Istanbul Seen from Cairo
Francois Déroche

In a recent book on Ottoman calligraphy, Muhittin Serin includes in his bibliography the name of the great lexicographer of the 12th/18th century, al-Zabidi; strangely enough, since the author is dealing with calligraphy, he only mentions the famous and monumental Arabic dictionary, the Tāj al-'Arūs, omitting a small treatise which al-Zabidi devoted to calligraphy, covering the history of the art up to his own day. Ottoman literature on the subject is rather well explored, but its perspective is largely centered on the milieu in Istanbul: it may therefore be of some interest to those who are interested in the history of Ottoman calligraphy to discover the point of view of a scholar who was living in a province of the Empire.

Al-Zabidi was born in the Indian city of Bilgram in 1145/1732, in a family who claimed to descend from 'Ali through his great-grand-son, Zayd b. ‘Ali Zayn al-Abīdīn. At a comparatively young age, he left his country and came to Yemen and Hijāz before reaching Egypt where he settled permanently in 1167/1754. A traditional scholar by formation, he seems to have had a wide-ranging appetite of knowledge as his pupil and friend ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Jabarī aptly puts it in the note he devoted to his master in his 'Ajā‘ib: “al-Zabidi was the luminary of the most distinguished, the enchanting one, playing with intellects, who traversed every path in language and tradition, and dove into every depth of knowledge, to whom the ways of theology submitted themselves, and pages and pens bore witness.” Was he himself a calligrapher? “You

1 Muhittin Serin, Hat Sanati ve Meşhur Hattatlar (İstanbul, 1999), p. 316.
find him continuously buying and copying against payment” writes a Maghribi witness, but he does not seem to have been a practitioner of calligraphy in the full sense of the term.

Why then did he write the *Hikmat al-ishrāq ilā kuttāb al-āfāq*, a short treatise on calligraphy? A first reason is to be found in the person to whom the work is dedicated, Hasan al-Rushdī. He was a slave, probably from the Anatolian part of the Ottoman empire, bought by ‘Alī Agha, an emissary of the Sublime Porte in Cairo. He was educated in Egypt, with a special interest in calligraphy which he learned under ‘Abd Allāh al-Anīs al-Mawlawī; his teacher granted him in 1147/1744–45 a diploma (*ijāzah*) which has been preserved and published by Adam Gacek.⁵ Al-Rushdī later married his teacher’s daughter and became *shaykh* of the calligraphers and *kuttāb* when Ismā‘īl al-Wahbī, *shaykh al-mukattabīn*, died in 1187/1774. When al-Zabidi wrote for him the *Hikmat*, he had not yet reached this position—the dictation of the work was completed according to the final note on the 12 *dhū al-hijjah* 1184/29 March 1770. Both al-Rushdī and al-Zabidi were to die in 1205/1790.

A second reason might be the deep interest showed by al-Zabidi in genealogy. Stefan Reichmuth speaks of his approach to hadith as “a kind of cultural archaeology […] through which the origins and the legitimacy of the cultural institutions of Islam must be brought to light”; this remark could be taken in a broader sense as a definition of al-Zabidi’s method as applied here to Arabic calligraphy. This is by no means a far-fetched statement since the few glimpses we can catch of the treatise’s genesis confirm the extensive approach to the matter by al-Zabidi. The author was a man of books and various accounts stress the richness of his library; the study of the text, as we shall see later, throws light on its dependence on written sources. But this did not exclude a search for direct knowledge: in the case of calligraphy, it seems that al-Zabidi became acquainted in 1181/1767 with a *mamluk*, ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh, who had been granted an *ijāzah* by al-Rushdī himself and who in turn taught al-Zabidi the fundamentals of the art of the pen.⁷

---


The Hikma reflects al-Zabidi’s quest for origins and legitimacy. It is basically a genealogy, linking the present—al-Rushdi—to its roots in the past; the treatise begins with the origins of the Arabic script, includes a digression on the merits of calligraphy and on the implements of the scribe (qalam, inkwell, ink) and on scribal practices, then goes on with the history of the art of writing. The part of the text devoted to Ottoman calligraphy, beginning with Şeyh Hamdullah, will detain us, as suggested previously, the interest of the document lies partly in the fact that it gives the point of view of a peripheral centre of the Empire, whereas Ottoman treatises devoted to this subject tend to be centered on the capital city.

