

Paper Documents from Iṣṭabl ʿAntar: Assessment of the findings and data analysis

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“Written documents are among the most important underutilized artefacts from Fustat.²”

Introduction

The heaps of Fuṣṭāṭ, the old quarter located south of the Fāṭimid Cairo, had been the subject of the interest of tourists, collectors and merchants trading in the antiquities for many years before excavations were finally carried out in order to study the history of that part of the city. Artifacts of all kinds were being sold by antique dealers, or even occasional diggers, to European and American traders and collectors. These objects are now exhibited in public museums or private collections all around the world. It was not before the turn of the twentieth century that archaeologists—and the authorities—understood that the situation was far from satisfying from a scientific point of view. Though these objects were being saved from fading into oblivion, the context in which they were found was irremediably forgotten. In

¹ This article was written in the course of a research program at the Università di Pisa financed by the Italian Government («Incentivazione alla mobilità di studiosi stranieri e italiani residenti all'estero»).

² J. L. Bacharach, “Introduction”, in *Idem*, ed. *Fustat Finds. Beads, Coins, Medical Instruments, Textiles, and Other Artifacts from the Awad Collection* (Cairo, 2002), p. 6.

1912, the decision was finally taken to dig part of al-Fuṣṭāṭ's soil. The excavations were led by Ali Bahgat, then director of the Arab Museum, with the help of a French architect, Albert Gabriel, and they proceeded until 1924. The results were manifold in several fields, including the history of Muslim architecture, the study of social life and the history of Muslim art. Among the thousands of findings, hundreds of documents, on parchment, papyrus and mostly on paper (these dating mainly from the twelfth to the fourteenth century) were unearthed.³

Bahgat's work was followed by smaller excavations that lasted for several decades with little impact on the scientific literature, most of the results remaining unpublished⁴. It was not before 1964 that the site attracted a new undertaking, similar to Bahgat's one, though this time seen as an emergency one motivated by an urban project regarding the whole area conceived by the town planners. Placed under the direction of George T. Scanlon, who was backed by Władysław Kubiak, the excavations carried out by the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) regarded an area that covered about three thousand square meters and it again produced a huge amount of results and artifacts, particularly ceramics. More than four hundred documents were also uncovered. The outcome of fourteen years of archaeological research was a volume where several aspects were dealt with.⁵

Two years before the American enterprise was about to be concluded (1980), a joint Japanese mission from the Waseda University and the Idemitsu Museum of Arts of Tokyo received the authorization to excavate another area of Fuṣṭāṭ. The team, directed by Kiyohiko Sakurai and

³ See A. Bahgat and A. Gabriel, *Fouilles d'Al Fouṣṭāṭ* (Paris, 1921), p. 5. See also A. Bahgat Bey, "Les Fouilles d'al Foustat," *Syria* 4/1 (1923), p. 61.

⁴ The only reference to a publication referring to these excavations is the following one: Hasan al-Hawary, "Une maison de l'époque toulounide," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 15 (1932-1933), pp. 79-87 (10 pl).

⁵ W. Kubiak and G. T. Scanlon, *Fuṣṭāṭ Expedition Final Report*. Vol. 2: Fuṣṭāṭ-C (Winona Lake, 1989).

Mutsuo Kawatoko, proceeded to diggings that helped to bring back to the light of day innumerable artifacts. After seven years, they were terminated in 1985.⁶

At the same time the two foreign teams were working, the Egyptian Antiquities Department didn't refrain from proceeding to archaeological research on the site. From the sixties onward, several missions were undertaken allowing to investigate a considerable area, mostly by means of soundings.⁷

The scientific interest for the site did not prevent the diggers looking for fertilizer (*sabbāhīn*) from exhuming objects. Adolf Grohmann could witness, in the late twenties, that masses of papyri and paper documents from Fustāt were still available on the antique market, particularly in 1929. The vast majority of these documents were bought for public collections which are now recognized, in their own right, as unique repositories of such material: the Erzherzog Rainer Papyrus collection in Vienna and the Universitätsbibliothek in Heidelberg whose collections of Fustāt documents were acquired in 1930 and 1934, respectively.⁸ Eventually, part of this material also reached the Dār al-Kutub's collections in Cairo. The thousands of documents preserved in these repositories have barely been studied so far. The only scholar who really contributed to making several of them accessible to the historians is Werner Diem.

⁶ K. Sakurai & M. Kawatoko, «Preliminary Report of Excavations at al-Fustat in Egypt (First Season)» (in Japanese), *Museum* 341 (1979), pp. 25-38; idem, «Preliminary Report of Excavations at al-Fustat in Egypt (Second Season)» (in Japanese with brief English summary), *Journal of the Archaeological Society of Nippon* 66 (1980), pp. 275-96; idem, «Preliminary Report of Excavations at al-Fustat in Egypt (Third Season)» (in Japanese with brief English summary), *Journal of the Archaeological Society of Nippon* 67 (1981), pp. 382-417; idem, «Preliminary Report of Excavations at al-Fustat in Egypt (Fourth Season)» (in Japanese with brief English summary), *Journal of the Archaeological Society of Nippon* 68 (1982), pp. 250-66; idem, «Preliminary Report of Excavations at al-Fustat in Egypt (Fifth Season)» (in Japanese with brief English summary), *Journal of the Archaeological Society of Nippon* 69 (1984), pp. 422-71.

⁷ W. Kubiak, *Al-Fustat. Its Foundation and Early Urban Development*, (Cairo, 1987), p. 30.

⁸ Adolf Grohmann, *Einführung und Chrestomathie zur arabischen Papyruskunde*. I. Band: Einführung (Praha, 1954), pp. 27-28.

The plunder of Fustāṭ's extraordinary rich soil was not stopped by the official excavations. Poor people who started to establish themselves in the area continued the work of the *sabbāḥīn*, seeing in the artifacts found a mean of living. This is witnessed by Dr. Henri Amin Awad's collection, which was built up mainly through his consultations of the people living in al-Fustāṭ and who could not afford the price of a visit to the doctor. Many of them rather paid him with the objects they had unearthed: coins, glass weights, objects and, of course, documents. Thanks to the collector, several Egyptian museums were enriched by the restitution of large parts of his collection. Among these, 35 documents were donated to the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo.⁹

The most striking element in all that precedes regards the fact that the material discovered thanks to the official or unofficial excavations remained, for some unknown reason, almost neglected. A factor that may explain, in a certain way, this negligence is certainly the quantity of material Fustāṭ contributed to preserve. As far as the documents—the “most important underutilized artefacts”, to quote Jere Bacharach's words—are concerned, they barely received any attention so far. Those discovered by the last mission carried out by the American team (September-October 1980) were entrusted to Donald Richards. Richards dealt with the 441 pieces discovered, made a selection on the basis of the state of preservation and the historical interest and published the results of his analysis together with three documents in a study that appeared in the final report.¹⁰ Thirty-seven documents had been registered for their particular interest and transferred to the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo. Apart from the three pieces

⁹ H. A. Awad, «Medical Prescriptions», in J. L. Bacharach, *Fustat Finds. Beads, Coins, Medical Instruments, Textiles, and Other Artifacts from the Awad Collection* (Cairo, 2002), p. 190.

¹⁰ D. S. Richards, «Written Documents», in W. Kubiak and G. T. Scanlon, *Fustāṭ Expedition Final Report. Vol. 2: Fustāṭ-C* (Winona Lake, 1989), pp. 64-80.

published in his report, only one has appeared since then.¹¹ As for the documents that once were in Awad's collection, only four, identified as medical prescriptions, have been published by their owner.¹² From those uncovered by the excavations led by the Egyptian authorities, only one, found at the end of 1988, near the site excavated by Bahgat and Gabriel, was ever published.¹³ Other factors that justify why so few items have been published so far regard the quality of preservation of these documents—most of the time they are in a fragmentary state—, and the kind of handwriting—sometimes they are barely legible even for the best trained eye. The lack of well-instructed palaeographers does not improve the situation. The following study must thus be seen as a contribution to the revival of a rather disregarded field.

Inventory of documents

Since 1985, the site of Iṣṭabl 'Antar, located a bit further south of Fuṣṭāṭ, has been excavated by the French mission directed by Roland-Pierre Gayraud.¹⁴ Rather elevated in comparison

¹¹ D. S. Richards, "Fragments of a slave dealer's day-book from Fustat," in Y. Rāḡib (ed.), *Documents de l'islam médiéval: nouvelles perspectives de recherche. Actes de la table ronde, Paris, 3-5 mars 1988* (Le Caire, 1991), pp. 89-96 and pl. III-IV.

¹² H. A. Awad, «Four Medical Prescriptions Unearthed at Fustat», in *International Congress of the History of Medicine, Proceedings*, vol. I (s.l., 1985), pp. 146-52; H. A. Awad, «Medical Prescriptions», in J. L. Bacharach, *Fustat Finds. Beads, Coins, Medical Instruments, Textiles, and Other Artifacts from the Awad Collection* (Cairo, 2002), pp. 190-97 (this a revised version of the previous study).

¹³ Ibrahim Abdel Rahman, «Deed of Lease from Fuṣṭāṭ (Rajab the 11th 567 AH/Feb. the 16th 1172 AD)», *Annales islamologiques* 34 (2000), pp. 1-7.

