

AI-AZHAR TYPICAL FORM OF HIGHER MADRASA

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Abstract: Jami` al-Azhar is the prototype of Islamic higher education. Starting from a mosque that metamorphosed into a university-level madrasa in the West, al-Azhar has crossed the time and era that confirmed it as the second oldest university after al-Qarawiyyin university in Fez, Morocco which still exists today. So it is not surprising that throughout more than a hundred years of service to the world of education, al-Azhar has succeeded in contributing the best generations in each era. The alumni of al-Azhar occupy important positions in the order of society and government. Undoubtedly, most of them were students of al-Azhar professors with their scientific halaqah during the Fatimiah period.

Keywords: Al-Azhar, Al-Azhar university, History of Al-Azhar University, Madrasa.

Introduction

Al-Azhar is the name of an educational and religious institution in Cairo, Egypt that is very well known in the Islamic world, including a mosque as the center of Islamic activities and an educational institution carrying out the mission of da'wah. The thousand-year-old institution remains the focal point of Islamic religious and cultural life for Egypt and the Islamic world to this day. The university, which was originally a Jami` Mosque, was established in the 4th century AH or 10th AD during the reign of the Fatimiah Banu in Egypt. Jami`s in medieval Islam were indeed established directly by the ruler or by people who received official permission from the government in order to become a mouthpiece for delivering state messages to the wider community. Therefore, the idea of the Fatimite rulers was initially motivated by the interest of developing the Shi'a sect. This idea later developed so that eventually al-Azhar turned into a higher madrasa.

Al-Azhar University has experienced a long history and ups and downs that forged it to become a leading Islamic higher education institution that continues to *exist* today. Revisiting and discussing the history of the development of one of these charismatic Islamic madrasas, certainly not only to lull us into an era of brilliance in the world of Islamic science, but also to open up insights and materials to reflect on the progress of past education.

History of Establishment

Caliph Mu`iz Lidinillah was the 4th caliph of the Fatimiah Dynasty (341-365 AH). He was named Abu Tamim Ma`ad and received the title Mu`iz Lidinillah upon his accession to the throne. He was described by friends and foes as wise, energetic, a very courteous ruler, a brilliant scientist, possessed of excellent knowledge in science and philosophy, a great supporter of the

arts and during his time North Africa experienced a golden age of civilization and prosperity.¹ He had ordered his commander Jauhar al-Katib as-Siqilli on Saturday 24 Jumada al-Awwal 359 AH to lay the first stone for the construction of the Jami` al-Azhar Mosque. So the workers and architects in the construction until it was completed in a period of approximately two years and precisely on Friday 7 Ramadan 361 H held a very grand inauguration ceremony.² The first name given to this mosque was *Jami`-ul-Qahirah*, named after the capital of the new Fatimite kingdom. But then after the construction of the az-Zahrah palace during the reign of Caliph al-`Aziz billah (365 AH-386 AH), this mosque was named al-Azhar Mosque after the Fatimite palace az-Zahrah because the Jami` al-Qahirah Mosque was the official government mosque. However, the name al-Qahirah continued to be used by people until the 7th century H, then little by little this name was no longer used and changed to the name of the Jami` al-Azhar Mosque until now.³ Giving the name al-Azhar is also associated with the name Fatimah az-Zahrah, where the Fatimiah Banu attribute their descendants to the youngest daughter of the Prophet, or because of the assumption that this mosque is the most beautiful and magnificent jami` mosque and will be the brightest mosque.

The background to the choice of the name al-Azhar is not known for certain. al-Azhar itself terminologically means "the most luminous". This may be due to the fact that Mu`iz's predecessor sultans always built mosques in Qahirah with names that did not indicate their benefits and uses such as the name of the Cairo Mosque. The coincidence of al-Azhar is very bright even in the dark of night, therefore giving the name al-Azhar which means the brightest or the most radiant is very appropriate to its condition.⁴ The most appropriate fact is that the daughter of the Prophet to whom the Fatimiah Banu leaned their lineage, had the nickname "az-Zahrah" so that this gave them the satisfaction of using the name al-Azhar, as well as naming the palaces of the Fatimiah Banu with the name al-Qushūru al-Zahirah and the name of the palace garden with a word that is similar to it.

