held prejudice that Mamluks were by nature and training unsuited to academic pursuits. Sometimes the transmission of hadith forged tangible links between Mamluks and scholars, or brought them together in specialized, institutionalized settings. As we shall see, most of the schools established by Mamluks and others made provisions for the public recitation of particular collections of hadith during Ramadan and the two months that preceded it; but some members of the military elite organized such sessions in their own homes. Thus during Baybars, Sha'ban, and Ramadan, Bardhak al-Ashraf, a Mamluk of Sultan Nasir who amassed extraordinary wealth, would hold in his home settings for the recitation of the Sahih of al-Bukhari "to which legal scholars, judges, and the like would hurry." One historian even reports that at the end of the fourteenth century the Mamluk amirs "paid great attention to the ulama, and each amir had his own scholar of hadith ['ilm bi'ahadith] who would recite to the Mamluks [al-neds] and summon them to listen." These "private scholars" or tutors were not necessarily men of minimal standing in the academic community, who gratefully accepted the direct patronage of amirs after failing to secure reputable positions in educational institutions. They might in fact be prominent hadith transmitters: Zayn al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iraqi (d. 1404), who held positions as professor of hadith in the mosque of Ibn Tullin, the dar al-hadith al-Kamiliiyya, and the Qarawiyyiyya and Zahiriyiyya madrasas, at different times had two leading Mamluks as "his amir." The recitation of hadith was a common phenomenon even at the very heart of the Mamluk state. In the Citadel that towered above the city of Cairo, traditionists were routinely appointed to the post of "reader of hadith" (gāri al-hadith). We do not know what stipend the appointment carried, but it was held by some of the leading scholars of Mamluk Cairo, including Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Asad (d. 1468), a specialist in the Quran readings who also held teaching positions in the mosque of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh and the Sābiqiyiyaa and Zahiriyiyya madrasas. Ibn Asad's appointment to the position was made through the intervention of his pupil Yashbak al-Faqih, an exceptionally well educated Mamluk.

At least some Mamluks also participated actively in the transmission of this particular field of Islamic learning. One mark of the exceptional quality of the learning of 'Alam al-Din Sanjar, whom we encountered as the founder of the Jāwiliyya madrasa, is that, in addition to writing books or treatises and issuing fatwas, he transmitted hadith to other students of

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Religious Education & the Mamluks: The subject. Amir Al Malik, who built a teaching mosque in the Husayniyya district outside of Cairo, also recited the Prophet's traditions. Mamluks were occasionally mentioned by prominent hadith scholars in their masajid, the book-length lists or biographical dictionaries of those on whose authority an individual transmitted the Prophet's traditions. Thus Aqiqi al-Tuizi, an otherwise obscure Mamluk of whose education we know almost nothing, was mentioned in the masjid of Abū Ja'far Ibn al-Kuwayk, a scholar who held the professorship in hadith at the tomb attached to the masjid of al-'Azhar Baybars in Cairo. Ibn Hajir al-'Asqalani himself, in his own account of those with whom he studied and on whose authority he recited hadith, mentioned at least two Mamluks. One of them was Yalbugha al-Zahirī (d. 1409), who heard hadith in Ibn Hajir's company for a time. The other was Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh who, according to Ibn Hajir, transmitted the Sahih of al-Bukhari on the authority of shaykh al-islam Siraj al-Din [Umār] al-Bukhari, with [his] iṣnaḍ [license to transmit]. Admittedly, both received mention only in al-fahaqa al-saghira of Ibn Hajir's list, that is, the "minor class" that included a wide variety of people, mostly non-specialists or transmitters of only minimal repute. But the point is that not the Mamluks ever became a mainstay of preservation of and instruction in the Prophet's traditions. It is simply that they found it worthwhile to participate in the transmission of this culturally valuable body of knowledge, and that the ulama provided them with space in which to pursue their interest.

That they were able to do so was in part a function of the principles and values that governed the transmission of Muslim texts, and in particular the persistent priority given to personal oral contacts over institutional affiliations. From a comparatively early period, it was accepted that one could only transmit hadith on the basis of a sound isnaḍ, a chain of the names of those individuals who had personally "received" the hadith from an earlier transmitter, ultimately linking the student through an unbroken succession to the Prophet himself or to one of his companions. This same principle was applied to virtually all texts and to the transmission of the later collections of hadith. Consequently, it was imperative
that one who wished to transmit hadith receive a personal authorization
to do so from one who was himself (or herself) a recognized transmitter.
The authorization could take one of several forms. In the most reliable
and authoritative form of transmission, a student heard the transmitter
himself recite a particular collection of hadith ( sawad ', literally "hearing").
Marginally less reliable was the case in which the student read, or heard
another read, hadith to the transmitter ( qurū 'a, literally "reading"). But
the personal connection between student and transmitter could be estab-
lished even without an actual encounter; the student simply requested,
perhaps in writing, a shaykh to issue to him an authorization ( ijāza )
to transmit a particular collection. The simple ijāza, however, was consid-
erably less reliable or prestigious than one issued to a student who could
claim to have personally heard the shaykh recite the hadith, or at least to
have himself recited them in the shaykh's presence. 77

It was also important, however, to reduce to as low a number as pos-
sible the names in the isnād, on the theory that with fewer links in the
chain, errors in transmission were less likely to occur. Consequently,
transmitters of hadith generally became more prominent as they aged.
Mamluks, therefore, like anyone else, might distinguish themselves by
transmitting hadith on the authority of respected shaykhah who had died
some time previously. The biographers note, for example, that several
amirs heard the recitation of hadith from "al-Ghumārī" in a H. 802 (1390-
1400), and that thereafter the amirs transmitted the hadith they had
heard. Most likely the shaykh in question was Muḥammad b. Muḥam-
mad b. "Ali al-Ghumārī, a famous mufaddith and grammarian who died
in that same year. The amirs, in other words, became valued transmitters
on the authority of al-Ghumārī because they were among the last to hear
hadith directly from the shaykh; they were even cited among those from
whom the famous mufaddith al-Baqʿī transmitted traditions. 88
Similarly, Alṭunbughā b. Alṭurqī (d. 1412-13) survived to become the last
man to transmit hadith on the authority of Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Ḥajār (a
woman who also transmitted on the authority of al-Ḥajār outlived Alṭun-
bughā by a year, as we shall see). That he had studied with the master

77 On ijāzas and the other forms of transmission of hadith, see Chapter Two. Cf. Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition, s.v. "Hadith" (by J. Robinson).
78 See al-Sakhwāwī's biographies of the amirs al-Sayf Buhāšīnsh and al-Sayf Bālār, al-Daw, 3:17, 18, respectively. The identification of al-Ghumārī as the Muḥammad b. Muḥ-
mānmad b. "Ali who bore that name is based on (a) the fact that he died in the year the
two amirs are said to have heard his recitation of hadīth—and hence the detail's significa-
cence to the historian; and (b) the fact that Buhāšīnsh is said to have transmitted "as a companion"
of al-Sakhwāwī's shaykh al-Zayn Rūfiān, who was also a student of al-Ghumārī's. For al-
Ghumārī's biography, see ibid., 9:149-50. The al-Baqʿī who listed both amirs among his
shaykhah was probably Buhrān al-Dīn Buhāšīnsh b. "Umar b. Ḥasan al-Baqʿī (d. 1400), whose
obituary notice is given in Ibn Iyās, Raudat al-mahārī, 3:108.
79 Ibn Ḥajar, Isbat al-ghawāʾīn, 7:92.
81 Alṭunbughā's biography is found in al-Sakhwāwī, al-Daw, 2:270-72. A fuller account of the sessions in the Citadel may be found in Ibn Ṭaghhrī Birdī's biographical notice of Taqī al-Ṭahāwī, al-Musnad al-ṣafī, 4:78-73.
But the significance of the event lies elsewhere. It lies, above all, in the importance that was apparently attached to the attendance of young Mamluks from the royal barracks at sessions for the recitation of hadith. Uzbak may not have attended all the sessions, and he may not have understood all that he heard; but more than half a century later, his biographer found the event significant enough, and found at his disposal sufficient materials, to tell us precisely which portions of the books Uzbak did hear recited. In other words, it mattered to Uzbak that he had attended the sessions, and that he had studied with the visiting shaykhs. In this event we may catch a glimpse of a world in which young Mamluks were introduced to the sciences of Islam and to the shaykhs who transmitted that knowledge, an acquaintance that in many engagements respect and a desire to "learn" (however thoroughly) more, and which no doubt contributed later in life to an inclination to establish and endow schools for the inculcation of those sciences.

Whether they heard the recitation of hadith or plunged into the intricacies of jurisprudence, the Mamluks as a group and as individuals were continually exposed to Islamic higher education. Regardless of the success or lack thereof of their intellectual endeavors, the decision of individual Mamluks to endow institutions of learning must be seen against this background, as a gesture of an individual to an academic world in which, in some limited but meaningful way, he had shared.

VI
WOMEN AND EDUCATION

The seeking of knowledge is a duty of every Muslim," went a popular hadith of the Prophet. The historian and traditionist al-Sakhawi, in his compilation of well-known traditions, warned that a number of copyists had added to the end of the hadith the words "sa'ad al-mustafa, so as to make the search for knowledge the "duty of every man and female Muslim." Accuracy in the transmission of the Prophet's words of course commanded a premium, and al-Sakhawi felt constrained to warn his readers that the addition was not supported by the best authorities. It is nonetheless a matter of historical interest that the scribes who copied the books of traditions added, as a matter of course, two small extra words so as to make women, too, explicitly subject to the command of the Prophet. And in any case, as al-Sakhawi noted, whatever Mu'ammar's actual words, the meaning of the modified hadith was nonetheless "correct."

Given the extraordinary value that Muslim society placed on knowledge and its acquisition and transmission, it is hardly surprising that women, too, should be encouraged to seek out and treasure religious knowledge. After all, the lure and prestige of learning proved so compelling that it managed to draw into the cultural center a military elite otherwise alienated from many of the forms of Muslim cultural life. And of course most of the Muslim women of Cairo—native speakers of Arabic, born to the Muslim faith—faced the same cultural handicaps that the Mamluks had to overcome. In another sense, however, women, like the Mamluks, formed a group of "outsiders." Even if not always confined strictly to the borders of the "haram," their lives were nonetheless circumscribed by a variety of legal and social restrictions, some of which bore directly on the availability of opportunities for their education.

This ambivalence carried over into attitudes regarding the very propriety of educating women. For example, a manual for market inspectors (muhattahib) dating from the Mamluk period cautioned against teaching women to write, citing a tradition of the Prophet to that effect. According to the manual, a woman might be safely instructed in certain passages of the Quran, in particular "Sura al-Nur," but "it is said that a woman who

1 Shams al-Din Muazzam al-Sakhawi, al-Maqasid al-hasanah fi bayan kathir min ahadith al-mushtahara 'ala 'l-ulma (Cairo, 1956), 275-77.
learns [how to] write is like a snake given poison to drink.” Such an attitude may have reflected a certain “folk wisdom” among the general urban population, but was by no means universally shared, especially by the ulama. More representative of feeling among the learned elite, perhaps, was the opinion of a leading Shafi’i jurist of the thirteenth century who cited another tradition, this from the Sahih of al-Bukhari: “How splendid were the women of the ansâr,” the Medineans “helpers” of the Prophet. “Shame did not prevent them from becoming learned (yatafaqqahna) in the faith.”

Whatever the theoretical duty of Muslim women to seek knowledge, the practical obstacles facing those living in medieval Cairo were hardly insignificant. Their restricted role in society at large combined with the ambivalence of certain shapers of public opinion to make it difficult, although by no means impossible, for a woman to acquire a significant education in the religious sciences. The fact that many did nonetheless become learned, as we shall see, testifies both to their own perseverance and, once again, to the extraordinary power of attraction that knowledge wielded in this society, the respect accorded those who possessed it, and its capacity to overcome, if not flatten, many of the social and cultural barriers that cut across the medieval Islamic world.

