

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Ottoman Prayer Book (En'am-i Şerif)

Signed Ibrahim ... b. Mustafa

Ottoman Turkey, Second half of the 18th century

Paper illuminated with coloured inks and gold leaf, bound in tan Morocco leather.

16cm x 11.5cm

Stock no.: A5309

Provenance: French Private Collection

According to an inscription, taken by Count Louis Andrault de Langeron at the Siege of Izmail in 1790.

A richly-illuminated Ottoman prayerbook in its original Morocco binding, comprising a selection of surahs in the first half and a description of the Prophet in the second. There are 11 lines of *naskhi* calligraphy on each page, spread over 91 written folios with 5 additional blank folios.

Named after its opening surah, surah 6 (*Al-An'am*, or the Cattle), this prayerbook is an example of an *En'am-i Şerif* (lit. Noble *En'am*). The *En'am* was the most popular Ottoman prayer book of the late 18th century, and was used for memorising and reciting prayers.¹ Though the number of surahs varies between different copies of the *En'am*, the selection is generally chosen from a list of 30.² In the present example, Surah 1 (*Al-Fatihah*) and Surah 6 are followed by 10 more: *Ya-Sin* (36); *Ad-Dukhan* / the Smoke (44); *Al-Fath* / the Victory (48); *Ar-Rahman* / the Gracious (55); *Al-Waqi'ah* / the Inevitable (56); *Al-Mulk* / The Sovereignty (67); *An-Naba* / the Tidings (78); *Al-Ikhlās* / the Unity (112); *Al-Falaq* / the Dawn (113); and *An-Nas* / Mankind (114). These surahs are followed by prayers and invocations known as *du'a*.

The second half of the manuscript contains tables listing the 99 names of God and the 99 attributes of

the Prophet Muhammad. These tables are followed by *hilyeler*, or descriptions of the Prophet's physical form and moral character based on hadith accounts. The earliest *hilyeler* were written on single sheets of paper or parchment and carried as protective amulets.³ In the second half of the 17th century, the calligrapher Hafiz Osman included a *hilye* in an *En'am*, establishing the standard layout of a circle of calligraphy. It has been suggested that when the circles of calligraphy are laid out across a double page, as in the case of this *En'am*, the *hilye* looks like a pair of eyes. By gazing into these calligraphic eyes, the reader might be blessed with a vision of the Prophet.⁴

After the *hilyeler* follow the *ta'viz*, or illustrations of seals (*muhr*). These seals are said to have apotropaic powers, including the ability to ward off illness and the evil eye or to bring protection.⁵ Further apotropaic illustrations are included, with representations of the Prophet's relics (his footprint, his sword, his handprint), and his personal effects including his Qur'an, prayer beads, ewer, prayer mat, and comb. Interspersed throughout are illustrations of the tombs of the prophets, and of the pilgrimage sites of Mecca, including the Ka'ba, Medina, Damascus, Jerusalem, and the Tree of Paradise. Like the act of reading reciting the surahs in the first half, the illustrations in the second half of the *En'am* serve as a conduit for baraka, 'the spiritual energy which emanates from the Divine and which passes through saintly persons or objects'.⁶

The manuscript is signed and dated in reserve on gold, however the date is now illegible and the calligrapher's name only partly legible as Ibrahim ... b. Mustafa.

An inscription in French at the front of the prayer book reads:

'Ce livre de prières a été pris au siège d'Ismail par Monsieur de Langeron émigré français. Souwaroff écrivit à l'impératrice Catherine : Gloire à Dieu, louange à Catherine ! Ismail est à vos pieds. Vingt-quatre mille Turcs furent tués par les Russes dans cette place'.

'This prayer book was taken from the siege of Izmail by the French émigré Monsieur de Langeron. Souwaroff wrote to the Empress Catherine: Glory be to God! Praise be to Catherine! Izmail is in the palm of your hand. Twenty-four thousand Turks were killed by the Russians in this place.'

The inscription refers to the events of the Siege of Izmail in 1790, during the Russo-Turkish War (1787-1792) between Catherine the Great of Russia and Sultans Abdul Hamid I and latterly Selim III of Turkey. General Suvorov (referred to as Souwaroff in this note) was the Russian leader who allowed his troops to massacre the Muslim civilians of the Ukrainian Black Sea town of Izmail. Count Louis Alexandre Andrault de Langeron (Monsieur Langeron) was a French soldier who entered the Russian army due to his opposition of Napoleon. The signature below this French inscription is illegible, but it is clearly written by a different hand to the body of the text. It is possible that both inscription and signature were added by a descendant of Langeron.

On the page preceding the first illuminated double page, an inscription of a prayer by the Sufi philosopher Shihab al-Din ibn Habash al-Suhrawardi is dated 1773-74, suggesting that the manuscript was produced no later than this date.

A roughly contemporaneous Ottoman *En'am-ı Şerif* is held in the Sabancı Museum, Istanbul (object no. [101-0288-AE](#)). Dated to 1193 AH (1779-1780 CE), it was copied by the calligrapher Abdullah Edirnevi and illuminated by Hafiz Mehmed. Like the present example, there are 11 lines per page.

Following the collection of surahs, it also ends with the names of Muhammad and other prophets, and illustrations of Mecca and Medina. Other contemporaneous examples of *En'am-ı Şerif* include an eighteenth-century copy held in the Smithsonian Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C. (accession no. [F1906.304](#)) and a copy dated to c.1790 in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard (accession no. [1985.260](#)). Despite the similarities in the quality and nature of the illuminations, no other known example of the En'am features the same breadth of depictions of pilgrimage sites or tombs of the prophets.⁷

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

¹ Bain, Victoria. 'The late Ottoman En'am-ı Şerif: Sacred text and images in an Islamic prayer book' (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 1999), p. 1; Rettig, Simon. 'Rise of the En'am-ı Şerif: Investigating the Production of Selections of Suras in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire', *The Word Illuminated: Form and Function of Qur'anic Manuscripts* (1-3 December 2017).

² Dévényi, Kinga. 'Manuscripts of En'ām-ı serif in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences', *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic* 37. P. 12-13.

³ Bain. *Op. Cit.* p. 74.

⁴ Grüber, Christiane J. *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2010. pp. 131-133.

⁵ Bain. *Op. Cit.* pp. 78-92.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 132.

⁷ With thanks to Dr. R.M.A. Noor, John Hopkins University, for his insight.