



## MAKING OF THE MASTER

The art of Arabic calligraphy

John Addis Gallery of Islamic Art  
25 April – 4 September 2005

‘He who  
writes the  
*basmala*  
well  
will obtain  
innumerable  
blessings’

*Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad*

## MAKING OF THE MASTER

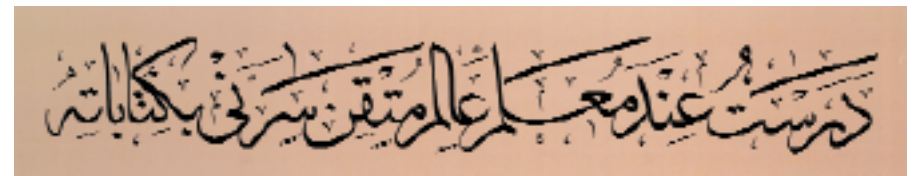
### The art of Arabic calligraphy



#### Introduction

Arabic is the language in which the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad outside Makka (Arabia) in the first century of the Islamic era (Hijra), early 7th century AD. It is also the script in which the revelation was written down. Ever since, the association between Arabic, the act of writing and Islam has given the calligrapher particularly important status in the Muslim world.

Arabic calligraphy continues to be taught today in the same way that it has for over 1000 years. To become a calligrapher (*khattat*), years of study are involved. The apprentice is tutored by a master (*ustadh*) who is himself part of a chain of calligraphers traditionally going back to the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib (d.661), who was well known for his mastery of calligraphy. The student must become proficient in the major script styles but should, in addition, have the right personality for the task: achieve, according to an early authority, 'sweet character and an unassuming disposition'.

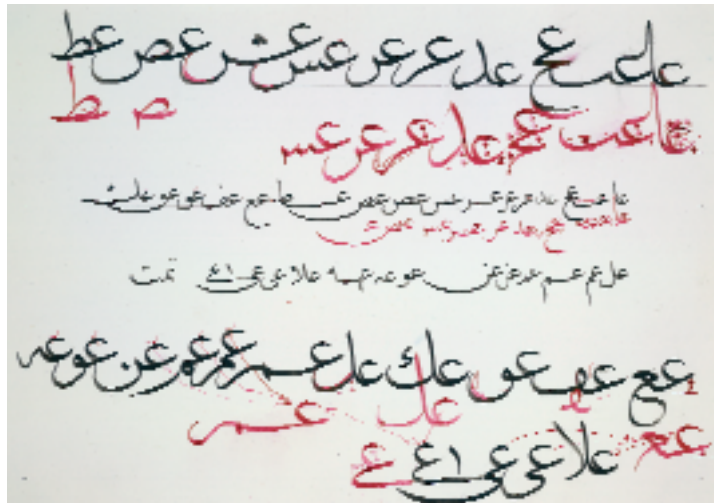


Above: 'I have studied under a master calligrapher, a man of knowledge, a perfectionist, whose writings gave me great pleasure.' Mustafa Ja'far in *jali thuluth* script

Among the most remarkable aspects of the Arabic script is its extraordinary flexibility. This allows it to be written in many different ways and over the years this has secured a constant creativity as calligraphers perfected, embellished and developed new script styles. At its root however is a strict set of rules established by master calligraphers early in the Islamic period which are still adhered to today.

On the completion of their training, an apprentice receives the ultimate accolade, the diploma known as an *ijaza*. This 'permission' will allow the calligrapher to add the words '*katabahu*' to their name, meaning 'he wrote it'; or *katabathu* for a female calligrapher such as Hilal Kazan, whose *ijaza* features in the exhibition. Now qualified after years of intensive study and reflection, students are finally able to teach on their own. They become the latest link in an ancient tradition.

*Making of the Master* celebrates this living tradition by displaying the *ijaza* of the renowned Turkish master calligrapher, Hasan Çelebi, based in Istanbul, and those of a number of students who have graduated from him. In addition, the exhibition looks at the method of training the calligrapher by showing some examples of practise sheets written over a period of years by Nassar Mansour, as corrected by his *ustadh*, Hasan Çelebi.



Above: Practise sheet of Nassar Mansour, with corrections by Hasan Çelebi

## The *ijaza*

The *ijaza* text itself is made up of two separate parts inscribed on a sheet of paper which is then mounted on a decorated card. The first part is an unsigned text written by the student, which has been chosen in consultation with the master. It can consist of passages from the Qur'an, the *Hadith* (tradition of the Prophet) or the *Hilya* (the physical description) of the Prophet Muhammad. The second part, at the base of the text, is the actual granting of the *ijaza* and contains several important elements. First is the phrase giving permission for the student to sign his name '*ajazu bi wad' al-kataba*, the name of the student, followed by the master's name and the date. There are also phrases generally referring to the skill of the student with prayers for his success. Finally there may be endorsements by other calligraphers.

