A CHALLENGE TO THE CONTEMPORARY MULTI-CULTURALISM FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPEC-TIVE: THE EARLY ABBASID ERA

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Abstract

This study examines the early multiculturalism of the Abbasid Empire. The purpose is to demonstrate the significance of historical multiculturalism in building a governmental-social system. The analysis of the early Abbasid multiculturalism also integrates Persian and Greco-Roman multicultural models. The study argues that the Abbasid Dynasty, which succeeded the Umayyad Dynasty after a revolution, had introduced a unique multicultural model by establishing a tolerant and libertarian imperial structure. In effect, the Abbasid Dynasty rejected the Umayyad emphasis on the so-called Arab nationalism in its early period (750-833). This study employs a comparative analysis of the early multiculturalism of the Abbasid Empire and modern practices of multiculturalism for textual analysis and conclusions. It is significant to demonstrate how the early multiculturalism of the Abbasid Empire could be correlated to modern multicultural practices. In this regard, the policy of support and encouragement of translation activities by the early Abbasid caliphs, rulers and intellectuals had strengthened this multicultural system, which was inclusive regardless of ethnicity, religion, and race.

Keywords: multiculturalism; historical multiculturalism; early Abbasid era; scientific-translation activities

Introduction

Although multiculturalism only emerged in scholarly works in the twentieth century, multicultural structures existed in the ancient world (Foster, 2016). For instance, Schumann (2010) notes that multicultural empires existed from ancient times until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, he states that multiculturalism cannot be exclusively considered as a concept unique to the modern period. Moreover, Fay (2001) emphasizes that multiculturalism, from historical and global perspectives, was a general way in which cultures, societies, and civilizations flourished. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to examine the early Abbasid period (750-833) as a case study to show that multiculturalism is a concept known long before the modern period. Multiculturalism challenges the nation-state relationship, which adopts the principle of a nation based on a common history, ethnicity, language, and culture. Thus, multiculturalism inherently prioritizes diversity against all forms of uniformity (Kymlicka, 1998). The debate about multiculturalism has become especially intense in recent years, leading to the dominating idea that multicultural societies have only recently emerged. From a historical point of view, the possibility of accepting the nation-state as a relatively new concept also supports the belief that multiculturalism is likewise a new phenomenon (Schumann, 2010). Therefore, another goal of this study is to create a counterpoint to this perception, utilizing a specific historical period as a case study.

A thorough literature review shows the multicultural character of the ancient empires and civilizations. Pingree (1973) notes that as a result of the success of the Abbasid Revolution, a new multicultural model emerged which was based on the demographic combination of different social groups in the cities, especially in Baghdad. Similarly, Gutas (2003) states that the early caliphs of the Abbasid Empire formed a multicultural society by overthrowing the exclusionary Umayyad policies. In addition, Endress and Kruk (1997) argue that the atmosphere allowing different societies to

come together within the borders of the Islamic State was established in the early Abbasid Empire. Likewise, Vatandaş (2015) states that classical Islamic Civilization consists of a mosaic consisting of differences, beliefs, traditions, cultures and values, which coexist in a multicultural environment. One of the important examples of this multicultural unity was established in the early Abbasid period.

The above studies on multiculturalism do not specifically examine the early Abbasid period from the perspective of multiculturalism. Therefore, this study examines the multiculturalism of the early Abbasid period within the framework of the parameters of modern multiculturalism. Although the literature seems to be dominated by the idea that each system should be examined in its own social and historical reality, some studies contain conceptual transitions between periods.

Various societies and civilizations in the past assumed a multicultural role thanks to some of their features. Modood (2014) emphasizes that in the past many multicultural societies existed, especially outside the nation-states of Europe (p. 18). While there is a dominant culture in these civilizations, a tolerant environment was established by the leaders of the dominant culture so that other cultures could protect themselves and survive together with their differences (Momin, 2010). In this way, the Abbasid Empire, in its early period (750-833), established a multicultural and pluralistic model of society, which was unprecedented in the history of Islam. Furthermore, the Abbasid multicultural model strongly rejected the tribal logic of the Umayyad Dynasty and supported translation activities that in turn aided the spreading of multiculturalism throughout the empire.

