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April 20, 2011

Curriculum and Certification: Elements of Structure in Islamic Education
as Reflected in al-Sakhāwī's Biographical Dictionary

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Abstract

Curriculum and Certification: Elements of Structure in Islamic Education as Reflected in al-Sakhāwī's Biographical Dictionary By Alexis Kellert

This study draws on the first eleven volumes of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary, *al-Ḍawʿ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, in an attempt to describe and analyze the character, stages, and status of Islamic medieval education in Mamluk Egypt and its adjacent regions. First, it examines Cairo's historical emergence as a major cultural center of scholarship in order to elucidate the setting of al-Sakhāwī's intellectual biographies of ninth/fifteenth-century scholars. Second, it responds to Jonathan Berkey, Daphna Ephrat, and Michael Chamberlain's assertions that there was no structured curriculum and that the process of Islamic learning during the later middle ages was instead highly informal. I found evidence in al-Sakhāwī's text of distinct stages of learning and also of specific texts that were studied in high frequencies among the students who are recorded. Lastly, it provides additional evidence for George Makdisi and Devin J. Stewart's arguments that the license to grant legal opinions and teach law (*ijāzat l-iftāʿ wa ʿl-tadrīs*) was a physical document and a formal certificate that bestowed a legal credential upon the recipient. While further research is needed to understand fully how this kind of license (*ijāzah*) was related to the institution of the *madrasa*, the research compiled here suggests that there existed clear links between *madrasas* and the formal structure of Islamic education including the practice of granting *ijaāzahs*.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| SCOPE OF THIS STUDY..... | 1 |
| THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND ISLAMIC LEGAL EDUCATION..... | 2 |
| RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON ISLAMIC LEGAL EDUCATION..... | 3 |
| AL-SAKHĀWĪ, HIS WORK, AND BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY..... | 12 |
| CHAPTER ONE: MIGRATION, CITIES, AND LEARNING..... | 20 |
| CHAPTER TWO: RECONSTRUCTING THE CURRICULUM..... | 39 |
| CHAPTER THREE: A SYSTEM OF DEGREES..... | 62 |
| CONCLUSION | 84 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 88 |

INTRODUCTION

i. Scope of this Study

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī’s twelve-volume biographical dictionary *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi’* (“The Light Shining Upon the People of the Ninth Century”—hereafter rendered *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*), written in the ninth hijri/fifteenth Gregorian century, is an encyclopedic compilation of biographical entries detailing the personal histories of elite members of the author’s contemporary and near-contemporary society. Through a close examination of the first eleven volumes of the text—purposefully excluding the twelfth volume, *Kitāb mu’jam al-Nisā’*, that focuses exclusively on women—I will first describe the emergence of Cairo under Mamluk control as an influential center of scholarship to prove that the institutional framework necessary to support a formalized learning system existed there. I then examine the current scholarly debate about the character of Islamic education, particularly legal education. In order to contribute to the advancement of study in this area, I address the age structure of students at each stage of learning, the courses of study included in the framework of Islamic education, and the existence of a standard set of texts that were memorized and presented. I then discuss the distinct types of licenses (*ijāzahs*) granted at the culmination of a student’s advanced education.

The present study aims to demonstrate that although the current scholarship about the medieval Islamic education system can be reduced to a debate about the formality versus the informality of it, the reality of late medieval Islamic education was more complex. Adding original information to the field about previously unmentioned *ijāzahs*, newly compiled quantitative data, and a fresh interpretation of al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary, this study

addresses the character, status, and structure of Islamic learning from the elementary to advanced levels as it likely occurred in fifteenth-century Cairo.

I now present brief reviews of the importance of knowledge and Islamic legal education, recent scholarship, al-Sakhāwī, his text, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, and a brief word on the biographical dictionary as a genre to provide the context from which my study arises.

ii. The Importance of Knowledge and Islamic Legal Education

The study of any education system, ancient or modern, must begin with an understanding of the concept of knowledge within the context of that particular society. In the present examination of medieval Islamic education—especially Islamic legal education—the Muslim concept of learning is nearly synonymous with the acquisition of religious knowledge. There are arguably two main words that suggest knowledge in Arabic: *ma'rifa* and *'ilm*. In his article on “*'ilm*,” P. Bearman explains that the two terms were distinguished early on in Muslim thinking. The former expresses knowledge through experience.¹ This definition presupposes a previous state of ignorance and therefore is defined as secular knowledge. The latter, *'ilm*, refers primarily to knowledge of God or religious knowledge.² Although the author casts aside this distinction as “artificial,” it is useful to illustrate that within Islam, religious knowledge and its pursuit is a highly revered and encouraged activity.³

Within medieval biographical literature, the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge is constantly glorified. Rosenthal attributes this trend to the “domination” that knowledge

¹ P. Bearman, “*'ilm*,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954) 3:1133.

² Bearman, “*'ilm*,” 3:1133.

³ Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 1.

possessed over all aspects of “Muslim intellectual, spiritual, and social life.”⁴ Jonathan Berkey adds to this assessment, arguing that the widespread endorsement of education expressed in the establishment of institutions of learning and cultural support of it emphasize the important social role of education in medieval Islamic society.⁵ Additionally, Berkey points out that the writings of the educated elites “placed scholars of the religious and legal sciences at the pinnacle of society and at the vanguard of the forces it marshaled to defend itself against enemies and to bring order and meaning to its members.”⁶ George Makdisi writes, “the criterion of leadership was universal acceptance of the jurist with the greatest knowledge of Islamic law.”⁷ Thus, a full understanding of the Islamic concept of knowledge undeniably includes Islamic legal education.

Rosenthal recalls an interesting quotation from al-Shāfiʿī, founder of the Sunni Shāfiʿī legal *madhhab*, who stated, “Knowledge is good, and the best and most important knowledge after the knowledge about God and God’s oneness is jurisprudence.”⁸ Makdisi attributes the emphasis on legal education to what he considers “the interplay between law and traditionalism.”⁹ He argues that Islam is a nomocracy¹⁰ and that law is a main source of legitimacy for the religion and its followers. I now introduce a brief review of the recent scholarship in the field of Islamic legal education.

iii. Recent Scholarship on Islamic Legal Education

⁴ Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 334.

⁵ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 1.

⁶ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 4.

⁷ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 7.

⁸ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 245.

⁹ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 6.

¹⁰ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 8.

George Makdisi is often referred to as the pioneer of the study of Islamic education. Published in 1981, his most celebrated contribution to the field, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, argues that elements of a formalized institutional system existed in medieval Islamic legal education. In his first three chapters, Makdisi describes the outline of a curriculum, stages of learning, processes of degrees and certifications, and a rigid institutional setting governed by formalized rules. Interestingly, Makdisi states in the work's preface that it is "not a survey of Islamic education."¹¹ Instead, he focuses on the *madrasa*—which he characterizes as a college of law—in eleventh-century Baghdad to prove that it was "the embodiment of Islam's ideal religious science, law, and of Islam's ideal religious orientation, traditionalism."¹² The current study draws most heavily from Makdisi's pioneering examination of technical terms related to Islamic legal education.

In a study that ranges both geographically and temporally—focused mainly on eleventh-century Baghdad and its relation to the twelfth-century Christian West—Makdisi's work consults an impressive array of primary sources including biographical notices and endowment deeds (*waqfiyyāt*). Yet, he is often criticized for his tendency to draw historical generalizations that are too broad, often treating eleventh-century Baghdad as unquestionably representative of the rest of the Muslim world. In *The Rise of Colleges*, Makdisi fails to clarify explicitly that while Baghdad was influential in the realm of education during its zenith as a cultural center in the region, its status was not indefinite and in fact had waned by the twelfth century.

Responding to Makdisi's work a number of scholars including Jonathan Berkey, Michael Chamberlain, and Daphna Ephrat have attempted to refute his portrayal of the *madrasa* as a

¹¹ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, xiii.

¹² Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, xiii.

formalized institution. In 1992, Jonathan Berkey published *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, a monographic study of the “people, processes, and institutions involved in higher religious education”¹³ in Cairo during Mamluk rule in Egypt (648-922/1250-1517). Berkey’s main contention is that the *madrasa* as it appeared in Mamluk Cairo was informal and provided no institutional support to the education system that was instead based on a fluid association between students and their professors. Invoking Abdul Latif Tibawi’s work¹⁴ to strengthen his argument, Berkey writes that one must look beyond the institutional framework of higher education and study the “informal world of personal instructional relationships that guided the transmission of Muslim knowledge.”¹⁵ He argues that *madrasas*, and associated institutions of learning such as mosques and *khānqāhs*, were inextricably linked both to the city and the populations of students, teachers and foreign scholars that surrounded them.

Berkey writes that there existed an “overwhelming preference for oral transmission, and the weight of personal connections in evaluating an individual’s academic training” in Mamluk Cairo.¹⁶ To emphasize this point, Berkey argues that the student-teacher relationship existed outside of the confines of an institutional structure. In addition, he believes that it was oral as opposed to the written transmission of knowledge that aided a student in the advancement of his intellectual career. If this were the case, then it would strongly suggest the informal nature of Islamic education. The problem that Berkey faces is that the biographical notices provide

¹³ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 12.

¹⁴ A.L. Tibawi, “Muslim Education in the Golden Age of the Caliphate,” *Islamic Culture* 28(1953), 418-38.

¹⁵ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 17.

¹⁶ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 43.

numerous records of students memorizing specific written texts—a point discussed in the second chapter of the current study.

Berkey also contends that the transmission of knowledge “never came to rely on an institutional structure or a formal system of degrees.”¹⁷ While Makdisi argues that the *madrasa* did promote at the very least a loose pattern of regulations in both curricula in particular fields of study and in administration, Berkey boldly claims, “the spread of such institutions never resulted in any formalization of the educational process.”¹⁸ Again, in his attempt to illustrate the informal nature of medieval Islamic education, Berkey overstates the social function of the *madrasa* and ignores, or purposefully omits, its practical function as an institution of higher education. His emphasis on the significance of personal relationships throughout his portrayal of medieval Islamic education and the rise of *madrasas* is meant to underscore his fundamental belief that the system lacked formality.

Berkey may be correct in his assessment that the spread of *madrasas* did not directly contribute to the emergence of a standardized education system in Mamluk Cairo. There is a paucity of information in biographical literature about specific student associations with *madrasas*—a fact that at least in the case of al-Sakhāwī’s works—I attribute to the author’s silence rather than to the absence of such associations in reality. In response to Berkey’s former claim, the data available in biographical literature clearly suggest curricular and certification systems that, while not universally followed, did represent a definitive norm among a subset of scholars. While the factual background information detailing the customs of Islamic scholarship, the Mamluk ruling elite, and the rise of the *madrasa* in Egypt provided an important foundational

¹⁷ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 44.

¹⁸ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 44.

base of research for the current study, Berkey fails to discuss legal education in depth as a distinct field of learning. The principal fault in this omission is that he ignores what Makdisi has proven to represent the most standardized aspect of medieval Islamic education—specialized legal instruction and certification.

Michael Chamberlain, in agreement with Berkey's claims about the informal nature of medieval Islamic education, contributes a work that focuses on the highly personal character of Islamic education in Damascus in the late Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods. Chamberlain's *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*, published in 1994, chiefly describes two processes that he argues existed in Damascus and other major cities in the later medieval period. First, he argues that the civilian elite (*a'yān*) calculatedly acquired knowledge (*'ilm*) as a strategy of social survival.¹⁹ Second, he posits that once acquired, this higher education would allow them to compete for stipendiary positions (*manṣib*) because, logically, access to an endowed position provided steady means of social influence and esteem—a struggle (*fitna*) he defined as the principal dynamic of political life.

In characterizing medieval Islamic education, Chamberlain goes as far as to fault Berkey for failing to fully “disengage from the paradigm he sought to criticize”²⁰—mainly that of the *madrasa* as a “system” at all. Chamberlain, following closely the model introduced by Tibawi,²¹ argues that the teacher-student relationship was of utmost importance and represented the core of Islamic learning, opposing Makdisi's claim that the *madrasa* was the central institution of Islamic learning and particularly higher legal education. In a mere six pages, Chamberlain denies

¹⁹ Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

²⁰ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 71.

²¹ A.L. Tibawi, “Muslim Education,” 418-38; idem, “Origin and Character of Al-Madrasa,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25(1962), 225-38.

the possibility that a curriculum existed. Instead, he believes that endowment deeds (*waqfiyyas*)—requiring a lecturer to present material in the field of study for which the *madrasa* was founded—are evidence of administrative intention, and in reality such stipulations were not followed.²² Chamberlain’s argument becomes somewhat confused when he tries to defend this claim using a two-pronged analysis.

First, he writes that, despite evidence that *madrasas* in Damascus did provide advanced legal education, students received specialized legal knowledge from their professors prior to the known appearance of *madrasas* in the Middle East and learned through informal study-circles—a practice that has endured to the present era throughout the Islamic world.²³ Second, he argues that the writings of jurists such as al-Subkī (d. 769/1368) did not describe reality, but instead condemned “for their own reasons, departures from the legal norms they defended.”²⁴ Unfortunately, Chamberlain provides little textual evidence for his claims, and in the rare occurrence that he does point to preserved biographical literature his analysis is often mistaken. One such egregious example is his footnote that catalogues a list of lecturers who taught and wrote in fields other than law (*fiqh*) as proof that there was no advanced legal curriculum within the institution of the *madrasa*.²⁵ In this instance, Chamberlain fails to consider that these additional subjects constituted a more rudimentary stage of learning, or were meant as complements to a student’s advanced legal education.

In Chamberlain’s brief treatment of Islamic curriculum he writes, “what the lecturer taught, if he taught anything at all, depended on the terms of the *waqf* [endowment deed], on his

²² Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 82-83.

²³ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 83.

²⁴ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 83.

²⁵ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 83, n. 73.

own interests, and occasionally on the efforts of rulers to mandate or proscribe subjects.”²⁶ In actuality, it is quite possible—an exercise undertaken in the second chapter of the present study—to reconstruct a general outline of the curriculum a student likely followed in the later middle ages.

Chamberlain arrives at his conclusions about the absence of any procedure of authorization with even less consideration. It seems that in his hasty conclusions—often based on his failure to find examples in the sources examined—his main objective is to illustrate that the transmission of knowledge in Damascus was a cultural rather than institutional practice. It is obvious from even a cursory reading of Chamberlain that the thrust of his arguments is made from silence rather than primary textual proof.

Daphna Ephrat’s book, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni ‘ulama in eleventh-century Baghdad*, is similar to Berkey’s study in that it focuses on a particular civilian elite. Ephrat studies the scholars of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries in Baghdad. In contrast to the previous studies of Makdisi, Berkey, and Chamberlain, Ephrat incorporates data analysis extracted from biographical dictionaries to aid her narrative about the movement of ‘ulama into, from, and within Baghdad. Joining Berkey, Ephrat perhaps overstates the informal and personal nature of the transmission of knowledge in the medieval Middle East. She depicts the style of study as one of a student “wandering from teacher to teacher” in a “highly personal, ‘informal’ system of instruction.”²⁷ It is logical that Ephrat would further this characterization of Baghdadi education in the eleventh century in order to strengthen her argument that the civilian

²⁶ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 83.

²⁷ Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni ‘Ulama of Eleventh-Century Baghdad* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 150.

elite of Baghdad were autonomous and socially important to the survival of the community to a greater extent than any institution would have been—a main thesis of her work.

Ephrat also comments on the nature of the *ijāzah* that she, unlike Berkey and Chamberlain, believes was in fact a physical document of certification. She argues that the *ijāzah* was important primarily as a tool that would establish a student’s authority to teach specific texts. This permission would then create a connection from the student back to the text’s original author; a process that she gladly points out was highly personalized. Ephrat, like Berkey, is firm in her belief that the certificate “never developed into an institutionalized degree...nor did its issuance involve any formal procedures.”²⁸ This point is made to emphasize that the existence of *madrasas* had no direct influence on any institutional procedures exhibited within the biographical notices examined.

In a tremendous effort to provide further support for the main corpus of Makdisi’s assertions, revise others, and introduce his own contributions, Devin J. Stewart’s essay, “The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria,”²⁹ published in 2004, is the most recent contribution to the study of the nature of medieval Islamic legal education. In general agreement with Makdisi, Stewart writes, “the data available suggest a system falling far short of utter rigidity, but nearly as far from utter flexibility.”³⁰ While Stewart credits his colleagues with raising important objections—if not totally accurate at least thought-provoking—it is clear that his main objective is to prove that elements of a structured curriculum, including “recognized

²⁸ Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 69.

²⁹ Devin J. Stewart, “The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria,” in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi*, ed. Devin J. Stewart et al. (Cambridge The E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 45-90.

³⁰ Devin J. Stewart, “Review of *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*” *Islamic Society and Law* 13(1994): 369.

certificates and degrees,” existed in Mamluk Egypt and Syria.³¹ Stewart limits himself in his treatment of a student’s early education, choosing instead to focus on *ijāzahs*—particularly the certificate granting permission to teach law and issue legal opinions (*ijāzat al-tadrīs wa ‘l-iftā’*).

Perhaps the most impressive part of Stewart’s study is his ability to begin to reconcile the debate between Makdisi and his critics. His arguments, drawn from three works describing Mamluk Egypt and Syria,³² highlight that while the role of individual professors within the medieval Islamic legal education was of undeniable importance, they themselves taught within an institutional framework. He adds that it is this same structural framework—one he likens to the legal *madhhabs*—that have had remarkable constancy in varying Islamic regions and even until now.³³

While scholars in the field have conveyed the social and political significance of Islamic education in the medieval Middle East and its basic content, further research about the relationship between *madhhabs* and *madrasas* is necessary to uncover a complete understanding of medieval Islamic education from the elementary to advanced levels of learning. There is limited information known about the purpose of legal *madhhabs* and their non-religious importance in Mamluk society as institutions that operated in connection to institutions of learning. Additionally, a comparative analysis of non-educational information recorded in entries describing students that followed the same standard curriculum would reveal whether these students share similar courses of study because of an institutional framework—as argued in this paper—or because of some other factor that remains unknown at the present time.

³¹ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 66.

³² Qalqashandī’s *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā*, Idfuwī’s *al-Ṭālī‘ al-sa‘īd*, and Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah’s *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahā’ al-shāfi‘īyah*.

