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## The Port of Al-Qulzum and its Importance in the Light of the Arabic Papyri of the Period from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.H

Wafaa Ibrahim Mahmoud<sup>a</sup>

Samah Abd El Rahman Mahmoud<sup>b</sup>

Mohammed Mohammed Morsy<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> PhD Researcher, Tourist Guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University

<sup>b</sup> Professor, Tourist Guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University

<sup>c</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Arcology and Civilization, Faculty of Arts, Helwan University

### Keywords

Qulzum;  
the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen;  
home for shipbuilding.

### Abstract

This research deal with reading and analysis an Arabic papyrus from the first to third century, which document some of aspects in the port of Qulzum in that time like the importance of Qulzum as commercial port in Islamic times since the beginning of the Arab conquest of Egypt , it was an ancient and important commercial port located on the northern tip of the Red Sea, and has become the main port of Egypt in the Red Sea, and the digging of the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen connecting between Fustat and Qulzum led to an increase in its importance as commercial center for internal and external trade, , and there was a shipbuilding house for the Islamic fleet in Qulzum, The research also deals with the importance of Arabic papyri in documenting the various aspects of Islamic civilization, and the port of Qulzum was highlighted and its importance was documented through the Arabic papyri and the information and content mentioned therein indicates the use of Qulzum as an important port and a home for shipbuilding and supplying the army and the fleet with soldiers and belongings. One of the goals of the research was clarify the role and importance of Arabic papyri in documenting aspects of Islamic civilization, economic, and commercial information in the port of Qulzum.

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## 1. Introduction

The study of Arabic papyri is of great importance to many researchers who have dealt with the study of Arabic papyri, trying to monitor the importance of these papyri and their content in documenting important information about the various manifestations of Islamic civilization, and employing the role of these Arabic papyri in this research in documenting information about Qulzum as an important commercial port and a home for the manufacture of ships for the Islamic fleet, hence the study of Qulzum is a fundamental value that goes in two directions 'The first direction is a historical study of Qulzum as an important commercial port since the beginning of the Arab conquest of Egypt, This allowed Egypt to supply grains to the Hijaz via river ships<sup>1</sup>. And the role of Qulzum evolved later and was used for trade between Egypt and the Hijaz. The ships also used to sail in the Gulf of Amir al-Mu'mineen to the Red Sea, and pass through Qulzum to the Hejaz, Yemen, and India<sup>2</sup>, and its role as a shipbuilding center supplies the Islamic fleet with ships, soldiers , Clear references in some Arab correspondences indicate the use of Al-Qulzum as a shipbuilding center, as mentioned in the correspondence of the Umayyad governor Qura bin Shareek, letter number (1346), stating "We have imposed on your court to send supplies to Al-Qulzum for cleaning and repairing ships and providing the necessary supplies," indicating the sending of tools for maintenance and cleaning of ships to Al-Qulzum because it was a shipbuilding center, It was considered a shipbuilding center<sup>3</sup> under the rule of Abdul Rahman bin Elias<sup>4</sup> 'The second direction is to study the Arabic papyri, which document the importance of Al-Qulzum, which we talked about as an important commercial port and a home for the shipbuilding industry, in addition to benefiting from some historical studies and linguistic dictionaries related to the words related to the fleet, trade and other terms mentioned in the papyri, to highlight that link between the historical study of the Qulzum and the Arabic papyri and their role in documenting this importance, the study sought to try to clarify this link and benefit from the sources in the theoretical field provided by historical sources, and in the documentary field through the Arabic papyri that.

## 2. The importance of study:

- \* Shed light on the importance of the port of Al-Qulzum and its role in Islamic times
- \* The importance of the port of Al-Qulzum as an important commercial port
- \* The importance of the keel as an important role for the shipbuilding industry

<sup>1</sup> سيده إسماعيل الكاشف، مصر في فجر الإسلام من الفتح العربي إلي قيام الدولة الطولونية، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، ص300، 1994م.

