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

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Written communication in Arabic: public use of letters

Like all inhabitants of the Egyptian countryside, the early Arab settlers were in serious need of writing to cover the short and long distances separating them from their relatives, friends, business partners and agents in the capital and other remote areas in the province or even beyond the borders. The letter was first and foremost the most essential mode of written communication in nearly all societies in Antiquity, and the Arabic letter (*risāla*, *kitāb*, *ruq'a*, *jawāb*) in early Islamic Egypt is no exception.<sup>39</sup> It represented the fastest, cheapest and easiest means of contact. One might argue that during the earliest Islamic centuries in Egypt, when the writers of these Arabic letters remained a minority in a prevalently Coptic speaking environment, there might have been even more reasons to communicate in Arabic per post over longer distances. A sense of distance is already conveyed by the language and lay-out of the early letters (1<sup>st</sup>-mid 3<sup>rd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>-mid 9<sup>th</sup>). To be more specific, by placing the internal address<sup>40</sup> immediately after the *basmala*, the sender indicates the physical remoteness between him and the addressee. This address was replaced by extensive blessings and prayers for the addressee in letters from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>41</sup> It has been suggested that in letters with initial blessings (letters from 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries), the sender presents himself as being in the virtual presence of the addressee rather than being in a remote place and thus pretends to overcome the distance separating between him and the addressee.<sup>42</sup>

Via an extensive epistolary network, the Arab settlers in the Egypt were able to break their isolation and to speak to one another with some ease, since traveling in person undoubtedly required a lot of effort and money, as is made clear in letter **14** in our corpus. In this letter, the sender writes that he wanted to travel in person to visit the addressee, but when it turned out to be difficult, he apologized, wrote the letter instead, and sent it with a neighbor of his (“[*wa-ukhbiruka annī*] *uḥibbu an law qadartu ātī usallimu ‘alaykum ... fa-‘dhirnī ... anna ṣāḥib kitābī hādḥā ilayka jār yamurru bi-‘Abd al-Jabbār*,” ll.4-6). This also seems to be the case of the sender of letter **9**, who asked the addressee to sail to him along with another woman. In line 15, the sender says that he would not have written the letter, if he had had the ability to do otherwise, i.e. to travel in person (“*mā katabtu bihi ilayka wa-‘lam law annī qadartu [...]*”).

The letter was considered an appropriate substitute for the physical presence of the sender whether he was remote or close in reality. Particularly on sad occasions, the bereaved person would find solace and repose in a letter sent from an absent relative. Ruqayya bt. Yaḥyā, for example, the sender of letter **18**, was so grieved by the death of her

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<sup>39</sup> See A. Gully, *The culture of letter-writing in pre-modern Islamic society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>40</sup> For this term, see Grob (2010a), 39-42.

<sup>41</sup> See Grob (2010a), 43-48.

<sup>42</sup> See Khan (2008), 895; Grob (2010a), 42.

son. Ruqayya was, however, even more lamenting the fact that she did not receive a letter from her full brother, who was absent during the misfortune (“*wa-lastu asma’u li-akhī khabar wa-lā asma’u minhu kitāb fa-askunu ilā ‘ilm dhālika wa-astarīhu ilayhi*,” l.8). Moreover, Ruqayya asked her aunt Umm al-Qāsim, the addressee, not to withhold writing her (“*wa-anā uhibbu aḥabbaki Allāh an lā taqṭa’ī ‘annī kitābaki*,” l.10). The two letters of condolence, **19** and **20**, are a clear evidence of the letter as being an ideal consolatory substitute for one’s physical presence in times of loss and grief. People would certainly try to attend funerals and to be present to comfort relatives and friends in times of sorrow, but when one could not be present in person, a letter of condolence was the best alternative.<sup>43</sup>

The letter could also be a nice and effective way to apologize for being late. Take the case of the absent husband ʿĪsā, the author of letter **4**, for example. ʿĪsā wrote a letter to his wife, anonymous to us, apologizing and explaining the reasons for his delay and wishing not to stay longer after writing this letter (“*rajawtu allā uqīmu ba’d kitābī ilaykum shay’ ḥattā aqdim ..... aqrī’ī nafsaki al-salām wa-‘dhirnī*,” ll.9, 18).

Letters were not only used for long distance correspondences, but also for correspondence of less than one day distance. In one published letter from the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, the sender asks the addressee, both anonymous to us, to visit him on the same day he wrote his letter in order to enjoy chatting to each other (“*uhibbu adāma Allāh ni’mataka an tasurrānī bi-qurbika wa-mu’ānasatika yawmanā hādhā li-tawfīr ḥazzī min mubāsamatika wa-l-tamattu’ min ru’yatika wa-l-sama’ min ṣuwaytika muwaffaqan in shā’a Allāh*,” P.Berl.Arab. II **76.3-4**). A similar request appears in another contemporary letter (“*wa-anā uhibbu fadatka nafsī an tasurrānī bi-muḥādathatika fī yawmika hādhā wa-tasurrānī bi-dhālika in shā’a Allāh*,” P.Berl.Arab. II **80.6-7**, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>). In another letter, one Junāda orders a certain Zabān and his mates, the addressees, to bring six hundred rams of the sheep of a certain Ibrāhīm b. Maymūn on the same day he wrote his letter (Friday) so that they could sell them the next day, Saturday, and the day after, Sunday, urging them to hurry up (“*kuntu katabtu ilaykum amartukum an tuqaddimū min ḍa’n Ibrāhīm b. Maymūn sitt-mi’a kabsh fa-l-yakun ḥaqquhu akbaru minnī fihā li-tanfuqa minnā wa-l-yakun quḍūmukum bihā al-yawm la-‘allanā nabī’uhā ghadan yawm al-sabt wa-ba’d ghadan yawm al-aḥad in shā’a Allāh fa-‘ajjilū ilayhi wa-lā tu’akhhirūhu sā’a in shā’a Allāh*,” PERF **663**[= P.World, 161-162].3-8, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>). Moving with six hundred rams would definitely require from the addressees more than one day notice, if they were not very close to the place of the sender.

