

C. CONSIGNMENTS FROM TRIPOLI

I wrote you from Tripoli and informed you that I had sent four bundles of cotton and twenty-one pieces¹⁴ of figs to Alexandria. I wrote to M. Mardūk,¹⁵ asking him to receive this shipment. With Yaḥyā b. al-Zaffāt¹⁶ I sent two bags and one basket with wheat, red earth,¹⁷ and two baskets with raisins and figs. I instructed him to deliver these to Mardūk. Your share in the basket (of wheat)¹⁸ and the figs is 8 dinars, and your share in the silk also 8 dinars. I hope you have written to Alexandria instructing Mardūk to take care of the matter, and also to attend to the sacking (*ḳhaysh*). Also write him to send you either the proceeds, or the goods to be bought for them, or broken dinars.¹⁹ And by God, answer. I have no business other than waiting for your letter. By God, do not neglect this. By the bread (we have eaten together), as soon as this letter arrives, send the answer to the warehouse of the representative of the merchants, Abu 'l-Barakāt Ibn al-Ḥulaybī.²⁰ A man like you needs no urging.²¹

D. NEWS FROM FUSTAT

Describe to me the prices in the city (Fustat), and especially with regard to wheat and bread—I need not urge you to write me about this—as well as concerning the state of my father and the family. Special regards to you, and also to those who ask about me. Please honor me with any concern you might have. Regards also to Joseph

¹⁴ The dried figs were pressed into huge cakes.

¹⁵ The Ar. equivalent of Mordechai, a name common in those days only among Persian Jews. This Mardūk (b. Mūsā) was from Tripoli, Libya, and a representative of the Maghrebi merchants in Alexandria.

¹⁶ "Trader in pitch, tar," an important commodity (used, e.g., for caulking ships).

¹⁷ Ar. *maḳra*, mentioned in the Geniza letters regularly as used for writing on bales.

¹⁸ This is clearly evident from the letter written in Tripoli (n. 2, above). The recipient's share might have been very small, as little as one-tenth. That letter made mention also of a consignment of rice.

¹⁹ To be sold to the caliphal mint. In one way or another, the writer wished to have his money in Fustat, and not in Alexandria. It was winter, wherefore he intended to travel overland direct to Fustat.

²⁰ "The little man from Aleppo," known also from other Geniza documents.

²¹ Such importunate repetitions were the rule, not the exception.

and his mother.²² How are they? Regards also to our friends. And Peace.²³

(Address:)

To my lord and master Abū Yaḥyā Nahray, son of Nissīm, (*may he r(est in) E(den)*), may God prolong his life and make permanent his honored position, strength, and happiness.

From Ya'qūb (Jacob) b. Salmān al-Ḥarīrī²⁴

(Repeated in Arabic characters. What follows is also in Arabic characters:)

To Fustat, the House of Exchange, the office of Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq, the Jewish banker.²⁵

(Note of the mail agency; in another pen and script:)

To my lord, the shaykh Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. Mufrij, from 'Abd b. Muḥammad b. Qaysar.

Fustat, if God will. Deliver and receive reward.²⁶

6 NOTE FROM ALEXANDRIA

About an Errand Done in Spain for a Business Friend in Fustat
Ca. 1110

This short note is perhaps more characteristic of Egypt's role in the Mediterranean trade than the many long business letters preserved in the Geniza. It speaks of gold from Morocco, silk from Spain, ambergris, which was found in the Atlantic Ocean, and of musk and civet perfumes, which were imported from far away Tibet

²² The writer's wife and son. This shows that the recipient was a close friend and, most likely, a relative.

²³ Written in Ar. characters, in abbreviated form.

²⁴ "The Silkworker," a family name.

²⁵ This is Abraham b. Isaac the Scholar (see *Med. Soc.*, II, 512, sec. 10), whose intimate friendship with Nahray is evident in Geniza documents through forty-five years (1050-1095).

²⁶ The receiving mail agency is identical with that mentioned in *Med. Soc.*, I, 292, bottom. The Ramle agency was different from that forwarding the letter (TS 13 J 36, f. 6). Qaysar is derived from Caesar, but is a good old Arabic name. "Deliver and receive reward" obviously means here "Payment after delivery."

or Indochina and the Malay archipelago. It is addressed to a merchant bearing the family name of al-'Afsī, which means a trader in gall, an important commodity brought to Egypt from northern Syria. Even more remarkable than the geographical diversity of the origin of the products mentioned is the extremely casual way in which the writer speaks about his safe arrival in Alexandria from Spain. It is also noteworthy that both the sender of the letter and its recipient, as well as the three merchants mentioned in it, are known from other Geniza documents.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. d 66 (Cat. 2878), f. 52.

IN (YOUR) NAME, O MERCI(FUL).

A

I am writing these lines to my lord, the illustrious elder—may God prolong your life and make permanent your exaltedness and high position—to inform you that the Kohen al-Fāsi¹ sent to me a bar of gold for you from Fez with the notification that he sold civet perfume for you for 7 1/2 and 1/8 Andalusian mithqāls. He asked me to sell the gold in Almeria² and to buy silk with the proceeds. However, I did not think that this was the right thing to do, and decided to leave the gold as it was sent to me. Now, God in his mercy decreed my safe arrival, whereupon I sent it to you with Binyām al-Rashīdī,³ the perfumer. Kindly compose my mind by the acknowledgment of its arrival. When I come, I shall, God willing, deliver the letter addressed to you in person.

B

One of the friends of the aforementioned Kohen sent a quantity of ambergris with me and asked me to sell it through you; you are to buy me good "fivers" of musk⁴ for the money—may I never be deprived of you and never miss you. The weight of the ambergris

¹ A family name derived from the town Fez in Morocco. Here, we find that merchant actually living in Fez.

² A port on the east coast of Spain.

³ A family name derived from Rosetta, Egypt. Binyām is Benjamin.

⁴ Musk was traded in "fivers," *ḫhumāsiyyāt*, perhaps a package weighing 5 dirhems (*India Book*, passim).

is 225 dirhems, together with the piece of cloth and the canvas. It will be brought to you by my brother Abu 'l-Barakāt. As soon as you take delivery, sell it without any slackness or delay for whatever price God grants and apportions.

C

Accept from me the best of greetings, *and may the welfare of my lord continue to increase forever*. As soon as the ambergris is sold, buy "fivers" of good musk with the money. If I can do anything for you, please honor me with the task. Do not be offended by the form of these lines.⁵ I wrote them *on the Eve of the Sabbath*, after having taken my bath. Therefore, please—may God honor you—excuse me and remove any blame from me. *And Peace!*

(Despite this polite request, the writer repeats a third time the demand that the ambergris should be sold immediately after its arrival. He also asks to be informed about its weight without the wrapping.)

(Address, written upside down, as usual:)

To Miṣr (Fustat), may God protect it, to my lord, the illustrious elder Abū Sa'īd al-'Afsī⁶—may God prolong his life and make permanent his honored position and prosperity.

His grateful Abu 'l-Ḥasan, son of Khulayf, the Alexandrian—*m(ay he rest in) p(eace!)*

7 FROM A SPANISH MERCHANT IN FEZ,
MOROCCO, TO HIS FATHER IN ALMERIA, SPAIN

1140 or slightly earlier

This rare specimen of a business letter going from Morocco to Spain provides interesting information on several points. Cheating

⁵ The letter is written calligraphically, but its style is somewhat brusque and importunate.

⁶ "The Merchant of Gall." This was a family name. The person concerned, as we learn from this and other Geniza letters, was a "perfumer," a dealer in perfumes and drugs.