

The Role of Women in the Political and Intellectual Dynamics of Classical Islamic Civilization (7th–13th Centuries)

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Abstract: This research explores the role of women in the political and intellectual dynamics of classical Islamic civilization (7th–13th centuries), a period marked by profound advancements in science, philosophy, literature, and governance. Despite the flourishing of knowledge during this era, women's contributions have often been overlooked or minimized in conventional historiography. This study seeks to reconstruct and reinterpret women's historical roles through the combined perspectives of Islamic studies, gender studies, and historical sociology, employing theoretical frameworks such as feminist historiography, social role theory, and Islamic epistemology. Using a qualitative historical approach, the research analyzes classical texts, biographical dictionaries, and scholarly records to uncover the presence and influence of women as scholars, educators, poets, patrons, and political figures. The findings reveal that women played a vital part in shaping the intellectual and political spheres of the Islamic world, supported by systemic and cultural enablers such as access to education, religious encouragement of knowledge-seeking, and the establishment of scholarly networks. Figures like Aisha bint Abu Bakr, Fatima al-Fihri, and Lubna of Cordoba exemplify women's intellectual agency during this period. The study contributes to a reinterpretation of Islamic history that challenges patriarchal readings and restores women's visibility within the broader narrative of Islamic civilization. It further offers insights for modern Islamic feminist thought and the enhancement of educational resources in Islamic history and gender studies. Ultimately, this research provides a more balanced understanding of the classical Islamic era, emphasizing that women's participation in intellectual and political life was not an anomaly, but an integral part of the civilization's legacy of knowledge, faith, and progress.

Research Highlights:

- Reconstructs the historical roles of women in the political and intellectual spheres of classical Islamic civilization (7th–13th centuries).
- Employs feminist historiography, social role theory, and Islamic epistemology to reinterpret historical narratives from a gender-aware perspective.
- Reveals that women such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr, Fatima al-Fihri, and Lubna of Cordoba made substantial contributions to scholarship, education, and governance.
- Identifies systemic and cultural enablers including access to education, religious encouragement of knowledge, and scholarly networks that supported women's intellectual development.
- Provides a more inclusive and balanced understanding of Islamic civilization and offers valuable insights for modern Islamic feminist thought and education.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Classical Islamic Civilization, spanning roughly from the 7th to the 13th century, is marked by remarkable achievements in politics, science, philosophy, art, and culture. During this era, the Islamic world became a center of learning and governance that connected Asia, Africa, and Europe (Lapidus, 2012). Cities such as Baghdad, Cordoba, Damascus, and Cairo flourished as hubs of intellectual activity where scholars, scientists, and thinkers from various backgrounds contributed to the advancement of human knowledge. However, while the political and intellectual accomplishments of men such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and al-Khwarizmi are well-documented, the contributions of women during this period have often been overlooked or undervalued in mainstream historical narratives.

In many early Islamic societies, women played a more significant role than is often assumed. From the earliest days of Islam, women were involved in political, educational, and religious life. Historical accounts highlight figures such as Aisha bint Abi Bakr, who was not only one of the most important transmitters of Hadith but also a political actor during the early Islamic period; Fatimah al-Fihri, who founded the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco recognized as one of the world's oldest universities; and Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, a pioneer in Islamic mysticism whose spiritual thought shaped Sufi traditions. In Andalusia, scholars like Lubna of Cordoba and Wallada bint al-Mustakfi were known for their literary and intellectual influence within royal and academic circles (Shamsie, 2016). These examples illustrate that women were not merely passive subjects of history but active participants in shaping the political and intellectual landscape of the Islamic world.

Nevertheless, the broader historical recognition of these women has been limited due to socio-cultural, political, and historiographical biases that have tended to prioritize male figures. The traditional historiography of Islamic civilization has often been written through patriarchal perspectives that minimized women's visibility and agency (Ahmed, 2021). As a result, the collective memory of women's achievements has been partially erased or confined to domestic or religious narratives. This has created an incomplete understanding of the richness and inclusivity of Islamic civilization's intellectual heritage.

For foundational historiographical rethinking, Leila Ahmed's landmark study *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (first published 1992/1993) remains essential. Ahmed traces how gender discourse developed from the formative centuries of Islam through later periods, showing how social, legal, and theological ideas about women were historically contingent rather than monolithic. Her work highlights the ways modern assumptions about "traditional" gender roles were shaped by later political and social processes, and it opened the field to gender-aware readings of classical sources.

