



# Call for Papers

## Military Foundations, *Ribāṭs*, and Urbanization

Workshop, February 1 – 2, 2024

RomanIslam Center (Early Islam) - Universität Hamburg

Organizers: Stefan Heidemann and Kurt Franz (RomanIslam Center)

All western Eurasian and Hispanic Empires build on cities and new urban military foundations cities as their strongholds. In other words, the foundation of cities with a (originally) military population is characteristic for imperial expansion. People foreign to the region serve as crucial agents for the spreading of imperial civilization, culture and the imperial (salvation) religion. However, the way such cities were formed impacted on their social, economic, cultural, and religious fabric.

Using a comparative approach to Empire Studies, the workshop looks at settlements founded by foreign conquering military elites promoting at the same time an Imperial (salvation) religion and the presence of garrisons as a driving force of colonialization and the proliferation of imperial civilizations. Four transregional empires offer possible comparisons: The Macedonian Empire, the Roman Empire, and the Habsburgian Hispanic Empire. Alexander's Empire is understudied in terms of its social and cultural impact, because we lack written sources beyond the narrative of battles, and limited archaeology has taken place. The other two empires are much better understood. The Roman army was legally celibate and lived in *castra*. Family and urban life mostly happened in an adjacent hamlet at the camp's gate. The military men mingled with the indigenous womenfolk and local craftsmen had their families living in these villages. Some developed into cities. Other cities were founded for the male Roman servicemen, the *coloniae*. They served as the nodes of Roman colonization and messengers of its imperial culture. The Habsburgian Empire in the Americas faced a situation comparable to that of Alexander's, the Romans and the Muslims. The conquistadores were a rapidly advancing, militarily superior, celibatarian army. They conquered the old empires of the Americas, imposing on them an outlandish imperial language and a foreign salvation religion of Middle Eastern origins. The conquistadores were mingling with the indigenous (female) nobility and other indigenous womenfolk. A part of the indigenous old American elite survived. Religious and military efforts went hand in hand with urbanization and a cultural mission. They created the Hispanic civilization. In contrast, the Islamic armies, the Arab, the Khurāsānian, and later the Central Asian were usually living with women from their

native regions. But compared with the Roman army and the conquistadores we know little about the life of those Islamic armies. Fortified garrison cities served as homes. They may have retained their foreign identity for a longer period, such as the Arab armies in Egypt, and the Khurāsānians in North Africa, Egypt, and al-Shām. There are observable differences between the military urban expansion in the Maghrib and the Mashriq. Garrison cities in the east usually were set up anew. In the West instead we often observe the takeover of Byzantine fortresses by Islamic armies.

Naturally, the workshop wants to challenge in a comparative mode the ongoing discourse on the origin of the 'Islamic' city, meaning the type of city recognizable within in the Islamic Empire.

Since the seminal book edited by Hourani and Stern (1970), scholarship has been dedicated above all by the transformation, or Islamization of inherited classical cities in the Western and Eastern Islamic empire. The first strand is the early discussion. It largely inspired by the Weberian critic of the Islamic city as lacking some of the municipal spirit of the classical Hellenistic or Roman imperial city. For another, it is now widely agreed on the basis of the past four decades of archeological research that the process of urban decline had already begun during late antiquity.

The second strand has focused in particular, but not exclusively, on 'new foundations' and identifies the new salvation religion, Islam, with its often centrally located houses of worship, the congregational mosque, and the emerging Islamic norms (*hisba*) as driving force in shaping the 'Islamic' city. The third strand of the discourse discusses the military aspect of new foundations in the context of the early conquest (*futūh*), and the distribution of the tribal forces in those encampments (*amṣār*) of al-Baṣra, al-Kūfa, which eventually turned into cities in their own right. These Early Islamic Cities were understood as models for the later ethnically and religiously segregated cities with a central mosque. Western and the Middle Eastern discourses merge into the discussion of the Islamization as a main factor of the transformation of the cities.

The workshop wants to explore, how the different military structures effected the urban foundations and cultures of empires.

In order to structure such a comparative approach, several questions can be addressed:

a) How did the military order shape the layout and structure of a city?

Differences in layout might result between early tribal encampments, and a structured infantry in later times: tribal resting areas with grazing grounds, versus a street grid along military units. A comparison with Roman and Hispanic military cities is tempting. Several models for family life have to be discussed in comparison, the family and the celibate soldier.

b) How is city foundation connected with the ruler and state agents?

The foundation of cities for the imperial army is frequently connected with the creation of a new residence for the ruler, vice-king, the governor, the *amīr*, or the caliph. This relation found architectural forms in the symbolic representation of power through architecture, such as palaces and city walls.

c) Military settlements as frontier-spaces.

Military settlements not only serve as hubs or encampments for the expansion of the empire, but also display the military prowess at its frontier, such as the Hellenistic Ai Khanoum in Central Asia, Roman Limes Castells, such as Mainz (Moguntiacum), Trier (Augusta Treverorum), and Regensburg (Ratisbona), and Hispanic Lima. In the Islamic Empire, distinct from the *amṣār* as military cities in the administrative center of the regions are the *ribāṭ*s, port cities, and the cities of the *awāṣim* and *thughūr* situated at the frontier of the empire. In the east, these cities were often 'manned' by groups foreign to the region, while in the west we see often in addition people from the region

who saw the military defense as their religious duty, such as the Berber. And in addition, how did these affect the hinterland?

d) Military settlement as cultural brokers of the Empire

The movement of soldiers from one end of the empire(s) to the other transferred an urban and social life across the empire and helped to develop and spread of a new Greek, Roman, Islamic or Hispanic civilization; Greek in Central Asia, Latin in Lutetia and Colonia Agrippina, Arabic in Cordoba and Qayrawān; Persian in the Khurāsānian garrison city al-Rāfiqa, Spanish in Tenochtitlan/Mexico City. The linguistic mix in the military cities with the dominating Arabic and Persian language helped to cement the position of both languages in the east and west. New dietary habits moved with armies. Foreign cults, liturgy, and religions were transferred, visibly in temples, churches, and mosques. While these are very general issues, the workshop will be limited to the role of the urbanized military.

e) How do cities change after the withdrawal of garrisons, or in many cases after the withdrawal of Imperial funds for the military, which had become sedentary?

The hypothesis to start with, is that after the withdrawal of the army or the end of imperial financial transfer to the military population, the military order - visible in the city's grid - disintegrates according to the local (economic) needs of commercial or population growth and decline, in the course of ordinary civil transfers of property, and changing public needs for common installations. Such changes can be observed already in the late Roman phase, with the planned military foundation of Justiniana Prima including in modern-day Serbia, in contrast to the more organic evolution of the city grid of Apamea, Tadmur, and other places.

f) How did the military in such cities relate to landownership in the hinterland?

While the city supposedly was founded on the transfer of tax monies, how did these monies influence the agricultural production in the frontier region? What impact did the taxation of agricultural produce have?



Center for Comparative Empire  
and Transcultural Studies

Abstracts should be 500-700 words in length. Please send them to [katharina.mewes@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:katharina.mewes@uni-hamburg.de) and [kurt.franz@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:kurt.franz@uni-hamburg.de) before **Jan. 2, 2024**.

Papers will be pre-circulated; presentations at the conference should summarize the speaker's major points without exceeding 25 minutes. presentation will be followed by 20 minutes of discussion. Please submit your abstract along with a CV.