

UNIVERSITATEA „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” IAȘI



# The Forgotten Origins of Universities in Europe

*“Birthday Seminar”  
on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary  
of the Coimbra Group*

EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” IAȘI

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**The forgotten origins of universities in Europe : "birthday seminar" on  
the 25th anniversary of the Coimbra Group /**

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## University and *Madrasah*: Knowledge as Identity and Legitimacy

The research on the history of universities has grown significantly in recent times<sup>1</sup>. And similarly, the literature on Islamic *madrasahs* has increased by contributions that have addressed the study from different points of view<sup>2</sup>. In this regard, for the Seminar Birthday on

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<sup>1</sup> See the four-volume series *A History of the University in Europe*: H. DE RIDDER-SYMOENS (ed.), vol. 1, *Universities in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003<sup>2</sup>) and vol. 2, *Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003<sup>2</sup>), W.A. RÜEGG (ed.), vol. 3, *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800–1945)* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and vol. 4, *Universities since 1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also some other noteworthy titles: Feingold, M., *History of Universities*, Vol. XXII/2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); A. C. MACINTYRE, *God, Philosophy, Universities: a selective history of the Catholic philosophical tradition* (Lanham: Sheed and Ward Book / Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); W. RUDY, *The Universities of Europe, 1100–1914: a history* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984); R.C. SCHWINGES, *Studenten und Gelehrte: Studien zur Sozial – und Kulturgeschichte deutscher Universitäten im Mittelalter = Students and scholars: a social and cultural history of German medieval universities* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> About the *madrasahs*, see for example: G. LEISER, “Notes on the Madrasa in Medieval Islamic Society”, *The Muslim World*, 71 (1986), pp. 16–23; R. LÓPEZ GUZMÁN & M.E. DÍEZ JORGE (eds.), *La Madraza: pasado, presente y futuro* (Granada: Universidad, 2007); N. GRANDIN & M. GABORIEAU (dirs.), *Madrasa. La transmission du savoir dans le Monde Musulman* (Paris: Arguments, 1997); L. POUZET, *Le madrasa-s de Damas et leurs professeurs au VII/XIIIème siècle* (Dar El-Machreq: Beyrut, 1995); W. QĀDĪ & V. BILLEH, V., *Islam and education: myths and truths* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 2007); D. REETZ, “From Madrasa to University – the Challenges and Formats of Islamic Education”, in A. AHMED and T. SONN (eds.), *The*

*The Forgotten Origins of Universities in Europe*<sup>3</sup>, it seemed appropriate to deal with both educational institutions and the ideological background of their own cultural traditions. Experts have focused both on universities and *madrassahs*. They have studied their differences and similarities and have noticed that they could have much more in common than their mere chronological coincidence in the Middle Ages<sup>4</sup>. In the next pages, I will summarize some of the main ideas published on these topics and, at the same time, I will focus on the value given to knowledge by Islam and Christianity. It was turned into one of the most important signs of identity by both religions.

Nowadays, when speaking about the origin of Universities, none of us can avoid thinking about the guilds. The medieval Latin term *universitas* originally had the most general meaning of a guild, in that it referred to any association of people. In the course of time, however, the term began to be used by itself, with the exclusive meaning of a self-regulating community of teachers and scholars. These corporations used to evolve from the old Cathedral schools, where pupils were taught the Seven Liberal Arts. These Seven

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*Concise SAGE Handbook of Islamic Studies* (London: SAGE, 2010), pp. 106-139. See also note 4.

<sup>3</sup> I want to express my most sincere thanks to the Coimbra Group, and especially Professors Inge Knudsen and Juan Luis Garcia Alonso, for giving me the opportunity to take part in this scientific meeting. It was an honour to be there and to deliver this paper.

<sup>4</sup> See the main works by G. MAKDISI on this field: "Eleventh-Century Muslim Institutions in Baghdad", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 24 (1961), pp. 1-56; "Madrassah as a Charitable Trust and the University as a Corporation in the Middle Ages", *Correspondance d'Orient 17. Actes du Ve congrès International d'Arabisants et d'Islamisants* (Bruselas, 1970), pp. 329-337; "Madrassah and University in the Middle Ages", *Studia Islamica*, 32 (1970), pp. 255-264; "The Madrasah in Spain: some remarks", *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 15-16 (1973), pp. 153-158; "On the Origin and Development of the College in Islam and the West", in K.I. Semaan (ed.) *Islam and the Medieval West. Aspects of Intercultural Relations* (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1980), pp. 26-49; *The Rise of Colleges. Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1981); "Scholasticism and Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109/2 (1989), pp. 175-182.

Liberal Arts comprised a curriculum that consisted of two clearly different parts: the *Trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the *Quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music). Furthermore, they let students pursue further and more ecclesiastical studies: theology, apologetics, Holy Scriptures and law.

As I have already said, the term *universitas* was directly associated with the community of teachers and scholars who were related to the Church and the Providential Wisdom. The process of defining the text was irreversible and took place in parallel with the development of the medieval towns. It was not necessary to say *universitas scholarium* or *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* – university of scholars and university of teachers and scholars. *Universitas* was just enough. Thus, we could say it was in the Renaissance that the word changed to its current meaning even though it coexisted with the name *Studium* or *Studium Generale* for a long time. These are matters we know a lot about, and it is not necessary, therefore, to dwell upon them. I will just jog your memory by bringing back the original location of these institutions. The *universitates* were established in places upon which Kings and Popes conferred some privileges: they were granted special protection as well as self-governing rights. It was already official. In these municipalities the knowledge was in institutions which were divided into different colleges. And they were aimed at harmonizing the knowledge which was a legacy of the classical tradition, particularly the one related to experience and reason, with the Wisdom the Christians supernaturally inherited, that is, that acquired through divine revelation and faith.

