

Ideas, Images, and  
Methods of Portrayal  
*Insights into Classical  
Arabic Literature and Islam*

—  
EDITED BY

Sebastian Günther



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## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADVICE FOR TEACHERS: THE 9TH CENTURY MUSLIM SCHOLARS IBN SAHNŪN AND AL-JĀHIZ ON PEDAGOGY AND DIDACTICS\*

Sebastian Günther

*Dedicated to Professor Michael Marmura,  
on the occasion of his 75th birthday, 11 November 2004.*

As Islam was spreading among diverse peoples between the 7th and the 9th century C.E., education came to be recognized by the Muslim community as a proper channel through which the universal and cohesive social order—in the way the Quran commanded it—could be established. This resulted in a rapidly increasing need for accessible and effective formal education at both the primary and higher levels. Interestingly enough, the major educational efforts in the formative period of Islam were made by individual scholars, most of them teachers themselves. In other words, these educational activities were individual in nature and intellectual in expression.

#### 1 *The ādāb al-‘ālim wa-l-muta‘allim literature*

By the 9th century, educational thought in Islam started to find its literary expression in Arabic texts devoted to teaching and learning. At this time, educational writing appears to have developed a distinct genre of its own, i.e. the *ādāb al-‘ālim wa-l-muta‘allim* literature. This subcategory of classical Arabic literature is represented, in its core, by works expressly dealing with “rules of conduct for teachers and students.” These texts explain and analyze teaching methods, the ways in which learning takes place, or should take place, the

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\* This chapter presents some of the first results of a long-term research project devoted to educational thought in the classical period of Islam. A monograph on this topic is in progress. Research for this article was partly supported by a grant generously provided by The NIWANO Peace Foundation Tokyo, Japan.

aims of education, as well as the means by which such goals may be achieved. This includes the manner in which teachers and students act and behave, their (moral) characteristics, their relationship with one another in the process of education, the contents of learning, and the means and methods of imparting and absorbing knowledge. In short, this particular type of text can aptly be called pedagogical.

Classical Arabic pedagogical writings provide useful insights into the intellectual culture of Islam in medieval times. They suggest the following: Firstly, the social transfer of knowledge and the intellectual development of individuals and groups were subject to the vivid scholarly interest of Muslims—as witnessed shortly after the rise of Islam in the early 7th century—and became more evident in literary and scholarly writing during subsequent centuries. Secondly, initiated by the translation of classical Greek and Syriac texts into Arabic in the 8th and 9th centuries, the creative adoption of the Hellenistic heritage also left its mark on the Islamic theory of education. This is particularly noticeable in the writings of Muslim authors who deal, from a philosophical-ethical point of view, with the developmental stages in the formation of human character and personality, the early education of the child, and with higher learning. Thirdly, the views on education in Islam benefited from, but also influenced, certain Jewish and Christian ideas on education significant to the Middle East at that time.

Thus far, the *ādāb al-ʿālim wa-l-mutaʿallim* literature as a particular type of scholarly expression in Arabic in medieval times has gained only scant attention in Western studies on Islam,<sup>1</sup> despite the fact that al-Ghazālī's (d. 505 A.H./1111 C.E.) insightful passages on the ethics of education in several of his works are fairly well known.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A classic, so to speak, of Western research on educational thought in medieval Arabic literature is Franz Rosenthal's *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship* (1947). Furthermore, one would need to mention Khalil Abdallah Totah's *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education* (1926), Ahmad Shalaby's *History of Muslim Education* (1954), and A.S. Tritton's *Materials on Muslim Education* (1957). For more specific aspects of the social history of Islamic education, the transmission of knowledge, and the educational practice and institutions, see, for example, the studies by A. Munir-ud-Din (1968), A. Tibawi, (1979), G. Schoeler (1985–), H. Nashshabe (1989), J. Berkey (1992), A. Gil'adi (1992), and M. Chamberlain (1994).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the passages on education included in al-Ghazālī's "The [Re-]Vitalization of Religious Sciences (*Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*)" and "The Criterion of Action (*Mīzān al-ʿamal*)," but also the educational-ethical treatise "O Son (*Ayyuhā l-walad*)" attributed to him.

The originality of the educational ideas in these works, along with the sophisticated way in which they are presented, have caused modern scholarship to appreciate al-Ghazālī as an intellectual mastermind behind classical Islam’s philosophy and ethics of education, in addition to his many other celebrated scholarly achievements.

However, a good number of Arabic works from the time before and after al-Ghazālī also deal in a most fascinating way with various aspects of pedagogy and didactics. Unfortunately, only a small portion of these educational texts have been studied and published, and the information about them is rather scattered throughout the primary and secondary sources. The evidence of the *ādāb al-‘ālim wa-l-muta‘allim* works, however, does provide a clear idea of the impressively long and continuous tradition of medieval Arabic scholarship dealing with pedagogical and didactic issues, regardless of their authors’ individual theological and juridical stances, ethnic origins, or geographical affiliations.

\* \* \*

In this chapter, the focus is on two very early and, in many ways, remarkable examples of classical Arabic writings on education. The first treatise is entitled “Rules of Conduct for Teachers (*K. Ādāb al-mu‘allimīn*),” and was written by Ibn Saḥnūn, a scholar from the western part of the Islamic empire. The second work bears the title “The Teachers (*K. al-Mu‘allimīn*),” and it is the work of ‘Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, a famous contemporary of Ibn Saḥnūn’s from the eastern lands of Islam.

Like other works of the *ādāb al-‘ālim wa-l-muta‘allim* literature, these two texts are significant in several regards: firstly, as historical sources, since they provide information on the realities of intellectual life in medieval Islam; secondly, as evidence for the development of the theory of education, since their authors attempt to establish rules for teachers and students; and thirdly, as literary testimonies, since these texts show the distinctive methods used by their authors for presenting their educational ideas in writing.

2 *Ibn Saḥnūn*2.1 *The scholar's life and academic career*

Muḥammad Ibn Saḥnūn al-Tanūkhī<sup>3</sup> was a prominent expert of Mālikī law, a *ḥadīth* scholar, historian, and biographer.<sup>4</sup> He was born in 202/817 in al-Qayrawān, a city in modern Tunisia. At the beginning of the 9th century, al-Qayrawān was a flourishing economic, administrative, cultural, and intellectual center, as well as a nucleus of the Mālikī school of law for the western lands of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Saḥnūn was of Arab descent. His grandfather Saʿīd had arrived in al-Qayrawān in the middle of the 2nd/8th century with a group of people from Ḥimṣ in Syria, sent there by the Umayyad authorities in Damascus to support (militarily) the presence of the Muslims in the Maghrib.<sup>6</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn's father, Saḥnūn,<sup>7</sup> “a man of rigorous and demanding ethics,” is known as “one of the great architects of the exclusive supremacy of Sunnism in its Mālikī form throughout the Muslim West.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, it is interesting to note that Saḥnūn had begun his academic career as an elementary schoolteacher, teaching the Quran in a simple building rented for this particular purpose.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> His full name is Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn (Abī Saʿīd) Saḥnūn ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥabīb ibn Ḥassān ibn Hilāl ibn Bakkār ibn Rabīʿa at-Tanūkhī; see Ibn Saḥnūn's biography in: al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, i, 443–458; and i, 345ff.; and ʿIyāḍ, *Tarājīm* 170–188; see furthermore the art. “Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn,” in: *EI*<sup>2</sup> vii, 409 (G. Lecomte); and G. Lecomte, *Le Livre* 77–82, esp. 79–80.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, p. 13 of the introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Under the rule of the Aghlabides (r. 184–296/800–909), al-Qayrawān became a stronghold for the study of the Quran and the Sunna, and for Mālikī law. Nonetheless, scholars from al-Qayrawān and other Maghribi cities were in vital academic contact with the east of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate, to which the area ruled by Aghlabides nominally belonged. Scholars made pilgrimages and study trips to Mecca and Medina, and traveled to centers of higher learning such as Baghdad, Basra, and Kufa. See, for example, ʿIyāḍ, *Tarājīm* 93; *EI*<sup>2</sup> viii, 843; and the art. “Mālikiyya” (N. Cottart), in: *EI*<sup>2</sup> vi, 278–283, esp. 278, 280–281.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 346–7; ʿIyāḍ, *Tarājīm* 86; al-Qayrawānī, *Ṭabaqāt* 184.

<sup>7</sup> For his biography, see al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 345–375; and the art. “Saḥnūn” (M. Talbi), in: *EI*<sup>2</sup> viii, 843–845. The nickname Saḥnūn—the name of a bird—was given to him because of his sharp eyesight.

<sup>8</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup> viii, 845.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 343–344; and Ismail 37. Saḥnūn owes much of his scholarly reputation to his *Mudawwana*, one of the great manuals of Mālikī law. Through this work, Saḥnūn played a major role in “the definitive implantation of Mālikism in the Maghrib” (*EI*<sup>2</sup> vii, 409 and *EI*<sup>2</sup> viii, 843), although he had—due to the lack of financial resources, as he himself attested—not been able to study himself with Imām Mālik.

Ibn Saḥnūn spent a carefree childhood in al-Qayrawān. He received a traditional primary education at an elementary school (*kuttāb*),<sup>10</sup> including an introduction to the Quran and the basics of writing. It appears that his father, Saḥnūn, cared very much for his son; for example, he is credited with having expressly requested that his son's teacher:

Educate him with compliments and kind words only. He is not the one to be educated by beating and reprimanding. [When I pass away,] I will leave him [as someone who acts] in accordance with what I believe (*atrūkuhū 'alā niḥlatī*). Hence I hope that he will be unique in his kind and unparalleled among the people of his time.<sup>11</sup>

Already as a young boy, Ibn Saḥnūn frequently attended the classes given by his father for more advanced students.<sup>12</sup> Thus he came to know the academic activities and the pious life-style of scholars participating in these study circles on Mālikī law, along with the topics and teaching methods of higher learning.<sup>13</sup> This exceptional study opportunity at a young age was certainly not an insignificant factor in preparing Ibn Saḥnūn intellectually for his future academic career as a leading Mālikī scholar.

In 235/850, at the age of thirty-three, Ibn Saḥnūn left on pilgrimage. He reached Mecca via Tripolis and Cairo (*miṣr*).<sup>14</sup> He is reported to have taught at the Friday-Mosque, 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, in Fuṣṭāṭ<sup>15</sup> and to have attended lectures by various prominent scholars in Egypt. After fulfilling the obligations of the pilgrimage, he went from Mecca to Medina. An anecdote relates that, upon arriving there, he paid a visit to the Mosque of the Prophet (*al-masjid al-nabawī*) where a study circle (*ḥalqa*) was held by Abū Muṣ'ab Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr al-Zuhrī (d. 242/854), one of Imām Mālik's closest

<sup>10</sup> "A primary, or elementary school, . . . [it] introduces the six to seven year old child to the basics of language, and instructs him in Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and different religious rituals. The structure and teaching methods of the *kuttāb* . . . were almost certainly inherited from Byzantium and reflect a wide Mediterranean tradition . . .;" cf. Baer, *Muslim Teaching Institutions* 73.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 443–444.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 444, 448; 'Iyāḍ, *Tarājīm* 171.

