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Commercial Practices in the Umayyad Era

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Abstract

The Islamic economic approach encourages honest and fair trade while condemning deceit and fraud transactions. In this study, we will focus on the methods of commercial transactions during the Umayyad era by examining practices such as barter and the use of various currencies before and after the advent of Islam. These currencies include the dinar, dirham, falus, collateral, and their terms, as well as financial guarantees.

Barter was one of the primary financial transactions and continued to be used even after the introduction of currency in transactions alongside physical currencies. Barter was employed as one of the exchange methods in several countries and collateral was a legitimate financial transaction within the framework of Islamic economic principles. Similarly, financial guarantees involve pledging assets and transferring the debt from the guaranteed party to the guarantor. The guaranteed party could only demand payment from the guarantor, and if the guarantee was unconditional, the guarantor could claim it at any time or upon maturity.

Cash transactions are one of the most common and significant trade methods, involving the exchange of cash for goods and services. Each country had its own currency that traders and others used for transactions, including Persian and Byzantine currencies. However, Islamic coinage emerged during the Umayyad era and became the state's official currency.

Keywords: *Barter, Islamic economic principles, commercial transactions.*

Introduction

Trade and its methods are essential, serving as a vital means to fulfill human needs. The wisdom behind the establishment of trade lies in the fact that, had it not been for the graciousness of Allah, who allocated resources differently among various regions and provided each territory with something distinct, trade would cease, industries would vanish, and people would neither travel nor migrate. The spirit of exchange, buying, selling, giving, and receiving would fade away. However, Allah has distributed blessings to each region and restricted others, so that people would travel from one place to another, and communities could benefit from the possessions of others, achieving balance and organized management.

Trade was extensively practiced through buying and selling in the markets of the Islamic state. The government did not intervene in buying and selling operations as long as they adhered to Islamic legal principles. Furthermore, the Islamic economic approach encourages honest and fair trade while condemning deceit and fraud transactions. In light of these principles, we will examine the methods of commercial transactions during the

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Umayyad era, focusing on practices such as barter, the use of currencies before and after the advent of Islam, including the dinar, dirham, falus, collateral, and their terms, as well as financial guarantees. We will conclude our study by highlighting the key findings.

First: Barter

It is necessary to consider the opinions of scholars on this matter. For Al-Farrahidi (1), barter is an exchange in sales, and for Al-Zubaydi (2), it is "exchange, the exchange of one commodity for another." Some have said it is selling a tangible item for another tangible item, meaning the exchange of goods for goods (3). This exchange is required to involve goods rather than cash and must involve two different categories (4).

The method of barter is one of the earliest commercial transactions, indeed, it is the first type of transaction to emerge among people. Arabs, before Islam, followed this method, exchanging hides for other goods, dates for wheat, or trading wheat for livestock. They also hired the services of some individuals in agricultural operations in exchange for a portion of the harvest. The aim of these exchanges was to satisfy immediate needs, known as self-sufficiency (5). This does not mean that this method ended in the pre-Islamic era; it remained a known and practiced method to this day, with some countries still using it for their product exchanges instead of cash (6).

Due to the inherent differences in barter, it has its drawbacks, such as the impracticality of dividing some dissimilar items, like exchanging agricultural goods for livestock, where dividing livestock, for example, is not feasible. Another drawback is the lack of a suitable means of storing goods, which means people hold onto their wealth in the form of goods, making it susceptible to risks. Many other drawbacks cannot be covered within the scope of this research (7).

All these drawbacks collectively led humans to invent money as a measure of value and an accepted medium of exchange for everyone, facilitating trade transactions and expanding their scope.

Secondly: Money

Money is important in the Arab state due to its extensive use in economic, financial, and service transactions. Without money, it would be challenging to express the prices of goods offered in markets. Therefore, those in charge prioritize minting coins and overseeing their circulation. Furthermore, using money represents an advancement in economic life, surpassing the barter system (8). The significance of money lies in its role as one of the pillars of a state, a symbol of its identity, and an indicator of its economic well-being (9). Thus, it is crucial to excel in its production, showcasing that Arabs, regardless of their circumstances, are capable of progress, creativity, and adaptation(10).

The term "money" encompasses all forms of currency, including dinars, dirhams, and copper coins. Money emerged as a solution to the difficulties of bartering. The use of dirhams was known among Arabs even before the advent of Islam and continued during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These dirhams were imported from Persia, where their weights varied significantly. The Quraysh tribe used them in their transactions (11). The legal weight of the dirham was defined during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), where ten dirhams equated to six mithqals of gold. This standard remained in place until the caliphate of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, who introduced Arabic coinage.

