Higher Education in Pre-Colonial Africa

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NOTE: This reading comprises Chapter 2 ("Premodern Africa) of a book titled *A History of African Higher Education from Antiquity to the Present: A Critical Synthesis* by Y.G-M. Lulat (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005) For more on the book click here: http://bit.ly/hedbook

Chapter Contents

2

Premodern Africa

History without historiography is meaningless. This chapter, therefore, has two objectives: one is to establish the precolonial historical record; the other is to confront the more contentious task of examining the larger theoretical implications of this record. Ultimately any historical record is of value only to the extent that it is the subject of a historiographical exegesis. (Upon further reflection, it appears that the historical record is equally contentious, as will be evident shortly.) First, however, a necessary point of prolegomena: The conventional dichotomous periodization by historians of African history into, principally, the precolonial and colonial periods may give pause to those seeking an anti-Eurocentric perspective on African history (see Appendix II). The matter raises not only the issue of a foreign (in this case European) temporal standard as a marker of African historical chronology (How often does one come across, for example, a periodization of European history labeled "Europe during the pre-imperialist period" or "Europe during the imperialist period?"), but as if that is not enough, there is the underlying implication of not only a general failure among historians to provide an equitable historical treatment of both sides of the dichotomous divide—hence suggestive of the relative unimportance of a strictly African history versus the hybridized Euro-African history, especially when viewed against the unequal weights of time involved (temporally, the colonial period is merely an infinitesimal blip when compared to the precolonial period, which stretches back in time to the very birth of humankind several million years ago)—but also a dyadic evaluational dimension to the dichotomy, usually manifest at the subterranean level of "ideology": savagery versus civili-

zation, darkness versus light, evil versus good, stasis versus progress, primitive versus modern, and so on.

Now, if one is cognizant of this problem as pervading much of African history, why then repeat this convention in this work? What is more, as if to add insult to injury, only one chapter is devoted to the precolonial era, while the rest of the book, in essence, covers the colonial period on, up to the present. There are three principal reasons that may be adduced in defense, but strictly from the perspective of this particular work. It is a matter of incontrovertible historical fact that there were simply far fewer institutions of higher education during the precolonial period than during the colonial period; in terms of human history (not prehistory), the precolonial period was never simply a purely African period, any more than say a European historical period was purely European, or an Asian historical period was purely Asian. The colonial period, whether one likes it or not, marked a permanent rupture from all that had gone on before of such level and magnitude as to force on any historian of Africa the perspective of a dichotomous periodization—though not necessarily with the ideological baggage it has come to acquire (see Appendix II).

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

In consideration of the enormous weight given in history books to that period of African history that commences with the arrival of Europeans in Africa under the aegis of the European voyages of "exploitation" and later, imperialism (see Appendix II), it is necessary to begin with the following question: Did higher education exist in precolonial Africa at all? If there is one person who can be credited with producing one of the earliest works on the history of higher education in Africa, then it is Eric Ashby. His response to this question is, therefore, of interest. His answer is, yes, higher education "is not new to the continent of Africa, but the modern universities in Africa," he continues, "*owe nothing to this ancient tradition of scholarship*" (emphasis added). He states further, "[t]he modern universities of Africa have their roots not in any indigenous system of education, but in a system brought from the West" (1966: 147). In other words, according to Ashby, the existence of premodern higher education is of no relevance to considerations of modern higher education in Africa today. Why? Because there is no continuity between precolonial higher education and modern African higher education, which he asserts is an entirely Western invention.

Of course, Ashby neglects to explain why there is no continuity: the deflection of the African historical trajectory by the intrusion of European imperialism. Be that as it may, Ashby is, by and large correct about the matter of continuity, but he is absolutely mistaken about the second assertion (see Appendix I). In any case, whether or not precolonial higher education institutions in Africa have any relevance to the development of modern higher education in Africa

today, it is still necessary to consider them, if for no other reason than to firmly register the point, that African history does not begin only with the arrival of European colonialism. In other words, for the sake of historical accuracy, any survey of the historical development of higher education in Africa must consider its entire history. Yet, there is more to this matter than just the issue of historical accuracy, as will be indicated in the conclusion to this chapter.

In the effort to identify the existence of precolonial higher education institutions in Africa, it would help by first noting that higher education cannot exist in any society without the presence of books, which in turn requires the availability of the written word. Historically, the origins of writing and books have generally been associated with the emergence of an organized state and/ or organized religion (usually the two have gone hand in hand in a theocratic alliance). In other words, writing and books emerged as a response to the bureaucratic needs of the state and/ or the requirements of religious practice and education. (This certainly was the case in that most ancient of known civilizations, the Sumerian; see Kramer 1981.) In time, once the written language was invented, it also became available for scholarly pursuits of a more secular nature to eventually effect the displacement of the oral tradition by the written one. In other words, writing marginalized the bard and the orator and the writer and the scholar took their place. "Civilization has few miracles," as Parsons (1952: 106) sagely observes, "to compare with the transmission of ancient learning on frail papyrus or tougher parchment." Not surprisingly, then, in the case of precolonial Africa all instances of higher education that are known of so far are associated with religions and their religious books—which, needless to say, presuppose the existence of written languages; there are principally three: that of the ancient Egyptians, that of the Ethiopian Christians, and that of the Muslims. Therefore, the account that follows structurally corresponds to the geographic domains of these three.[1] Also note that in the absence of a separate secular educational system, as was the case with most premodern societies with rare exception, religious higher education institutions did double duty: they provided training for both religious and secular (state) purposes.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Pharaonic Egypt's Per-ankh

The transition of human societies from rudimentary forms of social existence, rooted in a hunting-and-gathering mode of production, to more complex forms marked by such features as settled agriculture, urbanization, literacy, social differentiation, a redistributive economy, state formation with well-defined political structures (that is, all those features that speak to only one fundamental factor: the existence of surplus)—and that may legitimately be termed as civilization in its nonjudgmental sense—does not appear to have a definitive causal

factor, other than the presence of one critical variable: agriculturally easy access to a constant and plentiful food supply. This itself, it must be stressed, is an arbitrary function of climate and geography. (The succinctly summarized comparative study by Bard and Fattovich (2001) of early state formation in the Egypt and Ethiopia of antiquity, with their vastly differing climatic and geographic environments, is highly illustrative.)

It is not surprising then that the chance discovery by the Neolithic peoples of Northeast Africa of the existence of rich alluvial soils in the Nile valley in Egypt amidst an ocean of slowly but relentlessly desiccating Sahara, would unknowingly propel them toward the creation of one of Africa's and the world's early great civilizations: the Egyptian civilization. Along the way, in this cultural journey, they were probably assisted by their geographic proximity to other peoples—especially those of the Near East (Mesopotamia, for example), from whom they would receive via direct and indirect economic interactions periodic infusions of critical genetic and cultural material (in the form of immigrants, foods, agricultural practices, artistic and architectural traditions, etc.) that would become the basis for some of their own innovations to give rise to an African civilization that was unique to itself—the key word here is unique. The chronological zone of transition within which this process occurred was probably around 5000 to around 3000 B.C.E., by which time the known dynastic period of Egyptian history would commence and the capstone in the march toward civilization, the invention of writing (in this case the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing), would be firmly in place. Defensively insulated by the Sahara, the Africans of Egypt would have the luxury, for almost 2,000 years, to devote most of their energy toward unprecedented cultural, artistic, and architectural achievements.[2]

It follows, then, that the quest for the first instance of higher education institutions in Africa must perforce begin in ancient Egypt. Logic would suggest that any civilization that was as accomplished and sophisticated as the Egyptian civilization, and that was of such considerable longevity, must have had some type of formal educational system to impart the high arts, religious education, medical education, and so on, to the younger generation. In other words, individualized (usually familial-based) apprenticeship alone may not have been a sufficient vehicle for this purpose. After all, it is now well-known that from around c. 3000 B.C.E. there existed, as Bernal (2001) points out, specialized professions (e.g., astronomy, medicine, magic, scribal arts). To be sure, the Egyptians may not have had exact replicas of the modern university or college, but it is certainly true that they did possess an institution that, from their perspective, fulfilled some of the roles of a higher education institution. One such institution dating from around c. 2000 B.C.E. was the *per-ankh* (or the House of Life). It was located within the Egyptian temples, which usually took the form of huge campuses, with many buildings, and thousands of employees.[3]

Now, some have referred to the *per-ankh* as a library or a "scriptorium," where scribes wrote and kept their papyri. This indeed it was, but it should be emphasized that the *per-ankh* was no ordinary library. The *per-ankh* was in essence an institution of multiple roles. Yes, it was a repository for the sacred texts, but it also housed the administrative records of the kingdom, as well as the temple itself. Yet, it appears that it did more than that: it was also the place where texts on all the various branches of Egyptian religious, philosophical, medical, and scientific knowledge were produced and stored. However, it has been suggested that there also existed separate institutions that served as libraries in the usual sense (see Clagett 1989). Ghalioungui (1973: 30) reminds us that even as early as the sixth dynasty (2345 B.C.E.) there is reference to a high civil servant as the Governor of the House of Books, pointing to the presence of important collections of papyri. (Later, perhaps, it may be conjectured, these Houses of Books would become part of the *per-ankh*s.)

Moreover, it should be pointed out here that the term scribe describes someone who was more than just simply a manuscript-copying clerk; rather, the scribe was a learned person who combined within him (evidence so far suggests that they were all males) the "training of a calligrapher, a philosopher, a scholar, and a scientist" (Ghalioungui 1973: 28; see also Clagett 1989).[4] Consider, for instance, how the scribe who was nominated by the priests to accompany the pharaoh Psammetik II on his journey to Syria was addressed in explaining his nomination: "None other than you in this town can leave for Syria; look, you are a Scribe of the House of Life, there is nothing on which you would be questioned to which you would not find an answer" (from Ghalioungui,1973: 66). From this perspective, then, the *per-ankh* was also a research institute of a kind where new knowledge was brought forth out of the old. In fact, it is thought that even Greek physicians visited the *per-ankh* at Memphis to study the medical texts housed there (Wilkinson 2000: 74). Ghalioungui (1973: 63–64) goes a step further on this point: he discusses the very high probability that such Greek luminaries as Plato, no less, made scholarly visits to ancient Egypt. He, interestingly, points out that from at least the Eighteenth Dynasty there were Greek interpreters present at the royal palace.

At the same time, the *per-ankh* was also a higher educational institution of sorts that like other higher educational institutions that were to emerge in other parts of the world thousands of years on, combined religious education with secular education. For the Egyptians, as would be the case for many other peoples in millennia to come, knowledge did not neatly divide into the religious and the secular; to them each flowed seamlessly into the other—as is so clearly indicated in that masterly synthesis of evidence from a host of papyri (Edwin Smith, Chester Beatty, Carlsberg, Kahoun, Ramesseum, Leyden, London, Berlin, etc.), and a variety of archeological sources, that Paul Ghalioungui's riveting study of medical science in ancient Egypt, *The House of Life, Per-ankh: Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (1973), represents. Therefore,

those destined for the professions (scribes, doctors, lawyers, architects, astronomers, etc.) received their education alongside those who were to join the priesthood in the *per-ankh*. In this regard, compare with the early medieval European and Islamic universities. Clearly, as Wilkinson (2000: 74) observes, the genealogical roots of the very concept of a university as it was to be developed hundreds of years later by the Islamic and Christian societies—as, in its most elemental sense, a gathering of religious and secular scholars for the purpose of research and study—can be traced to the *per-ankh*.[5] Moreover, the *per-ankh* was not only restricted to the teaching of theoretical knowledge, it was also a place for the teaching of the practical arts such as sculpture and other crafts. It is also thought that the pharaohs themselves sometimes studied in these institutions; this certainly appears to have been the case with Ramses IV, a literary person of considerable knowledge (Ghalioungui 1973: 67).

The eventual demise of the Egyptian civilization also, of course, spelled the demise of the *per-ankh*. To account for the end of this uniquely African civilization is a task that lies well outside the subject matter of this book. Ergo, it will suffice to simply note that the civilization began its downward spiral starting roughly with the Twenty-Third Dynasty in 1070 B.C.E. as a result of a combination of factors, such as internal corruption, imperialistic ambitions, foreign invasions, and so on, so that by the time Alexander the Conqueror arrived in Egypt some 700 years later, in 332 B.C.E., the civilization of ancient Egypt was well into its twilight (see Mysliwiec 2000 for a fascinating account of this late period of ancient Egyptian history).

Now, interestingly, the next instance of higher education in ancient Africa that is known of, so far, is still to be found in ancient Egypt, but it emerges during the period of the Ptolemaic dynasty in the form of the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* complex. Before proceeding further, however, two additional points need to be made: (1) Had the *per-ankh*s of ancient Egypt undertaken systematic credentialing of bodies of students—there is, however, no evidence yet unearthed that points to this—then their designation as universities in the true sense of the word would not be farfetched. Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress this point: as Ghalioungui (1973) and Canfora (1990), for example, observe, the Alexandrina complex was heir to the legacy of the *per-ankh* as a religio-secular institution that gathered together in a single place of study concentrations of the most outstanding scholars and masters of the day, from near and far. In other words, the modern university, college, research institute, think-tank, research library, and so on of today, has a lineage that spans millennia and can be traced back to the Alexandrina complex and thence to ancient Egypt's *per-ankh*.

(2) There emerges from the foregoing an important matter that cannot be sidestepped. It can be articulated thusly: Having established the existence of a prototype version of higher education institutions in ancient Egypt, which of course constitutes one of the major institutional expressions of a vibrant intellectual life of any society in any time period, it invariably raises the further

question of whether ancient Egyptian knowledge and learning had any significance for other contemporaneous—at the very minimum—societies outside Africa. Greece, perhaps? Now, what appears to be an innocent and ordinary scholarly question has in recent years acquired an unseemly, racially inspired, ideological baggage as expressed by the intense and vitriolic disagreements between *Eurocentrists* such as Mary Lefkowitz and *Afrocentrists* such as Maulana Karenga and Molefe Asante over the broader question of the significance of the Egyptian (read: black) civilization vis-à-vis the genesis of the Western (read: white) civilization. The former say that Western civilization owes nothing of determinative substance to Africa (ancient Egyptian or otherwise), while the latter say they owe a lot and in fact they "stole" most of their ideas from ancient Egyptians.[6]

Then there is Martin Bernal, of the *Black Athena* fame; he too may be categorized here as an Afrocentrist of a sort (however, given the moderation in his claims and a more convincing attempt at marshalling evidence in support of his positions, perhaps a better label for him would be neo-Afrocentrist.[7] Anyhow, he has almost single-handedly resurrected—based on a remarkable and Herculean scholarship—a more moderate Afrocentric point of view (relative to that of the Afrocentrists proper), which he describes as the "Ancient model" (in contrast to the prevalent "Aryan model" that places the origins of the Greek civilization entirely within Europe—and northern for that matter), that if we accept that Western civilization has its roots in ancient Greece, then ancient Greece had some of its roots in, primarily, Phoenicia and ancient Egypt through the process of colonization by the latter of the former. One would be seriously remiss not to quickly mention in the same breath that many critics (not all by any means Eurocentrists—see the excellent overview and synthesis by Howe 1998 and Berlinerblau 1999; plus van Binsbergen 1997 and Wigen and Lewis 1997 are also of relevance here) have pointed out what appear to be significant flaws in his work so far. Leaving aside the fact that it is highly unlikely that any scholarship undertaken on as grand a scale as Bernal's *Black Athena* project can be entirely flawless, the truth probably lies somewhere in between the Ancient and Aryan models—as it so often does in disagreements of this type where incontrovertible evidence is not always available and whatever evidence is accessible is subject to conflicting, but legitimate interpretations.[8]

Hellenistic Egypt's Bibliotheca Alexandrina

If our knowledge of higher education in the Egyptian civilization remains woefully sketchy, then one is on a slightly more surer ground as one turns to another important instance of higher education in African antiquity: the museum/ library complex at Alexandria (the Bibliotheca Alexandrina complex), which has once again risen like the legendary phoenix from the ashes, more than 1,000 years following its destruction.[9] The Alexandrian museum/library

complex was established in that period of the Egyptian civilization known as the Hellenic period that would be ushered in by the arrival in Egypt, in December 332 B.C.E., of that infamous and ruthless Macedonian, Alexander the Conqueror (often referred to in history books as Alexander the Great), whose imperialistic ambitions would spawn an empire stretching from Macedonia to as far as India. Although the slaughter of the defeated was one of the hallmarks of many of his military expeditions, the Egyptians were spared this fate because they saw him not as an invader, but as a liberator. The warm welcome by the Egyptian populace accorded to Alexander enabled him to easily obtain the peaceful (and wise) surrender of the Persian satrap Mazaces. He thereby conquered Egypt without doing battle, while at the same time liberating the Egyptians from the much-disliked Persians who had become the rulers of Egypt from 664 B.C.E. under the Achaemenid dynasty.

Enticed by the hospitable geography of the ancient Mediterranean village seaport of Rakotis (established around 1500 B.C.E.) located on the western edge of the Nile River delta between the sea and the fresh water Lake of Mareotis, Alexander commanded it to be the site of his new Egyptian capital and a naval base for his fleet. As was his practice, in his typical ego flattering flourish, he named the capital after himself. It is with this beginning that the Greco-Egyptian city of Alexandria would become, in time, one of the world's greatest cities of antiquity and a major center of scientific and philosophical research. The task of placing the new capital on to this illustrious path, however, fell to his viceroys: first, Cleomenes, and later, after Alexander's death on June 13, 323 B.C.E. in Babylon, Ptolemy I Soter.

The Alexandrian empire did not survive the death of its creator, having been held together by the dint of his personality. The wealthiest and most prestigious province in the empire that was Egypt fell to the lot of Ptolemy I Soter who, in time, would proclaim himself the new Egyptian king, thereby launching a new dynasty. That the Egyptians accepted the new rulers was a testimony to the diplomatic and political acumen of the Ptolemys, as well as their respect for the culture of pharaonic Egypt. For instance, they generously dispensed patronage to the Egyptian nobility, they established a new religion that brought together Greek and Egyptian beliefs through the worship of the sun god Serapis (a reinvented Egyptian god of the underworld from Memphis); they restored some of the Egyptian temples that the Persians had destroyed; and so on.

Now, just before his death in 283 B.C.E., it is said, Ptolemy I Soter, who was also a man of letters, ordered the construction of a museum/library complex near the royal palace in the Greek section of the city known as the *Brucheion*. In this effort, it is thought, he was implementing an idea that was not originally his; for it had been the wish of Alexander to have a library built in the new city that would bear his name. It was to be dedicated to the worship of the Muses—a group of sister goddesses in the Greco-Roman religion who each were patrons of different artistic and intellectual endeavors. Ptolemy I Soter did not live long

enough to see the entire project completed; it was left to his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, to see it through. The complex was both a religious and a secular institution and as such it would enjoy patronage throughout the reign of the Ptolemies, including the appointment for life of full time, salaried staff headed by a librarian who also served as royal tutor to the king. The religious component of the complex, the place of worship of the Muses (the *mouseion*), was headed by the priest of the Muses. (It may be noted here that the modern term museum has its etymological origins in that Greek word *mouseion*.)

The complex comprised living quarters for the community of poets, philosophers and scholars that ran it, lecture rooms, a botanical garden, a zoological park, astronomical observatory, and the great library. In time, the complex would become a truly great monument to human knowledge and learning, built to gather together—either through purchase, systematic copying, or even forcible acquisition—every available work known to the librarians. The library's collection even included what was then and even today the priceless works of Aristotle; though how the library came to acquire these works remains a mystery to this day (see Tanner 2000 for one conjectural thesis). The zeal of the librarians in acquiring works is attested to by the naming of sections of the library's holdings as ship libraries because they were constituted from works confiscated from passing ships by customs officials. The supposed practice was that all books aboard a ship were copied and then returned to their owners, while the copies (catalogued as "from the ships") became part of the ship libraries. However, one may legitimately surmise, as MacLeod (2000a: 5) does, that many a traveler left Alexandria without their originals (or perhaps even without any copies at all). At one point, the library is thought to have amassed over a half a million works on rolls of papyri in an age when, it must be remembered, there was no paper and no printing press. Clearly, in terms of its acquisitions policy, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina complex was a multicultural institution that, over time (it would be in operation for almost 600 years), would attempt to bring together in one place the contributions of the Asian, Egyptian, Hellenic, Judaic, Mesopotamian, and Roman worlds.

The fact that the person entrusted by Ptolemy I Soter with the establishment of the complex was the Athenian Demetrius Phalereus speaks volumes for what the complex became. Why? Because Demetrius, who besides being a Greek orator, statesman, and philosopher, was also an ex-pupil of Plato's famous ex-pupil, none other than Aristotle himself. One can, therefore, confidently assume that from the very beginning the complex, in terms of its mission (and possibly its physical design) bore the hallmarks of Aristotle's Lyceum, an academy that he founded for the purposes of scholarly endeavors in a variety of scientific and philosophical fields of inquiry.