It is no wonder that the short silsile which appears in al-Rushdi icâzetnâme constitutes the backbone of the pages of the Hikmah devoted to Ottoman calligraphy; al-Zabidi certainly knew this tradition and takes it over into his text. For the same reason, the author only pays attention to the aqlam-i sitte tradition, omitting completely other aspects of the calligraphy. Three main developments have then been grafted upon that silsile: the first one corresponds to the generation of Şeyh Hamdullah’s direct pupils, the second one to those of Dervish Ali. Between the first and the second developments, the silsile is limited to the figureheads of Ottoman calligraphy. This situation is largely similar to what is found in classical works about Ottoman calligraphy. Al-Zabidi is responsible for the third development which is devoted to the late transmission (12th/18th century) of the Şeyh’s school in Egypt. The information provided by the author has to be compared with that found in classical sources. It can be conveniently summed up in a table with the names listed in alphabetical order, with the Turkish equivalent in the second column, followed by a reference to Şevket Rado’s book (R); the first column also contains the number of the page(s) in the modern edition (Z) of the Hikmah and singles out Egyptian calligraphers (Eg.).

| 'Abd Allah (Z 89) | Abdullah Amasi (R 48) |
| 'Abd Allah ef. al-Qarimi (Z 91) | Abdullah Krımı (R 78) |
| 'Abd Allah ef. al-Vefâ’î (Z 93) | Abdullah Vefâyi (R 133–34) |
| 'Abd Allah al-Mawlawî al-Anis (Z 95; Eg.) | Abdülkerim (Halife) (R 82) |
| 'Abd al-Karîm Khalîfâ Wiqâyat zâde (Z 90) | Ahmad Çelebi (Z 91) |
| Ahmet b. Pîr Mehmet (R 77) |