The Place of Women in Educational Institutions

If the spread of institutions devoted to religious education over the later Middle Ages proved beneficial to the academic world generally, it was not necessarily so with regard to women inclined to intellectual pursuits. Here, as much as anywhere, the ambivalence in Islamic cultural attitudes toward the education of females had practical consequences. The ties between women and the world of formal academic institutions were complex and uneven. Muslim women could own, inherit, and dispose of property, and so it is only natural that women as well as men gave generously of their wealth to secure the transmission of Muslim religious knowledge. The administration of schools, no matter who their founder and benefactor, and of their endowments could also fall upon the shoulders of women. In matters relating more directly to instruction, however, institutions of learning accorded women a far more circumscribed role.

Muslim women were susceptible to the same feelings of practical concern for the community of Islam and pious consideration for the welfare of their souls that encouraged Muslim men to build and endow religious institutions. No woman ever established a mosque or school as presti-

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the madrasa of the mother of al-Ashraf Sha'bân," sponsored classes in Shâ'î and Hanâfi law. Inscriptions on the building suggest that it was in fact built by the sultan, her son, in honor of his mother, although al-Maqūrizī states unequivocally that it was Barakât herself who built and endowed the school. According to Max van Berchem, this inscription was merely a popular fiction; if so, however, it was already current when al-Maqūrizī wrote, within two generations of the institution’s foundation, and that it could be attributed to her is of course interesting in itself.\(^9\) It is perhaps worth noting that each of these schools became known, not by the name of its founder, but by that of her brother, husband, or father.

At least one more school of higher religious education was endowed by a woman before the end of the Mamluk period. This institution, of which we know little except that it was known as the madrasa of Umm Kha-

waq, was built by Fatima bint Qinâbîy al-Umnât al-Nâzīrî, the wife of the Mamluk soldier Tağîrî Birdî al-Mu‘āshîdî, at some point in the late fifteenth century.\(^9\) Finally, at least one more was established within a decade of the Ottoman conquest, by a woman with the unusual name of Khadija bint al-Dîrham wa-Nîfî.\(^9\)

If it was not the rule, therefore, neither was it unheard of for a woman to participate in a public act of religious charity by committing a signifi-


cant portion of her wealth to the construction and endowment of a school of higher religious education. According to a sixteenth-century history of Damascus madrasas, the Syrian capital boasted even more such insti-
tutions.\(^9\) Other women shared in the abiding interest felt by their fami-

lies for schools established by some relative or ancestor, as when a female scion of the scholarly Bulqînî family named Alîf provided endowments to support Quran readers in her grandfather’s madrasa. Two of her cousins, both of whom died during the last decades of the fifteenth century, at the end of their lives began to pass their time in the family school, and were eventually buried next to their scholarly relatives.\(^9\) The Bulqînî family was hardly unusual in this respect. Quite a few women—daughters and wives of Mamluk as well as scholarly families—were buried in tombs at-


tached to schools founded by a husband, father, or grandfather.

It was also possible for a woman to be vested with a supervisory role

in the administration of a school. Normally, the deeds that enunciated the terms by which the schools would be run placed financial and admin-

istrative control of the institutions and their endowments in the hands of the founders. When they died, or when they voluntarily surrendered their supervisory rights, the position of controller (nâzîr) normally passed to their children and descendants—usually specified as “the most rightly guided” (al-arshāf) of the descendants—or to the founder’s trusted retin-


ees, to powerful amirs or leading judges, or some combination thereof. The “rightly guided” descendants of the founder might include women, of course. How often did such stipulations result in a woman

assumming the controllership of an institution of higher education? One researcher who knows the documentary sources well has concluded that the practice was common.\(^9\) Several deeds stipulated specifically that the female as well as the male descendants of the founder were to be eligible to serve as controller of endowments supporting their schools.\(^9\) On the other hand, it lay within the founder’s discretionary powers to exclude

his daughters and female descendants from the controllership, and the sultans al-Zâhir Barqûq and al-Mu‘âyyan Shaykh, among others, chose to make such a stipulation in establishing their madrasas.\(^9\)

Thus the wives and daughters of the Mamluk and civilian elites were not entirely strangers to the world of institutionalized education, and sev-

eral participat ed actively in the creation and administration of the endow-

ments on which that world relied. As benefactors, several women in-


tested substantial sums in the establishment of institutions of learning, like their male counterparts appropriating to themselves the baraka

thought to be gained from supporting the pious activities of the schools. As administrators, they found themselves, at least in theory (for substi-


tutes might always be appointed), actively managing a school’s assets and appointing its professors and other functionaries.

The intellectual, as opposed to the purely administrative side of insti-

tutional education, however, presents an entirely different picture. Women played virtually no role, as either professor or student, in the formal education offered in schools of higher education and supported by their endowments. The chronicles and biographical dictionaries of the Mamluk period yield not a single instance of the appointment of a woman to a professorship or, indeed, to any post in an endowed institution of

\(^{10}\) Petry, "Paradox," 190, on pp. 200-201 Petry lists a number of women who served various endowments as nâzîrîn (female controllers).

\(^{11}\) See, for example, the following waqafyya: that of Muḥammad al-Jamâlî, Wâqifât al-Awâqîf o. a. No. 1866; Zayn al-Dîn Sîlq, Dîr al-Wâṣîqât No. 59; Yūnús bîn Zâbîl, Dîr al-Wâṣîqât No. 58; and Jamâl al-Dîn al-Ustâdarî, Dîr al-Wâṣîqât No. 106.

\(^{12}\) Wâqifât al-Zâhir Barqûq, Dîr al-Wâṣîqât No. 51, 1. 1070; Wâqifât Sultan al-

education, except that of controller. Nor did any woman, so far as we know, formally enroll as a student in an institution providing endowed student fellowships in jurisprudence, hadith, Quranic exegesis, or any of their related subjects. In practical terms, there was, quite simply, no need for them to do so. Women were excluded, by law or by social convention, from active participation in those legal, religious, or bureaucratic occupations for which the systematic legal curriculum of the madrasa and its cognate institutions was designed to produce qualified candidates. The consensus of the jurists, for example, refused to admit the possibility that a woman might serve as a qadi, on the authority of the Quranic verse which declared that “men are the guardians of women, because God has set the one above the other.”

Another reason for the formal exclusion of women from those schools that provided organized and continual instruction was the intrinsic threat to sexual boundaries and taboos their presence was believed to represent in an institution housing any number of young male Muslims. Many felt that only a strict separation of men and women would prove conducive to instruction and study. Theorists on education routinely urged students to remain single, at least at the outset of their studies, so as to avoid being burdened by “the claims of a wife and the responsibility of earning a livelihood.” Such advice, generally following the admonition of the eleventh-century scholar al-Khaṭṭāb al-Baghdādī, was part of a broader call for scholars to de-emphasize, if not altogether to ignore, the cares of the “world” (al-dunyā). Feminine allure, in particular, posed a threat to the serious student. Women, wrote the fourteenth-century scholar Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jāmī’a in a treatise on the manners and methods of education, should not live in madrasas, or nearby where men and boys from the madrasa would pass by their doors, or even in buildings with windows overlooking the courtyards of the schools.

Whatever the theory, of course, in practice madrasas were by no means monastic in character. Islam, and by large, had always rejected celibacy as a permanent lifestyle. Despite Ibn Jāmī’a’s injunction, many people actually lived within the precincts of medieval schools, including married scholars with their families, as witnessed by the not infrequent reports in the chronicles that an individual was born in a madrasa or other

2 Al-Nawawī, al-Mujāhid, 1:35.
8 Ibn Jāmī’a, Taadhkarat al-a‘nām, 87.
9 The Education of Women

Yet the Islamic tradition, as understood in the later Middle Ages, was by no means uniformly hostile to the notion of educating women, of imparting to them at least some of the fundamentals of religious learning. As the sources attest, many medieval women were, in some sense, educated. For example, of the 1,075 biographies of women in al-Sakhāwī’s al-Duwā’ al-Nawwāb, 411 can definitely be said to have received some degree of religious education: to have memorized the Quran, studied with a particular scholar, or received an iǧāza. The biographies of the remaining women are not detailed enough to allow definite judgments as to the extent of their intellectual training, but given al-Sakhāwī’s interests, it seems probable that they, too, were educated: the eleven volumes devoted to men consist largely of details of the lives and careers of the educated elite.44 But if women were excluded from formal enrollment in the classes endowed in madrasas, mosques, and Sūl convents, what did they study, where, with whom, and why?

20 Al-Sakhāwī, al-Duwā’, 1:310. A daughter of Ibn Hajar al-‘Aṣqā’ī was born in the “hall” (qādih) of the Bāb al-Mursī‘ī, where her father was professor of hadith, ibid., 12:3.
21 Taqī Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, Kātib al-mālūk li-ma‘rīf dātul al-mulūk (Cairo, 1934–
73), 3:17.
24 Cf. Carl Fatrei’s comments on al-Sakhāwī’s purposes in The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages (Princeton, 1990), 9. Ignaz Goldziher first suggested that medieval Muslim women were more highly educated than we would otherwise think, and in particular that they formed important links in the chains through which hadith were transmitted. Muslim Studies, trs. C. B. Barber and S. M. Stern (London, 1971), 2: 276–77, 306–88.
Islamic education, of course, aims not only at producing a cadre of judges and scribes to regulate social intercourse, but also at inculcating the principles and practices that shape the character and behavior of a good Muslim—in other words, the individual soul and its fate, a concern in which men and women share equally. Obviously, not everyone possessed the means to become an 'ilm, a fully trained scholar, but all Muslims should obtain the degree of knowledge requisite for their station in life, according to an important treatise on knowledge and learning that circulated widely during the Mamluk period. Everyone, for example, must know enough of the law to fulfill his or her duties to pray, fast, pay zakāt (the obligatory alms tax), and perform the pilgrimage, duties incumbent upon women as well as men. But 'ilm, the knowledge embodied in the law and hadith, involved more than the minimum knowledge needed to fulfill one's religious obligations. The same text noted that "knowledge has an important bearing on all other qualities [of human character] such as generosity and avarice, cowardice and courage, arrogance and humility, chastity [and debauchery], prodigality and parsimony, and so on. For arrogance, avarice, cowardice and prodigality are illicit. Only through knowledge of them and their opposites is protection against them possible. Thus learning is prescribed for all of us." 18

For all of us—including women. If women did not function in society as lawyers, judges, or bureaucrats in the various governmental offices, they had no less need of religious knowledge at the personal level than did men. Islamic lawyers busied themselves with prescribing rules for the regulation of women's personal and social affairs, and their ritual and hygienic behavior—one need only consider the extensive chapters in the law books on menstruation and other matters of ritual purity of special interest to women—and somehow their precepts and regulations had to be transmitted to those they most concerned. A problem that could be perplexing, however, was how: how was the knowledge they required to be transmitted to women and young girls? In particular, how could it be achieved when women were systematically excluded from formal participation in the intellectual life of educational institutions? The matter was a delicate one, for somehow it had to be accomplished without threatening the gender boundaries that cut across the medieval Islamic world and that the ulama, with their greater familiarity with the precepts of the law and their deeper concern with moral rectitude, perhaps took more seriously than others.

Much of the answer lies in the persistent informality of Islamic education. The remarkable growth in the number of madrasas notwithstanding, the institution never established a monopoly on the inculcation of the Islamic sciences. Lessons continued to be given to informal circles, in mosques and in private homes. Moreover, of course, even those institutions that made specific provisions for endowed courses, with precise stipulations as to which classes were to be held when and in which parts of the building, and who was to attend, were nevertheless public forums, and many came and went who were not formally enrolled. In such a system and in such venues, women might be found alongside men, receiving instruction, attending the recitation of hadith, or, in some cases, reciting the traditions to others.

