

Muslim Views on Education: Parameters, Purview, and Possibilities

Asma Afsaruddin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/jcls>



Part of the [Islamic Studies Commons](#)

This Symposium is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Catholic Legal Studies by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.

MUSLIM VIEWS ON EDUCATION: PARAMETERS, PURVIEW, AND POSSIBILITIES

ASMA AFSARUDDIN[†]

INTRODUCTION

Islam is frequently characterized as a “religion of the Book,” the Book in question being the Qur’an, the central revealed scripture of Islam. The first word said to have been uttered by the angel Gabriel in roughly 610 C.E., which initiated the series of divine revelations to the Prophet Muhammad, was *Iqra*! (lit. “Recite” or “Read”). The full verse commands, “Read in the name of thy Lord who [has] create[d all things].”¹ The act of reading or reciting, in relation to Islam’s holy book and in general, thus took on an exceptionally sacrosanct quality within Islamic tradition and practice, as did the acquisition of particularly religious knowledge by extension. “Are those who know and those who [do not] know [to be reckoned] alike?” asks the Qur’an.² The Qur’an depicts knowledge as a great bounty from God granted to His prophets and their followers through time.³

Believers also took to heart the Prophet’s counsel to “[s]eek knowledge even unto China,” which sanctified the journey, often perilous, undertaken to supplement and complete one’s education, an endeavor known in Arabic as *rihlat talab al-’ilm* (lit. “journey in the search for knowledge”). The “seeker of knowledge” (Ar. *talib al-’ilm*) remains until today the term used for a student, normally in its abbreviated form (Ar. *talib* [masc.]/*taliba* [fem.]) for all levels of education. Another equally well-known statement of the Prophet exhorts, “The pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim,” a statement that has made the acquisition of at least rudimentary knowledge of

[†] Associate Professor of Arabic & Islamic Studies, University of Notre Dame.

¹ *The Holy Qur’an* 96:1 (Maulana Muhammad Ali trans., 1991).

² *Id.* 39:9.

³ *See, e.g., id.* 2:151, 4:113, 5:110, 12:22, 28:14.

religion and its duties mandatory for the Muslim individual, irrespective of gender. “The scholars are the heirs of the prophets” is another important saying of the Prophet invoked as a proof-text to underscore the extraordinary importance of learning in individual moral formation and in shaping communal life. Sanctioned by both the word of God and the statements of His prophet—the latter recorded in what is known in Arabic as *hadith* (lit. “speech”)—the pursuit of knowledge (Ar. *ilm*) is regarded as a religious obligation on par with prayer, charity, and other important religious duties. It is customary to find these sacred proof-texts extolling the merits of *ilm* assembled and recorded in many treatises on learning and education in both the pre-modern and modern periods exhorting the believer to embark on the noble pursuit of knowledge.⁴

I. CLASSICAL CENTERS OF EDUCATION

The earliest venue of education was the mosque, the place of formal worship in Islam. During the Prophet Muhammad’s time, his mosque in Medina served as both the locus of private and public worship and as a place for informal instruction of the believers in the religious law and related matters. The mosque continued to play these multiple roles throughout the first three centuries of Islam (the seventh through the ninth centuries of the Christian or the Common Era). Typically, instruction in the religious and legal sciences would be offered by a religious scholar to students who sat with him—and, less frequently, with her—in teaching circles (Ar. *halqa*, *majlis*), either inside the mosque or outside in its courtyard. By the tenth century, a new feature, the hostel (Ar. *khan*), was increasingly being established next to “teaching mosques” in Iraq and the eastern provinces of the Islamic world which allowed students and teachers from far-flung areas to reside near these places of instruction. The emergence of the mosque-khan complex at this time was a consequence of the lengthier and more intensive period of study required to qualify as a religious scholar. Religious learning had expanded by this time, and study of the religious law (Ar. *al-*

⁴ Two of the best known of such treatises are IBN ‘ABD AL-BARR, JAMI’ BAYAN AL-‘ILM WA-FADLIHI [THE EXPOSITORY COMPENDIUM ON KNOWLEDGE AND ITS VIRTUE] (Asma Afsaruddin trans., 2000) (on file with author) and IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYA, FADL AL-‘ILM WA-‘L-‘ULAMA’ [THE VIRTUES OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE LEARNED] (Asma Afsaruddin trans., 2001) (on file with author).

Shari'a) became more detailed and sophisticated, reflected in the establishment of the four prominent Sunni schools of law (Ar. *madhahib*; sing. *madhhab*) by the tenth century.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries of the Common Era, another important institution developed and proliferated known as the *madrasa*, literally meaning in Arabic "a place of study." The *madrasa* was a logical development of the mosque-khan complex, as both a teaching and residential institution. In addition to the impetus of the greater systematization of knowledge, particularly of the legal sciences, which led to the emergence of the *madrasa*, the development of this institution has also been attributed in part to a reassertion of Sunni Muslim identity in the wake of the collapse of the various Shi'i dynasties that had ruled much of the Islamic world in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

In the tenth century, a Shi'i dynasty called the Buwayhids—or Buyids—established its control over 'Abbasid Iraq and Iran, with the Sunni 'Abbasid caliph remaining as the nominal ruler. The Buwayhids retained their control until the eleventh century when they were beaten back by the Sunni Saljuqs, a Turkic-speaking people from Central Asia. In 969 C.E., another Shi'i dynasty from North Africa—later called the Fatimids—gained power in Cairo, Egypt and ruled the Sunni population until 1171 C.E. when they were defeated by the Ayyubids. One of the Fatimids' enduring intellectual legacies was the establishment, in 972 C.E., of what has been called the first university in the world—the al-Azhar *mosque-madrasa* complex in Cairo—to propagate Fatimid-Shi'i doctrine and learning. With the fall of the Fatimids, there was subsequently a concerted Sunni effort to roll back the Shi'i influence of the preceding two centuries. The *madrasa* became in many ways the *locus classicus* for waging this campaign of religious and intellectual reclamation. This is dramatically reflected in the transformation of al-Azhar into the foremost Sunni center of higher learning in the twelfth century, a position it enjoys still today.

Perhaps the most prominent name associated with the spread of *madrasas*, particularly in Iraq, was Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092), the redoubtable Saljuq vizier (Ar. *wazir*, a "minister"). His name is associated with the famous Nizamiyya Academy in Baghdad, which boasted the presence of famous scholars like Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111). In the twelfth century, the Zengid

ruler Nur al-Din ibn Zangi and the famous Ayyubid ruler Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub (known as Saladin in the West) were prominent patrons of *madrasas* in Syria and Egypt. Henceforth, the *madrasa*, a higher institution of learning comparable to a modern university, became the principal venue and vehicle for the transmission of religious education in the major urban centers of the Islamic world, such as Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem. In fact, as discussed below, the *madrasa* is very likely the precursor of modern colleges in the West, both in terms of structure and curricula.

II. OTHER VENUES OF EDUCATION

In addition to mosques, mosque-khans, and *madrasas*, other institutions developed over time which played important, supplementary roles in the dissemination of learning. One of the most significant institutions of this type was the burgeoning library, which developed from the ninth century onward. The larger mosques often had libraries attached to them containing books on religious topics. Additionally, other semi-public libraries had books on logic, philosophy, music, astronomy, geometry, medicine, astronomy, and alchemy. The first academy in the Islamic world, known in Arabic as *bayt al-hikma* (lit. "House of Wisdom"), was built by the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (813–833), and contained both a library and an astronomical observatory. In this academy, many Arab-Christian scholars under their Muslim Abbasid patrons translated significant classical Greek works first into their native Syriac and then into Arabic. Works of Euclid, Galen, and Plato, among others, were thus made accessible to the succeeding generations of primarily Arabic speaking scholars, influencing the development of a humanistic tradition. Sometimes wealthy private individuals, such as 'Ali b. Yahya (d. 888), endowed libraries in their residences. Ibn Yahya's library, known as *khizanat al-hikma* (lit. "Treasury of Wisdom"), was particularly renowned for astronomy, and allowed students to study all branches of learning without having to pay a fee.

Other specialized institutions of learning were the *dar al-qur'an* (lit. "house of the Qur'an"), which specialized in the study of the Qur'an and its sciences; the *dar al-hadith* (lit. "house of the Prophet's statements"), which concentrated on the study of the *sunna*, the sayings and customs of the Prophet Muhammad; the

dar al-'ilm (lit. "house of rational sciences"), which was concerned with the philosophical and natural sciences; and the *madrasat al-tibb* (lit. "schools of medicine"), which were dedicated to the medical sciences. Three more terms—*ribat*, *khanqa*, and *zawiya*—referred to Sufi lodges and conventicles where the traditional sciences were pursued. Medical instruction also took place primarily in hospitals (Ar. *maristan/bimaristan*), which served as schools of medicine, in mosques, and in the *madrasas*.

At all times, informal and formal instruction was offered by men and women in their own homes or in the private homes of scholars and wealthy individuals. In most areas of the medieval Islamic world, such modes of private education were more the norm than formal, collective education in a *madrasa*.⁵

III. ORGANIZATION AND CURRICULA OF *MADRASAS*: THE PARAMETERS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious education was based upon what is termed in Arabic as *al-'ulum al-naqliyya* (lit. the "transmitted sciences"), which consists primarily of the Qur'anic sciences, the *hadith* sciences, and jurisprudence (Ar. *fiqh*). In addition to the "transmitted" or religious sciences were *al-'ulum al-'aqliyya* (lit. "the rational sciences"), which included logic, philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences. The rational sciences were also termed the "foreign sciences," or "sciences of the ancients," pointing to their largely classical Greek provenance.

