

INDIVIDUALISM AND CONFORMITY IN MEDIEVAL  
ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT: SOME NOTES WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ELEMENTARY EDUCATION \*

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**In memoriam Hava Lazarus-Yafeh**

For medieval Muslim thinkers, whether they dealt with the upbringing of children, the moral education of young princes and the offspring of aristocrats and wealthy people, the training of adult mystics (*ṣūfīs*) or students in orthodox institutions of advanced education, the concern for the individual was a central consideration. This is clearly reflected in the sources researched for this paper, namely, ethical, pedagogical, legal and pediatric writings in Arabic from the Middle East, North Africa and Spain throughout medieval and pre-modern times.

Personal guidance and intensive, close relationships between educator and trainee were regarded as an essential part of the educational process. Of course, if we examine education as a social process, a “process by which a community [firstly] preserves and [then] transmits its physical and intellectual character”,<sup>1</sup> the role played by cultural conventions and social rules in setting the educational aims, contents, and methods in past and present societies will become evident. Nevertheless, in the domain of Islamic culture much attention was paid also to differences between individual pupils and to the need to adjust teaching contents and methods to the backgrounds and per-

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<sup>1</sup> Jaeger, W., *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford, 1965, I, XIII.

sonal abilities, inclinations and aspirations of single students. This may well have been not only because of the heritage of the “pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabs [who] were great individualists and had a keen eye for personality and character” as suggested by S. D. Goitein,<sup>2</sup> but also because of the influence of Greek ethical and medical theories on Muslim scholars.

The *waṣāyā* (instructions, exhortations) fathers would write down for the educators of their (male) children include general advice useful for any educator instructing any one's child, but they were also inspired by the closer and more intimate observations that fathers were able to make about the character and mental-intellectual potential of their sons and thus are especially useful for our purposes here. It is said, for instance, of Abū Sa'īd Saḥnūn, the Mālikī scholar of third/ninth-century Qayrawān, that when his son, Muḥammad (d. 256/870), showed signs of talent and cleverness when only a child, he urged his tutor (*mu'addib*) to treat him gently since, as he put it, “he is not the type to be educated through physical punishment and harsh words (*laysa huwa mimman yu'addabu bi-al-ḍarb wa-al-ta'nīf*)”.<sup>3</sup> 'Utba b. Abī Sufyān (d. 44/664), one of the Prophet's companions, in his *waṣīyya*, compares the educator with a medical doctor. Neither should hurry to prescribe a medicine before – always on a personal basis, of course – a solid diagnosis has been made (*lā yu'ajjil bi-al-dawā' qabla ma'rifat al-dā'*)<sup>4</sup>. And Ibn Ḥabīb, the Andalusian scholar (d. 238/853) is said to have advised his sons' teacher “to be for them as a doctor who uses the right medicine for each illness” (*wa-kun lahum ka-al-ṭabīb alladhī lā yaḍa'u al-dawā' illā mawḍi' al-dā'*)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Goitein, S. D., “Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam”, in Banani, A. and S. Vryonis Jr. (eds.), *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam* (Fifth Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference), Wiesbaden, 1977, 3.

W. M. Watt observes that individualism increased in the pre-Islamic community of Mecca as commerce and wealth increased; see his *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford, 1961, 100, 152.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, Muḥammad, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn* (ed. Muḥammad al-'Arūsī al-Matawī), Tunis, 1972, 15-16, editor's Introduction quoting Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, 48, editor's Introduction, quoting Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's *al-'Iqd al-farīd*.

<sup>5</sup> al-Maghrāwī Aḥmad b. Abī Jam'a (d. in Fez, 929/1523), *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār wa al-tibyān fīmā ya'riḍu bayna al-mu'allimīn wa-ābā' al-ṣibyān* (ed. 'Abd al-Hādī al-Tāzī) in *al-Maghrāwī wa-fikruhu al-tarbawī*, Beirut, 1986, 81.

Both latter citations should remind us that Islamic ethical thought, including theories of *ṣūfī* training, was inspired by Greek ethics which underlines the connection between soul and body; moral defects are described as an “illness of the heart” (a concept which is also developed in early Islamic sources, for instance, Qur’ān 2/10; 5/52)<sup>6</sup> and educators/mentors are regarded as the healers of the soul.<sup>7</sup> As such, the methods they adopt should be similar to those used by physicians. Muslim physicians, again under the influence of Greek medical thought, were well aware of individual differences, for instance, in child development, in physical reaction to medical treatment, etc., as we can see in Ibn al-Jazzār al-Qayrawānī’s pediatric treatise, *Siyāsat al-ṣibyān wa-tadbīruhum* from the fourth/tenth century.<sup>8</sup> As he regarded body and soul as a whole, Ibn al-Jazzār concludes his pediatric treatise, not surprisingly, with a chapter on child education.<sup>9</sup>

The simile of the teacher as the physician of the soul appears also in Islamic writings in the context of religious-orthodox “higher education”.<sup>10</sup> The teacher in the *madrassa* and in similar institutions was expected to take into account the aspirations and abilities of every single student when he came to determine teaching materials and methods.<sup>11</sup> Inspired by early ethical *ṣūfī* thought, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, in the fifth-sixth/eleventh-twelfth centuries, sees the college teacher as a spiritual father (*fa-awwal waḥd’if al-mu’allim an yajriya al-muta’allim minhu majrā bunayhi*)<sup>12</sup> and among his duties includes the moral improvement of his students

<sup>6</sup> Sherif, M. A., *Ghazali’s Theory of Virtue*, Albany, 1975, 33-34. For illness (especially of the heart) as a moral defect in the Qur’ān see al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mu’jam mufradāt alfāz al-Qur’ān* (ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn), Beirut, 1997, s.v. *m.r.d.*

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Minhāj al-‘ārīfīn* (ed. E. Kohlberg), *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1(1979), 25 (on the *ṣūfī* mentor – *shaykh* – as a physician), and in many places in the last two quarters of al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, Cairo, 1967, e.g., III, 63, 76, 79, 80, 82; IV, 63, 105. Cf. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-‘amal*, Cairo, 1973, 72-73; Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (eds. J. Ṣalībā and K. ‘Ayyād), Beirut, 1967, 115-116.

<sup>8</sup> Giladi, A., *Children of Islam: Concepts of Childhood in Medieval Muslim Society*, Houndmills and London, 1992, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-Jazzār al-Qayrawānī, *Siyāsat al-ṣibyān wa-tadbīruhum* (ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb al-Hīla), Tunis, 1968, Chapter 22, 134-138 (the first part of the chapter is missing).

<sup>10</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dunyā wa al-dīn* (ed. Muṣṭafā al-Siqā), Cairo, 1973, 75; al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, I, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’* I, 82; al-Ghazālī, *Mizān*, 49, 173.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Mizān*, 140.

