al-Haddad, grandson of 'Ali Najj and nephew of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Haddad, and himself a future mufti and judge in the town, was about eight years old when he entered a mā'lima located in the tiny prayer room of the little Humza Mosque near his house. With Ahmad at his Qur'ānic school were a group of boys from his quarter, the same ones who stood with him in the regular sundown children’s battles.

For generations in Jihā, as the sunset prayer call went out over the town, youths from opposing quarters met in combat under the spreading branches of a large tree in the central market square. As adult shoppers hurriedly dispersed to get out of the way, and merchants closed up their shops, the side alleys would be clogged with boys armed with sorghum stalks waiting to converge on the square. In his day, young Ahmad led the boys from his own and allied quarters. “I used to hit and be hit, but I don’t ever remember retreating,” he recalled. “In those days I was full of play, and my father tried to correct my behavior with punishments. But they say that when a boy is full of jinān (spirits) as a youth he will have great intelligence as an adult.”

Pupils addressed their teacher as “Our Master,” Sinna in colloquial. Sinna’s place was a slightly raised dais of cushions while his pupils sat cross-legged on a mat in a semicircle around him. As a child entered in the morning he formally greeted Sinna and kissed him on the hand or knee. Then he retrieved his personal wooden lesson-board, which had been washed and recaked at the end of the previous day with a clay solution that left a grey-white writing surface. Board in hand, he assumed an accustomed place. Thereafter, a pupil could leave only with permission. To be excused to go to the bathroom, for example, a pupil in al-Akwa’s school had to rise and say, “May God forgive Our Master,” and then make the appropriate indication with his little finger. Permission could be denied to those suspected of faking a call of nature as a subterfuge to go out and play, although then Sinna might have to put up with whining and complaints. Formally excused for the morning meal, or at the end of the morning session just before the noon call to prayer, the children escaped from the mā'lima “like sparrows from a cage.”

Though often a humble individual, Sinna was treated with great respect when entertained at meals at pupils’ houses. On such occasions he would replace his everyday school clothes with his best attire, including his scholar’s turban and multilayered, pure white gowns. In al-Akwa’s school there was also a daily institution of bringing blessing upon the teacher and the activities of the school. As they were excused, the children gathered outside the mā’lima, and one pupil led the others in shouting out their blessing at the tops of their young voices.

“May God forgive Our Master and his parents,” cried the leader. “May God forgive Our Master and his parents,” responded the others. “And our parents with his parents.” “And our parents with his parents,” in unison. “And those who study with him and learn from him [lit. “in his hands,” baynas handaṣṣ].” “And those who study with him and learn in his hands,” shouted the class. (n.d.: 44)

Sinna had means at his disposal to ensure proper discipline among his unruly pupils. With legal guardians, husbands, and governors, such teachers occupied a social role with a legally recognized capacity for discretionary discipline. The rod was commonly used, and al-Akwa’s teacher had in addition a simple pole-and-strap bastinado device, which restrained the legs of a child so that the soles of his feet could be beaten. In problem cases, Sinna put a pupil in a dark corner where he was not allowed to speak or even gesture to the others. As a still harsher measure, one that al-Akwa remembers caused feelings of desolation and fear (n.d.: 49), Sinna could keep the pupil in the corner when the others had been dismissed for lunch. In a procedure exactly analogous to the political process used to obtain the release of an official detainee, Sinna would entertain the interventions and appeals of some of the pupil’s older friends, who would offer their “guarantee” (kafla) that the delinquent pupil would not repeat his offense. In cases of grave offenses, Sinna might not accept these petitions, and the pupil would languish in the corner, at which point, just like a prisoner in jail, his lunch would have to be brought from his house.

Corporal and other forms of explicit correction, frequent and fear-inspiring though they might be, constituted only an overt aspect of the broad and subtle disciplining that was an important Qur'ānic-school objective. This was to instill adhāb, a complex of valued intellectual dispositions and appropriate behaviors. A verb from the same root (ādaba) means to educate, to discipline, and to punish, while adhāb the noun can refer specifically to either literature or manners. In a general sense, adhāb was the primary responsibility of a child’s parents. The Qur'ānic school specialized in correct comportment, both among a cohort of pupils and especially in relation to Sinna, and in the memorized acquisition of the Quran, the sacred text.

Qur'ānic-school formation was integral to a later stage of a child’s upbringing and development, matters that are elaborated upon in general terms in several law-manual sections. The responsibilities of the
mother and the father are differentiated in a section providing for the special circumstance of parental separation. Child rearing (hadana) concerns the care of dependent children prior to the age of discernment (tamzic), and in this the mother, or in her absence or refusal, another woman of her family, has the basic right and duty. The responsibilities include such things as proper raising (tarbiya), nursing and later providing food and drink, the cleansing of body and clothes, and care during illness. Specifics for infants, enumerated in a discussion of the hire of nurses, include "washing his head and body and clothes, anointing him with oil, putting kohl in his eyes, swaddling him in the cradle, and rocking him until he sleeps." The mother’s child-care responsibility continues until the child is seven, or the point at which the child reaches discernment. At this point, given separated parents, the child must choose which parent to reside with. The implications of a decision to reside with the mother differ for boys and girls: "If a male child chooses her, he resides with her during the night and spends the day with his father, who (should) educate/discipline him [the addaba verb], and place him in Quranic school or in a craft apprenticeship; if a female child [chooses her] she resides with her night and day."

In the manual discussions, a child’s later development is broken down into the attainments of intellectual and physical maturity. The transition from minority to majority entails the onset of full responsibility in one’s actions, including both obligations of the faith such as prayer and fasting and full capacity with respect to one’s social undertakings such as contracts. In his or her affairs the minor is under a protective interdiction, which is only lifted with the attainment of this two-part maturity. “Interdiction of the minor,” al-Nawawi writes, “is lifted with his physical and intellectual maturity” bulugh and rashd (1883: 16).

Bulugh is marked by reaching fifteen years of age, or by the emission of semen. The earliest moment it is possible is nine years of age. The growth of pubic hair is a decisive indicator of bulugh in a non-Muslim but not a Muslim boy, according to a preferred but contested view. [Bulugh] in a woman is indicated by menstruation and pregnancy. Rashd [in a boy] involves competency in ritual and financial matters, and that he not engage in sinful acts that would invalidate trustworthiness (‘adala), or be a spendthrift.

It is possible that a youth can mature physically without being mature intellectually, and in such cases the interdiction continues; when a youth matures physically, and he or she is also mature intellec-

tually, the interdiction is lifted. Physical maturity, bulugh, is associated implicitly with adult articulateness, with the bodily production of appropriately constituted vocings. From the same b-1-gh root comes the word bulugh, meaning “eloquent,” and also balagh, the name of the formal discipline of rhetoric. Balagh thus represents a sexual maturity or puberty that also implies a physical maturation in the capacity to articulate the word. At the onset of a youth’s capacity to produce semen, which carries a fertile seed, his word likewise begins to convey a matured intention and is therefore binding when communicated in the social world. Women and words are the associated ejaculations of potent male maturity.

As an analytically separate issue, intellectual maturity, rashd, a prerequisite for adult intentionality, can be examined in a youth, but significantly it is not connected with knowledge that may have been gained in school. The rashd indicators are instead those of practical sorts of competency. For boys this examination should take different forms according to the father’s occupation; for girls it is undifferentiated. Presumed here is the existence of the sorts of compartmentalized informal knowledge that necessarily attend a complex society and a developed division of labor.

The rashd of a minor can be examined and should differ according to status (al-manarat). The son of a merchant is examined about selling and buying and the negotiations involved in them; the son of a cultivator about agriculture and the financial management of those who undertake it; the son of a craftsman about that which concerns his craft; and a girl about that which concerns spinning and cotton and the protection of food from the cat, etc.

Set against this backdrop of conceptualization concerning child raising and maturation, the Quranic school was a specialized institution in which most town boys (and some girls) spent at least a few years. It was not by any means limited in its enrollments to the children of scholars or jurists. The result was a wide exposure to an authoritative intellectual world only a few would go on to master. In its later stages the Quranic school amounted to an apprenticeship in the specialized craft of knowledge. Meflama training ideally culminated in an individual who had embodied, and was capable of appropriately reproducing, the interrelated forms of both text and behavior. Such training was part of a general process of “inscription,” the social construction of what De Certeau terms a “corpus juridique,” a legal corpus or body of law. Two
complementary processes are involved: humans are entextualized and texts are physically embodied.9

Constructible in such terms are a series of ritual activities that serve to fix the social identities of children. These are described in manuals and enacted in Ibb. At birth, for example, it is established Sunna to recite the call to prayer in the ears of the newborn. Shouted out five times each day from the minarets, rooftops, or doorways of mosques, the call to prayer is the public summons to the fundamental communal activity of prayer. An infant is by definition unable to engage in prayer, an act that requires the physical capacity for articulation, the memorized Quranic verses, and the conscious formulation of the intent to pray. According to the manuals, at about age seven, or the age of discernment, children should be exhorted to begin praying, and by age ten they should be punished if they fail to pray. In the absence of an ability to pray, the infant can nevertheless be initially imprinted with the heard recitation of the call. The verb for “to call” to prayer is from a root that also gives the word for “ear” and might be more literally translated as “to make hear.” Hearing is the paradigmatic opening step in all recitational processes, and what is passively “heard” as the lines are spoken into a newborn’s right and left ears is not only a call to community but also the first citation of what will become his or her central recitation, the testimony of the faith, the shahada. The call to prayer contains the shahada lines “There is no god but God” and “Muhammad is the Prophet of God.” This first call, a recited word conveyed in the voice of the parent, is an opening social impression upon a human tabula rasa.

On the infant’s seventh day of life there are further recommended ritual undertakings, which are accompanied by animal sacrifice.9 The manuals specify that two young sheep should be slaughtered for a boy and one for a girl. This is an initial expression of a pattern of gender-based distinctions played out in many other domains of life, including some set forth in manual sections—for example, those concerning relative inheritance shares, blood money payments, and witnessing statuses. In Ibb, rituals surrounding birth include both the activities specified in the manuals and other local elaborations. On the third day after birth, for example, women gather to sing and celebrate with the mother; and on the fortieth day the period of a special food regime for the new mother, visiting by women, and separation of the husband and wife come to a close with a present from the husband.10

The gender differentiation in sacrifice is reinforced by the accom-
panying and also manual-mandated act of naming, the fundamental form of societal, familial, and gender labeling, which also occurs on the seventh day. In addition to this linguistic form of marking, boys in Ibb are also circumcised at this time. According to the manuals, male circumcision is not absolutely required until physical maturity (bulugh) is attained; it is recommended, however, that it occur in conjunction with the rites of the seventh day. Dramatized and concretized in this intersection of blood sacrifice, the bestowing of the name, and violent bodily marking are the broader contours of the general reproduction of society.

While boys maintained their own separate and unruly activities of play and combat outside the mi’lama,11 as pupils under the control of Sinna they represented the primary liminal group, one temporarily separated from society in order to be prepared for eventual full adult participation in society. The Quranic school experience was an extended rite of passage that, for some at least, gradually effected a social transition from an undisciplined and ignorant child to an adab-formed youth. In the sense that all such passages involve the loss of an old social identity and the acquisition of a new one, al-Akwa’s association of going to the mi’lama with the slaughterhouse and death is apt. Youthful play was eventually silenced.

The pupils’ special liminality is demonstrated by the role they assumed in the vanguard of rites associated with death and burial. “Among the enjoyable times for pupils,” al-Akwa writes (n.d.:53), “was when someone died and the relatives of the deceased called upon the school to perform its recitations at the head of the funeral procession.” To the relief of the pupils, the school’s normal activities were interrupted so that their youthful voices, repeating the names of God and the testimony of the faith, could lead the way to the cemetery.12

The conclusion of Quranic school studies was marked by a semi-public ceremony known as the khatam, which, in Yemen,13 occurred when a boy had successfully memorized a portion of the Quran. Guests, including Sinna as the guest of honor, were invited to a meal at the pupil’s house. His taha, his personal writing board, which had been repeatedly written upon, washed, and recoated over the years of his memorizing efforts, would now be retired. For the occasion, it was decorated by Sinna with Quranic verses in painted calligraphy and hung with herbs and flowers. Khatam ceremonies among the wealthy and powerful, such as that for the governor’s son photographed in Ibb in the 1950s (see fig. 6), could be extremely lavish events attended
by local dignitaries. For others, the khatam was a far more modest rite to conclude the ml’ama passage.

