The Madrasa Curriculum in Context

BY HAMZA KARAMALI

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Preface

This monograph describes the subjects, textbooks, pedagogy, and goals of the curriculum of the traditional madrasa, the social functions for which it prepared its graduates, and other kinds of religious education that used to complement it, all in the social and intellectual context of the traditional world in which it lived. The goal of the monograph is not to make argument; its goal is to merely describe and inform, and to be an intellectual resource for contemporary scholars to use in their research.

Its primary audience is a contemporary Muslim educator who wants to develop a curriculum of religious education that is both relevant to the religious problems of the present and grounded in the scholarly heritage of the past. But it also addresses a variety of other contemporary scholars: Muslim philosophers, scientists, sociologists, political scientists, and lawyers will be able to use it to locate the intellectual resources in the madrasa tradition that will help them navigate the problems of modernity; scholars of Islamic studies in contemporary universities will be able to enhance their research by finding their way through the academic community of the madrasa; journalists will be able to use it to explain the depth and sophistication of a genuine traditional Islamic education and distinguish it from the aberrations that we see in our times; politicians will be able to use it to effectively engage and integrate Muslim communities; and aspiring students of the madrasa tradition from all backgrounds will be able to use it as a map to traverse their studies in a way that benefits themselves and their future students.

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by Hamza Karamali

1.0 Introduction

To a student of the traditional islamic sciences, the word "madrasa" evokes two kinds of images. The first is the sacred space of an ancient building; the second is abstract, archetypical groups of students studying sacred texts with religious scholars. The focus of this article is this second kind.

The second kind of madrasa was a global academic community that collaboratively moved its state of knowledge forward for over a thousand years. The locus of this madrasa's academic exchange was the first kind of madrasa, a charitably endowed building with walls, rooms, and a roof, where professors would lecture on the Islamic sciences to small groups of students, the best of whom would carry the madrasa academic tradition to the next generation by becoming professors themselves and then lecturing to students of their own.

In the early period of the madrasa academic community, professors used lecture notes (*ta'liqa*) that extracted the most important questions of their science from larger reference works. The lecture notes of prominent professors would be copied and circulated among the global academic community and, over time, they were summarized into terse teaching texts (*mutun*) that briefly and precisely summarized the most important questions of their science, often staged over three levels: an introductory teaching text that introduced the fundamental questions of the science; an intermediate one that introduced more complex questions, their evidence, and scholarly disagreement; and an advanced one that thoroughly examined the evidentiary bases of the science's questions from every scholarly perspective (see 6.0).

As professors taught these teaching texts, they wrote commentaries (*shuruh*), which circulated among the global academic community in the same way that the lecture notes had in the past, and certain commentaries were accepted by the community as being better than others. These commentaries then became the subject of glosses (*hawashi*) that also circulated in the same way, and sometimes these glosses became the subjects of even further glosses. Through successive editions of teaching texts and their commentaries and glosses, students and professors engaged with the greatest minds of the past, comprehensively examined all historical scholarly disagreement, and improved the knowledge tradition that they were participating in by correcting mistakes, improving precision, and introducing new questions, all under the critical gaze of a thriving intellectual community.

This thriving intellectual community was, at its heart, a religious community that set its gaze on the next world, organized around religious sciences such as Sacred Law

(*fiqh*), legal theory, Qur'anic exegesis, Arabic grammar, and hadith criticism, which it studied in order to learn, preserve, practice, and teach the divine command to gain eternal felicity in Paradise.[1] But, it was also a community of this world, well-versed in the most advanced philosophical, scientific, social, and political sciences of its time, because felicity in the next world could only be acquired by living the divine command in this world or, to put it in the words of Ghazali, "the life of this world is a farmland that we cultivate now for harvest in the next world and religion is only completed through the life of this world".[2]

This connection between the sciences of the next world and those of this world was broken with the onset of modernity and, for approximately the last three centuries, the religious sciences that were written in the context of the pre-modern world have continued to be taught with the same teaching texts and pedagogical techniques, whereas most of the pre-modern worldly sciences have been abandoned, all while the intellectual and social currents of the modern world have moved with constantly increasing speed further and further away from their pre-modern predecessors. Why and how that happened is an important historical question that has been investigated by many traditional and modern scholars. For contemporary students of the traditional Islamic sciences, however, the more pressing question is how that connection between the sciences of the next world and those of this world—the one in which we live today—can be restored.

This monograph focuses on the Ottoman madrasa in its golden age during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (926/1520–973/1566) and relies on four main sources: (1) the description of the Ottoman madrasa curriculum during his reign by Tashkupri Zada (d. 968/1560) in his *Miftah al-sa'ada wa misbah al-siyada* and his *al-Shaqa'iq al-nu'maniyya fi 'ulama al-dawla al-'uthmaniyya*; (2) the description of the Ottoman madrasa pedagogy two centuries later by Sajiqli Zada (d. 1145/1732) in his *Tartib al-'ulum*; (3) the works of Ghazali, particularly the first book of his *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*; and (4) the author's own observations and reflections as a student of the traditional Islamic sciences in the contemporary world.

This essay is thus written from the perspective of a contemporary student of the pre-modern madrasa tradition who is looking back at how things used to be in the past to understand why they were that way, particularly in areas that seem strange or different, in the hope that this offering can be a stepping stone towards a critical examination of the madrasa tradition in order to bring that tradition into full conversation with our world, just as the luminaries of the past had brought it into conversation with theirs.

The article begins with a description of the sciences of the madrasa academic community in their social and intellectual contexts. This description forms the bulk of the text and it divides the sciences, as Tashkupri Zada does in his description of the Ottoman madrasa curriculum, into three categories: (1) the ancillary sciences (*'ulum al-ala*); (2) the philosophical sciences (*'ulum hikmiyya*); and (3) the revelatory sciences (*'ulum shar'iyya*).[3]

[1] The sincerity of many professors often fell short of this high standard due to their neglect of Islamic spirituality, noted most famously by Ghazali throughout his *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (see 8.0) and by dozens of Sufi masters since. Many have argued (correctly, in my opinion) that the steadily worsening neglect of Islamic spirituality among its professors was the most significant cause of the madrasa's decline.

[2] Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1421/2000), 1:35.

[3] Tashkupri Zada, *Miftah al-sa'ada wa misbah al-siyada* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1431/2010), 58.

2.0 Ancillary Sciences[4]

Every madrasa student began his education with a rigorous study of the *'ulum al-ala*, or ancillary sciences, which were the students' tools (*alat*) for all of their future learning. These tools were: (1) language and (2) the mind. The ancillary sciences were hence broadly divided into the language sciences and the sciences of critical thinking.

Table 1: Ancillary Sciences

Language	*Critical thinking*
Arabic vocabulary (*lugha*) Arabic morphology (*sarf*) Arabic grammar (*nahw*) Arabic rhetoric (*balagha*) Arabic prosody (*'arud*) Arabic literature (*adab*) Linguistic theory (*wad'*) Persian language (*farisi*)	Logic (*mantiq*) Dialectics (*al-bahth wa al-munazara*)

2.1 Language Sciences

The bridge language of the madrasa academic community was Arabic. It was because a madrasa professor in India wrote in Arabic that he could participate in an intellectual conversation with another professor, perhaps hundreds of years later, all the way in Morocco. Intermediate and advanced teaching texts for all the sciences were written in Arabic, although first-level teaching texts were often written in the native language of the area, particularly Persian (in East Asia) and Ottoman Turkish (in the central Ottoman provinces of Anatolia and Rumelia). This was especially true of primers of basic religious knowledge and basic Arabic grammar (*nahw*) and morphology (*sarf*). Sajiqli Zada mentions a popular primer of basic religious knowledge in Ottoman Turkish by Birgivi[5] and the Persian primers *Sarf mir* and *Nahw mir* are still studied in Persia, Afghanistan, and the Indian subcontinent.

Apart from such introductory primers, however, all the teaching texts were studied in their original Arabic, although it seems that the language of instruction was often the native language of the area. Most madrasa students, in other words, could read the Arabic language with understanding, but they could only speak it with difficulty. The goal of learning the Arabic language was not to use it in their daily lives, but to unlock the technical expressions of the madrasa teaching texts.

Unlocking these terse expressions required at least an intermediate-level education in Arabic grammar. The teaching texts were all written with extreme care and precision so that no word was superfluous. This brevity led to a loss of clarity and teachers would explain the intent of the author using the language of grammar, saying, for example, that

[4] Ibid., 58–214.

[5] Sajiqli Zada, *Tartib al-'ulum* (Beirut: Dar al-Basha'ir al-Islamiyya, 1408/1988), 209.

a word that came at the end of the page was the *khabar*, or "predicate" (grammatical term), of a *mubtada*, or "subject" (grammatical term), that was mentioned several lines earlier, and that the two sentences in between were *mu'tarida*, or "parenthetical" (grammatical term). Hence, it was not possible to study any science to a respectable level without an education in Arabic grammar.

However, the ultimate goal of all the Islamic sciences was to explain the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), both of which were preserved and studied in the same ancient Arabic language in which they were originally spoken. This language was highly sophisticated, particularly the language of the Qur'an, which the ancient Arabs, masters of eloquence themselves, had immediately recognized as miraculously eloquent and beyond the linguistic reach of any human being. As a spoken language, ancient Arabic disappeared around 150/767[6] and it was preserved instead in the various sciences of the Arabic language, particularly morphology, grammar, and rhetoric (*balagha*), all of which were learned through teaching-texts at the early and middle stages of the madrasa education and then rigorously applied during the study of the higher sciences at the end of the madrasa education.

The cornerstones of morphology and grammar in the Ottoman madrasas were Ibn al-Hajib's (d. 646/1249) *Shafiya* (on morphology) and *Kafiya* (on grammar). The commentaries of both the *Shafiya* and *Kafiya* were highly advanced, theoretical, and difficult to understand, and they prepared their students to use the commentaries and glosses of all the other sciences, particularly exegetical works on the Qur'an and hadiths, which painstakingly picked apart Arabic expressions using the analytical methods of these two sciences in order to precisely discern the intent of the author.

The most important teaching text in the science of rhetoric was Taftazani's (d. 792/1389) *Mukhtasar al-ma'ani*, which taught students precise analysis of figurative expressions (*'ilm al-bayan*) and the subtle connotations of word order and selection (*'ilm al-ma'ani*). This theoretical training was complemented by the study of eloquent expressions in ancient Arabic poetry, for which a popular book was Abu Tammam's (d. 231/845) *Diwan al-hamasa*, a careful selection of the most eloquent snippets of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabic poetry.

Apart from Arabic, the only other language that was taught in the madrasa was Persian, which was a secondary bridge language of the madrasa academic community. There remain many important scholarly works to this day that were written in Persian but have never been translated into Arabic. This was, perhaps, a remnant of the thorough Islamization of the Persians, the prevalence of their language in Asia, the dedication of its speakers to scholarship and learning, and the long-lasting Abbasid patronage of Persian-speaking communities, all of which made Persian a second language of Islam and Muslim scholarship.

Madrasa students did not learn any other language apart from Arabic and Persian. Works of scholarly interest in other languages would be brought into the madrasa academic community through translation, as with the sciences of the ancient Greeks, many of which have only been preserved through their Arabic translations. Just as English is the language of the dominant academic community today, Arabic was the language of

[6] The statements of all eloquent Arabs were accepted as evidence for the rules of Arabic grammar until the middle of the second Islamic century. After this time, the grammarians became increasingly selective in whose language they would consider representative of the ancient Arabic language of the Qur'an. See Sa'id al-Afghani, *Fi usul al-nahw* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1407/1987), 19–27.

the dominant academic community then and, for ideas to gain circulation and scholarly attention, they had to be expressed in Arabic.

Arabic was, however, more than just a bridge language for academic discourse; it was the language of the supremely eloquent ancient Arabs to whom the Qur'an and Sunna were primarily addressed. The ultimate goal of studying the language sciences was to become like those ancient Arabs and detect the miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an and the meaning of the Qur'an and Sunna firsthand by hearing them as they had. Language is inseparable from culture and mastering the ancient Arabic language required the madrasa students' immersion in ancient Arab culture. Date palms, deserts, camels, gazelles, romantic love, tribal war, bravery, chivalry, nobility—all of these were themes that permeated the vocabulary and poetry of the ancient Arabic language and formed the cultural backdrop against which the Qur'an and Sunna spoke.

