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Women and *Ḥadīth* Transmission Two Case Studies from Mamluk Damascus

A striking aspect of Mamlūk biographical dictionaries and chronicles is the frequency with which women appear as transmitters of *ḥadīth* (*muḥaddithah*s). (1) As examples, the eighth century compilation *al-Durar al-Kāminah* of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d.852/1449), and the ninth century compilation *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'* of al-Sakhāwī (d.902/1497) contain hundreds of entries for women known for their skills as *muḥaddithah*s. (2) Prominent female transmitters are also commemorated in comprehensive historical works such as al-Ṣafadī's (d.764/1362) *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi'l-Wafayāt* and in Ibn al-'Imād's (d.1089/1679) *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*. (3)

Women's participation in the field of *ḥadīth* transmission has received sporadic attention at the hands of historians of Islam in the West. Ignaz Goldziher's late nineteenth century anecdotal observations about this phenomenon provoked some curiosity. (4) However, we still lack analyses that

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1. Throughout this article, I use *muḥaddithah* as a generic term to denote a female transmitter of traditions. In the technical terminology of *ḥadīth* transmission, *muḥaddith* often designated a scholar who had a knowledge of *ḥadīth* as well as *ḥadīth* criticism (i.e. *man ishtaghala bi'l-ḥadīth riwāyatan wa-dirāyatan*). My own usage is not intended to convey this technical sense of the term. for an introduction to the use of scholarly titles in the Mamluk period, see, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d.902/1497), *al-Jawāhir wa-al-Durar fī Tarjamah Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Ḥajar* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1999), 1:65-84.

2. Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d.852/1449), *al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mi'ah al-Thāminah* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Jadīdah, 1966); and al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Qudsī, 1936), volume 12.

3. Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d.764/1362), *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi'l-Wafayāt* (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Dawlah, 1931-) and 'Abd al-Ḥayy b. Aḥmad b. al-'Imād (d.1089/1679), *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1982). Both of these works cover the period from the rise of Islam to the lifetime of the compiler and contain fewer entries for women than the centenary works of Ibn Ḥajar and al-Sakhāwī above. For a discussion of the male-female ratio in various biographical works, see, Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1994), 1-13.

4. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, trans. C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), 2:366-8. After Goldziher, several historians have discussed, to varying levels, the participation of women in *ḥadīth* transmission. These include Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 46-7, 72-4, 113-5; Jonathan Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 161-81; Huda Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisā'* as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women during

synthesize the fragmented historical evidence to reconstruct more complete individual portraits. (5) This study documents the careers of two prominent female *ḥadīth* transmitters in the region of Mamluk Damascus: Zaynab bint al-Kamāl (646-740/1248-1339) and 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī (723-816/1323-1413). The convergence of three historical trends is evident in the lives of these *muḥaddithah*s: 1) the educational culture promoted by the Mamluks, aimed at propagating the Sunnī religious sciences; 2) developments in the field of *ḥadīth* transmission, after the fourth/tenth century, which popularized the field, rendering it amenable to the entry of women; and 3) the spread of the Ḥanbalī religious ethos with its emphasis on traditionalism and ascetic piety. As reflections of these trends, Zaynab and 'Ā'isha are archetypes rather than anomalies in the world of Mamluk female education and *ḥadīth* transmission.

The Mamluks conquered Damascus, an important economic and administrative center, in 659/1260. (6) The beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century marked the full incorporation of Damascus into the Mamluk empire. In the mid-eighth/fourteenth century, the decline of the Mongol threat and the victories against the Crusaders led to the transfer of military activity farther north to Aleppo, a development that consolidated the function of Damascus as a civilian and administrative center. (7) Reorganization of state finances and investment in urban infrastructure increased regional economic stability, which in turn created a hospitable environment for intellectual endeavors. In the tradition of their Seljuk and Ayyubid predecessors, the Mamluks continued to endorse Sunnī traditionalism through the endowment of *madrasa*s, *dūr al-ḥadīth* and other institutions focused on the preservation and dissemination of Sunnī thought. (8) These developments created favo-

(suite de la note 4 page 71)

the Fifteenth Century, AD," *Muslim World*, 71 (1981), 104-24; Roded, *op. cit.*, 63-89; Elizabeth Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, Biography and Background* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 125-7; and M. Z. Siddiqui, *Ḥadīth Literature* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 117-23. None of these, however, offer detailed portraits of individual *muḥaddithah*s.

5. Women's participation in *ḥadīth* transmission has been recorded from the rise of Islam up to the pre-modern period. The published and widely available historical sources portray higher levels of female involvement in the first century of Islamic history than in the second and third centuries. This decline is followed by a gradual increase from the late Abbasid up to the Mamluk period. I am currently investigating the reasons for this pattern in my dissertation on the role of women in *ḥadīth* transmission from the first to the fourth centuries AH. Roded discusses some aspects of this phenomenon. *Op cit.* p. 65-72.

6. The social history of Damascus under the Mamluks is explored in greater detail in the following sources: Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus 1190-1350* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Chapter 1 "The a'yān of Damascus 590/1193-750/1350)," 27-68; N. Elisséeff, "Dimashq," *EI*², II; and Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

7. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 20. Adding to the prosperity of Damascus, Tankiz, the Mamluk governor of Damascus (711-39/1311-38), initiated a period of "unequaled splendor and expansion" by endowing schools, mosques, and other institutions. Approximately forty institutions were constructed or renovated during his rule. *Idem.* 22.

8. Berkey, 7-9. The Sunnī inclinations of these dynasties and their patronage of Sunnī institutions and scholars have been well documented. For a brief introduction, see, P.M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades* (New York, Longman Group), 1986, 77-81. A more extensive discussion may be found in Stephen Humphreys, "The Expressive Intent of the Mamluk Architecture of Cairo: A Preliminary Essay," *Studia Islamica*, 35 (1972), p. 69-119.

rable conditions for the careers of Zaynab bint al-Kamāl and 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad.

The relative economic and social stability in Damascus during the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries contributed in turn to the prosperity of several of its suburbs. Among these was al-Ṣāliḥiyyah to the northwest of Damascus, where both Zaynab bint al-Kamāl and 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad lived. The growth of this suburb is credited to a community of Ḥanbalīs who, fleeing from the Crusaders, had migrated from Nablus to the region of Damascus in the mid-sixth/twelfth century. ([9]) The majority of these were from the Banū Qudāmah, an influential clan of Ḥanbalī *'ulamā'*. Drawn to the relative safety of Damacus from Crusader oppression and the patronage of scholars by the Zangid sultan Nūr al-Dīn (d.569/1174), the Ḥanbalis reconstructed their community in the suburb of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah at the foot of Jabal Qāsiyūn. The prolific scholarly activity of this community promoted Ḥanbalism in Damascus and its environs.

Through the efforts of the Banū Qudāmah and other Ḥanbalīs of the region, al-Ṣāliḥiyyah grew as a center for religious learning. Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn's (d.953/1546) history of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah lists numerous educational institutions in this area. ([10]) These included congregational mosques, *dūr al-Qur'ān*, *dūr al-ḥadīth*, *madrasa*s, and *zāwiya*s. Ibn Faḍl Allah al-'Umarī (d.749/1349), a fourteenth century Damascene historian, describes al-Ṣāliḥiyyah as a prosperous area exhibiting signs of a thriving city such as "gardens, *madrasa*s, *ribāṭ*s, important cemeteries, lofty buildings, hospitals, and busy markets filled with dry goods and other materials." ([11]) Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d.779/1377), another fourteenth century admirer of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah, enumerated its divine blessings. Among its virtues (*faḍā'il*) was its reputation not only as the possible birthplace of Abraham, but also as the burial site (between *Bāb al-Farādīs* and the Qāsiyūn mosque) of some seven hundred prophets. ([12]) Owing to its religious legends, socio-economic prosperity, and the presence of resident scholars, al-Ṣāliḥiyyah was an ideal haven for itinerant students. ([13])

Women shared in the educational life of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah in a number of ways. A well-documented contribution of elite women throughout much of

9. Muḥammad b. Ṭūlūn (d.953/1546), *al-Qalā'id al-Jawhariyyah fi Tārikh al-Ṣāliḥiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad Duhmān (Damascus: Maktab al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, 1949), 26-9. The migration of this Ḥanbalī community from Nablus to Damascus has been the subject of two studies. See Joseph Drory, "Hanbalis of the Nablus Region in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Asian and African Studies*, 22 (1988), 93-112; and Daniella T. Heller, "The Shaykh and the Community: Popular Hanbalite Islam in the 12th-13th Century Jabal Nablus and Jabal Qasiyun," *Studia Islamica*, 79 (1994), 103-120. The Ḥanbalis of Damascus are also the subject of a chapter in Michael Cook's *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Chapter 7.

10. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*, 49-211.

11. Ibn Faḍl Allah al-'Umarī al-Dimashqī (d.749/1349), "Masālik al-Abṣār" MSS excerpted in "*Madīnat Dimashq 'Inda al-Jughrāfiyyīn wa-al-Raḥḥālīn al-Muslimīn* ed. Ṣalāh al Dīn al-Munajjid, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1967), 226.

12. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d.779/1377), *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭah* (al-Maktabat al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1964), 61-2.

