

## **Glimpses into Daily Life: Two Arabic Papyrus Letters from Third/Ninth-Century Egypt**

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**Abstract:** This article showcases the edition and study of two Arabic papyrus letters from third/ninth-century Egypt, currently housed in the papyrus collection of the Austrian National Library. The first letter, P.Vindob. A.P. 01754, records an invitation for lunch. The second, P.Vindob. A.P. 01764, is felicitations for marriage. The themes of these two letters are widely present in literary handbooks but hardly found in documentary letters on papyrus. The importance of these two original letters lies: first, in their contents that illuminate in some detail part of people's everyday social interactions and practices in early Islamic Egypt, and second, in the crucial role of the letter itself as an important pattern of interaction among geographically distant relatives and friends.

**Keywords:** Early Islamic Egypt, social history, Arabic papyri, private letters, lunch, marriage

Letter-writing was the most vital method of distance communication in the past. People in ancient societies, although the majority of them could not significantly read and write, used to send letters to each other on many occasions, both sad and happy, to bridge the short and long distances separating them.<sup>1</sup> Arabic documentary letters written in early Islamic Egypt comprise the largest corpus of the surviving bulk of Arabic papyri, published and unpublished. The overwhelming majority of these letters are palaeographically dated after the 2nd/8th century, i.e. 3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries.<sup>2</sup> Beside giving us the opportunity to hear the actual voices of their authors and to see closely the routine of their daily lives, letters provide us with certain useful information on many technical issues relating to letters' delivery, the distance separating the correspondents and the like. The two original letters published in this article are unique and show that written communication became a daily concern for some people in third/ninth-century Egypt. In other words, the letter was an inherent part of people's everyday social interactions. Both letters (P.Vindob. A.P. 01754 and P.Vindob. A.P. 01764), currently kept at the papyrus collection of the Austrian National Library, were acquired in Egypt, but we lack information about their exact provenances. Alike the vast majority of Arabic private letters on papyrus from Egypt,

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<sup>1</sup> Bagnall and Criore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*, pp. 33-36; P.JoySorrow, pp. 12-14; Diem, "Arabic Letters in Pre-Modern Times," pp. 845-846.

<sup>2</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, pp. 2-7, 207; Grob, "A Catalogue of Dating Criteria," pp. 123-143. See also Younes, "Review of Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus," p. 377.

our two letters bear no date.<sup>3</sup> Their palaeography and epistolary formulae point to a composition date in the 3rd/9th century.<sup>4</sup> Let us now allow the letters to speak for themselves.

### **P.Vindob. A.P. 01754: Lunch Invitation**

The first letter (P.Vindob. A.P. 01754), with anonymous sender and recipient, contains a unique lunch invitation, a rarity among Arabic papyri. Luckily, the papyrus is well preserved except for a few holes and tears in the right-hand side that caused the loss of a few characters, but they can easily be reconstructed on the basis of the context as well as parallels. The letter comprises 6 lines, starting with the *basmala* on the top as common in all Arabic letters. The sender starts his letter by wishing blessings for the addressee (*ju[ 'iltu] fidā'aka wa-llāhu yubqīka*, line 2). He then extends his invitation to the addressee to have lunch with him the same day he wrote the letter (*qad aḥbabbtu an yaṣīra ghadā'aka 'indī al-yawm ba 'da al-zuhr*, lines 3-4), stating that the invitee's acceptance would make him overwhelmingly happy (*watasurrunī bi-dhālika mutafaḍḍilan in shā'a allāh*, lines 4-5). The sender finishes his invitation with blessings, different than the initial ones (*abqāka allāh wa-a'azzaka wa-akramaka*, line 6).<sup>5</sup> The letter closes with the expression *wa-kutiba* (it has been written), which is commonly used in Arabic papyrus letters.<sup>6</sup>

Unexpectedly, the letter does not have an address on the back as most of the Arabic papyrus letters do, commonly written around the vertical axis at the same height as the *basmala*.<sup>7</sup> Needless to say that the address is very important for the safe and smooth delivery of the letter. The lack of address in our letter, strongly suggests that the letter/invitation was most likely dispatched informally with a carrier who must have been very familiar with the addressee's residence. As it is clear from the letter, the distance separating the inviter and the invitee must have been very short, as he, the invitee, should reach the inviter's house in the afternoon for lunch.<sup>8</sup> The letter was certainly penned and sent/delivered in the morning. All in all, the letter's carrier cannot be but the sender's servant (*ghulām*).<sup>9</sup>