The ultimate practical objective of the Ptolemys, it would appear, was twofold: the complex would serve as a symbol of prestige that spoke for the cultured or civilized status of their dynasty, and it would be a vehicle for cultural

and intellectual domination of other cultures through appropriation of all written knowledge where ever and when ever it was available. This was not an unusual practice as MacLeod (2000a) reminds us. Empire builders of antiquity had long grasped the importance of acquiring and translating works from other cultures as a means of gaining valuable insights into intellectual and other accomplishments of these cultures that could facilitate their domination. (Note that the present-day practice of national libraries in metropolitan countries, such the Library of Congress, systematically acquiring foreign produced materials, one may legitimately argue, is a continuation of this tradition. See also Casson 2001 for an excellent account of other libraries in the ancient world.)

The true significance of the complex, however, was not that it was simply a unique repository of knowledge for the time period, but like the proverbial moths being drawn to a candlelight, it attracted scholars from near and far. For, unlike today, libraries of the past were also important seats of learning where the librarians themselves too were, one and at the same time, scholars in residence. Hence, over time, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina became the source of prodigious and remarkable intellectual scholarship which, many centuries later, through the agency of the Muslims, would help to ignite the European Renaissance.[10]

Until new evidence comes to light, it is safe to say that the library complex was not a university in the modern sense in that it probably did not undertake *systematic teaching* and *credentialing* of bodies of students, even though research, teaching, and learning took place there. However, this much is certain: on its own terms, it did clearly function as a university and an international research institute, and a very important one at that. This is further underlined by the fact that dinners and symposia featuring philosophical, scientific, and literary disputations were regularly sponsored by the complex (often present among the invited guests were the Ptolemys themselves). Moreover, its staff were called upon, from time to time, to offer lessons to members of the royal family.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina was undoubtedly an institution of higher education, in fact one can go so far as to say that it was among the world's earliest known prototype universities.[11] At the same time, the library's presence, it is especially worth noting, helped to sustain a thriving publishing industry, thereby assisting in the dissemination of the knowledge that the library acquired, and produced, to all the four corners of the ancient world. From this perspective, the library was also indirectly responsible for helping to permanently preserve works that would have been lost forever when it underwent periodic and later final destruction. About this last point, the demise of the museum/ library complex was a cataclysmic scholarly disaster of massive proportions, the consequences of which can hardly be even imagined.

The Destruction of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

So, exactly how then did this magnificent institution of higher learning eventually meet its end? The short answer is that no one really knows with ab-

solute certainty because of a couple of problems: the lack of information regarding the exact layout of the complex internally, as well as externally with respect to the palace, and the fact that the complex included a smaller daughter library (created around 235 B.C.E. by Ptolemy III in the Serapeum [Temple of Sarapis]) and warehouses where acquisitions were initially stored while they were awaiting cataloguing. This yields four major architectural units that could have fallen victim to destruction by fire at different times or at one and the same time: the museum, the main library, the daughter library, and the warehouses—thereby generating much confusion as to when the complex was destroyed and by whom among the following four main probable culprits: the Roman general Julius Ceasar in 48/47 B.C.E. who set off an accidental fire provoked by a civil war among the last of the Ptolemaic dynasty (between Cleopatra VII and her brother Ptolemy XIII) in which Ceasar had become embroiled; the Roman emperor Aurelian in 272 C.E., who in the course of putting down a rebellion razed most of the Brucheion to the ground; the virulently anti-pagan Christian patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus, who in 391 C.E. ordered the destruction of all pagan temples in Alexandria; and Amr ibn al-'As, the leader of the conquering Muslims, who supposedly burned the library upon the orders of the Caliph Omar ibn Khattab in 642 C.E.

What is the stand on this matter of the various authorities on whose work this part of the chapter is primarily based? Casson (2001) and Barnes (2000) side with Edward Gibbon (1910 [originally written 1776–88]) and Alfred J. Butler (1998 [1902]), who both conclude that by the time the Muslim Army arrived in Egypt under the command of Amr ibn al-'As, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina complex had long passed into memory (El-Abbadi 1992 and Canfora 1989 are also of the same opinion); therefore, the Muslims could not have destroyed the complex—a viewpoint that, however, is not favored by Parsons (1952) and Zeydan (1952), for example, who insist that the Muslims were definitely the culprits. The preponderance of evidence—albeit much of it circumstantial—is in favor of Gibbon's and Butler's position. Both Gibbon (1962 [1910]: 345–47), and Butler (1998 [1902]: 401–26)—who interestingly labels the complex as a university in its own right and who feels compelled to deny that he is simply defending the Muslims in this matter, rather he only wants "to establish the truth"—draw attention to a number of disquieting facts; such as: the story that the Muslims burned the library makes its appearance for the first time more than five centuries after the event is supposed to have taken place!; the story is fraught with "absurdities" (e.g., the books being used to heat 4,000 bath houses over a period of six months, instead of being burned in a large bonfire on the spot; in the seventh-century most of the books in Egypt were made of vellum—not papyri—which does not burn as fuel, etc.); the principal protagonist in the story, John Philoponus, was long dead before the arrival of the Muslims; the existence of the library is nowhere alluded to in the literature of fifth, sixth and early seventh centuries; the contemporary and erudite chronicler at the

time, the Coptic bishop, John of Nikiou, would not have passed over the event in silence; the treaty signed between the Muslims and the Alexandrians on the surrender of the city to the Muslims had a clause in it allowing the Romans to remove all valuables as they pleased during a seven-month period that preceded the actual arrival of the Muslims in the city; and so on.

In conclusion, Butler, echoing Gibbon, also makes this telling observation: that had it been necessary to defend the Muslims from this charge, then "it would not be difficult to find something in the nature of an apology." Why? Because, the Muslims, he says, "in later times certainly set great store by all the classical and other books which fell into their hands, and had them carefully preserved and in many cases translated. Indeed they set an example, which modern conquerors might well have followed." Recall too, that, in the words of Cohen (1994: 398): the "Islamic civilization was the first in world history to consider the acquisition of knowledge a thing necessary for every person; hence the Islamic origins of such institutions as the public library and the school for higher learning, or *madrasah*."[12] Now, it is up to you, esteemed reader, to arrive at your own conclusion regarding this awful tragedy of the intellect; and in this regard it is worth while remembering that, in the words of Hedon (1963: vii): "[i]n the last resort the historian, like any humble member of a trial jury, is compelled to let his instinct and his experience of human affairs supplement the contradictory assertions put before him, or else he is a fool."

HIGHER EDUCATION IN PREMODERN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia, sometimes also referred to as Abyssinia in history books and identified as the fabled land of Prester John in the fertile imagination of medieval Europe, is one of the oldest countries on the planet. There is archeological evidence to show that human presence in Ethiopia can be traced as far back as some four million years; that is, to the time when *Australopithecus afarensis*, the ape-like (but bipedal) ancestor of the modern human, roamed the Ethiopian landscape. However, coming much, much closer to the present, it is the founding of the indigenous and powerful trading kingdom of Aksum, the process probably commencing in the second-century B.C.E., in northern Ethiopia that is of interest because the seeds for the emergence of premodern higher education in Ethiopia were sown in that kingdom with the conversion of its kings to Christianity, beginning with Emperor Ella Amida—the father of King Ezana I—in fourth-century C.E. when the Axumite empire was at its apogee. (Some 300 years later, a new religion would come on the scene and it too, in time, would contribute to the development of higher education in precolonial Ethiopia, namely Islam.)

There is a common myth among the lay public that Christianity first arrived in Africa through the agency of Western European missionaries beginning in the fifteenth-century, but both the Egyptian and Ethiopian experiences prove that

this is certainly not so. Focusing on Ethiopia, the precise events that led to the official adoption of Christianity (Monophysite version) by the Aksumite crown has to do with the chance arrival at the royal court in the city of Aksum, around 340 C.E., of two enslaved young brothers and students of philosophy, Frumentius and Aedesius, from the ancient Mediterranean port of Tyre. They had been kidnapped while they were returning home from India; they had gone there on a scholarly visit with a relative (the philosopher Meropius of Tyre). It was Frumentius, the more learned of the two, who was responsible for the formal introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia around the same time (fourth-century) as Christianity arrived in Western Europe through the missionary efforts of men such as Ulfilas (Germany), Martin of Tours (France) and St. Patrick (Ireland). Frumentius, who later upon his manumission would be consecrated as Bishop Frumentius in about 347 C.E. by the Alexandrian Coptic bishop, Athanasius the Great, was greatly helped in his self-appointed task of proselytizing by the fact that while in the service of the Crown he had delivered of himself well, winning the hearts and minds of those who would be among the first converts to the new faith, the royal family itself.

At a broader level, the factors that appear to have facilitated the adoption of Christianity by the Axumites were these two: a preexisting philosophical disposition rooted in a vague monotheism—derived probably from contacts with Christian traders in the preceding centuries—and the perception that it was a religion that could bring benefits given that it was associated with such powerful rulers as the Roman emperor (Constantius II). Of course, as is normal with any new faith, the adoption of Christianity as a nation-wide religion would take many more years; moreover, its close association with the state would also ensure that its fortunes would trace the ebb and flow of the power of the various dynasties to come.[13]

In mentioning southern Arabia a moment ago, reference ought to be made here, too, of its influence in the emergence of writing in Aksum—a necessary precondition for higher education, as noted earlier—in the form of the Ethiopic alphabet in which Ge'ez is written. Ge'ez was one of the main languages of Aksum, which, while no longer spoken today, still remains the liturgical language of the Ethiopian church. The alphabet in all likelihood was borrowed from the Sabaens, but it was given a local twist: according to legend, says Wagaw (1991), King Ezana decreed that the writing should go from left to right and not retain its original right to left orientation so as to imbue it with the tradition of Christian writing (in other words, Greek and Latin). In addition, new marks were integrated into the borrowed alphabet to allow an easier rendering of vowels in a syllabary that was entirely made up of consonants (the user supplied the vowels).

The Axumite kingdom, in time, passed into history and a new line of Ethiopian kings emerged out of a crucible of rebellious violence from among the Agew people of the Ethiopian interior, known as the Zagwe dynasty. Now, it is

not necessary here to go into the whys and wherefores of the demise of the Axumite kingdom; it will suffice to simply note that, as has been the case with every civilization, empire and kingdom of the past that continue to enthrall us to this day, its eclipse, which commenced some time in the seventh-century, was underwritten by both internal and external factors (and among the latter the rise of Islam was particularly important as Muslim shipping eroded Axum's monopoly over international trade in the Red Sea-Indian Ocean region) working dialectically over a long period of time.[14] The Zagwe dynasty would claim direct descent from the line of Axumite kings; but evidence so far suggests that the claim was fabricated for the purposes of underwriting their legitimacy. The church, however, it appears, went along with this claim in an implicitly understood exchange for a state financed, concerted campaign of church development by way of endowments and monuments. For example, the famous rock-hewn churches, numbering no less than eleven, built at the behest of Emperor Lalibela (ruled between 1185 and 1225) at their capital, Roha (present-day Lalibela), are a testimony to this effort. As the decades wore on, more violence facilitated the replacement of the Zagwe dynasty by another one in 1270: the present-day self-styled Solomonid dynasty that claims a line of descent from King Solomon himself—yet another legitimacy driven mythological concoction, but this time lacking in the slightest pretense of even a modicum of credibility, so outlandish is the myth (see Marcus 1994: 17–18 for details). The Ethiopian church, however, once again, rose to the occasion by putting its imprimatur on the myth and immortalizing it in an early fourteenth-century work called *Kebra Negast* ("Glory of Kings")—a hodgepodge of historical, allegorical, and apocalyptic mythology authored by a group of Tigrayan scribes, which in time would acquire the status of a sacred work for Ethiopian Christians.

It will be clear from the foregoing, then, that the institutionalization of Christianity in Ethiopia occurred primarily on the basis of a church-state symbiosis.[15] One other point, the significance of which will be clear in a moment: monasticism, according to legend, says Richard Pankhurst in his introduction in Kalewold (1970), arrived in Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Ella Amida through the agency of nine Syrian monks. Now, not too long after Christianity had become the official state religion, with the king henceforth as its protector, the church began to establish a decentralized, *monastic dominated* educational "system" that would include higher education to meet the specialized needs of both the state and itself—commencing, of course, with that most basic of all administrative needs: literacy. In fact, up until the beginning of the twentieth-century when Western-style secular higher education was introduced, the state's administrative personnel (general administrators, judges, governors, etc.) received their training in this system (or on occasions toward the end of the nineteenth-century they were sent to institutions abroad).

The emergence of premodern higher education in Ethiopia, therefore, occurred from the very beginning within the context of a mutually reinforcing alli-

ance—developed over the centuries against a backdrop of a feudal order—between the church and the state. Note too that the existence of a syllabary fostered from time to time a vibrant intellectual climate marked by such expressions of intellectual life as the production of manuscripts, the development of Ge'ez literature, philosophical disputations, establishment of libraries, artistic and architectural accomplishments, etc. (see Wagaw 1990 for details) that—even if restricted only to the clergy and the nobility—could have had nothing but a positive impact on the birth and growth of higher education in premodern Ethiopia.

The pinnacle of the monastic educational system, which usually took twenty-eight years to reach (starting from the elementary school level), according to Wagaw (1979), was occupied by a higher education institution known as *Metsahift Bet* (or the "School of Holy Books") located in such traditional centers of learning as those found in the provinces of Begemder and Gojam. Wagaw states that the *Metsahift Bet* was "in essence a university where the whole approach to learning, including the qualifications of the professors, methods of teaching and learning, and the popular attitude toward the leadership of the community of scholars, reflected maturity of mind and the ideal of democracy in action" (1979: 21). Those who managed to reach this stage undertook specialized studies in such theological areas as canonical laws, the computation of time and calendar, religious philosophy, religious literature, church history, and so on.

Below the *Metsahift Bet* were two other higher educational levels: the *Qine Bet* (School of Poetry) and below it the *Zema Bet* (School of Hymns).[16] Education at these levels was more restricted in terms of subject matter as may be inferred from their names. In the *Qine Bet*, for example, the primary focus was on religious Ge'ez poetry and literature with the aim of graduating poets of exemplary creativity and skill.[17] However, even when considering the *Metsahift Bet* it must be conceded that the curricular focus was considerably narrow.[18] The characterization of this institution as a "university" by Wagaw (1979) must therefore be seen as an exaggeration (an institution of higher education? Yes, that it is). Science and astronomy, for example, had almost no place in the curriculum. In fact, on the contrary the feeling was that scientific investigations were an intrusion into what was God's exclusive domain and therefore to be shunned.

There were some other serious failings too of the system. Considering the close connection between the church and the state in the context of a feudal political and social order, the higher education system, for the most part, was the preserve of the ruling elites—its graduates (all male) it must be pointed out, were destined for either secular or religious leadership (or both) depending upon their lineage. Moreover, the health of the system was greatly affected by the degree of interest of the ruling monarch in intellectual and ecclesiastical pursuits. For example, relative to others, monarchs such as Zera-Yakob (reigned

1434–1468), Yohannes I (reigned 1667–1682), Iyasu I (reigned 1682–1706) and Iyasu II (reigned 1730–1755), who were all men with extensive intellectual, artistic, and ecclesiastical interests, played significant roles directly and indirectly in the development of the monastic educational system. The problem, however, is that such monarchs were few and far between, thus rendering the positive impact of the state on higher education episodic, which did not make for a healthy educational system at any level over the long-term. In fact, on this matter the prevailing tradition was for the ruling classes to avoid literacy. For, as Milkias (1976) observes, "[i]lliteracy among the ruling classes was neither exceptional nor reprehensible." "As a matter of fact," he continues, "traditionally, reading and writing were not only looked down upon as the Amhara proverb 'the worst of beasts is the scorpion, the worst of men is the *debtera*' attests to, but were also associated with occult powers."[19]

Incidentally, since this proverb mentions the *debtera* (plural *debtrawoch)* and given their important place among the premodern Ethiopian intelligentsia, a word or two about the *debtrawoch* is in order here. In Ethiopian society the *debtrawoch* were both loved and feared; they were loved because of their scribal skills ("copying texts from the sacred books, writing letters and petitions for a fee, running ecclesiastical affairs, or serving as chroniclers in the courts of kings and nobles" [Milkias, p. 82]), but they were also feared because of the general perception that they dealt in the occult. The latter perception, however, was a further source of bread and butter for the *debtrawoch*: for a fee they could be approached for charms, amulets and so on. How did one become a *debtera*? There were three necessary qualities: an inordinate thirst for knowledge (if there is one overriding quality of the *debtrawoch* it was that they were highly learned persons); an opportunity to go through the more than two decades long higher education ladder just described; and (for obvious reasons), dogged perseverance. In sociological terms the importance of the *debtera* lay not only in his possession of scribal skills, but it is through the person of the *debtera* that one can locate the interface between the church and the feudal order, as Milkias explains:

> As the institution of education, the church supplied the secular power with its pen, ideas, ideologies, and the interpreters and justifiers of its legitimacy. To this extent, the linkage of the educated was two-sided. On the one hand, they hinged on the ecclesiastical hierarchy as a conduit to the secular powers, and, on the other, they aspired to win the favors of the secular powers who were the sources of their income. This dual dependence was not, by any means, a fragile one. Both secular and spiritual powers needed the educated: the former for administrative and ideological reasons, the latter for the very existence of the church as a religious and educational institution (p. 85).[20]

Given this powerful role played by the church through the products of its higher educational system, it is understandable that it did everything it could to retain its monopoly over education in Ethiopia even after Ethiopians were exposed to

the existence of other forms of education, notably secular Western education. For, as Milkias points out, "[c]contrary to popular belief…the influence of the church on Ethiopian people was not so much due to the religious fervor of the populace, but due to the monopoly the church enjoyed over education, thereby being not only the main agent of political socialization, but also the only custodian of the discourse of legitimation" (p. 86). Not surprisingly, despite the fact that Ethiopia had a free hand in developing its own educational policies (unlike colonial Africa), even with the onset of modernity (that for purposes of convenience one may date with the Battle of Adwa, in 1896, when the Ethiopians defeated the Italians), Western secular education would take a long time to come to Ethiopia. The resistance put up by the church was only overcome, initially, by a surreptitious approach: the first Western-type school established in Ethiopia by the government (Mennelik II school founded in 1908) specialized primarily in language training and was staffed by Egyptian Coptic clergy. (As noted elsewhere, 1908 was the same year that Egypt was founding its first secular *university*.) But the die was cast; with the founding of each new secular educational institution the church's monopoly grip on education was loosened; in the end it had no control over the development of this form of education that the vast majority of Ethiopians, in time, would aspire toward—as in rest of Africa. The church-run schools of course would continue; but that is not where the ruling classes would send their children, or for that matter most of the rest of the Ethiopian populace (compare here with the fate of the madrasahs in the Islamic empire, discussed later.) In other words, one must agree with Milkias that given that the power of the Ethiopian church was intimately linked with its monopoly over education, once that monopoly was broken it marked for the church the beginning of its slide toward political marginality in the affairs of the state; the coup de grace, however, would not come until the rise of the Derg following the 1974 revolution. The troubling question, however, is, Why didn't this whole process begin much earlier? Thereby placing Ethiopia on a completely different historical trajectory with profoundly positive consequences for the Ethiopian people. The answer is to be found in what may be termed as the "Ethiopia/ Japan anomaly" to be discussed later in this work.

Islamic Education

Among the most successful global propaganda achievements of an African state in modern history clearly has to be that of Ethiopia; it has managed to convince the world that Ethiopia is and has always been a Christian country.[21] Yet Ethiopia, with its close geographic proximity to the original homeland of Islam and surrounded by Muslim neighbors, has always been, both a Christian *and* a Muslim country (that is, after the birth of Islam). In fact, Christians have always been a minority in Ethiopia throughout its history, that is, relative to the rest of the population as a whole. Yes, it is true that because of the strong alli-

ance of Christianity with the Ethiopian state, Muslims (and others, such as Ethiopian Jews [*falashas*]) from time to time have been victims of horrendous persecutions (for example, during the reigns of King Amde-Siyon [1314–44], and Emperors Yishak [1413–30], Zera-Yakob [1434–68], and Yohannes I [1667–82]), including forcible conversions to Christianity (for example during the reigns of Emperors Tewodros II [1855–1868], Yohannis IV [1872–1889], and Menelik of Shewa [1889–1913]) in a replay of what the Muslims did to the Christians during the former's successful but brief onslaught on the Ethiopian state some centuries before. In fact, it is only with the revolution of 1974 that the status of the Muslims began to improve in relation to that of the Christians—until the new dictators (the military junta known as the *Dergue,* an Amharic word for council or committee) turned against both in their drive to create a secular state. Nonetheless, Muslim Ethiopians, far from being a small minority in Ethiopia, have accounted for a considerable proportion of the population. At present they make up 45–50% of the total and if one takes into consideration the 12–18% of animists and others, they form a slight majority relative to the Christians who constitute 35–40%. Moreover, as will be noted in a moment, had it not been for the assistance of the Portuguese, it is quite possible that Ethiopia today would be a Muslim country.