In the pre-'Abbasid period, *madrasas*, like the earlier "teaching" mosques, were primarily devoted to religious learning based on the study of the transmitted sciences—study of the Qur'an, *hadith*, and the religious law—supplemented by the ancillary sciences of grammar and literature. George Makdisi, who has done pioneering work on Islamic education and demonstrated the influence of the *madrasa* on the development of the medieval European college, has given us a comprehensive idea of medieval curricula of study and the organizations of learning.⁶

⁵ See, e.g., MICHAEL CHAMBERLAIN, *KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL PRACTICE IN MEDIAEVAL DAMASCUS, 1190–1350*, at 69–70 (1994).

⁶ See generally GEORGE MAKDISI, *THE RISE OF COLLEGES: INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING IN ISLAM AND THE WEST* (1981). The modern university, however, is a recent importation into Islamic societies from the West.

As far as the traditional or religious sciences were concerned, it was customary for the student to learn in sequence: the Qur'an; *hadith*; Qur'anic sciences, which included exegesis; variant readings of the text; and *hadith* sciences, which involved the study of the biographies of the *hadith* transmitters. The student would then proceed to study two "foundational sciences": *usul al-din*, referring to the principles or sources of religion, and *usul al-fiqh*, the sources, principles, and methodology of jurisprudence. The student would additionally learn the law of the *madhhab* (lit. "school of law") with which he⁷ was affiliated; the points of difference (Ar. *khilaf*) within the same *madhhab* and between the four schools of law; and dialectic (Ar. *jadal*), also called disputation (Ar. *munazara*).⁸ Following *dialectic* came the study of *adab*, or belles-lettres, including poetry, prosody, and grammar.

These subjects in essence constituted the curriculum and were meant to be sequentially studied as indicated above—at least as preferred by the educational theorists. In reality, however, the method and course of study tended to be informal and unstructured and were often dependent upon the proclivities of the teachers and sometimes of the students. Thus, a typical day of instruction for the famous jurist Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820) would involve teaching a course on the Qur'an before any other topic in the day, then one course each on *hadith* and disputation in that order, followed by a late morning course lasting until about noon on the classical language, grammar, prosody, and poetry.⁹

In his famous *Prolegomena* written in the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) lists a similar curriculum for the religious sciences, with an emphasis on the Qur'an and its sciences; *hadith* and its sciences, including the study of specific *hadith* terminology; and jurisprudence (Ar. *fiqh*), with an emphasis on the complex law of inheritance and the sources of jurisprudence. However, in addition to this curriculum, theology (Ar. *al-kalam*), Sufism (Islamic mysticism, called in Arabic *al-*

⁷ Law tended to be the preserve of the male.

⁸ MAKDISI, *supra* note 6, at 80.

⁹ 17 YAQUT, IRSHAD AL-ARIB ILA MA'RIFAT AL-ADIB [THE GUIDE FOR THE LEARNED INTO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CULTIVATED] 304 (al-Rifa'i ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1936–1938) (on file with author).

tasawwuf), and the science of the interpretation of dreams or visions (Ar. *ta'bir al-ruya*) were also studied.¹⁰

The *madrasa* was typically funded by a *waqf*, a charitable foundation or trust, a form of institutional organization that was borrowed by the West from the Islamic world towards the end of the eleventh century.¹¹ A *waqf* rendered a person's property safe from confiscation by the state by freezing it as a public asset, but these assets could be passed on to the founder's descendants. Wealthy men and women thus served as benefactors of *madrastas*, which were sometimes named after them, or their families, out of both pious interest and pragmatic concerns. Many had a genuine interest in furthering public education, and women played a prominent role in this particular charitable activity. For example, a renowned *madrasa* was endowed in the fourteenth century by Barakat, the mother of the Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Sha'ban, and became known as the *madrasa* of the mother of al-Ashraf Sha'ban.¹² Another woman named Alif, a member of the distinguished scholarly Bulqini family also from the Mamluk period, created endowments to support Qur'an reciters in her grandfather's *madrasa*.¹³

IV. METHODOLOGY OF INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING

The main methods of teaching were lecture and dictation; for legal studies, *munazara*, or "disputation," was important as well. The student was expected to first memorize the Qur'an and then as many *hadiths* as possible. The teacher, commonly called a *shaykh*, would repeat the *hadiths* three times so as to allow the student to remember them. In the case of *hadith*, dictation (Ar. *imla*) was particularly important since the text had to be precisely established. Problems of jurisprudence were also dictated as were linguistic and literary subjects.

¹⁰ IBN KHALDUN, AL-MUQADDIMA [THE PROLEGOMENA] (F. Rosenthal et al. trans., 1958).

¹¹ George Makdisi, *The Madrasa as a Charitable Trust and the University as a Corporation in the Middle Ages*, in CORRESPONDANCE D'ORIENT 2 (Actes du Ve Congrès Int'l d'Arabesants et d'Islamisants ed., 1970).

¹² JONATHAN BERKEY, THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE IN MEDIEVAL CAIRO: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION 163-64 (1992).

¹³ See 12 AL-SAKHAWI, AL-DAW AL-LAMI 'LI-AHL AL-QARN AL-TASI'A [THE BRILLIANT LIGHT REGARDING THE PEOPLE OF THE NINTH CENTURY] 7-8, 93-94 (Asma Afsaruddin trans., n.d.) (on file with author); BERKEY, *supra* note 12, at 164.

In relation to the Qur'an and *hadith*, learning by heart (Ar. *talqin*) was the principal method of acquiring knowledge, and a retentive memory was, therefore, greatly prized. But, at the same time, the importance of understanding was emphasized, and the students were expected to reflect on what they had learned. The saying "[l]earning is a city, one whose gates are memory and understanding" captures this two-pronged approach to effective learning. The Arabic term used for "understanding," *diraya*, is distinct from, although related to, the activity of memorization and transmission particularly of *hadiths*, a process known in Arabic as *riwaya*. *Diraya* was decisively the higher "gate" of learning since it referred to the individual's ability to comprehend the contents of *hadith*—as opposed to the mere passive memorization and transmission of them—and then use them to expound upon the religious law. The related term for jurisprudence, *fiqh*, also means "understanding" and reflects the importance attached to active comprehension of and engagement with one's subjects in the educational system.¹⁴ The famous ninth century belle-lettrist and scholastic theologian, Amr b. Bahr al-Jahiz (d. 869), thus emphasized that the purpose of reading books was to understand their content and not simply to learn their words.¹⁵

In the study of law, the scholastic method of disputation (Ar. *munazara*)—a pedagogical method that originated quite early in the Islamic milieu—prevailed. It is known that the 'Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid encouraged the holding of disputations at his court. The famous jurist Malik b. Anas used to deputize his student 'Uthman b. 'Isa b. Kinana (d. 797) to engage another well-known jurist Abu Yusuf in *munazara*. Al-Husayn b. Isma'il (d. 942), a *hadith* scholar and jurisconsult (Ar. *mufti*) who was the judge of the Iraqi town of Kufa for sixty years, held regular sessions of legal disputations at his home during his period of judgeship which were often attended by other prominent jurisconsults. Other examples of regular disputation sessions abound in legal literature. These sessions tended to be very

¹⁴ MAKDISI, *supra* note 6, at 144.

¹⁵ See Sebastian Günther, *Advice for Teachers: The 9th Century Muslim Scholars Ibn Sahnun and al-Jahiz on Pedagogy and Didactics*, in IDEAS, IMAGES, AND METHODS OF PORTRAYAL: INSIGHTS INTO CLASSICAL ARABIC LITERATURE AND ISLAM (Sebastian Günther ed., forthcoming 2005). I am grateful to Professor Günther for sharing a pre-publication draft of this article with me.

popular and often attracted large audiences, frequently running from sunset to midnight.¹⁶

Disputation required that the disputant have: (a) a comprehensive knowledge of *khilaf*, which referred to the divergent legal opinions of jurisconsults;¹⁷ (b) a thorough acquaintance with *jadal*, or “dialectic”; and (c) the ability to acquire skill through practice in *munazara*. Law students had to have memorized as thorough a list as possible of the disputed matters of law and know the answers. By virtue of their skill in disputation, the students earned their license or certificate, known in Arabic as *ijaza*, to teach law and issue legal opinions.¹⁸

Disputations sometimes became raucous and could even lead to violent altercations. The more traditional scholars, particularly of *hadith*, tended to look askance at these exercises, regarding them as the hallmark of the overweening intellectual who wished to make a public display of his debating skills to win the accolades of his audience. Furthermore, those engaging in disputations were deemed to be too rationalistic and inclined to have scant regard for the traditional religious sciences. Thus Ibn al-Jauzi (d. 1201), a conservative Hanbali theologian and *hadith* scholar, excoriated those jurisconsults prone to engaging in disputations:

The major portion of their effort is concentrated on acquiring the science of dialectic, their purpose being, they claim, to discover the right source for the legal prescription, the subtle points of the religious law, and the courses upon which the various legal opinions are based. If this claim of theirs were really true, they would have occupied themselves with all problems of the law without distinction. Instead, they busy

¹⁶ *Id.* (manuscript at 133, on file with author). It is no coincidence, therefore, that the college degree also came to be called a “licence” in French, reflecting its Islamic genealogy. See generally George Makdisi, *Interaction Between Islam and the West*, in *MEDIEVAL EDUCATION IN ISLAM AND THE WEST* (George Makdisi & Dominique Sourdel eds., 1977); George Makdisi, *On the Origin and Development of the College in Islam and the West*, in *ISLAM AND THE MEDIEVAL WEST: ASPECTS OF INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS* 32 (Khalil I. Semaan ed., 1980); George Makdisi, *The Scholastic Method in Medieval Education: An Inquiry into Its Origins in Law and Theology*, 49 *SPECULUM* 640 (1974).

