passed judgment on the qualifications of a scholar for the post. The altercation arose when, in 1338, the controller of the institution, Sanjar al-Jawfi, appointed Shihâb al-Din Ahmad al-Asjadi to the post. Sanjar, although a Manluk amir, was himself a scholar of hadith, and might have been relied upon to have chosen a fitting transmitter of the Prophetic traditions. Others vehemently disagreed with the choice, however. In particular, the Shâfi‘i qâdi `Izz al-Din Ibn Jama‘a objected to the appointment of al-Asjadi. Ibn Jama‘a’s father had previously been professor of hadith at the Mansûriyya, and in his words, the appointee “was not worthy of the post,” for it was “too important a position for the likes of al-Asjadi.”

The reigning sultan, al-Nâsir Muhammad ibn Qalâwin, at first ordered a council to be held in the Mansûriyya madrasa to resolve the dispute. Ibn Jama‘a and Sanjar al-Jawfi were the principal disputants, but “[all] the qâdis and many scholars” participated in the debate, including the Mansûriyya’s students themselves, who complained to Sanjar that “you have appointed over us one who is not worthy. We only want a teacher from whom we will benefit.” The Hanafi chief qâdi testified to al-Asjadi’s qualifications, but another scholar claimed that, when the appointee read Sûrat al-Fâtiha, the opening chapter of the Quran, he would make as many as three mistakes in his pronunciation.

The dispute grew more heated, the participants using “indecent language,” and eventually it broke up in anger. At last the affair was brought again to the sultan, who was forced to intervene personally in the matter. Sanjar al-Jawfi swore to his appointee’s fitness for the post, and produced a document written by the Hanafi qâdi attesting to al-Asjadi’s competence and giving him the honorific title “the outstanding scholar (al-`ali al-fâdi).” Ibn Jama‘a retorted that “[such] honorifics attached to a person do not establish either his knowledge or his ignorance.” The parties to the dispute remaining adamant in their contradictory assessments of al-Asjadi’s abilities, the sultan was forced to choose between them. He agreed, finally, with the opinion of Ibn Jama‘a, and forbade the appointment of al-Asjadi as professor of hadith at the school.28 The sultan’s choice in this particular instance, however, is not at issue.

What claims our attention is the dynamics of the dispute, and the role of the sultan as arbiter of contradictory professional assessments among the ulama. It is clear that no single individual held effective and absolute authority over appointments at the Mansûriyya, a condition characteristic of institutions of learning in medieval Cairo. The process of making appointments to paid teaching positions in academic institutions was in practice extremely fluid. Lines demarcating the limits of authority were not necessarily clear. The founders of the schools, and after them the controllers who oversaw the functioning and finance of the institutions, constituted a group that, prima facie, was responsible for academic appointments. But in practice, other individuals, qâdis and especially the reigning sultan, enjoyed some vaguely defined influence over the appointment process, especially in the larger and more prestigious schools of the city.

The Educated Elite as Patrons

Patronage can be a contagious game, and the story of patronage in the academic world of late medieval Cairo is incomplete if it confines itself to the more or less obvious ties that bound the ulama to wealthy members of the military elite. In the absence of clear guidelines to regulate the appointment process, those most likely to benefit were those well-connected in the world of education: those, that is, whose personalities and reputations shaped the matrix of personal relationships through which knowledge was transmitted, and which in effect defined the academic hierarchy. In other words, much was left to the initiative of the ulama themselves, and in particular to the most reputable and powerful among them. Indeed, insofar as the availability of teaching positions provided an opportunity for patronage and the dispensing of favors, such patronage was practiced not so much by the Manlukas as by the educated elite. High-ranking scholars in effect appropriated to themselves the right to hold professorial “chairs” and then distributed them to their students, their friends, and especially their sons.

The extent to which the ulama managed to control access to remunerative employment in the schools and mosques cannot be overemphasized. Even in cases where an appointment was nominally made by some individual in a position of authority, it is likely that influence wielded behind the scenes by the scholarly community proved decisive. When Fakhr al-Din `Abd al-Ghani built and endowed a madrasa in the early fifteenth century, he appointed as its first shaykh and professor of Shâfi‘i law Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Birmani. In 1420, Shams al-Din moved to Damascus in the company of his friend Najm al-Din `Umar Ibn Hajj, who paid him an undisclosed sum and “ordered him to resign from the post [in favor of] Burhan al-Din al-Bijuri.” Al-Bijuri was persuaded to accept the position, but it only became official when Zayn al-Din `Abd al-Qadir, the son of the founder of the madrasa and apparently still its
controller, "signed" the order effecting the transfer (anđa 'l-naṣṭā') and "made" al-Bījārī (ja'alaḥu) professor.⁶⁹

Some evidence of the decisive influence of the ulama even appears in one of the few copies of a royal appointment preserved by al-Qalqashandi. 'IZ al-Dīn Ibn Janā'ī was appointed professor at the "żawiyat al-Shāfī'i" in the mosque of 'Aṣār al-Fuṣṭāṭ early in the year 1390, but it is clear from the rather florid language of the document of appointment that he owed his appointment to his father Badr al-Dīn, the previous professor of Shāfī'i law there. "His father [Badr al-Dīn]," the document reads, "believes that what must be said extolling [his son], and what is instructive regarding his standing, [indicates] his worthiness [for the post], and therefore he deems advisable the transference to his son of the teaching post of the żawiyat in the mosque of al-Fuṣṭāṭ (the Protected by God) so that [his son] will occupy his place."⁷⁰

The intervention of the ulama went beyond simply making recommendations regarding who was appropriate for a particular teaching post. Scholars sometimes intervened in the appointment process to secure positions for their friends and students. A brief excursus into the language of the Arabic sources will make the point clearer. The terms that the chroniclers and biographers used to describe the practice include "through the mediation of" (bi-taṣawwuf) and "through the concern of" (bi-'andāya). Thus, for example, a scholar named Taqī 1-Dīn 'Abd al-Latif Ibn al-Andāna was appointed, following the death of his father in 1436, to the latter's professorships in hadith and Shāfī'i law in two Cairoene madrasas "through the concern of" 'Ali al-Dīn 'Ali al-Qalqashandi, a prominent jurist and hadith transmitter who himself held a number of important teaching positions. Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Humām, a Ḥanafī jurist, angrily resigned from his prestigious teaching posts at the Ashrafiyah and Mārānīyya madrasas in 1430, for reasons that were discussed above. A little more than a decade later, however, his temper had cooled enough so that he wished to return to teaching. An experienced academic, Ibn al-Humām knew what he must do, to secure a teaching appointment to the Shāhkiyyahīna khanqāh he "sought the help of" (ista'āna bi) two prominent Ḥanafī scholars.⁷¹

Scholars could also in effect pass on their professorships to their friends and students. The appointment might be subject to the ratification of a controller, as it was in the case of Burhān al-Dīn al-Bījārī's succession to the chair at the Fakhrīyya madrasa. The very language of the contemporary sources, however, suggests that the choice of a successor might lie with the sitting professor. The sources often report that a "resigned a post in favor of" B (nāzala lubu 'anhu), or "left it to him" (tarakahu lubu). Most commonly used was the phrase "he relinquished it to him" (raḥiba lubu 'anhu); alternatively, B might be said to have been appointed "upon A's relinquishing of the post to him" (bi-raḥibathī lubu 'anhu). Each of these expressions was, in substance, synonymous with the others.⁷²

Phrases such as raḥiba 'anhu or nāzala 'anhu by themselves, of course, simply meant that a professor resigned his post, and implied nothing regarding the choice of a successor.⁷³ But when they consciously used the terms in conjunction with the prepositional phrase lubu ("to him," or "on behalf of him," or "in favor of him"), the biographers and historians seem to have implied a decided act on the part of a teacher holding an endowed teaching post in selecting a particular successor. Almost all of such instances involved two individuals united by some close relationship: father and sons, uncles and nephews, brothers, or teachers and pupils.⁷⁴ A professor of Ḥanafī law at the Sārghimishīya, for example, signatories of any of these men to indicate why 'Ali al-Dīn al-Qalqashandi should take such an interest in the career of the young man, except perhaps that Taqī 1-Dīn's brother Jalīl al-Dīn had once studied with 'Ali al-Dīn. On Ibn al-Humān, see al-Sakhāwī, al-Daw', 8:130. Cf. A. S. Tritton, Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages (London, 1967), 45.

⁶⁹ The parallel meanings of the terms are, in context, clear. Occasionally, however, we find different writers, or even the same writer, using some combination of the three basic terms to describe the same event. For example, in his intellectual autobiography al-Majmūʿ al-maṣānūs bi-muṣaffāt al-mufāṭfas, p. 417, Ibn Ḥujair al-Aṣqalānī tells us that "I left the teaching post [in hadith]" (tarakahu lubu 'l-taḏrīs) at the Jamālīyya madrasa to his friend and student Kamāl al-Dīn Muhammad al-Shumāni (an account and choice of words quoted by al-Majmūʿ al-Daw', 8:75); in his historical chronicle Isḥāq al-Daw', 7:40, he wrote: "I resigned the post in favor of him" (nāzala lubu 'anhu). Similarly, Ibn Ḥujair wrote, regarding the lesson in Shāfī'i jurisprudence at the Shāhkiyya, that Nūr al-Dīn al-Ash'arī "left it to me" (tarakah bi'l-Majmū' al-Daw', 111). His pupil al-Sakhāwī, however, recorded that "he relinquished [the post] to our shaykh," (raḥiba 'anhu . . . l-shaykhīn), here meaning Ibn Ḥujair, al-Daw', 5:230. Kawsar, Ibn Ḥujair, 121, suggests that the term nāzala lubu was used only when the holder of an office was dismissed; for such a reading, however, he cites no authority, and in fact its use in contexts such as cited above suggests that it indicated a voluntary action on the part of the holder.


⁷¹ For examples of teachers passing their teaching positions to sons, see al-Sakhāwī, al-Daw', 2:119-20, 4:106-13, 5:197, 3:814, 4:77; for uncles to nephews, see al-
suffered from a protracted illness but did not die until "after he had relinquished his teaching post to his son." When Ibn Hajar resigned the professorship of hadith at the Māsurīyya to Badr al-Dīn Iba al-Amāna, and that in Shāfiʿī law at the Shākhūnīyya to Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn al-Muhammānī, someone complained that each of his successors was better suited for the other's post. Ibn Hajar responded that his choice had been deliberate, that, "on the contrary. I wished to extend the capabilities of each of the two men in that [field of study] for which he was not famous." The great scholar and jurist thus explicitly acknowledged that the choice of his successors—those to whom he relinquished his posts—had been his alone.35

The exercise by professors of this form of patronage—of effectively selecting, if not officially installing, their successors—was apparently a matter of routine. Most historical and biographical sources of the period provide precious little information about the employment of individual scholars in particular schools on specific occasions. In those that do systematically preserve some record of the appointment process, however, especially al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary of fifteenth-century personages, the observation that one teacher stepped down from his post in favor of another is extraordinarily common. It is possible to identify scholars all or most of whose academic appointments were secured in such a fashion. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Iba Asad (d. 1467), for example, found employment as prayer leader in one madrasa through the intervention of his teacher, the famous jurist and traditionist Ibn Hajar; later, professorships in the variant Quran readings at three prestigious Cairoene schools were passed to him from those who had formerly held them, including at least one scholar under whom Ibn Asad had studied. Similarly, Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad Iba Taqī (d. 1440) owed professorships in Mālikī law or hadith in five different schools to those who had previously taught in them, including a cousin and at least one of his teachers.36

Very often, of course, such patronage was exercised on behalf of a scholar's children, more specifically his sons, an issue to which we shall return. But the kind of close personal and intellectual relationships forged by the intimate association of teacher and student, relationships reinforced by the system's overwhelming preference for the oral transmission of knowledge, frequently had this practical consequence: that masters passed their academic positions on to their "intellectual sons," that is, to their pupils. Kamāl al-Dīn Muhammad al-Shumūnī (d. 1418), 37

although a slightly older contemporary of Ibn Hajar al-ʿAṣqālānī, had been a student in his class in hadith at the Jamāliyya khānqāḥa. When the fātimist traditionist resigned the post in 1415, he left it to his friend, the Shīʿī al-Shumūnī, who held it for two years until his death. Ibn Hajar also transferred his professorship in Quranic exegesis at the grand madrasa of Sultan Hasan to his friend and "disciple" (gāhib) Zayn al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣanṣābī (d. 1448). Another Zayn al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, known as al-Tahāfānī (d. 1432), became the disciple of Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Kuḥṣānī (d. 1398) and, when his teacher was appointed an important administrative official in the government, took over his teaching duties at the Ayyām al-Shīʿa madrasa.37

The transfer of employment in such a manner from friend to friend or teacher to pupil was a commonplace in Manṭūk Caire. There may be some evidence of resistance to the practice, and thus to the power and prerogatives of the ulama, in the deeds of endowment for several Cairoene schools. A rather obscure stipulation in the deed of the Jamāliyya, for example, forbade that "anyone [be appointed] to a position in the khānqāḥa, or be given a residence in it, because of status or interference or one possessed of power and might."38 It is difficult to know precisely what such a stipulation, and one similar to it in the endowment deed of Sultan Barqūq's madrasa, signified. The general idea is clear: that no one is to be appointed to a paying position within the institution through outside intervention. But whether the prohibition applied to the practice of professors naming their successors is doubtful, and in any case, the institutional histories of both the Jamāliyya and the Zāhrīyya include a number of instances of professors "relinquishing" their posts to sons, friends, or students.39

Indeed, so common was the practice that a professor's refusal to select his successors could elicit a comment and surprise. A scholar named Zayn al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣaḥāsīrī, for example, held the professorship, presumably in Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, at the Māsurīyya and Zāhrīyya madrasas in the early fifteenth century. As he neared death from some undisclosed illness, he was asked to "resign" his teaching posts in favor of his chosen companions; he refused to do so, however, claiming that this caused his students to call for a medical opinion. He then asked them to consider his death and to submit an opinion on who should succeed him. 40

38 Al-Sakhāwī, al-Ḍūr, 4:29, 6:208.
that "I do not command them [i.e., the teaching posts], in life or in death." Most scholars, however, were naturally less reluctant to exercise this important form of patronage. Kamal al-Din "Umar Ibn al-"Adim, for example, during the illness that finally cost him his life in 1408, only followed a common pattern in relinquishing his teaching posts at the Mansūriyya madrasa and the Shakhınıniyya khānqāh to his son. 

