

## Cultural Communication between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus and Its Impact on the Flourishing of Scientific Activity

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### Abstract

This study examines and analyzes the cultural dimension of Islam as embodied in Islamic civilization, understood as both a spiritual and material achievement that transcended geography, ethnicity, and the local cultures of Muslim societies. Within this framework, al-Andalus is regarded as one of the most significant civilizational accomplishments and historical legacies of Islamic civilization. The study explores how al-Andalus became a major center for the diffusion of Islamic thought and sciences, and how it helped generate channels of civilizational communication with other Islamic urban centers, especially in the Middle Maghreb. It also investigates the extent to which this cultural communication contributed to the stimulation, activation, and rapid dissemination of scientific activity across both shores of the Mediterranean. Scientific activity was not merely a cultural practice; rather, it was the outcome of accumulated intellectual and scholarly developments whose consolidation was made possible through cultural

communication. In this sense, cultural communication functioned as a guarantor of the intellectual and spiritual continuity of civilizations, since it affirmed their existence and defined their intellectual and scientific identity.

**Keywords:** cultural communication; civilization; scientific activity; al-Andalus; Middle Maghreb

### Introduction

Medieval Islamic history possesses characteristics that distinguish it from both earlier and later periods. Its intellectual dynamism and civilizational achievements elevated Arab-Islamic civilization to the rank of universal human civilizations with a global and ethical mission. One of the most important factors behind the development of this civilization's epistemic trajectory was the territorial expansion of Islam through the Islamic conquests, which provided the Arab-Islamic world with political and geographical extensions in Europe, most notably al-Andalus. The latter may be regarded as the cradle of Arab-

Islamic civilization beyond the geographical boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula.

In this context, it is impossible to overlook the effective and creative role of cultural communication, manifested in the exchange and cross-fertilization of knowledge across the two shores of the Mediterranean. This interaction contributed significantly to the construction of the civilizational and cultural edifice of Arab-Islamic civilization. Scientific activity in al-Andalus and the Middle Maghreb was not a fleeting historical moment; rather, it represented an exceptional phase in the trajectory of Islamic civilization. Although this medieval period witnessed fragmentation among Islamic polities in the Mediterranean basin, and although the fall of the Umayyad state was followed by the emergence of the Taifa kingdoms, scholarly life was not substantially undermined by these political ruptures. On the contrary, scholars and intellectuals played a pioneering role in advancing both transmitted and rational sciences in Andalusian and Maghrebi urban centers.

A close examination of the development of scholarly activity in the Arab-Andalusian civilization of the Islamic West reveals that this movement was represented by schools and intellectual currents led by thinkers and philosophers whose ideas transcended regions and cultures. The principal factor behind the development of scientific life in both the Middle

Maghreb and al-Andalus was a productive cultural communication founded on the exchange of sciences and knowledge between the two shores. Equally important was the role of scholars' migration in pursuit of learning, exploration, and the dissemination of ideas and works among thinkers in both al-Andalus and the Middle Maghreb, as well as the exchange of correspondence among thinkers, philosophers, and judges.

Accordingly, no historian concerned with cultural history can overlook the spiritual and demonstrative relationship between Abu Madyan Shu'ayb and Ibn Arabi, the extent to which the scholars of the Middle Maghreb were influenced by the thought of Ibn Rushd and Ibn Tufayl, or the role of the Middle Maghreb in providing conditions conducive to scholarly research while itself being shaped by the social dynamism of al-Andalus. From this perspective, the present study seeks to clarify the influence exerted by cultural communication between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus on the flourishing of scientific activity during a medieval period rich in intellectual and scientific achievements, yet also marked by political conflict, fragmentation, and the succession of kingdoms and dynasties. It also highlights the role of these two regions in transmitting ideas, knowledge, and sciences to both Islamic lands and the Christian West. In this regard, the study addresses a number of indicators and factors that deepened

communication between these two Mediterranean regions and examines the role of such communication in the flourishing of scientific activity.

