ARTIKLAR

EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF EARLY ISLAM [*]

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Scholars working in the field of philology are well acquainted with the practice of manuscript collation, i.e. examining and carefully comparing a manuscript with another manuscript, or a standard edition of it, in order to note points of disagreement. Now, with regard to the formation of the Quran, the early ninth-century traditonist al-Bukhari informs us that the Prophet, once a year, and twice in the last year of his life, collated the revealed *suras* with their heavenly prototype with the help of the archangel Gabriel.[1] In this manner, the ninth-century scholar projects back into the time of the Prophet the practice of manuscript collation of the scholar's own time.

This anecdote illustrates an epistemological point that I would like to make right here at the beginning. Any discourse about education and learning in the context of early Islam presupposes a series of assumptions, or, as I prefer to call them, biases. These biases may be attributed, first, to the present lecturer; secondly, to scholars in the research fields relevant for the subject; and thirdly, to the primary sources which provide us with information on the subject. To begin with the present lecturer, the most obvious bias on my part, with regard to the above-mentioned anecdote, is that I do not seriously consider the veracity of al-Bukhari's account. I naturally assume that al-Bukhari projects back into the time of the Prophet a practice of manuscript collation of the scholar's own time and that he fits this projection into a sacred myth about the origin of the Quran. As for the

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[1] See al-Bukhari, *Sahih* (Cairo, no date), vol. 3, 227:20-21 (*Fada´il al-Qur´an* [Virtues of the Quran], ch. 7). Cf. Theodor Nöldeke & Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans, I. Über den Ursprung des Qorans* (Leipzig 1909), 52. For the concept of manuscript collation in this respect and in general, see Franz Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship* (Analecta Orientalia 24; Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum 1947), 26-27, and Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section One, The Near and Middle East, 58; Leiden: Brill 2001), 98.

biases of scholars in the research fields relevant for the subject, a general observation has to be made. Most (though not all) scholars who might take an interest in education and learning in the Middle East from, say, 600 to 900 C.E., are either specialists on Late Antiquity or Byzantine Studies with limited or no knowledge of Arabic, or Syriac; or else they are specialists on Islamic and Arabic Studies with limited or no knowledge of Greek, or Syriac. The complex and multilingual melting pot of the seventh to ninth centuries in the Middle East often fall in between recognized scholarly domains. In addition, scholars in Islamic and Arabic Studies are often surprisingly credulous with regard to the rather late Muslim sources. The historical-critical methods commonly applied to other areas of research are sometimes conspicuously absent when scholars deal with these sources. This leads us over to biases on the part of the primary sources which are mainly written in Arabic and which presumably shed light on the issue of education and learning in early Islam. There are general biases, such as elitism and gender imbalance (or male chauvinism), but these are perhaps common to many traditional (and modern) societies. More specific are biases such as the importance attributed to the Quran and to pre-Islamic poetry, the appreciation of orality at the expense of literacy, and the view of history as a progressive decline in quality. These biases are somehow related to the overall tendency to construct a myth of religious and cultural origin onto which later generations project their own experiences and ambitions, in short, their own agenda. The anecdote of the Prophet collating the revealed *suras* with the heavenly prototype by the help of the archangel Gabriel epitomizes this bias.

In all studies of so called "Early Islam", the stance you take is fundamentally dependent on how you evaluate the sources. The amount of Muslim literature on pre-Islamic Arabia, on the Prophet Muhammad and the rise of Islam, on the conquests and the spread of Islam, on the Quran and the religious sciences and so on, is simply enormous. Roughly speaking, there are two extreme views. Either you accept, by and large, the picture given by the Muslim sources, the bulk of which was produced in the ninth century C.E. onwards, or you adopt a skeptical, historical-critical, attitude towards these late written sources. The resulting pictures of so called "Early Islam" may be radically different. Since the traditional picture is widely known, I will only say a few words about the skeptical line of modern research since it has some bearing on the subject of this lecture. A skeptical attitude was already adopted by Julius Wellhausen[2] and Ignaz Goldziher[3] in the late nineteenth century and

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[2] See e.g. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur ältesten Geschichte des Islams* (In Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, vol. 4; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1889), 65-83, and Wellhausen, *Das Arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (Berlin 1902), translated by M. G. Weir as *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta 1927. Repr., Beirut: Khayats 1963).

[3] See e.g. Ignaz Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam* (Heidelberg: C. Winter 1910), translated by Ruth & Andras Hamori as *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1981), and Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, 1-2 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1889-1890), translated by S. M. Stern & C. R. Barber as *Muslim Studies,* 1-2 (London: Allen & Unwin 1967-1971).

early twentieth century, concomitant with a reevaluation of Biblical Studies, but a major step was taken by Joseph Schacht in the mid 1900s in his works on Islamic law and the critique of the transmission of traditions.[4] Schacht proposed two major theses: (1) that it was not until the Abbasid revolution in the mid-eighth century that chains of transmission (*isnads*) going all the way back to the Prophet began to be widely used; (2) that, ironically, the more elaborate and formally correct a chain of transmission appeared to be, the more likely it was spurious. About two decades later, John Wansbrough[5] proposed two other major theses: (1) that the literature of *hadith* (i.e. formal traditions), and even the Quran itself, came into existence as the result of sectarian controversy during a period of more than two centuries, and then fictitiously projected back onto an invented Arabian seventh-century setting; (2) that the figure of the Prophet, as well as Islamic doctrine in general, were moulded on Rabbinic Jewish prototypes.[6] Inspired by Wansbrough, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook in 1977 published their book *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* which made this skeptical line of research known to a wider audience.[7] The scholarly reception of this book was in general negative. Nevertheless, the skeptical line of research has developed during the last decades. Much attention has been given to Christoph Luxenberg's theories on the origin of the Quran.[8] According to Luxenberg, parts of the Quran are derived from pre-existing Christian liturgical texts in Syriac that were misinterpreted by later Islamic scholars who prepared the editions of the Quran. In 2003, Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren published their book *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* in which they present a picture of so called "Early Islam" that is "so far removed from that in the Muslim literature (and in all the other literary sources based on it) that no reconciliation is possible".[9] The main points in their argument are: (1) The Arabs took over the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire without a struggle, because Byzantium had already decided not to defend them; (2) The Arabs were pagan at the time of the takeover. Soon afterwards some of their rulers adopted a simple form of monotheism with Judaeo-Christian overtones, which gradually over some 100-150 years developed into Islam; (3) Muhammad is not a historical figure,

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[4] See Joseph Schacht, "A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (London 1949), 143-154, and Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon 1950).

