

Between Dictators and Scholars: Institutions and Methods of Teaching in Medieval Islam

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Abstract

This paper explores the methods of teaching in the pre-Modern Muslim World including a survey of the practices implemented in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad from 700-1600 CE. Previous studies have focused primarily on the role of rote memorization and the dictatorial position of instructors. While not untrue, these claims represent only the extreme picture of how the project of education was undertaken in these instates. The current project therefore seeks to challenge this view and establish that education in the Muslim World was a complex system based upon relationships of self-respect, scholarship, and academic achievement.

Education in the pre-modern Muslim world led its societies towards levels of achievement not witnessed since the time of the great Greco-Roman academies and not seen again until the rise of the European university. Various fields in the arts and sciences flourished, providing a range of scholars whose works directly influenced the development of educational institutions in the West at a time when the complexities of the Middle Ages led to a restriction on the progression of knowledge and a stagnation of society. However, studies of the methods of education in the pre-modern Muslim world have tended to focus on largely negative aspects. In perhaps the most fundamental study on the subject, Jonathan Berkey claims that education was based almost entirely on rote memorization, and students were not encouraged to develop their own methods of thought. Students were merely servants, running behind their teachers seeking their personal approval. Their relationship was as that between a dictator and his people. Students would kiss the professor's hand which put them in a subservient position, and professorships were gained mostly through corruption or nepotism.² Women, according to Berkey, were also treated unfavorably in this system, and that "a women who learns how to write is like a snake given poison to drink."³ The present study seeks to examine the methods of teaching and education in medieval Islam with a focus on Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo from 700 – 1600 A.D. By looking at the system in more detail, it will become clear through the course of this paper that Berkey's claims, although not entirely untrue in certain circumstances, represent only a piece of the overall Muslim educational system, and that a true analysis requires a bit more consideration. A few general questions will be covered such as: What are the methods of teaching used during the Middle Ages? How effective were these methods? What is the difference between each method? What was the relationship between student and teacher and vice versa? What are the educational posts and the differences among them?

The Importance of Education

"If the wealth of people today is measured by what fancy cars they own then the Muslims from the period between the 9th and 13th Century would have their wealth measured by what they own in terms of books and manuscripts."⁴ Whereas at least 95 percent of residents in the West during the Middle Ages did not know how to read or write, the Islamic state established thousands of schools spread amongst cities and villages to teach people the Qur²ān, Arabic, accounting, history and geography.⁵

¹ McGill University, Canada.

² Ibid

³ Berkey, Jonathan. *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014) 162

⁴ Hunke, Sigrid. *Shams al-'Arab Taṣṭā'ala al-Gharb* (8th Edition. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl li al-Nashr, 1993) 385

⁵ Ibid

Seeking knowledge is an important aspect of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said "to acquire knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim, male and female," and "seek knowledge from the day of your birth until the day of your death" and "seek knowledge even if were in China."⁶ Muḥammad Ibn Saḥnūn is considered the first Muslim scholar to write a book for teachers in the 9th Century entitled *Adab al-Mu'allimīn* or "Rules of Conduct for Teachers." The book gives information relating to educational theory and curriculum development. In addition it focuses on the methods of teaching for children in the traditional schools or *Kuttāb* and includes information such as the importance of teaching *Qur'ān*, the equality between children, the importance of playtime for children in order to encourage their love of education and refresh their minds. Moreover, the work stresses cooperation between students in working as a team to help each other in the learning process, and that punishing children should not be in a violent manner.⁷ Another important book is *Ta'lim al-Muta'alim, Turuq at-Ta'allum* or "Educating the Student in the Methodology of Learning" was written by al-Zarnujī in the 12th Century. The book provides us with valuable information about the importance of education and taking education seriously, respecting educational settings by not eating, drinking or sleeping while the teacher is presenting a lesson. Also important is having a positive intention (*Niyya*) by the learner because good intention is essential for any work. al-Zarnujī believes acquiring knowledge with a bad intention makes knowledge not useful for the student. Knowledge is same as worship (*'Ibāda*) and should be combined with good intention in order to be fruitful.⁸ We should not forget also the role of other Muslim scholars who wrote about methods of teaching in medieval Islam such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Sīnā and Asad Ibn al-Furāt.