(... *an yazjura* [*al-mu'allim*] *al-muta'allim 'an sū' al-akhlāq*).<sup>13</sup> And the *ṣūfī* spiritual mentor himself was obviously urged to look carefully into the soul of every individual disciple and diagnose its defects, like a doctor diagnosing a physical disease in his patient, before making a decision as to what would be the appropriate educational measures to help him pave his way toward personal salvation: "Thus, the spiritual mentor (*shaykh*) who heals the souls of his novices and treats his disciples' hearts, as long as he does not know their moral nature and defects, should not pounce upon them with a specific system of training and imposing duties. Like the physician who would have killed most of his patients if he treated all their diseases with one medicine, the spiritual mentor would have ruined his disciples and killed their hearts had he guided them to only one manner of training" (*fa-ka-dhālika al-shaykh al-matbū' alladhī yutabbibu nufūs al-murīdīn wa-yu'ālīju qulūb al-mustarshidīn, yanbaghī an lā yahjuma 'alayhim bi-al-riyāda wa-al-takālīf fī fann makhsūs wa-fī tarīq makhsūs mā lam ya'rif akhlāqahum wa-amrāḍahum. Wa-kamā anna al-ṭabīb law 'ālaja jamī' al-marḍā bi-'ilāj wāḥid qatala aktharahum, fa-ka-dhālika al-shaykh law ashāra 'alā al-murīdīn bi-namaṭ wāḥid min al-riyāda ahlakahum wa-amāta qulūbahum*).<sup>14</sup>

Compared with other early Islamic institutions of learning the *kuttāb* (or *maktab*), the popular framework of elementary education, was less likely to supply its pupils with individual attention. This was due to physical conditions – *kuttābs* were sometimes overcrowded<sup>15</sup> – to the emphasis put on the mechanical memorization of the Qur'ān often reinforced by physical punishment, and to the low level of teaching – teachers were frequently criticized for their ignorance and for employing unqualified assistants.<sup>16</sup> In the eighth/fourteenth cen-

<sup>13</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, I, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, III, 79.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn 'Abdūn of Seville, in a treatise he wrote at the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century, calls upon teachers to restrict the number of pupils in their *kuttābs*, arguing that personal relations between teacher and pupil are necessary from the educational point of view. See Lévi-Provençal, E., "Un document sur la vie urbaine et les corps de métiers à Seville au début du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Le traité d'Ibn 'Abdun", *Journal Asiatique* avril-juin 1934, Arabic text, 23 (215). Cf. a testimony from nineteenth century Damascus: Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Qāsimī, *Qāmūs al-ṣinā'āt al-shāmiyya*, Paris, 1960, 408 where *kuttābs* attended by nearly two hundred pupils are mentioned.

<sup>16</sup> 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), the well-known author of works of *adab*, admits *kuttāb* teachers play a very important role in Muslim society although he criticizes

tury Ibn Khaldūn laments how elementary teaching had deteriorated from what he describes idealistically as the elevated position of a religious mission at the beginning of Islam to that of no more than a craft, a means to make a living for those who practiced it, in his own time. He describes teachers as “weak, indigent, and rootless... As a result, its practitioners came to be despised by the men who controlled the group feeling and the government” (... *wa-al-mu‘allim mustad‘if, mustakīn, munqati‘ al-jidhm... wa-ṣāra muntaḥiluhu muḥtaqir<sup>an</sup> ‘inda ahl al-‘aṣabiyya wa-al-mulk*).<sup>17</sup>

Still, Muslim thinkers, on the whole, had the individual pupil in mind when they discussed questions of elementary education. Their writings, particularly those of such North-African Māliki jurists from the third/ninth through the tenth/sixteenth century, as Ibn Saḥnūn, al-Qābisī (d. 403/1012), al-Maghrawī (d. 929/1523) and others whose *fatāwā* are included in al-Wansharīsi’s *Mi‘yār* (compiled in Fez in the ninth/fifteenth century), reflect some common ideas and every-day practices in this domain but also, clearly, the efforts ‘ulamā’ made to improve the system.

These scholars justified the heavy emphasis on memorizing the Qur’ānic text – common in the Maghrib and, according to Ibn Jubayr (the Andalusian traveller and writer of the sixth-seventh/twelfth-thirteenth centuries) also in the Eastern Mediterranean –<sup>18</sup> since they saw

them for various shortcomings. See his *Kitāb al-mu‘allimīn* (ed. I. Geries), Tel-Aviv and Acre, 1980, 60-61. See also Ibn ‘Abdūn (note 15, above), 23 (215): *wa-akthar al-mu‘allimīn juḥāl bi-ṣan‘at al-ta‘līm*. Tāj al-Dīn b. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī is quoted as criticising (in *Mufīd al-ni‘am*) Damascene *kuttāb* teachers of his time (eighth/fourteenth century) for adopting false religious (popular?) doctrine. See al-Qāsimī, *Qamūs al-ṣinā‘āt*, II, 407. On the required qualifications of the teacher’s assistant in Ottoman Cairo from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, as formulated in contemporary *waqf* documents see: Raymond, A., “Le fonctionnement des écoles élémentaires (*maktab*) au Caire d’après des documents de *waqf*”, Sanagustin, F. et al. (eds.), *L’Orient au cœur en l’honneur d’André Miquel*, Paris, 2001, 277-278 (I wish to thank Dr Jacqueline Sublet for granting me this collection of articles). See also “Education (Muslim)”, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, V, 198-207 (I. Goldziher); “Madrasa”, *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, V, 1123 (J. Pedersen and G. Makdisi); “Kuttāb”, *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, V, 567-570 (J. M. Landau).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* (ed. M. Quatremère), Paris, 1858, I, 46-47 (English translation by F. Rosenthal, Princeton, 1967, I, 58-60).

<sup>18</sup> Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla* (ed. W. Wright), Leiden, 1907, 272 (*wa-ta‘līm al-ṣibyān li-al-qur‘ān bi-hādhihi al-bilād al-mashriqiyya kulluhā innamā huwa talqīn*); Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, III, 260-262; Léon l’Africain, *Description de l’Afrique* (ed. A. Epaulard), Paris, 1956, 215-216 (on tenth/sixteenth century’s Fez). In the entries dealing with the *sabīl-kuttāb* in the endowment deed (*waqfiyya*) of the

it as the core component of the curriculum.<sup>19</sup> They defined subjects, such as Arabic language, basic arithmetic, selected poetry, oral tradition etc. as secondary or even optional,<sup>20</sup> although in the eyes of other scholars they constituted a more integral part of the curriculum.<sup>21</sup> Pupils ought to be taught mainly so that they would be able to repeat the Qur'ān, and writing was sometimes neglected altogether at the early stage of education.<sup>22</sup> By mastering the Qur'ānic text, even if they did not comprehend it,<sup>23</sup> children were supposed to enjoy the benefit of the magical, protective power ascribed to it: "Accepted custom gives preference to the teaching of the Qur'ān. The reason is the desire for blessing and reward (*wa-wajh mā ikhtaṣṣat bihi al-'awā'id min taqdīm dirāsāt al-Qur'ān – īthār al-tabarruk wa al-thawāb*)".<sup>24</sup> It was exceptional to find someone express the idea, as did the Māliki qāḍī Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī of Seville (d. 543/1148), that the studies in the *kuttāb* should, in a concrete and direct way, prepare children for worldly life by, for instance, providing them with linguistic and logical skills.<sup>25</sup> Vocational education of any sort was delayed to a later stage,<sup>26</sup>

Mamluk Sultan Faraj b. Barqūq (of the year 812/1409), memorizing the Qur'ān is always the first amongst the enumerated teaching subjects. See Haarmann, U., "Mamluk Endowment Deeds as a Source for the History of Education in Late Medieval Egypt", *Al-Abhāth* 28 (1980), Arabic text, 43 (Line 438), 45 (lines 582, 584, 588), 46 (lines 600, 601) (I wish to thank Prof. Yaacov Lev for drawing my attention to this article). See also: Frenkel, Y., "Muslim Institutions of Education in Jerusalem in the Mamluk Period 1250-1516", in Etikes, E. and R. Feldhai (eds.), *Education and History*, Jerusalem, 1999, 121-125 (in Hebrew) and Raymond, "Le fonctionnement des écoles élémentaires", 279.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, 78, 79, 80, 82 (on the religious value of knowing the Qur'ān), 102, 106, 136; Abū al-Ḥasan al-Qābisī, *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣila li-aḥwāl al-muta'allimīn wa-aḥkām al-mu'allimīn wa-al-muta'allimīn* (ed. Aḥmad Fu'ād al-Aḥwānī), in *al-Tarbiya fī al-islām*, Cairo, 1968, 294, 304-305.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, 102, 104, 106, 131, 136; al-Qābisī, *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣila*, 294-295, 304-305.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Naṣr al-Shayzarī (a Shāfi'i jurist from Ḥalab, of the sixth/twelfth century AD), *Nihāyat al-rutba fī ṭalab al-ḥisba*, Beirut, n.d., 103.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Eickelman, D. F., *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*, Princeton, 1985, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*, 63-64.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, III, 264 (English translation, III, 304).

