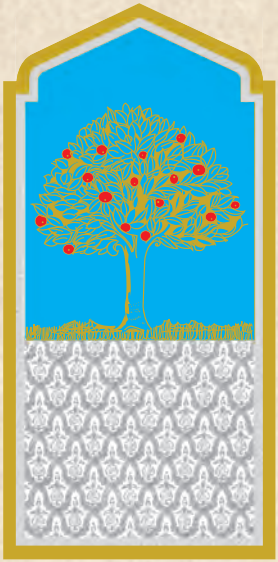

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INSTITUTIONALIZING EDUCATION AND THE CULTURE OF LEARNING IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM: THE AYYŪBIDS (569/966 AH) (1174/1263 AD) LEARNING PRACTICES IN EGYPT AS A CASE STUDY

Merah Souad
Tahraoui Ramdane

Abstract

Because of the political weakening of the central Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, and the fragmentation of its vast dominions into sultanates and emirates, it was customary for those emerging Muslim sultanates in medieval Islam, both Sunni and Shii', to manage andpatronizethe intellectual activities, including institutions of learning, curriculum, human capitals (scholars, and students) in a flexible manner. The intellectual life was not run by one particular office, though the educational policies in each of those sultanates were largely politicized like in the case of the Seljūks, Fatimids and the Ayyūbids. Some researchers in the history of Islamic education attributed the involvement of the state into different educational activities to another political and cultural factor that is the emergence of dogmatic, philosophical and legal debates and subsequently sectarianism. These factors have had a negative effect on the independent culture of learning which dominated the liberal character of Islamic education for many decades. This paper highlights the process of institutionalizing education and its effect on the culture of learning during the rule of the Ayyūbid sultanate. It aims to unveil the effect of the measures taken by the Ayyūbids in formalizing education and show the visible dominance of military and political elites on the intellectual life, an influence which heralded the death of the customary Muslim conventional and liberal style of learning. The results of this research show that despite the success of the Ayyūbids in their endeavor to restore Sunnism in Egypt, the autonomy that Sunni 'ulama maintained in early Islam up

to the military Seljūks deteriorated further under the Ayyūbid military patronage. However, the official formal institutions of education never replaced persons as the focus of intellectual life. Informal and formal instruction was available for pupils in their own homes or in the privacy of learned scholars and wealthy individuals.

Keywords: Ayyūbids, culture of learning, institutionalizing education, liberal educational practices and educational institutions

Introduction

In early centuries of Islam, the dissemination of knowledge was carried out in a voluntary manner. It was a way to seek Allāh's pleasure. Muslims in general were motivated to pursue knowledge under the fundamental religious rule *"fi sabil Allah"* (for the sake of God); financing education was provided under this rule as well. Spending on *"talabatul al 'ilm"* (students), was primarily from contributions given by princes, lords, and rich merchants, who were sensitive towards the needs of the poor and for socio-religious solidarity. The rapid expansion of the Islamic state as a direct consequence of the huge military gains and the mass conversion of people and entire nations led to the increase in thenumber of students from the four corners of the vast Muslim state. These new converts needed to learn their religion and the language of the Qur'an. Another fundamental reason to why the state needed to monitor the educational activities is the sectarian schism. In fact the latter was not a new phenomenon as it has its roots back to early Islam, when "political schisms emerged in the wake of the assassination of the third *khalifah*, Uthman ibn Affan, and the transfer of the seat of government first to Kufah and then to Damascus, and the occurrence of many other upheavals."[1] However, religious schism in Medieval Islam reached its zenith because it had taken the form of ideologies that fed the legitimacy of any political regime claimed by the many rival Muslim dynasties. Thus it created several new educational

[1] Taha Jabir al-'Alwani, *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam.* Edited by A.S. al Shaikh Ali . (Herdon- Virginia- USA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) . 1st edn., 1993), 61.

challenges, which paved the way for the states officially began to participate in monitoring learning activities, especially in terms of finance. Hence, educators were allocated a share in *bait al-Māl* (state treasury). Some researchers in the history of the Islamic education attributed the involvement of the state into different educational activities to another political and cultural factor that is the emergence of dogmatic, philosophical and legal debates. They claim that:

> Education in the *makātib* in the east and the west of the Muslim world remained independent, without any interference from the state. Such education was the result of initiatives dictated by the need of parents to teach their children. The only exception perhaps was the case of Al-Hakam Al-Mustanṣir in Cordoba, who established 27 (twenty seven) *makātib* in it for the children of the poor. He allocated properties and appointed teachers for them. The state's role in education became clear only after the emergence of sectarianism, in such a manner that wherever sectarianism appears, the state gets involved by sponsoring education. That fact occurred in the Fatimid Egypt, the Ibādi dominions (though, in the true sense, through the Council of *'azzābah*, that acted on behalf of the state), and among the Muwahhidīn in Maghrīb and Andalusia."[2]

"The idea of compulsory education and the necessity of knowledge was developed, adopted, and circulated in the books of Muslim jurists."[3] Therefore, it became necessary to find a formulation that ensured good organization and continuity of education in the Muslim states, a formulation which did not rely on contributions and grants of donors only. "Yet, the idea has grown towards something superior,

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[2] Ehsan Abbas, *Al-Namūthaj Al-Islami li Al-Tarbiyah* [The Islamic Model of Education] in *Al-Tarbiyah Al-'Arabiyah Al-Islamiyah: Al-Muassasāt wa Al-Mumārasāt* [The Arabic and Islamic Education: Institutions and Practices]. (Amman: Al-Majma' Al-Malaki li Buhūth Al-Hadhārah Al-Islamiyah, d.n, 1990), Vol 4, 1510.

[3] Ahmad Fuād Al-Ahwānī, *Al-Tarbiyah fi al-Islām* [Education in Islam] (Cairo: Dār Al-Ma'ārif, 1980), 102.

more stable, and more assuring to the survival of *makātib* life, which in turn secured the survival of youth education. This idea was to earmark endowments for *makātib* and schools."[4] Due to conflicts between competing dynasties and sects in Medieval Islam, politics intrinsically relied on the indoctrination and learning through different institutions such as mosques and circles of learning,in addition to the appearance of the *madrasa* as a formal place for learning with some degree of sophistication. The Ayyūbids' educational practices were not remote from all these transformations. In fact there is another reason for the Ayyūbids' political institution to be heavily involved in formalizing education. The reason is the task of restoring Sunnism in Egypt after more than two centuries and a half of Shii'-Ismaili' dominance in Egypt under the Fatimid rule (569 AH / 1174 AD). The Ayyūbids were also aware of the importance of education for their cause, and that it represented the key to capturing people's minds and hearts. Subsequently, they financed many educational institutions, founded new ones and sought to consolidate their relationship with the learned elite in order to gain their loyalty:

> The educational policy pursued by the Ayyūbids was required because of the general conditions and the reality fact during that time. Salāh al-Dīn who was considered the most important executive to lead the state's policy has by all means designed his policy of diffusing knowledge and building schools aimed to serve the interests of his state."[5]

Given this historical background, it is of great concern to investigate the effects of institutionalizing educationon the Islamic liberal educational practices which marked the intellectual life in the Muslim world from the time of the Prophet up to the Middle Age. Such effects are examined in the context of the practices of the Ayyūbids.

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[4]Ibid, 103.

[5]Hasan Sh'misani. *Madāris Demashq fi al-'Asr al-Ayyūbi* [Madrasas of Damascus in the Ayyūbid Period], (Beirut: Dār Al-Āfāq Al-Jadidah, 1983), 261.

