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# Arabic Documents from Medieval Nubia

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## 9. TITLES OF OFFICIALS

### 9.1. *Sulṭān*

The term *al-sulṭān* ‘the ruler’ appears in various letters. The Fatimid caliphs and viziers were sometimes referred to as *sulṭān* in the medieval sources (Khan 1993a, 487). In the late Fatimid period, the viziers were in de facto control, so, since the letters of the corpus are datable to the late Fatimid period, it is likely that ‘the ruler’ that is referred to would have been the vizier.

The writer of **21**, ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Qāḍī al-Rašīd ‘Alī ibn al-Zubayr, describes various missions of his family to the Nubian king on behalf of the ruler:

My grandfather travelled to visit the just king Basil and my father travelled to visit the king Mūyis, the father of Mena Kurē (?), as a messenger from the ruler, may God strengthen his victory, to Soba. It is he who strove to make a peace treaty between the ruler and the king when the situation deteriorated in the days of King David. My cousin, the judge ‘Abū al-Faḍl travelled to visit King Mūyis as a messenger of the ruler to Soba. (21r:9–13)

The writer of **22**, who is the ‘*amīr*’ ‘Abū Maṣṣūr ‘Ajīl, says that he has received instructions from the ruler to stop a shipment of horses to the eparch:

As for your saying that the ships conveying the horses have stopped, I was intending to (send them) until the order of the ruler, may God make his reign eternal, reached me by the hand of his brother, the governor of our land, together with a letter to the king informing him (the king) that if he (the king) needed an army, he (the ruler) would send it to

him, but he (the ruler) has prohibited me from sending to you the first instalment of the horses until these messengers (i.e., my slave boy and the slave boy of the ruler) arrive (at the king). (22r:5–9)

He received the instructions “by the hand of his brother, the governor of our land (*wālī bilādinā*).” This may have been the brother of the vizier Bahrām, who was the governor of Qūṣ, the key governor in Upper Egypt at that period. The ruler in question, therefore, would have been Bahrām, who served as vizier 529 AH/1135 AD–531 AH/1136 AD, during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ (al-Imad 1990, 109–17). The chain of command, therefore, was the ruler > governor of Qūṣ > local *ʿamīrs*.

Letter 6, which reports the news of the killing of the vizier Šāwar by Šīrkūh, indicates that the *ʿamīr* has been summoned by the new vizier Šīrkūh.

Letter 32, which is somewhat obscure, refers to the direct communication between the Kanz al-Dawla and the ruler with regard to the payment of poll-tax of some freedmen:

If the ruler, may God strengthen his victory, has validly received their poll-tax, through the services of the Pride of the Arabs, Kanz al-Dawla... (32:2)

The legal document 44 records the lease of a plot of land from the estate (*ʿiqṭāʾ*) of the lessor, which was “assigned to him by the Office of the Ruler (*ʿiqṭāʾatihi min diwān al-sulṭān*), may God strengthen his victory” (44:4).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A fragmentary letter discovered at Qaṣr Ibrīm, which is not in the edited corpus (1974\_V09\_08-08A), is addressed to the ‘prosperous Office of Friday and Neighbourhood Mosques’ (*diwān al-jawāmiʿ*)

## 9.2. *Wazīr*

The term *wazīr* ‘vizier’ is regularly used as a title of the eparch, who is referred to as ‘vizier of the king’ (*wazīr al-malik*; see §3.3). The term is not used to refer to the Fatimid vizier. As discussed above, the term *sulṭān* ‘ruler’ in the documents is likely to be intended to denote the Fatimid vizier. Letter 6, which reports the killing of the vizier Šāwar by Širkūh, indicates that

Širkūh, the military commander (*sallār*), may God protect him... has taken on the viziership to bear the burden of evil that is to come (*tawazzara šarr yakūn*). (6:7–8)

## 9.3. *ʿAmīr*

Many letters refer to a commander (*ʿamīr*). In several of the letters, an *ʿamīr* appears in the address, and his identity is sometimes specified. As has been discussed in §3.4 above, the *ʿamīrs* appearing in addresses include the Kanz al-Dawla (1, 8, 26), the son of the Kanz al-Dawla (2, 7) and *ʿamīrs* who do not have a Kanzī *nisba*, including ʿAbū Maṣṣūr ʿAjīl (22) and Ḥiṣn al-Dawla ibn al-ʿAsqalānī (28). Letter 29 is addressed to ʿAbū al-Qāsim Hibat Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn al-ʿAʿmā, who is identified in the opening of the letter as *al-ʿamīr ʿIbrīm* ‘the commander (at) Ibrīm’. In letter 33 there is reference to ‘the commander of the desert river’

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*w-al-masājid al-maʿmūra*). This was a Fatimid government office (Khan 1993a, 162). It is possible that the office concerned was a local branch in Upper Egypt.

(*al-ʿamīr fī baḥr al-ṣaḥrāʾ*). Evidently different *ʿamīrs* were operating at different localities in the region.

