

The Urbanization of the Suburbs of Damascus : al-Şāliḥiyya Quarter from the 12th Century to the 16th Century

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In the Ayyūbids and the Mamlūk era (6/12th c.-10/16th c.)many quarters were formed in the suburbs of Damascus. When Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited Damascus in 726/1326, he was amazed at the development of its suburbs and wrote about al-Şāliḥiyya, a quarter in the northern suburbs, that it become had a great city (madīa) in itself and all of its inhabitants were under the influence of the Ḥanbalī law school.

al-Şāliḥiyya began as a settlement of the Qudāma family, who were members of the Ḥanbalīs and had migrated to Damascus from Palestine after its capture during the Crusade. They sought a new future in Damascus which had restored its political stability due to the strong leadership of Nūr al-Dīn, who came to the city in 549/1154. With the aid of the Ḥanbalīs in the city, the Qudāmas succeeded in settling in Damascus and al-Şāliḥiyya in its suburbs. From the beginnings of 7/13th century construction of various religious institutions such as madras (college) and mosques was begun in al-Şāliḥiyya. Until the end of the Mamlūk era thirty-one madrasas were constructed there and they represented about 20% of all the madrasas in Damascus and its suburbs (greater Damascus) . In this article, writer attempts to investigate the features of the development of al-Şāliḥiyya through an analysis of the madrasas.

The madrasas in al-Şāliḥiyya have three distinctive features compared with those of greater Damascus. Firstly two thirds of them (21 madrasas) were constructed during a very short period of time; about eighty years of the Ayyūbids rule in Damascus. Secondly 58% of their founders (wāqif) were mamlūks. This fact shows that without the support of the mamlūks who had economic strength the rapid development of al-Şāliḥiyya could never have been achieved. Thirdly the majority of the madrasas belonged to the Ḥanafī law school (about 52%, 16 madrasas), and the second place was taken by the Ḥanbalīs (about 26%, 8 madrasas), while they remained in the position of the minority in greater Damascus. The construction of al-Şāliḥiyya was

significant for the Ḥanbalīs as it gave them a base from which to undertake activities in Damascus. Their doctrine as well as activity had a wide influence over different schools and strata. Not only the Ḥanbalīs but also various schools and strata of Damascus took a strong interest in al-Şāliḥiyya. Therefore, al-Şāliḥiyya could rapid development to be described as "a great city".