

Economic Glory of the Early Islamic Dynasties in Sicily, Italy

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Abstract

This study further examines the economic growth in Sicily in Islamic civilization the factors that influence the increase in economic mutuality and the development of the economic system at that time. This study focuses on one of the regions in Europe that were successfully conquered by Muslims, namely Sicily. The results of the study found that the progress of growth in various sectors of Islamic civilization seen in Sicily was very significant, one of which was in the economic sector. The trade carried out by the Sicilian people also experienced a rapid increase. Such as the industrial economy which was built through mining and agriculture of the Sicilian population, making good use of existing natural resources. They grow a lot of secondary crops, olives, grapes, bananas, oranges, lemons, peaches, almonds, pomegranates, and grapes. The presence of a money exchange market is a complex matter of needs, providing a mechanism and medium of exchange. Sicily had a bimetallic economy: that is, one based on the circulation of silver and gold. Some taxes are applied to Muslim governments, namely tenth taxes, customs duties, zakat, and charity (*sadaqah*). The evidence obtained during the Islamic era in Sicily contained a fifth tax (*khums*), a tax on agricultural produce, a tax on wine, a voting tax (*al-jawal*), and a sea tax. In rural areas, there is a green revolution to boost the agricultural economy.

Keywords: Sicily, economy, Islamic dynasty, Islamic civilization

1. Introduction

The existence of Islamic civilization cannot be separated from the growth and progress that existed at that time, this progress grew in various sectors, be it education, politics, socio-culture, law, especially in the economic sector. For example, in Italy, which is located on the Southern European continent and consists of a Peninsula, there are two of the largest islands, namely Sardinia and Sicily, where the Islamic civilization in Sicily entered due to the conflict between the Roman rulers. One of them is related to the entry of Byzantine power which controlled the Sicilian region (Yahaya, 1990: p. 25).

Simultaneously with this Euphemius asked Ziyadatullah for help (Caliph of the Aglabid dynasty III) and offered power over Sicily. The offer was accepted by Ziyadatullah. In the end, the

Aghlabid dynasty ruled Sicily. The progress of the Western world (Europe) cannot be separated from the role of the island of Sicily, which is the most important means of transferring the treasures of knowledge and the spiritual life of Muslims (Sunanto, 2007). In addition, Muslims are expanding to this island as one of the goals because it takes advantage of its very strategic geographical conditions (Imam, 2012: p. 71). This island is a connecting route between Africa and Europe so that Islam can develop in the two lands.

After the Aghlabiyah dynasty succeeded in conquering the island of Sicily in 827 AD, and became an influential ruler and played a major role in the progress of the island, after the Aghlabiyah dynasty was destroyed then replaced by the Fatimid dynasty in 909 AD Then in 948 AD the Fatimid dynasty appointed Hasan bin Ali bin Abi al-Kalb as governor of Sicily. Hasan bin Ali bin Abi al-Kalb founded the Kalbit dynasty which was semi-independent and ruled the island of Sicily.

The progress of the growth of various sectors during the Islamic civilization in Sicily was very significant, one of which was in the economic sector. Economic conditions in Sicily before Islam came to power, relied on the use of natural resources on the island, one of the factors the great rulers wanted to control Sicily was because this island was in a strategic position and had abundant natural resources.

Furthermore, the Sicilian people during the Greek rule were introduced to industrial techniques and handicrafts such as the production of ceramics and woolen threads. Meanwhile, during Roman rule, trade routes between Sicily and Spain and Portugal were well established. The goods imported from Spain and Portugal to Sicily include tin and silver (Watt, 1997: p. 22). In addition to establishing trade with other countries, the economy of the Roman government also came from taxes imposed on farmers and landlords (Syamsudin, 2007: p. 232).

During Byzantine rule, Sicily's economy was based on a taxation economy. This was not much different from Roman rule in the past. This system was applied by the Byzantine government to the peasants and landlords because the majority of the population of Sicily were farmers (Mahayudin, 1998: p. 25). The utilization of natural resources in Sicily during the Byzantine reign could not be maximized. This is because technology has not developed very rapidly, not to mention the pressure from the authorities that hampers the pace of the economy in Sicily.

