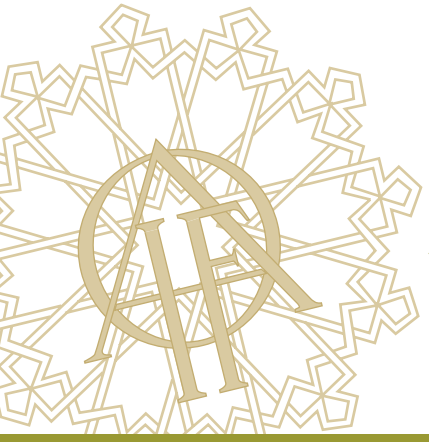
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AREZOU AZAD, PEJMAN FIROOZBAKHSH*

"No One Can Give You Protection"

The Reversal of Protection in a Persian Decree Dated 562/1167

ABSTRACT

While we know from historical texts that authorities in pre-Mongol Iran and Central Asia issued letters of protection (*amān-nāma*), no original has survived. In this article, we introduce one newly purchased document at the National Library of Israel catalogued as Ms.Heb.8333.86 and dated 562/1167, which refers to an act of protection (*ḥimāyat*)—or rather, its reversal. This is the closest we get to an actual documentary reference in Persian to an act of protection in the pre-Mongol period, and the document, therefore, merits closer study. The document offers an alternative history of protection far from the centres of power, at a very local level in the Ghūrid domains of today's Central Afghanistan and northern India, and the survival of the document offers clues as to the longevity of acts of protection and their archival value. The study, by extension, highlights the dynamism of reciprocal loyalties between citizens and administrative officials in local communities.

Keywords: Afghanistan, *amān-nāmas* (letters of protection), diplomatics, Ghūrids, Islamic history, Persian documents, Pre-Mongol history, regional administration in the pre-modern Islamic world

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✦ **RÉSUMÉ**

« Personne ne peut vous protéger ».
La levée de la protection dans un décret persan de 562/1167

Alors que nous savons d'après des textes historiques que les autorités de l'Iran pré-mongol et de l'Asie centrale ont émis des lettres de protection (*amān-nāma*), aucun original n'a survécu. Dans cet article, nous présentons un document de la Bibliothèque nationale d'Israël catalogué comme Ms.Heb.8333.86 et date 562/1167, qui fait référence à un acte de protection (*ḥimāyat*) – ou plutôt à la levée d'un tel acte. Il s'agit de la seule référence documentaire connue en persan sur la protection à la période pré-mongole, et le document mérite donc une étude très approfondie. Il permet une histoire alternative de la protection loin des centres de pouvoir, à un niveau très local dans les domaines Ghūrid de l'Afghanistan central et du nord de l'Inde d'aujourd'hui. Le fait qu'il ait été conservé offre des indices sur la longévité des actes de protection et leur valeur archivistique. L'étude, par extension, met en évidence le dynamisme des loyautés réciproques entre les citoyens et les responsables administratifs des collectivités locales.

Mots-clés : Afghanistan, *amān-nāmas* (lettres de protection), diplomatique, Ghūrids, histoire islamique, documents persans, histoire pré-mongole, administration régionale dans le monde islamique pré-moderne

✦ **ملخص**

«لا أحد يستطيع أن يمنحك الحماية»

إلغاء الحماية في مرسوم فارسي يعود تاريخه إلي سنة ٥٦٢/ ١١٦٧

في حين نعرف من النصوص التاريخية أن السلطات في إيران وآسيا الوسطى ما قبل العصر المغولي قد أصدرت كتب أمان (أمان نامه)، إلا أن الزمن لم يحفظ منها أي نسخة أصلية. وفي هذا المقال نقدم وثيقة اقتنتها مكتبة إسرائيل الوطنية مؤخرًا وسُجلت في كتالوجها تحت اختصار Ms.Heb.8333.86، يعود تاريخها إلى سنة ٥٦٢/ ١١٦٧، تتعلق بإجراء (حماية) أو بالأحرى بإلغائه. وتعد هذه المرجعية الوثائقية الوحيدة المحررة باللغة الفارسية التي تعني بإجراء حماية في الفترة السابقة للعصر المغولي، والوثيقة بالتالي تستحق دراسة متعمقة. وتمدنا الوثيقة بتاريخ بديل للحماية في المناطق الواقعة بعيدًا عن مراكز السلطة، على مستوى محلي جدًا، في أملاك الغوريين في وسط أفغانستان الحالية وشمال الهند، وبقاؤها يمدنا بأدلة فيما يخص طول فترة استمرار أعمال الحماية وقيمتها الأرشيفية. وتتوسع الدراسة بالتالي لتسلط الضوء على ديناميكية الولاء المتبادل بين المواطنين والمسؤولين الإداريين في المجتمعات المحلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أفغانستان، أمان نامه (كتب أمان)، الدبلوماتيك، الغوريون، تاريخ إسلامي، وثائق فارسية، تاريخ ما قبل العصر المغولي، الإدارة المحلية في العالم الإسلامي ما قبل العصر الحديث