This unique lunch invitation also reveals interesting information on the daily mealtimes, particularly the midday meal/lunch, which appears to be the main meal of the day. As the letter states, the lunch will be served at the inviter's house in the early afternoon. The letter explicitly says: *ba 'da al-zuhr* (line 4). This time slot can simply be rendered as 'in the afternoon' or more specifically 'after the noon-prayer' (i.e., *ba 'da ṣalāt al-zuhr*). The latter is likely since it gives a more specific time range than

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<sup>3</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, pp. 49, 207; Younes, "Review of Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus," p. 377.

<sup>4</sup> For relevant characteristics of the script, see below.

<sup>5</sup> See the commentary to line 6.

<sup>6</sup> See the commentary to line 6.

<sup>7</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, pp. 95, 173-177, 181.

<sup>8</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, p. 94.

the former, which might extend to the time of *al-‘aṣr* (middle and late afternoon).<sup>10</sup> There is no doubt that the invitee fully recognizes the lunchtime slot proposed by the inviter and would be there in time in case he accepts the invitation.

Unfortunately, not much can be said about the lunch banquet on the basis of this tiny piece of evidence. We also lack information on the reason for this lunch invitation. One may wonder, is there a special occasion for this invitation (e.g., wedding, birth, etc.) or simply practicing *it‘ām al-ṭa‘ām* (feeding food)? Are there other people invited or only our anonymous invitee?

### **The Islamic Practice of *It‘ām al-Ṭa‘ām***

*It‘ām al-ṭa‘ām* is a noble quality that is highly encouraged in the Islamic faith. The Islamic concept of *it‘ām al-ṭa‘ām* is not confined to giving food to the poor and needy but also includes inviting people (e.g., relatives, friends, neighbours, etc.) to banquets to foster sociality and cordiality among Muslims. A considerable number of Quranic verses as well as prophetic reports emphasize the importance and rewards of *it‘ām al-ṭa‘ām*. According to the Quran (76: 8), the righteous, awarded paradise in the hereafter, are those who selflessly (give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves, saying, “We feed you for the sake of God alone: We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you. We fear the Day of our Lord- a woefully grim Day”). The prophetic *Sunna*, in addition, praises the practice of *it‘ām al-ṭa‘ām* and considers it one of the best deeds in Islam. Among the many traditions related to this topic is the famous authentic *ḥadīth* narrated by ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 65/685). He said: A man asked the prophet: “Which deed in Islam is the best?” The prophet replied: “To give food, and to greet everyone, whether you know or you do not”.<sup>11</sup> Another authentic *ḥadīth* was narrated by ‘Abd Allāh b. Salām (d. 43/633). He said: the prophet said: “O people! Spread the greeting of peace, give food, retain the ties of kinship, pray at night while people are sound asleep, and you will enter paradise in peace”.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, those who withhold food from both humans and animals are threatened with severe punishment in the hellfire.<sup>13</sup> The Quran warns that withholding food from the poor and needy is a token of ingratitude to God (69: 33-34; 74: 43-44; 107: 1-3).

### **P.Vindob. A.P. 01764: Marriage Congratulations**

The second letter, P.Vindob. A.P. 01764, is sent from a certain Abū Muḥammad to two addressees named only with their *kunyas* (Abū ‘Alī and Abū ‘Umayr) in the address on the back. The letter is a reply to a previous letter from the two addressees, in which they informed the sender, Abū Muḥammad, that their respective [two adult]

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<sup>10</sup> Monnot, “Ṣalāt”, *EP*, vol. 8, p. 928.

<sup>11</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, pp. 13, 17, 1556 [nos. 12, 28, 6236]; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p. 39 [no. 39].

<sup>12</sup> al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-kabīr*, vol. 4, p. 264 [no. 2485]; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 2, pp. 468-469 [no. 1334]; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 8, p. 388 [no. 25777].

