

excellency that may arise.²⁹ Your excellency is greeted with best, profuse wishes. *And abundant peace! Salvation is near.*³⁰

[F. Address]

(To) His excellency, the most illustrious sheikh, my lord Sulaymān Kohen³¹ b. Judah. May God guard his life!

(From) His servant Maḥrūz b. Jacob—*may the spirit of the Lord give him rest!*³²

²⁹ Literally, 'whatever arises for your excellency of needs or services, honor me with them.' *Ma'a mā* seems to serve as the equivalent of *mahmā*, 'whatever.' The same usage, in similar context, can be found in II, 46 (there *ma'amā*, in one word; see 449, n. 72); III, 5v, line 5; III, 33, line 28.

³⁰ For this and other expressions of the urgency of messianic expectations, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:395 ff.; Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 14.

³¹ Sulaymān and his father Abū Zikrī (Judah) used Kohen (rather than ha-Kohen) as a family name.

³² Isa. 63:14.

II, 58 *Memorandum from Abū Zikrī Kohen to Maḥrūz*

Alexandria {ca. 1136–49}

TS 10J 16, f. 15

Memorandum sent by Abū Zikrī Kohen, sojourning on business in Alexandria, to his brother-in-law Maḥrūz in Fustat, who had arrived from Aden and, as in II, 56–57, was again preparing himself for a new journey to the East. The families of the two lived in one house in Fustat. The memorandum is written in the hand of a clerk.

{The memorandum is worded more or less like a regular business letter. Maḥrūz's reply might be found in the fragmentary V, 20. His first trip to India was probably ca. 1136 (see page 367). No. II, 58 can be divided into the following five sections, given below with selected translations:

A. Salutation (lines 1–4).

B. The writer's distress over his delay in Alexandria (lines 4–20).

(5) After I had written you and shipped a few commodities with Abu 'l-Riḍā (6) b. Hilāl,¹ all of the ships returned [...] and I had to (7) stay here, until I return my merchandise to the warehouse and lock it.² Then I'll come up (to Fustat),³ (8) God willing. I hope that we extricate ourselves from here this week, God willing. Don't ask, (9) my brother, what aggravation I had from the return of the ships, because I lost many (10) dues, expenditures, provisions and sizeable custom fees, from which I cannot recoup (11) one dirhem.⁴ I also shipped other merchandise to al-Mahdiyya, which came back. May God make (12) the outcome good! [...] (14) God knows how distressed I was (15) to have to stay here. I swear by these lines, were I to find a way not to sleep here (16) one night, I would not sleep here.⁵ This is for your information, my lord.

C. Purchase of wheat (lines 21-margin, 5).

(21) If the wheat in the house is depleted, buy for me two (22) or three dinars worth, which we shall eat until the wheat, (23) which you wrote that

¹ {Mentioned in V, 13, margin, line 4. On shipping between Alexandria and Fustat, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:298.}

² Abu Zikrī Kohen kept a warehouse in Alexandria for his Mediterranean business.

³ {For 'coming up' when speaking of travel to Fustat, see 749, n. 4.}

⁴ For the losses incurred by merchants by the return of ships after they had set sail, because of bad weather or similar circumstances, see the discussion in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:322–23, 483, n. 73, where this passage is cited.

⁵ Abū Naṣr b. Abraham's remarks in a letter from Alexandria 1141, in IV, 78v, line 15, probably reflect other circumstances: "Were I just a little stronger, I would not stay in the city one hour."

Musallam⁶ has for me arrives. Do not neglect (24) the wheat, for it is one of the most essential things.⁷ And write to [Margin] (1) Musallam (2) to deposit for you in (3) Akhmīm two *irdabbs* of wheat or (4) three, to serve you as provisions for the journey, (5) God willing.⁸

(Akhmīm was on the Nile in Upper Egypt, and Maḥrūz would pass there on his way East. The two or three *irdabbs* of wheat would probably suffice for several months, while he traveled to India.)⁹

D. Matters concerning two claims. One involved 11½ dinars, which Makhlūf Ibn 'Ayn Shirra¹⁰ admitted owing Maḥrūz's grandfather Isaac (margin, line 5-top of page, line 4). Abū Zikrī also urged the mother of Abū Iṣḥāq, son of the *Reliable* Claimant, not to take any action against Abū Naṣr (also mentioned in line 6 as being in Alexandria).¹¹

E. Greetings and a special, urgent request, of an undisclosed nature,¹² of 'our lord,' Head of Egyptian Jewry (top of page, line 5-verso, line 3).}

⁶ He is also mentioned below, margin, line 1. Undoubtedly this is Musallam al-Ka'kī; see II, 24, line 27 and 348, n. 74.

