

# Manuscripts on the battlefields: Early modern Ottoman subjects in the European theatre of war and their textual relations to the supernatural in their fight for survival<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Many travelers deem books perfect companions, and this fondness is hardly a modern phenomenon. Before the age of modern transportation, countless people, including early modern Ottomans, had books to read and journals to write in while on the road. We know that military commanders and rank-and-file soldiers in the Ottoman army spending months on the campaign, seafarers seeking

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safe harbor, pilgrims striving to reach their sacred sites, merchants hitting the road in pursuit of profits, captives and slaves displaced from one place to another, envoys and go-betweens traversing numerous towns in between different courts, scholars and students in the quest of new patrons in fresh places, officials on their way to their appointed posts, self-proclaimed travelers and geographers wandering around to become acquainted with new places and customs, all had texts in their baggage to turn to on different occasions.

This commonplace assertion raises a number of intriguing questions, not just for Ottoman history and literature but also for broader scholarly inquiry in a variety of fields, from manuscript studies and histories of emotions to military history and early modern mobilities. Where can we find today those copies that we know once accompanied a specific individual or group on a journey? What manuscript notes or other miscellaneous textual fragments might we find in these volumes? Could these notes allow us to capture, in their own contemporaneity, the personal reflections and emotional states of individuals on particular journeys or in struggles for survival? What could such details tell us about their relationship to writing, to the natural world around them, to time, or to the supernatural? And how have these manuscripts in motion, some of which eventually found their way into the hands of non-Ottomans, contribute to the accumulation of Islamic manuscripts in early modern European collections?

This article sets out to address these questions by spotlighting the contents of a curious manuscript of clear Ottoman provenance currently housed in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Paris. Internal evidence, specifically paratextual inscriptions, seals, and ownership statements, unequivocally document its use by an Ottoman owner (or owners) in the last quarter of the sixteenth century and its entering the private collection of a French orientalist from the seventeenth century before its being listed in the BnF collection sometime before 1740. The book includes several separate short tracts and textual fragments, mostly dealing with calendric computation and different divination techniques, penned down by manifestly different hands, some not fully literate in Arabic script. It would be more appropriate to categorize the tome as a *majmū'a* (multi-text volume) or a scrapbook, the contents of which were gradually collected, likely by several individuals. The nature of texts found in the manuscript and some of the curious notes on certain folios of the book (left by an Ottoman sailor taking part in military ventures and directly addressing his fellow seafarers on board) offer a unique window into capturing, with strik-

ing immediacy, the sentiments of a particular Ottoman individual and his respective community in motion that had resort to supernatural forces and other tools of divination in their fight for survival under dire circumstances. As such, the extant BnF volume presents an invaluable opportunity to explore the reflections of Ottoman individuals suffering the perils and uncertainties of travel and warfare and to trace everyday and unscholarly forms of writing and the use of divination among early modern Ottoman subjects.

## Ottomans' Texts in Motion

Early modern Ottomans provide us with rich documentary evidence about books and other textual materials that they took with them on the road. First of all, there are various anecdotes with respect to books that accompanied the sultans and soldiers on the march during military campaigns. Some of these items were undoubtedly preferred for their entertainment potential, while others were favored for their ascribed talismanic and protective power, like copies of the Qur'an of different sizes or prayerbooks. For example, there is a late-sixteenth century anecdote about Sultan Selim I (r. 1512–1520), shared by the son of one of the sultan's courtiers, describing how, during his campaign against the Mamluks, Selim enjoyed reading a copy of the *History of Wassaf*.<sup>3</sup> The sultans—when they were still physically leading Ottoman armies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—might have had the luxury to read for leisure and pleasure on their campaigns. Ottoman soldiers, however, had more urgent and pragmatic reasons to have textual materials in their possession. Unfortunately, due mainly to the relative scarcity of early modern Ottoman soldierly writings, we know very little about the social, personal, and emotional dynamics of warfare from the perspective of men-at-arms.<sup>4</sup> Still, some of the extant sources demonstrate

3 “*merhûm pâdişâh ol nüshaya mâ’üller olub yolda eğlenceleri imiş*,” cited in İ. E. Erünsal, “Fatih Sultan Mehmed’in İlgi Duyduğu Kitaplar ve Kütüphanesi”, in C. Yılmaz (ed.), *Düştün Fethi İstanbul* (Istanbul 2015), 203–212 at 203.

4 Rhoads Murphey had also addressed the absence of literature on the personal motivations and experiences of soldiers in the early modern Ottoman world in his *Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1700* (London 1999). For an intriguing textual example from the late seventeenth century written by a certain Hasan, who expressed all the hardships he and his peers suffered as guardians in Podolia, see: O. Ş. Gökyay, “Kamanîçe Muhafızlarının Çektiği”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, 32 (1979), 281–300. Also see the memoirs of a certain sailor with the name Talati, who took part in the naval campaign of 1736–7 in

that there were books and other textual objects in the baggage of some fighting troops. A late-fifteenth-century memoir written by Konstantin Mihailović, a Janissary in the army of Mehmed II (r. 1444–46; 1451–81) of Christian Serbian origin, notes for instance that a particular type of small book he called *hamahely* was frequently carried by his fellow Ottoman soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Mihailović says the Ottoman soldiers believed that these objects, properly *ḥamā'il* (i.e., small, amuletic books of Qur'anic verses, divine names, names of angels, etc., fastened to the arm or turban), provided them with spiritual assistance and protection.

Aside from those hefty sultanic codices and tiny protective booklets carried into combat zones, we know of works drafted or presented during military campaigns. Historians, scholars, artists, secretaries, poets, and other men of knowledge in the service of sultans and ruling elites accompanied their patrons on campaign, often on duty. The extensive campaign-narrative literature (*ğazavātnāmes* and *fetḥnāmes*) and the surviving manuscripts in this genre, ideally the messy ones, need to be explored from this perspective to find traces of disarranged notes and rough drafts their authors put down during the journey itself. Besides possible sketches of campaign narratives, there are several treatises penned or at least presented in the course of a military expedition for which we have manuscript records. For instance, the autograph copy of the fifteenth-century polymath Ali Qushji's (d. 1474) astronomical treatise *al-Risala al-fathiyya*, currently held in the Süleymaniye Library's Ayasofya collection, reveals through its colophon that it was penned and presented to Qushji's new patron Mehmed II in August 1473 during his campaign against the Aqqoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan (r. 1457–1478) culminating in victory at Otlukbeli (hence, the treatise is titled *al-fathiyya*, i.e., relating to “victory”).<sup>6</sup> Perhaps surprisingly,

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the Black Sea against the Russian fleet: F. Kurtoglu (ed.), *1736–1737 Seferine İştirak Eden Bir Türk Denizcisinin Hatıraları: 200 Sene Evvel Yazılmıştır* (Istanbul 1935). For an insightful account on early modern soldierly writings in the context of the Hispanic world, see: M. Martínez, *Front Lines: Soldiers' Writing in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (Philadelphia 2016).

- 5 Konstanty Michałowicz, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, trans. B. Stolz and ed. S. Soucek (Princeton 2010), 5. For *ḥamā'il* and its etymological connection to amulets, which Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall had mentioned in the nineteenth century, see: *EI*, s.v. “Ḥamā'il” (B. C. de Vaux); *EP*, s.v. “Amulet” (C. Hamès). For the use of amulets on battlefields, see M. Ekhtiar and R. Parikh, “Power and Piety: Islamic Talismans on the Battlefield”, in L. Saif et al. (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden 2020), 420–453.
- 6 SK Ayasofya 2733, f. 70a, also cited in H. Umut, “Theoretical Astronomy in the Early Mod-

Qushji's treatise is not the only astronomical text copied or presented during an Ottoman campaign. In the 1660s, Tezkireci Köse İbrahim Efendi, a finance bureaucrat in the chancery and translator of a French account of the new Copernican astronomy, wrote that, with the encouragement of the military judge at the time, he worked on his translation while on duty in Belgrade during the Ottoman campaign against Habsburg Austria in the year 1663.<sup>7</sup>

It should come as no surprise that members of the scholarly establishment and bureaucrats in the imperial chancery form the largest body of individuals who composed or consumed texts while on the move. Their texts display a wide variety ranging from captivity narratives and miscellanies of various sorts (like personal letters, official correspondences, poems, law codes, legal opinions, or medical and magical recipes) to individual treatises on different branches of knowledge. With specific regard to captivity narratives, the better-known examples were written by Ottoman bureaucrats and schoolmen taken by corsairs and other entrepreneurs of early modern ransom slavery while sailing or traveling by land toward a post of appointment.<sup>8</sup> The memoir of Macuncuzade Mustafa Efendi, an Ottoman judge from Istanbul who was appointed in 1597 to a post in Cyprus but caught *en route* by the Knights of Malta, is just one example; it was composed in Malta, as Macuncuzade says, during his term of captivity.<sup>9</sup> Of course, we cannot take at face value such authorial assertions that captivity narratives, including Macuncuzade's, were in fact penned while incarcerated. Considering the contents and surviving manuscript records of published cap-

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ern Ottoman Empire: 'Ali al-Qūshjī's *al-Risāla al-Fatḥiyya*', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2019.

7 Kandilli Observatory Library 403, cited in E. İhsanoğlu (ed.), *Osmanlı Astronomi Literatürü Tarihi = History of Astronomy Literature during the Ottoman Period*, vol. 1 (Istanbul 1997), 342.