The Islamic Culture of Learning

From the first days of his message, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had embarked on the supreme mission of educating his followers and preparing them to carry out the responsibilities of the mission after him. He did not settle for just inciting them, rather he engaged his followers in a longer process that involved educating, explaining, discussing, answering questions, and setting-up good examples by words and deeds. In fact the dedication of an illiterate man to seek knowledge and disseminate it as well as to motivate others to do so, must be the result of a more magical, powerful and influential force that helped to transform an illiterate, pagan society into a thirsty knowledge-seeking people. This force is nothing other than the words of the God in the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an is a religious book in the first place, and Muhammad (ﷺ) as he was inspired by a relatively long period of revelation (23 years) succeeded in transforming the Arab mind and shifting it from one state of consciousness to another and from ignorance knowledge. Yedullah Kazmi comments on the Arabs' reaction to God's inspiration:

The message of one God, they knew is old but this time around, they must have realized, the appeal is made to the human intellect. Intellect, not left to its own devices, but retooled, redesigned, refurbished by faith in Allah, now made to carry the burden of understanding the message of Allah… The faith in Allah, therefore does not limit knowledge, but provides the necessary corrective and direction to the pursuit of knowledge. The Qur'an, therefore, defines the domain of Islamic knowledge by linking faith with knowledge 'to be' with 'to know"[6]. Thus, according to the Qur'an, those who know and believe are much better than those who believe only. There are many verses in the Qur'an that emphases on the importance of knowledgeable Muslims, *Among His Servants who have knowledge: For Allah is Exalted in might, Oft-Forgiving* [Qur'an: 35, 28], in another verse, *Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know. It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition* [Qur'an 39, 9].

[6] Yedullah Kazmi, 'The Rise and Fall of Culture of Learning in Early Islam', *Islamic Studies*, Vol.44, No. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 15-51.

It was understood that:

> Knowledge is the twin-half of the entire Islamic message while the other twin-half -which is actually based upon the former- is sanctifying and purity. It is not conceivable that purification and sanctification could be fruitful with ignorance.[7]

Wadad Kadi echoes this statement and adds:

> In a way, education could be envisioned as one of the cornerstones of Islamicate civilization and its backbone, Islam. Although Islam emerged in a largely illiterate society on the Arabian Peninsula, the scripture that lay at its foundation, the Qur'an, called itself, among other things, "The Book"," and its study was made incumbent upon Muslims. More generally, seeking knowledge was encouraged in the Qur'an and in numerous traditions (hadiths) of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, as well as his actions.[8]

If we turn our attention to the prophetic traditions, we will find the same emphasis on showing the merits of knowledge and the direct and constant call to the faithful to seek it as depicted in the following *hadith*:

> "The learned on the earth are like the stars in the sky. Guidance is available by them during dark nights on land and sea. Once the stars disappear the guides are on the verge of falling astray." Reported by Anas ibn Mālik.

Abū Omāmah al-Bāhily reported*:*

> "Two persons were discussed by the Prophet (ﷺ) ; one a worshipper and another, a learned man. The Prophet

[7] Mohamed Taher ed., *Encyclopaedic Survey of Islamic Culture.* Article: 'Islam and Knowledge', by: Abdel Halim Mahmoud. (New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD, 1998), Vol 17, 2.

[8] Kadi Wadad, 'Education in Islam-Myths and Truths', Comparative, Vol. 50, no. 3, (2006), 311-324.

> said: The status of a learned man compared to a worshipper is like my status to the most inferior ones amongst you. The Prophet then added, Verily, Allāh, His angels, and all His creation in the heavens and the earth, including the ants in their holes and the fish, pray for the learned who imparts the good things to people. The learned are the successors of the prophets. Whoever travels in search of knowledge is in the path of Allāh until he returns."

Reported by Anas:

> "The learned hold the third rank exceeded only by God himself and his angels. Seek ye learning from the cradle to the grave."

The earlier mentioned verses and the Prophet's sayings emphasize the central position of seeking knowledge. They have presented the new image of society Islam wants build, a society that venerates knowledge-seeking and all the activities related to it. a trend which was clearly echoed in the earliest Islamic educational activities:

"Wherever a man who knew how to read met another who was not quite so fortunate, yet willing to learn, a school was organized. It may have been under a palm tree, in a tent, or in a private house; nevertheless it was a school." [9]In the early stages of Islam scholars were offering their knowledge voluntarily, inspired by the religious principle of seeking Allāh's pleasure and practicing the Islamic principle of disseminating knowledge and fearing the divine punishment for those who conceal it as mentioned in Al-Baqarah, *Those who conceal the clear (Signs) We have sent down, and the Guidance after We have made it clear for the people in the Book on them shall be Allah's curse of those entitled to curse.* [Qur'an: 2,159], and the saying of the Messenger (ﷺ): Whoever is asked about knowledge that he knows about and then hides it and keeps it away, he will be bridled on the Day of Judgment with a bridle of Fire. [narrated by Ahmad, Abū Dawūd and Al-Tirmidhi]. Indeed some scholars did

[9] Khalil A. Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education*, (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1926), 12.

more than that, they went to the extent of being responsible for sponsoring their student's education. It was reported in the Islamic education history books that "some scholars used their influence to obtain funds, not for themselves, but in order to distribute them among students… pensions were offered by the sovereign to jurists, consults, learned men in general and to students."[10]

They considered teaching, spreading and sharing knowledge as a religious duty. To prepare the young Muslims in order for them to be capable to deliver the message of Islam to the world, and also to implant into them faith in unity among mankind.

"Once the earliest campaigners had made good their foothold in the invaded territories they gradually ceased to be mere treasure-houses of plunder. In the great camps such as Bukhārā and Samarqand in Transoxina, as earlier at Kufa and Basra in Iraq and at Fustāt (Old Cairo) in Egypt, there were teachers and legists, and soon schools of ecclesiastical law and grammar were set up to answer the demands of those who wished for a true interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an. Those schools proved the centers from which Islam derived its strength and from which gradually the occupied regions were converted."[11]

The early generations, who perfectly fulfilled Allāh's own description of them, *You are indeed the best nation that has ever been raised up from mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong and you believe in Allāh* [Al-'Imran 3: 110] Hence, Muslims were able to write that incomparable page in human history, they established truth and justice on earth and raised for mankind an inimitable civilization which built up its structure in the material and spiritual worlds, and achieves harmony between body and soul, religion and politics, faith and science, the present life and the hereafter, the practical and the ideal.[12] The intellectual ambiance then was marked by the dominance of the spirit of learning for all.

'[10] Goerge Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and in the West*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, dn., 1981), 162-163.

[11] Reuben Levy M.A. *An Introduction to the Sociology of Islam*. Published for Herbert Spencer's Trustees by Williams and Norgate, Limited. 38 Great Ormond Street WCI. 1930. Vol. I, 35.

[12] M.A. Salahi and A.A Shamis, ed. (1979). *In the Shades of the Qur'an of Sayyid Qutb*. (London: MWH London Publishers), Vol 30, xii.

Muslims and non-Muslims had equal political and cultural rights. Scholars considered teaching as a noble mission, they taught for the sake of God because learning in general was not considered as a means to get a job or a position. The openness of learning for all people at any age was another encouraging factor for learning. The fact was that learning was not formalized, streamed or credentialed. The prevalence of such liberal learning values in this period founded what is coined as the Islamic culture of learning.

"The term 'culture of learning' is used to describe a culture where learning is not institutionalized and thus limited and controlled by institutions of learning; instead it points to an attribute which is neither limited to a class of scholars nor institutions but is characteristic of a whole society… In a culture of learning the desire to learn is part of the symbolic universe in which everyone participates."[13] It is in this liberal culture of learning that the Qur'an was compiled, the prophet' Sunnah was classified, numerous schools of fiqh appeared, the debate about the most important issues of dogma and theology took place and the great works of Muslim scholars which contributed tremendously to the human knowledge in general had emerged.

"This was a time when the Arabic word "Ulama" "علماء" (mentioned repeatedly in Quranic verses and Hadith) meant university professors, educated men, and men of science.You must not think of them as what Muslim imams now call "Ulama", by courtesy. The proper Arabic term for the latter is "Fuqaha", and it had hardly come into general use in those days when religious study – what is known as "Fiqh" – was still in its infancy. Back then, the Ulama were no blind guides, no mere fanatics, no fatwa releasing Imams. The Ulama were the most enlightened thinkers of their time, they were well versed in the Islamic religion, but much more importantly, they were well versed in the scientific knowledge of their day."[14] Islamic creativity reached its peak when learning was a religious and ethical commitment rather than a commodity.

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[13] Yedullah Kazmi, 'The Rise and Fallof Culture of Learning in Early Islam', Ibid, 19.