Many pupils simply dropped out earlier without reaching the point of the khatam. Until the time of the Revolution of 1962, the three or four years spent in one of the twelve neighborhood Quranic schools in Ibb would be the extent of many children’s (and virtually all girls’) exposure to the literate skills. For the sons of governors and of scholars, such as Ahmad al-Haddad and Muhammad al-Akwa’, and a small but consistent number of boys of modest and untutored backgrounds, however, the khatam represented the conclusion of only the primary stage of instruction. Already at this level, the characteristic pyramid of traditional instruction had begun to reproduce itself, providing, as always, a modicum of opportunity for upward mobility.

For the scholar-to-be the khatam marked the end of a time of early moral and intellectual formation. When a youth such as Ahmad al-Haddad began to join the madrassa, the advanced lesson circles in the prayer room of the Great Mosque, he stopped wearing the simple embroidered headpiece worn by a boy of his status and began to wear the elaborate imama turban of a scholar. Instead of the striped gown in

which he led his fellow combatants at dusk he would now wear white. For special occasions he had white overgarments with long, wide sleeves, and a sheathed dagger and embroidered dagger belt from his father to complete his formal attire. People in the community began to call him “al-Qadi Ahmad,” using the appropriate term of address for a young male from a qadi family who had embarked on the path of knowledge.\[14\]

Ahmad began to adhere to a more elaborate set of rules of conduct, for he had become one of the muhaajirin, the collective name for the advanced madrasa students. The term derives from the verbal root hajara, meaning to emigrate, to separate, to dissociate oneself, to abandon and relinquish.\[15\] Devoting themselves to the pursuit of knowledge, the muhaajirin passed their student lives in a kind of seclusion, entailing a still more developed liminality. The madrasa students were set apart from the rest of society by their special routines of study, to which they had initially been adapted by their years in the ml’ama. Ahmad rose with the dawn call to prayer and made his way from his house through the dark alleyways to the Great Mosque. Following the prayer and until sunrise, lessons were held by lamplight; even after sunrise light is slow in reaching the town because of the high peaks that rise immediately to the east. Following these early lessons, the students returned to the residence, known as the Hazr, a building located up an alley from the Great Mosque. Boarding students, such as Ahmad’s friend Qasim Shu’ay’ al-Din, a future teacher and doctor (‘abab),\[16\] and some of the teachers shared rooms in the Hazr. All the students ate their meals together there, beginning with an early morning “lunch” of sorghum bread and sorghum porridge. During the day many of the teachers occupied themselves in such lucrative work as writing contracts and other documents, while the students worked among themselves on their lessons until the afternoon prayer, following which they had a “supper” consisting of the same meal as earlier. They continued to study in the Hazr residence, pausing to pray at sundown, until the fifth and final evening prayer, after which they retired.

The muhaajirin passed their days between the madrasa of the Great Mosque and the Hazr. They were expressly forbidden to enter the nearby marketplace, the center of mundane contact among males going about their daily business. The muhaajirin were also not permitted to smoke tobacco or chew qat, the ubiquitous focus of everyday afternoon gatherings for adults. The Hazr was a place of retreat, and the muhaajirin were a community of scholars in training, who studied, took
their meals, and (among the boarders) shared small sleeping cells in communal fashion. They led an existence apart from ordinary society, in a seclusion that was a fundamental part of their lengthy initiation into the world of knowledge.

In demeanor, the students were typically shy and retiring, at least in forays outside their circle of fellow muhajirin. The rude and brash childish behavior that persisted well into Quranic school days was now thoroughly eradicated. Although they were legally mature, and while other youths their age had already embarked upon adult careers in trade and the crafts, the muhajirin retained a distinctive immaturity, a "bashfulness," when confronted with ordinary social life. It was during his years at the Great Mosque and the Hazr, for example, that Ahmad was engaged to be married to the daughter of his uncle 'Abd al-Rahman al-Haddad. He later described himself as "so shy I could not bring myself to attend the large engagement feast given by my uncle." This shyness associated with the muhajirin identity is as patterned as the stern, often asseritive, and even immodest character typical of many scholars who had left their formative years of study behind to become active in public affairs. Yet there were also a few men who seemed to retain that retiring quality, so pronounced among the muhajirin scholars, for their entire lives.

DARASA

In the Great Mosque lesson circles and at the nearby Hazr residence in Ahmad al-Haddad's day teachers and students engaged in a complex of activities known collectively as darasa.18 At its conceptual base, darasa was a pedagogy of recitation, a practice already thoroughly inculcated in youthful rote memorization of the paradigmatic text, the Quran.19 It was the ability to recite the Word of God that was marked and celebrated in the khutam ceremony. In Quranic school, recitation occurred in its simplest form and in association with the most sacred of texts. The problems of meaning and interpretation, however, remained to be addressed. The classical Arabic of the Quran was itself not immediately clear to the colloquial-speaking pupils who learned to recite it; beyond the Arabic words were complex exegetical issues. In Morocco, where students regularly undertook the considerably more lengthy and challenging effort of committing the entire Quran to memory, they did so without the aid of comprehension. They asked "no questions concerning the meaning of the verses, even among themselves, nor did it occur to them to do so."20 In advanced darasa instruction in Ibh, recitation continued to be fundamental, but it was set in combination with interpretive commentaries and elucidating discussions. The essential relation discussed earlier of text and commentary, of recited main and explanatory sharaq, underpinned darasa pedagogy.

An early suggestion of the key progression from recitation and memorization to understanding and application is found at the Quranic school level. Al-Akwâ writes that when the alphabet was introduced the pupil was initially told to repeat the letters, "alif, ba, ta, tha, jim, etc.... until they were memorized" (n.d.:39). Later, he "went on to the second stage, which involved learning how to place the letters in the written form of script on the writing board." This progression, from instructor recitation, to student repetition leading to memorization, and finally to the supplementation of memory by writing and learned understanding, also characterized the main routine of darasa learning. The relationship of Quranic school to advanced darasa instruction in the madrasa represents more, however, than the simple replication of a structural principle, initially embryonic and later elaborated. The shift from Quranic school to darasa instruction also recapitulates the general movement from the Quran (and the Sunna) to the jurisprudence of the shari'a, a movement from basic text to expansive commentary, from sacred to humanly constituted discourse.

In Ibh the Quran was not much memorized after Quranic school, although there were occasional individuals who went on to earn the title of haqz, one who had learned the whole text by heart.21 Among them were the blind students in Ibh,22 who devoted themselves mainly to Quran memorization and the art of recitation (tajwid). Their study, in the absence of any capacity for visual reference to a physical text that could be read or otherwise used as a cue, is a pointed reminder of the oral/aural nature of textual transmission and acquisition.

As a pedagogical complex, darasa was concerned with jurisprudence and an array of supporting disciplines, including the language sciences, Quranic exegesis, and the science of hadith. Darasa was broken down into several specialized modalities of learning, although some of the terminology involved is misleading, especially in the light of contemporary usage. Verbs that have come to mean separate activities, such as "to recite" (ula, tala'a), "to read" (qura'a), and "to study" (darara), were once much closer in their references. All were used interchangeably, for example, to describe the ritual activity the local muhajirin collec-
tively engaged in on the eves of Friday and Monday, namely, the recited repetition of the Ya Sin chapter of the Quran.

Beyond the Quran, in darasa proper, there were three distinct categories of texts and associated modes of relating to texts. In an autobiographical sketch, al-Shawkani (A.H. 1348, 2:214ff.) provides an unusually detailed example of this tripartite breakdown of textual relations in the scholarly habitus. In his enumeration of the texts he studied in his own formation, al-Shawkani begins with a listing of those he memorized, texts that are referred to as mahrufat, “memorized texts.” All were short, abridged works (he also calls them muhitasarat), and a few of them were versified. All are similar in their concision and suitability for rote acquisition to the maw'it of Abu Shuj'ah, which was among the memorized works forming the textual core in the advanced formation of Ahmad al-Haddad and other Shafi'i jurists. First among the texts al-Shawkani mentions in this category is in fact the maw'it of the key Zaidi text, Al-Azhahr. These texts designed for memorization were closest in structural identity to the Quran and were usually learned in a similar manner.

Such mahrufat, or memorized texts, constituted a first category of post-Quranic textual learning, which al-Shawkani says he began after his Quranic school khatam and before he embarked on his regular course of advanced study. Ahmad al-Haddad likewise recalled that he studied the Abu Shujah’s text and the Minhaj of al-Nawawi when, as he put it, he was “still young,” in his first years at the madrasa of the Great Mosque of Ibb. Al-Shawkani notes, however, that some of his total of eleven mahrufat were accomplished after his formal studies had begun, so that this first category should be considered both an initial stage and a category of basic acquisition coexisting with the other two types of textual relations.

Although he consistently identifies his teachers in connection with the second and third categories of texts, in listing his memorized works al-Shawkani makes no mention of any instructional intervention, indicating that he acquired them directly on his own. As with the Quran, this mode of relating to a text was not concerned with exegetical issues. Unlike the Quranic school process, however, which was guided by Sinna, this memorization usually involved a form of unmediated individual acquisition, designed to build a solid base for later study with teachers focusing on commentaries and interpretive problems. In this instructional absence—from both teachers and their own peers—students labored in the pure presence of the text.

Standard formulas for describing memorization use the verb hafaza, which also means to conserve and protect, and to store or place in safekeeping. The two main (and interchangeable) expressions using this verb and referring to memorization are h-‘aa‘ (and qalb) (by heart, lit. “on the surface of the heart”) and h-f-‘aa‘ (and qalb al-qalb). This usage of al-qalb, a difficult word, which can mean such apparently diverse things as “absence,” “concealed,” “invisible,” and “the supernatural,” and as a verb, “to vanish,” “to be forgotten,” and “to lose consciousness,” conveys the paradoxical qualities of memorization as a type of internal inscription. Memorization involves a knowledge Socrates understood to be “written in the soul of the learner”; in the Muslim tradition this knowledge is closest to the true self and yet absent, partaking of the genuine but elusive nature of the divine.

The great majority of al-Shawkani’s textual efforts are of a second type, classified as mawqaf, from the already mentioned q-‘aa‘ root. These are the “recited texts” studied in the pattern of qasa‘a ala (or darasa ala), a verb-plus-preposition formula indicating the standard recitation-commentary lessons guided by a teacher. This format was by far the most typical of darasa instruction. Lessons usually focused on works of commentary; these contained embedded basic texts, which some students had already committed to memory. An example in al-Shawkani’s case is the Shahr al-Azhahr, the important commentary on the basic al-Azhahr text. For the al-Haddad of Ibb and other Shafi’is the relevant texts were al-Ghazzi’s commentary on Abu Shuj’ah and Ibn Hajjar and al-Ramlili on al-Nawawi. While the scale alone of these multivolume works was prohibitive, the essentially disputed nature of commentary as a genre also rendered a memorization approach to them inappropriate. In Ibb some texts of the type memorized by a scholar such as al-Shawkani were learned in the mawqaf pattern.

In the typical lesson, oral presentation by the teacher of a section of the work under consideration was followed by his commentary—his lesson shahr. Later there was an opportunity for questions from the students. Isma'il al-Akhr (1980:11) describes the pedagogical technique of the northern highlands as follows:

Among the Zaidis, the teacher recites (jwqafs) the lesson and then comments upon it to the students. They listen to him and then he asks them during the commentary: has the meaning become clear? If one of them poses a question, he repeats the commentary, clarifying that part of the meaning that had not been clear. The second day, the teacher asks his students for a summary of the previous lesson, and this summary is called al-kibli.
Recitation is coupled with attentive listening, whereas commentary is associated with questioning. The situation in Yemen regarding student interventions during or immediately following the commentary portion of the lesson seems to fall midway between what occurred in Morocco, where no questions at all could be asked (Eickelman 1985:95), and Iran, where there were regular questions and extensive formal training in disputation (Fischer 1980: Mottahedeh 1985). It is reported of Sayf al-Sunna, the twelfth-century hadith scholar from Ibb, that he engaged his students in a discussion of the text he was teaching and that he eventually licensed all of them to transmit the text, except for one, who is said to have persisted in a disagreement with him.