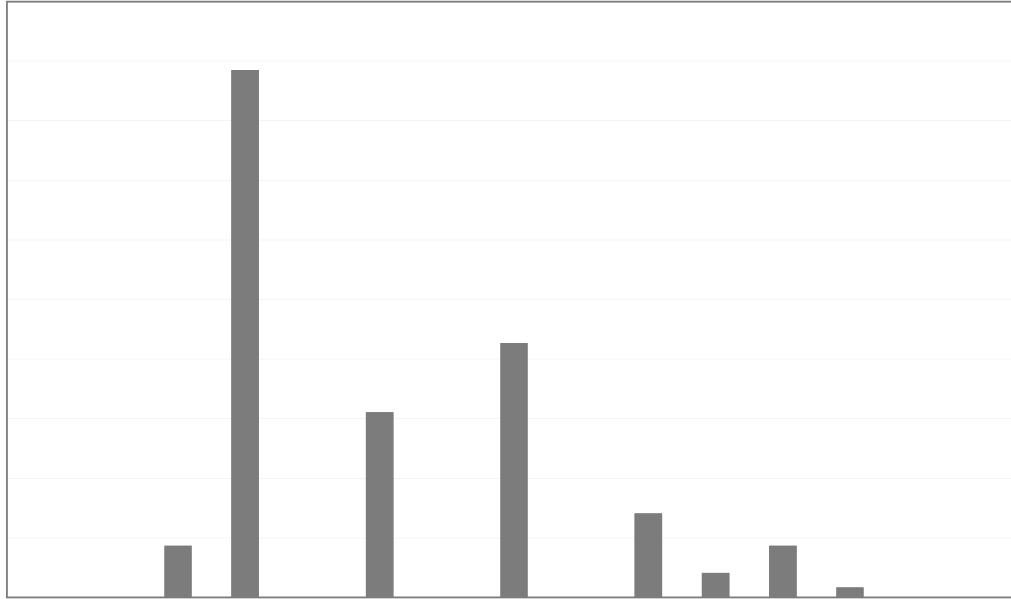
¹⁴ See R.-P. Gayraud, S. Björnesjö, and S. Denoix, "Iṣṭabl 'Antar (Fostat) 1985. Rapport de fouilles," *Annales islamologiques* 22 (1986), pp. 11-26 (12 pl.); R.-P. Gayraud, S. Björnesjö, S. Denoix, Sylvie, and M. Tuchscherer, "Iṣṭabl 'Antar (Fostat) 1986. Rapport de fouilles," *Annales islamologiques* 23 (1987), pp. 55-71; R.-P. Gayraud, S. Björnesjö, J.-M. Muller-Woulkoff, V. Roche, and M. Saillard, "Iṣṭabl 'Antar (Fostat), 1987-1989. Rapport de fouilles," *Annales islamologiques* 25 (1991), pp. 57-87 (15 pl.); R.-P. Gayraud and X. Peixoto, "Iṣṭabl 'Antar (Fostat) 1990. Rapport de fouilles," *Annales islamologiques* 27 (1993), pp. 225-232; R.-P. Gayraud, S. Björnesjö, and Ph. Speiser, "Iṣṭabl 'Antar (Fostat) 1992. Rapport de fouilles," *Annales islamologiques* 28 (1994), pp. 11-27; R.-P. Gayraud, S. Björnesjö, P. Gallo, J.-M. Mouton, and Fr. Paris, "Iṣṭabl 'Antar (Fostat) 1994. Rapport de fouilles," *Annales islamologiques* 29 (1995), pp. 11-24. The excavations were temporarily stopped in 2005.

with the area so far investigated by the archaeologists, the site has yielded thousands of artifacts of all sorts as well as numerous ostraca and documents on paper, parchment and papyrus.¹⁵ The present writer was entrusted with the task of analysing and studying those preserved on paper and parchment. Several missions were accomplished between 2007 and 2010 during which the unearthed material was restored, conditioned in neutral plastic sleeves, numbered, photographed, and finally scrutinized and sorted for future study. The documents, brought to light in the course of twelve seasons carried out between 1985 and 1999, amount to 1027 items of which 7 are on parchment. In comparison with those studied by Richards (441 items of which 399 on paper, 35 on parchment and 7 papyrus), the mass is more important but one should remind that the latter were uncovered in the course of only one season of excavations which lasted a month and a half in 1980.¹⁶ A similar number was reached in Iṣṭabl ʿAntar, in the course of the 1988 season, when Gayraud decided to proceed with a plane survey of a large area (3000 square meters) rather than a classical excavation of a smaller one.¹⁷ This is particularly perceivable in the chart below.

¹⁵ For the ostraca and the papyrus, see S. Bouderbala's contribution to this volume.

¹⁶ Besides the documents on paper, parchment and papyrus, Richards drew the attention to block printed amulets, while ostrich eggs covered with inscriptions were also uncovered. No block printing or ostrich egg was found at Iṣṭabl ʿAntar.

¹⁷ See R.-P. Gayraud *et. al.*, "Iṣṭabl ʿAntar (Fostat), 1987-1989. Rapport de fouilles," p. 59.



The paper is generally thin and of a creamy color but sometimes thicker and darker items are to be noticed, particularly in the case of older documents dating back to the tenth century. The ink can be black, dark brown and sepia depending on the kind of document dealt with. The handwriting is usually barely decipherable at first sight showing numerous ligatures typical of the chancery script. Accounts are even more difficult to read as they feature numbers that can be either Greek or Coptic. To this it must be added that most documents are torn and/or worn. This may be the result of the stay in the soil for centuries but in certain cases it is attested that the documents were cut out into smaller pieces for a use that is not always obvious to us. In some rare cases, the documents have been preserved almost by chance in their entirety. Given the fragmentary state of this material, it was imperative to make a selection. I considered various elements like the state of conservation, the historical interest (which means that in some cases a scrap where the name of person is legible has been retained), and the documentary value. The result is listed below. Each item was numbered besides the register number respecting the chronological order of the findings. When several items were discovered on the same spot, they received a serial number that is indicated here too. As for

the location, the details are provided on the basis of the excavation notebooks. It must be noticed that a limited number of documents without any number were found in the storehouse. In most cases, it has been possible to identify the date of the mission during which they were unearthed (nos. 17-18, 133-134) but in two cases no information of any sort could be retrieved except that they were found together with papyri (nos. 214-215), which indicates that they lied in the same layer. All references to the documents will be to the item numbers.

Item no.	Register no.	Serial no.	Location	Date of Find
1.	4830	1	S, surface rubble	17/10/87
2.	4830	2	S, surface rubble	17/10/87
3.	4830	5	S, surface rubble	17/10/87
4.	4830	6	S, surface rubble	17/10/87
5.	4830	7	S, surface rubble	17/10/87
6.	5007	1	S, digging of level 3	27/10/87
7.	5017		S, digging of level 3, SW = level 2 organic	27/10/87
8.	5096	2	S, level 2 SE	31/10/87
9.	5229	1	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
10.	5229	2	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
11.	5229	3	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
12.	5229	4	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
13.	5229	5	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
14.	5229	7	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
15.	5229	10	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
16.	5229	12	S, digging of level 3, centre	03/11/87
17.	NN 3 (1988)		?	?/10/88
18.	NN 4 (1988)	1	?	?/10/88
19.	6386	1	S, level1	02/10/88
20.	6386	2	S, level 1	02/10/88
21.	6387	2	S, level 1	02/10/88
22.	6387	3	S, level 1	02/10/88
23.	6387	4	S, level 1	02/10/88
24.	6387	5	S, level 1	02/10/88
25.	6387	6	S, level 1	02/10/88

26.	6387	7	S, level 1	02/10/88
27.	6387	8	S, level 1	02/10/88
28.	6388	1	S, level 1	02/10/88
29.	6388	2	S, level 1	02/10/88
30.	6388	16	S, level 1	02/10/88
31.	6388	17	S, level 1	02/10/88
32.	6422	3	SW, digging of level 1	09/10/88
33.	6422	7	SW, digging of level 1	09/10/88
34.	6422	10	SW, digging of level 1	09/10/88
35.	6422	13	SW, digging of level 1	09/10/88
36.	6422	14	SW, digging of level 1	09/10/88
37.	6422	15	SW, digging of level 1	09/10/88
38.	6440	3	SW, level 1	10/10/88
39.	6440	13	SW, level 1	10/10/88
40.	6440	16	SW, level 1	10/10/88
41.	6440	19	SW, level 1	10/10/88
42.	6440	20	SW, level 1	10/10/88
43.	6440	32	SW, level 1	10/10/88
44.	6440	43	SW, level 1	10/10/88
45.	6440	44	SW, level 1	10/10/88
46.	6440	46	SW, level 1	10/10/88
47.	6441	1	SW, level 1	11/10/88
48.	6441	3	SW, level 1	11/10/88
49.	6441	6	SW, level 1	11/10/88
50.	6441	7	SW, level 1	11/10/88
51.	6441	8	SW, level 1	11/10/88
52.	6441	10	SW, level 1	11/10/88
53.	6441	16	SW, level 1	11/10/88
54.	6441	18	SW, level 1	11/10/88
55.	6441	23	SW, level 1	11/10/88
56.	6441	24	SW, level 1	11/10/88
57.	6441	25	SW, level 1	11/10/88
58.	6441	26	SW, level 1	11/10/88
59.	6441	29	SW, level 1	11/10/88
60.	6441	32	SW, level 1	11/10/88
61.	6441	34	SW, level 1	11/10/88
62.	6441	37	SW, level 1	11/10/88
63.	6441	38	SW, level 1	11/10/88