Economic growth in Sicily historically before the advent of Islam was realized steadily but the arrival of the Byzantines described in the previous paragraph made the economy difficult because of the very high taxation of animals, this taxation of animals was used to transport goods and plow the fields. This shows that the policies issued by the Byzantines were very detrimental to the community, besides that the economic sector could not experience a significant increase.

The various reasons that became a problem during the Byzantine policy period also affected other sectors, although after the entry of Islam into Sicily the growth and development in various sectors experienced a very significant increase, the Islamic government in Sicily was ruled by three dynasties, namely the Aghlabiyah dynasty with its capital city. Qairwan managed to control all of Sicily and ruled in a state of constant war.

Sicily as one of the regions in Europe that was successfully conquered by Muslims contributed significantly to the progress of European civilization. Before Islam succeeded in conquering Sicily, this island had been ruled by various dynasties and empires one after another. Starting from 734-241 BC the island was ruled by Greece and Chartagia, then by the Roman Empire in 241 BC-436 AD, then by the Vandals and Ostrogoths (436-533 AD), and finally Byzantium (533-827 AD) (Subarman, 2008: p. 128).

However, the Aghlabiyah dynasty can only be said to be a conqueror, then the leadership was handed over to the Fatimid dynasty in 909 AD, and finally the Kalbit dynasty ruled on behalf of the Fatimids. For more than two centuries since being in the grip of Islam, Sicily has become one of the centers of civilization in Europe after Cordoba. Sicily became the gateway for the transfer of knowledge from the Muslim world to the West. In addition, the period of Islamic rule in Sicily was the initial stage of the trade revolution in the Middle Ages.

For example, trade carried out by the people of Sicily has increased rapidly. Like Industry, the economy built through mining and agriculture, the Sicilian population makes good use of existing natural resources. They grow a lot of secondary crops, olives, grapes, bananas, oranges, lemons, peaches, almonds, pomegranates, and grapes.

Apart from that, they also grow pine trees, dates, thorny leaf trees, and prickly pears. Not only grow fruits, but they also grow a lot of vegetables such as long beans, flax, tobacco, mulberry, cotton, and sugar cane. Fresh water that flows from springs and rivers makes Sicily rich in crops and agriculture. On the other hand, the people of Sicily also take advantage of the natural resources that come from the Mount Etna area. Many of them are miners of materials such as gold, ore, mercury, sulfur, naphtha, sulfuric acid (vitriol), antimony, and alum (Watt, 1997: p. 22).

Based on the things above, the author tries to study further related to economic growth in Sicily during the Islamic civilization and the factors that influence the increase in economic mutuality and the development of the economic system at that time. This study focuses on one of the regions in Europe that were successfully conquered by Muslims, namely Sicily. Departing from the above background, the author describes the History of Islam in Sicily and the study of the entry and growth of Islam in Sicily.

2. Method

This research uses library research techniques and secondary sources with an approach in the stages of searching for various sources related to the problems formulated in the research. This includes collecting sources, evaluating, verifying, and connecting past data to strengthen facts and draw conclusions.

Through this approach, the authors collect books, journals, and other documents as reference sources for economic research in Sicily. These sources are verified so that books, journals, and documents are worthy of being used as research sources and sources related to the economic research process in Sicily.

This study focuses on politics and the economy where the Islamic dynasty in power in Sicily aims to spread Islamic teachings, besides the Islamic dynasty in Sicily promotes the economic sector in various fields for the advancement of society in Sicily, especially in taxation. The Islamic dynasty eased tax payments, which were previously burdened by the Byzantine Empire.

3. Results and Discussion

Sicily is an island in the Mediterranean Sea, located in the south of the Italian peninsula, separated by the Straits of Messina. The island is shaped like a triangle with an area of 25,708 square km. To the north is the Bay of Palermo and to the east is the Bay of Catania. The island is bordered to the west and south by the Mediterranean Sea, to the north by the Tyrrhenian Sea, and to the east by the Ionian Sea. The island of Sicily is mountainous and very beautiful, the climate is good, and the soil is fertile and full of natural wealth. The island is divided into three parts: Val di Mazara to the west, Val di Noto to the southeast, and Val di Demone to the northeast. Islam is only the official religion in Val Mazara, while in other parts of the world, the majority are Christians (Sunanto, 2007; Dahlan, 2016: pp. 79-88).

