

beautiful robes of honor¹³ for myself and a garment of honor¹⁴ in the name of your brother, may God make [. . .] I am writing you this to make you happy,¹⁵ so that you may give thanks to God for this together with me. [And Peace.]

(Address:)

To Abū Ibrāhīm, may [. . .],¹⁶

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.¹

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.

¹³ Ar. *khila'*.

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

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

¹⁶ 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.

¹ 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 8.12.²

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,³ asking God to make it the most auspicious and blessed of all months for us and all Israel.⁴

I wrote you a letter, my master, with the first caravan⁵ and informed you that the pearls with which you favored me have arrived. . . .⁶ 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.

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

³ Mostly January.

⁴ At emancipation the slave became a full member of the Jewish community.

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

⁶ A blessing, not fully legible.

I have sent you, my master, . . . (with) Mūsā Ibn al-Majjānī,⁷ may God keep him, a purse with 120 dinars in number and 118 1/2 and 2 qīrāts in weight, 5 of these dinars are in *rubā'iyyas* (quarters). May God keep them in his mercy. I ask you now, my master—I know, I am imposing on you—to buy pearls, if they are good and to be had, prior to the departure of the people for Mecca and send them with the very first man setting out for here; and please send them by land.⁸

If pearls are not to be had, keep the money until the pilgrims' caravan returns from Mecca and God will give you opportunity to buy them.

If, God forbid, pearls should be scarce this year, buy pearls for one half of the sum sent, and for the other half *good indigo*⁹ or . . . All this should be sent overland, if God wills. But you, my master, are alone competent to decide.

I ask you, my master—may God keep you—to be patient with me for I am a burden on you. So act, my master, in this matter in a way for which God will recompense you in this world and the world to come.¹⁰

Accept, my master, my most special regards, and greetings to my masters Abu 'l-Faḍl and Abu 'l-Ṭayyib¹¹ and also to all those encompassed by your care.

(In the margin:) I prefer everything to be sent by land.

(Address:)

To my master Abu 'l-Faraj—may God prolong his life—Joseph b. Jacob b. 'Awkal¹² and to Abu 'l-Faḍl and Abu 'l-Ṭayyib, Hilāl and Benjamin, the sons of Joseph. From their¹³ grateful Faraj, the freedman of Barhūn.

⁷ Ibn 'Awkal's representative in Qayrawān. See no. 1, above. Six words preceding the name are of doubtful reading and interpretation.

⁸ That is, do not wait for the beginning of the seafaring season in spring.

⁹ Heb., in order to keep this detail secret.

¹⁰ Meaning that the writer would be unable to provide commensurate recompense. A frequently found polite expression.

¹¹ The recipient's sons. See the address.

¹² About this practice of separating the byname from the name see no. 11, n. 37, above.

¹³ In the dual, probably caused by the reference to Ibn 'Awkal's two sons. In later writings, the dual was sometimes used for the plural.

14 WRITING FROM ALEXANDRIA AFTER ARRIVAL FROM THE MUSLIM WEST

Ca. 1020

Many aspects of the Mediterranean trade are evident in this comparatively brief communication. The human relations: no less than twelve merchants, among them a Muslim, are connected with the writer and mostly also with the recipient. All the forms of commercial cooperation are present here: mutual help, partnerships of different sizes and combinations, and direct commission. Finally, the consignments sent from the West to Fustat contain a representative selection of Western goods: agricultural products, metals, minerals, and corals, but not the two staple exports: gold and silk.

The letter, like the preceding one (no. 13), is addressed to Ibn 'Awkal, but this time by a man of his own rank and at an early time of his life, for only his eldest son is greeted. It is written on vellum and, as it often happens with this material, a hole cuts through five lines, and many words are effaced. But most of the missing parts can be restored.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS 12.291.¹

Dear and beloved elder and leader, may God prolong your life, never take away your rank, and increase his favors and benefactions to you.

I inform you, my elder, that I have arrived safely. I have written you a letter before, but have seen no answer. Happy preoccupations—I hope.² In that letter I provided you with all the necessary information.³

I loaded nine pieces of antimony (kohl), five in baskets and four in complete pieces, on the boat of Ibn Jubār⁴—may Good keep it;⁵

¹ Ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbīz* 37 (1968), 74-77.

² Were the reason why you did not answer—a common phrase.

³ Such as lists of prices in Sicily and Tunisia.

⁴ Going from Alexandria to Fustat. I assume that *ā* is to be pronounced with *Imāla* (*ā* = *ā*) and that the name was actually Jubayr (Jubār), a rather common Ar. name.

⁵ Ar. *qaṭā'i'*, not yet found elsewhere in this meaning of a form of package. Later *qīṭa'tayn* in the same sense.

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