13. See, for example, Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*, for biographies of some of the resident *'ulamā'*. Also, see, Shākir Muṣṭafā, *Madinat al-'Ilm: Āl Qudāmah wa-al-Ṣāliḥiyyah* (Damascus: Dār Ṭalās, 1997).

Islamic history was the endowment of *madrasa*s, mosques, and *ribāṭ*s as expressions of piety and charity. ([14]) Their activities in Damascus and its environs were no exception. One example is the Madrasat al-Ṣāḥibah, a prominent Ḥanbalī school, endowed by Rabī'ah Khātūn bint Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (d.643/1245), a sister of the Ayyūbid sultan, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (d.589/1193). ([15]) Historical sources at our disposal do not, however, indicate that women were direct beneficiaries of endowed posts for teaching or studying at such institutions. Nevertheless, institutional, endowed education and its impact on urban areas are of great relevance to understanding women's roles as students and teachers.

Scholarly traffic in the region of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah increased as a result of investments in education and was a boon to women's participation. ([16]) Although women themselves probably did not travel as much as men in the search for religious knowledge (*riḥlah fī ṭalab al-'ilm*), contact with scholars who sojourned in the cities of their residence allowed them to acquire and disseminate *ḥadīth*. Itinerant scholars would obtain certification from *muḥaddithah*s of various locales and subsequently convey word of these women's reputations to other areas of the Muslim world. The suburb of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah, in particular, witnessed substantial participation of women in the field of *ḥadīth* transmission. The modern editor of Ibn Ṭūlūn's history of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah notes that women were encouraged to attend religious circles (*ḥalāqāt al-'ilm*), and assemblies for *ḥadīth* (*majālis al-ḥadīth*). He characterizes this activity as the beginnings of a Damascene feminist, cultural movement in which the majority of women were Ḥanbalī. ([17]) This reference to feminism in the Mamluk period, albeit anachronistic, impresses upon us the high level of women's involvement in the field of religious learning.

Ḥadīth transmission was particularly amenable to female participation for reasons that will be briefly introduced here and subsequently illustrated in the careers of our two *muḥaddithah*s. First, the *ijāza* (certification) system in the context of *ḥadīth* studies permitted the transfer of authority from teacher to student well before these students (sometimes young children) actually studied the work(s) with the understanding that the students would learn the material at an appropriate age. This allowed students and teachers to exchange religious knowledge without a lengthy period of individual tutelage (*suḥbah* or *mulāzamah*) that was more characteristic of studies in law

14. Berkey, 162-5; and Carl Petry, "A Paradox of Patronage," *The Muslim World* 73 (1983), 195-201.

15. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*, 156, See also, *Idem*, 61 (al-Madrasah al-Mārdāniyyah, founded by Azizah al-Dīn Ukhshāh Khātūn), and 102 (al-Madrasah al-Atābakiyyah endowed by Tarkān Khātūn).

16. Joan E. Gilbert, "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the *'Ulamā'* in Medieval Damascus," *Studia Islamica*, 52 (1980), 106-7. In this article, Gilbert discusses the expansion and rise of Damascus as an educational center in the centuries preceding, Zaynab bint al-Kamāl's life (468-658/1075-1259).

17. Muḥammad Duhmān, introduction to Ibn Tulun, *al-Qalā'id*, 5.

or theology. ([18]) Such a system was hospitable to women's participation as it was more flexible and less demanding than certification in other areas of religious learning. It also did not require extensive contact between a male teacher and female student or vice versa, thereby satisfying religious norms that limited contact between the sexes. A second characteristic of *ḥadīth* studies was its appeal and openness to Muslims of all ages and capacities. At an elementary level, even lay people could memorize short, popular *ḥadīth* collections. At the advanced level, mastering longer collections demanded prowess in memorization rather than creativity or rigorous intellectual engagement with other scholars. Literacy and knowledge of Arabic grammar and linguistics were prerequisites to understanding and faithfully transmitting lengthy compilations of *ḥadīth*. But these were skills that women could probably acquire even without higher education. As the activities of the two *muḥaddithah*s below demonstrate, women took full advantage of the entry points in *ḥadīth* studies and excelled to the extent that prominent male scholars eagerly sought their authoritative transmissions.

Zaynab bint al-Kamāl

Zaynab bint al-Kamāl, the subject of the first case study, elicits curiosity for the numerous *ijāza*s (certificates of *ḥadīth* transmission) she accumulated. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī reports that, at the time of her death, she possessed a camel load of *ijāza*s. ([19]) Aside from this anecdote, however, we are offered only a few details of her educational career. ([20]) Nevertheless, by combining her biographies with those of her teachers and students, it is possible to construct a more complete picture than the one offered in medieval compilations. Among the omissions in her entries is an explicit mention of her *madhhab*. Circumstantial evidence, such as her *nisba* of al-Maqdisīyyah, indicates that she belonged to a community of Ḥanbalīs, descending from the aforementioned Palestinian emigrants who had settled in Damascus and

18. For an introduction to these terms, see George Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 128-9. See also Berkey, for a discussion of why women excelled in *ḥadīth* transmission over and above other fields of religious learning, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 179-81. The significance of this certification system lay primarily in its utility for guaranteeing shorter *isnād*s: a phenomenon that will be discussed in greater detail below.

19. Her full name is Zaynab bint Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Aḥmad al-Maqdisiyyah. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar*, 2: 210. Zaynab's biography attracted Goldziher's attention for her prodigious collection of *ijāza*s. See Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2:367.

20. In keeping with the formulaic style of this genre of historical writing, Zaynab's biographers list the names of several teachers and students and praise her piety and upright character. Her biography is available in the following works: al-Dhahabī (d.748/1348), *Mu'jam al-Shuyūkh al-Dhahabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 199; al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb Duwal al-Islām* (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif, 1918), 1:190; al-Dhahabī and al-Ḥusaynī (d.763/1362), *Min Dhuyūl al-'Ibar* (Kuwait: Maṭba'at Ḥukūmat al-Kuwait, n.d.), 213; al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi'l-Wafayāt* (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Dawlah, 1931-), 15:68; al-Yāfi'ī, *Mir'āt al-Jinān wa-'Ibrat al-Yaqẓān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Alamī lil-Maṭbū'āt, 1970), 4:305; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:209-10; Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1982), 8:221; Kaḥḥālah, *A'lām al-Nisā'* (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Hāshimiyyah, 1959), 2:46-51; Ziriklī, *al-A'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 1986), 3:65.

its environs in the twelfth century. ([21]) Her Ḥanbalī association squares well with the observation above that many Damascene *muḥaddithah*s of this period were Ḥanbalī. It was also the *madhhab* claimed by the majority of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah's residents. ([22])

Zaynab bint al-Kamāl's career as a *muḥaddithah* began surprisingly early. At the age of one, she received an *ijāza* to transmit *ḥadīth* from 'Abd al-Khāliq al-Nishtibrī (537-649/1142-1251), a famed Shāfi'ī jurist and *muḥaddith*. ([23]) Al-Nishtibrî sent this *ijāza* for Zaynab in the year 647/1249. ([24]) Although biographers do not record the work(s) that this *ijāza* qualified her to transmit, they affirm that Zaynab's reputation rested partly on her link to al-Nishtibrī. Al-Dhahabī wrote, "Those who wanted the unmatched prestige [of this *isnād*] would go to hear her; if the student traveled a month to hear even one part of this [work], his journey would not be in vain." ([25]) Also in the first year of her life, Zaynab received two other *ijāza*s: from 'Ajībah al-Bāqadriyyah (d.647/1249) and Ibn al-Sayyidī (d.647/1249), both prominent *ḥadīth* scholars resident in Baghdād. At the age of two, Zaynab obtained additional certification after being brought into the presence of (*uḥdirat 'alā*) Ḥabībah bint Abī 'Umar (d.648/1250). ([26]) In the same year, she received another *ijāza* from Baghdad, this time from Ibrāhīm b. Maḥmūd b. al-Khayr (d.648/1250). By the time Zaynab was six years old, scholars from Aleppo, Ḥarrān, Alexandria, Cairo, and al-Shām had sent her written permission to transmit specific works. Between the ages of three and twelve, Zaynab was brought to several assemblies or individual meetings in which she heard (*sam'iat min*) scholars read works aloud. The

21. Drory explains that the Ḥanbalī refugees were often called *maqādisa* (i.e. *muqaddasī*s) either because of their origins from Nablus, adjacent to Jerusalem (*al-bayt al-muqaddas*) or because they were from a vaguely defined territory termed "*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*" in the Qur'ān. Drory, 98. In addition to the indication of *madhhab* through her *nisba*, the modern editor of the Ḥanbalī biographical compendium *al-Durr al-Munaḍḍad fī Dhikr Aṣḥāb al-Imām Aḥmad* awards her a brief biography in his footnotes. See, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-'Ulaymī, *Al-Durr al-Munaḍḍad fī Dhikr Aṣḥāb al-Imām Aḥmad* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Madanī, 1992), 2:501.

