

Budapest, Kaufmann Coll.

Handwritten notes in Hebrew and Arabic script at the top right.

נצח כבוד אל אביו הנא לא  
באסר מסחר מעשה ז"ל

בשמך רחמנה

DK X

וצלת כתב חצרת מולאי אלעאל. (ואלד בעלני אללה פדאם)

7

מן כל סו וופקם וגמע שמלי בה בפצלה ורחשתה

3

אן שא אללה ואלדי ~~תכנן~~ <sup>תריד</sup> עלמה יא מולאי אן נחן פי

4

שדה עצימה מן אל מרץ ואלגרב זקד פטמנא אלסל

5

לא חסל מא נחן פיה אלן מן אלנחס ואלבכא ואלסהר

חתי שהד אללה לקד צגו אלגיראן וקד גרמנא עליה

ללפדב וללשר <sup>ט</sup> ~~א~~ <sup>ב</sup> ופרוגין כל ליוס וקד בענא אלעחל

ואלסיוף ואלכלאנה ואכרינא אלסבקה ומא תורא

פלחק שי סצה ומע מא נחתאגה נחן איצא ובעד

(תלמה אמתה?)

דלך פארגו יבקא פהו שהד אללה כאן פרחת מן ~~המפני~~

אללה לא תחא... עלי אלי אללה ועאלי

ואלי וצולך וקד וצלת דנאנירך מן אלגרב ולא

יסלמו לנא שי ולא תנסא אללולו לזין אלדאר ~~וסולד~~ וכדלך

אלוציפה אנא אקב(ל) ידיך וכךלך ואלדתי וסתי

ו(כ)אלאתי ואמראת עמי <sup>וגמיע מן</sup> ~~וא(כ) עמך פי אל(בל)אד~~ אלדאר

ואתפק כרוגך וכרוג אלשיך ובקאינא ייתמה בלא רגל

Handwritten notes at the bottom right.

Handwritten Arabic text at the bottom of the page.

נער כותב אל אביו הנמצא במסע מסחר מעבר לים

אוסף דויד קופמן, בודאפשט

- 1 באשטן רחמנה
- 2 וצלת כתב הזרת (ו) מולאי אלאול אלואלד בעלני אללה פדאה
- 3 מן כל סו וופקה וגמע שמלי בה בפצלה ורחמתה
- 4 אן שא אללה ואלדי תריד עלמה יא מולאי אן נחן פי
- 5 שדה עזימה מן אלמרף ואאלגדב וקר פסטנא אלספל
- 6 לא תסל מא נחן פיה אלאן מן אלנחס ואלבכא ואלסהר
- 7 חתי שהד אללה לקד זנו אלניראן וקר גרמנא עליה
- 8 ללטב וללשראב ופרונין כל יום וקר בענא אלפתל
- 9 ואלסיוף ואלכזאנה ואכרינא אלסבקה ומא תודא
- 10 בלחק שי מעה ומע מא נחתאנה נחן איצא ובעד
- 11 דלך פאריגו יבקא פהו שהד אללה כאן פרחת מן תמלה (תאמלה?)
- 12 אללה אללה לא תתאכר פעיני אלי אללה תעאלי
- 13 ואלוי וצולך וקר וצלת דנאנירך מן אלזרב ולא
- 14 יסלמו לנא שי ולא תנסא אללוו לזין אלדאר וכדלך
- 15 אלוציפה אנא אקב(ל) ידיך וכדלך ואלדתי וסתי
- 16 ו(כ)אלאתי ואמראת (ו) עמי וגמיע מן פי אלדאר
- 17 ואתפק כרוגך וכרוג אלשיך ובקינא יתמה בלא רגל

189 א 2

ولده زين الدار  
يفديه

حضرة مولاي الشيخ  
ابوالحسن علان  
بن حسن

דגל סמטת אב אביו הנמצא במסע מסחר מעבר לים



Med Soc III, IX, C, K, m, 154-163

Family - Parents and Children

A Boy Writes to His Father, Away on a Business Trip Overseas

Budapest, David Kaufman Collection X

(The addressee, °Allān b. Ḥassūn, is known from the Geniza records as an India trader. Here, we find him in the Muslim West, i.e. North West Africa.)

