

Paper Draft for:
Civilizational Change: Challenges and Perspectives

Slobodan Dan Paich
Director and Principal Researcher
Artship Foundation, San Francisco

Seed, Soil and Fruit - Teachers and Civilization Change
Reflections on the historic examples and generative patterns of
cultural influences

The introduction looks at the relationship of academic disciplines to Revelation as cultural and inspirational phenomenon. The introduction explores briefly the overall conditions for future emergence by contextualizing the historic examples. The intention of the four examples is to deepen the search and understand the challenges and intricacies of growth of civilization and help gain perspectives and facilities learning from history:

Ziryab - Abu I-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Nafi (172/789 –242/ 857), Baghdad to Cordoba

Inspiration in to manifest culture and dally life

Ibn 'Arabī (560/1165 –637/1240), Cordoba to Damascus

Seal of the Particular Muhammadan Sanctity as continuity

Georgius Gemistus Pletho (755/1355–858/1454) Mistra to Florence

Living tradition that inspired Renaissance Civilization

Titus Burckhardt (1325/1908 – 1404/1984) Basel to Fez

Inter-cultural understanding

In closing we ask same meter questions about transmigration of ideas by briefly touching on African training of Pythagoras in the ancient world, Bosnian Bogomils adopting Islam in the medieval times and Arab influences on Dante' Divine Comedy in pre-Renaissance Mediterranean. We conclude with reflection on what kind of prepared inner and outer space is needed for the revelation and inspiration to grow naturally in to a new and regenerative cycle.

Introduction

Examining multiple layers of the phenomenon of civilization often requires a team of researchers and experts to assemble the concrete facts and multiple sources yet this may still leave out the essence of the civilization studied. Before approaching the subject of the process of civilizations through examples of protagonists who help shape and maintain them, we shall look at some obstacles within the academic practice ever since western era's nineteen century. Although three *Abrehamic Realigns* base their source and daily practice on reviled and written books when their impetus is effective within civilizations they inspire often through oral traditions, craft practices and societal discourse and folklore.

The relationship of academic disciplines to Revelation as cultural and inspirational phenomenon, if studied inter-disciplinary and across time provides, in a way, a new discipline. To open the subject of *Civilizational Change* we briefly examine some constrains of *objective stance* such as implied agendas, hierarchy of values, reliance on texts as the most admissible evidence, unease with non verbal evidence and oral traditions.

Oral Tradition

The worldview in which oral tradition and the capacity of the brain to keep large amounts of information through mnemonic ordering of meaning and facts, may have a completely different relationship to the externalization of information than does following a text.

A glimpse into this worldview where the dominant operational systems are preserved and communicated through the oral traditions may help reconstruct the intellectual achievements of early humans and help better understand archeological and ethnographic remains of early cultures as different rather than primitive.

To come close to this worldview, presided by the oral traditions, we shall look at transmission of oral epic poems. In the seminal book on oral tradition and epic poetry by A. Lord, *The Singers of Tales*, there is a translation of a live interview with one of the last oral epic singing practitioners surviving among mountain regions of Bosnia, recorded in the 1930's by M. Parry:

When I was a shepherd boy, they used to come [the singers of tales] for an evening to my house, or sometimes we would go to

someone else's for the evening, somewhere in the village. Then a singer would pick up the gusle, [bowed string instrument typical of the Balkans used specifically to accompany epic poetry] and I would listen to the song. The next day when I was with the flock, I would put the song together, word for word, without the gusle, but I would sing it from memory, word for word, just as the singer had sung it... Then I learned gradually to finger the instrument, and to fit the fingering to the words, and my fingers obeyed better and better... I didn't sing among the men until I had perfected the song, but only among the young fellows in my circle [*druzina*] not in front of my elders...

Now imagine any contemporary teenager first listening to an epic for several hours and then repeating it the next day from memory. By contrast, the non-literate shepherd boy was equipped with the necessary plasticity and capacity of brain independent from written record and entirely confident in the ability of comprehension, retention and reproduction through oral means alone. The recitation is approached from the general thematic over-sense to the particulars of the events of the story. The epic is held as a whole and as parts simultaneously, as a spatial and temporal continuum in the narrator's internal space. How many graduate students or doctoral candidates can do that with their thesis?

V J. Cornell in his extensive research of traces of Abu Medyan's writing coments comments that no one "has been unable to find any example of Abu Madyan's writings that was written down in manuscript form less than two hundred years after the death of the shaykh himself." V J. Cornell continues:

Consequently, it is difficult to imagine any modern version of the shaykh's writings that could realistically be represented as a final, definitive edition of Au Madyan's literary output. [...] a number of shorter works, such as poems and aphorisms have been transmitted from generation to generation until they have attained the status of popular folklore. [...] the original text was verified orally with the help of members of the Qadiri Suri zawiya in Marrakesh, Morocco, who had memorized and transmitted it to their brethren for many generations. Since the Moroccan version of this ode is so universally well known, it is probably safe to assume that it is more faithful to the original than the widely disseminated printed version from Egypt that was published by 'Abd al-

Halun Mahmud in his small volume on the life and works of Abu Madyan.

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Artifacts and Territory

In the nineteenth century Academies concerned with literature, language, philosophy and the arts were closely linked to an emergence of a new nationalistic spirit. Out of numerous examples we can point to the birth of United Italy, New Germany or small countries emerging after the dissolution of Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires. Funding, publication and respect came to those who were part of these nationalist movements.

In her comprehensive book titled *A World History of Nineteenth-Century Archaeology-Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Past* Margarita Diaz-Andreu discusses the relationship and emergence of archaeology as a discipline to the establishment of nationalist movements and politics. She writes:

Archaeology thus grew out of a political context in which the nation was the major element which provided legitimacy to the state. This happened in Europe as in all the other parts of the independent world, including the Near East, Latin America, China, and Japan. The very nature of the nation, however, was an arena of negotiation in which archaeologist had a voice. To start with, it was necessary to demonstrate that the nation indeed existed, and for this the construction of its life history was crucial. Knowledge of the past and an understanding of the events that had led to the specific make-up of a nation became a political tool. (Pg. 399)

Challenging the nationalist view of the past are numerous tangible and intangible examples that highlight the cultural similarity and diversity of sources often flowing in a number of directions in the *Middle Sea*, the watershed of Asia, Africa, and Europe. R. R. Holloway's, *The Classical Mediterranean, its Prehistoric Past and the Formation of Europe* writes:

[...] we must also avoid limiting our vision of the past only to the surviving material evidence without acknowledging that the objects are also pointers to technology — and thus to verbally transmitted knowledge — to traditions — and thus to social continuity — to both utility and display — and thus not only to the working life

of a community but also to creativity and the diplomacy [...] (Pg. 1)

R. R. Holloway continues:

To keep in mind what is superficially missing in the physical record but was present in its creation opens our eyes to many things that in a literate society would be recorded but that with the judicious use of imagination can be recaptured even in the absence of the written word. (Pg. 1)

R. R. Holloway points to the potential arbitrariness of disciplinary classification. He talks about how ancient pottery styles became the standard of cultural identity, splitting, reducing and trivializing larger cultural units along the lines of craft production. At the same time the organization of archaeology within modern national boundaries artificially creates polarizing classifications. The cultural heritage of modern Balkans is an example, and hostage, of the nationalist model. R. R. Holloway ends the opening of his essay with:

The classical period is affected by deep-seated prejudices. Architecture is surely that branch of Greek archaeology of which Italy and Sicily have preserved the majority of the standing monuments of the sixth and fifth centuries. But reading the introduction to William Bell Dinsmoor's standard treatment of the subject one realizes that in the author's view Greek architecture was the product of Greece within its modern boundaries. Our sense of division between the Aegean and the Central Mediterranean is also heightened by what happened in historical times. (Pg. 2)

The cited examples above are intended to open discussion about academic uneasiness with oral traditions as one of the primary sources of studying Civilizations. Also reflecting on restricted research caused by artificial divisions in the previous two centuries of formations of counties and nations. The vast field of *civilization appraisal* is limited by often impenetrable disciplinary practices and definitions. This paper, in its modest way intends to contribute to gaining comparative perspective and creating scholarly equipment to understand and share *civilizational germinating points*, they embodiment by *actual human beings* and pave a way for informed envisioning and *pre-constructing the future*.

