Joy and sorrow in early Muslim Egypt : Arabic papyrus letters, text and content

Younes, K.M.M.

Part one

INTRODUCTION

In Dhū al-Ḥijja 18/December 639, a force consisting of about 3,500 Arab troops commanded by the Muslim general ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 43/664) crossed the frontier of Byzantine Egypt. Euphoric and motivated after the sweeping victories they had already achieved over the Persians and Byzantines in Persia and Syria only seven years after the prophet Muḥammad's death in 11/632, the Muslims were now aiming to incorporate Egypt in the emerging Muslim empire. The caliph ʿUmar I (r. 13-23/634-644) sent a reinforcement of about 12,000 troops led by al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām (d. 36/656) to assist the small and poorly equipped army in its keen mission. After around two years of battles, clashes and sieges, Egypt fell into Muslim hands. Subsequent to the fall of Alexandria and after subduing the rest of the country, Muslims founded the city of Fusṭāṭ near the site of the Roman fortress Babylon signaling the beginning of a new era in Egypt's history.[1]

The conquest and the foundation of the new capital were just the beginning of long-running processes of massive changes in the administrative, linguistic, religious and social structures of the country, which eventually resulted in transforming Egypt into an Arabic-speaking and Muslim country. Whereas the administration witnessed swift and dramatic changes in the first two centuries after the conquest, the progress at the linguistic and religious levels was comparatively slow. The Arabic-speaking people long remained a minority consisting mainly of the offspring of the Arab conquerors, a small number of converts who preferred to speak the language of their new religion (Islam) and Egyptian officials who learned Arabic on the job as well as others for whom learning the language provided some advantages or necessity.[2]

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[1] Al-Kindī (d. 350/961), *Kitāb al-wulāt wa-kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest, *The governors and judges of Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1912), 6-10; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), *Futūḥ miṣr wa-akhbāruhā*, ed. Ch. Torrey, *The history of the conquests of Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1920), 55-84; al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1866; repr. 1992), 213-214; A.J. Butler, *The Arab conquest of Egypt and the thirty years of the Roman dominion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 209-210, 341 and note 1; H. Kennedy, *The great Arab conquests* (Philadelphia: Da Capo press, 2007), 139-168; P.M. Sijpesteijn, "The Arab conquest of Egypt and the beginning of the Muslim rule," in: R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine world, 300-700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 439-444; P.M. Sijpesteijn, "New rule over old structures: Egypt after the Muslim conquest," in: H. Crawford (ed.), *Regime change in the ancient Near East and Egypt: from Sargon of Agade to the Seljuks. Proceedings of the British academy proceedings of the British academy* 136 (London: The British Academy, 2007), 183; W.E. Kaegi, "Egypt on the eve of the Muslim conquest," in: C.F. Petry (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Egypt. Islamic Egypt 640-1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34-61.

[2] For more about the Arabization and Islamization of Egypt, see for example H. Suermann, "Copts and the Islam of the seventh century," in: E. Grypeou, M. Swanson, D. Thomas (eds.), *The encounter of eastern Christianity with early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 95-109; G.C. Anawati, "Factors and effects of Arabization and Islamization in medieval Egypt and Syria," in: I. Vryonis (ed.), *Islam and cultural change in the Middle Ages* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 17-41; S. Björneso, "L'arabisation de l'Égypte, le témoignage papyrologique," in: D. Madiha, C. Miller (eds.), *Les langues en Egypte* (Cairo: Cedej, 1996), 93-107; R.W. Bulliet, "Conversion stories in early Islam," in: M. Gervers, R.J. Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands: eighth to eighteenth centuries*, *Mediaeval studies* 9 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 122-133; Ch. Décobert, "Sur l'arabisation et l'islamisation de l'Égypte médiévale," in: Ch. Décobert (ed.), *Itinéraires d'Égypte* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1992), 273-300; D.C. Dennett, *Conversion and poll tax in early Islam* (Delhi: Idarah-I Adabyat-I Delli, 2000); D.P. Little, "Coptic conversion to Islam under the Baḥrī Mamlūks 692-755/1293-1354," *Bulletin of the school of oriental and African studies* 39 (1976), 552-569; B.B. Wilson, "The transition from Coptic to Arabic," *Muslim world* 53 (1963), 145-150; A.M. ʿUmar, *Tārīkh al-lugha al-*