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, III, 263-264. Earlier, and probably in the context of private education, al-Jāḥiẓ recommended a great variety of teaching subjects in order to develop the intellectual, artistic and physical skills of future rulers; see his *Kitāb al-mu'allimīn*, 64-66.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ's attitude seems to be exceptional from this point of view; see his *Kitāb al-mu'allimīn*, 50, 52, 56 (editor's Introduction).

whereas the years the child spent in the *kuttāb* were devoted mainly to achieve one goal, namely, to protect him in this world while preparing him for the world to come by imbuing him with the Qur'ānic text and through it with the knowledge of the basic Islamic principles of faith and religious commandments.<sup>27</sup> Thus, parents were encouraged to instill in their children, through the “educational system”, inert ideas that might well be totally irrelevant to their emotional and mental interests: “They [the pupils] read things they do not understand and work hard at something that is not as important for them as other matters”, as Ibn al-‘Arabī is said to have put it.<sup>28</sup> This was so not only because of what Ibn Khaldūn identifies as “a fear of the things that might affect children in ‘the folly of youth’ and harm them and keep them from acquiring knowledge” since “when they have grown up and shaken off the yoke of authority, the tempests of young manhood often cast them upon the shores of wrongdoing”.<sup>29</sup> Rather, as I see it, it arose out of an anxiety that children – always vulnerable in those periods of high rates of infant and child mortality –<sup>30</sup> should be prepared as early as possible for eternal life in the Hereafter.<sup>31</sup> In other words, into the sheer conformist definitions of the aims and contents of elementary education we ought to read a genuine worry for the fate of the individual child, rather than

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu‘allimīn*, 109-112 (on educating children towards the fulfillment of religious commandments). Cf. Messick, B., *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1993, 81, where the Qur'ānic school experience in contemporary Yemen is described, moreover, as “an extended rite of passage that, for some, at least, gradually effected a social transition from an undisciplined and ignorant child to an *adab*-formed youth”. Cf. Bouhdiba, A., “The Child and the Mother in Arab-Muslim Society”, in Brown, L. C., and N. Itzkowitz (eds.), *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies*, Princeton, 1977, 129 (on the education in the *kuttāb* as significant part of the socialization process in Muslim societies).

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, III, 263 (English translation, III, 304).

Bouhdiba (“The Child and the Mother”) observes that “the *kuttāb*... does not represent a simplified form of culture for consumption by children, nor is it a microcosm of the adult society into which, for better or worse, the child will have to raise himself. It is never society at large which adapts itself to the child, but rather the child who must adapt himself to it”.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, III, 264 (English translation, III, 304-305).

<sup>30</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, IV, 567 (*Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba’dahu*): ... *al-mawt fī al-shabbāb akthar fa-ilā an yamūta shaykh yamūtu al-faṣbiyy wa-shābb*. See also Giladi, *Children of Islam*, Chapter 6: “Infants, Children and Death in Medieval Muslim Society”, especially 69-79.

<sup>31</sup> See al-Maghrawī, *Jāmi‘ jawāmi‘ al-ikhtisār*, 90 where the author warns teachers not to delay the repetition of the alphabet and the Qur'ānic text lest the pupil would die.

social or other worldly considerations. What to us to-day seems to have stood in sharp contrast to the needs, interests and inclinations of the individual child was intended to achieve something far more important in the eyes of Muslims of the time: to save the child (as well as his father and teacher who were personally accountable for him) from the fires of Hell: "As much as the father shields his son from fire in this world, it is more meet for him to shield him from the fire of the world to come" (*wa-mahmā kāna al-ab yaṣūnuhu 'an nār al-dunyā fa-bi-an yaṣūnahu 'an nār al-ākhirā awlā*), that is to say, by means of religious-moral education.<sup>32</sup> As a means to protect the child, memorizing the Qur'ān – the *raison d'être* of the *kuttāb* – should be regarded as a magical device similar to the ceremonial acts (of tribal, pre-Islamic origin, adapted to an Islamic way of life) that used to be performed on new-born Muslim children: reciting into the ear of the new born the moment it has come into this world the call-to-prayer (*adhān*) formula as well as the words that are chanted in the mosque at the beginning of each prayer (*iqāma*); the first haircut accompanied by the slaughter of a sheep or a goat (*'aqīqa*), on the seventh day after the birth, and by *tasmiya*, naming.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of the father's religious-moral accountability coincides with that of the legal-practical responsibilities he shoulders in a patrilineal-patriarchal family. His guardianship over the child's person (*wilāyat al-naḥs*) includes overall responsibility for physical care, socialization and education and, not least, the duty to marry the child off when the latter comes of age (*wilāyat al-tazwīj*).<sup>34</sup> This explains why fathers were called to involve themselves in various ways in the formal, elementary education within the *kuttāb*, involvement which, again, could encourage the differentiation between individual pupils.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, III, 92. See also Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tuḥfat al-mawdūd bi-aḥkām al-mawlūd* (ed. 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Sharaf al-Dīn), Bombay, 1960, 134, 136. Cf. Von Grunebaum, G., *Medieval Islam*, Chicago and London, 1969, 230: "Man [in medieval Muslim society] is to be directed and guided towards salvation, rather than educated to develop his self in developing this world, as the deed more deserving of everlasting reward".

<sup>33</sup> Motzki, H., "Das Kind und seine Sozialisation in der islamischen Familie des Mittelalters", in Martin, J. and A. Nitschke (eds.), *Zur Sozialgeschichte der Kindheit*, Freiburg and Munich, 1986, 412-416; Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 35-36; Schimmel, A., *Islamic Names*, Edinburgh, 1989, 14-24.

<sup>34</sup> See "Ṣaghīr", *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, VIII, 824 (A. Giladi).



While consensus urged Muslims to grant their children (mainly sons) religious education,<sup>35</sup> the decision when and by whom was, in the absence of any state educational systems, in the father's hands, and certainly depended upon economic circumstances. But not only on them. Muslim scholars emphasize the child's mental-psychological readiness as a precondition for this stage of education and count on the father to detect the first manifestations of such readiness. For instance, the moment the notion of shame becomes a central characteristic of the way he behaves, the child is considered able to distinguish between good and evil (*tamyīz*, discernment).<sup>36</sup> The emergence of "shame" signifies the end of the period during which child education is based on acquiring habits through stimulation of the senses only and introduces the next stage in which it is possible to address the child's logical abilities and direct his actions through words of censure or of praise.<sup>37</sup> This is also the appropriate time to start the child's more formal, systematic education: *idhā 'aqala ba'athūhu ilā al-maktab*, as Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī describes the common practice in the eastern areas of the Islamic world (the *mashriq*).<sup>38</sup> Muslim scholars were aware that just as the point of transition from childhood to puberty could not be arbitrarily fixed in all children – *wa-laysa li-waqt al-iḥtilām sinn mu'tād*<sup>39</sup> – so too the age of *tamyīz* might differ from one child to another. While *tamyīz* was generally expected to emerge at the age of six or seven – when, according to a well-known *ḥadīth* report, the child should start his

<sup>35</sup> Al-Qābisī, *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣila*, 291: *wa-qad maḍā amr al-muslimīn annahum yu'allimūna awlādahum al-qur'ān wa-ya'tūnahum bi-al-mu'allimīn wa-yajtahidūna fī dhālika, wa-hādhā mimmā lā yamtanī 'u minhu wālid li-waladihi wa-huwa yajidu ilayhi sabīlān*; 296: *wa-lammā taraka a'immat al-muslimīn al-naẓar fī hādhā al-amr wa-kāna lā budda minhu li-al-muslimīn an yaḥ'alūhu fī awlādihi, wa-lā taḥibbu nafsuhum illā 'alā dhālika wa-ittahadhū li-awlādihi mu'allimān yakhtaṣṣu bihim*.

