

Al-Madrasa Al-Salihyya* Established in the Ayyubid Period: The First Institution in Egypt Teaching Four *Madhāhib

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Abstract

This article examines the architectural structure of *al-Salihyya Madrasa*, built during the Ayyubid period in Egypt, and its place in the history of Islamic scholarship. Constructed in Cairo between 639-641/1242-1243 by al-Malik al-Salih, the last great sultan of the Ayyubid State, the *madrasa* holds the distinction of being the first institution in Egypt where all four schools of Islamic *madhahib* were taught simultaneously. The *madrasa* represents one of the unique examples of its period with its architectural structure, four-iwan plan, and separate sections allocated for each school of law. This research analyses the establishment process, architectural features, and institutional structure of the *madrasa* in light of the works of Ayyubid and Mamluk period historians, particularly Ibn Wasil and al-Maqrizi. The most significant feature of *al-Salihyya Madrasa* is its institutional structure that enabled equal educational opportunities for all four Sunni schools of law. This structure later paved the way for the Mamluk state's practice of appointing separate chief judges (*qadi al-qudat*) from each school of law. Besides its educational function, the *madrasa* also served as a center for *mazalim* courts (courts of grievances) during the Mamluk period. *Al-Salihyya Madrasa*, where prominent scholars of the period such as Izz al-Din ibn Abd al-Salam and Afdal al-Din al-Khunaji served as professors (*mudarris*), continued its educational activities until the Ottoman period. This article takes a holistic approach in examining *al-Salihyya Madrasa's* place in Islamic educational history, its architectural features, and institutional structure, thus revealing its unique position among educational institutions in the medieval Islamic world. The multi-*madhhab* educational structure and institutional organization of *al-Salihyya Madrasa* can serve as a significant model for contemporary Islamic educational institutions. Particularly, the *madrasa's* approach of accommodating different schools of Islamic *madhahib* and providing equal opportunities for each school can be inspiring for interdisciplinary studies and pluralistic academic environments in modern educational institutions.

Keywords: Ayyubids, al-Malik al-Salih, *madrasa*, *al-Salihyya Madrasa*, *madrasa* architecture, four *madhahib*.

Introduction

The Ayyubid state, founded by Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Najm al-Din Ayyub ibn Shadi, shortly after seizing power in Egypt in 564/1169, extended its dominion over the Hijaz, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, North Africa, and significant parts of al-Jazira. Although the Ayyubids lost considerable territory due to political and military crises in the mid-13th century, they maintained their rule in Hama until 740/1341 and in Hasankeyf until 866/1462.¹

Established during a period when the Franks threatened the East, the territories under Ayyubid control became the primary targets of the Third, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Crusades. Despite the exhausting conditions of war, the Ayyubid dynasty demonstrated extraordinary resistance against the Crusaders while fostering scientific and cultural activities, establishing a powerful

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¹ R. Stephen Humphreys, "Ayyubids," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation, 1987), 3:164-167.

civilisation. Due to Sultan Salah al-Din's political stability, victories against the Crusaders, justice, generosity, and patronage of scholarship and scholars, Egypt, Bilad al-Sham, and al-Jazira became centers of attraction for scholars.² These developments, pioneered by him, continued during his successors' reigns, depending on political and economic stability. Ayyubid statesmen gained a special position among other Muslim rulers due to their emphasis on scholarship and education. During this period, distinguished scholars emerged who left significant impacts in the fields of religion, politics, and thought. The works produced were not limited to religious fields such as fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), hadith, *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), and *qira'at* (Quranic recitation); pioneering works were authored in almost every field. *Madrasas* made substantial contributions both to the writing of these works and the spread of knowledge and wisdom across vast regions.³

With the establishment of the Ayyubid state, the activity of founding madrasas accelerated and became widespread. During the Ayyubid period, Bilad al-Sham, Egypt, and al-Jazira were the regions where *madrasas* were most prevalent. Historical and biographical (*tabaqat*) books contain significant information about the *madrasas* established during the Ayyubid period, the courses taught, and their professors. Izz al-Din ibn Shaddad's *al-A'laq al-Khatira* provides detailed information about madrasas built in Damascus and al-Jazira during the Ayyubid period, while al-Maqrizi's *al-Khitat* offers comprehensive information about *madrasas* in Egypt. Later, al-Nu'aymi wrote his work *al-Daris fi Tarikh al-Madaris* about the *madrasas* in Damascus.⁴

These *madrasas*, which played a crucial role in spreading knowledge and wisdom, served important functions in strengthening Sunni Islam against Shi'i propaganda, training qualified personnel for state organisation, ensuring political unity, and gaining broad public support against the Crusaders.⁵ These *madrasas*, which provided education according to the four schools of Islamic law, were supported by strong *waqfs* (endowments) and rich libraries.