Scholars thus took advantage of a system that allowed them in effect to pass on opportunities for academic employment to their friends and pupils. That they felt free to do so may have resulted from another commonplace in the history of appointments to teaching positions in Mamlûk Cairo, and one that concentrated power and wealth in the hands of a few: namely, the tendency of important scholars to hold employment in several different institutions. Ibn "Hajar al-"Asqalâni, for instance, may have willingly surrendered his professorships at the Janâlîyya khânqâh and the madrasa of Sultan "Hasan to his pupils; but the great jurist and traditionalist at one time or another held appointments in more than a dozen other schools as well. 

The practice of holding multiple teaching appointments became all but institutionalized in the tendency to attach a number of important professorships to the offices of the chief qâdî of the various rites of law. For example, at the same time that Jalâl al-Din Muhammad al-Qâzîwânî was called from Damascus to Cairo to assume the office of Shâfi'i chief qâdî in 1326, he was also appointed to professorships at the Nâsîriyya and Şâlîhiyya madrasas and at the dâr al-khâlid al-Kâmîliyya. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander, and the chief judges of other schools of law also held teaching posts incidental to their judicial office. For example, "Izz al-Din Ahmad al-"Asqalâni (not to be confused with his more famous namesake, Ibn "Hajar al-"Asqalâni) held the office of chief Hanâfi qâdî in Cairo for almost twenty years until his death in 1471, as well as professorships in the Şâlîhiyya, Ashrafiyya, and Nâsîriyya madrasas and the mosque of Ibn "Tâlim "adjoined to the judgmental (al-mudafâ il-qa'dî). The practice seems to have been one of custom rather than a formal requirement of any institution's endowment. The lessons in Shahî, Hanâfi, Maliki, and Hanbali jurisprudence at the qubba (dome) of the Mansûriyya madrasa were, al-Maqrîzî tells us, originally supported by valuable endowments, and the professorships were held only by the four chief qâdis. By the first decades of the fifteenth century, however, the endowments had deteriorated, and by the time al-Maqrîzî wrote his history of Cairo, those who taught at the qubba were "not competent." 

professors and patrons

administrative or bureaucratic functions, but also "a number of professorships." Taqi al-Din "Ali al-Sulâkî was called in the mid-fourteenth century to be qâdî in Damascus, and the teaching positions that he held in Cairo at that time were transferred, at his request, to his son Bahâ' al-Din Ahmad; the schools included the Mansûriyya, Sayyîya, and Kakhâriyya madrasas, the mosque of Ibn "Tâlim, and "others." Similarly, when Sirâj al-Din "Umar, the famous Hanîfî jurist known as Qârî al-Hîdâya, died in 1436, his biographer records that his professorship in jurisprudence at the Shakhınıniyya was filled by one scholar, while "his son was appointed to the rest of the positions held by Sirâj al-Din at his death," including professorships at the Aqbughâwiyya, Ashrafiyya, and Nâsîriyya madrasas and at the mosque of Ibn "Tâlim. 

The practice of holding multiple teaching appointments became all but institutionalized in the tendency to attach a number of important professorships to the offices of the chief qâdî of the various rites of law. For example, at the same time that Jalâl al-Din Muhammad al-Qâzîwânî was called from Damascus to Cairo to assume the office of Shâfi'i chief qâdî in 1326, he was also appointed to professorships at the Nâsîriyya and Şâlîhiyya madrasas and at the dâr al-khâlid al-Kâmîliyya. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander, and the chief judges of other schools of law also held teaching posts incidental to their judicial office. For example, "Izz al-Din Ahmad al-"Asqalâni (not to be confused with his more famous namesake, Ibn "Hajar al-"Asqalâni) held the office of chief Hanâfi qâdî in Cairo for almost twenty years until his death in 1471, as well as professorships in the Şâlîhiyya, Ashrafiyya, and Nâsîriyya madrasas and the mosque of Ibn "Tâlim "adjoined to the judgmental (al-mudafâ il-qa'dî). The practice seems to have been one of custom rather than a formal requirement of any institution's endowment. The lessons in Shahî, Hanâfi, Maliki, and Hanbali jurisprudence at the qubba (dome) of the Mansûriyya madrasa were, al-Maqrîzî tells us, originally supported by valuable endowments, and the professorships were held only by the four chief qâdis. By the first decades of the fifteenth century, however, the endowments had deteriorated, and by the time al-Maqrîzî wrote his history of Cairo, those who taught at the qubba were "not competent." 

The final quotation is from Ibn "Hajar, Inshâ' al-qamar, 8:116; see also al-Sulâkî, al-Dânu', 1:501. On Ibn Bint al-Azz, see al-Maqrîzî, al-Sulâkî, 1:770, on the al-Sulâkîs, compare the accounts in Ibn "Hajar, al-Dânu', 1:225-28, and Ibn "Tâlim, Birr, al-Mubâl al-nafî, 1:409. Many other examples could be cited; see al-Maqrîzî, al-Sulâkî, 3:357.

Occasionally, scholars simultaneously held appointments to two professorships in the same institution. In late 1377 or early the next year, Dîyâ al-Dîn 'Ubayd Allâh al-Qarînî, who was already shaykh at a prominent Sufi convent, was placed in charge of the classes in Shâfi‘î law and the Prophetic traditions at the Manîyirîiya madrasa. Zayn al-Dîn 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Tâfahâni succeeded the famous historian Ibn Khalîlûn as instructor in hadîth at the Shârîhîmsîhîya madrasa, and later added to it the institution's professorship in Hanafi law. In 1365, 'Izz al-Dîn Ibn Jamâ‘û was dismissed as Shâfi‘î qâdî, but found himself appointed professor of jurisprudence and of traditions at the mosque of Ibn 'Uthîmîn, as well as controller of its endowments.46

The practice of simultaneously holding academic employment in two or more institutions, or two professorships in the same school, excited some controversy and a little opposition among the learned elite. Tâj al-Dîn al-Sulbî, a prominent Shâfi‘î jurist of the fourteenth century, after pointing out that it was “not permissible” for one man to be the imâm in two mosques since he could not simultaneously lead prayers at both places, noted that the same objection applied to professors employed to teach in two institutions, if the deeds of endowment stipulated that the lessons were to be held at the same hour.47 Stipulations in the deeds of endowment of a few Mamlûk schools may have attempted to forestall such conflicts, by forbidding those drawing stipends from the institutions’ endowments to hold a second paid position (waṣfîa) in that school or in any other, at least if they involved duties that were to be discharged at the same hour.48 A sixteenth-century history of schools in Damascus suggests that multiple employment was a problem there, too, and records that several madrasas in the Syrian capital also forbade their teachers to “combine two posts.”49 But complaints about the practice and efforts to prevent it were only sporadic, and stood little chance of forestalling a...

46 See, respectively, al-Maqrîzî, al-Sulbî, 3:330; al-Skîhî, al-Daw‘î, 4:98; and al-Maqrîzî, al-Sulbî, 3-99.
47 Al-Sulbî, Mu‘âlûd al-nâmîs, 164.
49 Al-Nâ‘ayînî, al-Dârî, see, for example, 3:34, 200, 369, 592.

custom widely accepted among the academic elite, and one that, after all, principally benefited those successful scholars who wielded the greatest moral and intellectual authority. Of three Cairene schools whose deeds of endowment theoretically restricted the “outside employment” of their stipendiaries, at least one hired some individuals as professors who nevertheless held institutional posts in other institutions.50 Moreover, one of the other deeds specifically exempted the “shaykh”—that is, the professor of jurisprudence—from the restrictions regarding additional employment.51

Did the practice of holding multiple appointments create difficulties? Al-Sulbî apparently saw in it the violation either of a teacher’s obligations to his students, or of the stipulations imposed upon him by the terms of the endowments supporting the schools. Classes in the various institutions were, of course, usually held at the same time, most commonly for several hours either in the morning or in the afternoon, at least according to the prescriptive deeds. Zayn al-Dîn al-Tâfahâni, without violating the terms of the Shârîhîmsîhîya’s endowment, could have discharged his duties as professor both of Hanafi jurisprudence and hadîth, since the school’s deed set aside the morning for the lesson in law and the late afternoon for that in the traditions.52 On the other hand, ‘Izz al-Dîn Ibn Jamâ‘û (who, as we have seen, was professor both of hadîth and Shâfi‘î jurisprudence at the mosque of Ibn ‘Uthîmîn) would have found it difficult to fulfill the stipulations that governed the school’s operations. The deed named “the beginning of the day” (nawâl al-nâhâr) as the appointed time for the lesson in hadîth, but also required the Shâfi‘î professor to sit with his students “between the rising of the sun and noon.”53 When the lessons to be taught were in different institutions, the tension between duties stipulated in the deeds and what was humanly possible was even greater. One scholar held appointments in both the Nâşîriyya and Şâfi‘îyya madrasas. Because of their close proximity, he could deliver his lecture in one and then run across the street to the other.54 But others simultaneously held teaching posts in schools scattered about the city. Many, as we have seen, relinquished their appointments to their friends or students. But Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalânî, who held several other posts...

50 For several years until his death in 1422, Majd al-Dîn Sâlih al-Maqrîzî held professorships in Hanîhî law at the Jamâliyya and also the Bâsanîyya and the madrasa of Umm al-Sulhâi, al-Skîhî, al-Daw‘î, 3:241. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalânî, as we know, was professor of hadîth at the Jamâliyya from 1408 until 1416; during that time, however, he was also professor in at least three other institutions. See Kawâsh, “Ibn Hajar,” 139-45.
51 Wâqifiyât Zayn al-Dîn al-Ustâdhî, Dir al-Wâlîhîyya No. 110, I, 1461.
52 Wâqifiyât Shârîhîmsîhî, Wâqifiyât al-Aqsa‘î o. S. No. 3160, pp. 27, 30.
53 Wâqifiyât al-Maqrîzî, Dir al-Wâlîhîyya No. 117, II, 327v, 332v.
while also holding forth as professor at the Mu‘ayyadiyya, apparently resolved his conflicting obligations by limiting his teaching at that important school to Wednesdays of every week.  

But the popularity and success of the practice of holding multiple teaching posts rested primarily on the fact that it allowed leading scholars to exercise yet another form of patronage over their students and lesser colleagues. It was not always necessary that they definitively “relinquish” their duties as “deputies” or “substitutes” (nā‘ib, pl. nā‘īḥūd). The holder of a professorial chair apparently would himself select the substitute, and assign to him some portion of the stipend attached to the post. Such a system was clearly subject to abuse, since a scholar might collect a number of appointments and hire substitutes for those in which he himself could not teach, and in fact the practice did lead to some criticism.  

Complaints aside, however, it also became a common feature of schools in the Mamluk period, and professors not infrequently appointed their students as their substitutes. For years, apparently, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī left his teaching duties at one school to a succession of his pupils.  

Substitute teaching played a recognized role in the transmission of the Islamic religious sciences. Al-Qalqashandi’s administrative manual even preserves a document officially appointing a certain Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad al-İkhnāṭī as the substitute for a teaching post in the mosque of Amr that was held by his uncle. According to the document, Tāj al-Dīn was to teach as substitute so long as his uncle lived, but would then hold the position “in his own right” (āṯirāt al-dā‘an) after the latter’s death. Scholars with relatively undistinguished academic records might spend much of their teaching careers substituting for others, receiving appointments in their own names, if at all, only at the end of their lives. In exchange for their services, substitute teachers received the ma‘ām al-niqābul, some portion of the post’s stipend, although individuals are occasionally mentioned who substituted gratis (maqā‘īn). It is not known precisely how much a substitute was routinely paid—presumably his wages were set on an ad hoc basis by the official holder of the post—but in at least one case a substitute grew dissatisfied with the level of his remuneration. Muhḥīr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Qādir Ibn Taqī (d. 1490) substituted for the son of a fa-

mous scholar at the Zahirīyya madrasa, but, his biographer reports, he “grew dissatisfied with the nā‘īb’s stipend” and desired to be officially appointed to the post himself. His behavior raised eyebrows, as his contemporaries compared his apparent greed with the magnanimity of another scholar who substituted gratis; the biographer excused him, however, commenting wryly that “the difference between the two [substitutes], especially in jurisprudence, is obvious.”  

A substitute might be appointed for a perfectly legitimate reason. In particular, a professor might appoint one to teach his classes while he was absent performing a pilgrimage. The deeds of endowment that governed the operation of Cairo’s schools routinely made provisions for the appointment of substitutes if a teacher left to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, or to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem, or, in some cases, to visit his relatives outside of Cairo. Thus, for example, when al-Khaṭṭāb al-’Awzārī made his pilgrimage, Sharaf al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Haq substituted for him as professor of Quranic exegesis at the Mu‘ayyadiyya, because he was “the most accomplished student in the class.” When Taqī ‘Īṣ-Dīn al-Ḥusnī went to Mecca in 1472, he named his student ‘Abd al-Rahīm al-Abnā’ī as his substitute for the professorship in Shaf‘ī law at the Sa‘lāhiyya madrasa. ‘Abd al-Rahīm’s lessons were highly praised, but he unsuccessfully sought to use the opportunity to secure a permanent appointment to the post.  

