PRIMARY EDUCATION UNDER THE MAMLUKKS:  
TWO DOCUMENTS FROM THE HARAM IN JERUSALEM  
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The starting point for these remarks on primary education under the Mamluks was provided by two documents preserved at Jerusalem in the collection of mostly late 14th-century material, commonly known as the Haram documents. The two pieces bear the numbers 3 and 49. The latter has not been published previously but the other, no. 3, has been edited by Kāmil ‘Asālī (JHD I, 195-197). Both pieces concern a Qur’ān school, a maktab, established and funded by a Mamlūk emir in the last third of the 14th century, at all events before the year 780/1378-9.

Qur’ān schools were often endowed institutions, often as one part of a larger complex that could include mosque or madrasa, mausoleum and public fountain in addition to the maktab. It is surprising that Goldziher in his excellent article from early last century on Muslim education makes no mention of waqfs as an economic base for regular primary education (Goldziher 1912). Other schools were private enterprises run by an individual who received fees. The following are examples of private arrangements. Zayn ad-Dīn ʿAbdarrahmān ibn Dī n-Nūn (805-81/1402-76) is said to have undertaken “the education of the children in his home town [Gaza]. Many benefited from him because of the excellence of his instruction” (as-Sahāwī, Daw’ IV, 78). A certain Ibn ʿaṣ-Ṣahrūr (born 762/1361, died after 830/1426) “was a tutor of young children (muʿaddib al-ātšā) at the entrance to the Friday mosque of Baalbek” (as-Sahāwī, Daw’ IX, 4, no. 18). In Cairo a Mālikī scholar, who was a well-known reciter of the Qur’ān, earned his living by his reciting and by instructing children (taʿdīb al-ātšā). His son, showing career continuity, “collaborated with his father in instructing children in the Qur’ān”1. Of course, it is not always clear whether these examples refer to the teaching of groups gathered in some location or whether the teachers were privately hired and brought into a particular domestic setting. The latter could be the case, as is shown by as-Sahāwī’s report that a Muḥammad ibn Muhammad ibn ʿAbdarrāhmān “brought al-Biqāʾī to his house to instruct his children in the Qur’ān”2. The scholar al-Biqāʾī’s own ṭārīq鸵 states that he earned his living “from notary work ...., as a copyist and from teaching children” (as-Sahāwī, Daw’ I, 102). Similarly, in what was plainly a private arrangement, another ʿālim had a special connection with the Emir Qīḥmas because he gave

1 See as-Sahāwī, Daw’ I, 99; IV, 261.

2 as-Sahāwī, Daw’ IX, 91 (no. 255). None of the four children had any scholastic success.
Qur'anic instruction to his mamluks (as-Sahawi, Daw' IX, 25). as-Sahawi adds one of his typically sour comments concerning this 'alim, that "he was wise in the ways of the world, taking an interest in the rich and influential, acting as their teacher, even if they were not bright."

From soundings in as-Sahawi's biographical dictionary, I would hazard the opinion that the overwhelming majority of the people who merit an entry within it received their earliest education in a private context, either within their own families, from a father or an uncle or other relation, or from individual private tutors. The entries fall into a pattern. It is common to read that X was born in Y at such-and-such a date and studied the Qur'an under so-and-so, frequently a relative. Never, as far as I can see, is "in such-and-such a maktab" added. It is also true that of those listed by as-Sahawi very few seem to have had a career as an elementary schoolmaster (mu'allim or faqih).

Perhaps the preponderance of private schooling in as-Sahawi's record is only to be expected because the endowed maktabs, which were by their very nature charitable institutions, expressly targeted orphans, by presumption the needy members of society. Nevertheless, that social classes did meet, if not in the endowed schools then at least in some private ones, can be inferred from the continuing use that theoretical writings made of hadith material which urged the equitable treatment of rich and poor students. A good example of this stress on equal treatment for rich and poor students is found in the writings of the 14th-century Ibn al-Hagg (Madhbal II, 94, ll. 25 ff). It is also worth recalling that the historian of Jerusalem, Muqir ad-Din al-Ulaymi, tells us that, after having had a private tutor at the age of six, by the age of ten he was studying the Qur'an in a maktab at the Bab an-Nazar (al-Ulaymi, Uns II, 188, 237).