The transmission of knowledge in the later Middle Ages continued to depend far more upon the relationship between teacher and student than it did upon any institutional framework. Most educations began with the closest relationship of all, that of kinship. Very often, when listing those with whom a particular individual had studied, al-Sakhāwī and other biographers will begin with the subject's father, grandfather, or uncle, and only then move on to others; this seems to be especially true in his biographies of women. Given the jealousies with which Muslim families protected the privacy of their women, it was only natural that girls should turn first to their closest male relatives for instruction. The exception, as is so often the case, proves the rule. The mother of Umm al-Jusayn bint 'Abd al-Baymān b. 'Abd Allah (d. 1422) herself instructed her daughter in certain basics—writing, particular chapters of the Quran, and al-Nawawī's popular collection of forty hadith, the Arba'in—because her husband had divorced her before the birth of their daughter. The implication of the narrative, however, is clearly that, under more normal circumstances, this duty would have fallen to the husband and father. 19

Zaynab al-Ṭūkiyya (d. 1388) provides a case in point. The daughter of 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Dīrūṣī al-Mahallī, she received from family members a basic but substantial education typical of that given many girls. As a child in Mahallat Būh, a town in the Egyptian Delta, her father made her memorize the Quran and taught her to write, but also instructed her in a number of books that formed core elements in the advanced education of any late medieval Muslim of the Shāfīʿī rite. She studied several fundamental works of Shāfīʿī jurisprudence, including Najm al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ghaffar al-Qazwīnī's al-Hādiʿ al-ṣaghīr fi-ṣurar, the Mukhtasar (abridged treatise) of Abū Shajāʿ Ahmad al-Islahānī, and a treatise in verse on Arabic grammar entitled al-Mulḥa, written by Abū Muḥammad Qāsim al-Harīrī. 20

19 Al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāneʿ, 12:140.
20 Al-Sakhāwī, of course, only refers to these works in a dohābād form—for example, as
Once a woman left the paternal household, her husband, no less than her father, grandfathers, or uncles, assumed a responsibility for the education of his wife. Thus, after her marriage, Zaynab al-Tukhiyya’s husband undertook to continue her education, guiding her through the two principal collections of hadith, the Shafi’i of al-Bukhari and that of Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj. Writing in the twelfth century, the influential jurist Qadi Khair recognized very few situations in which women were permitted to leave their homes without their husband’s permission, but among them was the case of a woman who wanted to attend an academic class (majlis al-ilim) and whose husband was not a faith—that is, was not himself qualified to instruct her. Clearly, the jurist understood that the primary responsibility for a woman’s education lay with her husband.

Families belonging to the scholarly elite took special care to educate their female offspring. The biographical dictionaries frequently comment that boys who were to become famous scholars began their education, and more specifically received ijazas permitting them to transmit a certain book or collection of traditions, at extraordinarily young ages, at the instigation of their fathers or other close relatives. Their sisters, too, shared in this distinction. Zaynab, daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahim ibn al-Hasan al-Turki of al-Qahiri (d. 1461), accompanied her brother to classes given by her father and other scholars before she had reached the age of five. Her older contemporary Zaynab bint ‘Abd Allah ibn Aymad, known as Ibn al-‘Aryasi (d. 1452), was similarly brought before a scholar for the first time at the age of two. A prominent jurist and traditionist such as Ibn Hajjar al-Asqalani brought along his daughter Zayn Khattun, in the third year after her birth, to hear the recitation of a particular collection of hadith. Sura (d. 1403), the daughter of the scholar and judge Taqi ‘I-Din ‘Ali al-Subki, received licenses to transmit hadith from some of the leading traditionists of both Cairo and Damascus before her fourth birthday. It was even possible for a girl to acquire an ijaza, and from a respectable scholar such as ‘Izz al-Din Ibn Jum’a, within a few months of her birth.

Such exposure held value chiefly as a first step in a process of familiarizing young students with the academic world. The full significance of

\[\text{[Consider what some women do when people gather with a shaykh to hear the recitation of books. At that point women come, too, to hear the readings; the men sit in one place, the women facing them. It even happens at such times that some of the women are carried away by the situation; one...]}\]

\[\text{[al-Sakhawi, al-Durr, 12:8.]}\]

\[\text{[al-Sakhawi, al-Durr, 12:8.]}\]

\[\text{[al-Sakhawi, al-Durr, 12:8.]}\]
will stand up, and sit down, and shout in a loud voice. [Moreover,] private parts of her body will appear; in her house, their exposure would be forbidden—how can it be allowed in a mosque, in the presence of men?  

"Private parts of her body"—the term Ibn al-Hajj used was 'anawat, literally "that which it is indecent to reveal." In the case of women, that might include everything except the face and hands; some might not even be that permissive. It is perhaps safe to assume that what concerned Ibn al-Hajj was not explicit exhibitionism, but the threat to established sexual boundaries represented by the mixing of men and women in these informal lessons. Here again, as with Mamluk and others, the persistent informality of Islamic education, its reliance on models that privileged direct personal contact, and the open, public character of Cairo's schools, expanded the limits of learning and eased the way for the participation of those—such as women—who might otherwise have been formally excluded from the institutions.

In many cases, of course, women could be educated and sexual boundaries preserved by providing instruction from family members: fathers, brothers, or husbands. Even so, many women studied with and received ijāzas from scholars outside the immediate family circle, and very often the scholars with whom they studied were themselves women. This is not to suggest that education took place exclusively in groups segregated by sex. On the contrary, many whose biographies were recorded in compilations such as al-Sakhawi's dictionary of fifteenth-century luminaries, males as well as females, were instructed by and received ijāzas from learned women, a point to which we shall return. But a thorough perusal of the Kitāb al-nisā', that volume of al-Sakhawi's work that is devoted to women, leaves one with the impression that girls, more than boys, received their instruction from other women. Some educated women shouldered the specific responsibility for "teaching women the Quran and instructing them in 'ilm and righteous deeds." The Muslim women of Cairo also took advantage of the comparatively free atmosphere of the public religious festivals, such as the Prophet's birthday, to gather with a woman who, they claimed, was a shaykhah, and who in-

interpreted to them the Quran, or read to them from the popular tales of the prophets. Ibn al-Hajj, of course, disapproved, although his censure derived as much from the dubious nature of the stories transmitted to them as from the doubtful qualifications of the female transmitters. He could not, however, have condemned all of those learned women who sought to share their knowledge. A comment of al-Sakhawi's offers an insight into a world in which learned women transmitted to other women the precepts of the law—that is to say, 'ilm—of special concern to them. A certain Khadija, daughter of 'Abi ibn 'Umar al-Anṣārī, who died in 1469, "informed [other] women concerning the chapters [from the law books] on menstruation and like matters." Women may not have explicitly formulated the law even as it regarded specifically feminine matters, but they did play an active role in transmitting its principles and regulations to each other.

It was not necessary to establish a completely separate structure for this purpose. As we have seen, even in Mamluk Cairo structure was very much a secondary element in the organization of education and the transmission of knowledge. Nonetheless, the need to preserve sexual boundaries did encourage the focusing of efforts to educate women on particular institutions and locations. The forums might well be found—a point worthy of special note—in private homes, such as that of one learned woman of the fifteenth century whose family seems to have devoted itself especially to the religious education of women, for "her house was a gathering place for divorced and widowed women, devoted to the instruction of young girls." True to form, Ibn al-Hajj expressed astonishment that a respected scholar had offered his home as a forum for the instruction of women by a shykhah. Thus men, too, might take a special interest in the education of women, as did the professor and Hanbali chief judge 'Izz al-Dīn Ahmad al-Kisānī (d. 1471), whose house was a "gathering spot" for "widows and the like."  

Mamluk Cairo did boast a few endowed institutions specifically devoted to housing women, which might provide their residents with instruction in the religious sciences. Generally, such establishments were known as 'madrasā, a term that usually referred to a hospice for Sufis. Little is known of these institutions, such as those established "for widows" by Khadija (d. 1474), the daughter of Amir Haji al-Baysari, and Zaynab, the wife of Sultan Ināl (reigned 1453-61). At least two maintained some
undefined connection with a neighboring madrasa. Shams al-Din Sunqur al-Sa’di constructed a ribāt for women in the madrasa that he built in 1315–16, while the founder of the Bāṣṭyiyā "built behind his madrasa a ribāt for foreign and poor women." Accordingly a total of at least five were established in Cairo over the course of the Mamluk period, in addition to a large number in the necropolis (al-qarafa al-kubra) outside the city. Principally, they seem to have served as places of residence for elderly, divorced, or widowed women who had no other place of abode, until their death or remarriage.

In addition to providing shelter, however, at least some of these institutions were expected to satisfy the intellectual and spiritual needs of women left without family members capable of providing them with whatever education they might need. In particular this was true of the ribāt al-Baghdādiyya, established toward the end of the thirteenth century by a daughter of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars. The shaykhya who supervised this institution routinely preached to the female residents and instructed them in the science of Islamic jurisprudence, "until such time as they should remarry or return to their husbands." Among the women who taught and administered this ribāt were some of the most accomplished female scholars of the period. Prominent among them was Fatima bint 'Abbas al-Baghdādiyya (d. 1314–15), who apparently gave her name to (or took it from) the institution. According to her biographer, she was well versed in jurisprudence, to an extent that impressed even the strict Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya. At an institution such as the ribāt al-Baghdādiyya, the instruction of women may have actually helped to protect and reaffirm those sexual boundaries that a divorced or widowed woman might threaten by her independent status.

The term "ribāt" as used in this document suggests, too, that some women may have been drawn into the world of learning through Sufism. A number of women were clearly initiated into Sufi orders; one young fourteenth-century male even received from his grandmother a khatira, the robe that a Sufi novice received from his master. Of course, an introduction into Islamic mysticism was by no means synonymous with education in the religious and legal sciences, but neither were the two worlds entirely separate, and as we have seen both the institutions and the personalities involved in each sphere tended to overlap. The ribāt al-Baghdādiyya may be a case in point. 'Abd al-Qadir ibn al-Hasan al-Qāmūsī, a Sufi of Al-Hasan, the daughter of Dāwūd Abi l-Jawād (d. 1456), apparently succeeded her father as shaykh of the Sufis at the mosque of 'Alam Dīr near the Bāb al-Qanīyā in Cairo, although al-Sakhawī failed to give her a biographical entry of her own, see al-Sakhawī, al-Durrā, 3:220, 337. In 1456 a certain Qādir ibn al-Hasan al-Hasan died, and his wife was appointed—"the word used is wāqyāt—to his position as "shaykh" of Sultan Qaytbay's cemets. The significance of this event is not at all clear, although the chronicler does record his surprise at the occasion. Ibn 'Asākir, Ibn 'Asākir al-Sawādir, 3:302-3, 313-15.
elementary stages, a woman's education focused almost exclusively on hadith, and in that field lay her surest path to prominence.

