

E. FIVE OTHER CONSIGNMENTS, SENT FROM VARIOUS
PORTS, SOME OF WHICH ARRIVED IN AL-MAHDIYYA
AFTER THE DEATH OF MAJJĀNĪ, SR.

Then in the year 430 (began on October 3, 1038), I sent to the address of Moses b. Yiḥye al-Majjānī these consignments:

From Tripoli (Lebanon): Sixty-five pots of rose marmalade and two bales of lac.

From Alexandria: A wickerwork basket of sal ammoniac, in which was also a bag with mace; 12 qintārs of cotton; half a bale of lac, weighing 4 (qintārs) and some pounds, on my own account and the other half on account of my brother Abu Kathīr; three bales of yellow myrobalan, in one of which were flasks of musk;¹⁵ thirteen bales of bandage flax, while Abu Is(mā'il) took delivery of another two.

From Barqa, in the ship of Jabbāra:¹⁶ fifteen bags of flax.

From Tripoli (Lebanon), carried by Abraham b. Isaac al-Qābisī:¹⁷ five bags of flax.

Likewise from Tripoli: three bags of rose marmalade.

In the same year, namely 430, I sent from Syria, in partnership with Ibn al-Hītī:¹⁸ seven mantles¹⁹ made of cotton; two bales of tragacanth gum; one piece of sarcocol.

All these shipments arrived safely in al-Mahdiyya—thank God—after the decease of the aforementioned Moses. His son Yiḥye took delivery of them and sent them abroad with 'Allūsh al-Majjānī who took care of their sale. Therefore, I claim from him the price of all of them in their entirety. First I claim the payments due to me from the transactions of the late Moses b. Yiḥye Majjānī, for I have letters from his son Yiḥye, announcing his father's death and specifying what the latter had bought for the money obtained from the

¹⁵ Musk, a very expensive perfume, was traded in flasks or in little boxes. The word used here: *ṣuḳ* is perhaps the Persian *soḳ* "ear of grain," or small flask. For myrobalan, a popular medical plant, see *Med. Soc.*, II, 367-368.

¹⁶ The notorious pirate. See *Med. Soc.*, I, 327-328.

¹⁷ A family name derived from the town of Gabes in Tunisia.

¹⁸ A family name derived from Hīt, a town on the Euphrates in Western Iraq.

¹⁹ The rare word *hudūm* is used. See Dozy, *Supplément*, II, 570b.

sale of the bandage flax, mentioned before, which was sent to him in the year (430).²⁰

F. ATTESTATION BY WITNESSES THAT THE LETTERS
FROM THE MAJJĀNĪS, PRODUCED IN COURT BY
THE PLAINTIFF, WERE GENUINE

(In this section, which is only partly preserved, the plaintiff produces three letters, written in Arabic characters and dated according to the Muslim calendar. Four Tunisian merchants, known from other Geniza papers to have been active in Egypt at that time, testify that the handwriting of the first two was that of a person—according to his name, a Jew—who used to do the elder Majjānī's Arabic correspondence with the merchants. One of the four gives similar testimony concerning a third letter, also written in Arabic characters and dated according to the Muslim calendar, which was copied by another Jewish person for the younger Majjānī. In the last preserved line, reference is made to a fourth document produced by the plaintiff.)

18 IN HIS DISTRESS A MERCHANT TURNS TO
HIS FORMER APPRENTICE AND
PRESENT PARTNER FOR HELP

Ca. 1040

This letter is noteworthy both for the historical situation and for the personal circumstances which form its background. We are here in the years of the great Byzantine attack on Muslim Sicily, 1038-1042, which led to the fall of Syracuse, Messina, and other towns closely connected with the countries around the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean.¹ Because of the presence of the Byzantine navy the direct route on the high seas from Egypt to Tunisia

²⁰ Here there is a hole in the manuscript. Bandage flax was mentioned only in the consignment sent from Alexandria in the Muslim year 430.

¹ See Amari, *Musulmani di Sicilia*, II, 438-455.

was avoided, and merchants were generally reluctant to travel at all. The writer of our letter expresses the hope that at least the route through Barqa, Libya, could be used.

The dire situation of the Mediterranean trade was aggravated for the writer by his own misfortune. His father, once the representative in Tunisia of the merchant prince Joseph Ibn 'Awkal (see no. 1, sec. F, above), seemingly had fallen on bad times and, after his death, the son Yaḥyā (Ar. for Heb. Yihye, both meaning "may he live") was publicly accused of malpractices (see the preceding selection). In his distress Yaḥyā turns to his former apprentice and present partner in Egypt for help. To the reader of his epistle it appears that he expects a little bit too much from him.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. a 2 (Cat. 2805), f. 17.

A. THE ADDRESSEE'S MARRIAGE AND DECISION
TO SETTLE IN EGYPT

I am writing to you, my dear brother—may God prolong your life and make permanent your well-being and honored state—from al-Mahdiyya, ten days before the end of the month of Elul (August-September). I am safe and well, thank God.