22. See Drory, 93-4 on the Ḥanbalī composition of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah.

23. Consistent with standards established for the field of *ḥadīth* transmission, Zaynab's biographers use different terms to describe how she received certification or transmission authority. Thus, "*uḥdirat 'alā*" is employed for instances in which she was physically brought into the presence of a particular scholar. "*Ajāza(t) la-hā*" is used for permission granted in writing either through a direct meeting with the granter of the certificate or by correspondence, and "*sam'iat min*" describes occasions in which she was brought to an assembly or meeting in which a specific work was read out loud. These terms were not always applied consistently and usage of them was not regulated by any strict conventions. Nonetheless, in Zaynab's case, the fact that a discriminating *ḥadīth* scholar of the rank of Ibn Ḥajar uses these terms as well as the ages at which the different types of interactions were said to take place indicate that the terms connote the meanings provided in this footnote. For further elucidation of *ḥadīth* terminology related to types of transmission, see, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d.643/1245), *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 96-118.

24. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1985), 23: 243. He is Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Khāliq b. al-Anjab b. Mu'ammar b. Ḥasan al-'Irāqī al-Nishtibrī al-Shāfi'ī (d.649/1251).Al-Dhahabī mentions the year (647/1249) in which he sent this *ijāza* to Zaynab (in al-Nishtibrī's biographical note as referenced above).

25. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 23:243.

26. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:209.

encounters were duly recorded and endowed her with authority to transmit the works she had heard. ([27]) Many of Zaynab's *ijāza*s were *a priori*; it is difficult to imagine that she meaningfully studied or even memorized (without comprehension) the works for which she was granted certificates before the age of five.

A common denominator unites the men and women who certified Zaynab in this early phase of her life. Almost without exception, they were luminaries of the world of *ḥadīth* transmission whose authority was highly coveted and whose reputations were grounded in long lists of scholarly achievements. In passing their authority to the young Zaynab, they were clearly invested in the hope that she would eventually master the works specified in the certificates and transmit them accurately.

Because Zaynab's acquisition of *ijāzā*s began at such an early age, there must have been an intermediary who paved the beginnings of her educational career. Previous studies have concluded that kinship networks among *'ulamā'* families provided educational access for women. ([28]) Fathers were responsible for educating their families, and the father-daughter connection was often crucial for women's accomplishments as *ḥadīth* transmitters. ([29]) However, Zaynab's case is unusual because biographers do not mention that her father acquired a reputation as a *muḥaddith*. Various biographical dictionaries and chronicles that cover the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries yield no clues about her father, Aḥmad Kamāl al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Aḥmad al-Maqdisī. ([30]) Nevertheless, Zaynab had at least one prominent uncle, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Aḥmad al-Maqdisī (d.688/1289), who excelled in the field of *ḥadīth* transmission. ([31]) His accomplishments earned him a teaching post in al-Madrasah al-Ḍiyā'iyyah. His daughter, Zaynab's pater-

27. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:209-10. The following is a list of Zaynab's *shaykhs* and *shaykhas* divided according to the types of transmission that was recorded between Zaynab and them. Each name is followed by a biographical reference in cases where such a reference was found. "*Uḥdirat 'ala*": Ḥabībah bint Abī 'Umar (d.648/1250). "*Sam'iat min*": Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Dā'im (d.649/1251); Abū al-Faḥm al-Yaldānī (d.655/1257), *Siyar*, 23:311-2; Khaṭīb Marda (d.656/1258), *Siyar*, 23:325; Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī (d.658/1259), *Siyar*, 23:342; Ibrāhīm b. Khalīl (d.658/1259). "*Ajāza(t) la-hā*": from Baghdad, 'Ajībah al-Bāqadriyyah (d.647/1249), *Siyar*, 23:232-3; Ibn al-Sayyidī (d.647/1249) 23:266; Ibrāhīm b. Maḥmūd b. al-Khayr (d.648/1250), *Siyar*, 23:235-6; Abū Naṣr b. al-'Ulayq (d.649/1251), *Siyar*, 23:238-9; from Mārdīn: 'Abd al-Khāliq al-Nishtibrī (cited in footnote #24 above); from Aleppo, Yūsuf b. Khalīl (d.648/1250), *Siyar*, 23:151-55; from al-Shām, Rashīd b. Muslim (d.650/1252), *Siyar*, 23:281-2; from Alexandria, Sibṭ al-Silafī (d.651/1253), *Siyar*, 23:278-80; from Ḥarrān, 'Īsā b. Salāmah (d.652/1254), *Siyar*, 23:280-1; from Cairo, al-Zakī al-Mundhirī. In addition to these sixteen names listed by Ibn Ḥajar, Kaḥḥālah provides names of eight others who authorized Zaynab to transmit specified works. Kaḥḥālah, *A'lām al-Nisā'*, 3:246-51.

28. Berkey, 169-71 and Roded, 75-6.

29. For observations regarding the importance of paternal connections, see, Berkey, 169-71; Lutfi, 123-4; and Roded, 76.

30. Given the cultural norms encouraging silence on the issue of maternal descent or mothers, in general, it is not surprising that we are told nothing about Zaynab's mother and her possible contributions to her daughter's education.

31. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*, 80-1.

nal cousin, Asmā' bint Muḥammad b. al-Kamāl 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Maqdisiyyah (d.723/1323), also acquired a reputation as a *ḥadīth* transmitter. ([32]) She is listed in Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī's (d.748/1347) *Mu'jam al-Shuyūkh*, where we learn that Asmā' heard *ḥadīth* from her father. ([33]) It is possible that Zaynab received lessons from him (i.e. Asmā's father, her uncle) as well. Although Zaynab's prominence as a *muḥaddithah* did not derive from her father's reputation in the field, he may have been instrumental in her initial entry to *ḥadīth* circles. Someone must have brought Zaynab to *ḥadīth* assemblies before the age of five and solicited the *ijāza*s conferred upon her. It may well have been her father, who accomplished this through connections to the prominent *'ulamā'* of their time.

Several practical factors, aside from kinship networks and paternal support, could impact a woman's success as a scholar. Biographers rarely record how marriage or child bearing influenced women's abilities to persevere in their studies. In Zaynab's case, Ibn Ḥajar informs us that she never married, possibly because she suffered from opthalmia (*ramad*). ([34]) He does not elaborate on whether her illness hampered her efforts as a *muḥaddithah*. However, her superlative reputation indicates that she prevailed over her eye trouble. In addition, remaining single may have eased her domestic burdens, allowing her uninterrupted time for studies.

Zaynab's biographers are most interested in the certification she acquired in the earliest years of her life and in her teaching career between the age of sixty and her death at the age of ninety-four. The intervening years have left few traces in the published sources. Zaynab's later career as a teacher indicates that, between the ages of ten and sixty, she must have continued her studies, in part by learning the works for which she had received early certification. For example, she had received an *ijāza* to narrate the *Kitāb al-Ṣamt* of Ibn Abī al-Dunya (d.281/894) from Ibn al-Sayyidī. ([35]) Ibn al-Sayyidī died in 647/1249, a year after Zaynab was born. She obviously did not have a chance to study the work with him. ([36]) Since *Kitāb al-Ṣamṭ* was a work that Zaynab transmitted in a *ḥadīth* assembly (*sumi'a 'alayhā*), she must have studied the compilation after the death of Ibn al-Sayyidī and subsequently transmitted it on the authority of the *ijāza* he granted to her. The same chronology of certification followed by learning applies to other works for which she received early *ijāza*s and which she later transmitted to her own students.

Zaynab bint al-Kamāl's renown rested in part on her narration of a wide variety of works. Her biographers confirm that she was a reliable authority for compilations from diverse genres. Among the works that she transmitted

32. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 1:385.

33. Al-Dhahabī, *Mu'jam al-Shuyūkh*, 150.

34. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:210.

35. Kaḥḥālah, 2:49.

36. If we take Ibn Ḥajar's biographical description at face value, Ibn al-Sayyidī simply sent the *ijāza* to Zaynab from Baghdad without ever meeting her. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:210.

are major *ḥadīth* collections including the *Ṣaḥiḥ*s of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, and the *Muwaṭṭa'* of Mālik. ([37]) In addition to these, she acquired authority for numerous other lesser compilations. Al-Dhahabī lists ten works which she narrated through an *ijāza* from Ibrāhīm b. al-Khayr (d.648/1250), another Ḥanbalī *muḥaddith*. ([38]) This list includes works relevant to ascetic piety, such as the *Kitāb al-Shukr li'llah* and *al-Qanā'ah* of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. Zaynab also transmitted *mashyakhah*s, extensive lists of a scholar's *shaykh*s and the works related on their authority. ([39]) Among these were the *mashyakhah*s of al-Ḥasan b. Shādhān (d.425/1033), Shuhda al-Kātibah (d. 570/1174), and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), all of them prominent *ḥadīth* transmitters. ([40]) Another testimony to the expansive range of her repertoire comes from Ibn Ḥajar's *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, a collection of *isnād*s through which Ibn Ḥajar acquired authority to transmit specific works. Zaynab appears in 139 of his *isnād*s signifying that she acquired permission to narrate at least that many works. ([41]) These were primarily collections of *ḥadîth* on specific subjects including early Muslim history, the sciences of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān* and *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*), and legal rulings in specific branches of Islamic law (*al-aḥkām al-furū'iyyah*). The subjects covered by these compilations underscores that her reputation was based on the transmission of a range of works in diverse areas of Islamic knowledge.