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Introduction

In Persian documentary practice, the *amān-nāma* refers to an official letter that expresses the protection of an individual or a group, which may include guarantees of personal safety and safe passage. It is beyond doubt that *amān-nāma*s were issued: they feature in the pre-Mongol literary record. However, neither the new manuscripts from Afghanistan at the National Library of Israel (NLI) which start from 395/1005,[1] nor the Ardabil documents which start from 517/1123,[2] nor the Ghūrid documents that were recently handed over to the National Archives of Afghanistan—the earliest of which dates to 573/1177—include any *amān-nāma* documents.[3] In this article, we will introduce one document from the NLI set catalogued as Ms.Heb.8333.86 and dated 562/1167, however, which refers to an act of protection (lit. *ḥimāyat*)—or rather, its reversal. This is the closest we get to an actual documentary reference to an act of protection, and the document, therefore, merits closer study as part of this volume.

Historical and Economic Context

The document catalogued by the NLI as Ms.Heb.8333.86 was probably written in the Bamiyan region of Afghanistan. It is one of more than 180 pre-Mongol Persian folios found in Afghanistan in recent years as part of the so-called "Afghan Geniza" which we refer to as the NLI set. The document is dated 562/1167, at which time a powerful branch of the Ghūrid dynasty from central Afghanistan (r. 1144–1212) made Bamiyan the capital of their large Central Asian kingdom that extended into India.[4]

These new documents from Afghanistan paint a picture of an agriculture-based local economy, focused mainly on grain production and animal husbandry. The business and trading life was vibrant, but also very local, and one gets not even a whiff of the 19th-century European notions of a massive silk road trade across Eurasia, as it was imagined by the Prussian Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905).[5] The documents also show that the Ghūrids—like the Ghaznawids and Saljūqs before them—maintained a form of centralised administration for taxing and regulating business transactions in these communities. The extent to which the "long arm" of central government reached into the local levels is still to be established and is

1. The document is available on the NLI website at: https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH003924822/NLI#$FL40239005, last accessed on 29.09.20. Unlike with the Cairo Geniza, we do not know where exactly these Afghan texts were found and whether they were part of one archive. For an overview, see Haim, 2019, pp. 70–90.
2. Gronke, 1982; Shaykh-al-ḥukamāyī, 2009.
3. Mīrzā Khwāja Muḥammad, Nabī Sāqī (eds.), 2009.
4. The Ghūrids have recently received more scholarly attention. See, especially, Thomas, 2018; O'Neal, 2015.
5. Von Richthofen coined the term "Seidenstrasse", however, the concept has been largely superseded by evidence-based studies. See, for example, Rezakhani, 2010, pp. 420–433; Hansen, 2012; Chin, 2013, pp. 194–219; Smith, 2015, pp. 233–256.

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a subject of study for the new Invisible East programme which started in 2019 at the University of Oxford to which the present authors belong.[6]

While the Ghaznawid and Ghūrid rulers had adopted Islam and professed Sunnī religiosity as relatively new converts, the population in the region was still highly multicultural, multilingual and multireligious at this time.[7] The NLI set attests to this through the sheer fact that a significant number of the documents in it were written in Hebrew script which points to the presence of Jewish communities. Moreover, recent carbon datings of paintings in the niches of the Bamiyan Buddhas indicate that Buddhist paintings were patronised and restored well beyond the time of the first Islamic conquests, thus supporting the notion of multiculturalism here in the *longue durée*, in this case four hundred years after the first Arab conquests.[8] Bamiyan had produced the largest standing Buddhas the world had known in late Antiquity, while a nearby like Balkh was home to one of the richest Buddhist monasteries, the Naw Bahār, and Tukhāristān was home to Nestorian Christians, Turks, Indians, Afghans and Hephthalites, and to adherents of local cults as well.[9]

The Ghaznawids and Ghūrids fashioned themselves as semi-autonomous sultans, but they never abandoned their allegiance to the caliph in Baghdad either. While the caliph by this time had lost many of the caliphal powers his predecessors had enjoyed, he remained an important symbolic and religious figurehead in the eastern sultanates. Ghaznawid sultans, for example, famously sought the caliph's investiture for their rule.[10]

