EDUCATION OF THE FIRST MUSLIM COMMUNITY

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ISSN (P):2708-6577
ISSN (E):2709-6157

Abstract
The background of 'Islamic education' as all Islamic traditions can be found dating back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. To comprehend the origin of 'Islamic education', the change from the pre-Islamic instruction in Arabia to the commencement of Islamic education with the arrival of the revelation will be explained and described. Subsequently, the educational establishments that could loosely be labeled as 'schools', founded by the Prophet in Makkah and Madinah, and the two educational methods introduced by him, will be covered. This paper will end with a critical analysis of the period.
Keywords*: Education, Muslim, Prophet, Educational methods*

PRE-ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION

Previous to the revelation to Muhammad ﷺ, the Arabs in general did not have a literary education. According to Ibn Khaldun it is a fact that the Arabs had no art or science in Arabia, thus they could not have developed in various sciences.[1] However, it is important not to write off the Arabs of the pre-Islamic period as being ignorant and foolish, even though, with regards to religious and social attitudes, their period has been dubbed as 'the period of ignorance'. According to various historical sources they did in fact have a form of education or rather it can be argued that they were instructed. Just like the Spartans of ancient Greece, the Arab concept of instruction was based upon the training of youths of a certain background to become warriors or tradesmen, however not as ideal citizens of a polis but as ideal members of individual tribes.[2] In the Arabian Peninsula, that would refer to the training of a man to become a certain Arab warrior or a tradesman with eloquent Arabic on his tongue. In the early age of a child's life, he/she would be given to foster parents in the desert, because it was healthier for them than the city[3]. Another explanation given by Martin Lings is that the children would learn to become strong by the surroundings and would acquire the eloquence of pure Arabic. The example can be given of Prophet Muhammad himself, who was sent to the desert in his early age to foster parents.[4] According to another source, Muhammad's ﷺ uncles put him through good military training and he became a skilled archer and a competent swordsman and wrestler.[5] It can be presumed that most Arabs were trained in such a way to different degrees, since the lifestyle required a strict Arab warrior's life and/or ability to trade. Another quality that brought honour and prestige to people in this society was an eloquent Arabic language and a talent for poetry. According to Ibn Khaldun the Arabs before the advent of Islam had only poetry as a craft and no other sciences. Thus, Arabic poetry became the instrument to distinguish the individual as a noble and *'educated'* man of the desert. As Ibn Khaldun states,

> "The Arabs appreciated poetry very highly. It was distinguished in their speech through a certain nobility, because it alone possessed harmony. They made poetry the archive of their history, their wisdom, their nobility and the touchstone of their natural gift for expressing themselves correctly, choosing the best methods of expression".[6]

In this way the Arabs included the science of genealogy (*ʿilm al-Ansab*), and the tales of the Arab battles (*Ayyam al-ʿArab*) in their poetry.[7]

PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA: THE EDUCATION OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Even though the pre-Islamic Arabs of Hijaz were limited in their education, there must have been some communities in the Arabian peninsula who, due to their historical contact with other civilizations, must have borrowed some ideas connected with education. In fact, there were three other pre-Islamic Arab communities that distinguished themselves from the rest of the Arabs by their contacts. These were the Lakhmids of Hirah (present day Iraq), whose rulers were often the vassals of the Persian throne, the Ghassanids of Huran (in present day Syria) whose kingdom was a satellite of Byzantium and the land of the Yemenites which was always a prize that was fought over by both Abyssinia and Persia.[8] Although these nations were less fortunate politically than their neighbours in respect of independence, their contact with other civilizations enabled them to boast a literary education. Thus, it is possible to come across Christian Arabs in these three communities who were educated through an educational system. Charles Cutler Torrey argues that certain Christians who resided along the northern borders of Arabia in the sixth and seventh centuries wrote their thoughts down in Syriac and some of these have been found preserved.[9] From this information we can deduce that some Christian Arabs could read and write Syriac. According to Torrey in his book *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*[10] the Jews of Pre-Islamic Arabia lived in certain cities including Yathrib (later to be the city of the Prophet), were educated in the Torah and had a Jewish cultural life. Nevertheless, they had accustomed themselves to an Arab tribal system and evidently spoke the Arabic language.[11] In addition, in his book *Futuh al-Buldan*, Baladhuri during the 9th century wrote that according to his sources, Jews taught some of the Arabs of Madinah to read and write.[12] However, this teaching seems to have been a bare minimum since, according to the *Tabaqat* of Ibn Sʿad, only nine people of Madinah knew the art of literacy before the arrival of the Prophet.[13] Hence, there is no doubt that the majority of the Arabs confined themselves to their personal religious and social customs and had very little educational contact with either the Jews or the Christians. In addition, it is important to note that both the Jews and the Christians had a closed education system, which was either Jewish or Christian by root and this education/instruction did not penetrate outside their circles to include Pagan Arabs. Thus, the Arabs of the peninsula had minimum contact with their neighbours and even less with regards to educational matter.