The roster of Zaynab's students also confirms her rank as a respected *muḥaddithah*. Prominent eighth/fourteenth century scholars number among her students revealing that she was well connected among the intellectual circles of her time. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347) ([42]) Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1362) ([43]); and Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1369) ([44]) are among the more accomplished men who received *ijāza*s from her. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa referred to her as "a traveler of the world" and lists her among those who granted him an *ijāza* during his visit to Damascus in 726/1325. ([45]) Shams al-Mulūk bint Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Dimashqī (d.803/1400) ([46]) and 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī (d.816/1413) ([47]); two respected *muḥaddithah*s, also received certification

37. This information is culled from the various biographies for Zaynab as cited above.

38. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 23:236.

39. She is listed as transmitting eight *mashyakha*s to Ibn Ḥajar. See Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1998) #801, 802, 816, 817, 818, 838, 866, 885.

40. Biographical information for these scholars can be found in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, as follows. For Shuhdah al-Kātibah, see, *Siyar* 20:542-3; for al-Ḥasan b. Shādhān, see *Siyar* 17: 415-18; for Ibn al-Jawzī, see, Ibn Rajab (795/1392) *Kitāb al-Dhayl 'alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah, 1953), 2:399-433.

41. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, 672.

42. al-Dhahabī, *Mu'jam al-Shuyūkh*, 199.

43. al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī*, 15:68.

44. Ibn al-'Irāqī (d.826/1422), *Dhayl 'ala al-'Ibar fi Khabar man 'Abar* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risḥlah, 1989), 2:304.

45. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d.779/1377), *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭah* (al-Maktabat al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1964), 67.

46. Kaḥḥālah, 2:304.

47. Kaḥḥālah, 3:187-8.

from her. Since *ḥadīth* transmission, unlike law or theology, was accessible to all classes of society, it is likely that many lay people also numbered among her students. Remarking on her popularity, Ibn Ḥajar wrote that students crowded around her to listen to her and to read to her for most of the day. ([48]) Thus, Zaynab attracted hosts of students eager to acquire her name and authority in their chains of transmission.

In addition to information drawn from published biographical works and chronicles, archival evidence in the form of *samā'āt* (certificates of oral transmission, lit. of "hearing" a text) is crucial to understanding the activities of *ḥadīth* transmitters. These *samā'āt* were often issued at a *majlis al-samā'* (assembly for hearing *ḥadīth*), the primary function of which was to verify the accuracy of the text being read. In such forums, participants would not actually study or discuss the text extensively in terms of its meaning or exegesis. The role of those presiding over these assemblies was to either listen to or read the specific texts; the students would examine their own copies to ensure that these were identical to the text being read. In the centuries before the advent of the printing press, the *majlis al-samā'* was one way to ensure accurate handwritten texts. Often students would attend multiple sessions of the same text, thereby raising the probability that the one in their possession was faithful to the original. ([49])

An overview of several *samā'āt* in which Zaynab is mentioned suggests that the richest documentary evidence for women's intellectual participation in medieval Muslim society has yet to be explored. In the index compilation *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah*, thirty-three certificates name Zaynab as a presiding authority, either alone or in conjunction with other teachers (*musmi'ūn*, lit. "listeners"), over a *majlis al-samā'*. ([50]) A typical certificate which served as a record of the assembly contains the following elements: the name of the presiding *shaykh*(s) or *shaykha*(s); the name of the text being read or studied; the place and date of the meeting; the name of the reader of the text (in cases where the reader is not the presiding teacher); the name of the writer of the *samā'*; and the number of students present for the occasion. It was also common practice to include the names of the students present, particularly in cases where the assembly was small enough to make such recording feasible. Although *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah* does not reproduce the actual text of the *samā'āt*, the summaries it provides cast light on Zaynab's career as a teacher.

48. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:210. Ibn Ḥajar is referring here to the pedagogy of *ḥadīth* transmission. A common means for certifying accuracy in texts was to have either the students read a specific work to his/her teacher or to have the teacher read the work aloud to students. Further elucidation of this method follows in the discussion of the *majlis al-samā'* below.

49. For example, Ibn Ḥajar, in his *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras* listed names of everyone from whom he transmitted texts, either by reading the text(s) out loud or by hearing them in an assembly. See, for example, his *isnāds* for the *Ṣaḥiḥ* of Muslim, where it is clear that he heard the work from a number of *shaykhs* and *shaykhas* at times in its entirety and at times in parts. *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, p. 27-29.

50. Stefan Leder *et al.* eds, *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah* (Damascus: Ma'had al-Faransi lil-Dirasāt al-'Arabiyyah, 1996), pg. 311-2.

Samā'āt are invaluable because they offer concrete details concerning the routines of students and teachers. In addition, their precise dating allows a fuller reconstruction of scholars' careers. All of the certificates in which Zaynab is mentioned as a teacher were awarded between the years of 713-739/1313-1338, when she was between seventy-seven and ninety years old. She held these assemblies in a variety of locations including her home and the homes of the readers of the texts. ([51]) Once, she presided over a small session in the garden of a certain Amīn al-Dīn. ([52]) Zaynab also held classes comprised of male and female students in al-Madrasa al-Ḍiyā'iyyah, where her uncle Shams al-Dīn held a post, and in the Ribāṭ of Ibn al-Qalānisī. ([53]) Another certificate describes an assembly of a little over a hundred students in the large congregational mosque, al-Jāmi' al-Muẓaffarī in the year 721/1321. Zaynab was among ten other authorities, most of them male, presiding over this assembly. ([54]) She would have been seventy-five years old at the time. Yet another *samā'* reveals that Zaynab convened a class in her home after Friday congregational prayer. ([55]) Twenty-one students, male and female, were present at this assembly. ([56]) The date of the certificate, 738/1337, places her in her early nineties at the time. Taken at face value, these *samā'āt* depict Zaynab as active and thriving at an age well beyond the reasonable life expectancy in the Mamluk period. ([57])

More broadly, the chronology of Zaynab's career raises the issue of age differentials between scholars and their students in the field of *ḥadīth* transmission as a whole. As noted above, before the age of five, she earned a number of *ijāza*s that were granted by teachers in the final years of their lives. By the time Zaynab was twelve, most of the teachers named in her biographies had died. She is famed precisely for the *ijāza*s she received from these men and women, and her prominence derived partly from being among

51. Examples of assemblies in her home can be found in *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt* pg. 30, #4, pg. 58, #18, pg. 59, #22, and for the home of the reader of the text, pg. 31, #8, and pg. 41, #4.

52. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt*, 7:1039, #5, pg. 41. Four students were present in this *majlis* for the reading of the work entitled *Karāmāt al-Awliyā'* of al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Khallāl (d.439/1047).

53. A description of these institutions can be found in Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*. For al-Madrasa al-Ḍiyā'iyyah, see, 76-84 and for Ribāṭ al-Qālanisiyah, see 85-7. Ibn Ṭūlūn has listed both of these as *dūr al-ḥadīth* indicating that the functions of different educational institutions often overlapped. In addition, his section on al-Madrasa al-Ḍiyā'iyyah includes a brief description of the post that Zaynab's uncle, the aforementioned Shams al-Dīn, held in this *madrasa*.

54. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt*, #11, pg. 89, the text heard at this assembly was entitled, *Juz' fī-hi ḥadīth wāḥid 'an Ādam b. Abī Īyās 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Shu'ayb al-Khurāsānī al-'Asqalānī* (d.220/835).

55. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt*, #4, pg. 30.

56. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt*, #80, pg. 39.

57. In a study of women as custodians of property in the Mamluk period, Carl Petry has suggested that Mamluk women enjoyed lower rates of mortality as they were sheltered from the political violence and instability that characterized this era. This made them more attractive as candidates for inheriting property and managing it within individual Mamluk clans. A similar principle may have applied to civilian women's roles as *ḥadīth* transmitters in the Mamluk period. Carl Petry, "Class Solidarity versus Gender Gain: Women as Custodians of Property in Later Medieval Egypt," Chap. in *Women in Middle Eastern History*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 122-42.

their last surviving students. Al-Dhahabī reaffirms her value in this respect, for he notes that Zaynab was distinguished through her certificates (*tafarradat bil-ijāza*) from 'Ajībah al-Bāqadriyyah, Ibrāhīm b. al-Khayr, Ibn al-'Ulayq, and 'Abd al-Khāliq al-Nishtibrī. ([58]) She was also the last to narrate from Sibṭ al-Silafī (d.651/1253). ([59])

This scenario of the very old transmitting authority to the very young is replayed in Zaynab's life as a teacher. She granted *ijāza*s to her students between 713/1313 and her death in 740/1339, when she was between the ages of 67 and 94. Students such as 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad (723-816/1323-1413), Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (727-771/1326-1369) ([60]), and Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Sa'īd al-Anṣārī (734-774/1333-1372) ([61]) went to her in their youth. 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad, the eldest of these three, would have been seventeen when Zaynab died. This pattern, peculiar to the field of *ḥadīth* transmission, will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

By the end of her life, Zaynab's prodigious accomplishments as a *ḥadīth* transmitter earned her the honorific "*musnidat al-Shām.*" ([62]) She died at the age of ninety-four. Biographers consistently praised her as a pious, chaste and generous woman. Her reliability as a transmitter combined with her longevity enabled her to connect the "young with the old" in the continuous transfer of religious knowledge. Furthermore, her activities probably inspired those women who acquired transmission authority from her. One such example is that of 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad, the subject of the second case study.