Among the significant features of these established *madrasas* were their support by powerful endowments and possession of rich libraries containing numerous books. Ayyubid sultans established endowments based on commercial and agricultural products to meet the needs of *madrasas*; these endowments provided for all the needs of professors and students. Additionally, dormitories were built to solve students' accommodation problems. These facilities attracted numerous professors and students from surrounding regions to these newly established *madrasas*.⁶

This study aims to determine the distinctive position of *al-Madrassa al-Salihyya* in the history of Islamic education by examining its establishment, architectural characteristics, and institutional structure. *Al-Madrassa al-Salihyya* holds historical significance as the first educational institution in Egypt established during the Ayyubid period that accommodated followers of all four canonical schools of Islamic law (*madhāhib al-arba'a*). The *madrasa's* architectural design, which allocated separate sections for the four *madhhabs*, is considered a reflection of the physical space conception aligned with its educational philosophy. In the

² Abdul-Latif Hamza, *Al-Harakat al-Fikriyya fi Misr fi'l-Asrayn: Al-Ayyubi wa'l-Mamluki* (Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1987), 159. See also Salem, Ahmad Magdy. "Political Conflicts and Their Impact on the Madrasa of Sultan Hasan During the Mamluk Era." *The International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Studies* 9, no. 2 (2025): 78-110.

³ Bedrettin Basuguy, *Selahaddin-i Eyyubi Devrinde İlmî Faaliyetler* (Hivda İletisim, 2009), 12-25.

⁴ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-A'laq al-Khatira fi Dhikr Umara' al-Sham wa'l-Jazira*, ed. Sami al-Dahhan (Institut Français de Damas, 1963); Maqrizi, *Al-Mawa'iz wa'l-I'tibar bi-Dhikr al-Khitat wa'l-Athar*, ed. Muhammad Zaynuhum and Medihat al-Sharqawi (Maktabat Madbuli, 1998); Nu'aymi, *Al-Daris fi Tarikh al-Madaris* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1990).

⁵ Maqrizi, *Al-Mawa'iz*, 1:363.

⁶ Abd al-Azim Ramadan, *Tarikh al-Madaris fi Misr al-Islami* (Al-Hay'at al-Misriyya al-'Amma li'l-Kitab, 1992), 166.

literature, studies comprehensively addressing the institutional structure of *al-Madrasa al-Salihyya* with a holistic approach are limited. In this context, the study aims to reinterpret the *madrasa's* position in Islamic educational history by evaluating its architectural, institutional, and functional innovations collectively.

Scientific and Construction Activities During the Reign of Al-Malik al-Salih (637-647/1240-1249)

After the death of al-Malik al-Kamil in 635/1238, the Ayyubid State began to experience internal turmoil, and competition among dynasty members intensified significantly. The power struggles between dynasty members, who sought both internal and external alliances to gain supremacy, notably weakened the state's power in the Damascus and al-Jazira regions. Al-Malik al-Adil Sayf al-Din (al-Adil II), who succeeded to the throne after al-Malik al-Kamil's death, failed to maintain political unity, alienated high-ranking emirs whom his father had valued, and neglected the people.⁷ Al-Malik al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, who was in al-Jazira at the time of his father's death, came to Cairo in 637/1240 with the help of the Khwarezmians and Mamluk emirs who were dissatisfied with al-Adil II's policies, and declared his sultanate.

Al-Malik al-Salih ascended to the throne during a period of intense struggles to establish power and prestige hierarchies among dynasty members, following the dissolution of political unity after his father al-Malik al-Kamil's death. His reign emerged as a period characterised by intense power struggles, resulting in the state's weakening and the evolution of political structure toward centralisation.⁸ The centralist policy of al-Malik al-Salih constitutes a contradiction to the political structure of the Ayyubid system, which was based on the collective exercise of power by all members of the family under the sultan's authority. The main effect of al-Malik al-Salih's centralisation policy emerged after his death. The Bahri Mamluks, established by al-Malik al-Salih, seized power in Egypt approximately eight months after his death and established a powerful centralised state governed from Cairo.

