On Academic Freedom and Elite Education in Historical Perspective

Medieval Christian Universities and Islamic Madrasas, Ottoman Palace Schools, French Grandes Écoles and "Modern World Class Research Universities"[1]

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Abstract

In this essay in a comparative analysis five historically and culturally distinct cases of elite higher education are presented as imperfect realisations of the ideal of academic freedom – medieval universities, early Islamic madrasas, Ottoman palace schools, French grandes écoles and "modern world class research universities". Special attention is given to the complexities of the French system of higher education and research. It is seen as a bridge between older forms of elite higher education and the quest for international research excellence characterising the current age of mass higher education.

1. Introduction

As Walter Rüegg (1992: xix, xxvii) authoritatively stated, 'the university is a European institution; indeed it is the European institution *par excellence*', characterised by 'the fundamental value of academic freedom'. The historical origins of the modern university are usually traced back to the first Latin Christian universities of medieval Italy, France, England and Spain.[2] From there the European university model started its advance around the globe, partly as a side-effect of European colonialism, partly as a driving force of the worldwide expansion of formal schooling and scientific rationalism (cf. Baker 2014).

Today, the university is an institution of global dissemination and prestige. From having been a place for educating small and select social minorities, it has become a huge enterprise of 'universal' or 'high-participation' higher education (Trow 2006, Marginson 2017a). In contemporary Europe, it is attended by more than half of the younger generation (OECD 2017).[3]

However, one should refrain from simply equating the undeniably European pedigree of the modern university with the tradition of Latin Christianity (or of the "Judaeo-Christian Occident"). *European culture carries strong Islamic traits*, too (cf. de Libera 2003, Goody 2004). It is all too easy to overlook the fact that Islam has been continuously present on European soil since the eighth century, in Andalusian Spain from 711 to 1492, in large parts of formerly Ottoman South East Europe since the 14th and 15th centuries. Furthermore, in recent times millions of Muslims have immigrated and settled almost everywhere in Europe. There have always been cross-fertilizations and elective affinities between the Christian and the Islamic worlds of academic learning which should be considered.

With this proviso in mind I shall now begin my survey of various historical systems of higher education with the following question: *How was it possible that the norm of*

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[2] Antique forerunners, such as the Platonic Academy of Athens, the Sassanid Academy of Gondeshapur in Iran, the Mouseion of Alexandria or the Pandidakterion of Constantinople, are not to be discussed here.
[3] The term „university" is used here in a broad sense, also including modern higher education institutions (HEIs) not describing themselves as universities, such as *grandes écoles*, *Fachhochschulen*, *hogescholen*, colleges of art, polytechnics etc. (cf. Sanz / Bergan 2006: 14).

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*academic freedom – implying free thought and its unhindered publication, free teaching,
learning and research – could unfold and take root in Europe since the Middle Ages?*

Clearly, the historical preconditions for such a development were not favourable.
Medieval Europe where the first universities arose was a world characterised by
aristocratic, feudal and clerical structures of domination, a world of obedience and of
religious dogma, not of free thought and enquiry. The first universities and their
professors were strongly dependent from their secular and / or religious masters, from
territorial princes, bishops and municipal authorities who financed and controlled them.
One of their main tasks was the systematic education and graduation of academically
qualified experts for the increasingly complex secular and religious governance
machineries. Apart from a solid grounding in Latin and the liberal arts, theological and
juridical learning was particularly in demand, as well as medical qualifications
(Kintzinger 2003: 115). That is, the medieval universities became the seedbed for an
emerging new social group of academically educated experts. Later sociologists called
it the *service class* 'which provides a bridge between the rulers and the ruled' and whose
members are expected to be loyal to their rulers and willing to take 'their cues from
above' (Dahrendorf 1964: 248-249).

Under these circumstances, the cultivation of free – and inevitably critical or
inconvenient – ways of academic thinking and research, teaching and learning was not
particularly likely. Yet it became possible, provided that two preconditions were met:

> First, the development of a far-reaching *institutional autonomy* of the universities
> had to be achieved to give them some degree of independence from the intrusion of
> religious, political and economic influences.

> Second, an occupational group of *professional scholars* had to be formed whose
> professional ethics encouraged independent thinking and inquiry and who were
> recruited according to proven abilities rather than family background or patronage
> (cf. Kreckel 1996).

In the hierarchical and violent world of medieval Europe these imperatives were by no
means obvious. Yet they began to emerge in different places, often hesitantly, full of
contradictions and with frequent setbacks. But nonetheless, the principles of
institutional autonomy and of professional integrity, and thereby the *ethics of academic
freedom*, have gradually won recognition as normative ground rules of the academic
world. Though these norms are nowhere completely implemented, they serve as general
value orientation and international guideline today (cf. Altbach 2007, Marginson 2014).
Thus, academic freedom is explicitly protected by the 'Recommendation Concerning
the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel' of the UNESCO (1997) and the
'Charter of Fundamental Rights' of the European Union (2000, art. 13).

To illustrate how this became possible I shall give a few historical examples each of
which requiring a different kind of expertise.[4] I begin with a short retrospect of the early

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[4] Surely, no single person can be a competent expert on medieval European universities, on the history of
early Islamic institutions, on the organisation of the Ottoman Empire, on elite education in modern France
and on the current developments of globalised higher education. Yet, comparisons across fields of

history of the *Latin Christian Universities*. Then, I shall contrast them with the medieval *Sunni Islamic Madrasas*. A discussion of two institutions of higher education specialising in the formation of servants of the state will follow, the *Ottoman Palace School* and the *French Grandes Écoles*. This will be the setting for a very short presentation of the ideal typical university of the 21st century, the international *"World Class Research University"*, and for some concluding reflections about the possible implications these recent developments may have on the issue of academic freedom.

At first glance, the five variants of higher education institutions to be discussed here do not seem to have much in common. Yet, in contrasting them, some light may be shed on the different ways in which the latent conflict between the ideal of academic freedom and the task of educating a loyal service class was handled in the past and what development(s) may be in store in the foreseeable future.

The present succinct exercise in historical and structural comparison is not to be misunderstood as a contribution to the theoretical discussion of the concepts of academic freedom[5] and of elite education. Rather, I see these notions as 'ineradicably evaluative and essentially contested concepts of social theory' (Lukes 2005: 14, Kreckel 2018). A stable consensus about their precise definition will never be reached as they are both deeply embedded in ever-changing historical contexts, normative assumptions and conflicting interests.

2. Early Beginnings of Institutional and Professional Autonomy – Latin Christian Universities and Sunni Islamic Madrasas of the Middle Ages

a. Medieval Universities[6]

By the first half of the 13th century, the Latin Christian universities had found their classic form. They had acquired the legal status of corporations (in medieval Latin: *universitates*) which enjoyed a certain degree of *institutional autonomy* from the jurisdiction of secular and spiritual territorial rulers.

At that time, the term *universitas* referred to diverse sorts of corporate bodies of persons associated as sworn confraternities, such as medieval crafts and guilds (cf. Michaud-Quantin 1970). The early institutions of higher education were not yet considered as

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knowledge *are* possible. What is needed is a clear research question and the ability to make critical sense of the scholarly expertise which others communicated in their published work.

In my own doctoral thesis, written almost fifty years ago (Kreckel 1972), I discussed the epistemological conditions of transdisciplinary comparisons in the social sciences. Today, fortified by a considerable amount of scholarly life experience, I try to demonstrate how this may be done.

[5] For a succinct summary of the theoretical considerations that would have to be considered, see Stichweh (2016), for a discussion of the current state of academic freedom, see Altbach (2007), for an instructive international and transcultural comparison of various conceptions of academic freedom, see Marginson (2014).

[6] The historical account given in this section is mainly based on Ridder-Symmons (1992), Boockmann (1999), Weber (2002), Charle/Verger (2012), Fisch (2015).

universitates, they were known under the name of *studium generale*. They were public places of advanced learning holding a papal or imperial teaching privilege, such as Bologna, Padua, Paris, Montpellier and Salamanca, or teaching without formal privilege, such as Oxford and Cambridge. Only these *studia generalia* were entitled to present the full academic curriculum and to confer higher academic grades (*magister* and *doctor*) recognized throughout Latin Christianity.[7]

Studia generalia were always situated in urban municipalities, but their professors and students came usually from far afield. They were foreigners without legal protection and right of residence. In his famous *privilegium scholasticum*, the '*authentica habita*' of 1155/1159, Emperor Frederick I described the wandering scholars as people 'who for love of learning choose exile and poverty, and divest themselves of their patrimony, while exposing themselves to every peril' (Kibre 1962: 10-11). To achieve a legal standing of their own they began to form corporations (*universitates*), either as separate corporations of teachers and of students, or as a common *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*. The latter format prevailed. It was best suited to protect the common interests of medieval professors and students by giving them a right of residence, legal guarantees and immunities, a jurisdiction of their own. Thereby the *universitates scholarium et magistrorum* acquired a certain institutional and legal autonomy from the territorial and religious powers surrounding them (Borgolte 2015). The word 'university' began to assume the common meaning still in use today where universities are understood as institutions of higher education.

Of course the newly acquired institutional autonomy of the universities was not total. Universities continued to depend on the goodwill of the territorial princes, bishops or municipalities who financed and controlled them. Decisions concerning the appointment or dismissal of professors and of their emoluments had to be approved from above. Universities were not allowed to admit women, Jews, Muslims or Orthodox Christians. And there was no such thing as 'academic freedom' concerning teaching. Curricula, textbooks, teaching methods etc. were subject to rigorous regulations. This was related to the fact that most university teachers and students were clerics themselves owing obedience to their spiritual superiors. It was uncontested that all members of the university and all teaching contents were subject to the supervision of the Church. Thus, the *licentia docendi* which gave all duly examined masters and doctors the right to teach in any university was not granted by the university, but by the supervising bishop or the university chancellor representing him (Kintzinger 2003: 110f., 152f.; Riché / Verger 2013: 187f., 205).

Nonetheless, the limits between what was allowed and what was considered as inacceptable or even heretic were often fluid and lead to conflicts between the universities and their superiors. And frequently, the lines of contestation split the professoriate itself when "traditionalists" (*antiqui*) and "modernists" (*moderni*) confronted each other (Kintzinger 2003: 162). One way of dealing with such controversies was the staging of formal *academic disputations* obliging all contestants

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[7] There were also *studia particularia* without privilege and without the right of full graduation, often located in cathedrals and monasteries (cf. Boockmann 1999: 12ff.).

to present their positions and to support them by valid reasons (cf. de Libera 2003: 118ff.). What counted were substantial and logically sound arguments. No self-respecting discussant wanted to be perceived as only representing "his master's voice". To explain one's position by merely referring to traditional authorities or to the duty of obedience was increasingly frowned upon.

As the French historian Jacques Le Goff (1957) put it, the university professors started to become urban *intellectuals* instead of being mere clerics. They wanted to be perceived as professional experts who thought, wrote, taught and debated as genuine scholars. Beyond the obligatory memorizing and paraphrasing of the classical texts, they began to enlarge upon them, e.g. by writing their own comments and interpretations (*glossae*) in the margins of old manuscripts. Thus, the quest for knowledge and the critical scrutiny of texts started to become a constituent part of the professional role of the learned doctors and professors. That is, they began to perceive themselves as genuine scientists and to understand 'Science as a Vocation' with an ethical foundation, as Max Weber (1948) described it centuries later.

But there was still a very long way to go before this idealised conception of the professorial role was to become the accepted norm. In particular, the 'research imperative' (Turner 1981), this *sine qua non* of success for modern professors, was barely developed. Perhaps the cautious description of the medieval doctor and university teacher given by Jacques Verger comes close to the truth:

> 'A doctor was a scholar, endowed with a science that was at once perfect and finished. (…) People in the Middle Ages were ignorant of the modern notion of scientific progress. Nevertheless many texts emphasized that a doctor … should make progress or, at any rate, seek to make his formulations approximate ever more closely to the truth. (…)
> 'There is some temptation … to define the teachers of medieval universities as "intellectuals", but this would only be accurate if one specified that, in contrast of what nowadays would be regarded as normal for intellectuals, they never meant their interventions in the service of a will that was subversive or even merely critical of the established order' (Verger 1992: 162, 164).

In summary it can be stated that the medieval universities in Europe had acquired some degree of *institutional autonomy* and that the professors and the academic disciplines were showing first signs of developing an *autonomous professional identity*. The principle of *merit* and the quest for *knowledge* began to take hold in the universities, even against the predominant religious, political and social currents of the non-academic world. I shall give three telling examples for this.

The *first example* is the revival of Roman Civil Law in the 11th and 12th centuries which also lead to the foundation of the university of Bologna. Learned Italian "legists" (*legistae*) had rediscovered the Roman Emperor Justinian's *corpus iuris civilis* and integrated its refined methods of legal reasoning into their own teaching activities. The legists and their pupils began to apply the ancient principles of Roman Law to their own practical activities as judges, jurisconsults or lawyers though they were largely incompatible with the existing Canon Law and with local traditions of legislation and

case law. In the beginning the holders of secular and spiritual power were opposed to this legal innovation. Lecturing on Roman Civil Law was even banned for a time in French and English universities. Yet, Roman jurisprudence eventually prevailed due to its intellectual precision and logical coherence and to the perseverance of the legal scholars. Despite strong initial opposition it became a pillar of the curriculum of medieval Faculties of Law (cf. Grundmann 1976; Weber 2002).

A *second example* of the ability of medieval scholars and professors to go new intellectual ways is there astonishing openness for influences from the pre-Christian classical antiquity and from the world of Islam.

Already in the 9th and 10th centuries, Islamic scholars in Baghdad, Cairo and elsewhere had discovered important philosophical, scientific and medical writings from Greek and Roman antiquity. Among them were works of Aristotle, Plato, Archimedes, Ptolemy, Euclid, Hippocrates and Galenos which were either totally unknown to Latin Europa or only available in truncated versions. They were systematically translated into Arabic, as well as important scientific texts from India and Iran (Krämer 2008: 98). On the basis of these translations, eminent Islamic philosophers and learned writers such as Ar-Razi (lat. Rhazes, d. 932), Al-Farabi (d. 950), Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037), Al-Ghazali (Algazel, d. 1111) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198) as well as Ibn Maimun (Maimonides, d. 1204, a Jewish scholar writing in Arabic) published systematisations of the antique masters and original contributions of their own.

