

TWO PRIVATE LETTERS

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The papyrus is of moderate quality, torn off irregularly at the bottom and left-hand-side. There are also a number of small holes in the middle. It has been folded six times.

Two private letters from the Tulunid period were written on the recto and on the verso by two hands. Clearly the letter written on the recto is from a father to his son. The language of the letter and the orders that have been directed to the receiver (L1. 2; 4; 5) prove this. Besides, the letter on the verso is a reply from that son to his father (L.3).

On the recto, the letter was written in 8 lines, in black ink. At the top, there is a margin of 3,8 cm. The hand writing is of a skilled scribe. Diacritical points occur rarely.

The suggested provenance and date, that is before 270 AH, depend on the appearance of the heir of Ishāq b. Kāmil, also called 'Allān = علان (L.1) in Grohmann 1934-61: IV, 235, 15, 16 (dated in 270 AH).

On the verso, there is a margin of 1,8 cm at the right-hand-side.

The handwriting is large, clear, points to the 3rd c. AD (Grohmann 1934-61: V, 296, VII). The document is a letter from a son to his father (L.3). It was written in 9 lines, in black ink. In this letter, the son explains to his father that he got from his uncle what he had demanded from the wheat and he sent it to him (L1. 2, 7).

1. A Letter from a Father to his Son

- | | |
|-----|--|
| ١ — | [وَأْتَمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ] عَلَيْكَ وَصَلْتُ إِلَى جِبَارَةَ كَتَبْتُكَ، مَعَ عَلَانٍ، وَبَعَثْتُ بِكَتَبِ |
| ٢ — | [؟ سَأَلْتُ] تَهْ عَنْ سَلَامَتِكَ وَسَلَامَةِ أَخَوَتِكَ فَسَّرَ فِي اللَّهِ وَكَثُرَتْ |
| ٣ — | [.]. شَرَّ جَارٍ فِي الدُّنْيَا — يَقُولُونَ لِأَبِي {أَهْمِ النَّحَاسِ |
| ٤ — | [؟ وَأَخَذَ مِنْ] رَهْنٍ وَيَلِّكَ أَخْرَجَ إِلَيْهِ وَخَذَ حَقَّكَ مِنْهُ |
| ٥ — | [.]. وَأَلَحَّ أَنْ تَخْرُجُوا مَعَ بَرٍّ مَصْرَ تَكُونُوا |
| ٦ — | [؟ وَقَالَ لِي] عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ أَبُو الْحَسَنِ يَبْعَثُ الدِّينَ |
| ٧ — | [] وَلَكِنِّي أَدَيْتُهُ أَلْفَ لَا غَيْرَ يَرْقُدُ فِيهِ |
| ٨ — | [] وَ[سَلَامًا] مَتَّ |

Translation:

1 — ... And may He fulfill His loving kindness] unto you. Your letters have been delivered to Ġubāra by 'Allān, and I sent letters

2 — ... I asked?] him about your safety and the safety of your others. Go on depending on Allah, and pay attention to

3 — ...] An evil moves in the world (= in the present time). They say to Ibrāhīm, the coppersmith

4 — ... and he got?] from him a security. Damn you. Go ahead to him, and take your right from him.

5 — ...], and I insist if you go out along with the land of Miṣr, you will be

6 — ... and?] ‘Abdarrahmān Abū al-Ḥasan, [said to him (?)] to send the debt

7 — ...] And I gave him on credit one thousand not more but he sleeps on it (meaning: he does not want to pay it).

8 — ...] and his safety?

Commentary:

L.1 — **وَأَتَمَّ نَعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ**: Clearly this line is the first line in the letter. It bears the salutation formula or the opening formula of the letter (al-Qalqaṣandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā’* VIII, 160)¹.

— **جَبَّارَةٌ**: The name is dotted. It could be vocalized according to ad-Dahabī, *Muṣṭabih* 83. We met a person named جَبَّارَةٌ in Grohmann 1934-61: V, 291 (13 date in 4th AH). It seems that he is not the same person of our document since we met the heir of Ishāq b. Kāmil also called ‘Allān in Grohmann 1934-61: IV, 234, r., 15; 16 dated in 270 AH.

