

ALIA HANAFI

Two Unpublished Arabic Documents

1. An order of delivery

T.Ragab (= ACPSI) s. r. no 1
Provenance Akhmîm?

13.2 × 8.5 cm

2nd/3rd cent. A.H. (8th/9th cent. A.D.)

This piece of linen (*kittân*) belongs to the collection of H. Ragab. It is kept in Ain-Shams University, Center of Papyrological Studies and Inscriptions (ACPSI). It bears a complete text written in five Arabic lines, in black ink, in a regular and clear hand. The text is destitute of diacritical points.

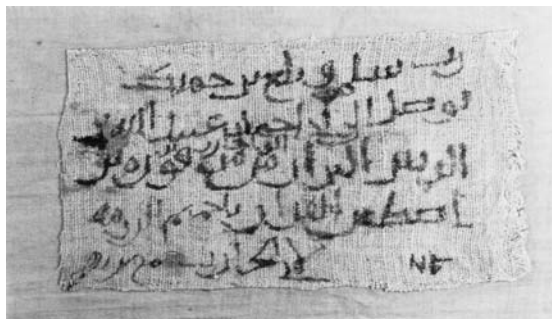
The handwriting points to the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 3rd century of the *Hiġra* (see APEL IV 391, pl. VII). The provenance of the piece may be Akhmîm (cf. l. 4).

The document is a bill of delivery of perhaps 53 *dinars* as the price for a parcel to a cloth-merchant from a silk-merchant inhabited in Akhmîm. The figure 53 in l. 5 was written in Greek.

To my knowledge, we did not meet the three person Abû Ahmed ben Obeid Allah ben Al-Zobeir (the cloth-merchant), Merqûre ben Işţafan (the silk-merchant), and Ibrahim (the agent) elsewhere.

Although we note that the textile has a cloth background, the back is blank.

Linen was used in Egypt as writing material. Several pieces of linen in which coins were wrapped up bore the address of the addressee (cf. PERF no. 767, PER inv. Ar. Lin. 4, 9, 15). Some pieces were used as a means for covering and clothing clay jugs and jars bore the name of the sender and addressee (cf. PER inv. Ar. Lin. 9, 1–2). For marriage contracts written on linen see A. Grohmann, *From the World of Arabic Papyri*, Cairo 1952, 58.



T.Ragab (= ACPSI) s. r. no. 1

- 1 - رب سلم وبلغ برحمتك
- 2 - يرصل إلى أبي أحمد عبيد الله بن
- 3 - الزيبر البزاز، أبو الحارث، من يد مرقورة بن
- 4 - اصطفن التزاز باخميم للرزق
- 5 - ٥٣ - vac. لأبي الحارث مع إبراهيم

- 1 “God, save (us). And (this) may be delivered with Your Mercy.
- 2 To be delivered to Abû Ahmed Obeid Allah ben
- 3 Al-Zubeir, the cloth-merchant (called also) Abû al-Hârith from ‘the hand of’ Merqûre ben
- 4 Işţafan, silk-merchant in Akhmim for the parcel
- 5 53 To Abû al-Hârith with Ibrahim”.

Comments

1. *رب سلم وبلغ برحمتك*: cf. APEL VI 390, 2 *أن سلم وبلغ برحمتك* which has been translated by Grohmann as “Verily there has been delivered — and may it have arrived with your pardon-to ...”. I think the sentence should be read as ours, but unfortunately we have not the photos. Besides, his reading the rest of the line is doubtful. The meaning of the sentence is close to an Islamic expression (cf. *اللهم ايسر علينا من بركاتك ورحمتك*, 14954 أحمد) or (cf. *اللهم ايسر علينا من بركاتك ورحمتك*, 14954 أحمد).

Perhaps this formula is instead of al-Basmala also since the addresser as his name shows is not a Muslim one (see l. 3–4 *مرقورة بن اصطفن*).

3. *البزاز* means the cloth-merchant (see Ibn Manẓūr, *لسان العرب*, vol. 1, p. 274: “... البزاز : الثياب ... البزاز : بائع البز ... البزاز : الثياب and cf. APEL IV 391, 3). In APEL I 39, 13 and the note 13, A. Grohmann translated the word *وحرثته البزازة* “the linen merchant”. He said that it could be also read *البزاز* (= the linseed-dealer). To my opinion, the reading *البزاز* in our document seems good, because this document deals with two merchants of the same trade; one merchant of silk (*القزاز*) and the other merchant of cloth (*البزاز*).