¹⁷ The *sic et non* which appears out of nowhere in Europe around 1100 has been traced back to the *khilaf* common by this time in Islamic legal studies. See MAKDISI, *supra* note 6, at 245 (discussing this and other European scholarly terms which appear to have Islamic antecedents).

¹⁸ See 5 *ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM Madrasa* 1130 (C.E. Bosworth et al. eds., new ed. 1986).

themselves with the leading problems demanding much discussion, so as to make a show of their dialectical prowess, publicly, in the give-and-take of disputation. . . .

....

Jurisconsults spend their time on disputation, to the exclusion of the recitation of the Koran, of hadith, of the life of the Prophet and his companions, matters which could awaken the religious feeling such as disputation could never do. They neglect the positive law and the rest of the religious sciences. They engage in disputation for purposes other than the discovery of the truth.¹⁹

But rationalism and disputation also had their eloquent proponents. The famous "free-thinking" poet of the eleventh century, Abu al-'Ala al-Ma'arri (d. 1057), took well-aimed shots at the traditionalists in elegant verse:

In all you do you follow some tradition, even when you say
"My Lord is One, Unique."

But He's ordered us to reflect on His creation, yet when we
do we're dubbed as heretic.

Save for natural rivalry, there would not be such books of
disputation as the *'Umda* or *Mughni*.²⁰

Al-Ma'arri is clearly making the point that the Qur'an itself exhorts the believer to reflect on the signs of God and to make use of his or her rational faculties. Thus, he believed that rationalist disputation was part of the divinely ordained human nature which resulted in beneficial works of intellectual scholarship, such as the well-known *'Umda* or *Mughni*. In another set of verses, al-Ma'arri makes clear that his preference is for a kind of religious humanism which occupied a middle road between pure intellectualism and traditional religiosity. He said:

They all err—Muslims, Christians, Jews and Magians. Two
make humanity's universal sect:

One man intelligent without religion, and one religious without
intellect.²¹

The tension between traditionalism and rationalism would continue through much of the medieval period, with traditionalism slowly gaining ground and becoming predominant in the late Middle Ages. But rationalism never completely faded;

¹⁹ MAKDISI, *supra* note 6, at 139–40 (quoting IBN AL-JAUZI, *TABLIS IBLIS* 119ff).

²⁰ REYNOLD ALLEYNE NICHOLSON, *STUDIES IN ISLAMIC POETRY* 268 (1921).

²¹ *Id.*

one could even say it ultimately triumphed in forcing traditionalism to reckon with it, adopt its methodology of rational dialectic, and absorb many of its premises while attempting to refute them.

V. THE "RATIONAL" OR "ANCIENT" SCIENCES

The so-called "rational sciences" (Ar. *al-'ulum al-'aqliyya*) or "the sciences of the ancients" (Ar. *al-'ulum al-awa'il*) usually consisted of seven main components: (1) logic (Ar. *al-mantiq*), which was the foundation of all the others; (2) arithmetic (Ar. *al-arithmatiqi*), including accounting (Ar. *hisab*); (3) geometry (Ar. *al-handasa*); (4) astronomy (Ar. *al-hay'a*); (5) music (Ar. *al-musiki*), which dealt with the theory of tones and their definition by number; (6) the natural sciences (Ar. *al-tabiiyyat*), which were concerned with the theory of bodies at rest and in motion, in addition to the study of humans, animals, plants, minerals, and the heavens, important subdivisions of which were medicine (Ar. *al-tibb*) and agriculture (Ar. *al-falaha*); and, finally, (7) metaphysics (Ar. *ilm al-ilahiyat*).²²

As early as the middle of the eighth century during the Abbasid period, strong interest began developing in the learning of the ancient world, not only in its Greek sources, but also, to a lesser extent, in its Persian and Indian ones as well. The intellectual awakening that this interest spawned has rendered this age especially illustrious in the annals of Islamic and world history. Due to the political and territorial expansion of Islam beyond the original Arabian Peninsula, Muslims became the heirs of the older and more cultured peoples whom they conquered or encountered. In Syria and Iraq, they adapted themselves to the already existing Aramaic civilization which had been influenced by the later Greek civilization in Syria and by the Persian civilization in Iraq. Three-quarters of a century after the establishment of Baghdad, the Arabic-reading world was in possession of the chief philosophical works of Aristotle, of the leading Neo-Platonic commentators, and of most of the medical writings of Galen, as well as of Persian and Indian scientific works. In only a few decades, Arab scholars would assimilate what had taken the Greeks centuries to develop.

²² 5 ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM, *supra* note 18, at 1130.

India acted as an early source of inspiration, especially in the wisdom literature and mathematics. About 771 C.E., an Indian traveler introduced into Baghdad a treatise on astronomy which by order of the Caliph al-Mansur was translated by Muhammad al-Fazari (d. between 796–806). Al-Fazari subsequently became the first astronomer in Islam. The stars had of course interested the Arabs since pre-Islamic times, but no scientific study of them was undertaken until this time. Islam had a particular interest in the study of astronomy as a means of fixing the direction of prayer towards the Ka'ba. The famous mathematician al-Khwarizmi (d. 850) based his widely known astronomical tables (Ar. *zij*) on al-Fazari's work. From al-Khwarizmi's name comes the word "algorithm." Other astronomical works were translated in this period from Persian into Arabic, especially during the time of Harun al-Rashid.

This same Indian traveler also brought a treatise on mathematics by means of which the numerals—which in the West are called Arabic numerals and which the Arabs called Indian numerals—entered the Muslim world. The Muslims borrowed the concept of zero (Ar. *sifr*) from the Indians and transmitted it to Europe. In the field of literature and the arts, the Persian contribution was the strongest.

In 765 C.E., the Caliph al-Mansur, afflicted with a stomach disease which had baffled his physicians, sent for Jurjis ibn Bakhtishu', a Nestorian Christian physician from Iraq who served as the dean of the hospital at Jundishapur (Gondishapur) in Persia. In the ancient world, Jundishapur was noted for its academy of medicine and philosophy, said to have been founded about 555 C.E. by the great Persian king Anushirwan. When the school of Alexandria was closed during the Christian period, many of its scholars are said to have fled to the school at Jundishapur. The science of the institution was based on the ancient Greek tradition, but the language of instruction was Aramaic. Jurjis soon won the confidence of the caliph and became the court physician while retaining his Christian faith. It is reported that on being invited by the caliph to embrace Islam, he retorted that he preferred the company of his fathers, regardless of whether they were in heaven or in hell.²³ He

²³ IBN AL-'IBRI, TA'RIKH MUKHTASAR AL-DUWAL [A SHORT HISTORY OF NATIONS] 215 (Antun Salihani ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1890) (on file with author).

appears not to have suffered any ill consequences on account of his candor. In Baghdad, Ibn Bakhtishu' became the founder of a brilliant family dynasty of medical practitioners which, for six or seven generations, spanning two and a half centuries, exercised an almost continuous monopoly over the court medical practice. Jurjis's son Bakhtishu' (d. 801) and his grandson Jibril (Gabriel) served as court physicians to Harun al-Rashid.²⁴

At the time of the Arab conquest of the Fertile Crescent, the intellectual legacy of Greece was unquestionably the most precious treasure at hand. Under the two Abbasid caliphs al-Mahdi and his son Harun al-Rashid in particular, the Muslim army won decisive victories over the Byzantine enemy forces. The young Harun actually led his father's campaign against the Byzantines; in 782 C.E., the Arab army reached the Bosphorus, at the very doors of Constantinople itself. The Byzantine queen-regent at that time, Irene—who held the regency in the name of her son Constantine VI—was forced to sue for peace and conclude a treaty with the Muslims. The various Abbasid military excursions into the land of the Byzantines—or, as the Arab chroniclers say, the land of the Romans—resulted in the introduction of Greek manuscripts, among other objects of booty. Al-Ma'mun is said to have sent his ambassadors as far as Constantinople, to the Byzantine Emperor Leo the Armenian himself, in search of Greek manuscripts. Al-Mansur requested and received a number of books, including Euclid, from the Byzantine emperor. The Arab Muslims were not able to read the Greek originals; therefore, they had to depend on translations made by their subjects who did know Greek: Nestorian Christians. The Nestorians first translated the Greek works into Syriac and then from Syriac into Arabic.