While being of Turkic stock, the Ghaznawids also profiled themselves as patrons of Persian literary culture. Abū al-Qāsim Firdawsī completed his Persian *Shāhnāma* epic in Tūṣ (eastern Iran, modern-day Mashhad) in 400/1010, having presented it to the Ghaznawid Sultan Maḥmūd I (r. 388–421/998–1030) at Ghazna. The reported initial rebuke by the sultan may be a reason for its limited circulation at the time, but earliest surviving specimens only

6. See https://www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/invisible-east-on-the-trails-of-lapis. The authors would like to thank the donors of this project, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the European Research Council (Grant agreement No. 851607) for their support of this programme.

7. Richard Bulliet showed several decades ago that conversions to Islam did not reach majority figures in Iran until the tenth-eleventh century CE. See, Bulliet, 1979. It is reasonable to assume that the date was even later in today's Afghanistan, not least as a function of the relative remoteness from the perspective of the caliphal centre. More recent scholarship is reassessing the concept of conversion and Islamisation altogether which may indicate a far more fluid and multireligious Islamicate society. See, for example, Peacock (ed.), 2017.

8. The Buddhist presence should not be overstated here, though. The evidence suggests the existence of active Buddhist communities up to the 9th century at this point, which means this is only a *terminus post quem* for the end of Buddhism in this region. It does, however, correct literary accounts claiming the total annihilation of Buddhism from the early days of the conquests found in Arabic *futūḥ* literature. See *Radiocarbon Dating of the Bamiyan Mural Paintings*. See also Gibb, 1970 [1923].

9. A good evidence base for the multiculturalism of the region (in Tukhāristān, specifically) in late antiquity and during the early Islamic period is the Bactrian corpus. See Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*; and one interpretation in Azad, 2016, pp. 33–56. The Bāmiyān buddhas were described by numerous medieval Muslim authors, often fondly and with admiration. For examples, see Pancaroğlu, 2003, pp. 31–41.

10. See for example Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī*; *The History of Beyhaqi*. Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*; *A General History*. For a seminal but older study, see Bosworth, 1963.

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date to two hundred years after its completion, in 614/1217.[11] The problem of survival only in late copies is not limited to the *Shāhnāma*, but to all early Persian literary and poetical writing. The famous works by pre-Mongol Persian writers and poets, like Rūdakī (d. 329/940–941), Balʿamī (d. 363/964 or 386/996–997), Farrukhī (d. 429/1037–1038), ʿUnṣurī (d. 431/1039–1040 or 441/1049–1050), and Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), all survive in manuscripts produced only centuries after their initial compositions, under the patronage of the Īlkhānids, Timūrids, Safavids and later rulers.[12]

Amān-nāma in Medieval Persian Writing

Amān-nāma (lit. letter of safety or protection) is a documentary type that may refer to the safe passage of persons, although it is more commonly used as a pledge to guarantee someone's personal safety or that of their family or community, and occasionally, of their possessions. In medieval Persian historical narratives, documents that provided protection are referred to variably as *amān-nāma*, *khaṭṭ-i amān* or *sawgand-nāma*. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Gardīzī writing in Persian in the early 440s/1050s during the reign of the Ghaznawid sultan ʿAbd al-Rashīd refers to various *amān-nāma*s.[13] Ibn Isfandiyār in his *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān* also mentions *amān-nāma*s, e.g., in a passage in which a certain Baraka, who is the brother of an *amīr* of Ḥilla and "king of the Arabs" begs the *ispahbad* (i.e., the Sasanian general) to intercede for him with the caliph whom he has offended. The story continues, "The *ispahbad* [who] did so, obtained for him a written pardon and assurance of safety (*amān-nāma*), and supplied him with money and other necessaries to take him back to his kingdom." [14]

Another example is found in the local history of Balkh, known as *Faḍāʾil-i Balkh*, written in the late 6th/12th century by the Shaykh al-Islām al-Wāʿiẓ al-Balkhī. One episode concerns the aftermath of the ʿAbbāsid revolution. In this passage, a young man who later became a well-known judge, Mutawakkil b. Ḥumrān (d. 142/759–760), and a number of shaykhs and close associates of the Umayyad general Qutayba b. Muslim (d. *ca.* 96/715) in Chaghāniyān (modern-day Uzbekistan) went into hiding when the Abbasids claimed the caliphate. After the Abbasid general Abū Dāwūd discovered their hideout, he issued a guarantee of safe passage (*amān-nāma*) for them which allowed everyone to return home to Balkh unharmed.[15]

11. On this early copy of the *Shāhnāma*, see Khaleghi-Motlagh, 2011-2012, pp. 207–250.

12. There are, however, four dated manuscripts surviving from before the 6th/12th century: a mystical treatise, a *tafsīr* work, a pharmacological and a medical treatise. There is also a fifth manuscript of a 3rd/9th century Arabic Qurʾān which has Persian annotations in it, that, in fact, constitute the oldest New Persian writing, see Karīmīniyā, 2017–2018, pp. 9–26.

13. Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār*, pp. 37, 69.

14. Ibn Isfandiyār, *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān*, p. 108; *The History of Tabaristān*, p. 60.

15. Shaykh al-Islām, *Faḍāʾil-i Balkh*, p. 75; ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī (ed.), p. 86.

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The term *khaṭṭ-i amān* has also survived in poetry. For example, the eleventh-century poet Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān wrote this verse:[16]

Tarsandigān-i bīnaẓarī-rā umīd-i ū / bar darj-i iʿtimād nawīsad khaṭṭ-i amān

Hope, that he gives to even the most unassuming of people,/writes the protection note on a *rotulus* of trust.

The poem is contemporary with the earliest Afghan documents and refers to a protection note that would have been written in a common format of a roll of paper, or *rotulus* (Per. *darj*). The term *darj* serves as a metaphor for trust in the beneficence of the person who is being praised here. Incidentally, the image also evokes the meaning and importance of the *rotulus* in assuring public safety and protection.

One more important genre of works in our search for *amān-nāma* exemplars is the Persian administrative manual. The earliest surviving Persian specimen was written by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Khāliq Mīhanī in the 6th/12th century. Its oldest copy is dated Dhū al-Qaʿda 585/December 1189-January 1190, which has been published under the titles of *Āyīn-i dabīrī* and *Dastūr-i dabīrī*.[17] However, we found no *amān-nāma* mentioned in this manual. Nor did we encounter *amān-nāma*s in other early manuals, such as, the *Qawāʿid al-rasāʾil, Rusūm al-rasāʾil wa-nuǧūm al-faḍāʾil* or *Ghunyat al-kātib wa-munyat al-ṭālib*, which were all written by Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Muʾmin Khuyī towards the end of 7th/13th century. We also did not find *amān-nāma*s in the *Tuḥfa-yi Jalālīya* written by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Nāmūs Khwārī at the beginning of 8th/14th century.[18] It is only once we get to the better-known manual known as *Dastūr al-kātib* and written in 767/1366 by Muḥammad b. Hindūshāh Nakhjawānī that we find, in a listing of "sultanic" letters, a sub-category of letters that give protection ("*amān*"). The examples listed here are exclusively on protecting criminals (*mujrimān*) and fugitives (*gurīkhtigān*).[19] It is a bit of a conundrum as to why these manuals are almost devoid of *amān-nāma*s, when they cover plenty of other examples and typologies of administrative letters, such as, conquest letters (*fatḥ-nāma*), letters of condolence (*taʿziyat-nāma*), and letters of apology (*dar iʿtiẓār*). The lacuna in the Persian historiographical record that can be dated, with some certainty, to a period close to the time of writing, together with the rise in the new availability of the Persian medieval documentary record, makes it an obvious choice to complement any study of Persian administrative practices with the study of surviving Persian documents.[20] With this context in mind, we will now proceed to introduce the one document from the NLI set believed to originate from the Bāmiyān area that refers to the granting of protection.

16. Masʿūd, *Dīwān ashʿār-i*, I, p. 570.
17. Mīhanī, *Āyīn-i dabīrī*.
18. Khuyī, *Majmūʿa āthār-i*; Nāmūs, Ms. or.oct.3512, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.
19. Nakhjawānī, *Dastūr al-kātib*, II, pp. 202–210.
20. Bamiyan was already established as a site in which pre-Mongol Persian administrative documents had survived in the 1940s and 1960s, when Vladimir Minorsky and Gianroberto Scarcia published articles

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Text[21]

The document catalogued Ms.Heb.8333.86 is the only Persian document in the NLI set that we have found so far that makes a reference to the issuance of protection. The full transcription and translation of the decree fragment written on the *recto* side follows (note that the beginning of the decree is lost):

Transcription

١. دست رئیس از ایشان کوتاه است این مثال [صادر گشت]
٢. تا هیچ کس ایشان را حمایت نگیرد و بهر کجا هستند باز
٣. دیه روند برسالت سپهسالار هبةالدین حسین... رکلی (؟) دام عزه
٤. فی الثالث عشر من ذیالحجه سنه اثنی ستین (؟) خمسمائه
٥. اگر باز نروند ملامت رسد

Translation

1. The *raʾīs* shall no longer have any authority over you [i.e. the recipient]. This decree (*mithāl*) [has been issued],
2. for no one can give you protection. Wherever you may be [right now], you must go to
3. the village, accompanying, under his auspices, the general Hibat al-Dīn Ḥusayn [...] lī [?], *may his glory be long*.
4. [Written] on the 13th of Dhū al-Ḥidja of the year 56[?]2.

