

A Judaeo-Arabic Commercial Letter from Early Nineteenth Century Egypt

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The document that is published in this paper is preserved in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah collection at Cambridge University Library. The majority of the manuscripts in the Genizah are datable to the Faṭimid and Ayyūbid periods (10th–13th centuries). Thereafter the material becomes sparser, no doubt due to the fact that the Jewish community of Fuṣṭāṭ became reduced in size and importance, with an increasing number of Jews settling in al-Qāhira. Although less abundant, there are, nevertheless, in the Genizah a considerable number of manuscripts from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, the latest datable to the second half of the nineteenth century, shortly before the discovery of the collection by scholars.

Among the Genizah material datable to the eighteenth and early nineteenth century is a corpus of Judaeo-Arabic letters written by Jewish traders who were based in Fuṣṭāṭ. Unlike the medieval Judaeo-Arabic letters from the Genizah, which have been extensively published and studied, the late Judaeo-Arabic letters have attracted relatively little attention. Not only are they an important source for the socio-economic history of Egypt of the period but they are also of considerable linguistic interest. These late documents can be found in most Genizah collections, although their distribution across them is uneven. It is of interest to note that the Genizah collection of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris contains a conspicuously large proportion of this late corpus, much more, in fact, than the Taylor-Schechter collection, which is overall the largest Genizah collection. Most of the letters present considerable difficulties of interpretation due to the fact that the writers, who were clearly

collaborating closely with one another, frequently allude to events with which the addressee would be expected to be familiar but which remain obscure to the modern reader.

In earlier papers I have described some of the significant features of the language of these documents and published the text of one of them.¹ In this paper I present an edition of another document from the corpus with linguistic comments.²

There are considerable differences between the Judaeo-Arabic of these late Genizah documents and that of the medieval documents. The Genizah documents from the Middle Ages are written in what is generally known as Classical Judaeo-Arabic. This exhibits a certain number of vernacular features and also some degree of variation across different texts. The causes of this variation are yet to be studied in detail, but it can be said that, in general, they correlate with factors such as the geographical origin of the writers, the register of the texts and the period in which they were written. Throughout the Middle Ages, however, the base of written Judaeo-Arabic remained the literary Classical Arabic language. This applied also to its orthography, which was, in essence, an imitation in Hebrew letters of Classical Arabic orthography.

A radical change is found in the Judaeo-Arabic of the Genizah documents datable to the Ottoman period. The vernacular dialectal elements are far more conspicuous in these late documents. The orthography, moreover, no longer corresponds to that of Classical Arabic, but rather follows the principles of Rabbinic Hebrew orthography. This shift in the type of orthography no doubt

1 G. Khan, "A linguistic analysis of the Judaeo-Arabic of late Genizah documents and its comparison with Classical Judaeo-Arabic", *Sefunot* XX (1991), pp. 223–234 [Hebrew]; idem, "Notes on the grammar of a late Judaeo-Arabic text", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* XV [Festschrift for Professor Joshua Blau] (1992), pp. 220–239. For a detailed study of literary Judaeo-Arabic texts written in post-medieval Egypt see B.H. Hary, *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic: With an Edition, Translation, and Grammatical Study of the Cairene Purim Scroll*, Leiden 1992.

2 I am currently in the process of preparing an edition of the entire corpus in the framework of the Friedberg Genizah project.

contributed to their vernacular appearance. This is because the orthography of the medieval Judaeo-Arabic texts, which corresponded to Classical Arabic orthography, is likely to have disguised many vernacular dialectal features of the language that would have been perceptible when the text was read aloud. We can gain some insight into this phenomenon from medieval Judaeo-Arabic texts supplied with vocalization signs. In many cases the vocalization of these texts reflects a vernacular Arabic form whereas the orthography reflects a standard Classical Arabic form. To cite one example, in the vocalized Genizah manuscript T-S Ar. 8.3, the 3ms. pronominal suffix is spelt with *he* in the orthography, corresponding to Classical Arabic *hā'*, but it is vocalized with a /u/ vowel in all contexts, irrespective of the case of the noun, reflecting the vernacular form of the suffix, e.g. **וּבְעַד מוֹתָהּ** *wa-ba'd mawtu* 'and after his death', **חַתִּי יִפְתַּח עֵינָהּ** *hattē yiftah 'aynu* 'until he opens his eye'. The unvocalized orthography of these phrases, **וּבְעַד מוֹתָהּ** and **חַתִּי יִפְתַּח עֵינָהּ**, could be interpreted as reflecting a Classical form of the pronouns, viz. *wa-ba'da mawtihi* and *hattā yiftaha 'aynahu*. In the later Judaeo-Arabic Genizah documents, the language has made a break with this orthographic tradition and in general represents directly, with an essentially Rabbinic Hebrew type of orthography, the way the writers were pronouncing the language. If the writer, for example, pronounced the 3ms. suffix in the word he was writing with its vernacular form –u, he would represent this by *waw* in the orthography, e.g. **מוֹתוֹ, עֵינוּ**.

