

Academic life in Bejaïa during the 5th-6th centuries AH (11th-12th centuries CE)**الحياة العلمية ببجاية الحمادية (القرن 05-06 هـ / 11 و 12 م).****Boussalim Salah^{1*}, Khaldi Abdelhamid²**¹ University of Ghardaia (Algeria), Salah_ghar@hotmail.fr² University of Algiers 2 - Abu Qasim Saadallah (Algeria), abdlhamidkhalidi@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This article aims to highlight aspects of the educational movement in Bejaïa during the Hamadid period. Under the Hamadids, the city of Bejaïa enjoyed great prestige and fame due to its numerous cultural institutions. This period marked a period of cultural, intellectual and economic prosperity that encompassed all aspects of life, as they were interrelated and complementary.

Bejaïa became one of the most important cultural centres in the Maghreb, a destination for students and seekers of knowledge. A number of scholars, thinkers and literary figures gathered there, encouraged by the institutions that created a favourable environment for students.

Among the most important of these institutions was the mosque, which served as a comprehensive educational institution offering various specialisations, including jurisprudence, literature, medicine and various sciences, as well as hosting scientific debates. Teaching circles proliferated, using curricula that borrowed elements from the East. However, these were adapted and refined to suit the local environment. As a result, the educational movement in Bejaïa during the Hamadid period was vibrant and flourishing.

Keywords: Bejaïa; Hamadid state; mosque; scholars; pursuit of knowledge; flourishing intellectual movement..

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Bejaïa period in the history of the Hamadian state represents a phase of urban development, openness, tranquillity and expansion (Al-Bakri et al., 1857, p. 68). This transformation can be attributed to several economic and social factors. Economically, the city's strategic location contributed to its prosperity in agriculture, industry and trade. This vibrant economic activity had a positive impact on the local population, which was protected and encouraged, boosting the economy and enriching the treasury. Consequently, the rulers actively promoted knowledge and its institutions, making Bejaïa as important as other prominent centres of contemporary Islamic civilisation such as Medina, Damascus, Kufa, Basra, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Córdoba. The city became a centre of intellectual activity, attracting scholars from Andalusia and beyond.

Bejaïa became one of the most important cultural centres in the central Maghreb, a destination for students of knowledge, theology, philosophy and Sufism (Al-Maqri, vol. 7, 1949, p. 241). It welcomed scholars of linguistics, literature, medicine and astronomy, and provided a refuge for those engaged in the sciences, various schools of thought and independent thinkers. The city offered its inhabitants a tranquil environment for contemplation and intellectual exchange, allowing them to escape the oppression of some tyrannical rulers (Amar Talbi, 1974, p. 153).

Béjaïa's importance was further enhanced by its role as a port and gateway for pilgrims and students travelling to the East, where they could learn from its scholars and exchange ideas (Bourouiba, 1970, p. 9).

Historical sources are rich in the names of numerous scholars from this period, with one list indicating that Béjaïa was home to some 140 scholars, including jurists, philosophers, writers and religious scholars. Many of these scholars were natives of the city or from the nearby

Qal'at Banu Hamad (Lqbal, 1974, p. 27). They were nurtured by a vibrant cultural environment, educated in the East by renowned scholars and returned to Bejaïa, most of whom were known by the title of "Zawawi", while fewer were referred to as "Béjaï". Scholars also came from Andalusia and the two Moroccan coasts, choosing Bejaïa as their final residence because of its intellectual vitality. Among the most notable were Al-Mahdi ibn Tumart, Abdul Haq al-Ishbili al-Bajai and Abu Madyan Shu'ayb. In the sixth century AD, Bejaïa saw the emergence of several prominent intellectuals, such as Abu Ali al-Misili, Amara al-Sharif and his daughter Aisha, among others, as documented by al-Ghabrini in his work *Title of Knowledge about the Scholars of the Seventh Century in Bejaïa* and other sources.