8 For the socio-economic and cultural significance of early modern ransom slavery from the Ottoman perspective, see the articles in G. Dávid and P. Fodor (eds), *Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden – Boston 2007).

9 The text was first introduced by İsmet Parmaksızoğlu in the following study: "Bir Türk Kadısının Esaret Hatıraları", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, 5/8 (1953), 77–84. Fahir İz then published the text in Arabic script based on the sole surviving manuscript at the Selim Ağa Library in Istanbul. See: F. İz, "Macuncuzade Mustafa'nın Malta Anıları: Sergüzeşt-i Esiri-i Malta", *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı-Belleten*, 18 (1970), 69–122. For a recent French translation of the text together with an introductory essay on the relevant historical context, see H. G. Özkoray (ed.), *Le captif de Malte: récit autobiographique d'un cadi ottoman* (Toulouse 2019).

tivity narratives, many of them seem to have been written much later as recollections, often well after the end of the author's confinement. Still, no matter where and under what specific conditions these texts were written down, these narratives are striking for the quotidian details they present about life in captivity and, often, circumstances on board ships, as well as their depiction of the role of reading and writing in captives' social interactions.

Captivity narratives offer vivid details of captives' socializing around texts. Macuncuzade's memoir, for instance, contains frequent references to captives' copying or reading texts during their spare time, writing chronograms on the release dates of their fellows, and exchanging papers among themselves with poetry written on them. Among those books copied, Macuncuzade cites a copy of the Qur'an and a sixteenth-century Turkish translation of Husayn Vaiz Kashifi's (d. 1504–5) Persian treatise on ethics and morality, *Ahlak-ı Muhsini*, completed by a certain Azmi.<sup>10</sup> Another late-sixteenth-century captivity narrative by yet another scribe in the imperial chancery, Hindi Mahmud, portrays how the more learned individuals among captives at sea recited verses from the Qur'an and other texts (such as *Mawlid-i nabi* used to celebrate the Prophet Muhammed's nativity) to boost morale on the ship.<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, copies of the Qur'an, either full or partial, were the essential component of text-based intercourse that promoted solidarity among peers and hostility across confessional lines. In the autobiographical narrative of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Admiral Seydi Ali Reis (d. 1563) on his adventures in the Indian Ocean (and later in today's India, Afghanistan, parts of Central Asia, and Iran), Qur'an copies appear on several occasions where he and the surviving members of his crew perform the art of bibliomancy (i.e., divination by books) by randomly

10 İz, "Macuncuzade Mustafâ'nın Malta Anıları", 78.

11 Hindi Mahmûd, *Sergüzeştname-i Hindi Mahmud: İnebahtı gazisi Hindi Mahmud ve esaret hatıraları*, ed. A. Karataş (Istanbul 2013). Crews often included a specific individual called "mu'allim" or "hoca," a learned person in religious sciences and other branches of knowledge, who offered help to people on the ship to perform prayers properly or pull themselves together in formidable circumstances. In some cases, they interpreted the horoscopes at the moment or consulted books on divination to provide guidance. We know next to nothing about the identities of those *mu'allims* and how they were selected, but both Ottoman and European sources attest to their presence on board. See for instance E. S. Gürkan, *Sultanın Korsanları: Osmanlı Akdenizi'nde Gazâ, Yağma ve Esaret, 1500–1700* (Istanbul 2018), 197, 249.

opening a page and interpreting the first verse chanced upon to find guidance.<sup>12</sup> In another captivity narrative written as a long letter by a scribe in the growing imperial bureaucracy in the early years of Süleyman's reign (r. 1520–1566), the Christian captors are reported as seizing the books of Ottoman captives, specifically Qur'ans and amulets with written verses (“*hamâyil-i ‘azîme*,” as referred to in the letter) and tossing them into the sea or sometimes a fire, because the “infidel corsairs,” believed “the books of the Turks on board were the chief cause of the violent storms in the sea.”<sup>13</sup>

There is little doubt that many texts Ottoman subjects brought to the frontiers and combat zones were lost for good due to such instances of destruction and confessionally-driven violence. Yet, many undeniably passed into and were preserved at the hands of non-Ottomans, especially Europeans, in the course of these acts of plunder and confinement.<sup>14</sup> These manuscripts eventually found their way, through a series of intermediaries, into court libraries of monarchs or private collections of European orientalists. This transmission alone is an important but sorely understudied chapter on the history of the formation of Islamic manuscript collections in Europe. The relevant literature on the accumulation of Islamic manuscripts in early modern Europe focuses primarily and justifiably on the role of early modern European orientalists and savants in obtaining manuscripts from the Muslim world.<sup>15</sup> Prompted by philological

12 Seydî Ali Reis, *Mir'âtü'l-memâlik: İnceleme, Metin, İndeks*, ed. M. Kiremit (Ankara 1999), 87, 102.

13 BnF Turc 223, f. 66a, also cited in H. Sahillioğlu, “Akdeniz’de Korsanlara Esir Düşen Abdi Çelebi’nin Mektubu”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, 13/17 (1963), 241–256, the specific detail is on p. 252. In the letters sent by Ottoman captives to their families in their homelands, one could also find references to copies of the Qur’an and prayer books. For instance, in the year 1646, a certain Receb, a *sipahi* from Pécs living under the captivity of the Hungarians, wrote a letter to his mother and asked her to send his “poor father’s prayer book.” See Zs. J. Újváry, “A Muslim captive’s vicissitudes in Ottoman Hungary (mid-seventeenth century)”, in Dávid and Fodor (eds), *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders*, 141–167, the specific detail is on p. 157.

14 The probable consequences of the many decades of Ottoman-Safavid warfare also deserve to be investigated in this regard.

15 The literature is too vast to list here, but I find the following studies particularly useful in gaining an overview of the extent of early modern European scholarly and diplomatic interest in gathering Islamic manuscripts and learning oriental languages: A. Hamilton et al., *The Republic of Letters and the Levant* (Leiden 2005); A. Vrolijk et al., *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950* (Leiden 2014); A. Bevilacqua,

and scholarly curiosities tinged with confessional concerns and political and commercial motivations, several generations of European orientalists and diplomats from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries in France, the German lands, England, and the Netherlands collected thousands of books in Arabic script from the Ottoman capital Istanbul and other centers of learning and commerce in the Eastern Mediterranean, either directly during their sojourns in the region or through local agents. Nonetheless, a vast number and variety of books currently housed in various European libraries and museums were also seized as spoils of war and pirates' booty during the early modern military confrontation between the Ottomans and their European rivals.

In his pioneering article on the role of piracy and wars upon the acquisition of Islamic manuscripts in early modern Europe, Robert Jones identifies more than a dozen such manuscripts of Ottoman and North African provenance that made their way into different European collections.<sup>16</sup> In locating those manuscripts, he primarily utilized inscriptions, in Latin or European vernacular languages, left on the flyleaves of volumes by European hands that detail the particular occasion the book in question was seized. For instance, on the flyleaf of Leiden Or. 222, an undated copy of a bilingual (Arabic-Turkish) work of Islamic jurisprudence, there is a note in Spanish by a certain Bernardo de Josa declaring that the book was delivered to him in Rome by Don Guillem de San Clemente, who had obtained it as war booty on 7 October 1571 during the Battle of Lepanto.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, Leiden Or. 222 includes no inscriptions or manuscript notes from its former Ottoman owner(s) who fought at Lepanto. Consequently, we can in no way reconstruct the social history of the book,

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*The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge 2018); S. Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge: Trade, Religion, and Scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire, c.1600–1760* (Oxford – New York 2020); P. Babinski, “World Literature in Practice: the Orientalist’s Manuscript Between the Ottoman Empire and Germany”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2020.

16 R. Jones, “Piracy, war, and the acquisition of Arabic manuscripts in Renaissance Europe”, *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 2 (1987), 96–110. For the intriguing story of the sultan of Morocco’s royal book collection’s being stolen by French pirates and eventually reaching Spain and later becoming the core of the oriental collection at the Escorial library, see D. Hershenzon, “Traveling Libraries: The Arabic Manuscripts of Muley Zidan and the Escorial Library”, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 18/6 (2014), 535–558.

17 See the note in J. Schmidt, *Catalogue of Turkish manuscripts in the library of Leiden University and other collections in the Netherlands*, vol. 1 (Leiden 2000), 25–26.



identify its Ottoman possessor(s), or fathom his motives in bringing a book on jurisprudence into a combat zone.