Although the orthography of the late documents has made a fundamental break with that of Classical Judaeo-Arabic, a few features of this medieval orthography have survived as isolated vestiges, which still disguise some features of the vernacular pronunciation. Moreover, even where there is no issue of orthographic representation, the grammatical structure of the language in certain cases is unlikely to correspond to what existed in the vernacular of the writer. Such cases can be regarded as literary features. What is significant is that these literary features do not correspond exactly to what one finds in Classical Arabic. Furthermore some of them do not occur, or are found only very rarely, in medieval Judaeo-Arabic. One such example is the negative

particle *lam*, which is used in the late Judaeo-Arabic Genizah documents as a general negator before all verb forms and even in verbless nominal clauses. Some of these features that are unlikely to correspond to the usage of the contemporary vernacular may have their roots in an earlier period of the development of the vernacular. In most cases, however, the immediate source for these features in the Judaeo-Arabic documents appears to be an Arabic dialectal literary language that was in general use in Ottoman Egypt.³ Finally, where the written language of the documents reflects the contemporary vernacular dialect of the writer, this dialect does not always correspond to what exists in Modern Cairene Arabic, although the writers were residents of the Cairo area. Such deviations from Modern Cairene Arabic reflect features of the Jewish dialect of Cairo, which differed in some details from the Muslim dialect, as is shown by the surviving remnants of the dialect that are still spoken today by Jews who were brought up in Cairo.⁴

Text⁵

Cambridge University Library, T-S 13J25.24

1 בעהש היום 4 שבט שנת 5066
 2 אלסי' מרקאדו קארו הי'6 ואלסי' אברהם הלוי ה"י נר"ו⁷
 3 אחדשו⁸ בעד מזיד אל סלאם עליכום סבב דיל כטיין
 4 נערפכום אן יום ר"ח כתבנה לכום וערפנכום בוסול
 5 אל אמאין נו' . 2 1 2 3 וערפנכום אן אל פצה בארדה
 6 ענדנה ע' 5 אל מייה ואל מח' ענדנה ע' 7 . 2 ואלדי יבאן

- 3 For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Khan, "A linguistic analysis" (n. 1 above).
- 4 Cf. H. Blanc, H., "The *nekteb* — *nektebu* imperfect in a variety of Cairene Arabic", *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974), pp. 206–226. A detailed study of the Jewish dialect is in preparation by G. Rosenbaum.
- 5 I am grateful to the syndics of Cambridge University Library for granting me permission to publish this fragment.
- 6 השם ינחמהו.
- 7 נטרינהו רחמנא ופרקינהו.
- 8 אחרי דרישת שלומו.

- 7 לכוּם אכטר מנאסיב לנה ארסלו מינו ולאכין אל
- 8 מח' אשהל לנה וערפנכוּם מן מא חסל ביננה
- 9 ובין אלסי' שמעון עזרי ה"י מן גיהת באעו פיל מח'
- 10 לסי' יהודה פינטו ה"י ולם עטאהום לנה ובעדו חין
- 11 גאנה ישטראך מיננה קולג לו אחנה לם נשארכו חד
- 12 מתל מא כתבנה לכוּם וכאן אל מזכור אן כאסר כאטרו
- 13 וכאף מנכוּם אן יבקה הווה אל סבב וקעד פי אל דוכאן
- 14 ולם ראצה' ינתקל אלה בסולחנה ותעזר לנה ואכד
- 15 בכטרנה פי כדה סמחנה להו ולם רצינה נכטרו
- 16 בכטרו מעאכוּם כורמה לכטרכוּם ועטאנה . ם אלף
- 17 פצה' פילוס וראיח יעטינה אל פולסה ויגלק לנה עלא
- 18 מית אלף פצה' ויסלמנה חיסאב אלדי אשתראה מן רשיד
- 19 מן ורק וחריר וצאבון וידכול חיסאבו ענדנה וכדה
- 20 כאן ענדנה שווית חריר דקאיך ורפאיך קדר . ם אוקה
- 21 גארז רשיד אכדהום אל מזכור לל שרכייה ובעדו
- 22 רוחנה ענד גמאעה אצחאבנה וכדנה מנהום קדר
- 23 . ם אוקה בירתי עלא בורסה ולאכין בוצאעה באש
- 24 כרקה והלבת מא יכברכוּם אלסי' עזרי עלא תעבנה
- 25 ואברמנה מעא אל נאס וכמאן ץ תכיאס בירתי באש
- 26 ורפיך קאווי ענד צאחבנה אל סי' זבאד ומתווקף פי
- 27 שי קליל מעאנה לאן כאן טאלב . ץ ריאל וכסבנה
- 28 ע' 1 א ואלסי' עזרי ה"י לם כלאנה נתקדימו אלה ע' < 1 א
- 29 וקעדין מתווקפין בע"ה יוקצמו לנה ונכלו פיהום אל
- 30 עיש ונווין נעטלו שאגלנה ונצורו מעה אל
- 31 מזכור עלא אל חריר ונלימו אל מוגוד ונכוושה ואל
- 32 מווגוד פיל בנצר לם יגי עשר תכיאס פי כדה
- 33 אחנה כולשי אן כדנה נרסלו לכוּם ולם נערפו
- 34 אלה אנתו ובע"ה מחר נרסלו לכוּם אלדי יתוופק לנה
- 35 ונערפכוּם תתפעו לכלתי אישת המנווח חיים מאיס
- 36 . ם פצה' ותקיידוהום עלינה מן כול ביד ותגיבו לנה
- 37 גוואב מנהום ו<נ>ערפכוּם ואלסי' עזרי מן קבל אל דורה

