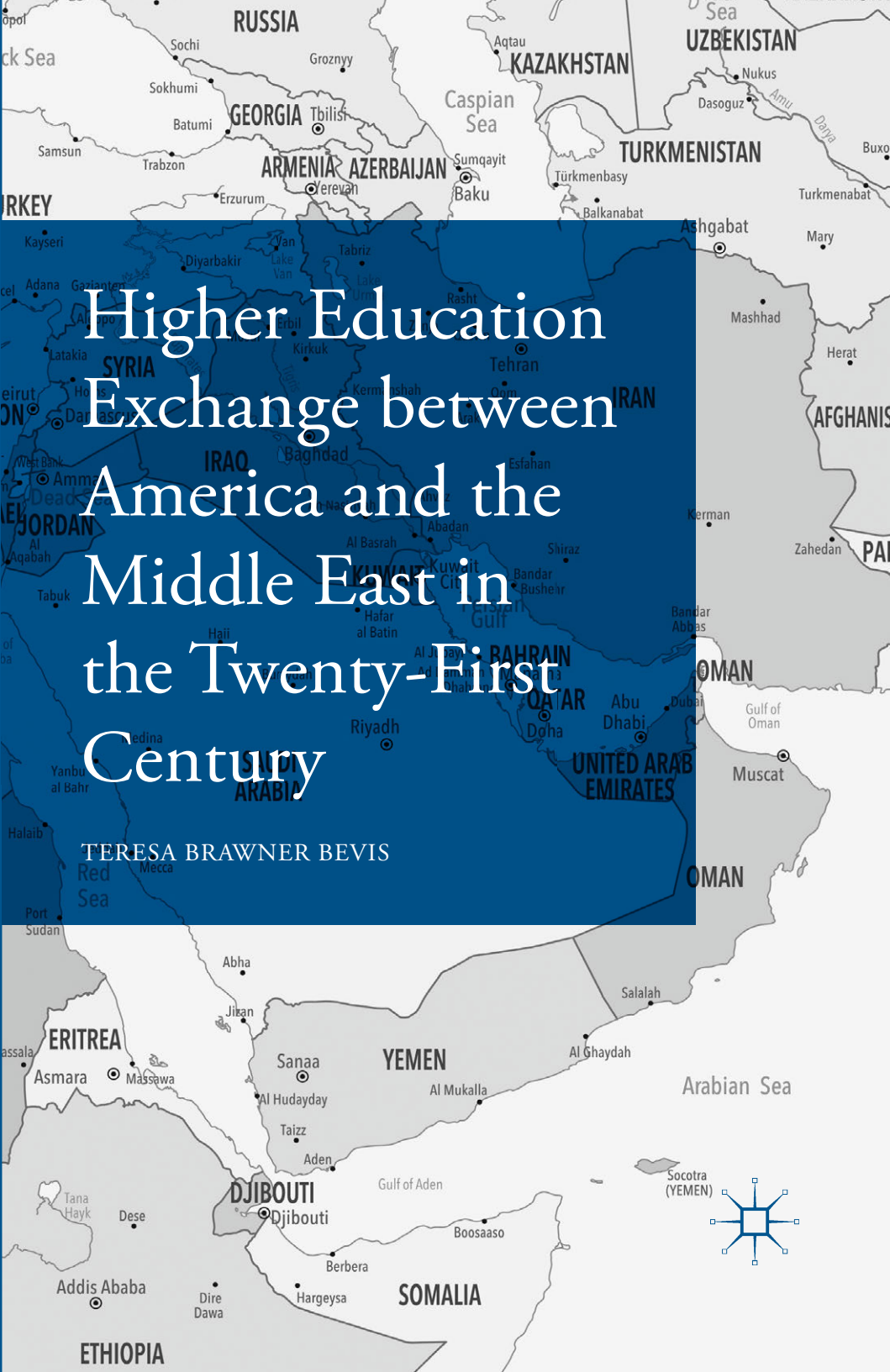

Higher Education Exchange between America and the Middle East in the Twenty-First Century

TERESA BRAWNER BEVIS

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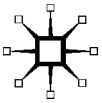

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE BETWEEN AMERICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Preface

Dame Violet Penelope Dickson was the widow of British Colonel H. R. P. Dickson and by the 1960s had already lived in Kuwait for almost a half century. Like her husband, Violet published some of the first English-language books about their beloved adopted country. Even so, despite a long and abiding association with the region, they were keenly aware of limitations in accurately transcribing the culture. In Colonel Dickson's book *The Arab of the Desert, A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia*, he wisely disclaimed any deep knowledge of the complexities of the Arabic language and its many derivatives. I respectfully borrow his statement from that book, in a similar attempt to disclose my own limitations:

> In representing Arabic . . . I have striven to write what I heard, however far removed from literary forms. To simplify typesetting, I have not attempted to distinguish the Arabic sounds of 'ain and hamr.ah but to represent both [in some cases] by an apostrophe. Similarly I have not sought to differentiate the Arabic varieties of s, t, h, etc., nor systematically to insert the final silent h. I lay no claim to a profound knowledge of classical or literary Arabic, and I therefore crave the indulgence of those learned in these matters.

