A Handbook and Reader of Ottoman Arabic

EDITED BY ESTHER-MIRIAM WAGNER
22. A JUDAEO-ARABIC LETTER FROM THE PRIZE PAPERS COLLECTION, HCA 32/1208/126.2 (1796)

Matthew Dudley

Transcription

1. jego
2. חו"ש' חם ש' החבה
3. שחובתי וההכרתי 'ר שלמה בשהו יkeypress;
4. אתה"ש' במעד כתבי אוסלאם עלי' ב"ש עשם אלתרפינ' בצער הבש נעלו' ألف
5. קבלת כאן
6. אלמסעי פי וט ברייר ח' ודאשעון עו בראשות תאירד ס'; ח' הנה'ל וטרבש המ
7. פיהו
8. מנה桥梁 קוסעי ילקרא ועי' טעם מיר(bytes) עליך ב'ש והאד אלחרפרין בקצור באש נעלםיך
9. עלאביאד גאס מרכב דה' מ더אי נוחה בבריך עו פייה אלקאהווא אל
10. היאדה אליסהץ סמייט אריאמו' נגב פיידי' מיהי' בקונטור בקצל אלקוא
11. על אולאלה על סטנער ייסתך אטיה סמו'ה פי סס בולדה יאב' ביע' או
12. יפי' לקראוד' נברך ואנת' יהודרו' יידע לקוט' סופ' טיב' פי' קמטטיב' אליא ביא
13. אתך' פים קוסעי פי' בכס' עמאי' חסן אלקלאהווא ודא להוק' להאמנס
14. גואני' מה' יהודרו' מק' אלצל' לבריך'י' רשלט' ראהט' ברוק' בvaisיך' טעבגי
15. פי' כפעוים בכסע'ביע'ב'עשת' תקבל עליה' ביא' אלו' אות'י' וואמה' ופייסוא
16. יקמט' פים'ו כ"פי' אסיא'ה' קטצ'י' מוא' עני' ביו' בטנו' עליך' ביא
17. בולרי' מצעיפי' וואם' ספטוק'ה' השגה' אמרו' בפייסוא' עליה' ראוי' ונייה' וש"ש
18. "ה שלמה זמת
19. ס"פ.

