İstanbul Seen from Cairo

François 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-'Arīfī, 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-'Abidin. At a comparatively young age, he left his country and came to Yemen and Hijaz 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-Jabarti aptly puts it in the note he devoted to his master in his 'Ajā'īb: “al-Zabidi was the luminary of the most distinguished, the enchanting one, playing with intellectuals, 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

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-îshrâq ilâ kuttâb al-dâ'îqâ*, a short treatise on calligraphy? A first reason is to be found in the person to whom the work is dedicated, Hasan al-Rushdi. He was a slave, probably from the Anatolian part of the Ottoman empire, bought by ‘Ali 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 Allâh al-Anîs al-Mawlâwî; his teacher granted him in 1147/1734–45 a diploma (*ıdâzah*) which has been preserved and published by Adam Gacek. Al-Rushdî later married his teacher’s daughter and became *shaykh* of the calligraphers and *kuttâb* when Ismâ‘îl al-Wahhâbi, *shaykh al-mukattabîn*, died in 1187/1774. When al-Zâbitî wrote for him the *Hikmah*, he had not yet reached this position—the dictation of the work was completed according to the final note on the 12 *dhî al-hijja* 1184/ 29 March 1770. Both al-Rushdî and al-Zâbitî were to die in 1205/1790.

A second reason might be the deep interest showed by al-Zâbitî 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-Zâbitî’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-Zâbitî. 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-Zâbitî became acquainted in 1181/1767 with a *mamlûk*; ‘Ali b. ‘Abd Allâh, who had been granted an *ıdâzah* by al-Rushdî himself and who in turn taught al-Zâbitî the fundamentals of the art of the pen.\(^6\)

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\(^{4}\)Quoted in Reichmuth, “Murtadî az-Zâbitî (d. 1791): Biographical and Autobiographical Accounts,” p. 66.


