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## **The Islamic Origins of European Modern Education with an Introduction to Baghdad's Medieval Muslim Madrasah and Library**

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### **Abstract**

In many respects, Islamic civilization contributed to Europe, partly through original innovations made during the Islamic golden age, including various fields such as the arts, sciences, medicine, research, agriculture, craft, architecture, music, law, pottery, education, Islamic institutions, etc. Medieval Islamic institutes and their systematic and well-structured education created a background that played a significant role in developing European educational institutions. This paper studies the history of medieval Muslim madrasas and libraries to find Islamic origins in modern European education systems. Madrasahs and libraries have been the most widespread, oldest, active, and well-prepared institutions over the last thousand years. By using historical qualitative research methods, this paper aims to find the terminologies of medieval Muslim institutes still used in modern European universities. This study finds that European education's academic and administrative systems were developed in the style of the Medieval Muslim

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Madrasah and the Baghdad Library. This study finds numerous academic and administrative terminologies for modern European educational institutions developed from Islam, much of which was used in the medieval Muslim Madrasah of Baghdad. These two Muslim institutions encompassed many aspects of their education system that were not limited to the Muslim land but spread into modern Europe.

**Keywords:** Islamic origins, Madrasah, library, academic and administrative system, European Education, and medieval Baghdad.

### **Introduction**

The Madrasah was one of medieval Islamic history's most well-known and widely spread educational institutions. Over the last thousand years, from roots in Baghdad, a number of Muslim educationists and scholars, and later Muslim kings and rich men, founded madrasahs in various places and territories that finally extended from Muslim lands to the whole of Asia and Europe (Gadyis, 2013). The splendor of madrasahs first peaked during the 9th century. It reached a flawless peak around the 11th century under Nizam-ul-Mulk Tosi of Baghdad, who established Madrasah Nizamiyyah in Baghdad in 1067 AD. This was the first time a structured schooling system had been instituted (Al-Hasani, 2019). Throughout almost a thousand years, the Madrasah contributed greatly to the world's leading civilization (Makdisi, 1961). The history of the Madrasah covers more than a thousand years, and it is believed to have produced the most advanced civilization in the world. Madrasah institutions were the most excellent institutions in the classical period of Islam because they provided well-adjusted education and produced eminent scholars and researchers in various fields of knowledge (Al-Hasani, 2019).

The success of madrasah flourished because of various aspects pertaining to the reputation of beautiful architecture, standard curriculum, academic rules, and administrative exercise in its early period from 700 to 1500 AC when it was regarded as an Islamic renaissance (Zia, 2011). The development of Islamic learning institutions, particularly the Madrasah, can be traced to the history of Baghdad in the eleventh century, from where the Madrasah institutions flourished and from where its teachings and methods of learning spread all over the world, including Western Europe. Madrasah was felt to be an important institute for its orderly practice. The development of Islamic institutes, particularly Madrasahs, can be traced back to the history of the glorious Baghdad of the 9th century, which influenced European

educationists and elites to develop their higher educational institutions. The influence of Madrasah in developing modern European education refers to the influence of Madrasah's academic and administrative genre on medieval Baghdad. The institutionalized style of Madrasah was a highly imitated import to European educational institutes throughout the Middle Ages. To John (2015), the contribution of the Madrasah to the assets of Islamic knowledge and education is unbelievable. However, it is important to note that this impact did not affect all aspects of education. It was roughly estimated in education development but was very influential in installing the academic and administrative terminologies used by medieval Muslim institutions.

### **Review of Literature**

The education system of Muslim Madrasah influenced modern Europe and later the rest of the world in many ways. Madrasah is influenced by its unique administrative style, structural design of the building, and interior adornment, including academic curriculum, courses and programs of study, the universality of learning, and the methods of teaching and granting diplomas (Makdisi, 1989). Consequently, in modern universities, many academic terms and concepts have developed and have been used since the origin of the Islamic tradition of medieval Madrasah in the 9th century (Montgomery, 1972). To Makdisi (1970), the development of the early European university might be copied from the ideal of the Madrasah during those centuries. The brilliant Muslim scholars' continuous efforts influenced established learning institutions and comprehensive research. Thus, Makdisi gave an account of the First European University, "Naples Federico II," established by Roman Emperor Frederick II in 1224. It is an example of the educational influence of the madrasah.