During the 1st/7th century, the Muslim presence was more or less restricted to the garrison cities of Fusṭāṭ and Alexandria as well as other military encampments in the province and the exceptional settlement of the Banū Mudlij in Kharibtā on the western edge of the Delta.[3] There was little or no contact between the Arab conquerors and the native Egyptians except for intercourse at the administrative level and the limited contact with the local farmers during the seasonal grazing of the troops in the countryside (*murtabaʿ al-jund*).[4] It is said that the caliph ʿUmar I issued a decree, in which he prevented the Arab soldiers from settling in the Egyptian countryside, cultivating lands themselves or even having lands cultivated through partnership (*muzāraʿa*) insofar as their military services were still greatly needed to defend the country from the enemy's counterattacks on the one hand and to continue the military campaigns to bring the rest of the world under Muslim rule on the other.[5] This situation had utterly changed at the turn of the 1st/7th century. The province was much more secure and the conquests had more or less stopped after reaching Spain in the far West and Transoxania in the far East.[6]

The time for consolidation also arrived at a more local level. In 109/727, the Muslim authorities in Egypt, reinforced by the caliph's support in Damascus, had decided to evacuate several hundred families belonging to the Arab tribe of Qays from Syria and settled them in rural areas in the eastern edge of the Delta for political and economic purposes.[7] From then onwards the Arabs in Egypt individually and collectively began to spread out in the Egyptian countryside. A great stimulus for Arab migration into the Egyptian countryside came when the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 218-227/834-841) ordered to dismiss all Arab forces from the military service (*dīwān al-jund*) and to stop their stipends (*ʿaṭāʾ*).[8] In search of alternative sources of income soldiers set off for the countryside to make a living from farming and trading.[9] Exactly two centuries after the conquest, the Arab conquerors were cut loose from their military obligations leading to more and more traders

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ʿarabiyya fī miṣr (Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿAmma li-l-Taʾlīf wa-l-Nashr, 1970); T.S. Richter, "Greek, Coptic and the 'language of the Hijra': the rise and decline of the Coptic language in the late antique and medieval Egypt," in: H. Cotton, R. Hoyland, J. Price, D. Wasserstein (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam, cultural and linguistic change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 401-446; T.S. Richter, "Language choice in the Qurra dossier," in: A. Papaconstantinou (ed.), *The multilingual experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 189-220; Y. Lev, "Coptic rebellions and the Islamization of medieval Egypt (8th-10th century): medieval and modern perceptions," *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* (forthcoming).

[3] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 142.

[4] According to literary sources, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ delivered a Friday speech in his mosque in Fusṭāṭ in which he exhorted the troops to go every spring to the countryside to graze their horses and to exploit its richness of sheep, milk and other agriculture products. In his speech, ʿAmr also urged the troops to maintain good relations with the Christian Egyptians. See Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 139-143; al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 21. See also S. Bouderbala, "An occasion for exploration and exploitation of a newly conquered countryside: the spring grazing of the *ǧund* in the Delta and Middle Egypt," in: A. Delattre, M.A.L. Legendre, P.M. Sijpesteijn (eds.), *Authority and control in the countryside, continuity and change in the Mediterranean 6th-10th century* (forthcoming).

[5] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 88-90, 162; al-Balādhurī, *Buldān*, 214. See also P.M. Sijpesteijn, "Landholding patterns in early Islamic Egypt," *Journal of Agrarian change* 9 (2009), 125-126.

[6] Kennedy (2007), 296.

[7] Al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 76.

[8] Al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 193.

