Sufis of the khanqāh, shall be appointed with him, and he shall read, in the presence of the shaykh and whoever might attend from among the general Muslim populace, what seems appropriate to him from books of Quranic exegesis, from books of reliable and well-known hadith, and from books of traditions of an exhortatory purpose [katib al-ra'iqiy wa-ll-adhkar].

This stipulation from the khanqāh’s deed of endowment highlights two important points: first, that many besides those formally enrolled in the classes, and implicitly many who were not full-time students, attended the mi’ād sessions; and second, that the transmission and explication of at least basic works of scholarship formed the core element of this popular Muslim religious experience.

What, exactly, did the mi’ād represent? A precise definition is elusive, and it may be that the sessions varied significantly from one institution to another, but certain common features can be identified. Fundamentally, it provided a more or less structured opportunity for the transmission of some of the basic texts of Muslim learning to the common people of Cairo. Naturally, hadith formed one important element in the materials available and appropriate to the shaykh al-mi’ād, and the popularity of the Prophetic traditions both as a source for practical normative guidelines and as texts for pious recitation gave them a special weight. Mi’ād sessions, however, provided scope for the introduction of materials from other fields of learning as well, and the texts recited and commented upon were not limited to hadith. At the Zāhiriyah madrasa of Sultan Barquq, for example, it was the professor of Quranic exegesis who also functioned as the shaykh al-mi’ād, and not the professor of hadith.

Eventually the post became one of the most common features of Mamluk schools. Every Tuesday from noon until the call to afternoon prayers at the madrasa of Zayn al-Din al-Ustādār, the qāri al-mi’ād was to read from and discuss books of Quranic exegesis, hadith, and the accounts of pious early Muslims (sakhbār al-ṣāhībīn). The qāri al-mi’ād at the mosque of Sūdun min Zāda undertook similar responsibilities, although he held his sessions after congregational prayers on Friday. Friday afternoons were also set aside at the Zāhiriyah madrasa for the mi’ād session. There, after the qāri had read aloud certain chapters of the Quran and appropriate passages from exegetical works and the collections of hadith, the shaykh al-mi’ād discussed on and explained what those assembled had heard. The madrasa of Sultan ʿĀṣim, like the Zāhiriyah and the khanqāh

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Teacher [muqaddar] of general instruction [mi‘ād ‘āmm] in the large recessed hall [facing Mecca]. A reader of good voice, from among the twenty

teacher [muqaddar] of general instruction [mi‘ād ‘āmm] in the large recessed hall [facing Mecca]. A reader of good voice, from among the twenty

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37 Compare Makhlûṭ, Colleges, 213, where he links the mi’ād sessions closely to the transmission of hadith.
of Mughulīyā al-Jamālī, employed both a qārī who read and a shaykh who expounded on the Quran, ḥadīth, exegetical works, and exhortatory traditions. In this more august institution, however, the mīʿād met four times a week, including a session after Friday congregational prayers. Even institutions that did not specifically appoint a “shaykh al-mīʿād” hired functionaries who effectively discharged the same duties. At the zāwiyā of Zayn al-Dīn Šāluq, the professor was required to hold twice-weekly sessions that, although not referred to as mīʿād in the deed of endowment, effectively functioned as appointments for public instruction: in addition to the four days on which he gave formal lessons, the professor was to sit and read to those assembled from books of exegesis, ḥadīth, and accounts of pious Muslims. At the great teaching mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, a Shāfiʿī scholar (faqīh) was appointed, along with a reader, to hold special sessions on three days (Fridays, Sundays, and Wednesdays) each week, in which they would read aloud from books of exegesis, ḥadīth, and stories of the pious. 64

It appears, then, that the post of mīʿād in institutions of learning in the Mamhūk period conformed with the less formal responsibilities of the qārī al-kursī. Both directed their attention broadly to the entire Muslim population, and both used basic books of ḥadīth, Quranic exegesis, sermons, and the like to instruct their audience as well as exhort them to a more pious life. Al-Subkī, in his Muʿād al-mīʿām, failed to mention the post of shaykh (or qārī) al-mīʿād; his omission is surprising because virtually every other educational, religious, and administrative post connected with institutions of learning received his critical attention. If the shaykh al-mīʿād performed essentially the same functions as the qārī al-kursī, as the deeds of endowment for various madrasas and mosques suggest, the absence of the former from al-Subkī’s work appears less puzzling.