Arabs continued to use foreign currencies alongside Islamic Arab currencies (12). Currency played a significant role in the economic relations between the Byzantine Empire and the Arab state. In the early 7th century AD (1st Hijri century), before the Islamic conquests, the West, with the exception of Byzantium, faced a shortage of gold concentrated in the commercial cities east of the Mediterranean. The stockpile of gold in the West gradually diminished because there were no suitable goods for trade to adjust the perpetual trade deficit. This was because trade was primarily import-based; Syrian merchants imported eastern goods and received gold in exchange. The West had nothing to offer except gold. On the other hand, Byzantium was considered the true kingdom of gold. Numerous mines existed there, and gold coins were abundant, as the trade balance with the West consistently favored it during the prosperous trade era (13).

The Islamic Arab state inherited and held onto a monetary system based on gold. Initially, it did not mint new coins; the circulating currency consisted of Persian and Byzantine coins. This situation persisted during the first fifty years of the Islamic Arab state's existence. Trade continued much as it did before the conquests, with major commodities transported from the Eastern Mediterranean region. Byzantine currency remained the sole medium of exchange in the Mediterranean basin(14).

During the Umayyad era, a significant shift occurred in the economic landscape as the Umayyads moved away from Byzantine control. They began minting their own currency, signifying a change like the economic rivalry between the two powers. The process of Arabizing money and paper currency began during the reign of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan(15).

Al-Bayhaqi (16) reported that Imam Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Hussein al-Baqir (peace be upon him) advised Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, saying: "Weigh thirty dirhams of various types, with ten of them weighing ten mithqals, ten weighing six mithqals, and ten weighing five mithqals. This results in a total weight of twenty-one mithqals. Divide them into dirhams based on this weight, with each dirham weighing seven mithqals." This illustrates the direct religious aspect of Arabization towards the Byzantines, establishing an integrated Islamic Arab monetary system free from foreign influences, unifying currency and weight standards(17).

Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan aimed to showcase the role of the new Arab forces in the financial and economic fields, further asserting their sovereignty and Arab identity. This process of Arabization became a necessity for economic and political stability(18).

Byzantium perceived this economic shift as a severe blow because Damascus gained economic independence and introduced its own currency. This loss compounded the many setbacks Byzantium faced in its confrontation with the Islamic state. Naturally, the Byzantine Empire did not submit to this economic upheaval. Instead, it declared economic warfare against the Umayyad Caliphate, attempting to initiate a trade war by implementing economic embargoes, starting from Cyprus, which heavily relied on the Levant and Egypt for its livelihood (19).

Despite the measures taken by Byzantium in the realm of economic warfare, trade continued, and the economic impact was mutual between the two states. The benefits derived from commercial exchange were indispensable for both parties. Therefore, despite the war, trade, currencies, and commercial transactions persisted. In this context, Byzantium allocated only two ports for trade with Muslims: Trebizond and Constantinople itself (20).

To complete what the Umayyad authorities began in the Arabization effort, mints were established. One was in Damascus for minting gold dinars, and the other was in Kufa, Iraq, for minting silver dirhams. The number of regions where coins were minted increased, and their factories spread across several cities and provinces. It's worth noting that these mints were not limited to minting gold and silver coins; there were also facilities dedicated to minting copper coins. Overseeing these mints was an individual known as the "Sahib al-Dar al-Darb" (Master of the Mint) (21) .

The concept of "Dar al-Darb" refers to all the coins used by the peoples of the Arab state, including gold dinars, silver dirhams, and copper coins. Ibn Khaldun (22) described "Dar al-Darb" as the stamping of images or reversed inscriptions on dinars and dirhams, resulting in visible, straight markings. This term originally referred to the iron die used for this purpose. Subsequently, similar engravings were transferred onto dinars and dirhams. These coins were inscribed with the seal of the ruler and became recognized symbols of the state. This was a necessary function for the ruler, as it allowed people to distinguish between genuine and counterfeit coins during transactions and trust their authenticity (23).

Ibn Manzur (24) explained that "Dar al-Darb" referred to the silver and gold coins that were engraved. In the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him), it was prohibited to break the "Sikat al-Muslimin," meaning the permissible coins used between Muslims, except for genuine reasons. The term "Sikat al-Muslimin" was used to describe the dinar and dirham that were stamped, and the name derived from the iron die used in their production.

Al-Maqrizi (25) indicated that the term "Sikat al-Muslimin" was used to refer to the dinar and dirham that were used in transactions, with the word "Sikat" signifying the engravings on these coins. In conclusion, the term "Dar al-Darb" primarily signifies the currency used in commercial transactions, and at times, it refers to the engravings on these coins or the molds used to mint the currency (26).