All these texts circulated widely in the scholarly world of Islam, but they remained unknown in Western Europe for a long time. This began to change with the intensification of cultural contacts in Spain and Sicily where formerly Islamic territories had come under Christian domination. Intensive communication networks between Latin Christians, Muslims and Jews developed in the 12th and 13th centuries. Especially in Toledo, Palermo and Naples organized translation activities from Arabic to Latin took place. Copies of these translations spread quickly in the Christian scholarly world. Latin versions of virtually all surviving texts from Greek antiquity were now available, as well as of the most important writings of Islamic scholars (cf. Watt 1972, Menocal 2002, de Libera 2003; Sezgin 2003; Borgolte 2014; 2015; Hasse 2017).

Especially the extensive interpretations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by the famous Andalusian scholar Averroes (Ibn Rushd) became standard textbooks in the universities of Latin Christianity and were considered as the best presentations of Aristotle's philosophy. Averroes, the Muslim, was colloquially referred to as "the Commentator". Clearly, the development of scholasticism and dialectics as an academic teaching method in the Christian Middle Ages was strongly influenced by the writings of Averroes and other Islamic thinkers. Montgomery Watt summarizes:

> 'Arabic thought provided European thought with new materials, and brought within its purview a whole new world of metaphysics. All strands of European thought had to take cognizance of the translations from Arabic. (…) The whole range of subsequent European philosophy was deeply indebted to the Arabic writers' (Watt 1972: 70-71).

In more general terms, Michael Borgolte writes:

'The teams of translators of the twelfth century created a highly sustainable corpus of works without which the scientific take-off of Western Europe would have been impossible' (transl. Borgolte 2015: 16).

As a *third example* of how medieval Western universities showed intellectual autonomy and adaptability refers to the field of medicine (cf. Watt 1972; Jacquart / Micheau 1990; Weber 2002). In fact, in traditional medieval universities medicine was mainly a theoretical discipline in which texts of classical authors such as Hippocrates and Galenos were considered as uncontested authorities. Their medical writings were taught without any concrete link to clinical practice. Frequently, university professors of medicine had no practical training as physicians at all. But in the tenth and eleventh centuries, a famous medical school emerged in Christian Salerno, in the proximity of Islamic Sicily. There, young doctors received a practical education of clinical medicine as well. Arabic and Greek medical textbooks were translated into Latin, especially the *Complete Book of the Medical Art* of the famous Iranian physician Ali Ibn al-Abbas (Haly Abbas, d. 994). In the second half of the eleventh century its translator, the North African medical scholar Constantinus Africanus (d. 1087) had established himself in Salerno as medical teacher and propagator of medical texts translated from the Arabic.

Perhaps even greater was the influence of the *Canon of Medicine* of the eminent Iranian physician and philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037) which was translated by Gherardo da Cremona (d. 1187) in Spanish Toledo where he had established a veritable "factory" of translation from Arabic into Latin. Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* contained many examples of concrete clinical practice as well as theoretical considerations. The *Canon* was soon recognized as *the* basic textbook in all Latin Christian faculties of medicine, remaining influential until the sixteenth century.

It was in this context that a new medical school emerged in the city of Montpellier, then belonging to the Crown of Aragon. Montpellier was granted full university privileges in 1289. Arab and Jewish physicians who had emigrated from Spain taught there on the basis of Avicenna's *Canon*. They followed the example of the Arab medical schools of Andalusian Spain where the existence of a teaching hospital (*maristan*) was considered necessary for the clinical education of young doctors. It is said that clinical lectures and bedside teaching were regularly included in the medical curriculum at Montpellier.

Thus, in opening up to influences from the Islamic world Salerno and Montpellier played a pioneering role in the development of medicine in Latin Christian universities. They were considered to be the best places for the education of competent physicians in Western Europe.

b. Early Islamic Madrasas

As the examples given in the previous section suggest there were numerous direct and indirect lines of intellectual influence from the world of Islam to the medieval

universities of the Christian West.[8] But it is generally assumed that no Islamic universities existed in the Middle Ages. Indeed, most of the universities existing in the Islamic world of today are foundations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries following Western models, often with a colonial history.

On the other hand, there are a number of very old Islamic institutions of higher education which still exist today and consider themselves as universities (sing. *jamia*). The most famous are the *Al Qarawiyyin University* in Fès (founded 859) und the *Al Azhar University* in Cairo (founded 988). Initially, both were Great Mosques. Besides being places of prayer and sermon they had the additional task to educate Islamic jurisconsults. For this purpose, chairs were created there and professors appointed who lectured to circles of students (sing. *halqa*) rallying around them.

According to George Makdisi (1981, 1991, 2003) whom I am following here[9], these early 'mosque-colleges' are not yet to be considered as genuine institutions of higher education. This changed in the 11th century with the foundation of the first Sunni madrasas in the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad. In a fully developed *madrasa*, a permanent teaching staff consisting of a professor of Islamic Law (sing. *mudarris*), assistant teachers and instructors teaching ancillary subjects were employed, student dormitories and lecture halls were available and regular lecture courses, disputations, examinations and graduations took place. Madrasas were organized as Islamic charitable trusts (sing. *waqf*) which gave them financial security and institutional autonomy. The most famous of the early Sunni madrasas was the *Nizamiyya*, founded in 1065 in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, by the Caliph's powerful Seljuk vizier Nizam Al-Mulk. It was the model for a network of Nizamiyya madrasas in all important centres of the Abbasid Caliphate. Their main aim was the education of Islamic jurisconsults (sing. *ulama*) able to provide legally binding interpretations of the Quran and the Hadiths. Al-Ghazali, the great philosopher and theologian, taught for a few years as professor at the Nizamiyya of Baghdad (Watt 1963: 23; Ephrat 2000: 171).

In his comparative analysis of Sunni Islamic madrasas and Western medieval universities, Makdisi rejects the conventional view that the university was a genuine invention of Latin Christian Europe. In his opinion the Sunni Islamic madrasas of the 11th century were fully developed *colleges of law* with all the basic structural traits which Western universities acquired much later. Only one characteristic was missing, the differentiation into four faculties (arts, theology, law, medicine).

Makdisi illustrates the striking structural affinity between Islamic madrasas and Latin Christian universities by means of a thought experiment. He describes the experiences of a time traveller, an imaginary visiting scholar from 11th century Bagdad who stayed

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[8] For a comprehensive survey of these influences, see Speer / Wegener (2006).
[9] George Makdisi (1920-2002) was an American historian with Lebanese-Christian roots and professor of Arab and Islamic studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh. As a specialist of medieval Islamic education he wrote *The Rise of Colleges. Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh 1981, rated as 'ground-breaking work' in the recent Encyclopaedia of Islam III (Günther 2017: section 6.1). For critical discussions of Makdisi's comparative work on madrasas and medieval universities see Daniel (1984), Berkey (1997), Geelhaar (2007), Borgolte (2014).

as a guest in a university of England or France of the 13th century, that is two hundred years later:

> ,In the Middle Ages an imaginary intellectual from the world of Islam, say Baghdad, on a visit to the Christian West, far from feeling out of his element, would be quite comfortable in his new surroundings. Quite familiar to him would be the colleges of Paris and Oxford, with their scholars and fellows, and their masters and doctors, aided by their assistants, repetitors and servitors. In attending the school lessons and exercises, he would feel at home with the lectures and disputations. Indeed, as a visiting scholar, he would expect the courtoisy of being invited to engage in a disputation or two, preferably three – the usual number for Baghdad – with his host colleagues. Hardly anything on the scholarly scene would be unfamiliar to him. […] How could it be otherwise when the intellectual landscape could hardly hold any surprises for him: the prominence and pervasiveness of legal studies…, the feverish concern with dialectic…, the scholastic method in law, theology and medicine..., the impressive list of technical terms representing the same functions as their Islamic counterparts, as well as being frequently the literal translations of the corresponding Arabic terms… […]
> Of course, we have no knowledge of such a visitor to the Christian West: the magnetism of Islamic learning made it so that the thrust of travel was rather eastward. But no matter; our imaginary visitor, had he been endowed with a life span of a couple of centuries, could have witnessed the development of Muslim education from its centre in his home-town Baghdad in a westward move to Syria, Egypt, North Africa, and on to Spain, Sicily and southern Italy, and from there to other parts of Christendom. *It moved with the moving scholars, pilgrims, crusaders, merchants and travellers; it travelled with them by word of mouth, as well as in the massive movement of books*' (Makdisi 1981: 238-240; my emphasis).

Makdisi (2003: 46) himself admits that there is no direct evidence that such a diffusion of academic culture from East to West actually did take place. His critics insist on this point and emphasize the uniqueness of Western universities (cf. Daniel 1984; Berkey 1997; Geelhaar 2007). I am not qualified to take position in this controversy in which scientific reasoning is intertwined with religious and cultural loyalties (cf. also Gouguenheim 2008; Kintzinger/König 2011). But one should keep in mind that the emergence of universities in the West coincided with the Christian Crusade movement explicitly directed against the rule of Islam in Palestine, Syria, Spain and elsewhere. This was probably not the most favourable period of time for an unprejudiced reception of Islamic ideas in Christian Europe.

However that may be, the question remains whether Islamic colleges of law, the madrasas, did in fact enjoy a similar degree of institutional and professional autonomy as the Western universities did. George Makdisi (1981: 35ff.) answers in the affirmative:

> (1) According to his view madrasas were *institutionally autonomous*, because every madrasa was based on an Islamic *waqf* (charitable trust) which gave them financial security and institutional autonomy. From the endowment of the waqf the emoluments of the professors, the student grants and the general maintenance costs of the madrasa were financed. Waqfs were independent from direct interference of

secular power holders. The donor's stipulations laid down in the act of donation were legally binding and the endowment funds could not be reallocated to other purposes. Trustees (sing. *mutawalli*) were appointed to guarantee this.

Of course, Makdisi is aware that in everyday practice things were never quite as clear-cut, especially when donors held powerful political positions. Nonetheless, he considers the waqf as the foundation of a far-reaching institutional autonomy of the Islamic madrasas.

It should be noted that Makdisi's discussion of the autonomy of madrasas aims at their independence from *secular* powers. On the other hand, when the institutional autonomy of Western universities is discussed, the complementary question of their autonomy from or dependence of *spiritual* powers is usually raised, too. Makdisi does not consider this, for in Sunni Islam no formal church organisation and no distinct clerical hierarchy exist.

(2) This must be kept in mind when the second issue, the question of the *professional autonomy* of the professor of law (*mudarris*) teaching in an Islamic madrasa is raised. Makdisi argues that the professors of Islamic madrasas formed corporations in much the same way as their counterparts in Christian universities did. In both cases the establishment of corporations (lat. *universitates*) or ‚guilds' of professors is seen as the decisive step towards the development of an 'academic profession' enjoying some degree of intellectual autonomy.

In Sunni Islam there are four recognized interpretations of Islamic Law (sing. *fiqh*) usually called ‚schools of law' (sing. *madhab*), the *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali* schools of law which are considered as equivalent. Scholars and professors of Islamic law were obliged to opt for one of these four schools of law and to join a corresponding ‚guild of law'. The same was true for their students. Within the confines of the accepted principles of their madhab, professors were free to teach and to pronounce legal opinions.[10] George Makdisi writes:

> 'The guild of law gave the jurisconsults autonomy; the college, with its scholastic method and its license, gave them the autonomy to determine orthodoxy in Islam, the sole *authority freely to teach orthodoxy with academic freedom'* (Makdisi 2003: 50; my emphasis).

Clearly, the 'academic freedom' Makdisi is referring to was a restricted freedom. It had its limits in the obligatory adherence of the professors to a ‚guild of law', a *madhab*, which implied that only its specific interpretation of Islamic law was academically acceptable.

Makdisi describes the ideal-typical course of studies in a classic Islamic madrasa in the following way[11]:

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[10] The early Sunni madrasas were "denominational" colleges, i.e. based on only one of the four recognized Sunni *madhabs*, usually with one *mudarris*. From the thirteenth century onwards madrasas were founded which included chairs for all four Sunni *madhabs*, such as the *Mustansiriyya* in Baghdad (Krämer 2008: 159f.; Günther 2017: section 6.3.2).

[11] Cf. Makdisi (1981, chapter 2).

- Prior to attending a madrasa, students had spent some years at an Islamic elementary school (*maktab*) where they were taught reading and writing classical Arabic and to memorize and recite significant parts of the *Quran.*

- In the first four years of study at a madrasa, propaedeutic and ancillary subjects (similar to the *artes liberales* in the West) were taught, such as grammar, logic, rhetoric, and history, besides the exegesis of the *Quran* and an introduction to the science of recognized *Hadiths*[12].

- Only very few students were selected for the second stage of study which provided a thorough education in Islamic law (*fiqh*). For this they had to be admitted as personal pupils in the *halqa* (study circle) of a professor. The second phase of study could take many years. It ended with a formal examination comparable to the examination of a *magister* or *doctor* in medieval Western universities, including the defence of theses in a formal disputation.

- The successful graduate was awarded the *ijaza*, the license to teach Islamic law as a qualified jurisconsult and to formulate authoritative legal opinions. Thereby, he became a member of the professional group of the *ulama* and could be appointed to influential posts such as *mufti*, *qadi* or *mudarris*. Makdisi (1981: 72ff.) sees a close parallel between the Islamic *ijaza* and the *venia docendi* of Latin Christian universities of the Middle Ages.

However, there is one significant difference between the structures of Sunni Islamic and of Latin Christian institutions of higher education of the Middle Ages. In the curriculum of Islamic madrasas the non-Islamic sciences, especially classical philosophy, mathematics, natural sciences and medicine were not represented.[13] Makdisi (1981: 77-80) explains this by pointing out that in their capacity as Islamic *waqfs* the madrasas could not admit non-Islamic 'foreign' subjects (op.cit.: 283). But he emphasizes that these subjects continued to be developed and taught in non-religious contexts, such as libraries and teaching hospitals (sing. *maristan*) and, furthermore, that the methods of scholarly thinking and teaching derived from classical philosophy had found their way into the core of the curriculum of Islamic jurisprudence taught in the madrasas.

