"Although [the Aga Khan University] is new, it will draw inspiration from the great traditions of Islamic civilisation and learning to which Your Excellency has referred. At the height of this civilisation, academies of higher learning reached from Spain to India, from North Africa to Afghanistan. One of the first and greatest research centres, the Bayt al-Hikmah established in Baghdad in 830, led Islam in translating philosophical and scientific works from Greek, Roman, Persian and Indian classics. By the art of translation, learning was assimilated from other civilisations. It was then advanced and furthered in new directions by scholarship in such institutions as the Dar-al-Ilm -- the House of Science, which during the ninth and tenth centuries spread to many cities, through colleges like those of al-Azhar in Cairo, Qarawiyin at Fez in Morocco, Zaytuna in Tunis and the eminent Spanish centre of Cordoba, founded between 929 and 961.

"Everywhere, whether in the simplest mosque schools or in universities, teaching was regarded as a mission undertaken for the service of God. Revenue from endowments provided students with stipends and no time limit was set for the acquisition of knowledge. Above all, following the guidance of the Holy Qur’an, there was freedom of enquiry and research. The result was a magnificent flowering of artistic and intellectual activity throughout the Ummah.

"Muslim scholars reached pinnacles of achievement in astronomy, geography, physics, philosophy, mathematics and especially, in medicine. The great British scientist Isaac Newton remarked that if he was able to see further than his predecessors, it was because he stood on the shoulders of giants. Among those giants who made possible the scientific revolution in Europe were Ibn Sina, whose 'Canon of Medicine' was a standard text for five hundred years; al-Idrissi, the geographer; Ibn Rushd, the philosopher, and a host of other Muslim scientists who had produced the notion of specific gravity, refined Euclid’s theories, perfected geometry, evolved trigonometry and algebra, and made modern mathematics possible by developing Indian numerals and the concept of the
zero as a numeral of no place value, an invention crucial to every aspect of technology from that time onwards to the present day. Their Socratic principles of education, so sympathetic to Muslims and so characteristic of the great Islamic teaching institutions of the golden age, are still and are likely to remain universally accepted practices of advanced teaching.

"It is no exaggeration to say that the original Christian universities of Latin West, at Paris, Bologna and Oxford, indeed the whole European renaissance, received a vital influx of new knowledge from Islam -- an influx from which the later Western colleges and universities, including those of North Africa [America? (see note in source)], were to benefit in turn. It is therefore most fitting that Harvard, McGill and McMaster Universities should today be associated with the Medical College which is the first faculty of the Aga Khan University, and that President Bok and other members of the Harvard faculty are advising us on the development of the university as a whole. Making wisdom available from one country to another is truly the finest tradition of Islamic learning."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Address on Acceptance of the Charter of the Aga Khan University (Karachi, Pakistan)

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