1-Methods of Education in Medieval Islam

One of the most important methods of teaching was direct contact between professor and student, through the oral transmission of knowledge. As a result many students and scholars travelled to meet and listen from the professor directly. This was described by Ibn Khaldūn when he said "a scholar's education is greatly improved by travelling in quest of knowledge and meeting the authoritative teachers of his time. The reason is that human beings obtain their knowledge and character qualities and all their opinions and virtues either through studying, instruction, and lecture or through imitation of a teacher and personal contact with him."⁹ Ibn Jama continued to advise his students to get knowledge directly from Sheikhs to avoid any mistakes that could be the result from incorrect readings of texts.¹⁰ The idea of contact directly with the professor to acquire the Islamic knowledge was an important part of unbroken chain of knowledge (*Isnād*) that every student was keen to maintain. An example of that is in the famous Hadith scholar as-Sam'ānī (d.562/1167) who travelled to Baghdad, Khurasan and Damascus to meet the men of knowledge (*Ahl al-'Ilm*) to acquire their knowledge and model their conduct. Another example is Abū al-Ḥasan al-Andalusī (d.541/1146) who travelled to China in a dangerous journey to meet directly with scholars and collect Prophetic Hadith. After that he travelled to Baghdad to study law with al-Ghazālī at the *Nizāmiyya* School.¹¹ Mak'hul (d.112/730) who is considered one of the masters of Damascus school of law was one of the students who also travelled to acquire knowledge. The sources report him as saying "I was in Egypt the slave of a woman who gave me my freedom. But I did not leave Egypt before having gathered all the knowledge that could be found there, then to Syria where I thoroughly examined that land. I have never left a land without thinking that there was a knowledge hidden within it I had not heard."¹² Memorization and repetition were important methods of teaching and learning in medieval Islam. In the *Kuttāb* for example a teacher would read a verse of the *Qur'ān* and the students would repeat it after him. Each student had a small blackboard where he would then write down what he had memorized from the knowledge of his teacher.

⁶ Gunther, Sebastian. "Be Masters in that you teach and Continue to Learn: Medieval Muslim Thinkers on Educational Theory" in *Comparative Education Review*. Special issue on Islam and Education. vol.50, no. 3, 2006, pp. 367-388, 368

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Afandi, Mochtar. *The Methods of Muslim Learning As Illustrated in al-Zarnujī, Ta'lim al-Muta'alim, Turuq at-Ta'allum*. Thesis for Masters of Arts, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1993

⁹ *Ibid*, p.83

¹⁰ Chamberlain, Michael. *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

¹¹ Ephrat, Daphna. *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition-The Sunni 'Ulemā' of Eleventh-Century Baghdad* (New York: University of New York Press, 2000)

¹² Touat, Houari. *Islam & Travel in The Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) 16

If a student ignored his studies or was incorrect in his recitation, the teacher would punish him once with merely some kind words, threaten him, or potentially forbid him from food or play time for a specific period of time until he returned properly to his studies.¹³ al-Ghazālī for example spent three years memorizing notes he had collected because he feared these notes would be robbed or destroyed. "The best time for memorizing one's lessons is clearly at dawn. And the best places are second story room rather than the ground floor or any place far from distraction. It is not advisable to study in places of vegetation; nor in river banks, nor highways for in these places is something always taking place that is bound to distract his attention."¹⁴ Students used repetition of lessons as an essential technique of studying. The repetition helped students to commit texts to memory. Some students used to repeat the lesson of jurisprudence (fiqh) a hundred times to memorize it by heart. al-Ghazālī's classmate, al-Kiya al-Harrasi, used to repeat his lessons at the Nizāmiyya School seventy times to make sure that he kept them in his memory.¹⁵ Learning by heart four or five hundred manuscript lines per day was considered as noteworthy achievement, to assist the faint listed those things which aided the memory including honey, the use of toothpicks, and eating twenty one raisins per day as well as foods such as coriander, eggplant, and bitter apples that made one forgetful.¹⁶ Understanding was a crucial part of the teaching process in Medieval Islam. The importance of memorization and repetition did not mean ignoring the understanding of the text or lesson.