Separated by the sea, Sicily was ruled by Muslims with great autonomy. They print their own money and when their Wali dies or is killed, they elect a new leader before the Ifriqiya governor makes a decision. The governor may keep it or make other decisions. Today, Muslims own much of the Val di Mazara, while most of the other two territories are still held by Christians. Syracuse, and especially Castrogiovanni with its impregnable fortress, became the main city and defense of the Christians. During Sicily's Islamic rule, the concentration of Muslims lived mostly in the western part of the island, while Christians remained the majority in the eastern part of the island.

Since many European cities were fortified, it took time to conquer them all, and the process was gradual. However, in 842, the Muslim Arabs completely occupied Val di Mazara. A year later, they also occupied Messina and controlled the seas between Sicily and Ifriqiya making it difficult for the Byzantine fleet to enter the Western Mediterranean. Castrogiovanni, the main Christian city apart from Syracuse, was finally conquered by the Muslims in 859. They also defeated the Byzantine navy who tried to retake the city. A large mosque was later built in this city. Two years later, returning from occupying Castrogiovanni, Abbas ibn Fadl, then governor of Sicily, died and was buried in Caltagirone (Kopanski, n.d: pp. 16-20; Alatas, n.d: p. 4; Runciman, 1960: p. 19).

The Fatimids were very interested in controlling Sicily, for political and economic reasons they wanted to establish a large state in the Mediterranean Region and planned to make Sicily a strong-armed naval base, to repel attacks from the Byzantines on the coasts of Africa and succeeded in realizing their ambitions in North Africa and Egypt from an economic point of view, they argued that Sicily was a productive area that would prosper them.

During the Fatimid and Kalbit periods, religious and intellectual activities proceeded under acceptable conditions. The Suni scholarship is growing more significantly than the Ismaili scholarship. In the intellectual field, the Islamic period in Sicily has spawned too many scholars

to name one by one. Some scholars came and lived in Sicily, while others were born on the island and continued their careers outside the island.

In agriculture, Arab Muslims made a significant contribution to Sicily as well as Europe. They developed an excellent irrigation system, sharing knowledge about the cultivation of several crops, such as sugarcane, mulberry, papyrus, cotton plants, lemons, oranges, and grapes. Their expertise in growing roots and green vegetables led to revolutionary changes in Sicily's agrarian and industrial economy. The Muslims made Sicily an international market where traders from the Christian cities of Italy were welcomed as much as Muslim traders from Africa and the East. In industry, Muslims mine and produce gold, sulfur, sulfuric acid, mercury, antimony, and alum. Taxes under Islamic rule were lower than those of the Byzantines.

The Islamic dynasty in Sicily had succeeded in completely abolishing animal taxes used to transport goods or plow fields, before Islam came to power in Sicily when Sicily was under Byzantine rule, taxes on animals were very high. In addition, Islam in Sicily has also succeeded in making its currency by including the names of the governor of Sicily and Amir Bani Aghlab (Hasan, 1989: p. 232).

The economy of the Aghlabid period led to a more integrated system of central and local government under the Fatimids. Such proposed reforms are consistent with the kind of domestic policy that al-Mu'izz pursued during this time in the 960s, but it is unclear whether his orders were ever carried out effectively in Sicily as the proposed development work left almost no traces on the archaeological trail to be seen (Brett, 2001: pp. 235-236). Of the main cities, the fortified cities listed by al-Muqaddas, mostly have ancient and/or Byzantine origins, and relatively few are further inland, as might be expected in a network of provinces meant to envelop the entire island.

In the 970s Sicily gave the impression of a well-populated and prosperous Arab-Islamic city (Watson, 1983). Documentary evidence corroborates, many manufacturers and traders are busy. They concern themselves with taxes and prices, quantity and quality, and all the demands of local and long-distance markets. Indicative of a thriving and integrated island economy, linking rural supply to urban and overseas demand, some researchers paint a vivid picture of the diverse markets that fill the vast area around the capital city. This includes sections for olive grocers, flour merchants, money changers, pharmacists, blacksmiths, burners, grain markets, embroiderers, fishmongers, spice sellers, butchers, fruit and vegetable stalls, potters, bakers, makers laces, perfumers, shoemakers, tanners, and carpenters.

