

## PAPER NAME

**Reviving Islamic Civilization in the Late P  
eriod of Abbasid A Historical Analysis  
of the Madrasaa**

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## WORD COUNT

**7721 Words**

## CHARACTER COUNT

**42055 Characters**

## PAGE COUNT

**24 Pages**

## FILE SIZE

**949.5KB**

## SUBMISSION DATE

**Sep 28, 2024 1:55 PM GMT+7**

## REPORT DATE

**Sep 28, 2024 1:55 PM GMT+7**

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# Reviving Islamic Civilization in the Late Period of Abbasid: A Historical Analysis of the *Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya*

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## Abstract

*The spirit of education was renewed in the age of the Prophet Muhammad san through a talaqqī method in the Majlis that used to be conducted in the mosque. This system then improved over time, particularly during the Abbasid era, when many educational institutes were built to preserve Islamic civilization. The Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya, constructed in 1234 AD during the reign of al-Mustansir Billah, is one of the most renowned institutions. This madrasah is well-known for its complete system. This study aims to demonstrate the educational system's role in promoting civilization through the Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya, which will be discussed first on the social dimension in the era of al-Mustansir Billah in order to comprehend the establishment of Madrasa Mustansiriyya, its educational system, and its collapse. Thus, the qualitative method will be employed in this work, along with a historical study approach gleaned from books, journals, and related publications. This research discovered that the purpose of Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya, which was established during the declining age of the Abbasid, was to restore the majesty of this dynasty. Despite the chaos, the Caliph successfully developed the spirit of science and education through the Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya. Furthermore, it provides facilities for academic support through the waqf system. Unfortunately, the Mongol invasion of Baghdad succeeded in destroying it.*

**Keywords:** *The Madrasa al-Mustansiriyyah, Islamic Civilization, School of Thought, Al-Mustansir Billah.*

## Abstrak

*Pembaruan dunia pendidikan terjadi pada zaman Nabi Muhammad saw. melalui metode talaqqī di majelis-majelis ilmu yang perpusat di masjid. Sistem tersebut lalu berkembang dari waktu ke waktu, terutama pada masa Dinasti Abbasiyah, yaitu dengan dibangunnya berbagai lembaga pendidikan untuk melestarikan peradaban Islam. Madrasah Mustansiriyya yang dibangun pada masa pemerintahan al-Mustansir Billah tahun 1234 M adalah salah satu lembaga pendidikan yang paling berpengaruh pada zaman itu. Madrasah Mustansiriyya terkenal dengan sistemnya yang lengkap. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan peran penting lembaga pendidikan Islam dalam memajukan peradaban Islam, yang dalam konteks ini adalah Madrasah Mustansiriyyah. Tulisan ini, pertama akan membahas seputar dimensi sosial pada era kekhilafahan al-Mustansir Billah untuk mendapatkan suatu pemahaman yang utuh tentang urgensi dari didirikannya Madrasah Mustansiriyyah. Dilanjutkan dengan pembabasan tentang sistem pendidikan, perkembangan, serta penyebab keruntuhannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dengan pendekatan studi sejarah. Peneliti menemukan bahwa tujuan pendirian Madrasah Mustansiriyya yang dibangun pada masa kemunduran Abbasiyah ini adalah untuk mengembalikan kebesaran Dinasti Abbasiyah. Meskipun terjadi banyak kekacauan, khalifah al-Mustansir Billah terbukti berhasil dalam mengembangkan ruh ilmu pengetahuan dan pendidikan Islam melalui keberadaan Madrasah Mustansiriyya. Selain itu, disediakan berbagai fasilitas lengkap untuk mendukung gerakan keilmuan yang bersistem wakaf. Sayangnya, invasi Mongol ke Baghdad berhasil menghancurkan Dinasti Abbasiyah, yang akhirnya berpengaruh terhadap keruntuhan madrasah ini.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Madrasah Mustansiriyyah, Peradaban Islam, Sekolah Pemikiran, Al-Mustansir Billah.*

## Introduction

Education in Islam was introduced in the era<sup>17</sup> of the prophet Muhammad saw. It is evidenced by the strategy of *da'wa* used in introducing the ummah to the Islamic religion. There has been no established educational institution in the prophetic era. Instead, the prophet and his companions used the methodology of direct teaching (*talaqqī*) in a meeting place (*majlis*). By then, the mosque had become the center of study in early Islam, where people discussed and learned after praying. The educational system in