³³ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 66. Also, see Devin J. Stewart *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).

iv. Al-Sakhāwī, His Work, and Biographical Dictionary

Shams al-Dīn Abu ‘l-Khayr Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Rahman al-Shafī’ī al-Sakhāwī was born into privilege in the Bahā’ al-Dīn quarter of the city of Cairo in Rabi’ī 830/ January 1427.³⁴ By the time of al-Sakhāwī’s birth, his family had established themselves as notables among the Cairene ‘*ulama*’³⁵ after migrating from the town of Sakhā—from which his geographic *nisba* derives—in the Nile Delta a mere two generations before. As a young learner, al-Sakhāwī demonstrated an academic penchant. A serious student, he followed the difficult curriculum characteristic of one oriented towards teaching the Islamic sciences.³⁶ We know from al-Sakhāwī’s autobiographical work that he studied under the direct instruction of Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d.852/1449),³⁷ a scholar who is perhaps most influential on al-Sakhāwī’s intellectual formation and who lived in a neighboring house during al-Sakhāwī’s youth.³⁸ In fact, Ibn Ḥajar was responsible for exposing to al-Sakhāwī the Prophetic traditions³⁹—a field to which al-Sakhāwī demonstrated considerable affection.⁴⁰ Additionally, throughout al-Sakhāwī’s two most recognized works, he refers to Ibn Ḥajar as “our teacher” (*shaykhunā*) a literary demonstration of his high regard for Ibn Ḥajar.⁴¹ Carl Petry beautifully characterizes the admiration al-Sakhāwī maintained for his teacher, writing that al-Sakhāwī “revered Ibn Ḥajar as a paragon of erudition

³⁴ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān Al-Sakhāwī. *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘ li-ahl al-qarn al-tasi’*, 12 vols. (Cairo, 1934; reprinted Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, n.d.) 8:2:1.

³⁵ Educated elite.

³⁶ Petry, “al-Sakhāwī” *EI2*, 8:881.

³⁷ Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

³⁸ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 8:2:1.

³⁹ Petry, Carl and Stanly Mendenhall, “Geographic Origins of the Civil Judiciary of Cairo in the Fifteenth Century” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 21(1978): 53.

⁴⁰ Petry, “al-Sakhāwī,” *EI2*, 8:881.

⁴¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 8:2:1.

and piety...[and] dedicated his career to augmenting his mentor's accomplishments."⁴² Within his autobiographical entry at the start of the eighth volume of *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, al-Sakhāwī writes that he loved Ibn Ḥajar to such a degree that he would not travel until after Ibn Ḥajar had died.⁴³

Following Ibn Ḥajar's death, al-Sakhāwī first performed the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) accompanied by his mother in year 870/1466.⁴⁴ He later completed the journey from Cairo to the holy cities twice more before his death in Medina in Sha'ban 902/April 1497.⁴⁵ In addition to pilgrimage, Al-Sakhāwī emphasized his piety through his intellectual works, especially during the second half of his career. Carl Petry explains that al-Sakhāwī was highly critical of the condition of education in the Prophetic traditions because of "minimal training in the art of transmissions, inadequate knowledge of history and its applications to related disciplines, and parochial deviation from orthodox curricular norms."⁴⁶ According to Petry's analysis, it was al-Sakhāwī's disdain for the direction of scholarship and his need to provide accurate accounts of the intellectual, and particularly legal, backgrounds of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries that led him to compile his most celebrated contribution as a prosopographer—the biographical dictionary⁴⁷ *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'* (The Light Illuminating the

⁴² Carl Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 9.

⁴³ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 8:7:1.

⁴⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 8:7:1.

⁴⁵ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 8.

⁴⁶ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 9.

⁴⁷ Scholars disagree about the origin of the Islamic biographical dictionary as a literary tradition. The line of dissent is drawn between on one side scholars, who argue that the biographical dictionary is essentially an Islamic literary form used in its earliest existence to detail the lives of the Prophet Muḥammad's companions, and on the other side, those who believe that the style predated Islam and instead was first used to describe early accounts of Arabian tribal conflicts. In view of this general debate, Franz Rosenthal argues that the genre fits within a larger guiding

People of the Ninth Century), completed in Rabi'ī II 896/February 1491.⁴⁸ Composed of twelve volumes representing 2,400 pages of text and 11,000 biographical entries on notables of the ninth/fifteenth century. The first eleven volumes contain 10,616 entries detailing the lives of men exclusively, while the final volume is dedicated to women.

In his autobiographical entry al-Sakhāwī explains that in addition to his pilgrimages to Mecca he also journeyed to various cities throughout the Middle East such as Nablus, Damascus, Jerusalem, Tripoli, Aleppo, and Hama. It was during these trips that he collected notes from personal encounters with other students and compiled descriptions supplied by his colleagues to formulate the entries on men from these foreign areas for inclusion in his biographical dictionary. Al-Sakhāwī's data on men from Cairo, Mecca, and Medina are often more complete on account of the fact that he spent considerable time living in each of these cities. The final component of his biographical work are entire excerpts taken from Ibn Ḥajar's biographical dictionary of eighth-century 'ulama, *al-Durar al-Kāmina* (Hidden Pearls) for notes on men predating his lifetime.

definition of historical literature, dating it as early as the royal inscriptions of the ancient Near East. He expands this opinion explaining that “the transmission of details of the Prophet's life depended on individuals, and the acceptability of what they transmitted hinged on the data of their lives.” He explains that at every level of society—from caliphs to commoners—each man used great men of history as exemplars of ethical behavior, and therefore the need for biography focusing on the lives and histories of such pillars of morality and righteousness satisfied this societal need. For information on biographical dictionary see Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa'd to Who's Who* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994); Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970); Tarif Khalidī “Islamic Biographical Dictionaries: A Preliminary Assessment” *The Muslim World* 63.1 (1973): 53-65; Hamilton Gibb “Islamic Biographical Literature.” In *Historians of the Middle East*, edited by Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt, 54-58. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

⁴⁸ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 9.

Al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary of ninth/fifteenth century subjects is widely considered one of the most important sources for scholarship on the Islamic educated elite because of its extensive information and the encyclopedic nature of the text.⁴⁹ Yet, in assessing the value of al-Sakhāwī's work as a source of information about the nature of medieval Islamic education it is necessary to discuss briefly al-Sakhāwī's "excesses of character"⁵⁰ or his penchant for criticism as it affects the main goals of this study. It is unclear whether al-Sakhāwī's condemnation of his contemporaries stems from his piety or merely exists under its guise, but it is obvious that he seldom hesitated to offer harsh criticisms of scholars whom he deemed unfit.⁵¹ Most infamous is the scholarly feud between al-Sakhāwī and his scholastic competitor Abu'l-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khudayri al-Suyūṭī (b. 849/1143 d. 911/1505).⁵² Al-Suyūṭī was al-Sakhāwī's contemporary and was an equally prominent Egyptian scholar. He was born in Cairo, and al-Suyūṭī's mother was a Turkish slave. Additionally, he was raised as an orphan.⁵³ The greatest source of tension between the two scholars derived from al-Sakhāwī's critical portrayal of al-Suyūṭī in his biographical dictionary *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*. Al-Sakhāwī's most captious claim against al-Suyūṭī was that he was arrogant—a point illustrated in various ways throughout the entry. One anecdote included at the beginning of the biographical notice dedicated to al-Suyūṭī describes an encounter between al-Suyūṭī and a professor. Al-Sakhāwī writes that al-Suyūṭī was scolded for sitting in front of a student who was more advanced than he, an action that went against the accepted norms of study circles whereby the most advanced students would sit closest to the professor. After the professor

⁴⁹ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 9.

⁵⁰ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 10.

⁵¹ Huda Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's Kitāb al-Nisā' as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century A.D.," *The Muslim World* vol. 71 2 (1981): 107.

⁵² E. Geoffrey, "al-Suyūṭī" *EI2*, 4:913.

⁵³ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, 4:75:203.

explained that younger students should sit in the second row behind the study circle, al-Suyūṭī became angered and refused to return to this professor’s lecture.⁵⁴ Al-Sakhāwī also claimed that al-Suyūṭī had plagiarized a vast number of works—pilfering some from al-Sakhāwī himself and many from Ibn Ḥajar. He alleged that al-Suyūṭī was untruthful in listing the professors that he had studied with, inflated his record of published works, attained occupational posts through corruption, and above all was overly impressed with his own success exaggerating the weight of his scholarly contributions to almost every field of study.⁵⁵

Al-Sakhāwī did not reserve his criticism for his intellectual rivals. Huda Lutfi explains that despite the tradition of emphasizing one’s subjects’ piety and achievements, al-Sakhāwī instead supplied personal judgments. A muted example of al-Sakhāwī’s forthright criticism is located in the sixth volume of *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*. Al-Sakhāwī quotes from the text of an *ijāzah* document that provides a long and laudatory account of a student. Following the conclusion of the quotation al-Sakhāwī remarks, “he exaggerated in describing him.”⁵⁶ Returning to the main question of the accuracy of the present source, I use Devin J. Stewart’s assessment of biographical literature to explain why, despite al-Sakhāwī’s personal vindictiveness against his rivals, the factual information presented is valuable. In his article “Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography” Stewart writes that academic biographies and autobiographies exist within a specified Arabic genre: *tarjama*. He contends, “the purpose of *tarjama*...[is] to prove the right of the individual to membership in the societal group in question, to determine his relative standing within the tradition of that group, and to evaluate his individual contribution to

⁵⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 4:76:203.

⁵⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 4:76-7:203.

⁵⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 6:241:848.

the group's accomplishments."⁵⁷ Additionally, he writes, "the characterization of the individual in the *tarjama* genre is intimately related to the representation of knowledge in the Islamic tradition, in which one of the most powerful, over-arching metaphors is that of knowledge as a patrimony or legacy."⁵⁸

This multi-purpose catalogue achieves three unique yet simultaneous objectives. First, it connects its subjects to a shared scholarly legacy, establishing the lineage of scholarship through, for example, the naming of teachers and geographic locations. Second, the *tarjama* highlights the individual's attainment of membership in the specified group, whether of jurists, scholars, grammarians, or others.⁵⁹ Lastly, it outlines the subject's additional scholarly contributions to the legacy to which he or she now belongs usually through a listing of the subject's publications.

Additionally, Stewart's concise explanations support Bulliet's assertion that the medieval Islamic biographical dictionary is arguably "the greatest untapped source of information on the medieval Middle East"⁶⁰ because of the richness of information about the lives of Muslim men and women included within its encyclopedic text. Fundamentally, therefore, the Islamic biographical dictionary is a collection of encyclopedic entries of biographical information about a purposefully selected group of people. It is for these reasons related to functionality that I agree with Petry's assessment that the factual information presented in *al-Daw' al-lāmi'* is reliable.⁶¹ Petry adds that al-Sakhāwī had little incentive to misrepresent the factual information included,

⁵⁷ Devin J. Stewart, "Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography" *Edebiyat* 7(1997): 347.

⁵⁸ Stewart, "Islamic Academic Biography," 356.

⁵⁹ Stewart, "Islamic Academic Biography," 357.

⁶⁰ Bulliet, "A Quantitative Approach," 195.

⁶¹ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 10.

recognizing that his rivals would quickly expose any inaccuracies—especially in response to his criticism of their work.⁶²

With confidence in the value of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, I now turn to an examination of the standard format he applied to each biographical notice. Petry notes that although the quality, length, and depth of description included in biographical literature varied as much as the subjects, "the arrangement of details was invariable."⁶³ Hamilton Gibb summarizes the structure of the Islamic biographical entry as: "who, when, where, intellectual powers, reputation."⁶⁴ In his treatment, Gibb suggests that the majority of information provided merely answers the benign questions "when and where." Yet, in my assessment al-Sakhāwī is meticulous in his attention to a subject's professional appointments and dismissals, personal events such as marriages, and, most importantly for this study, academic background.

Petry writes that the first significant sub-section of information included within a biographical entry is that relating a complete academic history from rudimentary instruction to advanced scholarship and scholastic achievement.⁶⁵ The curriculum and texts studied are often included, and instructors that directed or awarded such study are mentioned in every entry included in my data. In addition to this educational survey, al-Sakhāwī also lists the scholars who certified the subjects' achievements by granting degrees and assessing performance—a point that will be explored in detail in the following sections.

⁶² Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 10.

⁶³ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 10.

⁶⁴ Hamilton Gibb, "Islamic Biographical Literature" *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 57.

⁶⁵ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 12.

For now, it is important only to recognize that “al-Sakhāwī devoted more than fifty percent of a civilian *‘alim*’s biography to an account of his education.”⁶⁶ This is particularly significant considering the number of topics covered in the remaining half of the entry. Al-Sakhāwī clearly placed less of an emphasis on assorted subjects such as marriages, travels, pilgrimages, appointments, occupation, finances, family achievements, and pious acts than he did on the educational merits of his subjects. The fact that al-Sakhāwī infrequently cited information about religion is particularly interesting, considering his personal emphasis on piety. This fact shows either that al-Sakhāwī exaggerated his own piety or that intellectual achievement was of even greater importance in his opinion.

In the chapters that follow, I present my reading of al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary with a focus on Islamic education. First, I will examine the emergence of Cairo as a cultural center. Next, I attempt to show the stages of learning as defined by a medieval Islamic curriculum, and finally, I respond and add evidence to Makdisi and Stewart’s previous scholarship about the system of certifying a student, particularly in his advanced legal education.

⁶⁶ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 13.

CHAPTER ONE: MIGRATION, CITIES, AND LEARNING

The environment of Cairo depicted in al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary *al-Daw' al-lāmi'* is an urban metropolis at the height of its development. At this time Cairo⁶⁷ was a magnet for scholars from across the Islamic world—a significant difference from the city's early history as an exclusive administrative enclave for the Fāṭimid rulers. Cairo's gravitational force as a diverse center for the exchange of goods and ideas represents the culmination of the effects of war, anti-Shiite propaganda, trade, pilgrimage, and the Mamluk ruling elites' consolidation of their political power. To understand best the Cairene society of al-Sakhāwī's lifetime, one must first trace the city's historical development.

The city of Cairo was built in 358/969 to serve as a ceremonial capital for the Fāṭimid caliphate following its conquest of Egypt in the late tenth century.⁶⁸ It was deemed the “third Islamic city” in that location because of its construction after Fustāt (22/643) under the direction of 'Amr b. al 'Āṣ and al-Qaṭā'i', built by Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn's (3rd/9th century). While al-Fustāt remained, for a time, a highly populated center of commerce, Cairo exemplified a princely court meant to remain on the periphery of al-Fustāt's economic vitality.⁶⁹ The city was a secluded place of military elites and religious importance, especially following the construction of the mosque of al-Azhar (359-61/970-2), located to the south of the Fāṭimid palatial complex in the south-eastern corner of the enclosure.⁷⁰ In her study of the emergence of the “Islamic City” and specifically of Cairo, Janet Abu-Lughod explains succinctly that by the eleventh century Cairo

⁶⁷ The original name al-Manṣūrīyah is derived from the Arabic word meaning victory by God's will. Although al-Manṣūrīyah was later replaced with al-Qāhirah “The Victorious.” The name Cairo is the anglicized name for al-Qāhirah.

⁶⁸ J. Jomier, “al-Kāhira,” *EI2*, 4:424.

⁶⁹ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 14.

⁷⁰ J. Jomier, “al-Kāhira,” *EI2*, 4:424.

and Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ⁷¹ were “two symbiotic cities.”⁷² She writes that Miṣr was the larger sister, overrun by the native population and dedicated to the commercial success of its industrial activities. In contrast, during this early period, Cairo was a “well-designed community” serving the “complex courtly society.” In the eleventh century both cities were divided into separate quarters according to ethnic divisions and also physically separated from one another. This separation would disappear as they integrated both their populations and functions beginning in the tenth century and continuing to expand to include a diverse and learned population by the lifetime of al-Sakhāwī, when the center of commerce, power and scholarship had shifted from al-Fuṣṭāṭ to Cairo.

Previous scholarship on the Islamic city⁷³ has illustrated that cities were centers not only for commercial and cultural interactions, but also for the transmission of scholarship. Because of their shared character as hubs of economy, political power, and knowledge, it is useful to compare the processes that took place in Cairo to those of an earlier intellectual center, the city of Baghdad. During the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate beginning in the eighth century and lasting until the city’s decline in the early eleventh century, Baghdad remained a cultural milieu in the region attracting intellectual migrants from across the Middle East. In his book *Middle Eastern Cities: A symposium on Ancient, Islamic, and Contemporary Middle Eastern Urbanism* Ira Lapidus draws a similar parallel between the two cities. He writes:

⁷¹ Miṣr is the alternative name of al-Fuṣṭāṭ. For a period the two were thought of as symbiotic cities.

⁷² Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, 19.

⁷³ See Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); idem, *Middle Eastern Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); A.H. Hourani, *The Islamic City in Light of Recent Research*, (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1970); Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Baghdad and Cairo – homes of cosmopolitan populations, creative sources of Muslim culture, centers of imperial administration and international trade. Both developed by the juxtaposition of a succession of palace centers and military encampments, each of which grew into a settlement having the size and characteristics of a separate city. Cairo took shape as a set of adjacent administrative, military, and commercial centers, sometimes separated by open spaces.⁷⁴

Perhaps the most interesting resemblance between the two cities was their role as magnetic poles of scholarship and intellectual exchange. Biographical notices from Cairo and Baghdad suggest similar patterns of cities functioning as hubs that attracted peripatetic scholars from across a wide region. In al-Sakhāwī's *al-Daw' al-lāmi'* his own autobiographical entry illustrates how a student exploited the intellectual resources that were available in the major cities of the Middle East. Al-Sakhāwī writes that during his time in Jerusalem he studied with a man named Abū Bakr al-Qalqashandī, and then after studying the books of al-Qalqashandī, he was guided by him to Damascus and then Aleppo where he met and studied with two additional scholars.⁷⁵ This brief explanation hints at the fact that there was a recognized method of interaction among students and their teachers that was highly dependent on travel to centers of scholarship. I argue that the material resources available in cities supported the intellectual networks that Berkey and Chamerblain mistake for an unsupported and informal array of independent study-circles.

In addition to describing his own migration, al-Sakhāwī also emphasizes the migration patterns of his subjects in the fifteenth century. The patterns of travel that I was able to derive from the biographical notices of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Daw' al-lāmi'* reveal that scholars migrated to Cairo primarily to benefit from the prestige of studying within a major center of scholarship—a process that had a self-amplifying effect.

⁷⁴ Ira Lapidus ed., *Middle Eastern Cities: A symposium on Ancient, Islamic, and Contemporary Middle Eastern Urbanism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 61.