### **1. Scholarly and Cultural Migration and Its Role in Strengthening Cultural Communication between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus**

The environment of the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus was one that attracted competencies and dynamic ideas that contributed to safeguarding Arab-Islamic civilization in al-Andalus and the broader Islamic world. This communication was not merely the result of geographical proximity between the two regions. Rather, intellectual and cultural integration constituted the most significant factor linking them, especially given the ethnic diversity of Arab and Berber populations, the multiplicity of cultural traditions, and the dominance of the Maliki school in jurisprudential and interpretive life in both regions. This context fostered intellectual rapprochement among various cultural currents despite differences in specialization and fields of knowledge. A fundamental element in this cultural communication was the harmony between religion and wisdom, and the interaction between thought and jurisprudence.

Mutual migration between the two regions was shaped by several factors, including cultural ones such as the multiplicity of intellectual and juristic

schools in al-Andalus, as well as the rise of new cities in the Middle Maghreb, such as Bijaya (Bejaia), which played a strategic role in the development of knowledge and cultural life during the medieval period. These cities also helped alleviate the demographic pressure experienced by Andalusian urban centers (Balard & Ducellier, 2002, p. 299). Owing to its geographical position, the Middle Maghreb served as the pivotal link between the Mashriq, with its intellectual and spiritual symbolism, and al-Andalus, which represented a civilizational extension of the Islamic East into the Christian European West (Balard & Ducellier, 2002, p. 304).

In this context, cultural migration was not primarily driven by coercion, oppression, or political injustice exercised by rulers over their subjects in either the Middle Maghreb or al-Andalus. Rather, it often had a pragmatic dimension. The circulation of scholars and ideas among Islamic polities created the conditions for the emergence of cultural movements that could also serve to legitimize political authority. This was evident in the Almohad state, which encouraged cultural movements in order to attract scholars and transform them into platforms for disseminating its ideology. When the Almohad state was established in al-Andalus, it remained in conflict with the Almoravids in present-day Algeria and Morocco. The Almohads therefore resorted to cultural

reform in order to establish channels of communication between the two shores and attract as many scholars and judges as possible to their side against the Almoravids (Al-Jabri, 1998, p. 43).

Thus, the migration of scholars was not simply motivated by a desire to escape the political realities of the Middle Maghreb; rather, it was often driven by the search for renewal and creativity in both the religious and rational sciences, whether through the elaboration of juristic branches or the refinement of philosophical translations. In this way, individual scholars came to embody entire schools of thought, each with followers and adherents in both the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus. This, in turn, helped create a cultural bridge between the two regions.

What is particularly striking is that the geographical location of the Middle Maghreb enabled it to become a refuge for al-Andalus, its people, and its sciences. Andalusian sciences and cultural products arriving from the northern shore often settled first in the Middle Maghreb before traveling onward to the Arab East. At the same time, political stability played a major role in encouraging migration between the two regions. The Middle Maghreb became a safe haven for several jurists and scholars, such as the chief judge Ahmad ibn Abd Allah ibn Dhakwan, known as Abu al-Abbas, who found the Middle Maghreb a secure place of exile and settled in Oran, where he served as

preacher and chief judge of al-Andalus (Dararjah, n.d., p. 169).

This judge contributed to invigorating cultural life in the Middle Maghreb, particularly in Oran, where he participated in an enlightening intellectual project. There is no doubt that many students benefited from his knowledge and jurisprudence, and that he exerted a notable influence on the cultural milieu of the Middle Maghreb. This influence was made possible by the pluralistic identity of the region in the medieval period, which allowed various ethnicities and intellectual and juristic currents to merge within a unified yet diverse society composed of the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus.

Because of the richness of medieval history and the abundance of its political and cultural achievements, migration in this broad field was shaped by political determinants and was organically linked to the nature of relations between corresponding states in the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus. This was particularly evident during the Nasrid state in al-Andalus and the Zayyanid state in the Middle Maghreb. Here, migration was not compulsory or forced; rather, it was voluntary and aimed at mutual benefit in the civilizational, intellectual, and political spheres. These social factors reveal the extent of the cultural and intellectual diversity experienced by the Islamic West, especially during the medieval period, which was distinguished by the emergence of intellectual and juristic

elites that contributed to shaping the civilizational sphere in both the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus.

Among the forms of migration that served as productive gateways to cultural enrichment and civilizational communication was the reciprocal migration that took place within the framework of relations among the states of the Islamic West, particularly the communicative cultural migration between Nasrid al-Andalus and Zayyanid Tlemcen (Yamani, 2019, p. 38). This migration was not the result of irresistible circumstances imposed as a *fait accompli*; rather, migration itself was conceived as a cultural and communicative project between the two capitals, driven primarily by mutual goodwill and cooperation.