Other scholars, too, have located manuscripts of Ottoman provenance that were taken by Europeans as spoils of war. There is even a specific research field called *Türkenbeute* (literally “booty from the Turks”) that traces objects, including manuscripts, seized from defeated Ottoman soldiers as war trophies. One finds, especially in the manuscript libraries and museums of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Italy, books looted from madrasa and mosque libraries or snatched from the bodies of Ottoman soldiers by troops advancing deeper into Ottoman territories in Central and South-Eastern Europe after the failed Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683.<sup>18</sup> Inscriptions and other notes in Latin or vernacular languages found in these manuscripts describe, sometimes in a graphic manner, when and how the item was obtained. One such case from the Gotha Research Library, a volume that includes prayers and extracts from the Qur’an, reveals through a note on 2b that the book was found on the body of a Turk shot when Buda was taken by the Holy League in 1686.<sup>19</sup> There are likely many more manuscripts that lack such descriptive inscriptions but were obtained under similar circumstances. In his study on Arabic-script manuscripts in German libraries, Tilman Seidensticker notes that before the gradual expansion of its Oriental collection, the Gotha Research Library possessed 74 Islamic manuscripts in the eighteenth century, fourteen of which had evidently passed into German hands as war booty, as documented by their inscriptions. Seidensticker estimates further that about “a third or even half” of those 74 manuscripts are “instances of *Türkenbeute*.”<sup>20</sup> It would indeed be inaccurate to classify all *Türkenbeute* manuscripts as texts seized from the Ottoman subjects on the move, for most of them were looted from stationary institutions—madrasas, mosques, libraries, private residences—of Ottoman towns in Central Europe captured by European forces from the late seventeenth century onward. Still,

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18 See for instance B. Liebrecht, *Arabische, Persische und Türkische Handschriften in Leipzig: Geschichte ihrer Sammlung und Erschliessung von Den Anfängen bis zu Karl Vollers* (Leipzig 2008), 18–28; A. Hamilton, “‘To Rescue the Honour of the Germans’: Qur’an Translations by Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century German Protestants,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 77 (2014), 173–209; T. Seidensticker, “How Arabic Manuscripts Moved to German Libraries,” *Manuscript Cultures*, 10 (2017), 73–82; Babinski, “World Literature in Practice”, 283–302.

19 Seidensticker, “How Arabic Manuscripts Moved”, 78.

20 Ibid.

there are copious textual materials, including even the Ottoman central administration's bureaucratic ledgers and registers, brought by Ottoman military and administrative officials to the European theatre of war which remained there permanently.<sup>21</sup> Thus, a systematic inventory of such texts which have found their way into European collections by processes initially set in motion by early modern Ottoman subjects on the move is a major desideratum.

This sort of inventory could enable us to identify specific volumes, analyze which particular genres and titles found higher reception among different Ottoman social groups in transit, and explore the contents of books with an eye toward tracking notes of personal and emotional nature by their former Ottoman possessors. Such a task is, however, daunting, for it requires the meticulous work and scholarly collaboration of numerous researchers, including librarians, manuscript cataloguers, philologists, and historians, and it spans a broad spatial and temporal terrain from western to eastern Europe from the early sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. The endeavor becomes even more formidable when one considers the fact that the descriptive manuscript inscriptions on the flyleaves that would easily document the provenance and ownership records of the books are only sporadic. Many more manuscripts where such notes are absent also figured considerably in the holdings of mobile early modern Ottomans, even though it takes often mere good fortune or happy coincidence to spot such items after thoroughly browsing their contents. In an effort to overcome these methodological challenges, it would be helpful to employ a microhistorical approach and reduce the scale down to “exceptionally normal” items that could function as a precious lens to observe the socio-cultural and emotional dynamics of early modern mobility, warfare, and literacy. BnF Turc 186 is, by all means, one such artifact that deserves a closer investigation.<sup>22</sup>

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21 For instances of Ottoman bureaucratic registers brought from the Ottoman capital and remained in European hands, see H. G. Majer (ed.), *Das Osmanische “Registerbuch der Beschwerden” (Şikâyet Defteri) vom Jahre 1675: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Cod. mixt. 683* (Vienna 1984); A. Çetin, “Savaşlar ve Arşivler: İstila-yı keferede kalan Osmanlı defterleri”, *Türk Dünyası Tarih Dergisi*, 3 (1987), 6–8; F. Emecen, “Sefere Götürülen Defterlerin Defteri”, *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (Istanbul 1991), 241–268.

22 What I refer to here by “exceptionally normal” (or “exceptional normal” or “the normal exception”) is a key concept in Italian microhistory studies first phrased (as *eccezionalmente normale*) by Edoardo Grendi in his “Micro-analisi e storia sociale”, *Quaderni storici*, 35 (1977), 506–520. For a brief discussion on the development of the concept, see F. Trivellato,

## A Shipboard Manuscript

Let me summarize, at the expense of sounding rather painstakingly descriptive in this section of the study, the contents of BnF Turc 186. This description is essential to historicizing the document and justifying the attribution of its ownership to a particular Ottoman community from the late sixteenth century that was in all likelihood engaged in naval warfare, perhaps at the Battle of Lepanto. The manuscript, in fact, lacks a smoking gun that would clinch the claim that it passed into European hands after a military confrontation between the Ottomans and Europeans. Unlike the aforementioned Leiden Or. 222, in which a short note in Spanish registers that it was obtained at the Battle of Lepanto, or the book cited above which was exhibited in a private auction catalog and bears an inscription in Latin on its flyleaf to record that it was looted from Ottoman Buda by Saxon troops in 1686, BnF Turc 186 has no definitive provenance.<sup>23</sup> The only relevant inscription on page 1a, bibliographic in nature, was added likely in the 1730s by Pierre Armani or one of his associates. As a graduate of the language school in Istanbul (*L'École des Jeunes de langue d'Istanbul*) founded by Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) in 1669, Armani was hired in the 1730s to catalog the oriental manuscripts at the royal library, and the note on BnF Turc 186 verifies that the manuscript was already in the collection by then. There is another small ownership mark on the same page, a mark that frequently appears, as Paul Babinski mentions, in the manuscripts possessed by the seventeenth-century French orientalist Gilbert Gaulmin (1585–1665). As an erudite scholar and philologist well-versed in Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish, Gaulmin possessed more than five hundred manuscripts in oriental languages. Some of these books, says Babinski, came from the collection of another notable French orientalist, André du Ryer (1580–*ca.* 1660), who had acquired the majority of his collection during his service as a consul in Istanbul and Alexandria. Gaulmin is also known to have purchased manuscripts,

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“Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory”, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 33/1 (2015), 122–134.

23 In the Scribe’s Hand: A selection of Islamic manuscripts, Bernard Quaritch Ltd Catalogue 1428, accessed via <https://www.quaritch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/quaritch077.pdf> I became aware of the catalogue and the manuscript thanks to Nick McBurney’s social media thread here: [https://twitter.com/mcburney\\_nick/status/1258806638707908611](https://twitter.com/mcburney_nick/status/1258806638707908611)



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Turc 186

1a Ownership note by Pierre Armani and ownership mark by Gilbert Gaulmin

through his local agents, from the Ottoman capital and other cities in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>24</sup>

Is this manuscript, which appeared in the royal library in the first half of the eighteenth century and was eventually cataloged as BnF Turc 186, one of those items purchased in Ottoman localities, either by du Ryer or Gaulmin (or their associates)? Or did the volume find its way to the private collections of seventeenth-century French orientalists after it was forcefully taken somewhere in the Mediterranean from some Ottomans *en route* sometime around the late sixteenth century? Any interpretation would be purely conjectural in the absence of conclusive evidence, but the manuscript’s shabbiness, manifest in its poor binding, torn folios, and erratic contents, makes it a less likely candidate for desirability in the book market.

24 For Gaulmin and his manuscripts, see Babinski, “World Literature in Practice”, esp. 82–90.

Bnf Turc 186 consists of 28 folios, with some written content on all pages but 23b. These contents constitute nothing in the way of textual unity, nor is the type of handwriting the same throughout the codex. Nevertheless, there is still a thematic harmony in the volume that brings together texts, charts, and fragments about cognate interests and practical needs: calendar conversion and timekeeping, a perpetual calendar with weather prognostications, different divinatory techniques to seek guidance in a range of occasions from predicting the victorious party in a battle to finding out the fortunes of a missing person, and invocations to divine powers and prayers to recite to ward off the perils of sailing. While different textual communities might have had recourse to these samples of texts, their specific relevance to, and practical use for, people on board ships is beyond any doubt. Some folios also include scattered personal notes that relate specific details regarding the phases of the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 or that precisely record the birth and death dates of several people between 1573 and 1585.

The first coherent textual body in the volume is a set of calendar conversion tables running across eight pages from 1b to 5a. These tables display the months and years, both in the lunar-based Muslim calendar (*ta'riḫ al-'Arab*, as expressed in the text) and the solar-based Byzantine or Syrian calendar (*ta'riḫ al-Rūm* in the text) which counts the years according to the Seleucid era often misnamed after Alexander the Great.<sup>25</sup> The earliest of the years listed in the tables are the Hijri year 964 (1556–7 in the Gregorian calendar by modern computation) and its corresponding Syrian year of 1869. The latest entries of the tables are the Hijri year 1001 (1592–3 in the Gregorian calendar) and the Syrian year 1906. The *abjad* letters inserted directly below each month in the Hijri calendar part of the table serve to identify the first day of the month. For instance, the letter د —with the numerical value of 4—under Muharram of 964 means that the first day of the month in that year would be Wednesday (*yawm al-arba'ā'* or *ṣebārṣenbih*, literally, “the fourth day”). Aside from tabulating days, months, and years, these tables also note, again in *abjad* letters, the particular degree at which the Sun enters a Zodiac constellation at the beginning of each month (*taḥwīl al-shams*).