---


5 Şevket Rado, Türk Hattatlari (Istanbul, s.d.).
Ahmad ef. al-Darwish (Z 93)
Ahmad ef. Qızqıbān zāde (Z 92)
Ahmad ef. Qazanjı zāde (Z 93)
Ahmad ef. Shaykh zāde (Z 93, 94)
Ahmad ef. al-Shukri (Z 96; Eg.)
Ahmad ef. Qaraḩisārī (Z 90)
‘Ali ef. Nafası zāde (Z 92)
‘Ali ef. Qāshiqijzāde (Z 92)
‘Ali b. Yahyā (Z 88)
‘Ali imām Amīr Akhūr (Z 93)
Amr Allāh ef. (Z 91)
‘Anbar Mustafā aghā (Z 93)
Dālī Yūsuf ef. (Z 90)
Darwish ‘Alī efendi (Z 92, 94, 95)
Darwish Muhammad (Z 91)
Fadl Allāh ef. (Z 93, 94 twice)
Hasan ef. (Uskudārī Hasan Çelebi) (Z 91)
Hasan b. Hasan al-Diyā‘ī
(Z 94; Eg.)
Hasan ef. al-Rushdī (Z 96; Eg.)
Husām al-dīn Khalīfā (Z 89)
Husayn Çelebi Khalīfā (Z 90)
Husayn ef. al-Jazā‘irī
(Z 94, 95; Eg.)
Ibrāhīm ef. b. Ramādān (Z 93)
Ibrāhīm ef. Shaykhzāde (Z 94)
Ibrāhīm al-Ruwaydī al-Husaynī,
ābū al-Fath al-Hammāmī
al-‘Vefā‘ī (Z 95; Eg.)
İsmā‘īl ef. Khalīfā, Ibn ‘Alī (Z 93)
İsmā‘īl ef. Turk (Z 92; Eg.)
İsmā‘īl ef. al-Wahbī (Z 96; Eg.)
Jābi zāde Muhammad efendi (Z 93)
Jamāl al-dīn al-Amāsī (Z 89)
Khālid ef. al-‘Aẓīz (Z 91, 92)
Khalīl ef. al-Hāfīz (Z 92)
Kūcūk Darwish ‘Alī efendi (Z 93)
Mahmūd ef. Tunçhānēlī (Z 90)
Muhammad (al-Sayyīd) b.
Ibrāhīm al-Maqdīsī al-Nūrī
(Z 94, 95 twice, 96; Eg.)
Muhammad ef. ‘Arab zāde (Z 92)
Derviş Ahmed (R 122)
Ahmed Kızkapanzađe (R 93)
Ahmet Şükri (R Table 4)
Ahmed Karahisārī (R 69–72)
Ali b. Mustafā Kaşqıçzāde (R 107)
Ali Sofī (R 46)
Emrullah b. Mehmet (R 93)
Mustafā Anber Ağa (R 103)
Demircikulu Yusuf ef. (R. 85) ?
Birinci Derviş Ali (R 100–1)
Derviş Mehmet b. Mustafā Dede
(R 80–2)
Fazlullah (b. Mehmet) (R. 103) ?
Hasan Üsküdarı (R 86)
Hüsamettin Hüseyin Şah (R 79–80)
Karahisarızāde Hasan Çelebi
(R 82)
İbrahim b. Ramazan (R 129)
İsmail b. Ali ( Ağakapılı)
(R 118–19)
Mısırlı İsmail Vehbi (R Table 4)
Cabızade Abdullah (R 139–40)
Cemāl-i Amāsī (R 47)
Halîl ef. (R 93)
Halîl (Hāfīz) (R 117–18)
İkinci Derviş Ali (R 123)
Mahmud (Tophanelî) (R 99)
Mısırlı seyyid Mehmed Nuri
(R Table 4)
Mehmet b. Ömer (R 122)
Muhammad ef. Khwâja zâde (Z 92)
Muhammad ef. küçük 'Arab zâde (Z 93)
Muhammad ef. al-Imâm (Z 92)
Muhammad ef. Naqqâsh zâde (Z 92)
Muhammad ef. al-Shahiri al-Bostanî (Z 94 twice)
Muhayer al-din Jalâl-zâde (Z 89)
Mustafâ Dede (Z 90)
mustafâ ef. al-Ayyûbi (Z 92)
Mustafâ ef. Khalifa (Z 94; Eg.)
Pîr ef. (Z 91)
Qârâ ‘Ali ef. (Z 90)
Qarâ Husayn ef. (Z 91, 92)
Qâsim ef. (Z 94; Eg.)
Rajab Khalifa (Z 90)
Ramadan b. Ismâ’îl (Z 92)
Sâlih ef. Hammâmîzâde (Z 94, 95 twice)
Sayyid ‘Ali (Z 95)
Shaykh Ahmad, abû al-Izz (Z 95; Eg.)
Shaykh Hamdullah (Z 88–89)
Shihâb al-din Ahmad al-Afqam, abû al-Irshâd (Z 95; Eg.)
Shukr Allâh Khalifa (Z 89, 91)
Sulaymân ef. al-Shâkirî (Z 94 thrice, 95 thrice; Eg.)
Suyolghu zâde cf. Mustafâ ef. al-Ayyûbi
Tekneji Hasan Çelebi (Z 90)
‘Umar bey Nasûh Pâshâ zâde (Z 92)
‘Umar ef. (Z 93, 94, 95)
Uskudârî Hasan Çelebi
‘Uthmân ef. al-Hâfitz (Z 93, 94 twice)
Yahya al-Rûmi (Z 88)
Yûsuf ef. (Z 92; Eg.)

Mehmet ef. (Hocazâde, Karakız) (R 107)
Imâm Mehmet (R 94–96)
Mehmet (Nakkaşâde) (R 107)
Muhîddîn (Celälzâde) (R 37, 62)
Mustafa Dede (R 65)
Mustafa Eyyubi (Suyolcuzaâde) (R 104)
Pîr Mehmed b. Şîkrullah (R 77)
Şeyh Hamdullah (R 49–54)
Şükullâh (Halife, Amasî) (R 66)
cf. Mustafâ ef. al-Ayyûbi
Ömer b. Nasuh Paşa (R 99)
Ömer Kâtip (R 129)
cf. Hasan efendî
Hâfitz Osman (R 109–14)
Yahya-i Rûmi/Yahya Sofî (R 46)

