

“We Look Forward to Welcoming You to the Iftar on Friday”: An Ottoman-Era Invitation Letter

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Context¹

The invitation letter for *iftar* presented below is found on folio 33b of the *mecmua* registered under number 135 in the Arslan Kaynardağ Collection of the Süleymaniye Library. The compilation encompasses poems, prose compositions, and glossarial entries written in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, as well as various *fevā'id* (short didactic notes) and exemplars of correspondence. The exact date of the *mecmua* remains unknown; however, the mention of the year 1248 (ca. 1833 CE) in one of the letter samples suggests that the volume was produced in the nineteenth century. This reference, nevertheless, does not allow for a precise determination of the date on which the invitation letter for *iftar* was written.

The manuscript does not specify when or by whom this invitation letter was written.² Although the absence of such contextual information limits the extent to which the text can shed light on its broader background, it nevertheless illuminates the role that written communication played in the routines of everyday life in Ottoman society. The letter further shows that Ramadan, beyond its religious significance, served as a catalyst for social interaction. This intensified social atmosphere during Ramadan also found reflection in Ottoman literature, most notably in the *Ramazaniyye* which contain themes related to the religious and social dimensions of Ramadan. In these poems, which grew increasingly popular from the eighteenth century onward, the cultural and folkloric aspects of the month were used alongside its religious features as literary material.³

The invitation letter is addressed to a certain Mehmed Efendi and asks him to visit the writer's home together with his son, Şakir Efendi. Nevertheless, the expression

¹ I would like to sincerely thank Gisela Procházka-Eisl, Ercan Akyol, and Orhan Kılıçarslan for their kind support and helpful comments. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewer for the constructive feedback.

² The *mecmua* contains six letters with similar handwriting; four are dated 1248 (ca. 1833 CE), and two are undated. This suggests that the invitation letter may have been written in the same year or in a closely related period. In addition, the name of Taşköprü (Kastamonu) appears in three of the letters. If the letters are assumed to have been written by the same person, they may be linked to someone living near Taşköprü around 1833.

³ Mustafa İsmet Uzun, "Ramazâniyye," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 34 (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2007), 439.

“Şâkir Efendi oğlumuz ile ma‘an” (together with our son, Şakir Efendi) found in the text is open to more than one interpretation in its context. It is also possible that the author of the invitation letter sent his own son along with the intention of honoring or impressing the addressee. However, the use of the honorific “Efendi” with the personal name, together with the expression “oğlumuz” (our son), suggests that the phrase functions as a form of address intended to honor the addressee’s son and to establish a sense of close and cordial relations. Indeed, in social usage, expressions such as “efendi oğlumuz” (our esteemed son) and “hanım kızımız” (our esteemed daughter) are employed as inclusive and relational forms of address that convey both respect and warmth in communication with the addressee and his family. For these reasons, the individual in question is interpreted as the son of the invited person. Nevertheless, the possibility that the phrase refers to the author’s own son is retained as a cautious alternative.

Considering the possibility that other members of the family may have been alive at the time, it is noteworthy that the invitation did not encompass the household. Whether all family members usually joined such visits within the neighborhood or the city is a question that may be clarified through the examination of other iftar or dinner invitations that may surface in future studies.

In Ottoman studies, scholarly interest in the everyday lives of ordinary people has grown in recent years.⁴ Eating and drinking practices, along with friendly social gatherings, constituted a significant component of daily life.⁵ The delivery of the iftar invitation in written form, and its expression in an ornate style, suggest that both the sender and the recipient belonged to families with an established culture of literacy and adherence to social customs. The stylistic features of the invitation align closely with conventions commonly observed in Ottoman letter writing. Typically, Ottoman letters begin with honorific phrases and greetings adjusted to the recipient’s social position and to the nature of the relationship between the parties. These are followed

⁴ Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi, “Daily Life and Family in an Ottoman Urban Context: Historiographical Stakes and New Research Perspectives” *History of the Family*, 16 no: 2 (2011): 83.

