

SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Young boys attended primary school at the Suleymaniye mosque. They learned about Islam and were taught to recite passages from the Qur'an. (These were in Arabic, so boys also had to learn to translate them.) Teachers hoped pupils would remember these holy words for the rest of their lives, and that they would help them to live as good Muslims. The text of the Qur'an was also loved and admired as beautiful poetry.

Clever boys might be taught to read and write Arabic, so they could study the Qur'an and books written by leading Muslim scholars. They learned to read and write their own language, as well. If a boy was a really good student, he might win a place at a medrese (college). There he could study philosophy, science, medicine or law.

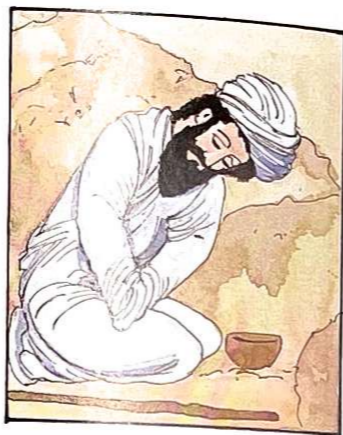
There were four grades of medrese in the Ottoman empire; students who graduated from the lower grades became scribes, lawyers or civil servants. Outstanding students, who graduated from the top grade, became medrese teachers themselves, or senior Qadis. The four best medreses in Constantinople were built by Sinan, next door to the Suleymaniye mosque, which became a great center of learning.

Girls did not usually attend schools or colleges; their parents, private tutors or well-educated slaves taught them at home.



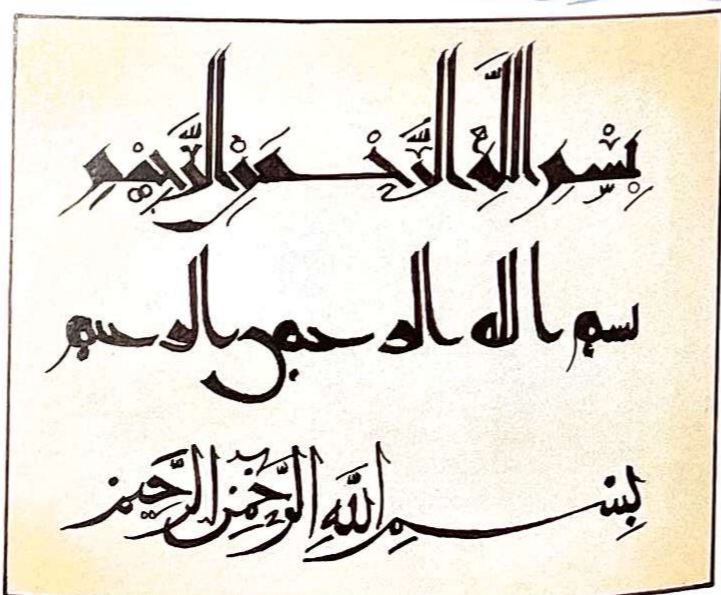
Muslim scribe (left) at his desk, from a 16th-century Turkish manuscript. He works seated on the floor, using a brush or reed pens and ink made of vinegar and soot. He has scissors, to cut the parchment he writes on, and a knife to scrape off any mistakes.

In some Muslim lands, deeply religious men became sufis (mystics). They spent their time in prayer, or meditating on the words of the Qur'an.



Children in 16th-century Turkey (above) carrying the Qur'an through the streets to collect money for charity.

Holy words: (below) 'In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate', written in Arabic in three different styles of calligraphy.



Decorative endpapers (far left) from a copy of the Qur'an. Muslims believed the Qur'an was the word of God, so copies of it were made as beautiful as possible.



Jewel-encrusted gold binding (left), made for a copy of the Qur'an read at Suleyman II's court. Muslims liked to give the Qur'an special bindings, because its words were so precious to them.