## The training

To achieve proficiency in Arabic calligraphy, the student will copy a series of practise texts known as *mashq* provided by their *ustadh*. These are generally in *thuluth* and *naskh* scripts. Only when the student has perfected each exercise can he move on. The first passage that is copied is the prayer 'Lord make it easy and not difficult and may it be completed in the best way'. He will then start an intensive process of writing single then double letters. At this stage, the master will decide whether the student is fit to continue. Those with the requisite ability will graduate to more advanced stages of writing which include complete words and phrases and often ending with verses from the poetry of the well-known medieval Arab poet, al-Burda. The length of the process depends on the student. Generally, however, it takes between three and five years to perfect *naskh* and *thuluth* which are taught together. On Nassar Mansour's practise sheets, it can be seen that the master has made corrections in red and sometimes includes the word *afirin*, 'you did well'.

## إجازة الخطاط

د. نصار منصور

تعد الإجازة - وهي اللوحة التي تنال بعد اجتياز مراحل تدريبية معينة في الخط - من أنفس القطع الخطية التي ينجزها الخطاط في حياته. فهي الشهادة التي تثبت لصاحبها كفاءة يعترف بها أهل صناعة الخط والفنون الإسلامية الأخرى باعتبار فن الخط متصلاً بها جميعها.

يمنح الأستاذ الخطاط الإجازة إلى تلميذه بعد أن يكون الأستاذ نفسه قد نال إجازته من أستاذ مجاز، وهكذا يمتد السند في هذا الفن الأصيل إلى نحو 1400 عام حتى يتصل بالإمام علي رضي الله عنه، رأس شجرة الخطاطين وأصل سندهم.

لقد عمل تقليد الإجازة في الخط العربي على صقل هذا الفن وانتشاره وتنوع أساليبه وتعدد مدارسه الفنية. وهو تقليد ظهر في الحواضر العربية مثل بغداد والشام ومصر منذ أن صار الخط فناً يدرس في المدارس الرسمية والخاصة، ثم ازدهر في زمن الدولة العثمانية.

كانت الإجازة سابقاً تمنح في الأقلام العربية السبعة (المحقق، والريحان، والثلاث، والنسخ، والتوقيع، والرقاع، والمؤنق)، ثم اقتصر لدى الخطاطين العثمانيين على ثلاثة أقلام رئيسية هي: (الثلاث، والنسخ، والتعليق). وحديثاً أضيفت إليها بعض الأقلام مثل: (الديواني، والرقعة).

وتمنح الإجازة لمن يظهر لديه الإستعداد والعشق الفطريين لتعلم الخط، حيث يظهر ذلك من خلال المواظبة على دروسه التي تستهل

عادة بكتابة دعاء «رب يسر ولا تعسر رب تمم بالخير»، ثم البدء بكتابة الحروف العربية المفردة فالحروف الثنائية فالمركبات. وتمتد هذه المدة بحسب همة الطالب ونشاطه ما بين 3-5 سنوات لخطي الثلث والنسخ مجتمعين والتعليق منفرداً تنتهي بمرحلة كتابة لوحة الإجازة التي ينال عليها التلميذ الإذن بالكتابة من أستاذه. وهذا التعبير يعني منح الإذن للتلميذ بوضع توقيعه تحت كتاباته وتعليم الخط على طريقة أستاذه.

وقد جرت العادة على إقامة احتفال مهيب لهذه المناسبة السعيدة يحضره أساتذة الخط وطلابه ومحبه، تلقى فيه المقطوعات الشعرية وتوزع المأكولات والحلوى.

تبرز القطع المعروضة هذا التقليد من خلال السند العثماني الذي تشكل عبر أجيال من الأساتذة حتى اتصل بالأستاذ حسن چلبی تلميذ الخطاط العظيم حامد الآمدي (ت1402هـ/1982م). لقد حرص حسن چلبی على اتساع هذا السند ليلتحق به العديد من الخطاطين في مختلف أنحاء العالم. فإضافة إلى تركيا، أجاز الأستاذ چلبی في المغرب العربي، والشام، والأردن، والخليج العربي، واليابان، وأمريكا، وغيرها من الدول. نجد في هذا المعرض عدداً من إجازات تلاميذه المتميزة إلى جانب إجازته الرائعة من حامد الآمدي.

كما يقدم المعرض نماذج من التمارين التي يتوجب على التلميذ اجتيازها وصولاً إلى لوحة التخرج وهي لوحة الإجازة. التمارين المعروضة هي من تمارين نصار منصور أحد تلاميذ الأستاذ حسن چلبی، يظهر في بعضها تصليحات الأستاذ التي عادة ما تكون بالحبر الأحمر.

يقام هذا المعرض بالتعاون مع المتحف البريطاني ليلقي الضوء على واحد من أهم التقاليد الحية في الفنون الإسلامية وهو تقليد الإجازة في فن الخط العربي.