Ironically, Islamic presence in Ethiopia began in 615 C.E. with Aksum hosting, as an act of mercy, a small contingent of Muslim refugees from Arabia during the time of Prophet Muhammed when Islam in its early days of inception was still under persecution. However, its significant presence, achieved on the back of long distance trade and commerce, would not come about until some centuries later when, by the middle of the thirteenth-century, Islamic principalities and sultanates (e.g., the sultanates of Dahlak, Dawaro, Ifat, and Shoa) had emerged to become a firm part of the Ethiopian political landscape with the waning of the kingdom of Aksum. However, with the emergence of the new Solomonid dynasty with its imperial ambitions it was inevitable that the uneasy modus vivendi reached by the Christian state with the Ethiopian Muslims, especially in the central highlands, would, as its power waxed over the subsequent centuries, progressively deteriorate; to be replaced by endemic and bloody conflicts. Finally, it would all come to a head in the sixteenth-century during the reign of Emperor Lebna Dengel (1508–40) with the rise of the charismatic Muslim leader of Harar, Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (nicknamed by the Ethiopian Christians, Ahmed the *Gran*). Uniting a variety of ethnic groups under the banner of Islam he would launch a holy war (*jihad*) against the Christian state, almost annihilating it.

Beginning with the decisive battle of Sembure Kure in 1529 (a tail-end battle in an ongoing war that started in 1526 and provoked by the Christians against the sultanate of Adal in the east) and going on until 1543 when a Portuguese soldier's bullet felled al-Ghazi, the Muslims would bring the Ethiopian state to its knees. Along the way the Muslims wreaked unimaginable barbaric

havoc on the Ethiopian church, looting and laying waste its churches and monasteries and, in flagrant violation of Qur'anic injunctions, putting to the sword any one who refused to convert to Islam. It is only in 1543, by which time two-thirds of the Ethiopian empire was now under the sway of the Muslims, that providence would at long last take the side of the Ethiopian state. In a coincidence of coincidences, it had just so happened that two years before, a Portuguese fleet had arrived at the Eritrean port of Massawa on the Red Sea from its base in the Portuguese Indian colony of Goa to counter the growing influence of the Ottomans in the region. The Ethiopian Christians beseeched them for assistance, and the Portuguese were only too happy to oblige and do battle with the Muslims, their sworn enemies (see Appendix II). Al-Ghazi and his forces, however, were not to be stopped; they soundly defeated the Ethiopians and their Portuguese allies. But two years later, it would be a different story. The tide would turn against al-Ghazi. His death on the battlefield in February of that fateful year of 1543, at a place east of Lake Tana, so demoralized his army that they were decisively routed. Thereafter, the Solomonid dynasty reconquered the territories lost to the Muslims, eventually reducing al-Ghazi's meteoric *jihad* to a whirlwind that had come and gone. Though that is not to say that the Islamic presence in Ethiopia would be extinguished. It would continue to survive; its fortunes, however, would ebb and flow as before, down the centuries, with each political gyration of the Solomonid dynasty.

It is against this backdrop one must consider the development of Islamic higher education in Ethiopia, in the form of *madrasahs*. Since these institutions will be the subject of discussion at some length in a moment and in Appendix I, it will suffice now to simply note that it is during the long interstitial periods of peace and prosperity over the centuries that the Ethiopian Muslims, like all Muslim communities elsewhere in the Islamic empire (and like their Ethiopian Christian counterparts too), developed vibrant centers of higher learning. However, given the vicissitudes of Muslim fortunes none would survive to the present, except for one: the town of Harrar. The disappearance of most centers of learning over the course of Ethiopian history should not be taken to imply, however, that the Ethiopian Muslims did not and have not retained their madrasahs in their individual communities.[22]

While the monastic educational system and the madrasahs may have been adequate for the needs of the Ethiopians when viewed narrowly in terms of transmission of ecclesiastical knowledge—coupled with the production of religious and administrative personnel for a premodern feudal era—from the perspective of the task of modernization that the state would eventually feel compelled to embark upon, especially following the attempted takeover of the country by foreigners (the Italians) in the 1890s, the problem becomes self-evident. An entirely new higher educational system had to be imported almost wholesale from abroad. This will be the subject of the section on modern Ethiopia in Chapter 5.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRECOLONIAL ISLAMIC AFRICA

If it is true (and the jury of history, as pointed out earlier, has yet to render an *incontrovertible* verdict on this), that the great Alexandrian library complex, that is whatever had remained of it as the fortunes of the Roman Empire waned, was destroyed in a pyrotechnical fit of incalculable ignorance by the Muslims following their arrival in 639 C.E. in Egypt, then this great tragedy constitutes among the supreme ironies of history. Why? There are two reasons: First, it is they who, in time, would become the custodians of the knowledge that came out of that complex when the lights of learning were reduced to a flicker all over Europe by the depredations of the barbarians that poured out of the European forests, plunging it into the so-called Dark Ages (see Appendix I). Second, the only known precolonial higher education institutions in Africa, besides those established by the ancient Egyptians and the Ethiopians, were those founded by the Muslims. However, this is moving the discussion somewhat far ahead of itself; one must pause here because there are one or two relevant matters of context that must be dispensed with right away; albeit briefly. First, a short exegesis into the emergence of the Islamic empire and civilization is in order, and then there is the very important matter of clarification regarding nomenclature: Muslim in place of Arab.[23]

One will probably never know why the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which together geographically hold sway over most of the globe today, all originated in the sands of the Middle Eastern desert. Be that as it may, the last to emerge among them, and hence the youngest, is Islam. From a theological point of view, this position in the chronological hierarchy was not a good omen; for much in the same way that Judaism, centuries earlier, had come to see the newly emergent religion of Christianity as an upstart and a usurper, so too did both of them together now regard Islam thusly. Islam's recognition of the other two as its forebears appeared to have merely intensified their animosity (see Lewis 1993, for more on the theological and chronological differences, and their consequences for relations between the three religions). Consequently, the nascent religion felt vulnerable; and all the more so given the nature of its birth: in the womb of armed conflict as its immediate enemies, the pagan Arabs in the city of Mecca (where Islam was first proclaimed by its messenger, Prophet Muhammed), attempted to vanquish it. It is perhaps not surprising then, that Islam—which means "to submit to the will of *God*" (that is, the monotheistic God of Moses and Jesus and referred to in Arabic as *Al'lah*)—would begin a march of conquest soon after it had managed to become the dominant religion in Saudi Arabia (by 632 C.E.) to subdue its enemies: the Christian Byzantines to their West and the polytheistic Persians to their east. Unbeknownst to them, and to anyone else for that matter, it would be a march that would eventually culminate in the creation of an empire that in ge-

ographic magnitude would be excelled by only one other empire in the entire history of humankind: that of the British more than 1,000 years later.[24]

Consider the nature of this feat, as that great doyen of African history, Basil Davidson (1995: 126–127), reminds us: on July 16, 622 C.E., Islam is effectively born with the arrival in Medina from Mecca of four exhausted and penniless fugitives, Prophet Muhammed and his three companions; yet within only a mere twenty-two years of this highly inauspicious beginning, by 644, the Muslims had taken over Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and conquered Alexandria; by 670 they were ruling most of North Africa; by 711 they were in Spain, two years later they had arrived in Portugal, and a year later again, in 714, they were in France, to be eventually stopped in their westward expansion, it would be appear, some years on, in 733, by Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers (sometimes also referred to as the Battle of Tours) near the Loire River.[25] In the East, by 651, the Muslims had absorbed the Persian empire that had lasted more than 1,000 years, and in time they would go into India, and beyond (see also Watt 1972). What is even more remarkable—the magnitude of which, tragically, is further reinforced when viewed from the vantage point of today's widespread political, economic, and social disarray (often wrapped in a cocoon of unmitigated absolutist tyranny for good measure) that characterizes much of the Islamic world*;* vide: Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, and so on)—is that in those lands where the Muslims achieved some degree of permanence, their invasions did not reproduce the large-scale chaos and mindless destruction characteristic of the invasions of, say, the European barbarians of two centuries earlier: the Vandals, Goths, Visigoths, or, say, the Mongols of the Golden Horde of five centuries later. Instead, as Davidson (1995: 126–127) points out: "In Africa, Spain and Asia these victories laid the groundwork for a civilization that could and did unite men of religion, learning and philosophy from the Mediterranean to Arabia, from the plains of the western Sudan to the hills of China, and bore a light of tolerance and social progress through centuries when Europe, impoverished, provincialized and almost illiterate, lay in distant battle and confusion." And even after the widespread devastation that the Muslims suffered at the hands of the Mongol invaders in the thirteenth-century, they would rise up again in the following century to produce the Ottoman Empire that would last into the twentieth-century. It would be a process that would, in yet another one of those strange ironies of history, involve the conversion of the Mongols themselves to Islam and their enlistment into rebuilding the empire, which at its apogee would now stretch from Central Asia in the East to southeastern Europe in the West, incorporating countries as diverse as the Ukraine and Egypt; Syria and Greece; Israel and Hungary; Iraq and Bosnia; Saudi Arabia and Romania; and so on. Yet, despite the enormous magnitude of the diversity of peoples and cultures that the empire incorporated, it would work for nearly another 600 years, held together by structures and institutions rooted in the religion of Islam. A key question that

emerges here is this: Given the magnitude, the speed and the longevity, how were the Muslims able to achieve so much? An interplay—repeat, interplay—of at least eight factors, albeit in various permutations and, it must be stressed, *at various levels of adherence in practice*, were probably critical in ensuring their success. The following is a quick rundown of them in no particular order on the basis of various sources (e.g., Ahmed 1975; Butler 1998 [1902], Courbage and Fargues 1997; Esposito 2000; Hillenbrand 1999; Hodgson 1974; Hourani 2002; Stanton 1990; and Watt 1965.

First, was the deep military discipline of the Islamic forces, which was an outcome of a combination of two factors: the belief that they were engaged in holy wars (*jihad*) and a powerful zeal to go the extra mile—characteristic of converts to a new religion. Second, was the weakness of the conquered in terms of disarray within the governing regimes on one hand, and on the other, the resentment of the populace against the regimes that ruled them because of oppression (it was not unusual for the Muslims to be welcomed as liberators *or to be simply indifferent to their arrival*—instead of putting up resistance). Third, was the philosophy of tolerance following conquest—for example, by virtue of a covenant (the *dhimma*) promulgated by the Islamic state, the conquered received protection; in return they were only required to pay a poll tax (the *jizya*), they were not required to convert, neither were they enslaved, and nor were their cultural and religious institutions destroyed—compare, for example, with the orderly arrival of the Muslims in Jerusalem in 638 C.E. with the mind-numbing horrifying carnage inflicted by the Crusaders when they stormed its walls on July 15, 1099.[26] (Conquest, in other words, did not necessarily mean conversion, since conversion by force is prohibited by the Qur'an. This was in marked contrast, for example, to how the Christian states treated other religious groups—witness the Spanish Inquisition—in their realm. See Mastnak 2002, for more on this.) Fourth, was the absolute unity of the temporal and the eternal in Islamic theology, which meant that the mechanics of statecraft—including taxation, economics and law—were among the elements of conquest that the Muslims brought with them, it did not have to be invented on an ad hoc basis (the surest door to anarchy and confusion). Fifth, was the concept of the global community (*ummah*), which preached the absolute unity of all Muslims regardless of their class status or race or ethnicity or nationality (one result of this view was that the subjugated could achieve parity with their rulers through conversion, while another was the universality of Islamic citizenship where all Muslims enjoyed virtually the same rights where ever they traveled in the empire). Sixth, was the ritualistic simplicity of worship (those who converted to Islam found that it was a very unpretentious and austere religion in terms of rituals and lifestyle, including the absence of a priestly class (which always has the potential to degenerate into a parasitically oppressive class—as had occurred in some of the societies that the Muslims came across). Seventh, was the multicultural unity of the Islamic world—which found its religious expression in the

hajj (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, which is mandatory on all Muslims at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it)—an outcome of which was that Islam did not recognize nationalistic and ethnic boundaries: all cultures and all nations were welcome into the faith on an equal footing; in this sense it was a truly multicultural religion. Eighth, was the urban commercial character of Islam (given that it was born in an urban commercial environment. One outcome of this was that economic prosperity, derived from commerce and trade across the length and breadth of the empire, was an integral part of the package that the Muslims brought with them. (Regarding this last factor, it is instructive to note here that, as Curtin (1984: 107), reminds one, it is commerce and not arms that accounts for the presence of Muslims in China and Indonesia—countries that each host the largest population of Muslims in the world.) Nineth, was the practice of the Muslim generals to provide a peaceful alternative to armed battle to those they were about to confront. To explain, an important innovation that the Muslims introduced (for the time period) was that before formal hostilities commenced, they would offer three choices to their enemies: either to convert to Islam, or surrender peacefully and be allowed to retain life, religion, property and general way of life (except that a poll tax would be levied, as noted earlier), or do battle. Many would choose the second alternative.

A second matter that must be dealt with is the use of the term Arab by Western historians whenever they refer to Muslims. This is erroneous for two reasons: First, then (as today) not all Arabs were Muslims and equally certainly, not all Muslims were Arabs. In fact, from the very beginning of the founding of Islam, for example, there were African converts to Islam residing in Saudi Arabia. (See, for example, Talib [1988] for a fascinating account of the African diaspora in Asia.) Second, given the relatively (the key word here is relatively) inclusive nature of Islam, the Islamic military forces had many other nationalities among them besides Arabs, but many of whom were Muslims too. (It should be remembered that the Arab population simply did not have the numbers to create the huge armies that arose in the course of the Islamic conquests.) From a strictly theological point of view Islam does not recognize the concept of the chosen race; in fact, such socially divisive markers as racism and nationalism (contrary to current practice in Islamic countries) are forbidden.[27] However, it does recognize the supremacy of Muslims over others, but even here there is a qualifier: it recognizes Christianity and Judaism as legitimate religions (their adherents are referred to in Islam as the "People of the Book").

Now, to move on with the discussion: It is a truism, as noted earlier, that any religion that possesses the written word, in the form of a holy book(s), will make provisions for some form of religious education, beginning with literacy, and going on to higher education. The Islamic injunction was that every Muslim community had to provide for the education of its young in, at the minimum, basic religious matters (which included of course the learning of Arabic, the memorization of the Qur'an, and some acquaintance with the *Shari'ah* (Islamic

laws) and the *hadith* (authenticated utterances and injunctions of the Prophet Muhammed). This educational system would evolve beyond elementary levels of education to include higher education institutions, such as prototype universities. This is attributable of course to another truism: that you need to train the teachers, and then the teachers of the teachers.

There were, however, other powerful conducive factors in this regard specific to Islam; going by Stanton (1990), Totah (1926), and others, they include the following (listed in no order of importance): (1) In the absence of a clergy, there emerged a scholarly class (the *ulama*) whose legitimacy could only rest on erudition and piety—unlike in the case of Christianity where legitimacy (at the immediate level) derived from an ecclesiastical bureaucracy. The absence of a clergy, one ought to explain, stemmed from the specifics of Islamic theology in which there is a deliberate absence of provision for transcendental intercession between the faithful and their Creator through the agency of other human beings—no matter how holy and pious.[28] (2) Islam's need for an ulama arose, in the first place, because Islam is a juridical-based religion, which itself was an outcome of two principal factors: first, its theology rested on the unity of the temporal and the divine so that pursuit of one's faith did not end at the mosque door, but extended into every corner of one's life, ranging from the private to the public, and second, the Qur'an did not provide details for all aspects of religious practice; it had to be supplemented with *hadith* and in the matter of the minutiae of every day life, the *sunnah* (the Prophet's behavioral precedents as verified by *hadith*).[29] (3) The high value placed by Islam on learning in general for its own sake, which included the view that the study of the natural worlds (biological, physical, etc.) was an aid to one's faith because it was a form of pietistic contemplation of the attributes of God. The Islamic civilization required, as already noted earlier, all of its adherents, male and female, young and old, rich and poor, to acquire knowledge (something that no other civilization had ever mandated before). (4) The use of Arabic as the liturgical language of Islam, which created a need to provide instruction in the use of this language to the vast numbers of non-Arab converts. (5) The role of Arabic (which was a language that already had within it the potential to articulate, as and when the need arose, "philosophical, theological, and scientific abstractions" [Stanton 1990: 9]) as the lingua franca of the elites, including the intellectual elites, in the Islamic empire facilitated intellectual discourse across a wide expanse of space and time, thereby enhancing the potential for the development of higher education within the empire.[30] (6) The requirement of the annual mandatory pilgrimage to Mecca that further enhanced intellectual discourse as Islamic scholars from all across the Islamic world gathered annually in a single place for worship and spiritual rejuvenation. (From this perspective, Mecca served and continues to serve, as a worldwide annual "conference," albeit a highly informal one, of Muslim scholars of every ethnicity and nationality.) (7) The necessity to provide some educational training for government officials as their

numbers multiplied with each successive wave of expansion of the empire. (8) The injunction that one learn the basic regulations pertaining to one's occupation or profession to ensure that one remained within the boundaries of Islamic law *even as one engaged in the pursuit of material interests*. (9) Like all major religions that aspired to global universality, Islam was not spared the development of fractional tendencies arising out of controversies, heresies, and so on; one outcome of this was attempts to use educational institutions to either counter or encourage these tendencies.

"From the beginning, then," to quote Berkey (1992: 6), "Islam was a religion of the book and of learning, a society that esteemed knowledge and education above almost every other human activity." Ergo: "Islam's high estimation of the value of knowledge translated naturally into broad-based social and cultural support for education" (p. 3).[31] Now, the Islamic higher education institutions that the Muslims established for themselves all over the Islamic world, including in Africa, usually took the form of schools and proto-universities or colleges (called madrasahs) that were attached to mosques or run independently from them out of other public (and private) premises.[32]

A model Islamic higher education system—the key word here is model, for in a sense the system (this term is not being used here in an organizational sense because Islamic higher education institutions were usually independent and self-financed; they were only linked together by the commonality of features and the informal interchange of teachers, scholars, and students) was always a work in progress—found in various permutations throughout Islamic Africa (and elsewhere in the Islamic world) looked like this: At the apex was the madrasah, which was established by means of an endowed charitable trust called *waqf*.[33] It was usually, but not always, attached to a major urban mosque where Friday congregational prayers took place (Friday being the holiest day of the week for Muslims) and included a residential component for its poor and out-of-town students.[34] The curriculum of the madrasahs was typically made up of three categories: the first dealt with the fundamental Islamic sciences: Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*); the traditions of Prophet Muhammed, namely behavioral precedents (*sunnah*) and public utterances (*hadith*); and Islamic law (*Shari'ah*), which itself was made up of two components: Islamic law proper (*al-fiqh*) and the sources of this law (jurisprudence—termed *usul al-fiqh*). The second comprised elements of language, namely: the Qur'anic language (*al-lughah*)—which in this case of course it was classical Arabic; grammar (*al-nahw wa'l-sarf*); literary style and rhetoric (*al-balaghah*); literature (*al-adab*); and the art of Qur'anic recitation (*al-qira'at*). The third category, which was usually considered to be of slightly lower level of importance included subjects such as astronomy, history, medicine, and mathematics. Below the madrasahs came the *halqahs* or the study circles located in congregational mosques (*jami-al-masjid*)—the principal mosques in a city or district where the Friday sermons and prayers took place.

The subjects taught in *halqahs* were varied, but always included some basic Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, hadith, and so on. Below the *halqahs* were the *majlis* found in all types of mosques (*masjids*), other than the congregational mosque; they were, in essence, an informal variety of the *halqahs*. The person who usually taught in the majlis was the prayer leader of the mosque (the *imam*). Under these two masjid connected institutions were the elementary schools known as the *kuttab* (also known as the *maktab*; the names are interchangeable), which taught the most elementary aspects of religious observance together with some Qur'anic recitation in Arabic (regardless of the children's native tongue).[35] It should be pointed out here that at some major *jami-al-masjids* (as at *al-Azhar* and at *al-Zaitouna*—see later in this chapter). All these institutions could be found under one roof. In other words, it was not uncommon for such major institutions to have within its precincts, at one and the same time, children starting their first lessons in literacy and adults pursuing what may be considered as the equivalent of graduate-level studies. Other characteristics of this education system worthy of note, include these:

How well the system functioned *in practice* was dependent a great deal on distance from the major towns and cities. That is, the quality of the system (in terms of resources, instructional effectiveness, repute, etc.) tended to degrade as one got further away from major population centers.[36]

It was a mass-based, relatively democratic education system—which was highly unusual for any civilization up to that point—hence ability to pay was not usually an issue because education was, for the most part, free.[37] (Even where it was not free, especially at the higher, specialized levels of the system, provisions were generally made for talented students without means to be awarded scholarships.) This development spoke to the fact that Islam, on one hand, enjoined on all parents the compulsory education of their children, at least up to the first rung of the system (the *kuttab* level), and on the other, mandated all communities to educate a select few, the very talented, to the highest educational-level in order to meet the staffing needs of the system as a whole, as well as ensure the availability of a cadre of ulama for juridical duties. The reason for this was that the ability to recite the Qur'an *in Arabic*, together with the acquisition of knowledge of basic foundational aspects of the religion, was obligatory on all Muslims (male and female) at the individual level; and at the level of society as a whole, it was obligatory to have persons well versed in community-level religious matters; ranging from presiding over legal disputes to execution of inheritance laws to taking care of funerary matters.[38] As to who was allowed to progress up the educational ladder; in keeping with the democratic nature of the system, merit more than financial circumstances was the determining factor (for the most part, though not always—students of ability from poor family backgrounds were sometimes unable to go forward because their parents needed their labor). Note: that there could be no deviation from this principle was guaranteed by the fact that further progression depended on a sol-

id memorization of the Qur'an *in its entirety*—not an easy feat to accomplish—and that ability as all societies know instinctively is more a function of genetics and dedication rather than financial or social standing.