The public recitation of hadith played a central role in the religious experience of the average Muslim, and the general Muslim population of medieval Cairo took a keen interest in their study. As we have seen, even the Manhûks found the study of traditions especially rewarding, so that hadith provided the most popular channel for the integration of the military elite into the world of religious learning. But the role of women in the actual transmission of hadith dwarfed that of the Manhûks. Well-known muḥadithûn (those who had memorized and taught traditions) routinely compiled lists of those on whose authority they recited hadith; in them, most important male scholars included significant numbers of women. Of the 172 names on his list, Tâj al-Dîn 'Abd al-Wahhâb al-Subâkî (d. 1370) included 19 women. Ibn Ḥâjar al-'Aqâlîkhî left us the names of 53 different women with whom, in one way or another, he studied hadith. No less a scholar than Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûtî (d. 1350) relied heavily on women as his sources for hadith; of the 130 shykhs of exceptional reliability on whose authority he transmitted, fully 33—more than a quarter of the total—were women.32

Hadith, of course, could be transmitted in a number of ways. A student might actually read them or hear them read in the presence of the muḥaddith, or he or she might simply receive an iḫāza authorizing their further transmission. Al-Sakhawi himself, in his biographical dictionary, names sixty-eight women with whom he, in some fashion, studied; of these, forty-six issued to him iḫâzas. Since it was possible, by the standards of the time, to receive an iḫāza from a scholar without actually studying or reciting a work in his or her presence, women might participate in the transmission of hadith without always encountering male students or teachers.33 Malika al-Sâlihyâya (d. 1400), for example, issued an iḫāza to Ibn Ḥâjar, but died in Damascus four months before he visited the city.34 Here again, the family connection proved crucial. Consider, for example, the two sisters who apparently received iḫâzas simply by virtue of their association with their scholarly brothers.35 In an iḫāza issued by al-Sakhawi himself, the scholar authorized Abî Bakr ibn al-Hisâî and his three sons, who had heard him recite the traditions in his Kitâb al-bul-dânîyâtû, to transmit the work; the same license was issued to Ibn al-Hisâî's younger daughter 'Aîsha, although there is nothing to suggest that she was actually present at the recitations.36

On the other hand, very often the transmission of hadith represented a world in which gender barriers, if they did not actually dissolve, were at least permeable. We have already seen how al-Sakhawi and other biographers used—that an individual "heard" (samâ') the recitation from a transmitter, or "read [a work] in" his/her presence (qarâ' âlî); leave no doubt that males and females often interacted directly to secure the transmission of hadith. Zaynab bint al-Kâmil heard recitations by scholars from all the major cities of Syria and Egypt—when she died she left behind a camel-load of iḫâzas—and was herself such a popular transmitter that "students pressed about her and read to her the great books."37

The very nature of the culture of hadith transmission ensured that women, no less than men, could become prized teachers. Clearly it was imperative that one study hadith with a shykh of wide knowledge and blameless reputation, not only to increase the number of traditions one knew and could transmit, but also to draw upon a shykh's authority and so enhance one's own reputation as a muḥaddith. But the selection of a teacher of hadith involved another criterion as well: reducing the number of transmitters in a given chain of authority (insâdû). In other words, a man or woman might become a prized teacher of hadith because he or she could claim to have studied directly with an especially revered transmitter or master of traditions. An inevitable consequence was the preference of young pupils for older teachers for, as they aged, these privileged students might become the sole surviving muḥaddith in a particular city or region to transmit hadith on the direct authority of a prominent shykh. At this level women could compete directly with men, and in fact a number of women are noted for having distinguished themselves as the sole surviving transmitter of hadith from prominent teachers. 'Aîsha, the daughter of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Hâdî, achieved a position in the transmission of hadith unequaled by many men, and in her life we may see a model for female transmitters. Born in Damascus in the early fourteenth century, in her fourth year she was brought before Abû Ḥâyâh Abû Ḥâyâh al-Ahmad al-Haṣîrî, a famous muḥaddith who died in A.H. 730, from whom

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33 Goldziher, Mission Studien, 2:176-78.

34 Ibn Ḥâjar, al-Majma' al-mâ'âmusâ, 387-89.

35 Al-Sakhawi, al-Dawâ', 12:120.

36 A. J. Arberry, Sâbâ'înus (London, 1953), 4-5. Arberry suggests that 'Aîsha may have "sometimes" attended the lessons with her father, but that hardly follows from the evidence of the iḫâza itself: that the license was issued in her name does not guarantee that she was present.

37 Ibn Ḥâjar, al-Durar, 2:200-10.
she heard two small but popular collections of hadith. 68 Later, she studied Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj’s important compendium of traditions, the Sunan, with a friend of her father’s 69 and other scholars, and Ibn Hisham’s (7th century) biography of the Prophet. During her lifetime she collected jāzās from scholars in Alepp, Hama, Nablus, and Hebrn, and became herself one whom the ṭrkhāla—those scholars and others who traveled the Islamic world in search of hadith and of new and stronger authorities for their transmission—eagerly sought out. Her fame spread—as important a scholar as Ibn Ḥajar was proud to list her among his principal teachers—so that the seventeenth-century historian Ibn al-‘Imād gave her the epithet “muḥadditha of Damascus,” and remarked that she was “the most supported [i.e., in the reliability of her transmitters] of the people of her time.”

The critical factor in ’Aisha’s success lay in the unique circumstances in which, as an elderly woman, she found herself. She well deserved the great respect in which she was held, for she “aged until she stood alone [as a transmitter] from the majority of her shuykh.” 60 Thus the early education of girls (and boys), in which they were brought before prominent teachers and transmitters of hadith at extraordinarily young ages, when (at least in the case of girls) they were not formally enrolled as students in an institution of instruction, played a critical role, and allowed women to establish independent reputations as valuable links in the chains of authority on which Muslim learning rested. ’Aisha was 4 and al-Ḥajar 103 (lunar) years old when she heard from the famous traditional the Sunnī of al-Bukhārī, so that in her old age, as her student Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqālānī announced proudly in his account of his education, “no one other than [’Aisha] remained on the earth who transmitted from al-Ḥajar.” 61

’Aisha was an exceptional woman, but she by no means stood alone.


60 This scholar is identified only as Shuraf al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan; probably the name refers to Shuraf al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan (not al-Husayn) ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Muqawli al-Hanbali (d. 1233-34), who, significantly, seems to have been a colleague of ’Aisha’s father Muḥammad. Ibn Ḥajar, al-Durar, 2:291-62.

61 Al-Sakhawī, al-Manṣūr, 12:51.

ments of any subject besides hadith, and in particular few became expert in jurisprudence.

To be sure, the study of hadith formed a core element in the education of any medieval Muslim, including those such as merchant-scholars who, though not perhaps full-time academics, nonetheless devoted great time and energy to the pursuit of learning. Moreover, the hadith themselves played a formative role in the shaping of Islamic thought and society. Not only did the Prophetic traditions constitute one of the bases—in many ways the most important basis—of Islamic law, but their public recital on feast days during the months of Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramaḍān, and on other special occasions, was a central feature of popular Muslim religious celebration.

But the culture of hadith transmission in some respects differed sharply from the rigorous education offered in the formal classes of jurisprudence in the madrasas and other schools of medieval Cairo. In the first place, most women (and men, for that matter) would become prominent transmitters of hadith only at a relatively advanced age, when the chains of authority on which their learning rested would be comparatively shorter; and to a system protective of its gender boundaries, an elderly woman transmitting a text or a body of traditions posed a less serious threat than one of a younger age. Moreover, the most important quality of the muhaddithūn was memory, the ability to remember and transmit accurately hadith that they themselves had studied, as well as the chains of authorities on which their transmission rested. Such stress was laid on memory that medieval writers sometimes complained of traditionists who merely memorized and recited hadith, without in fact understanding them. Memorization, of course, played a critical instructional role in other fields as well, but the study of the law and related subjects revolved around munāẓara, the disciplined disputation of fine points of the law and the resolution of controversial questions. That women played a critical role in the transmission of hadith, and virtually none in higher legal training, may reflect this pedagogical difference.

Women were systematically excluded from holding judicial posts that would position them to resolve disputes among men, or formal instructional positions that implied a personal, institutional, or metaphorical authority over young men. A similar concern may have lurked subconsciously behind their apparent exclusion from the intensive study of subjects such as jurisprudence, where the assertion of a woman's analytical and forensic skills could have threatened to place her—intellectually,

at least—in a position of authority over men. In the transmission of ḥadīth, of course, disputes might also arise, for example over the accuracy of a transmitter's memory, but such disputes could be resolved by reference to a text.

Such limitations, however, should not disguise the prominent role that women did play in the transmission of a critical field of traditional Muslim learning. The extent of their contribution is difficult to measure, observed as it is by the indifference or embarrassment of sources written exclusively by men, and by the private venue in which much of their teaching would have taken place. But the fact remains that prominent ḥadīth scholars of the stature of Ibn Hajar and al-Suyūṭī openly relied on many women for secure and persuasive chains of authority. Their reliance suggests that active participation in the transmission of Muslim knowledge in the Middle Ages was by no means an exclusively male preserve, and—as with those Mamluks who took such interest in it—that the social horizons of Islamic education were very wide indeed.

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44 Elizabeth Sartain makes this point in her outstanding study of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, vol. 1: Biography and Background (Cambridge, 1975), 127.
45 On this point and on instruction in hadith generally, see Mālikī, *Colūgā*, 210-13.
46 Ibid., 109-11; see also Chapter Two.
VII
BEYOND THE ELITE
EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY

In a long passage in his treatise Madkhal al-sharā' al-sharīf, Ibn al-Hājj (d. 1336) scathingly criticized the educated elite of Cairo of his day for their proclivity for dressing in ostentatious garments. "It is well known to those who are insightful," he wrote, "that many scholars—literally, "those who are linked to religious knowledge"—ignore a warning of the Prophet and have tailored for themselves garments that are wasteful in their use of cloth, since "from them could be tailored an entire garment for another." Some went so far as to wear silk, a fabric denied to men by Islamic tradition, and indulged in showing off their sumptuous garments "as is the custom with women." God had made the mark of honor (khīla') of the ulama the "fear" or "reverence" (khamasp) that their studies inspired in them; some of Ibn al-Hājj's educated contemporaries apparently made it the grandeur, beauty, and refinement of their clothing. Scholars were identified primarily by the size and form of the turbans that they wore. Over the course of the Middle Ages, this headgear took on monumental proportions, until the turban protruding from a scholar's head began to resemble a small tower. Ibn Battūta noted the "extraordinary size" of the turban worn by the qādis of Alexandria. "Never either in the eastern nor in the western lands have I seen a more voluminous headgear than this," he remarked. When the qādī sat before a mīhrāb his turban obscured the prayer niche completely. The experience of others confirmed Ibn al-Hājj's observations. In particular, the common people of Cairo seem to have sensed that clothing and fashion played a surprising role in marking out those individuals identified as learned men. Ibn al-Hājj recorded, for example, that street players (almukhāyilin min ahl al-lahhab wa-l-lāhāb) would perform in the city's thoroughfares a popular game or skit that they called "the Manner of the Judge" (bābat al-qādī). In the game, the jurists of the holy law were lampooned by parading those who represented them in oversized turbans, sleeves, and taylasins (a long scarf worn over the turban and neck, and falling around the shoulders).

This obsession for fashion, for establishing their identity through garments and outerwear rather than through piety and learning, represented more than the mere arrogance of learned men. On one level, it was an unobjectionable phenomenon, natural in a society in which one's outward appearance was often taken as a mark of certain characteristic: Jews, Christians, Samaritans, and, later, descendants of the Prophet were all identifiable (theoretically, at least) by the color of their clothing or turbans. Preachers in congregational mosques, for example, routinely dressed in black, the color of the 'Abbāsid, since the delivery of the Friday sermon was an official act that included an explicit acknowledgment of the nominal suzerainty of the 'Abbāsid caliph. Moreover, the ancient Near Eastern custom of bestowing robes of honor on officials and other notables, as both a measure of protection and a mark of favor, crystallized in the Mamluk period into a carefully graded system by which qādis, preachers, and other prominent scholars, as well as Mamluks and government officials, received robes of honor from the sultan, their varying forms, colors, and materials reifying and confirming the hierarchies that the ulama themselves nurtured.

It is difficult to know why exactly Ibn al-Hājj seized on the apparently superficial issue of the ulama's clothing. One strand of Muslim tradition had always looked askance upon scholars accepting appointments and honors from the government, and something of this suspicion may have lain at the root of Ibn al-Hājj's complaint. Moreover, Ibn al-Hājj himself was somewhat "puritanical"—his four-volume work is as much a list of praiseworthy practices as he decried as anything else—and he may have looked with wistful fondness on those elements in Muslim tradition that urged scholars to shun the material pleasures of this world. But of even greater concern to him was, I think, the threat to the identity of the educated elite and their intellectual traditions that he perceived in the ulama's obsession for fashion. Christians might be required to wear blue turbans, Jews yellow ones, and the descendants of the Prophet might be permitted to wear green headgear, but such distinctions marked nothing more than qualities and characteristics acquired at birth. In the case of the ulama, however, the problem was that their distinguishing characteristic was, or should have been, not an inherited status, but something acquired through long years of training. One of the practical conse-


Cf. Mayer, Mamluk Costume, 49.