### **The Islamic Origins of European Modern Education**

#### **Using Islamic Terminologies**

Makdisi (1989) identified many terminologies such as its university, teaching-learning methods, convocation robe, having academic fellows, giving funds and scholarships for the students, salary for the teacher, teaching license, awarding certificate, doctoral oral examination to defend a thesis, delivering inaugural lectures, open scholarly discussions, study circle, professorial chair, separate faculties for the various subjects, holding a chair of the subject, and many more, all developed from the tradition of the medieval Madrasah system of the 9th century.

The Professorial Chair was a scholarly tradition of Madrasah Nizamiyyah. To Hugh (2000), professors holding the 'chair' in the subject is the tradition of the Islamic pattern of teaching practiced in Madrasah Nizamiyyah. The professor used to sit on the chair, and all the senior students sat around him in the classroom. For example, the 'Chair of Shafi'ite Law' was first occupied by the famous professor al-Ghazali in the leading Nizamiyyah of Baghdad. Study circle (Halaqah) and holding a chair for the subject was the tradition of Islamic teaching at Madrasah Mustansiriyyah as well, where the professor sat on a chair, delivered the lecture in Halaqah and students sat around the professor (Shalaby, 1954).

Having independent faculties for various subjects was the scholarly fashion of almost every madrasah. For instance, the famous Al-Azhar in Cairo and the medieval Mustansiriyyah of Baghdad are the most appropriate examples of the dominant influence over them. Al-Azhar had individual faculties for some subjects. For instance, Professor Abd Latif Al-Baghdadi gave a lecture on Islamic medicine, while the prominent scholar Maimonides lectured on Astronomy and Medicine at Al-Azhar. The medieval Mustansiriyyah, where all four schools of Islamic thought (madhahibs) were taught in different halaqah by different prominent scholars at different times (Tritton, 1957).

Having a fellow for the internal organization of the early European college was developed from Islamic custom. The fellow is the derivative form of the Arabic term sahabat, which was used among the students of earlier madrasahs to address each other. Awarding a certificate and confirming a degree were the academic exercises in the Medieval Madrasah. For example, a law graduate student must have an ijazah (license) upon finishing his or her academic duration. These academic exercises are done throughout the student's academic career. To obtain an ijazah (license) and a certificate to teach in an institution, students had to study in a guild school of law. Usually, four years for the basic undergraduate course (which may be equivalent to the current B.Ed. or four-year honors program) and ten or more years for a post-graduate course (equivalent to the current Med or Masters/Ph.D. course with less duration) (Makdisi, 1989).

After students complete their post-graduate education, they are awarded ijazas, giving them the status of Faqih (scholar of jurisprudence), Mufti for issuing fatwas, and 'Mudarris' for teaching in the class. In the same, 'ijazat al-tadris' (permission to teach), an Islamic scholar's teaching certificate was presented to prove his teaching qualification (John, 2015). Later on, these terms, Mufty and Mudarris, were converted to professor, registerer, and

doctor, respectively, in the Latin administrative system (Merzel, 1980). In universities, for instance, the hat that the students use in the convocation ceremony is copied from the ‘Taylasan’, a type of hat used by Muslim students and scholars on the day of the graduation ceremony (Ekrem, 2016).

The term doctorate was developed from the Latin word “docere,” which stands for “to teach”. Thus, a licence to teach in Latin is called ‘licentiadocendi’, which was derived from the Arabic term *ijazat at-tadris*. Both “licentiadocendi” and “ijazattadris” stand for the same meaning as “licence to teach.” So, *licentiadocendi* ‘was given to a Latin teacher, while *ijazat at-tadris* was given to a qualified Islamic scholar or teacher, called *Mudarris* in the Arabic term (Makdisi, 1985). According to the consideration of Makdisi (1990), the European university award ‘licentiadocendi’, meaning licence to teach, may have been modified from the Arabic term ‘*Ijazat-al-tadris*’ and was the root of European doctorates. Thus, *Ijazat-al-tadris* and ‘licentiadocendi’ were the same award; the only basic difference being that ‘*Ijazat-al-tadris*’, a medieval doctorate, was presented to the student by the subject teacher, professor, or scholar, while ‘licentiadocendi’ was awarded to the students by the higher authority or combined faculty of the European university.