On other occasions, substitutes taught on a more indefinite and extended basis. When, for example, a professor grew old or weak, he might appoint his son or a promising student as his substitute rather than formally relinquish his post. In this way, ‘Īzz al-Dīn Ahmad al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1471), a student who went on to hold some of the most prominent professorships in Hanbalī law, while yet in his late teens or early twenties substituted for his aging teacher Majd al-Dīn Sālim al-Maqdisī in at least four different professorships. Sulaymān ibn Shu‘ayb al-‘Azhari, who apparently never held a teaching post in his own name, must have substituted at the mosque of Ibn Tūlūn for years, since at some point in the late fifteenth century he was substitute in the class in Mālikī law for both his teacher Șīrā‘ al-Dīn ‘Umar Ibn Hayrīz (d. 1487) and, after him, for Ibn Hayrīz’s son.  

* Al-Sakhawī, al-Dīn, 4:263. “He grew dissatisfied with the nā‘īb’s stipend” would seem to me to be the sense of al-Sakhawī’s statement shabāsah [lit., “he was stingy?”] fī ma‘ām al-niqābul.  

* Al-Sakhawī, al-Dīn, 4:39. For another example, see ibid., 3:177.  

* Al-Sakhawī, al-Dīn, 4:185. Here the term used is tākūdūfūn, meaning “he appointed him as substitute”; cf. Malkīzā, Colleges, 189.  

* Al-Sakhawī, al-Dīn, 1:206; for other examples, see ibid., 3:231–32, 4:33–35, 5:383; for other examples, see ibid., 3:231–32, 4:33–35.  

* See, respectively, al-Sakhawī, al-Dīn, 1:206, 3:283, for other examples, see ibid., 3:231–32, 4:33–35.
Above all, however, mature scholars substituted for boys who, despite their young age and lack of preparation, were formally appointed to professorships in the various institutions of learning in Mamluk Cairo. Most commonly, this resulted from the dominant tendency for sons, no matter what their age, to inherit their fathers’ posts, a point on which we will shortly have more to say. For the present, however, what is important is the opportunity this presented to scholars to teach in madrasas and mosques to which they might not otherwise receive a formal appointment. We have already seen how Izz al-Din al-Baghdaḍī was substitute for the son of the famous Ḥanafī scholar al-Ṣirāj Qâdir al-Ḥidāyâ, after the latter’s death and his son’s succession to most of his teaching posts, in several of Cairo’s premier academic institutions. Similarly, Burhān al-Dīn Ilḥām al-Ṭarāqī filled in for the son of one of his teachers as professor of Mālikī law in three important schools. As in the case of Izz al-Din al-Baghdaḍī, it was quite possible for a substitute formally to succeed to the professorship after the death or resignation of the young incumbent. If the boy’s minority were a long one, several successive substitutes might be required. When, for example, a scholar who held the professorship in Quranic exegesis at the Manṣūriyya madrasa died in 1483, his son, who succeeded him at the post, was apparently too young to do the teaching himself. His responsibilities were discharged by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Kūrānī, one of his father’s teachers, until Jamāl al-Dīn’s own death in 1490, at which point another substitute was appointed who eventually succeeded, in his own name, to the post. In another instance, an accomplished scholar substituted for his young pupil who had, at far too tender an age, succeeded to the post of Sufi shaykh and professor of Ḥanafī law at the prestigious Shaykhünīyya khanqah.

The point of all this is that the pattern of assignments to paid teaching positions in Cairene schools left much to the discretion and patronage of the educated elite themselves. The creation and endowment of an extensive network of schools providing permanent employment for a significant number of scholars may not have changed the methods or the content of higher education, but it did establish a new form of patronage by which the senior ulama could effectively control access to prestigious professorships. If others held the formal right to make appointments in the various schools, the decisive influence was in fact often wielded by the ulama. They might intervene to help secure a post for their friends, or leave particular employment to individuals of their own choosing. Individually, they might collect a considerable number of separate academic appointments and select their favorite students as substitutes, for themselves or for their sons. Teaching posts were valuable commodities, and it is no surprise that individuals highly placed in the academic hierarchy sought to control them. Ibn Ḥajjār al-‘Askalânī exhibited no special enmity when he sought the appointment as professor of Ḥadîth at the great mosque of Sultan Hasan for his thirteen-year-old son, and then, because the boy was so young, taught in his place. His paternal concern for his son’s position in the world of learning does, however, reflect the extraordinary importance of family connections to academic success. It is to this aspect of the professional life of the ulama that we now turn.

Family Connections and Academic Careers

It was the opinion of medieval educational theorists that poverty should be no excuse, for one of sound mind and body, for failing to strive after knowledge. After all, wrote al-Zarāñjī in his treatise on education and learning, no one was poorer than Abū ʿĪṣâf, the seminal Ḥanafī jurist of the eighth century. Yet financial independence has always been a factor in allocating higher educational resources, since it creates opportunities for leisure and free time for the purpose of study. Even al-Zarāñjī was forced to admit that having wealth could be of great service to a fledgling scholar: “It was said to a learned man, ‘By what means did you acquire knowledge?’ He said, ‘Through a rich father. Because by means of his [riches] he supported virtuous and learned men and so was the cause of an augmentation of learning.’” More practically, with wealth one could purchase books, or have them copied, and “this is a help in attaining knowledge and learning.” But the most significant nonintellectual factor contributing to the success of an academic career in Mamluk Cairo was not wealth per se, but having as one’s father a prominent scholar and teacher. To a certain degree, this may be viewed as a thoroughly natural phenomenon: the son of a scholar was more likely to be introduced early and attracted to the academic profession, and indeed, fathers are often listed in the biographical dictionaries as the first of an individual’s many teachers. But certain

---

21 Al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāne, 1:168.
23 The story can be pieced together from three separate biographies in al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāne, 4:37–39, 5:49–50, 10:252–54. For a similar example, see ibid., 3:265, 4:363.
24 Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar Qâdir al-Ḥidâyâ briefly substituted for his young pupil Nāṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿĀdīn who, in his late teens and early twenties, was shaykh and professor at the Shaykhünīyya. See their biographies in al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāne, 6:109–10, 8:365.
peculiarities of the Islamic teaching system, as well as certain institutional developments in late medieval Cairo, contributed to hardening significantly career patterns among the ulama and to making success in the academic field almost a matter of inheritance.\(^7\)

The education of Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Rahim, known as Ibn al-'Irâqî (d. 1422), provides a measure of the care with which ulama families undertook the instruction of their offspring. The son of another prominent scholar also known as Ibn al-'Irâqî, Ahmad was born in Cairo in 1360 and before the age of three was brought before 'Izz al-Dîn Ibn Jamâï and other prominent scholars in the Egyptian capital. In 1363-64, his father traveled to Syria and took Ahmad with him, presenting the young boy before the leading scholars and hadith transmitters of Damascus and Jerusalem. In particular, the father requested that these traditionalists issue to his son ijâzas, licenses empowering him to transmit hadith on their authority. Especially in the field of hadith transmission, such experiences could prove valuable for Ahmad Ibn al-'Irâqî and others like him in their later academic careers: three-year-olds may not have understood the lessons or traditions recited in their presence, but they could later in life claim to have studied directly with prominent shaykhs of previous generations.\(^8\) Back in Cairo, Ahmad began a more systematic education in law, grammar, and other subjects, as well as hadith. Here, too, family connections proved invaluable. He studied jurisprudence with Burhân al-Dîn Ibrâhîm al-Abnâsî (d. 1389), an intimate companion of his father who, "because of the close friendship" that they shared, secured for Ahmad student fellowships in several schools.\(^9\) His father took him to Mecca and Medina, where Ahmad studied hadith with the leading scholars of the Hijâz, and later he traveled again to Syria, this time in the company of another friend of his father, where he heard traditions from the next generation of transmitters.

---


8 The biographies of almost all famous scholars and teachers from the Mamluk period contain similar accounts. These early educational experiences proved invaluable for women scholars, as well, see Chapter 6.

9 The actual term used was dihibûlah. The word could refer either to student fellowships, or, of course, to employment as a teacher or other religious functionary. In content, the former seems the most likely interpretation. Al-Sakhawî, al-Dawâ', 1:339, cf. al-Abnâsî's biography in ibid., 1:374.

---

The care and attention with which a prominent scholar could direct the studies of his sons could also, of course, act as a catalyst for their careers. In Cairo, Ahmad Ibn al-'Irâqî gave lessons "in the lifetime of his father and of his teachers," which led Zayn al-Dîn to compose the verses: "the lessons of Ahmad are better than those of his father, / Which gives his father the greatest satisfaction." Consequently, when Zayn al-Dîn was appointed qâfil of Medina in 1385, Ahmad, who was as yet in his mid-twenties, took up his father's teaching responsibilities in a number of Cairene schools.\(^8\) Similarly, the famous traditionist and Hânîfî scholar Siwâj al-Dîn 'Umar al-Bulqûshî granted to his son Jalâl al-Dîn 'Abd al-Rahîm permission to teach and to issue fatwâs (legal opinions) at the extraordinarily young age of seventeen, attesting to the brilliance of his son and pupil in the science of Islamic jurisprudence.\(^8\)

Not surprisingly, the concerns of the ulama extended to securing for their sons prominent, lucrative, and secure teaching posts. In this the institutional framework of education in Mamluk Cairo proved to be of great assistance. The tendency for sons to inherit the teaching posts occupied by their fathers was, of course, by no means new. It had in fact manifested itself early in the development of institutions supporting classes in the legal and religious sciences, and long before the onset of the Mamluk regime.\(^7\) But in the later Middle Ages, the tendency became hard and fast, and was eventually codified in the deeds of endowment establishing madrasas and cognate institutions of learning.

The most obvious means by which a prominent scholar could secure for himself and his progeny a secure teaching post was by establishing a school himself. The founder could then stipulate, in the institution's deed of endowment, that he and his descendants were to hold the professorship, so long as they were themselves competent scholars.\(^8\) Tagûq i-Dîn al-Sukbî discussed, in a fatwâ dating from the mid-fourteenth century, a madrasa in Damascus that made precisely such a stipulation.\(^8\) Scholars seem to have been responsible for a greater share of the schools constructed in the provinces of Upper Egypt than in the metropolitan capital; since many of these scholar-benefactors went on to teach in the insti-
tutions that they founded, we may assume that their own sons not infrequently inherited their posts.\(^{40}\)

In Cairo, apparently, relatively few scholars built schools specifically to perpetuate their own academic dynasties. One who did was Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muhammad b. Salmī Ḥanān (d. 1278–79), the founder of the madrasa al-Ṣāḥibiyā al-Bahāʾiyya in al-Fustāṭ. Ibn Ḥanān was in fact a bureaucrat who rose to the rank of wāzīr, but his family had a demonstrated interest in education. From its foundation, the professorship of this institution was held by members of the Ibn Ḥanān family. The first to teach there was Fakhr al-Dīn Muhammad, the founder’s son, followed by a succession of other descendants of the founder over at least six generations. The professorship remained in the hands of family members until, in the early years of the fifteenth century, the school, plundered of its endowments and even of the marble with which it was constructed, with only two or three pupils remaining of its once significant student body, ceased to function.\(^{41}\)

Few scholars had the means or, if they did, the inclination to establish for themselves and their offspring institutions of the size of al-Ṣāḥibiyā al-Bahāʾiyya. One who did build and endow a madrasa was Sirāj al-Dīn al-Buḫṭūnī. We know very little concerning this madrasa other than that the fact that Sirāj al-Dīn and many of his family members and their descendants were buried there. The institution still survived as a mosque when, in the nineteenth century, ʿAlī Pāšā Mubārak completed his topographical survey of Cairo. Although Sirāj al-Dīn and his sons did hold informal sessions for public instruction in the madrasa, there is no indication that the institution’s endowments, the deeds for which have not survived, ever provided organized lessons, with student stipends and paid professorial chairs, in Islamic law or its ancillary sciences.\(^{42}\)

The madrasa known as the Majdīyya, located in al-Fustāṭ, was established by the shaykh Majd al-Dīn Ṭūfī Muhammad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. al-Ḥusayn al-Qalḥālī al-Dīrī (d. 1291). Again, its deed of endowment is lost, but we know that Majd al-Dīn established it in a Sha‘ī professor, two teaching assistants (muʾāṣirīn), and twenty students, as well as a prayer leader and a muezzīn. Moreover, al-Maqūṭī tells us that Majd al-Dīn’s son Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Umar, though he

---


41 Al-Sakkāwī, al-Dawʾ, 1:173. A certain Burdān al-Dīn Ṣayīd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Dīn (d. 1432) lived in this zāwiyā, and his son ʿAbd al-Kalīm (d. 1486) was mūdīr (substitute professor) here; Ibn Ḥajar, Iskāḥ al-ḥujjām, 5:260–87, and al-Sakkāwī, al-Dawʾ, 4:165. There is no indication, however, that these two scholars were directly related to the Burdān al-Dīn al-Ṣāḥibī, for whom the zāwiyā was named, although they shared a nibah. Several other scholars established schools about which even less is known, including: Ḥanābī b. Ṣayīd b. Nāʾir Allāḥ (d. 1471). Hanbalī chief judge from 1453 until his death, who established “a mosque and madrasa and public fountain and citernes [ṣalāt wa-ṣalātāt],” and Burdān b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Nāʾirī (d. 1492), who established along the Nile across from the Nilometer a zāwiyā that, according to al-Sakkāwī, was really a madrasa, and in which Friday prayers were said and a sermon read; al-Sakkāwī, al-Dawʾ, 1:207, 78–79.

42 Al-Sakkāwī, al-Dawʾ, 1:390, 9:149.
phers almost took the practice for granted, and sometimes blandly remark that so-and-so “taught after his father in several places,” without bothering to name the institutions. For at least a century from its construction in 1329, the professorship in Hanafi law at the Jamaliyya khanqah was the preserve of several generations of the family of its first incumbent. Not all institutions were so closely tied to one particular family, but the histories of most schools of the period yield at least one, and many several, instances of sons succeeding fathers in their academic employment.

