

The Professorial Chair (*kursī ‘ilmī* or *kursī li-l-wa‘z wa-l-irshād*) in Morocco

La cátedra (*kursī ‘ilmī* o *kursī li-l-wa‘z wa-l-irshād*) en Marruecos

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Las mezquitas congregacionales en Marruecos suelen tener un almimbar (púlpito) que se utiliza durante el sermón de los viernes. Muchas mezquitas de Marruecos cuentan también con una o más sillas, diferenciadas del almimbar en su forma y su función ya que son utilizadas por los profesores para enseñar a los estudiantes de la educación tradicional, y por eruditos que dan conferencias ocasionales al público en general. Esta tradición de cátedras se introduce probablemente en Marruecos desde Próximo Oriente en el siglo XIII. La mayoría de las cátedras existentes parecen datar de los siglos XIX y XX, manteniéndose hasta nuestros días la fabricación y utilización de estas sillas. Las cátedras siempre tienen dos peldaños, un asiento, un respaldo y apoyabrazos. La forma de las sillas parece evocar el almimbar original del Profeta en Medina, tradición que se muestra como uno de los muchos aspectos del conservadurismo y de la evolución distinta del Malikismo marroquí.

Palabras clave: cátedra; Marruecos; mezquita; educación; mobiliario litúrgico.

Moroccan congregational mosques are equipped with a *minbar* (pulpit) which is used for the Friday sermon. Many mosques in Morocco are also equipped with one or more smaller chairs, which differ in their form and function from the *minbar*. These chairs are used by professors to give regular lectures to students of traditional education, and by scholars to give occasional lectures to the general public. This tradition of the professorial chair was probably introduced to Morocco from the Middle East in the thirteenth century. Most of the existing chairs in Morocco seem to date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and they continue to be made and used today. The chairs always have two steps, a seat, a backrest and armrests. This form probably evokes the original *minbar* of the Prophet in Medina, which had two steps and a seat, and this is one of many aspects of the conservatism and separate evolution of Moroccan Malikism.

Keywords: Professorial chair; Morocco; Mosque; Education; Liturgical furniture.

Throughout the Muslim world, mosques that are authorized to hold the congregational Friday prayers and sermon are equipped with a *minbar* or pulpit. This principal piece of liturgical furniture is usually po-

sitioned to the right of the *miḥrāb*. However, there also exists another type of traditional chair in Moroccan mosques, which is smaller, has only two steps, and fulfils a different function. This is the *kursī ‘ilmī*, scientific or academic chair, which can be translated as “the professorial chair”, also known as the *kursī li-l-wa‘z wa-l-irshād*, “the chair for instruction and guidance”. This essay will discuss the professorial chairs of Morocco, items of furniture that have remained largely unnoticed by historians, despite being held in great esteem and affection in Morocco by scholars and devout people. These professorial chairs will be differentiated from yet another type of chair, the *kursī li-rāwī al-ḥadīth*, “the chair for the reading of the *ḥadīth*”. The conservative local form and function of these chairs distinguish Moroccan liturgical furniture from that elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Numerous professorial chairs are preserved in congregational and smaller mosques in Morocco, and also at tombs and in Sufi *zāwiyas* that have been endowed with *waqf* for lectures. Today the use of the chairs varies, depending on the survival of *waqf* endowments and on local demand. Generally, lectures or sermons are addressed to the general public, while regular lectures or classes are imparted separately to students of higher education (fig. 1). The same chairs are used for either audience. Unlike the *minbar* for the Friday sermon, there can be more than one professorial chair in a mosque, and more than one lecture conducted at one time. Almost all chairs are kept permanently in the prayer hall for lectures throughout the year, while in some small mosques the chair only comes out of storage for special lectures to the general public, especially during Ramadan. The chairs that stand in prayer halls are not usually moved from their permanent locations; however, there is no single specific location for them. They are positioned against the perimeter wall of the mosque, or against a pillar in the hall. They can also be placed beside the *miḥrāb* and *minbar* or far away from them.

The chairs are made of wood and always have the same form, consisting of two steps leading up to the seat, with armrests and a backrest. A professor will sit on the chair while giving a lecture, unlike the *minbar*, where the preacher (*khaṭīb*) stands on the steps to deliver his sermon. Often a professor will spread his felt prayer mat (*lubda*, in Moroccan Arabic) on the chair, and sit on it either cross-legged or with his feet on the steps. Sometimes a professor might choose to sit on the



Figure 1. Lectures being delivered from three of the new professorial chairs in the Qarawiyyin Mosque, Fez, in 2009. (Photograph by Peter Sanders, courtesy of the Ministry of Awqāf and Islamic Affairs, Rabat).

ground beside the symbolic chair, or not sit near a chair at all. These seating arrangements, with students sitting around a teacher, are known as a *majlis* or *ḥalqa* (“circle”), which is the origin of the modern term “academic circles”.¹ The origin of the two-step professorial chair in the Prophet’s *minbar* at Medina, and Middle Eastern parallels of the chair,

¹ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, pp. 92, 140-141, 156-157; Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, p. 100.

will be discussed below, following a survey of the professorial chairs of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque and elsewhere in Morocco, and a brief discussion of the chairs for the reading of the *ḥadīth*.

1. The professorial chairs of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque in Fez

As one of the principal teaching centres in the Maghrib, the Qarawiyyīn Mosque in Fez has a long history of *waqf* endowments for chairs specifically for higher education, as well as for lectures to the general public.² By the thirteenth century there were professorial chairs at the Qarawiyyīn Mosque; the endowment of chairs presumably coincided with the introduction of the institution of the madrasa from the Mashriq. Some Moroccan scholars considered chairs to be a dangerous innovation.³ Nevertheless, the number of professorial chairs in Morocco increased in the early modern period.⁴

Although professorial chairs are known today as *karāsī ‘ilmiyya* or *karāsī li-l-wa‘z* in Morocco, these are not the only terms used in earlier centuries. In *waqf* documents of the nineteenth century and earlier, a professorial chair of the Qarawiyyīn was also known as a *kursī li-l-tadrīs* (“chair for teaching”), and further identified by the specific subject taught from the chair, for example, *kursī al-Bukhārī li-l-tadrīs* (“chair for the teaching of Bukhārī”) (fig. 2). In 1912, according to A. Pérétié, the professorial chairs in Fez were colloquially termed *karāsī al-‘ulamā’* (“chairs of the scholars” or “of the professors”).⁵ Modern Moroccan terminology at the Ministry of Awqāf differentiates between three levels of teaching conducted from chairs, although the historical usage of these terms is not clear:

1. *karāsī li-l-wa‘z wa-l-irshād*, for lectures to the general public.
2. *karāsī ‘ilmiyya* (“scientific” or “academic chairs”), for lectures given to students of higher education.
3. *karāsī al-‘ālimiyya* (“scholars’ chairs”), for the highest level of traditional education.

² Al-Mannūnī, “Karāsī al-asātidha”, fasc. 9, 4; al-Tāzī, *Jāmi‘ al-Qarawiyyīn*, vol. 2, pp. 372, 390.

³ Al-Mannūnī, “Karāsī al-asātidha”, fasc. 9, 4, p. 92.

⁴ Al-Mannūnī, “Karāsī al-asātidha”, fasc. 9, 5.

⁵ Pérétié, “Les medrasas de Fès”, p. 316.