Perhaps it was really the only way in view of the nature of the institution and the medieval theocentrism. If the Law of God was unique and the Christianity was considered the one true religion, the knowledge leading to the better understanding of God's Revealed Truth and Law were of supreme importance. In fact there was nothing beyond this belief. God had full authority on earth: he had control over all States, subjects and rulers. The History was nothing



but “*the working out of God’s plan for humanity. The subsequent history of humanity is a drama of the tumultuous relations between God and his people*”<sup>5</sup>. Whether it, directly or indirectly, brought people closer to God, the Revealed Truth and the Christian doctrine, it was considered a matter of cardinal importance. It was so with the above mentioned liberal arts that shaped the mind and led students to further education. They fulfilled the idea of wisdom that cultured people should long for. Why? There were many different reasons but let me highlight just one: they provided people with a coherent system of rational laws that helped them understand the role they played in the History, in terms of God’s project, and to organize their world and existence. Therefore, it was obvious that universities had to continue and develop. They were the *almae matres*, they nourished people with necessary knowledge and were able to change people by means of science. There was no better guarantee.

Moreover, we should and shall raise another point which was also of great significance in the late medieval context in which universities emerged: knowledge and wisdom were the key dialectical weapons to defend their religion. During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Latin Europe decided to confront Islam not only with the military power – the Crusade and the Reconquest in Spain – but also with the power of reason<sup>6</sup>. Thinkers, sages and theologians had to argue rationally the Christian truth and achieve the intellectual defeat of Islam (and Judaism, despite the fact that the Jews lacked an army that conquered countries). They had to keep on answering the question that tormented the conscience of Christians at that time: if Christianity was the true religion, how was it possible that God had let such a brilliant spread of Islam? How could it be that, frequently, this creed managed to attract the attention of those Christians who lived in the conquered lands? They were converted

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<sup>5</sup> J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens. Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens*, p. XVIII.



without offering any resistance. Though it has been a long time since the Mozarabic scholar Paul Alvarus of Cordoba (9<sup>th</sup> century) pronounced his bitter words, they may have still resounded in many Christians' heads:

*"The Christian love to read the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologian and philosophers, not to refute them but to form a correct and elegant Arabic. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or Apostles? Alas! All talented young Christians read and study with enthusiasm the Arab books; they gather immense libraries at great expense; they despise the Christian literature as unworthy of attention. They have forgotten their language. For every one who can write a letter in Latin to a friend, there are a thousand who can express themselves in Arabic with elegance, and write better poems in this language than the Arabs themselves"*<sup>7</sup>.

As a result, scholars had to study the philosophy and science of the Arabic treatises, they had to translate them and understand the concepts. It was only then when they could refute the theories. This was the reason why the Franciscans and Dominicans who had been solidly educated in the first universities started their missions going into the Islamic world. Let me bring up just few names. Roger Bacon (1294), a theologian who decided to create a religious science basing his ideas on what he had learnt from the scientific and philosophical knowledge of the Greek-Arabic works; apologists such as Ramón de Penyafort (1275) and Ramón Martí (ca. 1286), who went to Tunisia to preach, where the former founded a language school in 1245 (he founded another one in Murcia after the conquest by Jaume I)<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, we shall think of Ramón Llul (1315), a thinker who, in addition to going to several countries like

<sup>7</sup> Apud J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens*, p 86.

<sup>8</sup> A. GIMÉNEZ REÍLLO, "El árabe como lengua extranjera en el siglo XIII: medicina para convertir", in A. Giménez Reillo y C.M. Thomas (ed.), *El Saber en Al-Ándalus. Textos y Estudios, IV* (Sevilla: Universidad, 2006), pp.147-187.

Tunisia, Cyprus and Asia Minor, wrote many works in Catalan, Latin and Arabic, and proved his great education in literature, sciences and philosophy. They all were exponents of the speculative and dialectical thinking turned into the sign of identity of European Christianity in the late Middle Ages. They themselves had learned and taught speculative and dialectical thinking in the university. Along with them, St. Thomas Aquinas (1274) had the same point of view. He lectured on the Bible in Paris, Rome and Bologna and thought that the direct reason was not enough to prove the Christian Truth, though it did make obvious the irrationality of the other rival religions<sup>9</sup>. The wisdom (or ignorance) of those who professed a creed was one of the arguments he supported against Islam in his *Summa contra gentiles*:

*"[...] the lessons of truth which he – the prophet MuḤammad – inculcated were only such as can easily known to any man of average wisdom by his natural powers [...] those who believed in him from the outset were not wise men practiced in things divine and human, but beastlike men who dwelt into the wilds, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching [...] Hence by a cunning device, he did not commit the reading of the Old and New Testament Books to his followers [...] Thus it is evident that those who believe his words believe lightly"*<sup>10</sup>.