<sup>13</sup> His father was his first and most important teacher. Ibn Saḥnūn studied also with some other leading Maghribi scholars such as Mūsā ibn Mu'āwiya al-Ṣumādihī (d. 225/840), 'Abd al-ʿAzīz ibn Yaḥyā al-Madanī (d. 240/854), and 'Abdallāh ibn Abī Ḥassān al-Ḥimṣī al-Yaḥṣūbī (d. 227/842); see al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 444.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 444; 'Iyāḍ, *Tarājīm* 177.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 444; and *EI*<sup>2</sup> vii, 409.

colleagues in Medina. The students at this circle were arguing on the legal issue of *umm al-walad*. When Ibn Saḥnūn told them a joke about the topic of discussion, he attracted Abū Muṣ‘ab’s attention so that Abū Muṣ‘ab recognized him as *the* Ibn Saḥnūn from al-Qayrawān.<sup>16</sup> It is more important, however, to note that Ibn Saḥnūn’s biographers all emphasize the very favorable impression the young scholar left on the intellectual milieu in Egypt and the Ḥijāz.<sup>17</sup>

At some point before the year 239/854–5, Ibn Saḥnūn returned to his hometown, al-Qayrawān. There he established his own study circle (*ḥalqa*) next to his father’s.<sup>18</sup> After his father’s death in Rajab 240/December 855, Ibn Saḥnūn became the chief *qādī* of the Mālikites in the Maghrib. Supported by the Aghlabid regent and *de facto* governor, Emir Ibrāhīm II (r. officially from 875 to 902), Ibn Saḥnūn is said to have led the Mālikī struggle against the Ḥanafites and Mu‘tazilites in the Maghrib.<sup>19</sup>

Ibn Saḥnūn died in al-Qayrawān in 256/870 at the age of fifty-four. On the day of his funeral, the stores and schools in al-Qayrawān were closed as an expression of mourning. The funeral prayer for the deceased scholar was led by Emir Ibrāhīm II.<sup>20</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn was buried in al-Qayrawān next to his father’s tomb. The memorial shrine (*qubba*) built over his grave shortly became such a popular site that shops opened to accommodate and benefit from the many visitors. The Emir, however, eventually ordered these shops closed and dispersed the people.<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Saḥnūn was a productive scholar. He is reported to have written nearly 200 books and treatises. Twenty-four works have been identified by title, but only three texts have been preserved. Most titles point to *fatwās* and other short legal documents. Some books, however, are said to have been multi-volume encyclopaedias on Ḥadīth and Islamic history. The preserved book titles indicate that Ibn Saḥnūn had, in general, a vivid interest in the systematic teaching of the Quran and the essentials of Islamic belief.<sup>22</sup> One can imag-

<sup>16</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 184.

<sup>17</sup> See also *EI*<sup>2</sup> vii, 409.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 444.

<sup>19</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup> vii, 409.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 444.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Iyād, *Tarājīm* 186–187.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* i, 443; ‘Iyād, *Tarājīm* 173. The other two preserved

ine how important this was especially when taking into consideration the attempts made in the 8th and 9th centuries in the Islamic West to Islamize and Arabicize the Berber population.

## 2.2 *Ibn Saḥnūn's book on "Rules of Conduct for Teachers"*

### 2.2.1 *Structure, contents, and style*

In terms of intention, content, and style, Ibn Saḥnūn's *K. Ādāb al-mu'allimīn*<sup>23</sup> is part of the so-called professional *adab*-literature. Like other manuals of this type—compiled for secretaries, clerks, copyists, or judges—Ibn Saḥnūn's work addresses a specific community of people: the teachers at elementary schools, whom he provides with professional and juridical advice.

Ibn Saḥnūn's *K. Ādāb al-mu'allimīn*<sup>24</sup> starts with quotations of prophetic traditions, expressing the "merit" (*fadl*) and the advantage of teaching and learning the Quran. The book concludes with similar statements by Mālik ibn Anas, which in turn display Ibn Saḥnūn's affiliation to the Mālikī school of law. Ibn Saḥnūn's treatise has ten chapters, as follows:

- i. [Traditions] on the teaching of the Quran. *Mā jā'a fī ta'līm al-Qur'ān al-‘azīz*
- ii. [Traditions] on the equity [to be observed in treating school]boys. *Mā jā'a fī l-‘adl bayna l-ṣibyān*

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books are: the *K. Masā'il al-jihād* (ms. Tunis) and the *K. Ajwibat Muḥammad ibn Saḥnūn, riwāyat Muḥammad ibn Sālim al-Qattān 'anhu* (ms. Escorial 1162; three copies in Tunis); see *EI*<sup>2</sup> vii, 409; Lecomte 80.

<sup>23</sup> The complete text of the *K. Ādāb al-mu'allimīn* has been preserved in a unique Tunisian manuscript from the 14th or 15th century (National Tunisian Library, ms. Tunis 8787); cf. also Lecomte, *Le Livre* 78. For a short description of the Tunisian ms., see Ḥijāzī 43. Fragmentary passages of the text have also been preserved in a Rabat manuscript (catalogued as ms. 85*qāf*) consisting of approximately sixty percent of the work; cf. Ḥijāzī 46. While the Tunisian text starts with *qāla Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Saḥnūn*, the Moroccan text indicates a different transmission by stating: *ḥaddathanī Abū l-‘Abbās 'Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Furāt ibn Muḥammad, qāla: ḥaddathanī Muḥammad ibn Saḥnūn 'an abihī* [. . .]. This suggests that Ibn Saḥnūn's treatise for teachers circulated in more than one transmitted version; see also Ḥijāzī 46. A French translation of the *K. Ādāb al-mu'allimīn* was published by G. Lecomte; see his *Le Livre* 82–105.

<sup>24</sup> This article's references to Ibn Saḥnūn's *K. Ādāb al-mu'allimīn* are based on Muḥammad al-‘Arūsī al-Maṭwī's edition as reprinted in: Ḥijāzī, *al-Madḥhab*, 111–128; lower case Roman numerals indicate chapters of Ibn Saḥnūn's work.

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|---|--|
| iii. Chapter [of traditions] on the reprehensibility of erasing the Word of God the Exalted [when written on slates], and what should be done [instead] in this regard. | <i>Bāb mā yukrahu maḥwuhu min dhikr Allāh ta‘ālā wa-mā yanbaghī an yuf‘ala min dhālika</i> |
| iv. [Traditions] on disciplining [students], and on what is permissible in this [regard] and what is not.   | <i>Mā jā’a fī l-adab wa-mā yajūzu min dhālika wa-mā lā yajūzu</i>                          |
| v. [Opinions] on the final exams for the recitation of the Quran [at elementary schools], and what is [to be given] to the teacher on this [occasion]                   | <i>Mā jā’a fī l-khitam wa-mā yajību fī dhālika li-l-mu‘allim</i>                           |
| vi. [Opinions] on the presentation of gifts [to the teacher] on feast days.   | <i>Mā jā’a fī l-qadā’ fī ‘aṭiyyat al-‘īd</i>   |
| vii. [Opinions] on [the occasions] when [the teacher] should give days off to the [school]boys  | <i>Mā yanbaghī an yukhallā l-ṣibyān fīhi</i>   |
| viii. [Opinions] on the obligation on the teacher to stay all the time with the pupils [under his supervision]  | <i>Mā yajību ‘alā l-mu‘allim min luzūm al-ṣibyān</i>                                       |
| ix. [Opinions] on the wage of the teacher and when it is obligatory   | <i>Mā jā’a fī ijārat al-mu‘allim wa-matā tajību</i>  |
| x. [Opinions] on renting a copy of the Quran, law books, and other such books   | <i>Mā jā’a fī ijārat al-muṣḥaf wa-kutub al-fiqh wa-mā shābahā</i>                          |

Based on criteria such as formal structure and style, the book is divided into two main parts: The first part comprises chapters one to four. Here the fundamentals of teaching pupils at elementary schools are provided. The author deals with the obligation to learn and memorize the Quran and the need for people to teach it. He talks about the practical issues implied when writing exercises are based on the quranic text, about the disciplinary measures to correct the pupils’ behavior, and about physical punishment. As indi-

cated above, this first part is almost entirely based on quotations of prophetic traditions. Only occasionally does the author make short comments on these *ḥadīths*, rounding off a particular topic.

The second part of the book is formed by chapters five to ten. These chapters follow a different scheme: they present almost exclusively questions Ibn Saḥnūn asked his father and answers his father gave him. Here the author addresses more specific issues related to the actual process of education. He covers the following topics: hiring a teacher, the various obligations regarding the *khatma* (the final oral exam after the pupil has memorized the Quran),<sup>25</sup> some teacher's obligations (including the rental of the school or classroom at the teachers' expense, and the preparation teachers need before entering the classroom), enforcement of the curriculum (including obligatory and optional topics to be taught, supervision of pupils, and consultation with a pupil's parents on the child's strengths and weaknesses). Furthermore, the author discusses the basic salary, additional payments for teachers (including questions of the permissibility of such additional payments), and the legitimacy of renting books for teaching purposes.

As for the formal structure of this second part, a decisive question-answer pattern is striking in Ibn Saḥnūn's work. This pattern supports the sequence of thesis and antithesis which, in turn, displays the author's legal training in reasoning and arguing.<sup>26</sup> Occasionally, the pros and cons of issues are given. For example, he first provides a statement that may reflect an arguable opinion or circumstance, and then quotes an authoritative tradition or a statement that sets things right.

These characteristics of the text altogether make Ibn Saḥnūn's book read like a legal document: it enumerates rules and precedents

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<sup>25</sup> *Khatma* (colloquial: *khitma*), pl. *khitam*, is the technical term used in Islamic education for a child's recitation of the entire Quran and his/her graduation. In modern times, "the so-called *iḥlāba* is celebrated when a boy has read through the whole of the sacred book (the ceremony after the half or one-third is called *iṣrāfa*);" cf. Fr. Buhl, in: *ET*<sup>2</sup> iv, 1112.

<sup>26</sup> The use of a question-and-answer pattern in scholarly writing has a long tradition in the Middle East; see U. Pietruschka's contribution to this book and the references given there. It is worth mentioning that this pattern is also evident in the narrative passages of the Quran, used there as a powerful stylistic tool to promote instruction; see my art. "Teaching," in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe, vol. iv, Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

and its language is precise and prosaic, as in a *fatwā*. Ibn Saḥnūn's primary concern is to clarify issues; the style in presenting these ideas is secondary to him. This latter observation might explain, to some extent, why the discussion of certain topics does not always correspond to the chapter headings; why subject matters relating to one and the same issue are occasionally scattered throughout different chapters or listed under various rubrics; and why there are some passages which almost lack a logical sequence for the ideas addressed therein. The last chapter may even give the impression to some readers that issues were included there which the author, for some reason, omitted mentioning earlier in his book at a, perhaps, thematically more fitting place.