[14] Hisham El-Fangary, 'The Rise and Fall of the Islamic Civilization: What went wrong? ', https://hishamfangs.wordpress.com

Despite the prevailing political setbacks, and conflicts, common among the ruling families, freedom of expression and a tolerant intellectual environment were prominent during those ages. According to some researchers "The era of Banu Al-Abbās was truly an arena of subjective opinion (*ra'iy*), establishing of the Islamic Jurisprudence, and the writing of it."[15] Except the discreditable succession of caliphate, the affairs of the Muslims were administered according to the Islamic law, especially those affairs related to *mu'āmalāt* (dealings). Jurisprudential critical reviews and intellectual discourses witnessed great flowering at the hands of the jurists who thrust "upon themselves to translate the ideals of Islam into prescriptions to meet the new situations of daily life and devise solutions for the new problems"[16].

Not only the *fuqahā* (jurists) participated in those vibrant educational forums, *mutakallimīn*[17] and also *sūfiyyah*[18] found ample space to contribute and voice up their opinions. These intellectual segments enjoyed great respect from the public which exceeded the respect offered to the rulers themselves, despite the efforts of the latter to dominate the public and impose their authority. Rulers, particularly those from the Abbasid dynasty, tried to boost their stature with aspects of reverence to some extent similar to the Persian style. Adopting their blood relationship with the Prophet (ﷺ) as a ground for claims of authority resembled the Persian theory of the Sassanid sacred divine right. "Hence, they wanted to be seen as religious and spiritual leaders, so that people conceive that their authority is

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[15] An-Nabrawi, *Tārīkh al-Nudhum wa al-Hadhārah al-Islamiyah* [History of Systems and Islamic Civilization] (Jeddah: Al-Dār Al-Sa'ūdiyah li Al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzi', 4th edn., 1987), 61.

[16] Isma'il R. al-Fāruqi and Lois Lamyā al-Fāruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, (Macmilan Publishing Company, New York & Collier Macmilan Publishers, London, 1986), 280.

[17] Name referring to oration applied to those who specialized in studying philosophical and theological issues, historically their debates began with three problems: The nature of Imān (faith), and the status of the grave sinner (*sāhib al-Kabīrah*); Determinism and freedom; and the Nature of the divine attributes.

[18] Adherents of *tasawwuf*, a movement that existed for a millennium, it calls for the nourishment of soul, purification of heart, and yearning for piety, virtue, and righteousness, and for closeness to Allāh.

religious."[19] Because of that, "the caliph reserved all authorities for him including the responsibilities of managing the state's affairs, safeguarding the religion, and establishing the pillars of justice,"[20] through sponsoring educational and knowledge seeking activities and creating a strong rapport with scholars.

In conclusion, despite the sometimes hostile political environment, knowledge was venerated and "education was considered a ministry within Islam and those who entered it did so of dedication and genuine interest in the life of the mind."[21]

Learning and the Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt

In 1171 AD, the Ayyūbids succeeded the Fatimids to the throne of Egypt, Syria, and North Africa.Contrary to the early Fatimid caliphs who exercised full power and authority, the late Fatimid caliphs' power was just like in any modern constitutional monarchy, in which the role of the monarch is limited to some symbolic and honorary duties. Weakened and stripped of real power, the caliphs became pawns of unscrupulous viziers. The latter, trying to preserve their power became involved in hatching intrigues that involved palace factions, military elements, and administration offices.

The numerous conflicts between viziers and army commanders created confederations, and the presence of racial blocs such as the Turkish, Sudanese, Maghribis (North Africans), Armenians, and Kurdish in the Fatimid army and within the royal court itself incapacitated the machinery of the state to the extent that its officers failed to collect taxes and protect the coinage from debasement. Famine and plague worsened the already ailing economy and allowed an environment of near anarchy to prevail.

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[19] Chehada Al-Nator and Others, *Al-Khilāfah al-Islamiyah hatta al-Qarn al-Rābi' al-Hijri* [The Islamic Caliphate until the Fourteenth Century after Hijrah] (Amman: Dār al-Thaqāfah li al-Tibā'a wa al-Nashr and Dār Al-Amal li Al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzi', 1st edn., 1990), 244.

[20] Mohammad Abdul Al-Karim, *Tatawur Al-Fikr Al-Falsafi wa Al-Siyāsi: Min Misr Al-Qadīmah hatta Al-Islam*. [The Development of Philosophical and Political Thought: From Ancient Egypt up to Islam]. (Saida, Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-'Asriyah, 1994), 194.

[21] Stanton Charles Michael, *Higher learning in Islam: The Classical Period A.D 700-1300*. (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1990), 33.

Some historians, such as al- Maqrizi[22], attribute the rapid collapse of the Fatimid dynasty at the Ayyūbids hands to Ismā'īli *da'wah*'s failure to penetrate among the public inhabitants of Egypt and win over the Sunni majority. *Da'wah* at that time was limited to *al-Khāssah* (selected people), hence, massive conversion of Egyptians into Ismā'īlism never materialized. Finally, the combination of the hermeneutic[23] theology and philosophy in the Ismā'īli*madhhab* itself contributed to that downfall.

Confederations and blocs within the Fatimid sensitive centers of power considerably weakened the spiritual and political authority of the Fatimid caliph. The last Fatimid caliph al-'Ādid (1160-1171/555-567) gradually lost his grip on power to the extent that he was completely stripped from the daily management of the state affairs, including the handling of religious Ismā'īli *da'wah*, judiciary, and military affairs. All military authorities eventually reverted to the powerful commander Shirkūh[24], uncle of Salāh al-Dīn. He was dispatched by Nūr al-Dīn Mahmūd Zangi[25] to support them

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[22] An Egyptian historian who lived between (1364–1442) in Mamluk Egypt famous for his master piece *al-khitat.*

[23] Traditionally hermeneutics has referred to the study of interpretation of written texts - and in particular religious texts, such as Biblical hermeneutics.

[24] Shirkuh's full name is al-Amīr Asad al-Dīn Shirkuh Ibn Shahdi. He was a son of the governor of Tikrit, in Iraq. In 1138, with his brother Ayyūb, Shirkuh went into exile after he had to kill a man to avenge the honor of a woman. The brothers settled in Syria, where they became partisans of the powerful Turkish *atābeg*, Zangi; Shirkuh himself became a close confidant of Zangi's son, the pious Nūr al-Dīn Mahmūd. From 1163 to 1169, Shirkuh took part in a staggering series of campaigns against Fatimid Egypt. In January 1169, he lured the Vizier into an ambush, killed him, and seized Egypt in the name of his master, Nūr al-Dīn. From the chronicler Baha' al-Dīn we learnt that Shirkuh was ". . . a great eater, excessively given to partaking of rich meats. He suffered many bouts of indigestion and from quinsy, from which he would recover after putting up with great discomfort." In March of 1169, after an excessively sumptuous meal, he was "seized by an atrocious sensation of suffocation and died within a few minutes.

[25] Al-Malik al-'Ādil Nūr al-Dīn Abu al-Qāsim Mahmūd Ibn 'Imād al-Dīn Zangi (1118 –1174) was a member of the Zengid dynasty who ruled Syria from 1146 to 1174. Egypt had been politically weakened by a series of very young Fatimid caliphs. By 1163, the caliph was the young Al-'Ādid, but the country was ruled by the vizier Shāwar. That year, Shāwar was overthrown by Dirghām. After a failed offensive of crusader Amalric I, exiled Shāwar visited Nūr al-Dīn, who begged him

against the crusaders who lined in wait for the best circumstances to invade Egypt. The Fatimid state, once casting fear and awe in the hearts of its neighbors and a major Mediterranean power was then too feeble to protect its own borders and had to rely on military assistance from its Zengid rivals. That step was the first in their march towards their end, and inevitably the emergence ofa new a Sunni political regime in Egypt.

After assuming the post of vizier under the Fatimid caliph al-'Ādid, Salāh al-Dīn found himself in unprecedented position, as he was serving under both, the Ismā'īli caliph al-'Ādid and the Sunni *atābak* Nūr al-Dīn.

The sudden death of caliph al-'Ādid two days later (Monday, September 13, 567 A.H / 1171 A.D) eased the way for Salāh al-Dīn to consolidate his power without shedding one drop of blood, the same way the death of *atābak* Nūr al-Dīn in 1174 has enabled him to stand alone in the path towards the throne of Egypt, and the establishment of the Ayyūbid dynasty.