Method

This study was designed as qualitative research, which is commonly used for the understanding of social systems. Qualitative methods offer flexibility to the researchers and lead to the development of new methods and approaches at every stage of the study. They also allow for fictional changes according to the course of the study. The qualitative studies then help the researchers to discover new findings. Through this feature, qualitative methods are practical and useful in approaching rarely studied topics from different perspectives (Neuman, 2006). Strauss & Corbin (1998) define qualitative research as one of the stages of knowledge production to make sense of organizational structures and social changes. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative analysis and literature review of the early Abbasid period from the perspective of historical multiculturalism. Moreover, the parameter method was used to determine whether the relevant society retains certain qualities of multiculturalism.

From a historical research perspective, empires, uniting different communities through conquests under a single administration, possess unique multicultural elements. These multicultural elements have been studied for the Achaemenid (Persian) Empire (Daryaee, Mousavi & Deckhani, 2014), Hellenistic period (Grazulis & Mockiene, 2017), Ottoman "millet sistemi" (nations system) (Braude & Lewis, 1982), and for the Habsburg monarchy (Griesser, 2012). By considering these studies, parameters of multiculturalism were developed by combining these historical multicultural examples with modern multiculturalism theorists, such as Fleras (2009), Benet (2012), Parekh (2000), Kymlicka (2010), and Modood (2014). The early Abbasid multiculturalism was studied by matching modern parameters with the multicultural characteristics of the related period. Therefore, the opinions of the relevant theorists and the parameters related were purposefully selected and examined. The parameters listed below will be discussed within the framework of the social and political applications:

- Modood (2014) states that "the existence of multiethnic dynamics that are perceived as different in a society and remain existing without causing conflict in the society" is one important indicator of multiculturalism (p. 19). Accordingly, the first parameter is: *In multicultural societies, members of different languages, religions, and cultures should coexist without conflict*;

- According to Kymlicka (2001), states are not "neutral." States are given an identity by cultures and peoples. However, this identity should be used not as an element of uniformization, but as a means of developing positive relationships with different groups (p. 18). Accordingly, the second parameter is: *Multicultural societies should not have a superior cultural structure. Even if there is a dominant culture in these societies, the people of this culture should use their power not as an element of oppression, but as a tool to ensure the preservation of differences and make it a state policy to benefit from the accumulation of different cultures*;

- According to Fleras (2009), there should be no restrictions on people not belonging to the dominant culture in multicultural societies in terms of their political rights and their election to decision-making mechanisms (p. 25). Accordingly, the third parameter is: *In multicultural societies, it should be possible for members of different cultures outside the dominant culture to participate in the management and decision-making mechanisms*;

- According to Parekh (2002), many common requirements that people have been defined in different ways by different cultures (p. 306). Therefore, differences in a society should be approached with an egalitarian idea, taking into account their differences while taking advantage of various opportunities. Accordingly, the fourth parameter is stated as such: *In multicultural societies, members of different cultures outside the dominant culture should be able to benefit from public and private opportunities without being exposed to any discrimination*.

This study's scope and limitations are due to certain historical limitations because of the concept of the early Abbasid period. The early Abbasid period begins in 750 when the Abbasids succeeded the Umayyad Dynasty after a revolution. This period lasted until 833, when the rule of Mamun began, one of the caliphs who made the highest contribution to scientific-transla-

tion activities. The two periods in which the socio-political structures of the early Abbasid period were shaped, were named "late Antiquity" and "early Islam."

Due to the different ethnicities (Greek, Indian, and Sasanians) and different languages (Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, Pahlavi) (Clot, 2007; Lyons, 2009), early Abbasid society gave their scientific works in late antiquity. These activities also supported the flourishing of multiculturalism and translation activities. Yet, the preparatory stage of translations and the origins of cultural and multiethnic demographic diversity were laid in the early Islamic period (Cameron, 1992; Gutas, 2003). Therefore, these two historical periods are of key importance for the multiculturalism of the early Abbasid period.

