

28. RYLANDS GENIZAH COLLECTION

A 803 (1825)

Esther-Miriam Wagner and Mohamed Ahmed

Transcription

1. בע"ה
2. ביום 28 לח' סיון שנת 805 ליצירה
3. אה אל סי' יעקב יעביץ נר"ו יאיר אבירא
4. אחדש"ו מן בעד מזיד אל סלאם עליכום נערפכום באין אתמול גה לטרפנה אלס' יוספ אאלייון וכברנה
5. עלה אל גזרה ביתאע אכוך בעונות אל נפטר פי יעלם אל שית' באין צועוב עלינה קאווי לאין
6. כאן ראגיל חסידא קדישא עלה מה חאכו כל אל נאס ולאכין מה ביל יד חילה אל שית' יצברכום ואל ברכה
7. פיך ופי ולאדו ובעד נערפכום באין סאביק תא' כתבנה ליכום וכברנאכום באין אלכוואגה בוגוז סאל
8. עליכום וקולנה לו סאפיר ישופ וולאדו ואתמול סאל עליכום אין כאן גית ולה לה וקולנה לו אל גומעה אל
9. גאייה ייגי פי כירה וכברנאכום כלפי יכברכום גירנה לנה מה תגיבוש אל חאק עלינה יכון פי שאריפ
10. עילמיכום בע"ה גוואב אל מכתוב תכוננו אינתו תיחצרו לטרפנה חוכם מא קולתו ליל ווכיל
11. וליל מבאשיר ולם ענדי מה נטול עליכום אלא ביל כיר ושלוס הצעיר
12. נסים סבאח
13. ס"ט

Arabic Transcription

1. בע"ה
2. ביום 28 לח' סיון שנת 85 ליצירה
3. אה السيد" יעקב יעביץ נר"ו יאיר אבירא
4. אחדש"ו מן بعد مزיד אל سلام עליکم نعرفکم یاين¹ אתמול² جه لطرفه السيد" יוספ
אאליין וخبירנה
5. עלה הגזרה ביתא ע אכוכ בעונות אל נפטר פי יעלם אל שית' יאين صوعوب עלינה
قاووی لأين
6. كان راجيل حسيڤا קדישא עלה מה חקו אל נאס ולאकिन מה ביל יד חילה אל שית'
יבשרכום ואל ברکه
7. فيك وفي ولادو وبعد نعرفکم یاين سابق تا' כתבה לیکום וخبירנאכום یاين الخواجه
بوجوز سأل
8. עליکم וقولנה לו سافیر یشوف וולادו ואתמול² سأل עליکم این كان جيت وله له
وقولנה לו الجمعة ال
9. جاييه يجي في خيره وخبيرנאכום כלפי³ يخبرכום غيرنه لנה מה تجيبوش الحق עלינה יכון
פי شاريف
10. عيلمیکום בע"ה جوواب אל مکتוב תכוננו اینتו תיחזרו لطرفנה حکم ما قولتو ליל
ווקיל
11. وليل مباشر ولم عندي מה نطول עליכם الا بال خير وسلום הצעיר
12. נסים סבאח
13. ס"ט

Translation

(1) With the help of God. (2) On the 28th of Sivan of the Year 5585 of Creation (= 1825 CE). (3) (To) our beloved, the master Jacob Yabets—may God protect and preserve him—enlightened by God. (4) After inquiring about his health, and after (extending) many greetings to you, we let you know that yesterday, Mr

¹ In order to reflect the Hebrew spelling באין, we decided to use the ا sign here.

Joseph Ayllon² came to our area, and he informed us (5) about the punishment of your brother, dead because of (our) sins. God—may his name be blessed—knows that (this) was difficult to bear for us, because (6) he was a pious and saintly man, as all people depicted him. Yet, there is nothing we can do. May God—his name be blessed—give you patience. It is for you³ (7) and his children to fill his place. Then we also inform you that previously we wrote to you and informed you that Mr Bogush asked (8) about you and we told him that you are travelling to see your children. Yesterday he asked about you, whether you came (back) or not. We said to him: Next (9) Friday he will come in good health. We tell you just as anyone other than us would tell you on our behalf. Do not blame it on us. You should know (10) this.⁴ With the help of God, (there will be an) answer to (this) letter. You should come to our area in accordance with what you told the agent (11) and the supervisor. I have nothing to add except the best of greetings. The young man (12) Nissim Sabbāḥ, (13) a good Sefardi.

Commentary

The code-switching between Hebrew and Arabic in this letter differs markedly from what can be observed in medieval letters. In fact, code-switching involving temporal adverbs, such as *'etmol*

² For the Ladino spelling of the name, see https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%94_%D7%90%D7%90%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9F.

³ A common Egyptian condolence, see Badawi and Hinds (1986, 68).

⁴ Literally 'This should be to your honourable knowledge'.

‘yesterday’, is not normally found in medieval Judaeo-Arabic letters, but is a much more common occurrence in Yiddish and Ladino letters.⁵ Medieval mercantile letters in particular avoid code-switching,⁶ whereas early modern traders frequently switch into Hebrew. Similarly, words such as *niftar* ‘deceased’ are not normally used in Classical Judaeo-Arabic code-switches, whereas they are commonly used loanwords in Yiddish. It could be argued that the change in style as well as frequency of mercantile code-switching observed between medieval Judaeo-Arabic and Early Modern Judaeo Arabic, in particular in the letter at hand, was influenced by language patterns from Yiddish and Ladino through traders from Europe and Asia Minor.

Line 1

בעזרת השם = בע"ה ‘With the help of God’.

Line 2

לח = לחודש ‘in the month’.

Line 3

אה = אהובנו ‘our beloved’.

נר"ו = נטרה רחמנא פרקה ‘may God protect and preserve him’.

Line 4

אחדש"ו = אחרי דרישת שלומו ‘After inquiring about your (lit. his) health’.

⁵ For differences in codeswitching between Judaeo-Arabic and Yiddish, see Wagner and Kühnert (2016). A cursory analysis of all Judaeo-Arabic letters written by Daniel b. ‘Azarya published in Gil (1997, 625–715) shows no temporal adverbs at all.

⁶ See Wagner and Connolly (2017).

גה. Classical Judaeo-Arabic גא, Classical Arabic جاء 'he came'.

Line 5

צועב 'difficult to bear'. The vocalisation here may reflect what Rosenbaum (2002, 37) describes as preference for *u* over Standard dialect *i* in Modern Jewish Egyptian Arabic, which would indicate the speaker's Jewish heritage and minority status for any listener.

Line 6

ראגיל. The pointing of this letter and the other letters below is somewhat random. Some of those going back to Classical Arabic ج have dots beneath, as here; others do not, for example יגי 'he will come' in line 9. Yet, also Classical Arabic غ may receive the dot, as in גירנה 'other than us', also in line 9. The same irregularity can be found in various letters, e.g., the pointing of כ to distinguish between [k] and [b], on the one hand, and [k] and [ḳ], on the other.

חסידיא קדישא. The use of this Aramaic form again is somewhat unusual for Judaeo-Arabic letters. Yet it is commonly used in Yiddish, as mentioned by Khan (2006, 358).

Line 7

تاريخه = تا "its (the letter's) time, i.e., today".

Line 8

ולה לה. The dialectal term *walla* + *lā* 'or not'.

וולאדו. The double spelling of ו here, as well as the double spelling of י in יגי 'he will come' in line 9, are not consistent throughout the letter and may show a preference of double spelling if ו is followed by short [u] if and י is followed by [i].