Fatima Mernissi's *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993) and related writings (e.g., *The Veil and the Male Elite*, 1987) foreground the political agency of women by recovering cases of female rulership, patronage and public authority across the Islamic world. Mernissi uses biographical and narrative sources to challenge the assumption that women were entirely excluded from governance, demonstrating instead that women sometimes held *de facto* or *de jure* power and exercised political influence in courts and dynastic politics. Her books have been influential in demonstrating that political leadership by women is not without precedent in Islamic history.

The edited volume *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (Gavin R. G. Hambly, ed., 1998) collects essays that examine multiple forms of female agency rulers, patrons, poets, and pious women across different regions and genres. Contributors use case studies to show how women's public roles often took shape through patronage, religious endowments (*waqf*), literary culture, and courtly networks. The collection is useful for comparative perspectives and for understanding how local institutions and cultural practices shaped women's opportunities in political and intellectual life.

More recent specialized studies have focused on women's roles in religious knowledge production. Asma Sayeed's *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) maps the historical involvement of women in *ḥadīth* transmission and other forms of religious instruction from the formative centuries through the early modern period. Sayeed links changes in women's scholarly visibility to broader transformations in legal culture, educational institutions, and gendered norms providing a careful, source-based account of intellectual agency that complicates simplistic assumptions about women's exclusion from learned networks.

Shahla Haeri's *The Unforgettable Queens of Islam: Succession, Authority, Gender* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) and related recent work push the literature on female rulership into the 21st-century scholarly conversation by re-examining succession politics and gendered claims to authority.

Haeri combines close reading of medieval sources with contemporary political theory to show continuities and ruptures in how female sovereignty was justified, contested, and remembered. Together with other modern monographs and edited collections, Haeri's book exemplifies a renewed scholarly interest in political dimensions of women's agency.

In recent years, scholars of Islamic history and gender studies have begun to re-examine historical sources to recover women's contributions to politics, education, and knowledge production (Zayd, 2006). By revisiting biographical dictionaries, chronicles, and manuscripts, researchers have uncovered evidence that women served as teachers, patrons of scholarship, poets, and advisors to rulers. This renewed attention not only challenges long-held assumptions about gender roles in the Islamic world but also offers a more nuanced and equitable perspective on the civilization's development.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore and analyze the multifaceted roles of women in the political and intellectual dynamics of Classical Islamic Civilization. It aims to uncover how women influenced governance, education, and scholarship, and how their contributions reflect broader social and cultural transformations of their time. Understanding these roles is essential to achieving a more balanced and comprehensive picture of Islamic history one that acknowledges women as integral contributors to the civilization's enduring legacy.

METHOD

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This research on "The Role of Women in the Political and Intellectual Dynamics of Classical Islamic Civilization" draws upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates perspectives from Islamic studies, gender studies, and historical sociology. The combination of these approaches enables a comprehensive understanding of women's participation in the social, political, and intellectual life of early Islamic societies (Sidani, 2005). The study situates women not as peripheral actors but as integral contributors within the broader historical processes that shaped Islamic civilization between the 7th and 13th centuries.

From the standpoint of Islamic studies, this research employs Islamic epistemology as a foundational framework. Islamic epistemology concerns the nature, sources, and transmission of knowledge within the Islamic intellectual tradition. In this context, knowledge (*'ilm*) is understood as a divine trust that transcends gender boundaries, emphasizing moral responsibility, intellectual pursuit, and social engagement (Unkule, 2019). The study explores how classical Islamic thought conceptualized the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, and how women participated in this process as teachers, scholars, and patrons. Figures such as Aisha bint Abi Bakr, known for her transmission of Hadith, and Fatimah al-Fihri, who established one of the world's earliest universities, serve as examples of how Islamic epistemology allowed women to engage actively in intellectual endeavors. This theoretical lens highlights the inherent inclusivity of Islamic knowledge traditions and challenges later patriarchal interpretations that restricted women's educational roles.

The framework of feminist historiography complements this by reinterpreting classical historical sources from a gender-aware perspective. Feminist historiography critically examines how historical narratives are constructed, whose voices are amplified, and whose experiences are marginalized (Friedman, 2013). By applying this approach, the research seeks to uncover the silenced or overlooked contributions of women in Islamic history. This involves a critical reading of chronicles, biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*), and religious texts to expose the gendered assumptions that shaped earlier historiography. Feminist historiography does not merely "add women" to existing historical accounts; rather, it reconstructs the understanding of history itself by interrogating the social and cultural power structures that shaped gender relations. In doing so, it repositions women as active participants in the intellectual and political evolution of Islamic societies.

