

# A Protection Against the Plague

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## Context

This *mecmū`a*, officially cataloged as Cod. Mixt. 220, is housed in the Austrian National Library. Its contents cover a rich assortment of materials, comprising Ottoman and Persian poems of varying length, highly ornate letter samples, Arabic prayers, a list of common Persian vocabulary items, *fevā`id*<sup>1</sup> registers, official records, a singular pleasantry (*latīfe*), *şemsī* and *kamerī* calendar calculations, as well as the enthronement dates of Ottoman sultans. Comprising a total of 90 folios, it showcases an array of calligraphic styles, including *ta`līk*, *nesih*, *dīvānī*, and *siyākat*. Noteworthy is the elusiveness of the compilation's date; neither the existence of copy records, nor any clues regarding potential transcribers and owners are discernible.

A good case for attribution of the compilation to the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century can nonetheless be made. It is plausible, indeed compelling, for a number of reasons: First, the poets mentioned in the manuscript—‘Azmi-zāde Hāletī Efendi, Bahāyī, Bākī, Hāfız, Hāşimī, Muhteşem-i Kāşānī, Nādirī, Nef‘ī, Riyāzī, Tıflī, Tıgī, Vaşşī, Vehbī, and Yaḥyā Efendi—all date to the period from the 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries, no later. Secondly, the list of Ottoman sultans' enthronement dates provided in the text ends with Aḥmed I, whose reign extended from 1603 to 1617. Lastly, the letter samples contained within the *mecmū`a* date to the period of the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Within the *mecmū`a*, three distinct categories of *fevā`id* are discernible: i) a concise remedy for alleviating toothaches (found on 30a); ii) a medley of recipes pertaining to soap preparation (located on folios 74b to 76a); and iii) an Arabic prayer against the plague, with instructions (*şerḥ*) in Ottoman Turkish for how to apply it (present on folio 19a).

*Fevā`id* registers are a prevalent feature of Ottoman manuscript culture, frequently found in *mecmū`as* in particular. As far as the prayer to ward off the plague transcribed and translated here is concerned, it clearly bears relevance, both directly and indirectly,

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<sup>1</sup> *Fevā`id* registers were handwritten notes in manuscripts that contained useful information on almost any subject. For more info, see Orhan Bilgin, “Fevāid Kaydı” in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, online version (accessed: 15.08.2023), <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/fevaid-kaydi>.

to the period in which the *mecmū`a* itself was compiled. Indeed, the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century witnessed incessant onslaughts of plague epidemics upon Ottoman cities; these form the backdrop against which the inclusion of this prayer and the instructions for how to apply it, on folio 19a, must be read.<sup>2</sup>

## Transcription

Şerh-i Du`ā-yı Tā`ūn

Her kim bu du`āyı bir koyun kulağına okuyub üzerine üfürse // andan soñra ol koyunu boğazlayub her kim ol koyun etinden bir loğma yirse // Allāh tebārek ü te`ālā celle zikruhu ḥazretleri kemāl-i lutfından ol kişileri tā`ūn // şerrinden ḥalāş olmağ müyesser ide bu du`ā berekātından her kim yazdurub götürse // yāḥūd evinde şaklasa ol eve vebā girmeye ve cemī` belādan ve kazādan ḥağ sübhānehu // ve te`ālā şaklıya bu du`ā-yı şerīf hürmetine inşā`l-lāhu te`ālā //

bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm, allāhumma yā ḥabīb al-abrār yā şāni` al-ikhtiyār wa-yā ma`rūf al-samā`<sup>3</sup> fi-l`arḍ wa-l-aqtār // yusabbih lahu al-ḥajar wa-l-shajar wa-l`uyūn wa-l-abrār<sup>4</sup> wa-l-biḥār, wa-yā khāliq al-janna wa-l-nār, wa-yā aḥad al-qadīm al-qahhār, wa-yā şarīḥ al-mustaşrihkīn // wa-yā ghiyāth al-mustaghīthīn, wa-yā ilāh al-`ālamīn, wa-yā lā ilāh illā anta, allāh akbar wa-a`lā wa-naşara wa-adhalla wa-a`azza wa-akrama wa-aḥfaz ka-mā ḥafıza // jamī`an lā ilāh illā huwa al-ḥaqq al-mubīn wa-ḥfaznī min sharr al-jinn wa-l-ins wa-min sharr al-wabā` wa-l-balā` wa-l-tā`ūn bi`adad kalimātihi // wa-şallā`alā Muḥammad fi-l-awwalīn wa-şallā`alā Muḥammad fi-l-ākhirīn subḥānak mā a`zam şānak<sup>5</sup> subḥān dhī al-mulk wa-l-malakūt // subḥān dhī al-`izza wa-l-jalāl wa-l-jamāl wa-

<sup>2</sup> On this issue, see Sam White, “Rethinking Disease In Ottoman History.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 4 (2010): 549–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41308709>; Nükhet Varlık, “New Methods for Governing Death in Istanbul.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 42, no. 1 (2022): 146–62. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-9698190>.

<sup>3</sup> The *hamza* of *samā`* here is elided through *tashīl*. I thank `Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maiman for pointing out that the *hamza al-tashīl* is not only a common aspect of handwritten texts, such as this, but a familiar grammatical feature found in a variety of contexts.

<sup>4</sup> This word is crossed out in the manuscript. In light of the rhymed prose and images of nature (stones, trees, sources of water and seas) here, it is possible that the term intended was *ābār* (“wells”), written as *abrār* by mistake and subsequently crossed out.