With the course of time, especially from late 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century onwards, writing, sending and receiving letters became more or less part of the daily activities. The number of the letters increased massively. The letters became almost equal to talking with many of them exhibiting an oral style of writing. The *empty letters*<sup>44</sup> or letters that contain only information about the health of the sender and his family, inquire about the wellbeing of the addressee and his family, and convey salutations to and from relatives and friends with no further essential contents are a clear evidence of the frequent use of letters in the

<sup>43</sup> See also J. Chapa, *Letters of condolence in Greek papyri* (Firenze: Edizioni Gonnelli, 1998), 30-32; K. Worp, “Letters of condolence in the Greek papyri: some observations,” *Analecta papyrologica* 7 (1995), 149-154.

<sup>44</sup> The term *empty letters* is my suggestion.

private realm (see in this corpus letters **15**, **21** and **22**).<sup>45</sup> The following example indicates a regular interval of every day correspondence between two individuals. In this letter, the sender greets the addressee and asks about how he passed the previous night, how he is doing today, and how Umm Muḥammad, Muḥammad and the rest of the family are doing (“*a’limnī ḥafīzaka Allāh kayfa kunta fī laylatika al-māḍiya wa-kayfa anta fī yawmika wa-kayfa Umm Muḥammad ‘āfāhu Allāh wa-Muḥammad wa-jamā‘at al-‘iyāl*,” P.Jahn **13**[= P.World, 183].3-6, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>).

In short, private letters cover almost all everyday-life practices. There are indeed many letters which are highly rhetorical and full of standard topics and stereotyped expressions, but there are also several practical correspondences, which contain very useful information and serve specific purposes.<sup>46</sup>

In business, letters were much more needed to regulate the trade. Many Arabic individual letters and archives inform us that very complicated and sophisticated methods of delegation and cooperation over great distances were created to move goods and wares from their production centers to the markets of Fuṣṭāṭ, Alexandria and elsewhere in Egypt or even beyond the borders.<sup>47</sup> These extensive commercial networks included several individuals such as workers, dealers, producers, drivers, agents, middlemen, sellers and buyers. Nearly all these parties were exchanging letters regularly accompanying the delivery and order of goods. For example, the commercial archive of the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu‘min shows a regular interval of every week correspondence between the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, a family of textile merchants living in the Fayyūm oasis in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, and their providers, weavers and smaller textile producers and traders, and their agents in the capital Fuṣṭāṭ, the Banū Thawr.<sup>48</sup> The commercial letters of this archive give us endlessly detailed and extensive information on the day-to-day mechanics of the textile trade between the important textile producing center in the Fayyūm and the booming market in Fuṣṭāṭ. They also give important insights into the organization of textile production, the arrangement of transport to and from the capital, of goods, money, orders, the financial tools available, the division of responsibilities and the regulation of accountability between traders, agents and workers. In brief, a socio-economic history of medieval Fayyūm can be written on the basis of this archive.<sup>49</sup>

The individual business letters in our corpus also show extensive commercial networks with several intermediaries including women (see letters **31** and **40**) and refer to a regular exchange of letters between remote cities such as Alexandria, Dimyāṭ and Fuṣṭāṭ. A few selected examples will manifest this. Al-Miswar b. Rajā’, the author of letter **32**, wrote to his relative and business partner, al-Khayr b. Muslim, once he reached the city of Dimyāṭ

<sup>45</sup> See also Rāḡib (2011), 273-284, dated 102/721; P.Loeth **2**[= P.Berl.Arab. II **75**], 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>. Compare this with late antique letters, see J.-L. Fournet, “Esquisse d’une anatomie de la lettre antique tardive d’après les papyrus,” in: R. Delmaire, J. Desmulliez, P.-L. Gatier, (eds.), *Correspondances: documents pour l’histoire de l’Antiquité tardive. Actes du colloque (Lille, Novembre 2003)*. Collection de la maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée 40. Série littéraire et philosophique 13 (Lyon: Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2009), 23-66.

<sup>46</sup> For more about topics and topoi in Arabic papyrus letters, see Grob (2010a), 90-93.

<sup>47</sup> See P.SijpesteijnTravel, 115-152.

<sup>48</sup> See also S.D. Goitein, “The commercial mail service in medieval Islam,” *Journal of the American oriental society* 84/2 (1964), 122.

<sup>49</sup> For historical and economic analysis of this archive, see Rāḡib (1988), 25-33; Younes (2013), 313-334.

informing him that he reached the city in good health and bought the linen he was looking for (“*katabtu ilayka hīna qadimtu Dimyāt wa-anā sālim ṣāliḥ wa-llāh maḥmūd ..... ukhbiruka annī qadimtu Dimyāt fa-wajadtu al-bazz fa-sharaytuhu*,” ll.5-6, 8-9). Shurayḥ b. ‘Amr, the author of letter **33**, instructs his business partner/agent, Ibn Abū ‘Ābid, to accomplish some business tasks, amongst which to buy him olives from Dimyāt for one *dirham* (“*wa-tashtarī lī bi-dirham zaytūn min Dimyāt*,” l.12). While writing this letter Shurayḥ was not, of course, in Dimyāt but at some distance outside the town. In letter no. **38**, al-Muṣ‘ab b. Subayḥ writes to the Christian Jurayj reporting on his arrival at Fuṣṭāṭ and the business situation in the city. This letter is one of the earliest correspondences that record business relations between Arab Muslims and Christian Egyptians after the Arab conquest of Egypt.

From the various lines of argument set out above it would seem safe to conclude that letter-writing was a widespread practice within the Arabic speaking milieu in early and medieval Islamic Egypt to such a degree that it was almost a regular routine of daily life.<sup>50</sup> Native Egyptians were, on the other hand, communicating with each other in Coptic and sometimes in Greek, and continued to do so for the largest part until the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century, when the vast majority of Christian Egyptians started to adopt Arabic as their spoken and written language even within their own Christian communities.<sup>51</sup> A handful of Arabic and Coptic-Arabic letters show, nonetheless, that some Christian Egyptians began to communicate in Arabic in the late 3<sup>rd</sup>-early 4<sup>th</sup>/late 9<sup>th</sup>-early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>52</sup>

Below, I briefly discuss the script, language, dating, layout and format as well as the epistolary formulae of the letters published in this thesis. As I mentioned earlier, some recent works have studied these topics with encouraging results.<sup>53</sup> However, our letters offer some unique features which are worth highlighting.

