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## **The Arabic Papyri in the Pushkin Museum: History of the Collection and Edition of I 1 6 732**

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*Abstract:* In Russia, collections of Arabic papyri and documents on paper are kept in Moscow (the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts) and St. Petersburg (the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts and the State Hermitage). Each of them has its own formation history. The Moscow collection, which is the main focus of the article, is associated with the name of Vladimir S. Golenishchev, Russian Egyptologist and collector of ancient Egyptian and Coptic antiquities. All three collections have not yet been studied relying on the latest data and up-to-date research tools. Victor I. Belyaev made an attempt to draw up a catalogue of the Pushkin Museum and IOM collections together with transcription of the documents, but did not finish his work. Now his notes are a good foundation for future research, even though they need to be revised. The article presents a short description of the Pushkin Museum papyri collection and verifies the date of the papyrus I 1 6 732. It became clear that I 1 6 732 was written half a century earlier than stated by V.I. Belyaev.

*Key words:* Arabic papyrology, papyri collections, paleography, V.I. Belyaev, V.S. Golenishchev

At present it is known that there are three collections of Arabic papyri and documents on paper in Russia. The largest one is held in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. Two other collections are kept in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, but this article focuses mainly on the Moscow collection.

The core of the Pushkin Museum collection is the Vladimir S. Golenishchev's collection of antiquities, which consists mostly of ancient Egyptian monuments. Formation of this collection began in 1879, when he first visited Egypt, and lasted for 30 years until it was bought by the Russian government in 1909 and placed in the Pushkin Museum.

V.S. Golenishchev (1856–1947) was an outstanding Russian Egyptologist and, predictably, all the articles and monographs dedicated to his life and academic pursuits focus on his contributions to Egyptology, and describe ancient Egyptian items of his collection. Nevertheless, V.S. Golenishchev managed to buy specimens of later periods, in particular Arabic papyri together with Arabic documents on paper and parchment, even though these purchases seem to have been made accidentally rather than intentionally.

In 1888–89 in Alexandria, during his first visit to Egypt, V.S. Golenishchev bought a metal box filled with various documents. In his report about this trip he mentions that these documents were written in different languages: Middle Persian, Hebrew, and unidentified languages, which seemed to be Arabic and Greek. Other papyrus fragments purchased in Alexandria were in Arabic, Greek and Coptic. V.S. Golenishchev noted that almost all of them were badly preserved.<sup>1</sup> In the book dedicated to V.S. Golenishchev's life and academic contributions we read: "After his arrival in Alexandria in 1888, V.S. Golenishchev purchased a number of papyri, among which were Jewish ones, exceptional for Egypt".<sup>2</sup> It seems that Arabic documents comprised a considerable bulk of the purchased papyri, but in fact they received only brief mentions.

V.S. Golenishchev purchased 8000 items for his collection, but did not mention the provenance of each of them. He recorded and described new pieces of his collection only in the early stage of its formation. Those records were published in the Transactions of the Oriental Department of the Imperial Russian Archeological Society.<sup>3</sup> Thus, V.S. Golenishchev might have bought Arabic documents not only once and not only in Alexandria.

The inventory list provided by the Pushkin Museum numbers 227 items of Arabic papyri and documents on paper and parchment. In fact, this number must be a little higher, as some fragments of different documents are kept together under the same entry number. Almost half of the specimens (103 items) are documents on papyrus. Most of these documents are official, business and private letters, documents concerning taxes, wages in goods and other payments, as well as land cadastres and some protocols. A number of documents are bilingual, or contain separate Greek or Coptic inscriptions. A more detailed description of the types of documents is presented below.

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<sup>1</sup> GOLENISHCHEV 1891: 1–2.

<sup>2</sup> *Golenishchev and his Collection of Oriental Antiquities* 2022: 31.

<sup>3</sup> KHODZHASH 2006: 15.

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Arabic papyrology in Russia has much room for development. At present, none of the collections has a catalogue and access to the collections is limited. The Arabic documents in the Pushkin Museum are digitized and uploaded to the online catalogue of Russian museums.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, some photos of the documents are of low quality and almost unreadable. Some of the documents have no verso, which is crucial for a comprehensive study of documents. The collection in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts is not digitized. In the State Hermitage it is digitized, but not available to the broad public. Thus, only several documents from the Russian collections are published. Their list follows.