Defending a thesis to get a doctorate, currently called final thesis defense or *viva-voce* defense in a modern university, is the tradition of the medieval *Madrasah* of the 9th century. Students had to pass the oral examination in order to confirm their postgraduate doctorate in law. During this time, students had to defend all objections from the examination committee to prove the originality of the candidate’s thesis. This academic tradition of *Madrasah Al-Azhar*, currently known as *Al-Azhar University*, was built by *Fatimid* rule in *Cairo* in 975 (Lunde, 2003). Thus, *Jamiah* (University) *al-Qarawiyyun* in *Fez*, *Morocco*, and *Jamiah* (University) *al-Mustansiriyyah* in *Baghdad* were the oldest degree-granting universities in the world. Therefore, *al-Qarawiyyun* was recognised by the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Some of the western colleges were connected to the medieval *madrasahs*. Examples include the Latin term “*baccalaureate*”, which is derived from the Arabic word “*baccalurus*,” which means *Bachelor’s Degree*. In order to get a good European ‘*baccalaureate*’ certificate, a student had to maintain the same education standard that was enforced by the medieval *Madrasah* of *Baghdad*.

Borrowing books and manuscripts from the library was an orderly tradition of the medieval Muslim libraries. Students, teachers, and scholars could

borrow books and manuscripts from the library for a specific period of time with particular requirements (Nakosteen, 1964). For example, Al-Qawl al-Mutabar, a work by Abu Abd Allah Muhammad al-Ajmawi, and Kitab al-Ibar by Ibn Khaldun were to be lent to its students and researchers for two months. To look after this task, the authorities appointed a fellow inside the library (Heffening and Pearson, 2010). Sultan al-Mutawakkil assigned an exceptional staff to the Al-Karrawiyyin Library, whose first duty was only to record the books and manuscripts, maintain the catalog, and follow up on the borrowing and returning of the books.

Regarding library catalogs, Algeriani and Mohadi (2017) stated that each collection was housed on a separate shelf in Baital Hikmah (the house of wisdom). When there was a clear cataloging method of book titles and manuscripts, books inside the house of wisdom were indexed in the same way as in modern-day libraries. In addition, there were some rooms called Gurfah Lil Dirasah, Gurfah Lil Bahas, and Gurfah Lil Munakasha for the students, teachers, professors, and scholars in medieval Muslim libraries. In the modern library, these terms refer to the study room, research room, and discussion room, and this is the best example of the Islamic origins of modern Western education (Al-Hasani, 2019).

### **The Tradition of Financial Assistance for Students**

Universities provide a lot of financial assistance for students. Academic stipends, partial scholarships, tuition waivers, and teacher assistantships were given to diploma and bachelor students. In contrast, research funds, research assistantships, doctoral and post-doctoral research fellowships, and a number of selected post-graduate scholarships were given to higher-level students. The medieval Madrasah practiced this tradition and culture according to the demand and quality of the students. The institutes and state governments provided monthly salaries for the professors, one gold dinar for the students as a monthly stipend, and scholarships for needy students. Offering teacher assistantships (TA) and tutorial classes to senior, qualified, and underprivileged students was the tradition of the famous Madrasah Al-Mustansiriyah in Baghdad (Dodge, 1962).

Al Azhar was regarded as one of the largest and best-known institutes in the entire Muslim world. Students and scholars from outside, including India, Afghanistan, Iran, Samarqand, Bukhara, Khorasan, Turkey, and Zanzibar, used to come for the purpose of study and research. All international students are provided free education, living and study room, kitchen, housing, and clothing (Petersen, 2010; Mohammad, 2014). Free accommodation, including

a dining hall, common room, and storeroom, was provided for the students and teachers to create a thriving educational environment. Predominantly, authorities allocate bread, butter, and milk as supplementary foods for them. For example, at the Madrasah Al-Karrawiyyin, students were given full and partial scholarships to cover their food and accommodation (Dodge, 1962). Thus, Damascus city also offered free food and accommodation to attract western students to come and study there.