Regarding the financial basis of the system: it rested primarily on charitable contributions (from all who could afford it to the best of their ability), especially in the form of trust funds (*waqf qhayri*) mentioned earlier. Such contributions in Islam held a special pride of place among those many voluntary meritorious deeds encouraged on the faithful. It may be noted that for the wealthy, including the rulers, there were two immediate benefits that accrued from this: legitimacy and enhanced standing in the community, and for some a personal religious fulfillment that comes out of executing a religious duty.[39]

Regardless of what level one is concerned with, the educational system of the Islamic empire, for the most part, was based on an institutional context of organizational decentralization and considerable structural informality in that some of the basic structural elements that one associates with modern educational institutions were largely absent.[40] Teaching, learning, and scholarship to a great extent relied on word-of-mouth repute of teachers (not institutions per se as will be pointed out in a moment), and of course, self-dedication of the student.

Pedagogy at the higher education-level relied mainly on the scholastic method where, by means of lectures in front of a radially seated study circle (the most senior students being closest to the teacher), a select body of venerated and often unchanging texts (this was a world where despite the existence of paper and awareness of the invention of the printing press, printing never really took hold because of a misguided notion that the mechanical printing of religious texts was sacrilegious) would be pored over to raise contrarian arguments and then proceeding to vanquish them with quotes from the same text (see Appendix I).[41]

An important dimension of instruction in the madrasahs was an even more informal (but hardly any less important) device: *peer learning*. Peer learning provided the necessary pedagogical intimacy between the teacher and learner that was usually lacking in the formal study circles. This is where acquisition of basic concepts, memorization, engagement with the texts, discussions, and so on, took place (a modern equivalent of the role of peer learning is that provided by the tutorial or recitation in universities in the United States). In fact, without peer learning it is unlikely that the system could have functioned at all.

Despite the ubiquity of the educational system, given its decentralization and informality coupled with its religious functions, the role of the state, if it was present at all, tended to be restricted for the most part to the financing of the system (which even then was episodic at best, depending on the philanthropic proclivities of a given ruler), and not its control. Therefore, the *ulama* (in their atomized entity—since Islam does not have ecclesiastical bureaucra-

cies) had almost total control of all the components that made up the system (with all that it implied for relevance to the changing needs of their societies).

The role of the *ulama* in the education system went beyond simply staffing the madrasahs; it is they and not the madrasahs themselves that were the repository of educational excellence, fame, reputation, and so on. In other words, one or two teachers of great repute, in terms of learning *and* piety, could easily make or break a madrasah with their ability to attract (or the reverse) both a large following of students from near and far, and *waqf* contributions. In the Islamic educational system, education was always, in the last instance, personal, not institutional.[42] This is nowhere more clearly attested to than in the artifact of the *ijaza* (discussed later). Ergo, peripatetism was always an intrinsic part of Islamic education. Both, teachers and students traveled great distances, including going abroad, to learn and teach. In other words, the foreign student or scholar is not as modern a person as one may think. Such institutions of higher learning as al-Azhar, al-Zaitouna, al-Qarawiyyin, as well as the madrasahs of major Islamic centers of learning like Cordoba, Baghdad, Damascus, and Timbuktu, always had a significant component of its population comprising foreign students and scholars (including at times non-Muslim foreign students as well).

Madrasahs almost always were also centers of worship, therefore Islamic higher education institutions tended to have multifaceted roles. It would have been rare for a *waqf* of a madrasah not to make provisions for worship by providing stipends for the imam (prayer leader), the *muezzin* (caller to prayers), Qur'anic reciters, and so on. Learning in Islam always had an explicit spiritual dimension to it.[43]

Above the madrasahs there existed in an even more informal outlet for higher education, but it was of no less significance: the *hajj* (the mandatory pilgrimage to Mecca/ Medina) The *hajj* permitted the congregation of Islamic scholars from across the length and breadth of the Islamic world creating in a sense opportunities for scholarly interchange that can generously be described as a "world university" without walls.

From about thirteenth to fourteenth-century onward, as a result of external forces buffeting the Islamic empire (discussed in Appendix II), the madrasah system began to enter a period of slow but steady decline in terms of the general quality of the education that it imparted so that by the time we arrive at the end of the eighteenth-century the system, with rare exception, was incapable of *efficiently* serving the religious needs of the community; and equally importantly, could not meet the new human capital and other allied educational needs that the forces of modernization threw up through out the empire. One consequence of this was that the state had to either overhaul the madrasah system all together or to simply go outside it and create an alternative secular educational system.

Side by side with the madrasah system, there was also another one, but which was even more informal and it was primarily restricted to large wealthy cities that had acquired a reputation as centers of learning. This system special-

ized in what was known as the foreign sciences (*awail*)—secular subjects such as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and so on. The institutions that made up this system included private and public libraries, research institutes (known as *Bait al Hikmah* or House of Wisdom), hospitals (known as *bimaristan* to which there was almost always a teaching unit attached), and even bookstores. Additionally, there existed guilds for the teaching and learning of vocational subjects (iron smithing, jewelry-making, clerical studies, etc.) and military academies to teach martial arts to a select few.[44]

In Africa, while some form of Islamic higher education on the basis of the foregoing institutions existed in every locality where there was a sizeable Muslim population, places that came to be regarded as centers of learning with an extensive higher education system teaching both Islamic and foreign sciences were of course few; they included: Cairo (which boasts the famous al-Azhar University that was founded as a madrasah in 969 C.E.); Fez in Morocco (the modern-day Qarawiyyin University in Fez began its life as a madrasah in 859 C.E.); Timbuktu in Mali (which, with its various madrasahs—such as the Sankore madrasah—became Islamic West Africa's premier center of learning); Al-Qayrawan (Kairouan) in Tunisia (founded in 674 by the commander of the Muslim Army that conquered Tunisia (in 670), Uqbah ibn Nafi, and which would in time become one of the most important centers of learning in the Maghreb).[45] Tunisia would also come to host another important Maghrebi institution, to be discussed in a moment: the madrasah attached to the *al-Zitouna* mosque, which has survived through the centuries to become the modern al-Zaitouna (Ezzitouna) University of today (not surprisingly, it proclaims itself as the oldest university in the Islamic world).

Al-Zaitouna

No firm date is possible to discern, so far, from the historical record as to specifically when the al-Zaitouna mosque, which in time would become the basis of an important mosque-college, was first built: one view has it that it was constructed at the time of the capture of Tunis in 698–99 C.E. by Hassan Ibn al-Numan, while another states that the mosque began its life in 732–33 under Ubayd-allah Ibn Habhab.[46] However, we do know that the Aghlabids carried out major renovations of the mosque sometime in the middle of the ninth-century and, as one would logically expect in the case of institutions as old as al-Zaitouna, further improvements took place periodically at various times through out its history (e.g., around 990–95 under the Zirids; 1250, 1277, 1316, 1438–39 under the Hafsids; 1894 during the time of the French protectorate).[47]

At the same time, one cannot say with certainty that the mosque was an important scholarly institution from its very inception; in fact, on the contrary, it is more likely that for most of the early part of the history of the mosque there were other madrasahs that were of greater importance within Tunis itself and

even more so at al-Kayrawan, which was an important center of learning (no doubt an associative development of the fact that it was the capital of the entire Maghreb at one point), where madrasahs at mosques such as that of Ukba bin Nafi had achieved considerable preeminence.[48] The importance of al-Zaitouna madrasah probably began to wax from around the time of the Hafsids as Tunis itself acquired significance as the capital of Ifriqiya (as Tunisia was then called).

By the time of the Spanish invasion of Tunis and their desecration of the mosque (together with the destruction of its library) following their occupation of La Goletta on July 14, 1534, al-Zaitouna boasted scores of halqahs (numbering as many as 70 or more) within its precincts. In time, the madrasah would recover and its fortunes would improve considerably as its waqf income was supplemented by funding provided by the Husaynid dynasty (c. 1715–1957). As for the nature of its curriculum, it was typical of other major madrasahs such as al-Azhar and al-Qarawiyyin, though many of the texts used at the institution came from Muslim Spain. The influence of Muslim Spain (which came about as a result of Spanish ulama seeking refuge in the Maghreb from the Reconquista) was also present in the pedagogy in that there was a greater emphasis on memorization than was the case at madrasahs in Egypt and elsewhere in the East.[49] Among the illustrious sons of the institution have included the thirteenth-century encylopedist, Ahmed Tifachi, the geographer Abdallah Tijani; and the brilliant historian and sociologist, Abderrahman Ibn Khaldoun (Ibn Khaldun). (For more on the institution in the modern era, see Chapter 3).

Al-Qarawiyyin

Al-Qarawiyyin began its life as a small mosque constructed in 859 C.E. by means of an endowment bequeathed by a wealthy woman of much piety, Fatima bint Muhammed al-Fahri. She was originally from Kayrawan in Tunisia and she had migrated with her family to Fez (also known as Fas). The ruler in her time, whose permission would have been most likely sought for such a project, was Amir Yahya Ibn Idris, the grandson of Idris II. Subsequent architectural additions (alcoves, expansion of prayer halls, minarets, cupolas, madrasahs, fountains, library, etc.) to the building to reach its present Hispano-Arab form and compass would include the contributions of: Amir Dawoud, a grandson of Idrisi I (in 877); Amir Ahmed bin Abil-Said, a Zanata Amir and vassal of the Umayyad caliph of Cordoba in Muslim Spain who provided the funding (in 956); al-Muzaffar, the son of the famous Muhammed Ibn Abu Amir al-Mansur (c. 938–1002) of Cordoba who ruled Muslim Spain from 978 until his death (a cupola, among other additions, in 998); Ibn Muisha al-Kinani, a qadi under Amir Ali bin Yousuf (beginning in 1134 and not completed until 1144); Abu Inan Faris, a Marinid sultan (in 1349—founded the library, which was later significantly expanded by Ahmed al-Mansur, a Saadi sultan); and the present Alawite dynasty,

who through the designation of the inner city (called *madina*) of Fez, where the mosque is located, as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, continues to contribute to its survival.

While instruction at the mosque must have begun almost from the beginning, it is only when it had become a Friday congregational prayer mosque (*jami masjid*) by the end of tenth-century that its reputation as a center of learning in both religious and secular sciences (philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, etc.) must have begun to wax. By the twelfth-century it had firmly established its reputation, attracting scholars from all over Islamic North Africa (including as far south as Timbuktu) and Muslim Spain. After the decline of Muslim Spain, especially from the thirteenth-century onward brought on by the *Reconquista*, coupled with the transfer of the Moroccan capital by the Saadis from Fez to Marrakash its star would slowly but inexorably begin to wane.

It would appear then that the institution reached its apogee probably sometime between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; thereafter stasis and later a slow but steady decline would set in. The curriculum would become narrow, focusing almost exclusively on the religious sciences and even here certain fields were taught less and less, such as Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir). The institution still remained the university equivalent for Morocco itself, but its significance abroad certainly waned. Some effort was made to introduce curricular and pedagogic reforms (for example in 1788 by Sultan Muhammed bin Abd Allah; and in 1845 by Mawlay Abd al-Rahman) to the institution, but over the long-term their impact must have been marginal.

As is usually the case with any institution that relied on informal administrative structures, there are no reliable statistics available on student enrollment, number of faculty, and so on. It is possible to guess that it may have once enrolled up to 3,000 students; by the time we arrive in the twentieth-century, however, there were less than a 1,000. As for faculty it is that thought there were 425 scholars teaching there in 1830, but by 1906 their number had dropped to 266, and of them only 101 were still teaching, the rest were officials in the Sultan's administration (referred to as the *Makhzen*) (Porter 2002: 131).

Among the highlights of learning in the history of the institution that we know of include these: At one time Maimonides (Moses Ben Maimon), the distinguished Jewish philosopher and physician to Sultan Saladin (of Crusade fame), had studied there (1159–65); many celebrated scholars from Muslim Spain who sought refuge from the unfolding Reconquista made it their institutional home (especially from the thirteenth-century onward following the Battle of Al-Uqab [also known as Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa] on July 16, 1212, when the combined forces of Aragon, Castile, Leon, Navarre, and Portugal, under the banner of a pope-sanctioned crusade, permanently broke the back of Muslim rule in Spain by defeating the Almohad Army led by caliph Muhammed an-Nasir); and Ibn Khaldun had studied and taught there.[50] (Note, like Timbuktu [described later], the Medina in Fez where al-Qarawiyyin is located was de-

clared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1981. The institution's history for the period following the arrival of French colonial rule in 1912, up to the present, is covered in Chapter 3.)[51]

The Madrasahs of Timbuktu: Jewels of Islamic West Africa

The city of Timbuktu began its life sometime in the late eleventh-century C.E. as a trading encampment of the Tuareg community (a Berber-speaking Islamized pastoralists) in the Sahelian desert at a point where the River Niger, Africa's third largest river, produces a huge internal delta at a section on the river known as the Niger Bend, in what is present-day Mali. From this beginning, it would eventually grow into a major city and acquire considerable international fame in the process; albeit some of it undeserved given the exaggerations—especially in Europe. Even though no one in Europe knew exactly where Timbuktu was, many, for centuries, according to Gardner (1968), had come to believe in such myths as that that it was the greatest city of culture and architectural achievements in Africa where houses, even had roofs made of gold!

Of course, by the time the first European adventurers had made their way to the city, inevitably drawn to it like moths to a candle, 700 years or so later in the nineteenth-century, it had long entered the stage of decay—their disappointment is palpable (see their accounts in Gardner 1968). Anyhow, while in its heyday it may not have had roofs of gold, it certainly did have gold of a different type: that currency of the mind: scholarship and learning. Writing in 1896, the French traveler Felix Dubois, makes this point this way following his visit to the city: to be sure the city was wanting in architectural achievements (understandably, he suggests, considering the lack of readily available time-insured building materials such as stone, given the city's geographic location); nevertheless, "[u]nable, therefore, to develop the sensuous arts, Timbuctoo [sic] reserved all her strength for the intellectual, and here her dominion was supreme." He goes on to quote a West African proverb: "Salt comes from the north, gold from the south, and silver from the country of the white men, but the word of God and the treasures of wisdom are only to be found in Timbuctoo" (Dubois 1969 [1896]: 275–76).

Located as it was on the synaptic intersection of great land and water routes of the Sahel, the Sahara and the Savannah of West Africa, it is perhaps not surprising that along with the ensuing commerce-driven prosperity there emerged scholarly communities attached to the various mosques in the city, quite possibly patterned, Hiskett (1984) surmises, on the al-Azhar mosque university (discussed later); though al-Qarawiyyin may have also had significant influence because of its relative proximity. For, there is no doubt that at the apogee of its existence Timbuktu was involved in a vibrant scholarly traffic of persons and ideas between itself and other centers of learning in the Islamic empire (Cairo, Damascus, etc.) as a consequence of three interrelated factors: the excellence of

its learning; the mandatory annual pilgrimage to Mecca; and the use of Arabic as the medium of scholarly instruction and discourse. Moreover, for most of its history, it remained an autonomous city—a prototype city state—because of its Islamic heritage. (In other words, for the surrounding state of the day, from an administrative point of view, but not taxation of course, the city was usually perceived as a foreign implant to be left alone.)

Interestingly, even though Timbuktu was a Muslim city, it was not an Arab or Berber city, but an indigenous West African city in which were to be found many different racial/ ethnic groups living together (a sine qua non of any large settlement worthy of being characterized a city) and who participated in its governance through the agency of a multiethnic Islamic scholarly patriciate. According to Saad (1983: 110), in the long history of Timbuktu there is no record of racially/ ethnically-based societal conflict. This should not be surprising for two reasons, one that racism/ ethnicism is, at the theological-level at least, prohibited in Islam (see, however, the discussion on this matter later), and two, in a religious community where erudition and piety, as already noted earlier, was a major avenue of achieving high status, anyone of any ethnicity could achieve these. Consequently, he explains, in Timbuktu there was seemingly little tolerance for racial/ ethnic prejudices.

That a scholarly patriciate governed Timbuktu, explains Saad (1983) in his detailed and well documented social history of that city, stemmed from the specific circumstances of the introduction of Islam into West Africa: diffusion. To elaborate, unlike in the case of North Africa, the engine for the spread of Islam into other regions of Africa was not wars of conquest; rather, in most of West Africa, certainly (and in East Africa too), for example, Islam arrived primarily through trade and commerce. The process, which was greatly facilitated by the rapid development of the trans-Saharan trade following the arrival of that Saharan ship of the desert, the camel (introduced probably in the second-century C.E., but most definitely well established by the time the Muslim traders made their first appearance) is succinctly summarized by Hiskett (1984: 30) in his detailed survey of the development of Islam in West Africa: "It is a common human characteristic that people who think alike and follow the same way of life are inclined to assist each others trading activities more readily. Moreover, where credit is based very largely on personal reputations and contracts[, which] have to be fulfilled to unknown or distant persons, men are more likely to trust those who share their religion. This was especially so in the case of Muslims. The *Shari'ah* included strict regulations for the conduct of trade. As the trade expanded, so conversion to Islam grew." This, however, is to establish need; there is the matter of the agency of conversion. In the special circumstances of West Africa, the agency was Islamic higher education, which took two forms: that of the traditional place-established (settled) institutions—like those in Timbuktu—and a peripatetic system resting on itinerant scholars (see also Levtzion and Pouwels 2000).

Now, one outcome of this diffusionary mode of transmission was that as the Islamic communities began to emerge in West Africa, they felt compelled to exert their Islamic identities in order to retain their Islamic image. Within this circumstance, the right to govern came to be strongly rooted in an Islamic concept of legitimacy, which is, as just noted, based on erudition and piety (at least in principle, though not always in practice). Concomitantly, as Saad (1983) points out, dynastic changes based on politico-military factors found elsewhere in the Islamic world, were, in the context of Islamic West Africa, of much lesser importance.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Timbuktu would come to boast Muslim scholars—both indigenous and foreign—of wide repute within the Islamic world. Yet, viewed only in these terms, from the perspective of Islamic West Africa, it was not unique; there were other towns and cities that had similar traditions of Islamic higher education (Hiskett 1984). The uniqueness of Timbuktu stemmed from its autonomy, size, and the magnitude of its commercial prosperity—which was a factor primarily of geography—where it came to play the role of a capital city for the pastoralists of the Sahel and the Sahara and which in turn allowed it to be the emporium of the indigenous peoples of all ethnicities and beliefs across much of West Africa.

Moving on, it should be pointed out here first, that even though the name Sankore is often associated with higher education in Timbuktu, hence the name Sankore University (as in one of the chapter headings in Dubois 1969 [1896]), Sankore was by no means the only mosque or even always the most important mosque in Timbuktu that imparted higher education. There were others in different parts of the city, though only two have survived to the present day, besides Sankore (examples include *Jingerebir, Sidi Yahya* and market *(jami al-suq)* mosques).

At all these mosques, however, the general model of higher education appears to have been the same. Going by Saad (1983), the existence of an erudite savant of wide repute who would attract a number of students to pursue the study of Qur'anic interpretation (tafsir), grammar, law, theology, and so on. From among the students a smaller number, the most advanced, would specialize in the indepth study of a theological or a legal work as the last stage of the curriculum or as a separate but concurrent curricular activity. Note that these classes were not held only at mosques, they were also offered in teachers homes. Further, students did not always restrict themselves to classes at a single mosque; they were free to attend classes at other mosques too, especially if they wished to study a subject not offered at their's. Did the students have to pay for their studies? The simple answer is yes and no. While there was no set tuition, explains Hiskett (1984), students paid their teachers either in cash or in kind on the basis of affordability.

Running parallel with this system was what Saad calls a system of tututorialships that involved a very personalized study relationship between the master

and a few of his most promising students who would be well into their adulthood upon entry into the system. Upon completion of the tututorialship the student would be conferred with a certificate that specified the subjects mastered and at what level of depth. This certificate (a licencia docendi called *ijaza*) was in essence a teaching certificate and a certificate of academic pedigree, where the teacher specified the line of descent of the teaching—which often spanned several generations of teachers—that the student had received (see Hiskett 1984: 57–58 for details). Needless to say, the value of the *ijaza* was directly proportional to the scholarly repute of the master. Ergo, it was not unusual for students to study under several masters.