## 1. Script

The letters published in the thesis show a great variety of handwritings, ranging from very irregular, clumsy and slow to finely executed, proficient and rapid hands. Most hands show no difficulties in writing or handling the pen in general which give the impression that most of the writers must have been trained and received some education to be familiar with writing. Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān, the author of letter **15**, is an exception. His slow and clumsy handwriting exhibits serious difficulties in handling the pen. Moreover, he makes many mistakes in grammar and spelling. Each letter is written in only one single hand<sup>54</sup> that could

<sup>50</sup> See also Grob (2010a), 207.

<sup>51</sup> For the complex linguistic situation in Egypt after the Islamic conquest, see L. Berkes, and K.M. Younes “A trilingual scribe from Abbasid Egypt? A note on CPR XXII 17,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 58/1 (2012), 97-100; T.S. Richter, “Coptic letters,” in: A. Kaplony, E.M. Grob (eds.), *Documentary letters from the Middle East: the evidence in Greek, Coptic, South Arabian, Pehlevi and Arabic (1<sup>st</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c CE)*, *Asiatische Studien* 62/3 (Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2008), 737-770; Richter (2009), 404; Grob (2010a), 86 and note 5; ‘Umar (1970), 45-55.

<sup>52</sup> T.S. Richter, A. Delattre, B. Liebrez, and N. Vanthieghem, “Écrire en arabe et en copte: Le cas de deux lettres bilingues,” *Chronique d’Égypte* 87 (2012), 170-188; Richter (2008), 742-743.

<sup>53</sup> 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; Sijpesteijn (2007b), 513-524.

<sup>54</sup> In Greek, Coptic and Judaeo-Arabic letters, the final greetings and a signature were sometimes added by the sender’s own hand in case the letter was penned by a scribe. See Grob (2010a), 87 and note 7; Bagnall and Cribior (2006), 46-48.

either be the hand of the sender himself or someone else, a professional scribe for example. Private letters in general hardly touch upon who actually wrote and read them.<sup>55</sup> At the best of my knowledge, the sender never mentions whether he wrote the letter in his own hand or that he had it written by someone else. This information emerges from reading between the lines.

In only four cases in our corpus, both direct and indirect references in the texts show different persons being involved in writing the letters instead of the senders. In letter **16**, a certain al-Rabī b. Muslim writes for one Salmān b. Mughīth to two addressees in Fuṣṭāṭ, i.e. ‘Ubayd b. Yasār and someone else whose name is missing. In line 14, al-Rabī cites his name and greets the two addressees (“*kataba al-Rabī b. Muslim wa-huwa yaqra’u ‘alaykumā al-salām*,”). The letter is well written, structured and composed. Moreover, the writer uses the dual consistently and makes almost no grammatical mistakes, indicating his high command of the language. In other words, the well trained hand and the proper language refer to a professional scribe. The fact that the scribe conveys greetings to the addressees does not mean, in any case, that he knows them in person. Conveying greetings from professional scribes to the addressee/s seems to be a general trend rather than a personal concern. Another example supports this interpretation. An anonymous professional female scribe also records her greetings to the addressees after she has completed the letter (“*wa-l-kātiba taqra’u ‘alaykumā al-salām*,” P.Khalili I 17.13, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>). While the voice of letter **23** claims direct communication between a woman and her sister, both addressees, i.e. the interior and exterior addressees, carry the name of the servant of a certain ‘Amr (*ghulām ‘Amr*). The writer makes many mistakes in grammar and spelling. Furthermore, he retains the masculine participle in places, indicating his poor command of the language. So when ‘Amr b. Zubayd, the sender of letter **2**, wanted to write to his father-in-law in order to inform him about the divorce, he did not write the letter himself for one reason or another but asked another person, presumably a professional scribe, to pen it for him. This hypothesis is based on a number of grounds. In the first place, the letter is written in a finely executed and proficient hand. Secondly, the letter exhibits an oral style of writing with some minor grammatical and spelling mistakes. Thirdly, the letter is full of repetitions and synonyms which are very common features in dictated letters. Finally and most importantly, the traces of dictation are straightforward in lines 19-20, where the sender is referred to in the third person.<sup>56</sup> Letter **6**, too, is not penned in the hand of Umm Zur‘a, the female sender, but in the hand of the writer, anonymous, who penned also the letter on the recto, letter no. **3**.

In a similar vein, references to different persons being involved in reading letters for illiterate addressees are infrequently attested in letters. Finding a good reader was definitely a difficult task at that time, since he should have a considerable knowledge of Arabic and the ability to read the partially dotted Arabic script. Even more important, he must be a trustworthy person, as he would be acquainted with the letter’s contents. Misreading and misunderstanding the letter’s contents could have caused a lot of troubles between the two correspondents. To demonstrate this, in one published letter, the sender,

<sup>55</sup> See also Grob (2010a), 86-89, 100-104.

<sup>56</sup> For more extensive discussion on dictated letters, see Grob (2010a), 86-89. See also Bagnall and Criboire (2006), 59-65.

unknown to us, informs Abū ‘Abd Allāh, the addressee, that he sent a letter to a certain ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṭalḥī, but this illiterate addressee asked another person to read the letter for him. The reader’s reading capacity was so poor that he totally misread and misunderstood the letter’s contents which made the addressee unsatisfied (“*wa-azunnuhu a’ṭā kitābahu man lā yuḥsinu yaqra’u fa-qara’a lahu bi-mā lam aktub bihi ..... fa-qad fahima shay’ mā huwa min ra’yī walā yurḍī*,” P.Cair.Arab. V 295.6-8, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>).

