

- ١ بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- ٢ (من نبر؟ بن) قيس إلى يزيد بن أسود وعبد الـ بن ...
- ٣ (سلام) عل(يك فإني أحمد الله الذي لا اله إلا هو. أما بعد...)
- ٤ (فإن) الله لا (يحب؟) الظلم ولا الفساد فإنكم لا
- ٥ ... إلى أمر تأثمون فيه وتظلموا بيناً (؟) ...
- ٦ ذلك الذي (؟) تندموا وتوجعوا فهذا (؟)
- ٧
- ٨ فإنه بئس الرأي رأيتم ا
- ٩ تأخذوا ثمنها فإني قد
- ١٠ ان يزيد بن فائد ليس له
- ١١ له دفع (؟) فإن لأهل نسان نمة الله
- ١٢ ... له فلا تحسبوا أن نقر لكم فيها ا
- ١٣ لفساد ولا الظلم فإذا جاءكم كتابي هذا ف...
- ١٤ التي (؟) انا... فوالله لا ... من منها
- ١٥ ... ظلم ... تسلفته من أموالكم ... أنعم أن
- ١٦ تقبل (؟) ذلك منكم في ماله فاعلم ذلك
- ١٧ ... ولا يعزئك ... بين ...
- ١٩ ... السلام عليك ورحمت الله

1. In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate
2. From (Nabr? Son of) Qays to Yazid son of Aswad and ‘Abdallah (?) son of...
3. Peace be upon you and praise to God beside Whom there is no other. To business:
4. God does not like wrong-doing nor corruption, and yet you do not
5. (desist from?) a matter in which you are clearly sinning and doing wrong...
6. That which you regret and bemoan is (not something you should be seeking?)
7.
8. ... Indeed your way of thinking is despicable...
9. ... You take the price of it, but I do not (think
10. it right) for Yazid son of Fa’id does not have
11. (the right to it) since the people of Nessana have the protection of God.
12. ... So do not reckon that we approve for you
13. corruption and wrong-doing in respect of it. When this letter of mine reaches you
- 14-18. (then please do this by way of amends...)
19. Peace be upon you and the mercy of God.

This papyrus was thought lost, and so does not appear in the publication of the papyrus texts from Nessana, southern Palestine (southeast of Gaza), by Kraemer, though the account list in Greek that appears on the reverse was published on the basis of a photograph (no. 77; it is not explained why the Arabic was not published on the same basis, but perhaps due to its many lacunae). It came to light by accident during a search for new Greek papyri at the Israel National Museum in Jerusalem. The archive from Nessana, consisting of over 200 papyri, was found in the course of excavations of one of the churches of the settlement. The texts span the period from AD 505 to 689 and so are fascinating for revealing aspects of the life of this community both before and after the Arab conquests. The Yazid ibn Fa’id mentioned in this particular text also features in another papyrus (no. 56), which is dated to the year 67 of the Hijra (AD 686-87). What strikes one at once is the statement that ‘the people of Nessana have the protection of God’. The Arabic term for this, *dhimmat Allah*, is already mentioned in the Qur’an and becomes the standard way to refer to the guarantee granted by the Muslim Arab conquerors to the subject population that they might live in peace according to their own laws and that their life and property would be respected. However, the discussions about the nature and content of these guarantees are only known from legal works that date from the late eighth century or

later. It is, therefore, fascinating to see the term occur in this papyrus; the question is can we, given the fragmentary nature of the papyrus, understand what was meant by it at this early time?

C. Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana 3: non-literary papyri* (Princeton, 1958).

R. Stroumsa, *People and Identities in Nessana* (PhD thesis; Duke University, 2008) – available online.

For reference, the Koran text referred to is as follows (chapter 9, verses 8-10):

If they (the idolaters) were to get the upper hand over you, they would not respect any tie of kinship with you or covenant (*dhimma*). They please you with their tongues, but their hearts are against you and most of them are lawbreakers. 9:9. They have sold God's message for a trifling gain, and barred others from His path. How evil their actions are! 9:10. Where believers are concerned, they respect no tie of kinship or covenant (*dhimma*). They are the ones who are committing aggression.