Inspiration and every day life

The life journey and land crossing from Baghdad to Cordoba by Ziryab - Abu I-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Nafi (172/789 –242/ 857) is an example how a single inspired person, under the right conditions can affect the culture of his day and multiple cultures across the time.

To understand the journey of Ziryab is to understand the journey and survival of the Umayyads and Al-Hakam I. Like the refugee prince before him, Ziryab's journey must have been on land through Arab territory and kingdoms, but with the Mediterranean, the White Middle Sea - al-Baḥr al-Abyaḍ al-Mutawassit, providing a natural and cultural presence beyond being scenic background. [We learned from the Phoenician history that the African coast was more navigable west to east due to currents and perhaps prevailing winds of colder Atlantic air being sucked by the hotter lighter air of Africa.] The prince Al-Hakam I in his exile from Damascus had to manage a vast territory, a number of kingdoms and potentially treacherous allegiances before he finally crossed Gibraltar into the Iberian Peninsula and unified disparate interests into the kingdom of Al-Andaluse.

Musician Ziryab - Abu I-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Nafi (789 – 857) was trained as a youth in his Native Baghdad then traveled through Damascus with a sojourn in North Africa before settling in Spain as a court adviser. Ziryab arrived in Cordoba in 822 at the age of 43 and was welcomed by Al-Hakam II who honored his recently desisted father's invitation.

It is rare for a stranger to be embraced and allowed to bring so much influence, politics, economics and inter-cultural polices all combined to make Al-Andaluse one of the most advanced societies of its day, famed for its conviviality, art, music, architecture and religious tolerance.

In the history of the Middle Sea the ebb and flow of periods of flourishing, conviviality and security are constantly parallel to or followed by strife, conflict, unrest and intolerance. The itinerant advisers, scholars, and artists play a part in it. The example of Ziryab's contribution to Iberian music, general culture and mores is a part of the history of the elusive Mediterranean conviviality. In the processes of Civilizations conviviality is a complex social interplay of many elements, but the legislative framework and cultural dynamics can be set up to facilitate daily practice of mutual understanding. Umayyads, Abbasids and Muslim empires in Andalusia and Mogul kingdoms in India managed to sustain

religious diversity and pluralism in their own time. The general attitude in Islam that recognized the Abrahamic religions as equally reviled, helped to institutionalize in certain historic periods the coexistence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in such areas as free religious practice, law, forming of business associations, protection and education. Following those earlier examples, The Ottoman Empire inherited the Arab Convivencia of the middle ages and created a unique legal and political instrument, the millet or community system, that made possible the coexistence of diverse Christians from the Balkans to the Caucasus, Jews and a majority Muslims under the same political system and social domain for centuries. Some Civilizations grew without conviviality and based their successes on specific identity and when fully formed fostered a sense of cultural superiority. At early stages of the development of Civilization there is always some form of cultural osmosis, inter-cultural exchange of ideas and skills thought and transmitted by competent practitioners.

The example of the Ottoman legislation¹ and diversity management is introduced briefly to give a comparative idea of the cultural climate and aspirations of an earlier time where Ziryab's contributions found a fertile ground. Summarizing Ziryab's life and work will open reflection on the dynamic of the traveling intellectuals, experts, advisers and artists at medieval and renaissance courts. Considering that Ziryab was first and foremost a great musician, let's first look briefly to the tradition from which Ziryab came from, the Persian Classical music.

Over centuries Persian music influenced Arab, Indian, Andalusian, medieval Troubadour, courtly music of Europe, Western China and Ottoman styles and practices. In Persian classical music the lead singer or instrumentalist is the master of the palpable, communicable mood of the performance. He conducts with his voice and instrument guiding other musicians in an ensemble performance. Often the other musicians are his relatives and disciples. Apprentices have well-defined and traditional relationships to the master musician, who is called Ostad. The appellation

¹ Ali Bardakoglu, "Culture of Co-existence in Islam: The Turkish Case", Insight Turkey, Vol. 10, No. 3. 2008. www.setav.org/document/Insight%20Turkey%20103%20Ali%20Bardakoglu (Accessed 24 November 2008), p. 115

Osted is similar to the European title Maestro (for the public), akin to the Indian Music Guru (for his students) and reminiscent to the Japanese title of National Treasure (for his Patron and supporters). Persian classical music is interplay of improvisation and pre-arranged composition and is based on a series of modal scales and tunes which must be memorized. The repertoire consists of more than two hundred short melodic movements which are classified into seven "modes." Out of this cultural context and tradition emerges Ziryab as a king of musicians, inspired performer and composer, music tradition keeper as well as innovator, instrument maker and teacher.

Ziryab Disidence and Exile

Baghdad is speculated as Ziryab's place of birth. He must have had early training even as an infant, he became fully proficient in musical skills demanding technical dexterity by the time he was in his early teens. Including all of his other gifts, this musical dexterity allowed him to comprehend, understand and memorize his teacher's work that would be impossible for a teenager or a young adult who recently started. Ziryab, who was nicknamed Blackbird because of his dark skin was thought by some scholars to be a freed slave. If that was the case, he was probably second or third generation because he was well versed, and adjusted to both the intricacies of court life and at home with rulers and kings. Even as a young man he was naturally part of the cosmopolitan circles of courtiers and advisers.

In both ancient and relatively modern times and until the industrial revolution, people inherited the profession of their family and parents, as was the case with Mozart and Beethoven. So probably Ziryab's mother was a court singer of considerable gifts, wisdom, allure, renown and of a remote ethnicity unusual in Baghdad, maybe Ethiopian, south Indian or North African. Almost all of the sources gave Ziryab Persian, Kurdish or African origins. His father may have been Persian/Kurdish, a highly placed musician or a court official and perhaps a protector if not a husband of Ziryab's mother.

Music was considered sinful even blasphemous among certain judges and religious circles of Islam. To get around this the ancient Arab speaking world employed non-Muslims or foreigners to perform the music. A dark, beautiful, cultured Indian or African women musician and her Persian

protector and consort would be a perfect answer to the Arab court's need of music and musicians.

Some scenarios, like the tentative reconstruction presented above with Ziryab already remarkably accomplished as a youth, would contextualize Ziryab strategically and wisely apprenticing himself to the leading singer of his time Ishaq al-Mawsili at the court of Harun al-Rashid. As he learned everything he could he began to take the music to greater heights, including improving instrument building.

Traditionally an apprentice who is not a family member had a very small chance of inheriting his teacher's post at the court. He would have to wait for a long and uncertain time and hide his gifts as not to offend his teacher. Ziryab's reputation was growing probably through some courtiers visiting Ishaq al-Mawsili classes or the master performing with his student at their house concerts. The reports of Ziryab's quality reached Harun al-Rashid so the king wanted to hear him. Ishaq al-Mawsili was amiable as this was a testament of the quality of his school and instruction demonstrated before the king. Tradition implied extreme deference to the master presenting his pupil. Ziryab's temperament was not that of a minor court musician content with security of a job, instead he took risk and approached the king. Ziryab knew that if he didn't show honestly his ability at this meeting, a prolonged and surreptitious rivalry behind the scenes would happen sooner or later in which he would have no access to the king's ear.

Julian Ribera in his book *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain*² describes the event in a staged dialog:

Then followed a question [from the king] about his skill, and Ziryab answered:

"I can sing what the other singers know, but most of repertory is made up of numbers suitable only for performance before a Caliph like Your Majesty. The other singers do not know these. If Your Majesty will permit, I will sing for you what human ears have never even heard."

Julian Ribera describes how the Caliph ordered that Ishaq's lute should be handed to him, but that Ziryab declined, saying that he has had brought his own lute and left it with the guards. It was made by him as

² Julian Ribera, *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain*, Humphrey Milford Oxford University Press, London 1929, p. 101

no other was suitable. Harun sent for it and after examining, it seemed that the two instruments were almost identical. Julian Ribera continues:

Caliph said: "Why were you unwilling to use your master's lute?"