### **The Tradition of Academic and Scientific Research and Funding**

Islam has contributed to the importance of the institutionalization of research and scholarship. Scientific research and knowledge are institutionalized through state support and patronage of royalty and political rulers. Research culture has become more entrenched in society. No one can dispute the assertion that institutionalization constitutes a significant phase in the development and progress of science. The Madrasahs and Islamic libraries generally offer modern scientific research work besides Islamic research and education. Some reputed madrasahs and libraries in Damascus, Cordova, Turkey, and Egypt introduced scientific research in modern knowledge. At the same time, al-Azhar of Egypt got a great response in the 9th century for its good medical research work. The Medical Madrasah of Jundishapur was regarded as a scientific research institution that continued high research work up to the Umayyad period (Makdisi, 1981). To create a successful research environment, Bayt al-Hikma, a library in Baghdad, provided a laboratory, a personal reading room, private experiment cells, and copyright cells for the teachers, researchers, and scholars. Examples include a newly established laboratory for astronomical research and a translation center inside Bayt al-Hikma (Rahim et al., 2012). Ibn Khaldun, cited by Makdisi (1990), noted that in Morocco at his time, madrasahs had a requirement for students to spend sixteen years on scientific research at the diploma level, in which a researcher or a student could develop a scholarly habit of acquiring knowledge under a specific supervisor within a particular subject. Obligatory academic research for the lecturers and professors in modern universities is similar to that of a Mufty (professor of Islamic Law) of a medieval Madrasah, who needed to conduct a huge amount of research work in the field of his specialization.

In order to give Fatwa, Mufty had to study intensively and research the sacred script, prophetic hadith, deeply. Various legal studies books to find the solution and answer the audience. This academic research method was called *ijtihad*, similar to the academic intellectual research of the modern university. For advancing research in the different branches of modern

knowledge and subjects, Madrasah Al-Nizamiyyah, during that time, got recognition all over the world. Al-Ghazaly of Nizamiyyah, one of the most outstanding Islamic scholars, wrote numerous works on philosophy, logic, theology, and Sufism. His research work was so influential in Latin Europe that in the middle of the 12th century, his work began to be translated into Latin.

Khizanat al-Hikma, another famous Baghdad library, drew researchers' and scholars' attention from far and wide. From mathematics and astronomy to zoology, the academy was a major center of research in the Muslim civilization. To encourage research work, the library announced a yearly fund and a monthly allowance for the scholars of Madrasah Al-Karrawiyyin (Rena, 2014).

The practice of the Medieval Muslim research institute continues into the present. The Middle East Documentation Center and the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago are modern-day examples of Muslim research influence (Nancy, 2011). According to Mohammad (2014) Cairo's Al-Azhar, Nizamiyyah, al-Mustansiriyah, and Baghdad's Baital Hikmah Library were influenced, and similar centers were established in Europe, particularly in Cordova and Granada in Spain.

At the early stage of this particular phase of research advancement, Islam has made another lasting contribution to world civilization. The contributions of Islamic scholars, researchers, scientists, and philosophers to advancing knowledge were enormous, as summarised by Encyclopedia Britannica. Thus, Makdisi (1970) confirmed that quality education, scientific research, and producing brilliant scholars in Madrasahs might have been followed by European universities of those centuries. Further, he established from the findings that comprehensive research work in the various fields of knowledge of medieval Muslim education became the role model for the modern research system of Europe. For higher scientific research in the various areas of knowledge and producing eminent scholars, later on, Madrasah al-Mustansariyyah turned into Mustansariyyah University. Another Western scholar, Jim Fry, cited by Abdulrazaq (2013), mentioned in his research paper titled "Positive Impact of Islam on Europe" that the foundation of modern Europe has been laid down by Islam even though Europe has led the world for the past centuries through its knowledge and power. He held that unless Galileo and Newton studied original and basic instruments invented by Muslim scientists, they would never have formulated the modern theories of mathematics and physics.



