Mediation to Solve Dispute and Business Instructions for Delivery of Oil: a 2nd/8th C.E Letter from Edfu

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Abstract

This paper presents an edition of the unpublished Arabic papyrus P.IFAO Edfou Ar. Inv. 10, currently kept at the Institut français d'archéologie orientale - IFAO – Cairo, Egypt. It was found in Edfu, the famous city of Upper Egypt, datable on palaeographical grounds to the 2nd/8th century. It is an early Arabic business letter, it illustrates a business network between Edfu, the town of Narmūda at Fayyūm and another third anonymous Egyptian place.

Keywords: 2nd/8th C.E, Edfū, Narmūda, business relations.

P. Ifao. Edfou. Ar. Inv. 10

Papyrus

2nd/8th

Edfū

1 The papyrological abbreviations used in this paper follow “The Checklist of Arabic Documents,” available online at http://www.naher-osten.lmu.de/isapchecklist. Papyrological references are taken according to the editions of the papyri. For example, P.Khalili I 17.13, 3rd/9th, Edfū = G. Khan, Arabic papyri: selected material from the Khalili Collection (London-Oxford: Azimuth Editions, Oxford University Press, 1992), vol. 1, papyrus no.17. line 13, dated 3rd/9th, its provenance (Edfū). The number of the edition is always Bold. The system of brackets used in the edition of the Arabic text follows the Leiden conventions of editing papyri. The transliteration of the Arabic alphabets follows the IFAO’s policy http://www.ifao.egnet.net/publications/publier/outils-ed/polices/.

Medium-brown papyrus written in an elegant, proficient, clear and careful hand in black ink with a medium-thin pen parallel to the fibers. The letter is incomplete at the top where an unknown number of lines is missing. The document has been folded 11 times, rolled from bottom up and crashed, causing three major lacunae and small holes, which have caused some damage to the text. The right margin is preserved, left margin is quite damaged while the bottom margin is largely intact. The original cutting lines have partially been preserved on the right hand side, left hand side and bottom margins. Diacritical dots are visible in some words. Side B is blank.

The script shows some features of the early script: alone standing alif has a bending to the right side (innamā line 8; ilayh, an line 9; wa-nzur line 11; ilā line 13) while final alif has a bending stroke below the line (kunnā, kallamnāk line 11). ṭāʾ is short (bi-ḥabarik line 3; Narmūdā line 4). Initial kāf has the typical shape of the Kūfīc kāf: with a slanting stroke, then an extending horizontal stroke and a small vertical part and then a small extending stroke to the left (kallamnāk, kunnā line 11) while the medial one doesn't have a slanting stroke at the top (yaktub line 9; al-kātib line 13). Medial nūn has a dot beneath (Kunnā l. 11.) Final yāʾ-son is extended to the right side consistently.

This is a correspondence between two Muslim friends, whose names are anonymous to us owing to the loss of the interior and exterior addresses. It is well understood from the context that this current letter was preceded by a letter from the addressee to the sender, in which he implicitly informed him about a quarrel between him and Abša the local governor Ṣāḥib of a pagarchy of Fayyūm called Narmūdā. Also, it is clear that these three individuals are business partners.

In addition to the business relation between these three partners, this letter illustrates to us another oil trading business network. It consists of the sender (the buyer) who is most likely an official, his representative the Coptic scribe Kayl who appears receiving the oil from the addressee to deliver it to the sender, the addressee and the certain oil traders, Mubārak and the Copt Samawīl al-Maṭālī.

The letter is structured in three paragraphs. In the first paragraph, the sender asks the addressee to write back with his news and the news of Abša who is in charge of (Ṣāḥib) Narmūdā. In the second paragraph, the sender informs the addressee with his intention to solve the addressee's quarrel with Ṣāḥib Narmūdā, so that he sent somebody (anonymous) for detecting the reason of this quarrel. Then the sender let the addressee know (in advance before revealing the quarrel) that he would keep him informed if his deed would be the reason of this quarrel.