"If the Emir desires me to sing in my master's style, I will sing with his lute, but if I am to sing in my own style, I must play my own instrument."

"They seem alike to me," answered Harun.

"At first view, yes; but even if the size and wood are the same, the weight is not, My lute weighs about a third less than Ishak's and my strings are made of silk that has not been spun with hot water, which weakens them. The bass and third strings are made of lion guts, softer and more sonorous than those from any other animal. These strings are stronger than any others and withstand better the striking of the plectrum."

(p. 101 – 102)

Years wondering

Julian Ribera describes how after that meeting, Ishaq al-Mawsili was unable to bear competition at the court. He asked Ziryab to either leave to some distant place where he would never hear of him again, and offered to finance the exile, or if he remained at the Baghdad Court he would use all means to ruin him. Ziryab chose exile and went to the west towards new frontiers of North Africa and Al-Andaluse in Spain. He sojourned for a while in Ifriqiyya, present day Tunisia, at the Aghlabid court. The arrangement seemed to be reasonable if not fulfilling and it gave Ziryab opportunity to build a reputation and respect among his colleagues and connoisseurs prior to being invited to Al-Andalus by the Umayyad Caliph, Al-Hakam I.

Years of full participation

Ziryab crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to Algeciras with his family in 822. Julian Ribera tells us that there he received the tragic news that Al-Hakam had died:

"At this he [Ziryab] considered turning back to Africa, but Mansur, the Jewish singer sent by Al-Hakam to meet Ziryab, persuaded him to remain and wait for word from Abdu'r-Rahman II, son and successor of the dead monarch. The Jewish singer wrote to Abdu'r-Rahman, telling of the occurrence, and shortly after Ziryab himself received a letter from the

monarch inviting him to Cordova and expressing his pleasure in the expectation of his presence.” p. 102

The successor Abd al-Rahman II turned out to be a great patron of cultural development and Ziryab was listened to and his ideas on reforms were implemented. Abd al-Rahman II and Ziryab became lifelong friends and their cultural contribution is so ubiquitously in the mores of daily life even today that it has become invisible.

Contribution

Music

Ziryab advanced and developed the Oud, the predecessor of lute and guitar. He added a fifth pair of strings and dyed the four strings a deferent color to symbolize the humors, the elements, and the fifth string to represent the ether, the soul. For greater sensitivity to the instrument and greater dexterity and precision of playing, he also introduced the use of a quill instead of a wooden pick.

The music based on his deeply considered and communicable style became a mode of Iberian and North African Music for generations. An example is nawba, an ensemble style where a larger group of people take turns singing individually. Cordoba became the place of one of the first schools of music initiated by Zirjab, with equal training for male and female students.

Model courtier

Ziryab must have been from an early age, a model courtier brought up with a profound knowledge of etiquette, unspoken innuendos of court interactions and ways of elegance. He deeply understood the use of artifice and stylization to bring out natural beauty in everyone. His early education and context of life must have provided an understanding of the mores of musicians behind the scene. At some periods in history and when they are were very young, boys were allowed and nurtured in women’s quarters until they are of a certain age. Ziryab must have seen elaborate and sophisticated ways of dressing, personal hygiene and body beatification processes of court singers that gave him grounding for his later involvement and revolutionizing the fashion of his day and enabled him to be a trusted and consulted arbiter of taste.

The list of his innovations is staggering and the fact that they were not only for the aristocrats but could be adopted inter-culturally by a wide spectrum of people and implemented within their means, made them the achievements of cosmopolitan urbanity of Umayyad Spain unparalleled in most of Europe at that time.

The parallel list of his innovations parallel to music

Fashion

Brought the flattering and opulent dressing of urban Baghdad, Damascus and the Orient to Iberia.

Launched different clothing for mornings, afternoons and evenings and for winter and summer.

Introduced winter clothing usually in dark colors, created from warm cottons, wool and velvet that he brought to Spain in contrast with summer clothing fashioned out of cotton, silk and flax in lighter, cooler materials and brighter colors.

Set up a fashion and textile industry producing colored striped fabric and coats of transparent fabric, and introduced bleached white clothing.

Grooming

Revolutionized hair cut with a fringe down to eyebrows, cut straight across the forehead, the ears and neck uncovered, considered a bit risqué. (Before this men and women wore long hair that hung loose to their shoulders, parted in the middle)

Opened beauty parlor and cosmetology schools teaching the shaping of eyebrows and the use of depilatories for removing body hair, and he introduced new perfumes and cosmetics.

Introduced the use of fragrant oils and salt to maintain healthy and shiny hair condition

He also advocated morning and evening baths and emphasized the importance of personal hygiene.

He made shaving for men widespread.

Invented a new type of deodorant.

Invented an early toothpaste

Food

Introduced the Tablecloth and brought many dishes from Persia, Baghdad, Damascus and created a new menu.

Revolutionized the local cuisine and table procedures, by initiating the three-course meal of soup, the main course, dessert and introduced new fruits, vegetables and herbs. He also introduced the use of glassware instead of metal goblets.

Introduced New Year celebrations to Spain that spread over time through Europe based on Persian festival of Nouroz.

The Role

It is rare in history that an adviser was listened to that extent and given a chance to implement so many well considered ideas in multiple fields. It is so rare for a patron to develop a deep working, life long relationship with an adviser. It seems that Zirjāb's internal grace and wisdom guided him to never overstep the delicate boundaries of power and friendship. Al-Hakam II and Zirjāb's partnership created a living, inspiring cultural nexus that made Al-Andaluse and Cordoba the intellectual and artistic center of their time, 8th and 9th century Iberia and some of the influences continue to this day. Within Islamic code of values and governance the partnership of Zirjāb and Al-Hakam II ushered so many innovations and changes that refined the Civilization of Middle Ages.

Seal of the Particular Muhammadan Sanctity as continuity

Ibn 'Arabī (560/1165 –637/1240), Seville to Damascus

The reason we follow the description of Zirjāb's great and inspiring journey westward from Bagdad to Cordoba with a brief account of Ibn Arabī's influential passage eastward from Seville to Damascus is to give a sense of the comparable wave of cultural influences from west to east in the proceeding centuries after Zirjāb. This is a way to set up some observable perimeters in studying influences and counter-influences and helps us understand how intangible heritage can play a role in giving a greater glimpse and understanding of history.

Culturally and in general we are still more or less under a nineteenth century model that defines the Middle Ages as Dark Ages. Current interest internationally for an inter-cultural and comparative inquiry of the Mediterranean Studies' is opening scholarship to areas previously unarticulated. Bringing some elements of intangible heritage and shared motifs into an overview of Ibn Arabī's life and work may also enrich our

understanding of Mediterranean cultural history and into the building blocks, movements and responses to Revelation that foster growth and changing dynamics of Civilizations.

Ibn Arabi's articulation of his role as the: *Seal of the Particular Muhammadan Sanctity* was based on his deep experiences and provides a glimpse of a dynamic of *Civilizational Continuity*. This is a delicate point as it is a unique role and he was the only person who had gone through a thorough training and had been tested by teachers and situations and was able to articulate a role like that trans-personally and with an absence or minimal ego. For a Revelation to continue it needs people who live its message and deep non-verbal content completely at all the levels. That kind of emergence is rare. Ibn Arabi is an example of a seeker, thinker and interpreter, meeting Prophet Mohamed's message fully.

William C. Chittick³ in his essay *The Muhammadan Inheritance* describes Ibn Arabi's articulations:

Each prophet has left an inheritance, and Ibn 'Arabi tells us that in every age there must be at least 124,000 friends of God, that is, one inheritor for each prophet of history (III 208.14). The prophetic inheritances define the various modes of authentic experience and knowledge of God. In other words, to attain to true knowledge, one must know God according to a certain paradigm of human perfection defined by a specific prophet. The question of how people can gain the knowledge bestowed upon a prophet is central to Ibn 'Arabi writings.

Ibn Arabi's outer journey from Seville to Damascus may touch upon the points of his development and show the Andalusian and Maghreb contribution to continuity and inspiration.