In the margin

5. If you do not return [to the village] you shall be punished.

introducing nine documents dated to the 5th/11th and early 7th/13th centuries that had been excavated in Afghanistan. There has been little scholarly follow-up, however, since those articles were written. See Minorsky, 1942, pp. 181–194; 1943, pp. 86–99; also Scarcia, 1963, pp. 73–85; 1966, pp. 290–5.

21. Our thanks go to Ali Safari of Mīrāth-i Maktūb, Ali Reza Emami of the University of Tehran and Maryam Mirshamsi from Lughatnāma-yi Dihkhuda who read this document with us at the "Invisible East Reading Persian Documents Workshop" held virtually on 25.08.2020. For more details on the workshop, see: https://twitter.com/invisible_east.

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Commentary

Line 1

Raʾīs: The note refers to a *raʾīs* who is based in another, unnamed, place. This *raʾīs* has presumably assumed authority over a fugitive to whom this document is addressed. The term *raʾīs* can either be used as an honorific title (*laqab*) or refer to a specific post of village headman who mediates between the local administration or military establishment and the community, notably on tax issues.[22] It has been observed that the position of *raʾīs* in the latter sense started to decline in importance precisely around the time when this letter was written, so from the mid-6th/12th century onwards, following a new Saljūq policy of deploying military commanders as part of a centralisation process.[23] In this document, as in other documents in the NLI set, the title *raʾīs* is used in the former sense—as a *laqab*, that is—often coming in conjunction with a name, i.e. the *raʾīs* Fulān b. Fulān.

Mithāl: denotes a formal order or decree that is legally binding. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with *farmān* during this period, but it is more common that *mithāl* is differentiated from *farmān*. The latter is used exclusively when referring to orders issued by the sultan, while the former refers to those issued by subordinate governors, princes and military commanders. The Iranian scholar Qāʾim-maqāmī, who wrote an important introduction to historical Persian documents, put the *mithāl* within the documentary genre of "*sulṭānīyāt*".[24]

This is not the only *mithāl* in the NLI set: There are at least two more (Ms. Heb.8333.27, Ms. Heb.8333.90), as well as another document (Ms. Heb.8333.119) that makes reference to *mithāl-i ki az dīwān* [*ṣādir shuda*], i.e., "a decree that has been issued by the *dīwān*". Not only do these documents specifically state that they are *mithāl*s, but the paper and *rotulus* (Per. *tūmār*) layout reflect the style that was common in decree documents. Unlike the other two decrees in the set, this one is of a more local, less formal nature, which can be deduced from the comparatively less generous spacing of lines and more modest calligraphy.

Line 2

Ḥimāyat: The term used to denote the contested act of protection is *ḥimāyat giriftan*, which is a transitive construct, literally meaning putting under one's protection. The institution of *ḥimāyat* (Ar. *ḥimāya*) is discussed in Jürgen Paul's contribution to this volume and shall not be discussed further here. Whether a written protection note (*amān-nāma*) was ever issued by the unnamed *raʾīs* we will probably never know. Ms. Heb.8333.86 is essentially part of a decree that states the reversal of a promise of protection issued by the *raʾīs* of another place. A parallel use can be found in *Āthār al-wuzarāʾ* by Ṣayf al-Dīn Hājī b. Niẓām ʿAqīlī written in the 9th/15th century, who cites a lost work by Abū al-Faḍl Bayhaqī (d. 470/1077) entitled *Maqāmāt-i Maḥmūdī*, in which

22. Paul, 1966, pp. 77–87, 213–214, 276.
23. Havemann, Bosworth, Soucek, 1994, pp. 416–417.
24. Qāʾim-maqāmī, 1971, pp. 50–56; Busse, 1964, pp. 822–823.

