

***WOMEN'S ROLES AS TEACHERS,
LEADERS, AND CONTRIBUTORS TO
THE WAQF IN DAMASCUS***

Research report for Julia Meltzer

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Glossary

ḥadīth: “the normative reports containing the history of the Prophet and the earliest Muslim community” (Fadel 1997: 191). As Asmaa Sayeed points out, there has been a great deal of debate over the ‘reliability’ of ḥadīth as historical documents (Sayeed 2005: 12); however, for the purposes of this research, while this must be acknowledged, the significance of the ḥadīth comes in the effort to understand, as she says, “the Muslim community’s historical memory of the role of women as transmitters” and the importance of the ḥadīth to Muslims over the centuries.

ijāzah: “the permission granted by one individual to another to represent a text or a body of knowledge” (Chamberlain 1994: 15); “a license authorising the bearer to transmit a text or perform and teach a knowledge-based skill. The concept originated with the need to certify oral transmission of Hadith ... [and] was gradually expanded to certify that an individual understood texts and jurisprudential processes sufficiently well enough to teach, deliver legal opinions, or both” (Kalmbach 2008: 42).

ijtihād: “the independent interpretation of basic sources (the Quran and Sunna) to derive laws for matters on which scripture is unclear” (Kalmbach 2008: 43).

khānqāh: a ṣūfī community/hospice for men (Hambly 1998: 8)

khātūn: princess, a title of respect for a woman of high status

isnād: the chain of transmission of a ḥadīth, written down at the start of the text of each ḥadīth, beginning with the last narrator and ending with the first (i.e. whoever heard the words of the Prophet on the matter narrated in the ḥadīth or saw the episode related in it).

madrasa, plural **madāris:** school (In Orientalist texts, as evident now in the Western media in particular, the term *madrasa* was taken to refer to ‘religious schools’ only; this is a misinterpretation, however, since the term simply means ‘school’ – both in terms of a place of learning, and a ‘school’ of thought and study. Prominent such *madāris* were known by name, therefore having no need for the explanatory adjective ‘religious’ – though to replace this adjective in English translation would be more correct; less prominent *madāris* would be referred to in conjunction with an explanatory adjective, such as *dīnī* for ‘religious’ or, etc.)

muḥaddith (m.) / muḥadditha (f.): transmitter or narrator of ḥadīth

ribāʿ: a ṣūfī lodge (Roded 1994: 93); a “convent for *ṣūfī* women” (Hambly 1998: 8); *ribāʿs* were “typically located on the edge of cities” and “functioned as retreats where people would go to deepen their knowledge and understanding, and strengthen their practice, of the religion” (Nadwi 2007: 76).

qāḍī: judge

waqf: “endowments for the upkeep of charitable institutions that might also have relatives as beneficiaries” (Ahmed 1992: 105). Details of *waqf* endowments are held by the office of the *qāḍī* as official endowment deeds (Humphreys 1994: 45). Petry’s description of the institution of *waqf* is helpful here:

...any Muslim sound of mind and faith may grant a portion of his/ her personal estate to pious activities that promote the religion or provide for the needs of less fortunate believers. In general, only fixed property, assets or services may be designated as *waqf*, although the range of trust instruments is broad enough to permit considerable flexibility in this matter. *Waqfs* were legally categorized as either charitable (*khayrī*) or familial (*dhurrī*), and could be reassigned, replaced, sold or transferred-but only under careful supervision of a

qādī or judge. The proceeds of a waqf were to be administered by a supervisor (*mutuwullī, nāzīr*) often – but not always – the donor, and upon his demise one or more of his heirs ... their beneficial effect on Muslim societies throughout the traditional period cannot be underestimated. (Petry 1983: 190-191)

Note on transliteration and dates

Transliteration follows the style of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. For Arabic words for which there exist standardised English forms, the standard form is used – that is, without diacritics. Arabic names for which there are no common English forms are transliterated with full diacritic markings. In names, a doubled consonant [*shadda*] is often signified with the repetition of the equivalent English letters, and emphatic consonants [ḍ, ṣ etc.] are marked in some cases but not all (often depending on the source). Specific terminology is italicised and transliterated with full diacritic markings.

Both anno Domini (AD) and anno Hegirae (AH, dating from the *hijra*, Prophet Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina) are used (sometimes separately, sometimes both) in this research brief, partly because some sources use AD years and some use AH. The year 1 AH corresponds to the year 622-623 AD (the first day of the first year of the anno Hegirae calendar, 1 Muḥarram, corresponds to Friday, 16th July 622). The following table helps situate AH years in AD years:¹

AH	AD
1	622-623
100	718-719
200	815-816
300	912-913
400	1009-1010
500	1106-1107
600	1203-1204
700	1300-1301
800	1397-1398
900	1494-1495
1000	1591-1592
1100	1689-1690
1200	1785-1786
1300	1882-1883
1400	1979-1980

¹ See AD / AH converter available at: info.charm.ru/library/AHxAD%20Converter.doc (Accessed 29/8/2010)

Introduction to research report

The first point to make in this research report is that there has been relatively little research carried out into women's roles as religious scholars, teachers and leaders, or as endowers of religious institutions in the Islamic world (Hambly 1998: 8). Indeed, "female religious authority exists and is accepted in conservative Damascene circles, though scholarship has largely overlooked it" (Kalmbach 2008: 37).

Of course, a serious problem in the study of women's religious roles in Islamic history is the lack of sources left by women themselves. As Ahmed points out, "women have left no written records, so we have no direct means of learning what it was like to live life thus" (Ahmed 1992: 121). Everything we understand about pre-modern Muslim women, then, must be learnt from sources written and compiled by male scholars – which, for various reasons, can present problems (as scholars cited in this report have all discussed).

An important point here is that we must ask ourselves how we should understand the role of women leaders, teachers, transmitters of *ḥadīth* and contributors to the *waqf*. The roles women played must be contextualised in order to understand what those roles meant to them and to their contemporaries, especially if we are then to use the information gained from such research to comment on today's female religious leaders. Another interesting angle from which to approach this subject, of course, is to ask the question of how Muslim women now (especially religious leaders like Huda al-Habash, for example), understand, represent, and refer to Muslim women in history.

Basic timeline of the history of Damascus from the rise of Islam

The following basic historical outline of the history of Damascus helps contextualise the information on the roles women have played in Damascus in various periods of its Islamic history.

- 635 AD Arab/Muslim conquest of Damascus
- 661 AD Mu'āwīyah bin Abī Sufyān, after occupying Damascus, became the 5th Caliph, and founded the Omayyad dynasty, with Damascus its capital. (The Omayyad Mosque was built between 705 and 715.)
- 750 AD The Abbasids (Arabs who had settled in Iran and led a revolt against the Omayyads) occupied Damascus. The Abbasid capital was transferred to Baghdad, and the importance of Damascus as a political and cultural centre declined.
- 878 AD Ahmad bin Tulun, appointed governor of Egypt in 868, asserted his independence and took Damascus in 878; Tulunid rule.
- 977 AD Fatimid (Shī'ī) conquest of Damascus. In the century prior to the Fatimid conquest, the population of Damascus had suffered great political instability and difficult economic conditions. During this time, the city was divided into separate quarters, which led to a great proliferation in the building of mosques, since each quarter wished to have its own.
- 1069 AD The First Crusade begins, marking the beginning of 200 years of conflict in the region
- 1076 AD The Seljuks seized Damascus (they were a Turkish tribe which converted to Islam in the 10th century).
Damascus was besieged in the Second Crusade. Nūr al-Dīn defeated the Crusader armies and subsequently ruled Damascus. The period of his rule saw the flourishing of art and architecture in the city, and the establishment of a number of schools.
- 1174 AD Nūr al-Dīn died. Eventually, Salāḥ al-Dīn (Vizier and commander of the Syrian forces in Egypt) came to rule Damascus and the Ayyūbid dynasty was founded.
- 1193 AD Death of Salāḥ al-Dīn. His empire was divided into three, each part given to one of his sons. Salāḥ al-Dīn's brother overthrew one of the sons, however, and moved the capital to Cairo.
- 1260 AD The Ayyūbids weakened by internal rivalries, Damascus was occupied by the Mongols.
- 1260 AD The Mongols only survived 6 months before the Mamluks, under Sultān Baybars, drove them out; they also defeated the weak Ayyūbids. Damascus became part of the growing Mamluk empire, which was ruled from Cairo. The early Mamluk period was one of relative prosperity in Damascus, especially as it was the second city of the empire and a major centre on the east-west trade route. The city grew outside the boundaries of the 'Old City', and a large number of mosques were built. In this period, the Ṣāliḥīyya area started to develop as a major centre of education and religious activity.
- 1400 AD Having sacked Aleppo, Timur (Timurlane), at the head of the Mongol army, besieged Damascus. The Mamluk sultān sent a delegation from Cairo (including Ibn Khaldūn), who negotiated with him, but after they left Timur and his army sacked Damascus, burning much of the city, taking many as slaves, slaughtering others, and capturing the city's artisans to take them back to his capital at Samarkand. Damascus remained, weakened, under Mamluk rule.

Sayeed notes that “Damascus and Cairo witnessed the establishment of traditionalism through the rule of the Ayyubids and Mamluks, who espoused Sunnī traditionalism to counter Shī‘ī–Fāṭimid propaganda and legitimize their own rule as a foreign dynasty” (Sayeed 2005: 244).

- 1516 AD Ottoman conquest of Damascus
- 1918 AD The Ottomans remained in Syria until 1918, when the Ottomans were defeated in the First World War and their Empire crumbled
- 1923 AD Syria officially became a French mandate
- 1946 AD Syria became an independent nation
- 1963 AD The Ba‘th Party comes to power in Syria
- 1970 AD Hafez al-Asad becomes president of Syria
- 2000 AD Bashar al-Asad becomes president of Syria

1. Women's participation as leaders, teachers, and contributors to the *waqf*

It is difficult to define exactly what is meant by 'teachers' and 'leaders' when looking at women's roles in Islamic history, because few women held 'teaching posts' or official positions as 'leaders' in a formal, institutional sense (Sayeed 2005: 255). The information we have about women's roles in Islamic education tells us that women were most prominent in the field of the transmission of ḥadīth (Fadel 1997: 191), that some convened study circles in their private homes, or in the mosques (Hambly 1998: 9), or established religious institutions (religious schools, *ribāts*, *khānqāhs* – see also the section below on women's contributions to the *waqf*) in which they held mainly administrative and supervisory, not instructional, roles. Ahmed also refers to some women in the late medieval period as having "become renowned scholars and even teachers of hadith and *tafsir* (interpretation)" (Ahmed 1992: 112).

Very little work has been done on women's roles as teachers and scholars, while even the research on women as transmitters of knowledge is still really in its infancy (Hambly 1998: 8). In his 1998 chapter, 'Becoming Visible: Medieval Islamic Women in Historiography and History', Hambly references the work of Ignaz Goldziher, "the great Islamicist" of the late 19th century, who was the first academic scholar to note that there were women in Islamic history who had been teachers, had played important roles as authorities for ḥadīth, and had acted as judges (Hambly 1998: 7-8).

If a girl's education continued beyond the elementary stages, her studies would focus "almost exclusively on ḥadīth, and in that field lay her surest path to prominence" (Berkey 1992: 176); indeed, "the very culture of ḥadīth transmission ensured that women, no less than men, could become prized teachers" (ibid: 177). A forthcoming edited volume by Hilary Kalmbach contains scholarship that suggests that women's leadership and religious educational roles were not limited to transmission only, but that women also interpreted and taught as well (in Turkey and Iran, at least, but it seems quite possible that this was also the case in the Arab world, including Syria). Indeed, Roded states that "if the female transmitters of the first generation merely passed on information they obtained because of their proximity to the source or to reliable authorities, the knowledgeable women of later generations were scholars and teachers" (Roded 1994: 67). Abou-Bakr also notes that these transmitters of ḥadīth, or *muḥaddithāt* "were successful scholars and educators in their own right who were known not only for memorizing, preserving, and transmitting the *ḥadīth* tradition, but also for their expert knowledge and understanding of this corpus" (Abou-Bakr 2003: 318). The importance of ḥadīth was great: the traditions narrated "played a formative role in the shaping of Islamic thought and society" (ibid: 180).