The level of technicality in accurately prefiguring the first day of each month

25 For the exact nomenclature of calendars and eras used in the pre-modern Muslim world, see *EP*, s.v. “Ta’riḫ” (F. C. De Blois, B. Van Dalen, et al.).

and precisely calculating the degrees of solar movement vis-à-vis Zodiac constellations requires some familiarity with practical astronomical and mathematical knowledge with which some sailors or secretaries were equipped. The above-mentioned Seydi Ali Reis, for instance, is known to have penned several treatises on astronomical theory and practice. During his sojourn in India, he was even asked by the Mughal ruler Humayun (r. 1530–40; 1555–6) to teach him to prepare almanacs by drawing on the data in astronomical tables (*zîjes*).<sup>26</sup> Regarding the celestial and calendrical interests of the Ottoman scribal class, manuscript libraries brim with evidence. Another *majmû'a* from the BnF, compiled by an Ottoman secretary in the imperial chancery in the 1530s, for instance, contains detailed information about the calculation of days, both in lunar and solar calendars, by relying on the knowledge of celestial spheres (*felekiyât ahvâli beyânında*).<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the sixteenth-century miscellany at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, which Cornell Fleischer introduced in an inspiring article focusing on the dream logs and other bureaucratic and self-help notes of Ottoman secretaries in the tome, is also rich in technical astrological contents and horoscope calculations.<sup>28</sup> What is more, one of the noteworthy compendia on calendar conversion available to Ottoman readers in the late sixteenth century was written by a finance bureaucrat (*defteri*) named Seyfullah Çelebi (d. 1606).<sup>29</sup> In all these regards, it would be hardly surprising if a sailor or a secretary had inserted the calendar conversion tables in the opening folios of BnF Turc 186. Nevertheless, no colophon or marginal note is found besides those tables that could help identify the copyist.

The particular attention the compilers of the volume show to precise dating and calendrical matters is also discernible in other parts of the tome. Besides the conversion tables on pages 1a–5b, there are similar sections of the text that ei-

26 Seydî Ali Reis, *Mir'âtü'l-memâlik*, ed. Kiremit, 109.

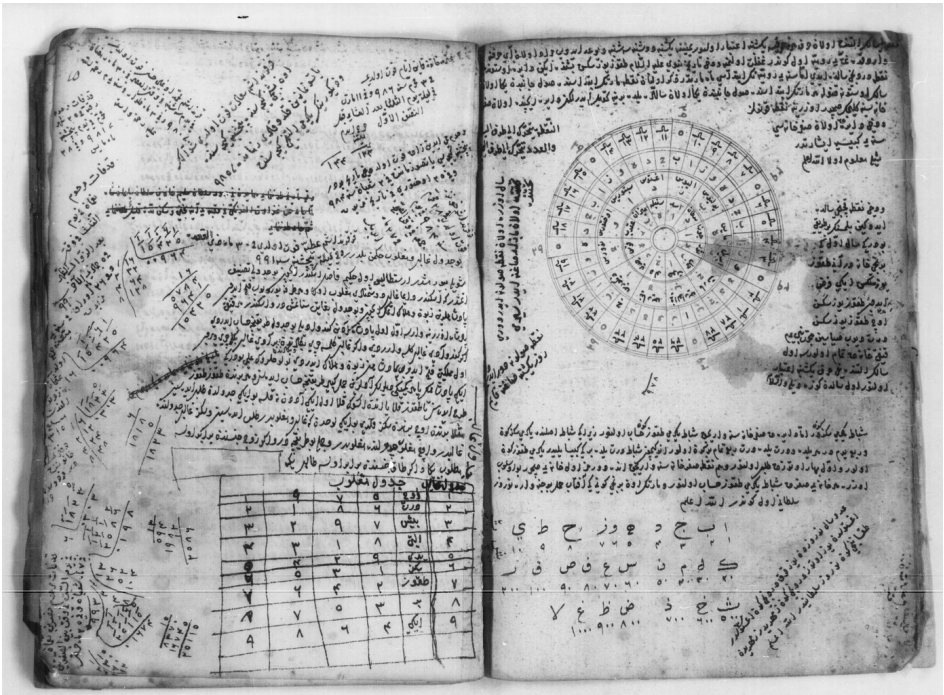
27 BnF Turc 41, 36b.

28 C. H. Fleischer, "Secretaries' Dreams: Augury and Angst in Ottoman Scribal Service", in I. Baldauf and S. Faroqi (eds), *Armağan: Festschrift für Andreas Tietze* (Prag 1994), 77–88. Although Fleischer tends to think that the specific manuscripts he explores in his article were acquired by the Medicis in the sixteenth century from the environs of the Topkapı Palace, this particular *majmû'a* (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Or. 116) seems like a strong candidate for being one of those early modern manuscripts in motion seized forcefully from traveling Ottomans and later reaching the private collections of European dignitaries.

29 SK Hacı Mahmud Efendi 6344, 85–88b, also cited in B. H. Küçük, *Science without Leisure: Practical Naturalism in Istanbul, 1660–1772* (Pittsburgh 2020), 135.

ther offer methods useful for calendar computation or present specific samples of dating according to different calendar systems. The first of these is found on 9a–9b, which pertains to calculating the first day of the new year (*Nevrūz*) in the Jalali calendar. The same folio also includes scattered notes on the birth date of various individuals. The earliest of these dates is about a certain Derviş Çelebi, who was born in December 1576 as the son of one Rüstem Bey, and the latest record is about another, unnamed son of (presumably the same) Rüstem Bey who came into the world in December 1584. The precision in the marking of time should be noted here, for the note-taker writes not just the day, month, and year of the event in both Hijri and Syrian calendars, but also mentions the hour of it with as much exactitude as possible, sometimes even with specific reference to astral markings. For instance, the note on Derviş Çelebi reads that he was born before sunrise (*qabl ṭulū' al-fajr*) on the night of Wednesday, Şevval the 5<sup>th</sup> (and *Zikūris* the 26<sup>th</sup>) of the year 984, corresponding to December 26, 1576. And the note on 'Aisha, the daughter of a certain 'Abdī, registers that on February 27, 1582 (3 *Şafer* 990 and 27 *Filvār[is]*) she was born at daybreak during the (auspicious) hour of the planet Mars (*fī waqt 'ind ṭulū' al-shams fī sā'at Merrīḥ*).

The notes on 9a about the birth dates of individuals continue on page 10a with entries on the death dates of different people. The total number of notes on deceased parties is nine, and its temporal range spans a dozen years from 1573 to 1585. One crucial difference in the notes on birth from those on death is the personal references in some of the entries in the latter. Three of the nine records are about the sisters of the note-taker(s): Hünze (died in April 1576), Sa'ādet (d. December 1577), and 'Atiyye (d. December 1583). No additional information is given, unfortunately, as to the ages of the deceased sisters. There are two more personal records, one about the note-taker's brother, Muḥammed b. Ḥasan, who passed away in February 1573, and the other about his mother-in-law, Muḥtereme Ḥātūn, who passed away in March 1578. The precision in dating the birth records is also visible in at least some of these death records. Sa'ādet, for instance, is said to have passed away while performing her night prayer (*yātsū namāzın kıldıqları zamānda*). Otherwise, neither the birth nor death records reveal particular locations or occasions. The handwriting in these records also shows noticeable dissimilarities, which suggest that they might have been jotted down by different hands at slightly separate times, implying a collective use of the scrapbook.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Turc 186

10a Entries on the death dates of several individuals; the divination method attributed to Aristotle to predict the outcome of a battle

The other textual units in the volume related to time reckoning involve a copy of a perpetual calendar known as the *Ruzname* of Şeyh Vefa (d. 1491). The longest individual treatise in the *majmū'a*, it comprises around one-third (10b–19a) of the entire volume, with possibly-related portions and fragments from the text inserted on pages 19b–20a and 21a–22a. The *Ruzname* of Şeyh Vefa corpus, including commentaries and texts attributed (and misattributed) to the author, stands as one of the most popular genres of early modern Ottoman literary culture. Combining calendrical tables with weather prognostications and other practical suggestions derived from astrological lore, the *Ruznames* offered their readers simple methods to calculate the first day of each month and particularly that of the new solar year (*Nevrûz-ı sulṭānî*)—which is essential to identify as it marks the beginning of the campaign season, among other things—to convert dates across Hijri and Syrian calendars, and to navigate their own temporal rhythm through monthly and seasonal ad-



vice about the weather, health, crops, or travel. It is difficult to establish the full textual archaeology and figures of the entire corpus, especially given the varying contents in different *Ruzname* copies. Some of these copies include prayer tables or detailed diagrams showing the position of the moon on the Zodiac, and many of them are housed in miscellaneous *majmū'as* waiting for researchers to save them from obscurity. It can be said with a reasonable certainty that the corpus has survived in hundreds if not thousands of manuscripts dispersed all around the globe. Today, one can easily locate a copy of it in any library with a decent oriental manuscript collection. The Bibliothèque nationale de France, for instance, houses at least five copies, including BnF Turc 186, that David King perused in some of his studies.<sup>30</sup> The exact number in the BnF is most likely greater. The popularity of the *Ruzname* even spilled into Europe at the time. A physician-scholar from seventeenth-century Augsburg, Georg Hieronymus Welsch (d. 1677), published a facsimile of a copy of the text with an extensive Latin commentary.<sup>31</sup>

The *Rūznāme* has often been attributed to Şeyh Vefa, a celebrated mystic and the founder of the Vefaiyye branch of the Zeyniyye order close to the royal circles of Sultan Mehmed II and his son Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512). The standard biographical and hagiographical accounts from the sixteenth century attest to Şeyh Vefa's gift in mathematical sciences, especially in the art of crafting magic squares (*vefk*).<sup>32</sup> However, some other contemporary sources, such as Aşık Çelebi's (d. 1572) *Meşar'ir*, dispute his authorship of the *Ruzname* and say instead that the text was compiled in fact by a certain Mehmed Çelebi, a high-ranking judge from the Balkan lands of the empire.<sup>33</sup> In certain copies of the *Ruzname*, additional biographical information is presented about Şeyh Vefa and the particular occasions leading to the composition of the text. It is worth noting here

30 D. King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens: Studies in Astronomical Timekeeping and Instrumentation in Medieval Islamic Civilization, Volume I: The Call of the Muezzin* (Leiden – Boston 2004), 440–443.