Universities were synonymous with knowledge and wisdom and, as I have already pointed out, both the Church and the political rulers were well aware of it. It explains why they, both the Church and the political rulers, too granted universities its institutionalization and protection. Although at the beginning both powers seemed to share similar approaches, their results were not always identical. On the one hand, the education students received consolidated the Christian view of world and ensured the propagation of the faith, what was totally to the Church's liking. Nevertheless, the reasoning

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<sup>9</sup> J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens*, p. 242.

<sup>10</sup> *Apud* J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens*, p. 243

and discussion procedures typical of the scholasticism would become scientific methods of universal validity which could not only compromise some of the Church's theories, but even reduce the importance of the role it played in teaching.

To illustrate the way some Christian theories were questioned, let me bring back the words said by the Parisian theologian Godefroid de Fontaines, who even stated that "*ea quae condita sunt a papa possunt esse dubia*" ("those matters that are established by the pope can be uncertain"<sup>11</sup>). Moreover, in order to understand the loss of ecclesiastical supremacy in universities, we should bear in mind that by that time monarchies also claimed their prominence in the protection and diffusion of wisdom. Therefore, it should not be surprising that they got increased in importance.

For instance, we can remember William of Nangis, a chronicler who wrote the biographies of King Louis IX of France (1214-1270). In the wake of the disturbances that took place in the University of Paris in 1229 and gave rise to its division in several provinces, he reflected in a text the King's immense concern for intellectual issues:

*"Then, the king saw that was ceasing in Paris the study of the letters and of philosophy through which the treasures of intelligence and wisdom are acquired, which are more valuable than all the other treasures. This study, that had come through Greece and Rome to France with the title of chivalry, had left Paris, and the meek and good-natured king was very concerned. He feared greatly that such great and rich treasures would go far from his kingdom, for the riches of salvation are filled with sense and knowledge and because he did not want the Lord to rebuke him in such words: «Because you have cast and moved away science from your kingdom, know that you have moved away from me»"*<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> *Apud* G. MAKDISI, "Scholasticism and Humanism", p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> *Apud* M.A. RODRÍGUEZ DE LA PEÑA, "Rex scholaribus impendebant: The King's Image as Patron of Learning in Thirteenth Century French and Spanish Chronicles: A Comparative Approach", *The Medieval History Journal*, 5/1 (2002), p. 26.

This is not, of course, the only example. There is a clearer paradigm that comes into my mind and belongs to my own cultural tradition. I am referring to King Alfonso X of Castile, who is more than worthy of being known as “El Sabio” (“The Wise”). It was only two years since he had ascended the throne (1254), when he turned the *Studium Generale* of Salamanca into a University with its first ordinances<sup>13</sup>. During his 32 years of reign, the Castilian monarch commissioned, from his royal scriptorium, an important compilation of books about history, law, religion, science and entertainment. The idea is recurrent in all prefaces: “[...] of quest for the best and most complete knowledge to place in the services of the kingdom in order to effect the greatest good”<sup>14</sup>. From the beginning of his reign, he surrounded himself with wise men, philosopher, translators – the vast majority Jews, “and of course, churchmen, although they no longer controlled the diffusion of knowledge”<sup>15</sup>.

It might be too prolix to talk about the increasingly prominent role monarchies played in the patronage and diffusion of wisdom and knowledge. However, I would like to highlight briefly the relevance of images in the medieval context, inasmuch as they were considered *fictiones veritatis* or “recreations of truth”. In this sense, it was the *imago sapientiae*, “the sapiential image”<sup>16</sup>, believed to reside in kings and linked to the development of universities, that established through symbols, representations and formulations “a

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<sup>13</sup> L.E. Rodríguez San Pedro-Bezares *Historia de la Universidad de Salamanca: Estructuras y flujos* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad, 2004), p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> R. GONZÁLEZ-CASANOVAS, “Alfonso’s Scientific Prologues: Scholarship as Enlightenment”, in E. Whitehurst Williams (ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Conference at Meredith College, Raleigh* (Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University, 1992), p. 113, *apud* M. FIERRO, “Alfonso X “The Wise”: The Last Almohad Caliph?”, *Medieval Encounters*, 15 (2009), p. 190.

<sup>15</sup> M. FIERRO, “Alfonso X”, p. 188.

<sup>16</sup> For the ideas and quotes that follows, see the excellent work of M.A. RODRÍGUEZ DE LA PEÑA, “*Imago Sapientiae: los orígenes del ideal sapiencial medieval*”, *Medievalismo*, 7 (1997), pp. 12, 14-17 and 30-31.



*criterion for organization into political, moral and social hierarchy, and whose paradigm is the knowledge*". Along with the traditional medieval division of *divites* (the rich) and *pauperes* (the poor), we shall now emphasize another one: people could be either *litterati* (learned people) or *illitterati* (illiterate). Kings should be a long way from the horrible Latin Maxim according to which "*Rex illiteratus est quasi asinus coronatus*" ("*An illiterate king is a crowned ass*"). Of course they should also protect themselves from the idea that put illiterate on a level with the *idiotae* – a pejorative term morally speaking – and even with the heretics. Basically, knowledge became a source of power, through which sapientalism turned into a political legitimization instrument that allowed the Monarchy to compete with the Church in their struggle to achieve the *summa potestas*. Consequently, it is not strange that in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century there was a canon from Cologne, Alexander von Roes, who spoke about the three powers in Christendom: *Sacerdotium, Regnum and Studium*. He even settled such a division in Italy, Germany and France, though it is not notable here. It is outstanding, however, and I would like to underline the fact that the Studium, identified with the University of Paris, was compared both with the Holy See and the Holy Empire as one of the highest authorities in Europe<sup>17</sup>. Taking that into account, we will find it easier to understand the state institutional nature European universities had from their very beginning.

