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 'Alān = علنان (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

\[\begin{align*}
1. & - وَأَثَّنَىُهُمْ [عَلَيْكَ] وَقُلْتَ إِلَى جِبَارَةَ كَتَبَكَ، مَعَ عَلَانٍ، وَبَعْثَتَ بُكْتَبٍ \\
2. & - سَأَلَتْهُ عَنِ السَّلَامَةِ وَسَلَامَةَ أُحْوُلَكَ فَقُرِ فيَ اللَّهِ واَكْتَرَتِ \\
3. & - شَرِّ جَارٌ فِي الدَّنْيَا - يَقُولُونَ إِلَى [إِبْكِرٍ] هِمْ النَّحَاسِ \\
4. & - وَأَخْذَهُ مَنْ [أُهُوُّ] رَهَنَ وَيَلَكَ اخْرَجَ إِلَيْهِ وَخَذَ حَقَّكَ مَنْهِ \\
5. & - وَأَلْحَ إنْ تَخْرِجاَكَا مَعَ بَرَمْصُرْ تَكُونُوا \\
6. & - وَقَالَ لَهُ جُعَلْ أَبُو الحَسِنٍ أَبَو الحَسِن يَبْعِثُ الْدِّينَ \\
7. & - وَلَكِنَّ [إِلَّا] أَذْهَبَ الْأَلْفَ لَا غَيْرٍ يَرَقُدُ فِيهِ \\
8. & - [وَ] سَأَلَ الْمَطَأَهْ \\
\end{align*}\]

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

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2 — ... I asked? him about your safety and the safety of you 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?] Abīdarrāḥman 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 — [وَأَتَمُّ هَمِيَّتَهُ عَلَيْكَ]: Clearly this line is the first line in the letter. It bears the salutation formula or the opening formula of the letter (al-Qalqašandi, Subh al-dāʾūr VIII, 160).1
— جباره: The name is dotted. It could be vocalized according to ad-Dahabī, Muṣṭabih 83. We met a person named جباره 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.
— علان: The name is superscribed. In Grohmann 1934–61: IV, 234, r., L1.15; 16 (270 AH), we met the heir of Ishāq b. Kāmil, also called Allān.
— Clearly كتبك refers to more than one letter. If it is one letter only, and the alif of وصلت is omitted as usual, then the verb will be not وصلت كتبك.
L.2 — [لاَّ سَأَلَّهُ عَن سَلامَتِكُ وسَلامَةَ أخوَتِكُ فَسُرُّ فِي النَّارِ واكْتُرِثُ]: According to Ibn al-ʿAtīr, Kāmil VI, 51 ff., in the year 270 AH, there were big troubles because of the death of Ahmed b. Tūlūn. So, perhaps the sender of the letter asked Allān about the safety of the receiver and his brothers.
— فسر في النار: It is a local expression. The sender advises the receiver to go out with the blessing of Allāh. Usually the expression is فسر على بركة الله = go on the benediction of Allāh (Abū Dāwud, Sunan, “al-Ǧīhād”, No 2301).
— واكترث: It means (= take care or pay attention). The sender advises his son also to pay attention to himself. Usually the word comes in negative form

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1 أطلاَكَ اللهُ وَحَصِّتَكَ وَأَتَمُّ هَمِيَّتَهُ عَلَيْكَ — may Allah preserve you and may he protect you; or أطلاَكَ اللهُ وَحَصِّتَكَ وَأَتَمُّ هَمِيَّتَهُ 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).
TWO PRIVATE LETTERS

such as ما ما or مث الث درم. but here the word is affirmative and this is rare (Ibn Manzûr, Lisân V, 3848).

L.3 = 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 الندائ and لإنه. It may serve as a dot in the end of the paragraph.

إم إم = The proper name النحاس 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: 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. ولك ( = 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: There are two variant readings for this word; either أوأخذ مناه رهن ( = and I insist) or أوأخذ ( = and he insisted). The first reading is preferable in the context.

إن تخرجوا مع برج مصر تكو نوا is a conditional particle here because an apodosis (جواب الشرط) of the conditional sentence (Wright 1971: II, 14). The verb تخرجوا (protasis = فعل الشرط) is a transitive verb. It should be followed by the preposition إلى not, 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 إلى البيت دخلت ( = I entered to the house). The preposition إلى is omitted (Ibn Manzûr, Lisân 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.