al-Azhar is located right in the heart of the capital of the new Fatimite Government. This location has not changed since more than a thousand years ago. Around al-Azhar were built the foundations of the first Islamic buildings. al-Azhar was a shortcut to the magnificent palace of the Fatimids and between these two buildings (mosque and palace) there were various buildings and was the urban area of the Fatimid kingdom.⁵ al-Azhar is bordered on the north by *Bab an-Nashr* and *Bab al-Futuh*, on the south by *Bab Zawilah*, on the east by *Bab al-Barqiyah* and *Bab Mahruq* which are high places on the hill and on the west by *Bab as-Sa`ādah* until it reaches the eastern shore of the Nile.

The al-Azhar building constructed by Commander Jauhar was nothing more than a decorated room and a connecting room. Like the jami`s of the time, al-Azhar consisted of a roofed enclosed space or building used for prayer and an open space without a roof. Besides

¹ Ameer Ali, *A Short History of the Saracens*, India: Kitab Bhavan, 1981, pp. 597.

² Khafaji, *al-Azhar fi alfi` Am*, volume I, Beirut: `Alam al-Kutub, 1988, p.28.

³ Khafaji, *ibid*, pp. 41-42.

⁴ Dodge, *al-Azhar A Millennium of Muslim Learning*, Washington D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 1961, p.5.

⁵ Al-qathari, *al-Jāmi`āt al-Islāmiyyah wa dauruha fi masīrah al-Fikr at-Tarbawi*, Egypt: Dār al-Fikr al-`arabi, t.t., p. 72.

these two spaces, there are also connecting or intermediary spaces such as minarets. In the roofed building, Jauhar built seventy-six pillars made of white alabaster and a mihrab which is now called the old Qibla. Later, nine mihrabs were built but six remain today. A minaret was also built during Jauhar's time and five minarets were added later. The original al-Azhar building was rectangular with a length of 280 feet and a width of 227 feet. The main gate was located on the northwest side, providing direct access to the courtroom in the roofless building. Along the wall leading to the main gate there are no supporting columns, but on the far side of the courtroom in the roofless building, there is a shelter that has four supporting columns.⁶

al-Azhar During the Fatimiah Period

1. Islamic Centers and Official Government Institutions

In classical times, mosques had functions and programs that could be classified in three ways; *first*, as a place to enforce the obligation to pray, *second*, a means of learning the Qur'an and Hadith and *third*, a means to carry out religious functions periodically.⁷ The Jami` al-Azhar Mosque was the first official mosque and had the privilege of being the only center of religious activities of the Fatimid Daulah for forty years. The Caliph gave sermons in it throughout Ramadan and on feast days until the establishment of Jami` Anwar during the time of Caliph al-Hakim (386 AH-411 AH).⁸ al-Azhar was also used for Friday prayers and prayers or special rituals of the Ismailiyya Shi'a as the official State sect held by the Fatimite Caliphs because al-Azhar was established to be a symbol of the *Imamah* (leadership) of the new government as well as a mouthpiece for the propagation of its official understanding.

During the reign of al-Hakim bi Amrillah (386 AH-411 AH), this privilege was shared because the caliph had built a new jami` mosque, Masjid Jami` al-Anwar (al-Hakim) which began to function for Friday prayers in Ramadan 403 AH. The privilege of al-Azhar as the official government mosque continued to be shared with Friday prayers being held in several other Fatimite mosques. At that time there were two other jami` mosques in the same position as al-Azhar: the Cairo Jami` Mosque commonly called Masjid `Amr in Fustat and the Ibn Tulun Jami` Mosque in Katā'i. These three mosques were the official religious institutions of the Fatimite government where Friday prayers were always held and the sultan read the khutbah in turn.⁹

Al-Azhar is one of the preaching centers in Cairo for the Fatimites, the Ismaili Shi'a who claim to be the true Imams.¹⁰ Al-Azhar was the *headquarters of the Muhtasib*. This institution is a very urgent part related to religious affairs in the Fatimiah Daulah. Structurally, the *Muhtasib* was at the third level after the Chief Justice and the *Dā'i Du`ā*. The *Muhtasib* Council was in charge of enforcing *`amal ma`rūf* and *nahi munkar* against state regulations and had representatives located in Jami` al-Azhar and Jami` Amr. Al-Azhar is also the center of the

⁶ Dodge, *op.cit.*, p.5.