- 38 אן ענדנה ע' . 1 1 קרוש ואנכאן יכלצכום ערפונה וכדה
 39 תכברונה עלא אצעאר אל חריר ענדכום וגירו מן כול
 40 שי ונערפכום אן כונה וכדין אל שווית אל כרז מן סי'
 41 אנטוניו פוסיקי צאחבכום וגא מיעאדו יקבץ מננה
 42 וכאן טלב מננה פולסה עליכום וחסבנה עלא
 43 ע' 1 2 1 אל ריאל ועטאנה פולסה באלף ותמניה . 2
 44 ריאל פרנסה לבעד וסולהא ליידכום בעשר תייאם
 45 ואל מדכור אתווגה לרשיד ולם ערפנה אנכאן כלאהא
 46 מעו אלה ארסלהא עליכום לשריכו אלסי' לוקה אל חכים
 47 פי כדה חין טוסלכום תתפעוהא ותרסלו לנה רגעתהא
 48 ותרסלו לנה גוואב אלסי' טלקה ה"י וגוואב פולסת עלי אל
 49 דיבה ואנכאן דפעלכומשי אלסי' שמעון פראנסיס ה"י
 50 ומן פצלכום לם תכלונה מן גיר אל פרשה ואל שאלין אל
 51 זורק אל חיגאזי ליל לולאד ואיצה נערפכום אן גרה לנה
 52 אלסי' פואה ה"י וקסצנה מן נחיתו ומן נחיתכום וקאל
 53 סי' מרקאדו ה"י שריכום ולאזים תנפעוה ותנפעוה
 54 פי שרכיית סלאניקי אלזי בינכום ובין סי' דניאל הלי
 55 מנדולפו ה"י בסבב אן סי' מנדולפו מיסאפר ואל
 56 סי' פואה ה"י ואנתו משבוכין מעו וכאיף לא ירוח
 57 ולם ירגע וקצצנה נכתב לכום מכתוב בכטו
 58 אן תבעת לנה מכתוב בורדין עלא סי' מנדולפו ה"י
 59 אן יסלם לנה כאמיל אל חיסאב ויעטינה אורדנס
 60 לסחבכום ביתוע סלאניקי אן לם יערפו כלפנה
 61 וירסלו אל פילוס לנה ואחנה נרסלהום לכום ואנכאן
 62 לם ירסלו לנה ויתבעוה נרסלו עליהום אורדנס
 63 לסי' נצר אלה מסך לאן לם באקה ענדו קועאד
 64 הנאך לאן לם ביעגבו אל חאל ונאווי יחצר פיל צאף
 65 וכדה וחיות אל עיש ואל מלח ואל מוחבה אן לם
 66 כונה רצין בידיל כלאם אלה לולה עלשאן כאטרקום
 67 לאן לאזים נקבתו מנדולפו ונעארוה ואלסי' פואה ה"י
 68 ביעמיל בי עלשאן אן הווה לם יעאריה ולם יבקה

- 69 בעדהא יתעב מעו וכדה דיל מארה כורמה לעיונכום
 70 לאן לם לנה פיהו מזייה בשי ולאכין חין יחצר לכום
 71 חיסבכום ותתכלסו עלא אל סאף בע"ה ימכין נרסלו
 72 סבובה בינתנה אחנה ואנתו ואלסי' פואה ה"י יכון כיר
 73 ונערפכום מן גיהת אל חריר אן צורנה אל בנצר ולם
 74 לקאנה בוצאעה נציפה ולם אחדן רצי יפרט לנה
 75 וכדה עאוודנה רגענה עלא אלסי' זבאד וחאינה וכדנה
 76 מנו אל 3 תכיאס ועבינאהום ע' א ו וחלף לנה אן לם
 77 כאן להו גרץ במוביעהום וכתשה (?) אנהו כאן עטאנה
 78 קול מן סאבק וצחיח אן בוצאעה עזימה ולם רצי
 79 ינתקל מן ענדהום סי' עזרי לאן חאגה טייבה ואלדי פיל
 80 בנצר בוצאעה עייאנה ולם תוגיד עשר אוקאת סווה
 81 אלה ענד אל עקאדין ולם ביירצו יביעו ע' . 2 רייאל
 82 וכדה חין יוסלכום אל סבב ביל סלאמה לם תסתעגלו
 83 עליה ולם תחרקה מתל אל כיס אלדי ארסלנה לכום לאן
 84 קעדו נאס<>ת<> יתחכו עלא אל ע' אלדי בעתוה ולאכין בע"ה
 85 יכון כסב מעאכום טייב פי שוגלו ות<>רפונה עליה
 86 ודיל וקתי בקאנה וכדין בקדר כמס תאלף רייאל ונווין בע"ה
 87 נרסלו לכום ולאכין סי' עזרי ה"י מוראצו ינזל עליה לאן
 88 לם חוצור גנס מראכב מן בארה ואלה גנס שי
 89 וקאל לנה סי' עזרי ה"י אן כאן יחצר שי בע"ה מן
 90 בארה נבקו אחנה נאכדו אלדי יוקצם לנה לאן שאף
 91 ענדנה אצעאר אל חריר סער אללה ואלחאצה ושאף
 92 אן אחנה נחסיסו פיה וכדה אסתלמנה מנו חיסאב
 93 אלדי אשתראה מן רשיד וארסלו לכום וקיידנאה ענדנה
 94 וסתלמנה מנו אלפלוס אלדי כאנו מעו עלא פלוס אל
 95 פולסה וגלק לנה עלא 2 9 1 אלף פצה ובאקה סבב
 96 רשיד ולדי אכדנאה מן נאמון באקה כולו מטלוב
 97 לנה בע"ה יום שיגי נרסלו לכום ביה קאימה ברוב
 98 מא יגד לנה שי כמאן נעמלוה חיסאב ואחד ובקה
 99 יוסלכום רגעת אל פולסה מן אלסי' ש' עזרי תקיידוהא

| | |
|--|-----|
| לנה פי אל חיסאב וכאמל אל מצאריף מן ענדנה | 100 |
| וראבח אל מח' באקי טרף סי' עזרי תבקו ותחסבוה | 101 |
| עליה ואהל ביתכום ד"ש ואלסי' מייר ה"י ד"ש ואללה יבקיכום | 102 |
| ושלום הצעייר | 103 |
| שלמה חיים | 104 |
| אברהם | 105 |
| ג'זאנה | 106 |
| סט ⁹ | 107 |

Translation

1. With the help of God. The 4th of Shevaṭ, in the year 5566 (1806).
2. Mr. Marcado Karo, may God comfort him, and Mr. Abraham ha-Levi, may God comfort him and may the Merciful One guard him and save him.
3. After offering greetings — after many greetings to you,¹⁰ the reason for these few lines¹¹
4. is to let you know that on the first of the month we wrote to you and informed you of the arrival
5. of the consignments numbers 20, 1, 2, 3 and we informed you that silver is 'cold'
6. in our place with the value of five for a hundred and *maḥbūb*¹² in our place has the value of 207. Send to us whatever seems
7. to you to be the most suitable thing for us, but
8. *maḥbūb* is more buoyant for us (than other currencies). We also informed you of what happened between us
9. and Mr. Shim'on Ezri, may God comfort him, in that they made a sale in *maḥbūb*

9 טיפיה טב, "may he come to a good end".