Bejaïa also became a centre for Sufism (Alam, 1971, p. 286), hosting prominent figures in both its ascetic and philosophical forms, such as Abu Madyan Shu'ayb, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, Ibn Sab'in and Al-Shushtari. This made Bejaïa a centre of cultural activity and a fertile ground for the production of scholars and thinkers.

A study of the lives and activities of the scholars of the seventh century AH (thirteenth century CE) in Bejaïa and the central Maghreb reveals the cultural richness that prevailed during this period. It is clear that the Almohads inherited the Hamadian state at the height of its civilisational splendour, and it is easy to believe that the scholars and thinkers who appeared in the central Maghreb throughout the sixth century AD were students of Hamadian civilisation.

The scholar Abdullah Alam emphasised this in his dissertation (Owais, 1980, p. 275), noting that the renaissance of Bejaïa during the Almohad period was not solely their achievement; it had already achieved exceptional fame during the Hamadian era. Al-Ghabrini compiled over a hundred biographies of scholars and writers who lived in Bejaïa at the end of the sixth and seventh centuries AH in his book Title of Knowledge (Ghabrini, 1328 AH, p. 25). It is no exaggeration to say that most of these figures represent a cultural extension of the

Hamadians and are clear evidence of the scientific renaissance promoted by the Hamadian dynasty in Béjaïa.

Despite the decline that befell the city in subsequent eras, many of its educational facilities and institutions survived long after the Hamadian period and even after the Spanish occupation. Al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan, describing Bejaïa in his time, said that its houses were beautifully built and that its mosques and schools housed students and scholars who taught jurisprudence and mathematics. He noted the presence of numerous hospitals, baths and hotels, and that the city was surrounded by luxuriant gardens with abundant fruit (Al-Wazzan, 1983, vol. 3, pp. 50-51). Following him, Marmol also mentioned that Béjaïa showed a tendency towards luxury and pleasure (Carbajal, 1984, pp. 370-380).

2. The most important educational institutions:

This rich intellectual and cultural heritage underlines the important role played by Béjaïa as a centre of learning and thought during the Hamadian era and beyond.

The main educational institutions in Bejaïa: Béjaïa, as the capital, had the same educational institutions that existed in the Qal'at Banu Hamad, along with the emergence of additional educational facilities. This development reflected the intellectual and civilisational progress of the time (Bourouiba, 1970, p. 96).

Each mosque in Bejaïa had a kind of Qur'anic school for teaching children, where study circles were often held, especially in the Great Mosque. One of the most enthusiastic patrons of these activities was Al-Aziz ibn al-Mansur al-Hamadi. Each mosque in Bejaïa also had a library, which housed the students' tablets, writing implements and some religious texts. It was in these libraries that licensing and Qur'an completion ceremonies were held, marking milestones in the students' memorisation, such as a quarter or half of the text.

The largest library was associated with the Grand Mosque built by Al-Mansur ibn al-Nasir ibn Alnas (Bourouiba, 1970, p. 97). This library contained a hall filled with books brought to Bejaïa and the central Maghreb in general from distant lands.

The mosque was considered the main educational institution in the Bejaïan period, as it had been in the Qal'at era. Bejaïa had a considerable number of mosques, seventy-three in all, as well as several libraries and palaces. However, much of this heritage is not well documented today. Many of the palaces of rulers and princes, praised for their grandeur by numerous historians and poets, have lost many of their traces and landmarks, leaving only a few remnants.

Among the most important educational institutions were :

- **The mosques of Bejaïa**

Béjaïa has a number of mosques that exceed those of the original capital, Qal'at Banu Hamad. The most important of these mosques are the Great Mosque, the Mosque of Al-Rihaniya, the Mosque of Al-Natihin and the Mosque of the Kasbah. According to a manuscript by an unknown author (Bourouiba, 1970, p. 97) in the possession of a resident of Bejaïa, Al-Mansur ibn al-Nasir converted the Pearl Palace, planned by his father in 494 AD, into a mosque. Converting a large palace with its various facilities into a mosque was not an easy or common task, but it is reasonable to assume that the palace may have been equipped with a mosque, given Béjaïa's scholarly importance during the Hamadan period and Al-Mansur's openness to knowledge.