<sup>2</sup> هويدا عبد العظيم ، المجتمع في مصر الإسلامية من الفتح العربي الي العصر الفاطمي، ج1، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1994م، ص205

<sup>3</sup> سعيد مغاوري محمد، بحوث ودراسات في البريدات العربية، المجلس الأعلى للآثار، وزارة الثقافة، ص 88

<sup>4</sup> سعيد مغاوري، بحوث ودراسات في البريدات العربية، ج1، ص 89.

\* Shed light on the importance of Arabic papyri in documenting important historical, social, and commercial events and highlighting the importance of Qulzum since the beginning of the Arab conquest.

### 3. Methodology

The research was based on the descriptive and analytical approach, which includes the description and analysis of the papyri mentioned in the research.

#### **First: A Brief history of Qulzum: -**

Al-Qulzum<sup>5</sup>, with a pronounced "qaaf", followed by a silent "lam", then a connected "zay" and "Meem". Al-Qulzum refers to swallowing something, and it is said to "Qulzum" something when it is swallowed. The sea was named "Bahr Al-Qulzum" due to its swallowing of what it carries, and it is the place where Pharaoh drowned. Al-Qulzum<sup>6</sup> is a city in Egypt located on the coast of the sea. The sea is known as the "Sea of Al-Qulzum", and it was used by merchants for their ships. It was named Al-Qulzum because it is in a narrow passage between mountains.

Al-Qulzum refers to narrow passages and straits. It is a small city with precise construction, lacking in vegetation and trees, but it is irrigated from the land of Egypt. The sea narrows by it until it resembles a river. Similarly, it passes north of the city of Al-Qulzum for ten miles and then breaks off. The people of Al-Qulzum drink from an island there and bring water from Suez on their backs. There is a well on the road to Egypt, three miles from the city of Al-Qulzum. Among their popular sayings: "eating goat meat and drinking Suez water". One of its wonders is that its goats are transported on the tracks without pastures or food, only eating dirt, yet they are very fat. The predecessors said that it connects between the sea Al-Qulzum, and the Mediterranean Sea are keen on building the land and fertilizing the country, and they prevented the Romans from invading the land of the Hijaz out of fear that the Romans would invade it.

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<sup>5</sup> ياقوت بن عبدالله بن الحموي الرومي البغدادي، معجم البلدان، دار الصادر، بيروت، ج4، ص 387

<sup>6</sup> محمد بن عبد المنعم الحميري، تحقيق د. إحسان عباس، الروض المعطار في خير الأقطار معجم جغرافي مع فهرس شامله، مكتبة لبنان، ساحة رياض الصلح، مطابع هابديليرغ، بيروت، 1975م، ص 466

## **Second: Geographically, Qulzum location:**

The location of the city of Al-Qulzum: The city of Al-Qulzum, which is Suez<sup>7</sup>, is in the third region, and it is fifty-three degrees west of the Morocco line, which is three thousand seven hundred and thirty-three miles and a third of a mile, and it is twenty-eight degrees north of the equator, which is two thousand five hundred and thirty-three miles and a third of a mile. If the traveler goes east from Egypt, he will reach the sea of Al-Qulzum<sup>8</sup>.

## **As for Al-Qulzum:**

it is a city on the seashore, and there are thirty farsakhs between it and Egypt. It is a city on the northern tip of the Red Sea, and the Red Sea (the Red Sea) is attributed to it. In the crown of the bride, it is mentioned that it was ruined, and another city was built in its place, called Suez, and its ruins are still standing among the residences of the Suez port under the name of Qal'at al-Qulzum<sup>9</sup>.

