

# ***Nâmah Al-Saadah* (Blessed Letter) Sent To the *Malik* (Ruler) of Ghassan and Transfer to the Ottoman State of the Copy of *Surah Al-Qadr* (Chapter on Power in the Holy Qur'an) Written by Caliph Ali**

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## **Abstract**

The letter of the Exalted Prophet Muhammad to the King of Ghassan, Harith bin Abi Shamir, to invite him to convert to Islam and the copy of the *Surah Al-Qadr* (Chapter on Power in the Holy Qur'an) made by Caliph Ali, was bought by a Frenchman called François Perpinyan in Paris in 1866 and brought to Istanbul. The Office of Sheikh Al-Islam examined the copies twice in 1866 and 1876, judging them to be authentic in the second examination. The documents were then purchased from the Frenchman in return for 4,000 Ottoman liras. But although an edict was issued by Sultan Abd Al-Hamid II for payment to be made in 1876, Perpinyan did not receive his money for 17 years. In this article, we will study the examination of these documents by Maqam Al-Mashihah (Directorate of Religious Affairs), their purchase, and the period of delay in the payment for them in respect of the Ottoman bureaucracy.

## **1.1 Introduction**

After the Exalted Prophet had concluded the Treaty of Hudaibiyah with the *mushriqs* (polytheists) in the sixth year after Hegira, he dispatched Letters of Invitation via his envoys to the presidents of the neighboring countries to invite them to convert to Islam (Ibn Sa'd, I, 2001: 222). Notwithstanding the fact that the texts of some of these letters, which were called *Na'mah Al-Nabawi* and *Na'mah Al-Saadah* in Ottoman literature have been mentioned in *Siyar* and history books (Tabari, II, 1987: 130-33; Ibn Sa'd, I, 222-52; Balazuri, 1987: 99, 102, 114, 127; Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawdhriyyah, III, 1981, 688-97; Qastalani, I, 1316: 237-48; Zarkani, III, 1282: 400-42 ), the originals of the majority of them are not available at present, except for a few.

The Letters of Invitation were dispatched by the Exalted Prophet Muhammad by means of his Companions as follows: Amr b. Umayyah Al-Damrih to the Ruler of Abyssinia, (*Najashi*) Negus; Dihyah Al-Qalbi to the Eastern Roman Emperor, Heraclius; Abdullah bin Khudhafah to the Qisrah of Iran, Parwiz; Khatib bin Abi

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Balta'ah to the Ruler of Egypt, Muqawqis; Shujah bin Wahb to the Ruler of Ghassan, Harith bin Abi Shamir; Salit bin Amr to the Governor of Yamamah, Hawzah bin Ali; Farwah b. Amr Al-Juzami to the *Amil* (Governor) of the Emperor in Oman; Amr b. Al-Aas to Sons of Julandah, Jaifar, Abd'ah and A'lah b. Hadrami, Munzir b. Sawah (Ibn Sa'd, I, 2001: 222-227; Tabari, II, 1987: 128, Beirut; Ayni, XIV, 1972: 392; Ibn Qathir, VI, 1997: 469, 483, 494; Ibn Jawdhi, II: 717-743). Apart from these, the Exalted Prophet Muhammad transmitted a great number of writings to the chiefs of and people in the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula on such issues as *iqtah* (*fief*), *zakah* (alms), land system, *fidyah* (poor tax) and manumission, the texts of several of which are given in references (Ibn Sa'd, I, 2001: 227-52; Tabari, II, 1987: 128; Ibn Jawdhi, II: 717-43).

Negus As'hamah, Muqawqis, and Heraclius respected the Blessed Letter delivered to them. In fact, Negus rubbed his eyes with the letter of the Exalted Prophet, descended from his throne, and sat on the floor as a token of modesty and pronounced *Kalimah Al-Shahadah* (the Formula of Faith) in the presence of the Companions of the Exalted Prophet found in Abyssinia at the time, thus embracing Islam. Negus, who then put the holy letter of the Exalted Prophet into a wooden pot, is reported to have said: "Now that this letter<sup>2</sup> is with the Abyssinians, bliss and abundance will not be lacking among them" (Ibn Sa'd, I, 2001: 222; Qastalani, I, 1316: 247; Halabi, III: 293).

Nevertheless, the *kisrah* of Persia, Parwiz, and the *malik* (ruler) of Ghassan, Harith b. Abi Shamir, not only did not respect the letters sent to them but also disparaged them. As a matter of fact, Parwiz went to so far as to tear the holy letter of the Exalted Prophet. When he was informed of this, the Blessed Prophet ﷺ cursed him saying, "O my Lord! As he tore my letter, tear him and his estate asunder." This curse resulted in one of Parwiz' sons, Shirwiyyah, stabbing his father to death (Abu Nu'aim Isbahani, I-II, 1991: 348-49; Ibn Jawdhi, II: 732-34; Askalani, VIII, 2000, 160; Qastalani, I, 1316: 238-39). Then Sa'd Ibn Al Abi Waqqath crushed his sultanate and the Sassanid state was completely destroyed in 22 A.H. (Saricik: 267-68).

### 1.1.1 Na'mahs Al-Saadah at Topkapi Palace

The Blessed Letters of the Noble Prophet began to be found from the second

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah, who stated that the original of this letter had been found, determined that none of the objections alleged by D.M. Dunlop in his article "Another Prophetic Letter" published in JRAS ([January 1940]: pp. 54-60) as to its originality held up, thus concluding that there could be no doubt regarding its accuracy and authenticity. In this article, Dunlop alleged that the letter had been obtained by an antiques dealer from an Abyssinian religious functionary in Damascus (see Muhammad Hamidullah, *Prophet of Islam*, translated by Mehmet Yazgan [Istanbul: Marifet, 2004], pp. 260-63).

half of the 19th century, the first of which was the one brought to Muqawqis, having been found by Monsieur Bartholomew at a monastery in the vicinity of Ahmim in Egypt in 1851 (TPMK, H.S. 15). Then it was brought to Istanbul in 1269 A.H./1852-1853 C.E., purchased by Sultan Abd Al-Majid (d. 1861), and placed amongst the holy relics in the Chamber of the Blissful Cloak of the Noble Prophet. The earliest registry concerning this letter of the Exalted Prophet is mentioned in the book of *Tabarruqah*,<sup>3</sup> dated 1269, in the Chamber of the Blessed Cloak of the Exalted Prophet with the description "In this cupboard is preserved the Blissful Letter by the Exalted Prophet sent to Muqawqis (1 item)" (PMOA, TP.MA.d. 900).