Historical Background

Historical multiculturalism flourished in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean basin, and the Persian Gulf. These regions remained within the borders of the Abbasid Empire and the first multicultural contacts appeared and developed in these regions (Foster, 2016). Moreover, the communities that migrated to these regions integrated into the new cultural structures, thus creating hybrid cultures by combining multicultural values (Mieroop, 2004). Thus, the traditional way of life and cultural values of the region remained alive constantly. These migrations formed a permanent environment of cultural contact. Therefore, the common culture that shaped human relations and social structure in these regions has an ancient history (Lendering, 2009). But some administrations in these geographical areas were sceptical towards differences outside the dominant ethnic and cultural structure, believing that they could damage the dominant culture (Aktay, 2003). As a reflection of this sceptical approach, many societies and civilizations followed the policy of integrating minorities into the mainstream culture through oppression to preserve their dominant culture (Momin, 2010).

The ancient artefacts and archaeological figures depicted the perceived hostile civilization in a derogatory way, which shows that assimilation policies were applied intensively throughout history (Foster, 2016). However, numerous examples show the failure of assimilation policies (Cassin, 1966). Religious, sectarian, cultural, and racial communities that were subjected to assimilation had adhered more tightly to their differences by resisting policies of uniformization. Despite the overwhelming implementation of assimilation policies, communities within the dominant culture managed to preserve their cultural values and pass them on to future generations (Lendering, 2009).

The Achaemenid Empire, which established a new ruling style on the Iranian Plateau in the sixth century B.C.E., is considered the first multicultural empire in history (Daryaee, Mousavi & Rezakhani, 2014) because of its religious diversity and freedom of belief. Moreover, the first declaration of human rights in history was written during the rule of Achaemenid Empire. Its political system introduced a sociologically multicultural structure based on the administrative, economic, and cultural system developed as a state policy by rejecting the aforementioned assimilation policies (Waters, 2014). Thus, it can be argued that the multicultural model of governance originated in the Achaemenid Empire. However, during these periods, multiculturalism was limited and the dominant culture positioned itself over other cultures. A multicultural state mechanism adopting multiculturalism as a state policy had to cope with numerous challenges (Foster, 2016). Subsequently, the Abbasids, influenced by the Achaemenid socio-political system, restored the multicultural environment in these regions after about a thousand years (Rosenthal, 1995).

In the seventh century, when Muslims established their rule and bureaucracy, ancient scientific and cultural centers continued to flourish in the Middle East, Western Asia, and in the Fertile Crescent region (Wujastyk, 2016). In addition, the same intellectual environment was prominent in monasteries and religious centers belonging to Eastern Christianity, which were widespread in the Fertile Crescent region (Lyons, 2009). The multicultural social structure that has emerged in the early Abbasid period was established due to the unification, preservation, and continuity of these scientific and cultural centers (Pingree, 1973). A few decades after the death of Prophet Muhammad, Arab armies annexed Southwest Asia and Northeast Africa, which Alexander the Great had conquered a thousand years earlier (Cameron, 1992; Nicolle, 1994). They annihilated the Sassanid Empire (224-651), the continuation of the Persian Empire, and united the centers of ancient civilizations under their rule by capturing Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Egypt, and the Fertile Crescent region. These centers had been strongly influenced by Greek, Hellenic, Roman, and Byzantine culture and intellect (Clot, 2007; Robinson, 2005). The Muslims, with the enthusiasm brought by their newly found religion with a universal message, began to transform these centers. By gathering people of different faiths, creeds, cultures, and ethnicities they established a multicultural structure (Graham, 2006).

The unification of ancient centers under Muslim rule also effectively ended the rule of oppressive governments and established safety within their borders. Consequently, these developments contributed to scientific activities which were now carried out in a libertarian environment in which scientists now could disseminate and freely share scientific knowledge (Adamson & Taylor, 2005; Kramers, 1934). After becoming Abbasid citizens, many scientists also learned Arabic, the language of the dominant culture, and translated works into Arabic (Van Bladel, 2012).

As a result of Arab conquests, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent were politically, administratively, and economically (re)united with Iran and India for nearly a thousand years after Alexander the Great (Gutas, 2003). Moreover, two major rivers were separating the civilized world and the ancient centers of civilization before the rise of Islam. However, this boundary disap-

peared, thus allowing free movement of products and raw materials as well as of ideas and technical skills (Adamson & Taylor, 2005; Lewis, 2002). This contributed to free movement and the beginnings of challenging the dominant Umayyad rule. Subsequently, the demographic diversity in the early Abbasid society was laid during and before the Abbasid Revolution (Barthold, 1984) which took place after a long period of propaganda by the leaders of various groups that were unsatisfied with the Umayyad Dynasty. The policies and political practices of the Umayyad caliphs during their nearly century-long reign had provoked negative reactions of various groups within Islamic society, which spread across wide borders, and became a harbinger of the fall of the dynasty (Van Bladel, 2012).