Ibn Arabi early years

Born in Murcia in Moorish Spain, Ibn Arabi (560/1165 –637/1240), moved to Seville with his family when he was a young boy. Like Cordoba, Seville was one of the cultural centers of Islamic Spain. Ibn Arabi's schooling in Qur'an and other basic elements of Islamic education began in Seville probably at the age of 7 or 8. Ibn Arabi's fathers recognized his

³ W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn 'Arabi 's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989

son's intellectual abilities and sent him to leading clerics and jurists for training.

An important element of this education was the study of Hadith, large collections of sayings, whose implied and stated meaning of the Prophet Mohamed were used in Islamic jurisprudence, clerical interpretations and religious discussions. This was a required learning for anyone aspiring to public office, religious or scholarly vocation. The credentials were earned by being accepted, apprenticed and trained by respected and established practitioners. This apprenticeship also taught the manners and the behavior of the learned man acquiring body language as well as deeper attitudes to religious practices by assimilating the examples of the elders. Not dissimilar to musicians learning by heart a large amount of traditional material and learning the elusive art of interpretation and creative response from living teachers.

This synergy of intellectual and bodily engagement is very important in understanding the education and bearing of any public figures or courtiers in pre-industrial times and particularly in the East and the Mediterranean. Out of this learning model emerges Ibn Arabi whose contemplative and articulating gifts have been recognized early.

Ibn Arabi writes in his dictionary of Andalusian teachers and mystics, *Al-Durrat Al-Fakhira*, about two of his women teachers Shams of Marchena, and Fatima of Cordoba. This association seemed to have happened when he was 16 or 17 when his grounding in scripture and commentary was in advance states of accomplishment. His association with practicing mystics along with his own abilities probably created a fork in the road that led him from potentially training for public office to becoming a practicing mystic, teacher and prolific writer about religious experience.

C. A. Helminski in her article on women mystics in Islam⁴ quotes R.W.J. Austin's translation of Ibn Arabi's recounting his connection with one of his early significant teachers:

I served as a disciple one of the lovers of God, a gnostic, a lady of Seville called Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna of Cordova. I served her for several years, she being over ninety-five years of

⁴ *Camille Adams Helminski, Women & Sufism*

This article first appeared in [*Gnosis* #30](#) (Winter 1994) San Francisco

age... She used to play on the tambourine and show great pleasure in it. [...] With my own hands I built for her a hut of reeds as high as she, in which she lived until she died. She used to say to me, 'I am your spiritual mother and the light of your earthly mother.'⁵

The quote is very important as it portrays the rich relational aspects of discipleship. The knowledge is not transmitted only through reading of scriptures, studying, memorizing and possible discussions but also by rising to an occasion and attending to the daily needs of situations for and with a teacher. Also of interest in this quote is the translator's choice to use the term Gnostic in describing Fatima. The entire Andalusian and neighboring Provençal cultures gave space for adoption and development of expressions of search, attitude or methodology for direct experience, Christen Cathars, Jewish Cabalist and Islamic Sufis seem to have some Gnostic element in their processes. This was the climate in which Ibn Arabi grew up and matured as a seeker, writer and teacher.

The second half of his education took place among spiritual and mystic co-fraternities in North Africa. The cultural significance of oral traditions in general will be of interest when we look at Neo-Platonic thought, schools and transmissions surrounding the example of Georgius Gemistus Pletho's life work. As cultural historians of ideas and intangible heritage, we straddled the difficulty of basing our reconstructions on very minimal evidence and writing about phenomenon that provides little documentation about their processes of transmission, and the official views that look at them as heresies, deviances, marginal occurrences or historically unimportant. In view of this we present a brief summary of Ibn Arabi's inner and outer journey and conclude this section with glimpses of Arab-Andaluse culture that flourished for four hundred years with his life more or less in the middle of it.

Advising, wandering, writing, teaching

After receiving the mantle from his North African teachers and a brief return to his native city and districts of his upbringing, Ibn Arabi at the age of thirty-five embarked on the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. On the

⁵ Ibn 'Arabi, *Sufis of Andalusia*, tr. R.W.J. Austin (Sherborne, Gloucestershire: Beshara Publications, 1988), pp. 25–26

way to Mecca and afterwards his advice, or just conversation was sought by a number of courts, dignitaries and rulers. Once he reached Mecca he lived there for three years. After that period he headed to Anatolia with his traveling companions and disciples. This sojourn lasted almost forty years, interrupted by a number of subsequent pilgrimages to Mecca. As his reputation grew and his interpretations caught the imagination of his contemporaries in the last 17 years of his life, he settled in Damascus.

Rich Cultural Context

The entire Andalusian and neighboring Provençal cultures gave space for adoption and development of some form of search, attitude or methodology for direct experience, Christian Cathars, Jewish Kabbalists and Islamic Sufis seem to have some Gnostic element in their processes. Once again we emphasize the richness and the crosscurrents of Al-Andaluse in which Ibn Arabi grew up and matured as a seeker, writer and teacher.

William C. Chittick, one of the world experts and translator of Ibn Arabi has this intriguing paragraph in his web article on the life and work of Ibn Arabi:

In fact, his earliest encounter with the “Men of the Unseen World” (rijâl al-ghayb) was with Jesus, as he states repeatedly, and his first teacher on the path to God, Abu'l-`Abbâs al-`Uryabî, was dominated by Christ's spiritual influence. Ibn `Arabî considered Jesus the “Seal of Universal Sanctity.” He himself, at least in certain passages, claimed to be the “Seal of the Particular, Muhammadan Sanctity,” so his early encounter with Jesus certainly suggests something about how he understood his own calling.⁶

The Christian reference is fully integrated in Ibn Arabi's reflection on succession of prophets that is part of the Quran and traditional commentaries, the quote is never the less interesting from a point of view of comparative cultural history. Moorish Spain and adjacent Occitan were a breeding ground of a whole array of independent thoughts considered heretical within the main stream of canonized religions. Even Ibn Arabi's deep commitment, understanding and interpretation of Islamic

⁶ W. Chittick in his essay *The Muhammadan Inheritance...*

Revelation are not universally accepted. Ibn Arabi's possible indirect influences on Christian and Kabbalistic thought still remain mostly unexplored.

A century prior to Ibn Arabi's time, the life and work of Ibn Hazm (994-1064) is an example of possible Iberian and Provençal inspirational flow. He was an Iberian proto-troubadour, who wrote primarily about law and theology and whose books were burned in public. Ibn Hazm is also the author of *The Ring of the Dove*. This work is a treatise about love composed in the Arabic-Persian mode of elegant writing. Translator A.J. Arberry describes Ibn Hazm's work as a systematic treatment of love and affection, combining metaphysics, social commentary and psychology. Troubadours of Provence on the other side of the Pyrenees continued Ibn Hazm's poetic tone and ideas a tradition that began in the 11th century.

Within this geography on both sides of the Pyrenees, facing the Mediterranean, the cultural diversity, trade and commerce flourished. M. R. Menocal in her book *Ornament of the World*⁷ helps articulate the parallel genesis of Jewish Kabbalists and Albigenian belief system:

It [the Occitan territory] was also the seat of the Jewish mystics and esotericists we call kabbalist. Culturally they were much like their Andalusian brethren, but spiritually they were at odds with the Andalusians' intellectual and philosophical visions of faith. This "land of yes" seemed to specialize in nay-saying, and it was also the breeding ground of the Cathar, or Albigenian, heresy, the resolutely Manichean "Church of the Purified" that Rome began to come down on heavily by the mid-twelfth century.

The mystical schools and co-fraternities, grounded in Islam but looking for direct experience of the transcendent reality (of which Ibn Arabi is a numinous proponent) are often marginalized by the established currents of religious interpretation of their time. Ibn Arabi's work is an example of a transmission of knowledge that is not an ornament or a badge of office or status but a communicable insight beyond formal elaborations. This fresh insight is the cultural wave from west to east that Ibn Arabi brought through North Africa, Egypt, Arabia and Anatolia to Damascus.