### 2.2.2 *Reflections of historical realities*

In terms of historical and cultural information, Ibn Saḥnūn's book has plenty to offer. As G. Lecomte already noted,<sup>27</sup> there are passages that vividly evoke in the reader's mind the diligent world of elementary schools at the beginning of the 9th century. We learn about the medieval teacher who is proud of the ink spots on his clothing; "It is the sign of manliness (*murū'a*) to see ink on a man's clothing or lips" (iii.116). There is also mention of the parents who offer the teacher gifts as a reward for his good work (vi.118). Yet if a father is unhappy with the results of his child's education, he does not hesitate to argue frankly with the teacher (ix.124, 125).

There are passages that allow us to picture situations where young schoolboys take care of each other at school and accompany each other home after class (vii.118; viii.119). We learn about the different ways of cleaning the writing tablet, either using a little dust cloth or even the tongue (iii.115). If one uses the foot to erase quranic text written on the tablet, one commits—as the text states—an act of irreverence toward the Quran and risks receiving punishment (iii.115). The text talks about school holidays and family celebrations taking place when pupils pass the *khatma* exam and graduate (v.117).

Along with these insights into the everyday life at elementary schools at the beginning of the 9th century, the book provides some significant historical information. One can conclude from the text,

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. his *Le Livre* 81–82.

firstly, that the teaching of the Quran and its supplementary disciplines at the primary level was, at that time, already well established in the Muslim West. Secondly, primary education was apparently in need of more systematic regulations and scholars responded to this need by offering professional advice. Within this context, the raising of fees for teaching classes—as Ibn Saḥnūn indicates—and even remuneration for teaching the Quran had become a common practice. The author generally supports this practice, yet he feels it indispensable to discuss it in detail (i.114; ix.124).

Ibn Saḥnūn also deals at length with physical punishment (see chapter iv). This, however, is less surprising when taking the author's legal background into consideration. Hence one can appreciate, for example, why he attempts to cover all *possible* precedents, those which actually occurred and those which might occur. Although the text makes it quite clear that punishment was part of rectifying a child's behavior in Islam in the medieval times, Ibn Saḥnūn leaves no doubt that physical punishment should not cross the line. He stresses that the child should not be seriously harmed. On the contrary, basing himself on prophetic traditions, he emphasizes that modesty, patience, and a passion for working with children are indispensable qualities of teachers (ii.115; iv.116; viii.119).

Moreover, Ibn Saḥnūn also advises the teachers to create situations to challenge pupils intellectually. He mentions, for example, that pupils may dictate to each other (ix.124), or that advanced pupils may profit from writing letters for adults (viii.119). Competition amongst pupils is expressly favored because, as the text says, it contributes to the formation of their personalities and to their general improvement (viii.119).

### 2.2.3 *The curriculum*

As for the curriculum, Ibn Saḥnūn presents to the teachers a number of rules. Some of them are obligatory; others are recommended. One can conclude from the text the following obligatory rules:

1. Teachers must instruct pupils in the precise articulation of the Quran, along with knowledge of reading, orthography, and grammar (viii.119).
2. Teachers are strongly advised not to teach melodious recitation of the Quran (*alḥān al-Qur'ān*). This is “unlawful” since it leads to singing, which is reprehensible (viii.120).

3. Teachers must teach the duties of worship (such as the ablutions before prayers, the number of inclinations and prostrations in prayer, etc.) (viii.121).
4. Teachers must teach the pupils good manners, since these are obligations towards God (viii.120).

As recommended topics for teaching, Ibn Saḥnūn suggests the following:

5. The basics of Arabic language and linguistics (viii.119).
6. Arithmetic (viii.119).
7. Calligraphy (viii.119).
8. Writing letters (viii.119).
9. Poetry, however, only if the verses are decent (viii.119).
10. Proverbs of the ancient Arabs.
11. Historical reports (*akhbār*) of the ancient Arabs and legends of their battles (viii.120).
12. Sermons (*khutab*), if the pupils show interest in them (viii.120).

Given the priority that the Mālikites in the Maghrib generally gave to instructing boys in the Quran, these rather diverse recommendations of Ibn Saḥnūn are significant.

Some other rules concern a variety of matters. For example, teachers are advised not to instruct young girls together with boys, because mixed classes corrupt young people (viii.123). This statement seems to point to the fact that, firstly, education was not restricted to boys, and secondly, that coeducation may have been practiced at elementary schools to some degree. Also, teachers must not teach the Quran to the children of Christians (viii.122). This rule is given on the authority of Ibn Saḥnūn's father. It seems to indicate, on the one hand, that Muslim and Christian children were attending the same classes. On the other hand, it shows that Ibn Saḥnūn took the quranic command "There is no compulsion in matters of faith" (Q 2:256) literally.

#### 2.2.4 *Rules for teachers and how Ibn Saḥnūn presents them to the reader*

The following passages in translation provide a more detailed and immediate idea of Ibn Saḥnūn's text. They highlight some major themes dealt with by Ibn Saḥnūn and the methods used by him for presenting these issues. These texts may also give an impression of the pious tone characteristic of this treatise.

*Merit and necessity of learning and teaching the Quran*

*Abū ‘Abdallāh Ibn Saḥnūn said:*

[it has been transmitted . . . that] the Messenger of God—God bless him and grant him peace—said:

“The best of you is the one who learns the Quran and teaches it.”  
 “Through the Quran God elevates [many] peoples.”  
 “You must [occupy yourselves with and continually] make use of the Quran, for it eliminates hypocrisy in the same way that fire eliminates rust from iron.”  
 “He who recites the Quran accurately (lit.: with desinential inflexion) will receive the reward of a martyr.”  
 “He who learns the Quran in his youth, the Quran will mix with his flesh and blood. [However,] he who learns it in old age, and does not give up on it even when it escapes [his memory], will receive double the reward” (i.113–114).

\* \* \*

[It has been transmitted] *on the authority of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān* (the third Rightly Guided Caliph, d. 35/656)—may God be pleased with him—concerning God’s saying—blessed and exalted be He—‘*Then We bequeathed the Book on those of our servants we chose* (Q 35:32)’ [that] he said, “Everyone who learns the Quran and teaches it is amongst those whom God has chosen from humankind” (i.114).

قال أبو عبد الله بن سحنون:

[... إن] رسول الله، صلى الله عليه وسلم،

قال:

"أفضلكم من تعلم القرآن وعلمه."

"يرفع الله بالقرآن أقواماً."

"عليكم بالقرآن فإنه ينفي النفاق كما تنفي

النار خبث الحديد."

"من قرأ القرآن بإعراب فله أجر شهيد."

"من تعلم القرآن في شبابه اختلط القرآن

بلحمه ودمه، ومن تعلمه في كبره وهو

يتفلس منه ولا يتركه فله أجره مرتين."

... عن عثمان بن عفان رضي الله عنه، في

قول الله تبارك وتعالى: ﴿ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ

الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا﴾، قال: "كل من

تعلم القرآن وعلمه فهو ممن اصطفاه الله من

بني آدم."

[It has been transmitted that ‘*Abdallāh Ibn Mas‘ūd* [d. ca. 32/625] said:

“Three [things] are essential for people:

- [1.] A ruler who rules amongst them [in justice]; if it were not for that, they would devour each other.
- [2.] Buying and selling copies of the Quran; if it were not for that, the Book of God would decrease [in number].
- [3.] Teachers who teach their children and who receive a salary for that; if it were not for that, the people would be illiterate” (i.114).

... قال ابن مسعود: "ثلاث لا بدّ للناس،

منهم: لا بدّ للناس من أمير يحكم بينهم ولولا ذلك لأكل بعضهم بعضاً، ولا بدّ للناس من شراء المصاحف وبيعها ولولا ذلك لقلّ كتاب الله، ولا بدّ للناس من معلّم يعلم أولادهم ويأخذ على ذلك أجراً ولولا ذلك لكان الناس أميين."

#### *Further teaching topics*

*I asked* [*Ṣaḥnūn*]: “So, it is permissible for the boy to write letters for someone?”

*He answered*: “There is no harm [in it]. If he writes letters, this is something that contributes to the boy’s education. The teacher should [also] teach the pupils calculation, although this is not obligatory for him to do—unless it is imposed on him as an obligation. Likewise [for] poetry, unfamiliar [words], the Arabic language, calligraphy, and all parts of grammar—[the teaching of] all of this is at his discretion.

The teacher should teach them the desinential inflexion of the quranic text—this is incumbent upon him. [He should also teach them] vocalization and spelling, good handwriting and to read well, when to pause and when to recite [the quranic text] in a slow, measured rhythmic way—[all] this is incumbent upon him.

[Also,] there is no harm in teaching them poetry—as long as there is nothing indecent in it from the language and the anecdotes of the

قلت: فيأذن للصبي أن يكتب لأحد كتاباً؟

قال: لا بأس، وهذا ممّا يخرج الصبي إذا كتب الرسائل. وينبغي أن يعلمهم الحساب، وليس ذلك بلازم له إلا أن يشترط ذلك عليه. وكذلك الشعر، والغريب، والعربية، والخطّ، وجميع النحو. وهو في ذلك متطوّع.

وينبغي له أن يعلمهم إعراب القرآن وذلك لازم له. وبالشكل، والهجاء، والخطّ الحسن، والقراءة الحسنة، والتوقيف، والترتيل، يلزمه ذلك.

ولا بأس أن يعلمهم الشعر ممّا لا يكون فيه فحش من كلام العرب وأخبارها، وليس ذلك بواجب عليه.

Arabs. This [however] is not an obligation on him” (viii.119–120).

*I said [to Saḥnūn]:* “Some Andalusians related that there was no harm in hiring [someone] to teach Islamic jurisprudence, religious duties, poetry, and grammar. It is similar to [teaching] the Quran.

*He replied:* “Mālik and our companions (i.e. the experts of our Law School) detested this. How could it be similar to the Quran? [Learning] the Quran has a [specific] goal that can be reached, whereas what (i.e., the topics) you have mentioned has none. So, this [i.e. the idea mentioned by the Andalusians?] is unknown.

Islamic jurisprudence and [religious] knowledge (as studied by the ‘*ulamā*’) are something about which there has been disagreement, whereas the Quran is the truth about which there is no doubt at all. Islamic jurisprudence is not to be learned by heart like the Quran; hence it is not similar to it, nor does it have a [definite] goal or time in which to reach it” (x.128).

قلت: روى بعض أهل الأندلس أنه لا بأس بالإجارة<sup>٢٨</sup> على تعليم الفقه والفرائض،<sup>٢٩</sup> والشعر، والنحو، وهو مثل القرآن.

فقال: كره ذلك مالك وأصحابنا. وكيف يشبه القرآن، والقرآن له غاية ينتهي إليها، وما ذكرت ليس له غاية ينتهي إليها، فهذا مجهول.

والفقه والعلم أمر قد اختلف فيه، والقرآن هو الحق الذي لا شك فيه. والفقه لا يستظهر مثل القرآن، فهو لا يشبهه، ولا غاية له، ولا أمد ينتهي إليه.

