

Mustafa Efendi's Medical Recipes: Remedies for Sciatica and Constipation

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Context

The prescriptions whose full text and translation we present below are contained in manuscript Ms. Or. Oct. 2946 in the Turkish manuscripts section of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. The manuscript consists of two principal sections, comprising the works titled *Žāhirü'l-kuḍāt* (5b–42a) and *Ḳānūn-nāme* (42a–62b).¹ In addition to these sections, the manuscript also contains various medicinal recipes and prayers.²

The texts in this manuscript were among the principal reference works used by various administrative officials serving within the Ottoman scholarly class in the early modern period. In this respect, it represents a type of reference source frequently encountered in manuscript form. Through such works, these officials were able to keep at hand earlier practices and regulations that could serve as precedents for their administrative decisions.³ Indeed, as can be understood from the ownership record, the manuscript once belonged to an individual named Seyyid Muṣṭafā Efendi, who served as the mufti of Eski Cuma (in present-day northeastern Bulgaria).⁴ No information concerning Muṣṭafā Efendi's identity has been found in the sources.

With regard to the date of compilation of the manuscript, it is possible—based on internal evidence—to suggest that it must have been written no earlier than the second half of the seventeenth century. Since the manuscript unfortunately contains no explicit dates such as those found in colophons, this assessment is derived from the dates of the fatwa samples included in the work. While the earliest of these dates back to the reign of Murad I (1362–1389 CE), the most recent is dated 1661.⁵

Of the four recipes translated here, three concern constipation and one addresses sciatica. Two of the constipation recipes are introduced with the term *līnet*, which

¹ *Žāhirü'l-kuḍāt* can be roughly translated as the book of judges and *Ḳānūn-nāme* means the code of laws.

² For more details, see *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland IV*, 84–85 and 119.

³ Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 189–190.

⁴ Ms. Or. Oct. 2946, 1a.

⁵ Ms. Or. Oct. 2946, 53a and 56b–57a.

refers to a gentle relaxation of the bowels; accordingly, the plants mentioned in these recipes are intended to achieve this mild laxative effect to treat the condition. The recipes also include brief instructions on how and when these mixtures should be taken. Some personal names appearing in the recipes may have been used to increase the credibility of the recipes. For example, the first recipe is attributed to *Hañçerli nā'ib*, about whom no information could be found in the sources. His status as a deputy judge likely serves to establish him as a reliable source. The fourth recipe refers to Lokman the Sage,⁶ highlighting legendary and ancient knowledge. Such references may have encouraged users to trust the effectiveness of the recipes.

Recipe 1, Transcription (64b)

yevmī bir iki 'amel-i līnet içün saḥḥ ide ve dilerse ma'cūn idüb ekl ideler

60 dirhem sināmekī

10 dirhem çörek otı

20 dirhem zencebīl

10 dirhem rāvend

130 dirhem şeker

Hañçerli nā'ib terkībidür

Recipe 1, Translation (64b)

For one or two laxative effects daily, one should pulverize it; if one wishes, one may make it into a paste and eat it.

60 dirhem⁷ senna

10 dirhem black cumin

⁶ Lokman the Sage is a legendary figure in Turkish folklore, widely regarded as a physician and a symbol of wisdom and healing, especially associated with knowledge of medicinal plants. See Mustafa İsmet Uzun, "Lokman," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed February 8, 2026, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/lokman>.

⁷ The *dirhem*, which also saw regional variations and changes over time, was traditionally calculated as two-thirds of a *mişkāl*, corresponding to a weight of 3.086 grams. See Walter Hinz, "İslam'da Ölçü Sistemleri," trans. Acar Sevim, *Türklük Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 5 (1989): 6.