Obviously, we could keep on talking about all these matters I have just succinctly expounded. Nevertheless, I would prefer to confine the second part of my presentation to the Islamic education. First of all, we should have regard for the historical context in which the *madrasah* was founded as well as the importance that knowledge plays in the Islamic tradition. Thus, it is essential that we take into account some previous ideas.

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<sup>17</sup> See Alexander von Roes, *Memoriale de prerogativa Imperii Romani, XXV, apud RODRÍGUEZ DE LA PEÑA, "Imago Sapientiae", p. 17.*

Nowadays, due to the current ideological and cultural confrontation between the European and Arab-Islamic countries, it is not easy at all to approach the Islamic knowledge or wisdom without prejudices. The average European citizen tends to think this religion is still full of rites and rules people have always had blind faith in. They believe the Muslims have not tried to know any other thing and they have not even investigated in their own roots.

Nevertheless, this is just a flimsy idea which has nothing to do with reality. The knowledge has always been one of the main causes for concern, and we are even referring to the period of the prophet Muḥammad. It is said that after the first fights in the Arabic Peninsula there were some prisoners of war who could be released as long as they taught the Muslims to read and write (after the Battle of Badr, in 624)<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, we can find several *ḥadīṡ* – sayings or stories traditionally believed to have been lived by Muḥammad – which expressed the importance of science and knowledge<sup>19</sup>. Just some examples:

*Man ḥaraġa fī ṭalab al-‘ilm fa-huwa fī sabīl Allāh ḥattā yarġi ‘a*

*“He who goes forth in search of knowledge is in the way of Allāh till he returns*

*Ṭalab al-‘ilm farīḍa ‘alā kull muslim”*

*“The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim”*

*Inna l-ulamā’ hum waraṭat al-anbiyā’*

*“The wise men are the heirs of the prophets”*

I would like to qualify, however, the relevant meaning of the Arabic word *‘ilm*. When talking about *al-‘ilm* / science, the Muslims refer to the science and knowledge par excellence, that is, the religious science, the scientific knowledge related to the religion. The other knowledge, in spite of being important – and one should

<sup>18</sup> See J. PEDERSEN [G. MAKDISI], “MADRASAH”, *EI*<sup>2</sup> [*The Encycopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, since 1960)], V, 1123a.

<sup>19</sup> Even now the most radical and fanatical Muslims, better known as “Taliban” share this same idea: “Taliban” is the plural form in the Pashto language from the original Arabic word “ṭalīb”, which means “students”.



not forget the great cultural influence of the Arab-Islamic civilization in the history of mankind – is always pushed into the background. The religious knowledge is of the utmost importance. It is the only one that brings people closer to the divine revelation, and it is only there where they can find the supreme law or *aš-šarī'a* that the Muslims must observe. In the classical Islamic tradition, the legislature belongs to God. As a result, there was no difference between law and religion. God prescribes what people must do, and good believers submit and obey. Therefore, in their everyday life they must behave in accordance with the *šarī'a*.

The problem is, however, that such a supreme law is not always evident for humans. This is the reason why it was studied in great depth and analysed by wise men – *al-'ulamā'* in Arabic – , who not only ensured the prophetic legacy, but also gave and transmitted one interpretation of the law that became orthodox and would be later reflected in the *fiqh* or Islamic law. That being said, we must be even more precise. Despite their apparent reputation and great influence, the *'ulamā'* were never compared with the different European ecclesiastical status (priest or minister, bishop, cardinal and so on). Neither were they with other Muslim personalities who were not Sunni, such as the Iranian *mullās* who, according to the Shiites, are special because of their spiritual qualities. In the classical Islam there was no religious hierarchy. The religion and the state were not different either, as the caliph was both the political and spiritual authority of the Islamic community, and aspired to comply with the divine law and disseminate it around the world.

Furthermore, the religious science was not only related to law, but it comprised more principles that were developing in parallel with the consolidation of the Islamic thinking. For example, we can talk about the Koranic sciences which, in addition to studying the Sacred Text, dealt with other forms of knowledge that were related to it (readings / *al-qira'āt*; recitation / *al-tağwīd*, exegesis / *at-tafsīr*). We have already mentioned the significance of traditions,

and should not forget the science devoted to them (*al-ḥadīth*). Neither can we leave out theology (*al-kalām*) and islamic law (*al-fiqh*). And there were many other complementary sciences that were related to language too. It could be only like that: the divine revelation had been in Arabic so, in order to understand the message, it was essential to have a deep knowledge of the language. That is why they were so interested in philology (*al-‘arabiyya*), grammar (*an-naḥw*), lexicography (*al-luġa*), literature (*al-adab*), metrics (*al-‘arūḍ*) and so on.