— **عَلَان**: The name عَلَان is superscribed. In Grohmann 1934-61: IV, 234, r., L.1.15; 16 (270 AH), we met the heir of Ishāq b. Kāmil, also called ‘Allān.

— Clearly **كَتَبَكَ** refers to more than one letter. If it is one letter only, and the *alif* of **كَتَابَكَ** is omitted as usual, then the verb will be **وَصَلَّ** not **وَصَلْت**.

L.2 — **[سَأَلْتَهُ عَنْ سَلَامَتِكَ وَسَلَامَةِ أَخَوَتِكَ فَفَسَّرَ فِي اللَّهِ وَاکْتَرَتْ]**: According to Ibn al-Aṭīr, *Kāmil* VI, 51 ff., in the year 270 AH, there were big troubles because of the death of Aḥmed b. Ṭūlūn. So, perhaps the sender of the letter asked ‘Allān about the safety of the receiver and his brothers.

— **فَسَّرَ فِي اللَّهِ**: It is a local expression. The sender advises the receiver to go out with the blessing of Allāh. Usually the expression is **فَسَّرَ عَلَى بَرَكَةِ اللَّهِ** = go on the benediction of Allāh (Abū Dāwud, *Sunan*, “al-Ġihād”, No 2301).

— **وَاکْتَرَتْ**: It means **وَاهْتَمَّ** (= take care or pay attention). The sender advises his son also to pay attention to himself. Usually the word comes in negative form

¹ **أَطَالَ** = **أَبْقَاكَ اللَّهُ وَحَفَظَكَ وَأَتَمَّ نَعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ** = may Allah preserve you and may he protect you; or **أَطَالَ** = **اللَّهُ بِقَاكَ وَأَدَامَ عَزَّكَ وَكَرَامَتَكَ وَتَأْيِيدَكَ وَسَعَادَتَكَ وَأَتَمَّ نَعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ** = may Allah prolong your life and may cause your might honour, strength and happiness to continue and complete his favours towards you; or similar formula could be restored BACPS VI, P. Haun.10, note 4; and Grohmann 1934-61: V, 309, 2-3).

such as *ما اكثر له*, but here the word is affirmative and this is rare (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* V, 3848).

L.3 — *شر جار في الدنيا* = an evil moves in the world (= in the present time). This sentence may mention some troubles in Egypt at that time, or because of the security on a debt (cf. note L.2 and L.4). There is a small dash between *الدنيا* and *لا*. It may serve as a dot in the end of the paragraph.

— *إبر <إ> هيم النحاس*: The proper name *إبر <إ> هيم* was written according to the local, not the classical language. He has not been identified. *النحاس* is either a surname or a profession (= coppersmith).

L.4 — *وأخذ من رهنه*: May be restored since the sender of the letter exhorts the receiver to go and to take his rights from someone. Clearly the security is movable. It could be jewels and alike. *ويلك* (= damn you): This expression indicates that the sender of the letter is in higher position than the receiver such as a father or someone from his relatives such as his uncle.

L.5 — *وألح*: There are two variant readings for this word; either *وألح* (= and I insist) or *وألح* (= and he insisted). The first reading is preferable in the context.

— *إن: ان تخرجوا مع بر مصر تكونوا* is a conditional particle here because *تكونوا* is an apodosis (*جواب الشرط*) of the conditional sentence (Wright 1971: II, 14). The verb *تخرجوا* (*فعل الشرط*) is a transitive verb. It should be followed by the preposition *إلى* not *مع*, or to omit the preposition according to classical Arabic syntax. This verb is from *الخروج* (= going out). It is opposite of *الدخول* (= entrance). It is said: *دخلت البيت* (= I entered the house). The correcting sentence is *دخلت إلى البيت* (= I entered to the house). The preposition *إلى* is omitted (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* II, 1341). So forth is verb *خرج*. The preposition *مع* (= with, along with) indicates association and connection in time or place, as the Arab grammarians remark (Wright 1971: II, 164). One of the usages of *إلى* indicates also association (Wright 1971: II, 145). So, it seems to me that there is an interchanging here between them. Using the preposition *مع* in this sentence is vulgar language.

— *البر* (= the land or the desert) is contrary of *البحر* (= the sea). *من قولهم*. *خرج فلان برا* (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* I, 254). This is another advice from the sender of the letter. He insists to push the receiver of the letter and his brothers to go out of their home.