مرقورة: The name is the Arabic form of the Coptic name ΜΕΡΚΟΥΡΕ (see MPER V p. 46), ΜΑΡΚΟΥΡΙ (see W. E. Crum, *Coptic Manuscripts Brought from the Fayyum*, London 1893, no. 15, 2, p. 30. There occurs another form in the papyri. It is *مركور* (see PERF 795, 2: MPER II/III, p. 171, P.Stras. Arab. 61, 4 and APEL I 43, v, 2, and the note p. 96).

4. *اصطفن*: This form corresponds the Coptic short form CTEΦAN, CTEΦEN (cf. G. Heuser, *Die Personennamen der Kopten*, I 91). It occurs also in W. E. Crum, CMRL 116, p. 64, PER Ar. Pap. 13820 (MPER II/III, p. 177, P.Ryl. Arab. XII 25, p. 143 and see APEL II 73 note 9).

القزاز is the silk-merchant. (See *دائرة معارف القرن العشرين*, محمد فريد وحدى, vol. 4, Beirut, p. 779 “*القزاز* : بائع القز” and see Ibn Manẓūr, *op. cit.* vol. 5, p. 3620 “*القزاز* : بائع القز” and vol. 2, p. 831 “*والحرير ثياب من الابرسيم*”).

أخميم is a town in Upper Egypt, just across the river from Sawhaj on the east bank of the Nil. It was famous of weaving textiles, clothing, either silk or linen ... etc. (see *مراكز الصناعة في مصر* عاصم محمد رزق عبد الرحمن, *دائرة معارف القرن العشرين*, محمد فريد وحدى, vol. 4, Beirut, p. 779 “*القزاز* : بائع القز” and see Ibn Manẓūr, *op. cit.* vol. 5, p. 3620 “*القزاز* : بائع القز” and vol. 2, p. 831 “*والحرير ثياب من الابرسيم*”). In the Pharaonic period, it was known as *Khent-Min* where its deity was Min. In the Hellenistic period it was identified with *Pan*, whence its name became Panopolis, meaning (the city of Pan). In the Islamic period, its name became Akhmin or Ikhmin. The pronunciation of *أخميم* with *fētha* is a local dialect till today. But Al-Makrizy says “*بكسر الهمزة*” meaning that the name should be pronounced and written *إخميم* with *kēsra* (= *Īkhmīm*) not *Akhmīm* (see Al-Makrizy, *الخطط* vol. 1, Cairo 1987, p. 239). The Arabic name follows the Coptic ωMIN, not the Greek name Χέπις as Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Papyri Selected Material from the Khalili Collection*, Oxford, p. 54, says. The Coptic letter ω was stereotyped to the Arabic letter خ (see Mohammed Ramzy, *مركز وثائق وتاريخ مصر المعاصر الهيئة القاموس الجغرافي للبلاد المصريين إلى سنة* الرابع، مركز وثائق وتاريخ مصر المعاصر الهيئة القاموس الجغرافي للبلاد المصريين إلى سنة، الجزء الثاني، البلاد الحالية، الجزء ١٩٤٥، العامة الكتاب، (p. 89–90). Besides, If any foreign name began with two consonants the Arabic name should have a vowel at the beginning of the name like Plato (Πλάτωνος) that became *أفلاطون*, and so ωMIN became *أخميم*. We have to notice also that the nasal letter N could be exchange with the letter M in Arabic vulgar language such as *فاطمة* instead of *فاطمة*. For ن takes the sound of م (see W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Cambridge 1967, vol. I, p. 7). So, I think that *أخميم* is an Arabic transliteration of the Coptic name ωMIN not of the Greek name Χέπις. For the town of ωMIN (= Akhmīm) cf. H. Gauthier, *Notes géographiques sur le nome Panopolite*, BIFAO 4 (1904) 44–47, and E. Amélineau, *La géographie de l’Égypte à l’époque Copte*, Paris 1893, 18–22.

الرزمة: Meaning, collecting a number of clothes in one parcel. See Ibn Manẓūr, *op. cit.* vol. 3, p. 1638 “*الرزمة من الثياب ما شد في ثوب واحد*”.

5. *براهيم* (l. *براهيم*). It may be noticed that *براهيم* is a local dialect.

2. A private letter

P.Copt. Mus. 3469
Provenance unknown

13.9 × 8.5 cm

3rd cent. A.H. (9th cent. A.D.)?

It is light brown papyrus. It has margins on left-hand side and bottom. It was folded 6 times, beginning from bottom.

The most striking feature is the coexistence of two different texts on the recto and verso. On the recto, there is a Greek Christian Homily¹ while on the verso, there is a private Arabic letter, which we discuss now.