*The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts.* One item from this collection was transcribed in *P. Ross.-Georg. IV*<sup>5</sup> without a photo and commentary on the Arabic text<sup>6</sup>. It is a Qurra letter; the entry number of this document is A 240.

The photo of the papyrus A 241 was published twice in exhibition catalogues<sup>7</sup> with short descriptions, which, undoubtedly, cannot be considered comprehensive editions.

*The State Hermitage.* A legal document on paper from the Mamluk period was published by Lahcen Daäif in 2014. This document is still kept in the State Hermitage under the entry number EG 601. In 1985 six legal documents were handed over by the then assistant director of the Museum to Yūsuf Rāgib for further publication.<sup>8</sup>

*The Pushkin Museum.* Two documents were published: a private letter and a list of villages. The edition of the first document was prepared by Y. Rāgib, who in 1974 found the photo of the papyrus from the Moscow collection among other documents previously owned by Jean David-Weill. The publication itself saw the light only in 2014. The accession number of the document is I 1 6 788. It is a private letter dating, according to Y. Rāgib's assumption, from the early 3rd AH/9th AD c. This letter was addressed from one merchant to another. Other seven merchants are mentioned in the text as well. Y. Rāgib supposes that all of them, including the sender and the addressee, were partners. The sender reports that those seven merchants had left Alexandria for Tripoli (in Syria), but no one has yet arrived.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/#/>

<sup>5</sup> P. Ross.-Georg = Papyri russischer und georgischer Sammlungen (published by P. Jernstedt & G. Zereteli).

<sup>6</sup> JERNSTEDT: 1927.

<sup>7</sup> BELYAEV 1934; PETROSYAN 1994.

<sup>8</sup> DAAIF 2014: 427.

<sup>9</sup> RAGIB 2014: 62-63.

A bilingual Graeco-Arabic list of villages in the Fayyūm oasis with the accession number I 1 6 224 was published by P. Jernstedt in *P. Ross.-Georg. V.*<sup>10</sup>

In fact, before the World War II the Arabic papyri collections in Russia gained some attention from local scholars, specifically from Victor I. Belyaev (1902–1976). He worked on compiling a catalogue of Arabic papyri from both Moscow and St Petersburg collections (held in the IOM). The Moscow collection catalogue was even typed out, but never published. The catalogue for St. Petersburg papyri is only handwritten and appears unfinished. Documents on paper were not part of V.I. Belyaev's research (perhaps only at this stage of his work).

After studying V.I. Belyaev's archives and relying on his notes, we have put together a preliminary table of the papyri from the Pushkin Museum collection that indicates types of documents and their dates.

Table 1.

**Identified type of the document**

	Type of the document	Century (after <i>hijra</i> )				
		1st AH	2nd AH	3rd AH	4th AH	Not clear
Letters	Official / business letters	I 16 826 I 16 827 (I+V)	I 16 813f I 16 813g I 16 911 (r)	I 16 735 I 16 738 (r) I 16 796 (r) I 16 798 (r) I 16 825 I 16 849 I 16 852 (r+v) I 16 863 (r) I 16 984e I 16 985 (r) I 16 995	I 16 776 I 16 990	
	Private letters		I 16 778 (v) I 16 788 I 16 795 (v) I 16 814	I 16 725 I 16 738 (v) I 16 771 I 16 772 I 16 778 (r) I 16 781 I 16 788 (published) I 16 795 (r) I 16 796 (v) I 16 803 I 16 809 I 16 816 I 16 850 I 16 856	I 16 760	I 16 860

<sup>10</sup> ZERETELI & JERNSTEDT: 1935.

