

SPOKEN WORD AND WRITTEN TEXT : MEANING AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INSTITUTION OF *RIWĀYA*

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Knowledge, *ʿilm*, the antonym of ignorance, *jahl*, was venerated already in the Arab past, which had not yet developed formal education, nor institutions of learning. Knowledge was perceived by poets as something which distinguished man from others, something which had an intrinsic value, and had to be acquired.¹ Poets' verses themselves constitute a field of knowledge since ancient times. Memorization and recitation of poems was the task of specialists, the *ruwāt*. Their activity could also include arrangement and embellishment of the verses and was considered an apprenticeship of future poets.² *Riwāya*, transmission, originated from this milieu. As a verbal noun of *rawā*, which originally means "to bear, to convey water" and hence signifies "to transmit, relate", *riwāya* mostly applies, in classical Arabic, to the technical meaning of transmission of poems, narratives and dicta, and also denotes the authorized transmission of books.³ When writing spread and became the main medium of the transmission of knowledge, *riwāya* came to mean, in practice, the transmission of a written text *through* oral expression. The term *riwāya* often refers to the transmission of written text, but it is closely related to the concept of oral tradition. It is this functioning of *riwāya*, based on the great value attached to oral testimony, which is at the core of a number of recognized methods of transmission. They were meant to preserve the original text in transmission and therefore differ from methods of teaching designed for developing the student's capacity of discernment and understanding. In contrast, *riwāya* implies a specific treatment of the verbal appearance of

¹ Franz Rosenthal: *Knowledge Triumphant. The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*. Leiden 1970, 12-18.

² Renate Jacobi: "Rāwī". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. VIII. Leiden 1995, 466; Rina Drory: "The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making." In: *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996), 33-49, here 39ff.

³ Stefan Leder: "Riwāya". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. VIII. Leiden 1995, 545-547.

the written text. Its main intention is to control transmission through uninterrupted formalized oral communication extending from the author to generations of transmitters. At the same time, this practice provides public accessibility of knowledge. *Riwāya* is an essential part of Islamic scholarship, at least of those parts of it, which produced the bulk of pre-modern Arabic writing.

The dialectical relation of oral and literary communication is deeply rooted in the Islamic conception of Scripture. God's communication through the Prophets' utterances is closely related to the conceptual pattern of *kitāb*, written text.⁴ The Qur'ān itself results from a process which ties together both aspects. Even if we dismiss here the concept of a celestial original (*kitāb*, or *lawḥ maḥfūz*), the interrelatedness of oral communication and written text is obvious from the transformation of the Prophet's utterances into the written text organized by verses (*āya*) and chapters (*sūra*). As it is established by Tradition and firmly believed by the majority of Muslims, this transformation encompassed memorization and writing on the side of a number of individuals.⁵ However, the oral form of the Qur'ān maintained its primary significance. During the first centuries of Islam, when the writing was limited to the *scriptio defecta*, the oral tradition established itself as the standard by which the written text was to be judged.

Oral tradition and written text are similarly intertwined in Islamic Tradition, *ḥadīth*. Accounts of what the Prophet said or did, or of his tacit approval to what was said or done in his presence, came to be considered second in authority to the Qur'ān. The complicated process of gradual codification involved memorization as well as written notes; but it took more than one century before the first comprehensive collections were produced.⁶ The

⁴ Arthur Jeffrey: *The Qur'ān as Scripture*. New York 1952. Cf. Stefan Wild: "We have sent down to thee the book." In: Stefan Wild (ed.): *The Qur'ān As Text*. Leiden 1996, 137-153, here 145.

⁵ Cf. Hossein Modarressi: "Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'ān. A Brief Survey." In: *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993), 5-40. The textual history of the Qur'ān is a matter of debate in Islamic studies, of course. Extremely different, in fact incompatible views concerning the codification of the text represent "orthodox" and "revisionist" positions, such as John Burton: *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, Cambridge 1977, 239f., and John Wansbrough: *Quranic Studies. Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation*. Oxford 1977. See also: Christoph Luxenberg: *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*. Berlin 2000.

⁶ This dating only refers to works preserved in independent transmission, such as 'Abdallāh ibn Wahb (d. 197/812), *Kitāb al-Jāmi' fi l-ḥadīth*, 'Abdarrazzāq ibn Hammām (d. 211/827), *al-Muṣannaf*.

legitimacy of this Tradition is based on its proximity to the Prophet, and it soon came to be based exclusively upon his authority according to the majority of Sunnī creed. Yet a canon of *ḥadīth* has never been established in any final form; instead, compilations were produced throughout the centuries in response to specified interests in certain subject-matters, in materials related to certain authorities, or in aspects of *ḥadīth* criticism. The textual corpus of *ḥadīth* is preserved in its main body as a collection – or many collections in fact – of single accounts. Their authentication therefore plays a decisive role. Since their scriptural appearance, or context, was continuously renewed by the creation of compendia and the temporal distance to the original source was growing with each generation, this body of knowledge was in need of methods which would secure reliability of the transmission of the Prophet’s words.

