Two Unpublished Arabic Documents

1. An order of delivery

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

13.2 × 8.5 cm  

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

Provenance Akhmim?

This piece of linen (kittān) 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 Hijra (see APEL IV 391, pl. VII). The provenance of the piece may be Akhmim (cf. l. 4).

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

To my knowledge, we did not meet the three person Abū Ahmed ben Obeid Allah ben Al-Zobeir (the cloth-merchant), Mēriqūr ben Iṣṭafan (the silk-merchant), and Ibrāhim (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 1. رَبَّ سَلَّم يَبْغَي بُرْحَاتَك
2 2. يُبَيِّن إِلَيْنِي أَبُو أَحْمَد عَبْد اللَّهِ بِن
3 3. الزَّيْرِ الإِبْزَازِ أَبُو الْحَارِثِ حَمَّةٌ مََرْتُرَةِ بِن
4 4. أَصْفَحُ الْأَنْزَازِ بِخَيْمَةِ الرَّزْعِ
5 5. لَا بَيْنِ الْحَارِثِ مِثْلُ بِرَاهِيمٍ vac. 77

1 “God, save (us). And (this) may be delivered with Your Mercy.
2 To be delivered to Abū Ahmed Obeid Allah ben
3 Al-Zobeir, the cloth-merchant (called also) Abū al-
   Hārith from ‘the hand of’ Mēriqūr ben
4 Iṣṭafan, silk-merchant in Akhmim for the parcel
5 53 To Abū al-Hārith with Ibrāhim.”
Comments

1. cf. APEL VI 390, 2 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 M. the reading the rest of the line is doubtful. The meaning of the sentence is close to an Islamic expression (cf. : 1483, 262, 4, 4, vol. 1, 2, 3). 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, 3–4).

3. The name is the Arabic form of the Coptic name / (see MPER V p. 46), / (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 (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. This form corresponds the Coptic short form / (cf. G. Heuser, Die Personennamen der Kopten, I 91). It occurs also in W. E. Crum, CRML II, 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).

5. This form is not found in Arabic. It is the silk-merchant. (See W. E. Crum, op. cit. vol. 5, p. 3620, 2, p. 831) and vol. 2, p. 2, 2, vol. 4, p. 779. He also gives the reading and the note: “I think this short form of the name Panopolis, meaning the city of Pan. In the Islamic period, its name became Akhmim or Ikhnin. The pronunciation of their name “fatha” is a local dialect till today. But Al-Makrizi says “Ikhmin” meaning the name should be pronounced and written with “fatha” (see Al-Makrizi, vol. 1, Cairo 1887, p. 239). The Arabic name follows the Coptic (which is not the Greek name “Xénakis” as Geoffrey Khan, Arabic Papyri Selected Material from the Khalili Collection, Oxford, p. 54, says. The Coptic letter trancribed in the letter “K” was stereotyped to the Arabic letter “X” (see Mohammed Ramzy, The Egyptian names N, vol. 1, p. 7). So, I think that is an Arabic transliteration of the Coptic name / of the Greek name “Xénakis”. For the town of / (Akhmim) cf. H. Gauthier, Notes géographiques sur le nom Panopolite, BIFAO 4 (1904) 44–47, and E. Amelineau, La géographie de l’Égypte à l’époque Copte, Paris 1893, 18–22.

6. Meaning, collecting a number of clothes in one parcel. See Ibn Manzūr, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 1638
2. A private letter

P.Copt. Mus. 3469 13.9 × 8.5 cm 3rd cent. A.H. (9th cent. A.D.)?
Provenance unknown

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 لحح). 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.

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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.Lug. 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 send 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 the سولوية ( = mysticism).

Verso

1 ... [ 
2 لا تصرح حى و لا آت رحبد خلقه
3 على رجح خلقه ؟ انت الطريق
4 7 و أنا يا ييا يا خدي بمقدمي وأمرك
5 ما في رأى عم في الأمر مشهدي خيبرك
6 و أسرار ذلك بعد ان خدع الله
7 أتهمت عليك و زاد في إحسان إليه 26
8...

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 (ت) or (د) could be added to the verb. I prefer the letter د since the writer speaks about a man (cf. l. 3 لا آت رحبد خلقه).

The reading of the letter ع is uncertain. But this noun is suitable to verb (دي) (see l. 6; and cf. APEL IV 339, 6-7 "يعلم خبرك" = and information giving news ..."), and 289, 15 "فاعمل ذلك فر ي الكتاب إلى بخيرك" = so take note of this and give order ... to write to me about your news"). The text needs the adverbial particle 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).


"Om Sâlâmah said: there is no humiliation on yourself " (see Mûsîm, Şâhidh, 2650).

3. The reconstruction of the lacuna depends on the fact that the perfect can properly be used only when ـ is repeated twice (cf. غلفه) or more often in clauses connected by و in which case it may be translated by the perfect or past as "he has neither believed nor prayed", or "he neither believed nor prayed" (see Wright, op. cit. vol. II, p. 300).

لا تصرح حى و لا آت رحبد خلقه. The noun should be in accusative case (cf. لإني هديت مسله لى إني هديت مسله. "The nation of Sâlâmah said: there is no humiliation on yourself " (see Mûsîm, Şâhidh, 2650).

This noun means either "the news = يحكيها" or "the traces = يحكيها" (see Ibn Manzûr, ibid., I, p. 25: ألا تصرح حى و لا آت رحبد خلقه. "(الأخبار: يحكيها، و الحجيم آثار من الأخبار، و الحجيم آثار من الأخبار" = 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 ٔ of the word ٗ is dotted. The reading ٔ is uncertain because the head of the letter ٔ is a little bit rounded (cf. the letter ٔ). But the reading ٔ is suitable here. It means that he left every thing that belongs to this world behind him.

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 ٌ.

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

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

8. 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-Qalqashandi, Subh El-'Ashra, vol. VIII, p. 160ff. ٔ

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

Reference

A. Primary sources


Al-Qalqashandi, Subh El-'Ashra = Şihāb ad-Dīn Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās Ahmad b. ʿAli b. al-Qalqashandi, Subh El-'Ashra fi ṣinda at-īns, Cairo 1922.


B. Secondary sources


ٔ = may Allah save you and may HE protect unto you and may HE increase His bounty unto you.

ٔ = may Allah prolong your life and may HE cause your might honor, strength and happiness continue and complete his favor towards you.