Naturally, these sciences were progressively developing. They were taking shape in parallel with the development of the Islamic civilization, which was reaching its maturity. At the same time, the spread of Islam contributed to the arrival of new cultural traditions that did not pass unnoticed for the Muslim wise men. These people, however, did not need to have a good command of all these sciences. They had to concentrate on religion and be experts on linguistics. They used to specialize in Islamic law (*fiqh*) and, in cases like that, in addition to becoming ‘*ulamā*’ they were regarded as *fuqahā*’.

With regard to teaching, the mosque was the first place to study. Scholars worked following the Prophet Muḥammad’s example, who used to surround himself with a circle (*ḥalqa*) of believers that tended to ask him and sit down in order to pay attention to his answers<sup>20</sup>. It was, of course, a very basic way to teach, but we cannot deny it was very illustrative at the same time. As we have already stated, it was not a hierarchical system, so education and teaching were not institutionalised. Both pupils and teachers, most of them ‘*ulamā*’, devoted themselves to teach and study spontaneously in view of the importance that knowledge had for them. In spite of that, teachers were paid, thanks to the donations (*waqf / awqāf*) of the devout which also helped to cover the costs mosques and other foundations incurred. When a teacher enjoyed

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<sup>20</sup> See J. PEDERSEN [G. MAKDISI], “MADRASAḤ”, *ET*, V, 1123b; G. MAKDISI, *The Rise of Colleges*, pp. 10-19 and 21-23.

great prestige, there were sometimes rulers who, private citizens and not as rulers, gave more money to pay them.

Unlike the European corporations or *universitates*, this system seemed to be, at the beginning, far from the state control. They tended to a very marked individualism, in which the personal relationship between teachers, who belonged to the group of *'ulamā'*, and pupils was essential. But it was also a system that worked. In fact, the teaching in mosques remained and has survived in Islam for a long time (and still continues today). To a certain extent, we could not talk about primary education – this was for small children who went to Koranic elementary schools (*kuttāb*)<sup>21</sup> – , but we also cannot say it dealt with too complex concepts related to the Koran, the *ḥadīth* or the Arabic language. To sum up, it would be difficult to compare this teaching with that of Europe in the Middle Ages. However, we should not forget that they did start to lecture on Islamic law (*fiqh*). As a matter of fact, the Arabic root *\*drs*, which means “to study”, has also a reduplication, *darrasa*, which, without the direct object, means “to teach Islamic law”. We should look at the root *\*drs*, just to understand the origin of *madrasah*, a place to study, that is, a “school”. We will later go back to what we are talking about now, but I will not continue without highlighting the special education that the students in mosques had received in Islamic law. Admittedly, they developed greater dexterity and skills in this subject. Additionally, there are later texts that show the concern for philology in some mosques and that even refer to the teaching of experimental sciences such as arithmetic, astronomy and medicine<sup>22</sup>.

We can talk about a second stage in the educational system that took place in the Islamic East during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. According to Makdisi, this second stage was due to the spread of the *masʿūd-*

<sup>21</sup> G. MAKDISI, *The Rise of Colleges*, pp. 19.

<sup>22</sup> See J. PEDERSEN [G. MAKDISI], “MADRASAH”, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, V, 1124a y 1130<sup>a</sup>; A. KHANEBOUBI, *Les institutions gouvernementales sous les Mérinides (1258-1465)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), p. 246.

*ḥān*, that is, the mosque-inn complex or the mosque-college, which was the direct antecedent to the *madrāsah*<sup>23</sup>. Though it continued to be a place to pray where they also gave classes, it now started referring to a room where the students coming from other cities could stay. The relevance of these colleges would not have spread so much without Badr b. Ḥasanawayh's help. It was his doing. By means of donations, this ruler of the Buyids set up, an important network of mosque-inn complexes (about 3,000 colleges)<sup>24</sup>. Students could only stay there but they themselves had to meet their subsistence needs. It was the reason why they took part in intellectual tasks like the copy of manuscripts (and also in other activities such as guardian of silos, and the job of the night watchman in the quarters of the city<sup>25</sup>). It is obvious, however, the *'ilm* – science and knowledge – was hugely disseminated and promoted. We might explain rulers' behaviour by saying that they saw these facts as a great chance to be closer to the good influence the *'ulamā'* had. Let's consider the situation in Iraq fifty years before the founding of these mosque-inn complexes. Thanks to Makdisi, today we know the testimony of the emir Bajkam the Turk, who worked for the caliph al-Muttaqī (940-944). His words leave little room for doubt:

*“Although I am not capable of scholarship and literary excellence, yet it is my desire that there should not be on this earth a man of letters, or a man of religious learning (i.e. from al-‘ulamā’), of any field of knowledge, but that I have him under my protection, indebted to my largesse!”*<sup>26</sup>.

I have repeatedly mentioned the pious donations (*waqf / awqāf*) which helped to build new mosques and cover the costs of the mosque-colleges and the *madrāsahs*, as well as those of other charities that came up later (hospitals or *zāwiyas*, for example). It is

<sup>23</sup> G. MAKDISI, “On the Origin and Development of the College”, pp. 26-27.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 32-36.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35; G. MAKDISI, *The Rise of Colleges*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.



important to take into account that these *awqāf* were for life. Nevertheless, it could be that those that donors lost the control of the charity, or even the donation itself, because of certain legal conditions which did not ensured their authority.