Jack Goody in his classical *Logic of Writing* set forth that the use of writing in the framework of Holy Scriptures makes “such works sacred repositories of the word of God, which in themselves remain unchanging, eternal, inspired by the divine, not by man alone”.⁷ The unchangeable character of the letter which was meant to preserve the word – the word of God – indeed produced scholarly disciplines such as exegesis, for example. As a means of bridging the rift between divine ordinance and the receptive horizons of its addressees, exegesis was to create a balance between the unchangeable preservation of the text and the need of its adaptation to changing conditions. In accordance with what Jack Goody considered the natural consequence of literacy, scholars functioned as mediators between the Word of God and the wider public of believers. This view, influenced by Max Weber, must be modified however: Scholarship which administered the scripture integrates the *exclusiveness* of specialization and the *inclusive* mechanism of social incorporation. The regulation of textual transmission through *riwāya* was designed as an instrument of control and at the same time provided a maximum of public participation. This was achieved by maintaining, even nourishing the dialectics of oral and written tradition.

A salient feature of the methods of transmission of knowledge in pre-modern times is the valorization of personal communication between master and pupil, or holder and seeker of knowledge.⁸ In contrast to educative teaching, manners and methods of *riwāya*,

⁷ *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Cambridge (Univ. Press) 1992, 6.

⁸ Michael Chamberlain: “The Production of Knowledge and the Reproduction of the A’yān in Medieval Damascus.” In: Nicole Grandin / Marc Gaborieau (eds.): *Madrassa. La transmission du*

did not necessarily further exclusive and lasting relationship, since *riwāya* was confined to the transmission of a certain text. It required nevertheless an extensive use of social resources: maintenance of contact and exchange between a large number of scholars. The effects of *riwāya* thus reinforced the influence of social relations which naturally result from the activity of scholars.

The *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, the discipline of *ḥadīth*-sciences, produced a detailed and complex methodology of transmission. Application of these methods may also be found in other fields of knowledge, like historiography, or philology, but only *ḥadīth*-sciences explicate these regulations. Moreover, we dispose of notes written on the margins of manuscripts which document certain modes of transmission. Again these documents are more copious in *ḥadīth* than in any other field.

Works which treat this topic follow the example of the first comprehensive and theoretical work on the science of *ḥadīth*, *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil baina l-rāwī wa-l-wā‘ī* by al-Rāmāhurmuṣī (d. 360/971): Statements of many authorities are quoted and discussed, various opinions regarding terminology are put forward and a number of detailed prescriptions are pointed out. The works of al-Ḥākīm al-Nisabūrī (d. 405/1014), al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazurī (d. 643/1245) and Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘a (d. 733/1333) may be mentioned among the most important titles of this kind.⁹ For an outline of the recognized methods of transmission one may rely on Ibn Jamā‘a, whose concise and systematic work is of great value.¹⁰ The author lived at Damascus and Cairo at

savoir dans le monde musulman. Paris 1997, 28-62; idem: *Knowledge and Social Practice in medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*. Cambridge (Univ. Press) 1994, 108-124; Jonathan Berkey: *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*. Princeton University Press 1992, 23ff.

⁹ al-Rāmāhurmuṣī: *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil baina l-rāwī wa-l-wā‘ī*. Ed. Muḥammad ‘Adjdjādī Khaṭīb. Damascus / Beirut 1404/1984; al-Ḥākīm an-Nisabūrī: *Kitāb Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*. Ed. al-Sayyid Mu‘azzam Ḥusain. Cairo n. d. (Maktabat al-Mutanabbī); al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī: *al-Kitāya fī ‘ilm al-riwāya*. Hayderabad 1357; idem: *Taqyid al-‘ilm*. Ed. Youssef Eche. Damascus 1949; idem: *Kitāb al-Faqī h wal-mutafaqqih*. Ed. Ismā‘īl al-Anṣārī . 1-2. [Riad 1389/1969] Beirut 1395/1975; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazurī: *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ fī ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*. Cairo n. d. (Maktabat al-Mutanabbī). Ed. ‘Ā’isha ‘Abdarrahmān. (Dhakhā’ir al-‘Arab 64). Cairo 1409/1989; Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘a: *al-Manhal ar-rawī fī mukhtaṣar ‘ulūm al-ḥadīṭ al-nabawī*. Ed. Muḥyi l-Dīn ‘Abdarrahmān Ramaḍān. Damascus 1406/1986.

¹⁰ On his treatise on higher education, *Tadhkirat al-sāmi‘ wa-l-mutakallim fī adab al-‘ālim wa-l-muta‘allim*, see Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 296ff.

a time when *ḥadīth* science was at its heyday with authors like al-Mizzī (d. 742/1342) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). In his work he often refers to al-Ḥākim, al-Khaṭīb and Ibn al-Ṣalāh, points out their opinions where they show particularities, and explains the common features of their teachings.