From the middle of the fourteenth century, exactly the time in which al-Subkī wrote his treatise, the mīʿād appeared with increasing frequency in a number of Cairoene schools as an endowed post. In addition to the institutions in the foregoing discussion, we know that scholars received appointments as shaykhs of the mīʿād at the Aljāhyūyā, Barga-riyā, Ḥijāziyya, and Sābiqīyya madrasas, and at the Ḥakīmiyy mosque and

65 Al-Sakhwāwī, al-Durū’, 4:97. The phrase (uḥdīna lāhu . . . fī al-mīʿād) parallels exactly that often used for the act of granting a student permission to teach (uḥdīna lāhu fī-tadfrīn).
both the professorship and the mi'ād, holding them until his own death in 1466.  

The chronicles and biographical dictionaries of the period offer more examples of prominent scholars and educators who held posts as shaykhīs of the mi'ād. The point, however, is to demonstrate that, through this institution, pious and interested Muslims who had not devoted their lives solely to the study of the holy law and the religious sciences nonetheless had contact of an instructional nature with the leading scholars and educators of the day. This is not to say that the objectives and methods of the mi'ād necessarily mirrored the more rigorous instruction received by full-time students: the purpose of the mi'ād, after all, was as much exhortatory as anything else. But neither were they entirely dissimilar. The books of hadith and exegesis that were read and expounded upon in the mi'ād also formed part of the curriculum of a full-time student of the Islamic sciences. Organized lessons met less frequently at several schools than did the mi'ād at the madrasa of Sultan Hasan, although, admittedly, no one was required to attend the more “public” sessions of the mi'ād. Judging by the guidelines laid down in their deeds of endowment, classes at a number of the smaller and less well-endowed schools of Mamluk Cairo were hardly more rigorous than were many mi'ād sessions. The mi'ād, in fact, represented one end of a broad instructional spectrum, through which many nonscholars could enter the arena of and take part in Islamic education.

The Transmission of Hadith as a Community Activity

In no field of intellectual endeavor did the general Muslim population participate more actively than in the transmission of hadith. The Prophetic traditions formed one of the bases, and in many ways the most critical one, of Islamic law. At this level, the serious study of hadith constituted an important element in any jurist’s or scholar’s education. One might specialize in hadith as a distinct subject of study, as did no small number of prominent and accomplished scholars of the Mamluk period—Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī and Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Būlāqī, for example, to recall two whom we have already had occasion to mention. As we have seen, a number of prominent Cairene schools provided separate endowed professorships for instruction in hadith, as well as stipends for students to attend the classes. In other, smaller and less rigorous schools, hadith was counted among the subjects taught in a more general curriculum. But the recitation of hadith, legal, moral, and exhortatory, traced through chains of authorities to the Prophet or his Companions, also formed an important element in the broader forum of Muslim piety and worship. The act of publicly and piously pronouncing the recorded words of Muhammad possessed, in the popular eye, extraordinary efficacy and power. Once, according to al-Sakhāwī, the historian of fifteenth-century scholars, jurists, and other luminaries, it happened that Aleppo was besieged. One of its inhabitants saw al-Sirāj al-Būlāqī in a dream, and (the famous traditionist) said to him: “Let not the people of Aleppo fear. Rather, go to the servant of the sunna [the customs and traditions of the Prophet and of his community] Ibrahim bin Abu ‘Ajamī, the muhaddith, and tell him to read customs and ‘Unudat al-Akhāmīr [a popular collection of hadith] so that God might liberate the Muslims.” The man awoke and informed the shaykh [Ibrāhīm], who hurried to read the prescribed book to a group of students and others in the Shamsīya madrasa on Friday morning, after which he prayed for the safe release of the Muslims. And it so happened that at the end of that day, God gave victory to the people of Aleppo.