It is for these reasons that the medieval madrasa as Islamic ‚college of law‘ remained a *one-faculty institution*[14] whereas the Western university developed its typical *four-*

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[12] The Arabic term *hadith* is sometimes translated as "tradition". It refers to reports of sayings and doings of the Prophet, or of his tacit approval or criticism of something said or done in his presence. To be recognized as a valid Hadith report, its original source and its subsequent transmitters must be identified and accepted as authentic (Hodgson 1974, vol. i: 63-66, 73-74, 254, 332). The most respected collection of Hadiths recognized as genuine is that of Muhammad Al-Bukhari (810-870).

[13] 'Legal science was placed above and beyond the literary arts, and indeed all other fields of knowledge. The ultimate goal of institutionalized learning was the jurisconsult; the ultimate goal, the jurisconsult's legal opinion. The professor of law was set apart from all other members of the teaching staff. The designation of mudarris was peculiar to him alone. (…) All other posts in the college were subordinate to his. For he alone was the interpreter of Islam's positive law whose sole legislator was God Himself' (Makdisi 1981: 284).

[14] Cf. Borgolte (2014: 274).

faculties structure (Arts, Theology, Law, Medicine).[15] In Latin Christian universities the academic freedom of professors of all faculties was restricted by the dogmatic principles defined and controlled by an external authority, the Roman Church. In contrast, in the Sunni Islamic madrasas the professors themselves, in the context of their 'guilds of law', had the authority to define what was religiously acceptable. This gave them the limited 'academic freedom' Makdisi is referring to.

Makdisi's thesis concerning the academic freedom of the professors depends on the assumption that the early Sunni madrasas enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy from direct political interference. Daphna Ephrat, a critical follower of Makdisi who studied the early madrasas in Baghdad, writes:

> 'The "ulama" of Baghdad … acted independently of the political authorities … and were reluctant to become involved or assume positions in the official sphere. Moreover, the political rulers avoided the internal affairs of the "ulama" and were careful not to meddle in religious matters in general' (Ephrat 2000: 8f.).

> 'Once a jurist was appointed to the post of teacher, he seemed to enjoy complete freedom in the admission of students, the sequence and method of all instruction, as well as the choice of treatises. Although the madrasa was founded for the teaching of the traditional religious and legal sciences (to the exclusion of the so-called ancient rational sciences), what a professor taught was not closely regulated; he would teach what he knew' (ibid.: 126f.).[16]

However, the autonomy from secular powers that the medieval madrasas and their professors had gained for themselves was eventually lost. As George Makdisi put it:

> 'Though waqf was static in nature, the practice of disputation and constant inquiry kept education dynamic, until such time as the governing power found a way of successfully interfering with the free flow of inquiry by creating the post of the paid mufti. (…) The ordinary layman sought the government-paid mufti to avoid paying the fee of the private mufti. This practice eventually put an end to the free flow of legal opinions and to active disputation, leading to the *degeneration of the scholastic method, a mere school exercise shorn of its erstwhile dynamic function*' (Makdisi 1981: 285; my emphasis).

Furthermore, from the 14th century onwards, new madrasas were usually founded by sultans. It became standard practice in the Islamic world that the maintenance costs of the madrasas, including the salaries of the professors, were paid directly from the sultan's treasury. This limited the influence of the *waqf* and undermined the institutional autonomy of the madrasas. Especially in the expanding Ottoman Empire all madrasas were transformed into state-supported and state-controlled institutions (Inalcik 1994).

Nonetheless, even under these more restricted conditions Muslim scholars found possibilities for autonomous and creative work. An outstanding example of this is the

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[15] The Western four-faculties structure was first developed in Paris and spread from there. The alternative model of the University of Bologna which – similarly to the madrasas – concentrated on Jurisprudence did not prevail (cf. Kintzinger 2003: 150).

[16] Ephrat's thesis of the high degree of autonomy of the early madrasas from political influence is discussed controversially (cf. Ahmed 2003; see also the somewhat more nuanced position in Ephrat 2011).

biography of the great North African historian, social scientist and independent thinker *Ibn Khaldun* (1332-1406) who served many princes. He spent the last years of his life in Cairo where the Sultan az-Zâhir Barqûq had made him a professor of Maliki law at the *Madrasa al-Qamhiyya,* later at his own newly founded *Madrasa az-Zâhiriyya* (Ibn Khaldun 1980: 153; Cheddadi 2006: 133-142).

c. Comparative Observations (1)

One common characteristic of medieval Islamic madrasas and Latin Christian universities is that both began to emancipate themselves from the ancient teaching practice of merely transmitting and memorizing received and canonized knowledge. With the reception of the Aristotelian logic and the dialectical method of disputation, the "search for truth" started to become a constituent part of professional scholarly behaviour both in universities *and* madrasas. In this respect, Makdisi's analysis is convincing – regardless of whether one accepts his speculative thesis that Western universities were directly influenced by the model of the Islamic madrasa.

Another common denominator is that in both cases, institutional autonomy and academic freedom were always at risk to be hemmed and restricted by the intervention of secular power holders.

A further parallel is that the academic professionals in both medieval Sunni madrasas and Latin Christian universities tended to "close ranks" and to transform themselves into an interest group primarily defending their own rights and prerogatives as intellectual elites, to the detriment of academic freedom of thought.

As to the difference between the one-faculty structure of the Islamic madrasa and the four-faculties organization of the traditional Western university, it goes much deeper than Makdisi concedes: In the Western academic world, neither the fusion of religious and legal sciences nor the exclusion of the "other" sciences took place. In Latin Christian universities, Theology was supposed to be but one scientific field among others, on the same footing as Jurisprudence, Medicine and Philosophy. One important feature of the classic structure of the four-faculties university was that it was not a hermetically closed system. Eventually, centuries later, it permitted additional differentiations and lead to the emergence of distinct faculties of Humanities, Natural Sciences, Economics, Engineering etc. In the logic of the Islamic madrasa with its restriction to teaching the Islamic sciences and their ancillaries, this possibility was not available. Thus, madrasas remained colleges of Islamic law and found it difficult to respond to the challenge of scientific differentiation.

The separate paths of development taken by the Islamic madrasa and the Latin Christian university may have to do with the fact that no institutionalized church and clerical hierarchy existed in Sunni Islam. There, no *Theory of the Two Swords* – implying the coexistence of a spiritual and a temporal power – could develop and no *Investiture Conflict* took place (cf. Krämer 2008: 129). In the Investiture Conflict, which shook Western Christianity in the 11th and 12th centuries, Kings and Popes fought over the

right to appoint and control bishops. The Pope prevailed and henceforth all religious matters fell under the authority of the Papal church (cf. Küng 2007). It follows that the main power of control over the medieval universities was held by the Latin Christian church.[17] Academic freedom of thought had to be wrested from this mighty custodian of religious orthodoxy,

In Sunni Islam, in the absence of a hierarchical church, the function of defining and controlling Islamic orthodoxy fell to the madrasas, their professors and the ulama. This happened in the period of *Sunni Revival* in the 10th to 12th centuries when the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad had lost most of its former power. Externally, many territories were no longer controlled by Baghdad, and competing Caliphates had emerged in Cairo and Cordoba. Internally, the power of the Caliphs of Baghdad had shrunk, their remaining territories in Iraq and Iran had fallen under the domination of foreign emirs and sultans, Buyids and Seljuks. Previously the Caliphs of Baghdad, as successors and stewards of the Prophet, had been understood as both secular *and* spiritual leaders of the Islamic world. But the Seljuk sultans who became their political masters in the 11th century had no claims to spiritual leadership. The madrasas stepped into this "void" and became the guardians of Islamic science and Sunni orthodoxy.[18] The Swiss theologian Hans Küng summarized this process in the following way:

> 'The former sacral regime, under a "representative of God" who determined both religion and politics, was now increasingly replaced by a separation between the state and religious élites and institutions, the Ulama or Sufis. Regardless of who was politically in power and controlled the state, believers were no longer guided by caliphs and sultans in religious, ethical and legal matters. They were guided by the religious scholars, the Ulama and – increasingly – by the mystics, the Sufis and religious orders. (…)
> The Seljuks … founded madrasahs in all the larger cities – for Sunni Islam this soon became the usual course of legal and theological training. Thus these educational institutions spread from Iraq to the West; by the end of the twelfth century there were thirty in Baghdad, six in Mosul and twenty in Damascus. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries they also existed in the Maghreb, indeed even in Granada. (…)
> The Ulama … owed their authority not to a nomination, nor to a group that they had represented, but to their teacher, their education and their recognition by the people. There was no central authority or church-like organization superior to the Ulama with the power of consecration' (Küng 2007: 316-320).

3. Elite Institutions for the Formation of Servants of the State – the Ottoman Enderûn Palace School and the French Grandes Écoles

a. The Ottoman Enderûn Mektebi of the 15th and 16th Century

The next case to be examined in this paper remains in the context of Sunni Islam, but several centuries later. The Ottoman palace school *(enderûn mektebi)* of the 15th and

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[17] Obviously, the Latin Christian world was afflicted by frequent schismatic scissions.
[18] Cf. Küng (2007: 305-323), Makdisi (1973), Ephrat (2011).

16th century is an institution of higher education one would usually not consider when discussing academic freedom, intellectual autonomy and creativity. The school was located inside the walls of Topkapi Palace, the seat of the Ottoman sultans, in European Constantinople (turk.: *Constantiniyye* or *Istanbul*) and it played a crucial role in the education and recruitment of the service class of the Ottoman empire at the height of its power, under formidable rulers such as Mehmed II and Suleiman I.

By the 15th century considerable parts of South East Europe, including modern Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina, had been conquered by Ottoman armies. For several centuries these countries stayed under the rule of the Ottoman empire. As in all Islamic countries, the provider of higher education for Muslim subjects in the Ottoman empire was the college of law, the madrasa (turk.: *medrese*). Over the centuries the medreses had lost much of their former autonomy, as stated by Makdisi above.

In the Ottoman case the medreses continued to be supported by Islamic waqfs (turk.: *vakif)*. But in fact they had been transformed into hierarchical institutions paid and supervised by the Ottoman state. The teaching curricula of the medreses and the appointments of their professors (turk.: *müderris*) were tightly controlled by the Ottoman court, especially in the capital Istanbul where the top-ranked medreses were concentrated.[19] The graduates of these Istanbul "elite"-medreses occupied most of the higher ranks of the profession of Islamic jurisconsults (turk.: *ulema*) and held the most influential posts in the state-controlled institutions of law and education. For a long time, access to the medreses and to an ulema-career (*ilmiyye*) had been socially quite open. By the mid-16th century this began to change (Atcil 2009). Soon all important posts were held by members of a small number of ulema-families from Istanbul and the most important provincial towns. The American historian Madeline Zilfi has this to say about the recruitment of the Ottoman ulema:

> 'By the opening of the seventeenth century, the ulema for all practical purposes had succeeded in "unionizing" the career of alim. Hundreds of religious colleges (medrese) and judgeships (kadilak) had been grouped and graded over the years into a single central system …, with virtually all content, standards, terms and conditions of their ulema personnel's recruitment, training and placement set by the ulema authorities themselves.
> A parallel trend … aimed at the heritability of the "union" itself. More and more it was blood that told. The contest mobility theoretically fostered by the system's merit opportunities – subsidized medrese schooling, examinations to fill vacancies, certificates of competence for student and teaching promotions – was increasingly compromised by an *overwhelming reliance on family ties* as the first and best test for ilmiye suitability and success' (Zilfi 1983: 319f.; my emphasis).

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[19] The official hierarchy of Ottoman medreses in the 16th century consisted of eleven ranks. The highest rank was occupied by the eight Semaniye medreses located in the Fatih-mosque-complex followed by six medreses connected with the Süleimaniye-mosque, all in Istanbul. The payment of the professors was graded according to the rank position of the medrese they were teaching at (Inalcik 1994: 168f.; Veinstein 1997: 78-80).

Thereby the control over the medreses exercised by the Ottoman state had weakened. This was perceived as a problem by the sultans and their environment. After all, the enormous strength and efficiency of the early Ottoman empire was based on a philosophy of power which conceded as little political influence as possible to indigenous clans and local elites. It was for this reason that both the Ottoman military elite, the *janissaries*, and almost the entire apparatus of the imperial administration and government, often including the post of grand vizier, were not open to the *ulema*. Instead, they were overwhelmingly occupied by foreign-born servants of the state converted to Islam, the *kuls*. These had no kinship ties and no local bonds to consider and owed total loyalty to their master, the sultan. By this strategy of appointing *kuls* to powerful military and administrative positions, the Ottoman sultans were able to keep the indigenous aristocracy and *ulema* away from the centres of power (cf. Inalcik 1994: 76ff.).

However, the sultans did not only demand total *loyalty* of their military and administrative personnel. The kuls were also expected to acquire a high level of *competence*. But the medreses, the established institutions of higher education, were not the right place to provide this competence. Apart from their familistic recruitment patterns, the main problem was that the primary focus of the medreses was Islamic jurisprudence. The kuls were supposed to receive a different, essentially secular kind of education (Miller 1941: 32; Zilfi 2016). This is why the *enderûn mektebi* was created, the "internal school" inside the closed precinct of the sultan's palace itself. There the selection and education of the sultan's kuls could take place under his personal control and they could be intensively prepared for their future role as competent members of the imperial service class.

The Ottoman-Turkisch word *kul* is usually translated as "slave". This easily leads to misunderstandings as Western readers tend to associate it with the abysmal situation of antique galley slaves or plantation slaves in America. In fact, a kul was a servant belonging to his (or her) master and owing him loyalty. A kul's status in society depended on that of his master. Thus, the social prestige of kuls of wealthy and powerful families was much higher than that of people who were free, but poor (Imber 2002: 148). The most honourable and influential position a kul could have was to be a kul of the sultan who ruled his empire with the help of kuls.

> 'The members of the elite not belonging to the ulema … usually had the status of a kul. A kul was "slave of the sultan" and member of his household. (…) But he was also considered as a free man by Islamic law, with the one very important exception that he could not claim any formal rights against the sultan. (…) All those who as members of the sultan's household rose to high dignities had the status of kul. Thus, all grand viziers of the 16th century where kuls. (…)
> The purpose of the entire system was to create a class of reliable servants of the state, having no basis of power independent of the sultan' (transl. Kreiser / Neumann 2006, 152-155).