Some *ʿamīrs* who acted as witnesses to legal transactions are named in the legal documents:

Muḥammad son of the commander Kanz al-Dawla ʿAbū al-Makārim Hibat Allāh (46r:3)

Mubārak, the freedman of the most powerful commander, Saʿd al-Dawla, witnessed (46v, witness, 6)

ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad son of the commander Sabʿ (48r, witness, 15)

Within the body of the letters, there are some references to the *ʿamīr* Kanz al-Dawla, e.g., 12r:4; 15r, margin, 8; 29r:5; 32:2; 33:2, 7, 8, 9. In many cases within the body of the letters, there is only an anonymous reference to *al-ʿamīr* ‘the commander’. The identity of the *ʿamīr* in such references is not clear. Given the variety of the *ʿamīrs* mentioned in the corpus, an unnamed *ʿamīr* was not necessarily always the Kanz al-Dawla. The Kanz al-Dawla was the supreme commander in the border region. Other *ʿamīrs* were presumably subordinate to him, such as his son, who is mentioned in 2 and 7. It is not clear, however, whether the *ʿamīrs* without a Kanzi *nisba* were subordinate to the Kanz al-Dawla. The Kanzi sender of letter 9, Lāmiʿ ibn Ḥasan, complains bitterly that the *ʿamīr* Ḥiṣn al-Dawla ibn al-ʿAsqalānī had impeded his activities in the court of the Nubian king, suggesting that he was a rival to the Banū al-Kanz. When there is reference to an *ʿamīr* in the letters, the context often shows that he was itinerant and not always to be found in the same place.

The letters indicate that *'amīrs* were responsible for the execution of the instructions of the eparch. The Muslims, it seems, could not carry out the eparch's requests without the authorisation of an *'amīr*, as seen in passages such as the following:

The commander has written that he will arrive and he will give instructions for your (the eparch's) sake and for the sake of the carrying out of your requests. (2r:13–14)

The passage below from letter **16** shows that the writer, Ḥusayn ibn Ḥasan al-Kanzī, has been instructed by the *'amīr* to forward to him letters received from the eparch, indicating that the writer himself was not authorised to act independently:

The commander is expecting in great anticipation news to reach him from your honour. Ensure that your letters reach the commander. Your envoys are in contact with him all the time. He has instructed that "when a letter from the Master of the Horses arrives, they should send it to me with anybody who comes here." (16r:16, top margin, 3)

In **25**, we learn that the eparch has sent a letter to the *'amīr* requesting him to carry out the requests of the writer, showing that authorisation from the *'amīr* was needed. The writer is frustrated by the fact that the *'amīr* has not done so:

You mentioned in it that you have sent to the commander a letter and also sent to the executive official a letter in order that my requests be carried out. As for the commander, I visited him one day and he said to me "We shall carry out your requests," but I have not seen him again since and they do not allow me to visit him. I have stayed in the district morning and evening and my request has not been carried out. (25r:5–7)

The writer is expecting the delivery of a slave (*raqiq*). Evidently the problem is that the eparch's letter does not contain clear instructions nor has a necessary payment been made:

He (the *'amīr*'s slave boy) says concerning the writer who wrote the letter for the commander, "I do not know what he is writing. There is no instruction in it concerning the slave (*al-raqiq*), nor payment, only the mention of the commander and nothing else. So far no payment has been made for anything." (25r:11–12)

The writer needs to receive the slave so that he can travel to Nubia in order to deliver it to the Nubian king:

Write your letter to the commander that this slave belongs to the king and that he should bring it down (the river) so that the requests of the king be fulfilled out of respect. Cold will be upon me (soon) and I shall not be able (to carry out my business) and the Marisī wind will not allow me to arrive. So, tell them to hurry up to carry out my requests and deliver the slave to me. (25r:12–15)

Letter **29** is sent to somebody addressed as *al-'amīr 'Ibrīm*, referring to a commander based in Ibrīm. The writer indicates that he requested the *'amīr* Kanz al-Dawla to send him a consignment in Ibrīm, evidently since the writer himself did not have the authority to send it himself:

I inform you, my son, that I had sent you the advance consignment immediately after asking the commander, Kanz al-Dawla, may He cause his power to endure (to dispatch it), and he sent it with a reliable person indicating that he would meet 'Abd al-Bāqī and deliver it to him. (29r:4–6)

In letter **30**, which is written to a dignitary of some kind, the writer laments that he is unable to pursue some runaway

servants into the land of Nubia without the authorisation of the *ʿamīr*, but he is currently unable to obtain this since the *ʿamīr* is absent on a journey:

Then I learnt that they (the runaway servants) had gone to Ibrīm. You did not give instructions for any power to be granted to me so that I could go there to exercise this and overcome my current inability to act until the time of the arrival of the commander from his journey there. I have informed you of this so that you know that I have asked him to respond quickly. Whatever he replies to you, give instructions to ʿAbū al-Wālid ibn Ḥaḍīr to inform me of the decision of our lord (the commander), may you be granted success, if God wills. (30v:3–5)

The writer of 12, Lāmiʿ ibn al-Ḥasan al-Kanzī, states that the letter has been presented to the eparch by the agency (*ʿalā yad*) of the *ʿamīr* Kanz al-Dawla, indicating that he was in control of communications with the eparch:

I inform the Ikšīl... that my letter has been presented to him (i.e., you) through the agency of (*ʿalā yad*) my master, Kanz al-Dawla. I inform him (i.e., you) that my slaves are travelling to the king, may God cause him to live. (12r:2–4)

Letter 33 refers to the need to receive instructions from an *ʿamīr*. The *ʿamīr* is described as “the commander of the desert river:”

My father commanded me that when I needed any instructions, we should write to your father, the commander of the desert river (*al-ʿamīr fī baḥr al-ṣaḥrāʾ*). (33:2–3)

An *ʿamīr* was responsible for ensuring the protection of the Muslim merchants in Nubia and also had responsibility to protect the Nubian kingdom:

He also mentions (the need) to safeguard the subjects and protect the merchants who are travelling to you from among the merchant community (and mentions) the country of the king and its guarding and protection. (2r:14–16)

The *ʿamīr* was responsible for the “guarding and protection” of the king’s country by virtue of being a representative of the Fatimid ruler. This can be linked to the situation described in letter 22, which mentions a complaint by the eparch that the supply of horses (*kayl*) for the Nubian army by the Fatimid authorities has stopped. This indicates that the Fatimid ruler was supporting the Nubian army.