⁷ Quddus, *The Challenge of Islamic Renaissance*, India: Adam Publisher, 1990, p.88.

⁸ Khafaji, *loc.cit.*, p.64.

⁹ J. Schacht, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Volume I, A-B, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960, p. 814.

¹⁰ John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, translated by: Eva Y.N. et al, (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), p. 228.

official celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the celebration of *Ashura* Day which is the most beautiful ritual of the madhhab in memory of the Prophet's grandson al-Husayn bin Ali (peace be upon him). The celebration of the Day of *Ashoora* was held in al-Azhar before the construction of the al-Husaini Monument in 549 A.H. The celebration of the Nights of *Wuqud*, namely the first and last nights of Rajab, and the celebration of the first and last night of Sha`ban.

During the time of Mu`iz, al-`Aziz and al-Hakim, al-Azhar was also the center for the activities of the Majlis Hikmah which was responsible for the propagation of the doctrine of the Imamate and the propagation of the sciences of the *Ahl Bait*. This activity was not only carried out in al-Azhar but was also sometimes carried out in the palace. The court officials participated in the Majlis al-Hikmah program such as Vizier Ibn Killis during the time of Mu`iz and al-`Aziz. The Da'wah of Majlis al-Hikmah was a covert propaganda of the Fatimid Caliphate. Propaganda activities are organized in such a way based on the level and ability of thinking. At the basic level, propaganda was given in general terms, then increased to specialized propaganda at higher levels regarding the secrets of the Imamate.

Besides being a Center for Religious Activities or *Islamic Center*, al-Azhar is inseparable from the political activities of the Fatimiah government. This is because in classical times there was a close relationship between religion and the state. Generally it can be said that the mosque especially its pulpit is the place where official statements are announced. The results of wars were reported in the khutbah. In the Fatimid and Abbasid periods, government statements and rulers' stipulations on taxes and so on were announced in the mosques. Letters of appointment from important officials were read from the pulpit. People used to come in droves to the mosques to listen to official announcements.¹¹ Similarly al-Azhar can be said to be a government institution with its frequent function as a place for the caliph's court, judicial sessions, and kadi meetings on certain days.¹²

2. High Madrasa

The history of the development of science in Islam is directly related to the mosque spiritually and culturally. All mosques in history such as Masjid al-Haram in Makkah, Masjid Nabawi in Madinah, al-Jami` Amawi in Damascus, Jami` Fusthat, Jami` Qairawan, Jami` Basrah, Masjid Zaitunah, Jami` Cordoba, Masjid al-Qarawiyyin in Fes and al-Azhar were places for the *halaqahs* of knowledge. Al-Jāmi`ah or university comes from Jami` in the sense of mosque. Therefore, the relationship between mosques and civilization, especially Islamic civilization, cannot be doubted. The mosque was the first form of higher education (university) in Islam,¹³ According to Makdisi, the development of universities is divided into three episodes; from the mosque to the khan mosque and finally to the madrasa. The Jami` Mosque was one of the first institutions used for teaching grammar and literature alongside religious sciences from

¹¹ Gazalba, *Mosque, Center of Islamic Worship and Culture*, Jakarta: Pustaka Antara, 1983, p. 285.

¹² Editorial Board of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Jakarta: Ichtisar baru Van Hoeve, 1997, p. 201.

¹³ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, London: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, p.29.

the second to the eighth century AH.¹⁴ Thus the Jami` al-Azhar Mosque was built in 972 AD. Its rooms all became madrasa rooms.

The function of the mosque as a madrasa is confirmed by the existence of *halaqah*. Therefore, it is very reasonable if the mosque is referred to as a school (madrasah) along with its function as a center of worship activities.¹⁵ al-Azhar itself was founded to be the official mosque of the Fatimiah Daulah, a means of preaching for religious understanding and at the same time a symbol of spiritual government. The orientation of this mosque changed with the holding of scholarly activities that were prevalent in the jami` mosque, not only in Egypt but throughout the Islamic world.