31 Georg Hieronymus Welsch, *Commentarius in Ruzname Naurus: Sive Tabulae Aequinoctiales Novi Persarum & Turcarum Anni. Nunc Primum Editæ à bibliotheca Georgii Hieronymi Velschii cujus accedit dissertatio, de earundem usu* (Augustæ Vindelicorum 1676).

32 *TDVİA*, s.v. “Muslihuddin Mustafa” (R. Öngören) accessed via <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/muslihuddin-mustafa> For the methods and purposes of constructing *vefk*, see EI, s.v. “Wafk” (J. Sesiano).

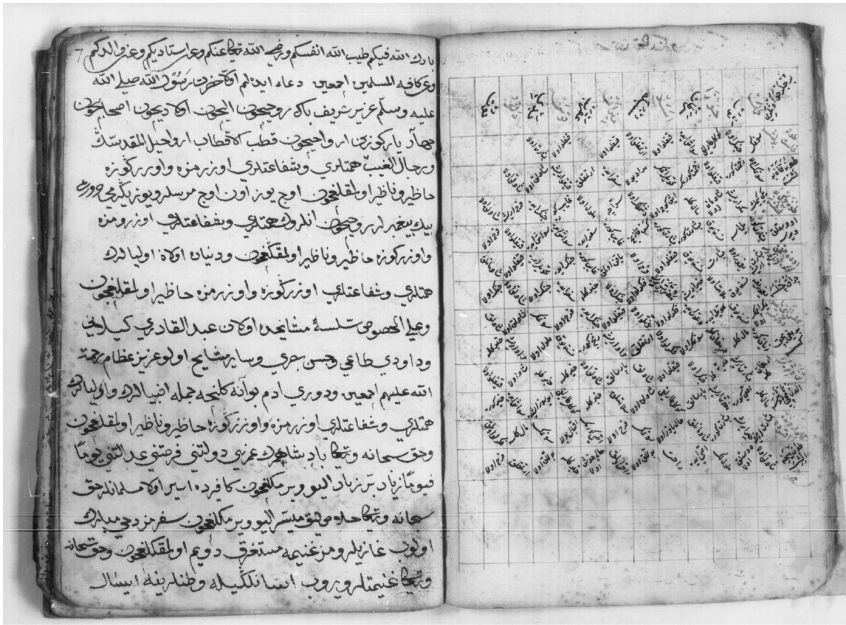
33 F. Kılıç, “Meşar'irü'ş-Şu'ara: İnceleme, Tenkitli Metin”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Gazi University, 1994, 626.

that in these additional descriptions, Şeyh Vefa is characterized as compiling the text while being held captive at the fortress of Rhodes by Christian corsairs who had captured him in the Mediterranean on his pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of the historical veracity of the description, the anecdote captures well that texts like *Ruznames* had specific relevance to the social milieu of travelers, pilgrims, or captives, who had an even greater need for instruction in keeping accurate track of days, months, and weather conditions in the absence of readily-available tools and means.

One might object here that the argument is stretched to ascribe BnF Turc 186's ownership to such a specific social group. It is true that the use of texts about time measurement was not the monopoly of seafarers. Nevertheless, certain pages in the volume contain textual fragments definitively documenting that they were penned by Ottoman travelers at sea. For instance, folio 7a and 7b contains a lengthy invocation to God, prophet Muhammad and his companions, the four rightly-guided caliphs, the 313 messengers and 124,000 prophets, saintly figures, including specifically 'Abd al-Qadir Gīlānī (d. 1166), Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), and Davud al-Ta'i (d. ca 781), and other "men of the unseen [world]" (*ricālül-ğayb*). At first sight this detail may seem negligible; such litanies appear abundantly in many manuscripts and miscellanies. The invocation, however, goes into specific detail and declares that the request is made for the victory of his fellow sea warriors against "infidels," the protection of their overcrowded ship from afflictions, and the emancipation of Muslim captives held by Christians. Orthographic inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the writing of certain Arabic words and Turkish suffixes suggest that the person in question comes from non-scholastic circles, likely a convert or another latecomer to learning Turkish and Arabic script, who had the habit of adding unnecessary vowels to vocalize words.<sup>35</sup> In any case, the passage is a precious instance of

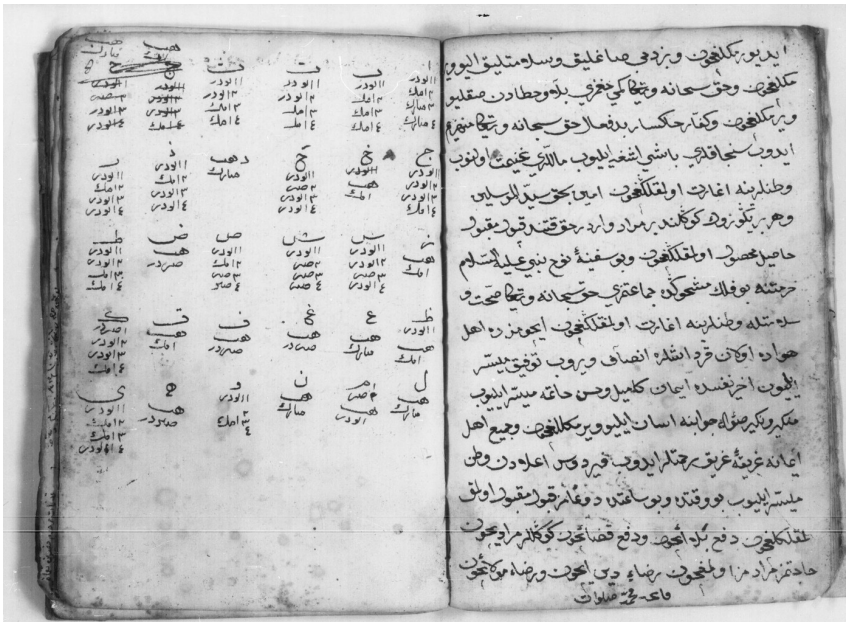
34 King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens*, 442.

35 Due to the challenges of adapting the vowel-poor Arabic alphabet to the spelling of vowel-rich Turkish words, such orthographic inconsistencies were relatively typical for various registers of early modern Ottoman literary culture. Still, new studies on the orthographic preferences of different social groups, especially those who learned Turkish and Arabic script later in their lives, such as converts, Devshirme boys, captives, corsairs, slaves, etc., might offer intriguing perspectives regarding the historical development of written and spoken (Ottoman) Turkish. For a useful study on the complexities of (Ottoman) Turkish orthography, see J. Schmidt, "How to write Turkish? The Vagaries of the Arabo-Persian Script in Ottoman-Turkish Texts", in D. Bondarev, A. Gori and L. Souag (eds), *Creating*



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Turc 186

7a First page of the invocation by a sailor to God and hidden saints



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Turc 186

7b Second page of the invocation by a sailor to God and hidden saints

first-hand, personal use of supplication to spiritual and supernatural forces in coping with the perils of sailing and fighting on board ship. It thus deserves to be quoted here in full in original before I move to its translation and interpretation (the parts in bold are my emphases):

بارک الله فيکم طيب الله انفسکم ورضى الله تعالى عنکم و عن  
استادیکم [sic] وعن والدکم وعن كافة المسلمين اجمعين