The existence of a money exchange market serves a complex set of needs, providing a mechanism and medium of exchange. Sicily had a bimetallic economy: that is, one based on the circulation of silver and gold. Therefore, money changers also supply vital liquidity to the local population and the wider economy. Financial instruments provide capital from investors, including the state and its officials, to traders and speculators for trading purposes whose profits and risks are shared, significantly encouraging business associations and ventures.

After the failure of the Aghlabids to build gold dinars in Sicily, the Fatimids introduced a new, smaller gold coin, the Tari'. In Latin it is known as Tarenus, in Greek Tarion and, since this coin is equivalent to a quarter of a dinar, in Arabic it is also called Ruba'i (Stern, 1970: pp. 177-207; Grassi, 2012; Travaini, 1995). Issued originally from the mint in Palermo, it is mainly associated with production under the Fatimids and corresponds to the greater degree of fiscal complexity found in the region in the tenth century. During the same period, Tari' was also common on land, first attested at Amalfi in 907, Salerno in 911, and Naples in 935. Although this phase of circulation coincided locally with the Muslim stronghold of Garigliano before its destruction in 915 (Grierson, et al., 1998)

The personal wealth of the urban elite of Sicily is also limited by tithe taxes, customs duties, *zakat*, and *sadaqah*. Evidence obtained during the Islamic era in Sicily contained a fifth tax (*khums*), a tax on agricultural produce, a tax on wine, a voting tax (*al-jawal*), a sea tax, payment of tribute, and fishing obligations (Metcalf, 2022).

In the countryside, the so-called 'Green Revolution', i.e., the process by which the rural economy employs new technologies such as hydraulic irrigation systems, i.e. Water from rivers, springs, and wells are directed through ditches and canals that traverse the countryside, supplying fields, waterwheels, and markets. This hydraulic irrigation system is water that is channeled underground through Qanat excavations or canals (Watson, 1983: pp. 29-58). The Islamic period also witnessed the introduction of new crops and crops, such as citrus fruits and dates. Henna for coloration is evidenced around Partinico and in western Sicily, mulberry trees. In addition, the papyrus plant is cultivated within the city and is used to manufacture high-quality paper roll ropes for administration.

Rich resources were also found on the island of Sicilia including antimony salts, silver, iron, lead, and ammonia in addition to alum and green vitriol, which were used by alchemists and dyes. The existence of a maritime economy, namely offshore tuna and swordfish fishing, and livestock rearing can all be summed up as being an important economic sub-sector. The great potential of rural Sicily, which is already rich in natural resources, not only fulfills internal demand but is also a source of exportable raw products. In some cases, some products are refined and then sold at a premium. However, Sicily's industry is less prominent than its exports of raw materials. In relatively few cases, such as because of the production of Sicilian ivory caskets.

Traders were also active in trading on a shifting basis following favorable prices, traders also traded around the western and central Mediterranean between Spain, Sicily, Ifriqiya, and Egypt, traders made profits through arbitrage, supply, and demand for the same products, different in different places.

Traders used to import-export plants for medical and industrial purposes, precious metals and minerals, basic and luxury foodstuffs, spices, gums and resins, and raw and finished textiles. More specifically, these include aloe vera, colocynth, asafoetida, celandine, hemp, amber, cedar resin, coral, lazuli, kohl, pearl, rose oil, soap, mongoose perfume, musk, myrrh, fur, leather and hides, wax and honey, peppercorns, cinnamon, carob, cumin, galangal, ginger, laurel, mace, mastic, sandalwood, diachylon, almonds, cherries, figs, gallnuts, nutmeg, turmeric, tamarind,

borax, sulfur, malachite, mercury, lead, copper, zinc, acorns, barley, rice, olive and olive oil, plums, raisins, grapes, fabrics and textiles, cotton, felt, wood and ceramics.