<sup>36</sup> For the term *tamyīz* and its educational significance, see, for instance, al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, III, 22, 72, 92-93; al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, 110-111. Cf. Motzki, "Das Kind", 421-423; Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 50-51.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, III, 92: *fā-al-ṣabiyy al-mustaḥyi lā yanbaghī an yuḥmala bal yusta'āna 'alā ta'dibihi bi-ḥayā'ihi aw tamyīzihi*. See also al-Ghazālī, *Mizān*, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Aḥkām* as cited in a supplement to Ibn Saḥnūn's *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, 140. For a Shi'ite tradition in this regard, see Abū Naṣr al-Ṭabarsī, *Makārim al-akhlāq*, Cairo, n.d., 176.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya *Tuḥfat al-mawḍūd*, 180. See also Motzki, H., "Volwassen worden in de vroeg-Islamitische periode: maatschappelijke en juridische gevolgen", *Sharḥiyyāt* 6/1(1994), 64-66 (in Dutch).

prayers <sup>40</sup> – it could occur earlier, at the age of five or even less: *wa-laysa lahu sinn mu'ayyan*. <sup>41</sup>

Agreements between fathers and teachers usually defined the period for which the teacher would be hired. However, because of the emphasis put on honoring individual differences among children – *ikhtilāf afhām al-ṣibyān* – religious scholars objected to any stipulation that fixed a certain period of time for the teaching of a particular number of Qur'ānic parts. <sup>42</sup> Thus, the picture of pupils starting elementary education and graduating from the *kuttāb* at different ages, progressing at their own individual pace, <sup>43</sup> here found its justification in psychological terms.

As we can learn from *Minhāj al-muta'allim*, a pedagogical treatise apparently dating from the tenth-eleventh/seventeenth century, <sup>44</sup> the teacher was expected to reduce the difficulties beginning pupils habitually faced by helping them adapt to the new framework, by being

<sup>40</sup> *Idhā balagha awlādukum sab' sinīna fa-murūhum bi-al-ṣalāt fa-idhā balagha 'ashr<sup>an</sup> fa-aḍribūhum 'alayhā...* For this and similar *ḥadīth* reports, see: Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-'iyāl* (ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Khalaf), al-Manṣūra, 1997, 219-223 (*Bāb ta'līm al-ṣibyān al-ṣalāt*). More flexible, i.e. individualistic, attitudes towards the question of the proper age in which a young Muslim should start praying are reflected in other *ḥadīth* reports. See, for instance, Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-muṣannaḥ fī al-aḥādīth wa-al-āthār* (ed. 'Abd al-Khālīq Afghānī), Ḥaydarābād, 1966, vol. I, 347-348 (*matā yu'maru al-ṣabiyy bi-al-ṣalāt*). There are reports recommending gradual training in this domain, e.g., to instruct children between the ages of seven and ten how to pray or to let children pray only four times a day (excluding, probably, either the morning prayer which takes place too early for them to wake up or the night prayer which may be too late) even if not at the exact fixed times. Other reports are even more considerate, from the child's point of view. One describes 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb advising a mother who was seen trying hard to wake her reluctant little son for the (morning) prayer to let him sleep. "He is not obliged to pray", says 'Umar, "unless he understands the meaning of the prayer's text" (*da'īhi, fa-laysat 'alayhi ḥattā ya'qiluhā*). Some reports insist on the appearance of signs of either physical or mental (i.e. individual) development in children as a condition for the start of regular daily prayers, e.g., the child's ability to distinguish between his/her right and left hand or to count up to twenty and shedding his/her milk teeth.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tuhfat al-mawdūd*, 176. The anonymous author of *Minhāj al-muta'allim* (MS, the Library of the University of Leiden, Or. 8431) suggests (in fol. 212), albeit without any explanation, that a (male) child will start his formal elementary education at the age of four years, four months and four days.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Maghrawī, *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār*, 75, 76.

<sup>43</sup> "Kuttāb", *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, V, 568.

<sup>44</sup> See above, note 41 and Voorhoeve, P., *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden*, Leiden, 1957, 214; Ahlwardt, W., *Die Handschriften Verzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Berlin, 1887, I, 49.

considerate, by honoring and supporting them, since, as the unknown author of the treatise puts it, “the child is like an untamed bird (*ka-al-ṭayr al-waḥsh*) which becomes accustomed to someone’s company only when it is shown friendliness, and learning is still a hard, tiresome, bitter experience for him”.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the same treatise highlights that the teacher is required to select the educational methods that are appropriate for each individual pupil after having identified his mental abilities and to separate the bright, intelligent students from the dull ones.<sup>46</sup> Al-Qābisī, in the fourth/tenth century, is aware of the difference in intelligence children show – *wa-al-idrāk yakhtalifu jid<sup>an</sup> fī al-ṣibyān*.<sup>47</sup>

Whenever a teacher wished to impose some kind of severe corporal punishment on a particular pupil the pupil’s father was supposed to be consulted,<sup>48</sup> first of all because of his legal right/duty of guardianship but also, more implicitly, because the child’s individual personality had to be taken into account and this was best known to the father.

In situations where an obvious gap exists between, on the one hand, the contents of education and the methods used to inculcate them, and, on the other, the child’s actual interests and psychological needs, recourse to physical punishment is viewed as inevitable.<sup>49</sup> Muslim scholars consider such punishment as an efficient means to instill into the child the required level of intellectual aptitude and the appropriate form of behaviour.<sup>50</sup> Luqmān, the legendary sage, is

<sup>45</sup> *Minhāj al-muta’allim*, fol. 208.

<sup>46</sup> *Minhāj al-muta’allim*, fol. 208: *wa-yajibu ‘alā al-mu’allim an yushakḥkhiṣa ṭabī‘at al-mubtadi’ min al-zakāwa [dhakā’] wa-al-ghabāwa wa-‘allamahu ‘alā miqdār wus‘atihi [wus‘ihi] wa-lā yukallifa al-ziyāda min miqdārihi... wa-lā yashtarika al-zakiyy [dhakiyy] ma’a al-ghabiyy*.

<sup>47</sup> As quoted in Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Wansharīsī’s, *al-Mi’yār al-mu’rib wa-al-jāmi’ al-mughrib ‘an fatāwā ‘ulamā’ ifriqiya wa-al-andalus wa-al-maghrib* (Muḥammad al-Ḥajjī et al. eds.), Rabat, 1981, VIII, 248.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu’allimīn*, 89 and see below; al-Maghrāwī, *Jāmi’ jawāmi’ al-ikhtisār*, 84; al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi’yār*, VIII, 257. On methods of corporal punishment in the *kuttāb* see, for instance, “Falāḥa”, *E.I.*<sup>2</sup> II, 763 (G. Lecomte).

<sup>49</sup> Throughout history corporal punishment has constituted an important element in child education. See, for instance, DeMause, L., “The Evolution of Childhood”, in, L. DeMause (ed.), *The History of Childhood*, New York, 1974, 40-41; Brubacher, J. S., *A History of the Problems of Education*, New York, 1947, 168-170; Frishtik, M., “Physical Violence by Parents Against Their Children in Jewish History and Jewish Law”, *The Jewish Law Annual*, 10 (1992), 79-97, esp. 82-84, 88-90.