Over the years the discipline of Orientalism left us with innumerable transliteration systems. Then came the Victorians who, as Dickson put it, just did things their own way. In this book concessions to the many variations have produced a simplified usage. For example, diacritical marks on the "heavy" consonants have been omitted, merciful to the typesetters.

It is difficult to discern what might be termed "correct" in terms of Arabic transliterations. One of many examples is the word "sheik." The vowel combination seems rational ("i" before "e" except after "c," or when pronounced "ay" and in "neighbor" or "weigh"). But because Americans frequently mispronounce their own language, the term often still comes out as "sheek." A more representative spelling is "shaykh." But in the interest of using the commonly recognized spellings, especially for American readers, "sheik" or "sheikh" are used. Mekkah is left as Mecca, Bahrayn is left Bahrain. The intention throughout is to make the reading of the text easy rather than attempt to, as in my case, pursue the impossible task of making things grammatically accurate.

Like Colonel Dickson, I readily acknowledge my limited command of Arabic, Farsi, or other Middle Eastern languages, and have conceded to use spellings and terms most common or most referenced, depending on context and time period. Scholars will undoubtedly ferret out inconsistencies. Therefore it is my hope that readers will use the text for its content and purpose—to provide a historical overview of higher education exchange between two dynamic regions—rather than count upon its linguistic precision. It is also my hope that the author's deep appreciation of the rich contributions of the peoples of the Middle East, a place I still remember as "home," is plainly evident. No disrespect is intended by any unintentional misspellings.

My affection and respect for the Middle East and my pursuit of research on the region has in fact been lifelong. Kuwait was my home during my childhood years, from the time Tom and Louise Brawner moved there from California in 1959, making ours among the first American families to travel to there for the developing oil industry. A native of Texas, my father had worked with the oil pipe and supply industry in California, then later accepted an offer from the American Independent Oil Company to administer their offices in downtown Kuwait City. It was a bold move for a young American family to relocate to the Middle East in those days, to a part of the world still largely unexplored

by Westerners. In my mother's hometown in Arkansas, an article in the local newspaper announced our departure. "They're Off to Kuwait, Kuwait, They Said" was the headline. Because so many Americans were not familiar with the tiny Persian Gulf country at that time, it was necessary to clarify its geographic position at the outset of the story.

Everything was different in Kuwait. My first memory is of arriving at the old Kuwait airport and clinging close to my mother. When we reached our house, large and sand-colored and so different from our middle-class California craftsman, it was located very near what was then the American Consulate. The Persian Gulf was just a few hundred yards from our front door, a deep turquoise blue and always with a steady stream of oil tankers on its horizon. I was glad to learn that there were two other American children who lived at the consulate compound—the daughters of Talcott Seelye, who would later serve as US ambassador to Tunisia and then as ambassador to Syria. They would be my first friends in Kuwait.

Facilities and services that catered to Western Europeans and Americans during those years were scarce. The only English-speaking school in Kuwait when we arrived in 1960 was the small British-run primary school at Shuwaik, now the location of Kuwait University. I attended there for the first years along with my new friends, the Seelye girls and Sophie, the daughter of British Ambassador Richmond—and indeed almost every English or American child in Kuwait City under the age of ten or eleven. After grade five my parents would hire a private teacher and, using the Calvert Correspondence system from Baltimore, set up what amounted to a private school on the second floor of our home, for three of the embassy children and myself. At the time, after one outgrew the school at Shuwaik, private tutoring was the only means of educating Americans past the fifth grade in Kuwait. Some of my friends would be sent off to boarding school at American Community School in Beirut, the nearest alternative, or to Switzerland, only to be seen again on holidays or in the

summers. Almost every American in Kuwait attended the only Christian Protestant church, run by the Scudders, a preeminent missionary family in the Middle East. And everyone's physician was Dr. Mary Allison, at the time the only practicing American doctor in Kuwait. It was a small circle.