Inevitably more is known about the higher-profile endowed schools, which were founded throughout the Mamluk state. Schools were established by sultans, emirs, administrators and merchants. Our knowledge of them comes from literary sources and more rarely from the details of the original endowment documents, the waqfiyas. Typically the appointed teachers received a monthly salary (g majkiyya), a daily bread ration and a set of clothes in winter and summer. The orphan pupils also received a daily bread ration and not infrequently some maintenance money. There were also other benefits distributed at the important annual Muslim festivals.

Educational theory and the practice of the primary maktabs were not likely to have been much of an issue in the Mamluk period. There was a general agreement that the syllabus should concentrate on a basic literacy and numeracy and the memorisation of the Qur'an. It is true that in Ibn Haldun one does find a discussion about the practices of different parts of the Islamic world, dealing with the question of to what extent a concentration on, or primacy accorded to, the study of the Qur'an was desirable and whether it was a sounder practice to start pupils on other subjects so that, for instance, they might gain a solid knowledge of literary Arabic before embarking on the Qur'an (Ibn Haldun, Muqaddima 1038-1044; Rosenthal 1958: III, 300-
A much commoner attitude is likely to have been that expressed by as-Subkī. When dealing with what is proper practice for a Qur’ān-school teacher (there called mu’allim al-kuttāb) he wrote: “It is right for a teacher of the young not to teach them anything before the Qur’ān, and then after that the hadīth of the Prophet. He should not discuss matters of belief (‘aqā’id) with them, but put these aside until they are properly fit for them” (as-Subkī, Mu’īd 185). The original waqfīyya of Sultan an-Nāṣir Hasan lays down that in the maktāb attached to his foundation the teacher (mu’ad-dib) should teach the orphans “what they can manage to learn of the Noble Qur’ān and instruct them in what they are able to learn of the Arabic script and alphabet (mā yahtamli‘ina ta’allumahu min al-haṭṭ al-‘arabī wa-hiğā’ahu)” (Haarmann 1980:45, ll. 582 ff).

The two works of hisba which are relevant in terms of place and time, those of aš-Sayzari (late 13th century) and Ibn al-Uhuwwa (died 729/1329), follow the same broad lines when dealing with the qualifications and practice of a schoolmaster. Instruction should begin with the short sûras of the Qur’ān, writing and arithmetic are specified but also approved poetry and good examples of prose composition are included in the ideal syllabus. Gentle treatment of pupils and moderate punishment for misdemeanours are recommended and both authors stress the need for irreproachable morality on the part of the teacher. Indeed, Ibn al-Uhuwwa states that it is preferable that he be married. Sultan Farağ’s waqf document actually requires that the schoolmaster appointed should be married and also demands kind and gentle treatment, although I doubt that the acceptable chastisement would meet the approval of a modern school inspector.

In comparison with grand royal foundations and those of emirs in Cairo the maktāb which features in Ḥaram document no. 49 was a minor affair. However, I know of no other document which puts one in touch with a modest provincial foundation, many examples of which existed perhaps in the smaller towns of Egypt and Syria. This document is a statement of account (dated 14 Rabi‘ II, 781/30 July, 1379) for a maktāb in Jerusalem that was established by a certain Emir Fāhr ad-Dīn Iyās al-Manṣūrī. No information about this emir’s career is available. At the date of the document he was clearly still living but the business connected with the administration of his educational endowment was transacted on his behalf by his dawdār, named Sayf ad-Dīn Aqtimur. The income of the school derived from the revenue of the village of aṣ-Ṣīr, which had presumably been the property of the emir, in the district of Qāqūn. The dawdār Aqtimur, according to the account, had been responsible for delivering the cash that had been realised from the produce of the village. By the 16th

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3 The text of the waqfīyya is quoted in Ibn Hābil, Taṣkīra III, 385-449. This passage is on p. 433.
4 See aš-Sayzari, Niḥāya 103-105; Ibn al-Uhuwwa, Ma‘ālim 170-172; Haarmann 1980:45, ll. 583-591.
century there were no waqf lands at as-Sir according to the list of the waqfāf of Palestine in an Ottoman Tabrīz defter. Indeed by that date it was imperial pādišāhi land according to Hütteroth and Abdulfattah’s study. Thus the waqf of the Emir Iyās had failed or been suppressed some time earlier.  

