

Islamic Education and the Transmission of Knowledge in Muslim Sicily

William Granara
(Harvard University)

The reconstruction of the intellectual and cultural history of Muslim Sicily has presented challenges to historians because of the dearth of primary sources for this richly layered but relatively unknown period. Unlike Islamic Spain, Sicily lacks the historical, literary, and religious documents that might bear witness to the cultural productivity of almost four centuries of Muslim presence on the island. Islamic Sicily can boast no Ibn Hazm, Ibn al-[°]Arabi, or Ibn Rushd, whose bio-bibliographies attest to Andalusian contributions to Islamic intellectual history writ large. Nor does Sicily possess a work such as al-Maqqari's *Nafḥ al-ḥib min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raḥīb* ["Fragrant Perfume Wafting from the Moist Branch of the Andalus"] a voluminous encyclopedia on the political, social and intellectual history of Muslim Spain.¹ Much of what we know of Muslim Sicily has been culled from later Arabic sources which the nineteenth-century Sicilian historian Michele Amari (1806–89) collated into a master volume in 1857, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula* (henceforth *BAS*), and drawing on which he composed his magnum opus, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (henceforth *SMS*), edited and published posthumously between 1933 and 1939 in Catania, Sicily.² Most modern scholarship on medieval Muslim Sicily (from the beginning of the ninth to the middle of the thirteenth century) is heavily indebted to Amari's ground-breaking work. This essay presents a survey of the biographies of several generations of Muslim Sicilian scholars and attempts to reconstruct the history of Islamic education and the transmission of knowledge to and from the island during the period of Arab rule and the first years after the Norman conquest. Given the paucity of primary sources and the wealth of modern scholarship, much of this introduction will reiterate and reconfirm what has come to be regarded as the accepted history of Sicilian Islam.

¹ *Nafḥ al-ḥib min ghuṣn al-andalus al-raḥīb* (8 vols.) is the most comprehensive work on Islamic Spain. It was written by Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqqari, prolific writer and historian, who was born in the city of Tlemcen in 986/1578 and died in Egypt in 1041/1631. The work was edited by Ihsān [°]Abbās, published in Beirut in 1968, and republished in 1997.

² Michele Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1857); idem, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 2nd ed., ed. C.A. Nallino (Catania: Romeo Prampolini, 1935).

To begin with, Sicily in the period of Islamic rule was intricately connected – socially, militarily, politically, economically, and culturally – to Ifriqiyā (from Constantine to Tripoli) in general, and to Qayrawān (Tunisia), its capital city, in particular. This connection was established at the Sunni Aghlabid court in 212/827 and survived the Shiite Fatimid takeover in 295/909 and subsequent Fatimid control over the island, first from Ifriqiyā and later from Cairo. Sicilian religious life was predominantly of the Sunni-Mālikī school, and its secular culture was very much part of the Arabo-Islamic mainstream. An indigenous Sicilian Islamic culture came into its own and flourished at the Kalbid court in the middle of the tenth century. Although the Kalbids were clients of the Shiite Fatimid caliphs, the cultural life they presided over was for the most part Sunni-Mālikī and one that aspired to keep pace with the major centers of the Islamic East. The *riḥlah* or academic journey played a pivotal role in Sicilian Muslim scholarship and, along with commerce, war, and pilgrimage (*hajj*), was instrumental in the import and export of knowledge to and from the island. Finally, the Norman synthesis, the great cultural eclecticism of the courts from Roger II (d. 1154) to Frederick II (d. 1250), sprouted in great part from the seeds of Arab and Islamic institutions that were deeply rooted in Sicilian soil.

One of the more interesting issues to emerge in post-Amari scholarship has been the unevenness of the primary sources from which Muslim Sicilian history has been reconstructed. Particularly with regard to the Fatimid revolution in North Africa and its suzerainty over Sicily, the question of the reliability of Sunni sources has been important. As Marius Canard has noted: "Having suffered from the prejudices and hostility of the Sunnis, it [the Fatimid dynasty] has not always been described by Sunni writers with understanding; but for some years now it has enjoyed a renewal of interest."³ More recently, the Italian historian Antonino Pellitteri has called attention to what he terms "la polemica anti-sciita e anti-*ubaydita*" which has characterized the historiography of Muslim Sicily until very recently.⁴ He provides a close reading of several Shiite or pro-Shiite sources, including the works of the eminent Ismāʿīlī jurist and historian, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 358/967), and folds them into the meta-narrative of Islamic Sicily. Especially important in Pellitteri's work is the reaffirmation of Sicily's importance to the Islamic *jihād* and its central role in the balance of Fatimid-Byzantine superpower rivalry in the Mediterranean during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The "Sunni" thesis has been clearly and succinctly articulated by H. Mones, who emphasizes three main points.⁵ First, the Maghrebi and Andalusian students of Mālik Ibn Anas (d. 179/795) preserved and spread not only the master's work on Islamic law (*al-Muwattaʿ*) but also the emulation of his personal qualities (*shamāʿil*) that became the essence of Mālikī praxis for later generations. The institution of the

³ Marius Canard, "Fātimids," *EP*, 2:862.

⁴ Antonino Pellitteri, *I Fatimidi e La Sicilia (Sec. X)* (Palermo: Centro Culturale Al-Farabi, 1996), 22. See also idem, "The Historical-Ideological Framework of Islamic Fātimid Sicily (Fourth/Tenth Century) with Reference of the Works of the Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān," in *Al-Masāq* 7 (1994): 111–63. In this article the author also raises concerns about the unevenness of Sunni history, especially in reading and understanding Fatimid Sicily.

⁵ H. Mones (Ḥusayn Muʿnis), "Le Malekisme et l'Échec des Fatimides en Ifriqiya," in *Études Levito-Provençales* I (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), 197–220.

Mosque of Sīdī 'Uqbah b. Nāfi' at Qayrawān also played a pivotal role in the dissemination of Mālikism throughout the Islamic west. Second, the political, social, and religious strife that plagued North Africa created a continuous rift between large segments of the population and their governors. The jurisconsults (*fuqahā'*), in their capacity as religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) and pious ascetics (*zuhhād*), were viewed as the real leaders of the Muslim community. Third, when the Fatimid government overthrew the Aghlabid dynasty and established itself in Ifrīqiyyā, its leaders were still doctrinally and theologically underdeveloped, no match for the well-trained and battle-tested Mālikī jurists.⁶ Thus, the Fatimid Mahdī's aim to humiliate the traditional Qayrawānī religious establishment and win over the general public backfired, as suspicion towards the new Shiite rulers and loyalty to the Sunni jurists increased. For these reasons, Mones concludes, Fatimid Shiism failed and Mālikism prevailed.

In his comprehensive study of the Fatimid Caliphate in Ifrīqiyyā, Farhat Dachraoui also addresses the Sunni biases and, in a more profound and detailed manner than Pellitteri, urges a rereading of Shiite sources that will nuance, correct, and revise our understanding of Fatimid history in the medieval Muslim West. His central thesis is that the early Mālikī sources overstated the Sunni/Shiite divide in early tenth-century North Africa in order to create martyrs out of the Mālikī jurists and to force a divorce between the new governors and the Qayrawānī religious establishment.⁷ Dachraoui makes the case that, while there were major rifts between the two parties the same hostilities between the *fuqahā'* and the Aghlabid princes, all Sunnis, also existed prior to the Fatimid revolution. He points out that this had also been the case between the Medinan disciples of Mālik and the Umayyad rulers. Dachraoui sees in the hostilities between Mālikī jurists and the Fatimid state a continuation of the same religio-political dynamic. In addition, he interprets the defections of some Ḥanafī Qayrawānī jurists less as a reaction against their Mālikī rivals and more as the result of certain doctrinal affinities the Ḥanafī scholars shared with the Shiites. Above all, Dachraoui argues that the new Fatimid leaders adopted policies of accommodation, and that Shiite theology at that time and place, with minor exceptions in ritual and cultural practices, diverged little from its Sunni counterpart. To support his position, Dachraoui shows how the office of chief judge under the Fatimids evolved into a two-tier system involving a judge for the Shiite community and a judge for the *general* public. This was meant to achieve the expansionist goals of the Fatimid mission while appeasing the Sunni jurists and their supporters among the masses. What distinguishes the Fatimid judiciary is its new didactic role: the chief judge was

⁶ To substantiate this point, Mones refers to the disputations between Abū 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd al-Haddād (d. 298/911) and several of the Fatimid scholars, preserved in Muḥammad Abū al-'Arab's *Tabaqāt 'ulamā' Ifrīqiyyā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1970) and Abū Bakr al-Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣrīyah, 1951). For references, see H. Mones, "Le Malekisme," 212-15.

