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

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Citation

Younes, K. M. M. (2013, August 27). *Joy and sorrow in early Muslim Egypt : Arabic papyrus letters, text and content*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/21541>

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

Issue Date: 2013-08-27

CHAPTER TWO

Joy and sorrow in early Muslim Egypt

“katabtu ilayki kitābī hādhā wa-anā ‘alā alladhī yasurruki wa-rabbunā maḥmūd ma‘a al-shidda wa-l-ḥāja allatī naḥnu fīhā.”

(I am writing you this letter of mine, whereas I am as you wish and our Lord be praised, in spite of the distress and the neediness that we are in.)

Letter 23.6-8

People in early Muslim Egypt, like people everywhere at this time, had good and bad experiences, went through sad and happy occasions, suffered from sickness and depression and faced the inevitable fate, death, when their time came. In their writings, they expressed to each other their emotions, their grief and hope, and how they experienced these turns of the fate. One may wonder, how would a sick person get cured with the primitive medical tools and experience then available? It must have been extremely painful for Hishām the surveyor, the author of letter 42, to have a boil between his backside and penis while measuring the city of Dalāṣ in Upper Egypt with its nasty landscape and under its hot sun. On top of all, as he writes, he and his team of surveyors were staying outdoors. Who cured him and how? And how did his painful days pass? We are not told.

To bring other sorrowful and pleasurable experiences of individuals in the life of early Islamic Egypt closer, Naṣṣār b. Abū Zayd, for instance, the author of letter no. 1, lived happy days while preparing for his marriage. He was in direct contact with his fiancée, Mahdiyya, even before concluding the contract of marriage. After sending the dowry (*mahr*), Naṣṣār was on tenterhooks waiting for Mahdiyya’s consent to marry him. He made a supplication to God asking Him to make her satisfied, to let her come to him in good health, to bring them together in health and happiness and to make their religion thrive. On the contrary, ‘Amr b. Zubayd, the sender of letter 2, had a bad experience with his rude and disobedient (*nāshiz*) wife, who used to insult and curse him. Moreover, she complained to the arbitrator (*al-ḥakam*) that he oppressed and beat her. Consequently, the marriage was dissolved. The addressee of letter 3, lived a mixture of joy and sorrow. He had a similar bad experience with his wife like ‘Amr b. Zubayd. His free wife (*al-ḥurra*) complained about him to the *amīr* for reasons unknown to us, but he at the same time received news that two of his female slaves gave birth to a boy and a girl.

Death in the family brought sadness for family members especially for females. Ruqayya bt. Yaḥyā, the sender of letter 18, wrote that she has had hard times after the death of her son and that she felt lonely, weak, poor and confused after this loss. She was also missing her full brother, who was absent during this calamity. Ruqayya was so depressed that she expressed the wish that she had died before facing these hard times. The case of Umm ‘Uthmān, the addressee of letter 20, was not much better. Umm ‘Uthmān lost, presumably,

her husband Nawfal. The letter of condolence she received from an anonymous male relative advising her to have patience and to seek refuge in God, and showing his deep sorrow and sympathy with Umm 'Uthmān's misfortune, must have relieved her a bit, but the misfortune was too much to be forgotten with a few words. Also the absent Zaynab bt. Abū Ziyād, the addressee of letter 17, was informed by a certain Wusāma b. Ṭalq al-Tujībī about her father's death, Abū Ziyād, after suffering from long-term illness. Abū Ziyād's slave, Muqsim, took good care of his master during the latter's last painful days. In return, Muqsim got the best reward for someone in his situation: his freedom. Likewise, Abū al-Azhar and Abū 'Uthmān were grieved by the loss of a certain Abū 'Abd al-'Azīz. In his letter of condolence, letter 19, another Abū al-Azhar tried to soothe the mourners' pains by expressing his profound sadness and sympathy, and reminding them by the deceased's good deeds and the reward that must be awaiting him in the life to come, i.e. the paradise.

Other calamities kept family members temporarily apart. 'Īsā, for instance, the author of letter 4, witnessed a big fight between two men or two groups of people belonging to two different Arab tribes, Banū Mudlij being one of them. In this fight a killing took place and 'Īsā who was temporary staying there could not leave. He had to write a letter to his wife to explain the reasons for his delay. Later on, the two fighting groups asked for an amicable settlement (*ṣulḥ*) and thus 'Īsā had to wait a few days more for the agreement to have effect. 'Īsā's tragedy was not only the fight itself, but an even greater loss was financial, namely of two *dīnārs*. He bought eggs for two *dīnārs* before breaking the fast of Ramaḍān (*al-fiṭr*) to bring to his family, but all the eggs got spoiled due to the long delay and therefore he had to throw them away. In letter 3, the sender complained to the addressee, both anonymous to us, that the latter's servant, Maymūn, did not come to him nor help him with little or much. The sender made a supplication to God to protect him from what grieved him in this world and the hereafter. The sender did not explicitly tell what his problem was, but he was indeed in need of help.

The economy is an important source for both joy and distress. For instance, the female sender of letter 23, expresses to her sister her distress and neediness, presumably due to a lack of money, but she apologizes for not writing to her about it before. Also the sad (*shaqiya*) female sender of letter 13 asked the male addressee to take care of a certain al-Zubayr, who is poor and needy (*miskīn*), and to buy him a garment as compensation (*jabr*). 'Abd al-Malik b. Ṣalatān, the author of letter 28, too, writes to a certain Musāfir b. Kathīr asking him to pay more attention to him and to fulfill his needs as he is the only one who could do so. In contrast, al-Khayr b. Muslim, the author of letter 32, joyously writes to his business partner and relative, al-Miswar b. Rajā', that he reached the city of Dimyāt in good health and bought the linen he was looking for. During his long journey, al-Khayr was accompanied by a good group of people which made him feel safe and happy.

Religious ceremonies and social gatherings are also major sources for both comfort and stress. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Mufaḍḍal, for example, the author of letter 37, writes to a certain Abū Sa'īd informing him that he has already intended to perform pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). Therefore, Abū Muḥammad sent to Abū Sa'īd twenty *dīnārs* so that the latter would rent something that remains unknown to us, presumably a camel, and to buy enough food supplies for the long and exhaustive journey.

At first glance, we can discern how rich and fruitful the letters are for the study and reconstruction of emotions in early Muslim Egypt. Such a study would not have been possible without having the letters published and studied together as one corpus. The letters, as shown above, give unprecedented direct insights into people's personal feelings than the literary corpus can do. They provide a fuller textual picture that can be used to voice people's personal feelings. On the other hand, one may wonder whether the written representation of emotions as they appear in the letters are really *sincere*. To what extent should we believe the tears of Ruqayya, the sorrow of 'Amr, the worry of 'Īsā, the pains of Hishām and the joy of al-Khayr? When Naṣṣār declares to his fiancée, Maḥdiyya, that he is rejoiced because they are getting married. Was he truly happy?¹¹⁵ And when al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥārith b. al-Ḥumayd writes to his absent brother to inform him that their mother got very sick since the latter's departure and that she yearns to see his face before death;¹¹⁶ was this real sickness? Did he really mean by death, *true* death? The question to be asked here, do we take these expressions for granted and be content with the accessible written representation of personal feelings as they are or should they be subjected to historical interrogation? To answer this question we need first to review the history of emotions.

Less than a century ago, emotions had become the subject of many interdisciplinary studies, i.e. sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology and history.¹¹⁷ As far as we are concerned with history, the history of emotion or "emotionology", as proposed by the husband-and-wife team of Peter and Carol Stearns, has become one of the hot new topics in social history.¹¹⁸ In their ground-breaking article published in 1985, the Stearnses created the term *emotionology* to describe "the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression; ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human conduct."¹¹⁹ The emphasis of the term is not, then, on how people experienced, represented and treated

¹¹⁵ See D.M. McMahon, *Happiness: a history* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006). In this book, McMahon studies the concept of happiness from ancient Greece to the present, relying largely on elite conceptions of felicity.

¹¹⁶ See below the discussion on sickness.

¹¹⁷ See M. Gendron, and L.F. Barrett, "Reconstructing the past: a century of ideas about emotion in psychology," *Emotion review* 1/4 (2009), 316-339; J.H. Turner, "The sociology of emotions: basic theoretical arguments," *Emotion review* 1/4 (2009), 340-354; P.A. Thoits, "The sociology of emotions," *Annual review of sociology* 15 (1989), 317-342; W.M. Reddy, "Against constructionism: the historical ethnography of emotions," *Current anthropology* 38/3 (1997), 327-351; M.B. Arnold, *Emotion and personality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); R.R. Cornelius, *The science of emotion: research and tradition in the psychology of emotion* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1996); T. Dixon, *From passions to emotions: the creation of a secular psychological category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); D. Evans, *Emotion: the science of sentiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); W.M. Reddy, "Emotional liberty: politics and history in the anthropology of emotions," *Cultural anthropology* 14 (1999), 256-288; R. MacMullen, *Feelings in history, ancient and modern* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2003); W.M. Reddy, "Historical research on the self and emotions," *Emotion review* 1/4 (2009), 302-315.

¹¹⁸ See P.N. Stearns, and C.Z. Stearns "Emotionology: clarifying the history of emotions and emotional standards," *The American historical review* 90/4 (1985), 813-836; B.H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about emotions in history," *The American historical review* 107/3 (2002), 824; J. Plamper, "The history of emotions: an interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," *History and theory* 49/2 (2010), 262. See also S.J. Matt, "Current emotion research in history: or, doing history from the inside out," *Emotion review* 3/1 (2011), 118-119; C. Cubitt, "The history of the emotions: a debate," *Early Medieval Europe* 10/2 (2001), 225-227; S. Airlie, "The history of emotions and emotional history," *Early Medieval Europe* 10/2 (2001), 235-241; A. Wierzbicka, "The "history of emotions" and the future of emotion research," *Emotion review* 2 (2010), 269-273.

¹¹⁹ Stearns and Stearns (1985), 318.

their feelings, but on what people thought about these feelings. The term thus draws a clear line between the collective emotional standards of a society, i.e. emotionology and the emotional experiences of individuals and groups (emotions).¹²⁰

Long time before the Stearnes (in 1938), the historian Lucien Febvre was the first to call for collaboration between historians and psychologists to study and reconstruct the emotions of the past.¹²¹ Since then many historians and psychologists have become actively engaged with the study of emotions and the questions of continuity and change in human emotions. They began to examine change in personal feelings and how they are socially represented and treated.

In the past few decades, the field has expanded massively. Barbara Rosenwein, one of the leading historians of emotions, encouraged the scholars to take up the task of studying and reconstructing the emotions of past generations as serious as they take “other ‘invisible’ topics, such as ecology and gender.”¹²² In her works, Rosenwein shows the problems and offers valuable methods to study and reconstruct emotions of the past. Rosenwein has proposed what she calls “emotional communities”,¹²³ i.e. “social groups whose members adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value or devalue the same or related emotions,” in order to study “collective emotions” of a certain community.¹²⁴ To explain, Rosenwein says: “An emotional community is a group in which people have a common stake, interests, values and goals. Thus it is often a social community. But it is also possibly a “textual community,” created and reinforced by ideologies, teachings, and common presuppositions.”¹²⁵ The starting point in Rosenwein’s method is to gather a dossier of sources for one community, no matter how large the dossier is. Then, to collect the words and phrases of emotions as they appear in the texts, weigh them to establish their relative importance, see in which context they are used, and how often and how they are expressed, e.g. forcefully or gently.¹²⁶ Rosenwein argues that “if this method is employed for each frequently mentioned emotion (noting also emotions that seem to be missing), eventually patterns should emerge – the outlines of an emotional community.”¹²⁷ Defending the authenticity of the “second hand” representation of emotions, Rosenwein states that “we should not worry about whether an emotion is authentic unless the particular emotional community that we are studying is itself concerned about authenticity.”¹²⁸ She continues: “If an emotion is the standard response of a particular group in certain instances, the question should not be whether it betrays real

¹²⁰ Stearns and Stearns (1985), 318; Rosenwein (2002), 224; Matt (2011), 118.

¹²¹ L. Febvre, “History and psychology,” in: P. Burke (ed.) and K. Folca (trans.), *A new kind of history: from the writings of Febvre* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row Publishers, 1938), 5.

¹²² Rosenwein (2006), 1-2. See also B.H. Rosenwein, “Writing without fear about early medieval emotions,” *Early Medieval Europe* 10/2 (2001), 229-234.

¹²³ “The definition suggests that any social group with common interests and goals should qualify as an emotional community. One would logically pick a group and read everything that its members wrote, carefully noting the emotions.” See Plamper (2010), 253.

¹²⁴ B.H. Rosenwein, *Emotional communities in the early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2; B.H. Rosenwein, “Problems and methods in the history of emotions,” in: A. Acorn (ed.), *Passions in context: international journal for the history and theory of emotions* 1 (2010), 1, 10-13.

¹²⁵ Rosenwein (2006), 24-25.

¹²⁶ Rosenwein (2010), 12-24.

¹²⁷ Plamper (2010), 254; Rosenwein (2010), 10-17.

¹²⁸ Rosenwein (2010), 21.

feeling but rather why one norm obtains over another.”¹²⁹ Commenting on the difference and significance of sources and materials having emotions, Rosenwein writes: “It is true that genres tend to have different uses for emotions. Presumably letters best reveal how a person “really” feels.”¹³⁰

William Reddy, a historian and anthropologist, one of the most important recent historians of emotions, suggests another theoretical approach to the study of emotions. To investigate the strong relationship between the emotions, culture and language, Reddy proposes the term “emotives” to describe “the speech act” of expressing feelings.¹³¹ He argues that emotional expressions are neither “constative” nor “performative”. They are a third kind of utterance, says Reddy. He argues that “*emotives* are at once managerial and exploratory. An emotional expression is an attempt to call up the emotion that is expressed; it is an attempt to feel what one says one feels. These attempts usually work, but they can and do fail. When they fail, the emotive expression is “exploratory” in the sense that one discovers something unexpected about one’s own feelings.”¹³² “Emotives,” Reddy says, “are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions, instruments that may be more or less successful.”¹³³ In addition to *emotives*, Reddy offers the terms “emotional regimes” which he defines as “the set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime.”¹³⁴ and “emotional refuges” which refers to “a relationship, ritual, or organization (whether informal or formal) that provides safe release from prevailing emotional norms and allows relation of emotional effort, with or without an ideological justification, which may shore up or threaten the existing emotional regime.”¹³⁵

In spite of the different approaches adopted to study emotions, historians of the emotions since the beginning shared the conviction that emotions or the ways in which they are experienced, expressed, treated and interpreted are “social products” shaped and reshaped by the society and the culture in which they are surrounded.¹³⁶

Depending on the point of view from which one studies emotions, whether emotionology, emotional communities, emotives, or all three, scholars build up their works on the Stearnses’, Rosenwein’s and Reddy’s methods and methodologies.¹³⁷ Since this chapter is mainly interested in showing who feels what, how, when and why, Rosenwein’s

¹²⁹ Rosenwein (2010), 21.

¹³⁰ “Letters reveal-in however commonplace a fashion- the feelings (or simulated feelings) of those who composed them.” Rosenwein (2006), 28, 193.

¹³¹ W.M. Reddy, *The navigation of feeling: a framework for the history of emotions* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 105, 128; Matt (2011), 119.

¹³² Plamper (2010), 240.

¹³³ Reddy (2001), 105.

¹³⁴ Reddy (2001), 129.

¹³⁵ Reddy (2001), 129.

¹³⁶ Rosenwein (2006), 15, 27; Rosenwein (2010), 8-9; Matt (2011), 118; A. Wierzbicka, “Human emotions: universal or culture-specific?,” *American anthropologist* 88/3 (1986), 584-594. On the other hand, Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen argue that there are six universal emotions, i.e. happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger and surprise. See P. Ekman, and W. Friesen, “Constants across cultures in the face and emotion,” *Journal of personality and social psychology* 17 (1971), 124-129; P. Ekman, “All emotions are basic,” in: P. Ekman, R.J. Davidson, *The nature of emotion: fundamental questions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 56-58.

¹³⁷ See Matt (2011), 119.

methods work very well as a strong theoretical and methodological ground for this study. I also follow the guidelines established by Mary Garrison for the interpretation of medieval peoples' emotions in written texts.¹³⁸ According to Garrison, we should read our texts with care avoiding projecting our own ideas of what people thought or felt into their words. The goal must be to recover the shared understanding of the two correspondents rather than anything else, says Garrison.¹³⁹

Before we start our investigation, it is perhaps worth grouping together some difficulties and challenges to the study of emotions through written texts. As we do not have direct access to the inner world of our individuals, some caution is therefore required when dealing with words and phrases of emotions; taking into consideration that some of these texts are stereotyped and formulaic expressions.¹⁴⁰ It is also worth keeping in mind the fact that emotions differ from one place to another, one culture to another and from an era to another. Even within the same society, individuals may differ in their reactions and in their ability and wish to express their feelings.¹⁴¹ Moreover, there is always a social desirability in the way feelings and thoughts are to be described in writings.

Having all these caveats in mind, I will take an effort to collect, study and analyze people's personal representation and treatment of emotions as they appear in the letters, aiming to show to what extent this could help us to achieve a better understanding of the early Muslim society in Egypt. Besides emotions, this chapter will deal with other legal and social topics, attempting to answer the questions posed in the introduction.

The discussion is based mainly on the topics raised in the letters edited in this thesis, but also includes almost all relevant references in published and also some of yet unpublished letters. The study shall let the letters speak for themselves and give them the central place in the discussion. Some letters are cited and studied in several places in the discussion because they fit more than one account.

It would have been tempting to extend this study to include inscriptions and other documentary and archeological materials and then compare these with literature, but this would have entirely altered the frame of the present work. The study just aims to show as a case study what information can be gotten out of the Arabic documentary letters alone. A central objective of this study is to contribute a coherent and comprehensive story of people's personal feelings or at least the ways in which they are presented in the letters to anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and scholars working on literature to allow further research on this field. It goes without saying that Greek and Coptic letters are beyond the scope of this study as we only focus on the Arab-Muslim community who communicated amongst each other in Arabic.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ M. Garrison, "The study of emotions in early medieval history: some starting points," *Early Medieval Europe* 10/2 (2001), 243-250.

¹³⁹ Garrison (2001), 244.

¹⁴⁰ Historians of emotions, on the other hand, argue that the existence of *topoi* and formulaic expressions should not deter us from studying and establishing points of continuity and change. See Cubitt (2001), 226; Rosenwein (2001), 232; Garrison (2001), 247. See also below the discussion on the value of *heath*.

¹⁴¹ "In anthropological literature, there is always one culture and one emotional style for every society studied, even though individuals are recognized to adapt to it in different ways." See Rosenwein (2006), 23.

¹⁴² A big project studying the history of emotions in the Greek world entitled: The social and cultural construction of emotions: the Greek paradigm is currently taking place at Oxford University. The project is

1. Emotions and the family

1.1. Spouses

“*lā khayr fī rajul bi-ghayr imra’a wa-lā imra’a bi-ghayr rajul.*”

(There is no goodness in a man without a woman nor (in) a woman without a man.)

Letter 1.23-24

Marriage and the relationship between husbands and wives is obviously a constant source of joy and sorrow depending on the personalities of the individuals involved, the circumstances, the stage the marriage is in and the conditions under which it was concluded.¹⁴³ On the one end of the spectrum we find the spectacular joy between two

based mainly on analysis of documentary sources (inscriptions and papyri). For more information about this ERC project check their website at: <http://emotions.classics.ox.ac.uk/>.

¹⁴³ The Qur’an presents marriage as the major source of comfort and joy for the husband and the wife (Q 2:187; 30:21). Through marriage both spouses would control their lust and satisfy their sexual needs in a licit manner, since all forms of sexual relationships outside marriage are strictly forbidden. Those who commit adultery (*zinā*) are to be severely punished with death penalty by stoning if they are married (*muḥṣan*). As for those who are not married but commit this heinous sin (*fāḥisha*), they are to be punished with one hundred lashes. Both punishments are to be carried out in public in order to serve as a strong deterrent to others. The institution of marriage occupies a central and pivotal place in Islamic law. It is recognized as a highly religious sacred covenant (*mithāqan ghalīẓan*, Q 4:20-21) upon which the entire society is built. Due to the great significance of marriage in Islam, the topic received the lion’s share of the interest of almost all Muslim jurists. They devoted considerable portions of their works to studying and discussing all issues pertaining to marriage. The basic rules of marriage are given in the Qur’an, while the *Sunna* provides only some necessary guidelines. Both sources exhort and encourage every Muslim individual to establish family/families. The Qur’an states that it is permissible for men, who are physically and financially able to lead a safe conjugal life to marry up to four women at the same time in case they treat them well, equally and with justice. However, if men cannot abide by these instructions, they are instructed to marry only one woman (Q 4:3). It is also permitted for Muslim men to marry Jewish and Christian women (*kitābiyyāt*) (Q 5:5). Besides marriage, men can take an unlimited number of slave concubines as far as they needed to fulfill their needs (Q 4:3; 23:5-6; 70:29-30). Muslim men are prohibited from marrying women who are too closely related to them by blood relationship or consanguinity, foster relationship and marriage, i.e. mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, nieces, foster-mothers, foster-sisters, step-mothers, step-daughters, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (Q 4:22-23). Moreover, a Muslim man is forbidden to take two sisters together as wives (Q 4:23) or to marry a married woman, unless she is a slave captive and to inherit the widow of a deceased relative (Q 4:19; 4:24). On the other hand, a Muslim woman is only permitted to marry one man at a time. The reason behind this is to be sure about the paternity of her children. In case a woman married a second husband, this marriage is considered completely invalid (*bāṭil*) and her children from the second husband would not be recognized as legal children and therefore would be excluded from inheritance. A Muslim woman is also prohibited to wed a non-Muslim, even if he is from the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). The explanation given for this prohibition is because the non-Muslim husband would not treat his Muslim wife according to the principles of Islam, but according to his own religion. Moreover, the children would innately follow their father’s religion. See J. Boyd “Nikāḥ,” E.I.2, vol. 8, 26-35; P. Peters, “Zinā,” E.I.2, vol. 11, 509-510; S. Spectorsky, *Women in classical Islamic law, a survey of the sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 25-30 and note 4; J. Esposito, *Women in Muslim family law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 15-21; J. Tucker, *Women, family and gender in Islamic law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38-41; M. Kazi, *Family and social obligations in Islam* (Karachi: Ferozsons, 1996), 34-44; G. Stern, *Marriage in early Islam* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1939), 95-103; A.A. Khan, T.M. Khan et al., *Encyclopedia of Islamic law, family law in Islam* (New Delhi: Pentagon press, 2006), vol. 5.

fiancées expressed in a letter containing references to legal and organizational matters concerning the upcoming marriage ceremonies but also very personal expressions of longing.