The Abbasid Revolution, as mentioned above, was waged against the increasingly autocratic Umayyad Dynasty by a coalition of various groups and different ethnicities. Therefore, this revolution, which succeeded due to rejection of the Umayyad nationalistic logic, gave birth to a multicultural Abbasid model of society (Robinson, 2005). According to Kennedy (1981), after the Abbasids came to power, calls for an egalitarian society as an alternative to Umayyad nationalism grew. Thus, Islam, under the early Abbasid rule, became a universal religion, treating Arabs and non-Arabs equally. Although class differences were strongly felt within society, ethnicity was not ground for discrimination (Harman, 2008).

After the Abbasid Revolution, the *Fatah*, the elite groups which participated in the conquests and subsequently controlled the state in remote geographical areas in the Umayyad period, disappeared. Consequently, a new political structure emerged (Lewis, 2002), but ethnic, social, and cultural differences that already existed in the Middle East endured within the Muslim community. Therefore, the need arose for a new imperial structure based on different ethnicities (Robinson, 2005). Military and political elites of the Abbasids were formed by different ethnicities that were later integrated into the Abbasid Revolutionary Army (Gutas, 2003). The polit-

ical elites from different ethnicities successfully abolished the Umayyad's fixed social hierarchy and hereditary nobility. Hence, they eliminated the Umayyad system of military and political elites based on a tribality. The abolition of the tribal policies paved the way for the formation of the multicultural structure and its strengthening thereafter (Robinson, 2005).

The Muslim conquests spread to the ancient Sassanid lands where schools preserved the ancient Persian heritage. These various centers enlivened Persian-Zoroastrian culture by combining it with Indian culture and Hellenism. Moreover, besides the temples located in Urfa and Harran, which fiercely defended paganism, scientific activities were implemented on the Indian side of Central Asia within the framework of Buddhism (Nacmabadi, 2017). The presence of a similar scientific environment was noticed in other Monophysite and Nasturi centers, which were also characterized by a unique cultural mosaic (Rosenthal, 1995).

Following the decision to translate these scientific works into Arabic and to support translation activities after the Abbasid Revolution, a large number of scientists, who could carry out these translation activities, appeared overnight in Baghdad, the newly established Abbasid capital (Clot, 2007). Scientific infrastructure and economic power were combined as part of incentive policies, which encouraged unprecedented translation activities from various languages, especially Greek. Wujastyk (2016) notes that almost all scientific works, except literature and history which can be found in the Near East and Anatolia, were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid period. Compilations by Karl Gottlob Kühn, based on the Arabic translations of Galenos, are collected in twenty large volumes and Greek commentaries written on Aristotle and translated into Arabic in the Abbasid period cover fifty-four volumes. This example testifies how far-reaching the translation activities were during this period. It should be noted that these constitute only a small part of the translated works (Endress & Kruk, 1997). Scientific translation activities covered other works whose origi-

nals have not survived despite their large numbers in addition to works in Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin, which have survived until today from the ancient Greek, Hellenistic, Persian, Egyptian, Roman and Mesopotamian civilizations (Cameron, 2009).

Findings

This study suggests that the most important factor that led to the emergence and strengthening of a multicultural system in the early Abbasid period was the translation activities. The Islamic state became acquainted with translation activities (from Greek, Persian and Sanskrit to Arabic) following the conquest movements towards distant lands after it united in Arabia and the consequent various contacts with different societies. Moreover, translation activities arose for practical and utilitarian reasons, including the translation of political texts and works in the field of health. It should be noted, however, that these translation activities were not systematic nor covered scientific works (Hitti, 1980). Although the expansion of the territory of the state during the first four caliphs and contacts with different cultural communities intensified, translation activities still did not go beyond partial efforts. Yet, these translation activities were a precursor to those in the early Abbasid period. As the open-mindedness of the respective managers and overall society began to blend with this background, systematic translation activities and a multicultural environment emerged in its their meaning (Huart, 2010).

