

Ibrahīm 'Ayyāsh<sup>29</sup> had had made for himself and I do not care if it costs 1 or 2 dinars more.

The package forwarded by my lord Abi 'l-Ḥasan (?) 'Alī, the son of the sister of the elder 'Allāl,<sup>30</sup> has arrived. But the 'attābi<sup>31</sup> does not have such good going here. All that was obtained for the package of 'attābi was 20 dinars.

(There follow about twenty partly effaced words).

#### D. URGENT APPEAL FOR THE WRITER'S BROTHERS

I have another wish, my lord. Should a caravan set out in which trustworthy Muslims, who have given you sureties, will travel, let the merchandise of my brothers be sent with them as if it were yours. They would profit from this in many respects.<sup>32</sup>

The balance for the garments ordered will be sent to you with the pilgrims' caravan in a purse of gold dinars.<sup>33</sup>

My lord, I do not need to entreat you to take care of my brothers—may God keep them—their soul lives only<sup>34</sup> . . . because they are with you. In a place where you are they are no strangers. May God protect me through you.<sup>35</sup>

(There follows a short, only partly preserved passage dealing with a lawsuit concerning a flask worth 22 dinars, probably containing musk).

<sup>29</sup> Meaning "Long-lived," one of the many Ar. equivalents of Heb. *Hayyim*. This 'Ayyāsh was a brother-in-law of Abū Zikrī and his commercial representative in Egypt (see no. 12, below). He should not be confounded with his namesake, frequently mentioned in the Geniza, who lived a generation later.

<sup>30</sup> It was common practice for a young man to serve as an apprentice with an uncle. Long after having become an independent merchant he still would be styled "the nephew of Mr. So-and-So."

<sup>31</sup> 'Attābi (from which Eng. *tabby* is derived). A silk taffeta, originally produced in Baghdad, was manufactured at that time in many different parts of the Islamic world. See Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, index, s.v., and no. 60, n. 4, below.

<sup>32</sup> It would be safer, cheaper, and also quicker. For otherwise they would have to wait for the next seafaring season opening late in April.

<sup>33</sup> Meaning that the payment would be in cash and immediately and not by calculating the reciprocal debts and assets.

<sup>34</sup> Partly effaced and torn away and followed by four other effaced words.

<sup>35</sup> Meaning: By keeping you alive and prosperous God protects also me.

#### E. CONCLUSION

A letter from you, my lord, with a report on your state and welfare and any order you may have will give me pleasure and will be sure of my recognition and thanks. Best regards to your dear selves and to my lords Abū Naṣr, Abū Sa'd, and Abū [Maṣṣūr]<sup>36</sup>—may God let you see all your hopes fulfilled in them—and to all encompassed by your care.

(Address. Right side:)

To my elder and illustrious leader Abu 'l-Faḍl, Abū Jacob, and Abū Sahl, Sahl, Joseph, and Sa'id, the sons of Israel, may God prolong their lives.<sup>37</sup>

(Left side:)

From Mūsā and Isaac, the sons of Barhūn, (may his) s(oul) r(est in peace).

#### 12 RECIPROCAL SERVICES

Ca. 1020

This short letter, written on vellum, illustrates well what has been described in *Med. Soc.*, 1, 164-169, as *informal business cooperation*. Abū Zikrī Judah, the leading Jewish merchant of Qayrawān, referred to in sec. B of the preceding letter, asks one of the Tāhertī brothers sojourning in Egypt to assist his brother-in-law in the management of his, Judah's, affairs in that country. On his side he had taken all the necessary steps to ensure that the Tāhertī's goods would be sent from Tunisia to Egypt safely and quickly.

Judah was able to do so because he was closely connected with the

<sup>36</sup> These were the sons of Sahl, the eldest of the three senior Tustarīs, who alone is spoken to in the letter. See, e.g., Mann, *Texts*, 1, 375.

<sup>37</sup> It was customary to address a person first with his honorific byname, the *kunya*, followed by a blessing, and then to give his full name. The names are to be understood therefore as follows: Abū 'l-Faḍl Sahl, Abū Jacob (rather Ya'qūb, but spelled here without *w*) Joseph, Abū Sahl Sa'id.