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The *Hikama* reflects al-Zâbitî’s quest for origins and legitimacy. It is basically a genealogy, linking the present—to al-Rushdî—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 *sîsîle* which appears in al-Rushdî *îcâzetnâme* constitutes the backbone of the pages of the *Hikmah* devoted to Ottoman calligraphy; al-Zâbitî certainly knew this tradition and takes it over into his text. For the same reason, the author only pays attention to the *aqlam-i sittâ* tradition, omitting completely other aspects of the calligraphy. Three main developments have then been grafted upon that *sîsîle*: the first corresponds to the generation of Şeyh Hamdullah’s direct pupils, the second one to those of Derwish Ali. Between the first and the second developments, the *sîsîle* is limited to the figureheads of Ottoman calligraphy. This situation is largely similar to what is found in classical works about Ottoman calligraphy. Al-Zâbitî is responsible for the third development which is devoted to the late transmission (12th/18th century) of the Seyh’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.*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Abd Allâh</em> (<em>Z</em> 89)</th>
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<td>Abdullah Krim (<em>R</em> 78)</td>
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<td><em>Abd Allâh ef. Velî’i</em> (<em>Z</em> 93)</td>
<td>Abdullah Velî (<em>R</em> 133–34)</td>
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<td><em>Abd Allâh al-Mawlâwî al-Anîs</em> (<em>Z</em> 95; <em>Eg.</em> 1790)</td>
<td>Abdullah Kerîm (<em>Hafife</em>) (<em>R</em> 82)</td>
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<td><em>Abd al-Karîm Khâlîfî Wişîyat zâde</em> (<em>Z</em> 90)</td>
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<td>Ahmad Çelebi (<em>Z</em> 91)</td>
<td>Ahmet b. Pîr Mehmet (<em>R</em> 77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^{6}\)Şevket Rado, *Türk Hatatlâlari* (Istanbul, ed.).
Ahmed ef. al-Darwish (Z 93)
Ahmed ef. Qazbahan zade (Z 92)
Ahmed ef. Qarani zade (Z 93)
Ahmed ef. Shaykh zade (Z 93, 94)
Ahmed ef. al-Shukri (Z 96, Eg.)
Ahmed ef. Qarani zade (Z 90)
All ef. Nafisi zade (Z 92)
All ef. Qasihigizade (Z 92)
All b. Yahya (Z 88)
All imam Amir Akhur (Z 93)
Amm Allah ef. (Z 91)
Asbar Mustafa agha (Z 93)
Dafi Yusuf ef. (Z 90)
Darwish 'Ali efendi (Z 92, 94, 95)
Darwish Muhammad (Z 91)
Fadl Allah ef. (Z 93, 94 twice)
Hasan ef. (Uskudari Hasan Celebi) (Z 91)
Hasan b. Hasan al-Diya'i (Z 94, Eg.)
Hasan ef. al-Rushdi (Z 96, Eg.)
Husam al-din Khalifa (Z 89)
Husayn Celebi Khalifa (Z 90)
Husayn ef. al-Iraj al-i (Z 94, 95, Eg.)
Ibrahim ef. b. Ramadun (Z 93)
Ibrahim ef. Shaykhzade (Z 94)
Ibrahim ef. al-Rawadadi al-Husayni, abu al-Fath al-Hammami (Z 95, Eg.)
Isma'il ef. Khalifa, Ibn 'Ali (Z 93)
Isma'il ef. le (Z 92, Eg.)
Isma'il ef. al-Wahbi (Z 96, Eg.)
Jabir zade Muhammad efendi (Z 93)
Jamal al-din al-Amsat (Z 89)
Khaliq ef. al-'Aziz (Z 91, 92)
Khaliq ef. al-Hafiz (Z 92)
Kucuk Darwish 'Ali efendi (Z 93)
Mahmud ef. Tuchanelli (Z 90)
Muhammad (al-Sayyid) b.
Ibrahim ef. al-Maqrizli al-Nuri (Z 94, 95 twice, 96, Eg.)
Muhammad ef. Arab zade (Z 92)
Dervis Ahmed (R 122)
Ahmed Kizkapanzade (R 93)
Ahmet Sutur (R Table 4)
Ahmed Karahisari (R 69-72)
Ali b. Mustafa Kaskicazade (R 107)
Ali Sofi (R 46)
Emrullah b. Mehmet (R 93)
Mustafa Ather Aqa (R 103)
Demirciulu Yusuf ef. (R 85) (R 88)
Dervis Ali (R 100-1)
Dervis Mehmet b. Mustafa Dede (R 80-2)
Fazullah b. Mehmet (R. 103) (R 86)
Haseemetin Huseynin Sah (R 79-80)
Karahisari zade Hasan Celebi (R 82)
Cezarli Huseyn ef. (R Table 4)
Ibrahim b. Ramuzan (R 129)
Ibrahim ef. al-Rawadadi al-Husayni, abu al-Fath al-Hammami (Z 95, Eg.)
Isma'il ef. Khalifa, Ibn 'Ali (Z 93)
Isma'il ef. le (Z 92, Eg.)
Isma'il ef. al-Wahbi (Z 96, Eg.)
Jabir zade Muhammad efendi (Z 93)
Jamal al-din al-Amsat (Z 89)
Khaliq ef. al-'Aziz (Z 91, 92)
Khaliq ef. al-Hafiz (Z 92)
Kucuk Darwish 'Ali efendi (Z 93)
Mahmud ef. Tuchanelli (Z 90)
Muhammad (al-Sayyid) b.
Ibrahim ef. al-Maqrizli al-Nuri (Z 94, 95 twice, 96, Eg.)
Muhammad ef. 'Arab zade (Z 92) (R 118-19)
Mursi Ismail Velbi (R Table 4)
Cabhade Abdullah (R 139-40)
Cenali Amadi (R 47)
Halit ef. (R 93)
Halil (Hafter) (R 117-18)
Ikinci Dervis Ali (R 123)
Mahmud (Topphanet) (R 99)
Mursi seyyid Mehmed Nur (R Table 4)
Mehmet ef. (Hocazade, Karakoz) (R 107)
Mehmet ef. (Nakkaizade) (R 107)
Muhiddin (Celalazade) (R 37, 62)
Mustafa Dede (R 65)
Mustafa Eyubbi (Seyouzazade) (R 104)
Pir Mehmet b. Sutkullah (R 77)
Recep ef. (R 67)
Ramzan b. Ismail (R 102)
Salih Celebi Flamasczade (R 121)
Seyyid Ali (Cavuszade) (R 133) (R 95, 95 twice)
Seyyid Ali (Cavuszade) (R 133)
Shey Handullah (R 49-54)
Sukruddin (Halife, Amazi) (R 66)
Suyoglu zade (Z 94, 95, 95 twice, Eg.)
Takmir ef. al-Ayyubi
Umar ef. nasir Pasha zade (Z 92)
'Umar ef. (Z 93, 94, 95)
Uskudari Hasan Celebi
Uthman ef. al-Hafiz (Z 93, 94 twice)
Yahya al-Rumi (Z 88)
Yusuf ef. (Z 92, Eg.)
Mehmet ef. (Hocazade, Karakoz) (R 107)
Imam Mehmet (R 94-96)
Mustafa Dede (R 65)
Mustafa Eyubbi (Seyouzazade) (R 104)
Pir Mehmet b. Sutkullah (R 77)
Recep ef. (R 67)
Ramzan b. Ismail (R 102)
Salih Celebi Flamasczade (R 121)
Seyyid Ali (Cavuszade) (R 133) (R 95, 95 twice)
Shey Handullah (R 49-54)
Sukruddin (Halife, Amazi) (R 66)
Suyoglu zade (Z 94, 95, 95 twice, Eg.)
Takmir ef. al-Ayyubi
Umar ef. nasir Pasha (R 99)
'Umar ef. (Z 93, 94, 95)
Uskudari Hasan Celebi
Uthman ef. al-Hafiz (Z 93, 94 twice)
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In addition to the names of the calligraphers, al-Zabidi 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'ans 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-Zabīdī’s text:

