

## The Scientific Establishment in the Era of the Zengid State

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### Abstract:

The numerous brilliant achievements of the Zengid state institution, especially during the reign of Sultan Nour elDin Mahmoud, were the pillars of the renaissance of the nation. The religious sciences were greatly served, as Nizam al-Mulk al-Tusi (408-45 AH) - may God have mercy on him - did in his Formal Schools. It is worth noting and considering that Nour el-Din achieved these achievements in the face of extremely difficult circumstances, represented by the Shiite intellectual invasion that controlled the minds of most of the people of Sham, on the one hand, and the ongoing state of war with the Frankish invaders, on the other. The impact of the educational institution, especially the schools, was clear and significant in guiding society and worked with the rest of the institutions within a reform plan that combined three matters: attention to religious sciences in order to refute heresies and manifest the true religion, scientific through the dissemination of knowledge and the transition of people from the darkness of ignorance and illiteracy to the light of knowledge and certainty, and the third of these matters is the reform of society.

**Keywords:** scientific institutions, Zengid state, Nour elDin Mahmoud, sciences.

### Introduction

Throughout its glorious history, the Islamic civilisation has witnessed specific and diverse places for carrying out the tasks of education and training, where people, both young and old, received various types of education and training,

whether through awareness, advice and guidance, or through reading, writing, recitation of the Holy Qur'an, memorising and interpreting it, knowledge of religious rulings and understanding them, the study and narration of the Prophet's Hadith and the related learning of the rules of the Arabic language, the study of the art of writing, calligraphy, the memorisation of poetry, and the learning of the principles of arithmetic, in addition to other knowledge, sciences and arts, which took place in a number of places or environments that can be called (educational and training institutions and centres).

The educational institutions were "a regional product from the heart of the needs of the Islamic society and its developments, pulsating with the spirit of Islam and guided by its teachings and purposes, and they were not taken as a whole from the ancient civilisation, but were connected in their growth and development to the general Islamic life, reflecting the main purposes and trends of that life".

Based on the above, the title of my paper is "The Scientific Establishment in the Era of Sultan Nour El-Din Mahmoud Zanki".

The problem statement is as follows: What role did Sultan Nour El-Din Mahmoud Zanki play in the establishment and construction of schools?

The importance of the study lies in highlighting the great role that Sultan Nour El-Din Mahmoud Zanki played in the scientific renaissance of his era through his policy of establishing schools throughout the Levant and his interest in them, as these schools had a prominent impact on renewal, reform and scientific renaissance in various sciences.

In order to respond to the aforementioned problem, I have divided my intervention into two axes:

The first axis is entitled: The Role of Education in the Zanki Era.

The second axis is entitled: The emergence of schools in the Zanki era and the role of Sultan Nour El-Din Mahmoud Zanki in their construction and development.

**First: The role of education in the Zanki era:**

Sultan Nour El-din Mahmoud Zanki saw the state as an integrated apparatus of service and achievement for all segments of society, not as an instrument of coercion, depletion and exploitation, for Nur ad-Din's entire time was spent "in the interests of the people and in caring for the subjects and having compassion for them" (Abu Shama, 1997, p.34).

Nour El-Din Mahmoud sought to provide the widest range of services in his dealings with the members of his nation, and to make the state capable of providing these services, and to provide it with the widest facilities, which are rightly considered the pinnacle of Nour El-Din Mahmoud's social measures, as these services extended to all areas of scientific activity, and sought to meet various material, spiritual, intellectual, and other needs. These services took different methods and forms, sometimes through the direct distribution of money, and sometimes through the establishment of institutions and facilities such as mosques, schools, hospitals, ribats, khanqahs, and hadith houses (Salabi, 2007, p.16).

Nour El-Din was the link between the Nizamiyyah (formal) system, which planted and nurtured the educational renaissance, and Saladin, in whose hands it was blessed and flourished (Arthur, 1978, p.356). It is important to understand the concordance of the terms Atabakiyyah and Nuriyyah in this message; that is, the Nuriyyah and Atabakiyyah schools are one and the same, as all the schools established during the reign of Nour el-Din Zanki were Nuriyyah and Atabakiyyah. It is worth noting that mosques were the primary centre of education in Islam, in addition to being the place of worship and meeting for

Muslims. However, over time, some aspects of education moved from the mosques to other places known as schools (Shalabi, 1973, pp.113-114).