It should be noted that in Tunisia, in this period, the *kunya* was often introduced by Abī, not Abū. Since there was no complete consistency in this matter and in order to avoid confusion I spell it Abū throughout.

with a h

"Sultan" of Tunisia<sup>1</sup> and especially with "the Illustrious Lady," the Sultan's aunt, who ruled the country in the early years of his reign until her death in October 1023.<sup>2</sup> For our taste, Judah here gets a bit too excited about the honors extended to him by the *Sayyida*. But the early years of the boyish Sultan's reign had been disastrous for the country in general, and its Jews in particular, which explains why this public show of royal favor was taken as a sign that the general security situation had improved.

The recipient, Isma'īl b. Barhūn (in Heb. Samuel b. Abraham) Tāhertī appears in many Geniza letters and documents, which show him as a commuter between Tunisia and Egypt. His difficult character, alluded to here, is underlined in another letter.<sup>3</sup> His elder brother, Abu 'l-Khayr Moses<sup>4</sup> is mentioned in the opening paragraph of our letter as present in Egypt. Moses visited Jerusalem in, or around, 1022. Taking into consideration the various additional data provided for in nos. 11 and 12, it is reasonable to assume that our letter was written approximately at that time.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS 12.224.

(The first ten lines contain polite Arabic phrases, often rhymed, expressing hopes for quick reunion with the addressee.)

I have charged our brother Abū Ibrāhīm 'Ayyāsh, my brother-in-law,<sup>5</sup> may God support him, to take care of my affairs. Then I have sent him additional goods and asked him to deal with them as well, and to complete all the operations. I wish now that you assist and help him until everything is carried out in accordance with my instructions.

I have not charged you with this because I know your impatience<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mu'izz b. Bādīs (1016-1062). In Bodl. MS Heb. d 65 (Cat. 2877), f. 17, l. 7. Judah alone was privileged to send goods in the Sultan's ship.

<sup>2</sup> Her name was Umm Mallāl. See Idrīs, *Zirides*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>3</sup> Bodl. MS Heb. d 65 (Cat. 2877), f. 9, ll. 15, 30, ed. S. Assaf, *J. N. Epstein Jubilee Volume*, Jerusalem, 1950, pp. 179-180.

<sup>4</sup> Moses (Mūsā) b. Barhūn Tāhertī is called Abu 'l-Khayr in TS 8 J 36, f. 2, a letter by our Judah b. Joseph to the three senior Tustarī brothers.

<sup>5</sup> See no. 11, n. 29. Ar. *sihr* could mean also *son-in-law*. But in that case the writer would have said "my son," "my child," not "our brother."

<sup>6</sup> Ar. *ḍāiq khalqak*, lit., "the narrowness of your disposition."

and how busy you are. Therefore I did not wish to impose on you the care for these goods. I am content with your assistance through encouragement<sup>7</sup> and advice. For me this is worth as much as that, and even more.

I wrote to the agent of the ship 'Alī Abū Dhahab<sup>8</sup> and also to its captain that all you wished with regard to the transport of your goods, heavy baggage and other, should be carried out in accordance with your instructions; they should receive the goods from your brother and from the [. . .] and the friends and keep them and put them on the best place aboard. I strongly urged them to carry out their promises, so that the goods should not arrive too short a time before the sailing of the ships, but should be a support to you and strengthen your position.<sup>9</sup>

Letters from you should arrive here all the time to keep us assured of your welfare. For we are disquieted until we receive letters telling us how you have been and how you are. And Peace upon you!

(In the margin:)

All the boys,<sup>10</sup> Abū Sahl and his son, Abū Ibrāhīm, and the rest of the company, and everyone here send you kindest regards. (The end of the margin, which could have contained about sixteen words, is torn away.)

(P.S. on the reverse side:)

The favor of the Creator, may he be exalted and glorified, which never leaves us even for an hour or a minute, caused the Illustrious Lady<sup>11</sup>—may God make her glory permanent—to send me a dove-colored<sup>12</sup> mule from her [stable] with a beautiful, long saddle, and

<sup>7</sup> Ar. *ta'kid*, insisting on a price demanded or offered.

<sup>8</sup> "The one with the gold," probably because it had a golden ornament on its bow. This ship belonged to the Sultan (TS 8 J 28, f. 9, l. 3, where, l. 8, our Isma'īl is mentioned, too). Judah b. Joseph obviously was an administrator of the Sultan's economic enterprises. See n. 1, above.

