufistic concepts. The number of fractions in the movement increased as they enlarged. When Caliph Nasir li dinillah, who had some connections to some groups which were engaged in Islamic guild (*futuvvet*), came to power, he wanted to create a structure on the existing separation and fractioning in order to secure caliphate against any risks that might occur. To this end, he worked to create a national movement that would exceed the borders of his reign. In order to expand the organization that he was holding the presidency he established a structure in neighboring emirates that made them responsible from their own guild organization. With his efforts and enterprises, the Islamic guild organization was renewed, it become more widespread and a new Islamic guild literature which defined its concepts and made them clearer occurred. The Islamic guild (*futuvvet*) organization kept Nasr's quality until the Mongolian invasion got a blow in this movement. The impacts of this movement on the *ahi* community to be founded in Anatolia and their communication should be separately discussed (Duri, *Introduction to the Economic History of Islam*, 105-109)

It is also understood that all traditions and principles of every occupation was stabilized and these values were accepted by Muslim judges and officials for public order while resolving occupational problems. Occupational organization, choosing an occupation and promoting in an occupation are all issues to be discussed in detail. Here, we are only reminding that each occupational branch had a founder or head officially recognized by the state and sometimes chosen and seen as the representative of the occupation; that such occupational branches open for people of all religions created a strong connection between people and the members were in close cooperation and solidarity. The cooperation between these people was based on such issues as ensuring a certain acceptable level in their own occupational branches, identifying the prices in their occupations and protecting the members of the profession against infringements. There are also examples of the fact that occupational groups took the role of protecting their members during the crisis periods. It is seen that these groups stood against the settled authority in order to protect their members. During the reign of Buyid, the cotton and silk weaving craftsman rebelled in 374/984-985 when a dime levy was placed on their products. They did not calm down until the tax was taken off. When the same tax was placed once again in 389/998-999, they rebelled again. They walked to the mosque on Friday and prevented the holy Friday prayer and sermon. Their anger continued for four days without getting any results. In 421/1030, in el-Karh, where there were Baghdad bazaars, some craftsman groups fought with Turkish army to defend themselves (Duri, *Introduction to Economic History of Islam*, 95-96. For more details see. İbnü'l-Cevzi, *el-Muntazam*, VIII, 47, 62-63; İbnü'l-Esir, *el-Kâmil*, IX, 33; es-Sabi, *el-Vüzera*, 368; Miskeveyh, *Tecaribu'l-Umem*,

III, 361-362). An interesting example of the rebellion of the tradesmen in the market when they saw that their interest was at risk was the tradesmen in Iran bazaar during the Iran Revolution. Tradesmen in the market, known as Bazârî were the predominant group among the followers of Humeyni, the leader of the revolution and Ali Şeriati, the ideologist. They played a key role in the revolution. They were traditional manufacturers and tradesmen making export or retailing. Having different relationships with production tools, Bazârî people were not considered as a class according to Marxist definition. Although they were sometimes called small middle-class this definition was not enough to define this group including wholesalers, bankers and laborers. That western products started to be sold in this market was the main factor bringing this group together against western opposition. The expansion of supermarkets, big banks and machine-woven carpets increased the western control on Iran economy while decreasing the role of Bazârî people (Bülent Keneş, *İran Siyasetinin İç yüzü*, 2013, 85)

The government which considered the political and economic integrity of the bazaar as a threat, was supporting “modernization” plans which aimed at removing bazaar by encouraging industry and trade outside bazaar. This explains the coalition between the tradesmen in bazaar and *ulama*. Most part of the education, culture and cooperation activities as well as political activities of mullah was financed by the tradesmen of bazaar. While the weekly religious meetings of bazaar people they organized in their homes created an ideal network where political issues and tactics were discussed, the shops in the bazaar were convenient places for fast communication and organization (Keneş, 2013, 85).

Result

In the first of the two given examples, we witnessed the humanitarian dimension of bazaar as supporting the poor and cooperating among themselves whilst in the second, we witnessed that they fought against destruction with a spirit of courage and bravery. It is possible to say that the modern world is reinforcing corruption by degrading this bazaar and making it dependent on international and global capital and fighting against what is humanitarian.

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