It was not so in the *madrasahs*, which can be classified in the third phase of the development of the Islamic education system. In all *maḍāhib al-fiqh* (theoretical ways of interpreting the Islamic law which are frequently called schools of law; we should not confuse this idea with the *madrasah* word, also translated as “school”), except one, the people who gave the money had the privilege either to run the school or to appoint an administrator (*nāẓir*) who, for his part, could name another person to stand in for him, and so on. Thus, the *waqf* or donation was given a new significance: they protected well-off families’ interests, in other words, they were a guarantee of their possessions. In order to safeguard the patrimony, the administrator designated by these families should have been somebody related to them. We should not forget that we are in the context of the Islamic inheritance law, which is too worried about inheritance division in too many parts; and that makes impossible to take advantage of accumulated wealth. Of course, we are talking about private donations and foundations. The following administrators could be some of the ‘*ulamā*’ teachers, or belong to the family who gave the money. That is why there were teachers who were genealogically linked with one specific *madrasah* and why the fact of being an ‘*ulamā*’ was nearly hereditary, which ruined the system in the end.

In the Islamic East, the vizier Nizām al-Mulk is said to be *madrasahs*’ father. In fact, we can highlight one of them which bears his name, an-Nizāmiyya. It is in Bagdad and dates from 459 / 1067. They were similar to the mosque-college but, actually, they were much more designed to put up their students. The contents were also basically centred on the Islamic law, but they could teach any other subject. I am not at all saying that *madrasahs* were like that. In fact, we can look for some examples in which teachers only

lectured on a different science: there were *madāris al-naḥw* “*madrasahs* for philology and grammar”, *madāris al-tafsīr* “*exegesis schools*”<sup>27</sup>, and so on. However, I do underline they were much more devoted to the teaching of law and, sometimes, theology.

In the Islamic West the *madrasahs* did not appear till the arrival of the Marinid dynasty, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is since then that we can start talking about the territory of Morocco. As the māliki school was the most important law school in the north of Africa and in the Alandalús, and the only one that didn't allow the founder to name an administrator<sup>28</sup>, the devout donations changed their purpose: they couldn't protect families' wealth. It was the state that assumed responsibility for it, which was totally different to the east behaviour. As a result, sultans became the ideal of Islamic virtue, mercy and devotion. And, at the same time, they were praised for their selfless defence of the religious studies. Ibn Marzūq wrote in the 14<sup>th</sup> century:

*“It is evident the virtue of disseminating the science [...], as science and knowledge only survive thanks to the help offered to those who look for them, and can learn and teach them [...] Once one receives the financial help, there are no more excuses [for not learning]. The advantage for that who helps is the same as the advantage for that who does it, and this [spiritual] trade has the most advantageous benefits; it is not necessary to prove it”*<sup>29</sup>.

The Marinids were indeed the greatest founders of the *madrasahs* in the Maghrib<sup>30</sup>. For instance, in Fez, the capital, we

<sup>27</sup> See J. PEDERSEN [G. MAKDISI], “MADRASAH”, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, V, 1130a.

<sup>28</sup> D. BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF, “WAḲF”, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, XI, 63a; G. MAKDISI, *The Rise of Colleges*, p. 238.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Marzuq, *al-Musnad al-saḥiḥ al-ḥasan fi m'ātīr mawlānā Abī l-Ḥasan*, ed. M.J. VIGUERA (Argel: SNED, 1981), p. 405 / *El Musnad. Hechos memorables de Abū l-Ḥasan, sultán de los Benimerines*, trad. M.J. VIGUERA (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, 1977) p. 335.

<sup>30</sup> About the background of the *madrasahs* of the Marinids, see M. AL-QABLĪ, “Qaḍīyyat al-madāris al-marīniyya: mulāḥazāt wa-ta'ammulāt” in *Fī naḥḍa wa-l-*



can still find seven *madrasahs*, the majority of them near the Qarawiyyīn mosque: the *madrasat aṣ-Ṣaffārīn* (1271); the *madrasat aṣ-Ṣahrīğ* (1321); the *madrasat Dār al-maḥzan* (1321); the *madrasat Sibā'iyīn* (1321); the *madrasat al-'Aṭṭārīn* (1323); the *madrasah Miṣbahīyya* (1348); and the *madrasat Bū 'Ināniyya* (1355), which is situated further and is the biggest one: the prayer room by itself has 224 square meters. The Marinids also founded *madrasahs* in other important cities such as Taza, Meknes, Salé, Ceuta and Marrakech (it hasn't remained though). Even in the Algerian city of Tlemcen, conquered by this dynasty, we can visit the *madrasat Sīdī Bū Madyan* (1346)<sup>31</sup>.

Why were they so interested in building charities to promote education and look after the scientific knowledge of religion / *al-'ilm*? It is easy to find the reason. The state needed to surround itself with the '*ulamā*'. They were a symbol of the best and purest Islamic tradition – "*the heirs of the prophets*" –, so they always enjoyed great moral authority and an enormous capacity to influence. All rulers need their consent to ensure their own political future. In short, we could say that the '*ulamā*' were a symbol of the Islamic tradition and governs needed it, it was essential for their legitimacy. Receiving this legitimacy was synonymous with maintaining the whole Islamic tradition<sup>32</sup>. The monarchies and the Church regarded the *universitates* as a source of power, as did the sultans. They built *madrasahs* and tried to be near the '*ulamā*' because both symbolically embodied the possession of knowledge and the religious science / *al-'ilm*, in other words, the Islamic legitimacy.