This linguistic culture had consequences, for example, in the kinds of connotations that a particular word might evoke, which meanings might be psychologically related, what might be considered beautiful and polite, and what might be considered ugly and rude. The science of rhetoric recorded linguistic beauty according to these cultural conventions. In the section on a certain kind of figurative expression called *majaz mursal*, for example, the science stipulated that the relations between the original and figurative meanings fall into one of twenty-odd categories that were inductively derived from the linguistic conventions of the ancient Arabs. New kinds of relations that might come to be accepted in other cultures were of no consequence because the goal of the science was to preserve the eloquence of the Qur'an, which required adherence to the linguistic conventions against which it spoke.[7]

2.2 Sciences of Critical Thinking

Every science in the madrasa curriculum was organized around questions[8] (*masa'il*) with precisely defined subjects and predicates. For example, every question of the science of Sacred Law predicated one of the rulings of Sacred Law (obligatory, recommended, permissible, offensive, unlawful, valid, and invalid) to a human action; for example, "praying witr"—(human action)—"is recommended" (legal ruling) or, "marrying without witnesses"—(human action)—"is invalid" (legal ruling). To take another example, every question of the science of Arabic grammar predicated a grammatical state (*raf'*, *nasb*, *jarr*, *jazm*) to an Arabic word in the context of a complete sentence; for example, "the verbal subject"—(Arabic word)—"is *marfu'*" (grammatical state) or, "the verbal object"—(Arabic word)—"is *mansub*" (grammatical state). And so on.[9]

A science was then mastered by progressively studying its teaching texts with a professor until one had at one's fingertips its most important questions, their evidence,

[7] This was the position of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in his *Mahsul* and Baydawi in his *Minhaj al-usul*, and al-Subki in his *Jam' al-Jawami'* deemed it the stronger of the two positions on this question. Ibn al-Hajib in his *Mukhtasar al-muntaha* is famous for holding the opposite position, i.e., that it is possible for there to be a new kind of relation that was not previously used by the ancient Arabs. See 'Ali ibn 'Abd al-Kafi al-Subki, 'Abd al-Wahhab ibn 'Ali al-Subki, and Nasir al-Din al-Baydawi, *al-Ibhaj fi sharh al-minhaj* (Mecca: al-Maktaba al-Makkiyya, 1425/2004), 1:505–6.

[8] "Question" here refers to "a propositional unknown that a science seeks to establish based on evidence" (*matlub khabariyy yuhbarhanu 'alayhi fi dhalika al-'ilm*). This is a famous definition that is prevalent in the commentaries and glosses of the Muslim scholarly tradition. See, for example, Abu Bakr Shata, *I'anat al-talibin 'ala hall alfaz fath al-mu'in* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), 1:20.

[9] The science of the classification of sciences was known in the late madrasa tradition as *'ilm tamayuz al-'ulum*. Tashkupri Zada, who falls in the late middle period of the madrasa tradition, calls it *'ilm taqasim al-'ulum* and discusses it briefly on p. 223 of his *Miftah al-sa'ada*.

the scholarly disagreement around them, the evidence of each scholarly position, and the responses to the evidence of each. Studying a science in this manner required the two sciences of critical thinking: logic (*mantiq*) and dialectics (*adab al-bahth wa al-munazara*).

The cornerstone of a student's education in logic was Najm al-Din al-Katibi's (d. 675/1276) *Shamsiyya* with the commentary of Qutb al-Din al-Razi (d. 766/1365), popularly known simply as *Sharh al-shamsiyya*. Logic taught them how to define terms with precision and how to construct a logical argument. Education in dialectics was based first on primers such as the teaching texts of 'Adud al-Din al-Iji (d. 756/1355) or Sajiqli Zada (called *al-Waladiyya* because he wrote it for his son) along with a commentary, which taught students how to critique and defend an argument according to a well-defined process that guaranteed resolution, and then on actual critical engagement with an experienced professor in the final stage of the madrasa education. The nested objections and responses that are found in the glosses on the teaching texts of every science are grounded in the science of dialectics and reflect their authors' mastery of that science. The importance of the science of dialectics can be gauged by Sajiqli Zada's observation that, "the investigations of the Islamic sciences are virtually incomprehensible to anyone who does not possess knowledge of this science".[10] The scholarly richness of the Islamic sciences was preserved in the languages of logic and dialectics and it was simply not possible to go the full length of a rigorous madrasa education nor to understand the advanced discussions of the sciences without them.

The sciences of logic and dialectics were each shaped by the purposes for which they were employed. Logic, for example, was used extensively in the science of *kalam*, which sought rational demonstration of religious tenets of faith in the language of philosophy (see 4.3.1). As a result, textbooks of logic went beyond formal logic to include philosophical discussions on the psychology of perception as well as discussions of the basic premises to which all of *kalam*'s rational demonstration ultimately resolved. Dialectics, on the other hand, was used extensively in debates of legal theory and Sacred Law, and the form and content of its discussions lent themselves to being used in those sciences, particularly through its sister science of legal disputation, or *jadal* (see 4.3.2).

3.0 Philosophical Sciences[11]

Rational inquiry is part of human nature. What kinds of things are there? How can I learn about them? Why are they the way that they are? How do they work? How can they be subjected to my purposes? How should I live my life? How should I live with others? Humans have asked these questions since the earliest of times.

There are three ways to answer such questions. The first is physical observation and mental reflection, or human reason. The second is listening to divine revelation, which enables us to know about things that we could not know by human reason alone, things such as angels, jinn, death, resurrection, and the afterlife. The third way to answer such questions is a combination of both ways, namely, with both human reason and divine revelation. This third way was the way of the madrasa and is described below in section 4.0.

[10] Sajiqli, *Tartib al-'ulum*, 141.
[11] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 215–93.

This section focuses on the first way, namely, answering such questions using human reason alone. The sciences that attempted to do this during the madrasa period were called the "philosophical sciences" (*'ulum hikmiyya*). It is important to note here that the pre-modern meaning of the word "philosophy" in the context of the madrasa differs from its prevalent meaning today. Philosophy in today's parlance includes subjects such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, but not physics, astronomy, mathematics, economics, political science, or medicine. In its pre-modern sense, however, it would include all of them because it referred to any subject that relied for its study on human reason without reference to divine revelation. It is in this latter meaning that the word "philosophy" is used in this section and throughout the rest of this monograph.

The madrasa academic community inherited its philosophical sciences from the Greeks, primarily Aristotle through the lens of later Neoplatonists. These sciences were translated by the royal court from Greek into Arabic, then elaborated on by Farabi (d. 339/951) and then partially integrated with Islam by Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) before being critically examined by Ghazali (d. 505/1111), who wrote his famous *Maqasid al-falasifa* to explain the philosophical sciences according to Ibn Sina and his *Tahafut al-falasifa* to reveal the logical inconsistencies of those elements of the sciences that conflicted with revelation. He followed his critique with the integration of the religiously neutral elements of the philosophical sciences into the religious sciences of his time and his work was taken to completion by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (Razi) (d. 606/1209), who rewrote the philosophical sciences to bring them into complete accord with the madrasa tradition, for which he was recognized by that tradition as being the fifth pillar of the philosophical sciences after Plato, Aristotle, Farabi, and Ibn Sina.[12] Through Ghazali and Razi, the philosophical sciences entered into the madrasa academic tradition to be refined, developed, and critiqued by successive generations of religious scholars both inside and outside the madrasa, to whom they were the most advanced "secular" sciences of the time.

Table 2: Philosophical Sciences

Theoretical sciences	*Practical sciences*
Metaphysics (*al-'ilm al-ilahi*) Mathematics (*'ilm al-riyadiyyat*) Natural sciences (*al-'ilm al-tabi'i*)	Ethics (*'ilm al-akhlaq*) Household administration (*'ilm tadbir al-manzil*) Politics (*al-siyasa*)

In the tradition of Aristotle from whom these sciences ultimately derived, the philosophical sciences were divided into two categories: the theoretical sciences *('ulum nazariyya*), which were studied purely to be known, and the practical sciences *('ulum 'amaliyya*), which were studied not just to be known, but to be applied and practiced, and we will now turn to a description of each.

[12] Ibid., 219–20. This does not conflict with the fact that these sciences were extensively developed and exactingly perfected by the very late scholars of the *kalam* tradition, such as Dawwani (d. 918/1512) and Mir Zahid (d. 1101/1689), because their work was still based on these five pillars of the philosophical tradition.

3.1 Theoretical Sciences[13]

The theoretical sciences were further divided into three categories: (1) metaphysics, (2) mathematics, and (3) natural science, in that order. Of these categories, the one that will sound most familiar to us today is the last one and we will therefore alter the traditional order in which these sciences were described by examining natural science before metaphysics, and lastly mathematics.

3.1.1 *Natural Science*

Natural science (*al-'ilm al-tabi'i*) studied physical objects, or, to be more precise, physical things inasmuch as they undergo physical change. This category included subjects such as farming, veterinary science, animal care, medicine, herbal medicine, botany, biology, chemistry, gemology, anatomy, and pharmacy, all subjects that would today fall under the umbrella of modern science, where discoveries have rendered the findings of the traditional natural sciences almost completely obsolete.[14] But, before we simply discard those natural sciences, it is worth reflecting on how their methods and assumptions differed from modern science and to what extent these differences were a result of the madrasa's religious and social context.

The first difference was that the traditional natural sciences included subjects that would not be considered "scientific" by the contemporary scientific community, subjects such as astrology (the study of the effects and properties of celestial bodies), the science of amulets and talismans, the science of discernment (Ar. *firasa*: the study of inferring people's inward traits from their outward appearances), dream interpretation, and sorcery. Not all of these subjects were countenanced by the madrasa community. Sorcery, in particular, was considered unlawful to practice, although nonetheless a real science;[15] astrology was either completely or partially unlawful and the madrasa community disagreed on whether it was a real science;[16] and the science of amulets and talismans was partially unlawful

[13] Ibid., 58–9 and 215–83.

[14] It seems to me from my conversations with various madrasa professors and graduates that natural science was the first philosophical science to be removed from the madrasa curriculum, probably when modern science rose to prominence and rendered it obsolete. Because this removal was never accompanied by the realignment of the madrasa sciences with a suitable modern replacement, a huge gap appeared between all of the madrasa sciences, which spoke of the natural world in terms of pre-modern natural science, and the increasingly popular modern sciences that were studied outside the madrasa, which spoke of the natural world in terms of modern science. This was an important reason for the madrasa's disconnection from the sciences of this world.

[15] Sorcery was counted by the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) as an enormity and was not studied in the madrasa. It was, however, acknowledged as a real science the knowledge of which in general was part of Islamic faith by virtue of its being mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunna. The Maliki jurist, theologian, and Sufi Ahmad al-Sawi (d. 1241/1825) wrote, "Know that the position of Sunni orthodoxy [*ahl al-sunna*] is that sorcery is true, that it has a reality, and that it can be performed by both speech and action . . . but because of its subtlety, only a small number of people are able to do it" (Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Sawi, *Hashiyat al-'allama al-sawi 'ala tafsir al-jalalayn* [Cairo: Maktaba wa Matba'a al-Mashhad al-Husayni, n.d.], 4:368–9).

[16] Most scholars considered astrology both a false and an unlawful science because of the rigorously authenticated hadith in which the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said that Allah says, "Some of my servants have believed in me and some have disbelieved: those who say, 'We have been given rain by the bounty and mercy of Allah', have believed in me and disbelieved in the stars whereas those who say, 'We have been given rain because of the setting of such-and-such a star', have disbelieved in me and believed in the stars" (Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* 72). According to most scholars, this hadith indicated both the unlawfulness and the falseness of astrology. Some scholars, however, held that the hadith only censures those who held that stars bring about effects independently of Allah and did not negate the possibility of Allah conventionally associating between the stars and certain universal phenomena, the knowledge of which would allow one to anticipate the future. According to this position, whether or not astrology is a true science would be a subject of empirical rather than scriptural reasoning. (See Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 234.)

and false and partially countenanced and real.[17] Discernment[18] and dream interpretation, on the other hand, were considered real sciences in the light of revelatory evidence that confirmed their genuineness.[19]

If this seems strange and unscientific to us today, it is because we are accustomed to the assumption by modern science that the universe is a machine, the processes of which can only be explained by reference to mechanistic processes such as molecular collisions and atomic forces. This assumption was not shared by the natural sciences that the madrasa academic community inherited from Aristotle through Ibn Sina, which assumed instead that the universe was more like a living organism that moved towards the realization of its purposes than like an inert machine. From the perspective of this Aristotelian assumption, none of these sciences would be strange at all.