L.7 — *يرقد فيه؟* (L. *يرقد عليه*, literary: sleeps on it). It is a colloquial expression meaning that the borrower has delayed the payment for a long time. The expression is still used to date.

L.8 — For the restoration cf. L.2.

2. A Letter from a Son to his Father

- ١ [...] —
 — ٢ من العم بما أريد أن أصيب من [القمح؟ وأكثر؟] —
 — ٣ يا به جعلت فداك بالدعاء كثيرا لله ع[سى والله على] —
 — ٤ كل شيء قدير وإ[ذا] أتبرك بدعا <ت>ك و.. [وخرجنا كما؟] —
 — ٥ ذكرت بر مصر وحبس. [] —
 — ٦ لا أصل الى حا... ال...[أنه؟] —
 — ٧ حمل قمح اليك وأرجو أ[ن] —
 — ٨ عدوا ولكن لا تكتب ال[ى] —
 — ٩ اليك ت[ـ]. [] ..

Translation:

- 1 — [...] —
 2 — from uncle, as I want, to obtain from the [wheat?. And increase, (?)] —
 3 — O my father, may I be made your ransom, praying so much for Allah perhaps [and Allah has] —
 4 — the power to do all that He will, and I seek the blessing of your prayers and. [And we went out as] —
 5 — you mentioned along the land (or country) of Miṣr, and he imprisoned him [...] —
 6 — I do not reach to [...] —
 7 — an amount of wheat for you, and I hope to [...] —
 8 — an enemy. Whoever do not write to (?) [...] —
 9 — to you. [...] —

Commentary:

L.2 — العم: The word is not dotted. It is either العم (= the uncle) or الغم (= the grief). I prefer the first the word since it is followed by بما أريد (= as I want), and what is wanted here is perhaps wheat (cf. L.7).

— أن أصيب: There is one dot under the word أصيب. It is written between the letter yā' and the letter bā'. It should be under the yā' because أصيب is an infinitive after verb أريد (= I want) (Wright 1971: I, 26).

— من [القمح]: is possible restoration (cf. L.7).

L.1.2/3 — وأكثر/يا به جعلت فداك بدعاك كثيرا — may be restored (cf. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* II, 1385): وفى حديث عرفه: أكثر دعائى.

L.3 — يا به: Is vulgar language. The classical Arabic language is يا أبت' or يا أبت. It becomes in pause يا أبة (Wright 1971: II, 78; 88; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* I, 18 "وقال: يا أبة و يا أبة لغتان").

— جعلت فداك: al-Qalqaṣandī in his book says (*Subḥ al-aṣṣā* VIII, 161) that this expression was part of the opening of letters at that time (Grohmann 1934-61: V, 326,2; 332,1;2; 358,2; 360,2).

— بالدعاء: The *hamza* is omitted. It is a usual phenomenon in that period.

L1.3/4 — والله قدیر علی کل شیء for the restoration, see *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q. 2:285). This *sūra* is used in praying by Muslims when they are in trouble. Obviously, the sender of the letter was in trouble (cf. L1. 2-5; r.; L1.5, 7, v).

— بدعا (بدعاك): (pap. بدعا <ك). It is a colloquial expression. For *hamza* at the end of a word see Wright 1971: I, 17.

L1.4/5 — خرجنا كما؟ ذكرت بر مصر: For the restoration see L.5, r. "إن" "تخرجوا مع بر مصر". This line affirms that this letter is a reply to the letter written on the recto. Here, clearly there is no preposition before بر مصر (= the land of Miṣr).

— حبسه (= and he imprisoned him). Who is imprisoned here? It is not clear. Perhaps he is one of the brothers of the letter's sender. So this could be the reason behind the advising of their father to leave their place and to go out along with the land of Miṣr (cf. L.5, r.)².

L.7 — حمل قمح اليك: The word حمل is either a verb حَمَلَ (= carried) or حَمْل (= an amount of wheat)³. I prefer the second because if حمل is a verb, the word قمح should be in accusative case قَمَحًا, according to the classical Arabic grammar (cf. L.2 and its note; Wright 1971: I, 236).