Some scholars, such as Roded, have remarked that the evidence of the roles women played in the development of the Islamic sciences, and particularly in the preservation, transmission, and critique of ḥadīth is quite remarkable, especially given previous assumptions about the inferiority, segregation and seclusion of women in the Islamic world. It seems, however, that in the early Islamic period, although women did participate in fewer numbers than men, this was not considered particularly exceptional, or undesirable. Indeed, Roded's "quantitative analysis belies the notion that all of the women [in the various biographical collections] cited were exceptions to a male-dominated rule" (Roded 1994: 2). Furthermore, no stigma appears to have been attached to the ḥadīth transmitted by women, suggesting that there was no question of the reliability of religious knowledge that had been passed on by women and that "female authorities were recognized to be the intellectual equals of men ... even in the context of law" (Fadel 1997: 191).

As Sayeed points out, for example, the fact that the *isnāds* of important legal ḥadīth included women meant that Muslims of the 2nd and 3rd centuries had a perception of the "female narrators as dependable transmitters" (Sayeed 2005: 16-17). Roded similarly states that "the legitimacy of female transmitters as women was definitely accepted by the predominantly male ḥadīth scholars" (Roded 1994: 78). Moreover, although in certain matters a woman's legal testimony appears to be valid only when corroborated by another woman (i.e. in some areas two women are required to bear witness in

court, where only one man would be required),² narrations of ḥadīth by women were entirely accepted, to the extent that apparently none of the exegetes “even attempted to explain why the normative statements of women were granted the same moral and scientific weight as those made by men, while women's testimony was deemed to be less weighty than that of men” (Fadel 1997: 200)—suggesting that no such explanation was necessary. Fadel also writes that “a woman’s opinion (fatwa) in law was just as valid and morally binding as the legal opinion of a man” (ibid. 189).

While there have been scholarly women engaged in the transmission of ḥadīth throughout Islamic history (Sayeed 2002: 72), their numbers have varied over time. Sayeed found that

whereas there are many *ḥadīth* that are attributed to women of the Companion generation, there is a precipitous decline of women in the historical record from the mid-second to the mid-fourth centuries. In the second half of the fourth century, women re-emerge in the sources on *ḥadīth* learning and transmission. From this period until well into the Mamluk era, women acquire exemplary reputations as *ḥadīth* scholars. (Sayeed 2005: iii)

Nadwi states that “the fourth century is the weakest for ḥadīth activity among women”, and that during that century what activity there was was mainly in Baghdad (Nadwi 2007: 253). Then, when activity was revived in the 5th century AH, Baghdad and Isfahan became more important centres for the study of ḥadīth than Cairo and Damascus (ibid. 257). Between the last of the Successors and the end of the 5th century “the sources do not record any major Syrian *muḥadditha*”. By the end of the 6th century, however, Damascus was becoming established as a major centre of ḥadīth study, indeed Nadwi reports that this revival was “on a scale without parallel anywhere in the Islamic world in any period of history”. Damascus of the 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries is described as “the most important centre of ḥadīth scholarship for both men and women” (ibid. 267).

Regarding later centuries, Roded notes (as does Nadwi) that “from the tenth/sixteenth century on, the number and proportion of women [included in the biographical collections] dropped dramatically”. She states that “why this is so is far from clear, but on the eve of modern times, prominent women were rarely included in biographical collections” (Roded 1994: 11). She suggests, however, that this may have been more a function of women being “systematically excluded from the biographical collections” than of there being a total lack of learned women (ibid: 135).

While the 9th century cannot be assumed to be representative of other periods of Islamic history, especially given the above observations, nor this particular biographer’s work representative of other biographers – not least because of his dedication of an entire volume to the biographies of learned women (Lutfi 1981: 105-106, n.8), many of whom he himself studied under – but it is interesting to note that:

...of the 1,075 biographies of women in al-Sakhāwī’s *al-Daw’ al-lāmi* [women of the 9th century], 411 can definitely be said to have received some degree of religious education: to have memorized the Quran, studied with a particular scholar, or received an *ijāza*. The biographies of the remaining women are not detailed enough to allow definite judgments as to the extent of their intellectual training, but given al-Sakhāwī’s interests, it seems probable that they, too, were educated: the eleven volumes devoted to men consist largely of details of the lives and careers of the educated elite. (Berkey 1992: 167)

The socio-economic status of the women referred to here, is mentioned according to each individual as far as information about it is recorded (which is not often, since compilers of biographical dictionaries did not seem very interested in such mundane matters). However, a note on the question of socio-economic status is important here too. Humphreys explains why this is a difficult question:

² See section 5 of this report.

The modern reader automatically wonders which economic classes or social strata are represented in the biographical collections. The answer is rather complex. The individuals included are by definition elite women in the sense that they are the most outstanding in qualities deemed important by the authors. Some are members of the governing elite, the economic upper class, or the most prestigious social stratum. Others, however, are of slave or other humble origin, live in poverty, and seem to be totally detached from political power. The reason for this confusion is twofold. First, in Islamic society a constant tension exists between an egalitarian ideal and the realities of social, political, and economic inequalities. Second, the social reality of the Islamic Middle East does not fit any of the prevalent Western theories of stratification. (Humphreys 1994: 7-8)

Leila Ahmed, discussing the late medieval period, notes that the majority of women engaged in “advanced levels of education were mostly of the *‘ulama* class – the class of educated men which supplied the state with jurists, theologians, and administrators (at the upper end of the middle class, its members also occasionally intermarried with the ruling elite)”. This was not least because women of lesser status would not have had the means to devote themselves to study (especially given that women are not known to have held salaried positions in religious educational institutions, except on the rare occasion as instructors in *ribāṭs*) In addition, “whether women of this class received an education or not apparently depended on whether a member of the family took the time to teach them” (Ahmed 1992: 112). On the other hand, however, Berkey argues that Islamic education, had very wide “social horizons” (Berkey 1992: 181) – and indeed not all of the women mentioned in biographical collections were from the upper echelons of society.

In addition to being narrators of ḥadīth, some women have been mentioned in the biographical literature (about 20 from the 4th/10th to the 10th/16th century) as “preachers” who addressed men as well as women (Roded 1994: 105, 109) – signalling a more significant leadership role than the majority of learned women involved in transmitting ḥadīth whose leadership roles were more limited.

In general, however, “few women ... studied more than the fundamentals of any subject besides ḥadīth, and in particular few became expert in jurisprudence” (Berkey 1992: 179-80). There were some who did, however, and a number of those who were recorded as legal experts are listed further at the end of this section.

Despite the fact that the evidence strongly supports the fact that women were perceived as intellectual equals, the roles the women played in religious educational institutions, including in those some of them founded themselves were – both in Cairo and Damascus, and probably in other cities – restricted to the administrative and supervisory: “women played virtually no role, as either professor or student, in the formal education offered in schools of higher education and supported by their endowments” (Berkey 1992: 165). Indeed, “women were systematically excluded from holding judicial posts that would position them to resolve disputes among men, or formal instructional positions that implied a personal, institutional, or metaphorical authority over young men” (ibid: 180), see also (Humphreys 1994: 35).³

The examples listed below mostly show this. As demonstrated by the information on women’s roles as students, teachers, transmitters of ḥadīth, and religious leaders above, however, we know that women did engage in religious learning and instruction, albeit less through the formal institutions of education than men. Berkey notes that “the ties between women and the world of formal academic institutions were complex and uneven”, and that while women “could own, inherit, and dispose of property” and have roles in administering the school they endowed, “in matters relating more directly to instruction, however, institutions of learning accorded women a far more circumscribed role” (Berkey 1992: 162). For example, Berkey also notes that, in Cairo at least, though

³ Omaima Abou-Bakr also notes that this is true, though “with the exception perhaps of *shaykhāt al-ribāṭ*, also institutes mostly founded and owned by women” (Abou-Bakr 2003: 321).

“women were never appointed to professorships, several seem to have become shaykhas of the *ṣūfīs* established in several, albeit minor, mosques” (Berkey 1992: 175).

One major factor that inhibited their greater participation in these formal institutions seems to have been practical and social obstacles having to do with a desire to preserve the “sexual boundaries” and segregation perceived essential to the proper and pious study and practice of Islam (see (Berkey 1992: 166-167)). However, as testified by the evidence of women’s learning and religious authority gained through intellectual excellence and knowledge of Islam (*ḥadīth*, *Qur’ān*, *fiqh*, and so on), women did access education. Berkey highlights the difficulty faced by the Islamic lawyers and scholars: “how was the knowledge required [by women and young girls] to be transmitted” to them⁴ “without threatening the gender boundaries that cut across the medieval Islamic world”, especially since Islamic education relied on “models that privileged direct personal contact” (Berkey 1992: 168, 172)?

The answer mostly was that Islamic education remained primarily informal until the Ottoman period, and women took lessons in informal *ḥalaqaḥs* in mosques, private homes and, also informally, in madrasas. Indeed, “the remarkable growth in the number of madrasas notwithstanding, the institution never established a monopoly on the inculcation of the Islamic sciences”, and “the transmission of knowledge in the later Middle Ages continued to depend far more upon the relationship between teacher and student than it did upon any institutional framework” and often began with the first relationship, that of kinship (Berkey 1992: 169). Leila Ahmed’s work has also shown that salaried positions in madrasas or other institutions “were evidently not open to women” – despite the fact that women could obtain certificates (Ahmed 1992: 114). The increasing institutionalisation and bureaucratisation, which peaked under the Ottomans, can be understood as a major factor in the decline of women’s roles in Islamic education (Roded 1994: 85).

Despite the apparent enforcement of the seclusion of women, however, there is much evidence that religious women did meet and study with men – and teach them. Nadwi states that “the women were not restricted to learning from only other women” and that “it appears that they studied with whoever they had the opportunity to study with” (Nadwi 2007: 97). Many women did, especially at the beginning of their studies, study with family members, male and female, which avoided breaking the sexual boundaries observed in social practices, or with female scholars, but Islamic education did not take place exclusively in same-sex groups, (though, as demonstrated by the data available in al-Sakhāwī’s biographical dictionary, more girls and women received their instruction from women than boys and men did) (Berkey 1992: 171-2). Ibn al-Ḥajj, for example, mentions how women and men would sit together in a room to hear narrations, for example – a practice he vehemently did not approve of (ibid.). Nadwi reports that some of the most prominent *muḥaddithāt* and female teachers in Damascus in the 7-9th centuries AH gave classes which were “attended by hundreds of both men and women” (Nadwi 2007: 267).

Besides face-to-face communication, much correspondence between scholars and *muḥaddithas* took the form of the exchange of letters (Abou-Bakr 2003: 321-323). This does not seem to have always been because meeting together would have been considered inappropriate, however, since such correspondence often took place because one or other of the scholars lived in a different city, for example.

One route to holding religious prestige, and often to greater independence, taken by some women in Islamic history, was within *Ṣufism* (Ahmed 1992: 98). As noted above, a few women in Damascus, and other cities, established *ribāṭs* – *ṣūfī* lodges – for women where they sometimes held roles as instructors.⁵ As Kalmbach points out, “the nature of Sufi knowledge, and the ways in which it

⁴ Kalmbach astutely points out that one of the reasons why levels of women’s religious authority remained relatively limited was that while a large proportion of women were educated in *ḥadīth* and the basics of other Islamic sciences, the main purpose of this education was “to spread Islamic practice, not to create female scholars” (Kalmbach 2008: 43).

⁵ Berkey writes that “an introduction into Islamic mysticism was by no means synonymous with education in the religious and legal sciences, but neither were the two worlds entirely separate, and as we have seen both the institutions and the personalities involved in each sphere tended to overlap” (Berkey 1992: 174-175).

could be obtained, differed significantly from the legal, text-based system of the ulema” (Kalmbach 2008: 43); this meant that would could access a level of religious authority outside of the religious educational institutions where official posts were not open to them.