However, the perspective of Aristotle was not the perspective of the madrasa academic community. The most important modification that the madrasa community made to the Aristotelian natural sciences was to replace the theory of necessary natural causation—the view that physical things must necessarily bring about certain effects by virtue of their natures—with conventional natural causation (*sababiyya ʿadiyya*)—the view that natural causation is merely an association that we grasp through the repetitive conjunction between natural causes and effects. Because we grasp this conventional association, the universe becomes causally coherent—we expect the effect upon the cause—and we are able to subject it to our purposes. But the conventional association between natural causes and effects is established not by their natures but by God, who alone creates the causes and who alone creates the effects.

From this perspective, sorcery and dream interpretation can, indeed, be respectable subjects within the natural sciences even if they do not appear to fit the mechanistic model of modern science. It is hypothetically possible for divine action in the universe to correspond to a machine model, to the living organism model, to some other model, or to no model at all, and even when scientific inquiry reveals that a large number of physical phenomena conform to a particular model, there might be other yet-to-be-discovered phenomena that do not.

This perspective liberates scripture and also liberates science. It liberates scripture by allowing it to be interpreted on its own terms instead of requiring that it be interpreted on the terms of prevailing naturalistic assumptions. And it liberates science by allowing it to consider possibilities that its mechanistic assumptions rule out from the start. Maybe Chinese medicine, homeopathy, telepathy, and out-of-body experiences are real universal

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[17] "Protective or healing words are permitted by Sacred Law and are called for when there is need for them, provided three conditions are met: (a) that they consist of the word of Allah Most High, His names, or His attributes (n: the hadiths prohibiting amulets being interpreted as referring to the beads and so forth that were used in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance . . .); (b) that they be in Arabic; (c) and that the user not believe the words have any effect in themselves (n: which is unbelief . . .), but are rather empowered to do so by Allah Most High." (Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveler*, trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller [Evanston: Sunna Books, 1415/1994], 879. See the pages that follow p. 879 for a detailed discussion of scriptural proofs.)

[18] There are two kinds of discernment (*firasa*): (1) discernment that is learned empirically and (2) discernment that is cast into the heart of a righteous believer who has complete conviction that benefit and harm come solely from God and hence places his entire reliance on Him (Tashkupri, *Miftah al-saʿada*, 231 and 244–50).

[19] Tirmidhi relates that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Beware of the discernment [*firasa*] of the believer, for verily he sees with the light of Allah" (*Jamiʿ al-Tirmidhi* 3127), and Muslim relates in a rigorously authenticated hadith that he said, "True dreams are one forty-sixth part of prophecy" (Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* 2263). According to Sakhawi, the hadith of Tirmidhi is well authenticated in view of corroboratory narrations. See Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sakhawi, *al-Maqasid al-hasana fi ma ashtahara ʿala al-alsina* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1399/1979), 19–20.

phenomena even though they do not fit the standard scientific model, or perhaps they are not. The perspective of conventional natural causation allows their critical consideration, whereas the assumption of necessary mechanistic causation rejects them without critical consideration simply because they conflict with prevailing assumptions.[20]

The madrasa academic community's adjustment of Aristotelian natural sciences in light of conventional natural causation is also why the famous empirical critiques of Aristotelian natural philosophy (and, by extension, of the church institutions that supported it) by Galileo, Copernicus, Bacon, and other founders of modern science, would not apply to the scientific heritage of the Muslims. Aristotelian natural philosophy made non-empirical judgments on the essential natures of things and then reasoned deductively about the natural world, which led to errors that were corrected by the empirical reasoning of Galileo and Copernicus and then critiqued by Bacon's theory of inductive reasoning, which became what is now known as the scientific method. Because the Muslim scientific tradition rejected any necessary logical relation between the essences of things and natural causation, its method of scientific reasoning was inductive from the outset.[21]

3.1.2 *Metaphysics*

The second category of theoretical sciences was metaphysics. This science was known in the madrasa tradition as "the divine science" (*al-'ilm al-ilahi*) because its philosophical inquiry had been motivated since Plato and Aristotle by the recognition that the physical universe could only have come into existence from an immaterial God without whom nothing else made sense, and from this the science took the name by which it was known in the madrasa tradition: "first philosophy" (*al-falsafa al-ula*). Metaphysics was distinguished from the natural sciences by the fact that the object of its study was immaterial, whereas the object of natural science was material.

If the religiousness of this science sounds surprising, it is only because the contemporary narrative of the relationship between religion and philosophy is very different from how it used to be in the madrasa academic community. The contemporary historical narrative of how the theoretical sciences were integrated into the madrasa academic community is the narrative of an unsuccessful religious struggle to refute philosophy. According to this narrative, the philosophical remnants of Aristotelian vocabulary and questions within the *kalam* tradition, for example, are signs of religion's failure to defeat philosophy. The historical narrative of the madrasa tradition itself, however, was markedly different. It was usual to posit that the theoretical sciences originated from a

[20] This echoes the views of Rupert Sheldrake in his book *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry* (London: Coronet, 2012). While Sheldrake is viewed by the mainstream scientific community as a fringe and even "heretical" scientist, his arguments against some of the unquestioned assumptions of modern science are in line with the views of the madrasa academic community. If the madrasa community were to engage modern science as it did Aristotelian natural science, Sheldrake would be a perfectly respectable scientist whose views would merit critical empirical examination.

[21] This is best illustrated in the science of legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*) in those sections that discuss methods for the determination of the legal cause (*masalik al-'illa*), which employ a combination of scriptural and empirical means to determine the legally significant qualities of the physical object to which rulings of Sacred Law relate (*mahall al-hukm*). The presence of qualities in physical objects is always determined empirically through observation, never through philosophical reflection on the natures of things. See, for example, Hasan al-'Attar, al-Jalal al-Mahalli, and Ibn al-Subki, *Hashiyat al-'attar 'ala jam' al-jawami'* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 2:305–31. The fact that scientific reasoning in the Muslim world was inductive rather than deductive is commonly overlooked and histories of science frequently assume that the natural science of the Muslim world was the same as the natural philosophy of the Christian world. Whereas the Christian world adopted a pure Aristotelian natural philosophy through Ibn Rushd, the Muslim world considered Ibn Rushd a marginal figure and adopted Aristotelian natural science through the critical lens of Ibn Sina, Ghazali, and Razi, to whom Aristotle's natural philosophy was largely based on unproved suppositions.

prophet[22] from whom Plato and Aristotle had inherited these sciences in some form and then developed on their own, straying in the process from their original prophetic purity. As a result, when the madrasa community appropriated these sciences from the Greeks, it only reclaimed what was originally its own and restored it to its original purity. This is why proper philosophical activity complemented revelation rather than conflicted with it. In the words of Tashkupri Zada:

> Never imagine that the philosophical sciences are in complete conflict with the revelatory sciences—that is not the case. Instead, they only conflict in a few questions, in some of which the conflict is superficial conflict which, on careful examination, reveals that the positions of the two sciences are actually complementary.[23]

In metaphysics, the most important of these conflicting questions was whether or not God created the universe out of nothing (Aristotelian philosophers: "No"; revelation: "Yes"), whether or not God possesses knowledge of particulars (Aristotelian philosophers: "No"; revelation: "Yes"), and whether or not there will be a bodily resurrection, punishment, and reward after death (Aristotelian philosophers: "No"; revelation: "Yes"). The madrasa academic community used the vocabulary and questions of the philosophical sciences themselves to justify revelation on all of these questions and, in the process, brought the philosophical sciences into harmony with the revelatory sciences. The example of conventional natural causation described above is one example. Other examples are described below in section 4.3.1.

3.1.3 *Mathematics*

The third category of the theoretical sciences was mathematics (*riyadiyyat*). Whereas the natural sciences studied what was material and metaphysics studied what was immaterial, mathematics lay in between, studying things like numbers and shapes, which were immaterial when conceived in the mind but material in their application to the physical things of the universe. It included subjects such as geometry, astronomy, architecture, optics, navigation, timekeeping, geography, arithmetic, accounting, prayer time calculation, prayer direction calculation, and inheritance division. Mathematics was considered the most exact of the theoretical sciences and the least susceptible of them to error. The madrasa academic community modified the natural sciences and metaphysics through a critical religious engagement, but adopted mathematics wholesale, developing it further (such as with Ibn al-Haytham's discoveries in optics, Khawarizmi's in algebra, and Tusi's in trigonometry), and adapted it to their social and religious needs (such as their adaptation of the astrolabe to calculate the direction of Mecca and the times of the daily prayers).

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[22] For Tashkupri Zada, this prophetic source was the Qur'anic prophet Idris (peace be upon him), whom he identified with the Biblical Enoch (*Miftah al-sa'ada*, 218). Whether or not this particular identification is correct, the more general identification of Plato and Aristotle's monotheism with some prophetic source does, indeed, seem correct because monotheism is not a later development in the history of mankind but mankind's original religion (Qur'an 10:19, among many other verses). For Tashkupri Zada and every other member of the madrasa academic community, it was a rationally demonstrable fact that Islamic monotheism was the original religion of mankind and that the first man, our father Adam (peace be upon him), was himself a prophet and messenger who preached it. Not only did the madrasa community not share the modern historical narrative in which primitive humans only believed in God because of their ignorance of modern science, they could demonstrate by argument why that could not have been the case. From their perspective, it was a reasoned academic conclusion that the monotheism of Plato and Aristotle was a remnant of original religion that might have been taken from a prophet who came before Noah (peace be upon him), such as Idris (peace be upon him), or from a divine messenger that Allah specifically sent to the Greeks to call them back to their original religion, just as He had done with every other nation: "There never were a people except that a warner passed among them" (Qur'an 34:24).

[23] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 221.

Tashkupri Zada wrote that there were three famous royal book treasuries in the history of Islam: the book treasury of the Abbasids in Baghdad, the book treasury of the Fatimids in Cairo, and the book treasury of the Umayyads in Cordoba. "As for now," he wrote, "the interest of kings in book treasuries has diminished because they have sufficed themselves with the book treasuries of the madrasas that they have built as they [i.e., the madrasas] have greater need for them [i.e., the book treasuries] than they [i.e., kings] do."[24] The madrasa academic community's engagement with the theoretical sciences of natural science, metaphysics, and mathematics corroborate what Tashkupri Zada relates about its book treasuries and indicates that it was a religious community that collected, studied, and engaged with all the philosophical knowledge of its time.

3.2 Practical Sciences[25]

To briefly recap what we have seen so far, the philosophical sciences are those that investigate things with human reason alone, unaided by revelation. In the tradition of the Greeks from whom the madrasa academic community inherited these sciences, they are divided into two categories. In the first category are the theoretical sciences, which, as we have seen in section 3.1, study God (metaphysics), the physical universe (natural sciences), and abstractions that our mind makes from the physical universe (mathematics). In the second category are the practical sciences, which study voluntary human actions and character traits with the aim of determining how to live a virtuous and happy life, and it is these practical sciences that are the subject of this section.

The practical sciences were further divided into three categories: (1) ethics (*'ilm al-akhlaq*), which studied virtuous character or proper human action as it relates to oneself; (2) household administration (*'ilm tadbir al-manzil*), which studied proper human interaction between husband and wife, parents and children, and master and slave; and (3) politics (*'ilm al-siyasa*), which studied proper government. According to the madrasa academic community, the well-being of every human community depended on the answers to these questions but, at the same time, the questions were too complex for humans to solve philosophically. Their inability to answer these important questions on their own was the reason why God sent them messengers, who brought them a sacred law that taught them how to live with happiness and well-being in this life and, at the same time, how to win eternal bliss in the afterlife. The madrasa community, therefore, turned for answers to these questions not to the philosophical sciences, but to the revelatory sciences and so, while the theoretical philosophical sciences flourished in the madrasa academic community, the practical philosophical sciences did not and were largely substituted by Sufism (for ethics) and Sacred Law (for household administration and politics). The work of Aristotle and Ibn Sina was retained and studied, but not developed any further.