### **1- Mosques:**

The mosque is considered the first and most important place of education in Islam as a whole, and the study of this institution in any region of the Islamic world is the study of the primary centre of scholarly life, especially in the periods before the emergence and widespread establishment of renowned modern schools. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) founded the Prophet's Mosque in Medina immediately after his migration, which became known as the Prophet's Mosque. (Ibn hicham 1936,p:141)

The Prophet's Mosque in Medina was the first educational institution established to disseminate knowledge, teach Muslims, and provide instruction in Qur'anic recitation, Hadith, the basics of writing, and the teachings of the Islamic religion. During the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the righteous caliphs after him, mosques were adopted as centres of moral refinement and education, which had a significant impact in spreading sound religious awareness and instilling the spirit of knowledge among Muslims.(Amine 1401,p:7)

In addition to being a place of worship where Muslims gathered five times a day to perform the obligatory prayers, the mosque was also a centre for adjudication and consultation, a place of welcome for visitors to Islamic capitals, and an open institute for anyone seeking to acquire more knowledge, science, and art. After prayers, Muslims would go to one of the many study circles scattered throughout the mosque, each led by a scholar dedicated to the education of Muslims. These study circles functioned as open schools, accessible to all who wished to be educated, where individuals could learn and discuss various sciences according to their understanding. These study circles played a pivotal

role in the flourishing of intellectual, cultural and religious life among Muslims.(Amine 1401,p:7)

The main reason for the early adoption of the mosque as a cultural centre in Islamic history is that Islamic studies at that time were strictly religious and included the teachings, interpretation, explanation and foundations of the Islamic religion, as well as disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric, morphology, hadith, jurisprudence and its principles. These studies were closely associated with the mosques, as learning them was considered part of religious worship. Over time, the studies conducted in the mosques expanded beyond preaching, teaching, and the purely religious sciences to include other subjects that Muslims had learned through the great conquests.(Amine 1401,p:7)

The construction of mosques spread throughout the Islamic world, with the multiplication of their circles and halls prepared to receive and educate students free of charge, whether rich or poor. These mosques were built by governments or benevolent individuals among the ruling class and other wealthy people. The mosque remained the primary place for the acquisition of religious and other sciences. In most mosques, education was provided free of charge, and in many cases it was accompanied by donations and gifts. (Principles of Islamic Education, 1947, p.26)

Despite the widespread emergence and rapid development of Islamic schools from the 5th century AH (11th century CE) onwards, the mosque remained an important foundation for education. It kept pace with the emergence of new sciences and arts that were in the spirit of the Islamic religion and beneficial to humanity. Many hadith scholars, jurists, linguists, literary figures and historians flourished in Islamic mosques. Among the mosques that were famous for their scholarly circles and fulfilled their educational mission exceptionally well are the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, the Haram in Mecca, the mosques of Basra, Kufa, Fustat, Qayrawan, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the El-Aqsa

Mosque, the El-Qarawiyyin in Fez, the Zaytouna Mosque in Tunis, the El-Mansour Mosque in Baghdad, the Cordoba Mosque, the Ibn Tulun Mosque and the Noble Al-Azhar in Cairo, among others. These mosques were the primary nuclei for the establishment of comprehensive schools in the Islamic world. (Amin, 1401, p.10)

The mosque is considered to be one of the prominent features of the scientific and cultural movement during the reign of Nur al-Din Mahmoud, who recognised the importance and central role of the mosque as a key religious institution that gathers people for worship and learning. In addition to uniting Muslims, refining their qualities, enhancing their virtues and promoting their unity, Nur al-Din Mahmoud established numerous mosques, reaching a hundred in the city of Damascus, and endowed them with waqf (endowments) (al-Bundari, 1989, p. 27).

The mosques continued to play their role in teaching, dictating, listening and preaching. Historical and biographical books are full of accounts of scholars and jurists who used mosques during the Zengid era as suitable places for teaching, preaching and writing, thus immortalising their scientific contributions. Among them was Sheikh Abu al-Barakat Abdullah ibn al-Khidr, known as Ibn al-Shayraji, who died in 574 AH/1178 CE (see the biography by Jamal al-Din al-Asnawi, al-Asnawi, 1981, pp. 110-111). He taught in a mosque on the banks of the river in Mosul, which became known by his name. Many people gathered there to study jurisprudence and listen to hadith, and many scholars narrated about him (al-Subki, 1966, p. 123).

Also famous in Mosul was Sheikh Radi el-Din Younes ibn Mana al-Mawsili, who died in 576 AH/1180 CE (see his biography in the book “Tabaqat al-Shafiiyyah” by Ibn Qadi Shuhba, Ibn Qadi, 1979, p. 26). He taught in the mosque of Zayn al-Din Ali ibn Buktakin, who died in 563 AH/1168 CE (see his

biography in “The Bright History of the Atabeg State “ in Mosul by Ibn al-Athir, Ibn al-Athir, 1963, p. 135).