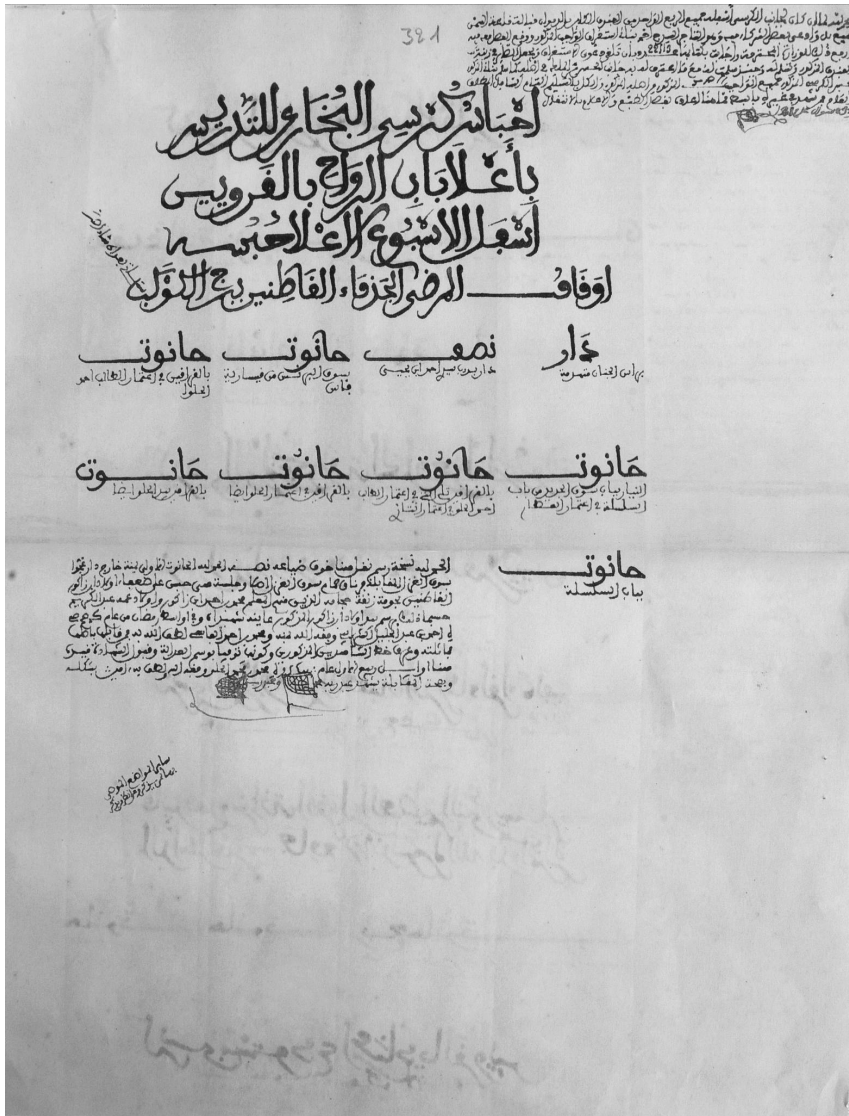


Figure 2. Document dated 1219/1804-5 endowing a chair for the teaching of Bukhārī, the chair itself being located near the Bāb al-Ruwāḥ of the Qarawiyyin Mosque. Unpublished waqf register (p. 321) of the Qarawiyyin Mosque copied for Sultan Sulaymān (r. 1792-1822). (Photo: N. Erzini, courtesy of the waqf administration of Fez).

The history of the chairs of the Qarawiyyīn, as well as other mosques and madrasas of Fez and other cities, has been examined by Muḥammad al-Mannūnī, Mohamed Hajji and ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Tāzī.⁶ They list the Qarawiyyīn chairs, the subjects taught from them, and the succession of professors who occupied them. The sources for these studies were *waqf* registers, juridical decisions (*nawāzil fiqhiyya*), hagiographies, chronicles, foundation inscriptions and oral history. As in the medieval Mashriq, the term *kursī* might refer to a professorship in the abstract, not necessarily a real chair. Nevertheless, in the early sixteenth century, Leo Africanus (Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Wazzān), himself probably once a student at the Qarawiyyīn, described the use of professorial chairs at the mosque: “About the wals of the said temple are diuers pulpits, out of which those that are learned in the Mahometan lawe instruct the people.”⁷ Leo Africanus also described the use of chairs by scholars during poetry competitions in honour of the Prophet’s birthday in Fez.⁸

The chairs of the Qarawiyyīn were endowed individually with *waqf* of varying wealth, by royal decree or by private donor. Each chair was endowed for a specific curriculum or book, which gave them their name. However, this was not a rigid system, as more than one subject could be taught from one chair at different times of day. The chairs were known by their permanent locations, such as the “chair of the ‘anza” (in Morocco today referring to an auxiliary *miḥrāb*, a fixed wooden panel or a portable marker on the *qibla* side of the courtyard, indicating the direction of Mecca), the “chair of the *miḥrāb*”, or the chair near a particular door of the mosque. The chairs could also be named after a scholar or after the benefactor of the *waqf*. The original *waqf* of chairs was reinvigorated by later endowments, such as that of a chair endowed by Sultan Ismā‘il (r. 1672–1727), renewed by Sultan Sulaymān (r. 1792–1822). The extent of teaching at the Qarawiyyīn was such that different parts of the mosque were organized for different levels of teaching: the western side of the courtyard for primary courses, the eastern and northern sides for secondary level courses, and the southern or *qibla* side for higher learning (fig. 3).

⁶ Al-Mannūnī, “Karāsī al-asātidha”, fasc. 9, 4 and 9, 5; Hajji, *L’activité intellectuelle*, vol. 1, pp. 142-144; al-Tāzī, *Jāmi‘ al-Qarawiyyīn*, vol. 2, pp. 371-402.

⁷ Leo Africanus, *The History and Description of Africa*, p. 422.

⁸ Davis, *Trickster Travels*, p. 22.

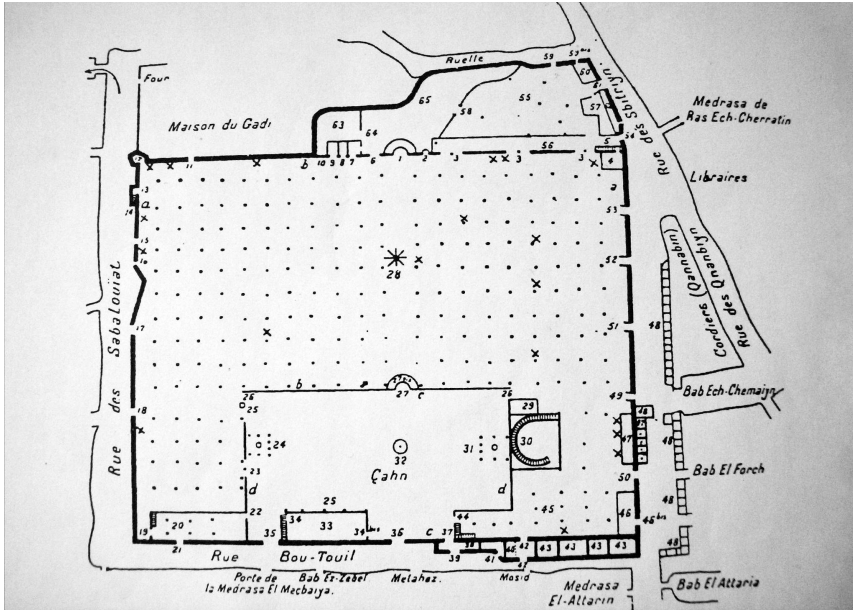


Figure 3. Plan of the Qarawiyyin in 1912, with x's marking the emplacement of eighteen professorial chairs. (Pérétié, "Les medrasas de Fès").

Women could hear lectures given from some of the chairs, hidden behind a grill.

In 1966, al-Mannūnī documented endowments for twenty-four "teachers' chairs" (*karāsī al-asātidha*) at the Qarawiyyin Mosque. He also documented seven endowed professorial posts that did not have chairs, but that were associated with particular columns of the Qarawiyyin where the professors sat (*ḥalaqāt 'ilmiyya*).⁹ In 1972, al-Tāzī documented eighteen professorial chairs at the Qarawiyyin Mosque, and also thirty-one study circles that did not have actual chairs, which he called *majālis arḍiyya* ("study circles on the ground"). Al-Tāzī also published an illustration of one professorial chair *in situ* at the mosque, presumably the *kursī al-'anza* (fig. 4).¹⁰

⁹ Al-Mannūnī noted that this custom was to be found in the medieval Mashriq, as at the Great Mosque in Damascus and the 'Amr Mosque in Cairo: al-Mannūnī, "Awqāf bidūn kursī", pp. 117-119.

¹⁰ Al-Tāzī, *Jāmi' al-Qarawiyyin*, vol. 2, pp. 371-383, illustration on p. 550. Another brief reference to the Qarawiyyin chairs is provided by Mohamed Sijelmassi, who illustrated one chair, covered in green felt, in 1991: Sijelmassi, *Fès*, p. 86.



Figure 4. Professorial chair at the Qarawiyyin Mosque. (Al-Tāzī, *Jāmi' al-Qarawiyyin*, 2, p. 550).

Furthermore, some of the madrasas in Fez had chairs. The Bū 'Ināniyya had three professorial chairs, while smaller madrasas such as the 'Aṭ-ṭārīn had only one. Combined with the chairs in other mosques in Fez, there were, according to al-Mannūnī, 57 professorial chairs in Fez alone.¹¹ Al-Tāzī counted as many as 140 professorial chairs in Fez, but these were chairs for which he had some sort of historical record; he did not specify that they were real chairs in existence in 1972.¹² Certainly, by the early twentieth century, the chairs al-Tāzī referred to in

the medieval madrasas were not preserved, as the madrasas themselves were disused and in a ruinous state.