In addition to the names of the calligraphers, al-Zabîdî also provides information about the date of their birth (2), of their death (15), about the duration of their life (8) as well as about their production—in 10 cases indicating the number of Qur’an s they transcribed. The author
usually states the name of the teacher(s). With all these data, it is possible to identify many of the calligraphers—as one can see in comparing the names in the two columns above. In a few instances, the identification required amending al-Zabidi’s text:

- Tunçaneli is evidently a misspelling for Topkhânelî (Mahmûd ef. Tophaneli);
- Husayn çelebi Khalifa, a pupil of Ahmad Karahisarî, is certainly identical with Karahisarizade Hasan çelebi;
- Dali Yûsuf ef., a pupil of the previously mentioned calligrapher, could be Demircikulu Yusuf ef.;
- The name of Jâbîzâde Muhammad ef. is tentatively corrected into Cabizade Abdullah ef., a pupil of Suyolcuçazade; it is true that in the Hikmah he appears as a student of Dervish Ali, but this is also the case for Muhammad ef. Khwâżâzade/Hocazade (Karakız) Mehmet ef. who, according to modern historians of Ottoman calligraphy, learned the art with Suyolcuçazade.

Other names, like that of Ali ef. Nafasîzàde or Tekneji Hasan çelebi suggested at first sight possible Ottoman equivalents but proved impossible to match satisfactorily with calligraphers known in other sources. These names cannot either be discarded as misspellings or other errors by the author who has information about less known characters (e.g. Ahmad ef. Qizqabânzade/Kızkapan or Kazkabânzade Ahmet ef.), or provides a date for the otherwise seemingly unknown Ahmad ef. Qazânjîzade. His knowledge of Ahmet Karahisarî’s school is different from what is commonly accepted: according to him, and if our identification of Dali Yûsuf ef. with Demircikulu Yusuf ef. is correct, there are two more representatives after Yusuf ef., Qara ‘Ali ef. and Taknajî Hasan çalabî. On other points, al-Zabidi (or his source) is wrong in relating calligraphers with a teacher: he lists 13 pupils of Derviş Ali, but out of 11 names we were able to identify only 5 are known by Rado as Derviş Ali’s students. In another instance, he ranks Mahmud Tophaneli as one of Şeyh Hamdullah’s pupils, whereas this calligrapher lived considerably later.

More puzzling is the confusion which surrounds two names in the list: Darwish Muhammad and his son Pir. The latter is described by al-Zabidi as a grandson of Seyh Hamdullah; it seems that the author actually refers to Pir Mehmed b. Sukrullah. Obviously Darwish Muhammad cannot be his father, and his name suggests an identification with Derviş Mehmet b. Mustafa Dede who was also a grandson of Seyh Hamdullah. In al-Rushdi’s icazetname, Pir Mehmet ef. appears in the silsile in the position of pupil of Derviş Mehmet who is in his turn described as the pupil of his father Mustafa Dede; this part of the transmission does not square with the sequence found in our sources on the history of Ottoman calligraphy. As we shall see, al-Zabidi was probably relying on a written source: he might have found a report which conflicted with the silsile and tried to amend this point. Anyhow, this sequence was still found a century later in an Egyptian treatise on calligraphy.

The wealth of details appearing in the Hikmah strongly suggests that the author was actually relying on a written account of Ottoman calligraphy while preparing his text. Al-Zabidi’s knowledge of Turkish (he also knew Persian and some Georgian) gives consistency to the hypothesis of such a source for the passage on Seyh Hamdullah’s school. It could have been written slightly later than the 30’s of the 12th/13th century, since the last Ottoman calligraphers mentioned by al-Zabidi died before 1730; the information on contemporary or almost contemporary Egyptian characters could of course be provided orally by local informants from the calligraphers’ milieu in Cairo. The layout of the Hikmah cannot be of much use in identifying the source: the presentation is obviously closer to that of Nefeszade Ibrahim’s Gûlzâr-i Savâb, but the conditions in which the author wrote his treatise might have induced him to prefer a text stressing the genealogical link between the origins and al-Rushdi, although he wrote himself a biographical dictionary arranged according to the alphabetical order, like Müstakimzade’s Tuhfe. The use of earlier written accounts by a man who was also a book collector is by no means surprising; that he does not mention his sources should not amaze us: for other parts of the Hikmah, Noureddine