The Great Mosque of Aleppo was famous for its many circles of learning, the most important of which was the Green Circle, dedicated to literary studies, where circles of literature, grammar and language studies were held alongside religious studies (Ibn Shaddad, 1935, p. 38). King Nur al-Din Mahmoud established two corners in this mosque: one for the teaching of Maliki jurisprudence and the other for the teaching of Hanbali jurisprudence (Ibn Shaddad, 1935, p. 121). During this period, and especially during the lifetime of its founder, Nur al-Din Mahmoud, there was considerable scholarly activity in these corners.

As for Damascus, despite the short duration of the Zengid rule, it was considered to be one of the most important centres of learning during this period. Its Umayyad mosque was famous for hosting numerous educational circles in various disciplines and levels of study. The traveller Ibn Jubayr, who visited this mosque in 580 AH/1184 CE, described the scholarly activity he witnessed. He marvelled at the expenditure on students and teachers and said: “There is a great community in this blessed mosque. Every day, after the morning prayer, seven readings of the Qur’an are recited, and the same after the afternoon prayer for a recitation called al-Kawthariyya. More than five hundred people gather daily for these sessions, and this is one of the glories of this blessed mosque. There is constant reading, both in the morning and in the evening. There are circles to teach the students, and the teachers have a wide range. The Maliki school has a corner for teaching on the western side, where students from the Maghreb gather, and they receive a scholarship” (Ibn Jubayr, 1907, pp. 244-245).

In addition to what Ibn Jubair mentioned, this mosque had the Ghazaliyya Zawiya, which was known for teaching Shafi’i jurisprudence, and several

distinguished scholars taught there, attracting a group of those interested in this specialisation. (Al-Nuaymi, 1948, p. 413) This mosque was truly one of the most important cultural landmarks in the Islamic world, and a number of the most eminent scholars taught there, whose names still shine in the history of Islamic sciences and whose works are still preserved today.

The mosque had an impact on scientific prosperity and development during the Zangid era, despite the widespread existence of madrasas at the time. An important observation is that hardly any of these mosques lacked a huge library containing a large number of books in various sciences and specialisations, and these libraries were specially endowed for the mosques, for students and researchers to refer to, such as the al-Sharafiyya library in the Aleppo mosque, which was a well-stocked public library for reading, containing many books in various fields of knowledge. (Kurd Ali, 1983, p. 186)

The mosques were like radiating scientific institutes that advanced various sciences in this era, as in previous Islamic eras, and they produced many eminent scholars who contributed to the progress and prosperity of knowledge. These mosques were characterised by equal opportunities for students, without discrimination between rich and poor. This increased the flow of students seeking knowledge, as poverty did not hinder the pursuit of knowledge. On the contrary, there were many endowments dedicated to those who frequented these mosques, whether as teachers or students, so that they could devote themselves to the pursuit of knowledge without being distracted by the need to earn a living. (al-Sallabi, 2007, p. 303)

**Second: The emergence of schools in the Zangid era and the role of Nur al-Din Mahmud in their construction and development:**

**1. The emergence of schools before the Zangid era:**

It has already been mentioned that mosques were the primary centres of education in Islam, in addition to being the places of worship for Muslims and the venues for their gatherings. However, in the course of time, education in some of its aspects shifted from the mosques to other places known as schools due to several factors, the most important of which are as follows: (Shalabi, 1973, pp.113-114):

- The increasing interest in Islamic legal studies and the consequent overcrowding of the study circles in the mosques with a large number of students. In each of these circles, a teacher would give his lesson and the students would discuss and question him until the rising voices from the multiple circles created a certain level of noise in the mosque, which was incompatible with the status of the mosque, and this made it difficult for the mosque to accommodate both prayer and teaching.
- The development of science and knowledge over time, where there were subjects that required extensive dialogue and discussion, and such subjects were at odds with the peace and tranquility that should prevail among the frequenters of the mosque.
- The preoccupation of a group of teachers with teaching in the mosque circles most of their time, and their attempt to earn a living by practicing simple professions alongside teaching. However, they were not able to achieve a decent standard of living, which led them to look for an independent place that would provide them with the conditions for teaching and a salary that would meet their needs. On this basis, this place, called a school, began to be created, and then the vanguard of the real school movement began to emerge and develop over time.

Here it refers to those houses in which the students of knowledge take refuge and are provided with food, and in which a righteous group of teachers and scholars are entrusted with their instruction and education. They are generously provided for, and those who are best able to fulfil the purpose for which they

have been appointed are selected according to the conditions set by the donor, and they are rewarded with the various branches of knowledge they have acquired. (Badawi, n.d., p.30).