[9] The earliest preserved Arabic business letter comes from Bahnasā (Oxyrhynchus) and is datable on palaeographical grounds to the 1st/7th century and the second is datable to 117/735, see P.SijpesteijnTravel, 115; P.RāġibPlusAncienneLetter, 1-10. The earliest Arabic land leases belonging to Arab landholders date from 159-161/775-776. See CPR XXI, 56-61.

and farmers living at a considerable distance from the Muslim capital and surrounded by Christian Egyptians.[10]

Papyrus letters

The papyrus letters published and discussed in this dissertation allow us a unique look into this minority community who communicated amongst each other in Arabic in early Islamic Egypt. These original letters are extraordinarily rich and discuss topics mostly ignored by literary sources. The letters represent an authentic and reliable contemporary source to the crucial formative period of Islamic Egypt. They are without doubt the only dependable source that could deepen our grasp and broaden our knowledge on daily activities, concerns, thoughts, interests and the dogma of authors who are almost entirely invisible in other sources. The letters allow us direct access to people's personal lives in almost every layer in society and open a window to hear their voices without intermediaries. The letters are, however, difficult and challenging to decipher and interpret. Only with a high degree of scholarly competence, energy and patience the letters can be read while a constant vigilance not to make mistakes in reading and interpretation the scholar can be prevented from experiencing oversights which might result in misleading conclusions.

Arabic private and business letters constitute the largest part among all published Arabic papyrus documents. No systematic census of unedited papyri has ever been made, but all the catalogues of the unpublished collections put letters at the top of their lists.[11] Around six hundred private and business letters have been published so far with full edition and translation. The Banū ʿAbd al-Muʾmin archive alone constitutes one third of them.[12] The archive consists of a total 200 pieces; 121 items have already been published by Yūsuf Rāġib. He has personally located and identified these different pieces from countless collections around the world (e.g. Paris, Berlin and Vienna) which he edited consecutively from 1982 to 1996 in four volumes entitled: *Marchands d'étoffes du Fayyoum*.[13] Two other volumes are awaiting publication. Another one hundred papyrus letters are partially edited (cf. P.Ryl.Arab. I) and more than four hundred letters are listed in catalogues of papyrus collections with neither edition nor translation (cf. P.Ryl.Arab. II; P.Khalili II). Two hundred letters in these catalogues provide reproductions of the papyri which allow further investigation of the texts (see P.Khalili II). Sixty percent of all published letters are written

[10] See also Sijpesteijn (2009), 126-131.
[11] See for example G. Khan, *A catalogue of the Arabic papyri in the Michaelides collection Cambridge university library* (online: http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/neareastern/michaelides.html); Arabic papyrus collection at Beinecke library of Yale University (online: http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/brblsear/aboutpap.htm); P.Gen.V.
[12] For more about this archive, see E.M. Grob, *Documentary Arabic private and business letters on papyrus. Form and function, content and context*. Beiheft 29 (Berlin–New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 105-118. See also chapter one.
[13] P.Marchands I-III; V/I. The first three volumes contain 98 documents including legal documents, i.e. nine debt acknowledgments dated from 250–264/864–878 (P.Marchands I **2-10**), one marriage contract dated to 252/866 (P.Marchands I **11**) and one contract of partnership dated to 250/864 (P.Marchands I **1**) as well as private and business letters belonging to the main figure of this family, Abū Hurayra Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Muʾmin. The fourth volume consists of 23 letters of another network of the textile trade.

on papyrus and the rest on paper.[14] The majority of the letters is assigned on palaeographical grounds to the 3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries, but there is a good number of letters from the earliest two Islamic centuries that were found outside the capital Fusṭāṭ and are directly connected to the settlement of Arabs in the countryside. Around sixty of these early letters have been edited,[15] but some of them need indeed to be reassigned a different date, earlier or later.[16]

Despite the good number of published letters which has resulted in several useful analysis, a comprehensive and systematic study of the *contents* of these letters, using them as the great source for social, cultural and economic history of early Islamic Egypt that they are is still lacking in the papyrological research.[17] Arabic papyri in general are rarely used for historical analysis and the letters even less so.[18] The letters are barely investigated with

[14] For an overview of the number of published letters in all volumes, catalogues and articles, see Grob (2010), 1, 1-21 and note 4; E.M. Grob, "Information packaging in Arabic private and business letters (8th to 13th c. CE): templates, slots and a cascade of reduction and rearrangement," in: T. Gagos, A. Hyatt et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the twenty-fifth international congress of papyrology. Ann Arbor 2007*, American studies in papyrology (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 277.