لـ البر = the land or the desert) is contrary of البحر ( = the sea). خرج فلان برا = إذا خرج الصحراء (Ibn Manzûr, Lisân 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: (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

[[...]]

من العلم بما أريد أن أصيب من الآية[?]? وجاء (؟)
كما جاءت فذاك بالدعاء كثيراً لله على
كل شيء قادر و[ذك] أترك بدعاأتى لك و... [وخرحلة كم؟]
ذكرت بمصر وحيس. 
لا أصل إلى حا... [أي؟]
حمل قمح الاعسوب وأرجله [أين]
عدوا ولكن لا تكتب ال[ي]
الليك تى [؟]

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

أصيب: There is one dot under the word أصيب. It is written between
the letter و and the letter ي. It should be under the و 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 and وأكثر/يا به جعلت فذاك بدعاك كثيرا — may be restored (cf. Ibn
Manzur, Lisân II, 1385).

وفي حديث عرفه: أكثر دعائي: (Ibn Manzur, Lisân I, 18
وقال: يا آبتك و يا آبتك لفتان”.

L.3 — يا به: Is vulgar language. The classical Arabic language is يَا أَبِي or يَا أَبَت. It becomes in pause (Wright 1971: II, 78; 88; Ibn Manzur, Lisân I, 18
"وقال: يا آبتك و يا آبتك لفتان".

L.4 — أثر: This is an archaic word. It means "indeed", "real", or "true".

L.5 — عدوا: A variant of عدو (enemy).

L.6 — لا أصل إلى حا... [أي؟]: There is a possible restoration of لا
وصلا إلى حا... [أي؟] (Wright 1971: I, 26).

L.7 — حمل قمح الاعسوب وأرجله [أين]: This is a possible restoration of حمل قمح الاعسوب وأرجله [أين؟] (Wright 1971: I, 26).

L.8 — أرحد: This is a possible restoration of أرحد (Ibn Manzur, Lisân II, 1385).

L.9 — لك و... [وخرحلة كم؟]: This is a possible restoration of لك و... [وخرحلة كم؟] (Wright 1971: I, 26).
al-Qalqasandi in his book says (Subh al-‘ālama 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).

The hamza is omitted. It is a usual phenomenon in that period.

L1.3/4 وَالله قُدُرٌ عَلَى كُل شَيْءٍ — (مأذاعاً > كَ) (pap. مأذاعاً > كَ). It is a colloquial expression. For hamza at the end of a word see Wright 1971: I, 17.

L1.4/5 “خُرَجْنَا كَمَا ذَكَّرْتِ بِرٍّ مَصر — (مأذاعاً > كَ) ًثَرَجْنَا مَعْ بِرٍّ مَصر. This line affirms that this letter is a reply to the letter written on the recto. Here, clearly there is no preposition before بِرٍّ مَصر ( = the land of Mिर).

= ( = 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 Mिर (cf. L.5, r.)².

L7.7 حِمْل — حِمْل: The word حِمْل is either a verb حَمَّل ( = carried) or حِمْل ( = an amount of wheat)³. I prefer the second because if حِمْل is a verb, the word حِمْل should be in accusative case حِمْل, according to the classical Arabic grammar (cf. L.2 and its note; Wright 1971: I, 236).

L8.8 عُدَّوا — ( = an enemy, Acc.) or عِدَّوا ( = running) may be read. I prefer the first because it goes with the context (cf. L1.3; 4; 5, r.; L5, v.)

² Ibn Iyās in his book says (Badā‘ī I, 168): “وَكانَ (أَحْمَدَ بْنُ طُولُوْنَ) كِرِيمَ الْيَد... غَيْرَ أَنَّهَا كِانَ شَهِيدَ.” ًفَحَضْيَ... حَتَّى قُلُّ مَاتُ فِي حِبْسِهِ ثَمَانِيَّةَ أَلْفٍ أَنْسَانٍ” (he [Ahmad b. Tūlūn] 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 Manṣūr (Līsān II, 1002) wrote:

“والحمْل: ثَمُّ الْشَجر، والكَسْرَ فِيهِ لْفَةٌ والحمْلَ بالكَسْرِ ما حَمَّلَ عَلَى ظُهْرِ أَو رَأس.”
A. Primary sources


B. Secondary sources


TWO PRIVATE LETTERS

Recto
P. Haun. inv. Arab. 5
13 x 13.7 cm
Provenance al-Fayyum
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