In Baalbek, during the Umayyad era, there was a mint for coinage, where coins and dirhams were struck. (27) From Damascus, half-dinars and third-dinars were issued (28), indicating the evolution in the minting of this currency, resulting in the issuance of various denominations.

Currency in circulation before and after Islam, namely the Dinar, Dirham, and Fals.

Currency has had a significant impact in the Arab state due to its extensive use in economic, financial, and service transactions. Without currency, it would be difficult to express the prices of goods in the markets. Therefore, authorities have been keen on minting coins and overseeing their production. Before Islam, Arabs used Byzantine gold Dinars and Sassanian silver Dirhams (29). When Islam emerged, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) permitted the use of these coins, and the Caliph Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) also allowed their usage (30). Al-Maqrizi mentioned that these coins were minted in various weights (31).

During the Caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), Muslims aimed to assert their identity even as they were occupied with conquests and the spread of the new religion. They began to leave their mark on the currency(32). During the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him), Dirhams were minted with the inscription 'Allahu Akbar,' and similar inscriptions appeared on coins during the time of Imam Ali (peace be upon him)(33).

Historical sources indicate that various Caliphs and Governors minted coins in their time, often inscribing Islamic phrases on them. For instance, during the Caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, Dirhams were minted with inscriptions such as 'Praise be to Allah,' 'There is no god but Allah,' 'Messenger of Allah,' and 'Umar.' However, the image of the Persian King remained on the Dirham. Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) inscribed 'Allahu Akbar' on the coins(34), even though primary sources do not mention Dirhams that were minted during the time of Imam Ali (peace be upon him). These Dirhams featured inscriptions like 'In the name of Allah,' 'The guardian is Allah,' or 'In the name of Allah, my Lord(35).

Additionally, Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan minted Dinars featuring his image while holding a sword, and Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr minted rounded Dirhams in Mecca(36). Similarly, Musab ibn al-Zubayr minted Dirhams in Iraq. Despite all these Dinars and Dirhams being minted in Arab lands and carrying Arabic inscriptions, they followed foreign models. Nevertheless, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan ordered the minting of Islamic currency. In Egypt, the governor Abd al-Aziz ibn Marwan minted inscribed Dirhams(37).

As for the Dinar, it was sometimes referred to as 'Dinar,' and it was connected to the 'Deebaj' building, which is a Persian term that was adapted(38). In another context, it was referred to as 'Mudunar,' signifying the large quantity of Dinars in circulation(39). 'Dunar' is derived from 'Dinar'(40) with a strengthened 'n' sound(41), replacing one of the weak 'n' sounds to avoid confusion with similar words used in various sources.

The Dinar was a unit of the gold standard used among the Arabs both before and after Islam. Before Islam, these Dinars were known as 'Heraclian Dinars.' These coins bore the image of Emperor Heraclius. Al-Baladhuri mentioned about these coins(42): 'The Heraclian Dinars used to come to the people of Mecca in the pre-Islamic era(43), and they exchanged them for Persian Dirhams(44). They would only trade on the condition that they were pure.' When Islam arrived, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) allowed the use of these coins(45), although some modifications were later made. The image of Christ was removed, and the name of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was substituted instead(46).

As for its weight, various sources have discussed this matter in some detail. Ibn Hazm stated(47): 'I extensively researched the precise weight of the gold Dinar, and it was unanimously agreed upon that in Mecca, its weight is equivalent to eighty-two grains plus three-tenths of a grain of pure barley.' On the other hand, the Dirham was seven-tenths of the Mithqal (a measure of weight).

Ibn al-Ikhwah mentioned(48): 'The Dinar was called 'Dinar' due to its weight, and it is synonymous with 'Tabr.' The Dinar weighs twenty-two carats except for one grain, which is equivalent to seventy-two grains of average barley.' This measurement was acknowledged by the people of the Hijaz, the Levant, and Egypt(50).

As for the Dirham, its origin and derivation are said to be either: 'Persian with an Arabic influence, associated with the structure of a building called 'Hijra,' and they called its diminutive form 'Darih.' Its plural form is 'Dirhams,' and 'Dirahim,' and they are necessarily similar to 'Siyarif.'(51) .Alternatively, it is said to be 'a non-Arabic word borrowed from the Greek word 'drakhma,' corresponding to the Persian 'darakhm' or 'diran.'(52). The Dirham is a silver currency used by the Arabs in their transactions, adopted from the Romans and Persians. Perhaps they also dealt with the currencies of Yemen and Abyssinia because their merchants frequented various markets for trade, including those under Roman and Persian influence, so they had to use the currencies of those regions(53).