Similarly, when a plague struck the city of Cairo in 1388, the Shāfi‘ī chief qādī called together a group of men to al-Azhar to read the Sahih of al-Bukhārī and pray for deliverance. After two weeks, al-Bukhārī’s collection of traditions was read for a second time, in the İhaḳimī mosque, and again three days later in al-Azhar with, interestingly enough, a group of children and orphans. Even under less unusual circumstances, the recitation of hadith served as the centerpiece of public celebration, for example at ceremonies marking the dedication of a new educational or religious institution. Thus on the occasion of the opening of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muhammad’s khānqāh at Sīrayqūt north of Cairo, Bād al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Jamā’ah presided over a session in which his son, ‘Īzz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, recited twenty traditions. The sultan and those assembled listened to the recitation, at the end of which Ibn Jamā’ah issued ijāzs to all those present.

That the scholars reciting traditions at such sessions, or supervising their recitation by others, issued ijāzs to those present, testifies to the

84 Al-Maqūtī, al-Surūq, 3:577.
85 Al-Maqūtī, Khatībat, 2:422.
seriousness with which participants approached the occasions. Such sessions may have been primarily devotional, and did not, perhaps, provide the setting for rigorous instruction found in madrasas and mosques that offered organized classes in hadith. At the mosque of Ibn Tulun, for example, a more gradual and methodical approach was taken, and the institution's students of hadith were required to memorize at least one tradition per day. The occasional public recitation of hadith did provide, however, a forum in which large and varied segments of the community would gather to display their piety and demonstrate their interest in this particular form of Islamic learning.

No doubt the vast majority of Muslims heard the recitation of hadith, if at all, from men and women of relatively inferior education and transmitters of no special reputation. Shihab al-Din Aynad al-Nasuki (d. 1475) was perhaps typical of such transmitters. Having received a basic education in the religious sciences he became a scribe, known for the speed rather than the accuracy of his writing. At other stages of his career he led prayers and delivered Friday sermons at several Cairo mosques, and also acted as a legal notary. But most importantly for our purposes, this Shihab al-Din regularly "read hadith to the common people in one [or several] of the mosques" (kura a al-hadith 'ala 'l-umma bi-hayd al-jumum). The biographical dictionaries contain frequent references to such minor ulama, the extent of whose education was not wide, and who may or may not have held minor religious, legal, or institutional posts, but who informally read or recited hadith to the general Muslim population.

On the other hand, a budding young religious, early in his career, might read hadith to the common people before his appointment to permanent and more lucrative educational or legal posts. Shihab al-Din Ahmad Ibn Asad (d. 1468), for example, eventually became a prominent mubaddith and later held teaching positions in prestigious schools such as the madrasa of al-Zahir Barquq and the mosque of al-Mu'ayyad Shakhsh, as well as the post of official reader of hadith in the Citadel. At the outset of his career, however, while he was still earning a living instructing children in the Quran and functioning as a legal notary, he "read [in the mosque of al-Hakim] the Sahih and the Targhib and other books of hadith to the common people." The various schools of Mamluk Cairo responded to this pervasive interest in hadith shared by all Muslim inhabitants of the city, both scholars

and laypersons. Madrasas, mosques, and khanaqas routinely employed men knowledgeable in the subject to recite various collections of hadith in organized public sessions separate from any formal classes. These recitations became a distinctive feature of religious celebration, especially during the months of Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramadhan, and drew many members of the urban community into the corporate life of the schools. At the Zahiriyah madrasa founded by Sultan Barquq, for example, a qari' was hired at 50 dirhams per year to recite the two principal collections of hadith, the Sahih of al-Bukhari (d. 870) and that of Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875), during Sha'ban and Ramadhan. In addition, an annual payment of 100 dirhams went to a shaykh musammu' whose responsibility it was to attend and supervise the sessions at which the qari' read the Sahih. The school's deed of endowment therefore required that the shaykh be authorized to transmit the works through a strong chain of authorities (sanad, isnad). Two others were employed for similar purposes at the teaching mosque of Sadiq bin Zada; their combined endowment totaled 300 dirhams per year, and their recitation was to spread itself across the three months of Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramadhan.