The resources of the school also included the rents of at least four shops in Jerusalem and a house (dār). The total income for the period in question was 1134 3/4 dirhams. However, it is not clear what period was involved. The rent for some shops and the house is said to have been overdue and for two other shops all that is said is “up to the end of the month Rabi‘ II of the year 781” without saying for what period of time before.

After the statement of the receipts there follow details of the expenditure, paid out in the dawādār’s presence. The main recipient was the teacher, Burhān ad-Din Ibrāhīm ibn Rizq Allāh an-Nāṣirī, who features as a rather humble ‘ālim in a large number of varied Haram documents but is totally unknown in other written records. He received 348 dirhams “up to the end of the year 780 [1378-9]”. In Haram document no. 3 (see below) his salary is specified as 30 per month, which, broadly speaking, comes to the same annual total. For the sake of comparison, the two waqf documents of Sultan Hasan (dated 760/1359 and 761/1360) assigned 60 dirhams monthly to two teachers (later increased to 100 dirhams for each of four teachers). Two assistants (‘arifūs) with 40 dirhams monthly were also increased in number to four.

In this present document thirteen “orphans” (all male) are listed who, for the preceding year 780, received sums that range from 87 to 10 dirhams. The average is just short of 48. These sums are for their general maintenance, mostly, one assumes, for clothing. Their free education is covered by the salary paid to the schoolmaster. Again for comparative purposes one finds that the maktab as-sabil in Sultan Hasan’s foundation originally catered for 100 orphans. The sultan’s second waqfiyya increased this number to 200. Each orphan received each month 30 dirhams (expressly for their maintenance [ṣafāqa] and their clothing [kiswā], the same sum as the teacher in the emir’s Jerusalem school. If a pupil “completed the Qur’ān” (ḥatam al-Qur’ān), he and his teacher received 50 dirhams each.

On the verso of the document six other persons were named with generally lesser sums for each (on average about 20 dirhams) “up to the end of Rabi‘ II 781”, the month the document was drawn up. There is a discontinuity in the listing and I take these persons to be other personnel of the school. One appears to be called Muḥam-

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5 Iṣ̄furī & at-Tamīmī 1982. For maktabs listed there, see p. 46, (schools in Jerusalem and Gaza, each for 10 orphans, founded by Maḏgak, waqf dated 771/1369-70); p. 17 (a school for 10 orphans, waqf dated 799/1396-7. The founder was T.m.s.n.k (? al-Ḥusaynī according to the editors. The reading is more than doubtful and one might expect a final -bak); p. 53 (a school for “children and orphans” founded by Qādi ʿAbdul-Ḥamīd Cēlebi ibn Naṣūḥ near the Bāb as-Silsila in Jerusalem, waqf dated 952/1545). See also Hütteroth & Abdulfattah 1977:125; as-Sir is listed as P5 in the liwā of Nablus, nāhiya of Ġabal Śami.
mad ibn Muḥammad al-Muʿallim (perhaps an assistant teacher?). Then other items of expenditure are listed, for notary services (witnessing etc.), for money changing and for a muḥandis. On the slender evidence of this latter term I assume that the school was in its own dedicated building which had come to require some maintenance. There are also items for mats (buṣur) for the school, for a water storage jar (zīr)\(^6\) and other vessels for the orphans, and most interestingly for the cost of ink and pens (expressly "for the orphans") and for paper (fourteen dirhams). No tablets or boards are mentioned. In the details of Sultan Farağ ibn Barqūq's waqf for his mosque just outside the Zuwayla Gate it is clear that the orphan pupils of the charity school it contained had to supply their own ink, writing tablets and ink-wells out of the monthly ten dirham fulūs they received for their personal expenses\(^7\). On the other hand, for the maktab in Sultan Hasan's complex, the waqf foundation was to purchase "whatever mats the orphans needed to sit on ... and tablets (alwāḥ), ink, pen boxes and pens and to provide the sweet water they need for drinking and washing their tablets." In the school within the mosque of the Emir Sargitmiṣ (his waqf-iyyā is dated 757/1356) the overseer (nāṣir) was also responsible for buying such items needed by the pupils from waqf funds (Ali 1965:153).