It is the tutorial system that was the means for entry into the scholarly patriciate—at the apex of which was the jurisconsult *(mufti)* who alone had the authority to offer legal opinions (fatwa) on matters that required clarification. Given the political importance of the tutorial system, it ought to be noted here that it was not accessible to all and sundry on the basis of pure academic merit. Political, familial, economic, and other such connections of the student also had a part to play, in addition to academic merit. As for the curriculum, it was typical of most madrasahs of their day in the Islamic empire.

If the Timbuktu madrasahs were the jewels of the West African Islamic world, then surely al-Azhar was the jewel of possibly the entire Islamic world during some phases of its history. Al-Azhar, however, continues to thrive to this day, though it has had to undergo considerable secular modernization along the way; yet, in contrast, the mosque universities of Timbuktu did not survive. They slowly withered away as the fortunes of the city waned in the period immediately leading up to the arrival of French colonialism in West Africa in the nineteenth-century (1894), and thereafter. Why did the city not retain its glory and continue to prosper? The answer is a simple one: its raison d'etre disappeared with the advent of modern transportation and colonial boundaries: trans-Sahelian and trans-Saharan trade. (Also, an invasion by Morocco in 1590 did not help matters.) Today Timbuktu is a lowly provincial capital, though in 1988 it was placed by UNESCO on its list of World Heritage Sites (see their website). Now, on to al-Azhar, which today ranks as among the oldest higher education institutions in the world.

Al-Azhar: The Jewel of North Africa

It is ironic that one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in the Islamic world today is not to be found in the land of the birth of Islam, but in what used to be one of the African provinces of the empire: Egypt—but then, such is the roll of the dice of history. Al-Azhar began its life as a *halqah* in a newly constructed congregational mosque *(jami al-masjid)* that was built in 972 C.E. by the Fatimid dynasty, which had conquered Egypt in 969 from their base in Tunisia.[52] The new mosque was part of a larger project of the conquerors

who, under the leadership of their general, named Jawhar (a Greek convert to Islam, from Sicily), sought to establish a new capital near the old administrative center of al-Fustat and which they would name Al-Qahirah; hence the Europeanized derivation: Cairo.[53] The name al-Azhar, it may be noted, originates from the name of Prophet Muhammed's daughter, Fatimah al-Azhar-Zahra, whose lineal descendents were the Fatimids, or at least so they claimed.

As a *halqah*, al-Azhar would be one of many that Cairo would come to boast as it eventually developed into a major center of learning in the Islamic empire. However, what would distinguish this particular *halqah* from the others from almost the very beginning is not only the fact that it was part of a *jami al-masjid* established by the Fatimids, but also the presence of two well-known Sh'ite scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, *Ibn Killis* (Abu al-Faraj Yakub ibn-Yusuf ibn-Killis, a convert from Judaism to Islam) and Ali ibn al-Numan, at the *jami al-masjid*. Their scholarly forensics would soon set al-Azhar on to the path of prestige and renown as Sh'ite students from near and far, including Sh'ite foreign students, journeyed to study there. In their desire to promote their particular version of Islamic theology, the Fatimids became enthusiastic benefactors of al-Azhar (exemplified, for instance, by the appointment of salaried resident teachers; the construction of the institution's first, it is thought, student dormitory in 988; the founding of an important research library in 1005; the establishment of permanent endowments for the mosque itself; periodic remodeling and the building of additions; etc.).[54]

The close ties to the ruling dynasty, however, was a double-edged sword as the institution would find out in time: a well endowed patronage could disappear overnight should the dynasty collapse or be replaced by a hostile one; which indeed happened around the middle of the twelfth-century as a combination of factors (dissension, corruption, unpopularity, external pressures, etc.) led to the dynasty's eventual demise. The formal end came with the death of the last Fatimid caliph in 1171. The new ruler of Egypt, *Salah Ad-din Yusuf ibn Ayyub* (Saladin—the Kurdish founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and of the great anti-Crusader fame who recaptured Jerusalem from the Frankish Christians on October 2, 1187), allowed al-Azhar to almost wither away on the vine so to speak. His hostility to it was no doubt underwritten by the fact that he was a Sun'ni Muslim with no interest in supporting a Sh'ite institution. Instead, the Ayyubids established a number of rival madrasahs (as a means for curtailing or even eliminating what they considered as the Sh'ite heresy) within the Islamic empire; among the more well-known ones in Cairo included *al-Madrasah al-Kamiliyah* and *al-Madrasah al-Salihiyah.* (See Leiser 1976, for more on this development.)

Since it is the Ayyubids, however, who would be the first to introduce the institution of the madrasah to Egypt, the al-Azhar halqahs would, in time, become inadvertent beneficiaries of Ayyubid dynastic rule as a result of this educational innovation by undergoing two major changes: al-Azhar itself would be

transformed into a madrasah, and its curriculum would be expanded to represent the typical madrasah curriculum. This institutional change would be formalized in 1340 with the building of a separate college next to the mosque during the reign of the Mamluks—the dynasty that replaced the Ayyubids in 1250.[55] This is not to say, however, that the change would spell the end of kuttab-level instruction at the institution. One of the hallmarks of al-Azhar was that even as it progressed toward its status as an institution of higher learning, it still retained (and continues to retain) its connections with elementary education. Al-Azhar was also a mosque and therefore young Cairene children were entitled to come and learn their basics there much in the same way that other children did at mosques all over Egypt and the rest of the Islamic world. (It was not unusual to find on one side of the same mosque premises young children receiving their first instructions in the recitation of the Qur'an, while on the other side old men with beards engaged in advanced studies [see Dodge 1961: 103].[56])

The Mamluks (who began ruling Egypt after deposing the Ayyubid dynasty in 1250 during the course of a succession dispute within the dynasty) were positively disposed toward al-Azhar, which was, by now, no longer a Sh'ite institution; consequently, al-Azhar would once again find its place in the sun. This development was no doubt helped by the fact that during this period, al-Azhar and other places of learning in Cairo came to assume considerable importance for the Islamic world as a whole because of the Mongol devastation (see Appendix II) that led Cairo to replace cities like Baghdad as a major center of Islamic learning. It is under the reign of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Zahir (1260–77) (known in history books as Baybars) that the process of restoring al-Azhar to its former glory was begun with some seriousness. Whatever their failings, and there were many, from the perspective of education specifically the Mamluks must be credited with greatly contributing to the development of the higher education infrastructure in Egypt. Certainly, the infrastructure that the French had found upon their arrival in 1798 was to a large extent the handy work of the Mamluks (Berkey 1992).

Why did the Mamluks display such great interest in the development of this infrastructure? After all, one would assume that given that they were (as already noted) a militaristic foreign elite of slave origins, the development of cultural institutions (religious, educational, or otherwise) would have been at the very bottom of their list of concerns. One answer is provided by Behrens-Abouseif (1994: 271): "The control of the rulers over religious institutions has always been a fact in the history of Muslim societies." Therefore, she continues, "[b]y acting as patrons of religious foundations, rulers sought to gain the support of the population and the opinion-making religious establishment, thus surmounting ethnic and cultural barriers, which often existed between rulers and subjects." However, this was not the only reason; the Mamluks were also Muslims. Therefore, besides the matter of cultural endowments as a means of political le-

gitimation, we must also add motivations that derived (at least for some if not all) from a genuine desire to fulfill their duties as Muslims for reasons of piety (as well as expiation of sins).[57]

Some 300 years or so later, in 1517, it would be the turn of the Mamluk dynasty to be marginalized; it would be replaced by the Ottoman Turks as Egypt became a province in the Ottoman Empire (their marginalization was only in dynastic terms, for, in time, a residuum of the dynasty would manage to win back considerable autonomy for itself from the Ottomans—hence in Chapter 3 they are referred to as the Ottoman Mamluks). Fortunately for al-Azhar, the change in regime did not prove to be adverse to its interests; the Ottomans too followed in the tradition of the Mamluk dynasty by continuing its support of the institution. By this point al-Azhar had acquired a status of distinction within the Islamic empire as the madrasah par excellence—one that was without peer. The ulama who taught there were held in high esteem, not only in Egypt, but in other parts of the empire as well, including Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam. Not surprisingly, it would attract students from all over the Islamic world in large numbers—though exactly how many students were studying at al-Azhar at any given time in the pre-Napoleon era will probably never be known since no statistical records appear to have been kept.

It ought to be noted that in addition to its religious and educational functions, al-Azhar had two other equally important roles: as a legal institution given that it was the home of the Grand Shaykh of Egypt (the Mufti) who was the arbiter of the last instance in a society that was governed, at least for the most part, by Islamic law (the *Shari'ah*), and as a social institution where the populace gathered during times of distress for refuge and guidance (as when Egypt was invaded by the French under Napoleon Bonaparte).[58]

The increasing student population in turn led to the development, most probably during the Ottoman period, of an administrative structure that divided the students into units on the basis of either nationality, or region, or the four schools of thought (known as *madhab*s) in Islamic law and jurisprudence. These units, which were also residential for out-of-town students, were called *riwaq*s and they were headed by members of the faculty. Examples of the *riwaq*s include *Riwaq al-Sa'aidah* (for students from upper Egypt); *Riwaq al-Shawaam* (for foreign students from Syria); *Riwaq al-Jawah* (for foreign students from Indonesia); *Riwaq al-Sulaymaniyah* (for foreign students from Afghanistan and Khurasan); *Riwaq al-Jabartiyah* (for foreign students from Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somaliland); and so on.

Another innovation during the period of Ottoman rule, was that sometime in the seventeenth-century, the madrasah began to be administered by a rector *(Shaikh al-Azhar)* chosen by the ulama from among themselves. The first rector was Muhammed Abdullah al-Khurashi who held his position until 1690.[59] Later, under the Khedives, beginning with Muhammed Ali, appointment to this posi-

tion would forever become the prerogative of the state, but with some advisory input from the ulama.

"Admission" (quotes are appropriate as will be evident in a moment) to study at al-Azhar, especially in the case of students who came from outside Cairo, depended on two primary factors: possession of some level of literacy and competence in reciting the Qur'an and access to funds from parents and relatives for lodging and board, or for the very indigent, from al-Azhar itself—which usually took the form of lodging space and food rations.[60] However, since there was no entrance exam or even a formal admission process, it is quite likely that those students who came from the more remote parts of Egypt and elsewhere in the Islamic empire where the *kuttab*s were not well developed, their level of learning would not have included literacy (notwithstanding their rote memorization of the Qur'an.) Upon arrival at the institution the new student, after having secured access to the essential matters of board and lodge (usually with the assistance of relatives or friends), simply assigned himself to whatever study circle he found appropriate to his education level.[61] The normal period of study for most students, who usually arrived in their early teens, was about eight years, whereupon the student would emerge as a school teacher or a legal assistant or a junior administrative official or an *imam* (a prayer leader at a mosque). A select few, the very dedicated, would continue in their studies to eventually become a *qadi* (a judge). (The Islamic empire, regardless of who the dynastic rulers were, was administered on the basis of the *Shari'ah*; and it is higher education institutions such as al-Azhar that trained the personnel required to implement the *Shari'ah*.) Prior to 1872, formal diplomas attesting to the completion of studies were not available; instead the practice was for individual teachers to issue an *ijaza*.

The finances of al-Azhar, in terms of both capital and recurrent expenditure, as with all large madrasahs in the Islamic world, were based on two principle sources: the *waqf* endowments (which usually took two main forms, agricultural/ commercial property and rentable buildings) and gifts from the state (either in cash or in kind or both and often given on an annual basis at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan). As with modern higher education endowments, benefits from a *waqf* accrued either to the whole institution or to parts of it (e.g., a given *riwaq* or even a specific ulama chair), depending upon the instructions of the donor, which under Islamic law were, in essence, written in stone.[62] Considering the prestige and status of al-Azhar at one time in its history, it was often the philanthropic target of private wealthy patrons. At the same time, however, only the rarest of rulers would have failed to want to ingratiate himself with the institution through both *waqf*s and annual gifts. Ergo, through a process of historical accumulation, al-Azhar amassed over the centuries a considerable amount of *waqf* property (until it lost a large part of it to the depredations of Muhammed Ali, see Chapter 3).

In addition to institutionally mediated support, both faculty and students also supplemented their salaries and stipends with services to the community (e.g., undertaking Qur'anic recitations during the month of Ramadan at other mosques in the city that possessed waqfs assigned for that purpose, or presiding at weddings and other similar social functions, or offering individualized tuition to the children of the wealthy, or in the case of the ulama serving as judges). [63] Note that while employment at al-Azhar for members of the ulama was more or less permanent (barring some major egregious behavior on their part), it is intriguing that a similar circumstance was also extended to the student; to explain, once a student became a recipient of institutional support (usually in his second or third year), the student had access to it for the rest of his life so long as he remained a student at the institution. (One is familiar with the concept of tenured faculty, but tenured students? That is novel.) It is known in fact that some students, from time to time, did remain at al-Azhar for most if not all of their lives, for religious or other personal reasons.

As for the curriculum, it remained typical of a large madrasah, so that even as late as the eighteenth-century when the French under Napoleon conquered Egypt (in July of 1798), thereby ending nearly 300 years of Ottoman rule, the curriculum of al-Azhar still did not countenance the foreign sciences. But, by the time the French had departed a mere three years later, in 1801, following their defeat by the British forces, al-Azhar in this respect would never be the same again. The ulama there had been taught a lesson: even 1,000 years of Muslim rule could be brought to an end; something had to change in the education of the Muslims so that they would be better equipped to confront the emerging foreign threats that Western imperialism represented. While understandably the immediate reaction was to turn toward even greater conservatism, with the arrival of Khedival rule the ulama were slowly coerced by secular forces to embark on a tortuous journey of curricular reform (and accompanied by physical expansion) so that by the time Egypt had gained full independence from British domination in 1952, al-Azhar was no longer a madrasah, but a full-fledged university in its modern sense—the foreign sciences were no longer foreign in al-Azhar. In 1961, al-Azhar would formally become part of the Egyptian national higher educational system as its further secularization, under pressure of the Egyptian government, continued. This change, however, did not imply that the ulama no longer taught there; they still do—but their curricular and administrative hold on it would be progressively weakened (see Chapter 3). From a purely religious point of view, al-Azhar no longer holds the pride of place that it once did in the Islamic empire as a whole; though within the narrower geographic confines of the Islamic Middle East and North Africa, its prestige remains unrivaled to this day.[64]

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

Having established the precolonial historical record, now comes the equally important task of pointing out the significance of this record in *historiographical* terms. There are at least three central issues that emerge from this record that must be dealt with: the importance of establishing African *historicity*; the need to expunge Eurocentrism from accounts of the origins of the modern university; and the importance of, again, expunging Eurocentrism from explanations of how Europe was able to "hijack" the trajectory of African history and thereby engineer the marginalization of precolonial higher education institutions in favor of colonially imported models. Because of the depth, complexity, and contentiousness of the subject matter, often requiring exegetical forays into corners of history whose relevance may not be readily apparent at first glance, Appendixes I and II have been assigned the task of addressing the second and third issues, while this chapter will concentrate on the first.

On African Historicity

The preceding account of precolonial higher education in Africa, needless to say, helps to highlight the fallacy that without European colonialism no progress would have come about in Africa. There are some who may consider this dimension of the raison d'etre of this chapter as somewhat irrelevant in this day and age. But is this really so? For, the bizarre idea first popularized by the likes of such Western intellectuals as Georg Hegel that prior to the arrival of Europeans, Africa was a dark continent immobilized in time and peopled by child-like savages who could not have possibly made any history may no longer be openly articulated today, but if the continuation of the racist discourse in Western countries (the continuing rancorous debate over the merits of affirmative action for black Americans in higher education in the United States, for instance, is just one infinitesimal example) is any indication, such sentiments continue to plague the Western psyche, even if only at subterranean levels among the majority of the populace. Ergo, those, like Cooper (1993) and Howe (1998), who believe that in this day and age the continuing emphasis on African historicity is nothing less than plaintive overinsistence are on this score naive—extremely naive. Consider that even as late as the mid–1990s "respectable" Euro-American academics could not resist dressing the following Hegelian view of Africans in the "modern" garb of pseudoscientific research on intelligence (a good example of which was the work of Richard J. Hernstein and Charles Murray 1994): "Negroes are to be regarded as a race of children who remain immersed in their state of uninterested naïveté. Good-natured and harmless when at peace, they can become suddenly enraged and then commit the most frightful cruelties." Hegel then continues that while "[t]hey cannot be denied a capacity for education," the fact still remains that "they do not show an inherent striving for cul-

ture." He goes on: "In their native country the most shocking despotism prevails. There they do not attain to the feeling of human personality, their mentality is quite dormant, remaining sunk within itself and making no progress, and thus corresponding to the compact, differenceless mass of the African continent" (Hegel 1971 [1845]: 42–43). Surely, the existence of complex civilizations and kingdoms in Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans ought to have long ago put to rest such preposterous notions—though, perhaps not quite: to explain these achievements they came out with their specious theory of Hamites (Robertshaw 1990). Before going on to consider this theory, one should also be reminded here of the fact that the Eurocentric model, in various guises, continues to hold sway in the writing of world history generally (see Appendix II).

When Europeans first stumbled across the architectural and artistic expressions of the wondrous achievements of Africans of antiquity (e.g., the Pyramids, the Zimbabwe Ruins, etc.) a dominant view that emerged among them to explain their origins was that they were the handiwork of a race of people from outside Africa.[65] As Edith Sanders (1969) explains, while tracing the origins of this particular Western myth: "[t]he Hamitic hypothesis is well-known to students of Africa. It states that everything of value ever found in Africa was brought there by the Hamites, allegedly a branch of the Caucasian race." However, she further explains, "[o]n closer examination of the history of the idea, there emerges a previous elaborate Hamitic theory, in which the Hamites are believed to be Negroes." In other words, as she observes, "[I]t becomes clear then that the hypothesis is symptomatic of the nature of race relations, that it has changed its content if not its nomenclature through time, and that it has become a problem of epistemology" (p. 521). Not surprisingly, her carefully reasoned exegesis unveils a wicked tale of the lengths to which Westerners have gone to deny an entire continent part of its history; all for the purpose of constructing a racist ideology that could permit the rape of a continent without causing so much as a twinge in the consciences of even the most ardent of Christians. In fact, with great convenience, the myth actually begins in the Christian cosmological realm. The necessity to describe the origins and role of this myth here (albeit briefly) stems, of course, from its pervasive influence on Western attitudes toward the darker peoples of the world ever since the rise of Christianity in the West, generally, and more specifically, its subterranean influence on how Western colonial policies on education (as well as in other areas of human endeavor) in Africa were shaped and implemented—as will be shown in the pages to come. Furthermore, there is also the fact of its continuing lingering presence even to this day, in various permutations at the subconscious and conscious levels, in the psyche of most Westerners when they confront Africa—symptomatic of which, to give just one example, is the virulent attack on Bernal by the Eurocentrists (mentioned earlier).

Now, as just noted and bizarre though this may appear, the Hamites make their entry into the Western racist discourse initially as a degenerate and accurs-

ed race, not as an exemplary, high achieving race (relative to black people) that they were eventually transformed into. Those familiar with the Bible will recall that in it there are two versions of Noah, the righteous and blameless patriarch who is saved from the Great Flood by a prior warning from God that involves the construction of an ark by Noah (Genesis 6: 11–9: 19); and the drunken Noah of Genesis 9: 20–9: 27 who inflicts a curse on one of his three sons, Ham. It is the latter version that is of relevance here. Here is how the story goes in the King James version of the Bible:

> 20. And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: 21. And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. 22. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. 23. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. 24. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. 25. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. 26. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. 27. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

Thus was born the Biblical curse of Ham (which in reality was a curse on his son Canaan).[66] Initially, in the period of Latin Christianity of the Middle Ages, the curse of Ham was used as a justification for the existence of slavery in a generic sense, that is without reference to skin color. Considering that slavery during this period encompassed all manner of European ethnicities and was not restricted to people of African descent alone, this is not surprising. However, by the time one arrives in the seventeenth-century when the enslavement of Africans is now well underway in the Americas, the curse of Ham becomes the justification for this enslavement; that is Ham and his progeny have been transformed into an accursed black people ordained by God to be slaves of white people (the progeny of Japheth) in perpetuity. (Aside: placed hierarchically in between these two groups were the progeny of Shem, namely, Jews and Asians.) Before reaching this point, however, first there had to be a connection made between the color black and the curse of Ham. The problem is best described by Goldenberg (2003: 195):

> To biblical Israel, Kush was the land at the furthest southern reach of the earth, whose inhabitants were militarily powerful, tall, and good-looking. These are the dominant images of the black African in the Bible, and they correspond to similar images in Greco-Roman culture. I found no indications of a negative sentiment toward Blacks in the Bible. Aside from its use in a proverb (found also among the Egyptians and the Greeks), skin color is never mentioned in descriptions of biblical Kushites. That is the most significant perception, or lack of perception, in the biblical image of the black African. Color did not matter.