Chairs were discarded from the Qarawiyyin during the numerous architectural restorations and institutional reforms that this university mosque underwent from the early twentieth century. However, two discarded chairs from the Qarawiyyin have survived and are preserved in the nearby Najjārīn Museum in Fez.¹³ They have the classic form of the Moroccan professorial chair, with two steps and a seat with an arched backrest, and both are unusually large and imposing (fig. 5). Their distinguishing feature, like the chair in al-Tāzī's photograph, is that they are quite plain; none has any surface decoration. The armrests of one chair have broken off. The precise date of endowment and the subject of instruction of the chairs have not been recorded. Thus, despite the

¹¹ Al-Mannūnī, "Karāsī al-asātidha", fasc. 9, 5.

¹² Al-Tāzī, *Jāmi' al-Qarawiyyin*, vol. 2, pp. 384-402.

¹³ See Chadli, "Musée et médiations du patrimoine".

wealth of archival and literary references, there seem to be very few surviving historic chairs from the Qarawiyyīn, certainly no medieval chairs, and no information preserved about the date and the endowment of the surviving chairs. Similar in shape and size to the chairs in the Najjārīn Museum are two chairs that have been recently placed in the Qarawiyyīn, and recently covered in maroon felt; these were discarded from the tomb of Mawlāy Idrīs in Fez, which no longer organizes regular lectures.

Laroui has highlighted the chain of five generations of scholars of the “Fez school” at the Qarawiyyīn from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Reforms of the Qarawiyyīn teaching were introduced by Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh (r. 1757–90). Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Kattānī (d. 1927), a chair-holding professor himself, recorded the lives of Qarawiyyīn professors in the *Salwat al-anfās* (1894), a hagiographical dictionary of Fez. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were forty professors at the Qarawiyyīn Mosque, headed by a *shaykh al-jamā‘a*. They were organized into four levels, of which only four of the top-ranking professors were entitled to use a chair. They were al-Kattānī himself, Ibn al-Khayyāṭ (d. 1925), Muḥammad al-Qādīrī (d. 1913) and Tuhāmī Gannūn (d. 1913). European accounts differ slightly: in 1902, Budgett Meakin noted that there were fifty professors (*‘ulamā’*) in Fez, of which twenty were of the first rank. In 1904, Eugène Aubin reported that there were seventeen professors of



Figure 5. Professorial chair from the Qarawiyyīn. Fez, Najjārīn Museum. (Photograph courtesy of the Mohammed Karim Lamrani Foundation for the Nejjarine Ensemble, Fez).

the highest level or the first class. They were appointed by the chief judge of the city, in conjunction with the *waqf* administrator. They received a salary from the *waqf*, which was supplemented by gifts from the Sultan. There were five levels of professors and only the highest rank was entitled to use a professorial chair. Professors were appointed to the chair on the basis of their diplomas (*ijāzas*) awarded by other professors. From the reign of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 1894–1908), the chief judge in Fez and later the Sultan had to give written permission for the use of a chair by a professor.¹⁴

In 1889, Delphin, a teacher in French Algeria, noted that while the professors’ chairs at the Qarawiyyīn were financed by *waqf* and by the government, chairs of higher education in other towns of Morocco were funded both by *waqf* and by students. Geographically, the closest chair to Delphin was at Oujda, where forty students helped to finance two professors, of whom one used a professorial chair like those of the Qarawiyyīn.¹⁵

Despite al-Mannūnī’s tally of twenty-four chairs in the Qarawiyyīn, there were fewer chairs in use in the early twentieth century. In 1911 Michaux-Bellaire specified that there were only twelve chairs there, six “chairs for professors giving lectures” and six for readers of the *ḥadīth*, and that the professorial chairs were distinguished by having three steps and a backrest.¹⁶ In 1912 Pérétié reported that there were twelve chairs in the Qarawiyyīn, possibly in addition to six *ḥadīth* chairs.¹⁷ However, there was some confusion in Pérétié’s mind about the number and type of chairs, probably because he wrote the article based on notes taken by the late Georges Salmon (d. 1906), the director of the Mission Scientifique du Maroc, and it appears that neither French scholar entered the mosque. Salmon seems to have relied on “native informants” rather than first hand observation, because of the difficulty for non-Muslims in gaining access to the mosque. Indeed, one Si Mohammed Koudja-Bach drew

¹⁴ Al-Kattānī, *Salwat al-anfās*; Ibn Zaydān, *Ithāf a’lām al-nās*, vol. 3, pp. 211-214; Laroui, *Les origines sociales et culturelles*, pp. 195-196; Delphin, *Fas, son université*, p. 42; Budgett Meakin, *The Moors*, p. 310; Aubin, *Le Maroc*, p. 281, quoted in Le Tourneau, *Fès*, p. 461; Michaux-Bellaire, “L’enseignement indigène au Maroc”, pp. 442-443, 446; Pérétié, “Les medrasas de Fès”, pp. 317-318; Yver, “Fās”, in *EL*.

¹⁵ Delphin, *Fas, son université*, p. 103.

¹⁶ Michaux-Bellaire, “L’enseignement indigène au Maroc”, p. 446.

¹⁷ Pérétié, “Les medrasas de Fès”, pp. 317, 358, and plan.

the schematic plan of the Qarawiyyīn for Pérétié's article, and marked the locations of the professorial chairs. In this plan there are in fact not twelve but eighteen chairs marked "chaires des professeurs" (fig. 3). They are placed against pillars of the prayer hall, around the outer walls, and both to the left and right of the *mihrāb*. Surprisingly, some chairs were lined up in groups of three quite close to each other, which might have meant noisy classes. Pérétié also reported the existence of professorial chairs in the other thirteen congregational mosques of the city.

Furthermore, according to this French account, although there were numerous chairs at the Qarawiyyīn c. 1900, only one of the four professors of the top level actually used a chair in that mosque. This was the above-mentioned al-Kattānī, and he sat on a chair exclusively for his interpretation of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*,¹⁸ whereas he sat on the mosque floor for his other lectures. Pérétié was at pains to explain that the use of the professorial chair was a dying tradition, and that chairs were only used by the most famous and popular professors out of necessity, for very large classes, so that the professor could see his students and be seen and heard by all of them. As the number of students of the Qarawiyyīn had declined, the chairs had fallen into disuse.¹⁹ Although some of the other professors at the Qarawiyyīn were entitled to use chairs, they sat on mats laid on the mosque floor, out of humility. It is possible, too, that al-Kattānī's exclusive use of the chair for the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* reflected the sanctity of the subject rather than the number of students or a decline of the university system.²⁰

French studies of the Qarawiyyīn in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tend to indicate that the university mosque, and consequently the use of professorial chairs, was in decline. The estimated 1,000 students of the early nineteenth century had dwindled to 300-400 by 1906.²¹ Nevertheless, the use of chairs has continued to the present day. It was revived to some extent by the reforms of the Qarawiyyīn in 1916 and 1932, and its transformation into a state institution in 1947.²² Indeed, numerous Moroccan scholars recorded their

¹⁸ Pérétié, "Les medrasas de Fès", p. 335.

¹⁹ Pérétié, "Les medrasas de Fès", p. 305, notes that there were only about 400 students.

²⁰ Pérétié, "Les medrasas de Fès", p. 317; Le Tourneau, *Fès*, p. 461.

²¹ Pérétié, "Les medrasas de Fès", p. 305; Le Tourneau, *Fès*, p. 462; Marty, "L'Université de Qaraouiyyine", pp. 329-353, especially p. 345.

²² Le Tourneau, *Fès*, pp. 459 n. 2, 461.

instruction from professorial chairs in the Qarawiyyīn. The historian Muḥammad Dāwūd of Tetuan, for example, who was a student in Fez between 1920 and 1922, gave the names of seventeen professors at the Qarawiyyīn and wrote in his autobiography: “In my time, the professors would choose their place in the mosque, and the students would sit around him in a half circle, and if there were many students, they sat in rows, and sometimes the teachers sat on a chair, so that more students could hear them.”²³ At this time all higher instruction was conducted in the Qarawiyyīn; however, Dāwūd continued, “...in many other mosques and *zāwiyas*, occasional or exceptional lectures took place on Thursday and Friday mornings and around the time of feast days.” Al-Tāzī’s professors still used chairs at the Qarawiyyīn in 1947.²⁴ ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ‘Ashshāb, historian and director of the Gannūn Library, Tangier, was taught from professorial chairs in the Qarawiyyīn in 1952.²⁵ Indeed, in 2008, thirteen new professorial chairs were made for use in the Qarawiyyīn; in theory they were manufactured and endowed with income from the historical *waqfs* for chairs (fig. 1).

