35. A ‘MANDÆO-ARABIC’ LETTER FROM LADY DROWER’S CORRESPONDENCE

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Transcription

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Arabic Transcription

1. اسوثا نيهويلاخ
2. مشابا ماري بلاقي ذاخيا
3. ماكي ياسلام عاليك بأليوس إيديكي
4. كلالا شيشيان اسوثا نيهويلكون ماكتوبچ
5. جا وانا ماممون جابات گانزا كابيرا
6. عاتاقا تاريخ مايات سانا وازرنا واقائتنا وتصمیر صباغا وناني بانيان راهمي واماوجعا
7. زيدقا بريخا من ناطرات الماندا نساوائي طريتنا وانا قرا لمامجيعا وانياني دارافشا مااع الأأساف
8. ماكتوبچ جانا وانا بال حالفنا وانا خاويي
9. مات وطالات وأحيد عازيري كليلا واعاد بيت هبيا
10. ماعلام بيه جيت يام الاحاد عالبگداد، يام رأس شاهار لماندايا، يام تامان بنشاهار نگاراز،
11. شاهر تاموز
12. وانا سلامات بيت لگانزي لعادليا
13. ميستر دراور
14. معا ماكتوب وانا ظايله بآگداد لدما بامجي
15. ماكتوبچ عاد ناثي مگولين اشاف باعامي لكاتاب
16. عازيري كليلا وانا موش كاداب مگولين عات مايات رابيا
17. وانا مانا فاقير وانا حابالنج تاليتلي هيات بات هيبا
18. بيت لگانزي مسار عاليا بمايآ ونامانين رابيا
19. من قير نا ولي شباخ كمات رام بر ياسمان

Translation

(1) “May you have health!” (2) “I praise God with my pure heart.” (3) Makki says hello, he kisses your hand. (4) Klila Shishyan, “may you have good health.” Your letter (5) has arrived, and I am grateful. I brought a large, (6) ancient Treasure, a hundred years old, and an amulet, a Liturgical Prayerbook, (7) a ruling template, and a Book of Refrains. There are devotions in the Refrains and a collection of the Blessed (8) Oblation when we set up the
mandi. We make the ṭaryāna, (9) and I read the collection and the banner hymns. Unfortunately, (10) your letter came to us when I was in Ḥalfaya, my brother (11) having died, and I left afterwards. My dear Klila, I swear by the House of Life (12) that I did not know it. (13) I came on Sunday to Baghdad, (14) the first day of the Mandaean month, which we celebrate on the eighth day of (15) the month of July, and I delivered the library [to] the Justice Inspector, (16) Mr Drower. (17) He was not at his office, and I had left Baghdad when (18) your letter came. As a result, you are saying, ‘I will examine the book with my eye’. (19) Dear Klila, I am not a liar, you say, ‘I’ll give 100 rupees’, (20) and I’ll be poor from it, and I truly love you, sister of the House of Life. (21) The library cost me 180 rupees. (22) From Qurna, W.Sh. Kumayt Rām bar Yasmīn.

Commentary

This is an undated letter from the personal correspondence of Stefana Drower (1879–1972) appearing here courtesy of Jorunn J. Buckley. The author of the letter is Sh. Kumayt Rām bar Yasmīn, a priest of the Mandowī family who was then resident in the city of al-ʿAmāra, roughly 340 km southeast of Baghdad. The letter details the purchase of the Drower Collection manuscripts 13, 14, and 22 (herein described as ‘the Treasure’), which are presently in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The letter is written in a form of colloquial Arabic similar to the Iraqi standard, but with a few unexpected features, such as the use of the personal pronoun ʾana instead of ʾāni. Its orthography shares some features with Mandaic, such as the elimination of the preposition b- before
the word *bit* ‘house’ and the spelling of final -i. Additionally, the author indiscriminately represents the vowels i, ō, and ē with the letter ͡o̞, which possibly reflects the phenomenon of ʾimāla or raising, as this sound is often realized as a mid front [ɛ] in the received pronunciation of Mandaic in Iraq, corresponding to the articulation of historical /a/ (fatḥa) in the gelet Arabic dialects. In the transcription below, I have normalised the Mandaic words to conform to Arabic orthography, to reflect the traditional Iraqi pronunciation of Mandaic and to minimise potential confusion between the two systems.

