



EJĀZA

EJĀZA (lit. permission, license, authorization), a term describing a variety of academic certificates ranging in length from a few lines to many fascicles. Giving, receiving, and collecting such certificates grew from the science of Prophetic tradition and became an essential part of Islamic education in nearly all academic fields. Three main types of certificate developed in the medieval period: 1. the certificate of transmission (*ejāzat al-rewāya*); 2. the certificate of memorization (*‘arż, ‘erāza*); and 3. the license to teach law and issue legal opinions (*ejāzat al-tadrīs wa’l-iftā*).

1. The certificate of audition (*samā’* or *ejāzat al-samā’*) or transmission (*ejāzat al-rewāya*) granted the recipient (*mojāz*) the right to pass a specific text on to the next generation of students on the authority of its issuer (*mojīz*), and it established the student’s place in an unbroken chain of reliable teachers and transmitters (*esnād*) going back to the text’s original author. The most common and most general type of *ejāza*, this certificate reflected a formal emphasis on the oral transmission of knowledge. Even quite early in Islamic history, the various fields of Islamic learning were no longer traditions passed on orally, except perhaps to a limited extent in the cases of Hadith and poetry. The process of obtaining such certificates, especially evident in the science of Hadith, was formally maintained in and played an important part in academic camaraderie, as well as in establishing scholarly credentials. In later periods, certificates sometimes incorporated elaborate rhymed and rhythmical prose (*saj’*) and provided opportunities for scholars to impress their peers and flattering them with honorific epithets. Students and scholars often collected



their *ejāzas* into volumes and returned from journeys with large numbers of them. Many women gave and received certificates of transmission, for they were quite active in the field of Hadith, especially since they often enjoyed the advantage of outliving their male relatives.

The *ejāza* guaranteed the integrity of the manuscript copy used by a scholar, especially important in an age before printing, in addition to establishing his authority to teach the text. Certificates of transmission were often written on the margins, end pages, or covers of books which a student had studied under a particular teacher. In many cases, the student had copied the text from the teacher's copy. The result was that the *esnād* of the transmitters of a work contained in the certificate often provided an accurate genealogy of the manuscript copy itself.

Many *ejāzas* specify that the recipient heard the relevant Hadith dictated or studied specific works directly under the granter of the certificate, often giving detailed information concerning the circumstances of study. For this reason, the certificate itself is often termed a *samā'* (audition). Nevertheless, numerous practices common in the medieval period indicate that such strict requirements were not always met. Children five or six years of age, or even younger, received *ejāzas* for works they could not have studied or for attending dictations they could not have understood. Scholars brought their young sons, even infants, to the Hadith dictations of famous transmitters in order to get written certificates attesting that they were in attendance. Such certificates would add to their prestige in later years, when they could claim to be among the few scholars remaining who had the right to relate Hadith directly from the authority (e.g., Saḳāwī, I, p. 17). Students often received a general certificate (*ejāza 'amma*) granting blanket permission to teach all the works a given teacher had the authority to transmit, whether or not the student had seen the works, let alone studied them with the scholar granting the *ejāza* (ibid., p. 14). Scholars obtained *ejāzas* from each other after meeting only briefly on their travels or received *ejāzas* by correspondence without ever having met their so-called teacher (Soyūṭī, p. 71). Scholars often sent an *ested'ā'* (a petition, written request) for an *ejāza* to one of their peers, who would write the *ejāza* on the same paper as the petition and return it (Qalqašandī, XIV, pp. 332-33). These practices suggest a concerted effort to preserve features of a system of oral transmission when it was required that the text be related orally; the *ejāza* simply ensured that this oral-aural exchange had taken place in an age when the act of transmission itself was



relying more and more heavily on the written word.

2. The certificate of memorization was linked to the institution of the *'arż* (lit. presentation), approximately an oral examination, and an important stage of education during the late medieval period. After memorizing the Qur'ān and before beginning advanced studies in specific fields, the student would memorize the standard textbooks of the fields he hoped to pursue. He would then perform the presentation of the memorized works, reciting passages chosen by the examiner. The student often performed this presentation before a number of scholars, at least ten in one case. If the presentation was successful, he received certificates from the scholars verifying that he had memorized the works (Saḳāwī, IX, pp. 26, 28, 31, 37, 53). The document itself was called either *ejāza* or *'arż*. According to Qalqašandī (d. 821/1418; XIV, p. 327), it was written on a small square piece of paper, and several examiners might write their own certificates on the same document. The student usually did not study the works memorized with the scholars granting *ejāzas*, and students often memorized the works without assistance from teachers. Students generally performed the *'arż* in their adolescent years. Saḳāwī reports that a thirteen-year-old student performed his *'arż* of Nawawī's *Menhājal-ṭālebīn* on Shafī'ite law in 802/1399-1400. Elsewhere he considers it unlikely that a certain scholar had performed his *'arż* at the age of twenty-one (IX, pp. 52-53). Qalqašandī reports that he wrote a certificate of memorization for an unusually young student aged under ten (XIV, p. 331). Ebn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546) memorized one set of books and received *ejāzas* for them at the age of fourteen from eight teachers (pp. 7-8).