The teacher’s oral presentation frequently took the form of recited dictation, as is indicated in the already quoted memorial poem referring to the jurisprudence text, “which he used to Dictate to me in the early morning darkness.” This dictation was the beginning of an instructional process the ideal end product of which occurred when a student could return to the teacher to recite back to him (qara’a ‘alāhi) the learned material. The pattern was established in the Qur’anic school, where the teacher demanded of the pupil, “Recite your lesson-board” (iifrāḍ lihāda). The pupil stood before the teacher, holding the lesson-board with the writing facing the teacher. The request was for the pupil to recite from memory a section of text originally taken as dictation from or written out by the teacher and then committed to memory on his or her own. In advanced study, the equivalent activity involved the accurate, correctly voweled recitational reproduction of the originally dictated work. It was the capacity to accurately reproduce the text that was taken as evidence of a learning achievement. Between the two moments invested with instructional weight—the opening recitation by the teacher and the closing recitation by the student—a great deal went on, but these activities of the interval were rarely remarked upon.

Although the aim of this second and principal type of darasa learning was not memorization, the day-to-day work of repetition of the successive segments of a text could result in an extreme familiarity verging on memorization. In accord with the theory of legitimate textual transmission, the established ideal was to “receive” the text directly from the teacher, but in practice the students frequently did a major portion of their learning independently of the lesson circle. Al-Haddad explained that the procedure in Ibb was to have recourse to teachers only when students could not resolve a question among themselves. “For the most part,” he said, “the method of study rested upon independent student efforts prior to formal instruction, with consultation with the teacher only in cases of intractable issues.”

“Peer learning,” as Eickelman (1985:98) has labeled the key activity of the interval, has been underestimated in studies of Islamic education “because it is characteristically informal.” Vital though it was, peer learning was typically left out of formal accounts of the learning process including those appearing in biographical dictionaries (cf. Eickelman 1985:92) because authoritative significance in this culture of knowledge was anchored in teacher-to-student nodes of transmission. After the early-morning lessons in the madrasa of the Great Mosque, most of the Ibb student’s day, including long hours spent at the Hazz residence, was devoted to study without guidance from teachers. During these same hours, some of the teachers went out to work as part-time notaries preparing legal documents to supplement their incomes. The pattern of separation was similar in Qur’anic school. After lunch the pupils pursued their lessons alone while Sinna passed the afternoon smoking his water pipe and chewing qat (cf. M. al-Akwa’ n.d.:44). In Ibb, the importance of peer learning for the acquisition and maintenance of the scholarly habitus was not confined to formal study; often a practice of informal study among learned friends continued in later years.

The theory of legitimate transmission meant not only that significance was attached to emphasized opening and closing moments of the instructional cycle but also that a predominately oral/recitational character was attributed to the process as a whole. The necessities of theory obscured not only peer learning but also the crucial role of writing. The unmarked activities of the interval were structured by an equally unrecognized reliance upon the activity of the pen. One of the features that distinguishes books by contemporary Yemeni scholars such as the al-Akwa’ brothers from accounts in the old biographical dictionaries is their attention to formerly unnoticed aspects of the instructional process. Thus Muhammad al-Akwa’ writes (n.d.:39) in minute detail about the Qur’anic school (a subject innovation in and of itself) and mentions that at the outset the pupil was shown how “hold the pen” and “place the writing board in his hands.”

From Isma’ il al-Akwa’’s book on Islamic schools in Yemen we learn that a potential artifact of day-to-day study by many of the advanced muhajirin was a written manuscript copy of the text worked on. In a passage very much unlike accounts found in old biographical dictionaries, al-Akwa’ (1980:269) describes the behind-the-scenes prac-
tices of former students in the important Zaid school in the northern plateau town of Dhamar.

Most of the students studied without one of them owning a book. They borrowed books from private owners or from their teachers and copied (yakula) the section for study from them every day. By the time he had finished a book, a student had his own manuscript copy of what he had studied. In a few years he had all of the books of instruction.

Contrary to ideal expectations, it is evident from this description that instructional transmission of the text often involved a mundane physical transfer, a simple borrowing of a book for the purposes of copying and study. Texts were not only carried in the "hearts" of scholars, they were often preserved as well in the form of personal manuscripts. The oral-medium formula of authenticity was quietly buttressed by the services of reading and writing. The existence of such handwritten texts also must be presupposed as a necessary accompaniment to many of the routines of memorization study, just as the "dictation" opening the standard lesson often required a written text as a cue.

Reading and writing figure importantly in the instructional activity of darasa. At the same time, however, their roles were systematically kept in the background while oral dimensions of the same complex of activities were placed in the foreground. This culturally specific devaluation and valuation of the respective roles of written and oral communication was integral to the larger theory of transmission upon which the legitimacy of knowledge hinged. The "dictation" relationship involved both a dictating teacher and note-taking students, but it was the oral recitation-like activity of the teacher and the listening of the students rather than his reading and their writing that were taken to be of consequence. An analytic identification of the important role played by reading and writing in this "recitational" complex should not be overstated, however. There were significant instances of memorization and aspects of transmission that occurred without the aid of a written text, including the mentioned case of the blind students and also the instruction of some teachers, especially those not teaching lengthy commentary works, who "dictated" their lesson texts straight from memory.

In view of the conceptual subordination of reading in the intellectual mainstream, represented by darasa instruction, it might be concluded that there existed no notion of "reading" in a sense equivalent to the Western "silent" and "comprehension" forms. This sort of reading was in fact common and routine, but it flourished without conceptual im-

plement only outside the instructional core, in subjects and activities relatively marginal or mundane in comparison with those associated with darasa. Such reading was considered an appropriate mode of relating to a number of textual genres, none of which were so rigorously "recitational" in either the character of their authorship or their mode of transmission as the basic darasa texts. In Yemen, the terms for such "reading" tend to be derived from the root ʿā-/ʿā'-, as opposed to the several verbs, such as ʿā-/rā'-, which referred to recitation-reading or dictation. Al-Shawkani, for example, uses words from both sets of roots to set his precocious reading of historical works and literature apart from his formal academic training. Referring to himself in the third person, he writes:

"Before formally commencing his advanced studies he worked hard in the reading (muṣalla) of history books and collections of literature, and this was the same in the days when he was still in Quranic school. He read (ṣala) numerous books and many collections, then he commenced formal instruction and studied with (recited to) (ṣara' ʿala)."

Most of the reading that went on outside the instructional sphere, that is, reading minus the concern for authoritative transmission which is by definition associated with face-to-face encounters and oral-aural connections, was of the ʿā-/ʿā'- type. A word from the same root is used, for example, to describe what an administrator does when he is handed a document: he "reads" the document, silently and for comprehension. Muṣalla was what one did with most library books.

The issues surrounding the relative importance within darasa of reading and writing skills versus verbal ones are posed more sharply in connection with a third and final category of study. Al-Shawkani concludes his listing of the works he studied with a category that he calls muṣmaʿat, or "heard texts." This comprises a short set of titles (a bit more numerous than his list of "memorized texts"), many but not all of which are the annually recited authoritative collections of hadiths, such as the Sahih of al-Bukhari and the Sahih of Muslim. The second of these was the work of ʿAbd al-Summa, who traveled from Ibn to Mecca in 1184. During the month of Rajab in many locales in Yemen, regular instruction was customarily interrupted as these hadith collections were recited in the local scholarly community. Many scholarly biographies mention that such texts were "heard."

What is especially interesting about the category of "heard texts" is that it separates out audition alone as a self-sufficient and authoritative
mode of textual acquisition. In fact, of a total of eight distinguishable methods of receiving knowledge from a teacher, "hearing" and the recitational study method of the maghribi'at are considered "the highest and the best." On the transmitter or teacher's side, adjusted for the different sort of text being handled, this mode of instruction is similar to the maghribi'at style; the terms "dictate" and "recite aloud" (qar'a) are both used in this connection. This instruction always departed from a written text because the lengthy compilations of hadiths, containing lists of linked transmitters' names, were not memorized (although, again, the originally spoken words of the mutan or individual hadiths frequently were).

It is on the student or listener's side that the "hearing" mode is markedly different. Through oral-recitational means the words of the author were directly and authoritatively reproduced, as in maghribi'at; but with the masma'at, no taking of dictation, no note taking, no writing, intervene to capture the words. Oral production is matched by aural reception alone: the great value placed on this sort of communication finds a model both in the initial transmission of the Qur'an and in its subsequent recitational use in ritual. It is in the "heard" texts mode that instruction most closely approximates the ideals of the legitimate transmission of knowledge. The fully reproduced presence of an original text—here including the quoted words of each mutan, the textual core of the hadith—is associated with an authoritative conveyance, via the voiced and heard word, across the human linkages between a teacher and the students assembled in his presence.

LICENSE

There are a number of general formulas applied to what transpires in the teacher-student instructional exchange. One, concerning a teacher, is that "a number of scholars benefited from him (iinta'a bihi)." This was a direct response to the fundamental condition placed upon the acquisition of knowledge—that it be communicated to the benefit of the community. Since the principal field of knowledge in advanced darasa was jurisprudence, or fiqh, one of the standard ways of stating that an individual "became educated" was tafaqqah, a verb derived from the same f-q-h root. Another important general expression for the reception of knowledge was akhadtha, meaning "to take." The student "took" some portion of what the teacher had (ma 'indahu) in the way of knowledge. In his autobiography, Al-Shawkani says, not modestly but appropriately in this conception of knowledge transmission, that he "took" all of what his several teachers had, "until there did not remain with any of his teachers anything that he [Al-Shawkani] had not acquired." He literally exhausted the text-knowledge of all of his teachers except for one, the very distinguished Za'di scholar 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd Allah, who died before Al-Shawkani had completed his studies.

The intense concern for specifying the human links in the transmission of knowledge is expressed through the detailing of precisely which texts were studied, how they were studied, and with whom. Al-Shawkani's seemingly obsessive recounting of a long list of texts, including both his maghribi'at and his masma'at, his "recited" and "heard" texts, with the title of each work followed by the name of the teacher in question, provides a measure of the significance that he attached to the careful demonstration of the particulars of authoritative textual transmission. In addition, he includes the repetition of such key works as the Shahr al-Azhar with several different teachers, and he regularly mentions just how much of a book in question was covered. "From the beginning to the end of it" and "all of it" are common in Al-Shawkani's lists, but he also frequently notes portions not covered—for example, "except for a missed bit at the end of the middle third"—or that he only worked on "some" of the treatise in question. The same sort of meticulous interest in the minutiae of textual interchange is found some seven hundred years earlier when Ibn Samara (1577: 149) says, concerning a student and a teacher, that "he studied with him some (basid) of Al-Tanbih." "I asked him about that," Ibn Samara continues, "and he said, 'Up to the chapter on Marriage.'" Elsewhere, Ibn Samara summarizes what occurred as one student received instruction from his teacher as follows: "He took from him and became educated with him with regard to part of his [the teacher's] heard texts and part of his memorized texts" (p. 95).

Equivalent to the khatam of Qur'anic school was the ijaaz of advanced instruction. Neither should be understood as a diploma delivered at the conclusion of a set curriculum and sequence of academic classes—these were notions that would appear later. Rather, both were "documents," the first an event, the second often a written text, giving evidence of a specific textual transmission, through a specific student-teacher link. Al-Shawkani names the individual with whom his Qur'anic khatam
occurred, just as he names the human mediators of the other texts he learned.

An *ijaza* typically authorized the student to teach in his turn the text that had been learned, using the formula for “oral transmission” (*rima’a*). Such usage represents an important further expression of the oral construction of darasa instruction. In an explicit fashion, *ijazas* articulate the genealogical manner in which knowledge was handed down through the generations. *Ijazas* documents could cover all types of texts and modes of learning. Zabara (1956:4–5) quotes an *ijaza* that gives the student the right to transmit the teacher’s *muqra’at* and *masmu’at*, which the teacher says he had likewise received from his own teacher. *Ijazas* could be either general (*ummah*), or restricted, pertaining to anything from a single text—as in the case of the *ijazas* Sayf al-Sunna granted to his students for Muslim’s *Sahih*—to a delimited discipline.

