

## The "Pastille Affair" in Ottoman-Safavid Relations, 1705-1709

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### Abstract

This article presents documents on the aftermath of a diplomatic affair from 1705, which was engineered by Safavid Iran's grand vizier Muhammad Mumin Shamlu and which was the last of his undertakings to reorient relations with the Ottoman Empire. It was a part of his policy played out as several faits accomplis unfolding at the same time and aiming to embitter Ottoman-Safavid relations, which had reached a formal alliance over the last decade. Starting out under the guise of a religious gift-giving, this initiative from the Iranian capital Isfahan to Prophet Muhammad's shrine in Ottoman-controlled Medina first slighted the Ottomans' lordship rights in the Hejaz and therefore became blocked by the Ottoman authorities in Medina as well as the dignitaries in Constantinople. But soon, it grew into a subject of diplomatic correspondence and then became entangled in a robbery reaching out to Mecca and Baghdad, whose prosecution spread further to Constantinople, Cairo, Damascus, and the eastern Mediterranean waters. Even after the affair was put to rest, Ottoman-Safavid dealings did not heal from the harm done by Muhammad Mumin Shamlu's successive thrusts to undermine the cooperation of the 1690s. The peace outlived Beygdilli-Shamlu's term as grand vizier, but he succeeded in downgrading it from an official brotherhood to a bare state of nonaggression.

**Keywords:** Ottoman-Safavid relations, Muhammad Mumin Xan Beygdili-Shamlu, Medina, Hajj, Shah Sultan-Husayn.

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## Introduction

As against the harmony of the 1690s, the early 1700s were a time of strife in Ottoman-Safavid diplomacy. As the eighteenth century started out, the two former foes had become friends abiding by their peace treaty for more than sixty years, notwithstanding the confrontations and challenges along the way.<sup>2</sup> Whereas this in itself was already unprecedented, they had also built an "alliance" and "brotherhood" towards the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> In the last two years of their cooperation stretching out to the eighteenth century (1700-1701), however, friction had arisen along the rebel-ridden southern flank of their border, all the way from Kurdistan down to the Persian Gulf. The armies of the two states, though fielded to work together rather than to clash, had thus come into one another's line of sight, thereby to the brink of an unuttered war, which had not broken out only because a last-minute flash of spark could somehow be hindered. Yet, tensions had kept on rising in the aftermath of this military contact too. As of 1702, diplomats shuttling between the Ottoman and the Safavid courts had begun bearing letters written to embitter one another, instead of strengthening the rapprochement, unlike the last two decades. The force behind this shift was the grand vizier of Iran, Muhammad Mumin Xan Beygdili-Shamlu, who was particularly unfriendly towards the Ottoman Empire and whose dealings with the Ottomans were at odds with the Safavids' policy throughout sixty years before and fifteen years after his grand vizierate (1699-1707).<sup>4</sup>

Relations had lately worsened as the Iranian government had diplomatically asked the Sublime Porte for favours doomed to rejection from the outset, meant only to anger the other side: such as an Ottoman license for the Safavids to access under new Imamic shrines, dig river canals, and appoint endowment trustees in Iraq

without needing a new permission from the Empire for each occasion, which all would have been symbolic breaches in the Ottomans' lordship rights in the province of Baghdad. Therefore had the Ottomans not only turned down these requests, as could be foreseen, but also uttered their rejections in sarcastic words. And thus broke down the harmony and cooperation of the last twenty years, thanks to which the Safavids could ask for and get one-time permissions on a few earlier occasions.<sup>5</sup> This paper introduces archival writs about the last undertaking crafted by Beygdili-Shamlu to embitter the Ottomans.

In 1705, the Safavids belatedly sent the shah's ambassador, Murtaza-qulu Xan Ustajlu, to Constantinople to congratulate the enthronement of Ahmed III (r. 1703-1730). Not only the timing of the embassy but also the requests it brought from Iran were unwelcome for the Empire, as also was a further attempt at a symbolic fait accompli in Iraq unfolding at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

Ahead of the embassy and in all likelihood with an eye to the time when the ambassador would reach the imperial court, the Safavids sent to Medina the shah's armour-bearer (جبهدار) bearing a "gemmed amber pastille (شمامهء عنبر (مرصع))" as a gift from Sultan-Husayn to the shrine of Prophet Muhammad, without letting the Ottomans know beforehand. Much as the object and its being sent as gift seem to have been a lesser event, first the political goal behind it, then the reaction against it, and lastly its becoming stolen by thieves while the affair was still unsettled, brought about a bustle spreading to almost all metropolises of the Middle East. The adventure started out from Isfahan as a fait accompli plan in the shape of a royal gift, unfolded physically in Medina and diplomatically in Constantinople, soon became entangled in a theft network stretching out also to Mecca and Baghdad, and led to a long investigation from the

<sup>2</sup>See Güngörürler, "The Belated Consummation of the Ottoman-Safavid Peace of Zuhab, 1639-1643," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 37 (2020): 35-67.

