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The Time of the Chancery: Normative and Discretionary Dating in 7th–8th-century Arabic Epistolography

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Abstract: One of the signs of the early implementation of shared bureaucratic practices across the newly established Islamic empire are the highly standardized formulaic features of seventh- and eighth-century Arabic official documents. At the same time, the use of dates and dating formulae appears to have been less closely regimented compared to other components of Arabic documentary templates. This article offers an overview of the different dating formulae used in the early Islamic official correspondence with an emphasis on patterns of difference (e.g., how norms for date formulations varied depending not only on the function of the document but also on the issuing office, scribe, recipient, direction of the communication). In particular, it is argued that the comparatively high variability of dating formulae suggests that the dates were not considered to be a structural part of documentary templates and were therefore more prone to respond to social variables, such as corporate designs of single chanceries and scribal styles. Furthermore, evidence suggests that dating formulae (or the absence of a date) reflect the register of written communication.

Keywords: Early Islamic, Arabic documents, dating formula, scribal etiquette.

Introduction

The development of a reliable system for dating administrative paperwork at the behest of the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb is considered a crucial step for the implementation of a bureaucratic machinery in the Arabic language by medieval commentators and modern scholars alike.¹ Dated Arabic original documents on papyrus from the seventh and eighth centuries offer empiric insights into this par-

¹ On the development of the *hiḡrī* calendar in general, see, e.g., DE BLOIS 2021 and references there.

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ticular facet of the regimentation of administrative routines in the early days of the Islamic empire.

In past decades, scholars have often turned to these documentary sources in order to better understand the chronology of the Islamic calendar and its interplay with different regional chronological systems as well as notions of identity attached to specific views of time and history by different communities.² Despite the fact that calendars and dating systems used by the early Islamic administration have been repeatedly at the center of modern studies, the actual wording of dating formulae and the factors regulating when dates should be inserted in Arabic documents have hardly been discussed. Perhaps as a consequence of their comparatively irregular nature, dating clauses have also rarely been studied in the extensive research that has been produced on the subject of the formal taxonomy of Arabic documents in the last two decades.³ In particular, no attempt has been made to explore possible correlations between the presence, wording, and precision of dates and specific types of documents.⁴

This paper explores the role of dates in administrative communication with the aim of illustrating how “norms” for (or, rather, normal ways of) formulating dates varied depending on the function of the document as well as on wider social factors such as the issuing office, the scribe, and the direction and register of the communication. The discussion of the variety in dating formulae will focus on variations in the temporal framework described by the formula (by which I mean the smallest unit of time) as well as in the actual wording of the formulae. As will be argued in greater detail over the course of the article, in addition to being a key element of

2 For some of the more comprehensive overviews, see GROHMANN 1966, CRISTOFORETTI 2003, BAGNALL/WORP 2004, RĀGĪB 2007, TILLIER/VATHIEGHEM 2019, DEN HEIJER 2022, and GAROSI 2023.

3 The earliest study of formulaic features of Arabic letters on papyrus is JAHN 1937. The most influential recent studies on the subject are KHAN 1994, *id.* 2008, and *id.* 2019, DIEM 2008, GROB 2010, and KAPLONY 2018.

4 The most complete treatment of formal features of Arabic letters, GROB 2010, notably has no dedicated section for dating formulae. In the overview by KAPLONY 2018, dating formulae are included in the document-types’ sketches listed in the Appendix, but not commented upon. My own recent monograph GAROSI 2022 does not take dating formulae into account in the categorization of document types. To my knowledge, the only study that attempts an approximate categorization of dating formulae based on different type of letters is DIEM 2008, 855. Date formats can be viewed in the subtype descriptions sketched in the “TYPES” Tool in *The Arabic Papyrology Database* (<https://www.apd.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/apd/typology.jsp>; last accessed 29 April 2023). However, these sketches are, of necessity, approximations that do not account for exceptions within a subtype (for instance, *P.Khurasan* 22 is listed under the subtype “A.1 ’inna-ka ’addayta ’ilay-ya” – for which the date format is given as “<Wa-kutiba> + <Month: fi šahri> + <Year: sanaʿa>,” although the document does not feature the *wa-kutiba* part).

bureaucratic practices, dating formulae offer a privileged avenue for understanding the milieu in which the documents were produced, the agency of offices and scribes in developing their own style, and the motivation behind their choices. Conversely, reconstructing the norms that governed the presence of dates and their degree of precision also offers some insights for understanding the type and origin of fragmentary documents based on the occurrence and style of their dates.

Position, Styles, and Components of Dates in Early Islamic Arabic Documents

Dates are one of the first details that modern editors of papyri look for, not only to place a text in time but also because dates have a tendency to stand out from the rest of a document by their position and/or formulaic features. Anyone involved in the study of early Islamic Arabic papyri, in particular, would know to look toward the end of the document, as it is the most likely place to spot the familiar shapes of numerals and the easily identifiable formula *w-ktb*,⁵ which typically introduces the date,⁶ sometimes underscored graphically by the scribe by the elongation of one or more of its graphemes.⁷ Whether this search for a date will be rewarded or not, however, depends greatly on the individual document. In those texts that do contain a date, the latter might vary greatly in precision, from being as vague as a one-year timespan to being as precise as to give the exact day of the week (or even the exact hour of the day)⁸ on which the document was penned or the activities described in it took place (or were planned to take place).

One key to understanding the operational logic of Arabic dating formulae is by contextualizing them within the highly formalized templates that characterize the administrative output of early Islamic chanceries. From a formal perspective, dates proper⁹ do not constitute an independent part of early Islamic Arabic corre-

⁵ See *infra*, p. 387.

⁶ DIEM 2004, 295–296 and *id.* 2008, 855.

⁷ On elongations of letters to underscore salient phrases or parts of early Islamic Arabic documents, see GROB 2010, 188, 192, 196, n 112, 203.

⁸ On general considerations on the use of precise dating in Arabic documentary sources, see THOMANN 2019, 89–90; cf. also *id.* 2020, 44–47. No such precise dating is found in documents from the surveyed timespan. Cf. *infra*, pp. 392 ff.

⁹ Here and in the rest of the article I use “date” to refer to temporal coordinates given by scribes/writers for indicating the *time in which the document* was produced. My considerations do not apply to temporal references, which are intended to locate in time events/actions referenced in the

spondence but are embedded into the notarial section of the documents. This is the portion of administrative texts containing information on the writing of a document and is usually set at the bottom end of the papyrus sheet (Figure 1).¹⁰

This notarial part consists of two components: a scribal note or subscription stating that the document has been written (see below in this section), followed by the date. Correspondence issued in the name of an Arab official would habitually – though by no means always –¹¹ feature a notarial section. Conversely, only a small fraction of the contemporaneous private and business correspondence has similar scribal remarks and dates (less than 8%).¹² As for the internal structure of the notarial section, the sequence of the scribe's subscription/remark and date is not only positional but also hierarchical. The subordinate character of dates is illustrated by the fact that items of correspondence in which the notarial section is entirely lacking are always undated (i. e., the document itself is undated, in contrast to events that might be referenced in it).¹³ In fact, a scribal subscription/remark may occur in isolation, without necessarily featuring a date.¹⁴ Conversely, cases of (complete) dates not introduced by a scribal subscription/remark are virtually unattested.¹⁵

document, such as deadlines, descriptions of prior events, etc. By the same token, I have not considered entries sorted in chronological order in lists and registers as dates *proprio sensu*.