The deed of endowment for the teaching khanaqah of Jamali al-Din al-Ustidhir is especially instructive. Hadith formed an important part of the school's curriculum, and the professorship was held at various times in the fifteenth century by such prominent transmitters as Ibn Hajjar al-'Asqalanl, al-Taqi i-Talqashandi (d. 1466-67), and 'Abd al-Barr Ibn al-Shihna (d. 1515-16). There, the primary responsibility of the professor of hadith was to instruct ten students in the subject. But during the months of Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramadhan, he was also to

supervise the reading [to] the students and whoever attends from among the Muslims of one of the six authoritative books of traditions [al-kutub al-sixah al-sanad]; except for the Sahih of al-Bukhari. From the beginning of the month of Rajab until the last day of Sha'ban, one of the five books is to be read in his presence; in the month of Ramadhan, the Sahih of al-Bukhari is to be read. For that [purpose], a qari' is to be appointed who has experience and knowledge in reading hadith, and he is to be read in them or the shaykh from a raised platform so that all who are present, those far and near, can hear [the recitation].
Such recitations became a standard feature of schools of higher education during the Mamluk period. Most commonly, the principal work recited was the Šabih of al-Bukhārī, not infrequently supplemented by the Šabih of Muslim; in at least one madrasa, however, the reciter of hadith was also to read aloud another collection, al-Šifā.27 In general, the recitations were spread out over the three months, culminating during the month-long fast of Ramadhān, although they might, as at the madrasa of Barqūq, be limited to Sha'bān and Ramadhān.28 Less frequently, a school’s endowment might make provisions for the continual public recitation of the Šabih of al-Bukhārī over the course of the entire year, as did Sultan Lājin’s for the mosque of Ibn Tūlūn.29

Several points need to be stressed. These recitations, whether lasting for two months or three, were clearly associated with the public religious celebration of the holy month of Ramadhān, and were not necessarily a substitute for formal instruction in hadith, at least in those schools that offered separate endowed courses in that subject. The daily recitation of the Šabih of al-Bukhārī at Ibn Tūlūn, for example, in no way displaced the morning lesson in hadith that a shaykh and his assistant delivered to twenty registered students.30 Similarly, at the madrasa of Sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq, the endowment provided for a separate course in hadith for fifteen students and their teacher. Yet the public recitation there during Sha'bān and Ramadhān of the Šabih of al-Bukhārī and Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj was extraordinarily popular, and was attended by many of the citizens of Cairo.31 Here, too, we may see a blurring of the boundaries between rigorous education and popular devotional activities.

Such public recitations may have been distinct from organized and endowed classes in hadith, and were certainly attended by a larger and more varied assortment of people. But it was precisely on such public gatherings that many medieval Muslims relied for acquiring the “chains of authorities” (insād) that might make them prominent and sought-after transmitters of hadith. That these sessions, even those which met only during the three months of Rajab, Sha'bān, and Ramadhān, were instigated for both instructional and devotional purposes is clear even from the terminology employed by several of the deeds of endowment, in which the shaykh presiding over the session is called a mutasaddir, a teacher.32 They are virtually indistinguishable from the sessions described by the Syrian scholar and historian Ibn Ḥabīb. He recorded that he attended in Aleppo a series of public sessions in which the traditionist Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-NAqīb (d. 1344–45) transmitted an important collection of hadith to a group of Muslims from that city:

I, along with a group of Aleppoans, heard [from Ibn al-NAqīb] the entire Sunan of Al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān al- Ṣalihīnī [the certificate that he had heard the book] from Jamāl al-Dīn Alī b. Ḥasan [in the presence of the famous traditionist] Ibn al-Bukhārī, in sixteen sessions, the last of which was on the second day of Muḥarram, in the year a.h. 731 [1330], in the ‘Aṣrūna madrasa in Aleppo.