				I 16 976 I 16 979 (r+v) I 16 982 I 16 987 (r+v) I 16 993		
Financial issues	Expenses / wages in goods		I 16 729 I 16 759 I 16 810 I 16 813 I 16 911 (v)	I 16 769 I 16 739 I 16 798		
	Taxes		I 16 822 (v) I 16 861 I 16 864	I 16 818 (AH 248) I 16 822 (r) I 16 985 (v) I 16 988	I 16 732 I 16 808 I 16 848 I 16 850 (r) I 16 984a (r)	
Land issues	Cadastres		I 16 779 I 16 813b I 16 813c I 16 819		I 16 863 (v) I 16 864 (r) I 16 972 (r)	
	Property			I 16 853 I 16 862 (AH 257)		
Administration	Orders	I 16 827 (III, IV, V)	I 16 800			
	Protocols	I 16 706 (AH 99) I 16 832	I 16 822 I 16 977 (r)	I 16 980a		I 16 820
Other texts	Magical texts and amulets		I 16 814	I 16 822 (III) I 16 974		
	Literary texts		I 16 866 (hadith corpus)			
Bilingual	Gr.-Arab.	I 16 706 (AH 99) I 16 832	I 16 224 (published) I 16 794 I 16 977 (r)	I 16 854		I 16 787 I 16 980(?)
	Copt.-Arab.			I 16 692 I 16 973	I 16 746	I 16 689 (3rd AH) I 16 764

Table 2.

**Unidentified type of the document**

<b>Accession number</b>	<b>Century AH</b>	<b>Type (supposedly)</b>
I 1 6 719	3rd	—
I 1 6 724	2nd–3rd	Private/official letter
I 1 6 783	2nd	Scribal practice
I 1 6 784	—	Governor's order
I 1 6 785	2nd	Tax declaration
I 1 6 790	3rd	Letter
I 1 6 800	2nd	Official letter from a governor to a bishop
I 1 6 802	2nd–3rd	Assessment
I 1 6 804	3rd	Assessment
I 1 6 806	3rd	Assessment
I 1 6 811	year 291	Credit declaration
I 1 6 813 (e)	2nd	Credit documents
I 1 6 817	—	Blanc piece of papyrus
I 1 6 822 (IV)	3rd	—
I 1 6 813a	—	—
I 1 6 833	2nd	r: Ar.-Gr.; v: Arab.
I 1 6 851	r: 4th / v: 3rd	r: cadastre; v: -
I 1 6 855	—	6 fragments of different documents
I 1 6 857	3rd	—
I 1 6 858	3rd	—
I 1 6 859	3rd–4th	2 fragments of different documents
I 1 6 865	3rd	—
I 1 6 970	2nd	2 fragments
I 1 6 971	3rd	2 fragments of the same document
I 1 6 972	3rd	v: assessment
I 1 6 975	3rd	—
I 1 6 977	2nd	v: cadastre
I 1 6 978	3rd	Private letter
I 1 6 980 (b-t)	2nd–4th	Fragments of different documents
I 1 6 981	r: 4th / v: 3rd	—
I 1 6 983	3rd	Assessment
I 1 6 984a	4th	v: private letter
I 1 6 984 (b, c, f, h.i)	3rd	—
I 1 6 986	4th	—
I 1 6 989	3rd	Assessment (draft)
I 1 6 991	3rd	r and v different documents
I 1 6 992	3rd	—
I 1 6 994	3rd	—
I 1 6 996	3rd–4th	—

According to these tables, the Pushkin Museum collection has a handful of documents that have a date in the text. The rest of the documents were, apparently, dated on the basis of paleographic evidence. Dating a document only by paleography is unreliable. As V.I. Belyaev mentioned in his report about the Arabic papyri in Russia, Vera A. Krachkovskaya managed to trace the development of Arabic script during the first two centuries after *hijra* with accuracy to a decade. He also stated that it may help with dating the early papyri.<sup>11</sup> In fact, however, it seems to be impossible. From the 2nd c. onward the script becomes more and more cursive and it turns out to be rather challenging to assign a document to a certain century, not to speak of a decade.

V.I. Belyaev also started his work on papyri transcriptions. It seems that deciphering all the documents from the Moscow collection was not his final goal. It is not clear what logic V.I. Belyaev followed when choosing the documents for deciphering, as some of the specimens, which tend to be important, were left aside. The situation with St. Petersburg collection is different: all the available papyri were transcribed. Nevertheless, only one deciphered papyrus from both collections has a translation and only two of them have a dotted (in one case not fully) transcription.

