



دعاً | "Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī. "Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing)" | شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مجرب إن شاء الله تعالى". Trans. Joshua Mugler. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al\_isbahani\_prayer\_presence\_king/.

### "Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing)" "دعاً شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مجرب إن شاء الله تعالى"

#### Text Information

Author | Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī [att.]

Language | Arabic

Period | 11th Century

Genre | Devotional Prose, Vita

Source | Khalidi Library (Jerusalem) MS 214, fol. 59r-61v.

Collection | Prayer, Spirituality, and Life after Death: Global Medieval Perspectives

URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al\_isbahani\_prayer\_presence\_king/

Transcription, translation and introduction by Joshua Mugler.

#### Introduction to the Text

This text is attributed to Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī (948-1038), and indeed a shorter version of the story can be found in Abū Nu'aym's biographical dictionary Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-tabaqāt al-aṣfiyā' (vol. 9, pp. 78-79 in the Beirut edition), which compiles biographical accounts of many early Islamic figures. This excerpt comes from the section on the foundational early legal scholar Muḥammad al-Shāfi'i (d. 820), its central character, but has been substantially expanded and modified from Abū Nu'aym's original version, itself passed down from generations of earlier narrators. Abū Nu'aym provides full chains of transmission (X said that Y said...) to authenticate each story, although in this version, the initial chain has been abbreviated on the assumption that the reader can seek out Abū Nu'aym's text for more complete information.

The accounts in Ḥilyat al-awliyā' emphasize the sanctity of early Muslims, and this one is no exception. The story is placed in the mouth of al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī' (755-824), one of the most important court officials under the 'Abbāsid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809). As al-Faḍl tells the story, he was summoned before the angry caliph one night and asked to produce al-Shāfi'i for likely torture and/or execution. The reason for the caliph's anger is not stated, but there is a historical nucleus to this event, for al-Shāfi'i was nearly executed in 803, while he was governor of the rebellious city of Najrān. Different explanations have been given for the scholar's narrow escape, including this account, which attributes his salvation to his pious recitation of a prayer at court. Through another, more complete chain of transmission, al-Shāfi'i tells al-Faḍl that this prayer was recited by the Prophet Muḥammad during the Battle of the Trench (626-627) and contributed to the Muslims' victory. Note that this connection to the Prophet is not found in Ḥilyat al-awliyā', where the prayer is simply attributed to al-Shāfi'i, but the expanded version amplifies its prestige. This text reflects the precarious, yet often luxurious, life of a powerful court official: you may be summoned before the caliph for torture, or you may instead receive more gold than you could ever need. One strategy for dealing with this precarity, as seen here, is to rely on the protection of God and recite this prayer each time the ruler calls your name.

As you read the text, note some of the distinctive features of classical Islamic texts, including:

- The chain of transmission (*isnād*), already discussed, that provides authority for stories and sayings attributed to earlier figures. This text includes one incomplete chain and one complete chain.
- Formulas of respect placed after the names of important people, such as "God's peace and blessings be upon him" after a mention of the Prophet Muḥammad or "God be pleased with him" after a mention of al-Shāfi'i.
- Polite forms of address: the caliph is usually addressed as "Commander of the Faithful" (*Amīr al-mu'minīn*), while others are often called by names derived from their firstborn sons—for example, al-Shāfi'i is often addressed as "Abū 'Abd Allāh," that is, "Father of 'Abd Allāh."



Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī. "Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing)" | دعاء | شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مجرب إن شاء الله تعالى. Trans. Joshua Mugler. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al\_isbahani\_prayer\_presence\_king/.

## Introduction to the Source

This version of the prayer story is found only in Khalidi Library (Jerusalem) MS 214, fol. 59r-61v. The manuscript is not dated, but was likely copied around the 15th century. The elaborately decorated title page (the style may indicate that it was produced in Egypt) describes the manuscript's contents as "a compilation that contains aphorisms and testaments and fables by Luqmān the Sage." The texts are a miscellany of popular philosophy, including the "Testament of Pythagoras" and the "Testament of Luqmān," in which ancient philosophers allegedly give final instructions to their disciples before their deaths. The "Fables of Luqmān," highly similar to those of Aesop, are also included. Various other sayings attributed to ancient philosophers appear between these larger texts, along with the inscriptions that were supposedly found on the philosophers' seals. The story of al-Shāfi'ī and his prayer is the final item in the manuscript.