Formalized oral communication was considered the most appropriate instrument of correct transmission. Most of the methods implied, however, aimed at reproducing written text. Dictates (*imlāʿ*) as an authorship-related form of transmission were attended by scholars who took notes for themselves, and by professional copyists (*warrāqūn*) who produced books to be sold afterwards.¹¹ Lecturers would use preexisting text material, such as notes, or would do without. The philologist al-Farrāʿ (d. 822) is mentioned as an exception, because he is said not to have used any notes when dictating his *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*. This book thus was generated in dictate.¹² Besides dictate, reading of a written text to a shaykh, *qirāʾatan ʿalayhi*, was the most recommended mode of transmission, especially in *ḥadīth*. This technique was often combined with the comparison of copies. Collation (*muqābala*) as a method of approving and correcting copies by comparison of a manuscript with another of the same work, preferably with the one from which it was copied, was applied at least as early as the middle of the 9th century.¹³ In contrast to this, the method of *qirāʾa ʿalayhi* secured the accuracy of oral and written transmission, because a copy was read out to the shaykh who would confirm the correctness of the reading as an oral performance as well as the accuracy of the copy as a written reproduction of the text. This kind of reading also allowed to obtain authorization for further transmission in both, oral and written form. Attending readings was therefore an essential instrument of transmission. Textual material (*aḥādīth, akhbār*) which was received through listening (*samāʿ*) to such readings was considered viable and was authorized for transmission. In addition, the book, or the copy of the book, which was read out to the shaykh acquired the status of a copy valid to be used in future readings allowing authorized transmission and the reproduction through copies.

¹¹ al-Samʿānī (d.662/1166): *Adab al-implāʿ wa-l-istimlāʿ*. Die Methodik des Diktatkollegs von ʿAbd al-Karīm Ibn Muḥammad as-Samʿānī. Ed. Max Weisweiler. Leiden 1952, 33; Aiman Fuʿad: al-Sayyid: *al-Kitāb al-ʿarabī al-makḥṭūṭ wa-ʿilm al-makḥṭūṭāt*. Kairo 1997, 85-90.

¹² al-Farrāʿ (d. 207/822): *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*. I, Ed. Aḥmad Yūsuf Najātī, M. ʿAlī al-Najjār. Cairo 1374/1955, 2.

¹³ R. Rosenthal: “Muqābala”. In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. VII, Leiden 1993, 490.

Many readings *qirā'atan 'alayhi* are documented in *certificates of audition* (*samā'*, or *ṭabaqat al-samā'*) noted on the margins, or at the beginning or end of the manuscripts used in this practice. These certificates provide detailed information (see the Figure below). Normally the title of the text which was read ("*dhikr al-muṣāfaḥa*, line 1), and its author are given. The certificate also indicates whether the text was read entirely or in part ("*hadhā l-juz'*", line 1). The names of the presiding master (*al-shaykh al-musmi'*) and of the person who performed the reading of the text (*bi-qirā'atihi*) have to be mentioned: "*alā sayyidinā qāḍī l-quḍāt...*" (line 1-2); "*bi-qirā'ati l-Qāsim b. Muḥammad...*" (line 3). Subsequently, the names of all listeners are given. The person who wrote the certificate regularly identifies himself by use of formulas (for example: "*wa-hadhā khaṭṭuhu*", "and this is his writing", line 3). The writer of the certificate sometimes explicitly confirms the correctness of his note ("*wa-ṣaḥḥa dhālika*", bottom line). In many cases, but not always, the date, even the time of the day, and the place of the reading are indicated (bottom line).

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منع هذا الخروجه ذكر الصلوة لما اضطر اليه من الجهد على سبيل
 ما من الضياء من الذي ادى الفصل سلف من غيره من الجهد على ما علم
 ساهم فيه اعلانه له بمسواه الاسم من بعد انزل هذا الخطه
 اسم محمد والامام علي بن ابي طالب والشيخ كثره العباد من اهل البيت
 والحمد لله من الذي اقرهم من عامهم من ابيه واهله من اهل البيت
 وفي العباد من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم
 من الصلوة واهل البيت والامام علي بن ابي طالب والشيخ كثره العباد
 على من علم من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم
 وعلى العباد من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم من الذي اقرهم
 وموسى بن اسحق بن عيسى بن الحسين بن ابي طالب والشيخ كثره العباد
 العلوي واهل البيت والامام علي بن ابي طالب والشيخ كثره العباد
 ابن عبد الحميد بن الحسين بن ابي طالب والشيخ كثره العباد
 اعمى من غير من صرنا الى ذلك في ايامه من غير من صرنا الى ذلك في ايامه
 ومع ذلك علم السماع فان من اذيع وصار كالمعظم في كل يوم

Dhikr al-muṣāfaḥa by Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abdalwāḥid al-Maqdisī, fol.28a.
 Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyya, Damascus, 3819,3.

