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The Gestures of Prayer

في صفة الصلاة

An anonymous instruction • Utah, P.Utah Ar. inv. 205



Historical illustration · caption and provenance inside

English · Arabic text · Notes and sources

VOLUME V

Reading guide

The English text, commentary and sources are brought together in the first part. Documentary reproductions appear at the end of the volume. Historical illustrations accompany the text.

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Appendix · Facsimiles 15

Arabic quotations needed for the commentary remain beside their explanations. The continuous Arabic transcription follows in a separate part.

References to editions and manuscripts have been retained. Contents-page references and internal links point to the new pagination.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

About the work

Dating

From its script, W. Matt Malczycki dates this copy to the eighth century. When the instruction was composed and who wrote it remain unknown.

Origin and preservation

The leaf's findspot is unknown. The papyrus is held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, under shelfmark P.Utah Ar. inv. 205.

Summary

The worshipper stands, raises his hands to shoulder height and begins his recitation. The instruction follows each gesture down to the position of the palms, fingers and foot, then addresses the reader directly about the words he must say while seated. A tear in the leaf interrupts the final formula of the profession of faith.

Detailed account and sources · p. 10

CONTENTS OF THE VOLUME

Reading guide

The two sides of a single papyrus describe the transition from ablution to prayer, the raised hands, and the words of the seated worshipper. Its script leads W. Matt Malczycki to suggest an eighth-century date. The place of discovery remains unknown. The French and Arabic titles are descriptive.

Passage	Arabic	English	Meaning
Beginning the prayer • recto	11	5	8
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PART ONE

English translation

الترجمة الإنجليزية

01 · Beginning the prayer • recto

01 In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Merciful.

02 Good comes from prayer. Ablution opens it. The salutation releases it, and proclaiming God's greatness makes it sacred.

03 Every Muslim who rises to pray must stand before God with devotion. This devotion

04 consists in bowing, bowing and reverence. Reverence arises from the fear of God. First, here is

05 what he says while standing, his hands raised to shoulder height, no higher than his ears. He says: “God, He is greater.”

06 “Glory to You, O God! Blessed are Your names; exalted is Your majesty. No deity exists but You. I have turned my face to Him who created

07 the heavens and the earth, turning to God alone, submitting to Him. I am not one of those who associate partners with Him. My prayer, my rite, my life

08 and my death belong to God, Lord of the worlds. He has no partner. This is what I have been commanded, and to be among those who submit to Him.” Then he begins the recitation

09 and recites the words of the Quran. When he has finished reciting, he says: “[God] is greater,” raising his hands to the height

10 of his shoulders, no higher than his ears. Then he bows [...] his head [...] he did not specify it [...] both his palms.

11 [Traces of letters along the torn edge.]



From standing to bowing. Lane drew the postures he observed in Egypt in the nineteenth century. E. W. Lane, The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, p. 64, "Postures of Prayer", I.

02 · The profession of faith • verso

01 Then he raises his head and brings his palms back onto his knees. He extends his fingers towards

02 the direction of prayer and straightens his big toe. He then performs the whole prayer in this way. When you sit

03 during the two units of prayer, recite the profession of faith. Take care neither to add anything to it nor to leave anything out until you have completed your profession

04 of faith. Then say whatever you wish. Good speech has great value. [It would happen that...?]

05 Ibn Masʿūd would say in his profession of faith: “Say: In the name of God.” Then he would speak the good words

06 as follows: [...]

07 [...] God [...] the righteous [...] I bear witness [...]

08 of him [...]



Postures on the ground and the seated position in Lane's second plate.
E. W. Lane, ibid., p. 65, “Postures of Prayer”, II.

NOTES AND SOURCES

Translation nuances
وجوه المعنى

01 · Beginning the prayer • recto

حسن

The absence of vowels leaves the punctuation open. We follow the reading that ends the clause after ḥusn (“a good thing”). If ḥusn is linked to wuḍū’, the meaning is “the quality of the ablution”.