<sup>3</sup>See Güngörürler, "Fraternity, Perpetual Peace, and Alliance in Ottoman-Safavid Relations, 1688-1698: A Diplomatic Revolution in the Middle East," *Turcica* 50 (2019): 145-207.

<sup>4</sup> See Güngörürler, "Diplomacy and Political Relations between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran, 1639-1722," PhD Dissertation (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2016).

<sup>5</sup>See Güngörürler, "Shiite Iranian Pilgrims and Safavid Agents in Holy Sites under Ottoman Rule, 1690-1710" in *Entangled Confessionalizations? Dialogic Perspectives on the Politics of Piety and Community Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th-18th Centuries*, ed. Krstić & Terzioğlu (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, forthcoming 2022).

<sup>6</sup>See the references in the former two footnotes.

imperial capital towards the Hejaz through the Aegean-Mediterranean sea lane, Cairo, and Damascus. Thus, as a twist of fate, the affair spread to all imperial and royal capitals of old and new in the Middle East, further dramatizing the already odd story of a gift by the king of Persia sent to start a diplomatic feud with the Empire of Rome, falling prey to a network of robbers in Arabia, and triggering a prosecution on three continents by the Turkish overlords.

Neither the Medinan authorities' report to the imperial court – about the coming of the shah's armor-bearer Khaje Mahmud Aqa with the gemmed amber pastille as gift – nor the Iranian grand vizier Muhammad Mumin Beygdili-Shamlu's letter of 1705 to his Ottoman counterpart BaltacıPakça Mehmed Pasha seems to be extant. That is why we first learn of the initiative, the Safavid government's follow-up request, and the Sublime Porte's answer only in Baltacı Mehmed's letter of answer in 1706 to Beygdili-Shamlu:<sup>7</sup>

Your vizierial, regental, deputial, and blissful Highness, the sharp-witted and high-standing marshal of Jupiter-providence and Asaph-virtue, fastener of the pillars of the kingdom, gatherer of the glories of the sultanate, arranger of the public affairs of the lands of Iran, coordinator of the business of the throne-room of the Kayanians, means of the security of the world, link of the righteousness of mankind, Aristotle-minded and Asaph-marked minister, overbearingly glorious and dignified Xan of Xans! In sending presents of purely sublime greetings, which enhance the seat of friendship and bedeck the great cushion of union, ... as gifts to Your blissfully noble gathering and Your uplifting and outstanding forum, friendship is expressed and shown to Your mirror-like bright awareness and Your clear, sweet-smelling mind as follows.

The dazzling gifts of wholeheartedness and the accompanying letter of eloquence, which, in accordance with the hereditary God-given friendship ... steadfast and stable between [us]since the forefathers, were graciously sent by the noble epitome of shahs of the time, sole lord

of the land of Iran, bearer of the banners of rulership, gatherer of the marks of sovereignty, owner of the Kayanian feats, ... his sublime majesty of heavens-status, of sultanate-virtue, of caliphate-rank, of Bahram-onslaught, of Jupiter-bliss, of Sun-accuracy, of Mercury-wit, the sky-high shah, ... the Alexander of Jamshid-throne ... to the world-owning blissful threshold of the greatest of the choice sultans, foremost of the reigning khaqans, helper of Islam and the Muslims, support of the holy warriors, sultan of the two main lands and of the two seas, servant of the respected Two Sanctuaries, layer of the groundwork of the Muhammadan religion, ... sun of the peak of the state, shadow of God's grace, ... world-sheltering judge, my lord, His imperial, wondrous, mighty, and awesome majesty, the padishah of Jamshid-dignity and shahenshah of skies-potency, Sultan Ahmad Khan, ... have reached at a merry time ... with the embassy of ... Murtaza-qulu Xan ...

The two papers, ... along with the gifts, sent by You the dignified to me the true-hearted, ... have also been received... Their contents... call for ...putting a pastille within the purified garden of the Paramount Messengers .a.w. in Medina the Enlightened ... It shall not be a secret to Your bright awareness of Sun-glaze: it is already known by all beings, that the respected Two Sanctuaries, by whose celebrated service this Sublime State ... is happy, are shielded and guarded from putting or lifting anything inside and outside them. Nonetheless, by means of [Khaje] Mahmud Aqa<sup>8</sup> the armour-bearer, a