Abi Ubaidah said(54): "Dirhams had an unspecified weight until the days of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, who standardized them, making every ten dirhams equivalent to seven mithqals." It is also said they had an unspecified weight, and they were used for financial transactions during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). As for their weight, it was fifty-seven and six-tenths grains and ten grains(55).

Regarding their value in terms of dirhams, it was equivalent to ten dirhams during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him)(56). However, despite this quality, their value decreased after the time of the Prophet. During the Umayyad era, they became twelve dirhams, and in the Abbasid era, they reached thirteen or fourteen dirhams(57).

As for the Fils, Ibn Saida referred to it as(58) "Al-Nume," equivalent to the Roman "Fils." Its plural form in the language scholars' lexicon is(59): "Afulus for a small quantity and Fulus for a large quantity." It is generally a piece of copper called Fils, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) approved this currency, among others(60). Originally, the minting of this type of copper currency aimed to facilitate and conduct simple commercial transactions(61).

Thirdly: Pledge

In the Arabic language, "Rahan" is the singular form of "Ruhun,"(62) which means confirmation, permanence, and stability(63). It can be said, "I pledged something with him here."(64) It is also said to mean detention(65). Additionally, it can refer to "What one leaves with you as security for something taken from them."(66) People can pledge (67)to produce someone's pledge(68).

Sheikh al-Tusi defines(69) a pledge as a term used when one places a sum of money as collateral for a debt, with the intention of redeeming it if the debtor fails to pay. Pledging is permissible according to the Quran, Sunnah, and the consensus of the Muslim community.If someone has a financial claim against another person, it is permissible for them to secure it by taking a pledge from them. The pledged item is only termed a "pledge" after the creditor has taken possession of it. The pledged item can be of greater or lesser value than the debt. If the pledged item is destroyed without the creditor's intention, the debtor must return the money to the pledger. However, if the pledger intentionally destroys the pledge, and the pledge's value exceeds the debt, the surplus is returned to the pledger(70).

Collateral cannot be sold without the consent of its owner. If the owner is absent, one must wait for their return and their permission to sell it. However, if the collateral holder conditions it upon the debtor, and the debtor possesses the funds, they can act as an agent to sell the collateral and recover their money; this is permissible. But if they sell it, donate it, or give it away without the knowledge of the debtor, it is considered invalid(71).

Collateral is one of the financial transactions that was practiced and deemed legitimate within the framework of Islamic economics. The concept of collateral is mentioned in the Quran, indicating its meaning(72). And mention of this transaction is specifically made in the Quran with the following verse: 'And if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then a security deposit [collateral] should be taken. But if one of you entrusts another, then let the one who is entrusted discharge his trust [faithfully] and let him fear Allah, his Lord...' (Quran, [2:283])(73). He should take collateral from him. However, if he trusts him and does not take collateral from him(74), then collateral is allowed in accordance with this verse, both during travel and in settled circumstances(75). The reason for its allowance in settled circumstances is that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) conducted such transactions. It has been narrated from Lady Aisha that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) bought food from a Jew and left his armor as collateral(76).

Regarding the Prophetic tradition, it has been narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, 'The one who takes collateral should not close it off from its owner, who mortgaged it to him, even if it is a sheep with its offspring and its due milk.'(77). The author of Al-Lum'ah Al-Dimashqiyyah (78) clarifies that a mortgage contract is a formal document that requires the consent of both parties. It is permissible during travel and in settled circumstances, requiring an offer and acceptance, as well as the satisfaction of the mortgagee. The mortgage should not be sold except with the consent of its owner, and if the owner is absent, one should be patient until they return and give permission for the sale. It is narrated from Abu Abdullah Al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) pledged his armor with a Jew in exchange for barley that he provided for his family.(79)"

Therefore, pledging collateral is permissible both during travel and in settled circumstances(80). It is sought after by those who have something to pledge as security and can obtain what they need in return. The jurists unanimously agree on the permissibility and legitimacy of collateral(81).

Collateral is a contract not intended for investment and profit; rather, it is a contract intended for authentication and guaranteeing the repayment of a debt. It should be noted that if the collateral is a living animal, the mortgagee is allowed to benefit from it up to the extent of the expenses incurred for its care. They can milk or ride it according to the expenses incurred while ensuring fairness in doing so(82).