<sup>13</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p. 569 [no. 2365]; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, p. 1068 [nos. 2242, 2243].

children are marrying each other. Abū Muḥammad penned this letter to convey his sincere felicitations on this happy occasion. The letter starts after the *basmala* with a very common imploration of God's blessings on the two addressees (*ḥafīzakumā allāh wa- 'āfākumā wa-amta 'a bikumā*, line 2). Abū Muḥammad then confirms the receipt of the addressees' previous letter and that he understood what they mentioned concerning the *milāk* (marriage) of their [two adult] children (*qad fahimtu mā katabtumā wa-mā dhakartumā min milāk waladikumā*, lines 3-4). He then makes supplications for them all, i.e. the two addressees, the two spouses as well as the family members on both sides (*fa-amta 'a allāh ba 'ḍakum bi-ba 'd wa-bāraka lakumā wa-atamma ni 'amahu 'alaykumā*, lines 4-5). The sender left a blank space at the end of line five to indicate the onset of a new section in the following line. Unfortunately, the letter breaks off with the beginning of the new section. Only upper traces of letters can be seen, which are not enough to recognize whether Abū Muḥammad moved on to another topic or just formulated the closing of the letter.

The address on the back contains only the *kunyas* of both addressees. No full names are given. Moreover, the place of delivery is unrecorded, which raises the question of the letter delivery like the first one. As mentioned above, the letter is an answer to a letter from the two addressees. One might then expect that the carrier of the addressees' letter might have waited to collect the answer from the sender. But it is also possible that the letter was sent later through someone else. In any case, the letter must have been delivered informally either through servants, intermediaries or family members. The regular contact between the sender and the two addressees, either living in the same place or very close to each other, indicates a short distance.

In view of the identification of the two male addressees (Abū 'Alī and Abū 'Umayr) mentioned in the address on the back of the letter, the interpretation of the sentence *milāk waladikumā*, lines 3-4, would at once become flawlessly clear; the son of Abū 'Alī got married to the daughter of Abū 'Umayr or the other way around. The Arabic word *walad* refers to both males and females as well as singular and plural.<sup>14</sup> The word *walad* in this context certainly refers to both, the bride and the groom. The intimate voice of the letter does not only celebrate the marriage of the two spouses but also the affinity between the two families, indicating a very strong bond of kinship or friendship/partnership between all three, i.e. the sender and the two addressees. In case the address was not recorded on the back or was for one reason or another lost, one would have translated and interpreted the word *waladikumā* in line four differently, i.e. masculine singular (your son). The two addressees in this case would be the groom's parents.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al- 'arab*, vol. 6, p. 2914. See also Giladi, "Ṣaghīr", *EF*, vol. 8, pp. 821-822.

## The *Milāk* (Marriage Ceremony)

The *milāk* or *imlāk* defines the marriage ceremony where the marriage contract is drawn up, typically before the consummation of marriage.<sup>15</sup> The root *m-l-k*, from which the terms *milk/milāk/imlāk* are derived, is associated with ownership, authority and dominion. Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) differentiates between two forms of *milk*: 1) *milk al-nikāḥ/milk al-‘iṣma* denoting ownership in marriage, and 2) *milk al-yamīn* (ownership by the right hand/lawful concubinage), as described in the Quran (4:24; 23:6; 70:30), which authorizes sexual relations between the male owner and his female slaves. Only males could exercise these two forms of *milk*.<sup>16</sup> According to the Quran (4:3), a free man is permitted a maximum number of four legitimate wives at a time and as many female slaves as he can afford to maintain. On the other hand, it strictly prohibits any kind of sexual relationship outside marriage and lawful concubinage (32:258).<sup>17</sup> The term *milāk* denoting marital *milk* is attested only once in an Arabic papyrus letter sent from a fiancé to his fiancée, discussing her choices for the banquet of the marriage ceremony whether to bring fresh fruits or dried fruits (*wakhhbirīnī mā arfaq li-l-milāk al-fākiha al-yābisa am al-fākiha al-raṭba li-anna fākiha al-raṭba aḥabbu ilā al-nās al-yawm min al-fākiha al-yābisa*, “Inform me of what is better for the marriage ceremony, fresh fruits or dried fruits, because fresh fruits are preferred by the people today over dried fruits”).<sup>18</sup> The term *milāk/imlāk* is also attested in the Cairo Geniza documents in the meaning of engagement/betrothal.<sup>19</sup>

## Editions

### Letter 1: Lunch-Invitation on Papyrus

P.Vindob. A.P. 01754<sup>20</sup>  
Provenance unknown

10 × 10.5 cm

3rd/9th  
Fig. 1

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<sup>15</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 6, p. 4268. The term is also attested in the Egyptian literary sources, see al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa-Kitāb al-Qudāt*, pp. 348, 521-522, 601.