As has already been discussed, letter 9 indicates that the Muslim writer, Lāmiʿ ibn Ḥasan al-Kanzī, swore to an agreement between himself and the eparch in the presence of the bishop, the terms of which include service to the king and protection of the eparch’s companions:

Does not the Master of the Horses think that what has brought me and you together close in the presence of the bishop is that I provide him with provisions and I remain in the service of the king and the protection of your companions? (9r, margin, 11–v:1)

The protection of the eparch’s companions is likely to be referring to the protection of Nubians crossing the border into Egypt. It is clear from the following passage from the same letter that the writer, Lāmiʿ ibn Ḥasan al-Kanzī, was working closely with an *ʿamīr* and, presumably, representing him:

I said to him that a messenger would reach you. I have sent the horse to you together with Maḥmūd, the slave boy of the commander (*al-ʿamīr*). When he reaches you, write to me a reply to this letter and read my letter to the bishop. For there have been good relations between us. My slave boy has come for the sake of good relations. The king should not allow Ibn al-ʿAsqalānī to sour his relationship with me or the commander. (9v:12–16)

Protection of the eparch's subjects in Egypt, therefore, was also the responsibility of the *ʿamīr*.

The *ʿamīr* was responsible for punishing misconduct of other officials, as seen in 16:

On account of this call for help in the land, the commander (*al-ʿamīr*) has come down and reprimanded the lieutenant (*al-ḵalīfa*) and forbidden him to do wrong to anybody. (16r:8–9)

The following passage from letter 30 indicates that an *ʿamīr* had a lieutenant (*ḵalīfa*):

I hired a muleteer and travelled to the person who is his (the commander's?) lieutenant (*ḵalīfatuhu*) and he met with the Head of all of us (*rayīs kullinā*), presiding over everything, whose decision is the (supreme) decision and it is fixed. If you make a decision, it is (likewise) fixed. (30v:6)

Letter 6, which reports the news of the killing of the vizier Šāwar by Šīrkūh, indicates that the *ʿamīr* has been summoned by the new vizier Šīrkūh. The *ʿamīr* in this case was presumably the Kanz al-Dawla.

He (the new vizier Šīrkūh) has summoned the commander (*al-ʿamīr*) to him, and the commander is determined to

travel to Egypt for the sake of his (Širkūh's) expeditions and his aid, while I am staying in the country (of Nubia). (6r:8–9)

Letter 4 refers to military action in which the 'amīr Kanz al-Dawla has been involved:

The commander Treasure of the Dynasty (*Kanz al-Dawla*) arrived after victory, slaughter and God's victory. (4v:2–3)

The writer of 15 indicates that the 'amīr Kanz al-Dawla had set off on a journey:

The reason I have delayed sending my letters to you is only that I travelled to say farewell to the commander, Kanz al-Dawla, may God establish his good omen and his glory, so that he may carry out all his tasks successfully. (15r, margin, 6–11)

Letter 32 refers to the payment of *jizya* apparently by non-Muslims. This was conveyed to the Fatimid ruler by Kanz al-Dawla:

If the ruler, may God strengthen his victory, has validly received their poll-tax (*jizyatahumā*), through the services of the Pride of the Arabs, Kanz al-Dawla, may God cause his elevation to endure... (32:2)

#### 9.4. Šadīd, Šādd

Letter 25 mentions an official who is variously referred to as *al-šadīd* and *al-šādd*, which I have translated 'executive officer'.

Such officers are mentioned in other sources in connection with the Fatimid administration. They assisted local staff to carry out their duties, especially in the collection of taxes; cf. al-Maqrīzī (*Kiṭaṭ*, I:107, 405); Stern (1964, decree no. 10, line

31); Rabie (1972, 66–67); Khan (1993a, 447). They were military officers, classified by al-Qalqašandī as belonging to the *'arbāb al-suyūf* 'masters of the sword' (Björkman 1928, 99, 102, 162, 164).

In **25**, the executive officer is presented as working together with the *'amīr* to carry out the requests of the writer:

You (the eparch) mentioned in it (your letter) that you have sent to the commander (*li-l-'amīr*) a letter and also sent to the executive officer (*li-l-šadīd*) a letter in order that my requests be carried out. (25r:5)

I do not need to order you (i.e., remind you) to write a letter to the commander regarding what concerns us and also the executive officer (*al-šadīd*). (25v:9)

I told them he has instructed that I should only sell them (the slaves) in Egypt. So, send two letters concerning them, one letter to the commander and one letter to the executive officer (*al-šadīd*). (25v:13–14)

### 9.5. *Šarīf*

The term *al-šarīf* 'the noble one' occurs in letters **16** and **32**:

I inform my honourable lord, the Master of the Horses... of the arrival of a letter by the hand of your slave boy Ipisi on the matter of the place that was discussed previously with the *šarīf*. (16r:2–3)

May he (the addressee) undertake this and what is appropriate and customary, with our thanks and out of respect for the sons of the *šarīf* in our district (*bi-l-nāḥiya*). (32:7–8)

The term *šarīf* denotes somebody who claims distinguished rank because of his descent from illustrious ancestors. In Fatimid

Egypt this would be expected to refer to descent from 'Alī, the prophet's cousin and son-in-law ('Alids), or 'Alī's father 'Abū Ṭālib (Ṭālibids).