It is noteworthy to clearly differentiate between the circumstances through which the Fatimid state progressed and those which accompanied the establishment of the Ayyūbid state. The former was engineered as a religious, sectarian, and schismatic

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to send an army and restore him to the vizierate. Nūr al-Dīn did not want to spare his own army for a defense of Egypt, but his Kurdish general Shirkuh convinced him to invade in 1164. In response Dirghām allied with the crusaders, but the king could not mobilize his forces on time to save him. Dirghām was killed during Shirkuh's invasion and Shāwar was restored as vizier. Shāwar immediately expelled Shirkuh and allied with Amalric, who arrived to besiege Shirkuh at Bilbeis. Shirkuh agreed to abandon Egypt. In 1166 Shirkuh was sent again to Egypt. Amalric followed him at the beginning of 1167, and a formal treaty was established between Amalric and Shāwar, with the nominal support of the caliph. The crusaders occupied Alexandria and Cairo and made Egypt a tributary state, but Amalric could not hold the country while Nūr al-Dīn still held Syria, and he was forced to return to Jerusalem. In 1168 Amalric sought an alliance with Emperor Manuel and invaded Egypt once more. Shāwar's son Khalīl had had enough, and with support from caliph al-'Ādid requested help from Nūr al-Dīn and Shirkuh. At the beginning of 1169 Shirkuh arrived and the crusaders once more were forced to retreat. This time Nūr al-Dīn gained ful control of Egypt. Shāwar was executed and Shirkuh was named vizier of the newly conquered territory, later succeeded by his nephew Salāh al-Dīn. See, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur_al-Din

movement ruled by *imāms*[26] whose main claim to acquire legitimacy was the contention that they descended from *ahl al-Bayt*. The latter however, who ruled by army chiefs and laid their legitimacy to rule their subjects in Egypt and Syria on the foundation of *jihād* propaganda against the crusaders. As for the educational activities, the Fatimid state-sponsored curriculum was distinguished with a dual character, in which, the legal exoteric curriculum was accessed by the public and the dogmatic esoteric curriculum was exclusively available to the *khassah* only. On the contrary, the predominantly religious and legal Ayyūbid curricular was standardized and widely open to the public from all walks of life, and allowed the Sunnis cholarship to freely function in Egypt.

Even though there was a clear proportional difference in the level of popularity that the four Sunni schools of law enjoyed among the Egyptian inhabitants and also in the level of patronage that the Ayyūbid rulers accorded to some *madhāhib* and scholars over the rest,

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[26] *Imamate* literally means 'to lead '; *al-imām* means 'the leader'. Among the Sunni the term is derived from Imām, which refers to the leader in the Friday prayer at the mosque; any pious Muslim may function as Imām. The term has also been used as a synonym for caliph. The Shi'ites, with their numerous denominations throughout history have developed specific meanings for the term. Zaydi Shiites recognize as Imam any pious descendant of 'Ali and Fatima who earns his recognition as a leader through struggle. Twelve-Imām Shiite dogma restricts the Imams to 'Ali, his sons Hasan and Husayn, and nine direct linear descendants of Husayn. Twelve-Imām Shiite doctrine presents the Imāms as infallible intermediaries between the human and the divine. The continuous presence of the Imams being a prerequisite for human salvation, al-Mahdi, the last Imām, is considered in occultation (hidden from humanity) since 874 only to return near the end of creation as a messiah like figure. For Ismā'īli Shiites, the succession of the Imāms breaks off from the Twelve- Imāms line with Ismā'īl, the son of Ja'far al-Sādiq. At present the Nizari subgroup of the Ismā'īlis is the only group whose members claim a living and visible Imām in the person of Shah Karim al-Husayn, Aga Khan IV. The use of the title "Imām " by the Iranian revolutionary leader Ruhollah Khomeini and by the Lebanese Shiite leader Musa al-Sadr signaled a new development in Twelve- Imām Shiite doctrine, since neither could not claim to be the Hidden Imām returned, reflecting the desire to transcend the passive waiting for the reappearance of the Mahdi and promote the reincorporation of political activism into Shiite religious life. See: Lagasse Paul, Goldman Lora, Hobson Archie, R. Susan and Norton eds., *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 6th edn., 2007), 23601.

religious education gained strong momentum. Within a few years the four Sunni schools of *fiqh* were able to invigorate and revive themselves in Egypt.

Jurists from each school had their institutions of learning well-established in Cairo, Fustāt, and Alexandria. The *madrasas* (schools) which appeared about one century earlier, and contributed to a great extent to repulse the *Shī'a* influence in Iraq, Mesopotamia, and Syria did not see the same success as in Fatimid Egypt. However with the Ayyūbids who were very eager to wipe out the Ismā'īli educational and political heritage in Egypt, they sponsored many *madrasas* for different Sunni *madhāhib* in order to establish legitimacy in the minds of their new subjects, power-brokering groups such as the scholars in particular.

Similarly, non-official agencies and individuals took part in that Sunni resurgence, and colleges of *fiqh* mushroomed very quickly in the Egyptian land. With remarkable resources and decent management manifested in several ranges of *madrasas* equipped with all the necessary facilities, comprehensive religious curriculum, renowned *shuyūkh*, and a conducive environment were put in place for a successful new educational experience in Egypt.

1. The role of the *Madrasa in* institutionalizing education

Besides the Medieval conventional places of learning such as *Jāmi* (mosque), *Maktabās (Libraries) and Whole Markets of Booksellers. RibātsBīmārīstāns*, castles, *makātib*, and *khangha* the madrasas were considered as 'the higher learning' institutions. These unique educational institutions then were very much in vogue after the establishment of al- *Nizāmiyah* madrasas by the Seljuk's vizier Nizām al-Mulk in Baghdad during the eleventh century A.D. Being highly meritorious and socially desirable, founding *madrasas*[27] was a practice that men of power and influence always desired. In normal circumstances the founder of the *madrasah* and his descendants after him reserved full control over its activities. Generally:

Schools were founded for the sake of propagating the

[27] In the last three decades, considerable attention has been accorded the *madrasa*. The most prominent work was that of Makdisi titled, *The Rise of Colleges*.

> religious tenets of the founder. As schisms, heresies and theological controversies began to shake Islam; schools were established to combat them. This was especially the case with Saladin, who established in Jerusalem an institution called al-Salāhiyah in order to counteract Shi'ite heresy.[28]

The spread and proliferation of *madrasas* in Egypt during the Ayyūbid period was bolstered by the state's patronage of Shāfi'ism in particular. The Nizāmiyah *madrasas* as far as the *usūl* (principles of jurisprudence) and the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) are concerned were based on *imām Shāfi'i*'s school of law and legacy. His blood connection with the prophetic line could be among the reasons which prompted Nizām al-Mulk to choose the school of al-Shāfi'i, considering that one of Nizāmiyah's goals was to fight against and eradicate the esoteric Shī'a doctrine adopted by the Fatimids state; and based on the claim of its founding fathers that they are from *ahl al-Bayt*, thus, more entitled to the caliphate than the others.

The high stature that *imām* al-Shāfi'i enjoyed among the Sunnis in general was another reason to favor his legacy and school of law.

> The Mālikites prided themselves that al-Shāfi'i was one of *imām* Mālik's students. *Imām* Ahmad b. Hanbal accorded him great respect and even considered him one of his *shuyūkh* (Professors). In addition to that, he (*imām* al-Shāfi'i) learned from Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Shaybāni, one of the most important disciples of Abū Hanīfa. Thus, he was the *wāsitatul al-'Iqd* (Middle of the necklace) among the known four Sunni schools. On top of that, the conservative and orthodox inclinations of *imām* al-Shāfi'i (towards the transmitted knowledge), his standing by the proof, his sharpness and use of reason in the substantiation of his *hujjah* (Evidence) against the opponents, as well as the distinction of his writings in *usūl al-Fiqh*, clarification of *khās* (the particular) and *'ām* (the general), *mutlaq* (the unlimited) and *muqa'yad* (the limited), *mujmal* (the abridged) and

[28] Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education*. Ibid, 19.