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4 See the commentary on line 10.
5 For this administrative title, see commentary on line 3.
6 For this town, see commentary on line 4.
The sender informs the addressee further that the portion of unknown thing to us, which the addressee made for his due, has to be entitled to Ṣāḥib Narmūda, and that he also wrote to Ṣāḥib Narmūda about this. The sender ends the second paragraph by letting the addressee know that he wrote to Ṣāḥib Narmūda asking him to write back to him with what happened from the addressee to him. In the third paragraph, the sender asks the addressee to receive in full for him, unknown quantity of oil from Mubārak, plus another five xestes from Samawīl al-Maṭālī, then he asks him to deliver these quantities to a scribe called Kayl, to bring them with him to the sender. The sender closes this paragraph by final blessings on the addressee and the expression wa-kutiba.

The sender of this letter is always referring to himself in a plural form. The scribe of the letter is not consistent in the manner of writing the final lām-yāʾ, he sometimes doesn't write yāʾ after the lām (taḡalī l. 6; ‘alā l. 10; tawallā l. 14) while he writes it in all its places in the rest of the letter. This ambiguity of scribal practice has no final interpretation (Hopkins § 55).

Text

١. [لا الا] لیک
٢. [له] بخربک [و] حالک
٣. [ابش] ساحب
٤. نرموده من نحبه ونح [ب] خبرک [ولی]
٥. وقد احببنا [ان] [ن] [ف] [ن] [و] [ن] [ن] [و] [ن] [ن] [و]
٦. [وان] [انت] فعلت له ذلك
٧. اعرفناه لك [ب]
٨. من حقي/شي اننما نصب[ب]به الله وق[د] كتبب الى صاحب نزرموده بخبره[ب]
٩. فاعلم ذلك ابقاك[ل] الله وق[د] [ب] [ن] [ك] [ن] [ب] [ن] [ه] ان كتبب الله بما جرى
١٠. منك اليه حتى [تكر] من ذلك على علم ولا قوه الا بالله العظيم
١١. وانظر ابقاك الله في امر الزيت الذي كنا كلمناك فيه
١٢. إن تاخذنا من م[ب] بارک وخمسه اقشاط من سموه المطلبی
١٣. فانظر حفظک الله [إن] تستوفي لنا وتدفعه الى حري الكاتب
١٤. فق[د] به لمية ولا ق[و] ء الا بالله العظيم[ب] تولى الله امرك بالفاعیه
١٥. في الدنيا والاخر[ه] وكتب

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Diacritical dots
(العطٌم 11 ) كـبا - سمويل 13 ) تستوڡـنـه - الكاتب

Translation

1. [ ]
2. [ ]
3. About your news and your health A)bša the pagarch of
4. Narmūda from (the persons) whom we love and like (to hear) his news [ ]
5. And we wish that [your matter of quarrel/your quarrel with him] is for the best and we sent
6. for the revelation of the matter of quarrel (between you) [ ] you caused this for him
7. We will make you know (your mistake) [ ] and what you made
8. from my portion would be [for him and I wrote to the pagarch of N]armūda with its news
9. So be aware of this. May God preserve you. And I wrote/ sent to him to write to us with what happened
10. from you to him to be aware of it, and no power except in God the Immense.
11. And consider may god preserve you the oil that I talked to you about,
12. to take it for us from Mubarāk and Five xestes from Samawīl al-Maṭālī
13. So, consider may god preserve you to receive it in full for us and deliver it to Kayl the scribe
14. to bring it with him and no power except in God the Immense. May God perpetuate your health
15. in life and hereafter and it has been written.