Kramers (1934) claims that during the first 150 years of Islamic history, Muslims were not scientifically superior to the Christian world. According to him, the rise of science among Muslims began with the early Abbasid period, especially with the translation of works of the Ancient Greek civilization, and these scientific developments continued to increase with the translation of works of various civilizations. Thus, the systematic transformation of translation activities was the most important factor that fed

scientific advancement and multiculturalism.

The translation activities brought scholars from different ethnicities, faiths, and cultures together in Abbasid cities, especially in Baghdad. Before the Islamic conquests, ancient Greek heritage combined with ancient Hellenistic culture was alive in scientific centers and monasteries in the Fertile Crescent, Mesopotamia, Western Iran, and the west of Central Asia. The ancient heritage of Hellenism and ancient Greek culture, despite being considered enemies by the Byzantine orthodoxy, nonetheless survived in the centers of Eastern Christianity in these regions since the Hellenistic period. Some settlements in the area also contained scientific centers with a Hellenic culture blended with the polytheistic beliefs of Mesopotamia. Scholars who possess these differences, in the early Abbasid period, found a common denominator in translation activities and formed a multicultural interaction with each other in constant communication (Adamson & Taylor, 2005).

Moreover, translation activities were responsible for the preservation of the literary culture of different civilizations before the early Abbasid period. Thus, the various ancient cultures, medieval and Islamic ones could be transferred to future generations within a multicultural environment. Arabic versions of the seven volumes of Galenos's Anatomy and almost all of Aristotle's works help us understand the role of translation activities in the early Abbasid period, which enabled the preservation of ancient cultural accumulations until today. Moreover, when considering that Galenos's Anatomy was largely based on the writings of the Ionian physician Hippocrates, it can be seen how rich the cultural mosaics were and what a great multicultural environment emerged thanks to these translation activities (Nacmabadi, 2017).

Due to its facilitating effect on the translation activities, the introduction of paper to the Islamic world provided great convenience in terms of scientific

and translation activities, making an important contribution to the establishment and strengthening of the multicultural system, albeit indirectly. No writing material had as much influence on scientific revolutions as paper and the Arabs began a new era in the history of civilization by spreading paper-making techniques around the world after learning them from the Chinese (Clot, 2007). During the early Abbasid period, paper, whose raw material was much easier and more abundant to find, quickly began to replace other writing materials. The quick spread of paper led to a rapid spread of translation activities in the early Abbasid period. For this reason, paper should be considered as one of the important factors that indirectly triggered the multiculturalism of the early Abbasid period due to its effect on popularizing translation activities (Cameron, 2009).

Another factor that allows the social system of the relevant period to be characterized as multicultural is the structure within the governance. In this social system, members of various ethnicities and beliefs took part in management and decision-making mechanisms and were able to benefit from public and private opportunities. Thus, the multicultural structure of society was grounded and strengthened. The architect of this social system was the people of the dominant Arabic-Islam culture. Therefore, it can be argued that the multicultural environment in early Abbasid society was established as a state policy (Nacmabadi, 2017).

Religious freedom was another indicator of multiculturalism in the early Abbasid period. For many years, these regions were under religious and sectarian pressure from the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires. However, the libertarian policies opened the door to a multicultural atmosphere because different religions were united under an administration that established religious freedom. Religious debate assemblies, especially held during the early Abbasid period, impressively demonstrate the high level of religious freedom and tolerance provided to members of different faiths. Thanks to these assemblies, in which the caliph participated occasionally, religious

freedom prevailed in all cities of the early Abbasid period (Graham, 2006).

Another indicator of multiculturalism is the state system that incorporated the cultural influences of different civilizations. The Abbasids' system of administration combined the Sassanid and Persian style of administration with the Byzantine system where Greek was the administrative language. Contrary to the Abbasids, the Umayyad took and applied the Byzantine system almost completely. Furthermore, the Abbasid administrative system enabled talented bureaucrats of different languages to rise through the ranks regardless of their ethnicity or beliefs. In addition to civilian managers and officers, military cadres also included people of different ethnicities, beliefs, and sectarian groups. The commanders and soldiers were ensured that the military structure of the empire took a multicultural form. In this system, where communities belonging to different sects, beliefs, and cultures were present at almost all levels, a multicultural public and social system emerged in all respects (Mesudi, 2004).