al-Azhar carried out its function as a means of higher education and madrasa since the month of Shafar 365 AH coinciding with October 975 AD, namely the end of the reign of Mu`iz Lidinillah with the holding of the *halaqah* of knowledge of Ibn Nu`man al-Qairawani. He read from a compendium of the Jurisprudence of the Ahl Bait composed by his father. This was the first book to be read in al-Azhar and *his halaqah* was the first *halaqah* in teaching in al-Azhar. These first scientific activities were held in the form of limited lectures such as training or *workshops*. Famous scientists and state officials were noted to be the first group of recipients of the lessons given by Abu Hasan Ali b. Muhammad b. an-Nu`man al-Qairawani who had the title of supreme kadi (*Qadi al-Qudat*) in the Fatimite Empire at that time. Ibn Nu`man's *halaqah* lasted until 369 AH, then it was replaced by more orderly and scheduled *halaqahs* conducted by the vizier Ya`kub b. Kilis. This second series of scheduled lectures given by Ya`kub b. Kilis can be said to be the forerunner of the real al-Azhar university, because it was oriented towards the development of knowledge, different from the first *halaqah* which was oriented towards the development of the official government mazhab.

Ibn Kilis was the vizier during the time of Mu`iz and al`Aziz. He held a *halaqah* open to the public on Fridays. This lecture pioneered by Ibn Kilis took place according to Shi'i principles which of course had the full support of the Fatimite Caliph. Caliph Mu`iz provided monthly funds (salaries) for great scholars to attend study groups in the al-Azhar dormitory to explore Fatimite Jurisprudence. Ibn Kilis continued to pay great attention to the improvement of al-Azhar. In 378 AH, he sought permission from the next caliph, al-Aziz billah (365 AH-386 AH), to hold regular and continuous lectures. Ibn Kilis tried to gather a group of fiqh scholars to attend scientific meetings after every Jum`at until the Asr prayer. The number of scholars gathered at that time was 37. Their lives were covered by the government, both in terms of finances, food and special housing adjacent to al-Azhar.¹⁶ In 380 AH/990 CE, the establishment of al-Azhar as a university madrasa (al-Jāmiyah or Ma`had) was completed with the establishment of a fixed schedule for the recitation of scholarly overviews. And since then, the scientific life at al-Azhar has been flourishing and productive.¹⁷ Scientific and religious activities continued at al-Azhar

¹⁴ Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West*, London: Edinburgh University Press, 1990, p. 50.

¹⁵ Hilgendorf, *Islamic Education: History and Tendency*, Peabody Journal of Education, Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 2003, p. 66, in <http://www.ebscohost.com>, accessed on 26/11/2009

¹⁶ Khafaji, *opcit*, pp. 206-207, see also al-Qatari, p. 76.

¹⁷ Khafaji, *ibid*, p 207.

and reached a glorious period during the Fatimid period. The Sultan paid serious attention and the kingdom set a very large budget which was endowed for the maintenance and development of al-Azhar.

The following will discuss some of the things that illustrate the conditions and rhythm of scientific life in the center of al-Azhar:

1. Learning System and Methods

In the 4th century H or 10th century AD the main teaching system besides the maktab was in the form of *halaqah* or *assemblies* led by a professor commonly called *shaikh*, *judge* or *ustadz*.¹⁸ According to Ahmad Shalabi who the author quotes in al-Qatari, *halaqah* is an assembly of knowledge in the form of a semicircle. Usually the teacher would sit with his back to the wall or lean against one of the pillars of the mosque while the students were in front of him.¹⁹ In the *jami`* there were usually many *halaqahs* led by a professor who had been appointed by the caliph. The *halaqahs* were named according to the subject of study, for example: the group studying language grammar was called *Halaqah an-Nahwiyyin*, the group studying hadith was called *Halaqah Hadith*. *Halaqahs* are also named after the shaikh or professor who teaches them.²⁰ The size of the *halaqah* varies greatly depending on the field of study being taught. A hadith *halaqah* using the dictation method is usually larger than a law and grammar *halaqah*. The size of the *halaqah* is also influenced by the reputation and popularity of the professor or shaikh giving the lessons. So there are *halaqahs* belonging to very famous Shaykhs that have students in the hundreds.

