

Contributions of the Qandousi Zawiya in Qanadsa in Establishing the Religious, Cultural, and Social Identity in Southwestern Algeria

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Abstract:

The Zawiya holds an important position in Algerian society in general and the people of southwestern Algeria in particular, a position that no one denies. It has had a significant and powerful impact on life in its various religious, intellectual, cultural, social, and economic fields. As an example, we mention the Zayyaniya Qandousi Zawiya in the Bechar region, which became well-known and spread in the area since the late 11th century AH - 17th century AD (11 AH / 17 AD) and was founded by Sheikh Muhammad bin Abi Zayyan. The Zayyaniya Qandousi Zawiya played an effective and important role in the fields of education and in consolidating the religious, cultural, and social identity in southwestern Algeria.

Keywords: Zawiya, Qanadsa, Bechar, southwestern Algeria

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Introduction:

Zawiyas are religious, educational, and social institutions that were established in the central Maghreb to spread and preserve religious, cultural, and social thought within Algerian society. These zawiyas originated as institutions similar to ribats for spiritual retreat and jihad, later evolving into centers for religious awareness and the spread of Islam, in addition to being places for advocacy, work, and social reform.

The Qandousi Zawiya, also known as the Zayyaniya Zawiya, is one of the oldest religious, historical, and archaeological landmarks in southwestern Algeria, in the Bechar province. It was founded by Sheikh Sidi Muhammad bin Ziyān in 1733 AD, who is originally from the Kherzaz region in the Algerian Sahara.

The Qandousi Zawiya is considered an important spiritual, intellectual, educational, cultural, and social center that attracted students, researchers, historians, and archaeologists from various parts of the country and the Arab world.

Based on the above, we raise the following question:

- What pivotal role did the Zayyaniya Qandousi Zawiya play in establishing and consolidating the religious, cultural, and social identity within Algerian society throughout the ages?

Before analyzing the topic and addressing the problem, we will first define the term "Zawiya" from a linguistic, terminological, and archaeological perspective, as well as provide a brief historical overview of the establishment and development of zawiyas to enrich and complete the topic.

Definition of the Zawiya:

1.Linguistically:

The word Zawiya is derived from the verb "zawa" (to gather), meaning to collect or gather together.

In the hadith: "The earth was gathered for me, and I saw its eastern and western parts." The skin gathered in the fire means it came together and contracted (Al-Zawawi, Al-Mukhtar al-Sihah, 1st edition, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, 2001, p. 124). The Zawiya in a house is its corner, and its plural is "zawaya." To "zawa" means to gather or choose, and "zawa" the speech means to prepare it in one's mind. "The people gathered in the corner" means they united (Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-Arab, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, n.d., p. 364).

2.Terminologically:

From a terminological perspective, the word Zawiya refers to a small building similar to a mosque, with a mihrab, where prayers may be held occasionally. However, it differs from a mosque in that it is considered a place for worship and has a combined educational, religious, and social function. It

provides shelter and food for the poor, needy, and travelers. Thus, the Zawiya is a place for worship, a religious school, and a free house for feeding (Sayf al-Din Mona, "Zawiyas Between the Past and the Present," Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Algiers, 2004/2005, p. 128).

3. Architectural and Archaeological Perspective:

In terms of architecture and archaeology, the term Zawiya refers to a part of the mosque where one of the sheikhs sits to give lessons to the students, as was done by Imam al-Shafi'i (Asim Muhammad Rizq, Dictionary of Terms in Islamic Architecture and Arts, 2000, p. 128). The Zawiya is also used to refer to educational buildings after education spread outside the mosques, with the emergence of schools dedicated to teaching religious sciences, jurisprudence, Islamic law, Arabic grammar, etc. These buildings are a type of religious structure that lacks a minaret or pulpit (Azouq, Abdel Karim, "Islamic Monuments in Bejaia: Census, Inventory, and Analysis," 1st edition, Al-Duha Publishing, Algeria, 2013, p. 113).

Architecturally, the Zawiya typically consists of a mihrab, a tomb for the sheikh of the Zawiya or its founder, and a prayer hall for the five daily prayers. It usually follows the architectural plan of a school. Additionally, it has annexes such as rooms for students, strangers, visitors, and other facilities necessary for the functioning of the Zawiya (Azouq, p. 114).

At the beginning of the 6th century AH / 12th century AD, the Zawiyas became associated with Sufi orders and were called "Khanqah" (Asim Muhammad Rizq, p. 128). Architecturally, a Khanqah consists of three main sections: the dome, where members of the Sufi order gather; the visitor's corridor for those who dedicate themselves to serving the Zawiya and its followers; and the living quarters of the Zawiya's sheikh (Azouq, p. 114). Thus, the architectural design of the Zawiya combines elements of both mosque and home architecture. Its layout is small and simple, with few windows, and it lacks decoration and ornate beauty. The general shape of the Zawiya conveys a sense of unity, solitude, austerity, and calmness.