Furthermore, there is evidence that *ṣūfī* women were more able to take part in the religious life of their community, since they seem to have been freer to mingle with unrelated men, as Roded describes:

In the stories about *ṣūfī* women, men who are not family members regularly visit women in their homes, approach them in various places, and discuss spiritual matters with them. Similarly, the women visit men’s houses, sit in the company of men, and voice their inner feelings. Moreover, women participate in the meetings of *ṣūfīs* devoted to the remembrance of God (*majālis al-dhikr*) and convene similar mystic sessions in their homes that are attended by men. (Roded 1994: 100)

As noted in the introduction, while analysis of the phenomenon of women’s participation in the religious life of Damascus and other cities in the region from a ‘feminist’ perspective – that is, understanding women’s actions in this sphere as seeking to gain ‘autonomy’ or to subvert a male-dominated structure of domination – it is interesting to look briefly at a few points concerning the derivation of social power and the influence a learned woman could gain.

Hallaq, a legal scholar writes that “moral, religious, epistemic and other types of socially based powers operated with equal efficiency [to power inferred from material, economic and political structures] but have received, in current scholarship, next to marginal attention” (Hallaq 2009: 184). The kind of ‘power’ held by women (and men) trained in the Islamic sciences, especially those not of a high socio-economic group can be classed as the former type. Hallaq (*ibid.* 186) notes that some Muslim women, for example those “who dedicated their lives as *shaykhāt* of *Ṣūfī* female *khānqāhs*” could find that their “worship, *dhikr*, and leading a pious and charity-dedicated way of life” “could bestow on them enough socio-religious prestige as to make them exemplary and influential leaders in their communities – and not just among the women (Roded 1994: 109).⁶ The success of some women as transmitters of Prophetic tradition (that is, their reputation as narrators), Sayeed argues, could be determined by their “achievements of these women as ascetics” (Sayeed 2005: 111), see also (Roded 1994: 85). This has been termed “charismatic authority”, which “has been (and is) much more readily available to women than scholarly or traditional authority” (Kalmbach 2008: 41). Female *ṣūfī*’s, Kalmbach notes, “have long based their activities on a type of charisma, *Baraka*, that is based on a reputation of piety (including but not limited to piety obtained through formal learning) and (often) family connections” (*ibid.*).

Power, then, could be derived from the “epistemic field” (Hallaq 2009: 186), such that a woman’s erudition may give her a form of social power, even disconnected from upper-class wealth.⁷ Similarly, Roded states that “spiritual excellence”, both “in the *ṣūfī* environment” and in “the transmission of learning” can convey a considerable amount of power (Roded 1994: 109). As discussed above, an indication of the potential power of a person with great religious knowledge is found in the exclusion of women from official positions in religious institutions, which has generally been interpreted by researchers as a social barrier to prevent women from having authority over men (Berkey 1992: 180-181).

A section from Roded’s work is useful in summing up the preceding discussion:

The recognition of women as transmitters of knowledge and as scholars depended on their contact with men, the reliability accorded

⁶ *Ṣūfī* women were noted as having “regularly mingled with men not only in the early Islamic period but at least as late as the ninth/fifteenth century” (Roded 1994: 138).

⁷ In addition, though financial benefits were not the aim of such women, their investment in learning “often intersected with financial and other material terrains that benefited women” – such as a good marriage, for example.

their memory, and the need for the information they possessed. These three requirements were clearly inherent in the structure of Islam from its beginnings. But knowledge implied authority, and religious authority could easily spill over to social, political, and economic spheres. At the interface of religion and the state, women's authority seems to have been limited. Religious activities that focused on the individual rather than on society or the state – such as mysticism – provided women with another avenue by which to impress the biographers with their achievements. (Roded 1994: 84-85)

Women of the Companion generation

The most prominent women of Islamic history are women Companions of the Prophet (Roded 1994: 12), (Nadwi 2007: 249).⁸ According to Roded's research, "nearly 1000 women Companions of the Prophet are recorded as transmitting pieces of information from or about the Prophet in the biographical collections devoted to the *sahaba*", and "the *Sahihs* of Bukhari and Muslim comprise traditions related by 11 percent female Companions" (Roded 1994: 65). In addition, "the legists and *ḥadīth* scholars seem to have weighed the reliability of traditions without regard to the gender of their first transmitters", and "the archetype of female transmitters is Aisha, the favored wife of the Prophet" (Roded 1994: 66, 78, respectively).

Below is some information on just a few of the Companions of the Prophet, some of whom lived or spent time in Damascus:

Name	Biographical information, details of activities, etc.
'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr, the youngest wife of the Prophet Muhammad	Roded writes that "Aisha is the most prominent female transmitter among the Companions" (Roded 1994: 29). Indeed, many traditions have their roots in 'Ā'isha's narrations. 'Ā'isha taught in her own house, as well as in the houses of others in Basrah (Nadwi 2007: 177). She narrated 2210 <i>ḥadīths</i> (ibid. 248). See (Spellberg 1993) for an entire book devoted to Aisha. [See also another entry for 'Ā'isha later]
Umm Salamah	She narrated 378 <i>ḥadīths</i> , and was a very important figure among the Companions (Nadwi 2007: 248).
Other wives of the Prophet Muhammad	Muhammad's other wives "were also consulted and were cited as the sources of traditions, though none was as prominent and prolific as 'Aisha" (Ahmed 1992: 60). Roded mentions that most of the female transmitters of the generation after the Companions transmitted them from wives of the Prophet (1994: 73).
Zaynab bint Abī Salāmah (d. 73/74)	She is credited with 21 <i>ḥadīth</i> , and is related to prominent female Companions (Sayeed 2005: 115).
Umm al-Dardā' Khayra bint Abī Hadrād (d. 81)	She was a famous Ansari companion of the Prophet. She died in Syria during the caliphate of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr described her as being virtuous, intelligent, and possessing good judgment, in addition to her having great piety. A large group of successors transmitted <i>ḥadīths</i> on her authority.

⁸ There is currently a whole academic debate regarding the way in which Muslims throughout Islamic history have regarded, and written about, the female Companions, particularly 'Ā'isha, and what they represent to Muslims now.

	<p>(Fadel 1997: 204, n.45)</p> <p>She was “one of the three most prominent and acclaimed women transmitters of the early period”, despite not being related to any of the wives of the Prophet. She is credited with 23 ḥadīth. (Sayeed 2005: 111)</p> <p>She is “well known for teaching in the mosques of Damascus and Jerusalem. Her classes were attended by male and female jurists and traditionists” and “even the caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān was a regular participant” (Nadwi 2007: 179). She was praised “for her juristic knowledge and intelligence and for her devotion to worship”. Ibn Kathīr said of her that ““She was a <i>tābi‘iyya</i>, devout, scholar, and jurist. Men studied with her and learnt <i>fiqh</i> from her in her teaching places on the north side of the [Umayyad] Mosque” (ibid. 249). She also ḥadīth and fiqh in her house (ibid. 266).</p>
Umm ‘Atiyya Nusayba bint al-Harith	She was also an Ansari companion of the Prophet, and “several of her hadiths have been included in the works of al-Bukhari and Muslim” (Fadel 1997: 204, n.46).
Ṣafiyyah bint Shaybah (d. end of 90s)	She is credited with 34 ḥadīth (Sayeed 2005: 115).
‘Amra b. ‘Abd al-Rahman (d.98)	She was “among the more prolific Successors”, a niece of ‘Ā’isha. (Sayeed 2005: 111). She narrated a large number of ḥadīths, having grown up in the house of ‘Ā’isha (Nadwi 2007: 248)..
Mu‘ādhah bint ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Adawiyyah (d. 100)	She was “one of the three most prominent and acclaimed women transmitters of the early period”, despite not being related to any of the wives of the Prophet. She is credited with 14 ḥadīth (Sayeed 2005: 111).
‘Ā’ishah bint Ṭalḥah (d. ca.101)	She was “among the more prolific Successors”, a niece of ‘Ā’isha. She is credited with 13 ḥadīth (Sayeed 2005: 111).
Ḥafṣah bint Sīrīn (d. ca. 101)	She was “one of the three most prominent and acclaimed women transmitters of the early period”, despite not being related to any of the wives of the Prophet (Sayeed 2005: 111).
Salāma al-Fazāriyya	Transmitter of ḥadīth in Kufa (Hambly 1998: 8, based on Goldziher’s work).
‘Ābida al-Madaniyya, and her granddaughter, ‘Abda bint Bishr	These two women were also notable transmitters of Prophetic traditions (Hambly 1998: 8, based on Goldziher’s work).
Karīma bint Aḥmad of Marv	She was “a source for Bukhārī’s <i>Ṣaḥīḥ</i> ” – a major collection of ḥadīth. (Hambly 1998: 8, based on Goldziher’s work)

Women of the Successor Generation

After the Companions, “the numbers and proportions of female transmitters drop dramatically in the second generation”, such that in one compilation of biographies of trustworthy transmitters, 16.5 percent of them among the Companions are women, compared to only 1.9 percent among the Successors (Roded 1994: 66, 46 respectively).

Roded notes, though, that “although there were far fewer female Successors recorded than female Companions, the Successors include women who were regarded as religious models as well as others who were engaged in worldly endeavours” (Roded 1994: 12).

Also, Nadwi reminds us that we should “differentiate between receiving ‘the knowledge’ and transmitting it”. Although in this period (3rd to 5th century AH) the number of female *transmitters* seems to drop dramatically, women continued to study ḥadīth (Nadwi 2007: 250). However, the major difference between the first and the second period is that in the second period there was more emphasis on “travelling between different teachers and different towns, and collecting the ḥadīth of every major centre of learning centre in the Islamic world”. While some women did travel for knowledge, women’s “ḥadīth were mostly acquired from their family and the scholars in the near locality” (Nadwi 2007: 252).

Some of the women mentioned in the next table are of the Successor generation – i.e. of the 1st or 2nd centuries of Islam.

Women’s roles as teachers and leaders in Damascus

The table below gives information about learned women who held roles as transmitters of ḥadīth (*muḥaddithāt*), teachers, and ṣūfī shaykhas:

Name and dates	Biographical information, details of activities
al-Awzā’ī (d. 157)	She is one of the “second century scholars identified with exacting standards in the study and critical evaluation of <i>ḥadīth</i> ”. (Sayeed 2005: 207)
Āminah bint Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ṬĀhir ibn al-Rār al-Dimashqiyyah (d. 595)	She studied ḥadīth with her grandfather. She later endowed a <i>ribāṭ</i> in Damascus and taught ḥadīth (Nadwi 2007: 258).
Fāṭima bint Sa’d al-Khayr (d. 600)	She was a student of Fāṭima bint ‘Abdillāh al-Jūzdāniyyah (d. 524), who lived in Isfahan and is “considered one of the most outstanding figures in the whole history of ḥadīth”. She then “diffused ḥadīth in Damascus and then in Cairo” (Nadwi 2007: 258).
Umm al-Fityān Ḥantamah bint al-Shaykh Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Mufarrij ibn ‘Alī ibn Maslamah (d. ca. 630)	She held classes in her house for women to study Islamic texts and ḥadīth. One of her students was Khātūn bint ‘Abdillāh. (Nadwi 2007: 78)
Zaynab bint Mekkī al-Ḥarrānī (d. 688)	She taught at the Madrasah al-Mismāriyyah in Damascus. (Nadwi 2007: 83)
Sitt al-Wuzarā’ bint ‘Umar bin al-Manja, from Damascus (1226–1316)	Sitt al-Wuzarā’ is an example of a <i>muḥadditha</i> who travelled across the region as a result of her reputation. She was originally from Damascus, but was invited to go to Egypt to teach there (Abou-Bakr 2003: 319).
Fāṭimah bint ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān	She was the wife of the caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. She was an active ḥadīth narrator in Damascus at the end of the first century (Nadwi 2007: 267).
Regarding the following 2 entries: Sayeed writes that both of these women “are archetypes rather than anomalies in the world of Mamluk female education and <i>ḥadīth</i> transmission” (Sayeed 2002). ⁹	

⁹ A large amount of detailed information is included in Sayeed’s 2002 article; it may be worth you reading (see note at the top of bibliography at the end of this report).