In Your Name, oh Merciful!

The letters of the Presence of my illustrious lord, my father, have arrived - may God make me his ransom from all evil and give him success and unite me with him in His kindness and mercy, if God will.

As to what you wish to know, my lord: We are in great distress, owing to illness and separation (from you). We have weaned the baby - do not ask me what we suffer from him: trouble, crying, sleepless nights, so much that the neighbors - God is my witness - are complaining. We incur great expenses for him, for the doctor, medicaments, and two chickens every day. We have sold the loaves,<sup>a)</sup> the swords,<sup>b)</sup> and have let the upper floor; the proceeds, however, are really not sufficient for the baby's expenses and for what we also need. After all this, I hope, he will remain alive - God is my witness, you would be happy to look at him.<sup>1</sup> By God, do not tarry any longer. My eyes are lifted upon God, the exalted, and upon your return.

The dinars, sent by you from the West, have arrived, but nothing was given to us.<sup>o)</sup> Do not forget the pearls for Zain al-Dar<sup>d)</sup> and the

likewise

strings<sup>f</sup> for the maidservant. I kiss your hands, and so does my mother and my grandmother, my maternal aunts, the wife of my paternal uncle, and everybody in the house. It happened that both you and "the elder"<sup>f</sup>) departed simultaneously, so that we remained like orphans without a man...

(Here the boy had arrived at the bottom of the page and could have continued overleaf, as was customary. Obviously, his mother asked him at this juncture to read out to her what he had written and, finding that the letter was a little too much outspoken, instructed him in how to write more politely. Thus, the letter, instead of going to North Africa, remained in the house and, finally, found its way into the Geniza. <sup>Verso</sup> ~~Overleaf~~ (the address is given in Arabic characters.)

To the Presence of my lord, the elder Abu 'lḥasan <sup>o</sup>Allān b. Ḥassūn - his son Zain al-Dār, may he be his ransom!

Notes

- a) In a merchant's house, where heavy loads had to be moved, levers were a necessary implement.
- b) There are various references in the Geniza records to swords bought or sold. Perhaps people kept swords in their houses, as one keeps a revolver today. As no "man" had remained in the house to handle a sword, the ladies sold them when they needed money. However, it is possible that the word for sword (saiif) then had also another meaning, which would fit in here.
- c) The money certainly was sent to one of the addressee's partners. In many Geniza letters of people writing from overseas to their partners, they ask to send certain sums home to their family. Our letter expresses disappointment that no such instruction had been given in this case.
- d) "The ornament of the house." Normally, only names of girls are combined with the phrase "of the house." However, on the <sup>verso</sup> backside, the name of the sender is given as "Your son Zain al-Dār," and the name Zain, "ornament," was borne also by men.

The "pearls," lūlū, of course, were not real pearls, but beads, made of amber or other material, actually worn by boys, as we know from various Geniza papers (see p.      ). The writer mentions himself in the third person, as his mother had told him to remind his

father of the presents promised.

- e) The children and the wife of a man would kiss his hands, but certainly not his mother or mother-in-law. The boy, although writing comparatively well, does not yet have full command of the epistolary style. Thus, he omits to say at the beginning of the letter that he and the family were happy to learn from his father's letters that he was well, etc., a detail absolutely de rigueur after the acknowledgement of the receipt of a letter.
- f) Most probably identical with the uncle mentioned before. The two brothers lived together in one house, as often was the case (see p.     ).
- g) Although it is extremely hazardous to compare the monumental Hebrew with the elegantly cursive Arabic script, I have <sup>the</sup> feeling that the address is written by the same hand as the letter itself. Boys in better Jewish houses learnt the Arabic script (see p.     ).

Comments

1. The manuscript is damaged here. Text: kān faraḥt min tml. I take the last word for ta'ammulihi. The colloquial kān faraḥt is very common. However, frḥ normally is connected with bi, and not with min.
2. The script is effaced. There is visible something like swlk, which I take as a boyish spelling for sulūk. It is possible, also, that the plural of silka was pronounced suluk (with two short u) and that the first vowel was rendered by w as a plene writing (see p. 