> *mufassal* (the detailed) and so forth, may have been among the reasons which led to the adoption of his legacy in the Nizāmiyah *madrasas*.[29]

The *madrasas* were colleges in which *fiqh* courses were taught according to the Malikite, Hanafite, and Shafi'ite or Hanbalid rites. This practice marked the first symptoms of institutionalization of education and channeling or even restricting the four madhabs to their own vicinities. As for their finance, they were often supported by endowments of charitable trust (*waqf, ahbās*). In most cases, persons of power and wealth, such as caliphs, sultāns, viziers, merchants, *qādis* (Judges), and *amīrs* (military commanders) would provide the financial support. Sometimes, even wealthy women or wives of dignitaries made contributions to those charity establishments. Endowments may include shops, pieces of land, houses, baths, mills, books or all of these.

Before attending *madrasas*, it was imperative for potential candidates to memorize the whole or some considerable parts of the Qur'an and demonstrate satisfactory abilities in reading and writing Arabic. Qur'an, sciences of Qur'an, *hadīth*, and Sciences of *hadīth*, *fiqh*, Arabic, History, Genealogy, Poetry, Narratives, Proverbs and Maxims, Medicine, Astronomy, Languages were among the subjects that medieval *madrasas* offered. These *madrasas* had distinct characteristics. They were among others:

i. Provided with hostels for the comfort of their professors and students. They were also furnished with other utilities such as: canteen, dining hall, and bathrooms.
ii. Equipped with lecture halls.
iii. Provided with professors who were appointed normally by the founder or donor through an explicit text in the endowment document. In some cases, professors were appointed by the state. Equally, the number of students in *madrasas* could be determined by the donor, founder, or the state.

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[29] Ali Muhammad Al-Salabi, *Dawlat al-Salājiqah wa Burūz Mashrū' Islami li Muqāwamat al-Taghalghul al-Bātini wa al-Ghazaw al-Salībi* [Seljuk State and the Emergence of an Islamic Project to Counter the Esoteric Penetration and Crusade Invasion]. (Cairo: Mu'asasat Iqra' li al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzī' wa Al-Tarjamah: 1st edn., 2006), 28.

iv. The professors and students received shares or stipends from endowed properties or the treasury of the state.
v. They were highly organized functioning in terms of taking and controlling students' attendance, syllabus, teaching staff, library, academic degrees …etc.
vi. Preparation and training of staff for the different departments and bureaus of state.
vii. Religious rites which Muslims normally perform in the mosque were also beconducted at *madrasas* premises.

As stated earlier, the Ayyūbid sultāns and the political elite accorded *madrasas* an exceptional importance:

> The new rulers embarked on a campaign aiming at building of madrasa-s, first outside al-Qāhira (Cairo) proper, and then within the capital itself. As a result, in the short period of forty years, and in Cairo only, about twenty madrasa-s for one or two schools of law were built.[30]

Because the Ayyūbid sultans, princes, merchants, judges, scholars and even women took great interest in founding *madrasas*, in most of the time, *madrasas* were ascribed to their founders or the ones who granted them pious endowments. In some cases, *madrasas* were named after a prominent '*ālim* (professor), or the school of *fiqh* it was devoted to. The motives which inspired people to found *madrasas* varied between intellectual, political, sectarian, economic, and social reasons. Trying to understand the motivation behind the great interest in building *madrasas* in the Ayyūbid period, many researchers classified them according to the political and social background of their founders. This classification comprehended the following:

a. *Madrasas* of sultāns
b. *Madrasas* of prominent princes and princesses
c. *Madrasas* of the foreign communities

[30] Fernandes Leonor, 'Mamluk Politics and Education: The Evidence from Two Forteenth Century Waqfiyya', Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Le Caire – Égypte, Annales Islamologiques, AnIsl (1987), 87-98.

d. *Madrasas* for the public.[31]

It is safe to state that unlike few *madrasas* that some Sunniviziers erected in Egypt during the late stages of the Fatimid period, which were basically managed and run according to the Nizāmiyah model, and which lacked the official patronage of the Fatimid authorities, the Ayyūbid *madrasas* matured and benefited from an open backing of the authorities.

Lapidus affirmed this assumption when he noted that:

> The first Ayyūbid task was to establish the cadres of viable religious institutions. Ayyūbid policy was not aimed at the sponsorship of the whole Sunni religious activity, but was aimed at the creation of the organizational forms and teaching cadres of the *madhāhib*. Ayyūbid madrasas were so few in number, and were so much the creation of sultans (but not all of all sultans), emirs and officials because they were intended to be a stimulus and a framework for school development. The madrasas did not employ all the *'ulama* but only the cadres upon whom the schools would be based. The Ayyūbids worked out the precedents of school organization and school relations to the state.[32]

Although the *madrasas* enjoyed autonomy and privileges in terms of building, internal management, allocated funds and endowments, salaries of teachers, and spending on the students, the state's intervention in the selection of their curricula and syllabus became very clear and led to the complete containment of the *madrasas* by the Ayyūbid regime,

The strategic goal of the Ayyūbid full patronage of *madrasas* was to fortify Sunnism and preempt any possibility for the Shī'a

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[31] Abdul Adhim Ramadan, ed., *Tārīkh al-Madāris fi Misr al-Islamiyah*. Article, 'Al-Madāris fi al-'Asr al-Ayyūbi' [Madrasas in the Ayyūbid Period] by, Afaf Sayyid, Vol 1, 140.

[32] Lapidus M. Ira, 'Ayyubid Religious Policy and the Development of the Schools of Law in Cairo', Colloque International sur l'histoire du Caire, (Cairo, 1969), 284.

Ismā'īli doctrine'sreturn. The Ayyūbid *madrasas* were distinguished with their sharp division according to the Sunni *madhāhib* of *fiqh*. Historical reference reported that on 566 A.H./1170 Salāh al-Dīn converted a prison complex in the south of the Ancient Mosque of 'Amr b. al-'Āsin Fustāt, into what will be known as *al-Madrasa al-Nāsiriyyah*, which was dedicated for the Shāfi'i school of law.

> Two weeks later, on another side of the complex of the Ancient Mosque, work began on a second law college. Saladin demolished a commercial building, a covered market which had been used for the sale of linen, *qaysāriyya al-Ghazl*, to make room for the building of a law college dedicated for the jurists of the Māliki legal school.[33]
>
> Then he built a third *madrasah* for the Hanafite jurists known as *al-Madrasah al-Sayūfiyyah*. He also built two more *madrasas* for the jurists of the Shāfi'ite legal school, especially that the latter was a *madhhab* for most of the Ayyūbid house itself. One of the two *madrasas* was near al-Mashhad al-Hussaini (Husayn Shrine). Al-Maqrīzi counted the number of *madrasas* in Cairo only up to eighteen; they built twenty eight *madrasas* in both Cairo and al-Fustāt.[34]

The *madrasas* which thrived in the Ayyūbid period were just like the present institutions of higher learning, with a varying number of teaching staff who joined the *madrasah* either by appointment or recommendation. However, because of *madhāhib* competition, it was normal that admission of staff and student depended on the school of law that the candidate followed. It was unusual for a *madrasah* to break the boundaries of the *madhhab* and offer religious education according to the four *Sunni* renowned schools. Perhaps the only exception was in the case of *al-Madrasah al-Sālihiyyah*, mentioned

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[33] Lev Yaaco, *Saladin in Egypt*, (Leiden: Brill Academic Publisher, 1st edn., 1999), 125.

[34]Muhammad Abd Al-Mun'im Khafaji, *Al-Azhar fi Alfi 'Ām* [The Azhar in One Millennium]. (Beirut, Lebanon, Cairo: 'Ālam Al-Kutub, Maktabat Al-Kulliyyah Al-Azhariyah, 2nd edn., 1988), 84.

earlier, founded by sultān Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb in 639 A.H which offered jurisprudential classes according to the four *madhāhib* conducted by four jurists, each of them adhered to one *madhhab*. It was the first of its kind in the Egyptian land. In fact, the rigid division of the madrasas according to the sectarian affiliation was another big blow to the spirit of the liberal culture of learning which had prevailed in the Islamic intellectual sphere for centuries.

