ON AN EARLY FRAGMENT OF THE QUR'ĀN

Papyrus No. 28 of the "Arabic papyri from Hirbet el-Mird," edited by Adolf Grohmann (Louvain-Leuven 1963, Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 52, pp. 30-32, Pl. XIV), is described by Grohmann as a "fragment of an official letter probably referring to the embola." His reading, translation and comments are reproduced here.

Mird A 31 a 1 (M.A.B.). $22 \times 8,5$ cm. IInd century A.H. (VIIIth century A.D.).

On the recto 16 lines are written in black ink in a cursive, inelegant hand at right-angles to the horizontal fibres. The verso (A 31b) bears fragments and vestiges of 13 lines written in black ink in a regular, skilled hand, parallel to the vertical fibres.

The fragment, coming from the middle of the letter, is very poorly preserved. Of the lines 12-16 only a small strip of papyrus, 1,7 cm wide, has survived. On the right side a piece, 3,5 cm high and 8,3 cm wide, has detached itself from the upper layer of the papyrus. The verso is so badly damaged that it is impossible to recover much more than some fragments of words, the translation of which is impossible.

Prototype: original.

```
] نفانه ولا عؤر الله ]
               واعتصموا [
            . ولا نفر مو[ا
           بنعمة الله [
               1....r 1
         Γ
                                                   11
               ]بوح[
                                               ]
                                                   12
               ]...[
                                               ]
                                                   18
               ]...[
                                                   12
               ]...[
                                               ]
                                                   10
         ٢
               ]...[
                                                   17
 1. [In the nam]e of God, the Compassionate, [the Merciful].
 2. [From So and So, Son of So and So, t]o Su[lai]mān ibn Ḥārit.
 3. [Thereafter. Verily, I] praise un[t]o you God, [besides]
 4. [whom there is] no god.
 5. [
           ] and . . . . . So inspe[ct
           ] Nu'mān, the corn-measurer. Therefore, prevent [ ]
 6. [
           8. [
           ] and they have had recourse [to
 9.
           ] . . . and no single person . . . . [
10. [
           ] with God's favour [
11.
           ] . . . . . . . . [
12. [
13.
                                                  1
14.
15. [
16. [
```

]نعان الكيّال [ف]المنع [

6. For the \leftarrow corn-measurer \rightarrow cf. APG no 18, 3 and p. 66. He is presumably a successor of the $\mu\epsilon\sigma(\tau\eta_s)$ of the Byzantine and early Arabic period, a trustee in the public barns in the province, who had to make the repartition

of the impost in kind among the individual tax-payers. Cf. H. Gerstinger, Neue byzantinische Vertragsurkunden aus der Sammlung «Papyri Erzherzog Rainer» in Wien, The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, XIII (1961), p. 57 (n° 3, VIth cent. A.D.).

However, Grohmann's reading does not correspond to what can be seen quite clearly in the papyrus. Consequently, his rendering and comments are not correct.

The correct reading of the papyrus is as follows:

The rendering of these lines is as follows:

- 4. [there is no god] but He
- 5. [.....] said in His Book
- 6. [....] O ye who believe
- 7. [Observe your duty to Allah] with right, observance and do not die
- 8. [save as those who have surrendered unto Him]. And hold fast
- 9. [all of you together to the cable of Allah] and do not separate
- 10. [and remember] Allah's favor

It is evident that the papyrus is not a "fragment of an official letter" but a fragment (lines 6-10) of the Qur'ān, containing Sūra III, verses 102-103.

There is no doubt whatsoever that this is the correct reading of the text; it seems to be of some importance that we have here one of the earliest specimens of the text of the Our'an, written in the second century of the Hijra.*

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. A. Etan, Mrs. I. Pomeranz and Mrs. A. Sussmann of the Department of Antiquities and Museums, Ministry of Education and Culture, Jerusalem, Israel, who kindly prepared the photograph of the papyrus for me.