<sup>5</sup> Here, too, the *hamza* of *sha`nak* is elided through *tashīl*.

*l-kamāl wa-l-baqā' wa-l-thanā' wa-l-ḍiyā' wa-l-ālā' wa-l-na'mā' wa-l-kibriyā' // wa-l-jabarūt, subḥān al-malik al-ma'būd, subḥān al-malik al-maqṣūd, subḥān al-malik al-mawjūd, subḥān al-malik al-masjūd, subḥān // al-malik al-khāliq al-ḥayy al-ḥalīm alladhī lā yanām wa-lā yamūt wa-lā yafūt abadan dāiman<sup>6</sup> bāqiyān bi-yadik al-khayr innak 'alā kull shay' // qadīr sabūḥ quddūs, rabbunā wa-rabb al-malā'ika wa-l-rūḥ subḥān allāh al-'azīm wa-bi-ḥamdihi astaghfir allāh wa-bi-kalāmihi min // al-danb, al-ḥamd li-llāh 'alā kull ḥāl, allāhumma 'alā al-dīn<sup>7</sup> wa-'hdinā fihā yā allāh yā arḥam al-rāḥimīn yā raḥmān yā raḥīm // yā mālik yā quddūs yā salām yā mumin<sup>8</sup> yā muhaymin yā 'azīz yā jabbār yā qahhār yā mutakabbir yā wahhāb lā // tadharnī fardan wa-anta khayr al-wārithīn tawaffānī muslimān wa-lḥiqnī bi-l-ṣāliḥīn bi-raḥmatika yā arḥam al-rāḥimīn yā // fard[d]<sup>9</sup> yā hū yā hū yā yā man huwa wa-lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwa illā bi-llāh al-'aliyy al-'azīm*

## Translation

### Explanation of a Prayer for the Plague

Whoever recites this prayer into the sheep's ear, and blows it upon the ear, and then slaughters the sheep, and whoever eats a piece of the mutton, may the exalted God – let His name be praised and honored – facilitate for them salvation from the harm of the plague through His great favor. And with the blessings of this prayer, whoever has this prayer written and carries it with themselves or keeps it in their home, may the plague not enter this home, and may God – be praised and blessed – protect them from all troubles and accidents for the sake of this auspicious prayer.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! Oh God, oh Beloved of the pious, oh Maker of choice, oh Known one of heaven on earth and in the lands, the stones and the trees praise Him, as do the sources of water, the wells and the seas. Oh, Creator of Paradise and Hell, oh Eternal One, oh Subduer, oh You who hears and helps those who

<sup>6</sup> Again, *hamza al-tashīl* for *dā'imān* here.

<sup>7</sup> There seems to be a verb missing here.

<sup>8</sup> Again, *hamza al-tashīl* for *mu'min*.

<sup>9</sup> The second *dāl* seems to have been added by mistake.

call for help. Oh You who gives rain to those who seek it; oh God of the worlds; there is no God but You; greatest God, and Highest, the Victor and the One who humiliates, the Mightiest and Most noble; the One who is most protecting, as is known altogether; there is no god save Him, the clear Truth; preserve me from the evil of the *jinn* and from [the evil of] humans; and from the evil of the infectious disease, the affliction, the plague, by a number of His words. God bless Muḥammad among the first ones and among the last ones;<sup>10</sup> may You (God) be praised. How great is Your affair! Praised be the One to whom supreme power and sovereignty belongs. Praised be the One who has [supreme] might, majesty, beauty, perfection, eternal life (*baqā'*), praise (*thanā'*), light (*diyā'*), favors (*ālā'*), grace (*na'mā'*), glory (*kibriyā'*), omnipotence (*jabarūt*), praised be the Master who is worshipped, praised be the Master who is sought, praised be the Master who exists, praised be the Master who is prostrated to, praised be the Master, the Creator, who is alive, the gentle One (*ḥalīm*),<sup>11</sup> who does not sleep, nor die; who never, ever disappears, staying on (always) in your hand of goodness; you are omnipotent;<sup>12</sup> perfect (*sabbūh*),<sup>13</sup> holy (*quddūs*), our Lord and the Lord of the angels, and [the Lord of] the spirit; praised be God, the great One, and extolled be He; seek forgiveness from God and by His words, from sin; Praise be to God, who is unrestrained by anything; Oh God, guide us according to the right religion, Oh God, Oh most Merciful of the merciful ones, Oh Compassionate, Oh Merciful, Oh Master, Oh Holy One, Oh peace, Oh believer, Oh Powerful One, Oh Almighty, Oh Subduer, Oh Proud One, Oh Giver. Do not leave me alone. You are the best of inheritors;<sup>14</sup> make me die as a Muslim and make me join the righteous ones, by Your mercy, oh most Merciful of the merciful ones; Oh Singular One,

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<sup>10</sup> Or "later ones."

<sup>11</sup> For this, as well as the preceding and subsequent names of God, see David Burrell and Nazih Daher's translation of Ghazālī's classic treatise, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā' fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*. Burrell and Daher, (trans.), *Al-Ghazālī: The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> "Powerful over everything," "able to do anything" (*'alā kull shay' qadīr*).

<sup>13</sup> "All-perfect," "all-pure," "all-glorious," i.e. far removed from everything evil, free from every imperfection.

<sup>14</sup> I.e. the one who *gives* something as an inheritance.

Oh He Oh He, Oh, Oh the one who is He; there is no power and no force other than through God, the High, the Powerful.

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