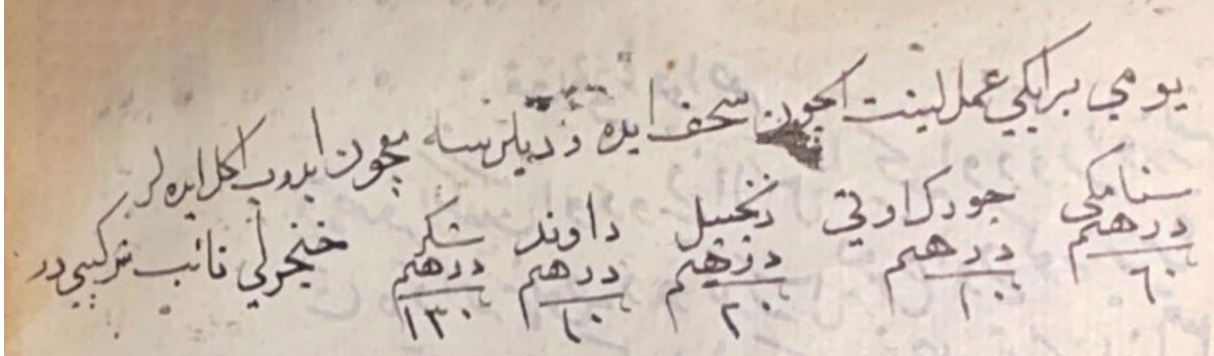
20 dirhem ginger

10 dirhem rhubarb

130 dirhem sugar

This is the mixture of *Hañcerli nā'ib*.⁸

Facsimile 1



Recipe 2, Transcription (65a)

līnet için ḥabb ide

10 şabır [dir]hem⁹

5 rāvend[-i] Hindī [dir]hem

5 ġārīkūn¹⁰

5 şurencan

bir yere döküb ḥabb idüb isti'māl ide

Recipe 2, Translation (65a)

For laxative effects, one should make pills from it.

10 agave [dir]hem

⁸ A *nā'ib* is a deputy of a judge (*kāḍī*).

⁹ The word *hem* (هم) may have been written as an abbreviated form of *dirhem* (درهم).

¹⁰ The word was mistakenly written as "ġārīkūn" in the text.

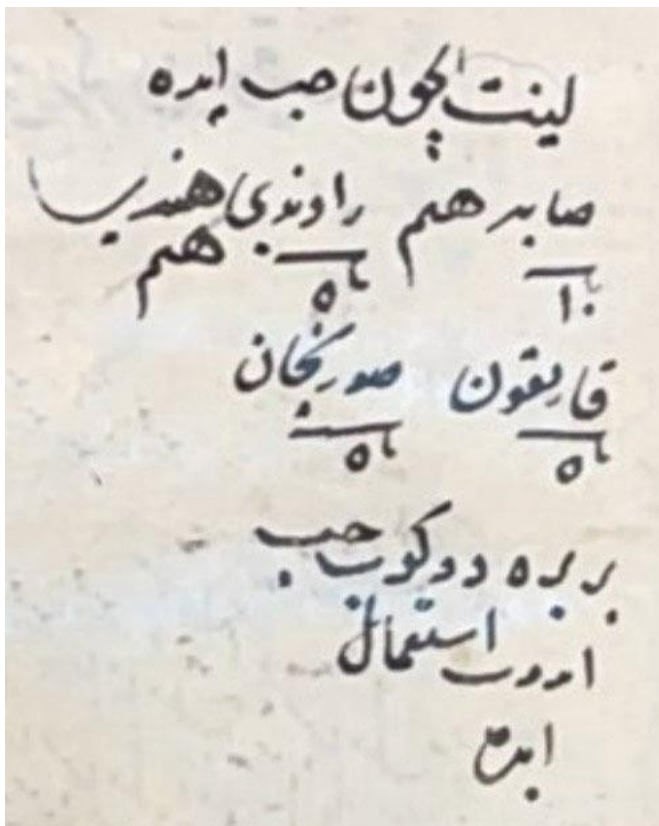
5 Indian rhubarb [*dir*]/hem

5 agarics

5 meadow saffron

One should pour it out, form pills out of it and use it.

Facsimile 2



Recipe 3, Transcription (65a)

ḳabz için olan ḥabb budur

1 dirhem saḡferān¹¹

1 dirhem mürr-i şāfi¹²

1 dirhem afyūn

1 dirhem günlük

1 dirhem eger

1 dirhem [?]¹³

*afyonu gül-āb¹⁴ ile ısladub yumurta şarusı ile eczāyı bir yire saḡḡ idüb noḡūd miḡdārı
şabāḡ aḡşām isti 'māl ide ekşiden ve baldan ve südden perhiz ide*

Recipe 3, Translation (65a)

This is the pill used for constipation.

1 dirhem saffron

1 dirhem myrrh

1 dirhem opium

1 dirhem sweetgum

1 dirhem agrimony

1 dirhem [?]

One should wet the opium with rose water; pound the ingredients together with egg yolk on a surface and take a chickpea-sized amount morning and evening. One should abstain from sour (food/drink), honey, and milk.