At first glance, the story of the prayer is an outlier in this compilation of texts attributed to ancient philosophers, focusing on specifically Islamic characters and themes as none of the other texts do. However, we may view the entire manuscript as a collection of short texts that would be interesting and beneficial for a court official to know, collected by just such an official (perhaps in Mamlük Egypt) with money to spend on an ornate manuscript. Pithy sayings attributed to ancient sages and entertaining animal fables with succinct moral lessons would not only be edifying for the manuscript's owner personally, but could be useful bits of knowledge as the owner aimed to impress superiors with erudite conversation topics. This prayer (and its enjoyable frame story) fits perfectly in that court context, and so we might view this manuscript as an anthology in the tradition of adab ("etiquette") literature, training its reader in the proper knowledge and protocols for a refined member of the upper class. The context of Khalidi MS 214 thus recasts the text to make it less about the personal sanctity of al-Shāfi'ī, as in Ḥilyat al-awliyā', and more about the elite readers who might rely on this prayer for protection in a precarious world.

## About this Edition

I have transcribed and translated the text from Khalidi MS 214, its only known copy in this form. I have generally maintained the spelling of the manuscript, including frequent omission of the Arabic letter hamzah (هـ) that marks the glottal stop, but have standardized the dots on several letters that sometimes appear without them. The manuscript includes a surprising number of short vowel and case markings, but these have been omitted in transcription. There are few punctuation marks in the text, as with most pre-modern Arabic texts, and I have added a few additional periods to help organize the sentences. I have retained masculine language for God to reflect the usage of the Arabic text.

## Further Reading

- Ali, Kecia. *Imam Shaf'i: Scholar and Saint*. Oneworld Academic, 2011.
- Short biography of al-Shāfi'ī, the main character of this text.
- Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*. Routledge, 2016.
- Collected essays showing some of the ways ancient philosophers were known and used in Arabic.
- Kadi, Wadad. "The Humanities through Islamic Eyes: The Beginnings." *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam: Religious Learning between Continuity and Change*, edited by Sebastian Günther, vol. 1. Brill, 2020, pp. 43-58.
- Overview of some important genres of classical Islamic scholarship, including the biographical dictionary.
- Mojaddedi, Jawid A. *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*. Curzon, 2001.
- Discussion of Ḥilyat al-awliyā' (especially in chapter 2) and other important Sufi biographical dictionaries.
- Orfali, Bilal. "The Art of Anthology in Premodern Arabic Literature." *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Mansūr al-Thā'ālibī and His Yatīmat al-dahr*. Brill, 2016, pp. 1-33.
- Study of classical *adab* anthologies that may provide some inspiration for the collection of short texts in this manuscript.



Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī. "Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing)" دعاء " | ا شاء الله تعالى نافع مغرب إن شاء الله تعالى شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مغرب إن شاء الله تعالى . Trans. Joshua Mugler. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al\_isbahani\_prayer\_presence\_king/.

### Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing) ”دعا شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مغرب ان شا الله تعالى“

In the name of God, compassionate and merciful

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Ḩāfiẓ Abū Nu’aym, God be pleased with him, narrated with a chain of transmission from al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī’—the companion of Hārūn al-Rashīd—who said:

روى الحافظ أبو نعيم رضي الله عنه بسنده إلى الفضل بن الريبع  
صاحب هرون الرشيد انه قال

Al-Rashīd sent for me one night, so I went to see him. When I entered before him, I found him with a number of swords and various instruments of torture.

ارسل إلى الرشيد ذات ليلة فحضرت إليه فلما دخلت عليه وجدت  
بين يديه صبارة سيف وانواعا من آلات العذاب

He said, "Faḍl." I said, "At your service, Commander of the Faithful." He said, "Bring me this Ḥijāzī"—meaning al-Shāfi‘ī, God be pleased with him—"this very hour!" And he was enraged.

فقال يا فضل فقلت لبيك يا أمير المؤمنين فقال علي بهذا الحجازي  
يعني الشافعي رضي الله عنه الساعة الساعة وهو مغضب

So I left, filled with indescribable grief and sorrow because of my love for al-Shāfi‘ī—God be pleased with him—on account of his eloquent way with words and his intellect.