### Writing exercises based on quranic text

*Anas [ibn Mālik] was asked:* “How were the educators during the time of [the first four caliphs,] the Imāms Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī—may God be pleased with them?”

قيل لأنس: كيف كان المؤدّبون على عهد الأئمة أبي بكر وعمر وعثمان وعليّ - رضي الله عنهم؟

<sup>28</sup> *Ijāra* is a legal term that “refers to the permission granted for a compensation to use a thing owed by, or the service of, another person.” Hence the term can also refer “to a book that was ‘hired’ for the purpose of, and with the right to, copying it.” See Rosenthal, *The Technique* 8, fn. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Farā’id* is ambiguous; it can refer to Islamic inheritance law but, in the present context, it is more likely to indicate “religious duties.”

*Anas answered:* “The teacher had a basin. Each boy used to come—every day, each in his turn—with some pure water. They would pour it into the basin and use it to erase the writing from their tablets.” [Then] *Anas added:* “Afterwards, they used to dig a hole in the ground and pour this water into it and so it was absorbed” (iii.115).

قال أنس: “كان المؤدّب له إجانة.<sup>30</sup> وكلّ صبيّ يأتي كلّ يوم بنوبته ماء طاهراً فيصبونه فيها فيمحوون به ألواحهم. قال أنس: “ثمّ يحفرون حفرة في الأرض فيصبون ذلك الماء فيها فينشف.<sup>31</sup>”

*Mental challenges for pupils, teaching assistance,  
and teacher responsibilities*

[*Ibn Saḥnūn*] said that *Sahnūn* stated: “. . . There is no harm in having them dictate to each other, because this is for their benefit. Yet he (the teacher) must review their dictation. [Moreover,] he must not let them move from one sura to another until they have memorized [the first sura] with its desinential inflexion and orthography—unless [the pupils’] fathers give him leeway to do so” (viii.120).

[*Sahnūn*] stated: “It is more appropriate for the teacher not to put one of the boys in charge of the beatings nor designate for them a monitor from amongst them, unless it is a boy who has finished [learning] the Quran and knows it, and no longer needs instruction. Hence, there is no harm in it. [Also, there is no harm for] the boy to help the teacher; [for] this is of benefit to the boy.

قال: وقال سحنون: . . . ولا بأس أن يجعلهم يملّي بعضهم على بعض، لأنّ ذلك منفعة لهم، وليتفقّد إملاءهم. ولا يجوز أن ينقلهم من سورة إلى سورة حتىّ يحفظوها بإعرابها وكتابتها إلّا أن يسهّل له الآباء.

قال: وأحبّ للمعلّم أن لا يولّي أحداً من الصبيان الضرب، ولا يجعل لهم عريفاً منهم، إلّا أن يكون الصبيّ الذي قد ختم وعرف القرآن، وهو مستغن عن التعليم، فلا بأس بذلك، وأن يعينه؛ فإنّ ذلك منفعة للصبيّ.

<sup>30</sup> For *ijāna* (vulg.) and *ijāna*, see Lane i, 26.

<sup>31</sup> This was done so that the quranic text would be erased from the tablets respectfully.

Yet it is not permissible for him (i.e. the boy assisting the teacher) to give orders to any of the pupils, or to instruct any of them—unless there is benefit in that for the boy's formation, or his father has approved of it. [If this is not the case,] the teacher himself should be in charge of this [teaching] or hire someone to help him, if he is equally qualified" (vii.118).

ولا يحلّ له أن يأمر أحداً، وأن يعلم أحداً منهم إلا أن يكون ذلك منفعة للصبي في تخرجه، أو بأذن والده في ذلك. وليل هو ذلك بنفسه أو يستأجر من يعينه إذا كان في مثل كفايته.

### *Supervision of pupils*

[*Sahnūn*] stated: The teacher must be committed to working hard. And he must devote himself to the pupils, . . . for he is a hireling and cannot leave his work (viii.119). *I asked [Sahnūn]:* "Then, can the teacher send the boys to look for each other?"

*He replied:* "I am not of the opinion that he is allowed to do so—unless their fathers or [their] guardians grant him (the teacher) permission in this regard, or if the places are nearby and the boy is not occupied with it [for too long]. He (the teacher) himself must be mindful of the boys at the time [they] return home, and inform their guardians [if] they did not come [to school]" (vii.118).

*I asked [Sahnūn]:* "Are you of the opinion that it is [permissible] for the teacher to write *fiqh* books for himself?"

*He replied:* "As for the time when he has finished [teaching] the boys, there is no harm in writing [such books] for himself and for others.; for example, [when] he has permitted them to return home. But as long as they are around him, no! That is, it is not permissible for him, for how can he be permitted to deviate from something

قال: وليلزم المعلم الاجتهاد، وليتفرغ لهم . . . ، لأنه أجير لا يدع عمله.

قلت: أفيرسل الصبيان بعضهم في طلب بعض؟

قال: لا أرى ذلك يجوز له، إلا أن يأذن له آباؤهم أو أولياء الصبيان في ذلك، أو تكون المواضع قريبة لا يشتغل الصبي في ذلك. وليتعاهد الصبيان هو بنفسه في وقت انقلاب الصبيان، ويخير أولياءهم أنهم لم يجيؤوا.

قلت: فهل ترى للمعلم أن يكتب لنفسه كتب الفقه؟

قال: أمّا في وقت فراغه من الصبيان فلا بأس أن يكتب لنفسه وللناس، مثل أن يأذن لهم في الانقلاب، وأمّا ما داموا حوله فلا، أي لا يجوز له ذلك، وكيف يجوز له أن يخرج ممّا

that it is incumbent upon him to observe, towards something that is not incumbent upon him? Don't you see that he is [also] not permitted to entrust to some of [the boys] the teaching of others? How, [then,] could he occupy himself with something other than them!" (viii.119).

*Saḥnūn stated:* The teacher is not permitted to send the boys [to take care of] his personal matters (viii.121).

يلزمه النظر فيه إلى ما لا يلزمه، ألا ترى أنه لا يجوز له أن يوكل تعليم بعضهم إلى بعض؟ فكيف يشتغل بغيرهم!

قال سحنون: ولا يجوز للمعلم أن يرسل الصبيان في حوائجه.

### *Just treatment of pupils*

[It has been transmitted] on the authority of *Anas ibn Mālik* that the Messenger of God—God bless him and grant him peace—stated: “Any teacher who is entrusted with three boys from this community and does not teach them on an equal basis—the poor with the rich, and the rich with the poor—will on the Day of Resurrection be raised up with the treacherous” (ii.115).

[It has been transmitted] on the authority of *al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣṭī?)* that he said: “If a teacher has been hired for a fixed salary and does not treat them—i.e. the boys—on an equal basis, he will be deemed to be one of the wrongdoers” (ii.115).

[...] عن أنس بن مالك، قال: قال رسول الله — صلى الله عليه وسلم — : “إيما مؤدّب ولي ثلاثة صبية من هذه الأمة فلم يعلمهم بالسوية فقيرهم مع غنيهم، وغنيهم مع فقيرهم حُشر يوم القيامة مع الخائنين.”

[...] عن الحسن، قال: “إذا قوطع المعلم بالسوية فلم يعدل بينهم — أي الصبيان — كتب من الظلمة.”

### *Handling trouble between pupils*

*Ibn Saḥnūn said:* Saḥnūn was asked about the teacher: “Should he accept the word of boys concerning the harm [done] by others?”

*He replied:* “I do not consider this [an issue] requiring legal judgment. However, the teacher should discipline them if they have harmed one another. In my view, he should do so if

قال: وسئل سحنون عن المعلم: أيأخذ الصبيان بقول بعضهم عن بعض في الأذى؟ فقال: ما أرى هذا من ناحية الحكم. وإيما على المؤدّب أن يؤدّبهم إذا آذى بعضهم بعضاً. وذلك عندي إذا استفاض علم الأذى

knowledge of the harm has been spread by a group of them, or [if] there was admission [of the misdeed]—unless they are boys known to him to be truthful; then, he should accept their word and punish accordingly. The teacher must not be excessive [in his punishment], as I have [already] told you. [Moreover,] he must command them to refrain from harming [one another], and return to them whatever they took from each other—[but] this is not [an issue] requiring a legal ruling; this is [at least] what I heard from more than one of our companions. Their testimony had been granted admission [even] in cases of homicide or injury, so how much more [should it be accepted] in this [matter]! God knows best” (viii.123).

من الجماعة منهم أو كان الاعتراف، إلا أن يكونوا صبياناً قد عرفهم بالصدق فيقبل قولهم ويعاقب على ذلك.

ولا يجاوز في الأدب كما أعلمتكم، ويأمرهم بالكف عن الأذى، ويردّ ما أخذ بعضهم لبعض، وليس هو من ناحية القضاء.

وكذلك سمعت من غير واحد من أصحابنا. وقد أجزت شهادتهم في القتل والجراح فكيف بهذا! والله أعلم.

### *Appointing a teacher*

*Sahnūn stated:* “Some scholars from the Hijāz—including Ibn Dīnār and others—were asked [about] a teacher hired for a group [if then] a due share should be allotted to each of them. *So he answered:* “It is permissible if the fathers come to terms on this matter. [This is so,] because this (i.e., education) is a necessity and something the people simply must have. It is the most suitable [thing to do]” (ix.124).

قال سحنون: وقد سئل بعض علماء الحجاز — منهم ابن دينار وغيره — أن يُستأجر المعلم لجماعة، وأن يُفرض على كلّ واحد ما ينوبه. فقال: يجوز إذا تراضى بذلك الآباء، لأنّ هذا ضرورة ولا بدّ للناس منه، وهو أشبه.

### *Classroom and teaching equipment*

[*Sahnūn said:*] It is incumbent [upon the teacher]—and not upon the pupils—to rent the shop [to be used as a classroom]. He must inspect [the pupils] by teaching and reviewing

[قال سحنون:] وعليه كراء الحانوت، وليس ذلك على الصبيان، وعليه أن يتفقدهم بالتعليم والعرض، ويجعل لعرض القرآن وقتاً

[with them]. He must schedule a fixed time to review [the children's knowledge] of the Quran, such as Thursdays or Wednesday evenings. Yet he must give them the day off on Fridays. This has been the practice of teachers since there have been teachers, and they have not been faulted for that (iii.120).

[*Sahnūn stated:*] Also, the teacher is obliged to obtain [at his own expense] the scourge and the device to hold the legs of the delinquent during the bastinado; this is not to be at the expense of the boys (viii.120).

Mālik was asked about the teaching of the boys in the mosque. *He answered:* "I do not consider this to be permitted, because they are not mindful of impurity. And mosques have not been set up for teaching [children]" (viii.120).

معلوماً مثل يوم الخميس، وعشية الأربعاء. ويأذن لهم في يوم الجمعة، وذلك سنة المعلمين منذ كانوا ولم يُعَب ذلك عليهم.

[قال سحنون:] وعلى المعلم أن يكسب الدرّة والفَلَقَة، وليس ذلك على حساب الصبيان.