2. Other professorial chairs in Morocco – regional variations

Most of the professorial chairs in use today in mosques and *zāwiyas* across Morocco are more decorated than the chairs surviving from the Qarawiyyīn. Only a few chairs of Fez, as in the Andalusiiyyīn Mosque, the tomb of Mawlāy Idrīs and the Mosque of the Shurafā’, follow the undecorated Qarawiyyīn model. Many of the decorated chairs look new because they have been extensively and gaudily repainted and varnished, but investigation of their undersides reveals the original woodwork, which was often fashioned with an adze rather than a saw. This would indicate a nineteenth-century date or earlier. The carpentry is quite primitive; there are no curved pieces or complex joinery, only right-angle joins between the horizontal and vertical planks. The most common decoration is low-relief carving and painting in a geometric pattern (figs. 6 and 7).

Unusually, a chair in the mausoleum of Sultan Ismā‘īl in Meknes

²³ Dāwūd, *‘Alā ra’s al-‘arbā‘īn*, pp. 208-209.

²⁴ Al-Tāzī, *Jāmi‘ al-Qarawiyyīn*, vol. 2, p. 376, n. 45.

²⁵ ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ‘Ashshāb, personal communication, 2009.

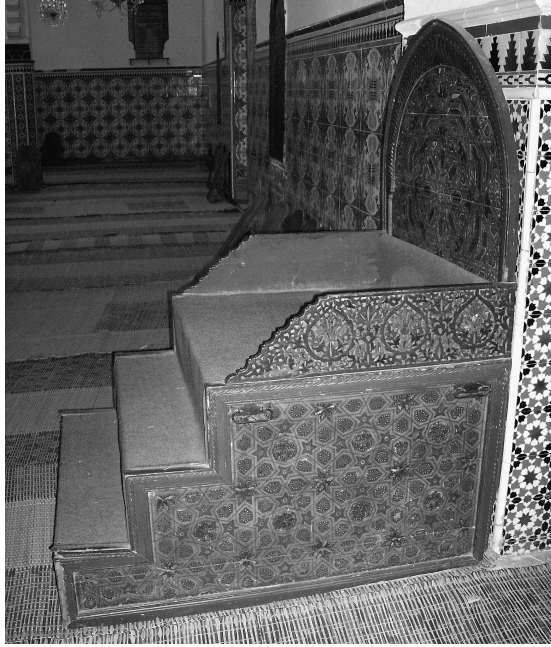


Figure 6. Professorial chair in the Raysūnī Zāwiya, Tetuan. (Photo: N. Erzini).



Figure 7. Two professorial chairs in the Mawāsīn Mosque, Marrakesh. (Photo: N. Erzini).



Figure 8. Professorial chair in the Great Mosque of Meknes. (Photo: N. Erzini).

carries a short inscription, *al-‘azama li-llāhi* (“majesty belongs to God”), painted on the armrest. One of the most distinctive chairs, and probably one of the oldest examples, is in the Great Mosque of Meknes; decorated with geometric strap-work in high relief, its original colour has been covered with modern monochrome paint (fig. 8).

In 2006, four disused professorial chairs were collected from mosques in Tangier, Chaouen and Meknes for display in the Museum of Religious Heritage at the Lūqash Madrasa in Tetuan. The finest example came from the Najjārīn Mosque (also known as the ‘Atīq Mosque) in Meknes; it is a good example of the carved and painted cedar wood tradition associated with Meknes and Fez (fig. 9).²⁶ The elaborate decoration of the backrest, with three miniature cusped arches and a row of turned colonettes, is unique among the professorial chairs of Morocco. The chair probably dates back to an early eighteenth-cen-

²⁶ Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum, wdw 7 (height 194 cm, length 115 cm, width 82 cm). El Khammar, “Mosquées et oratoires de Meknès”, pp. 270-271, figs. 69-70, where it is termed a “chaire d’enseignant”.



Figure 9. Professorial chair from the Najjārīn Mosque, Meknes. Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum. (Photo: N. Erzini).



Figure 10. Professorial chair from the Nāṣirī Zāwiya of Chaouen. Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum. (Photo: N. Erzini).

tury refurbishment of the Najjārīn Mosque by Sultan Ismā‘īl, and was endowed at the same time as the splendid disused *minbar* from the same mosque, now also in the Lūqash Madrasa Museum.²⁷

Two other professorial chairs in the Lūqash Madrasa Museum came from Chaouen, one from the Great Mosque,²⁸ the other from the Nāṣirī Zāwiya (fig. 10).²⁹ These chairs are smaller and simpler in form and decoration. Their sides and backrests are not carved but painted with the large geometric and floral designs typical of the woodwork of Tetuan and Chaouen. They have similar proportions and both carry spherical knobs or finials on either side of the two steps, the seat and flanking the backrest. Such spherical knobs are found only on the traditional chairs from Chaouen (although they are common on *minbars* elsewhere). In 2007, there were three professorial chairs in the Great Mosque of Chaouen and the adjacent madrasa, of different sizes but all with a similar form and decoration, unfortunately covered with modern oil-based paint.

The most austere chair in the Lūqash Madrasa Museum came from the Great Mosque of Tangier (fig. 11).³⁰ It is painted in plain panels of solid colour, a green background with panels of blue, outlined in red. On the second step of this chair is a cylindrical hole lined with metal; it was presumably added later for a microphone. This plain chair with heavy proportions can be contrasted with the exquisitely carved and painted *minbar* of the Great Mosque of Tangier, dating back to the reoccupation of Tangier by Sultan Ismā‘īl in 1684, which it must have stood next to.³¹ The Tangier chair, however, is probably the most modern of the professorial chairs in the Lūqash Madrasa Museum, as it is said to date from the visit of Sultan Ḥasan I (r. 1873–94)

²⁷ El Khammar, “Mosquées et oratoires de Meknès”, pp. 268-270, figs. 66-68. A similar pulpit, from the Mosque of Lāllā ‘Ūdā, Meknes, now in the Dār al-Jāma‘i Museum in Meknes, was probably also endowed by Sultan Ismā‘īl (El Khammar, “Mosquées et oratoires de Meknès”, p. 302, figs. 105-107).

²⁸ Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum, wdw 30 (height 101 cm, length 105 cm, width 62 cm).

²⁹ Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum, wdw 21 (height 100 cm, length 108 cm, width 62 cm).

³⁰ Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum, wdw 31 (height 139 cm, length 104 cm, width 82 cm).

³¹ The *minbar* of the Great Mosque of Tangier was transferred around 2002 to the Museum of ‘Alawī History at the Mausoleum of Muḥammad V in Rabat, which is not open to the public, and a copy of the *minbar* put in its place in Tangier.

to Tangier in 1889.³² It can be associated with his attempt to revive Islamic studies in that town, and his endowment of a library to the Great Mosque.³³ A fine late nineteenth-century volume of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from the Great Mosque of Tangier, carrying the Sultan's endowment document of 1310/1893, is also now in the Lūqash Madrasa Museum.³⁴

There were chairs at the Great Mosque of Tangier at an earlier date; they are mentioned and depicted by Domingo Badía y Leblich (Ali Bey), one of the few travellers who, in 1803, had access to Moroccan mosques in his disguise as a Muslim. In addition to the *minbar*, he wrote, "There are also two wooden chairs, on which the Fakih's sometimes sit to read before the people." However, in the simplistic drawing of the mosque furniture, neither the (existing) *minbar* nor the chairs are clearly depicted.³⁵

Professorial chairs of the usual Moroccan type are also found in the huge Mosque of Ḥasan II in Casablanca, completed in 1993. The style of these modern examples appears to be a conscious revival of Moroccan tradition; the chairs are not carved but brightly painted in red, pink and blue, and combine features from different regions of Morocco, such as the finials of the Chaouen chairs, and the rows of turned colonettes of the chairs from Meknes and Marrakesh.



Figure 11. Professorial chair endowed by Sultan Ḥasan I to the Great Mosque of Tangier. Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum. (Photo: N. Erzini).

³² "Al-Tuḥaf wa-l-manqūlāt", p. 175; Michaux-Bellaire, *Villes et tribus*, p. 128.