10 The first of these two formulaic phrases is in Hebrew (in abbreviated form) and the second in Arabic.

11 Literally: couple of lines.

12 For the currencies that were circulating in Egypt at this period see A. Raymond, *Artisans et Commerçants au Caire au XVIII^e Siècle*, Damas 1973, vol. 1, pp. 17–52.

10. to Mr. Yehuda Pinto, may God comfort him, but did not give them to us.
Then, when
11. he came to us to take a share from us, we said to him that we shall not share with anybody,
12. as we wrote to you. The aforementioned was offended
13. and was afraid that you (would think that) he was the cause (of this), so he remained in the shop
14. but did not want to come away unless we offer a reconciliation and he became an embarrassment to us and
15. annoyed us. So, we forgave him, since we did not want to offend
16. him for your sake, out of respect for you. He has given us 50 thousand
17. *fadda* in cash and he is going to give us the money order and close with us on
18. a hundred thousand *fadda* and give us the account of the paper, silk and soap that he bought from Rashid,
19. and his account will be entered to our credit (in the ledger). Furthermore,
20. we had some fine quality silk, 50 ounces in quantity,
21. produced in Rashid, and the aforementioned man took these in partnership. Furthermore,
22. we went to the group of our friends and took from them a quantity
23. of 50 ounces of Beiruti in exchange, yet it is top quality merchandise,
24. in (separate) pieces. No doubt Mr. Ezri will tell you about the pains we took.
25. We ratified (this transaction) with these people. Also our friend Mr. Zabad has 3 bags of top quality,
26. very fine Beiruti and he expects
27. something small from us, since he requested 20 *riyāl* and we made a profit
28. to the value of 18 ... (?)¹³ but Mr. Ezri, may God comfort him, let us advance only 18 (?)

13 This and the following numerical figure are followed by a mark that presumably marks a fraction, though it is not clear what its interpretation should be.

29. We are expecting, God willing, that they will be divided to our credit and we can make a living by them.
30. We intend to put our minds at rest and search, together with
31. the aforementioned person, for silk, collect what is available and take exclusive possession of it. What
32. is available in the town does not amount to ten bags. So,
33. we shall send to you everything we have taken, but we are letting
34. only you know this. Tomorrow, God willing, we shall send you what we manage to acquire.
35. We request you to pay to my aunt, the wife of the deceased Hayyim Mais,
36. 500 *faḍḍa* and register them to our debit as soon as possible and send us
37. a reply about them. We should like you and Mr. Ezri to know regarding maize
38. that we have some in our possession to the value of 110 piastres. If they are interested, let us know. Likewise,
39. let us know about the price of silk and everything else in your place.
40. We should like you to know that (when) we acquired a few beads from Mr.
41. Antonio Poseqi, your friend, he came at the appointed time to receive (payment) from us,
42. and requested from us a money order payable by you. We reckoned
43. the value to be 173 per *riyāl* and gave him a money order of one thousand and eighty and 20
44. French *riyāl*, (to be cashed) after it arrives in your hands in ten days time.
45. The aforementioned has gone to Rashid and we do not know whether he has kept it
46. with him or whether he has sent it to be cashed to your debit by his partner, Mr. Luca the doctor.
47. So, when you receive it, pay it and send us the receipt for it.
48. Send us also the letter of Mr. Talqa, may God give him comfort, and the letter containing the money order of 'Ali

49. al-Dibba and (let us know) whether Mr. Shim'on Frances, may God comfort him, has paid you.
50. Please do not leave us without the brush and the two blue hijāzi shawls
51. for the children. Also we should like you to know that
52. Mr. Puwwa, may God comfort him, rushed to visit us from his place and your place and said (that)
53. Mr. Mercado, may God comfort him, is your partner and you have to make him profit as well as make us profit
54. in the partnership of Salonica between you and Mr. Daniel Ha-Levi
55. Mandolfo, may God comfort him, since Mr. Mandolfo is travelling and
56. Mr. Puwwa, may God comfort him, and you are involved with him and he fears lest he go
57. and not come back. He requested us to write to you a letter on his behalf
58. asking you to send for us a letter, by (means of) those who are going down, addressed to (where) Mr. Mandolfo, may God comfort him, (is staying,)
59. demanding him to deliver to us the entire sum and give us an injunction
60. for your friends from Salonica for them not to inform anybody except us
61. and for them to send the money to us and we shall send it to you. If
62. they do not send it to us, they will cause us the trouble of having to send an injunction against them
63. to Mr. Naṣr Allāh Misk, because he no longer resides
64. there, since he does not like the situation and he intends to join ranks.¹⁴
65. (We swear) by (our) friendship and love¹⁵ that
66. we would not be happy with such words unless it would be for your benefit,
67. because we must condemn Mandolfo and expose him and Mr. Puwwa, may God comfort him,

14 R. Dozy, *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, second printing, Leiden-Paris, 1927, p. 834, gives as one meaning of the word *ṣaff* 'troisième partie d'une compagnie' (third part of a company), which may be the intention here.