So accepted was the practice that a deviation from the rule might engender a dispute. When Burhān al-Dīn ʿIbrāhīm al-Bijurī died in 1422, none of his children were considered his equal in intellectual accomplishment. Consequently, a colleague of al-Bijurī was appointed to his post in the Fakhriyya madrasa. So incensed was his son at being passed over for the post that he refused in anger his father’s jobs at other Qairawani schools. A more hostile confrontation embroiled the Shaykhīyya khanqah when, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, its respected professor of Hanafi law, al-Shaykh Zāda al-ʿAjamī, grew weak with age. His son Maḥmūd substituted for him, and apparently expected to inherit his father’s position. Just before Zāda’s death, however, a rival scholar, Kamāl al-Dīn ʿUmar Ibn al-ʿAḍīm, successfully challenged the competence of the aged shaykh and received the appointment himself. Kamāl al-Dīn’s peers apparently deplored his actions, but nonetheless Maḥmūd “was excluded from his father’s post.”

The extreme youth of their sons did not always prevent scholars from actively seeking their appointment to academic employment. Very often, sons succeeded to their fathers’ teaching positions at tender ages, before they could successfully shoulder full academic responsibilities. The same Ibn al-ʿAḍīm who prevented Maḥmūd b. Zāda from succeeding his father as professor at the Shaykhīyya in 1407 invited his own young son Nāṣir al-Dīn Muhammad to lecture in his place. Nāṣir al-Dīn was, according to one chronicler, a “youth who may or may not have attained puberty,” although it appears that he must have been seventeen years of age. In any case, Ibn al-ʿAḍīm saw in his son’s lecturing “the means of advancing him to employment in the post, despite his young age, and the complete absence of hair on his face.” His ploy was successful, and when Ibn al-ʿAḍīm died the following year, his son was appointed in his place. In situations where the holder of a professorial chair was simply too young to teach, a substitute might be appointed, as we have seen, to fulfill the boy’s instructional duties.

The routine transfer of teaching posts from father to son was a practice that benefited primarily the educated elite itself. When the decisive influence of the ulama generally is recalled, it will be seen that they not only formed the group through which Islamic learning was transmitted from one generation to the next, but also created the conditions allowing them to replicate their own power, wealth, and position in their offspring. This replication became a widely accepted pattern, and consequently, the endowment deeds of many late Mamluk madrasas and colleges included stipulations that appointments in them were to be hereditary, that is, that sons were to be allowed to succeed their fathers in their posts. At the mosque of Barsbāy, for example, if one of the institution’s professors or other appointees died and left a son who was qualified (ṣāliḥ) to assume the responsibilities of his father’s post, he was to be appointed to it. Similarly, the endowment deed of Khushqadam al-Zimān, which provided for fifty-nine Sufis and their shaykh, Shāfiʿī and Hanafi professors and ten students each, as well as a number of minor functionaries, stated:

The founder stipulates that if one of the aforementioned appointees dies and has a son of legal age (✅ṣāliḥ) who is from among the people of the Blessed Quran and [who is] worthy (ṣāliḥ) for the post, the controller should appoint him to his father’s place and disburse to him [his father’s] salary [risāq].

The ties of blood were broad as well as deep, and so a school’s endowment deed might provide that, if the deceased officeholder had no son, a relation (nasib) might be appointed to his post.

Naturally, many sons would not be considered capable of assuming their fathers’ posts and discharging their duties because of their youth; they may have been perfectly competent students, showing every sign of intellectual promise, but not yet advanced enough in their studies to justify their appointment to professorial chairs. Not to be forestalled, the hereditary clauses in the endowment deeds often made provisions for this contingency. If the deceased professor’s son was not qualified at the time of his father’s death, but was expected to become so at some later date, a substitute might be appointed to teach in the son’s place until his deficiencies were overcome.

68. Waqfīyyat al-Aṣhrāf Barsbāy, Dīr al-Wathāʾiq No. 173, fol. 134v–


70. Waqfīyyat al-Shihābi Khānī, Dīr al-Wathāʾiq No. 76, II. 59–51.

71. See, for example, Waqfīyyat al-Aṣhrāf Barsbāy, Dīr al-Wathāʾiq No. 173, fol. 134v–

72. Waqfīyyat Sīdīmu min Zāda, Dīr al-Wathāʾiq No. 95, II. 406–407; Waqfīyyat Jaʿfar al-Lālī,
Of course, as we have seen, the practice of sons inheriting their fathers' teaching posts had a long pedigree, predating the Mamluk period considerably. What clauses such as that in the deed for the madrasa of Sultan Barsibay represent, however, is the regularization of the practice, and confirmation of the privilege accruing to prominent scholars and teachers of ensuring that control of well-paid teaching positions remained in their families' hands. The clauses were not a gratuitous formality, but a conscious device to secure a privilege, as witnessed by the fact that they were sometimes included in documents augmenting or modifying endowments established several years earlier.44 Clauses such as that at Barsibay's madrasa became more frequent over the last century of Mamluk rule. The documentary evidence for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is much scantier, so that it may be dangerous to rely too heavily upon the silence of early Mamluk deeds of endowment. It is, however, notable that the first instance of such a clause in a surviving deed for a Mamluk-period school is found in the endowment deed for the mosque of the amir Sādīn min Zāda, dating from 1402. Thereafter, they became quite common, a feature of most endowment deeds for late Mamluk institutions of education.45

To be sure, the deeds of endowment for late Mamluk institutions of learning suggest that some shared a reluctance to codify the practice of allowing sons to inherit their fathers' posts. In the endowment established by Sultan Khusaṣqādan, for example, a hereditary clause similar to those above was conspicuously absent; rather, the controller was pointedly instructed to replace the institution's deceased functionaries with

44 Waqīfīyat al-Shiblī Kāfīr. Dār al-Wathiqī q No. 78, specifically the fifth document on the roll, dated 1 Ḏhū al-Ḥijja, a.m. 818, ll. 50–51; Waqīfīyat Qanīt Bākī Qārī, Wizārat al-Awqāf o.s. No. 1019, specifically the third document on the roll, dated 3 Rajab, a.m. 920 (Mohammad Amin, in his Fihrist waṣbī’ī q al-qabīrī [Cairo, 1981], 242, gives this date as a.m. 910, but the correct date appears to be 920), ll. 878–90. 45 Waqīfīyat Sādīn min Zāda. Dār al-Wathiqī q No. 58, ll. 365–67 is the earliest such waqf-yāsī uncovered during research for this book. It is possible that earlier examples escaped my attention. Even if thirteenth- or fourteenth-century examples exist, however, I believe that the general pattern—that such clauses became more frequent, almost de rigueur, over the course of the fifteenth century—is valid. In addition to those cited above, see the following deeds of endowment: Waqīfīyat Jāshar al-Labbā and Jāshar al-Qanawī, Dār al-Wathiqī q No. 89, ll. 66–67; Waqīfīyat Qanīt Bākī Qārī, Wizārat al-Awqāf o.s. No. 1019, ll. 878–90. The deed for endowment for the madrasa and khānqāh of Sultan al-Chawī has a similar clause, applying to the institutions' sufis and Qurans readers un washī ḍī’ī mīn arhāb al-wasāfī’ī al-madhākīrān. As noted above, this institution actually provided no salaried teaching positions, but the language of this clause would seem to apply not simply to the Sufis and readers but to all the other arhāb al-wasāfī’ī provided for in the endowment.


“whoever is suitable” for the post.46 More importantly, while numerically few, those schools whose endowment deeds did not specifically stipulate the inheritability of posts included several of the largest and most important schools founded over the latter half of the Mamluk period, such as the madrasa of Sultan Barqūq and the khānqāh of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ustādār.47 Yet the fact that the deeds for some institutions included no hereditary clause did not mean that, in practice, their posts would not be transferred to the posterity of those who held them. Between 1388 and 1475, for example, the Hanafī professorship at the madrasa of Sultan Barqūq was the preserve of several generations of the al-Sirārī family, despite the fact that the school's endowment deed carried no stipulation that sons were to succeed their fathers. Particular professors of Shāfī'ī law and Quranic exegesis at the same institution successfully transferred their posts to their sons.48

In this way, the proliferation of endowed institutions of learning served above all the interests of the educated elite, and afforded them the opportunity to guarantee their progeny's succession to their academic honors—and income. It should be stressed that the social phenomenon of sons inheriting the rank and employment of their scholarly fathers did not necessarily affect the character of education itself, the means and channels through which religious knowledge was transmitted. From a social perspective, the phenomenon is nonetheless significant. In the first place it may suggest that the social world of the higher-ranking ulama of the Mamluk period was not entirely fluid. The overall situation was far from one of caste, but the tendency for—and later the provisions in deeds of endowment allowing—sons to inherit their fathers' teaching posts may have contributed to a restriction of social movement and the concentration of career opportunities in the hands of particular families. The spread of institutions with endowments devoted specifically to education certainly suited the interests of those already resting at the top of the academic hierarchy, and proved to be a financial windfall for them.
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE MILITARY ELITE

In one sense, the world of higher religious education in late medieval Cairo was utterly dependent on the rambunctious, mostly Turkish-speaking, dubiously Muslim Mamluk soldiers who monopolized political and military power. Mamluk sultans and amirs, between them, were responsible for the creation and endowment of most institutions of higher religious education, and perhaps inevitably so, since they controlled a disproportionate share of income-producing property. Given the absence of an organized church and anything resembling ecclesiastical corporations as known in the West, scholars and religious functionaries, as well as the wider Muslim society that they served, relied heavily on individual members of the ruling military elite to take an interest in religious and educational affairs. Their interest, of course, did not necessarily affect the transmission of knowledge itself, but it did make possible the network of schools and paying professorships that, as was seen in the previous chapter, the educated elite managed to manipulate to their own advantage.

The extent of the Mamluks' financial contribution to religious education cannot be overemphasized. Despite the increasingly violent political struggles and the generally deteriorating economic conditions of the late century of Mamluk rule, they continued, through the early decades of the sixteenth century, actively to support the religious interests of Muslim society and, in particular, to construct educational institutions. A previous study has suggested that the Mamluks, distracted by internal dissension and a reduction of their disposable income, lost interest in the founding of new educational and religious institutions and that, in Syrian cities at least, the civilian elite established and endowed an increasing proportion of schools and mosques. In the case of Cairo, however, the Mamluks continued to account for the lion's share of new schools. At least seventy-four teaching institutions can be shown to have been constructed or endowed during the Turkish period (1250-1836), covering roughly the

---

1 On the wealth of Mamluks generally, see Iris Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), passim, esp. 39-52, 20ff.

---

3 These figures are based on my own survey of the literature, especially the major published chronicles and biographical dictionaries. Determining when each individual school was established is at times a difficult task, since the precise date of their construction and endowment, especially for smaller and less prestigious schools, is not always known. For the figures given here, when the precise date of establishment of any given institution is not known, the terminus ante quem is taken as the date of founding. Figures for the number of new schools established during the Circassian period are especially tentative; the actual number may well be higher than the figures given here. Al-Maqrizi's topographical description of Cairo, al-Maqrizi, wa'l-dahr bi-dahr al-khakhat wa'l-dahr, provides a useful, although not exhaustive, list of religious and educational institutions founded in the Turkish Mamluk period. However, since it was written in the first decades of the fifteenth century, and since no comparable work was written until 'All Pasha Maharrir's al-Khakhat al-nasiriyya al-yahudiyya al-mi'ah al-qushr, in the mid-nineteenth century, we possess no contemporary source listing late Mamluk schools that even pretends to be comprehensive. We must rely, therefore, on scattered references in the chronicles and biographical dictionaries in compiling a catalog of Cairo schools founded between al-Maqriz's death in 1442 and the Ottoman conquest in 1517.

4 See Chapter One. Davis Behrens-Assoudi, "Change in Function and Form of Mamluk Religious Institutions," Annals of Islamology 21 (1985), 88, notes the decline in endowments' economic strength over the last years of Mamluk rule, as does Lapidus, Muslim Cities, 37, 68, although the latter suggests that, at least in Syrian cities, the decline represented "growing neglect of religious and educational affairs" by the Mamluk regime."
built and maintained, and endowments had to be created that provided sufficient income for the salaries of the school's beneficiaries. Given the pattern of foundation of new institutions, it would seem that the wealthy elements of medieval Cairo society, and especially the Mamluk elite, retained to the end the interests and concerns that led them to endow institutions of learning. What motivations prompted them—and a few women—of the Mamluk period to make the expenditures necessary to endow a school? In particular, what ties of interest bound the Mamluk soldiers to the transmission of Muslim religious knowledge?

**Endowing a School: Political Considerations**

The madrasas and mosques of medieval Cairo were, for the most part, not insubstantial buildings. Not all were as imposing as the fortress-like structure established by Sultan Hasan below the Citadel, but most were prominent architectural features of the streets and quarters in which they were located; a few even lent their names to the surrounding neighborhoods. Constructing such an institution in some respects represented, for those wealthy enough to make the necessary outlays, a form of conspicuous consumption through which some sort of message was communicated to the population of the city. Some have discerned in the very architecture of the Cairo madrasas—in their massive facades, and the tall deep portals so reminiscent of the palaces and houses inhabited by the amirs—a systematic symbolic linking of the power of the educated establishment to the political interests of the ruling elite. But did the Mamluks, in endowing institutions of higher religious and legal education, really act with the profound sense of their collective political interests such an interpretation implies?