Commentary

1. The beginning of this line is lost, which contains one or two words at most. Of these lost words, only final alif, initial alif, lām-alif and two teeth are visible. Of the last word of this line, only final rāʾ and final kāf are visible.
2. This line is mostly destroyed, only initial fāʾ or qāf; short hook and final kāf are visible of lost words at the beginning of the line. Of the last word in this line only medial fāʾ or qāf; hook and tāʾ marbūta.
3-4. The loop of the conjunction wāw is lost in the lacuna. The extended stroke of final kāf of ḥalik is missing. The expression bi-ḥabarik wa-ḥalik -as a part of formula- occurs in different countless parallels in Arabic papyri, see uktub ilayyā bi- ḥabarik wa-salāmik wa-ḥalik wa-hayʾatik (CPR XVI 18.10, 1st-2nd/7th-8th), uktub ilayyā bi-ḥabarik wa-ḥalik wa-hayʾatik wa-bi-mā anta
‘alayh (P.Jahn 17.25–26, 3rd/9th); wa-anā wa-man qibāli ‘alā afdal ḥāl wa-
ahsan hay’ā (CPR XVI 33.9, 1st-2nd/7th-8th); bi- ḥabarik wa-ḥālik wa-
hay atik (P.Ryl.Arab. I VII 33.13, 3rd/9th); fa-lā tadaʾ al-kitāb ilaynā bi-
ḥabarik wa-ḥālik wa-salāmatik (P.JoySorrow 26.9, 2nd/8th). Abṣa Ṣāhib
Narmūda. The bāʾ of Abṣa is lost in the lacuna, for this Coptic name but
with final alif mamdūda instead of final hāʾ, see P.Cair.Arab. IV, 247–248.
For the meaning and the use of the administrative title Ṣāhib in Arabic
papyri, see P.MuslimState, 92–118. For the Fayyūmīc town Narmūda,
its administration in the 2nd/8th century and its attestation in Arabic papyri,
see P.MuslimState, 134–135, 140 n. 127, 141–143, 169. Of nuḥibu trace of
the final bāʾ is visible. Of ḥabarahu trace of rāʾ can still be seen. The following
words after the wāw in this line are hard to be recognized due to the
damaged fibers and the lacunae. The scribe left an empty space after this line
and started a new paragraph to start a new topic.

5. Aḥbabnā. the ink of the medial nūn is faded out. The nūn of an is missing.
Of yakān only trace of initial yāʾ and the vertical stroke of the kāf are still
visible. Of amr only the upper part of the initial alif and the mīm are still
seen. The next word after amr is difficult to be restored because of the
lacuna here, only traces of sīn or shīn, ḥāʾ or ḡāʾ, mīm, short vertical stroke
and trace of a loop are visible. This word can be restored as tasāḥumikumā
or tasāḥumika bīh, from the root saḥama, see Ibn Manzūr, Lisān al-ʿarab.
1964-1965. This expression is rarely attested in Arabic papyri, it is
reconstructed on the basis of only one parallel attested in Arabic papyrus
letter from Edfu for the best of my knowledge c.f. wa qad taʾibi mn amr
tasāḥumīnā ilā ḥaḍā al-waqṭ mn as-sana (P.Hamb.Arab. I 9.7–8, 3rd/9th). The
reading baʾṭnā is uncertain, only bāʾ, ʿayn and teeth are visible before the
lacuna.

6. The reading of the second word of this line is difficult. For the reading of
the adverb tasāḥumikumā see line 5. Of raʾayt the tail of the rāʾ, yāʾ and final
tāʾ are visible. The extended tail of the final kāf of ḡālik is not missing but
disappeared under the fibers.

8. The medial bāʾ of naṣībah is missing. Of ilayh the final hāʾ is lost in the
lacuna. The initial bāʾ of the name Narmūda is missing. Ṣāhib Narmūda is
restored on the basis of the same expression in lines 4-5. The final alif of bi-
ḥabarīnā is missing in the lacuna.

9-10. Abqāka trace of final kāf is visible. The lower part of the initial alif of al-
lāḥ is still visible. The loop of the conjunction wāw is missing. Trace of the
loop of qāf of qad is still visible. Only the medial nūn and the downward
bending stroke of the alif mamduḍa of Katabnābiʾathnā are still visible.
Ilaynā final alif mamdūda is written in special form: with too long
downward vertical stroke which intersects the medial nūn reaching under the
level of the line. Bi-mā Jarā mink ilayh. for the expressions mentioning the
verb Jarā see, la-qad jarā baynī wa bayn Sulbiqīyūḥa,Salqiqīyūḥa
ibn ḡurayḡ (CPR XVI 20.5–6, 3rd/9th); an ḡaʾ alaka fī saʾa mimma ḡarā
(P.Marchands V/I 16.4, 3rd/9th). The ink of the verb ḡarā is effaced but the
reading is certain. Both the medial kāf and the loop of the wāw of the verb takūn are missing. Of ʿalā the lām and alif maqṣūra are written in the form of final lām. The tail of the final mīm of ʿilm is lost in the hole. Wa-lā quwwata illā bi-l-lāh al-ʿazīm this religious formula -without the expression lā ḥawla at its beginning- is rarely attested in Arabic papyri. cf. fa-qad istadaffat ḥawāʾīlī wa ṣágū yahiba Allāh lī al-ʿāfiya wayusahil ḥurūqī in shāʾ Allāh wa al-ḥayrata wa-lā quwwata illā bi-l-lāh al-ʿazīm wa-uhibbu an tuʿarrif (P.Berl.Arab. II 66.9, 4th/10th). The use of this religious formula by the sender in this line and line 14, in addition to the final blessing in (lines 14-15) indicates that both he and the addressee are Muslims.