<sup>8</sup>Khaje Mahmud Aqa, the shah's armour-bearer, was no stranger to missions into Ottoman lands. In 1700-1701, when the Safavid court recrafted the sarcophagi of Imam Ali Hadi and Imam Hasan Askari along with a door for their shrine in Samarra with Ottoman permit, Khaje Mahmud led the mission that brought these from Iran to Samarra. Nazmi-zadeMurteza [Efendi], *Gülşen-iHulefa: BağdatTarihi 762-1717*, ed. Mehmet Karataş (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), pp. 337-342. In the previous year (1700) too he shows up passing through Basra, where Sayyid Farajullah, the unseated Safavid-vassal prince of Huvayza, entrusted to him a letter to Shah Sultan-Husayn. Muhammad Ibrahim b. ZaynalabidinNasiri, *Dastur-iŞahriyaran*, ed. Muhammad Nadir Nasiri Muqaddam (Tehran: Bunyad-iMavqufat-iDoktor Mahmud Afshar,

<sup>7</sup>Rami Mehmed, Munşeat, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, H.O. 179, 25a-26a (entry 37, misdated in this copy).

gemmed pastille came last year from the lofty shah to be put into that amber-smelling garden of the Noble Messenger. The servants of that affluent and angel-watched shrine then withheld its placement, as no imperial permission was given out for this matter. The aforesaid Mahmud Aqa the armour-bearer did not take it away either, and thus it was left in Medina the Enlightened. But because it ended up having been sent by the evidently honourable [shah] and owing to the long-standing wholeheartedness between the two sublime states, its rejection is not deemed suitable. Therefore, God willing, an illustrious order of required-abidance for putting the aforesaid pastille to its spot is to be given out and sent next year with the imperial overseer appointed upon the convoys of the Muslim pilgrims ...

#### April 1706<sup>9</sup>

As the pilgrimage season drew near, the imperial court kept its pledge. In a decree to its judicial, clerical, and military appointees as well as administrative and local functionaries in Medina, it ordered these authorities to team up with the forthcoming overseer of the imperial pilgrimage caravan, who would reach the Hejaz from Constantinople through the Anatolian-Syrian highway, in setting the gemmed amber pastille of the Iranian shah at a fitting spot within the shrine of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>10</sup>

Decree to the judge of Medina the Enlightened, to Muhammad Agha the chief of the Prophet's sanctuary, ... to the castellan of Medina the Enlightened, to the provincial notables, and to the functionaries, is thus.

hs.1373), pp. 259-262. Also see Muhammad Rafi' al-Din Ansâri, *Dastur al-Muluk: A Safavid State Manual*, trans. & ed. Willem Floor and Mohammad H. Faghgoory (Costa Mesa CA: Mazda Publishers, 2007), 183.

<sup>9</sup>Rami Mehmed, *Munşeat*, 25a-26a (entry 37).

<sup>10</sup>OsmanlıArşivi (BOA), *Cevdet -Hariciye*, 129/6430: draft officially approved by the grand vizier to be issued as imperial decree, to which slight changes were made later in the final decree; BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entry 615: summary of the final imperial decree, logged in the Register of the Important Decrees of the Imperial Council.

To be put within the musk-smelling garden and on the narcissus-breezing earth of the leader of the universe and pride of all beings Muhammad *Mustafa*, upon him be the most perfect prayers, a gemmed pastille from the illustrious, lofty-ranking, exaltedly reputed, and Jam-titled shah his sublime majesty the sovereign of the domains of Iran, came last year through [Khaje] Mahmud Aqa the armour bearer of the aforesaid shah. At that time, however, the said pastille was not put to its spot because the arrival of my illustrious order stating my august permission was awaited. And it is brought to my august ears that the aforesaid Mahmud Aqa the armour-bearer did not take it back and that it was left in Medina the Enlightened. And in accordance with our old emphatic fondness and lasting friendship with the sublimely dignified shah his majesty, the rejection of the said pastille was not deemed fit either, and my honourably august permission is bestowed for it to be put to its spot. For you, the addressees, to put the said pastille, God-willing, at a befitting spot in the purified garden of [Muhammad] the most-generous messenger in this blessed year by means of ... Sulayman, who is appointed as pilgrimage overseer of the caravans of the rightly-guided pilgrims,... my sublimely glorious decree is given out. I command so.