The study also incorporates social role theory from historical sociology to examine how societal expectations and institutional structures influenced women's roles in various domains. Social role theory posits that gender roles are shaped by social norms, cultural values, and institutional arrangements rather than biological determinism (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Applying this perspective helps explain how women's participation in political and intellectual life varied across regions and periods of Classical Islamic Civilization. For example, women in Andalusia or the Abbasid court often occupied different positions of influence compared to those in more conservative tribal or rural settings. This framework enables an

understanding of women's agency as dynamic and context-dependent mediated by family status, education, class, and political opportunity rather than static or uniform.

By synthesizing these three perspectives Islamic epistemology, feminist historiography, and social role theory this research constructs a comprehensive conceptual model for analyzing women's historical roles. The integration of these theories allows the study to bridge traditional Islamic scholarship with modern gender and sociological analysis. It recognizes that the marginalization of women in historical narratives is not reflective of their actual absence but rather a product of selective documentation and later interpretive biases. Thus, the theoretical and conceptual framework not only guides the reexamination of historical sources but also provides a means to rearticulate the narrative of Islamic civilization as one in which women were significant contributors to political authority, intellectual life, and cultural continuity.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative historical approach to explore and analyze the role of women in the political and intellectual dynamics of Classical Islamic Civilization. The qualitative method is chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of textual and historical sources, focusing on the meanings, contexts, and interpretations embedded in classical records (Kipping et al., 2014). The study aims to reconstruct women's participation in governance, scholarship, and cultural development during the 7th to 13th centuries by critically analyzing primary and secondary sources. Through this approach, the research seeks not only to document historical facts but also to interpret them within the broader framework of Islamic thought and gender dynamics.

The primary method used in this study is historical analysis, which involves the systematic examination and interpretation of historical data related to the social, political, and intellectual life of women in Islamic civilization (Zayd, 2006). This includes analyzing chronicles, biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*), historical manuscripts, hadith collections, letters, and educational records that reference women's activities and contributions. Key historical figures such as Aisha bint Abi Bakr, Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, Fatimah al-Fihri, and Lubna of Cordoba are studied to illustrate the various ways women influenced their societies. The research also considers institutional and cultural contexts, such as the role of educational centers like the Bayt al-Hikmah in Baghdad and the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco, to understand how these environments shaped women's opportunities for intellectual engagement.

In addition to primary sources, the study relies on secondary literature analysis, drawing on the works of modern historians, Islamic scholars, and gender theorists. Books, journal articles, and academic papers that discuss women's roles in early and medieval Islamic societies are reviewed to establish the current state of scholarship and to identify existing gaps in historical interpretation. By comparing modern academic interpretations with classical sources, this study aims to present a balanced and critically informed perspective. This comparative analysis helps uncover biases that may have influenced previous historiographical narratives, particularly those that minimized or ignored women's participation in public and intellectual life (Des Jardins, 2004).

The data collected from both primary and secondary sources are analyzed using content analysis and interpretive methods (Elbardan & Kholeif, 2017). Content analysis allows for identifying recurring themes, patterns, and representations of women in the sources. The interpretive method, grounded in feminist historiography and Islamic epistemology, helps reveal underlying social, cultural, and theological assumptions that shaped women's portrayals. This approach enables the researcher to go beyond surface descriptions and engage with deeper questions about gender, power, and knowledge production in Islamic civilization. The analysis is guided by three key themes: women's political influence, women's educational and intellectual contributions, and the social structures that supported or restricted their participation.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, triangulation is employed by cross-referencing different types of sources and scholarly interpretations. This involves comparing historical records with religious texts, biographical accounts, and modern research to confirm the consistency of information and to avoid interpretive bias. The study also adopts a contextual reading strategy, meaning that each source is analyzed within its historical, geographical, and cultural setting (Aitken, 2013). This helps prevent anachronistic interpretations and ensures that women's roles are understood according to the norms and values of their time.