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE IN THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

It is important to understand the difference between the instruction of the pre-Islamic era and the new style of education after Islam. This does not denote that after the spread of Islam the Arabs became masters in the literary *Fussah* Arabic and learnt all the sciences and arts *en masse.* Yet, Islam signifies the focal turning point in their philosophy of life with Islamic education at the fore point. The Qur'an without doubt was historically the first literary Arabic book found in Arabia and the raison d'être for the change in the 7th century across most of the known world.[14] Thus, everything started to change in Arabia after the first time the Prophet Muhammad came down from the mountain with his first revelation from Allah. In fact one may argue that the first revelation was the first step for Muslims in education.[15] Allah states in the Qur'an, "Read in the name of thy Lord who created, created human out of a clot of congealed blood. Read! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful, He Who taught you by the pen, taught human what he knew not."[16] Consequently, the first step in Islam was a command to read and the second instruction was to use the pen to write. In the next 23 years of the Prophet's ﷺ life, God revealed in the Qur'an at least twenty ayahs concerning knowledge and its importance for humankind.[17] Some examples of these are; "but say,

oh my Lord increase me in knowledge"[18] and "of knowledge it is little that is communicated to you."[19] These ayahs seem at first to be contradictory, but by looking closely at the various verses it is conclusive that they are not contradictory but rather complement each other. When these verses are combined they sum up the Muslim's duty to seek knowledge through reading, writing, learning and supplicating to God for increase in one's knowledge but with the belief that Absolute knowledge lies with Allah alone.

The Qur'an and Hadith did, however, not simply specify education as an imparting of knowledge. As mentioned earlier, in the introduction, scholars with hindsight ascertain that both the Qur'an and Hadith together mentioned '*tarbyah'*, i.e. to nurture the student, *'ta^{c}lim',* i.e. to impart knowledge and *'ta^{c}dib'*, i.e. to discipline the mind, body and soul as the three main concepts that describe Islamic education.[20] There are numerous examples of the importance given to the spiritual, mental and physical aspects of life in the example of the Prophet Muhammad. An example of learning etiquette and manners is demonstrated in the examples given by the book '*minhaj al-Muslim'* which relates both verses of Qur'an and Hadith mentioning the correct etiquette towards God, the Messengers, oneself, community, parents, children, siblings and manners of eating, inviting, attending a gathering, traveling and even sleeping. The Prophet taught his companions to eat together, "Eat your food together, for you will thereby be blessed in it"[21] and he said to one youth when eating "oh young man, mention the name of Allah, eat with your right hand and eat from what is close to you."[22] Furthermore, all the learning and teaching of rituals in Islam were specifically mentioned by the Prophet to have spiritual as well as moral and physical benefits. According to Al-Jaz'iry the aspect of physical education in Islam is an aid in the prevalence of truth. He seems to conclude from some verses of Hadith and Qur'an that athletics and sports are practiced only in order to become strong so as to be able to fight in the way of God (*fi sabilillah)* and to reach piety and awareness of God (*taqwa).* This seems to contradict the general understanding that all activities in Islam, as long as they are lawful, make a person come closer to God. Therefore, the explanation given by Al-Jaz'iry seems to be an overly simplistic comprehension of physical education. The question arises as to how one can explain issues such as games and play for children and adults in this debate? In numerous narratives of the Prophet's life are found descriptions of him racing with his wife Aiysha, playing with children and encouraging sports for the sake of amusement and for fitness.[23] For adults the sports such as archery and riding seemed indeed to be connected to defending the Islamic city state; it was also encouraged as a sport in the time of peace. Furthermore, Al-Jaz'iry points to only three sports, i.e. archery, racing horses and racing camels as being permissible as sports which can put up a guaranteed prize. He bases this conclusion on one Hadith that is not identified in its context but on a literal understanding. Accordingly, other sports are not eligible for guaranteed prizes based on an understanding that only these three sports have an effect on *Jihad*. This is, of course, irrational, for such sports as wrestling, swimming, racing with sea boats, and lifting weights, etcetera, can all contribute to a persons physical strength and abilities needed in any armed conflict. Conclusively, all games and sports in view of the Qur'anic teaching and the Prophet's actions point towards achieving good health of the person.

SCHOOLS IN MAKKAH

It is an interesting question: did any school or private education exist whereby people were taught to read, write and learn various sciences during the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ stay at Makkah? According to most sources the Muslims stayed at Makkah for 13 years from the first revelation until the emigration to Madinah.[24] Did the Prophet ﷺ encourage education in Makkah in those 13 years? The answer to this question is in twofold, first of all, the activities of the Muslims based upon memorizing the Qur'an,