Afterwards, a second *Na'mah Al-Nabawi* came to Topkapi Palace during the reign of Sultan Abd Al-Majid in 1276 A.H./1859-1860 C.E., after which it was observed that the books of *Tabarruqah* mentioned two letters of the Exalted Prophet. For instance, in the book of *Tabarruqah* on 16 *Rabi Al-Akhir* 1279/11 October, 1862, both the letters were registered together with the following descriptions: "1 item of *Na'mah Al-Sharif Al-Hadhrat Al-Nabawi (Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet) (is preserved in the Holy Chamber of the Blessed Cloak); 1 item of Na'mah Al-Saadah Al-Risalah-panah (Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet)" (PMOA, TS.MA. d. 893). The books of *Tabarruqah* did not indicate the addressee of this Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet. Nonetheless, after the Topkapi Palace was converted into a museum in 1924, the Topkapi Inventory Commission, which took an inventory of all the goods in the palace between 1924 and 1926 and entered the items into four books by their types, numbers, and qualities, determined for the first time that this Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet had been addressed to *Musaylamah Al-Qazzab* (Musaylamah the Liar). They noted they had discovered this letter while taking inventory in the Chamber of the Blessed Cloak in the Department of the Blessed Cloak, saying: "*Na'mah Al-Saadah Al-Hadhrat Al-Nabawi (Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet) was written on leather in Kufic writing and sent to Musaylamah Al-Qazzab*" (Topkapi Inventory Commission Book [TTCB], I, 1926: 379). Again, we learn in the document dated 1 Rajab, 1277 A.H./ 13 January, 1861 C.E. (PMOA, A. MKT.NZD 339/43) that the mentioned *Na'mah Al-Nabawi* had been bought from Alfred Vehinson and Loran Manesti.*

Meanwhile, information can be found in many books of *Tabarruqah* regarding the dates of the entry of these two Blessed Letters of the Exalted Prophet into the Palace as well. For example, in the book of *Tabarruqah* dated 17 Ramadan 1293 A.H./ 6 October 1876 C.E. it is said: "In the gold drawer is preserved a Blessed

<sup>3</sup> *Books of Tabarruqah*: These are the records of registry and inventory in the Department of the Blessed Cloak of the Noble Prophet, which is inclusive of the lists of the holy relics. Moreover, such goods that are donated or endowed to *Masjid Al-Haram* and *Masjid Al-Nabawi* or placed in the tombs of some scholars of Islam are called Objects of *Tabarruqah*.

Letter of the Exalted Prophet's, peace be upon him, 1 piece, **the date of arrival: 1269**; "In a drawer is a Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet's, peace be upon him, 1 piece, **the date of arrival: 1276**" (PMOA, TS.MA.d. 4645).

A third letter of the Exalted Prophet, the subject of our article, is the one sent to the *malik* (ruler) of Ghassan, Harith b. Abi Shamir, which was purchased by a Frenchman called François Perpinyan in Paris in 1283/1866 and then brought to Istanbul. Although there are a large number of archived documents concerning the examination of this letter of the Exalted Prophet by the Directorate of the Religious Affairs, its purchase and payment for it, no record thereof has been entered into the books of *Tabarruqah*.<sup>4</sup> The Topkapi Inventory Commission entered this letter by the Exalted Prophet, which they found amongst the holy relics in the Chamber of Treasury of Relics in the Department of the Holy Cloak, into the Commission Book No. 2, in doing which, however, they did not mention to whom it had been written by the Exalted Prophet. Nonetheless, as it was clearly mentioned in the documents that the letter of the Exalted Prophet to the ruler of Ghassan had first been examined by the Directorate of Religious Affairs and then placed in the Department of the Sultan's Treasury of Topkapi Palace for preservation in 1876 (PMOA, I.DH. 1183/92484; PMOA, Y.EE. 82/15; PMOA, Y.A.HUS 257/64). It is thus understood that this letter of the Exalted Prophet, the addressee of which was unknown, is the definitely the one that was written to the ruler of Ghassan. The letter of the Exalted Prophet, which had been preserved in the Sultan's Treasury, was later transferred to the Chamber of the Holy Cloak. Meanwhile, goods were exchanged between these two rooms from time to time.

After the Topkapi Inventory Commission had completed its task on 23 Qanun Al-Thani, 1926, the entry of works into Topkapi Palace from other museums con-

<sup>4</sup> As will be argued below, the reason for this must have been that there were certain doubts concerning the authenticity of the letter of the Exalted Prophet that had been conveyed to the ruler of Ghassan. As a matter of fact, just 14 years after it had been delivered to the Ottoman state in 1293/1876, even in 1307/1890 it was demanded that this letter of the Exalted Prophet be examined once more in comparison with the aforementioned two letters of the Exalted Prophet at the Topkapi Palace (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 235/28).