Regarding the origin of schools, it is difficult to determine the exact date and place for the emergence of the first school in Islamic lands, as several schools were established in different regions of the Islamic world. What is certain, however, is that schools were established earlier in the Islamic East, especially in Khorasan and Transoxiana, where many independent schools were established outside the mosques, in the early fourth century AH (tenth century AD). (Marouf, 1973, pp. 103-156). The schools developed and their spread increased during the Seljuk period under the hand of the Vizier Nizam al-Mulk al-Tusi. (Al-Sallabi, 2007, p. 304).

Some of these schools came under the rule of the Atabeks of Mosul, including the 'Nizamiyya of Mosul', which was the nucleus of the schools of Mosul, established by Nizam al-Mulk, like other Nizamiyya ( Formal )schools, to teach the Shafi'i school of thought. This was followed by the establishment of schools in Mosul, and the ancient Atabek School was the first school mentioned in the sources after the Nizamiyya, but it differed from it in its curriculum, as it was considered the first joint school between the Shafi'i and Hanafi schools, and it was founded by King Sayf el-Din Ghazi ibn Imad el-Din Zangi (541-544 AH / 1146-1149 AD), followed by the establishment of various specialised schools in Mosul.

As for the Levant, it knew schools from an early time, as the first school was established in Damascus in 491 AH / 1097 AD, founded by the brave of the state Sadiq ibn Abd Allah to teach the Hanafi school, and it was the Sadiriyya school (Ibn Shaddad, 1935, pp. 199-200).

## **2. The role of Nour el-Din Mahmoud Zangi in building schools:**

When Nour el-Din Mahmoud took over the rule of Aleppo after the martyrdom of his father Imad al-Din in 541 AH/1146 AD, he began to establish schools and invited distinguished scholars from different Islamic regions and built many schools for them throughout his kingdom. His aim was to support the Sunni school of thought and counter the Shia school in the region. We will discuss this in the second part of this chapter by looking at the main schools during the Zengid state.

Nour el-Din Mahmoud was the link between Nizam al-Mulk, who planted and nurtured the educational renaissance, and Salah el-Din, in whose hands it was blessed and flourished. (Arthur, 1978, p.356)

Nour el-Din Zangi paid great attention to knowledge during the invasion and his efforts were concentrated on three axes:

**The first axis:** The establishment of Sunni schools.

**The second axis:** Interest in the Prophetic Hadith and the establishment of special institutions for its scholars.

**The third axis:** The Sufi community and its sheikhs. (Louey, 2006, p.70)

The establishment of schools was the first axis of his scholarly policy to resist the Shiite tide and consolidate the Sunni school of thought. He established Hanafi and Shafi'i schools and attracted the most famous scholars of his time (Louey, 2006, p.71), establishing three Shafi'i schools and one Hanafi school.

Sultan Nour el\_Din Mahmoud's educational policy was all-encompassing, as it was not limited, for example, to focusing on scholars without building schools. Rather, it was a comprehensive plan that included the construction of various educational institutions, the recruitment of scholars from all regions, and the provision of all practical necessities to achieve a fruitful outcome - that is, an educated Muslim individual capable of facing the challenges facing the state at that time. (Mouhcn, n.d., p.340)

Although Sultan Nur ad-Din Mahmud Zanki was not the innovator of the madrasah (educational institution) system, but rather a follower of the Seljuks, his extensive establishment of madrasahs was, on the one hand, a powerful manifestation of the flourishing of scholarly life during his reign and, on the other hand, evidence of his enthusiasm and sincerity towards Sunni doctrine as well as his efforts to counter the opposing calls to Sunni thought and community. In this regard, Ibn Khallikan praised Nour el-Din Mahmud, saying: “He was a just, ascetic and pious king who fought in the way of God and built madrasahs throughout the lands of Sham (Greater Syria)”. (Ibn Khallikan, 1969, p.88)

The Sultan’s interest in the madrasa stemmed from its significant role in the intellectual renaissance and its status as one of the fundamental pillars on which he built his state, both politically and religiously. The madrasahs served as intellectual strongholds for the propagation of Sunni thought and as a means of training efficient, trustworthy and loyal officials for the new state. (Shawkat, 2018, p.799)

The second focus was the care and study of the Prophetic tradition, and he then built the largest Dar el-Hadith (institution for the study of Hadith) in Damascus and entrusted its leadership to one of the luminaries of his time, the Hadith scholar Ibn Asakir (d. 571 AH). (Mohammed Hamid, 2007, p.85)

