ARABIC PAPYRI
National Library of Egypt
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PREFACE

To keep up-to-date with the scientific and technological revolution-taking place in libraries all over the world, the National Library of Egypt, Dar el Kotob, implemented numerous projects to document and preserve its huge collections in order to offer the best possible services for researchers and intellectuals.

Most prominently among these projects are the digitization of 50,000 books in cooperation with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, the digitization of manuscripts in cooperation with the National Library of Congress, and the current projects implemented in collaboration with the Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT). Dar el Kotob and CULTNAT joined forces and finalized the documentation and digitization of its Arabic Papyri collection.

The project led to placing the collection within the user-friendly international library management system called ‘Horizon’. Among the project deliverables in the production of this important publication, which aims at raising awareness of the Arabic papyri collection.

Dr. Mohamed Saber Arab
Chairman of the National Library and Archives of Egypt
FOREWORD

The Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT) and the Public Authority for the National Library and Archives signed a protocol for cooperation to document the valuable collection of Arabic papyri folios found at Dar el kotob. This project comes within the context of the National Plan pursued by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, which aims at establishing national information systems in various fields. To complement these efforts, we published this book with its invaluable information concerning the most significant papyri folios available at the National Library of Egypt. Furthermore, a user friendly CD is being produced containing more than 700 Arabic papyri folios edited by Prof. Dr. Grohmann. These efforts were made to preserve this fortune and protect it from misuse or loss. It also seeks to facilitate research and scientific services the National Library offers to researches, academics and specialists from all over the world.

The Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage is looking forward for further cooperation with the Public Authority for the National Library and Archives in the documentation of Egypt’s rich heritage to safeguard it for our future generations.

Dr. Fathi Saleh
Director of CULTNAT
INTRODUCTION

The National Library of Egypt, Dar el Kotob possesses a significant collection of the rarest Arabic papyrus folios, which documents the development and prosperity of Egypt through different historical periods. These papyri are the media through which science, arts and literature were preserved, accordingly they played a significant role in the development of human civilizations. The Arabic papyri had a prominent role in highlighting several mysterious aspects of our history and Islamic civilization. The importance of these papyri stems from the fact that they contain a rare collection of protocols and documents related to the management affairs of the Islamic civilization. Furthermore, the papyri provide researches with numerous documents on the Dawawins, the administrative system then, letters exchanged among caliphs and governors, receipts of taxes and Kharaj, lists of workers, soldiers and marriage contracts, purchase documents, as well as lists of workers, artisans, farmers and merchants. Most of these documents have never been subject to study or publication till this moment. In addition to personal letters, the collection comprises medical recipes, popular epics, documents of endowments, dispute settlement, library texts, poetry and prose, Qur’anic verses and Hadiths, and in some cases, amulets, magical texts and many other miscellaneous documents. The importance of the information found on the folios led to increasing interest in studying the collection of Arabic papyri preserved in Dar el Kotob in Cairo and other collections in the world, such as the collection in the Papyri Institute in the Heidelberg University, Germany. The Arabic papyri collection in Dar el Kotob consists of 3739 documents; 2627 on papyrus, 1050 on Kaghid (paper), 58 on parchment, 3 on marble and 1 on textile. Collectively the papyri folios contain 5350 records on their front and back sides.

Mr. B. Moritz began collecting those papyri when he was the director of Dar el Kotob between 1896 and 1911 A.D. During the period 1899-1905, this collection increased through purchase, excavations, donations. The most important study of the Arabic papyri collection of the Egyptian National Library, was done by Professor Adolf Grohmann, between 1930 and 1962. Grohmann managed to study, verify, and publish 789 papyri and Kaghid papers from the collection. He put the results in 10 volumes, entitled “the Arabic Papyrus Papers in the Egyptian National Library.” So far six volumes are published while the other four are under verification.

During the following years, the Papyri collection was enlarged through the addition of newly found Arabic papyri in Egyptian towns and villages, while numerous folios were moved from the Egyptian Museum to Dar el Kotob. Another prominent project is the publication of the only book in the world written on papyrus, entitled “The Comprehensive Collection of the Hadiths” by the Egyptian scholar Abdulah Bin Muslim 125-197 A.H. 743-813 A.D. This book was found in Tal Edfu, south of Egypt.