<sup>50</sup> Messick, *The Calligraphic State*, 77.

quoted as saying: "A father's slap is to his child like fertilizer to seeds" (*ḍarb al-wālid li-waladihi ka-al-samād li-al-zar'*).<sup>51</sup> Islamic legal writings, in their efforts to regulate and restrict corporal punishment, tell us how wide-spread and severe it was. One of the tasks of the *muhtasib*, the Muslim *agoranomos*, was to ensure the judicious use of bodily chastisement by educators; to prevent children from being flogged with heavy thongs that might fracture their bones or with lashes that could cause intense pain; to order the use of a whip made not of a thin but of a broad leather band and to limit the parts of the body that could be hit.<sup>52</sup> The sole of the foot was regarded as the most appropriate part of the body to apply such physical punishment. Teachers were warned against any form of punishment that might cause damage to the head, the back, the belly and the sexual organs; causing pain was allowed, but not leaving either a mark or a scar on the child's body (*ilām faqaṭ, dūna ta'thīr fī al-'uḍw*); preventing children from relieving themselves at the appropriate times was also deemed a harmful means of punishment and therefore condemned.<sup>53</sup> Inevitably, children at times suffered grievous bodily harm, or died even, at the hands of too severe a teacher.<sup>54</sup> North-African jurists dealing with the legal consequences of such cases have left us details of the circumstances that called for physical punishment: when a pupil was neglecting his memorization of the Qur'ān,<sup>55</sup> made a mistake while reading the text,<sup>56</sup> laughed during prayer or neglected prayer altogether, had imbibed alcoholic drink,<sup>57</sup> had thrown stones at another child or at an adult passing by the *kuttāb*,<sup>58</sup> caused damage,

<sup>51</sup> 'Abdallāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, Beirut, 1982, II, 168.

<sup>52</sup> Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurashī (Ibn al-Ukhuwwa), *Ma'ālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba* (ed. R. Levy), London, 1938, 171.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Maghrāwī, *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār*, 81-82, 83. See also Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 63 and footnote 11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, 131; al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār*, II, 269; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-Makkī al-Haythamī (d. 973/1565-6), *Taḥrīr al-maqāl fī ādāb wa-aḥkām wa-fawā'id yaḥtāju ilayhā mu'addibū al-atfāl* (ed. Majdī al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm), Bulāq, n.d., 73-74, 76-77 and see Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 64.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Maghrāwī, *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār*, VIII, 255. On corporal punishment as a means of inculcating religious beliefs in a Christian *kuttāb* see the entry dedicated to Ma'rūf al-Karkhī in *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, Beirut, 1998, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār*, VIII, 245.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār*, VIII, 246.

played, slandered somebody, escaped from the *kuttāb*, lied, disobeyed his parents, joined companions of bad character, etc.<sup>59</sup>

Al-Qābisī encourages leniency on the part of teachers. When corporal or verbal punishment proves necessary, it should be dealt out in a deliberate, restrained and gradual manner, aiming to improve the child's behaviour, not to serve as outlet for the teacher's anger; only in exceptional cases should it exceed three lashes and, again, not before the father has given his permission. Even more importantly, it should be accommodated to the child's character in general and his ability to take the punishment (*idhā kāna al-ṣabiyy yuṭīqu dhālika*), in particular.<sup>60</sup> This, of course, works both ways. For instance, children approaching the age of puberty are particularly difficult to educate – generally strong enough to stand a severe physical punishment in any case, not even setting the limit of as high as ten lashes may prove effective in regard to them.<sup>61</sup>

‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Lakhmī, another North African Māliki jurist (d. 478/1085) highlights, in one of his *fatāwā*, the great variety of educational methods (*al-adab ghayr maḥūr*), on the one hand, and the many differences there are in children's constitution (*fa-ḥāl al-ṣibyān mukhtalifa*), on the other, for instance, from the point of view of their physical strength and weakness and the nature of the offences they commit.<sup>62</sup>

Ibn al-Jazzār lists six points in which children may differ, as far as their reaction is concerned to the educational process, in general, and to rebuke and threat of physical punishment, in particular: one is how susceptible they are to training and instruction (*qad najidu min al-ṣibyān man yaqbalu al-adab qabūl<sup>an</sup> sahl<sup>an</sup> wa-najidu minhum man*

<sup>59</sup> Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār*, VIII, 257; al-Maghrāwī, *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār*, 81, 84-86.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Qābisī, *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣila*, 313-315 (al-Qābisī is also quoted in this regard in al-Wansharīsī's *al-Mi'yār*, VIII, 250, 256). See also, Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, 90, 93, 98, 100, 101, 117-118, 131-133, 135; al-Maghrāwī, *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār*, 78, 83, 85; Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. al-Ḥusayn al-Asrūshānī, *Jāmi' aḥkām al-ṣiḡḥār*, Cairo (eds. Abū Muṣ'ab al-Badrī and Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Abd al-Mun'im), n.d., I, 36, where (in the context of the *ḥadīth* allowing for beating a boy of ten neglecting his prayer duties) the use of a wooden rod (*khashab*) is forbidden and the number of blows is limited to three; Haarmann, "Mamluk Endowment Deeds", Arabic text, 45 (lines 590-591).

<sup>61</sup> Al-Qābisī, *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣila*, 315.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār*, II, 267. See also VIII, 245, 246, 256.

*lā yaqbalu dhālika*); the second is how far their sense of shame has been developed (*qad najidu min al-ṣibyān man lā yastahyi wa-najidu minhum man huwa kathīr al-ḥayā*); third, how interested in their studies and how industrious they prove to be (*wa-najidu minhum man yu'nā bi-mā yu'allamahu wa-yata'allamhau bi-ḥirṣ wa-ijtihād, wa-najidu man huwa yamallu al-ta'līm wa-yabghuḍuhu*); fourth, what the effect may be of incentives on industrious pupils, such as positive encouragement, on the one hand, and reproach or threat of corporal punishment, on the other (*wa-qad najidu... fī dhawī al-'ināya minhum wa-dhawī al-'ilm man idhā mudiḥa ta'allama 'ilm<sup>an</sup> kathīr<sup>an</sup> wa-minhum man yata'allamu idhā ātabtahu aw ātabahu al-mu'allim wa-wabbakhahu, wa-minhum man lā yata'allamu illā li al-faraq min al-ḍarb*); fifth, how quickly they become bored with or averse to their studies (*wa-ka-dhālika najidu ikhtilāf<sup>an</sup> kathīr<sup>an</sup> wa-muṭṭarid<sup>an</sup> fī alladhīna yamallūna al-ta'allum wa-yabghuḍūnahu*), and finally, how readily they tell the truth or how easily they lie (*wa-qad narā min al-ṣibyān muḥibb<sup>an</sup> li-al-kidhb wa-narā minhum muḥibb<sup>an</sup> li-al-ṣidq*).<sup>63</sup>

Certain influential Muslim thinkers, while not disapproving of the traditional methods of bodily chastisement altogether, prove critical of corporal punishment.<sup>64</sup> They accept with certain reservations the idea that physical punishment can sometimes be useful and may bear fruits in the long term (*man addaba ibnahu ṣaghīr<sup>an</sup> qarrat bihi 'aynuhu kabīr<sup>an</sup>*).<sup>65</sup> For example, al-Ghazālī proposes that, in the context of moral education at home, the father give a more complex response to his child's behaviour. In line with the *Oikonomikos* of the Neo-Pythagorean philosopher Bryson and its Islamic elaborations,<sup>66</sup> he points to alternative educational means, such as arousing the child's fear of his father, warnings and rebukes. He also distinguishes between response in public, which is most desirable in order to rein-

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-Jazzār al-Qayrawānī, *Siyāsāt al-ṣibyān*, 134.