Although Al-Malik al-Salih spent a significant portion of his approximately ten-year reign on political and military activities, his construction activities began after his first year in power and continued intensively for the next three years. After suppressing opposition in Egypt during his first year of reign in 637/1240, he began construction activities. Known for his fondness for construction activities and elegant residences, he started construction work at the Rawda Castle immediately after consolidating his authority in Egypt.⁹ The effective use of the state treasury in financing construction activities and the employment of Frankish prisoners captured during the Crusades in construction work are essential in terms of demonstrating the economic resource management approach of the period. Construction activities such as marketplaces and bridges carried out during this period demonstrate a systematic effort to revitalise economic life.

Maqrizi provides the following information about his construction activities in the section describing Al-Malik al-Salih's death: "Al-Malik al-Salih loved construction and personally oversaw building projects. He undertook construction projects that no other Ayyubid ruler had accomplished. He built the castle on Rawda Island opposite the city of Fustat, spending great wealth on its construction. The Rawda Castle was the most beautiful among all structures built by sultans. He also built magnificent palaces overlooking the Nile in the Luq region. Being fond of polo (*al-kura*), he arranged the Luq field as a polo ground. He built a palace called Kabsh on the mountain near the Ibn Tulun Mosque between Cairo and Egypt. He also built

⁷ Maqrizi, *Al-Suluk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Muluk*, ed. M. Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 1:383.

⁸ Ibn Wasil, *Mufarrij al-Kurub fi Akhbar Bani Ayyub*, ed. Hasanayn Muhammad Rabi' (Dar al-Kutub wa-al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya, 1977), 5:174-175.

⁹ Ibn Wasil, *Mufarrij al-Kurub*, 5:278.

another palace near Alaqima in the Sanih lands. Around this palace, he established a garrison city known as Salihyya, which included mosques and markets."¹⁰ During Al-Malik al-Salih's reign, the prolonged process of achieving political unity and struggles among dynasty members negatively affected the development of scientific activities.

However, the existence of centers where scientific activities had long been conducted in Egypt, Bilad al-Sham, and al-Jazira had established a strong scientific tradition that managed to persist despite adversities. In this context, although Al-Malik al-Salih's relatively short reign saw less scientific development compared to previous periods, it did not significantly differ from earlier periods in terms of the number of scholars and their influence on social-political events. The historian Ibn Wasil, who lived during the time of al-Malik al-Salih, describes Al-Malik al-Salih's relationship with science and scholars as follows: "The Sultan was of sound faith and good intention. However, he had no inclination to study books and sciences. Nevertheless, he loved virtuous, pious scholars, provided them with clothing and salaries, and treated them well. However, due to his love for seclusion and solitude, he spent less time with scholars and other people."¹¹

In another section, Ibn Wasil notes that many scholars came to Egypt during Al-Malik al-Salih's reign, and while the sultan provided hospitality and gifts to scholars who came to him, he rarely met with them. He attributes this to Al-Malik al-Salih's reluctance to participate in scholarly assemblies, unlike his father, and his preference to avoid meeting people unless necessary. Thus, while the sultan patronised scholars and met their needs, he did not organize scholarly assemblies with them due to his love for seclusion and solitude.¹² His reluctance to convene scholarly assemblies (*majālis al-'ilm*), unlike his predecessors, may have negatively impacted the development of vibrant intellectual and cultural circles under royal patronage. Nevertheless, although he did not organise formal scholarly gatherings, his continued patronage (*ḥimāya*) of the '*ulamā'* and fulfillment of their material needs ensured that this negative impact remained limited in scope.

The Establishment and Architectural Features of *al-Salihyya Madrasa*

Al-Salihyya Madrasa, the first institution established in Egypt for teaching the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhahib*), is also the only partially surviving *madrasa* from the pre-Mamluk period.¹³ The *madrasa* was constructed in Cairo's Bayn al-Qasrayn district, on the site of the eastern al-Qasr al-Kabir. After deciding to build the *madrasa*, al-Malik al-Salih demolished part of al-Qasr al-Kabir on 13 Dhu al-Hijja 639/14 June 1242 to prepare a spacious area.