The multilingual atmosphere in the empire was another indicator of multiculturalism. Vatandaş (2015) states that Muslims, as a result of conquests, came across civilizations and cultures with histories spanning thousands of years and over ten spoken languages. Muslims found themselves in a dominant cultural position, as rulers of multilingual and multicultural lands. Merging different languages strengthened the interaction and the cosmopolitan structure of early Abbasid cities. The interaction of different languages was publicly supported and encouraged. In this way, a multilingual and multicultural society emerged with a wide variety of languages freely spoken and translated (Gutas, 2003).

Discussion

Modern age multiculturalism practices were used as parameters in this study. The traces of multicultural practices associated with the modern period can also be found in different historical periods. For instance, in the

Ottoman Empire multicultural practices were regulated through tolerance and granting autonomy to recognized Jewish and Christian communities (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 156) since the citizenship ties between people and the state were not rights-based. This represents the most important difference between the modern period and historical multiculturalism. Different congregations were not subjected to religious coercion in the Islamic administrations that ruled before the early Abbasid period (Huart, 2010).

Unlike the modern standards of multiculturalism, there were not any intermediary elements that would allow the peoples living in that period to claim rights and freedoms in the early Abbasid period. Therefore, when examining societies from the perspective of historical multiculturalism, it is necessary to determine whether they had basic characteristics of multiculturalism without looking for intermediary elements. Based on the considerations above our analysis will be conducted within the framework of the parameters of multiculturalism determined by the main theme of the study to answer whether the relevant period has the qualities of multiculturalism.

The first multiculturalism parameter states that "*the members of different languages, religions and cultures must coexist under the same roof without any conflict in multicultural societies*." First, the Abbasid Revolution was conducted against the Arab-based tribal Umayyad rule. Various groups, which had familiarized themsleves with one another during the Abbasid revolution and shared a common denominator, continued their alliances after the successful revolution, forming the founding element of the early Abbasid society. This consensus was based on convincing various people to believe that their interests and demands were in the continuity of the Abbasid state, which was another factor that complemented the demographic unification (Kennedy, 1981). No member of any culture was dominant in the early Abbasid society which was built on these dynamics. According to Pingree (1973), a new multicultural model of society emerged in the Abbasid capital Baghdad, which overthrew the exclusionary policies of Da-

mascus and ensured the demographic unification of different social groups in Iraq.

Kymlicka (2010) notes that differences in a society cannot originate from a single sending element, but from a combination of a wide range of ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural elements, in a real sense, multiculturalism. This is exactly how the social system of the early Abbasids was established by the dominant powers. Aramaic-speaking Christians and Jews, who were the majority of the resident population in Iraq (Lyons, 2009), Iranian people leading settled lives in the city centers, Zoroastrian communities from Central Asia, who resided in the area (Nacmabadi, 2017), Muslim Arabs, who partially settled and came to these geographies with conquests, non-Muslims of different ethnicities, Turks, who were among the main actors of the revolution, other Muslims of a wide variety of ethnicities, who were called Mawali, and various peoples of Eastern Christianity (Endress & Kruk, 1997) were included within this multicultural social system.

Harman (2008) describes this multicultural social atmosphere in the early Abbasid Empire as follows:

> A multicultural social order, which was based on merchants of different ethnicities, bankers and ulema consisting of religious scholars, teachers, judges and cosmopolitan ruling class, peaceful agricultural and commercial economy, emerged in the newly established Abbasid Empire, especially in Baghdad. (p. 134)

The second multiculturalism parameter states that "*multicultural societies should not have a superior (dominant) cultural structure. Although there is a dominant culture in these societies, the men of this culture should use their power not as an element of oppression, but as a tool to ensure the preservation of differences and they should make it a state policy to benefit from the accumulation of different cultures*."