Most importantly, Ibn Ḥabīb noted, Ibn al-NAqīb “issued to us ijkās for all that had been recited.”33

Public sessions in madrasas and mosques, delivered during periods of religious festivity or at other times, while aiming at a larger audience and with partially devotional purposes, thus provided an opportunity for men and women34 to acquire certificates testifying to their having heard a given collection of hadith from a recognized transmitter, thereby earning for themselves a role in the transmission of this body of religious knowledge. The Zāhiriyā madrasa, for example, specifically provided for the employment of a kāthī tābaqūt al-muhaddithīn to record the names of those present at the public sessions, and what portions of the hadith collections they had actually heard, proving conclusively that many attended these sessions to acquire certificates of audition (samba’s or ijkāt al-sama’) authorizing them to transmit what they had heard.35 These sessions brought together scholars of varying credentials and broad segments of the urban Muslim population. The point is not to insist that the ‘amma, the Muslim masses, were instrumental in the teaching of the traditions or were extensively educated. It is clear, however, that the transmission of this important field of Muslim learning took place in a very open world, one that drew no distinct boundaries between instruc-


31 Al-Sākhāwī’s biographical dictionary of fifteenth-century luminaries, al-Dīn al-ḥālī, is full of references to those, many of them by no means well-educated, who “heard [the recitation of the Šabih of al-Bukhārī at the Zāhiriyā.”


34 Khudūd al-żayn, daughters of Muḥammad al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Qādhī, were both brought by their father to hear the recitation of the Šabih of al-Bukhārī in the Zāhiriyā, al-Ṣalihīnī, al-Ḍamī, 12:31. 47. On the larger role of women in the transmission of hadith, see Chapter Six.

35 Waqf waqf al-Zāhirī Barqūq, Dīr al-Wathiqātī, 51. 1. 1018. On the duties of the kāthī tābaqūt al-muhaddithīn, see Makki, College, 141.
tion and devotion, and in which large and disparate groups of Muslims could and did participate.

The Transmission of Knowledge in a Diverse and Inclusive World
This book began by taking note of an extraordinary story about Imam al-Shafi'i and his intense devotion to learning and scholarship. It may be doubted whether all medieval Muslims felt the same attraction to knowledge and learning that led him to scorn a beautiful slave-girl in favor of long nights of reading and study. Few in any society, no doubt, are capable of such discipline. But this and all Islamic societies have always placed a supreme value on religious knowledge and its transmission, and as a result they have always exerted a powerful pull, in one form or another, on virtually every Muslim.

The inclusion of the broad spectrum of the Muslim population in the transmission of knowledge was perhaps an inevitable consequence of the very methods and system of education. For centuries in the medieval West, higher education, often even literacy itself, was the almost exclusive prerogative of a clerical elite consecrated to the service of an established Church. Islam, of course, has neither a church nor a clergy, and therefore lacks two fundamental impediments to broad social interest and participation in education. But that participation was secured even more firmly by the most basic values that guided the transmission of religious knowledge. In particular, the emphasis on personal as opposed to institutional contacts and relationships, and the unquestioned superiority of the spoken as opposed to the written word guaranteed the persistent openness and informality of the system of education.

This is not to say, of course, that there were no hierarchies or barriers that worked to limit access to knowledge, or at least to bar full participation in recognized channels of its transmission. Some of them perhaps grew out of the very importance attached to knowledge and, consequently, those most deeply engaged in its preservation and transmission: the complaint of Ibn al-Hajj that opened this chapter, about the ostentation and waste of the ulama's clothing, which effectively barred educational opportunities to the poor, provides a case in point. But the system of education itself, which developed over the Mamluk period into an awesome and wealthy network of schools and other institutions, threw up barriers of its own. In particular, the ability of the ulama to privilege their own sons, and later almost to guarantee their succession to their fathers' teaching positions, must have acted to set the learned apart as a formidable if not entirely impenetrable, elite.

Such tendencies were countered, however, by a number of factors, not least of which was the extraordinary diversity of the schools themselves.

Education and Urban Society
The vast range in the size, wealth, and quality of the schools, from immense and well-endowed madrasas such as that of Sultan Hasan to the tiny institutions that supported only a few students with their teacher, provided scope for the incorporation into the educational system of a large and diverse group of men. Each school hired any number of men trained to varying degrees in the religious sciences, and responsible for some activity deemed indispensable to an educational institution. Through such channels, not only full professors, but prayer leaders, preachers, librarians, Quran readers, gatekeepers, and others tied their fortunes directly to the institutional structure of education, and seized the opportunity in some way to participate in the transmission of knowledge. Moreover, the schools as public spaces provided forums for prayer and worship by members of the community at large, the distinction between learning and simple worship, already weakened by the values of Islamic religion, was blurred even further.