10 Exceptions to this rule pertain to documents that include added afterthoughts or summaries. See GROB 2010, 64–69.

11 See *infra*, pp. 401–402.

12 Out of the just over 130 Arabic private and business letters from the seventh and eighth century (some items are too fragmentary to enable an exact typologization), only 79 are preserved well enough for assessing whether they were dated and – in even fewer cases – how they were dated. To the best of my knowledge, only six pre-800 dated have been published: *P.RagibLettreFamiliare*; *P.Mird* 44 and 52; *P.JoySorrow* 24; *P.Heid.Arab.* II 1 v; and *P.HanafiTWOPaperDocuments* 3. Another dated letter, *P.Mird* 49, is too damaged to determine whether it concerned private or official matters and *P.HanafWill*, which is considered a letter by its editor, might just as easily have been a legal deed. For the purpose of this paper, I do not consider private letters containing references to contemporaneous events (such as *P.SijpesteijnTravel* and *P.YounesGovernors* 1) to be dated *sensu proprio*, as the temporal coordinates of those texts were not aimed at collocating the text itself in time.

13 See previous note.

14 For instance, *P.MuslimState* 4, *P.SijpesteijnArchivalMind* 1 *P.Berl.Arab.* II 26; scribal remarks not followed by dates are also attested in a number of private letters (e. g., *P.David-WeillLouvre* 23, *P.JoySorrow* 9 and 38, *P.Jahn* 12 = *Chrest.Khoury* I 98 (*wa-katabtu*) *P.YounesGovernors* 1 (*kuntu katabtu*), *P.RagibLettres* 9 b) and legal documents (*P.Giss.Arab.* 9 (VIII) (*wa-katabtu*)) as well as debt acknowledgements (*P.BruningSunna*) and registers (*P.TillierDebts* 1–4).

15 The only examples known to me are *P.DiemAphrodito* p. 272 = *P.RagibAn*22 (643) and *P.Khurasan* 22 (774/775). In both instances, the date is introduced by the particle *fi* (“in”) followed by the date. It can be speculated that here, too, the dating formula is intended as an abbreviation of the scribal remark: “(written) in ...” On the final scribal remarks in general, see DIEM 2004, 295.

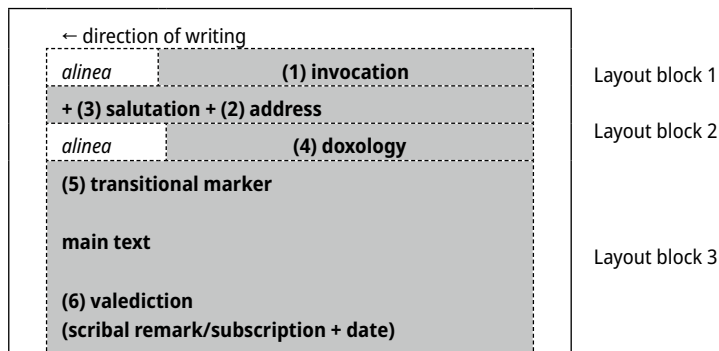


Fig. 1. Formal template and layout structure of early Islamic Arabic letters

Focusing more closely on the actual wording of the dating formulae, we encounter a variety of formulations, ranging from structurally different phrasings to the slightest differences in wording (see the Appendix). In broad strokes, virtually all dating formulae can be divided into two main typologies, based on the kind of scribal note that introduces them. The first and more common typology includes formulae starting with the subscription of the scribe, introduced by the phrase *wa-kataba fulān* “and NN wrote (it)”¹⁶ followed by the date.¹⁷ The second one is impersonal, whereby the date is introduced by the passive expression *wa-kutiba* “and it was written.”¹⁸ Regional preferences also appear to have played a role in choosing one type of formula over the other. Specifically, documents found in Egypt and Palestine display a general preference for dating formulae mentioning the scribe (i. e., *wa-kataba fulān* type). Conversely, Arabic letters (as well as other types of documents) issued by district-level officials in Central Asia usually use the scribal formula in the impersonal form (i. e., *wa-kutiba* type).¹⁹ Regional differences appear to affect terminological features of the date, as evidenced by the fact that

¹⁶ For the sake of readability, *wa-kataba fulān*-type formulae will henceforth be rendered as “written by NN.”

¹⁷ Appendix A nn. 1–20 and B ii nn. 3.

¹⁸ Appendix A nn. 21–26 and B ii nn. 1–2.

¹⁹ Thirty tokens out of thirty-one dated documents. Uses of *wa-kutiba* formulae in *administrative* documents from Egypt are only attested from the last quarter of the 8th century onward (i. e., a decade later than their first occurrence in documents from Central Asia). Given this temporal hiatus, it might be asked whether the spread of *wa-kutiba* formulae should not be interpreted as one of the several “Eastern” scribal fashions introduced in the Islamic West in the aftermath of the Abbasid takeover. On Iranian influences on the scribal culture of the Abbasid period, see in particular KHAN 2013, REINFANDT 2015, and RUSTOW 2020.

the appearance of the new moon at the beginning of the month is labeled *mustahall* in documents from Egypt and *ḡurra* in documents from northern Afghanistan.²⁰

When it comes to dates proper, the overwhelming majority of dating formula elements (cf. Appendix A–C), specifying units of time from the smallest (day of the week)²¹ to the largest (year). Typically, dates in early Islamic Arabic documents are absolute – with only a handful of documents omitting a reference to the calendar year.²² Throughout the surveyed timespan, all Arabic documents feature the *hiḡrī* era as the only method for reckoning years, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the Islamic lunar calendar is used for indicating months. Only a handful of administrative documents produced in Egypt in this period adopt the Egyptian months instead of or in combination with Islamic months.²³

Dated Documents in the Early Islamic Empire: Some Macroscopic Patterns

Currently, only about 230 published items of Arabic correspondence dated or datable before the year 800 preserve at least part of a date.²⁴ In about 120 of these texts, the state of preservation of the dating formula is sufficient to identify all its components. Finally, there are approximately a further 45 (sufficiently) complete official letters that do not contain a date at all.

Formal and Formulaic Features

A first breakdown of early Islamic official correspondence based on dating practices reveals that the percentage of the undated documents is not evenly distrib-

20 *P.Khurasan* 2 (764). New moon is also recorded in *P.Khurasan* 31 (763) and 32 (765), two acts of manumission from the same archive (not included in the Appendix).

21 More precise units of time can be found in later specimens of Arabic correspondence, see, i.a., GROHMANN 1954, 223–225 and THOMANN 2020, 90.

22 On relative dates, see *infra* p. 400 and n. 70.

23 On the combined use of Egyptian months and Islamic years, see DEN HEJER 2022, 499–519, who, however, is unaware of the existence of the same practice prior to the turn of the 9th century (*ibid.* 506).