# The Master and his students

## Hasan Çelebi

Hasan Çelebi (b. 1937) belongs to an important school of Ottoman calligraphers who follow in the tradition of one of its best known masters, the celebrated Sheikh Hamdullah (d. 1520). At his death some of his students are reputed to have buried their pens near his grave for a week in the hope that his spiritual power be transferred to them.

Çelebi studied under *Ustadh* Hamid al-Amidi (d. 1982) and received his *ijaza* (see cover) in 1971. The text of his *ijaza* is a *hilya* written in *thuluth* and *naskh* with the names of the four Orthodox caliphs in roundels inscribed in *thuluth*. When Çelebi grants the *ijaza* he sometimes gives his own pedigree as a calligrapher going back five generations to the well known calligrapher Kadiasker Mustafa Izzet Efendi (d.1876).

## *Ijaza* of Muhammad al-Buhairi

From Algeria, al-Buhairi was taught by Çelebi and now teaches in Jordan at the al-Balqa' applied university where there is a college of traditional Islamic arts. Like Çelebi, the text of his *ijaza*, which he obtained in 1991, is the *hilya* in *thuluth* and *naskh* scripts.



## *Ijaza* of HRH Ali bin Nayef of Jordan

The style of this *ijaza*, obtained in 2004, is unusual as the text, which consists of prayers (*du'a*), is inscribed in *diwani* and *riq'a* scripts as opposed to the usual *naskh* and *thuluth*. The text of his master Hasan Çelebi below, is also written in *diwani*.



## *Ijaza* of Hilal Kazan

Female Turkish calligrapher Hilal Kazan chose for her text the 'Most beautiful names of God' (the *asma' al-husna*). In individual roundels the names are inscribed in *naskh* with the *basmala* in *thuluth* above. She obtained her *ijaza* in 2000 and is currently teaching calligraphy and studying Ottoman art for her Ph.D at the university of Ankara.



## *Ijaza* of Ayman Hasan

Syrian calligrapher Ayman Hasan practises and teaches calligraphy and lives in Kuwait. His *ijaza*, obtained in 2003, is in a traditional Turkish format known as *qit'a*. The *basmala* is in *thuluth*; the rest including his text, a *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad, is in *naskh*.



## *Ijaza* of Nassar Mansour

Jordanian calligrapher Nassar Mansour also chose the *qit'a* for his *ijaza* (2003). At the top are prayers for the Prophet and his family in *thuluth*. The bottom line in *naskh* is a passage from the *Hadith*. He teaches calligraphy at The Prince's School for Traditional Arts in London.



## *Ijaza* of Kouichi Fou'ad Honda

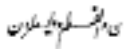
Japanese Muslim calligrapher Kouichi Honda is Professor of Arabic at Tokyo University. The text of his *ijaza* in *thuluth* and *naskh* is the opening of the Qur'an, 'The *Fatiha*'. He obtained his *ijaza* in 2000 from Hasan Çelebi.



## Selected Arabic scripts

Naskh 

Thulut 

Nasta'liq 

Diwani 

Written by Nassar Mansour.

Qur'an 68:1 'Nun. And the pen and what they inscribe'

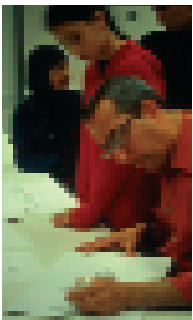
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### Find out more

- Derman, U. *Letters of gold: Ottoman calligraphy from the Sakip Sabanci Collection, Istanbul*  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1998
- Ja'far, M. *Arabic calligraphy: naskh style for beginners*  
British Museum Press London 2002
- Mansour, N. *The ijaza in Arabic calligraphy* (written in Arabic)  
Dar Majdalawi Publishing, Amman 2000
- Safadi, Y. *Islamic calligraphy*  
Thames and Hudson, London 1978
- Schimmel, A. *Calligraphy and Islamic culture*  
New York University Press, New York 1990
- [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/asia/ashome.html](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/asia/ashome.html)
- [www.ircica.org](http://www.ircica.org) - The Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, Istanbul
- [www.princes-foundation.org](http://www.princes-foundation.org) - The Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts programme of the Prince's School of Traditional Arts

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### Related Events



Gallery talks with Venetia Porter, British Museum curator, Islamic collections, 3 May, 16 June, 5 July, 13.15

Arabic calligraphy demonstrations, 14.00 – 16.00

John Addis Gallery of Islamic Art

14 May: Calligraphers Hasan Çelebi, Hilal Kazan, Kouichi

Fou'ad Honda & Nassar Mansour

25 June: Nassar Mansour & Mustafa Ja'far

23 July: Mustafa Ja'far

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## The Middle East and the Islamic World

Open throughout the year, the John Addis Gallery of Islamic Art highlights the British Museum's commitment to engaging people of all backgrounds with the cultures of the Middle East and the Islamic World. In addition, summer 2006 will see a special season of events, exhibitions and performances at the British Museum as part of the UK-wide Festival of Muslim Cultures ([www.muslimcultures.org](http://www.muslimcultures.org)).

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