The Establishment and Evolution of the Zawiya Through the Ages: It is difficult to precisely determine the exact date of the appearance of the Zawiyas, given their great similarity to mosques in terms of their roles and functions. Both the Zawiya and the mosque initially served the same purpose, which was education. As we know, in the early days, the mosque was not solely a place for prayer but also served as a center for religious and doctrinal education and played a significant role in the development of various sciences among Muslims. It contributed actively to the flourishing of cultural, social, and intellectual life (Azouq, p. 115).

With the continuous development of life in the Islamic community in various fields, new architectural buildings emerged, each having its own specific role in the social life of the Muslim community. These included the Kuttab (Quran schools), Dar al-Quran, Zawiyas, Islamic institutes,

and eventually schools. These architectural establishments did not exist before Islam (Azouq, p. 115).

When Ibn Battuta visited the East, he mentioned that he encountered a number of Zawiyas and observed the daily customs and rituals within them (Ibn Battuta, "The Journey," Vol. 1, 2nd edition, Al-Taquddum Press, Cairo, p. 20).

The term "Zawiya" has various names and meanings across different regions. It was called "Khanqah" in Persian, meaning "house," and "Khunqah" meaning "a place where the king eats," which appeared in the 4th century AH / 10th century AD in Khorasan, later spreading from Iran to Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. Before this, there were the Rabat, where soldiers practiced genuine Sufism. During the Mamluk era, the term "Takiya" was used, derived from the word "Ataka" meaning "to lean," and it is the Turkish name for the Khanqah (Azouq, p. 116). Takiya refers to a small mosque surrounded by rooms for Sufi dervishes who have dedicated their lives to worship, asceticism, and austerity. The person in charge of the Takiya oversees its functions (Asim Muhammad Rizq, p. 130).

And after that, the school emerged with a specific architectural character, taking on the role of education that was previously practiced in mosques. It was used for teaching and accommodating foreign students (Laraj Abdelaziz, *Islamic Schools and the Reasons for Their Emergence, the Conditions of Their Development, and Spread*, Human Studies, University of Algiers, Faculty of Humanities, First Edition, 2001, p. 300).

As for the Islamic Maghreb, it is likely that the term "zawiya" appeared in the late 6th century AH/12th century CE in North Africa after it had appeared earlier in the Mashriq. The origin of this term comes from the *ribat* which had been known in North Africa since the 1st century AH/7th century CE (Azouq, p. 117). Hence, we find a significant similarity in terms of function between the *ribat* and the *zawiya* in Morocco.

The zawiya typically takes the name of its founder, and when its name becomes famous, people from all places visit it for worship. After the death of the founding sheikh, his children, grandchildren, and visitors build a tomb topped with a dome to honor him and his scientific and religious status, and it later becomes a shrine visited by people from all over.

If we accept that the *khanaqah* in the East is visited by Sufis and dervishes for praise, then the *zawiyas* in Algeria are known for their role in teaching knowledge and the Quran. They initially spread in the cities, then expanded into the countryside and rural areas, becoming a hallmark of desert and mountainous life. They produced a significant number of students, soldiers, and scholars simultaneously.

We can divide the emergence of the *zawiyas* into two categories based on function or location of construction:

1. Zawiyas by function, which fulfill a specific role and are divided into:

- Educational Zawiyas, focused mainly on teaching the Quran to children. These are groups of buildings in most palaces known as “the mosque.” They played a vital role in teaching religious and linguistic sciences.

- Zawiyas of education and spiritual development, founded by Sufi men, regarded as places for spiritual education. These are places where Sufis retreat for worship.

- Zawiyas for hospitality and sustenance, which welcome guests, provide food, and offer lodging.

2. Zawiyas by the location of their construction:

- There are zawiyas built outside the palace, established on land purchased by the founder of the zawiya outside the palace.

- Zawiyas built inside the palace, which are considered part of the palace and its properties. (Ahmad bin Zayta, *The Organizational and Functional Structure of the Zawiyas in the Tuat Region*, First Zawiya Conference, Adrar, May 2000, p. 2).

Finally, we can say and firmly conclude that there is overlap and similarity in the functions between the mosque, *ribat*, *zawiya*, and school, even though there are differences in some details, elements, and architectural plans. If we were to arrange them in historical sequence, the *ribat* comes first, followed by the *zawiya*, and finally the school.

The Qandusiya Zawiya: The foundation of the Qandusiya Zawiya dates back to Sheikh Sidi Muhammad bin Abi Ziyān, born in 1062 AH/1651 CE in the village of Tallat Taniya, from the Beni Koumi palaces, located about 50 miles southeast of Sijilmasa (Tafilalt). He sought knowledge in Fez, especially in the sciences of language, grammar, jurisprudence, and Sufism, before deciding to return to the Qandusa region (Mustafa Alawi, *From the Memory of Qandusa, Coal Wisdom Treasures*, Algeria, 2018, p. 28). At the end of the 10th century AH, after his scientific and spiritual travels, he settled in Qandusa in 1098 AH/1686 CE (Muhammad Tayeb Aqab, *The Ancient Palaces of Qandusa*, Architectural and Archaeological Study, Dar Al-Hikma, Algeria, 2007, p. 27), choosing this site due to its strategic location and favorable environment for spreading knowledge and Islam. As a result, the zawiya became an important center for spreading the teachings of the Shadhili Sufi order and contributed significantly to consolidating the religious and cultural identity of the region. Trade caravans passing through Qandusa would visit the sheikh for blessings and seek protection on their journey, as he was highly regarded by local leaders and known for his humility and good deeds. He worked to achieve a reformatory educational mission in the region, which earned the Qandusa area a high status and great reputation (Muhammad Aqab, p. 27).