24 Estimates on the number of dated documents have been drawn with the help of *The Arabic Papyrology Database* (<https://www.naher-osten.lmu.de/apd>; last accessed 29 Apr. 2023) as well as the internal database of the *Lived Time* project (last accessed 28 May 2023; on the database, see also DEKKER 2023).

uted over the different administrative levels nor the types of documents examined. Specifically, documents produced by the chanceries of provincial governors are invariably dated regardless of their content and formal (sub-)type. In addition, (with only one exception),²⁵ all administrative correspondence produced in the capital is dated irrespective of the rank of the issuing official. Conversely, if one looks at the paperwork issued by the chanceries of Arab officials at a district level, the percentage of dated documents is much lower; only a few are dated. Furthermore, at a district level, the typology of documents bearing a date is much more selective. To be more precise, while documents connected with immediate fiscal purposes, such as tax demands and receipts, are always dated, letters are almost invariably undated. This tendency is even more pronounced at the lower levels of the provincial administration, where surviving correspondence from or between Arab local officials is always undated, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Temporal Framework	Office	Level	Type of Document
Year + <u>month</u>	governor, overseers of the barns (capital), pagarch/ <i>'āmil</i>	provincial, local (capital), district	letters, tax demands, tax receipts, passports, orders for delivery
Year + month + <u>day</u>	governor, <i>ṣāhib al-ḥarāğ</i> , central <i>dīwān</i> , unknown	provincial, local (capital), district	letters, passports, orders for delivery
Year + month + <u>day</u> + <u>day of the week</u>	capital official, <i>dīwān</i> of Lower Egypt, <i>dīwān</i> of		letters, orders for delivery
Year + Arab month + Egyptian month + <u>day</u> + <u>day of the week</u>	Upper Egypt, pagarch/ <i>'āmil</i>		orders for delivery
Month + <u>day</u> + <u>day of the week</u>	governor, unknown capital official, pagarch/ <i>'āmil</i> , unknown local official	provincial, local (capital), district	orders for delivery
Egyptian month + <u>day</u> + <u>day of the week</u>			letters
<u>Day of the week</u>			letters
None	<i>ṣāhib al-ḥarāğ</i> ²⁶ , pagarch/ <i>'āmil</i> , lower local official	provincial, district, local	letters

Differently put, the instances when the scribe omitted a dating formula are clustered in the lower reaches of the Arab administration and pertain exclusively to

²⁵ *P.Christ.Musl.* 5, a letter by the *ṣāhib al-ḥarāğ* Ḥayyān b. Surayğ (in office 717–720).

²⁶ See previous footnote.

letters. To better understand this divide, it is pertinent to point out that letters *sensu proprio* differ from other types of official correspondence not only from a functional viewpoint but also in terms of formal structure. While most of the output of Arab chanceries has an epistolary structure (as most documents specify a sender and an addressee), *discursive* Arabic official letters show a prescript comprising up to five formulaic parts: they open with the invocation *bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, “in the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate,” followed by the internal address *min fulān b. fulān ilā fulān b. fulān*, “from NN son of NN to NN son of NN.” In the correspondence of high-ranking Muslim officials, the address section might be introduced by what has been occasionally referred to as a “monumental opening,” consisting of an endophoric reference *hādhā kitāb min fulān* etc., “this is a writ from ...”²⁷ The early prescript further includes (3) the salutation *as-salām ‘alayka*, “peace be upon you,” (4) the doxology *aḥmadu ilay-ka allāh allādī lā ilāh illā huwa*, “I praise God for your sake – there is no other god but He,” and the (5) transition formula *ammā ba’d*, “and afterwards.” Following the main text, early Islamic Arabic letters usually display (6) the closing greeting *al-salām ‘alayka wa-rahmat allāh*, “peace be upon you and the mercy of God” (Figure 1). Conversely, shorter administrative orders, receipts, and tax demands only feature a shortened prescript consisting of the invocation and the internal address without opening or closing greetings.²⁸

It is noteworthy in this regard that the long prescript template that characterizes discursive letters is a transversal feature shared by official, private, and business correspondence alike.²⁹ In other words, the notarial dating section of official documents tended to be omitted (notably in the letters of district and lower officials) in contexts where the social boundaries between private and official correspondence were blurred. This was more likely to occur in document types in which formal differences between a notarial and non-notarial origin were more subtle (at least at the level of formulaic features).³⁰

27 KHAN 2019.

28 For a comprehensive survey of formal types of 7th- and 8th-century Arabic correspondence, see in particular KAPLONY 2018 and “TYPES” Tool in *The Arabic Papyrology Database* (<https://www.apd.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/apd/typology.jsp>; last accessed 29 Apr. 2023); cf. also the bibliography quoted *supra* n. 3. For an account of the correlation between the length of the prescript and different types of documents, see GAROSI 2022, 176–183.

29 Exceptional in this regard is the “monumental” variant of the prescript with an endophoric reference, which is reserved for official letters.

30 On more secondary formulaic features that distinguish early Islamic official letters from private ones, see GAROSI 2022, 202–207.

The correlation between more elaborate notarial features and the standing of the sender is also apparent, if we project the type of dating formulae onto the milieu of origin of the documents. Documents issued by the highest provincial authorities are always dated by the active formula (*wa-kataba*) specifying the name of the scribe.³¹ By contrast, we encounter the impersonal formula *wa-kutiba* only among documents issued by officials at the district or local levels. In a few instances, the scribal section of the letters includes not only the name of the scribe but also that of the copyist of the letter. Here again, there is a notable difference between copies issued by the gubernatorial chancery, in which the name of the copyist is spelled out (*wa-nasaḥa fulān* “and NN copied (it)”),³² and copies produced in the offices of district administrators, in which an impersonal remark (*nusiḥat* “it was copied”) is preferred.³³ Thus, it appears that documents from the higher spheres of provincial administration tended to emphasize a more stratified bureaucratic hierarchy by accentuating the role of the scribe. Incidentally, it is worth noting that in the rare instances in which 7th- and 8th-century private and business letters are dated, the date is introduced by either the impersonal scribal remark *wa-kutiba* or the active subscription in the first person singular (*wa-katabtu*). The use of scribal subscriptions of the *wa-kataba* type thus made letters by high-ranking officials distinguishable not only from private correspondence (which usually lacked a notarial section altogether) but also from district-level administrative paperwork, which was much less likely to carry a date and usually featured impersonal scribal remarks of the *wa-kutiba* type.

³¹ The picture from the documentary sources is partially complicated by the group of letters ascribed to the late Umayyad secretary ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib. Two letters (incidentally the only dated ones) reportedly penned by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd in the name of the caliph Marwan II and addressed to the governor of Khurasan Naṣr b. Sayyār (letter 8 in ‘ABBĀS’ 1988 edition) and to the crown prince ‘Ubayd Allāh (letter 21) feature an impersonal notarial formula. On the reading of the formula, see *infra* n. 66. On the historical reliability of ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd’s corpus, see AL-QĀḌĪ 1992.