Only in recent years have I recognized the significance of that pivotal time period for both America and the Middle East, and what a rare opportunity I was given, albeit at a young age, to witness its progress firsthand and to know some of the people who helped shape it. In the early 1960s a social and economic transformation was taking place in the region—the oil-producing countries in particular—that was similar in scope to changes that had taken centuries to evolve in Europe. In the Middle East, however, such a transformation would take place in a single generation, aided to an undetermined degree by higher learning exchange with the United States of America. While much has been written about the oil industry and of the many efforts of the early Christian missionaries in developing America's relationship with the Middle East, few book-length works have been published about the academic connections that have so rapidly expanded in scope and importance.

It was a privilege to have had the opportunity to offer the first comprehensive history of this topic in the book *Higher Education Exchange between America and the Middle East through the Twentieth Century*. A sequel to the first book, this text covers the developments in American higher education exchange with the Middle East since the turn of the new millennium, and especially since the events of September 11, 2001.

Acknowledgments

My thanks are first owed to my husband, David, and my children, Thomas and Elizabeth, whose love and support are at all times essential and indispensable; and to my late parents, Thomas A. and Louise King Brawner, whose bold decision to move from California to Kuwait forever instilled in their only offspring a lifelong appreciation for the countries and peoples of Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

Antiquity through the Twentieth Century

As World War II drew to a close, the United States and the Middle East were embarking upon what would become a long and abiding collaboration of academic exchange. The engagement was not accidental. A complex history of events and situations had well established the foundation upon which such an enduring collaboration could develop and grow. A unique set of circumstances had put that foundation into place—the century-long presence of American Christian missionaries, the discovery and development of oil in several Middle Eastern countries, the urgent need for a new generation of well-trained professionals in the region, and the rise of US higher education to the level of "best in the world."

By the time the Middle East found itself in need of higher education, the United States already had a deep connection with region, since George Washington first negotiated the young nation's international policies during the Barbary Wars.

America's first foreign battles had been fought there and its navy was inaugurated partly in response to threats emanating from that region. Other founding fathers were evidently intrigued by the culture; Thomas Jefferson is said to have taught himself basic Arabic using a copy of the Quran that he kept in his private library, and he is reported to have observed the first presidential *Iftaar* by breaking fast with a Tunisian ambassador at sunset.

The culture of the Middle East inspired iconic works by a number of early writers, among them Herman Melville, Edith Wharton and Mark Twain, and the nation's art and architecture is likewise embedded with Middle Eastern influences. Even the Statue of Liberty had its conceptual origins in the region. French sculptor Auguste Bartholdi had first designed "Egypt Brings Light to Asia," a colossal statue of a robed women with a torch, for a government-sponsored project along the Suez Canal. When the project was abandoned he had another opportunity to construct it, when he was commissioned to design the Statue of "Liberty Enlightening the World" in New York City.

Defining "Middle East"

The place most people refer to as the "Middle East" is, in fact, a complex amalgam of ethnicities, religions, and traditions within a mix of countries whose borders have sometimes been reinvented—often through foreign intervention. The complexities have resulted in a protracted history of local skirmishes, regional battles, and full-on wars. Since ancient times the culture of the Middle Eastern region has been impacted by the traditions of its conquering forces—Greeks, Romans, Ottomans, Western Europeans, and Mongols—a circumstance that has, over time, produced a rich and vibrant mosaic of cultures and perspectives. In its history the vast region has been home to varying populations of Arabs, Turks, Turkomans, Persians, Kurds, Azeris, Copts, Jews, Assyrians, Maronites, Circassians, Somalie, Armenians, Druze, and a number of other ethnic groups. As far as the physical region is concerned, there is as yet no universal consensus on its territorial definition and "gray areas" of interpretation remain. Some classify Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria as Middle Eastern, while others regard North Africa as a separate entity.[1] Some Middle Eastern studies departments in American universities exclude Pakistan and Afghanistan, while others include the Caucasus and Southwest Asia.

Alternative names sometimes used for the Middle East, such as Arab World or Arab Civilization or Islamic World, are generally inaccurate with regard to ethnic or religious makeup. Such terms do, on the other hand, correctly emphasize the preeminence of Arabic and Islam in the historical development of the Middle East's overall culture and identity. Arabic is both symbolically and practically predominant in the region, partly because of its prestige as the language of the Quran, but also because it was the language of the arts, sciences, and letters during the region's Golden Age of learning. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all artists, scientists, and writers who contributed to the region's academic advances have been Arabs. The visionaries and builders of this multifaceted civilization have emerged from every ethnic group within the *ummah*.[2]

Early uses of the term "Middle East" were most often references to the area between Mesopotamia and Burma—somewhere between the "Near East" and the "Far East." The modern definition took its shape following World War I, after the Ottoman Empire was defeated by the British and their allies, and the region was partitioned into various nations. But even before the fall of the Ottomans, the terms "Near East" and "Far East" were beginning to fall into disuse. In September 1902, an article titled "The Persian Gulf and International Relations" penned by American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan was published in the *National Review*, a British journal. In the article Mahan employed the term "Middle East" to designate territory between Arabia and India. After the Suez Canal, said the article, the strategic importance of this region was "the most important passage for Britain to control in order to keep the Russians from advancing toward India," which was a British colony.[3] At the time the British and Russian Empires were vying for influence in Central Asia in a rivalry known as "The Great Game."