The wording of these documents, their composition and the range of information vary according to particular usages.¹⁴ Their variety in regard to graphical form and contents is documented in a collection of about 1300 facsimiles of such certificates.¹⁵ Readings were sometimes held in a rather private atmosphere, when the presiding shaykh (*musmi*) wrote the certificate by his own hand for the reader, who had no other listeners. At other occasions several presiding shaykhs gathered in order to arrange a sort of festive reading,¹⁶ Sometimes vast audiences, of more than one hundred people, gathered to listen to a reading.¹⁷ From these *samā*'-certificates we may gather information concerning the textual history of manuscripts,¹⁸ and when they were copied from manuscript to manuscript, and thus appear as a sequence of notes comprising several generations of readers, we may infer the textual history going beyond the manuscript at hand.¹⁹

¹⁴ For a general introduction, see: Jacqueline Sublet: "Le modèle arabe. Eléments de vocabulaire." In: Nicole Grandin / Marc Gaborieau (eds.): *Madrassa. La transmission du savoir dans le monde musulman*. Paris 1997, 13-27. al-Sayyid: al-Kitāb al-ʿarabī, 473-507. Stefan Leder, Yāsīn Muḥammad al-Sawās, Maʿmūn al-Ṣāgharjī : *Muḡam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya al-muntaḥaba min sanati 550 ilā 750. Les certificats d'audition à Damas, 550 - 750 h./ 1155 - 1349*. Damas 1996 (Institut Français d'Études Arabes), 10f. (muqaddima). For the discussion of examples see further: Hellmut Ritter: "Autographs in Turkish Libraries." In: *Oriens* 6 (1953) 63-90; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid: "Ijāzāt al-samāʿ fi l-makhtūṭāt al-qadima." In: *Majallat Maʿhad al-Makhtūṭāt al-ʿArabiyya* 1 (1955), 232-254; Jan Just Wittkam: "The Human Element between Text and Reader. The Ijāza in Arabic Manuscripts." In: Yasin Dutton (ed.): *The Codicology of Islamic Manuscripts*. London (Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation) 1995, 123-136. The use of readings in textual transmission was also discussed in several articles by George Vajda; see, for example: "De la transmission orale du savoir dans l'Islam traditional." In: *L'Arabisant* 4 (1975), reprinted in: *La transmission du savoir en Islam (VIIe - XVIIIe siècle)*. London (Variorum Reprints) 1983.

¹⁵ Stefan Leder, Yāsīn Muḥammad al-Sawās, Maʿmūn al-Ṣāgharjī: *Muḡam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya. Ṣuwar al-makhtūṭāt al-muntaḥaba min sanati 550 ilā 750. Recueil de Documents facsimilés des certificats d'audition à Damas, 550 - 750 h./ 1155 - 1349*. (Institut Français d'Études Arabes). Damas 2000.

¹⁶ *Ṣuwar al-makhtūṭāt*, 41f.

¹⁷ *Muḡam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya*, 138, *samāʿ* 8.

¹⁸ Similar evidence can be gained from *qirāʾa*-notes, cf. Miklos Muranyi: "Das *Kitāb Musnad ḥadīṭ Mālik b. Anas* von Ismāʿīl b. Iṣḥāq al-Qāḍi (199/815-282/895)." In *ZDMG* 138 (1988), 128-147.

¹⁹ Stefan Leder: "Dokumente zum Ḥadīṭ in Schrifttum und Unterricht aus Damaskus im 6./12. Jhdt." In: *Oriens* 34 (1994), 57-75, here 66ff.

Certificates of audition may be combined with a license (*ijāza*) which explicitly authorizes further transmission of a certain text or of a group of texts, but most often both types of certification are held apart. In any case, *samāʿ* generally was considered a method authorizing further transmission at least within certain functional limits. In order to understand these regulations, it is useful to remember that readings *qirāʿatan ʿalayhi* served several purposes which combine practical and ritual aspects. First of all, authorship related transmission and intermediary transmission should be distinguished. The officiating shaykh could bring a textbook containing either his teachings or, as a rule in *ḥadīth* literature, traditions which he had collected himself. When the text was read to him, he would formally confirm its correctness including all statements concerning the exact manner of transmission which he had received. By the fact that the text was read out, the shaykh's confirmation was an official act, witnessed by all who were present.