³² *P.BeckerPAF* 1, *P.CairArab*. 154 and 155, *P.Heid.Arab*. I 10, *P.RagibQurra* 3, and *P.Qurra* 3, all produced by the chancery of Qurra b. Šarik. The reading of the impersonal form *wa-nusiḥa* – otherwise not attested in the Qurra dossier – at the end of *P.Heid.Arab*. I 18, 10, [*wa-kataba fulān wa-nusiḥa*, should be emended to [*wa-kataba ...*]sā; the scribe’s name is probably [ʾ]sā, which is also the name of the scribe of *P.BeckerPAF* 4.

³³ *P.RagibSauf-conduits* 7 and 8 (Saqqāra; 751), both issued by the office of the district administrator Ġābir b. ‘Ubayd Allāh. While the copyist’s subscription in the letters of Qurra b. Šarik is placed in the notarial section at the end of the documents, the copyist’s impersonal remark in those sent by Ġābir b. ‘Ubayd Allāh is placed in the upper right corner and thus forms a text unit separated from the main text.

Functional Features

In functional terms, the accuracy of early Islamic Arabic dating formulae varied, as the most precise component of dates could be the month, the day of the month, and/or the day of the week – with (i. e., absolute date) or without (i. e., relative date) reference to the calendar year. With regard to purely numerical ratios, the distribution between the temporal frameworks defined by different dating formulae is disproportionate. To be more precise, dates that only record the year and month are by far the preferred ones in all the regions from which Arabic documents survive. By contrast, only 16 % of the Arabic documents have a more precise date, including the day of the month and/or of the week (Table 2). Finally, almost a third of the evidence is deliberately undated.³⁴

Table 2.

Temporal Framework	Number of (Complete) Texts		Type of (Complete) Texts
year + <u>month</u>	91	57 %	letters, tax demands, tax receipts, passports, orders for delivery
year + month + <u>day</u>	10	12 %	letters, passports, orders for delivery
year + month + <u>day + day of the week</u>	5		letters, orders for delivery
year + month + Egyptian month + <u>day + day of the week</u>	3		orders for delivery
month + <u>day + day of the week</u>	2	4 %	orders for delivery
Egyptian month + <u>day + day of the week</u>	1		letters
<u>day of the week</u>	4		letters
None	44	27 %	letters

In some cases of precisely dated documents, this is seemingly the result of scribal conventions. In particular, scribes unfailingly indicated when a date happened to coincide with the beginning (*mustahall/istihlāl* or *ḡurra*), end (*salḥ/insilāḥ*), or the middle (*niṣf*) of the month or year.³⁵ A clear example of this practice is found in the group of Arabic texts belonging to a certain Mīr s. of Bēk and his son Qarwāl. All documents in the archive with a complete date are dated to the month. The only

³⁴ I use “deliberately undated” to refer to complete documents that clearly and intentionally lack a dating formula.

³⁵ For further ways to designate sections of the month in Arabic papyri from later periods, see GROHMANN 1954, 224–225.

exception to this rule is *P.Khurasan 2*, which is dated to “the beginning (*li-ḡurra*) of Ḍū l-Qa’da, year 147 [Dec. 30th, 764].”

Overall, however, precise dates specifying the day of the month tend to be found in documents that have a more tangible temporal connotation, or in which a precise date was integral for the normative value of the document. Cases in point are 8th-century Arabic passports issued to Coptic taxpayers. These documents are letters, usually issued by Arab district authorities, confirming that individuals mentioned in the document had paid their taxes and were – for a limited amount of time – allowed to travel and earn a living in a different district than the one they were registered in. In the extant Arabic examples, the validity of the passports is relatively short, varying from one to five months, and the date of the document coincides with the first day of the validity of the permit.³⁶ The other type of documents that exhibit a tendency to feature more precise dates is short orders for the transfer and processing of goods.³⁷ In this type of text, the (statistically) unusual precision of the date is not strictly speaking necessary for the scope of the missive, as was the case with passports, since these orders do not specify deadlines. Nonetheless, the exactness of the date might be understood to have functioned as a form of control in case of delays and therefore as a rhetorical form of pressure to carry out the orders as quickly as possible – thus acting, possibly, as a substitute for explicit deadlines.³⁸

The question of the functional aspect of date formats is also intertwined with the general tone of the missives. By dating a document in a certain way, its issuer automatically “imposed” a time framework on the addressee. In particular, the use of highly specific dates tends to correspond to situations in which elements of deference are kept to a minimum or are completely absent from the document’s formula expressions. Cases in point are two groups of eighth-century orders for delivery found in the then provincial capital of Egypt, al-Fustāṭ. The first one is a group of demands dated to the year 720 and addressed to a certain ‘Ammār, requesting him to provide a third party with cattle.³⁹ The second group is the archive of an unnamed “honey master” (*ṣāhib al-‘aṣal*), who is ordered by a superior to deliver honey to the household of several officials.⁴⁰ The dates in these texts are unusually

³⁶ On this type of document, see DELATTRE 2018, 533–535 and PILETTE/VANTHIEGHEM 2016.

³⁷ For a formal categorization of this or these type(s) of texts, see KAPLONY 2018, 344–347 (nn. 1.1–1.5). Cf. also *infra* n. 43.

³⁸ A somewhat analogous rhetorical strategy is the frequent reference to prior missives in Greek and Arabic letters by Qurra b. Šarīk, scolding Basileios for the belayed delivery of tax revenues. See PAPACONSTANTINO 2015.

³⁹ *P.DiemDienstschreiben* a–d; all texts were issued in short succession on 21 June (a and b), 26 Sept. (c) and 21 Nov. (d) 720 CE respectively.

⁴⁰ *P.VanthieghemMiel* 1–3; issued on 26 Jun., 761 (1), 14 Feb., 765 (2) and 31 Jan., 772 (3) respectively.

precise, specifying the day of the week, the day of the month, as well as the corresponding Egyptian calendar day (in the case of the honey master's archive).⁴¹ This format is not restricted to documents from the capital. The same style of date by day of the week, Egyptian month, and year appears on a similarly structured late 8th-century short order for the delivery of olive oil found in the Fayyūm.⁴² Regarding tone, this group of texts stands out for their lack of most expressions of politeness typical of more articulate communications by unceremoniously moving on to the menial task at hand.⁴³ Specifically, they lack opening and closing greetings or eulogies towards the addressee. In addition, only the receiver is mentioned in the internal address, which further stresses the impersonal tone of the document and the hierarchically descending direction of the communication.⁴⁴ More generally, virtually all seventh- and eighth-century Arabic administrative documents in which a precise date is given pertain to situations in which the issuer occupies a higher social standing in comparison to the recipient. Conversely, the use of dates as well as the stringency of their temporal frameworks tends to be looser in items of horizontal communication.⁴⁵ If we assume that dates – and precise dates in particular – increased, if only rhetorically, the accountability of the receiver, imposing a strict time framework on the addressee is likely to have highlighted the descending directionality of the communication and the subordinate position of the receiving party.