<sup>64</sup> Motzki, "Das Kind", 437-438.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Maghrawī, *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār*, 82.

<sup>66</sup> Little is known about the Neo-Pythagoreans in general and Bryson, in particular, not even when he lived. See Walzer, R., *Greek into Arabic*, Oxford, 1962, 220. On Bryson's *Oikonomikos* and its influence on Islamic ethical writings, including the chapter on child education in the *Iḥyā'*, see Plessner, M., *Der Oikonomikos des Neupythagorees Bryson und seine Einfluss auf die islamische Wissenschaft*, Heidelberg, 1928 (Orient und Antike 5),

force good qualities but wrong in case of misconduct, and response in private, and examines the effectiveness of both in different circumstances.<sup>67</sup> The chapter Ibn Khaldūn dedicates to the subject in his *Muqaddima* – which he called “Severity to pupils does them harm” (*fi anna al-shidda ‘alā al-muta‘allimīn muḍirra bihim* –<sup>68</sup> reflects a more critical attitude and indicates that the disadvantages of corporal punishment were gradually recognized by Muslim thinkers.<sup>69</sup> Particularly interesting are his observations on the long-term psychological damage that might be caused by regular use of excessive corporal punishment: Permanent pressure and threat make children passive and induce them to cheat, lie and be dishonest in their relations with their elders in order to avoid punishment. These traits are then incorporated in their adult character: “They lose the quality that goes with social and political organization and makes people human, namely (the desire to) protect and defend themselves and their homes, and they become dependent on others”.<sup>70</sup>

Another aspect of psychological understanding is reflected in Muslim sayings that view playing and physical activities as natural and typical characteristics of children. That this idea was popular we learn from a touching little story about the childhood of Dāwūd al-Ṭā’ī (d. 165/781), one of the prominent ascetics of the early ‘Abbāsid period, which can be found in the bio-hagiographical collection *Kitāb anabā’ nujabā’ al-abnā’* (Anecdotes [of the Childhood] of Noble Men’s Sons) by Muḥammad Ibn Ṣafar (d. 565/1170 or 568/1172-3). At the age of five, Ibn Ṣafar tells us, Dāwūd was already totally dedicated to the memorization of the Qur’ān, so much so that he spent even his free hours at home in contemplation, speaking to himself. Worried that something might be mentally wrong with him, his mother urged him to do what she thought every normal child should do in his free time, namely, play with friends: *fa-khāfat ‘alā ‘aqlihi fa-nādathu: qum ya Dāwūd, fa-il‘ab ma‘a al-ṣibyān*.<sup>71</sup> On a

<sup>67</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, III, 94. Cf. Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sinā, *Kitāb al-siyāsa* (ed. L. Ma‘lūf), *al-Mashriq* 9 (1906), 1074 and see Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 64-65. Cf. Plessner, *Der Oikonomikoc*, 186.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, III, 264-266.

<sup>69</sup> Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 63-66.

<sup>70</sup> *The Muqaddima*, III, 305.

<sup>71</sup> Muḥammad Ibn Ṣafar, *Kitāb anabā’ nujabā’ al-abnā’* (ed. Muṣṭafā al-Qabānī), Cairo, 1900, 160.

more theoretical level, under Greek psychological-pedagogical influence, Muslim scholars like Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), recommend physical exercise so as to ensure children do not become lazy. They are fully aware that “preventing the child from playing games and constant insistence on learning deadens his heart, blunts his wit and burdens his life; he looks for a ruse to escape them (i.e., his studies) altogether”.<sup>72</sup> According to al-Ghazālī, games fulfill a role as early as the weaning stage in helping divert the child’s attention away from his mother’s breasts.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the child’s natural tendency to play (*shahwat al-la‘b*),<sup>74</sup> which Muslim thinkers view as the clearest sign that his perception is as yet limited,<sup>75</sup> can be used in order to motivate him to study, although, again, if not supervised but left to the whim of the child itself, games become a delaying factor in learning and education.<sup>76</sup>

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā’ al-Rāzī, the well-known physician (d. in 313/925 or 323/935), quotes an observation found in Galen which says that from the way a child plays with friends one can tell whether he has the qualifications to become a ruler or, on the contrary, will be subservient to another’s authority.<sup>77</sup>

The company of other children is effective also from the point of view of moral and mental development of the individual child. Natural affinity between children makes understanding among them eas-

<sup>72</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, III, 94. Cf. Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq wa-taḥhīr al-a‘rāq*, Cairo, 1911, 52; Plessner, *Der Oikonomikos*, 202. A ḥadīth encouraging a father to enable his son to play during his first seven years of life (*da’ ibnaka yal‘abu sab ‘sinīna*) is quoted by Muḥammad Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, the Shī‘ite scholar of the fourth/tenth century, in his *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, al-Najaf, 1958-9, III, 318. See also al-Qurashī’s permission given, on a pedagogical basis, to children to play (*Ma‘ālīm al-qurba*, 32-38) as well as al-Maghrawī’s recommendation (91) to let *kuttāb* pupils take a rest from time to time in school. For medical doctors recommending children’s games see, for instance, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb*, Būlāq, 1877, I, 157.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, III, 325.

<sup>74</sup> Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur‘ān*, Cairo, 1964, 49.

<sup>75</sup> Rosenthal, F., “Child Psychology in Islam”, *Islamic Culture* 26 (1952), 3.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, IV, 161-162; al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi‘yār*, VIII, 257 (*man ittaṣafa min al-muta‘allimīn bi-al-adhā wa-al-la‘b wa-al-hurūb*) and cf. Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 56-58.

<sup>77</sup> *Yastadillu ‘alā himmat al-ṣabiyy min la‘bihi fī aqrānihi an yakūna mālik<sup>an</sup> ‘alayhim aw khādim<sup>an</sup> lahum...*: Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā’ al-Rāzī, *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu ṭabīb*, MS. The British Library, London, Or. 5620, fol. 173b.



ier: *al-ṣabiyy ‘an al-ṣabiyy afham wa-bihi ashkal*, as al-Jāḥiẓ puts it.<sup>78</sup> This is why adults, in order to communicate with children, tend to imitate their vocabulary and pronunciation in a way that may strike outsiders as some form of madness.<sup>79</sup> Sharing the company of well-behaved children – which al-Ghazālī regards as “the foundation of child education” –<sup>80</sup> is therefore useful for the individual child’s learning and moral education.<sup>81</sup> Ibn Sīnā, the famous philosopher and physician (d. 428/1037), emphasizes the advantages the *kuttāb* has over private education from this point of view, singling out the opportunity to learn from each other and to be enriched by other children’s experiences (the wide range of the pupils’ ages should be kept in mind in this context)<sup>82</sup> as well as the incentives created by competition.<sup>83</sup> Even the fact that the teacher has to divide his time between several children Ibn Sīnā sees as pedagogically valuable: the space it gives the individual pupil encourages him in his studies.<sup>84</sup>

Illuminating further is the discussion we find, in medieval Islamic writings, of the question of adequate careers and occupations.<sup>85</sup> Two scholars with as different backgrounds as Ibn Sīnā, in his *Kitāb al-siyāsa*, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), in his *Tuḥfat al-mawdūd*, stress that selecting a profession for a child who has finished his elementary religious education is a crucial decision which fathers should make very carefully. They are both aware of differences in inclinations and talents which, in addition to the inspirations of both father and child, should be taken into account in order to avoid failure and frustration.<sup>86</sup> There are children whose clarity of thought and abil-

<sup>78</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-mu‘allimīn*, 72.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, III, 94; cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-mu‘allimīn*, 86.