What is especially noteworthy is that the refugee or migrant moving between the two shores was not regarded as a burden upon the host society. Instead, such individuals often served as vectors of intellectual and cultural support, since each migrant carried with him ideas and cultural projects rather than merely the anxieties of exile or expulsion associated with forced migration caused by political or intellectual opposition to ruling authorities. Particularly striking is the fact that the mutual perception between the intellectuals of al-Andalus and Tlemcen was elevated to a scientific level, with each side viewing the other as a center of learning (Yamani, 2019, p. 40). This was made possible by the sound relationship linking scholars,

intellectuals, and political authority, which assumed responsibility for cultural reform. In addition, the political relations between the two states also encouraged cultural migration (Yamani, 2019, p. 41), especially in the interest of preventing fragmentation in the Islamic West in the face of the expanding Christian Spanish threat. This harmony stemmed from the two states' commitment not to interfere in one another's internal affairs, not to support internal rebellions, and not to favor any faction in domestic conflicts. All of these factors facilitated cultural communication between them.

It may therefore be argued that the medieval Islamic period cannot be adequately studied through historical methodology alone. Rather, it requires an interdisciplinary approach involving philosophy, sociology, and the religious sciences. This is due to the richness of the scientific and cultural heritage of the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus, as well as the constructive and effective nature of the reciprocal migrations that helped shape the cultural and civilizational landscape of the Islamic West.

Among the migrations characterized by an epistemic and exploratory purpose were scholarly journeys undertaken to investigate knowledge, benefit from the sciences of others, and learn about their lands and leading figures. One example encountered in the course of this study is a scholarly journey from al-Andalus to Tlemcen undertaken for the purpose

of acquiring knowledge and transmitting it back to al-Andalus. Tlemcen was regarded as a cultural gain capable of strengthening the bonds of communication between the two regions. This journey is known as the journey of al-Qalasadi (Belmadani, 2018, p. 140), whose focus was the cultural field and whose aim was to transmit the knowledge found in Zayyanid Tlemcen, a city of recognized scholarly status whose shaykhs enjoyed an illustrious reputation (Belmadani, 2018, p. 145). This prestige intensified al-Qalasadi's desire to travel there.

This journey was not merely movement across Andalusian space; its objective was to build a cultural and scientific bridge between the two regions, especially with Tlemcen, which served as a center of civilizational radiance for the people of al-Andalus owing to its scholarly abundance, intellectual distinction, political stability, and strategic geographical position linking East and West. Even more telling is the fact that the traveler's description of the city was neither sentimental nor poetic, but rather purely scholarly and epistemic. He described it as a market of knowledge and a commercial center for learners (Belmadani, 2018, p. 146).

This description clearly indicates the scientific distinction of the Middle Maghreb and the stability of its political climate, which qualified it to become a source of intellectual inspiration for the people of al-Andalus, including shaykhs, scholars, and ascetics. This

mutual inspiration between the inhabitants of the two regions soon became a foundational element of a shared cultural basis linking the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus.

These communicative manifestations suggest the superiority of the Middle Maghreb, particularly during the medieval period, in its capacity to create values of harmony, integration, and accommodation between Andalusian migrants and the social environment of the Middle Maghreb, which was marked by political and social stability. This included coexistence not only among Muslims but also between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially the Jewish community that suffered from the consequences of Christian religious extremism.

By way of example, one may refer to the migration of the Jews of al-Andalus to the Middle Maghreb, especially after the fall of Granada. They concentrated in cities such as Oran, Constantine, Tlemcen, Mostaganem, and Ténès because of the knowledge and scientific institutions these cities offered. These Jewish migrants contributed to the transfer of both rational and applied knowledge, particularly in medicine and theology. Tlemcen, in particular, became one of their principal centers (Ben Daoud & Wahrani, 2018, p. 113), where they contributed to the advancement of medicine as a scientific profession that fostered the development of Middle Maghrebi society and elevated it to the rank of

scientific and cultural urban centers. These indicators suggest that cultural communication between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus was the product of political and social stability, as well as the depth of political and religious relations between them.