فخرجت وهي من الغم والحزن ما لا يوصف لمحبتي للشافعي رضي  
الله عنه لفصاحته وبلايته وعقله

I came to his door and commanded someone to knock, but he was slow to answer.

فجئت إلى بابه فأمرت من دق عليه فابطأ الجواب فعلمت أنه  
يصلني فوقفت حتى فرغ من صلاته

He opened the door and I greeted him and said, "Answer the Commander of the Faithful."

ففتح الباب فسلمت عليه وقلت له أجب أمير المؤمنين.

He said, "To hear is to obey."

فقال سمعا وطاعة.

He renewed his ablutions, did two cycles of prayer, and left, walking until we reached the curtain.

فجدد الوضوء وركع ركعتين وخرج يمشي حتى وصلنا إلى الستر

I told him, "Abū ‘Abd Allāh, wait here and relax until I call you in." I went in to the Commander of the Faithful, who was still angry.

فقلت له يا أبا عبد الله قف هنا لتسريح إلى أن استاذن فدخلت  
على أمير المؤمنين فإذا هو على حالة غضبه

When he saw me, he said, "Where is the Ḥijāzī?" I said, "At the curtain." He said, "Command him to enter."

فلما رأني قال أين الحجازي قلت عند الستر قال مره بالدخول

So I went out and said to him, "In the name of God."

فخرجت إليه وقلت له بسم الله

He went in, walking serenely, neither dismayed nor frightened nor worried nor uneasy. Then he began moving his lips and his face was illuminated.

فدخل يمشي مطمئناً غير فرع ولا خائف ولا قلق ولا منزعج ثم بدا  
يحرك شفتيه ووجهه مستنير



دعاً | ا  
Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī. "Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing)"  
شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مجرب إن شاء الله تعالى . Trans. Joshua Mugler. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al\_isbahani\_prayer\_presence\_king/.

When he entered and the Commander of the Faithful saw him, he stood and welcomed him and began kissing him between the eyes. He was happy and said, "Welcome, Abū 'Abd Allāh! Why have you not visited us, when you're in town and I've been missing you?"

He had him sit in his place, sat next to him, and talked with him for a while, then ordered that he be given a huge quantity of gold.

Al-Shāfi'ī—God be pleased with him—said, "I have no interest in it." But he asked him to accept it and kept pestering him, so he accepted it with indifference.

Then al-Rashīd said to him, "Abū 'Abd Allāh, we only summoned you to obtain some blessing from you and to gain an audience with you."

Then he commanded me to return him to his home and to take the gold along.

When we went out, he began to give it to everyone he saw and everyone who asked, left and right, until he arrived at home and none of it remained.

When he had entered his home and was sitting peacefully, I sat before him and said, "Abū 'Abd Allāh, you know my love and affection for you. I saw the anger of the Commander of the Faithful when he first summoned you, then when you went before him, I saw his humility and friendliness, treating you with an honor and deference that delighted me.

I saw you moving your lips when you went in before him, so what else could have calmed his anger and contempt? Teach me what you were saying when you and I went in before him."

He said, "Mālik reported to me from Nāfi', from Ibn 'Umar—God be pleased with him and with them all—that the Messenger of God—God's peace and blessings be upon him—recited it on the Day of the Confederates, so God routed them and gave him victory over them. It is:

فَلَمَّا دَخَلَ وَبَصَرَ بِهِ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ قَامَ إِلَيْهِ وَاسْتَقْبَلَهُ وَجَعَلَ يَقْبَلُ  
بَيْنَ عَيْنَيْهِ وَابْتَهَجَ بِهِ وَقَالَ لَهُ مَرْحُبًا بْنَيْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ لَمْ لَا تَزَرَنَا وَتَكُونَ  
عَنْدَنَا فَانِي إِلَيْكَ مُشْتَاقٌ.