In other cases, even regularly, the *shaykh musmiʿ* presided over the reading of a text of which he was not the author. He was entitled to do so, because he himself had attended a reading of this same text in the past. His authorization was sometimes indicated by the term: “by the right of his audition” (*bi-ḥaqqi samāʿihi fihī*, or *bi-samāʿihi fihī*, see line 3). In our example this general reference is completed by a more precise information: *aṣlan min muʿallifihī*, “on the basis of its original, (heard) from the author”. The significance of such readings was twofold: First, listeners would generally benefit from a formal lecture, which was particularly appreciated when the presiding shaykh was a scholar of fame. As we may infer from the names of laymen appearing in notes which certify their presence at lectures, many people participated for pious motives only.²⁰ In this vein, attending the lecture was an expression of worship. Second, listeners could use and hand down the materials they received. They were expected to refer to the shaykh, whom they have heard, and to quote him (*akhbaranā*) according to the regulations accepted by a majority. Their attendance then was motivated by scholarly objectives and aspirations.

The reading *qirāʿatan ʿalayhi* also provided the validation of manuscript copies for further use in regulated transmission. As Ibn Jamāʿa explains, the copy was read to the presiding shaykh who either knew the text by heart, or held a textbook in his hands, preferably the one which the copy was made of, or asked a trustworthy person to hold and

²⁰ idem: “Charismatic Scripturalism - The Ḥanbalī Maqdisīs at Damascus.” In: *Der Islam* 74 (1997) 279-304, here 288-292.

compare it to the text which was read out. This method combined collation (*muqābala*), or presentation of the copy (*‘arḍ*), with reading. It thus served the particular needs of scholars who had produced copies and were fond of seeing a certificate – if possible on the copy – which approved formal transmission. Readings were thus arranged in response to the need of comparing new copies with the original, so that, as Ibn Kathīr²¹ once put it, these copies would become an authorized text from which other copies could be produced.

According to Ibn Jamā‘a, readings might also be arranged in order to combine listening and writing down the text in order to produce an authorized copy in this way.²² Since this permissible variation of *qirā’atun ‘alayhi* did not secure textual comparison (*muqābala*, *‘arḍ*), it must be considered an alleviation of the painful procedure demanding the production of a copy first and then its reading. Compared to dictate (*imlā’*), reading had the advantage of a formal lecture which allowed *samā’*. Therefore, reading combined with copying was accepted as a method of transmission, on the condition that this did not prevent from understanding. The context of Ibn Jamā‘a’s explanation reveals that *oral transmission*, i.e. the fact that a text was spoken, heard and understood, was deemed to be the essence of this method, since its value was seriously challenged only when, by whatever circumstances, hearing or understanding was hampered.

Scholars officiated, when they were entitled to do that, even if they did not have a copy of the text at their disposal. In many cases textbooks were brought from elsewhere and then were read out to the shaykh. Normally such readings were officiated by senior scholars who had attended themselves a reading many years ago. This circumstance would allow listeners to pass on the material by use of a “short” isnād bridging a long period of time (*al-isnād al-‘ālī*). Moreover, owners of copies were generally interested in collecting certificates, and therefore were willing to borrow manuscripts for readings *qirā’atan ‘alayhi*. This was a laudable activity, because the presiding shaykh knew – or was believed to know – the text by heart and thus controlled formal transmission. In fact this type of arrangement may have been very common.

Readings of these types were by no means confined to works on *ḥadīth*, but also treated editions of and commentaries on poetry, as well as poetic collections produced by

²¹ *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī t-ta’rikh*. Ed. Aḥmad Abū Maḥmūd et al. I-XIV. XV: al-Fahāris. Beirut 1408/1988, XIV, 97.

poets themselves; they were also practiced in the field of linguistics or grammar, and even works of history were treated this way. Among these we find, to give but a few examples, editions of and commentaries on the *diwāns* of poets, such as Tha‘lab’s (d. 291/904), *Sharḥ Dīwān Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā* (Cairo 1363/1944), or the “Spark of the Fire-Stick” (*Saqf al-zand*) of al-Ma‘arrī (d. 1058), works on grammar, such as Sibawayhi’s (d. 796) *Kitāb*, or works on history, like the *Kitāb al-Rauḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn* of Abū Šāma – which was read to the author in the Ḥadīth-School al-Ashrafiyya at Damascus in the year 664 (Muḥarram) / Sept. - Oct. 1265.²³

The earliest documentation of lectures known so far – there are older notes on manuscripts concerning *muqābala* and *ijāza* – dates from the second half of the 9th century. A *riwāya*-note discovered by Miklos Murany refers to a lecture in the year 896 Ch. A.²⁴ An independent documentation of *samā‘* comes from a manuscript of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal’s (d. 241/855) *Kitāb al-Ashriba*, which bears a certificate from the year 332 / 943-44,²⁵ and a certificate dating ten years before is preserved in the manuscript of *Ṣifāt al-nār* by Ibn Abī d-Dunyā (d. 281/894).²⁶ However, notes which certify readings *qirā‘atan ‘alayhi* from the 3rd/9th century are very few. This may be due to the rareness of old manuscripts and may also be caused by a lack of interest in copying certificates. Evidence does not allow any convincing conclusion as to the application of this method in the 3rd/9th century. In any case, certificates of audition obviously are a common feature of manuscripts in later times, especially in the 13th and 14th centuries, and they proliferated particularly at Damascus in this period. Thousands of these certificates are preserved in manuscripts, and several ten thousand names of participants are listed in the documents.²⁷

The information which can be gained from this abundant documentation allows to assess the social context of the practice of *riwāya*. The importance of scholarship as a

²² *Manhal*, 83.