[5] See John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: OUP 1977) and Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford & New York: OUP 1978).

[6] Cf. R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris 1991), 84.

[7] See Patricia Crone & Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977).

[8] See Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch 2000); for a revised and enlarged edition in English, see Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin: H. Schiler 2007). For the controversy this book gave rise to, see Christoph Burgmer (ed.), *Streit um den Koran: Die Luxenberg-Debatte: Standpunkte und Hintergründe* (Berlin: H. Schiler 2007, 3rd ed.).

[9] Yehuda D. Nevo & Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst: Prometheus Books 2003), 10.

and his official biography is a product of the age in which it was written (the second century A.H.); (4) The Quran is a late compilation and was not canonized until the end of the second century A.H. or perhaps early in the third.[10]

Enough has been said to illustrate the problems in speaking of so-called "Early Islam". It follows, naturally, that there are also problems in speaking of education and learning in this notorious "Early Islam". Since most of our sources belong to the eighth and ninth centuries, this is actually the era that is meant by the expression "the context of early Islam."

In the following I will present a few settings for education and learning in this period. Theoretically, there are two sides to each one of these settings. In allusion to narrative theory we could speak of story and discourse, or content and expression, or the "What" and the "How".[11] In reality, though, the expression or form of, for instance, instruction is often an integral part of the content, or message. However, when in the following the "How" is an integral part of the "What" I will draw attention to it.

The settings I have chosen are the following. The first setting, or set of settings, is primarily related to religious education, namely the *kuttab* (elementary school), the mosque, and the *madrasa* (college). Then comes the chancery which is primarily concerned with the administration of the state. We then have the Christian monasteries with their heritage and their new role in a novel cultural and religious situation. Further, the translation movement in Baghdad represents a unique endeavour of academic and ideological activity. The library is another setting for education and learning. A different kind of setting, no less important though, is the court of the ruler, the palace and its surroundings. Last but not least we have wisdom literature which is, of course, no setting comparable to the other ones, but rather something that permeates all the various settings and unites them. I will go back and forth between religious and profane settings, since there is no clear cut between the religious and the profane. It goes without saying that certain overlappings cannot be avoided. It also goes without saying that the presentation will necessarily be selective and restricted. In order to save time and space, I will in some cases present a scholar as an example of the setting. Quotations and biographical details sometimes supply valuable information.

The elementary school, the mosque, and the *madrasa*

The elementary school, the mosque, and the *madrasa* are settings for Muslim education.[12] Elementary instruction and higher education were strictly differentiated. The *kuttab* (or primary school) did not have a fixed location.

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[10] See Nevo & Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 10-11.

[11] See e.g. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1978), 19.

[12] See Ignaz Goldziher, "Education (Muslim)," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (ed. James Hastings), vol. 5, 198-207; A. S. Tritton, *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages* (London: Luzac & Co 1957); George Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1981).

Elementary tuition could be given in a variety of venues: private homes, shops, or in the open. When special school buildings were used they were either rented by the parents (or by other persons); or else pious endowments (*waqf*, pl. *awqaf*) were established for this purpose. Children were not obliged to go to school and there was no age limit. Schoolchildren of all age groups were together in one class. The elementary schools were almost exclusively attended by boys, and co-education seems to have been rare. Private instruction at home was given to daughters of wealthy families. The caliphs appointed private tutors (often famous philologists) for their sons.

A colourful picture of elementary education is found in a ninth-century book of "Rules of Conduct for Teachers", the first specialized book in Arabic in the field of teaching theory and learning.[13] The author, Ibn Sahnun (817-870), was born in Qayrawan in present-day Tunisia, where he attended a local *kuttab* before receiving instruction from a variety of scholars in the region. He then travelled east to receive additional learning from scholars in the Hijaz, Egypt, and Tripoli before returning to Qayrawan to become the head of a school. By later biographers he is remembered as a gifted historian and orator and the author of a large number of books. In his "Rules of Conduct for Teachers" he focuses on elementary education and topics such as student discipline, classroom management, educational leadership, teacher compensation, the giving of gifts, and the limits of corporal punishment. He starts off by citing prophetic traditions on the importance of the Quran: "… My father Sahnun transmitted to me from Abdallah ibn Wahb on the authority of Sufyan […and then the chain of transmitters goes all the way back to] the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) who said: The most excellent among you is he who learns the Quran and teaches it."[14] Ibn Sahnun goes on to quote a certain Ibn Masud: "Three things are indispensable to men. They must have a commander to judge between them, or else they would eat one another up; they must buy and sell copies of the Quran, or else God's Book would become rare; and they must have a teacher to teach their children and receive remuneration for it, or else people would be illiterate."[15] The children obviously learn the Quran by writing words on slates. How to erase the Quranic words is a delicate matter: "If the school-

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[13] The Arabic text along with an English translation by Michael Fishbein may be found in Bradley J. Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought: A compendium of parallel English-Arabic texts selected and introduced by Bradley J. Cook with assistance from Fathi H. Malkawi* (Islamic Translation Series; Provo: Brigham Young University Press 2010), 1-19. See also Sebastian Günther, "Advice for Teachers: The 9th Century Muslim Scholars Ibn Sahnun and al-Jahiz on Pedagogy and Didactics," in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam* (ed. Sebastian Günther; Islamic History and Civilazation: Studies and Texts 58; Leiden & Boston: Brill 2005).

[14] Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, 1. It may be noted that this is an example of "the How" (i.e. the expression, the form) being part of "the What" (i.e. the content, the message). The *hadith* form, with its chain of transmitters (i.e. the *isnad*) and its quotation from, or example of, the Prophet (i.e. the *matn*), is an ideal way of conveying a message about the importance of oral tradition, the authority of the Prophet, the Quran, and the overall myth of origin.