15 Literally: by the life of bread and salt and love.

68. works at his behest because he does not expose him, but he will not continue
69. to work with him in the future. So, this time (we are doing this) out of respect for you,
70. since we have no use for him. But when you receive
71. your account and you pay it¹⁶ in partnership,¹⁷ God willing we shall be able to send
72. goods¹⁸ to one another and Mr. Puwwa, may God comfort him, will be happy.
73. We inform you concerning silk that we have searched the town but have not
74. found clean merchandise and nobody who agreed to sell to us at a low price.
75. Also, we went back to Mr. Zabad, greeted him and took
76. from him the three bags and packed them (with currency/goods) to the value of 18. He swore that he did not have
77. any intention to sell them ... (?) that he had given us
78. his word previously. And it is true that the merchandise is marvellous.
79. Mr. Ezri did not want to part with it, since it was a good thing, but that which is in
80. the town is defective merchandise. There are not ten ounces (to be had) except
81. in the possession of trimmers of clothes and they do not want to sell at the rate of 20 *riyāl*.
82. Also, when the consignment reaches you safely do not be hasty
83. with it and do not burn it, like the bag that we sent to you, because
84. there are people who scoff at the price at which you sold it. But, God willing,

16 Dozy (n. 14 above, p. 392) defines *takhallaṣa* as 'solder, liquider un compte' ('pay off, liquidate an account').

17 See note 14.

18 M. Hinds and S. el-Badawi, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic. Arabic — English*, Beirut, 1986, p. 392, give as a definition of *sabbūba* 'goods carried by a peddler'.

85. you will make a good profit on it. Let us know about it.
86. At this time we are holding the amount of five thousand *riyāl* and intend, God willing,
87. to send them to you, but Mr. Ezri, may God comfort him, wants to sit on them because
88. no kind of boat or anything has come from abroad.
89. Mr. Ezri, may God comfort him, said to us (that) if anything, God willing, arrives from
90. abroad, we would take our share, because he has seen
91. the prices of silk in our place to be remarkably favourable¹⁹ and he has seen
92. that we shall give him a share of it. Also, we received from him the account of
93. what he bought from Rashid and sent it to you as well, and we entered it in the ledger to our credit.
94. We also received from him the money that was in his possession in accordance with the sum
95. of the money order and he closed with us on 192 thousand *faḍḍa* and there remains the consignment
96. from Rashid. With regard to what we have taken from Alexandria, all of it
97. is bespoke to our credit. God willing, the day it arrives, we shall send you an inventory of it. If
98. we should have anything additional we shall put it all in the one account. (When)
99. the receipt of the money order arrives from Mr. Sh. Ezri, enter it
100. to our credit in the ledger, together with all the disbursements by us.
101. Also the profit on the *mahbūb* is with Mr. Ezri, so enter it in the ledger

19 Literally: prices of silk with us are the price of God and favourable. I take מ'לחצ' to be *al-hāḍḍa < al-hāzẓa*.

102. to his debit. Greetings to your family. Greetings to Mr. Meir, may God comfort him. God preserve you.
103. Farewell. The humble
104. Shlomo Hayyim
105. Abraham
106. Chizana,
107. the humble one.

Grammatical notes²⁰

1.0. Features inherited from CJA orthography

1.1. *Ḍād*

The letter *ḏād* is regularly represented by *ṣade* with an upper diacritical dot. This type of orthography originated in CJA, which imitated the form of the *ḏād* in the Arabic alphabet (*ṣād* with an upper diacritic). Examples:

פֶּצֶה ‘silver currency’ (*passim*), וְלֹם רֵאצָּה ‘he was not content’ (14), וּמִן פְּצִלְכוּם ‘please’ (50), וְאִינָה ‘also’ (51), וְנֹאוּי יְחִצֵּר ‘he intends to come’ (64), בּוּצָאעָה ‘merchandise’ (73).

1.2. *Mater lectionis aleph* representing a historically long vowel

There are a few cases in which *mater lectionis aleph* is used where CA would have a long *lā/* vowel and where CJA orthography would in principle have a *mater lectionis*, but where the vowel would be short in MCA. This applies to vowels in originally open syllables, which have become closed in MCA, e.g. בַּאֲרֵדָה (MCA *barda* = CA *bārīda*) ‘cold’ (5), כַּאֲטָרוּ (MCA *khatru* = CA *khātīrahu*) ‘his feelings’ (12), אַחַנָּה לֹם נִשְׂאָרְכּוּ חַד (MCA type syllable structure²¹ *nišarku* < **nušārikū*) (11). In אֵל עִקְאֲדִין ‘the clothes trimmers’ (81) a *mater lectionis aleph* occurs in an open unstressed syllable, in which the original long

20 In the ensuing notes the following abbreviations are used: CA = Classical Arabic, CJA = Classic Judaeo-Arabic, MCA = Modern (Muslim) Cairene Arabic.

21 This 1pl. form does not occur in Muslim Cairene Arabic, but is a feature of the Jewish dialect.

/ā/ would be shortened in MCA. In both of these contexts the *mater lectionis* may be interpreted as an historical spelling, inherited from CJA orthography.

1.3. The definite article

The definite article is written אַל in all contexts, including before ‘sun letters’ where *//* would have been assimilated in the spoken language, e.g. אַל סלאַם ‘greetings’ (3), אַל טבב ‘the reason’ (13), אַל דוכאַן ‘the shop’ (13), אַל נאַס ‘the people’ (25), אַל ריאַל ‘the *riyāl*’ (43), וואַל שאַלין ‘the two shawls’ (50). Note also that the article is regularly written as a separate word.