#### late October, 1706<sup>11</sup>

Things did not go as planned, however. When the decree and in all likelihood the imperial pilgrimage overseer reached Medina, the notables of the town at the head of a great crowd went to the Prophet's shrine to ceremoniously put the shah's gift on display. It must have been a shock to the participants and beholders alike that once within the shrine's treasury; they could not find the gemmed pastille inside the chest where it had been left for safekeeping. The Medinan authorities reported the theft to Constantinople straightaway and arrested some suspects from among the shrine staff. The imperial court reacted more harshly than its functionaries in Medina. First, it held the shrine's directors responsible. Next, it took the prosecution into its

<sup>11</sup>BOA, *Cevdet - Hariciye*, 129/6430; BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entry 615.



own hands. Thirdly, it had its viceroy of Egypt step in at once and put through its orders until the arrival of the commissary from the capital, and set up the chain of command and the course of action for the local, provincial, and imperial investigators as well as the involved dignitaries. Last but not least, it also brought the Imperial Navy's galleon fleet into play by mobilizing the admirals and captains for the swift transportation of the commissary and new appointees to Muhammad's shrine across the sea. Meanwhile the prosecution spread not only westwards to Cairo and northwards to the Mediterranean and Constantinople but also southwards to Mecca (and even up to Baghdad, as to be seen further below). The shah's gift, which was outwardly a donation but indeed sent to diplomatically embitter the Ottomans, ended up, owing to a non-political robbery that no one could have foreseen, making a fuss across the Middle East that even the mastermind behind the initiative, Muhammad Mumin Beygdili-Shamlu the grand vizier of Iran, could not have imagined.<sup>12</sup>

Decree to vizier [Dellak] Ali Pasha<sup>(13)</sup> the

<sup>12</sup>BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entries 1469, 1470, 1477, 1478, 1630.

<sup>13</sup>Dellak Ali (then Agha) first shows up as the chief-of-staff (*katxuda* "steward") of grand vizier Köprülü Amcaoğlu Hüseyin Pasha (term: 1697-1702) – grand vizierial stewardship was then a de facto ministership of the interior. After his master's death, he was made the commander of the Household Corps cavalry, then reinstated as grand vizierial chief-of-staff under Rami Mehmed Pasha (term: 1703), but soon after appointed first as the commander of the Janissaries and next as governor-general of Belgrade, by which he also became vizier and pasha. After rotating at the governorships of southern Serbia (Nish) and southern Hungary (Temeşvar), he attained the highest-ranking governorship-general in the Empire, namely that of Rumelia (1704). After his governorship-general of Egypt, he went on to become governor-general of Eastern Anatolia (Erzurum), meanwhile serving in the Black Sea / Azov front of the Ottoman-Russian war of 1710-1711, and then governor of Crete (Heraklion/Candia). At the end of his last appointment, again as governor-general of Egypt, he was executed in Cairo by a specially-sent captain of the imperial court under the suspicion of embezzlement. See Silahdar Fındıklılı Mehmed Ağa, *Nusretnâme*, ed. Mehmet Topal (Ankara: Türkiye

governor-general of Egypt is thus.

It was formerly communicated to my stately court, that one amber pastille, which had come from the shah of Persia to be hung at the purified garden [of Muhammad] in Medina the Enlightened, and which had been kept at the treasury in a chest, was somehow stolen and not found to be present in its spot. Therefore, Muhammad Agha the chief of the Prophet's sanctuary and Osman Agha the vice-chief of the Prophet's sanctuary were unseated, because their slackness, shortcoming, treachery, and malignancy came to light, whereas they had to keep and guard the Prophet's sanctuary in Medina the Enlightened. In their stead, a new chief and a vice-chief of the sanctuary were appointed from here. To inspect and look into whoever had been the thieves of the pastille, Qapıcıbaşı Mahmud ... from among the master-gatekeepers of my sublime court, was appointed as commissary. He is now about to set out from here for his place of commission together with the appointed chief and vice-chief of the sanctuary. But until the said ones come to and reach their place of commission, the vice-chief of the sanctuary Osman Agha, who is the head of the corruption in this matter of theft, has to be imprisoned beforehand as a precaution so that he does not flee away. This illustrious order of mine is honour ably given out and sent to you, the addressed vizier, with a dispatch rider. Now, as soon as my abovesaid illustrious order comes and reaches, you shall send one of your trustworthy and skilful officers quickly to Medina the Enlightened together with the dispatch rider. As soon as he reaches his place of commission, God-willing, he shall grab and lock up Osman the aforesaid vice-chief of the sanctuary. Afterwards, to keep both the said one and the others who were formerly imprisoned in Medina the Enlightened for this matter, he shall stop at Medina the Enlightened. Upon the incoming, by-God, of the new chief of the sanctuary who is appointed from here and the aforesaid commissary, all prisoners shall be handed over to the said commissary; he shall receive an official

Bilimler Akademisi, 2018), pp. 685, 699, 704, 707, 802, 813, 823, 842, 881, 912, 926, 931-932, 938, 996, 1115, 1138.

protocol of handover and send it to my stately court. So shall you order and emphasize accordingly. My sublimely glorious decree thereon is given out.

**It is written so.  
mid-July, 1707<sup>14</sup>**

Decree to the high-judge of Medina the enlightened is thus.