³³ Many of the surviving manuscripts of the library of the Great Mosque of Tangier carry the endowment of Ḥasan I.

³⁴ Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum, ms 3.

³⁵ Ali Bey, *The Travels*, vol. 1, p. 28 and pl. IV.

3. The chair for reading the *ḥadīth*

In Morocco, as elsewhere, scholars and professors supplement their income from teaching by a variety of other appointments: giving the Friday sermon, leading prayers, or reciting the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, or special prayers such as the *Latīf* or the *Shifā'*, etc. The *kursī li-rāwī al-ḥadīth*, which is used for reading the *ḥadīth* before Friday prayers, is yet another type of chair still endowed to the congregational mosques of Morocco. The reading of the *ḥadīth*, and particularly the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, before Friday prayers is thought to have been instituted in Morocco in the early eighteenth century by Sultan Ismā'īl. The *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, which was carried by the eponymous '*abīd al-Bukhārī*', the black slave army bred by Sultan Ismā'īl, took on a ritual character in Morocco from that time. The Sultan required his slaves to take an oath of allegiance on a copy of this book, to promise to live by the Islamic precepts encoded in it, and carry it before them in battle. According to the chronicler al-Qādirī, "Among this year's events [1120/1708–9] was the institution of the reading of the *ḥadīth* containing the invocation to the people to listen, when the *imām* leaves the *maqṣūra* for the *minbar* to deliver the *khuṭba* and lead the prayer on Friday."³⁶ This tradition of reading the *ḥadīth al-inṣāt* before the sermon still continues in Morocco today. According to al-Tāzī, Sultan Ismā'īl endowed a *kursī li-rāwī al-ḥadīth* (al-Tāzī termed it both a *kursī* and a *dikka*) at the Qarawiyyīn, and had it placed below the great chandelier of the *qibla* aisle.³⁷

In 1911 Michaux-Bellaire reported six "chairs for readers of the *ḥadīth*" in the Qarawiyyīn, and described them as having no backrests.³⁸ In 1912, Pérétié referred to a *ḥadīth* chair in the Qarawiyyīn as *kursī li-l-tawrīq* ("chair for reading"). He noted that all major mosques had a *ḥadīth* chair, and he asserted that there were six *ḥadīth* chairs in the Qarawiyyīn, which are marked by x's on the schematic plan, along with the professorial chairs. The presence of six *ḥadīth* chairs at the Qarawiyyīn might be explained by the large size of the mosque: one reader was not loud enough to be heard throughout the mosque. Before amplification, it was common practice for the words of a *khaṭīb* or

³⁶ Al-Qādirī, *Nashr al-mathānī*, p. 158.

³⁷ Al-Tāzī, *Jāmi' al-Qarawiyyīn*, vol. 2, p. 381, n. 63; Pedersen discusses the Middle Eastern *dikka* in "Masdjid", in *EP*, pp. 663-664; Jomier, "Dikka", in *EP*.

³⁸ Michaux-Bellaire, "L'enseignement indigène au Maroc", p. 446.

reader to be projected by a series of “repeaters” further and further away from the *mihrāb*. Pérétié also noted that this type of chair was endowed for use throughout the week at the Qarawiyyīn, not only on Fridays, for reading the *ḥadīth* very early in the morning and between the sunset and evening prayers. He described the most important of the *ḥadīth* chairs as being located to the left of the *mihrāb*. A lamp in front of the *mihrāb*, which was attached to a pulley mechanism, was lowered for the reading of the *ḥadīth*.³⁹ Pérétié’s description suggests that more extensive passages of the *ḥadīth* were read daily than just the *ḥadīth al-inṣāt*.

Pérétié described the *ḥadīth* chair as a platform with only one step and no backrest or armrests. Some of the platforms had a low backrest or armrest on three sides, much lower than the backrest of the professorial chairs.⁴⁰ Two *ḥadīth* chairs survive from the Qarawiyyīn, both now in the Najjārīn Museum in Fez, and they fit Pérétié’s description, one having a low backrest, and the other having no backrest. These platforms have only one step. One is unusual in having elaborate and large-scale painted decoration with a white interlaced stellar design (fig. 12).

The form taken by other surviving *kursī li-rāwī al-ḥadīth* or *dikka* in Morocco is even simpler, being a platform or low box, without steps. Only the four sides of the *ḥadīth* chairs or platforms are decorated, not the flat top, which is usually covered with felt. It relates to the form of the *dikka* of Mashriqi mosques, in being a raised platform, although the scale of the *dikkas* of Mamluk Cairo is much larger than the Moroccan *kursī li-rāwī al-ḥadīth* (the Middle Eastern *dikka* can be several metres high). According to Sijelmassi, there was a *ḥadīth* chair at the tomb of Mawlāy Idrīs in Fez.⁴¹ A disused mid-twentieth-century example of the *ḥadīth* chair was brought from Fez, possibly discarded from the Bū ‘Ināniyya Madrasa, for the collection of the Lūqash Madrasa Museum.⁴² An older, probably nineteenth-century *ḥadīth* chair is still in weekly use at the Raysūnī Zāwiya in Tetuan (fig. 13). In 2008,

³⁹ Pérétié, “Les medrasas de Fès”, pp. 316-317, 358.

⁴⁰ Pérétié, “Les medrasas de Fès”, p. 316.

⁴¹ Sijelmassi, *Maroc méditerranée*, p. 207. A *ḥadīth* chair is no longer in place at the tomb. It is possible that Sijelmassi confused the professorial chairs now in the Qarawiyyin with *ḥadīth* chairs.

⁴² Tetuan, Lūqash Madrasa Museum, wdw 8 (height 34 cm, length 113 cm, width 80 cm).



Figure 12. Chair for the reading of the *ḥadīth*, probably nineteenth century, from the Qarawiyyīn. Fez, Najjārīn Museum. (Photograph courtesy of the Mohammed Karim Lamrani Foundation for the Nejjarine Ensemble, Fez).



Figure 13. *Ḥadīth* chair. Tetuan, Raysūnī Zāwiya. (Photo: N. Erzini).

a new *ḥadīth* chair was installed in the new Umma Mosque in Tetuan – the tradition of *ḥadīth* chairs is still alive. Although loosely termed *kursī*, this type of platform should not be confused with the professorial chair.

The *ḥadīth* chair or platform of the Raysūnī Zāwiya is decorated with similar geometric designs and colours to those of the *minbar* and the professorial chair from the same *zāwiya*, suggesting that they were commissioned and endowed simultaneously, when the *zāwiya* was rebuilt and furnished in the mid-nineteenth century by Sidī ‘Abd al-Salām b. ‘Alī al-Raysūnī. Thus, by the nineteenth century, if not earlier, the liturgical furniture of Moroccan mosques was fully elaborated, and might consist of a set of three types of chairs: the *minbar*, the professorial chair and the *ḥadīth* chair.⁴³

4. The origins of the Moroccan professorial chair

The form of Moroccan professorial chairs clearly evokes the Medinan tradition of the first *minbar*, made for the Prophet Muḥammad for his mosque at Medina, and possibly the Umayyad *minbars* at Mecca and Damascus. According to early Muslim sources, the first *minbar*, probably introduced during the years 7-9/628-31, was a wooden chair with two steps and a seat, a backrest made of three planks, and arms that ended in finials, on which the Prophet would rest his hands. It was made of *ṭarfā*’ wood or tamarisk from the woods near Medina, and the carpenter was a Byzantine or Coptic slave. The Prophet preached from this *minbar* and led prayers. After his death in 632, the *minbar* was used by the caliphs Abū Bakr (r. 632-34), ‘Umar (r. 634-44) and ‘Uthmān (r. 644-56). The origin of the *minbar* is usually traced to the judge’s seat of pre-Islamic Arabia; the *minbar* continued to serve as a throne or seat, indicating the political role of the sermon, and it also

⁴³ There was one other type of elaborately carved and painted chair in use in Morocco, which was employed not in mosques, but to display the bride during wedding celebrations. There are several bridal chairs to be found in museums, in the Najjārīn Museum in Fez, the Qaṣba Museum, Tangier and elsewhere. Like the professorial chairs, the bridal chairs have a backrest and armrests, but they never have the two steps of the professorial chairs. See Bernes and Jacob, *Arts et objets du Maroc*; Jouin, “Iconographie de la mariée citadine”, pls. 20, 21.

became the custom for each new caliph to receive homage while seated on this *minbar*.⁴⁴