Another reason for the omission of this letter of the Exalted Prophet from the books of *Tabarruqah* is that it had been placed in the Department of the Sultan's Treasury at Topkapi Palace, and was later taken from there and placed with other *Tabarruqah* goods in the Chamber of the Treasury of Relics (*Hazinah Al-Silahdar*, Treasury of the Armorer) of the Department of the Holy Cloak. In the meantime, towards the late period of the Ottoman state, two rooms were allocated in the Department of the Holy Cloak for the preservation of the holy relics, with the titles of the Chamber of *Hirkah Al-Saadah* (the Blissful Cloak) and the Chamber of *Hazinah Al-Amanah* (the Treasury of Relics), while in the former the most famous holy relics such as the Holy Cloak and *Sanjaq Al-Sharif* (the Blessed Banner) were kept. In the latter such *Tabarruqah* goods as the Cases of *Hajar Al-Aswad* (the Black Stone), *Mizâb Al-Ka'bah* (Gutter of the Holy Kabah), the Blessed Covers of *Masjid Al-Haram* and *Masjid Al-Nabawi*, the covers of *Maqabir Al-Anbiyah* (Tombs of Prophets), which were relatively of secondary importance were preserved. Last but not least, the holy relics in the Chamber of the Holy Cloak were mostly registered in the books of *Tabarruqah*.

tinued through transfer, purchase, or donation. Those works that arrived after the inventory of the above-mentioned commission began to be entered into the 4th book from the last number onwards. Here three items of Blessed Letters of the Exalted Prophet are registered in this book under the number 48208. Nevertheless, it was then realized that one of these holy relics was actually a copy of *Surah Al-Takathur* (chapter on Plenitude in the Holy Qur'an) and this case was duly registered in the book, too. According to the registry in the book, these three copies preserved between two sheets of glass in a silver drawer came from the Museum of Foundations via the memorandum of the Directorate General of Museums dated 2 February 1926 to have it preserved in the Treasury of Holy Relics (TTKD, IV, 1926: 33). Nevertheless, since there are four letters of the Exalted Prophet at Topkapi Palace today written to Muqawqis (Inv. No: 21/174), to *Musaylamah Al-Qazzab* (Inv. No: 21/169), to the Ruler of Ghassan, Harith b. Abi Shamir (Inv. No: 21/674) and to the Governor of Akhsah, Mundhir b. Sawah (Inv. No: 21/397), it can be concluded that one of the other two copies is not a *Na'mah Al-Sa'adah* but the copy of a chapter from the Glorious Qur'an,<sup>5</sup> in which case the remaining document is the *Na'mah Al-Nabawi*, which was last entered into registration and must be that letter written by the Exalted Prophet to the Governor of Iran to Akhsah, Mundhir b. Sawah. In the meantime, it has not been determined when these three copies, which have been registered as of *Namah Al-Saadah*, were placed in the Museum of Foundations, which had been established as the Museum of Islamic Foundations within the premises of the Section of Poorhouses of the Sulaimaniyah Complex in 1914 – or from where they had been brought.

As mentioned by Muhammed Hamidullah in his *The Prophet of Islam*, the discovery of the letter of the Exalted Prophet that had been sent to Mundhir b. Sawah was first promulgated to the academic world in 1863 in an article published in the journal *ZDMG* (XVII/ pp. 385-86). In light of the information given in this article, Busch, who was working at the Prussian Embassy in Istanbul, wrote in a letter to Prof. Brockhaus that he had met an Italian who alleged that he possessed an original letter by the Exalted Prophet, adding that this Italian told him that he had come across and purchased, in Damascus, four parchments with verses from the Holy Qur'an in Kufic writing with the letter, also saying that the attempts to sell the letter to the Ottoman State – as far as he had been informed – had come to naught. Nevertheless, Hamidullah states that there were actually various rumors as to who had possession the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet. Hamidullah went on to state that what had become of said letter was unknown after the Ottoman government refused to buy it from the Italian. He also states that Hajah

<sup>5</sup> In fact, the copies of *Surah Al-Humadhah* (Chapter on the Slanderer) (21/395) and *Surah Al-Qadr* (Chapter on Power) (21/674), which is mentioned in our article, are found in the Chamber of the Holy Cloak.

Kamal Al-Din nevertheless explained in an article in 1917 that he had seen the letter in the hands of the Salah Al-Din Family and that he was told in 1932 and 1956 that said letter was in the possession of the Kuwwatli family in Damascus (Hamidullah, 2004: 322-25). The fact that the Blissful Letter of the Exalted Prophet sent to Mundhir b. Sawah is now at Topkapi Palace reveals that the rumor that the letter was found in the possession of the Kuwwatli family is ungrounded.

### 1.1.2 *Blissful Letter Sent to Ruler of Ghassan, Harith b. Shamir*

In 628 A.C. the Exalted Prophet sent his Companion Shujah Ibn Wahab as an envoy with a Letter of Invitation to Harith b. Abi Shamir, the ruler of Ghassan,<sup>6</sup> who is mentioned as the "Owner of *Dimashq* (Damascus)" in certain sources (Tabari, II, 1987: 131; Ibn Kathir, VI, 1997: 483) and *Malik Al-Arab bi Al-Sham* in some other references (Zahabi, I, 2003: 418). Shujah states that Harith wore a crown

<sup>6</sup> Ghassanides was a Christian Arab dynasty that ruled Syria between 200 and 636. Being of the Kahlan branch of the Kahtanides, they migrated from Yemen after the destruction of the Dyke of Ma'rib and settled in Syria in the early third century. Jafnah, a son of the chief's of the tribe, Amr Muzaikiyah b. Amr Ma'ussamah, was the founder and the first ruler of the Ghassanides, which is why this dynasty is also called Jafna'ids. Ghassanides migrated to Syria under the leadership of Jafnah b. Amr. The Ghassanides lived for some time under the sovereignty of the tribe of Sélîh of the branch of Daja'im of the clan of Quda'ah in Syria. Nevertheless, they later defeated them and invaded the regions of *Dimashq* (Damascus) and Tadmur. Afterwards, the Ghassanides, vassals of the Byzantine Empire, adopted Christianity over the course of time and fell under the influence of the Byzantine culture. During the reign of Harith b. Jabalah II, of the rulers of the Ghassanides, who acted like Byzantine governors, (529-569), the dynasty had their most glorious period. That the Ghassanides, a strong buffer state that protected the south of Byzantium, weakened and lost political unity over the course of time benefited the Sassanid State, whereby the Sassanid *kisrah* (ruler), Husraw Parwiz, waged a campaign against Syria with a colossal army and occupied Jerusalem and Damascus, thus bringing an end to the sovereignty of Ghassanides (613-614). However, Heraclius, who sat on the Byzantine throne in 610, rehabilitated the state and recaptured Syria between 628 and 629 (Ağırakça, XIII, 1996: 397-98). Although it has been written that Jabalah b. Ayham, who is regarded as the last ruler of the Ghassanides, ruled over the country in that period (Ağırakça, XIII, 1996: 398), Dhahabi clearly states that it was Harith b. Abi Shamir, adding that after Harith had died as an infidel Jabalah b. Ayham replaced him (Dhahabi, I, 2003: 418).

