

ARABIC PAPYRI AND INSCRIPTIONS FROM NAQLUN, HERMITAGE 89

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During the excavations of Hermitage 89 (see above, p. 48ff.) a collection of Arabic texts and inscriptions was found. The following presentation of this find is based only on a preliminary investigation, principally concerned with the dating of the texts and inscriptions, as well as with the personal and geographical names occurring therein.

N 88/90. Fragment of an Arabic papyrus. This is probably the oldest Arabic text found in this hermitage. Although papyrus as writing material continued to be used into the 14th century AD,¹ the present document displays a variety of Kufic script which is characteristic of papyri from the 7th century AD.² The fragment measures about 11 x 8.5 cm. On the recto (hor. fibres) only six fragmentary lines survive, including the right margin of the papyrus, and a part of a Greek numeral (ΣΝ, 250?) above. The first line contains the Basmalla, the remainder of the contents is unclear.

The other Arabic texts are all on paper, and with but one exception these are preserved only as fragments. In all, the paper finds include around 15 fragments in Arabic. In the order of their registration, these include:

N 36/90. Upper part of a document of 12 x 9 cm in size, possibly a letter. The remains of ten lines are preserved, none complete. Of these, one line of the text was written along the edge of the paper, after which the paper was turned 180° and one more line was added by the same hand.

N 37/90. Small paper fragment (6 x 5 cm.) containing the beginnings of four lines written on both sides in the same hand.

¹ A. Grohmann, *Einführung und Chrestomatie zur arabischen Papyruskunde*, Bd. I, Prag 1954, pp.3-4.

² R.G. Khoury, in: *Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie*, Bd. I, Wiesbaden 1982, p. 263.

N 38/90. Four very small paper fragments, one of which shows remains of the Basmalla.

N 42/90. Small fragment with on the recto the remains of five lines of a list with accompanying numbers; the verso preserves only one line on the top, the rest of the paper is empty.

N 43/90. This is a larger fragment, measuring 13.5 x 23.5 cm, of a contract concerning grain (*kamh*), signed by four witnesses. The signatures are preserved as well as parts of the last five lines of the text itself. The beginning and the end of all the lines have been cut off.

The contract mentions the town of Fayum, and supplies the date of Friday, 14 nights before the end of the month Jumada al-akhira of the year 400 AM (approx. February 5, 1010 AD). The text of the fourth witness, moreover, seems to give the equivalent sun-date; the third day of the month Mecheir of the year 3(.)9, possibly the year 379. Four witnesses signed their names under the contract, three of them carry the name Muhammad. The first is called Muhammad b. Mahmud; the second Muhammad b. Ahmed b. Khaled; and the third Muhammad b. Maher (?).

The contract was later torn up and its verso used for writing a letter. After writing, the paper was folded down to a size of about 3.5 x 3.5 cm; this text is completely preserved, although the ink has faded considerably. The addressee of this letter carried the name of Theodore, likely to be a Christian. The writer begins his letter with the Basmalla. No toponyms seem to have been contained in the letter, but perhaps the mentioning of the town of Fayum in the contract on the recto gives an indication as to the whereabouts of the sender of the letter.

N 89/90. (three fragments). One is a small fragment, written on both sides in two different hands. Its recto has the remains of three lines, one of which contains the Basmalla. The other two fragments are even smaller, one of these preserves text on both, sides, written in two different hands.

The many Arabic graffiti inscribed on the walls of room B (the oratory) of Hermitage 89, preserve the names of only five of the numerous visitors that left a written trace of their presence there. Their names are: Lutfallah from Fayum town (east wall), John (east wall), Sulayman (east wall), Abu al-Sakhra, the son of Sulayman (north wall) and As'ad the son of Saeed, son of Barsuma, son of Marc (south wall). No dates are preserved in these graffiti, but the names of Barsuma and Lutfallah mentioned therein suggest a date much later than the initial period of occupation of the cell. Barsuma becomes a common name only after the death of the saint of that name in AD 1317, and Lutfallah too seems to be a relatively late name.

Most of the graffiti are short and contain prayers of the usual kind as inscribed by Coptic pilgrims. This type of inscription starts with the formula *ya rab arham 'abdak* (once *ya aghfar li-'abdik al-khati'* ("O Lord, have mercy on (and forgive) your slave, the sinner...") or: *adhkur ya rab 'abdak al-khati'* ("Remember, O Lord!, your slave, the sinner..."). Only one such text on the southern wall is longer than a few lines. Two graffiti mention the place of origin of the visitors as Fayum town, leading to the same conclusion that these texts were inscribed by pilgrims and therefore in the period following the occupation of the hermitage by monks.