We begin the discussion on spouses with a brief review of the contents of the two letters dealing with the relationship between husbands and wives (letters 1 and 2). We then try to show what we can actually learn from reading these letters about emotional ties between partners in early Islamic Egypt. The focus then shifts from individual experiences and expressions of personal feelings to legal discussion on marriage and divorce using some published legal acts and other papyrological references related to the first stages in the process of marriage, aiming to show how Islamic marriage and divorce were socially and legally perceived and conducted in the early Muslim society in Egypt.

In letter no. 1, Naṣṣār b. Abū Zayd writes to his fiancée, Mahdiyya, informing her that he sent to her two bracelets as a dowry (*mahr*) in addition to two extra bells¹⁴⁴ and two necklaces as a gift (“*fa-qad ba’athtu ilayki siwārayn li-tanzurī mahraki wa-l-juljulayn wa-l-‘iqdayn ‘alayhi*,” ll.2-3). Naṣṣār tells Mahdiyya that she is free to keep the two bracelets with her as well as the necklace(s) (“*fa-in raḍīti an taḥbisī al-siwārayn ‘indaki ammā al-‘iqd fa-huwa laki*,” ll.4-5, 7).¹⁴⁵ It is unclear, however, what she shall do with the bells as there is a lacuna obscuring the reading. He informs her further that he has kept with him another item to offer to her during the marriage ceremony in order to make her much more contented (“*wa-qad khaba’tu shay’ li-kayy ahabuhu laki wa-tatasarrī ‘inda al-milāk*,” ll.8-9). He hopes that the *mahr* will appeal to her and that she will accept to marry him soon (“*fa-as’alu Allāh yurḍiyaki wa-iiyānā wa-yukhrijaki ilaynā fī ‘āfiya*,” l.4). In the same letter, Naṣṣār discusses with his future wife the preparation for the marriage ceremony (*milāk*). He asks her to write back to him about the kind of fruits he should buy for the guests, namely fresh fruits or dried ones, suggesting to buy fresh fruits, because they are preferred by people “these days” (“*wa-akhbirīnī mā arfiq li-l-milāk al-fākiha al-yābisa am al-fākiha al-raṭiba li-anna al-fākiha al-raṭiba aḥabbu ilā al-nās al-yawm min al-fākiha al-yābisa*,” ll.10-14). Naṣṣār also asks Mahdiyya to inform a certain Abū al-Ḥakam, presumably Mahdiyya’s guardian (*walī*), that he received the trousseau (*al-matā’*), i.e. the household chattels and that he is pleased with it (“*wa-akhbirīhi annā qad ra’aynā al-ḥulīy wa-‘arafnā al-matā’ wa-kull shay’ wa-raḍīnā bihi*,” ll.19-20). To conclude his letter, Naṣṣār makes a supplication to God asking Him to bring them together in health and happiness and to make their religion thrive (“*jama’a Allāh baynī wa-baynaki fī ‘āfiya wa-surūr wa-yaj’aluhu ṣalāḥ li-dīninā*,” ll.21-22). He further cites a prophetic tradition that emphasizes the aversion to being single, stating that there is no goodness in a man without a woman nor in a woman without a man (“*fa-inna rasūl Allāh qāla fī-mā balaghanā lā khayr fī rajul bi-ghayr imra’a wa-lā imra’a bi-ghayr rajul*,” ll.22-24).¹⁴⁶ Finally, Naṣṣār asks Mahdiyya not to delay her departure more than three days, because she pleases him (“*wa-anā as’aluki bi-mā as’alu maratī bihi allā tuttrakī ‘annī ba’d thalāthat ayyām shay’ fa-innaki ‘indī riḍā*,” ll.24-25).

¹⁴⁴ See the commentary.

¹⁴⁵ See also the commentary to line 4.

¹⁴⁶ See the commentary.

The next step after Mahdiyya's acceptance of the dowry and the marriage (*qabūl*) would be concluding the marriage contract in a social gathering (the *milāk* ceremony), as Naṣṣār writes, where family members of both sides, relatives and friends are to be invited and then a new Muslim family in early Islamic Egypt would be established.¹⁴⁷

On the contrary, 'Amr b. Zubayd, the sender of letter 2, describes a bad conjugal experience with his disobedient wife which ended with divorce. In this letter, 'Amr writes to his father-in-law, possibly named 'Abd Al[lāh?], about his wife, who complained to the arbitrator (*al-ḥakam*), stating that 'Amr oppressed and beat her, because he prevented her from going out ("wa-dhālika kulluhu min ḥaṣrī lahā min al-khurūj wa-l-ṭawafān fī al-buyūt wa-l-ṭuruq fa-lammā ra'at annī manā'tuhā dhālika kullahu dhahabat ilā al-ḥakam fa-akhbarathu annahu yufalu bihā mā lam yufal bi-ḥurra min al-ḍarb wa-l-bu's wa-l-ḥirm," ll.7-11). 'Amr informs his father-in-law further that she used to insult and curse him and that he tolerated that for a while ("thumma innahā kānat taqūlu min al-qawl mā law annaka kunta tusāmi'ahu la-'adhartanī 'alayhā tantahiku al-sharaf fihi wa-l-nafs wa-taqūlu qawl mā sami'tu imra'a taqūlu li-zawjihā mā taqūlu al-'Allāna mā-lā yaṣ'adu fī al-samā' wa-lā yaq'udu fī al-ard," ll.11-14). After his unsuccessful attempts to improve his wife's ill nature, 'Amr sent to her some pious men from his clan, amongst whom a certain Abū al-Gharrā' by reminding her of God and advising her to improve her bad behavior and to restrain her tongue until the addressee would come and investigate everything himself ("fa-lammā ra'aytu minhā annahā irtakabat aswa' amrihā ba'athtu ilayhā rijāl ṣāliḥīn min 'ashīratī wa-arsaltu ilā Abū al-Gharrā' fa-qultu lahum idhhabū fa-dhkirūhā bi-llāh illā itqat Allāh wa-aṣlahat khuluqahā wa-kaffat lisānahā ḥattā taqdim,"

¹⁴⁷ The first step towards establishing a Muslim family starts when a man offers a proposal of marriage (*yāb*), i.e. betrothal (*khiṭba*) to a woman, who is usually represented by her family or more precisely her guardian (*walī*), who could either be the father or the bride's nearest male relative. The betrothal does not involve a contract and therefore does not form any legal obligation on either side. However, it gives the two future spouses the right to see each other. The betrothal also gives the fiancé a right of priority in marriage as another man is banned to ask the hand of a betrothed lady. If the proposal of marriage is accepted, the contract of marriage could be concluded. The marriage contract (*'aqd al-nikāḥ*), like all legal contracts in Islamic law, is binding and must meet certain conditions concerning content and form. It is usually concluded by a notary between the groom or his agent and the bride's guardian in the presence of at least two sound witnesses (*shuhūd 'udūl*). The payment of the dowry (*mahr*) is an essential element in every valid marriage contract. A valid marriage would also require the consent of the bride (*qabūl*). In addition to the abovementioned conditions, the jurists grant the wife the right to add certain clauses stipulating additional provisions to the marriage contract, even if these conditions are already part of any valid contract, e.g. recording the payment of the bride's dowry. In most cases, these stipulations support and expand the rights of the wife and limit the privileges of the husband particularly on the issue of polygamy, namely prohibiting the husband from taking another wife or even a concubine (*jāriya*). Other possible stipulations prevent the husband from taking the wife out of her hometown; secure the wife's right to visit her family as well as allowing her family to visit her, treat the wife with reverence, supply her with all living expenses and not to subject her to hard work. Sometimes the right of the bride to add such clauses is connected with the amount and division of the dowry. See Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), *al-Mudawwana al-kubrā, riwāyat Ṣaḥnūn* (Cairo, 1905-1906), vol. 4, 11-15, 48-49; A.M. Delcambre, "Khiṭba," *E.I.2*, vol. 5, 22-23; A. al-Sarīṭī, *Aḥkām al-zawāj wa-l-ṭalāq fī al-sharī'a al-islāmiyya* (Beirut: al-Dār al-Jāmi'iyya, 1995), 16-29; Tucker (2008), 41-42, 46, 49; Spectorsky (2010), 66, 78, 82; Kazi (1996), 39-41, 43; Stern (1939), 23, 32-56; J. Schacht, *An introduction to Islamic law* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1982), 161-168; A. Rahim, *The principles of Muhammadan jurisprudence according to the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools* (London: Luzac, 1911), 326-350; M. 'Abidī, *al-Aḥwāl al-shakṣiyya wa-l-mirāth fī al-fiqh al-mālikī* (al-Dār al-Bayḍā: Ifrīqiyyā al-Sharq, 1996), 25-29; K. Ali, "Marriage in classical Islamic jurisprudence: a survey of doctrines," in: A. Quraishi, F. Vogel (eds.), *The Islamic marriage contract, case studies in Islamic family law* (Harvard: Islamic legal studies program, Harvard law school, 2008), 21 and the sources cited there; Y. Rapoport, "Matrimonial gifts in early Islamic Egypt," *Islamic law and society* 7/1 (2000), 12-14.

ll.15-19). But this reconciliatory attempt made by an external party was also deemed to failure. ‘Amr continues to express his dissatisfaction with his wife’s nature assuring his father-in-law that he was serious about the marriage (“*fa-wa-llāh alladhī lā ilāh illā huwa la-qad kuntu kārih li-mā fa’alat al-‘Allāna wa-mā bī illā raghiba fī alladhī ja’ala Allāh baynī wa-baynaka min al-ṣihr wa-l-ḥaqq wa-innī murtaghib bi-muṣāharatika wa-mā qaddama Allāh laka min al-sharaf wa-l-ḥaqq wa-l-ṭhanā’ wa-l-ḥamd fī al-dīn fa-mithluka yartaghibu al-rajul fī muṣāharatihi*,” ll.20-25). However, he informs the father-in-law that he has recently divorced his wife or, to be more precise, he has been divorced from her and asks him not to be angry at him, because it was against his will. ‘Amr ends his letter with the wish to remarry his ex-wife awaiting the father-in-law’s arrival and approval (“*fa-lā tajid ‘alayya fī dhālika fa-innamā hiya fa’alat dhālika arjū min Allāh wa-minka an taruddahā ilayya fa-innī lam uṭliq wa-lam akhla’ ‘an hudan minnī fa-innamā iftadaytu minhā bi-dhālika min ḥujajihā wa-min lisānihā ḥattā taqdimā ilaynā*,” ll.25-26, 33-35).

The two letters bring us closer to conjugal life and obligations in early Islamic Egypt and the joyful and sorrowful stories and emotions stemming from them. The letters show how, when and in what context emotional bonds between partners were established and broken up. In letter 1, for example, Naṣṣār tries to make his joy visible to the future wife. In order to create a strong emotional bond, Naṣṣār sent to the future wife many jewelries as a gift besides the legal dowry. Naṣṣār also claims that he kept another item with him in order to offer to the bride as a surprise-gift at the time of signing the contract. The reason, according to Naṣṣār himself, is to make the bride much more happy. Besides discussing wedding ceremony arrangements, the letter contains many words and gestures of emotions, especially longing, joy and satisfaction. It is worth mentioning here that the very intimate personal feeling of longing given at the end of the letter is accompanied by a prophetic tradition emphasizing the aversion to remain single. I was not able to find an equivalent of this *ḥadīth* in canonical *ḥadīth* works, but the authenticity of lost *ḥadīths* and the trustworthiness of Naṣṣār are not issues of discussion here. I have discussed elsewhere the early lost *ḥadīth* codices written on papyrus.¹⁴⁸ Further to the religious significance in expressing personal feelings of longing, a supplication to bring the two fiancées together in health and happiness has been made at the end of the letter. Now then what can we learn of this letter about social mores of the society? Did Naṣṣār act according to or disregard for social mores of his society? In order to answer this question and to fully understand the text, we have to consider the fact that there were several factors that could have either enhanced or hindered expressing intimate feelings of love and passion between two genders. To demonstrate this, in a fragmentary letter introduced by Grohmann, as a romantic love letter, probably transported by a pigeon, the sender shows the sickness of his soul and heart (“*wa-in kānat nafsī marīḍa wa-qalbī []*,” PERF 639[= P.Word, 181].2 3rd/9th). At the end of the fragment, it is said that a copy of this letter was made and that the slave girl may have seen it. The letter is unique. But, unfortunately, the fragmentary condition of the papyrus does not allow further investigation of the text. The fragment does not tell in what context these words are expressed, nor does it say to whom they are addressed. Grohmann

¹⁴⁸ K.M. Younes, and Y. Nour “Fragment of a lost Ḥadīth collection of Sufyān al-Thawrī preserved on papyrus,” (forthcoming).

has also given another example of a love letter on papyrus (PERF 687[= P.Word, 181].2 3rd/9th). Grohmann's understanding of the letter's contents made him come up with this assumption. Let us then read the letter one more time. In the letter, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, that he has put a letter enclosed in another letter under the cushion and that he forgot to take it with him when leaving. Thus, the sender asks the addressee to immediately send this letter with the guard, namely the carrier of the current letter (*"amta'anī allāh bika qad kuntu waḍa'tu al-bāriḥa ruq'atan khalfa al-wisāda wa-fihā ruq'atan ukhrā wa-nasītu an ākhudha mā ma'ī al-yawm fa-b'ath bihā ilayya al-sā'a ma'a hādhā al-ḥāris in shā'a Allāh,"* ll.2-10). Now I wonder whether we see here any love or romantic expressions. Perhaps Grohmann indicates the enclosed letter that was kept under the pillow. And maybe this is why the sender was so worried and serious to have it as soon as possible before somebody else could have seen it. How can we know? This is too far-off assumption. It is not entirely clear why Grohmann entitled this letter as a love letter, as he does not provide a commentary on this letter. In her commentary on the first letter, Grob explained the scarcity of such kinds of letters (romantic love letters) due to social conventions and popular use of poetry to express love and affection rather than using written correspondences. Grob says: "A love letter would surely have been kept and disposed of differently from ordinary correspondence."¹⁴⁹ But, one may wonder, if someone expresses his feelings of love and affection in poetry, why would it be a problem of having them written down. The expression of love itself was not an issue, then, but to whom love expressions were addressed. Naṣṣār was not then breaking the social mores of his society by expressing his personal feelings of love and longing towards his future wife, but bringing them to the surface.

As far as the second letter is concerned in this discussion, the main story revolves around an unsuccessful marriage. The letter brings us close to one of the family disputes that resulted in divorce soon after a short-lived marriage and shows a complete mismatch between the husband and the wife from the start.¹⁵⁰ This assumption is based on a number of grounds. First and foremost, the voice of the letter shows the husband's surprise from the wife's bad nature soon after the departure of the father-in-law to the Fayyūm, presumably after bringing her to his place (*dukhūl*).¹⁵¹ The husband says that the wife started to make excuses and insisted to go out, most probably without his permission. He also expresses his shock from the wife's sharp tongue. Certainly, the wife's bad behavior and ill nature would not be an issue of complain after a long-lived marriage.

¹⁴⁹ See Grob (2010a), 93.

¹⁵⁰ When the objectives of marriage remain unfulfilled and the attempts to reconcile and settle the differences between the husband and the wife fail, Islamic law allows the two spouses to dissolve the marriage peacefully (Q 2:231). Islamic law also grants the husband the absolute right to break up the marriage and pronounce a unilateral divorce, if he dislikes his wife. As the Islamic law grants the husband the absolute right to divorce his wife at his will, it also grants the wife the right to demand separation (*khul'*) from her husband, whom she dislikes. The term *khul'* in its literal sense means "to take off or to remove" but as a technical term in Islamic law it signifies an agreement between the husband and the wife to dissolve the marriage through compensation paid by the wife to her husband, namely part or all of the dowry and other gifts she may have received from him (Q 2:229). If the wife makes a demand for *khul'* and the husband refuses, it is her right to go to the judge (*qāḍī*) to seek *khul'* from him. In this case, the *qāḍī* does not have to investigate whether the wife proposes reasonable reasons for seeking separation or not, but only to make sure that she dislikes him. The *qāḍī* would then order the husband to let the wife go. See Mālik, *Mudawwana*, vol. 5, 17-25.

¹⁵¹ For this term, see below.

In this letter as well as in letter 3 of this corpus which also shows a problem between a husband and a wife, we see the wife breaks up her silence about her discontent with the husband and goes to complain about him to religious and administrative authorities, i.e. *al-ḥakam* and *al-amīr*. The husbands, on the other side, seem to do nothing except to express their distress, anger and angst to close family members and to complain about their wives shameful acts. In his letter to the father-in-law, 'Amr b. Zubayd reports on his divorce against his will, complains about his wife's ill nature and sharp tongue and strangely enough asks him to remarry her. Does this refer to or reveal a strong love bond with the ex-wife? We can never be sure. But the letter is very emotional in tone and content with many words of sorrow and regret. It also shows high respect to the father-in-law and points up to what extent 'Amr is concerned to keep the bond of the *ṣihr* relationship (relationship through marriage) with his father-in-law very strong.

The addressee of letter 3, too, wrote a letter to his brother to express his deep sorrow and anxiety of his free wife (*al-ḥurra*), who also complained about him to the *amīr* for reasons unknown to us. The brother responded sympathetically to his brother's sorrowful letter and asked him not worry that much as he, the sender, will take care of this matter.

In all letters discussed above, emotions, whether painful or pleasurable, are predominant, especially in those touching upon marriage and the relationship between husbands and wives. While Naṣṣār, 'Amr and the two brothers, the addressee and sender of letter 3, speak of their own personal experience, they indicate a warm emotional community within the families. A point to which I shall return when discussing children and women of the house.

In addition to bringing the experiences of engaged and married individuals in the life of early Islamic Egypt, letters 1 and 2 are extremely significant as they bring to light an abundance of information about the social and legal practice of marriage and divorce settlements in early Muslim society in Egypt. To be more precise, the first letter sheds light on a number of significant issues, amongst which the direct communication between the bride and the groom before conducting the marriage contract, the payment of the dowry, the delivery of the bride's trousseau and the preparation of the marriage ceremony.

Unexpectedly, the letter records a direct written contact with the fiancée. Moreover, Mahdiyya is represented as a messenger between the future husband and the guardian (*walī*), Abū al-Ḥakam, whose role before concluding the marriage contract seems to be limited to delivering the trousseau to Naṣṣār's place.¹⁵² The marriage negotiations and settlements take place between the two future spouses, as the letter illustrates. The letter also states that the trousseau was provided by Mahdiyya's family from their own money.¹⁵³

¹⁵² For the role and right of the guardian in Islamic law, see Khan, et al. (2006), 223-252.

¹⁵³ The bride's trousseau (*jahāz/shiwār/matā'*) or the "counterpart" dowry is another sort of nuptial gift which was provided by the bride's family either as a gift or a loan (*'aṭiyya/āriyya*) or supplied as part of the groom's dowry. Mālik as well as other jurists hardly touch upon this dowry while discussing the nuptial gifts. However, in two prophetic traditions related to the prophet's marriage to 'Ā'isha (d. 58/678) and the marriage of the prophet's daughter, Fāṭima (d. 11/632), to 'Alī (d. 40/661), the trousseau is referred to as *matā'*, namely the household utensils. It is reported that the prophet asked 'Alī to put one-third of the dowry to Fāṭima into household chattels. In another version, this one-third took the form of clothes. In the prophet's marriage to 'Ā'isha, it is said that Abū Bakr (d. 13/634) provided his daughter with household equipment of a value of fifty *dirhams*. It is not clear, however, whether Abū Bakr provided the trousseau from his own money or from the dowry given by the prophet. See Rapoport (2000), 1-35; Stern (1939), 55 and the sources cited there.