'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad

'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Hādī descended from the Banū Qudāmah, one of the most prominent Ḥanbalī families in the Ṣāliḥiyyah district. ([63]) As mentioned earlier, the influence of the Banū Qudāmah in this

58. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 23:232, 236, 239, 243. "*Tafarradat bi'l-ijāza*" indicates that she was the only surviving student of these scholars who held an *ijāza* to narrate on their authority.

59. al-Ziriklī, 3:65; for Sibṭ al-Silafī's biography, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* 23:278-9.

60. Ibn al-'Irāqī, 2:304.

61. Ibid., 357.

62. The term "*musnid*" as used by *ḥadīth* scholars in this period referred to someone who could faithfully transmit traditions or collections with a reliable chain of transmission. Critical understanding of the traditions or of the science of *isnād* criticism (*'ilm al-rijāl*) was not necessary for one to be deemed a *musnid*. Al-Sakhāwī ranks a *musnid* below a *muḥaddith* in terms of the former's proficiency as a *ḥadīth* scholar. See, al-Sakhāwī, *al-Jawāhir wa-al-Durar*, 70 for his citation of an opinion that a *musnid* does not rise to the level of a *muḥaddith*. The use of such terminology, however, is not consistent in the chronicles and biographical dictionaries. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to conclude that Zaynab bint al-Kamāl's skills were limited only to rote transmission without critical knowledge of the sciences of *ḥadīth* transmission.

63. Her full name is 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. Qudāmah b. Miqdām. The following sources contain biographical entries for her: Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā' al-Ghumr bī Abnā' al-'Umr* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'lī lil-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1971), 3:25; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'* 12:81; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Qalā'id*, 287; Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī lil-Ṭibā'ah wa'l-Nashr, n.d.), 6:120-1; al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām*, 3:241; and Kaḥḥālah, *A'lām al-Nisā'* 3:187-8.

area can be traced to their migration from Nāblus to Damascus in the sixth/twelfth century and to their subsequent decision to settle in the Damascene suburb of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah. The prominence of the Banū Qudāmah and their prodigious scholarly output contributed to the spread of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* from al-Ṣaliḥiyyah to its environs. (64) 'Ā'isha's kinship to this network of *'ulamā'* no doubt facilitated her access to teachers in the course of her *ḥadīth* studies.

The tradition of being educated by women and of educating them was not foreign to the Banū Qudāmah. 'Abd Allah b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Qudāmah (d.620/1223), the most prominent jurist and scholar of this clan, heard *ḥadīth* from three well-known women during his travels to Baghdad: Khadījah al-Nahrawāniyyah (d.570/1174), Nafīsah al-Bazzāzah (d.563/1167) and Shuhdah al-Kātibah (d.584/1188). (65) Two other members of the Banū Qudāmah heard *ḥadīth* from Shuhdah al-Kātibah: Ibrahīm b. al-Waḥīd (d.614/1217) and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī (d.658/1259). (66) Several of the Banū Qudāmah also taught *ḥadīth* to women. Zaynab bint al-Wāsiṭī is listed as one of Ibn Qudāmah's students. (67) In addition, Zaynab bint al-Kamāl narrated *ḥadīth* on the authority of the aforementioned Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī. These examples reveal that 'Ā'isha was not an anomaly among the women of the Banū Qudāmah. (68)

Although 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad could clearly claim a distinguished lineage in the intellectual circles of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah, there is little indication that her father, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Hādī (680-749/1281-1348), was a prominent scholar. He was known not as a *muḥaddith*, but rather, as a *muḥtasib* (market inspector) in al-Ṣāliḥiyyah. (69) As such, he is likely to have had connections with the leading *'ulamā* of Damascus. (70) Whatever he knew

64. Muḥammad Duhmān, introduction to Ibn Ṭūlūn's *al-Qalā'id*, 4-5. Contributions of various members of the Banū Qudāmah are apparent in chronicles and biographical dictionaries where they are commemorated as *ḥadīth* transmitters, jurists, and judges. These works include al-Ṣafadī's *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi'l Wafayāt*, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's *al-Durar al-Kāminah*, al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'*. Also, Ibn Ṭūlūn's one volume history of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah contains many biographies of members of the Banū Qudāmah.

65. His full name is Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allah b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Qudāmah b. Miqdām b. Naṣr al-Maqdisī (541-620/1146-1223); for his biography, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 22:165-73. For the biography of Khadījah al-Nahrawāniyyah, see, al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 20:551, and for that of Nafīsah al-Bazzāzah, see, al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 20:489. Shuhdah's biographical reference is provided in FN #40 above.

66 For Ibrāhīm b. al-Wahīd, see Ibn Ṭūlūn, 335-7; for Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī, see, al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 23:342. This Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Hādī is not the father of 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad.

67. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 22:167.

68. Other similar examples may be found in Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*. See for example, Ibn Ṭūlūn's biographies for Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad 304, Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr, 334; 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī, 308; and 'Umar b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, 287.

69. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*, 271. See also, Ṣaliḥ 'Abbās, "Min Rijāl al-Ḥisbah fī al-Qarnayn al-Sābi' wa al-Thāmin," in *Dirāsāt fī al-Ḥisbah wa-al-Muḥtasib 'Inda al-'Arab*, (Bagdhad: 1988) 201, #49.

70. Lapidus points out in his study of Mamluk cities that the *'ulamā* were not a distinct class. They functioned in various capacities, as market inspectors, treasury officers, scribes, administrators of schools (*madāris*) and mosques and also as merchants. Moreover, Lapidus defines the position of market inspector as a "prominent *'ulamā'* office" along with the post of chief *qāḍī*, the head of the public treasury, and army judges. Lapidus, *op cit.*, 108-9.

of *ḥadīth* was communicated to his daughter in the initial phase of her studies. Ibn Ṭūlūn notes that ʻĀ'isha heard traditions from her father in addition to other *ḥadīth* transmitters of her period. ([71]) His commitment to educating his daughters is evident in the fact that ʻĀ'isha's older sister, Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (719-803/1319-1400), was also a prominent *muḥaddithah* who studied and taught *ḥadīth* alongside ʻĀ'isha. ([72]) In addition to their father's connections, ʻĀ'isha and Fāṭimah probably had access to their extended family's educational network. For example, one of their cousins studied with the famed Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728/1327). ([73]) His ties to other such notable scholars of Damascus may in turn have contributed to ʻĀ'isha's and Fāṭimah's growth as *muḥaddithah*s.

As in Zaynab's case above, ʻĀ'isha bint Muḥammad's acquisition of *ḥadīth* began at an unusually early age. When she was four, ʻĀ'isha was brought into the presence of the well-known *ḥadīth* authority, al-Ḥajjār (d.730/1329). ([74]) Through this meeting, she acquired an *ijāza* to narrate the *Ṣaḥiḥ* of al-Bukhārī on his authority. Al-Ḥajjār himself was a sought after source as he was among those who had heard the *Ṣaḥiḥ* from Ibn al-Zabīdī (d.649/1251), another prominent *muḥaddith*. ([75]) Al-Ḥajjār's repute was such that he narrated the *Ṣaḥiḥ* no less than seventy times in Damascus, al-Ṣāliḥiyyah, Cairo, Miṣr, Ḥāma, Baʻlabakk, Ḥoms, Kafr Baṭnā and other surrounding regions. ([76]) Since ʻĀ'isha outlived all of those who transmitted al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥiḥ* from al-Ḥajjār, she became a coveted authority for those seeking his name in their chain of transmission. ([77])

Aside from al-Ḥajjār, seventeen of ʻĀ'isha's teachers are named in her biographies. Nine for whom biographical information was found had died by the time she was eighteen. Four of the teachers mentioned by ʻĀ'isha's biographers are women. Not surprisingly, three of them are well known *muḥaddithāh*s of Damascus: Sitt al-Fuqahā' bint Ibrāhīm (d.726/1325), Zaynab bint Yaḥyā (d.735/1334) and Zaynab bint al-Kamāl (d.740/1339). ([78])

71. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*, 287.

72. Fāṭimah's biography occurs in al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw'* 12:103. See also, Kaḥḥālah, 4:133.

73. His name is Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ʻAbd al-Hādī b. ʻAbd al-Ḥamīd b. ʻAbd al-Hādī b. Yūsuf b. Qudāmah (704-44/1304-43). He is also noted for his works on Ḥanbalī fiqh. For his biography, see Ibn Rajab, 2:436-9 and Ibn Ṭūlūn, 313-6. His relationship to ʻĀ'isha was established through al-Sakhāwī's biography of ʻĀ'isha's sister, Fāṭimah. Here, we learn that their father was Muḥammad b. Aḥmad's paternal uncle. al-Sakhāwī, al-*Ḍaw'* 12:103.

74. His full name is Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-ʻAbbās Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭālib b. Niʻma b. Ḥasan b.ʻAlī b. Bayān. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah fī al-Tārīkh* (Cairo:n.d.), 14:150.

75. This is noted in the following biographies: al-Dhahabī, *Dhuyūl al-ʻIbar* (Beirut: Muʻassasat al-Risālah, 1985), 4:88; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah*, 14:150; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 1:152-3; Ibn Ṭūlūn, 298-9; Ibn al-Qāḍī, *Dhayl Wafayāt al-Aʻyān* (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, n.d.) 1:28; and Ibn al-ʻImād, 6:93. For Ibn al-Zabīdī, see, al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 25:251-2.

76. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 1:152.

77. All of her biographers note that she was the last one who could relate the *Ṣaḥiḥ* of al-Bukhārī on the authority of al-Ḥajjār.

78. For Sitt al-Fuqahā's biography, see, Kaḥḥālah, 2:161-2, for Zaynab bint Yaḥyā's, see, *idem*, 2:122-3.

The fourth is 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad b. al-Muslim, of Ḥarrān (d.736/1335). ([79]) The death dates for these women indicates that 'Ā'isha's contact with them must have occurred when she was very young: Sitt al-Fuqahā' died by the time 'Ā'isha was four, Zaynab bint Yaḥyā by the time she was eleven, Zaynab bint al-Kamāl by the time she was seventeen, and 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad b. al-Muslim by the time she was fourteen. A similar age relationship is evident in her association with the six male teachers for whom we have death dates. ([80]) All of them had died by the time she was fifteen.

The certificates that 'Ā'isha acquired during her early years authorized her to transmit a number of works. These included the following works: the *Ṣaḥiḥ* collections of both al-Bukhārī and Muslim; ([81]) the *Sīrah* of Ibn Hishām; ([82]) *'Arba'īn* collections of al-Ṭā'ī; ([83]) a minor *ḥadīth* compilation (*juz'*) of Abū al-Jahm; and a portion of the work entitled *Dhamm al-Kalām* of al-Harawī. ([84]) Ibn Ḥajar cites her as his authority for fourteen additional works not mentioned by her biographers. ([85]) Ibn al-'Imād (d.1089/1678) states admiringly that at the end of her life, she had the best *isnād*s from among her contemporaries and was prolific in terms of both the number of works that she had heard and the number of *shaykh*s that she could claim (*"kānat fī ākhir 'umri-hā asnad ahl zamāni-hā mukaththiratan samā'an wa-shuyūkhan"*). ([86]) Additionally, Kaḥḥālah refers to an alphabetically arranged index of 'Ā'isha's authorities which was compiled by a certain Ḥāfiẓ Najm al-Dīn. ([87]) Future research into the certificates of "hearing" (*samā'āt*) and transmission (*ijāzāt*) in which 'Ā'isha's name is mentioned would help clarify the extent of her knowledge. ([88])

79. Kaḥḥālah, 3:189-90.

80. The following are the six male teachers for whom biographical data was found. Their names are followed by a biographical reference. 1) Ibrāhīm b. Sālih b. Hāshim b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-'Ajamī al-Ḥalabī (d.731/1330), *al-Durar*, 1:28-9; 2) Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭālib b. Abī al-Na'm Ni'mah b. Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Bayyān al-Ṣāliḥī al-Ḥajjār (d.730/1329), *al-Durar*, 1:152-3; 3) Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. al-Raḍī 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Maqdisī (d.738/1337), *al-Durar*, 1:491; 4) 'Abd Allah b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-Ghanī b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. 'Alī b. Surū al-Maqdisī (d.732/1331), *al-Durar*, 2:361-2; 5) 'Abd Allah b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Tā'ib b. Abī al-'Īsh al-Anṣārī (d.735/1334), *al-Durar*, 2:362-3; 6) Yaḥyā b. Faḍl Allah b. Mujlī b. Da'jān b. Khalaf b. Naṣr b. Manṣūr b. 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar al-'Adawī(d.738/1337), *al-Durar*, 5:199-200.

81 Ibid., 12:81.

83. Ibn Hajjar, *Inba al-Ghumr*, 3:25. The work is identified in Ḥajjī Khalīfah Kātib Çelebi (d.1067/1656), *Kashf al-Ẓunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wa'l-Funūn* (Beirut, 1990), 56.

84. Kaḥḥālah, *A'lām*, 3:188. For the *juz'* of Abū al-Jahm, see Ḥajjī Khalīfah, *Kashf*, 584. The *Dhamm al-Kalām* is a published work presenting a Ḥanbalī critique of theology.

85. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, 669. Two of these works are in the genre of *ḥadīth* compilations known as *Arba'īnāt* (collections of forty *ḥadith* usually on a particular subject), and the remaining twelve in the category of *fawā'id* (a collection of *ḥadīth* narrated by a *shaykh*, often on disparate topics).

86. Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 7:121.

87. Kaḥḥālah, 3:187.

88. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah* is primarily devoted to certificates recorded in the years 550/1155-750/1349. As such, it does not contain entries for *samā'āt* granted during 'Ā'isha's teaching career. As for her student years, it records one certificate for an assembly which she attended at the age of eleven. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah*, 349. The index refers to an assembly for transmitting the text *Majlis al-Biṭāqah min Amālī Ḥamzah al-Kinānī* (d.357/967) (see *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt* 30, entry # 5:955).

'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad's list of students underscores her distinction as a *muḥaddithah*. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī is perhaps her best known student. His accomplishments in the field of *ḥadīth* criticism are exemplified in his monumental work *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥiḥ al-Bukhārī*, an extensive and authoritative commentary on the traditions contained in the *Ṣaḥiḥ* of al-Bukhārī. The latter was among the works that he was authorized to transmit on 'Ā'isha's authority. ([89]) While the extent to which he studied the *Ṣaḥīḥ* with her is unclear, it appears that having her name in his *isnād* boosted his reputation in the transmission of this work. As mentioned above, Ibn Ḥajar cites her in his *isnād*s for fifteen works. ([90]) Interestingly, he records, in each case, that he read the specified work or verified it in the presence of both 'Ā'isha and her sister Fāṭimah. ([91]) While it is not clear if the two sisters frequently conducted sessions together, Ibn Ḥajar's concurrent citation of both of them may be intended to underscore the accuracy of his transmission. In addition to Ibn Ḥajar, the following Mamluk notables numbered among her male students: 'Izz al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Qāḍī al-Quḍāh Burhān al-Dīn (800-876/1397-1471) ([92]), Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Naṣr Allah (800-876/1397-1471) ([93]) and Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Qāḍī Nāṣir al-Dīn (796-856/1393-1452). ([94]) Al-Sakhāwī remarks that "many learned men (*a'immah*), particularly travelers [in search of religious knowledge] went to her and narrated profusely from her." Thus we can conclude that her reputation was well established in Damascus and its environs. ([95])

'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad served as an authority not only for the men mentioned above, but also for many women. Al-Sakhāwī provides entries for thirty-one of 'Ā'isha's female students. ([96]) Most of these entries follow his standard

87. Kaḥḥālah, 3:187.

88. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah* is primarily devoted to certificates recorded in the years 550/1155-750/1349. As such, it does not contain entries for *samā'āt* granted during 'Ā'isha's teaching career. As for her student years, it records one certificate for an assembly which she attended at the age of eleven. *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah*, 349. The index refers to an assembly for transmitting the text *Majlis al-Biṭāqah min Amālī Ḥamzah al-Kinānī* (d.357/967) (see *Mu'jam al-Samā'āt* 30, entry # 5:955).

89. Kaḥḥālah, 3:188.

90. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, 669.

91. For simultaneous mention of 'Ā'isha and Fāṭimah, see the following entries in Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, #905, 927, 973, 1014, 1022, 1106, 1117, 1160, 1276, 1394, 1400, 1414, 1520, 1611, 1615.

92. For his biography, see 'Alī b. Dāwūd al-Jawharī al-Ṣayrafī (d.849/1445), *Inbā' al-Haṣr bi-Abnā' al-'Aṣr*, (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1970), 345-6.

93. al-Ṣayrāfī, 450-1.

94. Yūsuf b. Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm al-Ẓāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (d.874/1470), (Cairo, 1972), 16:13-14. Two articles that explore the subject of intellectual culture among the Mamluks are Urlich Haarman, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth Century Egypt and Syria" *Journal of Semitic Studies* (33) 1981, 81-114, and Jonathan Berkey, "Silver Threads among the Coal, A Well-Educated Mamluk of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century," *Studia Islamica*, 73 (1991), 109-25.

95. al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw'*, 12:81.