As Islamic law forbids the enslavement of born Muslims, kuls were recruited either by capturing non-Muslim male youths in military campaigns abroad or by the procedure of "collection" (*devşirme)* whereby the sultan's kuls were levied from his own Christian

subjects, mostly in the Balkan region. '*The Collection became the main source of recruitment into imperial service between the fourteenth and the late sixteenth centuries*' (Imber 2002: 134). As a rule, in intervals of about three to seven years, according to need, a young boy was drafted for lifelong service as kul of the sultan from one out of forty non-Muslim rural households in the provinces of the Ottoman empire.[20]

It would be misleading to consider *devşirme* merely as a system of violent abduction and forced Islamisation of Christian subjects. It also gave the kuls exceptional career opportunities in the Ottoman empire. The respected Turkish historian Halil Inalcik comments:

> 'Devşirme … was indeed a harsh measure, and although some families especially in poor, mountain districts, gave their children of their own accord, sources indicate that people usually sought to avoid the devşirme' (Inalcik 1994: 78).

Upon arrival in Istanbul, most of the *devşirme* boys were farmed out to Turkish foster-families in the countryside, where they were brought up as Muslims. Afterwards they were either drafted into the army or became servants in rich households. The cleverest boys were singled out to go to a cadet school (*acemi oğlan mektebi*) where they received a rigorous training. After finishing school, the most able and successful pupils of the *acemi oğlan mektebi* were selected to enter the *Janissary corps*, the sultan's elite infantry troop.

> *Yusuf Sinan* (c. 1490-1588), the master builder of many world-famous Ottoman mosques, was such a former *devşirme* boy who was educated at the *acemi oğlan mektebi*. Among other things he was qualified as a construction carpenter there. Subsequently he was admitted to the Janissary corps and he began his brilliant career as a military engineer constructing bridges, fortifications and military roads. Eventually he was to become the powerful chief architect of Sultan Suleiman I and his successors (Necipoğlu 2005: 127-134). Sinan 'received all his professional training in his many years' experience in the army and the architects´ office at the Palace, eventually becoming the author … of such masterpieces as the Süleymâniye and Selîmiye Mosques in Istanbul and Edirne' (Inalcik 1994: 88).
>
> If we undertake again an imaginary time travel, this time from 16th century Istanbul to 19th century Paris, we might encounter there a descendant of Sinan, a promising young Ottoman officer on secondment to the French army. Because of his exceptional talent he would have been admitted at the prestigious *École Polytechnique* to be educated as a high quality military engineer. Afterwards he might have completed his education at another French elite school, the *École des Ponts et Chaussées*, to be trained as an architect and civil engineer. With this solid grounding as a technical expert he would have been in a good starting position for an illustrious career as public servant, comparable to that of such

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[20] An exception was Ottoman Bosnia where Muslim boys were eligible for the *devşirme* (Imber 2002: 136).

formidable men as *Haussmann* or *Eiffel* who shaped and transformed the physiognomy of Paris, their capital city. *Sinan*, his ancestor, would have been proud of him. But he would not have been surprised, as his spiritual grandson had received the sort of challenging technical education in 19th century Paris which he himself had experienced centuries ago in Istanbul, but which was no longer available there. After a long decline, the Janissary corps had been completely disbanded in 1826.

However, if we return now to the 16th century Ottoman Empire again, a technical education in the context of the *Janissary* corps was not the only path by which the kuls could achieve high positions in the sultan's service. There was one more direct route: Immediately upon their arrival in Istanbul, the most promising *devşirme* boys were singled out as candidates for entry into the Sultan's palace school (*enderûn mektebi*) where they would be prepared for service in the highest positions of the Empire[21]. They were selected by means of an intensive screening procedure, sometimes attended by the Sultan himself. The aim was to pick out the most able boys for intensive education in the palace, whereas the remaining youths were given away to foster families. The selection was based on a number of tests, including some kind of „intelligence test", and the physical appearance and fitness of the *devşirme* boys played a significant role, too.

The education of those chosen to go to the *enderûn mektebi* must be understood as a continuous process of selection comprising several stages. Ideal-typically it included the following steps (cf. Miller 1941; Inalcik 1994; Imber 2002):

1. At first, the hand-picked boys were sent to one of several *external schools* (sing. *bîrûn mektebi*)[22] located in palaces outside the Imperial residence. These external schools served as preparatory schools for the *enderûn mektebi*. The young *kuls* received a thorough basic education there, taking between two and seven years according to entrance age and individual ability. The style of education in these external schools was extremely competitive and based on strict discipline. Intensive and continuous tutoring and supervision was the rule. One is reminded of European cadet academies or British boarding schools.

2. After this initial period of intensive schooling a second selection took place. Now, most of the kuls were allocated to the sultan's prestigious palace troops where they started a military career. Only the very best were promoted to the *enderûn mektebi* itself, the palace school inside the Topkapi-Palace in Istanbul, the Sultan's residence. There, they lived in one of two "lower chambers" (sing. *büyük oda* and *küçük oda*) and continued with their studies, normally for another four years, in strictest seclusion from the outside world. They now had to divide their time between doing service as pages at the sultan's court and pursuing their academic studies. Again ideal-typically, their curriculum may be summarized in the following way':[23]

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[21] Cf. Miller (1941), Inalcik (1965, 1994).

[22] One of these external palace schools was located in the Galatasaray Palace in Istanbul. It is still existing today as *Galatasaray Lisesi*.

[23] Cf. Miller 1941, Inalcik 1965, 1994, Corlu et al. 2010.

- Especially in the early stages of study, the main emphasis was on the Islamic sciences, including Islamic law (similar to the medreses) and on the perfect mastery of Turkish, Arabic and Persian.
- Particular attention was given to the teaching of non-Islamic sciences, especially mathematics, geography, history and literature.
- A subject area of central importance was the theory and practice of state- and palace-administration, as well as the initiation to the implicit and explicit rules of court life and diplomacy.
- Furthermore, particular attention was given to the development of practical skills, such as calligraphy, music, the arts. 'Each lad had to become skilled in one type of personal service or craft; many masters of miniature-painting, drawing, book-binding and calligraphy were trained in the *Enderûn*' (Inalcik 1965).
- And above all, there was a thorough military and physical education. Particular emphasis was 'given to physical training, and to horsemanship and the management of arms' (ibid.).

In the *enderûn mektebi* regular teaching duties were fulfilled by specialized staff of the palace, often former graduates of the palace school. Academically or professionally demanding lectures and courses were taught by high ranking external lecturers. Due to the outstanding reputation of the *enderûn mektebi*, professors of the most renowned medreses and important members of the ulema, the state administration and the military were among them, as well as highly regarded engineers, architects or artists. They usually worked for a symbolical remuneration. One may assume that the excellence of their students and the proximity of the *enderûn mektebi* to the centre of imperial power provided sufficient incentives for them (Miller 1941: 92f.).

3. After yet another selective examination, the regular studies at the *enderûn mektebi* ended with a graduation ceremony. Most former pupils of the *enderûn mektebi* moved on to distinguished careers. Only the most successful students were allowed to stay on and to rise to one of three "higher chambers" of the palace school (sing. *ḵẖazine oda, kilār oda* and *ḵẖāss oda*). Besides continuing with their studies, their role as pages became increasingly important. They were now responsible for the personal service of the sultan.

4. Finally, aged about 25-30 years, the kuls who had been found most suitable were promoted to the sultan's privy chamber (*seferli oda*). The select few who reached this point and were deemed satisfactory by the sultan himself were qualified for the highest positions, e.g. as provincial governor, troop commander, pasha, vizier and even grand vizier.

The curriculum of the *enderûn mektebi* summarized above appears very extensive and daunting. But it was by no means mandatory that every student had to follow it in its entirety. As Barnette Miller writes in her classic study of the palace school:

'The course of studies within broad lines was almost entirely a matter of choice, the only absolutely prescribed subjects being the Turkish and Arabic languages

and the Koran. In addition to the prescription of these two subjects there existed only the one general requirement that a "page should work at something in earnest, drones not being permitted." In actual fact the pages are said to have devoted day and night to the study of the "sciences", using their recreation time for required physical and manual exercises, or for study. (…)

The system of merit of the Palace School, which was a replica of the carefully graded rewards of merit underlying the hierarchy of the government, prevailed in the school. (…) Promotions from one hall to another, appointments to student offices and later military and administrative positions, all were strictly based on the merit system' (Miller 1941: 99f.).

Thus, the *formation of independent minds* clearly was one of the aims of education at the palace school. But it was not the only aim, and the methods of education of the *enderûn mektebi* had not much in common with modern ideas of academic freedom. Halil Inalcik writes:

'The palace education aimed to produce *"the warrior statesman and loyal Muslim who at the same time should be a man of letters and polished speech, profound courtesy and honest morals."*[24] But its fundamental aim was to instil complete *obedience and loyalty to the sultan*. (…)

Every minute of the pages' day was regulated. They woke, slept, ate, rested and played at fixed times; they could not converse wherever and whenever they wanted; they were denied access to the world outside the Palace. They led bachelor lifes, remaining in the Palace normally until they were twenty-five or thirty. Their every activity was controlled, infractions of rules bringing punishments suited to the offence – reprimand, bastinado, expulsion or death' (Inalcik 1994: 79; my emphasis).

Clearly, the *enderûn mektebi* used very harsh teaching methods. It never aimed to educate its students to become only scientists, only artists or mere soldiers. It did not train specialists, but generalists, and it aimed at versatility. It made sure that the students were able to understand the latest developments in science, have at least a craft or art, and excel in army command as well as in close combat skills. Furthermore, students from very different ethnic backgrounds were taught to live and learn together under a common umbrella – their loyalty to the sultan (Corlu et al. 2010: 22, 29). Prepared in this way they were expected to be able to fulfil their role as high-ranking servants of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire.

The following quotation is from a direct witness, the Habsburg diplomat *Ogier de Busbecq* who spent several months at the court of Sultan Suleiman I in 1555:

'The Sultan's headquarters were crowded by numerous attendants, including many high officials. All the cavalry of the guard were there … and a large number of Janissaries. In all that great assembly no single man owed his dignity to anything but his personal merits and bravery; no one is distinguished from the rest by his birth, and honour is paid to each man according to the nature of the duty and offices which he discharges. (…)

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[24] Inalcik quotes Menavino here. Giovanni Antonio Menavino was the son of a Genovese sailor who, having been captured at sea, became a kul of the sultan and attended the palace school. He published the story of his experiences in *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de' turchi*, Venice 1548.

The Sultan himself assigns to all their duties and offices, and in doing so pays no attention to wealth or the empty claims of rank, and takes no account of any influence or popularity which a candidate may possess; he only considers merit and scrutinizes the character, natural ability, and disposition of each. Thus each man is rewarded according to his deserts, and offices are filled by men capable of performing them. (…)

Those who hold the highest posts under the Sultan are very often the sons of shepherds and herdsmen, and, so far from being ashamed of their birth, they make it a subject of boasting, and the less they owe to their forefathers and to the accident of birth, the greater is the pride which they feel. (…)

Our method[25] is very different; there is no room for merit, but everything depends on birth; considerations of which alone open the way to high official position' (de Busbecq 2001: 39).

These words may sound somewhat idealizing. Nonetheless they indicate that, five hundred years ago, the Ottoman palace school showed an amazing degree of „modernity": The principles of individual achievement and merit-based promotion were held high – just as in contemporary universities. Of course, the students of today are not kuls, but free citizens. And it is hardly possible to attest institutional and professional autonomy to the *enderûn mektebi* and its staff. They were completely embedded in the Ottoman system of power. The aim of the palace school was to select the brightest and most able students, to detect and develop their talents, to foster their loyalty to the state in order to prepare them for a leading role in the Ottoman service class. To achieve this, a balance between rigorous discipline and scope for the development of individual talent was sought.

The *enderûn*-system of education may have had little in common with the idea of academic freedom – *but it worked*. At its heyday in the 15th and 16th centuries it was immensely successful. For about two centuries it provided the Ottoman Empire with highly competent and loyal servants of the state. Later, with the gradual erosion of meritocratic principles, the palace school lost its importance as training ground for future administrative and military elites and Ottoman statesmen.[26]

b. French Grandes Écoles of the 19th and 20th Century

In emphasizing the surprising „modernity" and meritocratic orientation of the Ottoman palace school in the 15th and 16th century I wanted to allude to the fact that academic freedom is not the only normative guideline extant in the world of higher education. There always was (and is) a further, equally powerful driving force – the idea that a central function of higher education is the *selection and formation of highly competent*

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[25] Scil., de Busbecq alludes here to the state of affairs at the imperial court of Vienna which he finds unsatisfactory.

[26] According to Miller (1941: 170ff.) the gradual disappearance of the *devşirme* since the mid-17th century and the closing of ranks of the janissaries, who became a largely hereditary troop, contributed to the gradual loss of influence of the *enderûn mektebi*. The Janissary corps was completely disbanded in 1826, whereas the *enderûn mektebi* continued to exist as school for the education of the pages of the Ottoman court until its closure in 1909; cf. Zilfi (2016).

and loyal servants of the state, not necessarily the education of free thinking critical minds.

As we have seen, the *enderûn mektebi* was installed as a deliberate alternative to the Islamic *medrese*, the established institution of higher education in the Ottoman Empire. It was felt that the education provided by the medreses was no longer sufficient for the formation of the servants required by the Ottoman state.

Several centuries later a similar constellation arose in another centrally ruled monarchy, in France. There, the universities as the established institutions of higher education stagnated. The important intellectual developments of the 17th and 18th century, Scientific Rationalism and Enlightenment, had largely bypassed the universities. Conservatism, clericalism and favouritism prevailed in the French universities of the *ancien régime*, the quality of teaching declined, research was virtually inexistent there. In lieu of the universities, the Académie Française (founded 1634) and the *Académie des Sciences* (founded 1666*)* emerged as new centres of innovation and of the 'legitimation of knowledge' (Charle / Verger 2012: 75). In 18th century France, the most influential thinkers (e.g. Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, Condillac, Condorcet, Diderot, d'Alembert) and important scientists (e.g. Réaumur, Nollet, Buffon, Lavoisier, Maupertuis, Quesnay) were not university professors, but members of the *Académie Française* or the *Académie des Sciences*.[27]

In the pre-1789 period the awareness had grown that the French universities were intellectually ailing and that 'university degrees … did not guarantee veritable competence' (transl. ibid.: 77). The French monarchy started to fill this gap by founding professional schools (*écoles spéciales)* outside of the universities (*École des Ponts et Chaussées, École du Génie, École Vétérinaire, École des Mines* etc.).[28] They were kept under strict state control. It was their task to educate the technically competent servants of the state which the universities could not deliver.