The third focus was the establishment of Sufi hospices (ribats) for men and women in the Levant region, particularly along the lines of the Shafi’i and Hanafi schools of jurisprudence. The historian Izz el-Din ibn Shaddad (d. 684 AH/1185 CE) enumerated the schools of Aleppo in his time and found 54 schools distributed among the four jurisprudential schools, of which 21 were for the Shafis, 22 for the Hanafis, 3 for the Malikis and Hanbalis, and 8 houses for the Noble Hadith, in addition to 31 Sufi hospices (khanqahs). (Mohammed Hamid, 2007, p.84)

During the reign of Nour el-Din Mahmoud in Egypt, new measures were taken, but under the hand of Salah al-Din el-Ayoubi in the year (566 AH/1170 CE), Salah el-Din el-Ayoubi abolished the Shiite call to prayer and reinstated the Sunni call. The second step was to dismiss the Shiite judges and delegate the judiciary to the Shafi'i judge Sadr al-Din ibn Dirbas (d. 605 AH/1208 C.E.), and to appoint Shafi'i judges in all the works of Egypt. He played a major role in the spread of the Shafi'i school and the restriction of the Isma'ili school. These measures were seen as a prelude to the cutting of the Sermon for the Fatimids and declaring it for the Abbasids, to the extent that it was described as an intellectual revolution aimed at eliminating Isma'ili thought in Egypt, which actually occurred in the year (567 AH/1171 CE). (Louey, 2006, pp.66-67)

Nour el-Din Mahmoud expanded the construction of madrasas (Islamic schools) after the annexation of Damascus in 549 AH / 1154 CE. He built many of them and endowed them with rich waqfs (charitable endowments) to be used for their maintenance and to support those engaged in scholarly pursuits within them. Nour el-Din Mahmoud's policy in this regard set an example for the princes and senior officials of his state, who then followed his lead in promoting learning and building more madrasas, endowing them with rich waqfs to support them. Scholars and wealthy patrons also embraced this trend, which contributed to the flourishing of intellectual life in these lands.

As for the location of these madrasahs, their founders took care to choose the most suitable and beautiful places for them, such as near rivers or gardens, sometimes hiding them in lush gardens with streams running through them. They also paid great attention to the decoration and architectural embellishment of these buildings. Ibn Jubayr, describing some of the madrasahs in Mosul during the Zengid period, said: "In the city there are about six or more madrasahs

for learning, situated on the Tigris, which look like imposing palaces”.( Ibn jubayr 1907,p211)

### **Conclusion:**

Scientific institutions witnessed a great scholarly flowering during the Zengid era, especially under the reign of Sultan Nour el-Din Mahmoud Zangi, in which various sciences matured. One of the most important scholarly institutions of this period was the mosque, which was a prominent aspect of the academic and cultural movement under Nour el-Din Mahmoud. He recognised the importance of the mosque and its pivotal role as one of the central religious institutions that brought people together for worship and learning, in addition to uniting Muslims, refining their qualities, increasing their virtues and working to unite their ranks. For this reason, Nour el-Din Mahmoud undertook the construction of numerous mosques, up to one hundred in the city of Damascus, and provided them with endowments (awqaf).

When Nour el-Din Mahmoud took over Aleppo after the martyrdom of his father ‘Imad el-Din in 541 AH/1146 CE, he began to establish madrasas (schools), inviting eminent scholars from different Islamic regions and building many schools for them throughout his kingdom. His aim was to promote Sunni doctrine and counter Shi’i doctrine in the region. We will discuss this further in the second part of this chapter, which looks at the most prominent madrasas of the Zengid era.

Nour el-Din Mahmoud also established schools as a scholarly policy to resist the Shiite advance and to consolidate Sunni doctrine. He founded Hanafi and Shafi’i schools and attracted the most renowned scholars of his time, establishing three Shafi’i schools and one Hanafi school. Nour el-Din Mahmoud’s educational policy was all-encompassing - it did not just focus on supporting scholars without building schools. Rather, it was a comprehensive plan that included building various educational institutions and inviting scholars from all regions,

in addition to providing all the practical necessities, in order to achieve the fruitful result of producing an educated Muslim capable of facing the challenges facing the state at that time.

Sultan Nour el-Din Mahmoud's interest in the madrasa stemmed from its important role in the intellectual renaissance, as it was one of the fundamental pillars on which he built his state, both politically and religiously. The madrasas also served as intellectual strongholds for the propagation of Sunni thought and as a means of producing efficient, trustworthy and loyal officials for the new state.

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