The Exalted Prophet also wrote a Letter of Invitation to Jabalah b. Ayham, who is considered to be the last ruler of the Ghassanides. It is stated that Jabalah accepted that invitation and converted to Islam but apostacized during the caliphate of Caliph Omar because of some incident (Ibn Sa'd, I, 2001: 228-29; Ibn Jawdhi, II: 739; Halabi, III: 307). Nonetheless, it has also been posited that such stories, i.e. that Jabalah b. Ayham became a Muslim, are not correct. Balazuri notes that Jabalah b. Ayham commanded those vanguards composed of Christian Arab tribes such as Lahm, Juzam, and others during the Battle of Yarmuq, which took place during the caliphate of Caliph Omar, on the orders of Heraclius (Balazuri, 1987: 192). When the Byzantine army was defeated at Yarmuq, he retreated to his own lands. Then, when he was presented with the choice of either converting to Islam and paying *zaqah* (alms), keeping his faith and paying *jizyah*, or leaving his land and going wherever he wished, he replied that he could give alms but not renounce his faith. Then when he was told that if he refused to profess Islam he would have to pay *jizyah*, he regarded having to pay *jizyah* humiliating and went to Byzantium with the 30,000 soldiers in his service (Ağırakça, XIII, 1996: 398).

when he came to meet him (Ibn Sa'd, I, 2001: 225; Ibn Jawdhi, II: 737). Muhammad Hamidullah said that Harith was a *malik*/ruler (Hamidullah, 2004: 277) as well. Even though Harith was a ruler, he held the rank of provincial governor appointed by the Greek emperor to Damascus (Sönmez, 1984: 138).

After Harith had read the Blissful Letter of the Exalted Prophet, he threw it down on the floor, saying "Who can dispossess me of my property? I shall attack him with my troops even if he is in Yemen." Although he wrote a letter to the emperor to whom he was subject to share his thoughts, the emperor refused that proposal. When Shujah b. Wahb reported Harith's insult to the Exalted Prophet against his Blessed Letter, the Exalted Prophet pronounced the following curse: "بئاد ملكه", i.e. "May his estate perish!" Harith, who thus deserved the imprecation of the Exalted Prophet, perished in the year of the conquest of Mecca (Ibn Sa'd, I, 2001: 225; Ibn Jawdhi, *Al-Vafah bi Ahwal Al-Mustafa*, II: 737-38; Zahabi, I, 2003: 418; Halabi, III: 304-05).

### 1.1.3 The Text of Namah Al-Saadah in Classical Islamic References

At present, the original of the Blessed Letter of the Noble Prophet sent to the Ruler of Ghassan, Harith b. Abi Shamir, is in the Department of the Blessed Cloak at Topkapi Palace. The six-line text of the, at the bottom of which is printed the Blessed Seal of the Exalted Prophet, reads as follows:<sup>7</sup>

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ  
رَسُولِ اللَّهِ إِلَى الْحَارِثِ بْنِ أَبِي  
سَلَامٍ عَلِيٍّ مِنْ اتِّبَاعِ الْهُدَى وَآمَنَ بِهِ شَمْرٌ  
أَدْعُوكَ إِلَى أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ بِي وَصَدَّقَ وَإِنِّي  
لِلَّهِ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ يَبْقَى  
لَكَ مَلِكُكَ  
لِلَّهِ رَسُولٌ مُحَمَّدٌ

In Tabari's *History*, the text of this letter of the Exalted Prophet is mentioned in reference to the story of Waqidih (130-207/748-823), where the conjunction 'و'

<sup>7</sup> I am obliged to our esteemed teacher Prof. Dr. Ahmed Akgündüz for checking this text and making very significant comments.

before the *Harf Al-Jarr* 'و صدق' and 'اني' in the Formula of *Basmalah Al-Sharif* at the beginning of the letter are missing. This text is actually mentioned by Halabi too:

سلام على من اتبع الهدى، و آمن به.

اني ادعوك الى ان تؤمن بالله وحده لا شريك له يبقى لك ملكك.

(Tabari, II, 1987: 131; Ibn Al-Kathir, VI, 1997: 473; Halabi, III: 304)).

On the other hand, in the text quoted by Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawdhriyyah, the expression of آمن بالله occurs instead of

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. من محمد رسول الله الى الحارث بن ابي شمر. سلام على من اتبع الهدى و آمن بالله و صدق. ادعوك الى ان تؤمن بالله وحده لا شريك له يبقى لك ملكك. واني آمن به

(Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawdhriyyah, III, 1981: 697).

Meanwhile, in his work *Sharkh Al-Dharqani Ala Al-Mawahib*, an annotation to *Mawahib Al-Ladunniyyah*, Dharqani deviated in only one spot from the original text at the Topkapi Palace, writing بالله instead of به and فاني instead of واني:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. من محمد رسول الله الى الحارث بن ابي شمر. سلام على من اتبع الهدى و آمن بالله و صدق. ادعوك الى ان تؤمن بالله وحده لا شريك له يبقى لك ملكك. فاني

(Dharqani, III, 12728: 427).

In the poet Baki's translation of *Mawahib Al-Ladunniyyah* into Turkish in 1001/1592-93, the following expressions in the aforesaid letter by the Exalted Prophet are missing:

و آمن بالله و صدق :

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. من محمد رسول الله الى الحارث بن ابي شمر. سلام على من اتبع الهدى.

<sup>8</sup> It is the date when the 8-volume collection, which was printed in Egypt, was endowed by Al-Hajj Omar Agha bin Qasim Agha on 15th *Dhu Al-Qadah*, 1282. It is unknown how long this work had been printed before that date.