[15] Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, 3.

children erase from their slates with their feet ´a revelation from the Lord of the worlds,´ the teacher is casting his Islam behind his back."[16] The proper way is for the teacher to have a basin, and every day "each child in turn would bring clean water, and they would pour it into the basin and wash their slates in it. […] Then they would dig a hole in the ground, pour the water into it, and it would dry up."[17] An alternative way is to lick off the writing on the slate, but in no way should it be wiped off with the foot. With regard to corporal punishment there is, curiously enough, a certain leniency towards mistakes in reciting the Quran: "Let [the teacher] not exceed three blows in disciplining, unless the father gives permission for more than that if the child hurts someone. He may discipline them for playing or idleness, but should not exceed ten blows for discipline. However, for mistakes in reciting the Quran, his discipline should not exceed three blows."[18]

As for higher education in religious studies, which was not formalized until the tenth century, the setting is primarily the mosque, but it could also take place in the teacher´s own home, or in other places.[19] The teacher´s own house was preferred by the teacher who wanted to offer hospitality to his auditors, or by the less reputable teacher who demanded payment for his tuition. It was also easier to withdraw from a session at one´s house, as did a certain traditionist when a bird soiled someone´s hand and pen and another auditor laughed out loud, spoiling the solemnity of the occasion. The normal procedure during instruction was to sit (*jalasa*) on the ground in a circle (*halqa*). The place where one sat was the *majlis*, i.e. the particular spot in the mosque where a certain teacher held forth. "He sat with so-and-so" meant to say "He learnt from so-and-so." In the mosque, the leader of the circle normally leant against the side of a pillar facing the *qibla* (i.e. the direction of the Kaba in Mecca) while his auditors sat fanned out before him. Sometimes the teacher sat on a pillow or on a bench. There were specific rules for how the auditors should sit and how to join a circle and what clothes to wear. It was forbidden to make someone get up, and then sit in his place. The circle was supposed to spread out and make room for a newcomer. Rising to salute someone was discouraged. There were two postures of sitting recommended. One could sit with knees drawn up and held either by a cord or by one´s turban (*ihtiba´*) or simply by one´s hands (*qurfusa´*). The other possibility was to sit with legs folded (*tarabbu`*). Opinion was divided about sitting or lying in the mosque with one leg over the other, or sitting with legs stretched out. Another issue was whether it was appropriate to sit with the fingers intertwined. Presumably, crossed fingers had some magical significance. When a newcomer had taken his place in the circle or in the next rank

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[16] Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, 4.
[17] Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, 4.
[18] Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, 5.
[19] For the following information and references to primary sources, see Christopher Melchert, "The Etiquette of Learning in the Early Islamic Study Circle," in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of George Makdisi* (ed. Joseph E. Lowry, Devin J. Stewart & Shawkat M. Toorawa; [Cambridge]: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust 2004), 33-44.

outside it, he was supposed to remove his sandals and put them to his left side. One was not to take them off or put them on while standing. Students were recommended to wear white garments, the black colour being associated with the court and the judges and the Abbasid rulers. The headgear, usually a turban, could vary in form and colour. It is significant that the rules regulating these formal aspects of higher education in the mosque or in the teacher's private home were based on traditions (*hadiths*) traced back to the Prophet, since at the same time traditions and how to apply them (i.e. law) is the message, the content, "the What" of this education and learning.

The studies in the circle, whether in the mosque or elsewhere, did not lead up to any final examination. As time went on, however, the teachers would give out attestations that a student had heard or read this or that text or work (*sama´* and *qira´a* certificates) and give him permission (*ijaza*) to transmit the text himself (these *ijaza* certificates were inscribed at the end of the manuscript studied).[20]

At a somewhat later stage the institution known as the *madrasa* (or college) became a setting for higher education.[21] This institution originated in the eastern part of the empire where students on their study trips to various teachers needed to lodge in hostels (*khans*). For practical reasons instruction was often given in these hostels, and from the combination of hostel and place of teaching the *madrasa* developed. Through pious endowments this development was furthered. But then we are already in the tenth century.[22]

The chancery and the administration of the state

With the chancery and the administration of the state we turn to a rather different setting. We move back a century from the times of Ibn Sahnun and his book of "Rules of Conduct for Teachers" in the ninth century to the more profane circles of state officials in the late Umayyad period during the first half of the eighth century. At the same time we move back to one of the oldest expressions of Arabic prose literature, namely the epistolary genre. The Umayyad rulers in Damascus, and especially the caliph Abd al-Malik (685-705) is credited not only with the building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in 692 where a famous inscription represents one of the earliest remains of words found in the Quran, but he is also credited with having Arabized the administration which up till then still had been in Greek in the western parts of the kingdom and in Pahlavi in the eastern or former Sasanian parts. This official Arabization prompted the need for secretaries with perfect knowledge of Arabic. In the chancery of Damascus secretaries were trained

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[20] See Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition*, 26-27, 71, 113.
[21] See Gregor Schoeler, "education, medieval," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (ed. Julie Scott Meisami & Paul Starkey; London & New York: Routledge 1998), 199-201.
[22] See e.g. George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1990), 24-25.

and educated for their profession. One of them was Abd al-Hamid.[23]