⁷ Farhat Dachraoui, *Le Califat Fatimide au Maghreb (909-975)* (Tunis: S.T.D., 1981). My remarks here draw on the last chapter of his thesis, "L'Organisation Judiciaire," 397-422. Dachraoui's views seem supported by the account now published as *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shi'i Witness*, ed. and trans. W. Madelung and P. E. Walker (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000).

charged with serving as a theoretician of Ismā'īli law in the name of the Imam, composing treatises on that law, and making it accessible to the general public.⁸

The historian of Muslim Sicilian intellectual history remains totally beholden, however, to the Sunni sources and what they say – or do not say – about its overwhelmingly Ifriqiyān/Sunni salient features. Inspired and challenged by Dachraoui and Pellitteri's calls for evenhandedness, I will survey Muslim Sicilian scholars while addressing the first four points mentioned above. The question of the degree to which Arab-Islamic influences penetrated and survived in Norman Sicily begs further extensive research and remains beyond the scope of this study.

The Aghlabid Jihād and the Qayrawān Foundation

The history of Muslim Sicily begins at the court of the Aghlabid (Banū al-Aghlab) dynasty (189–297/800–909) in Qayrawān (Ifriqiyā) and ends at the court of the Zirid princes of Maḥdiyyah two centuries later. It was specifically during the reign of the third Aghlabid emir, Ziyādat Allāh b. Ibrāhīm (201–225/816–38), who launched a full-scale *jihād* against Byzantine Sicily, that this history begins. Faced with a number of domestic problems – a restless and underemployed army, tensions between an urban Arab elite and disenfranchised Berber tribes, Kharijite insurrections, squabbles among the religious factions, hostility aroused by the jurists and their supporters, and charges of moral and political corruption – Ziyādat Allāh found an expedient solution to all these problems in the creation of an external enemy to which he could direct all the negative attention.

In order to bypass a treaty with Byzantine Sicily which his predecessor had brokered and to counteract the overwhelming opposition of the Ifriqiyān jurists to what would be considered an illegal act of war, Ziyādat Allāh sought the counsel of his two chief judges, Abū Muḥriz and Asad b. al-Furāt. The former, representing the majority opinion of the jurists, urged caution, while the maverick Asad seized the day and, equipped with information about the illegal detention of Muslim prisoners in Sicily which would make the treaty null and void, urged the emir to proceed with the attack.⁹

Grateful for the advice, Ziyādat Allāh responded by appointing Asad b. al-Furāt the commander of the army, while specifying that he was to maintain his position as Qayrawān's (second) chief judge. The sometime-Mālikī, sometime-Ḥanafī Asad rose to the occasion by assembling a naval fleet of a hundred ships, a cavalry of seven hundred, and an infantry of ten thousand, drawn from the diverse elements of Ifriqiyān society: Arabs of many tribes, Berbers, Persians, professional soldiers, as

⁸ Dachraoui cites the post-afternoon prayer classes (*durūs al-ḥikmah*) and the evening debates (*majālis al-ḥikmah*) that were institutionalized in order to spread Ismā'īli learning. For a comprehensive and more recent study on this subject, see Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997).

⁹ For a detailed account of the circumstances of the *jihād* and the ensuing debate, see al-Mālikī, *Riyād al-nufūs*, 185–89; also Amari, *SMS*, 1:367–92. For further information on the life and career of Asad b. al-Furāt, see W. Granara, "Ibn Sabīl: Crossing Boundaries in the Biography of Asad," *Scripta Mediterranea* 19–20 (1998–99): 259–67.

well as scholars and jurists. Describing a scene of beating drums, neighing horses, and waving banners, with huge throngs of citizens in attendance, the historian al-Mālikī recounts a short speech Asad delivered on that Spring day in 212/827, at the end of which he quoted the Quranic injunction: "Exert your minds and bodies in the search and pursuit of knowledge; increase it and be patient with its intensity, for, with it, you will gain this world and the next."¹⁰ The launching of *jihād* in all its pageantry, replete with its spiritual and intellectual symbols, not only provided some immediate solutions to the Aghlabid rulership's problems, but laid the foundations for the subsequent history of Islamic Sicily. What was to follow in the next two centuries was the development of a *ghāzī* society on the frontiers between Islam and Christendom, whose first order of business would remain *jihād*, with all its political and legal ramifications.

Unlike the Muslim conquest of Visigothic Spain a little more than a century earlier, which occurred under a still politically united Islamic Empire that paid allegiance to the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus, the conquest of Sicily was the exclusive project of the autonomous ruling family of the Aghlabids of Ifrīqiya.¹¹ Also, the relatively easy entry of the Muslims into the Iberian peninsula, facilitated by a seriously divided and weakened government and a discontented population only too willing to support any new regime, contrasts sharply with the difficulties the Aghlabids faced in the Sicilian conquest. With Asad's premature death within the first year of the *jihād*, the subsequent crises in maintaining a chain of military command, not to mention the fierce Byzantine resistance, plagues, and other natural catastrophes that befell the Muslim forces, the Aghlabids had to keep a constant eye and a generous hand over this overseas project, from which they had much to gain in the way of booty and prestige. What had taken the Muslims five years to accomplish in securing Spain took their co-religionists seventy years to achieve in Sicily, and that only by constant reinforcement with waves of expeditionary forces of the professional Arab *jund* and Berber conscripts recruited from the general Ifrīqiyān population. The injection of these elements into Sicily – which lasted throughout the two centuries of Muslim rule – created a majority population with irrevocable ties to the mother country, Ifrīqiya.

The importance of Sicily as a locus of *jihād* for the economic, military, and political survival of the Ifrīqiyān rulership is amply attested in both the primary and secondary sources. Recent scholarship has emphasized how well this was understood by the Fatimids during their campaign against the Aghlabids, which culminated in the Fatimid victory of 297/909.¹² The historical chronicles show how quickly the new Mahdī, 'Ubayd Allāh, appointed a governor and chief judges to Sicily once he set up his government in Raqqādah.¹³ What these appointments reveal is a careful balance,

¹⁰ al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, 187–88.

¹¹ For the most complete and authoritative study on the Aghlabids, see Mohamed Talbi, *L'Émirat Aghlabide 800–909* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1966).

¹² Amari, *SMS* 2:148–49; W. Granara, *Political Legitimacy and Jihād in Muslim Sicily, 827–1053*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1986; A. Pellitteri, *I Fatimiti*.

¹³ Most information on the political and dynastic history of Sicily comes from the later universal histories of Ibn al-Athīr (*al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*: BAS, 35) al-Nuwayrī (*Nihāyat al-arab*: BAS, 48) and Ibn

at least in the early years, between trusted servants committed to the Shiite cause on the one hand, and men who would represent the interests of – or at least not offend – the local Sicilian population on the other. For instance, an ethnic Arab would be selected as chief judge in predominantly Arab Palermo, while a Berber would be chosen for predominantly Berber Agrigento.

More enlightening have been the texts of the Fatimid jurist and historian, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 358/967), which recount the Mahdī's appeal for Sicilian support, achieved in three ways: by deferring to the caliph in Baghdad, by strongly supporting the Sicilian *jihād*, and by condemning the moral decadence of the Aghlabids and the illegitimacy of their rule. In language reminiscent of Asad's speech cited previously, the Mahdī exhorts the Sicilians: "Undertake *jihād* with your possessions and your souls, just as it has been prescribed for you. Resist licentiousness and sacrileges, lest you be led away from the rightful path of your religion; and defend your religion against anyone who would alter it, and free yourselves from those who innovate or change it."¹⁴ He also promises them in a letter his full support of war matériel, praising their bravery for living so close to the polytheist enemy and defending Islam against them.¹⁵

It is clear that the massive military, economic, and human investments which both the Aghlabid ruling family and their Fatimid successors poured into Sicily during the ninth and tenth centuries made Sicily a province of Ifrīqiyyā and a part of the greater Islamic *umma*. Sicily's connection to Ifrīqiyyā would continue to be a dominant factor, politically and culturally, in the development of Sicilian Islam throughout the eleventh century, long after the Fatimid caliph moved to Cairo in 361/972. With the appointment of Buluggin b. Zirī as governor of Ifrīqiyyā and the establishment of the Zirid dynasty, Ifrīqiyyā and its provinces emerged as a semi-autonomous political entity. The long and relatively successful reign of the fourth Zirid prince, Muʿizz b. Bādīs (r. 408–54/1017–62), saw the final break with the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt, the re-emergence of the Mālīkī jurists of Qayrawān onto the religio-political scene, and a renewed and aggressive interest in Sicily.