Various judges in the marriage contract **48** have the epithet *ṣarīf*, including the noble judge, leader of the Ṭālibids in the southern sector of Upper Egypt (*al-ṣarīf al-qāḍī naqīb al-ṭālibiyyīn bi-l-Ṣa'īd al-'Aḳā*), 'Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ḥaydara ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ḥusaynī (**48r:12–13**). The legal document no. 36 (407 AH/1017 AD) in the Genizah corpus (Khan 1993a, 210) refers to 'the glorious *ṣarīf*, a leader of the Ṭālibids' (*al-ṣarīf al-jalīl naqīb min nuqabā' al-ṭālibiyyīn*).

The *ṣarīf* mentioned in documents **16** and **32** in the present corpus must have had an influential social status in the Muslim community and possibly a *qāḍī* such as the one mentioned in **48** is intended.

## 9.6. *Mutawallī*

The Arabic term *mutawallī* 'administrator, governor' is used in sources relating to Fatimid administration as a title of the head of government offices and institutions (Khan 1993a, 106, 107, 175, 342, 358, 416, 434).

We have seen (§3.3) that the term regularly appears in the title of the eparch in the addresses of letters, in phrases such as *mutawallī bilād Marīs wa-'a'mālihā* 'the governor of the land of Marīs and its districts' (**21v**, address, right, 2), *mutawallī 'a'māl bilād al-Marīs* 'the governor of the districts of the land of al-Marīs' (**21r:2**), *mutawallī 'al-qal'a al-'ibrīmiyya wa-bilād Marīs* 'the

governor of the fortress of Ibrīm and the land of Maris' (7v, address, right, 2).

The term is used in various other contexts in the corpus. It appears in the title *mutawallī al-bāb* 'administrator of the gate' in 8r:4. The holder of this post was responsible for supervising the northern border between Egypt and Nubia (§3.5.5). The use of the term *mutawallī* indicates that this was a government office.

Letter 24 refers to a *mutawallī* in the entourage of the eparch:

His slaves (i.e., the writers) [kiss the ground] before him and report to him that it has not been concealed from him (the eparch) that his slaves (the writers) were dependent on the administrator in his presence without being in financial partnership (*bi-dūn al-qarīḍa*). (24r:4–6)

The term *qarīḍa* here seems to be a variant of the form *qirāḍ*, which is used in medieval sources to denote a financial partnership. The intention seems to be that the trade activities of the writers were controlled by the administrator although he has not contributed capital to this trade, which would have given him a clearer right to have a say in how the trade was conducted. The Nubian *mutawallī* here, therefore, had some role in controlling trade.

### 9.7. *Wālī*

The term *wālī* in the definite singular is used to refer to a governor of a locality. In letter 22, the writer refers to *wālī Qūṣ* 'the governor of Qūṣ' (22r:14) and *wālī bilādinā* 'the governor of our land' (22r:7), probably also meaning the governor of Qūṣ, who was the most powerful governor in Upper Egypt.

Letter **31** refers to business conducted with the *wālī*:

By God, take for me the price of the five portions (*ašqāq*), which are owed to me by the governor (*al-wālī*). (31v:7–8)

### 9.8. *Wulāh*

The plural *الولاة* ‘the governors’ is mentioned in letter **14**:

He has a right to your customary protection, so that he is able to have access to the administrators (*al-wulāh*) and others of your slaves and servants (*‘abīdihā wa-ḵadamatihā*). (14r:5–6)

Here the term seems to be used in the sense of administrators of various government offices of the eparch and so has the same meaning as *mutawallī* (§9.6).

Letter **16** mentions *الولا*, evidently a variant form of *الولاة*, also referring to the eparch’s administrators:

I would like a letter to be sent to all the administrators (*al-wulā*) requesting them to protect the places of Lāmi<sup>c</sup> and his slaves and likewise my places and my slaves. (16r:13–14)

### 9.9. *Qā’id*

Various people with the title *al-qā’id* ‘the leader’ are mentioned in the letters. A *qā’id* appears to have been of high rank and to have had important responsibilities. In letters **3** and **8**, *qā’ids* are mentioned who had honorific titles:

The bearer (of this letter), the leader (*al-qā’id*) Sa‘āda, may God decree his abundant good health, the relative of the noble leader (*al-qā’id al-najīb*), Humām al-Dawla (‘Hero of

the Dynasty') Ḥāmid, may God decree for him abundant good health, has departed. (3r, margin, 1–3)

The bearer of (this letter), who has travelled (to you), is the leader (*al-qā'id*) Ḥasan, the son of the leader (*al-qā'id*) Šujā' al-Dawla ('the Courage of the State') 'Ishāq, the administrator of the gate (*mutawallī al-bāb*). His status with me is firmly established and his rank is well-known, may God decree his safety and cause him to have good company. (8r:3–6)

Honorific titles such as Humām al-Dawla and Šujā' al-Dawla, which were bestowed by the Fatimid régime, reflect the fact that the bearers had some kind of affiliation to a government office. For the origin of such titles, see Rosenthal (2012). The leader Ḥāmid is also described as *najīb* 'noble'. The leader Sa'āda is mentioned in several places in the corpus (1r:3; 3r, margin, 1; 3v:3; 10r:4). 'Sa'āda' is most likely a personal name; cf. al-Dahabī (d. 748 AH/1348 AD), *Siyar 'A'lām al-Nubalā'*, XXIII:64. These passages also suggest that the office of *qā'id* was hereditary.