---

13 Quoted in Serin, Hat Sanati ve Meşhur Hattatlar, p. 198.
15 Müstakimzade Süleyman, Tuhfe-i Hattatîm, ed. Mahmud Kemal İnal (İstanbul, 1928).
Abouricha has been able to trace the bulk of the information given by the author back to al-Qalqashandi whom al-Zabidi never quotes.\cite{Abouricha2000}

We so far left out the Egyptian extension of the list. Al-Zabidi names various calligraphers who spent at least part of their life in Egypt, beginning with Isma’il ef. Turk (d. 1085/1674–75) and Yusuf ef. (d. 1119/1707–8). The bulk of the information is devoted to the later period and answers the purpose of the Hikmah, that is to trace back al-Rushdi’s calligraphic ancestry. The names are almost unknown to the Ottoman and Turkish sources we investigated, with the exception of Müstakızade who is contemporary with al-Zabidi and the Hattatlar Silsilesi at the end of Rado’s book which probably relies on Müstakızade’s information. On Table 4, four names (Cezairli Hüseyin ef./Hasan al-Jazâ’iri; Mısırli seyyid Mehmet Nuri/al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Nürî; Ahmet Şükru/Ahmad Ef. al-Shukri; Mısırli İsmail Vehbi/İsmâ’il al-Wahbi) can be related to four calligraphers who, according to al-Zabidi, played a role in the history of Ottoman calligraphy in Egypt.

The Egyptian branch of the Ottoman school of calligraphy mirrors the political importance of Istanbul: even native calligraphers apparently claim their dependance on Şeyh Hamdullah’s teachings. Al-Zabidi, who supported the Ottoman state in many ways, actually tried to show how the calligraphers’ milieu in Cairo truly provided a synthesis between an earlier local tradition and the Ottoman one. In the text of the Hikmah, Şeyh Hamdullah appears next to the great Egyptian calligrapher of the end of the 8\textsuperscript{th}/14\textsuperscript{th} and beginning of the 9\textsuperscript{th}/15\textsuperscript{th} century, Ibn al-Sâ’îgh.\footnote{al-Zabidi, “Hikmat al-ishrâq ilâ kutûb al-af‘aq,” p. 88.} The account of his life begins unconspicuously by a rather vague formula suggesting a continuity: “Then, after Ibn al-Sâ’îgh and his generation, the improvement and beauty of the script went to the qiblat al-kuttâb, to the shaykh of this art...”\footnote{Gacek, “The Diploma of the Egyptian Calligrapher Hasan al-Rushdi,” p. 46.} The Şeyh’s silsile is only mentioned a few lines later. When al-Zabidi comes to Egyptian calligraphers who were his contemporaries, he does not recall their double connection with the Egyptian tradition on one hand and the Ottoman one on the other. This is particularly clear with Hasan al-Diyâ’î who, as pointed out by Gacek, could boast about his links with the tradition of Ibn al-Sâ’îgh.\footnote{Gacek, “The Diploma of the Egyptian Calligrapher Hasan al-Rushdi,” p. 46.}

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
The pages devoted by al-Zabidi to the Ottoman school of calligraphy are limited in scope. They are nevertheless interesting for their contribution to the history of this school—adding perhaps a few names to our lists—and of the milieu in Cairo by the middle of the 12th/18th century. They are even more interesting as a witness of the diffusion of the calligraphers' culture throughout the Empire, a culture which is not only centered on the transmission of aesthetics, of techniques or of an official history, but relies also on a code of ethics which constitutes the last chapter of the *Hikmah* as they were also part of al-Rushdi's *icâzetnâme*. Al-Zabidi's provincial point of view is strongly pro-Ottoman and confirms to some extent a famous saying: even in Cairo, the Qur'ân was copied after the fashion of Istanbul.

---

M. Uğur Derman Armağanı
Altmışbeşinci Yaşı Münasebetiyle Sunulmuş Tebliğler

M. Uğur Derman Festschrift
Papers Presented on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday

Derleyen/Edited by: İrvin Cemil Schick