In this regard, I have had the opportunity to study deeply the education received by Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī (1331-1351), who was one of the most relevant Marinid sultans. He tried hard to reunify the north of Africa and Alandalús and was about to proclaim himself

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*tarākum* (Casablanca: Dār Tūqbāl, 1986), pp. 47-63.

<sup>31</sup> A.KHANEBOUBI, *Les institutions gouvernementales sous les Mérinides*, pp. 247-248.

<sup>32</sup> F. R. MEDIANO, *Familias de Fez (ss. XV-XVII)* (Madrid: CSIC, 1995), p. 63.

caliph. I came to the conclusion that there was almost no difference between the way sultans and well-to-do Muslims were educated<sup>33</sup>, setting aside, of course, what was related to the political and administrative duties sultans had to learn about. For instance, Abū l-Ḥasan studied the Koran since he had a predilection for it and enjoyed copying it; the exegetic comments about it, the *ḥadīṭ* or prophetic tradition, and law books written by the māliki school such as *al-Muwattaʿa* along with other similar textbooks (*muḥtaṣars*). In addition to it, he read devotional books which were about the beginning of Islam (for example, the biography of the Prophet) and the Sufis. At the same time, he was also interested in philological and historical books which were about the subject that had always been attractive in the Arab-Islamic cultural tradition: books about the Arabic language, as well as poetry and genealogy books<sup>34</sup>. In short, he followed the traditional method, whose virtues and defects were meticulously described by Ibn Ḥaldūn in his *al-Muqaddima*<sup>35</sup>. Firstly, students had to learn everything by heart. Then they had to understand what they studied and finally, make time to discuss it<sup>36</sup>.

With such education, the sultan Abū l-Ḥasan – or, as we have seen, any other Muslim – was expected to become a scientific man,

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that in this system women were not totally excluded. Although there is not much information in the Arabic sources, we can find data on women who founded *madrasahs* or were buried in them; women who, at the end of his days, withdrew in *madrasahs*, leading a pious and devout life; women who were renowned for their wisdom and intelligence, able to instruct other women. See, for example, M. MARÍN, “Educar a las mujeres en el Islam clásico: saberes, espacios, normas”, in R. LÓPEZ & M.E. Díez (eds.), *La Madraza: pasado, presente y futuro*, pp. 25-41.

<sup>34</sup> M. A. MANZANO RODRÍGUEZ, “Notes on The Education, Training and Performance of a Sultan: Maghribi Values and Patterns in the Late Middle Ages”, en F. GEORGEON & K. KREISER (eds.), *Enfance et jeunesse dans le monde musulmane* (Paris: ESF-Maisonneuve & Larose, 2007), p. 78.

<sup>35</sup> *Muqaddima*, first volume of the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, translated into English by F. ROSENTHAL, *Ibn Khaldūn. The Muqaddima. An Introduction to History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), III, pp. 301-308.

<sup>36</sup> About the method followed in the Islamic West, see ; G. MAKDISI, *The Rise of Colleges*, pp. 99-105.

that is, he should become one of the *'ulamā'*. Judging by the facts depicted by some official chroniclers, the goal was perfectly met. These are the words said by Ibn al-Aḥmar (15<sup>th</sup> century) when referring to Abū 'Inān Fāris (1348-1358), who was Abū l-Ḥasan's son and successor and founder of the *madrasah* that carries his name:

*"He was a faqīh – expert in fiqh or islamic law – capable of debating with the most eminent 'ulamā' in a way that made them err, while he was always right, since his knowledge of law was perfect, and he was an expert in logic and uṣūl al-dīn – the bases of the religion –. He also had a very good knowledge of the Arabic language and arithmetic. He knew the Koran by heart [...]. He was very given to cite verses from the Koran and had a great command of the ḥadīth, distinguishing the validity of the traditionalists very well. With a fine style, he was a clear and eloquent writer. He also had splendid calligraphy and a beautiful signature"*<sup>37</sup>.

In short, this was all favourable to a controlled state education, in which the *'ulamā'* taught in *madrasahs* and mosques with the sultans' approval. Nevertheless, the *'ulamā'* themselves used to hold an important administrative or political position and they even served as judges. In this way, the scholars who studied in the *madrasahs* aspired to become teachers or civil servants, which meant both to continue the legitimate authority's strength and to reinforce the State's power to rule.

There were also *'ulamā'* who showed their opposition to such a centralized model. For instance, the famous teacher Muḥammad al-Ābilī, who taught Ibn Ḥaldūn, argued against the system basing his ideas on three forceful reasons. First, he thought that, when studying in the *madrasahs*, scholars had to read too many and repetitive textbooks, instead of reading the real sources of religion. Second, students, who were offered financial help, had become submissive

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<sup>37</sup> *Rawḍat al-nisrīn fī dawlat Banī Marīn*, ed. A.W. BENMANSOUR (Rabat: Imprimerie Royale, 1991<sup>2</sup>), p. 38 / translated into Spanish by myself (Madrid: CSIC, 1989), pp. 55-56.

and pliable. Finally, and it was the most important reason, the tradition of the *rihla* or study trip was being destroyed and, according to al-Ābilī, the knowledge acquired while on it. However modern this concept seems to be, its importance was also stressed by Ibn Ḥaldūn himself<sup>38</sup>. Nowadays, we do not find it surprising to talk about the numerous possibilities to travel that both teachers and students have. Actually, just think how many exchanges between universities and investigation centres there are. Nevertheless, we have to emphasize the fact that the Muslims recognised the importance that a study trip had in scholars' education. In the medieval Islamic civilization it was, at least, something of merit. Their own experience led them to this thinking, in other words, they were used to going on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Meanwhile, they used to stop and visit some villages because the trip could be too long sometimes. Among other things, science is a dialogue among scientists. And, in those days, the Islamic wise men were already aware of it. They appreciated the value of conversing with other teachers, visiting new cities and taking part in other customs, though it was always in the Islamic land.