و اني ادعوك الى ان تؤمن بالله وحده لا شريك له يبقى لك ملكك.

(Kastalani, II, 1316: 244).

Again, in the text provided by Feridun Bey, we find آمن بالله in place of آمن به, like in those texts given by Tabari and Halabi (Feridun Bey, I, 1274: 31). Meanwhile, Muhammad Hamidullah gives the same text as Zarkani (Hamidullah, 1985: 126).

As can be observed, the texts given in all the references are almost the same as that of the Blessed Letter of the Prophet at the Topkapi Palace with very slight differences. The great similiarity between the texts of the sources and that of the original actually reveal how conscientious the Companions of the Exalted Prophet were in reporting on the statements pouring out of the Blessed Mouth of the Exalted Prophet. Thus, the original at the Topkapi Palace both corroborates and corrects the texts mentioned in references.

The translation of the Blessed Letter is as follows: "In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. From Muhammad the Messenger of Allah to Harith bin Abi Shammar.

*Peace be upon him who follows True Guidance, believes in Allah and confirms his Faith in Him. Verily, I invite you to believe in Allah the Only One with no partner so that your kingdom may remain with you.*

*Seal: Muhammad the Messenger of Allah*<sup>9</sup>

In light of the information given in *Tabarruqah* No. 21 in the Department of the Blessed Cloak at the Topkapi Palace, the dimensions of the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet conveyed to the ruler of Ghassan are 22 x 17 cm, with some parts missing and with the Blessed Seal of the Exalted Prophet printed on it. Nevertheless, the copy of the chapter on power from the Holy Qur'an, which is listed in the inventory records with the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet, is to have been written in Caliph Ali's handwriting, are both, by mistake, registered under the same number (21/674) as *Na'mah Al-Saadah*. The copy of *Surah Al-Qadr* (the chapter on power) is 25 x 16 cm and also has some parts missing (TPM, H.S. *Tabarruqah* No: 21, p. 168).

### **1.2 Na'mah Al-Saadah Dispatched to the Ruler of Ghassan, Harith b. Shamir, and the Copy of the Chapter on Power Written by Caliph Ali according to the Archive Sources**

In reality, there are a great number of documents in the Ottoman archive sources on the discovery of the Blessed Letter dispatched to the ruler of Ghassan,

<sup>9</sup> Hamidullah, 2004: 277; Sönmez, 1984: 139.

Harith Ibn Shamir, and the copy of the chapter on power attributed to Caliph Ali, apart from which no other sources actually exist. Although Muhammad Hamidullah, who carried out very significant research regarding the letters of the Exalted Prophet and concluded that six originals of the letters of the Exalted Prophet have survived to our time, has quoted the text of these letters in classical Islamic references in his works, he made no mention of the discovery of this Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet (Hamidullah, 1985: 126; Hamidullah, 2004: 277).

### *1.2.1 Presentation of the Na'mah Al-Saadah and the Chapter on Power to Sultan Abd Al-Aziz*

*The Na'mah Al-Nabawi* and the copy of the chapter on power were purchased by François Perpinyan in Paris in 1283 A.H. and then brought to Istanbul. That Armenian names ending with the suffix *-yan* must have evoked the probability of Perpinyan's being the Armenian of whom Sadr Al-Azam Jawad Pasha informs us in his memorandum dated 17 Muharram 1311 A.H./ 31 July 1893 submitted to *Mabain Al-Humayun* (Sultan's Palace) that it had been determined that he was not an Armenian but was of Italian background (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 278/100). It is thus understood that the demonstrations and rebellions that had been organized by the Armenians in the 1890s both in Istanbul and across Anatolia induced *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman Government) to be vigilant against the Armenian subjects and thus such an investigation was necessary.

We do not know whom Perpinyan purchased the documents from and when they had been brought to Paris. However, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, the European orientalists began to do a great deal of scientific research and archaeological excavations in the Middle East and take the works they had found to Europe with or without permission. For instance, Monsieur Sole, who went on a trip to carry out scientific operations around the Dead Sea in 1268/1852, delivered antiques and the sarcophagus he excavated that, he alleged, belonged to the Prophet David to the Louvre (PMOA, HR. MKT. 46/5). It is most probable that those Europeans who took a great number of antiques they had found in the Middle East to their countries also took the the Blessed Letter of the Noble Prophet and the copy of the chapter on power from the Glorious Qur'an to Paris.

Perpinyan presented the letter of the Exalted Prophet and the copy of the chapter on power, which he had brought with him, to Sultan Abd Al-Aziz (d. 1876) with a petition in early *Rabi Al-Awwal* 1283/ July 1866, writing that he had happened to see the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet and the copy of the chapter

on power somewhere in Paris. He then bought these precious relics for 3,500 liras in the anticipation that the sultan would purchase them because he saw them as blessed and benign, and thus requested that they be duly examined and preserved. The petition submitted by Perpinyan to the sultan reads as follows:

Zât-ı şevketsîmât-ı hazret-i tâcdârîlerine ma'rûz-ı kemterîleridir ki,  
Zamân-ı mes'adet iktirân-ı Hazret-i Risâletpenâhîden Şâm meliki tarafına en sonra olarak şerefsâdir olmuş olan nâme-i Celîl-i Cenâb-ı Nebevî ile bazı Âyât-ı Furkânîyeyi münâttık şu iki kît'a levha-i şerîfler Paris'te bir mahalde görülmüş ve bu misillü yâdigâr-ı şerîflerin nezd-i âlîde kemâl-i yümn ve makbûliyetle ahz ve telakkî buyurulacağı ümîdiyle üçbin beşyüz liraya alınub getirilerek huzûr-ı âli-i hazret-i pâdişâhîlerine ref ve arz kılınmış olmağla tedkîkât-ı lâzimenin icrâsıyla mahfaza-i tevkîr ve tevkîfe vaz'ı husûsuna rağbet-i seniyye-i hazret-i cihandârîleri erzân buyurulmak bâbında emr ü ferman hazret-i veliyyu'l-emr ve'l-ihsân efendimizindir. Bende Fransuva Briyan<sup>10</sup> kulları. (PMOA, İ.MMS. 32/1319-1)