Islam developed from period to period.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in this matter, classified the Muslim educational system into two periods. The first one is the pre-madrasa institution, where most activities were done in the mosque (*jāmi'*) and its approach was more inclusive except for certain institutions such as the library and hospital. The second one is madrasa and cognate institutions, where the activities were done in an established building that officially provided courses for students and was opened exclusively for foreign sciences.<sup>2</sup> The spirit of education drew great attention in the Abbasid era, known as the Golden Age of Islam. The Abbasid is the longest dynasty in the Islamic tradition, and scholars have classified the Abbasid dynasty into two main periods. Those were the golden age periods of the Abbasid until it began to decline (750-945 AD), the Abbasid period after losing its autonomy to regional war world dynasties, and the ending of the Abbasid with the Mongol attack (945-1258 AD).<sup>3</sup> The advanced Islamic civilization happened in the era of the Abbasid dynasty, particularly during its golden age. It started with its glory in the period of the caliph al-Saffah and *Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr* who successfully established Baghdad city, and reached its peak in the seven caliphs afterward.<sup>4</sup>

Baghdad became the capital of the Abbasid era and was a center of education and knowledge in the world.<sup>19</sup> In the era of the caliph *Hārūn al-Rashīd*, he built many facilities for the social welfare of the ummah, such as mosques, hospitals, madrasa, and other

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Faqih Nidzom, Fiqhi Akbar Rafsanjani, and Rochmad Rochmad, "Considering an Islamic Framework in the Study of Philosophy of History," *Tasfiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 7, no. 1 (April 29, 2023): 6–10, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfiyah.v7i1.8089>.

<sup>2</sup> Jurj Al- Maqdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 9–10.

<sup>3</sup> Josef W. Meri, "Abbasids," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Josef. W Meri (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Iham Aziz and Ahmad Musta'id, "Islamic Astronomy of Abbasid Era (750-1258 AD)," *Journal of Islamic History and Manuscript* 1, no. 1 (June 29, 2022): 40, <https://doi.org/10.24090/jihm.v1i1.5944>.

public places.<sup>5</sup> The Islamic empire emphasized the advancement of education and knowledge, which resulted in diverse fields of study such as geography, astronomy, geometry, mathematics, physics, and other sciences.<sup>6</sup> Education is an essential part of civilization as it improves the quality of human resources to develop the sciences. Thus, the caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty supported education as part of their efforts to maintain civilization. As a consequence, if the power of the caliphs started decreasing, the institutions built in their era would also start declining. During the Abbasid era, three recognized educational institutions of Islam contributed to the civilization: The Bayt al-Hikmah Library, Madrasa *Niẓāmiyyah*, and Madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya*. Bayt al-Hikmah is a library that also became a center of academic activities such as translation from a foreign language into the Arabic language in the era of *Hārūn al-Rāshid*. Madrasa *Niẓāmiyya* was established within the Seljuk dynasty in the era of *Niẓām al-Mulk*. Third, Madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya* was established in the era of *Mustanṣir Billāh* (1226 – 1242 CE).

In highlight, *Mustanṣir Billāh* was among the last caliphs who attempted to maintain the Islamic civilization at the beginning of the Abbasid decline through education by establishing a Madrasa named *Madrasa Mustanṣiriyya*. Unlike in the contemporary era, the madrasa in early Islam was known as a higher educational institution for learning par excellence.<sup>7</sup> Students of the Madrasa obtained their area of specialization to be great experts in their fields. Thus, this paper aims to highlight the history of the educational system in advancing civilization through the Madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya* which will be discussed firstly on the social dimension in the era of *Mustanṣir*

<sup>5</sup> Anto Apriyanto, “Civilization in the Era of Harun Al-Rashid: The Synergy of Islamic Education and Economics in Building The Golden Age of Islam,” *Review of Islamic Economics and Finance* 3, no. 2 (December 14, 2020): 66–79, <https://doi.org/10.17509/rief.v3i2.30337>.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hilgendorf, “Islamic Education: History and Tendency,” *Everybody Journal of Education* 78, no. 2 (April 2003): 63, [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930PJE7802\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930PJE7802_04).

<sup>7</sup> Maqdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 27.

*ir Billāh* to understand the establishment of Madrasa *Mustanşiriyya*, its educational system, and its collapse.

This research relies on qualitative methodology with a historical approach to describe the educational system of Madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* historically, from its establishment to its collapse at the end of the Abbasid era. Historical research is supposed to provide the link that connects the past to the present and can be passed through some stages, which are: looking for the phenomenon, developing the hypothesis, exploring the data, collecting the data, and writing the findings based on the interpretation of the provided evidence.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the historical study expects to make people learn from the past, and history also gives perspective on the present and investigates the context and situation.<sup>9</sup> This study aims to highlight practical matters in the future, particularly in terms of the educational system and innovation, because the past and present will definitely affect the future.

This study on Madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* is expected to provide insight or ideas about maintaining the educational system within the political problems in the country as it survived during the Abbasid decline with the Mongol attack. Hence, the situational dimension will also be discussed in this research. The data are collected from the primary source, *Tārīkh 'Ulamā' al-Mustanşiriyya*, and the secondary sources from books, journals, and articles related to the topic. This study attempts to interpret the collected data objectively through a descriptive approach. However, Scientific works that address the history of Madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* are still limited. Prior research has mostly concentrated on the development and implementation of the Madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* curriculum. The significance of this madrasa's existence on the development of

<sup>8</sup> Lisa M. Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE, 2008), 396.