On the other hand, the dowry that Naṣṣār offered to Mahdiyya and the way he divided it seems quite remarkable.¹⁵⁴ He sent three different accessories, two items of each, i.e. two bracelets, two necklaces and two bells. Perhaps all or at least the two bracelets were golden pieces. It is a pity that the word describing the value of the two bracelets is partially illegible at the beginning of line five. The reading [*dha*]*habiyy* (golden) fits nicely but it is not entirely certain.¹⁵⁵ The two bracelets, the two necklaces, the two bells and the surprise-gift, that Naṣṣār claims to keep with him till the time of signing the contract, are not all part of the dowry. Only the two bracelets constitute the dowry and the rest are gifts.¹⁵⁶

In all published marriage contracts, the dowry is paid in money and usually divided into advance (*mu'ajjal*) and deferred (*mu'ajjal/mu'akhkhar*) portions in two or more installments always due at specified dates.¹⁵⁷ On occasions, a separate *barā'a* document recording the receiving of a portion of the dowry or a *dhikr ḥaqq* document recording the acknowledgment of the deferred portions is issued at the request of one of the spouses.¹⁵⁸ Giving gifts, jewelries or any other valuable items as dowry are, to the best of my knowledge, not yet recorded in the papyri. Also the *counterpart* dowry¹⁵⁹ given by the bride's family is conspicuously absent in all published marriage contracts. It is referred to, however, in divorce deeds. The papyrus PERF 569 [= Chrest.Khoury II 19], which dates back to the 2nd/8th century, is a document of a divorce settlement between a husband named Abū Sulaymān and his wife Sukayna. In this document, the two spouses reached an agreement that Sukayna is entitled to what is in her house (*mā fī baytiḥā*), namely the trousseau, and that Abū Sulaymān is entitled to the (deferred) dowry he still owes her (*mā 'alayhi min al-ṣadāq*). Abū Sulaymān is also required to pay thirty *dīnārs* (*wa-arḍāḥā bi-thalāthīn dīnār*) as

¹⁵⁴ The dowry (*ṣadāq/mahr*) constitutes a valuable gift or amount of money which the bride is entitled to receive from the groom at the time of marriage or afterwards and not to be returned in case of divorce, if the marriage was already consummated (Q 4:4, 4:24). In case the wife is divorced before the consummation of the marriage, she has the right to receive only half of the dowry, unless she forgoes it (Q 2:237). The *mahr* could also be paid in kind or anything else that has some value or can be bought, sold or hired for a price. If the groom has no financial sources to pay the dowry at the time of marriage, it is possible for him to marry on the basis of a pledge to pay it in the future. The amount of the *mahr* could vary considerably depending mainly on the groom's financial status. Mālik agreed to fix a lower limit (*ḥadd*) for the dowry to the equivalent of one quarter of a golden *dīnār* or three silver *dirhams*. The dowry could either be paid all at once at the time of the marriage or in two or more installments. Nevertheless, the Mālikī school affirms that the deferred portions of the dowry must be specified to certain dates in the contract of marriage. The social practice of dividing the dowry into two main portions, i.e. immediate (*mu'ajjal*) at the time of the conclusion of the marriage contract and deferred (*mu'ajjal*) most probably payable only at the time of death or divorce provoked a lot of discussions between early Muslim jurists particularly between Mālik in Medina and the famous Egyptian jurist al-Layth b. Sa'd (d. 175/791). Mālik prohibits the postponement of the deferred portions of the dowry (*mu'ajjal*) at the time of death or divorce stating that the non-specification of time would invalidate the dowry and the contract in case the marriage has not yet consummated. Al-Layth, on the reverse, sees no problem in deferring the rest of the dowry at divorce or death. See Mālik, *Mudawwana*, vol. 4, 19, 47, 73-74, 103 and vol. 5, 116-117; al-Asyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *Jawāhir al-'uqūd wa-mu'īn al-qudāt wa-l-muwaqqi'īn wa-l-shuhūd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 33-38; Y. Rapoport, *Marriage, money and divorce in medieval Islamic society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14-18, 53-59; Tucker (2008), 46-47; O. Spies, "Mahr," E.I.2, vol. 6, 78-80; Stern (1939), 25; Rapoport (2000), 5-16, and the sources cited there.

¹⁵⁵ See the commentary to line 5.

¹⁵⁶ For more extensive discussion on matrimonial gifts in early Islamic Egypt, see Rapoport (2000), 1-36.

¹⁵⁷ See Rapoport (2000), 5-16.

¹⁵⁸ P.Cair.Arab. I 49 [= Chrest.Khoury II 13], dated 297/910; P.Cair.Arab. I 48 [= Chrest.Khoury II 14], dated 233/847.

¹⁵⁹ This term is proposed by Rapoport for the bride's trousseau (*jahāz/shiwār*) or any gifts provided by the bride's family to the groom, see Rapoport (2000), 22-28.

compensation for his wife, i.e. the divorce gift (*al-mut'a*).¹⁶⁰ A certain 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh stands guarantor for Abū Sulaymān and two other persons witness the agreement.¹⁶¹ A similar agreement is recorded in another divorce deed from the 3rd/9th century. In this document, the ex-husband, Muḥammad, had to deliver to his ex-wife, 'Ā'isha, what is in her house of trousseau (*shiwār*), which she contributed ("wa-qad sallama Muḥammad mā fī baytiḥā min shiwār kāna lahā," PERF 797 [= Chrest.Khoury II 20].7).¹⁶² In our letter, the trousseau is referred to as *matā'* and it is provided by the bride's guardian. Naṣṣār received the trousseau at his place and was totally pleased with it, and thus another settlement of the process of marriage was agreed upon.

The preparation for the marriage ceremony (*milāk*) is another issue to be highlighted in this discussion. It is remarkable to see Naṣṣār involving his future wife in the small details of the preparation, as he asked her about the quantity and kind of fruits he should buy for the guests. Nevertheless, he put the number twenty-five as the maximum limit. It is not clear from the text whether the mentioned number is referring to the amount of the fruits or the value of them.

Before we move to the second letter, it might be worth studying some other papyrological references related to the first stages in the process of marriage in order to lead forward our understanding of the actual social practice surrounding marriage before and after drawing up the contract. Consulting elderly family members before offering a proposal of marriage (*tazwīj*) to a girl from the same family seems to have been conventional. In one letter originating from the Fayyūm, the sender 'Umar b. Muḥammad informs the addressee Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Salām that he received his two consequent letters. In the first letter, Abū 'Alī expressed his desire to marry his cousin and asked for 'Umar's opinion, while in the second, he gave up the idea stating that he is not interested in this marriage any longer. In his response, the consultant strongly supports the idea of getting married and asks Abū 'Alī to move ahead and not to be reluctant. He, nevertheless, apologizes for being unable to attend any of the negotiations of the marriage settlements ("atānī minka kitāb ba'd kitāb fa-l-awwal minhā dhakarta lī fīhi annaka turīdu tazwīj ibnat 'ammika wa-tas'alunī 'an ra'yī fī dhālīka wa-kitāb ba'dahu bi-l-farāgh minhu fa-as'alu Allāh yā bunayya an ya'zima laka wa-lanā fī kull amr 'alā arshad al-umūr fī 'āfiya fa-ammā masarratuka iyyāya fī ibnat 'ammika fa-mā aḥsan mā ra'aytu wa-mā aḥaqq ba'dukum min ba'd bi-dhālīka wa-lam yā bunayya annī qad kuntū uḥibbu an law ḥaḍartu ba'd amrika fa-dhīrī fa-llāh al-musta'ān wa-as'alu Allāh an yaj'alāhā 'alayka mubārakatan naqiyyatan wa-an yuqni'aka bihā wa-yajma'a ulfatakum 'alā al-taḥābb wa-l-taqwā wa-an yaj'ala ba'dakum 'alā ba'd barakatan," P.Marchands V/I 11.2-6, 17-20, 3rd/9th).

Another two aspects of the marriage ceremonies that the papyri report on are the *delivery* of the bride to the groom after concluding the contract of marriage and the first

¹⁶⁰ See Mālik, *Mudawwana*, vol. 4, 19.

¹⁶¹ For a wider discussion on the divorce gift (*al-mut'a*) using this document, see Rapoport (2000), 16-21.

¹⁶² In another divorce settlement dated 461/1069, the ex-husband was absolved from paying the outstanding portion of the deferred dowry he owes his wife, which amounts to three *dīnārs* as well as all other expenses, i.e. maintenance, wheat, *dirhams*, clothing, blankets, carpets, house rent, water and oil ("ba'd an waḍa'at 'anhu jamī mu'akhhkar ṣadāqihā wa-mablaghuhu thalāthat danānīr wa-jamī mā yajibu lahā 'alayhi min al-naḥaqa al-qamḥ wa-l-darāhim wa-l-kiswa wa-l-ghīṭa' wa-l-waṭ' wa-ujrat al-maskan wa-l-mā' wa-l-zayt," Chrest.Khoury II 18, ll. 8-11). See also Chrest.Khoury II 15, dated 378/989.

sexual cohabitation (*dukhūl*). In two published private letters datable on palaeographical grounds to the 2nd/8th century, the senders inform the addressees about the *dukhūl* of their daughters with their husbands. In the first letter, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, that his daughter has cohabited with her husband, meaning mainly that the marriage has been consummated (“*wa-inna ibna[t]ī qad dakhlat ‘alā zawjihā,*” P.Ryl.Arab. B II 10r[= P.World, 171-173].13-14).¹⁶³ In the second letter, the same issue is recorded in a similar way. The female sender Umm al-Ḥakam informs her business agent Mīnā Bajūsh that she was in Fustāṭ when the husband of her daughter came and cohabited with her (“*wa-qad kuntu bi-l-fustāṭ ḥattā qadima zawj bintī fa-dakhala ‘alayhā,*” P.Jahn 12[= Chrest.Khoury I 98].7-8).¹⁶⁴

Let us now move to divorce. Letter 2 stresses the role of family arbitration before going to court which echoes the Qur’anic command to bring forth two arbiters from the husband’s side and the wife’s side to judge between the two (Q 4:35).¹⁶⁵ The letter shows that after the husband’s unsuccessful attempts to improve the wife’s nature either by advising her and preventing her from going out or by beating and oppressing her, as the wife claimed before the arbitrator, ‘Amr sent to his wife some pious men from his clan. He also asked a certain Abū al-Gharra’, most probably from the wife’s side, to go along with his people to advise her to improve her bad behavior and to restrain her tongue. But the external reconciliatory attempt failed and the court was the only available solution for the repressed and oppressed wife. The result was to dissolve the marriage according to the wife’s will.

The letter also casts light on the function of the arbitration institution (*taḥkīm*) in the judicial system in early Islamic centuries. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the arbitration was the only judicial system available to the people who were unable to settle their differences by means of a direct friendly agreement. After the advent of Islam, the arbitration became an additional procedure but continued to function as a branch of the organized judicial system (*al-qadā’*). The arbitrator’s necessary qualities were as those demanded of the judge and his decision was binding.¹⁶⁶ Our letter confirms this fact.

Letter 3 in our corpus may add a bit to this discussion, since the husband had a similar experience with his free wife, who complained about him to the *amīr*.¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, this is all we know about the case. Why did the wife complain about her husband? And what was the *amīr*’s decision? It is impossible to know. On the other hand, it is quite a lot to be informed that this wife was also a free wife (*ḥurra*) exactly like the wife of ‘Amr. I discussed elsewhere in this thesis this category of women.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ See also K.M. Younes, “New governors identified in Arabic papyri,” 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*, document no. 2 (forthcoming).

¹⁶⁴ See also Römer and Demiri (2009), 43-45.

¹⁶⁵ Before going to court to seek *khul’* or divorce, the most abominable thing with God among all the permitted things, the Qur’an recommends reconciliation through family arbitration, namely to bring forth two arbiters from the husband’s side and the wife’s side to judge between the two (“And if ye fear a breach between them twain (the man and wife), appoint an arbiter from his folk and an arbiter from her folk. If they desire amendment Allah will make them of one mind. Lo! Allah is ever Knower, Aware.” Q 4:35).

¹⁶⁶ E. Tyan, “Ḥakam,” E.I.2, vol. 3, 72.

¹⁶⁷ For the title *amīr* and who is meant by the *amīr* in the text, see the commentary.

¹⁶⁸ See below the discussion on women of the house.

Back to ‘Amr b. Zubayd and his tragic conjugal life which ended quickly with divorce. After the separation, ‘Amr asks the father-in-law to remarry his ex-wife using the technical term *radda* (to take back). Did ‘Amr succeed in his endeavor to take his wife back? The letter does not tell further. The letter does not tell either whether the ex-wife continued to live in ‘Amr’s house or moved to another place to live independently. She did not, of course, go to her father’s house, as he had to be informed by the letter about the divorce. Finally, it would be fair to conclude the discussion on this letter with the fact that we do not really know whether ‘Amr is telling the truth about his wife or not, as we hear the story from his side only.

The two just discussed letters show that financial and customary matters pertaining to marriage and divorce were mainly settled by mutual consent between the two families, more precisely between the two spouses, as our first letter shows. The marriage proposal offered by the groom (*ijāb*), the bride’s consent (*qabūl*), the amount and division of the dowry (*ṣadāq/mahr*) and the value and delivery of the bride’s trousseau (*matāʾ*) were all agreed upon in the private sphere before concluding the legal act. The role of the notary “the state” comes into sight at the time of drawing up the marriage contract which should be in a legal valid format. The same holds true for the cases of divorce and *khulʿ* settlements; we saw in divorce deeds the wives absolving their husbands from paying the outstanding portion of the deferred dowry and the husbands giving them back the trousseau to terminate the marriage through family arbitration. The court appears only when one of the spouses repudiates the friendly agreement, as made clear in the second letter.

One final remark is to be made to end this legal discussion. While all published legal marriage acts follow comparatively the legal formularies proposed in the earliest manual book of *shurūṭ*, i.e. the book *al-Shurūṭ al-ṣaghīr* composed by the prominent Egyptian scholar Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭaḥawī (d. 312/933)¹⁶⁹ and specify with precision the due date of the deferred portion of the *ṣadāq* as recommended by the Mālikī legal doctrine (*madhhab*),¹⁷⁰ which was dominant in Egypt during the early centuries of Islam, the actual local practice of the society as noticed in divorce deeds show that the deferred portion of the *ṣadāq* was in reality deferred to the time of death or divorce as was practiced in pre-Islamic Egypt.¹⁷¹ The Egyptian tradition and practice regarding the payment of the *ṣadāq* was already mirrored in the legal discourse by contemporaneous local and non-local jurists.¹⁷² The legal discussion has eventually succeeded in eliminating the practice which shows the interaction between Islamic law and the local Egyptian practices, and how the early Muslim jurists responded to limit or eradicate non-Islamic practices connected with marriage and divorce.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ al-Ṭaḥawī (d. 312/933), *al-Shurūṭ al-ṣaghīr*, ed. R. Awzajān (Baghdad: Riʾāsat Dīwān al-Awqāf, 1974), 671. For the great influence of the *shurūṭ* works over all legal acts from the end of the 3rd/9th century onwards, see J. Wakin, *The function of documents in Islamic law: the chapters on sale from Ṭaḥawī’s kitāb al-shurūṭ al-kabīr* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972); P. Khalili II, 174-75. See also G. Frantz-Murphy, “A comparison of Arabic and earlier Egyptian contract formularies,” I-IV, *Journal of Near Eastern studies* 40 (1981), 203-25; 44 (1985), 99-114; 47 (1988), 105-12, 269-80; W. Hallaq, “Model *shurūṭ* works and the dialectic of doctrine and practice,” *Islamic law and society* 2 (1995), 109-34.

¹⁷⁰ The Mālikī school was established by the widely known jurist and transmitter Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), who was born and died in Medina. For more, see J. Schacht, “Mālik b. Anas,” E.I.2, vol. 6, 262-265.

¹⁷¹ See the discussion in Rapoport (2000), 3, 10-12, 33.

¹⁷² For more extensive discussion on this legal dispute, see Rapoport (2000), 5-16, and the sources cited there.

¹⁷³ For more information, see Rapoport (2000), 9, 31-33.

1.2. Children

“fa-in kānat qad waladat fa-awṣṭhim bihā wa-bi-waladihā khayran.”

(If she already gave birth, ask them to take good care of her and her baby.)

Letter 9.18-19

The odds of miscarriage and death by childbirth and during childhood in pre-modern times were extremely high due to the primitive medical tools and experience then available.¹⁷⁴ In our corpus, two references to childbirth occur but none to pregnancy.¹⁷⁵ In addition, two other references to childbirth appear in published texts. The references to childbirth are too short and concise and the topic does not seem to be the main concern of the writer, as we find it always mixed with many other personal and commercial affairs or even given as an afterthought at the very end of the letter. In the four cases attested in the papyri, the sender either inquires or informs about a new childbirth, mentioning usually the gender of the baby neither without giving any further details about the condition of the childbearing woman before and after giving birth nor about the newborn and the birth process at large. The letters are also completely silent regarding the expected celebrations that might have followed a successful childbirth, i.e. naming the newborn, the circumcision (*khitān*) and *‘aqīqa* ceremonies which would have been obligatory or recommended rituals as part of the religion these people adhere to, namely Islam.¹⁷⁶ Likewise, the letters tell us nothing about childrearing in terms of education.¹⁷⁷

With these few and short papyrological references we cannot, of course, catch the emotional reactions of the childbearing women in pregnancy and at birth nor the personal feelings of the fathers and the family at large after a successful childbirth. Nevertheless, it may be fruitful to take a closer look at these references and study them in some detail to see whether we deal here with a different emotional community, i.e. “introvert” expression of emotions.

In letter 3 of our corpus, the sender informs his absent brother that two of his female slaves gave birth to a boy and a girl (*“wa-qad jā’anā khabar anna Sidbata qad waladat ghulām*

¹⁷⁴ See Bagnall and Cribiore (2006), 76; A. Gil’adi, *Children of Islam: concepts of childhood in medieval Muslim society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with St. Antony’s College, Oxford, 1992), 69-93; A. Gil’adi, “Infants, children and death in medieval Muslim society: some preliminary observations,” *Social history of medicine* 3 (1990), 345-368.

¹⁷⁵ For references in Greek and Coptic letters, see Bagnall and Cribiore (2006), 75-77.

¹⁷⁶ According to Muslim faith, on the seventh day after the birth of a child, the parents should give a name to a newborn child, shave off its hair and make a sacrifice, namely two rams or goats for a boy and one for a girl. See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1349), *Tuhfat al-mawdūd bi-ahkām al-mawlūd* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Thaqāfi li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī, 1986), especially chapters 6-8; Th.W. Juynbol, and J. Pedersen, “*Aḳīqa*,” E.I.2, vol. I, 337. For circumcision, mostly in the modern Islamic world, see A.J. Wensinck, “*Khitān*,” E.I.2, vol. 5, 20-22. See also Gil’adi (1992), 19-34.

¹⁷⁷ For more extensive discussion on childrearing and education in medieval Muslim societies, see Gil’adi (1992), 45-60; A. Gil’adi, “Gender differences in child rearing and education: some preliminary observations with reference to medieval Muslim thought,” *Al-Qantara* 16/2 (1995), 291-308. See also A. Gil’adi, “Concepts of childhood and attitudes towards children in medieval Islam: a preliminary study with special reference to reactions to infant and child mortality,” *Journal of the economic and social history of the orient* 32 (1989), 121-152.

wa-ukhbirnā anna al-ukhrā qad waladat jāriya,” ll.17-19). The letter remains silent about the health status of the mothers and the babies after birth, but the silence seems more likely to be taken as good news. What is more, the expected emotional expressions showing happiness and concern are absent. Is it because they are slaves? The answer could be yes. Immediately after informing the addressee about the birth of the two babies, the sender reports on costs of one hundred and nine *dīnārs* that were spent after the addressee’s departure. One may wonder, do these expenses include birth costs? We are not told. At the very end of letter 9, the sender inquires whether an unidentified woman gave birth or not. The sender asks the addressee to ask others to take good care of this woman and her baby in case she already gave birth (“*hal waladat fa-in kānat qad waladat fa-awṣihim bihā wa-bi-waladihā khayran waladahā*,” ll.18-19). The letter does not say who this woman is, nor does it say how the sender is related to her. While the letter’s tone suggests a degree of physical distance, it shows a strong emotional feeling towards the childbearing lady and her baby. In one published letter, the two senders, Abū Ismāʿīl and Umm ʿUmar, ask the addressee, ʿUmar b. Rāshid, to write back to them with a certain Wusāma when a certain Mājida gave birth (“*wa-ktub ilayya maʿa Wusāma in kānat waladat Mājida am lā ḥattā aʿlama dhālika*,” P.Jahn 5.8-9, 2nd/8th). The relationship between the senders and the addressee is not clear, but the letter’s tone indicates a very close kinship. Umm ʿUmar is, most probably, the addressee’s mother. In another letter, the sender, Abū Khālīd Yazīd b. Walīd, informs the addressee, Zayd b. Yaḥyā, about several personal and commercial matters. Among the personal affairs, Abū Khālīd reports that a certain Khadīja, most probably his wife, gave birth to a girl (“*wa-ukhbirukum anna Khadīja waladat jāriya*,” P.David-Weill/Louvre 11.17-18, 2nd/8th). Again, Abū Khālīd does not tell how the mother and the new baby are doing nor does he mention what name he gave to the girl. Nevertheless, we can assume that Khadīja, the mother, was in a good condition after giving birth, as we hear her voice in the letter. In the greeting section, Khadīja conveys her salutations to the addressees as well as to other male and female relatives.

With the exception of letter no. 9 of our corpus, where feelings of care and concern for the childbearing woman and the newborn are evident, none of the references use words of emotions. Does this mean that people focused more in reporting on the incident itself, i.e. the childbirth rather than expressing their personal feelings or do we see another emotional community whose members are keen and introvert in expressing personal feelings? It may be fruitful to continue our investigation before we give an answer to this question.