Line 1

*asūta nihwilik*. The first few lines consist of Classical Mandaic formulae. These particular formulae are employed to open many compositions, particularly letters. The verb is a base stem imperfective from the root *h-w/-y*, in the 3ms form, with a 3ms enclitic indirect object, literally meaning ‘may it (health) be for you’.

Line 2

*mšabba mārī b-libbī dakya*. The first word is a passive participle from the causative stem of the verb √š-b-w/-y ‘to praise’.

Line 3

*Makkī yusallim ʿalēk yabūs ʿideek*. Sh. Kumayt refers here to his son, the famous Iraqi actor Makkī Al-Badrī (16/6/1925–5/8/2014), whom Drower first met when he was still a small child.
Line 4
klīla šišyān asūta nihwilḵun. The salutation returns to Mandaic, using the same standard formula found in ln. 1, albeit with the 2pl suffix (‘may there be health for [all of] you’). Klīla ‘crown’ is the Mandaic equivalent of Drower’s given name, Stefana; Šišyān is the Mandaic form of her mother’s name.

Lines 4–5
maktūbič jā w-ana mamnūn. It is in the second of these lines that we find the first colloquial features of this text, namely the form of the 2fs possessive suffix -ič instead of the more standard -ki. Also noteworthy in this context is the apparent lenition of the glottal stop in jā ‘it came’ (< jāʾa) and w-ana ‘and I’ (< wa-ʾana).

Lines 5–7
jābit Ginza kabīra ʿatiqa tariḥ miyyat sinna wa-zrazta wa-Qlasta wa-taṣṭīr ṣbāqa w-ʿAnyānī. Here one encounters the colloquial verb jāb ~ yjīb ‘to bring’ together with the names of some well-known Mandaic compositions, the Ginza Rabba or Great Treasure, and the Qulasta and Inyānī, which were published together as the Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans (Drower 1959). The hundred-year-old Treasure mentioned here was likely accessioned into the Drower Collection as DC 22, which is dated to 1831 and was purchased by Drower in 1936 (Buckley 2010, 106–7). The words taṣṭīr [sic] ṣbāqa (تسطير صباغة) refer to the template used when ruling manuscript pages to ensure that the writing follows straight lines, a photo of which appears in Buckley (2010, Plate 8).
b-Anyānī rahmī wa-majmū‘a Zidqa Briḥa min niṭras ʾil-manda, nsawwī ṭaryāna. The Blessed Oblation (Zidqa Briḥa) is a ritual performed on certain occasions, in this instance for the consecration of the mandī, the structure which is the site of many Mandaean rituals, and the making of the ṭaryāna, the clay table on which the ritual is performed. The use of min ‘at the time’ is another colloquial feature of this text. The verb derived from √t-r-ṣ (often √t-r-s) ‘to consecrate’ derives from Mandaic and is particular to the Mandaean ritual vocabulary.

w-ana qrā ʾil-majmū‘a w-anyānī darafša. The word darafša or darfaš refers to the ritual banner employed during baptism, consisting of a length of white silk wrapped around a wooden cross-piece. Banner hymns (cf. Drower 1959, 330–47) are recited during the ritual of erecting, unfurling, and dismantling this banner in the Jordan.

maʿa-l-asaf maktūbič jāna w-ana b-il-Ḥalfaya w-ana ḥūyya māt wa-tallit ʾaḥar. Ḥalfaya is a plateau 35 km southeast of al-ʿAmāra. The colloquial form ḥūyya ‘my brother’ appears here in place of the standard ʾaḥī. The colloquial form ʾallit replaces standard ʾalʿit, in which the ʾ has assimilated to the preceding l.