وسئل مالك عن تعليم الصبيان في المسجد. قال: لا أرى ذلك يجوز، لأنهم لا يتحفظون من النجاسة. ولم يُنصب المسجد للتعليم.

### *Payment for teaching the Quran*

[*It has been transmitted*] from 'Aṭā' [ibn Abī Rabāḥ] that he used to teach the art of writing during the time of Mu'āwiya (the first Umayyad caliph who r. 661–680 C.E.) and that he stipulated [payment for it] (i.114).

*Ibn Jurayj said:* I asked 'Aṭā': "Can I take wages for teaching the Book? Do you know of anybody having detested it?" He said: "No, I do not" (i.114).

[*It has been transmitted*] on the authority of *Ibn Shihāb [al-Zuhrī]* that Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ got a man from Iraq to teach the Book to their children in Medina and that they (the Medinans) gave him wages (i.114).

*Mālik [ibn Anas] stated* that "there is no harm in a teacher's taking [payment] for teaching the Quran. If he stipulates something [as payment], it is lawful and permissible. So, there is no harm in his stipulating in this regard.

... عن عطاء، أنه كان يعلم الكُتُب على عهد معاوية ويَشترط.

... عن ابن جريج، قال: قلت لعطاء: أأخذ أجراً على تعليم الكتاب؟ أعلمت أن أحداً كرهه؟ قال: لا.

... عن ابن شهاب أن سعد بن أبي وقاص قدم برجل من العراق يعلم أبناءهم الكتاب بالمدينة ويعطونه الأجر.

... وقال مالك: لا بأس بما يأخذ المعلم على تعليم القرآن. وإن اشترط شيئاً كان حلالاً جائزاً. ولا بأس بالاشتراط في ذلك.

[Moreover,] what is due to him when the Quran has been completely recited from memory is obligatory, whether he had stipulated it or not. The scholars of our country [agree] on this as it concerns the teachers (i.114).

*Muhammad [ibn Saḥnūn] said:* There is no harm in a man's hiring a teacher to teach his children the Quran for a predetermined sum for a fixed time, or for each month. Also, [he can teach] half or a quarter of the Quran or any other portion specified by the two [parties].

*He said:* If a man hires a teacher to teach certain boys, it is permissible for the teacher to teach others together with them—provided that this does not divert him from teaching those for whom we was hired” (x.126).

*He said:* There is no harm in a man's hiring [an instructor] to teach his child writing and spelling. [In fact,] the Prophet—God bless him and grant him peace—used to free a man who taught writing [to the Muslims] (x.127).

وحقّ الختمة له واجب اشترطها أو لم يشترطها.  
وعلى ذلك أهل العلم ببلدنا في المعلمين.

قال محمد: لا بأس أن يستأجر الرجل المعلم  
على أن يعلم أولاده القرآن بأجرة معلومة إلى  
أجل معلوم أو كل شهر. وكذلك نصف القرآن  
أو ربه أو ما سميا منه.

قال: وإذا استأجر الرجل معلما على صبيان  
معلومين جاز للمعلم أن يعلم معهم غيرهم إذا  
كان لا يشغله ذلك عن تعليم هؤلاء الذين  
استؤجر لهم.

قال: ولا بأس بالرجل يستأجر أن يعلم ولده  
الخط والهجاء. وقد كان النبي — صلى الله عليه  
وسلم — يفادي بالرجل يعلم الخط.

### Graduation

*I asked him [Saḥnūn]:* “When is the time due for the final exam?”

*He replied:* “[It is due] when he (the pupil) comes near it and has gone beyond [learning] two thirds [of the Quran].”

*Then I asked him* about [the possibility of having] the final exam [after memorizing only] half [of the Quran].

*He replied:* “I do not consider it to be compulsory.”

*Saḥnūn stated:* “The final exam on anything other than the entire Quran—be it half, a third, or a quarter [of it]—is not compulsory, unless they volunteer in this regard” (v.117).

وسأله متى تجب الختمة، فقال: إذا قاربها  
وجاوز الثلثين.

فسألت عن ختمة النصف، فقال: لا أرى ذلك  
يلزم. قال سحنون: ولا يلزم ختمة غير القرآن  
كله، لا نصف ولا ثلث ولا ربع، إلا أن  
يتطوعوا بذلك.

In conclusion of this part of our study, it is worth noting that Ibn Saḥnūn's *vademecum* for teachers was—already in the Middle Ages—of much interest to Muslim scholars. An example of this is Abū l-Ḥasan al-Qābisī (d. 403/1012), a leading representative of the Mālikī law school from al-Qayrawān who lived about 150 years after Ibn Saḥnūn. Al-Qābisī used Ibn Saḥnūn's text extensively as a source and commented on it when compiling his own “Elaborate Treatise on the Circumstances of Teachers and the Legal Regulations for Teachers and Students (*al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣala fī ahwāl al-mu'allimīn wa-ahkām al-mu'allimīn wa-l-muta'allimīn*)”<sup>32</sup> Thus, al-Qābisī sets forth Ibn Saḥnūn's educational efforts and, at the same time, affirms that he was one of the earliest Muslim educationalists.

### 3 *Al-Jāḥiẓ*

#### 3.1 *The scholar: life and academic career*

Due to his masterly compositions in the areas of belles-lettres, Mu'tazili theology, and political-religious polemics, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Fuqaymī al-Baṣrī al-Jāḥiẓ is well known as one of the most prominent classical Arabic writers. He was born in Basra in about 160/776 and died there in Muḥarram 255/December 868–January 869. He was probably of Abyssinian origin and received his sobriquet due to a malformation of the eyes.<sup>33</sup>

From an early age, al-Jāḥiẓ dedicated himself to learning. He participated in study circles held at mosques and also attended the debates on Arabic philology, lexicography, poetry, and philosophy conducted at the Mirbad, a celebrated public place in Basra, which played an outstanding role in the shaping of Arabic culture in medieval times.

Al-Jāḥiẓ acquainted himself with the works of the ancient Greek philosophers (especially Aristotle) available in Arabic since the great translation movement under the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833). He participated frequently in the intellectual conversations taking place in the salons of the upper class, where issues of general concern to

<sup>32</sup> Reprinted in: Shams al-Dīn, *al-Fikr al-tarbawī 'inda Ibn Saḥnūn and al-Qābisī* 117–196. See also al-Ahwānī, *at-Ta'lim fī ra'y al-Qābisī*, esp. 39–41.

<sup>33</sup> Art. “al-Djāḥiẓ” (Ch. Pellat), in: *ET*<sup>2</sup> ii, 385–388.

Islamic society were discussed. One of his favorite activities, however, was to spend a great deal of time in libraries and bookstores. For a small amount of money, he is said to have rented a bookstore overnight to read and copy what was of interest to him.<sup>34</sup>

Only in about 200/815–6, at the age of forty-five, does he seem to have started writing professionally. Writing, and the considerable amounts of money he received for dedicating his works to people of influence and wealth, thus seem to have been his main sources of income. He built up his private library and even employed a copyist (*warrāq*) known by the name of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Īsā.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, al-Jāḥiẓ also had some bitter experiences, for works of his were torn apart by envious colleagues and critics shortly after they were published.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ seems to have held no official or regular post in his life. It is known, however, that when he was in Baghdad he worked for some time as a scribe and teacher. Al-Jāḥiẓ himself reports that the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861) had apparently endeavored to entrust him with the education of his children. However, the caliph later changed his mind, seemingly because of al-Jāḥiẓ’s ugliness.<sup>37</sup>

The circumstances and often unfair treatment of professional teachers al-Jāḥiẓ witnessed, and may have experienced firsthand,<sup>38</sup> seem to have induced him to write a book entitled “The Teachers.”<sup>39</sup> This

<sup>34</sup> Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ* vi, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Shalaby 90.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. al-Jāḥiẓ’s own statements in *Risālat Faṣl mā bayna l-ʿadāwa wa-l-ḥasad*, in: *Majmūʿ rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Bāwl Krāws [Paul Kraus] and Muḥammad Ṭaha al-Ḥājirī, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Taʿlif wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1943, 108–109; and Pellat, *The Life* 218–219; see also Rosenthal, *The Technique* 24.

<sup>37</sup> Hirschfeld 202; and Pellat, “al-Djāḥiẓ,” in: *EI*<sup>2</sup> ii, 385.

<sup>38</sup> Hirschfeld 202.

<sup>39</sup> For the theory and practice of Islamic education in medieval times, the encyclopedic work of al-Jāḥiẓ as a whole is an important source. It provides much insightful information on the curriculum for princes, the social status of teachers, the value of books, and even on the etiquette to be observed by people attending literary salons, to mention a few topics. This is also the case for al-Jāḥiẓ’s main works: the *K. al-Ḥayawān* (“The Book of Animals,” a cerebral anthology on a large variety of subjects, based on animals); the *K. al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (“The Book of Eloquence and Exposition,” which Pellat called “an inventory of what have been called the “Arabic humanities,” designed to stress the oratorical and poetic ability of Arabs;” cf. *EI*<sup>2</sup> ii, 386); and the *K. al-Bukhalāʾ* (“The Book of Misers,” an entertaining work praising Arab generosity and analyzing non-Arab avarice). Other works dealing in more detail with intellectual refinement and ethics are: (1) The *Risālat al-māʿāsh wa-l-māʿād* (“The Treatise on the Manner of Living [in this World] and the Hereafter,” known also as *Risāla fī l-Akhlāq al-maḥmūda wa-l-madhūma*, “Treatise

provided him with the opportunity not only to defend but also to champion schoolteachers and stress their superiority over all other classes of educators and tutors.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2 *Al-Jāḥiẓ's book "The Teachers"*

As is the case for quite a number of al-Jāḥiẓ's writings, no complete text of the book "The Teachers" has been preserved.<sup>41</sup> Various fragments of this work were discovered, however, in four manuscripts in Cairo, Istanbul, London, and Mosul.<sup>42</sup> The text has been published several times.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, this work of al-Jāḥiẓ's—which he apparently composed at a late stage of his life<sup>44</sup>—is little known thus far, in either the Arab or the Western world.

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on Laudable and Blameworthy Morals"); (2) The *Kitāb Kitmān al-sirr wa-ḥifẓ al-lisān* ("The Book on Keeping Secrets and Controlling the Tongue"), and (3) the treatise *Dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb* ("Censure of the Manners of Scribes").