In case the letter is being sent to women, trustworthy carriers and readers are highly recommended. In one published letter, a certain Khunāsa bt. Muslim and another lady write to one Umm al-‘Arab bt. ‘Ammār and other women to inform them about their wellbeing and ask them to write back with their news. Khunāsa knows well that all the female addressees are illiterate. This is why she commended the carrier of the letter, Yazīd b. Sālim, to read and write for them. To assure his trustworthiness, loyalty and dependability, Khunāsa describes Yazīd as a good servant of God (“*fa-idhā katabtum fa-ktubū thumma idfa’ū kitābakum ilā man ya’tikum bi-hādhā al-kitāb fa-innahu ya’rifunā wa-huwa yursiluhu ilaynā ma’a man ya’rifu wa-idhā faragha min ḥājatihi marra ‘alaykum thumma taktubū ma’ahu wa-in aradtum yaktubu lakum aw yaqra’u lakum salūhu fa-innī qad amartuhu wa-huwa ni’ma al-‘abd li-llāh wa-smuhu Yazīd b. Sālim*,” P.Loeth 2[= P.Berl.Arab. II 75].10-14, 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>).<sup>57</sup>

Unfortunately, very little is known about the level of literacy among the Arabs, both men and women, as well as the educational institutions and the training of the scribes in early Islamic Egypt. Both literary and documentary sources are wrapped in silence regarding these issues. However, it is widely accepted among Arabic papyrologists that the vast majority of the Arabic private and business letters was written in the senders’ own hands in a private realm and not in chanceries by professional scribes.<sup>58</sup> Petra Sijpesteijn has touched upon the issue of literacy on the basis of a semi-official archive from the mid-second/mid-eighth century. In her concluding remarks, Sijpesteijn argues that while the level of illiteracy among the Arabs was high in the first two Islamic centuries and that the majority of population was yet non-native Arabic speakers, this fact did not prevent writing being the prevailing method of communication between individuals and between the state and the subjects. Moreover, she affirms that written documents penetrated every social and geographical layer of the society, even though the ability to read and understand Arabic was more widespread than to write.<sup>59</sup> Grob, on the other hand, has connected the huge amount of survived documents with the level of literacy, arguing that “the amount and kind of surviving records indicate a society with an advanced literacy level and frequent written contact. The written word was important.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the huge amount of survived texts could be a good indication of a high level of literacy in case we proved that they were truly written in the senders’ own hands.

Let us turn now to the palaeographical features attested in the letters published in this thesis. The letters exhibit many features of the early script, which is generally characterized by elongating lines between characters and wide spaces between words and characters. In many cases, words are broken off at the end of a line and continued on the

<sup>57</sup> See also Grob (2010a), 100-101.

<sup>58</sup> See Grob (2010a), 159; Diem (2008), 845.

<sup>59</sup> See Sijpesteijn (2013), chapter 4.

<sup>60</sup> Grob (2010a), 207.

next (see 1.12-13, 13-14, 20-21; 2.16-17, 27-28, 28-29; 3.2-3, 14-15; 8.7-8; 16.3-4, 6-7, 11-12; 17.18-19; 20.5-6; 21.5-6). Diacritical dots are widely used, but randomly, without following any systematic practice. *Hamza* and vowel signs are conspicuously absent (cf. *al-‘atā’* 1.7; *al-samā’* 2.14; *al-thanā’* 2.24; *shā’a* 2.30, 15.8, 17.10, 27.13, 31.10).<sup>61</sup> The final and freestanding *alif* usually rise above similar vertical letters in a straight form and extend below the base line. In some places, the freestanding *alif* bends to the right from the bottom. *Dāl* and *dhāl* are very much alike and easily confusing without dots distinguishing them and often have an upturning top to the right (cf. *Dimyāt* 8.6; *alladhī* 21.4, 6). *Sīn* and *shīn* are frequently written with three teeth. On occasions, *sīn* and *shīn* are written as a straight line with three dots written over the line to represent the teeth (cf. *al-salām* 24.18; *bi-sm* 36.1, 37.1; *al-sū’* 36.4; *‘ishrīn* 37.6). The three dots of *shīn* are usually aligned horizontally (cf. *sha’nahā* 3.16; *ashadda* 4.11). *Ṣād* and *dād* are either horizontally elongated or oval in shape (cf. *al-ṣihr* 2.22; *ṣibyānī* 7.7; *Ḥaḥṣa* 8.2). The horizontal stroke of initial and freestanding *‘ayn* and *ghayn* usually extends to the right (cf. *ghulām* 3.18; *‘inda* 3.10; *‘alaynā* 7.9). In many cases, the head of medial and final *‘ayn/ghayn* consists of two oblique strokes which are not joined at the top by a horizontal stroke forming the shape of the letter *v* (cf. *ya’finā* 3.8; *ba’daka* 3.20; *Rabī’a* 5.2; *al-nīma*, *al-‘āfiya* 5.6; *yaj’ala* 12.7; *taghfalā* 16.11). On occasions, *fā’* appears with a diacritical dot under the letter and *qāf* with one dot over it (cf. *ya’finā* 3.8; *fī-mā* 3.15; *bi-qawl* 3.12; *al-ḥīr* 4.12; *uqīmu* 4.9; *al-khalaf* 4.14; *faḍlihi*, *al-‘āfiya*, *qaḍā’ihi* 5.6). In places, the tail of the final and independent *qāf* extends vertically downwards before bending to the left resembling the old Arabic *qāf* (cf. *al-turuq* 1.8; *al-ḥaqq* 1.22; *Ṭalq* 17.2).<sup>62</sup> Initial and medial *kāfs* are either horizontally elongated with an extended base, an upper stroke parallel to the base line and a rightward shaft at the top or hairpin-shaped (cf. *kitābuka* 3.5; *kitābī* 4.9; *kullīhi* 4.13; *kataba* 16.14). *Mīm* has a round head and a very short tail (cf. *al-ḥakam*, *lam* 2.10; *al-ḥirm* 2.11; *ghulām* 3.18; *bi-sm* 5.1). Final *yā’* usually bends backwards in a straight line.<sup>63</sup>

## 2. Language

The language of the letters edited in the thesis exhibits many orthographical and morphological peculiarities similar to all Arabic papyrus letters and deviating in many aspects from the accepted norms of the standard Arabic. In the following lines, I list some of these peculiarities without going into details, owing to the fact that some studies have widely discussed this topic.<sup>64</sup> *Scriptio defectiva* and *plena* are frequently attested against classical Arabic rules (cf. *thalāthat* 1.25; *lisānahā* 2.18; *ghulām* 3.9; *dīnār* 3.19; *dhālika* 15.11).<sup>65</sup> *Tanwīn alif* is lacking in most cases in the direct object and after numerals which would have been obligatory in classical Arabic (cf. *qawl* 2.13; *amr* 2.28; *dīnār* 34.6).<sup>66</sup> *Tā’ marbūṭa* is sometimes represented in *status constructus* by *tā’ maftūḥa*, especially in the word *rahmat* in

<sup>61</sup> Hopkins § 19 & 20. See also in this corpus letter 6.14 and the commentary.

