CHAPTER 6

Africa in the Islamic University of Medina

History of the Foundation of the University

The idea of opening a university in Medina is an old one. As early as 1913, the Ottomans planned to build an Islamic university in Medina and name it Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī University (Jāmiʿa Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī). Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Jawish of the Ḥizb al-Waṭānī (National Party) was appointed rector of the university. He came to Medina from Egypt, together with Shakīb Arslān, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Maghribī, and engineers to begin work on the project. They laid the first stone in the western part of the city in ‘Abariyya Street (Shāriʿ al-ʿAbariyya) and even completed the foundations. A list of students from Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, and other Arab and Muslim countries were accepted. These students were sent to the Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī faculty that had just opened in Jerusalem until they could transfer to Medina when the construction of university in Medina was complete. But construction was halted in 1913 by the beginning of World War I and the hardships in Medina.¹

The Indian ʿālim Shaykh Fayḍ Abādī who founded the Madrasat al-ʿUlūm al-Sharʿiyya in 1921 also considered expanding the madrasa into a university, but he died (in 1939) before he could complete this project. Yet the idea of the establishing a university remained in the minds of the people of Medina, especially the elite, writers, journalists, and ʿulamāʾ, who continued to mention it in their writings. After the establishment of the kingdom of the Āl Saʿūd by ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz and especially during the period of his successor, his son Saʿūd, Saudi journalists, particularly those from Medina, called for the foundation of an Islamic university in Medina. Medina has been significant for Muslims since the time of the Prophet. Muslims believe that the people of Medina saved the Prophet of Islam and its message, as it was from Medina that the message of Islam spread throughout the world. Based on this idea, the elite of Medina have long believed that a modern Islamic university with the goal of spreading the message of Islam should be based in Medina, the ‘City of the Prophet’ (madīnat al-rasūl).

Campaigning in the Medinan Press for the Foundation of the Islamic University

The daily newspaper al-Madinat was, perhaps not surprisingly, the first to call for the creation of this university. The journalist ‘Abd al-Salām Hāshim Ḥāfiẓ

2 This madrasa was closed during the reign of the Ashrāf because it was accused of using Salafī books in its teaching. While the teaching was transferred to the Prophet’s Mosque, Shaykh Fayḍ Abādī had written to Sharīf Husayn of Mecca asking permission to reopen his madrasa. Sharīf Husayn granted him permission and the madrasa was opened again. See Badr, “al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyya,” pp. 61–62.

3 The political authority of King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was established in Medina in the month of Jumādī l-ūlā in 1344/1925 when the people of Medina took the oath of obedience (bayʿa) to the king through his son Muḥammad, first amīr of Medina and its region. See, among others, Suʿūd b. Hadhlūl and Muḥammad al-ʿAbbūdī, Mulūk Āl Suʿūd (Riyadh, 1380/1960), p. 177; Zaydān, Dhikrayāt, p. 109.

4 The first issue of al-Madīna was published on 26 Muḥarram 1356/1937. The newspaper was founded by the brothers ʿUthmān Ḥāfiẓ and ʿAli Ḥāfiẓ, who were also the owners of the printing house Maṭbaʿat Ṭayyibat al-Fayḥāʾ, the first printing house in Medina. Al-Madīna was initially published once weekly, then twice weekly, and finally every day. This printing house also published the first issue of al-Manhal (the magazine founded by al-ʿĀbd al-Quddūs al-ʿAnsārī). Al-Madīna and al-Manhal were founded in the same year, the first preceding the second by only two months. In any case, the young people who discussed and then participated in the foundation of these two media were friends who used to discuss, read, and comment on the few newspapers and magazines they received from Cairo, the cultural capital of the Arab world, which inspired them in everything. See Badr, “al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyya,” pp. 91–94.