The foundation was laid on 14 Rabi al-Awwal 640/11 September 1242, and construction was completed in 641/1243, with sections arranged for teaching all four schools of law. The four-*iwān madrasa* designated separate *iwāns*¹⁴ for each school's adherents. Entry was through the

¹⁰ Maqrizi, *Al-Suluk*, 1:383.

¹¹ Ibn Wasil, *Mufarrij al-Kurub*, 6:84.

¹² Ibn Wasil, *Mufarrij al-Kurub*, 6:88.

¹³ Ibn Abd al-Zahir, *Al-Rawda al-Bahiyya al-Zahira fi Khitat al-Mu'izziyya al-Qahira*, ed. Ayman Fuad Sayyid (Al-Dar al-'Arabiyya li'l-Kitab, 1996), 85; Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, 3:465; Gary La Viere Leiser, "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisun (495-647/1101-1249)" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976), 409. See also Berkey, Jonathan P. "The Restoration of Sunnism: The Early History of Islamic Law Schools and the Professoriate in Egypt, 495-647/1101-1249" Gary Leiser. Resources in Arabic and Islamic Studies (Columbus, GA: Lockwood Press, 2022). Pp. 347. \$69.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781948488891." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 55, no. 3 (2023): 601-602.

¹⁴ Iwan: A vaulted hall, walled on three sides, with one end entirely open. Iwans were common in the Sassanian world before Islam and rapidly became incorporated into Islamic architecture. The greatest period of diffusion was under the Seljuks in the tenth century when iwans became established as one of the basic units of Islamic architecture. One of the most typical iwan arrangements is to have four iwans opening on to a central courtyard.

Zuhuma gate, formerly the entrance to al-Qasr al-Kabir, which Hanbali scholars later used during the Mamluk period.¹⁵ Evidence suggests that Frankish prisoners were employed in the construction of *al-Salihyya Madrasa*. Al-Maqrizi notes that in 638/1241, al-Malik al-Salih defeated the army of Imad al-Din Ismail, who had allied with the Franks, capturing many Frankish prisoners who were then used in building both the Rawda Fortress and *al-Salihyya Madrasa*.¹⁶

The inscription on the *madrasa's* facade, written in *naskh* script, identifies its founder and construction date:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم امر بانشاء هذه المدرسة المباركة مولانا السلطان الاعظم الملك الصالح نجم الدين و
الدنيا أبو الفتح ايوب خليل امير المومنون اعزه الله و نصره في سنة ١٧٤١

Translation: "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. The construction of this blessed *madrasa* was ordered by our master, the greatest sultan, al-Malik al-Salih Najm al-Din wa al-Dunya Abu al-Fath Ayyub, friend of the Commander of the Faithful (may Allah strengthen and support him) in the year 641."

Max van Berchem, a Swiss epigraphist and historian among the earliest to publish the inscription, suggests that the date 641 likely indicates the completion year, based on al-Maqrizi's chronology of site preparation (639/1242), foundation laying (640/1242), and readiness for teaching (641/1243).¹⁸

Al-Maqrizi's varying references to the institution as "*al-madrasa*" (singular), "*al-madrasatayn*" (dual), and "*al-madaris*" (plural) have led art historians to develop different theories about its physical structure. Based on these terms, various architects and art historians have proposed different interpretations of the building's layout. Berchem (1894) suggested two similar *madrasas* divided by a street;¹⁹ Ernest Richmond (1926) described it as a single *madrasa* with four iwans;²⁰ Nuwaysar proposed two separate *madrasas*, each with two iwans;²¹ while Creswell, who prepared detailed architectural drawings and photographic documentation, described it as a large *madrasa* comprising two blocks divided by a passage (*harat al-salihyya*).²²

In Islamic history, the term "*madrasa*" was not only used by historians to denote physical spaces for education but also referred to abstract institutional identities associated with the schools of law and sciences taught within. Al-Maqrizi's use of both singular and plural forms

The first occurrence of this plan is at the Assyrian site of Ashur in Iraq although this later became a typical arrangement for mosques, madrasas and palaces. See: Andrew Petersen, *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture* (Routledge, 1996), 130.

