



## Madīna مدينة

Madīna means ‘town’, ‘city’ or ‘state’, and the adjective ‘madanī’ means ‘urban’ or pertaining to civilization. As a proper name, madīna (Medina, followed by the epithet ‘al-munawwara’, ‘the illuminated one’) is the city where the first Islamic community was established after the migration (‘hijra’) from Mecca by Prophet Muhammad and his followers. The pre-Islamic name of the city was Yathrib. The Islamic constitution of Medina, drawn up after the arrival of Prophet Muhammad and his Meccan allies, established a single Islamic community composed of Meccan and Medinan groups. It included references to God and the Islamic believers, although it accepted the presence of the Jewish and even pagan groups in the city. Medina came to represent the first Islamic community and the model for future Islamic communities. It had a thriving intellectual life and in it a strong tradition of Islamic law developed.

In medieval Islamic philosophy, the term ‘madīna’ and the adjective ‘madanī’ came to apply to political theory or political science which drew heavily on ancient Greek philosophy, with strong Islamic elements. Naturally, the term served to establish a connection between ancient Greek city states and the ideal Islamic political state.

Alfarabi (d. 950) developed a complete political theory, which he laid out in several works. The main inspiration for this was Plato’s political philosophy, since Alfarabi did not appear to have had access to Aristotle’s *Politics*. His writings indicate that he was familiar with Plato’s *Republic*. He wrote a commentary on Plato’s *Laws*.

In the *Aphorisms of the Statesman* (Al-fuṣūl al-madanī), he explains his views on the ideal city or political state. Alfarabi likens the city to the human body, as being constituted by different parts that work together, and whose members have specific functions. He makes a distinction between an ideal or virtuous city, in which the most excellent things are attained, and whose inhabitants are virtuous, and the indispensable city, which simply aims at the preservation of life. The ideal city leads to the attainment of happiness in this life and in the afterlife.

Justice consists in the division of good things shared by people of the city. The different classes within the city are established according to the crafts they practise. There is a distinction between the rulers or guardians and the majority of people. Those in charge apprehend reality by studying philosophy while the majority of people know reality through religion, which is a more symbolic way of thinking. Every citizen must have a correct idea of reality and also of the virtues in order to play his/her role in society. This view is also present in the *Political Regime*.

In his magnum opus, *The Principles of the Ideas of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (*Mabādī’ arā’ ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍīla*), Alfarabi states that there are different units within the city, such as the household and the street, but the political unit comprises all segments of society.

The virtuous city is one where happiness is pursued and which ensures physical survival in this life.

In opposition to the virtuous city, Alfarabi lists the types of cities which do not pursue a higher good and do not lead to happiness in the afterlife, since they are not led by a wise philosopher ruler. The ignorant city does not know true happiness. It is divided into six types: the city which seeks physical survival (city of necessity), the city which is concerned with the attainment of wealth (city of meanness), the city which seeks the pleasures of the senses (city of baseness), the city where honour is sought (city of honour), the city which relishes power (city of power), and the city where freedom is the highest good (democratic city). These cities suggest a reference to a pre-Islamic context.

The inhabitants of the wicked city know reality as it is, but they act like the inhabitants of the ignorant city. The erring city has wrong ideas about God and the other existents. This city which has deliberately changed altered its views from the ones of the virtuous city.

In his commentary on Plato's *Republic*, Averroes follows many of the themes present in Alfarabi's political writings, namely the need for virtue in the ideal city and the need to have a ruler who is a philosopher. Averroes also lists the different kinds of cities which are not virtuous.

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