PART III

UNCOVERING ALMOHAD IBERIA
EVOLUTION OF THE ANDALUSI URBAN LANDSCAPE:
FROM THE DISPERSED TO THE SATURATED MEDINA

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If we review the historiography on Islamic urbanism, one of the fundamental issues from the pioneering studies to the contemporary critic has been the supposedly static character of the medina, an issue which has also been raised in recent critical discussions regarding the relevance of the notion of the timeless Islamic city. Today, almost all scholars accept that the medina is not an immutable entity and that it is untenable to argue that in the medieval period the medina was like the traditional examples which have survived to the twentieth century. Nevertheless, no doubt due to the difficulty of gathering relevant data, an explanation of the original character of these medinas and the processes by which they evolved into the archetype described by early Orientalist scholars has yet to appear.

Most scholars accept that Islamic cities did not originally resemble those of the nineteenth century, and that they were not constructed with disordered cores, dead-end alleys, and quarters, which are supposedly characteristic of the Islamic city. We felt the subject needed to move forward, and we wanted to answer questions such as “What were the first cities founded by Muslims like? How did they evolve over time, up to the point at which they took on the appearance described by earlier scholars?”. We therefore published in 2003 a comprehensive article entitled “Sobre la Ciudad Islámica y su Evolución”, and in the following year a summary called “Evolución del Paisaje Urbano Andalusí: de la

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*Translated by Glaire D. Anderson.


2 See Abu-Lughod, “The Islamic City”.