64.	6441	42	SW, level 1	11/10/88
65.	6441	43	SW, level 1	11/10/88
66.	6441	44	SW, level 1	11/10/88
67.	6441	45	SW, level 1	11/10/88
68.	6441	46	SW, level 1	11/10/88
69.	6464	8	S, level 1	11/10/88
70.	6464	10	S, level 1	11/10/88
71.	6464	11	S, level 1	11/10/88
72.	6464	13	S, level 1	11/10/88
73.	6464	15	S, level 1	11/10/88
74.	6464	25	S, level 1	11/10/88
75.	6464	27	S, level 1	11/10/88
76.	6464	29	S, level 1	11/10/88
77.	6464	48	S, level 1	11/10/88
78.	6486	1	S, level 1	13/10/88
79.	6486	19	S, level 1	13/10/88
80.	6487	4	S, level 1	13/10/88
81.	6487	5	S, level 1	13/10/88
82.	6487	6	S, level 1	13/10/88
83.	6487	7	S, level 1	13/10/88
84.	6487	8	S, level 1	13/10/88
85.	6487	9	S, level 1	13/10/88
86.	6487	11	S, level 1	13/10/88
87.	6487	12	S, level 1	13/10/88
88.	6487	13	S, level 1	13/10/88
89.	6487	14	S, level 1	13/10/88
90.	6488	3	S, level 1	15/10/88
91.	6488	7	S, level 1	15/10/88
92.	6488	8	S, level 1	15/10/88
93.	6488	12	S, level 1	15/10/88
94.	6488	22	S, level 1	15/10/88
95.	6488	26	S, level 1	15/10/88
96.	6488	28	S, level 1	15/10/88
97.	6488	30	S, level 1	15/10/88
98.	6488	44	S, level 1	15/10/88
99.	6488	51	S, level 1	15/10/88
100.	6488	55	S, level 1	15/10/88
101.	6488	56	S, level 1	15/10/88

102.	6489	1	S, level 1	15/10/88
103.	6489	2	S, level 1	15/10/88
104.	6489	3	S, level 1	15/10/88
105.	6489	4	S, level 1	15/10/88
106.	6520	1	S, level 1	16/10/88
107.	6520	2	S, level 1	16/10/88
108.	6520	8	S, level 1	16/10/88
109.	6520	11	S, level 1	16/10/88
110.	6520	12	S, level 1	16/10/88
111.	6520	14	S, level 1	16/10/88
112.	6520	15	S, level 1	16/10/88
113.	6520	16	S, level 1	16/10/88
114.	6520	17	S, level 1	16/10/88
115.	6520	18	S, level 1	16/10/88
116.	6520	19	S, level 1	16/10/88
117.	6520	20	S, level 1	16/10/88
118.	6521	7	S, level 1	16/10/88
119.	6521	11	S, level 1	16/10/88
120.	6521	14	S, level 1	16/10/88
121.	6521	28	S, level 1	16/10/88
122.	6521	31	S, level 1	16/10/88
123.	6524	1	S, level 1	17/10/88
124.	6524	2	S, level 1	17/10/88
125.	6524	3	S, level 1	17/10/88
126.	6524	11	S, level 1	17/10/88
127.	6568	1	S, end of level 1, above level 2	17/10/88
128.	6596	1	S, level 1 centre	19/10/88
129.	6596	2	S, level 1 centre	19/10/88
130.	6596	4	S, level 1 centre	19/10/88
131.	6596	9	S, level 1 centre	19/10/88
132.	6643	5	S, trench second layer	26/10/88
133.	NN 2	1	?	?/10/90
134.	NN 2	2	?	?/10/90
135.	8433	3/2	E, surface rubble	14/10/90
136.	8433	3/5	E, surface rubble	14/10/90
137.	8433	3/6	E, surface rubble	14/10/90
138.	8433	8/4	E, surface rubble	14/10/90
139.	8433	8/8	E, surface rubble	14/10/90

140.	8481	a	E, surface rubble (extension W)	18/10/90
141.	8481	b	E, surface rubble (extension W)	18/10/90
142.	8496	1	E, level 1, between BM 15 and 248	20/10/90
143.	8949	1/1	E, extension surface	14/11/90
144.	8949	2/1	E, extension surface	14/11/90
145.	8949	2/2	E, extension surface	14/11/90
146.	8978	1	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
147.	8978	2/1	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
148.	8978	2/2	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
149.	8978	2/3	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
150.	8978	2/4	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
151.	8978	3/1	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
152.	8978	3/2	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
153.	8978	3/3	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
154.	8978	3/5	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
155.	8978	3/6	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
156.	8978	8/1	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
157.	8978	8/2	E, extension 2 surface	18/11/90
158.	9008	1	E, extension 2, level 1	19/11/90
159.	9008	5	E, extension 2, level 1	19/11/90
160.	9026	3/1	E, extension 2, level 1	20/11/90
161.	9026	4/1	E, extension 2, level 1	20/11/90
162.	9026	4/2	E, extension 2, level 1	20/11/90
163.	9043	1	E, extension 2, level 1	21/11/90
164.	9043	2	E, extension 2, level 1	21/11/90
165.	9080	1	E, extension 3, level 1	26/11/90
166.	9080	5	E, extension 3, level 1	26/11/90
167.	9167	1	S, level 1	17/02/92
168.	9168	1/1	S, level 1	17/02/92
169.	9168	1/10	S, level 1	17/02/92
170.	9168	1/2	S, level 1	17/02/92
171.	9169	1	S, level 1	17/02/92
172.	9170	1	S, level 1	17/02/92
173.	9206	1/1	S, level 1	24/02/92
174.	9261	1/2	S, level 1	26/02/92
175.	9278	1	S, level 1 NW	27/02/92
176.	9328	1/1	S, level 1 N	01/03/92
177.	9353	3	S, level 1 centre	02/03/92

178.	9389	1	S, level 1 W	05/03/92
179.	9389	2	S, level 1 W	05/03/92
180.	9411	1	S, level 1 centre	05/03/92
181.	9437	1	S, level 1 SW	07/03/92
182.	9787	1	Outside area, between 319 and aqueduct	09/03/92
183.	9787	2	Outside area, between 319 and aqueduct	09/03/92
184.	9535	1/1	S, level 2 E	12/03/92
185.	9535	1/2	S, level 2 E	12/03/92
186.	9535	2/1	S, level 2 E	12/03/92
187.	9547	1	S, level 2	14/03/92
188.	9547	3	S, level 2	14/03/92
189.	9547	2	S, level 2	14/03/92
190.	9565	1	S, level 1 N (close to aqueduct)	15/03/92
191.	9649	1	S, level 2 E	19/03/92
192.	9679	1	S, level 2 E	21/03/92
193.	9833	1/11	S, level 1, extension E	02/04/92
194.	9833	2/3	S, level 1, extension E	02/04/92
195.	9833	3/9	S, level 1, extension E	02/04/92
196.	9846	1	S, level 1, extension E	02/04/92
197.	10456	6	Great pool, level 1	05/04/94
198.	10457	4	Great pool, level 1	05/04/94
199.	10457	c/2	Great pool, level 1	05/04/94
200.	10457	c/3	Great pool, level 1	05/04/94
201.	10457	d	Great pool, level 1	05/04/94
202.	10544	1	Great pool, S, level 1	13/04/94
203.	10629		W aqueduct, level 1	19/04/94
204.	10894	1	T 49, level 2	15/05/94
205.	10918	1	N, level 1	26/03/95
206.	10918	a	N, level 1	26/03/95
207.	10918	f	N, level 1	26/03/95
208.	11306	3	Extension, level 1	27/03/96
209.	11319	1	Level 2, negative	29/03/96
210.	11366	2	Extension, level 1	30/03/96
211.	11452	1	Extension, level 1	11/04/96
212.	11663	1	Small place, level 1	02/04/97
213.	11663	3/1	Small place, level 1	02/04/97
214.	NN (with papyrus)	1	?	?
215.	NN (with papyrus)	2	?	?

Contents of the documents

The material dug out does not represent an archive. Rather, we are dealing with discarded papers which were being considered for their potential as reusable material as this essay will tentatively demonstrate. Given that we are mostly dealing with random scraps of a disparate nature which still pose several problems of decipherment, it must be kept in mind that the classification of the documents proposed below must be regarded as preliminary. Each item has been assigned to a category on the ground of the subject matter identified in the text. In some cases, the ascription remains dubious because of the fragmentary state of the document. This is indicated by a question mark placed at the end of the figure. The recto and the verso are referred to through letters a and b, respectively. If no letter follows the figure, it means that the verso is either blank or that the text found on the recto runs on the verso.