In order to disseminate and doctrine the official state madhhab, the Fatimites organized assemblies in the form of *halaqahs* that were publicized to the general public in several levels, such as the Ahl bait Assembly, the Special Assembly, the Assembly for State shaikhs, the Assembly for the General Public and others. Similarly, from the beginning there were special assemblies for women at al-Azhar, where the basics of the Ismaili school of Shi'ism were taught. Among the female students at that time was Umm Zainab Fatimah Bint Abbas who was famous in Baghdad, died in 714 AH and she is recorded as a jurist of great knowledge. Women around Egypt and Damascus studied with her and implemented her fatwas. The study groups at al-Azhar used books of *commentaries* or summaries, rather than learning something from the original book which is the primary source. This was later criticized by the eminent scientist Ibn Khaldun when he taught at al-Azhar around the 14th century AD. He suggested studying something from the original book, not through the books of *iqtisar* or summaries of scholars.²¹

The learning methods applied in the *halaqahs* at al-Azhar were: *niqasy* (discussion) and *hiwar* (dialogue) between student and teacher.²² Other methods emphasized memorization and review, often of overviews and tafsir, rather than original classics. The *Niqasy* method is also called *munāzharah*, which is discussion or debate. This debate arises from a conflict of opinions or opinions that can actually enrich the treasure of knowledge. Certain fields of study such as

¹⁸ Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, USA: Plume Books, 1970, p. 70.

¹⁹ al-Qatari, *loc.cit*, p. 82.

²⁰ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, *loc.cit*, p. 17

²¹ See Rosenthal, *Ibn Khaldun The Muqaddimah*, Princeton University Press, 1967, pp. 414.

²² Editorial Board of Islamic Encyclopedias, *loc.cit*, p. 203. See also al-Qatari, p. 83.

jadal, *ushūl al-fiqh* and in-depth grammar use this method to arrive at a sharp and strong understanding. The scholars even motivate their students to debate and discuss, because this method can sharpen the memory, strengthen the reason (*hujjah*), smooth the tongue and the ability to speak without concepts by taking comparisons, increase freedom of thought and increase self-confidence. *Hiwar* or *mudzākarah* method is more commonly used in grammar circles. It is a method of knowledge-generating dialog (*instructive conversation*). A member of the *halaqah* who listens or who conducts the dialogue himself, gets better knowledge than before after *mudzākarah*. This method is also used when testing the extent of the learner's understanding after the teacher explains.

Another method is memorization, which also plays an important role in the learning process. The method of memorization is a means to arrive at knowledge (*ilm*). This method has been used since the early period of the history of Islamic education. Memorization can be in the form of Qur'anic verses and matans written by scholars whose commentaries or *syarahs* will be explained (read) in *halaqah* at al-Azhar. Among the advantages of this method is that it creates creativity and critical thinking. Because with the sharpness of one's memorization, he will be able to create and modify new things, especially in the field of poetry and literature, as well as be able to criticize the mistakes of reading or writing of others. Usually the shaikh will start reading something (*matan*) that the students have memorized. The students listen attentively and try to hear the reading as intently as if they were hearing it for the first time. When the shaikh asks if they have memorized the text, the students should not answer "yes" even if they have memorized it, nor should they say "no" because that would be incorrect. The students should respond with the phrase: "I prefer to hear it from the shaykh", or "I have memorized it, but it was a long time ago", or "If I hear it from the shaykh, it seems to be more correct", or other phrases that do not embarrass the shaykh. Similarly, if the shaykh makes a mistake, the student should not reprimand the shaykh directly, but should give the shaykh a chance to correct the mistake, such as by repeating the shaykh's reading. If the shaikh does not realize his mistake, the student can ask another shaikh.²³ Leading Islamic scholar and thinker Ibn Khaldun strongly disagreed with the *matan* memorization method applied at al-Azhar because it can kill creativity and sharpness of thought.²⁴

2. Teaching curriculum

The curriculum or field of study taught in the Masjid Madrasa was very simple, beginning with the recitation of the Qur'an and Hadith. A teacher taught those who wanted to be good at reading, memorizing and interpreting the Qur'an.²⁵ At al-Azhar, Qur'anic and Hadith recitation was given in the morning. At *shuruq* time fiqh lessons are given. Grammar lessons: *nahu*, *sharaf*, *ma`ani*, *bayan*, *badi`* were given after the noon prayer, arithmetic, history, geography and contemporary sciences were given after Asr and after Mahrib lessons in *mantiq* and literature

²³ See Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, USA; Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 38-39.