But, while the answers to these questions were to be sought in revelation, the human mind could, after learning the answers, discern how they led to the very happiness and prosperity that it sought in the first place. This rational discernment of human interest was recorded not in the philosophical sciences of ethics, household administration, and politics, but in the revelatory sciences of Sacred Law and legal theory and will be discussed below in 4.3.2 and 4.4.

As the madrasa academic community searched for the human interest concealed within revealed guidance, it sometimes found that the practical philosophical sciences had

[24] Ibid., 203.
[25] Ibid., 284–93.

reasoned to the same conclusions and it did not hesitate to appropriate their methods as a form of revelatory exegesis. For example, many scholars found that Aristotle's ethical theory that virtue was always the mean between two extremes could be used to confirm and explain the virtues described in revelation and did not hesitate to put it to good use.[26]

According to Tashkupri Zada, the frequent agreement between the practical sciences and revelation was because, out of His mercy, God had given humans the ability to independently discern their worldly interests so that they would be able to live together in cities and towns without civil discord in order that they might not perish during times when the sacred law of a messenger might not reach them.[27] According to Ghazali, it was because the Greeks had inherited something of the knowledge of the prophets and Sufis who lived before them.[28] Whichever one of the two might be right, what is important is that, although the madrasa academic community did not see a need to develop the practical sciences further, it nevertheless preserved what it received and did not hesitate to benefit from its insights.

4.0 Revelatory Sciences[29]

While the philosophical sciences were well received by the madrasa academic community, its academic focus was not philosophy, but revelation. Its knowledge of philosophy was driven either by the need to defend revelation (this is why it studied metaphysics) or to faithfully understand and apply it (this is why it studied natural science). It was not an academic community dedicated to the collective advancement of independent human knowledge, which is why it did not produce the regular scientific breakthroughs that the modern academic community, for example, produces. Scientific and philosophical academic communities were not centered around the institution of the madrasa, but around smaller, less prestigious institutions such as hospitals (*maristan*) and informal scholarly networks.[30] It was these networks that led to the discoveries of famous Muslim scientists such as Biruni and Ibn al-Haytham, not the madrasa. The madrasa community did not hinder these developments and kept abreast of them, but they were not its purpose.[31]

The purpose of the madrasa academic community was, in a word, to preserve revelation: to preserve its words, to preserve its meanings, to preserve its intellectual rigor, and to preserve its application, and it developed sciences for each of these tasks. Before explaining these sciences, however, it is important to pause for a moment to understand exactly what this paragraph means by "revelation" and its "preservation".

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[26] See, for example, al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, 3:70–1, and Abu al-Su'ud Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-'Amadi, *Tafsir Abi al-Su'ud al-musamma bi irshad al-'aql al-salim ila mazaya al-qur'an al-karim* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1415/1994), 5:136.

[27] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 285.

[28] Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-dalal wa ma'ahu kimiya' al-sa'ada wa al-qawa'id al-'ashara wa al-adab fi al-din* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqafiyya, n.d.), 29. Although contemporary readers may be skeptical of Ghazali's position, it is very plausible from the perspective of the Muslim scholarly tradition, as explained above in footnote 22.

[29] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 58–9 and 294–692.

[30] A useful study of scholarly networks outside the madrasa is Sonja Brentjes, "On the Location of the Ancient or 'Rational' Sciences in Muslim Educational Landscapes (AH 500-1100)", *Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 42–71.

[31] To imagine that the madrasa academic community did this out of slighting the philosophical academic community would be a mistake because no such philosophical academic community existed at that time. The madrasa academic community was the only academic community of the pre-modern age. The birth of the modern philosophical academic community (remember that I am using "philosophical" in its pre-modern sense as described in section 3.0) was a result of the social value that the philosophical sciences only acquired in the modern age. How these two academic communities should interact today is one of the most important unsolved questions that Muslim educators face.

"Revelation" is a translation of the Arabic word *shari'a*, the original meaning of which in the ancient Arabic language is a place from which people obtain water. Water was a precious and widely sought commodity in the arid Arabian desert and the reason why this word was used to refer to divine revelation was to strike a metaphor—just as people go to a watering place to quench their thirst, they go to revelation in order fulfill their most precious and direly sought needs: happiness in this life and felicity in the life to come.[32]

But the tremendous value of revelation as a source of knowledge does not discount human observation and reason. The relationship between the two is not one of conflict but complementarity. Human reason allows us to discern authentic divinely revealed knowledge from human fabrications, and that revealed knowledge then teaches us how to use our reason in a way that benefits us in this life and the next. Ghazali expressed this complementary relationship by citing three lines of poetry:[33]

There are two kinds of reason:
  Innate and revealed.
Revealed reason does not benefit one
  Without innate reason.
Just as the sun does not benefit
  Someone who is blind.

Revelation, in other words, is a blazing sun, but it needs the eye of human reason to see it and benefit from its light. By implication, without the blazing light of revelation, the eye of reason strains to see in the dark, sometimes discerning with difficulty what the sun would have revealed to it with ease and sometimes mistaking things for other than what they really are.

This was not the first time that mankind had been blessed with the light of revelation. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, and the multitudes of prophets and messengers in between had received and conveyed the same light. But, time and time again, that blazing light had slipped out of people's fingers and its renewal by the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) was the last time that it would come down from Heaven. Human reason would remain with us whether we preserved it or not, but divine revelation would only remain if we preserved it and that was why the madrasa academic community dedicated itself to preserving revelation (rather than philosophy), which leads us next to a discussion of the meaning of "preservation".

The final revelation came in two forms: a book (the Qur'an) and a messenger in the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace), whose role was to explain the book. "We have sent down to you the Remembrance that you may make clear to mankind what was sent down to them" (Qur'an 16:44). This prophetic explanation took many forms: the simple explanations of meanings, the addition of details, rational arguments, exhortation, and a living example of how to apply the Qur'an in one's daily life and of the purity of heart and soul that it came to engender. To preserve revelation meant not only to preserve its words, but also to somehow preserve these more abstract prophetic explanations and examples so that people would be able to shine the light of revelation on every human circumstance to enable the eye of reason to see clearly.

[32] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 294. *Shari'a* frequently refers to Sacred Law, which is why the *'ulum shar'iyya* are often mistranslated as the "legal sciences", but, as described in subsequent sections, Sacred Law was only one of the *'ulum shar'iyya* and what *shari'a* means in this context is not "Sacred Law", but "divinely revealed knowledge".

[33] Al-Ghazali, Ihya', 1:120.

The goal of the revelatory sciences (`ulum shar`iyya) was to do just that, and it was through them that madrasa academic community preserved revelation.

Tashkupri Zada divided these revelatory sciences into four categories:

(1) sciences that *transmitted* the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace);
(2) sciences that *explained* the meaning the Qur'an and Sunna;
(3) sciences that *reasoned* to demonstrate the veracity of the Qur'an and Sunna;
(4) sciences that explained how to *apply* the Qur'an and Sunna in every human circumstance.

The following sections examine each of these categories in turn.

Table 3: Revelatory Sciences

Transmission	*Exegesis*	*Reasoning*	*Application*
Canonical Qur'anic recitations *('ilm al-qira'at*) Hadith narration (*riwayat al-hadith*)	Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir al-qur'an*) Hadith understanding (*dirayat al-hadith*)	*Kalam* Legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*)	Sacred Law (*fiqh*)

4.1 Transmission

The goal of the first kind of the revelatory sciences was to transmit the Qur'an and Sunna in a way that protected them from deliberate or accidental alteration. The science that transmitted the Qur'an was known as the science of the canonical Qur'anic recitations *('ilm al-qira'at*) and the science that transmitted the Sunna was known as the science of hadith narration (*'ilm riwayat al-hadith*).

4.1.1 *Canonical Qur'anic Recitations*

The ancient Arabic language was not uniform. The various tribes and towns scattered across the Arabian peninsula had different accents, often used the same word with different meanings, and sometimes even had slightly different rules of syntax and morphology. Those who lived on the western coast of the peninsula around Mecca and Medina (the Hijaz), for example, put the object of the negating particle "ma" into the *nasb* (accusative) state, expressing the sentence "Zayd is not standing" as *ma Zaydun qa'iman*, whereas those who lived in the desert plateau in the center of the peninsula (Najd) left the object in the *raf'* (nominative) state, expressing the sentence as *ma Zaydun qa'imun*. The regional variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and morphology were all captured in the various sciences of the Arabic language (see 2.1).

Since the Qur'an addressed all of the ancient Arabs with its miraculous eloquence, it incorporated variations out of consideration for the different linguistic "ear" of the different tribes and cities. The goal of the science of the canonical Qur'anic recitations was to capture these variations and to ensure that the Qur'an with all of its variations was mass-transmitted from every generation to the next ("mass-transmission" [*tawatur*] is a technical term that refers to an observable event that is independently transmitted in the same way by so many people that it would be conventionally impossible for them to have conspired to lie).[34]

The Qur'an was transmitted from one generation to the next by a student reciting it in its entirety according to one or more of its canonical recitations to a teacher who had similarly received it from another teacher, all the way back to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). It was a communal obligation for this process to be repeated in every generation by large numbers of people for every canonical recitation such that, as a whole, every canonical recitation would be mass-transmitted from one generation to the next. This process was aided by two famous versifications of the differences between the various recitations, the *Shatibiyya* of Shatibi (d. 590/1194) and the *Tayyibat al-nashr* of Ibn al-Jazari (d. 833/1429). These didactic poems were memorized and mass-transmitted all over the Muslim world to ensure that, if there were ever a mistake in the transmission of any of the canonical recitations of the Qur'an, whether accidental or deliberate, it would be discovered and corrected.

4.1.2 *Hadith Narration*

The Qur'an lent itself to mass-transmission; it was a book with a beginning, middle, and end that, in its own words, God Himself had made easy to memorize (see Qur'an 54:32). The hadiths, however, did not lend themselves to mass-transmission; they were scattered reports about the Prophet's words, deeds, appearance, and character (Allah bless him and give him peace) that had, for the most part, been transmitted from one individual to another over a series of generations and then selectively collected with their chains of transmission (*isnad*) into topically arranged books by prominent hadith scholars from the second to the fifth Islamic centuries. The most popular of these books eventually came to be mass-transmitted as the hadith tradition transitioned from transmission through personal chains gathered from many different individuals to transmission through chains that went through the famous books of hadith—Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, and others—that came to constitute the Sunni hadith corpus.[35]

Although there were many scholars who memorized many hadiths, the entire hadith corpus was never memorized by anyone. As a result, while the Qur'an was transmitted through audition and memorization, hadiths were generally transmitted through audition and writing. A hadith scholar who had himself received one of the books of hadith through audition read them out loud—either by himself or by someone else as he listened to ensure accuracy—as students followed along in their handwritten manuscript copies of the book, correcting any copying mistakes that might have crept in as they listened to their teacher. After

[34] Mass-transmission is discussed in the science of legal theory as well as in the science of hadith criticism (*mustalah al-hadith*). One of the best treatments of the topic is by the contemporary Turkish scholar Muhammad Salih al-Gharsi in his gloss on Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani's *Sharh nukhbat al-fikar*. See Muhammad Salih ibn Ahmad al-Gharsi and Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Nukat al-ghurar 'ala nuzhat al-nazar fi tawdih nukhbat al-fikar fi mustalah ahl al-athar* (Damascus: Dar al-Qadiri li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1429/2008), 38–78. I am grateful to his student Hoca Masuk Yamaz for drawing my attention to this.

[35] The transition from independent narration to narration through one of the existing books of hadith happened approximately at the time of Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi (d. 458/1066), who was the last of the great hadith scholars, whose hadith collections came to be considered indispensable by the Muslim scholarly tradition.

the book was completed over a period of days, weeks, or months, they would present their manuscripts to their teacher, who would authorize them to similarly transmit what they had received to others. Unless a student had received a book of hadith in this manner, he could not transmit it to anyone else and, according to many scholars, he could not even cite it.