The mosque probably included areas for teaching children in small Qur'anic schools (kuttabs), a prayer area for women, a room for their education, accommodation for students, a section for adult education, a library and areas for the five daily prayers and Friday congregations.

- **Al-Rihaniya Mosque:**

This mosque was once called the Imam's mosque because Al-Mahdi ibn Tumart stayed there after his arrival in Bejaïa on his return from the East, where he also taught (Al-Baydak, 1928, p. 52).

The mosque of Al-Natihin and the mosque of the Kasbah: Little is known about these two mosques beyond their names (Bourouiba, 1970, p. 96).

Some scholars had their own dedicated mosques, such as the mosque of Al-Faqih Ibn Zakariya Al-Zawawi, where he taught and where Sheikh Abu Madyan Shu'ayb also taught; this mosque is located in the Homa neighbourhood of the Pearl district in Bejaïa (Al-Ghabrini, 1328, p. 59).

There was great respect for the teacher and preacher in the mosque, and teaching methods varied from one scholar to another. Each sheikh had a group of students and listeners (Al-Ghabrini, 1328, p. 59) who showed him respect and did not acknowledge others in his presence out of reverence.

- The Grand Mosque

The Great Mosque was 220 dhir'aa long and 150 dhir'aa wide. It had a façade decorated with seventeen arches, a large door on the right, and ornate marble slabs with exquisite inscriptions on the left. In addition to this main door, the mosque had 22 other doors, one of which led to a women's prayer area, guarded by an elderly sheikh. Inside the mosque there were 32 marble minarets and a large dome. The floor of the mosque was covered with marble and the walls were decorated with zelliges with Qur'anic inscriptions. The minaret reached a height of 60 dhir'aa, with a base of 20 dhir'aa (Bourouiba, 1974, p. 494).

The Great Mosque was considered the most important mosque in Bejaïa, built during the reign of Al-Mansur ibn al-Nasir. It played an important role in the educational life of the city, accommodating some ninety students from various disciplines. Scientific circles were held there to discuss many of the daily problems of the inhabitants of Hamadian Béjaïa.

According to a book on Béjaïa published by the Ministry of Information and Culture, as the scientific movement developed, Al-Nasir ibn Alnas founded an institute similar to a university, the Sidi Tawati Institute, which claimed to have 3,000 students. A wide range of subjects were taught, including astronomy. During a scientific conference, a student from this university gave a three-hour lecture on the rising of the sun to a group of foreign scholars. This indicates that women were allowed to pursue secondary and higher education during this period, unlike in the Qal'at era.

- **Scientific councils and debates:**

During the reign of Al-Aziz, scholars from Andalusia, Africa and the Islamic East lectured at the Sidi Tawati University. The same book states that the Sidi Tawati Institute continued without interruption until 1824 (Al-Jilali, 1965, p. 384). However, this assertion is controversial, as historical sources on Bejaïa and the central Maghreb do not provide evidence to support it, even in a general sense (Ibn Khaldun, 1968, vol. 6, p. 366). Ibn Khaldun mentions only that "there were schools, scientific institutes and mosques full of lessons and scientific meetings". These gatherings led to the scientific debates that were common in Bejaïa's educational circles, often involving exchanges between scholars and students. Some rulers, including Al-Aziz ibn al-Mansur, participated in these intellectual debates. Ibn Khaldun noted that "the days of Al-Aziz were a time of truce and peace, with scholars debating in his council" (Al-Kaak, 1925, p. 217). However, Ibn Khaldun does not give the names of the debating scholars or the subjects discussed.

3. Scientific councils and debates:

As Osman Al-Kaak mentioned: "When the Hamadians appeared, Kairouan, Sicily and Andalusia had achieved a prominent status in knowledge and literature, which prompted the Hamadians to establish schools and mosques for the teaching of science and literature. They surrounded themselves with scholars and held scientific councils for debate' (Al-Kaak, 1925,

p. 219). I agree with Al-Kaak about the status of Sicily and its similarities to Hamadian Béjaïa during this period. However, Kairouan experienced a decline in scientific activity following the Hilali invasion and the migration of scholars to other Moroccan cities, including Qal'at and Béjaïa.