¹⁵ Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, 3:465; Ayman Shahin Salam, "Al-Madaris al-Islamiyya fi Misr fi'l-'Asr al-Ayyubi wa-Duruha fi Nashr al-Madhab al-Sunni" (PhD diss., Tanta University, 1999), 122.

¹⁶ Maqrizi, *Al-Suluk*, 1:407.

¹⁷ Max Van Berchem, "Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum," in *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique française au Caire*, ed. Ernest Leroux (Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1894), 104.; Salam, "Al-Madaris al-Islamiyya fi Misr," 122-123; Hasani Muhammad Nuwaysar, *Al-'Imara al-Islamiyya fi Misr: 'Asr al-Ayyubiyyin wa'l-Mamalik* (Maktabat Zahra' al-Sharq, 1996), 79-80.

¹⁸ Van Berchem, "Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum," 104.

¹⁹ Van Berchem, "Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum," 104.

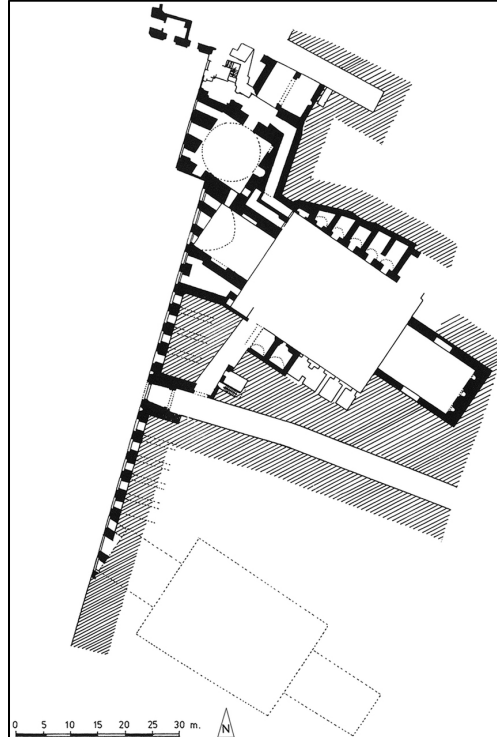
²⁰ Nairy Heraz Karkour Hampikian, "Complex of al-Salihyya Transformations Through Time and a Proposal for the Future" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997), 78-79.

²¹ Nuwaysar, *Al-'Imara al-Islamiyya fi Misr*, 82.

²² K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt: Ayyubids and Early Bahrite Mamluks* (Hacker Art Books, 1978), 2:94.

(*madrasa, madaris*) should be understood in this context. Considering that *al-Salihiyya Madrasa* taught all four schools of Islamic law simultaneously, al-Maqrizi's use of "*madaris*" likely refers to either the four *iwans* allocated to each school or the four schools of law taught there. Thus, "*madaris*" suggests a single building with four *iwans* rather than separate structures. The dual form "*al-madrasatayn*" can be interpreted within Creswell's framework of a single *madrasa* consisting of two connected blocks. Although al-Maqrizi referred to each block as a separate *madrasa*, since these blocks were not independent buildings, *al-Salihiyya* can be considered a single structure.²³

Figure 1: Plan of the *Salihiyya Madrasa*



Credit: Drawn by Saeed Arida, reproduced courtesy of Nasser Rabbat²⁴

Figure 2: A Photograph of the *Salihiyya Madrasa* and *Qubbat al-Salih*²⁵



²³ Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:94.

²⁴ D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Tree of Pearls: The Extraordinary Architectural Patronage of the 13th-Century Egyptian Slave-Queen Shajar al-Durr* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 61.

²⁵ Ruggles, *Tree of Pearls*, 65.

Approximately seven years after the *madrasa's* construction, al-Malik al-Salih's mausoleum (*Qubbat al-Salih*) was built adjacent to it. This mausoleum was commissioned by his wife, Shajarat al-Durr, following al-Malik al-Salih's death in 647/1249 in Mansura. Shajarat al-Durr, keeping the sultan's death secret, had his body secretly transferred from Mansura to the Rawda fortress. The sultan's coffin, which was kept there for some time, was moved to the mausoleum in Rajab 648/September 1250 in a grand ceremony led by Izz al-Din Aybek.²⁶

The Significance and Professors of *al-Salihyya Madrasa*

During al-Malik al-Salih's reign, scholarly activities continued in numerous educational institutions inherited from his predecessors, including *madrasas*, mosques, *khanqahs*, and libraries.²⁷ Sources mention no other educational institutions built during al-Malik al-Salih's period except *al-Salihyya Madrasa*. The lack of new educational institutions during this period can be attributed to several factors: the adequacy of existing institutions, prolonged wars aimed at achieving political unity, and the sultan's focus on military rather than educational systems.