### 1.2.2 The First Examination of the Namah Al-Saadah and and the Copy of the Chapter on Power

Perpinyan's petition by was conveyed by *Mabain Al-Humayun*<sup>11</sup> to *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman government), where they were examined by *Anjuman Al-Mahsus Al-Wuqalah* (Ad hoc Parliamentary Commission). *Énjumén Al-Mahsus Al-Wuqalah* (Ad hoc Parliamentary Commission) resolved that *Dérs Wéqili*<sup>12</sup> Effendi and *Saray Al-Humayun Hojasi*<sup>13</sup> Effendi should meet in the Department of *Haziné Al-Humayun Wéqili* and examine both very closely and attentively, and thus publish their findings if their authenticity was attested. Then the resolution of the *Énjumén Al-Mahsus Al-Wuqalah* (Ad-hoc Parliamentary Commission) was communicated to Sheikh Al-Islam Mehmed Refiq Effendi by the Memorandum of

<sup>10</sup> Although the family name has usually been given as Perpinyan in documents, it is also mentioned in variously as Perpinyani, Briyan or Priyan.

<sup>11</sup> The palace in which Ottoman sultans lived was called *Mabain Al-Humayun*. In the meantime, the *sadr al-azam* (grand vizier) and *nazirs* (the ministers), who comprised the government organization officiated at *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, i.e. the Ottoman government), where the Office of the Governor of Istanbul is now located. The relations and liaison between the ruler and the government organization were performed by the officials called *mabain arqan* (see Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü* [Dictionary of Ottoman Historical Idioms and Terms, II, 376-77, Istanbul: Milli Eğitim, 1983]).

<sup>12</sup> The titles of those who were appointed from the *Qibars Al-Mudarrisin* (Senior Professors) to *Bayezid Madrasah* (University) to fulfill the task of *sheikh al-islams*, who were obliged to lecture there (M. Zeki Pakalın, I, p. 428).

<sup>13</sup> The most competent lecturers of their age who lectured the people of *Andarun* who studied at *Maqtab Al-Andarun* (the Special Palace School) at Topkapı Palace, which was the administrative center of the Ottoman state.

*Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman government) dated 18 Rabi Al-Awwal 1283/ 31 July 1866 (PMOA, I.MMS. 32/1319-2). Afterwards, *Dérs Wéqili* Effendi and *Saray Al-Humayun Hojasi* Effendi duly met in the Department of *Haziné Al-Humayun Wéqili* and studied and examined the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet minutely. At the end of the examination, Sheikh Al-Islam Mehmed Refiq Effendi put the aforementioned Commission's decision at the bottom of the Memorandum that was conveyed by *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman Government), and submitted the Memorandum to *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman government) on 15 Rabi Al-Akhir 1283/ 27 August, 1866.

The following points were highlighted in the report: notwithstanding the fact that the Blessed Letter brought by Perpinyan was apparently old, considering the facts that it had been written on parchment in Kufic writing and had some torn parts, it was completely lacking in any evidence and reports that it was an authentic letter of the Exalted Prophet. Moreover, certain words and letters in it did not correspond to the text of the Blessed Letter of the Noble Prophet written to Harith bin Abi Shamir of Ghassan, which is provided in the book *Mawahib Al-Ladunniyyah*.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, it may not be authentic since it has not been evidenced by *Shariah* that it is a Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet.

Thereafter, after *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman government) had submitted the report of the Investigation Commission to Sultan Abd Al-Aziz through *Mabain Al-Humayun*, Sultan Abd Al-Aziz issued a *firman* with his *Iradah Al-Thaniyyah* (Sultan's Edict) dated 23 Rabi Al-Akhir 1283/ 4 September 1866, whereby instructing *Bab Al-Ali* to give an appropriate reply to Perpinyan on basis of that report (PMOA, I.MMS. 32/1319-3).

As a consequence, the *Na'mah Al-Saadah* and the copy of the *Surah Al-Qadr* (chapter on power) were returned to Perpinyan, who did not demand any money for them because of the negative report.

<sup>14</sup> There actually is minuscule difference between the text of the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet at Topkapi Palace and those texts given in the sources. For example, as is mentioned above, به in the copy at the Topkapi Palace has been given - with the same meaning - as بالله in the text provided by Ibn Kayyim Al-Jawdhiyyah and Dharqani. But the work by Baki called *Ma'alim Al-Yaqeen: An Interpretation of Mawahib Al-Ladunniyyah* lacks the words و آمن بالله و صدق, which exist in the copy at Topkapi Palace. It is thus understood that the aforesaid Board of Examination took Baki's interpretation as its basis, and made their assessment according to its text without having carried out a proper study of the other classical Islamic sources.

### 1.2.3 *Second Examination of the Na'mah Al-Saadah and the Chapter on Power and the Presentation to Sultan Abd Al-Hamid II*

Perpinyan, to whom the *Na'mah Al-Saadah* and the copy of *Surah Al-Qadr* were returned in 1866, did not return to France but stayed in Istanbul; in fact, he even bought an estate in Ayastefanos (Yeşilköy) (PMOA, I.DH 1183/92484-1).

In his own words, he entrusted the *Na'mah Al-Saadah* and the copy of *Surah Al-Qadr*, which he owned and were public knowledge, to the French Ambassador, Monsieur Vököe, fearing that they might be seized and confiscated from him by force. Then, in the month of Tashrin Al-Awwal, 1876 *Sheikh Al-Islam* Hayrullah Effendi proposed to Perpinyan that he submit the documents to the examination of scholars so that they would investigate and decide if they were authentic. Upon the approval of Perpinyan, the documents were examined by prominent scholars under the presidency of Hayrullah Effendi. At the end of this examination it was concluded that both were authentic and thus a price was decided to be paid to him (PMOA, I.DH 1183/92484-1).