In 416/1025, in response to the Norman conquest of Southern Italy and their forays into Sicily, Muʿizz assembled a massive naval expedition, once again with the full pageantry of Islamic *jihād*, to support the Sicilian Muslims. But a violent storm at sea destroyed most of the fleet and thwarted Ifrīqiyyā's attempts to push back the Normans. In 429/1036, in response to Sicilian appeals to help resolve the violent disputes among the warring Sicilian factions, Muʿizz sent his son ʿAbd Allāh as commander of an expedition which ended in failure. His return to Qayrawān with many of Sicily's notables and their families initiated the first wave of Muslim evacuations from the island.¹⁶

Khaldūn (*Kitāb al-ʿIbar*: BAS, 50). Amari observes that their accounts are quite similar, suggesting that all three may have drawn on one contemporary source. SMS 1:373–74.

¹⁴ al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ifṭīḥ al-daʿwah*, ed. Farḥāt al-Dashrāwī (Dachraoui) (Tunis: al-Sharikah al-Tūnisīyah li'l-Tawzīʿ, 1986), 191.

¹⁵ al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ifṭīḥ al-daʿwah*, 256–57.

¹⁶ For the most detailed account of these events, see Ibn al-Athīr in BAS 35:271–78.

Undeterred by the hostile and fractious situation in Sicily, not to mention the invasions of North Africa by the Arabian Banū Hilāl tribes, Mu[°]izz's son Tamīm (r. 454–503/1062–1108) continued his father's role as protector of Sicily, with similar results. As the Muslims of Sicily self-destructed and the Normans made their way southward, the Zirid princes could only watch in despair as their prized possession was being wrested away from them. The feelings of loss and despair, eloquently expressed in the verses of the Zirid court poet and Sicily's most prominent exile, Ibn Ḥamdīs (1055–1132),¹⁷ encapsulate the history of Muslim Sicily and its multi-faceted relationship to Ifrīqiyā .

The Tradition of Saḥnūn

By the time the emir Ziyādat Allāh decided to wage a *jihād* against Sicily in 212/827, Qayrawān had developed into a flourishing urban center and was imperial capital to the greater province of Ifrīqiyā. Since its founding in 50/670 by the Arab general °Uqbah b. al-Nāfi°, it had grown in prestige as a center for Islamic learning and culture. The sources report that °Uqbah counted some twenty-five Companions of the Prophet among his soldiers, and that the Umayyad Caliph °Umar b. °Abd al-°Azīz (r. 99–102/717–20) later sent ten leading religious scholars to teach the Islamic faith to the newly conquered lands of the West.¹⁸ The establishment of the Mosque of Sīdī °Uqbah (The Grand Mosque of Qayrawān) and the proliferation of the mosque schools (*kuttāb*, pl. *katātīb*), first in the urban centers and later throughout the rural areas,¹⁹ attracted eminent scholars from the east, and encouraged more and more of the indigenous North African population to come into the Islamic fold.

Qayrawān in the early ninth century could boast not only ethnic and religious diversity – Arabs and Berbers of many tribes, Christians, Jews, and Persians – but Islamic sectarian diversity as well. Kharijism as a political movement enjoyed wide popular appeal, and Kharijite theology was taught at the leading institutions. The Murji[°]ite sect had adherents among the local °ulamā°, and Mu[°]tazilism, the creed of choice of the Aghlabid court and many of the Qayrawāni intellectual elite, was well known. Issues that were debated throughout the Islamic East, such as predestination, divine anthropomorphism, and the created or uncreated nature of the Qur[°]ān, were also debated and contested among Qayrawān's leading scholars of law and theology.

Beyond simple diversity, there was an important split between what would eventually be more accurately called Mālikīs and Ḥanafīs among the Sunni °ulamā° of Ifrīqiyā. That is, most scholars followed the doctrines attributed to the Medinan

¹⁷ For a summary of his life and work, see W. Granara, "Remaking Muslim Sicily: Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetics of Exile," *Edebiyat* 9 (1998): 167–98.

¹⁸ For the primary sources, see Abū al-°Arab, *Ṭabaqāt*; Mālikī, *Riyād al-nufūs*. For secondary sources, see G. Marçais, *La Berbérie musulmane et l'Orient au Moyen Age* (Paris: Aubier, 1946); H. H. °Abd al-Wahhāb, *Waraqāt °an al-ḥaḍārah al-°arabiyah bi-Ifrīqiyā al-tūnistiyah* (Tunis: Maktabat al-Manār, 1965–66); Muḥammad al-Ṭālibī (Talbi), "al-Bī[°]ah allatī ansha[°]at Saḥnūn: °ālim al-Qayrawān 160–240/777–854," in *Études d'Histoire Ifriqiyenne et de Civilisation musulmane médiévale* (Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1982), pp. 91–164.

¹⁹ Ṭālibī, "al-Bī[°]ah," 140, 152.

Mālik b. Anas or the Iraqi Abū Ḥanīfah and their immediate disciples. It was the Ḥanafī scholars, usually favored over the Mālikīs by the Aghlabid court, who sometimes espoused Muʿtazilī doctrines. The Mālikīs, on the other hand, were suspicious of systematic theologizing and portrayed their own views as more in line with ancient Muslim practice. Although the divisions between these two nascent *madhhabs* could be sharp, the educational experiences of Asad b. al-Furāt, who had studied with both Mālik in Medina and disciples of Abū Ḥanīfah in Iraq, show that the boundaries were not impermeable.

The triumph of Mālikism over Ḥanafism in North Africa is thoroughly documented, but may be read in several ways. Politically, it may be seen as a victory of the jurists over the governors; socially or economically, it may be seen as a reassertion of popular rights against the excesses of an exploitative Arab upper-class. Theologically, the case has been made that it was a decisive victory of those jurists opposed to rationalist theological systems like those of the Muʿtazilah, first, and of the Ismāʿīlī strand of Shiism, later.

Mālikism, as a school of both Islamic law and theology, is characterized above all by strict emulation of the practice (*ʿamal*) or lived experience of the Medinan community.²⁰ The figure of Mālik b. Anas, as the jurist most knowledgeable of the law (Qurʾān and hadith), the most eminent of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), and the exemplar of Prophetic piety and asceticism, embodied the authority which his disciples claimed in their ascendancy.²¹ The Mālikī jurists effectively legitimated their authority by an aggressive campaign against all forms of what they identified as religious, cultural, and social innovation (*bidʿah*), which included such ideas as predestination, the created Quran, and anthropomorphism.²² What distinguishes Malikism from the other schools of Sunni Islam is its emphasis on the historical Medinan community, deemed to possess an authority superior to that of other communities by virtue of its proximity to the site of Divine revelation and Prophetic tradition. Partly in response to the growing influence of Iraq as the center of Islamic intellectual activity, the disciples of Mālik advanced what R. Brunschvig terms: “la notion médinoise d’une source géographique unique de la loi.”²³ Although this idea of Medina’s holding a special authority in Islamic law was contested successfully by rival scholars,²⁴ it took root in the major centers of learning throughout North Africa

²⁰ al-Qādī ʿIyād b. Mūsā, *Tartīb al-madārik wa-taqrīb al-masālik*, ed. Aḥmad Bākir Maḥmūd (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1968), 58–81. See also Robert Brunschvig, “Polémiques médiévales autour du rite de Malik,” *Al-Andalus* 15 (1950): 377–43; Abdel-Majid Turki, “Défense de la tradition du prophète (sunna) et lutte contre l’innovation blamable (*bidʿah*) dans le malikisme: du *Muwattaʿ* de Mālik (179/795) au *K. al-Ġāmiʿ* d’Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (386/996),” *Studia Islamica* 87 (1998): 5–34.

²¹ This combination of legal knowledge, association with the traditional elders, and the exemplarity of the Prophet may reflect Max Weber’s paradigm of legal, traditional and charismatic modes of authority. On the application of Weber’s notions on authority and their applicability to early Islamic history, see Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 34, 72–73, 105, 113.

²² A. Turki, “Defense,” 16–17. He points out that half of all Muslims treatises on *bidʿah* are authored by Mālikī scholars.

²³ Brunschvig, “Polémiques,” 384.

²⁴ Brunschvig discusses three scholars who contested the primacy of Medina: al-Layth b. Saʿd (d. 175/791), al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 458/1064). “Polémiques,” 379–98.

by the mid-ninth century and helped Qayrawān grow into an influential center which attracted scholars from all over the Muslim West.

The lion's share of credit for the triumph of Malikism in North Africa goes to Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd (162–241/777–855), who figures in many hagiographies in Mālikī literature. The son of a *mujāhid* of Arab stock from the city of Ḥimṣ (Syria), Saḥnūn made his reputation as a man of impeccable character and unparalleled intellect. His earliest biographer, Abū al-ʿArab, describes him as follows: "He possessed qualities which were not to be found combined in any other: perfect knowledge of the law, sincere piety, vigor in the application of justice, contempt for temporal things, simple tastes in food and clothing, generosity, and a refusal to accept anything from princes."²⁵ An intellect that overwhelms all those who come into contact with him is a dominant theme in Saḥnūn's biography. In fact, the nickname Saḥnūn, meaning a sparrow, was given to him for the sharpness and speed with which he answered questions on law. As a student, Saḥnūn could boast an impressive list of teachers and a vast library of texts he had committed to memory. The rapidity and depth of his understanding of legal problems and intricacies was proverbial; he became the standard by which all others were judged.