understanding the Qur'an and living in accordance with the revelations which were being revealed at that time. The Prophet was transforming the Arab nomads into becoming reflective people who believed in the oneness of God. As W. M. Watt points out, in the Makkan period the basic theological conception of Islam, like One God, the Last day, Prophets, Paradise and Hell had been fully developed, however it was in Madinah that the C*Umma* with the social structure would be built-up through revelation.[25] Secondly, the political situation of Makkah at this time would not have allowed Muhammad ﷺ to establish nor to encourage public education (schools/institutions for study). When the Prophet ﷺ first brought the Message to the Makkans they did not take him as a serious opponent to their way of life. However, this attitude changed drastically when people started increasingly to convert to Islam. Muslims began to be persecuted by the Makkans, and it lasted until the Muslims immigrated to Madinah. Looking at the sources concerning both the lives of the Prophet and the Muslims in Makkah it is evident why he did not establish an open institution of education at this stage. However, there are many sources that point to the house of al-Arqam in Makkahnear the foothills of the Saffah Mountain as the first seat of Islamic learning. Arqam bin Abu Arqam[26] was one of the Prophet's companions in Makkah and his house was used by the Prophet to teach the followers of Islam about their new religion. [27] This learning was carried out in secret and the instructions were basic in comparison to what was to be taught in Madinah. The reason for the teachings to be basic was related to the fact that most of the Qur'an, which was revealed at Makkah, was related to faith and belief and not a social structure. Thus, the change of Muslims in Makkah with reference to the educational sphere was the commitment to the memorization of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and living in harmony with the new Message of Islam. However, it should also be mentioned that the Prophet took a lot of care to discipline the body, soul and spirit of the Muslims in addition to the imparting of knowledge. Numerous Hadith can be found concerning the manners of Muslims, the etiquette for various situations, the importance of good diet, physical training, and many more issues related to everyday life. According to Ahmad Munir-ud-Din the starting point of Islamic education by Muhammad was "in his capacity as the Prophet of God" to teach the new Muslims the principles of Islam, the ritual of prayer and the Divine revelation.[28] According to the sources, Dar ul-Arqam was the school for all Islamic learning in Makkah for the early years of the revelation. Accordingly, Umar Ibn Al-Khattab was the last to embrace Islam at the doors of Dar ul-Arqam during the sixth year of *Hijrah*. Hence, it is possible from most of the historical evidence to assume that this school was used for three years before the Boycott of Banu Hashim, when it was ultimately abandoned. It is in Madinah that the first Muslim state was created and therefore it was here that the revelations about the social structures of Islam were revealed. Marshall G. S. Hodgson argues that in Madinah the Qur'anic messages started to become more related to the community, he states, "As the Muslim community developed, the character of the Qur'anic messages altered. The Qur'an served at once as the inspiration of Muslim life. It was filled with repeated exhortations to support the community efforts."[29] Zakaria Bashier states regarding the Qur'an's relationship with Madinah that, "Insofar as the Qur'an was the overriding pre-occupation and concern of Madinah, the epithet Qur'anic village is most apt."[30] Hence, In Madinah the first Muslim environment was created.

SCHOOLS IN MADINAH

According to William Muir the first six months of Muhammad's residence in Madinah were occupied with the construction of the mosque and houses for the emigrants. He mentions the mosque as a building with a prayer hall and doors leading to the apartments of his wives. He additionally points out, "to the north of the building the ground was open. On that side a place was appropriated for the poorer followers of Muhammad, who had no home of their own. They slept in the mosque and had a

sheltered bench or pavement outside."[31] According to Victor Danner these people were the *ahl al-Suffah* 'the people of the Veranda', who led a contemplative and saintly existence in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah."[32] However, Hamidullah argues that the *Suffah* was not simply used as a place for poorer Muslims to sleep at night neither simply for those who wanted to lead a saintly existence. He maintains that in addition this place was used as a place of study. It may be sufficient to argue that the *Suffah* was in fact a blueprint for the future student's dormitory in the Islamic history of education. The *Bait ul-mal*, the Prophet's household and those in Madinah who were wealthy provided the *Suffah* with food and other necessities. Additionally, the people of *Suffah* would also work to be able to provide for themselves while studying.[33] At this *Suffah* there were also lessons in poetry, and a specific day was chosen for the Prophet himself to teach the women of Madinah separately. It is also obvious from the Hadith collection that the Prophet taught his followers about spiritual, physical and religious knowledge. Furthermore, in a short time Islamic education started to be taught in the other mosques of Madinah. According to Hamidullah, there were at least nine mosques, which had study circles[34] in Madinah at the Prophet's time that served in providing education for various inhabitants of Madinah.[35] The Prophet himself ordered the various mosques of Madinah to open their own study-circles so that the central mosque would not be overcrowded. In addition, he believed that all the children around the Madinah area should have a mosque close to their vicinity so it could be easy for them to go and receive their education.[36]

THE FIRST METHOD OF EDUCATION (*HALAQAH*)