*Du'ā idelüm evvelā hazret-i resülullah şaliyallahu 'aleyhi vesselam [sic] 'aziz şerif pak (باک) rūhi-içün (روحجون) āli-içün (اليجون) evlādi-içün (اولاديچون) aşhābı-içün (اصحابيچون) çehāryār-güzün ervāhi-içün (ارواحجون) kuşbu'l-aķāb ervāhıyl[a]? el-muķaddesin ve ricālū'l-ğayb himmetleri ve şefā'atleri üzerimize (اوزرمزه) ve üzeriñüze (اوزركوزه) hāzır [sic] ve nāzır [sic] olmaklığı-içün (ولمقلنجون) üç yüz on üç mürseller ve yüz yigirmi dört bin peygamberler rūhi-içün (روحجون) anlaruñ (انلروک) himmetleri ve şefā'atleri üzerimize (اوزرومزه) ve üzeriñüze (اوزركوزه) hāzır [sic] ve nāzır [sic] olmaklığı-içün (ولمقلنجون) ve dünyāda olan evliyālaruñ himmetleri ve şefā'atleri üzeriñüze (اوزركوزه) ve üzerimize (اوزرمزه) hāzır [sic] olmaklığı-içün ve 'ale'l-huşuş silsile-i meşāyihde olan 'Abdülkādir [sic] Geylānī ve Dāvudī [sic] Tā'ī ve Hasan Başrī ve sā'ir meşāyih [sic] ulu 'aziz-i 'izām rahmetullah 'aleyhim ecma'ın ve devr-i (دوری) Ādem bu āna gelince cümle enbiyālaruñ ve evliyālaruñ himmetleri ve şefā'atleri üzerimize (اوزرمزه) ve üzeriñüze (اوزركوزه) hāzır [sic] ve nāzır [sic] olmaklığı-içün ve haķ sübhānehu ve te'ālā pādīşāhımızuñ 'ömrünü devletini fırsatını 'adāletini yevmen fe-yevmen ziyād-ber-ziyād eyleyüvirmeklığı-içün (اليويورمكلنجون) kāfirde [sic] esir ola[n] müslümānlar[a] haķ sübhānehu ve te'ālā hālāşlīķ [sic] müyesser eyleyüvirmeklığı-içün (اليويورمكلنجون) seferimiz daħt mübārek olub ġāzilerümüz ġānime [sic] müstağrak doyum (دويم) olmaklığı-içün (ولمقلنجون) ve haķ sübhānehu ve te'ālā ġānımetler virüb āsānlık [sic] ile vaţanlarına tsāl idivirmeklığı-içün ve biz daħt sađlık (صاعليق) ve selāmetlīķ [sic] eyleyüvirmeklığı-içün (اليويورمكلنجون) ve haķ sübhānehu ve te'ālā gemiciğimizi belā ve haţādan şaklayuvirmeklığı-içün ve küffār-ı hāksār-ı [sic] bed-fi'āl[ı] haķ sübhānehu ve te'ālā münhezim [sic] idüb sancāķları başı aşığa eyleyüb malları ġānımet olunub vaţanlarına iğāre (اغارت) olmaklığı-içün (ولمقلنجون) Āmīn bi-haķķ-ı seyid el-mürselin ve her biriñüzüñ gönliñd[e] bir medār vardır haķ katund[a] kabül-ı maķbül hāşıl-ı [sic] maħşül olmaklığı-içün ve bu sefineyi (سفينه) Nūh nebī 'aleyhisselām hürmetine bu fülk-i meşhūnda [sic] cemā'atimizi haķ sübhānehu ve te'ālā şıhhat ve selāmetle vaţanlarına iğāre olmak-*

*lği-içün içimizde ehl-i hevâda olan qardâşlara inşâf virüb tevftk müyesser eyleyüb âhîr nefesinde ĩmân-ı kâmil [sic] ve hüsni-hâtime [sic] müyesser eyleyüb Münkîr [sic] ve Nekîr [sic] şu 'âl [sic] cevâbına âsân eyleyüvirmekliđi-içün ve cemî'-i ehl-i ĩmâna ğarîka-i ğarîk [sic] rahmetler idüib Fırdevs-i [sic] a'lâdan vağan müyesser eyleyüb bu vaktde ve bu sâ'atde donanmamız qabül-ı maqbül olmaklıđı-içün (اولمقلكلنجون) def'-i belâ için ve def'-i kazâ için göñüller murâdı-içün hâcetimiz murâdımız olmađı-içün rızâ '-yı dîn için ve rızâ '-yı mevlâ için fâtiha Muħammed şalavât''*



God bless you, may God bless you with beauty, may God be pleased with you, with your master, with your father, and with all the Muslims.

Let us pray first in the name of Prophet Muhammad, the noble and pure spirit of the messenger of God (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him), of his family and children, of his companions, of the spirits of the four rightly guided caliphs. [Let us pray] for the sacred spirits of the pole of the poles and men of the hidden world to bestow upon us and upon you their help and grace. [Let us pray] for the spirit of the 313 messengers and 124,000 prophets to confer on us and on you their aid and favor. [Let us pray] for the chain of saints in the world, specifically Abd al-Qadir Gilani, Dawud al-Ta'i, Hasan al-Basri, and other venerable and noble holy men (may God have mercy upon all of them) to grant to us and to you their assistance. [Let us pray] that all the prophets and saints from the age of Adam till now bestow their aid and grace upon us and upon you. [Let us pray] that God prolongs the life of our sultan and enhances his fortunes and justice every day. [Let us pray] that God facilitates the release of the Muslims held as captives by the infidels. [Let us pray] that our campaign will be blessed, and our warriors will be inundated with spoils and booty. [Let us pray] that God grants them booty and facilitates their return to their homeland safe and sound. [Let us pray] that God helps us to remain in health and safety, protects our little ship from any calamity and mistake, destroys the despicable and ill-bred infidels, turns their flags upside down, and makes them return their homeland with their goods plundered. Amen to Prophet Muhammad, the master of the messengers! The heart of each one of you turns to a particular cause (as a desire). [Let us pray] that God allows each of you to attain it. [Let us pray] that God protects this ship for the sake of Prophet Noah and enables our companion in this overcrowded vessel to arrive in our homeland safe and sound. [Let us pray] that God shows mercy on those self-indulgent companions among us, provides them with divine guidance, and lets them take their final breath with impeccable faith toward a good end so that they can easily answer

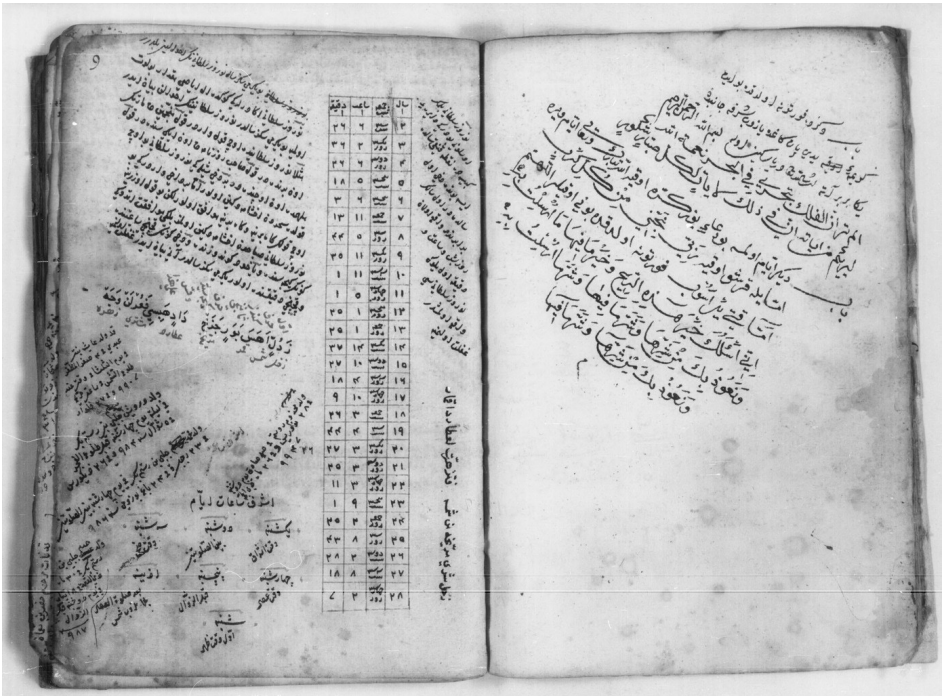
**the questions of the two angels, Munkar and Nakir [testing the faith of the dead].** [Let us pray] that God shows mercy upon all the believers and allocates each a place in his Heaven. **[Let us pray] that at this time and in this moment, our ship receives the favor [of God]. [Let us pray] for warding off trouble and calamity and for attaining our wishes and desires.** [Let us pray] for the blessing of religion and of God the protector.

What strikes the eye in the invocation, even from the very beginning, is the strong sense of collective “us” the note-taker has in addressing his fellows on board in a distinctly urgent manner. The invocation starts, after the brief Arabic prayer that is written in a second plural pronoun, with an open call to pray together in a way reminiscent of *oremus* (Latin “Let us pray”) in Christian liturgical prayer: “let us pray” (*du'ā idelüm*).<sup>36</sup> This collective “us” should not be confused with the royal we or the typical use of the first-person plural in Islamic belles lettres to disguise the real first-person singular self. Whoever jotted down this invocation had a clear identification with, and attachment to, his particular community sharing a similar destiny. The identity of this community is revealed soon after in the specific references in the invocation to “our campaign” (*seferimiz*), “our warriors” (*gâzîlerimiz*), “our little ship” (*gemiciğimiz*), “our company...in this overcrowded vessel” (*bu fülk-i meşhûnda...cemâ'atimiz*), or “our fleet” (*donanmamız*). The men at prayer are unmistakably a particular group of Ottoman seafarers sailing and fighting their enemies. It is by nature impossible to identify the exact historical occasion or establish the precise time when the note was inscribed, even whether during or before sailing. In any case, besides the frequent use of first-person plural pronouns that have a special significance in communicating the collective experience in its own present time, some of the specific words the note-taker uses literally capture the “moment” of those unnamed Ottoman individuals on board. As it reads toward the end of the invocation, the supplication is made “at this time and in this moment” (*bu vaktde ve bu sâ'atde*) to protect their fleet from calamities and let each of them attain their particular desires.

