

Mediation to Solve Dispute and Business Instructions for Delivery of Oil: a 2nd/8th C.E Letter from Edfu¹

Ahmed Nabil Maghraby¹

¹Faculty of tourism and hotel management, University of Sadat City

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This paper presents an edition of the unpublished Arabic papyrus P.IFAO Edfou Ar.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, Edfu, Narmūda, business relations.

P.Ifao.Edfou. Ar. Inv. 10²

Papyrus
2nd/8th
Edfū

22.5 x 22.4

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/>.

² This papyrus was discovered during the excavations of the French and the Franco-Polish missions at Tell Edfu (1920-1939). Its exact date of discovery is unfortunately unknown. Tell Edfu was officially excavated by both French and Franco-polish missions for ten seasons. The first seven seasons were carried out by the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) in (1914, 1921-1922, 1923, 1924, 1928, 1932-1933, 1935). In 1937 the excavation at the Tell became a Franco-polish. This joint expedition lasted for three seasons till the work was stopped in 1939 due to the World War II. The results of these excavations have been published by the IFAO in eight volumes: Henne, H. (1924). Rapport sur les Fouilles de Tell Edfou (1921 - 1922). *Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 1.2., Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo; Henne, H. (1925). Rapport sur les Fouilles de Tell Edfou (1923 - 1924). *Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 2.3., Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo; Guéraud, O. (1929). Rapport sur les Fouilles de Tell Edfou (1928). *Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 4.6., Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo; Alliot, M. (1933). Rapport sur les Fouilles de Tell Edfou (1932), *Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 9.2., Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo; Alliot, M. (1935). Rapport sur les Fouilles de Tell Edfou (1932). *Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 10.2., Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo; Bruyère, B., Jerzy M., Jean Sainte F. G. & Kazimierz M. (1937). Tell Edfu 1937. *Fouilles Franco-Polonaises*, Rapports I, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo; Michalowski, K., Jean d. L., Jerzy M. & Jean S. F. G. (1938). Tell Edfu 1938. *Fouilles Franco-Polonaises*, Rapports II, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo; Michalowski, K., Christiane D., Jean d. L., Jerzy M. & Stanislaw Z. (1950). Tell Edfu 1939. *Fouilles Franco-Polonaises*, Rapports III, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo.

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 script³: 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). *Rā'* is short (*bi-ḥabarik* line 3; *Narmūda* 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 *yā'*-s is extended to the right side consistently.

This is a correspondence between two Muslim friends⁴, 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 *Ṣāhib*⁵ of a pagarchy of Fayyūm called *Narmūda*⁶. 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 (*Ṣāhib*) *Narmūda*. In the second paragraph, the sender informs the addressee with his intention to solve the addressee's quarrel with *Ṣāhib Narmūda*, 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.

³ For dating Arabic papyrus documents on the basis of the script, see Grob, E.M. (2010). A Catalogue of Dating Criteria for Undated Arabic Papyri with 'Cursive' Features," in A. Regourd (ed.), *Documents et histoire. Islam, VIIe-XVIIe siècle*. Geneva, 115-135; P.Khalili 1, 27-44.

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 *Ṣāhib Narmūda*, and that he also wrote to *Ṣāhib Narmūda* about this. The sender ends the second paragraph by letting the addressee know that he wrote to *Ṣāhib 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 *wakutiba*.

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-yā*, he sometimes doesn't write *yā* 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 [] -رك
٢. [] [ك] [] -قه
٣. بخبرك [و] حال [ك] [] [ب] شه صاحب
٤. نرموده ممن نحبه ونحـ [ب] خبـ [ر] ه و [] [] الى
٥. وقد احببنا [ان يـ] كـ [ون امـ] ر تسخـمكم / تسخـمك به [خير ا وبعثـ] [نا]
٦. فى تجلى أمر تسخـمكـ [ما] [] وان [انـ]ت فعلت له ذلك
٧. اعرفناه لك با [] وما صنعت [انـ]ت
٨. من حقى / شى انما نصيـ [بـ] ه اليـ [ه] وقد كتبت الى صاحب نـ [نـ] نرموده بخبرهـ []
٩. فاعلم ذلك ابقاك [الله] وقد [بعثـ] نا / [كتبـ] نا [] [] ليه ان يكتب الينا بما جرى
١٠. منك اليه حتى [تكو] ن من ذلك على علم ولا قوه الا بالله العظيم
١١. وانظر ابقاك الله فى امر الزيت الذي كنا كلمناك فيه
١٢. ان تاخذنه لنا من مـ [بـ] ارك وخمسة اقساط من سمويل المطالى
١٣. فانظر حفظك الله [ان] تستوفيه لنا وتدفعه الى كيل الكاتب
١٤. فيقدم به مـ [عـ] ه ولا قـ [و] ة الا بالله العظـ [يم] تولى الله امرك بالعافيه
١٥. فى الدنيا والاخر [ه] وكتب

Diacritical dots

١٠. العظیم (١١) کبا - سمویل (١٣) تستوفنه - الکاتب

Translation

1. []
2. []
3. About your news and your health [h] 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 *rā'* and final *kāf* are visible.
2. This line is mostly destroyed, only initial *fā'* 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 *fā'* or *qāf*, hook and *tā' 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-ḥālik* -as a part of formula- occurs in different countless parallels in Arabic papyri, see *uktub ilayyā bi- ḥabarik wa-salāmik wa-ḥālik wa-hay'atik* (CPR XVI 18.10, 1st-2nd/7th-8th); *uktub ilayyā bi-ḥabarik wa-ḥālik wa-hay'atik wa-bi-mā anta*