ʿazīztī klīla w-ʿad Bīt Hayya m-ʾalam bih. The House of Life is a location within the ‘lightworld’, although it often stands metonymically for the latter. While one would expect the preposition
b-, in Mandaic texts this preposition is regularly not written before the word bit.

Lines 12–14
jit yōm il-ahad ‘al-Bağdād, yōm rās šahar il-mandāya, yōm tāmin b-šahar ngarraẓ šahar Tammūz. The form ngarraẓ is evidently nuqarraẓ ‘we celebrate, extol’. During the 24-year period in which Drower lived in Baghdad, the 8th of Tammūz (July) fell on a Sunday (yōm il-ahad) in 1923, 1928, 1934, and finally in 1945. The aforementioned Treasure (DC 22) was the subject of a letter from another priest, Sh. Negm, who wrote Drower on 2 February 1936 to inform her that it had arrived and that he would send it with the next mail. Therefore, it seems likely that this letter was composed in 1934. In that year, the date 8 July indeed corresponded to the first day of Ṭābit / Gadyā, the twelfth month of the Mandaean calendar.

Lines 15–16
w-ana sallamit bēt il-ginzī li-mfattiš il-‘adl Mistar Drawar. The phrase bēt il-ginzī ‘library’, an Arabic calque on Mandaic bīt ginzī, literally means ‘house of the treasures’ or ‘treasury’. Edwin Drower, Stefana Drower’s husband, served as the Inspector-General of the Iraqi Ministry of Justice from 1922 to 1946.

Lines 17–18
mū ‘amaktab[a] w-ana ṭallīt Bağdād liman yajīni maktūbīč. The first two words of this sentence appear to be miʿa maktūb, but this would be meaningless in this context. We know from context that Drower had not yet acquired the manuscript or paid for it. So they must mean something along the lines of ‘he was not at his office’. For ṭallīt, see ln. 11 above.
Line 18
ʿād ʾintī tagūlin ʿašawwif b-ʿēnī li-ktāb. The conjunction ʿād ʿbut; therefore, as a result’ is another colloquial feature, as is the voicing of q in tagūlin ‘you (f) say’.

Line 19
ʿazīztī klīla, ʾana mūš kaddāb. The negative particle mūš is a colloquial feature, as is the plosivisation of the fricative ḗ in kaddāb.

Lines 19–20
tagūlin ʿāt miyyat rūbiyya w-ana minna faqīr w-āɑḥibannič taraṇī ḥayat Bit Hayya. Drower glosses the verb ʿāt as ‘I will give’, probably reflecting standard Arabic ʿuʿāti; in its place, one would expect ʿantī. If this is indeed the meaning, it is conjugated as if it came from a hollow root. The form ʿaḥibannič, standard Arabic ʿuḥibu-ki, is less problematic, save for the anomalous -n- before the object suffix. This may reflect an energetic form. The colloquial form ḥayat ‘sister’ appears here in place of standard ʿuḥt. For Bit Hayya, see ln. 11 above.

Line 21
bēt l-ginzī ṣār ʿalēya b-miyya w-tamānīn rūbiyya. For bēt l-ginzī, see ln. 15 above. As with the word ʾinṭī, Sh. Kumayt sometimes indicates final -i by means of the letters ʾi, a device borrowed from Mandaic orthography.

Line 22
min qurna, wali šieḥ Kmēt Rām bar Yasmin.

Sh. Kumayt closes his letter with a few words that have presented particular difficulties for its readers, including native speakers of Iraqi Arabic. The location from which (min) Sh. Kumayt writes is evidently Qurna, a town roughly 100 km due south of al-ʿAmāra
and 74 km northwest of Basra, but he has written this word with the letter َ (qirna) rather than the expected ُ (qurna). The spelling of his title, šīēḥ (for standard Arabic šayḥ ‘old man; sheikh’) reflects the monophthongization of the historical diphthong and its subsequent division into two segments, which is characteristic of colloquial Arabic in this region. Between the two words is the word wali ‘guardian; authorized agent’, which possibly refers to Sh. Kumayt’s role in securing these documents on Drower’s behalf.