The teaching profession, revered in the Islamic tradition, was instrumental in the Islamization and Arabization of North Africa. In the great mosques at Qayrawān and Tunis, the hundreds of Qurʾān schools in urban and rural areas, and private homes, Muslim teachers spread the faith and taught their students how to live lives of piety and devotion. As a teacher, Saḥnūn once again stands out. The characteristics (*shamāʿil*) that shaped his intellect served him well as a teacher. References to his 700 students from all parts of the earth (hyperbole reflective of the hagiographic and mythical dimensions of his biography) bear witness to his fame. These students would then become beacons of knowledge (*maṣābiḥ*) in their own countries.²⁶ Saḥnūn's long list of teachers, renowned scholars and disciples of Mālik, matched his long list of students.

As both student and teacher, Saḥnūn rose to the highest rank of his *madhhab* by way of *ṣuḥbah*: "He was the most intelligent, the most learned, and the most gifted legal mind as a disciple (*ṣāhiban*) ... and these were the qualities which his disciples (*aṣḥāb*) adopted."²⁷ The institution of *ṣuḥbah*, defined by George Makdisi as 'companionship,' 'discipleship,' and 'fellowship,' is critical to understanding the personal relationship between teacher and student (or between teacher and disciple) that was the essence of Islamic education.²⁸ Like the *isnād* in hadith, the institution of *ṣuḥbah* finds its highest expression in successful and reliable transmission of knowledge, not only from earlier scholars to the present, but also to the following generation.

²⁵ Abū al-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 101; M. Talbi (Tālibī), "Saḥnūn," *EP*, 8:845. For his complete biography, see al-Qādi ʿIyāḍ, *Tartīb*, 1:585–624; Muḥammad al-Tālibī, *Tarājim aghālībāh* (Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1968), 86–136. Talbi's collection contains extracts from the *Tartīb*, but more carefully edited.

²⁶ Tālibī, *Tarājim*, 120.

²⁷ Tālibī, *Tarājim*, 98.

²⁸ George Makdisi, "Ṣuḥba et Riyāsa dans l'Enseignement Médiéval," *Recherches d'Islamologie* (Louvain: Peeters, 1978), 207.

Sahnūn's reputation as scholar and teacher was built upon his achievement of *riyāṣah*, i.e., the highest position, the status of most knowledgeable in one's field.²⁹ Ṭālibī describes his status: "He achieved *riyāṣah* in knowledge throughout the Maghreb, and what he said was authoritative. He composed the *Mudawwanah* on which the Qayrawānī jurists depended, and he had more disciples than any other Mālikī scholar. It was through him that Mālikism spread in the Maghreb."³⁰ This Sahnūn achieved in part by undertaking a journey (*riḥlah*) in search of knowledge from the most reputable scholars of the time. The *riḥlah* was particularly important for Maghrebis; in this respect, Sahnūn followed in the footsteps of his predecessors and contemporaries. His journey to the east was typical in many ways, but its connection to that of his rival, Asad b. al-Furāt, sheds light on Sahnūn's overall goals.

According to Mālikī sources, when Asad reached Egypt, having previously studied in the Hijāz and Iraq, he contacted Ibn Wahb, Ashhab, and Ibn al-Qāsim, the most eminent disciple of Mālik. Unhappy with Ibn Wahb, who responded to his questions with only confirmed hadith reports, and annoyed with Ashhab, who was more interested in promoting his own views than those of the masters Abū Ḥanīfah and Mālik, Asad settled on Ibn al-Qāsim. Upon his return to Qayrawān, Asad probably taught both the Iraqi-Ḥanafī material he had learned while in the East, as well as the materials he had learned during his studies with Ibn al-Qāsim. In order to emphasize the importance of Sahnūn to the Mālikī *madhhab*, however, Mālikī authors add further details, to the detriment of Asad, but to the glory of Sahnūn. Sahnūn, it is claimed, managed to write out for himself many of the teachings of Ibn al-Qāsim as transmitted by Asad. Asad became suspicious, however, and increasingly restricted access to these. Undeterred, Sahnūn succeeded in making a complete copy of these materials for himself, which he then took to Egypt and to Ibn al-Qāsim. Sahnūn then, so the story goes, read them back to Ibn al-Qāsim, and corrected them on the basis of Ibn al-Qāsim's comments.³¹ This corrected version then became the standard text of Mālikī law in the Maghreb and the Andalus – purged, of course, of accretions stemming from Asad. Because it is the version "written down" by Sahnūn, it came to be called the *Mudawwanah*. The implication of the story, in part, is that what Sahnūn removed from Asad's version was deemed, by consensus of the *madhhab*, to be wrong.

In his study on early Islamic legal works, Norman Calder concludes from a study of the formal features and sections of material in the *Mudawwanah* that it was not an authored text: "It is a school text which grew organically in response to ongoing problems and perceptions that emerged and disturbed the scholars who preserved the material."³² He correctly situates it as one of the two canonical texts of the Mālikī legal tradition and links the *Mudawwanah* to Qayrawān and Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'* of the Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā recension to Cordoba. He states, "They were local canons reflecting

²⁹ See Makdisi, "Suḥba" for a discussion of *riyāṣah* and its importance in Islamic education.

³⁰ Ṭālibī, *Tarājim*, 94.

³¹ Mālikī, *Riyād al-nufūs*, 178–81. On the relationship between the works and teachings of Sahnūn, Asad, and Ibn al-Qāsim, see M. Muranyi, *Die Rechtsbücher des Qairawaners Sahnūn b. Sa'īd: Entstehungsgeschichte und Werküberlieferung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999).

³² Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Islamic Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 11.

the state of legal thought in a particular place at a particular time.³³ The form of the final text, comprised of notebooks addressing many questions taken up by a number of scholars throughout the Muslim world, gives credence to Calder's characterization.³⁴ Saḥnūn's sole authorship of the text is validly questioned, but of concern are the long-term ramifications of the association of the man with the text, so deeply institutionalized in the religious and legal culture of the medieval Maghreb.

What Saḥnūn did to the text of the *Mudawwanah* parallels what he did to the mosques and other institutions of learning over which he held sway throughout the Maghreb in his capacity as chief judge. At the age of seventy-four, Saḥnūn grudgingly accepted the position offered to him by the Aghlabid prince, Muḥammad II b. Aḥmad (r. 250–56/864–75), on condition that he be allowed to perform his duties with complete independence and with a clear mandate to redress abuses, beginning with the royal family itself and its coterie of government employees. True to his word never to accept money or gifts from rulers, Saḥnūn refused any stipend and chose to pay his staff with money from the poll tax (*jizyah*) levied on Christians and Jews.

As chief judge Saḥnūn replaced the veteran Muʿtazilī jurist, Ibn Abī Jawād, the son-in-law of Asad b. al-Furāt, who had held the post for eighteen years. With tables turned, Saḥnūn ordered Ibn Abī Jawād to be flogged severely in prison for crimes of fiscal misconduct. Ibn Abī Jawād succumbed to his wounds. After a short bout of guilt, Saḥnūn turned his attention to ridding Qayrawān of what he considered to be its heretical elements. With a violence that contrasts sharply with his reputation as a kindly, patient, and pious man, he banished all forms of non-Sunni teaching from the mosques. Abū al-ʿArab writes: "He was the first [judge] to banish the heretics from the Grand Mosque, where classes on Ṣufrite and Ibādite Kharijism were held."³⁵ His biographies also state that in his campaign against cheating and embezzlement, Saḥnūn applied rigorous standards of conduct in the marketplace, bringing the office of price controls (*ḥisbah*) under his jurisdiction and reorganizing the system for tax collection.³⁶ He had a special room built at the Mosque where litigants could plead their cases in privacy, and this practice (*sunnah*) continued as long as Mālikīs held the position of chief judge.³⁷

Toward the end of his biography on Saḥnūn, al-Qāḍī ʿIyād includes an anecdote in which ʿAbd Allah b. al-Khashshāb al-Andalusī dreamed that he saw the Prophet walking along a road, followed by Abū Bakr. Behind Abū Bakr was ʿUmar, behind ʿUmar was Mālik, and behind Mālik was Saḥnūn. The anecdote finishes with Ibn al-Waḍḍāḥ, a Maghrebi jurist, saying that when he related this dream to Saḥnūn, he was very happy.³⁸ This dream projects a clear image of the Islamic orthodox ideal, one in which a direct line of charismatic authority through the transmission of personality is

³³ Calder, *Studies*, 17.

³⁴ Calder's account is confirmed by Muranyi in its general outlines but not in its specific details. See Muranyi, *Rechtsbücher*.

³⁵ Abū al-ʿArab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 102.