<sup>40</sup> Pellat remarks that al-Jāḥiẓ's "acute powers of observation, his light-hearted skepticism, his comic sense and satirical turn of mind fit him admirably to portray human types and society." He says also that, at times, "he uses all his skill at the expense of several social groups (schoolmasters, singers, scribes, etc.) [although] generally keeping within the bounds of decency; cf. *EI*<sup>2</sup> ii, 386. The fact that al-Jāḥiẓ praises the schoolteachers highly in one passage (e.g., *K. al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* i, 250–2) and makes rather unflattering jokes about them in another (*ibid.* 248–49) may therefore be understood as the result of an essentially dialectical intellect—something, however, that was interpreted by his contemporaries (Ibn Qutayba, for example) as a lack of seriousness. G.J. van Gelder suggests that it is precisely this "lack of seriousness" which seems to be one al-Jāḥiẓ's attractive sides: the fact that al-Jāḥiẓ mixes jest and earnestness; see van Gelder's article on this topic in: *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23 (1992), esp. 95–106. In addition, al-Jāḥiẓ's Mu'tazilite views, which eventually aim at tackling the various aspects of a given topic, may also have played a role in this regard.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ's works comprise nearly 200 titles. However, only about thirty works—whether authentic or apocryphal—have been preserved in full length. Of about fifty works, only excerpts, quotations, or fragmentary passages have come down to us; see *EI*<sup>2</sup> ii, 386–388, with further references. The *K. al-Mu'allimīn* belongs to this latter category; cf. Geries 9. C. Brockelmann classified al-Jāḥiẓ's works according to real or assumed subjects; his list provides a good idea of the breadth of al-Jāḥiẓ's literary and scholarly interests (*GAL* Supplement i, 241–247).

<sup>42</sup> Geries 9–17, 25.

<sup>43</sup> (1) In the margin of *Kitāb al-Kāmil fī l-luġha wa-l-adab, ta'rif* [. . .] *Abī l-'Abbās Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-ma'rūf bi-l-Mubarrad al-Nahwī*, [. . .] *wa-qad ṭurīza hāmishuhu bi-Kitāb al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra min kutub al-Imām Abī Uthmān 'Amr al-Jāḥiẓ ibn Baḥr ibn Maḥbūb al-Kinānī al-Baṣrī* [. . .], *ikhtiyār al-Imām 'Ubaydallāh ibn Ḥassān*, Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Taqaddum al-'Ilmiyya, 1323 [1905], 17–40; (2) *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Beirut, 1991 (based on the ed. Cairo 1964), vol. iii, 27–51; (3) in: *al-Mawrid* (Baghdad) 7.4 (1978), *ʿAdad Khāṣṣ: Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ*, 149–158; and (4) *Kitābān li-l-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Ibrahim Geries, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1980, 57–87. Cf. also Pellat, *Nouvel essai* 148–149 (no. 143); and Geries 9.—I have

### 3.2.1 *Intention and literary style*

With regard to al-Jāḥiẓ's literary oeuvre in general, Ibrahim Geris observed that this medieval scholar seems to have believed that "the people's need for one another is a salient characteristic of their nature and an inborn feature of the core of their souls. It is permanent and . . . covers all beings, from the smallest to the greatest."<sup>45</sup> None of God's creatures would be able to reach his goal without the assistance of those deployed to help him; the most respected cannot exist without the least respected; rulers need the lower classes as the lower classes need rulers; rich people need the poor and slaves need masters.<sup>46</sup> This idea, of Greek origin, regarding the interdependence of elements in the universe, influenced al-Jāḥiẓ's general perception of the world. For al-Jāḥiẓ, attempts to comprehend the microcosm lead to an understanding of the macrocosm. This scientific-philosophic approach made al-Jāḥiẓ the sharp observer and analyst he was. Basing himself on deduction and logical reasoning, he unveils to the reader the significance of what is insignificant in the eyes of those relying simply on superficial perceptions and initial sensory impressions. Such a view of the world eventually enabled him to observe and minutely examine various social groups. As a result, his writings reflect, rather objectively and realistically, actual circumstances, opinions, and viewpoints prevalent in his own time, thus providing a spectacular insight into Arabic-Islamic culture and society under the 'Abbāsids.<sup>47</sup>

The book "The Teachers" reveals in an aesthetic way many of these characteristics of al-Jāḥiẓ's approach as a scholar and as a man of letters. For example, the various digressions and the original sequence of thoughts in this text appeal to the reader through the

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consulted Hārūn's and Geris' editions of the *K. al-Mu'allimīn*. All references to al-Jāḥiẓ's *K. al-Mu'allimīn* in this article are based on Geris' edition, if not indicated otherwise. I would like to thank Dr. Khaled Sindawi (Haifa) for drawing my attention to the latter edition.

Passages of al-Jāḥiẓ's essay on "The Teachers" have been translated into English (by H. Hirschfeld, 1922), German (by O. Rescher, 1931), and French (by Ch. Pellat, 1953). In the light of the more recent editions by Hārūn and Geris, some passages in these translations seem to require further thought. Pellat's French translation was later also rendered into English (Pellat, *The Life* 112–114) and German (Pellat, *Arabische Geisteswelt* 181–184).

<sup>44</sup> Geris argues that al-Jāḥiẓ wrote the book "The Teachers" after he had completed the *K. al-Ḥayawān*, *K. al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* and *K. al-Bukhalā'*; cf. Geris 23.

<sup>45</sup> Geris 28–29.

<sup>46</sup> Geris 23–24 (mainly based on al-Jāḥiẓ's *K. al-Ḥayawān*, i, 204–210).

<sup>47</sup> Geris 24.

balanced repetition of similar ideas presented each time in a different way. Hence “what would be pointless repetition” in terms of modern thinking and presentation, arose “in the mind of the 3rd/9th century writer . . . from the desire . . . to give ordinary prose the symmetry of verse,” wrote Charles Pellat, one of the best-known experts on al-Jāhiz.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Structure and contents*

The author of the book “The Teachers” addresses the reader directly in the second person singular. He starts with an appeal to God to protect the people—including the reader of his book—from the rage of anger and to grant them justice and patience in their hearts. Then he sets out to defend the teachers against a (fictitious) critic and to commend them highly. The teachers are described as knowledgeable, diligent, and hardworking people. Moreover, it is said that they are passionate about their profession and suffer with their students when they do not make the progress expected. Parents should not, therefore, blame the teachers when their children are slow in their education, but instead look at the mental capability of their offspring.

Al-Jāhiz starts his book with a particularly appealing chapter. It deals with writing in general and with the fundamental impact writing has had on human civilization. Writing and recording, along with calculation, are “the pillars” on which the present and the future of civilization and “the welfare of this world” rest. Writing and calculation are God-given, as are the teachers themselves, for God “made them available to us” (p. 60).<sup>49</sup>

The next paragraph of the book deals with memory and memorization. Interestingly enough, the author stresses here that independent thinkers and researchers dislike (*kariha*) memorization. He says that depending on it makes “the mind disregard distinction” and causes it to neglect thought (p. 62). People with a good memory are tempted to rely simply on what their predecessors achieved,

<sup>48</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup> ii, 387.

<sup>49</sup> Such praise of books and writing must have been perceived as being even more polemical and provocative in a society in which people seem to have looked askance at writing down knowledge. It is worth mentioning here that al-Jāhiz’s refreshing views in this regard are paralleled in a lengthy passage in his *K. al-Hayawān*; see esp. i, 38–102.

without making attempts to reach conclusions of their own. Nevertheless, for the process of studying, a good memory is valuable and necessary; otherwise, the results of study and research would not last.

As for the trust one is to have in teachers, the teachers of princes are mentioned as examples. Rulers entrusted teachers with the education of their children and so should everybody else. However, one is advised to do so only after testing the teacher and being convinced of his pedagogical skills. Attention is also drawn to the many great scholars in all branches of the arts and sciences and to the men renowned in politics and society who were once teachers (p. 63).

At this point of the presentation, the author effectively alerts the reader not to draw conclusions prematurely; instead he advises us to finish reading the entire treatise first (p. 64). He points to the fact that there are teachers for everything one needs to know: writing, arithmetic, law, the religious duties (*farāʾīḍ*), the Quran, grammar, prosody, poetry, and history. This is followed by a list of further subjects that are taught: these include astronomy, music (*luḥūn*), medicine, geometry, polo, archery, and horsemanship, playing musical instruments, chess, and other games. The children of the lower classes are given lessons in farming, shop-keeping,<sup>50</sup> construction, jewelry-making, sewing, weaving, dying, and other handicrafts and occupations. It is noted that even animals can be taught. Yet, schoolteachers, as al-Jāḥiẓ stresses, are superior to all other categories of teachers (pp. 64–66).

Manifold pieces of advice for teachers follow. They focus on the qualifications teachers need for their work, but also deal with the actual process of teaching and the curriculum. The “Chapter on the Instruction of Boys (*Fī riẓādat al-ṣabī*),” one of only two chapters in the treatise that bears a title, discusses extensively the teaching of grammar (as will be shown below in more detail). Further thoughts relate to literature and scholarship, to writing prose, and to the value of reading good books. Frequently these remarks are interspersed with sayings and anecdotes from Arabic literature (p. 72).

The flow of the presentation is seemingly interrupted here by a chapter entitled “On the Censure of Homosexuality (*Fī dhamm al-liwāṭ*).”

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<sup>50</sup> *Tijāra* (“trading”) in Gerjes’ edition, p. 66; *niḡāra* (“carpentry”) in Hārūn’s edition, p. 117.

It denounces certain sexual activities among adults, both male and female, and the lust for boys (p. 78).<sup>51</sup>

Then, back to literature, the author praises ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. ca. 139/756), who is best known for his translation of the fables of *Kalīla wa-Dimna* into Arabic. As it is said, he is admired not only as a man of letters, an expert on literary style, a poet, and translator, but also as a teacher (p. 79).

The following paragraph warns that too much self-confidence in scholarly matters is a dangerous mistake. To have knowledge and noteworthy achievements in one or two branches of knowledge, for example, does not necessarily indicate an equivalent excellence in other branches. The famous al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. ca. 175/791) is given as an example; it is said that he gained a fine reputation for his work in Arabic grammar and prosody, but that he failed and made a fool of himself when claiming to be an expert in theology (*kalām*) and the metres of songs (*awzān al-aghānī*; p. 80).

Various fragmentary passages follow: they relate to the importance of the ruler (*sultān*) and the administrators of the government. These are praised as most intelligent people and it is said that society is in need of them. Another statement admonishes the teaching of the books of Abū Ḥanīfa. Further remarks then deal with the proper application of analogies (in teaching?). The author uses the history and the merits of the clan of the Quraysh—well known to most Muslims—to show how analogies should or should not be used. The harsh critique of the merchants (which expresses the opposite of what al-Jāhīz said of them in his other writings) and of the money changers seems, again, not to have been initially part of this educational treatise (p. 81).

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<sup>51</sup> Even if one takes into account the possibility that this passage initially was not part of the book “The Teachers” (Rescher 108–109), some readers may nonetheless wonder why a medieval copyist of this book should have included this passage in a text expressly addressing teachers. However, the appropriateness of addressing such a topic in a book on teachers is understandable given the fact that homoerotic love of young and adolescent boys was rather common in ‘Abbāsīd times, and bawdy anecdotes about teachers and their pupils abound. See also the art. “Liwāṭ” (editors), in: *ET*<sup>2</sup> v, 776–779, which includes more information on al-Jāhīz’s concerns in this regard. See furthermore Adam Mez: *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Hildesheim: G. Olms (Repr. Heidelberg 1922), 337–341 (Engl. Tr., Patna: Jubilee Printing and Publishing House, 1937. 364–361). For the meaning of *liwāṭ* in Islamic law, cf. Arno Schmitt: *Liwāṭ im Fiqh: Männliche Homosexualität?*, in: *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 4 (2001–2002), 44–110.