In addition to minimizing copying mistakes that would otherwise have been prevalent in the age of handwritten manuscripts, this process also ensured that the core books of the hadith corpus always remained "alive", being read out loud before large numbers directly from one living hadith scholar to a group of other dedicated students. Were it not for this focused emphasis on hadith narration, the hadith books would have become, for example, loosely bound pieces of paper that were transcribed by an anonymous copyist, stored in a chest, and then discovered by coincidence a hundred years later by someone else, allowing any number of interpolations and deletions to be made by anyone who got his hands on the manuscript without anyone being able to tell what had happened.[36]

The methods of hadith transmission were carefully refined to ensure that both teachers and students adhered to conventions that were designed to minimize errors. These methods were part of students' study of hadith methodology, which is described below in section 4.2. While the science of hadith narration was a sophisticated and important science for its time, it has now been rendered largely obsolete by the largely error-free reproduction of carefully produced critical editions using modern printing technologies.[37]

4.2 *Exegesis*

Transmission of the Qur'an and Sunna is distinct from its understanding. In a frequently cited hadith, the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "It often happens that the one to whom something is transmitted understands it better than the one who originally heard it" (Tirmidhi, *Jami' al-Tirmidhi* 2657). If the goal of the first category of revelatory sciences was to transmit the Qur'an and Sunna, the goal of the second category was to understand their meanings. The science that studied the meanings of the Qur'an was known as the science of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and the science that studied the meanings of the Sunna was known as the science of hadith understanding (*'ilm dirayat al-hadith*).

4.2.1 *Qur'anic Exegesis*

The science of Qur'anic exegesis was the most difficult of all the madrasa sciences. It was studied in the final stage of students' madrasa education after they had studied all the other sciences (see 6.0). They applied all of these sciences to an investigation of the meanings of the Qur'an, which was the source from which all of them ultimately sprang. In the words of Baydawi (d. 685/1286), whose *tafsir* was the standard madrasa textbook for the science:

> The greatest of all sciences in value and the highest of them in merit and guidance is the science of Qur'anic exegesis, which is the chief and head of all religious sciences and the basis and foundation of all revelatory principles. No one is fit to take it in his hand and step forth to expound it except someone who is steeped in all of the religious sciences, both their rational foundations and their legal details, and who excels in all of the sciences of the Arabic language and all of the linguistic arts.[38]

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[36] The best historical overview of the transmission of hadith is Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, ed. and rev. by Abdal Hakim Murad (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

[37] The qualification "carefully produced critical editions" is crucial and the argument for these methods' obsolescence only holds when such good critical editions exist and are widespread.

[38] Muhyiddin Sheikh Zadah, *Hashiyat Muhyiddin Sheikh Zadah 'ala tafsir al-Baydawi* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi, reprint, n.d.), 1:9.

The religious sciences that were most needed for Qur'anic exegesis were the ancillary sciences, *kalam*, and legal theory, the technical vocabulary of which is so prevalent in Baydawi's *tafsir* and its accompanying glosses that it is impossible to understand what the authors are saying without them. The vocabulary and questions of these sciences, in other words, were the language of Qur'anic exegesis, which, in turn was the highest of all the religious sciences and their ultimate purpose.

What this tells us is that the ancillary sciences, *kalam*, and legal theory, however philosophical they might seem at first glance, lived in the madrasa within the higher context of Qur'anic exegesis and, although the primary purposes of the madrasa were to teach the Arabic language and critical thinking (ancillary sciences), to establish rational proofs for tenets of faith (*kalam*), and to study the methods of legal inference (*usul al-fiqh*), all of this—language, critical thinking, rational proofs, and legal inference—were for the sake of the higher secondary purpose of explaining the Qur'an. The implications of this higher Qur'anic context for the language sciences has been discussed above in section 2.1. Its implications for the more rational sciences will be discussed below when we examine the science of *kalam* in section 4.3.1.

4.2.2 *Hadith Understanding*

Whereas the Qur'an was a book whose exegesis could be studied from beginning to end, the Sunna consisted of tens of thousands of reports of varying authenticity scattered in many different books that had been compiled with their chains of transmission by prominent hadith scholars over a period of three centuries. The sheer volume of the hadith corpus, compounded by lengthy chains of transmission, voluminous biographical dictionaries of hadith narrators, tens of thousands of critical evaluations of hadith authenticity and narrator reliability from early Islamic history, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of reports from the Companions and Followers (some with chains of transmission and some without), all meant that the hadith corpus simply could not be formally studied in its entirety.

In the madrasa, understanding the hadith corpus meant two things: (1) learning the meaning of a representative sample of hadiths and (2) learning the methods of hadith criticism. For the first goal, they would study Ibn al-Athir's (d. 606/1209) *Jami' al-usul fi ahadith al-rasul*, which is a topically arranged compendium of all the hadiths and Companion reports in the hadith collections of Malik (his *Muwatta*), Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, and Nasa'i, with brief explanations of difficult words and variations in transmission but without any chains of transmission. For the second goal, they would memorize the *Muqaddima* of Ibn al-Salah (d. 643/1245) or Nawawi's (d. 676/1277) abridgment, *al-Taqrib wa al-taysir*. Advanced students might go on to study the collections of Bukhari and Muslim with their chains of transmission. Further specialization was left to the students' personal studies.[39]

Most of the hadith compilers had focused their efforts on capturing the legally significant statements and actions of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and the science of hadith was hence closely tied to the science of Sacred Law (discussed below in section 4.4). The scholars of hadith were commonly described as pharmacists who prepared the ingredients of the medicines that the scholars of Sacred Law—the

[39] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 373.

doctors—would dispense.[40] In terms of education, this meant that Sacred Law formed the higher context of the science of hadith understanding and that it was therefore not possible to understand the hadith corpus without first studying Sacred Law and legal theory, which is discussed further in subsequent sections (see 6.0).

4.3 **Reasoning**

Placing the philosophical and the revelatory sciences into separate categories can give the mistaken impression that revelation was, in some sense, non-rational. But the Qur'an appealed from the very beginning to the reason of those it addressed (the Arab polytheists and the Jews and Christians who lived in the peninsula), censured them for adopting their religion merely because it was what their ancestors had done, and declared unequivocally that those who did turn away from the Prophet's call (Allah bless him and give him peace) did so without any proof and that everything they believed in was baseless conjecture (see, for example, Qur'an 2:170; 5:104; 28:36; 31:21; 45:24; 53:23). The message of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), on the other hand, was aided with clear signs for anyone who would reflect. The imperative to reason was thus at the heart of the Qur'anic revelation.

When the early Muslims came into contact with the Byzantine and Persian civilizations, this "revelatory reason" found expression in the intellectual vocabulary and questions of their new interlocutors and came to be recorded in the twin sciences of *kalam*, or scholastic theology, and legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*), which are collectively known in the Muslim scholarly tradition as *al-aslayn*, or "the two rational foundations": the rational foundation of religion (*usul al-din* or *kalam*) and the rational foundation of Sacred Law (*usul al-fiqh*).

4.3.1 *Kalam*

In the tradition of the Qur'anic imperative to reason, the goal of the science of *kalam* was to establish logical proofs for God and His attributes, His messengers and their attributes, and the afterlife. *Kalam* was organized around these three investigations: it began with an examination of the proofs for beliefs about God (*ilahiyyat*), moved on to proofs for beliefs about His messengers (*nubuwwat*), and concluded with proofs for beliefs about the afterlife (*sam'iyyat*). These three elements—God, His messengers, and the afterlife—are, in fact, the entire message of the Qur'an and, indeed, of every previous divine revelation. The universe is created and sustained by one almighty God, who created us in it to worship and adore Him alone. He sent His messengers again and again over the ages to tell people to worship and adore Him alone and to tell them about resurrection, judgment, Paradise, and Hell. And He gave us reason so that we could listen to the messengers and discover for ourselves that everything that they said was true. The very organization of *kalam* textbooks thus reveals their Qur'anic origins.

The reality of the science of *kalam* cannot be understood without grasping this relationship between *kalam* and the Qur'an. Because the *mutakallimun* used the technical vocabulary of the philosophical sciences and rarely cite the Qur'an or Sunna, it is easy to

[40] Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi narrates with his chain of transmission that the hadith scholar al-A'mash said to Abu Hanifa, "O jurists [*fuqaha*]! You are the doctors and we are the pharmacists, and you . . . have taken from both groups". See the citations for this statement in Muhammad 'Awwama, *Athar al-hadith al-sharif fi ikhtilaf al-a'immat al-fuqaha* (Beirut: Dar al-Basha'ir al-Islamiyya, 1418/1997), 111. This book is widely considered the best scholarly treatment of why the science of Sacred Law is indispensable for understanding the hadith corpus.

mistake *kalam* for philosophy. But its core questions and arguments were not ones that the *kalam* tradition invented; rather, they were questions and arguments that it inherited.

For example, the *kalam* arguments for the existence of God are all cosmological arguments, either from the universe's contingency or its creation or some combination of the two. The design argument exists in the *kalam* tradition, but it is not as prominent as the cosmological argument. As for the ontological argument, it does not exist at all. The reason for this focus on the cosmological argument is not just that it is the soundest of all arguments, but also, and more importantly, that it is the argument that is employed in the Qur'an. The hundreds of Qur'anic verses that urge us to reflect on the universe were unanimously understood by scholars of Qur'anic exegesis as references to the cosmological argument.[41]

The same is true of the many other core arguments employed by the *mutakallimun*: the argument for the impossibility of infinite regress; the argument for the impossibility of multiple gods; the argument for God's possessing attributes of knowledge, will, and power; the argument for prophetic veracity from miracles; the argument for the possibility of resurrection and the afterlife by contingency—all of these arguments were clearly expressed in the Qur'an (some even in the Sunna) and only afterwards clothed by the *mutakallimun* in philosophical vocabulary to bring them into conversation with the philosophical sciences. The Qur'anic origins of these arguments is explained in the science of Qur'anic exegesis, where scholars used *kalam* to do their exegesis.[42]

The late textbooks of the *kalam* tradition that were studied in the madrasa—Taftazani's (d. 792/1389) *Sharh al-'aqa'id* with its dozens of glosses, Jurjani's (d. 816/1413) *Sharh al-mawaqif* with its dozens of glosses, and the many commentaries and glosses on Tusi's (d. 672/1274) *Tajrid al-i'tiqad*—are all expressions of the Qur'anic arguments in the language of the sciences of logic, metaphysics, natural science, and mathematics that the madrasa academic community inherited from Aristotle (see 3.1), along with a comprehensive study of all of the objections that could be raised against them and their answers. But they are more than just elaborations of revelatory rationality; they are also philosophy in its most sophisticated form. *Kalam* merged so thoroughly with these sciences that, in the words of Taftazani, "it became virtually indistinguishable from philosophy were it not for its inclusion of matters related to the afterlife [*sam'iyyat*]".[43] The late books of *kalam*, therefore, have two elements: an element of revelation expressed in Avicennan philosophy (that of Ibn Sina) and an element of pure Avicennan philosophy in harmony with that.

The reason for this unity between *kalam* and philosophy was that the *mutakallimun* made it the goal of their science to study all knowledge that bore any relation to the rational demonstration of tenets of faith, whether that relation be proximate or remote.[44]

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[41] See, for example, Baydawi's commentary on the following Qur'anic verses: 2:164, 6:78, 7:54, 15:23–4, 16:20, 17:44, 24:42, 25:45, 26:24, 27:25, and 29:61. The glosses in Baydawi's commentary contain dozens of other examples, as do the other most important Qur'anic commentaries, such as the magnificent commentary of the Ottoman *şeyhülislam* in the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent: Abu al-Su'ud's *Irshad*.

[42] A useful summary of the scriptural origins of the most important *kalam* arguments is *Risalat istihsan al-khawd fi 'ilm al-kalam* (Hyderabad: Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmaniyya, 1399/1979), whose authorship is ascribed to Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari. Although this ascription to Ash'ari is probably not authentic, the book is a scholarly work that is representative of the madrasa academic community.

[43] Muslih al-Din al-Kastali, Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani, and al-Nasafi, *Hashiyat al-kastali 'ala sharh al-'aqa'id al-nasafiyya* (Istanbul, 1308/1890), 17.

[44] Al-Sharif al-Jurjani, *Sharh al-mawaqif* (Cairo: Matba'a al-Sa'ada, 1325/1908; facsimile copy published in Qom, n.d.), 1:40.