1.4. *Tanwīn*

A few cases of *tanwīn* occur in the document. These do not correspond to a usage that is found in MCA and are unlikely to have occurred in the spoken vernacular of the writers. They are best interpreted as vestiges from CJA, in which similar cases of *tanwīn* are found.²² They do not correspond to the use of *tanwīn* in CA. Two varieties are attested in our text: (i) The *tanwīn* element occurs as a separate word spelt אַן placed after an indefinite noun that is followed by an attributive phrase, e.g. אַחנּה כּולשי אַן כּדנּה נרסלו לכּוּם ‘We shall send to you everything that we have taken’ (33); (ii) The *tanwīn* element, spelt with *nun*, is attached to the word אַחד, e.g. אַחדן רצי יפרט לנּה ‘Nobody wanted to sell to us at a low price’ (74). Both types of usage originate historically as indefinite accusative inflection *-an*, but have come to mark only indefiniteness, irrespective of the case of the noun.

2.0. Elements of orthography that deviate from the norm in Classical Judaeo-Arabic orthography

2.1. *Scriptio defectiva* of long */ā/*

This is relatively infrequent in the document. It may be identified in, for example, וּעַרפּנּוּם = *wa-‘arrafnākum* ‘we have informed you’ (4).

²² See J. Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*, third edition, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 170–187.

Most cases where *mater lectionis aleph* is omitted occur in contexts where the long /ā/ is shortened in MCA, e.g. in originally open syllables closed by the elision of the following vowel: בְּכַטְרוֹ (*bi-khatru* = CA *bi-khāṭirihi*) ‘his feelings’ (16), וְקַעֲדִין (*qa’dīn* < *qā’idīn*) ‘sitting (pl.)’ (29), וְכַדִּין (*wakhdīn* < *’akhidhīn*) ‘taking (pl.)’ (40), מִן נַחֲיִתוֹ וּמִן נַחֲיִתְכֶּם (*nahyitu* = CA *nāhiyatuhu*, etc.) ‘from his place and from your place’ (52), חִסְבְּכֶם (*ḥisabkum* < *ḥisābukum*) ‘your account’ (71). The omission of *mater lectionis aleph* in these contexts, therefore, may be interpreted as reflecting the shortness of the vowel in the spoken vernacular of the writer.

2.2. Scriptio plena of short /a/

In numerous cases *mater lectionis aleph* is used where both CA and MCA have a short vowel, e.g. פִּיל צַאף (*saff*) ‘in the rank’ (64), דִּיל מַאֲרָה (*marra*) ‘this time’ (69), מִן בַּאֲרָה (*barra*) ‘from outside’ (89–90), לֶם בַּאֲקָה (*baqa*) ‘he has not remained’ (63), נַעַאֲרוּהָ (*ni’arrūh*) ‘we expose him’ (67), עַאֲוּוּדְנָה (*’awwidna*) ‘we returned’ (75), וְחַאֲיִנָּה (*ḥayyena*) ‘we greeted’ (75). This is not a practice either of CJA orthography or of Rabbinic Hebrew orthography. It may have developed in the orthography of late Judaeo-Arabic by analogy with historical spellings with *mater lectionis aleph* such as those described in §1.2., where the vowel would have been pronounced as short /a/ in the spoken vernacular.

2.3. Scriptio plena of short /i/

In many cases short /i/ is represented by *mater lectionis yod*, e.g. מְנַאֲסִיב (*menāsib*) ‘suitable’ (7), חִסְאֵב ‘account’ (18), אֵל חִיגַאזִי ‘*ḥijāzī*’ (51), וְלַאזִים ‘must’ (53), מִיסַאפֵר ‘he travels’ (55), כַּאֲמִיל ‘complete’ (59), מִן גִּיהַת ‘on account of’ (9).

2.4. Scriptio plena of short /u/

Likewise short /u/ is frequently represented by *mater lectionis waw*, e.g. לְכֹם ‘to you’ (4), אַכְדָּהוּם ‘he took them’ (21), אֵל דּוּכַאן ‘the shop’ (13), רוּחְנָה ‘we went’ (22), בּוּצַאעָה ‘merchandise’ (23), כּוּל ‘all’ (36), כּוּנָה ‘we were’ (40).

The use of *matres lectionis* to represent short /i/ and /u/ is not unknown in

CJA texts, especially the use of *waw* for short /u/.²³ Their occurrence in this text, however, is far more regular and corresponds closely to the practice of Rabbinic Hebrew orthography.

2.5. Word final *matres lectionis*

When a word ends in an /a/ vowel it is represented in the orthography either by *mater lectionis* *he* or *aleph*, in accordance with Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic spelling, e.g. כתבנה 'we wrote' (4), ענדינה 'with us' (6), לנה 'to us' (10), אחנה 'we' (11), אלה 'except' (14), פֶּצֶה 'silver (currency)' (*passim*), בוצאעה 'merchandise' (23), מעה 'with' (30); מא 'what' (8), מעא 'with' (25), וגא 'and he came' (41), וסולהא 'their arrival' (44), ארסלהא 'he sent them' (46), לא 'not' (56). This includes cases where CA has an *alif maqṣūra* and CJA a *yod*, e.g. עלא 'upon' (17, CA على CJA עלי), יבקה 'he remains' (13, CA يبقى CJA יבקי).

2.6. Consonantal /w/ and /y/

Consonantal /w/, whether geminated or ungeminated in pronunciation, is generally represented by double *waw* to distinguish it from a *mater lectionis*, e.g. ומתווקף 'he expects' (26), ונכוושה 'we take exclusive possession of it' (31), אלדי יתוופק לנה 'what we manage to acquire' (34), גוואב 'reply' (37), אתווגה 'he has gone' (45), הווה 'he' (13). The same appears to apply to consonantal /y/, judging by the spelling with double *yod* in עייאנה ('*ayyāna*') 'defective' (8). In all other cases of double *yod* in the document, however, there is an adjacent /i/ vowel, so one of the *yods* could be interpreted as a *mater lectionis*, e.g. ותקיידוהום 'you register them' (36), ליידיכום 'to your hand' (44), רייאל *riyāl* (44), לם בייעגבו אל חאל 'the situation does not please him' (64).