3. The license to teach law and to issue legal opinions (*ejāzat al-tadrīs wa'l-iftā'*) recognized the recipient as a fully qualified jurist and held an important place in medieval Islamic legal education. Makdisi has likened this license to a doctorate of law and suggests that the Latin *licentia docendi* ultimately may derive from it (1981, pp. 140-52, 272-76; 1990, pp. 20-23). The main difference between the Islamic and its European certificates is that the former is issued by an individual rather than by a corporate university or institution. This certificate is said to date at least to the middle of the 2nd/8th century when Šāfe'ī (d. 204/820) was granted permission at the age of fifteen by his Meccan teacher Moslem b. Kāled to issue legal opinions. His contemporary Mālek b. Anas (d. 179/795) is said to have been authorized to give legal opinions by seventy teachers (Makdisi, 1981, p. 149). Issuing licenses to teach law and to give legal opinions seems to have become standard practice by the 5th/11th



century. Reference to such permission, described by the terms *ejāza* or *adena*, appear frequently in biographical sources (e.g., Saḳāwī, IX, pp. 32, 43, 59). ‘Abd-al-Wahhāb Ša‘rānī (d. 972/1565; *passim*) tells of thirty-seven contemporary scholars in 16th-century Cairo who received this license. The actual document was clearly one of some importance and conferred official or legal standing. Qalqašandī reports that the certificate was generally written on large paper with evenly spaced lines a finger’s width apart (XIV, p. 322). Ja‘far Odfūwī mentions a license to teach law granted to Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Qūšī in Upper Egypt, dated 15 Ša‘bān 650/21 October 1252, and signed by two witnesses (p. 309). By the 7th/13th century or even earlier, this type of license was usually restricted to the law of one of the four recognized Sunni legal traditions. The text of a certificate granted to the Egyptian scholar Šams-al-Dīn Manfalūṭī (d. 667/1268) specifies, for example, Shafi‘ite law (Odfūwī, pp. 235-36). Qalqašandī also provides the text of a license to teach Shafi‘ite law and to grant legal opinions which he received in Alexandria in 778/1376-77 at the age of twenty-one (XIV, pp. 322-27). Occasionally, women also received a license to teach law and issue legal opinions, as in the case of ‘Āyeša bent Yūsuf Bā‘ūnīya (d. 922/1516). A scion of the distinguished Bā‘ūnī line of Damascene scholars, she studied in Cairo as well as in her native Damascus and gained wide recognition as a jurist (Ġazzī, I, pp. 287-92).

While in Sunni circles use of this certificate seems to have lapsed, it survives to this day under the slightly different term *ejāzat al-ejtehād* in traditional Islamic legal education at the centers of Twelver Shi‘ite learning in Najaf, Qom, and elsewhere. This *ejāza* may be granted only by *mojtaheds*, or fully qualified jurists, to students who have completed their legal studies. It certifies the student’s ability to derive and issue legal opinions (*A‘yān al-šī‘a* X, p. 352).

It is not clear exactly when the practice of granting this authorization began, but there is no indication of the practice during the Safavid period. For example, the many *ejāzas* collected in Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī’s *Behār al-anwār* are for the transmission of Hadith and other specific works (CVII-CX). The *ejāzat al-ejtehād* certainly had become prevalent by the mid-19th century, for Moḥammad-Ḥasan Najafī (d. 1266/1850) was known to have licensed about sixty *mojtaheds* during his career (*A‘yān al-šī‘a* IX, p. 149). Āqā Bozorg Ṭehrānī (q.v.) cites one of these *ejāzas*, which he terms *ejāza ejtehādīya*, dated 20 Šawwāl 1265/8 September 1849 (*al-Darī‘a* I, pp. 168-69). The term *ejtehād* in this context may point to an origin during the jurists’ reaction to the Aḳbārī (q.v.) controversy of the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries. At the time the



terms *mojtahed* and *ejtehād* came into much wider use, and *mojtahed* became the common designation for proponents of the juridical system of religious authority—rather than Oṣūlīs—in opposition to the Akbārīs, who rejected the jurists’ authority. The *ejāzat al-ejtehād* may have become prevalent when the term *mojtahed* was commonly applied to any recognized, qualified jurist.

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