One of the most important achievements of al-Ma'mun's rule is his establishment of the previously mentioned Bayt al-Hikma (lit. "the House of Wisdom") in 830 C.E. This House of Wisdom was a combined library, academy, and translation bureau. Bayt al-Hikma has been described as the most important educational institution since the foundation of the Alexandrian Museum in the first half of the third century B.C. Under al-Ma'mun, the Bayt al-Hikma became the center of translation activity. This

²⁴ PHILIP K. HITTI, *HISTORY OF THE ARABS* 309 (1970).

era of avid translation would last through the early tenth century.²⁵

Under the second Abbasid caliph, al-Mansur, the translation of Greek works into Arabic had already begun. Apparently these early translations were not properly done and had to be revised under Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun. The chief of the translators was Hunayn b. Ishaq, one of the greatest scholars of the age. Hunayn was a Nestorian Christian from Iraq who was appointed by al-Ma'mun as the director of his famous Bayt al-Hikma. In many cases, Hunayn would do the initial translation from Greek into Syriac, and his colleagues took the second step and translated from Syriac into Arabic. His son, Ishaq b. Hunayn, became known as the greatest translator of Aristotle's works. Hunayn is reported to have translated Plato's *Republic*, several works of Aristotle, and almost all of Galen's scientific output. Seven books of Galen's anatomy, lost in the original Greek, have luckily been preserved in Arabic. Before the age of translation was brought to an end, practically all the works of Aristotle that had survived to that day had been translated into Arabic. Two Muslim chroniclers tell us that no less than one hundred works of Aristotle, whom the Muslims called "the philosopher of the Greeks," had been translated. Some of these works attributed to Aristotle, however, are now known to be forgeries.

This intellectual floruit in the Islamic world was taking place while Europe was almost totally ignorant of Greek thought and science. Europe's later rediscovery of it was through the Arabic translations, which in turn would spur the Western Renaissance. One modern historian has remarked, "[W]hile al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun were delving into Greek and Persian philosophy their contemporaries in the West, Charlemagne and his lords, were reportedly dabbling in the art of writing their names."²⁶ Aristotle's works on logic, particularly his works *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, became, along with the study of Arabic grammar, the bases of humanistic studies (Ar. *adab*) in Islam. These translated works progressively took intellectual circles by storm, and the Islamic world, like Patristic Christianity before it, had to

²⁵ See DIMITRI GUTAS, GREEK THOUGHT, ARABIC CULTURE: THE GRAECO-ARABIC TRANSLATION MOVEMENT IN BAGHDAD AND EARLY 'ABBASID SOCIETY 53-60 (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries) (1998).

²⁶ HITTI, *supra* note 24, at 315.

grapple with “the problem of how to assimilate the ‘pagan’ knowledge of the Greeks to a conception of the world that included God as its creator.”²⁷ The tension between the two led to a creative accommodation and synthesis, as well as a festering uneasiness and outright hostility, in the medieval world—a range of responses that in some measure still influences modern discourse on the nature and parameters of education in Islamic societies.

The Caliph al-Ma’mun’s receptivity toward the “ancient” sciences was fostered by his partiality for Mu’tazilism, the school of scholastic theology and rationalism which arose in the eighth century. Its adherents essentially believed that there was no contradiction between reason and revelation. The Mu’tazilites excelled in the dialectic method, relying to a large measure on Greek logic and syllogism to make their case. They debated their adversaries, the traditional theologians, on questions of human free will—which they supported unqualifiedly—versus predestination, and God’s justice (theodicy) and attributes.

Whereas al-Ma’mun deserves justifiable credit for instigating and overseeing one of the most important intellectual revolutions in the world’s history, his reputation has been sullied by his imposition of a “test” or a “trial” (Ar. *mihna*) on the prominent traditional theologians of his time, forcing them to subscribe to the Mu’tazili notion of the createdness of the Qur’an—as opposed to the traditionalist espousal of its uncreatedness—or face penalties. This dispute raged with respect to whether the Qur’an had existed from the very beginning of time as the Word of God or whether it had been “created” at the time of the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. The Mu’tazila objected to the first possibility since that would set up, as they understood it, a thing coequal with God, undermining His unity. While the *mihna* continued under two of al-Ma’mun’s caliphal successors, it was brought to an end by the caliph al-Mutawakkil, who reverted to the doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Qur’an. Some intellectual historians have understood this reversal as representing the triumph of traditionalism over rationalism, but that is too simplistic. Sources continue to indicate the presence and even floruit of the philosophical and natural sciences through the late medieval period.

²⁷ MAKDISI, *supra* note 6, at 77.

In the early 'Abbasid period, the rational sciences were taught in special institutions called *dar al-'ilm* (lit. "house of knowledge"), which flourished until about the middle of the eleventh century when they began to cede ground to the *madrasa*. Like the *madrasa*, the *dar al-'ilm* was also often a *waqf* institution, established by a private Muslim individual using his or her private property for a public charitable purpose. In addition to these institutions, the rational sciences were typically taught in private homes and in other non-institutional locations. Because of the largely non-institutional nature of this kind of education, it has been assumed by some historians that instruction in the rational sciences declined considerably and then well-nigh disappeared after the twelfth century, just as Europe was beginning to experience a surge in learning inspired by its contacts with the Islamic world. It appears that these historians were looking for *'ilm* in all the wrong places because once the *madrasa*, with its mandated curriculum of religious sciences, became the predominant institution of formal learning, the rational subjects were taught primarily in informal study circles in private homes, libraries, and, until they faded away, in the *dar al-'ilm*. Since most modern scholars have tended to focus on the *madrasa* as the *locus classicus* of Islamic education, the significance of non-formal and non-institutionalized modes of learning tended to be downplayed.

Recent research based on unpublished manuscripts, charitable foundation deed documents, and biographical works about scholars yields a revised picture. In favorable circumstances, the rational sciences continued to be taught and studied openly even in *madrasas*, sometimes even in mosques, and certainly in informal study-circles and libraries. This was a natural consequence of the fact that the broadly educated person who had acquired mastery in several fields, including the Hellenistic subjects, remained the ideal throughout the pre-modern period in contradistinction to our era of specialization. Thus biographical dictionaries from the Mamluk period (1256–1571 C.E.) refer to *shaykhs* (professors and learned notables) in Damascus who had achieved enviable mastery (Ar. *riyasa*, *imama*) in a number of subjects, including theology, belles lettres, medicine, mathematics, natural science, and the Hellenistic sciences. A Hanafi jurist is described in one biographical entry as having taught logic and scholastic dialectic

in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus during the Mamluk period.²⁸ In a mosque or *madrasa* environment, the studying and teaching of Hellenic philosophy could be the most problematic, since some of its postulations were at variance with monotheistic doctrines, such as the existence of an omnipotent, personal, and providential God, the finiteness of the world, and bodily resurrection. Thus a philosopher who had studied with the well-known theologian Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209) was accused by some of his colleagues of corrupting his students at the *madrasa* where he lived and taught.

The rational sciences, along with the Islamic sciences, could always be taught discreetly, however, by professors who had a partiality for both types of learning under a neutral or concealing umbrella rubric like *hadith*. Even in unfavorable political circumstances, such as during the reign of the twelfth-century Ayyubid rulers al-Mu'azzam and al-Ashraf who tried to forbid the teaching of philosophy, the teaching of the Hellenistic sciences continued unabated.²⁹

George Makdisi, who remains the preeminent scholar on Islamic education even after his death, has pointed to the fact that the "ancient sciences" remained accessible and avidly pursued through the High Middle Ages, even by "conventional" scholars such as the Shafi'i jurisconsult Sayf al-Din al-Amidi (d. 1234). In regard to these sciences, he remarked that "[n]ot only was access easy, it was in turn concealed, condoned, allowed, encouraged, held in honour, according to different regions and periods, in spite of the traditionalist opposition, the periodic prohibitions, and autos-da-fé."³⁰

VI. HUMANISTIC STUDIES (*ADAB*)

Another very important part of education in the Islamic milieu was the humanistic sciences, termed in Arabic *adab*, which was based primarily upon the study of literature—poetry, belles-lettres, prosody—and the linguistic sciences—grammar, syntax, philology. In addition to religious or sacred literature, "profane" or secular literature had also been produced since the

²⁸ See CHAMBERLAIN, *supra* note 5, at 84 n.76 (citing 21 AL-SAFADI, AL-WAFI BI AL-WAFAYAT [THE COMPLETE LIST OF OBITUARIES] 88 (H. Ritter et al. eds., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1931) (on file with author)).

²⁹ *Id.* at 83–84.

³⁰ MAKDISI, *supra* note 6, at 78.

Umayyad period (661–750 C.E.). In the field of literature and the arts, the Persian contribution was the strongest. The earliest work of Arabic literary prose that has come down to us is *Kalila wa-Dimna*, a translation of a wisdom tale from Pahlavi (Middle Persian), which in turn was a translation from the Sanskrit. The original work was brought to Persia from India, together with the game of chess, during the reign of the Persian King Anusharwan (531–578 C.E.) and would become hugely popular in world literature upon its translation into various languages. What gives the Arabic version special significance is the fact that the Persian translation was lost, as was the Sanskrit original. The Arabic version therefore became the basis for all existing translations into some forty languages, including several European tongues such as Latin, Italian, Greek, Icelandic, and several Slavonic languages, as well as Turkish, Hebrew, Ethiopic, and Malay.

The book *Kalila and Dimna* was part of the burgeoning mirrors-of-princes literature intended to instruct princes in the art of administration by means of animal fables. It was rendered into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa', a Persian Zoroastrian convert to Islam, whose life spanned the late Umayyad and 'Abbasid periods. Ibn al-Muqaffa' was a member of the powerful, highly educated secretarial class which was largely responsible for the emergence and development of *adab*.

As Islamic realms expanded and a sophisticated, complex bureaucracy evolved, the epistolary (prose-essay) genre arose and would eventually spawn a rich secular and administrative literature. Many from among this class of royal secretaries and courtiers continued to provide adaptations and translations of Indian-Persian wisdom literature for the entertainment and edification of the upper class. Among the translated works were ancient histories and legends, and fables and proverbs—almost anything that appealed to the literary sophisticate and social dilettante. Poetry had dipped in popularity in the early Islamic period but began to enjoy a resurgence in the eighth century. Pre-Islamic poetry in fact was minutely studied by Muslim philologists and religious scholars because of the proximity of its language to that of the Qur'an and its beneficial role in elucidating abstruse words or locutions in the sacred text.