The Role of “Corporate Designs”

Despite the general stability of epistolary templates, it has long been noticed that different chanceries customized several aesthetic features of Arabic official documents. The archive of Arabic letters centered around the mid-8th-century official ‘Abd Allāh b. As‘ad, for instance, comprises incoming correspondence from both the chancery of his direct superior, the pagarch of the Fayyūm Nāḡid b. Muslim, and a wider group of lower officials under ‘Abd Allāh’s authority and some of his busi-

41 *P.VanthieghemMiel* 1–3.

42 *P.World.* p. 141 a (776), the text is addressed a certain Ka‘b b. Zayd. As in the orders in the ‘Ammār and the “honey master” archives, the sender is not specified.

43 In both groups the address is directly followed by the transitional element *ammā ba’d* (“and afterwards”) and a verb in the imperative: *fa-sarriḥ* (“dispatch!”) in *P.DiemDienstschriften* a, c and d, and *fa-idfa* (“hand over!”) in the case of *P.VanthieghemMiel* 1–3. In *P.DiemDienstschriften* b, which is a reminder of a previous order gone unaccounted for, the main text is introduced by *fa-innā kunnā katabnā ilay-ka an tusarriḥa* (“we had written to you to dispatch ...”).

44 KAPLONY 2018, 347 type 1.4.

45 See *infra*, pp. 400–401.

ness associates. In letters penned in Nāǧid's office the opening invocation (*basmala*) is outdented by ca. 1 cm, a feature not encountered in the rest of 'Abd Allāh's correspondence.⁴⁶ Similarly, letters sent from the governors and the *aṣḥāb al-ḥarāǧ* show the distinctive layout feature of a strongly indented last line.⁴⁷ Conversely, this same aesthetic feature is not attested for documents issued at the middle and lower levels of the Arabic writing administration.

There is some evidence that the personalization of chancery styles also played a role in the selection of elements in dating formulae, marking differences both between official and informal documents, and between documents produced by different offices. For instance, in the dossier of Arabic and Greek documents discovered in the town of Nessana, all tax demands⁴⁸ issued by Arab authorities in Gaza display the same date format:

wa-kataba fulān fī kāḏā (month name) min sanat kāḏā wa-kāḏā
 “and NN wrote it in X (month name) of the year so-and-so.”

This is notably different from the way the only other (dated) private Arabic document in the dossier – *P.Ness. 56*, a bilingual certificate of discharge – is dated.⁴⁹ Two copies of Arabic official letters written on the back of a Greek register from the same archive are undated.⁵⁰ Returning to the prior example of the 'Ammār and the “honey master” archives, it is noticeable that while the dates in both groups of documents (which are chronologically set apart by roughly two generations) are similarly precise, they differ in terms of scribal conventions. In 'Ammār's archive, in particular, dates are introduced by scribal subscriptions and are given only according to the Arab calendar with written-out numerals. In the “honey master” papers, on the contrary, the notarial-plus-date formula is introduced by the impersonal *wa-kutiba*, the day of the month is given according to both the Arab and Egyptian calendars, and the days of the week and of the month are given in Greek numbers. These examples indicate the commitment to a certain temporal framework and demonstrate that a specific notarial-plus-date formula functioned as a sort of corporate design for this type of offices.

⁴⁶ SIJPESTEIJN 2013, 227–228.

⁴⁷ GAROSI 2022, 185. The same feature appears in the few letters from the different Egyptian *Dawāwīn*, see *infra*, p. 396.

⁴⁸ *P.Ness.* 60–67.

⁴⁹ The dating formula of *P.Ness. 56* is partially lost, but probably followed the format *kataba [fulān] sanat kāḏā sana* “NN wrote (it) in the year so-and-so of the calendar(?)”. On the dating formula, see also TILLIER/VANTHIEGHEM 2019.

⁵⁰ *P.HoylandDhimma* 1 and 2, written on the back of *P.Ness. 77*.

Another example of “corporate designs” affecting the formulation of dates is provided by a series of documents connected with the main archives of the Arab administration in Egypt. In 1898, L. Abel published an acephalous official letter from the Berlin collection with the unique scribal subscription “written by ‘Ikrima of the scribes of the *dīwān* of lower Egypt on Monday, ten nights remaining of the *Ḍū l-Ḥiġġa*, year 143.” On the one hand, the papyrus stands out on account of the unusually precise temporal framework used in its dating formula. On the other hand, the way the scribe is identified is highly peculiar. It not only specifies the scribe’s name but also the office that he belonged to – in this case, the retinue of scribes in the *dīwān* of Lower Egypt. To the best of my knowledge, this type of subscription is unparalleled in published documents. There are two other unedited documents that feature similar subscriptions, housed at the Beinecke Library and the Austrian National Library. Both of them feature a precise date and a note that the scribe belonged to “the scribes of the *dīwān*”⁵¹ and “the scribes of the *dīwān* of Upper Egypt”⁵² respectively. In fact, the similarities between these *dīwānī* letters extend to their overall script and layout: all of them feature an indented last line, an esthetic feature typical of the correspondence of the highest provincial authorities (the governor and the *ṣāhib al-ḥarāġ*) of early Islamic Egypt.⁵³

The unusually elaborate notarial section (and the unusually precise dating) of these three letters points to a particular group awareness of a class of *dīwānī* secretaries.⁵⁴ In this case, the notarial-plus-dating formulae appear to have carried the “stamp” of one (type of) office and, by extension, to have functioned as a signifier of the sender’s status and position.

The Scribe’s Agency

Any discussion on the possible contextual factors that influenced the phrasing of the dating formulae would be incomplete without a discussion of the scribe’s agency.

51 P.Vind.inv. A P 1418 ll. 5–8: (...) [*wa-kataba fulān min kuttāb*] *ad-dīwān yawm* [... *li-kāda layāl*] *baqiat min dī al-ḥiġġa sanat kāda*] *wa-[kāda]* “(...) [written by NN of the scribes] of the *dīwān* on [...]day with [x nights] remaining of *Ḍū l-Ḥiġġa* [a year so]-and-[so].”

52 P.CtYBR inv. 2719, ll. 1–5: [*wa-kata*]ba ‘*Abd ar-R[ahmān b.] ‘Abd Allāh min kuttāb dīwān aṣ-ṣa’id li-arba’ layāl baqīna min Ġumāda al-āḥir sanat sitt wa-arba’in wa-mī’a* “written by ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān s. of ‘Abd Allāh of the scribes of the *dīwān* of Upper Egypt with 4 nights remaining of Ġumāda II, year 147 (= 31 Aug. 764 CE).”

53 As all three “*dīwānī*” letters are acephalous, it is not clear if the peculiar scribal subscription was linked to a particular office and to what extent it depended on the scribe himself.