Without any doubt V.I. Belyaev has carried out outstanding work and now his archives are a good foundation for further research. However, we should keep in mind that he was preparing these catalogues almost a century ago and now they need to be thoroughly revised.

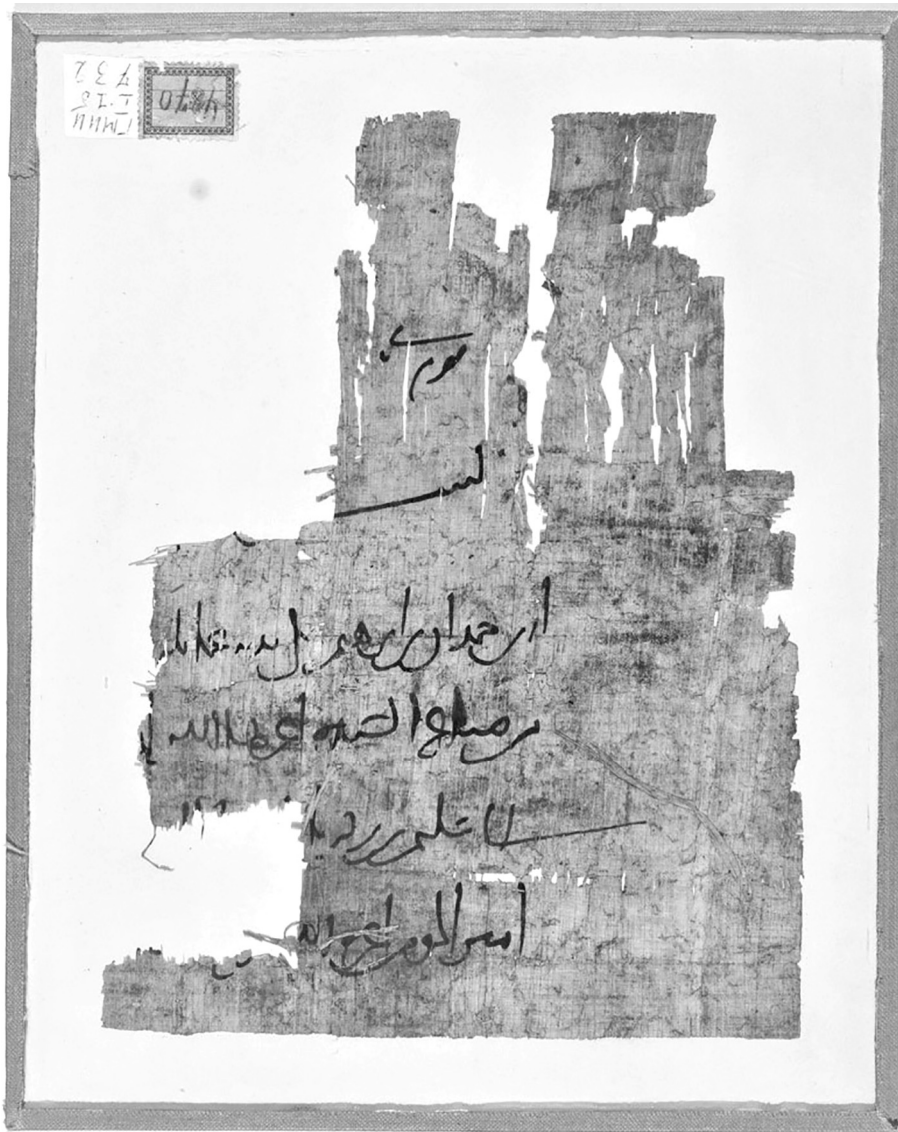
While studying V.I. Belyaev's notes we came across his description of the papyrus I 1 6 732 from the Pushkin Museum collection. V.I. Belyaev gives the following information: "the 4th c. AH (i.e. 10th c. AD — *E.T.*); a receipt confirming that Ḥamdān b. Ibrāhīm paid land-tax (*kharāj*) from the domains of the caliph al-Muqtadir's<sup>12</sup> mother. The tax was paid to the wazir's deputy Sulaymān b. Zakariyā". In this note Belyaev mentions the name of the caliph, his mother and a possible date of the document. The document itself, however, does not contain any exact information, neither the name of the caliph nor the date is given, and this prompted us to study it in detail.