It has often been assumed that the rise and spread of the madrasa in the Fertile Crescent and, later, in Egypt was linked to the efforts of the new Sunni regimes of the twelfth century to combat the religious and political propaganda of the Shi'i regimes—the Fatimids in Egypt, for example—that had dominated the central Islamic world during the eleventh. This may well have been the case in the early years of the "Sunni revival," that period which saw the organization of an effective and conscious Sunni response to both Shi'i political ascendancy and the challenge of the Latin crusaders. A key element of that response lay in the efforts of the new Sunni rulers, such as Nūr al-Dīn Mahmūd b. Zangi in Syria (d. 1174) and his successor, Salāḥ al-Dīn b. Ayyūb (d. 1193, better known to the West as Saladin), to establish madrasas and other institutions to train a new Sunni religious elite. It would be difficult to see in any other light the first madrasa established in Aleppo, a Shi'ī institution that the angry Shi'ī residents of the city saw fit promptly to demolish.3

In Egypt, too, such concerns may have informed the decisions of those who, in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, chose to construct Sunni madrasas. Until the collapse of the Fatimid caliphate in 1171, their Cairo establishments such as the great mosque of al-Azhar served as training centers for the men sent out to propagate the Fatimids' radical Ismā'īli brand of Shi'ism. The first Egyptian madrasas, established several decades before the fall of the Fatimids, must have represented to contemporaries a Renaissance of Sunni learning in the face of institutions devoted to Ismā'īlī propaganda. Ridwān ibn al-Walākhī, the first of a series of Sunni wāzzīs (ministers) to the late Fatimid caliphs, in 1137–38 founded one of the earliest Egyptian madrasas, a school for students of Mālikī law in Alexandria; fourteen years later another Sunni wāzir, ibn al-Sallar, established a second school in the port city, this one for Shi'īs. Their schools, and especially those built and endowed by Salādīn toward the end of the twelfth century, constituted a conscious attempt to establish a political base among the Sunni residents of Alexandria and al-Fustāt in opposition to the Shi'ī regime.4

The political context in which institutions of traditional Muslim learning were constructed, however, did not remain static. By the middle of the thirteenth century—by the time, that is, of the coup that brought the Mamluks to power—the Shi'ī presence in Egypt had all but been extinguished. The Ismā'īli Fatimids had never succeeded in converting large numbers of Egyptians to Shi'ism. Even under the Ayyūbid sultans who ruled Egypt during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, threats to the legitimacy and power of the new Sunni regime may have stemmed less from any residual Shi'īism than from the still large Christian population of the country, which had adopted a more assertive stance under a series of Christian ministers to the late Fatimid caliphs. Indeed, recent research has suggested that even Ayyūbid madrasas were constructed more to organize the Sunni community against the Christian

---


4 See, for example, A. S. Tiffo,"Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages" (London, 1907), 103; a more recent work coming to the same conclusion specifically in the Egyptian context is Muhammad M. Amin, *al-Azhar wa-l-baghdād al-dirāshīyyā fi mīrāq* (Cairo, 1990), 239.


Residents of Egypt than to combat a realistic Shi‘i menace.9 It is difficult, therefore, to see in the munificence of the Mamluk military elite in establishing and endowing institutions of higher religious education an attempt to confirm Sunnism’s “new role as the one orthodoxy within their realms,” at least if the “heretical” enemy is identified as Shi‘ism.10 No other “orthodoxy” was even conceivable.

But it may be misleading to search for an explanation of the remarkable proliferation of schools under the patronage of the Mamluks exclusively, or even primarily, in broad political considerations. It is true that the Mamluks had extinguished, almost by accident, the respected Ayyubid regime, but the circumstances surrounding the endowment of each school reveal little trace of any attempt, conscious or unconscious, to confirm the political role of the Mamluks as a group in medieval Egyptian society. Even though the behavior of many superficially Islamicized Mamluks was not such as to win the approbation of the legal and religious authorities, those same scholars recognized the contributions of the Mamluk system as a whole to the defense and vitality of the Muslim community—Ibn Khaldun, after all, credited the “Turks” with nothing less than the salvation of Islam. Thus the pattern of endowment should probably not be read as an attempt to overcome any perceived illegitimacy to their rule. Rather, the very fact that individuals, and not the state, undertook the construction of schools, mosques, and Sufi convents suggests that individual concerns governed the decision to establish a charitable endowment. Insofar as the Mamluks’ efforts to establish and endow schools were “political,” they reflect the intensely personal character of Egyptian politics during the Mamluk period, in which bitter and mutually hostile political factions coalesced principally around the leading personalities of the Mamluk corps.

Intimate and lasting ties bound each individual school to the reputation, or memory, of the individual who founded it. In a recurrent pattern, Mamluks built schools in the immediate vicinity of their personal dwelling places in the city. The official opening of a new school, especially those constructed by sultans, was routinely marked by a vast public banquet at which courtiers, judges, and scholars gathered together to eat a meal, listen to the recitation of the Quran or hadith, or even a formal lesson in jurisprudence or exegesis, pray, and distribute alms to the institution’s stipendiaries and the local poor. The name of a religious or academic establishment generally derived from that of its founder—the Zāhiriyā of al-Zahir Barquq, for example, or the Şarḥītishīyya of the

anīr Şarḥītishī—and the Mamluks seem to have been eager to acquire the prestige within the community associated with the construction of a school devoted to religious learning. Consider, for example, the fate of the khānqāh known as the Baybarsiyā built and endowed by Sultan Baybars al-Jāshānī in the first years of the fourteenth century. By the time it was completed, Baybars was dead, deposed by his rival al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, who promptly closed the institution and confiscated its endowments—and, for good measure, ordered the obliteration of Baybars’ name from the institution’s inscriptions. Ultimately, al-Nāṣir Muhammad permitted the khānqāh to reopen, and even restored its endowments, but only after the completion of his own convent in Sīrāqūn, north of the city, and its elevation to the status of premier khānqāh in the Egyptian capital.11

A good deal, it seems, resided in a name. In the fiercely competitive world of Mamluk politics, the establishment of a prominent institution of learning, which took its name from its founder, provided him with a potent symbol of political legitimacy. After the disgrace, arrest, and execution of Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Ustāḏār, a rich and powerful civilian bureaucrat of the early fifteenth century, Sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj ibn Barquq sought, through a legal maneuver involving Jamāl al-Dīn’s endowments, to reconstitute the school he had founded and to rename it the Naṣāriyā. This sultan, too, had Jamāl al-Dīn’s name effaced from the building’s inscriptions, and replaced with his own, so that “the name of the Sultan was inscribed on top of [the walls] surrounding the courtyard and upon the school’s candles and carpets and ceilings.” Faraj’s triumph, however, proved short-lived. After the succession of his rival al-Mu‘ayyad Shāhkh to the sultanate, the endowments of Jamāl al-Dīn, who had formerly been a client of the new sultan, were restored to his heirs. And of course the institution Jamāl al-Dīn founded is, to this day, known as the Jamāliyā.12

Thus, to medieval observers, the establishment of a school of higher education served an important commemorative function. By retaining the names of their founders, sultans and amirs and, in cases like that of Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf, powerful civilian bureaucrats, religious establishments provided individual beneficiaries with a symbolic capital that rebounded to their credit. This, after all, was a society that treasured knowledge, especially religious knowledge, knowledge of the revelation of God and the law to which it gave rise. Through the establishment of institutions devoted to its transmission, the Mamluks were able to link...
Endowing a School: Financial Considerations

If Mamluk politics were primarily personal, then the victims of that political process were not ideas or ideologies so much as the individual Mamluks whose factions lost power. In this world, the construction and endowment of a school—or, for that matter, of other religious institutions—provided the Mamluks with more than symbolic capital. Despite the vast expenditures necessary to establish a school, the Mamluks paradoxically found in the endowment of madrasas and cognate institutions an opportunity to protect their wealth and provide for a steady income to their heirs. In the early fifteenth century, Ibn Khaldun noted that educational establishments had flourished in Egypt under the Mamluk regime because of the attempt by members of the ruling elite to preserve for their children some of their wealth, otherwise subject to confiscation at their deaths. It was possible, of course, simply to establish an endowment designed specifically to benefit one’s heirs. In theory the property of such legal instruments was inalienable, but in fact these endowments remained vulnerable to confiscation. A safer bet was to establish an endowment in favor of a madrasa, khānqāh, or mosque, or for some other charitable purpose, and to ensure that its income would exceed the charity’s requirements. Any surplus, then, could be earmarked for the founder and his heirs.15

Such endowments, for mixed charitable and private purposes, remained for most of the Mamluk period the safest way of ensuring the orderly transferral of a Mamluk’s wealth to his heirs. The reluctance of the regime to tamper with the endowments of religious institutions was palpable. In the month of Dhū ‘l-Qa‘dā of the year 872 (May–June 1468), Sultan Qaytbay summoned a council consisting of the caliph, the four chief qādis, a group of leading religious scholars, and several prominent amirs. The sultan detailed to the assembled notables the military threat posed by a restive Turkoman principality on the empire’s Syrian–Anatolian border, and the insufficiency of government funds to outfit an army to confront it. He proposed, therefore, to raise the necessary money from the people and from the endowments of mosques and other religious institutions which, he noted, recently “had increased in number.” Arriving late, but in time to express his opinion, a prominent Ḥaṣāfi shaykh, Amin al-Dīn Yahyā al-Aṣṣārī, expostulated on the wickedness of the plan, at which, apparently, the sultan backed down.14

Over the last decades of Mamluk rule, as external threats pressed more heavily and civil disorders in Cairo became more frequent, attempts to raid charitable endowments continued and, increasingly, succeeded. In 1500–1501, rebellious young Mamluks ascended on mace to the Citadel, demanding from the new sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri the customary payment in celebration of his accession. When they returned to the city below, the rumor quickly spread that the sultan planned to distribute to them lands belonging to the endowments of mosques and madrasas. Again, in council the four chief qādis rejected the sultan’s plan. This time, however, the Ḥanafī qādis returned to the sultan at the end of the day, and together they reached a compromise: the endowments were to be left intact, but were to surrender to the sultan a full year’s income.15

At least until the end of the fifteenth century, however, such endowments were generally safe; not surprisingly, therefore, many of the deeds establishing schools also made provisions for regular payments to the founder and his descendants from the income of the endowment. The sums involved could be substantial. One school’s endowment provided for a fixed payment of 2,000 dirhams per month to the children and descendants of the founder, as well as a certain proportion of the endowment’s residual income, compared to 250 dirhams per month for the mosque’s professors of Ḥanafī and Ḡāzī’s law.16 Most commonly, a founder’s children were provided for out of what was left of the endowment’s income after expenditures on the school or other object of charity. Amir Qalanṣūṭ, for example, after setting aside one-third of the residual income of his endowment for the upkeep and repair of his madrasa, stipulated that the remaining two-thirds be distributed among his children and their descendants.17 Several founders went further and insisted that the residual income be divided among their children and descendants equally, without regard to gender, thereby circumventing the laws of Islamic inheritance that required a male to receive double a female’s por-

15 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, trans. Franz Rosenzweig (New York, 1968), 2:425. cf. Lapidus, Muslim Cities, 74. On mixed endowments, which he identifies as a third type intermediary between purely private (adi) and purely charitable (khāqā) waqfs, see Amir, al-Aṣṣārī, 72–73ff. Amir’s book is, in fact, the definitive study of charitable endowments in Mamluk Egypt and their impact on, among other things, religious institutions.

17 Wāqfīyat Qalanṣūṭ, Dīr al-Wathīqa, No. 68, II, 310ff.
tion. A Mamluk’s feelings of responsibility might extend beyond the bounds of his immediate family circle: one, for example, provided that half of the residual income of his endowment be set aside for his wife (as long as she remained unmarried), his children, and their descendants, but allotted another eighth for his two sisters and their heirs. Bonds of devotion in medieval Muslim families included other members of a household, such as emancipated slaves (naqaq, pl. nāqaq), whom many Mamluks also named residual beneficiaries.

The law governing charitable endowments provided wealthy individuals a second means to ensure the regular disbursement of money to their offspring. Each endowment required the services of a controller (nāzir), one to oversee the administration of the endowment and the distribution of funds to its beneficiaries. Usually the founder reserved to himself the right to hold the controllership during his lifetime, but after his death could pass the post on to his children. The endowment deeds outlined in considerable detail the criteria by which future controllers were to be appointed, and in most cases—more than three quarters of the deeds that survive and which give the relevant information—the founder’s children and descendants, or, in some cases his freed slaves and their descendants, were to hold or at least share in the controllership of the institution. The sums passed on to heirs in this manner, if not colossal, were not insubstantial. Most often the controller was paid a monthly stipend comparable to that of the senior instructor or religious official in the institution. At the madrasa of Sarghiṭnîsh, for example, the controller received 200 dirhams per month, the professors of Hawaiji jurisprudence and badhth 300 each. At the madrasa of Sultan Hasan, the Shāfi‘i professor also received 300 dirhams per month, but the controller was paid 1,000 for his services.

Even in the case of those institutions for which deeds have not survived, the circumstances surrounding their foundation and the creation of endowments for their upkeep strongly suggest that Ibn Khalidīn was right, and that the protection of personal and family wealth lay close to, if not absolutely at the front of, a founder’s list of priorities. Already in the first years of the Mamluk regime, schools were established by public figures who had previously suffered arrest and confiscation of their wealth, and who might therefore be inclined to seek out ways to protect what wealth remained to them. The founder of the Marzûqīyya, Sa‘īd al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Mu’ayyad al-Ṣāfī al-Dīn, a prominent Syrian merchant, ba‘dīth scholar, and adviser to governors, had been arrested and mulcted of 500,000 dinars in 1238-39, after which he came to Egypt where, sometime before his death, he established his madrasa. Another who established one of the earliest Mamluk madrasas, Amir ʿAla‘ al-Dīn Aydakīn al-Bunduqdarī (d. 1255), had also known imprisonment and confiscation, in this case at the hands of the Ayyūbīd sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn, before endowing his madrasa not far from the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlīn.

In later instances, the connection between some sort of crisis in the career of the individual and the decision to endow a school is far less tenuous. Consider, for example, the madrasa established by Amir Sayf al-Dīn Mankūṭṭūrī al-Husāmī. Mankūṭṭūrī stipulated that the madrasa al-Wāḥiqiyya No. 100, B. 3808, Zayn al-Dīn al-Ustādī, Dir al-Wāḥiqiyya No. 110, B. 1471 ff., Qānī Bāy Qūk, al-Wāḥiqiyya o.s. o. No. 109, B. 3809–92, Sayfī Būyaynī, Dir al-Wāḥiqiyya No. 313, B. 198–99, Sultan al-Ghawīrī, Dir al-Wāḥiqiyya o.s. o. No. 982, pp. 222–25. 