3 Ibn al-Hājj, Madkhal, 1:146. On the taylasins, see Mayer, Mamluk Costume, 52, on the clothing of the ulama generally, see ibid., 48-55.

4 On robes of honor, see Mayer, Mamluk Costume, 56-54. Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari, Mamluk al-sharīr fī muṣālik al-umār (Cairo, 1900), 72, Encyclopedia of Islam, 3rd edition, s.v. "Khila'."
quences of the ulama’s sartorial pretensions, according to Ibn al-Ḥajj, was that some poor people might be denied access to religious knowledge. The writer claimed himself to have known of such a case. He knew, he said, a man who wished to educate his sons, but was unable to do so because he could not afford to buy them the clothing they were expected to wear to their lessons. Without such finery they were not able to attend a teaching circle, and therefore they abandoned their studies.

But another, and deeper, fear also gripped Ibn al-Ḥajj. one that found a certain resonance in the opinions of other contemporary commentators on the condition of learning in the Mamluk state. If the ulama distinguished themselves by their clothing rather than by their learning and comportment, it would be possible for those “who have no knowledge and are immersed in ignorance” to parade themselves as learned men. The ulama by no means formed an impregnable caste, set apart by ethnicity or heredity, but by their training they did constitute one element of the khāṣṣa, the “special people,” and were thereby defined in opposition to the comparably uneducated common people, the ‘īmmā or ʿawāmm.6 Indeed, it was the case that “a common man [ḥaḍḍ al-‘awāmm] will dress himself in the same clothing as a scholar so as to appropriate to himself a position [munsib, i.e., educational or religious employment] that he does not deserve.”

This was a serious charge indeed. It was linked to more general complaints, not limited to Ibn al-Ḥajj, of a breakdown in the moral fiber, public behavior, and depth of learning of many members of the learned elite. In the words of Ibn al-Ḥajj, many did not practice what they preached, “rarely does one find the man who behaves according to the precepts he outlines with his tongue in his lessons.” Other Mamluk writers also remarked on the blameworthy behavior of the ulama. Badr al-Dīn Ibn Janā’ī, for example, after listing many of the vices and attitudes that a scholar of the religious sciences should avoid, complained that many in his day were known for the very characteristics they should have shunned. But the critical problem was to assure the integrity of the process of the transmission of knowledge. Tūj al-Dīn al-Suhbī, like the others, complained of supposedly learned men who made light of minor sins, and who felt that “our knowledge will hide our disobedience.” Such men could not, however, possess true knowledge (‘ilm), since true knowledge only highlights the importance of obedience to the precepts of the law.8

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6 Ibn al-Ḥajj, Madkhal, 1:154.
8 Ibn al-Ḥajj, Madkhal, 1:155.
9 Ibid., 1:156; Ibn Janā’ī, Ta’līkhār al-sāmū’ wa’l-muta’alimīn fi aḥad al-‘ilm wa’t-

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Indeed, Mamluk-period scholars who wrote on matters pertaining to education frequently disparaged the intellectual qualities and sense of professional responsibility of those active in the transmission of Muslim learning. Because of the extraordinary importance of religious knowledge and its transmission in this society, any threat to the competence and integrity of those who shouldered primary responsibility for learning and education could generate almost apocalyptic fears. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, a controversial scholar of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, became embroiled in a public dispute over his claim to be the muḥaddid al-ṣārīf, “the restorer of the age,” who would revitalize religion and religious learning at the turn of the ninth hijri century. A precondition to his claim was the assertion that ignorance had spread throughout the earth, and that men of true learning and scholarship had disappeared.9 Other warnings were less alarmist, but also, for that very reason, perhaps more credibly. More than a century before al-Suyūṭī staked his claim, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Janā’ī had written a treatise on the prescribed etiquette and behavior of both students and teachers. That section of the treatise which presents guidelines for the student is concerned largely with how students should deal with incompetent teachers: šaykha who repeat themselves, fall asleep in class, or who in their answers to questions are simply wrong.10

Tūj al-Dīn al-Suhbī left more precise descriptions of those who claimed to be members of the learned elite, but whose training and understanding of their subjects were superficial and incomplete. Some, he said, mistakenly call themselves faqīḥ—learned, that is, in the science of Islamic jurisprudence—after studying only al-Ḥāfīz al-saghir of Najm al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī (d. 1260). The Ḥāfīz was indeed an important textbook of Shāfī’i jurisprudence, but reading it did not make one a faqīḥ. Others studied the commentary on the Quran entitled al-Kashfīḥ by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), and then claimed to be “expert and knowledgeable in the exegesis of the Book of God.”11 Despite certain reservations among the ulama about the orthodoxy of all of its contents, the book was an important work of Quranic exegesis and formed a part of the curriculum of many students of the later Middle Ages. At the mosque of al-ʿArshāf Barsbāy, for example, it was required that the man hired as professor of Hanafi law be able

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9 Ibn Janā’ī, Ta’līkhār al-sāmū’, passim, especially the section “fī ʿādāb al-muta’alimīn ma’s ᵖḥyāth.”

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to deliver lectures on al-Zamakhshari's work. But again, reading it alone did not make one a scholar.

Those who claimed to be muhaddithin, prominent transmitters of hadith, al-Subki submitted to special scrutiny. The term muhaddith, when used in its technical sense to refer to an individual hadith scholar, indicated a transmitter of a significant level of accomplishment. The scholars who defined and regulated the transmission of hadith did not always agree on the precise qualifications of those who might legitimately claim the title muhaddith, but they did universally understand it to refer to one thoroughly trained in the study of the Prophetic traditions. Al-Subki spelled out precisely what the term meant to him. It indicated one who knew the names of the men and women in the chains of authority (insāds) on which the recitation of the traditions rested, who knew which links in the chain were strong and which weak, who had memorized "a large quantity of hadith texts," and who had heard recited the six "canonical" collections of hadith, three others popular throughout the Middle Ages, and one thousand individual "volumes" (juz' min al-a'jaz)—perhaps signifying simply a sizeable number) of the Prophetic traditions.

Yet as al-Subki pointed out, by his day the title had undergone a certain debasement of value. With apparent success, many claimed to be muhaddithin who did not, by the strictest standards, so qualify. "At the most," he said, referring to several minor hadith collections, "they look at Masāhir al-anwaʿr al-Ṣaḥḥaṭ, and if they get as far as the Maṣūḥiḥ of al-Baghdādi they think they have reached the level of the muhaddithin." If they study a few more texts, such as Ibn al-Athir's large compilation Fāris al-walī and Ibn al-Salāh's popular work on the science of the traditions Uṣūl al-aḥadīth, or its abridgement by al-Nawawī, they call themselves, al-Subki sarcastically noted, "the muhaddith of the muhaddithin" and, referring to the great ninth-century compiler of traditions, Muḥammad b. Iṣṭaqlal al-Bukhāri, "the Bukhāri of the age." To make matters worse, he testified, many of those who study the traditions and transmit them are satisfied with learning the names in the chains of authority and the words of the texts, and with hearing many recitations, but do not understand what they have heard.

These complaints about the intellectual quality and depth of learning of those who claimed to be scholars related to a more practical problem plaguing instruction in the Islamic sciences, one that reinforced Ibn al-Hajj's fear that unqualified common people were garnering to themselves teaching positions that should be held only by legitimate ulama. Al-Subki was conscious of a tendency among some who called themselves professors and held paid teaching posts to come to their lessons unprepared, or to deliver their lectures improperly. A professor, for instance, might "memorize two or three lines from a book, sit and deliver them in lecture, and then hurry away." In some cases, such laxity resulted from simple laziness on the part of professors who were capable of more; but in others, teaching posts were improperly held by men who were fundamentally incompetent.

The real danger in all this was that it led unqualified common people to seek teaching posts; after all, al-Subki noted, it is a rare man who cannot memorize two lines. A good professor should give to his lessons all the time and effort that they required, and deliver stunning lectures, and satisfactorily answer all questions put to him, so that if an unlearned man or a beginning or intermediate student should attend the lesson, he will appreciate his own inability to teach properly the subject at hand. As
things stood, however, the ulama "take liberties in their lessons, and do not give them their due, and waste so much working [i.e., teaching] days, and, if they do attend [their classes], give only brief replies to one or two questions." It was no surprise, therefore, that the ulama "are alarmed at the control over teaching positions of those who are not qualified for them." To their expressed anxieties, however, al-Suhki angrily replied: "You are the cause of this, in what you have done, and the offense is yours."

It is difficult to judge with certainty the extent to which the analysis of these men reflected accurately the state of learning and pattern of teaching appointments in late medieval Cairo. Ibn al-Hajj was an inveterate complainer, and of course al-Suyuti's allegations were designed, at least in part, as a weapon in his intense and personal rivalry with other scholars of the day. On the other hand, cumulatively they carry more weight. In particular, the specificity of al-Suhki's charges, and the fact that they paralleled in some way the accusations of other writers, may lend credence to them. Through them all runs a common thread. These writers feared a blurring of the identity of the educated elite. They feared that the "democratization of education, the participation of the common people in the transmission of knowledge, might reduce standards. In a certain sense, such fears were not entirely misplaced. Despite the largely successful efforts of the ulama to ensure that their paid teaching positions were passed on to their sons or favorite students, the broader world of learning and of the transmission of knowledge remained largely open, even capable, as we have seen, of creating space within its boundaries for Mamluks and women. Similarly, through a number of important channels the broad Muslim population of Cairo—the 'awalim—was drawn intimately into the world of education and the life of the institutions that supported it.

The Schools in the Life of the Town: Nonacademic Functions

For the general Muslim population of Cairo, the presence of schools and the academic population who studied and taught in them were a dominant feature of urban life. Large schools, such as the madrasa of Sultan Hasan, dominated the physical landscape of the town. Schools tended to cluster together in groups, such as that along Bayn al-Qasrayn in the heart of the city—the Zimaniyya madrasa was so close to the Sahibiyya that anyone praying in one school could clearly hear the worshippers in the other—but no quarter was more than a brief walk from some center

of education. Men and women who had nothing directly to do with their affairs passed by the schools every day, or conducted business in the shops and stalls that frequently lined their exterior walls. The lives of academics and nonacademics were symbiotic. The contemporary sources leave little trace of any of that structural antagonism that set "town against gown" in late medieval Europe. It is true that, as Carl Pety has shown, particular schools were associated primarily with "foreign" groups, such as the Shafi'i and especially Hanafi scholars from Syria, Iran, and Anatolia who figured prominently in the major academic institutions of Cairo, and who provided the intellectual networks with much of their cosmopolitan air. But their position was hardly exclusive, and most scholars and students were Cairene by birth or domicile. The life of the academic world blended thoroughly into that of the urban metropolis around it.

Over the course of the Mamluk period, those institutions housing lessons in the Islamic religious and legal sciences grew progressively more intertwined with the life of the neighborhoods surrounding them. The broader urban society sometimes made its presence felt within madrasas and other institutions in ways wholly unrelated to their academic and devotional functions. For example, until the year 1388, postal couriers arriving from Syria and elsewhere stayed exclusively at the Qaralisunquiriya madrasa, established at the beginning of the century. When Jamal al-Din Yusef al-Bahawî was appointed to the high office of 'ustâd dar' under Sultan al-Nasir Faraj ibn Barquq (reigned 1399–1412), he began to use the Hizâziyya madrasa as a prison, a practice continued by his successors. Despite this, al-Maqrizi tells us, the madrasa remained among the most splendid in Cairo, and Shafi'i and Mamluk jurists continued to teach there and receive salaries through the end of the Mamluk period.