The Directorate of Religious Affairs submitted the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet and the copy of the chapter on power, for which they issued a report of authenticity to Sultan Abd Al-Hamid II (d. 1918) in 1294/1877. Sultan Abd Al-Hamid II, who was extremely meticulous regarding the authenticity of the documents, instructed the documents to be compared to the other Blessed Letters of the Noble Prophet in the Sultan's Treasury at Topkapi Palace as well. The Treasury Chamberlain thus compared the Letter of the Exalted Prophet and the copy of the chapter on power with the other letters of the Prophet and affirmed that they were identical. Nevertheless, Sultan Abd Al-Hamid II, who was not satisfied with that, announced via an *Iradah Al-Thaniyyah* (Sultan's Edict) that an examination and due investigation were to be carried out by *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman government) as well (PMOA, MF.MKT 83/57-1).

But *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman government) did not carry out the sultan's instructions for a long time. At last, because *Majlis Al-Mahsus Al-Wuqalah* (*Ad-hoc* Parliamentary Council) adopted a resolution that the documents should be examined by a commission to be composed of the Minister of Commerce, Subhi Pasha, and the concerned persons at the Department of Education and compared with its precedents (i.e. the other *Na'mahs Al-Saadah*), the Office of the Chamberlain of the Sultan's Treasury was asked on 9 Rajab 1301/5 May 1884 if the documents were in the Sultan's Treasury (PMOA, MF.MKT 83/57-2). Although it is unknown when this Commission carried out an examination at the Sultan's Treasury and what assessment they made, it is apparent that they did not issue an adverse decision in consideration of the fact that it was not reflected in

the official correspondence that took place later.

Nonetheless, the wish was expressed that this *Na'mah Al-Saadah* be reexamined six years later. In the memorandum sent to the Office of the Chamberlain of the Sultan's Treasury on 14 Ramadan 1307/ 3 May 1890, Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha wanted the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet to the ruler of Ghassan, which was preserved in the *Hazinah Al-Humayun* (Sultan's Treasury), to be prepared before his customary visit to the Blessed Cloak the following day, viz. on the 15th of the Blessed Month of Ramadan, so that it could be compared to the other Blessed Letters of the Exalted Prophet in the Sultan's Treasury (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 235/28)

As result, although several examinations were carried out during the later periods, the report on authenticity issued by the Commission under the presidency of Sheikh Al-Islam Hayrullah Effendi in 1876 continued to be valid during the reign of Sultan Abd Al-Hamid II, which actually served as the basis for the issuance of Sultan's Edict for payment to be made to Perpinyan.

#### *1.2.4 Attempts of Perpinyan and French Embassy to Obtain Payment for the Documents*

Although in his petition to Sultan Abd Al-Aziz in early *Rabi Al-Awwal*, 1283/ July 1866), Perpinyan had written that he had purchased the *Na'mah Al-Saadah* and the copy of the chapter on power for 3,500 liras in Paris (PMOA, I.MMS.32/1319), he later alleged in the month of Tashrin A-Awwal in 1876 that he had bought the documents for 5,300 Ottoman liras<sup>15</sup>, adding that he had sold them to the Ottoman government at a loss for 1,300 liras at the insistence of Sheikh Al-Islam Hayrullah Effendi, with the promise that he was to be made a Ottoman ensign, third class, for that reduction. As a consequence, he agreed to sell the documents for 4,000 Ottoman liras, which was to be paid to him in cash within five days. An agreement was thus signed (PMOA, I.DH 1183/92484-1). In the meantime, it has been stated that the reason why Perpinyan accepted that sum was because he anticipated obtaining some privileges in the Ottoman state (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 257/64).

Nevertheless, Perpinyan was not paid for the documents for many years. Al-

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<sup>15</sup> There might have been three reasons for this discrepancy: first, the person who wrote Perpinyan's petition may have mistakenly written 5,300 in place of 3,500. Second, the devaluation in the Ottoman lira and the increasing interest rates that had occurred within the period of 10 years from 1866, when he had bought the documents, to 1876 might have been reflected in the price. Third, Perpinyan lied. However, neither *Bab Al-Ali* nor the departments that had studied and examined all the records concerning Perpinyan ever accused him of that in their correspondence.

though he exerted a great number of attempts to get the money, all his efforts came to naught and he finally applied to the French Embassy and requested them to mediate for payment to be collected from *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Ottoman government) and to be indemnified for the loss he had incurred (PMOA, İ.DH 1183/92484-1). Also, Perpinyan sent two protest<sup>16</sup> petitions<sup>17</sup> to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by means of the French embassy.

In his first petition dated 12 Dhu Al-Qadah 1300/ 14 Tashrin Al-Thani 1883, he wrote that he had received no payment even though a contract had been drawn up, that, which was why he had borrowed money with an interest rate of 12% from a banker called Karagavar Karagözyan, a subject of the Ottoman state, and had to sign over the whole of his estate in Ayastefanos (Yeşilköy) to the banker as collateral, thus incurring a great loss. He listed his requests to *Bab Al-Ali* as follows:

- payment of the 4,000 Ottoman liras, the sum that had been appraised for the price of the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet and the chapter from the Holy Qur'an
- remittance of the interest of the appraised sum with the calculation of it at the rate of 12% as of 12 Tashrin Al-Awwal 1876 to the date it would be settled (since he was to pay the same amount of interest to the banker cKKWS Karagavar Karagözyan)
- being indemnified in cash for the incurred from the deference of the payment of the amount he had demanded
- delivery to him of the Ottoman ensign, third class, which had not been given to him even though it had been promised to him by the sultan
- if these demands were not met, the immediate restitution to him of the *Na'mah Al-Saadah* and the copy of the chapter from the Glorious Qur'an – apart from the indemnification mentioned in the third provision (PMOA, İ.DH 1183/92484-1)
- Perpinyan thereby alleged that if the documents were returned to him, he was likely to sell them to the British Museum since it aspired to purchase them (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 257/64).