The attraction towards "foreign," "non-Islamic" literary traditions was unsurprisingly not to everyone's liking. There is

no need to recapitulate here the *culturkampf* that would ensue for the next two centuries—the ninth through the tenth—pitting Persian ethno-cultural sentiments against similar Arab sensibilities. Suffice it to say that at the end of this *culturkampf* a much more cosmopolitan, one could even say multi-cultural, Islamic cultural identity emerged which was not necessarily predicated on a particular—specifically Arab—ethnic affiliation. Some have described this multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious civilization as Islamicate rather than Islamic, underscoring the fact that Islam as a religion was but one seminal component of the rich constellation of values, ideas, imaginaries, and perspectives that shaped it.³¹

As a consequence of these intellectual and cultural trends, a specifically Islamic humanism emerged based on the concept of *adab*, which according to the previously mentioned al-Jahiz (d. 869), may be defined as “(1) the total educational system of (2) a cultured Muslim who (3) took the whole world for his object of curiosity and knowledge.”³² *Adab*, according to the first part of this definition, is the equivalent of the Greek notion of *paideia*, according to which a holistic education contributes to the moral development of the individual.³³ One can even speak of a multiplicity of humanistic trends (humanisms) in this period of extraordinary intellectual and cultural floruit.

These trends may variously be characterized as:³⁴ (1) philosophical humanism, referring to the humanism of the Muslim philosophers of the tenth and eleventh centuries who held that philosophy, rather than religion, was the ultimate guide to perfect conduct of both the state and the individual; (2) intellectual humanism, practiced mainly by the Mu'tazilites and predicated on the belief that Islam is a rational religion in full accordance with the laws of logic; (3) literary humanism, which has been described as the product of an “aristocracy of the

³¹ See 1 MARSHALL G. S. HODGSON, *THE VENTURE OF ISLAM: CONSCIENCE AND HISTORY IN A WORLD CIVILIZATION* 58–59 (1974).

³² TARIF KHALIDI, *CLASSICAL ARAB ISLAM: THE CULTURE AND HERITAGE OF THE GOLDEN AGE* 57 (1985).

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ See Michael G. Carter, *Humanism and the Language Sciences in Medieval Islam*, in *HUMANISM, CULTURE, AND LANGUAGE IN THE NEAR EAST* 27–38 (Asma Afsaruddin & A. H. Mathias Zahniser eds., 1997).

mind,"³⁵ resulting from a formal, broad-based humanistic education with an emphasis on language studies that led to the acquisition of refined cultural and social ideals appropriate to the courtier, statesman, religious dignitary, and diplomat; (4) religious humanism, which may be characterized as a "serene contentment with the non-transcendental aspects of Islamic life alongside an unreserved acquiescence to all the conditions of the faith, thus integrating a humane and satisfying earthly existence with the hope of eternal salvation;"³⁶ and (5) legalistic humanism, engendered by the fact that the Shari'a, the religious law, being as comprehensive as it is in its scope, requires the jurist and other legal practitioners to be concerned with the complexities of human nature at the spiritual and temporal levels, allowing for the emergence of a certain humanistic perception and insight.

As our sources show, *adab* in the broad sense of humanistic studies became an integral part of the curriculum in mosques, *madrasas*, and libraries. The sciences of the Arabic language (Ar. *'ulum al-'Arabiyya*) were necessary ancillaries to the religious sciences from the very beginning. According to the well-known philologist al-Anbari (d. 1181), a full range of offerings in the Arabic sciences would include grammar, lexicology, morphology, metrics, rhyme, prosody, history of the Arab tribes, Arab genealogy, as well as the science of dialectic for grammar and the science of grammatical theory and methodology.³⁷ Secular, belle-lettristic works were sometimes even taught in mosques. The biographer al-Safadi mentions that a shaykh taught al-Hariri's famous *Maqamat* and other *adab* works in the Umayyad mosque.³⁸ Being a polymath was a matter of pride, and scholars won renown for their breadth of learning in various religious and secular subjects rather than for a narrow specialization. Thus the elder Subki, father of the famous biographer and chronicler Taj al-Din Subki (d. 1370), is described by his son as not atypically having mastery over jurisprudence, *hadith*, Qur'anic exegesis and recitation, didactic and speculative

³⁵ MOHAMMED ARKOUN, L'HUMANISME ARABE AU IVE/XE SIECLE: MISKAWAYH, PHILOSOPHE ET HISTORIEN 357 (1982).

³⁶ Carter, *supra* note 34, at 32.

³⁷ MAKDISI, *supra* note 6, at 79 (citing AL-ANBARI, NUZHAT AL-ALIBBA' FI TABAQAT AL-UDABA' [A PLEASANT [COMPENDIUM] FOR THE DISCERNING REGARDING THE GENERATIONS OF LITTERATEURS] 55 (A. Amer ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1962)).

³⁸ See CHAMBERLAIN, *supra* note 5, at 85 n.82.

theology, grammar and syntax, lexicography, belles-lettres and ethics, medicine, scholastic dialectic, *khilaf* (points of difference within and among the law schools), logic, poetry, heresiography, arithmetic, law, and astronomy.³⁹ Physicians were also commonly learned in *adab* and the legal sciences just as many jurists were also learned in medicine.⁴⁰

Mastery of the Arabic language in fact became so equated with moral superiority that the scholar Ibn Hubayra the Senior declared that the pious man who correctly spoke Arabic possessed greater merit, both in this world and the next, than the pious man who did not.⁴¹ Such sentiments are reminiscent of medieval Christian regard for Latin and correct speech; according to St. Augustine, "Rightly ordered speech... is a consequence of the Incarnation."⁴²

VII. ROLE OF WOMEN SCHOLARS

The master narrative on Islamic education in both Islamic languages—Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, among others—and Western languages has traditionally minimized the role of women in scholarship, creating the impression that their influence has been slight. Yet, sources consulted not as frequently—like biographical dictionaries—establish that the contribution of women, particularly in the transmission of *hadith* and in other areas of religious scholarship, has been considerable and recognized as such by their contemporaries. For example, 'A'isha, the Prophet's widow, was a prolific transmitter of *hadith*; a significant number of her reports have been recorded by al-Bukhari (d. 870), author of the most authoritative Sunni *hadith* compilation. She was also renowned for her exegesis of the

³⁹ 6 AL-SUBKI, AL-TABAQAT AL-SHAFI'YYA AL-KUBRA [THE GREAT SHAFI' GENERATIONS [OF SCHOLARS]] 146–47, 150, 168–69 (Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1964–1976) (on file with author); CHAMBERLAIN, *supra* note 5, at 86.

⁴⁰ See IBN ABI 'USAYBI'A, 'UYUN AL-ANBA' FI TABAQAT AL-ATIBBA' [FOUNTS OF INFORMATION REGARDING GENERATIONS OF PHYSICIANS] 646–51 (Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1965) (on file with author).

⁴¹ 1 YAQUT, IRSHAD AL-ARIB ILA MA'RIFAT AL-ADIB [THE GUIDE FOR THE LEARNED INTO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CULTIVATED] 23 (D.S. Margoliouth ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1982) (on file with author).

⁴² MARCIA L. COLISH, THE MIRROR OF LANGUAGE: A STUDY IN THE MEDIEVAL THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE 33 (1968).

Qur'an and was consulted widely by the closest associates of the Prophet on account of her knowledge of the religious law.⁴³

During the later period, there is evidence of women's impressive scholarship in biographical dictionaries, such as the one composed by Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sakhawi (d. 1497).⁴⁴ An overwhelming number of the 1075 women referred to in al-Sakhawi's chapter on women are distinguished for their exemplary religious piety and for their excellence in, and dedication to, religious scholarship. The general picture that emerges is one of women who were active in both receiving and imparting religious knowledge, particularly in the transmission of *hadith*.

The notion of sexually segregated space that one takes for granted as a defining feature of medieval Muslim society is challenged by what these biographical accounts have to tell us about the formal and informal settings in which women scholars conducted their activity. Women are depicted as freely studying with men and other women. After becoming credentialed as teachers, they would go on to teach both men and women. The settings included the *madrasa*, informal study circles (Ar. *halaqas*), and private homes. Two of the most important *madrasas* mentioned by name are the Zahiriyya and the Salihiyya in Cairo, Egypt, where some of these women received their education and later taught.⁴⁵ Our protagonists are mostly women from elite backgrounds; almost without exception, they are described as being of noble birth, and/or from families which were previously distinguished for a tradition of learning and for the production of religious and legal scholars. The male relatives of these women appear to have been quite encouraging of the desire of these women to acquire advanced religious instruction. Clearly, these women were empowered by their specific social and familial circumstances which appear not to have recognized a gender barrier in the acquisition and dissemination of religious scholarship.

These women scholars, like their male counterparts, spent years in scholarly apprenticeship, making the usual rounds of academic circles, choosing to study closely with renowned

⁴³ 8 IBN SA'D, AL-TABAQAT AL-KUBRA [THE GREAT GENERATIONS] 52-53 (Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1997) (on file with author).