³⁶ Ṭālibī, *Tarājim*, 104.

³⁷ Ṭālibī, *Tarājim*, 105.

³⁸ Ṭālibī, *Tarājim*, 134.

established. This image reflects Saḥnūn's goal of *madhhab*-building for Qayrawān and the Muslim West. It begins with the Prophet himself, and passes through the first two righteous (unequivocally orthodox) caliphs. Skipping over the problematic personas of °Uthmān and °Ali (third and fourth caliphs), the hierarchal continuity legitimates the line of authority as established by Mālik and ending with Saḥnūn.

Saḥnūn began his project through the process of *taqlīd*, "investing with authority," which Makdisi has described as Islam's method of determining orthodoxy.³⁹ He went back to the source, the tradition of the Prophet, and continued on the path (*madhhab*) of Mālik. He patterned his life on the model bequeathed to him by the Prophet and his Companions. He attempted to establish and codify a canonical text, devoid of rationalist views and personal opinions and without authorial biases. He campaigned to purge the mosque schools of unorthodox, heretical teachings, intending thereby to eliminate dissent, establish consensus (*ijmā'*), and build a *madhhab*, not in the later institutional sense, but in a broader religio-ethical sense. Thus, we may view Saḥnūn as a prototype of the post-Inquisition restorers of orthodoxy.⁴⁰

The dream's image of Saḥnūn walking behind Mālik in a chain of authority that began with the Prophet Muḥammad could only find its true force in the continuance of that line and the routinization of its authority.⁴¹ For Saḥnūn, this meant bequeathing the task of *madhhab*-building to future generations. In defining what constitutes orthodoxy through this clear line of authorial transmission, eliminating all forms of dissent or innovation, Saḥnūn laid the foundation of Malikism as the '*madhhab*' of the entire Maghreb, making of Qayrawān a replica of Medina as a sacred locale. Saḥnūn's students and disciples projected and reinforced the image of Saḥnūn and Qayrawān as the western extension of Mālik and Medina.

Saḥnūn's son Muḥammad (202–56/817–70) was the heir apparent and *imām* of the Mālikī *madhhab* upon his father's death in 240/854. According to Mālikī sources, Muḥammad was one of two most outstanding students of Saḥnūn, the other being Muḥammad b. °Abdūs (202–60/817–74). There grew a great rivalry between the two, dividing the Qayrawānī Mālikīs into two camps: al-Muḥammadiyah and al-°Abdūsiyah.⁴² From Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn's biography emerges a personality of a different temperament, a scholar of immense accomplishment, whose prolific output complemented the work of his father. Three areas of activity mark him as the practitioner of what Saḥnūn strove to conceptualize and legislate for his *madhhab*. The first was his extraordinary eloquence in public sermons (*maw'izah*) and

³⁹ George Makdisi, "Freedom in Islamic Jurisprudence: Ijtihād, Taqlīd, and Academic Freedom," in *La Notion de liberté au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, eds. G. Makdisi, D. Sourdél, and J. Sourdél-Thomine (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1985), 81.

⁴⁰ "The collapse of the Inquisition and the consequent political defeat of the Mu'tazilites set in motion two developments of capital importance for the resurgence of conservative Islam. The first of these developments was the relatively rapid compilation of hadith collections, and the second was the gradual monopolization of the *masjid*-mosque and its organization for the education of the jurisconsult." George Makdisi, "Institutional Learning as a Self-Image," in *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, ed. R. Hovannisjan and S. Vryonis, Jr. (Malibu, California: Undena Publications, 1983), 77.

⁴¹ See note 21.

⁴² Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, 362. For the full biography of Muḥammad, see 345–60; for Ibn °Abdūs, see 360–63.

disputations (*munāzarah*). In contrast to his father's brash methods in forcing his views, the historians suggest a more tempered and cerebral approach for Muḥammad. In one sermon, for example, he cautions the Aghlabid rulership against their sinful ways in a subtle, measured tone, full of humility and heartfelt advice.⁴³

The second area was defense of the faith, in which Muḥammad exhibited patience and courage in the face of adversity, a test of the true *mujāhid*. In a polemically charged anecdote, his biography records how the rival Ḥanafīs of Qayrawān hired a man to harass him publicly and insult him in front of his students. Muḥammad exercised restraint by not responding. Then, on another such occasion, he responded to the harasser's whispered insult with an invitation to his home that evening. Having the crowd think that he was asking a favor, Muḥammad put the man on the defensive. When the Ḥanafī instigators fired the harasser, depriving him of his only means of support, Muḥammad won him over, and the anecdote ends in praise of his patience, craft, and kindness in a hostile situation. Muḥammad's biography also shows him as a defender of the faith in the physical sense. He frequently spent time in one of the fortified monasteries (*ribāṭ*) that lined the North African coast and that served as both military and monastic retreats for Muslims. In the face of a surprise Byzantine attack, Muḥammad was supposedly able to mount his mule and assemble enough soldiers to fight off the invaders.

Muḥammad's third area of activity was scholarly writing. Unlike his father, to whom is attributed only the *Mudawwanah*, Muḥammad boasts a long list of works, including books on the prohibition of alcohol (*Tahrīm al-sakar*); refutations of free thinkers and to Christians (*al-Radd 'alā ahl al-bid'ah*, *Kitāb al-īmān wa'l-radd 'alā ahl al-shirk*, *al-Hujjah 'alā al-qadarīyah* and *al-Hujjah 'alā al-naṣārā*); and treatises on governance (*al-Imāmah*), holy war (*al-Jihād*) and piety (*al-Wara'*). He also wrote a commentary on the *Muwatta'*, a biographical dictionary of learned men, and a general history. Of particular interest are two pedagogical works that underscore the importance of well-trained disciples for the *madhhab*: one deals with protocol for disputation (*Mā yajib 'alā al-mutanāzirīn min ḥusn al-adab*), and the other is a manual for teachers (*Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*).⁴⁴ The latter, among the first works of its kind in Islamic literature, discusses such issues as what to teach, classroom conduct and etiquette, salaries, graduation protocol, and the appropriateness of receiving gifts from students or their families. A major characteristic of the work is the format of questions directed to Saḥnūn along with his responses, giving the work a hadith-like quality and upholding Saḥnūn as the ultimate authority in transmitting Prophetic traditions through Mālik.

Intellectual and Cultural Florescence at the Kalbid Court

The appointment of Saḥnūn as chief judge of Qayrawān in 236/850 by the Aghlabid prince Muḥammad I blurs the commonly held view of a clearly divided power

⁴³ Mālikī, *Riyād al-nufūs*, 348–49.

⁴⁴ For a complete list of his works, see Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn, *Kitāb ādāb al-mu'allimīn*, ed. Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Mawlā (Algiers: al-Sharikah al-Waṭāniyah li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzi', 1973), 50–51.

structure pitting the ruling family against the masses strictly along Ḥanafī/Mālikī lines. On the other hand, it reflects the growing influence of the Mālikī jurists whose support among the wider population was considerable, but ironically at a time when the Aghlabids were riding the crest of their successes in the Sicilian *jihād*.

War provided opportunities for economically disempowered and socially marginalized segments of the population. The government channeled political opposition to their overseas adventure, sending the restless army out of the barracks and onto the battlefield. Seized Sicilian land made it possible to resettle North African soldiers, and booty and taxes collected from the conquered peoples replenished the Aghlabid coffers. The spiritual and scholarly symbolism of the *jihād*, culminating in the command and subsequent martyrdom of the leading *faqīh* and *qādī* Asad b. al-Furāt, gave the Muslims of Ifriqiya the chance to fulfill religious obligations and defend the faith in the manner of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions. The first generations of *mujāhidūn* coming into Sicily – professional soldiers and conscripts, religious scholars and jurists of different persuasions and creeds, craftsmen and artisans – were all steeped in the Prophetic traditions, the teachings of Mālik and the Medinan elders, and the emulation (*‘amal*) of Saḥnūn and his disciples. These first generations planted the seeds of Islam on Sicilian soil and left their mark on Arabic and Islamic culture for as long as it survived on the island.

The leadership of the Muslim Sicilian community, as a warrior society engaged in military conflict, was chosen from the highest ranks of the *jund* who demonstrated loyal support to the ruling family in Ifriqiya. This was the case with both the Aghlabids in the ninth century and the Fatimids in the tenth. In non-military matters, the scholars and pious elite attended to the religious and legal aspects of the *mujāhid*'s life. The office of the chief judge held jurisdiction over these matters in Sicily as well. Dachraoui is correct in emphasizing the importance of this office during both Aghlabid and Fatimid rule. However, just as the *jihād* proper underwent no discernible change from the one government to the other, there is no evidence in the sources to show that there were significant changes in the judiciary structure either. This is undoubtedly attributed, as Dachraoui points out, to the Fatimid policy of the two-tier judgship in making judiciary appointments.