The significance of the Arabic papyri collection in the National Library of Egypt lies in the fact that it complements other Arabic papyri found in international collections. It includes important letters of the Umayyad governor “Qura Bin Shrek Bin Murtad Alabasy” 90-96 A.H. 705-715 A.D., while other letters of this governor are scattered among several universities, institutes, and research centers around the world. Through our ambitious project in cooperation with the Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage, we are looking forward to offer a digital publication of the papyri collection to the scholarly world.

Head of the Egyptian National Library
With the spread of Islam, the Arabic language attained a unique and distinctive status, calligraphy was honored and glorified, and the pen, the object which symbolizes this process, was itself praised within the Holy Qur’an. The Arabic language created an identity that united the Muslim world. Soon, the beauty of the script and its meanings secured the Arabic calligraphy's eternity, and gave rise to its development. At the earliest stages in the Arabian Peninsula, writing was only confined to recording the revealed verses and **ayat** as well as in the form of letters & correspondences by the Prophet (s.a.w). Most of these documents were inscribed on parchments, yet some where also inscribed on papyri.

The earliest Arabic texts dating from the first century hijrah, that exist till today include several letters sent by the prophet Mohammed to different rulers inviting them to Islam and monotheism. Among these rulers were Hercules, the Roman Emperor (Qaisar al Rum) and the Moqawqa (leader of the Copts). These early letters revealed several pre-Kufic script styles such as the Madina or hijazi script, characterized by its rigid angular slanting letters and the lack of dots and articulation marks. They also reveal a Qurashi script style characterized by its rounded forms of letters and dense appearance. The angular Kufic script style evolved during the second half of the first century hijrah, with regulated rules and guidelines that was followed when inscribing Qur’ans, official tablets and monumental inscriptions up to the 4th century H./10th c. AD.

However flexibility and speedy forms of writing were two factors that hindered the use of Kufic and encouraged a more fluid form of Arabic writing. The purpose of such cursive scripts was to record everyday interaction, contracts, certificates, and legal documents. In Egypt a body of literature was discovered buried within ruins of old garrison estates dated from the first to the 7th centuries Hijrah. These documents are on papyrus paper written in Greek, Coptic, and Arabic languages while some are on paper (kaghid) written in Arabic. Beside their social, economic and political importance in documenting the first centuries of Islam in Egypt, the significance of these folios lies in their script style.

For the first time, dated folios that reflect the every day use of the Arabic language was discovered. Such folios document the script that was used by the local community in Egypt and records its development from papyri to paper, as of the 1st to the 7th century H. The Arabic Papyrus collection at Dar al Kotob is indeed unique as it will reveal for the first time the handwriting of the people, rather than the eloquent drawing of scripts by professional calligraphers. Through out this catalogue of selected folios from the collection, we draw your attention to different script styles used by the locals. Eliminating with an attempt to label or name these styles and date them. We feel that identifying them would greatly contribute in revealing, dating and understanding many other documents and holdings found in archives and libraries from around the world.

Dr. Heba Barakat
Project Manager
THE CATALOGUE
A short prayer written on papyrus was intended to be a reminder for believers and was kept within the personal belongings. The folio is written in cursive script in black ink, and reveals the following words: "In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful, shall God; forgive us and let us see His face. Be pleased with us always, amen!"
The text is inscribed on parchment in brownish-black ink in Kufic with diacritics. It displays Qur'anic verses of al-Thurayj and al-Tur suras written in 11 lines on verso and recto. This parchment is datable to the 3rd century Hijra/9th century A.D. and must have been a page of a complete Qur'an produced in Egypt.
The script is written in black ink with a reed pen and inscribed in cursive nastkh script with few dots on recto and verso. The content displays hadiths of the Prophet recorded and transmitted by theologians. The papyrus is in a poor condition and shows evidence of difficulties in writing over the papyrus (the support) that is clear in the discrepancy in the size and shape of the letters.

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