- Tunçanelli is evidently a misspelling for Topkhâneîli (Mahmûd ef. Tophanelî);
- Hāsînî cêlebi Khâlibî, a pupil of Ahmâd Karacasîrî, is certainly identical with Karahasîrîzâde Hasan cêlebi;
- Dâlî Yusuf ef., a pupil of the previously mentioned calligrapher, could be Demirîzâde Yusuf ef.;
- The name of Jâbîzâde Muhammad ef. is tentatively corrected into Cabizade Abdûllah ef., a pupil of Sûyolçuzade; it is true that in the Hikmah he appears as a student of Derviştî Ali, but this is also the case for Muhammad ef. Khwâjâzâde/Hacazade/Karakızî Mehmet ef. who, according to modern historians of Ottoman calligraphy, learned the art with Sûyolçuzade.

Other names, like that of Ali ef. Nafasîzâde or Tekneî Hasan cêlebi 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. Ahmâd ef. Qizqâbûnzâde/Kazkapan or Kazkabanzâde Ahmet ef.), or provides a date for the otherwise seemingly unknown Ahmâd ef. Qizqânîzâde. His knowledge of Ahmet Karahasîrî’s school is different from what is commonly accepted,10 according to him, and if our identification of Dâlî Yusuf ef. with Demirîzâde Yusuf ef. is correct, there are two more representatives after Yusuf ef., Qara ’Ali ef. and Takanji Hasan calabî. On other points, al-Zabîdî (or his source) is wrong in relating calligraphers with a teacher: he lists 13 pupils of Derviştî Ali, but out of 11 names we were able to identify only 5 are known by Rado as Derviştî Ali’s students. In another instance, he ranks Mahmûd Tophanelî as one of Şeyh Hamdullah’s pupils,11 whereas this calligrapher lived considerably later.


More puzzling is the confusion which surrounds two names in the list: Darwish Muhammad and his son Pir ef.12 The latter is described by al-Zabîdî as a grandson of Şeyh Hamdullah; it seems that the author actually refers to Pir Mehmed b. Şükûrîlah. Obviously Darwish Muhammad cannot be his father, and his name suggests an identification with Derviştî Mehmet b. Mustafa Dede who was also a grandson of Şeyh Hamdullah. In al-Rushî’s icazetname, Pir Mehmet ef. appears in the silsile in the position of pupil of Derviştî 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-Zabîdî 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.13

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-Zabîdî’s knowledge of Turkish (he also knew Persian and some Georgian) gives consistency to the hypothesis of such a source for the passage on Şeyh Hamdullah’s school. It could have been written slightly later than the 30’s of the 12th/18th century, since the last Ottoman calligraphers mentioned by al-Zabîdî 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 Nefesîzâde Ibrâhîm’s Gâzî-i Savâh,14 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-Rushî, although he wrote himself a biographical dictionary arranged according to the alphabetical order, like Mûstâkimzâde’s Tufje.15 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 Sanatı ve Mesnur Hatattârî, p. 198.
Abouricha has been able to trace the bulk of the information given by the author back to al-Qalqashandi whom al-Zabidi never quotes.18

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 Ismā‘īl cf. Turk (d. 1085/1674–75) and Yūsuf cf. (d. 1119/1707–8). The bulk of the information is devoted to the later period and answers the purpose of the Ḥikmah, 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 Mūsākīmzàde who is contemporary with al-Zabidi and the Hattatlar Sütünesi at the end of Rado’s book which probably relies on Mūsākīmzàde’s information; on Table 4, four names (Cezairī Hüseyin cf.; Husayn al-Jazā‘īrī; Mısırrı seyyid Mehmet Nuri/al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Nūrī; Ahmet Şükri/Ahmad cf. al-Shukrī; Mısırrı Ismail Yehbi/Ismā‘īl al-Wahhī) 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 dependence 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 Ḥikmah, Şeyh Hamdullah appears next to the great Egyptian calligrapher of the end of the 8th/14th and beginning of the 9th/15th century, Ibn al-Sā‘igh.17 The account of his life begins unconspicuously by a rather vague formula suggesting a continuity: “Then, after Ibn al-Sā‘igh and his generation, the improvement and beauty of the script went to the qiblat al-kuttāb, to the shaykh of this art...”18 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-Diyā‘ī who, as pointed out by Gacek, could boast about his links with the tradition of Ibn al-Sā‘igh.19


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 Ḥikmah19—as they were also part of al-Rushdi’s içizetmâne. Al-Zabidi’s provincial point of view is strongly pro-Ottoman and confirms to some extent a famous saying: even in Cairo, the Qur‘ān was copied after the fashion of Istanbul.

Right: Table indicating the names of the calligraphers who are clearly identified by al-Zabidi as masters and pupils. Other names found in the Ḥikmah are only introduced as “contemporaries” and could therefore not find a place on the table.

A Brief Survey of the Development of Turkish Library Catalogues

İsmail E. Erdem