²⁴ Rosenthal, *loc.cit*, p.413.

²⁵ Gazalba, *op.cit*, p.214.

were given.²⁶ Until the 4th century A.H. or 10th century A.D., the main institution of education in the form of *halaqahs* taught a variety of sciences both religious sciences and the sciences of ra`yu (philosophy).

Law and theology were a central part of the Islamic higher education system implemented in madrasas.²⁷ This means that the naqliyah sciences dominated and became the orientation of the teaching curriculum in all early Islamic educational institutions. However, although the primary purpose of establishing madrasas was to provide training and instruction for judges and legal consultants (this can be seen in the early days of al-Azhar which functioned as a training facility for judges with the study of Shi'a Jurisprudence), language and literature lessons were still given. As science developed and new branches of knowledge emerged, the general sciences (ra`yu) also had a place in the *halaqah* of knowledge. Science Logic (mantiq) for example has always been part of al-Azhar's educational program. Since the time of Caliph al-Hakim, al-Azhar's curriculum has included philosophy and mathematics.

The study of the sciences of revelation in al-Azhar is related to the Shi'a preaching which is built on philosophical foundations derived from the Batiniyah creeds, Mu'tazilah and philosophy which are the three joints of the Fatimite Shi'a Law. The existence of the scientific organization *Ikhwan as-Shafa* which was born in the 4th century AH (373 AH) in Basrah-Iraq and published their treatises related to the sciences of revelation, also colored the discussions of the *halaqah* at al-Azhar. Sciences such as mathematics, medicine, Sciences such as mathematics, medicine, astrology and geography were part of al-Azhar's curriculum at the time of al-Hakim, but since he established *Dār Ilm* in 395 AH, the studies of the revelatory sciences were prioritized in *Dār Ilm*, until al-Azhar's curriculum returned to the original curriculum of religious sciences and languages.

The Fatimid Caliphate was very firm in adopting the color of Ismailiism both in the political and theological spheres. However, this was not always an absolute rule for the students. On many occasions the government protected the Sunni school of thought by being compassionate and tolerant. So since the reign of al-Hakim bi amrillah, to be precise in 398 AH/1008 CE, al-Azhar's curriculum related to the field of law has changed with the discussion of multi-tafsir between Shi'a and Ahl Sunnah interpretations, the differences that exist between the two along with efforts to reconcile differences between conflicting schools of thought are discussed and discussed.

3. Teaching staff

The teachers and professors who taught at al-Azhar were of high scholarly quality, both in religion and science. They were also men of piety and wara`. Hence they earned the respect and honor of their students, the government and the judges of the State. Teachers who taught at al-Azhar included: Abu Hasan an-Nu`man (d.374 AH) a jurist of the ahl al-bayt, literary expert and poet. Muhammad b. Nu`man (d. 389 AH) and his son Hussein b. an-Nu`man. The Egyptian jurist and historian Hasan b. Zaulaq (d. 387 AH), the companion of Mu`iz Lidinillah who was a famous chronicler al-Amir Mukhtar Abdul Malik Muhammad b. Abdul Malik b. Ahmad al-

²⁶ John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, translated by: Eva Y.N. et al, (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), pp. 229. See also al-Qatari, p. 80

²⁷ Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, translation Ahsin Mohammad, (Bandung: Pustaka, 1985), p. 37

Hadani who was a minister during the time of al-Hakim bi Amrillah, he was also the author of *Akhh̄ār Misr* (News of Egypt) which is a great legacy.²⁸ Allamah al-Khaufi (d. 430 AH) Arabic linguist, author of *I'rāb al-Qur'an*. Ibn Baisyadz an-Nahwi (d. 469 AH) author of *al-Mukaddimah* and *Syarah al-Jamal*, Ibn al-Qatha'i al-Lughawi author of *al-Af'āl*, al-Musabbahi minister of state secretary (d. 420 AH), al-Qadha'i (d. 454 AH) hadith and fiqh expert, Ibn Zaulaq al-Muarrikh (d. 387) and Ibn Yunus al-Munjim (d. 399 AH) and others.