⁷⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, 8:9:1.

النجم بن العلاء السعدي الحسيني الأصل الدمشقي ثم القاهري الشافعي

This entry,⁷⁶ located towards the end of the tenth volume of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, presents an example of a man who was originally born in Damascus and later not only moved to Cairo to study but also is referred to by the geographic *nisba* of Cairo (*al-Qāhirī*). The Cairene *nisba* thus reflects both his physical trajectory and also establishes the formative nature of his education in Cairo. The two geographic *nisbas* are separated by the word *thumma* meaning “then.” This scholar moved to Cairo when he was very young. The record accounts that by the age of ten he had finished his study of the Qur'an—an achievement that he completed in Cairo. It is important to clarify that the student did not necessarily change his own geographic *nisba*. Instead, it is more likely that al-Sakhāwī includes the change to signal a personal decision to refer to this student by the new *nisba* “*al-Qāhirī*.” Regardless of the exact motivation for the change, the deliberate alteration is evidence of a social norm in which a scholar is tied to a particular locality. Critics could argue that in this case, al-Sakhāwī links the scholar to Cairo not because of the student's formative connection there but rather simply because he spent most of his life there. On the other hand, one finds examples in which al-Sakhāwī refers to scholars by the Cairene geographic *nisba* despite their having moved to Cairo later in life.

محمد بن محمد بن عبد اللطيف بن اسحق بن أحمد بن ابراهيم الولوى ابو البقاء
بن الضياء بن الصدر بن النجم الأموى المحلي المولد ثم السنباطي ثم القاهري المالكي

The student, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Abū al-Baqā', in this example does not move to Cairo from the Delta towns of al-Simbāt and al-Maḥallah until after the age of twenty-two when

⁷⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 10:252:1030.

he takes a position as a chief judge.⁷⁷ I argue that it is because of Cairo's importance as a center of scholarship and his subject's attainment of intellectual maturity there that al-Sakhāwī uses the new geographic *nisba* of Cairo to refer to this scholar. Despite the fact that Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Abū al-Baqā' spent the early years of his life and education outside of Cairo his move to Cairo from the Egyptian countryside represents the culmination of his career. The data presented in Daphna Ephrat's *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition* complements and expands on these brief examples of students traveling to Cairo and shows that this drift included people from further afield.

Daphna Ephrat's study examines the Sunni 'ulama of eleventh-century Baghdad. Unlike the flourishing Cairo that al-Sakhāwī inhabited, Ephrat argues that Baghdad was a waning city in terms of political power, scholarship, and trade. In her study, Ephrat examines data on 265 "immigrant, transient, and emigrant 'ulama who lived in eleventh-century Baghdad for most of their careers."⁷⁸ Ephrat elected to trace four verbs that describe immigration instead of simply compiling information extracted from recording geographical *nisbas*—names that are often criticized as inaccurate⁷⁹.

She provides data on the places of destination of thirty-four subjects included in biographical literature. The four main verbs examined are *intaqala* (form III): to change locality, change one's residence; *qadima* (form I): to arrive at a place when it appears in conjunction with *nazala* (form I); and *sakana* (form I): to remain in order to live, dwell, inhabit.⁸⁰ The data

⁷⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, 9:113:297.

⁷⁸ Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 36.

⁷⁹ It is a well-known fact that there existed a habit of changing one's *nisba* for a variety of reasons including the desire to tie one's family to a new geographic location for both political and economic reasons.

⁸⁰ Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 36-7.

collected confirms that five percent of emigrants of Baghdad settled in Egypt, and only one percent emigrated from Egypt to Baghdad during the eleventh century—perhaps a comment on Baghdad’s diminishing role. Ephrat summarizes that there existed a “general trend of a huge movement westward, which began in the eleventh century and continued in the later medieval period.”⁸¹ This confirms that by the fifteenth century large waves of scholars, merchants, pilgrims, and migrants were traveling westward from Baghdad to Cairo.

Ephrat concludes that the first successful means of attracting transient scholars to study in Baghdad during the height of the city’s prominence was the arrival of the *madrasas* that encouraged the increasing “influence of a stable and prosperous cosmopolitan cultural elite.”⁸² It was the advent of the *madrasa* that, in Ephrat’s opinion, brought stability to the learned society of Baghdad. To support this argument, Ephrat writes that scholarly accounts found around the Muslim world indicate that the prestige associated with visiting and traveling to the *madrasas* of Baghdad were useful to “maintain Baghdad’s image as the intellectual capital of the Muslim world..., even if its central role was eroded.”⁸³ Comparing this information to that collected from the biographical dictionary of al-Sakhāwī from fifteenth century Cairo, one may posit that while the *madrasa* likely played a role in attracting foreign travelers, it was but one determinant among several that caused a larger movement westward. As Baghdad’s influence as a cultural metropolis waned, Cairo rose to assert its role as an importance center of scholarship in the region.

Five additional main determinants motivated Cairo’s development from an elite administrative city meant to celebrate the birth of the Fāṭimid dynasty to the cosmopolitan and

⁸¹ Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 37.

⁸² Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 64.

⁸³ Ephrat, *Learned Society*, 65.

diverse capital of scholarship that is depicted in the writing of al-Sakhāwī. The five main processes of war, anti-Shiite propaganda, trade, pilgrimage, and the Mamluk mode of political power worked in tandem, amplifying one another's effects and encouraging mass migrations of wealth, people, and institutions into Cairo. An examination of these factors may highlight the mode of Cairo's growth as a center of scholarship and provide necessary background for an understanding of the Islamic educational system in the later middle ages.

While calamities such as the Great Plague of 1063 and a severe earthquake in 1138 greatly diminished the once thriving population of Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ it was the later campaigns of the Crusaders that compounded these disasters and shifted the topographical focus from Fuṣṭāṭ to Cairo. Most significant in driving this shift were the Crusades that transpired between 1164 and 1169.⁸⁴ The invasion of the Latin King Amalric of Jerusalem in 1168—a direct threat to the longevity of the Shiite Egyptian caliphate—prompted Shāwar (d. 564/1169)⁸⁵, the vizier of the last Fāṭimid caliph of Egypt, to order Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ burned for fear that once overtaken it would provide an invaluable base from which foreign forces could besiege the better-fortified Cairo.⁸⁶ It was reported that the conflagration lasted for fifty-four days and nights, forcing Amalric's forces back, while the people of Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ sought shelter within the city limits of Cairo.⁸⁷ As Fāṭimid rule deteriorated, a new Sunni dynasty of the Ayyūbids rose to power under the leadership of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (d.589/1193), a Sunni vizier who first served under the last Fāṭimid Caliph, and was instrumental in preventing the Crusaders' conquest of Egypt. During this time period, from the late tenth to twelfth centuries, there was huge rupture in the political systems of Syria, Anatolia, Iraq, and Iran. This instability sent tremors throughout the greater region of the

⁸⁴ Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, 20.

⁸⁵ D.S. Richards, "Shāwar," *EI2*, 9: 372.

⁸⁶ Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo* (London: J.M.Dent & Company, 1906), 110.

⁸⁷ Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, 20.

Middle East and the image of Cairo as a refuge began to emerge. Additionally, war had the effect of consolidating the populations of Cairo-Fuṣṭāṭ within the walled refuge—a process that would continue attracting greater numbers of refugees into a city able and willing to support such floods of people.

Broadly speaking, war—or shelter from its violence against Muslims—is the first factor that transformed Cairo into a diverse metropolis. In the mid-thirteenth century the mongol army under the leadership of the non-Muslim Hulegu, the grandson of Ghengis Khan, led a conquest across the Middle East. The Mongols' burning of the mosque of the caliphs, the shrine of Kāẓimayn and the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Baghdadis were only some of the events of the unbridled destruction and violence that were recorded during this bloody period.⁸⁸ Two years later at the Battle of Ayn Jalut,⁸⁹ the Egyptian Mamluks under the leadership of al-Malik al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Bunduqḏārī Abū al-Futūḥ (r. 1260-1277) successfully prevented the continued westward advancement of the Mongol conquests, creating a shelter for the region's first wave of refugees.

A subsequent wave of refugees flooded into the city of Cairo in the wake of Timur Lenk's (Tamerlane d. 807/1405) conquests, beginning in 801/1399. Timur was a Turkic conqueror who was born into a Mongol subtribe.⁹⁰ The 801/1399 military expedition was meant as an act of reprisal against the Mamluk sultan of Egypt and the Ottoman sultan for their seizures of what he believed was stolen territory. By 1402, Timur had marched on the major cities of the Middle East, defeating the Mamluk army at Aleppo, occupying Damascus, and massacring the population of Baghdad. With the fall of these three major metropolitan capitals, fearful Muslims

⁸⁸ A.A. Duri, "Baghdad," 1:894.

⁸⁹ Bernard Lewis, "Ayn Djālūt," *EI2*, 1:786.

⁹⁰ Beatrice F. Manz, "Timūr Lang," *EI2*, 10: 510

fled to Cairo to take refuge. Having received offers of submission from the Egyptian sultan, Timur did not infiltrate the city and died shortly after, in 807/1405.

While it was the Mamluks who eventually prevented Timur from invading Egypt, the sectarian history of the ruling dynasties in Egypt preceding Mamluk rule is the second significant factor that shaped the city into a cultural center. The period from 338/950-441/1050 is known as the Shiite Century because of the widespread control of the Shiite ruling elites throughout the majority of the Islamic world. The period beginning with the Seljuk conquest of Baghdad and its surrounding region in 446/1055 marked a major event towards the beginning of the Sunni Revival in which Sunni dynasties began to replace their Shiite predecessors. An important example of this transformation from Shiite to Sunni rule is found in Egypt, where the Sunni Ayyūbids rose to power in Egypt under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn following the demise of the Fāṭimid dynasty.

By the ninth/fifteenth century, al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442)⁹¹ could claim that the Shiites in Egypt had disappeared, thus suggesting that anti-Shiite propaganda was in fact a part of the Ayyūbid and later Mamluk governing policies. It is important to note here that the new Sunni dynasties were not eradicating the Shiites, but instead severely curtailing of their influence in the public sphere. One way to accomplish this task was to spread Sunni religious institutions throughout the city of Cairo. In his dissertation on the rise of Sunni *madrasas* in Egypt in the twelfth century, Gary Leiser argues that the institution of *madrasas* and other Sunni establishments served to unify society under the auspices of Sunni Islam.⁹² This was a direct

⁹¹ Devin J. Stewart, "Popular Shiism in Medieval Egypt: Vestiges of Islamic Sectarian Polemics in Egyptian Arabic," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996): 52.

⁹² Gary La Viere Leiser, "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisun 495-657/1101-1249" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976).

response meant to reverse the Shiite legacy of the Fāṭimids in Egypt. The perhaps unintentional effect of anti-Shiite propaganda was an increasing population of educated Sunni scholars and the institutional framework that was equipped to receive larger numbers of scholars traveling to the city to complete their educations. The Mamluks were able to establish networks of *madrasas* throughout the cities of Egypt because of the wealth that they had accumulated from the Egyptian involvement in international trade.

Cairo emerged as an economic force on account of its growing involvement in the lucrative spice and pepper trade with Yemen, South Arabia, and most notably India around the early part of the twelfth century.⁹³ Cairene ports accepted large shipments and then warehoused the goods in its depositories until sold to European merchants at inflated prices. The Egyptian, and particularly Cairene, position in the spice trade originating in India and extending as far as Europe illustrates both the potential and actual wealth that was possessed by Cairene spice merchants during the Mamluk era. The economic force of Cairo is the second determinant that raised the city to share equal prominence with Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ and further encouraged the shift of commerce to the heart of Cairo. Egypt became the nexus of international trade in this period. In economic terms, the spice trade benefited the rulers because of the taxes imposed. It is undeniable that the long-term success of any trade must have depended upon an association or collaboration of men—most likely overseen by a governing body. Fischel writes that the nature of sea-borne trade complicated by the two-way import and export, treacherous transportation, and other difficulties required “association, cooperation, mutual help and assistance.”⁹⁴ This

⁹³ Walter J. Fischel, “The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt: A Contribution to the Economic History of Medieval Islam,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1(1958): 158.

⁹⁴ Fischel, “Spice Trade,” 158.

arrangement funneled enormous amounts of money into the central economy, creating significant wealth.

The accumulation of wealth produced two direct effects. First, as Fischel mentions, prosperity derived from mercantile activities necessitated banking activities.⁹⁵ The political consequence of merchants' control of accessible income was that they were able to assert influence as bankers and financiers. The inflow of resources to Cairo, therefore, allowed for increased building projects such as *madrasas* to take root and continued to shift the locus of power from Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ to Cairo. Second, similar to modern cities, with the accumulation of wealth and increased employment opportunities comes an influx of migrants. Migrant workers came to Cairo with distinct cultural backgrounds and new ideas flooded the city. The rapid production of public works projects and major increases in population were direct results of the wealth gained from Cairo's position in the spice trade, and two ways in which Cairene trade helped to drive the urban center of gravity from Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ to Cairo.

The fourth main factor that helped expand both the population and the city limits of Cairo was the religious pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Pilgrims travelling to Mecca journeyed in caravans that departed from designated gathering sites located in the major cities of the Islamic world: Damascus, Baghdad, and Cairo. During the Baḥrī Mamluks' reign, it is recorded that all Egyptian pilgrims likely traveled in one caravan under centralized protection from the state. With the increase in travelers came a revised program whereby several convoys of pilgrims would travel to the Holy Cities at short distances from one another, but along the same general path.

⁹⁵ Fischel, "Spice Trade," 169.

The Burjī Mamluks further revised the system to institute a system of two regular caravans known as *Rakb al-Maḥmil* and *Rakb al-Awwal* that led in the front.⁹⁶

The populations of North Africa and Spain convened in the city of Cairo—the only center for the Egyptian pilgrimage⁹⁷—at the beginning of the parade. According to Bernard Lewis’ article on “Ḥajj,” pilgrims from Senegal and Timbuktu often joined this particular caravan en route.⁹⁸ Once source estimates that the route from Cairo to Mecca (*Darb al-Ḥajj al-Miṣrī*) was a thirty-five day journey,⁹⁹ while others calculate that, although actual traveling time was approximately 424 hours including rest, prayer, and food, the journey likely lasted between forty-five to fifty days.¹⁰⁰

With the reform to the overland route via ‘Aqabah (664/1266 or 666/1268) the position of Cairo as a gathering place for the journey was particularly strengthened.¹⁰¹ This overland route was heavily fortified, and the caravan often travelled with a military escort for safety purposes. Interestingly, as the city of Baghdad waned in importance, its pilgrimage route is thought to have closed, shifting even more pilgrims to join Cairo’s gathering parades. As people moved into the city to prepare for the pilgrimage they brought unique ideas and customs, encouraging the emergence of Cairo as an international cultural center. Few authors provide narrative accounts of this cultural exchange, most likely because it was considered an obvious result of large floods of people and therefore is rarely described in detail.

⁹⁶ Abdullah ‘Akawi, “The Pilgrimage to Mecca in Mamlūk Times,” in *Arabian Studies*, ed. R.B. Serjeant et al. (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1974), 147.

⁹⁷ ‘Akawi, “Pilgrimage to Mecca,” 146.

⁹⁷ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 15.

⁹⁸ Bernard Lewis, “Ḥajj,” *EI2*, 3:31.

⁹⁹ Bernard Lewis, “Ḥajj,” *EI2*, 3:31.

¹⁰⁰ Akawi, “Pilgrimage to Mecca,” 147.

¹⁰¹ ‘Akawi, “Pilgrimage to Mecca,” 146.

One account recorded that the pilgrimage caravan arriving in Cairo from the Muslim regions of West Africa (*Rakb al-Takrūr*) took part in the trade of “slaves, raw gold (*tibr*), cloth and horses” in exchange for the goods native to Egypt and the Ḥijāz.¹⁰² In his examination of the pilgrimage to Mecca under Mamluk rule, Abdullah ‘Akawi summarizes that in addition to Cairo’s exposure to commercial activities at the start of the pilgrimage season, the treasury of the Mamluk rulers also directly profited from Cairo’s role as a hub. The Mamluk governors taxed goods transmitted with foreign caravans re-entering Cairo, and Damascus, on their return from the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.¹⁰³ This system was further institutionalized in 830/1427 under the direction of the Mamluk king of Egypt al-Malik al Ashraf Abū ‘l-Naṣr Barsbāy (d. 841/1438) who wished to consolidate all commercial activity conducted during the pilgrimage under the auspices of the Egyptian caravan. In this vein, he decreed that “all merchants, whether of the Egyptian caravan or of any other, should accompany the Egyptian pilgrimage on its return to Cairo, where they would have to be taxed before they were allowed to return to their own countries.”¹⁰⁴ It is argued that because of the revenue attached to the Egyptian pilgrimage route the Mamluk rulers were particularly inclined to maintain its organization and continued success.

The culmination of economic and strategic advantages and a swelling population in Cairo was harnessed under the rising political power of the Mamluks, thus, introducing the final determinant of Cairo’s emergence as an urban milieu. The name “Mamluk” derives from the passive participle of the Arabic verb *malaka*.¹⁰⁵ Although its translation—“one who is possessed”—clearly conveys slavery, it is important to understand that this is a reference to non-

¹⁰² ‘Akawi, “Pilgrimage to Mecca,” 147.

¹⁰³ ‘Akawi, “Pilgrimage to Mecca,” 149.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Akawi, “Pilgrimage to Mecca,” 150.

¹⁰⁵ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 15.

African slaves.¹⁰⁶ Ethnically, it is clear that the slaves were preferentially enlisted from the Circassian, Turcoman, Mongol, and Turkish peoples of the Caucasus and the Russian steppes specifically because of their superior skills in riding and archery.¹⁰⁷ Muslim rulers have employed slaves in their armed forces and administrative institutions for centuries, but it was the Mamluks who institutionalized the practice into a well-regulated system with a lasting political regime.

As hinted at earlier, the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517) is conventionally divided into two administrative phases, the Bahrī /Turkish dynasty (1250-1382) and the Burji/Circassian dynasty (1382-1517).¹⁰⁸ Historians rely on this division to emphasize that there was a decisive change in the ethnic origin of the majority of people between these two periods. Additionally, it is argued that the Mamluk state reached its peak under the Turkish emperors and similarly began to fall into disarray under the latter Circassian ones.¹⁰⁹ It is noteworthy, therefore, that it was this latter dynasty that had more of an impact in educational sponsorship and the spread of networks of *madrāsas* within Egypt. As witnessed in Baghdad, it is possible that this effect is the evidence of a final effort by the Mamluk ruling elite to maintain power in the face of collapse.