⁴⁴ 12 AL-SAKHAWI, *supra* note 13.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 93.

teachers, and finally earning the coveted *ijaza*, the teaching certificate which permitted them to instruct others. Like their male colleagues, they clearly worked hard to make their entré into the world of formal religious training. The actual academic training of the best of these female scholars appears to match that of the best male scholars in rigor and thoroughness, a fact that was acknowledged in their own time, given the amount of academic recognition that came their way as a result. This is reflected primarily in the number and quality of the students they supervised, which included al-Sakhawi himself, and prior to him, his own teacher, the famous Ibn Hajar. Some women traveled quite far and wide in their scholarly quest. For example, Fatima bt. Muhammad b. Abd al-Hadi obtained her teaching certificates in Damascus, Egypt, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and other places, studying with renowned scholars like the famous *hadith* scholar Muhammad Ibn Asakir, among others.⁴⁶ Rabi', daughter of the celebrated Ibn Hajar mentioned above, received teaching certificates from a large number of Egyptian and Syrian scholars. Her *rihlat talab al-ilm* (lit. "travel in the pursuit of knowledge") began at the age of four when her father took her to Mecca to listen to al-Zayn al-Maraghi.⁴⁷

Key descriptive terms used to describe some of these distinguished women scholars are *ra'isa* (lit. "a female leader") and the more elevated form *kathirat al-ri'asa* (lit. "having plenitude of leadership"). These terms are particularly significant since they connote both authority and exceptional mastery in the scholar's field(s) of expertise. One scholar, Halima bt. Ahmad b. Muhammad, who is described as possessing *kathirat al-riyasa*, or "plenitude of leadership," is clearly deserving of this accolade. She is described as having been subjected to a rigorous examination before being granted her certificate to teach by her board of examiners, which was constituted by a number of the most distinguished scholars of the day. After her certification, prominent scholars audited her transmission of *hadith*.⁴⁸

A number of these women scholars held formal, salaried appointments,⁴⁹ although this was probably not too common. The

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 103.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 34.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 129–30.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 7.

very presence of these women and their active contributions in scholarly spheres, however, testify to the high valuation of learning as a religious obligation for both men and women.⁵⁰ Furthermore, this fact provides an important corrective to the commonly held notion that women had all but disappeared from the public, including educational, realm by the High Middle Ages.

VIII. PARTICIPATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The participation of religious minorities, mainly Christians and Jews, in the intellectual and academic life in Islamic societies is well documented in various sources. This Article has already referred to the enormous contributions of Jacobite and Nestorian Christians to the efflorescence of Islamic civilization starting in the eighth century through their translation activities funded by their Muslim patrons. Interfaith dialogue and dialectics were sometimes conducted at the caliphal court to promote a critical understanding of other religions. For example, the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi (d. 785) convened formal discussions on theological matters with the Catholicos Timothy, the eighth century leader of the Nestorian church in Iraq.

Biographical sources in particular are a valuable repository of information about the inter-religious scholarly exchanges and collaborations taking place in study-circles and other venues. One source mentions that a certain Muslim scholar, well-versed in grammar and the rational sciences, held study sessions in his house attended not only by Muslims but also by Jews, Christians, "heretics," and Samaritans,⁵¹ while another shaykh, 'Izz al-Din al-Hasan al-Irbili (d. 1262), is said to have read rational sciences and philosophy with fellow-Muslims, the "People of the Book," and philosophers.⁵² Other examples can be found in valuable biographical works of the period.

Lessons in non-Muslim scriptures were also sometimes given by Muslim scholars. According to one source, a professor in

⁵⁰ Asma Afsaruddin, *Knowledge, Piety, and Religious Leadership: Re-inserting Women into the Master Narrative*, in *SISTERS IN FAITH: WOMEN, RELIGION AND LEADERSHIP IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM* (Scott Alexander ed., forthcoming 2005).

⁵¹ 2 AL-YUNINI, *DHAYL MIR'AT AL-ZAMAN* [APPENDIX TO THE MIRRORS OF THE TIME] 165 (Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1954–1961) (on file with author).

⁵² See CHAMBERLAIN, *supra* note 5, at 84 n.80 (citing 12 AL-SAFADI, *AL-WAFI BI AL-WAFAYAT* [THE COMPLETE LIST OF OBITUARIES] 247 (H. Ritter et al. eds., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1931).

Damascus convened study-circles on the New Testament, which were attended by Christians, and on the Old Testament, which were attended by Jews.⁵³ The celebrated Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, called in Arabic *Musa ibn Maymun*, served as Saladdin's court physician and wrote most of his philosophical treatises in Arabic. Highly respected for his scholarship, he moved easily within learned Muslim and Jewish circles. His death in 1204 C.E. was officially mourned by Jews and Muslims alike for three days in Cairo, his birthplace. In Persia, the Syrian Jacobite Catholicos Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-'Ibri (d. 1286) lectured in the thirteenth century at the famous Il-Khanid observatory and library of Maragha on Euclid and Ptolemy.⁵⁴ This kind of ecumenical scholarly collegiality was a major ingredient in the formidable edifice of learning in the medieval Muslim world.

IX. EARLY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY PERIODS

Contemporary writings on traditional educational systems in various Islamic societies usually tend to paint in broad strokes the rather woeful images of slowly ossifying systems rendered largely incapable of providing education suitable to the needs of modern and modernizing countries.⁵⁵ Indeed, learned Muslims in various societies from the early modern period have also considered their systems to be inadequately prepared for new challenges and have proposed and sometimes instigated much-needed reforms.

Islamic societies in the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and North Africa were subject to dramatic social transformations starting in the early nineteenth century due to

⁵³ 4 IBN KHALLIKAN, WAFAYAT AL-A'YAN WA-ANBA ABNA' AL-ZAMAN [THE OBITUARIES OF NOTABLES AND INFORMATION REGARDING THE SONS OF THE TIMES] 397 (M. 'Abd al-Hamid ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 1948) (on file with author).

⁵⁴ HITTI, *supra* note 24, at 683.

⁵⁵ Such views can sometimes be extreme, revealing a lack of awareness of the history of the classical *madrasa* and other venues of learning in the Islamic world. For example, Aziz Talbani is of the opinion that in traditional Islamic education, "originality, innovation, and change were never upheld as intrinsic values. The ideal of Islamic culture was not mechanical evolutionary progress but the permanent immutable transcendental divinely revealed moral, theological, spiritual values of the Qur'an and *Sunna*." Aziz Talbani, *Pedagogy, Power, and Discourse: Transformation of Islamic Education*, 40 COMP. EDUC. REV. 66, 77-78 (1996). Even from our brief survey of Islamic educational systems through time, we are aware that this is quite an ahistorical statement.

the political and economic domination of these areas by European colonial powers and the increasing embeddedness of these societies in a globalizing economic order. Although Ottoman Turkey was never colonized itself, it saw many of its provinces in the Middle East succumb to European occupation. Given their sense of political and economic vulnerability in the face of increasing Western encroachment, the Ottomans initiated a series of significant reforms, known as the Tanzimat (“(re-)organization” in Ottoman Turkish) during the period 1839–1876 under Sultan Abdul Mejid, partly due to pressure from European nations.

Among other changes, these reforms established the complete equality of all Ottoman subjects before the law, irrespective of religious and ethnic background, and introduced some sweeping educational reforms which brought education under greater state control. Previously, religious education for Muslims was primarily under the control of the *ulama*, the religious scholars, while education for the various autonomous millets or non-Muslim religious communities—mainly the various Christian denominations and Jews—was regulated by their own clergy. Increasing bureaucratic centralization brought religious education under the purview of the state while allowing for the establishment of parallel secular state schools for the elite in Istanbul. Such changes, regarded as undue state interference in the traditional religious educational systems and an attempt to impose secularization, displeased most Muslim and Christian clerics.

Among the significant political changes made in the late Tanzimat period were the establishment of provincial representative assemblies and the adoption of the first constitution in 1876. However, most of these Tanzimat reforms were reversed under the next Sultan Abdul Hamid (1876–1909), who, in reaction to the loss of much Ottoman land to the European powers, adopted “pan-Islamism” and abolished the constitution. He, however, continued the policy of using public schools to implement social discipline and projects of modernization from the top down.

Numerous public schools established at this time were expected to inculcate religious and authoritarian values among the population, which in turn, it was assumed, would induce loyalty to the state. As one scholar has described it, “structural

factors such as chronic weakness of finances, the inability to formulate an ideological synthesis of Islamism and modernism as well as ethnic heterogeneity constituted the main obstacles of this educational reform project of authoritarian-Islamic modernization.”⁵⁶ Such top-down measures alienated many from the younger generation, paving the way to the deposition of Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1909, the establishment of the secular Republic of Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923, and the abolition of the caliphate in 1924.

Subsequently, Atatürk’s relentless agenda of secularization has led to the complete marginalization of the religious schools (*medreses*) which went underground after the ban on religious education in 1924.⁵⁷ Since that time, the secular, state-sponsored school system has basically remained the only educational venue available to the citizenry. Very recently, private religious educational institutions, such as the private middle schools and high schools known as the Gülen colleges, have emerged in Turkey. These schools attempt to instill religious sensibility and knowledge through extracurricular activities and adherence to the Fethullah Gülen movement.⁵⁸ These schools and colleges remain isolated instances and have not yet appreciably affected the educational landscape, although they represent a noteworthy reversal of a long-time national trend.

In other parts of the Middle East, European colonial occupation had a particularly deleterious effect on traditional educational systems. In Egypt, for example, the system of charitable foundations (Ar. *waqf*) began to be dismantled by the British colonial rulers, and the *madrasas* were consequently emasculated financially and structurally, an objective ultimately desired by the British. They sought, instead, to replace the traditional institutions with mediocre secular schools, ostensibly to “Westernize” and “modernize” Egyptians, but in reality to train a cadre of loyal, middle-level Egyptian bureaucrats. High

⁵⁶ SELÇUK AKŞIN SOMEL, THE MODERNIZATION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE 1839–1908: ISLAMIZATION, AUTOCRACY AND DISCIPLINE 13 (2001).