3.0. Word division

The definite article אל is regularly separated from the following word, e.g. אל סלאם 'the greeting' (3), אל אמאין 'the consignments' (5), אל פֶּצֶה 'the silver' (5).

23 Cf. J. Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*, second edition, Jerusalem 1979 [Hebrew], p. 21.

The article and the noun it qualifies may be split by a line division, e.g. אל עיש (29–30). Note the ‘sandhi’ spelling ליל לולאד (MCA *li-l-wilād, li-l-awlād*) ‘for the children’ (51).

In MCA when a numeral is placed before a plural noun beginning with /l/, a linking /t/ element is often inserted. In our document this /t/ element is written at the beginning of the noun following the numeral, e.g. עשר תכיאס (*‘ašar t-akyās*) ‘ten bags’ (32), בעשר תייאם (*bi-‘ašar t-iyyām*) ‘in ten days time’ (44), בקדר כמס תאלף רייאל (*khamas t-alāf*) ‘the amount of five thousand *riyāl*’ (86). This linking /t/ appears even where the numeral is written with a figure rather than a word, e.g. תכיאס 3 (*talat t-akyās*) ‘three bags’ (25).

The conditional construction אנכאן (38, 45), which is in origin the phrase *‘in + the auxiliary verb kān*, is written as a single word, indicating that it was interpreted as a unitary particle.

וכאן אל מדכור אן כאסר כאטרו (12), ‘The aforementioned was offended’ (12), the phrase אן כאסר appears to be the 7th verb form *‘inkasar* with the affix *‘in-* written as a separate word.

4.0. Phonetic processes

4.1. *Tafkhīm* and *tarqīq*

The spelling of several words reflects *tafkhīm* (suprasegmental spread of emphasis), in that ט, צ or ֿ are written for an original /t/, /s/ or /d/ respectively. The majority of these are in words containing /r/, e.g., אכטר ‘most’ (7), ישטראך ‘he shares’ (11), אצעאר ‘prices’ (39, 91), צורנה ‘we searched’ (73), מוראצו ‘his wish’ (87), בנצר ‘town’ (32). Note also יוקצמו ‘they will divide’ (29).

In numerous words an original emphatic /s/ is written with ס rather than צ, e.g. בוטול ‘about the arrival’ (< *wṣl*) (4), וסולהא ‘its arrival’ (44), יוסלכום ‘it reaches you’ (82), חסל ‘it happened’ (< *ḥsl*) (8), בסולחנה ‘by our reconciliation’ (< *ṣulḥ*) (14), לסחבכום ‘for your friends’ (< *lašḥabkum*) (60). Some words with this type of spelling, however, also exhibit *tafkhīm* in another letter, e.g. טוסלכום ‘it reaches you’ (47), וקסצנה ‘he came to us’ (< *qṣd*) (52), suggesting that

the **ט** does not necessarily reflect a loss of emphasis (*tarqāq*) but is simply an orthographic alternant of **צ**.

4.2. Devoicing

An original /d/ is written with **ת** when in contact with the unvoiced consonant /f/ in the root *df* 'to pay', e.g. ונערפכום תתפעו 'we request you to pay ...' (35), תתפעוהא 'you should pay it' (47).

5.0 3ms. pronominal suffixes

The 3ms. suffix is attested in a variety of forms:

(i) **ו** after a consonant, e.g. מינו 'from it' (7), כאטרו 'his feelings' (12), וגירו 'other than it' (39), בכטו 'on his behalf (literally: in his script)' (57). Also after the preposition *ma* 'a, e.g. מעו 'with him' (94).

(ii) **ה** after a vowel, e.g. ונכוושהו 'we take exclusive possession of it' (31), חיסאב אלדי אשתראה מן 'we shall make it one account' (98), נעמלוה חיסאב ואחד רשיד 'the account of what he bought from Rashid' (18), ביה 'in it' (97).

(iii) Zero, e.g. ואלסי פואה ה"י בייעמיל בי 'Mr. Puwwa, may God comfort him, works at his behest' (67–68).

(iv) **הו**, which may be a literary or pseudo-literary feature, e.g. להו 'to him' (15), פיהו 'in him' (70), אנהו 'that he' (77).

6.0. The demonstrative pronoun

The attributive demonstrative pronoun has the form **דיל**. It is invariable and is placed before the noun it qualifies, written as a separate word, e.g., סבב **דיל** כטינ 'the reason for these few lines (literally: couple of lines)' (3), **דיל** כטינ **דיל** כטינ 'this speech' (66), דיל מארה 'this time' (69), ודיל וקתי 'this time, now' (86). In MCA the demonstrative pronoun is placed after the noun, except in a few fixed phrases such as *dilwaqti* 'now'. Its placement after the noun is attested already in medieval Judaeo-Arabic texts of Egyptian origin.²⁴ Also in

24 J. Blau, השתקפותם של להגים בטכסטים ערביים-יהודיים מימי הביניים, *Tarbiz* 27 (1958), p. 91.

the Egyptian dialectal passages of the 17th century work *Hazz al-quḥūf fī šarḥ qaṣīd 'Abī Šādūf* by al-Šīrbīnī the demonstrative is generally placed after the noun.²⁵ The source of the preposing of the demonstrative in the language of the late Judaeo-Arabic documents, therefore, appears not to be the spoken vernacular of the writer. Rather, it is likely to be a literary dialectal form of Egyptian Arabic that is attested in a variety of sources from the Mamlūk period onwards.²⁶

7.0. The relative particle

The relative particle is the invariable form אלדי. This is a pseudo-literary form, in that it resembles the masculine singular form of the CA relative pronoun, but is fossilized and is not inflected for gender or number, e.g. וסתלמנה מנו אלפלוס 'and we received from him the money that was with him' (94). In the majority of cases where the particle occurs in our document it has the function of introducing a nominal relative construction without an antecedent, e.g. ואלדי יתוופק לנה 'what we manage to acquire' (34), ואלדי פיל בנצר בוצאעה עייאנה, 'That which is in the town is defective merchandise' (79–80), חיסאב אלדי אשתראה מן רשיד, 'the account of what he bought from Rashid' (92–93).