<sup>16</sup> For more information on the Islamic legal marriage and slavery-related terminology, particularly *milk al-nikāḥ* (ownership in marriage) and *milk al-yamīn* (ownership by the right hand/slave ownership), see Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, pp. 164-186.

<sup>17</sup> Peters, “Zinā”, in *EF<sup>2</sup>*, vol. 11, pp. 509-510.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. P.JoySorrow 1.11-14, 2nd/8th, provenance unknown.

<sup>19</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3, pp. 69-70; Diem and Radenberg, *Dictionary of the Arabic Material of S.D. Goitein’s A Mediterranean Society*, p. 205.

<sup>20</sup> A short description and a digital image of the papyrus are available at the Austrian National Library’s digital catalogue at <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/RZ00021426>

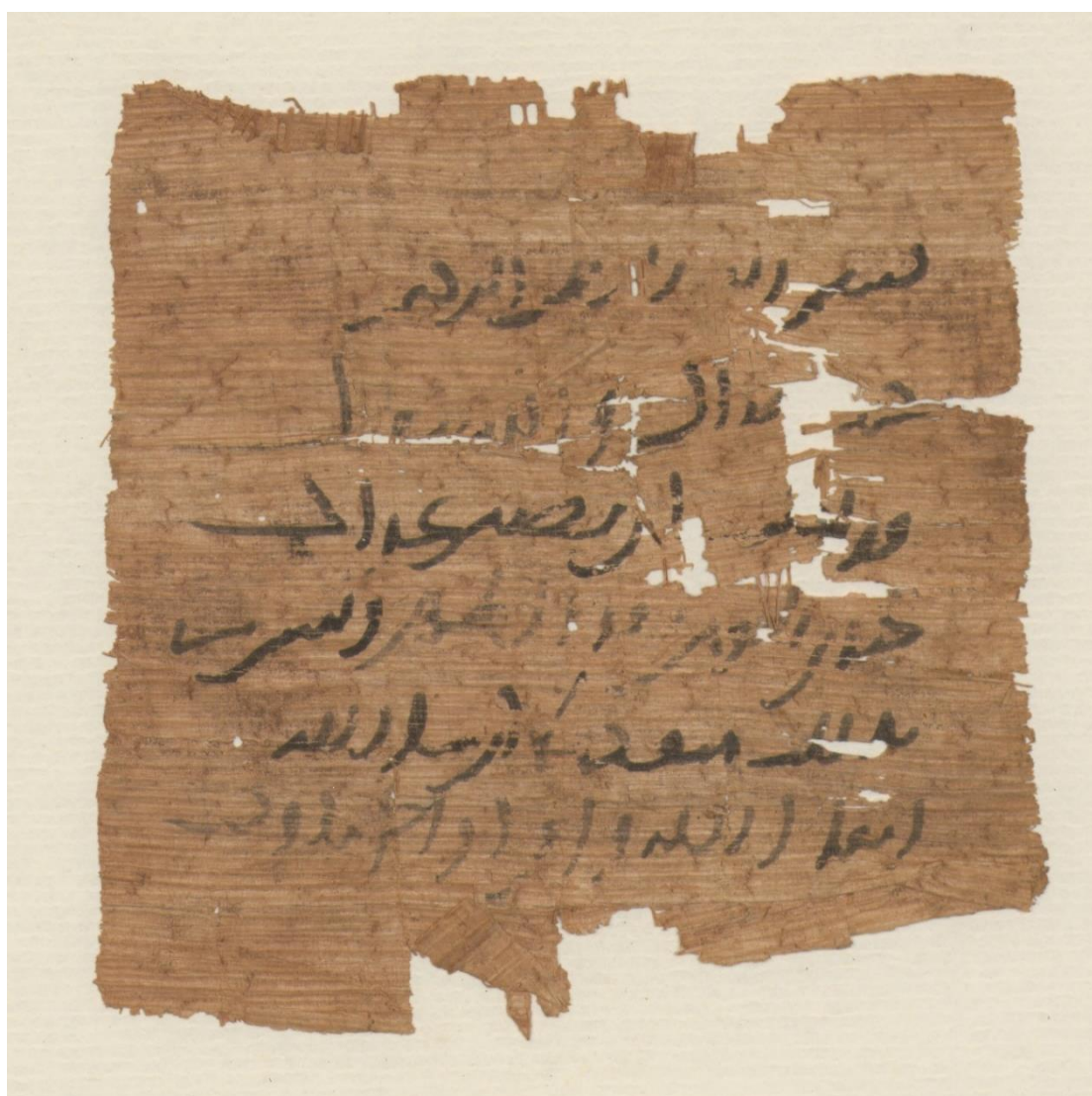


Fig. 1: P.Vindob. A.P. 01754 © Austrian National Library.

Well preserved dark brown papyrus written in a practiced hand in black ink with a medial thick pen parallel to fibres in contrast to the more common *transversa charta* practice in the Islamic period. The original cutting lines are preserved on all sides. Few holes and tears in the right side of the papyrus have resulted in some damage to the text, but they can easily be reconstructed. There are no diacritical dots. Verso is blank. The script does not show any usage of *linea dilatans/mashq* or abusive ligaturing and the orientation of the overall writing line is mainly horizontal, which are typical characteristics of the 3rd/9th century letters. Of the characteristics of the script, the letters *sīn* and *shīn* are constantly written with three denticles (*bi-sm*, line 1; *wa-tasurrunī*, line 4; *shā`a*, line 5). *Ṣād*, *ḍād* and *zā`* are oval (*yaṣīr*, line 3; *al-zuhr*, line 4; *mutafaddilan*, line 5). The *lām-alif* ligature is v-shaped (*mutafaddilan*, line 5). Final attached *yā`* extends backward (*wa-tasurrunī*, line 4), while independent *yā`* finishes unusually low, without turning upwards on the left side resembling the letter *nūn* (*indī*, line 4). The writer dipped the pen into ink three times to write the letter. The first dipping covered the first two lines. The second was at the beginning of line