<p>Zaynab bint al-Kamāl (646-740/1248-1339)</p>	<p>Zaynab bint al-Kamāl ... elicits curiosity for the numerous <i>ijāzahs</i> she accumulated. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī reports that at the time of her death, she possessed a camel load of <i>ijāzahs</i>. Aside from this anecdote, her biographers offer only a few details of her educational career. Nevertheless, these biographical sources can be combined with records of archival evidence to produce a more nuanced portrait of Zaynab’s activities. Zaynab’s <i>nisba</i>, “al-Maqdisiyyah,” links her to a prominent community of Ḥanbalīs and evokes the traditionalist milieu in which she flourished. The Maqādisah were a prominent, scholarly group of Ḥanbalī Palestinian emigrants, fleeing from Crusaders, who had settled in Damascus and its environs in the twelfth century.⁸¹ Boosted by the patronage of the Zangid sultan Nūr al-Dīn (r.541-69) and his successors, the Ayyubids (569-647), the Maqādisah are credited with the promotion of traditionalist orthodoxy in the area of Damascus. In particular, the Banū Qudāmāh clan of this community was at the forefront of the effort to disseminate Ḥanbalism, the epitome of traditionalism in the classical period. They were particularly active in the Damascene suburb of al-Ṣālihiyyah, the residence of Zaynab bint al-Kamāl. (Sayeed 2005: 253-254)</p> <p>Nadwi says of her that she “outdid men and women alike in the sheer abundance of her teaching of both major books and small <i>ajzā</i>” (Nadwi 2007: 267).</p>
<p>‘Ā’isha, daughter of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (b. 1323, d. 1414/816)</p>	<p>In Damascus, at the age of 4 she was brought before Abū ‘l-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Ḥajjār (a well-known muḥaddith, d. 730 AH, who was 103 at the time), from whom she heard two popular collections of ḥadīth, before going on to study other important collections of traditions during her lifetime. ‘Ā’isha “collected <i>ijāzas</i> from scholars in Aleppo, Hama, Nablus, and Hebron, and became herself one from the <i>raḥḥāla</i>”. Her fame spread, and she was “eagerly sought out”, partly because she was the last person alive (in her old age) to have transmitted from al-Ḥajjār – and therefore the only trusted authority on the works transmitted to her through him. Al-Sakhawī also cites her as having been the teacher of at least 35 women.</p> <p>Ibn al-‘Imād (a 17th-century historian) gave her the epithet “muḥadditha of Damascus”.</p> <p>(Berkey 1992: 177-178), see also (Abou-Bakr 2003: 320)) and (Roded 1994: 74).</p> <p>Nadwi mentions that she was “the one who narrated the whole <i>Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī</i> with the highest <i>isnād</i> among men or women”</p>

	(Nadwi 2007: 267). See also (Sayeed 2002).
Khadija al-Dimashqiyya (d. 1400-1401, at the age of almost 90)	Khadija also held prestige, having been the last to transmit ḥadīth on the authority of al-Qāsim b. Muẓaffar Ibn ‘Asākir (a prominent Syrian traditionist, d. 1323). (Berkey 1992: 179) ¹⁰
Sārah, daughter of Muḥammad bin ‘Alī bin Yūsuf (d. 1457)	Al-Sakhawi mentions her as being one of “the distinguished leaders among the women of her time in mind, religion, and nobility of descent.” From al-Sakhawi: 53, in (Abou-Bakr 2003: 318).
Sitt al-Quḍāt bint Abī Bakr Ibn Zurayq (d. 1459 or 1460)	Al-Sakhāwī mentions that he heard a recitation from her, in the company of her granddaughter and her brothers in Damascus (Berkey 1992: 171).
Khadijah bint Abī Bakr ibn Salmān al-Wā‘iz al-Ḥamawī	She studied in a ribāṭ in Damascus in 610. (Nadwi 2007: 76)
Umm al-‘Abbās Lubābah bint Yaḥyā ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Yūsuf al-Kharrāz	She was of the Successor generation. She related her ḥadīths to a male travelling scholar from Baghdād, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, for example (Nadwi 2007: 253).

Below are some examples of the schools and mosques in Damascus in which women attended classes, studied with shaykhs and shaykhas, or taught:¹¹

- Women studied in their homes and in the homes of their teachers, including in the homes of male teachers (Nadwi 2007: 77).
- Ribāṭ Qalanīsī. This was “perhaps the most important” ribāṭ; “ḥadīth classes were held regularly and well attended by both men and women” (Nadwi 2007: 76).
- “One of the famous mosques where women regularly attended ḥadīth classes was Jāmi‘ al-Muẓaffarī in Ṣāliḥiyyah¹² in Qāsyūn. The building of the mosque started in 598” (Nadwi 2007: 77).
- “Another important mosque where women attended ḥadīth classes was the Jāmi‘ of Bayt al-Abbar”. For example, Ruqayyah bint Dāwūd ibn ‘Umar ibn Yūsūf ibn Yaḥyā al-Shāfi‘ī studied there in a class of 22 students (ibid. 82).
- Women also attended ḥadīth classes in large numbers at al-Madrasah al-‘Umariyyah, which was founded by Shaykh Abū ‘Umar al-Maqdisī in 557 in the Ṣāliḥiyya area of Damascus (ibid.).
- Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyyah where women attended classes in large numbers. This was “perhaps the most important centre in Damascus for learning ḥadīth” in the 6th century (ibid. 83).

¹⁰ Berkey also notes that both Khadija and ‘Ā’isha had “*mashyakhas*” (“lists of those on whose authority they transmitted ḥadīth”) composed for them, which he reports indicates that “women studied traditions not only as a pious activity, but so as to participate actively in the transmission of this important field of Muslim intellectual endeavor” (Berkey 1992: 179).

¹¹ Nadwi reports that in the early period of Islam ḥadīth classes might be held in shops whose owners were scholars of ḥadīth/interested in ḥadīth, or in gardens and orchards, also (Nadwi 2007: 76).

¹² This area was a major centre for Islamic education.

- Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Nūriyyah, where the shaykhah Umm Muḥammad Āminah bint al-Imām al-Zāhid Taqī al-Dīn Abī Ishāq Ibrāhīm ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Faḍl al-Wāstīyyah studied in 724 (ibid.).
- Al-Madrasah al-Mismāriyyah (ibid.).
- Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Diyā‘iyyah (ibid. 84).
- Classes were also held in the Umayyad Mosque, in *ribāṭs* and in gardens (ibid. 267).

The table below gives some information on a number of women from the region, not specifically Damascus:

Name	Biographical information, details of activities
Karima d. Ahmad al-Marwaziyya	She lived to be 100 and died in Mecca in the middle of the 5 th /11 th century. She “was the foremost authority on the text of Bukhari because of the excellence of her source. She never married and was accompanied by her father on her travels”(Roded 1994: 67).
Shuhda d. Abu Nasr Ahmad al-Ibari (d. 574/1178)	She “was ranked among the best scholars of the age” and she “taught Bukhari and other works she received from the highest authorities to large numbers of students” (Roded 1994: 67).
Shams, Mother of the Poor	She taught ḥadīth, and Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240) studied under her (Ahmed 1992: 99).
Nunah Fāṭima bint al-Muthanna	She taught ḥadīth, and Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240) studied under her (Ahmed 1992: 99).
Hajar (b. 1388)	“Al-Sakhawi says she was among the foremost ḥadīth scholars of her time, and students crowded to hear her” – though al-Sakhawi did not study her with her, because she did not wear the veil when she taught (other male scholars did, however) (Ahmed 1992: 113).
Bay Khatun (d. 1391)	She taught ḥadīth in Egypt and Syria, and her “teachers included distinguished male as well as female scholars” (Ahmed 1992: 114).
Umm Zaynab Fāṭima bint al-‘Abbās (d. 1394)	She headed a <i>ribāṭ</i> , which had been established in 1285 by Princess Tadhkaray. “A woman of great learning, she influenced, inspired, and benefited many women in Cairo and Damascus” (Ahmed 1992: 110).
Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīyya (d. 801)	Born in Basra, she was a ṣūfī saint and ascetic. She is an extremely well-known figure, and Kalmbach asserts that “the ability of women to assert religious authority on the strength of <i>baraka</i> dates back at least to the (often romanticised) life of Rabi‘a al-‘Adawīyya, an eighth-century Syrian mystic” (Kalmbach 2008: 41-42). Ahmad says that the narratives about her “exemplify distinctly countercultural elements with respect to ideas about gender”. “As a mystic, Rabi‘a’s major contribution was her emphasis on the centrality of the love of God to mystical experience” (Ahmed 1992: 96-98).
Umm Hanī (d. 1466)	“Al-Sakhawi reports that she knew ḥadīth and fiqh and was one of the distinguished scholars of her day” (Ahmed 1992: 113).
Bayram	Al-Sakhawi reports that “her father studied the Quran and mingled

with the learned and that she grew up sharing in this”, and that “her father also took her to Jerusalem; she “recited to the sheikhs there, and taught women of what she had studied”” (apparently before marrying, when “her life changed”) (Ahmed 1992: 113).

The question of whether women could act as judges was decided upon differently by different scholars and judges at different times.¹³ Roded found that “outstanding women among the Companions and Successors did in fact make judgments, but [she] found no woman who served as a qadi” (Roded 1994: 80).¹⁴ Fadel records, however, that “there was complete agreement among Sunni jurists that women could be muftis” (Fadel 1997: 200).

I came across records of a small number of women who were legal experts in some way, including a few in Damascus. The table below gives some information on some of them:

Name	Biographical information, details of activities
‘Ā’isha bint Abī Bakr, youngest wife of the Prophet Mohamed	<p>She made independent judgments in legal matters (Roded 1994: 81) – she was “consulted on his [Muhammad’s] <i>sunna</i> ... and gave decision on sacred laws and customs” (Ahmed 1992: 60).</p> <p>She was not only an important transmitter of religious doctrine, she was also recognized as an independent legal authority by both her contemporaries and succeeding generations of Muslim religious scholars. She practiced this freedom as an interpreter of the law to issue legal opinions on controversial legal matters. Often, later jurists would bolster their positions with her opinions. The fact that ‘Ā’isha was a wife of the Prophet gave her privileged status as a transmitter of religious doctrine. <i>It was her own qualities as an individual, however, that afforded her the authority to interpret law</i> (Fadel 1997: 190-191, emphasis added)</p>
‘Amra d. ‘Abd al-Rahman Hafsa d. Sirin ...and other women of the 2 nd and 3 rd generations	<p>These women were also described as having made independent judgements in legal matters.</p> <p>‘Amra in particular is mentioned as an <i>‘ālima</i> and a respected authority. Moreover, Roded says, “the legitimacy of her authority on such matters [criminal, for example] seems to conflict with the view of traditional Muslim legists, who precluded women from giving evidence in matters of retaliation and punishment” (Roded 1994: 81, and 48-49).</p>
Umm Isa d. Ibrahim (d. 328/939)	She “rendered legal judgments” in Baghdad (Roded 1994: 81).
Amat al-Wahid (d. 377/987)	She was “the daughter of the judge Abu ‘Abdallah al-Husayn al-Muhamili” and “studied with her father and other teachers”. “After committing the Quran to memory, she devoted herself to the study

¹³ Fadel, for example, writes that “the Hanafi legal school allowed women to serve as judges for all cases admitting female testimony. Al-Tabari (d. 923), meanwhile, permitted women to be judges in all areas of the law, arguing that if their fatwas were legitimate in all areas of the law, then a fortiori their rulings as judges must also be valid” (Fadel 1997: 196).