More commonly, however, educational institutions provided a focal point for the prayer, worship, and other pious deeds of many besides those directly involved in teaching or attending classes. Some reflection of this may be seen in the architecture of the buildings themselves. A number of schools, of course, were located in the large, open communal mosques designed for use by a large and diverse public. Moreover, in

11 Taqi T-Din Ahmad al-Maqrizi, al-Maana'îs wa'l-athâb bi-dhikr al-khâṣṣ wa'l-athâb (Bâle, A.D. 1775), 2:394.

12 Al-Maqrizi, Khatib, 2:388.


14 Al-Maqrizi, Khatib, 2:393. The post of Shafi'i professor at the Hizâziyya was held repeatedly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by members of the famous al-Buhûrî family, including Sayf al-Din 'Umar (d. 1403), Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahîm (d. 1415), and Wali T-Din Ahmad (d. 1463). Ibid., 2:392; al-Suhkawat, al-Din, 2:199, 4:106–13.
those enclosed buildings more typical of some of the smaller madrasas, there was, over the course of the fourteenth century, a tendency toward removing the living accommodations set aside for students from the more “public” areas of the schools, so that windows, for example, overlooked interior openings or the outside street or alley, rather than the inner courtyard and arched recesses in which lessons, prayers, and other communal activities would take place. The schools, in other words, were becoming more public spaces, so that a level of privacy and quietude had to be established for the students.

Here again, however, form may have followed function, since madrasas and cognate institutions of learning had begun to serve as public forums before the perceived architectural shift. The Hassaniyya madrasa (built 1356–62), as an institution that combined systematic education with all the functions of a congregational mosque, pointedly included living cells that were withdrawn from the central, open areas of the institution. Other, slightly later madrasas may have further separated living accommodations from the main structures of the schools. But we know that functions such as daily prayers for the community at large and the Friday congregational prayers had been attached to educational institutions several decades earlier. Friday prayers had been instituted at the Sâlihiyya madrasa as early as 1329–30, and other prominent schools had been established at large congregational mosques such as those of Ibn Tulun and al-Hakim.

Already at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, Badr al-Din Ibn Jamâ’a had expressed concern about students in madrasas meeting and mixing with the general, nonacademic population during prayers. Such encounters must have become routine, however. Sultan Nasir al-Malik al-Adil had this madrasa transferred to Bayn al-Qasrayn in the heart of the city, specifically for the professors, teaching assistants, and students who lived and studied there. Their claims to the building were not, however, exclusive. On the contrary, it was also established “for those who frequent this madrasa and for those who gather [in it] for prayers and the performance of obligatory religious duties. And may it be left open to the Muslims in a legal fashion [as khattâ’ bayn al-musulûmin wa-baynahu takhlîyya sharî’yya], so that it is permitted to them to pray in it, and may its administration be [like] that which is usual in madrasas.”

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119 Ibid. Besides the Hassaniyya, the other madrasas that Behrens-Abouseif cites to define the shift are those of Umr al-Ashrâf Sha’tân (1360) and Aljây al-Yânâfi (1373).
120 Ibn Jamâ’a, Fadîqârât al-ahmât, 322.
121 From the summary of the Nâṣirîyya’s endowment deed as provided by al-Nuwariyy in...
in al-Azhar until the separate mosque that was to house them had been completed; the endowment also specified that alms and clothing be distributed to the poor during the month of Ramadān. Increasingly over the Mamluk period, school complexes included large cisterns to provide water to a thirsty public.

Unusual circumstances at the madrasa of Jawhar al-Lālī highlight the extent to which schools could become centers for thoroughly nonacademic activities. This madrasa had been built in southern Cairo on the hill between the Ḥāsāniyya and the Citadel in 1430–31. Several years after its opening, the school’s founder appended to its deed of endowment a stipulation regarding a white pearl that was to be housed inside the madrasa. The condition of the document leaves much to be desired, and parts of it are illegible. Enough can be read, however, to ascertain that the pearl and an accompanying copper pot, inscribed with appropriate Quranic verses, were believed to provide an effective cure for certain diseases of the urinary tract. One complaining of such an ailment was to place the pearl in the pot with a quantity of water, and then, after the water had absorbed the healing power of the pearl, drink the liquid. Leaving aside questions about the efficacy of the cure, what interests us is that Jawhar al-Lālī saw fit “to establish a place [for the healing pearl] in his madrasa” so that the “whole [community] of Muslims” (al-Insān al-musālim) could benefit from it.

All this reflected the essentially public character of Islamic piety and charity. The benefactors who built and endowed schools did not, for the most part, tuck them away in isolated and unpopular corners, but set them down in the busiest quarters of the city. While a madrasa, mosque, or khanqāh might be designed principally to facilitate instruction in the Islamic legal and religious sciences, such a purpose was in no way incompatible with other charitable endeavors. Hence a secondary activity associated with virtually every school of higher education, and one from which any Muslim inhabitant of Cairo might derive benefit: the organized recitation of the Qur’ān. Most schools included among their stipendiaries men whose duty it was to recite the Qur’ān in small groups.

Education and the Noninstitutional Staff of the Schools

The prominence of organized groups of Qur’ān readers at virtually every school may suggest that one of the principal reasons why the academic and nonacademic spheres mixed so harmoniously was that these were more than mere institutions of education. They were also centers of public worship. This involved far more than the simple participation of the general population in prayer and ritual in those institutions. Larger schools hired substantial numbers of men to fill nonacademic positions deemed necessary to the proper functioning of an educational institution, individuals of varying degrees of academic attainment drawn principally from among the local population. An institution the size of the mosque of al-Mu‘ayyad Shaykh, just inside the southern gate of the city of Cairo, could afford extensive specialization of function among those it hired. The Mu‘ayyadiyya employed more than 150 men in occupations that had nothing directly to do with education, including 4 imāms, 17 muezzins, and a total of 59 Qur’ān readers. The immense madrasa of Sultan Hasan was even more lavish, employing 6 imāms, 51 muezzins, and more than 120 Qur’ān readers.

But all medieval schools devoted sizeable portions of their expendi-
tures to paying the salaries of functionaries whose duties were not directly instructional. Even late Mamluk madrasas that made no provisions at all for the direct financing of professors or students, such as those of Qānūn Bāy Qārā, al-Sayfī Bāybars, or Sultan al-Ghawrī, nonetheless hired a full complement of religious, service, and administrative functionaries. Some services could not be dispensed with by even the smallest schools. The madrasa of Qalmtātī, for example, supported only five Ḥanafī students and their shaykh, but also employed an imām, three muezzins, a Qur’ān reader, and a buwādī (gatekeeper).

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30 Cf. Petry, Civilian Elite, esp. chap. 3.
Leaving aside those involved in the administration of the properties that comprised the schools’ endowments, the nonacademic functionaries of educational institutions executed a variety of responsibilities that demanded varying levels of academic accomplishment. The most prestigious positions in most institutions were those of the imam and the khaṭīb, who delivered the Friday sermon; at those late-Mamluk madrasas that hired no teachers or students, the imām and the khaṭīb led the list of the institutions’ stipendaries and received higher monthly salaries than other appointees. Virtually every school hired at least one imām, and perhaps half hired khaṭībs as well. Most of these prayer leaders and preachers received a stipend between one-fifth and one-half that paid to professors of jurisprudence, but noticeably above that given to students. Variations were possible, however. At the khanaqāh of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ustādār, for example, the position of imām was to be filled simply by one of the institution’s Sufi students, who received a modest supplement to his normal stipend, while at other schools the imām was actually paid more than the professors.

Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 313, Waqfīyat Qanāṭir al-Ǧawwārī, Wizārat al-Awqaf o.s. No. 982; Waqfīyat Qanāṭir al-Ǧawwārī, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 68. 28 Waqfīyat Qanāṭir Qaṣīrāt Qaṣīrāt, Wizārat al-Awqaf o.s. No. 1019, at whose madrasa the imām received 50 and the khaṭīb 30 1/2 dirhams and, considerably more than any other stipendaries; Waqfīyat al-Sayf Barāq, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 313, where the corresponding figures were 50 and 25, also the institution’s highest; and Waqfīyat Qanāṭir al-Ǧawwārī, Wizārat al-Awqaf o.s. No. 982, at whose madrasa the imām received 1,200 copper dirhams and the khaṭīb 900.

29 Compare, for example, the stipends paid at the following institutions: at the madrasa of Jawhar al-Labīl, 500 copper dirhams for the šaykh/ḥanafī professor, 300 for the imām, and 200 each for the Sufi students. Waqfīyat Jawhar al-Labīl, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 86; at the mosque of Sūṭa min Zāda, 250 dirhams for the ḥanafī and ḥanafī professors, 100 each for the khaṭīb and the imām, and 30 dirhams for the students, Waqfīyat Sūṭa min Zāda, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 56; at the Saqāṭīn al-Ǧuyūs, 300 dirhams for the ḥanafī professor, 70 for the imām, and 55 for the students of jurisprudence, Waqfīyat Saqāṭīn, Wizārat al-Awqaf o.s. No. 3105; at the Ġusārāt (Barbary), 3,000 copper dirhams for the šaykh/ḥanafī professor, 1,000 for the imām, 500 for the khaṭīb, and 300 for the students, Waqfīyat al-Ǧusārāt Barbary, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 173. Since these represent institutions of differing size and wealth, founded at different times, the values of the currencies of account vary; comparisons are meant to be drawn only between employees of the same institution, to illustrate the level of the remuneration of the imāms and the khaṭībs relative to other stipendaries.

30 Waqfīyat Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ustādār, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 106; cf. the situation at the Zāhiyya madrasa, Waqfīyat al-Zāhiyya Baraṣq, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 51. At the mosque of al-Šāhīl Kūfī, the imām received 70 dirhams per month to 600 for the šaykh/ḥanafī, Waqfīyat al-Šāhīl Kūfī, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 76. The endowment deed of Khusaybād al-Zimān stipulated that the imām was to be paid as much as the šaykh/ḥanafī and ḥanafī professors combined; Waqfīyat Khusaybād al-Zimān, Wizārat al-Awqaf n.s. No. 185. At the madrasa of Qalansūṣī, the imām and the šaykh/ḥanafī both received 100 dirhams per month; Waqfīyat Qalansūṣī, Dār al-Wathāʾiq No. 68.