The importance of both understanding and memorization was illustrated by Zamakhsharī when he said "learning is a city one of whose gates is understanding, and the other retrieval from memory." 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī also stated "when you read a book make every possible effort to learn it by heart and master its meaning. Imaging the book to have disappeared and that you can dispense with it, unaffected by its loss."¹⁷ Other methods also were used by students in Medieval Islam to improve students' ability to learn and study some of them were disputation, argumentation and debate that were later copied in the Christian West.¹⁸ Ibn Jama talks about the importance of managing the study time for achieving better learning "for memorizing it's suggested that the most convenient time is in the late night, approaching the dawn. For thinking it is in the early morning, as for writing it is better in the middle of the day, while reflection and discussion are more effective at night."¹⁹ A student practicing what he has learned is also an important method of teaching in medieval Islam. According to al-Ghazālī a student who learns something without putting it into practice is considered wasting his time. In addition, al-Ghazālī emphasizes the importance of breaking up longer lessons into smaller sections in order to make it easy for student to understand and not feel bored. Moreover, moral character building is important and includes personal conduct and values before building the educational aspect which includes reading, writing and other knowledge.²⁰ Writing down what the professor says in the lecture was also an important method. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭusī advised students to carry an inkwell and write down the important information they received from the professor. al-Ṭusī says "what is memorized flies but what is written down remains."²¹ The study circle is formed around the professor that is similar to a University academy; the standard class layout for many madrasas.²²

2-The Relationship between Teacher and Student

The relationship between the professor and his students was like that between the Prophet and his Companions: based on mutual respect. The professor's role was not only to teach (Ta'īim) but also to guide his students (Tarbiyya). The relationship characterized by kindness (Rifq) and sympathy ('Aṭf).

¹³al-Ahwānī, Fu'ād. *al-Tarbiyya fi al-Islām* (Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1967)

¹⁴ Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Colleges: Institution of Learning in Islam and West* (London: Edinburgh University Press, 1981) 102

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Berkey, p, 29

¹⁷ Makdisi, 103

¹⁸ Farhad, Daftary. *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilfred Madelung* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003)

¹⁹ Afandi, 69

²⁰al-Kanderi, Latefah. *Exploring Education in Islam: Al-Ghazālī's Model of the Master-Pupil Relationship Applied to Educational Relationship within Islamic Family*. Ph.D Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 2011.

²¹ Berkey, 25

²² Sabki, Ahmed and Glenn Hardaker. "The Madrasah Concept of Islamic Pedagogy" in *Educational Review*. vol. 65, Issue 3, 2013, pp, 342-356, 351

"The Shaykh should be like the Prophet who taught by being aware of the spiritual status of Companions according to their specific needs."²³ Michael Chamberlain indicates that the relationship between students and their Sheikhs was like that between father and son. Students saw their sheikhs as experts in their field and sources of blessing (Baraka). As a result some drank from the used ablution water of scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Jama wrote, "the relation to their shaykhs, students should be as the sick man is to the expert physician."²⁴ In addition, there was a form of ritualization of knowledge. Knowledge ('Ilm) is like prayer that demands purity and as a result both teachers and students should possess full ritual purity when attending lessons. According to Jonathan Berkey education in medieval Islam was always based on the personal relationship between student and teacher. As a result, the choice of a teacher was very important and some students spent more than two months choosing a professor.²⁵ al-Zarnujī indicates the criteria of choosing a good professor such as having experience, piety and an older age. In addition he stressed the importance of students showing their appreciation of the professor by trusting him and when the professor visits the student's town students should meet and welcome him. al-Zarnujī also advised students to respect their companions and teach others the merits of respect.²⁶ al-Ghazālī's advice for students was "The student must not set himself above his professor and should accept whatever his professor teaches him. He should embrace all advice proffered by his professor and trust his guidance implicitly. In addition the student is to be to his professor like the soft soil which has received heavy rains and completely absorbed them."²⁷ On the other hand the professor should be a good example for his students. He should not teach only for gaining money or praise but for the sake of God and benefit of his students.²⁸ The relationship between the student and the teacher therefore was very strong. Students would accompany their teachers everywhere and help with housework and would also purchase goods for them in the market. The teachers were likewise good to their students, to the point where a teacher would sell his donkey to purchase medicine for his needy students.²⁹ Many anecdotes in the historical sources demonstrate how the relationship between students and their professors developed.