So, the question is how did color enter into the curse? Here, there is some disagreement. Goldenberg suggests that the linkage takes place through two principal exegetical changes: the erroneous etymological understanding of the word Ham as referring, in root, to the color black (which also spawns another serious exegetical error, the replacement of Canaan with Ham in the curse); and the exegetical seepage of blackness into the story of the curse (which originally, he observes, was colorless) as it was retold, beginning, perhaps, in the third or fourth-century C.E. with Syriac Christians via a work titled the *Cave of Treasures*, and then further taken up by the Arab Muslims in the seventh-century following their conquest of North Africa (and the two, in turn, later influencing the Jewish exegetical treatment of the story). Goldenberg further observes that the *Cave of Treasures* in its various recensions down the centuries extends the curse to not just Kushites, but all blacks defined to include, for example, the Egyptian Copts, East Indians and Ethiopians (that is they are all descendents, according to the *Cave of Treasures*, of Ham). Hence, Goldenberg quotes one version as reading "When Noah awoke…he cursed him and said: 'Cursed be Ham and may he be slave to his brothers'…and he became a slave, he and his lineage, namely the Egyptians, the Abyssinians, and the Indians. Indeed, Ham lost all sense of shame and he became black and was called shameless all the days of his life forever" (p. 173).

On the other hand, taking the lead from Graves and Patai (1966)—as for example Sanders (1969) does—the connection, it is suggested, occurs via the agency of Jewish oral traditions (*midrashim*), specifically those contained in one of the two Talmuds, the Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)—the other Talmud is the Palestinian Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*). The Talmuds were a compilation of *midrashim*, which for centuries had been transmitted orally, put together by Jewish scholars in their academies in Palestine and in Babylonia. Although the *Talmud Bavli* was compiled in fifth-century C.E., it did not make its appearance in Europe until probably sixth-century C.E. Now, the *midrash* relevant here was concocted, according to the gloss by Graves and Patai (1966: 122), in order to justify the enslavement of the Canaanites by the Israelites; and here is how it goes (reproduced from the version compiled by Graves and Patai 1966: 121):

(d) Some say that at the height of his drunkenness he uncovered himself, whereupon Canaan, Ham's little son, entered the tent, mischievously looped a stout cord about his grandfather's genitals, drew it tight, and [enfeebled] him…. (e) Others say that Ham himself [enfeebled] Noah who, awakening from his drunken sleep and understanding what had been done to him, cried: "Now I cannot beget the fourth son whose children I would have ordered to serve you and your brothers! Therefore it must be Canaan, your first-born whom they enslave….Canaan's children shall be born ugly and black! Moreover, because you twisted your head around to see my nakedness, your grandchildren's hair shall be twisted into kinks, and their eyes red; again because your lips jested at my misfortune, theirs shall swell; and because you neglected my nakedness, they shall go

naked, and their male members shall be shamefully elongated." Men of their race are called Negroes, their forefather Canaan commanded them to love theft and fornication, to be banded together in hatred of their masters and never to tell the truth.

Anyhow, regardless of whether it was early Eastern Christians, or Jews or Muslims who were responsible for corrupting the biblical story along two axes, replacing Canaan with Ham and rendering Ham black, this much is incontrovertible: Medieval Christians in the West would in time adopt it as their very own because it would allow them to develop an ideology of exploitation and oppression of black peoples, especially beginning in the fifteenth-century onward, without violating their religious sensibilities.

Notice then that through this mythological trickery two basic elements of Christian cosmology are retained: that one, all human beings are descended from a common ancestor (Adam whose line of descent includes Noah) and that, two, not all human beings are equal. Hence, the peoples of the European peninsula (the conventional use of the term continent in relation to Europe is an ideologically driven misnomer as a quick glance at a world atlas will confirm) on one hand, and the peoples of the African and Asian continents on the other, stand in a racial hierarchical relationship of master/ servant/ slave. Since this was a Biblical determined order, it followed then that no Christian need lose sleep over the morality of exploiting and enslaving other human beings.

Now the question that one must ask here is, When do the descendants of Ham, while still residing in Africa, rejoin the family of Europeans as a subgroup of Caucasians? It occurs during the period of the beginnings of the colonization of Africa. There are two factors that account for this development: the emergence of scientific explanations of race during the era of the Enlightenment when theological explanations began to give way to scientific explanations of the natural world; and the arrival of Napoleon's Army in Egypt in 1798, accompanied by French scientists who would go on to establish the new discipline of Egyptology. The former factor established the possibility of polygenesis as an alternative to the biblical theory of monogenesis (all human beings were descendents of Adam); that is not all human beings have a common ancestor, but that some had emerged separately as a subspecies of humankind. The latter factor's role turns on the startling discovery by the French scientists that the Egyptian civilization, that is the civilization of black people, was the precursor of the Western civilization. Now, this finding met with considerable opposition in the West since for some it flew in the face of the prevalent racist notions that dialectically justified and drew succor from the ongoing Atlantic slave trade, while for others it stood in opposition to the biblical notion of black people as accursed descendents of Ham. The resolution of the problem of determining who were the ancient Egyptians, therefore, was resolved by turning to a polygenetic explanation. Specifically, following a rereading of the Bible the notion emerged that the Egyptians were the descendents of that other son of Ham, Mizraim, who it was argued had not been cursed as Canaan had been. By isolating Ca-

naan from his brothers, Mizraim and Cush, it was possible to suggest that only the descendents of Canaan had been cursed, and not those of Mizraim and Cush.

The ancient Egyptians therefore were not a black people, it was argued, but a Caucasian subgroup, the Hamites. To provide scientific support for this view, Western scientists in the nineteenth-century, especially those working in the United States (perhaps spurred on by the need to justify slavery in the face of rising abolitionist sentiments), emerged with the bogus "science of craniometry," that purported to prove on the basis of the measurement of human skulls a hierarchy of intelligence among different groups of people (blacks with supposedly the smallest crania, and hence the smallest brain, falling to the very bottom).[67] On the basis of this bogus science it was quickly established that the ancient Egyptians were not black Africans, but Hamites. However, it is important to point out here that the Hamites were not completely shorn off of their early inferior status as descendants of the accursed Ham. Rather they were considered to be an inferior subgroup of the Caucasian group, but superior to black peoples. (In other words, a new internal hierarchy was established among the descendants of Jephet where the Tuetonic Anglo-Saxons were at the very top and the Hamites at the very bottom and eastern and southern Europeans—Slavs, Italians, Portuguese, Greeks, etc.—somewhere in the middle.) Thus was born the infamous Hamitic theory that was used to explain any expression of the grandeur of African history that Europeans came across. Hamites were Africans, but they were Caucasian in origin—they came from outside Africa.[68]

NOTES

1. There is a tendency in much of Western writing on Africa to divide the continent into North Africa and Sub-Saharan (or Black) Africa, even in the absence of a geographic division, and then proceed to deny that North Africa can be legitimately considered as part of the African continent; rather they insist that it is part of the Arab world of the "Middle East" (the latter term itself is of course a misnomer, although for the sake of convenience it is retained in this book). The most obvious example of this approach has been, until very recently, the highly unwarranted excision of the Egyptian civilization from African history. However at the level of popular culture it continues to be evident through the common use of the phrase Sub-Saharan Africa in the media. A good example of this is evidenced by such publications as the annual tomes put out by Europa Publications titled Africa South of the Sahara and the Middle East and North Africa as part of its otherwise useful references series called "Regional Surveys of the World." Furthermore, such are the times we live in that there are those within Africa itself (both north of the Sahara and south of the Sahara) who would concur with this artificial bifurcation of the continent. The truth is that just as Eastern Europe is part of Asia and part of Europe at one and the same time, North Africa belongs to both sides, the African side and the Middle Eastern side. It is not simply that geography dictates that North Africa be seen as part of Africa, but culture and history as well. At the most basic level consid-

er the fact that British colonial Africa, as in the cases of French, Italian and Spanish colonial Africa, also included parts of North Africa. To put the matter in another way: If modern African culture is a fusion of Western and African cultures, then the only differentiating factor that separates modern North African culture from modern Sub-Saharan African culture is that modern North African culture incorporates a third culture: Arabic Islamic culture. Yes, it is true that Arabic is not an indigenous African language any more than English, French or Portuguese is, even though its arrival in Africa precedes others by some 1,000 years—a long enough period to shed its tramontane status. (On the other hand, one could challenge this statement by suggesting, as Mazrui (1986) does, that from a geographic point of view the Arabic peninsula ought to be considered part of Africa; and therefore Arabic is not a foreign language. The fact that this is not how the peninsula is usually seen today, is a function of Western engineering—the Suez Canal—and Western domination of world cartography.) At the heart of the definitional problem is the matter of race, not geography; that is, the racism of the West (which has always sought to create racial hierarchies—positing peoples defined as black at the bottom and those defined as white at the top and the rest in between); combined with the racism of the North Africans and Africans themselves, is the root of this problem. Since this issue will be discussed further in its different manifestations, it will suffice for the moment to simply state that this work will not succumb to any racist project (whoever may be its past and present architects). Instead, the insisted position is that North Africa is as much part of Africa as it is part of the Middle East. In fact, we will go even one step further and insist that there is a geographic and cultural unity that brings together Africa, Asia and Europe in the form of that great Afro-Eurasian ecumene a la Hodgson (1974; 1993). (See also Wigen and Lewis [1997] who discuss this matter at some length.)

2. For recent literature that provides an accessible general introduction to ancient Egyptian history see Mysliewiec (2000); Shaw (2000); and Wilkinson (2000).

3. There appears to be some confusion, as Richard Wilkinson (2000) in his lavishly and beautifully illustrated gold mine of a book, The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt, points out, about the nature and purposes of temples in the Egyptian civilization that stems from a failure to see that they did not perform the same role as temples in many other cultures—that is, as, simply, places of religious worship. To be specific, the Egyptian temples were at once secular and religious institutions. The immense size of many of the temple campuses speak to the fact that they did not all exist purely for religious purposes; they often performed many other wider functions. Wilkinson (2000: 7) describes the scenario well: "Within the walls of most of these monuments, sanctuaries and treasuries, offices and palaces, slaughterhouses and schools might be found. Not only were many of the religious complexes centers of government, economy and commerce, but also within these temples ancient science and scholarship thrived and the nature of existence itself was pondered by generations of learned priests." There is a very good reason why the temples had a multiplicity of functions: in the Egyptian world the divine and the secular were inseparable.

4. Compare here with the description that Kramer (1981: 4) provides of the earliest known scribes, those of Sumeria. The Sumerian scribe was “the scholar scientist, the man who studied whatever theological, botanical, zoological, mineralogical, geographical, mathematical, grammatical, and linguistic knowledge was current in his day, and

who in some cases added to this knowledge." In other words, it would not be too far fetched to conjecture that the role of the Egyptian scribe may have been modeled on that of the Sumerian scribe.

5. In consonance with the concept of civilizational cross-fertilization, or more simply civilizational borrowings, it is possible that in tracing the genealogy of the *per-ankh* itself, one may be taken to an earlier time to a place outside Egypt: to Sumeria, where it appears that the functions of the Sumerian scribal schools were not unlike those of the *per-ankh*. See Kramer (1981) for an interesting description of the Sumerian schools.

6. The fact is that these are people with a political agenda: one that has nothing to do with scholarly truth, but which has everything to do with racist politics peculiar to the United States—perhaps, not surprisingly, given the deeply entrenched racist culture that pervades that society. Only those who are products of a racist society would be obsessed with, for example, asking the question: Were the ancient Egyptians black? Not only is the premise of the question absolutely asinine (for, what is black if nothing more than an ideologically driven historically rooted social construction, the applicability of which to a different society in a different age and place is an absolutely meaningless exercise), but as Howe (1998) correctly points out, it has nothing to do with advancing our knowledge of the Egyptian civilization by even one iota. The best that one can say if one must insist on an answer, if only to appease the demands of a racist society, is that the skin palette of ancient Egyptians was the same as the one today: one of a dark to light continuum—with the darkest hue to be found in the south and the lightest in the north. More importantly, there is no evidence, so far, that in ancient Egyptian society this gradation was accorded any political or social significance—even though it was a highly stratified society in many other ways. For more on this subject see Berlinerblau (1999); Keita (1993); and the various contributions to the section titled "Race," in Lefkowitz and Rogers (1996: 103–166). Note that Bernal (1987) does not say much on the subject directly; rather his entire project is relevant indirectly. See also Lewis and Wigen (1997) for a critique of Afrocentrists, as well as their Eurocentrist detractors.

For some of the ideas espoused by the Afrocentrists see, for example, Asante (1992), Asante and Mazama (2002); Diop (1983); James (1992 [1954]); and Karenga and Carruthers (1986). To be fair to the Afrocentrists, it must be emphatically stated that they did not invent the racialization of history; that contemptible honor must go to the Eurocentrists of yesteryear, who with their mythologically rooted Semitic/ Hamitic theories, sought to denigrate Africans and their achievement. See Appendix II for more on these theories and their influence on Western perceptions of Africa.

7. It ought to be noted here that Bernal himself has never claimed that he is an Afrocentrist, and neither do Afrocentrists proper view him as such.

8. Moreover, it is necessary to point out here that the question of the origins of the Western civilization, as framed by the debate between the Afro and Eurocentrists, needless to say, betrays, fundamentally, a deep asininity (rooted, of course, in a barely concealed racist project). How? Because there is, from the perspective of truth, a perverse refusal to recognize that among the incontrovertible lessons of history is the commonsensical fact that no civilization can ever develop in isolation from contemporaneous and/ or historical influences—whatever their agency: war, conquest, colonization, commerce, travel, etc.—emanating from other cultures and civilizations that are in spatial and/ or temporal proximity. Moreover, this is a hugely amorphous process that is not

only devoid of solid boundaries of time and magnitude—consequently, it is virtually impossible to draw clear demarcations between originality and imitation, especially in the realm of ideas—but, more often than not, involves a creative domestication of borrowings and influences as opposed to wholesale mechanistic transplantations. The observations of Bard and Fattovich (2001: 277–278), for example, on the genesis of a unitarian state—without which there would have been no Egyptian civilization—in early dynastic Egypt (and in Axum too), captures this point admirably; as they put it: "Both the Early Dynastic Egyptian state and the Aksumite state did not evolve in isolation, but were (specific) sociopolitical adaptations to processes and interactions occurring on a much larger scale in the ancient Near East, Northeast Africa, and (for Aksum) the Mediterranean and south Asia." They continue, "there is evidence of fairly complex economic interaction and long-distance trade with other hierarchical polities, and concomitant with this was the probable spread of ideas/ models of hierarchical control and organization." In light of the foregoing, then, it will suffice to say that the learning of the ancient Egyptians probably did find its way to the Greeks and helped to shape their civilization in some way; however, exactly what kinds and levels of influence and what type of mechanisms were involved are questions that will, in terms of exactitude, probably remain chimerical for a long time to come, if not forever. No civilization that had traversed the expanse of time for as long as the Egyptian civilization did—some 3000 years—and that was in such close geographic proximity to what was probably one of the busiest highways of cross-cultural interchanges in the history of the world up to that point, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, could have remained outside that process; both, as a donor and as a recipient. (See also van Binsbergen (1997a), who raises a similar point in his masterly summary and review of Bernal's work.) Yet, having said all this, one must confront this fundamental political question that arises from the debate surrounding Bernal's work (especially in North America): What does it matter who influenced who, or who borrowed from who? Only the narrow minded and the bigot is unable to celebrate the fact that the foundation of all human progress is cultural diversity because only such diversity generates influences and borrowings in the first place—no matter what the source: black, brown, red, white, or yellow culture.

9. In its latest incarnation—officially opened on October 16, 2002—it is a massive 69,000 square meters, 3500 seat, state-of-the-art library built to house 4 million volumes and preserves that ancient tradition of duality of functions: a repository of knowledge and a seat of higher learning.

10. The museum/ library complex came to boast among its patrons a number of very famous scholars indeed, including:

Archimedes (c. 290–212 B.C.E.): the preeminent mathematician who, among his many intellectual gifts, bequeathed the law of hydrostatics or the "Archimedes Principle" (the true weight of an immersed body in fluid is its weight minus the weight of the fluid it displaces), and the hydraulic screw to raise water which is still in use in some parts of the world.

Aristarchus of Samos (c. 310–230 B.C.E.): an astronomer who taught that the solar system was heliocentric almost 2000 years before Copernicus.

Erasistratus of Ceos (lived during the period that included the year 250 B.C.E.): an anatomist and physician who is considered by some as the founder of physiology.

Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 276–194 B.C.E.): one of those who served as heads of the library, and who, as a geographer, among his many accomplishments, accurately measured the cir-

cumference of the earth—he was off by only 15%—by astronomically measuring latitudinal differences; he also taught that one could reach the east by sailing west, and so on.

Euclid (lived during the period that included the year 300 B.C.E.): among the most famous mathematicians who not only founded a school of mathematics in Alexandria, but also authored the multivolume magnum opus on geometry titled Elements.

Herophilus (c. 335–280 B.C.E.): a physician in Alexandria who studied the human body by means of dissections—hence his status as the founder of scientific anatomy.

Manetho (lived during the period that included the year 300 B.C.E.): an Egyptian priest, who as a scholar of the history of ancient Egypt wrote in Greek the famous Aegyptiaca, the surviving fragments of which are still of use to Egyptologists of today.

Philitas of Cos (c. 330–270 B.C.E.): poet and grammarian who is credited with establishing the Hellenistic school of poetry in Alexandria.

Strabo (c. 64 B.C.E.–23 C.E.): geographer and historian whose many writings included Geography, perhaps the only comprehensive treatise on all the peoples and countries known to the Greeks and Romans of his period.

Theophrastus (c. 372–287 B.C.E.): one the famous pupils of Aristotle who inherited the directorship of Aristotle's Lyceum and who, as a philosopher and botanist, among other writings, authored such influential works as History of Plants, Etiology of Plants, History of Physics, and so on.

Zenodotus of Ephesus (lived in the third-century B.C.E.): one of those who served as heads of the library, and who, as a grammarian, produced what is thought to be the first critical edition of Homer.

Hypatia (c. 370–March 415 C.E.): a renowned philosopher, astronomer and mathematician of her day was considered an authority on Neoplatonism (a la Plotinus and Lamblichus). Sadly, she was brutally murdered by an overzealous mob of Christians as they set about destroying everything deemed pagan, which it is said included, possibly, the looting and burning of the Alexandrian library complex—as well as Jewish synagogues, culminating in the illegal expulsion of the Alexandrian Jews—during the dominion of Cyril, who in 412 had succeeded his uncle Theophilus as the patriarch of Alexandria (it was the latter who had first initiated the reign of antipagan terror, beginning in 391, with the encouragement of the Roman emperor Theodosius I).

11. The Associated Press reported recently (May 2004) the discovery, by a Polish-Egyptian archeological team (the Polish team was headed by Grzegory Majderek), of a group of thirteen auditoria (lecture halls) in the Late Antique section of modern Alexandria that were part of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina complex. It is estimated that together the auditoria could have catered to a population of as many as 5,000 lecture attendees (students?). What this finding suggests is that one can legitimately argue that on its own terms—that is for its time period—the Bibliotheca was also a university and not just a library or research institute. For more on the discovery, see, for example the story in the *Los Angeles Times* (Home Edition), dated May 9th, 2004 on p. A3 by Thomas H. Maugh II, titled "Archeologists Find Fabled Center of Learning in Egypt; The University of Alexandria Drew Some of the Ancient World's Most Famous Scholars." Interestingly, in the story the head of the Egyptian Supreme Council for Antiquities, the renowned Egyptologist, Zahi Hawass, is quoted as saying that the artifacts found at the discovery were "typical of a classroom," adding "When I stood in front if it recently, it looked like I was in front of an old university."

12. Though the orgy of looting and burning in April 2003 by Iraqis of museums and

libraries of unfathomable scholarly value in Iraq—the birthplace of what is thought to be the world's first civilization, the Mesopotamian civilization—following the illegal invasion of that country in March of 2003 by U.S. and British armed forces (who by all accounts in a fit of incalculable ignorance of history were more concerned with preserving oil pumping installations than protecting these institutions, despite the pleas of their own experts of antiquity)—lends a slightly different color to the matter. Mention ought to be made here also of the barbaric behavior of the Turkish Muslims who invaded northern India (toward the end of the twelfth-century) to give rise to Islamic rule there (the Sultanate of Delhi). In the early phases of their invasion, because they viewed both the Buddhist and Hindu religions as unworthy of even a modicum of respect given their polytheistic character, they subjected their religious centers (which were also their centers of learning) to a vandalism of incalculable magnitude. One consequence of this, as Pacey (1996: 23) for example points out, is that it probably dealt Indian science a permanent setback.