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Professor Hayrettin Yucesoy of St. Louis University for his suggestions concerning this section of the paper on Turkish educational reform.

⁵⁸ For an extensive study of this movement, see M. HAKAN YAVUZ, ISLAMIC POLITICAL IDENTITY IN TURKEY 179–205 (2003).

tuition fees were sometimes set by the colonial rulers to discourage "too much" schooling for the Egyptians.⁵⁹

Propelled by the 1898 French invasion of Egypt under Napoleon Bonaparte, rude encounters with the economically and militarily superior West had already set reform agendas in motion for the traditional educational system. One of the luminaries of educational and religious reform of the late nineteenth century was the rector of al-Azhar, Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) who advocated the revision of traditional curricula to reflect a blending of the best of Western ideas with Islamic thought.⁶⁰ He, like other Muslim reformers before and after him, pointed to the historical precedent of the 'Abbasid period as an example of a time during which a successful synthesis took place. Another rector after him, Mahmud Shaltut (d. 1963), went much further and instituted wide-ranging reforms that allowed for the introduction of the study of modern natural sciences as part of the institution's basic curriculum.⁶¹ Under his rectorship in 1961, new colleges of applied sciences, including medicine and engineering, were created at al-Azhar so that the secular disciplines are now well-represented there, opening up many more educational opportunities for both men and women. Women in fact had been studying at al-Azhar University since the early nineteenth century, if not earlier.⁶² It is sobering to remember that, in contrast, some prestigious educational institutions in the United States started admitting women only in the 1970s.

When the British colonials departed, successive authoritarian governments in Egypt maintained the status quo vis-à-vis religious institutions. Without the *waqf* deed which had prevented the *madrassa* from being confiscated by the government, religious institutions continued to be controlled under governmental jurisdiction. As a consequence, a corps of

⁵⁹ See ROBERT L. TIGNOR, MODERNIZATION AND BRITISH COLONIAL RULE IN EGYPT, 1882-1914, at 324 (1966).

⁶⁰ For a comprehensive study of 'Abduh's thought, see MALCOLM H. KERR, ISLAMIC REFORM: THE POLITICAL AND LEGAL THEORIES OF MUHAMMAD 'ABDUH AND RASHID RIDA (1966).

⁶¹ See generally KATE ZEBIRI, MAHMUD SHALTUT AND ISLAMIC MODERNISM (1993).

⁶² It is known that al-Azhar, founded under the Fatimids in the tenth century, offered lectures to women from its inception. See BAYARD DODGE, AL-AZHAR: A MILLENIUM OF MUSLIM LEARNING 17 (1961).

religious scholars, drawing their salaries from the government, was created in the twentieth century, undermining the *ulama's* traditional role as an independent class which often served as a mediator between the population and the administration.⁶³ In the contemporary period, the rector of al-Azhar is a government employee and widely regarded as a political spokesperson for the administration, which has tarnished the image and the credibility of the office with the public to a considerable extent.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, it is the religious educational system in Pakistan that has come under intense internal and external scrutiny since it is popularly assumed that Pakistani *madrasas*, attended by many from among the Afghani Taliban, served as the incubators of their militancy. The traditional *madrasa* system in Pakistan, however, is a complex one and incorporates a number of different types of religious schools of different denominations, most of which impart traditional religious education with an emphasis on Qur'anic and *hadith* sciences, jurisprudence, and dialectic. It represents a continuation of the religious school system set up in the Indian sub-continent under the Muslim Mughal rulers, which has traditionally admitted both Muslim and Hindu students and incorporated both religious and rational subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy.⁶⁴ In Egypt and elsewhere, the shock of colonial occupation had instigated much soul-searching on the part of the religious and intellectual elites in the eighteenth century which set in motion attempts to reform what was perceived as archaic modes of education. A group of religious scholars known as the '*ulama*' of Farangi Mahall (so-called after a residential area in Lucknow, India) developed a revised standard curriculum for the *madrasas* called Dars-e-Nizami, which in modified forms is still adopted by Sunni religious schools in South Asia.⁶⁵

The range of reforms initiated, discussed, and hotly debated resulted, on the one hand, in modern institutions such as al-Aligarh University established by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a liberal

⁶³ This trend had already started under the reign of Muhammad 'Ali (d. 1849), who embarked on a zealous modernization campaign and subjected the religious scholars to more direct control by the state.

⁶⁴ JAMAL MALIK, *COLONIALIZATION OF ISLAM: DISSOLUTION OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN PAKISTAN* 166 (1996).

⁶⁵ See generally FRANCIS ROBINSON, *SPIRITUAL MIDDLEMEN: THE 'ULAMA OF FARANGI MAHALL AND ISLAMIC CULTURE IN SOUTH ASIA* (2001).

reformer who included the study of English and the hard sciences along with the traditional subjects of theology and jurisprudence, and, on the other, the Deoband *madrasa* system which emphasized traditional scriptural studies, “purification” of belief, and rejection of British imperialism and its values.⁶⁶ Over time, the Deobandi scholars adopted the Dars-e Nizami curriculum but only after having purged it of its “secular” (non-Islamic) components. The primary role of these religious institutions, both reformist and traditionalist, was to spread literacy, disseminate faith-based education, and introduce examinations, printing presses, and textbooks—in other words, to create a culture of literacy and an ethical social consciousness under the difficult conditions imposed by Western colonial occupation.

Currently, about one third of Pakistani children attend *madrasas*. In these religious schools, they receive free, basic Qur’anic and Arabic lessons, while the clerics trained by these institutions dispense religious counsel to the people, officiate at marriages and other religious ceremonies, and administer mosques. *Madrasas* also perform philanthropic activities and render crucial humanitarian and social services such as providing shelter for homeless people and displaced refugees. Their crucial extra-educational functions are an important part of their *raison d’être*.

The influx of millions of Afghani refugees into Pakistan during the Soviet occupation of their country caused the number of *madrasas* to mushroom from 235 in 1947 to 2862 in 1987. Some of these schools were also used as sites to train military cadres of students (hence the Persian term *Taliban*) to fight the Soviets during the Afghan war, aided by Pakistani military agencies, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf states.⁶⁷ Today, the number of *madrasas* with militant agendas admittedly remains an overall minority within the Pakistani system of religious schools. However, the virulence of their environment and curricula makes them the source of a global affliction which, if left unchecked, will escalate. Given their

⁶⁶ The classic study of the early Deoband *madrasa* system remains. BARBARA DALY METCALF, *ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN BRITISH INDIA: DEOBAND, 1860–1900* (1989).

⁶⁷ See Allan Pitman & Farrukh A. Chishtie, *Pakistan: The Clash of Globalizing Forces*, in *EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES AMONG MUSLIMS IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION: SOME NATIONAL CASE STUDIES* 109 (Holger Daun & Geoffrey Walford eds., 2004).

historically conservative and integrist proclivities, it is not surprising that some—certainly not all—Deobandi *madrasas*, following a narrow, stridently anti-modern curriculum, have been inclined to religious radicalism. The Pakistani government at present is developing a *madrasa* reform law which would effect changes in the curriculum of religious schools, register and monitor their finances, and institute other regulatory provisions.

X. LOOKING AHEAD: MAKING THE CASE FOR LIBERAL, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE ISLAMIC MILIEU

Is there a place for religious education in modernizing Muslim societies that desire to adhere to liberal universal principles of tolerance and pluralism and establish democratic societies with equal rights for women, religious and ethnic minorities? Are these values intrinsically alien within the Islamic milieu, as a considerable segment of traditionalists and radical Islamists have maintained and only attainable through wholesale secularization? Or are these modern liberal values the logical extension of certain foundational Islamic principles capable of being nurtured in a religious milieu, as modernists maintain?

Our survey in broad strokes of Islamic educational patterns and systems from the classical and medieval periods to contemporary times allows us to make the following remarks. At its best and most confident, medieval Islamic civilization came as close as possible in the pre-modern period to the modern conception of a vibrantly diverse, multi-cultural, and tolerant society. The usual caveats apply—tolerance in the twenty-first century is different in quality and scope from its facsimile in the ninth, for example, and one must be aware of the pitfalls of anachronism. But the early and middle ‘Abbasid periods, the period of *convivencia* (lit. “co-existence”) in Muslim Spain and the Ottoman Era were the high benchmarks of a medieval civilization that was generally tolerant of religious minorities and receptive to a diversity of beliefs at a time when such notions were unheard of in most other parts of the world.

During the early ‘Abbasid period, an avidity for knowledge, whatever its source, and toleration of various religious groups—first Jews and Christians, then later Zoroastrians and Hindus as well—as mandated by scripture, were among the reasons that Muslims were able to develop a cosmopolitan, intellectually

vibrant, and, at the same time, intensely religious civilization which left its mark on the course of world history. A constellation of values similar—but certainly not identical, given the disparities in time and historical circumstances—to what one would now prize in the modern liberal educational system can be identified in the pre-modern Islamic modes of education. Today, these values can form the basis for developing faith-based educational systems which are also nurturing of modern liberal ideals.