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<sup>11</sup> BELYAEV 1941: 78.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Muqtadir bi-Ilāh — the 18th caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate (908–932).

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Pl. 1. Papyrus I 1 6 732, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts



## Confirmation of the *kharāj* paid from the Lady's domains

I 1 6 732; 13×18.4 cm; mid. 3/9th c. AH  
Place of discovery unknown; Tax receipt

### Paleographic features of the script

Light-brown papyrus. Recto is written on the side with vertical fibers. Verso is blank. The text is fragmentary, most likely more than half of it is lost. The preserved text is written in black ink, clearly readable.

Diacritics are scarce: السيدة *al-sayyida* and سليمان *Sulaymān* have a stroke over *sīn*; زكريا *Zakariyā* has dots for *ya'*. 'Alif is omitted in سليمان *Sulaymān* and ابراهيم *Ibrāhīm*. Preposition الي *'ilā* is typically written with *ya'* turned to the right, but على *'alī* with *ya'* bending to the left and extending directly from the bottom of the *lām*. In المؤمنين *al-mu'minīn* the part after *wāw* is written as one stroke with a small loop at the beginning to define *mīm*.

'Alif is perpendicular; when ligatured to the preceding letter, it extends below the connecting stroke.

Initial *bā'* in the *basmala* has a high vertical extension, but in other cases is not distinctive.

Final *rā'* and *zāy* have a curve, but the curvature of the separate *zāy* is almost completely eliminated.

*Dāl* is distinctive from *rā'*, but its horizontal line is reduced (except حمدان *ḥamdān* (3)). The curvature of separate *dāl* in ادى *'addā* is eliminated.

*Sīn* has teeth in the *basmala*, in other cases the letter is flat with a stroke over it.

Ṣād has a round loop and lacks a stroke on the left side.

'Ayn has curvature in both initial and final forms.

*Mīm* has a reduced loop (except امير *'amīr* (6)). In من *min* (4) resembles *yā'* in يديه *yadayhi* (3).

The curvature of the final *nūn*, especially when ligatured to the preceding letter, is reduced.

**Transcription**

- 1 يوم ٤  
 2 بسم [الله الرحمان الرحيم]  
 3 ادى حمدان بن ابراهيم على يديه مما يلـ[زمه من الخراج...]  
 4 من ضياع السيدة اعزها اله ...  
 5 الى سليمان بن زكريا...  
 6 امير المومنين اعزه الله...

**Translation**

- 1 Day 5 (Thursday)  
 2 In the name [of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful]  
 3 Ḥamdān b. Ibrāhīm has paid by his hands what was due from him [for kharāj]  
 4 Belonging to the estates of the Lady — may God exalt her —  
 5 To Sulaymān b. Zakariyā  
 6 Commander of the Faithful — may God exalt him

**Commentary**

1. The day is written in Graeco-Coptic numerals; in all likelihood the amount of the tax in dinars was also indicated in the first line in Graeco-Coptic numerals.

The culture of the early Islamic period in Egypt was similar to the former dominant Byzantine culture, and for this reason it was normal for an official document to be written in Greek or Coptic. In AH 87 (AD 706), ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abd al-Malik, the governor of Egypt, pursued Arabisation of official documentation according to the decree of the caliph al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, and Arabic letters were adopted immediately for coin inscriptions and gradually for official documents. However, Greek and Coptic numerals were still used alongside Arabic letters. The Abjad Arabic numerals were also created, but were not widely used. Documents dated to the 10th century AD still contain numeric information given in the Graeco-Coptic numerals.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> KAWATOKO 1992: 58–59.