<sup>9</sup> David W. Moore, E. Jennifer Monaghan, and Douglas K. Hartman, "Values of Literacy History," *Reading Research Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (January 9, 1997): 90–91, <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.32.1.6>.

Islamic civilization through the end of the Abbasid era has not been thoroughly studied.<sup>10</sup> Hillenbrand asserted that the story of the caliph *al-Mustanşir* could hardly be found due to the unavailability of essential sources.<sup>11</sup> This is the point at which the research is crucial.

## The Social Dimension in the Caliphate of Mustanşir Billah

The Abbasid dynasty, in its early rule, has been a center for Sunni Muslims politically and spiritually. However, in the second half of the Abbasid period, it significantly weakened after the Seljuk dynasty took over the Abbasid dynasty under the rule of Tuğhril II. But finally, the Seljuk power collapsed, and the Caliph *al-Naşr* attempted to bring glory back to the Abbasid dynasty by ruling the dynasty wisely and skillfully.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, the dynasty system strongly depends on the leadership of the caliphs in each period, which means if the caliphs are not strategically good at ruling the dynasty, it will bring a significant decrease in the dynasty. Hence, although the caliph *al-Naşr* (d. 622/1225) struggled to revive the Abbasid glory, his son, *al-Zābir Biamrillah Abī Naşr bin Aḥmad bin al-Naşir li al-Dīnillāh Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad*, could not maintain the stability of the Abbasid atmosphere due to his insignificant strategy in politics. At the same time, the Sunni Muslim caliphate in the east faced external enemies.<sup>13</sup> A moment after that, the Caliph

<sup>10</sup> A few scientific studies concerning Madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* that concentrate on the formulation and execution of the curriculum are as follows: Sofyan Sofyan, “Kajian Historis Kurikulum Di Madrasah Mustansiriyah Baghdad,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 1 (2022): 875–888, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.4980>.

<sup>11</sup> Carole Hillenbrand, “Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture,” in *Classical Islam: Collected Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 40.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1974), 55–57.

<sup>13</sup> Hillebrand, “The Al-Mustanşiriyya Madrasa in Baghdad,” in *The Historian of Islam at Work : Essays in Honor of Hugh N. Kennedy*, ed. Maaïke van Berkel and Letizia Osti (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2022), 321.

Zāhir died (623 AH/1226 CE), and the caliph *al-Mustanṣir Billāh* took the throne of the Abbasid caliphate afterward, precisely on Friday, Rajab, 13 623 AH. In this precarious situation, *al-Mustanṣir Billāh* was expected to be a good caliph who could bring glory back to the Abbasid dynasty.

*Abū Ja'far Manṣūr bin Al-Zābir Biamrillāh al-'Abbāsī*, familiarly known as *al-Mustanṣir Billāh*, was born in 588 AH (March 1192).<sup>2</sup> He was the oldest son of *al-Zābir* and his mother was an enslaved Turkish.<sup>14</sup> *Al-Mustanṣir* was a very loved grandson of *al-Naṣr* due to his excellent manner and intellect. *Ibn al-Najjār* mentioned that *al-Mustanṣir* was a just person who spread peace, embraced and respected the ulama and righteous people, built mosques, schools, and guest houses, shared gifts, and built paths for pilgrims and homes for the sick in the holy mosques, *Haramayn*. He ruled the dynasty well and maintained sovereign stability and justice, making his reign memorable in Abbasid history. Besides that, *al-Mustanṣir* had a great political strategy, as he was concerned about the Abbasid dynasty's situation during his era, which the Mongols threatened. In anticipating the Mongol attack, he prepared the military forces, and at the same time, he targeted taking over the Khurasan.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that the caliph *al-Mustanṣir* made great efforts to bring back the glory of the Abbasid dynasty at its end, while the Tatars targeted the Abbasid destruction by prioritizing social welfare.

The precarious atmosphere did not stop him from being optimistic; the caliph *al-Mustanṣir* focused on uniting the ummah to strengthen the power of the Abbasid sovereignty as it started to be divided into many parts. It is evidenced by the strong political cooperation with the Arbil empire, which was ruled by *Muẓaffar al-Dīn Gokbori* in fighting their threatening enemies, the Mongols. This cooperation resulted in the unity of their military forces and the agreement to hand over the Arbil empire to the

<sup>14</sup> Hillenbrand, "Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture," 40.

<sup>20</sup> Syamsuddin Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Usman Ad-Dzahabi, *Sīyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'* (Beirut: Al-Risālah, 2001), 83.