⁷ M.R. Menocal, *Ornament of the world*, Little, Brown and Company, New York 2002. p. 221

Living tradition that inspired Renaissance Civilization

Georgius Gemistus Pletho (1355–1454)

The reflections in this chapter on the elusive, almost hidden history of the life work of Georgius Gemistus Pletho are mainly based on two sources. The first source, *Georgius Gemistus Pletho- The Last of the Hellenes* by C. M. Woodhouse published in 1986 by Oxford University Press, is the detailed study of most of the surviving documents written by Gemistus and his immediate circle of contemporaries. The other source is the ongoing study and collection of comparative examples of oral traditions by the author of this paper and the Artship Foundation. This includes observing examples of skills training, memory systems and ways of tallying that are not written down. This inter-cultural study looks at surviving traditional and contemporary on the job apprenticeship education. C. M. Woodhouse in his book on Gemistus writes about the philosophy omissions that the renowned Byzantine teacher of Platonism Georgius Gemistus Pletho left out from his excerpts and summaries:

In the higher studies, especially philosophy, he preferred oral teaching. He [Gemistus Pletho] liked to emphasize that Plato and the Pythagoreans distrusted the written word as the means of communicating their most important ideas.⁸

So through looking at C. M. Woodhouse's meticulously researched findings, we bring our research to fill some gaps with open questions and tentative hypotheses about transmitting of insight and distilling through means other than writing. Oral traditions were the main instrument for passing knowledge and training dexterity of the body or the mind before writing was invented. It persists throughout history to this day, in different regions and for a different purpose. Oral transmission is ever-present in the Mediterranean history, for example seafaring skills and knowledge are mostly communicated in direct training particularly among fisherman.

Early education and youthful studies

George Gemistus was born into a family of jurists that was close to the Byzantine Court at Constantinople, either as advisers, courtiers or

⁸ C. M. Woodhouse

cherished guests. As a son of a prominent family he was exposed to the finest cultural achievements of his time and received a classical education and general education of quality. His instinct for learning, family support, independent spirit, deep inborn sense of dignity and discretion led him to cultural and cosmopolitan places and cities in search of knowledge and meeting the wise people of his time. He traveled to Cairo, Baghdad, East Mediterranean islands and territories with possible learning communities like Cyprus, Anatolia and Palestine. Adrianopolis seems to be a place where he studied under a teacher. At the time of Gemistus Adrianople / Edirne in Threace was the cosmopolitan capital of the Ottoman state. Threace, today East Thrace or European Turkey is bordering with Greece and Bulgaria, separated by the Dardanelles from Turkey of Asia Minor.

According to C. M. Woodhouse, the most careful of the sources on Gemistus, it appears in indirect references that he studied with the obscure philosopher Elissaeus. C. M. Woodhouse critically evaluates admissible references from written sources and gives glimpses of Elissaeus. Summarized here, Elissaeus must have been a trained Greek philosophy teacher, also connected to Zoroastrianism of Persia, an interpreter of Islamic thinkers like Averroes, and of Jewish origin and learning. Elissaeus' mix of interests, skills and attention to the diversity of traditions reflects a more Arabic intellectual climate with the Mediterranean richness of influences and counter influences than the Byzantine dogmatic views of what is pure and what is heretical and corrupted knowledge. Elissaeus must have been a trained Platonist who carried the teaching and methodology of transmutation of knowledge of the Platonic Academy that since its closure in the fifth century AD went underground.

Before we evaluate the ramifications of this teacher - student relationship of Plathon - Elissaeus and its' influences on the Italian Renaissance and that particular knowledge itinerary, let us look briefly at some cultural centers of the east Mediterranean of their time and the time of Abassids.

Baghdad

Harun al-Rashid (we mentioned earlier in the section on the musician Zyrab) knew that a flourishing empire needs to encourage and legislate for art, culture, learning and commerce. He and particularly his son al-

Ma'mun in the 9th century instigated among many initiatives The House of Wisdom, a library and translation institute in Baghdad.

Both Umayyad Cordoba and Abassid Baghdad were the cultural capitals of the Islamic world from the 9th to 13th centuries. Although rivals and at a great geographic distance from each other, the flow of ideas, scientific and other research was carried by itinerant scholars, mystics, experts, advisers and artists. The Baghdad of the al-Ma'mun region fostered many disciplines. Today we know about developments in the science of hydraulics, time keeping and navigation, astronomy/astrology, alchemy/chemistry, zoology, botany, medical botany, medicine and mathematics with emergent algebra. This includes collections of Persian, Hindu and Hebrew scriptures and translation of Greek manuscripts, summaries and comments on Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plotinus and probably a number of others.

Under Abbasid Dynasty, Baghdad was a truly cosmopolitan capital with a population of over a million, abundant in diversity of people and religions, material wealth, intellectual development, cultural and artistic reaches.

Cairo and Adrianopole

Cairo gained cultural importance through the complex tangles and battles of numerous interests throughout the late middle ages. Its prominence was aided by Abbasid Caliphate dynastic infighting, Mamluk Turkic Military successes, Mongol invasions and ambitions and Christian Crusader clams. Also the rise of the Ottoman and shrinking of the Byzantine Empires witnessed development of cultural and learning institutions that attempted to rival Baghdad. Like Cairo for the Mamluks, Adrianopole for the Ottoman state developed into a significant cultural and learning center. Adrianopole was in the late 14th century the capital of the Ottoman state. Gemistus went to Adrianopole when he was twenty, approximately in 1380.

Discrete Learning Containers

The thinkers, teachers, students, and devotees traveled and intentionally followed or looked for their own networks of religious, ethnic, learning or mystic communities, libraries and schools. After the destruction and burning of Alexandrian Library in the 5th century AD, the

dispersed scholars formed formal and informal fraternities that kept some of the Hellenic and other traditions alive, evolving and sometimes cross-pollinating. Just like Ibn Arabi who found the networks of his tradition and beliefs traveling from Spain to Anatolia via North Africa, so did young Gemistus crisscross the Eastern Mediterranean in search of deepening and broadening his philosophical, legal and historic interests. This culminated in Gemistus finding or being found by a living teacher capable of transmitting.

Ammonius - Platonist Teacher

Alexandria of the 3rd century BC was the home of a philosophy school held by the almost anonymous Ammonius Saccas, sakkophoros - sacks bearer. He did not document any of his teaching or write down his ideas and encouraged his pupils to do the same. The known students of Ammonius were Plotinus, Origen and Herrenius who must have, according to tradition, accepted the requirement of nothing being written down. It was only when Herrenius, probably departing from the school, wrote about his ideas that Plotinus and Origen responded in writing to correct partial and misleading representation. It is with thanks to this rising to the occasion that we have the significant writings of Plotinus.

Ilija Savic, colleague of the author of this paper, in researching Porphyry, early Neo-Platonist and traces of Orphic Mysteries for his doctoral thesis, before his untimely death, was of the opinion that neither Clement of Alexandria or Athenagoras were fully trained Orphic initiates. He shared this view with colleagues that prior to converting to Christianity, he must have had only a rudimentary training in the mysteries and denounced them because of their limited knowledge. It appears that facts about Orphic, Elysian or any other mystery processes came from students that had broken the training either voluntarily or had been asked to leave.

Another example of a complex relationship of a Platonic School to the surrounding culture is, the life and work of Hypatia in the fifth century, before she was brutally assassinated by a Byzantine appointed bishop. She held a Platonic Academy at Alexandria. She wrote on mathematics, astronomy and music but did not write about her teachings of philosophy and methods of transmission. Destruction of Hypatia and the subsequent burning of the library saw dispersion of Hellenic, Jewish

and Egyptian/African scholars, writers, translators and scientists into the geographic areas of the Fertile Crescent or Magreb. An overlooked fact of cultural history is that the Old Testament, as we know it, was compiled at the Alexandrian Library by a *collegium* of probably eighty Rabbis and most likely first drafted in Greek, which points to the multiple cultural strands nurtured there.