In provincial Ibb, at least by the turn of this century, the issuing of written *ijazas* was rare. Oral and biographical history accounts of the last decades of the old darasa system do not refer to a practice of formalized licensing; they mention only the names of teachers, and possibly, but normally separately, the titles of the principal texts studied. In any case, if the older *ijaza* institution had seemed to offer a marking of the transition from student to teacher, the transition was usually not abrupt. Al-Shawkani describes a period of his academic life during which he simultaneously took lessons from some scholars and gave lessons to others. The historian al-Burayhi describes an individual as “studying with those more learned than he and teaching those less so.” Isma’il al-Akwa’ (1980:11) points to the practice of charging advanced students to recite the lesson aloud as a distinctive feature of Shafi’i instruction. In Quranic schools, as Muhammad al-Akwa’ notes (n.d.: 47), it was customary to have “the older instructing the younger and the ones who understood teaching those who did not.”

Just as the *ijaza* was not a diploma in the contemporary sense, so the “books of study” (*kwab al-lab*) did not represent a conventional curriculum. For the darasa student, the works studied represented at most a specific *madhhab*, they were the standard texts of a particular school of shari’a jurisprudence. The biographical histories give evidence of specialization among some scholars; others dabbled, or in unusual cases such as al-Shawkani, went profoundly into numerous subjects. All, however, began with the key manual texts of their madhhab.

ENDOWMENTS

The teacher may not ask payment.

Providing for the expenses of instruction was a venerable charitable and pious activity, one that usually took the form of a special institution known as *waqf* (sing. *waqf*). These “pious endowments” supported not only students but also the physical plant of instruction, the mosques and residences. The four categories of public endowments in Ibb included separately earmarked funding for the Great Mosque of Ibb (known as *waqf al-kahira*), the town’s other mosques (*masjids*), local saint-tomb complexes (*turab*), and advanced instruction (*darasa*). In-kind revenues came from extensive endowment landholdings in the Ibb hinterland, and cash rents were derived from town real estate, including building lots, houses, shops, warehouses, and the public bath.

In the official darasa-endowment register (see fig. 7), document texts refer to *waqfs* “for the darasa of the muhajirin in the Great Mosque of the town of Ibb” or simply, “endowment for darasa” (*waqf li-l-darasa*). The management of the endowment properties, the collection of the revenue, and the disbursement of food and money to the students was the responsibility of an official known as the *iqil i’la al-darasa*. During Ramadan the normal endowment-supplied fare of sorghum bread and porridge was changed to wheat bread, meat gravy, and clarified butter. For the *id al-kahira*, the major feast day of the Muslim calendar, two bulls were slaughtered for the students at endowment expense. In Ahmad al-Hajj ‘s day there were more than fifty muhajirin, half boarders, half day students, who were served together with some teachers and a few poor men in groups of four at as many as sixteen tables.

The endowment mandate for its student beneficiaries was to study “the magnificent Quran and the noble knowledge (‘ilm),” one text reads, “under the supervision of the darasa official, in the assembly mosque of Ibb town.” Jurisprudence was to be studied in both its “root and branches,” its “roots and branches.” As a condition of, and in return for, the support given them, the muhajirin accomplished specially dedicated recitations on Monday and Friday eves. These were in memory of the Prophet and of the local founders: “to the soul (nafs) of the Prophet,” a typical text says, “and to his [i.e., the founder’s] soul, using his name.” As such donors accumulated over the years, their names
were added to a list read out at the conclusion of the recitation by a special Great Mosque functionary. An Ibb testament (waqfya) dated 1904, for example, mentions two agricultural terraces set aside as endowments for “daraasat Ibb” and “daraasat Jibla [a nearby town],” respectively. These charities are intended, in the founder’s words, “to enter me into the recitations (al-raab)”—that is, by the muhajirin at the main mosques of both Ibb and Jibla. Another endowment was to be in memory of the founder’s mother, “to enter her into the recitations.”

This type of recitation by the muhajirin was actually a specialized public version of a much wider phenomenon. Recitation in memory of a deceased individual’s soul could occur as a simple and uncompensated act of devotion. Relevant in this connection is an exchange Muhammad al-Akwâ (n.d.:56–57) remembers with his stepmother: “Muhammad,” she asked, “when I die will you recite (tadrs) to my soul, recite (tappa) for me the Fatiha [the opening sura of the Quran], and pray for me?” He answered “Yes” at the time, and as an adult he carried out these recitations. There is, in addition, a separate category of endowments (known as waqf sira’s) that pertain to such recitation. Such private endowments were administered directly by the reciter rather than by the Endowments Office. In the Ibb testament of 1904, there are several “recitation waqf’s” enumerated, involving designated properties with revenues to be provided the reciters named. Other privately held documents attest to such developments as “stepping down” from reciterships, involving a transfer of both the right to the annual income and the duty of recitation. Some recitational waqfs were intended as small charities provided to nonfamily poor, especially scholars; others were huge family trusts in which the recitational waqf formula shields an important allocation of an estate. That various perils awaited endowments was clearly recognized by their founders: cautions and conditional curzes are common in the formation texts.

The several varieties of public and private endowments shared a common legal structure, which is set forth in the chapter on waqf in the jurisprudence manuals. In establishing an endowment an individual undertook a unilateral legal act whereby property was converted from private ownership (milki) to endowment (waqfi) status. There are three distinctive features of this legal transformation. The first is that the transfer to endowment status is an action in perpetuity, valid until Judgment Day, or as the establishing documents read, “until God inherits the earth and all upon it.” Second, the property in question is
removed (the formulae are waqafa, "to stop," and habasa, "to restrain") from the circles of worldly transfer. As the documents state, the property may no longer be "sold, inherited, pawned, or given as a gift." The endowment properties are no longer property in the worldly sense that they may be alienated. A third essential feature concerns the intention of the founder. This must be qarba, which is "an act pleasing to God," or a "desire to draw near to Him." In theory at least, the legal transfer involved is not understood in terms of the this-worldly intentions associated with ordinary legal undertakings. The support of mosques is one such action pleasing to God; the funding of instruction is another. That the muhajirin were a set-apart group of initiates was thus reinforced by the special qualities of their material support.

At an annual awards day ceremony held at the elementary Revolution School in Ibb in 1975, some of the teachers and pupils put on a short skit. A breeze snapped at the Yemen Arab Republic flag bunting that decorated the stage, and an antiquated public address system crackled. Speeches that castigated the old regime, recalled the glorious events of the revolutionary years, and then underlined the importance of education in building the nation's future were made by local dignitaries, including the governor, the provincial military commander, and the director of the Ibb branch office of the Ministry of Education. Poems written for the occasion were also read out, local musicians played some popular tunes, and all joined in the national anthem.

Critical of the past and, somewhat more implicitly, of the present as well, skits are standard fare at the public occasions that have proliferated on the republican calendar. The skit this day was entitled, "Education in the Old Days." In it the teachers who wrote it looked back with a mix of serious and humorous intent typical of such theater at an institution, the Quranic school, which they and many in the audience had attended. For their young pupils, some of whom were the actors, the skit offered a representation of a mode of instruction that was fast disappearing. Unlike most other scripts, this one contains only a few spoken parts and was mainly intended to provide stage directions for a living tableau.

Initial scene: the curtain rises on a Quranic school room, with a floor covering of reed mats and burlap sacks. Sinna is sitting on the right side leaning against arm cushions. The general situation: the clothes of the poor students are old and some are torn. The clothes of the rich children
indicate wealth. The clothes of Sinna are a gown over a gown, a vest, a scholar’s turban, with tooth-cleaning sticks and a wooden pen stuck in it, and old-style “white” spectacles attached to the ear by means of two strings. Next to Sinna are a number of rods, inkwells for ink, and a collection of wooden writing boards.

At that moment a group of poor children enters from the left, carrying their writing boards. They go immediately to kiss the hands and knees of the teacher, who receives them in haste and with abuse. This is taken for granted, because they are poor. Sinna addresses them with insults: “Idle ones, sons of idle ones, one of broken honor, you’ve come as early as the poor woman to the threshing floor, God curse your fathers. Yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that you didn’t bring my food. And two weeks without my Thursday money. Do I work for your fathers instructing you for nothing?”

The students: “Sinna, we asked our fathers and each of them said he will give you all that is owed.” Sinna: “You ingrates, each of you will pay nothing less than the full amount”—aside: “as if their fathers were government functionaries or merchants, like those of Sulṭān and Qasim”—“all your fathers are worthless destitutes.”

At this instant there enters a group of small pupils, whose clothes show wealth. They come to greet Sinna, who raises the chin of each one individually, trying to kiss them. A smile is across his face, and from time to time he praises them and their fathers. Each one of the rich pupils takes out some coins and slips them in Sinna’s pocket or in his hand, excusing themselves for the paltriness of the sum. Sinna gathers the money and places it in his gown, while glaring at the poor children and then directing a few blows in their direction.

Sinna turns round to the rich pupils and invites them to sit next to him. He whispers in the ear of one of the students sitting next to him, “Did you tell your mother to send more food, and to provide sorghum stalks too?” He answers, “I told my mother. She’s going to.”

Sinna calls one of the poor pupils, “Bring me your writing board. Today I’ve decorated it with verses, and now I’m waiting to see how much your father will give.” The boy responds, “Yes, Sinna.” The boy takes the decorated board to his father, who after some difficulty manages to borrow a riyal to give to him. The boy returns and gives the riyal to Sinna, who turns it over in his hand a number of times and then puts it in his pocket.

An hour passes, then two, and Sinna does not excuse the children because the sun was too small. The boy tries to ask Sinna to let the children go. Sinna says to him, “Quit your bellyaching, what did you bring me, lovely one, son of a lovely one?” After a long time Sinna excuses the children. The poor boy goes to his house, and he is crying.

THE “NEW METHOD”

Sometime after 1878, the year it was introduced in the capital, San‘ā, a new educational institution opened its doors in Ibb. Housed in the old Jalaliyya Mosque on the town’s Upper Square, the maktab rudāfiya, as the school was called (from rudaf, adolescence), was an advanced primary school of a type legislated into existence by the Ottoman Public School Law of 1869 and instituted thereafter throughout the empire. A new Ministry of Public Instruction, utilizing the public and secular concept of ma‘arif, was an integral part of the ordering policies of the Ottoman reformers and modernizers. In the eyes of these reformers, ma‘arif, the knowledge imparted in “public instruction,” stood in opposition to the old style of knowledge (ilm), with its substantive focus on jurisprudence and its mode of recitational transmission in mosque-school lesson circles. Berkes (1964:160) has aptly characterized the then current concept of ma‘arif as “the learning of unfamiliar things.” A related conception, focused on the instructional dissemination of “useful knowledge,” had been developed for colonial purposes in British India. It too would have an impact on the Yemeni highlands, although indirectly and at a later date, through institutions and ideas in circulation in India-administered Aden.

For diverse political purposes, the new nineteenth-century conceptions of “knowledge” attributed a fundamental vitality and openness to a type of learning, of “unfamiliar things,” of “useful knowledge,” that seemed to fit consciousnesses of change and advocacies of “modern” goals. The same conceptions also contributed to the rise of an image of old modes of instruction and forms of knowledge as closed, unadaptable, moribund. Educational reforms also had direct implications for the construction of new notions concerning law. The Ottoman system of public instruction was initially created to parallel and compete with the old madrasas, just as the new nizam courts applying legislated law were instituted as foils (in the central provinces at least) for the old shari‘a courts. Education reforms further represented an important early salient in the struggle to introduce a comprehensive notion of “public” responsibility, which entailed a thorough reconstitution of the form and scope of the state. This differentiation and elaboration of the “public” sphere, and the constitution of its opposite, the “private,” were new to Yemen.