Abbasid caliphate after the death of *Muẓaffar*.<sup>16</sup> According to the characteristic of the caliph *al-Mustansir*, he was a great successor to his grandfather, *al-Naṣr*, who struggled to rule the dynasty for 45 years by being wise and skillful and also his father, *al-Zābir*. He was a very respected caliph, and a great figure in Islamic history, his enthusiasm for education and knowledge pushed him to build a great Islamic educational institution in the era, called *Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya*, whose endowment reached more than 70,000 dinars each year.<sup>17</sup> This madrasa was expected to establish outstanding human resources for advancing Islamic civilization.

### The Establishment of *Madrasa Mustansiriyya*

Knowing that the Abbasid period was in decline, the caliph *al-Mustansir* proved that he successfully restored Islamic civilization through education due to his ambition and enthusiasm for knowledge. He built *Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya*, the first and most prominent Muslim university in Baghdad under the rule of the Mongols. The main goal of establishing *madrasa al-Mustansiriyya* was to create a generation, especially the Muslim generation, sustaining civilization and perceiving social welfare, which was proven by the good salary of the lecturers, which depended on the total number of students with at least 3000 students in each faculty. As a reward, all lecturers and students were gifted a golden dinar each year.<sup>18</sup> A library and a hospital were attached to the madrasa, with assumedly 80,000 books collected in its magnificent library.<sup>19</sup> The madrasa, its scholars, its library, and its librarians were

<sup>16</sup> Huseen Hdiys Jasim, "Political Relations between Caliph Al-Mustansir Billah and Muzaffar Al-Deem Kokbari 623-1226 AH / 630-1232 AD," *Adab Al Rafidayn* 31, no. 34 (2001): 275.

<sup>17</sup> Ad-Dzahabi, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Muid, "Peradaban Islam Pada Zaman Dinasti Bani Abbasiyah," *Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 3 (2016): 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, *How Do You Know? Reading Ziauddin Sardar on Islam, Science and Cultural Relations*, ed. Ehsan Masood (England: Pluto Press, 2006), 37.

historically recognized and honored. The significant endowment was for the library, where the books stored were brought from the palace library collection.<sup>20</sup> It took 160 trucks to bring all the books to the madrasa's magnificent library, which was done directly under the supervision of the Abbasid library council.<sup>21</sup>

*Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya* provided diverse faculties such as Quranic and hadith studies, Islamic jurisprudence with four different schools, the science of *farā'id wa al-tirkāt*, Arabic literature, mathematics, zoology, and medical studies.<sup>22</sup> Compared with other recognized madrasahs in Baghdad, *Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya* was the first educational institution enriched by diversity in the field of education. *Al-Nizāmiyya* was built in 1066 under the Seljuk empire as a madrasa that only focused on Islamic jurisprudence, especially in the *shāfi'ī* school.<sup>23</sup> The essential factor of *Madrasa al-Nizāmiyya* that distinguished it from the earlier schools was the endowment system.<sup>24</sup> Another educational institution, the Bayt al-Hikmah library built in the golden era of the Abbasid dynasty, *Hārūn al-Rashīd*, was the most extensive library during the era with the great attention and enthusiasm of the ulama in translating and writing books. It was essentially not a higher education that provided specific courses for the student.<sup>25</sup> Instead, it was a place for depositing, lending, copying, and binding books, providing

<sup>20</sup> Doris Behrens and Abouseif, *The Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250-1517)* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Sebastian Günther, "Al-Madrasa Bi Waḥfihā Mu'assasah Li Al-Ta'līm Fī Al-'Aḥr Al-Islāmīy Al-Wasīṭ," *At-Tafahum* 12 (2020), <https://doi.org/https://shababtafahom.om/p/170>.

<sup>22</sup> Najī Ma'ruf, *Tārikh 'Ulamā' Al-Mustansiriyya*, 1st ed. (Baghdad: Al-'Ānī, 1959), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Basma Taha Ismail and Mahmoud Abbad Mohammed, "The Impact of The Nizamia School in Baghdad And Its Graduates on The Scientific Movement in Iraq, The Euphrates And Sham," *Journal of Al-Farabidi's Arts* 13, no. 44-2 (2021): 45.

<sup>24</sup> Burhan İndikli, "Rethinking Ancient Centers Of Higher Learning: Madrasa In A Comparative-Historical Perspective," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 70, no. 2 (March 4, 2022): 131, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2021.1901853>.