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Clearly those appointed as imām or khaṭīb had attained some level of academic accomplishment in the Islamic religious sciences. At some smaller schools, such as the khanaqāh of Zayn al-Dīn Ǧudī, the same man was to function as imām and ṣufī šaykh and, if possible, as Ǧaḥīfī professor. Several schools required that the imām and/or the khaṭīb be either the šaykh/ḥanafī or ḥanafī, which may suggest that these appointees were assumed to have had at least a basic training in the jurisprudence of their rite. Similarly, the imām at the Jamālīyya khānqāh was to be a ḥanafī, and a student of the noble sciences. Moreover, since leading prayer or preaching the Friday sermon was, at least in the larger institutions, a prominent public activity, some of the most important jurists and religious scholars of the Mamluk period occasionally delivered the Friday sermon at different mosques and madrasas, better the-known Cairene institutions. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAṣqānī, for example, was successively khaṭīb at the famous al-Ẓahrā and at the mosque of Ḥamīn al-Fuṣṭāṭ. But very often the positions of imām and khaṭīb, the remuneration for which was generally inferior to that available to a successful teacher, attracted men of only secondary academic accomplishments. While such prominent scholars as Burhān al-Dīn Ḥusayn (d. 1448), Ḥāʾī al-Dīn Ṭabāṣṭabāʾ (d. 1455), and Qaṭī l-Dīn al-Qalqashandī (d. 1382) were Ǧaḥīfī scholars, the small number of appointees to the khanaqāh and mosques was relatively small.
1467) taught jurisprudence at the Mankūtāmuriyya madrasa, the post of the imām there was held by men of distinctly lesser repute, such as Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ibn Sābiq (d. 1477), a minor scholar who was also a Sufi at several Cairoene khānqāhs. Ibn Sābiq was succeeded as imām at the Mankūtāmuriyya by his son, also named Ibrāhīm, an equally unprepossessing scholar who memorized the Quran and “read a little of the Minhāj” (a basic textbook in Shāfi‘i law), who had been muezzin at the Mankūtāmuriyya before his appointment as imām, and who may have supplemented his income by working as a tailor.44 A similar pattern prevailed at other institutions. ‘Īzz al-Dīn al-Baghdādī studied jurisprudence and its foundations, hadith, and a variety of other subjects in Baghdad, Aleppo, Damascus, and Jerusalem before coming to Cairo to complete his education. In the Egyptian capital, he built for himself an impressive teaching career, counting Taqi ‘l-Dīn al-Qalqashandi, the historian al-Sakhāwī, and others among his students. In his academic career and the extent of his preparation, he typified those who held the teaching post (taṣāfir) at the Bāṣṭiyya madrasa. By contrast, the imāms and khaṭṭāb, of that institution, judging from the biographical record, seem to have been scholars of markedly lesser academic accomplishments.45

A similar pattern emerges for those who held the post of librarian (khāṭīn al-ḵutub) in the various schools of Mamluk Cairo. Since hand-copied books were expensive, beyond the financial means of many scholars and most students, schools routinely provided for the purchase and maintenance of collections of books in the religious and legal sciences. Consequently, as the endowment deeds testify, many schools employed separate librarians. At several places the post was to be held by one of the institution’s enrolled students, for which he received a supplement to his stipend.46 The deed to the Jawhāriyya madrasa required that, if possible,

44 Al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāne‘, 1:8, 151–52. On al-Baghdādī, Ibn Khādir, and al-Qalqashandi, scholars of considerably greater reputation, see ibid., 1:43–47, 446–48, 198–203. The Minhāj referred to here is presumably the Minhāj al-sharī‘ah, a popular basic textbook in Shāfi‘i law written by Abī Zarakhshī al-Nawawī in the thirteenth century.

45 For example, Abī al-Qādir b. Ahmad b. Jām‘ al-Dīn, ibid., 1:17 (d. ?), its imām at some point during the fifteenth century, who studied jurisprudence, hadith, grammar, logic, and other subjects both in Cairo and in Damascus, and was tutor to the children of the Ibrāhīm al-Shijna family and those of the Bāṣṭiyya’s founder (ṣa‘īda bint ‘Abd al-Sha’ma‘a ibn Jām‘ b. Ahmād), but who, as far as we know, never held a teaching post; al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāne‘, 4:361–62. Cf. Shībāb al-Dīn Ahmad al-Ash‘arī (d. 1477), khaṭṭāb at the Bāṣṭiyya, whose apparently meager education exerted no details in his biography, ibid., 2:131.

46 Waqfīyat Ḥamād b. Rūhān, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 120, 1:202–4; cf. Waqfīyat al-‘Alī b. Rūhān, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 128, 2:300–05; and Waqfīyat al-‘Alī b. Rūhān, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 128, 2:300–05; and Waqfīyat al-‘Alī b. Rūhān, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 128, 2:300–05. The reason given is that the imām should supervise the library.47 Wherever a librarian was employed, however, his salary was considerably below even that of the imām and the khaṭṭāb, ranking among the least remunerative and prestigious posts of the institution. In some, he was even required to undertake certain menial tasks: at the Zāhiriyah, to care for the institution’s “mats, carpets, and candles,” as well as its books, and at the library of the Ghawārīyya madrasa, to be not only librarian, but also farriṣ, a sort of factotum primarily responsible for housekeeping duties.48

Again, holding the post of librarian clearly required a certain level of academic accomplishment: he must be able to read, and should have some knowledge of the works with whose care he was charged. Some librarians were very successful scholars indeed. At the Mahmūdiyya madrasa, whose extensive library knew no equal in either Egypt or Syria, according to al-Maqrizi, librarians included scholars of the stature of Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī49 Ali al-Dīn al-Qalqashandi (d. 1452), a son of a prominent Cairoene ulama family and brother to Taqi ‘l-Dīn al-Qalqashandi, who studied with the leading Shāfi‘i jurists and khaṭṭāb scholars of the Egyptian capital and who held several prestigious teaching posts, at some point in his career was also librarian at the Ashrafiyah; he was followed in this post by his son Jamāl al-Dīn Ibrāhīm.50 But the biographical sources themselves rarely list employment as a librarian among the activities of those whose life stories they record.51 This lacuna does not

ence,” without specifying that the officeholder be an enrolled student in that particular institution.


45 At the mosques of al-Aṣṣarī Būrāq and al-Musayyad Shaykh, the librarian received the same stipend as a student: Waqfīyat al-Musayyad Shaykh, Wizarat al-Kawqif, o.s.o. No. 908, Waqfīyat al-Aṣṣarī Būrāq, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 173, 1:125–128. He received the same salary as the bawwāl at the Nāṣiriyya madrasa on Bayn al-Qasrayn, and less than the bawwāl at the madrasas of al-Sayyid Baybars and Qāsim Bāy Qarā, Waqfīyat al-Nāṣiri Muḥammad, as summarized by al-Nawawī in Nījabat al-ṣirāt, published in al-Maqrizi, al-Futūḥ, 1:1047; Waqfīyat al-Sayyid Baybars, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 313, 1:160–62. Waqfīyat Qāsim Bāy Qarā, Wizarat al-Kawqif, o.s.o. No. 1019. There were exceptions to this rule, of course. We do not know what the stipend was for the librarians at the Mahmūdiyya madrasa, but the importance of that library and the prestige of at least some of its librarians may suggest that his salary was higher than most; see below.

46 Waqfīyat al-Zāhirī Būrāq, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 51, 1:965–89; Waqfīyat Qāsim Qal‘ish, Dīr al-Walī‘a‘q, No. 902, pp. 158–89. At the Ghawārīyya, while the librarian received a stipend of 1,500 dhūrān “for the two wazāfīr”, (i.e., for supervising the library and for underlining the firshāt), it is clear that he could hire another to be farriṣ, and pay him “what he wishes.”

47 On the Mahmūdiyya library, see al-Maqrizi, Kirāt, 3:996; al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāne‘, 2:309; mentions that Ibn Ḥajar held the post of librarian there.

48 On ‘Ali al-Dīn, see al-Sakhāwī, al-Dāne‘, 3:581–83; and Jamāl al-Dīn, see ibid., 1:777–78.

49 Petr, Civilians Elite, 253–54, 376–77. Petr’s survey of the educated elite in fifteenth-century Cairo revealed the names of only thirty-eight men who held the post of librarian.
implies that few were actually hired as librarians in the schools of medieval Cairo. On the contrary, the endowment deeds suggest that most institutions did employ someone to supervise their collections of books. Rather, it probably indicates that the post was simply not that important, and that those who held it were generally minor scholars of insignificant academic accomplishment, who merited little or no mention in biographical compilations.

Moving down the list of those religious but nonacademic functionaries hired by most Cairene schools (who received, generally, progressively lower stipends), the level of their expected educational attainment also declined. The list of the functionaries at an institution the size of the Mu‘ayyadyya reads like a list of employment opportunities for unassuming and only partially educated umma: muizzins, assistants to the khatib, a mādhī to read poems in praise of the Prophet, a primary school teacher (mu‘uddīb) and his assistant (ʿarif), scribes to record the names of Sufis missing from their religious exercises, and of course any number of Quran readers. To be sure, most lower-level religious functionaries attached to madrasas, khānqāhs, or teaching mosques need not have received substantial higher instruction in jurisprudence or other Islamic sciences. A muqrī (Quran reader), for instance, need not have accomplished anything more than memorizing the Quran. But two things are important to note. The first is the sheer number of men in late medieval Cairo who participated directly in the functions of academic institutions, even if their duties were not strictly related to education. Nothing approximating a precise figure can be given, partly because the surviving deeds of endowment are so few in comparison to the total number of schools, and partly because many individuals might have concurrently held appointments in more than one institution. Moreover, references in the biographical dictionaries to these lower-level functionaries are relatively rare, since the comparative lack of prestige associated with their positions did not often excite the interest of the biographers and historians. But it must have been a sizeable group. As we have seen, virtually every school hired several muizzins, Quran readers, and men in a variety of service positions—gatekeepers to guard the doors, farāshīs to clean the buildings, waqqāqdīs to “wash the candles and clean them, to fill and hang them, to light and extinguish them,” mubakkhīrs to “spread incense during gatherings in the aforementioned places [in the madrasa] and [during] Friday prayers, the two Feasts, and the tarwīṭh [the nightly prayers during the month of Ramdān].” Even if most schools hired considerably fewer men than the Mu‘ayyadyya or the Ḥasanīyya, the total number of Cairenes directly employed by academic institutions—dependent, that is, for at least a portion of their livelihood on the world of education—must have reached several thousands at any given point in time.

More importantly, however, it was possible, and probably not that uncommon, for these lower-level functionaries to attend and to participate directly in classes in the higher Islamic sciences. To be sure, the deeds of endowment for several schools specified that their own students were to hold these posts—tact as gatekeeper, or as Quran readers, or even as imām—in addition to fulfilling their academic and devotional responsibilities; this was especially true in institutions whose students were also required to be Sufis. The Ghawriyya madrasa, although it provided no stipends for students, nonetheless required that some of its functionaries, for example, the three Quran readers in the qubta (domed burial chamber), be drawn from among “the students of the holy sciences,” perhaps those who frequented the school. The biographical dictionaries, too, indicate that many of the lower-level religious functionaries of the schools, and even those who held service positions in them, were local men sometimes educated in the very subjects those schools taught.

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52 Contra Petry, Ciyâliyya Elite, 253, who concluded that the lack of references to librarians in the biographical literature suggested that the post was not common in religio-academic institutions. When he wrote the book, however, Petry could not have known of the frequency with which the position appeared in the deeds of endowment of Cairene schools; more than half of those surveyed during the course of the present research provided for the hiring of librarians.

53 Hence the standard requirement made by the terms of the institutions’ endowments that the Quran readers (muqrīs or qurrā‘) have memorized the Quran—al-qurrā‘ al-‘aṣ-ḥafīn bi-l-khittāt allāh. This phrase is drawn from the Waqqāq of Ṣultan Burqayr, Dar al-Wathā‘iq No. 51, l. 944, but similar expressions are found in virtually every deed of endowment. Cf. Petry, Ciyâliyya Elite, 263.

54 Petry’s survey of the fifteenth-century Cairene elite, for example, identified only 187 professional Quran readers, compared to 238 imāms, 279 khāfīfis, and 496 professors—despite the fact that Quran readers hired by academic institutions often outnumbered professors in those schools by a factor of five, six, or more. Petry, Ciyâliyya Elite, 375, 379, 391, 383.


56 The Jamāliyya reserved a number of minor positions for its Sufi students, including those of mūththār, librarians, teacher for the institution’s primary school, and imām, six muizzins, seven to act as farāshīs and waqqāqīs, and others. Waqqāqyya Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ustādis, Dar al-Wathā‘iq No. 106. The Sufi students at the khānqāh of Zayn al-Dīn Sīdīqī doub led as primary school teachers, muizzins, and gatekeepers, among other occupations. Waqqāqyya Zayn al-Dīn Sīdīqī, Dar al-Wathā‘iq No. 59. At another mosque, a Shāfi‘ī student was librarian, while a khānqāh, a Hanbalī student was qur‘ī al-‘aṣ-ḥafīd (on which position see below), Waqqāqyya Zayn al-Dīn al-Ustādis, Dar al-Wathā‘iq No. 110; Waqqāqyya Mu‘ghalliyā Jamāl, Waqqāqyya al-Awqaf o.s. No. 1066.