⁵ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 2005), 4.

by transitional expressions that lead into the statement of the letter's purpose, and the text concludes with an appropriate closing formula.⁶

Transcription

Da 'vet için

Pesendide ahlāk ile meşhūr-ı āfāk olan ma'ārif kânı ser-tācum qarındaş-ı e'azz u ekremüm Mehmed Beg efendüm sulṭānum ḥazretleri hemvāren vaqt-i şerīfñüz sa'īd ve 'ömr-i devletiñüz mezīd olub nice sāl emşāl-i keşīresiyle müşerref olmaları da'vātıyla ba'de's-selām inhā-yı muḥibbāne-i vefādārileridür ki inşā'allāhu te'ālā cum'a gicesi ḳadem rencide ḳılub Şākir Efendi oğlumuz ile ma'an bizüm ḥāneye iftāra teşrīf buyurmalaruñuz için maḥşuş tezkere-i maḥabbet taḥrīrine yārī ḳılındı ma'lūm-ı mürüvvetleri [ola] bi-eyyi ḥālin teşrīfñüze muntazırım ve ḡāyet memnūn olurum sulṭānum

Translation

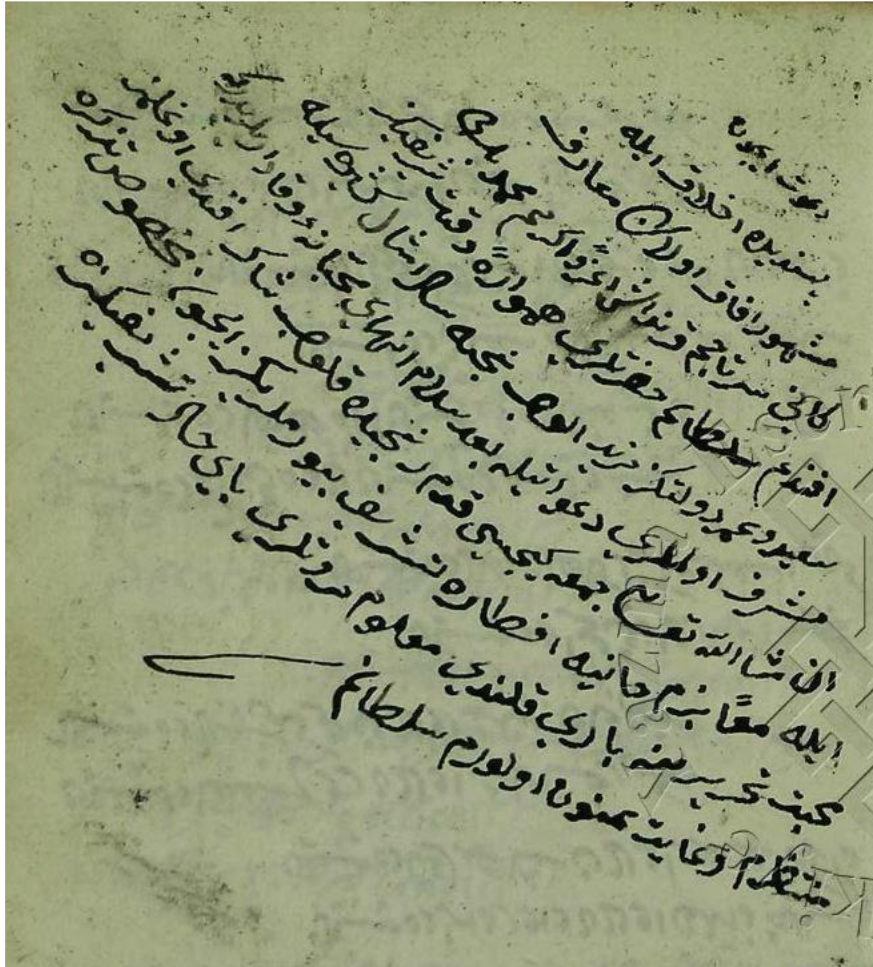
For the invitation

My exalted sire Mehmed Efendi—my esteemed and generous brother, the source of knowledge whom I hold in the highest regard [like a crown on my head], whose distinguished virtue and [far-reaching] renown extend beyond all horizons—may your precious hours always be blessed, and may your blissful life be augmented. After offering my salutations together with prayers that you may be honored with many more years adorned by many similar blessings, it is hereby submitted with the loyalty of friendship that this special letter of friendship has been written in the hope that, God willing, you would graciously deign to [molest your feet and] come to our home for the iftar on Friday night together with our son, Şakir Efendi. May your gracious

⁶ İbrahim Çetin Derdiyok, "Osmanlı Devrinde Mektup Yazma Geleneği," in *Osmanlı*, ed. Güler Eren (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999), 735.

kindness know this. In any case, I am awaiting your gracious visit and would be most delighted, my sire.

Facsimile



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