In the passage in 8, it is not clear whether the role of 'the administrator of the gate' (*mutawallī al-bāb*) describes Šujā' al-Dawla 'Ishāq or his son Ḥasan. The 'gate' is likely to be the entrance to Nubia at the town of al-Qaṣr, just south of Aswan. Al-'Aswānī describes this town as *bāb 'ilā balad al-nūba* 'a gate into the land of the Nubians' (al-Maqrīzī, *Ḳiṭaṭ*, I:352). In this place there was an armed garrison (*maslaḥa* or *musallaḥa*) post (al-Maqrīzī, *Ḳiṭaṭ*, I:307), which is mentioned in 19 of the corpus. This suggests, therefore, that the *qā'id* 'Ishāq or the *qā'id* Ḥasan was responsible for controlling traffic passing in and out of Nubia

and, presumably, supervising the garrison post. It is possible that both had this role. Borders facing non-Muslim territory (*tuḡūr*) were controlled by a military commander with the title of *qā'id* (Brauer 1995, 16). The men called *qā'id* in our documents were clearly military officers.

The letters record that the leader Sa'āda made several trips to Nubia. Ṭalā'i' ibn Ruzzīk, who was governor in Upper Egypt and subsequently vizier in the twelfth century, owned a powerful black *mamlūk* called Sa'āda (al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā'* III, 257). Sartain (1993, 28) speculates that this could be the *qā'id* Sa'āda who appears in our documents.

Letter 10 indicates that the leader Sa'āda was sent on a mission by the writer, Ḥāmid al-Kanzī, to carry out various tasks. This indicates that the duties of a *qā'id* were varied:

My companion, the leader Sa'āda, has set off. I have sent him to carry out various tasks that I have commissioned him to do. The Ikšīl is requested to send to specify the identity of the matters that need to be dealt with and send a request regarding them so that I am made grateful to the Ikšīl (for having the opportunity of carrying them out). (10r:4–7)

Letters 1 and 3 request the eparch to ensure the protection of the leader Sa'āda, who is the bearer of the letters, on various trips to Nubia:

I inform the Ikšīl... that the leader Sa'āda has set off on the ship travelling to (meet) him. What I would like to request from the Ikšīl is to give him the status of the people belonging to my servants who have been granted freedom, like my other freedmen and servants. The Ikšīl cannot show them opposition in anything small or big, but should

show honour to the aforementioned leader and care for him and for his companions who are travelling with him. (1r:2–7)

The bearer (of this letter), the leader Sa‘āda, may God decree his abundant good health... has departed.... So, please arrange for his (i.e., the eparch’s) letter to be sent to me with authorisation for me to offer the leader Sa‘āda respectful treatment until it (his work) is finished. (3r, margin, 1–3; 3v:3–4)

The sender of letter 1 was the Kanz al-Dawla, which is a further indication of the high rank and military responsibilities of the *qā'id*.

### 9.10. *Nā'ib*

The term *nā'ib* ‘deputy’ is used in various contexts in the corpus. As we have seen in §3.3, it is frequently used in the phrase *al-nā'ib 'an al-malik* ‘the deputy of the king’ in titles of the eparchs in the addresses of letters. In 26, the term refers to the deputy of the eparch Darmā, i.e., the vice-eparch.

Letter 16 reports to the eparch that people in the ‘southern land’, i.e., Muslims operating in Marīs, have complained about various officials, including a *nā'ib* of the Qūsa:

As for the southern land, people have been arriving from there complaining about the lieutenant (*al-kalifa*), the Master of the Shipmasts (*ṣāhib al-sawārī*), and a deputy of the Qūsa (*nā'ib li-l-Qūsa*). (16r:7–8)

The Qūsa were a clan from Upper Egypt; cf. al-Maqrīzī (d. 845 AH/1441 AD), *Rasā'il*, 136; al-Qalqašandī (d. 821 AH/1418 AD), *Nihāyat al-'Arab fī Ma'rīfat 'Ansāb al-'Arab*, 156. Members of

this clan were evidently operating in Marīs under the authority of a deputy.

In the same letter there is reference to a *nā'ib al-ḥaḍra* called Ibn 'Imrān. This appears to be the deputy of the eparch. He is asked to pay for the salary of a visiting Muslim official:

The agent (*al-kalifa*) mentioned that he has instructions and he adhered to all of these. He wrote to Ibn 'Imrān, the deputy (*nā'ib*) of your honour asking him about his salary and he gave him his usual salary. (16r:14–16)

The writer of letter 21, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alī ibn al-Zubayr, requests the eparch to grant privileges to his children through 'his deputies':

May the Master of the Horses, may God cause his power to endure, instruct his deputies (*nuwwābahu*) in Erkinun concerning my children. (21r, margin, 2)

This suggests that the eparch had more than one *nā'ib* and these served as executive administrators.

The term 'deputy' is also used in letter 9 to refer to the loyalty and allegiance of the Muslim writer, Lāmi' ibn Ḥasan al-Kanzī, to the Nubian king:

I am the servant of the king and his deputy (*kādīm al-malik wa-nāyibuhu*), and the one who fulfills his needs, but, by God, I experience from people only pleasure in my suffering. (9r:27–margin, 2)

### 9.11. *Kalifa*

The word *kalifa* denotes somebody who substitutes or deputises for a superior, which I generally translate 'lieutenant' to

distinguish it from *nā'ib*, which I translate 'deputy'. People with this title are mentioned in several letters.