¹⁴ Furthermore, she later notes that in later centuries “the fact that women of the first and second Islamic generations had made independent legal judgments was either forgotten or ignored” (Roded 1994: 84).

	of jurisprudence according to the <i>shafi'i</i> school and the complex rules of inheritance and the calculation of heirs' portions. She issued legal decisions along with a male jurisconsult" (Roded 1994: 81).
Fatima of Samarqand	She lived in Aleppo in the 6 th /12 th century, and, according to Roded (Roded 1994: 81), her biography illustrates "the power a woman with legal knowledge obtained". For example, "she married her father's student, who was noted for his treatise on legal innovations" but "nevertheless, the biographer tells us that Fatima's proficiency in law was such that when her husband prepared legal opinions, she would correct his errors, and he deferred to her judgment."
Umm al-Baqa' Khadija d. al-Hasan (d. 641/1243)	She was from Damascus, and "was an ascetic who devoted herself to law" (Roded 1994: 81).
Umm Zaynab Fatima d. 'Abbas (d. 714/1314)	She came from Baghdad and "was a mystic poet and preacher who thoroughly understood Islamic law" and "preached to women in Damascus and Cairo and devoted herself to the study of law". Roded says that her "prominence appears to have resulted primarily from her preaching activities, and her proficiency in law was emphasized to distinguish her from popular preachers, who were considered ignorant and were accused of leading the Muslims astray" (Roded 1994: 81-82).
Aisha al-Ba'undiyya d. Yusuf (d. 922/1516)	A Damascene <i>sūfi</i> shaykha, she was the "author of several books dealing with mysticism" and "was brought to Cairo where she was authorized to give legal opinions and to teach". Roded's research shows that "the biographers do not comment on this exceptional phenomenon of a woman who was granted the right to give legal opinions but dwell on her writings, pious sayings, and contacts with men of power" (Roded 1994: 83).
Khadija d. Muhammad al-Bayluni (d. 930/1523)	She was a <i>ḥanafī</i> legal scholar from Aleppo (Roded 1994: 83).
Zubayda d. As'ad (d. 1194/1780)	This woman represents the latest evidence of woman with legal knowledge. She was the daughter and sister of chief jurisconsults of the Ottoman Empire, as well as being a poet, who wrote in Persian and Turkish, and whose verses "gained celebrity among the ruling classes and the people". The Syrian biographer al-Muradi noted that she "read the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, language and literature". (Roded 1994: 83-84)

Women's roles as contributors to the waqf¹⁵ in Damascus

Humbly writes that

one area of women's activity which has recently attracted attention is the promotion and funding of building construction of all kinds, as well as the commemoration of individual women with mausolea. Both contradict the notion of the invisibility of women with indubitably evidence that women were lavish patrons of architecture, and therefore agents in the spatial organization of urban centers, along with the implication that some women were sufficiently esteemed to warrant commemoration after their deaths. (Hambly 1998: 18)

¹⁵ See definition in glossary at the beginning of this report.

The system of dedicating property and funds to *waqf* constituted “one of the most powerful economies in Muslim lands, ... which, by the dawn of colonialism, constituted 40-60 percent of all real property” (Hallaq 2009: 194). While few of the largest endowments were founded by women, “many of the founders of medium-size and smaller *waqfs* were women” (ibid.).

Roded’s research has shown that from the 16th to the 20th century “the percentage of women among founders of *waqf* endowments ranges from 17 percent to 50 percent, with a tentative mean of about 35 percent” (Roded 1994: 136). Another figure for endowments founded by women is that “by the eighteenth century, women constituted 40-50 percent of *waqf* founders in Aleppo, and according to one estimate, about 25 percent of those of Cairo in the same period ... In some cities, a significant number, and at times more than half, of endowments established by women were public, dedicated to religious and educational purposes or to caring for and feeding the poor” (as opposed to family *waqfs* primarily for the benefit of the founder’s family and descendents) (Hallaq 2009: 194).

Most of the material on women’s contributions to the *waqf* included in this report comes from an article by Humphreys (‘Women as Patrons of Religious Architecture in Ayyubid Damascus’), in which he notes that “it was Damascus, during the eighty-five years between Saladin’s entry into the city in 1174 and the Mongol occupation of 1260, which witnessed the most intense and sustained patronage of religious architecture by women” (Humphreys 1994: 35).

During this time, women particularly supported madrasas and *ṣūfī* hospices, which, Humphreys states, “were the key religious institutions” of the 12th and 13th centuries (Humphreys 1994: 35).¹⁶ This, he points out, means that “women had a significant voice in defining the character of Islam in Ayyubid Damascus” (Humphreys 1994: 36). Of the 26 institutions Humphreys studied, 15 were madrasas, which, he points out, shows “remarkable” commitment “to this central educational institution of Sunni Islam” (Humphreys 1994: 37).¹⁷ The other institutions sponsored by women were: 6 *khanqahs* and *ribats*; and 5 monumental tombs (*turbas*). Overall, despite some small differences (such as their concentration on madrasas and *ṣūfī* hospices) Humphreys finds that “the institutions favored by women do not differ in any obvious way from those sponsored by men” (Humphreys 1994: 37).¹⁸

Who were these women? Humphreys points out that “we have to recognize that not all women could claim such a voice” and that “only a very small number were in a position to do so” – indeed, only ‘elite’ women could be patrons of such projects. He found that: a majority (13 out of the 21 women in his study) were members of the Ayyubid house (either by birth or by marriage); 4 women were daughters of *amīrs* – connected to the “powerful military caste of the Ayyubid confederation”¹⁹; 1 was a servant in an Ayyubid princely household; 1 was the daughter of a courtier at an Ayyubid princely household; 2 were the daughters of ‘*ulamā*’ (Humphreys 1994: 36). Humphreys points to the significance of the contributions of these women, saying that without their activities “the ruling family would have had rather a modest impact on the religious infrastructure of Damascus” (Humphreys 1994: 36).²⁰ His study also considers why so few women from military and scholarly families endowed religious and charitable institutions and buildings during this period.

¹⁶ Humphreys found that 14% of persons who “who underwrote the building of religious and charitable institutions” were women (21 out of 147), but women made up 40% of patrons of madrasas and *ṣūfī* hospices. Another type of building concentrated on by women was mausoleums (Humphreys 1994: 36).

¹⁷ Further, Humphreys remarks that this means that “it hardly seems possible to imagine that they felt excluded or alienated from the “official” Islam of their era” – though we should remember that we are talking about a very small number of women from certain backgrounds.

¹⁸ Later, he says, however, that “we must not oversimplify”; “women’s patronage in Ayyubid Damascus was not quite the same as men’s” (Humphreys 1994: 48).

¹⁹ What is interesting about these 4 women is that their names are not known through their fathers, brothers or husbands. Rather, the names of the latter are only known due to the activities of the daughters (Humphreys 1994: 36).

²⁰ While the other women, of lesser status, “were in no position to endow educational complexes on a grand scale,” their “foundations left a clearly visible mark on the city’s religious topography” – they left 9 of the 26 institutions included in Humphreys’ study (Humphreys 1994: 37).

However, for our purpose, the important point here is that the women who *did* engage in such activities were predominantly from the ruling family.²¹

As stated above, the *waqf* economy was one of the most powerful economies in the Islamic world. This fact makes it imperative to question the purely ‘religious’ or ‘pious’ nature of a person’s desire to establish a *waqf*: this is not to say that religious institutions perhaps established for more pragmatic, mundane reasons did not benefit many people, including the poor and students of Islam, but it must influence our understanding of the establishment of such fund and institutions, particularly by women. As an example of a more mundane justification for the establishment of *waqfs*, there was a theory that “the juridical instrument of *waqf* was used to deprive females of their entitlements to inheritance”. This no longer stands, “for it appears, to the contrary, that the *waqf* was more often used as a means to avoid the laws of inheritance to accomplish the opposite effect: not only to allocate bigger shares for female heirs than what they would have inherited by Quranic rules, but also to create a sort of matrilineal system of property devolution” (Hallaq 2009: 194-195), but it does highlight reasons other than piety for the growth of the *waqf* economy. Both Petry and Humphreys’ work (on the *waqf* in Mamluk Cairo and Ayyubid Damascus, respectively) seeks to explain the establishment of large numbers of religious institutions as *waqfs*. Both scholars find that particular circumstances of the time often lead people who could afford to do so to establish *waqfs* as a way to ensure that property remained in the possession of their descendents, or to evade taxes, and so on.

In his analysis of *waqf* endowments, however, Petry also states that “we must not discount desire to contribute, and thereby to seek God’s favor” as a major component in a person’s endowment of *waqf* (Petry 1983: 193).

Humphreys’ work suggests that the tradition of women’s patronage of religious architecture and institutions of learning dates from 1110-11, when Safwat al-Mulk ordered the construction of a mausoleum in Damascus, and, by inference, that there seems to be no evidence of women having any such role prior to that date. Many of the names in the table below are drawn from his research, in which he looks at 21 women who endowed a total of 26 institutions between them, and therefore come from the period 1174 – 1260, which he describes as a period in which there were “an exceptionally high number of women patrons in this one medium-sized city during a single century” (Humphreys 1994: 48).

The data provided by Humphreys’ study gives us information for the period from the beginning of the 6th century to the mid-7th century of Islam. Regarding later centuries, in Berkey’s chapter on women and education in medieval Cairo he mentions that “according to a sixteenth-century history of Damascene madrasas, the Syrian capital boasted even more” religious schools and other institutions endowed by women than Cairo (Berkey 1992: 164).

Name	Endowment, biographical details, etc.
Safwat al-Mulk	Qubbat al-Tawāwīs (mausoleum), Damascus Seljuk era (1110-11) (Humphreys 1994: 35).
Khutlu-Khayr bint Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abdullah (from the House of Ayyub)	She endowed a madrasa in the name of one of her sons, Farrūkshāh; “a not atypical act of piety.” An earlier scholar, Sauvaget, had the following to say about it: The madrasa cited by our sources is [thus] no specialized building, expressly constructed for purposes of instruction, but only <i>an institution</i> sheltered by the

²¹ “With the Ayyubids *as with other dynasties*, only women from the ruling family, or closely connected with it, possessed the wealth, status, and prestige to attempt a major role on the public stage.” (Humphreys 1994: 49, emphasis added.)

	<p>founder's tomb. What constitutes it is essentially a waqf whose revenues served to pay a professor, around whom a few students grouped themselves in a corner of the funerary chamber.</p> <p>Wife of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's eldest brother Shāhanshāh b. Ayyub (d. 1148 AD). She was also, at some stage, wife of a commander-in-chief, Mubārak b. 'Abdullah. She had several sons from both marriages. Besides this, very little is known about her (Humphreys 1994: 42).</p>
Dayfa Khātūn	<p>Madrasat al-Firdaws</p> <p>According to Humphreys, this was "beyond dispute the most impressive madrasa built by any Ayyubid ruler in Syria" and "the single madrasa in Aleppo during the Zangid-Ayyubid era to be founded by a woman (out of more than fifty madrasas in the city dating from those 133 years)" (Humphreys 1994: 35).</p>
'Ismat al-Dīn Khātūn bint Mu'īn al-Dīn Ōmör (from the House of Ayyub)	<p>This woman played a significant role as a patron of religious architecture and "left a distinct mark on the city's religious architecture". She had 4 institutions constructed: a Ḥanafī madrasa; a <i>khānqāh</i>; a mausoleum for her father; and her own mausoleum.</p> <p>The madrasa may have begun operating in 537 AH/1177-78, but the dates are unclear. It is possible that the madrasa was in fact endowed by her brother, or that he acted on her behalf ("as her agent"). Humphreys concludes his study of her patronage of religious architecture with the following: "Here, as so often, an apparently simple act of patronage must have been in reality a complex family affair, the nature of which is now beyond our grasp."</p> <p>'Ismat al-Dīn was daughter of the dictator Mu'īn al-Dīn Ōnör (d. 1149), then married to Nūr al-Dīn in Aleppo in 1147, and later married to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in 1174. She was therefore a politically prominent woman (Humphreys 1994: 42-43).</p>
Fāṭima bint Sunqur al-Tughtakini (d. 606 AH/1210 AD)	<p>Small, humble <i>turba</i> (mausoleum) with a <i>masjid</i> (including a <i>mihrab</i>) inside at the southern boundary of <i>al-Ṣāḥilīyya</i> (as mentioned by the 16th century chronicler, Ibn Tulun). Her father was buried inside.</p> <p>Again, there is little known about this woman except that her father was a soldier and possibly an <i>amīr</i>.</p>
Sitt al-'Irāq bint al-Shuja' (from a military family)	<p>Mausoleum (<i>turba</i>) for her son, in <i>al-Ṣāḥilīyya</i> (616 AH)</p> <p>Very little is known about this woman, except that her father was an <i>amīr</i>, probably in the service of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Her name was mentioned by the 16th century chronicler, Ibn Tulun (Humphreys 1994: 38).</p>
'Ā'isha, the widow of Ibn al-Dammāgh al-'Ādilī (from the court of an Ayyubid household)	<p>Madrasa Dammāghīyya (in 638 AH)</p> <p>This madrasa was endowed for both Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī professors (including eminent figures: chief <i>qāḍī</i> of Damascus, Shams al-Dīn al-Khuwayi, who was Shāfi'ī, and Iftikhar al-Dīn al-Kashghari, who was Ḥanafī).</p> <p>The madrasa had been the house of her husband, which, on his death, appears to have been passed on to her, along with his wealth. She</p>