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Arabic Transcription

1. بِعَالَةٍ
2. تونس يو سَلَى هِنَاكَ شُوشَ شُوَاихَنَة
3. سَأَلَهُمْ عَمَّاً وَدَعَاهُمْ بِهِدَاهُمْ يَاً
4. أَهْنَاشَةً مِنْ بَعْدِ كَتْرَاطٍ إِلَى عَلِيمَهَا تَاَلَا وَهَادَ الْحِرْفِينِ بِقُصُورٍ بَاشَ نَعْلُمَهُ إِلَى
5. قِبْلَ مَعَهُ
6. الْمُسْعِيِّ فِي وَصْطٍ بِرِبْطِ هَذَا دَاعِنَهُ عَرَبَ بِرَايَتَكَ تَارِيَخٍ تَاَلَا هَذَا هِذَا وَرَفَطَهَا فِيهَا
7. وَمِنْهَا فِرْحَتٍ نَسْمَعُ بِكَ طَيْبَ هَذَا وَرَابِطَكَ تَحْرِسُكَ بَشَ نَخْرَكَ سُوْمَ الْقَاهْوَوَا أَش
8. تَسَوَّوَ عَنْدَكُ مِنْهَا تَعْلِمُ بَا سَيِّدِي إِلَى الْقَاهْوَوَا فَاطَوُ تَسْوَى مِبَآ
9. وَسَطْلَيْنَ لَمْ يَمْحِسُ وَحْمَسُ لَنَفْتَارٍ وَذَا دَأْمٍ جَآَئَذُ مَرْكَبٍ مِنْ مَلَاِطَا وَجَابُتُ الْقَاهْوَوَاٞ
10. وَالْبَارِحُ جَآَئَذُ مَرْكَبٍ دَوْهُ الْمُصَدِّرِ مِنْ ذَرَابِيِّ مُحِيْ فَيْرِبُ وَجَآَهُ فِيهَا الْقَاهْوَوَا الْيٓ
11. جَآَهُ وَحَدُّ الْخَلْسِ سُمْيَتْ ارْمُوْشٍ جَآَبُ فِيْدُوُ مِيَّا وَعِشْرِينَ قُنْفَتَارَ خَلْقُ الْغُورٓ
12. الْيَ جَالِهَمُ الْيَ سِيْغُورُ وَيَسْطَحْقُ اطْبِيحُ سُوْمَهَا فِي سِبْطٍ كَلْوَحَدٍ يَحَابُ بِيْعَ وَلَيٓ
13. يَسْبِرُ لَقُدْمَ نَخْرَكَ وَأَنَّهَا بِذَهْوِلْوَهْ وَبِدَا لَقُوتُ سُوْمَ طَيْبَ فِي قَصْمَطْبَةٍ الْآَيٓ
14. أَحْسَنُ مِنْ تَوْنِسٍ فِي سِبْطٍ الْيَمَانِ شُوَاهُ وَالْقَاهْوَوَا وَبِدَا لَحْقَتَ لَمَّا عَدْمُطٓ
15. وَأَنْتَ وَتَهْدِيْلْكَ وَمِنْ الْقُلُوْمِ الْآَخِرِينِ الْيَ سُلَطَلَوُ رَاهْوُمُ بَائِمِيْ مَطْبَعُيْنَ
16. فِيْ قُفَافِهَا مُبَاطَعُكَ بَشَ اْتَّبَعَكَ عَلَهَ الْيَ الْأَنْتَيْ وَمَا تَأْمَرَنِي كِفْيَٰكَ
17. تَعْمَلُ فِيهِمُ وَذَا دَأْمٍ اسْتَعَاْ قُصَرَأَ وَمَا عَنْدَي حَدُوْشَ بَشَ طَنْوُلَ عَلَيْكَ كَان
18. بَالْخَيْرِ وَعَافِيِهِ وَكَانَ تَسْطِحْقَشُ حَاجَةَ اَمْرِيَّ طَقْضِيْهَا عَلَهَ رَاضِيٖ وَعِينَيِهِ وَذَا دَأْمٍ شَلَالَةَ ذِمْتُ
19. سُذُن

Translation

(1) With the help of God. (2) Tunis on the 21st of Cheshvan 5557,
(3) Our beloved and dear Rav Shlomo Bush’ara¹—may his Rock

¹ Although I have provided the direct transliteration ‘Bush’ara’ in line with that of Richard Ayoun (2010), there is a great deal of variation in transliterations of this surname in primary sources related to HCA 32/1208. For example, in HCA 32/901/276 spellings range from ‘Bou-chara’ (n.48r), ‘Bochara’ (n.41r), ‘Busciara’ (n.37r), and ‘Bocharra’ (n.35r). Most of the papers and letters in HCA/32/1208 appear to have
keep him and grant him life. (4) Much peace upon you in the name of God. I am sending these two letters in order to briefly inform you that I have received from (5) the messenger in between the letter of the respected Rav Da’nos dated the fifteenth of the aforementioned month and having taken note what’s in it (6) and from it, I was happy to learn that you are well (thanks be to God) and your perspective in supervising me so that I should inform you of the sale of what the coffee (7) totals to on Saturday, informing you, sir, that you have ground coffee totalling one-hundred (8) sixty and one-hundred sixty-five [reales] per qantar and also the vessel arrived from Malta carrying the coffee, (9) yesterday a Dobra [Ragusan] vessel arrived from Algiers loaded with raisins and had with it the coffee (10) that the Muslim named Aramouche came bringing [with] one-hundred twenty qantar in hand, of inexperienced character (11) he told them surely it is worth granting its sale, on Saturday everyone likes selling and [through] that (12) which was sent we had previously informed you that it appears also for foodstuffs [there is] an agreeable sale in Constantine, (13) it is better selling there than in Tunis on Saturday, it is now wintertime and the coffee also was afflicted when it became unavailable, (14) and letting you know from the money for the others I sent [what] are the remaining balances (15) in their baskets, following your supervision in order to [meet that which] is on your mind and [awaiting] what you direct me to do with how (16) to handle them and also the

belonged to Shlomo Bush’ara and were captured aboard the cargo ship Venus in late-October 1800, after the vessel ran aground in the port of Mahon.
time is short and I have nothing new in order to prolong [this letter], may (17) you be well and healthy, if there is anything else required command me and I will gladly carry it out, with great care, peace and happiness (18) Shlomo Şemaḥ, 2 servant of God (19) a good Sefardi