Both in the central Ottoman Empire and in Egypt instructional innovations in the first half of the nineteenth century were destined for
the formation of officers and other military specialists, and the methods involved were only later spread to the separately created field of general public education. In Yemen, however, the new *rashidiya* schools were introduced at the same moment in the late nineteenth century as the first new-style battalions of Yemeni soldiers. As new-method schools acquired the ordered form and discipline of military units, there was a parallel effort toward the “education and training of the minds” of the new soldiers.6

While pious endowments supported the instructional activities going on nearby in the Great Mosque of Ibb, the little *maktub rashidiya* was financed in a novel manner: with budgeted state monies.7 In the 1916 Ottoman financial summary for the Ibb subdistrict, there appears a separate budgetary subheading for the local Ma’arif section, with a listing of salaries for three individuals, including two grades of Turkish teachers (*mu'allim*) and a locally employed caretaker.8 Reflecting the competitive split of education in the Ottoman heartlands, and indicating a change already wrought internally to the local “traditional” system, there was another teacher (*mudarris*) on the official payroll. This position, occupied by an Ibb man from the al-Ansi family, is listed among the *'inshiya* officials, who were otherwise the court personnel. As his full-position title indicates, he was a state-paid instructor in what had come to be designated as the “religious sciences” (*'adam al-'inshiya*).9

The *maktub rashidiya* was the only Ottoman school established in the subdistrict seat of Ibb town, but there were secondary schools, military colleges, technical schools, schools for girls, and schools for orphans opened in the three larger towns of San‘a, al-Hudayda, and nearby Ta’izz.10 As in nineteenth-century Egypt,11 the new Ottoman schools were adapted from instructional methods developed earlier in the century by the Englishman Joseph Lancaster.12 Elaborated in a concise guide for the requisite physical layout and associated instructional routines, the Lancaster school design was widely influential. Model schools were established in France, Germany, the United States, and a number of colonial settings. In his study of the birth of new “disciplinary” modes of power in the West, Michel Foucault (1977) examines the Lancaster-method schools as one of the principal sites of a subtle but consequential ordering that quietly invaded and replicated itself in a whole series of institutions, from the prison to the hospital, the factory, and the military barracks. New institutional efficiencies, enabled by new forms of supervision and control, rested upon the differentiation of space and the precise regulation and coordination of time and human activities. As such disciplinary procedures took hold across a spectrum of institutional settings, they were integral to the definition and production of a new type of individual.

Derived ultimately from Western models, educational “order” arrived in the Province of Yemen mediated and adapted by Ottoman planners, legislators, and administrators. According to the legislative model,13 education was to be given systematic form. Overall, five levels were envisioned, each comprising a set number of years. The four-year program of the *rashidiya* included, in legislative theory, “elementary religious instruction, Turkish grammar, writing and prose style, Arabic and Persian grammar following the new method, bookkeeping, drawing, elementary geometry, universal history, Ottoman history, geography, physical exercise, and the language of a non-Muslim community in the locality.” Students in the empire’s commercially active towns could elect to study French in their fourth year. Although there is no indication that French was being used or taught in Ibb,14 instruction was provided in Ottoman Turkish.

During my residence in Ibb in the 1970s, Ahmad al-Basir, a *maktub rashidiya* student in his youth, was able to make translations for me from Ottoman Turkish to Arabic. Once a member of a local Sufi order, and later a Quranic schoolmaster, teacher of *muqaddim*, and a prominent Ibb notary, al-Basir had an eclectic educational career, which included years in several of the new Ottoman schools. After Quran instruction in his own neighborhood he attended the Ibb *maktub rashidiya*. Then he moved to Ta‘izz, where he lived with relatives while attending the Ottoman secondary (*'iladire* school in the mornings and the military college in the afternoons. Later still, however, he studied in the mosque-school *darasa* format in Zabid, where he did advance work in jurisprudence and related disciplines. Returning to Ibb, he was initially appointed to the Endowments Office as a functionary. Later, under imamic rule, he became one of the teachers in the Great Mosque and began a lucrative parallel career writing legal instruments in the afternoons. In the late 1970s, he was considered one of the last of the town’s old-style scholars, which is ironic in view of his extensive exposure to the Ottoman “new method” schools.

While certainly not delivered to Ibb intact, the Ottoman educational program nevertheless marked the local advent of revolutionary new ideas concerning the nature of schooling and appropriate subjects for study. However reduced and adapted, it was a program that stood in sharp contrast to the old sequences of *mi‘lama* to *darasa* lesson circle.
and of Quran to shari’a manual. If not yet seriously challenged, the madhhab approach to knowledge was at least confronted by the existence of the new curriculum approach to “ma‘arif.” The pursuit of ‘ilm would persist in Yemen for another half century, but its once exclusive field of action was irrevocably altered. Although it initially appeared in Yemen in only embryonic form, the new conception of instruction would eventually displace the old style altogether.

According to the new program, instruction was to be extended in time and have its own space. While ‘ilm was transmitted in the mosque, a multipurpose place, with the Hazr serving as the student residence and the locale of peer learning, the maktab rashiyya and the other Ottoman schools were meant to be schools in the Western sense, ideally utilizing set-apart and specially arranged spaces designed for the newly conceived, daylong activity of instruction. One eventual by-product of this move would be the redefinition of the mosque as the place of exclusively “religious” practices. Furthermore, with teacher-student contact extended to encompass the entire learning day, peer learning, lacking both a space and a time in the new system, would decline.

In Ibb, the Ottomans had to make do with the available room in the Jalaliyya Mosque, but in the minds of the legislators was a different idea. As in Lancaster’s conception, the Ottoman schools were to be newly constructed, in conformity to a design set forth in a ministerial plan. This aim of standardization involved the physical differentiation of rationalized seating arrangements and the development of classrooms as separately walled spaces for the instruction of different levels of students. This ordering procedure helped define a student, who was categorized by sex, age, and academic level. In contrast to the Quranic schools and the Great Mosque lesson circles, where students of widely different ages and levels of study intermingled, the new classes were to be composed of groups of children and youths with uniform characteristics.

“Elementary instruction is obligatory in the Empire,” wrote the Ottoman legislators of 1869. “Education is a right for all Yemenis,” echoed the provisional Yemeni constitution of 1962. Universal education offered a template for a different sort of society, and it carried with it the Western ideology of attainable equality. Replacing the sharply pyramidal pattern of restricted attendance and rapid attrition that appears from the outset of the mosque-school system, and the conception of instruction as but one of many “crafts,” the philosophy (at least) behind the Ottoman schools was one of universal access to primary education. Instead of the “ascending individualization” (Foucault 1977: 193) of the old social order, with its fundamental distinction between the knowledgeable and the ignorant, with the lives of the “great men” inscribed in biographical histories, a society of educated citizens implementing a form of “descending individualization” was implied. For the first time, schooling was intended to be something appropriate for all boys and girls. Education was in the process of becoming a newly constituted right of the individual, required and guaranteed by the laws of a new form of state. To this end, procedures were elaborated in the central Ottoman districts for keeping local registers of school-age children, and fines were set for parents who did not comply with the law. The advent of rashiyya education for girls entailed not only a modified instructional program that included home economics and needlework but also the radical idea that girls should receive post-Quranic-school instruction outside the home. Most of these ideas would not begin to be implemented in Yemen until after the 1962 Revolution, at the same time that the abstract political notion of the Yemeni “citizen” (ma‘aratim) began to take hold.

Important changes in pedagogical technique were part of the nascent transformation of the Ottoman period. Over the longer term, these would entail a shift in elementary instruction from the luhay writing board of the individual student to the collective blackboard of the contemporary classroom. The luhay was not merely a highly personalized and intimate instrument—each of the boards being a bit different in surface and cut—it also concretely exemplified the fact that students in the same circle worked at diverse paces and levels, with varying capacities applied to different segments of text. By contrast, the blackboard, now standard equipment in Yemeni schools, in its distance from the student and in its control by the teacher, entails a comparatively depersonalized and uniform pattern of instruction. A teacher-to-class relationship mediated by the blackboard would replace the numerous Sinna-to-pupil dyads mediated by luhay. This change also went to the heart of the old theory of knowledge transmission, which was based on individual teacher-student links, on a student’s being formed “in the hands,” in the undivided presence, of the teacher. A new sort of teacher, salaried and standardized through professional formation in teacher training institutes, would relate to a new sort of student.

Before the introduction of the classroom blackboard, the initial shift was from luhay to slates, which were used in the rashiyya as they were in Lancaster schools. The apparent similarity between the individual
writing board of Quranic instruction and the individual slate of the new-method schools concealed a fundamental organizational difference, one that accompanied the equally important change in the nature of the text written down. Instead of routinely centering on dyadic, “recite your lesson-board” commands from Sinna to individual pupils taken one at a time, the new method worked upon a collectivity of concurrently performing individuals who received the same instruction simultaneously from an orchestrating schoolmaster. In the mornings, when reciting pupils occupied Sinna’s attention one by one, the rest of the circle were left unattended to pursue their lessons (or not) as they saw fit. In the afternoons, Sinna turned to his water pipe and qat, and the pupils were completely on their own. By contrast, in the typically large Lancaster classrooms, bells and simple semaphores were employed to signal the appropriate numbers of a minutely regimented and continually engaging instructional program to hundreds of simultaneously attentive pupils, each positioned at a specially designated desk. A typical writing exercise, for example, followed a sequence of numbered instructions:

9: hands on knees. This command is conveyed by one ring on the bell; 10: hands on table, head up; 11: clean slates: everyone cleans his slate with a little saliva, or better still with a piece of rag; 12: show slates.®

In this manner, it was seen, a school could function efficiently, like a machine for learning. Each individual was at the same time both located and occupied; space and time were blocked off, minutely organized, mobilized in the service of a continuing disciplinary hold and maximum output. Transposed to Yemen, later versions of such pedagogical procedures would eventually result in a class with a single voice replacing one of many voices, which came to be understood as representing an undesirable cacophony.

Testing, and the passing and failing associated with it, figures prominently in a system that is based on collective activity and is at the same time crosed by the necessity of ranking and marking individual movement through grades. These days, a primary-school student’s final report card, organized by subject matter and according to grades for class work and written-test scores,® concludes by passing the successful student on to the next level. The old ijarah, the granting of transmission authority by a particular teacher to a particular student for a particular text, has given way to the diploma (shahada), a standardized, state-issued document of fulfillment, through testing, of abstractly defined educational goals. This has initiated a system that gives the “same value to all holders of the same certificate, so that any one of them can take the place of any other” (Bourdieu 1977: 187).

THE POLITICS OF INSTRUCTION

With the demise of the Ottoman Empire at the close of World War I, Imam Yahya unceremoniously closed the entire Turkish school system. In 1924 the Lebanese visitor Amin al-Rihani recorded a schoolboy’s lament: “We had organized schools under the Turks,” he said, “where geography and arithmetic were taught. They gave us books, slates, paper, ink, pens, exercise books, and chalk—everything, and all free. Sir, I am sad. Today we have no schools and no teachers except the jagh. . . . and he charges eight Riyals per month.”® The semiofficial imamic historian al-Wasi tells a different story, however.® “In the days of the Turks,” he writes, the educational system was in “total disarray”; it was the imam who “opened the schools and disseminated knowledge (‘ilm).”® In the post-Ottoman period of Yemeni independence educational policy would continue to be a bone of political contention.

It should be noted here that the account I am giving of the relationship of education and social transformation in Yemen is not the familiar one. The standard political history begins with a group of Yemeni students of the mid-1930s sent to study at the Iraqi military academy in Baghdad and continues with those trained later in Yemen by Iraqi military missions of the 1940s and in Yemen and Egypt by Egyptian officers after 1952. Having absorbed revolutionary ideas from their foreign instructors, it was these former cadets who participated in the several attempted coups and eventually launched the successful Revolution of 1962 by a tank assault on the last imam’s palace on the night of September 26.® By contrast, my account cites another history, emphasizing the far less dramatic, cumulative importance of detailed shifts in organization and techniques. It also dates the formative events in these processes of change to practices instituted in the Ottoman period.