But, despite being right, criticism was unsuccessful. Although there were a lot of new *madrāsahs*, the system favoured stagnation. So saying, we can imagine there were no many advances in the sciences. Undoubtedly, the strong individual nature of the Islamic education, that is, the close relationship between teacher and scholar, played a deciding role in what we have been saying. Concerning this subject, I would like to talk briefly about the European *licentiae docendi* and the *iğāzas* of the Islamic tradition. As regards semantics, these two words may be very similar – in the Arabic language *iğāza* also means “permission”. However, they really referred to different ideas. Whereas the former were granted

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<sup>38</sup> M. A. MANZANO RODRÍGUEZ, “Ibn Jaldūn, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān”, in J. LIROLA DELGADO y J.M. PUERTA VÍLCHÉZ (eds.), *Biblioteca de al-Andalus: De Ibn al-Dabbāg a Ibn Kurz [Enciclopedia de la Cultura Andalusí, I]* (Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Árabes, 2004), vol. 3, p. 584b.



by the universities and allowed one to lecture on a field of knowledge, the *iğāza* were a personal prerogative of teachers, who gave the scholar permission to teach what he himself had learnt from the teacher. Thus, in this second case neither the state nor a corporation had influence in the decision<sup>39</sup>. It was a personal matter between two people: master and disciple. No matter how strange it may sound in our modern conception of education, the master was indispensable in the Islamic cultural tradition. Even the Sufi reflected this idea in one of their proverbs: that who has no master, will have Satan as a master (*allađī laysa la-hu šayḥ fa-šayḥu-hu al-Šayṭān*).

At the beginning, this system worked well and the *iğāzas* enjoyed great prestige. Students worked hard to get as many *iğāzas* as possible and also tried to surround themselves with teachers of repute. When the scholars could travel, they never missed the opportunity of meeting teachers from other cities. It enhanced their *curriculum* and explains the reason why there were teachers who received the visits of so many scholars and whose classes were always full of students<sup>40</sup>. Unluckily, the problem arose when the *iğāzas* were distorted and lost their original sense. In Fez, for example, there were *iğāzas* that were given to a pupil and their descendants, to whole cities, and even to scholars living in a different place<sup>41</sup>. As a result, the system was discredited and its stagnation greatly increased. In addition, the teachers of the *madrasahs* were chosen by the sultan, so you can imagine the

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<sup>39</sup> G. MAKDISI, "Madrasah and University in the Middle Ages", p. 260; F.R. MEDIANO, *Familias de Fez*, pp. 52-53. On the origin and development of *iğāzas*, see G. MAKDISI, *The Rise of Colleges*, 140-146.

<sup>40</sup> A. KHANEBOUBI, *Les institutions gouvernementales*, p. 255, says, for example, that Abū l-Ḥasan al-Šuğayyir had a hundred students, and 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ġanāfi had almost four hundred.

<sup>41</sup> F. R. MEDIANO, *Familias de Fez*, p. 53. The lack of direct contact between teacher and disciple is probably the reason why women could receive *iğāzas* of male teachers, or were able to grant them to the male disciples (M. MARÍN, "Educar a las mujeres", p. 37).

decision did not depend on their merits but on their social class. No matter how much the teachers knew, but they had to belong to the well-off families. The rich succeeded each other in the most important administrative positions, groups of teachers and *'ulamā'*. They were not prepared to assume such positions but belonged to well-off families, and that was enough. Consequently, the idea of *'ilm* – science, knowledge – was completely transgressed, even forgotten, and, although it was illogical in the Islamic tradition, the knowledge became hereditary.

The results are well known. The European universities continued to advance and make progress, and nowadays they keep making an outstanding contribution to the development of sciences and knowledge. The Islamic *madrasahs*, however, did not help to the scientific progress in general. Far from it, we have had to wait till the 20<sup>th</sup> century to start talking about a new university in the Arab-Islamic world.

Even so, I prefer to remember that time that achieved its greatest splendour and in which the Islamic and European education systems had the same understanding and discussion methods. As far as I am concerned, I would dare assert that these methods were not only the exam scholars had to pass, but were also an idea on which teachers had to reflect. It is perfectly reflected in the words attributed to one of the greatest Islamic philologists, al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad (8<sup>th</sup> century), and I would like to conclude this paper by quoting his thought:

*Iğ'al ta'līma-ka dirāsatan li-'ilmi-ka, wa-ğ'al munāzārat al-muta'allim tanbīhan la-ka 'alā mā laysa 'inda-ka*

*“Make the most of your classes to study your science and, see the discussion with that who learns as a notice of what you still have to learn”.*