<sup>25</sup> Maqdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 24.

maps and manuscripts, and also translating and authoring books.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is clear that madrasa *al-Mustanṣiriyya* was the first largest university in the Muslim world that prioritized the quality of education and social welfare. At least until the era of *Ibn al-Wāṣil*, there has not been any university better than it with a tremendous amount of endowment fund.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the grand opening of the *madrasa Mustanṣiriyya* was held on April 6, 1234 CE, with a glorious celebration that the eminent people of the Abbasid, the library's directories, teachers, religious figures, judges, Sufis, preachers, Quranic reciters, poets, and foreign merchants attended. A grand banquet was also served for the guests in the madrasa's yard, and appreciation rewards were awarded to the lecturers, staff officers, and the attending guests.<sup>28</sup> Madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya* was an excellent architectural building designed by *Mu'ayyad al-Dīn bin al-'Alqāmī*,<sup>29</sup> built in 625 AH/1228 CE and finished in 631 AH/1234 CE, located in the eastern part of Baghdad and on the left bank of the Tigris River near the northern bridge, al-Mamoun Bridge. In the eastern of the building, there are three important mosques for the Juma prayer: The Caliph's mosque, a large cathedral mosque that consist of many places for ablutions, the Sultan's mosque, which was located outside the town; and *Ruṣāfa*'s mosque, which was a mile apart from Sultan's mosque.<sup>30</sup> Various Islamic decorations were attached to the walls of every building of the madrasa. This building was identically known by

<sup>26</sup> Adel Abdul-Aziz Algeriani and Mawloud Mohadi, "The House of Wisdom (Bayt Al-Hikmah) and Its Civilizational Impact on Islamic Libraries: A Historical Perspective," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 5 (September 1, 2017): 182–83, <https://doi.org/10.1515/mjss-2017-0036>.

<sup>27</sup> Yusuf bin Ismail Al-Nabhani, *Mufarrij Al-Kurūb Wa Mufarriḥ Al-Qulūb* (Beirut, Lebanon: Daar Al-Fikr, 2001), 317.

<sup>28</sup> Günther, "Al-Madrasa Bi Waṣfihā Mu'assasah Li Al-Ta'lim Fī Al-'Aḥr Al-Islāmīy Al-Wasīṭ."

<sup>29</sup> Najī Ma'ruf, *Al-Madrasa Al-Mustanṣiriyya* (Baghdad: Dankor Modern Press, 1935), 25.

<sup>30</sup> A.A.R. Gibb and C.F. Beckingham, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta: A. D. 1325-1354* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1959), 332.

the four special lecture rooms (*'iwān*) that surrounded the courtyard in the middle, in which there is a pool that has its source from the Tigris river, which flew underground. Fascinatingly, there were houses and large rooms for the school discussion of the Quran (*Dār al-Qur'ān*) and the hadith (*Dār al-Ḥadīth*), a kitchen, a house for the sick, and stores. Although some broken parts occurred in the building, the great architectural design of this building can still be seen today. The monumental inscriptions in this madrasa were written to praise the Caliph *Mustanşir Billāh* and were a great work of Baghdadi calligraphers in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> Also, this elegant building could even be seen from the ship stopped at the nearest port.<sup>32</sup> It was obvious that madrasa *al-Mustanşiriyya* was the magnificent work and contribution of the Caliph *Mustanşir Billāh* during the historical context of the Abbasid, and it is undeniable that it might inspire educational institutions all over the world.

## The Educational Methodology of the *Madrasa Mustanşiriyya*

A madrasa is a development of the Mosque and Khan, where the mosque was used to conduct a college for law and the Khan was used for the students' residences who came from out of town. He added that the distinction between the madrasa and the two previous institutions was the endowment system (*waqf*), as the madrasa is normally initiated by the founder and his descendants.<sup>33</sup> However, madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* still applied the endowment system, and its majority was granted to the library of the madrasa. Madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* created a new historical record for the first madrasa that taught medical studies and Islamic jurisprudence studies with four madhhabs simultaneously. It is because the earlier madrasas

<sup>31</sup> Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, <sup>12</sup> *Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (USA: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 321.

<sup>32</sup> Hillebrand, "The Al-Mustanşiriyya Madrasa in Baghdad," 334.

<sup>33</sup> Maqdisi, <sup>2</sup> *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 28.

only taught one or two madhhabs, such as *al-Nizāmiyya* for *Syāfi*'s school and *al-Ṣadriyya* for *Māliki*'s school. This innovation initiated by the Caliph was a sign of freedom of thought to push creativity without fanaticism. In addition, the following are the academic standards of the madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya*:

*First*, accepted students in this madrasa were selected by the *fuqahā'* based on skills in writing and teaching; and *Second*, selected professors, teachers, and assistants were chosen by the senior teachers, professors from Iraq, Sham, Egypt, and other Islamic countries who held a high reliability of *sanad*, mastered knowledge, and were known due to their academic research of the country they travelled to. Also, they were the authors of destroyed and lost books after the tragedy in Baghdad during the Abbasid caliphate's decline and Timur's destruction at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the selected teachers after that were chosen from favorite students and then continuously inherited from their families, and thus, the teachers commonly have prestige and wealth.<sup>34</sup>

Based on the academic qualifications of the students and the teachers of the madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya*, it is understood that it was a place for the greatest scholars around the world. The professors in the madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya* used to teach the students under the wooden canopy while sitting quietly on the chair covered with rugs and wearing black robes and turbans, with two assistants beside them to repeat what they dictated.<sup>35</sup> The position of the assistant is to repeat all the lessons taught by the professor after the professor leaves the class to make the students understand and memorize the lessons.<sup>36</sup> The caliphs frequently came to the madrasa to listen to the lectures from a special seat. A special lecture was also occasionally conducted for the heads of state and distinguished guests. The

<sup>34</sup> Ayhan Öz, "Teacher in the History of Islamic Education—Baghdad," *Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 5, no. 10 (2017): 55.