According to Ghulam Ahmed Harery the education of the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was divided into two different aspects. The first method was based upon education in the mosque of the Prophet at the *Ashab ul-Suffah* in study circles, here the students learnt Islam, i.e. the Qur'an, Sunnah, Shari'ah, poetry and the art of reading and writing.[37] The students who wanted to learn would form a circle around the teacher. These study circles began to be referred to as a *halaqah*. It was named as such because the teacher sat against a wall or a pillar and the students would make a semicircle around him/her. The circle was formed according to rank, thus the most advanced students sat closer to the teacher.[38] This unique educational experience would be a constant phenomenon in the whole history of Islamic education, be it either in a mosque, *kuttab*, *maktab*, or *madrasah.*[39] One of the most famous teachers of writing and reading in the *Suffah* was the companion Ibada Ibn Samat, who in Caliph Umar's time was sent to Palestine to teach the natives the sciences of Islam.[40] He also taught the Qur'an to his students by the request of the Prophet. Ibada Ibn Samat himself reports concerning this matter; "Whenever a person migrated to Madinah, the prophet would assign him to one of us so that we could teach him the Qur'an".[41] Another teacher of reading and writing in the *Suffah* was the companion Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Al-'Asi of Makkah, who was personally requested by the Prophet to teach the people of Madinah.[42] According to the sources the Prophet also requested a certain Shafad bint Abdullah to teach reading and writing to his wife Hafsa. Therefore it is possible that other women in Madinah were also taught to read and write either by her or other Muslims. According to the companion Anas, seventy members of the *Ashab ul-Suffah* would sometimes go to a teacher at night and engage in learning until daylight.[43] Thus, there is evidence that there was a group of teachers in the *Suffah* who taught students the Qur'an, Hadith and literacy. Some historians including Ghuinaima have cited this *Suffah* or the mosque of Madinah as a university.[44] Here it is imperative to state that the *Suffah*, according to the evidence provided above, was a place of learning for all those who had a desire to learn and were able to attend. The *Suffah* was a place of teaching and learning and not of scholarship and scholarly production, which came later in the Islamic history of education. Hence, it cannot be seen as a madrasah/university[45] since its level of organization was more related to a school.

Nevertheless, the mosque of Madinah can be seen as the origin and cornerstone of all Islamic education. H. A Jawad summarizes the status of the *Suffah* in Islamic history as, "In the course of time, the simple pattern of the Prophet's school developed into a comprehensive and coherent educational system, fully integrated into the social and economical way of life.[46] Thus, the Prophet and other leading companions started to teach at the *Suffah.* The sources reveal that the Prophet personally devoted much time to teaching, and he lectured regularly to his companions and followers, who he gathered at the *Suffah* to be instructed in religion and cognate subjects.[47] The Prophet in his lessons introduced the initiative of teaching by repetition. He taught subjects across the board such as manners, ethics, law, spirituality and *tajwid.* According to one of his companions named Anas "Whenever the Prophet said a thing, he would repeat it three times so that people would fully comprehend it from him."[48] In this way he conveyed the notion that teachers should at all times be patient with their students and speak clearly and repeatedly to make them understand their lesson. Another notion of education that the Prophet introduced was that it is imperative to teach people in suitable times and not to have long sessions, in case the students fall prey to boredom and lose all enthusiasm for further learning. As stated by Ibn Mas'ud, "the Prophet used to take care in his teachings by selecting a suitable time, so that we might not get bored."[49] Another concept of education introduced was that a good teacher is the one who starts teaching people simple subjects of knowledge before touching difficult ones.[50] This in itself introduced a moderate education system, which was regulated by good time management, good subject planning and good teaching skills with empathy to the student. There is also evidence in the sources that the Prophet allowed the teaching of poetry (the first non-religious subject besides literacy) at the *Suffah* and allocated certain times specifically for women who wanted to study what he taught. According to a narration by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri, "some women requested the Prophet to fix a day for them as the men were taking all his time. On that he promised them one day for religious lessons and commandments."[51] However, this does not mean that women were not allowed to attend other lessons with the men; it just means that they wanted a specific day for themselves, as they thought the Prophet's time was very limited. According to K. Seeman, the Prophet's main teaching techniques were influenced by pre-Islamic society. It may be argued that certain ideas were indeed the influence of the society he lived in, but when looking at some of his main initiatives in education, there is no doubt that the Prophet was introducing revolutionary ideas in the educational sense. Some of his techniques could not in any case be from the pre-Islamic society; for example, his actions towards giving women the right to learn as equals and his softness to children were explicitly frowned upon by the pre-Islamic traditionists. After the Prophet passed on, his companions continued to teach by applying his techniques, but at the same time, following his example, they developed further techniques of teaching. The companions understood the most important basis of any education system, i.e. that they needed to continue the work of the Prophet by following his example but without subjecting the education system to stagnancy. In the following years, Islamic literature started to become filled with educational theories. For example, the caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab initiated the notion that in addition to religious studies, children should also be taught art subjects such as poetry and history, the social sciences, which guarantee the success of society, and physical education such as horsemanship and swimming.[52] This is one of the few mentions of physical training as a part of Muslim education. It should also be specifically noted that there was no reference to gender, but simply to the inclusive word children. Another companion to continue the Prophet's work in education was Ibn Abbas. He copied the Prophet's idea of suitable time for study and further developed it by stating: "teach only for as long as the students look at you with their eyes fully open, but once students start to turn their eyes away from you their attention has strayed."[53] Ibn Abbas also developed in his advanced teaching classes the notion of free time given to students to do whatever they

wanted between each lecture.[54] The fourth caliph Ali emphasized the importance of debate and review of the student's lessons, to ensure that the student had not forgotten or made a mistake in his/her understanding of the lecture. Ali also stressed the idea of asking questions; he used to state; "knowledge is a treasure, and its keys are the questions asked, so ask questions. As the question is rewarded by its answer, so is the person who asked the question, his teacher, the listener and the friend who stands by."[55]

SECOND METHOD OF EDUCATION (RIHLAH)