3, while the third dipping was before writing the last word in line 4 and continued until the end of the letter.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم	1 ←
جعلت فداك والله بيبقيك	2
قد أحببت أن يصير غداك	3
عندي اليوم بعد الظهر وتسرنني	4
بذلك متفضلا إن شا الله	5
أبقاك الله وأعزك وأكرمك وكتب	6

1. In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful
2. May I be your ransom and may God prolong your life
3. I would like that you would come to have lunch
4. with me today in the afternoon and make me happy
5. by kindly doing so, if God wills.
6. May God prolong your life and preserve you and honor you, and it has been written.

**2 ju[ 'iltu] fidā'aka wa-llāhu yubqīka** Of *ju 'iltu* only the *jīm* is preserved, which is followed by a downward loop as a connecting stroke with the next missing character. It resembles much the way the *qāf* and *alif* in *abqāka* and the *mīm* and *kāf* in *akramaka* are ligatured in line 6. The reconstruction of this initial blessing is made on the basis of many parallels. The eulogy *wa-llāhu yubqīka* is attested in papyrus letters, cf. CPR XVI 26.5, 2nd/8th, provenance unknown. See also *wa-llāhu yubqīka fī 'azīm 'āfiyatihī* (P.David-Weill Louvre 19B.2-3, 3rd/9th, provenance unknown); *fa-as'alu allāh an yubqiyaka* (P.JoySorrow 13.10, 2nd/8th, provenance unknown, and the references cited in the commentary).

**3 qad aḥbābtu an yaṣīra ghadā'aka** The word *aḥbābtu* is not entirely clear due to the lacuna and the effacing of the ink. The beginning of the *ḥā'* is attached to the preceding *alif*. The formula is very well attested in Arabic papyrus letters. The *ghayn* of *ghadā'aka* is linked to the *rā'* of *yaṣīra*. There is an ink spot below the *kāf* of *ghadā'aka*.

**4 'indī al-yawm ba'da al-zuhr wa-tasurrunī** The ink is effaced at the beginning of this line. The writer dipped the pen into ink before writing the final word in the line (*wa-tasurrunī*). The tail of the *mīm* of *al-yawm* is long compared to the short oblique tail of the *mīm* of *bi-sm* in line 1.