<sup>62</sup> See also P.Khalili I, 33-34.

<sup>63</sup> For more extensive discussion on the palaeography of the papyri, see P.World, 82-87; P.Khalili I, 27-46; Grob (2010a), 159-172; P.Qurra, 33-39; Sijpesteijn (2007b), 513-524. See also P.Khurasan, 66-81; Kaplony (2008), 91-112.

<sup>64</sup> See Grob (2010a), 156-158. For more about the language of papyri, see P.World, 94-98; Hopkins, xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>65</sup> Hopkins § 9.

<sup>66</sup> Hopkins § 167.

the final *salām* greeting, which is how this final greeting is written in all the letters of our corpus as well as in other published letters.<sup>67</sup> *Alif* is usually absent after the vocative particle *yā* (cf. 15.7; 20.8).<sup>68</sup> The long vowel is maintained in the jussive in most of cases (cf. 3.10; 9.7; 13.18; 26.8; 43.7).<sup>69</sup> The accusative of the plural-*īn* usually replaces the nominative-*ūn* (cf. 5.4; 8.4; 12.5; 17.6; 41.5.).<sup>70</sup> The feminine plural form is absent (see letters 5 and 12). In few cases, *dād* is converted to *zā* and vice versa (cf. *faḏluhu* instead of *faḏluhu* and *‘aḏīm* instead of *‘aḏīm* 21.7, 22.9).<sup>71</sup> The letters also show a unique orthographical feature, i.e. the long *ā* is sometimes replaced by a little hook (see *rijāl* and *ilāh*, 2.16, 21; *‘āfānā*, 15.3; 28.4; 29.3; 32.4; 35.4; 39.4), which might reflect the traces of vernacular pronunciation of *imāla*.<sup>72</sup> For more orthographical and morphological peculiarities, see the commentaries.

### 3. Dating

For a long time, Arabic papyrologists have believed that private and business letters do not carry a full date in their texts.<sup>73</sup> The recent publication of a complete private letter sent from a man to four female relatives dated to the 24<sup>th</sup> (six nights remaining) of Dhū al-Qa‘da of the year 102/721 should change this assumption.<sup>74</sup> Also the papyrus P.Mird 52 forms the conclusion of a private letter in which the month and the year are given, i.e. Dhū al-Ḥijja 126/October 744. In many cases, the sender tends to specify the place and time of writing by the day of the week or the month without mentioning the respective year as it was obviously known to both parties of the letter.<sup>75</sup> This information could either be found at the beginning or the end of private and business letters in contrast to official letters, in which a full date is usually given at the end.<sup>76</sup>

With the exception of letter 24 which is partially dated to the 28<sup>th</sup> of Dhū al-Ḥijja and letter 18 which was written on Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Ṣafar, none of the letters of this corpus bears a full date. Thus, I had to rely mainly on the script for dating, which is approximate.<sup>77</sup> In her book, Grob studied the development of the script from a less cursive tendency in the 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries to progressing cursiveness in the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. She offers new techniques to measure the cursiveness of the script and thereby reaches a more accurate dating system on the basis of the script.<sup>78</sup> Although Grob is not the first to

<sup>67</sup> Hopkins § 47.a. See also in this corpus letter 1.21 and the commentary.

<sup>68</sup> Hopkins § 49.a.ii.

<sup>69</sup> Hopkins § 82.d.

<sup>70</sup> Hopkins § 86.a.

<sup>71</sup> Hopkins § 39.b, 41.

<sup>72</sup> Hopkins § 7.

<sup>73</sup> See Diem (2008), 855; Grob (2010a), 49, 207.

<sup>74</sup> Rāḡib (2011), 273-284.

<sup>75</sup> The papyrus letter P.RāḡibLettres 7 dated on palaeographical grounds to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> affirms this fact. In this letter, the sender Muḥammad b. Wahb informs his servant Faṭḥ, the addressee, that he received the latter's dated letter to Rabī I ("wa-huwa 'alā mā waradat bihi risālatuka al-mu'arrakha fī Rabī al-awwal," l.3). The sender wrote his letter one month later, i.e. Thursday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Rabī II ("wa-kutiba yawm al-khamīs li-thalāth layāl khalawn min shahr Rabī al-ākhar," ll.4-5).

<sup>76</sup> Diem (2008), 855; P.Khalili II, 64. See also in this corpus letter no. 24.19 and the examples provided in the commentary.

<sup>77</sup> For the problems of dating letters on the basis of the script, see P.Khalili I, 27; Grob (2010a), 2.

<sup>78</sup> Grob (2010a), 159-206.

deal with this topic, her study is substantially more comprehensive and detailed than any preceding treatments.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the script, the epistolary formulae and layout of the letters are also considered in dating. To be more precise, the presence of the internal address following immediately the *basmala* has been always proposed as an important device for dating letters. It is argued that no internal address is given in private and business letters after the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century and that the internal address was either placed above the *basmala* or omitted altogether with the other elements of the prescript, and replaced by long prayers and blessings for the addressee in letters from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>80</sup> Grob's discussion of the presence of an internal address or prescript in general is a bit confusing. On p. 39, Grob argues that no internal address is given in private and business letters after the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century and on p. 41, she affirms that the change of letters with prescripts to letters without prescripts was abrupt. But on p. 42, she says: "The existence or absence of the internal address is an important device for dating letters. But unfortunately, this important change did not take place sharply around the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century. There are letters without internal address dating probably from before the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> c., and some with internal address from the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century." In contrast, on p. 83, Grob states: "Mandatory parts are in letters of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries: *Basmala*, *prescript* and *final blessings*. In the letters of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the mandatory *prescript* is replaced by a mandatory *initial blessings* section." One would like to have conclusive evidence: Was there a transitional period between letters with and without a prescript or not? Do letters with prescripts exist after the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century or did they totally disappear at that time? These questions are really difficult to answer, owing to the fact that in comparison to the letters without prescripts, very few letters with prescripts remain, and most of those are difficult to date exactly. However, two unpublished private letters with a prescript (P.Cam.Michaelides A 1368r and P.CtYBR.inv. 2681(B)), relating to al-Mufaḍḍal b. Faḍḍāla (d. 252/866), the grandson of the judge al-Mufaḍḍal b. Faḍḍāla (in office 168-169/784-786 and 174-177/790-793), suggest that the letters with prescripts indeed continued to be written in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, to rest dating our letters on a solid ground I would date all the letters with prescripts to the 1<sup>st</sup>-mid 3<sup>rd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>-mid 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Four letters can be dated, however, more specifically to the late 1<sup>st</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup>/late 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries (see letters **2**, **5**, **12**, **16**) on the basis of the early palaeographical peculiarities. Letter **21** is internally dated on the basis of the name of the governor of Egypt al-Ḥurr b. Yūsuf (in office 105-108/724-727) and the caliph Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 105-125/724-743), who represent the addressees of the letter. Letter no. **18** is reassigned a later date (late 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century) on the basis of its formulae, script, layout and format.