The other method of education in Madinah introduced by the Prophet was concerned with those people who came to Madinah from the tribes' resident on the outskirts of Arabia. According to Abdullah Ibn Abbas, an envoy from nearly every tribe of Arabia went to the Prophet ﷺ and enquired about Islam and acquired the knowledge of Islamic sciences from him.[56] These envoys stayed in Madinah for a short time, learning about the different religious sciences of Islam and then they returned to their tribes with this knowledge. One famous example of this is concerning the companion Malik Ibn Hurith, who after learning about Islam was told by the Prophet ﷺ, "Go back to your tribe and teach them of Islam and teach them the prayer as you have seen me pray"[57] There is no doubt that traveling in search of knowledge was an ancient method of education. It is possible to find this tradition in various ancient societies such as Persia, Rome and China. Here it has to be argued that the *rihlah* (traveling for knowledge) was an ancient tradition mostly existent outside the Arabian Peninsula, which started to be used specifically for the acquirement of religious knowledge by the encouragement of the Prophetﷺ. However, this approach to education was due to a socio-geographical situation and not because of a religious commandment. Since there was only one Prophet and his city, every Muslim who desired to learn from the Prophet ﷺ had to visit him personally. Another variation to this method (*rihlah)* was that Muhammad ﷺ himself sent selected people to the areas that had recently converted to Islam to teach them about their new religion.[58] He is known to have taken this action even while he was residing at Makkah, "The Prophet before his migration to Madinah had sent a teacher there to arrange for the education of the Muslims."[59] After the Prophet ﷺ passed on, the companions spread throughout the newly conquered lands. This led to a great deal of traveling for those Muslims who were new to the religion and wished to learn more about it. They would undertake journeys to visit the companions and later on their successors. Thus, by the first century of Islam a number of learned men and women were held in esteem by the Islamic world. Furthermore, those desiring to do *rihlah* were provided with the opportunity to visit the many centers of knowledge, such as Madinah, Kufa, Basra, Damascus and Jerusalem. Eminent scholars such as Abu'l Darda settled at Damascus, with Anas Ibn Malik at Basra, Abu Idris at Emesa, Hudayfa at Kufa and many others staying back in Madinah including Aiysha. All of these companions were seen at mosques giving lectures at *Halaqah,* especially on Hadith.[60] Thus, since traveling for knowledge or being sent to various areas to teach was very limited in pre-Islamic Arabia, this specific method of education can definitely be seen as an innovative method inside the Arabian Peninsula.

PRE-ISLAMIC LITERACY IN ARABIA

At this juncture it has to be pointed out that even if education as a concept is very wide, the modern world very often limits the word 'education' to its basic literate form. This literate education then signifies the modern world's social progress, which is seen in relation to the percentage of literate citizens. According to H.W.F. Saggs, literacy is the highest valued skill in the modern world. He states, "The word 'education' is normally used in the limited sense of literate education; and the percentage of literate citizens has became a yardstick of the social progress for developing countries."[61] In this sense of education, pre-Islamic Arabia had very few people who knew the art of reading and writing. [62] According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, various sources point

out that seventeen individuals of the Quraysh were literate at the time of the conquest of Makkah. One of these seventeen individuals was the famous Caliph Mu'awiyah bin Abu Sufyan, who served as a scribe to the Prophet Muhammadﷺ after the conquest of Makkah.[63] According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, the first written record of Arabic was found in the Christian Temple of Ramm in Sinai in 300 C.E. Muslim tradition names the poet Adi b. Zayd b. Hamad as one of the first people to write Arabic in 500 C.E. He was a Christian of Hirah, although his classical Arabic was not fully Fussah, moreover, the Arabic written language was still in its early evolutionary stages.[64] According to Ibn Khaldun it was the Hymyarite script from the Southern Kingdom that was relocated to Hirah by the family of al-Mundhir. He further states, "From Hirah, the inhabitants of Taif and the Quraysh learned writing."[65] The historians Al-Baladhuri in his book Futuh al-Buldan and Qadamah bin Jaffar in his book al-Kharaj elaborate on the story of how Harb al-Umayyah was taught to write Arabic by Aslam bin Sidrah in Hirah. The story gives an account that Aslam bin Sidrah from Hirah desired to marry Harb's daughter. As her dowry he taught her father the art of writing, in order that he would be able to keep records in trade.[66] Al-Baladhuri and Qadamah bin Jaffar further ascertain that after Harb was taught the art of reading and writing, he passed on this knowledge to his son Abu Sufyan who then taught his son Mu'awiyah. In other words, all sources emphasize that literary Arabic commenced during the time of Harb bin Umayyah, when Muhammadﷺ was a youth in Makkah.[67] In addition, Muhammad Hamidullah maintains that according to Ibn Hajar there were also a certain number of women who were familiar with the art of reading and writing. He specifically mentions Shafad bint Abdullah,[68] who was related to Umar Ibn Al-Khattab and was literate before the Hijrah to Madinah. Therefore, after she moved to Madinah the Prophetﷺ placed her in a shop in the bazaar so that she could use her talent for reading and writing in this context. Hamidullah provides a few examples on the subject of pre-Islamic literary activities in Makkah. These examples include the hanging of written parchments on the wall of the Kaba, containing the best Arabic poetry of the time and the use of writing on the Sahifah, when the Makkans boycotted the family of the Prophet Muhammadﷺ. They wrote the orders concerning this boycott which were: "No one is to give their daughter in marriage to them, neither marry their daughter, nor to buy anything from them or sell them anything nor even to talk to them."[69] This Sahifah was then hung inside the Kaba so that it could be seen as a legal and sacrament boycott.[70] When looking at the various sources it is easily seen that literacy in the pre-Islamic society was confined to the elite circle of Makkah, i.e. the ruling tribe of Quraysh. In addition, as mentioned earlier, there were only nine people of Madinah who are recorded to have known the art of literacy before the arrival of Muhammad.[71] According to the Tabaqat of Ibn Sad these nine individuals were Abu 'Abs, Aws Ibn Khawil, Al Mundhir Ibn Amr, Ubayy Ibn Ka'b, Abdullah Ibn Rawaha, al-Hudayr, Usayd Ibn Hudayr, Sa'd Ibn Ubada and Rafi Ibn Malik.[72] It is important to note that the Hymyarite script was written by separating the letters, therefore, literary Arabic was a very new thing at the time of the Prophet ﷺ and it was rudimentary in its form.[73] Thus, the Mudar Arabs learned it, but did not advance the writing; in fact they seemed to have even learnt it poorly. As Ibn Khaldun states, "Arabic writing at the beginning of Islam was therefore, not of the best quality or of the greatest accuracy and excellence. It was not even of medium quality, because the Arabs possessed the savage desert attitude and were not familiar with crafts."[74] However, there were individuals who lived in Hijaz at the time of Prophet Muhammadﷺ who were educated outside the Arabian Peninsula. These included people such as Salman al-Farsi and Shuaib al-Rumani. All of these companions were educated in their own societies before embracing Islam. In conclusion, the Arabs belonged to a predominantly illiterate society and only a certain number of people, as mentioned above, were familiar with the art of literacy. At this time Arabic writing was deficient and not fully advanced, in contrast with spoken Arabic which was at its peak. Even though written Arabic had started to gain currency