The active participation of the common people of Cairo in the transmission of knowledge, if a distinct phenomenon, none the less parallels the ability of Mamluks and women, comparative outsiders, to acquire for themselves a niche within the educational system. What all this suggests is that Muslim society in the later Middle Ages was far less segmented and divided than we might otherwise have thought. To be sure, linguistic and cultural barriers separated the Mamluks from local Cairenes, legal and social restrictions imposed upon Muslim women set them apart from their fathers, brothers, and husbands; efforts to secure the inheritance of teaching posts by the sons of their incumbents reinforced the collective identity of the educated elite. But education, if it did not obliterate those boundaries, at least rendered them porous and permeable. In a very real sense, education acted as a leveler. It did not transform a Mamluk or a native member of Cairene society, nor a woman into a man. But it did bring together in the public sphere groups that might otherwise have remained separated in their private worlds.

What made this possible was, above all, the personal and oral nature of the transmission of knowledge. Education in the medieval period was never framed by any system of institutional degrees. Despite the proliferation of schools devoted to the religious sciences, instruction was never limited to particular institutions; it could go on wherever a scholar sat down, and could be shared by all those to whom he chose to speak. It was its personal and oral character that, in some form, made education accessible to all.

But just as important was the very frame of mind in which this society approached its religious texts. Learning constituted the highest form of worship recognized by Muslim civilization. If one studied hadith, for example (and it was hadith that provided entry into the world of learning
for many Mamluks, women, and others), one did so not only because they formed the most important basis of Islamic law. One studied these texts because to do so was itself a pious deed. Classes in any of the religious subjects routinely began with a long series of prayers, and could not be commenced unless all participating were in a state of ritual purity. One studied these texts because their very pronunciation contained a reservoir of enormous power, capable, as we have seen, of defeating Mongol armies and warding off the dreaded plague. One studied these texts because they provided a convenient and recognized model on which to pattern one's own life. To transmit them to others, to Mamluks, women, and common people, as well as to full-time students, was to transmit a body of information valuable to each and every Muslim.

It was factors such as these that encouraged every Muslim to seek out, to hear books and traditions recited. Mamluks, common people, and women, as well as the academic elite, all participated, on some level, in the transmission of the texts that embodied Muslim learning. This world of education, broadly conceived, possessed an extraordinary diversity. This very diversity may have bothered some, who felt that broad participation would threaten the integrity of Muslim learning. But from another perspective, that diversity stands as one of the monumental achievements of this medieval civilization.

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The waqfiyas (deeds of endowment) on which much of this study was based are housed in three Cairo archives: (1) Dār al-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya (the National Documents Archive), specifically the collection belonging to the Maḥkama Sharʿīyya, until recently housed in the Citadel; (2) the archives of the Wizārat al-Awqāf (the Waqf Ministry), sometimes referred to as the Daftarkhāna; and (3) Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya (the Egyptian National Library). For those from Dār al-Wathāʾiq, the numbers given below (and in footnotes) correspond to the numbers in the Maḥkama’s sijill (register). Documents from the Wizārat al-Awqāf are, in the Ministry’s register, followed by the Arabic letter qaʿf or jaʾm, abbreviations for the words qaʿam (old) or jaʿam (new), according to whether the document belongs to the Ministry’s old collection or to that series of documents discovered since 1967. For the sake of convenience, I have substituted the usual English abbreviation “o.s.” (for “old series”) and “n.s.” (for “new series”) in referring to the Ministry’s waqfiyas. Most of these Ministry’s waqfiyas are on long scrolls, and contain several related documents. The date (according to the Muslim calendar) given after the waqfiya’s register number is that of the first document on the scroll. Where the document in question has been published, I have also given the appropriate bibliographic references, although the editions of some waqfiyas are far better than those of others.

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