96 For 'Ā'isha's female students, see the following numbered entries in al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'*, volume 12: 46, 47, 60, 103, 145, 156, 169, 231, 232, 258, 339, 346, 409, 488, 593, 609, 694, 741, 806, 843, 860, 919, 946, 975, 978, 983, 984, 987, 999, 1002, 1004.

pattern of providing birth dates, names of spouses and children, and names of a few prominent authorities from whom the women narrated. In only one case, that of Zaynab bint 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Bar'am, do we learn the name of the work for which she heard from 'Ā'isha (viz. the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī). ([97])

The biographical data at our disposal permits a few important observations regarding 'Ā'isha's contact with both male and female students. The four male students for whom we have names were born sometime after she was fifty years old. More precisely, Ibn Ḥajar was born when she was fifty, Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad when she was seventy-three, and the remaining two, 'Izz al-Dīn Aḥmad and Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm when she was seventy-seven. Her female students similarly had contact with her late in her life. Al-Sakhāwī provides a combination of birth dates and *ijāza* dates for twenty-seven of these women. Only one of these students, Fāṭimah bint 'Alī ibn Manṣūr (b. *ca.* 770/1368), was born by the time 'Ā'isha bint Muḥammad had reached the age of forty-seven. The remaining birth date data shows that two students were born when she was in her seventies, and eight of them when she was past the age of eighty. As for the *ijāza* dates, one woman obtained her *ijāza* from 'Ā'isha when the latter was in her sixties, eleven of them when she was in her eighties, and six of them when she was in her early nineties. This age structure resembles the teacher-student age ratio in Zaynab bint al-Kamāl's life above.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the biographies of 'Ā'isha's students pertains to the geographical extent of her reputation. Al-Sakhāwī mentions the provenance of twenty-six of her female students as follows: twenty-one were from Mecca, two were from Aleppo, one from Cairo, and one from Būlāq. We do not know whether the students actually went to see 'Ā'isha in al-Ṣāliḥiyyah or if she met them in the cities of their origin. It may well be that the *ijāza*s were granted *in absentia*. Nevertheless, the provenance of 'Ā'isha's students indicates that her reputation as a *muḥaddithah* had spread to these locales. Meccan origin, in particular, is frequently noted. She may have been sought out for *ijāza*s during pilgrimage(s) to Mecca, a popular occasion for the transmission of religious knowledge.

Ā'isha bint Muḥammad lived to the age of ninety-three; at the time of her death, she joined ranks with the foremost *ḥadīth* transmitters in the region of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah. ([98]) Her funeral prayers were held in one of the large Damascene congregational mosques, al-Jāmi' al-Muẓaffarī. Describing the occasion, Ibn Ṭūlūn notes "many people came from all regions at the occasion of her death." ([99]) Her accomplishments as a student and teacher earned her an enviable reputation as an exemplary and revered *muḥaddithah*.

97. al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw'*, 12:44 #258.

98. In the course of this research, I did not come across any information regarding 'Ā'isha's marriage.

99. Ibn Ṭūlūn, 288.

A Collective Portrait

The lives of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha spanned nearly two centuries (646-816/1248-1413). Yet, as the above biographical accounts indicate, the system of *ḥadīth* transmission was rather stable and the careers of these women overlap in many ways. Features common to both of their lives can be extracted and extrapolated towards a collective portrait of female *ḥadīth* transmitters in the Mamluk period. One parallel emerges in the age structure of their relationships with their teachers as well as their students. A second similarity is the interaction between men and women as illustrated in their careers. Evidence of co-education is relevant to a clearer understanding of gender relations in medieval Muslim history. Third, their successful records highlight the persistence of education outside the *madrasa* system; it is precisely this phenomenon that helps to explain the accomplishments of *muḥaddithah*s in spite of their general exclusion from endowed, salaried posts in educational institutions. Fourth, both women were authorities primarily for compilations of *ḥadīth*. Works of *fiqh*, grammar, theology or even poetry do not appear frequently in the lists of compilations that they are known for transmitting. Finally, the activities of these two *muḥaddithah*s resonate with the religious culture espoused in the Ḥanbalī circles of their time.

Zaynab's and 'Ā'isha's educational profiles indicate that their most widely appreciated *ḥadīth* acquisitions occurred between the ages of one and twelve. In our modern context, this would be roughly analogous to deriving our scholarly reputation based on who our teachers were between preschool and elementary school. Yet, in the medieval Muslim context of *ḥadīth* transmission, this practice was a means for preserving the authenticity of religious tradition transmitted from Muḥammad and his Companions to each subsequent generation. Guarding against corruption of the original often meant seeking the shortest *isnād*s narrated by reliable authorities. Prominent *ḥadīth* scholars such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d.463/1070) and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d.643/1245) agreed that awarding *ijāza*s to young children was acceptable so long as the material was learned later in life and transmitted accurately. ([100]) In addition to Zaynab and 'Ā'isha, who were granted a number of such certificates, many other women whose lives are recorded in Ibn Ḥajar's *al-Durar al-Kāminah* and in al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'* were awarded *ijāza*s before the age of five. ([101])

The phenomenon of transmission authority passing from the very old to the very young has been observed in other regions of the Muslim empire.

100. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d.463/1070), *al-Kifāyah fī 'Ilm al-Riwāyah* (Beirut:Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), 76-7; and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥal-Shahrazūrī (d.643/1245), *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 108-9.

101. This is readily observed through a perusal of these two dictionaries as well as Kaḥḥālah's compendium, *A'lām al-Nisā'*. Roded has made similar observations in her study, *op cit.*, 70-1.

Richard Bulliet's study of tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth century Nishapur assessed the significance of age in male teacher-student relationships and noted patterns similar to those evident in the cases of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha. ([102]) Using a sample of 200 teachers in Nishapur, Bulliet notes a trend among *ḥadīth* teachers to have young students, particularly in their final years of teaching. *Ḥadīth* study often began as early as age four with fathers or uncles taking notes for children in these "classes." The teachers that *ḥadīth* students had at a young age appear frequently in their biographies. ([103])

The acquisition of *ḥadīth* did not cease at a young age. Bulliet notes that by approximately the late twenties in a student's career, the student had received certification for all the *ḥadīth* that others might later solicit from him. While the student would continue his study of *ḥadīth*, it would not be as useful to formally record his attendance at sessions. ([104]) Similarly, in the cases of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha, teachers they encountered before the age of fourteen predominate in their biographies and these two *muḥaddithah*s appear frequently in biographies of students during their advanced years. Thus biographical sources show similar age structures for male and female *ḥadīth* transmission. These dictionaries, however, do not provide information for women that would allow conclusive comment on the period between youth and seniority. Due to normative constraints on women's public participation during their marriageable years, it is difficult at this point to know the extent to which women attended co-educational assemblies in this phase of their lives. This issue will be considered in more detail below.

That the very old transmitted to the very young is understandable in light of the preference for short *isnād*s. That many of the transmitters, among them Zaynab and 'Ā'isha, lived to ages rarely seen in the medieval period prompts scrutiny. One possible explanation is the process of "natural selection" described above; since short chains of transmission were favored, biographical dictionaries primarily recorded accomplishments of transmitters who surpassed average life expectancy. These statistical outliers would be disproportionately represented in historical records. Future research into life expectancies in the Mamluk period may shed light on the frequent appearance of octogenarians and nonagenarians in the biographical sources.

Medieval sources documenting the activities of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha depict them interacting regularly with male teachers and students. Our understanding of gender relations in Muslim history can benefit from closer analyses of cases such as Zaynab's and 'Ā'isha's, both of which present strong evidence of co-educational participation albeit only in stages of their

102. Richard Bulliet, "The Age Structure of Medieval Education," *Studia Islamica* (1983), 105-17.

103. Berkey, although he did not conduct the same type of quantitative analysis as Bulliet, draws a similar conclusion regarding age structures in educational relationships during the Mamluk period. Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 177.

104. Bulliet, 114-5.

lives when they were not considered a source for social disorder (*fitna*). Previous studies on education in Mamluk Egypt reveal a world where men and women of the urban elite had access to and pursued religious education. Elizabeth Sartain, in her biography of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, confirms that a "surprisingly large" number of women were commemorated as *ḥadīth* transmitters in the ninth/fifteenth century. She noted that the cultural norms prohibiting mixing between men and women of marriageable age left girls up to the age of sexual maturity (*ca.* ten to thirteen years old) free to attend co-educational classes. Likewise, old women, past the age of sexual attraction, were accepted as teachers of boys and men. ([105]) A graph of Zaynab's and 'Ā'isha's recorded careers would lend credence to Sartain's observation as it would show co-educational activity during their youth and seniority.

As mentioned above, the intervening years were not deemed worthy of note by chroniclers and historians. In the world of female *ḥadīth* transmission, there are two possible hypotheses that can be tested by future research. The first is that women, in conformity with religious norms prescribing strict seclusion for women of marriageable age, ceased attending public, co-educational *ḥadīth* sessions. Instead, they primarily devoted themselves to privately studying collections for which they had received certification in their early childhood. Once they reached an advanced enough age that their public presence did not threaten social order, they would convene classes for male and female students.

A second scenario, which finds greater evidence, is that women's careers in this domain largely paralleled those of their male counterparts. That is, they may have continued their education in study circles open to both men and women rather than in cloistered or segregated settings. Zaynab bint Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm b. Sālim b. Barākāt b. Sa'd (born in 659/1260) is one such case. ([106]) *Al-Mu'jam al-Samā'āt al-Dimashqiyyah* lists her as an auditor (*mustami'ah*) in two certificates the dates of which place her in her twenties and thirties at the time of audition. ([107]) Both of these assemblies were conducted with male and female participants. Because *samā'āt* and *ijāzāt* often provide details not included in biographical sources, a closer investigation of these sources may uncover other such examples of women attending *ḥadīth* sessions at various ages in addition to youth and seniority. Such research would help chart a more complete picture of women in *ḥadīth* transmission than is available through biographical sources alone.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that women participated as auditors in public educational forums even at ages when we would expect more rigorous seclusion. The Mālikī scholar Ibn al-Ḥajj al-'Abdarī (d.737/1336), for

105. Sartain, *op cit.*, 125-127.

106. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2:211. Surprisingly, Ibn Ḥajar does not provide a death date for her, nor do any other biographical sources consulted for this study.