"Some professors support their students from their own pockets. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, for example, is reported to have given one of his students five gold dinars on two occasions for writing paper (Kāghiz)."³⁰ He also on his deathbed recommended that his student Ibn Khayrūn donate all his books as a pious endowment (waqf) for students. The relationship extended to marriage between the professor's daughters and his students. An example of that is Abū Naṣr al-Ibrāhīm (d.506/1112) who married his daughter Shuhda al-Kātiba to his student Abū al-Ḥasan al-Anbarī.³¹ Muḥammad Ibn Saḥnūn indicates that the teacher in the school (Kuttāb) should not be busy with anything else while teaching his pupils, even with funeral prayers (Ṣalāt al-Janāza) or writing a book because he gets money to do this work. In addition the teacher should teach pupils useful knowledge such as Qur'ān, Hadīth, reading, writing, poetry, handwriting and grammar, as well as how to do ablution and perform prayers.³² The relationship between students and professor some time extended to several years. "Some students studied with many professors others stayed with a single professor for years, holding a job or two under him and acting as his companions or junior colleague. In some cases a student studied with only one individual, followed his professor from place to place, and settled himself in the locale to which his professor had immigrated."³³ The classroom itself had rules based on respect of the professor and knowledge. For instance, it was not acceptable for a student to sit in the middle of a learning circle (Ḥalaqa) or for a student to turn his back to the professor or speaks in a tone louder than that of the professor.³⁴

²³ Alario, Laury. "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Merier's Definition of the Shaykh al-Tarbiya and the Shaykh al-Talim" in *The Muslim World*. Vol. 93, Issue 1, 2003, pp. 69-97, 77

²⁴ Chamberlain, 123

²⁵ Berkey

²⁶ Afandi

²⁷ Gunther, p. 383

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Hunke

³⁰ Ephrat, p. 83

³¹ Ibid

³² al-Muṭawwā', Muḥammad. *Kitāb Ādāb al-Mu'ālimīn li Muḥammad ibn Saḥnūn* (Tunis: Maṭba' al-'Arab, 1972)

³³ Gilbert, Joane. "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the 'Ulemā' in Medieval Damascus" in *Studia Islamica*. No. 52, 1980, pp. 105-134, 108

³⁴ Ahmed, Munir. "Muslim Education Prior to the Establishment of Madrasah" in *Islamic Studies*, vol. 26, No. 4, Winter 1987, pp. 321-

The students loved and respected their professors and were keen to be on time at their classes. Anecdotes in the sources tell us the story of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who "was once caught hold of by a man in the street as he was running in order to reach the next class on time. The man said 'Are you not ashamed of running like this? How long do you intend to run along with children?' Ibn Ḥanbal answered 'Until I die.'"³⁵

3-Educational Posts

The first Muslim educational institution was built in Medina in the Seventh Century by the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. Since that time the mosque became a center of both worship and education particularly in law and theology. Study circles were held in the mosque where students would sit around professors who specialized in the Qur'ān, theology, jurisprudence, history and the Arabic language. With the passage of time, the madrasa appeared in around Tenth Century and became an independent institution distinguished from the mosque. More specializations were added to the educational system such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and music.³⁶ "The Madrasa in medieval Islam also served as a hostel for merchants and travellers, was a site of legal courts, provided employment and business opportunities and contributed to the creation and integration of Islamic society."³⁷ The madrasa, mosque, and Kuttāb had several teaching and administrative posts. In the educational realm, the professor (Mudarris) was a paid post and had its great prestige in the community according to al-Subkī's description. "A professor was to be an expert in Islamic religious law and its ancillaries, devoted to instruction in holy knowledge, and adhering to the ideals of proper transmission. Ideally, he was to do more than memorize the texts he transmitted and hand down accurately. He would also encourage disputation (Munāẓara) in controversial questions in order to teach his students how to derive the law from its sources."³⁸