Doris Behrens-Abouseif argues that the Mamluks were champions of Arab culture, protectors of Islam and promoters of educational institutions.¹¹⁰ She writes, “the pious foundations, which were equipped with substantial libraries, boosted scholarship and book production, and, while in principle dedicated to the study of the legal and religious sciences, they

¹⁰⁶ The Arabic word ‘*abd*’ refers to black slaves or servants and are therefore distinguished from the white Mamluk ruling military elite.

¹⁰⁷ Andre Raymond, *Cairo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 111.

¹⁰⁸ Raymond, *Cairo*, 116.

¹⁰⁹ Raymond, *Cairo*, 116.

¹¹⁰ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks. A History of Architecture and its Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 5.

disseminated a broad range of knowledge.”¹¹¹ The Mamluks’ patronage of educational institutions encourages one to ask what was the Mamluks’ utility in supporting Islamic educational institutions specifically and whether this promulgated a more formalized system of education more generally.

The Mamluk financial and cultural endorsement of education is inextricably linked to their need—particularly as an imported ruling elite—to legitimate their rule. The trappings of legitimacy for the Mamluks were gained through a variety of politically astute policies. The grandeur of Mamluk Cairene *madrasas* was linked both to political and economic motivations. In his article about *madrasas*, Hillenbrand writes that an immediate concern of an *amīr* upon ascending to power was to found some charitable institution—in the Mamluk case the chosen institution was often one of learning.¹¹² As a foreign ruling elite both ethnically and linguistically, the Mamluks needed to prove their own Islamic orthodoxy and establish their credentials as pious Muslims. Patronizing Islamic institutions—mosques and *madrasas*—was a clear demonstration of their piety and dedication to engagement with the Muslim communities that they came to rule.

In his dissertation “The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisun 495-647/1101-1249)” Gary Leiser offers an example of a Sunni vizier in the sixth/twelfth century who, after driving out the former Christian vizier, built a *madrasa* to strengthen his connection to Sunni community, thus creating a power base independent of non-Muslims and Shiites.¹¹³ This example drawn from the Ayyūbid period in Egypt illustrates the roots of an institutional

¹¹¹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 5.

¹¹² R. Hillenbrand, “Madrasa,” *EI2*, 5:1123.

¹¹³ Leiser, “Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt,” 131.

structure—the *madrasa*—that amplified the attractiveness of Cairo for scholars from across the Islamic world and also facilitated their incorporation into Cairene learned circles.

Madrasas constituted the principal network of institutions dedicated firstly to the propagation of Islamic learning. Jonathan Berkey traces the origins of instruction in the Islamic religious and legal sciences to mosques occurring simultaneously with what he terms the “systematization of Islamic law” in the eighth and ninth centuries.¹¹⁴ Similarly, as the need grew for more patterned study of learning within legal *madhhabs*, hostels (*khāns/ khānaqāhs*) were adjoined to mosques to shelter students and later accommodating visiting scholars.¹¹⁵ Berkey explains that the growth of such mosque-khāns ultimately culminated in the emergence of *madrasas* in the tenth and eleventh centuries. A concise definition of a *madrasa* is an independent Sunnī college, privately endowed that designated a specific teaching position mainly for law (*fiqh*), and provided residences for students who belonged.¹¹⁶

The approximate date of the earliest recorded *madrasa* in Egypt is estimated between 490/1097 and 515/1121; it was constructed under Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Walīd b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf b. Sulaymān b. Ayyūb al-Fihri al-Ṭurṭūshī, a man born in 451/1059 in the town of Tortosa, Spain.¹¹⁷ The earliest known and undisputed *madrasa* founded within Egypt was constructed under Salāḥ al-Dīn in Miṣr-Fuṣṭāṭ in 1170.¹¹⁸ By the mid-thirteenth century the *madrasa* was well established within urban society and served as the primary institution of religious instruction. It is clear, therefore, that the institution of the *madrasa* predated the

¹¹⁴ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 7.

¹¹⁵ R. Hillenbrand, “Madrasa,” *EI2*, 5:1123.

¹¹⁶ Leiser, *Restoration of Sunnism*, 124.

¹¹⁷ Leiser, *Restoration of Sunnism*, 114-1125.

¹¹⁸ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 8.

Mamluk state in Egypt. The Mamluk ruling elite adapted themselves to exploit the existing system of patronizing *madrasa*.

Mamluk-built *madrasas* stood as tangible declarations of Mamluk support for the community in general. This visible sign of Mamluk power was the most obvious source of utility derived from their patronage of institutions of learning. Additionally, the Mamluk ruling elite legitimated themselves as worthy Islamic rulers augmenting their prestige through patronage of significant Islamic institutions of learning—a recognizably meritorious Islamic act. The Mamluks also increased their social and political capital from their endorsement of Islamic learning that led to the formation of loyal personal networks. On an individual level, the endower benefitted from the allegiances of the legions of students educated in his institution that were then “obliged to him for their education or teaching position.”¹¹⁹ Additionally, A.H. Hourani’s study on the Islamic City demonstrates that Islamic institutions concentrated in urban areas provided a framework for urban life because of the prestige and strength associated with them. He writes, “Through [Islamic institutions] the ruler’s acts could be legitimized, the city-dwellers could take corporate action, and the two could be morally linked.”¹²⁰ It is clear that the Mamluks’ political and financial support of *madrasas* enabled them to identify with a population that was neither wholly Egyptian nor Arab.

The majority of al-Sakhāwī’s subjects lived in a society that fostered intellectual immersion and provided a forum for public lectures and disputations by scholars and teachers alike.¹²¹ As *madrasas* became rooted in Cairene society as both academic centers and

¹¹⁹ Leiser, *Restoration of Sunnism*, 132.

¹²⁰ A.H. Hourani, *The Islamic City in light of Recent Research* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1970), 23-4.

¹²¹ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 35.

international meeting grounds, Leiser argues, it became “all the more necessary for the ruling elite to have some control over them in order to be apprised of what was going on.”¹²² Lastly, the educated class of students that emerged from endowed institutions augmented the gravitational pull of Cairo as a center of scholarship further promoting and accelerating the growth of the *madrasa* system. This environment fostered the institutionalization of learning in Cairo and conferred the foundations upon which there could be *madrasas* able to receive and process large numbers of scholars through a structured system of education.

As hinted at earlier, the Sunnī establishment of networks of *madrasa* institutions throughout the Islamic world and specifically in Egypt took hold only after the collapse of the Fāṭimid Shīʿī dynasty. During the Sunnī ruling dynasties of the Ayyūbids and Mamluks the spread of *madrasas* occurred rapidly and persisted throughout Egypt. Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) mentions a total of seventy-three *madrasas* divided among the four legal *madhhabs* accordingly: 14 exclusively for Shāfiʿīs, 4 exclusively for Mālikīs, and 10 exclusively for Ḥanafīs and the rest serving combinations of *madhhabs* together.¹²³ This initial breakdown of *madrasas* illustrates the significant skew towards the Shāfiʿī *madhhab* that continued to increase in Egypt—illustrated later in the data compiled from Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary.¹²⁴ Al-Maqrīzī’s record also introduces the final component of Mamluk patronage of a large diversity of people that added to the attractiveness of Cairo as a hub of scholarship and illustrated its inclusive nature regardless of a scholar’s legal *madhhab* affiliation.

¹²² Leiser, *Restoration of Sunnism*, 426.

¹²³ R. Hillenbrand, “Madrasa,” *EI2*, 5:1123.

¹²⁴ It is important to note also that the Ḥanbalīs had no exclusive *madhhab* in this early period, a foreshadow of the later paucity of information available in Al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary about the legal rite.

The fourth Mamluk sultan of the Bahrī dynasty, al-Malik al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dīn al-Ṣāliḥī Baybars I (d. 648/1250) appointed four chief judges (qadis) to represent the four Sunni legal schools (*madhhabs*) rather than choosing to define his rule with only one.¹²⁵ Previous scholarship explains that the population in medieval Cairo was composed of “Turcomens, Kurds, Anatolians, Greeks, Caucasians” and other refugees from throughout the Muslim world.¹²⁶ Contributing to this diversity was the establishment and support of *madrāsas* representing four of the legal *madhhabs*. As Behrens-Abouseif argues, “the multi-rite policy...encourages students and scholars from other parts of the Muslim world to study and teach in Cairo.”¹²⁷ The total effect was self-amplifying and attracted yet more scholars to Cairo.

These five determinants of war, anti-Shiite propaganda, trade, pilgrimage and Mamluk efforts to legitimate their political power worked as synergistic forces in the development of Cairo as a major center of scholarship. With increased wealth arrived the ability to build and improve fortifications, endow institutions of higher learning, and ultimately attract scholars from across the Islamic world. I now attempt to uncover what were the stages of learning that existed within this system of education that emerged in Cairo and what texts, specifically, were studied.

¹²⁵ Raymond, *Cairo*, 10.

¹²⁶ Raymond, *Cairo*, 5.

¹²⁷ Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 10.

CHAPTER TWO: RECONSTRUCTING THE CURRICULUM

As noted in the introduction, scholars to date are embroiled in a debate about the character of medieval Islamic education. On one side of the debate, George Makdisi and Devin J. Stewart¹²⁸ propose that there existed an institutional foundation for the Islamic education system equipped with a shared curriculum and formal process of degrees. On the other side of the debate, Jonathan Berkey, Daphna Ephrat and Michael Chamberlain argue that the transmission of knowledge relied on an informal network of personal relationships. Berkey and Chamberlain insist that a student's association with his teacher superseded the importance of his study of written texts and also of the physical location where he studied—the *madrasa*.¹²⁹ The main questions that motivated my study of al-Sakhāwī's text within the context of this debate are whether the scholars of Mamluk Cairo developed a standard curriculum and, if so, what stages of scholarship generally and texts specifically defined their version of Islamic learning. I attempt to reconstruct the outline of a fifteenth-century curriculum, in order to flesh out our understanding of the Islamic scholarly conventions of the later middle ages.

A Muslim Cairene's early education unquestionably began with his study and memorization of the Qur'an.¹³⁰ Detailed quantitative data collected from the first eleven volumes of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* confirms that the age of a student recorded to have memorized the Qur'an is as early as five years old and generally no later than mid-to late adolescence. The

¹²⁸ Stewart presents an abridged outline of the course of study found in fifteenth century Cairo and Damascus based on "Sunni sources," among which he names Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*. See Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System*, (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1998), 222.

¹²⁹ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 21.

¹³⁰ See Richard W. Bulliet, "The Age Structure of Medieval Islamic Education," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 105-117.

average of exact ages¹³¹ calculated is between eleven and twelve years old; however, I suspect that this estimate may exhibit an upward skew because of al-Sakhāwī's tendency to combine mention of the memorization of the Qur'an with later studies—described in detail in the following sections. In his article “The Age Structure of Medieval Islamic Education,” Richard Bulliet employs a different methodology to calculate the age at which a student commenced his studies. Bulliet compiled lists of students known to have studied under the same teacher. He then calculated the age of a teacher's youngest student known at the time of that teacher's death. Bulliet asserts that this estimation is accurate because of a recognized practice of very old men teaching very young students in an attempt to shorten the chain of transmission.¹³² Within his data, drawn from the biographical dictionary of Nishapur in northeastern Iran, *al-Siyāq li-tarīkh Naisābūr* compiled by ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (d. 1135), Bulliet believes the average age of a student initiating his studies was 7.5 years with a standard deviation of 2.7.¹³³ This estimation agrees with the information presented in al-Sakhāwī once I calculated the standard deviation of 4.8—meaning that a student memorized the Qur'an between the ages of 7 and 16.5. Remembering the skew presented in my data sample, it is important to note that the earliest recorded age of a student known to have memorized the Qur'an was five years old and the mode within the sample was six—further illustrating the agreement with Bulliet's study.

Confirming the quantitative evidence that students memorized the Qur'an as a first stage in their academic careers, al-Sakhāwī explicitly states in several cases that a student was “young”

¹³¹ Exact ages mean that the age was calculated relying on the method of subtracting the birth year from the year that the action of memorization took place. Approximate ages suggest that the birth year was subtracted from the next known year of academic accomplishment—assuming that all entries followed a strictly chronological presentation discussed in the introduction of this work.

¹³² Bulliet, “The Age Structure,” 105-117.

¹³³ Richard Bulliet, “The Age Structure,” 108.

(*ṣaghīr*) at the time of memorization.¹³⁴ In my survey of the first eleven volumes of al-Sakhāwī's work, the verb expressing one's memorization or study of the Qur'an, when mentioned, is written immediately following that which reports birth years and on average no more than two sentences later. The chronological structure of the entries included in biographical dictionaries and the close proximity of the memorization of Qur'an with the birth date supports my argument that, just as in Nishapur, study of the Qur'an was in fact a primary phase in one's Islamic education in Mamluk Cairo. This initial study of the Qur'an provided a student with basic literacy and the skills necessary to begin the elementary stage of learning that initiated a formal curriculum.

Generally speaking, a curriculum is the linear progression of courses of study according to specific subject matter. Adhering to the argument that specific texts in the fifteenth century are representative of fields of study more generally, I include the sequential study of texts within the definition of curriculum as well. Two main methods are used to derive a curriculum from the preserved literature. First, one can examine various sources such as canonical accounts of education, biographical dictionaries, and endowment deeds to extract the general progression of subjects followed or prescribed and perhaps locate references to specific texts that are frequently mentioned. The second approach is a more focused analysis of a single curricular list so that the researcher can then make predictions about the nature of education as it existed in that particular society or time period more generally.

Through a summary of the curricula outlined by George Makdisi, Muḥsin al-Amīn, and the work of Shahab Ahmed and Nenad Filipovic—scholars that have used variations of the two approaches described above—I attempt to illustrate that my analysis and construction of the

¹³⁴ Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*, 4:42:245; 4:245:641; 6:110:344; 6:184:635; 6:243:851.

Mamluk curriculum fits neatly into the matrix of Islamic education throughout its historical development. A close examination of the content of these Islamic curricula demonstrates that despite differences in time period, location, and the scholar's methodological approach, much regularity may be detected. The commonalities suggest that there was in fact a recognized curriculum that has made a lasting impression on Islamic education.

In *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, George Makdisi argues that although there was no canonized curriculum—each institution instead following the courses and texts set by the desire of its founder or professors—there was a certain progression of subjects.¹³⁵ At the same time Makdisi presents a three-stage curriculum. The first step in the sequence of study, according to Makdisi, is described in his chapter “Organization of Learning” and includes “the arts.”¹³⁶ To expand on this point, Makdisi claims that Qur'an, hadith, grammar and literature were fundamental areas of study before a student was able to progress to the next stage of specialization. The second and third levels of study are described in Makdisi's third chapter “The Methodology of Learning.” He argues that this period constituted “the main thrust” of a student's education. First, he would study the legal principles of a particular school of law (*madhhab*) and later, after establishing himself as a fellow (*sahib*), he would examine the disputed questions of the law (*khilaf*) in the second period.¹³⁷ In general, Makdisi accepted the notion that specialization in any field was preceded by study of the Qur'an, hadith, grammar, and literature—what Makdisi often refers to as “the arts.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 84.

¹³⁶ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 84. Devin J. Stewart refers to this as “literary arts.”

¹³⁷ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 114.

¹³⁸ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 84.

Makdisi writes that despite the existence of a prescribed sequence of courses gleaned from books on the theory of Muslim education, biographical notices imply the lack of a prearranged program of study.¹³⁹ He attributes the lack of a unified pattern of courses to the fact that the founder of each institution of learning maintained decision-making authority, including the choice of courses to be taught. Makdisi adds that the subjects taught in each institution of learning—while principally at the discretion of its founder—most likely indicate the preferences of the individual professor controlling the authority of the institution rather than the founder. In other words, while the founder controlled administrative decision-making, he was often influenced if not fully directed by the leading professor of the institution.

According to the twentieth-century Shiite scholar Muḥsin al-Amīn (d.1371/1952), the curriculum has three distinct stages: the “propaedeutic sciences” (*al-muqaddimāt*)¹⁴⁰, the “study of legal texts” (*dars al-suṭūḥ/ al-dars al-saḥīḥ*), and “extra-textual study” (*dars al-khārij*). Within the first stage of learning texts were selected to emphasize lessons on Arabic grammar, rhetoric and logic. Upon completion of this stage a student was equipped to begin his study of the law (*fiqh*) and jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). The final stage of learning continued the study of law, but at this stage Stewart writes that the goal is “to teach students to conduct legal research, to arrive at independent legal rulings, and to establish their soundness with adequate proofs.”¹⁴¹

In his analysis of al-Amīn’s detailed description of courses undertaken at Najaf between 1308/1890-1 and 1319/1901, Stewart concludes that al-Amīn is in fact describing a scholarly

¹³⁹ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 80.

¹⁴⁰ Notably absent from this three stage curriculum is the study and memorization of the Qur’an because it was a more fundamental stage of learning as was instruction in basic literacy. It is understood that both learning how to read and write, and memorization of the Qur’an were complete prior to a student undertaking the courses outlined by al-Amīn.

¹⁴¹ Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 219.

tradition that dates back a number of centuries. Stewart believes this outline compares specifically to the works studied in the seventeenth century by Husayn b. ‘Ali al-‘Amili (d.1078/1668).¹⁴² He points out that the Shiite legal curriculum depicted by al-Amīn includes texts that are standard within the Sunni legal tradition dating to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. From these historical connections, Stewart concludes that the contemporary Shiite legal curriculum is rooted in the Sunni educational framework of as early as the fourteenth century. It follows that one should note several similarities between the titles included in the curricula of al-Amīn and al-Sakhāwī.

Shahab Ahmed and Nenad Filipovic examined a document from the Ottoman period, dated 973/1565, and titled “This is a list of the books required for the imperial *medreses*, given to the [teachers] in accordance with the decree of the Padishah [Ottoman sultan].” This provides primary evidence that a century after al-Sakhāwī compiled his biographical dictionary the Ottoman state prescribed an imperial curriculum outlining the appropriate content of Islamic education. Prior to reviewing Ahmed and Filipovic’s findings, it is important to mention that the official legal rite of the Ottoman Empire was the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. Furthermore, the authors point out that the Ottomans, unlike the Mamluk rulers who supported each of the four legal schools,¹⁴³ exhibited no interest in training legal scholars in any *madhhab* other than the Ḥanafī.¹⁴⁴ This represents the most significant difference between the Mamluk and Ottoman

¹⁴² Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 220.