Abd al-Hamid al-Katib, or the Secretary, (686-750) was a Muslim, probably of Persian descent. He was born in Iraq and started his career as a teacher and then private tutor. Shortly before 705 Abd al-Hamid came to Damascus and began his formal training as a secretary or scribe under Salim Abu l-`Ala´, an established secretary. He was eventually promoted and by 725 at the latest he was already writing official letters on the behalf of the Umayyad caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik. In 732 he was appointed secretary to the Umayyad governor in Armenia and Azerbaijan and the commander-in-chief of the Muslim army there, Marwan ibn Muhammad, who was also a member of the ruling family. When Marwan was declared caliph in 744, Abd al-Hamid became the head of the chancery. The reign of Marwan ended abruptly in 750 with the overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty. Both Marwan and his chief secretary, Abd al-Hamid, were killed by the agents of the victorious new regime, that of the Abbasids. Abd al-Hamid enjoyed great esteem in the following centuries, and his literary style exerted a great influence on later prose writers in general, and on the secretaries of the chancery in particular. According to the bibliophile Ibn an-Nadim in the tenth century the letters by Abd al-Hamid ran to a thousand folios.[24] Most of the letters have now been lost. The surviving corpus published in 1988 amounts to about 5 % of the 1000 folios mentioned by Ibn an-Nadim.[25] The modern critical edition contains more than fifty letters regarded as authentic. The subjects of the letters vary. Most of them are official letters written on behalf of the caliph with regard to a particular issue. Other letters have been characterized as personal letters, but I think this is a mistake. To these letters belong pieces of writing that are descriptive in nature, for instance one in which the flooding of the Euphrates is described,[26] another which describes hunting trips,[27] and a third which discusses the advantages and disadvantages of being away from home (i.e. the theme of nostalgia).[28] Even some of the official letters are descriptive in nature. An example of this is a letter in

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[23] For Abd al-Hamid, see e.g. J. D. Latham, "The beginnings of Arabic prose literature: the epistolary genre," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (ed. A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant & G. R. Smith; The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), 154-179; Wadad al-Qadi, "Early Islamic State Letters: The Question of Authenticity," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: I. Problems in the Literary Source Material* (ed. Averil Cameron & Lawrence I. Conrad; Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam; Princeton: Darwin Press 1992), 215-275; Klaus U. Hachmeier, "Die Entwicklung der Epistolographie vom frühen Isalm bis zum 4./10. Jahrhundert," in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33 (2002), 131-135.
[24] See Bayard Dodge (ed. and trans.), *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, vol. 1 (New York & London: Columbia University Press 1970), 257.
[25] See Ihsan Abbas (intr. and ed.), `*Abd al-Hamid ibn Yahya al-Katib wa-ma tabaqqa min rasa´ilihi wa-min rasa´il Salim ibn al-`Ala´* [Abd al-Hamid the Secretary and what remains of his letters and of the letters by Salim al-Ala] (Amman, Jordan: Dar ash-shuruq li-n-nashr wa-t-tawzi` 1988).
[26] Abbas, `*Abd al-Hamid,* 196-197.
[27] Abbas, `*Abd al-Hamid,* 268-281.
[28] Abbas, `*Abd al-Hamid,* 203-204.

which the caliph instructs a certain person to buy a slave-girl for him.[29] It is my impression that these descriptive letters were used in the instruction of new secretaries as a means to improve their stylistic skills. There is a wide range of styles in Abd al-Hamid's writings. In his letter to the crown prince (the longest of the surviving letters),[30] he uses long sentences and syntactically complex structures. In his descriptive letters, his style is far more terse and compact. Harmony of sound is important, but he is a master of many rhetorical devices. His stylistic impact depends mainly on his exploitation of the possibilities of parallelism, whether of sound, sense or structure. It is clear that Abd al-Hamid stands out as a chancery tutor. This is, of course, most evident in his "Letter to the secretaries."[31]

Abd al-Hamid's letter to the secretaries is a code of conduct depicting the qualities and duties required of a man of position and honour. In the opening passage of the letter the rank and dignity attached to the class of chancery secretaries is underlined. He then goes on to enumerate the qualities that will make secretaries worthy of their calling. The secretary needs "to be mild where mildness is needed, to be understanding where judgment is needed, to be enterprising where enterprise is needed, to be hesitant where hesitation is needed. He must prefer modesty, justice, and fairness. He must keep secrets. He must be faithful in difficult circumstances. […] He must have studied every branch of learning, and know it well […] By virtue of his natural intelligence, good education, and outstanding experience, he must know what is going to happen before it happens. […] Start with the knowledge of the Book of God and religious duties. Then, study the Arabic language, as that will give you a cultivated form of speech. Then, learn to write well […]. Transmit poetry […]."[32] Abd al-Hamid then gives a list of vices his secretaries are to eschew, such as ambition, backbiting, calumny and haughtiness. The letter ends with admonitions to avoid luxury and too much talking and the necessity to depend on God and to acknowledge one's own fallibility.

The Christian monastery

Let us now turn to another setting for education and learning: the Christian monastery. In Muslim Arabic literature there is a specific literary genre dedicated to Christian monasteries, a genre that seems to have flourished especially during the tenth century. They purport to reflect a custom we also know of from other sources, namely that rulers and high dignitaries used to stop at monasteries for refreshment during hunting trips and other journeys, and that common people too made excursions there to eat, drink, listen to

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[29] Abbas, `*Abd al-Hamid*, 197-198.
[30] Abbas, `*Abd al-Hamid*, 215-265.
[31] Abbas, `*Abd al-Hamid*, 281-288. A variant reading of this letter is quoted by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) in his introduction to world history and translated from Arabic to English by Franz Rosenthal in Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Bollingen Series XLIII; New York: Pantheon Books 1958), vol. 2, 29-35.
[32] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 2, 30.

music, and watch the rituals. In the monasteries, or at taverns attached to them, wine was available, and many visitors anticipated erotic adventures too. The monasteries, with their orchards, vineyards, and gardens, were not only devotional sites, but also touristic pleasure-grounds where high and low could find diversion from ordinary life. The monastery books of this genre were compilations of poetry, anecdotes about visits to them, and some information about the monasteries themselves. It is not clear how much fact there is behind the obvious fictitious character of this literary genre.[33]

A rather different picture of the Christian monasteries appears when we look at them from the point of view of Late Antiquity. Naturally, the monasteries represent continuity from pre-Islamic times and inferences can be made from what we know of monasteries in the area in Late Antiquity. Biblical, theological and monastic literature was not only studied, copied, and translated, but also produced. Especially in Palestine and in Sinai we know of such activity in, for instance, the monasteries of Mar Saba, Mar Chariton and St. Catherine. At St. Cattherine's monastery, Anastasius of Sinai was a prolific writer in the seventh century.[34] John of Damascus, who died in 749, belonged to the monastery of Mar Saba and was to become one of the most famous theologians of his time.[35] He was a contemporary of the secretary Abd al-Hamid, and before becoming a monk and a priest he is supposed to have served in the administration of the Umayyad caliph in Damascus. Yet, strange as it may seem, we do not know if they knew each other or if they even met. Perhaps this lacuna in our knowledge is due to the biases of scholars in the research fields relevant for the subject, i.e. on the one hand specialists on Late Antiquity or Byzantine Studies and, on the other hand, specialists on Islamic and Arabic Studies.