واجلسه مكانه وقعد إلى جانبه وتحدث معه ساعة ثم أمر له ببدرة من الذهب

فقال الشافعي رضي الله عنه لا رأي لي فيه فسألته ان يقبله والج عليه فقبله غير مكتثر به

ثم قال له الرشيد يا ابا عبد الله ما طلبناك الا لتناول من بركتك ونحظى بمشاهدتك

ثم امرني ان ارده الى داره وان احمل البدرة بين يديه

فلما خرجنا جعل يعطي كل من رأه وكل من سأله يمينا وشمالا حتى وصل الى منزله وما معه شيء منها

فَلَمَّا دَخَلَ مُنْزَلَهُ وَاطْمَانَ بِهِ الْجُلوسُ جَلَسَتْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَقَلَتْ لَهُ  
يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَدْ عَرَفْتَ مَحْبَبِي لَكَ وَشَفَقْتِي عَلَيْكَ وَإِنِّي شَاهَدْتُكَ  
غَضْبَ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي ابْتِدَاءِ طَلَبِهِ لَكَ ثُمَّ لَمَّا دَخَلْتَ عَلَيْهِ رَأَيْتَ  
مِنْهُ مِنَ التَّوَاضُعِ وَالتَّوَدُّدِ وَالْأَجْلَاءِ وَالْأَكْرَامِ لَكَ مَا سَرَنِي

وَكُنْتَ رَايْتَكَ تَحْرِكَ شَفَقَتِيكَ عِنْ دُخُولِكَ عَلَيْهِ فِي الَّذِي سَكَنَ غَضْبَهِ  
وَسُخْرَهُ إِلَّا مَا عَلِمْتَنِي مَا كُنْتَ تَقُولُهُ عِنْ دُخُولِكَ مَعِي إِلَيْهِ

فَقَالَ حَدِيثِي مَالِكٌ عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنْ أَبْنَى عَمِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ وَعَنْهُمْ  
اجْمَعِينَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَرَاهُ يَوْمَ الْاحْرَابِ  
فَهُزِمُوهُمُ اللَّهُ وَنَصَرَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَهُوَ



دعاً | دعاءً | Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī. "Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing)" "شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مجرب إن شاء الله تعالى". Trans. Joshua Mugler. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al\_isbahani\_prayer\_presence\_king/.

"I seek refuge in God from Satan the damned, in the name of God, merciful and compassionate. 'God testifies that there is no god but him—as do the angels and those with knowledge—upholding justice. There is no god but him, Mighty and Wise. Religion in the sight of God is Islam.'<sup>1</sup>

Then he said, I also testify to what he has testified, and I place this testimony as a deposit with God. This testimony is my deposit with God until the day of resurrection.

God, I seek refuge in the light of your holiness, the power of your blessing, the greatness of your purity, the blessing of your majesty, from every harm and malady and the misfortunes of night and day, that the traveler may arrive safely.

Merciful God, you are my help, so I seek help with you! You are my shelter, so I seek shelter with you! You are my refuge, so I seek refuge with you! You are my protection, so I seek protection with you!

You, before whom the necks of tyrants are humbled and to whom those of pharaohs submit!

I seek refuge in you from disgrace before you, from the opening of your veil, from forgetting to remember you, from neglecting to give you thanks. I am in your sanctuary, beneath your wing.

My night and my day, my sleeping and my lying down, my setting out and my traveling, my moving and my resting, my living and my dying, and all of my hours and times, your remembrance is on my lips and your praise covers me.

I testify that there is no god but you, there is no god beside you, there is no one worshiped except you, exalting your greatness, honoring the glory of your face, declaring your eternity and confessing your oneness, affirming that you are above all that the unbelievers and the unjust and the deniers say of you. You are highly exalted above that!

اعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم سُمِّ الله الرَّحْمَن الرَّحِيم شهد الله  
أنه لا إله إلا هو والملائكة وأولوا العلم قائماً بالقسط لا إله إلا هو  
العزيز الحكيم إن الدين عند الله الإسلام

ثم قال وأناأشهد بما شهد به وأستودع الله هذه الشهادة وهذه  
الشهادة وديعة لي عند الله إلى يوم القيمة

اللهم أَعُوذُ بِنُورِ قُدْسِكَ وَعَظِيمِ بَرَكَتِكَ وَعَظِيمِ طَهَارَتِكَ وَبِرَكَةِ  
جَلَالِكَ مِنْ كُلِّ أَفْٰةٍ وَعَاهَةٍ وَمِنْ طُوَّارِقِ اللَّيلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِلَّا طَارِقاً يَطْرُقُ  
بَخِيرٌ

يَا رَحْمَنَ الْلَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ غَيَاثِي فِي كُلِّ أَسْتَغْيِثُ وَأَنْتَ مَلَادِي فِي كُلِّ أَلَوْذٍ  
وَأَنْتَ عِيَاضِي فِي كُلِّ أَعْوَذُ وَأَنْتَ جَارِي فِي كُلِّ أَسْتَجِيرٍ