Learning styles in these *madrasas* were multiple, and methods of teaching such as *tadrīs* (lecturing), *imla'* (dictation), *munāzara'* (disputation) and *talqīn* (learning by heart) were largely employed. Furthermore, the Ayyūbid educational experience witnessed the invention of a new order of teachers' ranking that included, the *mu'īd* (teaching assistant). Normally, the *mudarris* (professor) was assisted by one *mu'īd* whose main duty was to repeat to the students what was delivered. They also refer to the *mu'īd* in order to explain what were difficult for them to understand from the *mudarris*:

> Position in a school apart from the *tadrīs* included the deputyship (*niyābah*) of a school, the repetitorship (*i'ādah*), the research assistantship (*ifādah*), and, at least at the Hallawiyyah, the office of registrar (*naqīb al-nuqaba*)… That numbers of people were available to fill these posts, is illustrated by the caliber of some of the people who filled the post of *mu'īd*, or repetitor, in a school, whose task it was to repeat the lesson of the *mudarris*, while explaining it to the students. Sometimes, it is true the position was occupied by a student himself.[35]
>
> It was during the Ayyūbid period that the mu'idship became a prominent post which *madrasas* of that era rarely dispensed with. In fact, Salāh al-Dīn himself appointed *mu'īds* in the *madrasah* al-Nāsiriyyah. Also, two *mu'īds* were appointed by al-Sālih Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb for each of the four *mudarris* (professors) at his

[35] Moray W. David, 'An Ayyubid Notable and His World: Ibn al-'Adim and Aleppo as Portrayed in His Biographical Dictionary of People Associated with the City' American Oriental Society, 116, No. 2 (Ap.-Jun., 1996), 323.

madrasah.[36]

The study circle system known as *halaqah* which existed during the Fatimid period and even before that continued to be the main form of class setting in the Ayyūbid period. As for the curricula of the *madrasas*, it was based primarily on *al-'Ulūm al-Naqliyah* which included *fiqh*, *hadīth*, Qur'an, theology, etc… The Ayyūbids emphasized on this kind of curricula in their religious education in order to keep the students away from *al-'Ulūm al-'Aqliyyah* and philosophy in particular, a discipline that the former Fatimid regime invested in.

Along with the phenomenon of founding *madrasas* in, the Ayyūbid founded another unique institution which distinguished their educational establishments from the previous Fatimid regime. It was *dār al-Hadīth* which concentrated on the study of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

> They established specialized *madrasas* for the study of *hadīth* sciences, known as *dār al-Hadīth*. Sultān al-Malik al-Kāmil, the greatest Ayyūbid sultāns known for his patronage and promotion of sciences was the first to establish a house for *hadīth* in Egypt.[37]

Therefore, the establishment of the chain of law colleges and *madrasas* during theAyyūbid dynast, and the official financial patronage of these institutions in the form of pious endowments and salaries was one of the principal means by which the ruling authorities in the state tried to establish their religious and political legitimacy in Egypt. The Ayyūbid chain of *madrasas* and *khānaqāhs* to some extent, helped to forge and restore a common Sunni identity in Egypt.

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[36] Saeed Abd El-Fatteh Ashour, *Misr wa Al-Shām fi 'Asr Al-Ayyūbiyīn wa Al-Mamālīk* [Egypt and Syria during the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Period]. (Beirut: Dār Al-Nahdhah A-'Arabiyya li Al-Tibā'a wa Al-Nashr, 1980), 132.

[37] Ahmad Fuad Al-Syed, *Tārīkh Misr al-Islamiyah Zaman Salātin Bani Ayyūb 567-648 A.H* [History of Islamic Egypt during the time of Ayyūbid Sultans 567- 648 A.H] (Cairo (Egypt): Maktabat Madbūli, 1st edn., 2002), 186-187.

2. The Promotion of *tasawwuf* (sufism) and the Role of the Khanqah

The second character of the educational curriculum in the Ayyūbid period was its clear support for Sufism, probably, as a response to the direct threat posed by Ismā'īlism. One may wonder, however, on the feasibility of the assumption that *tasawwuf* may stood as a response to the Ismā'īli challenge when we know that one major concern for the Sunni *'ulama* of Egypt and elsewhere have always been the puzzling connections between Sufism and Shi'ism.

> Certainly there are parallels of a doctrinal nature: the Sufi emphasis upon a special "knowledge" (*ma'rifa*) acquired through intuitive insight, which is distinct from the exoteric "knowledge" (*'ilm*) represented by the law. For example, recalls the Shi'i doctrine of the hidden meaning (bātin) which lies behind, and is superior to, the external sense (zāhir) of, say, a Koranic verse. The terminology in which Shi'is and Sufis express their ideals – the Shi'i doctrine of the "sovereignty" (*wilaya*) of the Imams, for example, and the Sufi notion that some are graced with a special "closeness" to or "friendship" with God (for which the same Arabic term served) -may also betray common origins, although the meanings of those terms in their fully-developed form were obviously quite different.[38]

Furthermore, some incidents have shown a little to prove that the Ayyūbid elites were supporting the *tasawwuf* movement. In fact, Salāh al-Dīn according to some reports, or his son according to other reports issued orders to execute the controversial theosophist Shihāb al-Dīn Yahya al-Suhrawardi[39] in 1191. Perhaps the similarities and

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[38] Berkey Jonathan, *Formation of Islam*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1st edn., 2002), 234.

[39] Shihab al-Din Yahya b. Habash al-Suhrawardiwas a Persian philosopher and Sufi. He was born in 1155 in the village of *Suhraward* located in a Kurdish inhabited region in present-day northwestern Iran and was executed in 1191 in Aleppo. He was executed in 1191 on charges of cultivating Batini teachings and philosophy, by the

parallels between the doctrinal fundamentals of Ismā'īlism and *tasawwuf* motivated the Ayyūbid ruling elites to promote the latter as a way to fight Ismā'īlism and attract the *'awam* (common people), "for, Salāh al-Dīn considered combating the Shī'a *madhhab* by the same weapon, the *tasawwuf*, which the Fatimids capitalized on to disseminate their doctrine."[40]

Spreading word of the sultān's achievements and calling for *jihād* against the Crusaders is another propaganda service which Salāh al-Dīn expected from his Sufis alliance. Some other studies attributed peoples' zeal towards *tasawwuf* to the fact that:

> From the later stages of the Fatimid period, Sufi views filled the vacuum that was left by the Ismā'īli *dā'is* in Egypt. The Egyptians who have been influenced by the Ismā'īli teachings and doctrine found themselves after the extinction of the Fatimid state deprived from elements that normally nourished their religious sentiments (needs). Hence, they turned to the *tasawwuf* and subrogated it in their spirits and a life in place of what they used to hear from the Ismā'īli *dā'is*. Those in charge in the Ayyūbid state, according to Kamel Hussein, understood this psychological part of the people (in Egypt); hence they fought the Fatimid doctrines in Egypt by the teachings of Sufism.[41]

Had the *tasawwuf* as a tradition and practice preceeded the Ayyūbid reign in Egypt, or had it just appeared as a result of their patronage? There is no consensus among historians on this matter. What is likely, however, is that only in the Ayyūbid period that the newly established institution called *khānaqāhs* began its primary role as the locus of education that disseminated the Sunni doctrine and

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order of al-Malik al-Zahir, son of Salah al-Din.

[40] *Al-Tarbiyah al-'Arabiyah al-Islamiyah: Al-Muassasāt wa al-Mumārasāt* Article, 'Al-Tarbiyah wa al-Ta'līm baina al-Qarnayn al-Khāmis wa al-'Āshir li al-Hijrah / Al-Hādi 'Ashar ela al-Sādis 'Ashar li al-Milād'. (Māb: Mussasat Āl Al-Bayt li Al-Fikr Al-Islami, 1996), 97.