Here I am not going further into the role of monasteries as pleasure-grounds or as survivals from Late Antiquity. Rather, I would like to point at the monastery as a symbol for Christian-Muslim dialogue, perhaps beginning already in Palestine in the eighth century, but flourishing particularly in the ninth century (and onwards).[36] Of course the dynamics of this dialogue is not conceivable without the background of Palestinian and Syrian monasticism

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[33] A book of this genre is the tenth-century ash-Shabushti, *Kitab ad-diyarat* [The Book of Monasteries] (ed. G. Awwad; Baghdad 1966). Stories about travellers visiting monasteries may also be found in *The Book of Strangers* attributed to the tenth-century Abu l-Faraj al-Isfahani. It has been translated into English by Patricia Crone & Shmuel Moreh in *The Book of Strangers: Mediaeval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers 2000).

[34] See e.g. Daniel F. Caner (with contributions by Sebastian Brock, Richard M. Price, & Kevin van Bladel), *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai: Including translations of Pseudo-Nilus´* Narrations, *Ammonius´* Report on the Slaughter of the Monks of Sinai and Rhaithou, *and Anastasius´ of Sinai´s* Tales of the Sinai Fathers (Translated Texts for the Historians 53; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2010).

[35] See e.g. Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (The Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: OUP 2002); and Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: Brill 1972).

[36] See e.g. Sidney H. Griffith, "Greek Into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century; The Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*," *Byzantion* 56 (1986), 117-138.

and the scholarly activity associated with Syrian monasteries and intellectual centres such as Antioch and Amidha (present-day Diyarbakir) and Nisibis.[37] The achievement of the Christian theologians writing in Arabic in the ninth century may be compared with the achievement of the Greek apologists in the second century, such as Justin Martyr and Tatian. The Greek apologists tried to express Christian theology using concepts and ideas current in contemporary Greek philosophy. In the same manner, Christian theologians writing in Arabic in the ninth century, such as Theodore Abu Qurra,[38] Abu Ra'ita[39] and Ammar al-Basri[40] endeavoured to create a defense of their faith in terms comprehensible in the ideological discourse of their era.[41] The most common topics dealt with by these apologists were (1) the criteria for true religion; (2) the truth of the Gospels; (3) christology and incarnation; (4) reverence for the cross and for icons; (5) the direction of prayer; and (6) the unity and trinity of God. These and other topics were treated in mainly five different genres: (1) Proofs from the Scriptures; (2) Questions and answers; (3) Letters (mostly fictive); (4) Refutations; and last but not least (5) Debates.

As an example of a Christian Arab theologian of the ninth century, Israel of Kashkar, who died in 872, may be mentioned.[42] He was appointed bishop of Kashkar, a town on the eastern shore of the Tigris in Iraq about midway between Kufa and Basra, sometime during the 860s. He was subsequently elected catholicos of the East-Syrian church, but found a rival in Enosh, the metropolitan of Mosul, who also claimed the leadership of the church. Followers of the two parties even fought each other physically and the ruler in Baghdad tried to persuade Israel to step down. The fatal and dramatic climax came when Israel was about to officiate at the eucharist. He was attacked by a follower of Enosh, who so violently squeezed his genitals that Israel fainted. He died forty days later and was buried in the monastery of Mar Pethion. Apart from the violent end of his life we do not know much about the biography of Israel of Kashkar. We do know, though, that he was a scholar and a learned monk. He was called "the interpreter" (*al-mufassir*) which may also mean commentator or translator. In connection with his election as

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[37] See Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Divinations. Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2006).

[38] See e.g. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abu Qurrah (c. 750-c. 820 A.D.): A Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature* (Washington: University Microfilms International 1978); and John C. Lamoreux (trans.), *Theodore Abu Qurrah* (Library of the Christian East 1; Provo: Brigham Young University Press 2005).

[39] See e.g. Sidney H. Griffith, "Habib ibn Hidma Abu Ra'itah: a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens christianus* 64 (1980), 161-201.

[40] See e.g. Sidney H. Griffith, "Ammar al-Basri's *Kitab al-Burhan*: Christian *Kalam* in the First Abbasid Century," *Le Muséon* 96 (1983), 145-181; and Michel Hayek, `Ammar al-Basri: Apologie et Controverses* (Recherches publiées sous la direction de l'Institut Orientales de Beyrouth, Nouvelle série, B. Orient chrétien 5; Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs 1977).

[41] See e.g. Seppo Rissanen, *Theological Encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press 1993).

[42] See Bo Holmberg, *A Treatise on the Unity and Trinity of God by Israel of Kashkar (d. 872): Introduction, edition and word index* (Lund Studies in African and Asian Religions 3; Lund: Plus Ultra 1989).

catholicos he is said to have been worthy of election because of his know-
ledge (`ilm) and excellence (fadl). He is also described as intelligent (fahim)
and an expert in debate (`alim bi-l-jadal). His skills in debate are also stressed
in the account of his debate with Ahmad ibn at-Tayyib as-Sarakhsi, student
of the famous philosopher al-Kindi, in which Israel is pictured as the hero.[43]