57 Waqqāqyya Qāsimī al-Ghwawī, Waqqāqyya al-Awqaf o.s. No. 882, pp. 193-94. The fact that this particular phrase was not used regarding the imām, the muizzins, and other functionaries, of course, does not necessarily imply that these men were not themselves students.
Consider, for example, two muezzins. Badr al-Din Hasan al-Qaimari al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 1480) studied a number of subjects, including jurisprudence and grammar, but especially farā‘id, that is, the science of asportioning inheritances according to the strict rules of Islamic law; eventually he succeeded his teacher Abu Tawāl al-Malikī as professor of the subject at a madrasa outside Cairo. But before that, he had been muezzin in several institutions, including the madrasa of Sultan Hasan.58 Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Sukkur (d. 1404) was muezzin in the Māsāṭiriyya madrasa and the Ḥakimī mosque, near which he also had a shop in which he sold pottery. Ibn Sukkur, in contrast to al-Qaimari, devoted most of his education to hadith: not only did he hear hadith read by a number of transmitters and receive from them ijāzas, but he transmitted much of what he heard. The historian al-Maqari was one of his students, as was Ibn Hājar al-‘Asqalānī, who accorded him an entry in his biographical account of those with whom he had studied.59 This is not to suggest that muezzins and other lower-level religious functionaries were frequently well-educated or became prominent teachers.60 On the other hand, it is clear that they might partake in the education that made a full-fledged scholar, that they occasionally transmitted what they themselves had learned and received, and that their company included ulama of the highest stature.

What the network of schools provided, therefore, was an institutional structure that allowed many men who were not, strictly speaking, scholars, nonetheless to live on the periphery of the world of higher Islamic education. Many of the lower-ranking functionaries of these institutions, like the muezzin Ibn Sukkur, no doubt found it impossible to live exclusively on their meager stipends and supplemented their incomes with outside employment.61 The important point, however, is that they were drawn into the academic world, and in the fluid situation in most madrasas and teaching mosques, in which students and even teachers might come and go with a fair degree of freedom, they had an opportunity to study or even teach. A gatekeeper at the Mu‘ayyadīyya might have studied the classical Arabic language, while a simple Quran reader could study hadith and issue an ījāza to a scholar of the stature of the historian al-Sakhawī.62 A gatekeeper and Quran reader of the first half of the fifteenth century "studied a little jurisprudence and Arabic" and heard Ibn Hājar, Wālī ‘Ibn al-‘Iraqī, and other prominent scholars recite hadith, and eventually himself read traditions to the common people at al-Azhār and elsewhere.63 Even a mu‘azzin al-mālī, charged with supplying water to a khānqāh, studied both law and hadith, memorized basic works on traditions and Shāfi‘ī law, heard the recitation of hadith by some of the most respected transmitters of his day, and himself issued an ījāza to al-Sakhawī.64 In men such as these, the boundaries between the ulama and the common people became blurred and indistinct. They belonged to the world of education just as legitimately, if not as exclusively, as those whose lives were devoted to scholarship and teaching. Through them, the process of transmitting Islamic religious knowledge reached ever more deeply into the fabric of urban Muslim life.

Madrasas and Mosques as Centers of Public Instruction

The social networks through which knowledge was transmitted also included large numbers of urban Muslims who had no formal ties at all to the world of institutional education, who relied not at all upon employment in those institutions, and who held no promise for any career in education. It included, in other words, the common people of the city. As we saw above, instruction in madrasas, teaching mosques, and khānqāhs was by no means limited to those actually resident in the institutions. Well over half of those receiving stipends from a school’s endowments might actually reside somewhere other than the school, as at the khānqāh of Janal al-Dīn al-Ustādār, where only 20 of the school’s 113 Sufi students lived on the premises. But more importantly, there was nothing to prevent many from attending an institution’s teaching circles who did not even receive a stipend from the school’s endowments. In this fluid

60 Petry’s survey apparently revealed no professors who were also muezzins; Cīrusī Elīţ, 375. Presumably his pool of professors did not include those who, like al-Qaimari, were professors of farā‘id.
61 Ira Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 139.
situation, with many from the surrounding community coming to the schools for prayers, sermons, or even medical cures, professors might find themselves instructing many besides those young students formally “enrolled” and planning an academic or juristic career: other scholars, part-time students, or members of the local community simply pursuing a pious interest in the Islamic sciences.

The fact is that madrasas, khānqāhs, and teaching mosques, while training a group of students who would go on to form the academic and judicial elite, fulfilled a secondary educational function of providing instruction at a variety of levels to the broader Muslim community. Consider, for example, the following passage from Ibn al-Ḥajj’s (d. 1336–37) treatise al-Muḥākāt:

It is desirable [that the scholar] in a madrasa, as has been described in a mosque, be humble and approachable to any student or any other who attends him, and that he forbid no one from among the common people [to approach him], because if religious knowledge is forbidden to the common people, the elite [al-ḥāqq, i.e., the ulama] will not benefit from it either, as has been explained. To lock the door of a madrasa is to shut out the masses and prevent them from hearing the [recitation of] knowledge [al-ʿistimāʿ li-l-ʿilm] and being blessed by it and by its people [i.e., the ulama]. The doorkeeper, too, should exclude no one, since to do so is a barrier to knowledge and a restriction of it, as has been explained. On the contrary, let the door be opened and forbid no one of God’s creatures to enter, just as if it were a mosque.58

The thrust of Ibn al-Ḥajj’s remarks, both in this passage and elsewhere in his treatise, is that nothing and no one should prevent the broad Muslim populace from attending lessons and teaching circles, whether in madrasas, mosques, or other venues. Of course, the very fact that Ibn al-Ḥajj condemned efforts to exclude the common people from participating in, or at least attending, teaching circles suggests that some scholars did precisely that. On this point, however, Ibn al-Ḥajj’s views were by no means extreme, and corresponded to the best opinion of mainstream Muslim scholars, jurists, and educators. Two years after Ibn al-Ḥajj’s death, the prominent Shāfiʿī jurist Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī issued a fatwā legal opinion in which he forbade a scholar who held an endowed teaching post in one mosque to move his teaching circle to the larger mosque of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ in al-Fustāṭ. In doing so, al-Subkī stressed the right of the people of a particular location to the benefits of a lesson endowed in their neighborhood:

58 Ibn al-Ḥajj, Maḏḥah, 2.104.

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57 Taqī al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Subkī, Futūḥ al-Subkī (Cairo, a. h. 1350; reprinted Beirut, n.d.), 1.480.
60 Wāṣafqāt al-Manṣūr Liʿlīn, Dīr al-Watāʾiq N. 17, II, 280–22; Wāṣafqāt al-Zāhir Bāḥrāq, Dīr al-Watāʾiq N. 51. The document in question, coming at the end of the scroll, is incomplete, and no date for it survives; however, it immediately follows one dated 3 ʿShaʿbān, a. h. 707.
therefore, that many of those availing themselves of this instruction would have been residents of the quarters in which these schools were found. At the madrasa complex of Sultan al-Ghawri, the man hired to teach writing (taqżīfat al-taқīb) was explicitly instructed to direct his efforts to al-nās, a term that here seems to refer to the general population.\textsuperscript{22} Similarly, the primary school teacher attached to the madrasa of Jawhar al-Lālā was required, in addition to his normal duties in the school’s maktab, to instruct 8ūfīs “and others” in the art of writing.\textsuperscript{23}

The biographical dictionaries tell us little about the individuals who earned a living teaching the art of writing and calligraphy. Of Qāṭābī b. ‘Umar al-Mu’ālikīb (d. 1486), for example, we know only that he studied the Quran, ḥadīth, and the Arabic language, and that his education sufficed to qualify him to hold minor religious positions, such as Quran reader in the mosque of Uţbāk al-Zāhirī, as well as “the post for teaching writing” (al-tasādud ‘l-taқīb) at that institution. Another instructor in writing, A‘bāb b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Turkī (d. 1374-75), was, judging by his name, a member of the Manṣūrī military caste rather than the educated civilian elite. We know only that he studied the art of writing from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Sīnābī, and that he so excelled in the field that “he was appointed to the madrasa of Umm al-Sultān, there to teach calligraphy (al-ḥatt) to the people.”\textsuperscript{24} The very fact, however, that Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Aṣqālānī, al-Sakhāwī, and the other biographers record little or no information about the education and careers of such men suggests that they belonged, if at all, to the lowest ranks of the educated class.

At a slightly more sophisticated level, there existed a cadre of minor scholars who supported themselves, in whole or in part, by delivering simple lessons to the masses of the Muslim population who were not full-time students, or by reading to them from introductory religious and legal texts. The sources refer to such individuals as the qawāṣa (sing. qāṣa), “narrators” or “storytellers” who sat or stood in the streets of the city, reciting from memory verses of the Quran, or traditions of the Prophet, or stories of the pious early Muslims.\textsuperscript{25} The qawāṣa, of course, had been active in Muslim societies for centuries, and not always with blameless reputations. Drawing on both hadith and popular anecdotes and catering

to a wide audience, their recitations tended to the outlandish and the bizarre, and sometimes incurred the disapprobation of more rigorous and staid theologians and scholars. But the qawāṣa also responded to a genuine if not altogether discriminating demand among the populace for knowledge and information of a religious character. In the Manṣūrī period, lessons delivered by the qawāṣa resembled exhortatory sermons (ṣaʿīs, khaṭṭāb) more closely than they did formal instruction in jurisprudence or another religious science, so that they were urged not to recite to the common people material that they would not understand, such as complicated questions of theology, but to concentrate on simple matters such as fasting, prayer, and the alms tax.

More rigorous still, and more closely tied to the various textual traditions of the scholarly community and to institutions of education, was the instruction offered by the qāri al-kurṣ, literally “the reader of the qur’an.” This figure sat in mosques, madrasas, or khānqāhs, and read as opposed to the qāṣa, who recited from memory) from various books of the religious sciences: hadith, Quranic commentaries, and traditions describing exemplary Muslim behavior (kutub al-ra‘a‘iq). Here again, his audience consisted chiefly of common people not connected formally to institutions of learning. Like the qāṣa, he was enjoined to read from books that his listeners would understand easily, and that would not frighten them. Tāj al-Dīn al-Suhbī (d. 1370), for example, in his work Mu‘ād al-nām wa-mu‘ālīd al-nīqūm (“The Restorer of Blessings and Destroyer of Misfortunes”), gave a list of works from which he felt the qāri al-kurṣ could appropriately read; they included collections of sermons (kutub al-wa‘l 2) and al-Nawawī’s popular compendium of hadith, the Ri‘yād al-salīhīn, but also al-Ghazālī’s famous work on religious exposition, Ihyā‘ ‘ulūm al-dīn.\textsuperscript{26}

Although they are not always referred to as qāri al-kurṣ, quite a few Muslims in the Manṣūrī period spent their time teaching or “reading to the common people” from basic books of hadith, exegesis, etc. Karīm al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shābī (d. 1474), for example, “read from al-Targhīb wa‘l-Tarḥīb and al-Tadhkirah and the like to the common people in the mosque of the Moroccans, and perhaps,” al-Sakhāwī adds, “he delivered the Friday sermon there.”\textsuperscript{27} It was possible to earn a living at least

\textsuperscript{22} Waḥīṣī Qāṭābī al-Ghawri, Wizārat al-Wa‘īqīf o. a. No. 882, pp. 202–3. In the context, it seems likely that the term al-nās refers simply to the people, rather than to the Manṣūrīs, whom it often signified in medieval literature.

\textsuperscript{23} Waḥīṣī Jawhar al-Lālā, Dār al-Waṭāwī‘a No. 86, document dated 10 Jumādā al-Thānī, 1471, p. 55.