54 On group awareness among early Islamic scribes, see SIJPESTEIJN 2013, 229–238 and AL-QĀḌĪ 2014.

Addressing the question of the scribe's role in determining a text's wording is made difficult by the fact that it requires a sizeable number of documents originating from the same context, but written by different scribes. In the extant documentary record, there are a few examples of different scribes attached to a single chancery in the same period.⁵⁵ However, in only two instances do we possess sufficient evidence for scribes writing from the same office to really allow for a comparison. The first sample is a group of six late 7th-century tax demands issued in the name of al-Ḥārith b. 'Abd to the inhabitants of Nessana and Sykomazon. While in one of these documents the name of the scribe is lost, two of them are written by a certain Abū Sa'īd, two by Ḥalīd, and a fifth one by Ḥamīd. The complete notarial-plus-dating formulae in this small sample of texts follow the same format (*wa-kataba fulān fī kādā sanat kādā*) without exception.⁵⁶ The second and by far largest sample stems from the famous archive of the early 8th-century administrator Basileios, based in the town of Aphrodito. A large part of the archive consists of letters and tax demands sent to him by the governor Qurra b. Šarik, about one hundred of which are in Arabic or, in the case of bilingual documents, have an Arabic version. In the Arabic portion of Basileios's archive we can identify between 15 and 18 scribes⁵⁷ from the governor's office, with between one

55 Governor 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān: two tax demands are written by the scribe Yazīd, the letter *P.DiemGouverneur* = *P.RylArab.* I XV 59 possibly issued by 'Abd al-'Azīz as well is written by Abān b. NN. The governor Abū 'Awn 'Abd al-Malik b. Yazīd: three orders to the postmaster of Ušmūn (*P.DiemRemarkableDocuments* 2 and *P.RagibLettresdeService* 2 and 3) are written by the scribe Muḥammad while a fourth one is penned by Sulaymān (*P.RagibLettresdeService* 4); a letter possibly issued by him is written by Mahdī (*P.RagibLettres* 8). The pagarch Nāgīd b. Muslim: two letters sent to his subordinate 'Abd Allāh b. As'ad are penned by the scribe 'Abd ar-Raḥmān (*P.MuslimState* 4 and 7), a third one by Ḥumrān (*P.MuslimState* 3); a fourth scribe from Nāgīd's chancery, Muḥammad b. Nā'ib, features in two letters (*P.MuslimState* 38 and 39). Three orders sent by an unknown official to one 'Ammār (*P.DiemDienstschreiben* a–d) are written by the scribes 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (a), al-Ḥaḡḡāḡ (b), and Yaḥyā (d) respectively.

56 The date of *P.Ness.* 67 (ll. 6–8) should be read as (6) (...) *wa-kataba* (7) [*Ḥalīd?*] *fī ḡumādā al-awwal min [san]at* (8) *sab'in*. F. Day's reading (6) (...) *wa-zayt* (7) *fī [šahr rabī'] al-awwal min [san]at* (8) *sab'in* has no parallel among the dating formulae in the Nessana dossier and is a misreading of the clearly written *wa-kataba*. For the name of the scribe being written directly above the *yā'* of the *fī*, see *P.Ness.* 61 and 62.

57 See the overview by RÄGIB 1996, 21–23. NB, the scribe listed in RÄGIB 1996, 22 n. 14, Basīl, should be emended to Muslim and counted together with *ibid.* n. 7. An estimation of the total number of Arabic scribes in Qurra's correspondence depends on the question of whether one chooses to count homonymous scribes with different scribal subscriptions as a single person. In the Qurra dossier, there are three such instances: aṣ-Šalt (RÄGIB 1996, 21 n. 3) and aṣ-Šalt b. Mas'ūd (*ibid.*, 22 n. 3), Muslim (*ibid.*, 22 n. 7) and Muslim b. Lubnān (*ibid.*, 22 n. 1), and 'Abd Allāh (*ibid.*, 21 n. 6) and 'Abd Allāh b. Nu'mān (*ibid.*, 23 n. 4). I am inclined to consider the scribes "Muslim" and "Muslim b. Lubnān" as one and the same person since the subscription "Muslim" appears only in two letters written in the scribe's own handwriting, while he is referred to as "Muslim b. Lubnān" only in copies of his

and six (or eight)⁵⁸ documents signed with their name. Of all the scribes, only Murṭid and Yazīd⁵⁹ are attested as having written documents dated according to different temporal coordinates (month and day for Murṭid and month and day of the week for Yazīd). Letters written by the scribes Wāzi⁶⁰ and Ḥalīfa⁶¹ are only dated by day of the month and by day of the week, respectively. Otherwise, all other (complete) documents are dated by month and can be used to compare the phrasing of the dating formula by different scribes. Among the Arabic documents of the Qurra dossier, the most frequent subscription-plus-date formulation is:

wa-kataba fulān fī kāḏā min sanat kāḏā

“and NN wrote (it) in so-and-so (month name) of the year so-and-so.”

This formula is used by nine different scribes in 31 documents that preserve the name of the scribe as well as a complete dating formula (see Appendix). Several scribes in the dossier, however, use formulae that are peculiar to them. For instance, in the two letters drawn up by him, the scribe Ġarīr uses the format:

wa-kataba fulān fī šahr kāḏā sanat kāḏā

“and NN wrote (it) in the month so-and-so, year so-and-so.”

In the only recorded letter written by him, ‘Abd Allāh uses the slightly different expression:

wa-kataba fulān fī šahr kāḏā min sanat kāḏā

“And NN wrote (it) in the month so-and-so of the year so-and-so.”

In the only known letter penned by him,⁶² Wa[līd] uses yet another distinctive variant:

wa-kataba fulān šahr kāḏā min sanat kāḏā

“And NN wrote (it), month so-and-so of the year so-and-so.”

letters made by the scribes aṣ-Ṣalt and Saʿīd. Similar considerations apply to the homonymy aṣ-Ṣalt/aṣ-Ṣalt b. Maṣʿūd as the former subscription is used only in letters in which aṣ-Ṣalt is the copyist, while the version with the patronym is the one preferred in original documents penned by him. In the case of ‘Abd Allāh (by far the most common name of the lot) and ‘Abd Allāh b. Nuʿmān, there are no contextual clues as to why the scribe would use two different signatures.

58 See the previous note.

59 It is theoretically possible that the scribe Yazīd working for Qurra is the same person as the homonymous scribe active in the chancery of the previous governor, ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān. If that is the case, Yazīd’s activity would have spanned roughly 15 years (694–709), which is not implausible.

60 *P.GrohmannQorra-Brief* (709).

61 *P.Qurra* 4.

62 *P.CairArab.* 150 (709).

Furthermore, there is some evidence that the same scribe could use different formulae to describe the same temporal framework. This is the case of Yazīd, who uses both the “standard” *wa-kataba fulān fī kādā min sanat kādā*⁶³ and the functionally identical formulation *wa-kataba fulān fī kādā sanat kādā* (with no *min*),⁶⁴ a version also used by the scribe ʿIsā in the only known letter penned by him.⁶⁵

The use of different dating formulae by different scribes, and even by the same scribe, shows that clerks were accorded a modicum of freedom in determining the wording of the document’s subscription.⁶⁶ This also implies that the subscription-plus-dating formula had a different status when compared to the other formulae that constituted the formal template of Arabic documents (which are identical irrespective of the scribe). In turn, the existence of individual styles of dating formulae singles out the date section of Arabic documents as one of the few elements where we can recognize (if only in a limited way) the individual preference of the actual writers (as opposed to the author) in determining features of the documents.