The Conditions of Collateral:

Collateral, such as a house, a slave, or any other item, can be pledged, and the pledger may impose conditions on the debtor's utilization of it, such as residing in the house or having the slave serve them, among other conditions. However, these conditions are only permissible after the consent of the debtor. In this regard, it is narrated from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) that he said, "Collateral is what can be used and benefited from."(83) .Some scholars interpret this hadith to mean that the benefit should go to the debtor since they possess the collateral(84). Sheikh Al-Amili elaborates on the criteria for those involved in the transaction, including maturity, sanity, and non-minor status(85).

The Imamiyyah jurists unanimously agree(86) that collateral is entrusted in the hands of the debtor, and nothing from their property can be taken unless it is damaged through negligence or misuse. It cannot be sold without the consent of its owner, and if the owner is absent, one must be patient until they return and grant permission for its sale(87).

It is also narrated from Abu Abdullah Al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) that he said, "If someone pledges collateral for a specified period and then disappears, does he have a right to sell the collateral within that period?" He replied, "No, he must wait."(88).

Collateral was established to facilitate and provide ease for people, making life straightforward and free from complications. When an individual needs to borrow a specific amount of money and receives it, they place collateral in the hands of the creditor as security and assurance for repaying the debt. Among the scholars, it is unanimous that the pledger cannot dispose of the collateral without the debtor's consent. This underscores the concept of collateral as a trust for assurance and documentation.

Fourth: Guarantee

Guarantee in the language means "assurance and commitment to something(89), with the guarantor pledging and assuring the item(90)." However, in the context of terminology, it refers to attaching the guarantor's obligation to the principal's obligation when making a claim for a specific debt or person(91). Jurists believe that guarantee is permissible according to the Quran, the Sunnah, and the consensus of the Muslim community.

It is mentioned in the Noble Quran: "And for the one who brought the news, a burden of a she-camel." (93) Here, "the one who brought the news" is the guarantor and the one providing assurance.(94)

It is narrated from Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "We were at a funeral with the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), and when the deceased was placed in the grave, he asked, 'Does your companion owe a debt?' They said, 'Yes, two dirhams.' He said, 'Pray for your companion.' Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) said, 'I will take responsibility for it.' The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) then stood and prayed over the deceased, and then turned to Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) and said, 'May Allah reward you well on behalf of Islam...'"(95).

Guarantee involves the commitment of funds and the transfer of debt from the responsibility of the guaranteed person to the responsibility of the guarantor. The guaranteed person cannot claim it from anyone other than the guarantor. If the guaranteed debt becomes due, then the guarantee is valid. This is when someone says, "I guarantee his pledge" or "I guarantee for him," or when he says to the buyer, "I guarantee, commit, or accept." When any of these phrases are used, the guarantee is considered valid (96).

Guarantee of lands, construction, and planting is permitted based on what was narrated from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him): "A man usurped land belonging to my supporters and planted in it." He informed the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), and he ordered its uprooting(98). If the usurper can prove it, he must uproot it. Consequently, he owes a fee equal to what he gained through the planting, as he exceeded his rights by planting without permission. However, if they had stipulated and agreed on uprooting, then he must uproot it because he was allowed to plant on the condition of uprooting it. In this case, the guarantee is not valid(99).

Conclusion

Money has been and continues to be an essential means of financial transactions in Arab Islamic countries, including Al-Andalus. Various methods of commercial and cash transactions have diversified. Cash transactions, involving the exchange of money for goods and services, remain the most common and significant form of trade. Each country has its own currency used by traders and others.

Barter, another financial transaction method, has remained relevant even after the adoption of money in transactions alongside cash currencies. Barter has been used as a method of trade in several countries. Collateral, too, is a financial transaction that was practiced and considered legitimate within the Islamic economic framework.

Guarantee, in financial transactions, involves a commitment of funds and the transfer of debt responsibility from the guaranteed party to the guarantor. The guaranteed party cannot claim this debt from anyone other than the guarantor. If the guarantee is absolute, the guarantor can claim it at any time, but if it is deferred, the guarantor can only claim it after the specified term.

Islamic ethics demand that rulers and state officials refrain from engaging in commercial competition. Their competition with individuals would favor the officials due to their unique competitive advantages.

Islam regards trade as a legitimate means of earning. According to jurists, the foundation of lawful earnings expanded the scope of trade to include buying and selling within a single region, city, and sometimes even a village. Therefore, the importance of trade increases with the level of risk involved.

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44) It is gold, silver, and all the jewels of the earth, from copper and copper, from what was extracted from the metal before it was formulated. See: Ibn Sayeda, Al-Mukhassos, vol. 1, p. 295; Al-Maqrizi, Relief of the Nation, pg. 50.

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