From the relatively scant sources available, I have identified six judges appointed to Sicily during the first century of the *jihād*.⁴⁵

(a) Abd Allāh b. Sahl al-Qibriyāni (d. 248/862): master (*shaykh*) in his field, reliable, distinguished Mālikī scholar and jurist; precise in his writings. He studied with Ibn al-Mājishūn, Ibn Sallām, Asad b. al-Furāt, and Saḥnūn, whose support he enjoyed.

⁴⁵ For expediency, the following list and subsequent ones draw their information from the sources cited after each entry. In addition to the abbreviations for Amari's works, *BAS* and *SMS*, *Tartīb* = 'Iyād b. Mūsā (see n. 20); *Dībāj* = Ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dībāj al-mudhhab fī ma'rifat a'yan ulamā' al-madhhab*, ed. Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī Abū al-Nūr (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth); *Ma'ālim* = Abū Zayd Dabbāgh and Ibn Nāji, *Ma'ālim al-īmān fī ma'rifat ahl al-Qayrawān* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānji, 1968); *Qft* = Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qiftī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt 'alā anbāh al-nuḥāt*, 4 vols., ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah, 1951-73); for 'Abbās, see n. 46.

Sahnūn appointed him to the judgeship in Ṭulayṭilah, Qafṣah and Nafzāwah, and then he was appointed to the judgeship in Sicily. [*Tartīb* 2: 94]

(b) Muḥammad b. Sulaymān Ibn Kaḥḥālah (d. 289/902): student of Sahnūn and of his son, Muḥammad. He traveled to Medīna and studied with Mālik's son. Praised as a reliable and prolific scholar of Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and law, he was judge at Bājah and head of the grievance court (*mazālim*) in Qayrawān before his appointment in 281/894 as chief judge in Sicily, where 'he spread much knowledge.' [*Tartīb* 2:233; *Ma'ālim* 2: 201; *Dībāj* 1:374]

(c) Di'āmah b. Muḥammad (d. 297/910): disciple of Sahnūn who held the post of chief judge in Sicily during Aghlabid rule. [*SMS* 2:259]

(d) Abū °Amr al-Maymūn (d. 316/928): disciple of Sahnūn who headed the grievance court in Qayrawān before his appointment as judge in Sicily. [*BAS* 28:191; *Ma'ālim* 2:356-57]

(e) Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭarzī (d. 317/929): disciple of Sahnūn who headed the grievance court at Qayrawān with control over the markets (*al-ḥisbah*) before his appointment as chief judge of Sicily by the Aghlabid prince Ziyādat Allāh III (r. 290-97/903-9). [*BAS* 28:189; *Ma'ālim* 3:9-10]

(f) Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm (d. 333/945): eminent jurist from Arabia who traveled to Ifrīqiyā and studied with the disciples of Sahnūn. He was appointed judge of Sicily but was later removed and imprisoned by Ziyādat Allāh when he stopped hearing cases. [*Tartīb* 2:357.]

These sketches show that the appointments were made from North Africa. Men of considerable experience, they were trained in Mālikī law with strong connections to Sahnūn and his disciples. This post was extremely important in Sicily during the first years of the *jihād*. The chief judge would be called on to decide issues such as the distribution of land, the enactment or breaking of treaties, the levying of poll taxes on non-Muslims and land and crop taxes on Muslims, the division of spoils of war, the treatment of slaves and their legal status, and the disbursement of funds from the state treasury. The presiding judge needed to know the sources of law, from the Qur'ān and hadith, as well as the authoritative statements, practices and opinions of the pious forefathers. The implications of these issues went far beyond the realm of faith, and quick solutions and judgements required a thorough grounding in all aspects of the law. Whether a political or military leader abided by these judgements is another matter, but it is clear that Muslim society as it developed in Sicily was very much grounded in the theory and practice of Islamic law.

An irony that marks the history of Muslim Sicily is that close to the time when the Aghlabid forces were completing their conquest of the island, the Islamic *jihād* fell into the hands of the Fatimid caliphate, along with Ifrīqiyā and the other provinces of North Africa. The new Shiite regime embraced the Sicilian Muslims and invested

heavily in their *jihād*. The historical chronicles mention initial problems, insurrections, and unholy political alliances, but eventually Sicily was brought under Fatimid control, militarily, politically, and economically.

The appointment of Ḥasan b. Alī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Kalbī as governor of Sicily ca. 330/940 marks the initial stages of autonomous rule for the island. His family had distinguished themselves as loyal servants to the Fatimid court and were instrumental in putting down the Kharijite insurrections led by Abū Yazīd. A process of dynastic succession spawned a cohesion and continuity in the political structure which created a degree of tranquility for the island. In addition, the judicious domestic policies of the Fatimid caliphate of appointing loyal and disciplined servants to positions of authority who did not upset the status quo, as well as their far-sighted foreign policies of building naval strength, cultivating diplomacy and trade, and negotiating with Byzantium from a position of strength, allowed Sicily a period of peace and prosperity in which Arabic culture could grow. By the latter half of the tenth century, Sicilian Muslim architecture and Arabic poetry and scholarship flourished at the Kalbid court in Palermo.

The recent publication by Iḥsān ʿAbbās of *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, although of considerable benefit to historians and literary scholars, confirms the difficulty of studying Muslim Sicily.⁴⁶ Some entries contain only one line, most are without birth or death dates, and even specimens of poetry are presented in fragmented form. Most entries include snippets of information on language studies, poetry, prose, prosody, grammar and philology. From the classical sources to Amari's *Biblioteca*, those men associated with Sicily belong to one of three general categories: scholars or judges who came to the island either in a professional or political capacity; Muslims who were Sicilian-born but lived their professional lives elsewhere; and "indigenous" Sicilians who were born there and spent the majority of their careers on the island.

Now follows a list of indigenous Sicilians scholars who are representative of general patterns (immigrants to and emigrants from Sicily are discussed in the next section).

(a) Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥasāʿirī (d. ca. 416/1025): judge and scholar of law, theology and hadith. Many Sicilians studied law with him, including al-Samanṭarī and Abū Bakr b. Yūnus. [*Tartīb* 2:715]

(b) Abū Bakr b. Yūnus (d. c. 452/1060): jurisconsult and specialist in inheritance law, on which he wrote a book. He also wrote a commentary on the *Mudawwanah*, and he had many students throughout the Maghreb. He was engaged in *jihād*. [*Tartīb* 2:800; *Dībāj* 2:240-41]

(c) Muḥammad al-Ṭūbī (d. 452/1060): grammarian and student of medicine; he taught composition and mastered the art of epistolary writing. He was also an eloquent poet

⁴⁶ Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Muʿjam al-ʿulamāʾ waʾl-shuʿarāʾ al-ṣiqilliyīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994), is largely based on the fragments of the Sicilian-born Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ's *al-Durrah al-khaṭīrah fi shiʿr al-Jazīrah*, written around 500/1107. See the introduction, pp. 5-11.

and composed *maqāmāt* in the style of Badī° al-Zamān. [Qft 3:107–8; °Abbās 184–201]

(d) Ibn Šāhib al-Khums (d. ca. 452/1060): jurisconsult, theologian, and specialist in legal theory and methodology. He was an active teacher and debater on theological questions. [Tartīb 2:776]

(e) Abū Bakr Ibn al-°Abbās (d. ca. 452/1060): specialist in inheritance law; he was also a teacher of *fiqh* and taught the *Mudawwanah*.

(f) Ibn al-Birr (d. 462/1068): renowned scholar of philology who traveled to the East to study grammar and lexicography. He studied hadith with the son of Muḥammad b. °Abdūs and transmitted Jawharī's dictionary, *al-Šihāh*, to Sicily. He was expelled from Mazara for drinking alcohol and took refuge in the more liberal Palermo. [BAS 69:648; Qft 3:190–91; °Abbās 209–11]

(g) °Atīq al-Samanṭarī (d. 464/1072): eminent scholar of law and hadith, best known for his piety and asceticism. He went to Mecca for the pilgrimage and traveled extensively throughout the east. He contacted other mystics (Sufis) and composed a huge work of over ten volumes on the lives of pious men. He was also known to have composed Sufi poetry. [BAS 11:113–14; °Abbās 73–74]

(h) °Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Samḥī (d. 466/1074): studied law in Sicily and Qayrawān. He made the pilgrimage to Mecca twice and frequently traveled to Egypt. He composed a work on legal questions in the *Mudawwanah* as well as a major commentary on it. He was a prominent teacher in Sicily and taught subjects such as law and legal methodology. [Tartīb 2:774; Dībāj 2:56; °Abbās 49–51.]