Mahan's article was reprinted in *The Times*, and then was followed by a series of 20 articles titled "The Middle East Question" by another author, Sir Ignatius Valentine Chirol. In this series the

term was expanded to include "those regions of Asia which extend to the borders in India or command the approaches to India."[4] From that point forward, *The Times* discontinued the use of quotation marks from subsequent printings of the term Middle East.

The term was defined in part by American policy. The Middle East Institute was founded in Washington, DC, in 1946, further delineating the term in the United States. Then in 1957 the Eisenhower Doctrine described the Middle East as the area "between and including Libya on the west and Pakistan on the east, with Syria and Iraq on the North and the Arabian peninsula to the south, plus the Sudan and Ethiopia." In 1958 the US State Department more specifically defined the region as including only Egypt, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar. Today the definition has expanded to include much of North Africa, thus the acronym MENA (Middle East and North Africa) is, in some cases, replacing the former terminology. The MENA designation typically includes the above-mentioned countries, with the addition of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Oman, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Palestine, and Iran. The Institute of International Education (IIE), which provides the annual census of foreign student exchange enrollments, currently includes all of the aforementioned countries with the addition of Cyprus and Turkey.

According to the World Bank, the countries making up the MENA include Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunesia, the UAE, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen. For the purposes of this text, especially when discussing current topics, the terms "Middle East" and "MENA" are used more or less interchangeably. This text focuses chiefly on the Arabic/Islamic countries that have had a significant history of higher education exchange with the United States.

Some take issue with its Western origins, but over time the term "Middle East" has come into almost universally accepted use. Partly because of the influence of Western journalism, the

Arabic equivalent of the term "Middle East" (*ash-Sharq al-Awsat*; the Persian equivalent is *Khavar-e miyaneh*) has also taken on standard usage in the mainstream press in most of the region. In Arab publications the designation *Mashriq*, from the Arabic root for east, further denotes a variously defined region around the Levant, in the eastern part of the Arabic-speaking world. The term *Maghreb* refers to the western part.

The Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates

Professionals in the United States who work in the field of higher education exchange have a vested interest in understanding the unique cultural differences and backgrounds of the many students they serve and teach. Middle Eastern students are indeed unique, in that their story is especially ancient and rich, but also because of the region's deep diversity and its long history of conflict, reconstruction, and reform. When Islam was born, the Middle East and its people were again transformed.

The new religious movement began in western Arabia in the early seventh century. It rose from the margins of the great empires, those of the Byzantines and Sasanians, which had dominated the Western half of the world. From Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad called men and women to moral reform and submission to the will of God as expressed in what he and his adherents accepted to be divine messages, later embodied in the Quran. A new empire was founded, the caliphate, which included much of the territory of the Byzantine Empire and all of that of the Sasanian, extending from Central Asia to Spain. The center of power moved from Arabia to Damascus in Syria under the Umayyad caliphs, and then to Baghdad in Iraq under the Abbasids.[5]

Two important periods of art, architectural, and educational advancement in Middle Eastern antiquity occurred during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. After the death of Muhammad in 632, four successive caliphs (from the Arabic *khalifa,* meaning "successor") had reigned, and under their leadership the messages of the new faith were carried as far as the shores of the

Mediterranean and the eastern reaches of Iran. When the fourth caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law), was assassinated in 661, Muawiya of Syria took power and established the Umayyad caliphate. During his reign the city of Damascus would become the capital of an empire that extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus River.