The staff of the Madrasa was based on the size and the wishes of the founder, but generally there were several professors such as a teacher of Qur'ānic recitation, a teacher of Hadith and a teacher of Arabic grammar. There were also assistants such as (Mu'īd), (Mufīd), librarian (Khazindār) and preacher.³⁹ The Kuttāb, on the other hand, was a place where teachers could rent out space to teach the Qur'ān and the basics of reading, writing, Hadith, and mathematics to his pupils. The teacher would normally be a legal scholar who had completed his studies at the hands of a knowledgeable scholar and had received permission (Ijāza) to teach. In addition, he had an assistant (Ārif). The teacher would work with pupils in return for a small fee paid by their parents.⁴⁰ For instance, Qur'ān reciter was a profession of great demand in medieval Islam. Each teacher in the Kuttāb had 5 to 10 pupils to teach to recite and memorize Qur'ān in a proper way. There was no fixed time for study but a successful pupil should be able to chant the entire Qur'ān from memory.⁴¹ In higher education the assistant (Mu'īd) was chosen by the professor from amongs this most advanced students. "However, the only duty of him is to instruct, he sits with the audience listen to the lecture given by the professor. When the lecture ends, the function of the repeater starts. His duty is to go over the same subject again, explaining the complicated parts and helping the less gifted students to understand the topic. So (Mu'īds) were needed to help students with different abilities and have them reach to the level of other students."⁴² Another assistant was the repeater (mustamlī). While the assistant's (Mu'īd) role is to explain the complicated parts of the lecture the repeater was to repeat what the professor said word by word, the reason for this was that some meetings were very large, and at times seventeen columns of the mosque were surrounded by the students. As a result the professor's voice could not be heard by every student and therefore there peater helped each student listen to what the professor said or dictated. The repeater usually stood on a raised seat to make it possible for all students to listen and see him clearly.⁴³ The mufīd also was an assistant for the professor but there is no clear difference between the role of mufīd and mu'īd in the sources.

³⁵ Ibid, 328

³⁶ Mirbabaev, A. K., P. Zieme, and Wang Furen. "The Development of Education: Maktab, Madrasa, Science and Pedagogy" in Asimov and Bosworth, eds, 1996, pp. 31-59.

³⁷ Leiser, Gary. "Notes on the Madrasa in Medieval Islamic Society" in *The Muslim World*. Vol. 76, Issue 1, 1986, pp. 16-23, 23

³⁸ Ephrat, p. 108-109

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ al-Ahwānī,

⁴¹ Mirbabaev

⁴² Sonmez, Selami. "Tutorial Instruction in the History of Muslim Education" in *International Journal of Sociology, Science and Education*. Vol. 3, Issue 4, 2013, pp. 1135-1141, 1138

⁴³ Ahmed

Generally both were assistants worked to repeat the professor's lecture to the students. The only clear difference between the two posts is that one was a paid position (I'āda) while the other was not (Ifāda). Deeds of endowments from the Mamluk Period suggest that no institution ever supported a non-salaried endowed position (Ifāda).⁴⁴ "The place of the professor in the community appears clearly as one of great honor. His honored state was evidenced by the development of the inaugural lecture, accompanied by the attendance of government officials and the bestowal of robes of honor."⁴⁵ For example when al-Ghazālī was sent by Nizām al-Mulk to Baghdad to hold the chair of Shāfi'ī law at the Nizāmiyyah School many scholars, government officials and students attended his inaugural lecture including Hanbali law professors Ibn 'Aqīl and al-Kalwadhānī.⁴⁶