## **The Sea of Qulzum:**

It is a branch of the ocean, branching off at Aden and heading north. When it reaches Al-Qulzum, it is said to be 200 farsakhs wide, separated from Egypt by mountains and a waterless, plant less desert. From there, one can travel from the sea to Mecca and from Mecca to the city of Jeddah. For those who want to travel to Mecca from Egypt, they must head east. When they reach Al-Qulzum, they will find two routes, one by land and the other by sea. Mecca can be reached from the first route in fifteen days, and most caravans coming from Egypt take this route. If one travels by sea, they will reach the Hijaz in twenty days, then to Medina in three days, and from Medina to Mecca is one hundred farsakhs.

<sup>7</sup> إسحاق بن الحسن بن ابي الحسين الزيات، تحقيق د. عمرو عبد العزيز، ذكر الأقاليم واختلافها وأحوالها وأبعادها عن خط الاستواء

والمدن المشهورة فيها، مركز جمعة الماجد للثقافة والتراث قسم الدراسات والنشر والشؤون الخارجية، ط1، 2019م، ص 134

<sup>8</sup> محمد رمزي، القاموس الجغرافي للبلاد المصرية من عهد قدماء المصريين إلى سنة 1945، القسم الأول، البلاد المندرسة، مطبعة

دار الكتب المصرية، القاهرة، 1953-1954م، ص99

<sup>9</sup> ناصر خسرو علوي، سفر نامه2، مطبعة لجنة التأليف والترجمة والنشر، القاهرة، ط1، 1945م، ص45

10(Plate No. 1)



10 حسين مؤنس، أطلس تاريخ الإسلام، الزهراء للإعلام العربي، القاهرة، ط1، 1987م، ص119

An illustrative map of the conquest of Egypt and clearly shows the sea of Qulzum and its branches all the way to the city of Qulzum (From the book Atlas of the history of Islam P. 119)

### **The great importance of Al-Qulzum as a commercial center and shipbuilding site**

In the era of the Ptolemy's, the task of naval fleets was not limited to military operations, expanding the state's possessions, and protecting its independence only, but there were also commercial fleets<sup>11</sup> that were of great importance in the economic aspect of the country. There were two main trade routes: the first was the northern route between Egypt and the Greek colonies scattered on the shores of the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, and the second was the southeastern route to the countries located on the shores of the Red Sea, even to the lands of Somalia to the south. Egyptian ships used to sail from the city of Al-Qulzum (Suez) to Aden and the lands of the Arabian Peninsula.

### **Egypt had three main trade Routes:**

First: the maritime route, second, the river route, third, the desert route. As for the maritime route, Egypt had two.

### **The Red Sea Route:**

The Red Sea route was the most important trade route between the East and the West. Goods sent from India and China always took the sea route, and commercial ships sometimes continued to sail in the Red Sea to Qulzum (now Suez), then proceeded through the Nile canal connecting the Red Sea and the Nile via the inland lakes. This canal was initially dug by the pharaohs and later re-excavated by the Ptolemy's and the Romans. This canal greatly facilitated traders and was used to reach Alexandria via the sea at the port of Qulzum, which was known as the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen<sup>12</sup>.

### **Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen:**

This gulf is attributed to the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khatib, who sent a message to Amr ibn al-As in the year of Ramada 18 AH/620 CE complaining about the scarcity of food in the Hijaz and ordered him to dig a gulf from the Nile to flow into the sea. This allowed Egypt to supply grains to the Hijaz via river ships<sup>13</sup>. And the role of this gulf

<sup>11</sup> محمد بن عبد المنعم الحميري، الروض المعطار في خبر الأقطار، ص466

<sup>12</sup> سعاد ماهر، البحرية في مصر الإسلامية وأثارها الباقية، وزارة الثقافة دار الكاتب العربي للطباعة والنشر، ص74.