(i) Abū Ḥafṣ °Umar Ibn al-Ḥakkār (d. 483/1090): belletrist, poet and jurist. He wrote a commentary on the *Mudawwanah* that comprises 300 sections. [Tartīb 2:800–1; Dībāj 2:77]

These sketches show that law, philology, and mysticism were the most important subjects in the education and culture of early Muslim Sicily. In legal studies, the dominance of the *madhhab* of Mālik is clearly established, with the *Mudawwanah* as a primary text and Saḥnūn and his disciples as important transmitters of knowledge. Following trends in the major centers of both the Muslim West and East, the Sicilian curriculum also included the study of legal theory and methodology (*uṣūl*), the points of law (*furū°*), exegesis (*tafsīr*), and speculative theology (*kalām*). Inheritance law and legal issues pertaining to *jihād* were particularly popular topics of specialization.

The second concern of Islamic education in Sicily was linguistic studies, including grammar, syntax, poetry and prosody, prose composition, lexicography, and literary

criticism, matching what we know of contemporary North Africa and al-Andalus.⁴⁷ The importance of learning and teaching the Arabic language, especially in areas with non-native speakers, was obviously a factor, not to mention the fact that the language arts and linguistic sciences were a hallmark of Arabic education and a key component of Islamic humanism throughout the classical period.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the preponderance of linguistic studies in Islamic Sicily is remarkable. The broader significance of this is that Sicily was, at least with regard to linguistic scholarship, very much within the mainstream of the great centers of Arabic culture and learning. In addition, the large number of Sicilian poets in anthologies and biographical dictionaries indicates that Arabic poetry was a vital part of cultural life. Sicily was undoubtedly a rich source of cross-cultural – and perhaps cross-linguistic – influence.

The third focus of Islamic education in this period of maturity was mysticism. This is not surprising given the spiritual dimension so strongly emphasized in the undertaking of *jihād*. The information we have on the life and works of ‘Atīq al-Samanṭarī, however scant, shows that mysticism in Sicily evolved from living a monastic life of piety, prayer, and renunciation into an academic discipline.⁴⁹ His travels east and his contacts with other mystics, his writings on mystical subjects, and his scholarship in law and hadith suggests a different mystical-ascetical practice from the earlier mode of the *murābiṭ/mujāhid*, or soldier/monk. In one biographical entry, the Sicilian Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar (430–526/1039–1132), a mystic and ascetic with a wide following from Sicily and North Africa, reported that he had studied with al-Samanṭarī and received an *ijāzah* (license) to teach his work.⁵⁰ This once again shows that Sicilian Islam to a large extent mirrored the development of Islam in North Africa and the East.

Riḥlah: The Transmission of Knowledge to and from Sicily

When the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz sent ten scholars to teach the tenets of the faith to the newly conquered territories of North Africa, he began a tradition of scholarly travel and intellectual exchange between the Muslims of the West and the Muslims of the East that would continue until the end of the nineteenth century when French colonial rule impaired this process by driving a political, cultural, and psychological wedge between the Arab West and the Arab East. Geography dictated that the academic journey (*riḥlah*) become of paramount

⁴⁷ The early history and development of Arabic linguistic studies in North Africa has been treated in ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Waraqāt*, 95–106. For Sicily, see Amari, *SMS*, 2: 526–612.

⁴⁸ This has been a recurring motif in George Makdisi’s work on Islamic humanism. See “Scholasticism and Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West,” *JAOS* 109 (1989):175–82, here 179–80; idem, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

⁴⁹ The Sicilian poet Ibn al-Tazzī, who flourished in the mid-eleventh century, wrote a poem in which he condemns the popular ecstatic form of mysticism and advocates a traditionally religious and rational mysticism, leading Amari to make the observation that Sufism was evolving into an intellectual discipline. See *BAS*, 590 and *SMS*, 2:556–57.

⁵⁰ ‘Abbās, *Mu‘jam*, 157–58.

importance to the development of Islamic education in the Maghreb. Combined with the religious obligation of pilgrimage (*hajj*), and personal contacts essential to one's academic formation, the *riḥlah* became de rigueur for any credible Muslim scholar.

The biographies of Muslim Sicily's two 'founding fathers,' Asad b. al-Furāt and Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd, show how essential the *riḥlah* was to the origins and development of Sicilian Muslim history. Asad's journey to Mecca to learn from the grand master, Mālik, was followed by his studies in Iraq with Abū Yūsuf and Shaybānī, the greatest living disciples of Abū Ḥanīfah. He completed his *riḥlah* with a period of intensive studies with Ibn al-Qāsim, Egypt's premier scholar in the tradition of Mālik, which culminated in the completion of his *Asadīyah*. The combination of these travels gave him personal prestige, scholarly and legal standing, and political maneuverability to promote his agenda. His accomplishments as traveler/scholar prepared him for the command over ninth-century Ifrīqiyā's greatest historical event: the conquest of Sicily. Saḥnūn's journey to Mecca and his travels to Egypt to study under Ibn al-Qāsim allowed him to write the lawbook that was to become the standard text of Mālikī jurisprudence, the *Mudawwanah*. This journey was undoubtedly a kind of rite of passage – the establishment of contact with the city of Medina and its scholars – which contributed greatly to his scholarly attainments and to his rightful place as a central figure in the building of the Mālikī *madhhab* in the Maghreb.

Information about the transmission of knowledge into and out of Sicily from the early tenth to the mid-eleventh century must be culled, once again, from the scant material found in the biographical literature. A representative selection will tell us whence scholars came to the island, under what circumstances they arrived, what they studied, wrote, or taught, and what impact they had on Sicilian Islam. Patterns of migration to Sicily begin around 930, just as the Fatimids were completing their control over the major cities of Ifrīqiyā and other parts of North Africa and working their way into Sicily. Travel to Sicily slows down considerably in the mid-eleventh century, during the years of civil strife among the Muslims and the Norman conquest.

(a) Abū Sa'īd Luqmān (d. 318/930): scholar of jurisprudence who wrote prolifically on many branches of knowledge. He studied under a number of disciples of Saḥnūn. Born in Qayrawān, he lived for fourteen years in Sicily, teaching the *Mudawwanah*, and resettled in Tunis. In addition to his legal studies, he was an ascetic who lived a pious life. [BAS 28:192; *Tartīb* 2:311]

(b) 'Alī b. Ḥamzah al-Baṣrī (d. 375/985): immigrated to Palermo where he lived until he died. He was a professional reciter of the poetry of the great Arab poet al-Mutanabbī, whose *dīwān* he taught. He also wrote commentaries on al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, as well as other works on *adab* (belles lettres), which he presumably also taught in Palermo.⁵¹

(c) Ṣā'īd b. al-Ḥasan (d. 385/995): originally from Mosul (Iraq), he studied in the East and was best known as a grammarian. He traveled to al-Andalus and was a

⁵¹ Ihsān 'Abbās, *al-'Arab fī Ṣiqillīyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1959), 93.

specialist in language, belles lettres and history (*akhbār*). He migrated to Sicily during a period of civil strife in Spain. [BAS 68:625-6; 69:644; 72:659; 76:675; Qft 2:85-90]

(d) Muḥammad b. Khurāsān (d. 386/996): philologist and scholar of Qur'ānic sciences and Mālikī law. He immigrated to Sicily where he taught hadith to many students. [BAS 74:664; 76:670]

(e) Abū al-Qāsim Ibn al-Barādhī'ī (d. ca. 400/1010): one of the most successful students of Ibn Abī Zayd and Qābisī, the leading North African Mālikī jurists of their generation. He wrote a short compendium on the *Mudawwanah*, but failed to attain *riyāsah* in his *madhhab* due to his association with the governing authorities. He traveled to Sicily, where he earned the favor of the emir and flourished as a scholar and teacher. [Tartīb 4:72-73; Ma'ālim 3:146-50]⁵²

(f) Abū Ḥasan Ibn Rashīq (d. 456/1064): perhaps the most famous medieval Muslim scholar to visit and settle in Sicily. He was renowned as a poet and literary critic and authored many works, most prominent of which is *Kitāb al-'umdah*, a sophisticated treatise on Arabic literary criticism. [BAS 68:624; 69:644; 71:649; 72:659; Qft 1:298-304]

The biographies of these scholars, who flourished in the latter half of the tenth and first decades of the eleventh century, reveal two important trajectories by which knowledge and its adepts came to the island. In matters of religion and legal studies, it was generally Mālikī scholars from North Africa who came to Sicily. Other than proximity, a primary reason for this was undoubtedly the opportunities to teach in this newest frontier of the Islamic Empire. This pattern of travel was instrumental in the consolidation of Mālikism throughout the Muslim West. Scholars coming from the East, on the other hand, tended to be specialists in language and literature. They brought with them extensive knowledge of classical philology, literature, and poetry and exposed Sicilian students to the latest trends in these fields. Poetic commentaries, *adab* literature, *maqāmāt*, literary histories, and anthologies flourished in Sicily at this time. Additionally, experts in many fields, including members of the ruling family, tried their hand at poetry.