Al-Salihyya Madrasa holds particular significance as the first institution in Mamluk Egypt established for teaching all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhahib*). Before al-Malik al-Salih's reign, all *madrasas* in Egypt, except for al-Fadiliyya Madrasa, were dedicated to teaching a single school of law. *Al-Fadiliyya Madrasa* was built in 570/1174 by Salah al-Din's vizier al-Qadi al-Fadil for teaching both Shafi'i and Maliki schools.²⁸ While sources do not explicitly state al-Malik al-Salih's motivations for establishing a *madrasa* teaching all four schools, its similarity to Baghdad's *al-Mustansiriyya Madrasa*²⁹ suggests possible inspiration. However, *al-Salihyya* distinguished itself through its architectural features and four separate *iwans* designated for each school.³⁰

Al-Salihyya Madrasa represents a turning point in establishing a new relationship among the four legal schools by providing equal facilities and space for their instruction. Considering that Egyptian *madrasas* previously focused primarily on Shafi'i and Maliki schools, *al-Salihyya* initiated a gradual balance among all four schools' adherents. Escovitz, in his analysis of the chief judgeship (*qadi al-qudat*) institution's transformation during the Mamluk period, traces the practice of appointing separate chief judges from each school to this educational model at *al-Salihyya*.³¹ Accordingly, a new phase in the balance among the four schools began in 661/1263. In that year, Sultan Baybars ordered Egypt's Shafi'i chief judge, Ibn Bint al-A'azz, to select four deputies representing the other three schools. Unable to find a Hanbali jurist for appointment, Ibn Bint al-A'azz selected three professors with whom he had worked at *al-Salihyya* as chief judge deputies.³² In this respect, *al-Salihyya Madrasa* played a crucial role in Egypt's judicial system as a source of qualified personnel needed for the Mamluk practice of appointing chief judges from each school.

²⁶ Maqrizi, *al-Suluk*, 1:465; Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, 3:466-467.

²⁷ For *madrasas* established in Egypt and Syria during Salah al-Din's period, see Mahmut Dundar, *Eyyubiler Döneminde Mısır'da Eğitim ve Öğretim* (Çıra Publications, 2017).

²⁸ Dundar, *Eyyubiler Döneminde Mısır'da Eğitim ve Öğretim*, 66-88.

²⁹ Before the *Salihyya madrasa*, the first and most crucial madrasa that provided education according to the four schools of fiqh (*madhāhib al-arba'a*) was the *Mustansiriya madrasa*. This *madrasa* was founded by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir Billah (d. 640/1242) in Baghdad, with construction beginning in 625 (1228) and completing in 630 (1233). This *madrasa* is considered the first institution with university characteristics, as it provided higher education not only in the four schools of fiqh but also in the fields of Quran, Hadith, and Medicine. For detailed information about the *Mustansiriya Madrasa*, see: Sâmi es-Sakkâr and Nebi Bozkurt, "Müstansiriyye Medresesi," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2006), 32:121-122.

³⁰ Salam, "Al-Madaris al-Islamiyya fi Misr," 123.

³¹ Joseph H. Escovitz, "The Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in the Mamluk Empire," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, no. 3 (1982): 529.

³² Maqrizi, *al-Suluk*, 1:562; Escovitz, "The Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships," 529-530.

After its opening, *al-Salihyya Madrasa* became Egypt's most prestigious educational institution, hosting prominent scholars as professors. Scholars like Izz al-Din ibn Abd al-Salam and Afdal al-Din al-Khunaji served both as professors and as Egypt's chief judges. Ibn Wasil mentions the Shafi'i professors who taught at *al-Salihyya*, where each school had its designated professor: Izz al-Din ibn Abd al-Salam, Afdal al-Din al-Khunaji, Baha al-Din ibn al-Jumayzi, and Badr al-Din al-Sinjari.³³ These scholars were notably the first Shafi'i professors at the institution. Sources³⁴ indicate that Ibn Abd al-Salam was the first in Egypt to emphasise Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*) in his lectures.³⁵