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he related the contents of an exchange of letters between the Ghaznawid Sultan Masʿūd and his candidate for the vizierate, Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Maymandī. One of the latter's conditions was that the heads of two of the most powerful *dīwān*s stop interfering in his work (*tā dast kūtāh bāshand*, lit. "keep their hands off", the same construct we find in our document). Specifically, he requested that all direct contact between them and the public (*mardumān*) or tax or other officials (*ʿummāl*) cease, and that no one receive any special treatment or protection (*ḥimāyat nagīrand*, as used in our document as well) or pressure (*sitam nakunand*).[25]

In our order fragment, the names and titles of neither the recipient nor the issuer are given: they were probably written into the top of the decree which is now lost. The recipient is ordered to leave the place in which a local *raʾīs* has given him protection, and to proceed to an unnamed village. It appears that the recipient had either left this place of residence or deployment, or never moved there in the first place despite being requested to do so. Line 5 which runs along the vertical right-hand margin specifically instructs him, though, to "return" to the village, which would support the former interpretation. Although we do not know the circumstances around the addressee's apparent insubordination, it seems that he is a runaway, given that he needs to be escorted by a senior military official in this transfer. The recipient appears to be an official who has abandoned his post. It is highly unlikely that he is a civilian as *mithāl*s were government orders specifically issued for internal administrative purposes (see "*mithāl*" above). We do not know the circumstances that led to his flight (or desertion?), but the situation was bad enough for the him to seek out protection.

The issuer seems not to know the exact whereabouts of the addressee (sic. *bi har kujā hastand*, i.e. "wherever you may be")[26], but the fact that the letter was written means that, in his search for him, the issuer had identified his general locality. The letter was probably addressed to the administrative official in charge of this locality who was expected to transmit the decree to the runaway.

Line 3

Sipahsālār: General, commander of the army, equivalent of Ar. *ṣāḥib al-jaysh*.[27] The decree informs us that the general is to escort the recipient to the instructed village and that he is doing so by legal authority (*bi risālat*, translated as "accompanying, under his auspices, …"). The latter formula also appears as *dar risālat* in another NLI document (Ms.Heb.8333.93). The formulation *bi risālat* is rather unusual and seems to be a rhetorical device to soften the blow. The issuer may well have had in mind the strong likelihood that the decree would be read out loud by the local authority or other members of the community, and he would want

25. ʿAqīlī, *Āthār al-wuzarāʾ*, p. 184.

26. The Persian text uses the third person plural (Pers. *hastand*), instead of the second person singular (Pers. *hastī*), while meaning to refer directly to the addressee (hence, our translation as "you", and not "they"). This is common Persian practice and serves as a rhetorical device to indicate respect and soften the directness of speech.

27. Dihkhudā et al., 1377, s.v. "*sipahsālār*".

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to avoid coming across as harsh or unjust. That said, the additional line 5 that was added on the vertical right-hand side of the page does use stronger language, threatening punishment if the runaway refuses to return to the village.

Line 4

Sittīn?: is the number sixty, written out as part of the dating formula, which we have read as 56[?]2. The *sittīn* in "562" is not clearly legible due to the excessive cursivity of the writing. However, given the context of the NLI set from which it emanates, as well as the dating of the reused verso side of the decree (564, see below), the middle number (in the tens value) can only be read as *sittīn*, not *sabʿīn* or *tisʿīn*.

Diplomatics and Document Recycling

The diplomatics of the document give us insight into its archival history, and hence its longevity and the extent of its authority as an administrative order. It is worth considering the process of recycling a little more closely. As mentioned, the document was written on the *recto* side (fig. 1) of what must have been a *rotulus* (Per. *tūmār*) sheet of paper, as was common for decrees. Only the bottom third of the original has survived with its final four horizontal lines and one vertical line running along the right margin. The document—with the lines written in black ink, generously-spaced in decree writing style—was written in Dhū al-Ḥidja 562/October 1167 and was reused two years later. There are four folding lines, a point to which we will return shortly. Thus, the period for which this decree was valid was relatively short, from which we can deduce four possible scenarios: either the fugitive official had turned himself in, the issuing authority had given up its search, the document had gone astray or it was actually never sent.

The size of the paper (98 × 100 mm), the average quality of the handwriting, and the moderate spacing of the lines indicate that this letter was issued by a senior local or provincial authority rather than anyone at the central sultanic level. The names of the issuer and recipient of the document are missing from the fragment. The fact that the issuers sent a *sipahsālār* (l. 3) to deliver the order gives a clue of the relative seniority of the sender as well.