Commentary

The letter features a variety of linguistic elements characteristic of Maghrebi Arabic. These components include the interrogatives āsh (אש/اش) and kīfāsh (كيفاش/كيفاش), as well as the conjunction bāsh (باش/باس) and the demonstrative pronoun hād (האד/هاد). Additionally, the author makes use of the common Maghrebi verbal construction ‘to be’, through the conjugation of رأي in the third-person plural (رامو/راهوم). Şemaḥ’s writing also demonstrates instances of code-switching to vocabulary from Judaeo-Spanish (line 11), and Hebrew (lines 4 and 16).

Another overarching feature within the letter is the author’s reference to the potential sale of the coffee ‘on Saturday’ (lines 7, 11, 13). This arrangement should give readers pause due to the fact that it stands in violation of both biblical and rabbinic injunctions against conducting business on the Sabbath. The two

2 As with the recipient’s surname, the transliteration ‘Şemaḥ’ directly portrays the sender’s Hebrew orthography. That said, alternate Latinised versions of the surname surely existed in the late-18th century. One example is the spelling ‘Semah’, which is attested in the 1784 communal census records of the Livornese Massari (Tribunale dei Massari, vol. 10, f. 388r, Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica di Livorno).
Jewish merchants in question therefore likely relied on the assistance of Muslim or Christian trading partners to carry out this transaction. Besides the obvious temporal dimensions of the phrase פי סבט/في سبت, it may also imply the location for the coffee’s sale. More specifically, the inclusive tone of Şemah’s affirmation in line 12 to the effect that ‘on Saturday everyone likes selling’, may suggest the existence of a Saturday market (Sūq es Sebt).

Line 1

בע"ה–ב幫וראיהשם ‘with the help of God’ (lit. ‘with the help of the Name’) (Hebrew).

Line 2

'לח' = לחודש 'in the month’ (Hebrew).

'ש' = שנה 'year’ (Hebrew).

Line 3

ה"ר = הרב ‘the master’ (Hebrew).

'ישמרה צויה וחייו = י"ז 'may his Rock keep him and grant him life’ (Hebrew; Hacker 2015, 75).

Line 4

ב"ש = ב"ש in His name’ (Hebrew).

'אחדידישהוץשלום = אודיש "after inquiring about your (lit. his) health’ (Hebrew).

'בקצור 'briefly’ (Hebrew).

Line 5

בריות ‘letters’ (Maghrebi Arabic).
Line 6
תודה לאל = תודה לאל = 'thanks be to God'.

Line 7
The term fatto is possibly a borrowing from Italian via Judaeo-Spanish, more specifically, the past participle of the Italian verb *fare* 'to make, to do'. Accordingly, the ‘made’ or ‘finished’ coffee may indicate that it had already been ground or processed in some manner.

Line 8
lit. ‘generally and particularly’, but used colloquially as ‘also’ (Hebrew).

Line 10
This prepositional construction ‘in hand’ is perhaps a hybridisation of the Hebrew 3ms possessive suffix (ו) and the Arabic preposition (في) with the cognate ‘hand’ (יד). Furthermore, the mention of ‘inexperienced character’ in this line stems from the likelihood that the merchant Aramouche did not offer the proper valuation for the coffee he brought from Algiers. From another letter we learn that the latter cargo sold for only one hundred forty reales per qantar, while the cargo of coffee from Malta sold for one hundred sixty-five reales per qantar.³

Line 11
seguro ‘certainly’ (Castilian).

Line 16
'news' (Hebrew).

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³ Shlomo Ṣemaḥ to Shlomo Bushara, 4 Kislev 5557, HCA/32/1208/126.1, British National Archives.
Line 17
ש’מל ושמח = ש’ש
lit. ‘my eyes’ is used here colloquially as a parting word of affection that translates to ‘with great care’.

Line 18
עבד השם = ע’ה
‘servant of God’ (lit. ‘servant of the Name’) (Hebrew).

Line 19
ספרדי טוב = ס’ט
‘a good Sefardi’ (Hebrew).