The French ambassador, who submitted the petition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that he anticipated that *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, viz. the Otto-

<sup>16</sup> The statutory declaration that had been written to allege that the decision issued against a benefit was not recognized and that actions against a concluded contract had occurred.

<sup>17</sup> The statutory declaration that had been written to allege that the decision issued against a benefit was not recognized and that actions against a concluded contract had occurred.

man government) would instruct the concerned departments to execute the demands made by Perpinyan (PMOA, I.DH 1183/92484-1). Nonetheless, the Ottoman government did not reply to the petition.

Seeing that his demands were not answered, Perpinyan sent another protest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by means of the French ambassador six years later, on 4 Shawwal 1306/ 3 June 1889, in which he demanded once more that he be paid the interest of the amount that had been appraised for those documents, that he was to be given his due right immediately, and that justice was thus to be done (PMOA, I.DH 1183/92484-2). But the Ottoman government did not answer that petition either.

Then, having seen that both deeds of protest, in which the French embassy acted as an intermediary, had been left unanswered, the embassy began to employ strong language. As a matter of fact, on 10 Dhu Al-Qadah 1306/ 8 July 1889 the French embassy sent a memorandum to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that not delaying the covenanted loan any longer would be to the benefit of the Ottoman government (PMOA, I.DH 1183/92484-3).

Nonetheless, payment was neglected again. In the meantime, the *Majlis Al-Mahsus Al-Wuqalah* (Ad hoc Parliamentary Council), which had been convened on 13 Sha'ban 1309/ 13 March 1892 at the instruction of Sultan Abd Al-Hamid, decided that Perpinyan was to be paid 5,000 Ottoman liras in consideration of the fact that the accumulated interest of 4,000 liras until that date would amount to a greater sum. This decision was also approved by the French embassy (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 257/64).

On 6 Muharram 1310/ 31 July 1892, Grand Vizier Jawad Pasha submitted to *Mabain Al-Humayun* (Sultan's Office) that the French embassy, which had repeatedly complained about the postponement of payment, wished to have this affair finalized without further delay (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 263/24).

The final application of the French embassy to *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, i.e. the Ottoman Government) was just a year after that date, whereupon, on 17 Muharram 1311/ 31 July 1893, Grand Vizier Jawad Pasha submitted to *Mabain Al-Humayun* (Sultan's Office) the issue that the French ambassador requested to be informed of the sultan's decision for the payment to be made to Perpinyan before the French ambassador left for France, which he would be doing within a few days (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 278/100). The ever-anticipated reply came at last three days later with the second and final edict of Sultan Abd Al-Hamid Khan, issued on 20 Muharram 1311/ 3 August 1893 as to the fulfillment of payment: *"Although the mentioned works are to be confiscated in consideration of the very fact that Blessed Works belong to the Supreme Caliphate, let the mentioned five thousand Lira be*



paid to the person in question considering that he is a foreigner and he has been following this matter for a long time" (PMOA, Y.A.HUS 278/100). In essence, these statements by Sultan Abd Al-Hamid Khan actually give some clue as to the reason for deference in the payment of the price that had been agreed on.<sup>18</sup>

The Accountancy Department of the Ministry of Interior demanded on 2 Safer 1311/ 15 August 1893 that the due amount be paid from the account of the subsidies of the Interior for the year 1309 in addition to the Loans Deficit and the Balance Sheet of 1309/1893-94 and that the said *zuhûrât tertibi fazlası* money be sent to the Pay Desk of the Interior to be received by the Accounting Department. As result, the sum was given to the Accountancy Department on 22 Safer 1311/ 4 September 1893 (PMOA, DH.MKT.112/2). But it is not known if the promised Ottoman rank of ensign, third class, was given to Perpinyan.

### 1.3 Conclusion

The Blessed Letter the Exalted Prophet sent to the ruler of Ghassan in 628 to communicate his Task of *Risalah* (Prophethood) that was discovered in 1866 was brought to Istanbul and examined by the Office of Sheikh Al-Islam in that same year. Nevertheless, it was found to be inauthentic and given back to the person who had brought it. Then it was reexamined by the committee under the presidency of Sheikh Al-Islam Hayrullah Effendi in 1876 and this time it was decided that it was authentic. Nonetheless, both the Blessed Letter of the Exalted Prophet and the copy of the chapter on power were examined many times during the reign of Sultan Abd Al-Hamid, in which process the *Na'mah Al-Nabawi* in question was compared with the other Blessed Letters at Topkapi Palace. But no judgment was made on the authenticity of these documents throughout any of these examinations. On the other hand, the payment of the price of the documents emerged as another problem. In fact, although it had been ordered with the Sultan's edict dated 1877 that the payment was to be made, payment was not made until 16-17 years later. While this event might reflect the stagnation of the Ottoman bureaucracy that got squeezed between *Mabain Al-Humayun* (Sultan's Office) and *Bab Al-Ali* (the Sublime Porte, i.e. the Ottoman government) on the one hand, it must also have originated from the fact that Caliph Sultan Abd Al-Hamid deemed all holy relics to be objects in the possession of *Maqam Al-Hilafah* (the Elevated Position of

<sup>18</sup> As has also been expressed by Shamsuddin Sami, since such holy relics as the Holy Clock of the Exalted Prophet, which had been passed down from the Blessed Age of the Exalted Prophet, are considered objects for safekeeping in the possession of the position of Caliphate (Shamsuddin Sami, 1317: 163), the Ottoman government was vested with the authority to seize and confiscate holy relics in the ownership of individuals, if it so willed.

Caliphate) on the other. Last but not least, the Blessed Letter written to the ruler of Ghassan witnesses, even today, as physical evidence not only of *Da'wah Al-Risalah* (the Mission of Prophethood) of the Exalted Prophet but also of the Truth of Belief in Allah, which was the greatest cause of that Exalted Personage.

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**Figure 1:** *Na'mah Al-Nabawi* (Letter from Muhammad the Exalted Prophet) sent to Harith b. Abi Shammār. TPM. *Khirkah Al-Saadah* (Holy Cloak of Muhammad the Exalted Prophet), 21/674.