<sup>35</sup> Gibb and Beckingham, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta: A. D. 1325-1354*, 332.

<sup>36</sup> Ma'ruf, *Al-Madrasa Al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 49.

teaching method was listening to the lectures and learning by heart.<sup>37</sup> The methodology of dictation (*al-Imlā' wa al-Istimlā'*) was also applied due to the limited coursebook, only the professors owned the book, and hence the assistants dictated it.<sup>38</sup> The study tour (*Rihlah 'Ilmiyyah*) is also conducted for the students, particularly in the study of the hadith. The professors opened the discussion, debate, and comments to enrich the teaching methodology because this method worked better than memorization.<sup>39</sup> For the Islamic jurisprudence, there were different corners for the lectures of different madhhabs, and the right qibla was for the *syāfi'īs*, the quarter left qibla was for the *Hanafīs*, the right of the entrance was for *Hanbalīs*, and its left was for *Mālikīs*.<sup>40</sup> Although there were various faculties that the experts taught, the highest number of students were Islamic studies students, who specialized in the Quranic and hadith studies as well as Islamic jurisprudence studies.

In addition, Madrasa *Mustanṣiriyya* provided everything to strengthen educational advancement. It provided pens and paper for book authoring in Islamic jurisprudence studies, supplied various medicines for the healthy students and lecturers, built a large kitchen to serve free food for all members of the university, and built houses for lecturers and bathhouses for all madrasa's members, and those facilities were never established by the earlier caliph. The welfare of the students and the lecturers was crucial to enhancing educational effectiveness so they could focus on learning and studying. The students who lived in the madrasa's residence were provided with daily food, including bread, fruits, and snacks, and they were also given soap, a blanket, a mattress, a lamp, oil, ink, paper, pens, cold water during the summer, and hot water during the winter. At the same time, the lecturers and staff were given meat, vegetables, and bread. Students and lecturers were also

<sup>37</sup> Hillebrand, "The Al-Mustanṣiriyya Madrasa in Baghdad," 324.

<sup>38</sup> Ma'ruf, *Al-Madrasa Al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Ma'ruf, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Hillebrand, "The Al-Mustanṣiriyya Madrasa in Baghdad," 328.

provided with free health insurance and a monthly allowance of golden dinars according to their academic level, and the allowance was doubled every *Ramaḍān* month.<sup>41</sup> Those facilities were granted from the endowment fund (*waqf*) for them to focus on research and studies.

As a splendid institution, *Mustanṣiriyya* recruited advisors to manage the departmental matters of the madrasa. Those advisors were scholars, judges, and eminent figures in leadership, such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tikrītī (d. 641 AH/1243 CE), a historian scholar who memorized the Quran, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Yāzīrī (d. 641 AH/1243 CE), a translator of the Islamic manuscript, an expert writer, and a scholar who memorized the Quran.<sup>42</sup> As a result, it was not impossible to have double positions at the same time, working in the government and institutions.<sup>43</sup> Besides academic matters, the madrasa also emphasized spiritual values through good management of the mosque (*al-Jāmi'*). The Caliph required an *imām*, a *quranic* reciter who mastered seven *qirāāt*, a preacher, a muezzin of each group in the madrasa, and that the orator of Juma prayer (khatib) be from *Hāshimī 'Abbāsī*, the descendants of *Hāshim* and 'Abbās, and all of them were also paid well. Based on the analysis of the educational methodology in the madrasa, *Mustanṣiriyya* paid good attention to three things: good administration, academic qualification, teaching methodology, and the welfare of the academic communities to improve the quality and effectiveness of the educational activities.

## The Collapse of the Madrasa Mustanṣiriyya

It was obvious that the caliph *al-Mustanṣir* dedicated a lot to developing the *madrasa Mustanṣiriyya* as his ambition in education, which is proven by the successful establishment of the madrasa

<sup>41</sup> Ma'ruf, *Tārīkh 'Ulamā' Al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Ma'ruf, 29–32.