In 1793 the *Convention Nationale*, the elected parliament of the revolutionary French Republic, decided to dismantle all universities, the ancient Sorbonne as well as the old provincial universities. The universities were seen as strongholds of the clericalism and inertia of the *ancien régime*. In contrast, the existing *écoles spéciales* were retained. Little later, in 1794, additional *écoles spéciales* were founded, among them the *École Centrale des Travaux Publics* (later: *École Polytechnique*) and the *Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers*. Furthermore, a central training institution for secondary school teachers, the *École Normale Supérieure*, was inaugurated for the first time.[29] These *écoles spéciales* were the founding stones of the future network of highly selective *grandes écoles* which was to become one of the three main pillars upon which the system of higher education and academic research (HER-system) in contemporary

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[27] Only Rousseau was not an academy member. Diderot was an external member of the Prussian Royal Academy of Sciences.

[28] All founded between 1743 and 1783 (Charle / Verger 2012: 77).

[29] Charle / Verger (2012: 88). The *École Normale Supérieure* was closed again soon, re-opened under Napoleon in 1810, and closed again between 1818 and 1824. It was finally established in its present location at the *rue d'Ulm* in Paris in 1845.

France still rests – the resurrected *universities,* the *public research organisations,* and the *Grandes Écoles*. As Catherine Paradeise puts it:

> 'In France, history partitioned the HER system between public research and teaching institutions on one side, between selective professional schools (*Grandes écoles*) and universities open to all baccalauréat graduates on the other side. The three subsystems have developed interdependently. The weaknesses of each of them provided good reasons to justify the existence of the other two' (Paradeise 2017: 2).

This ideal-typical tripartite HER-system existed in France until the 1980s and 1990s when a number of reforms began to take effect. Its historical genesis and logic can be summarized in the following way:[30]

1. **Public Universities:** In 1806, thirteen years after the end of the classical *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* in France, Napoléon Bonaparte created a completely new institution, called the *Université Impériale* (spelled with a capital "U"), which was a national government agency responsible for the entire field of public education in France.[31] Concrete universities in specific university towns (spelled with a small "u") did not exist anymore. In its broad outlines Napoléon's conception of a centralized higher education regime survived the numerous political turnovers of 19th century France relatively unscathed, until it was formally abolished in 1896.[32]

    The Napoleonic *Université* of the 19th century had been a highly centralized and state-controlled administrative body located in Paris[33], subdivided into four distinct faculties – Letters, Sciences, Law and Medicine[34]. The main task of these faculties was the awarding of state degrees and the organization, standardization and control of academic examinations in Paris and in the provinces. The faculty professors were appointed by the ministry. The most onerous responsibility of the faculties of letters and of sciences was the examination of the *baccalauréat* which was considered as the first university degree, whereas in fact all teaching leading to the *baccalauréat* took place in secondary schools (*lycées*). Thus, the faculties of letters and of sciences had virtually no students of their own and very few teaching obligations (Weisz 1983: 20). This began to change in the decade after the war of 1870-71 when the preparation for higher degrees (*licence-ès-lettres, licence-ès-sciences* etc.) and for the *agrégation* became more important. From then on, the faculties of letters and of sciences started to become normal institutions of higher education offering lectures, courses and seminars on a regular basis. On the other hand, in the formerly "higher" faculties of

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[30] For the following short summary see Kreckel (2008: 88-99), Kreckel / Zimmermann (2014: 101-107), Charle (1994), Musselin (2004, 2017), Paradeise (2017, 2018).

[31] *Loi du 10 mai 1806 complétée par décret du 17 mars 1808.*

[32] After 1815, the *Université Impériale* became the *Université de France*. In later years it was simply called *Université*.

[33] In the provinces, *Academies* were installed. They were subordinate bodies of the *Université Impériale*, with the same tasks and the same faculty structure (Musselin 2004: 10f.).

[34] There was a fifth faculty, Theology, with special rights and duties according to the Concordat between Napoléon and the Vatican in 1802. The theological faculty existed until about 1885 when the secularisation of public higher education in France prevailed.

law, medicine (and theology) which prepared post-*baccalauréat* students for professionally oriented degrees regular teaching had resumed much sooner.

What all faculties of the French *Université* of the 19th century had in common was their complete submission under state control and their lack of institutional autonomy.[35] Their teaching activities were geared to the preparation of standardized examinations, not primarily to the education of scholars and scientists. And above all, it was not their task to conduct systematic research. On the other hand, the traditional academic professions, especially the medical and legal professions, remained strong and exercised considerable influence on the government's higher education policy (cf. Minot 1991; Charle 1994; Musselin 2004).

In 1896 'for the first time after the Revolution, the term "university" reappeared in French administrative language' (Musselin 2004: 13): By the *Loi relative à la constitution des universités* of 1896, fifteen local universities where created in Paris and in various provincial (mostly ancient) university towns. In the 20th century, when the French universities started to become 'veritable universities' (Minot 1991: 53) again, their core mission remained lecturing, conducting examinations and awarding state degrees. As before, research was not high on their agenda.[36] The *baccalauréat* (de facto the school leaving certificate after secondary education) became the general entrance ticket for studying at any French university. Selective university admission is considered as inadmissible in France[37], and tuition fees did not exist in French public universities until very recently.[38] With the continuous rise of student numbers since the 1960s this constellation lead to inevitable problems of university finance and of academic quality. In response, many new public universities were founded in the second half of the 20th century. But apart from very few renowned locations (such as the Sorbonne, Aix-Marseille, Grenoble, Lyon, Montpellier) the academic reputation and research output of the traditional universities remained generally low, the dilemma of increasing massification and deficient state funding was hard to overcome.

2. **Public Research Organisations:** One established French response to these problems is the binary division of labour between academic teaching and academic research. Whereas the universities and the *écoles spéciales* of the 19th and 20th century concentrated on education and examination, the task of academic research was eventually allocated to specialized non-university *public research organisations*. In the first half of the 19th century academic research had even lain quite fallow in

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[35] The French historian Christophe Charle (1994: 17) summarizes: '*Le long déclin du XVIIIᵉ siècle et la cassure révolutionnaire ont abouti a une perte d'autonomie quasi totale du champ universitaire François.*'

[36] Since the *Loi sur l'orientation de l'enseignement supérieur* of 1968 (Loi Faure) all academic staff members of universities are legally described as *enseignants-chercheurs* (teachers-researchers) which was more of a declaration of intention than a realistic description then (Kreckel 2008: 91).

[37] With the exception of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy, university education is traditionally open to all *bacheliers*. However, the failure rate at university examinations is very high. Recently, French universities have even begun to implement lottery procedures to allocate places of study in over-crowded faculties.

[38] Since the academic year 2010-11, obligatory tuition fees (quite moderate in comparison to the USA or the UK) are charged in public institutions of higher education in France.

France. The traditional places of intellectual and scientific excellence (such as the *Collège de France*, the *Académie Française*, the *Académie des Sciences*, the *Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle*) were unable to transform themselves into organizations of systematically organized academic research. New institutions were eventually founded for this purpose, the most famous being the *Institut Pasteur* for fundamental medical and biological research (founded 1887). However, various attempts to finance continuous research activities in French universities remained unsuccessful in the beginning of the 20th century. Eventually, the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS) was established in 1939 (cf. Picard / Pradoura 2009). Ever since, the CNRS was *the* dominant state-financed non-university research organisation in France.

By the end of the 20th century, there were around 1.200 well-endowed CNRS-institutes (usually called *laboratoires*) doing fundamental research in all academic fields.[39] They appoint their own permanent research personnel, a civil service career for tenured academic researchers analogous to that of the *enseignants-chercheurs* at the universities has been established. Besides the CNRS there are several further important public research organisations in France, called *Établissements Publics à Caractère Scientifique et Technologique* (EPST), which are maintained and controlled by various ministries.[40] Today, about 25% of all permanent academic staff with civil service status in the French public HER-System are employed as researchers in public research organizations, two thirds of them in the CNRS-institutes. They have no formal teaching obligation and are unaffected by the massification of the universities, though most of them are located in physical proximity to the universities and cooperate with them (cf. Kreckel / Zimmermann 2014: 116ff.; Garçon 2011: 109ff.).

3. **Public Grandes Écoles:** The other traditionally French strategy to cope with the problems of academic massification and financial shortage in higher education is the rigorous binary distinction[41] between non-selective and costless public universities on one side, highly selective public *écoles spéciales* and *grandes écoles* on the other[42] – that is, an institutional division between poorly financed "mass" universities and more prosperous places of "elite" higher education of limited size.[43] When the

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[39] Most CNRS-Institutes are housed as independent research units on the campus of a university or a *grande école*.

[40] For example INSERM (*Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Medicale*), INED (*Institut National d'Études Démographiques*), INRA (*Institut National de Recherche Agronomique*). Important private research institutes cooperating with CNRS and INSERM are the *Institut Pasteur* and the *Institut Curie*.

[41] In reality, the structure of French system of higher education is even more complex (cf. Kreckel 2008). In a recent *Rapport au Président de la République* it has been described as a *'mikado institutionnel'* (https://cache.media.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/file/Assises_esr/24/0/Assises-ESR-Rapport-Vincent-Berger-_237240.pdf; 11.10.2017).

[42] There are also private *écoles spéciales* and *grandes écoles*, mostly in the fields of business education and of engineering, which are not discussed here. 18,2% of the students in French higher education were enrolled in the private, fee-paying sector in the academic year 2016-17 *grande école*. (http://cache.media.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/file/2017/29/0/NF_2017-11_Synthese_effectifs_etudiants_2016-2017_num_802290.pdf; 02.10.2017).

[43] Cf. e.g. Garçon (2011: 99-103).

universities of the ancien régime had been abolished in 1793, the existing system of *écoles spéciales* was deliberately retained. It was subsequently consolidated. The task of the *écoles spéciale*s always was (and still is) to select, to train and to examine the best students for the French public service and for other prestigious professional fields.

The following description of the situation in France by van Zanten and Maxwell is strikingly reminiscent of the constellation between the *medreses* and the *enderûn mektebi* encountered in the Ottoman empire several centuries earlier:

> 'The creation of these "special training schools" … (was) related to generalised political mistrust towards universities. *Universities were considered by representatives of all types of political regimes in France as … either too influenced by the Church or too autonomous to produce the kinds of competent military and civil servants that would be loyal to the state*. Elite educational institutions were therefore used from the outset as a means of sustaining the efficacy and legitimacy of the state.
>
> Central to this process was the *introduction of selection by merit* through competitive examinations – the *concours* – for a specific number of places, which were annually determined by the state. The concours had a clear practical function – *providing the state with highly skilled professionals according to its technical needs*' (van Zanten / Maxwell 2015: 74; my emphasis).

Today, about 1.900 *écoles spéciales* and *écoles spécialisées* exist in the non-university sector of French higher education, attended by roughly 25% of the students.[44] Not all of them can be considered as "elite" institutions: Only 208 of these schools (enrolling an estimated 5% of the students) are accredited members of the *Conférence des Grandes Écoles* (CGE) and understand themselves as "*grandes écoles*".[45] Approximately one half of the CGE-members in France are private institutions, most of them charging considerable tuition fees. The other half, which are of particular interest here, are the publicly maintained members of the CGE:

> 'What is special in the French case is that it involves a range of prestigious public and semi-private professional schools which impact on the public perception of the openly accessible universities as being only second best. Such schools were set up at the turn of the nineteenth century to train state engineers and high school teachers. Each was placed under the supervision of the ministry which had established it (ministry of defense for *École polytechnique*, of industry for *École des mines*, of public works *for École des ponts et chaussées*, of education for *École normale supérieure*, etc.). Over time, such specialized

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[44] Cf. http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/2017/41/3/depp_rers_2017_801413.pdf, pp. 63, 152; 09.10.2017.

[45] The term "grande école" is not legally defined, but it has been in use since the period of the French Revolution when the École Centrale des Travaux Publics (later: *École Polytechnique)* and the *Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers* were founded. The *Conférence des Grandes Écoles* is a voluntary association. Among its 208 accredited member institutions in France are the most prestigious grandes écoles, such as ENA, ENS, École Polytechnique (http://www.cge.asso.fr/listings/; 2017-10-20).

schools and their alumni forgot their original mission and spread all over industry, higher education and research, services, and politics' (Paradeise 2017: 3).

These publicly maintained *grandes écoles* differ from the public universities by their strictly selective admission policy, their small size, their much better funding and their advantageous staff-student ratio. Traditionally the *grandes écoles* were not active in research (though some of their teaching staff were renowned researchers), but saw their core function in giving a first-rate professional education to high-quality students selected by severe entrance examinations. They claim that they provide a superior education, attract the best students, and offer more advantageous career chances than the universities. The *grandes écoles* thereby aspire to an "elite" status in French higher education.

In practice, the situation is more nuanced. Only the most prestigious public institutions accredited by the CGE are commonly understood as veritable *grandes écoles*. The overwhelming majority of them are specialised engineering schools of high quality.[46] Only one of those, the *École Polytechnique* (abbreviated X), stands far out as engineering *grande école* of international recognition. The same holds true for the legendary *École Normale Supérieure* with its traditional campus at the rue d'Ulm in the Quartier Latin of Paris (ENS-Ulm). According to Pierre Bourdieu (1988: xix), himself a former *normalien*, ENS-Ulm is 'the apex of the whole academic hierarchy' in France.[47]

ENS-Ulm and X may therefore be seen as the *ideal-typically models* to which the other *grandes écoles* and would-be *grandes écoles* in France aspire. Their classical format was fully established by the third quarter of the 19th century and remained almost unaltered until the third quarter of the 20th century. The most characteristic feature of grandes écoles such as ENS-Ulm and X is their highly selective admission policy.[48] To be admitted as one of their regular students (called *élève*) the applicants of ENS-Ulm or X are normally required

- to have passed the *baccalauréat* with excellent marks,
- to have been admitted to a selective *lycée* offering post-baccalauréat *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles (CPGE)*,
- to have successfully completed two highly demanding and competitive years of study at such a *classe préparatoire (prépa)*[49], preferably in a prestigious *lycée* with

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[46] Other prestigious and very selective public engineering schools with a long tradition are, besides the *École Polytechnique*: *École d'Arts et Métiers, École Centrale Paris, École Nationale Supérieure des Mines, École Nationale de Ponts et Chaussées*. The most highly rated private commercial schools are: *École des Hautes Études Commerciales Paris* (HEC) and *École Supérieure des Sciences Économiques et Commerciales* (ESSEC).