¹⁴³ See Chapter one for explanation of Mamluk endorsement of Islamic education.

¹⁴⁴ Shahab Ahmed and Nenad Filipovic, “The Sultan’s Syllabus: A Curriculum for the Ottoman Imperial *medreses* Prescribed in a Ferman of Qānūnī I Suleymān, Dated 973/1565,” *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004): 213.

curricula. As shown below, al-Sakhāwī’s text illustrates Ahmed and Filipovic’s argument that the Mamluks permitted, and perhaps endorsed, the “intermingling of legal scholarship.”¹⁴⁵

Providing a general outline of the program of study, Ahmed and Filipovic are also adherents to the belief that the Ottoman curriculum—similar to the other Islamic curricula described above—was divided into three stages. A student’s elementary learning would include the study of fundamental disciplines such as logic, Arabic grammar and syntax. They conclude that disputation, preaching, rhetoric, tenets of faith, philosophy, and theology occupied the intermediate level, and later a student graduated to the “highest sciences”—the Prophetic tradition (*hadith*), Qur’anic exegesis, and Islamic jurisprudence.¹⁴⁶

Prior to examining the evidence found in the Arabic text of al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary, it is necessary to present first a note on the methodology of the current study in comparison to previous scholarship in the field. The studies mentioned above represent a variety of methodological techniques to depict the Islamic education system either in part or as a general overview. Adding to the approaches of past scholars—a first-hand account (al-Amīn), an expansive and pioneering study of various primary sources (Makdisi), and a focused examination of a single document (Ahmed and Filipovic)—I examine all eleven¹⁴⁷ volumes of al-Sakhāwī’s *al-Daw’ al-lāmī’* in an attempt to extract from the scholars’ biographies the stages of learning and specific texts that I argue constitute the standard curriculum followed in Mamluk Cairo. This approach is most similar to the one George Makdisi proposed, yet presents a narrower

¹⁴⁵ Ahmed and Filipovic, “The Sultan’s Syllabus,” 187.

¹⁴⁶ Ahmed and Filipovic, “The Sultan’s Syllabus,” 190-191.

¹⁴⁷ I have chosen to exclude the twelfth volume of Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw’ al-lāmī*, from my study because its subjects are all women. Women in the fifteenth century likely followed a different curriculum than their male counterparts and therefore I focused my study on the first eleven volumes of al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary.

perspective based on a single biographer and limited in time and place to fifteenth-century Cairo and its adjacent regions.

During the initial stage of my study I discovered that throughout *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, al-Sakhāwī presents sequences of book titles that each student memorized according to a standardized structure:

حفظ (كتاب) و(كتاب)؛ وعرض على (شيخ أو جماعة)

A translation of the formula for this structure is “He memorized (title of book) and (title of book); and he presented to (scholar(s)/ or in a group).”¹⁴⁸ I argue that the books recorded in this format belong to the group of books that al-Sakhāwī terms *al-mutūn*.¹⁴⁹ Devin J. Stewart translates this term found in al-Sakhāwī as “the texts”¹⁵⁰ arguing that they represent the standard textbooks in various fields that a student would have memorized and later presented. Al-Sakhāwī also uses a derivative of this term, *al-mutūn al-fiqhiyyah* “the standard legal texts.” In his biographical notice on al-Suyūṭī, al-Sakhāwī records that after having memorized the Qur'an, ‘*Umda, al-Minhaj al-far'i*, part of the *al-Minhaj al-Aṣlī* and the *Alfiyyat al-Naḥw*, al-Suyūṭī ascended until he read from the *al-mutūn al-fiqhiyyah*.¹⁵¹ These various uses of the word *al-mutūn* suggest that al-Sakhāwī had a concept of a standardized curriculum, meaning that there was likely a formal system of education in the later middle ages.

¹⁴⁸ There exist slight variations to this basic arrangement, sometimes listing specific books after the verb ‘*araḍa* to express that a student presented an additional book instead of referring to the previous titles listed.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* 9:45.

¹⁵⁰ Stewart, “Book Review: *The Transmission of Knowledge*,” 370.

¹⁵¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:76:302.

I further restricted my study to catalogue only those texts that are the direct object of two verbs: *hafīza* “to memorize” and *‘araḍa* “to present.” In total, I examined 544¹⁵² occurrences of this textual pattern throughout the eleven volumes under study.¹⁵³ I argue that al-Sakhāwī’s reliance on this particular method of recording books represents a deliberate expression of a program of study that becomes evident after close examination of the data. After I compiled a catalogue of the 544 sequences of book titles from al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary, I used auxiliary quantitative and qualitative data included in the entries to enhance my understanding of a student’s progression through the standard stages of learning. It is from this larger corpus of information that included a student’s age, legal *madhhab* affiliation, ordered position of each

¹⁵² The 544 examples included in the sample represent approximately five percent of the total number of biographical notices included in the first eleven volumes of al-Sakhāwī’s *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*. Within this total population of subjects, al-Sakhāwī includes various kinds of people such as well-known political figures, sultans, emirs, and other men for whom he merely provides a name. While five percent appears unrepresentative of the larger Cairene population, it in fact indicates the standard educational norm of the people who were educated beyond a rudimentary level. One should recognize that al-Sakhāwī included most of his contemporaries and near contemporaries who had received a license (*ijāzah*) for *ḥadīth* recitation, thus greatly increasing the total number of subjects included in his work. For a more detailed explanation about the possible reasons why al-Sakhāwī chose to include the people that see Carl Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Huda Lutfi, “Al-Sakhāwī’s Kitāb al-Nisā’ as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women During the Fifteenth Century A.D.,” *The Muslim World* 71 2(1981): 104-124; Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa’d to Who’s Who*. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994); Brittany J. Burns, “Of Martyrs and Concubines: Al-Sakhāwī’s Kitāb al-Nisā’” Honors Thesis., Emory University, 2009. he did,

¹⁵³ The sample collected represents approximately one third of the information offered within the biographical dictionary and exhibits significant consistency in both presentation of information and number of examples available. The occurrences divided by volume (48 in Vol. 1; 51 in Vol. 2; 21 in Vol. 3; 68 in Vol. 4; 52 in Vol. 5; 55 in Vol. 6; 79 in Vol. 7; 60 in Vol. 8; 92 in Vol. 9; 56 in Vol. 10; 31 in Vol. 11) illustrates the consistency of the number of scholars that followed this curriculum per volume.

book in the sequence, and number of books memorized that I extracted the standard curriculum of fifteenth-century Mamluk Cairo.

First, I record a student's age when provided. Knowing a student's age at the time of his memorization or presentation of a standard book provides evidence of the stage of learning to which a particular text belonged. As I expected, the data provides evidence that students presented (*'araḍa*) memorized works at an intermediate stage of education, usually during mid to late adolescence. The earliest recorded age of presentation found in al-Sakhāwī was six,¹⁵⁴ however, this entry represents an outlier because mastery of this level demonstrated at such a young age was uncommon. The upper age limit found in the Arabic text was twenty-nine years of age.¹⁵⁵ The average age calculated was fifteen years old¹⁵⁶ with a standard deviation of 3.7, confirming that the presentation was a transitional achievement in a student's education—occurring when a student was between the ages of eleven and nineteen.

This quantitative evidence is supported further by the physical placement of information about the memorization and presentation of texts in relation to the full biographical entry for each subject. Despite the length of a particular entry, the record of a student's memorization and presentation of selected texts occurs within the first third of the entry, following information about family history, birth date and place, and memorization of the Qur'an. It is often succeeded by information detailing his occupational history or other significant academic achievements such as *ijāzahs* or published works.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 8:134:310.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 6.247.860

¹⁵⁶ The exact average was 14.80. The sample for this estimate includes students in all eleven volumes that include male subjects. The sample size used is fifty-seven.

Second, I record the legal *madhhab* to which a student belonged. Unlike in the main *madrasas* of Ottoman Anatolia where one would expect an almost exclusive adherence to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*, there was no official legal rite in Mamluk Cairo and therefore it is meaningful to record which *madhhab* a student followed—although the Shāfiʿī was unquestionably dominant. Throughout the two initial stages of learning, students studied books on the subjects of grammar, syntax, morphology, rhetoric, logic, poetry, theology, prosody, and the prophetic science without a significant emphasis on one’s *madhhab*. In fact, 63.4 percent of students – regardless of their *madhhab* affiliation—memorized the same grammar book, the *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik/ Alfiyyat al-Naḥw*. A slightly smaller percentage, 41.7, of students memorized the *ʿUmda*, a book on legal *ḥadīth* that represents a more advanced level of learning. It is clear from this comparison that as a student approached an advanced level of instruction he memorized texts specific to the legal *madhhab* to which he is affiliated. There are examples of students whose academic records contradict this point, but they are few and are unlikely illustrative of an educational trend.

Lastly, I record the ordered position of each book in the sentence and the average number of books included in the entry’s sequence. In general, a student is credited with the memorization and presentation of three to four texts.¹⁵⁷ Within the larger sample one finds cases of extreme outliers to this general rule. I will highlight a few examples of students recorded to have memorized ten to twelve volumes because they best demonstrate the full course of study that a student would have completed. In comparing these examples to the general trend of students who memorized a smaller quantity of texts, I find that two possibilities are clear. First, students—even though dedicated to a life of scholarship—could physically only master a handful of

¹⁵⁷ The average for volume 5 and 6 was 3.32 including outliers on the upper and lower limits. The volume 5 average was 3.5 and the volume 6 average was 3.14.

volumes. One piece of evidence in support of this argument is the emergence of abridged manuals (*mukhtasar*) meant to condense the contents and ideas of a standard text in a specific field of learning. According to A. Arazi and H. Ben-Shammy, *mukhtaṣars* were introduced as a limited practice beginning in the 2nd-3rd/ 8th- 9th centuries, but became a prevalent method of study in the later centuries.¹⁵⁸ Certainly by the time of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, the practice was solidified as the biographical notices contain frequent mention of such texts. One such text that I argue holds a place in the canon is the *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ* by al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d.739/1338) an abridged book on rhetoric from the original text *Miftāḥ al-'ulūm* by al-Sakkākī (d.626/1229).

The second possibility is that al-Sakhāwī omits between six and eight volumes from each entry—meaning the average number of texts memorized and presented was in most cases closer to ten or twelve. There are two logical reasons why al-Sakhāwī would have omitted the titles of texts from the sequences recorded. One possibility is that al-Sakhāwī simply did not know the specifics about which other texts a student had memorized. Another is that the omission of titles could be a deliberate decision made because of al-Sakhāwī's expectation that his contemporary reader would have understood that the volumes mentioned were an abbreviation of a larger curricular list of texts. According to this argument, the titles that are included in al-Sakhāwī's record are perhaps a catalogue including the most formative books and are meant only to convey the general structure of study rather than a comprehensive list. While there is merit in considering this possibility, I expect that al-Sakhāwī recorded as much factual data about a student's education as he was aware of.

¹⁵⁸ A. Arazi and H. Ben-Shammy, "Mukhtasar," EI2, 7:536.

The odd variety in number of volumes mentioned in comparison to an otherwise rigid structure of sequencing provoked the final procedure of my study: I recorded the ordered position of every text as it appeared in each of the 544 examples. The only other scholar who appears to have studied the ordered sequence of texts in a similar manner is George Makdisi. In his description of the “Organization of Learning” Makdisi argues that there exists a discrepancy between the theoretical sequence of learning and the actual one. According to the “Theoretical Sequence of Courses” a student’s study of subjects proceeded in the order of Qur’an, *ḥadīth*, Qur’anic sciences, exegesis, variant readings, the sciences of *ḥadīth* (involving the study of the biographies of the transmitters of *ḥadīth*), principle of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*), principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), sources and methodology of the law; sources of the school of law (*madhhab*) to which one belonged, the divergences of the law (*khilāf*) within one school and between schools, and dialectic (*jadāl*). The main difference between Makdisi’s discussion and the current study is that Makdisi does not present quantitative evidence supporting this arrangement and states that the actual sequences of courses followed often diverged from the courses outlined above.

The first case that I will present appears towards the beginning of the fifth volume where al-Sakhāwī introduces a Cairene student belonging to the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab*. Born in 834/ 1431, ‘Abd al-Mughīth Abū al-Ghayth al-Sanqirī first studied under the instruction of his father. In this particular entry the texts according to subject area are introduced in the sequence of legal *ḥadīth*, *ḥadīth*, Qur’anic recitation, standard Shāfi‘ī law book, jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), grammar, syntax, second grammar book, rhetoric, logic, and prosody.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 5:83:312.

حفظ القرآن عند أبيه القرآن والعمدة وألفية الحديث والنخبة والشاطبية والمنهاج الفرعي
وجمع الجوامع وألفية النحو وتوضيحها والجرومية والى الصرف من التسهيل
والتلخيص والشمسية والحاجبية

Examined independently, the sequence of areas of study appears arbitrary and unordered, but when one compares it to the books listed for another student who also memorized a large number of volumes, the similarities in sequence are striking. ‘Alī al-Anṣārī, a Ḥanafī student born in 840/1436, memorized a total of ten texts presented by al-Sakhāwī in the order of *ḥadīth*, Quranic recitation, second *ḥadīth* book, standard Ḥanafī law book, Ḥanafī book on jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), second Ḥanafī law book, theology, grammar, morphology, logic.¹⁶⁰

حفظ القرآن و أربعي النووي والشاطبية وألفية الحديث والكنز وأصول الشاشي والمنار
ومختصر التفتازاني في علم الكلام وألفية ابن ملك وتوضيحها لابن هشام و الشافية في
الصرف و ايساغوجي في المنطق

A final example, illustrating that this pattern traversed both *madhhab* and the volumes of al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary, is a record of a Meccan Mālikī student born in the year 815/1412. Unlike the other examples, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Abu al-Hasan al-Nūwayrī is credited with memorizing six volumes recorded in the order of legal *ḥadīth*, Qur’anic recitation, standard Mālikī law book, second Mālikī law book, jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), grammar.¹⁶¹

حفظ القرآن والعمدة والشاطبية والرسالة لابن أبي زيد ومختصر ابن الحاجب الفرعي
والتنقيح للقرافي وألفية ابن ملك.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 5:224:759.

¹⁶¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 6:12:32.

These examples suggest that sequence of books presented in the biographical notices are ordered either according to the books' holiness or according to their importance: a measure that al-Sakhāwī likely defined himself. It is without exception that the Qur'an is listed as the first text memorized. This habit is illustrative of the universal reverence for the holy text and also shows that Qur'anic study marked the most elementary stage of a student's learning. Previous scholarship has shown that al-Sakhāwī was particularly fond of *ḥadīth*, and therefore one can argue that his presentation of texts reflects his personal idealization of the importance of *ḥadīth*. Following either argument, the texts of least importance according to al-Sakhāwī and least religious significance such as grammar, syntax, morphology, logic and rhetoric are often listed last. Logically we know these texts in fact represent the primary stages of learning—for one could not memorize a book on legal jurisprudence without first having a firm understanding of Arabic grammar and morphology.

To examine this issue further, I analyzed examples of students affiliated with each of the four *madhhabs* to emphasize that the books that were memorized belonged to a standard curriculum rather than being arbitrarily selected at a professor's whim as Chamberlain argues. The first example, located in the sixth volume, presents the record of a Mālikī student who memorized texts in the following order: *ḥadīth* with legal character, standard Mālikī law book, Mālikī text on jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and a grammar book.¹⁶²

حفظ القرآن والعمدة وابن الحاجب الفرعي والأصلي وألفية ابن ملك وغيرها؛

Most interesting is that after the mention of the final grammar book al-Sakhāwī writes “and

¹⁶² Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 6:241: 846

others” (*ghayrahā*), suggesting that this list represents a larger catalogue of texts similar to the ones described above. Al-Sakhāwī’s use of this term reaffirms the argument made earlier that his record omits the titles of certain texts that he was either ignorant of or he saw as non-essential to mention in conveying the progression of a student’s academic career. The second example similarly completes the sequence of titles with the phrase “and others.” Besides this time, for a Ḥanafī student, the texts in subject area are similarly ordered as Qur’anic recitation, *ḥadīth* of legal character, a book on jurisprudence, and lastly standard Ḥanafī law book.

حفظ الشاطبية والعمدة للنسفي والجمع والمنار وغيرها؛

The final position of the law book is not unusual in this case because there is no mention of the student’s memorizing or presenting books within the primary stage of learning such as grammar, syntax, and morphology. Finding a student associated with the Ḥanbalī rite was more of a challenge because of the paucity of examples. One student born in the year 788/1386¹⁶³ is only recorded to have memorized and presented one book.

حفظ الخرقى

It is not surprising that the book listed is the standard law text for the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khiraqī. Unlike the Mālikī and Ḥanafī cases, al-Sakhāwī does not write that he also studied other books. This supports the conclusion that students may have mastered a smaller number of texts within the larger canon. Lastly, students belonging to the Shāfi’ī *madhhab* appear with the highest frequency throughout al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary. Once again, there is a similar pattern of Qur’an and then books on the Prophetic tradition,

¹⁶³ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 6:119:383.

followed by two standard Shāfi'ī law books, a work on jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and then a book on grammar.

حفظ القرآن والعمدة والتنبيه والمنهاج الأصلي وألفية ابن ملك

The titles listed below represent the standard curriculum extracted from the 544 sequences of titles recorded in the biographical notices of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*. I have organized the texts into categories that represent my depiction of the stages of learning characteristic of fifteenth-century Mamluk Cairo.