[15] For early published private and business letters from Egypt, see Y. Rāġib, "Une lettre familiale rédigée en 102/721," *Annales Islamologiques* 45 (2011), 273-284; P.Jahn **1**[= G. Levi della Vida, "Remarks on a recent edition of Arabic papyrus letters," *Journal of the American oriental society* 64 (1944), 129; Chrest.Khoury I **96**; P.Heid.Arab. II **1**]; **2**[**=** G. Levi della Vida (1944), 129; P.Heid.Arab. I **7**]; **3**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 130]; **4**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 130]; **5**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 130]; **6**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 130; P.World, 184]; **7**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 130; P.World, 185-186]; **8**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 131; Chrest.Khoury I **97**]; **9**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 131]; **10**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 132]; **11**; **12**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 133; Chrest.Khoury I **98**]; **13**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 133; P.World, 183]; **17**[= G. Levi della Vida (1944), 135]; P.RāġibPlusAncienneLettre, 1-9; P.HanafiBusinessLetter, 153-161; CPR XVI **4**; **7**; **9**; **18**; **26**; **27**; **33**; P.RāġibLettres **3**; **4**; **9**; **10**; **11**; **12**; **19**; P.David-WeillLouvre **9**; **11**; **12-13**; **25**; **26**; **30**; P.Cair.Arab. V **317**; **337**; P.Horak 85; P.Berl.Arab. II **49**; **50**; **51**; **52**; **53**; **72**; **73**; **74**; **75**; P.Khalili I **14**; **15**; **21**; **24**; P.World, 138; 162-163; 186-187; P.SijpesteijnTravel, 115-152; P.Louvre6842; P.M. Sijpesteijn, "Army economics: an early papyrus letter related to *ʿaṭāʾ* payments," in: R. Margarati, A. Sabra, P.M. Sijpesteijn (eds.), *Studies in the social and economic history of the medieval Middle East. Essays in honour of Avram L. Udovitch* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011), 245-267; L. Reinfandt, "Leinenhändler im Herakleopolites in arabischer Zeit. P.Vindob. A.P. 15021 (PERF 576)," *Bulletin of the American society of papyrologists* 44 (2007), 97-123[= P.MugawiriAlqab 3, 117].

[16] See Grob (2010a), 2-7, 11 and note 8. See also chapter one, dating.

[17] See Werner Diem's comments in W. Diem, "Arabic letters in pre-modern times. A survey with commented selected bibliographies," in: A. Kaplony, E.M. Grob (eds.), *Documentary letters from the Middle East: the evidence in Greek, Coptic, South Arabian, Pehlevi and Arabic (1st–15th c CE)*, *Asiatische Studien* 62/3 (Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2008), 845, 862.