L.8 — عدوا: The word is undotted. عَدُوًّا (= an enemy, Acc.) or عَدُوا (= running) may be read. I prefer the first because it goes with the context (cf. L1.3; 4; 5, r.; L.5, v.)

² Ibn Iyās in his book says (*Badāʾir* I, 168): "وكان (أحمد بن طولون) كريم اليد... غير أنه كان شديد: (he [Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn] was generous... However he was more severe in his anger... So much so that it is said that 8.000 persons died in his prison.) Is there a relation between the imprisoned person here and what Ibn Iyās says in his book? We do not know.

³ Ibn Manẓūr (*Lisān* II, 1002) wrote:

والحَمْل: ثمر الشجر، والكسر فيه لغة والحمل بالكسر ما حَمَلَ على ظهر أو رأس.

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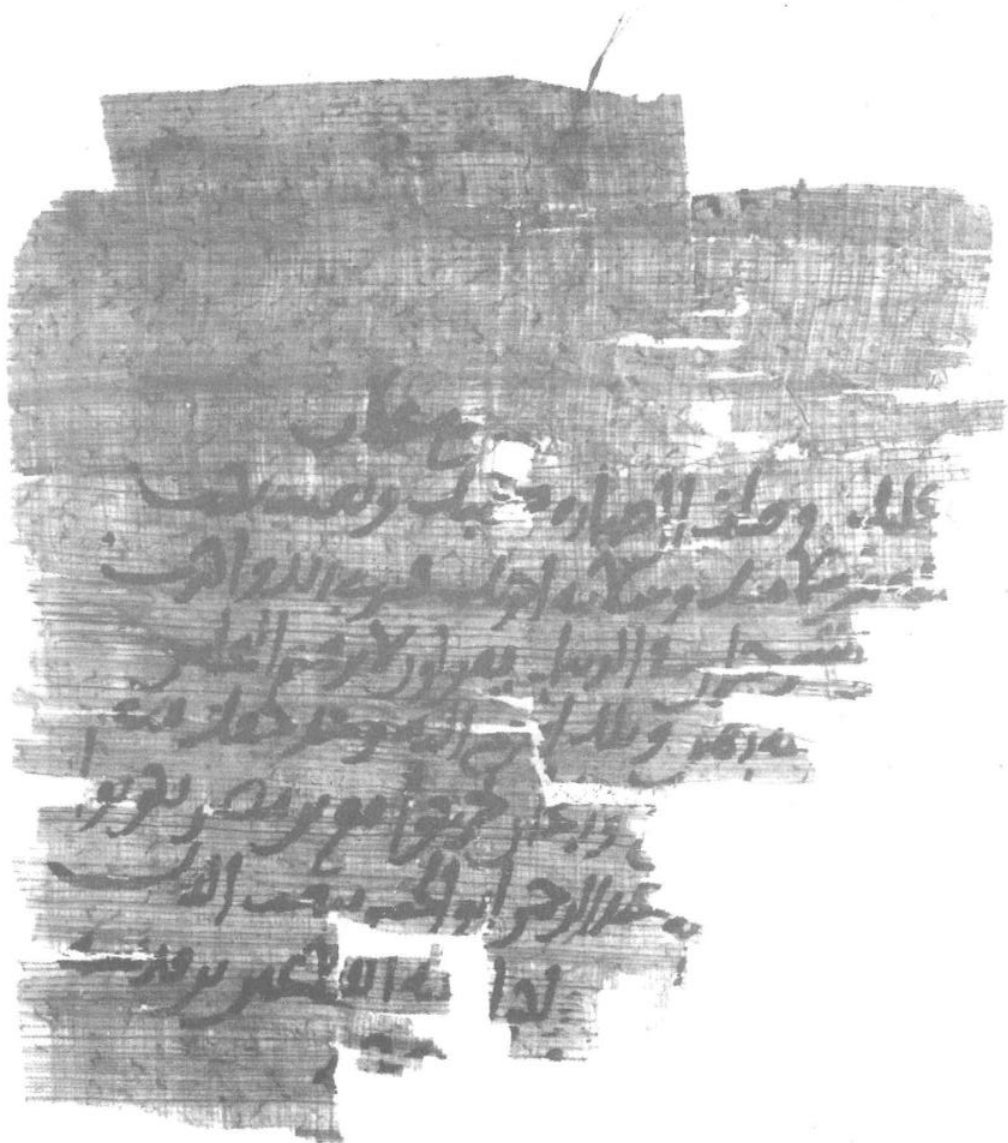
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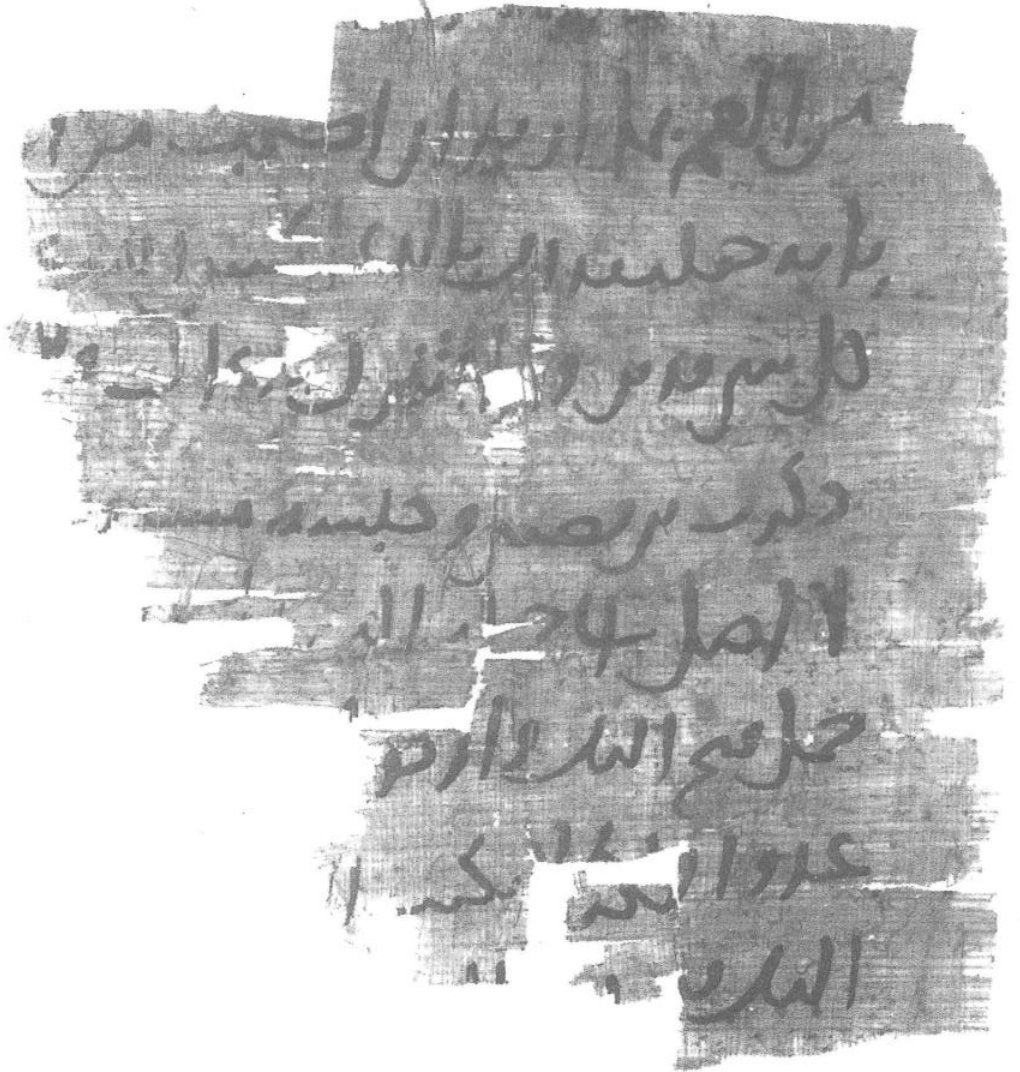
Recto

P. Haun. inv. Arab. 5

13 x 13.7 cm

Provenance al-Fayyūm

3rd c. AH / 9th c. AD



Verso

P. Haun. inv. Arab. 5

13 x 13.7 cm

Provenance al-Fayyūm

3rd c. AH / 9th c. AD