<sup>9</sup> Literally, "your heart." The goods were scheduled to be sent from Tunisia to Egypt early in spring. Their sale would take many months, sometimes years. But when they arrived in good time, their proprietor would be in a good bargaining position for buying merchandise to be dispatched with the convoys setting out from Egypt to the West in the fall.

<sup>10</sup> The writer's sons.

<sup>11</sup> See the introduction.

<sup>12</sup> Meaning: iridescent. Ar. *fākhitiyya*, from *fākhita*, ringdove.

beautiful robes of honor<sup>13</sup> for myself and a garment of honor<sup>14</sup> in the name of your brother, may God make [. . .] I am writing you this to make you happy,<sup>15</sup> so that you may give thanks to God for this together with me. [And Peace.]

(Address:)

To Abū Ibrāhīm, may [. . .],<sup>16</sup>

Isma'īl, son of Barhūn, (may he) r(est in) E(den).

From Judah b. Joseph.

### 13 A FREEDMAN ADDRESSES A MERCHANT PRINCE

Tunisia—Egypt, ca. 1020

The writer of this letter was Faraj, a former slave of Barhūn (Abraham), the father of the four Tāhertī brothers, about whom see no. 11, above. His master, whom he had certainly served as business agent, set him free, but he remained in some kind of family relationship with the Tāhertīs (a usage Muslim rather than Jewish; see *Med. Soc.*, 1, 144-146). This is evident from a moving letter on his behalf, addressed to the merchant prince Joseph Ibn 'Awkal, by a brother-in-law of the Tāhertīs, who at that time, acted as the senior member of the family.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of our letter, the former slave had become a respectable merchant. He addresses the merchant prince with respect, but by no means in a way more deferential than that found in the letters of Ibn 'Awkal's correspondents born free.

<sup>13</sup> Ar. *khila'*.

<sup>14</sup> Ar. *kiswa*. This probably was destined for Moses Tāhertī, who at that time was in Egypt. See above.

<sup>15</sup> Text: *ltqr* [*'ynk*], lit., "so that your eye should be cooled."

<sup>16</sup> Two lines of blessings, totally effaced.

It was absolutely uncommon to address a distinguished merchant without any epithet such as "To the illustrious elder." This omission proves that the writer was far above the recipient in social standing.

<sup>1</sup> TS 12.175, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* 34 (1965), 169-174. About Ibn 'Awkal see no. 1, above.

The impact of the pilgrimage to Mecca, referred to twice, is noteworthy. It might have been possible to obtain fine pearls cheaply prior to the departure of the caravan from Cairo, probably because many pilgrims would sell their pearls for provisions and clothing needed on the way. And pearls would be abundant when the caravan returned—provided that there had been a good year for pearl-fishing in the Arabian Seas. Pearls as a lucrative article of trade, bringing up to 100 percent profit in Tunisia are mentioned in another letter to Ibn 'Awkal (no. 1, above).

Despite the dangers and difficulties, goods were sent on to countries where they might obtain a better price. Even our short letter contains an example for this golden rule of Mediterranean trade (Egypt-Tunisia-Spain).

Finally, as in no. 11, as against the products and manufactured goods of the East, the Muslim West provides gold.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS 8.12.<sup>2</sup>

My illustrious elder and master, may God prolong your life and make your well-being and happiness permanent, may he in his mercy always favor you and keep away from you all that is bad and hateful.

I am writing at the beginning of Shevat,<sup>3</sup> asking God to make it the most auspicious and blessed of all months for us and all Israel.<sup>4</sup>

I wrote you a letter, my master, with the first caravan<sup>5</sup> and informed you that the pearls with which you favored me have arrived. . . .<sup>6</sup> Thanks to God and thanks to you, my master, they brought profit and blessing. May God be praised.

The textiles in that consignment were sent by me to Spain, for they do not provide me with sustenance here this year.

<sup>2</sup> TS 8.12, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* 37 (1968), 164-166, trans. Stillman, *East-West Relations*, 287-292.

<sup>3</sup> Mostly January.

<sup>4</sup> At emancipation the slave became a full member of the Jewish community.

<sup>5</sup> At least three caravans set out from Qayrawān to Cairo during the winter season. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 277, where the term *mawsim* for caravan is also explained.

<sup>6</sup> A blessing, not fully legible.