The book “The Teachers” concludes with a moving passage on the gentle treatment students merit. In the second person singular, it once again directly addresses the teachers and us readers. It advises us to treat the students with great care, gentleness, and kindness and not to force them so as not to make them dislike good manners, nor to neglect them since students “deserve your care and hard efforts” (p. 87).

### 3.2.3 *Curricular and non-curricular topics of teaching*

In his book “The Teachers,” al-Jāḥiẓ suggests an impressive variety of topics to be taught. He does so, however, without indicating that these topics in fact relate to two very different categories of teaching: (a) the formal, curricular kind of teaching, as conducted by the schoolteachers at the elementary and the more advanced levels (i.e. the kind of instruction which Ibn Saḥnūn is concerned with in his treatise on primary education); and (b) the informal, non-curricular kind of teaching, which could take place at various locations, including “on the shop floor,” for example. Since al-Jāḥiẓ was interested in teaching in general terms, a clear-cut distinction between the teaching topics belonging to one or the other category is rather difficult to make. This notion needs to be taken into account when looking at the following list of teaching topics drawn from his book.

Obligatory topics:

#### 1. Reading and Writing

- The essentials of writing (*kitāb*); the focus is on correct spelling (even if the handwriting is at a low level) (p. 64).
- The essentials of grammar needed for correct verbal communication and for writing (p. 73).
- The essentials of stylistics, including the use of easy and precise words, and the clarity of expression (p. 74).
- Correct articulation and basic skills in rhetoric (pp. 74–75).

#### 2. Arithmetic

- Good knowledge of arithmetic (pp. 64, 70); accuracy is important here even more so than for writing. At the beginner’s level, the focus is on the basics of calculation; later on one may deal with higher arithmetic, geometry, field measurements etc. (pp. 74–75).

## 3. The Essentials of Religion

- Religious duties (*farā'id*, pp. 64, 69).
- The Quran (pp. 64, 69).

## 4. Literature and Literary Theory

- Poetry: all poems, including those displaying “metrical speech, as used in poems in the metre of *qaṣīd* verse and in poems in *rajaz* metre (*al-mawzūn min qaṣā'id wa-l-arjāz*; pp. 65, 69).
- Prose: including what is balanced and often rhymed (*min al-muzdawij wa-l-asjā'*; p. 69),<sup>52</sup> what provides historical information (*akhbār*), and what is to be found in literary works from former times (*āthār*) (pp. 65, 73).
- Prosody (*arūd*, p. 65).

## 5. Logic and Disputation

- Articulate prose (*al-mantiq al-manthūr*, p. 68).
- Logical argumentation and debate, i.e. formulating questions and answers (p. 68).

## 6. Accounting

- What is required of government clerks and registrars (*kuttāb al-dawāwīn*); such as arithmetic and what is related to marketing and promotion, as well as correct spelling (for the knowledge of accounting is more useful and fruitful than the knowledge possessed by editors and scribes; p. 74).

Recommended topics [at a more advanced stage of education]:

## 7. Hunting.

## 8. Sports, including the use of light arms.

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<sup>52</sup> For *muzdawij* as a technical term of philology, rhetoric, and prosody, see the art. “Muzdawij,” in: *ET*<sup>2</sup> vii, 825 (M. Bencheneb). For the meaning of *muzdawij* as related here, cf. al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa-tabyīn*, ed. Hārūn, ii, 116–117, where al-Jāhiz provides examples of what he calls *muzdawij al-kalām*. See furthermore Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *K. al-Šināʿatayn, al-kitāba wa-l-šīr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī and Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, <sup>1</sup>Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya; ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1371/1952, 260–265 (“*Fī dhikr al-sajʿ wa-l-izdawāj*”). For this term referring to poetry that has paired rhyme (*aa bb cc . . .*), see Gustav E. von Grunebaum, On the Origin and Early Development of Arabic *Muzdawij* Poetry, in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3 (1944), 9–13; and Manfred Ullmann, *Untersuchungen zur Rağāzpoesie, Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1966, 44–60 (“Das Muzdawij-Gedicht”). I am grateful to Prof. G.J. van Gelder (Oxford) for drawing my attention to these publications.

9. Music, including how to play various musical instruments.
10. Astronomy, i.e. “the knowledge of the stars.”
11. Medicine.
12. Geometry (*handasa*).
13. Teaching (or training) animals, especially those used by people for labor, including camels and horses (pp. 65–66).

Topics recommended specifically for children of people from the lower class: Farming, trading, construction, goldsmithing, sewing, weaving, dyeing, and other crafts (p. 66).

### 3.2.4 *Advice for teachers*

The text provides numerous pieces of advice for teachers, some of which are given expressly, while others are indicated in a more general way. Some of the more striking examples shall be presented here. They concern:

#### *The process of education*

- Take the mental ability of students into account. Use a language understandable to them (p. 74).
- Treat students gently and in a most lovable way. Attempt to reach their hearts when it comes to the subject matters taught (p. 77).

#### *The purpose of reading*

- Make the students understand that the purpose of reading books is to learn and to understand and not, simply, the enjoyment of nice words, for: “He who reads the books of eloquent writers and leafs through the collections of sages to acquire ideas pursues the right course. He, [however,] who looks into these books [simply] to learn [more] words pursues the wrong course (*wa-man qara’a kutub al-bulaghā’ wa-taṣaffaha dawāwīn al-ḥukamā’ li-yastafīda l-mā’ānī fa-huwa ‘alā sabīl ṣawāb; wa-man nazara fihā li-yastafīda l-alfāz fa-huwa ‘alā sabīl khata’*)” (pp. 75–76).

#### *The means of expression and style*

- Make the students familiar with the arguments of writers and their eloquent use of simple and easily understood words. Make them taste “the sweetness of brevity and the comfort of sufficiency [in expression] (*ḥalāwat al-ikhtiṣār wa-rāḥat al-kifāya*)” (p. 74).

- Warn the students against pretentiousness (p. 74).
- Teach them to express themselves in a way understandable to people without the need for any additional interpretation and comment (pp. 74–75).
- Teach them to choose simple words whose semantic fields, or meanings, do not cover “extremes, nor extravagance and unnaturalness;” there are already too many people who do not care about the loss of meaning in words, but concern themselves instead with eloquence and “meaningless elegance” in expression (p. 75).
- Make the students understand that content has priority over style, because the least eloquent person is he “who has prepared the means of conveying meaning before preparing the meaning itself.” Enrich their active vocabulary, for one should not just stick to the words one already knows. New vocabulary, however, should be limited to known and distinct meanings, and should not just be created off-hand (p. 75).

*Good manners and style in writing*

- Warn the students about using bad manners in life and in writing. They should also be warned about slow articulation, inactive performance, extreme arrogance, and the keenness to be counted among the eloquent. Again, make them aware of good style; prepare them to distinguish between a smooth and easy style and a complicated one (p. 75).

3.2.5 *Further pieces of advice and examples of how al-Jāhiz presents them*

*Deduction vs. memorization*

The leading sages, masters of the art of deductive reasoning and [independent] thinking, have been averse to excellence in memorization, because of [one’s] dependence on it and [its rendering] the mind negligent of rational discernment, so [much so] that they said: “Memorization inhibits the intellect.”

وكرهت الحكماء الرؤساء، أصحاب  
الاستنباط والتفكير، جودة الحفظ لمكان  
الائتكال عليه، وإغفال العقل من التمييز، حتى  
قالوا: "الحفظ عذق الذهن."

[They have been averse to it] because the one engaged in memorization is only an imitator, whereas deductive reasoning is that which brings the one engaged in it to the coolness of certainty and the strength of confidence.

ولأنّ مستعمل الحفظ لا يكون إلاّ مقلّداً، والاستنباط هو الذي يفضي بصاحبه إلى برد اليقين وعزّ الثقّة.

The true proposition and the praiseworthy judgment is that, when [a student] perpetuates learning by memorization, this harms deductive reasoning; and when he perpetuates deductive reasoning, this harms learning by memorization—even if memorization has a more honorable rank than [deductive reasoning].

والقضية الصحيحة، والحكم المحمود: أنّه متى أدام التحفّظ أضرّ ذلك بالاستنباط، ومتى أدام الاستنباط أضرّ ذلك بالحفظ، وإن كان التحفّظ أشرف منزلة منه.

So, when he neglects rational reflection, ideas do not come quickly to him, and when he neglects learning by memorization, [these ideas] do not stick in his mind or remain long in his heart.

ومتى أهمل النظر<sup>53</sup> لم تسرع إليه المعاني، ومتى أهمل التحفّظ، لم تعلق بقلبه، وقلّ مكثها في صدره.

The nature of memorization is other than [that] of deductive reasoning. [However,] that which is treated and helped by both [memorization and deductive reasoning] is [something] agreed upon: it is freeing the mind for—and desiring—only one thing. By means of these two (i.e. memorization and deductive reasoning), perfection comes to be and virtue appears.

وطبيعة الحفظ غير طبيعة الاستنباط. والذي يعالجان به ويستعينان [به] متفق عليه وهو فراغ القلب للشيء والشهوة له، وبهما يكون التمام وتظهر الفضيلة.

The adherent of learning by memorization [and the adherent of deductive reasoning] have another aspect [of learning] on which they agree: this is the location and the time [for studying].

ولصاحب التحفّظ [ولصاحب الاستنباط] سبب<sup>54</sup> آخر يتفقان عليه، وهو الموضع والوقت.

<sup>53</sup> *Naẓar* refers here to “inferential knowledge” differentiated from “necessary knowledge,” *ilm ʿdarūrī*, i.e. the knowledge known immediately without reflection (such as the knowledge of one’s existence and of the self-evident truth of logic).

<sup>54</sup> *Sabab* means “cause, reason, motive, occasion,” etc.; it was decided, however, to render it here as “aspect” for the generality of the term.

As for the locations, whatever both of them choose [is appropriate]; if they so wish [however, these locations could be upper] chambers without distractions.

فَأَمَّا الْمَوَاضِعُ فَأَيُّهَا يَخْتَارَانِ إِذَا أَرَادَا ذَلِكَ  
الْغُرْفِ دُونَ الشُّغْلِ.<sup>55</sup>

As for the hours, the early mornings [are preferred] above all other times, because that time is before the time of being occupied [with other things,] and [it] follows [the time of] total relaxation and rest;

وَأَمَّا السَّاعَاتُ فَالْأَسْحَارُ دُونَ سَائِرِ الْأَوْقَاتِ،  
لَأَنَّ ذَلِكَ الْوَقْتَ قَبْلَ وَقْتِ الْإِشْتِغَالِ، وَتَعْقِبُ  
تَمَامَ الرَّاحَةِ وَالْجَمَامِ،

[this is so] since there is a certain amount of time for relaxation, which is [for one's] benefit, just as there is a certain amount of time for hard work, which is [also for one's] benefit. (pp. 62–63).