<sup>13</sup> سيده إسماعيل الكاشف، مصر في فجر الإسلام من الفتح العربي إلى قيام الدولة الطولونية، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1994م، ص300.

evolved later and was used for trade between Egypt and the Hijaz. The Nile boats would unload their cargo in the Qulzum, and then carry what was in the Qulzum from the Hijaz and elsewhere to Egypt. This gulf, which connects the Red Sea to the Nile, was dug in less than a year. Al-Maqrizi mentioned that it was dug in six months, and in the seventh month the ships arrived in the Hijaz. Pilgrims of the sea would ride from the coast of Tennis and travel in it, then transfer to larger boats in the Qulzum. The ships also sailed in the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen to the Red Sea, passing the sea pilgrims used to ride from the coast of Tennis and walk in it, and then they would transfer by the Qulzum in the large boats. The ships also used to sail in the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen to the Red Sea, and pass through the sea to the Hejaz, Yemen, and India<sup>14</sup>. The name of the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen is mentioned in the document bearing number (1346), the text of which says "I had written to you a letter about the goods of Qulzum in your land, and I ordered you to expedite this before the waters of the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen decrease. Until today, you have not sent anything of the goods." In this document, he is reminded to send the goods as quickly as possible before the waters of the Gulf of Amir Al-Mu'mineen decrease and it becomes difficult to sail the ships in it, so he must send them by land, and the land route to Qulzum was extremely difficult.

### **Port of Al-Qulzum:**

Third of the Egyptian ports<sup>15</sup>, its old name was Klisima, and the Arabs called it Al-Qulzum (4th century AH / 10th century AD). A small village called Al-Suez emerged south of Al-Qulzum, and it didn't take long before it was encompassed by Al-Qulzum and became a port of Egypt on the Red Sea. The city grew and its population increased when the waters of the Nile reached it through the Al-Suez Canal (1869 AD). Ibn Khurdadhbeh said about the merchants, "They sail the western sea and depart with merchandise, carrying their goods on their backs to Al-Qulzum, a distance of twenty-five farsakhs between them. Then they sail the eastern sea from Al-Qulzum to Jeddah for trade, then they travel to Sindh, India, and China. From Al-Qulzum, people descend into the wilderness and desert, six stages to Aylah, and they stock up on water for these six stages. It is said that there are three stages between Al-Qulzum and the Mediterranean Sea." Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamdani<sup>16</sup> mentioned the active trade movement in many Egyptian ports through maritime trade, and the transfer of many commercial goods and agricultural crops, including the trade of grains and cereals,

<sup>14</sup> هويدا عبد العظيم ، المجتمع في مصر الإسلامية من الفتح العربي الي العصر الفاطمي، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، ط1، ج1، 1994م، ص205

<sup>15</sup> هويدا عبد العظيم، نفس المرجع، ص208

<sup>16</sup> موسوعة سفير للتاريخ الإسلامي، ج11، ص39

with wheat being the most prominent. It is worth mentioning that the Jewish merchants who used to come from the Frankish lands.

### **Al-Qulzum is one of Egypt's prominent ports for wheat transportation and trade, and a significant center for shipbuilding through Arab correspondences:**

Al-Qulzum is a port located on the Red Sea, and it is an important link for connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the eastern seas. It was considered a shipbuilding center<sup>17</sup> under the rule of Abdul Rahman bin Elias<sup>18</sup>. In the year 91 AH, Muhammad bin Abi Habibah was the supervisor there. Clear references in some Arab correspondences indicate the use of Al-Qulzum as a shipbuilding center, as mentioned in the correspondence of the Umayyad governor Qura bin Shareek, letter number (1346), stating "We have imposed on your court to send supplies to Al-Qulzum for cleaning and repairing ships and providing the necessary supplies," indicating the sending of tools for maintenance and cleaning of ships to Al-Qulzum because it was a shipbuilding center. The military shipbuilding industry has thrived in Al-Qulzum, Suez, and here we find many details about Al-Qulzum as one of the most important shipbuilding centers<sup>19</sup>. The shipbuilding industry was widespread in Egypt and its regions such as Alexandria, Damietta, and Al-Qulzum, as seen in the correspondences between the Prince of Egypt, Qura bin Shareek, and the governor of the Aswan region, Basil, where Qura bin Shareek requests skilled workers for shipbuilding in the port of Al-Qulzum and also demands the required funds for that region. Thus, it is evident from the numerous references in those correspondences that Al-Qulzum was an important maritime center, and some correspondences contain lists of items required from the Aswan region, such as money and sailors for the fleet at Al-Qulzum<sup>20</sup>.