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2. *'Addā fulān b. fulān mim mā yulzimuhu min al-ḥarāğ* is a formula especially typical for tax receipts from the Ushmūn Province, even though it was first attested in AH 213 in a document attributed to the Fayyūm Province. The part *mā yulzimuhu min al-ḥarāğ* was no longer used after AH 314; on the contrary, *ادى 'addā* became normative and remained so throughout the period of receipts.<sup>14</sup>

4. The term *ḍay'a* (pl. *ḍiyā'*) in general refers to private agricultural holdings or property and can also be used to identify small settlements. In the Abbasid period the caliph, his family and other members of the Abbasid ruling and military elite were the owners of the *ḍiyā'* in Egypt. *Al-sayyida*, mentioned in this document as the owner of the domains, stands for the caliph's mother. There are several land leases and tax receipts paid for the *al-sayyida* domains in Ushmūnayn and Ihnās dating from the mid.-3rd c. AH. Marie Legendre, with reference to Ibn Taghrī Birdī (AH 873/AD 1469), notes that this title belonged to Shujā', the mother of the caliph al-Mutawakkil. Shujā' died in AH 249, while other documents mentioning *al-sayyida* are dated back to AH 238, 253 and 272, i.e. also after her death, and this title could apply not only to Shujā', but to mothers of later caliphs as well.<sup>15</sup>

The lands belonging to the close entourage of the caliph were not occupied by their owners. They were virtual seats of authority mainly managed by appointees (*wakīl*). The caliph al-Muntaşir, for instance, was put in charge of Egypt by the administration of Baghdad, but he hardly ever visited the province.<sup>16</sup>

5. Judging from the type of the document, the contents of similar receipts<sup>17</sup> and the formulary,<sup>18</sup> Sulaymān b. Zakariyā was probably responsible for the collection of tax money. This particular receipt does not provide us with enough information about the title or duties he had. However, there is another document that mentions Sulaymān b. Zakariyā. This papyrus, kept in the Austrian National Library in Vienna under the entry number A.P. 4028, was published by Gladys Frantz-Murphy. As follows from the edition, Sulaymān b. Zakariyā "may have been the guarantor of the estates in question". The document attests that Sulaymān b. Zakariyā was a cashier of the *kharāj* from the caliph's mother estates in the year AH 252 in Ushmūnayn.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> FRANZ-MURPHY 2001b: 70–71.

<sup>15</sup> LEGENDRE 2019: 410–412; SIJPESTEIJN 2022: 257

<sup>16</sup> LEGENDRE 2019: 413.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, no. 184 in GROHMANN 1938: 148.

<sup>18</sup> FRANZ-MURPHY 2001b: 73–76.

<sup>19</sup> FRANTZ-MURPHY 2001a: 245.

Thus, drawing on the Vienna papyrus, it is fair to say that I 1 6 732 can refer to the mid—3rd c. AH, but not to the beginning of the 4th c. AH. It is very doubtful that Sulaymān b. Zakariyā could serve as a cashier for about 50 years, or that there existed another cashier for the imperial estates with the identical name.

Very likely, when dating the document, V.I. Belyaev based his assumptions on the volume of the *Kitāb al-Awrāq* entitled *Akhbār ar-Rādī billāh wa'l-Muttaqi billāh* by Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā aṣ-Ṣūlī. It is known that in the 1930s V.I. Belyaev started writing his dissertation on another volume of the aṣ-Ṣūlī's work.<sup>20</sup> His research on the papyri collection at the Pushkin Museum went parallel with the preparation of his dissertation. In *Akhbār ar-Rādī billāh wa al-Muttaqi billāh* the "title" *as-sayyida* refers only to the caliph al-Muqtadir's mother Shaḡab, and it might be the reason why V.I. Belyaev assigned the document to the period of al-Muqtadir's reign, i.e. to the beginning of the 4th c. AH.<sup>21</sup>

The Russian collections of Arabic papyri and documents on paper are certainly smaller than the collections held in Vienna or Berlin. There are only several dated documents, most items are separate fragments from different periods and places that cannot be compiled into a dossier or an archive. The IOM collection of Arabic papyri also contains documents from different finds. For the reasons mentioned, a comprehensive historical, paleographic or linguistic research should be based on all collections scattered around the world. Only this holistic approach can lead to discovery of parallels between documents kept in different collections and to finding fragments of high importance.

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<sup>20</sup> V.I. Belyaev did not manage to finish his dissertation. A.B. Khalidov (1929–2001) continued and completed his work (BELYAEV & KHALIDOV 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Aṣ-Ṣūlī 1935: 5.

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