²³ See al-Munajjid (as note 14), “Ijāzāt”.

²⁴ *Beiträge*, 103.

²⁵ Ms. Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyya 3868 (Majmū‘ 132); cf. *Kitāb al-Ashriba*, ed. Šubḥi al-Sāmarra‘i. Beirut 1405/1985, 11.

²⁶ In the same *majmū‘*, folia 238-254; cf. Yāsīn M. as-Sawwās: *Fihris Mağāmi‘ al-Madrasa al-Umariyya fī Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyya bi-Dimashq*, Kuwait 1408/1987, 693.

constituent element of medieval society, both for its organizational and conceptual aspects, is widely acknowledged.²⁸ The role and effects of textual transmission as they can be studied in the case of Damascus must be seen in a context of the general blossoming of Islamic sciences at that time. The particular character of this practice and its significance for social life, however, highlights an aspect of scholarship which has not received much attention so far.

Transmission according to the methods of *riwāya* became a sort of public institution at Damascus in the 13th century. The public character of a practice originally confined to scholarship was made possible by its egalitarian tendency which encouraged the participation of laymen. As a scholarly activity the practice of *riwāya* maintained its independence from endowments and particular establishments and thus appears to have shaped, or at least to have contributed to the shape of a particular structure of the public sphere. However, this situation could not have occurred without favorable circumstance. The support of religious scholarship and especially *ḥadīth* sciences granted by the Zengids and many princely Ayyubid households as well as military leaders at that time certainly furthered this development.²⁹ Generous endowments for schools (*madāris*) promoted institutionalization³⁰ and offered important resources for scholars from Damascus and abroad. Under the leadership of the Ḥanbalī al-Maqdisī families, emigrants from Jammāʿil, Palestine,³¹ a new quarter of Damascus, al-Ṣālihiyya at the slope of the Jabal Qāsiyūn, was founded, which soon attracted numerous endowments.³² The Ḥanbalīs strengthened the role of *ḥadīth* and its transmission at Damascus. They achieved this through their propagation of practical piety and by accommodating the study of *ḥadīth* to religious

²⁷ *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-dīmaṣḥīyya*, 27 (eng. introd.).

²⁸ See footnote 8.

²⁹ R. Stephen Humphreys: "Politics and Architectural Patronage in Ayyubid Damascus." In: C.E. Bosworth et al. (eds.): *The Islamic World. From Classical to Modern Times. Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis*. Princeton 1989, 151-173.

³⁰ J. E. Gilbert: "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the 'ulamā' in medieval Damascus." In: *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980), 105-135.

³¹ Joseph Drory: "Ḥanbalīs of the Nāblus Region in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries." In: *Asian and African Studies* 22 (1988), 93-112.

³² Toru Miura: "The Ṣālihiyya Quarter in the Suburbs of Damascus. Its Formation, Structure, and Transformation in the Ayyubid and Mamlūk periods." In: *BEO* 47 (1995), 127-181.

emotion.³³ Under their influence, the reading of texts, mainly *ḥadīth*, became a type of communal worship organized by scholarship and attended by a larger public

The practice of *riwāya* shows a number of particular features with respect to its social implications. Contrary to what one would expect, public readings did not have their center at schools. Even in the second half of the 12th and in the 13th centuries, when schools, *madrasas*, played an important role in education and social organization, readings were rarely held there. Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176), author of the famous *Ta’rikh Madīnat Dimāšq*, for instance, gave readings outside of “his” school, the *Dār al-ḥadīth*, which had been founded by a Nūr ad-Dīn, and which he directed. Instead, he obviously preferred to offer readings at the central Mosque, or at his nephew’s garden in Mizza, a village west of Damascus.³⁴ Both places, gardens and the Umayyad mosque play an important role in public readings of this period at Damascus. As is known from the work of George Makdisi,³⁵ the Umayyad Mosque was used as a multifunctional center for very different types of scholarly activity. Lectures, disputation or readings were held at fixed spots within the vast space of the Mosque. Certificates show that distinct names were used to designate places of teaching or reading circles (*ḥalqāt*).³⁶ The circles were easily accessible and open even to irregular attendance. Contrary to schools which had to observe the stipulations of endowments,³⁷ readings *qirā’atan ‘alayhi* did not entail many obligations. They did not provide any formalized curriculum which was systematically structured, but gave ample opportunity to receive knowledge, on the spot, and in a formalized way.

When readings became to be held regularly at schools in the 14th century, the presiding master rarely was a professor assigned at the school where he officiated. Instead,

³³ Stefan Leder: “Charismatic Scripturalism”, 296ff.