1. Literary
 - a. Poetry: 22/b, 28, 32, 155
 - b. Quran: 1/a (XXXVIII:18-24), 1/b (XXXVIII:26-31), 5/a (VI:71-72), 5/b (VI:75-76)
 - c. *Ḥadīṭ*: 69, 119, 192, 198
 - d. History: 2, 4, 92
 - e. *Kalām*: 128
 - f. Cooking: 10
 - g. Astronomy: 207
2. Official: 19, 33, 41, 63, 89, 121, 133, 134, 151, 167, 173, 174, 180/a, 188, 202, 211, 213
3. Petitions: 9/b, 18, 21, 31, 40, 49, 52, 65, 78, 82, 83, 125/a, 129, 131, 133, 134, 148, 168, 178, 201
4. Accounts
 - a. General: 3, 15, 20, 23, 27, 35, 38, 42, 43, 45, 48, 51, 58, 59, 61, 66, 67, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 80, 93, 99, 107, 112, 115, 123, 124, 132, 138, 150, 152, 153, 156, 157/a, 160, 165, 166, 176, 180/b, 184, 185, 186, 191, 193, 197
 - b. Agricultural: 68, 85, 86, 90, 91, 94, 95, 101, 102, 111, 130, 135, 141, 144, 145, 149, 161, 162, 164, 172, 177, 179, 196
5. Legal: 14/a, 17, 46, 97, 98, 100, 143, 154, 194

- a. Contracts: 60, 114, 116
 - b. Receipts: 39, 215
 - c. Witness clauses: 200, 204
 - d. Acknowledgments: 24, 57
 - e. Lease: 50
6. Letters: 6, 8, 11?, 13?, 16, 26, 37, 44, 47, 53, 54, 55, 62, 81, 84, 87, 88, 96, 103, 105, 106, 108, 109, 110, 113, 120, 126, 139, 147, 157/b, 163, 169, 171, 175, 181, 182, 183, 190, 195, 199, 205, 214
 7. Miscellaneous: 12, 25, 36
 - a. Charms: 64, 136, 187, 189
 - b. Recipes: 56, 140
 8. Jottings, pen exercises: 9/a, 29, 30, 87/a, 137, 142
 9. Drawings: 29, 34, 138/b, 206
 10. Cutouts: 66, 79, 117, 118, 122, 125, 127, 159, 167, 170, 205
 11. Modern: 208, 209, 210, 212
 12. Coptic: 158

The most represented categories are the letters, the accounts and the various official documents with a focus on petitions. Among the most promising items are two fragments of ledgers, one of which includes records for the assigned rate (*rātīb*)¹⁸ of taxes (*ḥarāğ*) paid in the year 523/1129 for lands located in Iṭfiḥ by two brothers belonging to a family of the Prophet's descendants (no. 196). These two pieces consist of sheets of paper folded in two and then sewn together with a stitch passing through two holes situated in the middle of the fold. Several fragments of literary texts, including manuscripts, are also featured. One of these contains a version of the famous *ḥadīṭ al-ifk* (the account of the slander), i.e. the story involving the Prophet's young wife, ʿĀ'īša, who was accused of infidelity. This version does not fully tally in its wording with the one found in the traditional collections of prophetic traditions.

¹⁸ For the meaning of this term, see G. Frantz-Murphy, *The Agrarian Administration of Egypt from the Arabs to the Ottomans* (Le Caire, 1986), p. 34.

Though no block printing of charms is part of the material excavated, several items can be identified as magical talismans and amulets. One of them (see picture no. 187) is a long roll made of two sheets sewn one to the other with a handwritten text similar to those found on block printed amulets.¹⁹

The drawings are not comparable with the ones found in other areas of Fuṣṭāṭ and now in various collections around the world.²⁰ They consist of unsophisticated sketches, the themes being flowers, geometrical diagrams and animals (see pictures of nos. 29 and 34).

Some interesting pen exercises are also featured, like one showing exercises of calligraphy (see no. 142 below).

Dated and dateable documents

A relatively small number of documents feature dates or dateable elements. Twelve provide us with an indication of the date which can be interpreted as the date of the document. The oldest goes back to the beginning of the fourth/tenth c. but most of them are from the first part of the sixth/twelfth c. Some items found at the surface are more recent as is evidenced by one of them which bears the date 1154/1742. Sometimes, it is possible to pinpoint the date of other documents thanks to the mention of the caliph or references to the caliphs' names in the titles of persons. This is the case for three of them: no. 13/a ([Maḥm]ūd al-Zāhirī, linked to the

¹⁹ For block printed amulets, see K. Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms. Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* (Leiden ; Boston, 2006).

²⁰ For these, see E. de Unger, "Fragments of Drawing and Paintings From Fustat," in W. Ball and L. Harrow (eds.), *Cairo to Kabul. Afghan and Islamic Studies Presented to Ralph Pinder-Wilson* (London, 2002), pp. 90-94.

caliph al-Zāhir, r. 1021-1036); no. 78/a (al-Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ, r. 1130-1149); no. 24/a (Sayf al-Dawla Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Anbar al-Zāfirī al-‘Ādilī, linked to the caliph al-Zāfir, r. 1149-1154).

- 214/a 306/918-919
- 114/a *ḍū l-qa‘da* 503/May-June 1110
- 71/a 505/1111-1112
- 15/a 509/1115-1116
- 176/a *al-‘ašr al-āḥir min [ša]ww[āl]* 509/5-15 April 1116
- 75/b 513/1119-1120
- 196/ar 8 *ḡumādā* I 523/29 April 1129
- 196/b 13 *ḡumādā* II 523/3 June 1129
- 111/a 531/1136-1137
- 211/a *muḥarram* 539/July-August 1144
- 24/a 21 *ša‘bān* 545/13 December 1150
- 208/a 20 *ḍū al-ḥiḡḡa* 1154/26 February 1742

Terminology in the documents

Before being able to provide an edition of some of the most significant items, I deemed it would be useful to give a provisional list of the names of persons and places as well as of technical terms of noteworthy interest. I tried to identify some of the persons listed below, focusing mainly on those who were apparently high officials. However, sources of the Fāṭimid period are known for their scarcity and even the books of an author who devoted much of his time to the dynasty like al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) did not prove very useful for this purpose.²¹

²¹ None of them was found either in his history of the dynasty entitled *Itti‘āz al-hunafā’ bi-aḥbār al-a’imma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-ḥulafā’*, eds. Ğ. al-dīn al-Šayyāl and M. Ḥ. Aḥmad, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1967-1973) or in the biographical dictionary of the Egyptians entitled *al-Ta’rīḥ al-kabīr al-muqaffá*, ed. M. al-Ya’lāwī, 8 vols. (Bayrūt, 1991).

• Persons

• ‘Abd al-Malik	105/a
• ‘Abd al-Muḥsin	54/b; 103/a
• ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ibn Ṭāhir ibn ‘Abd al-Mun‘im	62/a
• ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn [...]	23/b
• Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yūsuf	49/a
• Abū Ğa‘far Aḥmad ibn Mūsā	183/b
• Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥaššāb	148/a
• Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn al-šarīf Mu‘tamad al-dawla Yaḥyā ibn Šarīf al-Ḥusaynī al-Mūsawī	196/a ²²
• Abū Ishāq	27/b
• Abū Naṣr Šadaqa ibn Wuhayb	196/a
• Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ya‘lāwī	133/b
• ‘Alī ibn Abī al-Aḥwar	22/a
• ‘Alī ibn Šādiq ibn Hannā[...]	194/a
• al-Amīr Sayf al-dawla Bādar al-Sayfī	113/a
• al-Amīr Sulṭān al-ğuyūš	106/a
• al-Armanī	135/a
• Asad al-dawla	53/a
• ‘Asīr ibn Bū al-Qāsi[m]	131/a
• al-A‘azz ‘Afīf al-dawla	104/a
• Ğa‘far ibn [...]ğmān	14/a
• Ğazil ibn Yūḥannā al-ğahbad	106/a
• al-Ḥasan ibn Sa‘d ibn Ḥamza al-Ibyārī	46/a
• Ḥalīl ibn M.I.[...] ibn Sulaymān	19/a
• al-Ḥusayn ibn Sulṭān al-Anšārī	
• Ḥiḍr ibn Šaddād	135/b
• Ibn al-Yamīn	22/a
• Ibrāhīm	169/a
• al-Imām al-Ḥāfiḡ	78/a
• Ishāq maw[lā]	49/a

²² A person bearing the same title (Mu‘tamad al-dawla) and the same name is al-Qāḍī al-Šarīf Mu‘tamad al-dawla Abū al-Ḥusayn Yaḥyā ibn Zayd ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-Zaydī al-Dimašqī (d. 455/1063). He was judge of Damascus and Aleppo and intendant of the military expenses at the time of his death. See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīḡ Madīnat Dimašq*, ed. ‘Umar ibn Ğarāma al-‘Amrawī, 80 vols. (Bayrūt, 1995-2000), 64: 229-230 (no. 8140); Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-ḡalab min ta’rīḡ Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, 2 vols. (Dimašq, 1997), 1: 235. If this Muḥammad was his son, he must have been very old because the document where he is named is dated 523/1129.