In contrast to the brief and rare references to childbirth in letters, references to taking care of children and female members of the family during the absence of the *paterfamilias* appear frequently in published letters as well as in letters edited in this thesis. To start with letters published in this thesis, in letter 41, the absent ʿUbayd b. Jinān writes to his business partner Abū Sulaymān Ismāʿīl b. Ayyūb reporting on many business affairs. At the end of the letter, ʿUbayd asks Abū Sulaymān to take good care of his family and children (“*fa-stawṣī bi-ahl al-bayt wa-bi-l-ʿiyāl khayran fa-innamā hum ahluka maʿa innaka mustawṣī in shāʾa Allāh*,” ll.10-12). A similar request appears in letter 27. In this letter, Abū Muḥammad asks the addressee, his business partner, to take good care of his family so that not to blame him concerning

them (“*wa-stawṣī bi-ahlinā khayran wa-lā alumannka fīhim in shā’a Allāh*,” l.13). Also in letter **31**, the absent husband asks his business partner and probably relative to contact his family, most probably his wife, in order to inform them about his arrival on the eleventh of the current month so that they get ready for his arrival (“*wa-qad katabnā ilayka innā qādimūn wa-naḥnu nurīdu dhālika in shā’a Allāh ilā ‘ashr layāl takhlū min al-shahr fa-akthir iṭlā’ ahlinā fa-innamā hum ahluka*,” ll.10-13). In letter **24**, Abū ‘Amr and his wife Umāma write to a certain Abū Nu‘aym and his family to strengthen the bonds of the *ṣihr* relationship (relationship through marriage). At the end of the letter, the senders mention something about their children while playing with someone (“*iyālinā ābathuhu*,” l.16). The content and the context are not clear due to the fragmentary nature of the bottom part of the papyrus. Īsā, the author of letter **4**, ends his letter to his wife by conveying special greetings to her, a certain Idrīs and the sister, most likely his two children, the household (*ahl al-bayt*) and finally his mother and all those who are with her (“*ablighī nafsaki al-salām kathīran wa-Idrīs wa-ukhtahu wa-jamī’ ahl al-bayt wa-aqrī’ī ummī al-salām kathīran wa-jamī’ man ‘indahā*,” ll.14-16). In letter **6**, Umm Zur‘a, the sender, informs her male relative Abū Tamīm that his son Tamīm and all his family are well and in good health as the father wishes (“*wa-ukhbiruka anna ibnaka Tamīm sālim ṣāliḥ kamā yasurruka min faḍl Allāh wa-raḥmatihi wa-ahlahu kamā tuḥibbūna*,” ll.7-9). Also, Shurayḥ b. ‘Amr, the author of letter **33**, informs the absent addressee that the latter’s family is in good health as he wishes (“*ukhbiruka anna ahlaka wa-waladaka ‘alā mā yasurruka*,” l.5). All references given in published letters are very similar, namely greetings to and from children and inquiries about their wellbeing.¹⁷⁸

The terms used to refer to children in the letters are somewhat problematic, and should be highlighted in this discussion. The term *‘iyāl*, for example, literary means children, but it is sometimes used for all family members including females. To demonstrate this, the term *‘aṭā’ al-‘iyāl* (the family allowance) appears quite often in administrative letters related to the *‘aṭā’* payments to the *jund* and their families.¹⁷⁹ In private letters, as they appear in the aforementioned examples, *‘iyāl* is more likely used for little children both males and females. As for the term *ṣibyān*, Petra Sijpesteijn argues that this term “might be a rendering of the Greek *paidia* in the sense of servants, slaves,” which might be true in an administrative context.¹⁸⁰ In private realm, however, the word would simply refer to male children.¹⁸¹ Special for salves, the word *jāriya* is used for a female child and *ghulām* for a male child (see letters **3.9**, **18-19**; **13.22**).

Back to our question, while we are little informed about pregnancy and childbearing in early Islamic Egypt and the stories and emotions stemming from them, the letters offer another window on people’s care and concern for the wellbeing of their children. We can clearly discern the feelings of responsibility and accountability on the part of the parents especially the fathers. When they leave their homes, for whatever reason, they ask other family members, friends and business partners to take care of their families and children. Not taking the request seriously might result in harsh blame, as is made clear in letter **27**. In

¹⁷⁸ See P.Heid.Arab. II **50.4** and **56.10**; P.Marchands V/I **10.3**, **11.21**, **12.10** and **17r.4**; P.World, 166[= P.Marchands V/I **8r.8**]; P.Jahn **13**[= P.World, 183].6, all 3rd/9th. See also P.Genv.V **6.13**, 3rd/9th.

¹⁷⁹ See Sijpesteijn (2011), 245-267.

¹⁸⁰ Sijpesteijn (2004), **24.8** and the commentary.

¹⁸¹ See Lane, vol. 4, 1650.

most cases, the caretakers do the work properly and write back to the absent worried fathers with information about the wellbeing of their families stating that they are well and in good health (“*kamā tuḥibbūn*,” (they are as you wish) or “*alā mā yasurruka*,” (as pleases you) cf. 6.9; 33.5). It is misleading to assume here that the caretakers were not somehow related to the families of the absent patrons; they were to some extent kith and kin. This assumption can be supported by the observation that the letters sometimes say in plain words *fa-innamā hum ahluka* (they are your family as well). The case of Abū Hurayra in the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu‘min archive is exceptional. The series of letters sent to him from his sister Anūbīs and brother, asking him for wheat, money and cloths, and complaining that their father is so hard with them leaving them hungry and naked, make us wonder about the reason for this aversion (“*wa-bi-llāh asta‘īnu fī amrī yā akhī abī wa-ghilaḏuhu ‘alaynā wa-qulta yā akhī mā lanā minhu illā al-ṭa‘ām*,” P.Marchands II 18.4, 5; “*wa-kallim abī abqāhu Allāh ḥattā yarḥamanā*,” P.Marchands II 17.2; “*wa-anā wa-llāh ‘uryāna jā’i’a ‘aṭshāna*,” P.Marchands II 23.13-14, all 3rd/9th). The repetitive requests and the distant tone of the letters suggest that they were probably children from an earlier marriage. This possibility is confirmed by another letter from the same archive in which the father Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad asks his son Abū Hurayra to take care of his step-mother and brother during his absence. Instead of being fraternal, Abū Hurayra turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to the cries and misery of his step-mother, half-brother and sister. Having known that, the father, full of anger, wrote back to Abū Hurayra blaming and urging him to be serious about taking care of the family, and reminding him of a Qur’anic verse and a prophetic tradition that are related with the topic of keeping contact with kinship. In this vein, the father continued, with words of pain and sorrow, for some lines (“*yā bunayya bi-jamī ahl baytika min abīka fa-qad kānū ṣāliḥīn ruḥamā’a qāla Allāh yaṣilūna mā amara Allāh an yūṣala qāla bal ‘ibādun mukarramūna lā yasbiqūnahu bi-l-qawl wa-hum bi-amrihi ya‘malūna wa-fahimtu mā dhakarta min amr man ‘aṣā Allāh qāla Allāh fa-man ‘afā wa-aṣlaḥa fa-ajruhu ‘alā Allāh innahu lā yuḥibbu al-ẓālimīn fa-lā yaḍurruka an taqif wa-tas’al ‘an akhīka wa-taṣilahu bi-l-salām wa-tatafaqqadahu fa-la‘alla Allāh sa-yatafaqqaduka wa‘adtahu wa-llāh la-qad jā’a anna rasūl Allāh qāla inna min barr al-birr ṣilataka wudd abīka ba’d abīka fa-kayfa bi-imra’at abīka wa-akhīka*,” P.Marchands II 9.4-11, 3rd/9th).¹⁸² The delinquent Abū Hurayra seems not to pay any attention. What is more, he does not take care of his sick wife in the Fayyūm, leaving her suffering excruciating stomach pains (see P.Marchands II 28, discussed in sickness).

In addition to bringing paternal and fraternal experiences, the letters collected and studied above show that the Muslim society in Egypt was organized around large and small families, and beyond the families there were small and wide complex networks of tribal relations, friendships and business partnerships which extended sometimes beyond the borders of Egypt and were conditioned by strong emotional ties. The letters have also shown that kinship terms implying relationships by blood (*nasab*) and marriage (*muṣāhara*) were sometimes used in an imprecise way, different from the lexical meaning.¹⁸³ Thus, terms such as brother and sister should be dealt with caution and not always taken literally

¹⁸² For more information about the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu‘min family life, see Younes (2013), 326-327. See also Grob (2010a), 110-112.

¹⁸³ Bagnall and Cribiore (2006), 85-87; Worp (1995), 153.

(see letters 3.10, 17; 4.14; 18.7, 8 and the address; 20.3; 23.24).¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, kinship terms such as son, mother, father, aunt and uncle are highly likely used at face value indicating direct blood relationship (see letters 4.15; 6.8; 23.12, 32).¹⁸⁵

In a similar vein, business letters discussed above suggest that some kind of social and emotional ties might have existed between business partners albeit to a certain extent. Take the commercial archive of the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu’min for example. The business letters of this archive show that two daughters of the *paterfamilias* of the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu’min, Abū Ja’far, were married to two merchants from Fustāṭ. Another business letter published in this thesis (letter 32) shows that business relations were at times built upon tribal affiliation. Besides blood, tribal, social and economic ties that held the Arab-Muslim society together in early Muslim Egypt, the bond of religion (Islam) seems to have been emotionally important and affective. Letter 25 of our corpus brings this fact to the fore. The main concern of the letter is to strengthen the bonds of kin and friendship between the two correspondents. In the letter, the sender stresses the tie of Islam and its holiness (“*fā-innahu laysa min amr yuqaribu ilayyā minhu Allāh illā wa-qad sabbabahu baynanā wa-baynaka ḥaqq al-islām wa-ḥurmatihi wa-ḥaqq al-qarāba wa-ma’rifatihi*,” ll.2-4). Two other letters stress the bond of brotherhood (*al-ikhā’*) through religion (cf. *wa-dhālika limā qad ajrā Allāh baynanā wa-baynaka min al-ikhā’ wa-l-ṣihr*, 24.11; *wa-nzur bi-ḥaqq mā baynī wa-baynaka min al-ikhā’ illā m[ā] fā’alta*, 26.11).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ See also P.Horak 85.8; P.Jahn 12[= Chrest.Khoury I 98].13; P.Berl.Arab. II 55.3.

¹⁸⁵ See also P.Marchands II 24.15; P.Marchands II 36.2, 5, 8; P.RāgibLettres 15.3, 5, 8 and verso. address, 1, 2; Marchands V/I 11.3; P.Khalili I 29.7.

¹⁸⁶ See also below the discussion on death and consolation.

1.3. Women of the house

“*wa-sami'nā alladhī dhakarta min sha'n imra'atika al-ḥurra annahā qad ablaghat sha'naka al-amīr.*”

(We heard what you mentioned about your wife, the free woman, that she complained about you to the *amīr*.)

Letter 3.5-6

About women and their personal representation of emotions the letters tell us far more than we can learn from any other literary and documentary source. As it is mentioned earlier, fourteen letters of this corpus can be identified as women's letters. The letters are mostly sent to, from and in-between females (see letters 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 20, 23). In addition to letters edited in this thesis, some other letters have already been published and studied.¹⁸⁷ Through studying and analyzing these writings we can learn whether there are differences between females' and males' letters and expression of emotion.

Starting with the only statement made on women's letters by Werner Diem in his discussion on Arabic private and business letters, Diem argues that “typical addressees of letters sent by males are other males (without any restriction as to status or relationship), while female addressees are rare (mostly the mothers of the senders). Letters sent to the senders' wives are almost non-existing, and senders mention their wives, if at all, rather *en passant* in letters sent to their relatives..... Typical addressees of letters sent by females are other females (with a restriction to relatives or friends) while male addressees are extremely rare and in most cases sons of the female senders. But not only is the range of possible addressees of female senders more restricted than is the case with the addressees of male senders but also the contents of their letters. While letters of male senders may concern any subject, from business to private affairs, letters of female senders are usually confined to family affairs. Furthermore, the style of letters sent by female senders is often emotional, with many of them apparently serving no other purpose than that of strengthening the bonds of kin and friendship between the female sender and the female addressee. Often greetings are given to numerous persons, and husbands and sons of the female addressees may be mentioned, especially in prayers to the effect that God may preserve them to the addressee.”¹⁸⁸

Women's letters edited in this thesis as well as many other published letters show that this assumption cannot be taken without reservations. In our corpus, for instance, we see a fiancé in contact with her future wife as well as husbands writing to their wives (see letters 1 and 4).¹⁸⁹ We are also well informed about women sending to and receiving from males,

¹⁸⁷ See P.Loth 2[= P.Berl.Arab. II 75]; P.Jahn 5; P.Jahn 12[= Chrest.Khoury I 98]; P.RāḡibLettres 9r; P.RāḡibLettres 10; P.RāḡibLettres 11; P.RāḡibLettres 12; Rāḡib (2011), 273-284; P.Berl.Arab. II 73; P.Khalili I 17; P.Khalili I 21; CPR XVI 30.

¹⁸⁸ Diem (2008), 845-846.

¹⁸⁹ See above spouses.

both relatives and non-relatives, about business and private matters (see letters **1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 20**). Some women were involved in extensive commercial networks (see letters **17**.side B; **31; 40**). Take the case of Abū Hurayra's mother for example. This woman was active in the same textile trade as her husband and son albeit to a limited extent. There is one letter from her to Abū Hurayra in which she orders several coats and other closing items (P.Marchands II, XIII. 4, 7, 11, 12). These big orders were not, of course, for personal consumption. She also sent goods to Abū Hurayra to sell for her and received three *dirhams* from a previous sale and gave another three to Sayyida. These transactions all confirm that Abū Ja'far's wife (Abū Hurayra's mother) was indeed involved in commercial trading.¹⁹⁰

What is more, some women had their own business and were in direct contact with their Muslim and non-Muslim agents. For instance, Umm al-Ḥakam, a wealthy business Muslim woman residing in the Fayyūm, was in direct contact with her business agent Mīnā Bajūsh (P.Jahn **12**[= Chrest.Khoury I **98**], 2nd/8th).¹⁹¹ In her correspondence to Mīnā, Umm al-Ḥakam writes about many personal and business matters. For another example, the papyrus letter P.Khalili I **17** datable on palaeographical grounds to the 3rd/9th records a contact between a female servant named Rujḥān and her mistress. In this correspondence, the female sender informs her mistress about the delivery and dispatch of huge amounts of various items, i.e. a basket of apples, four baskets of wheat which weigh four *irdabbs* and three *waybāt* according to the large *qafīz* and five baskets of jujube seeds wrapped in five sheets of papyrus. In the letter, Rujḥān says that she met a certain Abū al-Qāsim, presumably an agent, who reported on the good health of the addressee. The letter shows strong emotional bond between the two correspondents. At the end of the letter, a certain Umm ibniḥā (literally "the mother of her son") records her painful longing to the absent mistress. She says: "My lady, how great is my longing for you" ("*wa-Umm ibniḥā tuqrī'uki al-salām kathīran wa-taqūluki yā sayyittī mā ashadda shawqī ilayki*," P.Khalili I **17.10**, 3rd/9th).

Nevertheless, Abū Hurayra's mother, Umm al-Ḥakam and Rujḥān's mistress seem to be the exception rather than the rule. I have discussed elsewhere in this chapter that the majority of women was to a great extent socially and financially dependent upon males.¹⁹²

Apart from business where very little about emotions is to be told, women's personal feelings in response to being sick or to someone else's sickness, and when the misfortune of death struck one of their close relatives are lavishly expressed. These expressions are widely discussed in sickness and death and consolation.

Women in early Muslim Egypt had their personal female social networks which sometimes extended beyond the borders of Egypt and were conditioned by strong emotional ties, as illustrated in letter **23** of our corpus. This letter has been written between two sisters. The letter's main concern revolves around a certain Ḥammāda bt. Ibrāhīm b. al-Manāzilī, who moved with her husband from Zawīla,¹⁹³ the sender's domicile, to Fuṣṭāṭ (*Miṣr*), where the female addressee lives. The sender asks her sister to look for this woman

¹⁹⁰ For more information, see Younes (2013), 227-228.

¹⁹¹ See also Römer and Demiri (2009), 43-45.

¹⁹² See below the discussion on death and consolation. See also J. Rowlandson, *Women and society in Greek and Roman Egypt: a sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 218-368; Bagnall and Cribiore (2006), 68-74.

¹⁹³ For more about Zawīla, a city located in the land of Sūdān, see the commentary on **23.16**.

at the address she gives in full in the letter (near Bilāl, the vet, in the house of Ṣard Abū al-Ḥussām). Then, she asks her to become good friend with Ḥammāda, because she is a dear friend to the sender. At the end of the letter, the sender informs her sister that she is really distressed due to Ḥammāda's departure, indicating the strong emotional bond between the two, regardless of the long distance separating them.¹⁹⁴

In a similar vein, women traveled over long and short distances for family visits and other social reasons. In letter 11 in our corpus, a certain al-Nu'mān b. Shu'ayb and someone else, whose name is missing, write to one Umm Nu'aym bt. Nu'aym and three other male and female addressees, i.e. Ḥammād, Umm 'Uthmān and Yazīd b. 'Uthmān. Although the letter states that there are two senders and four addressees, the voice of the letter is first-person singular and the addressee is grammatically singular feminine. In this letter, al-Nu'mān b. Shu'ayb asks Umm Nu'aym bt. Nu'aym to write back to him and to inform him before she travels to him (*"taktubī ilaynā bi-jawāb kitābī ammā al-khurūj ilaynā illā mā narjū nanẓur fī wujūhikum fa-in kunti khārīja ilaynā fa-taktubī lanā,"* ll.8-10). The content of the letter is somewhat incomprehensible due to the fragmentary state of the papyrus. The relationship between the senders and the addressees is not clear, but the voice of the letter indicates a very close kinship. At the end of the letter, the cities Kharibtā, Alexandria and Maryūt are mentioned in an unclear context. Probably, the female addressee will travel to or pass by these cities. Also in letter 9, the sender asks the addressee to ask an unidentified woman to sail to the sender's domicile because the air is fresh and healthy there or because the wind is good for sailing (*"wa-ḥaddithhā taqdim ilaynā fa-inna al-rīḥ ṭayyiba,"* l.14).¹⁹⁵

The mention of women in private and business letters is another issue to be raised in this discussion. In general, women are mentioned by their names and other forms of direct and indirect address. Expressions such as *ahl*, *ahl al-bayt* and *man qibalī/qibalika* are often used either to refer to the family at large or to specify the wife/wives in particular (cf. *wa-stawṣī bi-ahlinā khayran wa-lā alumannaka fīhim in shā'a Allāh*, 27.13; *katabtu ilayki wa-anā wa-man qibalī min ahlī wa-ṣibyānī 'alā aḥsan ḥāl al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, 7.6-8; *ablighī nafsaki al-salām kathīran wa-Idrīs wa-ukhtahu wa-jamī' ahl al-bayt wa-aqrā'ī ummī al-salām kathīran wa-jamī' man 'indahā*, 4.14-16; *ukhbiruka anna ahlaka wa-waladaka 'alā mā yasurruka*, 33.5).

The term *qibalī/qibalaka* is to some extent problematic. In private and business letters, the term is either used to indicate the location or the family members depending mainly on the proposition that precedes whether it is *mā* or *min*.¹⁹⁶ The term has another technical meaning related to legal acknowledgments.¹⁹⁷ As far as we are concerned with letters, Werner Diem argues that expressions such as *man qibalaka* were mainly used to avoid direct mention of female members in the family.¹⁹⁸ It is unclear, however, on what basis Diem arrives at this conclusion, since many letters refer in very direct terms to women.¹⁹⁹ Petra Sijpesteijn argues rather that the practice of mentioning women by their names compares well with what is witnessed in pre-Islamic material from Egypt. She concludes: "While other

¹⁹⁴ See also P.Loth 2[= P.Berl.Arab. II 75].10-14, 2nd/8th, discussed in chapter one.

¹⁹⁵ See the commentary to this line.

¹⁹⁶ P.Khalili I, 127.

¹⁹⁷ P.Khalili I 22.2, 3rd/9th and the examples given in the commentary.

¹⁹⁸ Diem (2008), 845.

¹⁹⁹ See letters CPR XVI 30; P.Berl.Arab. II 73; P.Loth 2[= P.Berl.Arab. II 75].

expressions are also used to refer to those of the household of the sender or addressee (*man qibālī/qibalika*), there does not seem to have existed at this time an antipathy to mentioning women by name and other forms of direct address comparable to that of the late 12th/13th century Jewish community from the Geniza.”²⁰⁰

Before we end our discussion on women, women’s letters and emotions, one minor observation about one category of women, i.e. free women (*ḥarā’ir*) is to be made. In letters 2 and 3, a great emphasis has been placed on wives as being free women. The letters show the high social status and the privileges that this category of women enjoyed. Free women, as the two letters show, were able to appear before courts and *amīrs*, most probably by themselves, to complain about their husbands and other family problems. Verdicts were at times drawn in their favors.²⁰¹

In conclusion, the letters that have been collected here brought us closer to women’s life, main concerns and interests, and showed to what extent women were involved in public life. The letters have shown that women in early Muslim Egypt were more or less accessible, free to travel, able to trade and to build up their own trade and social relations. Unexpectedly, women’s letters are neither confined to family affairs nor are they more emotional than males’ letters. On the contrary, women’s letters concern variant topics, from business to private matters. The tension that one might have expected to grasp about women of the house is not really seen in private and business letters.

²⁰⁰ Sijpesteijn (2013), 27.11 and the commentary.

²⁰¹ See above the discussion on spouses.

2. Feasts and festivities

“*wa-qad katabtu ilayka wa-ba‘athtu ilayka ‘ishrīn dīnāran fa-takārā lī li-l-ḥajj in shā’a Allāh fa-qad aradtu dhālika.*”

(I have written to you and sent to you twenty *dīnārs* so that you could rent for me for the pilgrimage, if God wills, because I wanted to do so.)

Letter 37.5-6

Religious rituals are emotionally loaded occasions, so argue historians of emotions.²⁰² During these occasions, celebrants interact with and influence each other. This interaction excites and intensifies lots of emotions.²⁰³ Time and again, Arabic papyri in general and private and business letters in particular inform us abundantly about religious rituals, social gatherings and feasts and festivities which the early Arab settlers in Egypt referred to in their written correspondences.²⁰⁴ Some of these references are given in some detail and speak of sad and happy feelings. Among the religious ceremonies that are recorded in published letters, namely the month of Ramaḍān, the feast celebrating the end of Ramaḍān (*al-fīṭr*), pilgrimage (*al-ḥajj*) and the feast of sacrifice (*al-aḍḥā*), two are attested in our corpus, i.e. *al-fīṭr* and *al-ḥajj*.²⁰⁵ In what follows, I shall discuss all the references recorded in the letters, aiming to highlight the emotions we see and to show how these festivities and feasts are perceived, represented and celebrated by early Arab settlers in Egypt.

2.1. The month of fasting (Ramaḍān)

²⁰² See A. Chaniotis, “Emotional community through ritual. Initiates, citizens, and pilgrims as emotional communities in the Greek world,” in: A. Chaniotis (ed.), *Ritual dynamics in the ancient Mediterranean: agency, emotion, gender, representation* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011), 265 and the sources cited there.