The translation movement

Though translations from Greek into Syriac and Arabic were made already
before the Abbasid period,[44] it was the translation movement instigated and
fostered by the Abbasid caliphs during the latter half of the eighth century
and the first half of the ninth century which meant a serious and systematic
effort of translation. As has been shown by Dimitri Gutas the translation
movement was a social phenomenon entrenched in the political and histori-
cal circumstances of the early Abbasid caliphate.[45] The translation movement
was an outcome of the efforts of the early Abbasid rulers to adopt the Zoro-
astrian imperial ideology of the Sasanians. The goal of this ideological ap-
propriation was to create a viable and divinely ordained central authority by
incorporating the Zoroastrian model of imperial order and by addressing the
cultural and political needs of the so-called Persianized Arabs. The imperial
vision was then combined with political astrology as an account of dynastic
history in terms of cyclical periods of varying lengths governed by the stars
and the planets. These policies were instrumental for the enduring success of
the Abbasid revolution and explain the interest of Abbasid rulers in sponsor-
ing works of translation from Greek and Persian sources. The specific inte-
rests of the Abbasid caliphs resulted in a general promotion of translations.
In this way important parts of Greek philosophy and science became avail-
able in Arabic translations, for instance Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, *Cate-
gories* and *Physics*, and works by Galen and Hippocrates.[46] Neoplatonic
works were widely spread, though usually wrongly attributed to Aristotle.
Some of Proclus' writings became available under the name of Aristotle
(*Liber de Causis*), and Plotinus' *Enneads* circulated under the name of the
Theology of Aristotle.[47]

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[43] See Matti Moosa, "A new source on Ahmad ibn al-Tayyib al-Sarrakhsi: Florentine MS
Arabic 299," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92 (1972), 19-24; and Holmberg, *A Trea-
tise*, 50-58. For further studies of the debate genre, see David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim
Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East* (Gorgias Eas-
tern Christian Studies 29; Piscataway: Gorgias 2011), and Bo Holmberg, "The Public De-
bate as a Literary Genre in Arabic Literature," *Orientalia Suecana* 38-39 (1989-1990), 45-53.
[44] See e.g. Daniel King, *The Earliest Syriac Translations of Aristotle's Categories: Text, Transla-
tion and Commentary* (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus 21; Leiden: Brill 2010); and Dimitri
Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and
Early `Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London: Routledge 1998), 20-27.
[45] See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 1-8, 28-60.
[46] See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 144.
[47] See Gerhard Endress, *Proclus Arabus: Zwanzig Abschnitte aus der* Institutio Theologica *in
arabischer Übersetzung* (Beiruter Texte und Studien 10; Beirut 1973); Paul Kraus, "Plotin chez

One of the most well-known figures in the translation movement was the Christian physician Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 873 or 877).[48] He seems to have been a controversial person alternately patronized and persecuted. Although he was a leading figure in the translation movement and served as physician to the Abbasid caliphs, he is said to have been imprisoned twice: once for refusing to concoct a poison, and once for having desecrated an icon at the instigation of his rivals. Hunayn and his disciples collected and collated Greek manuscripts on the basis of which they corrected previous renderings or translated afresh into both Syriac and Arabic. Hunayn wanted to render the sense, not the form, of the source text, and his translations were renowned for their accuracy and their readability. He is credited with having translated over a hundred Greek medical works (including most of the Galenic corpus) as well as Plato and Aristotle. He also composed over seventy scholarly treatises of his own. Hunayn wrote lists of his translations interspersed with personal comments which reveal his efforts to find manuscripts and his labour in the course of translation. He also mentions the persons for whom he made the individual translations. In certain cases, he states that he spent much effort on improving the quality of a particular translation, because it was done for a person of exceptional learning and culture.

The library

We have already seen that higher education was primarily located in the mosque or in the teacher's private home before the development in the tenth century of the educational institution called *madrasa* which combined lodging and instruction. Another setting for education and learning was the library. With the spread of literacy and a written tradition we start to hear about book collections already in the eighth century. One of the biases of classical Arab culture is the esteem of orality and the suspicion towards written documents. In some cases people were perhaps like "walking, talking books."[49] But at the same time, the rapid emergence of a written tradition points to an imbalance between theory and practice. It is strange that classical Arabic does not have a specific single term for "library", but uses the more generic word *khizana* (storehouse), either by itself or in compounds such as "storehouse of wisdom"

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les Arabes," *Bulletin de l'Institut Egypte* 23 (1940-1941), 263-295; Friederich Dieterici, *Die sogenannte Theologie des Aristoteles aus arabischen Handschriften zum ersten Mal herausgegeben* (Leipzig, 1882); Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwan al-Safa') (London: George Allen & Unwin 1982).

[48] See Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Hunain ibn Ishak und seine Schule: sprach- und literargeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den arabischen Hippokrates- und Galen-Übersetzungen* (Leiden 1913); Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Hunain ibn Ishaq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 17; Leipzig 1925); Max Meyerhof, "New Light on Hunain Ibn Ishaq and his Period," *Isis* 8 (1926), 685-724; Michael Cooperson, "The Purported Autobiography of Hunayn ibn Ishaq," *Edebiyat* 7 (1997), 235-249.

[49] Robert Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Anchor 2001), 354.

or "storehouse of books".[50] An important step in the development of libraries was marked by the translation movement in the ninth century. The translators needed access to collections of manuscripts, and for this purpose the early Abbasid caliphs created a library called Bayt al-Hikma (or "House of Wisdom") in Baghdad.[51] Private ownership and restricted access were typical for libraries throughout the centuries. Libraries open to a wider public only started to appear in the eleventh century as pious foundations, and then only as adjuncts to mosques, *madrasas*, or hospitals. Biographers and chroniclers from the tenth century onwards mention extraordinary large private holdings of manuscripts. The anecdotal nature of these reports suggests that the figures given are rather symbolic, especially when multiples of "forty" and large even numbers are concerned.[52] It was mainly scholars and littérateurs who supported the flourishing book trade in Baghdad and other centres. Very often we hear of scholars who earned, or supplemented, their livelihood as copiers and book dealers.[53] One of these book dealers and bibliophiles wrote a famous biobibliographical catalogue (*al-Fihrist*), which is still extant and provides a lot of information.[54]

There is a wealth of literature preserved dealing with the technique of Muslim scholarship and the role of books as the tools of scholarship. The problem is that most of these works are late, though some of them depend on, or even reproduce, earlier writers. Such a case is the work by the sixteenth-century scholar `Abd al-Basit ibn Musa al-`Almawi (d. 1573), a comprehensive study, which in many cases obviously describes practices we know of already in the ninth century. The sixth chapter[55] of this work contains "all the necessary information about books in their capacity as the tools through which knowledge is acquired; how to establish a correct and clear text; how to shelve and take care of books; how to buy, borrow, and copy them etc."[56] Important topics treated in this chapter are: (1) the procurement of manuscripts (incidentally, this is a topic which already Hunayn ibn Ishaq in the ninth century elaborates, when he describes his travels to Byzantium in order to procure Greek manuscripts); (2) incidental information gathered from manuscripts (such as marginal notes, introductory remarks, colophons, and *ijazas*); (3) the importance of respect for manuscript tradition; (4) inaccuracy due to the ambiguity of Arabic writing (short vowels are not marked, and without certain diacritical points many letters are identical); (5) manuscript collation (also described by Hunayn ibn Ishaq); (6) variant readings; (7) conjectural readings; (8) abbreviations; (9) references; (10) the indication of the end of a

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[50] See Lutz Richter-Bernburg, "libraries, medieval," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 470.