• Ismā‘īl ibn Naṣr	89/b
• Kulṭum bint Ṣubḥ	168/a
• [Maḥm]ūd al-Zāhirī	13/a
• Makkī al-Muštāk	31/a
• Al-Malfaṭiyya	19/a
• Manasī ibn Damyānūs ²³	49/a
• Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī	15/b
• Nizām al-dīn	157/b
• Raslān ibn Yūsuf ibn Sālīm al-Sā[...]	203/a
• Sa‘īd ibn Masā[...] ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Quraṣī	98/a
• Sayf al-Dawla Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Anbar al-Zāfirī al-‘Ādilī	24/a
• Sayf al-dīn	157/b
• al-Ṣāliḥī Ṣāwar	11/a
• al-Ṣarīf Ḥusayn ibn al-ṣarīf Mu‘tamad al-dawla Yahyā ibn Ṣarīf al-Ḥusaynī al-Mūsawī	196/a
• al-Ṣayḥ al-ḡalīl	6/a
• Ṣū‘a al-Yahūdī	169/a
• Umm Ya‘qūb al-Yahūdiyya	169/a
• al-Wazīr al-Afḍal al-[Sa‘īd al-As‘ad Tāḡ al-Wuz[arā’]	9/b ²⁴
• Yahyā ibn Muḥammad	139/b

• Places

• Bāb al-baḥr	41/a ²⁵
• Bayt al-ṣarīf al-Kūfī	190/a
• Dimašq	109/a
• al-Faramā	81/b

²³ These Arabic forms might correspond to the following Coptic names: respectively ⲠⲏⲏⲏⲐⲚⲉ or ⲠⲏⲏⲏⲐⲚⲓ and ⲠⲏⲏⲏⲐⲚⲏⲐⲚⲏⲐ. See M. Hasitska, “Namen in koptischen dokumentarischen Texten” (s.l., 2007, typescript), respectively p. 58 and 61 and p. 25.

²⁴ The only Fāṭimid vizier whose title was Tāḡ al-wuzarā’ is Ibn al-‘Aḡamī (d. 465/1073: al-Wazīr al-Aḡall al-Awḥad Tāḡ al-wuzarā’ al-Amīn al-Makīn Ṣaraf al-Kufāt Dū al-Mafāḥir Ḥalīl Amīr al-Mu’minīn wa-Ḥālīṣatuhu Abū Ḡalīb ‘Abd al-Zāhir ibn Faḍl). See ‘Alī ibn Munḡib Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *Al-Iṣāra ilā man nāla al-wizāra*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Muḥliṣ, *BIFAO* 25 (1925), p. 63 (∘ ∘).

²⁵ There was a *bāb al-baḥr* in Alexandria (al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā‘iẓ wa-l-i‘tibār fī ḍikr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa-l-āṭār* [Bulāq, 1270/1853, 2 vols.], 1: 175 [l. 10]) and in Cairo (*ibid.*, 1: 362 [l. 19]). In the latter case, the gate was built under al-Ḥākim’s reign and destroyed during Baybars’ rule when it came to be known as *bāb qaṣr Baštāk* because it was integrated in Baštāk’s residence. Its location was in front of the Kāmiliyya madrasa.

• Funduq al-Qaṣṭallānī	139/b
• al-Iskandariyya	190/a
• Iṭfiḥ	196/a
• Miṣr	62/a; 139/b; 190/b
• al-Qāhira	81/b
• al-Šām	19/b
• Tağr al-Iskandariyya	19/a

• Terms

• birdawn	84/a
• dār	169/a
• dīwān bayt al-māl	83/a
• dīwān al-ğuyūš al-ma‘[mūra]	213/a
• al-dīwān al-ma‘mūr	33/a
• al-faras	108/b
• al-farrāšūn	21/b
• al-ğahbaḍ	40/a; 86/b
• al-ḥānūt	50/a
• ḥawli	49/a
• muqṭa‘ū bāb al-a[...]	21/b
• mawlā tanfiḍ mā ḥaṣṣa al-ğiha [...]	24/a
• mustawfi al-dīwān	152/a
• al-qā'id	100/a
• al-šūfiyya	103/a

• Formulæ

• <i>uṭbita wa-l-ḥamd li-llāh al-ḥafi luṭfuhu</i>	40/a
• <i>uṭbita wa-l-ḥamd li-llāh ‘alā ni‘amihi</i>	40/b
• <i>uṭbita wa-l-ḥamd li-llāh al-muwaḥfiq</i>	83/a
• <i>yuṭbat fi dīwān bayt al-māl</i>	83/a

Reuse of documents

One of the most interesting issues raised by the excavations carried out on the Iṣṭabl ʿAntar site regards the disposal of manuscripts and documents. In the course of the last few decades, with an increase of interest during the last one, several studies have been devoted to the question of the lack of archives in pre-modern Islam²⁶ as well as to the disposal of old manuscripts, particularly Quranic ones.²⁷ As for the Egyptian archives from the Mamlūk period, the present writer has already been able to demonstrate that there existed a practice aiming at giving a second life to a specific category of documents (scrolls): they were cut into pieces and sold as scrap paper because the space between the lines of the text inscribed on them was large enough to allow such a reprocess.²⁸ We may wonder if this practice, attested at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th c., was also put in use during other periods prior to this one. The question of the reason why such Arabic official documents, which had, for the most part, nothing to do with the Jewish community of Fuṣṭāṭ or Cairo, found their way in the Cairo Genizah, a normally temporary repository whose aim was to preserve Jewish texts from

²⁶ For this issue in particular, see the following forthcoming article for the state of the art: F. Bauden, “Du destin des archives en Islam. Analyse des données et éléments de réponse,” in D. Aigle and S. Péquignot, *La Correspondance entre souverains. Rédaction, transmission, modalités d’archivage et ambassades. Approches croisées entre l’Orient musulman, l’Occident latin et Byzance (xiii^e-début xvi^e s.)*, in print.

²⁷ On the disposal of Quran copies, the best reference remains J. Sadan, “Genizah and Genizah-Like Practices in Islamic and Jewish Traditions: Customs Concerning the Disposal of Worn-Out Sacred Books in the Middle Ages, According to an Ottoman Source,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43 (1986), pp. 36-58 with the following update by the same author “New Materials Regarding Purity and Impurity of Books in Islam in Comparison With Judaism: Al-Burzūlī and Other Muslim Scholars on Defiled Parchment, Papyrus and Paper,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 33 (2007), pp. 193-218. This issue was also dealt with in the following references: Hossein Modarressi, “Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qurʾān: A Brief Survey,” *Studia islamica* 77 (1993), pp. 5-39 (p. 28, where the author states that according to the long-held Shiʿite legal ruling, “worn fragments of the Qurʾan that can no longer be used may be buried or washed in water, but not burnt”); Fierro, Maribel. “En manos de fieles e infieles: Normas relativas a cómo tratar los ejemplares escritos del Corán,” in *El Corán ayer y hoy. Perspectivas actuales sobre el islam. Estudios en honor al Professor Julio Cortés*, ed. Miguel Hernando de Larramendi and Salvador Peña Martín (Córdoba, 2008), pp. 199-214; J. Svensson, “Relating, Revering, and Removing: Muslim Views on the Use, Power, and Disposal of Divine Words,” in *The Death of Sacred Texts. Ritual Disposal and Renovation of Texts in World Religions*, ed. Kristina Myrvold (Farnham, 2010), pp. 31-53, specially 39-44 (the author ignores most of the previous references).

²⁸ See F. Bauden, “Du destin des archives en Islam”, pp. ??? and id., “The Recovery of Mamlūk Chancery Documents in an Unsuspected Place,” in M. Winter and A. Levanoni, *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 59-76.

being spoiled before they had to be buried during an apposite ceremony, is also a challenging one. Khan argued that they could have been brought back to their homes by Jewish clerks who were employed in the government offices.²⁹ On the other hand, Baker and Polliack advocated that the presence of these few Arabic documents (7000 out of 140000 Hebrew fragments, i.e. 5%) was due to a mere chance and that their presence was linked to the Jewish elite who had to master Arabic to evolve in the official circles: some members of the community would have kept them in a family archive or a library alongside Hebrew writings.³⁰ More recently, it has been argued that these documents could have reached the Genizah because they originated in the Fatimid archives which would have been destroyed after the collapse of the chiite dynasty under the Ayyubid rule.³¹ Such massive destructions of archives—in the sense that they physically disappeared but not necessarily that the documents were destroyed—would have thus occurred during harsh political events that could lead to the replacement of a dynasty by another in some cases, like with the Fatimids,³² or to a (temporary) shift of power between factions, as in the case dealing with Barqūq’s rule at the beginning of his sultanate (1389-90).³³

This issue can now be reconsidered in the light of the material brought to the light of day by the Iṣṭab ‘Antar excavations. Besides the documents unearthed by the American campaigns in

²⁹ G. Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 2.

³⁰ C. F. Baker and M. Polliack, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections. Arabic Old Series (T-S Ar. 1a-54)* (Cambridge, 2001), p. IX-X.

³¹ M. Rustow, “A petition to a woman at the Fatimid court (413-414 A.H./1022-23 C.E.),” *BSOAS* 73/1 (2010), pp. 16-20.