4. Student

Since the opening of the scientific halaqahs, al-Azhar has been open to all Muslims from the West and East. The students who came were placed in dormitories and were not charged. At the beginning of the ninth century AH, there were seven hundred and fifty al-Azhar students from the West and they occupied special dormitories.²⁹ They had no obligation to pay tuition fees and were even given expenditures that met their special needs as seekers of knowledge with full scholarships. This certainly adds to their determination in navigating the world of knowledge and jihad in its path. If there *was* a need to travel to gain knowledge by meeting a famous shaikh, then these students traveled patiently to gain knowledge from these famous teachers.³⁰

Students of al-Azhar are usually called al-Mujāwir because they live in the vicinity of al-Azhar and their average age has reached puberty.³¹ They live in dormitories (*ruwaq*) which have complete facilities. Each room (*riwaq*) was equipped with a library, kitchen and bathroom. Until the end of the 10th century AH/17 AD there were 29 ruwaqs in al-Azhar. Students have certain rules about attendance. They have an attendance register, and are not allowed to be absent from class without permission. The number of class hours per day and study times do not have permanent regulations. However, halaqah activities take place according to the times that have become customary since the early days of the *halaqah* such as the study of tafsir-hadith in the morning, the study of fiqh when the sun begins to rise, the study of linguistics after Zuhr, mathematics, history, geography and all the contemporary sciences of the time studied ba'da Asar and mantiq and the ethics of discussion studied after maghrib. The duration of the course is one to two hours and students usually take two subjects in the morning and two in the afternoon. Students are considered to have completed their studies and can travel after receiving a diploma from the shaikh who testifies that the student has actually studied at al-Azhar. Before releasing the student, the shaikh gives advice and testifies with taqwa.

5. Library

The Fatimid caliphs paid great attention to and subsidized libraries. The largest collection of books took place during the Fatimid period. The supervision and all matters related to the development and progress of al-Azhar library were left to the *Dā'i Du'āt* who were among the main spiritual leaders of the Fatimid period. During the Fatimid period, large libraries were built. The university library (jāmi'ah) was usually flooded with historians. More than two hundred thousand volumes covering all branches of science and civilization such as fiqh, hadith,

²⁸ Editorial Board of Islamic Encyclopedias, *loc.cit*, p. 201.

²⁹ See Khafaji, volume I, *loc.cit*, p. 54.

³⁰ al-Qatari, *loc.cit*, p. 79. This rihlah method was highly recommended by Ibn Khaldun as a Shaykh of al-Azhar, see Rosenthal, *Ibn Khaldun The Muqaddimah*, p.426.

³¹ al-Qatari, *ibid*, p. 78. See also p. 134.

languages, history, humanities, medicine, chemistry, astrology and others were in the university library. The al-Azhar Library is a specialized library that is a treasure trove of good books. It is a large institution that is very urgent and specialized. Even the dormitories in al-Azhar especially each room is facilitated with its own library, to facilitate each student in their studies and discuss important matters related to their studies.

al-Azhar During the Time of the Banu Ayyub

The Ayyub dynasty was founded by Salah ad-Din Yusuf bin Ayyub (d. 595 AH) in the late 6th century AH. He took control of Egypt in 567 AH. He was known to be just and loved by many, his rule extended from the Maghrib to Iraq and even Yemen and the Hijaz. Since the reign of Sultan Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi and his descendants, the development that directly affected al-Azhar was the expansion of the sunni education system.³² Then al-Azhar became silent. Saladin ordered that all former Fatimiah relics be abolished and eliminated even Friday prayers were prohibited in al-Azhar let alone teach the Shi'a madhhab and the science of philosophy. More or less a century long al-Azhar silent not allowed to establish Friday prayers while the place of education and teaching was moved to the madrasas of Saladin.³³

During the reign of the Bani Ayyub there were twenty-six higher madrasas. Two of the most important were the madrasa founded by Sultan al-Kamil known as the Kamaliyah Madrasah and a few years later al-Salih Ayyub built the largest institution known as the al-Salihiyah madrasah. The establishment of these madrasas was primarily for the study of the Sunni school of Shafi'i as the school of the Bani Ayyub sultans. While the purpose of the establishment of these madrasas was to rival al-Azhar and attract its students. The Shalahiyah madrasas were established throughout the 7th and 8th centuries AH and had such a profound effect on the world of education in al-Azhar that during the time of the Ayyub Bani it can be said that al-Azhar underwent a long sleep. The Sultan instructed Jum`at prayers at the al-Hakim mosque only. He argued that Imam Shafi`i's understanding of fiqh forbade Friday prayers to be offered in more than one mosque in a city.³⁴