The *verso* side of the fragment (fig. 2) was reused which is probably the only reason why the fragment has survived, as we will see shortly. The text on the *verso* was written two years after the decree, in Dhū al-Ḥidja 564/September 1169. The reused text, which is unrelated to the decree, is a receipt issued for the handover of grain (*taslīm kard[and]*) and other items. The person acknowledging the handover is a certain Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar. He features in a number of other documents in the NLI set and appears to have been some sort of manager of a warehouse in which grain and wheat were stored. It is not yet clear to us for whom Abū Bakr was working. However, from some of the other receipts issued by him in the NLI set, which are for bulk amounts of grain delivered on behalf of a certain village, it would seem that these are *kharāj* tax contributions that Abū Bakr is collecting on behalf of a regional or central-level administration.[28]

28. See, for example, Ms. Heb.8333.83 and Ms. Heb.8333.84 at www.nli.org.

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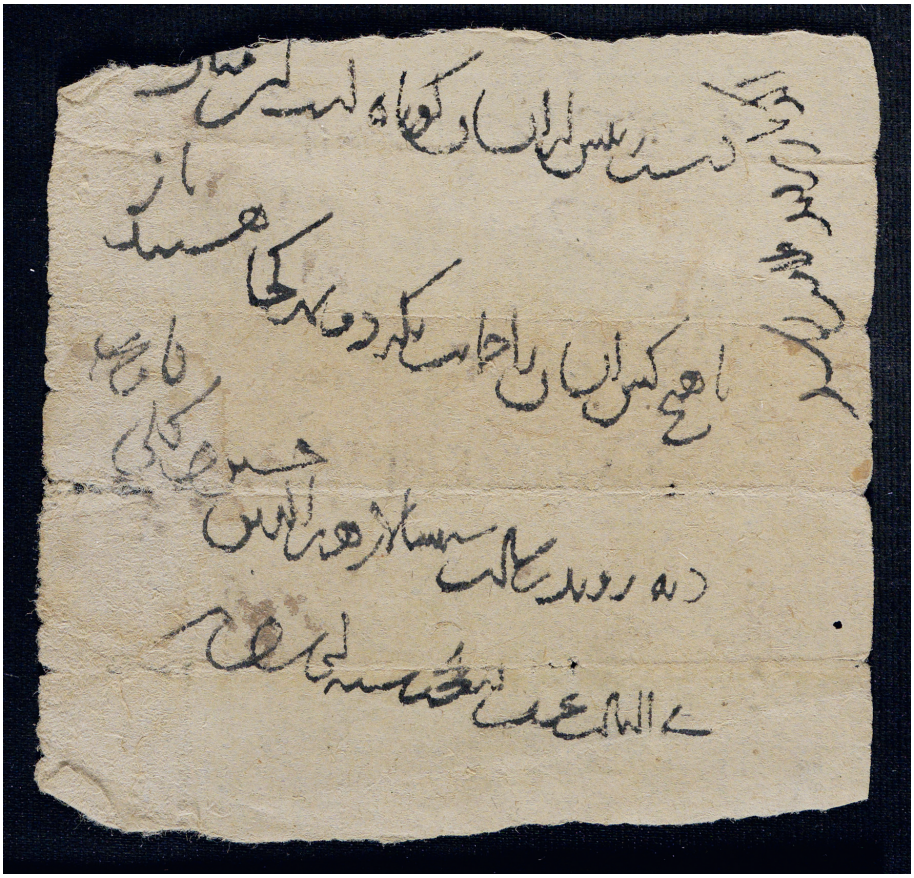


Fig. 1. Ms.Heb.8333.86 *recto*: decree fragment, dated 562/1167.