The Educational and Cultural Role of the Qandusiya Zawiya: The Qandusiya Zawiya played a significant role in spreading knowledge and Islam. The teaching method was traditional, following the style practiced in various cultural centers of the time (Shibli Rabi'a, *The Zayaniya Zawiya and Its*

Role in the Saoura Region Until the 19th Century, *Al-Ma'yar Journal*, Vol. 27, Issue 5, 2023, p. 1019). The sciences taught included all religious sciences such as jurisprudence, tafsir (exegesis), hadith, as well as Arabic language, grammar, rhetoric, history, philosophy, and Maliki thought, including works like *al-Nashir* by Ibn Ashir. It also encouraged authorship and scientific research, organizing sessions for remembrance (dhikr) and academic lectures. Students from various parts of the country, especially from the region, attended the zawiya, and it produced many scholars and jurists who contributed significantly to spreading knowledge both within and outside the country. The zawiya became a distinguished intellectual and cultural beacon, frequented by scholars and those seeking knowledge (Muhammad Qadi, *Property Ownership and Its Negative Impact on Projects for Preserving and Promoting Desert Palaces - The Qandusa Palace as a Model*, *Social Sciences Journal*, p. 4).

The Qandusiya Zawiya preserved Arab culture during a time of ignorance, especially during French colonization, and trained righteous scholars who worked on spreading Islam, the Arabic language, and various sciences. They also worked to preserve and celebrate important local religious events such as the Prophet's birthday, the Sabbath, Ashura, and Laylat al-Qadr, among others.

Social and Economic Role: The Qandusiya Zawiya served as a center for social welfare, promoting values of cooperation, solidarity, and mutual support. It helped the needy, travelers, pilgrims, and others in need. It also worked diligently to resolve disputes and conflicts between local residents and helped maintain peace in the absence of formal authority, essentially replacing the governing power (Muhammad Bay Belalam, *Lecture on the National Conference of Zawiyas*, Adrar, 2000, p. 5). Through its efforts, the zawiya helped build a community that respects ethics and traditions. Economically, the zawiya contributed to the region's development by promoting agriculture, such as date palm cultivation, vegetable and fruit farming, and grain production, turning the region into a green oasis that became a source of income and self-sufficiency for its people.

Library and Scientific Repository: The Zayaniya Qandusiya Library is one of the important scientific facilities attached to the zawiya. It is rich in a vast collection of books and manuscripts, which were acquired through purchase, copying, donations, and bequests. It played a major role in invigorating and sustaining the cultural movement in southwestern Algeria (Mustafa Alawi, *The Zayaniya Qandusiya Library and Its Role in Preserving Local Heritage*, *Algerian Journal of Historical Studies and Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 8, December 2018, p. 11). The zawiya houses a library full of rare manuscripts and scientific and literary books in several fields. Researchers, students, and scholars from various disciplines visit the library to study these manuscripts and complete their research, theses, and dissertations. The library represents a significant cultural and scientific heritage that

reflects the region's history and its commitment to knowledge. It plays an active and serious role in preserving the cultural and scientific heritage of the Qandusa area and southwestern Algeria in general. It is a center of intellectual and educational radiation, comprising a reading room, lecture hall, and museum, as well as a Quranic school, manuscript preservation room, and a library containing more than 200 manuscripts in various fields, including:

- Manuscripts on creed, hadith, jurisprudence, and the biography of the Prophet.
- Manuscripts on Arabic language and literature.
- Manuscripts on history, biographies, and chronicles.
- Manuscripts on Sufism. (Mustafa Alawi, p. 11)

Challenges and Achievements:

Throughout its long history, the Qandusiya Zawiya faced significant challenges, including internal conflicts and the period of French colonization. However, it managed to withstand these challenges and maintain its pioneering role in spreading knowledge, teaching Islamic principles, preserving the Arabic language, and reinforcing national identity. It was able to maintain the cohesion of the community that rallied around it when they believed in its noble message. This was achieved through the efforts of the sheikhs and scholars who succeeded each other.

Conclusion

The Qandusiya Zawiya, as a living model, represents a pioneering institution of religious and educational significance. It played a crucial role in spreading knowledge and strengthening religious, cultural, and social values in Algerian society. It also contributed to the establishment of national identity through its various roles. The Zawiya has left a clear mark in the history of the region, and to this day, it remains a symbol of pride in preserving Algeria's cultural, religious, and social heritage.

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