[41] Ahmad Fuad Al-Syed, *Tārīkh Misr al-Ayyūbiyyah Zaman Salātin Bani Ayyūb 567- 648 A.H.*, [History of Islamic Egypt during the time of Ayyūbid Sultans 567-648 A.H] (Cairo (Egypt): Maktabat Madbūli, 1st edn,, 2002), 108.

attracted the former partisans of the Ismā'īli *madhhab*. The account provided by the medieval Egyptian writer al-Qalqashandi[42] is a testimony of the Ayyūbid origins of Egyptian *khānaqāhs*:

> "*khānaqāhs* and *ribāts* were not known in the Egyptian land before the advent of the Ayyūbid state. Their author was Salāh al-Dīn Yūsuf bin Ayyūb who built al-Sālihiyyah *khānaqāh* that is commonly called *sa'īd al-Su'ada*."[43]

Al-Maqrīzi however, thinks that *sa'īd al-Su'ada* was the first *khānaqāh* to be founded in Egypt in 569 A.H. / 1173 by Salāh al-Dīn himself. He added that this establishment was built and located opposite of *al-Wazārah*, and was supported by a pious endowment intended for the foreign Sufis who came to Egypt. He gave its *shaykh* prominence over other *shuyūkh* with the title of *shaykh al-Shuyūkh* (master of the masters), and equipped the building with *hammāms* (bath rooms). In order to ease their travelling and settling in town, Salāh al-Dīn designed special regulations for the Sufis of this *khānaqāh*.[44] Salāh al-Dīn's extraordinary treatment towards the people of *tasawwuf* prompted some historians to attribute it to his own devoted personal religious character.

Another significant development in the practice of *tasawwuf* in Egypt during the Ayyūbid period was the fact that it took a new collective shape which overtook the limited individual direction it used to have in the earlier stages. This development turned out well in the form of building various establishments allocated with significant pious endowments. As a result, considerable number of Egyptians pounced at *tasawwuf* either as *murīds* (an initiate or a committed to a

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[42] Shihāb al-Dīn abu al-'Abbās Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Ahmad Abd Allah al-Qalqashandi (1355 or 1356 - 1418) was a medieval Egyptian writer and Mathematician born in a village in the Nile Delta. He is the author of *Subh al-A 'sha*, (The Dawn of the Blind), a fourteen volume Encyclopedia which contains much information on medieval Egypt and topics like cryptography and heraldry.

[43] Yusuf Ali Tawil, ed. *Kitāb Subh Al-A 'sha li Al-Qalqashandi* [The Book of the Dawn of the Blind]. (Damascus: Dār Al-Fikr, 1st edn. 1987,), Vol 3, 343

[44] See, Khalil al-Mansur, ed., *Al-Mawā'iz wa al-'Itibar bi Dhikr al-Khitat wa al-Āthār li al-Maqrīzi* [Exhortations and Contemplation of the Recollection of Plans and Monuments] (Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyah, 1st edn., 1998), Vol 4, 282-283

teacher in the spiritual path of Sufism) or just as simple sympathizers of this school.

> The head of the Sufis took the title of *shayk al-Shuyūkh*, and the residents of the *khānaqāh* were known for their knowledge and devotion that ordinary people sought them to get their blessing. Only notable individuals took charge of the *mashyakhah* (administrative and scholarship leadership) in this house, and many prominent sufis resided at it. It was common that every Friday, masses of people would come from Misr (al-Fustāt) to Cairo, just to observe Sufis from the *khānaqāh*of *sa'īd al-Su'ada* when they proceed to *jāmi'* al-Hākim in order to conduct their Friday prayer. They believed that *baraqah* (blessing) and benefaction would occur to them by the virtue of observing those Sufis in their wonderful appearance.[45]

The introduction of the *khānaqāhs* into Egypt by the Ayyūbids and their establishment as religious and educational institutions officially sponsored by the state gave intellectual Sufism the chance to boom into Egypt. However, as a society in which religion constituted a central organizational principle, another brand of Sufism and religiosity appeared. "It was not identical to Sufism; it was very closely identified with it"[46]. That trend could be labeled as a popular or mass Sufism. Jonathan Berkey cited that members of this trend were not necessarily attached to any particular *tarīqah*, but were intimately tied to the communities that surrounded them. They also tended to focus on particular individuals who were revered for their saintly character or great learning. He stated that syncretistic elements and patterns tended to be more pronounced among the religious practices and expectations of the common people.[47] Berkey then

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[45] Al-Urayni, Al-Syed Al-Baz, *Al-Sharq Al-Adna fi Al-'Usūr Al-Wusta: Al-Juz' Al-Awal, Al-Ayyūbiyūn* [The Near East in the Middle-Ages: 1st Volume, The Ayyūbids]. (Cairo: Dār Al-Nahdhah li Al-Tibā'a wa Al-Nashr, 1967), 217.

[46] P. Jonathan, Berkey, *Formation of Islam*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1st edn., 2002), 249.

[47] Ibid, 250-251.

summarized the reaction of the *'ulama* towards this trend:

> From the scholars' standpoint, the danger of popular religion is that it constituted a challenge to the authority of the *'ulama*. In the first place, popular religious festivals and practices often were associated with behavior that transgressed the *sharī'a*, and so undermined the legal and ethical system which lay at the base of the *'ulama*'s authority.[48]

The *khānaqāh* -also known as *khāngāh*- was a retreat for Sufis, mystics, and dervishes along with their disciples. It evolved as a non-profit institution in the beginning of 11th Century A.D. and contributed with ample share in the religious enlightenment of its devotees. People flocked to the *khānaqāh* to learn the short cut path to spiritual bliss and salvation that Sufism furnished.

Apart from spiritual exercises and religious enlightenment, community living was also an important part of *khānaqāh*. The *khānaqāh* institution not only served religious roles but also encompassed socio-economic functions and contributed to the redistribution of social wealth by assuring food and lodging for the needy. Festivals for the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (*mawlid*) were held in these establishmentsat specific times of the year. Like *madrasas*, some researchers argued that *khānaqāh* were first established by the Seljūk rulers for political objectives, primarily to legitimize themselves as the guardians of Sunni Islam. The tendency of constructing *khānaqāh* accelerated under the Ayyūbid elites in Egypt. "Saladin welcomed Asiatic Sufi in Egypt and he and his followers founded and endowed many *khānaqāh*, *Ribāts*, and *zāwiyas* of which al-Maqrīzi gives a long list."[49] It was mainly an attempt to soften the influence of the philosophical appeal of the Ismā'īli*da'wah*.

What genuinely distinguished the performance of *khānaqāh*during the Ayyūbid period was the fact that they became part of the state's sponsored institutions in terms of the allocation of

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[48] Ibid, 253.

[49] Trimingham John Spencer and Voll O. John, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., 1971), 17.

generous endowments as well as their administrative structure.

> The founding of sufi homes in the Ayyūbid period depended largely on the availability of endowments… In addition to endowing sufi *khānaqāh*of *sa'īd al-Su'ada* with properties, he made a daily ration of 3 pounds of bread and a piece of meat which weighs one third pound dipped into bouillon. He used to monthly distribute soap and make *halwa* (dessert) for them. At the eve of every year, he donated an allowance for the *kiswah* (clothing) of 300 sufis living in that *khānaqāh*. Such privileges lured many of the prominent leaders of sufism to migrate to Egypt, among them Abu al-Hassan al-Shādhili, Abu al-Abbās al-Mursi, and Ahmad al-Badāwi. More significantly than this, many people joined the ranks of sufi *mashāykh* (masters).[50]

Admission to such institution was not open to all; it was restricted to those who have adequate knowledge of the *tarīqah* (sufi religious order) and its customs, irrespective of their country of origin and age. Hence, it was no wonder that joining the *khānaqāh*was regarded as membership in the *Tarīqah* before being membership in an educational institution. This practice is in fact another blow to the open access to learning which Muslims from all walks of life had enjoyed for centuries.

The number of disciples and staff in the *khānaqāh* largely depended on the size of the building and the earnings of its endowments, thus it varied from one *khānaqāh* to another. The activities which the residents of these institutions practiced during the Ayyūbid period were fundamentally acts of spiritual devotion, piety and meditation:

> Individuals were educated to learn the Qur'an and its spiritual meaning, to cultivate an inner life, and to read the writings of great poets and writers in the sufi tradition… As it was common for many sufi *shaykhs* to

[50] *Al-Mūjaz fi Al-Tarbiyah Al-'Arabiyah Al-Islamiyah: Al-Muassasāt wa Al-Mumārasāt*. [Summary of Arab-Islamic Education: Institutions and Practices]. (Māb: Mussasat Āl Al-Bayt li Al-Fikr Al-Islami, 1996), 98.