In the following deeds that of al-Nāṣir Muhammad ibn Qālūwīn, a summary of which is preserved in Sāḥib al-Dīn Ahmad al-Nawvī’s encyclopedic treatise Nakhsīt al-aʿrāf fī fann al-ʿadāb, the relevant sections printed as an appendix to Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad al-Maqūlī’s Kātib al-malāk fī maʿrifat dawād al-mulūk (Cairo, 1934–73), 1:1043 ff., Makūlī al-Jamālī, Dir al-Wāḥiqiyya o.s. o. No. 1069, B. 320–44, Sultan Ḥasan ibn Muhammad ibn ʿAlī Qālū, as published by Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Rasūl ibn ʿAbd al-Rasūl (Paris, 1893; repr. Beirut, 1964), 4:45. It is not known when exactly this madrasa was constructed and endowed—presumably sometime between Ibn Marqūz’s arrest in 1238-39 and his death in 1261. Gary Leiter points out that this madrasa may have been built under the last Ayyūbīds. Ibn Marqūz became an advisor to the Ayyūbīd sultan al-Ṣāliḥ in Egypt; the latter’s death, and the political crisis that followed, may well have played a role in inducing Ibn Marqūz to endow this institution. Leiter, “Restoration,” 296–97. 40 Jassal al-Dīn Yūnīf Ibn Ṭabīḥ Bīrī, al-Mashāiḥ al-nafis wa-l-imtāmātī fī al-masāhir (Cairo, 1984–4), 3:193–96. Little is known of this institution. Ibn Ṭabīḥ Bīrī calls the building simply a “mausoleum” (ḥanif); others, however, specifically label it a madrasa; al-Maqūzī, Kifayat, 2:73 and possibly 289, and Ibn ʿIyās, Badī‘ al-suhur, 1 (pt. 1):415.
offer courses in both Maliki and Hanafi law, and provided a library for the use of the school's students; he endowed the institution with property in Syria and elsewhere. We know nothing about whether the deed of endowment also made provisions for Maqtilitum himself, his descendants, household slaves, or anyone else not directly associated with the madrasa. The date of the institution's establishment is significant, however. The building was completed in 1298-99, but construction could hardly have commenced more than a short time before its completion. 

Maqtilitum, a Mamluk of Sultan Husain al-Din Lajin, rode to power, as it were, on the coattails of his ustadh (master) following Lajin's coup against Sultan Kitbugh in the month of Safar, A.H. 696 (December 1296). It was not until the next month, Babar al-Awwal, that Maqtilitum was even made an amir, and not until the end of 696, in Dhil 1-Qa'da, that he was appointed viceregal (nabib al-sultano).28 It was in this post, at that time the second highest in the sultanate, that Maqtilitum acquired the kind of income that allowed—and to a prudent man, might encourage—the establishment of an institution such as that which he established. Maqtilitum played a central role in the ra'ak, the redistribution of quasi-feudal aqita's (grants of income from agricultural estates) to the military elite, carried out under Sultan Lajin. In this sensitive post, the income of this parvenu skyrocketed to over 100,000 dinars per year. Suddenly he possessed the means to build and endow a madrasa or some other religious institution; motivation may have followed quickly. In the course of his administration of the rawk and other matters, Maqtilitum had alienated many of the leading amirs, who envied him, among other things, the value of their own feudal grants that had shrunk. Soon rumors began to circulate of a plot against Maqtilitum and Lajin; we know that Maqtilitum was aware of them, for at one point he threatened—perhaps disingenuously—to forsake his lucrative and powerful post and 'go live among the fuqara' [Sufi ascetics]. The point is that, from an individual perspective, the time was ripe for Maqtilitum's decision to endow a religious institution if he wished thereby to shelter any portion of his wealth from confiscation. By Babar al-Akhir of A.H. 698 (January-February 1299), within a few months of his madrasa's construction, Maqtilitum and his patron, Sultan Lajin, were dead.29


A quarter of a century later, al-Maqrizi tells us, in 1333, Amir 'Alam al-Din Sanjar al-Jawali established a madrasa in the Khatj al-Kabash, in the same street as his house, near the mosque of Ibn Tulun. Sanjar, who died in 1345, had originally been a Mamluk of Jawal, an amir of Sultan Baybars. After Jawal's death, Sanjar moved to the service of Sultan Qalawun, and after him served under his son al-Nasir Muhammad. Sanjar was an exceptionally pious and learned Mamluk—a point to which we will return—and provided in his endowment for a course in Shafi'i jurisprudence and a number of Sufis. Again, we know nothing about what provisions he might have made in the deed of endowment to preserve his own wealth, but the timing of his decision to establish this madrasa was striking: in 1330 Sanjar had been arrested; when his madrasa was established in 1333, he was still imprisoned in Alexandria, facing what now has seemed a very uncertain future.30

The evidence for individuals such as Maqtilitum al-Husaini and Sanjar al-Jawali is admittedly circumstantial—without their actual deeds of endowment, or more detailed information from the sources, we cannot prove that their decisions to establish schools were informed by the opportunity to protect their personal wealth behind the shield of the Islamic law of endowment. But the coincidence of a personal crisis, often one threatening arrest and confiscation of wealth, and the decision to endow an institution of religious learning recurred throughout the Mamluk period. As in the previous cases, the decision of Sayf al-Din Alajay al-Yusufi to build and endow a madrasa for Shafi'i and Hanafi students coincided suspiciously with his arrest. Sultan Hasan had promoted him to the rank of an 'amir of 100', the highest military rank to which a Mamluk could aspire. After Hasan's assassination and Yalbugha al-Umari's rise to power, commander-in-chief (atbakah) of the Mamluk armies under Sultan al-Aslah Sha'tan, Aljay in 1363-64 was confirmed in office as amir jandar, a high-ranking position charged with supervision of a combined arsenal/detention center.31 By the autumn of 1366, however, matters had begun to unravel. In December of that year, a group of Yalbugha's own Mamluks initiated a revolt against him, on account of his wanton cruelty toward them, and persuaded the fourteen-year-old sultan to join them. The coup was successful, and Yalbugha was killed. Over the next several months, high-rankling amirs such as Aljay must have felt the increasing precariousness of their positions as the new atbakah Asudumur concen-
treated power in his own hands, and arrest and banishment was meted out to those formerly associated with Yalbugha. Finally, three months after Yalbugha’s demise, a revolt broke out against Asundumur; it was put down, and the leaders, among them Aljāy, were arrested and imprisoned. We know that Aljāy’s madrasa was established in that same year. Is it too much to read his decision to endow it against the background of the uncertainty of his personal position?  

In the case of the mosque established by Amir Südüm min Zāda in 1402, we can be even more precise. Originally a Mamluk of Sultan Barqūq, Südüm rose through the ranks of the military elite. By 1400–1401 he was an amir tabākhāna, the second highest officer rank in the Mamluk army, leader of a detachment of soldiers (ra’ra naṣib), and, for a period of two months, treasurer to the sultan (khāzinādar). Tamurlane’s invasion of Syria in that year threw the Mamluk military elite into confusion; the details need not concern us here, but one of the consequences was an abortive rebellion of disgruntled amirs that broke out in Ramādān, A.H. 804 (April 1402). Südüm seems to have been involved in this disturbance in some way, and by the fourteenth day of Shawwāl—that is, by the middle of the following month—he was in custody, and was later moved to prison in Alexandria. Again, the date is worth noting; the deed of endowment establishing the institution that bears his name dates from “the last days of Ramādān.” 804—just days, that is, before his arrest. It should come as no surprise that the deed provides for a monthly payment of 2,000 dirhams to his descendants, males and females equally, and also that a portion of any remainder after the endowment’s stipulated expenditures be paid to them.

The link between a personal crisis and the decision to endow a madrasa holds as well for non-Mamluks who were employed in important governmental or bureaucratic posts. Janāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ‘Alī b. Aṣfar had begun his career as a minor bureaucrat, but persevered until, under Sultan Barqūq, he became ustādār, a position in which he undertook the important responsibility of distributing their pay to the Mamluks.  

Despite setbacks—during the interregnum of 1389–90, for example, in what

89 Al-Maqrizī, Khībat, 2:309, summarizes the story of Aljāy and his madrasa; further details can be gleaned from Ibn Taghī Barī’s, al-Nuṣūm al-sāhīn, 11:54–44.  


88 Compare the accounts in al-Maqrizī, al-Sulūk, 3:1094 and passim; Ibn Taghī Barī, al- Ṣuḥrā, 12:290–91 and passim; al-Sakhāwī, al-Daw’ al-dawwār, 2:275; and Ibn Iyyās, Raddī al-sulūk, 1 (pt. 2):550–53. Al-Sakhāwī’s abbreviated and relatively late account actually suggests that Südüm and the others were imprisoned during Ramādān; the other three sources, however, make clear that they were captured on the fourteenth day of Shawwāl.

90 Wafqīyyat Südüm min Zāda, Dīr al-Wathiqā, No. 50.


he might well have looked upon as a warning, he was imprisoned and fined—after Baṣrī’s restoration to the throne he amassed an extraordinary personal fortune. In A.H. 799 (1396–97), Maḥmūd was imprisoned and tortured to death, but his fall from grace had actually begun toward the beginning of A.H. 797 (1394–95)—the year in which he established a madrasa. In Baṣrī al-Awwal of that year, he was beaten and fined 150,000 dirhams at the orders of the sultan; in Baṣrī, he lost his post as ustādār, in Sha’bān, he was dismissed as head of the royal mint in Cairo; and in Ramādān he was fined another 150,000 dirhams. His subsequent losses—al-Maqrizī gives totals of 1,400,000 dinars, 1,000,000 silver dirhams, as well as goods valued at over 1,000,000 silver dirhams—need not concern us; the point is that by the time he built his madrasa, his position was precarious and worsening. Maḥmūd also seems to have attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, a new tack for protecting his wealth in a religious institution: in a.H. 798 (1395–96) the sultan’s men discovered and unearthed 6,000 dinars and more than a million silver dirhams from the ground behind his madrasa.  

A similar tale could be told concerning Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ustādār, who founded his famous khānqāh in Jumālā al-Awwal, A.H. 510 (October 1407), the construction of which was completed fourteen months later. In A.H. 809, Jamāl al-Dīn was appointed waṣīr al-ḥāṣaṣṣ, in addition to his post as ustādār, a combination of positions that effectively made him responsible for distributing to the army pay, food, and clothing, but that also exposed him to the wrath of the Mamluks should the funds at his disposal fall short. In the first month of A.H. 810 he was still strong enough to appoint his son, an incompetent youth of seventeen, to the position of supervising the annual pilgrimage (anṭīr al-ḥaqq). But the economy of Egypt was already in serious disarray, payments to the Mamluk soldiers were in arrears, and apparently much of the blame fell on Jamāl al-Dīn’s shoulders. He, too, might have read the writing on the wall; by A.H. 812 he was in disgrace, imprisoned and impoverished. Like Jamāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd, he hid a part of his treasure in his madrasa; like that of Amir Südüm, his endowment deed has survived. Consequently we know that it stipulated that the remainder of the endowment’s income after the expenses of the school were to go to his children and descendants, in equal shares for males and females, and that one of them was to hold the controllership of the endowment, at a stipend of 200 dirhams per month.  

92 Ibn Iyyās, Raddī al-sulūk, 1 (pt. 2):476. Maḥmūd’s story can be found in al-Maqrizī’s account of his madrasa, Khībat, 2:466–77; further details can be gleaned from his chronicle, al-Sulūk, 3:828–29.  

93 Wafqīyyat Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Ustādār, Dīr al-Wathiqā, No. 106. On the madrasa
Thus the establishment and endowment of schools ostensibly to benefit teachers, students, and the educated class more generally also offered the wealthy elite the opportunity to secure the transferral of at least some of their wealth to their heirs and descendants. From all accounts, it was a mechanism widely employed. Of the seven deeds of endowment considered in this study that neither made provisions for direct payments to designated children nor stipulated that they at least share in the paying out of controller of the endowment, three belonged to eunuchs, who presumably were childless. The Mamluk polity systematically precluded the ruling military elite from transferring their political power to their offspring. Indirectly, however, the endowment of institutions of religious education provided them with a means by which they might pass on their wealth to their descendants, and with it, perhaps, some portion of their status.

Endowing a School: Pious Considerations

We should not, however, be led to believe that only mercenary considerations led medieval men and women to establish and endow madrasas and other religious institutions. On the contrary, financial considerations were only one of a number of highly personal factors that informed the decision of an individual to endow a school or mosque. Above all, we should not dismiss the possibility that Mamluks and others established schools of higher education out of a genuine interest in their religious and instructional functions. For men such as Siraj al-Din ‘Umar al-Bulghini (d. 1403) or Badr al-Din Mahmod al-Awani (d. 1451), two leading scholars and judges who established institutions known as madrasas, such concerns may be assumed. For the members of the military elite and their families who established the majority of institutions of learning, the connection may be more practical. Can a pious interest in higher religious education be reconciled with the prevailing image, shared by many of the contemporary historians and biographers of the Mamluks as wild, ethnically lax, and only superficially Islamicized?

Cultural animosity toward the Turks—to which ethnic group, broadly speaking, most Mamluks belonged—and in particular skepticism of their intellectual attainments and sensitivity to religious matters, has deep roots in the Arab Islamic societies of the Near East. In the words of Ulrich Haarmann, Arab suspicion of the Turks amounts to the level of an ideology. From at least the ninth century, various Turkish military elites had intermittently ruled or dominated the central Islamic lands of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, and their political dominance perhaps naturally gave rise to cultural antipathies and ethnic stereotypes among their Arabic-speaking subjects. To be sure, the “Turk” was universally acknowledged to excel in the martial arts, an almost inescapable conclusion given their position in Muslim society. Moreover, at least among some, most notably the perceptible historian Ibn Khalid, resentment gradually gave way to a grudging acknowledgement that Turkish-speaking soldiers had performed an incalculable service to the Islamic world by delivering it from the dual threat of pagan Mongols and Christian Crusaders. But to most Muslim Arabs, the Turks in general, and Mamluks in particular, remained boors, alienated from the mainstream culture by their ignorance of Arabic and their indifference to Islam. Many scholars of the religious sciences were especially eager to deny the Mamluks any credit for achievement in academic or literary pursuits, and their prejudice infected the historical and biographical literature of the period.

