

# The Daughter of Kelemen Bemoans Her Father

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## Context

The story we present here is taken from a miscellany (*mecmū'a*) kept in the manuscript collection of the University of Tübingen.<sup>1</sup> It consists of two parts: the first comprises poems of mystical content<sup>2</sup> and the second consists of poems written by Vaşfi from Nazilli (d. 1850).<sup>3</sup> Most of these poems are chronograms (*tārīḥ*), several entitled *güfte*.<sup>4</sup> It is not yet clear whether we are dealing with an autograph of Vaşfi. The poet was a member of the 'Uşşākīye, and given the nature of its content, the *mecmū'a* was obviously written in the circle of this mystical order. We also know that the manuscript once was in the possession of János Eckmann.

Our story, which is located among Vaşfi's poems, has part of its origins in the Koran; four of the suras mention that God gave the Prophet Shu'ayb the task of converting the people in the land of Madyan<sup>5</sup> to monotheism and imbuing them with ethical values.<sup>6</sup> However, Madyan's leaders resisted and Shu'ayb's life was spared only because he was a member of the same group. Because of this rejection, a divine judgment came upon the people, and after a horrific night, all but Shu'ayb and his followers lay dead in their homes. In suras 7 and 29 this catastrophe is an earthquake, in sura 11 a shriek/blast (الصيحة), and in sura 26 the "day of the shadow" (يوم الظلّة).<sup>7</sup> This last version is found in various Koran translations as "day of the black cloud", "day of gloom", "day of overshadowing gloom", "day of covering", and "day of canopy".<sup>8</sup>

At that time (this is now the folklore part of the story) there allegedly reigned in the land of Madyan six kings with the strange names: *Ebced*, *Hevvez*, *Huṭṭi*, *Kelemen*, *Sa'feş* and *Karaşet*. These names are mnemonics without meaning, made up from the ancient sequence of the letters of the Arabic alphabet – the same sequence as in the

<sup>1</sup> The manuscript comprises 48 folia; shelfmark Ma VII 178, DOI: 10.20345/digitue.8778.

<sup>2</sup> Fol. 1v-8r and fol. 9v-17v are poems from Niyāzī-yi Mıṣrī (d. 1694) and Şalāḥaddīn 'Uşşākī (d. 1783).

<sup>3</sup> Fol. 19r-46r; only two short prose texts are inserted into this second part (fol. 44r-v).

<sup>4</sup> These ca. 80 poems are currently being prepared for publication by the authors of this article.

<sup>5</sup> The biblical Midian on the Arabian Peninsula; see Harman, "Medyen", in *TDVİA*.

<sup>6</sup> Q 7:85-93, 11: 84-95, 26:177-189, 29:36-37.

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of these stories see Wansbrough 1977, 21-25.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=26&verse=189>.

Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets. In their above order they also correspond to the numerical values of the alphabet's letters. In Ottoman, this is a well-known mnemonic device for remembering the numerical values of letters when composing chronograms. This was because the original, ancient order of the alphabet had already fallen into oblivion by the time of the Ottomans, and meanwhile more letters had been included, forming the words *şehaz* und *zazağ*. Numerous stories emerged around the first six of these mnemonic words – stories that are completely unfounded and likely stem from the need to explain them and give them meaning. They are associated with the most beautiful names of God (*esmā`-i ħüsna*), Adam's banishment from Paradise, the primary elements, the names of six Shaitans, and finally the names of the kings of Madyan.<sup>9</sup>

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century the story is found in Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. 998) *Kitāb al-Fihrist* in the chapter on the origins of the Arabic script, with reference to an older source. As in all the sources we were able to locate, it comprises only a few lines. Al-Nadīm reports that Ebced, Hevvez, Ĥuṭṭī, Kelemen, Sa'feş and Ķaraşet were six men from a Bedouin tribe, who were the kings of Madyan and to whom we owe the Arabic alphabet. They were destroyed on the Day of the Shadow, and the sister (not as in our text the daughter!) of Kelemen (al-Nadīm: "Kalamūn") recited his elegy.<sup>10</sup> We also find the same story in Firūzābādī's (d. 1414) dictionary *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* under the entry *ابجد*.<sup>11</sup> In 1814 Seyyid Aḥmed 'Āşım, better known as Mütercim 'Āşım Efendi, translated this comprehensive work into Ottoman Turkish and presented it to Sultan Maḥmūd II. (r. 1808-1839), who issued a *fermān* for its immediate printing.<sup>12</sup> Mütercim 'Āşım's translation was apparently the template for the copyist of the story in our *mecmū'a*,<sup>13</sup> as there is no other way to understand the note "Oḳyānūs" at the end. Apart from a small transcription error the

<sup>9</sup> See Uzun, "Ebced", in *TDVİA*.

<sup>10</sup> Flügel (ed.), al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, p. 4; al-Nadim refers to Hişām al-Kalbī.

<sup>11</sup> [https://islamweb.net/ar/library/index.php?page=bookcontents&ID=198&bk\\_no=123&idfrom=1842&idto=1861](https://islamweb.net/ar/library/index.php?page=bookcontents&ID=198&bk_no=123&idfrom=1842&idto=1861). Visited 08-08-2023.

<sup>12</sup> See Kaçalın, "Mütercim Âşım Efendi", in *TDVİA*.