before the time of the Prophet Muhammadﷺ, it was the Wahih that would make literary Arabic an international phenomenon.

LITERACY AFTER THE REVELATION

The Prophet ﷺ wanted all the Muslims to be literate so that his followers could learn and transmit the knowledge of Islam to the future generations. This is conclusive from the many incidents which indicate that the Prophet ﷺ encouraged the Arabs to learn to read and write. Thus, Muslims such as Ali, Ibn Abbas and Abdullah Ibn Amr were influenced by the Prophet to learn to read and write at an early age.[75] It can also be argued that he initiated amongst the Muslims the first science of Islam, which was not religious, i.e. reading and writing. The following examples emphasize this point: after the battle of *Badr* the Prophet proposed to the captives that those who were literate could buy their freedom by teaching ten Muslim children each to read and write.[76] One of the results of this initiative was Zayd Ibn Thabit, who was taught literacy by one of the captives of *Badr* and in his later years became the Prophet's foremost scribe and a great scholar of the Qur'an.[77] At this point the statement of William Muir about this incident has to be examined. He contends that most of the Makkans knew how to read and write, especially those amongst them who were poor. He states, "Some of the poorest Makkan captives taken at *Badr* were offered their release on condition that they could teach a certain number of the ignorant citizens of Madinah to write."[78] From earlier mentions of life before Islam in Arabia it is evident that most Makkans could not read and write, and especially those who were poor. It is also apparent from the way the social system was built before Islam that poor people would not have been given any educational nourishment; as such they would have been at a disadvantage to the nobles in social life. There is no doubt that certain members of the upper class were taught how to read and write, which also included a small number of women.[79] However, there is no historical evidence found that the bulk of the poor of Makkah knew how to read or write. Additionally, Muir has added the word 'poor' for the captives of *Badr*, whereas the Prophet'sﷺ order was explicitly for 'any person' who knew how to read and write to teach ten children. Evidently, if all of them knew how to read and write then he would have simply asked them all to teach ten children each. Muir's *raison d'être* for this contention was to reduce the Prophet's achievement of allowing children from all backgrounds to learn how to read and write, by stating that the poor of Makkah were already literate and thus according to him Muhammad ﷺ would not have done anything unique. Another example of the Prophet's ﷺ initiative to literacy can be seen as early as his entrance to Madinah. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ordered the writing of the constitution of Madinah in the early period of his arrival there;[80] he also sent letters to foreign rulers and made written treaties.[81] Moreover, in the later period of its revelation the Qur'an asks the Muslims to write down trade agreements and marriage certificates: "*Oh you who have attained faith. Whenever you give or take credit for a stated term, set it down in writing."*[82] The ayah also speaks of finding scribes to write the '*aqd* (contracts) for the people, which shows that not everyone had learnt literacy during the Prophet's life time, however, by that time writing was seen as a commendable art to learn and master for all who desired to do so. Another example for the reverence of literacy as an art was that by the end of the Prophet's life he had twenty-four scribes for the Qur'an, including Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali and Zayd Ibn Thabit.[83] Therefore, in the history of *The City of the Prophet*, the emphasis on reading and writing stands as early as the commencement of the city itself alongside the student dormitory, the Constitution of Madinah and various treaties. The art of writing gained so much importance that it began to be utilized in the people's personal and business lives. This also illustrates the importance given to literacy by the Muslims at the early stage of Islamic history. A lot of the Companions after receiving the gift of reading and writing set out to write down the sayings of the Prophet. As a result a number of the companions owned a written collection (*Sahifah)* in the Prophet's lifetime. These included *Sahifah* by companions such as Abdullah Ibn