	<p>converted the house and endowed it with <i>waqfs</i>. She also placed a “sandal of the Prophet” in the madrasa (Humphreys 1994: 38).</p>
<p>‘Adhra’ Khātūn bint Nūr al-Dawla Shāhanshāh (from the House of Ayyub)</p>	<p>Founded 2 institutions: the Madrasa ‘Adhrawiyya, for both Shāfi‘ī’s and Ḥanafīs, and a <i>ribat</i> (just inside Bāb al-Naṣr, south of the Citadel and adjacent to Sūq al-Ḥamīdiyya).</p> <p>‘Adhra’ was one of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s nieces. Her mother was probably Khutlu-Khayr (mentioned above), who, upon ‘Adhra’ Khātūn’s death (apparently in 593 AH – one source suggests she founded it as <i>waqf</i> herself in 580 AH, but this seems less likely), placed the latter’s house in <i>waqf</i> as a madrasa for the Shāfi‘ī’s and Ḥanafīs. ‘Adhra’ was interred in the madrasa named after her.</p> <p>Fakhr al-Dīn ibn ‘Asākir began teaching at the madrasa in 593 AH (Humphreys 1994: 45-46).</p>
<p>Fāṭima bint al-Amīr Gökçe</p>	<p>Madrasa Qassā‘īn, founded in 593 AH/1196-97 AD (there is also another building, a <i>khanqah</i>, Khanqah Qassa‘iyya, the founder of which is unclear).</p> <p>Even less is certain about this woman’s life and background (her name is not even certain, and ‘Fāṭima’ may in fact be two women – the sources are unclear, made especially so by the existence of the second building). In any case, the two religious institutions were in a lower-class, Muslim-dominated, district in the south of the city (not where the major Islamic foundations were, between the Citadel and the Umayyad Mosque) (Humphreys 1994: 39-40).</p>
<p>Sitt al-Shām Zumurrud Khātūn bint Najm al-Dīn al-Ayyūb (from the House of Ayyub) (d. 1220 AD)</p>	<p><i>Khānqāh</i>; funerary madrasa (Shamiyya extra-muros); madrasa (Shamiyya intra-muros)</p> <p>A <i>khānqāh</i>, in <i>al-Ṣāliḥiyya</i>: date uncertain, but it was perhaps built in 1191, in the year of her son Husam al-Dīn’s death – and was known as Ḥusāmīyya after him, having been built in his memory.</p> <p>The funerary madrasa:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">one of the largest and most imposing madrasas, one of the most generously endowed, and possessing among the greatest numbers of scholars of law (<i>fuqahā</i>). (Ibn Shaddad, quoted in Humphreys, 1994: 47)</p> <p>The madrasa was located close to the Citadel. It was also known as ‘Ḥusāmīyya,’ after her son. The madrasa seems to have originally been established in memory of her brother, Turanshah, but also then contained the tomb of her husband, and her son (and later Sitt al-Shām herself).</p> <p>Second madrasa: in the “prestigious religious residential district” near the Nūr al-Dīn hospital. This madrasa was housed in the building she had lived in during her lifetime; before she died (in 1220 AD), she instructed that it should be established as a madrasa, but only when the lineage of her son, Ḥusām al-Dīn, should die out.</p>

	<p>This happened 12 years later, in 1231 AD. In the meantime, then, the house was to benefit her granddaughter, and her children, and so on – but her granddaughter died leaving no children, hence, as Sitt al-Shām had instructed, but had most likely not expected to happen so soon, her house became a madrasa, supported by the income from the <i>waqf</i>, as soon as 1231 AD.²²</p> <p>She was a second sister of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (probably older than Rabī‘a Khātūn). The identity of her husband remains “a complete mystery”, and, as noted above, even her son’s name – in whose memory the first monument she had constructed was – remains ambiguous. It appears he may have been a fairly important officer in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s armies.</p> <p>However, despite this lack of biographical detail, her impact on 13th century Damascus is worthy of note: Humphreys states that “she is the only Ayyubid princess to receive a genuine biographical notice, one that ... tells us something about her own achievements” besides just her genealogical ties to the royal family. Her activities may in part be accounted for by her long (35-year) widowhood which “allowed her a degree of independence she could not easily have enjoyed under a husband’s jealous eye”.</p> <p>Abu Shama wrote of her in 616 AH (quoted in (Humphreys 1994: 47):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">She was the first in rank among the princesses (<i>sayyidat al-khawātīm</i>), intelligent, deeply pious, and greatly devoted to prayer, good works, and alms. Every year thousands of dinars were expended in her residence [<i>dār</i>] on the manufacture of potions, narcotic electuaries, and medicinal plants, and she would distribute these to the people. Her gate was a refuge of seekers and a sanctuary for those who mourn. She provided a generous endowment for the two madrasas, and she received an impressive funeral.</p> <p>(Humphreys 1994: 47-48), see also (Chamberlain 1994)</p>
<p>Ṣāfiyya al-Qal‘īyya (from an ‘ulamā family) (d. 633 AH/1235-36 AD)</p>	<p><i>Ribat</i>, near Madrasa Zahiriyya, in the area between the Citadel and the Umayyad Mosque.</p> <p>“She was the shaykha of this establishment, which indicates that it had been founded for women and that she herself had adopted a life of ascetic piety.”</p> <p>She was the daughter of the Ḥanafī chief <i>qāḍī</i> ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Ata’ (Humphreys 1994: 40).</p>

²² Humphreys notes: “We have here then a classic waqf *ahli*, a family trust, with a generable charitable purpose as ultimate beneficiary ... Sitt al-Sham’s vast wealth, deep piety, and political influence could not prevent the final frustration of her simplest personal hopes...” (Humphreys 1994: 48).

Fāṭima Khātūn bint al-Salar	<p>Endowed: Madrasa Mayturiyya, on the eastern slope of Mount Qassyūn (629 AH/1231-32 AD). This was a madrasa for Ḥanafīs. The first professor was the well-known Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 1237-38).²³</p> <p>Again, this woman’s background is somewhat unclear. However, she was probably “one of the last known descendents of the Seljuqid military aristocracy under whose aegis the architectural renaissance of Damascus had commenced a century earlier” (Humphreys 1994: 39).</p>
Terken Khātūn bint ‘Izz al-Dīn Maṣ‘ūd (from the House of Ayyub, by marriage)	<p>This woman only spent about 13 years in Damascus (between her husband’s (al-Ashraf Mūsā) conquest of the city in 1229 AD and her death in 1242), but in that time she left 2 monuments: a <i>ribat</i> (Ribat bint ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Maṣ‘ūd, exact location unknown) and a funerary madrasa for the Shāfi‘īs in <i>al-Ṣāhiliyya</i>. Humphreys records that “the madrasa and tomb chamber were apparently already constructed but were not formally endowed until her death. This would imply that she, in common with many donors, planned to draw on the incomes of the properties to be endowed until she actually passed from the scene” (Humphreys 1994: 43).</p>
Arghun al-Hāfīzīyya (formerly a servant in an Ayyubid princely household – in the service of al-Hāfīz at Qal‘at Ja‘bar) (d. 1245 AD)	<p>Funerary <i>masjid</i> (where she was interred) in a garden in the suburb of <i>al-Ṣāhiliyya</i>; she also (“as a further act of piety”) made her house in Damascus a <i>waqf</i> for her slaves.</p> <p>This case “demonstrates how a woman of obscure origin, beginning as the household servant of a minor prince, could rise to considerable wealth and property, and thereby could contribute to the distinctive religious topography of Damascus.” Unfortunately it is not clear how she accumulated her wealth (Humphreys 1994: 38).</p>
Rabī‘a Khātūn bint Najm al-Dīn al-Ayyūb (from the House of Ayyub) (probably d. 643 AH/1246 AD)	<p>Madrasat al-Ṣāḥiba for the Ḥanbalī’s (1231 AD – see above, Amat al-Laṭīf, for whose father the madrasa was specifically founded).</p> <p>The madrasa is probably still standing (Humphreys visited it in 1973, when it was being used as a girls’ school).</p> <p>Her choice to endow the madrasa for the Ḥanbalīs is interesting as it is the only royal foundation for this school in this period: perhaps because of Amat al-Laṭīf’s personal influence, though Rabī‘a Khātūn’s husband was also a supporter of the Ḥanbalīs.</p> <p>Rabī‘a Khātūn was the sister of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. She spent more than 40 years away from Damascus, until just before her second husband (Muẓaffar al-Dīn Gökböri) died in 1233.</p> <p>(Humphreys 1994: 46), see also (Chamberlain 1994: 53) and (Sayeed 2002: 74).</p>
‘Azīzat al-Dīn Akhshu Khātūn (from the House of Ayyub – of the family of al-Mu‘azzam ‘Īsā, the longest-ruling and perhaps the most influential of the Ayyubid	<p>Maridiniyya madrasa, endowed in favour of the Ḥanafīs. This was part of a “cluster of princely foundations” for the Ḥanafī madhhab, 6 of which were located in <i>al-Ṣāhiliyya</i>.</p> <p>The dates are unclear, but it may have been founded in 601 AH/1213 AD, though it was not formally constituted as <i>waqf</i> until 624</p>

²³ Humphreys notes that this madrasa is interesting in itself, but is more interesting as “part of a broader religio-political movement of the time the establishment of the ḥanafī madhhab as a major element in Damascene society” (Humphreys 1994: 39).

<p>princes of Damascus, who was invested with the city in 1198 and ruled there until 1227, under the close tutelage of first his father and then the suzerainty of his elder brother)</p>	<p>AH/1227 AD.</p> <p>Interestingly, Humphreys reports that:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Although the Maridiniyya includes a funerary cupola, Akhshu is not buried there. After her husband's death, she went on the hajj to Mecca and then continued to reside there. After the funds she had brought with her were exhausted, she took up the humble profession of water carrier, refusing to accept any income from her <i>awqāf</i> in Damascus, since those monies had been dedicated to God's purposes. Akhshu Khatun's career as a widow makes us want to know a great deal more about her than we do. Had she always been given to such stern piety and self-denial, or was she driven to it by the political crisis following al-Mu'azzam's [her husband] death? ... But in the end we do not know; her actions must be left to speak for themselves. (Humphreys 1994: 43-44)</p>
<p>Amat al-Laṭīf bint Naṣīh al-Dīn al-Ḥanbalī (from an <i>'ulamā</i> family)</p>	<p>A Ḥanbalī <i>shaykha</i>, she prompted Rabī'a Khātūn (sister of Ṣalāh al-Dīn) to build the Madrasat al-Ṣāhibā in al-Ṣāliḥiyya (1231 AD) expressly for the former's father.</p> <p>She left 600 000 dirhams, plus substantial <i>milk</i> and <i>waqf</i> properties when she died (it is not known when). This money was used to endow her Madrasat al-Ālima (Ḥanbalī madrasa and <i>dār al-ḥadīth</i>) in al-Ṣāliḥiyya</p> <p>Daughter of noted Ḥanbalī scholar, Naṣīh al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān (who claimed descent from the Companion Sa'd b. 'Ubāda, and who had come to Damascus during the reign of the first Seljuqid ruler Tutush in the late 11th century).</p> <p>Amat al-Laṭīf was also the "close companion and spiritual advisor" of the sister of Ṣalāh al-Dīn, Rabī'a Khātūn (d. 1246 – see below), for many years, and until the death of the latter (Humphreys 1994: 40-41).²⁴</p>
<p>The three daughters of al-Kāmil Muḥammad (from the House of Ayyub)</p>	<p>The daughters of al-Kāmil Muḥammad, who, two months before he died (22 Rajab 635 AH/10 March 1238), had taken Damascus from his brother and rival al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā'īl, purchased land just north east of the Umayyad Mosque and erected a mausoleum (with a door leading into the north arcade of the mosque).</p> <p>This was a "conventional expression of piety", and it was not odd that the dead man's daughters erected this mausoleum, since this was relatively normal practice among Ayyubid women (Humphreys 1994: 41-42).</p>

²⁴ Humphreys notes that "the case of Amat al-Latif weaves together themes of piety, high politics, and the social status and influence that a few old learned families might achieve" (Humphreys 1994: 41).