The handwriting runs across the fibers. This is sufficient proof that it was written later. The letters are bold, medium to capitals pointed to the 3rd century A.H. Diacritical dots are rare. The letter **س** has a stroke (see l. 8 **احسانه**). The date and the scribe of this letter are unknown. The hand may be related to the 9th century (cf. APEL II 80 [236 A.H./15th July 850 to 4th July 851 A.D.] plate V, and APEL III 176 [3rd cent. A.H./9th cent. A.D.] plate XIV). E. G. Turner discussed Recto and Verso in JEA 40 (1954) 102ff. He said: “official documents were retained either in the bureau originally concerned or in official depositories for a fixed period, the length of which is not known but is assessed at the figure given 50–100 years. When this time had elapsed, they were released and treated as scrap paper”. He concludes that:

(1) when the writing on the recto consists of an official document, the time interval to be allowed before its verso was utilized lays between 1 and 100 years.

(2) Within the 100-years limit, there is a slight balance of probability in favour of re-use within 25 years. P.Bour. 41, which are various official lists dated in 197 A.D., written on the recto, while on the verso there are Christian homilies of 5th cent. A.D. This gives an interval of about 300 years.



P.Copt. Mus. 3469

¹ It was published by me in the Proceedings of the International Congress, *Palestine in the Light of Papyri and Inscriptions*, Cairo 2000, vol. I, 101–114.

Indeed, keeping papers that bear theological texts for long time does not need any explanation. In all heavenly religions (Jewish, Christian and Islamic) people preserve these kinds of texts and do not throw them away, as a sign of reverence for their content. Besides, the verso was reused for a family letter that should also be kept for a long time (cf. the family papers in P.Lugd. Bat. VI were apparently kept together for more than 130 years), which means that the paper was not thrown away.

The text is a private letter. The letter was sent from a son to his father. This should be understood from the text. This son did not sign his name. Only, he signs literary “your slave” which means metaphorically “your obedient”. The subject of the letter is about a person who left his home and took the way of **الصوفية** (= mysticism).

Verso

1	[. .]	١
2	لم يبعلمنى خبرا كما هو أهله	٢
3	فلا تر ك جوابا ولا آثار < خلفه	٣
4	[بل وخرج خاليا؟! أنه الطريق	٤
5	؟ و أنا بذلك يبأ مغموم بأمرك	٥
6	[ما فى لا شى < فى الأمر اعلمنى خبرك	٦
7	[و أسرار ذلك بعد إن شاء < الله	٧
8	أتم نعمته عليك وزاد فى إحسانه إليك + عبدك	٨

- 1] ...
- 2] “He did not write me any news as he himself used to do.
- 3] So, neither he sent a letter nor he even left any traces behind him.
- 4] But he also went out with nothing. It is the way (i. e. he took the way of the mystics).
- 5 Therefore, I] feel sorry, O father, for your condition.
- 6] There is nothing in this case. Write to me about your news
- 7] And the mysteries of this later, if Allah wills.
- 8] May He fulfill His loving kindness unto you, and may He increase His bounty unto you. Your obedient”.

Comments:

1. There are only remainings of about two letters.

2. The letter **ع** is closed. This means that it is in the middle of the word. The letter **ي** (يعلمنى) or **ت** (تعلمنى) could be added to the verb. I prefer the letter **ي** since the writer speaks about a man (cf. l. 3 (و لا آثار < خلفه).

3. The reading of the letter **ع** is uncertain. But this noun is suitable to verb يعلمنى (see l. 6; and cf. APEL IV 339, 6–7 “وعلم خبرك = and information giving news ...”, and 289, 15 “الكتاب إلى بخبرك” = so take note of this and give order ... to write to me about your news”). The text needs the adverbial particle **لم** which is a negative of the perfect, but always joined to the Jussive in the sense of perfect, *not* (cf. the negative **لا** in l. 3, and see Wright, *loc. cit.*, vol. I, 287).

المعنى (يعلمنى) : كما هو أهله means نفسه (= himself), see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, vol. I, p. 163f.

ومنى حديث أم سلمة : “إنه ليس بك على أهلك هوان” أراد بالأهل نفسه (see Mūslem, *Ṣāhīh*, 2650).

3. لا تر ك جوابا ولا آثار < خلفه : The reconstruction of the lacuna depends on the fact that the perfect can properly be used only when **لا** is repeated twice (cf. (ولا آثار < خلفه) or more often in clauses connected by **و** in which case it may be translated by the perfect or past as **لا صدق ولا صلى** = “he has neither believed nor prayed”, or “he neither believed nor prayed” (see Wright, *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 300).

لا ترك جوابا : آثار < : ولا آثار < خلفه.