²⁰³ Chaniotis (2011), 286.

²⁰⁴ For Islamic feasts and festivities in early Islamic times, see M. Ahsan, *Social life under the Abbasids, 170-289 AH/786-902 AD* (London: Longman, 1979), 275-296.

²⁰⁵ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), the oldest Arab historian to collect and write down the stories of the Arab conquest, records the earliest religious Muslim festivity on the Egyptian lands. The account goes as follows: in its first military penetration in the Egyptian territory, the Muslim army reached the city of al-‘Arīsh on the day of sacrifice (*yawm al-naḥr*), i.e. 10th Dhū al-Ḥijja 18/12th December 639. The soldiers celebrated the day and a ram was sacrificed by the commander of the army ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ on behalf of the soldiers (*fa-ḍaḥā ‘Amr ‘an aṣḥābihi yawma’dhin bi-kabsh*). Al-Kindī (d. 350/961), on the other hand, the most reliable historian dealing with the political history of early Islamic Egypt, reports on a sad celebration of the second minor Muslim feast (*‘īd al-fīṭr*). After around twenty five years of the conquest, the commander, who later became the governor of the province, died on the night of the breaking of the fast of Ramaḍān (*laylat al-fīṭr*), 1st of Shawwāl 43/6th January 664, and instead of him leading the Muslims in the special prayer of the feast (*ṣalāt al-‘īd*) in the early morning, his body was carried to the mosque so that the Muslims could perform the funeral prayer for him. The account continues, when the Muslims both women and men gathered in the mosque and got to know about the death of their commander and governor, they first performed the funeral prayer and then the *‘īd* prayer. The leader in both prayers was ‘Amr’s son ‘Abd Allāh (d. 65/685). See Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 58; al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 34.

Ramaḍān is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. In this month, Muslims believe that the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the prophet Muḥammad through the angel Gabriel in Mecca. A special respect has thus been given to this month through fasting it, namely to abstain from eating, drinking and having sexual intercourse every day throughout the month from the first flush of dawn till sunset.²⁰⁶ According to Muslim faith, once the crescent of the new moon of Ramaḍān is sighted, every single Muslim, both man and woman, who has reached the age of puberty and is sound in health and mind is obliged to fast this month annually. The travelers, sick people, women in menstruation and those who are, for reasonable reasons, unable to undertake fasting during this month are exempt as far as the cause of exemption continues, but should fast a number of days equal to those missed (Q 2:183-185).²⁰⁷ When the new moon of the next month appears, the fast comes to an end and everybody must break the fast and celebrate the breaking of the fast (*al-fiṭr*).²⁰⁸

Papyrological references to the month of Ramaḍān are only a handful but they clearly show the special religious status of the month and how the early Muslims in Egypt received it with joy, seeking its blessings and mercy. In one letter from the Banū 'Abd al-Mu'min archive, the sender Ayyūb b. Sulaymān informs the *paterfamilias* of the Banū 'Abd al-Mu'min, Abū Ja'far, that he wrote the letter after having *suḥūr*, i.e. the night meal taken before the dawn to strengthen the fasting person and help him endure the hardships of the fast during the day ("*katabtu ilayka hādhā al-kitāb ba'd al-suḥūr min kathrat al-shughl*," P.Marchands II 1 left margin.1-2, 3rd/9th). At the end of the letter, Ayyūb swears by the holiness of this month to do something that remains unknown to us ("*fa-bi-ḥaqq hādhā al-shahr al-ʿaẓīm*," l.11). In another published letter, the sender prays to God to accept the fasting of the addressee of this month ("*ḥamala Allāh ʿanka wa-aʿānaka wa-khallaṣaka wa-qabila minka ṣiyām hādhā al-shahr*," P.Khalili I 32.18, 3rd/9th). In one other letter, the sender informs the addressee that he wrote his letter on Friday in the mid of the month of Ramaḍān. The sender makes a supplication to God to bestow blessings upon them in this blessed month through His mercy ("*kitābī ilayka aʿazzaka Allāh yawm al-jumʿa bi-niṣf min Ramaḍān jaʿalahu Allāh barakatan ʿalayka wa-ʿalaynā bi-raḥmatihi*," P.Berl.Arab. II 42.3-4, 3rd/9th).

The festive month of Ramaḍān requires some preparation before the beginning of the month, namely to buy enough food and light supplies. In one letter, the sender asks the addressee not to neglect buying the necessities of Ramaḍān ("*wa-lā tadaʿ an tashtariya ḥawāʾij Ramaḍān*," P.Ryl.Arab. I VI 15[= P.World, 175].4, 3rd/9th).

The religious celebration of the month of Ramaḍān through gathering and praying in the mosque is attested in a petition sent to the governor of Egypt from an anonymous

²⁰⁶ K. Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 47-122.

²⁰⁷ "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil); (183) (Fast) a certain number of days; and (for) him who is sick among you, or on a journey, (the same) number of other days; and for those who can afford it there is a ransom: the feeding of a man in need - but whoso doeth good of his own accord, it is better for him: and that ye fast is better for you if ye did but know - (184) The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of other days. Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you; and (He desireth) that ye should complete the period, and that ye should magnify Allah for having guided you, and that peradventure ye may be thankful."

²⁰⁸ M. Plessner, "Ramaḍān," E.I.2, vol. 8, 417-418; Ahsan (1979), 275-277; G.E. Grunebaum, *Muhammadan festivals* (London: Curzon Press, 1951), 51-65.

complaining about an unidentified person. In this petition, the complainer writes with words of grief and anxiety that this impious person introduced himself to call and lead the prayers without being approved by the state (the governor). But that is not all. In addition to some other intolerable actions done by this person, the complainer claims that he poured a gar of wine inside the mosque. This shameful action took place in the blessed month of Ramaḍān, in which the people rather seek blessings and mercy of God, says the complainer (“*wa-lā yanẓuru fī amrihi siwāka fī idkhāl mu’adhdhin aw man yuṣallī bi-l-nās fī Ramaḍān wa-ghayrihi kamā yafalu al-amīr abqāhu Allāh bi-ahl al-fuṣṭāṭ fī masjid jāmi’ihim wa-‘indanā rajul ‘allām fī dākhil al-madīna lahu radā’u fī’l adkhala fī al-adhān bi-lā amrika bi-mā yuzādu ba’dū minhu yuṣallī bi-l-nās fī hādhā al-shahr alladhī narjā fīhi al-raḥma min Allāh wa-innamā nataqarrabu ilā Allāh bi-ahl al-taqwā lā naghumu awliyā’ Allāh wa-rasūlihi li-rajā’ barakatihim wa-du’ā’ihim wa-hādhā al-rajul lā yaḥullu li-makhlūq ‘alima ‘ilmahu al-ṣalāt khalfahu wa-lā al-naẓaru ilayhi raḍā’ fī’lihi wa-la-qad balaghanī annahu aṣbaba fī al-masjid qullat nabīdh,*” P.RāgibLettres 5.9-12, 3rd-4th/9th-10th).

While we are little informed about the ceremonial aspects during this festive month, the feelings of joy, hope and respect are quite evident in the letters. The letters clearly show the role of the collective worship in generating and intensifying emotions as well as in creating emotional community of worshippers. A point to which I shall return when discussing the ritual of ḥajj.

2.2. The feast of the breaking of the fast (*al-fiṭr*)

The end of the long and tough period of fasting is heralded by the appearance of the crescent of the new moon of the month of Shawwāl, which marks the feast of the breaking of the fast (*‘īd al-fiṭr*).²⁰⁹ According to Muslim faith, the day starts by performing a special prayer of *‘īd* in the early morning. Both men and women, including those in menstruation, are encouraged and urged to perform or at least witness the prayer.²¹⁰

On the day of *‘īd*, families and friends are supposed to gather and celebrate. The absent husband *‘Īsā*, the author of letter 4 of our corpus, could not travel to celebrate this day with the family, namely his wife, his two children and his mother, due to a big fight that broke out between two Arab tribes. *‘Īsā*, who was temporarily staying where the fight took place, could not leave (“*an nakhruja Banū Mudlij wa-a‘mala al-sayf [] yaqturu dam,*” ll.5-6). He, thus, had to write a letter to his wife to apologize and explain the reasons for his delay. In the letter, *‘Īsā* informed his wife that her matter, meaning mainly leaving her celebrating the feast alone, made him feel sad more than the financial loss that had befallen him. He bought eggs for two *dīnārs* before breaking the fast of Ramaḍān (*al-fiṭr*) to bring to his wife, but all the eggs got spoiled due to the long delay and therefore he had to throw them away (“*wa-inna amraki la-yuḥzinunī ashadda mā dakhala ‘alayya min al-khassāra ishtaraytu dīnārayn bayḍ li-aqdima bihi ilaykum qabl al-fiṭr ḥattā jā’a amr lā ṭāqa lanā bihi fa-nas’alu Allāh al-khalaf,*” ll.10-14). Likewise, the second wife of Abū Ja’far Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Mu’min had to spend the day of *‘īd* lonely and sad in the Fayyūm, while her husband was celebrating the day with his

²⁰⁹ E. Mittwoch, “*‘Īd al-fiṭr*,” E.I.2, vol. 3, 1008.

²¹⁰ Bukhārī, 931; Muslim, 890.

other wife in Fustāṭ. Before traveling, the husband promised the wife in the Fayyūm not to prolong his absence more than one month, and they both reached an agreement regarding celebrating the two Muslim feasts, i.e. *al-fiṭr* and *al-aḍḥā*. The wife in the Fayyūm agreed to let her husband celebrate the feast of the breaking of the fast (*al-fiṭr*) with the wife in Fustāṭ on condition that he would celebrate the feast of sacrifice (*al-aḍḥā*), which comes ten weeks later, with her in the Fayyūm. But eight weeks passed, and the husband did not show up. The wife in the Fayyūm immediately realized that the husband would like to spend the second feast with the wife in Fustāṭ as well. Thus, she angrily wrote to him, blaming and assuring him that she and her children will be extremely sad, if he leaves them celebrating this feast alone as well (“*wa-akhbaratnī Ḥamdūna ‘an Sayyida annahā qālat innaka kharajta ‘annī ‘alā allā taghīb ‘annī illā shahr fa-min shahr hādhā shahrayn fa-law kuntu waḥdī bi-lā walad mā kuntu ubālī bi-mā ghibta wa-law ‘alimtu annaka kunta turīdu an tuḍaḥḥiya khārij ‘annī mā kuntu atrukuka bi-salāmatika taghību ‘annī fī al-fiṭr wa-anā taraktuka tuṭṭiru ‘indahum wa-tuḍaḥī ‘indī taraktanā fī al-fiṭr mithl al-masākīn turīdu tatrūkunā ayḍan fī al-aḍḥā mithl al-masākīn wa-anta ta‘lamu annī mā aṭlubuka li-naḥaqa wa-lā li-shay’ min al-dunyā wa-lākinnī u‘ātibu ‘alayka li-unsī bika wa-ammā sha’nuka fī shirā’ fa-wa-llāh mā urīdu bihi wa-lā urīdu an uḍaḥḥiya wa-anta ghā’ib ‘annī,”* P.Marchand II 2.10-15, 3rd/9th). In the same archive, a letter was sent to Abū Hurayra, most probably from his mother, informing him that she is willing to stay, where she is, presumably in Fustāṭ, till the feast of the breaking of the fast, most probably to celebrate the feast with the family there (“*innī uqīmu ilā al-fiṭr in shā’a Allāh,* P.Marchands II 14.4, 3rd/9th). In another letter between two blood brothers, the sender informs his brother, ‘Umar b. Muḥammad, that he knew that the latter has planned to visit them, i.e. the sender and the mother, after breaking the fast of Ramaḍān (*al-fiṭr*). The sender expresses his deep feelings of longing and affection towards his brother and shows how much their mother is suffering out of love and passion, because of the absence of her son (“*wa-dhakarta annaka turīdu al-quḍūm ilaynā ba’d al-fiṭr in shā’a Allāh wa-mā dhakarta min shawqika ilaynā fa-wa-llāh innā la-najidu laka mithl mā dhakarta min al-shawq wa-la-qad aradtu al-khurūj ilā mā qibalaka mithl mā dhakarta min al-shawq nusallimu ‘alayka ḥattā dhakarta al-quḍūm wa-inna al-wālida mushtāqa ilayka shadīdat al-shawq fa-lā akhlā Allāh minka makān wa-lā anzala bika makrūh abadan,”* P.Marchands V/I 20.18, 3rd/9th).

As it is shown above, sad emotions showing the distress and grief of those left celebrating the festive day of *īd* alone are predominant in the letters which shows how important it was for family members to gather and celebrate this day together.

2.3. The pilgrimage (*al-ḥajj*)

The word *ḥajj* literally means to set out towards a certain place. In Islamic law, it signifies the annual pilgrimage to Mecca to fulfill the last of the five pillars of the Muslim faith. According to Islamic law, pilgrimage is obligatory, at least once in a lifetime, on all Muslims, both men and women, as long as they are physically and financially able to do so and as far

as the roads are safe to undertake the journey (Q 3:97).²¹¹ The pilgrimage season always takes place during the first two weeks of the last month of the Muslim calendar, Dhū al-Ḥijja.²¹² The religious, political and social meanings of the ritual of ḥajj have been widely discussed by both ancient and modern historians and jurists. On the other hand, the emotional dimension of this ritual has been hardly discussed. This study stresses the emotional aspects of the journey and rituals of ḥajj.

For Muslim settlers in far-off territories like Egypt, the holy journey must have been quite long, exhaustive and costly with the means of transportation then available. A letter edited in this thesis datable on palaeographical grounds to the 2nd/8th century telling a story of a Muslim pilgrim arranging for the journey of ḥajj as well as a handful number of references to the ḥajj in published letters can improve our knowledge about this religious journey twelve hundred years ago. Also, a very significant but yet unpublished semi-official letter, most probably dated to late 1st/7th century, shows the state's concern and interest in exhorting people to undertake this journey in the earliest Islamic decades.²¹³ The letters normally speak about four main points of the journey of ḥajj: (1) the organization of ḥajj, (2) costs of ḥajj, (3) trade on ḥajj, and (4) rewards after the return.

2.3.1. The organization of ḥajj

Since the ḥajj can only be fulfilled at Mecca at a certain time of the year, pilgrims from all over the Islamic world need to prepare and organize their journey to arrive at Mecca at that time. Arabic papyrus letters tell us how Muslim settlers in early Muslim Egypt organized their journey.²¹⁴ They, first, inform their relatives and friends about their intention and willingness to go to ḥajj. In this way, they implicitly ask them to take care of their families during their absence.²¹⁵ Then, they rent their beasts, mostly camels. And finally, they buy enough food supplies for the long journey.

In one unpublished letter, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, that he is keen to go to perform ḥajj (*"hādhā al-waqt aṭāla Allāh baqā'aka aradtu al-khurūj ilā al-ḥajj wa-ḥaraṣtu,"* P.Cam.Michaelides A 589v.13, 3rd/9th). Unfortunately, this is all we know about this pilgrim due to the fragmentary state of the papyrus. Did he truly go to ḥajj? How did he arrange his journey? We are not informed. Letter 37 of our corpus gives further detail. In this letter, the sender, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Mufaḍḍal writes to a certain Abū Sa'īd

²¹¹ "Wherein are plain memorials (of Allah's guidance); the place where Abraham stood up to pray; and whosoever entereth it is safe. And pilgrimage to the House is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither. As for him who disbelieveth, (let him know that) lo! Allah is Independent of (all) creatures."

²¹² For more information on the ḥajj in early Islamic times, see M.N. Pearson, *Pious passengers, the hajj in earlier times* (London: Hurst, 1994); B. Lewis, "Ḥadjdj," E.I.2, vol. 3, 31-38; Ahsan (1979), 279-282; Grunebaum (1951), 15-49; F.E. Peters, *The Hajj: the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and the holy places* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²¹³ P.M. Sijpesteijn, "An early Umayyad papyrus invitation for the Ḥajj," *Journal of Near Eastern studies* (forthcoming). I would like to seize the opportunity to thank Prof. Sijpesteijn for allowing me to include this unpublished article in my discussion.

²¹⁴ There are also a number of letters and documents written on paper from 4th-6th/10th-12th centuries conveying greetings from ḥajj or reporting on the completion of the ḥajj. See P.Berlin.Arab. II 66, 4th/10th; P.Berlin.Arab. II 69, 5th/11th; P.Vind.Arab. V 28, 6th/12th.

²¹⁵ See above the discussion on children.

informing him that he has planned to perform the pilgrimage. Therefore, Abū Muḥammad sent to Abū Saʿīd twenty *dīnārs* so that the latter would rent for him and a certain ʿUmar something that remains unknown to us, presumably camels, and to buy them enough food supplies for the journey (“*wa-qad katabtu ilayka wa-[baʿathtu ilayka] ʿishrīn dīnāran fa-takārā lī li-l-ḥajj in shāʿa [Allāh fa-qad] aradtu dhālika*,” ll.5-7). Abū Muḥammad informs Abū Saʿīd further that he is coming to the latter’s domicile before the appearing of the moon and asks him not to rent until he arrives, otherwise he, Abū Saʿīd, should rent from a trustworthy person (“*wa-anā qādim ʿalayka qabla al-hilāl in shāʿa Allāh takārā lī wa-li-ʿUmar lī wa-lahu wa-sufra rātiba fī al-ṭarīq maʿa fa-in raʿayta an yakūna dhālika maʿaka fī ruqʿatika fa-fal in shāʿa Allāh an akūna maʿaka wa-illā fa-takārā maʿa thiqa*,” ll.7-11).

It is not clear from the text whether Abū Muḥammad is traveling to Mecca over land or sea. But if our assumption that Abū Muḥammad is traveling over land is correct, the journey would take from him roughly forty days to travel from Egypt to Mecca and about the same time or a bit longer to return, as both the Arabic papyri and narrative sources indicate. Abū Muḥammad may have meant by arriving at the addressee’s domicile before the appearing of the moon, i.e. the moon of Dhū al-Qaʿda, counting around forty days for the journey which fits nicely with the period recorded in the sources.²¹⁶

Letter 18 in our corpus shows that the return journey might have taken much longer than the journey going there. In this letter, the female sender, Ruqayya bt. Yaḥyā, who is living in Egypt, informs her aunt, Umm al-Qāsim bt. Zakariyā, based in Mecca, that her son died in the month of Ṣafar after people’s return from the ḥajj (“*wa-kāna wafātuhu raḍiya Allāh ʿanhu fī Ṣafar baʿd dukhūl al-nās min al-ḥajj*,” l.6).²¹⁷ The letter states that the pilgrims returned in the month of Ṣafar without specifying an exact date. But if we assume that they returned at the beginning of the month, this means that the journey took at least around forty-five days after the end of the ḥajj season in Mecca.

The unpublished semi-official letter (P.O.I.A. 17653), currently preserved in the oriental institute collection of the University of Chicago,²¹⁸ tells us more about the organization of the journey on the official level.²¹⁹ In this letter, Sahl b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 99/717), the son of the governor of Egypt ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān (r. 65-86/685-705) writes to ʿUqba b. Muslim al-Tujibī (d. 118/735 or 120/737), a local Muslim official in the Egyptian countryside, about going to the ḥajj. In this letter, Sahl informs ʿUqba that the commander of faithful (*amīr al-muʿminīn*) has announced to the people that it is already time for ḥajj and exhorted them to perform this ritual. Thus, Sahl wonders if ʿUqba is willing and being able to join his caravan to undertake the ḥajj. Sahl informs ʿUqba further that he is not obliged to pay anything besides the rental costs of his own camel (“*ammā baʿdu fa-innī dhakartu al-ḥajj wa-qad dariyahu amīr al-muʿminīn wa-ḥaḍḍa ʿalayhi fa-in istaṭaʿta an takhruja maʿi fa-mal fa-innaka in tashā tafala dhālika in shāʿa Allāh ukhruj ilayya maʿa rawāḥilī wa-lā tukalafanna shayʿan ghayr karā rāḥila*,” ll.6-12).

The letter is extremely significant as it shows the caliph, the highest religious and administrative authority, concerned about calling and urging individuals in Islamic

²¹⁶ Peters (1994), 86-87; 90-95 and the sources cited there.

²¹⁷ This letter is widely discussed in death.

²¹⁸ To be published by Petra M. Sijpesteijn.