<p>The mother of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā‘īl (from the House of Ayyub)</p>	<p>Madrasa Ṣāliḥīyya (near the hospital of Nūr al-Dīn). This madrasa was comprehensive: it provided instruction in Shāfi‘ī <i>fiqh</i>, ḥadīth, and Qur’ānic recitation (<i>iqrā’</i>). The date of establishment is unknown, but it must have been completed by Shawwal 638 AH/April 1241 AD (when its first professor of <i>fiqh</i> died).</p> <p>There is little information about the woman who founded this madrasa – we do not even know her name. But, Humphreys points out, “in spite of her anonymity, she had means and motive to construct and endow a major religious-educational complex, one which was clearly intended to rival the most important foundations of the previous century”.</p> <p>She was buried there, as were three of her grandchildren. Her son might also have been had he not been captured and killed by Mamluk forces (Humphreys 1994: 42).</p>
<p>Khadīja Khātūn bint al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam ‘Isa (from the House of Ayyub, by birth) (probably d. 650)</p>	<p>She founded a funerary madrasa for the Ḥanafīs in al-Ṣāliḥīyya (the last of the ‘al-Mu‘azzam cluster’ of madrasas). This madrasa seems to have been quite well endowed. She was the daughter of al-Mu‘azzam (Humphreys 1994: 44).</p>
<p>‘Ismat al-Dīn Zahra’ Khātūn bint al-Malik al-‘Ādil (from the House of Ayyub)</p>	<p>‘Ādilīyya Sughra madrasa – formally endowed in 656 AH/1258 AD.</p> <p>The madrasa was later transferred to the ownership of Lady Baba Khātūn (the daughter of her father’s paternal uncle), and she</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">formally stipulated that the madrasa should have a professor (<i>mudarris</i>), an assistant (<i>mu‘id</i>), an imam, a muezzin, a gatekeeper, a supervisor (<i>qayyim</i>), and twenty faqihs. And she placed in waqf the aforementioned properties (<i>jihāt</i>), including a part to meet the needs and expenses of the madrasa, and another part for the benefit of [Zahra’ Khatun’s] relatives and freedmen.” (Nu‘aymī, <i>Dāris</i>, 1: 368, quoted in Humphreys, 1994: 45)</p> <p>Humphreys records that “the waqf was to provide for the five prayers and for Qur’an reciters, while the edifice was to be a hospice for Zahra’ Khatun’s eunuchs and freedmen”.</p> <p>It is unclear exactly why the madrasa was ‘transferred’ to Baba Khātūn, or what exactly this meant. Humphreys suggests it may have been because Zahra’ Khātūn may have become “mentally incompetent or otherwise unable to act in her own name.” In any case, he concludes, “even if this hypothetical reconstruction is off the mark, the history of the ‘Adiliyya Sughra points to the very complex operations embodied in the simple term “patronage”.”</p> <p>Zahra’ Khātūn was the daughter of al-‘Ādil I. (Humphreys 1994: 44-45)</p>

Below are a few examples from Cairo.

Name	Endowment, biographical details, etc.
Barakāt, the mother of Sultan al-Ashraf Sha‘bān	Madrasa, established 1369-70, sponsored classes in Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī law (Berkey 1992: 163-4).
A daughter of Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars	Established the <i>ribāṭ</i> al-Baghdādīyya. Berkey (Berkey 1992: 174) writes that “the shaykha who supervised this institution routinely preached to the female residents and instructed them in the science of Islamic jurisprudence, “until such time as they should remarry or return to their husbands” [citing al-Maqrīzī]. Among the women who taught and administered this <i>ribāṭ</i> were some of the most accomplished female scholars of the period. Prominent among them was Fāima bint ‘Abbās al-Baghdādīyya (d. 1314-15), who apparently gave her name (or took it from) the institution. According to her biographer, she was well versed in jurisprudence, to an extent that impressed even the strict Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Taymiyya. At an institution such as the <i>ribāṭ</i> al-Baghdādīyya, the instruction of women may have actually helped to protect and reaffirm those sexual boundaries that a divorced or widowed woman might threaten by her independent status”. In addition, Berkey notes that Fātima al-Baghdādīyya was “somewhat unusual in her acknowledged expertise in Islamic jurisprudence”.
Zaynab, wife of Sultān Īnāl (who reigned 1453-61)	Also established a <i>ribāṭ</i> for widows (Berkey 1992: 173).
Khadīja (d. 1474), daughter of Amir Ḥajj al-Baysarī	Established a <i>ribāṭ</i> for widows (Berkey 1992: 173).
Fāṭima bint Qānibāy al-‘Umarī al-Nāṣirī, wife of the Mamluk soldier Taghrī Birdī al-Mu‘adhdhī	Madrasa, established late 15 th century (Berkey 1992: 164).
Khawand Tatar al-Hijāziyya	Madrasa, in the Bāb al-‘Īd quarter (Petry 1983: 199).
Umm al-Sultān	Madrasa, in the Darb al-Aḥmar-Bāb al-Wazīr district (Petry 1983: 199).
Zawjat Īnāl	Ribāṭ (hospice), in the Khurunfish section (Petry 1983: 199-200).
Khawand Ṭughāy	Monastery (<i>khānqāh</i>), near the mausoleum of Qāyṭbāy in the Desert Cemetery (<i>Ṣaḥrā</i>) (Petry 1983: 200).
Fāṭima Umm Khawand	Hospice (<i>zāwīya</i>), in the Khurunfish quarter (Petry 1983: 200).

It should also be noted that when the founder of an endowment died or relinquished their supervisory or administrative roles, the endowment could be passed into the hands of their descendants, who could – and often did – include women (Berkey 1992: 165).

Some of the women who provided the funds for the building and establishment of madrasas and other religious institutions also built *qubbās* in the same grounds for their own burial (as noted in some of the details of endowments above), “since the souls of women, as well as men, might benefit from the *baraka* (blessing) associated with religious learning” (Berkey 1992: 163).

It might be interesting to explore with Huda what she thinks such women – the women detailed above and other women in other periods of Damascus’s Islamic history – contributed to the

religious life of the city, and to other people, perhaps women in particular. Do such endowments of religious institutions (madrasas, mausoleums, *ṣūfī* hospices/*ribats*, etc.) hold particular significance for her, having been established and endowed by women?

[See above section on women as leaders and teachers for information about the roles they played in the institutions they founded and in Islamic education in general.]

2. When and why this level of participation changed

Hilary Kalmbach, in her 2008 article abstract, succinctly summarises the main characteristic of the changes seen in female religious authority in modern times: “while charismatic forms of authority have been accessible to women for centuries, twentieth-century [and late nineteenth century] changes have made it possible for women to achieve scholarly authority as well” (Kalmbach 2008: 37), since “prominent institutions have opened their doors to women” (ibid. 40). These institutions have included al-Azhar in Egypt and the University of Damascus (ibid. 440). However, as she points out, while women *have* gained some access to the formal scholarly institutions of Islamic education over the course of the last century, from which, as religious authorities, they have benefited, their authority remains “based more on reputation, teaching experience and personal style rather than on formal religious training” (Kalmbach 2008: 44). As a result of the changes over the last century, as Karen Bauer states, though some women have always engaged in religious instruction in some capacity, the number of women doing so seems to have increased quite dramatically in recent times.²⁵

Major changes have come about through mass education and the subsequently changing relationship of ordinary Muslims to the written word, to the Qur’ān and ḥadīth, as well as through a shift in the state-religious authority relationship – both functions of the development of the modern nation state. The question is one of “who is entitled to Islamic religious authority”, and, overall, “the path to obtaining scholarly authority has changed during the twentieth century” through shifts in the answer to that question (Kalmbach 2008: 40), such that women have benefited in terms of their ability to access and gain religious authority, albeit in ways much different to their historical precedents (to whom today’s female religious leaders refer to, but differ from in important ways – ibid. 46).

Earlier in this report we saw that women’s roles as *muḥaddithāt*, teachers and legal experts changed for various reasons at different junctures of Damascus’s history. The changes that have taken place since the beginning of the twentieth century have certainly been significant, but it seems particularly salient to remind ourselves to reflect on the social changes over the centuries that seem to have allowed reports of some of the women mentioned above – particularly the female Companions of the Prophet – to be neglected (by both many Muslims and academics), and the extent of their activities and recognition of their intellectual equality to be somewhat forgotten. As Karen Bauer pointed out to me, it is very sad that the role of women in Islam seems to have become so limited to teaching other women, and that such a strictly gendered space is being created.²⁶ As noted by some of the scholars referred to in this report, while women never have held the same prestigious positions as men in religious institutions, even in the early Islamic period, the level of authority women did have certainly contradicts stereotypical images of Muslim women as silent and oppressed.

In any case, here we are primarily interested in the changes in female religious authority in the 20th century and being witnessed now, early in the 21st. Several key points should be made:

- The central point from which this discussion stems is that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in Hilary Kalmbach’s words, “reform efforts reduced the social, legal and educational influence of the ulema and paved the way for individuals without a clerical

²⁵ Karen Bauer, Institute of Ismaili Studies – personal communication, 26-27/8/2010

²⁶ Karen Bauer, Institute of Ismaili Studies – personal communication, 26-27/8/2010

education to teach and preach Islam” (Kalmbach 2008: 43).²⁷ This was a product of the introduction of mass education, which gave ordinary Muslims the tools with which to read and interpret the texts of Islam for themselves, as well as of emphasis on the need for cultural and religious revival and reform, and a renewed emphasis on *ijtihād*, which opened the door for Muslims to engage in *tafsīr* and for the creation of an even greater plurality of meanings of ‘being Muslim’. This also applied to women more and more, with their increasing integration into the public sphere of life and their growing access to education.

- This trend was accentuated by the modern nation state’s attempts to appropriate religious discourse (for example in Egypt by bringing the ulema and religious institutions into the fold of the state and controlling the curricula taught in religious schools), and by the way in which the “indigenous modernisers” came to deem the ulema’s “knowledge of centuries of legal rulings” “irrelevant” (Kalmbach 2008: 43). In this way, it became more possible for Muslims with secular training to approach the core texts of Islam – bypassing 1400 years’ worth of interpretation and legal rulings – and define their faith for themselves.²⁸
- In this way, as has begun to be explored in extremely interesting ways in anthropology in recent years,²⁹ “many modern Muslims ... base their claims to authority on personal piety and devotion, as well as an informally-taught ability to read, understand and interpret source texts” (ibid. 44) – rather than on formal training. Indeed, Kalmbach notes that “charismatic authority remains the key to female success as religious leaders”, since “most women have only recently gained entrance to formal religious learning” (Kalmbach 2008: 42).³⁰ In a sense ‘charismatic authority’ has perhaps become even more important to female religious authorities. Having met both Huda al-Habash and Asmaa’ Kaftarou (another important ‘reformist’ female Islamic authority) in Damascus, it seems that the charisma they exude is a central part of who they are and what they are do, not least because now their personality must fill not only the space of a hall in a mosque or a room in a house, but also the different forms of media they use to communicate their messages and try to exercise their religious authority. Although Asmaa’ Kaftarou, at least, has a diploma in Shar‘ia law from the University of Damascus, this does not seem to be her main claim to Islamic authority.
- As many scholars have observed, the societies of the Middle East have been seen to have become more ‘religious’, particularly since the 1970s – one oft-quoted sign of which is that many more women appear to be wearing *hijāb*. One way of looking at the increased religiosity and more obvious display of piety, especially among women, is to argue that “pious roles are an avenue for regular women to have real empowerment”.³¹ This returns us to the question of how we understand women’s activities as religious authorities.
- Kalmbach notes that “the authority exercised by al-Habash and other female activists is limited because the conservative norms that govern mainstream religious society are inherently structured against the participation of women as equals to men” (Kalmbach 2008: 49). However, “female religious authority can be seen as performative” and “by demonstrating their potential to openly oppose the system, women can maximise their standing within it” (ibid. 37). Therefore, Kalmbach argues, “because al-Habash wholeheartedly embraces the norms that constrain her activities and does not seek to radically change the status quo, potential critics do not notice her most controversial action: teaching

²⁷ Indeed, as she later points out, many of the well-known figures of Islam in the 20th century had secular training in other professions (Kalmbach 2008: 44).