In letter **30** and the marriage contract **48** the term is used to refer to a deputising judge:

He is the son of the Kanzī judge deputising for him (*walad kalifa li-l-qāḍī al-kanzī*). (30r, margin, 17)

deputy for his son (*kalifat waladihi*), the noble judge, leader of the Ṭālibids (48r:12)

In letter **30**, the term is also used in a context where it seems to be referring to the lieutenant of an absent 'amīr:

I hired a muleteer and travelled to the person who is his (the commander's?) lieutenant (*kalifatuhu*) and he met with the Head of all of us (*rayis kullinā*; i.e., the 'amīr), presiding over everything, whose decision is the (supreme) decision and it is fixed. If you make a decision, it is (like-wise) fixed. (30v:6)

In **16**, the writer reports that the 'amīr reprimanded the lieutenant (*al-ḳalifa*). This may have been his own lieutenant, though the context does not make this clear:

As for the southern land, people have been arriving from there complaining about the lieutenant (*al-ḳalifa*), the Master of the Shipmasts (*ṣāhib al-sawārī*), and a deputy (*nā'ib*) of the Qūsa. On account of this call for help in the land, the commander (*al-'amīr*) has come down and reprimanded the lieutenant (*al-ḳalifa*) and forbidden him to do wrong to anybody. (16r:7–9)

Elsewhere in the corpus, the function of the *kalifa* is less clear. In **16**, a statement about a *kalifa* follows a general request for the eparch to protect the writer's property and servants:

I would like a letter to be sent to all the administrators requesting them to protect the places of Lāmiʿ and his servants (*ʿabīdihī*) and likewise my places and my servants (*ʿabīdī*). You know that they all perform good services to the king and to you. The lieutenant (*al-ḵalīfa*) mentioned that he has instructions and he adhered to all of these. He wrote to Ibn ʿImrān, the deputy of your honour (*nāʾib al-ḥaḍra*) asking him about his salary and he gave him his usual salary. (16r:13–16)

This may indicate that the *ḵalīfa* was a servant of senior rank. Dozy (*Supplément* I:397), indeed, notes that the term was used to designate slaves or servants in the court of the Umayyads in Spain. The reference in the passage above to the *ḵalīfa* requesting his salary from “the deputy of your honour,” i.e., from the deputy of the eparch, suggest that he was based in Nubia.

The writer of letter 36 reports that the letter of a lieutenant (*al-ḵalīfa*) has arrived “by the hand of his servants.” It seems, therefore, that a *ḵalīfa* could have his own servants:

The letter of the lieutenant Mašal Ankara, may God keep him safe, has reached me by the hand of his servants (*ʿabīdihī*). I dealt with their business and they departed. (36r:2–3)

In letter 18, which was apparently written by the eparch Uruwī to a Muslim merchant, we read:

As for the seeds of wheat, I have delivered to your slave six irdabbs minus a third without any waste. Your slave boy has received them. These garments are for you. The lieutenant (*al-ḵalīfa*) has nothing (from me). (18r:4–6)

The fact that the eparch states that the garments are for the Muslim recipient and not the *kalifa*, suggests that the *kalifa* was working for the Muslim rather than the eparch.

The writer of **27**, which is addressed to the secretary of the eparch Uruwī, refers to a *kalifa* with the Nubian name Peti (if this is the correct reading). From the context, he appears to have held a responsible position in Nubia and had to be disabused of malicious gossip against the writer:

The slave (the writer) requests his honour to write a letter to the slave (the writer) so that it be in his hand and mention in it the lieutenant Peti and the Master of the Shipmasts (asking them) not to listen to anybody saying things like “Have we triumphed over his slave in the (trading) places?” (**27r:8–11**)

### 9.12. *Ṣāḥib al-Sawārī*

An official with this title is mentioned in several letters of the corpus. The usual orthography of the second word is سوارى with a final *yā*<sup>2</sup>. This is most easily interpreted as the plural of سارية *sāriya* ‘shipmast’. I translate the title, therefore, ‘Master of the Shipmasts’. This was presumably a title of an official responsible for shipping. It would correspond to the Greek title ναύαρχης ‘Master of Ships’, which is attested in several Greek inscriptions from the Nubian region (Hendrickx 2011, 317).<sup>2</sup> In letters **16** and **18**, the second word of the Arabic title is spelt without a final *yā*: صاحب السوار (**16r:7–8**; **18r:1–3**). This orthography is likely to

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<sup>2</sup> For further references, see [http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/Offices\\_and\\_Titles](http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/Offices_and_Titles), accessed 8 March 2024.

reflect the shortening of the final unstressed long *-ī* in vernacular speech.<sup>3</sup>

In letter **18**, which appears to have been sent by the eparch Uruwī, the Master of the Shipmasts is said to be conveying merchandise from the Muslim recipient to the eparch:

The letter of the Master of the Shipmasts has reached me.  
He says that he will take for me from you three garments.  
He has taken [ ] two garments in your name. The Master  
of the Shipmasts has received them. (18r:1–3)

We learn also from letter **27**, which was sent to the secretary of the eparch Uruwī, that the Master of Shipmasts acted as purveyor of items from a Muslim merchant to the eparch:

The slave will ask my master the elder ‘Ubayd Allāh to encourage him (the secretary) to draft a letter for me and send it to me with the Master of the Shipmasts. This is what I need the most from my master (the eparch). In the days of his father, my master the Master of the Horses, nobody opposed me in anything.... I have sent (this letter) to him with the Master of the Shipmasts and we shall request him to pay one dīnār as cash commission to my master the elder ‘Ubayd Allāh. (27r:17–v:8)

In **16**, the writer reports that a complaint has been made about the Master of Shipmasts and some other officials:

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<sup>3</sup> In Classical Arabic, the form السوار would be more easily read as the word *suwār* ‘bracelet’. ‘Abū al-Makārim (d. 1208 AD; *Taʿrīk al-Kanāʾis wa-l-ʿAdyira*, 323) mentions that *al-suwār al-ḍahab* ‘the golden bracelet’ was part of the apparel of a Nubian eparch. The interpretation of the title as ‘Master of the Shipmasts’, corresponding to the Greek title ναυάρχης, is, however, the preferable one.