Scholars such as Ibn Ali al-Misili, Abu Muhammad Abdul Haq al-Ishbili and Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Umar al-Qurashi, known as Ibn Qirsha, had a council where they discussed contemporary scientific matters. They probably exchanged views on various intellectual issues and often met in a shop on the outskirts of the Sacred Neighbourhood, which was called the "City of Knowledge" because of the meetings of these three scholars (Lqbal, 1974, p. 8).

4. Notable scholars in Béjaïa

In Bejaïa during the Hamadian period, there was a notable group of teacher-scholars, including:

- Ahmad al-Umwi: An emigrant from Murcia, renowned in his time for his expertise in medicine and mathematics.
- Ahmad ibn Khalid: An émigré from Malaga, well versed in both religious and secular sciences, who dedicated himself to teaching and benefiting the people.
- Abdullah al-Hadri al-Qurtubi: A prominent figure in literature and a narrator of the Hadith.
- Abdullah al-Ishbili: He served as a preacher at the Bejaïa mosque, where he also taught and wrote.
- Abu al-Hasan al-Bajai: Another scholar who contributed significantly to the educational landscape.
- Ali ibn Nasr al-Fatih ibn Abdullah: He also assumed the role of a teacher in Bejaïa (Al-Madani, 1963, p. 80).

In addition, Abu Ali Hassan ibn Ali ibn Muhammad al-Misili taught in the Great Mosque. He used to come to the mosque for prayer in the last third of the night, and his students followed his example.

Abdul Haq al-Ishbili was a self-taught teacher known for his vast knowledge and teaching style, as well as his rapport with students. Al-Dhubi noted that Abdullah would engage with his students, address their problems and provide companionship as much as he could (Al-Dhubi, 1884, p. 378). Among his students were the ascetic Abu al-Hajjaj ibn al-Sheikh al-Balawi, Abu Dharr al-Khashin and Abu Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Qurtubi.

Abu Zakariya ibn Abu Ali, known as al-Zawawi, concentrated on the sciences of hadith, jurisprudence and exhortation. He often emphasised the themes of fear of hellfire and punishment, instilling a sense of awe and reverence in the hearts of his listeners. This approach to teaching was considered one of the best ways to call people to God (Al-Ghabrini, 1328 AH, p. 151).

5. Teaching methods and curricula

During the Hamadian period, Bejaïa enjoyed a golden age of intellectual activity, serving as the capital of the state and the centre of the central Maghreb. The curriculum included both traditional (naqli) and rational (aqli) sciences in various disciplines (Al-Mili, 1963, p. 226).

Teaching methods in Bejaïa varied according to the scholars. Some used traditional methods, while others favoured dialogue and discussion. Naturally, the latter approach appealed more to the students, especially at the Sidi Tawati Institute.

The subjects taught by Béjaïa's scholars mirrored those studied in the East, based on texts that had reached the Maghreb. Scholars in the region engaged with these texts, expanding and refining them according to their own perspectives, cultural contexts and political orientations.

6. Major sciences

The sciences were divided into two types: the sciences of understanding (*diraaya*) and the sciences of narration (*riwaya*). The curriculum was not limited to the well-known religious and literary subjects of the Qal'at era, but also included language, literature, arithmetic, medicine, astronomy and even philosophy (Mustafa, 1971, p. 85). Philosophy, which had not played a prominent role in the Qal'at period, began to attract attention towards the end of the Hamadian state, alongside the science of theology.

In addition to these subjects, there were other sciences related to crafts and civic life. Scholarships and prizes were awarded to outstanding students in these fields, encouraging many to pursue knowledge. It was not uncommon for a single teacher to attract over a hundred students, regardless of their faith or background (Al-Jilali, 1965, p. 383).