The Umayyad caliph Mu‘āwiya (r. 661-80) and his successors ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 684-705) and al-Walīd I (r. 705-15) wanted to take the Prophet’s *minbar* to Damascus where they resided, but the people of Medina objected and miraculous events (a darkening of the sky and a sandstorm) intervened to prevent its removal. In 670, however, Mu‘āwiya decided to raise the height of the Prophet’s *minbar* in Medina by adding a platform with six steps.⁴⁵

By the end of the seventh century the use of a *minbar* for the Friday sermon had probably become widespread in congregational mosques, though the form taken by these *minbars* is not known. The taller form of *minbar* following Mu‘āwiya’s design became the dominant type throughout the Muslim world, including Morocco. However, it is likely that the two-stepped *minbar* or chair of the Prophet in Medina was also imitated during the first centuries of Islam. We know that during the Umayyad period the *minbars* of Mecca and Damascus were low and portable, and it is possible they were stored within or in front of the *miḥrāb*. At the Ḥarām in Mecca, the *minbar* was brought out from the Maqām Ibrāhīm to a place near the Ka‘ba for the sermon. According to al-Azrāqī (d. 865), the Meccan *minbar* had only three steps. Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) indicated that the Meccan *minbar* was on wheels, though this was probably one that was rebuilt in the ninth century.⁴⁶

In the late eighth and ninth centuries most *minbars* were probably movable, sometimes on wheels, stored in a room to the right of the *miḥrāb*, and moved into the mosque for the Friday sermon.⁴⁷ This tra-

⁴⁴ Abū Dāwud refers to a *minbar* with two steps, and one of his sources was Tamīm al-Dārī (d. 660), companion of the Prophet; Abū Dāwud, *Ṣaḥīḥ sunan*, vol. 1, pp. 298-299. Tamīm al-Dārī was himself a sermonizer (*qāṣṣ*) and familiar with the pulpits of churches in Syria. Al-Ṭabarī also described the Prophet’s *minbar* as having two steps: al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, vol. 1, p. 1591. Sauvaget assembled descriptions by later historians, especially Ibn al-Najjār (d. 1245), who refer to the backrest and finials: Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade*, pp. 85-87; Bloom *et al.*, *The Minbar from the Kutubiyya*, p. 42, n. 12.

⁴⁵ Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade*, pp. 87ff, 141ff; Pedersen *et al.*, “Minbar”, in *EP*.

⁴⁶ Schacht, “An Unknown Type of Minbar”, pp. 156, 170-173; Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade*, pp. 87-89, 139, 143; Bloom *et al.*, *The Minbar from the Kutubiyya*, pp. 41-65; Fierro, “The Mobile Minbar in Cordoba”, p. 157. Regarding the *minbar* at Mecca, see Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, pp. 95, 97.

⁴⁷ Schacht, “An Unknown Type of Minbar”; Terrasse, “Les minbars anciens du Maroc”.

dition had reached Ifrīqiya by the ninth century, for example at Sfax and Tunis, followed by the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the tenth century and Qal'at Banī Ḥammād in the eleventh. The tradition has continued in Morocco to the present day, where *minbars* are stored in a room flanking the *mihrāb*, pulled out for use on Fridays (often on metal tracks) and put away again for the week. Both Joseph Schacht and Henri Terrasse, in separate articles published in 1957, showed how the medieval *minbars* of North Africa formed a distinctive group, and pointed to an early Islamic, Medinan source, for this development. As Terrasse was familiar with the interiors of Moroccan mosques, he must also have seen many professorial chairs (one is illustrated in his book on the Andalusīyyīn Mosque in Fez),⁴⁸ but he does not mention them or discuss their relationship to the two-stepped *minbar* of Medina. Terrasse only stated, with reference to large *minbars*, “Imitation of the Prophet’s *minbar*, which had two steps and a seat with a back-rest, cannot be invoked here.”⁴⁹

Both the movable *minbars* and the professorial chairs in Morocco can be seen as examples of fidelity to a Medinan tradition. Indeed, the preoccupation with the two-stepped *minbar* of the Prophet is also seen in the position that the *khaṭīb* occupies on the *minbar* in Morocco when giving his sermon, usually standing on the third (sometimes the sixth) step from the ground. In the fourteenth century, the *ḥadīth* about the Prophet’s *minbar* having two steps and a seat is referred to by the traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa of Tangier and in the early twentieth century the accounts of both Abū Dāwud and al-Ṭabarī were repeated by the chronicler ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Zaydān of Meknes.⁵⁰

Furthermore, visual representations of the Prophet’s two-stepped *minbar* at Medina can be found in Moroccan manuscripts. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Moroccan copies of al-Jazūlī’s *Dalā’il al-khayrāt* usually have two pages of schematic representations of the Mosque at Medina; on one page are the tombs of the Prophet Muḥammad, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and on the other page is the *mihrāb*, a hanging lamp and the Prophet’s *minbar*. The latter is depicted in profile as

⁴⁸ Terrasse, *La mosquée des Andalous*, vol. 2, pl. 3. Terrasse was not alone: Maslow in *Les mosquées de Fès*, p. 31, stated that there was no furniture in Moroccan mosques.

⁴⁹ Terrasse, “Les minbars anciens du Maroc”, p. 159.

⁵⁰ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Voyages*, vol. 1, p. 275; Ibn Zaydān, *Iṭḥāf a’lām al-nās*, vol. 1, p. 168.

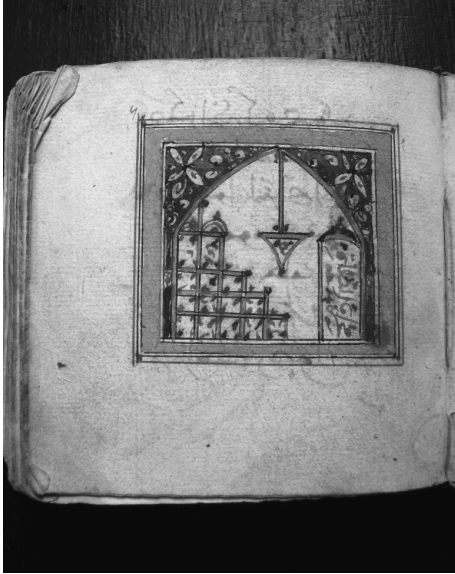


Figure 14. The *minbar* of the Prophet represented in a schematic drawing of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, from a copy of al-Jazūli's *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*, Morocco, eighteenth century. Tangier, private collection. (Photo: N. Erzini).

having a high backrest and (usually) three steps. These three steps are probably two steps and the armrests of the seat, as seen in existing Moroccan professorial chairs (fig. 14). The same iconography is found in images of the *minbars* at Medina, Mecca and Jerusalem in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century illustrated copies of the *Dhakhīrat al-muhtāj fi l-ṣalāt 'alā ṣāhib al-liwā' wa-l-tāj* of al-Mu'tī b. Ṣāliḥ al-Sharqāwī of Bejaad (d. 1766) (fig. 15).⁵¹

While the form of Moroccan professorial chairs is based on the Prophet's *minbar*, the function of the chairs for occasional lectures to the general public has a different origin. During the first centuries of Islam, in addition to the Friday sermon from a *minbar*, unofficial sermons or lectures were given to the public by an appointed speaker, known as a *qāṣṣ* or *wā'iz*, who lectured in mosques, madrasas, mausoleums and in the streets.⁵² Significantly, the speakers were also known as *aṣḥāb al-karāsī* ("they of the chairs") because they lectured from chairs, sometimes made of teak. Their discourse was called a *dhikr* or *wa'z*. These unofficial sermons or lectures, often delivered from chairs, constitute the origin of the modern *kursī li-l-wa'z*. Hatim Mahamid has documented the popularity of these public lectures in

⁵¹ The Ministry of Awqāf and Islamic Affairs's partial facsimile of al-Sharqāwī's *Dhakhīrat al-muhtāj* reproduces pages from several manuscripts of the book, including copies in the Ḥasaniyya Library, Rabat, (ms. 10318 and ms. 7868, fols. 158 and 125 respectively), and in the National Library, Rabat (ms. n. 513, fols. 30, 34). Some of the plates are erroneously labelled.

⁵² Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, pp. 17-19; Pedersen *et al.*, "Masjdīd", in *EP*; Pellat, "Ḳāṣṣ", in *EP*.