The origin and production of Sicily's commodities are mostly rural where there is little demand for their use. Instead, the demand lies in cities and abroad. So, at the port of Sicily where the Fatimid-Kalbid state imposed a tax on expenditures on raw materials and inflows of processed goods. Therefore this is the spirit of the Sicilian Muslims in trading where business and politics are combined.

Arab rule in Sicily was tolerant, as long as Christians and Jews paid their taxes. The Kalbite dynasty (940-1052) with a population of perhaps 300,000. In Palermo, many Arab immigrants from Spain and North Africa exchanged goods with Christians from Italy and France. The Arabs diversified Sicilian agriculture by introducing cotton from Syria, pistachios from Persia, and sugarcane, most commonly produced in western Sicily. Arab farmers increased irrigation and expanded the cultivation of olives and oranges. Some experts think that ice cream was invented in Sicily, and maybe even spaghetti. The growth of Palermo, Mazara, Trapani, and Marsala in the 10th century increased the market for agricultural goods, and agriculture expanded. By 1050 western Sicily was ethnically and culturally quite different from central and eastern Sicily.

Of all the goods destined for overseas originating in Sicily, one that stands out of particular importance is the durable Sicilian grain. These grains were exchanged for Ifriqiya gold on a large scale. Not only this big business but one that had a political dimension based on Sicilian agriculture that was stronger than its Ifriqiya allies who were often short-sighted, relying on importing supplies from their northern neighbours. Ifriqiya and Sicily have both experienced political crises many times but rich and diverse economies with high levels of agriculture and sustainable production at least ensure that serious food shortages are rare. history records the eleventh and twelfth-century Ifriqiya farming is punctuated by a series of devastating crop failures. A particularly severe famine was recorded in 1004-5 and led to extensive migration of both rural and urban populations to Sicily.

Thus the mass famine and depopulation of the countryside marked this critical point in the wealth of the Zirid dynasty. In the eleventh century, serious seasonal famines were recorded in Ifriqiya in 1018-19, 1022-3, 1033-4, 1040-2, 1055-6, and 1076-7.7. After that, the gradual economic downturn began to undermine the region's political integrity as it entered failure. The harvest, famine, and gradual depletion of the Zirids' gold reserves were caused by importing grain from Sicily that they would otherwise be able to produce on their own. The political and economic dynamics of the powerful landowning states and their large estates that emerged after the Arab conquests have long been undermined during the Aghlabid period in favor of lower profits, small yields, and less viable agricultural land. The emergence of nomadic pastoralism, which exacerbated economic crises and fueled political instability throughout the region continued into the twelfth century (Metcalf, 2022).

During the Kalbit dynasty, the development of civilization was at its peak. Many magnificent buildings were built, in Palermo there are 300 magnificent mosques (Hitti, 2005: p. 773). The existing teachers also perform their duties well, so there are many intelligent people in Palermo.

In addition, the support of the authorities is increasingly visible with the establishment of various libraries, so that people can easily learn various sciences. Almost all disciplines are in the library. Not only the Muslim community of Sicily who came to read but also non-Muslims were free to read in the library. The intelligence and intelligence of a person at that time was a special prestige because almost all intelligent people in Sicily had a high degree of honor.

The glory of Islam in Sicily began: Firstly, the Bani Aghlab dynasty (827-909 AD). When ruled by this Muslim dynasty, Sicily's population grew as Muslim immigrants came from Africa, Asia, Spain, and Barbary. Every town in Sicily was equipped with a town council. During this period, agrarian reform was introduced. This was done so that land was not only controlled by the rich. Irrigation was also introduced so that the agricultural sector developed rapidly. In the 10th century AD, Sicily became the most populous province in Italy with a population of 300,000; Second, the Fatimid Dynasty (909-965 AD), when the governors of the Fatimid dynasty in Sicily, such as Ziyadatullah bin Qurthub, Abu Musa al-Dayf, Salim Rashid and Khalil bin Ishaq. They built Islamic civilization with many advancements. The strongest governor of the Fatimid dynasty was Hasan bin Ali al-Kalby of Kalb Arab descent later founded the Kalbid dynasty in Sicily, but he remained loyal to the Fatimids; Third, the Dynasty of Kalbiyah ruled for 80 years. In 948 AD, the Fatimid Caliph Ismail al-Mansur appointed Hassan al-Kalbi as emir of Sicily. De facto, the Emirate of Sicily was separated from Fatimid rule in Egypt. Then it was replaced by a new emir named Abu Al-Qasim (969 AD-982 AD). During the time the two emirs were in power, Sicilian Muslims fought with the Byzantines. After that, Islamic power waned as the Muslims themselves struggled for power. In 1061 AD, Sicily fell out of Muslim hands (Sunanto, 2007: p. 162-170).