[51] Cf. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 53-60.

[52] Perhaps this should be kept in mind when we read about the secretary Abd al-Hamid´s writings amounting to "a thousand" folios. See note 24 above.

[53] Cf. the common nickname al-Warraq ("book dealer" or "copyist").

[54] I.e. Ibn an-Nadim in the tenth century. Cf. note 24 above.

[55] English translation in Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship*, 8-18.

[56] Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship*, 8.

quotation; (11) the problem of footnotes; and tables of contents and indexes.[57]

The spread of books was greatly promoted by the introduction of paper, a material considerably cheaper than papyrus and parchment.[58] Chinese prisoners of war taken at the battle of Talash in 751 were instrumental in introducing the craft of paper-making. For some time the new craft was limited to the eastern parts of the empire, but already in the beginning of the ninth century the first paper-mill in Baghdad was established. Soon, paper made books more affordable to a wider circle of people.

The palace

Another setting for education, learning and culture is the court of the ruler, or the palace. Already during the Umayyad dynasty the caliphs and their princes developed a royal life style, as one may gather from the hunting scenes of the mosaics of the Umayyad palace Qusayr Amra[59] (in present-day Jordan) and from the writings of the secretary Abd al-Hamid which describe hunting trips,[60] chess-games[61] and slave-girls.[62] The imperial splendor of the royal court grew rapidly in Baghdad during the early Abbasid caliphate, and when the Abbasid caliphate disintegrated the custom spread to the princely courts of Aleppo and other places. The caliphs and princes were patrons for poets and surrounded themselves with a variety of court functionaries which developed into professions, in some cases hereditary professions. Besides poets, we meet, for instance, musicians,[63] eunuchs,[64] boon companions, slave-girls,[65] and buffoons.[66]

The office of boon companion (*nadim*), whose origin can be traced back to Sasanian Iran, was especially important.[67] The boon companion accompanied the ruler and entertained him in his solitary moments, at his private salons (or literary and musical gatherings), at drinking parties, in gaming (mainly chess and backgammon), in hunting, and travelling and so on. The *nadim* was expected to have many and varied talents. He had to be physically fit and well dressed, well acquainted with the Koran, *hadith*, grammar,

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[57] For a discussion of these topics, see Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship*, 18-40.

[58] See Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press 2008), 45-56.

[59] See Garth Fowden, *Qusayr `Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkely & Los Angeles: University of California Press 2004).

[60] See note 27 above.

[61] Abbas, `*Abd al-Hamid*, 265-268.

[62] See note 29 above.

[63] See Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1995).

[64] See Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, "Servants at the Gate: Eunuchs at the Court of al-Muqtadir," *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 48 (2005), 234-252.

[65] See A. F. L. Beeston, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jahiz* (Approaches to Arabic Literature 2; Warminster, Wilts: Aris & Phillips Ltd. 1980).

[66] See Shmuel Moreh, "acting and actors, medieval," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 52-54.

[67] See Anwar G. Chejne, "The Boon-Companion in Early Abbasid Times," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965), 327-335.

poetry, music, as well as the military arts, cookery, and horse-breeding. He was obliged to entertain the ruler in whatever way the moment called for. One wonders if any one individual could ever combine all these talents.

An office similar to the boon companion´s was the slave-girl, whose function was reminiscent of the Japanese institution of the geisha. In one of the secretary Abd al-Hamid´s letters, the purchase of a slave-girl (*jariya*) is the topic.[68] Someone is commissioned to buy a slave-girl, who must meet certain requirement, and then to prepare her for marriage. The girl has to be beautiful as well as intelligent, able to read and write and to proclaim poetry. The attributes given to the girl in question are somewhat contradictory, a fact that may suggest that the letter is a school exercise for future secretaries. The artistic qualities and the education of these kind of slave-girls are also mentioned by other authors. According to the traditionist al-Bukhari it was regarded as a work of special meritorious character "to educate a slave-girl well, then set her free, and give her to a husband."[69] The ninth-century *adab* anthologist al-Jahiz mentions a slave-girl who was conversant with Euclid.[70]

Wisdom

Last but not least we have wisdom literature which is, of course, no setting comparable to the other ones, but rather something that permeates all the various settings and unites them. Wisdom literature is present everywhere in education and learning, religious as well as profane, but also in society in general, in every-day discourse, so to speak. It is there from the very beginning and it lingers on through the centuries.

The voluminous Arabic wisdom literature derives from a variety of sources.[71] One of these is the pool of wisdom literature in Semitic languages, transmitted in the biblical, apocryphal, and Ahiqar traditions. Much of these ancient traditions were associated with the legendary sage Luqman, renowned for his longevity and as the utterer of admonitions, proverbs and wise maxims.[72] His sayings are quoted in six verses in the Quran, where he is pictured as a prophet having received the book of maxims.[73] As a result of the translation movement in the ninth century features of Aesop (particularly his blackness) were attributed to Luqman, and Hunayn ibn Ishaq has a section devoted to Luqman´s sayings in his book on philosophical anecdotes (*Nawadir al-falasifa*).[74]

There are several Arabic sources for wisdom literature, in later texts attributed to prominent pre-Islamic Arabs, such as tribal chiefs, arbitrators, poets, and men famous for their long lives. During the formative period of Islam