Closeness and Distance in Dating Formulae

Since factors such as the function of the document, the issuing office, and the scribe’s preferences all seemingly played a role in determining the inclusion and wording of dates in early Islamic official correspondence, the question arises as to whether similar variables also played a role in determining which documents were deliberately left undated.

⁶³ *P.RagibQurra* 1 = *Chrest.Khoury* I 92 = *P.GascouQurra* (709), *P.Qurra* 1 (709) and *P.Vanthieghem-Correspondance* II = *P.BeckerPAF* 3 (709).

⁶⁴ *P.Cair.Arab.* 151 (= *P.BeckerNPAF* 7 = *P.BeckerPAF* 14 = *P.Heid.Arab.* I 12) (710). One cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that there were multiple scribes by the name of Yazīd working in Qurra’s chancery.

⁶⁵ *P.BeckerPAF* 4 (709–710).

⁶⁶ A useful comparandum is provided by the letters ascribed to the already mentioned ʿAbd al-Ḥamid al-Kātib and his mentor Sālim Abū l-ʿAlā. The few examples of letters by ʿAbd al-Ḥamid in which the end of the letter has not been cut out by the compilers feature the format *wa-ktb* (the edition has *kataba*, but *kutiba* seems more plausible) *sanat kādā wa-kādā* “written in the year so-and-so” (letters 8 and 21 in ʿABBĀS’ 1988 edition). Conversely, the only dated letter by Sālim (ibid., 311–317 n. 4) features the dating formula *wa-kataba fulān yawm kādā li-kādā baqīna min kādā sanat kādā wa-kādā* (“NN wrote (it) on day so-and-so (weekday) with so-and-so-many (days) remaining of so-and-so (month name), year so-and-so”), while another one attributed to Sālim’s son ʿAbd Allāh (ibid. 320–323) follows the format *wa-kataba fulān sanat kādā wa-kādā* (“NN wrote (it), year so-and-so”). On the question of authorship of the last letter, see AL-QĀḌĪ 1992, 263–269.

It appears that communications among officials who operated in closer proximity (both physically and hierarchically) to each other were much more likely to be undated. A clear example are the letters sent by the mid-8th-century pagarch of the Fayyūm, Nāḡid b. Muslim (in office in 730–743)⁶⁷ to his subordinate ‘Abd Allāh b. As‘ad. Of about 30 letters sent by Nāḡid to ‘Abd Allāh, all but 2 are undated. The paucity of dates in Nāḡid’s correspondence is possibly a reflection of the logistics of communicating with his subordinate. As pagarch of the Fayyūm, Nāḡid presumably resided in the district capital, Madīnat al-Fayyūm/Arsinoe.⁶⁸ As for ‘Abd Allāh, he was the superintendent over a subdivision (*ḥayyiz*) of the pagarchy and his archives suggests that he resided in the town of Narmūda (Madīnat Maḡī), about 30 km southwest of the district capital).⁶⁹ Thus, Nāḡid’s letters to ‘Abd Allāh would have had to travel far lesser distances than, for instance, those by Qurra to Basileios, and written exchange between the pagarch and ‘Abd Allāh could take place on a daily basis if necessary. Naturally, the short distance between the two correspondents would have meant that the temporal framework of the written communication was largely implicit, and might, therefore, not have been considered worth mentioning (explicitly). It is indicative that the only two of Nāḡid’s “dated” letters just refer to the day of the week,⁷⁰ a time coordinate that would only have been meaningful if the intervals between the sending and arrival of a letter was shorter than a one-week span.⁷¹

Furthermore, ‘Abd Allāh’s archive includes a series of letters addressing a mix of official and business concerns sent to him by lower officials and other business

⁶⁷ The Arabic correspondence of Nāḡid b. Muslim is edited in Sijpesteijn 2013 (*P.MuslimState* 1–23 and 36–37). On the date of the dossier, see Berkes/Vanthieghem 2020, 157n11 and Garel/Vanthieghem 2022, 88–89.

⁶⁸ Sijpesteijn 2013, 126.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 141–3.

⁷⁰ *P.MuslimState* 3 and 7; another letter, *P.MuslimState* 4 has a scribal subscription but no date.

⁷¹ Analogous considerations apply to two orders from the already mentioned archive of ‘Ammār (*P.DiemDienstschreiben* a and b) that specify the day of the week and of the month but not the year (which can be reconstructed from the other two documents from the same archive), as those orders circulated within the confines of the capital. *P.Ryl.Arab.* I II 7, a letter dated by day of the week and the Egyptian day of the month of unknown provenance, might represent a similar case (for the reading of the date, see Bélanger Sarrazin/Martin/Vanthieghem 2017, 222–223). Less intuitive is the case of two letters by the governor Qurra b. Šarik to Basileios that are only dated by the day of the week. Whether there was an intrinsic functional reason for dating the documents this way is not immediately apparent from the texts themselves. Both letters (*P.Cair.Arab.* 148 and *P.Qurra* 4) deal with delays in sending tax revenues to the capital and it might be speculated that, by dating the missive by weekday, the sender might have wanted to convey a sense of urgency. This type (and tone) of request, however, is hardly unique in Qurra’s dossier.

associates (as well as a few letters between other lower officials).⁷² These letters are of particular interest as they represent the largest coherent body of evidence for correspondence in the Arabic language at the lowest levels of the 8th-century Egyptian administration. The fact that all of them lack the notarial dating section reinforces the impression that dates in early Islamic official letters are of a rather non-utilitarian nature. In fact, their inclusion seems to have been determined by the will to express the notarial status of the document rather than immediate practical purposes and was consequently omitted in contexts in which highlighting the official nature of a letter was deemed less important, or where a comparatively less elaborate chancery system was involved. This is corroborated by single items of the contemporaneous and equally undated correspondence between lower officials from other regions in Egypt, such as a letter by a certain Yazīd b. Aslam to his colleague Petosiris “the scribe” and from locations abroad, such as two letters from Southern Palestine, in which two tax officials are admonished by a superior.⁷³

As the elaborate notarial markings of high-end official letters arguably stressed the distance between the correspondents, the question arises as to whether the deliberate omission of notarial markings (dates included) could function as a conscious expression (as opposed to a simple manifestation) of closeness. Differently put: could a feature (such as the absence of a notarial section) typical of the correspondence between “closely” operating lower official and private individuals be deployed to enhance the aura of familiarity of letters in typically more formal settings? A circumstantial indication that this might have been the case could be seen in examples of deliberately undated papyri, for which to a date could have been expected in view of their origin and the standing of their issuers. Particularly interesting in this regard are items of correspondence by higher officials in which the absence of a notarial section is coupled with a seemingly cordial tone. One example is a letter from the *ṣāḥib al-ḥarāğ* Ḥayyān b. Surağ (in office in 717–720), containing an answer to a plea from an unknown official.⁷⁴ Another example is a rare “private” exchange between two high-profile members of the Umayyad elite, Sahl b. ‘Abd al-Azīz and ‘Uqba b. Muslim, in which the former invites the latter to join the *Ḥağğ* pilgrimage.⁷⁵ Yet another example might be the undated letter found in

⁷² *P.MuslimState* 24–35 and 38–39.