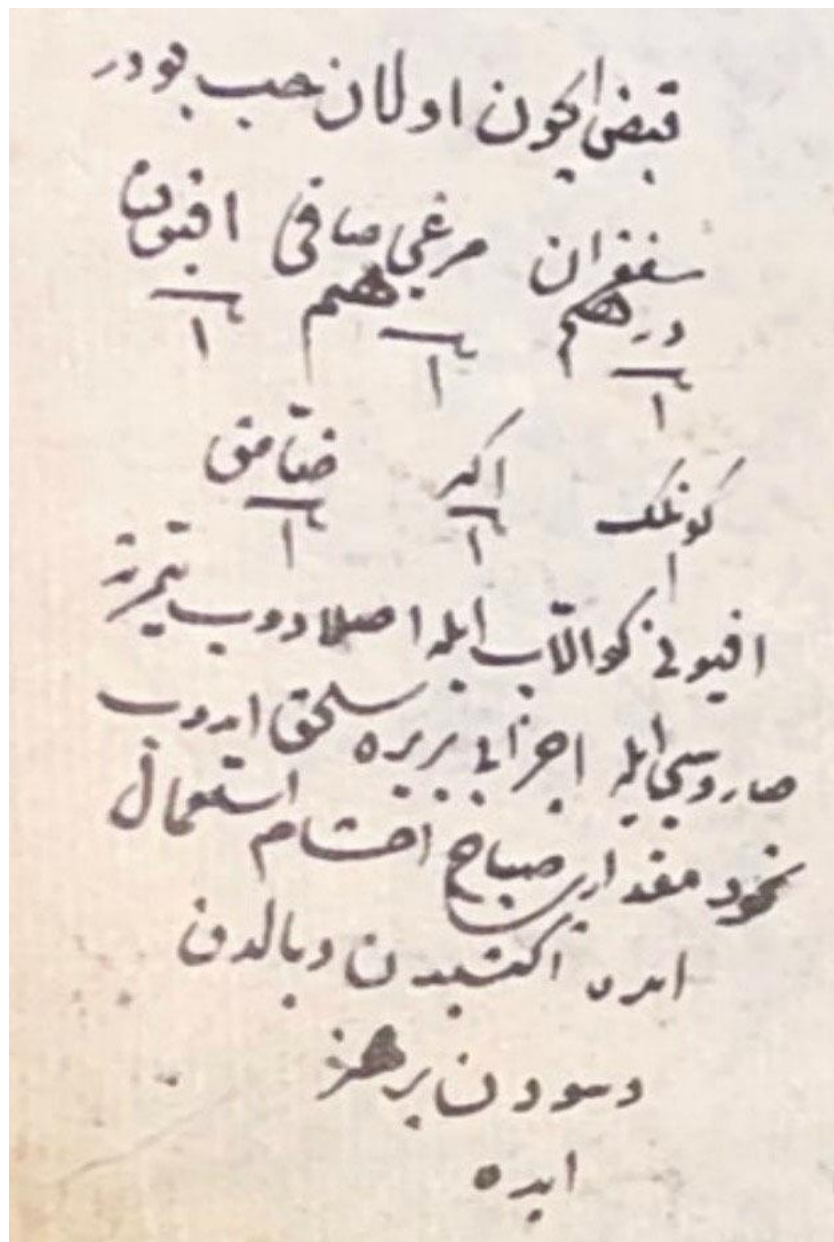
¹¹ It may have been written this way due to the z-s alternation in Turkish. In the following recipe, it is written with the letter “z”.

¹² Org. “murḡi-yi şāfi”, which is obviously wrong.

¹³ The word could not be found.

¹⁴ Org. “كوالاب” could not be found in any dictionary. Given that the author makes numerous spelling mistakes, we propose reading it here as *gül-āb* (“rosewater”).

Facsimile 3



Recipe 4, Transcription (65a)

*ma 'cūn-ı 'ırķu'n-nesā için olan Loķmān hekīm rivāyet cem '-i emrāzlar[a]¹⁵ nāfi ' olmak
üzre*

5 dirhem cevz-i bevvā dirhem¹⁶

5 dirhem kıaranfil

5 dirhem kıākūle

5 dirhem dārçīn

5 dirhem sa 'ad

5 dirhem emlec

5 dirhem sūnbül-i tayyib

1 dirhem za 'ferān¹⁷

1 dirhem afyon

misk-i berdenk

*üç eczā miķdārı 'asel ile kıvām buldurub saķķ-ı eczā idüb parmaķ duyar duymaz
ķarışdırub ma 'cūn idesiz her tenāvül birer mişķāl ola*

Recipe 4, Translation (65a)

This is a paste transmitted by Loķman the Sage for sciatica and said to be beneficial for all diseases.

5 dirhem coconut

5 dirhem clove

5 dirhem cardamom

5 dirhem cinnamon

5 dirhem nut grass / cyperus rotundus

5 dirhem phyllanthus emblica / indian gooseberry

5 dirhem spikenard

¹⁵ In the text, it is written as “emrāzları”.