#### 4. Layout and format

<sup>79</sup> See P.World, 82-87; P.Khalili I, 27-46; P.Qurra, 33-39; P.Khurasan, 66-90; P.Mird, XII-XLVI; Sijpesteijn (2007b), 513-524.

<sup>80</sup> See Diem (2008), 856; Grob (2010a), 39, 41-44, 83; Khan (2008), 890; P.Khalili I, 25, 126-127; P.Khalili II, 63.

<sup>81</sup> For more, see Younes, review.

The letters published in the thesis vary considerably in their layout and format depending mainly on the scribe's proficiency and whim. Some letters are well composed and structured, and laid out into paragraphs with several means to highlight parts of the text and to mark off the onset and the end of the different sections within the letter (see letters 7, 25 and 35). Others are written as one block with almost no attention to the graphic arrangement of the text (cf. 1, 2, 3 and 41). Some letters are highly rhetorical and full of standard topics and common expressions such as the complaint about the lack of replies, the request to write back and the pleasure at receiving a letter from the addressee and knowing about his wellbeing (see letters 26 and 27). Some other letters are direct and straightforward, skipping introductory and concluding expressions (cf. letters 1 and 2). Yet others are very short and condensed with lengthy introductory and concluding expressions and salutations to and from relatives and friends (see letters 15, 21 and 22). Some letters deal with a mixed variety of topics (see as a best example letter 31), while others are only devoted to one specific topic (see letters 1, 2, 3, 24, 17-20). The letters show also considerable variations in dimensions. Some letters are written on long rectangular pieces (e.g. 2, 3-6, 13-23, 17), but others are written on a short square piece (see for example 28).<sup>82</sup>

All letters are written on papyrus sheets of different quality and thickness, written in different kinds of pens (thin, medium-thick and thick)<sup>83</sup> and handwritings. The letters are regularly written in black ink.<sup>84</sup> Most of the letters are written on the "recto" side at right angles to the fibers leaving the back side blank except for the address. In case of papyri which bear texts on both sides, the recto (Side A) and verso (Side B) have been identified on the basis of the direction of fibers, no matter what the identification of the curator was (see letters 3-6, 13-23).

With the exception of letter no. 1, where traces of one line are still preserved in the right hand margin, none of the letters of our corpus show a use of the margins for writing. The marginal notes have been explained to have been due to a general aversion to continue the letter on the verso.<sup>85</sup> In my view this is not strictly true. I would argue rather that the writing in the margins was part of the new style of writing letters that became dominant from the late 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century onwards resulting in radical changes in formulae and layout, such as replacing the prescript with initial blessings and the tendency toward cursiveness in writing. There are a number of arguments that supports this interpretation. In the first place, letters with marginal notes are too numerous to be considered exceptional. Secondly, these marginal notes are not always notes or afterthoughts, but in most cases simply continue the main text. In other words, the margins were taken into account as writing space from the onset of writing the letter. Thirdly, early letters with prescripts are sometimes continued on the verso, but not in the margins on the recto. It is worth mentioning that letter no. 1 is continued on the back side as well as letter no. 15. Finally, these marginal notes usually follow one typical pattern, i.e. after exhausting the proper space on the recto; the scribe starts writing in the right hand margin from the top

<sup>82</sup> See also Grob (2010a), 173-175.

<sup>83</sup> If the pen's notch is long and thin, the writing gets finer, thinner and more distinct, but if it is short and thick, the writing gets clearer, heavier and thicker. For more, see P.World, 64.

<sup>84</sup> The black ink was made of soot mixed with water, see P.World, 67-68.

<sup>85</sup> Grob (2010a), 179.

downwards then in the left hand margin from the bottom upwards. Marginal notes in the top margin are very rare, but normally run parallel to the main text either in the same direction or upside down.<sup>86</sup> Surely, all of these common features cannot be seen as mere coincidence.<sup>87</sup>

Some other observations on the layout and format of the letters should also be made. None of the letters of our corpus show systematic spacing between words and sections. Traces of folds are still clearly perceptible on the overwhelming majority of letters. Some letters have been folded several times vertically and then rolled up horizontally (see letter no. **2**), but the majority of letters was first folded horizontally parallel to the written lines from the bottom upwards and then folded vertically.<sup>88</sup> Yet other letters have been folded several times horizontally, but there are no vertical folds perceptible (see letters **24**, **27** and **35**).

In order to write the address on the back side the papyrus sheet is in most cases turned around the vertical axis, namely the way one would turn a sheet of a book. As an exception, the papyrus sheets in letters **1**, **4** and **43** are turned around the horizontal axis, i.e. the way one would turn over a playing card lying on a table.<sup>89</sup> Also letter **22** shows the address on the bottom margin, in view of the fact that the front side of the sheet is full of Arabic and Coptic scripts. The exterior address typically identifies the addressee in more detail than that of the internal one. For the clearer and the more specified the exterior address is, the more certain the sender could be of the letter's successful delivery. As a standard, the exterior address is added at the top of the back of the letter. In case the back side was later reused, the two texts usually co-exist.<sup>90</sup>

## 5. Formulary

As a general rule, the *basmala* opens all documentary Arabic papyrus letters on the first line which is usually followed by the prescript section in the letters datable to the first two and a half Islamic centuries. In only one case in our corpus (letter no. **1**), the author starts his letter on the same line as the *basmala* which is uncommon in early letters but occurs frequently in letters from 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>91</sup>

The prescript section typically includes four basic elements, namely the internal address naming both correspondents, the initial *salām* greeting (“*salām ‘alayka*,” peace upon you), the *ḥamdala* (“*fa-innī aḥmadu ilayka Allāh alladhī lā ilāh illā huwa*,” I praise for your sake God other than Whom there is no god)<sup>92</sup> and finally the transitional element (“*ammā ba‘du*,” as for what follows).<sup>93</sup> The prescript is often highlighted and set off graphically with *alinea*

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<sup>86</sup> Grob (2010a), 179.