³⁴ Stefan Leder: “Eine neue Quelle zur Stadtgeschichte von Damaskus - Zur Alltagsgeschichte der Ḥadīṭwissenschaft.” In: *Supplement XI der ZDMG* (26. Deutscher Orientalistentag Leipzig 1995), Stuttgart 1998, 268-279, here 272f.

³⁵ George Makdisi: *The Rise of Colleges. Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. Edinburgh 1981, 19f.

³⁶ “Eine neue Quelle zur Stadtgeschichte”, 274; *Mu’jam al-samā’āt al-dimashqiyya*, 648f..

³⁷ See Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1372): *Mu’id al-ni’am wa-mubīd al-niqam*. Beirut 1407/1986, *passim*, (engl.) D. W. Myhrman: *The Restorer of Favours and the Restrainer of Chastishments*. London 1908.

scholars used to leave “their” institution in order to arrange the reading at another school.³⁸ Choice was made according to personal preference and social relations. With respect to other institutions, as houses founded as a retreat for the personal use of saintly persons (*zāwiya*), Sufi-convents (*khānqāh*) and hospices (*ribāt*), the certificates of this period confirm what was recently suggested by Donald Little concerning the variable profile of these institutions.³⁹ All of these institutions were included in the activity of *riwāya*.⁴⁰

In accordance with this open and flexible spatial organization, the practice of *riwāya* also required adaptation to the variety of situations which might occur. Scholars used to accept different responsibilities in formalized transmission depending on competence and cooperation. They might preside over the reading at one meeting, and perform the reading or listen and write the certificate at another. The custom of gathering several presiding shakhs for a reading *qirā’atan ‘alayhim* may be seen as infringing this principle, but there is ample evidence from the documents that variation of offices was part of this practice.⁴¹ *Riwāya* may thus be described as an open, communal institution, which did not favor permanent assignments and functions and was built upon scholarly exchange and relationship between colleagues. It aimed principally at a general accessibility of religious learning, not restricted by social standing and not regulated by dependent relation. This tendency becomes even more obvious when we consider the abuse of the general non-specified allowances for transmission (*ijāza*), which cannot be treated here in detail. The methods of transmission developed by *ḥadīth* science and also applied in many other fields display a certain distrust of individual, closed away scholarship. Instead they adhere to an ideal of the community of pious believers permanently involved in a communicative process treating the topics of Islamic Tradition.

³⁸ *ibid.* 275.

³⁹ “The Nature of *Khānqāhs*, *Ribāts* and *Zāwiyas* under the Mamlūks.” In: Wael B. Hallaq / Donald P. Little (eds.): *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles I. Adams*. Leiden 1991, 91-105.

⁴⁰ *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya*, 650-652 (*khānqāh*, *ribāt*, *zāwiya*).

⁴¹ See, for instance, the presence of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341) at readings *qirā’atan ‘alaihi*, *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya*, 638-640.

Another aspect of this tendency is that readings gathered, specially during the Ayyubid period, all classes of people, from the ruling class downward to craftsmen.⁴² Ayyubid notables not only endowed schools dedicated to Islamic Tradition, but in several cases actively participated in such scholarship. The house of al-Malik al-Muḥsin, son of Saladin, for instance, hosted reading circles,⁴³ and he himself occasionally was present at readings.⁴⁴ His daughter Fāṭima also used to preside readings held in her private house.⁴⁵ The presence of women at readings as well as their role as presiding masters or attendants is a common feature of *riwāya* at that time. Many of our certificates show women participating at reading circles, even in the presence of men, contrary to what usually is maintained.⁴⁶ Several female members of the princely Ayyubid households were generous patrons of *ḥadīth* scholarship. In some cases, members of the same family benefited from their deeds. In the al-Murshidiyya school, founded by the daughter of the ruler of Damascus, al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam (1198-1227), a descendant of this family used to preside over readings.⁴⁷ These readings were attended by a large public; at one occasion six masters officiated and three of them continued to preside over a second reading.⁴⁸ This event must have been a kind of festive celebration of the art of *riwāya*. Here, the upper class background of the presiding shaykh may have been responsible for a particular attraction of the congregation.

This leads us to another aspect: symbolic representation of religious learning was a permanent effect of public readings and was reinforced by particular arrangements. Bringing together eminent scholars and members of the princely households was one manner to achieve this. Moreover, the Maqdisi families who played a leading role in the practice of *riwāya* occasionally used readings as a demonstration of their eminence in scholarship and extraordinary clan solidarity. At one occasion, in the month of Ramaḍān

⁴² David Morray: *An Ayyubid Notable and his World: Ibn al-³/₄AdĀm and Aleppo as Portrayed in his Biographical Dictionary of People Associated with the City*. Leiden 1994, 157.

⁴³ *Ṣuwar al-makhṭūṭāt*, 251, *Samā‘* 6.