8.0. Negation

The general negator before all verb forms is לם. Although the form *lam* exists marginally in the MCA as an emphatic negator, the regular occurrence of this particle in the language of the late Judaeo-Arabic documents is likely to be a pseudo-literary feature. Examples: ולם ראצה 'and he was not pleased' (14), ולם רצינה נכסרו בכטרו 'and we did not want to offend him' (15–16), לם ללאנה 'he did not let us' (28), ולם ערפנה 'and we did not know' (45), אהנה לם נשארנו חד 'we shall not share with anybody' (11), לם יגי 'does not come to' (32), אן לם יערפו

25 Cf. M. Doss, "The position of the demonstrative *da, di* in Egyptian Arabic: A diachronic inquiry", *Annales Islamologiques* 15 (1979), pp. 353–355.

26 For further discussion of this issue see Khan, "A linguistic analysis" (n. 1 above), p. 231.

‘that they do not inform’ (60), *ואנכאן לם ירסלו לנה ויתבעונה נרסלו עליהום אורדנס* ‘If they do not send it to us, they will cause us the trouble of having to send an injunction against them’ (61–62), *לם בייעגבו אל חאל* ‘the situation does not please him’ (64). It is also found in verbless nominal clauses, e.g. *לם לנה פיהו* ‘we do not have with him any merit (= we owe him no favours)’ (70).

Note, however, that the negator *לא* is used after the verb ‘to fear’ in *וכאיף לא ירוח ולם ירגע* ‘and he is afraid lest he go and not come back’ (56–57). The particle *לא* in this context does not have a clear function as a negator, but rather is used with modal force in association with an event that has not yet occurred.

9.0. Differences from MCA

Some aspects of the language of the document differ both from CA and from MCA and are likely to be distinctive features of the Jewish Cairene dialect that was spoken by the writer.

9.1. 1pl. imperfect forms

One of the most conspicuous of these features is the presence of the ending *-u* on 1pl. imperfect verbal forms, e.g. *לם נשארכו חד* ‘we shall not share with anybody’ (11), *לם כלאנה נתקדימו* ‘he did not let us advance’ (28), *ונכלו* ‘we eat’ (29), *ונכוושהו* ‘we take exclusive possession of it’ (31), *נרסלו לכום* ‘we send to you’ (33), *ולם נערפו אלה אנתו* ‘we are letting only you know’ (33–34), *לאזים* ‘we must condemn Mandolfo and expose him’ (67).

This form, however, is not consistently used for the 1pl., as shown by *וקצצנה* and *ואחנה* ‘and he requested us to write to you a letter’ (57) and *נכתב לכום מכתוב* ‘and we shall send them to you’ (61), which are demonstrated to be 1pl. by the surrounding context. Note also the form *ונערפכום* ‘and we let you know’ (35, 40, 73), which is also likely to be 1pl.

The forms *niqtīl* — *niqtīlu* for the 1s and 1pl. of the imperfect are not found in the standard Muslim Cairene dialect, but are a feature of the Jewish dialect of Cairo. It is relevant to note that in the Jewish dialect the 1pl. form *niqtīlu*

is not used consistently, rather the 1pl. is expressed interchangeably by *niqtilu* and *niqtil*,²⁷ exactly as in our document.

9.2. Vocalism of verbal forms

In a number of cases the vocalism of verbal forms differs from what is found in MCA or CA, e.g. ולם ראצה 'and he did not want' (14, MCA *riḏi*), ישטראך 'he takes part' (11, MCA *yīštirik*), לם חוצור 'it has not come' (88, MCA *ḥadar*), בקאנה 'we have remained' (86, MCA *baqēna*). These may be a reflection of the distinctive features of the Jewish dialect of Cairo at that period. The use of the *quṭul* vocalism for verbs that in MCA have the *qaṭal* or *qīṭil* pattern is still found in the surviving spoken Jewish Cairene dialect.²⁸

10.0 Hebrew elements

A number of Hebrew elements are found in the document. Some are formulaic abbreviations, e.g. אחדשו (= אחרי דרישת שלומו) 'after offering greetings' (3), יום ר"ח (= ראש חודש) 'the first day of the month' (4), בע"ה (= בעזרת השם) 'God willing' (*passim*). Some, however, are words used outside of formulaic phraseology, e.g. מחר נרסלו לכם 'tomorrow we shall send to you' (34), ונערפכום 'I request you to pay to my aunt, the wife of the deceased Hayyim Mais ...' (35). The form ראבח 'profit' (101) is most likely intended to represent Hebrew רווח. Of particular interest is יום שיגי נרסלו בע"ה 'God willing, the day it arrives, we shall send you an inventory of it' (97), in which the Hebrew relative particle ך is placed before the Arabic verbal form יגי. Note also the abbreviation 'ע which is placed before amounts of currency, which appears to denote the Hebrew term ערך 'value'.

27 Cf. Blanc (n. 4 above).

28 Rosenbaum (personal communication).