I. Introductory Learning:

a. Grammar: Syntax and Morphology

- i. *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik/Alfiyyat al-Naḥw* (Ibn Mālik-d.627/1274)
 1. 1000 verse poem on Grammar
- ii. *Mulḥat al-I'rāb* (al-Ḥarīrī- d. 444/1052)
 1. Didactic poem on Grammar
- iii. *Alfiyyat Ibn Mu'īṭ*
 1. Grammar book
- iv. *al-Tashīl* (Ibn Mālik)
 1. Grammar book
- v. *al-Shāfiyyah* (Ibn al-Ḥajīb – d.646/1249)
 1. Grammar book
- vi. *Al-Ajurrūmiyyah* (Ibn Ajurrūm-d.723/1323)
 1. Shorter text on syntax.
- vii. *Kāfiyyah* (Ibn al-Ḥajīb)
 1. Syntax

b. Qur'anic Recitation

- i. *Ḥirz al-Amānī fī wajh al-tahānī* (al-Shāṭibī b.538/1144 – d.590/1194)

II. Intermediate Learning:

a. Rhetoric, Logic, Poetry, Theology, Prosody

- i. *Miftāḥ al-'ulūm* (al-Sakkākī d.626/1229)
 1. Rhetoric
- ii. *al-Talkhīṣ* (al-Khatib al-Qazwini – d.739/1338)
 1. abridgement of al-Sakkākī's book on Rhetoric
- iii. *Sharḥ al-shamsiyyah* (Qutb al-Din al-Razi d.766/1365)
 1. Logic
 - a. Commentary on the treatise on logic of 'Alī b 'Umar al-Kātibi al-Qazwīnī (d.693/1274)

- iv. *'aqīdat al-Nasafī* (al-Nasafī)
 1. Statement on belief on theology
 - v. *al-Khazrajiyyah* (Khazraji)
 1. Book on meters of poetry (prosody)
 - vi. *al-Maqṣid al-jalīl fī 'ilm al-Khalīl* (Ibn al-Ḥajīb– d.646/1249)
 1. Book on meters of poetry (prosody)
 - b. Prophetic Sciences
 - i. *Alfiyyat al-Ḥadīth* (Walī al-Dīn al-'Arāqī)
 - ii. *Arba 'ūn ḥadīth al-Nawawī/ Arba 'un al-Nawawī* (Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Sharaf b. Murrī al-Nawawī)
 1. “the Forty Hadiths” collection of 40 hadiths
 - iii. *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ/ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī d. 256/870)
 1. *Ḥadīth* collection
- III. Advanced Learning:
- a. Legal Ḥadīth
 - i. *al-Ilmām fī aḥādīth al-aḥkām* (Taqī al-Dīn Abu Al-Aath Muhammad Ibn 'Ali)
 - ii. *'Umdat al-aḥkām 'an sayyid al-anām* (Taqī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ghanī b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Maqdisī d.600/1203)
 - b. Jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) by *madhhab*
 - i. Shafī'i:
 1. *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* (al-Subkī)
 2. *al-Minhāj al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl* (Qāḍī Bayḍāwī (d.685/1286))
 3. *Mukhtaṣar al-Aṣlī/ Mukhtaṣar al-Muntadrā* (Ibn al-Hajib)
 - ii. Maliki:
 1. *al-Sharḥ al-'Aḍudī* ('Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī)
 - a. commentary on Ibn al-Hajib's book on *Uṣul al-fiqh* (Mukhtasar al-Asli)
 - iii. Hanafi:
 1. *Tanqīḥ* (Ṣadr al-Sharī'ah)
 2. *Uṣūl al-Shāshī* (al-Shāshī)
 - iv. Hanbali:
 1. *Muḥarrar* (Safī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mu'min)
 - c. Law Books by *madhhab*:
 - i. Shafī'i:
 1. *al-Minhāj al-far'ī = Minhāj al-fiqh = Minhāj al-ṭālibīn* (al-Nawawī)
 2. *al-Tanbīh* (Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi)
 3. *Rawdat al-Ṭālibīn* (Rawdat) (al-Nawawī)
 4. *al-Ḥāwī* (al-Mawardi)
 - ii. Maliki:
 1. *Risāla* (Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani)
 2. *Mukhtasar Ibn Hajib al-far'ī* (Ibn al-Hajib)
 - iii. Hanafi:

1. *Kanz al-daqa`iq* (‘Abd ‘Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafi d.710/1310)
2. *Al-Manār* (Abd ‘Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafi)
3. *Mukhtaṣar al-Qudūri / al-Qudūri* (al-Qudūri)

iv. Hanbali:

1. *Mukhtasar al-Khiraqī* (Khiraqī)

After an outline of this general canon emerged from my data, I compared each of the 544 sequences against each other in an attempt to uncover combinations of titles occurring in frequent patterns. First, I traced the memorization of the Qur’an, ‘*Umda, Shāḥibiyyah*, and the

حفظ القرآن و العمدة و الشاطبية و المنهاج

Minhāj.

An exact replica of the above sequence appears six times within the sample.¹⁶⁴ According to subject area, the sequence lists Qur’an, legal *ḥadīth*, Qur’anic recitation, and lastly, a Shāfi’ī law book. In an additional five occurrences extra texts disrupt the sequence in the middle or the above titles are presented in a rearranged order.¹⁶⁵ Lastly, I located two places where the sequence occurs but the student memorizes the *Tanbīh*, a different Shāfi’ī law book instead of the *Minhāj*.¹⁶⁶ I then restricted my sequence to the ‘*Umda, Minhāj*, and *Alfiyyat (Ibn Malik/ al-Naḥw)*, a pattern that excludes the Qur’an and focuses instead on a book on legal *ḥadīth*, a Shāfi’ī law book, and the most commonly memorized grammar book.

العمدة والمنهاج والألفية

In tracing the sequence above, I was able to locate sixteen examples throughout the eleven volumes. Lastly, I searched for the sequence that began with a Shāfi’ī law book, a Shāfi’ī book on jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and the most commonly memorized grammar book.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 2:12:34; 2:283:894; 5:104:288; 7:35:50; 7:228:570; 7:247:1017.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 5:83:312; 6:334:1061; 7:36:76; 7:55:111; 7:163:401.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 7:27:56; 7:77:150.

المنهاج وجمع الجوامع والألفية

I recorded thirty-one occurrences throughout the eleven volumes, five of which included the titles of other books or presented the titles in a different order than shown above.¹⁶⁷ While this information was inconclusive in proving that exact replicated sequences occur in high frequencies, it did provide strong evidence that there existed a standard set of texts representing distinct stages of learning that was followed in a highly patterned way.

I then turned my attention to the other sources of medieval Islamic curriculum to examine any commonalities among them despite their differences in time period and location. As expected, I found the most overlap between the early stages of learning depicted in al-Sakhāwī's and al-Amīn's curriculum, including books on logic, grammar and rhetoric. The hierarchical completion of texts and shared volumes confirms what Stewart suggests was "a degree of stability and regularity in the transmission of knowledge."¹⁶⁸

The final body of evidence that lends support to my argument that the sequence of titles presented in the biographical notices of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* signifies a standard curriculum is the frequency of titles mentioned. Within the sample of 544 scholars, al-Sakhāwī provides information about the student's *madhhab* in 527 cases: 401 Shāfi'ī, 59 Mālikī, 49 Ḥanafī, and 18 Ḥanbalī. First, I will examine the frequency of texts studied in the field of jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*). Of the Shāfi'ī students, 26.98 percent memorized Qaḍī Baydawi's *Minhāj al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl* and 17.95 percent memorized al-Ṣubkī's *Jam' al-Jawami'*. More

¹⁶⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 1-363:942; 2-114:343; 3-198:753, 198:754, 239:898; 4-139:365, 179:454, 228:583, 276:727; 5- 83:312, 114:405, 178:618; 6- 81:278, 99:327, 123:396, 244:853; 7- 61:126, 140:231; 8-203:535, 258:699; 9-129:329, 191:477, 207:511, 263:684, 234:577, 252:602, 284:730; 10- 71:244, 77:270, 141:568.

¹⁶⁸ Stewart, "Book Review of *The Transmission of Knowledge*," 369.

interesting is the case of those memorizing the *Minhāj*: only 4.7 percent belonged to a *madhhab* other than the Shāfi'ī, whereas 18.2 percent of students recorded to have memorized *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* belonged to a different *madhhab*. Similarly, every student who memorized Sadr al-Shar'iah's book on the subject of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), *al-Tanqih*, was affiliated with the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. The data compiled from the al-Sakhāwī's text shows that 27.8 percent of all Ḥanbalīs that followed the standard texts had memorized Safī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mu'min's *al-Muḥarrar*. When calculating the total number of students who memorized Safī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mu'min's *al-Muḥarrar*, 71.4 percent of the students were affiliated with the Ḥanbalī rite.¹⁶⁹

In my investigation of legal textbooks I gathered additional support for my argument that in general a student memorized specific law books associated with his legal *madhhab*. The three Shāfi'ī law textbooks that appeared most frequently within this sample were the *al-Minhāj al-far'ī*, *Tanbīh*, and *Hawī*. Within the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* 62.3 percent of all students recorded in Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* memorized *al-Minhāj al-far'ī*. This estimation suggests that *al-Minhāj al-far'ī* was the most important textbook for the study of law within the Shāfi'ī *madhhab*. The *Tanbīh* and *Hāwī* were memorized by 23.9 percent and 7.9 percent of Shāfi'ī students, respectively. An additional 37 students, representing 13 percent of those who memorized *al-Minhāj al-far'ī*, did not have a recorded *madhhab* affiliation. In considering the possibility that all or part of this 13 percent of students belonged to a *madhhab* other than the Shāfi'ī, I examined the percentages of students in other *madhhabs* recorded to have memorized or presented either the *Tanbīh* or *Hāwī*. A mere two students, 1.9 percent, belonging to a *madhhab* other than the Shāfi'ī memorized the *Tanbīh*, and none are recorded to have memorized or

¹⁶⁹ The data compiled shows that two Shāfi'ī students memorized *al-Muḥarrar*, representing 28.6 percent of the total sample size. The small sample of Ḥanbalī students is responsible for the skewed data in this case.

presented the *Ḥāwī*. This suggests that if any percentage of the 37 students did in fact belong to another *madhhab* it was likely only a small minority.

The argument that a student studied law books within his own *madhhab* is strengthened by the data compiled for students belonging to the other *madhhabs* as well. Of those students that followed the Mālikī curriculum, 67.8 percent and 42.4 percent of them memorized the *Risāla* and *Mukhtaṣar Ibn Ḥajīb*, respectively. Of the three law textbooks associated most frequently with Ḥanafī students, *al-Manār* was memorized by 40.8 percent of Ḥanafīs, thus making the most memorized by Ḥanafī students. *Al-Kanz* and *Mukhtaṣar Ibn al-Ḥajīb* were memorized by 30.6 and 12.2 percents of Ḥanafīs, respectively. Only 22 percent of Ḥanbalī students were recorded to have memorized the *Mukhtasar al-Khiraqī*. In addition, 75 percent of students memorizing this particular text belonged to a *madhhab* other than the Ḥanbalī. At first glance these results seem to contradict the argument that students memorized specific textbooks within their legal *madhhab*. Upon a closer examination of the data, one notices that the figures calculated for the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* are problematic. There are a mere 18 Ḥanbalī students found in al-Sakhāwī's text for whom he recorded this educational information. To highlight the paucity of Ḥanbalī examples one should recall that there are 401 Shāfi'ī included in the sample.

Regardless of the methods used to derive either an outline of the stages of learning or a specific curricular list, each body of evidence compiled here illustrates the standardization of the education system. As reflected in the biographical notices of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, the ages at which a student memorized the Qur'an and then later presented higher-level texts bespeaks a recognizable structure of learning in which a student acquired—in his formative years—the elementary skills necessary to advance to a specialized legal education. Adding further support to this claim is the fact that a majority of students, regardless of their affiliation to

a legal *madhhab*, memorized a standard book on grammar the *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik/ Alfiyyat al-Nahw*. In comparing these statistics with the percentages of students memorizing legal textbooks it is clear that a student's presentation of a legal text depended heavily on his affiliation to a particular legal *madhhab*. The 544 sequences included in the sample suggest that a student's course of study adhered to a standard curriculum rather than an informal and haphazard selection of texts at the professor's discretion as Berkey and Chamberlain claim. I now examine the distinct kinds of licenses that were granted at the culmination of a student's advanced legal education to reveal yet another facet of the institutionalization of medieval Islamic education.

CHAPTER THREE: A SYSTEM OF DEGREES

In his book *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, George Makdisi contends that specific documents of achievement, *ijāzahs*, were awarded to a student at the culmination of his legal education in a *madrasa*. Makdisi argues that the ultimate goal of Islamic education was to produce a jurisconsult (*muftī*), an authority whom Muslims could consult about the law because of its influence on all aspects of Islamic life. The specific *ijāzah* that authorized a student to “teach law and issue legal opinions (*fatwas*)” was the *ijāzat at-tadrīs wa ‘l-iftā’*, which was awarded after the student completed an oral examination on particular books that had been studied.¹⁷⁰ Stewart adds that the student would have also completed a “doctoral thesis” (*ta ‘līqah*) that in combination with his oral examination would prove competence in disputation (*munāzara*)—the third function of the jurisconsult that is often excluded from the title of the *ijāzah* earned.¹⁷¹ This argument about the existence of authorizations for legal mastery—a branch of his broader thesis regarding the overlooked institutional character of Islamic education—implies that in addition to following a standard set of texts there also existed a formalized and specific practice of granting degrees.

Advancing the debate established in the introduction of the current study, Jonathan Berkey, Michael Chamberlain, and Daphna Ephrat criticize Makdisi’s interpretation of the *ijāzahs*’ physical characteristics, purpose, and status in medieval society. Devin J. Stewart, in his definitive study on the subject of *ijāzahs*, critically summarizes the scholars’ objections in four concise points. First, the specific licenses granted to teach and/or issue legal opinions were not

¹⁷⁰ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 148-151.

¹⁷¹ Stewart, “The Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 45.

physical documents. Second, the agreements—perhaps exchanged orally—were not formal or official. Third, the granting of licenses was separated from the institution of the *madrasa*. Fourth, the *ijāzahs* did not confer authorized credentials qualifying students for higher positions of leadership, teaching, or occupational advancement.¹⁷² I scrutinized the first eleven volumes of Sakhāwī’s *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’* for textual evidence supporting or rejecting these objections. Prior to detailing my findings in relation to published literature on the topic, I present briefly the history of the emergence of the *ijāzah* and explain the different kinds of *ijāzahs* found in al-Sakhāwī’s text.

The original understanding of the technical term *ijāzah* meant permission to transmit *ḥadīth*, exclusively.¹⁷³ Stewart states that the earliest reference to specific authorizations dates to the second/eighth century.¹⁷⁴ However, by the mid-fourth/ tenth century, Makdisi finds evidence beginning with the jurisconsult Abū ‘Ali al-Ṭabarī, arguing that the language in notices of *ijāzah* had by this time adopted a legal character—meaning that specialized terminology relating to the law is used.¹⁷⁵ Stewart, agreeing with Makdisi’s fundamental argument about this shift, argues that certainly by the Mamluk period mention of *ijāzahs* in biographical literature frequently refer to *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa l’iftā’* of the legal type Makdisi proposes. To warn against ignoring the existence of distinct types of *ijāzahs*—a fault Stewart attributes to his scholastic opponents—he

¹⁷² Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law”, 48.

Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 16, 22, 43, 44.
Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 87-90.

¹⁷³ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 147.

¹⁷⁴ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 46.

¹⁷⁵ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 147.

encourages future researchers to pay careful attention to context to help one decipher which kind of *ijāzah* the text under study refers.¹⁷⁶

The entry devoted to a Shāfi'ī scholar born in 755/1354 recorded in the sixth volume of *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* illustrates how al-Sakhāwī distinguishes *ijāzahs* for *ḥadīth* from those of a legal nature. He writes, “He was given an *ijāzah*. Indeed, he granted him permission to issue legal opinions.”¹⁷⁷ In this example, al-Sakhāwī confirms that the *ijāzah* was meant to serve as a legal degree granting the Shāfi'ī permission to give legal opinions. Stewart provides a list of several kinds of *ijāzahs* including the categories and subtypes delineated by al-Qalqashandī (b. 756/1355):¹⁷⁸

- 1) Licenses for issuing legal opinions and teaching law (*ijāzat al-futyā [l- 'iftā'] wa 'l-tadrīs*);
- 2) Presentations of books (*'arāḍat al-kutub*);
- 3) Licenses for transmitted material (*ijāzat bi'l marwiyyāt*) / License of transmission (*ijāzat al-riwayah*) such as:
 - (i) The license for transmitted texts, written on petitions (*al-ijāzah bi 'l-marwiyyat 'alā al-istid'ā'āt*)
 - (ii) General license (*ijāzah 'āmmah*).¹⁷⁹

In addition to those cited above, I found evidence of other distinct types of *ijāzahs* in the text of al-Sakhāwī's biographical notices. First, I discovered the frequent occurrence of the “license to teach (texts)” (*ijāzat al-iqrā'*)—a license that is completely overlooked in existing

¹⁷⁶ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 52.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 6:27:66.

¹⁷⁸ al-Qalqashandī was a legal scholar. He wrote a manual for secretaries, *Ṣubḥ*, that teaches them how to write documents, one of which is how to write *ijāzahs*. For more information see Devin J. Stewart's “The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria,” in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi*, ed. Devin J. Stewart et al. (Cambridge: The E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 45-90.

¹⁷⁹ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 49-51.

scholarship on the subject. I first recorded the *ijāzat al-iqrā'* in relation to the *ijāzat al-tadrīs* and the *ijāzat l-iftā'* either directly preceding or succeeding the two, suggesting the license authorized an additional legal function. I later found evidence disproving this possibility because there are more frequent examples of the *ijāzat al-iqrā'* mentioned independently than as part of a sequence of authorizations. In the context of biographical notices, the *ijāzat al-iqrā'* is likely a distinct form of *ijāzah* that grants a student general permission to teach in a certain field rather than specifying a particular book.¹⁸⁰ One piece of evidence showing that the *ijāzat al-iqrā'* is a distinct kind of *ijāzah* from that of both the *tadrīs* and the *iftā'* is found in fourth volume of *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*. In this example, a student is recorded to received permission to teach law and issue legal opinions in addition to obtaining the *ijāzat al-iqrā'*.¹⁸¹ Additionally, there is also evidence in the fourth volume of *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* that the *ijāzat al-iqrā'* was perhaps a permission given to a student to teach books within an entire field of study—likely the Prophetic sciences (*ḥadīth*).¹⁸²

One example found in the fourth volume of *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* states that directly after studying under the supervision of al-ʿAsqalānī in the ten readings of the Qur'an—meaning the ten ways to recite the Qur'an—a Shāfi'ī student was given the *ijāzat al-iqrā'*.¹⁸³ This example suggests that the *iqrā'* here refers to the field of Qur'anic recitation rather than one book in particular, yet in general there remains a considerable amount of uncertainty in distinguishing the exact function *ijāzat al-iqrā'*. A Ḥanafī scholar born in the year 804/1401 may provide a counter example to my assessment that the *ijāzat al-iqrā'* was a more general *ijāzah* that permitted a

¹⁸⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 8:53.

¹⁸¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:72:209.