As for the southern land, people have been arriving from there complaining about the lieutenant (*al-ḳalīfa*), the Master of the Shipmasts, and a deputy (*nāʾib*) of the Qūsa (clan). On account of this call for help in the land, the commander (*al-ʿamīr*) has come down and reprimanded the lieutenant and forbidden him to do wrong to anybody. (16r:7–9)

The sender of letter 23 to an eparch is the Master of the Shipmasts. In the letter, he tells the eparch that a Nubian called Merki had behaved incorrectly in Aswan and that he has attempted to stop it:

He entered Aswan and gathered the slaves of Darmā and brought me to them and said to me that “the Master of the Horses has ordered me to take over the administrative office.” I said to him, “Who has endowed you with the office before I come to take over from you the office?” (23r:9–11)

The Master of the Shipmasts requests further instructions from the eparch:

If you command me, I shall finish (my business here) and come (to you). Write and let me know. If you would like to tell me to come to you and return, write and let me know. (23r:17–18)

From these various passages it appears that the Master of the Shipmasts had the responsibility of liaising between the Muslim community in Aswan and the eparch and conveying goods, letters and money from the Muslims to the eparch.

### 9.13. *Simsār*

Letter 9 refers to a middleman called a *simsār* ‘broker’:

When your slave boy informed me that you needed the goods (*al-ḥawāʾij*), I delivered him (the slave) to the broker (*al-simsār*) and he auctioned him and acquired (the offer of) five dīnārs. I then went to your slave boy and consulted him concerning his sale and sold him for five dīnārs, on the grounds that there is nobody in the land and none of the people have anything. (9r:7–11)

As can be seen, the job of this broker involved holding an auction. The Genizah documents refer to the activities of *simsārs*. In many cases, they specialised in specific commodities (Goitein 1967, 160). It is possible that the *simsār* mentioned in 9 was a slave broker.

#### 9.14. *Kātib*

Letter 27 is addressed to *al-kātib* ‘the secretary’, whose master is the eparch Uruwī:

The slave asks my honourable master (*ḥaḍrat mawlāya*), the sublime elder (*al-šayḫ al-ʿajall*), the secretary (*al-kātib*), may God cause his strength to endure, to kiss the hands of my sublime master, the Master of the Horses, (U)ruwī, the son of my sublime master [Īsū]. (27r:2–3)

The honorifics used in the address indicate that the secretary was regarded as being a person of high rank. It appears that the eparch was absent from Ibrīm and the writer, therefore, asks the secretary rather than the eparch to draft a letter for him that will put an end to malicious gossip. This demonstrates that the secretary, in principle, had the authority to issue correspondence of his own accord.

The term *kātib* is found also in letter 25, where it refers to the secretary of an *ʿamīr*:

He says concerning the secretary (*al-kātib*) who wrote the letter for the commander “I do not know what he is writing.” (25r:11)

### 9.15. *ʿUsquf*

The bishop (*al-ʿusquf*), presumably of Ibrīm, is mentioned several times in letter 9, in the context of the writer’s complaint about the incorrect treatment of his slave boy at the court of the king at the hands of a certain Ibn ʿAsqalānī. The writer refers to the code of behaviour between himself and the eparch that has been sanctioned “in the presence of the bishop:”

Does not the Master of the Horses think that what brings me and you together close in the presence of (*bi-ḥuḍūr*) the bishop is that I provide him with provisions and I remain in the service of the king and the protection of your companions? (9r, margin, 11–v:1)

As discussed above (§3.5.5), the phrase “in the presence of the bishop” gives the act of ‘coming close’ a legal sanction, just as a legal act is frequently stated in medieval Arabic legal documents to have been conducted in the presence of witnesses or of a judge. The bishop, therefore, played a role in establishing the working relationship between the Muslim merchants and the Nubians.

The writer indicates that he has written a letter to the bishop complaining of Ibn ʿAsqalānī’s behaviour. Again, the bishop appears to have a quasi-legal role, in this case the role of arbitrating a dispute:

I sent a messenger, after I had informed the bishop about my suffering due to his (Ibn ʿAsqalānī’s) shocking

behaviour, I said to him that a messenger would reach you. I have sent the horse to you together with Maḥmūd, the slave boy of the commander. When he reaches you, write to me a reply to this letter and read my letter to the bishop. (9v:10–14)

### 9.16. *ʿAqīd*

The sender of letter **38**, Danī ibn Kannān, has the title *al-ʿaqīd*. In the lease document **44**, the same man leases some of his land in “Abū Fāris to the west of the border of Nubia, which is administered in his estate (*ʿiqṭāʿatihi*) assigned to him by the Office of the Ruler” (44:3–4). The term *ʿaqīd* has the basic meaning of somebody who is ‘bound by a contract or treaty’. According to Dozy (*Supplément*, II:151), the word has the sense of ‘military leader’ in some sources. By the late Fatimid period in Egypt, grantees of an *ʿiqṭāʿ* were mainly professional army officers, so ‘military leader’ is likely to be the meaning of the term in **38**.

In Fatimid Egypt, an *ʿiqṭāʿ* typically consisted of agricultural land leased to a military grantee (*muṣṭaʿ*) for a sum of money payable to the treasury, which, in turn, paid the soldiers a contractual supplement to their payment, called *qabāla*. The grantee (*muṣṭaʿ*) was not necessarily resident on the property; cf. Cahen (2012), Rabie (1972, 26–29).