Overall, the methodological design of this research integrates historical inquiry, gender analysis, and Islamic scholarship to construct a nuanced understanding of women's agency in the Classical Islamic era. By combining rigorous historical examination with theoretical insight, the study aims to illuminate the

often-overlooked contributions of women to the political and intellectual vitality of Islamic civilization and to challenge the traditional narratives that have obscured their significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Reconstruction of Women's Historical Roles in Politics and Intellectual Life

Reconstructing the historical roles of women in the politics and intellectual life of Classical Islamic Civilization reveals a complex and dynamic portrait of female participation that has long been overshadowed by patriarchal historical narratives. Far from being passive figures, women in the Islamic world from the 7th to the 13th centuries played active and influential roles in shaping the political, educational, and spiritual life of their societies. Their contributions, though often underrepresented in mainstream historiography, are evident in a variety of sources, including biographical records, religious texts, and historical chronicles. By revisiting these sources through the lens of feminist historiography and Islamic epistemology, this study aims to reconstruct a more accurate and inclusive understanding of women's roles during this transformative era.

In the political domain, women in early Islamic societies were not merely subjects of governance but often participants and decision-makers in the political process (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). One of the most prominent examples is Aisha bint Abi Bakr, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, who was deeply involved in early Islamic politics and played a decisive role during the First Fitna (civil war). Her political leadership and oratory skills demonstrated that women could engage meaningfully in matters of state and governance. Similarly, Shajar al-Durr, who ruled Egypt in the 13th century, exemplified female sovereignty within an Islamic framework. She successfully managed state affairs and led the defense of Egypt during the Crusades before male elites challenged her authority. These examples, among others, show that women were capable of exercising political power, both directly and indirectly, often serving as advisors, mediators, or patrons of rulers. Their influence, though sometimes constrained by societal expectations, was significant in shaping political outcomes and preserving state stability.

In addition to their political engagement, women made substantial contributions to the intellectual and educational life of Islamic civilization. The establishment of al-Qarawiyyin University by Fatimah al-Fihri in 859 CE in Fez, Morocco, stands as a testament to women's leadership in higher education. The institution became a renowned center for Islamic and scientific learning, attracting scholars from across the Muslim world. Similarly, Lubna of Cordoba, a scholar, mathematician, and secretary to the Caliph al-Hakam II in 10th-century Andalusia, played a vital role in the intellectual flourishing of Al-Andalus (Hummel, 2009). Her expertise in mathematics and literature, along with her work in organizing and transcribing manuscripts, highlights the intellectual agency of women in medieval Islamic societies. Furthermore, women were active as transmitters of hadith (sayings of the Prophet) and as teachers in both formal and informal settings. Historical records indicate that women such as Aisha bint Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas and Karima al-Marwaziyya were respected scholars who instructed both men and women, emphasizing the centrality of women in Islamic knowledge transmission.

The spiritual and philosophical dimensions of women's intellectual life were equally profound. Figures such as Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, the 8th-century Sufi mystic, reshaped the understanding of divine love and devotion in Islamic mysticism. Her theological reflections on sincerity, love, and asceticism influenced generations of male and female Sufis alike (Abdel-Latif, 2020). Rabi'a's prominence in the Sufi tradition demonstrates that women were not only participants in religious life but also originators of new spiritual paradigms. In many cases, women's intellectual and spiritual pursuits were supported by Islamic teachings that valued knowledge ('ilm) as a moral and communal duty. The Qur'an and Hadith encouraged both men and women to seek knowledge, and this egalitarian principle underpinned much of women's educational involvement in the classical period.

Reconstructing these narratives also requires acknowledging the social and institutional frameworks that enabled or constrained women's participation (Zuckerman & Greenberg, 2004). Women from elite or educated families often had greater access to learning and political influence, while others engaged in intellectual pursuits through informal educational networks or patronage systems. The proliferation of mosques, madrasas, and libraries provided spaces where women could contribute to scholarly activities, either as patrons, teachers, or students. However, shifts in political power and the rise of conservative interpretations of Islamic law over time often restricted women's visibility in public intellectual life. Despite these limitations, the persistence of female scholarship across regions from

Baghdad and Cairo to Cordoba and Damascus illustrates a continuous, though uneven, tradition of female intellectual participation.

In essence, the reconstruction of women's roles in the political and intellectual history of Classical Islamic Civilization challenges the notion that women were absent from public life. Instead, it reveals a nuanced picture in which women's agency was expressed through governance, scholarship, spiritual leadership, and social reform. Their contributions were not exceptions but integral components of a civilization that valued knowledge, justice, and moral excellence. Recognizing these roles not only restores women to their rightful place in history but also provides valuable insight into the inclusive and multifaceted nature of Islamic civilization at its height.