³² Michael Brett evokes the reason why and when the Fatimid archives disappeared. Though I agree with the reasons that led to the destruction, I cannot share his views on the time when it took place (the Ottoman conquest of Egypt). See M. Brett, “Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean: John Wansbrough and the historiography of mediaeval Egypt”, in H. Kennedy (ed.), *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 10-11.

³³ F. Bauden, “The Recovery of Mamlūk Chancery Documents.”

the soil of a neighboring site in Fuṣṭāṭ and by the English ones in Quṣayr al-Qadīm on the Red Sea shore,³⁴ we barely know the exact origin of most of the Arabic paper documents found in collections around the world, not to speak of the stratigraphy. Thanks to the aforementioned excavations, we know precisely where they were found and what the stratum was composed of. Nevertheless, it must be stated that a same layer may contain several artifacts dated or dateable to various periods. For example, item no. 168 (see below, for its study) was found at the same level (1, i.e. surface) with an ostrakon probably Umayyad or Abbasid (reg. no. 9166), a Fatimid glass weight from the reign of al-Zāhir (411/1021-427/1036) (reg. no. 9172) and a fragment of an Umayyad glass stamp (reg. no. 9174). It can be concluded that the soil, on various parts of the site, was turned over at a later, undefinable period.

As we have seen with Iṣṭabl ‘Antar, the site was occupied by artisans, like potters, and by scavengers (*zabbālūn*), at various periods when the area was abandoned (in the course of the 9th and of the 12th c.). The remains resulting from the occupation of the site by the scavengers is consistent with the material uncovered: pieces of cloths like garments and carpets, leather coming from discarded shoes and other similar items, and documents (either on papyrus, parchment or paper).³⁵ The latter embraces a vast array of categories where either manuscripts or documents are represented. As far as the manuscripts are concerned, we notice that these are mere scraps meaning that they were already worn out when they were discarded. It is interesting to note that the Quranic fragments were not disposed of as requested by the tradition which recommends several ways for this: the *muṣḥaf* should

³⁴ I am referring here to the excavations led by a team of archaeologists from Southampton University on a site adjacent to the one dug by the University of Chicago. For the results of the former, see A. Regourd, “Arabic Language Documents on Paper,” in D. Peacock and L. Blue (eds.), *Myos Hormos—Quseir al Qadīm. Roman and Islamic Ports on the Red Sea*. Vol. 2: Finds from the excavations 1999-2003 (Oxford, 2009), pp. 339-344.

³⁵ See R.-P. Gayraud *et. al.*, “Iṣṭabl ‘Antar (Fostat), 1987-1989. Rapport de fouilles,” p. 91.

normally be buried, or burnt or washed away or even immersed in a river.³⁶ In one case (see no. 1 below), it can be ascertained that we are only dealing with one leaf that was thrown out because the scribe erred in copying the holy text (incident of homeoteleuton). When the mistake was noticed, the erroneous verse was stricken through, the leaf probably torn up from the quire and thrown out in the basket before being brought to this area by the stavengers. The second Quranic fragment (see no. 2 below) is too tiny to allow a similar conclusion but the fact that only two fragments of the holy text were found in the rather rich material excavated testifies that this must have happened only when the text had been corrupted by the scribe.

Among the official documents that found their way to the heaps of Iṣṭabl ʿAntar, there is an early Ayyubid petition addressed by a woman to the vizir of al-ʿĀdil (596-615/1200-1218). This piece is also interesting for our purpose as it confirms that not only documents from the Umayyad up to the Fatimid period were discarded in this area. In fact, as already stated by Grohmann³⁷ and confirmed by the actual excavations, documents from the 14th c. as well as from the 18th c. resurfaced³⁸ showing that Fuṣṭāṭ played this role at least until that time before being replaced, in this function of garbage dump, by another area in the 20th c.

However, most of our paper items date back to the Fatimid period and mostly the 12th c. The second occupation of the site, dateable to this very century, is crucial in this respect. If we consider that the Fatimid archives were plundered under Ayyubid rule, as it is quite logical to surmise, there is no wonder that we find the majority of these documents going back to the period that corresponds to the end of the dynasty. Thanks to the stratigraphy that has been preserved, it is possible to see that several artifacts date or are dateable to various periods in

³⁶ See J. Sadan, "Genizah and Genizah-Like Practices".

³⁷ A. Grohmann, *Einführung*, 28.

³⁸ See item no. 208 dated 1154/1742.

the same layer. As already mentioned, several artefacts that may be dated to the Umayyad/ Abbasid and Fatimid periods were found at the same level (1, i.e. surface). From this, it can be inferred that each layer can be dated only with great caution, at least for the upper level.

Several ways of reuse are witnessed in the bulk of pieces collected by the excavators. Some items were used for pen exercises (see no. 5 in the studied documents below) while others were precisely cut in strips, which may have been used to light a candel, for instance (see item no. 63 below), or as perfect squares (see item 125, a fragment of a roll as is shown by the presence of a *kollesis*, the overlapped joint between two sheets of paper; the roll, produced by the chancery, had previously been reused on the verso for pen exercises).

In other cases, we see that documents had a second life as *découpage* or cutouts. Several examples give an idea of the wide range of uses that were made of such pieces: a fragment (octagonal shape) of an account ledger folded in four and cut out in a symmetrical fashion (see no. 66 reproduced below); a fragment of a list of goods delivered to a person in 509/1116 where lines of diamond shapes were cut out (see no. 175 reproduced below); two cones made from administrative documents, decorated with colour dots (blue and red), that were hung to a string (in one case, the thread is still attached to the cone) to create a garland.

Some documents, already reused, were torn in several strips on the spot and all the strips were thrown out at the same place. Item no. 56 (see picture below) is a perfect example: this rectangle, cut into an official document, as demonstrated by the chancery script, was reused to write down a list of ingredients (including potash [*ušnān*], flour [*daqīq*], sesame oil [*šīraġ*], squash [*yaqtīn*], green lemon [*lāymūn aḥḍar*], watermelon [*ġabas*], mustard seeds [*ḥardal*])

which was torn later on in small vertical strips that have all been preserved together and allow a complete reconstruction. This phenomenon was already noticed by Richards.³⁹

Finally, documents cut into pieces could also be used to help keep the stopper of a bottle or of a jar to remain in place. Item no. 191 (reproduced below) consists of a piece of paper carelessly torn from a bigger piece that was first used to write down a payment order⁴⁰ and later on to keep a plug as is demonstrated by the converging folds towards the center of the piece.

Edition of selected documents

Document No. 1

Quran (recto: XXXVIII:18-24; verso: XXXVIII:26-31), undated, paper, 65 x 116 mm
(item no. 1; register no. 4830: 1).

Text

Recto

١. [انا سخرنا الجبال معه يسبح]ـن [بال]عشي والاشرا[ق] [...] [...]

٢. [...] [ك]ل له اوابٌ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَشَدَدْنَا مُلْكَهُ [...] [...]

٣. [...] وَفَضَلَ الْخِطَابِ ﴿٢٧﴾ وَهَلْ اَتَاكَ نَبَأٌ [...] [...]

٤. [...] وَالْمِحْرَابِ ﴿٢٨﴾ اِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلٰى دَاوُدَ فَفَجَعَ [...] [...]

³⁹ Richards, "Written documents," 64 and doc. 19 (figs. 96 and 97).

⁴⁰ The text regards the payment of 3 *raṭl* of meat (*lahm*) ordered by an assistant (*sā'id*).

٥. [...] تخلف خَصْمَانِ ﴿٦﴾ بَعِي بَعْضَنَا عَلَيَّ بَعْضٌ [...]]

٦. [...] بالحاقِّ وَلَا تُشْطِطْ وَاهْدِنَا إِلَيَّ سَاءَ مَا [...]]

٧. [...] تساع وتسعون نَعَجَةً وَلِي نَعَجَةٌ وَ[احدة ...]

٨. [...] أكفلنيها وَعَزَّنِي فِي الْخِطَابِ ﴿٦﴾ قَالَ لَقَدْ [...]]

Verso

١. [...] يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ [...]]

٢. [...] بَاطِلًا ذَلِكَ ظَنُّ الَّذِينَ [...]]

٣. [...] النَّارِ ﴿٦﴾ أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا [...]]