Now, you, the addressed high judge! When the commissary appointed by the aforesaid governor-general comes in from Egypt, you shall grab Osman the vice-chief of the sanctuary by means of him and lock him up safely. As per my decree, you shall have the aforesaid commissary stop in Medina to keep both the mentioned one and those who were formerly imprisoned for this matter. You too shall take care to keep the prisoners, ... and until the commissary appointed from here comes in together with the new chief of the sanctuary, you shall act watchfully and carefully in guarding, protection, and other needed affairs and matters, and with God's help, when the new chief of the sanctuary comes in with the commissary appointed from my stately court, hand over the prisoners to the said one. After having the commissary coming from Egypt go back to Egypt, you shall pay full attention to executing the sublime content of my illustrious order sent with the commissary that will come from here. You shall shield no one, fulfil each matter in accordance with my decree, and submit and communicate the revealed situation to my stately court accurately. Thereon is given out my sublimely glorious decree.

**It is written so.  
mid-July, 1707<sup>15</sup>**

Decree to the high-judge of Medina the Enlightened and to the chief of the sanctuary of

Medina is thus.

... Medina's former chief of the sanctuary Muhammad Agha communicated to Mecca's blissful prince Abdulkarim (b. Muhammad al-Hashimi<sup>16</sup>),... his margravian and princely highness, that three persons from the aghas were grabbed and imprisoned as perpetrators of this corruption of theft, that as per their report a few more persons had also been alongside them in this ugly affair, and that they were now in Mecca the Honoured. The aforesaid prince communicated in a letter to my stately court that the cited one had then grabbed the three suspects, that gem stones and amber pieces were found with them, and that therefore the three persons who were grabbed as told were also sent to Medina the Enlightened. From persons whose words are noteworthy, however, incontestable knowledge is received that Osman Agha the current vice-chief of the sanctuary had somehow obtained a further key other than the one kept by the chief of the sanctuary, the vice-chief of the sanctuary, the treasurer, and the scribe in a purse sealed with the seals of these four persons, and that he was the head of the corruption in carrying out this hateful affair. Now, when my illustrious order reaches, grab and safely lock up the said Osman who dared this treachery. By means of Qapıcıbaşı Mahmud,... who is from among the master-gatekeepers of my sublime court and who is appointed as commissary for the aforesaid matter, and by lawful means, survey and log his cash, holdings, belongings, and whatever else he has that can be called a property, and keep them at a well-guarded place. Duly look into and investigate the suspects of this pastille theft. After grabbing and imprisoning whomever that had been in this deed, survey and log their holdings and belongings too, and put these to a well-guarded place and keep them there. What number of objects in terms of gemmed things and other things Muhammad Agha the former chief

<sup>14</sup>BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entry 1469: summary of the imperial decree, logged in the Register of the Important Decrees of the Imperial Council.

<sup>15</sup>BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entry 1470: summary of the imperial decree, logged in the Register of the Important Decrees of the Imperial Council.

<sup>16</sup> See Fındıklılı Mehmed Ağa, *Nusretnâme*, pp. 95, 686, 708, 852 and 1063; and Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde-i Vekaiyat*, ed. Abdülkadir Özcan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995), pp. 527-528, 751-752 for references to his two appointments as prince of Mecca as well as to the events in his predecessors' terms leading up to his.

of the sanctuary took over from his predecessor Ahmad Agha at the time of his deposition, how much is present today inside the treasury, whether there are missing things, and how much is missing, shall be made distinct and clarified. Aside from this, the logs of what amount and number of objects the chiefs of the sanctuary handed over to one another, from predecessor to successor, shall be juxtaposed painstakingly. In whosever time as sanctuary chief there are things missing or lacking from those which his predecessor handed over to him, it shall be collected from him and be put to its place. This pastille theft is a treachery of transgression against the treasury of the Prophet's purified garden, and because of the loss of an object coming from a neighbouring ruler, it is a repulsive act that leads to the cheapening of the reputation of the state.

Therefore, it is certainly necessary, and rather imperative, to find those who dared this harmful deed and give them their due sentence by lawful means. Hence, there shall never be any kind of slackness or laziness in this matter, those involved in the theft of the aforesaid pastille shall be found out no matter how, they – no matter who – shall be grabbed and lawfully punished as they deserve. Afterwards, all shall be submitted and communicated to my stately court, the aforesaid commissary shall stop at Medina the Enlightened until the answer comes in from here, those whose imprisonment I decreed shall be carefully kept imprisoned, and after the submission, all shall act according to however my august decree comes out again. Thereon is given out my sublimely glorious decree with my august hand writ. I command so.