⁷³ *P.HoylandDhimma* 1 and 2 (prior to ca. 690). The letters are copies transcribed on the reverse side of a Greek register (*P.Ness.* 77).

⁷⁴ *P.Christ.Musl.* 5. Some circumstantial evidence can be extrapolated from the letter’s formulaic features. I have argued elsewhere (GAROSI 2022, 203) that the valediction used in the letter (*wa-s-salām ‘alayka wa-raḥmat allāh wa-barakātuḥu* “peace, God’s mercy and His blessing be upon you”) tends to be used in private letters rather than official ones, which typically omit *wa-barakātuḥu*.

⁷⁵ *P.SijpesteijnInvitation*.

a ruined fortress in Sangar Şah, which has been noted by its editors for its tone of camaraderie⁷⁶. Ultimately, however, the evidence is too patchy and inconclusive to enable us to venture beyond mere hypotheses.

Conclusion

To summarize, the use of dates in early Islamic official correspondence shows that – unlike other components of Arabic documentary templates – neither the presence nor the formulation of dates (or rather, the documents' notarial section at large) fully depended on the formulaic typology of the document. Overall, the different formats and wordings of dates – though formulaic in character – were not quite as fixed as the other elements of the epistolary convention. Rather, the evidence indicates that dating formulae in Arabic documents were calibrated to fit specific social interactions.

The fact that the date was not considered an independent component of a letter but rather an extension of the scribal subscription is evident from the fact that communications produced in arguably more developed chancery settings tended to be more consistent with regard to the use of dates. While some date formats clearly responded to pragmatic constraints – as in the case of precise dates being used for documents with a stronger temporal connotation – others appear to have been the result of more arbitrary circumstances. The inclusion and complexity of dates and as well as the explicit mention of the scribe and/or copyist, in particular, seems to have been deployed to emphasize social stratification and to put rhetorical pressure on the addressee, most notably in letters by governors and other high officials. Within these broad outlines, the stylistic choices made by specific offices, group awareness among secretarial personnel, and even the personal style of the individual scribe were all factors for determining the elements included in the dating formulae.

Finally, whereas the inclusion of a date or the commitment to a particularly strict temporal framework was apparently used as a signifier of officialdom and rank, the relaxation (or outright omission) of temporal coordinates in written communication was often the manifestation, if not necessarily a deliberate expression, of closer social ties.

76 *P.Haim*Paper 3.

Appendix: Dating Formulae in 7th- and 8th-Century Arabic Official Documents

Abbreviations used in the table.

- CA = Central Asia
- Eg = Egypt
- Pl = Palestine

A. Conventional Sequence

Nr.	Scribal subscription	Day of the week	Day of the month	Month	Year	Regions
1	wa-kataba fulān			fi kāḡā (month name)	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
2	wa-kataba fulān			fi kāḡā (month name)	min sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg; Pl
3	wa-kataba fulān			šahr kāḡā	min sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
4	wa-kataba fulān			fi šahr kāḡā	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
5	wa-kataba fulān			fi šahr kāḡā	min sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
6	wa-kataba fulān		fi mustahall	kāḡā (month name)	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
7	wa-kataba fulān		li-mustahall	kāḡā (month name)	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
8	wa-kataba fulān			fi qī l-ḡiḡḡa	tamām sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg; Pl
9	wa-kataba fulān		fi mustahall	qī l-ḡiḡḡa	tamām sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
10	wa-kataba fulān	yawm kāḡā (day of the week)		min kāḡā (month name)	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
11	wa-kataba fulān	yawm kāḡā (day of the week)	li-kāḡā baqiyat	min kāḡā (month name)	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
12	wa-kataba fulān	yawm kāḡā (day of the week)	li-kāḡā baqiyat	min kāḡā (month name)	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
13	wa-kataba fulān	yawm kāḡā (day of the week)	li-kāḡā layāl baqin	min šahr kāḡā	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg
14	wa-kataba fulān		li-n-niṣf	kāḡā (month name)	sanat kāḡā wa-kāḡā	Eg

Nr.	Scribal subscription	Day of the week	Day of the month	Month	Year	Regions
15	<i>wa-kataba fulān</i>	<i>yawm kāḡḡā</i> (day of the week)		<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
16	<i>wa-kataba fulān</i>	<i>yawm kāḡḡā</i> (day of the week)	<i>li-*</i> (number) <i>layāl ḥalawna</i>	<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)		Eg
17	<i>wa-kataba fulān</i> <i>wa-nasaḥa fulān</i>			<i>fi kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
18	<i>wa-kataba fulān min</i> <i>kuttāb ad-diwān</i>	<i>yawm kāḡḡā</i> (day of the week)	<i>li-kāḡḡā layla baqiyat</i>	<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
19	<i>wa-kataba fulān min</i> <i>kuttāb diwān asfal</i>	<i>yawm kāḡḡā</i> (day of the week)	<i>li-kāḡḡā layla baqiya</i>	<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
20	<i>al-arḡ</i> <i>wa-kataba fulān b.</i> <i>fulān min kuttāb diwān</i> <i>aṣ-ṣa'īd</i>		<i>li-kāḡḡā layāl baqīna</i>	<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
21	<i>wa-kutiba</i>			<i>fi kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
22	<i>wa-kutiba</i>			<i>fi kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat * (number)</i>	Eg
23	<i>wa-kutiba</i>			<i>fi ṣahr kāḡḡā</i>	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
24	<i>wa-kutiba</i>		<i>fi kāḡḡā (number) maḡayna</i>	<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg
25	<i>wa-kutiba</i>	<i>yawm kāḡḡā</i> (day of the week)	<i>li-kāḡḡā layla</i>	<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)		SP
26	<i>wa-kutiba</i>		<i>li-ḡurra</i>	<i>kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	CA
27				<i>fi kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	CA
28			<i>fi an-niṣf</i>	<i>min kāḡḡā</i> (month name)	<i>sanat kāḡḡā wa-kāḡḡā</i>	Eg

B. Different Sequences

I

Day of the week	Day of the month	Month	Year	Scribal subscription	Region
		<i>fī šahr kādā</i>	<i>min sanat kādā</i>	<i>wa-kādā</i>	Eg
				<i>wa-kataba fulān</i>	

II

Nr.	Scribal subscription	Day of the week	Month (Arab)	Day of the month (Arab)	Month (Egyptian)	Day of the month (Egyptian)	Year	Region
1	<i>wa-kutiba</i>	<i>yawm kādā</i> (day of the week)	<i>kādā</i> (month name)	<i>baqiya/baqiyat/baqīna</i> * (number)	<i>kādā</i> (month name)	* (number)	<i>sanat</i> * (number)	Eg
2	<i>wa-kutiba</i>	* (number of day of the week)			<i>kādā</i> (month name)	* (number)	<i>sanat</i> * (number)	Eg
3	<i>wa-kataba fulān</i>	<i>yawm</i> * (number of day of the week)			<i>kādā</i> (month name)	* (number)		Eg

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