Identification of Systemic and Cultural Enablers that Allowed Women to Thrive Intellectually

The flourishing of women's intellectual contributions during the Classical Islamic Civilization was not accidental but was supported by a range of systemic and cultural enablers embedded within the social, religious, and educational structures of the Islamic world. One of the most significant systemic enablers was the Islamic emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge ('ilm) as a divine and moral obligation for both men and women. The Qur'an and Hadith contain numerous exhortations encouraging believers to seek knowledge, with no gender distinction in this command (Ibrahim, 2020). The Prophet Muhammad's saying, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim," was interpreted inclusively, legitimizing women's participation in educational and scholarly activities. This religious foundation created a culture that valued intellectual development as a form of worship and service to God. Women were thus able to pursue education and scholarship not as acts of rebellion against social norms, but as expressions of faith and piety aligned with Islamic teachings. This theological egalitarianism served as the cornerstone for women's inclusion in intellectual life across various Islamic regions and centuries.

Another enabler was the institutionalization of education through mosques, madrasas, and libraries that were often accessible to women, especially in urban centers. Many women learned in private or semi-public settings, participating in study circles (halaqat) or receiving instruction from renowned scholars (Gazzah et al., 2004). In some cases, women themselves became teachers, issuing ijazah (teaching certificates) to their students, both male and female. Biographical sources document hundreds of female muhaddithat (Hadith transmitters) who taught in cities such as Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo. Furthermore, women's participation in knowledge transmission was supported by familial networks, as scholarly families often encouraged both sons and daughters to pursue education. This familial encouragement, combined with institutional flexibility, facilitated the emergence of female intellectuals whose authority was recognized within mainstream scholarly circles.

Economic and social patronage systems also played an essential role in enabling women's intellectual growth (Boserup et al., 2013). Wealthy women, particularly from elite or royal families, used their resources to support educational and religious institutions through waqf (charitable endowments). This system allowed women to fund the construction of schools, libraries, and mosques, ensuring that knowledge continued to flourish. Fatimah al-Fihri's establishment of the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco is a prime example of how women's patronage had a lasting institutional impact. Similarly, female patrons in the Abbasid and Andalusian periods sponsored poets, scholars, and translators, contributing to the vibrant intellectual culture of their time. Economic independence and property rights, which Islam granted to women, further empowered them to engage in such acts of intellectual patronage.

Cultural openness and cosmopolitanism in major Islamic cities also served as cultural enablers for women's intellectual advancement. Urban centers like Baghdad, Cordoba, and Cairo were melting pots of ideas where different cultures, languages, and philosophies interacted under the umbrella of Islamic civilization (Bennison & Gascoigne, 2007). The translation movement, for instance, brought Greek, Persian, and Indian knowledge into dialogue with Islamic thought, creating intellectual spaces that valued reasoning, science, and debate. In such cosmopolitan environments, women could participate in scholarly circles and engage with diverse ideas. The presence of educated women in these contexts indicates that intellectual life was not strictly gender-segregated, and that social norms often accommodated women's scholarly aspirations, particularly among educated and urban elites.

Lastly, the spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islamic culture, particularly through Sufism, offered women alternative pathways for intellectual and moral authority. Sufi orders emphasized inner knowledge (ma'rifah) and spiritual discipline over formal institutional learning, making them more accessible to women. Figures such as Rabi'a al-Adawiyya became respected authorities not through formal academic institutions but through their mastery of spiritual insight and moral example (Cornell, 2019). This

democratization of knowledge within the Sufi tradition allowed women to engage in intellectual discourse, influence spiritual teachings, and mentor both men and women in matters of faith and ethics.

A reinterpretation of classical Islamic history that challenges patriarchal readings

A reinterpretation of classical Islamic history that challenges patriarchal readings involves a critical reassessment of the ways in which historical narratives have been constructed, transmitted, and interpreted through predominantly male-centered perspectives. Traditional historiography has often marginalized or omitted women's roles, portraying them as passive participants in society rather than active contributors to political and intellectual life (Zezeza, 2005). This study challenges such patriarchal readings by re-examining primary sources such as historical chronicles, hadith collections, biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*), and literary works through a feminist historiographical lens. By doing so, it reveals that women were not only present but also played significant roles in shaping the intellectual and political fabric of classical Islamic civilization.