During last winter, I did not get any letters from you. But we learned about the shipwreck of the Nile barges. This troubled my mind, and some people held back payments they owed me.² Yet I put my trust in God. Finally, a courier arrived from Alexandria this week with your letter, dated "the middle of Sivan" (May-June) with a report about you and your well-being—may God make it permanent.

You mentioned that you married into a fine family—may God make this the most auspicious of all times for you. I have no doubt that your parents died fully satisfied with you, as God has let you attain such status. Your decision was the right thing to do. For the whole (Muslim) West is not worth a thing these days. I hope that God will make this the happiest and most blessed of times for you.

² The merchants in Tunisia feared that valuable goods belonging to our writer were lost in the shipwreck and that, as a result, he would be unable to meet his commitments.

I was happy for you, and so were all the people to whom I told the news.

B. ABOUT COPPER AND ANTIMONY GOING EAST,
AND LAC AND ODOROUS WOOD GOING WEST

You wrote about the loss of part of the copper—may God compensate me and you, then—about the blessed profit made from the antimony and, finally, about the lac and the odorous wood which you bought and loaded on Mi'ḍād and 'Abūr.³ (You mentioned) that the bale on Mi'ḍād was unloaded afterwards; I have no doubt that the other will also be unloaded. I hope however, that there will be traffic on the Barqa route. Therefore, repack the bales into camel-loads—half their original size—and send them via Barqa. Perhaps I shall get a good price for them and acquire antimony with it this winter. For, dear brother, if the merchandise remains in Alexandria year after year, we shall make no profit.

Only small quantities of odorous wood are to be had here, and it is much in demand. Again, do not be remiss, but make an effort and send the goods on the Barqa route—may God inspire you and me and all Israel to do the right thing.

C. ABOUT FLAX SUNK NEAR THE ISLE OF JERBA,
TUNISIA, AND OTHER SUNK IN THE NILE

I tried to retrieve the two bales of Buṣīrī (flax) sunk in Jerba. We did not find one of them. (The other)⁴ I treated and improved with the result that I saved seven qinṭārs, which I sent to Bona.⁵ But until now, brother, I have not received a grain of its price. Abu 'l-Faḍl b. Jāwid (?) will confirm this to you. The three bales which sank in the Nile contained very inferior flax, one qinṭār being worth 60 dirhems. In addition, whenever bad news comes, the losses in the flax become even greater.

³ Names of ships—the first meaning "a butcher's knife," so called perhaps because of its quick cutting of the waves, and the second, sirius, or dog star, the brightest star in the sky.

⁴ One or more words must be lacking here. The letter is a copy on vellum made by a clerk.

⁵ An important seaport in Algeria.

D. REQUEST FROM THE ADDRESSEE TO DEAL WITH
ALLEGEDLY UNJUSTIFIED CLAIMS MADE AGAINST THE WRITER

By God, brother, I tried to procure 50 dinars for you, in order to buy you skins (containing oil) and send them to you, but I could not get hold of any, for I am harassed on every side. After the death of the old man (his father)—God's mercy upon him—and your departure, I was accused of things of which I had no knowledge and with which I had nothing to do⁶ and which I did not commit. My mind became distraught, and I wanted to leave this world. Finally, I submitted the matter to my lord, the Nagid—may God keep him alive—and found that he knew the facts, which strengthened my heart. Then a letter of the elder Abu 'l-Ṭayyib⁷ arrived at the house of Abu 'l-Faḍl b. Farah, containing a power of attorney to bring action against me. At that time, Abu 'l-Faḍl was in al-Mahdiyya, and the letter fell into the hands of his brother—(or son)-in-law, Barakāt, who showed it to everyone. The people became agitated and hostile to me, and whoever owed the old man anything conspired to keep it from me. The receiver of that power of attorney submitted it to my master, the dayyān (judge)—*may the All-merciful keep him*, who validated it, whereupon the people approached him, but he did not disappoint (me) and stopped the affair.

My lord, the Nagid, intended to address a letter to the elder Abu 'l-Faraj,⁸ but finally, he had no opportunity to write to Fustat this year at all. Instead, he asked Ishāq b. Ḥabīb to convey his message to him, and when the latter, after all, did not want to go up to Egypt, he said to him: "By no means need you go up only for this affair." He then gave a similar message to the elders Abū Naṣr and Abū Sa'd⁹ and, finally, to Shemaryah Ibn al-Mahāra¹⁰ also. Please, brother, meet all these people; keep an eye on what is going

⁶ Text: "which I have neither eaten nor drunk."

⁷ A creditor of the addressee, living in Egypt, and sending the power of attorney to Qayrawān, Tunisia, where the events described here took place.

⁸ The writer's chief opponent, Ibn 'Allān, who had applied to the Nagid of Tunisia. See the preceding selection.

⁹ Although these names were common, it is likely that these were the famous Tustarī brothers (junior) of Cairo (see no. 2, above). Since our letter states that no one in al-Qayrawān was eager to go overseas that year, it is probable that the three named last were Egyptian merchants.