<sup>87</sup> See also Younes, review.

<sup>88</sup> See Grob (2010a), 181-182.

<sup>89</sup> See Grob (2010a), 177-178.

<sup>90</sup> For more about the exterior address, see Grob (2010a), 77-81.

<sup>91</sup> See the commentary of 1.1.

<sup>92</sup> For references of the *ḥamdala* in published letters, see P.Khalili I, 126-127. The latest datable document having this formula is PERF **624**[= P. World, 132-134].8-9, which is a decree issued in the name of the governor ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Musayyab (in office 176-177/792-793).

<sup>93</sup> See Diem (2008), 856; Grob (2010a), 39-42, 83; Khan (2008), 890; P.Khalili I, 25; P.Khalili II, 63.

after the *ḥamdala* and the transitional element *ammā ba'du* is usually placed at the beginning of the next line (see letters 5-8, 24, 32, 33, 35). In few cases, the *ḥamdala* is squeezed and the transitional element *ammā ba'du* is followed immediately with no space in-between (see letters 15, 21, 22).<sup>94</sup> In only one case in this corpus, the transitional element *ammā ba'du* is skipped after the *ḥamdala* (see letter 30), while in letters 4 and 19, the *taṣliya* is shoved in-between the *ḥamdala* and *ammā ba'du*. In letter 18, the *basmala* is followed directly by the initial blessings replacing the prescript as letters from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries usually do.<sup>95</sup>

Besides the familiar *salām* greeting *salām 'alayka* the archaic formula *silm anta/sālim anta/salām anta* (you are at peace) appears in letter 38.2. It has been suggested that this formula predates Islam and that it was replaced by the familiar greeting *salām 'alayka* with the advent of Islam, owing to the fact that the latter is a typical Qur'anic expression.<sup>96</sup>

Our letters also offer a new transitional element in addition to the well-known *amma ba'du* which is usually used to bridge the prescript to the further sections of the letter. The expression *ammā 'alā ithr dhālika* appears in letters 5.7 and 17.7 as an equivalent to *amma ba'du*.<sup>97</sup>

Extra blessings and prayers for both the sender and the addressee usually appear after the transitional element and before getting into the main point of the letter. These extra blessings usually beginning with *'āfānā Allāh wa-iyyāka* (may God save us and you), which could be further extended as *'āfānā Allāh wa-iyyāka min al-sū' kullihi wa-'afā 'annā wa-'anka bi-rahmatihi* (may God save us and you from all evils and may He forgive us and you through His mercy) or any other common prayers and blessings (see letters 7.5-6, 9.3-4, 11.4, 13.4-6, 19.4-5, 23.5, 24.5-6, 25.1-2, 28.4, 29.3-5, 32.4-5, 33.4, 35.4-5, 36.4-5, 37.4-5, 41.4-5, 42.6-8).<sup>98</sup>

The letters produce also an abundance of religious formulae of glorification and prayer types throughout the text such as the *taṣliya*,<sup>99</sup> *ḥawqala* ("*lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwa illā bi-llāh*," there is no strength nor power except in God), cf. 1.9 and 30.8, slide-in-blessings,<sup>100</sup> oaths such as *fa-wa-llāh* (by God) 24.12; *fa-wa-llāh alladhī lā ilāh illā huwa* (by God other than Whom there is no god) 2.20-21, *wa-innī uqsimu laka bi-llāh* (I swear to you by God) 2.31-32, *wa-l-'amrī* (by my life) 43.10.<sup>101</sup> Expressions showing the happiness of the sender are frequently followed by religious formulae of the glorification type, while the expressions of grief and anxiety are typically accompanied by religious formulae of the prayer type.<sup>102</sup>

The complaint about lack of prompt replies to one's written messages appears often in our letters as well as in many published letters. For example, in letter 25, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, that he wrote to him before his current letter several subsequent letters, but he did not receive for any of them an answer ("*wa-qad kuntū katabtu*

<sup>94</sup> See also Grob (2010a), 192-193.

<sup>95</sup> Grob (2010a), 39-48.

<sup>96</sup> Diem (2008), 860-861.

<sup>97</sup> See also Rāḡib (2011), 273-284; Hopkins § 106.

<sup>98</sup> See also Grob (2010a), 41.

<sup>99</sup> For the different forms of the *taṣliya*, see letter 4.3 and the commentary. See also P.Cair.Arab. I, 215-216; P.Khalili I, 148; Grob (2010a), 27, note 11.

<sup>100</sup> This term is proposed by Grob for the blessings that follow mentioning of the addressee or third parties. See Grob (2010a), 33 and note 20, 237.

<sup>101</sup> See Grob (2010a), 25-29.

<sup>102</sup> For more, see Grob (2010a), 91-93.