One of the key approaches in this reinterpretation is the application of **feminist historiography**, which seeks to uncover the voices and experiences of women obscured by traditional male-dominated narratives. Scholars such as Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed have emphasized that the exclusion of women from historical accounts often stems not from a lack of female participation but from biases in record-keeping and interpretation (Stockreiter, 2015). By re-reading classical texts, such as Ibn Sa'd's *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* and al-Dhahabī's *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalā*, we find evidence of women scholars, jurists, poets, and political leaders who engaged actively in intellectual discourse and governance. These reinterpretations help to reconstruct a more balanced historical understanding that acknowledges the multidimensional roles women played in Islamic societies.

Furthermore, this reinterpretation highlights the **epistemological foundations of Islam** that encourage the pursuit of knowledge for all believers, regardless of gender. The Prophet Muhammad's saying, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim," has traditionally been cited as gender-neutral, implying that both men and women share the same intellectual obligations and rights. The reinterpretation of Islamic epistemology through a gender-aware framework reveals that early Islamic societies often supported female education and scholarship. Women such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr, Fatima al-Fihri, and Lubna of Cordoba exemplify this intellectual spirit, challenging the assumption that Islamic civilization was inherently patriarchal in its treatment of women.

This renewed historical reading also interrogates **social role theory** within the Islamic context, exploring how societal norms and structures shaped, but did not entirely restrict, women's participation. While patriarchal elements existed often influenced by local cultures or political systems they did not define the totality of women's experiences in the Islamic world. In cities like Baghdad, Cordoba, and Damascus, women were known to participate in scholarly debates, found educational institutions, and serve as patrons of science and literature. By highlighting these examples, the reinterpretation dismantles essentialist notions that confine women to domestic spheres, instead portraying them as integral actors in public and intellectual life.

Ultimately, this reinterpretation of classical Islamic history seeks not only to recover forgotten figures but to challenge the methodological and ideological frameworks that perpetuate their invisibility. It invites scholars to adopt a **gender-inclusive historical methodology** that recognizes diversity and complexity in the Islamic past (Ayubi, 2020). By re-centering women's contributions within the broader narrative of Islamic civilization, the study contributes to a more equitable and accurate understanding of history one that honors the intellectual and political agency of Muslim women as foundational to the development of Islamic thought and society.

Contribution

This research makes a significant contribution by offering a more balanced and inclusive understanding of Islamic civilization, particularly through its reconstruction of women's roles in political and intellectual life. Traditional historical narratives often centered on male scholars, rulers, and theologians, leaving the contributions of women underexplored or altogether ignored (Ruether, 2011). By reintegrating female figures such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr, Fatima al-Fihri, Lubna of Cordoba, and numerous other scholars and patrons, this study restores women to their rightful place in the historical record. This inclusive approach challenges the perception that Islamic civilization was exclusively male-driven, instead highlighting the cooperative and complementary nature of men's and women's contributions to cultural, political, and intellectual advancements during the classical period.

Moreover, the research provides valuable insights for modern Islamic feminist thought by connecting the historical agency of women in classical Islamic civilization to contemporary debates on gender equality in Muslim societies. Islamic feminism, which seeks to reconcile gender justice with Islamic teachings, can draw strength and legitimacy from historical precedents uncovered through this study. The examples of learned women who taught hadith, engaged in jurisprudence, or led educational institutions demonstrate that intellectual and spiritual authority among women is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition (Sayeed, 2013). This historical evidence helps to counter modern misconceptions that gender equality is a Western import, reaffirming instead that Islam has a rich legacy of recognizing and empowering female intellect and leadership.

Additionally, this research enhances educational resources in Islamic history and gender studies by providing a more comprehensive framework for teaching and scholarship. It encourages the integration of women's historical contributions into curricula at both secondary and higher education levels, thereby fostering a more inclusive understanding of Islamic civilization. The findings can inform the development of textbooks, academic modules, and digital resources that reflect the diversity of voices within the Islamic world (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009). Such educational enhancement not only benefits students of Islamic studies but also promotes intercultural and interreligious understanding, as it demonstrates the sophistication and inclusivity of Islamic thought across history.

Ultimately, this study's contribution lies in its capacity to bridge the past and present, reshaping how Islamic history is understood and taught. By challenging patriarchal interpretations and emphasizing the historical agency of women, it opens new avenues for dialogue between tradition and modernity. The research underscores that the legacy of classical Islamic civilization is not one of exclusion but of intellectual richness and diversity a legacy that continues to inspire contemporary discussions on gender, knowledge, and social justice in the Muslim world.