يَا مَنْ ذَلَّتْ لَهُ رِقَابُ الْجَبَابِرَةِ وَخَضَعَتْ لَهُ أَعْنَاقُ الْفَرَاعِنَةِ

اعوذ بك من خزيك ومن كشف سترك ومن نسيان ذكرك والإعراض  
عن شكرك أنا في حزرك وتحت كنفك

لِي وَهَنَارِي وَنُومِي وَرَقَادِي وَظَعِينِي وَأَسْفَارِي وَحَرَكَاتِي وَسَكَنَاتِي  
وَحَيَاتِي وَمَمَاتِي وَجَمِيعِ سَاعَاتِي وَأَوْقَاتِي ذَكْرِ شَعَارِي وَثَنَاؤُكَ دَثَارِي

أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ وَلَا إِلَهَ غَيْرُكَ وَلَا مَعْبُودٌ سُواكَ تَشْرِيفًا  
لِعَظَمَتِكَ وَتَكْرِيمًا لِسَبَحَاتِكَ وَجَهَكَ وَإِقْرَارًا لِصَمْدَانِيَّتِكَ وَاعْتِرَافًا  
بِوَحْدَانِيَّتِكَ وَتَنْزِيهًا لِكَ عَمَّا يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُونَ وَالظَّالِمُونَ وَالْجَاحِدُونَ  
تَعْالَى عَنِ ذَلِكَ عَلَوْا كَبِيرًا

## Critical Notes

Note 1

Qur'an, Āl 'Imrān 3:18-19.



دعاً | دعاء "أ" | Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī. "Noble prayer said when standing before kings, known by experience to be beneficial (God most high willing)" "شريف يقال عند مقابلة الملوك نافع مجرب إن شاء الله تعالى". Trans. Joshua Mugler. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al\_isbahani\_prayer\_presence\_king/.

God, protect me from disgrace before you and from the wickedness of your slaves! Pitch for me the pavilions of your preservation and your providence! Generously grant me your blessing, most merciful of the merciful!

My God, how can I fear, when you are my hope? How can I be harmed, when my trust is in you? How can I be overcome, when you are my treasure? How can I be defeated, when I rely upon you in all things?

I strike the face of every envier who envies, every watcher who watches, everyone unjust and ungrateful, with 'Say: He is God the one, God the eternal, he does not beget and he is not begotten, and there is none equal to him.'<sup>2</sup>

Al-Fadl said:

قال الفضل

So I memorized these words from al-Shāfi'ī - God be pleased with him – and I did not stop returning to his house until I had memorized them well, and I never went in before Hārūn al-Rashīd without reciting them and praying them, morning or evening.

By God, I no longer received anything unpleasant from him, he was not annoyed with me for even a day, and he was never angry with me, by the blessing of this noble prayer and the blessing of al-Shāfi'ī, God be pleased with him.

May the blessing of this noble prayer continue to be upon us and upon the Muslims, amen.

God's peace and blessings be upon our lord Muḥammad and his family and companions.

اللهم أجرني من خزيك ومن شر عبادك واضرب علي سرادقات حفظك وعنايتك وجد علي منك بخير يا أرحم الراحمين

إلهي كيف أخاف وأنت أملأ أم كيف أضام وعليك توكيلاً أم كيف أقهراً وأنت ذخري أم كيف أغلب وعليك في كل الأمور اعتمادي

ضررت وجه كل حاسد حسد وراصد رصد وطالع كند بقل هو الله أحد الله الصمد لم يلد ولم يولد ولم يكن له كفواً أحد

فحفظت هذه الكلمات من الشافعي رضي الله عنه ولم أزل أتردد إلى بيته حتى حفظتها حفظاً جيداً وما دخلت على هارون الرشيد إلا وقرأتها ودعوت بها بكرة وعشية

فوالله ما عدت رأيت منه ما أكره ولا حرج علي يوماً ولا غضب علي بركة هذا الدعاء الشريف وبركة الشافعي رضي الله عنه

وأعاد علينا وعلى المسلمين من بركة هذا الدعاء الشريف أمن

وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وأله وصحبه وسلم

## Critical Notes

Note 2

Qur'an, al-Ikhlas 112.