### **The Tradition of Academic Freedom**

Regarding academic freedom and freedom of professors and students in institutions, Islam influenced European universities and education. Academic freedom refers to the freedom of students as well as the freedom of the academy. Madrasahs usually have better legal autonomy. The state government, founding owners, loyal donors, and endowments could not be involved in planning academic subjects and curricula of madrasahs. The Madrasah Dakhwariyya of Damascus offered religious science and modern science, including medicine and Islamic hospitals, Madrasah Kamal al-Din in Mosul, which focused on music, astronomy, and the New and Old Testaments along with religious education, and Madrasah Ulugh Beg of Samarkand, which emphasized astronomy (Santon, 1990), are the best examples of academic freedom of those centuries' madrasah.

Thus, freedom of students means full freedom for the students to choose their subject-related supervisor, concentrate on research, and spend a number of years under a prominent scholar or professor's supervision. This technique created a strong research bond between the supervisor and supervisee to finalize the intended research project with successful findings. Accordingly, the idea of this academic freedom of Islamic concepts fashioned the foundation of the academic freedom of European institutions, practiced from the Middle Ages up to now. In one more respect, the freedom of professors and students signified freedom in the doctoral thesis, its oral examination, and in the peer review process of scholarly research work according to the consensus of peers.

### **Developing the Legal System**

In the 9th century, madrasahs started systematically teaching Islamic legal education and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) when Madhahibs (schools of Islamic law) were established. The Madrasah offered different classes for four different Madhahibs. The classes of fiqh and *usul al-fiqh* (fundamentals of jurisprudence) were conducted by prominent Muslim scholars. Madrasah Nizamiyah prioritized Islamic legal studies (Gadyis, 2013). Madrasah Mustansiriyah offered different lectures for different madhabs. Scholars and researchers of Madrasah Mustansiriyah made an effort for the first time to unify the four schools of thought (madhahib): Hanafi, Shafei, Hanbali, and Maleki (Richard and Grabar, 1987).

These Madhahib (schools of jurisprudence) issued the *izajat at-tadrees wa al-iftah* (certificate to teach and license to give fatwah) to the students. But the requirement for issuing a certificate and license was that a student had to

study for four years to complete an undergraduate and ten years or above for a post-graduate program in a school of law (Makdisi, 1989). This time, it is like the rules of the Madrasah of that time. To Makdisi (1981), many madrasahs were established by Waqf in the medieval Islamic world to teach Islamic law and theology. Later, these madrasahs were followed by Europeans to build their law colleges. “The scholastic method, the licence to teach,” “law schools known as Inns of Court in England,” and “European commenda” (parallel to Islamic Qirad), and all these have been imitated from those Madrasahs where Islamic law and jurisprudence were taught. Limited partnership (commenda) used in European civil law was formulated by Qirad and Mudaraba in Islamic law (Jamila, 2001).

John (1999), in his paper ‘The Islamic Origins of the Common Law’, of the North Carolina Law Review showed a comparison between the “Royal English contract protected by the action of debt” and the “Islamic Aqd”, the “English assize of novel disseisin” and the “Islamic Istihqaq”, and the “English jury” and the “Islamic Lafif” in classical Maliki jurisprudence and claimed that these institutions were transmitted to England by the Normans. The similarities and influences of these institutions prove that Islamic law has laid the foundations for “the common law” as an integrated whole. According to legal scholars, Monica (1988) and Gamal (1978), English trust and agency institutions in common law have been developed from the Middle East’s Islamic Waqf and Hawala institutions. One of the prominent institutions, Merton College, founded by Walter de Merton, has been modified, followed by Islamic Waqf and trust. The Avallo in Italian civil law and the Aval in French civil law were developed by the influence of the Islamic Hawala institution (Monica, 1988). Thus, according to John (1999), English common law and fundamental common law institutions in Europe have been adapted from the same legal institutions in Islamic law and jurisprudence by the Normans, who took over England and inherited the Islamic legal administration of the Emirate of Sicily.