Amr, Ali Ibn Talib, Jabir Ibn Abdullah, Abu Rafi, Ibn Abbas, Itban Ibn Malik Al-Ansari, Samura Ibn Jundab and Abu Hurayra.[84] However, here it has to be mentioned that according to sources there are a certain number of Hadith that explicitly forbid the writing down of sayings except the Qur'an. The Hadith analyst Ibn Qutayba in his book '*Ta^{c}wil Mukhtalif Al-Hadith'* explains this contradiction away by reasoning that either the prohibitive Hadith belong to an earlier period of the Prophethood and thus are abrogated by later permissions in the Hadith or, alternatively, the prohibition was specifically meant for only those companions who were not proficient in literacy.[85] Historical evidence gives support to Ibn Qutayba's argument concerning the abrogation of the prohibitive Hadith by dating the latest Hadith concerning writing to the episode of Abu Shah. According to the sources, Abu Shah asked the Prophet at the conquest of Makkah if he had the permission to have the Prophet's oration written down.[86] The Prophet consented to this and the oration was written down. There is very little doubt that the episode of Abu Shah postdates the incidents concerning the prohibition of the writing down of Hadith.

At this point it has to be remembered that literacy in Islam was to be a vehicle for the *ta^{c}lim* and through the transmission of knowledge it would become possible to receive *tarbyah* and *ta^{c}dib*. Literacy in itself was never seen as 'education', and the percentage of literate citizens did not stand as a yardstick of social progress. It was the training of a Muslim that was the center of education and in order to obtain this the Muslims needed to be familiar with the art of reading and writing. According to Hamidullah, this is even evident from the earliest time in Madinah, when Muhammad ﷺ started to encourage certain individuals to learn foreign languages. He states that Jews of Madinah used to come to Muhammad ﷺ to argue about religion. The Prophet ﷺ referred to the Torah when dealing with issues of religion, however, the Jews would purposely not translate certain verses of the Torah into Arabic. Once when this happened, Abdullah Ibn Salam who had converted from Judaism to Islam pointed this out. At this occurrence the Prophet ﷺ encouraged Zayd Ibn Thabit to learn Hebrew, which he did. Another example of linguistics being learnt is the companion Abdullah Ibn Amr Ibn al-^{c}As who learnt the Syriac language with encouragement from the Prophet ﷺ in order to understand the Bible.[87] Thus, when Islam came to spread outside Arabia, a certain number of Muslims were quick to educate themselves in foreign languages in the same tradition as their predecessors.

SUMMARY

In conclusion it is vital to comprehend the notion that the only sciences that the Arabs learnt at this point were the religious sciences (poetry being the only exception), since that was all the knowledge they possessed at this time. However, these religious sciences covered topics as wide as law, jurisprudence, worship, trade ethics, manners, Qur'an and Hadith studies, etc. On the other hand these sciences were not categorized at this time and were therefore taught unsystematically under the term 'Islam'. Due to the encouragement of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, certain individuals of the old generation acquired additional linguistic and literary skills while the majority of the youth of Islam encompassed knowledge from both the religious sciences and literacy. Thus, children were in the forefront to be taught memorizing, reading and writing which was used in the context of the Qur'an and in Hadith. The Qur'an tells Muslims that the Prophet ﷺ, "Conveys to you His Messages, he purifies and develops you, he teaches you the law and wisdom, he teaches you what you knew not."[88] This verse demonstrates that the Prophet did not only teach Muslims knowledge but also how to achieve spiritual and physical wellbeing. Hence, the philosophy of the early community was the use of *ta^{c}lim, ta^{c}dib* and *tarbyah,* i.e. learning all the sciences that were available to them, being ethical and moral in all situations, and acting upon the laws laid down by God. It is very important at this juncture to understand that these three specific educational terms did not exist as literary terms used commonly amongst