While the imam’s abrupt closure of the Ottoman schools might have seemed to imply the elimination of all innovations and a simple return to a unitary “traditional” system of instruction, such was not the case. Imam Yahya was an astute observer of all aspects of the Ottoman system, and his own educational oeuvre, despite its outwardly traditional appearance, was actually very much a hybrid, quietly incorporating
several of the key features of Ottoman-introduced instructional "order." Some of the schools al-Wasi‘i credits the imam with founding, including the Military College, and the School for Orphans, had in fact been established by the Ottomans. As early as 1906, when engaged in preliminary negotiations that would later result in the Treaty of Da‘an (1911), Imam Yahya had already demonstrated that he was conversant with the special Ottoman usage of the term mawārisf. His fifth demand was for the "transfer of pious endowments to our stewardship so as to revitalize education (mawārisf) in the country."28

This early idea and others drawn from the Ottoman system were integrated in the foundation of an important new school, al-madrasa al-‘ilmīyya, opened in San‘ā‘ by Imam Yahya in 1926, two years after the al-Rihami visit. Located in the modified, Turkish-style residence of the former Ottoman governor, its carriage garage converted into a mosque, the school had a complete, jurisprudence-centered course of study in the classic style, including set readings in the basic Zaidi text, Shari‘ al-Azhari, and works on jihād and hadith by al-Shawkani. Over a forty-year period it would graduate many of the country’s leading jurists, who assumed judgelposts and other posts in the middle and late imamic era and on into the republican period. In its heyday the school had over five hundred boarding students and about one hundred and fifty day students from San‘ā’.29

In structure the madrasa ‘ilmīyya was quite new: never before in Yemen had ‘ilm been conveyed in a "school" that began to approximate the Western organizational sense of the term. One important element was funding. In the three lines he devotes to describing this school, al-Wasi‘i mentions a key fact: that the students’ “food and drink are the responsibility of the government.”30 This funding was predicated upon a reorganized system of endowments administration, a move hinted at in negotiations twenty years earlier.31 Although this sort of funding is still distinct from the purely public mode of financing of the Ottoman system, it was indicative of an emergent attitude toward asserting a new sort of state control over pious endowments. At Imam Yahya’s new school the reorganized endowment revenues were put to use suggested by Ottoman practice: the provisioning of regular monthly cash salaries for some twenty-four regular staff, including twenty-one teachers and three functionaries. As in the darasa system, students were also provided for.32

Other features that distinguished the madrasa ‘ilmīyya from the earlier ‘ilm-transmitting institutions include the division of both the student body and the curriculum into distinct classes. Al-Wasi‘i, who had traveled outside Yemen, observed that “the organization of the school into grades is like Egyptian schools.”33 In the twelve-year program there were three levels with four grades to a level. The final year was known as the “jihād class.” Venerable madhhab texts were converted into a curriculum: subjects of study were identified, and specific books were set up as a formal program, especially for the higher levels.34 Progression from class to class was by means of passing annual examinations. A committee of scholar-examiners, chosen by the minister of Ma‘ārif, posed questions to the students individually, and rankings by test results on a scale of one to ten were issued in an annual report. Supervising the overall operation of the school was a director (naẓir). These were the rudiments of an academic form that has become so utterly basic all around the world that its relatively recent historical emergence is often forgotten.

There were also similarities between the new school and Imam Yahya’s military, where a number of Turkish officers had stayed on. Both students and soldiers were handled administratively through the legal mechanism of the bond (kafala),35 which was required for enrollment of either type. As in the case of new military recruits, entering students had to be accompanied by bondsmen, who undertook to guarantee “conduct appropriate for students of ‘ilm,” their obedience to imamic orders, and financial responsibility for any supplies misappropriated. Also like the imam’s soldiers, students at the new school received graded weekly pay36 and daily allotments of a special type of government bakery bread. Soldiers, younger students, and government-supported orphans regularly paraded together on state occasions, arranged in units and classes.37

Instruction was an essential policy area in the imam’s shar‘a style of politics in two distinct ways: one concerned madhhab control of the formation of jurists at the highest levels, which the new madrasa ‘ilmīyya ensured; another was the perennially felt duty (especially among town scholars) to push back the frontiers of ignorance by sending teachers out to rural districts to provide basic instruction. The symbolic importance of this second political objective is indicated by the idealized summary account of Imam Yahya’s first acts upon his triumphant entrance into the capital in the month of Safar, A.H. 1337 [1918]: “The imam set the affairs of San‘ā‘ in order, forbade officials from oppression and corruption, and dispatched instructors to all the villages.”38

The regional version of such instructional policies involved, as in previous centuries, the movement of Zaidi scholars into Shafi‘i districts.
A local example from the early 1920s is the posting of 'Ali b. Husayn al-Akwa' (father of Muhammad and Isma'il, whose books I have repeatedly cited) to a madrasa in the little village of Ma'in, just outside of Ibb to the northwest. In a few years, he was succeeded in the post by his eldest son, Muhammad, who had just completed his studies in Dhamar and San'a. In his early twenties at the time, Muhammad al-Akwa' taught at Ma'in while continuing his own studies with scholars in Ibb.

Like most of his students, al-Akwa' resided in Ibb and walked out to the village madrasa every day to hold classes. Conscious both of changes in the imam was instituting in San'a and of new ideas percolating northward from British Aden, he organized his students in small groups of four or five according to their level, and he also gave weekly exams. His former students remember that he was fatherly and friendly during the week, even to the extent of joining them in swimming and soccer, but that he became very severe at test time. Maintaining an older practice, the students engaged in regular recitations to the "soul" of the waqf founder and received a full sack of grain per month from the waqf revenues, which al-Akwa' administered.

It was in such scholarly milieu around the country that nationalist ideas began to be articulated in the 1930s. By 1944, Muhammad al-Akwa' 's secret political activities against the imamic regime were discovered and he was jailed, which terminated his teaching career. The year before he had been elected head of an Ibb-based group of scholars and rural leaders from nearby Ban'an known as the Reform Society.

Composed of both Shafi'i and Zaidi of qadi families, but no Zaidi sayyids, the Ibb group was one of the earliest nationalist organizations to operate in the country, and it established links both with the Free Yemenis, who had just surfaced in Aden, and with other organizations or groups of individuals in Ta'izz and San'a. Muhammad's younger brother Isma'il, also a member of the Ibb group, was responsible for carrying messages and pamphlets printed in Aden, including nationalist poetry and the group's own Reform Program leaflet, north to Dhamar and San'a. It was on such a trip that he was arrested and jailed.

Whereas the attempts of 1935 and 1961 and the successful Revolution of 1962 would be led by military officers, this first generation of nationalist endeavor, culminating in the abortive coup of 1948, the dasturiyya ("Constitutional Movement"), was mainly the work of scholars and intellectuals. They had contacts with Yemenis returned from studies in Cairo and, through merchant connections, with the numerous highlanders resident in Aden. Political activity emerged from the regular intellectual gatherings that were such a prominent part of the scholarly life of the period. In Ibb such men assembled for qat-chewing sessions in the afternoons and for lengthy evening gatherings as well. "The town used to glow at night from the lights of houses where men gathered to study," one participant fondly remembered. Individuals such as Hasan al-Duraisi, a leading Ba'dani shaykh known as "the philosopher," joined rooms of men who took turns reading aloud from and commenting upon such newly available, smuggled works as Jurgi Zaydan's world history. An extension of the youthful activity of peer learning into adult life, such intellectual gatherings occurred in other towns as well, where they took a similar political turn. With other prominent Ibb members of the Reform Society, Muhammad al-Akwa' was initially jailed from 1944 to 1947. After only one year of freedom, however, he was once again brought in and jailed in the aftermath of the 1948 coup, this time until 1955.

Such men turned their jails into virtual academies. Ahmad al-Shami has written an account of the flourishing of Yemeni literature that occurred in the notorious prison in Hajjara. He tells how the writers, scholars, and poets among the prisoners eventually overcame their dreadful circumstances: "Lips started to smile again, weariness and fatigue were relieved by literary anecdotes, verses were recalled, and tales and morals drawn from history started to circulate among the prison inmates. . . . Literary sessions took place and discussion circles were convened; jokes, naqmahs, poems, and tales were exchanged, and thus the otherwise oppressive and miserable time was killed in a pleasant manner." One of the techniques used by the prisoners recalls their days in Quranic schools. When there were no writing materials, he writes, "we used pieces of wood or flattened tin cans to write on, after blackening them with charcoal or soot. We recorded verses and ideas so that they would not be lost. Then we would commit them to memory, wipe them off, and write others." Among prisoners from the Ibb area, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani and Isma'il al-Akwa' worked on editions of the famous Yemeni poets 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ansi and 'Umarah al-Yamani, while Muhammad al-Akwa' prepared an annotated edition of volumes of the Kitab by the early Yemeni historian al-Hamdani.

In this period Aden was both an important refuge and a source of reform ideas for the early nationalist leaders. From the middle of the
previous century, when Aden became a free port, trade volume had grown steadily, and merchants and laborers were increasingly drawn to the bustling enclave from the highland Shafi'i districts around Ta'izz and Ibb. By 1900 there was regular caravan traffic between Aden and Ibb: coffee, skins, "bastard saffron" (ears), and clarified butter were sent southward, and the spectrum of Indian Ocean trade goods, including spices, cloth, scents, medicines, and many other items, were carried northward. Isma'il Baslama, who was both an important regional shaykh and the Ottoman governor in the waning days of the empire, was also the leading merchant of his day.

Educational innovation in Aden dates to an unsuccessful effort to introduce a new style of school as early as 1856. According to a later British observer, the "ignorance and apathy of the inhabitants," combined with criticism from India, where colonial educational policy was then the subject of intense debate, caused the school to be closed after only two years. A more modest government institution intended to provide elementary instruction in English was opened under an Indian headmaster in 1866. By 1877 the Aden Regency School had sixty students of widely varied backgrounds who studied a Bombay presidency fifth-standard program that included the "elementary histories of England, India, and Rome; Euclid as far as the first book; geography, arithmetic, and algebra." Instruction in English and bookkeeping (introduced later) proved attractive for Adeni students interested in conducting trade with foreign firms or obtaining positions in government service. An Arabic Government School was also opened in 1866. While the sort of education provided by the English-language schools, employing a "new method" pedagogy applied to a new spectrum of subjects known as the "Aden syllabus," may have represented the ultimate local model of "modern" instruction, the Arabic school program was also innovative and was more readily imitated. In the early years of the Arabic Government School the "medium" of instruction was the Quran, but "secular reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic" were later introduced. And, unlike local Quranic schools, where parents paid the teacher, the Arabic Government School was supported by the colonial government and the Municipal Fund.

In terms of the student population involved, schooling in Aden remained relatively small in scale until the 1930s and 1940s. At about the same time that rapid educational expansion was occurring in the colony, schools inspired in part by Aden models began to appear in the highlands. One example, connected to the activity of the important

early nationalist leader Ahmad Muhammad Nu'man, was a school established in a village in al-Hujariyya district (in Ta'izz province close to Aden) in 1934. At this alternative to the regular Quranic schools students studied such subjects as geography, history, arithmetic, and science, and at an associated "club" they could read books, newspapers, and magazines brought back from Aden by workers.

But it was not only the nationalists who were attentive to developments in Aden. In the same year in Ibb, the imamic government under Sayf al-Islam al-Hasan (Imam Yahya's son) opened a new school known simply as the maktab, perhaps suggesting descent from the old maktab ruzhidiyya. Like the former Ottoman school, it was a four-year advanced primary school, but it was financed more on the Aden model with support from merchant parents and with the government assuming responsibility only for the teacher's salary and floor coverings. Another educational development in Ibb still more directly reflected the influence of policies in British Aden. A special college in Aden for the sons of hinterland "chiefs" had been founded in 1935–37. By 1940 a similar institution, known as al-masaj, meaning "to rescue," was established in Ibb. Designed to "rescue" the sons of rural notables from ignorance, the new Ibb institution dovetailed with an ancient Yemeni political device—the hostage system. Holding the sons of rural shaykhs hostage ensured the fathers' good conduct vis-à-vis the state. Several hundred young men from districts radiating around the town thus embarked on a tightly supervised student life (there were soldier chaperons for walks around town), including a mild educational-indoctrination program taught by Zaidi instructors. Among other subjects, they studied the history of the family of the Prophet, touching on the line of descent that produced the Zaidi imams of Yemen. Although the "school" lasted only three years, its brief existence was part of a new awareness of the political potential of instruction as a policy instrument.