## **2. Sciences, Scholars, and Their Role in Embodying Cultural Communication as a Civilizational Bridge between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus**

No meaningful communication can be established, nor can its banner be raised, without scholars who carry the mission of advancing sciences and knowledge. This compels us to argue that scholars themselves were the principal agents in bridging cultural communication between the two shores. This was due to the historical trajectory of the emergence of sciences in this Islamic region, which soon became an interactive space for the exchange of sciences and forms of knowledge. Scholarly travel became the main vehicle through which learning circulated between the two shores.

Among the thinkers who emerged from this cultural communication between al-Andalus and the Middle Maghreb and who contributed to renewing the communicative movement between the two regions was Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, author of the *Muqaddimah*. He was particularly attached to the Middle Maghreb, especially Tlemcen. It is well known to researchers in the

cultural history of science that Ibn Khaldun played both scientific and political roles in Bijaya and Tlemcen, and that he moved frequently between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus. He was deeply influenced by the lived realities of both shores. In this regard, it may be said that Tlemcen served as a source of intellectual inspiration for Ibn Khaldun (Jum'ah, n.d., p. 230), especially during his stay in Qal'at Bani Salamah, which fell within the domain of Tlemcen.

It was in this fortress that he wrote one of the most important intellectual and civilizational treasures to become a universal heritage for humanity. This, in turn, enabled Tlemcen to be classified among the great scholarly and cultural centers throughout history. For this reason, no historian specializing in the history of Islamic sciences and knowledge can overlook the city of Tlemcen and the Middle Maghreb, nor their role in invigorating cultural life in al-Andalus and other Islamic lands. The Middle Maghreb served as an intellectual support for al-Andalus and indeed functioned as a reservoir of knowledge, sciences, and both rational and transmitted forms of *ijtihad*. This demonstrates the effective role played by Ibn Khaldun in consolidating the mechanisms of cultural communication between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus. Yet he was by no means the only one; many other scholars also contributed directly to this process.

Among the key determinants of this cultural communication was the Maliki school of law (Hasan, 1980, p. 463), which gained broad popularity and diffusion throughout the Maghreb in general and in the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus in particular. Since the inhabitants of both shores strongly adhered to it, the Maliki school facilitated the linkage and harmonization of thought and jurisprudence. As a result, the madhhab became fertile ground within which various intellectual and doctrinal currents developed. The thinkers of al-Andalus and the Middle Maghreb may thus be seen as fruits cultivated in Maliki soil, and Ibn Khaldun himself was one of the great Maliki scholars.

This scholarly role was not confined to Ibn Khaldun alone. Numerous philosophers contributed to the construction of a cultural bridge between the two shores, and their ideas formed the very foundations upon which that bridge was built. Nevertheless, our emphasis on Ibn Khaldun serves as historical confirmation of the depth of scholarly communication between the two shores, especially in view of his extensive travels, his eyewitness familiarity with the conditions of both regions, and his frequent visits to the cities of the Middle Maghreb, especially Constantine, Bijaya, and Tlemcen. These urban centers enjoyed scholarly and cultural significance by virtue of their political and strategic status and their

intermediate position between al-Andalus and the Arab East.

It may therefore be stated with confidence that Ibn Khaldun's journeys and his intellectual and cultural contributions in both regions constitute a form of historical documentation of cultural and scientific communication (Ibn Khaldun, n.d., p. 99). His travels testify to the role of scholars in elevating scientific and cultural life during the medieval period. Cultural action was not restricted to institutions and chancelleries; rather, it was also the product of scholars' efforts in transmitting and disseminating knowledge among the inhabitants of both shores. This was made possible by the prevalence of *ijtihad* and the rejection of rigid imitation in both Tlemcen and al-Andalus.

Science and scholars are not bound to a specific geography; rather, they transcend narrow affiliations. Knowledge surpasses time and space, unifies distant entities, and compels them to interact within a shared space grounded in epistemic unity and intellectual exchange among scholars and producers of knowledge. This was one of the defining features of the medieval period in Islamic history.