And lists of names of people who donate to send supplies to Al-Qulzum, as indicated in the document bearing the number (No. ppsI26), with the amount donated by each person specified in dinars and carats, it is also worth mentioning that the port of Al-Qulzum is mentioned in Arabic.

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<sup>17</sup> سعيد مغاوى محمد، بحوث ودراسات في البريديات العربية، مطابع المجلس الأعلى للآثار، وزارة الثقافة، ج1، 2009م، ص 88

<sup>18</sup> سعيد مغاوى، بحوث ودراسات في البريديات العربية، ج1، ص 89.

<sup>19</sup> مسعود، غاده محمد حامد، صناعة السفن في مصر الإسلامية في ضوء أوراق البردي العربية 923- 21هـ/ 1517- 641م، مجلة مركز الدراسات البريدية والنقوش، مج36، ج1، 2019م، 137-166.

<sup>20</sup> The shipbuilding industry: It means the places where ships are built and is called the shipyard, and it was mentioned in the Arab navigational charts. Its importance lies in the fact that it serves as naval bases that supply ships with sailors, fighters, and supplies. Majid Abdul-Munim, The Role of Egyptians in Islamic Naval in the First Century AH - Seventh Century AD: Through Arab Navigational Documents, Journal of the Center for Arab Navigational Studies and Inscriptions, Vol. 9, 1993, pp. 265-269.

It is also worth mentioning that the port of Al-Qulzum is also mentioned among the Arabic papyrus texts preserved at the British Museum in London with the record number (2-6233), which is the second papyrus in the research, in the fifth line of the text, which is a papyrus dated 91 AH, where the word (Al-Qulzum) was mentioned at the beginning of the fifth line.

### **The papyri in which Al-Qulzum was mentioned.**

#### **The first papyrus: Plate No. (2)<sup>21</sup>**

Place of preservation: British Museum.

The material: papyrus.

is written in black ink.

Number of lines: 16lines.

The papyrus status: it has a lot of holes.

Register number: p.lond.inv.or.6233

Date: 91 Ah

Type of letter: official letter (administrative document)

Language: Arabic.

Subject: a letter about the annual recurring donation or transfer to and from the Qulzum.

Reference: Baker Becker

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<sup>21</sup> جاسر بن خليل أبو صفيه، برديات قره بن شريك العبسي، مركز الملك فيصل للبحوث والدراسات الإسلامية، ط1، 2004م، ص174-175

### **Papyrus text:**

- 1- أما بعد فقد \*\*\*\*\*
- 2- \*\*\* على ا\*\*\*\*
- 3- من متاع ا\*\*\*\*
- 4- ذلك قد ك \*\*\*\*ط\*\*\*\*
- 5- القلزم قبل ح\*\*\*\*
- 6- كل عام وإن \*\*\*\*\*
- 7- قد قل ماءه\*\*\*\*
- 8- احمل شأنى\*\*\*\*
- 9- فإذا جاءك كتيبى هذا
- 10- فعجل الذى على
- 11- أرضك من ذلك
- 12- ولا تجعلن على ذلك
- 13- من اتبع الهدى وكتب
- 14- عيسى\*\*\*\*
- 15- سنه إحدى وتسعي

### **Commentary on the papyrus:**

This papyrus talks about sending belongings to the Qulzum, and it resembles the previous Greek papyrus before the Gulf waters receded.

Plate No. (2)<sup>22</sup>



Plate No. (2) in which the word Qulzum belongings is mentioned, jasrabin Khalil Abu Safieh, papyri of Qara bin Shrek Al-Absi, King Faisal Center for research and Islamic studies, 1<sup>st</sup>, 1425 Ah /2004AD).