²¹⁹ For more extensive discussion on this letter, see Sijpesteijn, *Ḥajj*.

territories to undertake the annual pilgrimage which echoes the Qur'anic command to exhort people or at least those who can find a way to it to perform this ritual (Q 22:27-29).²²⁰ The letter also shows that organized and collective journeys "caravans" to perform the *ḥajj* were undertaken annually from the early beginning of Islam. This annual journey has a number of connotations, which do not all have a religious character. In the first place, it shows the religious and political power of the Muslim authorities who organized, lead and protected the caravans of pilgrims on their way to the holy city and during performing the rituals. At the same time, pilgrims who join these caravans acknowledge somehow the authorities as their rulers. Secondly and most importantly, bringing together large numbers of Muslims from all over the Islamic world every year in one place and at one time in early Islamic centuries greatly contributes to the solidarity and unity of Islam and the Muslim community, when Muslims were still a minority in a prevalently non-Muslim environments in the conquered territories.²²¹

2.3.2. Costs of *ḥajj*

The costs of *ḥajj* is another aspect that the letters occasionally report on. In one letter from the Banū 'Abd al-Mu'min archive, the business agent in Fustāt Muḥammad b. 'Amr b. Thawr writes to inform his main producer Abū Hurayra in the Fayyūm that he received two clothes from the addressee and that he already sold them for fourteen carats and one fourth of a carat. The agent praises the quality of the commodity and states that Abū Hurayra has gotten abundant gain in view of the fact that he, Abū Hurayra, is willing to perform the *ḥajj*. Muḥammad b. 'Amr b. Thawr prays to God to supply Abū Hurayra with the expenses of the *ḥajj* ("waṣala ilayya thawbayn laka wa-qad bi'tuhā bi-arba'at a'shar qirāt wa-rub' sab'a wa-niṣf wa-sab'a illā rub' wa-qad wajjahta bi-matā' jayyid kāna al-ḥirzu laka fa-as'alu Allāh an yu'ajjila 'alayka nafat al-ḥajj wa-khalaf al-ḥajj sarī," P. Marchands III 3.2-5, 3rd/9th). In another letter from the same archive, the textile trader Aḥmad b. Killīs informs Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm the broker, both living and trading in the Fayyūm, that he sent to him nine *dīnārs* (actually eight *dīnārs* and eighteen *dirhams* and the rest is from an old account) so that the latter could buy him textiles. The sender urges the addressee to send him this ware immediately in the same week he wrote the letter. He claims that he saved the money for the costs of the *ḥajj* journey to Mecca. He, nonetheless, spent two *dīnārs* of the total amount. Aḥmad b. Killīs thus thought of trading with the rest of the money to recompense the disbursed money ("qad wajjahtu ilayka ḥafīẓaka Allāh bi-tis'at al-danānīr illā sab' al-darāhim minhā thamāniyat al-danānīr 'ayn wa-thamāniyat a'shara dirham wa-thamāniyat al-danānīr bi-naqṣ qirātayn wa-'indaka qirātayn lī fa-dhālika tis'at al-danānīr illā sab'at al-darāhim fa-nzur ḥafīẓaka Allāh an tashtariya lī bihā matā' shiqāq wa-riyāt wa-tuwajjihhā ilayya fī hādhihi al-jum'a fa-innī qad akaltu kull mā fī yadī wa-qad a'tayta hādhihi al-danānīr 'alā an aḥujja bihā ilā makka wa-qad akaltu minhā dīnārayn fa-

²²⁰ "And proclaim unto mankind the pilgrimage. They will come unto thee on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine, (27) That they may witness things that are of benefit to them, and mention the name of Allah on appointed days over the beast of cattle that He hath bestowed upon them. Then eat thereof and feed therewith the poor unfortunate. (28) Then let them make an end of their unkemptness and pay their vows and go around the ancient House."

²²¹ Sijpesteijn, *Hajj*.

‘*ajjil bihā ‘alayya la‘alla Allāh yarzuqunī fihā shay’*,” P.GrohmannWirtsch. 3[= P.Marchands V/I 5].2-9, 3rd/9th).

The letter shows that the total cost of the *hajj* journey for one person is around ten *dīnārs* including the two disbursed *dīnārs*. To be sure, a double amount of money is given in letter 37 of our corpus for two persons.

2.3.3. Trade on *hajj*

Mecca is not only the holy city where the house of God (*ka‘ba*) exists, but also a booming market in which the merchants from all over the Islamic world brought, sent and received their wares and goods. Doubtlessly, the economic significance of the city made most of pilgrims go to Mecca as much to trade as to perform the *hajj*.²²²

In one published letter from the 1st/7th century, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, that he received the gold (*dīnārs*) that the addressee sent with a certain Qays b. Ḥajar as the price of three clothes and another cloth which was received during the *hajj* season (“*wa-anna al-dhahab allatī arsalta ma‘a Qays b. Ḥajar min thaman al-thalāthat athwāb allatī ma‘a Qays b. Ḥajar wa-l-thawb alladhī laḥiqa fī al-ḥajj*,” P.HanafiBusinessLetter, 154).²²³ In the commentary, the editor argues that this fourth *thawb* should be understood as “an ordinary garment that the sender wears on his journey from Egypt to Mecca, for the purpose of performing the pilgrimage, rather than the special clothes worn during the *hajj* for which special words were used.”²²⁴ Indeed, the cloth mentioned in the text does not refer to the special clothes of the *hajj*, but it is not also special for the journey of the *hajj*. The cloth was only received during the *hajj* season in a business transaction.

2.3.4. Rewards after the return

The safe return of pilgrims to their homes after the long, exhaustive and probably dangerous journey of the *hajj* brings happiness to family members. Their joy was proved by offering gifts and rewards to relatives, friends and acquaintances. In one published letter, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, that the latter will be rewarded when the pilgrim arrives safely (“*fa-idhā jā‘a al-ḥājj fa-laka ‘indānā al-mukāfā in shā‘a Allāh*,” P.Khalili II 26r.9-10, 3rd/9th).

One more reference for the *hajj* in a published private letter should not be included here, as the reading is incorrect (P. Jahn 14.9, 3rd/9th).²²⁵

2.4. The feast of sacrifice (*al-aḍḥā*)

²²² See Peters (1994), 180-181. For more extensive discussion on the economic dimensions of the *hajj*, see Pearson (1994), 131-187.

²²³ The editor misread the last sentence as *wa-l-thawb alladhī li-ḥaqqī fī al-ḥajj*.

²²⁴ P.HanafiBusinessLetter, 157.

²²⁵ The editor reads *fa-innī lā aqdiru aḥujju ḥatta afrugha*, (I could not go for pilgrimage until I finish), but I would read it as follows, *fa-innī lā aqdiru ājī ḥatta afrugha*, (I could not come until I finish).

The celebration of fulfilling of the ceremony of the *ḥajj*, the last of the five core tenets of the Muslim faith, is shared throughout the Muslim world as believers in general and pilgrims in particular sacrifice their animals on the tenth day of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijja (Q 22:36).²²⁶ By starting their day with sacrificing their animals celebrants marked the difference of this festive day from a normal day life.

Arabic private and business letters confirm the celebration of this feast by sacrificing. In one letter from the 2nd/8th century, the sender Khālīd b. Ḥasan informs the addressee Ibrāhīm that a certain Abū Yazīd, known to the addressee, promised to buy him for a *dīnār* an animal for the feast (*juzur aḍḥānā*). Abū Yazīd told the sender that he would buy the animal and leave it with Ibrāhīm, the addressee, until the time of *ʿīd*. Thus, the sender asks whether Abū Yazīd had already bought it; if not, he asks the addressee to immediately let him know so that he could buy another animal from his place and not to be dependent on Abū Yazīd (“*wa-inna Abū Yazīd kāna qāla lanā innā yashtarī lanā bi-dīnār juzur aḍḥānā fa-lā nadrī ishtarāhu lanā aw lā wa-qāla atrukuhu ʿinda Ibrāhīm ḥattā idhā kāna āwān al-aḍḥā yaʿtikum bihi in shāʿa Allāh fa-in kāna lam yashtarī shayʿ fa-ktub ilaynā yā Ibrāhīm wa-ʿajjil uktub fa-nashtarī najdatan wa-innā nuḥibbu naʿlamu in kāna ishtarā am lā wa-in kāna lam yashtarī fa-ktub ilaynā nashtarī hunā wa-lā natawakkalu ʿalayhi wa-huwa lam yashtarī shāyʿ fa-innī uḥibbu an tuʿlimanī dhāka laʿallahu nasiya an yashtariya,*” P.RāḡibLettres 19.2-4, 2nd/8th). While Khālīd b. Ḥasan does not mention any word of emotion in the letter, we can clearly discern the feeling of concern towards fulfilling this religious ritual. Another reference to *al-aḍḥā* is attested in an early official correspondence. In one letter from the Qurra archive, the governor Qurra b. Sharīk asks the local official, most probably Basilios to immediately fulfill something, unknown to us, which he ordered him to do before the day of sacrifice. This shows how early Islamic religious terms became part of the daily speech in early Muslim Egypt (“*wa-taʿahhad li-tuwaffiyanī mā amartuka bihi qabla al-aḍḥā,*” P.BeckerPAF 5.15, dated 90/709).²²⁷

To summarize, feasts and festivities constituted an integral part of life in early Islamic Egypt. They were true moments of comfort and happiness in which people gathered to celebrate and entertain, but also moments of grief and distress at times. In the letters and references for the ritual of *ḥajj*, for instance, we hear voices full of hope and desire and we can best observe striving spirits seeking spiritual satisfaction. Individuals were eager to undertake this holy journey, how difficult, long, costly and exhaustive it may be, because they felt strong feelings towards this ritual and the holy places they planned to visit. On the official side, the state organized and lead caravans of pilgrims and encouraged individuals all over the Islamic world to join these caravans. The significance of the emotional dimension of the journey and ritual of *ḥajj* in creating an emotional community of believers can never be underestimated. Emotions were a target and a product of these journeys. The dedication of an entire month of worship, i.e. the festive month of Ramaḍān and the two Islamic feasts *al-fīṭr* and *al-aḍḥā* must have had a similar influence and consequence. To cut a

²²⁶ “And the camels! We have appointed them among the ceremonies of Allah. Therein ye have much good. So mention the name of Allah over them when they are drawn up in lines. Then when their flanks fall (dead), eat thereof and feed the beggar and the suppliant. Thus have We made them subject unto you, that haply ye may give thanks.” For more about *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*, see E. Mittwoch, “*ʿīd al-aḍḥā*,” E.I.2, vol. 3, 1007-1008; Ahsan (1979), 282-283.

²²⁷ See also P.Marchand II 2.13, discussed in *ʿīd al-fīṭr*.

long story short, “cult communities were emotional communities,” as Angelos Chaniotis put it.²²⁸ There is also the following clear cut statement by Rosenwein that emphasizes the role of religion in affecting the way in which feelings and thoughts are expressed, she states: “Belief has much to do with feeling.... People train themselves to have feelings that are based on their beliefs. At the same time, feelings help to create, validate, and maintain belief system.”²²⁹

²²⁸ Chaniotis (2011), 267.

²²⁹ Rosenwein (2006), 196.

3. Sickness

“wa-anā marīḍ mundhu fāraqtukum min dhālika al-dummāl alladhī kuntu araytukahu bayna maq’adatī wa-madhākiratī qad ahlakanī lā anāmu wa-lā aq’udu wa-anā ḥīna katabtu ilaykum shadīd al-marāḍ.”

(I am sick since I left you from the boil that I showed you between my backside and my penis. It ruins me (and) I cannot sleep nor can I sit down. While I am writing you, I am very sick.)

Letter **42**.15-18

In the life cycle, people habitually pass through alternating periods of strength and weakness, health and sickness. Sickness does not only generate and intensify sadness and distress to those who go through this painful experience but also to their close family members. A good number of published letters as well as letters published in this thesis enlighten us about physical incapacity and sickness in early Islamic Egypt. In these letters, the problems of ill health are graphically illustrated sometimes by the sick people themselves, who express their individual experiences with sickness like Hishām, the author of the above-mentioned quotation, or by others who describe someone else’s tragedy with sickness such as the case of Abū Ziyād in letter **17** and Duwaylim and al-Admā’ in letter **16**. Through these expressions one can examine the social representation of sickness and picture people’s behavior in response to being sick. As a matter of fact, being healthy or ill depends chiefly on the lifestyle of each person; what he eats and how and where he lives. In other words, the different diseases we encounter in a certain society indicate to a certain extent the way of life of the people, who live in this society. Our letters speak about two different types of illness: (1) physical sickness (2) emotional ailments. The questions I would like to answer through studying the papyrological references of illness are: How did the people in early Islamic Egypt respond to the misfortune of sickness? To what extent were they concerned about health and healthcare? And how would a sick person get cured?

3.1. Physical sickness

To start with personal experiences of physical illness and sorrowful stories and emotions stemming from them, Hishām, the author of letter **42**, tells us how painful it was to have a boil between the backside and penis. It hurt him and made him unable to sleep or sit down, as he describes. Having this painful boil in this sensitive part of the body comprised the core of Hishām’s tragedy, but there were also some extra external circumstances that added to his pains and suffering and made his miserable days pass slowly. Hishām as a land surveyor was on a mission in the hot Upper Egyptian countryside measuring the city of Dalāṣ. The city’s landscape was very inconvenient for Hishām’s health status. “It is the worst city that God created; its soil is the most distasteful and sickening,” says Hishām (*“katabnā ilaykum*

wa-naḥnu fī madīnat Dalāṣ fī asharr madīna khalaqahā Allāh wa-tharāhā athqaluhu wa-akhbathuhu,” ll.9-10). What is more, the accommodation was badly arranged, and they had to stay outdoors, as he writes. After measuring the city and calculating tax assessments, the surveyors found much surplus, which they had to send to the *amīr* with the local official and the people of the district (“*wa-qad faraghnā min qiyāsāt al-madīna ‘alā aḥsan ḥāl wa-l-ḥamdu li-llāh wajadnā fihā faḍl kathīr qad ba’athnā bihi ilā al-amīr*,” ll.13-15). The team of surveyors including Hishām had to wait some more days for their return, which must have made Hishām’s condition even worse (“*wa-naḥnu muqīmīn fī ghayr shay’ nantaḥziru qudūmahum ‘alaynā*,” l.12). How did Hishām get rid of this painful nightmare? The letter does not tell.

Abū Ziyād’s sore experience with his long-term illness was even greater than Hishām’s painful boil, owing to the fact that death was the eventual outcome of his disease. Abū Ziyād’s deadly illness is not explicitly mentioned in the letter, but the careful description of his condition could tell us something about it. In letter 17, the sender Wusāma b. Ṭalq al-Tujībī informs the female addressee Zaynab bt. Abū Ziyād that her father, Abū Ziyād, had passed away (“*ukhbiruki anna Abū Ziyād tuwuffiya fa-yarḥamuhu Allāh wa-ṣallā ‘alayhi wa-adkhalahu al-janna wa-llāh fā’il in shā’a Allāh*,” ll.8-10). Wusāma graphically describes how the deceased’s last days passed. He says that Abū Ziyād was unable to move by himself and that his slave, Muqsim, was nursing him all day and night. When Abū Ziyād needed to leave his cottage (*al-khuṣṣ*), Muqsim was always there at his service; he carried him on his hands, took him out and brought him back (“*wa-inna Muqsim wa-llāh [] wa-aḥsana lahu al-ṣaḥāba ḥattā law kunti anti lam taqūmī ‘alayhi ka-naḥw mā kāna yaqūmu ‘alayhi Muqsim fīmā kāna yuḥsinu ilā Abū Ziyād fī al-qiyām ‘alayhi ḥīna lam yas’amhu yawm wa-lā layla law kāna wāliduhu mā ṣabara ‘alayhi illā ka-naḥw mā ṣabara ‘alā Abū Ziyād fī raḥīhi iyyāhu wa-waḍ’ihi wa-ikhrājīhi min al-khuṣṣ maḥmūl ‘alā yadd wa-idkhālīhi mithl dhālika*,” ll.13-22). One might wonder, was Abū Ziyād paralyzed or just too weak? It is obvious that Abū Ziyād was an old man. A sick man in his old age would definitely need someone else’s help to move, but the description indicates a complete or semi-complete physical incapacity, most probably paralysis (*fālīj*). Abū Ziyād’s gloomy story with his long-term illness has, nevertheless, a happy ending for the loyal slave. On his deathbed, Abū Ziyād invited some sound witnesses to his house in order to witness him emancipating Muqsim in return of his loyalty and dependability (“*wa-annahu a’taqa Muqsim fī shahīdan ṣāliḥīn min aṣḥābinā qabla an yutawaffā bi-zaman*,” ll.11-13). In the end, Abū Ziyād’s long misfortune with sickness resulted in Muqsim’s joy of freedom.

Letter 16 in our corpus also informs us about two other sick persons in Fustāṭ. In this letter, a certain Salmān b. Mughīth writes to one ‘Ubayd b. Yasār and another person, whose name is missing, about a certain Duwaylim and al-Admā’, who are/were sick. The right half of the letter is missing and the preserved vestiges are not enough to extract a continuous sense. All that we know from the letter is that al-Admā’ was unable to eat because of her sickness.

Besides the above-mentioned references, some other published and yet unpublished letters having information about ill health and ill people should be included for a wider discussion of how physical sickness was presented, dealt with and treated in early Muslim Egypt. In one published letter, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, that he feels sick. He further blames the addressee for not visiting and asking about him (“*wa-anā ‘alīl lam taji’ wa-lam tas’al ‘annī wa-llāh al-musta’ān*,” P.Ryl.Arab. I VI 18 [= P.World,

180].5-6, 2nd-3rd/8th-9th). In another letter, the sender, Aḥmad b. al-Aswad, informs the addressee, Abū 'Uthmān, that he sent to him several letters telling him about the matter of his son Muḥammad and the affliction that has befallen him. He also expresses his deep grief and distress after hearing about the addressee's illness, asking God to protect him and not to let him see anything unpleasant afflict those whom he loves. Further, Aḥmad asks Abū 'Uthmān to immediately write back to him so that he knows more about his health condition, assuring him that he will be very pleased at receiving a letter with his news. In plain words, Aḥmad informs Abū 'Uthmān that he is worried about him "I should like you to know, may God give you strength, that I am worried about you," (*"u'limuka akramaka Allāh annī qad katabtu ilayka min al-kutub mā lā uḥṣīhā adhkuru laka fihā amr Muḥammad waladī wa-mā nazala fī min muṣība wa-lam arā laka kitāb wa-lā khabar wa-la-qad ghammanī amruka wa-ba'du fa-lā adri yaṣīlu kitābī wa-l-danānīr fa-as'alu Allāh an lā yuriyaka fī man aḥbabta makrūh uḥibbu ta'lamu a'azzaka Allāh annahu ghammanī amr khabarika bihi nafsī wa-qad abṣartu annaka 'alīl fa-ghammanī dhālika fa-as'alu Allāh an lā yuriya fīka makrūh,"* P.Khalili I 36[= P.Khalili II 93].4-9, 3rd/9th).²³⁰ In another letter, the sender, unknown to us, shows his grief and sorrow due to the addressee's illness. He makes a supplication to God to protect the addressee and to restore his health (*"dafa'a Allāh 'anka wa-arāka al-'āfiya fa-inna maraḍaka mim mā qad ghammanī,"* P.Khalili I 34[= P.Khalili II 40].3, 3rd/9th).²³¹ In one other letter, the sender tells the addressee, both are unknown to us, that he had expected his immediate return. The long delay of the addressee made the sender ask about him, and he got to know about his sickness. The thing that made him very sad. He prayed to God with affection to restore the addressee's health soon and to let him return in wellbeing, health and happiness. He, finally, asked the addressee to immediately write back to him to let him know about his news, orders and health condition (*"lam araka aṭāla Allāh baqā'aka innī kuntu atawaqqa'u sur'at qudūmika aqdamaka Allāh 'alaynā fī khayr wa-'āfiya wa-surūr wa-dafa'a 'anka makāriḥ al-dunyā wa-l-ākḥira bi-raḥmatihi fa-innahu 'alā dhālika qādir ḥattā ittaṣala binā mā ightamammtu lahu min 'illatika lā a'allaka Allāh wa-lā arānā fīka sū' wa-lā makrūh wa-arjū an yakūna Allāh 'azza wa-jalla qad wahaba laka al-'āfiya fa-ta'muru aṭāla Allāh baqā'aka bi-l-amr bi-l-kitāb ilayya wa-tu'arriḥnī khabaraka fī nafsika wa-bi-amrika wa-nahyika aqifu 'indahū wa-antahī muwaffaqan,"* P.Jahn 6[= P.World, 184-185].11, 2nd-3rd/8th-9th). In another letter, the sender Aḥmad informs the addressee Abū Bakr that he sent his letter with his friend and neighbor Abū al-Ḥadīd. The latter was in a partnership with a certain Jarīr who is gravely sick in Fustāṭ. Therefore, the sender asks the addressee to go with Abū al-Ḥadīd to visit the sick Jarīr and to complete the transaction (*"wa-waṣala kitābī hādhā ma'a jāri wa-ṣadīqī Abū al-Ḥadīd al-aṣṣār wa-baynahu wa-bayna Abū al-Ḥadīd wa-Jarīr alladhī huwa mu'tall 'indaka bi-l-fustāṭ sharika fī kattān ḥamalūhu ilā mā qibalaka wa-balaghahu annahu 'alīl shadīd al-'illa fa-uḥibbu aḥabbaka Allāh an taḥḍura ma'ahu bayna yaday Jarīr wa-an as'adahū Allāh ḥattā yatawaqqafā 'an mā baynahun min al-sharika,"* CPR XVI 22.8-11, 3rd/9th). In one letter from the Banū 'Abd al-Mu'min archive, the sender, unknown to us, informs Abū Hurayra, the addressee, that a certain Umm Salama is very sick and urges him to come to see her as soon as possible (once he has read the letter), as she yearns to see him (*"Umm Salama 'alīla wa-hiya shadīdat al-'illa fa-idhā qara'ta kitābī allā taḍa'ahu*

²³⁰ See also P.DiemKhalili, 57.

²³¹ See also P.DiemKhalili, 57.

min yadika ḥattā taqdima fa-innahā mushtāqa ilā ru'yatika," P.Marchands II 32[= P.Berl.Arab. II 48].3-4, 3rd/9th). In another letter from the same archive, Muḥammad b. 'Amr b. Thawr informs Abū Hurayra that the former's father (*al-shaykh*) is sick and that that is why he is busy ("*al-shaykh 'alīl wa-anā mashghūl,*" P.Marchands III 19.16, 3rd/9th).

The letters cited and studied above show the profound feelings of sadness, anxiety, fear and distress due to the physical incapacity and the tough experience with sickness. Similar feelings of grief and worry are also expressed in the response of relatives and friends after hearing about the others' sickness. The letters have shown that sick persons would find solace and repose in visits from family members and friends, and blame them in case they do not do so. On the other side, the absent relatives and those who could not travel in person ask the sick persons to keep them informed about their news and health status.