<sup>13</sup> Mütercim 'Āşım, *Al-Ūqiyānūs al-basīṭ fi tarġamat al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ wa-l-qābūs al-wasīṭ*, Cairo: Matbaa al-Kubra bi-Bulaq, 1834, vol. 1, p. 572 (digital catalog entry: <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC10145156>). Visited 08-08-2023.

elegy in Arabic is a literal copy: the story itself is faithfully rendered in terms of content, but in different words. It gives the impression that the writer read it and then reproduced it from memory.

Why he had the idea of including this short story among Vaşfi's poems is unclear – it is the only “foreign” insertion in this part of the manuscript and is not thematically related to its surroundings. However, the fact that it is found among chronograms and contains the *ebced*-mnemonics suggests a very pragmatic reason: the writer may simply have wished to check the numbers of the chronograms and looked up the entry “ebced” in his (or someone else's) dictionary *Okyānūs*.

## Transcription

*Beytun li-binti Kelemen*<sup>14</sup>

*Kalaman hudima ruknī                      hulkuhū waṣṭa l-maḥalla*

*Sayyidu l-qawmi atāhu                      l-ḥanfu*<sup>15</sup> *nāran waṣṭa zilla*

*Ğu 'ilat nārun 'alayhim                      dāruhum ka-l-muḍmaḥilla*

*Yevm-i zülle Şu 'ayb 'aleyhi s-selā[m] kavminüñ helāk oldığı gündür ki ol günde Ebced 1  
Hevvez 2 Huṭṭi 3 Kelemen 4 Sa feş 5 Karaşet 6 Medyen ülkesinüñ pādişāhları olub şehen-  
şāhları Kelemen idi ol günde cümlesi helāk oldılar ve Kelemenüñ kıızı babasına merşiyeye  
olarak ebyāt-ı mezkūreyi inşād eyledi*

*Okyānūs*

## Translation

Poem by Kelemen's Daughter<sup>16</sup>

Kelemen, the pillar [of my strength], was destroyed, his ruin was in the middle of the camp.

<sup>14</sup> Metre: *remel* - v - - / - v - - / - v - - / - v - - with the variant v v - - / v v - - / - v - - / - v - - .

<sup>15</sup> Recte: *ḥatfu*.

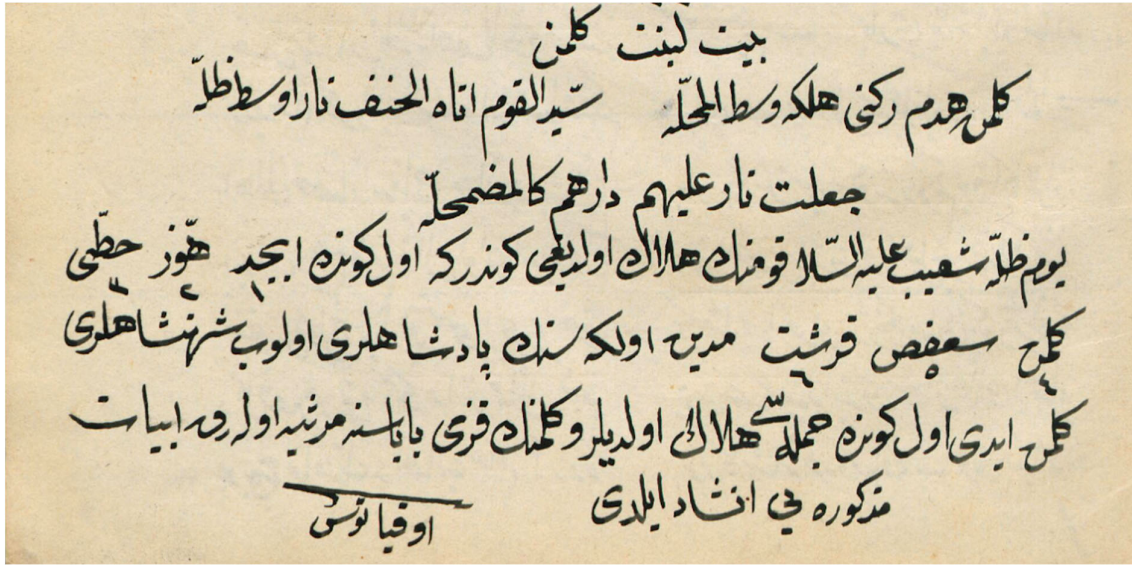
<sup>16</sup> There is an English translation (Dodge 1970, p. 7) of the elegy, but because we had some different views we have provided our own translation.

The ruler of the people – death came upon him as a fire amid a shadow.

Their house[es] became fire above them and vanished, as it were.

The “Day of the Shadow” is that day when the people of Şu‘ayb – peace be upon him – perished. On that day the rulers of the land Madyan were 1. Ebcad, 2. Hevvez, 3. Huṭṭī, 4. Kelemen, 5. Sa‘feş and 6. Qaraşet. Their shahinshah was Kelemen and on that day all of them perished. And Kelemen’s daughter recited the [above] mentioned verses as an elegy on the death of her father. *Oḳyānūs*.

### Facsimile



Ma VII 178 fol. 37r

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Edition of the last entry: <http://ekitap.yek.gov.tr/urun/kam%C3%BBsu%E2%80%99-muhit-tercumesi--takim-6-cilt-536.aspx>, vol 2, p. 1353.

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