Among the reasons for this optimism are the following. Described above is the general receptivity of early Muslims to knowledge, religious and secular, regardless of its provenance. Greek, Persian, Indian, and Syriac learning were selectively synthesized with Islamic scholarship and values that enriched the religious sciences and fostered the cultivation of the natural sciences, philosophy, belles-lettres, and mathematics, among other disciplines. There are recorded instances of Muslims, Christians, Jews, and “heretics”—as called by some of the sources—studying with and learning from one another in a common educational enterprise. Education, in many ways, was a great equalizer. Therefore, as has been noted, women often had the opportunity to excel in the study and teaching of the religious sciences. Their names and accomplishments are gratefully recorded in works by their male students and colleagues. As this Article has shown, local rulers, notables, and the state sometimes tried to impose restrictions on the curricula of *madrasas*, but many scholars simply ignored them or found creative ways to circumvent them.

Education served its best purpose when it fostered honest, intellectual inquiry based on the critical study of texts and dialectal—and, ideally, respectful—engagement with one’s peers. Scholarly disagreement was welcomed and, as has been discussed, even publicly staged in legal and intellectual circles. A quote attributed to the Prophet states, “There is mercy in the differences of my community.” This *hadith* embodies a deep-seated awareness that the hermeneutics of reading scripture—or any other text—yields a multiplicity of equally valid readings at any given time or place. In the juridical realm, this view became enshrined in the fact that by the tenth century, four Sunni legal schools of thought were accepted as offering equally valid and authoritative interpretations of the religious law based on the

ijtihad (lit. “independent reasoning”) of learned jurists. Meticulous research in recent times has clearly proven that there is not much substance to the much-cited adage in particularly Orientalist literature that the doors of *ijtihad* were closed in the tenth century.⁶⁸ Innovative thinking certainly continued beyond this century but, compared to the early period, it slowed down and is presently in need of reinvigoration. Presently, a fresh, critical reengagement with the classical religious and intellectual sources and tradition is definitely called for in the face of secular modernity to which Muslim scholars and thinkers, in general, have not adequately responded.

The revival of classical Muslim education at its best—with its appeal to both faith and reason and wedded to the practical curricular needs of the modern classroom—will make the educational systems of various Islamic societies more relevant and meaningful today. Re-emphasis upon the scriptural and classical Islamic value of tolerance for diversity of opinions, reasoned dissent, religious minorities, and women are in accord with the orientation of liberal educational systems. In the context of the modern nation-state, these traditional Islamic notions have to expand to include full rights of citizenship for all, regardless of ethnic or national origin, gender, or religious affiliation. An early *hadith* states, “Religion is magnanimity, and tolerance, and ease.”⁶⁹

Furthermore, in accordance with specific Qur’anic injunctions, one may consider it a moral imperative to foster an educational environment that promotes the dignity of all human beings as the children of Adam;⁷⁰ noncoercion in matters of religion and belief;⁷¹ and, above all, promotion and maintenance of moderation in all matters, a key characteristic of the ethical and righteous individuals and communities from the Qur’anic point of view. Thus, righteous Muslims are described in the Qur’an as constituting a “middle” or “moderate nation” (Ar.

⁶⁸ See generally Wael B. Hallaq, *Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?*, 16 INT’L J. MIDDLE EAST STUD. 3 (1984). This article remains the best study of the state of *ijtihad* in the tenth century.

⁶⁹ In Arabic, this *hadith* reads, “*al-din samh sahl.*” See 1 ‘ABD AL-RAZZAQ, AL-MUSANNAF [THE [HADITH] COMPILATION] 315 (Mu’ammār b. Rashid al-Azdi ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., 2000) (on file with author).

⁷⁰ *The Holy Qur’an* 17:70 (Maulana Muhammad Ali trans., 1991).

⁷¹ *Id.* 2:256.

umma wasat)⁷² while righteous Jews and Christians are said to constitute a “balanced community” (Ar. *umma muqtasida*)⁷³ and “an upright nation” (Ar. *umma qa’ima*).⁷⁴ How these core ethical and moral principles should be interpreted and what rights and privileges may be assumed to fall within their ambit are always open to interpretation in specific times and places in accordance with traditional legal considerations of public welfare and utility (Ar. *maslaha mursala*).⁷⁵ Consequently, there is much room for curricular innovation and educational methodologies as long as these moral objectives and ethical precepts are realized.

Madrassa reform, in the wake of September 11, 2001 in particular, is currently receiving serious attention in a number of Muslim countries, and its implementation has begun in earnest in several of them.⁷⁶ The purpose of this essay, inevitably constrained by length, was not to empirically document the efficacy of these reforms in the contemporary period—particularly since these reforms are of very recent vintage—but to make a case for the viability and even desirability of faith-based education in modern, liberalizing Islamic societies. As mentioned earlier, religious intolerance and gender inequality as manifestations of illiberalism characterize deliberately reactionary religious schools, such as those found within the Deoband *madrassa* system in South Asia. The puritanical school of thought known as Wahhabism, founded in the eighteenth century in what is now Saudi Arabia, and its illiberal tenets exert undue influence on many of these schools. Although not in itself conducive to militancy, Wahhabism has been appropriated by radical extremists as a manifesto for violent overthrow of

⁷² *Id.* 2:143 n.182.

⁷³ *Id.* 5:66.

⁷⁴ *Id.* 3:113.

⁷⁵ The term *maslaha* has become an important *ratio legis* in Islamic law, invoked to justify emendation or abrogation of existing legal rulings and/or promulgation of new ones. One of the best-known proponents of this legal principle is the fourteenth century jurist Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Shatibi (d. 1388) who discusses its application in his *AL-MUWAFQAQAT FI USUL AL-SHARI’A* [THE [POINTS OF] AGREEMENT REGARDING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE RELIGIOUS LAW] (Shaykh ‘Abd Allah Diraz ed., Asma Afsaruddin trans., n.d.) (on file with author). For an accessible treatment of this topic in English, see M.H. Kamali, *Have We Neglected the Shari’ah Law Doctrine of Maslahah?*, 27 *ISLAMIC STUD.* 287 (1988).

⁷⁶ See *EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES AMONG MUSLIMS IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION: SOME NATIONAL CASE STUDIES*, *supra* note 67 (containing various case studies regarding *madrassa* reform post-September 11, 2001).

“corrupt” governments in Islamic countries, to be replaced by what they imagine to be the ideal “Islamic State.”⁷⁷

In the newer Muslim communities of the United States, only a meager handful of recently established Islamic schools exist. “Sunday schools” operate within most mosques in America and derive their orientation from the overall “ideological” constitution of the mosque. Mosques patronized and funded by Saudi Arabians and citizens of some Persian Gulf countries often tend to replicate conservative and illiberal Wahhabi attitudes in their schools and overall administration. This illiberalism preached and practiced in these types of schools needs to be challenged, and countervailing educational policies and measures need to be adopted and implemented along the lines of curricular reform begun on a modest scale in Pakistan, for example. Admittedly, without a documented track record as of yet, one cannot predict the future success of such measures. However, it is clear that such measures must take into account the religious sensibilities of Muslim citizens. Within the context of traditional religious societies, which exist overwhelmingly in the Islamic world, and among observant Western Muslims, illiberalism practiced in the name of Islam can be most effectively undermined by positing historically authentic counterexamples of, for instance, religious tolerance emanating from scriptural directives and women’s active contributions to scholarship. Such counterexamples find and will continue to find broad resonance among the large majority of Muslims, emanating from their shared religio-cultural heritage, and, as such, are far more likely to be effective in discrediting illiberal readings of the religious tradition.⁷⁸ Intolerance, one should add, is not just a problem in certain religious schools. It can also clearly thrive in secular, ostensibly liberal schools, as established by the painful experiences of a

⁷⁷ A recent study of Wahhabism plots the changes over time in this school of thought. See NATANA J. DELONG-BAS, *WAHHABI ISLAM: FROM REVIVAL AND REFORM TO GLOBAL JIHAD* (2004).

⁷⁸ Fazlur Rahman, arguably the most original and brilliant Muslim modernist of the twentieth century, has remarked, “If the Muslim modernist has done nothing else, he has adduced such formidable evidence from the Qur’an for the absolute necessity to faith of a knowledge of the universe, of man, and of history, that all Muslims today at least pay lip service to it.” FAZLUR RAHMAN, *ISLAM & MODERNITY: TRANSFORMATION OF AN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION* 135 (1982). Such an inferred scriptural mandate for the acquisition of all forms of beneficial knowledge, sacred and profane, is far more capable of galvanizing real change in average Muslim views on education than purely empirical data and theories.

significant number of Muslim students within the American public school system in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. This suggests that modern liberal educational practices have also not adequately grappled with this problem, and that such practices in and of themselves are not always an effective antidote to bigotry. Liberal secularism, predicated on banishing public expressions of religious belief and sentiment, has, in fact, bred its own peculiar form of intolerance.⁷⁹

Based on this broad diachronic survey of traditional educational principles and modes, and their past track record, this Article confidently asserts that the project of regenerating and revamping faith-based schools in Islamic societies—existing alongside secular schools—is quite feasible based on religiously-mandated core principles, which happily coincide with many liberal notions today. In the absence of such revitalized and modernized educational systems, genuine social and political transformations in the Islamic heartlands in particular will be impossible to achieve. Educational reform along the lines broadly delineated above must, therefore, remain a priority in the foreseeable future.

⁷⁹ The ban against headscarves in France and Turkey, for example, comes readily to mind as instances of “liberal” intolerance in secular societies. The French justify the ban on the grounds that the wearing of headscarves somehow threatens the “French way of life.” Such arguments are no different from the exclusivist claims of religious particularism.