#### mid-July, 1707<sup>17</sup>

Decree to vizier [MoralıAşçı] Ibrahim Pasha (<sup>18</sup>)

<sup>17</sup>BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entry 1630: summary of the imperial decree, logged in the Register of the Important Decrees of the Imperial Council.

<sup>18</sup>He was from the Peloponnese (Greece). He first found employment at the imperial court within the palace kitchen, where he rose to management positions. After functioning as the chief-of-staff of Çorlulu Ali Pasha in the latter's governorship of Syrian Tripoli, he was made vizier and the chief-

the admiral-in-chief is as follows.

New chief and vice-chief of the sanctuary are appointed, and to duly look into and investigate whomever the thieves of the pastille were, Qapıcıbaşı Mahmud (may his glory continue) from among the master-gatekeepers of my exalted court is appointed as commissary. He has been sent forth with a galley alongside the sanctuary's new chief and vice-chief, to go to Medina the Enlightened by sea and then over the road of Egypt. You, the addressed vizier! In whichever spot the aforesaid commissary, together with the sanctuary's new chief and vice chief, meets you, you shall take good care to assign a befitting galleon, and to transport and forward the mentioned ones alongside their followings safe and sound to Cairo. Thereon is given out my sublimely glorious decree.

#### It is written so. mid-July, 1707<sup>19</sup>

Decree to CanımHoca [Mehmed<sup>20</sup>] the admiral of the galleons in the Mediterranean Sea, and to other galleon admirals, is thus.

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admiral of the imperial navy in October 1707, followed by his governorship-general of Egypt in August 1709. After deposition, he was first shut up in the Bosphorus citadel and then banished to Sinop, northern Anatolia (1710-1713). Pardoned, he went on to serve as governor of Sidon, Jerusalem, Syria (Damascus), and Aleppo. After a second term as admiral-in-chief, the last two posts he held before his death were governorship of Azov (overlooking Crimea) and then that of Crete (Heraklion/Candia). Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani* III, ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman & Nuri Akbayar (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), p. 776.

<sup>19</sup>BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entry 1477: summary of the imperial decree, logged in the Register of the Important Decrees of the Imperial Council.

<sup>20</sup>CanımHoca Mehmed rose up through the ranks of Imperial Arsenal. He was later made a vizier, entitled pasha, and served three times as admiral-in-chief (1714-1717, 1731, 1733-1736). In between these terms, he was appointed as commander of Koroni (southwestern-most Greece, 1718), of western Crete (Chania, 1725/1726), and of Negroponte (Eğriboz/Euboea, 1732). Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani* IV, p. 1044.

The aforesaid admiral-in-chief may be far away. You the admirals! So as to not be late this matter, whomever of you the aforesaid commissioner and the sanctuary's new chief and vice-chief meet, [that] one of you shall take the said ones and their followings to his galleon, transport and forward them, safe and sound, and as soon as possible, to Cairo, and you shall beware of any kind of lag, procrastination, distraction, or lingering. Thereon is given out my sublimely glorious decree.

**It is written so.  
mid-July, 1707<sup>21</sup>**

The outcome of the prosecution from all sides reached Constantinople around the late winter and early spring of 1708. The end reports amounted to at least six official letters, a collective petition, and three survey registers, besides any other writs that had flowed in earlier from Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Mecca, and Medina to the imperial court amidst the investigation:<sup>22</sup>

Submission by this powerless servant of Yours is thus, my majestic, wondrous, awesome, and gracious Monarch!

Out of respect for the master of prophets and apostles, the exalted and sublime God shall preserve and secure your august entity from material worries, and shall keep your monarchy's long shadow of affection over us together with all creatures for all days, amen! My majestic lord: formerly, Your servant Qapıcıbaşı Mahmud Agha from among the master-gatekeepers of the sublime court had gone with an illustrious order to look into the amber pastille which had been stolen from the treasury of the purified garden in Medina the Enlightened. Now came letters from each of Sayyid Muhammad Efendi the mufti of Medina the Enlightened, the said Qapıcıbaşı

Mahmud Agha, Eyyub Agha the current chief of the sanctuary in Medina the Enlightened, Ahmad Agha the former chief of the sanctuary, and the judge of Medina the Enlightened; and a collective petition from the townfolk of Medina the Enlightened. Summarily, they mean that they communicate in detail the situation that came to light after looking into and investigating the aforesaid matter with full attention and care. They also wrote down and sent a total of three logs, as such: one on the aforesaid pastille's discovered and collected gems, musk, and gold; one on the things found to be present in the respected sanctuary of the Prophet, and one on the lawfully surveyed holdings and belongings of Osman Agha the former vice-chief of the sanctuary. Aside from these, QavvasoğluŞamlı<sup>(23)</sup> Hasan Pasha<sup>24</sup> the pilgrimage commander of Damascus-Syria also sent a letter, which states he reached and entered Medina the Enlightened on February 20 (1708). Now, all of the said papers are raised before your excellent presence. When you augustly look at and come to know them, in whatever way You command your august decree, the order and decree is Yours my monarch, my majestic, wondrous, great, and gracious Lord!<sup>25</sup>