¹⁸² Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:30:94.

¹⁸³ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:60:184.

student to teach in a certain subject area. In this biographical notice, al-Sakhāwī writes that the student was granted permission to teach the science of *ḥadīth* and *iqrā'*.¹⁸⁴ Following earlier logic, if the scholar were granted permission in *ḥadīth*, it would be repetitious to also state that he earned an *ijāzat al-iqrā'* if that too suggested the authority to teach *ḥadīth*. While a large number of additional examples are necessary to make a definitive statement about the function of the *ijāzat al-iqrā'*, I argue that *iqrā'* refers to an area of *ḥadīth* that is separated from the sciences of *ḥadīth*, perhaps suggesting a specific focus or specialization within the larger field of *ḥadīth*.

Another *ijāzah*, previously unmentioned within the field, is the perhaps unusual authorization referred to in al-Sakhāwī as *funūn al-ḥadīth*.¹⁸⁵ The paucity of examples prevents any full understanding of the term, but this particular *ijāzah* most likely authorized a student in *ḥadīth* criticism. Another *ijāzah* scarcely found in al-Sakhāwī is a specialized degree authorizing mastery in grammar (*ijāzat al-naḥw*).¹⁸⁶ The second occurrence of this *ijāzah* found in the fourth volume of the Arabic text states:

أذن له الجوجري في تدريس الفقه والنحو والافادة و الحيوي ضمن جماعة في اقراء الألفية

This passage asserts that “he was granted permission in teaching law and teaching grammar and *ifāda* and al-Muḥyawī (another scholar) in a group of people, gave him an *ijāzah* for teaching the *Alfiyyah*.” The specific mention of the *Alfiyyah*, a one thousand-verse poem and standard grammar book by Ibn Mālik, confirms that this particular student was authorized in grammar separately from the other *ijāzahs* that he earned in teaching law. The fact that this student received permission in an introductory field of study such as grammar suggests that *ijāzahs* were

¹⁸⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:252:654.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 8:438.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:186:472; 4:226:574.

granted in all fields of study, yet there is no known record of this in scholarship to date. This passage also introduces the final *ijāzah* that my study highlights for the first time, the *ijāzat al-ifāda*.

The only previous mention of *ifāda* is a brief reference to the term by Makdisi in his third chapter “Posts, Occupations, Functions” as part of the discussion on the Docent of Law (*Mufīd*).¹⁸⁷ In his effort to distinguish the occupation of a *mufīd* from the higher esteemed positions of Professor of law (*mudarris*), and Deputy Professor of law (*naʿib mudarris*), Makdisi writes that the *mufīd*’s chief function was to “impart useful knowledge (*ifāda*).”¹⁸⁸ Throughout the biographical notices of al-Sakhāwī’s *al-Ḍawʿ al-lāmiʿ* I located several examples of this *ijāzah* that appear to suggest its distinct function from the *ijāzat al-tadrīs* and also the *ijāzat al-iftāʿ*. The “useful knowledge” is arguably the sciences of hadith. In the biographical notice of a Meccan Ḥanafī student born in 804/1401¹⁸⁹, al-Sakhāwī writes:

أذن له في الافادة علوم الحديث كلها واقرائها.

The formulation “he was given permission in *ifāda* the sciences of hadith and the *iqrāʿ* of it” suggests that *ifāda* is synonymous with teaching the “sciences of ḥadīth.” It is interesting to note that the Meccan student is also granted permission in *iqrāʿ* eliminating both the possibility that *iqrāʿ* was a general *ijāzah* that implied mastery in *ḥadīth* and also that it served the same purpose as *ifāda*—a suggestion mentioned earlier. In contrast to the small number of examples of the *ijāzah al-iqrāʿ*, *funūn al-hadith*, *ijāzat al-naḥw*, and *ijāzat al-ifāda* al-Sakhāwī provides frequent mention of the *ijāzahs* for *iftāʿ* and *tadrīs*. I now address Berkey and Chamberlain’s main

¹⁸⁷ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 195.

¹⁸⁸ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 195.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ al-lāmiʿ*, 4:252:654.

objections raised against Makdisi's study about *ijāzahs* using evidence about the character, function, and status of legal *ijāzahs* from al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary.

The *ijāzat al-iftā'* and *ijāzat al-tadrīs* are potentially distinct *ijāzahs* from one another, but their occurrence as a combined authorization (*ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs*) or (*ijāzat al-tadrīs wa'l-iftā'*) has in itself most interested scholars in the field such as Makdisi and Stewart. Makdisi proposes that in general when the two permissions are combined, *tadrīs* precedes *iftā'*.¹⁹⁰ Stewart, in his study of several Mamluk sources, concluded that the order is not fixed, but that when both are mentioned in combination, *iftā'* more often precedes *tadrīs*.¹⁹¹ I examined closely seventy occurrences of the *ijāzahs'* combined arrangement across eleven volumes of biographical notices. Within this sample, there are forty-three appearances of *ijāzahs* for *iftā'* and then *tadrīs*, representing over half of all cases. This proportion is greatly affected by data gathered from the fourth volume in which there are ten occurrences of *ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs* and a mere two in the reverse order. Excluding the fourth volume for a moment, there is a more even record of thirty-three appearances of *ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs* and twenty-five *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa'l-iftā'* in the remaining ten volumes included in the sample. This evidence would appear to suggest that al-Sakhāwī does not exhibit a preference or pattern for a specific ordering. Al-Sakhāwī uses the *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa'l-iftā'* in seven of the eight occurrences within the eighth volume alone and as mentioned earlier ten of twelve *ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs* found in the fourth volume. I located one example where *fatwā* replaces the word *iftā'*.¹⁹² In this example *tadrīs* precedes *fatwā*. Thus, the high variation in arrangement confirms Stewart's analysis that their order is not fixed, but also opens an avenue for further statistical and qualitative research to

¹⁹⁰ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 148, 270.

¹⁹¹ Stewart, "Doctorate of Islamic Law," 55.

¹⁹² Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 2:85:251.

determine whether al-Sakhāwī's word order is a deliberate one, and if so what other factors potentially contribute to the order in which a student was granted such permissions.

My detailed reading of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* confirms Stewart's previous research that argues the use of two main verbs to describe the granting of *ijāzahs* or certificates of authorization. First, *ajāzahu* (*bi-*) is the fourth form of the verb meaning "he permitted." As mentioned, the verbal noun *ijāzah* is translated as "permission, authorization; approval; license." Second, *adhina lahu* (*bi-*, or *fi*) is the first form of the verb '*adhina* meaning "to permit or allow." A common translation of both verbs in the context of educational certification is to authorize a student for a specific field of study—such as to issue legal opinion or teach law. Stewart remarks accurately that within biographical sources these verbs appear in greater frequency than the noun that describes the actual document or the act of authorization itself: *ijāzah*.¹⁹³ In contrast to the uncertainty that plagues our understanding of al-Sakhāwī's arrangement of *iftā'* and *tadrīs*, there is a clear pattern to his use of verbs within the Arabic text. The verb *adhina* is used when referring to the authorizations together. The verb *ajāzahu*, in contrast, is used in general to signal the *ijāzah* for hadith.

I now turn my attention to a detailed examination of the characteristics, purpose, and occupational value of the *ijāzahs* to issue legal opinions (*iftā'*) and to teach law (*tadrīs*). While Jonathan Berkey concedes to Makdisi and Stewart that *ijāzahs* constituted a formalized system of degrees—nevertheless writing that it was one that was subject to "abuses"¹⁹⁴—Chamberlain is unyielding in his contention that the different forms of *ijāzahs* "were not necessarily attested by a certificate, but were often expressed as much by the verbal form *yujūzu* as through the verbal

¹⁹³ Stewart, "Doctorate of Islamic Law," 54.

¹⁹⁴ Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 31.

noun *ijāzah*, and also by other verbs such as *adhana* or *aḥsana*.”¹⁹⁵ In response to Chamberlain’s claim that the *ijāzah* was perhaps an oral testimony or agreement rather than a written document I turn first to Stewart’s research on al-Qalqashandī’s *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā* for information regarding the physical characteristics of *ijāzahs*.

Drawing on al-Qalqashandī’s descriptions, Stewart writes that the *ijāzahs* were “written on paper of different size and quality, with scripts of different style, size, and spacing, reflecting the documents’ relative importance.”¹⁹⁶ Despite the lack of more explicit descriptions of the physical nature of *ijāzahs*, it seems clear to me that *ijāzahs* were physical documents rather than solely informal oral agreements. The main evidence supporting this conclusion is al-Sakhāwī’s habit of quoting from the document that was apparently in front of him.¹⁹⁷ Throughout the eleven volumes included in the current study, al-Sakhāwī exhibits a tendency of quoting directly from the text of the *ijāzahs* awarded. In the following section I present translations of passages that support my conclusion that *ijāzahs* are in fact physical certifications.

In the sixth volume, the reader encounters an *ijāzat l-iftā’ wa tadrīs* that was received through a written letter rather than in person. It appears that the recipient of the *ijāzah* had studied with two men and that he was granted his authorization at a later time by one of them, or by a third person. Al-Sakhāwī writes:

بالاذن له في الافتاء والتدريس على ما قرأته بخطه

¹⁹⁵ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 88-89. To avoid a repetition of Devin J. Stewart’s corrections of Chamberlain’s errors concerning verb usage and his analysis of such, see Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 48-49.

¹⁹⁶ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 52.

¹⁹⁷ This did not occur in all cases, but frequently throughout the biographical dictionary.

Granted him permission to issue legal opinions and teach law according to what I read in his handwriting.¹⁹⁸

In this example, al-Sakhāwī explicitly states both that he read—suggesting from a written document—and that what he read was in *his* handwriting, meaning the grantor. An argument suggesting that al-Sakhāwī’s reference to handwriting is merely a convention that in reality referred to an informal conversation is proven false by the fact that al-Sakhāwī distinguishes between the two modes of data collection. For example, al-Sakhāwī explains that he learned that al-Suyūfī’s claim to have studied with a certain professor was false from a conversation he had with that professor himself.¹⁹⁹ In the current example, al-Sakhāwī is emphasizing that he learned of this student’s *ijāzah* after reading from a physical document the handwriting of another scholar. Another example, located in the eighth volume is translated:

I saw the permission [*ijāzah*] of the first one of these, and that the man gave to him an *ijāzah* for issuing legal opinions (*iftā’*) and teaching law (*tadrīs*), and then he was described as a great scholar and the consummate scholar, and the one possessed of much knowledge of many fields, and he calls him the greatest of judges, the mufti of the Muslims, and the adornment of the teachers. He praised the soundness of his mind, and then he made the *ijāzah* long [*meaning he went on in his descriptions of the man’s excellence*] and he dated it in the year [8]80 and there witnessed to him [*here, al-Sakhāwī provides the name of the notaries present*].²⁰⁰

To an even greater extent than the previous passage, al-Sakhāwī provides abundant textual clues that he is reading from a physical document. First, he makes a positive statement that he *saw* the *ijāzah*. Al-Sakhāwī then comments on the length of the document that is arguably a physical dimension of the license. Next, al-Sakhāwī records the date of the *ijāzah*. While one could argue

¹⁹⁸ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 6:12:32.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 4:69:203.

²⁰⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 8:147:240.

that the date refers to the event of granting the license, a more convincing assessment is that the physical document displayed a date on it. Al-Sakhāwī's emphasis on the handwriting, length and date of the *ijāzah* in combination with a list of names—presumably the signatures of the witnesses—suggest strongly that his knowledge of this *ijāzah* was the result of his viewing a material object. A final illustration supporting the physical character of *ijāzahs* is presented towards the end of the sixth volume. Al-Sakhāwī writes:

He describes him with magnificent attributes at its beginning: “the prominent authority and the scholar who does works [*meaning he is not only educated but also devout*] the unique consummate scholar, lion of the debators, and strongest of the investigators.” He is extreme in describing him.²⁰¹

The first word translated “he described him” (*waṣafahu*) indicates that the following portion of the text is not the words of al-Sakhāwī, but rather another scholar's praises for his student included in the actual *ijāzah* text. Additionally, the use of the word *beginning* is another indication that al-Sakhāwī was deliberately referring to the physical location of a description within a tangible document that would have had a distinct beginning and end. The final sentence critiquing the grantor for “making extreme” his descriptions of the student are evidence not only of al-Sakhāwī's distaste for this characterization and recognition that it is perhaps not a merited description, but also that al-Sakhāwī does not take credit for the writing, but instead he was reading a document granted by another scholar.

Lastly, Stewart provides a useful outline for the fundamental structure and organization of the *ijāzah* document itself. Similar to a biographical entry, the *ijāzahs* have a more or less rigid structure. Initiated with a prayer, the document then offers a section legitimating the importance of sacred Islamic law and the issuing of legal opinions. Then, as illustrated in the

²⁰¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 6:244:853.

translations above, the candidate for *ijāzah* is praised with admiring epithets describing—and at times exaggerating—his academic achievements and status. This section is followed by an explanation of the circumstances of the permission—whether it was earned or requested—and finally, the actual granting of the *ijāzah* is outlined, followed by any additional or subsidiary certifications and of course is concluded with a colophon recording the grantor’s name, epithets, and the date.²⁰² Witnesses, or notaries, were then called upon to sign the document—at least in some cases. The actual wording of the document within this otherwise standardized outline, Stewart argues, was flexible, allowing the grantor to display his literary talents.²⁰³

The quantitative data collected also offers interesting conclusions concerning the average age that a student received an *ijāzat al-al-iftā’ wa ‘l-tadrīs* authorizing him to issue legal opinions and teach law. One should note that many entries omit specific mention of a scholar’s age at the time of *ijāzah*. In his article, “The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Egypt and Syria,” Devin J. Stewart describes examples of students receiving the license to issue legal opinions between their early twenties and early thirties. He argues that Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba’s report that ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī (d. 771/1372) received an *ijāzat al-al-iftā’* at the age of 18 was very young.²⁰⁴ Of those entries included in al-Sakhāwī’s text that provide explicit ages of authorization one can calculate that the average age of students achieving this authorization was twenty-four.²⁰⁵ The youngest recorded age is sixteen,²⁰⁶ while the oldest is thirty-three.²⁰⁷ The corpus assembled here supports the logical conclusion that the standard curriculum of texts outlined in the second chapter was in

²⁰² Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 58.

²⁰³ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 58.

²⁰⁴ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 60.

²⁰⁵ The exact age was 23.583.

²⁰⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 7:45:93.

²⁰⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 6:241:848.

fact completed in a student's mid-to late adolescence, allowing for the completion of a degree in one's mid-to late twenties.

One subject in al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary,²⁰⁸ recorded in the sixth volume, received an *ijāzah* after he traveled to Egypt in the year 789/1387 to study under the instruction of two famous Shāfi'ī jurists, Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401) and Ibn al-Bulqīnī (d. 805/1403).²⁰⁹ Although the text omits an exact date that the student earned his permission to grant legal opinions, it states that after receiving the *ijāzat al-iftā'* he was appointed to the position of jurisconsult (*mufti*) of the *Dar al-'Adl* in the year 792 AH. The *Dar al-'Adl* is an institution designed for the purpose of issuing legal opinions known as *fatwās*, and the advisor who issues such *fatwas* is the *mufti*. Relying on al-Sakhāwī's consistent use of a chronological organization within each entry, one can conclude that this particular student finished his legal degree within three years, before he was appointed to the position of *mufti*. From the body of evidence collected one can conclude that the purpose of *ijāzah* was to serve as a formal degree that allowed a student—in the case of *ijāzat l-iftā' wa tadrīs*—to grant legal opinions and to teach law. As the third and final stage of the medieval Islamic legal curriculum, the *ijāzat l-iftā' wa tadrīs* was a moment of academic transformation whereby the candidate for authorization becomes a scholar after years of study as a student. Perhaps most important in this transformation is the mention of academic lineage. Prior to mention of an *ijāzah*, a student's academic achievements, from memorization of the Qur'an to his mastery of a standard set of texts, are universally wedded to his professors. Chamberlain and Berkey attribute this habit of

²⁰⁸ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 6:76:269.

²⁰⁹ For more information see Devin J. Stewart's "The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria," in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi*, ed. Devin J. Stewart et al. (Cambridge: The E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 45-90.

description to an informal system of education whereby the personal relationships supersede any formalized institution of learning such as a documented system of degrees. A close examination of the text provides evidence that this is not the case.

Following a student's certified permission to grant legal opinions (*iftā'*) or teach law (*tadrīs*), the citation of professors' names wanes. This is to be expected if a student is in fact authorized in a particular field because he then becomes a scholar himself.²¹⁰ An example supporting the notion that an *ijāzah* functioned as a formal degree is drawn from the fifth volume of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Daw' al-lāmi'*. The biographical notice of a Cairene Shāfi'ī student born in the year 765/1365 reads:

He was given permission by more than one of his masters in *iftā'* and *tadrīs* ...and he (meaning one of his masters) described him as the master of the jurists, learned and trustworthy, and that he has come to recognize (found out) his qualification and his deserving status.²¹¹

This quotation suggests that the *ijāzah* is testifying to the student's overall ability and worthiness to gain permission in issuing legal opinions and teaching law. Additionally, directly after the mention of the student's worthiness, al-Sakhāwī writes that the student was named to the position of Deputy judge (*nā'ib al-qāḍī*). This introduces the final component of an *ijāzah* as a valued occupational credential in the context of Mamluk Cairo.

²¹⁰ Stewart also has a discussion on this issue, see Devin J. Stewart's "The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria," in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi*, ed. Devin J. Stewart et al. (Cambridge: The E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 45-90.

²¹¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw' al-lamī*, 5:61:225.

Stewart argues that those who obtained the *ijāzat l-iftā' wa tadrīs* “gained access to positions as judge, deputy judge, professor of law, either as a titular or deputy, or repetitor.”²¹² In the source examined, I too found evidence that suggests that one’s achievement of an *ijāzah* was often—although not absolutely—a prerequisite for attainment of such important jobs within Mamluk society. One example of a Hanafi candidate for the *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa l-iftā'*, recorded in the eighth volume, states that he was granted these permissions and then directly afterwards appointed to the position of a repetitor or an assistant professor (*mu'īd*) in a *madrasa*.²¹³ Another example that emphasizes both the function of an *ijāzah* in certifying a student in a particular field of study and also its importance as an occupational credential is found in the fourth volume of *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*. Al-Sakhāwī records the personal history of a student born around the year 827/1424 who was granted permission to issue legal opinions and teach law by Ibn al-Bulqīnī.²¹⁴ The following sentence explains that after receiving the *ijāzahs*, he issued legal opinions (*fatwās*) and he became the teacher (*shaykh*) of an institution in Hebron—likely a *madrasa* or mosque there—as a partner to his uncle in replacing his father’s old post.