Page 8b offers another noteworthy example of prayers and invocations explicitly related to the experiences of people aboard ship, in the form of a list of ideal prayers one can resort to for an uneventful sailing experience. The prescribed prayers (written likely by the same hand that inscribed the above invo-

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36 I would like to thank Bill Walsh for bringing *oremus* to my attention.



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8b Notes on prayers to recite to ward off furious storm

ation) also involve a performative aspect, and readers are instructed to recite or write those prayers in specific manners. The first prayer addresses those occasions when there is a furious storm in the sea (*deñizde fortuna olduğda*). The given instruction is to write down a specific Qur’anic verse (31:31) on seven separate sheets of paper and to toss them into the sea, one by one, from the starboard side of the ship. Apparently, the copyist first wrote “recite” (*okuna*), but then crossed it out and revised it with “write down” (*yazub*). Unsurprisingly, the select Qur’anic verse for the occasion pertains to ships and sailing: *أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ الْفُلْكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِنِعْمَةِ اللَّهِ لِيُرِيَكُمْ مِّنْ آيَاتِهِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ* (“Do you not see that ships sail through the sea by the favor of Allah that He may show you of His signs? Indeed in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful”). The second prayer mentioned in the note also relates to the instances when constant cycles of wind become overwhelming. The recommended prayer to recite in those circumstances, at least 100 times, is not a Qur’anic verse but a simple petition (*رَبِّي نَجِّنِي مِنْ كُلِّ كَرْبٍ*): “My Lord, save me from every affliction”. The note

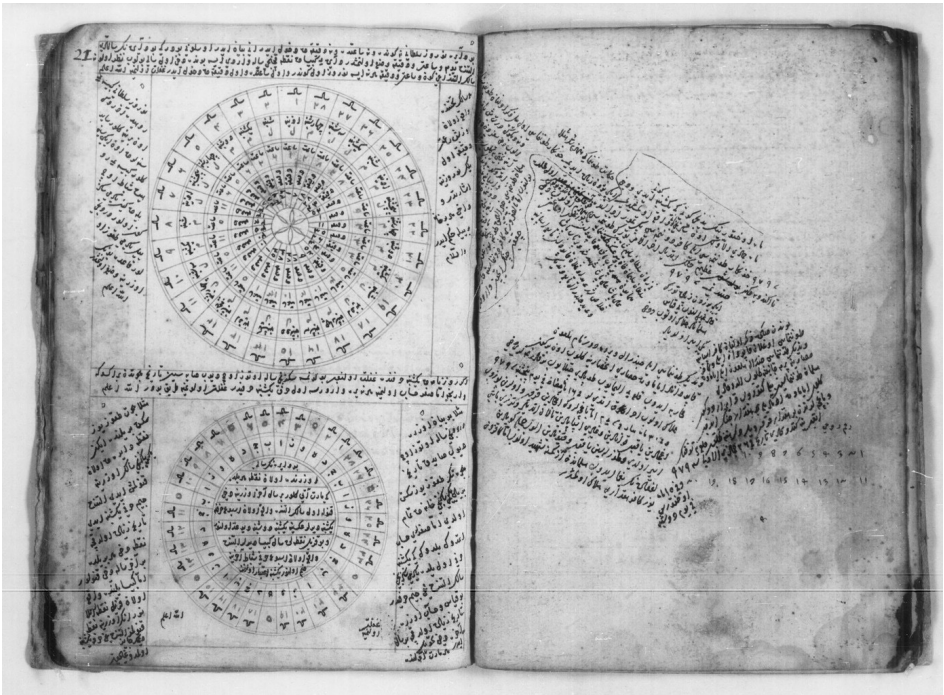
states, however, that the prayer should specifically be performed directly facing the wind. The third and final part of the note advises reciting the following prayer if the repeated cycles of wind turn into an endangering storm: **الْهُمَّ اِنِّي اَسْأَلُكَ خَيْرَ هَذِهِ الرِّيحِ وَخَيْرَ مَا فِيهَا وَمَا اُرْسَلَتْ بِهٖ وَنَعُوْذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّهَا وَشَرِّ مَا فِيهَا وَشَرِّ مَا اُرْسَلَتْ بِهٖ** (‘‘O God! I solicit from You the good for this wind and the good for all that is in this wind and the good it was sent with, and we take refuge in You from the evil of it and from the evil of all that is in it and the evil it was sent with [and we take refuge in you from the evil of it and the evil of all that is in it]’’). All these three suggested prayers hardly require an interpretation; they point, without a doubt, to a particular milieu comprising seafarers who need practical spiritual assistance in a life-and-death situation.

BnF Turc 186 contains other samples of texts that seem to substantiate the claim that the tome might once have been at the hands of Ottoman subjects involved in a naval venture. An instance of this is the lengthy note on page 20b that was inserted into the different parts of the page as detached fragments. When read together, they coalesce to form a brief narrative of the Battle of Lepanto and its immediate aftermath. The precise details presented in the note on the names or monikers of certain commanders in the Holy League’s fleet and on specific dates and locations of confrontations suggest that the person who wrote it down had inside knowledge of the narrated incidents, either through his own involvement or via personal acquaintances. Unlike the invocations or prescribed prayers mentioned above that allude to, if not decisively identify, the sentimental dynamics of a particular Ottoman social group on board, this note is written in a nonchalant manner, simply narrating events without using emotionally loaded expressions. The only sentence written in bold on the page reveals what the text is all about: the story of the [Ottoman] navy that was crushed [at the Battle of Lepanto] (*hikāyet-i donanma ki münhezim şod*).<sup>37</sup> It then moves to provide details that on Monday, October the 7<sup>th</sup>, corresponding to the 18<sup>th</sup> of Cemaziyülevvel (*māh-i Uḥturisīn 7. günü ki Yekşenbih günü idi ve dahī māh-ı Cemāziyülevvelin 18. günü*), the Ottoman imperial navy confronted the Holy League fleet (*kāfir donanması*) close to the island of Bektömür/Beydemir (پک تمور) around mid-morning.<sup>38</sup> Two fleets fought one another un-

37 Since I only had the opportunity to work on the black-and-white reproduction of the manuscript made freely available on the BnF website (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10082401s>), the part I see as bold might be in red or another color in the original.

38 I was not able to identify what the *Bektömür/Beydemir adası* refers to today. The name ap-





Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Turc 186

20b Note on the Battle of Lepanto

til mid-afternoon, and eventually, the Ottoman forces (*Türk donanması*) were defeated and crushed (*münhezim olub dahî şındı*).

The note reports that around 200 Ottoman galleys were seized, and numerous Muslims were killed, including the Grand Admiral Ali Pasha. The commander-in-chief of the expedition (*ser'asker-i donanma-yı hümayün*) Pertev Pasha (d. 1572) (written as *Pertāb* in the text) was caught by Don John of Austria (d. 1578), *Oğlan Kāpūdān* in the text (“the Boy Admiral,” who was 24), captain-general of the Holy League’s fleet in the service of the King of Spain (*tābi'-'i İspanya*) and by *Cendrāl* (جندرال) serving the Republic of Venice (*tābi'-'i Venedik*), possibly Gianandrea Doria (d. 1606).<sup>39</sup> The Spanish and

pears in the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi, who mentions that it was a deserted island, a mile away from the shores of Lepanto and only inhabited by goats in winters. See S. A. Kahraman, Y. Dağlı and R. Dankoff (eds), *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. 8 (Istanbul 2003), 275.

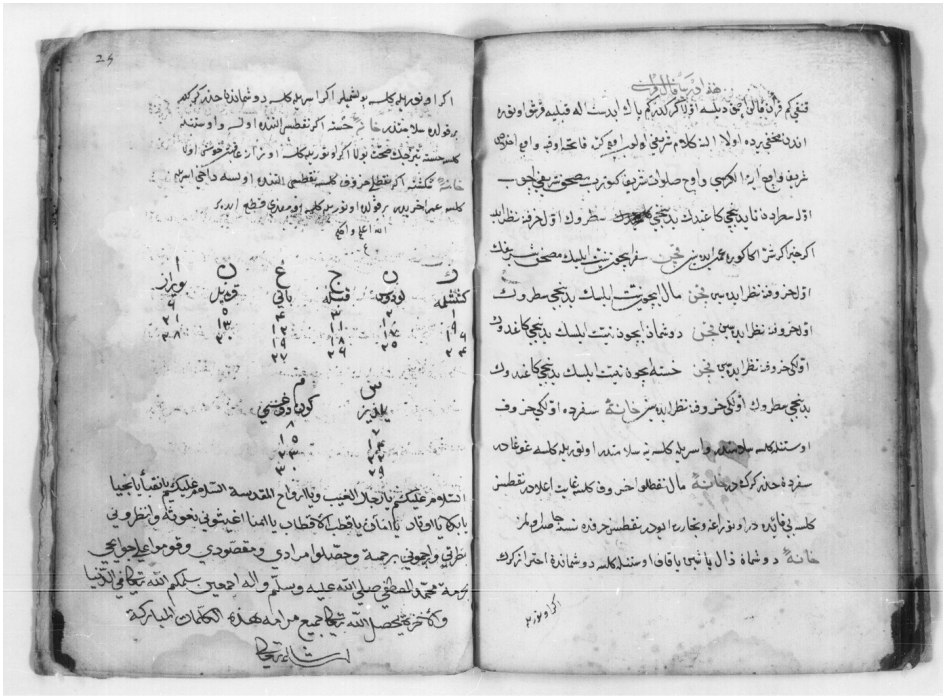
39 One wonders if he’s accidentally calling Sebastiano Venier (d. 1578), commander of the Venetian contingent, by Gianandrea Doria’s name.