[18] For historical studies using papyrus archives, see P.M. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim state: the world of a mid-eighth-century Egyptian official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); A.J. Silverstein, "Documentary evidence for the early historical of the *barīd*," in: P.M. Sijpesteijn, L. Sundelin (eds.), *Papyrology and the history of early Islamic Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 153-161; A.J. Silverstein, *Postal systems in the pre-modern Islamic world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Y. Rāġib, "Marchands d'Egypte du VIIe au IXe siècle d'aprés leur correspondence et leurs actes," in: *Le marchand au moyen age. Actes des congrés de la société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public (19e congress, Reims, 1988)*, 25-33; K.M. Younes, "Textile trade between the Fayyūm and Fusṭāṭ in the iiird/ixth century according to the Banū ʿAbd al-Muʾmin archive," in: A. Regourd (ed.), *Documents et histoire. Islam, VIIe-XVIe s. Actes des journées d'Études musée du Louvre/EPHE, Mai 2008. Ecole pratique des hautes études, Sciences historiques et philologiques II, Hautes Etudes Orientales - Moyen et Proche - Orient* 5/51 (Geneva: Droz, 2013), 313-334. See also S. Hopkins, *Studies in the grammar of early Arabic: based upon papyri datable to before 300 A.H./912 A.D.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). For historical analysis using archives on paper, see L. Guo, *Commerce, culture and community in a Red Sea port in the thirteenth century: the Arabic documents from Quseir* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004); L. Guo, "Arabic documents from the Red Sea port of Quseir in the seventh/thirteenth century, part I: business letters," *Journal of Near Eastern studies* 58/3 (1999), 161-190; L. Guo, "Arabic documents from the Red Sea port of Quseir in the seventh/thirteenth century, part II: shipping notes and account records," *Journal of Near Eastern studies* 60/2 (2001), 81-117.

the exception of some typological and formalistic studies by Werner Diem and Geoffrey Khan[19] in addition to Grob's recent book *Documentary Arabic private and business letters on papyrus*.[20] Grob's book is to be considered "the first monograph devoted to documentary Arabic letters, based on all available editions of Arabic private and business letters on papyrus."[21] The volume does not produce new editions of Arabic papyrus letters, but greatly facilitates the task of deciphering and interpreting these texts. By grouping and analyzing the epistolary formulae attested in almost all private and business letters published so far and by providing many examples, including entire texts, from the original letters in the main text and the footnotes, Grob provides a useful tool with which to tackle unedited texts. The volume is successful in studying the Arabic private and business letters as one corpus and thereby offering new insights in the process of letter-writing in early Islamic Egypt.[22]

Still the special value of these letters lies in their *contents* which have hardly been touched upon.[23] Some Arabic papyrologists have already indicated the great value of the original Arabic private and business letters for the study of early and medieval Islamic Egypt, both orally and in writing.[24] Nonetheless, they did not provide us with a concrete methodology with which to approach this far-reaching and intriguing task. The well-established field of Greek papyrology does offer some methods to study and use scattered papyri. So we are not totally lost in the world of papyrology. In his book, *Reading papyri, writing ancient history*,[25] Roger Bagnall shows the problems and offers valuable methods to use scattered and badly damaged documents to come from fragments and damaged documents to a lively antique history. The book is really an essential guide for anyone struggling with papyri and documentary sources seeking a general historical approach. Bagnall's and Cribiore's book *Women's letters from ancient Egypt*[26] is a practical model of the application of Bagnall's approach on epistolary texts. In this book, Bagnall and Cribiore used Greek and Coptic letters written to and from women in the timeframe 300 BC-800 AD. The volume studies in some detail how the letters were written, sent and read, and the level of literacy and the privacy of women. The volume also provides a clear image of the socio-economic status of women in the period of discussion. The second section of the volume consists of the translations of letters used in the discussion. In Judaeo-Arabic studies,

[19] See P.Khalili I, 23-27; P.Khalili II, 63-66; G. Khan, "Remarks on the historical background and development of early Arabic documentary formulae," in: A. Kaplony, E.M. Grob (eds.), *Documentary letters from the Middle East: the evidence in Greek, Coptic, South Arabian, Pehlevi and Arabic (1st-15th c), Asiatische Studien* 62/3 (Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2008), 885-906; Diem (2008), 843-883. See also P.Jahn, 153-200.

[20] E.M. Grob, *Documentary Arabic private and business letters on papyrus. Form and function, content and context*. Beiheft 29 (Berlin–New York: De Gruyter, 2010).

[21] Grob (2010), 207.

[22] See K.M. Younes, review of Documentary Arabic private and business letters on papyrus. *Bulletin of the American society of papyrologists* (forthcoming).