A Shāfi'ī scholar in the fourth volume who memorized the standard texts was granted an *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa l-iftā'* and then immediately al-Sakhāwī lists the positions he held in five institutions of learning including *madrasas* and *khānaqāhs*.²¹⁵ Similarly, in the eighth volume, al-Sakhāwī includes another Shāfi'ī, born in the year 762/1360, who, after obtaining permission to grant legal opinions and teach law, served as a judge in Mecca and then later in Medina.²¹⁶ The chronology of this particular subject’s biographical notice suggests that the *ijāzahs* did in

²¹² Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 63-4.

²¹³ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 8:265:711.

²¹⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:29:93.

²¹⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:38:117.

²¹⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 8:162:385.

fact serve as credentials for his later positions as a judge. A similar pattern of *ijāzah* and then employment in the judiciary appears in the tenth volume.²¹⁷ Shortly afterwards, al-Sakhāwī mentions another student born in 851/1448 who, after being granted an *ijāzah* by his father (and others like his father) for teaching law and issuing legal opinions, gave legal opinions.²¹⁸ In this case, al-Sakhāwī's juxtaposition of his record of the student's *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa l-iftā'* with his act of providing legal opinions suggests that the *ijāzah* served as a credential that then allowed the student to serve as a *mufīī*.

Despite the frequent mention or allusion to a student's acquiring or performing a job after receiving a legal *ijāzah*, this is not always the case. An example taken from the sixth volume of *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* describes a student born shortly after the year 760/1359.²¹⁹ Although his early educational background is described in sufficient detail, there exists no mention of any occupational posts directly following the record of his receiving an *ijāzat l-iftā' wa tadrīs*, but instead the information is provided much later in the biographical notice. One conclusion is that this contradiction is attributable to a simple inconsistency on the part of al-Sakhāwī in the presentation of his record. In consideration of the otherwise rigid organization of biographical notices it is more likely that al-Sakhāwī deliberately delayed the presentation of this information to highlight either elongated academic study or other personal undertakings that somehow supported the scholar's later employment.

In their denial that the *ijāzah* was part of a formalized system of certification, Berkey and Chamberlain point out the personal rather than institutional aspects of the *ijāzah*. To strengthen his argument, Chamberlain comments that fathers obtained *ijāzahs* for their sons, thus arguing

²¹⁷ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 10:19:55.

²¹⁸ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:33:102.

²¹⁹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 6:54:155.

that this form of nepotism denied the possibility of institutional involvement or objective structure.²²⁰ Within al-Sakhāwī's text the evidence suggests that, while sons did obtain *ijāzahs* from their fathers, it often occurred after a period of studying under him. A Shāfi'ī scholar from Damascus studied law under his father first and then later was granted permission to issue legal opinions and teach law. Immediately following this, he taught law at the al-Qalījiyyah *Madrasa* and others.²²¹ Other cases recorded earlier in the fourth volume also describe sons' receiving *ijāzahs* after first studying law under their fathers. In the first case, the student receives permission to teach law and then replaces his father's post at a *madrasa* or mosque, while in the second example he is granted an *ijāzah* for teaching law and issuing legal opinions directly from his father and other scholars like his father and immediately thereafter begins to issue his own legal opinions.²²² I argue that these examples are less illustrative of nepotism or unearned certification, but instead provide even stronger evidence that the *ijāzah* was a necessary credential. If there were truly an absence of any institutional framework governing the appointment of positions, al-Sakhāwī would likely only record that a son acceded his father's position. The explicit mention of a systematized process of fathers obtaining legal *ijāzahs* for their sons illustrates that there was a societal norm that in order to legitimate a son replacing his father's post, he would first need to receive an *ijāzah*. Unfortunately, the text did not mention any examples where sons lacked the appropriate *ijāzah* and therefore their authority to replace their fathers in judicial positions was challenged.

Another interesting trend throughout al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* is his record of students receiving an *ijāzat al-iftā'* immediately after mastering a specific text. In his article

²²⁰ Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 88.

²²¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 5:7:16.

²²² Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:29:93; 4:33:102; 4:57:179.

“The Doctorate of Islamic Law,” Stewart discusses this custom suggesting that in the context of a biographical notice, its grammar, and the fact that the student’s legal studies were mentioned last, the *ijāzah* was an indication of a specific authorization to issue legal opinions (*ijāzat al-iftā’*).²²³ The biographical notices of al-Sakhāwī present more explicit proof that once a student mastered a specific law book he was only then authorized in the field of legal opinions or to teach law. In the fifth volume of *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’* a Shāfi’ī student born in the year 804/1401 was granted permission to issue legal opinions and teach law.²²⁴ In the sentence directly preceding this information, the reader learns that the Shāfi’ī student had studied with a professor and completed a text by Ibn al-Naqīb, *al-Nukat*, under his supervision. The juxtaposition of these two sentences suggests that this student would have studied the text in its entirety first and as a result had earned the judiciary *ijāzahs*. In the ninth volume, al-Sakhāwī records a Ḥanafī student who after studying the standard texts was given permission to teach books (*ijāzat al-iqrā’*) and especially those on jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and a law book by a man from Luxor.²²⁵

Perhaps the best example of the progression of one individual student receiving a series of distinct *ijāzahs* upon the completion of his mastery of texts appears in the ninth volume. In his description of this Shāfi’ī student in Cairo, al-Sakhāwī writes:

He granted him a general *ijāzah*, and then in the next year he received an *ijāzat al-iftā’*. He became interested in ta’bir (the interpretation of dreams). He read with Abū Hamid al-Qudsī then his work called ‘The Skillful Administration, on the Sciences of Dream Interpretation’ and he described him as a master imam learned consummate the exacting the precise the peerless in this science he is the exacting scholar of the various paths and the beneficial teacher of the various sects and the mufti of the Muslims in it (meaning in this science), and he gave him permission to teach this (meaning the book on dream interpretation), and moreover teaching

²²³ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 56-7.

²²⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 5:6:14.

²²⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*, 9:112:296.

all of the books of that science because of his knowledge and of the perfection of his qualification for this and his perfect preparation for it and that he transmit from him all of his transmitted works and his own writings and he dated that in Jumada the first in the year 877 (1472) then he gave him the permission in Jumada the first of the following year to issue legal opinions and teach in it (most likely meaning in the science of dream interpretation).

It is interesting that after receiving a general *ijāzah*, the Shāfi‘ī student focused his studies on the science of dream interpretation in order to obtain a degree in it. Al-Sakhāwī explains clearly that because of this student’s mastery of the texts in the field of dream interpretation, he is qualified to transmit his knowledge to the next generation of scholars. This quotation also provides evidence for Makdisi’s argument that in the early stages of learning students studied in many fields and then later specialized when reaching an advanced level of education.

Another interesting discovery connects to an earlier discussion of *madhhabs* within the context of one’s legal education. One entry describing a man earning an *iftā’* states:

He studied every science until he had read in every *madhhab* a book, and he was given the authorization to do *iftā’* in every *madhhab*.²²⁶

When peering through the lens of a medieval biographical dictionary, one must heed Stewart’s warning that careful analysis and translation using the literary context of the entry itself is of utmost importance. In this example, the translation “he had read in every *madhhab*” likely is not meant to literally translate the action of reading an arbitrary book in the physical space of the four *madhhabs* (*Shāfi‘ī*, *Ḥanbalī*, *Ḥanafī*, *Mālikī*). Instead, the text suggests that this scholar studied a law book unique to each of the four main *madhhabs*, and upon his successful completion was granted an authorization to issue legal opinions for each one. Makdisi’s study argues that the authorization to grant legal opinions was not limited by *madhhab*. Stewart

²²⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw‘ al-lāmi‘*, 6:100:330.

explores four examples that authorize students to teach or issue legal opinions for the Shafi'i *madhhab* in particular. From this information—despite the paucity of examples—Stewart concludes “one’s expertise was regularly limited in the certificate itself to one Islamic legal *madhhab*.”²²⁷ I agree with Stewart’s overall conclusion in this respect because the above example was likely four separate *ijāzat al-iftā’* obtained by one individual.

Lastly, I examine the authority of the grantor issuing a legal *ijāzah* in an attempt to show the ties that existed between *madrāsas* as institutions and the granting of degrees. Makdisi, writing on legal authorization argues that no matter how sophisticated or inclusive²²⁸ the *ijāzah* was it “remained an authorization made by one person, and if by more than one, by one at a time.”²²⁹ While Makdisi does not deny that students could also “go on to collect other authorizations from other masters; and he could do this for the same book or books, or for teaching law (based on books studied, as well as disputation), or for issuing legal opinions),”²³⁰ the general opinion demonstrated in his writing was that there was one main scholar who would grant *ijāzahs* to students in each particular field. This raises the question of whether a student derived his legal credentials from one famous scholar or from multiple teachers representing a faculty within a broader institution. In general, I agree that there is evidence that students sought to earn *ijāzahs* from specific teachers.²³¹ Yet, I also found significant evidence within al-Sakhāwī’s text suggesting that students gained additional prestige with each scholar who also granted him a legal *ijāzah*. Throughout the eleven volumes contained in this study, al-Sakhāwī

²²⁷ Stewart, “Doctorate of Islamic Law,” 59.

²²⁸ Meaning regardless of whether it granted permission to teach a single book or an entire complex field of study.

²²⁹ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 148.

²³⁰ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 148.

²³¹ Although my study did not focus on a catalogue of teachers it was obvious that legal *ijāzahs* were often granted by such scholars as Ibn al-Mulaqqin and Ibn al-Bulqīnī, clearly leaders in the field.

records several students who were granted *ijāzahs* of various distinctions by several teachers.²³²

The text states:

اذن له غير واحد في الافتاء والتدريس

He was authorized by more than one [teacher/master] in al-iftā' wa al-tadrīs.²³³

The translation *by more than one* means that more than one scholar granted this combination of *ijāzahs* to one individual student. The most illustrative example of the fact that there was a recognized value in earning *ijāzahs* from additional scholars other than the main teacher in a particular field is located in the sixth volume. The man's *madhhab* affiliation and birth date was unknown to al-Sakhāwī. Despite this missing information, al-Sakhāwī writes:

He memorized...and he presented to a group of scholars. He was trained under Zayn al-Dīn al-Santawī his jurist (studying full time) in such a manner that he made for him when upon his completing under him the *Minhāj al-farī'ī* (law book) a well-attended ceremony in Al-Azhar (mosque in Cairo) which the important people attended. He performed in it from his memory the lecture that my brother had made in the first one of his ceremonies for finishing a book, then he ascended to study under al-Bakrī. The ceremony of the day of his finishing the book was also filled with people and on that day at the Baybarsiyyah *Madrasa* most of the law professors were asked to issue him an *ijāzah*. I was among those who was asked to issue him an *ijāzah* for both of the days, but I did not attend either of them, and al-Bakrī gave him permission on that day for teaching law and issuing legal opinions in exchange for a purse that contained, according to what was said, ten thousand dirhams.²³⁴

The sentence that is translated “most of the law professors were asked to issue him an *ijāzah*” clearly illustrates that there existed a known practice whereby numerous professors would grant

²³² Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 4:32; 4:43; 4:129; 6:112; 8:51; 10:177.

²³³ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 6:112:353.

²³⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 10:31:88.

a single student identical legal *ijāzahs*. In the case of this student, he presented the texts he had memorized at an official party. Following his presentation, the student was granted permission in a certain field or fields of study. It is obvious from the request that all professors grant this particular student an *ijāzah*—even those like al-Sakhāwī who did not attend his presentation ceremony— that the greater the number of *ijāzahs* that a student was able to obtain from well-known scholars the more credibility and prestige he would have earned. The information presented in this entry hints at the existence of a relationship between the license to grant legal opinions and teach law (*ijāzat al-iftā' wa 'l-tadrīs*) and the *madrasa* as an institution—a possible connection that Berkey, Ephrat, and Chamberlain vehemently deny.

CONCLUSION

This study has proven that various elements of structure existed in the medieval Islamic education system, and when considered in sum, these features depict a system of learning and degrees that was both institutionalized and widely followed. In 1983, Richard Bulliet estimated the age structure of medieval Islamic education drawing evidence from a twelfth century biographical dictionary from Nishapur in northeastern Iran. Bulliet asserted that the average age that a student began his education was 7.5 years with a standard deviation of 2.7.²³⁵ The ages recorded in al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary present a similar story whereby a student began his study of the Qur'an between the ages of 7 and 16.5 with an average age of 11 years old. Adding to Bulliet's study on the age structure of Islamic education I calculated the ages at which students presented (*'araḍa*) texts and received licenses (*ijāzahs*) to conclude a more comprehensive picture of the stages of learning in Mamluk Cairo. The average age that a student presented texts was 15 with a standard deviation of 3.7, thus marking a moment of transition in both his academic career—advancing to a higher level of scholarship—and also his personal life as he completed adolescence. Lastly, in an effort to narrow the general rule presented in Stewart's study "The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria" that students attained the *ijāzat al-iftā' wa 'l-tadrīs* between their early twenties and early thirties,²³⁶ I calculated that a student received these legal *ijāzahs* at an average age of 23.6 with a standard deviation of 5.3. While the data compiled about the age structure of learning introduced a general outline of the stages of Islamic education, the evidence collected about the progression of subjects and specific texts studied was more revealing about the nature of Islamic education.

²³⁵ Bulliet, "The Age Structure," 105-117.

²³⁶ Stewart, "Doctorate of Islamic Law," 60.

The academic histories recorded in the biographical notices of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Daw' al-lāmi*²³⁷ provide definitive evidence that the education system in Mamluk Egypt and its adjacent regions had clear stages of learning and a standard set of texts that was integrated into this structure. The stages of learning were distinguished from one another, first, based on the subject matter taught. The corpus assembled suggests that the medieval Islamic curriculum in Cairo was divided into three distinct phases. During the introductory level of learning, students studied subjects such as grammar, syntax, and Qur'anic recitation. At the intermediate level, learning advanced to include texts in the fields of rhetoric, logic, poetry, theology, prosody, and the Prophetic sciences (*ḥadīth*). A student's education culminated in his study of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and legal texts (*fiqh*). The second criterion used to distinguish the stages of learning from one another is the students' legal *madhhab* affiliation. For example, 63.4 percent of all students included in the sample memorized the *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik/Alfiyyat al-Naḥw*—providing strong evidence that this thousand-verse poem represented a standard introductory textbook for all students. The books studied on jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) begin to show more of a dependence on a student's *madhhab* affiliation and are categorized accordingly. The most frequently studied books in the field of jurisprudence, presented in the order of the Shāfi'ī, Ḥanafī, and Ḥanbalī legal *madhhabs*²³⁷ are Qāḍī Bayḍawī's *Minhāj al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl* and al-Ṣubkī's *Jam' al-Jawāmi*²³⁷, Ṣadr al-Sharī'ah's *al-Tanqīh*, and Ṣafī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mu'min's *al-Muḥarrar*, respectively. The practice of rigid adherence to studying books within one's legal *madhhab* is show to be ever greater when one examines the percentages of students memorizing legal texts.

As noted earlier, the three Shāfi'ī law textbooks that appeared most frequently within the sample studied were the *al-Minhāj al-far'ī* of al-Nawai, Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi's *Tanbīh*, and al-

²³⁷ The data about Malikī books on jurisprudence were inconclusive.

Mawardi's *Ḥāwī*. Within the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* 62.3 percent of students memorized *al-Minhāj al-far'ī*. Additionally, 40.8 percent of Ḥanafīs were recorded as studying al-Nasafi's *al-Manār*. Of those students who followed the Mālikī curriculum, 67.8 percent and 42.4 percent of them memorized the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawani and *Mukhtaṣar Ibn Ḥajīb*, respectively. While only 22 percent of Ḥanbalī students were recorded to have memorized al-Khiraqī's *Mukhtaṣar al-Khiraqī* this estimation is likely to be inaccurate because there were a mere 18 Ḥanbalīs included in the sample. My efforts to define each of the three stages of learning and the books associated with each are limited by certain factors. Chief among these is the fact that the texts that occur within the secondary and tertiary stages of learning are recorded in al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary in tandem—perhaps illustrative of less rigidity between these levels. While I strongly argue that there existed a standard set of texts that professors drew from, I believe that an examination of additional biographical dictionaries compiled by other prosopographers, in addition to the study of endowment deeds from Mamluk Cairo, would increase the force of the arguments presented here.

In the final chapter “A System of Degrees,” I have introduced for the first time previously unmentioned *ijāzahs* such as the *ijāzat al-iqrā'*, *funūn al-hadith*, *ijāzat al-naḥw*, and *ijāzat al-ifāda*. We now know that there were many distinct kinds of *ijāzahs*. Furthermore, it is likely that an *ijāzah* existed for each field of study. While it appears that each served as a credential, the exact functions of some (*iqrā'* and *ifāda*) are less obvious than others such as the license to issue legal opinions and teach law (*ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs*) that Makdisi previously discussed and the majority of my research was focused towards. It is clear that the *ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs* is introduced by the verb *adhina* whereas the verb *ajāzahu* signals *ijāzahs* for *ḥadīth*. Additionally, I argue that there was no rigid ordered combination of *ijāzat al-iftā'* and *ijāzat al-tadrīs*—yet

there was a slight skew favoring *iftā'* before *tadrīs*. The current study provided undeniable evidence that the *ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs* was a physical document that served as an occupational credential. Furthermore, the data compiled about positions of employment confirm Stewart's analysis that the *ijāzat al-iftā' wa'l-tadrīs* granted to a student access to positions as a jurisconsult, judge, titular or deputy professor of law, and repetitor. Lastly, the source used here provides evidence that a student could obtain multiple *ijāzahs* of the same distinction from various professors. The examples included in this study provide additional evidence from Mamluk Egypt for Makdisi's work on *ijāzahs* and hint at the potential institutional ties between legal degrees and *madrasas*.

This study has provided both quantitative and qualitative evidence that medieval Islamic education was a formal system of learning equipped with designated texts and supported by an endowed institutional framework. As much as this study has attempted to answer the claims of scholars in the field such as George Makdisi, Jonathan Berkey, Michael Chamberlain and Devin Stewart it has similarly introduced new ideas to which I hope future scholars in the field will respond.

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