<sup>43</sup> Öz, "Teacher in the History of Islamic Education–Baghdad," 55.

that inspired the university's system until now. The contribution of the *madrassa Mustanşiriyya* could also be seen in the books authored by the *madrassa's* communities and the scholars who taught and studied in the *madrassa*, for example, *al-Tabyīn fī al-Nasab* by *Ibn Qudāma al-Hanbalī* and *Mukhtṣar Jumbura al-Nasab* by *Ibn al-Kalbi*.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, numerous books authored and translated in the *madrassa* were broken and lost.<sup>45</sup> *Mustanşiriyya* was considered to produce the richest book references. Nevertheless, according to Ibn Khaldun, civilization, state, and nation were like humans who were born, grow, and die, and so are civilization.<sup>46</sup> They started, reached the peak of glory, collapsed while another one took over their positions, and so forth.<sup>47</sup> As a result, *madrassa Mustanşiriyya* which the Caliph *Mustanşir Billāh* had strategically established until it reached its peak, was also facing a decline at the end of the Abbasid period. The glory of *madrassa Mustanşiriyya* lasted only a very short time due to the Mongol invasion. The *madrassa* that was supported and initiated by a certain caliph would typically depend on the Caliph himself, which would gradually decline after the death of the Caliph.

The contribution of the *madrassa Mustanşiriyya* was also evidenced by the establishment of the *madrassa* with a similar educational system in several countries right after it was well established. For example, the *madrassa Şalahiyya*, established in Egypt in 1243 AD, also provided the study of four madhhabs at the same time and was followed by other *madrassas*.<sup>48</sup> The caliph

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<sup>44</sup> Ma'ruf, *Tārikh 'Ulamā' Al-Mustanşiriyya*, 272.

<sup>45</sup> Ma'ruf, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Harda Armayanto et al., "A Mosaic of Islamic Civilization in The Malaysia State," *Jurnal Tamaddun: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Islam* 11, no. 2 (December 11, 2023): 157, <https://doi.org/10.24235/tamaddun.v11i2.13571>.

<sup>47</sup> Murat Önder and Fatih Ulaşan, "Ibn Khaldun's Cyclical Theory on the Rise and Fall of Sovereign Powers: The Case of Ottoman Empire," *Adam Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 8, no. 2 (December 30, 2018): 234, <https://doi.org/10.31679/adamakademi.453944>.

<sup>48</sup> Ma'ruf, *Tārikh 'Ulamā' Al-Mustanşiriyya*, 7.



*al-Mustanshir* died in *Jumādā al-Thāniyya*, 10 640 AH. Under his reign, which was about seventeen years, he sacrificed his wealth, commanded the *jihād* in the best way, suppressed the tyrants, opened the forts, guarded the frontiers, and the kings respected him.<sup>49</sup> After the Caliph *Mustanshir* died, the caliph '*Abdullāh bin Mansūr al-Mustanshir*, who was familiarly known as *al-Musta'ṣim*, regenerated his father as an Abbasid caliph, and he was the last Caliph in the Abbasid caliphate. He was a religious caliph who strongly upheld the principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.<sup>50</sup> But he was insignificant in the political strategy to maintain the stability of the situation in the middle of the Mongol attack.

Consequently, the Abbasid dynasty gradually weakened, and the chaotic situation decreased. The Mongols came and destroyed the Abbasids in 1258 AD. The Mongols attack was eased by the betrayal of *Ibn al-'Alqāmī*, an Abbasid vizier, who cooperated with the Hulagu Khan in dismissing the Abbasid caliphate. The strategy was to lie to the caliph *al-Musta'ṣim* regarding the number of the Mongol army and not prepare the city for a massive attack. *Ibn al-'Alqāmī* was a Shiite who aimed to make Abbasid a Shiite state.<sup>51</sup> *Al-Musta'ṣim* was killed by the Mongols, and there are various interpretations of the way he was tragically killed in the East and West.<sup>52</sup> The chaotic situation at the end of the Abbasid era affected the madrasa *al-Mustansiriyya*. However, the inconducive situation had already started in 1255 with the conflict between *Ruṣafā* (Sunni) and *Kbuḍayriyyīn* (Shiites) that happened because of a lack of governmental control. The conflicts were getting worse, and in the midst of it, there were robbers (*'ayyārīn*) who robbed the stores and houses, and the madrasa *Mustansiriyya*

<sup>49</sup> Ad-Dzahabi, *Siyar Alām Al-Nubalā'*, 83.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Nabhani, *Mufarrij Al-Kurūb Wa Mufarriḥ Al-Qulūb*, 321.

<sup>51</sup> R. Bennett Furlow, Kristin Fleischer, and Steven R. Corman, *De-Romanticizing the Islamic State's Vision of the Caliphate* (United States: Center for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, 2014), 5–6.

<sup>52</sup> Nassima Neggaz, "The Many Deaths of the Last 'Abbāsīd Caliph Al-Musta'ṣim Bi-Llāh (d. 1258)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 4 (October 18, 2020): 586, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186320000267>.

was robbed twice.<sup>53</sup> After the collapse of the Abbasid dynasty, Hulagu Khan was less concerned about the madrasa *Mustansiriyya*, and the capital of the sovereignty moved to Tabriz. He also considered Shiites to be better than Sunnis, which caused the Sunni ulama to be deported from Iraq.