It did not take long for the imperial court to pass the final judgement. We are lucky to have the text of the decree, for we learn some new details about the earlier phases of the affair only thanks to this later summary of the proceedings. It is remarkable that given the lack of modern forensic technology in the early eighteenth century, the prosecution could still track down (or claim to have tracked down) most parts from an expensive artefact of numerous pieces torn asunder and scattered across the land and, if we are to believe the facts found, identify those involved in the robbery. Meanwhile the affair had already lost some of its diplomatic significance

<sup>23</sup>Karl Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 51

<sup>24</sup> He came from among the notables of Damascus. In 1703, he was the sub-governor of Nablus, and in 1707, he was made sub-governor of Jerusalem-Gaza at the same time as commander of the imperial pilgrimage highway from Syria to the Hejaz. Fındıklılı Mehmed, *Nusretnâme*, pp. 709, 852

<sup>25</sup>BOA, *Amedi Kalemi Belgeleri*, 1/36.

<sup>21</sup>BOA, *Mühimme Defteri*, 115, entry 1478: summary of the imperial decree, logged in the Register of the Important Decrees of the Imperial Council.

<sup>22</sup>BOA, *Amedi Kalemi Belgeleri*, 1/36 (sene 1120): arz-type petition to the monarch himself, in all likelihood the summarization (*talxis*) by the grand vizier meant as a cover letter to the attached reports.



and become rather an inside matter of the Ottoman Empire where the state wanted, out of self-esteem, to find the perpetrators of a misdeed committed against the inviolability of something entrusted to the sanctity of a holy shrine under its safekeeping, even though the criminals were not political and in all likelihood had only sought material gain out of this theft, rather than casting a slur on Ottoman lordship.<sup>26</sup>

Decree to the high-judge of Medina the Enlightened and its sanctuary chief is thus.

Earlier, the expositions, collective petitions, letters, and logs that were sent to my stately court about the pastille, which had come from the shah of Persia and been stolen at the spot called the "Oil Dome" within the Prophet's respected sanctuary in Medina the Enlightened, came in by means of the inspector of Medina the Enlightened. I augustly looked at all of the said papers. In summary, their contents report as such:

The thieves of the aforesaid pastille and in what way it had been stolen was duly inspected and investigated by Qapıcıbaşı Mahmud ... who is from among the master-gatekeepers of my sublime court and who with an illustrious order was formerly appointed as commissary for the aforesaid matter. Khalil and Ahmad abd-i Rus, who are followers of Ahmad Omar from among the aghas of the illustrious sanctuary, and another Khalil, who is a follower of Suleiman Agha the former treasurer, had undertaken the theft themselves. The aforesaid Ahmad Omar and Ahmad 'A amir too had helped the three mentioned thieves in this hateful deed. Whereas at first the jeweller named Abdulgaffur had also denied the gems that he had taken from the aforesaid ones with a profit, fifty-six pieces of gems showed up after he was brought to account. The five mentioned felons were strictly locked up and likewise Osman the former vice-chief of the sanctuary was too imprisoned out of the stronghold into the house of Hafiz Muhammad the former chief of the sanctuary. Afterwards, as per my illustrious order, the holdings and

belongings of the mentioned Osman and the aforesaid Ahmad Omar, who as told above had given consent and help to the pastille thieves, were surveyed and logged by lawful means as well as by means of the aforesaid commissary. However, Osman's treachery in this matter was not obvious. When the abovementioned Hafiz Muhammad also said to his predecessor amidst his imprisonment "you handed over to me only the things within the small cabinet located in the platform of aghas and a sealed chest from the illustrious room, you did not give me a pastille," the mentioned Ahmad confessed willingly and confirmed the words of the aforesaid before everyone. Aside from these, Abdulgaffur the jeweller, who as told above was grabbed and imprisoned, said "I sold twenty pieces of stones to the person named Muhammad Mashriqi," and Ahmad Omar also said "I have sold jewels to Sarraj Hindi, a tradesman from India, and to the person called Abbas the jeweller." The three mentioned ones were also grabbed and imprisoned, but as it later became obvious that they were blameless in this misdeed, they were taken out of prison after receiving their guarantors to call them forth upon request. Likewise, nothing became proven or obvious about the two persons named Abdurrahim Shukuri and Rashid Martabani, who, upon being found in Mecca the Honoured in the same place as Ahmad abd-i Rus, were grabbed along, called forth to Medina the Enlightened, and imprisoned there. They too were set free after their guarantors were received. Two hundred and forty-three pieces of ruby, two hundred and twenty-one large as well as small pieces of emerald, twenty-nine large, small, and tiny pieces of diamond, twelve pieces of unpierced pearl, [ca.] 2300 grams of gold, [ca.] 3800 grams of amber from different parts of the stolen pastille, some sound and some broken, have been discovered, collected, and kept. Misgiving holds sway over the dwellers of Medina the Enlightened, as the prisoners, who were grabbed with the accusation of theft, dared to slander those who had nothing to do with this treachery, owing to the former enmity and feud between them. Because most parts of the mentioned pastille have already been tracked down, as for the rest the dwellers of Medina ask for