⁷ This sentence is quoted and discussed by Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:235, 435, n. 68.

⁸ The consumption of wheat, its measures and prices are discussed in detail by Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:235-44 (for the *irdabb* see above, 465, n. 15). Twelve *irdabbs* of wheat were yearly provisions for an average middle-class family. Maḥrūz writes Abū Zikrī about wheat in V, 20, line 7.

⁹ The Jewish merchants staying in certain areas of India imported wheat for their own consumption, since it was not considered a necessity of life for the natives there. See page 602, n. 45.

¹⁰ On Makhlūf b. Musā, called Ibn 'Ayn Sarra (here spelled *Shirra*, 'mischief'), see 338-39 and n. 4.

¹¹ For Abū Iṣḥāq Abraham, see II, 32, line 13. Abū Naṣr is probably the prominent Alexandrian India trader Abū Naṣr b. Elisha; see II, 59. Makhlūf complains about Abū Naṣr b. Elisha's dishonesty in business in VI, 23 (see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:247, 575, n. 143).

¹² Arabic *al-ḥāja alladhī kātabak fī amrihā*, can be translated, 'the need about which he wrote you for instructions' (or: 'concerning which he wrote you'). This could be connected to a passage in a letter by Abū Zikrī to someone else (V, 6, margin, lines 7-9): "If you travel up (to Fustat) perhaps you can take from the *Rayyis* the responsum concerning the house."}

II, 59 *Letter from Maḥrūz to Abū Zikrī Kohen with Urgent Warning*

Fustat {March 3, 1135}

ENA 4194, f. 3

Ed. Gil, *Ishmael*, 4:602-5, no. 801.¹

An urgent warning sent by Maḥrūz, Fustat, to Abū Zikrī, Alexandria, advising him to take all his merchandise out of a warehouse there. A business partner of Abū Zikrī in Fustat was dying, and because of the lawlessness prevailing at that time in Egypt, Abū Zikrī's goods would be confiscated together with those of the dead man (before 1129, it seems).

{The dying man, Abū Sa'īd, was related to Abū Zikrī's partner the well-known Alexandrian India trader Abū Naṣr b. Elisha.² Evidently, Abū Sa'īd did not have any heirs of the first degree, and the officials of the *diwān al-mawārith* (line 5: *aṣḥāb mawārith!*),³ the Office of Estates, which took advantage of such situations, were about to confiscate all of his belongings held by Abū Naṣr.⁴ Not taking any chances, the officials would sequester Abū Naṣr's assets and, moreover, those of Abū Zikrī, since the partners' holdings were stored together. The Head of the Yeshiva, certainly Maṣliḥ ha-Kohen, who in fact was apparently Abū Zikrī's cousin, personally conveyed the warning to Maḥrūz and instructed him to send immediately an urgent message to his brother-in-law Abū Zikrī. For this purpose Maḥrūz

¹ {Gil did not identify the parties and mistakenly described the document as written in Alexandria, ca. 1062; cf. id., "Institutions," 156.

² Here in line 4. His father's name, Elisha, is only partially preserved and was not deciphered by Gil. Abū Naṣr b. Elisha is mentioned in III, 15, line 32, III, 29, lines 8-9, V, 8, lines 7-8, VI, 23, lines 13 ff., VI, 43v, line 12 (there his son, called Abu 'l-Majd b. Abū Naṣr b. Lishā'; see Zeldes and Frenkel, "The Sicilian Trade," 127, n. 12, where 'Elisha' is to be corrected). He was a prominent man, for the famous Spanish Hebrew poet Judah ha-Levi, when staying in Alexandria in the fall of 1140, dedicated to him a poem, in which he consoled him upon the death of a slave girl and apologized for being unable, owing to a sore eye, to visit him and express his sympathy in person (Brody, *Diwān*, 40-41; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:143; Gil and Fleischer, *Yehuda ha-Levi*, 210, n. 143—where the reference to Goitein, "Letter to Judah ha-Levi," 344 is misprinted—and on condolences for the death of a slave girl, Friedman, *Polygyny*, 352). There were a number of India traders named Abū Naṣr. In some cases where Abū Naṣr is named without his father's name, Abū Naṣr b. Elisha is probably intended. See, e.g., II, 56, line 29, the note to II, 58, sec. D (486, n. 11), III, 47, line 14 and verso, line 3.

³ For the *th > f* shift (cf., e.g., *thūm > fūm*), see Blau, *Grammar*, 285.

⁴ On the activities of the Office of Estates and its effect on the Jewish community, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:395 ff., 613; 3:277 ff.; Rabie, *The Financial System*, 127-32; Friedman, "Responsa of Abraham Maimuni," 272, and the literature cited in these studies.}