The total expenditure of the Jerusalem school is stated to equal the income (1134 3/4 dirhams). The total monthly expenditure for the personnel alone in Sultan Ḥasan's school was over 6,500. The figures are here given in the Mamlūk style siyāqa numerals. The difficulties they present may explain why the expenses can only be made to total 1134 dirhams (three quarters short). The fractions could easily have been misunderstood. All the figures must remain doubtful.

Haram no. 3 is closely associated with the other document. It contains an order of the same dawādār Sayf ad-Dīn Aqtīmur, appointing Burḥān ad-Dīn an-Nāṣiri as faqīḥ of the Emir Iyās's maktab\(^8\). One should say "re-appointing", as the order is dated 25 Rabi‘ II, 781/10 August, 1379, that is, just a few days after the statement of account. Burḥān ad-Dīn had clearly been functioning as teacher through the previous year. Does this mean that the post was "un-tenured" and subject to review? At all events it argues for a certain strict control by the founder exercised through his dawādār. The salary is specified as 30 dirhams per month, which is in line with the 346 dirhams received by Burḥān ad-Dīn for the preceding year 780. Permission is given for his salary to be drawn from the rents received from the Jerusalem property,

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\(^6\) Bagader (1984:54) mentions the zīr, "a cool water container with glasses for the children to drink".

\(^7\) See Haarmann 1980:46. In an early 18th-century charity school in my own village of Eynsham in England the teacher had to supply such consumables out of his annual salary of ten pounds.

\(^8\) Published by Kāmil ‘Asali (JHD) but with a serious error in line 7 of the recto, where an yaktub al-maqarr al-karim is read instead of the correct faqīḥ maktab al-maqarr etc. At the beginning of l. 8 read allātī labhū rather than al-baltīya.
which might have been due monthly. Thus his salary should henceforward be paid monthly, more desirable than waiting for a lump sum at the end of the year! In addition Burhān ad-Din as teacher is given responsibility for the management of the waqf properties in Jerusalem, to fix the rentals annually. This new arrangement is to be in force with effect from the beginning of the month, Rabī‘ II (781) and the authority of his predecessor, presumably for the management of the waqf’s as distinct from the teaching, is accordingly cancelled.

Haram document no.49
19.5 x 28.5 cm. See Little 1984:348.
The document was folded three times vertically and twice laterally. The final text on the far left of the verso probably served as identification of the contents.

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إ أحمد بن البيطار إلى آخر شهر ربيع الآخر سنة 781

إ حسن حصر للمكتب
إ حسن خبر وإقلاع للأيتام
إ زبير وجرتين للأيتام
إ أجرية مهندسة
إ زبير ورق
إ أجرية شهود

أ حسن حصر للأيتام
أ ناصر الساع إلى آخر سنة 781

Witnesses from right to left:

أ حضرت الصروف المذكور والآمر على ما شرح فيه بطانة كتبه أحمد بن محمد بن خليل
أ حضرت ذلك والآمر على ما نص وشرح فيه بطانة كتبه أبو بكر بن محمد بن إبراهيم بن رزق الله

On far left:

أ ورقية مبزكة بما صرف عن الأيتام بمكتبة الأمير
أ العالي النخير إياض المنصور بالقديس الشريف
أ أعز الله نصره بتاريخ رابع عشر ربيع الآخر سنة أصحابين وثمانين وسبع وأربع

ان شاء الله
الحمد لله وحده وحده وحده على سيدتنا محمد وله وصحته وسلمه
حسبنا الله تعالى ونعم الوكيل

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REFERENCES

A. Primary sources


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B. Secondary sources