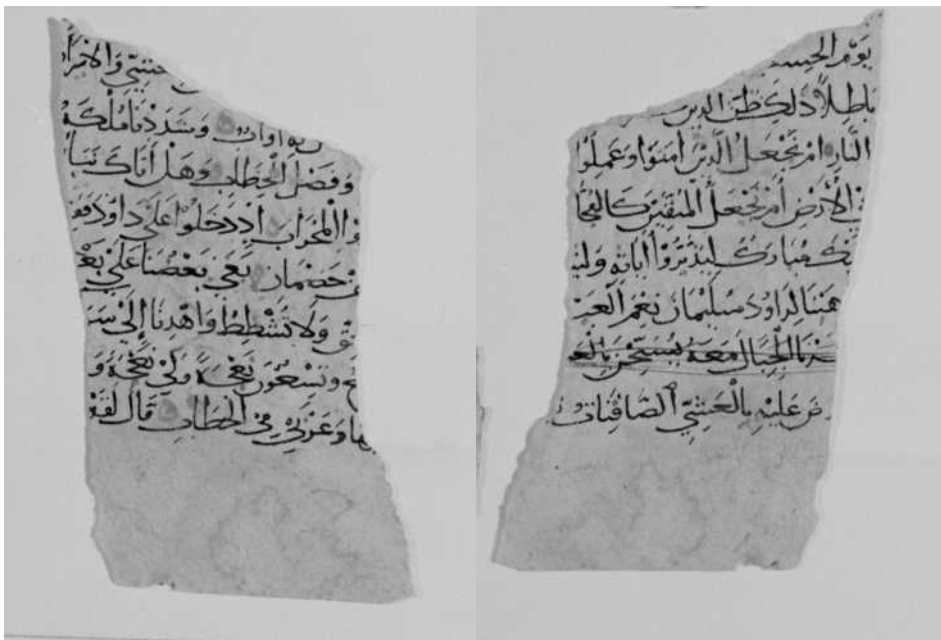
٤. [...] فِي الْأَرْضِ أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الْمُتَّقِينَ كَالْفُجَّارِ [...]]

٥. [...] إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرُوا [...]]

٦. [...] وَوَهَبْنَا لِدَاوُدَ سُلَيْمَانَ نِعَمَ الْعَبْدِ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ ﴿٦﴾]

٧. [انا سنخ] رزنا الجبال معه يسبحن بالعب [عشي والاشراق ﴿٦﴾]

٨. [اذا عر] ض عليه بالعشي الصافات [...]]



Document No. 2

Quran (recto: VI:71-72; verso: VI:75-76), undated, paper, 40 x 62 mm (item no. 5; register no. 4830: 7).

Text

Recto

١. الْهُدَىٰ وَأُمًّا [رنا لنسلم لرب العالمين ﴿٦٦﴾]

٢. وَأَنَّ أَقِيمُوا [الصلوة واتقوه وهو الذي]

٣. إِلَيْهِ [تحشرون ...]

Verso

١. [م...] مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَوَاتِ

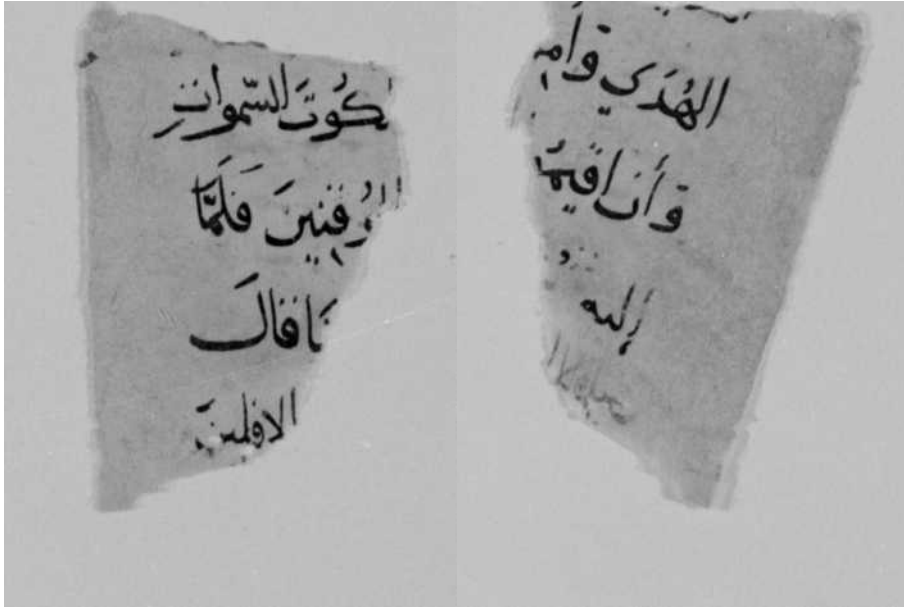
٢. [والارض وليكون من الم...] ثُوقَيْنِ فَلَمَّا

٣. [جن عليه الليل رأى كوكبًا] نَا قَالَ

٤. [هذا ربي فلما أفل قال لا أحب] الْأُفْلِينَ

Commentary

Script: nashī



Document No. 3

Fragment of a cookbook, undated, paper, 165 x 87 mm (item no. 10; register no. 5229: 2).

Text

Fol. 1, recto

١. ويلقى معه الجص واللوييا⁴¹ [...]

٢. يصب في القدر شيئا من مـ [...]

٣. ويلقى فيها من الملح ما يحتاج اليه [...]

٤. فيطل ويصب على ذلك من الـ [...]

٥. ويزاد في مائها حتى يتجاوز ما نعـم]؟

٦. على النار حتى يستخرج [...]

٧. غلب ؟ ...

⁴¹ Asparagus bean. I. Gālib, *al-Mawsū'a fī 'ulūm al-ṭabī'a*, 3 vols. (Bayrūt, 1965), 2: 429.

Fol. 1, verso

١. [...] ه الطعم وهي اسهل
٢. [...] الناس منها
٣. [...] خدي رضيع واطا[ب]ه ويحكم صنعها على
٤. [...] الطباخون ويجعل فيها التمام والانشا
٥. [...] ان يرفعها عن النار صب فيها سكر<ه> حه
٦. [...] رغوّة خردل وارفعها عن النار
٧. [...] لا يعلم من ياكلها ما هي الا
٨. [...] مصيرة ياكلها الناس

Fol. 2, recto

١. والمري ثم يسبغه النار بعد ذلك و[...]
٢. عليها من الما والخل والمري الذي في ال[...]
٣. والابرار حتى يفتى جميع ما في العصارة ثم يلقى [...]
٤. شيا يسيرا من الما ويلقى فيها وزن درهم [...]
٥. ونصف درهم خولنجان⁴² ومثله دار صيني⁴³ [...]
٦. ويتركها ويرفعها عن النار و...
٧. ؟ طيب الرايحة [...].

Fol. 2, verso

⁴² Alpinia/Galanga. Ġālib, *al-Mawsū'a*, 1: 378.

⁴³ Also known as *qirfat Sarandīb* (Cinnamon). Ġālib, *al-Mawsū'a*, 2: 286.

١. [...] في القدر ويصب عليها من الماء مقدار
٢. [...] أربع أصابع مضمومة [يجعلها على
٣. [...] ويامن تحريكها ثم يصب فيها من الخل
٤. [...] من الماء قدر وزن عشرين درهما فإذا يصح
٥. [...] نصف رطل خل ما كسيرة رطبة و
٦. [...] القدر [...] لها فيها وزن درهمين زعفران



Document No. 4

Fragment of a petition with pen exercises, undated, paper, 220 x 59 mm (item no. 9; register no. 5229: 1).

Text

Recto



Document No. 5

Official report regarding a captain, undated, paper, verso blank, 98 x 102 mm (item no. 33; register no. 6422: 7).

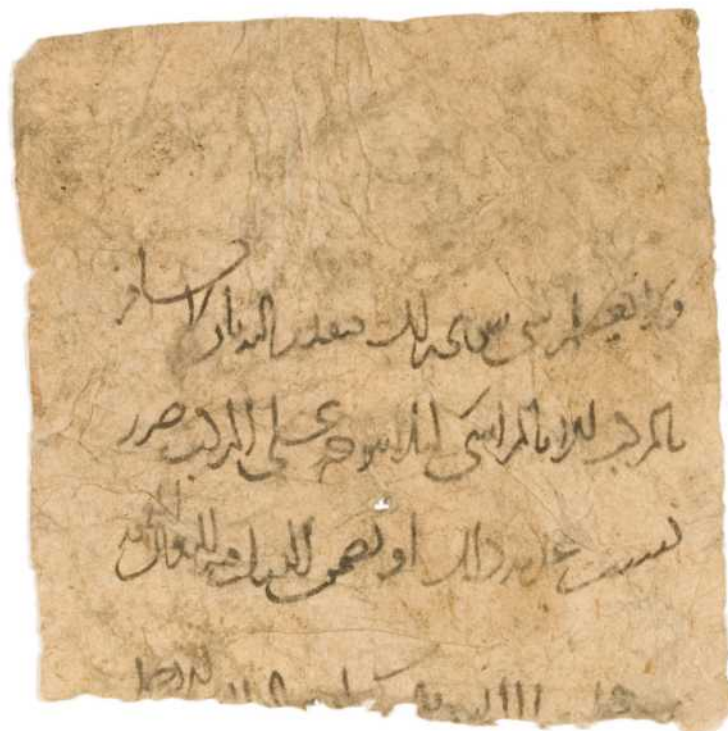
Text

Recto

١. ولا يعلم شي سوى ذلك فيقدم اليه بان لا يسافر
٢. بالمركب الا بالمراسي لثلا يتوجه على المركب ضرر
٣. بسبب علمه ذلك او يضمن الدرك فيه للديوان المعمور
٤. [.....] للاجل

Translation

1. and that he doesn't know anything else. It must be stated to him that he should drive
2. the boat only in the harbours lest the boat be damaged
3. on the ground that he knows that or unless he guarantees the indemnity to the prosperous office
4. [.....] for the term



Document No. 6

Petition to a vizir of al-ʿĀdil (596-615/1200-1218), undated, paper, verso blank, 163 x 140 mm (item no. 168; register no. 9167).