They then made any knowledge of this description a part of their science and demonstrated how proper reflection on that knowledge took one to revelation. The philosophical sciences represented the totality of academic knowledge at that time and their incorporation into *kalam* reflected the breadth of the *mutakallimun*'s knowledge. *Kalam* was the bridge between the philosophical and revelatory sciences and was employed extensively in other revelatory sciences, particularly Qur'anic exegesis and legal theory, and it became the interface with which scholars of the revelatory sciences rationally interacted with the intellectual context in which they lived.

4.3.2 *Legal Theory*

The science of legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*) continued from where *kalam* left off: *kalam* rationally demonstrated the existence of God, the genuineness of His messengers, and the certainty of the afterlife; legal theory investigated the divine address (*khitab*) to human beings and their resultant responsibility, rationally demonstrated that the Qur'an, Sunna, scholarly consensus (*ijma'*), legal analogy (*qiyas*), and other legal proofs were, in fact, indicators of that divine address, and then demonstrated the proper way to use each proof to infer a legal ruling. The combination of logic, *kalam*, and legal theory gave graduates of the madrasa curriculum the ability to take any particular ruling of Sacred Law—that it is obligatory to give 2.5% of one's wealth in charity, for example—and rationally demonstrate that it really was a command that God had addressed us with through a series of logical syllogisms, starting with the scriptural proofs for the legal ruling and then demonstrating the probativeness of those scriptural proofs in general, which would, in turn, require a demonstration of the existence of God and the genuineness of His messengers, all of which would ultimately resolve to the first principles of all rational demonstration as described in the science of logic (see 2.2). Because of this close relationship between legal theory and *kalam*, the scholars who wrote the most advanced textbooks of legal theory were also scholars of *kalam*: in the Ottoman Hanafi tradition, the most advanced textbook of legal theory was Taftazani's *al-Tawdih 'ala al-talwih*, along with its associated glosses.

This merging of *kalam* and legal theory was the overflow of *kalam* into the most closely related sciences of the madrasa curriculum for the sake of its own mission of drawing a rational map of the entire religion. The goal of the science of legal theory itself, however, was not quite the same as the goal of *kalam*; its goal was the formalization of the methods of scriptural interpretation. It drew on a variety of other sciences—the science of logic, the sciences of the Arabic language, the science of hadith criticism, the science of Sacred Law, the science of dialectics, and the science of *kalam*—and merged them all into a coherent whole, the aim of which was to capture the interpretive methods of the entire madrasa academic community with an examination of the evidence that the various interpretive schools used to support their principles of interpretation. It comprised discussions such as how to determine when to interpret scripture literally or figuratively, how to determine when general statements have exceptions and when they do not, how to determine when the counter-implication (*mafhum mukhalafa*) of a statement is intended and when it is not, and how to determine whether an action of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) was done in a legislative capacity or not. The technical vocabulary of the science of legal theory was the language that scholars used to explain the Qur'an and Sunna in the sciences of Qur'anic exegesis and hadith commentary.

Among its most important discussions were the methods of report authentication (*akhbar*), or, in contemporary vocabulary, historical criticism. Methods for grading the reliability of historical reports were the cornerstone of religious reliability. Its discussions of mass-transmission (*tawatur*) and the authentication of non-mass-transmitted reports (*ahad*) formed the theoretical basis for the sciences of the canonical Qur'anic recitations and hadith narration (see 4.1) as well as the historical reliability of Islamic history in general, particularly the biography of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and his Companions. The intellectual consequences of mastering the legal theorists' methods of hadith criticism were very significant. When members of the madrasa academic community studied the biography of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), for example, they were able to rationally discern that what they were reading was historical fact, not pious fabrications, and when they studied the various sects that had appeared in Islamic history, they were able to rationally discern that each of these sects were departures from the original religion that had been brought by the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), preserved by his Companions, and then eventually settled within the madrasa academic community.

But the most important and by far the most complex and intricate sections in the science of legal theory were the discussions on legal analogy (*qiyas*), particularly the ones about the legal causes of the rulings of Sacred Law (*'illa*). These discussions were important for two reasons. The first was that they captured the purpose and philosophy of Sacred Law. The vast majority of the rulings of Sacred Law were dependent on legal causes in whose absence the rulings also disappeared (the legal cause for shortening the daily prayers, for example, was travel and one of the possible legal causes for being able to give someone one's obligatory charity was their poverty) and this dependence on legal causes always comprised a human interest (relief from the hardship of travel in the case of shortening prayers and the alleviation of poverty in the case of obligatory charity). What is significant here is that the rulings were never directly dependent on human interest; their dependence on human interest was always through the mediation of a legal cause, and that legal cause was normally inferred from revealed scripture. Within this interplay between revealed scripture and rationally inferred human interests lay the philosophy of Sacred Law that replaced the philosophical ethics discussed above in 3.2. The origin of this philosophy lay in this section of the science of legal theory and its applications were scattered throughout the books of Sacred Law and elaborated with spiritual insights in dedicated works such as the Shafi'i al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam's (d. 660/1261) *al-Qawa'id al-kubra* or the Hanafi Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bukhari's (d. 546/1151) *Mahasin al-islam*. This deep familiarity with the human interests within submission to the divine not only created a synthesis between revelatory and philosophical ethics but also facilitated an adherence to Sacred Law that came willingly rather than through imposition, and this willingness was only strengthened by the prestige that Sacred Law gained through the prosperity and strength of the Ottomans, who celebrated it from their inception to the time of Süleyman the Magnificent.

The second reason why the discussions on legal analogy were important was that legal inference based on analogy—coupled throughout with the philosophical insights described above—was the basis for extrapolating the commands of the Qur'an and Sunna to new situations that did not exist during the time of revelation. It was these new situations that gave rise to the science of Sacred Law (described below in section 4.4), which was unneeded while the legal questions of Muslim society were simple enough to be directly

addressed by the Qur'an and Sunna, and the emergence of Sacred Law as a science went hand in hand with the proliferation of legal inference based on analogy, which, in turn, led to scholarly disagreement, which, in turn, gave rise to the science of legal theory.[45]

The goal of the science of legal theory was to comprehensively survey the evidence that scholars of Sacred Law used to arrive at their conclusions and to then raise the level of scholarly discussion to the examination of this evidence. The questions that they asked included, for example, "What evidence should a scholar of Sacred Law use and why?"; "What level of confidence do various kinds of evidence give?"; "What should a scholar do when different evidence leads to different conclusions?". What the science of legal theory unveiled, in other words, was that, unlike the conclusions of the science of *kalam*, most of the conclusions of the science of Sacred Law were probabilistic and scholarly disagreement was, hence, inevitable. And, to return to our point of departure, a great percentage of this scholarly disagreement arose from analogical reasoning.

This is why the most complex and intricate discussions of the science of legal theory lay within the section of legal analogy, specifically within those of its subsections that studied the methods of legal cause determination (*masalik al-'illa*) and the methods of legal cause invalidation (*nawaqid al-'illa*), which were so extensively used by scholars of the various legal schools to debate their differences that they gave rise to a science of legal debate known as the science of disputation (*'ilm al-jadal*). This science bore some resemblance to the science of dialectics (see 2.2), but it was not the same: whereas dialectics focused on the proper resolution of debates that could be solved conclusively, disputation focused on debates whose conclusions were always probabilistic and whose methods of inference were primarily based on legal analogy. It studied methods of refuting a proposed legal cause, methods of turning a legal cause against its proponent, methods of demonstrating the inefficacy of a legal cause, methods of demonstrating the absence of the proposed legal cause in the question under discussion, methods of preponderating one possible legal cause over another one, and methods of rebutting all of the above.[46] It was the application of these methods to hundreds of legal cases in written and oral public debates between the scholars of the various legal schools that gave rise to the science of legal theory, its discussions of legal analogy, and the philosophy of Sacred Law.

Legal theory at once facilitated and failed to resolve these complex debates. It facilitated them by providing their vocabulary and theoretical background; it failed to resolve them by bringing to full light their complexity and the probabilistic nature of their conclusions. The madrasa academic community, therefore, quickly came to accept the disagreement of the scholars of Sacred Law as a mercy for the generality of Muslims, who could fulfill the divine command by following any one of them. But they also saw it as a divine plan for bringing academic rigor to the madrasa community and only the best interlocutors—the four Sunni schools of Sacred Law—were considered acceptable for the generality to follow. The active disagreement and debate also ensured that these schools' extrapolation of the Qur'an and Sunna to new situations always met the highest standards of scholarly quality, which brings us to the fourth, final, and most prestigious of the revelatory sciences: Sacred Law.

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[45] This is the standard account within the madrasa tradition of how the sciences of Sacred Law and legal theory arose. See, for example, al-Kastali *et al*., *Hashiyat*, 12.

[46] For one of the best elaborations of this science, see Abu al-Ma'ali 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwayni, *al-Kafiya fi al-jadal* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1420/1999).

4.4 Application

To briefly recap what we have seen so far, the revelatory sciences fell into one of four categories. The purpose of the first category (see 4.1) was to transmit revelation (the sciences of the canonical recitations of the Qur'an and hadith narration); the purpose of the second category (see 4.2) was to understand what the first category transmitted (the sciences of Qur'anic exegesis and hadith understanding); the purpose of the third category (see 4.3) was to rationally demonstrate that what the first category transmitted really was divine revelation (the science of *kalam*) and that what the second category claimed to understand from scripture really was the intent of revelation (the science of legal theory); and the purpose of the fourth category was to apply revelation to human life. This fourth and final category only comprised one science, which was called Sacred Law (*fiqh*).

Sacred Law was the practical upshot of revelation, the purpose of which was to be a "great guidance"[47] for mankind (Qur'an 2:185), to teach them how to live in a way that would make them thrive in this life and then prosper for eternity in the afterlife. The scholars of the four Sunni schools determined the details of this guidance by using the science of legal theory to extrapolate revelation to hundreds of thousands of legal rulings arranged into topics and organized under legal principles (*qawa'id fiqhiyya*) in a way that facilitated a universal grasp of the divine command by someone who had mastered the science, which gave him the ability to determine the legal rulings of situations that scholars before him had not explicitly determined.

The most important textbook of Sacred Law in the Ottoman madrasas was Marghinani's (d. 593/1196) famous *Hidaya*. Sacred Law, as described in the previous section, developed through a competitive process of debate within the madrasa academic community. In the early stages of the madrasa, this debate was between the various legal schools. As the debate between the schools revealed their intellectual strength and acceptability, the debate turned inward within each school and, in the later stages of the madrasa, the legal tradition's academic community divided into four separate communities that debated the disagreements within each school. Just as the debate between the schools ensured that only the best schools would come to be accepted as rigorous enough for the Muslim masses to follow, the debate within each school ensured that only the best positions within them would come to be accepted as rigorous enough for them to follow. That was the dialectic style that the *Hidaya* was written in and the dozens of commentaries that the Ottoman scholars wrote on it reveal that Sacred Law was always alive in the madrasa, as the intra-school debates that it engaged in kept scholars on their toes and ensured that the schools' extrapolation to new situations would always be of the highest quality.[48]

However, more important than the life of Sacred Law in the madrasa was its life in society. The topics of a post-classical madrasa textbook like the *Hidaya* reveal the divine command just as much as they reveal post-classical Ottoman society. A full quarter of the book was dedicated to worship—purification, prayer, zakat, fasting, and Hajj—and the importance of worship that this reflects in Ottoman society is only confirmed by the majestic Ottoman mosques that still dominate the Istanbul skyline. The remaining three-quarters of the book were dedicated to marriage, divorce, financial transactions,

[47] The adjective "great" expresses the rhetorical indication of the word's indefiniteness.