يحلّها / يحرّمها

The salutation makes lawful again the actions suspended during prayer. The takbīr marks entry into the state of prayer. The order in which the papyrus mentions them has been retained.

القنوت / الخشوع

Qunūt can mean obedience, standing or devotion. The scribe specifies it as bowing; khushūʿ expresses the inward attitude of reverence or humility. The repeated word “bowing” reflects the repetition in the line.

جَدّك

“Your majesty”, “Your greatness” or “Your power”. The familial meaning “grandfather”, which jadd also has, would be incompatible with this formula.

حنيفًا / نُسُكي

Ḥanīf suggests an exclusive orientation towards the one God. Nusuk can denote a rite, an act of worship or a sacrifice; “my rite” retains its general scope here.

فطر

“Created”, “brought into being”, “gave their first form”. The formula echoes Quran 6:79; what follows is close to 6:162-163, but with a different ending.

Arabic text · Translation

02 · The profession of faith • verso

إبهامه

Ibhām denotes the thumb or the big toe. The movement of the fingers has already been mentioned immediately before; the translation therefore proposes the toe. The photograph does not show the gesture.

الركعتين

“The two units of prayer”. A rakʿa comprises several gestures; translating it simply as “prostration” would erase this distinction.

تشهّد / شهادتك

This refers to the ritual recitation of the tashahhud: “recite the profession of faith” or, more literally, “bear witness”.

الكلام الطيّب

“Good speech”, but also “excellent words” or “pure words”. In this context, these may be devotional formulas; compare Quran 35:10.

[...] الله الصالحين أشهد

The surviving ending allows the type of prayer to be identified. It can be compared with the formula known from the hadith collections; its exact length in this witness remains unknown.

Arabic text · Translation

DOCUMENTATION

Introduction and sources

A reading text in normalised Arabic, established by comparing the two University of Utah photographs with Malczycki's edition. Consonant dots, hamzas and punctuation make the text easier to read. Some letter forms have been modernised.

R. 10: the relationship between the final words is uncertain. V. 6-7: as a parallel, the editor prints a profession of faith longer than the available space. We retain the gaps and translate only the words that can still be recognised. On the verso, the scribe switches from “he” to “you”.

Textual sources

J. Willard Marriott Library, P.Utah Ar. inv. 205. Photographs of the recto and verso.

W. Matt Malczycki, “Instructions for Islamic Prayer from the Second Century AH/Eighth Century CE”, BASP 49 (2012), pp. 41-54.

Image provenance

E. W. Lane, The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, p. 64, “Postures of Prayer”, I.

E. W. Lane, ibid., p. 65, “Postures of Prayer”, II.

J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, P.Utah Ar. inv. 205, recto.

J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, P.Utah Ar. inv. 205, verso.

Return to the first passage

PART TWO

Original Arabic text
النص العربي

01 · Beginning the prayer • recto

01 بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

02 من الصلاة حسن. الوضوء هو منها فتحها يحلّها التسليم ويحرّمها التكبير

03 على كلّ مسلم إذا قام إلى الصلاة أن يقوم لله قانتا والقنوت

04 الركوع والركوع والخشوع، والخشوع من رهبة الله ثم يكون أول

05 ما يقول حين يقوم وهو رافع يديه [حـ]ذاء منكبيه من غير تجاوز أذنيه فيقول الله هو أكبر

06 سبحانك اللهم وتباركت أسماؤك وتعالى جدّك ولا إله غيرك. وجّهت وجهي للذي فطر

07 السماوات والأرض حنيفا مسلما وما أنا من المشركين. إنّ صلاتي ونسكي ومحياي

08 ومماتي لله ربّ العالمين لا شريك له، بذلك أُمرت وأن أكون من المسلمين، ثمّ يفتتح

09 فيقول القرآن فإذا فرغ من قراءته قال [الله] أكبر وهو رافع يديه بحذ

10 اء منكبيه من غير تجا[و]ز أذنيه ثمّ يركع [...] ليدلّ رأسه ولم يعيّنه [...] وكفّيه

11 [...]