3.2. Emotional ailments

Physical illness is not the only source of anxiety and distress recorded in letters. Emotional ailments, such as lovesickness (*shawq*) and homesickness (*ubāba*) also caused lots of worries (*hamm*), grief (*ghamm/ḥuzn*) and fear (*khawf*) to the people in early Islamic Egypt. To demonstrate this, in one unpublished letter, the sender expresses his strong distress and deep sadness due to the addressee's departure. The sender informs the absent addressee further that an unidentified person burst into tears after his departure. He, this person, does not find solace in crying all day and night. Thus, the sender asks the addressee to hasten his return to soothe his suffering ("*min ghamm firāqika wa-innī as'alu Allāh fīhi wa-qad ta'lam anā fī shidda fa-lā tubṭī 'alaynā ḥattā taqdima in shā'a Allāh fa-anā fī ghamm shadīd min firāqika fa-lā tada' al-qudūm ilaynā [] mā ta'azā min al-bukā' al-layl wa-l-nahār,*" P.Gen.V 15.5-10, 3rd/9th). The letter is very emotional in tone and content with many words of sorrow and distress. The relationship between the sender, the distressed person and the addressee is not clear, but the letter's intimate tone indicates a very close relationship. In another letter between two brothers, the sender informs his brother that he got to know about the latter's plan to visit him and the whole family after breaking the fast of Ramaḍān (*al-fiṭr*) because he is yearning to see them. The sender informs his brother that he and the mother find the same feeling of longing towards him. He also lets him know that he, the sender, had planned to go and visit the addressee before receiving the letter and knowing about his arrival ("*wa-dhakarta annaka turīdu al-qudūm ilaynā ba'd al-fiṭr in shā'a Allāh wa-mā dhakarta min shawqika ilaynā fa-wa-llāh innā la-najīdu laka mithl mā dhakarta min al-shawq wa-la-qad aradtu al-khurūj ilā mā qibalaka mithl mā dhakarta min al-shawq nusallimu 'alayka ḥattā dhakarta al-qudūm wa-inna al-wālida mushtāqa ilayka shadīdat al-shawq fa-lā akhlā Allāh minka makān wa-lā anzala bika makrūh abadan,*" P.Marchands V/I 20.18, 3rd/9th). In another letter also between two brothers, the sender informs the addressee that the mother got very sick since the latter's departure. The sender makes a supplication to God to let him see the addressee's face before death ("*wa-u'limuka yā akhī anna ummaka marīḍa shadīdat al-maraḍ mudh kharajta as'alu Allāh an yuriyanī wajhaka qabla al-mawt,*" P.RāḡibLettres 15.5-6, 3rd/9th). Again, in a letter sent from a certain Umm Bakr to two other female addressees, i.e. Umm Muḥammad and Umm 'Abbāsa, Umm Bakr says that she went sick since she left them. She claims that her

sickness lasted for three month (“*mundhu fāraqtukum ajidu annanī ‘alīl al-‘illa mundhu thalāthat ashhur*,” CPR XVI 30.3-4, 3rd/9th). One final reference showing deep sorrow and distress due to a dear female friend’s departure occurs in letter 23 of our corpus. The letter is widely discussed in women of the house.

Even when taking into account that some of these references are conventions and *topoi*, still some personal feelings of sadness and anxiety can be seen. As historians of emotions have argued that the existence of *topoi* and formulaic expressions should not deter us from studying and establishing points of continuity and change.²³² A point to which I shall return at the end of this discussion.

3.3. Medicine and popular methods of curing

The letters do not only inform us about diseases, but also give hints about medicine and other popular and alternative methods of curing accompanied by words and gestures of emotions. Taking into account that medical care in rural areas must have differed greatly from that in urban cities. In lower layers of the society, there was always a room for popular medicine and different explanation of disease.²³³

To begin with medicine, in one published letter, the sender informed the addressee, both anonymous to us, that the former’s children (*al-‘iyāl*)²³⁴ are very sick and that they urgently need to take the medicine “today”. The father was so afraid for his children. He thought they were dying. The father full of fear and awe quickly went to the physician (*al-ṭabīb*) and described to him the symptoms of their disease.²³⁵ The physician prescribed for them lettuce, psyllium and phoinix.²³⁶ The sender, therefore, asks the addressee to send to him this medicine, since the latter used to take the same medicine for his illness as well (“*ḥafīẓaka Allāh wa-abqāka wa-amta’a bika aẓunnuka tashrabu al-dawā’ fa-nafa’aka Allāh bihi wa-razaqaka ‘alayhi al-ṣiḥḥa yā akhī qad kuntu a’lamtuka anna al-‘iyāl yurīdūna shurbat al-dawā’ al-yawm fa-aṣābahum ‘alayhi shay’ ḥattā ẓanantu annahu al-mawt fa-ji’tu al-ṭabīb fa-a’lamtuhu ‘illatahum fa-dhakara al-khass wa-l-asfiyūsh wa-tashrib bīniksa fa-in ra’ayta ḥafīẓaka Allāh an tab’atha ilayya bi-shurb asfiyūsh wa-bīniks fa’alta*,” CPR XVI 24.2-10, 3rd/9th).²³⁷ Strikingly, the physician did not check the sick children himself but prescribed the medicine on the basis of the father’s description. Why? We are not told.

Drugs (*dawā’*) were generally used to cure diseases. In one letter from the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu’min archive, Abū Hurayra’s step-mother writes to her sick daughter in the Fayyūm inquiring about the latter’s current condition. The mother had sent to the sick daughter a bag of drugs (*qirṭās fīhi dawā’*) from Fustāt to cure the daughter’s affected stomach. The mother was so worried and eager to know whether the daughter took the medicine and improved or not (“*wa-ba’athtu ilayki ma’ahu qirṭās fīhi dawā’ li-jawfiki fa-ktubī ilayya bi-l-wuṣūlī*

²³² See Cubitt (2001), 226; Rosenwein (2001), 232. See also below the value of the health.

²³³ For more extensive discussion on popular medicine in medieval Islamic times, see P. Pormann, and E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic medicine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 144-161.

²³⁴ The editor translates it as “meine familie”, see the discussion on this term in children.

²³⁵ For more about physicians in medieval Islamic times, see Pormann, and Savage-Smith (2007), 80-114.

²³⁶ For these drugs, see CPR XVI, 67.

²³⁷ See also the commentary to lines 7-8.

wa-kitābī waṣala ilayki wa-sharibtīhi wa-ntafa'tī bihi fa-ktubī ilayya ḥattā taṭība nafsī fa-innī maghmūma biki ghamm shadīd as'alu Allāh al-faraj min 'indihi," P.Marchands II 28.3-5, 3rd/9th).²³⁸ In another letter, Abū Hurayra's step-mother shows how grief and sorrow have affected her and her husband due to their daughter's sickness. She says that her tears do not stop day and night (*"ahlakanī al-ghamm fa-inna kitābī ilayka wa-dam'atī 'alā khaddī layl wa-nahār mā afirru minhā wa-lā ahda'u ... wa-llāh qad halaktu min al-ghamm wa-abūhā zādahu ghamm bintihi,"* P.Marchands II 27.10-12, 16, 3rd/9th).

Grape syrup (*'aqīd*) and wine (*sharāb*) were widely used as medicine.²³⁹ In one unpublished letter, the sender informs the addressee about a sick woman, most probably his wife. In this letter, the sender asks the addressee to send him grape syrup (*'aqīd*) for this sick woman, if he is able to do so (*"yā akhī anna al-mara ams fa-llāh al-musta'ān wa-iyāhu as'alu al-ṣabr wa-l-ajr wa-l-..... wa-qad kuriha lahā shurb fa-in khaffa 'alayka an tab'ath ilayya bi-shay' min 'aqīd,"* P.Gen.V 18r.3-7, 3rd/9th). The answer is given on the verso, but the papyrus is badly preserved and the ink is being effaced. The vestiges conserved on the verso contain only prayers and blessings for the addressee and mention the matter of the woman as well as sending something, most probably the syrup (*"waṣala kitābuka wa-fahimtu mā dhakarta min amr al-mara wa-as'al Allāh an wa-yaj'ala thawābaka minhu wa-l-khayr wa-razaqaka arsala shay',"* P.Gen.V 18v.3-5, 3rd/9th). The letter does not tell that the grape syrup was prescribed for the woman's illness. Another published letter from Edfou confirms the fact that grape syrup and wine were popularly used to treat diseases. In this letter, the sender asks the addressee to send to him a jar of grape syrup or wine (*sharāb*). He says that he did not drink it for months and that it was prescribed for him to drink little of it to cure his illness (*"a'azzaka Allāh an tanfa'anī wa-tab'atha ilayya shay' yaṣluḥa li-l-marīḍ min bayna jarrat 'aqīd aw sharāb fa-innī ma sharabtuhu mundhu ashhur wa-lakin wuṣifa lī an atanāwala minhu shay' qalīl la'alla yanfa'unī Allāh bihi,"* P.RāgibEdfou 3.6-10, 4th/10th).

Dietary therapy, namely eating fresh fruits, and keeping sad news from the ill person seem to have been recommended especially for elderly ill people. In one letter from the Banū 'Abd al-Mu'min archive, the two brothers Mūsā and Hārūn sons of 'Absūn, living in Fuṣṭāṭ, inform their half-brother Abū Hurayra in the Fayyūm about the death of their cousin (*"wa-u'alimuka yā akhī anna [] ibn khālika Abū 'Alī tuwuffiya raḥimahumā Allāh,"* P.Marchands II 24.11, 3rd/9th). The two brothers asked Abū Hurayra not to tell their mother in her current condition of illness, but to wait until she had recovered, so as not to increase her illness and to make her sad (*"wa-lā tu'lim al-wālida wa-hiya fī hādhihi al-'illa ḥattā ta'tiqu in shā'a Allāh fa-taghummuḥā,"* ll.15-16). At the end of the letter, the two brothers mention that they are really happy that the bananas and apples they sent for their ill mother had reached her, and she had eaten the ripe ones (*"wa-la-qad sarranī lammā akhbaranī anna dhālika al-mawz wa-l-tuffāḥ waṣala ilayka wa-akalat minhu al-'ajūz surūr Allāh bihi 'alīm fa-lā awḥashanā Allāh minhā wa-lā arānā fīhā makrūh,"* ll.19-20). Strikingly, the Fayyūm is supposed to be so famous for its fruits as both the Arabic papyri and narrative sources indicate. Perhaps there was no fresh fruit available in the season in the oasis, while there were fruits available in the Fuṣṭāṭ markets, imported from elsewhere.

²³⁸ For Abū Hurayra's carelessness towards his family, see the discussion on children.

²³⁹ For the use of grape syrup (*'aqīd*) and wine as medicine, see H. Kamal, *Encyclopedia of Islamic medicine* (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1975), 182-183 and the primary sources cited there.

Moving to fresh air areas certainly helps to restore ill health. In letter 9 in our corpus, the sender asks the addressee to sail to him and to ask another woman to sail to the sender's domicile as well, since the air is fresh and healthy there ("*fa-inna al-rīḥ ṭayyiba*," l.14).²⁴⁰

Besides drugs, herbs, dietary therapy and moving to fresh air areas, amulets, talismans²⁴¹ and other magical and religious medicaments have been widely used for protection and curing.²⁴² Lovesickness (*shawq*) was unquestionably only comforted by reunion (*wiṣāl*).²⁴³

In addition to the references of popular treatments given in private and business letters many scientific medical prescriptions and orders of medicine are recorded in papyri. Some of these prescriptions and orders have already been published but many are still awaiting publication.²⁴⁴ A good and careful examination of these documents would indeed help us to widen our outlook and improve our knowledge about the actual medical care and practice in Egypt after the Arab conquest and show whether or not the Arabs produced new medical practices to what was already known in pre-Islamic Egypt. An attempt has already been done by Ernst Seidel on the basis of some scientific medical Arabic writings found in the Heidelberg papyrus collection.²⁴⁵ Recently, Lucian Reinfandt has elaborated and built upon this study with some encouraging results using mainly published and also some of yet unpublished material.²⁴⁶ Most recently, a PhD thesis on herbs and medical plants cited in the Arabic papyri has been defended in Egypt, but the dissertation has not yet been published and is not easily accessible.²⁴⁷

3.4. The value of health

Further to the question to what extent people in early Islamic Egypt were concerned about health, many references given in private and business letters show the value of health and longevity. Blessings such as *madda Allāh fī 'umrika wa-aṭāla Allāh baqā'aka* (may God lengthen your life and prolong your existence "on earth") are well attested in letters.²⁴⁸ Also the words, health (*āfiya*), sound condition (*salāma*) and condition (*ḥāl*) seem to be basic elements in every single letter.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, before getting into the main point of the

²⁴⁰ For different interpretations of this sentence, see the commentary.

²⁴¹ A great number of amulets and talismans are preserved on papyrus and paper, many of them are unpublished, see P.M. Sijpesteijn, "A curious Arabic talisman," in: A. Vrolijk, P. Hogendijk (eds.), *O ye gentlemen: Arabic studies on science and literary culture in honour of Remke Kruk* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 201-210.

²⁴² See I. Perho, *The prophet's medicine, a creation of the Muslim traditionalist scholars* (Helsinki: Studia Orientalia 74, 1995), 111-118; Pormann, and Savage-Smith (2007), 144-159.

²⁴³ See also the discussion on spouses.

²⁴⁴ See for example A. Dietrich, *Zum Drogenhandel im islamischen Ägypten. Eine Studie über die arabische Handschrift Nr. 912 Heidelberger Papyrussammlung* (Heidelberg, 1954); PERF 649, 760, 804, 834. See also L. Reinfandt, "Medizin und Alltag in den arabischen Papyri," in: H. Froschauer, C. Römer (eds.), *Zwischen Magie und Wissenschaft. Ärzte und Heilkunst in den Papyri, Nilus. Studien zur Kultur Ägyptens und des Vorderen Orients* 13 (Wien: Phoibos Verlag, 2007), 65-78 and the references provided there.

²⁴⁵ E. Seidel, "Medizinisches aus den Heidelberger Papyri Schott-Reinhardt," *Der Islam* 1 (1910), 145-152; 238-263; 2 (1911), 220-231; 3 (1912), 273-291.

²⁴⁶ Reinfandt (2007b), 65-78.

²⁴⁷ S.M. Hānī, *al-A'shāb wa-l-nabatāt al-ṭibīyya wa-l-ṭīriyya min khilāl awrāq al-bardī fī al-ʿaṣr al-islāmī* (PhD dissertation, Hilwan University, 2010).

²⁴⁸ See for example CPR XVI 26.2, 10, 2nd/8th; P.Cair.Arab. V 359.2, 3rd/9th; CPR XVI 11 .1, 3rd/9th; P.Marchands II 39.17, 3rd/9th. See also Grob (2010a), 43-48.

²⁴⁹ Grob (2010a), 49.

letter, the sender usually mentions that he and his family are well and in good health, thanks God for this gift and asks Him to grant him and his family always good health. He also inquires about the health of the addressee and his family and wishes them good health as well. Even in regular exchange of letters, the sender usually mentions his wellbeing and expresses his pleasure at receiving a letter from the addressee and hearing about his wellbeing and barely skips this section. Again, at the end of the letter, the sender usually asks the addressee to write back to him with his news and health condition.

On the opening section of the letter, Grob comments: “The content and structure of well-being and confirmation are very conventional and may be described as ‘initial courtesy’.”²⁵⁰ And on the closing part, she says: “The request to write back – rather a courtesy than a major concern – is conventionally introduced by an instruction-trigger.”²⁵¹ Grob’s comments on both sections hold true to some extent. On the other hand, formulaic expressions and conventions can be used to voice *true* feelings and concerns. The conventions did not largely lose their meanings. They rather indicate prevailing emotional norms in the society. As Mary Garrison reminds us, “models and topoi, then, may be able to convey ‘genuine’ statements about the experience of the self and they may also be able to serve as the most effective way to communicate or represent aspects of emotions or the inner world to others. In other words, they are not a barrier to interpreting emotional experience, but a potentially privileged access.”²⁵² This clear cut statement leads us to the conclusion that the repetitive inquiries about health as well as blessings and prayers for longevity show that the members of this society were very much concerned about their wellbeing and health and were always worried about illness, lack of medicine and death.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Grob (2010a), 52.

²⁵¹ Grob (2010a), 69.

²⁵² Garrison (2001), 247. See also Cubitt (2001), 226; Rosenwein (2001), 232.

²⁵³ See also Reinfandt (2007b), 73–75, 78.

4. Death and consolation

“fa-‘alayki yā-mm ‘Uthmān bi-l-ṣabr fa-inna al-ṣabr manjā inna al-mawt sabīl al-awwalīn wa-l-ākhirīn laysa li-aḥad barā’a min al-mawt.”

(Umm ‘Uthmān, you must have patience, for in patience lies salvation. The death is the fate of all people from the first to the last. Nobody is saved from the death.)

Letter 20.9-10

“Death is inevitable and verily everybody whether willingly or unwillingly shall die. Death is the fate of all people from the first to the last. You must have patience, for in patience there is salvation. Indeed, we belong to God and indeed to Him we will return.” With these words, a comforter compiles a letter of condolence to express his personal grief, anxiety and sympathy with the mourners when the misfortune of death strikes one or more of their relatives. Compared to other types of letters, letters of condolence are extremely rare. Not a single letter of condolence has been published so far, and, as a consequence, a comprehensive study on this important subject is still absent from papyrological research. Among our corpus, two unique letters of condolence are edited (19 and 20) as well as two letters notifying the death of close relatives (17 and 18). The letters vary considerably to include a letter written by a bereaved mother who expresses her personal grief and anxiety after the death of her son (18), a letter of condolence sent to a sorrowful widow (20), another one sent to a man on the death of a male relative (19) and finally, a letter sent to a woman by a male relative announcing the death of her ill father (17). In addition to these four letters, one unpublished letter of condolence sent to a woman and her child from two males, which has recently been found in Fustāt (9702/f), as well as a papyrus text that contains a model for letters of condolence and two models for replies to such letters shall be included in the discussion.²⁵⁴

In chapter one, I argued that letters of condolence were considered a suitable substitute for one’s physical presence in times of loss and grief.²⁵⁵ Below, I shall focus on the formulaic traditions and the special expressions of grief and distress emerging in these letters, endeavoring to perceive how the people in early Islamic Egypt responded to the misfortune of death.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ These two letters and more will be published in K.M. Younes, “Arabic letters of condolence on papyrus,” (forthcoming).

²⁵⁵ The practice and the objective of this type of letter compare well with that witnessed in pre-Islamic Egypt, particularly in Greek papyri, see Chapa (1998), 30-32.

²⁵⁶ For the study of Arabic funerary inscriptions and other related funerary structures with the Muslim society as compared to non-Muslim areas, see W. Diem, *The living and the dead in Islam, studies in Arabic epitaphs, I epitaphs as texts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004) and W. Schöller, *The living and the dead in Islam, studies in Arabic epitaphs, II epitaphs in context* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004). See also L. Halevi, *Muhammad’s grave. Death rites and the making of Islamic society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

4.1. Letters of condolence

Let us start with a closer look at the letters of condolence of our corpus. In letter **19**, the sender writes to the addressee, both having the same *kunya*, i.e. Abū al-Azhar, trying to soothe the addressee's pains by expressing his sincere condolences, profound sadness and sympathy. The right half of the letter is missing with a considerable loss of text, but it is possible to reconstruct some of the missing parts with the help of other letters of the same genre, Qur'an, traditions (*aḥādīth*) and other literary texts.²⁵⁷ The letter starts after the introductory formulae with the reference to hearing of the death of a certain Abū 'Abd al-'Azīz and then continues with extensive prayers and blessings for the deceased. The sender asks God to have mercy upon the deceased, bless him and grant him a better life in the hereafter. Afterwards, the sender expresses how great the disaster is. He, at the same time, reminds himself and the addressee about the inevitability of death, stating that they have to surrender to God's command being patient and calm in anticipation of God's reward ("balaghanā alladhī kāna min qaḍā' Ab[ū 'Abd al-'Azīz] Allāh wa-maghfiratan 'alayhi fa-'inda Allāh aḥtasibu muṣībatahu wa-aqūlu innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji'ūna ṣabran wa-ḥtisāban wa-taslīman li-amr Allāh fa-hādhihi muṣība mā a'ḥamuhā fa-as'alu Allāh an yarḥamahu wa-an yaghfira lahu wa-an yubārika lahu fīmā ṣāra ilayhi wa-arjū an yakūn [] mā 'alimtuḥu maḥmūd wa-lākinna al-muṣība qad 'aẓumat [] wa-lākinnaḥu sabīl al-māḍīn wa-l-[lāhiqīn," ll.13-14). Next, he makes a supplication to the addressee, but it is lost ("fa-razaqaka Allāh al-[] ya'mal ṣāliḥan yablughaka wa-iyyanā [] bi-raḥmatihī," ll.15-17). To conclude his letter, Abū al-Azhar sends his greetings and condolences to a certain Abū 'Uthmān, makes further collective supplications and then closes the letter with the final *salām* greeting ("abligh Abū 'Uthmān minnā al-salām wa-abligh ta'ziyatanā iyyāhu bi-Abī 'Abd al-'Azīz [] tawallāka Allāh wa-iyyanā bi-l-'āfiya wa-l-salām 'alayka wa-raḥmat Allāh," ll.17-19).

Letter **20** contains stronger expressions of grief and distress than the other letters do. The letter is fragmentary and forms the middle part of a letter of condolence sent to a woman known as Umm 'Uthmān who had lost a man named Nawfal, who was presumably her husband. The sender, whose name is missing, refers to Nawfal as his brother, but this should not be taken literally.²⁵⁸ The sender assures Umm 'Uthmān that "their" misfortune is a misfortune for him, their sorrow is for him a sorrow and their joy is for him a joy. He then asks, with soothing words, Umm 'Uthmān to be patient, reminding her of God's reward for the patients and stating that death is a universal truth. At the end of the fragment, the sender cites a Qur'anic verse, but it is missing²⁵⁹ ("akhī innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji'ūna fa-yarḥamuhu Allāh wa-ṣallā 'alayhi wa-adkhalahu al-janna 'arrafahā lahu fa-wa-llāh inna muṣībatakum lī la-muṣība wa-inna ḥuznakum lī ḥuzn wa-farahakum lī farah Allāh ya'lam dhālika fa-'alayki yā-mm 'Uthmān bi-l-ṣabr fa-inna al-ṣabr manjā inna al-mawt sabīl al-awwalīn wa-l-ākhirīn laysa li-aḥad barā'a min al-mawt qāla Allāh li-nabiyyihī ..., ll.3-10). The letter is very emotional in tone and content. The relationship between the mourner, the comforter and the deceased is unclear, but the intimate tone of the letter indicates a very close relationship.

