

Husband and Wife

A Letter of a Young Scribe to His Wife, Sent to Old Cairo from

Sammanūd, a Little Town in the Nile Delta

(In Hebrew)

E-S. 13 J 20, f. 9

Text in MJ II, pp. 307-8

(The young scribe most likely was the son-in-law, and perhaps also successor designate, of the cantor Abu 'l-Bayān, to whom the letter is addressed (see p.). Instead of Arabic, the normal medium of correspondence between husband and wife at that time, the writer uses Hebrew, perhaps because his provenance was from a Christian country and, therefore, he was not very fluent in the written use of Arabic, or, more likely, because the daughter of the cantor was a learned woman and it was a point of honor for her to be addressed in Hebrew, the literary language of her community.)

Abundant greetings and wishes for speedy salvation to my pure and chaste wife. It is only now that I appreciate your good deeds, but I have no words to express what I feel. I hope you are happy, but I feel great bitterness,^{a)} owing to my separation from you and from the eyes^{b)} of the boy, my dear, beloved, and most cherished son. I weep and groan and cry, day and night, and lift my eyes unto the four quarters of the world, but there is no one who has mercy upon me, except the Holy one - Blessed be He. Although you need no admonition from me, please act for the sake of your soul¹