The Umayyad period marked a formative one in Islamic art. Influences came from late classical traditions, supplemented by the more formalized Byzantine and Sasanian, which especially affected the style of metal works and textiles, and the use of figural motifs. This period was also critical in the development of Islamic architecture, as spaces and accommodations evolved to meet the needs of new religion and rulers. Many religious buildings and mosques were constructed on historic sites, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, for example (691), the Umayyad's first major architectural undertaking. In terms of secular architecture, Umayyad palaces such as Mshatta, Qasr Amra (Jordan), Anjar (Lebanon), Khirbat al-Mafjar (Palestine), and Qasr al-Hayr East and West (Syria) stand as testaments to the talents of the architects and the wealth of their patrons.[6]

The Umayyad family and Muhammad had common ancestry. Muhammad had descended from Abd Manaf ibn Qusai via his son Hashim, while the Umayyads' lineage came from Abd Manaf and a different son, Umayya. The two families were therefore of shared lineage, but different clans, and a rivalry ensued.

Abu Muslim, whose lineage is controversial, may have been a Persian slave. He was born between 718 and 727 CE with the original name of Behzadan, according to some sources, although others claim he was a descendant of Godarz and the vizier Bozorgmehr. His father's name was Vandad Hormoz—both indicate a Zoroastrian connection, which is likely, given that Abu Muslim had been born prior to the Arab (Umayyad) invasion of Iran. Two contradictory views of his origin exist: one that believes him to be a free man emanating from noble descent, and the second that portrays him as a slave, with suspicious genealogy.[7]

Whatever the case, he ultimately received his pseudonym from the Imam Ebrahim when he joined the Abbasid cause.[8]

Abu Muslim would become the leader of a militant sect that for 30 years denounced the Umayyads. In the summer of the year 747, his army of followers unfurled the black flags of revolt in the eastern Iranian province of Khurasas and from there seized all of Khurasan. They advanced westward across Iran and by 749 Abu Muslim's army had crossed the Euphrates, decisively defeating the Umayyads. The outcome of that victory was the replacement of the Umayyad by the Abbasid caliphate, a revolutionary event in Islamic history.[9]

Even a superficial analysis of the history of the Islamic Middle East would reveal a vibrant Golden Age of learning in the ninth through thirteenth centuries, an era that generally coincides with the Abbasid period (750–1258 CE). The vast empire was ruled from Baghdad, then the capital of the Islamic world, a city second only to Constantinople in population with over a million inhabitants. It was perhaps the world's richest city. Baghdad became a vibrant center for intellectuals and culture, a reputation contributed by the reigns of the caliphs al-Rashid, al-Mamun, al-Mutadhid, and al-Muktafi. The Abbasid caliphs were genuinely invested in collecting global scientific works and they encouraged public learning. Schools where students could learn Arabic literature, theology, philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, physics, astrology, astronomy, and other branches of science were founded across the region. Education was imparted chiefly through oral instruction.

Where the Umayyad dynasty had been influenced by classical and Byzantine architecture and the arts, in contrast the Abassids, although the leaders were Arab, embraced Persian culture, according to historian Philip Hitti. They moved their capital to Baghdad, making it the largest and most cultured city in the world. Caliph Harun al-Rashid sponsored art, literature, and the sciences there, creating the House of Wisdom where knowledge from around the world was translated into Arabic.[10]

A child's education in the Abbasid era usually started in the home and then at age six boys were admitted into schools, which were often housed in mosques, and their formal education began. The curriculum consisted of reading, writing, grammar, traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, arithmetic, and devotional poems. Senior students studied Quranic criticism, jurisprudence, scholastic theology, lexicography, rhetoric, and literature, while those even more advanced had opportunities to study astronomy, philosophy, geometry, music, or medicine. Despite increasing gender separation, many girls received education in the Abbasid period, and some female students became masters of theology and talented teachers. Author Shaykh Akram Nadwi described his research into Islamic women scholars under the Abbasids, saying: "I thought there may be thirty to forty women," but he uncovered more than 8,000 biographical accounts, each a testament to the vital role women played in the preservation and development of Islamic learning.[11]

Islamic learning would inspire the opening of richly endowed schools and libraries. During the Golden Age, Baghdad offered no less than 36 public libraries and 100 booksellers, and Cordoba on the Iberian Peninsula was likewise a center of learning, perhaps the most advanced city in Europe, with a population of a half million. There were an estimated 300 baths, 300 mosques, 50 hospitals, and a comparatively high literacy rate. In Cordoba, experiments by Armen Firman ibn Faris and Ahmed Celebi were forerunners of modern-day flight.[12] An observatory was built and a university was founded during the reigns of Harun Al-Rashid and his son (763–809), a period when the Abbasids reached their peak.[13] Under Caliph Al-Mamun an academy named Bait-ul-Hitmat (House of Wisdom) was founded, where specialized higher education could be pursued. Nizamayah, a learning institute established by Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092 CE), would become a model for later schools of advanced learning. The aforementioned Al-Azhar University was founded around 970 in Egypt. During this later Abbasid period the curriculum was not confined