Teachers welcomed students from diverse backgrounds with open arms, fulfilling the trust of knowledge. The student-teacher relationship was generally positive, with students receiving ample support from their mentors. However, some teachers were strict about granting licences to teach, only doing so after rigorous testing to ensure that the student had achieved a thorough and accurate understanding rather than a superficial one. This practice reflected a commitment to academic integrity in the teaching and transmission of knowledge (Mustafa, 1971, p. 85).

7. The main subjects taught and the most important texts

The subjects taught in Bejaïa were derived from texts written in the East, which then reached the Maghreb. The scholars of the region studied, added to and refined these texts according to their cultural awareness and the comprehension of their students. They freely adapted the material to suit their educational context, imparting knowledge accurately to their students. This included the creation of new comprehensive texts that synthesised and refined the information available in this later period.

Among the most notable books circulated in Bejaïa, in addition to those from the earlier Qal'at period, was "Ihya Ulum al-Din"

by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, which had a significant influence on the Sufi community in the central Maghreb, including figures such as Ibn al-Nahwi and Abu Madyan Shu'ayb, among other prominent scholars.

Abu Abbas al-Ghabrini, author of "Unwan al-Diraaya", listed the texts studied in Hamadian Béjaïa. These included works on jurisprudence, interpretation, hadith, the Arabic language, Sufism, exhortation and the foundations of religion.

It is likely that these texts were in circulation in Bejaïa during the Hamadian period, although there is no material evidence to prove this definitively, except for the book on the sciences of understanding (Al-Ghabrini, 1328 AH, p. 28).

Bejaïa benefited from the influx of intellectuals and literary figures who left the Qal'at and became a refuge for scholars, hadith narrators and writers from Andalusia and beyond. They settled in the city, which led to a flowering of intellectual activity that gradually enriched its culture. This growth was not limited to the religious and linguistic sciences, but also extended to mathematics, medicine and various crafts. The geographer Al-Idrisi noted several plants related to medicine in Béjaïa and discussed the shipbuilding industry, stressing the availability of raw materials for such endeavours (Al-Jilali, 1965, p. 383).

Béjaïa became an important cultural and scientific centre, attracting foreigners, including Christians and Jews. Among its notable students was the famous Italian mathematician Leonardo da Vinci, who studied arithmetic, algebra and geometry there. Italian merchants from Pisa visited Béjaïa to learn the art of candle-making, which they later brought back to their homeland and Europe. The name "bougie", which refers to the candle, is thought by some to derive from Béjaïa, although its true origin may be linked to a tribe living in the area (Al-Jilali, 1965, p. 383).

Education flourished and Béjaïa became a centre for poets and scholars from various regions. Notable figures such as Ibn Hamdis al-Siqili, among many other writers and scholars, flocked to Bejaïa. It became the cradle of jurists, scientists, poets, historians, doctors and mathematicians. Al-Ghabrini, in his work "Unwan al-Diraaya", acknowledged the presence of many distinguished scholars from the late sixth century, noting that although some notable figures from that era remained, the limitations of his text prevented their mention (Al-Ghabrini, 1328 AH, p. 82).

During the sixth century AH, Bejaïa was a centre for scholars of jurisprudence, Sufism, literature and linguistics. Al-Abdari recorded some features of the scholarly movement in Bejaïa during this period (Al-Abdari, 1968, p. 115). A strong Sufi tendency emerged, influencing the minds of the people and directing them towards the hereafter, while diverting them from a life of frivolity. This deep-seated faith in word and deed manifested itself in the defence of the homeland during the invasions of Western powers such as the Normans and the Spanish (Mustafa, 1971, p. 85).

Sufism in Bejaïa had a dual nature. On the one hand, it had a positive and beneficial aspect, represented by many dedicated scholars who adhered to the boundaries of Islamic law. On the other hand, there was a negative side, characterised by charlatans who exploited Sufism for purposes that distracted people from actively facing the challenges of life.

The educational movement was not confined to Béjaïa alone; it spread throughout the central Maghreb (modern Algeria) during the Hamadian period. However, Béjaïa differed from other intellectual centres in that it was both a political and cultural capital, and served as a source of intellectual influence for other cities in the region.

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