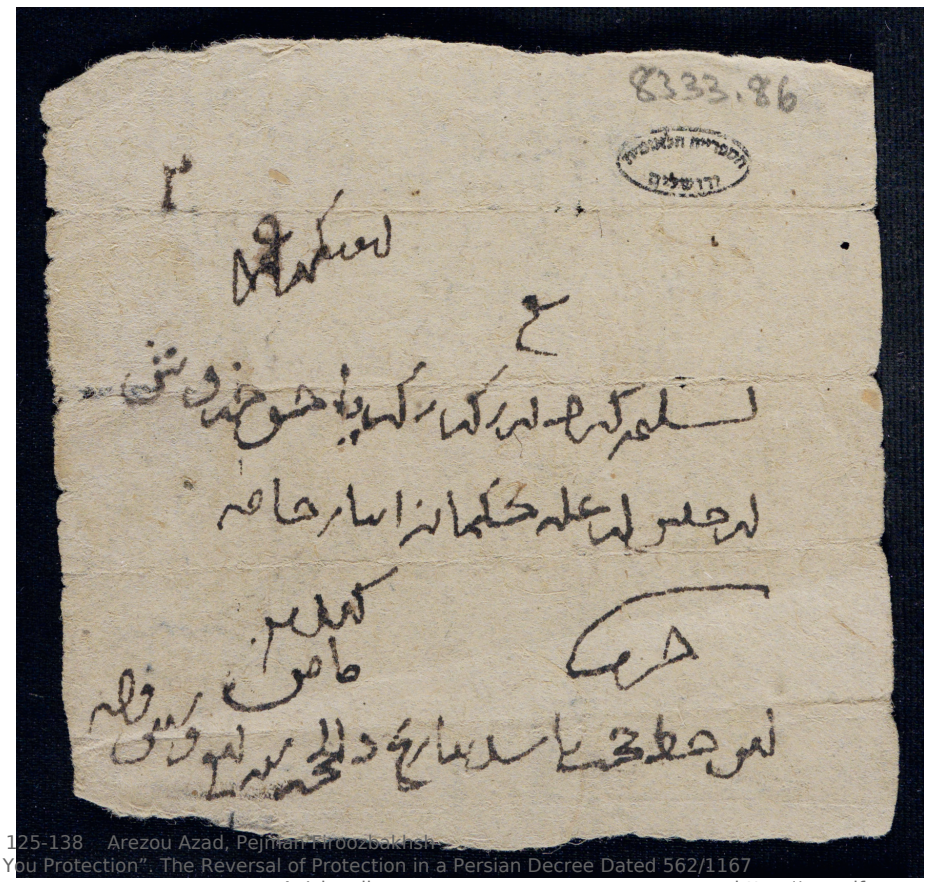


Fig. 2. Ms.Heb.8333.86 *verso*: receipt for handover of grain and other items, dated 564/1169.

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So how did the decree *rotulus* end up in the warehouse of Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar? There are at least two possible explanations. One is that the relevant state archives of the Ghūrid officials in charge of the region had deaccessioned documents because of paper storage limitations and the cost (and value of resold) paper. The deaccessioning might have led to a resale or recycle for use by lower-level administrative offices, a "shedding" that Marina Rustow found to be common practice in the medieval Egyptian chanceries as well. It was precisely this shedding that led to chancery documents ending up in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo that make up today's "Cairo Geniza".[29]

The second explanation is that the recipient of the order was somehow connected, either directly or indirectly, to the warehouse of Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar, and that his document was reused in the warehouse directly. The four surviving fold lines indicate that the sheet was archived once it had been recycled, enabling the folio to extend its lifetime and to be converted to financial use. The horizontal folding lines were created by turning the fold around itself. This archival practice can be found in a number of other documents in the NLI set, and in many other documents right up to the 20th century, such as those from Ibb, Yemen studied by Brinkley Messick.[30] But a decree would not have been stored flat or folded, but rolled up. Moreover, the *verso* text is complete, which indicates, again, that it was written after the paper (with writing only on its *recto* side) was deaccessioned. This is also further evidence that the storing, retaining and reuse of administrative paper was not limited to Jewish geniza practice, but reflected a general trend in how states archived their records.

Conclusion

The decree in Ms.Heb.8333.86 offers a unique example of how protection for a public official functioned in the Ghūrid domains of the 6th/12th century at the local level. Whether this official had previously received a written *amān-nāma* from the *raʾīs* mentioned in the decree we will probably never know. He may have just been offered a verbal promise of protection. Equally, whether the document that has survived was actually sent we will not know, and it is possible that it was written more as a threat or warning to say that people offering this person protection in the future would not be able to fulfil their promise.

This is the first piece of documentary evidence that we have for the use of protection, or rather the threat or request that such a protection be reversed. While Ms. Heb.8333.86 complements

29. Rustow, 2019, pp. 55–77. Thus, Rustow explains: "Deaccessioning happened in the normal course of business. The government officials who jettisoned the decrees probably weren't employees of the central archives; it's more likely that they were provincial officials who didn't need to keep the decrees on hand because they had already been archived elsewhere. And just as deaccessioning decrees happened in the normal course of business, so, too, was recycling them a regular part of the medieval scribe's habitus" (p. 77).
30. For the Yemeni documents, see Messick, 2017, p. 350. Often these were pierced by a hole through which a cord would be passed to bundle sets of documents which facilitated archiving.

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the references to *amān-nāma* issuances found in the pre-Mongol Persian local historical sources and administrative manuals, it currently stands alone amongst the still relatively small, but largely understudied documentary Persian record of the pre-Mongol period.

What we do know is that the document was important enough to be retained, at least for some time until it was reused in the warehouse of Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar for the issuance of receipts. The decree fragment remained intact (if fragmentary). As such, Ms.Heb.9333.86 is also a testament to the ephemeral nature of protection afforded or nullified by senior authorities, and the dynamism of changing loyalties between administrative officials and local communities.

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