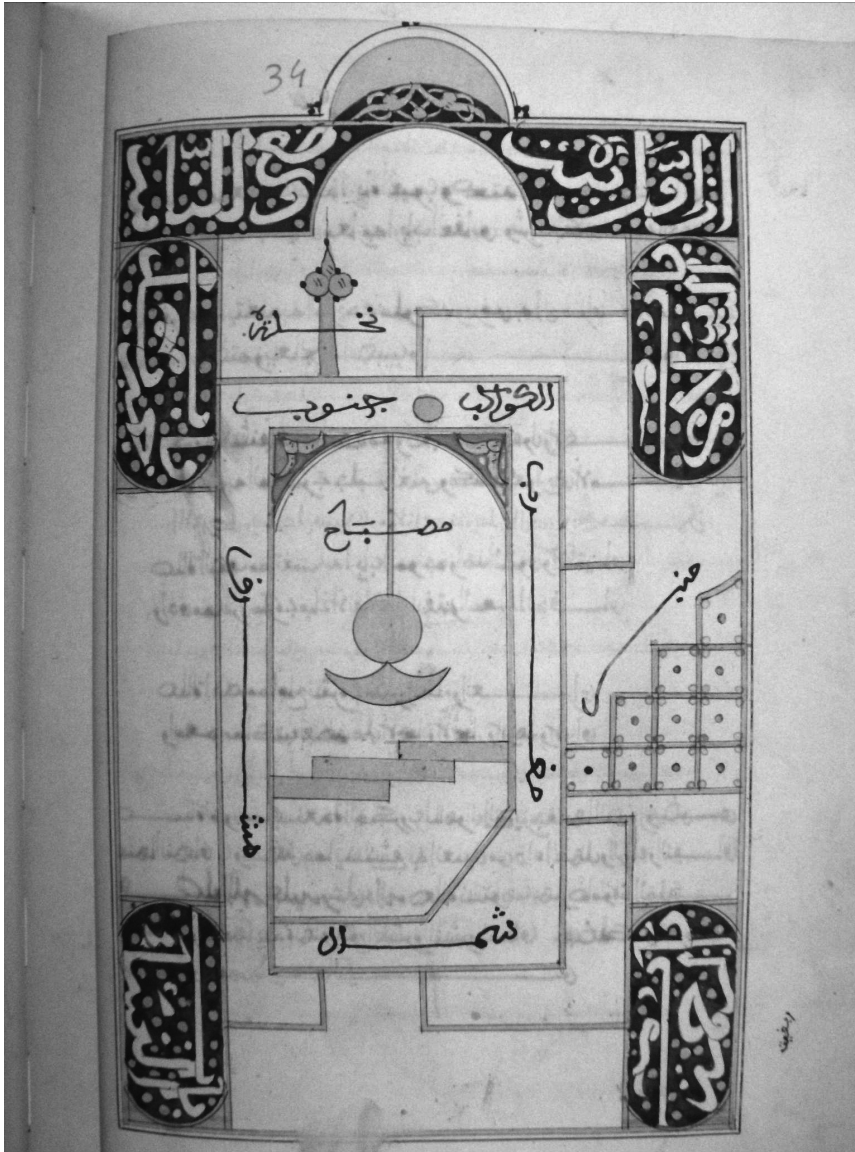


Figure 15. The *minbar* of the Prophet clearly identified in a schematic plan of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, from a copy of al-Sharqāwī's *Dhakhīrat al-muhtāj*, Morocco, eighteenth or nineteenth century. (Rabat, National Library, ms. n. 513, fol. 34).

Mamluk Syria, where they were termed *majālis wa'z* or *mī'ād*. In fifteenth-century Damascus, some of the preachers sat on chairs for their unofficial sermons.⁵³

Along with the unofficial public sermons or *wa'z*, regular lectures to students of the religious sciences were given by salaried professors from endowed professorial chairs. The endowment of professorial chairs in mosques coincided with the development of more formal structures of education and the building of madrasas. George Makdisi suggested that the modern term for the endowed university post, the “professorial chair”, came from the use of real chairs in the educational institutions of the medieval Islamic world, and he cited numerous examples of individuals holding “chairs” in the mosques and madrasas of eleventh- and twelfth-century Baghdad. However, medieval texts lack clarity about whether a “chair” was a professorship in the abstract, and the professor lectured while seated on the floor, or denoted the existence of a real chair. The “chairs” were named either after the subject taught, the patron of the endowment, or the professor. The appointment to a professorship or “chair” was accompanied by the ritual gift of a robe of honour from the ruler, and followed by an inaugural lecture.⁵⁴

When Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the Mustanṣiriyya Madrasa in Baghdad, he noted the presence of real chairs for instruction.⁵⁵ He described how the professor sat under a small wooden dome on a chair covered with a carpet. If professorial chairs did exist in the medieval Mashriq, apparently none have been preserved and it is not clear from literary references what form they took. Miniature paintings, showing two-stepped *minbars* or chairs in mosques, might be useful in this respect.⁵⁶

It may also be impossible to establish whether or not chairs were in use for teaching in contemporary al-Andalus.⁵⁷ Makdisi suggested that education in al-Andalus was primarily conducted in mosques, as there

⁵³ Mahamid, “Mosques as Higher Educational Institutions”, pp. 209-211, n. 75.

⁵⁴ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, pp. 17-19.

⁵⁵ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Voyages*, vol. 2, p. 109.

⁵⁶ See, for example, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Persian miniatures illustrated in Binyon, Wilkinson and Grey, *Persian Miniature Painting*, pls. LXIII (the Prophet Muḥammad and the first *minbar*), LXX and LXXXIV (later chairs or *minbars*).

⁵⁷ In Catholic Spain the term *kursi* was applied to the seat or cathedra of a bishop, as well as his diocese, but the derivation of this usage from Andalusī teaching has not been documented. See Dozy, “kursī”, in *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*. In modern Spanish the term “cátedra” is used for a professorial chair at a university.

were few madrasas in this region.⁵⁸ The tradition of popular sermons or *wa'z* also spread from the Mashriq to al-Andalus, but *wa'z* lectures were less prominent in al-Andalus because of opposition from the conservative Mālikī orthodoxy.⁵⁹

Chairs known as *vā'iz kürsüsü* (for general lectures, not the Friday sermon) and *tilavet kürsüsü* (chairs for reading or recitation) can be seen in Ottoman mosques, such as the Yeni Valide,⁶⁰ Fatih, Hamidi Evvel, Şehzade, Aya Sofya, Süleymaniye and Ahmed mosques in Istanbul,⁶¹ and at the Selimiye in Edirne. As in Morocco, these chairs occupy various locations in the prayer hall. The Ottoman *vā'iz kürsüsü* are still in use for unofficial sermons and lectures, and hence are equipped with microphones and ladders, but they are not used for traditional education as is the case in Morocco. The form of Ottoman chairs is also different from those in Morocco: they have a high box-like shape, with or without an arched backrest and armrests, and with finials marking the corners of the seat. The seats are so high that a small (separate) ladder is needed to mount the chair. In other words, they do not recall the description of the Prophet's *minbar* at Medina, with two steps and a seat. Often the chairs are found in conjunction with a Qur'ān box or stand, equally tall and square in plan, though slightly smaller than the chairs. The chairs also have carved and inlaid wood and *mashrabiyya* panels, and are more elaborate than the Moroccan examples. Some *vā'iz kürsüsü* are even further removed from the Medinan model: made of marble or stone like later Ottoman *minbars*, they take the form of a European pulpit, a conical or cylindrical balcony standing on a pillar, built against the wall, and reached by a flight of masonry stairs.

The Ottoman type of chair as found in Istanbul, with its high box-like shape, can also be seen in the Ottoman provinces of Tunisia and

⁵⁸ Makdisi, "The Madrasa in Spain".

⁵⁹ Pellat, "Kāṣṣ", in *EP*; Arié, "Traduction annotée", p. 362.

⁶⁰ A painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme depicts a man seated on an Ottoman *kürsü* and reading (c. 1900; private collection), and a painting by Rudolf Ernst accurately depicts the *kürsü* in the Yeni Valide Mosque, Istanbul, with a ladder, and a man seated on the ground in front of it (private collection). The *kürsü* in the Yeni Valide Mosque is illustrated in Denny, "Quotations In and Out of Context", fig. 6. Denny translates *kürsü* as "chair pulpit".

⁶¹ Barišta, *Türk El Sanatları*, pp. 81-83, figs. 121-124 (there appear to be two *kürsü* from the Fatih Mosque illustrated here); Rogers and Ward, *Süleyman the Magnificent*, p. 156, refer to a chair in the Süleymaniye and translate the term *vā'iz kürsüsü* as "preacher's chair" (no illustration).