<sup>81</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-siyāsa*, 1074: *wa-yanbaghī an yakūna ma‘a al-ṣabiyy fī maktabihī ṣibya min awlād al-jilla ḥasana ādabuhum, mardīyya ‘ādatuhum, fa-inna al-ṣabiyy ‘an al-ṣabiyy alqan wa-huwa ‘anhu ākhadh wa-bihi ānas.*

<sup>82</sup> “Kuttāb”, *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, V, 568. Cf. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco*, 62.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-siyāsa*, 1074-1075.

<sup>84</sup> *Id.*, 1074: *wa-infirād al-ṣabiyy al-wāḥid bi-al-mu‘addib ajlab al-ashyā’ li-ḍajrihimā, fa-idhā rāwaha al-mu‘addib bayna al-ṣabiyy wa-al-ṣabiyy kāna dhālīka anfā li-al-sa‘āma wa-abqā li-al-nashaṭ wa-aḥraṣ li-al-ṣabiyy ‘alā al-ta‘allum wa-al-taḥarruj.*

<sup>85</sup> Motzki, “Das Kind”, 436-437.

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-siyāsa*, 1075: *laysa kull ṣinā‘a yarūmuḥā al-ṣabiyy mumkina lahu, mu‘ātiya, lākin mā shākala ṭab‘uhu wa-nāsabahu... fa-li-dhālīka yanbaghī li-mudabbir al-ṣabiyy idhā rāma ikhtiyār al-ṣinā‘a an yazina awalan ṭab‘ al-ṣabiyy*

ity to conceptualize as well as their good memory, make them suitable for theoretical studies (*'ilm*). Others having the skills and physical tendency for military training (*furūsiyya*, lit. horsemanship, chivalry, knighthood, heroism) or for different crafts (*ṣan'a min al-ṣanā'i'*) should be encouraged to train in these fields.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, Ibn Sīnā admits that it is impossible to discover the deeper roots of such differences; they remain an unsolved mystery for human beings.<sup>88</sup>

Finally – but, of course, before anything else – it is clear that medieval Muslim scholars writing on educational questions, particularly in the context of the *kuttāb*, largely had male rather than female children in mind.<sup>89</sup> Given the fact that Muslim societies on the whole are strongly gendered and recommendations abound to educate girls at home and prepare them mainly for their future tasks as wives and mothers (for instance, by teaching them only few Qur'ānic verses, and then particularly those that preach modesty and innocence),<sup>90</sup> it is interesting to find religious scholars sanctioning female education in special *kuttābs*. For instance, Ibn Bassām's guide-book for *muḥtasibs*, *Nihāyat al-rutba fī ṭalab al-ḥisba*<sup>91</sup> includes a chapter on “(Male)

*wa-yasbura qarīḥatahu wa-yakhbura dhakā'ahu wa-yakhtāru lahu al-ṣinā'āt bi-ḥasab dhālika*; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tuḥfat al-mawdūd*, 144: *wa-mimmā yanbaghī an ya'tamida (al-ab) – ḥāl al-ṣabiyy wa mā huwa musta'idd lahu min al-a'māl wa-muhayya' lahu minhā fa-ya'lima annahu makhlūq lahu fa-lā yaḥmilhu 'alā ghayrihi mā kāna ma'dhūn fīhi shar'ūn, fa-innahu in ḥumila 'alā ghayr mā huwa musta'idd lahu lam yuḥliḥ fīhi wa-fātahu mā huwa muhayya' lahu.*

<sup>87</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tuḥfat al-mawdūd*, 144-145; Cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-siyāsa*, 1075; al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-mu'allimīn*, 66.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-siyāsa*, 1075: *wa-li-hādhihi al-ikhtiyārāt wa-hādhihi al-munāsabāt wa-al-mushākalāt asbāb ghāmiḍa wa-'ilal khafiyya tadīqu 'an aḥām al-bashar wa-taṭfu' 'an al-qiyās wa-al-naẓar lā ya'lamuhā illā Allāh jalla dhikruhu.*

<sup>89</sup> An explanation for the low attendance of girls in educational institutions in Muslim societies – past and present – may be found in anthropological observations to the effect that “Arab Muslim societies [today] tend to separate male and female spheres more sharply than most other contemporary societies”, that “boys' childhood is more prolonged than that of girls”, that “decency and family honor must come first” when education outside the home is concerned, and that daughters' services, particularly in watching over younger children, are very much needed at home. See: Dorsky, S. and Th. B. Stevenson, “Childhood and Education in Highland North Yemen”, in Warnock Fernea, E. (ed.), *Children in the Muslim Middle East*, Austin, 1995, 309, 313, 315, 317.

<sup>90</sup> See Giladi, A., “Gender Differences in Child Rearing and Education: Some Preliminary Observations with Reference to Medieval Muslim Thought”, *Al-Qanṭara* XVI (1995), 301-302. Cf. Boudiba, “The Child and the Mother”, 130-131.

<sup>91</sup> Written in Syria or Egypt in the seventh/thirteenth century. See “Ḥisba (General)”, *EP*, III, 485-489 (Cl. Cahen and M. Talbi), esp. 486.

Teachers for Boys and (Female) Teachers for Girls” in which the latter (i.e., *mu'allimāt al-banāt*) are asked to pay special attention to moral education and to avoid teaching poetry and writing (both regarded by religious scholars as morally dangerous for girls).<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Ibn Saḥnūn explicitly rejects co-education and male teachers teaching girls –<sup>93</sup> an indication that the phenomenon was not unknown –<sup>94</sup> and al-Qābisī discusses the question whether or not religious education of children, males and females alike, is the duty of their fathers.<sup>95</sup> That women in urban centres – ninth/fifteenth-century Cairo is a remarkable example – participated in advanced religious education, particularly in transmitting and teaching *ḥadīth*, is another indication that, in certain periods and places, women certainly received elementary education.<sup>96</sup> However, for the majority of girls the few verses they learnt at home (in addition to other magical devices, such as amulets) were intended to protect them, as their parents saw it, from death, illness and other dangers in this world and from the fire

<sup>92</sup> Ibn Bassām al-Muḥtasib, *Nihāyat al-rutba fī ṭalab al-ḥisba*, Baghdad, 1968, 161; al-Qābisī, *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣila*, 293-294: *wa-ammā ta'līm al-unthā al-qur'ān wa al-'ilm fa-huwa ḥasan wa-min maṣāliḥihā. fa-ammā an tu'allama al-tarassul wa-al-shi'r wa-mā ashbahahu fa-huwa makhūf 'alayhā*. Cf. al-Qāsimī, *Qāmūs al-ṣinā'āt*, II, 408 (*mu'allimāt al-aṭfāl*). The term *mu'allima* designated also “a teacher of embroidery and other female arts”, see Shatzmiller, M., “Aspects of Women's Participation in the Economic Life of Later Medieval Islam: Occupations and Mentalities”, *Arabica* 35 (1988), 50.

On female education in medieval Muslim societies see also “Education (Muslim)”, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* V, 204-205; Tritton, A. S., *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages*, London, 1957, 140-143; Ahmad, M., *Muslim Education and the Scholars' Social Status up to 5<sup>th</sup> Century in the Light of Ta'rikh Baghdad*, Zurich, 1968, 175-177, and see below, note 96. Cf. Goitein, S. D., *A Mediterranean Society* II, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1971, 183-185; Cole, S. G., “Could Greek Women Read and Write?” in H. P. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, New York, London and Paris, 1981, 219-245, esp. pp. 227, 230-232.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, 117: *wa-akrahu li-al-mu'allim an yu'allima al-jawārī wa-lā yukhalliṭuhunna ma'a al-ghilmān li-anna dhālika fasad lahum*. See also al-Qābisī, *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣila*, 315; al-Maghrāwī, *Jāmi' jawāmi' al-ikhtisār*, 84.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco*, 61; Messick, *The Calligraphic State*, 79, 82.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār*, VIII, 249.