[48] Tashkupri Zada lists the most important commentaries of his time on the *Hidaya* in *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 462 onwards, and the biographies of Ottoman scholars in his *al-Shaqa'iq al-nu'maniyya* reveal that authoring a commentary on the *Hidaya* was considered the mark of scholarly distinction.

government, and the judiciary. The legal details of marriage and divorce reveal a society that was pre-modern in the sense that its public affairs were mostly conducted by men, but at the same time not pre-modern in the sense that they were meticulously regulated by hundreds of legal details that sought to ensure that they always acted to acquire the interests of whomever they might represent. They also reveal a society that promoted marriage, preserved lineage, frowned upon celibacy, and waged war against adultery. The legal details of financial transactions reveal a simple pre-modern economy which transacted with instruments such as the simple sale, partnerships, rental, and hiring contracts; a society in which agriculture was prominent and in which usury was shunned. And the legal details of government and the judiciary reveal a self-regulating society with a highly decentralized government. Just as *kalam* was based on revelation and then overflowed into philosophy in a way that was in harmony with revelation (see 4.3.1), Sacred Law, too, was based on revelation and then overflowed into social conventions in a way that was in harmony with revelation. The textbooks of Sacred Law, hence, comprised two elements: an element that was absolutely prescriptive regardless of social conventions and an element that was prescriptive in view of certain social conventions. Distinguishing between the two is a matter of examining the evidence that the scholars of Sacred Law used to arrive at their conclusions, which was thoroughly documented in their competitive debates.

Perhaps the most prominent example where the prescriptions of Sacred Law were heavily influenced by social conventions was the area of government and politics. The guidance that textbooks of Sacred Law such as the *Hidaya* gave on government was sparse—a handful of criminal punishments and a brief description of judicial procedures. What the institution of the state should look like and how it should be administered were also addressed, but outside these manuals, in books such as Mawardi's (d. 450/1058) *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya*, his *al-Rutba fi talab al-hisba*, Tartushi's (d. 520/1126) *Siraj al-muluk*, and Maliqi's (d. 783/1381) *al-Shuhub al-lami'a fi al-siyasa al-nafi'a*. These books discussed topics such as the appointment of governors and judges, tax collection, military organization, policing, court affairs, and diplomacy, all with the goal of helping the ruler govern well in a way that was consistent with both the general principles of Sacred Law and the prevailing political procedures of the time. It is significant that Tashkupri Zada discusses this genre of Sacred Law under practical philosophy as a replacement for Aristotle's political philosophy, rather than under his section on Sacred Law.[49] Although Sacred Law made good government an obligation on the ruler, it was generally silent on the details of how exactly to govern well. Rulers would involve scholars of Sacred Law in their government, who would acquire a detailed and practical understanding of the exigencies of government in their time, and then use their knowledge of the philosophy of Sacred Law to direct the ruler on how to tweak the political institutions of his time to serve the human interests that Sacred Law came to promote. The reason why they did not discuss postal services, utilities, municipal administration, and parliamentary procedures was not because Sacred Law was against them, but simply because these were not the political conventions of that time.

The involvement of the scholars of Sacred Law at the highest levels of government indicates the prestige that this science enjoyed in the madrasa. It was, in fact, the most prestigious of the revelatory sciences because it did the most to further the careers of the madrasa graduates, and it is to a description of these careers that we will turn to next.

[49] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 289–93.

5.0 The Career of the Madrasa Graduate[50]

The curriculum of the madrasa was designed to prepare its graduates for successful careers as teachers, professors, judges, jurisconsults, and leaders of a society that enshrined religion in its institutions of education, law, and government. Each of these three institutions—education, law, and government—competed for the best madrasa graduates, offering them generous salaries, prestigious offices, and paths for career development. These career paths represent how the madrasa flourished and integrated with the society in which it lived, which, in turn, explain the priorities that were given to the various sciences and the kinds of students that the madrasa sought to educate (see 6.0).

5.1 Education

For centuries after its inception, the madrasa was the most advanced educational institution in the world. Madrasas were independent charitably endowed institutions that provided lodging and stipends to both students and professors. The philanthropist who endowed the madrasa was allowed to stipulate the number of professors and students that his or her endowment would support as well as the sciences that would be taught there for perpetuity.[51] The best and most generously endowed madrasas were normally those that had been established by a sultan, such as the Fatih and Süleymaniye madrasas in Istanbul, where the best scholars taught the best students, who would graduate to occupy the most influential civilian positions in the Ottoman Empire.

The career of the madrasa professor was the most obvious career path for madrasa graduates. With experience, they could rise from a professorship at a lower madrasa to a higher one, as well as acquire multiple professorships at different madrasas at the same time. Education was decentralized and students studying at a particular madrasa did not graduate from the institution, but from the professor with whom they affiliated themselves. This professor would follow the student's education and issue him a teaching license (*ijaza*) on his completion to promote him to the rank of professor within the madrasa academic community. The quality and prestige of a professor was judged by the successful careers of the students who graduated at his hands. The best-endowed madrasas competed to attract the best professors with generous stipends. This competitive process, driven by the social demand for the madrasa graduate and the social value of madrasa-related philanthropy, made the madrasa an educational institution of the highest quality.

The very best graduates were also appointed as private tutors for wealthy and influential people, such as the sultan's children. Lower level graduates worked as Qur'an teachers for children in charitably endowed primary schools, or *kuttab*s, or as preachers or imams in charitably endowed mosques. Imams were responsible not only for leading the prayers, but also for giving sermons and general religious instruction to the masses and for answering their religious questions.

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[50] The sources from which I have gleaned the information in this section include (1) the first book of the *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, (2) the descriptions of the careers of Ottoman scholars in *al-Shaqa'iq al-nu'maniyya*, (3) *Tartib al-'ulum*, and (4) the biography of Mustafa Sabri Effendi, whose life and works are the subject of my forthcoming book: Hamza Karamali, *True Faith: The Ottoman Scholarly Legacy of Mustafa Sabri Effendi* (Abu Dhabi: Kalam Research & Media, forthcoming).

[51] For a useful description of the establishment and maintenance of the madrasa endowment, as well as the influence of the institution of the madrasa on institutions of learning in Europe, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

5.2 Law

Neither the Ottomans nor any of the Muslim dynasties before them had ever been lawgivers in the European absolutist sense of the word.[52] Both the sultan and his citizens understood that Sacred Law was above both of them and that the role of the sultan was not to make law, but to empower the *fuqaha* (the scholars of Sacred Law) to interpret and apply it without political interference. At the height of Ottoman strength during the rule of Süleyman the "Lawgiver", Tashkupri Zada, under the patronage of the sultan, wrote that the duties of the sultan included "[a] appointing a *faqih* in every town that is without a *faqih* to teach people their religion and [b] surrendering the keys of legal judgments to them because none has the right to make legal judgment except God".[53]

The legal institutions of the state thus represented another prestigious career path that madrasa graduates followed. The posts that the graduates occupied included the post of judge (*qadi*) in civilian courts, the post of judge in military courts, and the jurisconsult (mufti) of each. With experience, a judge could rise from a judgeship in a small town to one in a larger city to one in the army. The jurisconsult not only gave his legal opinions to the judge, but also to the masses, who sought his direction on living Sacred Law in their daily lives.

Traditional Islamic society was organized around religious lines using the millet system, which granted religious and legal autonomy to non-Muslim citizens, who would regulate their legal affairs in their own independent courts according to their own laws and customs. But Islamic Sacred Law had the upper hand in the case of legal disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims, which would default to the Muslim courts. This simple arrangement meant that the madrasa graduate had no need to learn any law other than Sacred Law.

5.3 Government

The highest post that a madrasa graduate could rise to was that of *şeyhülislam*. The role of the *şeyhülislam* was to give religious guidance to the sultan as he made political and administrative decisions and to ensure that only the best judges and madrasa professors were appointed throughout the Ottoman lands. As the highest religious authority in the Ottoman Empire, he represented the *fuqaha* at the highest level of government. His official appointment by the sultan was thus a sign of royal deference to the *fuqaha* and of royal commitment to governing according to Sacred Law. The office of *şeyhülislam* comprised many other government posts that were also filled by madrasa graduates under his supervision.

6.0 Madrasa Pedagogy

The madrasa academic community was a centuries-long scholarly tradition with a distinguished history of sophisticated scholarly disagreement over thousands of questions in every science. The goal of the madrasa education was to nurture its students' critical understanding of every science by taking them in stages from its most basic questions to

[52] Meaning, in other words, that they could not create law at whim. The legislative power that they possessed through the right to issue fermans in the *'urfi* sphere of Ottoman law was carefully circumscribed by the *shar'i* sphere of Ottoman law and, in reality, returned to the divine law kept by the *fuqaha*. For a description of the relationship between *'urfi* and *shar'i* aspects of Ottoman law, see Mehmet Akif Ayın, "The Ottoman Legal System", in *History of the Ottoman State, Society and Civilisation*, ed. E. ÐnsanoÐlu, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture [IRCICA], 2001), 1:431–89. For a legal-theoretical analysis of this phenomenon, see my forthcoming book, *True Faith*.

[53] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 290.

its most advanced ones in order to initiate them into the academic debates of the madrasa community. The hope was that the best students would eventually enter these debates as equal participants under the critical gaze of their peers, all in order to move the state of knowledge another step forward. This education was a carefully planned process in which students progressed from one level of difficulty to another and from basic sciences to more complex ones until they reached the level of a "complete scholar" (*kamil*) who had mastered all of the sciences.

The proper order of studying the madrasa sciences, according to Sajiqli Zada, was to begin by memorizing a selection of Arabic vocabulary (students of the Ottoman madrasa would memorize a selection compiled by a scholar called Ibn Farishta), then learn Arabic morphology, then Arabic grammar, then read an introductory summary of the rulings of Sacred Law (such as *Mukhtasar al-quduri*), then logic, then dialectics, then *kalam*, then Arabic rhetoric, then legal theory, then an advanced book of Sacred Law that studied legal rulings with their legal evidence (such as a commentary on the *Hidaya*), then hadith methodology, then hadith narration and understanding, and finally Qur'anic exegesis.[54]

Sciences that were studied earlier were used by sciences that were studied later. Some Arabic vocabulary was a prerequisite for morphology which, in turn, was a prerequisite for grammar, both of which were prerequisites for studying an Arabic-language summary of Sacred Law such as *Mukhtasar al-quduri*. With this summary, students grasped the essential features of their religion as a whole and they were ready to learn how to ground these features in rational demonstration, which they began by studying the structure of argument in the science of logic, then based upon this their study of how to critique an argument in the science of dialectics, and then used each of these sciences to thoroughly examine the rational foundations of tenets of faith in the science of *kalam*. The next step in their education was to place the science of Sacred Law on this rational foundation, which they did by first studying rhetoric, which was a prerequisite for being able to understand the Qur'an as well as the science of legal theory, which drew heavily on its discussions of literal and figurative uses of language as well as its philosophy of language. After rhetoric, they studied legal theory and then Sacred Law based on the science of legal theory, which, in turn was based on everything that came before it. The final stage of their education was to ground all of this in the Qur'an and the Sunna. They began with the Sunna, which was, in fact, not possible to understand without Sacred Law, as most early scholars had organized their hadith works around topics of Sacred Law. After studying hadith, they crowned their studies with the science of Qur'anic exegesis, which was studied in the light of all of the sciences that went before it.

Most sciences were studied through a gradual three-step process, beginning with an introductory teaching text (see 1.0) that taught a selection of basic questions from each chapter of the science to help the student grasp its questions and purposes at a high level. This would be followed by an intermediate-level teaching text that revisited those same questions with the addition of other, more complex, questions and with an introduction to the evidence of each question and the scholarly disagreement that surrounded it. The student would then return a third time to an advanced teaching text with commentaries and glosses and his teacher would engage him in debate until he arrived at a critical understanding of the question through consideration of all of the various possibilities that surrounded it, all in the light of the science of dialectics, as described above in section 2.2.

[54] Sajiqli, *Tartib al-'ulum*, 210.

Rote memorization of teaching texts was frequent and highly encouraged, not for its own sake, but for the sake of achieving the highest level of interdisciplinary critical engagement at the advanced levels of study.