Algeria. They can be found in Tunisia, for example, at the Yūsuf Dāy Mosque in Tunis, which was endowed by the Ottoman governor in 1631; at the al-Jadīd Mosque in Tunis, built by Ḥusayn Bāy ‘Alī Pasha in 1726-27; and at the Ḥajjī Sulaymān Ḥamza Mosque in Mahdia, built in 1824.⁶² In Tunisia, a tall Ottoman-type Qur’ān box or stand is always placed immediately in front of the chair, forming a single unit. In Algeria, there are few remaining chairs, such as the one at the Mazouna Zāwiya.⁶³ This is probably due to the rapid dismantling of the *waqf* system by French rule after 1843.⁶⁴

The combination of chair and Qur’ān box mentioned above resembles the chair-lecterns found in Egypt, where the two elements are fused into one piece of furniture. They had two levels, one for the seat, the other forming the desk or lectern for the manuscript. In early nineteenth-century Cairo, Edward Lane described seats, “having a kind of desk to bear a volume of the Kurān”, that were placed in front of or by the side of the *dikka* of mosques.⁶⁵ The form of the chair-lectern and its positioning beside the *dikka* is confirmed by a contemporary engraving of a Cairene mosque by Pascal Coste.⁶⁶

These chairs do not seem to have been used for teaching. In the Middle East, the generic term *kursī*, sometimes *kursī li-l-sūra*,⁶⁷ is applied to chairs and stands for storing the Qur’ān, and for sitting while reciting. The thirteenth-century Andalusī traveller Ibn Jubayr saw several reciters seated on chairs reading the Qur’ān before the Friday prayers at the Niẓāmiyya Madrasa in Baghdad.⁶⁸ Al-Maqrīzī described

⁶² Ibn Māmī, “Jāmi‘ Yūsuf Dāy”, illustration p. 135. See also Pektaş, *Tunus’ta Osmanlı*, pp. 25, 84, 86, 292, figures. 31, 178. Our thanks to Professor Pektaş for sending photographs of chairs in Tunis.

⁶³ Our thanks go to Professor Mohammed Salah Boukechour of the University of Algiers, who generously investigated and photographed the chair at the Mazouna Zāwiya. Thanks also to Professor Zaïm Khenchelaoui who informed us that there were some chairs of the Ottoman type in the old mosques of Algiers, but that they lacked ladders or stools, suggesting they are no longer in use.

⁶⁴ In Delphin’s *Fas, son université et l’enseignement supérieur musulman* (1889), professorial chairs are described as peculiar to higher education in Morocco, and it is implied, although not stated, in the text, that this tradition was not to be found in Algeria.

⁶⁵ Lane, *Manners and Customs*, p. 86.

⁶⁶ Coste, *Architecture arabe*. For an Egyptian chair-lectern depicted in an orientalist painting, see Ludwig Deutsch’s *Interior of a Mosque*, private collection, dated 1902.

⁶⁷ Jomier, “Dikka”, in *EP*; Huart and Sadan, “Kursī”, in *EP*; Pedersen *et al.*, “Masjid”, in *EP*, pp. 663-664.

⁶⁸ Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, pp. 119, 219, 222.

in the fifteenth century how there were many chairs in the Mosque of 'Amr in Fuṣṭāṭ (old Cairo), and although he does not specify the function of these chairs, they were perhaps for recitation of the Qur'ān.⁶⁹ Lane mentioned that the *Sūrat al-Kahf* (Sūra 18, The Cave) was usually recited before the Friday prayers by a reader seated on a chair.⁷⁰

It may be the case that the lack of extant professorial chairs in the Mashriq is due to the fact that their use was abandoned as new practices were implemented, as revenue from specific *waqf* endowments was eroded over time, or as large-scale reforms of the *waqf* system eradicated the funding of professorial posts. Earlier examples of Moroccan professorial chairs have certainly disappeared. In Egypt, Muḥammad 'Alī (r. 1805-49) confiscated most of the *waqf* lands of al-Azhar university mosque, and only a reduced income survived for necessary repairs. Lane noted in the early nineteenth century that the salaries of its "principal officers" (i.e. imams and *khaṭīb*s) were paid by the government, whereas "The professors receive no salaries" and survived from private incomes, family support or patronage.⁷¹ Yet despite the lack of salaries, professors continued to teach, and the erosion of professorial *waqfs* does not adequately explain the lack of surviving chairs in the Mashriq. The alternative is that we are dealing with a localized Moroccan phenomenon.

The contrast between Moroccan and Middle Eastern liturgical furniture also extends to the storage of copies of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān stands that survive from the furniture of medieval and early modern Mashriqi mosques come in a variety of shapes, variously described as chairs, platforms, reading stands, lecterns, tabouret stools, pedestal tables, or low cupboards, all somewhat confusingly labelled *kursīs*. In Morocco, Qur'ān stands *per se* do not exist in the traditional furnishing of mosques. Instead, copies of the Qur'ān and other books were stored in cupboards built into the wall on the left of the *miḥrāb*, sometimes on both sides of the *miḥrāb*.⁷² These are often simple alcoves with shelves, protected by decorative doors of two leaves, usually pierced

⁶⁹ Pedersen *et al.*, "Masjdīd", in *EP*.

⁷⁰ Lane, *Manners and Customs*, p. 8.

⁷¹ Lane, *Manners and Customs*, p. 213. The number of students had also greatly reduced after the *waqf* reform.

⁷² For the cupboards to the left of the *miḥrāb* of the Qarawiyyīn, see Pérésié, "Les medrasas de Fès", p. 358, and the schematic plan. Often, as in the Great Mosque of Tangier, the small library room to the left of the *miḥrāb* was also equipped with an external window to ventilate the books.



Figure 16. Seat, backrest, table and Qur'ān box of the intendant (*muqaddam*) of the tomb of Sultan Ismā'īl, Meknes. (Photo: N. Erzini).

to allow ventilation (sometimes the cupboard is a small room with shelves on three sides, to hold an entire library endowed to a mosque). In Pérétié's plan of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque in Fez, there are three cupboards to the left of the *mihṛāb*, one for copies of the Qur'ān, and two for the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. When copies of the Qur'ān were required in the prayer halls of Moroccan mosques, especially those copies in ten volumes or more, they were kept in simple wooden Qur'ān boxes, closed with a sliding top, known as a *rabī'a*.⁷³ The term *rabī'a*, and this form of Qur'ān box, has local medieval Andalusī and Maghribī precedents.⁷⁴ In recent times, low rectangular tables were also used, specifically for the reading of the Qur'ān in the mosque by reciters seated on the floor (fig. 16).

⁷³ There is a Qur'ān box from the Great Mosque of Tetuan now in the Lūqash Madrasa Museum, wdw 68.

⁷⁴ Dozy, "rabī'a", in *Supplément*. The most famous of Moroccan Qur'ān boxes is the Marinid example endowed to the Aqṣā Mosque, Jerusalem, by Sultan Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī. For illustration, see Salameh, *The Qur'an Manuscripts*, pp. 69-70.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to give an account of Moroccan professorial chairs, with reference to existing examples. Their presence in Morocco may be attributable to the Mālikī school of law, which tends to be conservative, based on the earliest practices in Medina. Other instances of a conservative, archaicizing tendency in Morocco have been noted by historians. The “Arab” type or hypostyle plan for mosques, based on the house of the Prophet in Medina and the Great Mosque in Damascus, has been the standard plan for Moroccan mosques from the building of the Qarawiyyīn in the ninth century onwards. The south-facing *mihrāb* of the Great Mosque of Damascus, and subsequently the Great Mosque of Cordoba, is reproduced not only at the Qarawiyyīn but at much later mosques of Fez, despite the inaccuracy of the orientation.⁷⁵ Given the preoccupation with Mālikī orthodoxy in Morocco and the country’s subsequent geographic isolation, it is perhaps not surprising that certain traditions have been preserved. The professorial chair, which looks to the original *minbar* of the Prophet as a prototype, reflects this continuity.

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⁷⁵ The Spanish Umayyads promoted their legitimacy both through association with the Umayyad lineage of Damascus and Medina, and through Mālikism as the true orthodoxy, based on the Medinan model. Bloom, “The Revival of Early Islamic Architecture”, pp. 35-41; Khoury, “The Meaning of the Great Mosque”; Fierro, “The Mobile Minbar in Cordoba”. Regarding the southern *qibla* orientation, see El Khammar, “Mosquées et oratoires de Meknès”, pp. 454-500.

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