¹⁰ Oyster, a family name, which, no doubt, originally was a nickname.

on and report back to me with every courier coming here. Likewise, assure them under oath, in my name, that I have nothing to do with any of their claims and do not know anything about them, except for a claim concerning a transaction made many years ago. Do this for me; there is no greater service than this. By God, brother, my only wish is to be cleared and to get rid of this; if they want to sue me, I shall honor (the decision of the court) and do what is imposed upon me, for my only wish is to be cleared. Nor do I wish to lay my hand on that consignment from Syria.¹¹ As a matter of fact, the Nagid—may God keep him—and Abu Shāq admonished me saying: "As far as you are concerned, do not commit any wrong in this matter. For the people know these matters and remember them, and this is not the first time that he¹² has acted in such a way." I hope that I shall not be forced to do anything of the kind.¹³

E. MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE ADDRESSEE'S
VILIFICATION OF THE TUNISIAN NAGID

In a letter, received here from Ibn Sighmār,¹⁴ he accuses you of vilifying my master, the Nagid, which distressed me very much. I really cannot believe that you are capable of besmirching the honor of a noble man in his absence. We are obligated to revere him and to revere all those who serve him, and certainly not to do the opposite.

F. REQUEST TO PAY A DEBT IN EXCHANGE FOR
MERCHANDISE TO BE SENT IN NEWLY ACQUIRED
SPANISH SHIPS

You wrote about the Shīrajī's¹⁵ claim of 100 dinars. I also received a letter from him and from Ibn Budayr ("Little full moon"), which

¹¹ See in the document translated in no. 17, above.

¹² Ibn 'Allān. See no. 17, above.

¹³ Namely, to apply to a Muslim court or another Muslim authority.

¹⁴ The most prominent Jewish family of al-Mahdiyya, many of whose members commuted to Egypt or settled there. Here, no doubt, the reference is to Abraham b. David Ibn Sighmar, mentioned in sec. F of our preceding selection (only summarized there) and many other documents written in Fustat during this period.

¹⁵ Seller or maker of sesame oil; here a family name.

caused me anguish and took sleep away from my eyes. Had I ready money which I could collect and send him, I would not care. The trouble is, my brother, that I have none at present, for something strange happened this year: not a single grain I earned remained with me, but everything went back to the merchants completely and in full. Now you wrote that you earned 100 dinars unexpectedly, through a tip I gave you. Will you, then, pay those hundred dinars for me as recompense, which will spare me trouble, for I explained the situation to you and you understand the hint.

For my part, I shall send you merchandise in these new ships, and I hope that it will sell well and bring us relief. During the whole of last summer I was in Qayrawān to arrange for the dispatch of the consignments belonging to M. Abu 'l-Faraj (Ibn 'Allān) and found that no one wanted to undertake an overseas journey this year. These new Spanish ships, however, were bought by the merchants and loaded, and I and everyone else hope for God's blessing—may he grant relief to me and to them. Now, brother, mind our friendship and the education given to you by me, and the bread and salt we have eaten together, for it was for a time like this that I took you on. Therefore, be my proxy everywhere and reply to every detail in this letter. Deal discreetly with this affair of Ibn 'Allān, both in person and through your friends, so that he may not encroach upon me, and I hope my lord, the Nagid, will do the rest and provide me with his protection.

G. CONCLUSION

Please convey my best greetings to M. Abū Ghālib, your brother-in-law, for I know him and his paternal uncles and know what pious people they are. May God strengthen you through each other; you have indeed attained a fine status.

Kindest regards to you personally, and regards to those under your care, as well as to everyone asking about me.

(Address:)

To my brother and master Abu 'l-Khayr—may God prolong his life—the dear Zakariyyā, son of Tammām—(may he) *r(est in E(den)*

May God be his protector.

From Yahyā, son of Mūsā—(may his) *s(oul rest in) p(eace)*—
Majjānī

His . . .

19 AN ENCLOSURE ON BUSINESS IN JERUSALEM

About Middle of the Eleventh Century

The form of the paper—a long strip (7 x 2 inches), folded twice lengthwise—as well as the arrangement of the writing, indicate that the text does not represent part of a sheet, but was an enclosure attached to a letter—most probably one dealing with public affairs. Only a few of such small-sized enclosures have been preserved.

Jewish Theological Seminary of America, JTS Geniza Misc. 15.

You inquired about *silḳ*. Here, black and sky blue are mostly in demand, and, indeed, all colors. Crimson, however, does not sell in Jerusalem, but it might be sold in Ramle or in Ascalon. Corals are weak in Jerusalem, for it is a poor town. In any case, bring them or a part of them, for success is in the hand of God. If Persians happen to arrive, they may buy them. And Peace upon you.

(It is characteristic of the medieval predilection for variety [*Med. Soc.*, II, 237] that in this small note Jerusalem is first called by its more ancient name *Bayt al-maqdis* ["The Temple"] and later by the one still in use *Al-Quds* ["Sanctuary"]. Many Persians, Jewish as well as Muslim, visited in Jerusalem or even settled there.)

20 WEAVING, EMBROIDERING, AND BLEACHING OF A THOUSAND GARMENTS

Tyre-Jerusalem, Eleventh Century

Yarn sent from Jerusalem was worked by Jewish craftsmen in Tyre, Lebanon, into clothes. A report about such work is contained