[47] There are three further, less well-known establishments of the *École National Supérieure* - ENS-Saclay (formerly Cachan), ENS -Lyon and ENS-Rennes.

[48] For the following summary description, see Hartmann (2007: 39-44); Lebègue / Walter (2008), Garçon (2011: 104ff.).

[49] In spite of their affiliation to secondary schools, the CPGE belong to the French higher education system. The two-year course at a CPGE is recognized as equivalent to the first two undergraduate years

the reputation of getting many of its pupils into the most renowned *grandes écoles*,[50]

- and, most importantly, to have been successful in a severe nation-wide anonymous competition, the *concours*, which serves as entrance examination to the *grandes écoles*. The available places of study are strictly limited and allocated to the highest performers in this concours.

In French academic culture, rigorously formalized competitive examinations (*concours*) are seen as *the* objective method guaranteeing that the most qualified persons are selected and that the meritocratic principle – i.e. the famous *élitisme républicain* – prevails (cf. Allouch 2017: 23ff.).[51] The success rate of the *concours*, i.e. the ratio between the number of applicants and of accepted candidates, is usually seen as a powerful indicator of the selectivity and quality of a *grande école*. The rate can be as low as five percent or less for prestigious institutions such as X and ENS-Ulm (Schippling 2015: 243).

It implies that the likelihood of failure after a long and arduous time spent at *classes préparatoires* is very high. But this risk is counterbalanced by the prospective benefits awaiting the successful candidates. In this respect, X and ENS-Ulm have clear advantages in that

- their pupils are not in the same situation as normal university students, their "poor relatives". Apart from receiving an excellent education and personal tutoring, they occupy the advantageous status of *élève fonctionnaire stagiaire* (trainee public servant). [52]
- In this capacity they live as *resident pupils* on campus. This sustains the legendary *esprit de corps* of the *polytechniciens* and the *normaliens*.[53]
- Furthermore, all *élèves* receive the monthly *salary* of trainee public servants.
- In return they are obliged to spent at least *ten years* in the French public service.[54]
- This stipulation is connected with a far-reaching *guarantee of employment* and of access to the highest level of the French public service. The pupils reaching the top

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at a university, allowing students who have failed to get admitted to a *grande école* to complete their degree as normal students at a university.

[50] Among them are the lycées Henri-IV, Louis-le-Grand, and Victor-Duruy in Paris, Lakanal and Hoche in the vicinity of Paris, and several more in mayor provincial cities, e.g. Marseilles, Lyon, Toulouse (Lebègue / Walter 2008: 35).

[51] Notwithstanding this, it is a well-established social fact that an overproportioned part of the students of the *grandes écoles* come from upper or upper middle-class family backgrounds, due to their privileged access to social and cultural capital. Clearly, meritocratic procedures and inter-generational status reproduction are *not* incompatible (cf. e.g.: Suleiman 1978, Bourdieu 1989, Euriat / Thélot 1995, Hartmann 2007, van Zanten / Maxwell 2015, Kreckel 2018).

[52] Today, X and ENS-Ulm also admit normal post-graduate students (master and doctoral students, including international students) without the privileged status of salaried *élève fonctionnaire stagiaire*. These students are not recruited via *concours*, they are selected on the strength of their previous achievements in other institutions of higher education.

[53] The obligation to live on campus has been relented recently, especially for married pupils, but it is still recommended.

[54] Former pupils not fulfilling this clause are expected to refund the salary they have received. This is often taken care of by their new employers who see it as a kind of moderate "transfer fee".

ranks in the final examination (*classement de sortie*) are given free choice to select their future careers.

At this point, however, the situation of X and ENS-Ulm began to change in the course of the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century, for two main reasons: Firstly, a new competitor appeared in the field of public elite higher education, the *École Nationale d'Administration* (ENA), founded in 1945. Secondly, for a long time, ENS-Ulm and X had fulfilled parallel functions, as both institutions were meant to deliver competent and loyal leadership personnel for two core sectors of the French state apparatus, the *Éducation Nationale* and the *Service Public Technique*, and to provide them with reliable career perspectives:[55]

(1) In the case of the ***École Normale Supérieure*** of the 19ᵗʰ and early 20ᵗʰ century this had meant that the regular career prospect of a *normalien* was that of a secondary school professor (*professeur de lycée* or *professeur de CPGE*). Consequently, only the main subjects which were taught there – philosophy, history and geography, languages and literature, social sciences, mathematics and various natural sciences – were represented at ENS-Ulm.[56] As there was no final examination and no conferment of academic degrees at the end of the studies at ENS, the *normaliens* had to participate in a further demanding external *concours*, the *agrégation*, to be eligible for a secondary school career as *professeur agrégé*. Only if they reached top ranks in the *compétition nationale d'agrégation* they could influence the decision where they were appointed. Frequently, the only available posts were in *lycées* far away from Paris.[57]

However, as the reputation of the French universities improved and the public research organisations grew in the course of the twentieth century, teaching at a secondary school became less and less attractive for many *normaliens* who saw themselves as the intellectual and scientific elite of the country. Ezra Suleiman aptly described the career situation of the *ancien élèves* of ENS-Ulm at the end of the 1970s:

'The school's traditional *raison d'être* – the training of lycée professors – is more and more being questioned. Gone, it seems, are the days when graduates of the caliber of a Bergson or a Sartre were content to spend many years as lycée professors. Normaliens no longer want to become secondary school teachers; they would rather be university professors. Admittedly, they have a distinct advantage even here over the non-normaliens, but they are not *guaranteed* a good post' (Suleiman 1978: 38).

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[55] The ensuing paragraphs sketching ENS, X and ENA are mainly based on Suleiman (1978), Kessler (1986), Gaillard (1999), Legendre (1999), Garrigou (2001), Belhoste (2002), Hartmann (2007), Lebègue/Walter (2008), Garçon (2011), Saint-Preux (2013).

[56] That is, important academic fields such as Medicine, Law, Economics or Engineering were absent.

[57] E.g. Jean-Paul Sartre who had finished in first place in the *agrégation de philosophie* of 1929 spent seven years as *professeur de lycée* at Le Havre before he was transferred to Paris.

Today, only about ten percent of the former *élèves* of ENS-Ulm still enter the traditional career of *professeur agrégé* at a *lycée*[58], whereas two thirds become *enseignants-chercheurs* in universities and *grandes écoles* or *chercheurs* in public research organisations (CNRS, INSEE, INSERM etc.), most of them being doctorate holders.[59] That is, as ENS-Ulm could no longer guarantee safe appointments in the elite sector of the public service, it began to develop a new profile. It built upon its traditional strengths as an institution of advanced academic scholarship and research which had spawned two dozen Nobel prize winners and Fields medalists[60], as well as numerous critical intellectuals such as Raymond Aron, Simone de Beauvoir, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Simone Weil.

Today, ENS-Ulm sees its role as an elite Graduate University of Sciences and Humanities with a strong commitment to fundamental research, thus providing its pupils with national and international career opportunities in higher education and research. Indeed, in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings of 2016-2017, ENS-Ulm reached the global rank no. 61, the highest position attributed to a French institution of higher education (the École Polytechnique coming second as no. 116, both far ahead of "normal" French universities).[61]

(2) The case of the ***École Polytechnique*** differs from that of ENS-Ulm because X never lost its traditional function of providing the best *élèves* with a safe career path to the top positions in the French public employment sector. Those *élèves* occupying the highest ranks in the *classement de sortie* of X, the competitive examination taking place after the second year of study, are admitted to one of the two most important *grands corps techniques* of the French state, the *Corps des Ingénieurs des Mines* and the *Corps des Ingénieurs des Ponts et Chaussées* (today: *Corps des Ingénieurs des Ponts, des Eaux et des Forêts*).

> For historical reasons the civil servants (*fonctionnaires titulaires du service public*) of the French state are subdivided into about 120 separate sections (*corps*) of unequal rank. Each corps has its own public mission (*charge publique*) and a selective recruitment procedure, it provides its members with specific career perspectives and a distinct sense of professional identity and social status.[62]
>
> The most high-ranking and prestigious *corps* are the *"Grands Corps de l'État"*. These grands corps give access to the highest positions of the French public service. From there, crossovers to a political career or to a leading position in

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[58] The *professeurs agrégés d'enseignement du second degré* are classified in category A of the French public service, not in the highest category A+ (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_des_corps_de_la_fonction_publique_fran%C3%A7aise; 2017-10-30).

[59] These data are derived from a study investigating the professional situation of ENS-graduates of 2003, ten years after their graduation (2013). Source: http://www.letudiant.fr/etudes/quels-debouches-apres-une-ens.html; 2017-10-23; cf. also Garçon (2011: 105f.). For the different positions and ranks in French higher education institutions and public research organisations, see Kreckel (2008; 2017).

[60] https://theconversation.com/institutions/ecole-normale-superieure-ens-2180; 2017-10-27.

[61] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/ecole-normale-superieure#ranking-dataset/589595; 2017-10-24.

[62] For this and the following paragraph, see Kessler (1986: 9-40).

the world of business, finance and industry, or into politics are not uncommon.[63] The *Grands Corps de l'État* are subdivided into technical and administrative *grands corps* – a distinction which symbolizes the traditionally French combination of "technocratic" and "bureaucratic" government. The most eminent (non-military[64]) technical *grands corps* have always been the *Corps des Ingénieurs des Mines* ("Mines") and the *Corps des Ingénieurs des Ponts et Chaussées* ("Ponts"). Both recruited (and still recruit) their leading personnel from X.

The three most distinguished administrative *grands corps* are the *Conseil d'État*, the *Inspection des Finances* and the *Cour des Comptes*, followed by the *Corps Préfectoral* and the *Corps Diplomatique*. They recruit almost exclusively from the élèves of ENA.[65]

The first two years of study at the *École Polytechnique* include – besides several months of compulsory military training or community service – an extremely broad and intensive course in *Multidisciplinary Scientific Studies* (covering at present Pure and Applied Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mechanics, Economics and Computer Science, as well as selected subjects of Law, Political Science, Humanities and the Arts). That is, the two formative years at X are meant to educate scientific generalists, not specialized engineers. The competitive examinations which decide about the future career paths of the pupils are held at the end of this "generalist" initial phase of study at X. The top-ranked *élèves* (usually about 15, called "*la botte*") can opt for a career in one of the two leading *grands corps techniques, "Mines"* or *"Ponts"*. Those further down the ranking order may decide to enter one of the less prestigious *corps techniques* or to turn towards a future career in industry and business or in scientific research.

The third year of study is called the year of *Scientific Concentration*. It is meant to give the pupils a scientific grounding in the field they have chosen according to their second year ranking.

The fourth and final year, the year of *Professional Specialisation*, is spent outside of the École Polytechnique, partly in internships, partly at appropriate instititutions of higher education in France or abroad where the pupils finish their engineering degrees. The case of the top-ranked *élèves*, the "*botte*", is somewhat different in that they are admitted either to the *École des Mines* or to the *École des Ponts et Chaussées* which are *grandes écoles* themselves, with the additional function of being *écoles d'application*. There, the top-graduates of X are specially groomed for their future careers as senior government officials in the *Corps des Ingénieurs des Mines* or the *Corps des Ingénieurs des Ponts et Chaussées*.[66]

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[63] On the system of "*pantouflage*", see Suleiman (1978: 226ff.), Hartmann (2007: 99ff.).

[64] Since the end of the second world war, the original mission of X to train military engineers lost importance as fewer and fewer polytechniciens chose a military career (Suleiman 1978: 199f.).

[65] In contrast, the corps employing most of today's ENS-graduates, the *Corps Supérieurs de l'Éducation et de la Recherche*, do not rate as *grands corps*. 'With respect to the training of France´s governing elites, Normale has now ceded its place to the Ecole Polytechnique and ENA' (Suleiman 1978: 38).

[66] https://www.polytechnique.edu/en/ingenieur-polytechnicien-program; 2017-10-30.

If one looks through the lists of cabinet members of the various French ministries or of the senior civil servants of the numerous public establishments with administrative or industrial and commercial functions (EPA, EPIC)[67], or if one examines the homepages of state-owned and state-controlled organisations and enterprises in France (such as *SNCF*, *France Télécom* or the *Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile)*, the *anciens élèves de l'École Polytechnique* are omnipresent. However, the top positions are increasingly held by *énarques*, former pupils of the *École Nationale d'Administration*. In turn, top positions in industry are increasingly occupied by former *polytechniciens* (cf. Suleiman 1978: 199-203, Hartmann 2007: 83-102).

Since the days of Bonaparte it has always been the explicit task of the public *grandes écoles* to educate academically competent and loyal servants of the state. They were highly competitive government-controlled institutions with the aim to integrate their best pupils via the *grands corps* into the elite sector of the public service. But surprisingly enough, there was a conspicuous gap in this system. Whereas the educational ascent to the *grands corps techniques* (via bac – prépa – X – Mines or Ponts) was clearly preordained, no standardised educational pathway to the non-technical *grands corps administratives* existed, especially not to the *grands corps* at the very centre of the French state bureaucracy, the *Conseil d'État*, the *Inspection des Finances* and the *Cour des Comptes*.