But as Ulrich Haarmann has suggested, such self-serving attitudes of the religious scholars toward the Mamluks may do the Turkish soldiers an injustice. For a start, it should be remembered that most madrasas, khanqahs, and other religious institutions established during the two and a half centuries of Mamluk rule were associated with tombs for their founders and their wives and children, their descendants, and sometimes their household slaves. This was true for mainstream Madrasas—the madrasa of the Bulgini family, for example, functioned in fact as a family mausoleum, with many members of the family, both male and female, interred there over the course of the fifteenth century. But Mamluks also laid great stress on burial in a religious or academic institution, and most of the schools of Mamluk Cairo served this secondary purpose, housing the tombs not only of the sultans or amirs who founded the institutions, but of their families as well. During the insufing that fol-

---


29 See Humphreys, "Expressive Intent," 113-117.
lowed the assassination of Sultan Lâjin in the late thirteenth century, one of the Mamlik conspirators. Sayf al-Dîn Tughjî, was killed and his body unceremoniously carted away from the Citadel in a dung bin; the unflattering conveyance notwithstanding, his corpse was taken directly to his madrasa for burial. After the completion of the Nâşirîyya, Sultan al-Nâṣir Muhammad transported the body of his mother to his new madrasa for reburial; Sultan Barruqî also reinterred his deceased children upon the construction of the Zâhirîyya.39 When Zaynab bint Jîrahsh al-Kârimî died in 1460, she too was buried in Sultan Barruqî’s madrasa in Bayn al-Qârayn, because her mother, Fâtimah, was the daughter of Qânîlab, the son of Barruqî’s sister.40 Her connection to the sultan, who had died more than half a century earlier, was surely somewhat remote; that she shared his tomb testifies to the strength of the continuing bonds between the families of Mamliks and the institutions of learning their progenitors had founded.

Indeed, so great was the connection in the public mind between institutions of learning and places of burial that the terms madrasa and turba (tomb) could be conflated. Several institutions in late medieval Cairo were known as “turbas,” but functioned as schools. Al-Shâbîl Kâfir (d. 1427) built a turba outside of Cairo, and made provisions for the recitation in it of a sermon (khutba) during the Friday prayers. But a contemporary historian noted that “he had another madrasa” (na’ma lårna madrasa ikhrî) in Kâht Hârat al-Daylam, as if the two terms were synonymous.41 The point is simply to stress the connection, as these things were popularly understood, between the establishment of an institution of learning and the provision of a burial spot for oneself and one’s family. The concern of the founder was to secure for himself, and for any buried with him, the baraka, or blessing, associated with the holy activities of the school—the study and teaching of law and other religious subjects, performance of the Sufi exercises, recitation of the Quran, prayer. Jawhar al-Lâlî spilled out explicitly his concern that his tomb, attached to his madrasa, absorb through a sort of osmosis the blessings somehow connected with pious endeavors. He stipulated in his deed of endowment that, in addition to himself, one should be buried there “who is a man of good deeds and religion and knowledge, and who is famous for [his] righteous-

40 Al-Sakhâwî, al-Dawâ’, 12:8-41.
41 Ibn Taghît Bîdîr, al-Nujum al-adhârî, 15:143. Amir Jâmbak al-Zâhirî (d. 1460) established outside Bib al-Qarâqa a “turba” that “included a madrasa and rasasun [i.e., provisions for Sufis] and a primary school for orphans.” Al-Sakhâwî, al-Dawâ’, 3:57-59. Amir Amâs al-Ashraf (d. ca. 1475) built a “turba” and established in it classes for Hanâlis, with provisions for seven students. Ibid., 3:521. On the confusion of institutional terms generally, see Chapter Three.

ness and [in whom the people] believe, so that his blessings may accrue to the founder.”42 Sultan Baybars, we are told, announced piously to the scholars assembled in the madrasa he had built in Bayn al-Qârayn that “I established this place for God, and when I die, do not bury me here, and do not change the character of it.” But he was buried in a madrasa nonetheless, as one in Damascus built posthumously and especially for that purpose.43 Consequently the deeds of endowment often provided prayer leaders, Quran readers, and other minor religious posts specifically for the tombs established in or alongside madrasas, “for formal Quran recitations for the sake of those buried in the tomb,” as one late fifteenth-century deed put it.44 People felt keenly the continuing presence of the entombed founder in the burial structure, as an amusing anecdote concerning the madrasa and tomb of Khwâd Hadâr al-Hâjrîyya, a daughter of Sultan al-Nâṣir Muhammad, suggests. Upon discovering that one of the Quran readers had entered the domed burial chamber (qibba) without long drapers (sarásâ’il), the chief of the eunuchs who guarded and cared for the qibba beat the man and berated him because he “entered into [the presence] of Khwâd Hadâr without drapers”—that is, disrespectfully, without the proper garments, threatening the efficacy of his pious task.45 The presence of entombed founders and their relatives ensured that institutions of higher education would play a part in the broader Muslim phenomenon of the suydârât, the visitation of the dead in their tombs.46 Sultan al-Zâhir Barruqî specifically set aside the burial chamber next to his madrasa for the benefit of “those who frequent it, Quran readers, the sultan’s descendents . . . and his relatives,” and employed eunuchs to serve and guard the tomb.47 Not surprisingly, as Barruqî’s deed suggests, a founder’s descendents might frequent his tomb and the associated madrasa to visit their father, mother, or relatives, and to attend the ongoing religious or educational activities. Other schools provided private accommodations (ma‘âbit) for overnight visitors to the tomb from among the founder’s families or their descendents. We know from references in the chronicles that such schools, or more precisely those buried in them, were routinely visited. Sultan Barruqî used it to visit his deceased father Amâs,
Religious Learning among the Mamluks

A desire on the part of individual Mamluks to secure an efficacious burial setting thrust the confines of personal concerns that informed their decisions to endow institutions of learning. By itself the fact that most founders were buried in their madrasas, mosques, or khânsâqs, even that they were buried specifically in order to be the beneficiaries of the baraka of the institutions’ activities, does little to broaden our picture of Mamluk piety, except to stress that the Mamluks participated in religious exercises that lay at the heart of the religious experience of most medieval Muslims. The broader question of piety among the Mamluks is in fact a far more complex issue, an issue whose bizarre and intriguing history has yet to be written. 49 Here we confine ourselves to remarks touching on the surprisingly pervasive interest in Islamic religious and legal learning among the Mamluk elite. The genuineness of any individual’s religious experience is an almost impossible matter to judge. But a close look at these Mamluks who did endow institutions of religious education suggests that the image of a rapacious and nonreligious alien military elite, unconcerned with the spiritual and especially the educational affairs of Islam, bears revision.

In theory, at least, all Mamluks were exposed to at least the basics of Muslim religious practice and learning. The conversion to Islam of the young, foreign-born, newly imported slaves was the sine qua non of their training, and so, for example, the education of the royal Mamluks in Cairo’s Citadel included a grounding in the fundamentals of Islam. Al-Maqrîzî, in a famous passage in his topographical history of Cairo, described their training. They were schooled in Arabic and Arabic writing, and above all in the Quran, by a local Muslim scholar (faqih) who came to them every day. Their teacher sought to instill in them the “good manners of the holy law” (âdâb al-shar’i‘), and so they instructed them in the basic rituals of religion, such as prayer, as well as, perhaps, a “bit of jurisprudence.” The explicit purpose of the training was their acculturation to the religion and norms of local Muslim society, or as al-Maqrîzî put it, “the mingling of the glorification of Islam and its people in their hearts.” 50

It is becoming clear that the acculturation of the Mamluks into mainstream Muslim society was by no means unsuccessful. The ethical laxity of many Mamluks, and the consequent hostility toward them on the part of the religious scholars and historians of medieval Cairo, should not disguise the extent to which large numbers of adult Mamluks participated in the religious life of the Egyptian capital, and in particular it should not obscure their eagerness to involve themselves in the transmission of Muslim learning. The research of Ulrich Haarmann in the biographical literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has identified a number of individual Mamluks who exhibited genuine and pious interest in religious and legal learning, and who to that end forged deep personal connections to the ulama of the cities of Egypt and Syria. Over the last century and a half of Mamluk rule, as the Hanîfi rite to which most Mamluks belonged came to occupy a more prominent place in Cairo’s religious and educational institutions, and as more and more Turkish-speaking Hanîfi scholars from Anatolia, Iran, and more remote Asian provinces flocked to Cairo, the intellectual and personal ties that bound the Mamluks to the world of Islamic learning grew only more intense. 51

It is against this background that the decision of individual Mamluks to endow institutions of learning must be seen. The chroniclers and biographers report, almost as a matter of course, that many of those amirs who established schools were “religious” (âlîynâmî) and “charitable” 52

50 Al-Maqrîzî, al-Sulûk, 3:190.
51 For some preliminary comments, see Donald Little, “Religion under the Mamluks,” The Muslim World 73 (1983), 105-81, esp. 165-72.
One such was a certain ‘Ali al-Din Taybars, who built his madrasa outside the door to the al-Azhar mosque, although the historian does remark that his character was "in contrast to Albugha 'Abd al-Wahid," a notoriously oppressive and covetous Mamluk with little appreciation for Muslim ethical principles, "who also built his madrasa at the door to al-Azhar." But not all Mamluks who endowed schools also participated actively in various forms of religious or legal instruction. They include, of course, sultans such as al-Nasir Hasan, Qaytbay, and Qansuh al-Ghawri, whose interest in intellectual matters is well known, but also some of the more obscure Mamluk amirs who founded the numerous smaller schools of the city.

‘Alam al-Din Sanjar al-Jawari, the Mamluk who, as we have seen, founded a madrasa outside Cairo in 1323, presents a striking example. Al-Maqrizi called him al-faqih al-Shafi‘i ("the Shafi‘i scholar or jurist") who, during the eight years he spent in prison, "copied the Quran and books of hadith and the like." Al-Maqrizi’s high opinion of Sanjar was shared by other chroniclers, such as the Syrian Ibn Habih, who noted that he "heard hadith and transmitted it, and read jurisprudence according to the Shafi‘i rite, and issued legal opinions [fatwas] and composed books, and met with scholars and was charitable toward them." Among the works he transmitted was the Ma‘mad of al-Shafi‘i, a collection of hadith excerpted from that famous jurist’s treatise al-Mahاشi, he went so far as to compose an arrangement of these treatises in topical order, and wrote a commentary on them in several volumes. For Sanjar our information is more detailed, but he was certainly not unique. Sayf al-Din al-Malik, originally a Mamluk of Sultan Qalawun’s who rose to become viceroy in Egypt, established both a mosque and a madrasa with a lesson in Shafi‘i law in the Husayniyya district to the north of the walled city of Cairo. He was known, we are told, for sitting in his mosque all day long without becoming tired or bored. Ibn Taghi Birdi also reports that he frequently sat with students during their lessons. One scholar even prepared for him a masyakhha, a list of those shaykhs on whose authority he was entitled to transmit hadith.

---


---

Taghti Birdi: ‘I-Bakalmish (d. 1442), a powerful amir who held several of the most important offices of state in the Mamluk kingdom, built an institution near the mosque of Ibn Tulun that is variously called a madrasa and a jam‘i, but whose endowments certainly supported at least one professor in one of the religious sciences. As ḥāfi‘ al-‘ulamā‘, in which office he held remarkable responsibilities, he undertook his duties seriously, and "never heard a petition sent [to him] without struggling to do justice, as he saw it." As a member of the ruling military elite, of course, he took an interest in things such as farisūtiya, the skills and practical knowledge of horsemanship and the military games that lay at the core of a Mamluk’s training and active life. Yet he also "wrote in a hand appropriate to his station and studied jurisprudence and asked questions of the legal scholars and studied various histories." Nor was his interest in legal matters superficial, as he "memorized questions about which the jurists disputed." 85

A simple suggestion may clarify the situation: namely, that we avoid the assumption that the kind of violent and (from a strict Islamic perspective) unethical behavior in which the Mamluks often indulged precluded a serious interest in religious and educational matters. Tuthām al-Hāsani al-Zahirī (d. 1415), who built a madrasa near the home of the scholarly Būqlān family in the Bahri al-Din quarter of Cairo, in his younger days was a drunkard and a reveler, but later changed his ways, and sat and studied with the ulama.86 Amir Sayf al-Din Sharifīth (d. 1358) not only established an important madrasa for Ḥanafis to the north of the mosque of Ibn Tulun, but by all accounts studied jurisprudence and other subjects, enjoyed the company of the ulama and frequently sat with them in their study circles, and became an ardent partisan of the Ḥanafī rite. Yet, "his morals were vicious and his spirit strong, and although he studied jurisprudence and [the Arabic] language, his behavior went beyond the proper bounds." 87

An intellectual preoccupation with religious sciences thus informed the decision of some Mamluks to build and endow a school or other institute.