Venetian troops of the Holy League led by the *Oğlan Kāpūdān* and *Cendrāl* later reached, as the note says, the shores of Lefkas (*Ayā Māvra*) along with the galleys they seized from the Ottomans. Here, the use of “*gelüb*” (“came [to]”) instead of another verb, begs the question as to whether the note-taker was at the time a resident of Lefkas, an island in Ottoman possession that was at the time a base for Muslim corsairs.<sup>40</sup> As to the possible Lefkadian connection of the note-taker, the volume offers an additional clue on page 20a. A fragment of a chancery register dated February 27, 1572, records on this page the expenses of repairing the fortress of the island (*defter-i icmāl-i binā-yı kal'e-yi Ayāmāvra vaka'ā fi 12 Şevvāl... 979*). Returning to the note on page 20b, we read that some fighting took place on Lefkas between the allied forces of the Holy League and local Ottoman forces protecting the fortress. Although the Holy League troops damaged some agricultural lands and ruined the fortress with their arquebus fire, they had to retreat temporarily on Tuesday, October the 15<sup>th</sup> (*fi 15 mäh-i Uhturis fi yevm-i duşenbih*). A few months later, according to the narrative, Venetian forces under the command of *Cendrāl* and *Pervedor* (پروہ دور) besieged the fortress of Lefkas again.<sup>41</sup> The siege continued for eleven days to no avail. Some of their cannons were cracked, and one of their galleys was set on fire on Thursday, January the 30<sup>th</sup> (*fi 16 Ramažān fi yevm pençsenbih sene 979 ve fi 30 mäh-i Yenāris*). Still, they ruined many trees in the cultivated lands, damaged several houses, and looted the hives and other belongings of the inhabitants. The salt mine was destructed, and the villagers' herds of sheep flocks were plundered. While only a few Muslim residents of the island were eventually killed, around 100 non-Muslim inhabitants (*kāfir den yüz kāfir miğdārı*) perished during the siege.

Though not explicitly related to the Battle of Lepanto and its human toll, there are additional textual materials in the manuscript, largely divinatory in content, that can be closely associated with war-related concerns and consequences. On page 10a, for instance, the method typically attributed to Aristo-

40 On the significance of Lefkas for the activities of Muslim corsairs, see N. Malcolm, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (London 2015), 171.

41 Although it is not clear whom exactly the note-taker means by “Pervedor,” it is likely that “Pervedor” was the *Provveditore d'Armata* (superintendent of the Venetian fleet) Marco Querini. I would like to thank Stefan Hanß for generously sharing his expert opinion about the term and possible names via personal communication.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Turc 186

24b–25a Divination by the Qur'an (on the right) and the table for the rijal al-ghayb (on the left)

tle and frequently found in Ottoman compilations of divinatory practices that aims at predicting the outcome of a battle is described in length with an additional easy-to-use table (*bu cedvel ġalib ve maġlûb hükmün bildirir*). The page, however, does not offer any signposts to link it with a concrete historical case. Moreover, on 24b–25a, specific instructions for performing divination by the Qur'an treat four separate inquiries. The inquiries exemplified in the instructions are related respectively to campaigns (*sefer için niyet eylesen*), receiving property/booty (*mâl*), encounters with the enemy (*düşman*), and the outcome of diseases (*hasta*). At the end of 25a is a tabular note that lists all the eight wind directions and adds three or four numbers underneath each. The southwest (*lodos*), for example, has 2-10-17-25 and the northwest (*karayel*) has 5-13-20. All numbers from 1 to 30 are distributed likewise to these eight directions, which overall suggests that the table had a particular function relating to the days of the month. The exact purpose of the table becomes apparent with the prayer

in Arabic inserted below the table that was arguably written by the same hand that inscribed the invocation on pages 7a–7b. Here, the prayer supplicates the aid of the “men of the unseen [world]” (*ricâlül-ğayb*) by referring specifically to the key figures in the hierarchy of hidden saints, ranging from the *quṭb al-aqtāb* (the pole of the poles) and *imāmān* (the imams) to the *evtād* ([four] pillars) and *budalā*. What the tabular note does, then, is point to the directions from which and days in each month on which the hidden saints would appear.

What, one must ask, is going on here? Why did Ottoman sailors need to know the times when and places where the men of the hidden world would appear? Originating in early Sufi circles to point to the hidden saints that were believed to offer aid to the inhabitants of the world, and eventually developed by Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240) in his doctrine of sainthood, the *rijāl al-ghayb* theory describes a hierarchy of spiritual beings led by the pole (*quṭb*) and divided into different ranks.<sup>42</sup> The names, numbers, and functions of the holders of each rank vary in different sources, but the doctrine as a whole found acceptance and was put into practical use within different social milieus beyond Sufi circles. In the eyes of some, it was a risk-management tool helping them make an informed decision about whether or not to fight or travel on certain days in specific directions. For instance, in the lore of astrology and other divinatory practices, one could come across instructions and diagrams to seek the aid of the *rijāl al-ghayb*. Another BnF *majmū'a* from the first half of the sixteenth century that contains at least three almanacs with prognostications (*taqwīm*) has an elegantly drawn diagram of the days and directions of the *rijāl al-ghayb* prefaced by a prayer similar to the one located in BnF Turc 183.<sup>43</sup> Besides the astrological and divinatory corpus, one finds references to the divination of *rijāl al-ghayb* in the writings of sailors or soldiers. In specific passages of his *Kitābu'l-muḥīt*, Seydi Ali Reis informs novice sailors (*mübtediler*) about the directions that the *rijāl al-ghayb* would appear in particular days of each month, referring explicitly to Ibn al-Arabi.<sup>44</sup> The same instructions and references to Ibn al-Arabi are also found in a text on military arts written by an unnamed Ottoman soldier

42 TDVİ, s.v. “Ricâlül-ğayb” (S. Uludağ), accessed via <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ricalu-ğayb> For the *rijāl al-ghayb* doctrine of Ibn al-Arabi, see M. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi* (Cambridge 1993), esp. 89–102.

43 BnF Turc 183, 35a.

44 SK Nuruosmaniye 2948, 67b–68a.

who fought in the Russo-Ottoman wars of 1735–1739.<sup>45</sup> The presence of *rijāl al-ghayb* doctrine and divination in texts written or appealed to by seafarers, combatants, and travelers illustrates how these early modern Ottoman subjects brought spiritual and supernatural conventions to bear on their earthly concerns and considerations.

## Conclusion

It remains a mystery who put together the manuscript in the first place and what phases it went through before it found its way into the BnF in the first half of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, there are adequate clues in the eccentric contents of this miscellaneous volume that enable us to imagine a community of Ottoman seafarers seeking refuge, through writing, in spiritual forces and supernatural methods during their fight for survival. It goes without saying that the possessor(s) of the volume took part in a naval conflict. Based on the specific note regarding the incidents during and after the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 and the chronological range of the entries on several pages about birth and death dates or calendar computation, it seems highly likely that this naval conflict was the Battle of Lepanto. In view of additional details in the volume that manifest the literacy of the note-takers in the Greek alphabet, their broken Turkish and Arabic, and their familiarity with the Greek names of months in the solar calendar and introducing prayers with an Ottoman-language *oremus*, they were perhaps Greek-speaking Christian converts to Islam blending different types of knowledge and elements of faith at the frontiers of warfare.

The distinctive stories and historical possibilities offered by this single surviving manuscript indicate the importance of the microscopic approach to individual textual artifacts, though it is certain that not every single textual item (be it a letter, treatise, poem, or something else) will be a promising window on broader historical and historiographical questions. One must also bear in mind justified concerns about whether single, solitary examples can represent a larger and more complicated whole. Sometimes, however, a deep dive into the contents of a single volume, extracting the “exceptionally normal” elements in

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45 H. Söylemez, “Mukaddimetü’s-Sefer (1736–1739 Seferi Hakkında Bir Eser): Metin-Değerlendirme”, unpublished M.A. thesis, Marmara University, 2007, 39–43. It is worth noting that the text cites historical examples from the Ottoman past, such as the Battle of Mohács in 1526, where he says the Ottoman forces deployed the method.

its details, and juxtaposing them with other relevant textual materials produced by or circulated among individuals from similar social milieus offers invaluable insights into recognizing and reconstructing the cultural, mental, and emotional world of the historical actors in their own complexity.

BnF Turc 186 proves to be a powerful window for describing and even capturing particular “moments” of obscure Ottoman individuals when they took recourse to strategies, mostly divinatory in nature, to cope with the particular perils of those moments. We are fortunate to have here the textual traces of the actual recourse itself; thereby, we observe them creating texts to record different forms of divination for managing risks and treating immediate or foreseeable pragmatic concerns. It is true that the medieval and early modern Muslim past, including the Ottoman world, abounds with treatises and manuals on different divinatory practices. Nevertheless, by the very nature of their genre-specific qualities, these texts often fall short in revealing how they were put into actual use by real historical actors in various situations. When more texts and manuscript fragments like BnF Turc 186 are discovered, we will be able to address with greater nuance questions about early modern Ottomans’ textual and mental relations to faith and fate.