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[68] See note 29 above.
[69] al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 2, 83:13-14.
[70] See Goldziher, "Education (Muslim)," 198.
[71] See Dimitri Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981), 49-86.
[72] See B. Heller & N. A. Stillman, "Lukman," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 5, 811-813.
[73] See the Quran 31:12-13, 16-19.
[74] See Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature," 58.

numerous wisdom sayings were attributed to the Prophet and his Companions. In more profane genres of literature sayings are attributed to a wide range of individuals from all the walks of life (caliphs and viziers, poets and scholars, jesters and paupers). Gnomic material appears in poetry, proverbial literature, and in biography. It is prominent in the Arabic literary genre called *adab* (a word comparable to the Greek word *paideia*), which combines poetry and proverbs, maxims and anecdotes, and all sorts of sayings to form anthologies for education and for entertainment.[75] These compilations from various sources are treasure troves of gnomic material. The *adab* compilations often address certain classes of people, for example rulers, viziers, judges, secretaries, or calligraphers. Some *adab* anthologies deal with a certain subject, such as food, love, jokes, or even sticks. Specialized works were also compiled within certain intellectual or sectarian traditions. In the Shiite tradition, we of course come across collections of sayings attributed to Ali. And Sufi literature is replete with anecdotes and maxims, terse and paradoxical sayings. Wisdom material is an integral part of all these different types of *adab* collections.

There are also foreign sources for Arabic wisdom literature.[76] The bulk of foreign gnomic material translated into Arabic was Greek. On the one hand we have political literature associated with the genre of "Mirror for Princes" based on Byzantine manuals on administration and warfare from the sixth and seventh centuries.[77] This material, with additions from Hellenistic, Hermetic and Sasanian sources, was translated and adapted into Arabic by the secretary Salim Abu l-`Ala', who was the teacher of Abd al-Hamid, to form a "romance cycle" of correspondence between Aristotle and Alexander.[78] On the other hand we have ethical wisdom literature derived from the numerous gnomologia compiled through the centuries in the Greek-speaking world.[79] Most of this material was translated by Hunayn ibn Ishaq during the translation movement in the ninth century and then found its way to several famous and comprehensive Arabic collections of Greek sayings. Apart from the Greek sources for Arabic wisdom literature, we have translations from Persian, from Sanskrit, and from Syriac. From Persian (or Pahlavi) literature writings of a political nature were translated into Arabic by individuals of Persian descent in high official positions, Ibn al-Muqaffa being the most

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[75] See Bo Holmberg, "*Adab* and Arabic Literature," in *Notions of Literature Across Times and Cultures* (ed. Anders Pettersson; Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective, vol. 1; Berlin & New York: de Gruyter 2006), 180-205.

[76] See Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature," 60-62.

[77] See Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "Mirrors for Princes," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 527-529.

[78] See Mario Grignaschi, "Le roman épistolaire classique conserve dans la version arabe de Salim Abu-l-`Ala'," *Le Muséon* 80 (1967), 211-264; and Mario Grignaschi, "Les `Rasa'il Arastatalis ila l-Iskandar' de Salim Abu-`Ala' et l'activité culturelle à l'époque Omayyade," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 19 (1965-1966), 7-83.

[79] See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia* (American Oriental Series 60; New Haven 1975); and Hans Daiber, *Aetius Arabus: Die Vorsokratiker in arabischer Überlieferung* (Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission /Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur [Mainz], 33; Wiesbaden: Steiner 1980).

notable among them in the eighth century.[80] Gnomic material from Sanskrit (e.g. *Hitopadesha* and *Panchatantra*) was translated into Arabic with Pahlavi as an intermediary and made its way to the genre of "Mirror of Princes" and collections of fables and legends, such as *Kalila wa-Dimna* and *The Arabian Nights*.[81] The role of Syriac in the transmission of wisdom literature into Arabic seems largely to have been intermediary: (1) biblical and monastic; (2) Greek; and (3) relating to Ahiqar.[82] It is not sufficiently known whether any gnomic material was originally composed in Syriac.

As for the typology of Arabic wisdom sayings, it seems to be less refined than what we find in Greek tradition.[83] In the school tradition of Greek rhetorical manuals known as *progymnasmata*, the discussion of literary types of maxims occupied a prominent place, and they were defined according to their form or structure into, for instance, *chreia*, *gnome*, and *apomnemoneuma*. So far it is not known whether the *progymnasmata* themselves were available in Arabic or Syriac translations. But in some form, the Late Antique rhetorical school tradition must have been transmitted into the Arabic-speaking world. A closer look at the secretarial letters of Abd al-Hamid and their setting might prove fruitful in this respect. In general, the Arab anthologists who collected sayings did not classify them according to literary type or form, but rather according to their contents and the persons to whom they were attributed.

The significance of Arabic wisdom literature is immense. In its social function it permeates and unites the various expressions of education and learning in the early Islamic period. Together with poetry, wisdom literature constituted the basis for Arab *paideia* (*adab*) and was an integral part of the upbringing and intellectual capital of all educated members of the society. It had a special significance in the education and training of secretaries, who needed both the rhetorical tools to compose effective and eloquent prose, and the practical guidance in government administration provided by the "Mirrors for Princes". In scholarly discourse and argumentation maxims and proverbs played a prominent role.[84] In the anthologies of *adab* literature, people from all the walks of life are involved in the wisdom accumulated from ancient times. Even today gnomic sayings, maxims and proverbs form an essential part of the Arabic language and the cultures associated with it. As the common Arabic saying puts it:

> *Utlub al-ilm wa-law fi s-Sin*
> "Pursue knowledge, even if you have to go all the way to China!"

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[80] See J. D. Latham, "Ibn al-Muqaffa` and early `Abbasid prose," in `*Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (ed. Julia Ashtiany, T. M. Johnstone, J. D. Latham, R. B. Serjeant & G. Rex Smith; The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 48-77.

[81] See F. de Blois, "Kalila wa-Dimna," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature,* 425-427; and D. Pinault, "Alf layla wa-layla," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature,* 69-77.

[82] See Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature," 61-62.

[83] See Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature," 65-66.

[84] The treatise on the unity and trinity of God by Israel of Kashkar contains a fairly large section of Greek philosophical gnomologia. Cf. note 42 above.