11-12. Al-zayt. Vegetable oils produced in Egypt were made from olives or seeds, mostly radish seeds and they were mainly used for cooking and lighting. For more comprehensive discussion on oil in the papyri, see (Sijpesteijn, 2014). The name Mubārak is well attested in the papyri. cf. P.Marchands II 2r.7, 3rd/9th; P.Marchands V/I 23. 3rd/9th. On aqṣāt (pl. of qiṣṭ) and its kinds as a measure of capacity in medieval Egypt, see P.Cair.Arab. V, 153–154. The use of qiṣṭ for measuring oil is common in papyri. For the title al-Maṭālī see CPR XVI 27.7, 2nd/8th.

13. The verb tastawfī is always used in Arabic letters to express the meaning of receiving money or something in kind (in full) and delivering it to somebody cf. wa-l-darāhim allatī ḥaqīqahā min abī muḥammad ʿabd al-lāh aʿazzahu al-lāh fa-idfāʾ hā ilā ṣāḥib al-muʿāfā atāla al-lāh baqāʾ ah wa-uktub ilaynā min ḥaytū tastawfīḥā ḥattā naʿmal bi ḥasb dālik (P.Cair.Arab. 325.8-9). Kayl is a famous Coptic name in Arabic papyri, he appears her as the representative of the sender as he would receive the oil from the sender and deliver it to him.

14-15. Of maʿah trace of the ʿayn can still be seen. Of al-ʿazīm only alif, lām, ʿayn and the tail of final mīm are still visible, this word is constructed on the basis of line 10, where the same word occurs. Tawallā al-lāh amrāk bi-l-ʿāfiyā ḥī-d-dunyā wa-l-āḥira. final blessings using the verb tawallā are variants in Arabic papyri letters. Cf. tawālā-ka/tawallā al-lāh bi-l-ʿāfiya (P.David-WeillLouvre 23.15-16, 2nd/8th); tawallā al-lāh ḥifzaka (P.Marchands III 3. recto 9, 3rd/9th); Tawallā al-lāh kifāyatakumā (P.Marchands III 26. recto 22, Fayyum, 3rd/9th). For using the performative wa-kutiba as final point of a letter by the scribes see (Grob, 2010); P.Khalilī I, p. 194.

Conclusion
Although this letter is the only discovered papyrus document datable to the 2nd/8th century, it revealed to us a 2nd/8th century business network linking Edfu, the town of Nārmūda at Fayyum and another third anonymous Egyptian place. It showed us that dispute could sometimes strike the business relations among some of these partners, and how it used to be solved through the wise intercession of one of them to solve the problem between the dispute parties, by making everyone to know his mistakes.

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This letter also provided us with unique information about the mechanism of commerce of this business network, which gathers Muslims and Copts, with full details about these networks' configurations (sellers, buyers, representatives). It also showed that oil was among the salable merchandises of Edfu at that time. Such information can't be found in the Arabic literary sources.

References


Ibn Manzūr (d. 711/1311), Lisān al-ʿArab. Dār al-maʿarif.


تهم هذه الورقة البحثية تحقيق للبردية العربية غير مشهورة، محفوظة حاليا في المعهد الفرنسي للأثار الشرقية - IFAO - القاهرة، مصر. تم العثور عليها في مدينة إدفو، المدينة الشهيرة في صعيد مصر، ويمكن تأريخ هذه البردية طبقا لسمات الكتابة إلى القرن الثاني الهجري/الثامن الميلادي. ونص البردية عبارة عن خطاب أعمال تجارية، يعكس لنا شبكة أعمال تجارية تضم مدينة إدفو، بلدة نرومود بالقهر، ومكان مصرى آخر لم يذكره نص الورقة.

الكلمات الدالة: تسوية نزاع، تسليم زيت، مدينة إدفو، البرديات العربية.