G. N. Atiyeh⁹ in his paper gives insight into the Iberian mystic and teacher Ibn Masarra born in “883 AD in Cordoba, and died in 931AD in a hermitage he had founded for his friends and disciples in the Sierra of Cordoba”. G. N. Atiyeh writes:

M. Asín Palacios, the Spanish scholar who first reconstructed an integral account of Ibn Masarra's life and thought, concluded that he was the first Andalusian to structure Spanish Islamic philosophy (hikma) and that he conveyed his doctrines in a series of batini (inward) esoteric images and symbols (Asín Palacios [1972](#)). The centrepiece of Asín's thesis, however, was the elaboration of a whole theory of Ibn Masarra's inspiration from a pseudo-Empedocles, who had developed a peculiar form of Plotinian ideas on the One and the five eternal substances of Primal Matter, Intellect, Soul, Nature and Secondary Matter. According to Asín, Ibn Masarra was the founder of a philosophical-mystical school which influenced Jewish, Christian and Muslim medieval philosophers. Andalusian Sufism from Isma'il al-Ru'ayni (d. ah 555/ad 1268) to [Ibn al-'Arabi](#) by way of Ibn al-'Arif (d. ah 536/ad 1141) sprang from the Masarri school.

G. N. Atiyeh in the following passage points to the perpetual strife and danger Neo-Platonist thought encounters under any system.

His success came from a Socratic style of pedagogy as well as a charismatic personality and skill in communication. After his death the jurists carried out a veritable persecution of his disciples; who had formed themselves into an ascetic order, the Masarriya, in Cordoba and later in Almeria.

⁹ George N. Atiyeh-1998, Routledge.

Before we return to Gemistus Plathon' and Elissaeus' teacher-student relationship let us remember Socrates for the moment. The barefooted teacher and mystic Socrates, often on his way to attending to matters of daily life, stopped in the streets and porticos to commune with a world of ideas. An elderly impoverished thinker, he was accused of corrupting youth and executed in the democratic Athens of the 5th century BC. He did not write any of his ideas and teachings. What is it that makes him and other teachers of philosophic austerity and rigour so unacceptable to the authorities? Plato also never expounded directly on his theories but put them in the mouth of the characters of his dialogues allowing for contrasting and inconclusive views. Similarly, Abu Madyan's teacher Shaikh Abu Ya'azza never written down any of his thought and teaching. Shaikh Abu Ya'azza did not speak or write Arabic, he spoke a Barber dialect of North Africa. Abu Ya'azza's deeds, teaching and advice deeply influenced Abu Medyan's writing and in turn through Abu Madyan's legacy profound articulations of Ibn Arabi.

It appears that in looking at a number of instances inter-culturally, that a training of philosophers with an aspiration to some direct knowledge of transcendent reality demanded a rigorous training not only of the intellect but also of the being of the aspirant. As cultural historians we do not advocate any outcome but the fact that humanity in all its cultures have had a methodology for transcendence is of interest here. Neo Platonic schools seem to offer such training, the traces of its intangible itineraries crisscrossing the Mediterranean can be seen in many geographic areas and in all of the regional and diverse religious traditions. Gemistus Plathon belongs to that culture of highly trained philosophy teachers of the Mediterranean.

We learn mostly about Gemistus' training from a vigorous detractor, a life long enemy and his ex-student George Scholarios who became Patriarch of Constantinople under the new name of Gennadios. Before we analyze Scholarios' text on Plathon's education and training, let us look at some general characteristics of direct learning. To remain comparative and open in the study of methodologies of direct learning from a teacher, we based this draft of the stages on scant documentary evidence, folklore, training of musicians, artist and craftsmen in traditional societies, oral reminiscences, post training diaries, anthropological writing and Pythagorean, Platonic, Neo-Platonic,

Hermetic and Cabalist training fragments. Gemistos Plethon must have gone through the same process resembling phases listed below.

Natural aptitude and schooling

Years of physiological destitution and search (regardless of outer circumstances)

Sings, recommendation, hearsay about a teacher or a school

Meeting of the teacher and student

Testing of the student's resolve

Preliminary acceptance into some form of apprenticeship

Renunciation, service, daily practice and learning

First responsibilities, privations and isolation as test of quality of being

Deeper internal acceptance, shedding aspects of conditioning

Rejection from the school/teacher as second larger test of the resolve

Bewilderment and crisis, temptations of power

Transpersonal merging into the essence of the school or teaching

Specialization and Life Skills, profession

Fully integrated as a proponent / carrier of a particular tradition and becoming its teacher

C. M. Woodhouse meticulously presents the case of Gemistos' ex-pupil Scholarios, later renamed Gennadios as Patriarch of Constantinople. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and death of Gemistos in 1454, Scholarios posthumously was seeking to justify his burning of Gemistos' advice to the princes in the Book of Laws. To explain the genesis of this Gemistos' last work and to Scholarios most heretical work, the manuscript of which he had received from the sister of Theodor Despot of Mistra, into whose hands it had gone when Gemistos died. Scholarios' denouncement is our source for following Gemistos' path of learning and the multiple influences he absorbed. [In the square brackets we shall comment on segment of the quote in italics from the point of view of our list of characteristics of oral training of philosophers] C. M. Woodhouse writes:

Scholarios detected the origin of Gemistos' heresies in his education, which he described in the following terms:

Before he had acquired the maturity of reason and education and the capacity of judgment in such matters – or rather, before he had even devoted himself to acquiring them—he was so dominated by Hellenic ideas that he took little trouble about learning traditional Christianity, apart from the most superficial aspects. (Scholarios 1)

[Gemistos showed natural aptitude for learning and his schooling took place between the Imperial Court, the Byzantine legal system, the Orthodox Church and private tutors and he probably excelled in the necessary grounding available at his time in Constantinople]

In reality it was not for the sake of the Greek language, like all Christians, that he read and studied Greek literature—first the poets and then the philosophers—but in order to associate himself with them; and so in fact he did, as we know for certain that many who knew him in his youth. (Scholarios 2)

[Years of physiological destitution and searching (regardless of outer circumstances) while having no peers, happened to many gifted children and youth throughout history. It is a period that teaches them to stand-alone, to have intellectual courage]

It was natural in the case of a man under such influence, in the absence of divine grace, that through the demons with whom he associated there should have come a tendency towards an ineradicable adherence to error, as happened to Julian and many other apostates. (Scholarios 3)

[There are many stories in history and folklore of how people found signs, responded to recommendations, or went to search after hearing about a teacher or a school. This seems to be part of many oral traditions and a numinous, fertilizing moment in an otherwise rigorous process of testing of the student's resolve. We glean something of this from Gemistus' conduct as a teacher from his student who had stamina and were encouraged to stay and complete the training]

The climax of his apostasy came later under the influence of a certain Jew with whom he studied, attracted by his skill as an interpreter of Aristotle. This Jew was an adherent of Averroes and other Persian and Arabic interpreters of Aristotle's works, which the Jews had translated into their own language, but he

paid little regard to Moses or the beliefs and observances which the Jews received from him. (Scholarios 4)

[From this text above we can approximate that Gemistus was accepted into a necessary form of full apprenticeship that demanded renunciation, service, daily practice, learning diligence and probably practical chores. Scholarios' denouncement also points not only to the rich inter-cultural intellectual influences but also indirectly to the further aspect of training like deputized responsibilities, contained privations and isolation as test of quality of being]

This man also expounded to Gemistos the doctrines of Zoroaster and others. He was ostensibly a Jew but in fact a Hellenist (pagan). Gemistos stayed with him for a long time, not only as a pupil but also in his service, living at his expense, for he was one of the most influential men of the court of these barbarians. His name was Elissaeus. So Gemistos ended up as he did. (Scholarios 5)

[This negative passage points to a phase of training when unity of shared tradition among practitioners is stronger than duality of teacher-student. It probably comes after the hardest test of being rejected by the school or teacher leading to enduring bewilderment and crisis. It is a phase that very few survive and it forms the end of training for many aspirants. Scholarios probably never past this one as part of the bewilderment phase is a test of temptations of power, summarized in saying: if you want to test someone give them power.]

He tried to conceal his true character, but was unable to do so when he sought to implant his ideas among his pupils, and he was dismissed from the City by the pious Emperor Manuel and the Church. Their only mistake was that they refrained from denouncing him to the public, and failed to send him into dishonourable exile in barbarian territory, or in some other way to prevent the harm that was to come from him. (Scholarios 6)¹⁰

[According to C. M. Woodhouse's findings in the texts surrounding Gemistus, Emperor Manuel was a Neo-Platonist sympathizer and our hypothesis is that he protected Gemistos by placing him at the court of his relative at Mistra where he became the Chief Magistrate and was able

¹⁰ Scholarios, iv. 152-3.

to carry the tradition of teaching philosophy in the direct method typical of Platonic Academies.]