After the threatening period of the 1940s, with the initial arrests of nationalists in Ibb and elsewhere and then the abortive "Constitutional" coup attempt (1948), there was a local reinforcement of the classic strategy in instructional politics. This was to ensure madhhab control in darasa instruction, the idea behind the establishment of the madrasa `lima`ayn in San`a. In connection with his treatment of this institution and other educational programs in the mid-1920s, al-Wast`i remarks that in the mosques of San`a, "`ilm is studied as in the old days." Through the transition to Zaidi rule in Lower Yemen instruc-
tion had also continued at the Great Mosque of Ibb. In later years, the San‘a‘ model of the madrasa ‘ilmiyah was replicated on a smaller scale in other towns, including Sa‘da, in the far north, and Ibb and nearby Jibla in Lower Yemen. In Ta‘izz, the provincial seat and, after 1948, the national capital of Imam Ahmad, the equivalent new-style ‘ilm school was known as the Ahmadiyya. The student body at the Ahmadiyya included a few young men from Ibb, such as Muhammad Yahya al-Haddad, who had been a student with al-Akwa‘ at Ma‘ain, others from Jibla and elsewhere in Lower Yemen, and students from Ta‘izz, including young men from the royal family, such as the future imam, Muhammad al-Badr.

The alteration of the Great Mosque program in Ibb was associated with a local reorganization of the endowments system in the late 1940s and 1950s. As the aim of this restructuring and replicating the old practice of supporting study in the madhhab of the ruler, a specially earmarked monthly stipend of half a sack (qadah) of grain and two royals cash was offered as “encouragement” for Ibb darasa students to study the Azhar, the Zaidi manual, in both “text and commentary.” Those who took up this offer, including the continuing responsibility to recite to the “souls” of the waqf founders, were young men with no other means of support, such as an orphan named Muhammad Zain al-Awdi, who went on to study at the Ahmadiyya and later became an Ibb primary-school director after the Revolution. Al-Awdi remembers that together the four thick volumes of the Sharh al-Azhar served as a perfect armrest for floor-level sitting. At this point before the Revolution, darasa instruction at the Great Mosque had become an intermediate level, situated between the primary instruction offered at the local maktub and the potential for some students to pursue advanced work at the Ahmadiyya in Ta‘izz.

Although principally concerned with the administration of schools, Imam Yahya’s Ma‘arif administration also provided the umbrella for small-scale but significant early departures in state-initiated publishing, library reform, and officially sponsored history writing. The printing equipment in question had been left behind by the departing Turks, and the early imamic usage of it was partly inspired by that of the previous Ottoman administration. Like his school program, the Imam’s new library was an imaginative hybrid, a recasting of old institutional ideas in newly elaborated forms. The history-writing project, although new to Yemen, bore some resemblance to a far better known scholarly enterprise of the new Turkish Republic. These collateral Ma‘arif efforts were further assertions of a tentative yet determined attitude toward developing the state’s identity and extending its authority by means of new textual technologies.

In 1877 the Ottomans brought the first printing press to their province of Yemen. Prior to the establishment of any Muslim-operated presses in the Middle East, European firms had begun publishing books in Arabic, and as Carsten Niebuhr noted in the course of his highland travels in 1763, such printed works were known in Yemen. In the central Ottoman Empire, presses were initially established by and for non-Muslim communities, but printing in the Turkish language was banned until the early eighteenth century. In 1727, when formal legal authorization was obtained, it did not include permission to print the Quran or works on hadith, Quranic exegesis, or jurisprudence. An earlier European observer had noted that the Turks refused to allow publication of such texts, “because they think that the Scriptures, that
is, their sacred books—would no longer be scriptures if they were printed” (emphasis in original). In fact, the formal permission granted in 1727 covered only the printing of dictionaries and books in such fields as medicine, astronomy, geography, and history. Permission to print the Quran was not obtained in the Ottoman Empire until 1874. By the end of the nineteenth century Qurans published in both Beirut and Hyderabad were in circulation in the Yemeni highlands.

An Arabic printing press brought by Napoleon to issue proclamations had figured prominently in the shock of the brief French occupation of Egypt in 1798–1801, and by 1822 a Muslim-operated press was turning out textbooks for newly instituted Egyptian schools. Snouck Hurgronje has described the impact of printed texts on lesson circles in Mecca, where books published in Cairo had been available for some years and where a local press was opened in 1833: “All students now bring to lecture printed copies of the text which is being treated, which circumstance has entirely changed the mode of instruction. Formerly the teacher had first to dictate the text, in the margins of which the students then noted down his glosses. Now, on the contrary, the student notes down only a few oral remarks (laqmir) of the professor, and often has nothing to write at all (1931:192, 178).” This transformative encounter of printed texts with unconstructed lesson-circle instruction was not everywhere repeated, however.

In nineteenth-century lesson circles at the Azhar Mosque-University in Cairo, for example, such dramatic changes were forestalled as printed texts were banned. At the Ottoman ruqdhiyya and other higher-level schools in Yemen, textbooks were routinely used, but the program of study was, as I have already noted, totally different from that followed in lesson circles. In the following years, however, in a manner reminiscent of the earlier policy at the Azhar, Imam Yahya at one point explicitly disallowed the use of printed texts in his advanced schools. According to Rossi (1938:579), “the students of the madrasa ilmiyya . . . study texts [that are] nearly all manuscripts and [handwritten] anthologies which they buy or copy for themselves.” Former students from Ibb and Jibla report that a rule against printed texts was also in effect later at the Ahmadiyya school in Ta’izz.

How are such restrictions on the use of printed texts to be understood? In the case of the new-style ‘ilm schools, did the policy represent a rearguard effort to maintain an old conception of the appropriate form to be taken by authoritative knowledge? There was no parallel policy to restrict the publication of Yemeni books to subject matters other than works of fiqh and related texts of darasa instruction. In fact, the Azhar manual, the centerpiece of recitation and memorization in Zaidi circles, was published at an early date, but as with most of the other important works of Zaidi jurisprudence, its publication occurred overseas. The main intent of foreign publication may have been to introduce Zaidi-Yemeni thought to a wider Muslim audience, rather than to provide printed materials for instruction in Yemen. Problems of cost and availability concerning such printed texts could also have been a factor in any use in Yemen.

While the texts of Yemeni pedagogy were once exclusively written by hand, under the mu‘arif system the manual art was decisively supplemented by print technology. In the course of about a century, from Ottoman openings through to the contemporary republican school system, instruction in a manuscript culture would be completely replaced by schooling based on print culture. The old diversity of handwritten texts, including the drafts and autographs of famous scholars, calligraphic exercises, copies made as pious pastimes, artifacts of formal study, products of professional copyists, and so forth, would eventually be reduced, from the point of view of a print-oriented society, to a single basic and increasingly archaic type, the “manuscript,” to be collected and curated, kept in library sections that would begin to resemble museums. Texts such as the fiqh manuals pertained to a social, political, and intellectual community articulated in madhhabi printbooks, to a curriculum system of public instruction, and the associated sociopolitical, citizen-based universe of nationalism (Anderson 1993).

Manuscripts were still being made well into the present century, however. In 1920, after completing his studies in Ibb, young Ahmad al-Haddad was employed by ‘Abd Allah al-Wazir to make a copy of the famous history by al-Kibsi. In the 1930s, a young Zaidi scholar from Yarim, later appointed to an administrative position in Ibb, occupied himself in writing, and then binding in leather, personal copies of both an inheritance treatise and a work of asal jurisprudence. “The profession of copyist still flourishes,” the visiting Italian Orientalist Ettore Rossi observed in 1938. Textual commodification is commonly linked to “print capitalism” (Anderson 1993). Although many manuscripts were produced for self-consumption, not all were “substitution” texts. Copies made in the course of instruction or as a private pious activity did not normally enter into circulation, but many other manuscripts were the scholarly commodities of a different economic order. Most familiar is the work of
professional copyists, who produced handwritten copies for an established fee. Authorship in the manuscript era also had its notions of drafts and finished products. There was a decisive step in which the text moved from a tentative draft or a preliminary oral version to a written-out or dictatable work suitable for circulation. The finished manuscript could circulate either in closed, "genealogical" networks, that is, through the links of instruction with student or colleague transcribing, or in open networks of commercial exchange, involving hired copyists. Although by comparison (with the equivalent print institutions) very restricted in its implications, there was a version of publishing in the manuscript era. In Yemen, a verb meaning "to write on white bond" (bayyad) was commonly used to describe the key transition to fair copy. In listing his own writings, for example, al-Shawkani says of a "published" work such as his famous Hadith study Naql al-mutar that "it was put on white bond in four large volumes." To indicate that a work remained "unpublished," that is, it existed only in draft form, he says "it was not put on white bond."18

At the same time as printed works were kept at a distance from advanced schools in twentieth-century Islamic Yemen, steps were taken to promote the new technology in other domains. First among these was the official Yemeni newspaper al-Iman (the Faith), which first appeared in 1926 as a monthly and later became a daily.19 Using the same printing machine, the Ottomans had published a similar official newspaper (called Sanc'at) in both Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. Al-Iman provides a chronicle of Yemeni political events, major and minor, internal and in some instances external, from 1926 to 1948, and has been read by Western observers as a record of "efforts to form a national consciousness" (Rossi 1938: 569) and of "the institutionalization of the state" (Obermeyer 1981: 181).

In his History of Yemen, published in Cairo two years after al-Iman was introduced, al-Wasi'i makes an advocacy of newspapers that demonstrates his own awareness of the role they played by the press outside of Yemen. He first refers to newspapers as among the "essentials of civilization" (asbab al-lumran) and then, under a separate section heading, "newspapers" (which also deals with speeches), he speaks of the press in lofty and ideal terms: "Newspapers are the great force, the instructive school, the scales for [weighing] the activity of the community and the indicator of its condition, the vigilant overseer of the government."20 While, in practice, the imam endeavored to keep the foreign press of the era out of the country,21 newspapers were nevertheless a central figure in al-Wasi'i's ideal portrayal of Yahya's qualities as a ruler: "The thoroughness of his attention and the excellence of his political administration is [indicated by] the importance he gives to the reading (i.b'd) of world news in newspapers and magazines."22

In other parts of the Middle East in the era, newspapers were a comparatively developed medium of established or emergent nationalist discourses. As an indicator of rising nationalist thought in the nearby colony of Aden, the first Arabic newspaper to be run as a commercial venture was licensed there by 1940.23 Soon afterwards, the Free Yemenis in Aden acquired a small press, which was used to print pamphlets (smuggled northward to the Ibb-Ta'izz area and then to plateau towns by men such as Isma'il al-Akwa'), short tracts such as the "Sacred Charter" of the 1948 coup, some books, and their own opposition newspaper, called Sane't al-Yaman, the "Voice of Yemen."24

In addition to his official newspaper and a monthly magazine that appeared briefly,25 Imam Yahya also authorized the printing of a number of books, both at the government press and overseas, especially in Cairo and the Levant. Rossi categorizes the government press output as of 1938 in three groups: editions of venerable old works by Yemeni scholars (a total of six books published and one in press); nine varied contemporary works; and two brief military manuals. Four books appear on the madrasa al-ti'miya curriculum list given by al-Akwa' (1980). There is also a recognizable emphasis on pedagogical materials of various types. Works of a theoretical nature include a classic treatise on adab in darasa instruction; a little book entitled Risala fi al-tahlya, which Rossi describes as a "collection of pedagogical recommendations inspired by modern concepts," authored by the former inspector of elementary schools in Sa'n'a; and, finally, the two military manuals, one containing rules of army discipline inherited from the Turks with "few modifications," the other a military pedagogy work by a Syrian officer in the employ of the imam.26 Many of the remaining publications are short works, including what Rossi describes as a sort of "catechism," and brief treatises on Quran recitation, grammar, and history that appear suitable for use in the lower schools. Rossi states, however, that at the time of his visit in 1937 neither a textbook nor a syllabus for elementary students has yet been printed in Yemen.27

"ONLY FOR READING": LIBRARY REFORM

"Spiders have spun their webs on them," Imam Yahya wrote, referring to the condition of books in the old library collections in a 1925 decree.28 "Their term [of usefulness] has expired as most are either in torn
condition or have been sold or pawned." Library reform was another
subfield of activity in the imam's maʿarif oeuvre, one that exemplified
and contributed to changes in the identity of texts and the practices of
reading. Mosque libraries, housing manuscript book collections desig-
nated as pious endowments, were a very old institution in Yemen; like
the imam's schools, the new library that opened in the Great Mosque
of Sana'a in 1925 represented both a rejuvenated continuation of an
established tradition and a quietly innovative break with the past.
Reform activity, in this domain as in others, was predicated on an
initial identification of disorder: the collections were benefiting no one,
and the spires were at work.