13. For more on the arrival of Christianity in Ethiopia, as well as on the Kingdom of Aksum in general, see Bard and Fattovich (2001); Burstein (1998); Kobischanov (1979 [1966]); Mekouria (1981); and Munro-Hay (1991). For a general introduction to the history of Ethiopia see Henze (2000); Marcus (1994); Zegeye and Pausang (1994); and Zewde (2001).

14. See, for example, Mekouria 1988 and Marcus 1994 for details. While on this subject, one can legitimately argue that the beginnings of the eventual collapse of the kingdom could be traced to its loss of political control over South Arabia in the latter half of the sixth-century (around 570 C.E.) at the hands of an expeditionary force sent by the Sassanids to destroy the Ethiopian vassalic hold over the country. Axum proved incapable of responding to the Sassanids.

15. This development, as Tamarat 1984 reminds us, would serve as a double-edged sword for the Ethiopian church: on one hand it would have the resources necessary to expand and thrive, yet on the other its effort to universalize itself throughout Ethiopia would always remain a chimeric objective given the association by the non-Christian populace with state (feudal) oppression. Consequently, it is not surprising that with the overthrow of the feudal order in 1974, the church's fortunes took a turn for the worse from which it has never fully recovered.

16. At this first level, there were three further branches of specialization: first came the study of Dugua (liturgical music composed by a sixth-century Ethiopian scholar, Yared); followed by Zamare (Eucharist songs) and Mewaset (commemoration and funeral songs), and the third branch involved the study of Kedasse (general liturgy). Any one wishing to specialize in all three would have had to allocate at least six years of his life to the task, two for each (see Milkias 1976 for more).

17. Milkias (1976) states that philosophy was also taught at this level, but only at the most prestigious institutions (such as those located in the monastries in Gojam Province: Woshara, Wadela, and Gonj). Among the principal texts taught were these two: the philosophical critiques of Judaism, Christianity and Islam authored by Zera Yakob; and Metsahafe-Falasfa Tabiban (the Book of Wise Philosophers).

18. The main syllabus at this level, depending upon the size and prestige of the institution, comprised the study of, first, Kedusan Metsaheft (comprising the sacred books of Old and New Testaments); followed by Awaledt (literature of fiction) and Gedle

(books on monasticism). After these first three subjects came subjects such as Tarike Negest (monarchic history), Kebra Negast (Glory of the Kings), Zena-Ayehud (History of the Jews), Lessane-Tarik (historical tales), and so on (see Milkias 1976).

19. The association of magic with literacy in societies where only a tiny minority had it is perhaps to be expected. To the vast majority, the nonliterate, the drawing of meaning out of incomprehensible symbols must have appeared as an exercise in magic; especially when this feat was associated with individuals who performed the role of a shaman or a witchdoctor. While in Ethiopia, at one time, literacy may have been viewed as demonic (going by Milkias), in some other parts of Africa it was the obverse in the sense that precisely because of the perception that it had magical properties literacy had to be sought after; this appears to have been the case in some non-Islamic societies that were nonliterate and which were just beginning to be exposed to literacy through the agency of European colonialism. That is, long after the collective memory of military defeat at the hands of Europe because of its possession of superior weapons (guns) had faded, a belief slowly emerged that it was literacy (and formal education) that accounted for the superiority of Europe—hence its ability to subjugate Africa. The outcome of this substitution of objective facts with subjective perceptions was an insatiable thirst for formal Western education (especially in a context—as during the early phase of the colonial era—where such education was deliberately made inaccessible to the general populace, and where it was available, it was accessible only through the agency of the missionary—the modern witchdoctor). The foregoing is all conjectural, but it is suggestive; and, perhaps, explains the obsession to this day among Africans, Asians and others outside Europe for formal educational qualifications. From a different perspective, it may also explain the obsession among the three religions of the desert (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) with the word. This line of reasoning, it should be pointed out in the interest of scholarly integrity, is not entirely original on the part of this author. Besides Milkias, it was also suggested by a mentor, Professor Philips Stevens, Jr., in an e-mail missive dated July 20, 2004, to the author that is brief enough to be quoted in full:

> I'd like to suggest [an angle] of education in Africa that I have long thought about—since my Peace Corps days as a teacher in Nigeria, 1963–66: the magical power of literacy, hence its tremendous appeal. I think I [have] mentioned the magical power of words, and how that power is enhanced with writing—making the word permanent, and anonymous—in two articles currently in print: in my entry, "Magic," in David Levinson and Melvin Ember (eds.), Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology, Holt 1996; and "Magic, Sorcery and Witchcraft," in Philip M. Peek and Kwesi Yankah (eds.) African Folklore: An Encyclopedia, Routledge 2004; also in Henry Louis Gates and Anthony Appiah (eds.), Africana, 2nd. ed., Oxford 2005 (in press). But these are only brief mentions, no details. You'll have to interview me for more!

20. In describing this role of the debtrawoch, you may do well dear reader, by also comparing it with the role of the ulama in Islamic societies, described later. For more on the debtrawoch see also Wagaw (1990).

21. Consider, for instance, one of the few works specifically on the development of higher education in Ethiopia from antiquity to the present, Wagaw (1990); there is no mention in it of Islamic education (let alone the existence of Muslim Ethiopians). In fact, the hegemony of the Christian Ethiopians has been such that for centuries the legitimacy of the citizenship of Muslim Ethiopians was never acknowledged; they were

simply referred to as "Muslims in Ethiopia."

22. This section on Islam in Ethiopia draws upon the following sources: Ahmad (1997), Ahmed (2001), Braukämper (2003), Ehrlich (1994), Gibb (1997), Haberland (1992), Hassen (1990), Kapteijns (2000), Tamrat (1984), Trimingham (1965), and the section titled "Education and Human Resources" in volume III of the massive multiauthor three-volume work on Ethiopian studies edited by Fukui, Kurimoto, and Shigeta (1997).

23. Another matter of nomenclature must also be dealt with here: the term "Islamic empire" is used through out this work interchangeably between the formal Islamic empire that existed under a single ruler (the Caliph) in the early years of Islam, as well as in the later years (in the form of the Ottoman Empire), and the informal Islamic empire that was present at other times in Islamic history and which encompassed several Muslim empires but with no ties to each other, other than those of civilization (religion, trade, commerce, etc.)

24. For an introductory overview—repeat, introductory overview—of the history of Islam in general, these two sources should suffice: Esposito (2000), and Savory (1976).

25. It ought to be pointed out here that Western historians have tended to exaggerate the significance of this battle. As Mastnak (2002: 99–100) observes in his extensively researched book, it was just one battle among many fought between the Muslims and the Franks in southern France around the middle of the eighth-century; plus, he argues, it was just one of a series that various Frankish princes, the Carolingians, undertook against others (such as the Saxons, as well as other Christian princes), for the sake of "booty, power and territory." See also Cardini (2001).

26. Consider, for instance, the quote below from a farewell address by the first Caliph of Islam, Syeddina Abu Bakr, delivered before the first Muslim expeditionary force to depart Saudi Arabia (on its way to do battle with the much feared army of one of the superpowers of its day, the Byzantine Empire) following the death of Prophet Muhammed. As Salahi (2004:5) points out, the rules of engagement—which long predated the Geneva Conventions—that the Muslim armies of that period were assigned paid great heed to human rights (and this in an age when "war meant what it means to all humanity today: a wave of senseless, careless, indiscriminate destruction").

> Learn the following ten points and always bear them in mind: Do not do any act of treason to your community or to yourselves; and never betray anyone. Do not disfigure a dead body. Never kill a child, an elderly person, or a woman. Do not destroy or burn any date farm, and never cut down a fruit tree. Do not slaughter a sheep, cow or camel except for your food. You will come across some people who devote themselves to worship in hermitages, so leave them alone to do what they please. (from Salahi 2004: 5).

27. Though in practice this has not always been adhered to at all times in all places. While all forms of racism and ethnocentrism are highly objectionable, what is especially disquieting is when it is expressed against fellow coreligionists in a theological context where all are supposed to be equal before God. Hence, even though the only two references to skin color (one tangential and the other specific) in the entire Qur'an has to do with affirming God as the architect of all things, including diversity in human pigmentation, and the admonition that piety supersedes all distinctions in the eyes of God—as Lewis (1990: 54) explains: "[t]he Qur'an gives no countenance to the idea that there are

superior and inferior races and that the latter are foredoomed to a subordinate status; the overwhelming majority of Muslim jurists and theologians share this rejection." Muslim Arabs, however, contrary to Islamic teachings, quite often (which is not to say always) appear to have favored those who most closely approximated their own skin color; which they mistakenly perceived as "white." Certainly the current arrogance, vis-à-vis other Muslim peoples of color, but who happen not to be "Arabs," expressed some times openly and sometimes sotto voce, that one finds among many Muslim Arabs—who usually and hypocritically consider themselves as the true inheritors and custodians of the religion of Islam regardless of their level of practical commitment to it—appears to have always been part of the Arab Islamic tradition. Here, for example, is what the Arab Muslim Ibn Khaldun—arguably one of the foremost philosophers of history of the medieval era—had to say about black Africans: "Their qualities of character are close to those of dumb animals. It has even been reported that most of the Negroes of the first zone dwell in caves and thickets, eat herbs, live in savage isolation and do not congregate, and eat each other." (Though in fairness to him he did not think much of Europeans either for in the next sentence he writes: "The same applies to the Slavs." His explanation for this supposed inferiority of blacks and whites was that it had to do with climate. (Khaldun 1967, Vol. 1: 168–69)

What is particularly disturbing is that such prejudice has at times been expressed in extremely virulent forms, with horrendous consequences for their victims. Two examples in support of this point; one from the past, and the other from the present: during the era of the slave trade, Muslim Arab slave traders were not entirely above enslaving their fellow Muslims and selling them into bondage—simply because the latter were not, in the eyes of the former, racial co-equals. (Here, the matter of the theological position of Islam on slavery is of relevance: it was akin to that of Christianity and Judaism, and is well summarized by Diouf (1998: 10): "Islam neither condemned nor forbade slavery but stated that enslavement was lawful under only two conditions: if the slave was born of slave parents or if he or she had been a pagan prisoner of war. Captives could legally be made slaves if the prisoner was a kafir (pagan) who had first refused to convert and then declined to accept the protection of the Muslims. In theory, a freeborn Muslim could never become a slave.") One ought to also point out, however, that the corrupting influence of the slave trade did not spare black African Muslim slave traders from succumbing to the same temptation; they too at times sold their fellow black African Muslims into slavery. The enslaved Muslims who became part of the humanity dragged across the oceans (see Diouf) were more than likely sold, mainly, by non-Muslim black African enslavers, but it is not beyond the realm of the possibility that a few were also sold by both black African and Arab Muslim enslavers. All this was in the past, but what about today? The short answer is that things have not changed much for the better. Consider, for instance, what is going on today in the Sudanese Muslim province of Darfur where government supported "Arab" militias are embarked on a mass slaughter of, this time, fellow Muslims (unlike in Sudan's south where the target of Khartoum's genocidal tendencies for the past several decades have been Christians/ animists) who they consider as black and therefore inferior. The irony of this horror is that the so-called Arabs involved in the conflict are Arabized black Africans, phenotypically indistinguishable from their fellow Sudanese (whether Muslims, Christians or animists) they are slaughtering. (For more on this conflict visit the www.bbc.com website and

search their archives of news stories.)

In raising this entire matter of Arab racism one risks being accused of abandoning historical objectivity; in defense, dear reader, you are asked to consult sources by others who have looked at this issue with some diligence; such as Bernard Lewis. In his book Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry (1990), he meticulously documents the history of the nefarious attitudes of Muslim Arabs on the race question. He begins by noting that the arrival of Islam in the Afro-Eurasian ecumene introduced a new equation in the matter of race relations: the potential to associate skin pigmentation with "otherness" (something that was rare up to that point in the ancient world where otherness was more a matter of ethnicity [such as linguistic or religious differences] and/or nationality [e.g., Greeks versus Persians] rather than race). This potential emerged out of the fact that for the first time in human history Islam created "a truly universal civilization" where "[b]y conquest and by conversion, the Muslims brought within the bounds of a single imperial system and a common religious culture peoples as diverse as the Chinese, the Indians, the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, black Africans, and white Europeans," and not only that, but the obligatory requirements of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca enjoined on all Muslim adults, if they can afford it, at least once in their lifetime) placed members of all these groups into direct and close contact with each other (p. 18). Against this background, the transformation of the potential to the actual (theological prohibitions notwithstanding), for a variety of reasons (including holdovers from pre-Islamic times of Arab prejudices), was a matter of time; thereby leaving us with a circumstance that he summarizes thusly: "The cause of racial equality is sustained by the almost unanimous voice of Islamic religion—both the exhortations of piety and the injunctions of the law. And yet, at the same time, the picture of inequality and injustice is vividly reflected in the literature, the arts, and the folklore of the Muslim peoples. In this, as in so much else, there is a sharp contrast between what Islam says and what Muslims—or at least some Muslims—do" (p. 20). Consequently, even among subordinate populations, such as slaves, according to Lewis, hierarchic distinctions were often imposed: white slaves tended to fare better than black slaves in almost all respects. What is worse was that as the African slave trade (both the trans-Saharan and the Atlantic) became ever more lucrative, there was a corresponding rise in the putrescence of Muslim Arab attitudes on this matter—exemplified, as already noted a moment ago, in the enslavement of black Muslims too.

The amazing irony in all this, to complicate matters, is that today there are, in truth, very few Muslim Arabs who can claim a pure Arab ancestry. Regardless of how racist Arabs think of other peoples of color, or how their equally racist detractors from among the people of color think of them, Arabs (especially those in Afro-Arab Islamic Africa), like that segment of the population categorized as "black" in the United States, range from the whitest white to the blackest black! In other words, the category Arab is less a category of skin-color and phenotype, than it is a linguistic and cultural category. That this should be so is not surprising considering that as the Islamic empire came to encompass a heterogeneity of colors, Muslim Arabs came to genetically intermingle with ethnicities from across the entire Afro-Eurasian ecumene over the millennia.

There is one other matter that ought to be noted here in the interest of scholarly integrity: while it is true that Lewis's detractors have accused him of "orientalist" bias (a variant of Eurocentrism as indicated in Appendix II) in his work—and they may well be

correct, especially in the case of his earlier works—as with all Eurocentrists, it would be wrong to assume that everything he has written is ipso facto false. In fact, in this instance, his 1990 work, one finds, is well researched and documented, even if his earlier work (Lewis 1971) on the same subject may have been less so. More importantly, on this particular issue, Lewis does not stand alone. For instance, see Davis 2001; Fisher 2001; Goldenberg 2003; Gordon 1989; Hunwick and Powell 2002; Marmon 1999; Segal 2001; and Willis 1985. (A defensive view from the other side is available via Kamil 1970.) For a trenchant critique of Lewis, see Nyang and Abed-Rabbo (1984); Halliday (1993), is also relevant here.

28. In other words, Islam does not require a priestly class to perform rites (no matter how profound the event, as in the case, for example, of weddings or funerals or even in the matter of conversion to the faith) as a means to bind the faithful to their religion; nor is there any provision for that class of people found in some religions who lay claim to special magical/ spiritual powers emanating from the Creator to be used in the service of the faithful (shamans for example). From this perspective, religion for Muslims is a personal undertaking—a matter solely between the believer and the Creator with no intermediary in between (not even Prophet Muhammed). Moreover, the lack of a need for a priestly and/ or theurgical class has been further assured by, on one hand, the utter simplicity of executing religious rites and on the other the devolution of responsibility for those rites that require community participation, such as weddings and funerals, on to the entire community (instead of a select category of people, priests and/ or shamans). The consequence of one of these fundamental characteristics of Islam is well described by Eccel (1984: 335): "With priesthood ruled out, and the saintly repositories of mystical secrets and sacred power disfavored, the ulama have elaborated a cogent set of disciplines by which, having mastered them, they may establish themselves as a professional religious elite qua jurists, as well as teachers and preachers." Eccel further observes, "[I]n this they were aided by an epistemology that is oriented to rationality, their hallmark." It is little wonder, then, that piety in Islam has meant more than faithful adherence to ritualistic requirements; it has also included the acquisition of knowledge. Having said all this there is one qualifying observation that must be made: in practice in some Islamic countries (such as those in the Maghrebi North Africa), the masses—who are less conversant with the tenets of Islam—have often fallen prey to the sacrilegious practice of saint worship, which to all intents and purposes borders on superstition and magic harking back to a pre-Islamic era.

29. Consider the variety of subjects that fall under the purview of Islamic law: inheritance law; family law; principles of trade, commerce, and banking; dietary regulations; principles of environmental protection; principles of state governance; principles of taxation; the laws of war; principles of personal conduct (including dress); principles of foreign policy; principles of crime and punishment (murder, theft, etc.); principles of hygiene; and so on.

30. Interestingly, even today, the Muslim ulama of every nationality—African, Chinese, European, East Indian, etc.—still uses Arabic as its lingua franca. One may also note here that at a certain time in the history of East-West relations (see next chapter) Arabic was also used by Western intellectuals because it was the language of science.

31. For more on the importance of knowledge in Islam see Rosenthal (1970).

32. In some places, as in Morocco for example, the madrasah may refer exclusively

to either a mosque university's student dormitories, or to places of learning that do not have dormitories attached to them (found usually in the countryside) (Porter 2002: 10).

33. It may be noted here that the first madrasah, known as al-madrasah al-Nizamiyah, was founded in Baghdad in 1067 by the powerful Seljuk Turk governor, Nizam-al-Mulk. It is this madrasah that became the model for nearly all madrasahs that were established throughout the Islamic empire in subsequent years. About waqfs: there are in practice two types of waqfs, the public or charitable trust (referred to as waqf *qhayri*) and the private family trust (known as waqf *ahli*). It is the former and not the latter that was among the mainstays of the madrasah system. (For more on the role of waqfs in the madrasah system in general see Makdisi 1981; as for, specifically, waqfs in Egypt see Behrens-Abouseif 1994; Berkey 1992; and Eccel 1984). Note also that elsewhere in North Africa waqf may go by the name *hubus* (or *habous*).

34. See Eickelman (1985) and Eccel (1984) for an idea of what student dormitories looked like and how room space was allocated.

35. Other names for the kuttab-level institutions include Qur'anic schools (usually in French literature); msid (in Morocco—the name is a corruption of masjid); and khalwah (in Sudan). It may also be noted that in parts of Afro-Arab Islamic Africa where Sufism holds considerable sway, as in the Maghreb, madrasah-level institutions are also called zawiyahs—which in reality, are more than just madrasahs; they are religious centers with diverse functions run by Sufi orders. (For an excellent example of a Sufi order and its zawiyah see the study by Clancy-Smith 1994.) (A Sufi is a practitioner of Sufism, a form of ascetic ecstatic mysticism, practiced and venerated in some parts of the Islamic world, but which while in other parts is considered an embodiment of deep profanation; that is, a heretical innovation (referred to in Islam as bid'aa).

36. This tragic phenomenon, incidentally, is characteristic of this day and age as well; no country any where in the world, no matter how wealthy, advanced, etc., it may be, has been able to fully and effectively grapple with this iniquity in their educational systems.

37. In stating that the system was relatively democratic, one is acknowledging here that in practice female students were generally excluded from the upper levels of the system, but not at the ground level.

38. Although Islamic theology in itself places no barriers to the acquisition of knowledge by women (on the contrary encourages women to participate in this endeavor too), in practice, as a result of local customs, the madrasah system tended to be male dominated as one went up the educational ladder beyond the kuttab level. Recall that in the pre-Islamic era, most societies throughout the region that came to be encompassed by the Islamic empire did not give equal emphasis to the education (formal) of boys and girls, whatever form such education took. This was true of the Greeks as it was of the Chinese; it was true of the Egyptians as it was of the Persians; it was true of the Romans and the Byzantines as it was true of the Indians; and it was true of the Christians as it was true of Jews. Yet, as Berkey (1992) shows, there were individual Muslim women of exceptional character who did persevere with their education in the face of severe obstacles to achieve comparable status with their male peers. (See also Dunbar (2000) who examines the place of Muslim women in African history; and Clancy-Smith 1994 who provides us with a study of a Muslim woman notable of considerable learning and influence in the period of French colonial rule in Algeria.)

39. An aside of current interest: Westerners today fail to understand this basic fact when they puzzle over why the Saudis, for example, took to financing madrasahs in Islamic communities around the world. It should also be pointed out that the support of madrasahs did not depend entirely on the wealthy; the day to day expenses of less well to do students, for example, were often supplemented by donations in kind (food, clothing, etc.) from ordinary people who by means of these donations wished to secure the same religious blessings as those sought by the wealthy patrons. In Islam, as in most other religions, the religious value of an act of charity is not tied to the magnitude of the charity itself, but in relation to one's ability to undertake it.