Platonic Academy in Florence

It seems that a Platonic Academy needed to be seeded by a trained and practicing Platonist. Since closing the Academy in Athens in the fifth century BC with Proclus as a last teacher and the destruction of Hypatia and the Alexandrian Library at about the same time, the likelihood of finding one fully trained for the Florence of the early 14 century is was very small. The History of culture is full of examples of tenacity and ingenuity of continuation of traditions under most difficult circumstances.

Florence

Cosimo the Elder in 1434 inherited the Medici Bank, became the head of the Medici Family and de facto head of state of the Florentine republic without having to hold a political office.

Cosimo embodied the concept of true leadership that knows what people can do and creates conditions for them to excel. This is true for any profession, there are examples of this among educators, theater or film directors and conductors. The Roman Emperor Hadrian was legislator, strategist and architect initiating some fine and memorable buildings and managing the Empire by a remarkable choice of people.

Cosimo knew the balance of statement – understatement and value of cultivated discernment and he had a sense of the role of Florence and the needs of his time. He was not a rich man of parochial outlook who bought respect through outer forms. He was well educated, constantly learning and surrounding himself with the best minds and talent of his day. The combination of deep outlook, interest in transcendence, but also in the ideal form of government and matters of legislation made Cosimo and Gemistos perfect co-respondents. Creating conditions where Platonic ideas could be taught in the open must have appealed to both of them. The new Platonic Academy was born.

Constantinople

The capital of what survived of the Eastern Roman Empire was almost an opposite story to Florence. Constantinople was overgrown with consolidating, conserving politics at every level. Imperial family infighting, dogmatic and politicized church and a weak army were contributing to

the sense of ailing empire, a sense of a different and new future was completely absent. It was a matter of decades and then years of impending conquest by any of the multiple contenders. The minds like Gemistos were not welcomed, only the procedural pedantry ruled the day. But the deepest sickness of any culture is not the benign neglect of the past due simply to the passage of time, but a vigilant self-loathing of the previous phase and its history. The Byzantine Empire by persecuting its own pagan culture forced it to go underground and flourish at neighboring cultures that absorbed them.

This is why the timing of the raising of Florentine renaissance and the living connection to generative ideas are a seeming miracle of the meeting of these two strands of Mediterranean culture, the strand of a living germ hidden within an imploded seed and the numinous flow of rejuvenating, affirming instinct.

In 1438 the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos headed a delegation with Patriarch Joseph of Constantinople to the west, hoping to create powerful allegiance with the Pope in defending his largely shrunken and tittering Empire against the rising Ottoman powers. At Ferrara a joint council was arranged with the Pope to discuss possible union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Because of the rumors of plague, Cosimo Medici suggested that the proceedings be redirected to Florence at his expense. Although not a churchman but a secular philosopher, Gemistos was invited to accompany John VIII Palaiologos on the grounds of being highly recognized by some of his contemporaries, a Greek version of the concept of stupor mundi the marvel of the world, and subject of admiration and wonder. It was believed that Gemistos knew the entire legal system by heart

(as a proponent of the cultivated oral tradition, he must have had a similar connection to the philosophical knowledge), he had a reputation of generosity as a teacher and of living to the highest standards of ethics. Already a decade before the Council of Florence, Gemistos was consulted by the Byzantine Emperor on the issue of unification of the Greek and Latin churches. Eventually at the Council of Florence the document of the union was created, agreed upon and signed. It was so watered down that the agreement was a matter of trivial technicality. Immediately after the council both parties ignored it and the Byzantine clergy saw it as usurping their imagined supremacy as inheritors of the first Christian Roman

Emperor Constantine. At times the schism of the two churches seems to be more about the politicized Apostolic or Imperial succession than about some theological differences. Hidden within the history of events, the Byzantine clergy's valiant guarding of the Imperial succession stemming from Emperor Constantine's conversion had not been studied as a recurrent pattern and one of the causes of demise of Byzantium.

At the Council of Florence the real union happened behind the scenes not only of two views of Christianity but also many strands of Mediterranean learning. Gemistus was invited by Florentine humanists to lecture on Greek philosophy. Because Gemistus was not an ecclesiastic functionary but a secular scholar, he was needed at very few sessions of the council. Cosimo de' Medici attended Gemisto's lectures, as he also was not an ecclesiastic but a lay citizen of Florence. The documentary material about what happened in those meetings is very minimal and most commentators concluded that Cosimo was so inspired by these lectures and Gemistus' teachings that it prompted him to found the Accademia Platonica in Florence. As we have mentioned before, Gemistos did not write his concept or processes, but mostly summaries. These notes are his mini-reference library allowing only indirect glimpse of his teaching. The relationship to books or reference material by the scholars was completely different before the printed book and memory and oral traditions played a great part in holding the knowledge.

Gemistus' lectures and Cosimo's attendance at them must have been a climax of a process of direct or indirect communication most probably started a decade or more before. Medicies had been collecting Greek and Roman statuary with pagan motives, manuscripts connecting to traditions of Kabala, ancient Egyptian alchemy, Hermetic tradition and Muslim medicine and science for their library. It opened as the first public library in Europe in 1440. Cosimo's interest in philosophy and a philosophical basis of for government must have led him to Gemistus. They could have communicated with each other through Gemistus' students and Italian merchants traveling through Greece. Probably the reason Gemistus was enlisted in the Byzantine Emperor's delegation was because of his contacts and the respect he held in Italy. After the council and sojourn in Italy, far reaching was the influence of Georgius Gemistus Pletho on Florentine Humanist Marsilio Ficino, the first director of the Platonic Academy in Florence. Today Gemistus is considered one of the most

important influences on the Italian Renaissance. The Medicis did not unearth broken statues and found rare manuscripts they also connected to a living breathing tradition embodied by Georgius Gemistus Pletho.

If we read the material carefully and caringly presented by C. M. Woodhouse and add our comparative thought on teaching transmissions, it could be summarized that Gemistus intentions were never to be original or remembered but simply to carry the inspiration and creativity inherent in the Platonic Training applied to his time. Just like the effectiveness of a fertilizing germ, it is not the uniqueness of its form that matters but the vigor of carrying the cellular signature forward. This processes may open our thinking about perspectives and struggles of inceptions, growth and maturation of Civilizations.

Inter-cultural understanding

Titus Burckhardt (1325/1908 – 1404/1984) Basel to Fez

Titus Burckhardt stands for an understanding and commitment to continuous perennial values in the midst of twentieth century's crisis of meaning, reductionist thought, preoccupation with extreme individualism to the point of self absorption and material and fanatical gains regardless of consequences. Titus Burckhardt's life work was involved in bridging cultures. He wrote and studied a number of the world's religious traditions and looked for the common essence and underlining principals that had existed for a long time and would continue to last.

Titus Burckhardt with his contemporary and life long friend Frithjof Schuon wrote in a mode and furthered Perennialism, a *universalist view* within the philosophy of religion.

William Stoddart in his book *The Essential Titus Burckhardt*¹¹ describes perennial philosophy as “sharing a single, universal truth on which foundation all religious knowledge and doctrine has grown.” W. Stoddart continues:

The universal truth which lies at heart of each religion has been rediscovered in each epoch by saints, sages, prophets and philosophers. These include not only the 'founders' of the world's great religions but also gifted and inspired mystics,

¹¹ Burckhardt, Titus – edit. Stoddart W, *The Essential Titus Burckhardt, Reflexions on Sacred Art, Faiths, and Civilizations*, World Wisdom, Bloomington 2003, p

theologians and preachers who have revived already existing religions when they had fallen into empty platitudes and hollow ceremonialism.

