

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

Isma'īl Ibn Abī 'Uqba²⁸ 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,"²⁹ and "Joseph b. Isrā'il b. Bānūqa"³⁰ 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:)³¹ 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*³² 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.³³

From his old friend³⁴ Abraham, son of Joseph, (may his) s(oul be at) r(est).

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

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

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

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

³¹ 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.

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

³³ See no. 11, n. 37, above.

³⁴ 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.¹ 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.²

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-

¹ TS 13 J 17, f. 6, l. 5. Bale: *shikāra*.

² 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.

cus on the second of Jumādā II.³ I am well and prosperous, but God alone decrees.

I have written you before and informed you that I have issued two bills of exchange on your account to the amount of 250 dinars and given them⁴ to Ibn Ḥazūr as a prepayment on paper with the trademark of Ibn Imām.⁵

Last week I turned over ten camel loads to Salāma b. Jaysh,⁶ and today I shall turn over five loads to him, and I hope to send with him also the rest which God, the exalted, will enable me to buy.

The Illustrious Elder⁷ instructed me to write you, my lord, and to ask you to buy sixty golden boxes of the best quality that can be had, without break // (above the line) and without break //,⁸ only topnotch quality. Pack them in leather bottles and send them immediately with a warship,⁹ with whomever God may let you find, to Ibn Abī Ḥaffāz.¹⁰ Write me the price and also who will carry them. The matter is urgent.

I have also asked you to buy me a container with linseed oil¹¹ for any price and to send it as early as possible on a warship. You will oblige me very much if you favor me with carrying out these orders without delay and send me your letters continuously.

³ See no. 16, n. 1, below.

⁴ Ar. *daḡāṭuh*. Such slips are common with this writer.

⁵ Not a watermark in the paper (which is a later invention). It is likely, however, that the name of the manufacturer was stamped on a fly-leaf pasted to the beginning of each roll of paper, similar to the protocol-sheet that preceded all papyrus rolls. About the protocol (which simply means "first sheet glued to the role") see Grohmann, *World of Arabic Papyri*, pp. 32-42.

⁶ The camel driver, i.e., head of the caravan (see next letter). The name Jaysh ("army") was already pre-Islamic.

⁷ A notable, referred to by this honorific title.

⁸ Ar. *maqṭā'*, or *muqaṭṭā'*. While making this repetitious addition the writer thought he had written something else before.

⁹ About sending goods with a warship see no. 17, below.

¹⁰ A representative of merchants in Tyre, Lebanon (see next letter). The boxes were to be sent by boat from Egypt to Tyre and from there overland to Damascus.

¹¹ Ar. *zayt bizr* (see *Med. Soc.*, 1, 426, n. 28). Ar. *zarf* is a general word for container, but in the Mediterranean oil trade of the eleventh century it seems to have designated a (goat's) skin of standardized size.

Also inform me about the price of ox tongue.¹² I have sent the cover.¹³

And may your welfare increase.

(P.S.) I ask my lord to sell the containers with rose marmalade one by one.¹⁴ By God, do not tarry.

(Address in Ar. characters:)

(To) my lord, the elder Abu 'l-'Alā Yūsuf b. Dā'ūd b. Sha'yā.

(From) one grateful for his favors, may I never be deprived of him.¹⁵

(To) Fustat, if God wills.

(Note of the forwarding mail agency:)

(To) al-Ḥusayn b. Ṭāhir.

(From) al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Zabyān.¹⁶

¹² This medical plant often appears in prescriptions, e.g., *Med. Soc.*, 11, 267, 583, n. 37.

¹³ Ar. *ghaṭā'*, of a vessel, certainly manufactured in Damascus, wherefore the cover to be replaced was ordered from there.

¹⁴ In the letter cited in n. 1 mention was made that the rose marmalade could not be sold in Fustat wholesale.

¹⁵ To remain anonymous was a sign of intimate friendship. The handwriting of Mūsā b. Ya'qūb is absolutely unmistakable. He writes his name in TS 13 J 18, f. 16, and 13 J 23, f. 6. His namesake and younger contemporary Moses b. Jacob, who wrote four letters to Nahray b. Nissim in a most beautiful hand, is not identical with him, as is proved by the content and tenor of these letters. (The script is not decisive here, because the Nahray letters were all sent from Jerusalem, where the sender might have used the services of a copyist. But of the letters of Mūsā b. Ya'qūb, two were written in Damascus, two in Tyre, and three in various Egyptian localities, and all are identical in handwriting, style, and personal touch.)

¹⁶ See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 293; Zabyān is spelled with *d* = *z*.