[23] But see on individual texts: P.SijpesteijnArchivalMind; P.SijpesteijnTravel; P.L.Bat. XXXIII 65; P.Horak 85; Sijpesteijn (2011), 245-267; Reinfandt (2007a), 97-123; Rāġib (2011), 273-284.

[24] See Diem (2008), 845, 862. For the great value of Arabic papyri including letters for the history of early and medieval Islamic Egypt, see A. Grohmann, "The value of Arabic papyri for the study of the history of mediaeval Egypt," *Proceedings of the royal society of historical studies* 1 (1952), 41-56.

[25] R.S. Bagnall, *Reading papyri, writing ancient history* (London-New York: Routledge, 2005).

[26] R.S. Bagnall and R. Cribiore, *Women's letters from ancient Egypt, 300 BC-AD 800* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006).

Goitein's prominent work *A Mediterranean society*[27] based mainly on the Cairo-Geniza documents stands as a perfect example in describing the world of the letter writers and how to extract the history of their daily life. The work does not contain editions of complete texts, but analysis of the original letters with quotations and translations in the main text and the footnotes. Cairo-Geniza documents have also been used as a primary source for many recent scholarly projects, among which the work of March Cohen on poverty and charity in the Jewish community.[28] While the material and timeframe of the foregoing models are different, the methodology can be applied to the Arabic material.

One corpus/One story

This study aims to show what diverse and extensive information is described in the original letters and how, when taken together, they enrich our understanding of the Muslim society in Egypt after the conquest. In this dissertation, I will take an effort to analyze and interpret the letters for as far as we are able to do twelve hundred years after they were written. My main focus is the group of people who used the Arabic language in their correspondences during the first four centuries of Muslim rule in Egypt (1st-4th/7th-10th), but focusing mainly on the earliest two and a half centuries. Their ethnic and religious background can be understood as Arabs and Muslims, although we are not always able to recognize their social or economic position exactly.

In contrast to the original letters that cover daily life activities, Arabic literary texts including scholarly letters described in secretaries' handbooks and copies of letters (*rasā'il*) found in anthologies and literary sources are mainly written with the intention to be preserved and read by a public audience.[29] Literary texts in general are written from a male, urban élite perspective interested mainly in political and historical events and represent a late composition of earlier fluid oral traditions.[30] Likewise, the scholarly letters do not always represent an actual situation, but are regularly mere models and formulas. My central interest concerns day-to-day life and a population, which often was not part of the urban elite. I have chosen to focus on their concerns more than on the relation between or differences with these urban elites. Thus, all letters and copies of letters given in literary sources are neither studied nor cited in this study.

This thesis edits and studies forty-three private and business letters that have never been published. The letters have been collected from five different papyrus collections worldwide. The main corpus of letters (twenty letters) is kept in the Michaelides collection at Cambridge University library where I consulted the originals and was able to select these letters after making a systematic search through all the boxes with papyri. I would like to thank the imaging service department for providing me with the digital images of the

[27] S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean society: the Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-1993).
[28] M. Cohen, *Poverty and charity in the Jewish community on medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[29] Diem (2008), 843-853.
[30] S. Humphreys, *Islamic history, a framework for inquiry* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1992), 25-49, 69-91. See also F.M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic origins. The beginnings of Islamic historical writing* (Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, INC, 1998), 1-31.

letters and the syndicates of the library for their permission to publish them in this dissertation. Fifteen letters are from Beinecke library of Yale University which are freely accessible on their website.[31] I would like to seize the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Prof. Andreas Kaplony for entrusting me to work on these items, considering that they were registered in his name for future publication. Thanks are also due to the imaging service department for providing me with the digital images and the permission for publication. Four letters stem from the national library of Egypt (*Dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya*). I am grateful to the department of Arabic papyri in the library for allowing me access to the originals. I would also like to thank Prof. Cornelia Römer and Ahmad Nabil for helping me to obtain the digital photographs of these items. I have also used the published photographs in the catalogue of Arabic papyri from the national library of Egypt.[32] Two letters from the private Khalili collection have been edited on the basis of the published photographs in P.Khalili II. One letter belongs to the J. Willard Marriott library at the University of Utah. I owe thanks to Matt Malczycki who drew my attention to this papyrus. I am also grateful to the digital technologies division of the library for providing me with a scan and permission to publish it. Finally, one letter comes from the papyrus collection of the institute of papyrology in Heidelberg. I am greatly indebted to Prof. Andrea Jördens for sending me the digital image and giving me the permission for publication.[33]