Sicily became the center of Islamic science and culture. The Islamisation of science and Islamic culture colored Sicily and its surroundings (Gruneboun, 1969: p. 234). Mosques and colleges were established, such as in Paleno which was packed with worshippers at all times, and universities were established whose greatness was able to match the Universities of Cordova and Baghdad (Bosworth, 1993: p. 329). The prosperity experienced by Sicily has earned it the nickname great land alongside Spain. There were many famous names in various fields of scientific disciplines, such as the conqueror of Sicily, Asad ibn al-Furat who was an expert in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), language, and war; Jauhar al-Siqli who was an expert in war; Muhammad ibn Khurasan who was a linguist and Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Ali who was an expert in *fiqh*. This shows that Islamic culture is very prominent and colors the lives of Sicilian people who are Maliki (Amin, 1996: p. 121). On the other hand, tolerance and religious life in Sicily were very strong. This situation lasted until the fall of Islam to Christian rule. Islamic culture still exerts a strong influence on the subsequent life of Sicily. In the economic field, Sicily was classified as an advanced producer region. Sicily established trade contacts with neighboring countries by exporting corn and camel meat to North Africa and importing fuel from Egypt (Amin, 1996: pp. 164-165).

If you look at the statistical data of the Sicilian economy at the beginning of Islam in the country, there is no data found, because historical researchers only provide explanations related to the process of emergence, glory, decline, and destruction of a dynasty. Asriyah (2016: pp. 169-181)

explains that the existence of the Aglabiyah dynasty that controlled Sicily had an impact on the progress of the European world because the island of Sicily was the most important means of transferring the treasures of science and the spiritual life of Muslims. In addition, the fields of science, agriculture, and mining also experienced progress under Islamic rule. Munawir (2009: 231) explains that history has recorded that Islam has ruled the European and Italian hemispheres including Sicily. It has come to color the Sicilian world; forming an important center for the spread of Islamic civilization to Europe. This means that the Renaissance in Italy occurred because of the transmission of knowledge through this island. Based on the literature, the author concludes that Sicily was a center of civilization and economy in the early Islamic period.

4. Conclusion

Sicily as one of the regions in Europe that was successfully conquered by Muslims contributed significantly to the progress of European civilization, the progress of growth in various sectors during the Islamic civilization in Sicily was very visible, one of them in the economic sector. The trade carried out by the Sicilian people also experienced a rapid increase. Like Industry, the economy built through mining and agriculture, the Sicilian population makes good use of existing natural resources. They grow a lot of secondary crops, olives, grapes, bananas, oranges, lemons, peaches, almonds, pomegranates, and grapes. The existence of a money exchange market serves a complex set of needs, providing a mechanism and medium of exchange. Sicily has a bimetallic economy: that is, which is based on the circulation of silver and gold. The personal wealth of the urban elite of Sicily is also limited by tithe taxes, customs duties, *zakat*, and *sadaqah*. The evidence obtained during the Islamic era in Sicily contained a fifth tax (*khums*), a tax on agricultural produce, a tax on wine, a voting tax (*al-jawal*), a sea tax, payment of tribute and fishing obligations while in the countryside, what is called 'Green Revolution', i.e., the process by which the rural economy uses new technologies such as hydraulic irrigation systems, i.e. Water from rivers, springs, and wells are directed through ditches and canals that traverse the countryside, supplying fields, waterwheels, and markets. Arab rule in Sicily was tolerant, as long as Christians and Jews paid their taxes.

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