In the Maliki section, Sharaf al-Din Abu al-Hafs Umar ibn Abdullah ibn Salih al-Subki is recorded as the first Maliki professor. Al-Subki, who served as *muhtasib* (market inspector) in Cairo during al-Kamil's reign and later as chief Maliki judge during the Mamluk period, taught hadith and fiqh at *al-Salihyya*.³⁶ After his death in 682/1283, Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Idris al-Qarafi succeeded him.³⁷

Among the first scholars in the Hanafi section was Sadr al-Din Sulayman ibn Abu al-Izz ibn Wuhayb, who later served as chief judge in Egypt and Damascus during the Mamluk period. When Sultan Baybars appointed chief judges from each school in 661/1263, he selected Sadr al-Din as the Hanafi chief judge. Sadr al-Din, who also served as military judge (*qadi al-askar*) in Egypt, died in 677/1278.³⁸

The first Hanbali professor was Chief Judge Shams al-Din Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Abd al-Wahid ibn Ali ibn Surur al-Maqdisi.³⁹ As *al-Salihyya* was the first *madrassa* in pre-Mamluk Egypt to teach the Hanbali school, Shams al-Din al-Maqdisi is considered the first Hanbali scholar to teach in Egypt.⁴⁰ Born in Damascus in 603/1206, he studied there before moving to Baghdad and then to Egypt in 640. Quickly gaining prominence in Egypt, he was appointed by al-Malik al-Salih as the Hanbali professor. During Baybars's reign, he briefly served as sheikh of the Sa'id al-Su'ada Khanqah and became the first Hanbali chief judge of the Mamluk period. He continued teaching fiqh, hadith, and Quranic recitation until his death in 676/1277.⁴¹

The *Salihyya madrasa* was supported by various revenues for meeting its needs and paying staff salaries. Maqrizi states that the extensive land behind the *Salihyya madrasa* was organised and endowed (*waqf*) to the *madrassa*, and that income was also transferred to the *madrassa* from the goldsmith market across from it and from certain other properties outside

³³ Ibn Wasil, *Al-Tarikh al-Salihi*, ed. Omar Abdulsalam Tadmuri (Al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 2010), 70, 87, 119.

³⁴ Making a different claim from Ibn al-'Imad and Isnawi, Suyuti states that Ibn Abd al-Salam was the first person to give *tafsir* lessons in Egypt. (Suyuti, *Husn al-Muhadara fi Tarikh Misr wa'l-Qahira*, ed. M. Abu'l-Fadl Ibrahim (Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1967), 1:315.) However, considering that *tafsir* was a subject taught in the Ayyubid *madrassa* curriculum since Salah al-Din's period (see Basuguy, *Selahaddin-i Eyyubi Devrinde İlmî Faaliyetler*, 53-56.) Ibn al-'Imad and Isnawi's claims appear closer to reality.

³⁵ Isnawi, *Tabaqat*, ed. Kamal Yusuf al-Hut (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), 2:85; Ibn al-'Imad, *Shadharat al-Dhahab fi Akhbar Man Dhahab*, ed. Abd al-Qadir-Mahmud Arnaut (Dar Ibn Kathir, 1991), 7:524.

³⁶ Yunini, *Dhayl Mir'at al-Zaman* (Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-Osmaniyya, 1954), 2:461; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya*, ed. Riyad Abd al-Hamid and M. Hassan 'Ubayd (Dar Ibn Kathir, 2010), 15:429-430.

³⁷ Safadi, *Al-Wafi bi'l-Wafayat*, ed. Ahmad al-Arnaut and Turki Mustafa (Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 2000), 6:146.

³⁸ Safadi, *Al-Wafi bi'l-Wafayat*, 15:247; Qurashi, *Al-Jawahir al-Mudiyya fi Tabaqat al-Hanafiyya*, ed. Abd al-Fattah Muhammad al-Hulw (Dar Hijr, 1993), 2:237; 3:164; Suyuti, *Husn al-Muhadara*, 1:466.

³⁹ Maqrizi, *Al-Khitat*, 3:465.

⁴⁰ Leiser, *The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt*, 358.