²⁵⁷ See al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1922), vol. 9, 80-100. See also the commentary.

²⁵⁸ See the discussion on children.

²⁵⁹ See the commentary to line 10.

The unpublished letter of condolence (9702/f) datable on palaeographical grounds to the 2nd/8th century is fortunately almost complete except for a horizontal strip 2 cm wide and 8.5 cm long which has disappeared of the upper layer of the papyrus at the right half. This results in the loss of two words of each line, but it is not difficult to restore almost all the missing words. The letter is sent from two males, Abū Zufar being one of them, to a woman named Zakhīm and her child (*Zakhīm wa-waladihā*) on the death of the *paterfamilias*, Abū Yazīd. After the common introductory formula, the senders start the letter with the reference to hearing of the death of Abū Yazīd and follow this with extensive prayers for the deceased and the bereaved family (*“balaghanā wafāt Abī Yazīd fa-innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji‘ūna fa-raḥimahu Allāh wa-ghafara lahu wa-jazāhu bi-ṣāliḥ ‘amalihi wa-a‘qabakum ba’dahu ṣabran wa-imānan,”* ll.3-5). Afterwards, the senders stress the fact that all that dwells upon the earth will perish eventually and that God alone lives eternally (*“fa-huwa al-sabīl ḥattā lā yabqā illā Allāh,”* l.5). The exhortation to have patience because God promises the patient with the best rewards is present in the letter (*“fa-‘alaykum bi-l-ṣabr fa-inna Allāh wa‘ada al-ṣābirīn khayran,”* l.5). The senders then close the letter with the common request to the addressees to write back with their news and condition (*“uktubū ilaynā bi-khabarikum wa-salāmatikum fa-innā nusarru bi-dhālika,”* ll.6-7). After the final *salām* greeting, a certain Tamīma, probably the wife of Abū Zufar, sends her greetings and condolences to the female addressee (*“wa-Tamīma tuqri’uki al-salām wa-taqūlu a‘ḏama Allāh ajraki wa-jabara muṣībataki,”* l.7).

4.2. Models for letters of condolence and replies to such letters

P.Cair.Arab. VII 459 is a receipt of payment of land-tax (*barā’a*) from Edfou dated 268/881.²⁶⁰ The back of this receipt contains one model for a letter of condolence and two models for replies to such letters. The model of letter of condolence is written at the top. It starts with the reference to hearing of the death of so and so and follows this with prayers for the deceased (*“balaghanī mā kāna min wafāt Abī fulān raḥmat Allāh wa-maghfiratah,”* l.1). The writer declares twice that they belong to God and to Him they will return, stating that the misfortune of death is one of the heavy disasters and offensive misfortunes that happens to the souls that God entrusted us with (*“innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji‘ūna thumma innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji‘ūna fa-la-qad ‘aḏumat muṣibat al-[l-mawt] min ‘aḏimāt al-razāyā wa-mūbiqāt al-balāyā allatī taghdū ‘alā al-anfus al-mustawda[‘a],”* ll.2-3). The writer then states that death is an inevitable fate that comes in an appointed measure and a fixed time. He also confirms that the death of anyone will not be postponed because of his age or status and that God is the only to survive (*“wa-ja‘ala al-maw[t] [...] ḥatman maqḍiyyan al-ḥabīb bi-l-ḥabīb wa-l-ṣaghīr bi-l-ṣaghīr wa-l-kabīr <bi-l-kabīr> lā yu‘akhar ṣaghīr li-ṣigharihi wa-lā kabīr li-kibarihi kull dhālika bi-qadar ma‘lūm wa-kitāb ‘alayhim maḥtūm ḥattā yabqā Allāh al-aḥad al-ṣamad,”* ll.5-6). The writer quotes two Quranic verses that are connected with death. He then states that the greatest disaster of the people of Islam is the disaster of the loss of the Prophet (*“wa-qad qāla Allāh ‘azza wa-jalla fī muḥkam kitābihi kullu nafsin dhā’iqatu al-mawti wa-kullun ilaynā rāji‘ūna wa-*

²⁶⁰ For the image of this document, see the catalogue of Arabic papyri from the national library of Egypt [= P.DarAlKutub].

qāla kullu man ‘alayhā fānin wa-yabqā wajhu rabbika dhū al-jalāli wa-l-ikrāmi wa-inna a‘zam maṣā’ib ahl al-islām muṣībatahum bi-l-nabiyy ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-salam,” ll.7-9). Finally, the writer prays to God to comfort the mourner’s grief and asks the mourner to have patience. The writer then emphasizes one last time that death is inevitable (“*fa-a‘zama Allāh ajrak wa-jabara muṣībatak wa-raḥima Allāh Abī fulān wa-ghafara lahu wa-‘alayka bi-l-ṣabr yā akhī fa-innahu sabīl man maḍā wa-sabīl man baqā,”* ll.10-11).

The two models for replies to letters of condolence are actually titled as such (*jawāb ta‘ziya*, m. 1; *jawāb ta‘ziya ayḍan*, m. 2). The formulae used in the two models are very similar. After the *basmala* at the top of the papyrus, the writer starts with the transitional element *amma ba‘du* skipping the first part of the prescript. Model 2 skips also the transitional element. The writer then confirms that he, i.e. the mourner, received the comforter’s letter of condolence on the death of so and so and follows this with extensive prayers and blessings for himself, the comforter as well as for the deceased (“*amma ba‘du waṣala ilayya kitābuka akramaka Allāh bi-ta‘ziyatika iyyāya fī fulān \raḥimahu Allāh/ fa-anā as’alu Allāh lanā wa-laka al-i’tisām bi-tā‘atihi wa-l-riḍā bi-qaḍā’ihi fa-innahu waliyy kull khayr wa-mu’ṭīhi wa-raḥima Allāh fulān (Abā fulān, m. 2) wa-ghafara lahu fa-‘inda Allāh aḥtasibu muṣībatahu (wa-aqūlu innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji‘ūna ṣabran wa-ḥtisāban wa-taslīman li-amr Allāh, m. 2) wa-iiyāhu as’alu al-ajr ‘alayhi wa-yaj’al mā ṣāra ilayhi khayran mim mā kāna fīhi,”* ll.2-5/13-17). Next, the writer stresses the fact that death is inevitable and that all people upon the earth will perish eventually (“*wa-innahu yā akhī amr lā budda minhu wa-lā maḥiṣa ‘anhu wa-‘alā dhālika halaka al-awwalūn wa-ilayhi yaṣīr al-ākhirūn,”* ll.5-6/17-18) and continues this with the prayers to live peacefully in this world and to grant them better life in the hereafter (“*wa-nas’alu ḥayātan ṭayyibatan wa-munqalab karīm,”* ll.6-7/19). Afterwards, the writer expresses his sincere gratitude to the comforter for the consolation and shows that he knew what grief and sorrow have affected him, i.e. the comforter, because of this disaster, stressing the strong bond of friendship and brotherhood between both of them (“*wa-qad ‘araftu al-dākil ‘alayka min dhālika li-makāninā li-khāṣṣatinā bika wa-limā ajrā Allāh baynanā wa-baynaka min al-ḥurmma wa-l-ikhā’,”* ll.7-8/19-20). At the end of the letter, the writer makes another collective supplication, asking God to grant them patience and reward them for it and emphasizing once again that everybody whether willingly or unwillingly shall die (“*fa-lā aḥramanā Allāh wa-iiyāka ajra muṣibatinā wa-baraka lanā wa-laka fī qaḍā’ihi fa-nas’alu Allāh al-ṣabr ‘alā qaḍā’ihi fa-lā budda min qaḍā’ihi in shi’nā wa-in abaynā wa-lā maradda li-qaḍā’ihi wa-lā yanjū minhu aḥad wa-maṣīr al-khalq ilā mā ṣāra ilayhi wa-warada manhalihī,”* ll.8-11/20-23).

The two reply models are very significant as they show us the basic structure, formulae, and main points stressed in every reply to a letter of condolence. These are: (1) the confirmation of the arrival of the letter of condolence; (2) blessings and prayers for all parties, namely the author, the mourner, and the deceased; (3) emphasis on the inevitability of death and exhortations to be patient and accept God’s will; and finally, (4) re-affirmation of the strong personal bonds between the comforter and the mourner.

The original letters of condolence, on the other hand, seem to follow one typical pattern, and it is possible that the authors used models while writing their letters.²⁶¹ The letters have the same basic elements as the model above. After the introductory formulae

²⁶¹ The same holds true for the Greek letters of condolence, see Chapa (1998), 45-47.

and blessings, the letters usually mention that the authors have heard news of a death.²⁶² The bodies of the letters are full of expressions of grief, anxiety, distress, and sympathy. There are no expressions of joy. There is repeated reference to death.²⁶³ Prayers and blessings for the deceased as well as the bereaved family are always there. Similarly, Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions connected with death appear frequently. The exhortation to have patience was a major theme in every letter of condolence.²⁶⁴ In all letters, death is represented as the ultimate fate of all mankind for God alone is immortal. Both mourners and comforters usually pray to God to bestow blessings upon the deceased and to guide him to the paradise. The mourners are always reminded to remember God's command to be patient and calm and to seek God's reward. According to Muslim faith, the reward for those who frequently, thoughtfully and truthfully show patience (*ṣabr/iḥtisāb/istirjā'*) and declare that they belong to God and to Him they will return (*innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji'ūna*),²⁶⁵ when the misfortune of death strikes one or more of their relatives, is the paradise (Q 2:155-156).²⁶⁶ But indeed patience must be displayed at the first stroke of the affliction.²⁶⁷ The feelings of concern and sympathy about what will happen to the deceased in the life to come are also expressed by both, the mourners and the comforters. All in all, these Muslim letters of condolences are Islamic versions of a consolatory letter-writing tradition that existed in Egypt even before the appearance of Islam.²⁶⁸

4.3. Letters announcing death

In our corpus, two letters announcing the death of close relatives are edited (17 and 18). Letter 17 is widely studied in sickness, but it may be worthy to readdress here once again how the sender reports this sad news. In this letter, the sender Wusāma informs the female addressee about the death of her father (*"ukhbiruki anna Abū Ziyād tuwuffiya fa-yarḥamuhu Allāh wa-ṣallā 'alayhi wa-adkhalahu al-janna wa-llāh fā'il in shā'a Allāh,"* ll.8-10). Strikingly, the strong feelings of grief and distress are not visible in the letter. Wusāma neither reports the news as a disaster nor does he express his sincere sympathy and condolences. The cold attitude of Wusāma towards Abū Ziyād's death can be explained in view of the fact that Abū Ziyād has been suffering from his deadly illness for a long time. Abū Ziyād's death was

²⁶² Some Greek letters of condolence begin by stating what grief and sorrow have affected the sender after hearing the death of so and so, see Chapa (1998), 26-27.

²⁶³ In contrast, the mention of death in the Greek letters of condolence is euphemistically avoided, see Chapa (1998), 35.

²⁶⁴ For *ṣabr* (patience) as a motif in medieval Islamic consolation treatises, see Gil'adi (1992), 94-100. See also, A. Gil'adi, "Islamic consolation treatises for bereaved parents: some bibliographical notes," *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995), 197-202; A. Gil'adi, "'The child was small... not so the grief for him': sources, structure and content of al-Sakhawi's consolation treatise for bereaved parents," *Poetics today* 14 (1993), 367-386.

²⁶⁵ (Q 2:156).

²⁶⁶ "And surely We shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the steadfast, (155) Who say, when a misfortune striketh them: Lo! we are Allah's and lo! unto Him we are returning." See also Nasā'ī, 1870-1876.

²⁶⁷ "*innamā al-ṣabr 'inda al-ṣadma al-āwālā*." See Bukhārī, 1252; Muslim, 926; Nasā'ī, 1868.

²⁶⁸ See Chapa (1998), 23-24. See also J. Smith, and Y. Haddad, *The Islamic understanding of death and resurrection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); R. ibn Salāma, *al-Mawt wa-ṭuqūṣuh min khilāl ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī wa-Muslim* (Tunisia: Dār al-Ganūb li-l-Nashr, 1997), 23-40.

expected at any time, and that that is why it caused lesser sadness. Wusāma, Muqsim, the servant, and maybe Zaynab, the daughter, were not strongly afflicted out of this loss; they were, I assume, relieved.

On the contrary, in the letter 18, strong feelings of grief and worry are vividly expressed by a bereaved mother reporting on her son's death. This letter is cited elsewhere in this thesis, but let us study the letter's contents in some detail here. In this letter, the female sender, Ruqayya informs her aunt, Umm al-Qāsim, that she is in good health in spite of the affliction that has befallen her, namely the death of her son who died in the month of Ṣafar after people's return from the ḥajj (*"wa-anā bi-ḥāl salāma wa-l-ḥamdu li-llāh kathīran 'alā mā dahanī wa-afja'anī min wafāt sayyidī wa-waladī raḍiya Allāh 'anhu wa-llāh as'aluhu an yu'azzima ajraki wa-yuḥsina 'azā'aki wa-yajbura bi-taqwā nafsiki wa-yuḥsina al-khalaf 'alayki fa-huwa al-sabīl ḥattā lā yabqā aḥad wa-kāna wafātuhu raḍiya Allāh 'anhu fī ṣafar ba'd dukhūl al-nās min al-ḥajj,"* ll.3-7). Ruqayya shows how confused, lonely, poor and weak she feels after this loss, especially after her brother's departure (*"fa-qad baqītu ḥayrā waḥīdatan ḍa'ifatan faqīratan dhahaba al-ān al-surūr ma'a al-akh al-shaqīq wa-baqītu waḥīdatan,"* ll.6-7). In this vein, Ruqayya was so depressed that she expressed the wish that she had died before facing these hard times, namely losing her son and missing her brother (*"fa-layta anna al-mawt qadamanī qablahu wa-lastu asma'u li-akhī khabar wa-lā asma'u minhu kitāb fa-askunu ilā 'ilm dhālika wa-astariḥu ilayhi,"* ll.7-8). Afterwards, Ruqayya informs her aunt that a certain Abū 'Abd Allāh, known to the addressee, looked after her during this misfortune. He also took care of the deceased and the preparation of the funeral. In return, Ruqayya expresses her deep gratitude to Abū 'Abd Allāh and makes supplications for him. She prays to God to please him in this life and in the life to come (*"wa-llāh as'aluhu li-sayyidī Abū 'Abd Allāh al-baqā' fa-law ra'at 'aynuki qiyāmahu bihi wa-binā la-sarraki sarrahu Allāh bi-..... wa-a'ānahu 'alā mā wallāhu min umūr dunyāhu wa-ākhiratihi,"* ll.8-10). Before ending her letter, Ruqayya asks her aunt not to withhold writing her (*"wa-anā uḥibbu aḥabbaki Allāh an lā taqṭa'ī 'annī kitābaki,"* 18.10). The letter closes with the *taṣliya* and the common closing blessings.

In addition to the aforementioned letters, four other published letters reporting on the death of someone should also be included in this discussion as they lead forward our understanding of how death was announced, perceived and dealt with in early Islamic Egypt. To start with the letter of the Banū 'Abd al-Mu'min archive (P.Marchands II 24), the two brothers Mūsā and Hārūn sons of 'Absūn inform their half-brother Abū Hurayra about the death of their cousin (*"wa-u'alimuka yā akhī anna [] ibn khālika Abū 'Alī tuwuffiya raḥimahumā Allāh,"* l.11, 3rd/9th). The cousin died in the countryside, but his body was brought to be buried in Fustāṭ, which shows how important it obviously was to be buried in one's home territory. The journey took around three days and two nights from Tuesday to Thursday evening. The body was buried in the fourth day, Friday, most probably to allow relatives, friends and comforters to attend the burial (*"wa-u'alimuka annahu māta bi-l-rīf yawm al-thulāthā' wa-ḥumila ilā al-fuṣṭāṭ waṣala yawm al-khamīs fī ākhir al-nahār wa-dufina yawm al-jum'a bi-l-ghadāt,"* ll.13-14).²⁶⁹ In the letter, the two brothers stress the fact that death is the fate of all mankind. They also pray to God to have mercy upon themselves as well as the deceased (*"fa-raḥimanā Allāh wa-iyyāhu wa-huwa al-sabīl ḥattā lā yabqā aḥad,"* ll.14-15). In

²⁶⁹ This letter is also discussed in sickness.

another letter, the sender informs the addressee, among many other things, that he got to know about the death of a certain Mūsā b. Walīd. The sender shows what strong grief and sorrow have affected him after hearing this sad news, but also shows patience and makes supplications to the deceased. He prays to God to forgive the deceased, have mercy upon him and to be blessed with him (*“wa-qad balaghanī wafāt Mūsā b. Walīd fa-ghammanī dhālīka ghamm shadīd fa-‘inda Allāh naḥtasibu muṣībatahu wa-naqūlu innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji‘ūna fa-raḥimahu Allāh wa-ghafara lahu wa-raḍiya ‘anhu,”* P.Jahn 14.13-17, 3rd/9th). In another letter, the sender Abū ‘Uthmān writes to Abū Aḥmad, the addressee, inquiring about and reporting on very important political information, amongst which the death of the commander of the faithful. In this interesting letter, Abū ‘Uthmān informs the addressee that he got to know about the death of *amīr al-mu‘minīn* (*“wa-qad balaghanā wafāt amīr al-mu‘minīn,”* P.RāḡibLettres 13.7, 3rd/9th). Further, Abū ‘Uthmān asks Abū Aḥmad to always keep him reported about the news of the city of al-‘Askar, the capital of Egypt at that time, as well as the news of *al-Shām* (Syria) and the city of Fustāt (*“wa-mā yajī‘ukum min akhbār min al-‘askar wa-min al-qāyim bi-yamīn al-nās wa-mā yablughukum ‘an al-shām wa-akhbarihā wa-‘an al-fustāt wa-akhbarihā,”* ll.10-13).²⁷⁰

This letter is exceptional. The script, formulary, style and format of the letter confirm that it is a private letter. Also, there is no indications in the letter that makes us assume that Abū ‘Uthmān and Abū Aḥmad were local officials or somehow related to the administration. They were, most probably, two of the common folk. If our interpretation of P.RāḡibLettres 13 holds, we have to consider as well that there may have been other examples that show people’s curiosity and interest in the news of the administrative courts. Fortunately, we have one more evidence that supports this interpretation. At a more local level, another interesting letter from the 2nd/8th century shows to what extent individuals in early Islamic Egypt, especially those who were settling in the countryside, were concerned about the political changes in the capital. In this letter, the sender informs the addressee, both anonymous to us, about several public, business and private affairs. Among the public affairs, the sender reports on the appointment of a new governor (*wālī*) over the province. The sender intended to send the letter to the addressee on the same day he wrote it, but he postponed sending it after hearing about the arrival of a new governor. The next day, the sender got further details. He was informed about the appointment of the governor Ḥuwayy b. Ḥuwayy over the prayer (civil and military administration) and the finance of the province (*al-ṣalāt wa-l-kharāj*). The new governor made many administrative changes which were worthy to be reported to the absent addressee. The governor appointed a certain Ibn Falīḥ over the control of the *dīwāns* and the finance (*al-zimām wa-l-kharāj*) and a certain Abū ‘Ubayda b. ‘Uqba b. Nāfi‘ over Upper Egypt and the finance (*al-ṣa‘īd wa-l-kharāj*). The new governor also wrote to the officials and the tribal heads summoning them. He further ordered the *tawābīt* and the *dawāwīn* (archives) to be transferred to somewhere that remains unknown to us. According to the sender, the appointment of this governor was only confirmed on Sunday the third of Ramaḍān. At the end of the letter, the sender wrote that he found it necessary to let the addressee know about all these changes (Younes, “New governors,” no. 2 [= P.Rayl.Arab. I I 5; P.World, 171-173]).

²⁷⁰ See also Grob (2010a), 90.

Here then I leave the references to people's concern with political and administrative news and changes and come back to their concern with death. One final papyrological reference reporting on the death of a close female relative is to be studied. In her letter, Umm al-Ḥakam, the wealthy Muslim lady from the Fayyūm, informs her agent Mīnā Bajūsh about various commercial and personal affairs, amongst which, Umm al-Ḥakam reports on the death of her sister Umm Hāshim. Umm al-Ḥakam then makes a supplication to God to have mercy upon Umm Hāshim (*"wa-ukhbiruka anna ukhtī Umm Hāshim qad tuwuffiyat raḥimahā Allāh,"* P.Jahn 12[= Chrest.Khoury I 98].13-14, 2nd/8th).²⁷¹ Strikingly, the topic is marginally addressed. Moreover, the expected feelings of strong grief and worry are not expressed in spite of the close blood ties between the deceased and the sender. Taking into account that the letter is sent to a male business agent and not to a relative, Umm al-Ḥakam might have found no need to express her personal feelings but just to report on the death.

To sum up, the letters studied above have shown that death in the family brought sadness and distress to family members especially for females. For them, the death of a male member of the family, mainly a husband, father or son certainly added worries and fear to their grief not only because of the blood ties and emotional bonds between the mourners and the deceased but also because of their need and dependency on him. In letter 18, for example, we can clearly see the deep feelings of grief and worry of a bereaved mother next to the feelings of dependency and need towards the dead son. The letters made it clear that women were to a great extent socially and financially dependent upon males and were thus more distressed when these fell away.

²⁷¹ See also Römer and Demiri (2009), 43-45.