*ilayka qabl kitābī hādhā bi-kutub kathīra mutawātira fa-lam yablughnī li-shay' minhā jawāban,*" ll.9-10). Also in letter **26**, one Rābiḥ the servant of a certain Sa'īd angrily writes to one Abū Yazīd about the lack of replies and asks him to always keep in touch. He tells that he wrote to him seven letters including the current one, but he never received an answer ("wa-ukhbiruka annī wājīd 'alayka wa-qad katabtu ilayka bi-hādhīhi sab'at kutub fa-lam arā min[ka li-shay' minhā jawāban]," ll.7-8). Likewise, the sender of letter **27**, whose *kunya* is partially preserved, writes to a certain Abū Muḥammad blaming him for not answering his previous letter and urging him to answer this one ("wa-qad katabtu ilayka bi-kitāb qabla hādhā fa-lam tujibnī fīhi bi-shay' ..... wa-b'ath bi-jawābika in shā'a Allāh," ll.7-10).<sup>103</sup>

This complaint has always been explained as a stereotyped expression.<sup>104</sup> In fact, the chance of loss of written messages along the way of delivery was very real. Private letters were usually delivered informally through friends, neighbors, family members and acquaintances. Take the following examples. The sender of letter **14** in our corpus informs the addressee that he sent the letter with his neighbor, who will first pass by a certain 'Abd al-Jabbār ("anna ṣāḥib kitābī hādhā ilayka jār yamurru bi-'Abd al-Jabbār," ll.4-6). In another published letter, the sender informs the addressee that the letter's carrier, Abū al-Ḥadīd, is a friend and neighbor of his ("wa-waṣala kitābī hādhā ma'a jāri wa-ṣadīqī Abū al-Ḥadīd al-'aṣṣār," CPR XVI **22.8**, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>). In one other letter, the sender informs the addressee that he sent his letter with his neighbor, Bulbul, who usually travels to the addressee's place ("wa-hādhā jārūnā yajrū 'indakum yusammā Bulbul arsaltu ma'ahu kitābī," P.Marchands II **28.6**, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>).

Sometimes the impetus for writing a letter was just the occasion of having a traveler heading for the addressee's domicile. To demonstrate this, in one published letter, the sender informs the addressee that he did not write to him before, because the person (*insān*), who was supposed to carry the letter was in a hurry ("wa-innamā katabtu ilā al-akh kitāb ma'a insān 'ajila 'alayya wa-lam yumkinnī li-sur'at khurūjihi kitāb ilayka ma'ahu fa-katabtu ilayhi bi-ḥaml kitābī ilayka," CPR XVI **32.2-3**, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>).<sup>105</sup>

The expressions *balligh raḥimaka Allāh* (deliver, may God have mercy upon you); *balligh hudīta* (deliver, may you be guided the right path); *raḥima Allāh man ballaghahā* (may God have mercy upon who delivers it); *balligh yarḥamuka Allāh* (deliver, may God have mercy upon you); *balligh sallamaka Allāh* (deliver, may God save you); *balligh hadāka Allāh* (deliver, may God guide you); *balligh ṣāḥibaka Allāh* (deliver, may God accompany you); *balligh arshadaka Allāh* (deliver, may God guide you) that usually appear next to the exterior address on the back of the letter indicate that the letter is delivered as a personal favor and that no payment is to be made to the carrier (see letters **7**, **15** and **18**).<sup>106</sup>

In many cases, the letters do not specify the place of delivery nor do they provide concise addresses. The senders themselves must have been aware that the addresses were incomplete and unclear. Two possible explanations can be made out for the case of letters with incomplete addresses. First, the carrier might know the destination and could have been either a family member or a servant, who used to deliver letters on a regular basis.

<sup>103</sup> For other attestations of the complaint about lack of replies, see in this corpus letter **25.9-10** and the commentary.

<sup>104</sup> Grob (2010a), 93-100. See also Bagnall and Cribiore (2006), 37-40.

<sup>105</sup> See also Grob (2010a), 107.

<sup>106</sup> Grob (2010a), 95. See also Goitein (1964), 120.

Second, the carrier may have received oral instructions about the destination from the sender. In any case, the letter was at “the mercy” of its carrier.<sup>107</sup> One published letter stresses the fact that the delivery of the letter depends mainly on the safety of the carrier (“*wa-idhā sallama Allāh hāmīl kitābī hādhā ilayka [...]*,” P.Heid.Arab. II 35.4-5, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>).

There is no doubt that the carrier who agreed to carry the letter as a favor, would do his best to deliver it to make the favor complete. In long-distance correspondence, however, people often sent several letters together with the same carrier.<sup>108</sup> Some of these letters were supposed to be distributed at their final destinations. Others were intended to pass through intermediaries. Yet others were enclosed with other letters or goods lacking any information about the place of delivery.<sup>109</sup> During this long and complicated delivery process, the possibility of losing letters is absolutely high. This argument can be strengthened by the observation that the senders, i.e. the complainers, sometimes mention the number of the unanswered letters (see letters 26.7; 27.7).<sup>110</sup>

It is reasonable to end the discussion with some remarks on the closing section of the letters. Most of the letters of this corpus close as usual with the request to keep in touch which is typically followed by salutations to and from relatives and friends.<sup>111</sup> In letters 14.1-3; 15.8-9; 31.20-23, the senders incorporate salutations into the body of the letter which is uncommon. The final greeting *wa-l-salām ‘alayka wa-rahmat Allāh* (peace be upon you and God’s mercy) represents the typical closing of the letters of this corpus.<sup>112</sup> The addition *wa-barakātuahu* (and blessings) appears in few letters and it is often written with *scriptio defectiva* of the long *ā* (see letters 1.37, 5.12; 8.8; 11.16; 22.12). As an exception, letter 38 closes with the expression *wa-kutiba* (it has been written).<sup>113</sup> In many cases, some afterthoughts were added after the letter was completed. These afterthoughts are mainly further instructions, inquiries, requests, greetings or just marginal notes (see letters 1.21-25, 3.25-26, 6.11-15, 8.7-8, 9.17-19, 16.13-16, 22.11-14, 24.18-19, 34.9-10, 41.13.15).<sup>114</sup>

Let us now leave the *text* and move to the *content*.

<sup>107</sup> Grob (2010a), 95. See also Bagnall and Cribiore (2006), 38.

<sup>108</sup> See in this corpus letter 27.9-10 and the commentary.

<sup>109</sup> See for instance *wa-qad wajahtu ilayka bi-kitābihim fī darj kitābī ilayka*, P.Marchands II 2.8, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>. See also Grob (2010a), 96-98.

<sup>110</sup> See also P.Cair.Arab. V 339.5-6, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>; P.Berl.Arab. II 77.2-3, 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>111</sup> See Grob (2010a), 69-74.

<sup>112</sup> See Grob (2010a), 74-77.

<sup>113</sup> For this expression and other expressions to be used to signal the closure of letters, see P.Khalili I, 194.

<sup>114</sup> For more about afterthoughts, see Grob (2010a), 64-69. For a general overview of the typical sections of private or business letters on papyrus and their conventional sequence and internal structure, see Grob (2010a), 82-83.