<sup>22</sup> جاسر بن خليل أبو صفية، نفس المرجع، ص348.

## **The second papyrus: plate No (3-4)<sup>23</sup>**

Size: 19\* 23cm

The material: papyrus.

is written in black ink.

Number of lines: 15 lines on the face / 11 lines on the back

Papyrus status: the papyrus is missing from the top and bottom parts of the text.

Register number: No. ppsI26.

Date: 3 Ah / 9 AD

Subject: list of names of persons donating funds.

Reference: Geoffrey Khan, Bills, letters, And Deeds

### **The recto:**

The letter mentions a dwarf port, the final A runs below the conduction limit, the X is written with teeth.

### **The verso:**

The account consists of a list of personal names donating sums of money arranged in two columns, the amounts expressed in dinars and carats.

## **Researcher's reading:**

### **The Recto:**

1. من بضائع (نع) زرع بعينه وانا الذى خيرته .....
2. وحمل عند سعه ... ذلك وصدقك منى انا .... معمر في المقاد ول.....
3. اقل انك معمر في .... رغم فلها بالغ الفسقه أن المعمر قد خرج من
4. القلزم محمود ..... إلى الجبال وعلي قبل ..... إلى القلزم
5. ومتاع كبير وقد صانعوا بزعم (...). بمال ..... فإن متاع كامل
6. ..... وعبدالله بن .... بن عمه
7. علي قرب واحده انك من منفعه .... جرير بن علي بركبته منه بذلك
8. فاسأل الله أن لا يؤخذ الإسلام.....
9. شقوه منذ زمان عبد الله.....

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Khan, Bills, Letters and Deeds, Arabic papyri of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries, The Nour foundation, Oxford University press, p.142.

10. وان تو اسعد الله من الفسفه ان عبد الله.....  
 11. مائة رسل ممن...في خير.....  
 12. تلصنوا وقتلوا ان .....  
 13. يمنعهن من تعانقو.....  
 14. يدفنوا في .....

**The verso:**

1. ....بين السمان قيراطين ونصف ..... كيل الـ..  
 2. قبل بن الشمس قيراطين ..... من سدس وقيراط  
 3. وال..... عشر دينر انولا القراريط عشر دينر  
 4. .... عشر دينر أبو صا...قيراطين  
 5. كا.....بعد عشر دينر مسا.....قيراطين  
 6. ..سر بن كيل  
 7. جمعه الخياط قيراط(ين) وال الغصون سدس  
 8. .... قيراطين والاسمر والأسود قيراط  
 9. .... قيراطين والاربعه والحراس قيراطين  
 10. ربع  
 11. ال..... بن الحارس سدس  
 12. عشر دينر

**Commentary on the papyrus:**

The Recto mentioned the name of the city of Al-Qulzum twice in the fourth line and mentioned the word heirloom and perhaps the agreement on the content of the heirloom that will be sent to Al-Qulzum and mentioned the word big heirloom and full heirloom, which indicates the quality of the heirloom and its large size.

On the Verso is an account list with the names of people, and in front of each person's name is a financial value expressed in dinars and carats, which is an account statement with annual donations collected to be sent to Al-Qulzum.

Plate (3)