107. *Al-Mu'jam al-Samā'āt*, 312. The certificates are referenced under 2:955 *samā'* #11 (recorded in 692/1292) and 5:3775 *samā'* #8 (recorded in 679/1280).

example, describes an undesirable scenario in which women attended *majālis al-ḥadīth* held in mosques and in the company of men. The women would sit facing men in these assemblies, and in their excitement, would get up and sit down in ways that manifested their "*'awrāt*" (i.e. parts of a woman's body that should not be seen by a man to whom she is not married or related). ([108]) It is interesting that Ibn al-Ḥajj, whose views on women's public presence are extremely conservative, did not protest the participation of women in such gatherings. ([109]) Rather, he was opposed to aspects of their comportment that caused disturbances. In fact, Ibn al-Ḥajj insisted on a woman's right to a religious education. He maintained that if her husband could not educate her properly, he should allow her to go out and learn from others who were more knowledgeable. If the husband denied her permission, Ibn al-Ḥajj encouraged the wife to seek legal redress. ([110]) While he does not specify whether women in such instances should learn exclusively from other women, we may glean from his comments on women's attendance of *majālis al-ḥadīth* in mosques that, in principle, he was not opposed to women learning from men. Anecdotal evidence such as this suggests that in spite of overarching prescriptions limiting contact between the sexes at certain ages, exceptions may have been made for religious forums such as *majālis al-ḥadīth*.

Another common thread in the careers of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha is their success as *muḥaddithah*s outside the framework of *madrasa*s. There is no evidence that either woman ever officially enrolled in a *madrasa* let alone held endowed teaching posts. ([111]) However, different modes of medieval Muslim education were not discrete, and the proliferation of *madrasa*s under the Seljuks, Ayyubids, and Mamluks did not diminish the importance of other informal channels of learning. Salaried teachers from *madrasa*s tutored individual students and presided over classes in mosques and private homes. Generally, women participated as teachers and students of *ḥadīth* through study circles (*Ḥalqa*s) in private homes or mosques. ([112]) As Berkey notes, throughout Islamic history, "education remained fundamentally informal, flexible, and tied to persons rather than institutions." ([113]) This informality

108. Ibn al-Ḥajj al-'Abdarī (d.737/1336), *Madkhal al-Shar' al-Sharīf* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Miṣriyyah bi'l-Azhar, 1929), 2:219. Berkey, in his analysis of female education in the Mamluk Cairo concludes on the basis of such anecdotal evidence that gender barriers were permeable in the world of *ḥadīth* transmission. Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 177.

109. Ibn al-Ḥajj's prescribed severe restrictions for women's public presence throughout his work. See in particular, the following section on women's going out for various needs and occasions, *Madkhal*, 1:245-72.

110. Ibn al-Ḥajj, *Madkhal*, 1:276-77. Ibn al-Ḥajj states that a woman should take her case to a "*ḥākim*" (a judge overseeing social regulations) and that this officer should force her husband to grant her religious rights just as he is forced to in cases of material, worldly rights. See also, Ibn al-Ḥajj, 1:209-10 for further discussion of a man's duty to teach his wife her religious obligations.

111. Although Zaynab's *samā'āt* record her assemblies in al-Madrasa al-Ḍiyā'iyyah, it is not clear if she held a salaried teaching position there.

112. Shalaby, 332, Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 171, and Roded, 76-8, 85.

113. Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 18.

and the persistence of the educational process in diverse locations such as private homes, libraries, and literary salons clarifies how women studied and taught in spite of their formal exclusion from institutions such as *madrasa*s. In the light of these alternative modes of education, it is not unusual that Zaynab and 'Ā'isha were granted numerous *ijāza*s and that they disseminated this knowledge to other *ḥadīth* students. Ibn Ḥajar notes that Zaynab collected *ijāzas* from scholars of Aleppo, Damascus, Baghdād, Jericho, Ḥarrān, Alexandria, and Cairo, and that students crowded around her to read great works with her. ([114]) Similarly, 'Ā'isha's reputation attracted students traveling in the search of knowledge (*ṭalab al-'ilm*) to her study circles.

The fourth observation pertains to the actual works which Zaynab and 'Ā'isha studied and transmitted. As noted above, these works are primarily compilations of *ḥadīth* on particular topics of Muslim ritual and ascetic piety as well as some of the major canonical collections. Legal commentaries, theological tracts, and Qur'ānic exegeses are not listed as works which these *muḥaddithah*s studied or transmitted. In the absence of additional detailed studies of female scholars, it is hard to know the extent to which women were involved in other fields of learning. An overview of existing evidence suggests that women excelled most frequently as *ḥadīth* transmitters. There are several possible explanations for the apparent preponderance of this field in the scholarly activity of women. Among them is that learning and then teaching works of *fiqh*, theology, or Qurānic exegeses required prolonged and uninterrupted years of study (*mulāzamah*), often with one or more *shaykh*s. ([115]) Such contact between unmarried men and women was probably not condoned in the cultural and religious framework of Mamluk society. Further, demands placed on women by marriage and child rearing would render such devotion to education difficult. In this vein, it is interesting to note that Zaynab remained unmarried and this factor could have contributed to her superlative success as a *muḥaddithah*. In addition to the time demanded by the study of law or theology, the fact that such subjects were commonly studied and taught under the auspices of endowed stipends and salaries may have hampered a woman's access to this type of education. However, further study of female scholars in various areas and time periods of Islamic history is necessary to confirm these speculations.

The general profiles of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha conform to Ḥanbalī religious culture promoted in Damascus and its environs. Ḥanbalism stressed traditionalism over rationalist theology and emphasized attaining piety through the emulation of the Prophet's *sunna* as conveyed through *ḥadīth*. The study, memorization, and incorporation of *ḥadīth* into daily life paved the way to personal salvation. In this vein, it is appropriate that the compilations of the third/ninth century ascetic Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d.281/894), with titles such as

114. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 2: 210.

115. Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 128-9 and Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 179-80.

Kitāb Shukr li-llah (The Book concerning Expressing Gratitude to God), and *al-Qanā'ah* (Contentment [with God and Divine Will]), are listed among the transmissions of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha. It is also not surprising that 'Ā'isha was authorized to transmit the *Dhamm al-Kalām wa-Ahli-hi* (Reproof of Theology and its Practitioners) of the noted Ḥanbalī scholar, 'Abd Allah b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Harawī (d.481/1089). Compilations such as the *Karāmāt al-Awliyā'* of al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Khallāl (d.439/1047), in the *faḍā'il* or *manāqib* category, promoted contemplation of the virtues of pious ancestors. The dissemination of such works in this Ḥanbalī community supports observations in previous studies that Ḥanbalī traditionalism went hand in hand with ascetic piety. ([116]) Organized Sufism, however, does not appear to have exercised a strong influence on the careers of Zaynab or 'Ā'isha. ([117])

In light of the communal interest in promoting traditionalism, it is no coincidence that Zaynab and 'Ā'isha flourished in al-Ṣaliḥiyyah. Biographers indicate that their sessions were well attended and that they were in demand as reliable transmitters. Zaynab and 'Ā'isha had many female contemporaries who engaged in similar activities. ([118]) The high level of women's participation in al-Ṣāliḥiyyah reveals the extent to which the Ḥanbalī vision influenced various sectors of society. Whereas women were largely excluded from legal and theological academic pursuits, they were apparently welcomed in the transmission of *ḥadīth*. As such, *ḥadīth* transmission drew different segments of the population into a cultural framework articulated in Ḥanbalī scholarly discourse and financially supported by the Mamluks. While the connection between Ḥanbalī ideology and the careers of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha is apparent, it is important not to overstate it. Zaynab and 'Ā'isha interacted with prominent students and teachers of *ḥadīth* from other *madhhab*s. Additionally, other *muḥaddithah*s with profiles similar to those of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha were affiliated to different *madhhab*s, indicating that traditionalism was not a prerogative of Ḥanbalīs. Future studies may clarify the extent to which *madhhab* affiliation shaped the careers of individual *ḥadīth* transmitters.

The analysis above sheds light on the careers of two *muḥaddithah*s in Mamluk Damascus, and also raises questions regarding the education of Muslim women in other periods and regions of Islamic history. Zaynab and 'Ā'isha are but two of numerous distinguished *muḥaddithah*s. Women who

116. George Makdisi has pointed out that Ḥanbalism was not inimical to organized Sufism as a whole but rather was opposed to particular types of Sufism. George Makdisi, "The Ḥanbalī School and Sufism," *Boletin de la Asociacion des Orientalistas,* 15 (1979), 115-26.

117. Heller has made a similar observation regarding "popular Islam" among the Ḥanbalīs of al-Ṣāliḥiyyah as a whole. Heller, 117-20.

118. Kaḥḥālah's *A'lām al-Nisā'* is the most comprehensive biographical work on Muslim women and as such is a good starting point for investigating other *ḥadīth* transmitters during the Mamluk era as well as in other periods of Muslim history.

achieved prominence in other areas of religious learning such as law and Qur'ānic exegesis also merit detailed attention, as do female scholars and practitioners of Sufism. It would be interesting to compare the profiles of such women to those of Zaynab and 'Ā'isha. Biographical studies of other female scholars would simultaneously further our understanding of developments in Muslim educational history beyond the *madrasa*s and promote historically rooted approaches to Middle Eastern women's studies.

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