

I have sent you, my master, . . . (with) Mūsā Ibn al-Majjānī,<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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*<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

Accept, my master, my most special regards, and greetings to my masters Abu 'l-Faḍl and Abu 'l-Ṭayyib<sup>11</sup> 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. 'Awkal<sup>12</sup> and to Abu 'l-Faḍl and Abu 'l-Ṭayyib, Hilāl and Benjamin, the sons of Joseph. From their<sup>13</sup> grateful Faraj, the freedman of Barhūn.

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

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

<sup>9</sup> Heb., in order to keep this detail secret.

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

<sup>11</sup> The recipient's sons. See the address.

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

<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> In that letter I provided you with all the necessary information.<sup>3</sup>

I loaded nine pieces of antimony (kohl), five in baskets and four in complete pieces, on the boat of Ibn Jubār<sup>4</sup>—may Good keep it;<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* 37 (1968), 74-77.

<sup>2</sup> Were the reason why you did not answer—a common phrase.

<sup>3</sup> Such as lists of prices in Sicily and Tunisia.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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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these are for you personally, sent by Mūsā Ibn al-Majjānī.<sup>6</sup> On this boat, I have in partnership with you—may God keep you—a load of cast copper, a basket with (copper) fragments,<sup>7</sup> and two pieces of antimony. I hope God will grant their safe arrival. Kindly take delivery of everything, my lord.

I have also sent with Banāna<sup>8</sup> a camel load for you from Ibn al-Majjānī, and a camel load for me in partnership with you—may God keep you. He also carries another partnership of mine, namely, with 'Ammār Ibn Yijū,<sup>9</sup> four small jugs (of oil).

With Abū Zayd<sup>10</sup> I have a shipload<sup>11</sup> of tin in partnership with Salāma al-Mahdawī.<sup>12</sup> Your share in this partnership with him is fifty pounds. I also have seventeen small jugs of s[oap]. I hope they arrive safely. They belong to a man [called . . .] b. Salmūn, who entrusted them to me at his own risk.<sup>13</sup> Also a bundle of hammered copper, belonging to [a Muslim] man from the Maghreb, called Abū Bakr Ibn Rizq Allah.<sup>14</sup> Two other bundles, on one is written Abraham, on the other M[. . .]. I agreed with the shipowner that he would transport the goods to their destination. I wish my brother Abū Naṣr<sup>15</sup>—may God preserve him—to take care of all the goods and carry them to his place until I shall arrive, if God wills.

Please sell the tin for me at whatever price God may grant and

<sup>6</sup> See no. 13, n. 7, above.

<sup>7</sup> Ar. *fajar* (cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, II, 242b), a common item in both the Mediterranean and the Indian trade. The opposite is *qaḍīb*, copper in large bars. See no. 43, n. 13, below (in Aden).

<sup>8</sup> A sailor, mentioned also below and in other letters. On Arab, as on Byzantine, boats sailors had the right to engage in the transport business on their own.

<sup>9</sup> A North African Jewish family name often found in the Geniza and still widely diffused. See Goitein, *Studies*, pp. 336-337.

<sup>10</sup> The captain of another Nile boat. See below.

<sup>11</sup> The shipload, *'idl*, comprised at that time about 300 pounds (see *Med. Soc.*, I, 335). Thus, Ibn 'Awkal's share was about one-sixth of the partnership.

<sup>12</sup> I.e., of al-Mahdiyya. Appears often in contemporary letters.

<sup>13</sup> Ar. *risāla*. About this term see *Med. Soc.*, I, 183-184.

<sup>14</sup> Typical Muslim names. Abū Bakr was the name of the first caliph.

<sup>15</sup> No doubt, this is Ibn 'Awkal's son-in-law, whose wife was older than her three brothers, for whenever they are mentioned together, greetings are extended to him prior to them. My suggestion (*Tarbiz* 36 [1967], 368) that this might have been Abū Naṣr Tustarī, the brother of Abū Sa'd (see no. 11, introduction, above), mentioned often in business letters, is, of course, only an educated guess.

leave its "purse" (the money received for it) until my arrival. I am ready to travel, but must stay until I can unload the tar and oil from the ships.<sup>16</sup>

I have no doubt that you have sent me a letter containing all the quotations.

I have learned that the government has seized the oil<sup>17</sup> and that Ibn al-Naffāt<sup>18</sup> has taken the payment upon himself. I hope that this is indeed the case. Please take care of this matter and take from him the price of five skins (filled with oil). The account is with Salāma.<sup>19</sup>

Al-Ṣabbāgh<sup>20</sup> of Tripoli has bribed Bu 'l-'Alā the agent, and I shall unload my goods soon.

Kindest regards to your noble self and to my master [. . .<sup>21</sup> and] Abu 'l-Faḍl, may God keep them.

(P.S.) Abu 'l-Faraj Marwān<sup>22</sup> sends you kindest regards and says to you: "I have with Alī Ibn Jubār<sup>23</sup> two baskets with liquid storax (?).<sup>24</sup> I ask you, my lord—may God protect you—to order one of your boys to receive them and [to transpor]t them to Abū Ja'far Ibn al-Mudallal,<sup>25</sup> the agent. I have not fixed the freight with him,<sup>26</sup> except that he would charge me what he charges others.

The textiles were taken by Ben Sārā,<sup>27</sup> for he . . . [. . .] and said

<sup>16</sup> The government had reserved for itself the right to buy these first. See below.

<sup>17</sup> Which arrived in Fustat.

<sup>18</sup> About this name see *Med. Soc.*, I, 85.

<sup>19</sup> See n. 12, above. This oil had been sent to Fustat on an earlier occasion.