> (3) This gap was closed in 1945, when General de Gaulle and Michel Debré founded the ***École Nationale d'Administration***. Before that time, the *grands corps administratives* recruited new members by an unclear mixture of co-optation and *concours*, and the prior education of the candidates was not regulated (Kessler 1986: 69). Partly, the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques*, founded privately in 1872, had stepped into this void. There, courses on international and administrative law, political economy, public finance, comparative government, public administration etc. were taught. The *École Libre* proved highly successful at preparing candidates for the concours of the *grands corps administratives*. In doing so, it served as a kind of functional equivalent to the technical *grandes écoles*, but its teaching was not under direct government control.
>
> At a single stroke this situation ended in 1945 when the newly founded *École Nationale d'Administration* (ENA) opened its doors and the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* was nationalized, becoming the state-financed *Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris* ("Science Po") supervised by the Ministry of Education. From then on, the ENA was the major filter institution controlling the access to the *grands corps administratives* of the French state, in the same way as the École Polytechnique had always acted as gatekeeper to the *grands corps techniques*. The quality and selectivity of access to the ENA[68] was controlled by a very demanding external

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[67] *Établissements publics à caractère administratif* (EPA), *Établissements publics à caractère industriel et commercial* (EPIC).

[68] Today, the usual success rate of the external concours of the ENA is seven percent of the participants (file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Rapport%20du%20pr%C3%A9sident%20des%20jurys%202016.pdf, p. 12; 2017-11-10).

concours.[69] However, the admission to this concours was not based upon the established system of *classes préparatoires*. Instead, to be admitted to the external concours of entry to the ENA the candidates were expected to have previously completed a very good academic degree at another institution of higher education. Therefore, the ENA was classified as a postgraduate school, an *école d'application*. It soon became apparent that the majority of the successful candidates at the *concours externe* of the ENA held a degree from Science Po[70] which itself did not recruit via *concours*. Thus, the *Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris* fulfilled a double function, that of an *école préparatoire* for the ENA and that of a generalist *grande école* analogous to the École Polytechnique. For this reason Science Po was often nicknamed *quasi grande école,* whereas the ENA (for a long time residing in the near vicinity of Science Po)[71] was labelled *super grande école* (Garrigou 2001: 59-60).

Surprisingly enough, in spite of its extreme selectivity and enormous reputation the ENA is not primarily an institution of academic teaching and research. It does not even have a permanent professorial staff of its own. The lectures and courses held at the ENA are mainly given by visiting professors, senior civil servants, successful politicians and influential business leaders, often former *énarques*. This is not very dissimilar to what was the case at the Ottoman Palace School several centuries earlier.

Over the years, the curriculum of the *École Nationale d'Administration* underwent a number of reforms and changes, but the basic structure remained more or less the same (cf. Suleiman 1978: 164ff.; Saint-Preux 2013). The *élèves* of the ENA – who also have the status of trainee public servants drawing a salary – spend about one half of their time of two years outside of the school, on obligatory internships (*stages*). Today, there are three such *stages*,

- the *stage international*, usually passed at an administration of the European Union in Brussels or at a French embassy abroad (4 months),
- the *stage entreprise*, to be spent at a private firm or corporation , or at a non-profit organisation (2 months),
- the *stage territoire*, taking place at one of the French *Préfectures* or another regional organisation of public service (5 months).

Formerly, the remaining time spent at the ENA was filled by intermittent periods of teaching at the premises of the ENA, since 2005 located in Strasbourg. As these teaching periods were often criticised as not being very structured and substantial, partly due to the lack of a permanent teaching staff at the ENA and the somewhat haphazard performance of eminent guest lecturers (cf. Saint-Preux 2013: 45ff.), one has recently reorganised the time-table. A block of nine months of obligatory

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[69] Further ways of access to the ENA such as the *concours interne* for experienced public servants and the *troisième concours* are not considered here.
[70] At present around 75 percent of the successful candidates of the *concours externe* of the ENA hold an MA of Science Po, mostly in *Politiques Publiques* (http://www.sciencespo.fr/public/fr/actualites/ena-82-des-nouveaux-admis-viennent-de-sciences-po; 2017-11-07).
[71] In the year 2005, the ENA was transferred from Paris to Strasbourg. By that time, Science Po had begun its process of re-orientation towards a 'world-class university in the social sciences' (http://www.sciencespo.fr/en/what-sciences-po; 2017-11-07).

attendance to lectures, seminars and working groups covering a broad range of themes from public law, economics, public finance, management, social questions as well as European and international politics is now on schedule.

Notwithstanding this, one of the major preoccupations of the *élèves* is to come to terms with the permanent assessments and gradings of their performance in view of the all-important final ranking (*classement de sortie*) at the end of their time at the ENA. Thus, they are obliged to deliver various formal reports about their outside *stages* and they have to undergo fastidious visitations by their *directeurs de stage*. The marks received for their performance at the external *stages* make up about 40 percent of the global ranking of the élèves. During the phases of presence at Strasbourg, various papers and reports have to be written, formal oral examinations are held and incessant informal assessments of their interventions and their demeanour take place. The marks obtained there represent about 50 percent of the overall evaluation and final ranking of the pupils. The remaining percentage points are allocated to the pupils' achievements in languages and sports.[72]

In spite of the apparent calculability and transparency of the assessment procedure at the ENA, there seems to be ample room for discretion and surprise. The day in autumn when the final rank order is ceremoniously disclosed is a day of apprehension and anxiety, as the results are barely predictable. Only those élèves finally selected for the "*botte*", the top 12 to 16 places of the overall ranking, are offered careers in one of the three most attractive *grands corps*, the *Conseil d'État*, the *Inspection des Finances* and the *Cour des Comptes*.[73] For those further down the line excellent career opportunities in the public service are also available. From there, the path into the upper levels of the private sector of industry, business and banking as well as into politics is also wide open.

Though only a small proportion of former *énarques* have become successful politicians, it is not insignificant that since 1959 four of the eight Presidents of the Fifth Republic (Giscard d'Estaing, Chirac, Hollande, Macron)[74], eight of the twenty-four French Prime Ministers[75] and countless Cabinet Ministers were *anciens élèves* of the *École Nationale d'Administration*. To illustrate this, a glance at the biography of the current President of France, may be illuminating:

> *Emmanuel Macron*, born 1977, gains his baccalauréat at the famous Lycée Henri IV in Paris in 1995. Afterwards, he spends three years at the *classes préparatoires* there. But he fails twice at the external *concours* of entry to ENS-Ulm where he had meant to study philosophy and social sciences. Instead, he graduates in philosophy from the Université Paris-Nanterre in 2000/2001 and simultaneously studies at Science Po, where he obtains a master's degree in public affairs and prepares himself for the external

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[72] http://www.ena3c.fr/la-scolarite-a-l-ena/; 2017-11-09.

[73] For an instructive participant account, cf. Saint-Preux (2013: 105ff.).

[74] Furthermore, de Gaulle was educated at the *École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr* (ESM), Pompidou at the ENS-Ulm, Mitterrand and Sarkozy were students at Science Po.

[75] One may add to this list three prime ministers who had finished their education before the ENA was founded: *Debré* (1959-1962, École Libre and Conseil d'État), *Couve de Murville* (1968-1969, École Libre and Inspection des Finances, *Chaban-Delmas* (1969-1972, École Libre and St. Cyr).

concours of entry to the ENA. He passes the *concours* and becomes an élève of the ENA from 2002 to 2004. Among other things he spends his *stage international* at the French embassy in Nigeria. At the *classement de sortie* of the ENA he takes fifth place and subsequently joins the *Inspection Générale des Finances* at Bercy, now 26 years old. In 2008 he is granted leave from public service and enters the private bank Rothschild & Cie where he rises quickly and becomes a partner in 2010. In 2012 he returns to the public service and takes the influential post of Deputy Secretary-General of the Élyssée under President Hollande. In 2014 he is back to Bercy, this time as Minister of Economy and Finance. In 2017, aged 39, he is the elected *Président de la République*.[76]

c. Comparative Observations (2)

President Macron's model career clearly illustrates the close relationship between the French political and administrative elites and the *grandes écoles*, especially the ENA. This connection was always intended – in much the same way as in the Ottoman Empire hundreds of years earlier where the education at the Janissary Corps and at the Enderûn Palace School served to prepare '*des élèves dociles et efficaces*' (docile and effective pupils)[77] for a role as reliable and flexible members of the Imperial service class, and eventually as responsible leaders. In both cases, similar principles prevailed: Under close state supervision highly selective and examination-oriented elite schools were established and deliberately kept apart from "normal" institutions of higher education (*madrasas*, universities). Their students were selected on merit, yet they were not treated as independent young academics, but as dependent pupils to be submitted to rigorous discipline and continuous selective pressure. Nonetheless, many of these pupils developed exceptional competence and great assertiveness, combined with a sense of loyalty, a vigorous *esprit de corps* and considerable self-confidence as future members of the elite of their country. And in some cases, they had the makings for highest political office.

One should not overstretch the analogies between these two historically very distinct institutions of higher education. The task of the *enderûn mektebi* was to mould unfree *kuls* into capable and loyal servants of the Sultan, the ENA educates ambitious *élèves fonctionnaires* to become capable and loyal public servants of the French Nation. In both institutions there is little room for the ideas of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Yet, their ability to form and promote highly cultured, intellectually versatile and loyal leadership personnel is undeniable.

Furthermore, neither the Enderûn Palace School nor the École Nationale d'Administation are noted for their profound commitment to academic research. Both

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[76] This short summary is based on information available on the internet, especially https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmanuel_Macron; 2017-11-11.
[77] Saint-Preux (2013: 98).

institutions were not congenial places for creative scholars and scientists. They preferred to consign most of their teaching to external professors, outside experts and outstanding public personalities. These hand-picked guest lecturers were expected to bring up-to-date knowledge, leadership experience and political pragmatism into the schools. But no permanent professorial staff was appointed there, as it was anticipated that regular professors (who would be scholars of high calibre given the prestige of these schools) would have insisted on their professional autonomy as academics.

At this point, a significant distinction should be made between the ENA on one side, ENS-Ulm and X on the other: Whereas the ENA does not employ any permanent academic staff, both ENS and X do have high-powered professoriates. Their research potential is quite remarkable as witnessed for example by the good positions attributed to ENS-Ulm and X in the recent Times Higher Education World University Rankings referred to above. The ENA is not listed there at all.[78]

This means, that both the École Normale Supérieure and the École Polytechnique come much closer to the classical model of the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* with its emphasis on professional and institutional autonomy then the ENA and the *enderûn mektebi* do. For similar reasons, ENS and X are also much closer to the model of the modern research university then many of the "normal" French universities are, as they possess a higher reputation, an excellent professoriate and stable numbers of well prepared and carefully selected students. They have begun to build on these strengths. Ezra Suleiman recently observed that both ENS and X have started to 'borrow models and methods from abroad to renew their pedagogic approach and … to accept criteria of excellence very different from those of the national tradition', to become 'international centres of study and research.'[79]

4. „Modern World Class Research Universities"

a. Recent Developments in the French System of Higher Education and Research

The ideal-typical presentation of the tripartite public HER-system of France and of the French *grandes écoles* given above was focussed on the constellation prevailing until the final decades of the 20th century. Lately, this constellation has come under increasing reform pressure, for at least two reasons which shall be mentioned here to initiate the crossover to the final historical case – the *Modern World Class Research University* – to be considered here:[80]

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[78] ENS-Ulm and X are classified as the two highest ranking French institutions of higher education in the THE-ranking for 2016-2017. (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/ecole-normale-superieure#ranking-dataset/589595; 2017-10-24). The ARWU-Shanghai Ranking 2017 ranks the École Normale Supérieure-Paris in third place of the French ranking order, the École Polytechnique in eighteenth place (http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2017.html; 2017-11-14).

[79] Suleiman (2008: 216f.), my translation. In the same context, Suleiman also mentions the exceptional development of Science Po Paris.

[80] For the following, see Kreckel (2008: 111ff.), Musselin (2017), Paradeise (2018).

1. First, there is the time-honoured complaint that, due to the existence of public research organisations in France, the French universities are largely cut off from academic research and exist mainly as institutions of teaching, examination and graduation. As mentioned above, the *Loi Faure* of 1968 had relabelled the academic staff of the universities as *enseignants-chercheurs* (teachers-researchers). But this was more of a symbolic declaration of intention than a realistic description. In fact, the overwhelming majority of research institutes and laboratories of the CNRS and the other public research organizations were physically housed on a university campus or in its direct vicinity. But it was a co-habitation with little shared purposes and activities. To change this state of affairs, the French Ministry of Education created the format of *Unités Mixtes de Recherche* (mixed research units, UMR) in 1995. The UMRs served as platforms of cooperation where university members and researchers from the CNRS etc. could interact as formally equivalent partners. In 2006, a new instrument to encourage research cooperation between universités and research organisations was introduced, the *Pôles de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieure* (PRES). It was replaced in 2013 by the concept of *Communités d'Universités et d'Établissements* (COMUES) which allowed the association of universities, research organisations *and* Grandes Écoles to pursue common goals in research, teaching and administration.

   All these institutional devices to promote cooperation were introduced top down, on the initiative of the Ministry in charge of higher education and research. Their snag was, of course, that universities, research organisations and Grandes Écoles are legally distinct corporations inclined to defend jealously their established identities and prerogatives. That is, the values of institutional and professional autonomy were often mobilised in support of the institutional status quo.

2. However, the scenario began to change at a precise date, in 2003. The first *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (ARWU-Shanghai Ranking) was published then, quickly followed by similar rankings such as the *THE-World University Rankings* mentioned above. As it became clear that the top ranks of all international university league tables went almost exclusively to US-American and British research universities, the public outcry was enormous in countries such as France and Germany who found themselves lagging far behind. There was no denying that Philip Altbach had a valid point when he soberly stated:

   > '*Research universities are most successful where there is little or no competition from non-university research institutes* or where there are strong ties between the universities and such institutes. The "academy of science" system in countries such as Russia and China; the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique in France; and some other models of distinct research institutes generally lack such connections to universities.'[81]

   Thus, Shanghai either triggered or encouraged transformations of the French HER-system hitherto thought chanceless: The French Ministry of Higher Education and Research saw it as a matter of national interest that "their" universities should occupy

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[81] Altbach (2011: 70), my emphasis.

top positions in international rankings. Ambitious universities and university professors understood it as their duty, too, to be rated among the best of the world. On the other hand most of the Grandes Écoles, so far considered as elite institutions in their own right, found themselves suddenly reduced to the level of "normal" institutions of higher education with little research output. And the representatives of the public research organizations such as the CNRS learnt that as non-university institutions they were not adequately represented in the international university rankings.