After Hulagu left, the city was under the Il-Khanids until 740 AH/1339 AD, and they managed a taxation system for the Baghdad population, which made Baghdad gradually develop under Il-Khanids, whereas *Mustansiriyya* was repaired and resumed to work.<sup>54</sup> However, Il-Khanids finally collapsed, and the dynasty fell to the hand of Qara Qoyunlu (1411 AD/814 AH- 1433 AD/836 AH). A lot of madrasas were abandoned, including madrasa *Mustansiriyya*.<sup>55</sup> Finally, on April 1, 1945, there was attention from the Directorate of Antiquities Management of Iraq to restore the *Mustansiriyya* madrasa. The madrasa's buildings still survived because the luxurious architectural design of the *Mustansiriyya* madrasa made it endure the Mongol invasion, as historical evidence across the ages in which the picture could be seen in Figure 1. In 1960 the former madrasa was opened as a museum of culture and arts. In 1963, the modern *Mustansiriyya* university was re-established to organize evening courses and was awarded a modern semi-state university, then transferred to a new campus located in the north of the city until it was honored as a state university in 1968 AD.<sup>56</sup> In March 2021, the ministry of culture, tourism, and antiquities recently relaunched the historic *Mustansiriyya*.

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<sup>53</sup> Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *Historic Cities of the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 40.

<sup>54</sup> Bosworth, 55.

<sup>55</sup> Hishām Nashabe, *Muslim Educational Institutions* (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1989), 101.

<sup>56</sup> Abdallah Al-Zoubi and Sultan T. Abu-Orabi, "Impact of Internationalization on Arab Higher Education the Role of Association of Arab Universities," *Journal of Education and Human Development* 8, no. 1 (2019): 70, <https://doi.org/10.15640/jehd.v8n1a9>.



Figure 1. The courtyard of the madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* before restoration. Copyright of <https://www.archnet.org/sites/3836>



Figure 2. The courtyard of the madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* after restoration. Copyright of <https://www.archnet.org/sites/3836>

Apart from that, the long history of madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* was evidence of Islamic civilization that successfully occurred during the decline of the Abbasid caliphate. Although it was not the oldest university that appeared in the world, Europe has Bologna and

Paris universities, with most medieval universities only having three faculties; law, medicine, and theology.<sup>57</sup> It is undeniable that the educational system of the madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* has inspired globally, such as the scholarship system, the welfare of university members, and the complete facility for academic activities. The glory of *Mustanşiriyya* only occurred during its establishment in the era of the Caliph *Mustanşiriyya* and the early era of the Caliph *Musta'şim*. But during the era, the massive development in book authoring, translation, and any academic activities was well-accomplished with the excellent system of its endowment (*waqf*). Based on the research, there are at least three essential factors that could potentially produce the quality of education in advancing civilization within a short time: the strict requirement in selecting the students and teachers (admission requirement), the endowment (*waqf*) system that supports both students and teachers financially through the provided facilities, and good management of the administrative matters that ease all matters for the students and teachers to ensure their focus on teaching and learning activities.

## Conclusion

Madrasa al-*Mustanşiriyya* was established in 1234 AD, during the reign of the Caliph al-*Mustanşir* Billāh, during the decline period of the Abbasid dynasty due to the Mongol threat, with the goal of bringing back the glory of the Abbasid dynasty. Although in a chaotic situation, caliph al-*Mustanşir* successfully maintained the stability of the Abbasid situation and strengthened the spirit of knowledge and education through the madrasa *Mustanşiriyya*. The madrasa *Mustanşiriyya* was the first madrasa in the Muslim world that simultaneously provided courses in four madhhabs and mathematics, zoology, and medical studies as a sign of freedom of thought. Besides, this madrasa provided facilities for supporting

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<sup>57</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, Vol.1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 9.

academic activities through the endowment (waqf) system, such as a library, hospital, and grand kitchen with magnificent architectural buildings. All madrasa communities were prioritized in terms of welfare to ensure their focus on teaching and learning activities.

Unfortunately, the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258 AD occurred and succeeded in destroying the longest dynasty in Islamic history, the Abbasids. As a result, the *madrasa al-Mustanşiriyya* gradually faded and was neglected until the Iraqi Antiquities Management Directorate restored it. In 1963, *Mustanşiriyya* University was re-established as the modern form of a madrasa, located north of the Iraq city. Based on research, it is known that education is an important factor in reviving civilization. In addition, there are three important factors that encourage the quality of education: a good reception system, endowments, and good administrative management. There should have been an influence of the *Mustanşiriyya* madrasas on the global education system up to the contemporary era regarding the faculty system and scholarships. However, further research is still needed to explain historically the relationship between the *Mustanşiriyya* and the modern university system, which can fill this knowledge gap.[]

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