02 · The profession of faith • verso

01 ثمّ يرفع رأسه ويجعل مرجع كفّيه على ركبتيه، يشرع أصابعه قبل

02 القبلة ويقيم إبهامه ثمّ يصلّي الصلاة كلّها على هذا. فإذا جلست

03 في الركعتين فتشهّد ولا تزيدنّ فيه شيئا ولا تنقصه حتّى تفرغ من شها

04 دتك فإذا فرغت فقل ما شئت. إنّ الكلام الطيّب كان كبيرا. [كان؟]

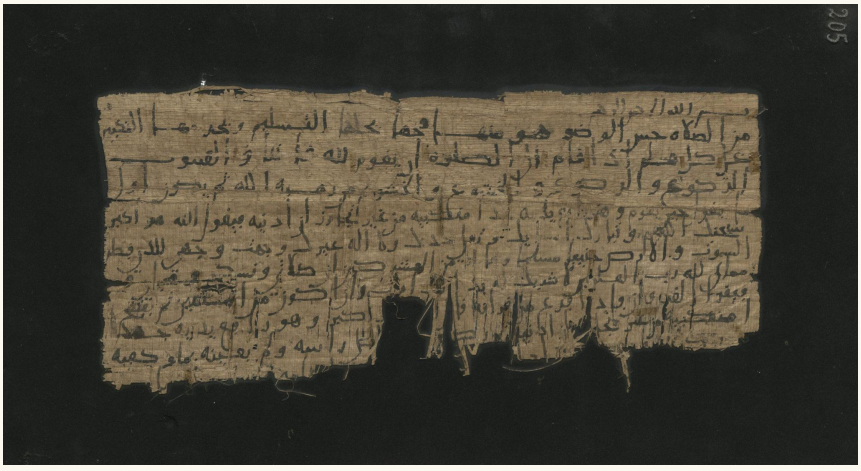
05 ابن مسعود يقول في شهادته قل بسم الله فيقول الكلام الطيّب

06 هكذا [...]

07 [...] الله الصالحين أشهد [...]

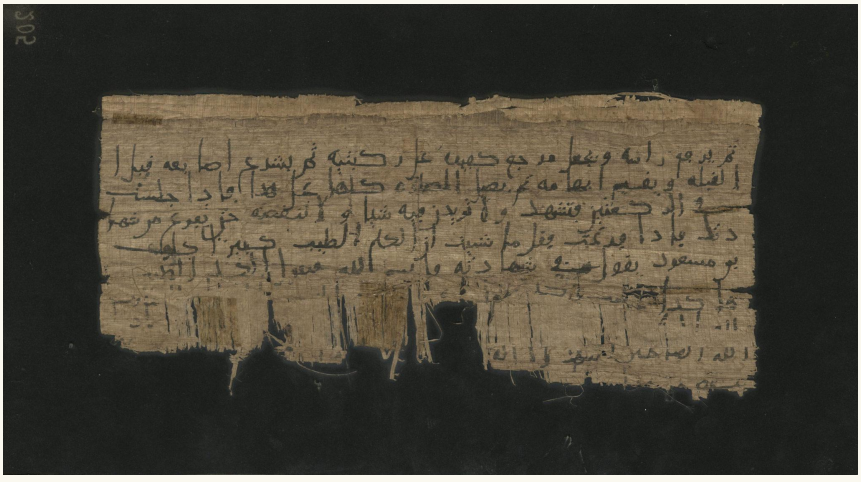
08 منه [...]

The Gestures of Prayer



Recto of the papyrus. The reference to recitation and the sequences of gestures appear on the same side. J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, P.Utah Ar. inv. 205, recto.

The Gestures of Prayer



Verso of the same papyrus. Missing fibres account for the breaks in the reading of the text. J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, P.Utah Ar. inv. 205, verso.