**5 bi-dhālika mutafaḍḍilan in shā'a allāh** This expression is very well attested in Arabic letters of request as well as petitions. For letters, see for example P.Ryl.Arab. I XV 35.5, 3rd-4th/9th-10th, provenance unknown; P.Khalili I 31.15-16, 3rd/9th, provenance unknown. For petitions, see P.Ryl.Arab. II 11.28, 3rd/9th, provenance Asyūt. The denticles of the *shīn* of *shā'a* are written with less emphasis than the denticles of the *sīn*.

**6 *abqāka allāh wa-a‘azzaka wa-akramaka wa-kutiba*** The final blessings on the addressee are different than the initial ones. In the vast majority of Arabic letters, the final blessings recapitulate the initial ones in script and content.<sup>21</sup> The expression *wa-kutiba* is commonly used in Arabic papyrus letters to signal the closure of the letter.<sup>22</sup> This expression appears also in legal documents from the 1st/7th century, cf. P.BruningSunna, dated 44/664-665, provenance probably Upper Egypt; P.TillierDebts 3, dated 48/667-668, provenance probably Fustāṭ. The *alif* of *wa-akramaka* is intersected with the *nūn* of *an* in the preceding line. The initial *kāf* of *wa-akramaka* is written differently (hairpin-shaped) than the *kāf* of *wa-kutiba* (only a round stroke). The final *kāf* of *abqāka* and *a‘azzaka* are written as an oblique stroke resembling the letter *alif*. Similarly, the final *kāf* of *akramaka* has a very short horizontal stroke. Compare it with the long final *kāf* of *fidā‘aka* and *yubqīka* in line 1, *ghadā‘aka* in line 3 and *bi-dhālika* in line 5.

## Letter 2: Marriage Congratulations on Papyrus

P.Vindob. A.P. 01764<sup>23</sup>  
Provenance unknown

12,8 × 18 cm

3rd/9th  
Figs. 2-3



Fig. 2: P.Vindob. A.P. 01764 recto © Austrian National Library.

Dark brown papyrus, torn off at the bottom. The original cutting lines are preserved on the other three sides. Two scraps, now detached from the papyrus, are currently placed to the left of the papyrus. The papyrus fibres are frayed at the top without damaging the beginning of the text on recto but causing some damage to the address on verso. The text is written in a well-practiced hand in black ink with a medial thick pen at

<sup>21</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, pp. 195-197.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. P.Khalili I, p. 194; Diem, “‘katabtu ‘ilayka ‘Ich schreibe Dir‘ und Verwandtes,” pp. 295-296; Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>23</sup> A short description and a digital image of the papyrus are available at the Austrian National Library’s digital catalogue at <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/RZ00021427>



right angles to fibres. The letter is written in the middle of the papyrus sheet, leaving wide blank margins on all sides. It is structured in paragraphs with fair spaces between lines. The orientation of the overall writing line is mainly horizontal. Only the beginning of lines 1, 2 and 3 shows a low degree of hanging. There are no diacritical dots. The verso contains the address in one line. Initial and medial *kāfs* are written as an oblique or even as a short vertical stroke (Cf. *ḥafīzakumā, wa-‘āfākumā, bikumā*, line 2; *katabtumā, wa-dhakartumā*, line 3; *waladikumā, ba‘ḍakum*, line 4; *lakumā, ‘alaykumā*, line 5).



Fig. 3: P.Vindob. A.P. 01764 verso © Austrian National Library.

Recto:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم	1	↓
حفظكما الله وعافاكما وأمتع بكما	2	
قد فهمت ما كتبتما وما ذكرتما من ملاك	3	
ولدكما فأمتع الله بعضكم ببعض وبارك	4	
لكما وأتم نعمه عليكما (vac.)	5	
وسرني (?) ع.....	6	

Verso:

أبي محمد	لأبي علي وأبي عمير (?) من	←
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Recto:

1. In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful
2. May God preserve you and keep you in good health and may He grant you enjoyment of life
3. I understood what you wrote and what you mentioned concerning the marriage
4. of your [two adult] children. May God grant you enjoyment of life and bless
5. you and complete His favors upon you (vac.)
6. I was pleased .....