- ‘alayh* (P.Jahn 17.25-26, 3rd/9th); *wa-anā wa-man qibalī ‘alā afḍal ḥāl wa-aḥsan hay’a* (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 tada ‘al-kitāb ilaynā bi-ḥabarik wa-ḥālik wa-salāmatik* (P.JoySorrow 26.9, 2nd/8th). Abša *Ṣāḥib Narmūda*. The *bā’* of Abša is lost in the lacuna, for this Coptic name but with final *alif mamdūda* instead of final *hā’*, see P.Cair.Arab. IV, 247-248. For the meaning and the use of the administrative title *Ṣāḥib* in Arabic papyri, see P.MuslimState, 92-118. For the *Fayyūmic* 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 *bā’* is visible. Of *ḥabarahu* trace of *rā’* 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 *yakūn* only trace of initial *yā’* 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 *šīn*, *ḥā’* or *ḥā’*, *mīm*, short vertical stroke and trace of a loop are visible. This word can be restored as *tasaḥumikuma* or *tasaḥumika bih*, from the root *saḥama*, see Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*. 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 ta ‘ibt mn amr tasaḥuminā ilā ḥadā al-waqt mn as-sana* (P.Hamb.Arab. I 9.7-8, 3rd/9th). The reading *ba ‘aṭnā* is uncertain, only *bā’*, *‘ayn* 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 *tasaḥumikumā* see line 5. Of *ra ‘ayt* the tail of the *rā’*, *yā’* and final *tā’* are visible. The extended tail of the final *kāf* of *dālik* is not missing but disappeared under the fibers.
 8. The medial *bā’* of *naṣībah* is missing. Of *ilayh* the final *hā’* is lost in the lacuna. The initial *bā’* of the name *Narmūda* is missing. *Ṣāḥib Narmūda* is restored on the basis of the same expression in lines 4-5. The final *alif* of *bi-ḥabarihā* is missing in the lacuna.
 - 9-10. *Abqāka* trace of final *kāf* is visible. The lower part of the initial *alif* of *al-lāh* 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 mamdūda* of *Katabnā/ba ‘aṭnā* 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 Sulbiqiyūha/Salīqiyūha ibn ḡurayḡ* (CPR XVI 20.5-6, 3rd/9th); *an aḡ ‘alaka fī sa ‘a mim mā 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 *‘alā* the *lām* and *alif maqṣūra* are written in the form of final *lām*. The tail of the final *mīm* of *‘ilm* is lost in the hole. *Wa-lā quwwata illā bi-l-lāh al-‘aẓīm* this religious formula -without the expression *lā ḥawla* at its beginning- is rarely attested in Arabic papyri. cf. *fa-qad istadaffat ḥawā’iḡī wa arḡū yahiba Allāh lī al-‘āfiya wayusahil ḥurūḡī in shā’ Allāh wa al-ḥayrata wa-lā quwwata illā bi-l-lāh al-‘aẓīm wa-uhibbu an tu‘arrif* (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 aḥadṭahā min abī muḥammad ‘abd al-lāh a‘azzahu al-lāh fa-idfa ‘hā ilā ṣāhib al-mu‘āfā aṭāla al-lāh baqā’ah wa-uktub ilaynā min ḥaytu tastawfihā ḥattā na‘mal bi ḥasb dālik* (P.Cair.Arab. 325.8-9). *Kayl* is a famous Coptic name in Arabic papyri, he appears here as the representative of the sender as he would receive the oil from the sender and deliver it to him.

14-15. Of *ma‘ah* trace of the *‘ayn* can still be seen. Of *al-‘aẓīm* only *alif*, *lām*, *‘ayn* 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 amrak bi-l-‘āfiyah fī-d-dunyā wa-l-āḥira*. final blessings using the verb *tawallā* are variants in Arabic papyrus letters. Cf. *tawālā-ka /tawallā al-lāh bi-l-‘āfiya* (P.David-WeillLouvre 23.15-16, 2nd/8th); *tawallā al-lāh ḥiḏzaka* (P.Marchands III 3 .recto 9, 3rd/9th); *Tawallā al-lāh kifāyatakumā* (P.Marchands III 26 .recto 22, *Fayyūm*, 3rd/9th). For using the performative *wa-kutiba* as final point of a letter by the scribes see (Grob, 2010); P.Khalili 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 *Narmūda* at *Fayyūm* 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.

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.

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10

P.Ifao.Edfou. Ar. Inv. 10

التوسط لتسوية نزاع و تعليمات تجارية لتسليم زيت:

خطاب يرجع للقرن الثاني/الثامن من مدينة إدفو

الملخص العربي

تقدم هذه الورقة البحثية تحقيق للبردية العربية الغير منشورة P.IFAO Edfou Ar. 10، محفوظة حالياً في المعهد الفرنسي للآثار الشرقية - IFAO - القاهرة ، مصر. تم العثور عليها في مدينة إدفو، المدينة الشهيرة في صعيد مصر، ويمكن تأريخ هذه البردية طبقاً لسمات الكتابة إلى القرن الثاني الهجري/ الثامن الميلادي. ونص البردية عبارة عن خطاب أعمال تجارية، يعكس لنا شبكة أعمال تجارية تضم مدينة إدفو، بلدة نمروده بالفيوم ومكان مصري آخر لم يذكره نص البردية.

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