<sup>20</sup> "The Dyer," a family name. The government agent would look the other way while the merchants would unload oil, tar, and other goods held back by the authorities. Although the merchants were recompensed for goods seized by the government, prices on the free market were higher.

<sup>21</sup> No doubt Abū Naṣr was greeted here. See no. 15, above.

<sup>22</sup> This name of two Umayyad caliphs was borne by many Jews in the eleventh century. Abu 'l-Faraj Marwān occurs also in other letters, e.g. no. 22, n. 27, and no. 41, n. 13, below.

<sup>23</sup> See no. 4, above.

<sup>24</sup> Ar. *sayyāla*, frequently mentioned in the Geniza, but not in the Ar. dictionaries. I take it as an abbreviation of *may'a sā'ila*, liquid storax, a plant used in medicine and perfumery, and a great article of export to the countries of the Indian Ocean.

<sup>25</sup> "The spoiled child," meaning: the one beloved excessively.

<sup>26</sup> With the captain of the boat. Freight was often paid after arrival.

<sup>27</sup> For Ben 'Ayin Sārā, "The man with the narrow eye," i.e., miserly. (This writer, as other Maghrebis, often writes *s* for *ṣ*); a Heb. nickname, occurring

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to me: "I shall take care of the cost of the transport"—the soul knows what is in it.

Isma'īl Ibn Abī 'Uqba<sup>28</sup> greets you and asks you to receive a shipload of wax for him. It is in the boat of Abū Zayd and a quarter dinar has to be paid for its transport. It was loaded by Khallūf. "Ibn al-Shāma,"<sup>29</sup> and "Joseph b. Isrā'il b. Bānūqa"<sup>30</sup> are written on it. Give it (for sale) to any agent you see fit.

And peace upon you, may God preserve you.

(P.S., by the copyist:)<sup>31</sup> And I, Daniel Ibn al-Shāma, greet my lord and his boys—may God protect you.

(There follow two, mostly effaced, lines in another hand, presumably that of the sender of the letter. Then the first script resumes.)

Isma'īl Ibn Abī 'Uqba has a shipload of corals with Banāna, the sailor.

You also have four (?) *barqalūs*<sup>32</sup> of wax with Ibn Jubār.

(Another line and a short marginal note, both in the second script and mostly illegible, follow here.)

(Address:)

(To) my elder and master Abu 'l-Faraj, may God protect him, Joseph, son of Jacob Ibn 'Awkal.<sup>33</sup>

From his old friend<sup>34</sup> Abraham, son of Joseph, (may his) s(oul be at) r(est).

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also in other letters. The purport of the only partly preserved passage: the man knew very well why he made such a generous offer.

<sup>28</sup> A son of Ibn 'Awkal's sister and in close business connection with his uncle.

<sup>29</sup> Not necessarily identical with the man from the Ibn al-Shāma family mentioned presently.

<sup>30</sup> Several members of this family were active in the Spanish and North African trade.

<sup>31</sup> It was common practice for merchants with bad handwriting, while on travel, to ask a business friend (sometimes a very distinguished one) to copy a letter. The writer, who would usually also know the recipient, would add his own greetings at the end.

<sup>32</sup> A shipload of smaller size than the *'idl*. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 335.

<sup>33</sup> See no. 11, n. 37, above.

<sup>34</sup> A weak rendering of Ar. *mu'attaq wuddih*, meaning: my love, like old wine, becomes ever stronger with age. I am inclined, however, to assume that the writer omitted a *d* (read: *mu'taqid*), "the one bound by the love of you," as in the contemporary letter TS Box K 6, f. 189.

## 15-16 LETTERS OF A COMMUTER

The Geniza has preserved at least seven letters, all addressed to Yūsuf b. Da'ūd b. Sha'ya (Joseph b. David, member of the prominent Isaiah family), by Mūsā b. Ya'qūb (Moses b. Jacob), called al-Miṣri, that is, "from Fustat." His family lived in that city, but being constantly on travel to Damascus, Tyre, Ramle, and the towns of Lower Egypt, he received this byname from his business friends abroad.

As was usual, Mūsā traded in many products of Syria-Lebanon, such as rose marmalade (a popular preserve), dried fruit (a great article of import to Egypt), oil, medical plants, and money coined in Syria-Lebanon. But the staple item exported by him from Damascus was paper. In a letter written from Tyre, Lebanon, in a year different from that in which the two letters translated here were dispatched, he acknowledges with satisfaction that the addressee had already sold in Egypt ten bales of the paper sent.<sup>1</sup> Here we read about twenty-eight camel loads (approximately 14,000 pounds), the mere transport of which cost 157.5 dinars, having a purchasing power of about \$15,000.

The letters translated here were probably written in the third or fourth decade of the eleventh century.<sup>2</sup>

## 15 FROM DAMASCUS TO FUSTAT

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter  
Collection, TS 13 J 15, f. 5.

I am writing—may God prolong the life of my lord, the elder, and make his honored position and prosperity permanent—from Damas-

<sup>1</sup> TS 13 J 17, f. 6, l. 5. Bale: *shikāra*.

<sup>2</sup> The approximate dating of the letter is based on these considerations: Ibrāhīm b. Da'ūd b. Sighmār, a letter to whom, enclosed in TS 13 J 17, f. 6 (see preceding note), is referred to in no. 17, below (1041-1042), and signed (TS 13 J 1, f. 12) in 1049. "The year of the plague," mentioned in TS 13 J 17, f. 6, refers perhaps to 1036, when the caliph al-Zāhir died of the plague. There were also plagues in the 1050s and 1060s. See Lane-Poole, *History of Egypt*, pp. 136, 143, 146.