لَأَنَّ لِلْجَمَامِ مَقْدَارًا هُوَ الْمَصْلُحَةُ، كَمَا أَنَّ  
لِلْكَدِّ مَقْدَارًا هُوَ الْمَصْلُحَةُ.

### *The teaching of grammar*

*About the training of the boy:*

فِي رِيَاضَةِ الصَّبِيِّ:

As for grammar, occupy [the boy's] mind with it only to the extent that it would safeguard [him] against the [commission of] excessive grammatical errors and against the measure of [grammatical] ignorance [encountered in the parlance of] the commonality—should he happen to draft a piece of writing, recite poetry, [or] describe something.

وَأَمَّا النَّحْوُ، فَلَا تُشْغِلْ قَلْبَهُ مِنْهُ إِلَّا بِقَدْرِ مَا  
يُؤَدِّيهِ إِلَى السَّلَامَةِ مِنْ فَاحِشِ اللَّحْنِ، وَمِنْ  
مَقْدَارِ جَهْلِ الْعَوَامِّ فِي كِتَابِ إِنْ كَتَبَهُ، وَشَعْرَ  
إِنْ أَنْشَدَهُ، وَشَيْءٍ إِنْ وَصَفَهُ.

Anything exceeding this is a diversion from what has a higher claim [for the pupil's education] and is a distraction

وَمَا زَادَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ فَهُوَ مَشْغَلَةٌ عَمَّا هُوَ أَوْلَى  
بِهِ، وَمُذْهِلٌّ عَمَّا هُوَ أَرْدُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْهُ، مِنْ رَوَايَةٍ

<sup>55</sup> *Ghurfa*, pl. *ghuraf*, means “an (upper) chamber.” It also signifies the highest place(s) in Paradise (see Q 25:75, 29:58, 34:37, 39:20; see also Lane vi, 2249). Furthermore, it is one of the names of Paradise (Lane vi, 2249). *Shughl* means “business, occupation, or employment . . . [and in particular business . . . that diverts one from a thing] or an occurrence that causes a man to forget, or neglect, or be unmindful” (Lane iv, 1567). Hārūn's edition, p. 30, offers a different (and perhaps more likely) reading:

فَأَمَّا الْمَوَاضِعُ فَأَيُّهُمَا يَخْتَارَانِ إِذَا أَرَادَا ذَلِكَ الْفَوْقَ دُونَ السُّفْلِ.

As for the location [for studying], both [groups] choose, if they so wish, the [quiter?] upper rather than the lower [levels of a building].

from what is more profitable for him in the way of relating the [pointedly] illustrative proverb, the true informative account, and the [most] outstanding interpretation.

المثل الشاهد<sup>56</sup> والخبر الصادق، والتعبير  
البارع.

He who desires to reach the utmost limits [of grammar], and to go beyond [studying only] a moderate amount [of it], is someone who does not need to familiarize himself with substantial matters, the deductive unveiling of the obscurities in the [art of] governance, [knowledge of] the welfare of peoples and countries, the pillars [of religion], and the axis around which the [world's] millstone revolves; [that is to say, this is someone] who has no share [of knowledge] nor any livelihood other than [grammar].

وإنما يرغب في بلوغ غايته ومجاوزة الاقتصاد فيه من لا يحتاج إلى تعرّف جسيمات الأمور، والاستنباط لغوامض التدبير، ولمصالح العباد والبلاد والعلم بالأركان، والقطب الذي تدور عليه الرحي، ومن ليس له حظّ غيره ولا معاش سواه.

The difficulties of grammar do not occur in human transactions and there is nothing compelling [you] to indulge in it.

وعويص النحو، لا يجري في المعاملات، ولا يضطرّ إليه شيء.

It is sound judgment, then, to direct [the pupil] towards finger reckoning, rather than Indian calculus, and rather than geometry and the difficulties belonging to the [science of] measuring surface areas. Concerning all of this, however, you are obliged to teach him what the competent [clerks] of the ruler and secretaries in the chancelleries need [to know].

فمن الرأي أن يصمد به في حساب العقد دون حساب الهند<sup>57</sup> ودون الهندسة وعويص ما يدخل في المساحة، وعليك في ذلك بما يحتاج إليه كفاة السلطان وكتاب الدواوين.

<sup>56</sup> This seems to be the nuance of what al-Jāhīz means by *al-mathal al-shāhid*. A more literal translation would be something like “the proverb that bears witness,” or “. . . provides evidence.” Alternatively, if *mathal* is taken to mean “example,” it would be translated as “the example that serves as evidence,” which therefore would make it relevant for the exegesis of the Quran. Hārūn’s edition, p. 38, has *al-mathal wa-l-shāhid*. While this reading would also be possible, the text as given in Gerjes’ edition seems to be rhetorically better with respect to the following pairs of noun plus adjective.

<sup>57</sup> Medieval Arabic scholars were aware of the significance of the decimal numeral system of the Indians. This is shown, for example, by the many books on *al-ḥisāb al-hindī*, as medieval Arabic scholars called the numeral system based on “ten” (see *GAS* v, 195–196). For the Indian calculus as an arithmetic method (and for the classical theory of numbers in medieval Arabic scholarship in general), see al-Hassan

*I say* that reaching an [adequate] knowledge of accounting, about which [all this] work revolves, and progressing in it and being motivated to do so, is more beneficial for [the pupil] than reaching [the level] of craftsmanship of the skilled copyists and chief calligraphers.

وأنا أقول إنّ البلوغ في معرفة الحساب الذي يدور عليه العمل، والترقي فيه والسبب إليه، أرد عليه من البلوغ في صناعة المحررين ورؤوس الخطاطين؛

[This is] because there is communication at the lowest level of penmanship—as long as the spelling is correct—while this is not the case for calculation (pp. 73–74).

لأن في أدنى طبقات الخط مع صحة الهجاء بلاغا، وليس كذلك حال الحساب.<sup>58</sup>

### *The treatment of the student*

After that, I am of the opinion that you should not force him [to work] and so make him dislike good manners and education. [Also,] do not neglect him, lest he get used to wasting [time] in amusing activities.

وبعد هذا، فإنني أرى أن لا تستكرهه فتبغض إليه الأدب. ولا تهمله فيعتاد اللهو.

Moreover, I know of nothing in the entire world that is more [capable of] attracting complete corruption than bad companions and leisure-time beyond [what is needed for] relaxation.

على أنني لا أعلم في جميع الأرض شيئا أجلب لجميع الفساد من قرناء السوء والفراغ الفاضل عن الجمام.

Teach him knowledge as long as he is free from the tasks of men and the demands of those with high-minded ambitions.

درسه العلم ما كان فارغا من أشغال الرجال ومطالب ذوي الهمم.

(ed.), *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture* iv, 189. Also see Gohlman (ed.), *The Life of Ibn Sina* 20 and 21.

It is interesting to note that the word *hind* in classical Arabic also means “a hundred camels,” or any hundreds, or higher numbers; or “two hundred [camels or years];” see *Lisān al-Arab* iii, 437; and Lane viii, 2903–4. This seems to indicate that the word *hind* in general referred to higher numbers. At any rate, even in this latter case, the first part of the sentence at issue here would refer to “basic” calculation, while the latter would refer to “higher” arithmetic.

<sup>58</sup> In other words: communication is possible even with little knowledge in writing. In calculation, however, the smallest mistake will lead to inaccurate results.

Devise artful means to make yourself more lovable to him than his mother.

[However,] you cannot [expect] him to show tender affection and sincere friendship towards you with his dislike for the heavy burden of education you put on him, [that is] on someone who has not [yet] reached the state of somebody who is familiar with erudition.

Therefore, bring out his innate affection with righteous words and the offer of financial [assistance].

However, there is a limit to this; whoever goes beyond it is excessive, and excessiveness is dissipation; and whoever does not reach it is excessive in neglect, and the one who is neglectful is a wastrel.

The one you attempt [to induce]—by way of benefiting the state of affairs of [this person being] the one in whom you have the hope that he will take your place amongst your people and will take care of [and continue] what you have left behind, in the way you would have done [it],—is worthy of all care and the making of every effort on your part (p. 86).

واحتل في أن تكون أحب إليه من أمه.

ولا تستطيع أن يمحصك المقة، ويصفي لك المودة، مع كراهته لما تحمل إليه من ثقل التأديب عند من لم يبلغ حال العارف بفضل.

فاستخرج مكنون محبته ببر اللسان وبذل المال.

ولهذا مقدار، من جازه أفرط، والإفراط سرف، ومن قصر عنه فرط والمفرط مضباع [...].

والذي تحاول من صلاح أمر من تؤمل فيه أن يقوم في أهلك مقامك — وصلاح ما خلقت كقيامك — لحقيق بالحيفة عليه، وبإعطائه المجهود من نفسك.

#### 4 Conclusions

As has become apparent, the two treatises presented in this chapter show in an impressive way the attempts made by two 9th century Muslim scholars to analyze and explain primary education, the objectives of education, and the pedagogical and didactic tools to be applied in achieving such goals.

In terms of the history of ideas, most of the educational rules given by Ibn Saḥnūn and al-Jāḥiẓ can be found—in a more systematic and perhaps more elaborate way—in the writings of the theologian and original thinker al-Ghazālī, who lived 250 years after

these predecessors of his in this particular field of scholarship. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that these two early texts should already address many major aspects of educational ethics and philosophy, regardless of the fact that each of them approaches these issues from a different perspective: one from a legal and the other from a literary-philosophical point of view.

In more general terms, the pedagogical advice given in the two classical Arabic texts under discussion may remind us also of similar ideas introduced to Europe in the educational renaissance of the 16th and 17th centuries. In Europe, it was somebody like the Czech educational reformer and religious leader John Amos Comenius (1592–1670) who became known for his innovative teaching methods in his time. Like Ibn Saḥnūn, Comenius emphasized the need for teaching all aspects of language, since good language skills are a basic prerequisite for the intellectual improvement of students. Like Ibn Saḥnūn also, Comenius argued that education should aim at equipping young people with a profound knowledge of the Holy Scripture and religious duties. Comenius, though, stressed as well that teachers should ensure a rapid, pleasant, and thorough education, which follows in “the footsteps of nature.”<sup>59</sup> These latter ideas of making teaching and learning a natural and pleasant experience are not yet addressed clearly in Ibn Saḥnūn’s book on “Rules of Conduct for Teachers.” However, they are present and discussed most insightfully in al-Jāḥiẓ’s book “The Teachers.”

For these reasons, these two classical Arabic works from the 9th century not only represent some of the very earliest attempts of Muslim scholarship to deal, in an elaborate manner, with pedagogy and didactics,<sup>60</sup> but they also deserve recognition for their contribution to the history of pedagogy in general.

<sup>59</sup> Weimer, *Geschichte der Pädagogik* 81–86.

<sup>60</sup> See my art. “Education: Islamic Education,” in: *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* ii, 640–45, esp. 643–44.

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