Verso:

To Abū 'Alī and Abū 'Umayr (?) from (vac.) Abū Muḥammad

**1** The first part of *bi-sm* is slanting. A long connecting stroke (*linea dilatans/mashq*) is attested between the *sīn* and *mīm*.<sup>24</sup> The *mīm* of *bi-sm* has a short slanting tail compared to the long downward tail of the *mīm* of *al-Raḥīm*. The ink is smudged below the *ḥā'* of *al-Raḥīm*.

**2** *ḥafīzakumā allāh wa-'āfākumā wa-amta'a bikumā* The dual form is used consistently in the initial blessings for the addressees. The final *alif* of *bikumā* is a bit longer than the other *alifs* in the rest of the text. It does not extend below the baseline as most of the final *alifs* do. The *alif* of *'alaykumā* in line 5 is written likewise. See also the comment on the *alif* of *katabtumā* in the following line.

**3-4** *qad fahimtu mā katabtumā wa-mā dhakartumā min milāk waladikumā* The final *alif* of *katabtumā* is written differently, resembling somewhat the shape of an inverted letter V. For the term *milāk* denoting marital *milk*, see the discussion above. For the Arabic word *walad*, see the discussion above.

**4-5** *fa-amta'a allāh ba'dakum bi-ba'd wa-bāraka lakumā wa-atamma ni'amahu 'alaykumā* In this eulogy, the dual alternates with the plural,<sup>25</sup> as it refers the two addressees as well as the two spouses. A blank space is left at the end of line five indicating the beginning of a new section in the following line.<sup>26</sup>

**6** In this line only traces of letters can be read. The reading *wa-sarranī* at the beginning of this line is tentative. Only the loop of the *wāw*, three denticles of the *sīn* and the upper tip of a third letter are preserved. A tiny slip of papyrus fibre is flipped over covering the upper traces of the second word on this line.

**Verso** The address is written around the vertical axis at the same height as the *basmala* on recto. The first part of the address can either be read as *ilā 'Alī* (to 'Alī) or *li-abī 'Alī* (to Abū 'Alī). The latter is more likely, for three reasons: 1) the calligraphic form (*rasm*) closely resembles the *rasm* of *abī* of both, the second addressee and the sender; 2) it is reasonable that both parties (i.e., the sender and both addressees) are all identified with their *kunyas*, and 3) the lower traces of the first character indicates the base of a v-shaped *lām-alif* ligature rather than a free-standing *alif*. The *lām* of 'Alī extends vertically downwards without bending to the left to write the letter *yā'* which

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<sup>24</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>25</sup> Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic*, pp. 94-95 [§ 84.ii].

<sup>26</sup> Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus*, p. 190.

is common in this ligature.<sup>27</sup> The name of the second addressee is not entirely clear due to the loss of papyrus fibres. The reading 'Umayr is uncertain. The ink is effaced in the name of the sender, Abū Muḥammad, but the reading is certain.

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<sup>27</sup> For the omission of the final yā'/alif maqṣūra after the lām, see Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic*, pp. 57-59 [§ 55].

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## نوافذ على الحياة اليومية في مصر خلال القرن الثالث الهجري: رسالتان عربيتان على ورق البردي

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### الملخص:

يقدم هذا المقال دراسة وتحقيق لبرديتين عربيتين يعودان إلى القرن الثالث الهجري/التاسع الميلادي، وهما محفوظتان حاليًا ضمن مجموعة البردي بالمكتبة الوطنية النمساوية بفيينا. البردية الأولى (P.Vindob. A.P. 01754)، عبارة عن رسالة تتضمن دعوة خاصة للغداء. أما البردية الثانية (P.Vindob. A.P. 01764)، فهي عبارة عن رسالة تتضمن تهنئة بالزواج. تكمن أهمية هاتين الرسالتين في أمرين: أولهما، مضمونهما الفريد الذي يكشف لنا بعض جوانب التفاعلات والممارسات الاجتماعية اليومية في مصر خلال العصر الإسلامي المبكر، وثانيهما، الدور المحوري للرسائل المكتوبة كنمط مهم للتواصل بين الأقارب والأصدقاء المتباعدين جغرافيا خلال العصور القديمة.

**الكلمات الدالة:** مصر الإسلامية، التاريخ الاجتماعي، البردي العربي، الرسائل الخاصة، الغداء، الزواج