There is no consensus among experts on whether there was a superior cultural structure in the early Abbasid period. However, it can be inferred

from the social conditions of the time that the Caliph, his family, and the administrative staff were in a superior position. However, since this dominant position did not develop within the framework of any racial, ethnic, religious, or sectarian superiority, it did not result in damaging the multicultural system because many early Abbasid caliphs did not even belong to the pure Arab lineage (Huart, 2010) and the foundations the early Abbasid society was formed on were at a level that was not able to handle a social stratification based on nationalism. In the early Abbasid period, it was not necessary to adhere to Arab ethnicity, as during the Umayyad, or to possess Orthodox Christian faith, as in Byzantium, in order to achieve a high-level administrative position. Moreover, there was no social stratification, as during the Sassanids, where the transition between classes was almost impossible (Christensen, 1939).

The third multiculturalism parameter states that "*it should be possible for members of different cultures outside the dominant culture to participate in the management and decision-making mechanisms in multicultural societies.*" The Umayyad administration and decision-making mechanisms were dominated by a system based on nobility and centered around ethnicity. Within this system, Arabs were in a dominant position and used bureaucrats and civil servants trained under the influence of Byzantine Orthodoxy to carry out their public affairs (Kennedy, 1981). These bureaucrats and officers were brought up under the influence of Byzantine Orthodoxy, known for its uniformization policies on people belonging to Eastern Christianity (Cameron, 1992). In other words, by bringing these bureaucrats and civil servants into the Umayyad cadres another elitist group was brought into an elitist system (Kennedy, 1981).

The public system of the new caliphate was completely overhauled, and the mechanisms of governance and with the Abbasid Revolution and the subsequent relocation of the capital to Baghdad, decision-making in the new social system were opened to various peoples belonging to different ethnic-

ities (Huart, 2010). The names of these bureaucrats and officers of different ethnicities who served in the Abbasid bureaucracy and decision-making mechanisms are still present in primary sources. Numerous studies on this issue prove this situation (Mesudi, 2005). Therefore, in the early Abbasid period, people outside the dominant culture could participate in management and decision-making mechanisms.

The fourth multiculturalism parameter states that "*in multicultural societies, members of different cultures outside the dominant culture should be able to benefit from public and private opportunities without any discrimination. However, this opportunity should be provided by the men of the dominant culture.*" Cameron (1992) states that during the early Abbasid period, experts in translation activities were supported by large public and private funds. Most primary protectors who provided these funds were the caliphs and senior bureaucrats. Moreover, patronage of translation activities by the protectors and their large financial investment to fund these translators indicates respect for these activities. Caliphs and senior bureaucrats, who were the representatives of the dominant culture, supported these translators, most of whom belonged to ethnicities outside the dominant culture, which qualifies the early Abbasid society as multicultural. Given these parameters, the early Abbasid society fulfils the conditions necessary to consider a society multicultural; a multicultural way of life that marked history emerged during this period. Supporting, encouraging and funding these translation activities played a key role in the emergence of such an environment.

Conclusion

This study examined whether social groups with racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious differences could coexist in certain historical periods just as in today's world based on the example of the early Abbasid period. Although the social system of the early Abbasid period was based on a multicultural

character, it did not possess the modern intermediary elements of universal human rights and democratic practices. However, this past society had advanced libertarian practices. In this structure, communities from various ethnicities, beliefs, and cultures lived together with their differences; an environment that was established by the people of the dominant culture.

Besides the people of the dominant culture, the tradition of tolerance and acceptance of each other along with their differences was also formed in other groups in society. Tolerance for differences entrenched in this way in society is an important social orientation. For this reason, the early Abbasid society, which was formed as a result of merging various peoples who were subjected to sectarian oppression and assimilation policies for many years before with the Arabs as members of the dominant culture, is a crucial example of historical multiculturalism and provides an important model that can be presented to today's societies as it involves a culture of coexistence without any control or assurance mechanisms.

In this sense, historical multiculturalism research examining the multicultural aspects of other civilizations that have reigned in history can and should be done thereafter. Understanding the multiculturalism of Islamic cultures that developed as a mosaic of Greco-Roman and Persian-Sassanid cultures has implications not only for history but also the presence, as these are the two ancient civilizational traditions that have influenced a large part of historical and today's social and political systems. Thus, this study, which examined historical multiculturalism, showed that the early Abbasid period is one of the most important examples of multiculturalism in history. Although it is not based on the intermediary elements that existed in the modern era, the multicultural social system of the early Abbasid period is notable in many respects and can provide important lessons for today's pluralistic and multicultural societies.

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