86 Al-Salāhib, al-Daw‘, 4:11.
87 The words are al-Maqrizi’s, Khait, 2:404–5; cf. Ibn Taghi Birdi, al-Najumi al-zahira, 10:328, and Ahmad Ibn Haqqar al-Aṣqānī, al-Daw‘ al-kāmil wa fī a`īn al-ma‘āl-i al-thābita (Cairo, 1900–67), 2:305–6. Leenor Fernandez discusses Sārghītiyyah, his madrasa, and his almost fanatical partisanship of the Ḥanafī rite in her article, "Mamluk Politics and Education."
tion, but the broader point to be stressed is that a religious education, or at least some familiarity with the texts and traditions of Muslim learning, was not unusual among the Mamluks. To be sure, it is in fact difficult to determine precisely the extent of learning among the Mamluks. Even with a systematic study of the entries for amirs in the biographical dictionaries, we could not be certain that all the information was at our disposal, since the sources do not claim to give the comprehensive life stories of their subjects. But the biographical dictionaries in fact abound with tantalizing hints relating to the education of the military class. The historians record nothing unusual in the fact that an amir had "memorized the Quran, and heard [the recitation of] hadith," or that another "participated in [the study of] jurisprudence and history," or that one wrote in a good hand in addition to having studied jurisprudence and the variant Quran readings. Other Mamluks besides Bakaldish al-'Alîy (d. 1398) were partisans of the Hanafi rite, and others besides Argbân al-Nâşirî (d. 1331) collected books in the various sciences and wrote out their own copies of the Sâhib of al-Bukhârî. Not infrequently do the historians—most of whom, such as al-Sakhâwî, were themselves scholars or from scholarly families—give as a Mamluk's epithet the title "al-fâqîh." All this, however, is more suggestive than definitive, and more nuanced questions must be put to the sources. If many Mamluks, and in particular many Mamluk founders of schools and other religious institutions, were in some sense "learned," what significance can we in fact attach to their education in the Islamic sciences? What was the extent of their learning, and what limitations differentiated it from the education of a fully trained scholar? Above all, did they participate actively in the transmission of the Muslim religious and legal sciences?

The term fâqîh (pl. fuqahâ') means "religious scholar or student" or, more properly, "scholar of the religious law." It is difficult, however, to be certain as to what exactly the biographers intended when they applied the title to particular Mamluks. The sources only rarely provide details of an amir's education, beyond saying that "he studied [religious] knowledge" (lahu istîghâl hil'îm), or "he studied jurisprudence" (ta- faqqa, lahu mushâriqa fi'l-fa'qîh), or "he read a number of legal treatises" (wa kâna ... yaqra'nu fi ba'd al-ra'sîdî al-fa'qhiyya), although that

68 Examples can be found in al-Sakhâwî, al-Durr, 3:45, 53-54, 276; Ibn Iyâs, Râ'dî'î al-nabîy, 3:149, 602.

is true of many civilians as well. Consequently there is no guarantee that use of the term reflected a significant intellectual achievement. Over the course of the Mamluk period, other valuable appellations, such as "gâdi" and "amîr," also came to be applied more generously than some purists might allow, and the same may well apply to the term "fâqîh." But when a Mamluk was accorded and accepted the epithet "al-fâqîh," he was in effect appropriating to himself a title of enormous cultural significance that commanded a premium of social respect. Whether or not he deserved the title is almost secondary to his desire to secure it and the willingness of the Muslim community to recognize his appropriation of it.

To be sure, serious limitations prevented many Mamluks from becoming, even if they had desired it, full-fledged scholars. In their encounter with the sophisticated Islamic sciences beyond their rudimentary training in the barracks, many did not penetrate beyond the preliminary layers of learning. Sayf al-Dîn Aqfîhî (d. 1448) studied jurisprudence, but only understood its superficial questions (zawârid masâ'il). Sayf al-Dîn Süâdîn al-Zâhîrî (d. 1440) was "an all-round fâqîh" (kâna ... fâqîhan fil-jumla); but although he studied jurisprudence assiduously, he "wasted his time in doing so," according to Ibn Taghîr Bîrdî, "because of his limited understanding and lack of imagination." Ibn Hajar commented of his Mamluk son-in-law, Shâhîn al-'Aliy (d. 1456), that although he had copied in his own hand al-Shâfi'i, a popular treatise on the life and attributes of the Prophet, and Mâlik Ibn Anas' early law book, the Munâfîrî, "it was worth less than the paper, and he did not benefit from it." Indeed, even comparatively educated Mamluks may not always have fully understood that which they studied—for all, for most of these Turkish-speaking soldiers, Arabic was a second language. Amir Khâyr Bâkî (d. 1462), who established a madrasa in the Zu'âq (Halab, wrote well, and "studied the variant Quran readings and jurisprudence and the principles of religion, and in general understood [them]." However, his biographer gently noted, "if he proved more deeply and brought up particular examples, it would have been better for him to avoid them." Uzvâkîn Tutûkh al-Zâhîrî, who established a teaching mosque, studied with

69 Examples can be found in al-Sakhâwî, al-Durr, 2:311, 329, 10:277.
70 One can even find the verb tu'addul, which usually connoted a primary education, employed to describe the intellectual relationship between a Mamluk and a scholar; see, for example, al-Sakhâwî, al-Durr, 3:10.
several hadith scholars while he was still a young Mamluk in the barracks in the Citadel, yet the man who actually recited the hadith on that occasion, Taqi al-Din al-Qalqashandi, commented that Uzbak "did not understand a word of Arabic." On the other hand, despite the cultural importance of Arabic, the simple fact that a Mamluk could not communicate effectively in the local language by itself does not indicate an alienation from the various forms of Muslim piety, or even from Islamic religious knowledge and its transmission. In the fertile cultural ground of the Mamluk court, a vibrant Turkish literary tradition also took root, through which the Mamluks were exposed to various religious writings, such as lives of the Prophet, Sufi poetry, and basic legal treatises, as well as to profane literature from Persia and elsewhere.

A little knowledge, when improperly wielded, can be dangerous; the rug supplies to the Mamluks as well as others, and the tentative immersion of the military elite in the world of higher Islamic learning could engender complications. Amir Azizummur al-Tawiri, originally a Mamluk of Sultan al-Zahir Jarkaqq who rose to hold several high offices of state, was eventually banished to Mecca and, in 1480, was strangled by order of Sultan Qayt Bays. Azizummur studied the Quran intensively and successfully, so much so that he recited it in an organized group. And although he, like Khayr Bak, understood things "in general," his stubbornness led him to "meddle in [matters] that did not concern him, and to [have] evil beliefs [māʾ 'aqida] and [to] make light of matters of religion and mistreat many legal scholars and [to] scorn them."67

It is important, however, that we not simply compare the participation of the Mamluks in higher Muslim learning and education to the systematic instruction that produced a fully trained civilian scholar, and then judge the former to be inferior. Their purposes, for a start, were clearly different. Whereas an 'alim was intensively trained for an academic or judicial career from an early age, a Mamluk's religious or legal education necessarily took a back seat to training in the military arts, which alone could assure him of a successful career. On the whole, a strict consciousness of identities characterized both academic and military elites. Occasionally, an exceptionally well-educated Mamluk might be certified to hold an official teaching position, as was Arghun al-Nasiri (d. 1331), wādār to Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad, who constructed a madrasa in Mecca and "received permission to issue fatwas and teach [Hanafi jurisprudence]."68 But in general, Mamluks did not teach in or hold endowed chairs in the religious schools of Cairo any more than scholars accepted military commissions.

Many Mamluks may have conceived of the recitation of the Quran and other religious works more as entertainment than as education. The biographical dictionaries reveal that many of these warriors delighted especially in the reading of histories and literature, and Sultan Barsbay's close relationship with the scholar and judge Badr al-Din al-'Ayubi, who translated for him books of history, is well known.69 Al-Suhki complained bitterly of Quran readers and those who recited poems in praise of the Prophet (mushahid, pt. munshhidin) that they often frequented amirs who clearly derived no spiritual nourishment from the recitations, but rather considered the readings a sort of "background noise" or entertainment:

Once I saw a munshid at the encampment [mukhabayram] of one of the amirs, where many people had gathered. He was reading a poem and reciting the attributes of the Prophet, may God bless and preserve him, but the people were not listening to him; indeed, there was no one there who understood what he was saying. Because of this I experienced a heart-rending pain.70

Other Mamluks may have touched the world of education more intimately through some personal circumstance. Mamluks, of course, frequently married the daughters of the educated elite, and through such marriage alliances the soldiers may have been introduced at least to the basics of Islamic learning. Zaynab, the daughter of the prominent fifteenth-century Hanafi jurist al-Amin al-Aqsa'ari, married in succession a Mamluk of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay and one of Sultan al-Zahir Jarkaqq. Both took at least elementary steps into the world of education, and both owed their accomplishments to their marriage into a family of learning. The first husband, Janihak al-Zahir, wrote in a hand good and copied a number of works such as al-Shifa, which he studied with his father-in-law.71 Jarkaqq al-Ashraf, who married Zaynab after Janihak's death, also "was instructed" (tahaddidhaha) by his wife's father, and managed successfully to memorize the entire Quran.72 Al-Aqsa'ari was also related by

71 Al-Suhaki, al-Daw, 3:54. The important phrase reads qurratuha 'alid (lit., he read it without [ahd]. The Arabic word ahd implies any kinsman of a man's wife, it is therefore of course possible that Janihak received his education from a brother of Zaynab's, although her father seems the most likely candidate. Cf. E. W. Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon (London, 1863-69), s.v. "ahd."
72 Al-Suhaki, al-Daw, 3:75.
marriage to another prominent Mamluk. Yashbak al-Zāhirī al-Saghīr (d. 1480 or 81), who according to al-Sakhāwī also took an interest in the Islamic sciences, collecting books and building three separate madrasas in Cairo. Al-Aqṣārī’s efforts to educate his Mamluk relations proved more successful than those of Ibn Ḥajar, but the fact that they all attempted to relate on an academic plane is itself significant.

Within the constraints under which they operated, the accomplishments of many Mamluks in the world of Islamic education were by no means trivial. That many would take the time and trouble even to attempt to study Muslim jurisprudence is itself remarkable. And if the efforts of some produced only meager results, others reached a position in which they could actively apply their legal training. Sanjar al-Dawārī, who established a madrasa in the early fourteenth century, was not the only Mamluk who was accorded the title smīṭ, and who was thereby qualified to issue fatwās on the basis of Islamic law. Others, such as Arghūn al-Nāṣīrī, a Mamluk of Sultan Qalāwūn who eventually became vicerey in Egypt and dawārī, also “studied Ḥanafī jurisprudence and excelled in it until he was accounted one who issued fatwās.”

Such learning, it seems, was not wholly incompatible with the political and military responsibilities facing a prominent Mamluk. Yashbak al-Faqīh (d. 1473), for example, was an extraordinarily accomplished student of jurisprudence, the variant Qur’an readings, and ḥadith. He received private lessons from several scholars, including al-Badr ibn ʿAlī Ṭūlūn, who visited him several days a week, and with whom he studied al-Hidāya, a fundamental textbook of Ḥanafī jurisprudence. He also studied with al-Sakhāwī, reading to the scholar and historian parts of the ʿAǧāḥ of al-Bukhārī, and hearing al-Sakhāwī recite several of his own works, including al-Qawl al-badī’ fī al-yawāqūt ʿalā ʿl-badī’, a long treatise on the prophethood of the Prophet. Al-Sakhāwī was apparently pleased with the progress and understanding of this Mamluk who proclaimed to him: “I will continue to read with you until I encounter God and [become] a student of the religious sciences.” Yet Yashbak was no misfit Mamluk. He participated in campaigns against the “Franks,” became involved in the political intrigues that plagued the Mamluk government during the fifteenth century, and served as dawārī to Sultan al-Zahir Khoshqadām. Taghī Birmish al-Faqīh studied all of the major collections of hadith with some of the leading scholars of his day. Ibn Ḥajar, in whose presence Taghī Birmish read the Sunan of Abū Dā’ūd, referred to his Mamluk student as “our companion, the outstanding muḥaddith,” using a technical term that indicated a transmitter of traditions of wide knowledge and prominent standing.

The widespread interest of the Mamluks in the Prophetic traditions has great significance for the social and cultural history of medieval Cairo, and in particular has a direct bearing on the integration of the military elite into the cultural life of their Muslim subjects, despite the widely slavery at the age of seven; whatever his origins, he outshone most other Mamluks in the extent of his learning. Both Ibn Taghī Birdī and al-Sakhāwī listed the names of many of those with whom he studied jurisprudence and especially hadith. Among them were several of the leading scholars of his day, including Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Sirāj al-Dīn ʿUmār (known as Qārī al-Hidāya, who held professorships in Ḥanafī law at prestigious schools such as the Ash’arīyya, the Naṣīrīyya, and the Ash’ubīyya), and Saʿd al-Dīn al-Dīrī, who taught Ḥanafī jurisprudence at the Fakhriyya madrasa, the mosque of al-Muʿayyad Shaykh, and other institutions. Taghī Birmish’s active commitment to academic pursuits, in the midst of an otherwise unexceptional military and political career, stands as a sort of benchmark for what an eager Mamluk could achieve. His intellectual association with prominent transmitters of the Muslim sciences suggests the degree to which the academic elite, although it complained about the Mamluks as a group, accepted as routine the participation of individual soldiers in the pursuit of religious knowledge.

Mamluks and the Transmission of Hadith

Above all, Mamluks listened eagerly to the recitation of hadith, and some participated actively in its transmission. The biographical literature frequently mentions amirs who participated in public recitations of the important books of traditions, such as the ʿAǧāḥ of al-Bukhārī and Muslim ibn al-Ḥujjāj, or the Masābīḥ, a popular collection containing hadith excerpted from the larger and more comprehensive volumes. It was not unusual for Mamluks to hear recitations supervised by prominent transmitters such as Ibn Ḥajar, or to attend sessions in a prominent educational institution such as the Shaykhīyya khānqāh. Taghī Birmish al-Faqīh studied all of the major collections of hadith with some of the leading scholars of his day. Ibn Ḥajar, in whose presence Taghī Birmish read the Sunan of Abū Dā’ūd, referred to his Mamluk student as “our companion, the outstanding muḥaddith,” using a technical term that indicated a transmitter of traditions of wide knowledge and prominent standing.

The widespread interest of the Mamluks in the Prophetic traditions has great significance for the social and cultural history of medieval Cairo, and in particular has a direct bearing on the integration of the military elite into the cultural life of their Muslim subjects, despite the widely

---

23 Ibid., 10:275–74.
26 Al-Sakhāwī, al-Dīrār, 10:270–72.