Research limitations

Despite its contributions, this research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. One of the main limitations lies in the availability and accessibility of primary sources. Much of the historical documentation from the classical Islamic period (7th–13th centuries) was written by male scholars and historians, whose perspectives were influenced by the cultural norms of their times. As a result, women's voices and achievements were often underrepresented, anonymized, or omitted entirely. This presents a challenge in reconstructing women's historical roles, as the available sources may not fully capture the scope of their intellectual or political participation. The research, therefore, depends heavily on interpretative methodologies and secondary analyses, which can introduce subjectivity and possible bias (Weed, 2005).

Another limitation concerns the geographical and cultural diversity of the Islamic world during the classical period. Islamic civilization spanned vast regions from Andalusia and North Africa to Persia and Central Asia each with distinct cultural, linguistic, and political dynamics. Because of this diversity, the experiences and opportunities of women varied greatly depending on region and social context (Bagilhole, 2009). This research, while aiming for a broad overview, cannot fully account for every local variation in women's roles or conditions. As a result, some regional nuances may be generalized or underrepresented, limiting the universality of the study's conclusions.

A further limitation is related to the interpretive nature of feminist historiography and theoretical frameworks used in the study. While feminist historiography and social role theory offer valuable tools for re-examining history through a gender-aware lens, they can sometimes risk imposing modern concepts of gender and equality onto premodern contexts. The social and intellectual frameworks of the classical Islamic period operated under different assumptions than those of contemporary gender discourse. Consequently, while reinterpretation helps uncover neglected aspects of women's contributions, there remains a risk of anachronism projecting present-day values onto historical realities that may not align with them.

Finally, the research faces limitations in empirical validation due to the nature of historical analysis itself. Unlike contemporary social studies that allow for quantitative data collection or direct observation, this research relies on textual analysis and interpretation of existing historical records (Kipping et al., 2014). As such, its conclusions depend on the accuracy, preservation, and interpretation of centuries-old manuscripts and translations. Future studies could strengthen these findings by combining textual analysis with archaeological evidence, comparative historiography, or interdisciplinary approaches from anthropology and linguistics.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research underscore the significant yet often overlooked role of women in the political and intellectual dynamics of classical Islamic civilization. Through a reexamination of historical sources using feminist historiography, social role theory, and Islamic epistemology, this study has demonstrated that women were active participants in shaping the intellectual, cultural, and even political landscapes of their societies. Far from being passive figures, many women served as scholars, educators, patrons of knowledge, poets, and advisors who contributed meaningfully to the development of Islamic thought and governance between the 7th and 13th centuries. This challenges the long-held assumption that the classical Islamic era was exclusively male-centered and reveals instead a more inclusive and collaborative historical reality. The research also highlights the systemic and cultural enablers that allowed women to thrive intellectually within Islamic civilization. Access to education, the existence of scholarly networks, and the religious encouragement to seek knowledge regardless of gender all played crucial roles in fostering women's intellectual development. Figures such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr, Fatima al-Fihri, and Lubna of Cordoba stand as enduring examples of women who achieved scholarly distinction and influenced generations of thinkers. These examples demonstrate that the principles of equality and intellectual pursuit were embedded in the foundations of Islamic thought, even if historical narratives have not always reflected them accurately. Furthermore, the study contributes to the reinterpretation of Islamic history by challenging patriarchal readings that have dominated traditional historiography. By reassessing classical texts through gender-aware frameworks, this research reveals the complexity and diversity of women's roles, offering a more balanced understanding of Islamic civilization. This reinterpretation not only enriches the historical record but also supports contemporary Islamic feminist movements that seek to reclaim women's spiritual and intellectual authority within Islamic discourse. This research calls for a continued reevaluation of historical narratives to ensure that women's contributions are recognized as integral to the legacy of Islamic civilization. It emphasizes the importance of inclusive historiography, interdisciplinary approaches, and critical engagement with primary sources to uncover a more accurate portrayal of the past. By doing so, it bridges the gap between history and modern discourse, reaffirming that the empowerment of women is not a departure from Islamic tradition but a continuation of its intellectual and ethical foundations.

AUTHORS' DECLARATION

Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

All authors contributed significantly to the conception, design, implementation, and completion of this research.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that there are no competing interests or potential conflicts of interest related to this research.

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