When selecting the letters, I searched for complete or nearly complete letters which are relevant to the study of emotions as well as fragments which are in some way significant either in their contents, i.e. emotions or in the new epistolary formulae they produce. The corpus is confined to the Arabic papyrus letters that were found in Egypt in the earliest two and a half *hijrī* centuries.[34] One letter, no. **18**, possibly dating to the late 3rd/9th century based on the formulae, script, style and format of the letter, is included because of the interesting information it contains and the scarcity of such kinds of letters. The letters deal with family, business and work concerns. Thirty letters are mainly related to family affairs (**1**-**30**), fourteen of them deal mostly with daily activities in managing household business (**3**-**16**), two letters touch upon marriage and divorce settlements (**1** and **2**), another two notify the death of close relatives (**17** and **18**), two are letters of condolence (**19** and **20**) and ten letters strengthen the bonds of kinship and friendship between the two correspondents (**21**-**30**). The rest of the letters is centered on business and work affairs (**31**-**43**). Fourteen letters of this corpus can be identified as women's letters, as they are mostly sent to, from, and in-between females (**1**, **4**, **5**, **6**, **7**, **8**, **10**, **11**, **12**, **13**, **17**, **18**, **20**, **23**). In the discussion and commentaries all relevant references in published private and business letters on papyrus and some of yet unpublished letters are included. Official and semi-official letters sent to, from, and in-between authorities are rarely cited in this thesis.

In spite of the fact that all the letters published in this study are single and somehow unrelated, lacking an archaeological and archival context, they can give reliable answers to a number of the hotly debated issues in modern academic scholarship about the early

[31] http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/brblsear/aboutpap.htm
[32] P.DarAlKutub.
[33] I intentionally added words of thanks in this paragraph to highlight these individuals' and institutions' help, without which this work would have been incomplete or even impossible.
[34] For more accurate dating, see chapter one, dating.

Muslim society and the following generations of the Arab conquerors in Egypt. The object here is not to answer many questions on the basis of this number of letters or to give exhaustive comments on every aspect given in the letters. All I attempt here is rather to study the letters as one corpus regardless of their archaeological and archival contexts. This thesis will show and argue that to read and study these texts as one corpus is indeed the right approach. Methodologically speaking, the study will follow a two-sided approach, namely the philological and historical approach. For the philological side, the study contributes forty-three complete editions of unpublished letters to the field of Arabic papyrology. As for the historical side, the thesis gives an analytical overview of the letters' contents with main focus on addressing the questions to be raised below.

The thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part comprises two chapters in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter concerns the practicalities of letter-writing, using the encouraging results of several recent studies in this field.[35] The questions I would like to address in this chapter are: How important was letter-writing for the early Arab settlers in Egypt? What can we learn from the letters' contents about letter-writing, reading, dating, delivery, and the distance between the correspondents? What new palaeographical and linguistic features and epistolary formulae can we see in the letters published in this thesis? In the second chapter, an attempt will be made to explore the social and emotional aspects as they appear in the letters endeavoring to show: How did people in early Islamic Egypt express themselves, their joy and sorrow? How did they respond to misfortunes in their writings? What interested and stirred them? And what did they worry about and believe in? This chapter will also touch upon the organization of the Muslim society aiming to answer the questions: To what extent were the different segments of the Muslim society related to each other? How strong or weak were the social and blood ties? How large or small was their world; did they see themselves as a part of a large Muslim world or were they just limited to their own territory? The second section constitutes the edition of the letters which are classified thematically. Bearing in mind that every categorization is problematic, it is possible that one letter might fall in more than one category.