Jean-Louis Michon in his Afterword to *Fez – City of Islam*¹² describes twenty five year old Titus Burckhardt meeting with Mulay Ali ben Tayyib Darqawa in 1933. The reason we mention this meeting here because it is an instance similar to some examples cited earlier throughout this paper as signifiers of an aspect of *Civilizational continuity*. J. L. Michon describes Titus Burckhardt's apprenticing with Mulay Ali ben Tayyib Darqawa that completed his education. Areas of immersion for outer and inner knowledge and the required effort were enormous. J. L. Michon lists the disciplines:

Arabic, theology and mystical doctrine, making him [Titus Burckhardt] read and learn by heart many chapters of Koran, as well as the versified treaty on dogma and ritual by Ibn Ashir; also making him attend the courses in traditional science, which he himself and other savants give at Qarawiyyin University.

This partial list demonstrates just some of the outer demands required to develop and sustain a living connection to the essence of any Civilization as a living daily reality. Out of many ramifications of this meeting and training we shall touch upon two: Respect for other *Prophets and Religions* and *Training and Education*.

Titus Burckhardt's role as an *intercultural bridge* grew and was refined by a deep understanding and connection to Islam and the Prophet's respect and continuation from other religions. Due to the politics prior to the Second World War, he was asked to leave and could only return twenty-five years latter. In this period he devoted his life to study and became director of an intercultural publishing, the Urs Graf Publishing House. J. L. Michon wrote in his biographical note:

It was during these years with the Urs Graf Publishing House that Burckhardt presided over an interesting series of publications with the general title of *Stätten des Geistes* ("Homesteads of the Spirit"). These were historical-cum-spiritual studies of certain manifestations of sacred civilization,

¹²Burckhardt, Titus, *Fez, City of Islam*, translated from the German by William Stoddart, The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1992.

and covered such themes as Mount Athos, Celtic Ireland, Sinai, Constantinople, and other places. Burckhardt himself contributed three books in the series: *Siena, City of the Virgin*, *Chartres and the Birth of the Cathedral*, and *Fez, City of Islam*.

Titus Burckhard's sensibilities and commitment can be sensed from his writing, an example is an essay - book chapter entitled *How to Approach Medieval and Oriental Civilizations*:

Nothing brings us into such immediate contact with another culture as a work of art which, within that culture, represents, as it were a "center". This may be a sacred image, a temple, a cathedral, a mosque, or even a carpet with a primordial design. Such works invariably express an essential quality or factor, which neither a historical account, nor an analysis of social and economic conditions, can capture. A similarly rich insight into another culture can be found in its literature, especially in those works that deal with eternal verities.

Jean-Louis Michon in his Afterword to *Fez – City of Islam*, we cited earlier describes development of Titus Burckhard's bridging role:

It was at this time, in spring 1960, that Bruckhardt put the final touches to his work on Fez which had long been in preparation. Later the same year he published it in his native German. Burckhardt was to become in 1971 (and for the following five years) the inspirer and promoter of the UNESCO programme for the preservation of the Medina of Fez. Nevertheless, since Burckhardt's portrait of this city as he knew it in the thirties is that of a "human city" - in other words, a city capable of responding to all the needs of man: physical, emotional and spiritual - this portrait has not become out-of-date. Even better, since it depicts an urban model which is that of the classical Islamic city, it is rich in instruction for whomsoever, amidst the often anarchic pressures and tendencies of modern development, may be involved in the preservation of the irreplaceable qualities of life that flourish in a traditional urban environment.

Titus Burckhard in his plans for preservation of the Medina of Fez along side of inventory and rational of preserving not just buildings but a

fabric of life that included apprentice programs for education and continuation of crafts as a necessary and organic part of this heritage.

In regards to this sensitivity to the continuation of craft tradition we turn again to J. L. Michon's afterword to *Fez – City of Islam* and quote in full the program for the “need to formalize and maintain artisanal teaching, as well as the cardinal importance of apprenticeship”:

It must never be forgotten that the chief aim of the proposed school is to restore a craftsmanship which has already fallen into decadence. The only way to halt this fatal trend is to set up strict training procedures, whereby master craftsmen, imbued with the purest traditional techniques, can integrally transmit to their apprentices both the form and the spirit of their craft...

Schools of traditional arts and crafts must never be allowed to become refuges for pupils not gifted enough to study at ordinary schools. On the contrary, the schools of traditional craftsmanship must attract an élite in the area of visual talent...

The importance of calligraphy does not merely reside in the fact that Maghribi ornamentation includes epigraphy: Arabic calligraphy, with its synthesis of rhythm and form, is, as it were, the key to all Islamic art, as well as the touchstone for the mastering of its style...

As for the geometry of regular figures, this is the basis of the decorative arts of the Maghrib. The pupil must know how to construct these figures with the help of a ruler and compass; he must know how to develop one figure from another, and understand the laws of proportion inherent therein.

The teaching of art history must be essentially visual; in the other words, its aim is not to load pupils' memories with dates and technical terms, but to nourish their visual imagination. Without being exclusive, art history - or 'art typology' - must concentrate on Islamic art, the many variants of which contain essential lessons for students. For instance, could there be anything more important for an apprentice learning the art of zellij than the study of the enameled terracotta decorations of the sanctuaries of Bukhara and Samarkand? p.169

This profound insight about cultural continuity expressed by Titus Burckhard through his advice for apprentices' training, brings as back without losing sight of the central Revelation to oral traditions and intangible heritage. The perspective gained from Titus Burckhard's life and work may point to some of the crucial ingredients and values that may be the basic for understanding needs and processes of a Civilization's growth and change that includes decline.

Conclusion

We followed an inner and outer journey of a number of historic figures that contributed to the Mediterranean Civilization. Ziryab - Abu I-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Nafi (172/789 –242/ 857), whose exile from Baghdad to Cordoba left lasting influence on daily life still experienced today. Ibn 'Arabī (560/1165 –637/1240) pilgrimage from Iberian Peninsula to Mecca, Anatolia ending in Damascus provided a living legacy of religious and philosophical thought that sprang from his understanding the role of *Seal of the Particular Muhammadan Sanctity* as continuity. We touched the ubiquitous presence of oral tradition and student teacher relationship through Georgius Gemistus Pletho (755/1355–858/1454) whose Byzantine and trans-Mediterranean roots offered a living tradition that inspired Renaissance Civilization. The last example is the life and work of Titus Burckhardt (1325/1908 – 1404/1984) a Swiss student of Mulay Ali ben Tayyib Darqawa, who life offered a glimpse into deep values and contribution to the world by Maghreb teachers leaving inspired students that offer foundations of inter-cultural understanding.

The crossing and re-crossing of influences in the Mediterranean over at least three millenniums can be seen as yet not a fully recognized connection of Ancient Egyptian Civilization and the Classical Greek Culture. Twenty years of African training of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras in the ancient world have been largely overlooked. The connections and similarity of Poalicans of Euphrates and Bosnian Bogomils both adopting Islam in the medieval times and Arab influences on Dante's Divine Comedy in pre-Renaissance Mediterranean still awaits more study.

In citing the specialized experience of makers and maintainers of Civilization through examples of highly trained, dedicated and visionary humans with destiny, a question emerges: How could this be relevant to

the world of mass education, media domination and economic and electronic divide.

It could be relevant not as an answer but as starting point of discussion about Civilizational Change with its needs, challenges, perspectives and methodologies. The two interwoven strands of the work of the author of this paper and the Artship Foundation will be briefly cited. Teaching artists, architects, designers, musicians, actors, stage designers, etc. the field of art history was expanded in 1969 into History of Art and Ideas offering future *doers and makers* a broader cultural view. These lecture courses constitute the background research from which this paper is drawn.

Also methodology discussions can emerge from the examples of large-scale community initiatives of the Artship Foundation over the past twenty years addressing *Crisis of Perseverance* and *Collective and Personal Mastery*. Aspects of this work is assembled under topics of Crisis of perseverance - instant versus lasting learning, Learning Assemblies - structured learning outside institutions, Continuous Education - life long learning and Mastery - time as biological necessity in learning

Each generation, location, and constituency face the ever present issues of what is needed to prepare inner and outer space for the revelation and inspiration to grow naturally into a new and regenerative cycle.

End Notes

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This article first appeared in [Gnosis](#) #30 (Winter 1994) San Francisco

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