⁴⁴ *Mu‘jam al-samā‘āt al-dimashqiyya*, 209f. (Aḥmad b. Yūsuf b. Ayyūb).

⁴⁵ “Eine neue Quelle zur Stadtgeschichte”, 277.

⁴⁶ Morray, 157.

⁴⁷ “Eine neue Quelle zur Stadtgeschichte”, 277; *Mu‘jam al-samā‘āt al-dimashqiyya*, 30ff. (*samā‘* 1, 2, 7, 32, 70, 79).

696 / 1295⁴⁹ thirteen experts, or more or less experts, of the Maqdisi families gathered at the Mosque of the Şālihiyya quarter, which their forefathers had founded 150 years before, in order to preside all together over the reading of a manuscript which had been in the possession of this family for nearly hundred years.⁵⁰

Among the people attending readings we often come across children. The habit of taking children to readings of *ḥadīth* was apparently not motivated by particular interest in the contents of a communication. Instead, the pious and sometimes solemn character of these meetings may have inspired the wish to make children share this experience. More important however is the scholarly context of this practice, because attendance at a young age might be of great value for the transmission of the text in future. As mentioned above, implicit authorization achieved through attending formal readings was of practical importance, not only for a-matter-of-fact transmission of knowledge, but also for the scholars' careers. This circumstance gave rise to a custom, the consequences of which contradicted the original purpose of readings: Parents used to take their small children to these occasions, hoping that they, having become scholars themselves, would be able to preside a reading of this same text many years later. Certificates reveal that scholars indeed based their authority for a given text on readings which they had attended at an age of eleven years and younger.⁵¹ The question whether children's attendance should be accepted in terms of a permissible and correct transmission, is discussed in all works dealing with the methods of transmission. The limited intellectual capacities of children was seen as a flaw, of course, but nevertheless this custom was generally encouraged. Ibn Jamā'a's assessment in this context is quite revealing. After discussing different opinions concerning the age which was thought to agree with the requirements of complete understanding, he adds:⁵² "The right thing is that children should be brought to readings at an early age, as soon as their listening is to be regarded as valid, because nowadays it is the maintenance of the uninterrupted *isnād* which has to be observed." A scholar who was able to legitimate the transmission of a text by his presence at a reading fifty and more years

⁴⁸ *Ṣuwar al-makhṭūṭāt*, 35f.

⁴⁹ *Ṣuwar al-makhṭūṭāt*, 41f.

⁵⁰ *Majlis al-biṭāqa min amāli Ḥamza al-Kināni*, see *Mu'jam al-samā'āt al-dimashqiyya*, 30ff.

⁵¹ "Dokumente zum Ḥadīṭ in Schrifttum und Unterricht", 71.

⁵² *Manhal*, 80.

ago not only maintained the uninterrupted *isnād*, but also enabled his listeners to refer to a “short” (*‘ālī*) *isnād*. This technique is a logical continuation of the principle of *riwāya* which necessitated permanent scholarly – i.e. regulated – oral transmission in order to preserve the standards of authentication.

Oral transmission of the written text was an important *modus operandi*, also used as a method of ordinary transmission, which did not involve the production of copies. Normally manuscripts were used by several scholars in their readings, but in other cases scholars who had produced authorized copies might exploit this “asset” by presiding over public readings for many years.⁵³ Since itinerant scholars who offered readings could expect friendly reception, scholars sometimes engaged in traveling in order to disseminate the *ḥadīth*-material of a certain collection. A particularly interesting case shows how a scholar escaped from the summer heat at Damascus taking his manuscript up the valley of the river Baradā, stopping over at Ābal as-Sūq, al-Fīja, al-Zabadānī, and Ba‘labakk, not without, of course, arranging reading sessions which were noted on his manuscript. We again find this zealous scholar, along with his manuscript, participating, in his own manner, at the *jihād*. During the last and victorious siege of the crusaders stronghold *Crac de Chevaliers* in the year 669/1271, he was present arranging several readings of his text.⁵⁴

The few aspects of *riwāya* which have been mentioned here demonstrate that this scholarly practice combined regulation and public accessibility of transmission, that it amalgamates ritualized practices with the dissemination of religious teaching. Form and range of public participation may be seen as accommodating egalitarian tendencies. The concept of transmission of the written text through oral communication reflects a dialectical relation of both modes which is deeply rooted in Islamic Tradition. This legacy as well as the presence of this practice in different domains of social life make *riwāya* an important and persistent part of scholarship.

⁵³ Stefan Leder: “Hörerzertifikate als Dokumente für die islamische Lehrkultur des Mittelalters.” In: R. G. Khouri (ed.): *Urkunden und Urkundenformulare im Klassischen Altertum und in den orientalischen Kulturen*. Heidelberg 1999, 147-166, here 159f.

⁵⁴ *Mu‘jam al-samā‘āt al-dimashqiyya*, 60-63.



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