Editorial remarks

The edition of the texts has been made according to the guidelines established by Adolf Grohmann.[36] For each text I provide a physical description of the papyrus, the main characteristics of the handwriting, a short paragraph summarizing the contents of the letter, an edition of the original text in Arabic, diacritical dots in the original, a translation and finally a commentary. All editions will have these seven parts. I also provide whatever

[35] See P.World, 82-87; P.Khalili I, 27-46; Grob (2010a), 127-206; P.Qurra, 33-39; P.Khurasan, 66-90; P.Mird, XII-XLVI; P.M. Sijpesteijn, "Palaeography," in: C. Versteegh (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 513-524; A. Kaplony, "What are those few dots for? Thoughts on the orthography of the Qurra papyri (709-710), the Khurasan parchments (755-777) and the inscription of the Jerusalem dome of the rock (692)," *Arabica* 55/1 (2008), 91-112.

[36] P.World, 98-109; A. Grohmann, *Einführung und Chrestomathie zur arabischen Papyruskunde. I: Einführung* (Prag: Státní Pedagogické Nakladatelství, 1954), 130-139.

information is available about the place of writing, receiving and finding. In most cases these issues are unknown to us. Occasionally, the place of finding is itself the place of writing or the place of receiving. The Arabic edition is kept as close as possible to the original. Diacritical dots are supplied throughout the text, but *hamza* and vowels are not added. Due to the fragmentary state of some papyri it was burdensome for me to decipher some words and to offer satisfactory readings to others. These reading problems are somewhat minor and do not influence or change the common sense of the text. The translation has been kept as near to the original as English usage permits. The commentary aims to indicate the orthographical and morphological mistakes, to provide other possible readings and to call the readers' attention to difficulties in the interpretation of the text. Both *hijrī* and Common Era dates are used. As a rule, the *hijrī* date is given first separated from the Common Era equivalent by a slash. Arabic texts are transliterated according to the system used by the *International Journal for Middle East Studies* which can be found online at: http://web.gc.cuny.edu/ijmes/pages/transliteration.html. For quoting the Qurʾan, the study uses the translation by Marmaduke Pickthall.[37]

This study follows the abbreviation system of the papyrological editions proposed in the last updated version of the checklist of Arabic documents which can be found online at: http://www.ori.uzh.ch/isap/isapchecklist/ISAP_Checklist_2011.pdf. The study also uses the abbreviations suggested for the articles by the Arabic papyrology database (APD) which is freely accessible on: http://orientw.uzh.ch:8080/apd/requisits3a.jsp.

Papyrological references are taken according to the editions of the papyri. For example, P.Khalili I **17**.13, 3rd/9th = 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. The number of the edition is always Bold.

References to primary sources consist of a shortened version of the name of the author and part of the book's title. Secondary sources are referred to by the name of the author and the date of the publication. Full bibliographical information can be found in bibliography.

The edition of the texts is presented according to the usual papyrological practices and the following bracket system has been employed:[38]

[ ] Single square brackets:	Indicate missing text believed to be written by the scribe. Completed by the editor, if possible. In cases where it is impossible to reconstruct the text the space within the brackets is left blank.
⟦ ⟧ Double square brackets:	Enclose erasures, deleted by the scribe.
< > Angular brackets:	Indicate text left out by the scribe. Completed by the editor.

[37] M.M. Pickthall, *The meaning of the glorious Koran: an explanatory translation* (New York: The New American Library, 1953).
[38] See P.World, 103-105.

{ } Curly brackets:	Enclose text written by mistake by the scribe.
\ / Diagonal strokes:	Enclose words and phrases written by the scribe in-between lines.
... Dots:	Indicate words or letters cannot be deciphered, usually because the ink has faded. The number of dots corresponds roughly the number of missing letters.
( ) Round brackets:	Enclose solutions of abbreviations in the Arabic text and words added for the better understanding of the sentence in the translation.
(?) Question mark:	Indicates uncertain reading.