

## **The Construction of Islamic-Educational Institutions in Mamluk Gaza.**

By Hatim Mahamid<sup>i</sup>

The development of educational institutions and main mosques (*jami*'-s) in the principal cities of Syria was compatible with the importance of the cities as centres of government. A review of the educational institutions in various cities of the region reveals two different phenomena.<sup>ii</sup> The first is the development of educational institutions during the Zangid and Ayyubid periods in the northern cities of Syria, which were not affected by the Crusader conquest, like Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, Homs, Ba'albek, Busra, Balis, Manbij, al-Ma'arra and others. During the Ayyubid period, most of these cities were governed by Ayyubid rulers, who exercised almost complete autonomy. This led to the development of Islamic education under their auspices, which reflected the positions of the Ayyubid rulers. These cities (the northern ones) were also affected by the Mongolian invasion of Syria during the Mamluk period, which directly or indirectly damaged educational and religious institutions.

The second phenomenon was the development of educational and religious institutions during the Mamluk period, in the southern and coastal cities of Syria, and particularly those cities that had previously been under Crusader rule or influence, like Jerusalem, Hebron, Gaza, Safed, Tripoli, and others. Most of the educational institutions in those cities were founded during the Mamluk period after the Crusaders were entirely expelled from the coastal areas of Syria.

Although information about educational and religious institutions in these cities is scarce, one may conduct a limited survey based on the biographies of scholars or rulers who were involved in these enterprises during the period under discussion. In this study, I'll focus dealing with this topic related the city of Gaza as a case study and model of the southern cities of Syria which were affected by similar political circumstances.

The historian Ibn Qadi Shuhba contends that Gaza developed and flourished as an urban center as a result of the initiative of the Mamluk governor 'Alam al-Din Sanjar bin 'Abdallah al-Jawuli (d. 745/1344), who sought to make it the seat of his

regime. He built various governmental and public institutions there, including a palace, a mosque, a bathhouse (*hammam*), a madrasa for adherents of the Shafi‘i school, a hospital, a commercial center and merchants’ inn (*khan*) and a military training camp (*al-midan*).<sup>iii</sup> Al-Jawuli served as governor of Jerusalem from 711/1311 to 720/1320, overlapping the reign of Sayf al-Din Tankiz, the governor of Damascus (*al-Sham*). In addition to Jerusalem, al-Jawuli’s authority extended to the cities of Gaza, Hebron, Nablus, and the areas along the coastal plain.<sup>iv</sup> As was the case with Tankiz and other Mamluk rulers, al-Jawuli endeavored to reinforce his authority by means of institutions he constructed in the region. Among these was the Jerusalem madrasa known by his name, *al-Jawuliyya*.<sup>v</sup>

As noted, Gaza developed as an urban centre during the first Mamluk period, when Sanjar al-Jawuli was governor of the southern area of Palestine. He turned Gaza into the seat of his government and administration (*niyaba*) by constructing government and educational institutions there.<sup>vi</sup> Al-Jawuli dedicated the principal mosque in the city, named *al-Jawuli* after him, a madrasa for the Shafi‘is, and a hospital (*maristan*). In his description of the city during his visit to Gaza in 726/1325-1326, Ibn Battuta refers to the construction of buildings. He also describes the beauty of the main mosque (*al-Jawuli*), in which prayers took place on Fridays.<sup>vii</sup>

The disruptions and changes that took place in the functioning of educational institutions during the last Mamluk period engendered differences of opinions among historians in determining the names and number of madrasas in Gaza during the period under discussion. Despite the fact that some of these madrasas were utilised as mosques or vice versa, the available sources make it clear that nine of the educational institutions in Gaza were utilised as madrasas (see the table down).<sup>viii</sup>

**Table:** Educational Institutions in Gaza Until the End of the Mamluk Period

| Madrasa          | Founder                                | Year Founded                                |
|------------------|--|---|
| Al-Ghusayn       | ?                                      | During the reign of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars |
| Al-Shafi‘iyya    | Governor ‘Alam al-Din Sanjar al-Jawuli | 711-720/1311-1320                           |
| Arzamak          | Emir Arzamak al-Zahiri                 | 797/1395                                    |
| Riwaq Ibn Miqbil | Ibn Miqbil                             | 807/1404                                    |
| Al-Kujuki        | Emir Shahin al-Kujuki                  | 821/1418                                    |

|                 |  |  |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Al-Basitiyya    | Judge Zayn al-Din ‘Abd al-Basit bin Khalil al-Dimashqi | Before 854/1450  |
| Al-Jarkasiyya   | ?  | 857/1453   |
| Al-Bardibekiyya | Emir Bardi-bek al-Dawadar                              | 859/1455   |
| Al-Ashrafiyya   | Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay                               | Second half of the 9 <sup>th</sup> /15 <sup>th</sup> century |

This list presents two principal facts that further reinforce what has previously been presented regarding the development of educational institutions in other Syrian cities. The first fact is that almost all of the madrasas in the coastal regions of Syria and in Palestine were founded during the Mamluk period, except for the madrasas that were established in Jerusalem during the Ayyubid period.<sup>ix</sup> The second fact is that most of the various institutions in Syria were founded by the ruling class.