¹⁶ The word *dirhem* is written in addition to the abbreviation of *dirhem*.

¹⁷ In the text it is written with “3”.

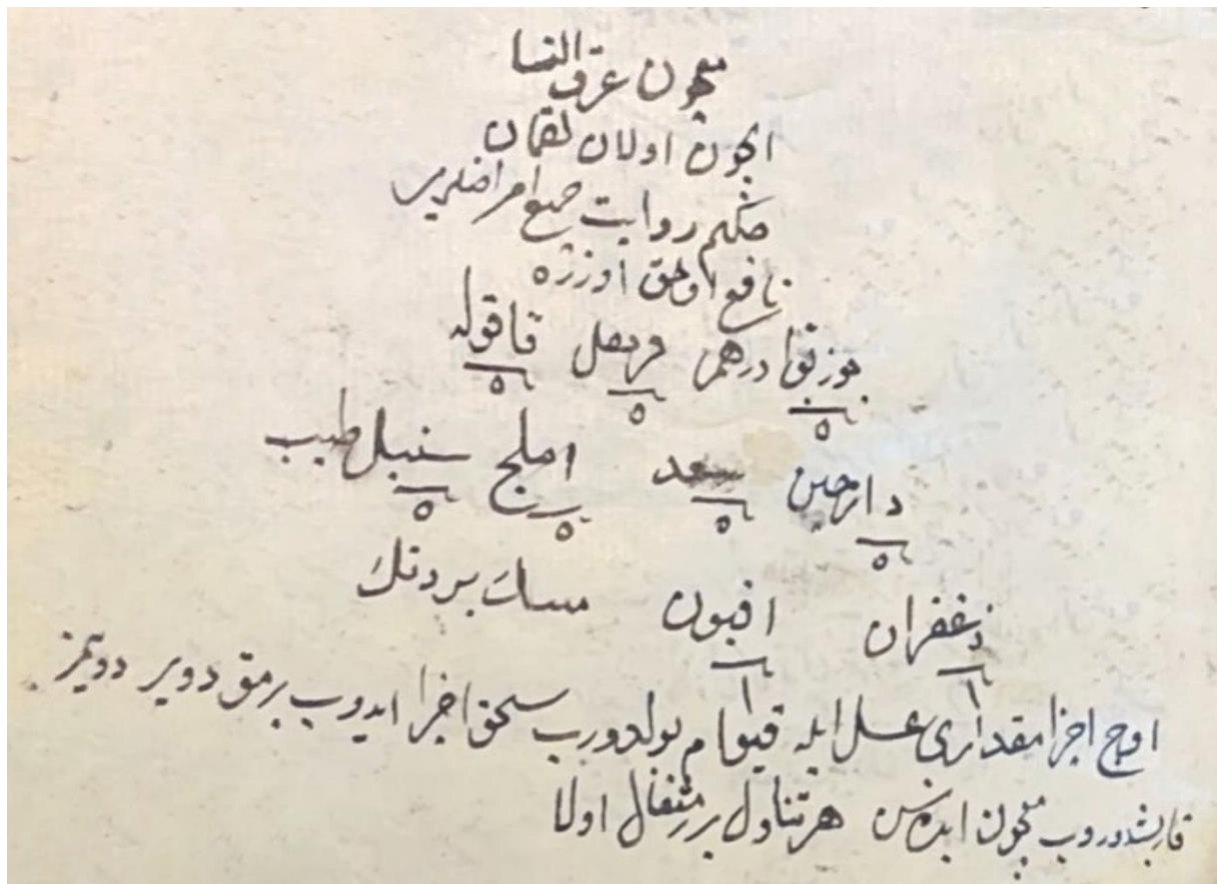
1 dirhem saffron

1 dirhem opium

desert musk

Bring it to consistency with three parts of honey; pound the ingredients; and as soon as the mixture reaches a proper consistency,¹⁸ mix it and prepare a paste. Each dose should be one *mişkāl*.¹⁹

Facsimile 4



¹⁸ As no record of the phrase “barmak duyar duymaz” was found in the sources, its meaning has been interpreted according to the context of the passage.

¹⁹ While its exact value frequently fluctuated across different periods and regions, the Ottoman *mişkāl* was typically standardized at 4.81 grams, a figure derived from the Egyptian *mişkāl*. See Walter Hinz, “İslam’da Ölçü Sistemleri,” trans. Acar Sevim, *Türklük Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 5 (1989): 6.

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