These tectonic changes lead to a new situation which appeared more amenable to concerted action (cf. Powell / Dusdal 2017). What eventually happened was a wave of academic mergers, beginning with the foundation of the *Université de Strasbourg* through the amalgamation of three universities in 2009. Its culmination so far is the establishment of the *Université Paris-Saclay* (UPS) vividly summarized by Catherine Paradeise (2018: 121):

> 'UPS groups together a top-ranking university[82], a second-tier university[83], numerous joint and full research centers from all major French research organizations[84] and (mostly top) grandes écoles. Each of the nine public grandes écoles[85] is under the supervision of a specific ministry (defense, industry, telecommunications, agriculture, finance, higher education, etc.). All are located at, or are in the process of relocating to an extensive campus in Saclay, an area southwest of Paris. In 2015, a total of 68,000 students were enrolled at UPS, of whom 5,700 were doctoral students. In additions 10,000 scholars work at the new community of universities, accounting for 13 percent of all academic researchers in France. (…) UPS is expected to rank among the top 20 world-class universities, and the MIT Technological Review considers it one of the eight most promising innovation clusters in the world. (…)
>
> From the perspective of the individual UPS members, this magnificent project has become quite complex and has led to numerous dilemmas. In particular, the creation of this melting pot has caused disagreements and conflicts between arrogant grandes écoles and defensive universities. For instance, universities are reluctant to lose their best students to grandes écoles. By contrast, it is difficult for grandes écoles to accept this melding together with universities and to relinquish their former nationally prestigious reputation.'

In the eyes of Christine Musselin (2017: 226) this process is part of an all-encompassing 'fusion mania', leading from local universities to more abstract units of cooperation – to *"Universities with a capital letter"* – which wipe out the customary distinction between universities and Grandes Écoles (ibid.: 163, 245). Looking into the likely future of the French HER-system Musselin writes:

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[82] Scil. *Université Paris-Sud* (formerly Université Paris XI)
[83] Scil. *Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines* (UVSQ)
[84] Including *CNRS*, *INSERM*, *INRA* and *CEA*.
[85] Among them are the *Ecole Polytechnique* (X), the *Ecole Normale Supérieure de Cachan* (ENS-Saclay), and the private *École CentraleSupélec*.

'If the Universities become the only basic units for the international university rankings … then about twenty Universities, all multidisciplinary, will have replaced the near-century of universities and the 222 Grandes Écoles (…). Perhaps one third of these Universities might even achieve high placings in the rankings.'[86]

One may be sceptical whether all this is really going to happen. But one can be pretty certain that the *École Nationale d'Administration* will not play a key role in these new developments as it is focussed on national elite formation, not on academic excellence and international competition.

b. From National Elite Education to International Research Excellence

This consideration brings me to the final stage of my sinuous time travel through thousand years of academic history. The four stages visited so far were all about institutions of 'elite higher education' (Trow 2006) involving small social minorities selected through birth and / or on merit. These institutions produced educational elites who had a very good chance to become members of the social and political elites of their countries. Today, in the age of 'high-participation higher education' (Marginson 2017a) when well over fifty percent of the younger generation take up post-secondary studies in developed countries, the link between higher education and social elite formation has loosened (cf. Maxwell et al. 2018).

As the example of the French Grandes Écoles (especially of ENS-Ulm and X) has shown, a shift of identities is now in progress in the field of higher education – away from the image of exclusive national elite institutions towards the model of the international research university of recognized academic excellence. That is, instead of national "elite" formation, the new guiding concept in the field of higher education is "excellence", or more precisely: international *research* excellence.[87]

Beginning in the 1990s – in the wake of the collapse of the Iron Curtain, of the spectacular expansion of higher education enrolment rates, of the global progress of neoliberalism and the increasing impact of New Public Management policies – the normative paradigm of the *World Class University* or *Super Research University* began to gain momentum. This development was intensified by the publication of the first international university rankings (Shanghai and THE) in 2003-2004.

The *International Handbook of Universities* lists now more than 18.000 institutions of higher education in the world[88], most of them in poor shape and in poor countries. Obviously, the overwhelming majority of these institutions cannot be understood as research universities of high quality. Thus, the idea grew that a very small and select '*pinnacle*' (Altbach 2003: 6) of first class research universities should take the role of

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[86] Musselin (2007: 245); my translation.
[87] Cf. e.g. Ricken (2009), Peter (2018).
[88] http://www.unesco.vg/INTERNATIONAL_HANDBOOK.pdf; 2017-11-24

national and global flagships providing 'leadership to the rest of the academic system' (Altbach 2017: 16). However, as Marginson (2006: 68) aptly observed, these flagships are very strongly tinged by the *hegemony of the Anglo-American university model.* Non-university academic research institutes do not play a significant role there.

Countries with strong non-university sectors of academic research began to respond to this situation: Germany started its *Exzellenzintiative* in 2005, the French government launched a similar *Programme d'Investissement d'Avenir* (PIA) in 2010, the Russian government initiated its own *Project 5-100* in 2012[89], the Chinese government released an *Overall Plan on Development of World-Class Universities and World-Class Disciplines* in 2015, after several earlier initiatives.[90]

The common aim of these government-induced excellence programmes is to enable the strongest national HER-institutions to further increase their competitive strengths and thereby to improve their country's visibility in the global university rankings. The strategy of these programmes is, basically, to identify the country's best HER-institutions by staging peer-reviewed competitions between universities or between University compounds, as in the case of France. The winners receive substantial extra funds. Those not "ennobled" as academic flagships by this procedure go away empty-handed.

It is generally recognised that a global process of expansion, standardisation and stratification of higher education is currently going on. It is less clear whether this process will eventually lead to a *Matthew effect*[91] of an increasing polarisation between winners and losers (Merton) or to an *elevator effect* of general upgrading (Beck), i.e. to a win-win situation for all. However, given the enormous disparities in the global distribution of wealth and power, the substantial differences of quality between higher education institutions in poor and in rich countries will be difficult to overcome.

In the present context, these controversial issues cannot be treated any further. What can be done is a further clarification of the concept of the World Class University which has gained global political influence. Perusing a number of influential analytical texts and policy statements[92] which are overlapping in many respects, I have distilled a catalogue of fifteen points characterizing the normative model of the World Class University (WCU) in an ideal-typical fashion:

1. According to the WCU-model, the best place for first-rate academic research is the *university* where teaching and research are interrelated and where a plurality of disciplines are present. Non-university academic research organisations are seen as problematic.

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[89] The label "5-100" means that five Russian universities shall be brought into the top hundred of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings by 2020.
[90] Wang (2017: 65f.).
[91] 'Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them' (Matthew 25:29).
[92] Altbach (2003, 2011, 2017), Baker (2007, 2014); Mohrman et al. (2008), Salmi (2009), Hefei Statement (2013), Paradeise (2016), Hamburg Declaration (2017), Powell et. al. (2017). For an earlier version, see Kreckel (2012).

2. Teaching and research in the World Class University is oriented to competitive *international quality standards* (measured by impact factors and citation indices, independent evaluations, peer reviews and international rankings, the quality of a university's students and the success of its alumni, its ability to win competitive research funds etc.).

3. *English* is the standard language of teaching and research of the WCU. Other languages have only subsidiary functions.

4. The worldwide *standardisation* of the structure of academic decrees (BA – MA – PhD) and of academic career structures is encouraged in support of international mobility and transparency.

5. Selective *international recruitment* of students, academic staff and university leaders on the basis of merit and open competition is a characteristic of the WCU.

6. The formation of excellent young researchers and a high output of *first-class research doctorates* is a priority of the WCU.

7. *"Cutting-edge" fundamental research* published in peer-reviewed articles in leading journals is seen as the best indicator of academic excellence, in preference to classical research monographs.

8. *Inter- and transdisciplinary research* carried out by international teams and in international cooperation is preferred to individual scholarship. International co-authorship of peer-reviewed research publications is highly valued.

9. *„Big science",* huge projects and quantitative research methods receive preferential treatment, also in the humanities and social sciences.

10. *Competitive research funding* is seen as most desirable, irrespective of whether the funding sources are public or private. Research grants awarded for fixed-term projects are perceived as normal. Projects evaluated as academically excellent by independent peer-review procedures are preferred. Budget financed research and commissioned projects are frowned upon.

11. Notwithstanding their status as public or private institutions, world class universities have the *autonomy* to make their own policy decisions about academic matters (admission of students, appointment of staff, teaching and research priorities, chosen path to excellence etc.). They are held accountable for their own success or failure.

12. World class universities insist on their *academic freedom.* Public and private donors may restrict this freedom by defining thematic priorities for specific fields or particularly "relevant" areas of research.

13. Being situated at the crossroads of education, research and innovation, the WCU is seen as a vital factor of *economic growth* in the knowledge-based economy.

14. Research universities of internationally recognised excellence are only a small proportion of a country's institutions of higher education and research, serving as *"flagships"* supposed to lead the way in expanding and increasingly stratified fields of post-secondary education.

15. The WCU is *extremely cost-intensive*. Apart from providing optimal teaching conditions, efficient management and an expensive research infrastructure of up-to-date libraries, laboratories, competent technicians etc., a successful WCU must also be able to mobilise the (sometimes astronomical) funds necessary to attract and retain the best academic staff.

As said before, this catalogue represents a normative model, an '*emerging global model (EGM) of the super research university*', as Mohrman, Ma and Baker (2008: 6) have called it. They emphasize that *'in fact, there may be only a few dozen fully developed EGM universities but they are the institutions that head virtually every list of leading universities worldwide. (…) Other institutions look to them as models so their influence is greater than their numbers would suggest.'*

c. Concluding Considerations

If the WCU-model as outlined in the above list of characteristics really *is* the emerging model of the global academic world of the 21st century[93], it carries one central and uncontroversial message: World class universities are to be understood as *research* universities. Whoever wants to be on a level with them will have to concentrate on research, too.

In the earlier institutions of higher education surveyed above – Latin Christian universities and Islamic madrasas, the Ottoman Palace School and the Republican Grandes Écoles – the task of educating future social elites and competent members of the service class stood at the centre. As we have seen, scholarly erudition and excellent scientific research were not alien to these institutions. But they did not play the role of *leitmotif* or *idée directrice* which they have acquired now in the WCU-model. The roots of the 'research imperative' for universities and their professors go only back to the Humboldtian model and its Anglo-American adaptations of the 19th and 20th century.[94]

Nonetheless, there is one vital link between all these historical forms of higher education discussed here – the shared experience that institutions of higher education need the *breathing space of academic freedom* to be able to fulfil their missions adequately. This space is always threatened by outside interventions and inside impediments. But even in the Ottoman Palace School, our example furthest away from the ideal of academic freedom, we have detected that the formation of independent minds and the fostering of talents were understood as crucial elements of the education of competent servants of the state.

In medieval Christian universities and Islamic madrasas, the submission to *religious* dogma was the most powerful external factor curtailing academic freedom. As to the Ottoman and French elite schools, their subordination to overt *political* control may be

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[93] On the basis of their comparative biometrical analyses, Powell et al. (2017) speak of '*The Global Triumph of the Research University*'.
[94] Cf. e.g. Turner (1982), Ash (1999), Schwinges (2001).

seen as the main external limitation to academic freedom. In the case of the WCU-model, external threats to academic freedom spring mainly from the *economic* sphere.

However, it can be misleading to conceptualise this new situation as *academic capitalism* (e.g. Slaughter / Rhoades 2004; Münch 2014). I prefer to speak of a process of *indirect economisation* affecting contemporary higher education (Kreckel 2006, 2016). Though high-quality institutions of higher education and research are generally understood as key factors of economic growth in the contemporary capitalist world (cf. Hölscher 2016: 15-38), yet none of the globally leading research universities existing today are for-profit organisations who would treat their teaching and research output primarily as marketable commodities.[95] Their academic teaching and research activities continue to be heavily subsidised by direct or indirect state funding. And notwithstanding their increased autonomy as so-called "entrepreneurial universities", the leading research universities are still subject to intensive state regulation, albeit often in the form of indirect governance. It can be argued that the modern state itself has adopted certain features of the economic sphere which are encapsulated in neoliberal concepts such as *deregulation*, *lean government* and especially *new public management* (controlling, auditing, performance evaluation, outsourcing, staging quasi-market competitions etc.). These new forms of economic governance have migrated from the state administrations into the academic institutions of higher education and research dependent on them. It is an open question to what extent the ethic of academic freedom is affected by this process of indirect economisation. It certainly is impeded by the inscrutable interplay of business interests, political agenda setting, academic oligarchies and research funding.

On the other hand, there is the uncompromising commitment to excellent *research* as supreme criterion of academic quality. This means that intellectual and scientific creativity are valued more highly than ever, even if only for instrumental reasons. *Excellent research without some "breathing space" of academic freedom for scholars, scientists and their students is hard to imagine*.

But there is the high *cost-intensity* of the WCU-model. If considered in juxtaposition with the enormous inequalities in the global distribution of wealth and power,[96] the chances to join the club of top research universities are slim and very unevenly spread in the global system of higher education and research. The opportunities for an unhindered development of academic teaching and research are negatively affected by this.

There is, at least, one possible factor of consolation: Universities placed very lowly in the academic rank order and / or in very poor countries increasingly expect their professors and lecturers to hold a *research doctorate* from a research university observing high standards of quality (cf. Kreckel 2012; Fernandez / Baker 2017). Thus,

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[95] This is the case both for leading public *and* private research universities. Cf. also Marginson (2013) and Jessop (2017) who underline the essential theoretical difference between *profit-seeking* in capitalist markets and *status-seeking* in competitive quasi-markets for public goods and services.
[96] Cf. e.g. Kreckel (2004: chap. 6).

even against many odds, the ideal of free and research-based academic teaching might spread and be kept alive.

With this final thought, my scholarly perambulations through five very distinct, yet not unrelated instances of the history of higher education have come to an end. They remind us that the quest for knowledge and excellence has taken many different forms. One of its driving forces, often behind the scenes, was and is the ideal of academic freedom. Nowhere this ideal is completely implemented.

The chances of academic freedom to prevail against external intrusions and internal malpractice are best when it is housed in universities with considerable institutional autonomy and when the members of these universities understand freedom of expression, teaching and research as their common lifeline, not to be unduly weakened by self-seeking opportunism, disciplinary and institutional particularisms, local parochialisms or by mindless marketing activities and ranking rituals.

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