<sup>26</sup>BOA, *İbnülemin - Dahiliye*, 32/2799: draft officially approved by the grand vizier to be issued as imperial decree.

forgiveness and mercy.

Hence, you, the addressed one! With my illustrious order, I have prescribed the governor of Jeddah and the castellan of Jeddah to forever lock up the three persons who, from among those grabbed and imprisoned with this outrageous blame, had dared this wickedness themselves while they had been servants of the chamber of the Prophet's sanctuary, namely Khalil and Ahmad abd-i Rus, both followers of Ahmad Omar, and the other Khalil, follower of Suleiman the former treasurer. When my illustrious order comes, you shall send the aforesaid ones to Jeddah. Ahmad Omar and Ahmad 'A amir, who helped the thieves in this ugly deed, and Abdulgaffur the jeweller, who partnered with the thieves by buying from them for profit, shall be cast out and banned from the environs of the Prophet his holiness and banished to another region to never come again to Medina the Enlightened from this day forth. The five persons who as told above were grabbed as suspects of the blame but later found to bear no responsibility, namely Muhammad Marshiqi, Sarraj Hindi, Abbas the jeweller, Abdurrahim, and Rashid Martabani, shall be acquitted and not be harassed from this day forth. Hafiz Muhammad the former chief of the sanctuary and Osman the former vice-chief of the sanctuary shall also be freed from imprisonment, as it became established that they did not commit treachery. The said Osman's belongings, which were surveyed and logged, shall be given back to him. The ugly mannered and wicked one called Ahmad Omar, besides helping the thieves, also acknowledged that he had sent plenty of things from the stolen parts of the aforesaid pastille to Baghdad with his sister's son. What he did causes liability for him, plenty of things were wasted in his hands, and he is a wretched traitor. Therefore, his holdings and belongings, which had been surveyed and logged, shall be sold by lawful means and by means of the aforesaid commissary, with the condition that the sales not be less than the prices shown in the log. The money to be earned and the collected parts of the said pastille shall be handed over to the aforesaid commissary. For the wasted parts of the pastille to be perfected and shaped into its original form here out of the mentioned amount and the State

Treasury, the aforesaid commissary shall be returned to my stately court. In whatever way my illustrious order comes out thereafter, it shall be duly acted upon. Thereon is issued my highly glorious decree. I command so.

#### **late May, 1708<sup>27</sup>**

It took slightly over a year for the Ottoman authorities to fulfil all orders of the decree above across Medina and Constantinople. The last order from the capital, which was given out "to the judge of Medina and the chief of the Prophet's sanctuary concerning the fact that the pastille was crafted back into its original layout and sent to be set at its place" bears the date of September 25, 1709.<sup>28</sup> As it seems, the pastille affair does not show up again in archival records after this date.

#### **Conclusion**

Nevertheless, Ottoman-Safavid dealings would not settle down after this episode, and relations would keep on worsening as they had been doing since 1701. Border breaches by Iranian vassals and punitive expeditions by Ottoman governors would become chronic. Such frictions arising in borderlands would grow into diplomatic strifes between the central governments of the two sides. Thereby would the two former allies become further estranged from one another, at the same time as the Hotaki Afghans' uprising in Qandahar would unfold into an onslaught towards the Iranian heartland and, step by step, overthrow the Safavid kingdom.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> BOA, *İbnülemin - Dahiliye*, 32/2799.

<sup>28</sup> BOA, *İbnülemin - Dahiliye*, 32/2806: I could not see this one document although I tried for over a year. Its image has been missing in the Ottoman Archive's online database. As I could not travel to Istanbul for more than year and a half owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, I attempted to fetch it on site through a middleman, but this yielded no result either, though I acquired hundreds of other documents by this means. Therefore, I must content myself with quoting the archivist's summary of the document, the full version of which would in all likelihood shed light on further details that are unknown to us.

<sup>29</sup> See Güngörürler, "Diplomacy and Political Relations between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran, 1639-1722," 409-479.

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