

A Juxtaposition of Happiness and Sadness on the Same Page

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Context

Manuscript notes such as birth and death records, meaning writings unrelated to the main text, are frequently encountered in oriental manuscripts. An inventory of these manuscript notes would be useful for conducting a systematic study of these records, but such an inventory does not currently exist. Despite this, the notes found in manuscripts are significant as they provide insight into various stories, events, and connections.

One example of such a text is in the *Tuḥfetu'l-Küttāb*, an eighteenth-century book of legal documents on Islamic Law, by Mūsāzāde 'Ubeydullāh Efendi (d. 1782-83). The manuscript is now housed in the Leiden University Library (Cod. Or. 12.032).¹ In the book, there are birth and death records dating from 1860 and 1862 which demonstrate how happiness and sadness can be found on the same page.²

Those notes were written by Meḥmed Emīn Bey, the owner of the book in the nineteenth century. Emīn Bey was the regent of the town of Küre-i Nuḥās/Küretu'n-Nuḥās in the sanjak of Kaşamonu in the 1860s. In his seal in the Ottoman archival documents, he is referred to as al-Sayyid, the lineage of which goes back to Prophet Muḥammad.³

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¹ For more information about the manuscript, see Jan Schmidt, *Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in the Library of Leiden University and Other Collections in the Netherlands: Comprising the Acquisitions of Turkish Manuscripts in Leiden University Library between 1970 and 2003*, v. 2 (Leiden: Leiden University Library, 2002), pp. 683-685.

² Leiden University Library, Special Collection, Cod. Or. 12.032, p. 534.

³ His seal can be seen on a document related to the tender of a mine in Küre. See BOA, İ.MVL., 442/19642, no. 2, 25 Rebiülevvel 1277 [October 11, 1860]. The same seal appears on another document concerning the death of an individual. See BOA, MVL, 613/24, no. 2, 11 Zilkade 1277 [May 21, 1861].

On December 22, 1860, Meḥmed Emīn Bey's son was born at the family's home in Küre. Meḥmed Emīn Bey wrote the sentences in the book in black ink, expressing his happiness about the birth of his son. He says he named his son Muştafā 'Āşım. His excitement and hope are reflected in the prayers he wrote. Those joyous sentiments, however, were short-lived. As it is understood from the note below the birth record, Meḥmed Emīn Bey suffered the grief of losing his son, who died at the age of one on January 6, 1862. Moreover, he must have been reminded of a similar grief he had suffered before, as he noted saying that his other son, Meḥmed Rāsım, had passed away when he was six months old.

Meḥmed Emīn Bey recorded those accounts of deaths in red letters that were shaped like droplets, as if he were weeping tears of blood. It is not known how long he lived, nor what else he experienced after writing those lines. However, the book in which he recorded those moments of happiness and sadness in Küre in 1860s somehow made its way to Leiden in 1960s⁴ and thus carried his memories down to the present day.

Keywords: Ego-document, 19h Century, Meḥmed Emīn Bey, Küre-i Nuḥās, Birth and Death

Transcription

İşbu biñ iki yüz yetmiş yedi senesi şehr-i Cemāziyelāhire'niñ sekizinci yevm-i Cum'a sâ'at dokuzda Küretu'n-Nuḥās kaçabasında bir oğlumuz dünyāya gelüb ismi Muştafā 'Āşım tesmiye olunmuşdur. Allah 'azîmü'ş-şān hazretleri cemī' ümmet-i Muḥammed'iñ evlādıyla atvel 'ömr ile mu'ammer eyleyüb 'ulemā-i 'āmilīn ve aġniyā-i şākirīn ve ḥādīm-i şer-'i mübīnden eyleye, āmin, bi-ḥürmeti seyyidi'l-mürselin.

[...] *Meḥmed Emīn En-nāib bi-kaza-i Küretu'n-Nuḥās.*

Tārīḫ-i vefātı: Sene 1278 fi 5 Be (Receb)

⁴ Leiden University bought this manuscript from the Egyptian trader A. A. Fatatri in 1969. See Jan Schmidt, "Manuscripts and Their Function in Ottoman Culture; the Fatatri Collection in the Leiden University Library," *Journal of Turkish Studies = Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları*, 28/1 (2004), pp. 345-369.

Şehr-i mezbūruñ beşinci Bazar ertesi gicesi sā'at sekizi on beş dakika geçerken irtihāl-i dār-ı beķā itmişdir. Mevlam şefā'atine mazhar eyleye, āmin.

Bundan aķdem dahī altı aylık Meħmed Rāsım nāmında bir oğlumuz dahī irtihāl-i dār-ı beķā itmişdi. Mevlam şefā'atlerine mazhar eyleye, āmin.

Translation

At nine o'clock on Friday, the eighth day of Cemāziyelāħir in the year one thousand two hundred and seventy-seven, our son was born in the town of Kūre-i Nuħās. He was named Muşţafā 'Āşım. May Almighty Allah grant the children of the entire Ummah of Muħammad long lives. May He make my son from among scholars who act with their knowledge, from among the wealthy who are grateful, from among servants of Shari'a. Amen! May Allah accept my prayer for the sake of the chief of all prophets.

[...]

Meħmed Emīn, the regent of the town of Kūre-i Nuħās

Date of his death: The fifth of Receb in the year 1278.

On the fifth of the month of Receb, on Monday at a quarter past eight, he passed away.

May Allah grant us his intercession, amen.

Before this, our son Meħmed Rāsım had also passed away, dying at the age of six months.

May Allah grant us their intercessions, amen.

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