⁴¹ Yunini, *Dhayl Mir'at al-Zaman*, 3:279-280; Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam*, ed. Abdulsalam Tadmuri (Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1998), 50:240-241; Safadi, *Al-Wafi bi'l-Wafayat*, 2:10; Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl 'ala Tabaqat al-Hanabila*, ed. Abd al-Rahman b. Sulayman al-Uthaymeen (Maktabat al-'Ubaykan, 2005), 4:142-148.

Cairo.⁴² These revenues endowed to the *madrasa (awqaf)* serve as an example of the economic functioning of endowment institutions in Islamic civilisation, and can be evaluated as a strategic approach for the uninterrupted continuation of the *madrasa's* educational activities and the regular payment of staff salaries. *Al-Salihyya Madrasa* maintained its importance during the Mamluk period not only as an active educational institution but also as a center for *mazalim* courts (courts of grievances).

Al-Malik al-Mu'izz Izz al-Din Aybek appointed Amir Ala al-Din Aytakin al-Bunduqdari as regent on 23 Shawwal 648/18 January 1251 and tasked him with presiding over the *mazalim* courts held at *al-Salihyya*. Al-Malik al-Sa'id, son of al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars, endowed the goldsmiths' market opposite the *madrasa* and various properties in Cairo and al-Mahalla al-Gharbiyya to the *madrasa*, while also granting *iqta'* (land grants) from the Giza and Atfihiyya regions to its four professors.⁴³

The tradition of using *al-Salihyya* for court proceedings, which began in 648, continued through the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. Some court records from the Ottoman period, beginning in 943/1527, have been published in the journal *Annales Islamologiques*.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Al-Salihyya Madrasa represents a turning point in 13th-century Islamic educational history. Analysis of its establishment, architectural features, and institutional structure reveals a multifaceted educational institution reflecting the social, political, and religious dynamics of its era. Our research has identified three fundamental aspects that establish the *madrasa's* unique position. First, the architectural structure of *al-Salihyya Madrasa* represents a new understanding in the history of Islamic educational institutions. Its four-*iwan* plan and separate sections allocated for each school of law demonstrate a physical space designed in harmony with its educational philosophy.

The varying terms used in al-Maqrizi's records to describe the *madrasa's* structure (*al-madrasa, al-madrasatayn, al-madaris*) reflect its complex character and multifunctional nature. Second, through its institutional structure, which allowed equal educational opportunities for all four Sunni schools, the *madrasa* made significant contributions to developing inter-*madhhab* dialogue and interaction in the Islamic world. This structure influenced the Mamluk state's judicial organisation, establishing the theoretical and practical foundation for appointing separate chief judges from each school of law. Third, besides its educational functions, the *madrasa* pioneered the establishment of an organic link between educational and judicial institutions by serving as a center for *mazalim* courts. This multifunctional structure continued through the Ottoman period, creating a unique model in the history of Islamic institutions.

Examination of the *madrasa's* teaching staff reveals that the most distinguished scholars of the period served there. Izz al-Din ibn Abd al-Salam's emphasis on Quranic exegesis demonstrates that not only *fiqh* but other Islamic sciences were taught at an advanced level, reinforcing the institution's multifaceted educational character.

In conclusion, *al-Salihyya Madrasa's* significance in Islamic educational history stems not only from its simultaneous teaching of four schools but also from its architectural, institutional, and functional innovations. Although built during the Ayyubid-Mamluk transition period, it presented a unique educational institution model whose influence extended into the Ottoman

⁴² Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, 3:466.

⁴³ Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, 3:465.

⁴⁴ Salwa Ali Ibrahim Milad, "Registres judiciaires du tribunal de la Salihyya Nagmiyya," *Annales Islamologiques* 12 (1975): 161.

era. This model provides valuable historical experience for understanding the background of contemporary Islamic educational institutions and structuring modern Islamic educational establishments. In this context, a detailed study of *al-Salihyya Madrasa* will make significant contributions to Islamic educational history research and guide the structuring of modern Islamic educational institutions. Future research focusing on topics such as the *madrasa's* endowment system, educational curriculum, and student profile will contribute to a better understanding of the institution. As contemporary educational institutions face challenges of accommodating diverse perspectives while maintaining coherent institutional identities, the historical example of *al-Salihyya* offers valuable lessons in creating physical and institutional spaces that respect intellectual diversity while fostering a shared commitment to scholarly excellence and mutual understanding.

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