Accession to the professorship was based on the superior qualifications of the candidate and the recommendations made by his professors and other 'ulemā' in addition to the reputation of the candidate himself. However, there were other posts that were achieved through lineage or corruption. Other posts that existed in the madrasas/mosques in Medieval Islam were the keeper of attendance (Kātib al-Ghaiba). His role was to record and report any absent student from the class. This post was important because if a student failed to attend certain number of classes he might be dismissed or not given his share of the foundation's (waqf) income.⁴⁷ Many madrasas/mosques also had large libraries and hired librarians. The role of the librarian (Khāzīn al-Kutub) was to help students to borrow manuscripts and return them safely. Other general maintenance positions included the candleworker (waqqād), the janitor (farrāsh), and the gate keeper (bawwāb). The job of the waqqād was to make sure that the lights were working well, checking the candles and the lights of the minarets. The farrāsh was in charge of sweeping the floors and sprinkling water in front of the building to keep the dust down. The Bawwāb's main role was to prevent iniquitous men from entering the building.⁴⁸ Finally, I would like to highlight the role of the Muslim women in education during Medieval Islam. According to Asma Sayeed "women contributed to the effort of 'ulemā' families in a number of ways. One of these was the endowments and charitable contributions, which helped make property inalienable and less vulnerable to division, taxation and confiscation by ruling authorities. Women were also central to scholarly networks, their participation as students and as teachers cemented ties of religious learning."⁴⁹ There are many examples of women who participated actively in the transmission of Islamic knowledge such as Karīm bint Aḥmad al-Marwaziyya and Fāṭima bint al-Daqqāq. Now further details will be given about one particular individual, Suhda al-Kātiba (d.482/108). Shuhda's father helped to connect her with the 'ulemā' in Baghdad beginning when she was only eight years old. The first teacher of Shuhda was al-Zaynabī (d.491/1098) one of the famous Hadith scholars of the time. Shuhda was described by al-Dhahbī as "the pride of all women"⁵⁰ (Fakhr al-nisā'). "Shuhda's renown extended beyond her Hadith transmission she also ranked as one of the great calligraphers of Baghdad."⁵¹

4-Conclusion

In this summary I will respond to the research questions that were initially posed in the introduction, as well as Jonathan Berkey's claims regarding the styles of teaching and education in the Islamic Middle Ages. It has become clear to us that a number of methods were used in the educational process, primarily that of memorization of the Qur'ān and Hadith. Despite the importance of memorization, a number of scholars such as al-Zamakhsharī confirmed the importance of understanding as one of the most critical paths to gaining knowledge. In the same vein was the position of debates and posing questions to the teachers, particularly in the higher levels of education. There was also an important social element amongst the students where they would check each other's work, read out loud, listen to one another, repeat, and record what they had heard from their professors on boards.

⁴⁴ Berkey

⁴⁵ Makdisi, p.154

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Berkey

⁴⁹ Sayeed, Asma. Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 141

⁵⁰ Ibid, p, 154

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 157

All of these were ways of education and teaching that proved their effectiveness in producing many famous scholars throughout Islamic history. Many of these methods were also transported to the West, particularly that of the debate. With regards to the relationship between teacher and student, it was characterized by mutual respect where the teacher was treated like a father, and students were not embarrassed to help him in housework and fulfilling his household needs from the market. On the other hand, teachers dealt with their students as sons, and one particular example shows that a teacher sold his donkey to purchase medicine for his sick student. From amongst the educational positions available it was the teacher who held the most prominent place during that time. There were specializations for each branch of knowledge; there was a teacher for the Qur'ān, Hadith, jurisprudence, grammar, history, medicine, music, etc. Underneath the teachers was a support staff that included a mu'īd, a mufīd, and a mustamlī. In addition, there were librarians and a bawwāb, farrāsh, and a waqqād. Finally, with regards to the claims made by Berkey on the level of education of women and her level of participation in the school system, the work of Asma Sayeed has shown that women were not forbidden from participating in education. Some women began their education as young as eight years old and reached high levels of knowledge and understanding in transferring Hadith. With regards to his discussions about the relationship between teacher and student, it was never the dictatorial approach that Berkey claims and rather it relied heavily on mutual respect and homage paid to the teacher, traditions that might appear to other cultural backgrounds as dictatorial and overpowering. Ultimately, the main way that teaching positions were achieved was through qualification and efficiency. Although there were instances where positions were inherited or gained through nepotism from the state or others in the system, this was not the standard. An unbiased viewer of the situation can notice that the introduction of personal relationships or the opinions of state officials into the selection process was not unique to the Islamic situation in the Middle Ages and was also clear in the interference of the Church in Europe, a level of interference that remains present today even in modern developed societies.

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