One of the historical facts that confirms the effective role of science and scholars in reinforcing the foundations of cultural communication between the two shores is that the cultural climate of the Islamic West in general, and of the

Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus in particular, attracted intellectual, juristic, and scholarly talent. These two regions shared a distinctive scientific and juristic feature that deepened the differentiation between the eastern and western Arab-Islamic worlds: namely, the effort to reconcile shari'ah and wisdom (Abd al-Maqsud, 1993, p. 33). This meant fostering intellectual and methodological interaction between reason and transmission without falling into rigidity, extremism, or dogmatic partisanship. The phenomenon of harmonizing religion and philosophy spread rapidly across the two shores, and the exchange of views and juristic reasoning constituted the foundation upon which the project of cultural communication was built.

Most philosophical views and juristic efforts circulated rapidly between the two shores and spread among the population because of the multiplicity of mutual scholarly visits. In this context, scientific and intellectual questions were raised that generated philosophical and juristic debates, which soon spread throughout the Middle Maghreb and its scholarly urban centers, such as Tlemcen, as well as in al-Andalus.

One reason for the development of the sciences was that jurists also participated in philosophy and speculative thought. Ibn Rushd, for example, held that religious truth does not contradict philosophical truth (Abd al-Maqsud, 1993, p. 34). This position contributed to the enrichment of cultural

and scientific life in both al-Andalus and the Middle Maghreb. The purpose of harmonizing reason and revelation, or shari'ah and wisdom, was to create a fruitful and productive interaction between the fields of jurisprudence and philosophy, activate mechanisms of dialogue and scholarly discourse between jurists and philosophers, and arrive at the unifying idea that not every free rational inquiry constitutes an attack on religion (Musa, n.d., p. 25).

The pioneering role played by scholars in strengthening the bonds of cultural communication between the two shores was also the fruit of the work of scholars who migrated from al-Andalus to the Maghreb and contributed to transmitting Andalusian urbanity and refinement to the Middle Maghreb (al-Daghli, 1979, p. 75) within the framework of civilizational exchange between al-Andalus and the neighboring urban centers that shared with it religion, language, and culture. Among the most visible scientific and cultural effects of this process was the influence of Andalusian literature on the inhabitants of the Maghreb (al-Daghli, 1979, p. 76), owing to its aesthetic and emotional values. Literature thus played the role of cultural mediator between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus.

No matter how extensively one may analyze this dimension, it remains difficult to do it full justice, because science and scholars in medieval history are like galaxies: impossible to fully enumerate. Cultural communication

was a central element in the civilizational and scientific project of both the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus. Political stability provided security for al-Andalus, while al-Andalus in turn became a source of inspiration for the scholars of the Middle Maghreb. It is therefore impossible to speak of cultural communication without examining in detail the role of knowledge, scholars, the transmission of sciences, the movement of scholars between the two shores, and the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and juristic reasoning among scholars and jurists. These were the factors that reinforced cultural communication.

### **Conclusion**

The main conclusion that may be drawn from this study is that medieval history has not received the scholarly attention it deserves, not only from historians but also from researchers in the social sciences, especially in philosophy and sociology. This is due to the ethnic plurality and social complexity that characterized Islamic society in the medieval period and led to the emergence of new concepts such as interaction, harmony, migration, and communication.

Within the philosophical domain, this period witnessed the rise of intellectual schools and political currents, as well as efforts to reconcile wisdom and shari'ah, connect jurisprudence with thought, and exchange intellectual positions and

written works. For this reason, this decisive phase in Islamic history cannot be confined to the framework of historiography alone. Rather, a deeper examination of the trajectory and development of knowledge reveals that medieval Islamic history belongs equally to the philosophy of history, insofar as it focuses on the origins and evolution of knowledge and its role in creating cultural communication among peoples and societies.

This study has encouraged further inquiry into the depths of medieval history, with its rich store of knowledge, sciences, and distinguished scholars made possible by the fertility of its intellectual soil and the relative stability of its political structures. Medieval history was the history of sciences, scholars, and knowledge. It was not merely an intermediate period between phases of Islamic history; rather, it functioned as a bridge between East and West, supplying the intellectual and rational foundations that contributed to the European Renaissance through the circulation of knowledge among the inhabitants of the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus and its subsequent spread into Western Europe. Schools of thought and scientific traditions were built upon the foundations laid by cultural communication between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Therefore, the study of cultural communication between the Middle Maghreb and al-Andalus requires more than books and isolated studies; it calls for dedicated

research centers specialized in documenting, analyzing, and interpreting its intellectual and civilizational production.

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