people at that time. On the other hand, they were to be coined from the Qur'an and Hadith later on by historians and educators who looked back at the earliest era of Islam with hindsight. Thus, *ta^{c}lim, ta^{c}dib* and *tarbyah* existed in Madinah at the Prophet's time purely through physical enactment and not as a written educational theory. When Muhammad ﷺ and the Muslims conquered Makkah in 632 C.E all of Arabia gave their allegiance to the Muslims within a short time.[89] By this time the Prophet ﷺ had introduced two different styles of education in the whole of Arabia; one was the schools or a better term may be study circles (*halaqah)* based in the mosques, where students of all ages met together at various times to learn various religious subjects (including poetry) and literacy from a teacher. The second style of learning was based upon students traveling *(rihlah)* to a known teacher or place, which in this case was the Prophet and his city and here they learned what they required before returning home. Another variation of this second style of learning *(rihlah)* was that the Prophet himself appointed teachers to be sent to various places that needed education. It is thus vital to understand that even if education and learning at this time was centered on the religious sciences, the emphasis of learning in Islam was materially conveyed in the central symbol of the Book, *'Al-Kitab',* i.e. The Qur'an. Thus, even at that time, secular learning was seen as inseparable from religious practice, as can be seen by the example of poetry and literacy being taught in the mosques of Madinah. The knowledge of Islam at that time was thus transcendent in the sense that it combined the secular and religious, the spiritual and the mundane. In addition, it has to be remembered that Muhammad was the Prophet for his followers, thus all his actions were formulated by his Companions and even recorded by them through memory or in a written form. He was therefore, foremost the Prophet for those around him; a man chosen by God who they wanted to copy in all aspects of life, i.e. how to pray, how to eat, how to sleep, and even how to teach and learn. This is what made the Prophet's action in all matters (including education) so highly seized upon by his companions. Ahmed Munir-ud-Din ascertains this view by stating, "It was Muhammad's unique position as a prophet of God, which gave the impetus to achieve his success. The Muslims took everything he said or did seriously. The same was the case in the field of education. His method of teaching and what he taught, even the way he used to sit among people were copied throughout the Muslim history." [90] This whole phenomenon was termed the *Sunnah,* the Way of the Prophet. The education under the Prophet in Makkah and Madinah lasted as long as his Prophethood, which was around 23 years, from 610 to 632 C.E. The history of education in the Prophet's time is a parallel account to the build-up of the first Islamic society. In Makkah the revelation dealt with the central principles of Islam, the Muslims were few in numbers, they were persecuted and for that reason the education was considerably basic for the first 13 years in comparison to the later years. In contrast, in Madinah the education became more advanced because of various factors such as the freedom the Muslims had in their new state, for example to build mosques which included study circles. Thus, revelations became more focused on social structures such as law, ethics and community, and the Prophet could at this point spend considerable time to boost literacy and education openly. Thus, the Prophet became a school in himself who taught the Muslims to take care of their spiritual and physical wellbeing.

In the history of Islamic education the period under the Prophet was the primary stage of education; a 'stage of foundation', and his two methods of education were so influential on the first Islamic community that they have been ever present in the Islamic education up to the present day.



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[7] Munir-ud-din, Ahmed, *Muslim Education and the Scholar's Social Status up to the 5th century Muslim Era, (*Zurich: Verlag Der Islam), 1968, p.31**.**
[8] K. Seeman, Education in Islam; From the Jahiliyyah to Ibn Khaldun, *Muslim World,* **(**Binghamton: State University of New York), Vol. 56, 1966, pp.188-198.
[9] Charles Butler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam, (*New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1933, p. xiv.
[10] Charles Cutler Torrey in this book seems to be trying to convince the reader that Islam is based upon Judaism. He further contends that Muhammad ﷺ somehow got to read and learn from Jewish books given by certain unnamed Rabbis; hence the conclusion that Muhammad ﷺ must have himself written the Qur'an basing it upon Judaism. Nevertheless, his book is much more useful for the detailed information regarding the pre-Islamic period.
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[34] See below.

[35] Muhammad Hamidullah, *Khutabat-e- Bahaawalpoor (Essays of Bahaawalpoor)*, (Islamabad: Idarah Tahqiqat Islami), 1997, pp.202-205
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[44] George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 1981, p.293.
[45] George Makdisi believes that the modern university has nothing to do with what is called the Muslim madrasa. He believes that Muslims did not have universities but colleges, which they called madrasa. The main reason given for this contention is that the university is a corporation, teaches all sciences and has a license to teach, on the other hand Makdisi argues that the Muslim college (madrasa) is a charity trust, is limited to religious studies and law and only the madrasa has *Ijaza.* Thus, he argues that the Modern western university has nothing to do with the Muslim madrasa. I will come back to this later in the thesis when speaking of the first Muslim higher education institute.
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[66] Muhammad Hamidullah, *Khutabah Behaawlapoor*, (Islamabad: Idarah Tahqiqat Islami), 1997, p.298.
[67] Muhammad Hamidullah, *Khutabah Behaawlapoor*, (Islamabad: Idarah Tahqiqat Islami), 1997, p.298.
[68] She is also known to have taught the Prophet's wife the art of reading and writing, as mentioned earlier in this thesis.
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[79] Umar and his sister knew the art of reading and writing according to the famous incident concerning Umar's conversion to Islam. The account describes Umar going to *Dar-Ul Arqam* to kill the Prophet. In his way he meets Nu'aym ibn Abdullah who deters him from his current intention by stating that Umar's own sister has become a Muslim. He immediately turns direction and goes to his sister's house, forcing himself into the house when he hears the reading of the Qur'an. She in fear of him hides the copy of the twentieth surah that she was reading with her husband and Khabbab. Umar hits his sister and feels consumed with shame with once. Thus, his sister challenges him to read the Qur'an and hear its arguments. Hence, Umar then goes to Dar Ul-Arqam to confess the *shahadah* in front of the Prophetﷺ. For more information see: Al-Tabari**,** Ismail K. Poonawala(tr.), *The History of al-Tabari, (*Los Angles: State University of New Press), 1990.
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