<sup>96</sup> Lutfi, H., “Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisā'* as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century A. D.”, *The Muslim World* 71 (1981), 104-124, esp. pp. 119-121; Berkey, J., “Women and Islamic Education in the Mamluk Period” in Keddie, N. R., and B. Baron (eds.), *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, New Haven and London, 1991, 143-160; Musallam, B. F., “The Ordering of Muslim Societies”, in Robinson, F. (ed.), *Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1996, 186-197.

of Hell in the Hereafter and replaced the systematic memorization of the Qur'ān boys went through in the *kuttāb*.

To sum up: Islamic sources from the Middle East, North Africa and Spain – mainly legal-ethical writings compiled throughout the Middle Ages and pre-modern times – indicate that the teaching level in institutions of elementary education was at times low, that the curriculum, with the memorization of the Qur'ānic text at its heart, was limited and that the use of corporal punishment was common. These sources, as well as travelers' writings, give a clear impression that local differences were marginal in Islamic elementary education, at least in urban areas, where most scholars, the authors of the writings we used, lived.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, parents and teachers believed that by such an education they protected their children in this world as well as in the Hereafter. Moreover, as there was no state educational system, for all practical matters – the teacher's wages and work conditions, the child's age of admission, the period of study, the curriculum, the methods of punishment, etc. – teacher-pupil relations were legally based on a contract between the child's father or patron and the teacher. Since it was in their interest to make teachers adhere to the agreement, fathers or, in their absence, other appointed legal guardians, must have been involved, at least to a certain extent, in the

<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, autobiographies and memoirs of Muslim intellectuals from the twentieth and twenty first centuries echo some aspects of the atmosphere in the *kuttābs* and their teachers' practice as depicted in medieval sources. Such are the childhood chapters in Ṭāha Husayn's *al-Ayyām* and Sayyid Quṭb's *Tifl min al-qarya* (where the confrontation between the traditional Qur'ān school and the newly introduced governmental modern school in the author's village is illuminating) as well as the following passage from the recently published *L'Islam expliqué aux enfants* by Tahar Ben Jelloun, Paris, 2002, 36-37:

— *As-tu lu le Coran [asks the author's little daughter]?*

— *Quand j'avais ton âge, et même avant d'aller à l'école primaire, je suis allé pendant deux ans à l'école coranique où on nous faisait apprendre le Coran par cœur. Même si je ne savais pas encore lire, j'apprenais les versets les uns après les autres. Je les récitais le lendemain; si je me trompais, je recevais un coup de bâton.*

— *Et tes parents ne disaient rien?*

— *Ils ne le savaient pas. Je faisais des efforts tous les soirs pour me remémorer les versets à réciter le lendemain.*

— *Tu comprenais ce que tu apprenais par cœur?*

— *Pas tout. Je savais qu'il fallait faire le Bien, ne pas mentir, ne pas voler, obéir à ses parents, respecter le maître d'école, faire la prière, sinon Dieu nous punit. Parfois j'avais peur, surtout quand Dieu parle de l'enfer et du jour du Jugement dernier. Mais juste après, il y a des versets où on rappelle que Dieu est miséricordieux et pardonne à ceux qui se sont égarés.*

educational process in the *kuttāb*. Thus, crowded as *kuttābs* may have been, they probably never became institutions of “mass education” in which the individual student was lost in anonymity. By serving as a special institution for child education, the *kuttāb* moreover helped in prolonging the period of childhood for a while, particularly within prosperous urban households (for others, the rate of drop-out from Qur’ānic schools was probably high <sup>98</sup>). It is, by the way, the lack of the idea of education and educational institutions which Philippe Ariès regarded as one of the main reasons why childhood in medieval Europe was generally very short. <sup>99</sup>.

It is difficult to tell what impact the psychological-pedagogical observations made by prominent Muslim scholars had in every-day practice. It is reasonable to assume that they helped shape at least the legal relationships between fathers and teachers. However, the salience of those educational theories which support an individualistic attitude of teachers and parents towards children is a remarkable characteristic of medieval and pre-modern Islamic culture, interesting and important in itself.

S. D. Goitein points out a polarity between individualism and conformity inherent, in his view, in the very nature of Islam as a culture. This is due to four elements which he identified in medieval Islamic civilization: *a.* pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab individualism rooted in the interest in personality and the faculty to observe; *b.* Arab conformity created by the hard exigencies of desert life and tribal warfare; *c.* Islamic conformity made imperative by great forces and historical situations, and *d.* Islamic individualism which the Prophet Muḥammad inspired by emphasizing the value and responsibility of the individual before God. <sup>100</sup> To these one should add foreign cultural influences, particularly in the context of educational thought, i.e., Greek psychological, ethical and medical theories that contributed to the awareness of Muslim thinkers of individual differences in humans.

In light of Goitein’s observations, educational theories can be seen as a good example for the co-existence of these two seemingly contradictory tendencies in Islamic communal life: that of conformity

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco*, 64-65.

<sup>99</sup> Ariès, Ph., *Centuries of Childhood*, Harmondsworth, 1986, 395-396.

<sup>100</sup> Goitein, “Individualism and Conformity,” 3.

and uniformity which education, perhaps more than any other social activity, is expected to enforce, on the one hand; and on the other, that of individualism – the concern for the individual child, the ability to observe and understand differences in children and actually apply these in the educational sphere within the conventional cultural limits.

If we accept that the way in which children are raised can serve as one of the criteria to assess “the degree of individuality or enforced conformity in medieval society”<sup>101</sup> then Islamic writings, and the empathy in child rearing they clearly mirror, represent proper aspects of individualism as existing in medieval Muslim societies.

#### ABSTRACT

In medieval Islamic societies, cultural conventions and social rules played a significant role in education, but Muslim thinkers also paid attention to the differences between individual pupils and students and to the need to adjust teaching contents as well as educational methods to their backgrounds and personal abilities, their inclinations and aspirations. This may well have been not only because of heritage of the “pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabs” as suggested by S. D. Goitein, but also because of the foreign (Greek, for example) cultural influences, particularly in the context of educational thought. The *kuttāb* was less likely than other early Islamic institutions of learning to supply its young pupils with individual attention. Nevertheless, *‘ulamā*, on the whole, had the individual pupil in mind when they discussed questions of elementary education, such as the curriculum, the child age of admission, selecting appropriate educational methods, children’s games, the company of other children, selecting a profession for the child and the father’s involvement in the formal education within the *kuttāb*.

#### RESUMEN

En las sociedades islámicas medievales, las convenciones culturales y las normas sociales tenían un papel importante en la educación, pero los pensadores musulmanes también prestaron atención a las diferencias individuales entre los estudiantes y a la necesidad de ajustar tanto el contenido de la enseñanza como los métodos educativos al contexto familiar de esos estudiantes, así como a sus habilidades personales, sus inclinaciones y sus aspiraciones. Esto pudo deberse no sólo a la herencia de los “árabes preislámicos y del Islam temprano” como

<sup>101</sup> Benton, J. F., “Individualism and Conformity in Medieval Western Europe,” in *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam*, 156.

sugirió S. D. Goitein, sino también a la influencia cultural extranjera (por ejemplo, griega), especialmente en el ámbito del pensamiento educativo. En principio, podría parecer que el *kuttāb* ofrecería menos atención individualizada a los que allí estudiaban que otras instituciones educativas. Sin embargo, los ulemas, en general, tenían en mente al estudiante individual cuando discutían asuntos de educación elemental, tales como el currículum, la edad de admisión del niño, la selección de métodos educativos apropiados, los juegos de los niños, la compañía de otros niños, la selección de una profesión para el niño y la participación del padre en la educación formal.