²⁸ See also Patrick Gaffney (1994), *The Prophet’s Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in contemporary Egypt*. Ahmed writes that: Now that women in unprecedented and ever-growing numbers are coming to form part of the intellectual community in Muslim countries – they are already reclaiming the rights, not enjoyed for centuries, to attend mosque – perhaps those early struggles around the meaning of Islam will be explored in new ways and the process of the creation of Islamic law and the core discourse brought fully into question (Ahmed 1992: 101).

²⁹ See recent work by Saba Mahmood, Lara Deeb, Charles Hirschkind, Patrick Gaffney, etc.

³⁰ See also section 3 of this report.

³¹ Karen Bauer, Institute of Ismaili Studies – personal communication, 26-27/8/2010

women in a mosque” (ibid. 53). In this way, female religious authorities ‘empowered’ by the changes in social and religious authority are finding new ways, within a system inherently structured against the equal participation of women as religious leaders, to maximise their authority and (ibid. 52). It is within this context, perhaps, that we can understand the modern highly segregated nature of the mosque and religious space in general, in which women seem much more secluded than they were in the early Islamic period – as demonstrated by some of the evidence presented above.

- Most recently, the story of the entry of the *Qubaysiyāt* into the mosques of Damascus is a highly significant development. In 2006, the Syrian government gave this women’s Islamic movement permission to teach women in mosques where previously they had been confined to teaching in private homes, giving ‘female religious authority’ in Syria a new characteristic. This matter may provide an interesting subject for discussion with Huda and Enas.

3. Looking at the Qur’ān

A section from Karen Bauer’s introduction to her article entitled ‘The Male is Not Like the Female: The Question of Gender Equality in the Qur’ān’ serves well as a preface to this section:

One of the problems in understanding whether the Qur’ān treats men and women equally is that, although most scholars today argue for one ultimate position (‘equality’ or ‘inequality’), it seems that the Qur’ān itself does not promote a single model: at times, women and men are treated equally, and at times they are not. More than half of the verses in the Qur’ān that refer to women come in the context of stories about prophets and significant events ... In terms of their equality with men and personal empowerment, these women’s stories diverge greatly ... Other verses of the Qur’ān contain commands, or normative material from which laws can be derived. Like the verses that speak of specific women, Qur’ānic injunctions do not offer an exclusively egalitarian or hierarchical model. (Bauer 2009: 638)

Bauer’s further explanation of three rough categories of scholars, grouped according to how they interpret certain verses of the Qur’ān, is also helpful as a reminder of the complex nature of asking questions to do with verses being used to back up either Islam’s ‘progressive’ or ‘regressive’ elements:

The traditionalists say the Qur’ān promotes certain marital hierarchies, but treats men and women as the same in human value; for this group, proper egalitarianism exists only in that realm, while certain hierarchies in this world are natural and just.

The reformists agree that the Qur’ān promotes some hierarchies, but for them hierarchies are unjust and, therefore, the text of the Qur’ān itself is problematic.

The idealists reinterpret certain phrases in the Qur’ān to minimize differences between the sexes, but ultimately acknowledge that differences exist; for them, such differences are not unequal or unjust. (Bauer 2009: 639)

Some parts of the Qur’ān that are often singled out which speak about women in both ‘progressive’ and ‘regressive’ elements might be listed as below. It is essential to note, however, that all of these verses have been variously interpreted at different stages of history – some verses once thought emblematic of what some have understood as an inherent inequality between men and women proscribed in the Qur’ān, for example, being reinterpreted in the modern period. In particular, this has become a phenomenon among ‘Islamic feminists’ and others looking to demonstrate that Islam treats

men and women equally (see, for example, Bauer’s discussion of this phenomenon, (Bauer 2009: 644) – and see below discussion of verses **Q 30:21** and **Q 4:1**, as examples).

It is also important to note here that many ḥadīth are often used to support or undermine women’s rights – narratives of the behaviour of some of the Prophet’s wives and Companions are often used to provide examples of equality in Islam.

Qur’ānic verses that are often singled out to support women’s rights

- **Q 2:187** ‘Lawful for you on the night of the fast is that you go into your wives; they are a raiment for you and you are a raiment for them’ (translation from (Bauer 2009)), which some use to highlight the asymmetry of the marital relationship. It also indicates the reciprocity which is also a part of the relationship and can therefore be used to highlight equality, however – which it often is (especially in terms of highlighting the fact that women also have sexual desire).
- **Q 3:42** Mary was ‘chosen above the World’s women’, she is “a strongly empowered figure”, “a model of self-reliance” (Bauer 2009: 638)
- **Q 3:193** “And their Lord answers them: “I waste not the labor of any that labors among you, be you male or female – the one of you is as the other” (translation from (Petry 1983: 195)).
- **Q 4:36** “Do not covet that whereby God in bounty has preferred one of you above another. To the men a share from what they have earned, and to the women a share from what they have earned. And ask God of His bounty; God knows everything” (translation from (Petry 1983: 195)).
- **Q 4:127** declares “that it is impossible to do justice among a plurality of wives” (Hallaq 2009: 528). This verse is used to advocate that polygyny is not permissible.
- **Q 17:31** this verse condemns the pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide
- **Q 33:35** “Men and women who have surrendered [i.e., to God], believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, enduring men and enduring women, humble men and humble women, men and women who give in charity, men who fast and women who fast, men and women who guard their private parts, men and women who remember God oft – for them God has prepared forgiveness and a mighty wage” (translation from (Berkey 1999: 101). This verse was revealed in response to Aisha’s demand to know why it seemed that Qur’ānic language apparently only addressed men. The Prophet also explained that the ordinary language of the Qur’ān (i.e. which did not explicitly address ‘men and women’) was not intended to speak only to men, but included women also. This verse obviously has important implications for many aspects of equality between men and women.
- **Q 4:1** To do with the human being having been created from one ‘soul’ (*nafsin wāḥida*), as a pair, with no reference to one sex having been ‘created from’ the other (see Adam and Eve story below) – indicating the idea that man and woman are originally and inherently the same.

Qur’ānic verses that are often singled out to limit women’s rights

- **Q 2:282** “O believers, when you contract a debt one upon another for a stated term, write it down.... And call in to witness two witnesses, men; or, if they be not men, then one man and two women, such witnesses as you approve of, lest one of the two [women] err, then the other will remind her” (Fadel 1997: 187) (“Muslim modernists have taken ‘Abduh’s lead in interpreting this verse as being the result of a temporal division of labor between the sexes” – *ibid.*.)³²

³² It is interesting to compare different interpretations of this verse, and opinions on the matter in comparison with the acceptance of women’s authority in transmitting ḥadīth, though the two are considered quite different: “Muslim jurists used the terms *shahāda* (testimony) and *ḥukm* (verdict) to distinguish discourse that had political consequences from the normative discourse that was described with the terms *riwāya* (narration) and *fatwa* (non-binding legal opinion)” (Fadel 1997: 188), such that “the narration of normative statements, unlike

- **Q 4:3** “If you fear that you will not be able to deal justly with the orphans, then marry the women [among them] who seem good to you, two, three, or four; but if you fear you cannot deal with them equitably, then marry only one, or those whom your right hands possess [i.e., captives] – that makes it less likely you will be unjust” (translation from (Berkey 1999: 99). This verse has been used to justify polygyny. Another interpretation has been, however, that this verse in fact provides a mechanism of protection for widowed or divorced women with children (since orphan, *yeṭīm*, in Arabic means a child having only a mother *or* a father, or neither, which differs from its meaning in English), and that it is *only* permissible in these circumstances.
- **Q 4:11** This verse says that sons receive twice daughters’ share in inheritance (in fact there are around 30 different cases of inheritance shares, and it is only in the case of sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, that a female inheritor inherits half of what the male inheritor inherits). This verse is also used, by those who perceive the man’s duty to look after and provide for the women as just and fair, to highlight the justice in the Qur’ān.
- **Q 4:34** Seems to explain how and why the system of inheritance outlined in the Qur’ān is just. ‘Men are *qawwamun* [supporters, maintainers] over women, because of what God has given the one more than the other, and because of what they spend of their wealth’ (translation in (Bauer 2009: 640). Later in the *sūra* (verse 38): ‘when you fear *nushuz* from them [the wives], admonish them, abandon them in the beds, and beat them; and if they obey you, do not seek a way against them.’ *Nushuz* “could mean a number of things, including rebelliousness or disagreement”. In her discussion of this verse, Bauer concludes that, “although the verse has certain ambiguous points, it clearly sets up a hierarchy in the marriage where women should obey their husbands”, and that overall, in the case of *nushūz*, men and women do not have equal rights accorded to them in the Qur’ān (see also verse Q 4:128) (Bauer 2009: 640). This debate takes us into the question of marriage as a contract, and the place of love in the relationship.³³
- **Q 15:71** Lot offers his daughters in marriage to his people (no evidence of his daughters having any involvement in decisions deciding their fate, see (Bauer 2009: 638))
- **Q 28:27-28** Moses’ marriage to the daughter of a farmer he works for – again, no evidence of the daughter involved having any choice in this matter, see (Bauer 2009: 638).
- **Q 30:21** “One of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves, that you may find rest in them. And He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.” This verse has been used (though the verse itself is not often cited, though the reference to a story of Eve having been created from Adam’s rib) to contribute to an androcentric reading of the Qur’ān. Bauer notes, however, that “the gender-neutral interpretation, humans have mates which were created for them, of the same substance as them; the purpose of having a mate is to find rest, love and compassion” (Bauer 2009: 645).
- **Q 24:31** “And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and reveal not their adornment save such as is outward; and let them cast their veils [*khimār*] over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands’ fathers, or their sons, or their husbands’ sons, or their brothers, or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or what their right hands own [i.e.,

testimony, was explicitly gender-neutral. Thus, Fatima’s narration of a Prophetic saying or precedent would be as probative as ‘Ali’s, assuming that both narrators were credible (*‘adl*), while different conditions for testimony are maintained for men and women (Fadel 1997: 189). See Fadel’s article for an interesting exploration of scholars’ understanding of the idea that the testimony of two women is necessary where there are not two men, and problematisation of any simple explanation of this – in which a particularly important point is made (among others) regarding the fact that guidelines for witnesses in matters of dispute depend on each sex’s likely knowledge of the matter (i.e. men are not accepted as witnesses in matters requiring knowledge of matters of childbirth, for example).

³³ Some scholars understand the obedience women owe to men as *only* in terms of their sexual duties – feelings or expressions of love cannot be commanded. Bauer points out that this can be taken to “protect their interests, albeit not by modern standards of human rights” (Bauer 2009: 642).

their slaves], or such men as attend them, nor having sexual desire, or children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's private parts; nor let them stamp their feet, so that their hidden ornament may be known. And turn all together to God, O you believers; haply so you will prosper" (translation from (Berkey 1999: 102).

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Should you have the time to do so, it may be worth you having a look at the following sources: a few chapters of (Roded 1994); (Sayeed 2002); sections of (Nadwi 2007); and (Kalmbach 2008). They are all referred to in this report – see bibliography below – but you may benefit from a fuller understanding of some of the issues included in the original sources.

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