Nevertheless, the development of European international law was also influenced by Islamic international law through the Crusades of the Norman Conquest of the Emirate of Sicily and the Reconquista of Al-Andalus. The “Monument of Legal Science” in Alfonso X’s 1263 work *Siete Partidas* and *de Vitoria* by the Spanish jurist Francisco, for example, was influenced by the Islamic legal treatise written in Islamic Spain (Marcel, 1980; and Halilovic, 2017). Accordingly, some other legal issues like human and women’s rights, dignity of human and labor, charitable trust, personal freedom, social justice, equity, criticism of antisocial behavior, power

limitations, and individual privacy of medieval European legal systems were adopted from the original Islamic legal system through the Emirate of Sicily, Toledo school of translators, and Islamic Spain, Latin translations of the 12th century, and Crusades (Makdisi, 1985).

### **Reflection of Islamic Design in the European Buildings**

There is a resemblance between medieval Muslim and modern European architecture. The Muslim institutes influenced their curricula, texts, regulations, and architecture. Medieval Muslim architecture can still be experienced in the European infrastructure/construction and academic complexes. Europe imitated the educational aspect and influenced building design (Hitti, 1960). Medieval Muslim architecture had a vital influence on Europe. Portugal and Spain still have new forms of architectural design, which are mixed forms of Islamic and Christian architecture. European institutes' academic complex and administrative building designs are similar to the medieval madrasahs of Baghdad and Islamic Spain. European institutes remind us of the beautiful architecture of medieval Muslim institutes. Looking at this design, they seemed to resemble each other closely.

Makdisi (1973) acknowledges the similarities between medieval Muslim institutes and the design of modern European educational institutes. Following the European institutes, medieval Muslim architecture was regarded as unique. The method of the old madrasahs in Baghdad, Iran, Cordova, Damascus, Al-Azhar, Nishapur, Islamic Spain, Aleppo, and Turkey was of two-story stone buildings surrounding a yard and a garden with different kinds of fruit and flower trees.

The building of the Madrasah included separate rooms for administration, registration, department, faculty, library, practical lab, seminal hall, lecture hall, prayer hall, and a separate common room for students and teachers. Moreover, Ekrem (2016) stated that these architectural approaches were followed by the old European universities such as Bologna, Paris, Montpellier, and Oxford, so much so that the mosque was located in the entry or in the middle and was replaced by a chapel. OMER (2008) stated that Cordova's university design and structure were so beautiful and were imported to Western Europe throughout the Middle Ages. European elites and educationists liked Islamic architecture, and it was widely imported during the Middle Ages.

Islamic architecture posed a design of multiple dimensions from the early period of Islam to the present day. It developed unique features in the shape of the building and unique features in the decoration of the surface with Islamic calligraphy, geometric and intermixed ornament. Today, many original sites of Islamic architecture remain, not only in Europe alone but also in India and China. According to Hitti (1960), these universities served as models for Europeans who established universities such as the University of Paris, Oxford, and Naples in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For example, the architecture of Cambridge University College's building is similar to that of Al-Azhar University. Islamic architecture and the architectural heritage of the Muslim societies in the Middle East were found in the early 7th century. This architecture is most commonly found in religious worship places and Islamic learning institutes such as mosques, madrasahs, and libraries. From the 7th century onward, this Muslim architecture began to spread in Europe and the rest of the western world.

### **Conclusion**

Medieval Muslim institutions influenced modern Europe through good education and systematic practice. In particular, madrasahs and libraries developed unique academic and administrative structures and research habits that garnered huge praise from every class. The academic and administrative practice were a style within the system design that was very influential and followed by the European educational institutes. Moreover, the medieval madrasah is to be considered the first modern university for its systematic operation, even though the famous Universities of Vicenza, University of Padua, University of Naples Federico II, and University of Bologna in Italy, the University of Paris and the University of Toulouse in France, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, the University of Palencia and Salamanca in Spain, and the University of Coimbra in Portugal were not established then. Definitely, the tradition of Islamic institutions holds an outstanding historical background in Iraq, Iran, Khorasan, Damascus, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Islamic Spain of Europe. It has influenced the West in the fields of education and academic culture enormously.

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