

## THE *IJĀZAH* TRADITION IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup>-20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BALKANS<sup>#</sup>

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### 1. The meaning of *ijāzah*

*Ijāzah* is an Arabic term derived from the root-verb *ajāza* which means, among other things, to "lean upon" as on a cushion.<sup>1</sup> According to al-Nawawī, this verb refers to the water which irrigates the fields or satisfies the thirst.<sup>2</sup> Another linguist, al-Fayrūzābādī, tells us that the word means to give permission, licence or authorization.<sup>3</sup> Technically, however, *ijāzah* refers, according to Ibn Manẓūr, to the authorities on whom a student relies on to support his claim to knowledge in a particular science. As al-Nawawī explains, a student would ask his professor to give him an *ijāzah* in order to satisfy his thirst for knowledge and, as al-Fayrūzābādī more precisely put it, to grant him permission to teach.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, s.v. *ajāza* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1970), 1: 25.

<sup>2</sup> M. Abū Zakariyyā al-Nawawī, *al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr li-Maʿrifat Sunan al-Bashīr al-Nadhīr* (n.p. : n.d.), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*, ed. M. Naim al-Araqsusi, 3d ed. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1993), 652.

In short, the term *ijāzah* in Islamic pedagogy signifies generally a *licence to teach* and, more specifically, refers to a certificate given by a professor in an institution of higher learning to a student who has attended a course of lectures, satisfied the professor's requirements, and is deemed henceforth qualified to teach the same subject and transmit the knowledge to his own students.<sup>4</sup> *Ijāzah* is issued by the grantor (*al-mujiz*, i.e., 'alim or professor) who gives licence to transmit from him all that he has taught and narrated. Generally, an *ijāzah* would contain the titles of books read and the subjects taught for the transmission of which the licence is issued. This transmission from the grantor could either be in general or in detail. The chain of transmitters would go back either to the author of the book or to the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) or others.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The *ijāzah* tradition in the Muslim world and its significance

In the Muslim tradition, the authoritative character of the transmission is derived ultimately from the Prophet, who was chosen by God to receive the revelation and knowledge ('ilm) necessary for the salvation of humankind, transmitted to him through the agency of the Archangel Gabriel (Jibril). From the Prophet this knowledge passed to his Companions (*aṣḥāb*, *ṣaḥāba*, pl. of *ṣāhib*), then to their Successors (*tābi'ūn*), and subsequently to their successors (*tābi'u'l-tābi'ūn*) and so on through the centuries down to the 'ulamā' (sing. 'ālim, scholar). Such was the case for the transmission of ḥadīth accounts relating to the deeds, words and attitudes of the Prophet called his

<sup>4</sup> R. Y. Ebied and M. J. L. Young, "An Early Eighteenth-Century *Ijāzah* Issued in Damietta," *Le Muséon* (1974) 87: 445.

<sup>5</sup> Muḥammad A. Ghunaymah, *Tārīkh al-Jāmi'āt al-Islāmiyya al-Kubrā*, (Tetuwan: 1953), 219, hereafter cited as *TJI*; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 2d ed. : 102, (Beirut: Muassasat al-Wafā', 1983), 166; see also Agha Buzruk al-Tahrānī's *al-Dhari'ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī'ah*, both quoted in 'Abd Allāh Fayyād, *Tārīkh al-Tarbiyah al-Islāmiyyah* (Baghdad: Maṭba'ah As'ad, 1972), 233-234, and Maḥmūd al-Mar'ashi, *Al-Musalsalāt fi al-Ijāzāt*, (Qumm: Hāfiz, 1416 A.H.-1995 A.D.), 1: 9.