These patterns of migration to Sicily also confirm that Sicily was not a major center of expertise in any one field. There are extremely few cases in which scholars came to Sicily to study a particular subject or to make contact with a particular scholar. Although Sicilian Muslim intellectual life succeeded in following trends set

⁵² It has been suggested that al-Barādhī'ī may have been rejected by the Qayrawānī jurists because of his Shiite sympathies. "One of Ibn Abī Zayd's most brilliant students, and author of *Tahdhīb al-Mudawwanah* . . . [al-Barādhī'ī] destroyed his own reputation by the publication of an historical study of the Fatimids which appeared sympathetic not only to their religious positions but to their claims to be descended from Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet. Ibn Abī Zayd led the 'ulamā' in condemning this publication . . . After this consensus, al-Barādhī'ī was compelled to leave Qayrawān for Sicily." Najib Abdul-Wahhab al-Fili, *A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Amwal of Abu Jaḥfar Ahmad b. Naṣr al-Dawūdī (d. 401 H.)*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Exeter, 1989.

elsewhere, especially in Baghdad, it still gained its sustenance primarily from Qayrawān and to a lesser extent from Cairo after the Fatimid caliphate moved there in 358/969. These patterns do suggest that Sicily was a haven for those escaping political or religious repression, the ravages of war, or other human tragedies. It was a porous and relatively tolerant society that was able to absorb many different intellectual and cultural elements.

In contrast to the 'indigenous' Sicilian Muslims described above, the last generations of Sicilians, who flourished in the later decades of the eleventh and the early years of the twelfth centuries, are better represented in the sources. While information on academic journeys per se is lacking, emigration from the island due to political turmoil, civil war, and, most importantly, the Norman conquest is clearly taking place. A 'brain drain' preceded the larger waves of exile that began by the mid-twelfth century. The florescence of Arabo-Islamic culture that had peaked at the Kalbid court from 379-412/990-1020 began to be eclipsed thereafter by the Kalbid family's domestic quarrels and self-destruction. As a result, old tensions among the Muslim community - Arab vs. Berber, urban vs. rural, skilled vs. unskilled labor - resurfaced and animosities flared up between the newly arrived 'North African' volunteers and the older generations of settled, landed 'Sicilian' Muslims. The notion of *jihād* as a lucrative fighting machine was dying out, as the spoils of war were decreasing at a rapid rate. The primary feature of Sicily as a *ghāzī* society⁵³ was giving way to the development of a civil society, especially in the big towns long settled by Muslims. But as the political situation deteriorated, Islamic scholarship and high culture continued to follow their established patterns, as the biographies of Sicily's last generations show.

Many figures whose names include a Sicilian *nisbah* such as Ṣiqillī, Saraqūsī, Ballanūbī, Trabanshī, Māzarī had no direct contact with the island but were sons or grandsons of Sicilian émigrés. Two of the most famous Sicilian Muslim scholars, Muḥammad al-Māzarī (d. 538/1138), eminent Mālikī jurist, hadith scholar, Ash'arite theologian, teacher, and preacher,⁵⁴ and Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn Zafar (d. 565/1170), jurist, theologian, and author of a famous work on royal etiquette (*Sulwān al-muṭā'ā*),⁵⁵ both left the island as young children. Of concern here are those who developed as scholars in Sicily and left fully matured. Through their biographies we can see the last stages of scholarship before the end of Islamic rule.

(a) 'Umar b. Khalaf Ibn Makkī (d. 500/1107): jurisconsult, hadith scholar, poet, and linguist who composed a famous work on dialectology, *Talqīḥ al-jinān fī tathqīf al-lisān*. He emigrated from Sicily during the civil strife and took residence in Tunis,

⁵³ Ottoman historian Paul Wittek defines a *ghāzī* society as "a community of Moslem march warriors, devoted to the struggle with the infidels in their neighborhood." Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1958), 14.

⁵⁴ For more information on his life and work, see H. Idriss, "L'École Mālikite de Mahdia: L'Imām al-Māzarī (m. 536 H/1141)," in *Études Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), 153-63.

⁵⁵ Ibn Zafar was a prolific writer on many subjects. For his life and work, see U. Rizzitano, "Ibn Zafar," *EF*, 3:970.

distancing and imitation," the desire to imitate the models provided by Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus, while maintaining a separate, distinctive identity.⁵⁷ By proving himself in all the major areas of knowledge, the Sicilian Muslim had the chance to make his mark in a borrowed time and a precarious place.

Conclusion

The political, social, and intellectual history of Islamic Sicily was intricately connected to the medieval Muslim states of Ifrīqiyā, beginning with the Aghlabid, passing through the Fatimid, and ending with the Zirid periods of its history. The vast majority of Muslim Sicilians trace their origins to North Africa. *Jihād* provided the ideological backdrop for a continuing North African emigration to the island. The most salient feature of Muslim society in Sicily was its frontier status as a community fighting in the defense of the faith. As a *ghāzī* community, it depended heavily on manpower, weaponry, and political and military leadership from Ifrīqiyā. In matters of religion and law, Sicily drew from Ifrīqiyā as well. The inclusion of religious scholars in the army and the establishment of judgeships in Sicilian towns were not only means of ministering to the spiritual needs of the troops, but also of assuring control over the direction of the *jihād* and asserting its connectedness to the political and religious authority of Qayrawān. The very nature of *jihād* and a major factor in its wide popular appeal was its rootedness in the tenets of the faith, in its legitimacy; this legitimacy was reinforced by the presence of the jurisconsults and judges who were sent to read and enact the law.

Because of these connections to Ifrīqiyā, the major architects of the legal society that developed in Sicily were Saḥnūn b. Saʿīd and his son Muḥammad. Sicilian Islam evolved as part of a process of '*madhhab* building' which Saḥnūn had begun for Qayrawān. Through a combination of reaffirming the primacy of the *sunnah*, waging a relentless campaign against all forms of *bid'ah* (innovation), and enforcing the emulation of the practices and pronouncements of the Medinan community of Companions (*taqlīd*), he established a chain of authority in which he and his disciples were forever linked with Qayrawān as sacred center. As teachers, scholars, and men of extreme piety and populist politics, Saḥnūn and Muḥammad created an extensive *ṣuḥbah*, a fellowship of disciples who, through conformity, consensus, and discipline, formed the core of the *madhhab* that would become the backbone of Sicilian Islam. The spatial proximity of Qayrawān and the temporal proximity of Saḥnūn and his *Mudawwanah* connected this frontier community to the wider Muslim world.

The education and formation of the first generations of Sicilian Muslims was based on a trivium of Arabic language, Islamic law, and ethics. In spite of a paucity of information, it can safely be assumed that Sicily resembled Ifrīqiyā in the composition and diversity of its religious and scholarly life, including disciples of Abū Ḥanīfah, adherents of Muʿtazilism, and not a few devotees of Kharijite theology and politics. But as Mālikism consolidated into a legal guild in Qayrawān and other areas of North Africa and eliminated its rivals, the same phenomenon was occurring

⁵⁷ David Wasserstein, "The Library of al-Ḥakam II al-Mustansir and the Culture of Islamic Spain," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 5 (1990-91): 101-2.

in Sicily. As the *ghāzī* society evolved into a more civilian society, its institutions of learning were expanding in new directions. Just as the architecture of Sicily expanded beyond the fortress or fortified monastery to include private homes with extended mosque complexes for prayer and education, pleasure palaces, and government complexes with adjoining shops and factories, so too did the legal and cultural institutions expand beyond their original forms.

Beyond the memorization of the Qur'ān and the rudiments of reading and writing, Islamic legal studies in Sicily, as elsewhere, evolved into a complex of subjects including methodological literature and speculative theology. Language studies branched out into many subfields, and poetry as entertainment became the subject of linguistic, historical, and critical aesthetic investigation. Piety and asceticism gave way to a more sophisticated treatment of Sufism as a field of inquiry.

In sum, the education of Sicilian Muslims did not differ significantly from that of their co-religionists in other centers of the Sunni Muslim world. The fact that it advanced the way it did given an environment of constant war is remarkable, but it was otherwise mainstream. Its genesis and development are found in the Mālikī tradition which Saḥnūn and his disciples established throughout the medieval Maghreb, but the success and growth of Islamic knowledge and learning owe a great deal to the Fatimid caliphs and their clients too who, through political acumen, tolerance, far-sightedness, and patronage of culture, allowed the natural processes of Sicilian Islam to flow uninterrupted. The dynamism of security in strongly conservative Qayrawāni Mālikism tempered by a modicum of independence and financial prosperity under the Fatimid caliphate reflects the balancing act between distancing and imitation that was a mark of both Muslim Spanish and Sicilian identity. In this regard, Dachraoui is correct in cautioning against a purely Sunni historical perspective and in calling our attention to Fatimid contributions to many aspects of medieval Islamic history.