### 9.17. *Mukārī*

The term *mukārī* ‘muleteer’ is mentioned in letter **30**:

I hired a muleteer (*mukārī*) and travelled to the person who is his (the commander’s?) lieutenant (*kalīfatuhu*). (30v:6)

### 9.18. *Ṣāhib al-Ḥarba*

The term *ṣāhib al-ḥarba* ‘master of the spear’ is mentioned in letter 13, where it seems to refer to a high-ranking military officer in the entourage of the king of Nubia. The writer is keen to reassure the eparch, to whom the letter is addressed, that his association with this officer should not be interpreted as sedition. This reflects the tension surrounding visits of the Muslims to the king:

As for their saying that I am the slave boy of the Master of the Spear (*ṣāhib al-ḥarba*)—I am only a merchant. I was the guest of the king and I lodged with the Master of the Spear like the (other) merchants. Not everybody who lodges with a person is his slave boy. (13r:9–11)

### 9.19. *Mu‘addī*

This term is mentioned in letter 20:

I put [the bitumen in them] and I loaded them on a ship of the purveyor of merchandise (*markaban li-l-mu‘addī bi-l-tijāra*). (20r:9–10)

It appears from this that the person called *mu‘addī* was responsible for portage by ship. The participle is used in 22 as an adjective qualifying the noun *markab*:

As for your saying that the ships conveying the horses (*al-marākib al-mu‘addiya li-l-ḳayl*) have stopped... (22r:5–6)

### 9.20. *Qāḍī*

There are numerous references to a judge (*qāḍī*) in the documents of the corpus.

Letter **19** was sent by a judge with the *nisba* al-Ḥusaynī, whose name appears in the address:

the judge 'Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn al-Fātiḥ ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusaynī, the prosperous and just judge, Trust of the Kingdom (**19v**, address, left, 1–3)

The writer of **21** was the son of a judge (“‘Abd Allāh, son of the rightly-guided judge ‘Alī ibn al-Zubayr,” **21v**, address, left, 2–3) and several members of his family were judges, including his cousin, the judge 'Abū al-Faḍl. The legal acknowledgement **47r**, which is dated 515 AH/1121 AD (during the reign of the caliph al-ʿĀmir), also mentions a judge from the Banū Zubayr:

Merki ibn Abrām, the freedman of the rightly-guided, prosperous, just judge, Light of the Kingdom, 'Abū al-Ḳayr 'Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Zubayr (**47r**:3–4)

Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845 AH/1441 AD) mentions this judge in his *al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*, I:181. He indicates that he had the *nisba* of al-ʿAswānī and was the judge of Qūṣ, who “was alive (*kāna ḥayyan*) in the year 471 AH (1078–79 AD).”

We learn from letter **30** that a certain judge called Nūr al-Dīn was a member of a partnership (*šarika*). Presumably a ‘business partnership’ is intended:

Inform the Master of the Horses about the person who is with you and tell him that he (the person with you) is the son of the sister of the judge, Nūr al-Dīn, and he is a member of the partnership (*al-šarika*) of which Nūr al-Dīn is a member. (**30r**:15–16)

The same letter refers to the deputy (*kalīfa*) of a judge:

So, talk to him and inform him that the author of the letter brought by Ṭāʿī is an elder sent by the judge. He is the son of the Kanzī judge deputising for him (*walad kalīfa li-l-qāḍī al-kanzī*). (30r, margin, 15–17)

The marriage contract 48 mentions two judges:

the noble judge ʿAbū Turāb Ḥaydara ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ḥusaynī, deputising for his son, the noble judge, leader of the Ṭālibids in the southern sector of Upper Egypt, ʿAbū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ḥaydara ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ḥusaynī (48r:12–13)

Documents 49, 51–53 concerning marital affairs were drawn up under the authority of “the judge Hibat Allāh ibn Makīn.” Within the body of letter 53, there is reference to the judge of Aḳmīm:

He (the bearer of this letter) went to the judge in Aḳmīm, may God cause his strength to endure, and he sent him to me. (51v:4)

### 9.21. *Raʿīs/Rayīs*

Letter 26, which is addressed to the deputy of the eparch Darmā, mentions an official with the title *al-raʿīs* ‘the Head’:

(I inform) that the bearer of these lines is the Head (*al-raʿīs*), may God decree his safety, and he must be shown favour and respect. (26r:3–5)

The sender of the letter was the Kanz al-Dawla, which suggests that ‘the Head’ was of high rank.

The writer of letter 30 mentions “the Head of all of us,” who is presented as being equipollent with the eparch:

I hired a muleteer and travelled to the person who is his (the commander's?) lieutenant (*kalifatuhu*) and he met with the Head of all of us (*rayis kullinā*), presiding over everything, whose decision is the (supreme) decision and it is fixed. If you (the eparch) make a decision, it is (like-wise) fixed. (30v:6)

It is not completely clear what the status of this 'Head' was. He may have been a senior 'amīr, though judging from 26 this was not the Kanz al-Dawla. Some Nubian documents refer to a chief called *ouran*, which literally means 'head', e.g., P. QI III 34.

## 9.22. Šarīk

Letter 30 mentions a 'partner' (*šarīk*), who is presumably a 'business partner':

Moreover, I would not have desisted from travelling to Ib-rīm in the current situation, but I did not know whether I had a friend or acquaintance in it (Ibrīm) after you departed from it upriver and Ṭā'ī was absent. So I desisted from coming to the partner (*al-šarīk*), because I did not dare, and, moreover, he could not have helped me (anyhow). (30r:10–11)

The same letter refers to a business parntership (*šarika*, 30r:16).