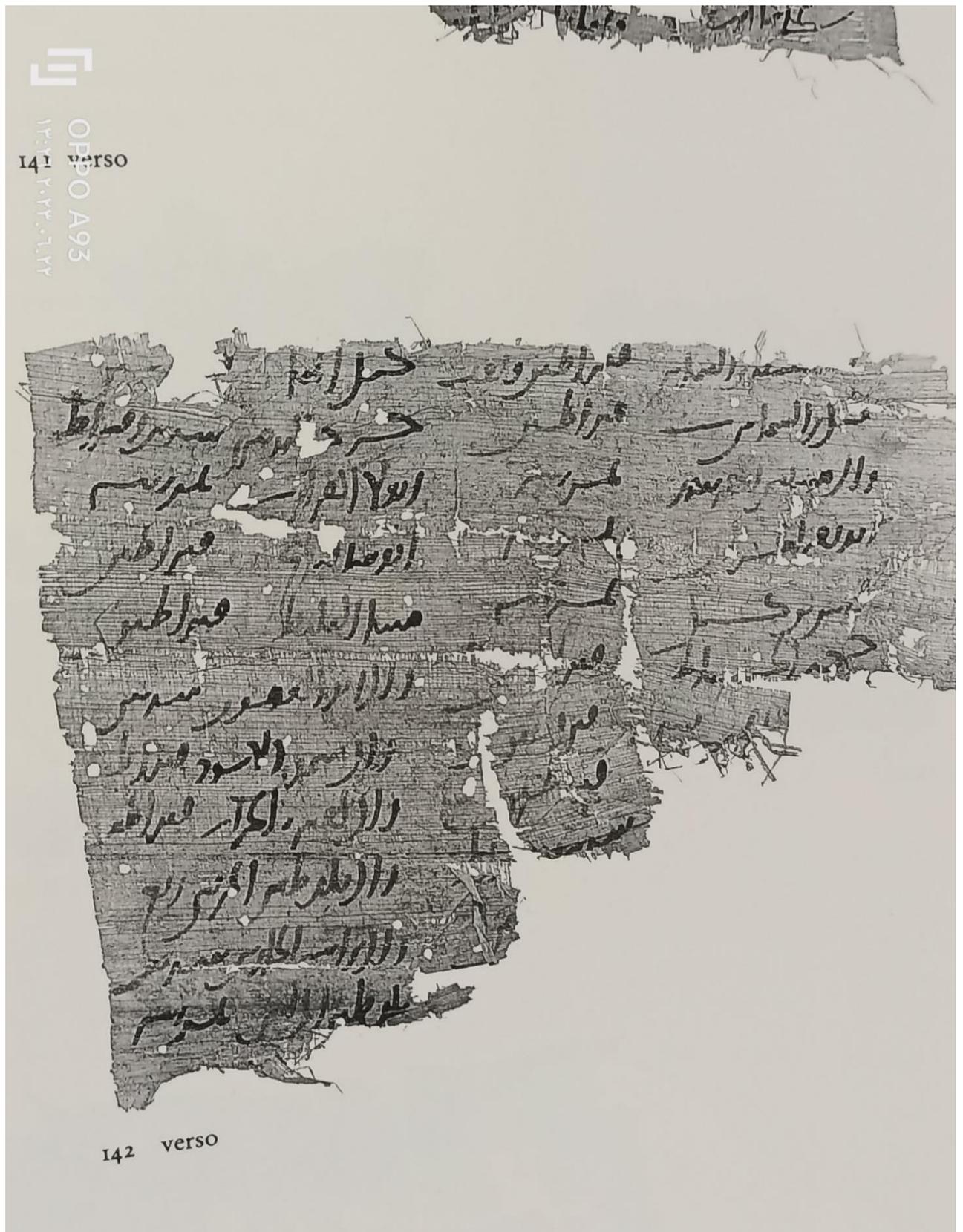


Plate (4)<sup>24</sup>

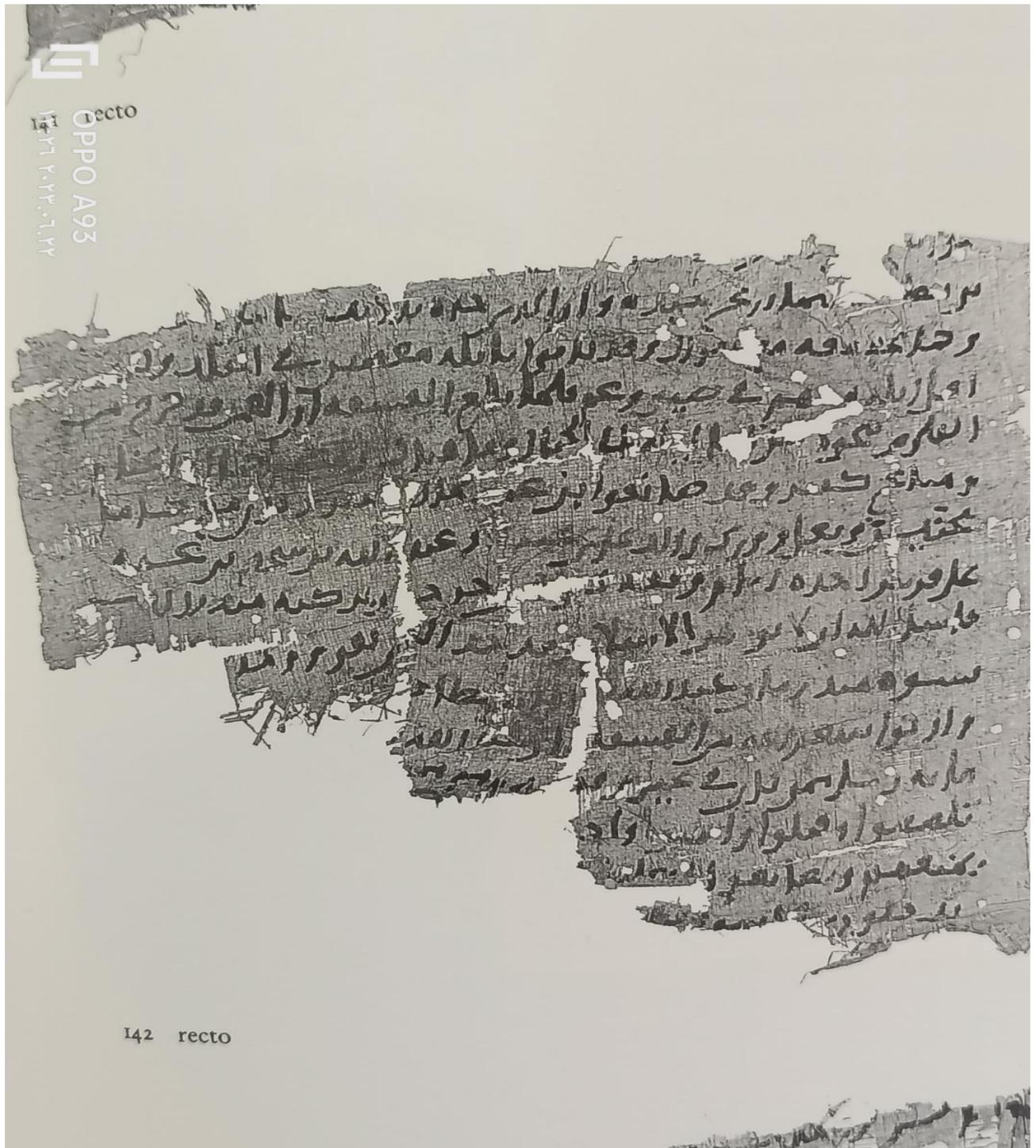


Plate (3-4) mentions Al-Qulzum port on the face, and on the back is an account list with the names of people donating money.

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Khan, Bells, Letters and Deeds, Arabic papyri of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries, The Nour foundation, Oxford University press, p.142

**.The most important results reached by the researcher were as follows**

- The port of Qulzum is one of the most important commercial and economic centers since the Arab conquest of Egypt, where all merchants come to buy their goods.
- The role of the Arabic papyri in documenting the events and names of cities and ports.
- The importance of Arabic papyri in documenting various manifestations of Islamic civilization has not been dealt with in detail by historical sources, so it was talked about the port of Qulzum is an important commercial port in the breast of Islam and importance. work was carried out in two directions: The first direction: which are the historical sources in documenting the place of Qulzum and its historical significance.
- The second is the use of Arabic papyri as a source for documenting all the above.

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