> be buried in their 'place of residence' (*khānaqāh*), these spaces have become popular pilgrimage sites (*ziyārat*) to seek *barakah* and *shafā'a* (intercession).[51]

However, towards the end of the Ayyūbid reign in Egypt and the beginning of Mamlūk era, a new but significant development occured in the activities practiced inside the khānaqāh. Many of them, depending on the will of *waqf* donor, added to the teaching of *ahl al-Haqīqah* another dimension; that is; the teaching of *ahl al-Sharī'a*. The former involved teaching the spiritual sufi path for enlightenment, while the latter comprised the teaching of Sunni Islamic law according to the four prominent schools of *fiqh*.

The Ayyūbid's engagement in a broad process of Sunnism restorationand homogenization of Sunni religious life in Egypt, through the adoption of many institutional organization reforms was under the preference to the Shāfi'ite law and the Ash'arite theology.The fundamental change in the Ayyūbid religio-educational policies was their success in restoring Sunnism in Egypt and abolishing the Ismā'īlidoctrine of the Fatimids. Second to it was the restoration of allegiance to the symbolic legitimate Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad. *Madrasas* played a very significant role in the execution of these two policies. The Ayyūbids patronized educational activities in the chains of *madrasas* and *khānāqahs* enabled the regime to provide permanent places of instruction, residence, and employment for teachers and students, and also provided lasting endowments to pay for salaries and stipends and to pay for building maintenance costs.This patronage contributed to a large extent to the institutionalization and professionalization of Islamic education in medieval age, an aspect that was missing in the earlier stages. However its negative effect was the loss of autonomy that Sunni *'ulama* maintained in early Islam up to the military Seljūks. It deteriorated further under the military patronage state of the Ayyūbids (1175-1265). The elite *amīrs* and *a'yān* became involved in the social and intellectual life of Egypt, and due to the militarization of the system, they were able to patronize the *'ulama* positions. The Ayyūbid

[51] Jiwani Karim, 'Muslim Spaces of Piety and Worship', (The Institute of Ismaili Studies, March 2006), 4.

rulers patronized the educational life in Egypt by offering the *'ulama* positions at various state-sponsored institutions. In return, they received full support from the *'ulama*. Thus, formal and informal institutions of education in the Ayyūbid period were arenas in which power and politics received a fundamental expression.

Conclusion

It is worth to mention that the Ayyūbids ruled through a direct military-political elite dictatorship; thus, they were largely involved in decades of warfare. The success of the Ayyūbids to topple the Fatimid regime was primarily due to the propaganda of *jihād*. Salāh al-Dīn's subsequent defense of Islam against the Crusaders earned him admiration and respect not only within Egypt but in the entire Islamic world of the day. Sunni scholars also rallied around him and provided him with much needed religious support; in their eyes, he was a strong savior of the Muslim ummah from the crusaders' assault. Such alliance between Salāh al-Dīn and the *'ulama* was in another aspect, a marriage between education and politics.

It is evident that the main motivation for the Ayyūbid rulers to forge alliance with the *'ulama* in particular, and to put their hands on the major educational institutions such as madrasas and *khānaqāh* was primarily incited by their common cause of annihilating the ideological and political heritage of the Ismā'īlis and restoring Sunnism in Egypt. Furthermore, the Ayyūbids' call to fight infidel crusaders and revitalize the obligation of *jihād* appealed to the *'ulama* and encouraged them to give their full support to the Ayyūbids.

Another significant factor in what appeared to be a solid alliance between the Ayyūbid ruling elites and the *'ulama* was the fact that the former accepted to play a marginal role in the daily monitoring and supervision of the educational and religious institutions. They gave a free hand to the *'ulama* to manage those institutions including administrating a large number of endowments (*waqf*), which were the main source of expenditure on educational activities at that time. The military-political elite maintained the authority of directing the general guidelines and philosophy of education in general.

Last but not least, the charismatic influence of the personality of Salāh al-Dīn, father of the Ayyūbid house, especially his political and religious idealism had some appeal to the men of knowledge. They saw in his persona an image of a savior who could the reclaim *ummah*'s past strength and glory. For once they forgot their *madhāhib* schism and offered him their unconditional loyalty. Salāh al-Dīn thus, won the challenge of the *'ulama*.

Some researchers suggested that the Ayyūbid rulers, like in the case of other medieval Sunni sultanates invested their patronage of *madrasas* as well as their alliance with Sunni *'ulama* in order to provide their state with a cadre of functionaries and bureaucrats[52], however, this assumption was contested by many others:

> Several historians have cast doubt on any sort of systematic, functional link between the *madrasa* and the political and bureaucratic administration of the medieval Sunni governments… The establishment of *madrasas* served the political interests of those who founded them, both individually and collectively, but the institutions themselves, and the academic activities they supported were not subjected to systematic governmental regulation and control and did not undergird any particular political program.[53]

Nevertheless, even if we agree that the Ayyubid governmental agenda in dealing with the *'ulama* and their establishments did not include any intent to employ them as state bureaucrats, the fact that it succeeded in winning them over sometimes and containing them some other times represented a significant blow to the academic

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[52] See, Leiser Gary, 'Notes on the Madrasa in Medieval Islamic Society', The Muslim World, Vol. 76/1 (1986), 16-23. Also see, Mohammad Munir Saad Al-Din, *Al-Madrasa al-Islamiyah fi al-'Usūr al-Wusta': Mafhūmuha', Nash'atuha', Dawruha' wa Khadamatuha' fi al-Mujtama', Idāratuha' wa Tanzimuha'* [The Islamic Madrasa in the Middle-Ages: Concept, Establishment, Role, Social Services, Management, and Structure]. (Beirut, Saida: Al-Maktabah Al-'Asriyah), 18.

[53] Hefner W. Robert and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, ed., *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Article, 'Madrasas Medieval and Modern: Politics, Education and the Problem of Muslim Identy' by Jonathan Berkey, 44-45.

liberalism which they enjoyed for many centuries. It marked the beginning of a new phase in the Muslim intellectual life which started to meander towards *jumud* (stagnation) and the dominance of *taqlid* (imitation) and sectarian division associated with *taa'sub* (fanaticism) and schism. In short, the state's financing of the educational institutions and its involvement in its management was the beginning of a process which enabled it to exercise greater control over the educational institutions and practices in the later stages, even if the academic liberal model continued to exist.

State's interference in shaping the intellectual life and attempting to turn education into one of its agencies prompted some researchers to suggest that states such as the Fatimids and Ayyūbids which were based on a sectarian basis used the *waqf* as a means of attracting Egyptians to the doctrine of the State.

In essence, the educational focus of the Ayyūbid formal and informal institutions of learning, *madrasas* in particular was based upon both *al-'Ulūm al-Naqliyyah* and *al-'Ulūm al-'Aqliyyah* but with greater emphasis on the teaching of *fiqh*, *tasawuf*, ash'arite speculative theolog, and logic. In general the establishment of the Ayyūbid dynasty deepened the conservativeinterpretationof Islamic law and theology. Thus orthodoxy was mainly taught in *madrasas*, *khānaqāhs* and later at al-Azhar in Cairo, a venue which later would become a principal center of Islamic higher learning, and consequently the birth of institutionalized learning practices.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

	Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	’	’	’	’	ز	z	z	z	z	گ	–	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	b	ڑ	–	–	–	ṛ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	–	p	p	p	ژ	–	zh	j	zh	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ٹ	–	–	–	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ṣ	sh	ہ	h	h	h[1]	h[1]
ث	th	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	j	ض	ḍ	ẓ	ż	ż	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	–	ch	çh	ch	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah			-a[2]
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al[3]			
خ	kh	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	‘					
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğ	gh					
ڈ	–	–	–	d	ف	f	f	f	f					
ذ	dh	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	q					
ر	r	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k					

[1] – when not final
[2] – at in construct state
[3] – (article) al - or 1-

VOWELS

		Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	Ā	–
	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	يِّ	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	iyy (final form ī)
	وُّ	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uv	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	ـَ	a	a	a or e
	ـُ	u	u	u or ü o or ö
	ـِ	i	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

AL-SHAJARAH
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