Text

Recto

١. العبدۃ المملوكۃ
٢. كلثم بنت صبح
٣. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٤. خلد الله تعالى ايام المجلس العالي الاجلي المالكي العادلي المظفر الهمام ناصر الاسلام
٥. غياث الانام سيف الدين سلطان جيوش المسلمين خليل امير المومنين وادام قدرته واعلا كلمته
٦. العبدۃ المملوكۃ تقبل الارض وتنهي انها حرمة مقطعة مقرة ووالدتها كانت
٧. ضمنت الدار بمصر من الاكثرا [...] بحماية الشريف ` عز الدين منزله من القصر ونقصت مدة
٨. اجارتها ويتفاعل؟ [...] المذكور وهي حاضرة مقرة
٩. [...] المذكور تعمدوا
١٠. [...] يعرفوها

Translation

1. The owned servant
2. Kulthum bint Şubḥ
3. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
4. May God—Lofty He is!—make eternal the days of the exalted seat, the mighty [lord], under al-Malik al-Ādil, the victorious, the heroic, the helper of Islam,

5. the succour of mankind, the sword of religion, sultan of the armies of the Muslims, the friend of the commander of the believers,⁴⁵ [May God] cause his power to endure and exalt his word.

6. The owned servant kisses the ground and reports that she is a lady who was conceded and granted [a house] and that her mother had

7. insured the house located in old Cairo against the lease [...] by the *šarīf* ‘Izz al-Dīn’s protection of his house from the Palace. Its period

8. of rent was reduced [...] the abovementioned and she is present stating [that]

9. [...] the abovesaid. They intendend

10. [...] they recognized her.

⁴⁵ This titlature, except for the last element, tallies almost exactly with the one found in a petition to al-‘Ādil published by G. Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 1993), 365-368 (no. 88) but in our case, it is addressed to the vizir and not to the sultan (this is probably the case too for no. 89 in Khan, *ibid.*).



Document No. 7

Report about a [European?] captive taken on sea, undated, paper, verso blank, 103 x 129 mm (item no. 202; register no. 10544: 1).

Text

Recto

١. [...] اسمعيل عند متوليه والناظر

٢. [...] اساطيل المظفرة

٣. [...] الاعتدال اسمر اللون بحمرة واضح الجبهة وبها اثر البر

٤. [...] من الحاجب الايمن مقرون الحاجبين اشهل العينين اقنا الانف

٥. [...] وبجبهته ايضا من الجانب الايسر اثر وسأل

٦. [...] طعمه عن نصف النمـ[...]رية وعن ما يرد الى الصناعة

[...] .٧

Translation

1. [...] Ismā'īl by his supervisor and the inspector
2. [...] the victorious fleet
3. [...] stature, of brown colour with some redness, with a smooth forehead bearing the
mark of reverence
4. [...] from the right eyebrow, having joined eyebrows, bluish-black eyes, an aquiline
nose
5. [...] on his forehead too, on the left side, there is a scar. He asked
6. [...] he feeds from half a [...] and from what reaches the arsenal
7. [...]



Conclusion

Compared to the thousands of scraps of paper documents unearthed in Fustāṭ and preserved in various public and private collections around the world, those excavated by the French mission were discovered in a well documented archaeological context. Thanks to this, we are

in good stand to understand when and in which circumstances they were disposed of. Nevertheless, there remains a caveat for the upper level: it can be ascertained that the soil corresponding to the actual surface, because of the activity of those who exploited this area for its fertilizing quality about one hundred years ago, was turned over. Consequently, the stratigraphy of that level is mixed up and is of little help for the archaeologist.

The documents on paper can be dated mainly from the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth c., which means that we are dealing with witnesses that were redacted during the Fatimid rule over Egypt. Later documents, from the Mamluk or the Ottoman periods, may be identified in this bulk but this happens by chance given the exploitation of the site for its fertilizer: the latest levels disappeared and when documents from Fuṣṭāṭ from these late periods are identified in collections, this is due to the fact that they were extracted from the soil before it was sold as fertilizer.

Their historical exploitation could yield interesting results for the study of chancery handwritings and practices, commercial activities, state affairs and the like. However, it must be borne in mind, as the assessment made in this article has tried to show, that it can only be in a limited manner. Most of the material consist of scraps that provide a partial view of the whole document and are difficult to decipher.

The most compelling result of their study in their archaeological context regards the fate of archives (private or public) in Egypt and their potential for reuse. It has been tentatively demonstrated that several pieces found in the ground of Iṣṭabl ‘Antar knew a second or even a third life before being definitely discarded. As such, they throw light on the uses and customs of the Egyptians regarding archival material in the pre-modern period.

Pictures

no. 187 (a roll consisting of a charm)



no. 187 (detail of the stitch)



no. 29 (drawing of flowers)



no. 34 (drawing of a bird)



no. 142 (pen exercise)



no. 63 (narrow strips)



0  5 6441/38



0  5 6441/38

no. 125 (square cut in a roll produced by the chancery and first reused for pen exercises)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
التي هي عليه والله
الله

0 5 6524/3

س
س
س
س

0 5 6524/3

no. 56 (fragment of an official document reused to write down a list of ingredients with the quantities requested indicated and later torn in several vertical strips).

والمسألة الأولى من المسائل
أولها: إذا كان أولها

0 5 6441/24

استبان في وقتها ربع وتمن شيخ رطل
بعطين تمن يادى من لرواس در نصف
لمور اخضر ثم جيلتر ربع حرداج مخراج
در مسور عن كشته اللمر الجادى الطعمه

0 5 6441/24

no. 66 (cut-out of octagonal shape)



0 5 6441/44



0 5 6441/44

no. 175 (a document listing goods given to some persons dated 509/1116 where diamond shapes were cut)





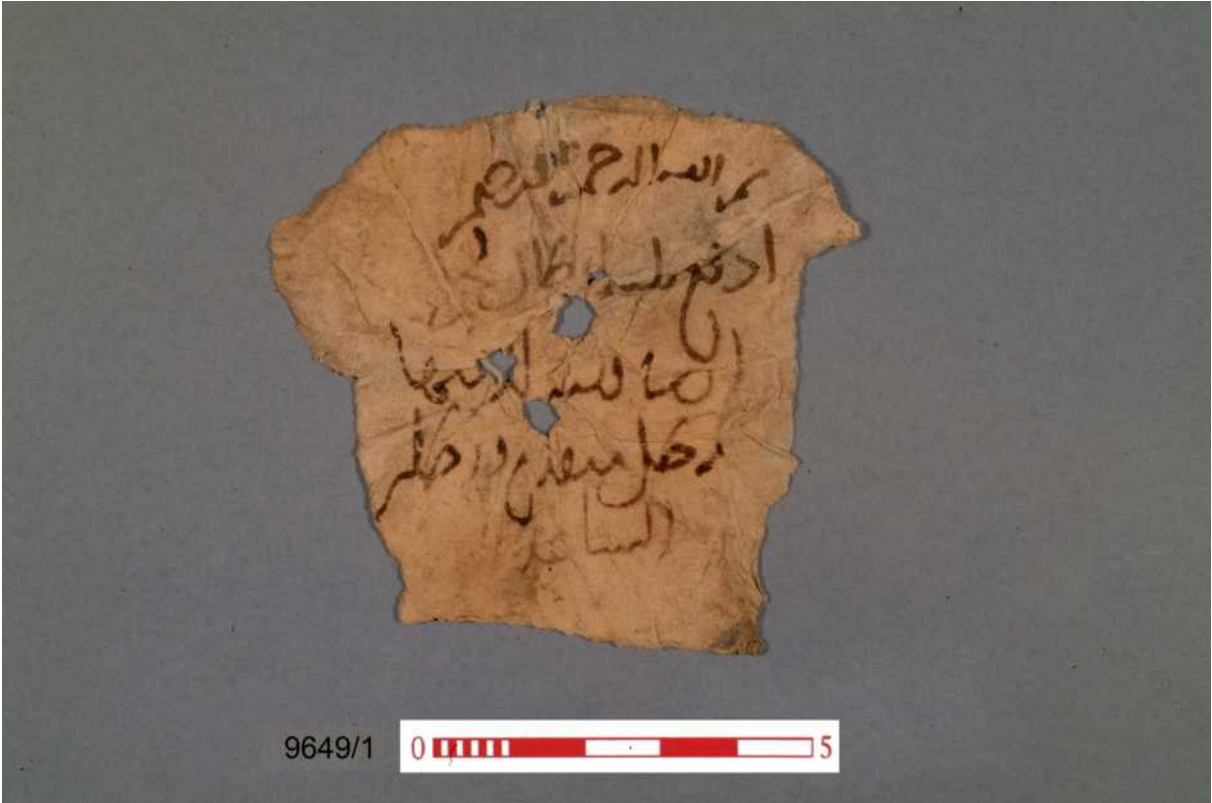
no. 184 (decorated cone made from a reused administrative document and that was suspended to a string).



9535/2



no. 191 (an order payment of meat reused to stop the plug of a bottle; the verso is blank).



9649/1