This three-step process was widespread across the Muslim world and described by a variety of historians as the proper method of study, perhaps most notably by Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1405) in his *Muqaddima*.[55] It was, however, possible for bright students to skip the beginner or intermediate stages, although when this was done out of impatience, it was an impediment to learning and Sajiqli Zada frequently cited it as bad educational practice (*su' al-tadbir*) that prevented students from being able to master the Islamic sciences.[56]

Someone who reached this level of mastery in all of the sciences deserved the title of the "completed student", or "complete scholar" (*kamil*), although such graduates were few and the title was often given to someone who had reached an intermediate level in every science. Anyone who completely missed studying even one of these sciences, however, did not deserve the title and was not considered a scholar who had completed his education.[57] The Islamic sciences were all intertwined with each other and missing out on a science left an educational gap in the rest of the sciences. In the words of Ghazali:

> The fifth duty [of proper study] is that a student not neglect any of the praiseworthy religious sciences nor any of its sub-sciences. He should ensure that he studies them all in a way that acquaints him with their goals and purposes. Then, if he later finds time in his life to master a particular science, [he can do so]; otherwise, he should busy himself with completing his study of the most important sciences and familiarizing himself with the rest, for the religious sciences all assist one another and are interrelated to each other.[58]

The study of these sciences was divided into three madrasa stages. The first stage laid the foundations for future study by focusing on the ancillary sciences of language and critical thinking along with a basic instruction in Sacred Law. The intermediate stage was designed to yield graduates who would give general religious guidance, probably as imams and preachers, and focused on the sciences of dialectics, preaching (*wa'z*), rhetoric, *kalam*, and philosophy (*hikma*), with an introduction to Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, and legal theory. The final stage was designed to yield graduates who would be judges, jurisconsults, and professors and focused on Sacred Law and Qur'anic exegesis.[59] It was in the direction of this final and most prestigious stage that the madrasa education inclined, which highlights an important point: the education of the madrasa was designed to produce the religious leaders of Ottoman society; it was not designed to give basic religious knowledge to the masses, nor was it designed to teach women, who did not normally occupy positions of leadership, nor was it designed to give spiritual guidance, each of which we will now examine in turn.

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[55] 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Ma'arif, 1428/2007), 571.

[56] Sajiqli, *Tartib al-'ulum*, 81–2; 140.

[57] Ibid., 217.

[58] Al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, 1:77.

[59] These three stages are described in passing in Shahab Ahmed and Nenad Filipovic, "The Sultan's Syllabus: A Curriculum for the Ottoman Imperial Medreses Prescribed in a Ferman of Qanuni I Suleyman, dated 973 (1565)", *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004): 183–218. It is important to distinguish these three stages of learning from the seven grades of madrasas mentioned in Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age* 1300–1600 (London: Westfield and Nicholson, 1973), 168. The stages of learning are groups of subjects that might be studied in multiple madrasas concentrated in the same geographical location, because madrasas were often dedicated to teaching particular courses that only formed a complete curriculum in combination with courses taught in other madrasas. The grades of madrasas, on the other hand, were rankings of how much a professor who taught a particular kind of course was paid.

7.0 Religious Education Outside the Madrasa

Because it was an institution that prepared its graduates to assume positions of leadership in society, law, and government, the madrasa curriculum did not include subjects such as "An Introduction to Islam", "Successful Islamic Marriage", or the "Islamic Character". In the religious society that the madrasa served, subjects such as these were cultural knowledge that children acquired from their parents, from visiting the mosque five times a day, from living among people who organized their lives around their faith, and, perhaps most importantly, through the simple religious piety that they learned by their affiliation with a Sufi order (see 8.0).

Children would also attend primary schools known as *maktab*s, in which they would learn basic literacy, Qur'anic recitation, and basic religious knowledge that was called *'ilm al-hal*, or "knowledge of the moment", which comprised tenets of faith, rules of purification and prayer, Islamic virtues, and something about the person and life of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace).[60]

There was also an active life of scholarly instruction outside the madrasas—in mosques, homes, and Sufi hospices—where scholars would often teach the Islamic sciences for free (in contrast to the madrasas, where they were paid a stipend) with the goal of spreading religious knowledge in order to help people know and worship God. Because such gatherings had a more clearly religious motive than the madrasa classroom, where the religious motive was often lost behind the more immediate motive of furthering one's career, they tended to focus on sciences that had a direct religious benefit for the lives of the students rather than those that engaged in abstract rational inquiry, sciences such as Qur'anic recitation (*tajwid*) and hadith narration, as well as the reading of general works of practical religion and spirituality, for example, Qadi 'Iyad's (d. 544/1149) *Shifa* or the *Shama'il* of al-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892).

Unlike the madrasas, which normally only accommodated male students, gatherings such as these were widely attended by women and sometimes even taught by them. But because the students and teachers of such gatherings were not professional members of the madrasa academic community, works that they might have authored did not win the same circulation as those authored by prominent madrasa professors. That is why the participation of women in scholarship is most prominently recorded not in the authorship of madrasa teaching texts but in the authorizations of hadith narration.[61]

After the madrasa academic community fell into disrepair in more recent times, it was informal gatherings such as these that preserved its scholarly heritage, which is one of many reasons why the more rational sciences of the madrasa curriculum—logic, dialectics, philosophy, rhetoric, legal theory, and advanced *kalam*—became less widely taught than those sciences with more tangible spiritual benefit, such as the practical aspects of Sacred Law, the science of hadith, and the sciences of Qur'anic recitation, as well as Islamic spirituality itself which, surprisingly for many, was not traditionally part of the madrasa curriculum. It is that science that is the subject of the next section.

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[60] For an accessible and readable translation of a traditional primer on *'ilm al-hal*, see Faraz Rabbani, *The Absolute Essentials of Islam: Faith, Prayer, and the Path of Salvation According to the Hanafi School* (California: White Thread Press, 2004).

[61] Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2013) is an excellent description of this phenomenon.

8.0 Spiritual Sciences

It is, by this point, easy to understand why Ghazali called the scholars of Sacred Law "scholars of this world"[62]—their education prepared them for prestigious careers in law and government rather than for a life of worship. And while, on the other hand, the intellectual sophistication of the sciences of the madrasa gave religion social prestige and gave religious direction within the social and intellectual currents of the time, on the other, the same intellectual sophistication led to pride, arrogance, envy, and a host of other spiritual ailments in the hearts of too many madrasa graduates who sought through their learning the successful career of the religious scholar rather than the pleasure of God. In the analysis of Ghazali, the intellectual sophistication of the Islamic sciences was a body whose soul was pure-hearted religious sincerity and scholars such as these had killed the Islamic sciences with their insincerity. This problem was serious enough in the Ottoman age for Tashkupri Zada to dedicate the entire second half of his *Miftah al-sa'ada* to summarizing Ghazali's *Ihya'*.[63]

He did this, in the tradition of Ghazali before him, by dividing knowledge into two categories: (1) knowledge whose method of acquisition was rational reflection (*nazar*) and (2) knowledge whose method of acquisition was spiritual purification (*tasfiya*). The first comprised all of the sciences of the madrasa that we have described so far. The second comprised four things: (1) knowledge of the inward aspects of worship, such as presence of heart in prayer; (2) knowledge of the inward aspects of interpersonal dealings, such as having good character with one's spouse and friends; (3) knowledge of the blameworthy traits of the heart, such as pride, envy, and rancor; and (4) knowledge of the praiseworthy traits of the hearts, such as repentance, gratitude, and love.

This second category of knowledge—knowledge that was acquired through spiritual purification—was not learned in the madrasa but through personal affiliation with someone of piety, usually a spiritual guide of one of the Sufi orders. The veneration of the Sufis in Ottoman society is well known and when Tashkupri Zada looked back in history to record the lives of the great Ottoman scholars who had preceded him, he made sure to follow his description of the careers of the scholars of the religious sciences (*shari'a*) with "an exposition of the states of the sheikhs of the spiritual path (may Allah increase their lights and sanctify their secrets)".[64] It was normal for even the most distinguished of madrasa scholars to sit with humility before the Sufis, even when they were below them in terms of outward learning. This was, in the words of Ghazali, how things had always been in the early Islamic period:

> The godfearing among the scholars of the outward sciences used to acknowledge the superiority of the scholars of the inward sciences and those who had purified their hearts [*arbab al-qulub*]. Imam Shafi'i (Allah be pleased with him) used to sit before Shayban the shepherd as a child sits in a maktab and ask him, "How should one do such-and-such?". When it was remarked to him, "How can someone of your stature pose questions to this unlearned person [*badawi*]?", he replied, "Verily God has given this great person success in what we have neglected".[65]

One might say that it was by virtue of this veneration that the scholars of the madrasa showed to the Sufis that the latter gained their influence among the masses, or one might say that it was because of the Sufis' regard for the scholars of the madrasa that they gained

[62] Al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, 1:35.
[63] Tashkupri, *Miftah al-sa'ada*, 693–1086.
[64] Tashkupri Zada, *al-Shaqa'iq al-nu'maniyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1395/1975), 5.
[65] Al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, 1:41.

their influence among the masses. Whatever the case may be, the influence of the Sufi orders on the daily lives of the religious, from the sultans all the way down to the simple masses, was unmistakable.

In their capacity as spiritual guides, the Sufis helped people organize their lives around religious devotions, they organized gatherings of divine remembrance (*dhikr*), they counseled husbands and wives through their marriage problems, they helped reconcile disputing parties, they organized charitable efforts, and they taught people how to purify their hearts and character, all so that people would make Allah alone the goal of every aspect of their lives. Their instruction filled the spiritual gap in the madrasas and provided a religious education that was, for most people, far more relevant to their daily religious lives than the rational education of the madrasa.

9.0 Conclusion

This monograph has tried to speak from within the traditional world of the madrasa out to the contemporary post-traditional world, explaining the madrasa and its curriculum, but also explaining the social and intellectual context in which it lived by way of anticipating and removing those misunderstandings that a modern mind would be predisposed to when looking back into the past. It has described the subjects and textbooks of the madrasa curriculum, with particular attention to an explanation of their purpose and to those aspects of each subject that especially deserve our attention today. It has then described the kinds of careers that those subjects prepared their students for, the pedagogy that was employed for teaching them inside the madrasa, the religious education that took place outside the madrasa, and the educational role of the spiritual sciences.

What all of these descriptions seek to reveal is that the academic experience of the madrasa community was a sophisticated preservation of the "pure revelation" of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) in the philosophical and social vocabulary of the pre-modern world. That world no longer exists, the careers that madrasa graduates filled no longer exist, the society that they served no longer exists, the philosophy that they integrated with their sciences no longer exists, and the academic community that collectively examined religious questions also no longer exists. But, the need for a religious education that would help Muslims keep their faith, practice it, and be spiritually changed by it does exist, more now than ever before, and how we use our scholarly heritage to meet this need is the urgent question of our time.

Hamza Karamali

Hamza Karamali earned his BASc and MASc in Computer Engineering at the University of Toronto. He then worked briefly as a software engineer before moving abroad to study the Islamic sciences full time. In private settings with distinguished traditional scholars in Jordan, Kuwait, and the UAE, he read and memorized traditional works in all of the Islamic sciences, with special focus on *kalam*, legal theory *(usul al-fiqh)*, and the Arabic language sciences, after which he completed his BA (Islamic Studies) and MA (Islamic Law and Legal Theory) from the historic and traditional Jamia Nizamiyya seminary in Hyderabad, India. He taught the Islamic sciences online at Qibla.com, then taught advanced Arabic grammar and rhetoric at Qasid Institute, and then served at KRM as a research fellow and Academic Programme Manager for the Islamic Analytic Theology Initiative, conducting research on theological issues that intersect with contemporary philosophy and science, and working with KRM's partners to design educational events and intellectual conversations to bring the *kalam* tradition into conversation with contemporary issues. He now teaches the traditional Islamic sciences online at SeekersHub.org and on the ground in Amman, Jordan, where he lives with his wife and five children.

MONOGRAPH NO. 12

THE MADRASA CURRICULUM IN CONTEXT

BY HAMZA KARAMALI

The traditional madrasa was a global academic community that developed religious sciences such as Sacred Law, kalam, legal theory, Qur'anic exegesis, Arabic grammar, and hadith criticism in conversation with the most advanced philosophical, scientific, social, and political sciences of its time. This monograph describes the subjects, textbooks, pedagogy, and goals of the curriculum of the traditional madrasa, the social functions for which it prepared its graduates, and other kinds of religious education that used to complement it, all in the social and intellectual context of the traditional world in which it lived. The author looks back at how things used be in the past to understand why they were that way, particularly in areas that seem strange or different, in the hope that this monograph can be a stepping stone towards a critical examination of the madrasa tradition in order to bring that tradition into full conversation with our world just as the luminaries of the past brought it into conversation with theirs.

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