The first organizational step was the creation of a specially desig-
nated space: a new storey was constructed over arcades along the
southern side of the Great Mosque (Sana'a) courtyard. Access to the
library (located "south of the east minaret") was by means of a long
flight of steps. There the imam gathered what remained of the old
collections together with his own large and newly created endowment.
The properly qualified librarian, described in the decree, was to have
"comprehensive knowledge of religion and jurisprudence so as to know
the relative importance of the books and the disciplines." This librarian
—the scholarly brother of the historian al-Wasi'I is named as the first
holder of the position—"is required to "take a security deposit from
each borrower in an amount greater than the value of the book bor-
rowed." "Tens of thousands of endowed books have been lost," the
imam wrote, "because of the nontaking of security deposits." With a
proper deposit a book could be borrowed for a period of six months.
The contractual language of "loan" and "deposit," and the notion that
a book may be constituted as an "endowment," come directly from
the manuals of jurisprudence. In his initial organizing decree for his new
library the imam also appointed a second library official, charged with
documenting and indexing the collections. In the same year, the
imam dispatched Muhammad Zahara to Ibb and nearby Jibla, where
he was ordered to "find out about the endowment books for teachers
and students and compile a listing of them in a register."31

In subsequent years, developments indicative of a nascent library
science occur. An original type of accounting technology (the simple
masasawada or dayfar register used for general pious foundation prop-
erty records, referred to in the original imam's decree) gives way two
decades later to a more specialized form of library index (Pūrnat, n.d.)
published by the Maʿarif Ministry press. This embodies a detailed
system of classification (tarīkh) that includes categorization according to
twenty-six disciplinary and other subject headings and then alphabeti-
cal listings by title within each subject. This general classification is
supplemented in the index by specification of authors and their dates,
indication of a text's handwritten or printed character with the relevant
dates, detail concerning volume sizes in centimeters, and, finally, the
name of the individual who established the book as an endowment with
an associated volume number.

It is not only such things as the holdings of printed books and the
use of metric system measures that are indicative of an emergent new
order in Imam Yahya's library. Complementing the specially devel-
oped classificatory system are an elaboration of detailed rules of
"library" conduct, which are set forth in a supplementary imamic
order of 1938. In a manner familiar to Western library users, these rules
define a library negatively, in terms of inappropriate behaviors: it is
forbidden "for some one to enter the library with a book, small or large,
in his hand"; "for a reader or borrower to write anything [in a book],
even as a correction, except with permission from the librarian"; "for a
reader to directly take a book—instead it should be requested from the
librarian"; "to take a book [out of the library and] into the mosque
itself for reading (muṭala'a) or recitation (qir'a) except by [providing]
a material security deposit greater in value than that of the book."
It is also forbidden to "engage the librarian or anyone else in the
library with talk on unnecessary matters, because the library is only for
reading (muṭala'a), not talk." Borrowing privileges are denied to indi-
viduals known not to return books or who are "unqualified" with
respect to a book requested, while several types of books and a list of
specific titles (including a very early Quran and autograph manus-
cripts by al-Shawkani) are categorized as noncirculating by a decree
of 1942.

A library was a place for the activities of muṭala'a, silent reading or
textual consultation, and naskh, copying or transcription. Classification
systems, rules of conduct, and spatial bounding—the characteristic
techniques of introduced order—had made the library a more special-
ized institution for the activity of relating to texts. But there were still
other dimensions of change. Like old Yemeni schools, the original
libraries were physically located in mosques and administered by en-
dowment officials. Still linked to the Great Mosque, the imam's new
library was somewhat more physically and conceptually distinct (cf.
the rules on entering and leaving). While the 1925 organizing decree
identifies the director of the internal endowments (nāṣir al-nāya' al-
dakhili) as responsible for oversight and support of the head librarian,
by the 1940s organizational control has passed to the Ministry of Ma‘arif. Over the longer term, continual institutional differentiation led from the omnisbus authority of the endowments to the more specialized Ma‘arif, and recently to a still more specialized organ, the Office of Antiquities and Libraries. While Imam Yahya’s library is still open in the Great Mosque, the new dar al-kutub library is located in a separate new building outside the old city.

Modifications in the social organization of circulation also began in the imamic period. Although the intent of the old endowments was the beneficial use (initfa‘a) of the books, there were frequently unfounded stipulated restrictions regarding circulation. Two such types of stipulation are referred to in the 1925 decree. One is in the endowment of Muhammad bin al-Hasan, grandson of the famous Zaidi imam Qasim bin Muhammad (ruled 1198-1620), which is established not as a public endowment but rather as a private one for the benefit of his descendants. Because of the limited benefit that ensued, Imam Yahya ordered this collection joined to his new library. The descendants’ endowment rights were upheld by the imam to the extent that they are permitted preferential, but no longer exclusive, borrowing privileges; and there is a further condition: they must give a security deposit, like every other borrower. In the otherwise public endowment of al-Hajj Sa‘d bin ‘Ali al-Bawab al-Hashidi, there is a provision giving first borrowing rights to all sayyids. That provision is affirmed by the imam, again with the standardized obligation required of all borrowers of a security deposit.

Over the longer term, fundamental shifts in types of library book holdings and in related circulation patterns have mirrored the broader changes in the nature of knowledge and the social organization of its transmission. Simply stated, a genealogically modeled and status-sensitive circulation system has been largely replaced, especially in legislative theory, by a free-market type designed for a democratically conceived citizenry. The older “beneficial intent” rubric of the pious-book foundations has given way to nation-state language: the legislative mandate of the new administration is to open local libraries to help disseminate culture and knowledge to “all the people” (b-balad al-sha‘b). Once mainstays of library collections, manuscripts have now been removed from circulation. Legislation envisions the encouraging of private individuals to “make gifts [of their manuscripts] to the Office, it being understood that their names will be associated with these gifts upon display in the museum.”

In the Author’s Foreword to his Selections, a concise overview of Yemeni history published in Cairo in 1951, ‘Abd Allah al-Jirafi recalls a former problem and its solution by Imam Yahya. The problem was the perceived state of existing historical studies in Yemen. One aspect of this concerned the fragmentation that had resulted from regional accounts: “The historian of the (northern) mountains limited himself to the history of the imams, and the historian of the Tihama and the south of Yemen limited himself to others; no one managed to bring together all the Yemeni historical sources and extract from them that which would satisfy the spirit and give pleasure to the intellect.” A very different and also newly perceived part of the problem in the discipline of history derived from the reliance upon “pens and inkwells.” This referred to the dangerous openness of writing, the fact that “the handwritten books” of Yemeni history were not secure against misreadings and changed vowelization.” As a consequence, according to al-Jirafi, “the reader emerged from them with disordered views (ara‘ muttarib).” A still further dimension of the problem was the physical frailty of writing and the extremely limited number of copies of manuscript works. Many histories had suffered the ravages of time (and spiders), while in the case of others, “the hands of Europeans and other visitors to Yemen of various eras had fallen upon them.”

At the opening of his Foreword, before reviewing these detailed aspects of the problematic scholarly situation that obtained in Yemen, al-Jirafi offers a general testimony to the importance of the “art of history” (fann al-i‘rikh):

Noble in what is perpetuated of bygone days and related of peoples and races, employing to this end inkwells and pens, is the art of history, the link between the past and the present, the record of works small and great, the preserver of the monuments of societies in countrysides and towns, the expressive tongue for their sciences and their knowledge and their circumstances and their character and their culture and their beliefs, the truthful picture of their rise and their fall, and the oppression and justice and lowliness and honor involved.

He concludes that it is, therefore, incumbent upon every society endeavoring to advance that it first turn attention to its past and the study of its history, learning what it has
consisted of in the way of events and catastrophes and what the causes have been of rises and falls. This is because the life of societies is bound up with their past, and their recent times are but the child of their distant eras. For this reason it is said that a society that has neglected its past and knows not is like a man who has lost his memory. The study of history is a necessity of survival; knowledge of the society's history is itself one of the greatest factors in progress, especially if in the society's history there are excellent and glorious accomplishments.

According to al-Jirafi, Imam Yahya had "reflected on the problematic state of affairs" in Yemeni historiography and he desired, following upon his [political] unification of Yemen al-Sa'ida, to unify its history. To this end, he issued an official order to his son, his Royal Highness Sayf al-Islam 'Abd Allah, the Minister of Ma'arif, to establish a committee in the Ma'arif Ministry to study the history of Yemen and publish a comprehensive book, containing a concise survey together with political, literary, and social facts.

The history committee was appointed in a.H. 1356 [1937], relatively late in comparison with the school, publishing, and library efforts begun in the early or mid-twentieth centuries. The timing did coincide, however, with the beginnings of underground nationalist opposition. With Sayyid Muhammad b. Muhammad Zabara as its head and Sayyid Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Muta', Sayyid Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Warith, and Qadi 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Jirafi as members, the committee was composed of leading intellectual figures, all of whom, except for al-Jirafi, are also commonly identified as important early advocates of reform. Their mandated production of a "unified" Yemeni history proceeded by first breaking the object of study down analytically, by means of a classification into periods. In a parallel division of scholarly labor, committee members undertook specialized compilation and writing tasks in one of the four resulting great historical epochs: pre-Islamic history (pre-seventh century a.H.); from the time of the Prophet to the beginning of the Banu Ziyad state in ninth-century (a.H.) Yemen; from the Banu Ziyad to the end of the tenth century a.H. [sixteenth a.D.]; and from the beginning of the tenth century to the "present history" (al-ta'rikh al-hadith) of the fourteenth [twentieth] century.40

Unlike several bracketed studies that stayed within the frames of this new historical classification, al-Jirafi's own 1951 study is based on materials that he "selected" from all four periods. He put the history of Yemen back together again, reconstituting an unbroken chronology that begins with sketches of the pre-Islamic Yemeni states of Himyar and Saba' and concludes with details of the announcement of Imam Ahmad's cabinet in 1949. Unlike most contemporary Western historians, who by definition apply themselves to the study of other eras, Yemeni historians had always written most fully about the events of their own time. As with legal witnessing, the authoritative contributions of historical accounts centered on what the author had personally seen or had heard from reliable individuals. Historians used to open their accounts as if they were giving oral testimony: for example, "qala 'Ali b. al-Hasan al-Khazraj'i" (lit. "Ali b. al-Hasan al-Khazraj'i said").41 These were historians of the present, chroniclers, in the main, of their own times. Retaining something of this sort of authority, al-Jirafi is most expansive on the contemporary reigns of Imams Yahya and Ahmad.

At the same time, however, the rapid surveys of his earlier chapters established a continuous identity for an entity called "Yemen," ruled by a long succession of states. Developments in history writing outside of Yemen were part of the backdrop for such new approaches taken by highland authors. A series of published universal42 and national histories, from the Ottoman Sulaýman Pasha (1876) to the Egyptian Jurgi Zaydan,43 had been in vogue among Yemeni readers. Universal and Ottoman history had been taught in the Ottoman school curriculum in Yemen; a new "comprehensive history," developed by the imam's History Committee, was eventually introduced into that of the madrasa 'ilmiya (al-Akwa' 1980:289).

Al-Jirafi's historical project is rounded out by introductory materials of an interdisciplinary nature: the first chapter includes, in his description, a "detailed account of the country of Yemen, including basic information about its land and its boundaries, its varied climates, its regions, its rivers and valley systems, its mountains, its most renowned towns and ports, its most important and ancient ruins, and something about its economy, its tribes, and its population." The inclusion of geographical, linguistic, genealogical, and folklore materials was, in part, a continuation of distinguished indigenous traditions of inquiry on these topics. The eclectic comprehensiveness of al-Jirafi's account would be reproduced—with a political adjustment from royalist to republican—in a series of works of similar scope—for example, al-Waysi (1962), Shara'f al-Din (1963), al-Thawr (1969), M. al-Akwa'a (1971), al-Shamahi (1972), and al-Haddad (new ed. 1976; 1986), that began to appear about a decade later, in the early years of the Revolu-