This noun means either “the news = أخبارا” or “the traces = بقايا الشىء” (see Ibn Manẓūr, *ibid.*, I, p. 25:

“الأثر : بقية الشىء، والجمع آثار والأثر : الخبر، والجمع آثار” **ولا** is sometimes repeated emphatically after a preceding negative, and requires to be rendered in English by “even” (see Wright, *op. cit.* vol. II, 304).

4. The letter **پ** of the word **بل** is dotted. The reading **خاليه** is uncertain because the head of the letter **خ** is a little bit rounded (cf. the letter **خ** of **خرج**). But the reading **خاليا** is suitable here. It means that he left every thing that belongs to this world behind him.

انه الطريق: This expression gave an impression that this person became one of the **صوفية** = mystics (see Ibn Manzūr, *ibid.*, IV, p. 2665: “**والطريقة السيرة، والطريقة الرجل مذهبه**” cf. Abou-Dawūd. *Sunān Abū-Dawūd*, the intro. p. 19 “**انه على الطريق ما كان على الأثر**” or “**ما دام على الأثر فهو على الطريق**”. This suggestion may confirm the reading **خاليا**, which corresponds to the Sufi. For mysticism in Islam: Fisāl Bādr ‘Uān, **التصوف الإسلامي**, the *الطريق والرجال*, Cairo 1983, and for the word **الصوفية** which could be derived from the word **الصوف** = the wool, or **الصفاء** = the purity, or **الصف** = the line, or the Greek word **σοφία** see Fisāl Bādr ‘Uān, *op. cit.* p. 48.

5. At the beginning of the line, there is a horizontal stroke, probably remain of a letter. It looks like the lower part of the letter **ك**.

ياأبي is a local dialect for the word **ياأبي**. (cf. l. 7 **ذلك**). **ياأبي** may be restored (cf. l. 7 **ذلك**).

6. **اعلمني**: It seems that the scribe of the letter began to write a word beginning with **لا**, but he changed his mind and wrote the letter **ع** of **اعلمني** above it.

7. **وأسرار**: The reading is uncertain. There is a round head of a letter. It could be a head of **و** or **ف**. It means that the word is either **و** or **في**. But **في** is not suitable here since the letter **ي** is not present. It is to be noticed that the letter **س** has not a stroke above it like the letter **س** of **إحسانه** in line 8. One may read **وابرار** where there is a faint dot. This means that the scribe began to write another word, but he changed his mind.

8. **وأتم** [**نعمته عليك وزاد في إحسانه إليك**]: Clearly this line is the last line of the letter. It contains the salutation formula and perhaps the sign of the sender. The formula of salutation comes either as an opening or closing sentence of the letters. See Al-Qalqashandī, *Subhi El-‘Asha*, vol. VIII, p. 160ff.²

عبدك: This word has not any diacritical dot. **عندك** or **عبدك** may be read. If the word is **عندك** (= to you), it should confirm the preceding word **إليك** (= unto you). But no parallel is found for this construction. Furthermore, the music of the Arabic prose must be ended with **إليك**. Thus, the word should be read **عبدك**, which means “your obedient” (literary: your slave). First, I prefer the reading **عبدك** because the sender of the letter directed his speech to the receiver by saying “O father” (see l. 5). Second, this word “**عبدك**” is the sign of the sender. Literally, it means “your slave”, but metaphorically, it means “your obedient”.

Reference

A. Primary sources

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Al-Qalqashandī, *Subh El-‘Asha* = Šihāb ad-Dīn Abū ‘l-‘Abbās Ahmad b. ‘Alī b. al-Qalqashāndī, *Subh El-‘Asha fi sinā’ at al-inš*, Cairo 1922.
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B. Secondary sources

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Grohmann, Adolf (ed.), *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*. 6 vol., Cairo 1934–1961.
Wright, William, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, ed. by W. R. Smith & M. J. de Goeje, 2 vols London 1967.

² **بِقَاكَ اللَّهُ وَحِفْظُكَ وَأَتَمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ** (= may Allah preserve you and may HE protect unto you and may HE increase His bounty unto you), or **أَطَالَ اللَّهُ بِقَاكَ وَأَدَامَ عِزَّكَ وَكَرَامَتَكَ وَتَأَيَّدَكَ وَسَعَادَتَكَ وَأَتَمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ** (= may Allah prolong your life and may He cause your might honor, strength and happiness to continue and complete his favor towards you). See also APEL V 309, 3, and Alia Hanafi, *Two private letters*, Proceedings of the Arabic and Islamic Sections of the 35th International Congress of Asian and North African Studies (ICANAS), part 1, **المستعرب** = *The Arabist*, Budapest Studies in Arabic 19–20, Budapest 1998, 52.