40. Such as a formal curricula; universally recognized formal admission qualifications, procedures, and programs of study; formal completion of study examinations; teacher certification; formal vertical and horizontal institutional linkages; inspectorates and accreditation mechanisms; distinct diurnal and calendrical time structures (e.g., class periods and semesters—other than that imposed by the timetable of the mandatory five daily prayers, and the month of fasting); detailed written regulations; classrooms with desks and chairs; an elaborate hierarchic bureaucracy; and so on. One may also note here that in general there was no concept of failure in madrasahs. Withdrawal from a madrasah could occur at any time for whatever reasons that were specific to the student without incurring a mantle of failure from society at large—only personal regret was usually the main negative outcome of not completing one's studies as originally intended. In Islam (as in Judaism and Buddhism, to give other examples) the pursuit of higher learning was less motivated by instrumentalist concerns (employment), than by the desire for pietistic self-betterment.

41. Even though the basic elements of the madrasah system were roughly the same, there were some pedagogical differences between madrasah systems in different parts of the Islamic empire. The scholastic method was therefore not universal, but it appears to have been the dominant teaching method in many parts of the Islamic empire. See Eickelman's comment on this matter (1985: 95–96).

42. Yet paradoxically, despite this highly personal nature of Islamic higher education, major centers of learning (such as Cairo), came to boast a large number of public buildings (with the requisite waqfs for their upkeep) for the sole purpose of encouraging teaching and learning.

43. What also follows from this multidimensional role of the madrasah is that there was considerable fluidity in not only the use of space, but also of relations between the madrasah and the community in which it was located; exemplified, for instance, by the welcome accorded to worshippers, whatever their profession, to join study or lesson circles of their choice for how often and however long they wished—though out of deference to regular students such "transient students" would sit at the outer edge of the circle. (In a sense one may liken this practice to the modern concept of course auditing.)

44. Some cities (such as Cairo during the Mamluk dynastic period) also came to have other unique institutions of higher learning such as convents for the sufis (Muslim ascetics)—see Berkey (1992). For more on the Islamic educational system prior to the advent of Western imperialism in Africa (and in the Islamic empire generally), see: Berkey (1992); Dodge (1961, and 1962); Eccel (1984); Eickelman (1985); Heyworth-Dunne (1939); Iqbal (2002); Leiser (1976); Makdisi (1981); Nakosteen (1964); Reichmuth (2000); Saad (1983); Tibawi (1972); and Totah (1926).

45. Maghreb is the shortened form of the Arabic term that the conquering Muslims applied to all of North Africa west of Egypt: Bilad al-Maghreb (meaning Lands of Sunset). The Maghreb as a province of the Islamic empire was known as Ifriqiyah.

46. Official literature issued by the present-day incarnation of the madrasah, the University of Ezzitouna, in proclaiming that it is the oldest Islamic university states that the mosque was built by Ubayd-allah Ibn Habhab in 734 and its madrasah functions began in 737. (Note: al-Zaitouna is also spelled Ezzitouna and al-Zaytuna.)

47. About the various dynasties: The Aghlabids reigned from 800 to 909 C.E. from the capital city they founded, al-Kayrawan; the dynasty was begun by Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab (ruled from 800 to 812) who was the governor appointed to be in charge of Ifriqiyah by the Abbasid caliph, Harun ar-Rashid. The Zirid dynasty was begun by the Kabylie Berber governor (appointed by the Fatimids) of al-Kayrawan, Yousuf Buluggin I ibn Ziri (ruled from 972 to 995). The dynasty reigned from 972 to 1152 in Ifriqiyah and from 1012 to 1090 in Granada in Muslim Spain (the Granadian branch was begun by Zawa ibn Ziri). The Hafsid dynasty was also a Berber dynasty; it was founded around 1229 by Abu Zakariyya Yahya and they ruled until the Ottoman takeover of Tunisia in 1574. (For more on these dynasties see Abun-Nasr 1987).

48. Green (1978: 29–30) suggests that the madrasah does not really come into its own until the nineteenth-century when the Husaynids congregated ulama recruited from other madrasahs at this particular institution.

49. The differences in Muslim educational practices in Islamic North Africa are discussed by Ibn Khaldun; see volume three of the Rosenthal translation of his fourteenth-century work, the Muqaddimah (Khaldun 1967).

50. See Porter (2002); and the entry under al-Karawiyyin in the Encyclopedia of Islam for more on this institution.

51. It ought to be mentioned in passing that the al-Qarawiyyin (also spelled al-Karawiyyin) was not the only major mosque-college in Morocco during the precolonial era; there were others too (albeit of slightly lesser importance, such the Ibn Youssef Mosque-college in Rabat, and the Yusufiya Mosque-college in Marrakesh (see Eickelman 1985, for more).

52. In devoting almost exclusive attention to al-Azhar as the premier madrasah of North Africa two points need to be stressed: one, that it achieved this status only in the later phases of its history (otherwise in its early years it was just one madrasah among many); and two, that this was not the only madrasah in Cairo; there were many other madrasahs besides al-Azhar even at the time of the French invasion. Al-Azhar's eventual preeminence was an outcome of fortuitous circumstances (see Berkey 1992).

53. The Fatimids belonged to the Ismailiah wing of the Sh'ite half of the great schism (the other half being Sun'nite) that engulfed Islam immediately following the murder of the third caliph of the Muslims, Omar ibn Khattab, in 656. For more on the Fatimids see Brett (2001), and Halm (1997).

54. Commenting on the origins of al-Azhar, Eccel (1984) makes this interesting observation: "These then we may number among the paradoxes of Egyptian history: the al-Azhar, the most renowned center of Sun'ni orthodoxy, was established by a general of Christian origins (Jawahar the Sicilian) and a minister of Jewish origins (Ibn Killis of Baghdad) to be a Shi'ite madrasah-mosque; and even though it became a center of Egyptian nationalism against Napoleon, and later against the British, it was founded by

one foreign conqueror, a Sicilian, and made Sun'ni by another, a Kurd" (p. 115–116). Such then is the spice of history; and yet the unwashed still lament that history is bland intellectual discourse.

55. Given the critically important role played by this very unique dynasty (1250–1517), together with its residuum (1517–1798), in the cultural and educational life of Egypt for close to 600 years, down to the beginning of modern Egyptian history, demands a digression on exactly who these people were. The name mamluk is an Arabic word that stands for owned and in the Arabs color-conscious terminology it came to refer to "white" slaves, in this case military slaves from Central Asia. (Black slaves were called abd, which today has come to signify any black person, slave or not—see Lewis 1990.) From around nineth-century onward, Muslim rulers, from time to time, had used soldiers of slave origins (military slaves) in their armies. While the use of slaves by a state for purposes other than domestic labor or economic production was not unique to the Muslims (vide the presence of government slaves [servi Caesaris] in the Roman empire and among other European entities [e.g., the Burgundian Kingdom, medieval Germany, Muscovy], or consider the use of slaves in U.S. armies during the Civil War), there was one distinct difference, explains Pipes (1981): these were slaves systematically acquired and formally trained for only one purpose: to serve as professional soldiers in the armies of the state. From this perspective they were not slaves in the ordinary sense of the word because they were part and parcel of the praetorian state apparatus, for by the time they were ready to assume their duties the nature of their bondage had transmuted from one based on coercion to one relying on allegiance. (The slaves, for the most part, did not acquire their freedom by means of formal process of manumission, but by means of a self-conscious decision to usurp power under certain extraordinary circumstances—Pipes calls it "ipsimission" though perhaps a better word would be "automanumission"—if and until that point was reached they were still fundamentally slaves, but only in the sense that they had a master whose jurisdiction over their lives was not optional.) Pipes suggests that military slaves were ubiquitous throughout the Islamic empire where four-fifths of the various Muslim dynasties regularly employed them in their armies. He states further that among them those in Sub-Saharan Africa were most especially dependent on military slaves (p. 52).

Turning specifically to the military slaves in North Africa (the mamluks) who in time gave rise to their own dynasties: first, we may enquire into how they were acquired (and from where) by the Islamic state? The general procedure involved their procurement at a young age (around twelve) from non-Muslim sources on the periphery of the Islamic empire (mainly from the Central Asian steppes from among the various Turkish nomadic tribes, though sometimes, as under the Fatimids, they also came from some parts of Africa such as the Sudan) and then providing them with training in the martial arts and the rudiments of Islamic beliefs and practices—in general mamluks were Muslims, though, as with the ordinary populace, the depth of their piety varied from person to person. Irwin (1986) comments that the criticism by some historians that they were not good Muslims is not true of all Mamluks; in fact there were times when some had "a stronger commitment to Islam and better knowledge of its tenets than the majority of their subjects." He further observes that "[o]n the whole the mamluks are best understood as being public servants, so long as one also understands that they were the servants of God, not of their subjects" (p. 153). On the matter of their provenance, one

would assume that the acquisition of young children for military enslavement in far off lands must have been a brutal and cruel process for them and their parents, and at the level of individual families this most certainly must have been so; however, it appears that the matter is a little more complex than that. To be sure, such mechanisms of acquisition as capture in warfare and extraction as human tribute did exist; but consider further Irwin's description of other avenues: "On the steppes warfare—the raiding of other tribes herds of livestock and the taking into captivity of the defeated—formed a crucial part of the nomad economy. The slavers who sold the [young non-Muslim] Turks to the Islamic regimes were for the most part themselves Turks. At times of hardship, particularly of drought, families might sell their own children into captivity. Then again it occasionally happened, particularly in later centuries, that a man inspired by ambition might sell himself into captivity" (Irwin 1986: 4).

How did the Mamluks end up becoming rulers of Egypt (and Syria)? It has to do with the nature of military slavery: The use of such slaves was always a double-edged sword: the rulers could also become their targets, which is what happened in Egypt when Turkish Mamluks rebelled and overthrew the Abbasid dynasty in 1250 and established their own instead—but interestingly it was based on a dynastic lineage that was secured by means of nonhereditary succession where each generation of rulers came out of fresh purchases from their original homeland of young new mamluks. The Mamluk dynasty lasted until 1517 when it was defeated by another group of Turks, the Ottomans (Muslim nomadic Turkmen who under their leader Uthman—hence the derivation Ottoman—founded an empire that lasted for more than 600 years, from around 1400 to 1922, and encompassed a vast and highly diverse terrain that at one time included, besides Turkey: the Arabian peninsula, Bosnia, Egypt (and almost all of North Africa), Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Israel, Romania, Serbia, Syria, and the Ukraine).

Compared to the Ottoman period in Egypt, the period of Mamluk dynasty, especially the early part (about first 100 years or so—up to 1382), appears generally to have been one of significant cultural enlightenment and prosperity (though with regard to the latter probably much less so for the Egyptian peasantry). As Behrens-Abouseif (1994: 271) has observed: "The Mamluk sultans [rulers] had been great sponsors of religious institutions," so much so she continues that "[t]heir foundations in Cairo can be considered in their totality to be the greatest achievement of its kind in the Muslim medieval world." It is also true that a major contribution of the Mamluks was to save Egypt from the Mongol devastation with their defeat of them in Palestine and Syria; they were responsible too for getting rid of the last remnants of the Crusaders from the Levant. In a global sense, then, the pre-Ottoman Mamluk dynasty did a great service to the Arabic Islamic civilization by playing a critical role in its preservation. It may be noted here that even after the dynasty's overthrow, remnants of it continued to rule Egypt and in time, as the Ottoman state weakened, they were able to win back much of their power; though they still remained nominally beholden to the state through tribute payments. They ruled until around 1800 (see Chapter 3). This latter group of mamluks are described in this work as the Ottoman Mamluks. Considered from this perspective, Mamluk rule lasted for nearly 600 years; however Behrens-Abouseif's point is well taken: the continuity between the dynasty and its residuum was "in form only" in that while they continued to be recruited mainly from the Caucasus, Ottoman rule introduced a new element: the residuum became a hereditary aristocracy (1994: 270). From the perspective of their role

in maintaining the cultural and educational institutions through waqf endowments, the tradition, however, was continued. For more on the Mamluks (besides Irwin, Pipes, and Behrens-Abouseif), see Berkey (1992); Glubb (1973); and Petry (1994).

56. Interestingly, this unity of student age levels in the provision of education has been retained by al-Azhar to this day; that is, in the al-Azhar university system one can commence education in the first grade and not leave the system until after completing the doctorate.

57. Yet again a material interest of a different order can not be ruled out either from the constellation of motivations: the waqfs were also a means for shielding wealth from expropriation by the state, thereby enabling the individual Mamluk rulers to pass on their wealth to their descendents by entrusting to them the management of the waqfs (a legitimate device that carried with it remuneration).

58. For more on these other functions of al-Azhar, which increased in importance during the period of Ottoman Mamluk rule, see Behrens-Abouseif (1994) who suggests that this development is attributable to the fact that during the Ottoman period, the al-Azhar ulama served for the Ottoman government in Istanbul as a form of a counterweight to the local Mamluk governors.

59. Behrens-Abouseif (1994: 94) suggests that it is possible that this post emerged earlier, probably in the sixteenth-century when it was held by one Shaykh Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Qadir al-Ghazzi. However, even if this is so, it is from the seventeenth-century she states that the post began to acquire considerable political importance, especially since the Shaykh al-Azhar was also the Mufti. (In 1961 the two offices would be separated so that the state could have greater control over the institution through the office of the rector.)

60. The literature indicates that the quality of life of a student at al-Azhar was greatly determined by whether one relied exclusively on the institution for board and lodging or whether one also had access to family resources. Those who were most dependent on al-Azhar could look forward to a life of very few creature comforts, with undernourishment, inadequate clothes, primitive bedding and so on as constant companions. What is more, merely showing up for studies at al-Azhar did not automatically entitle one to food rations since demand often exceeded supply; one had to survive on one's own resources for up to two years or more before one was eligible for rations. Clearly, to survive at al-Azhar one had to be extremely dedicated if one's family was not well-off. There was, however, one very important fringe benefit enjoyed by all students that must have helped considerably in this regard: exemption from military service and corvee labor. See Dodge (1961) for more on student life at al-Azhar.

61. The very informality of the entire operation of al-Azhar, it must be noted, was both its strongest and weakest points: on one hand, from the perspective of class and ethnicity (though not sex) it was a democratic institution where higher learning was within the grasp of anyone willing to apply himself; yet it also permitted considerable academic laxity and behavioral indiscipline— even to the point of falling prey to the temptations of the worst attributes of urban street life (crime, solicitation of prostitutes, etc.) (Eccel 1984: 149). Moreover, periodic violent confrontations between students and teachers, or among each of the two groups themselves, over allocation of waqf and other benefits were not unknown. There was also operational indiscipline in areas such as lodging where it appears that as student numbers grew, the living quarters of the stu-

dents correspondingly grew worse—squalid is the term that comes to mind and it's the term Eccel uses (p. 172).

62. Eccel (1984: 125), draws attention to an intriguing practice regarding waqfs established for specific ulama: the benefits were sometimes inheritable by their descendants!

63. In later years, of course, with the advent of the Khedives in the nineteenth-century, the ulama received monthly salaries from the government from a fund established for that purpose and which in part was based on the waqfs of al-Azhar (and whose administration was now handled by the government—see Chapter 3).

64. For more on al-Azhar see Behrens-Abouseif (1994); Berkey (1992); Dodge (1961); Crecelius (1968); Eccel (1984); and Heyworth-Dunne (1939). Note: each of these sources emphasize different periods in the evolution of al-Azhar, therefore it is advisable to consult all of them together to obtain a comprehensive picture of the institution.

While going through the foregoing examination of madrasahs in the Afro-Arab Islamic world, many will not help but be reminded that madrasahs have in recent years acquired an unsavory reputation in the Western media. They are being blamed for fomenting "Islamized" terrorism. One or two words on this issue, therefore, would not out of place here. To begin with, it is ironic that we in the West (especially in the United States) with all of our sophisticated information gathering and knowledge producing resources (from spy satellites to think-tanks) have an inordinate thirst for silliest explanations for complex issues of global importance, especially those rooted in pre/ quasi/ developing countries. (The source of this phenomenon is not too difficult to discern: it is a combination of two factors: the realization that to delve deeper into causes is to risk unearthing the complicitous role of the West; and good old-fashioned racism where the West has never shaken off a notion that it developed in the heyday of Western imperialism that peoples of color are, on one hand, child-like and easily misled; and on the other, prone to violence and savagery.) Yes, madrasahs may have a role to play, but it's a minor one. We refuse to consider the possibility that the existence of such madrasahs in the first place is a symptom of a much larger problem: the specific political and economic configurations that exist in the Islamic countries and regions and in which the West has had a determinative role. There are three essential elements to these configurations: the lack of economic development (hence mass unemployment, widespread poverty and an unconscionable elite-mass gap in living standards), lack of democracy (hence the persistent massive violations of the human rights of the citizenry, ranging from vote-rigging to arbitrary imprisonment, torture and murder), and the perceived Western assault on the dignity of the Muslim ummah (exemplified by the refusal to resolve the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict and the related occupation of Islam's second holiest city, Jerusalem, by Israel.) The last factor is particularly important considering that the other two factors are also present in other parts of the world—such as much of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America—and yet they do not produce anti-Western suicide bombers. Yes, it is true that sometimes the organizers (and even the perpetrators) of the terrorist acts may not necessarily be from hopeless poverty-stricken backgrounds (Osama Bin Laden is supposed to come from a wealthy family), but the fact that these people continue to emerge time after time (9/ 11—a date that will be etched forever in the annals of U.S. history—is just one of a series of terrorist acts spanning decades) and are supported

by countless misguided foot soldiers who most often do the actual dying (the terrorist planners who dispatch the young men and women on suicidal bombing missions do not usually send their own children) speaks to the existence of this matrix. Consequently, no amount of braying into the wind that "they are jealous of our democracy"; "they do not like freedom"; etc. (serving essentially as a cover to further ramp up an already bloated military-industrial complex and to undermine the very democracy that is supposed to distinguish us from the rest of the world), or putting pressures on other countries to disband their madrasahs is in itself going to address the root causes of this phenomenon. One is always perplexed as to why it is so difficult for the denizens of executive mansions in the capitals of the West to understand that the best security stems from converting the foe to a friend, and that any other approach dooms us all to a constant potential of being blown to smithereens as we go about our daily business. Note: For more on the topic of the provenance of Islamized terrorism (there is no such thing as Islamic terrorism) see, for example, Hershberg and Moore (2002); Munjee (2001); Murden (2002); and Sonbol (2000)—to get a proper handle on the topic you are advised dear reader to consult these sources together. For a Eurocentric populist view on the subject see the 1998 work by that arch Eurocentrist, Samuel P. Huntington, titled (tellingly) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Thanks to the efforts of his publisher, Simon & Schuster, it generated much commotion at the time of its publication, but of course little enlightenment. That the best one can say about that work is that it is pure cant masquerading as academic scholarship—attested to by his basic thesis which he prefaces with what he calls an old truth that he quotes from a character in Michael Dibdin's novel, *Dead Lagoon*: "There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are." Ergo the premise of Huntington's entire work: "For peoples seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential, and the potentially most dangerous enmities occur across fault lines between the world's major civilizations" (p. 20).

65. For a discussion of the politics behind the anthropological explanations of the origins of the Zimbabwe Ruins (Great Zimbabwe) see Kuklick (1991) who describes the depth of ridiculousness to which they had sunk—exemplified by a decree by the white minority government of Ian Smith that government employees who publicly disseminated the now long established fact (e.g., through carbon dating) that the Zimbabwe Ruins were of indigenous (African) provenance and not some mythical foreign race would lose their jobs.

66. It may be noted here that it is the ancestors of Canaan, the Canaanites, who are conquered by the Israelites giving rise to that well-known passage in the Bible (Joshua 9: 21) "And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them" (emphasis added). The Canaanites living in the city of Gibeon saved themselves from the possibility of being massacred by Joshua (for no other reason beyond the fact that their land had now been promised by God to the Israelites) by pretending to be foreigners from outside the Land of Canaan and entering into a peace truce with Joshua. However, upon discovering this deception, Joshua cursed the Gibeonites relegating them forever to become "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in the service of the Israelites.

67. The literature on the historical origins of the ideology of racism in the West is fairly extensive. As an entry-point into this literature the following select sources will

prove to be, for present purposes, more than adequate: Bieder (1986); Davies, Nandy, and Sardar (1993); Drescher (1992); Frederickson (2002); Gould (1971); Hannaford (1996); Huemer (1998); Jackson and Weidman (2004); Jordan (1968); Kovel (1988); Libby, Spickard, and Ditto (2005); Niro (2003); Pieterse (1992); Reilly, Kaufman, and Bodino (2003); Shipman (1994); Smedley (1993); Stanton (1960); and Wolpoff and Caspari (1997). Note that although Jordan, and Libby, Spickard, and Ditto are very specific to the U.S. context, they are included here because of their treatment of an important element in the formation of Western racist ideologies not given as much attention in the literature as it deserves: the role of sexuality.

68. For more on the Christian cosmological and "scientific" roots of Western racist discourse, see also the sources mentioned in the preceding note.