The development of studies at al-Azhar depended largely on the efforts of individuals and people who sympathized with religious education. Students from various parts of the Islamic world are still coming, as well as the visit of famous scholars occurred during the time of Salahuddin's son, Sultan al-Aziz Imaduddin Usman (589 H- 594 H / 1193 AD-1198 AD), among others Abdul latif al-Baghdadi taught at al-Azhar the subjects of mantiq and bayan. Sheikh Jalaluddin as-Suyuti, Abu Qasim al-Manfakuti, Sheikh as-Sahruri, the famous Sufi Ibn al-Farid and the famous historian Shamsuddin Khallikan. Other famous teachers were Abu Abdullah al-Qudhai, a scholar of Jurisprudence, Hadith and History. Al-Hufi was a linguist, Abdullah Muhammad bin Barakat was a nahu expert and Hasan bin Khatiral-Farisi was a Hanafi school of Jurisprudence as well as an exegete.³⁵

³² Dodge, *loc.cit.*, p. 38, see also Khafaji, volume III, p. 221.

³³ Yunus, *History of Islamic Education*, Jakarta: PT Hidakarya Agung, 1981, pp. 175-176.

³⁴ Salamon, *Azhar and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur: al-Rahmaniyah, 1988, pp. 12.

³⁵ Editorial Board of the Islamic Encyclopaedia, *ibid.*

Al-Azhar's contribution to the Islamic world

al-Azhar has given birth to important figures, thinkers and world-class scholars such as Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Ridha, Fazlur Rahman and even Ibn Khaldun who in the 14th century studied at al-Azhar (history field) and immediately devoted himself to his alma mater.³⁶ In Indonesia itself, there are many national figures who are alumni of al-Azhar University. Their work and contributions have high magnetic power in realizing Indonesia as a country and nation. The alumni of al-Azhar have also always been a barometer in the dynamics of understanding Islamic religion in the country.

Conclusion

Al-Azhar is a jami` mosque that functions as a higher madrasa. As a madrasa or educational institution, al-Azhar is a phenomenon. This institution has transcended the times and the rulers. Dynasties swapped but al-Azhar still stands firmly as a witness to the times with the swift flow of change. The ups and downs of development have been passed since the classical period to the modern era, from the bastion of the spread of Shi'a, turning to Sunni to the era of change reforming Egypt in the late 19th century AD.

The curriculum of the madrasa, which began its career from the jami` mosque, has undergone many changes; the curriculum which was previously limited to two fields, namely religious sciences side by side with the sciences of language and literature, at the time of Caliph al-Hakim especially experienced rapid progress with the inclusion of the curriculum of `aqliyah sciences at al-Azhar. So philosophy, mantiq, mathematics, astrology and geography were not foreign. The subject matter of law or fiqh also became more tolerant; on discourses of khilafiyah, Sunni jurisprudence began to be studied in comparison with Shi'i jurisprudence and then an approach was taken based on both.

During the reign of the Fatimites was the most glorious period in al-Azhar. Its shaikhs were expert professors, its students came from the West and the East and its library was a special library equipped with hundreds of volumes of the best books that later during the reign of the Banu ayyub, the library as a center of scholarly activity was also maintained and preserved by implementing double copying. When the Ayyub Bani took power in Egypt, al-Azhar received no attention from the sultan because it was considered identical to the center of the spread of Ismailiyyah Shi'ism. The *indifferent* attitude of the Bani Ayyub government made al-Azhar experience a long sleep, although scientific activities can still continue to run. Scientific activity in al-Azhar runs naturally on personal efforts. Famous scholars still continue to arrive and convey their knowledge to be absorbed by students. al-Azhar remains firmly established, leaving its best people born from its womb to carry the civilization of the times. They are scholars, pious people, scholars, professors, judges, ministers, movers and shakers who number thousands of millions of people scattered throughout the world.

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³⁶ Nata, *History of Islamic Education in the Classical and Medieval Periods*, Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2004, p.108. some other names of shaikhs see on pp. 96 and 107.

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