What characterises the madrasas of Gaza is that most of them were founded during the second Mamluk period, except for two madrasas, *al-Ghusayn* and *al-Shafi‘iyya*, which date to the first Mamluk period. Although *al-Ghuṣayn* madrasa was known by this name during the Ottoman period, it was actually founded during the reign of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars (658-676/1260-1278) and was destroyed not too many years later by Sultan Muhammad ibn Qalawun. The madrasa was rebuilt at the end of the Mamluk period, during the reign of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay.<sup>x</sup>

Furthermore, most of these institutions were founded by the Mamluk ruling class, with the exception of *al-Basitiyya*, which was dedicated by judge Zayn al-Din ‘Abd al-Basit al-Dimashqi.<sup>xi</sup>

Apparently, Gaza's location on the route between Egypt and Syria, and the fact that the Mongolians didn't reach or damage it, gave it the status of an important way-station and refuge for travellers from Syria to Egypt. Gaza became an extraordinarily important city compared with the other cities of Syria, which had been severely damaged as a result of the war with the Mongolians and the conflicts between rival groups of Mamluks. The stability in the Gaza region was maintained because of its proximity to Egypt and the function it fulfilled as the first way-station for the Mamluk armies sent to Syria during crises. The Mamluk rulers bestowed on

Gaza a special importance due to this status; they continued to dedicate institutions there, despite the economic and political crises that erupted in the state during the last period of the Mamluk regime. This importance is reflected in the institutions that were constructed in Gaza by Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay during the second half of the fifteenth century. He founded a mosque and madrasa there, in addition to the endowments he made in Jerusalem and in other cities of the Mamluk state.<sup>xiii</sup>

## Conclusions

In the southern and coastal regions of Syria, the Mamluk period saw a boost in the development of educational institutions. Two reasons account for this; the first was the effect of the Crusader threat and conquest of these regions during the Zangid and Ayyubid periods. The second was the fact that they were not directly affected by the Mongolian invasion during the Mamluk period, as happened to the northern cities between Aleppo and Damascus.

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<sup>ii</sup> For comparison, see Chapter three in: Hatim Mahamid, "Islamic Education in Syria (Bilad al-Sham) in the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods, 569/1173 - 922/1516", Thesis Submitted for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in Tel-Aviv University, 1999.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibn Qadi Shuhba, *Tarikh ibn Qadi Shuhba*, (Damascus, 1994), 2: 426-429. See regarding al-Jawuli: Ahmad bin Ali ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Al-Durar al-Kamina fi A'yan al-Mi'ah al-Thamina*, (Beirut, 1993), 2: 170-172; Ibn Aybak al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-Durar wa-Jami' al-Ghurar*, (Cairo, 1960), 9: 390; Mahmud 'Ali 'Atallah, *Niyabat Ghazza fi al-'Asr al-Mamluki*, (Beirut, 1986), 280-283.

<sup>iv</sup> See the *sijill* of al-Jawuli's appointment: Ahmad bin 'Ali al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al-A'sha fi Sina'at al-Insha'*, (Beirut, 1987), 12: 209-212.

<sup>v</sup> See regarding the *al-Jawuliyya* madrasa in Jerusalem: Mujir al-Din 'Abd-al-Rahman Al-'Ulaymi, *Al-'Uns al-Jalil bi-Tarikh al-Quds wal-Khalil*, (Amman, 1973), 2: 38; Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, *Khitat al-Sham*, (Damascus, 1928), 6: 119; 'Arif al-'Arif, *Al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Quds*, (Al-Quds, 1986), 243; Kamil Jamil al-'Asali, *Ma'ahid al-'Ilm fi Bayt al-Maqdis*, (Amman, 1981), 116; 'Abd al-Jalil Hasan 'Abd al-Mahdi, *Al-Madaris fi Bayt al-Maqdis*, (Amman, 1981), 1: 19-21.

<sup>vi</sup> Muhammad ibn Rafi' al-Sulami, *Al-Wafayat*, (Beirut, 1982), 2: 498-499; Ibn Hajar, 2: 170-171; Ibn Qadi Shuhba, *Tarikh Ibn Qadi Shuhba*, (Damascus, 1994), 2: 428-429. On the development of Gaza as an independent center of government, see: Mahmud Ali 'Atallah, 121-159.

<sup>vii</sup> See: Muhammad bin Ibrahim ibn Battuta, *Rihlat Ibn Battuta*, (Beirut, 1985), 54.

<sup>viii</sup> The information and data on the madrasas in Gaza were mentioned in various sources. See: Muhammad Absharli and M. al-Tamimi, *Awqaf wa-Amlak al-Muslimin fi Falastin*, (Istanbul, 1982), 9, 14; Kurd 'Ali, 6: 129, 131; Mahmud 'Atallah, 221-

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247; Mohamed Moain Sadek, *Die Mamlukische Architektur der Stadt Gaza*, (Berlin, 1991), 322-331.

<sup>ix</sup> See: Hatim Mahamid, "Developments in the Establishment of Islamic Educational Institutions in Medieval Jerusalem", in: *Annales Islamologiques*, 37, (2003), 329-354.

<sup>x</sup> The madrasa of al-Ghuṣayn, known by this name during the Ottoman period was named after one of the *'ulama*, 'Abd al-Qadir bin Ahmad ibn al-Ghusayn (d. 1087/1676-1677). See: M. Sadek, 323-324.

<sup>xi</sup> The judge Zayn al-Din al-Dimashqi (d. 854/1450) served the Mamluks in the capacity of supervisor of the armies (*nazir al-juyush*). He dedicated several madrasas in Damascus, Jerusalem, Gaza and Cairo. See: M. Sadek, p. 325; 'Abd al-Jalil Hasan 'Abd al-Mahdi, 2: 112-113; Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sakhawi, *Al-Daw' al-Lami' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tasi'*, (Cairo, 1935), 4: 24-27; See also on his biography: Muhammad bin Ahmad ibn Iyās, *Bada'i' al-Zuhur fi Waqa'i' al-Duhur*, (Cairo, 1982), 2: 285-286.

<sup>xii</sup> See: Kurd 'Ali, 6: 131, Mahmud 'Atallah, 245-246. See regarding the *waqf* of the mosque in Gaza and the madrasa in Jerusalem: Absharli and al-Tamimi, 14.